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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-470](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations, and the Census, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In the 1990 and 2000 Censuses, U.S. military and federal civilian employees overseas were included in the numbers used for apportioning Congress. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) is assessing the practicality of counting all Americans abroad by holding a test census in France, Kuwait, and Mexico. GAO was asked to (1) assess the soundness of the test design, and (2) examine what past court decisions have held about Americans' rights and obligations abroad.

What GAO Recommends

In order to give the Bureau as much planning time as possible, Congress may wish to consider coming to an early decision on whether the Bureau should be required to enumerate all overseas Americans, and if so, whether they should be counted as part of the decennial census or by some other, separate data collection effort. Should Congress desire an overseas count, it should consider telling the Bureau how the data would be used. Further, the Bureau should address the shortcomings of the 2004 test design, in part by being more transparent about what the test can and cannot measure. The Bureau generally concurred with our findings and recommendations, but believes it has already been clear about the test's limitations. Still, the Bureau agreed it will be critical to point out the various limitations that may affect congressional deliberations on this matter.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-470.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Patricia A. Dalton at (202) 512-6806 or daltonpj@gao.gov.

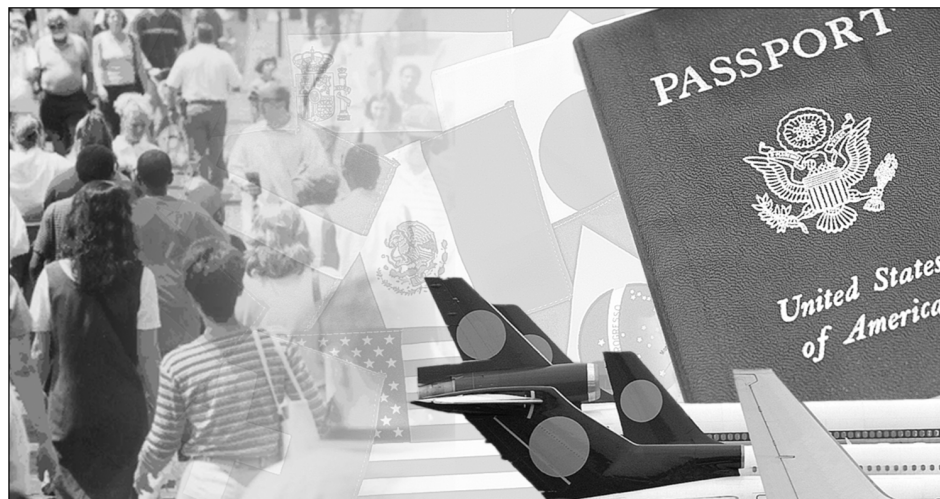
2010 CENSUS

Overseas Enumeration Test Raises Need for Clear Policy Direction

What GAO Found

Although the overseas enumeration test was designed to help determine the practicality of counting all Americans abroad, because of various methodological limitations, the test results will only partially answer the Bureau's key questions concerning feasibility, data quality, and cost. For example, one research question asks, "How good is the quality of the data?" However, the Bureau will only measure item nonresponse, which indicates whether a person completed a particular question. As a measure of quality, it is far from complete. Similarly, although a key research objective was to determine the cost of counting Americans overseas, the Bureau's data will not inform the cost of conducting future tests or an overseas enumeration in 2010. Overall, the Bureau overstated the test's ability to answer its key research objectives.

Counting Americans Abroad Would be a Monumental Challenge



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and PhotoDisc.

Overseas Americans have various rights and obligations to federal programs and activities. For example, Americans abroad are generally taxed on their worldwide income and can vote in federal elections, but are generally not entitled to Medicare benefits. There is nothing in the Constitution, federal law, or court decisions that would either require the Bureau to count overseas Americans, or not count this population group. As a result, Congress would need to enact legislation if it wanted to require the Bureau to include overseas Americans in the 2010 Census. Counting Americans abroad as part of the census would add new risks to an enterprise that already faces an array of challenges. Therefore, it will be important for Congress to decide whether overseas Americans should be counted as part of the census or counted as part of a separate survey or whether there are so many obstacles to a successful count regardless of the approach that the Bureau should shelve any plans for further research and testing. To the extent a second test is required, the Bureau will need to take steps to develop a more rigorous design.