

Trust & Safety

U.S. Census Bureau

June 2021

Combating Mis- and Disinformation

To protect the 2020 Census count, the Census Bureau established the first government Trust & Safety team, a cross-functional network of experts working to proactively combat reputational threats.



These core functions work together to enable proactive messaging, rapid response to cases of mis- and disinformation, and coordination across various external partners.

Continuous Monitoring

A key function of the Trust & Safety Team is continuous monitoring to detect and analyze mis- and disinformation to inform follow up actions.



In the News

We scan the 24-hour news cycle via traditional media sources like television, radio, print, and online media platforms.



On the Ground

We engage with community partners around the nation for information from public events, in-person interactions, and flyers or billboards.



On the Web

We monitor the web through public social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.



Over the Phone

We receive live tips from Census Bureau Customer Service (1-800-923-8282).



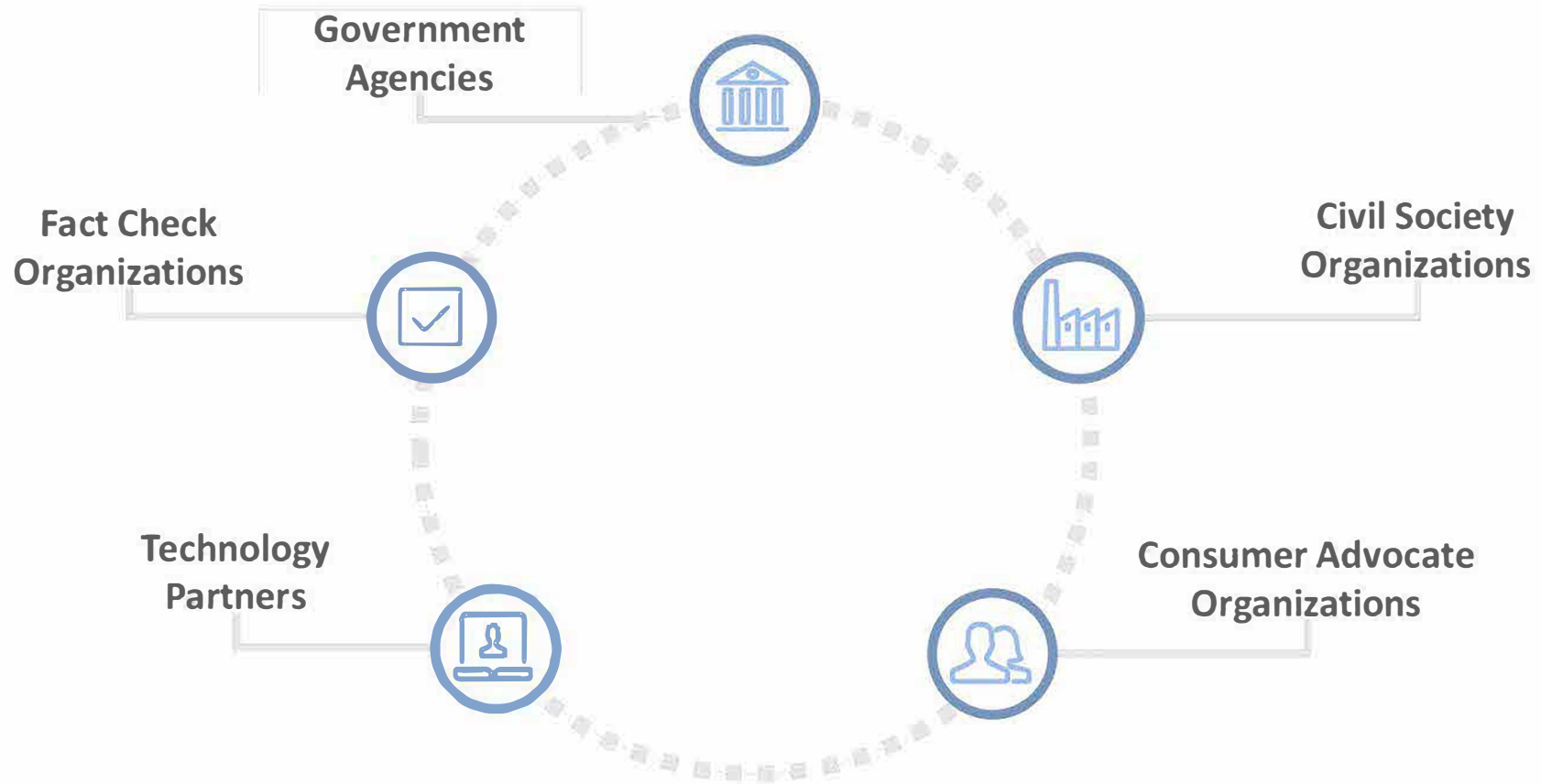
In our Inbox

We receive information from the public via submissions to rumors@census.gov and respondent-advocate@census.gov, as well as the ask.census.gov web intake form.

Our continuous monitoring capabilities allow us to detect mis- and disinformation in real-time and identify larger trends, enabling us to develop updated messaging for the public to proactively combat the spread of mis- and disinformation.

Establishing Partnerships

The Census Bureau could not protect the count alone. We established a partnership network across multiple sectors to help us detect, mitigate, and respond to mis- and disinformation.



Empowering the Public

The Census Bureau began the Internet Self-Response Operation (ISR) in March 2020. In preparation, the Trust & Safety Team proactively empowered the public to take the necessary steps to identify and take action against mis- and disinformation.



Visiting [2020Census.gov](https://www.2020census.gov) for the latest information related to the 2020 Census and tips for avoiding fraudulent activities and scams



Reaching out to us via [Twitter](#) (@USCensusBureau), [Instagram](#) (@uscensusbureau), [LinkedIn](#) (linkedin.com/company/us-census-bureau), and [Facebook](#) (facebook.com/uscensusbureau)



Reporting suspicious information and tips to rumors@census.gov



Accessing updated [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQs), [chatbot](#), and [voice assistant](#) for information on-the-go



Calling the [Census Bureau Customer Service Hotline](#) at (800) 923-8282 for questions related to the 2020 Census



Reporting malicious posts violating platform guidelines on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Nextdoor](#), and other networks

Sample Incidents

Examples of Mis- and Disinformation

Sample Incident: Home Affairs

The Trust & Safety team identified misinformation that could have posed a safety risk for census workers and suppress the effectiveness of 2020 Census field operations.

Incident Summary

A message circulating on public and private social media channels and in local community centers across the United States warned of officials with the “Department of Home Affairs” visiting homes to collect information for the census and robbing homes.



First Detection: September 18, 2019



Digital Platforms: Facebook, Nextdoor, WhatsApp, Twitter, email

#BeAware: We have been notified this morning there is a group of individuals going to homes and pretending to be officials from “home affairs.” They have documents with the letterhead Department of Home Affairs and claim to be confirming that everyone has a valid ID for the upcoming census. Instead, they are robbing homes. There is no initiative like that from the government. They are everywhere and they look presentable. Please alert your family, friends, and neighbors.
Immediately call 911 in such case.

Mitigation Strategy

The team determined the hoax originated overseas and was spread in several countries including South Africa, Kenya, and the UK ahead of their census operations. **In addition to continuous monitoring, several actions were executed to address the hoax and mitigate its spread:**



Engaged **Fact Check organizations** and **traditional media** to publish **6** articles debunking the hoax.



Coordinated with **Civil Society organizations** to engage their networks and provide accurate information debunking the hoax.



Reported the hoax on **social media platforms** to partners for removal.



Published an article on [2020census.gov/rumors](https://www.census.gov/rumors) to counter the hoax with accurate information.



Are People Posing as “Department of Home Affairs” Workers and Checking IDs for the Census?

There is a false rumor circulating online that individuals posing as workers for the “Department of Home Affairs” are going door-to-door to confirm that everyone has a valid ID for the 2020 Census — and committing crimes at homes they are pretending to canvass.

Sample Incident: Stimulus Check

The Trust & Safety team detected misinformation that insinuated the Census Bureau was sharing personal information of those who responded to the 2020 Census with the Department of Treasury, in violation of Title 13.

Incident Summary

A rumor circulating across social media platforms, text, and email linking completion of the 2020 Census to receipt of an economic stimulus check.



First Detection: March 16, 2020



Digital Platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Email, Text

FYI... Go to 2020census.gov and fill out the census form so you can get you stimulus check. That's how they going to know where to send the checks. Forward this to everyone that you know. If you don't fill it out you will not receive a check in the mail.
\$1000 per Adult \$500 per child \$3K max Per household

Mitigation Strategy

The team saw an immediate increase in online conversation and rumors targeting millions of Americans in need of financial relief. Over the course of two weeks, this rumor resulted in a 273% increase in reports to the rumors mailbox. **In addition to continuous monitoring, several actions were executed to address the rumor and mitigate its spread:**



Published an article on 2020census.gov/rumors to counter the rumor with accurate information.



Engaged **Fact Check organizations** and **traditional media** to publish over a dozen articles debunking the rumor.



Reported the rumor on **social media platforms** to partners for removal.



Developed the first **response from rumors@census.gov** to answer inquiries from the public.

Census Responses Not Tied to Potential Stimulus Packages

Your answers cannot be used to impact your eligibility for any government benefits, including any potential stimulus package.

Will filling out the 2020 Census impact whether you receive a stimulus check?
No. Your answers cannot be used to impact your eligibility for any government benefits, including any potential stimulus package. The Census Bureau is bound by Title 13 of the U.S. Code to keep your information confidential, and the answers you provide are used only to produce statistics.



Due to the team's rapid detection and response, within four days the volume of reports and proliferation of the rumor on social media decreased dramatically.

- For Discussion Only -

Census Accomplishments

Results to Date

Team Accomplishments

Our core functions enabled the Census Bureau to develop content, detect threats, and reach the public directly resulting in:

