

ETHNIC AND RACIAL  
CLASSIFICATIONS  
IN NATIONAL CENSUSES

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## ***Broad Research Question and Motivation***

**“What are the principal forms taken by  
census ethnicity questions?”**

- Theoretical motives
- Applied implications

## ***Uses of Census Data***

### **Traditional focus on data:**

- Analysis of census data collected
- Methodological innovation in analysis

### **Alternative focus on process:**

- Census design
- Census-taking as object of sociological study

## ***Data***

- **Census questionnaires from 141 nations**
- **Used in 1995-2004 period**
- **Primarily from:**
  - **United Nations** (Statistical Division, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch)
  - **U.S. Census Bureau** (International Programs Center)

TABLE 1. COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN STUDY														
	N. America		S. America		Africa		Europe		Asia		Oceania		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Included in Study</b>	18	49	11	79	19	34	37	76	37	74	19	76	141	61
<b>Missing Questionnaire</b>	17	46	3	21	26	46	0	0	9	18	5	20	60	23
<b>No Census Planned</b>	2	5	0	0	11	20	12	24	4	8	1	4	30	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	37	100	14	100	56	100	49	100	50	100	25	100	231	100
Region % Share in Study Sample	13		8		13		26		26		13		100	
% Region Covered	51		79		42		100		80		79		70	

## ***Research Questions***

- How many / which countries collect ethnicity information on census?
- How do ethnicity questions vary?
- How do response formats vary?

## ***Methodology***

### **Qualitative analysis of content required**

- Terminology: what constitutes a question on “ethnicity”?
- Language: are different concepts of ethnicity conveyed by different phrasing?

## ***What is ethnic enumeration?***

**Share of censuses that enumerate ethnicity using terms:**

	(%)
Ethnicity	56
Nationality	23
Race	15
Indigenous Group/Tribe	15
Ancestry/Descent/Origin	7
Cultural Group	5
Community/Population	3
Caste	2
Color/Phenotype	2

TABLE 2. SHARE OF COUNTRIES STUDIED USING ETHNIC ENUMERATION, BY REGION							
Countries Enumerating Ethnicity:	North America	South America	Africa	Europe	Asia	Oceania	TOTAL
<b>Percent</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>63</b>
N	15	9	8	16	23	16	87

## ***Benefits of Comparative Study of Census Classifications***

### **1. Theoretical:**

- Add historical, social, political, economic variables to explain form of ethnic enumeration

### **2. Applied:**

- Alternative strategies of ethnic enumeration
- Assess advantages of diverse approaches

### **3. Policy:**

- Explore basis for common guidelines

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END

Thank You

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TABLE 3. CENSUS ETHNICITY TERMINOLOGY BY REGION								
<i>Share of countries using term:</i>	<b>North America</b>	<b>South America</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>Europe</b>	<b>Asia</b>	<b>Oceania</b>	<i>TOTAL</i>	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	<i>N</i>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>81</b>	56	49
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>6</b>	23	20
<b>Indigenous/Tribe</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	14	12
<b>Race</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>	15	13
<i>% Countries Covered by 4 Terms</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>78</i>

## ***Language of ethnic enumeration***

SUBJECTIVITY:

**“To what ethnic group do you think you belong?”**

(Saint Lucia)

**“To what ethnic group do you belong?”**

(Guyana)

SELF-IDENTIFICATION:

**“How does [the person] classify himself/herself?”**

(Philippines)

**“In your opinion, which of the following best describes  
your ancestry?”**

(Bermuda)

## ***Ethnic enumeration response formats***

1. Closed-ended (checkboxes, code lists)
2. Closed-ended with open-ended “Other” option
3. Open-ended (i.e. write-in)

TABLE 4. CENSUS ETHNICITY RESPONSE FORMATS, BY QUESTION TYPE					
<i>Response Format:</i>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>All</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Closed-Ended</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Closed w/“Other” Write-in</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Open-Ended</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31</b>
Total	100	100	100	100	100