

Project on Government Oversight Update on Census work in Texas
November 2023

I Introduction

In the Fall of 2022, the Episcopal Health Foundation, the Saint David’s Foundation, the University of Texas at Austin / Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and the Census Equity Initiative all jointly provided support to Project On Government Oversight (POGO) for our work to show how the census influences federal funding allocations at the state level and, where possible, down to the local level within the state.

II. Activities

POGO’s major goal for the project was to conduct research into the local distribution of funds from some of the identified census guided programs in the state of Texas. During our 2019 research with George Washington University in this area, we were able to collect local spending data on five census guided federal assistance programs. Those five programs were selected for the availability of reliable spending data across the entire country. Our goal with this project was to expand that window into local distribution by adding more programs to the research.

The plan was to gather more recent Texas spending data on the original five programs and conduct new research into 10 – 20 additional programs depending on the difficulty of the research. POGO would work with local stakeholders in Texas to help select the programs to be researched to ensure that the findings would match up as closely as possible with state and local concerns. Our hope was that matching the programs to local concerns would make the information collected more influential in establishing the importance of an accurate census.

POGO’s primary partner in the Texas component of this project has been the Texas Census Institute. With their input we selected 19 new programs for potential research on local spending patterns. These programs covered issues of healthcare, education, infrastructure, economic development, and housing. The Texas Census Institute’s research into issues of concern within the

Texas Program Candidates	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program• National School Lunch Program• Children’s Health Insurance Program• School Breakfast Program• Basic Health Program (Affordable Care Act)• Child Care and Development Block Grant
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Title I Grants to LEAs*• Special Education Grants to States• Head Start• Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants
Infrastructure (Transportation, Energy, Broadband)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highway Planning and Construction• Federal Transit Formula Grants• Rural Electrification Loans and Loan Guarantees• Universal Service Fund - Schools and Libraries
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CDBG Entitlement Grants*• WIOA Adult Program*• WIOA Youth Activities*• WIOA Dislocated Workers*• 7(a) Loan Guarantees• Unemployment Insurance
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers• Very Low to Moderate Income Housing Loans (Section 502)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments Program• Mortgage Insurance Rental and Cooperative Housing for Moderate Income Families and

state identified these as the topics that would be seen as important to the most people across all the regions of the state.

POGO has completed its updating research on the original five programs whose spending we previously tracked to the local level. We have conducted primary research on 13 of the 19 new programs. This research examined the mission and scope of the programs' activities, how the programs operate at both the federal and state levels, how allocations decisions are made, and the availability of local spending data. We anticipate finishing the primary research on the remaining 6 new programs shortly.

We are in the process of summarizing that research into factsheets on each of the programs, though we will only produce factsheets on those programs for which we can provide information on the local distribution of federal funds. The availability of this spending data is the limiting factor in this state level research. Several agencies are requiring POGO to file formal open records requests before providing the spending data we need. Such requests will take time, creating additional delays to our plans. Despite these challenges, POGO expects to have the factsheets and local spending data finalized on the original five programs and at least 10 of the new programs by the end of the year.

III. Challenges and Lessons Learned

A major challenge revolved around the limited availability of program spending data from Texas state agencies. While some agencies provided usable data either in annual reports or databases, others failed to publicly post any local spending allocations for programs. Several agencies also proved to be less cooperative with our inquiries, insisting on the formal submission of open records requests before providing the necessary spending data.

In hindsight, we acknowledge that the project would have been better served if we found a way to have started these data requests earlier in the project timeline. We could have filed requests with multiple agencies for spending data on the largest 10 census-guided programs they oversaw. This would have allowed us to start the data request process even before finalizing the list of programs prioritized for state level research. As we developed our list of key programs to research, we could have narrowed our open records requests with agencies to drop any programs we were no longer interested in. While we might have missed a program or two in the initial requests with this approach it would have allowed us to kickstart the clock on data retrieval for most programs sooner.

IV. Key Partners

At the state level, the Texas Census Institute has been a key partner for POGO. The group, which launched in 2019, grew out of the Texas Counts Campaign in the run up to the 2020 decennial census. The group is working to develop new research to provide data driven insight into how the population count impacts Texas and then leverage that data in an education effort to inform leaders, decisionmakers, and everyday Texans. The group has been an indispensable partner for our Texas work.

The Texas Census Institute conducted a research project to identify top issues the Texas public had related to government activities. The research explored media coverage and other social media mentions that were broken down by regions within the state of Texas to identify any changes in issue priorities based on location. This work played a pivotal role in shaping which programs were prioritized for research.

Furthermore, the institute's Research Advisory Council, comprised of knowledgeable state experts, offered helpful guidance and insight into our census work and its deliverables. Their insightful perspectives and strategic recommendations not only added depth to our research methodology but also ensured that our findings would be relevant and impactful. The Texas Census Institute's collaborative approach and dedication to producing meaningful results have undoubtedly strengthened our project's final products.

V. Conclusion

The state of Texas is the largest growing state by population in the country. It already had an undercount in the previous census, which is costing the state hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds. The work for the 2030 census has begun in earnest and our work is a necessary step to ensure the state of Texas and its citizens are all counted equitably and do not have a second consecutive undercount. Thank you.