

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-463](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) conducted the Count Question Resolution (CQR) program to correct errors in the count of housing units as well as dormitories and other group living facilities known as group quarters. GAO was asked to assess whether CQR was consistently implemented across the country, paying particular attention to whether the Bureau identified census errors that could have been caused by more systemic problems. GAO also evaluated how well the Bureau transitioned to CQR from an earlier quality assurance program called Full Count Review.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Commerce direct the Bureau to take such actions as consolidating CQR and Full Count Review into a single effort that systematically reviews and corrects any errors prior to the release of data for apportionment and redistricting; prioritizing the review of errors based on the magnitude of the problem; and ensuring the accuracy and accessibility of the revised data on its Web site. The Department of Commerce noted our report made several useful recommendations, but stated our approach was infeasible because of timing and other constraints. We believe our recommendations still apply because they could help the Bureau overcome these constraints and deliver better quality data.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-463.

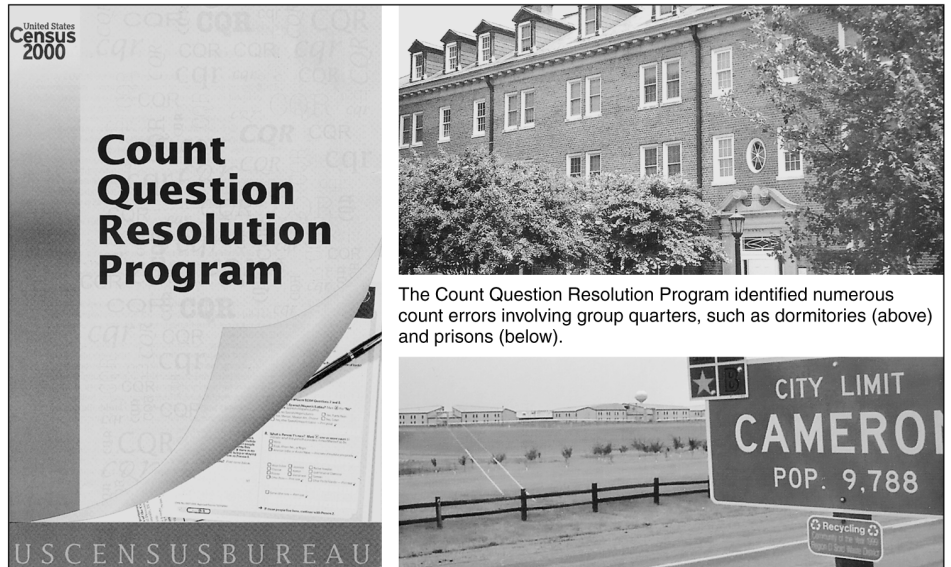
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Orice Williams at (202) 512-6806 or williamso@gao.gov.

DATA QUALITY

Improvements to Count Correction Efforts Could Produce More Accurate Census Data

What GAO Found

The CQR program, which ran from June 30, 2001, to September 30, 2003, played an important role in improving the quality of data from the 2000 Census in that it corrected numbers affecting 47 states and over 1,180 governmental units. Although this is a small percentage of the nation's more than 39,000 government entities, the count revisions impacted private homes, prisons, and other dwellings and, in some cases, were significant. For example, when the Bureau deleted duplicate data on students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and made other corrections, that state's head count dropped by 2,828 people. Similarly, CQR found that more than 1,600 people in Morehead, Kentucky, were counted in the wrong location.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (left), and GAO (upper right and lower right).

GAO identified several shortcomings with the CQR program, including inconsistent implementation by the Bureau's regional offices and the posting of inaccurate data to the Bureau's Web-based errata report. Moreover, while CQR found the counting of group quarters to be particularly problematic, the Bureau did not perform an active, nationwide review of these known trouble spots, and thus missed an opportunity to potentially improve the accuracy of the data for these dwellings. Further, because CQR had more stringent documentation requirements compared to a preceding program called Full Count Review, CQR rejected hundreds of unresolved full count issues, missing another opportunity to improve the data. As its plans proceed for the 2010 Census, it will be important for the Bureau to address the operational issues GAO identified. Moreover, because the data for apportionment and redistricting were later found to be flawed for some jurisdictions, it will be important for the Bureau to develop a count correction program that is designed to systematically review and correct these essential figures.