

Census 2010 Sikh American Census Campaign FAQ

This FAQ has been drafted as a result of many questions and concerns that have been expressed by members of the Sikh community in relation to the Sikh American Census campaign. We hope that the questions and answers below will provide clarity to any confusion, and you are welcome to contact us at law-usa@unitedsikhs.org.

Q1: What happens if I mark "Other Race" and write in "Sikh" on the Census Form?

A1: Currently, the Census bureau automatically codes all Sikh write-ins as "Asian-Indian." This is a problem because it doesn't allow Sikhs to be counted by the Census Bureau, even though many other nationalities and ethnic groups are coded and counted correctly. In conversation with Karen Humes, Assistant Division Chief for Special Populations for the Census Bureau, members of the Sikh community asked how to get a code, and she responded that we should petition the Census Bureau. UNITED SIKHS submitted a petition, with the support of SALDEF, the Sikh Coalition, World Sikh Council, and many other leading Sikh organizations and Gurdwaras to the Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget to ask for a separate code, and we will continue our effort to obtain a separate code. You can review the petition and supporting academic paper at: <http://www.unitedsikhs.org/petitions/census.php>

Q2: The Census form asks for race. Sikhs are a religion, not a race. Why should I write-in Sikh?

A2: The definition of "race" used by the Census is vague, and the Census form is not the best designed form. It only asks for "Race," and this is a problem for many people. It should rather ask for "Ethnicity." The Census counts many categories of people that are not "races" by any traditional definition. For example, if you write in "Bangladeshi," you will be counted as Bangladeshi, even though Bangladeshi is a nationality, not a race. Another example are the "Hmong" people who are of the same ethnicity, but not necessarily the same "race." Rather than only recognizing Sikhs as a religion, Sikhs are recognized as an ethnicity in many countries as we do have a very distinct identity and idea of the "kaum." We have a distinct language (Gurmukhi script), religion, marriage, festivals, appearance, and other cultural variances; all of these additional factors qualify Sikhs as an ethnic group and a religion. We should be counted as Sikhs by the Census Bureau. In the past, other ethnic groups have also been counted if they have many write-ins. The Census Bureau informed us that they will not assign Sikhs a code because of write-ins, Sikhs will be coded as Asian Indian. However, the write-in forms are not thrown away and the Census Bureau does review the data. It is important to show that Sikhs want to be counted; also the forms become a part of national historical data and are made public after 72 years. This campaign is for now, and our future generations.

Q3: Why should we waste the Sikh Community's time and money to be counted? Why now? Aren't we too late? Are you being dishonest or misleading the community?

A3: UNITED SIKHS and other members of the Sikh community have been working on this issue for more than a year, and we understand that this must be a sustained effort until we succeed in being coded correctly. Sikh Americans are tax-paying citizens just like everyone else and have been excluded from being counted. It is a difficult task to change the government's opinion on an issue, and it will require the Sikh community in America to unite and take action by calling their Congressman and Senators and by having their voices heard in public forums to be successful on this issue. **If we do not succeed in getting a code in 2010, it is still important for the Annual American Community Survey, which also codes Sikhs as Asian Indian, for the Census 2020, all other Censuses to come.**

Q4: Why not simply mark the box for 'Asian Indian'?

A4: If we want to be recognized as a group of people in the United States, and also if we (and the government) want to have accurate numbers of how many Sikhs there are in the United States, we must ask to be counted as Sikhs. If we want the government to pay attention to our community, they have to recognize how many Sikhs are in the United States. Also, not all Sikhs are of Asian Indian origin, and many Sikhs who are not of Indian origin have expressed that they would like to be counted as Sikhs.

Q5: Why not fill in 'Other Asian' and then 'Sikh'?

A5: Not all Sikhs are of Asian Indian origin, and many Sikhs who are not of Indian origin have expressed that they would like to be counted as Sikhs. Also, it is important that for the purposes of showing our numbers, we all fill in the form the same way. Mark "Other Race" and write-in "Sikh."

Q6: What about Sikhs in other countries and Sikhs in India? Are you trying to separate Sikhs from India?

A6: The United States Census Bureau is only concerned with counting all people within the United States, whether they are legal or illegal. This is an official count by the United States government and happens every ten years. This has nothing to do with Sikhs outside of the United States, nor does it have any effect on Sikhs outside of the United States. It is important for Sikhs in the United States to be counted by the Census Bureau because it is important to be properly recognized by the government for a variety of reasons; in elections, for resources, and for advocacy.

Q7: What are some other minorities that have gotten themselves counted successfully in the past?

A7: Minorities always have to speak-up and advocate for their rights. In the past during the founding of the United States Constitution, only three-fifths of the population of slaves were counted by the Census, changing the distribution of taxes and the amount of representatives into Congress by southern states. That means only three out of five slaves were counted as people. The Latino/Hispanic communities also had to advocate for their right to be counted separately, and some of them, such as people from the Dominican

Republic are only being counted correctly for the first time, in Census 2010. Many communities are advocating around the Census because there are still many problems and solutions being proposed.

Q8: Are other religions counted by the Census?

A8: The Census Bureau is not allowed, by law, to ask a mandatory question on religion on the Census form. However, this does not stop the Census from accepting answers from those who self-identify, and the Census does count people of many different ethnicities. The only count the Census Bureau engages in where a question about religion is asked is in the American Community Survey, which is a much smaller annual survey that is done randomly around the country; Census 2010 aims to count every person in America.

Q9: How will this affect the count of Asian Indians? Does it affect the "Asian Indian" category at all with the current computer coding versus with the new coding, if we successfully obtain a new code?

A9: Currently, since writing in Sikh automatically codes a Sikh as "Asian Indian," the number of Asian Indians increases, though Sikhs are not specially recognized in that increase. If we successfully obtain a new code, the numbers that would have increased the Asian Indian numbers will be counted as Sikhs, rather than as Asian Indian.

Q10: How will the Sikh community be affected if we are counted separately versus not?

A10: Census data is used by many many parts of government for a variety of things from allocating resources, to drawing districts for political representation, to determining what areas require special assistance, to name a few uses. Even local governments often use Census data in making decisions that affect the local people. If we are counted separately, we will be able to lobby more effectively as a community when we approach our congressman and senators, and we will have recognition as a separate people. Many Sikhs express frustration that people in government and in the public do not know who we are. This is another step in creating the awareness that we need to be a successful community in the United States.

Q11: How do we benefit at the state level to register a Sikh Complete Count Committee?

A11: Forming a Sikh Complete Count Committee is another way to display to the Census Bureau that we want to be counted as Sikhs, that we are taking the Census seriously, and that we are willing to work with the government to be counted.

We need your help with this campaign so that the Sikh community can be counted correctly. Please feel free to email law-usa@unitedsikhs.org with any further questions or concerns.