

SCIENCE'S COMPASS

shown by a National Institutes of Health multisite trial (6). Denying children diagnosed with ADHD safe and effective treatments is also wrong. Physicians should use data, not dogma, when planning the treatment of children afflicted with ADHD.

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Politics of the Census

FORMER CENSUS BUREAU DIRECTOR KENNETH

Prewitt makes three assertions in his Editorial "U.S. Census 2000: an update" (12 Jan., p. 209) that are subject to debate. Whereas

the bureau's acting director must soon (in late February) provide a recommendation to the current administration regarding the release of census data adjusted with results of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation survey, making clear the exact terms thereof is timely and necessary.

First, in regard to the use of sample-adjusted data for "block level counts used for drawing congressional district boundaries," Prewitt says that it is allowed "under current legal interpretation." But this matter is by no means settled as a legal issue. In the Supreme Court's January 1999 decision (1), referring to the argument that 1976 census law intended to allow statistical estimation to alter district lines, the Court states, "Indeed, it tests the limits of reason to suggest that...Members of Congress...intended to enact what would arguably be the single most significant change in the method of conducting the decennial census since its inception."

Second, regarding the authority to release adjusted data, Prewitt says that "federal regulation specifies that...the final decision [will be] made by the director of the bureau" (rather than by the secretary of commerce). Prewitt is referring to a rule issued by former commerce secretary William Daley. Upon assuming the chairmanship of a presidential

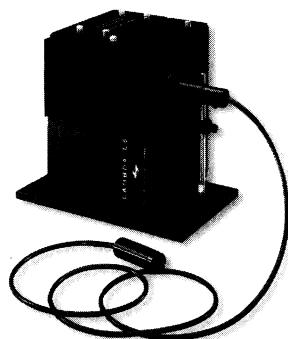
campaign, Daley delegated his authority over the census to the bureau director, but without the prospect of review for the decisions taken. The binding status of such a rule is likewise unsettled legally.

Finally, Prewitt warns against the intrusion of politics into census decisions. If, he says, the decision to use adjusted data "is then overturned politically...[p]olitics will have trumped science." High-minded as this may sound, an alternative formulation deserves consideration. At the Brookings Institution in March 2000, a speaker commended a recent book (2) by Peter Skerry about census-related controversies in the following terms: "I agree with Peter's book, and I quote

Letters to the Editor

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SCIENCE'S COMPASS

one sentence from it... 'I argue that the census is inherently and properly political in nature.' I think he's absolutely correct....[R]ight from the beginning, the census was put in [the Constitution] for a political purpose; that is, the distribution of power. What could be more political than that?" (3).

The speaker was Prewitt, who in this instance seemed to recognize that in public policy, science should provide the best information it can, whereas decisions regarding the use of such information are, and should be, vested in accountable political processes.

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References and Notes

1. *DOC v. United States House of Representatives*, 525 U.S. 316, 119 S. Ct. 765 (O'Connor, Circuit Justice, 1999).
2. P. Skerry, *Counting on the Census? Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics* (Brookings Institution, Washington, DC 2000).
3. K. Prewitt, from a Brookings Press Briefing, "Counting on the census?" (Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 15 March 2000). Transcript available at <http://www.brook.edu/comm/transcripts/20000315.htm>

Response

DAVID MURRAY IS FREE TO OPINE ON HOW the courts will resolve legal questions that, to my knowledge, have not yet been

litigated. Obviously, the Census Bureau will comply with any rulings. To date, there has been no ruling on whether dual system estimation can be used to improve census counts for future data releases from Census 2000. (Dual system estimation is a method to approximate more closely the true census count by measuring two types of error: persons not counted who should have been and individuals mistakenly counted or who were counted twice.) The federal regulation I referred to in my Editorial and that Murray mentions simply codifies practice in all decennials before 1990. It is also consistent with how the Census Bureau released apportionment counts in 2000. All technical decisions regarding these constitutionally mandated numbers were made by Census Bureau professionals. None were first referred to the secretary of commerce.

On Murray's third point, I have written at length on the fact that the decennial was put in the Constitution to perform fundamental state-building tasks in the new nation, and that for two centuries census numbers have been "political" in their application to reapportionment, redistricting, enforcement of civil rights laws, federal

formula spending, and similar matters. I have drawn the obvious distinction between these appropriate uses of census numbers in the political process, on the one hand, and partisan attempts to influence the scientific methodology of data collection, on the other. Any scientific agency should resist the latter even when its mandate includes the former.

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CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

NEWS FOCUS: "Anthropological warfare" by C. C. Mann (19 Jan., p. 416). William Denevan was described as an archaeologist, but archaeology is his avocation. He is by profession a geographer.

RANDOM SAMPLES: "You read it here first" (5 Jan., p. 39). Fred R. Shapiro has discovered hundreds of, not just three dozen, scientific terms that appeared in *Science* before the earliest citation recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary.

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