Ethnic Classification in Global Perspective: A Cross-National Survey of the 2000 Census Round

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Abstract Academic interest in official systems of racial and ethnic classification has grown in recent years, but most research on such census categories has been limited to small case studies or regional surveys. In contrast, this article analyzes a uniquely global data set compiled by the United Nations Statistical Division to survey the approaches to ethnic enumeration taken in 141 countries. The motives for this analysis combine theoretical, applied, and policy objectives. I find that 63% of the national censuses studied incorporate some form of ethnic enumeration, but their question and answer formats vary along several dimensions that betray diverse conceptualizations of ethnicity (for example, as "race" or "nationality"). Moreover, these formats follow notably regional patterns. Nonetheless, the variety of approaches can be grouped into a basic taxonomy of ethnic classification approaches, suggesting greater commonality in worldwide manifestations of the ethnicity concept than some have recognized.

Keywords Census · Classification · Ethnicity · International · Race

Introduction

Many if not most countries around the world categorize their inhabitants by race, ethnicity, and/or national origins when it comes time to conduct a census. In an unpublished survey of census questionnaires, the United Nations found that 65% enumerated their populations by national or ethnic group (United Nations Statistical Division 2003). However, this statistic encompasses a wide diversity of approaches to ethnic classification, as evinced by the spectrum of terms employed; "race,"

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"ethnic origin," "nationality," "ancestry" and "indigenous," "tribal" or "aboriginal" group all serve to draw distinctions within the national population. The picture is further complicated by the ambiguity of the meanings of these terms: what is called "race" in one country might be labeled "ethnicity" in another, while "nationality" means ancestry in some contexts and citizenship in others. Even within the same country, one term can take on several connotations, or several terms may be used interchangeably.

This article surveys the approaches to ethnic enumeration that 141 nations took on their 1995–2004 (or "2000 round") censuses. Using a unique data set compiled by the United Nations Statistical Division, this research identifies several dimensions along which classification practices vary. Specifically, I address four research questions:

1. How widespread is census enumeration by ethnicity, in global terms?
2. Among national censuses that do enumerate by ethnicity, what approaches do they take, in terms of both their question and answer formats?
3. What geographic patterns, if any, do ethnic enumeration practices follow?
4. How does the United States' census approach to ethnic enumeration compare to those that are prevalent elsewhere?

The motives for this analysis are threefold: theoretical, applied, and policy-oriented.

First, this comparative research contributes a typology of classification approaches that can serve as a building block for social scientific theory-building. Hypotheses that seek to explain which nations count by ethnicity, why certain countries choose particular ethnic enumeration strategies, or the effects of official ethnic enumeration all stand to benefit from such an empirically derived typology. Although these engaging and important historical, political, economic, and social questions lie outside the scope of the present analysis, it provides a tool for pursuing them systematically in future scholarly research. Moreover, its analysis of enumeration practices by geographic region is a first step in the development of such historically grounded hypotheses.

Second, this comparative analysis offers applied demographers a wide range of information concerning international enumeration practices, and thus a source of potential innovations that might inform national preparations for future censuses. In this pragmatic vein, I include a case study of the United States in order to illustrate the ways in which international comparison highlights unusual national census practices and provides models for alternative approaches. Though complex, the diversity of international ethnic enumeration offers demographers a wealth of formats to consider.

Finally, I apply this project's findings to current policy debates concerning the utility, desirability, and feasibility of cross-national guidelines on ethnic enumeration. Both international organizations like the United Nations and regional bodies like the European Union offer (or consider offering) their member states guidance on the collection of official statistics. However, some perceive enumeration by ethnicity as a particularly challenging—or unwelcome—area of data collection. By presenting a systematic typology of ethnic enumeration approaches, this article

suggests that international guidelines for counting by ethnicity are feasible. And while the empirical findings here cannot determine the utility or desirability of ethnic classification for national policymakers, I consider their relevance for these concerns in the conclusion.

This report begins with a brief review of both theoretical and empirical literature on ethnic classification that, among other things, takes the crucial step of defining the concept of ethnicity to be operationalized in this study. Going on to describe the data on census ethnicity questions to be analyzed, I next present findings on the frequency of ethnic enumeration, both globally and by region, and then examine the terminology and formats used both in questions about ethnicity and in their response options. In the last set of findings, I focus on the United States' Census 2000 items on ancestry, ethnicity, and race in order to illustrate the points of divergence that can emerge when one nation's practices are compared globally. After reviewing these results, the concluding section highlights the benefits and complexities of international comparison in an area of demographic measurement that is profoundly shaped by cultural and historical forces.

Classification by Ethnicity

Conceptual Links Between Ethnicity, Race, and Nationality

Any review of approaches to ethnic identification must tackle the question of what—if anything—distinguishes the concepts of ethnicity, race, and nationality. The elision between the three is a well-known and widely apparent phenomenon (Fenton 2003). In *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (Jewell and Abate 2001), for example, ethnicity is defined as "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition" (p. 583), and the definition for "race" also equates it with ethnicity (p. 1402):

> **race**: each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics … a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc; an ethnic group ... a group or set of people or things with a common feature or features….

This brief example suffices to illustrate the interconnections often drawn between ethnicity, race, nationality and other concepts. Here the definition of ethnicity makes reference to "national tradition," and the definition of race mirrors that of ethnicity.

Academic research has however suggested various distinctions between the three concepts. One of the most common is the association of ethnicity with cultural commonality—i.e., shared beliefs, values, and practices—while race is seen as revolving around physical or biological commonality.[1] As Weber (1978) described, ethnic groups are "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their

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[1] Kertzer and Arel (2002b) note, however, that even culturalist interpretations of ethnicity can take on an essentialist, almost biological quality, as in 19th-century depictions of culture as physically inheritable, e.g., "in the blood." For descriptions of contemporary forms of cultural essentialism, see Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) and Taguieff (1991).

common descent…it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists" (p. 389), whereas "race identity" stems from "common inherited and inheritable traits that actually derive from common descent" (p. 385). This essentialist notion of race has met with considerable challenge in recent years from those who define it as a social construct—"a social invention that changes as political, economic, and historical contexts change" (American Sociological Association 2002, p. 7). Yet the conceptualization of race as rooted in biological (especially genetic) difference endures, at least in the United States today (Omi 2001). Regardless of the general state of belief today concerning the nature of race, however, the origins of racial groupings lie in historical notions of intrinsic human differences (Fredrickson 2002).

Another important line of distinction that has been drawn between racial and ethnic identity turns on the degree to which they reflect voluntary choice and entail significant consequences (Banton 1983; Jenkins 1997). In the United States in particular, ethnicity has increasingly come to be understood as "symbolic" (Gans 1979) or "optional" (Waters 1990). According to these views, individuals can choose the ethnic group(s) with which they most identify, and signal their affiliation with the group(s) by means of superficial behavior (e.g., choice of clothing or food) with the knowledge that such identification will have little if any repercussion for major life outcomes such as employment or educational opportunities. In sharp contrast, racial identity is usually portrayed as involuntary—it is imposed by others—and immutable, regardless of individual behavioral choices. Most important of all, this externally enforced affiliation has profound and far-reaching effects on life outcomes (Smelser et al. 2001).

Interestingly, the concept of nationality has been linked to both ethnicity and race, as well as to citizenship. Eighteenth-century German Romantic ideas of the *Volk* laid the groundwork for the view that political boundaries mirrored cultural, ethnic ones, and even that they contained people of the same "blood" or physical stock (Hannaford 1996). Such ideas found expression in the 19th and 20th centuries as well, leading to mass migrations and conflicts over state borders (Brubaker 1996). In Eastern Europe in particular, nationality has come to designate something other than political citizenship, something more like ancestry or national origins (Eberhardt 2003; Kertzer and Arel 2002b).

Despite the fluidity between the conceptual borders of ethnicity, race, and nationality, at their cores they share a common connotation of ancestry or "community of descent" (Hollinger 1998). Each concept relies on a different type of proof or manifestation of those shared roots—ethnicity discerns it in cultural practices or beliefs (e.g., dress, language, religion), race in perceived physical traits, and nationality through geographic location—yet they all aim to convey an accounting of origins or ancestry. As a result, in the research to be described I have included all three of these terms—and others—as indicators of one underlying concept of origins. For this umbrella concept I use the label "ethnicity" rather than "ancestry," however, to emphasize the immediacy that such categories can have when individuals identify themselves. As Alba (1990, p. 38) points out, *ancestry* involves beliefs about one's forebears, while *ethnicity* is a matter of "beliefs directly about oneself." He illustrates the difference as being one between the statements,

"My great-grandparents came from Poland" (ancestry) versus "I am Polish" (ethnicity). Accordingly, this study uses a broad definition of "ethnic enumeration" that includes census references to a heterogeneous collection of terms (e.g., "ethnic group," "race," "people," "tribe") that indicate a contemporary yet somewhat inchoate sense of origin-based "groupness."

International Comparisons of Ethnic Enumeration Practices

Identifying a core meaning shared by varied ethnicity-related terms makes possible a global comparative study of ethnic categorization. Previous academic comparisons of census ethnic enumeration have usually included only a few national cases, as part of an intensive examination of the social, historical, and political factors behind diverse classificatory regimes (e.g., Kertzer and Arel 2002a; Nobles 2000). And the broader surveys available are generally either regional (e.g., Almey et al. 1992), not based on systematic samples (e.g., Rallu et al. 2004; Statistics Canada and U.S. Census Bureau 1993), or focused on informal conventions rather than official categorization schemes (e.g., Wagley 1965; Washington 2005). As a result, no comprehensive international analysis of formal ethnic enumeration approaches precedes this study. One of the fundamental contributions made here is thus an empirical one, in the form of a profile of ethnic enumeration worldwide and typology of such practices.

Providing information about a large sample of contemporary national censuses is also a major step forward for theory-building about the origins of different classificatory systems. Collecting data on the dependent variable of classification type suggests important features to measure and eventually to explain. Rallu et al. (2004) exemplify the possibilities of such an analysis by proposing four types of governmental approach to ethnic enumeration:

1. Enumeration for political control (*compter pour dominer*),
2. Non-enumeration in the name of national integration (*ne pas compter au nom de l'intégration nationale*),
3. Discourse of national hybridity (*compter ou ne pas compter au nom de la mixité*), and
4. Enumeration for antidiscrimination (*compter pour justifier l'action positive*).

Rallu et al. identify colonial census administration with the first category, as well as related examples such as apartheid-era South Africa, the Soviet Union, and Rwanda. In these cases, ethnic categories form the basis for exclusionary policies. In the second category, where ethnic categories are rejected in order to promote national unity, western European nations such as France, Germany, and Spain are prominent. The third category is largely associated with Latin American countries, where governments take different decisions about whether to enumerate by ethnicity, but a broader discourse praising interethnic mixture or hybridity is not uncommon. The final category is illustrated with examples from Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) and Asia (China), but the principal cases discussed here are those of England, Canada, and the United States, where ethnic census data serve as

tools in combating discrimination. Despite the number of regions that Rallu et al. take into account, however, their conclusions are drawn from a limited set of countries rather than the complete international pool. As a result, the four-part schema they identify might be altered if a wider sample of national censuses were considered.

Another element that is missing from the existing literature on ethnic enumeration is comparative content analysis of the language of census ethnicity items. The studies previously described generally focus on the question of which political motives result in the presence or absence of an ethnic question on a national census. They do not delve into the details of the precise format of the question. But such nuances offer particular applied interest for demographers and other census officials. Maintaining that such technical information is of use for the architects of population censuses, this study investigates what terminology is used in different countries (e.g., "race" or "nationality"?), how the request for information is framed, and what options are given to respondents in formulating their answers. In this way, the project may suggest alternative approaches to implement when census forms are being redesigned, and offer a basis for weighing the relative strengths and weaknesses of diverse formats.

Data and Methodology

As publisher of the annual *Demographic Yearbook*, the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) regularly collects international census information, including both questionnaire forms and data results. For the 2000 round (i.e., censuses conducted from 1995 through 2004), UNSD drew up a list of 231 nations and territories from which to solicit census materials. As of June 2005, this researcher located 141 national questionnaires in the UNSD collection and elsewhere (i.e., from 61% of the countries listed), and calculated that 30 nations (13%) had not scheduled a census in that round. Therefore, questionnaires were missing from 60 countries (26% of the original list, or 30% of the 201 countries expected to have conducted a census within the 2000 round).

The gaps in the resultant database's coverage of international census-taking were not spread randomly across the globe, as Table 1 shows. The nations of Europe were best-represented in the collection, as all of the 2000 census round questionnaires available have been located. Next came Asia (including the Middle East), for which 80% of the available questionnaires have been obtained, followed by South America and Oceania (79% each), North America (at 51%, including Central America and the Caribbean), and Africa (42%). One effect of this uneven coverage is that African countries, which would make up 22% of the sample and the second-largest regional bloc after Asia if all its 1995–2004 censuses were included, contribute only 13% to the final sample of national census questionnaires studied. More generally, the variation in coverage suggests that while the results to be described can be considered a good representation of enumeration in Europe, Asia, South America, and Oceania, this is not the case for discussion of North (and Central) America or of Africa. Moreover, the country-level data below do not

Table 1 Countries included in study

	N. America		S. America		Africa		Europe		Asia		Oceania		Total	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Included in study	18	49	11	79	19	34	37	76	37	74	19	76	141	61
Missing questionnaire	17	46	3	21	26	46	0	0	9	18	5	20	60	23
No census planned	2	5	0	0	11	20	12	24	4	8	1	4	30	13
Total	37	100	14	100	56	101	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	

Notes: (1) See Appendix Table A for list of countries comprising each region

(2) "No Census Planned" includes both countries that have foregone census enumeration in favor of population registers (this is most often the case in Northern Europe) as well as those that have not scheduled any enumeration for the 2000 round

indicate what percentage of the world's population is covered by the census regimes studied here; findings are not weighted by national population in this inquiry.

Each census form available was checked for questions about respondents' "race," "ethnicity," "ancestry," "nationality" or "national origins," "indigenous" or "aboriginal" status—in short, any terminology that indicated group membership based on descent. Although language, religion, and legal citizenship questions also appear frequently on national censuses and may be interpreted as reflections of ethnic affiliation, I do not include such indirect references to ancestry. (Consider, for example, how poor an indicator of ethnicity "Native English Speaker" status would be in a multicultural society like the United States.) When an ethnicity item as defined above appeared on a census, both the question text and response categories or format were entered verbatim into a database. Translations into English were provided by national census authorities, United Nations staff, the author, and others for all but three questionnaires, resulting in a final sample of 138 censuses.

Findings

Frequency of Ethnic Enumeration

Among the 138 national census questionnaires analyzed, 87 countries or 63% employed some form of ethnic census classification (see Appendix for complete listing). As Table 2 shows, North America, South America, and Oceania were the regions with the greatest propensity to include ethnicity on their censuses. While Asia's tendency to enumerate by ethnicity was close to the sample average, both Europe and Africa were much less likely to do so. This regional variation may be explained by Rallu et al.'s (2004) hypothesis that concern about the preservation of national unity leads some countries to forgo ethnic enumeration. The tendency toward ethnic counting in the Americas also suggests, however, that societies whose

Table 2 Share of countries studied using ethnic enumeration, by region

	N. America		S. America		Africa		Europe		Asia		Oceania		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enumerating ethnicity	15	83	9	82	8	44	16	44	23	64	16	84	87	63
Total *N* countries studied in region	18		11		18		36		36		19		138	

populations are largely descended from relatively recent settlers (voluntary or involuntary) are most likely to characterize their inhabitants in ethnic terms. As Bean and Tienda (1987, pp. 34–35) wrote of the United States, "an ethnic group is *created* by the entry of an immigrant group into…society."

Census Ethnicity Questions

Terminology and Geographic Distribution

Not only do nations and regions vary in their censuses' inclusion of ethnicity items, but they also employ widely differing terminology for such questions. In 49 of the 87 cases of ethnic enumeration (56%), the terms *ethnicity* or *ethnic* (or their foreign-language cognates like *ethnicité* and *étnico*) were used. This terminology was found on censuses from every world region. Often the term was combined with others for clarification, as in: "Caste/Ethnicity" (Nepal); "cultural and ethnic background" (Channel Islands/Jersey); "*grupo étnico (pueblo)*" (Guatemala); "Ethnic/Dialect Group" (Singapore); "Ethnic nationality" (Latvia); and "race or ethnic group" (Jamaica). Overall, 9 different terms or concepts appeared in census ethnicity questions; Table 3 lists them in descending order of frequency. The table also distinguishes between "primary" terms (i.e., first to appear if more than one term is used in one or more questions) and "secondary," or following, terms. For example, in the Nepal example above, *caste* was recorded as the primary term and *ethnicity* as a secondary term.

As Table 3 shows, the second most frequent term after *ethnicity* was *nationality*, used by 20 nations (or 23%). Here *nationality* denoted origins rather than current legal citizenship status. This distinction was made clear in most cases either by the presence on the census questionnaire of a separate question for citizenship (e.g., Romania, Tajikistan) or by the use of the adjective "ethnic" to create the term "ethnic nationality" (Estonia). However, I also include in this category census items that combined ethnicity and nationality by using a single question to identify either citizens' ethnicity or noncitizens' nationality. For example, the Senegalese question ran, "*Ethnie ou nationalité: Inscrivez l'ethnie pour les Sénégalais et la nationalité pour les étrangers*" (Ethnicity or nationality: Write down ethnicity for Senegalese and nationality for foreigners).

References to nationality as ethnic origin came largely from eastern European nations (e.g., Poland, Romania) and Asian countries of the former Soviet Union

Table 3 Terminology of census ethnicity questions

	Number of countries using term as:		Total frequency	
	Primary term	Secondary term	N	%
Ethnicity	45	4	49	56
Nationality	17	3	20	23
Indigenous group/Tribe	6	7	13	15
Race	3	10	13	15
Ancestry/Descent/Origin	3	3	6	7
Cultural group	2	2	4	5
Community/Population	3	0	3	3
Caste	2	0	2	2
Color/Phenotype	2	0	2	2

Notes: (1) The number of primary terms does not sum to the full number of countries that enumerated by ethnicity (87) because some censuses either included an ethnicity term in a secondary position only, preceded by terms referring to language or religion, or used no descriptive term at all (e.g., Philippines: "How does [the person] classify himself/herself?")

(2) The sum of term frequencies exceeds 100% because some censuses feature more than one term

such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (see Table 4). This regional concentration reflects a number of historical factors. First, 20th century (and earlier) movements of both political borders and people in Eastern Europe left groups with allegiances to past or neighboring governments situated in new or different states (Eberhardt 2003). Second, this reinforced existing Romantic notions of nations as corresponding to ethnic communities of descent (Kertzer and Arel 2002b). Finally, the Soviet Union's practice of identifying distinct nationalities within its borders extended the equation of nationality with ethnic membership (Blum and Gousseff 1996).

Roughly 15% of the national censuses asked about respondents' indigenous status. These cases came from North America (e.g., Mexico: "¿[Name] *pertenece a*

Table 4 Census ethnicity terminology by region

Primary or secondary term	N. America		S. America		Africa		Europe		Asia		Oceania		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Ethnicity	8	53	3	33	4	50	9	56	12	52	13	81	49	56
Nationality	0	0	0	0	2	25	9	56	8	35	1	6	20	23
Indigenous/Tribe	2	13	6	67	1	13	0	0	0	0	4	25	13	15
Race	7	47	1	11	1	13	0	0	0	0	4	25	13	15
Countries covered by 4 terms	13	87	8	89	5	63	16	100	20	87	16	100	78	90
No. countries using some ethnicity term	15		9		8		16		23		16		87	

Note: Percentages do not total to 100, because (a) not all ethnic terms are included; and (b) many countries use more than one ethnic term on their censuses

algún grupo indígena?"; Does [name] belong to an indigenous group?), South America (e.g., Venezuela: "*¿Pertenece usted a algún grupo indígena?*"; Do you belong to an indigenous group?), Oceania (e.g., Nauru: "family's local tribe"), and Africa (Kenya: "Write tribe code for Kenyan Africans"). Indigeneity seems to serve as a marker largely in nations that experienced European colonialism, where it distinguishes populations that ostensibly do not have European ancestry (separating them from *mestizos*, for example, in Mexico) or who inhabited the territory prior to European settlement. The indigenous status formulation was not found on any European or Asian censuses.

The same number of countries (13, or 15% of all censuses using some form of ethnic enumeration) asked for respondents' *race*, but this term was three times more likely to appear as a secondary term than as a primary one. For example, the Brazilian question placed *race* after *color* ("*A sua cor o raça e:*"), and Anguilla used *race* to modify *ethnicity*: "To what ethnic/racial group does [the person] belong?" *Race* usage was largely confined to North America (including Central America and the Caribbean), as well as to United States territories in Oceania (American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands). More specifically, census usage of *race* is found almost entirely in the former slaveholding societies of the Western Hemisphere and their territories. Of the 13 countries studied that enumerate by *race*, 11 are either New World former slave societies (United States, Anguilla, Bermuda, Brazil, Jamaica, Saint Lucia) and/or their territories (United States Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands).

Table 4 summarizes the geographic patterns in usage of the four most frequent ethnic terms found on national census questionnaires. Reference to *ethnicity* is most prevalent in Oceania and least prevalent in South America, whereas *nationality* is found on more than half of the European censuses but on none in the Americas. Conversely, references to indigenous status or "tribe" reach their peak in South America, but are absent on European and Asian censuses. Similarly, *race* is not found on European or Asian censuses, but appears on almost half of those used in North America (which includes Central America and the Caribbean). Still, in all regions ethnicity remains the most frequent term used, with the exception of South America, where references to indigenous status appear twice as often as those to ethnicity. Together, the four most frequent terms—*ethnicity*, *nationality*, *indigenous group*, and *race*—appear on 90% of the censuses that enumerate by ethnicity.

The Language of Census Ethnicity Questions: The Subjectivity of Identity

Census ethnicity questions vary considerably not just in their terminology but also in the language they use to elicit respondents' identities. In particular, census questionnaires differ noticeably in their recognition of ethnicity as a matter of subjective belief, as opposed to objective fact. Twelve (or 14%) of the 87 countries that practice ethnic enumeration treat it as a subjective facet of identity by asking respondents what they "think," "consider," or otherwise believe themselves to be. Examples come from every world region. Saint Lucia's census asks, "To what

ethnic group *do you think* [the person] belongs?" (emphasis added) rather than simply, "To what ethnic, racial or national group *does* [the person] belong?" The same explicitly subjective formulation is found on the census questionnaires of New Caledonia ("*A laquelle des communautés suivantes estimez-vous appartenir?*"; To which of the following communities *do you think* you belong?) and Paraguay ("*¿Se considera pert) eneciente a una étnia indígena?*"; *Do you consider yourself* as belonging to an indigenous ethnic group?), for example (emphases mine).

In addition to the recognition of the subjectivity of identity through references to respondents' beliefs, these censuses achieve the same end by emphasizing the personal, self-selected aspect of ethnicity; it is what the individual says it is, not the product of an objective external measurement. Accordingly, the individual respondent's choice is paramount here, as in the Philippines' question, "How does [the person] classify himself/herself?" or Bermuda's "In your opinion, which of the following best describes your ancestry?" South Africa's census asks, "How would (the person) describe him/herself in terms of population group?" while Jamaica asks, "To which race or ethnic group would you say you… belong(s)?", both questions employing the conditional tense. Deference to the individual's choice of self-recognition is found in non-English formulations as well, such as Argentina's "*¿Existe en este hogar alguna persona que se reconozca descendiente o perteneciente a un pueblo indígena?*" (Is there someone in this household who considers him/herself a descendant of or belonging to an indigenous people?) or Suriname's "*Tot welke etnische groep rekent deze persoon zichzelf?*" (With which ethnic group does this person identify him/herself?). Peru's census question even lays out the basis on which individuals might construct their ethnic identity, asking "*¿Por sus antepasados y de acuerdo a sus costumbres Ud. se considera:…*" (Given your ancestors and traditions, you consider yourself…).

Many of these examples also illustrate another strategy of recognizing the subjectivity of identity, and that is the reference to ethnic groups as something with which one *is affiliated*, as opposed to the more total ethnicity as something that one *is*. The difference between an essential *being* ethnic and a constructed *belonging to* an ethnicity can be illustrated by juxtaposing the question "What is your ethnic group?" (United Kingdom) against "To what ethnic group do you belong?" (Guyana). The difference is subtle, yet it marks a distinction between a more essentialist concept of ethnicity as objectively given, and a more constructionist understanding of ethnicity as socially and thus subjectively developed. In addition to the 14% of the national censuses studied that presented ethnicity as subjective in the ways previously described, another 21% (18 countries) used the concept of belonging (*appartenir* in French, *pertenecer* in Spanish) in the formulation of their ethnicity question. Again, this approach was found on censuses from every world region.

It is clear however that in the majority of cases, census ethnicity questions were brief and direct, simply treating ethnicity as an objective individual characteristic to be reported. Some did not in fact include a question, merely a title (e.g., "Ethnic Group," Bulgaria). However, it should be noted that three national censuses from eastern Europe indicated that it was not obligatory to respond to the ethnicity question, ostensibly due to its sensitive nature. Croatia's census notes "person is not

obliged to commit himself/herself," Slovenia's reads, "You don't have to answer this question if you don't wish to," and Hungary adds, "Answering the following questions is not compulsory!"

Answering the Ethnicity Question

Response Formats

Turning now to the structuring of response options for ethnicity questions, the national censuses studied employed three types of answer format:

1. Closed-ended responses (e.g., category checkboxes; code lists)
2. Closed-ended with open-ended "Other" option (i.e., permitting the respondent to write in a group name not included on the list presented)
3. Open-ended (i.e., write-in blanks)

The three approaches were used in nearly equal proportions among the 87 countries employing ethnic enumeration: 32 (37%) used the entirely closed-ended approach, 28 (32%) the mixed approach, and 27 (31%) permitted respondents to write in whatever ethnic identity they chose.

The closed-ended approach generally took two forms: either a limited number of checkbox category options, or the request to select a code from a list of ethnic groups assigned to codes. The former strategy can be found, for example, on the Brazilian census, which gave respondents five options to choose from to identify their "color or race": (1) *Branca* (white); (2) *Preta* (black or dark brown); (3) *Parda* (brown or light brown); (4) *Amarela* (yellow); (5) *Indigena* (indigenous). This listing of five categories is a relatively brief one; another such example is Romania's series of "nationality" answers: (1) Romanian; (2) Hungarian; (3) Gypsy/Roma; (4) German, and (5) Other. At the other end of the spectrum, Guatemala offered a list of 22 indigenous groups plus *Garifuna* and *Ladino*, and Argentina and Paraguay each presented a list of 17 indigenous groups for selection by the respondent. However, the second type of closed-ended format—the linking of ethnic groups to code numbers—permitted respondents to select from an even longer list of choices; Laos offered 48 such code options. Other countries to use the code-list strategy were Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, the Philippines, and India.

An even wider range of responses was possible on the censuses that featured the combination of closed-ended categories with a fill-in blank for the "Other" option alone. After giving respondents six options to choose from—Estonian, Ukrainian, Finnish, Russian, Belorussian, and Latvian—the Estonian census requested that individuals choosing the seventh "Other" box write in their specific "ethnic nationality." In Mongolia, respondents either identified with the *Khalkh* option or wrote in their ethnicity. Singapore listed 13 possibilities for "ethnic/dialect group"—Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka (Khek), Hainanese, Malay, Boyanese, Javanese, Tamil, Filipino, Thai, Japanese, and Eurasian—before requesting specification from anyone selecting the last, "Others" option.

Table 5 Census ethnicity response formats by region

	N. America		S. America		Africa		Europe		Asia		Oceania		Total	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Closed-ended	7	47	6	67	5	63	2	13	6	26	6	38	32	37
Closed w/"Other" write-in option	6	40	3	33	1	13	11	69	2	9	5	31	28	32
Open-ended	2	13	0	0	2	25	3	19	15	65	5	31	27	31
Total	15	100	9	100	8	101	16	101	23	100	16	100	87	100

Note: Each country is represented only once here even if its census includes more than one question on ethnicity. In that case, only the first question is classified here

In the last, entirely open-ended strategy, respondents were simply asked to "write in" (Senegal) or "provide the name of" (China) their ethnic group. This approach may not always offer the respondent as much latitude as it appears, however. In nations where one's ethnic affiliation is firmly fixed in other official records (e.g., mandatory identity documents), individuals may not choose freely from an unlimited range of identities so much as they reproduce the label that has already been assigned to them by state bureaucracies.

Although the sample of censuses studied was fairly evenly divided across the three types of ethnic response format, each world region generally favored one approach more than the others. Table 5 shows that in South America and Africa, the closed-ended approach was taken by about two thirds of the national censuses, whereas roughly the same share in Europe used the mixed approach, and about two thirds of Asian censuses relied on the open-ended strategy.

In addition to geographic distribution, census ethnicity response formats also vary depending on whether the terminology in use is *ethnicity*, *nationality*, *indigenous status/tribe*, or *race* (see Table 6). In particular, questions on nationality are most likely to permit some kind of write-in response, while those inquiring

Table 6 Census ethnicity response formats, by question type

Primary term only	Type of question terminology							
	Ethnicity		Nationality		Indigenous/Tribe		Race	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Closed-ended	38	17	12	2	67	4	67	2
Closed w/"Other" write-in	31	14	35	6	16	1	33	1
Open-ended	31	14	53	9	16	1	0	0
Total	100	45	100	17	99	6	100	3

Note: Only 71 countries, rather than the full 87 that enumerate by ethnicity, are included in this table because it is limited to census questionnaires whose primary ethnicity term is one of the four most frequent terms: *ethnicity, nationality, indigenous/tribe*, or *race*. See Table 3 for the breakdown of ethnicity terms by primary and secondary status

about indigenous status and race are the least likely to do so. The first finding may reflect the expectation that fairly few national origins are likely to be elicited and thus an open-ended approach is not likely to become unwieldy. The second finding may reflect governmental tendencies to develop official lists of indigenous and racial groups that are formally recognized by the state, coupled with a sense of necessity to assign all respondents to such predetermined indigenous or racial groups. In addition, popular conceptions of these identities may depict them as involving a limited number of categories (such as "black," "white," and "yellow" color groupings) or even simple dichotomies (e.g., indigenous versus nonindigenous).

Response Options

Census response formats for ethnicity vary in other ways worth noting:

a. *Mixed or Combined Categories*. Several census questionnaires permit the respondent to identify with more than one ethnicity. This flexibility takes three forms. First, some censuses allow the respondent to check off more than one category (e.g., Channel Islands—Jersey; Canada; New Zealand; United States; U.S. Virgin Islands). Other census questionnaires offer a generic mixed-ethnicity response option (e.g., "Mixed": Channel Islands—Jersey, Saint Lucia, Anguilla, Guyana, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Suriname; "*Mestizo*": Belize, Peru; "Coloured" in South Africa). Finally, some censuses specify exact combinations of interest, for example: "White and Black Caribbean," "White and Black African," etc., in the United Kingdom; "Black and White," "Black and Other," etc., in Bermuda; "Part Cook Island Maori," Cook Islands; "Eurasian," Singapore; "Part Ni-Vanuatu," Vanuatu; "Part Tokelauan/Samoan," "Part Tokelauan/Tuvaluan," etc., Tokelau; "Part Tongan," Tonga; and "Part Tuvaluan" in Tuvalu.

b. *Overlap Between Ethnic, National, Language and Other Response Categories*. The conceptual proximity between such concepts as ethnicity and nationality is illustrated once again by some censuses' use of the same set of response categories to serve as answers to distinct questions on ethnicity, nationality, or language. For example, the Bermudan census response category "Asian" can be selected when responding either to the *race* or the "ancestry" question. An even more striking example comes from Hungary, where the same detailed list of categories serves as the response options to *three* separate questions (one each for nationality, culture and language); the options are: Bulgarian; Gipsy (Roma); Beas; Romani; Greek; Croatian; Polish; German; Armenian; Roumanian; Ruthenian; Serbian; Slovakian; Slovenian; Ukrainian; Hungarian, and "Do not wish to answer." Moldova also uses the same responses for three questions (one each on citizenship, nationality, and language), while Estonia and Poland use the same categories for their citizenship and ethnic nationality questions, and Latvia, Romania, and Turkmenistan use the same response options for nationality and language questions.

It is also worth recalling that even when only one ethnicity question appears on a census with one set of response options, the answer categories themselves may reference multiple concepts such as race and nationality. The United States' race question, which includes answers like "white" and "black" alongside national or ethnic designations like "Korean" and "Japanese," provides a good example. Similarly, Saint Lucia and Guyana's ethnicity options include races like "black" and "white" alongside national designations like "Chinese" and "Portuguese."

Nationality and ethnicity are also intertwined on censuses that use a single question to ask respondents for ethnicity if they are citizens, but for something else if they are foreigners. For example, Indonesia requests, "If the respondent is a foreigner, please specify his/her citizenship and if the respondent is an Indonesian, please specify his/her ethnicity." Kenya's ethnicity question reads, "Write tribe code for Kenyan Africans and country of origin for other Kenyans and non-Kenyans." Zambia's ethnicity question instructs, "If Zambian enter ethnic grouping, if not mark major racial group." And Iraq's census asks only Iraqis to answer the ethnicity question.

Perhaps the simplest cases of conceptual overlap occur, however, on censuses that combine multiple terms in the same item, such as the conflation of *ethnicity* and *race* in the Solomon Islands' question: "Ethnicity. What race do you belong to? Melanesian, Polynesian, Micronesian, Chinese, European, other or mixed?"

c. *Use of Examples*. National censuses vary considerably in the extent to which they employ examples to facilitate response to their ethnicity questions. Given typical space constraints, this strategy is not widespread; instead, the list of checkbox response options may serve as the principal illustration of the objective of the question. For example, the Philippine presentation of examples before its closed-ended code-list question is unusual: "How does [the person] classify himself/herself? Is he/she an Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Mangyan, Manobo, Chinese, Ilocano or what?" Instead, examples are more likely to be employed when the answer format calls for an open-ended write-in response; it is in this context, for example, that Fiji offers respondents the examples "Chinese, European, Fijian, Indian, part European, Rotuman, Tongan, etc." The U.S. Pacific territories do the same for their "ethnic origin or race" write-in item.

In summary, both the amount of latitude that census respondents enjoy when answering an ethnicity question and the amount of guidance or clarification they are given vary widely across the international spectrum.

Case Study: U.S. Ethnic Enumeration in Global Context

One of the primary motives for this comparative investigation of ethnic enumeration is to identify widespread census practices and provide demographers with a basis for applied evaluations of individual censuses. In this spirit I focus on the case of the

United States in order to furnish an example of how a given national census might be assessed in light of global ethnic classification practices.

Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Enumeration in Global Perspective

The United States Census of 2000 asked respondents to answer three questions about ethnicity (Fig. 1). When compared to other national censuses from the 2000 round, it is clear that the current United States census practice of enumerating Hispanic ethnicity, race, and ancestry is unusual in several respects. For one thing, the United States is part of a small minority of nations that use the term *race* for its primary ethnicity question. As Table 3 showed, only 15% of the countries that use ethnic enumeration employed the language of race on their censuses. It must be noted, however, that even when national censuses referred to *ethnicity* rather than *race*, the response categories they offered often included the same groups as would be found among the answer options to a race question, such as "Black," "Caucasian," or "Chinese." The U.S. response options also display a great deal of conceptual overlap: the category "Mexican," for example, figures on both the Hispanic ethnicity and the ancestry questions, and "African American" and "Korean" are both race and ancestry categories. The explicit permission to select more than one race or ancestry group is another distinguishing feature of the 2000 U.S. census.

U.S. ethnic enumeration diverges most strikingly from other countries', however, in its treatment of *race* as a concept distinct from *ethnicity*. This conceptual demarcation is evinced by two aspects of the U.S. census: its use of an ethnicity question that is separate from its race question, and its targeting of only one ethnic group: Hispanics. The inclusion of an ethnicity question that identifies only one group (Hispanics) is unique; no other national census takes such an asymmetrical approach to nonindigenous respondents, singling out only one group rather than identifying a wider range of ethnic affiliations. The closest parallel can be found on some countries' dichotomous questions concerning indigenous status, although many of those in fact seek to capture a wide range of indigenous affiliations, not just a generic aboriginal status. The U.S. separation of *race* from its question on *ethnicity* that is dedicated to enumerating only one group (Hispanics) conveys the idea that neither the race question nor the ancestry question can adequately identify this group, leaving open the question of how *ethnicity* and *race* differ from each other.

This question looms even larger when it becomes apparent through international comparison that the United States is the only nation in this sample whose census treats race as a measure separate from ethnicity.[2] All the other censuses instead present the two concepts as interchangeable, as in "To what ethnic/racial group does [the person] belong?" (Anguilla). Interestingly, even the censuses administered in

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[2] The only other nation to suggest such a distinction is Zambia, whose census instructs, "If Zambian enter ethnic grouping, if not mark major racial group." But by combining the two terms in one question, this formulation departs from the U.S. presumption that the same individual must be classified simultaneously along two different dimensions of identity: an "ethnic" one and a "racial" one.

- **Is this person Spanish / Hispanic / Latino?** *Mark ⊠ the "No" box if **not** Spanish / Hispanic / Latino.*

  ☐ **No,** not Spanish / Hispanic / Latino

  ☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

  ☐ Yes, Puerto Rican

  ☐ Yes, Cuban

  ☐ Yes, other Spanish / Hispanic / Latino – *Print group.*

- **What is this person's race?** *Mark ⊠ **one or more races** to indicate what this person considers himself / herself to be.*

  ☐ White

  ☐ Black, African Am., or Negro

  ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native – *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe*

  ☐ Asian Indian   ☐ Native Hawaiian

  ☐ Chinese   ☐ Guamanian

  ☐ Filipino   or Chamorro

  ☐ Japanese   ☐ Samoan

  ☐ Korean   ☐ Other Pacific Islander – *Print race.*

  ☐ Vietnamese

  ☐ Other Asian – *Print race.*

  ☐ Some other race – *Print race.*

- **What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?**   (For example: Italian, Jamaican, African Am., Cambodian, Cape Verdean, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian and so on)

Fig. 1 U.S. 2000 Census questions on Hispanic ethnicity, race, and ancestry

the United States' Pacific territories treat race and ethnicity as substitutes for each other: "What is this person's ethnic origin or race?" (used in American Samoa, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands).

The United States' unique conceptual distinction between race and ethnicity may unwittingly support the longstanding belief that race reflects biological difference and ethnicity stems from cultural difference. In this scheme, ethnicity is socially produced but race is an immutable facet of nature. Consequently, walling off *race* from *ethnicity* on the census may reinforce essentialist interpretations of race and preclude understanding of the ways in which racial categories are also socially constructed. This conclusion is evident in the U.S. federal racial classification standards' explanation for why Hispanics are not enumerated as a race (Office of Management and Budget 1997); they are instead an "ethnic group" that is demarcated by culture (specifically, "Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race"). In this view, which is extremely unusual in international perspective, ethnic groups are different from races because they are rooted in sociohistorical contexts; races thus appear to be grounded in something other than social processes.

Comparing the United States to Nations with Similar Demographic History

In addition to contrasting the U.S. census broadly with all other countries that enumerate by ethnicity, it is also instructive to compare the United States to the narrower range of nations with similar demographic histories. The formation of states in the wake of European colonization is a fairly widespread experience, but the subsequent development of societies that—like the U.S.—are numerically dominated by people of European descent is largely limited to the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand. And while all of these cases entailed European encounters with indigenous peoples, not all experienced the influx as well of a significant African population. Taking these fundamental features into account, perhaps the country most demographically similar to the United States is Brazil, but as numerous authors have demonstrated, the two countries have developed quite different forms of race relations and imagery (Marx 1998; Nobles 2000; Telles 2004). In short, the United States' demographic evolution and its cultural response are unique. Nonetheless, I sketch below a few points of comparison between it and other societies outside Europe in which the descendants of European settlers have remained a distinct majority—like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—or have assimilated a large African population, like Brazil.

Like the United States, Canada uses three questions to elicit ethnic information from its respondents. First is an ancestry question, "To which ethnic or cultural group(s) did this person's ancestors belong?" Answer examples are given, and individuals are permitted four open-ended fill-in entries. Next Canadians are asked (without specifying the term "race"), "Is this person…" and they are given the following response options: White; Chinese; South Asian; Black; Arab/West Asian; Filipino; South East Asian; Latin American; Japanese; Korean; Other—specify. Respondents may mark more than one group. Finally, Canadians are asked about their indigenous affiliation.

Three differences from the U.S. procedure are particularly noteworthy. First is the list of categories on the Canadian race question; as in the United States, they include categories such as White, Black, and several Asian categories (e.g., Chinese, Japanese). However, they also include the category "Latin American" among these choices—unlike the American creation of a separate Hispanic ethnicity question—and they include an "Arab/West Asian" option, thereby facilitating the self-identification of people of Arab or Middle Eastern descent. Second, Canadians are permitted to list up to four ancestry groups, compared to the two allowed on the U.S. census long form. Finally, Statistics Canada has placed explanatory notes next to its census ethnicity questions. The question on ancestral origins is annotated:

> "While most people in Canada view themselves as Canadians, information on their ancestral origins has been collected since the 1901 Census to capture the changing composition of Canada's diverse population. Therefore, this question refers to the origins of the person's ancestors."

Moreover, Canada's race item (with categories beginning, "White," "Chinese," "South Asian," "Black," etc.) is accompanied by the note, "This information is collected to support programs that promote equal opportunity for everyone to share

in the social, cultural and economic life of Canada." In other words, Statistics Canada attempts to provide its respondents with a rationale for the use of such questions.

Like Canada, both Australia and New Zealand distinguish general ethnicity questions ("What is the person's ancestry?" and "Which ethnic group do you belong to?", respectively) from those that refer to indigenous status ("Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?" on the Australian census; the New Zealand census asks, "Are you descended from a Mäori (that is, did you have a Mäori birth parent, grandparent or great-grandparent, etc)?" and if so, "Do you know the name(s) of your iwi (tribe or tribes)?"). Response options to the Australian ancestry question include: English; Irish; Italian; German; Greek; Chinese; Australian, and "Other—please specify." The possible answers to New Zealand's general ethnicity question are: New Zealand European; Maori; Samoan; Cook Island Maori; Tongan; Niuean; Chinese; Indian, and "Other (such as DUTCH, JAPANESE, TOKELAUAN)." (Multiple responses are permitted.) The response format to New Zealand's general ethnicity question is of particular interest because it explicitly names indigenous groups side-by-side with other ethnic groups, unlike its Australian and Canadian counterparts, where indigenous groups are named only as part of a separate question. In this respect, it is similar to the U.S. race question, but unlike the U.S., it dedicates two additional questions to enumerating indigenous people.

In contrast to the American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand cases, the Brazilian census' ethnic enumeration is limited to one question. It asks for respondents' "color or race" ("*A sua cor ou raça e:*") and the five response categories use color terms (*Branca*—white; *Amarela*—yellow), imply a gradation of color (*Preta, Parda*—darker and lighter brown), and identify *Indigena* status.[3] Since Brazil is the only other country highlighted here to have been a large-scale importer of African slaves, it is notable that both the U.S. and Brazil privilege the concept of race—anchored in a black/white binary—in their ethnic enumeration practices, whereas Canada, Australia and New Zealand evoke "ethnicity" and "ancestry."

Brazil's reliance on one question alone raises the important question of why more than one ethnicity item might be necessary for a national census. In other words, do multiple questions actually target different kinds of information, or could they plausibly be covered with one question alone? The Canadian inclusion of "Latin Americans" among other racial groups suggests that the U.S. could dispense with its separate Hispanic ethnicity question and instead incorporate Hispanics alongside its categories of white, black, etc. (Former U.S. Census Bureau director Kenneth Prewitt, among others, has made this suggestion; see Prewitt 2005.) And the Australian and New Zealand censuses (in addition to Brazil's) do not call for separate *ancestry* questions distinct from *ethnicity* or *race* items. In short, censuses from the small group of countries that are demographically comparable to the United States illustrate several ways in which ethnic enumeration could be

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[3] This emphasis on phenotype is found on only one other census in this sample, that of another former Portuguese colony: Mozambique. Mozambique's census asks for "*tipo somático/origem*" and features response categories similar to Brazil's (*Negro; Misto; Branco; Indiano; Outro*).

streamlined (or expanded). These myriad approaches highlight the importance of clear conceptual goals in designing ethnicity questions that obtain the desired information yet do not burden respondents with unnecessary overlap that may cause confusion.

Ethnic Enumeration in Largest Immigrant-Sending Countries

The final set of countries whose enumeration practices are of particular comparative interest when assessing a national census are the largest contemporary senders of that country's immigrants. In the case of the United States, that group includes: Mexico, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Cuba, Korea (both South and North), Canada, El Salvador, and Germany (see Table 7). Their importance lies in the fact that they are likely to have shaped the understandings of ethnicity that immigrants draw on when confronted with the nation classification schemes in force in their new home country.

Almost all of the major immigrant source countries for whom census questionnaires were available[4] used some form of census ethnic enumeration; South Korea is the sole exception. Mexico is a particularly important case as it far surpasses any other nation as a source of immigrants to the United States. But it also stands out in this group because it alone employs a single dichotomous yes/no question about indigenous status ("¿[Name] *pertenece a algún grupo indígena*?"; Does [name] belong to an indigenous group?). As a result, its ethnic enumeration approach is perhaps most distinct from that of the United States, compared to those of other major immigration source countries, and indeed, the disjuncture between the Mexican and U.S. approaches to ethnic enumeration is strongly evident in Mexican immigrants' responses to the U.S. census race question. Del Pinal and Ennis (2005) found that among the 2000 census respondents who reported Mexico as their country of birth, nearly 11% refused to select a race, and over 45% chose "Some other race" as their answer. In other words, over half of the Mexico-born population in the United States opted not to identify themselves in the customary U.S. racial terms. Respondents born in El Salvador, the 9th-largest country of birth for the U.S. foreign-born, were even less likely to select one of the official racial categories used on the U.S. census; only 38% did so (del Pinal and Ennis 2005). The divergence in the Mexican and U.S. approaches to ethnic enumeration appear to be associated with the latter's lack of clarity or relevance for Mexican-origin respondents.

In contrast to Mexico's dichotomous question on indigenous status, however, most of the United States' major immigrant source countries offer broader and more open-ended formats for reporting ethnicity. The censuses of China and Vietnam feature a write-in format for "ethnic group, " and India and the Philippines ask respondents to select a numerical code from a code list to indicate caste and tribe (in the Indian case) or ethnicity (in the Filipino case, where the question reads, "How

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[4] The census questionnaire for El Salvador is missing, and Cuba and Germany did not conduct censuses in the 2000 round (Germany maintains a population register instead).

Table 7 Top ten countries of birth of U.S. foreign-born population

From 2000 census	Number	% of All U.S. foreign-born
Mexico	9,177,487	29.5
China	1,518,652	4.9
Philippines	1,369,070	4.4
India	1,022,552	3.3
Vietnam	988,174	3.2
Cuba	872,716	2.8
Korea	864,125	2.8
Canada	820,771	2.6
El Salvador	817,336	2.6
Germany	706,704	2.3
Total, top 10 countries	18,157,587	58.4
Total foreign born, all countries	31,107,889	100.0

Source: This table adapted from Malone et al. (2003, Table 2)

does [the person] classify himself/herself? Is he/she an Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Mangyan, Manobo, Chinese, Ilocano or what?"). India and the Philippines offer particularly good examples of the ways in which immigrants are likely to have been accustomed to group categories in their home countries that are entirely different from those encountered on the U.S. census. Although Asian immigrants find their responses to the U.S. race question facilitated by the inclusion of national categories ("Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," and "Vietnamese" all have their own checkboxes on the race question), this attempt at ethnic enumeration is unlikely to elicit the group identities that were originally salient for them in their countries of origin. And for immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, who are not offered any national designators on the U.S. census race question, the instruction to locate themselves in the categories of White, Black, Asian, or American Indian must seem even more at odds with the ethnicity schemes to which they are accustomed (Rodríguez 2000; Waters 1999).

Review of the ethnic enumeration approaches found on the censuses of the largest source countries of the U.S. foreign-born population suggests that immigrants may have difficulty responding to national census ethnicity questions when the approach or categories of their countries of origin are markedly different from those found in their country of destination. Comparisons of a given census to those of its largest immigration source countries should thus be taken into consideration when evaluating the efficacy of national census ethnicity items.

Implications of Comparative Review for U.S. Census Ethnic Classification

One of the main objectives of the juxtaposition of U.S. census approaches to ethnicity with those of other nations has been to illustrate how a comparative perspective reveals distinct national practices that might merit review and redesign

in future census rounds. In the U.S. case, in particular, at least three striking divergences from international conventions emerged.

The United States is One of a Small Number of Nations to Enumerate by "Race"

In the sample analyzed here, only 15% of the census questionnaires referred to *race*. However, many countries that used the term *ethnicity* in their census question included traditional race labels (e.g., "black," "Caucasian") among their response options.

The United States is Virtually Alone in Treating "Race" and "Ethnicity" as Different Types of Identity

The few other countries that mention both *race* and *ethnicity* on their census questionnaires—there are eight in this sample—treat them as synonymous (as in Anguilla's question, "To what ethnic/racial group does [the person] belong?"), with the exception of Zambia. And only the United States uses separate questions to measure its inhabitants' race versus their ethnicity. One unintended effect of this practice may be to reinforce essentialist biological understandings of *race*, since it is presented as distinct from culturally delineated and socially produced *ethnicity*.

The United States' Use of an "Ethnicity" Question to Single Out Only One Group (Hispanics) is Unique

National ethnic enumeration is usually intended to permit all respondents to register the group(s) with which they identify. In contrast, the United States' ethnicity question records ethnic identity only if it is Hispanic; all others are deemed simply non-Hispanic. The closest precedent for this approach in the rest of the world is the measurement of indigenous status, but even this inquiry usually permits respondents to identify with a number of groups (as is true of the "American Indian or Alaska Native" fill-in blank on the U.S. race question). The delegation of Hispanic ethnicity to a question other than the race or ancestry questions raises the question of what it is about this particular group that precludes its measurement through either the race or ancestry questions. Moreover, it results in the somewhat unusual practice of using three distinct ethnicity questions.

The ways in which U.S. ethnic enumeration differs from other countries' practices suggest possible areas for change (with the assumption that some form of ethnicity enumeration is to be retained). Of course, the fact that one country has adopted a particular classificatory scheme does not imply any requirement that it be more closely aligned with other national conventions. Such departures from widespread norms, however, can prove fertile sites for questioning national objectives of ethnic enumeration and revisiting established approaches; in other

words, identifying divergence from widespread practices offers demographers and policymakers "food for thought."

In the U.S. case, international comparisons suggest several avenues for future innovations in ethnic enumeration. For example, placing the unusual American separation of *race* from *ethnicity* questions in international context suggests two modifications. One might be to offer some explanation or guidance concerning the difference between the two concepts (recall Canada's guide to *ancestry*). What do *race* and *ethnicity* each mean in this context? Such a step would both clarify the rationale for the two questions and facilitate response; this is particularly meaningful since the race, Hispanic ethnicity, and ancestry questions have had among the highest item nonresponse rates on the U.S. census.

Another possible modification might be to combine the race and ethnicity questions, if in fact there is little logical rationale for treating Hispanics as a group apart. This approach could also have the positive effect of underscoring the socially constructed nature of all the categories in question—including "black" and "white"—especially if the resultant combined question used the language of "ethnicity" rather than "race."[5] Dropping the reference to *race* would also bring the United States' practice closer to that of other nations.

The unique U.S. practice of using an ethnicity question to target only one type of group affiliation (Hispanic) could also be modified by turning the current ethnicity question into one that resembles the type found most commonly abroad: a question that permits respondents to register the full range of ethnic identities. This could happen in one of two ways (assuming no change to the current race question). One possibility would be to expand the current Hispanic ethnicity question into a more comprehensive ethnicity question, along the lines of "To what ethnic group do you belong?", with either closed- or open-ended responses. The other strategy would be to adapt the current ancestry question in some way (if necessary) to ensure that it adequately captures Hispanic ethnicity. Both approaches involve some kind of amalgamation of the current ethnicity and ancestry questions into a single question. This might be preferable to combining the Hispanic ethnicity question with the race question, as the Hispanic category—especially with its subcategories like "Mexican," "Cuban," etc.—is perhaps conceptually closer to ancestry categories like "Irish" or "Italian."

Finally, the examples of Brazil and many other countries raise the question of why a national census would require even two questions on ethnicity; would one be sufficient? Considering that all the categories in question are socially delineated groupings with some reference to geographical origins, perhaps one question could be developed. This would not only save space, but it would also assuage the suspicion that some groups receive more attention—welcome or unwelcome—than others. Consider the United Kingdom's example, which uses a racial framework (white, Asian, black) to structure its request for more detailed national/ethnic identifiers (Fig. 2).

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[5] Note that the American Anthropological Association (1997) has also recommended that the term "ethnicity" replace "race" in federal classification, for the same reason.

What is your ethnic group? Choose ONE section from A to E, then check the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

A. White

   ☐ British

   ☐ Irish

   ☐ Any other White background, please write in

B. Mixed

   ☐ White and Black Caribbean

   ☐ White and Black African

   ☐ White and Asian

   ☐ Any other Mixed background, please write in

C. Asian or Asian British

   ☐ Indian

   ☐ Pakistani

   ☐ Bangladeshi

   ☐ Any other Asian background, please write in

D. Black or Black British

   ☐ Caribbean

   ☐ African

   ☐ Any other Black background, please write in

E. Chinese or other ethnic group

   ☐ Chinese

   ☐ Any other, please write in

Fig. 2 United Kingdom 2001 Census question on ethnicity (used in England and Scotland)

Here racial groups (white, Asian, and black) are used as the superstructure for a more detailed breakdown of identities by national or regional origin. The same model could be used without recourse to racial labels, substituting continental origins (African, European, Asian) instead. In this way, the detailed ethnic identities currently sought by the U.S. ancestry and Hispanic ethnicity questions could be recorded, but the data could also be grouped into "racial" categories as desired.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings

Although widespread, ethnic enumeration is not a universal feature of national censuses; 63% of the censuses studied here included some type of ethnicity question. In nearly half of these cases, "ethnicity" was the term used, but significant numbers of censuses inquired about "nationality," "indigenous status," and "race." Each of these terms tended to be associated with a particular type of response format: questions about indigenous status were most likely to entail a closed-ended response format (checkboxes or code lists), whereas nationality questions were the most likely to permit open-ended responses (i.e., fill-in blanks). National census practices also varied in terms of their allowance of multiple-group reporting and use of examples.

The large number of questionnaires studied here (138 in total, with 87 employing ethnic enumeration) permits the exploration of geographic patterns in census practices. Based on this sample, it appears that nations in the Americas and in Oceania are most likely to enumerate by ethnicity, while those in Europe and Africa are the least likely. Among the countries that do practice census ethnic classification, the term "nationality" is most likely to be used in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, while "indigenous status" is most likely to be a concern in the Americas, as is "race."

Finally, comparison of U.S. ethnic enumeration with census practices elsewhere illustrates the ways in which global overviews can highlight unusual national procedures and provoke reevaluation, if not necessarily reformulation, of such items.

Uses of International Comparison of Ethnic Enumeration

As outlined earlier, global comparisons of ethnic enumeration practices offer insights for applied, theoretical, and policy agendas. Below I discuss the implications of this project's findings for each of those research areas.

Applied Demography

Despite the variety of terminologies and approaches to ethnic enumeration taken by censuses worldwide, the opportunity to place a national census in international perspective casts new light on existing practices and suggests potential modifications for future approaches. Thus global comparisons—and global communication between national census bureaus—have much to offer. This is particularly true as a growing number of countries face similar issues related to ethnic enumeration, such as immigrant inflows or calls for strengthened antidiscrimination protections. At the same time, there is a growing body of academic literature that explores the impact of governmental activities such as census-taking on notions of identity and group

belonging (Goldberg 2002; Kertzer and Arel 2002a). The realization that official ethnic enumeration is not simply a scientific measurement of objective fact, but that it simultaneously shapes the identities it seeks to capture, provides another reason for considering how and why diverse nations grapple with the task. Attention to the strategies employed abroad to register ethnic diversity can thus provide useful input for the review of any one national approach in particular.

In the past, international comparisons of ethnic enumeration have been limited to small case studies, regional surveys, or purposive samples of well-documented country experiences. Thanks to the United Nations' collection of census questionnaires, this study offers a much more comprehensive and systematic survey of international ethnic enumeration practices. In addition to permitting new insight into the patterns of variation in ethnic enumeration worldwide, this study also provides an opportunity to consider the commonalities that undergird varied national census approaches.

However, this collection of data is limited in certain ways that leave several issues open for future research. For example, linking enumeration practices to statistical results on ethnicity could address the question of whether countries with particular social compositions are more likely to undertake particular forms of ethnic enumeration. (It would be necessary to take into account, of course, that our statistics on ethnic makeup depend on the enumeration strategy.) Such an exploration would also offer insight into which types of ethnic questions and answer formats are likely to garner the highest item response rates. Unfortunately, however, international statistics on the final results of census enumeration by ethnicity are not easily available in a central location. By the end of 2003, only 29 nations had submitted 2000-round data on their ethnic composition to the United Nations' *Demographic Yearbook* (United Nations Statistical Division 2003).

Theorizing Ethnic Classification as Cause and Effect

Similarly, this study offers tools for future social scientific research on the causes and effects of formal ethnic enumeration. Its findings regarding which nations count by ethnicity, how they do so, and the geographic patterns of variation in their practice all constitute a starting point for the development of theory accounting for the use of ethnic enumeration. For example, the finding that ethnic enumeration is relatively limited in Europe and in Africa may lend support to Rallu et al.'s (2004) hypothesis that governments concerned with national unity avoid ethnic classification. Another finding relates to theory-building about the type of ethnic question used: namely, the discovery that it is almost exclusively nations with a history of African slavery (and their territories) that use the language of "race" today suggests that ethnic terminology is produced by specific forms of social stratification. To fully pursue these questions, however, comprehensive data on historical social, economic, and political forces must be brought into the picture. In-depth review of national debates and discourses concerning ethnicity would also add immeasurably to such an account of the explanatory factors behind specific ethnic enumeration practices. Executing such a study on an international scale—i.e., for hundreds of countries—obviously represents a tremendous challenge, one that is well beyond the

scope and data of this project. A more practical undertaking might be to conduct such research on a regional scale, combining both breadth and depth of knowledge for real theoretical reward.

Finally, theorizing ethnic enumeration also calls for further research that approaches it as a causal variable. Does the official decision to classify a population by ethnicity on a national census have repercussions in terms of individuals' self-identification, intergroup relations, or the prevalence of discrimination? Again, linking data on such outcomes to the type of finding reported here would permit the testing of these hypotheses. Such research would be particularly meaningful because it addresses the concerns that drive the contemporary debates about ethnic enumeration policies that I describe next.

Evaluating Ethnic Enumeration as Policy

In addition to the empirical, theoretical, and applied contributions to be made to existing research on ethnic classification, the findings reported here are relevant to debates about the formulation, feasibility, and desirability of both census ethnic enumeration and international guidelines concerning it. The case of the United States offers a productive example of how cross-national comparison can highlight features of national ethnic enumeration that invite new conceptual approaches.

Any proposal for new enumeration strategies, however, must reckon with the fact that census construction is not merely an exercise in survey design; it is fundamentally a political process, where state and group interests and ideology thoroughly inform the final census product (Anderson 1988; Kertzer and Arel 2002a; Nobles 2000; Skerry 2000). The United States in particular offers a long record of instances in which official racial classification has been shaped by forces other than methodological concerns (Lee 1993; Morning 2003; Wolfe 2001). The current format that distinguishes Hispanics as an ethnic group but not a race, the inclusion of multiple subcategories of the "Asian" race option, and the retention of a "Some other race" response are just a few examples of census features championed by political actors.

Consequently, it is not enough to appeal to methodological principles of logic, consistency, parsimony, or clarity—nor to international precedent—when calling for change in census questionnaires. Political interpretation and agendas around the census must also be taken into account. More specifically, potential revisions that are suggested by cross-national comparison must address the policy concerns and motivations that shaped the current questionnaire. Are these political exigencies still salient or have they diminished in importance? Does the proposed revision solve or exacerbate the social problem in question, or do neither? Will the suggested change have other benefits or costs? How do they compare to the benefits and costs of the existing arrangement? Although survey design problems such as inconsistency or lack of clarity may not seem pressing enough to overhaul longstanding census items, we should not overlook the fact that they entail real costs; confusion, nonresponse, offense, and lack of representation are just a few. In other words, the kinds of census design flaws that cross-national comparison reveals are most likely

to be addressed if their implications for data quality are translated into the political language of social costs and benefits that has always shaped national census-taking.

International guidelines for the conduct of population censuses must also take both design imperatives and policy motivations into account. The most widely applicable guidance is the United Nations Statistical Division's (1998) *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (*Revision 1*). In its discussion of ethnic enumeration, this document stresses the practical difficulty of proposing a common, cross-national approach to ethnic enumeration:

> The national and/or ethnic groups of the population about which information is needed in different countries are dependent upon national circumstances. Some of the bases upon which ethnic groups are identified are ethnic nationality (in other words country or area of origin as distinct from citizenship or country of legal nationality), race, colour, language, religion, customs of dress or eating, tribe or various combinations of these character-istics. In addition, some of the terms used, such as "race", "origin" and "tribe," have a number of different connotations. The definitions and criteria applied by each country investigating ethnic characteristics of the population must therefore be determined by the groups that it desires to identify. By the very nature of the subject, these groups will vary widely from country to country; thus, no internationally relevant criteria can be recommended. (p. 72)

Despite the United Nations' conclusion that "no internationally relevant criteria can be recommended," given the many ways that ethnicity is operationalized around the world (i.e., with measures such as language or dress), this analysis has revealed a great deal of commonality in official approaches to ethnic enumeration. And despite national variety in the groups recognized or the ethnicity terminology used, a broad class of ethnicity questions targeting communities of descent can be identified. Diversity in indicators of ethnicity—which as the U.N. rightly notes, are context-driven—does not preclude recognizing and analyzing them as reflections of a shared fundamental concept. Despite the different formulations used, such as "race" or "nationality," their shared reference to communities of descent justifies both academic and policy interpretation of them as comparable categorization schemes. Just as different countries might define "family" membership differently, we can recognize that their varied enumeration approaches target an underlying shared concept of kinship—and suggest census guidelines accordingly. In short, these findings challenge the United Nations conclusion that international guidance on ethnic enumeration is not possible.

The feasibility of proposing international guidelines on ethnic enumeration is an entirely separate matter, however, from the question of what recommendations should be made, including first and foremost any guidance about whether ethnicity should be a census item at all. The debate about the desirability of formal ethnic classification is a political one—and it is important and timely. In the United States, some public figures have called for the removal of racial categories from official state-level records, believing that government policies should not be informed by data on race (Morning and Sabbagh 2005). In some European countries, France in particular, the potential introduction of official ethnic classification has been hotly

debated (Blum 2002; Simon and Stavo-Debauge 2004). While supporters believe such categories are necessary to identify and combat discrimination, opponents fear that government adoption of such a classification scheme would divide the nation, stigmatize some groups, and generally bolster concepts of difference that have been closely associated with prejudice. Given such concerns, Zuberi's (2005) admonition that ethnic categories not be used on censuses without a clear objective, and one that will not harm those groups traditionally stigmatized by such classifications, is essential. But as the French case illustrates, it can be difficult to ascertain the pros and cons of ethnic enumeration, as its likely impact may be highly contested. While the presentation of results on global classification practices cannot answer the normative questions posed here, empirical findings on the reach and uses of such categorization schemes should nonetheless be a meaningful resource that informs the important debate over whether populations should be enumerated by ethnicity at all.

Appendix

Table A Countries included in regional groupings

North America	
Anguilla*	Dominican Republic
Antigua and Barbuda	El Salvador
Aruba	Greenland
Bahamas*	Grenada
Barbados	Guadeloupe
Belize*	**Guatemala***
Bermuda*	Haiti*
British Virgin Islands	**Honduras***
Canada*	**Jamaica***
Cayman Islands	Martinique
Costa Rica*	**Mexico***
Cuba	Montserrat
Dominica	Netherlands Antilles

Table A continued

Nicaragua*	Egypt*
Panama*	Equatorial Guinea
Puerto Rico*	Eritrea
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Ethiopia
Saint Lucia*	Gabon
Saint Pierre and Miquelon	Gambia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	**Ghana***
Trinidad and Tobago*	Guinea*
Turks and Caicos Islands	Guinea-Bissau
United States*	**Kenya***
U.S. Virgin Islands*	Lesotho*
South America	Liberia
Argentina*	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Bolivia*	Madagascar
Brazil*	Malawi*
Chile*	Mali
Colombia	Mauritania
Ecuador	**Mauritius***
Falkland Islands (Malvinas)	Morocco*
French Guiana*	**Mozambique***
Guyana*	Namibia*
Paraguay*	Niger
Peru*	Nigeria
Suriname*	Réunion
Uruguay*	Rwanda
Venezuela*	Saint Helena
Africa	São Tomé and Principe
Algeria	**Senegal***
Angola	Seychelles*
Benin	Sierra Leone
Botswana*	Somalia
Burkina Faso	**South Africa***
Burundi	Sudan
Cameroon	Swaziland*
Cape Verde*	Togo
Central African Republic	Tunisia
Chad	Uganda
Comoros	United Rep. of Tanzania*
Congo	Western Sahara
Côte d'Ivoire	**Zambia***
Democratic Republic of the Congo	**Zimbabwe***
Djibouti	

Table A continued

Europe

Albania*	Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands
Andorra	Sweden
Austria*	Switzerland*
Belarus*	**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***
Belgium*	**Ukraine***
Bosnia and Herzegovina	**United Kingdom***
Bulgaria*	**Yugoslavia***
Channel Islands (Guernsey) *	Asia
Channel Islands (Jersey) *	Afghanistan
Croatia*	**Armenia***
Czech Republic*	**Azerbaijan***
Denmark	Bahrain*
Estonia*	Bangladesh
Faeroe Islands	Bhutan
Finland*	Brunei Darussalam
France*	Cambodia*
Germany	**China***
Gibraltar	**Cyprus***
Greece*	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Holy See	East Timor*
Hungary*	**Georgia***
Iceland	**Hong Kong***
Ireland*	**India***
Isle of Man*	**Indonesia***
Italy*	Iran
Latvia*	**Iraq***
Liechtenstein*	Israel*
Lithuania*	Japan*
Luxembourg*	Jordan
Malta*	**Kazakhstan***
Monaco*	Kuwait*
Netherlands	**Kyrgyzstan***
Norway*	**Lao People's Dem. Republic***
Poland*	Lebanon
Portugal*	**Macao***
Republic of Moldova*	**Malaysia***
Romania*	Maldives*
Russian Federation*	**Mongolia***
San Marino	Myanmar
Slovakia	**Nepal***
Slovenia*	Occupied Palestinian Territory*
Spain*	Oman

Table A continued

Pakistan*	French Polynesia*
Philippines*	**Guam***
Qatar	**Kiribati***
Republic of Korea*	Marshall Islands
Saudi Arabia	**Micronesia (Federated States of)***
Singapore*	**Nauru***
Sri Lanka*	**New Caledonia***
Syrian Arab Republic	**New Zealand***
Tajikistan*	Niue
Thailand*	Norfolk Island
Turkey*	**Northern Mariana Islands***
Turkmenistan*	Palau
United Arab Emirates	Papua New Guinea*
Uzbekistan*	Pitcairn
Vietnam*	Samoa
Yemen*	**Solomon Islands***
Oceania	**Tokelau***
American Samoa*	**Tonga***
Australia*	**Tuvalu***
Cook Islands*	**Vanuatu***
Fiji*	Wallis and Futuna Islands*

Organizing scheme borrowed from United Nations Statistical Division. Countries marked with an asterisk (*) are those whose censuses from the 1995–2004 period were used for this study; countries in **bold** include an ethnicity question on the census

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