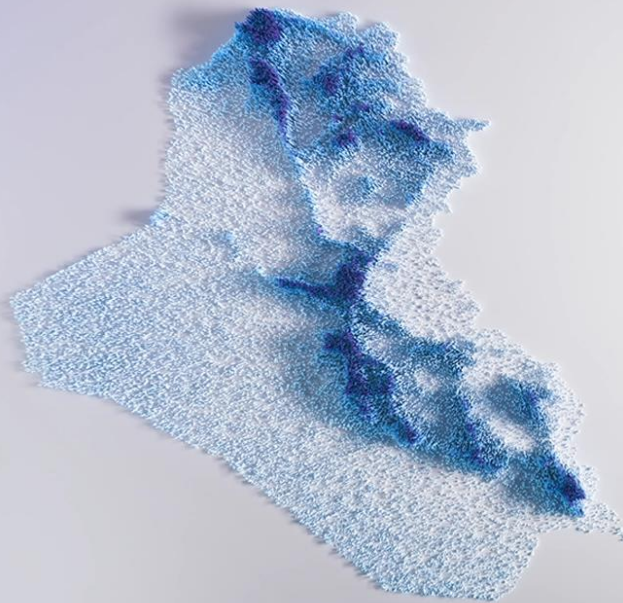


THE 2024 GENERAL POPULATION CENSUS IN IRAQ: A NECESSARY ENDEAVOR MET WITH DOUBT

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CENSUS

Director's Special Note

A general population census is a critical pillar in the modern world of governance. It forms the foundation for policy planning, allocation of resources, and socio-economic development. Accurate and reliable census data can assist policymakers and governments at large in addressing critical service issues such as healthcare, education, infrastructure development and social services. Determining the various demographics, their locations and their specific needs are the very fundamental information that necessitates conducting a general population census. As societies grow and develop, census-derived data are essential for understanding current realities, predicting upcoming trends and drafting evidence-based policies for the future.

Despite the evident importance of census, conducting a census is often met with certain skepticism in some parts of the world. Some of the factors that lead to skepticism originate from lack of trust in the governments in managing the data. Privacy issues rank as the number one concern in western societies, however political and ethnic concerns seem to be the leading factors in the developing and conflict-prone countries.

Iraq, with its complex mix of ethno-religious population, and with its history of ethnically driven conflicts, and politically driven government actions, is set to conduct a general population census on November 20th, 2024.

While the logistical aspects of the process are on track and well organized, the political atmosphere has not been prepared adequately. As recently as the past few days, KRG and KRI officials have voiced concern over the intentions behind the general population census. They often refer to the challenges Kurds face in the disputed territories and particularly in

Kirkuk. Iraqi government officials have consistently offered comforting messages to counter the concerns of the Kurds, however past experiences with the lack of trust in Kirkuk, related to article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, and central government's lack of intention to implement the article, serve as backdrop to this upcoming census.

Imad A. Farhadi

Part I by Soleen Soran

- **What is a Census?**
- **Data Collection Methods**
- **International Guidelines :Key Rules That Countries Follow to Conduct a Proper Census**
- **Data Storage and Use :How the Information is Kept Safe and Used for Planning**

Overview of the Census

What is a Census?

A census is a survey that counts important information about a region at any given time. Used by itself, the term usually refers to a general population census, which is data collected on every person living in the designated area the census is taking place in. The area and time the general population census is taking place in must be selected properly as it will serve as a checkpoint for data collection. Due to their expensive and complex nature, general population censuses are not taken often, in many countries they are taken every 10 years or when needed¹

To get the most accurate results, a fixed questionnaire is used for interviewing, the questions can include name, sex, age, place of residence, birthplace, marital status, occupation, family

composition, citizenship, language, ethnicity, religious affiliation, economic state, educational literacy or level of education, and more.

General population censuses are vital as they provide a snapshot of a society at a specific time, capturing details that other data cannot. It creates a valuable database for comparing and understanding demographic, social, and economic changes, such as population growth rates, age and gender composition, and workforce ratio. General population censuses are very important for planning purposes. A country's historical general population census data reveals population changes and offers insights into its history, politics, as well as future trajectory.

Countries are always aiming to increase the general population census participation rate. For instance, in 2006, Australian citizens participated in the general population census online. In 2011, they allowed citizens to report more detailed data by sending them in postal letters.²

According to the United Nation, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the essential features of a general population census are as follows;³

1. Individual enumeration: A general population census ensures each person is counted individually, with details recorded separately.
2. Universality within a defined territory: A general population census must cover a chosen defined area, including all people and housing within its scope, and collect all the detailed data requirements. Sampling, which is collecting data from a selected portion of the population to represent the whole, can be used if so agreed upon.
3. Simultaneity: The data collection must be counted at a specific reference point in time, all at the same time, to ensure the accuracy of the data.
4. Defined periodicity and small-area statistics: general population censuses should be completed regularly, ideally every 10 years, to have data on past trends and compare them with present trends, for better future planning.

5. Capacity to produce small-area statistics: It is necessary to collect detailed data on the population and housing characteristics down to the smallest geographic level possible, while ensuring confidentiality for individuals who may feel unsafe about giving away their information.

Data Collection Methods

The machinery used to analyze the results has a profound influence on the general population census. When data analyzing was done manually, complex questions were dismissed due to analysis limitations. Ever since the introduction of computerized data analysis this has changed, allowing quick and complex analyses, bringing forth a second revolution of census analysis systems. General population census data is collected using several methods, here are the most popular ones:

1. Self-Reporting: In many regions, individuals are asked to complete general population census forms online, by mail, or in person.⁴ For instance, in the U.S. and the U.K., households receive questionnaires they can fill out and submit either digitally or via mail.⁵

2. Field work: In some places in-person visits by trained census workers are the most optimal way to collect data. The field workers go door-to-door and ask a questionnaire to every family.⁶

3. Rolling Census: This approach is used in countries such as France, the United States, and some EU member states. In this approach, instead of collecting data on a single day, information is gathered continuously over several years. Field workers visit different neighborhoods on a rotating schedule, allowing for regular updates. This approach helps track population changes accurately and keeps costs lower than a traditional general population census.

To keep the census data updated, Administrative Records such as (birth, death and school records) are used to keep track of population status until the next upcoming general population census.

International Guidelines :Key Rules That Countries Follow to Conduct a Proper General Population Census .

Every country has different regulations and guidelines to ensure the success and accuracy of their census. However, certain guidelines are commonly followed across many countries, including the following:

Ensuring confidentiality is crucial for a general population census to succeed. Which is why it must be made clear that the only reason for collecting individual data is for statistics, and that there will be no sharing or leaking of identifiable personal information. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics states: *“Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.”*⁷

The United Nations recommends that all countries and regions around the world produce detailed population and housing statistics in different intervals of time, at least once every 10 years. Keeping an updated population data analysis helps with many decision-making processes in a country which makes regular general population census necessary .

Another international guideline that countries should follow when conducting a general population census is to avoid topics that may increase respondent burden, arouse fear/prejudice, or be used for political purposes, as these can negatively impact response rates and support for the census. Ask about topics that are generally recognized as being of basic value and defined according to regional and global standards.

Countries should aim to align their general population census topics and classifications with international standards to ensure their data is comparable across borders. This allows nations to measure their census results against global benchmarks and maintain high-quality, relevant statistics.

Data Storage and Use :How the information is kept safe and used for planning .

General population census data is commonly used for development planning purposes, research, taxing, and marketing. For example, population data can determine where housing projects and schools should be constructed, where to develop transportation methods like highways and bus routes, and if development of more factories and job opportunities are needed.⁸ In some countries, census data determines how many representatives a certain minority needs to be fairly represented in the legislature. If a minority group has a large population, they may need more seats in parliament to ensure adequate representation.

People who belong to marginalized groups find it difficult to give information on their ethnicity and religion background for fear of information leaks, exposing them to danger and discrimination.

General population census data is stored online on secure servers, and it is crucial that these servers are strategically located and properly managed to ensure data protection. The United Nations recommends implementing security policies, certified by relevant authorities, to protect against hardware/software malfunctions and potential hacking and data theft. Although physical archives are used less frequently today, it is essential to secure a protected storage space for completed census forms throughout the entire process. Additionally, the UN advises that documentation about the census data and its usage conditions be made publicly available, ideally online, to promote transparency.⁹

Part II by Noor Omer

- **The Changing Face of Census**
- **Iraq General Population Census 1927-2024**
 - **2024 General Population Census :Key Background**
 - **Iraq General Population Census Data from 1957-1997**
- **Expected Challenges and Limitations**

The Changing Face of Census

Derived from Latin word *Cen sere*, which means to estimate, census taking¹⁰ began its roots in the ancient societies of Babylonian and later Chinese, Egyptians, Greek and Roman civilizations. In the past, governments conducted population census to determine the society's power structure. The power structure was determined by the data from the census, which was based on three critical factors:¹¹ the amount of tax to be paid, the eligibility of individuals to serve in the military, and the level of citizenship required based on one's income. As the political systems of governments shifted to democracies, the collected data from census was repurposed to help governments determine how many representatives a specific region will have in parliament, congress or national assembly based on the current population. Much has changed in the modern world of census. A modern population census¹² is a foundational tool for governments to decide which policy path to pursue that serves the community best. Most importantly, census data is pivotal in budget allocations across different sectors of government¹³ as well as determining the level of industrial growth and the building of infrastructure of a country.

Iraq General Population Census 1927-2024

Iraq conducted general population censuses eight times, each ten years apart, from 1927 to 1997. There is little information available about how Iraq conducted previous censuses or for what exact purpose the data was collected and utilized. Currently, Iraq has taken the initiative to conduct a general population census¹⁴ after several delays due to political instability and a volatile security situation. According to the Government of Iraq (GoI), the 2024 General Population Census will feature human development as its primary goal. Since this will be the first census in Iraq's history where electronic tablets are used to collect the data, the Iraqi government has teamed up with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to assist with the technical aspects of the general population census. According to UNFPA, the general population census is pivotal to equip the country with accurate demographic information, facilitate effective policymaking, and promote inclusive growth.

2024 General Population Census: Key Background¹⁵

- Census date: November 20 (curfew mandate continuation till Nov 21)
- 2024 general population census will be Iraq's first census in 27 years
- Implemented by: Iraqi Ministry of Planning (MoP)
- Partner organization: the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)¹⁶
- Estimated population (MoP): 46 million (Growth at annual rate: 2.5%)¹⁷
- Census operations: electronic tablets used to collect the data (using online platforms/software that will store the data digitally)
- Field researchers/counters: around 7,400 (trainees), 17 000 counters in the KRI¹⁸
- Preliminary results announcement: within 24 hours
- Survey: 11 detailed sections (70 questions)
- Cost projections: approximating 300 billion IQD¹⁹

Country Name	Nationality	1957 Census	Percentage (%) of Nationalities to the total of Iraq 1957	1977 Census	Percentage (%) of Nationalities to the total of Iraq 1977	1987 Census	Percentage (%) of Nationalities to the total of Iraq 1987	1997 Census (KRI Excluded)	Percentage (%) of Nationalities to the total of Iraq 1997	2010 Census Results & Numbering
Iraq	Arab	5018963	79.29%	9702849	81.75%	13000933	79.59%	18403660	96.44%	
	Kurd	1042774	16.47%	1891887	15.94%	2603613	15.94%	578358	3.03%	
	Faili Kurd	0	0.00%	11515	0.10%	614	0.00%	2210	0.01%	
	Turkish or Turkmen	136806	2.16%	137219	1.16%	116849	0.72%	72727	0.38%	
	Armenian	0		13755	0.12%	13274	0.08%	8909	0.05%	
	Assyrian	0		68819	0.58%	34132	0.21%	10919	0.06%	
	Chaldean and Christian	61053	0.96%	0				0		
	Others	27480	0.43%	11692	0.10%	25465	0.16%	5455	0.03%	
	Not Clear	19394	0.31%	30884	0.26%	540319	3.31%	564	0.003%	
	Foreigner	23491	0.37%					0		
Total Iraqi Governorates				10382122	87.48%	14319722	87.66%	19082802	85.73%	27920958
Total Kurdistan Region				1486488	12.52%	2015466	12.34%	3176231 (EST)	14.27%	4899264
Total for Iraq		6329961		11868620	100%	16335199	100.00%	22259033	100.00%	32820222
KRI Population Percentage				↓ 12.52%		↓ 12.34%		↓ 14.27%		↓ 14.93%

Table 1: Iraq general population census data from 1957-1997. Source: KRI Ministry of Planning

Estimation of Iraq Population based on governorates and gender for 2024									
Governorate	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Duhok	557,460	556,169	1,113,629	196,105	194,122	390,227	753,565	750,291	1,503,856
Nineveh	1,347,542	1,284,229	2,631,771	869,399	838,706	1,708,105	2,216,941	2,122,935	4,339,876
Sulaymaniyah	1,064,411	1,067,269	2,131,680	194,120	190,023	384,143	1,258,531	1,257,292	2,515,823
Kirkuk	690,414	683,821	1,374,235	245,472	239,447	484,919	935,886	923,268	1,859,154
Erbil	908,436	888,120	1,796,556	181,052	180,441	361,493	1,089,488	1,068,561	2,158,049
Diyala	470,752	466,494	937,246	491,531	476,157	967,688	962,283	942,651	1,904,934
Al-Anbar	530,611	500,397	1,031,008	528,388	501,951	1,030,339	1,058,999	1,002,348	2,061,347
Baghdad	4,188,730	4,084,090	8,272,820	609,152	573,582	1,182,734	4,797,882	4,657,672	9,455,554
Babel	583,465	576,415	1,159,880	630,571	612,238	1,242,809	1,214,036	1,188,653	2,402,689
Karbala	477,534	470,566	948,100	237,786	232,110	469,896	715,320	702,676	1,417,996
Wasit	487,555	477,917	965,472	322,285	316,413	638,698	809,840	794,330	1,604,170
Saladin	421,783	415,177	836,960	515,777	503,334	1,019,111	937,560	918,511	1,856,071
Najaf	609,914	612,896	1,222,810	248,554	240,850	489,404	858,468	853,746	1,712,214
Al-Qādisiyyah	433,260	427,263	860,523	323,841	317,774	641,615	757,101	745,037	1,502,138
Muthanna	223,354	216,721	440,075	252,787	254,666	507,453	476,141	471,387	947,528
Dhi Qar	784,417	780,277	1,564,694	439,166	433,892	873,058	1,223,583	1,214,169	2,437,752
Maysan	478,450	477,786	956,236	166,496	171,879	338,375	644,946	649,665	1,294,611
Basra	1,382,765	1,365,594	2,748,359	317,277	318,438	635,715	1,700,042	1,684,032	3,384,074
Total	15,640,851	15,351,201	30,992,052	6,769,759	6,596,023	13,365,782	22,410,610	21,947,224	44,357,834

Table 2: Current data assumptions regarding gender ratio for 2024 in Iraq by Ministry of Planning. Source: KRI Ministry of Planning.

Expected Challenges and Limitations

The 2024 general population census has sparked critical debate regarding its conduct, particularly the questions that are included in the survey. Ethnicity was one of the main questions that was anticipated to be asked in the census. However, the general population census will rule out any chance of determining the ethnic origins of Iraqi citizens due to politically pre-agreed-upon criteria. Tribal linkage questions will not be included either. Besides the cultural, ethnic sensitivity challenges, some other limitations are expected, especially given that this is the first Iraqi general population census that utilizes electronic devices to carry out the census. Counting more than 40 million people is certainly a massive undertaking. Since the beginning of the process, timeliness has undoubtedly been a crucial concern for the success of the process. Most importantly, how the collected data is stored comes at the core of this census. How the Iraqi authorities plan to store the data while securing it from hands that might use it for other purposes has not been disclosed. Other challenges or limitations²⁰ of conducting general population census in general relate to:

- hired clerks that are being overwhelmed with workload.
- unavailability of citizens in some households (or access to highly secured houses and apartments).
- repeated counts of individuals or inaccurate representations of their data.
- absence of power banks for the electronic tablets.
- technology-related issues (i.e. system failures and data breaches).
- poor preparation among citizens.
- in some cases, unpaid allowances in the private sector.

Part III by Roman Jamal

- **Impact of Iraq's General Population Census on Policy and Economy**
 - **Iraq's General Population Census and Political Struggles**
 - **Economic Indications and Challenges for Iraq's General Population Census**

Impact of Iraq's General Population Census on Policy and Economy

The general population census, conducted every ten years, is one of the most complex and influential peacetime exercises. Its broad scope and overarching nature necessitate detailed cautious planning, resource allocation, training of many enumerators and awareness campaigning. The process of careful monitoring and analyzing the resulting data can be a significant challenge in itself. General population census data can be critical in governance, policy-making, and economic analysis as the generated data is concerning demographics including age, sex, wealth, spatial distribution, and socioeconomic characteristics.

For Iraq, emerging from decades of instability, violence and tension, the general population census represents a complex landscape showcasing both risks and opportunities. Announced by the Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia' Al-Sudani in 2023, the upcoming general population census is a key component of a five-year national development plan. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning will oversee the general population census, with logistical support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).²¹ On a regional and global scale, the UNFPA helps in resource mobilization and modernizing general population census methodologies, as well as strengthening capacity through the Population Data Thematic Fund, introduced in 2020.²² While the program delivers financial support to national statistical offices for general population census applications, UNFPA's contribution to Iraq

have only facilitated study tours, training programs, the exchange of expertise, and the provision of GIS data of Iraq's governorates.

Iraq's General Population Census and Political Struggles

The fate of Kirkuk and Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution sit at the center stage of the play, and have long been central to Iraq's political landscape, given the city's strategic importance as both an oil capital and a backbone for prolonging national stability. Since the formation of the new Iraqi government in 2005, the nationwide general population census has been repeatedly postponed, largely to avoid sparking political tension over Kirkuk and the other disputed territories of the north of the country. The planned 2010 general population census never took place because there could not be any conducted status referendum until Iraq determines who is eligible to vote in Kirkuk, a process that requires an accurate population count, which the general population census would have provided. At the same time, the new cabinet members found themselves at a stalemate aiming for control over Iraq's northern oil field which accounted for 40% of the country's proven oil reserves at the time, further complicating the situation.²³ The need for a power-sharing agreement among the ethnic Arab, Turkmen and Kurds was clear. The reality was that the general population census was intrinsically linked to political maneuvering, as both power and financial resources are tied to the number of people living in each area.

History is repeating itself, as the general population census of 2024 will exclude questions about ethnic identity due to its sensitive and contested nature. The head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)'s office in Kirkuk, Mohammed Kamal has, openly rejected the idea of the 2024 general population census, calling for a delay until Article 140 is fully addressed and implemented.²⁴ Similarly, Shakhawan Abdullah, the deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament,

commented that the general population census process in Kirkuk and the disputed territories must reflect accurate and fair representation. Abdullah pointed out that the Iraqi Ministry of Planning has pledged to set up a data center in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) which he believes is crucial. Additionally, Abdullah stated that the 1957 general population census data for Kirkuk will serve as the baseline until the issue of territorial status is resolved.²⁵

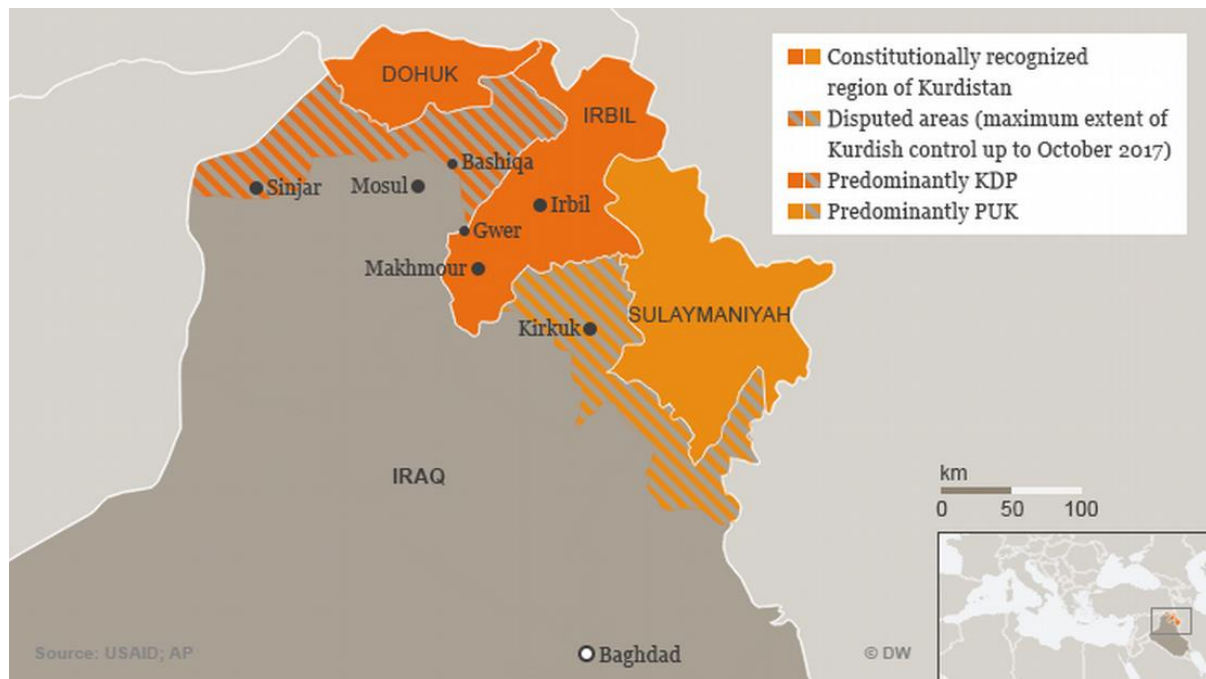


Figure 1: The disputed territories of Iraq Source: DW

Sectarianism is having its fair share in the dispute, and it further complicates the situation. Iraqi journalist Yahya Al-Kubaisi has argued that Shiite political factions are attempting to suppress demographic data that may compromise the estimates of Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority.²⁶ In this context, the produced numbers by the general population census will have narrative claims utilized as a subject of political manipulation. Political analyst Basil Al-Kadhimi's assessment was that the political parties will try to exploit the data to assemble the largest share of national resources for securing influence.²⁷ In response, the Iraqi

government has defended the integrity of the general population census process, citing the decision by Iraq's Federal Supreme Court that removes the ethnicity criteria. This ruling was followed by an agreement between Iraq's Shiite and Kurdish political parties in 2020, which was endorsed by UNFPA.²⁸

Economic Indications and Challenges for Iraq's General Population Census

Economic activities of the population are of the most important investigative subjects of general population censuses. In most countries, the general population census is regarded as the primary source for collecting comprehensive data on labor force resources and their utilization. Therefore, the general population census presents an opportunity for economic growth particularly in the KRI.

The general population census data can be a valuable tool for business forecasting, helping to identify areas where businesses are likely to thrive using the population size as an advantage. The profits from this could contribute to an improvement in tax revenue for the government. However, Iraq currently lacks a formal taxation system, and there are no clear plans to implement one in the near future, making it difficult to utilize general population census data for such purposes.

The potential economic benefits of the general population census were addressed by Abdul-Zahra Al-Hindawi, spokesperson of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning. Al-Hindawi explained that the data collected from the general population census could be used to create a comprehensive map of the Iraqi governorates, enabling the government to make more informed decisions and guarantee adequate provisions for the social amenities.²⁹ This will facilitate fair distribution of resources and revenues based on accurate population data.

Abdul Rahman Al-Sheikhli, an economist, asserted that the five-year development plan by the Iraqi government must leverage data collected from the general population census for its

succession. Al-Sheikhli emphasized that the general population census results can help in shaping a sustainable strategy to serve Iraq's economy by enabling more accurate resource allocations.³⁰ The cost of conducting the general population census remains a speculative issue due to its extensive nature. Abdul Salam Hussein, a researcher of economics, became particularly focused on this concern, drawing analogies between the general population census and the 2022 tax trust embezzlement, given that the projected cost of the general population census may reach billions of dollars. In his analysis, Hussein questioned the necessity of this high expense, proposing an alternative which is carrying out the general population census during elections or through collaboration with public and private facilities.³¹

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