

**Standing Up to be Counted:
Interest Group Strategies and Ethnic Classification
in the United Kingdom and United States Censuses**

Karen Long

Department of Political Science
University of Michigan
kjlong@umich.edu

Paper prepared for the annual meetings of the
International Studies Association, in New Orleans,
March 23-March 27, 2002.

Ethnic communities that are "classified" in censuses receive both symbolic and material benefits that are unavailable to other communities. However, as evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrates, there is nothing systematic in the construction of ethnic classification systems: They seem to have little to do with the size of communities, nor the changing structure of a population. Even when category labels do not vary, the definition of a category can change in significant ways. It seems to be the case that ethnic classifications are determined instead, by the relative influence of the ethnic communities that comprise a state. Because some of the decision-makers involved in the process of constructing an ethnic classification system are elected officials, who are sensitive to the public opinion of their constituents, ethnic communities may gain influence through interest group activities. The strategies pursued by the interest groups that are successful in influencing ethnic classification systems are different in important and observable ways from the strategies pursued by their competitors. This discussion illuminates these differences in a comparative analysis, with explicit concern for the academic and policy implications of this political process.

**Standing Up to be Counted:
Interest Group Strategies and Ethnic Classification
in the United Kingdom and United States Censuses¹**

What factors determine which communities are recognized in the ethnic² classification systems used in censuses? This discussion presents evidence that census classification systems of ethnicity may be influenced more by the political strategies of ethnic communities, than by their descriptive characteristics. Because ethnic classification systems are closely linked to the distribution of both material and symbolic goods, and because there is rarely consensus about what categories and their labels mean, ethnic classification systems are highly contested policies. The dynamics of the competition between the ethnic communities that comprise a state necessarily influence the classification system that results. Simply, this policy may represent the distribution of influence among the ethnic communities, at least insofar as which communities are classified. One of the most effective ways for ethnic communities to gain influence in this process is through interest group activities. In this way, competition among the ethnic communities becomes competition between the interest groups that represent them. As a result, changes in the ethnic classification systems used in censuses can be attributed to changes in the strategies³ of the interest groups that represent the ethnic communities in a particular state.

This discussion presents evidence from the most recent United Kingdom (1991 and 2001) and United States (2000) censuses, in support of this argument, with concern for both academic and policy implications. These settings are ideal for "most similar" comparative analysis for several reasons: First, both the United States and the United Kingdom revised the ethnic classification systems used in their censuses substantially over the last two decades. Further, during this period, the legislators and agencies responsible for the revisions invited public participation in the process. Participation in public hearings provides a base line for interest group activity in both cases. Finally, in both countries, the ethnic classification systems used in

¹ This is the first attempt at a long-term project, and the author is grateful to those who have already offered their thoughts, particularly Zvi Gitelman and Irfan Nooruddin. This paper is intended therefore, not to provide a definitive account of this important political process, but rather to present some preliminary evidence in support of its argument, in the hopes of generating discussion on the topic. Comments are most welcome: kjlong@umich.edu.

² For simplicity, the census classification systems are referred to as "ethnic," rather than the perhaps more appropriate "ethnic/racial" throughout the discussion.

the censuses identify "pan-ethnic" racial categories, suggesting that policy-makers are concerned with the identification of visible minorities in both cases (Ballard 1996; 1998; Coleman and Salt 1996; Walter 1998). These cases, therefore, allow us to develop of an explanation of why some ethnic communities are "classified" and others are not, while controlling for other factors that may obscure the process. In short, evidence from the U.K. and the U.S. will allow us to answer the question, posed above: What factors determine which communities are recognized in the ethnic classification systems used in censuses?

Interest Group Competition and the Construct of Census Ethnic Categories

The suggested answer to this question- that the differences in the strategies of the interest groups representing ethnic communities are the key factors in determining which communities are classified- rests upon the validity of the following propositions: (1) Census classification systems allow classified communities to receive benefits that are otherwise inaccessible. That is, under normal circumstances, most ethnic communities would prefer to be "classified."⁴ (2) Census classifications of ethnicity are, by their very nature, sufficiently ambiguous to allow for some flexibility in their construction.⁵ Indeed, there is little permanence in classification systems: Categories and their labels may vary from one census to the next. (3) Census ethnic classifications have very little to do with the relative size of ethnic communities, or with the changing characteristics of a population. (4) Rather, ethnic classification systems are determined by the relative *influence* of ethnic communities. This implies that at least some of the decision-makers are elected officials who are sensitive to public opinion, and who are able to persuade better-insulated administrators of its worth. (5) Ethnic communities may gain influence through interest group activities. As a result, competition among ethnic communities for classification becomes a competition among the interest groups that represent the various ethnic communities. Because of the fluidity of the census classification systems, these interest groups may gain

³ Of course, these "changes in the strategies" of interest groups may include the initial organization of a group.

⁴ Important exceptions to this proposition are the Jewish communities, in both the U.S. and the U.K., who fervently oppose ethnic classification generally. Note, there was also considerable resistance within the black community in the U.K. when ethnic classification systems were first proposed: It was feared that these data would be used for discriminatory purposes.

⁵ "Construction" in this discussion does not imply a post-modernist interpretation, but rather the selection of categories, the specification of category definitions, and the application of labels to these categories.

influence at any time, but may be most influential during official review periods or test stages. Finally, (6) the strategies pursued by the successful interest groups are different in important and observable ways, than the strategies pursued by their competitors. Simply, if ethnic classification systems used in censuses are the results of political competition between the interest groups that represent various ethnic communities within a population, then our usual understanding of the way interest groups compete to influence public policy is relevant.

Interest Group Strategies and Policy Outcomes

In his analysis of public utility regulation, Gormley (1983) develops expectations about the success of different interest group strategies, according to the type of policy issue the groups are trying to influence. Briefly, Gormley classifies policy issues along two dimensions: First, policy issues may vary according to their technical complexity. In order to be resolved, issues of high complexity require detailed analyses of alternative policy options. By contrast, the resolution of less complicated issues "depend more on value judgments than on technical inquiries" (Gormley 1983:90). Along a second dimension, policy issues may vary according to the extent of "consumer conflict" they will result in, or in other words, the amount of salience they have. "In contrast to technical complexity, consumer conflict depends more on perceptions" (Gormley 1983: 90). Gormley finds that a particular advocacy, or interest group, strategy may be more effective for some types of issues than for others. For instance, as shown in Table 1 (adapted from Gormley 1983), grass roots lobbying (including letter writing, direct mailing, telephone alerts, etc.) is most effective when policy issues are not technically complex, but are highly salient. Alternatively, issues that are more complex, and low in salience are best approached through "boardroom strategies" (i.e. testimony in hearings, preparation of reports, etc.). Gormley's model has since been validated in a number of other policy settings: Gerber and Teske (2000) find that the vast majority of work done on regulatory policymaking is consistent with Gormley's complexity-salience model.

Using this framework therefore, we can develop confident expectations about the interest group strategies that are most likely to be effective in influencing the construction of the ethnic classification systems used in censuses. First, although in both the U.K. and the U.S.,

government agencies conducted extensive analyses of various classification schemes,⁶ this policy issue is fairly low in complexity: As the testimony before the various committees involved in the process demonstrates, citizens without any expertise or training were capable of developing detailed opinions on the various proposals (House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel 1993, 1997; OMB 1994). Second, as suggested in the introduction to this discussion, because of the relationship of census ethnic classification systems to public policy (and the distribution of symbolic and material goods), this policy is also highly salient. Therefore, the ethnic classification systems used in censuses are appropriately located in the top left quadrant of Table 1. The expectation about interest group strategies, following from this classification, is that grass-roots strategies are likely to be more effective in influencing policy than proxy strategies. The observable implication is that ethnic communities represented by interest groups pursuing grass strategies are more likely to be "classified," than other communities.

Table 1. Issue Type and the Effectiveness of Different Interest Group Strategies

		Technical Complexity	
		Low	High
Issue Salience	High	<i>Effective grass-roots advocacy</i>	<i>Neither</i>
	Low	<i>Both</i>	<i>Effective proxy advocacy</i>

SOURCE: Adapted from Gormley (1983: 90).

⁶ An Interagency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards was established in 1994 by OMB to evaluate Directive No. 15, which established the current classification system. This Committee established a Research Working Group that devised a research strategy and aided in a number of specific research projects carried out by various government agencies. These included the May 1995 Supplement on Race and Ethnicity to the Current Population Study, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and carried out by the Bureau of the Census, the Race and Ethnic Targeted Test in June 1996 that was also administered by the Bureau of the Census, in addition to several studies of a smaller scale. The conclusions reached as a result of these studies are not entirely clear: Besides response rate, the criteria used for evaluating the different ethnic classification systems are ambiguous.

Not 'Other': Why Being Classified is Important

"The population groups identified by the Directive No. 15⁷ racial and Hispanic origin categories reflected legislative and agency needs, and not efforts by the population groups to be specifically identified" (OMB 1995). However, over the last two decades, the U.S. ethnic classification has been subjected to increasing public criticism: Various ethnic communities argued that Directive No. 15, the standing classification system, did not adequately reflect the nation's diversity. In 1994, the U.S. Office of Management and the Budget announced an agenda for the review of the policy that invited public participation. Nearly one hundred interest groups, representing many different ethnic communities, participated in this process over the next six years (see Appendix B.2.).⁸ The process by which the U.K. ethnic classification system was constructed and reviewed, first for the 1991 and then the 2001 censuses, also explicitly invited public participation through hearings. Again, dozens of groups, representing many different communities were involved. This raises an important question: Why is being "classified" important to ethnic communities?

The ethnic classification systems used in censuses bring both symbolic and material benefits to classified communities. There are at least three ways in which "being classified" may have symbolic benefits: First, census classification may signal membership or exclusion from the larger political community (Robbin 2000c). For instance, there are some ethnic identities that may not 'fit' well in a particular classification scheme. That is, ethnic identities that are based largely on language or religious identity may not be easily classified in systems based on other criteria. As a result, the legitimacy of that ethnic identity, within the larger political community may be uncertain. For instance,

Britain prides itself on being a "multi-cultural society." Yet the state recognizes and accommodates only certain identities. Some do not register at all on the barometer of inclusion. So, one is either Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian or White- the categories that currently appear on the census form. But if you describe yourself as a Muslim, you do not really exist as a legal entity, even though it's possible to find Muslims in each and every one of those categories (Sardar 2000:24).

⁷ This Statistical Policy Directive provided the framework for ethnic classification systems used in the 1980 and 1990 American censuses.

⁸ Appendix B reports a list of all interest groups who were represented in the public hearings held in 1993, 1994 and 1997.

One might suppose that this sense of exclusion is concentrated within unclassified minority populations. But in the U.S., the hearings on changes to the census classification scheme heard testimony from " 'white ethnics' who believed that they were disenfranchised by the current classification system" (Robbin 2000a: 138). "Like other groups that support [ethnic classification generally], they too argued entitlement, disenfranchisement and representation, but for white Europeans" (Robbin 2000a: 138). Groups representing multiracial interests also expressed similar arguments. Therefore, it seems that the exclusion felt by the "unclassified" is not limited to minority populations, but is a common feeling among "unclassified" communities generally.

Second, alternatively, the particular label used in the census classification of a particular ethnic group may perpetuate symbolic (and real) exclusion from the larger community. For instance, there was considerable resistance within the Black community in the U.K. when a classification scheme referring to the Caribbean or Africa was proposed. It was argued that neither the Caribbean nor Africa had any substantive meaning to this community's identity, and further, that this reference compromised its own sense of "Britishness" (Ballard 1996). Indeed, "Black-British" was the label preferred by this community (Ballard 1996:14).⁹

Finally, classification, or lack thereof, may have important implications for the degree to which a community is represented in legislatures, government, schools, etc. (Robbin 2000a: 145). It seems to be the case that classified communities are more likely to be represented according to their proportion of the population (through reservation of legislative seats, committee appointments, construction of electoral districts, etc.) than those that are not. As a result, there is symbolic value in being classified, in the labels applied to ethnic categories in the census classification scheme, and in the "official" representation of classified communities.

Classified communities may also receive material benefits. Appendix C provides a list of all U.S. federal legislation requiring the use of census data on race and ethnicity in the administration of government services. These data provide officials with the necessary information to evaluate and respond to the needs and resources of communities. Note, however, that this evaluation includes only "classified" ethnic communities (Robbin 2000a): Unclassified communities, and their needs, are statistically invisible to administrators. Simply, "being

⁹ However, as Sadar notes above, the "Black-Caribbean," "Black-African," "Black-Other" classification was established, and will be used in the 2001 census, as well.

classified" entitles groups access to several different types of government resources (in addition to the benefits of preferential policies) that are otherwise unavailable. For instance, there are some resources available to ethnic communities for the promotion of their cultural identity. Classified communities may have better access to these resources by virtue of "being classified," and by having a more accurate understanding of the needs of their communities. Alternatively, ethnic groups that are not classified by be barred from government resources set aside for "cultural" purposes. This seems to be the case for the Muslim community in U.K.:

The denial of religious identity to Muslims has led to state-sanctioned discrimination against them. For example, Muslim community projects, such as the Muslim Women's Help-line, are not recognized as legitimate "ethnic" organizations and therefore cannot get council or government funding. The *Muslim News* does not qualify as an "ethnic paper" and is thus denied advertising from local authorities, government agencies and the Commission for Racial Equality which sustains newspapers such as the *Asian Times*, *Caribbean Times* and the *Voice*. (Sardar 2000:24)

Census data also allow administrators to specifically provide for the needs of particular ethnic groups with respect to health care, social services and education (Owen 1999). Alternatively, census data may enable "ethnic minority entrepreneurs to plan their businesses and develop new activities, such as ethnic minority radio stations" (Owen 1999:7).

To summarize this section, there are indeed both symbolic and material benefits inherent in being classified. An important issue that underlies much of this discussion concerns the differences between census data and other types of government data on ethnicity and the distribution of goods (broadly defined) across ethnic groups. Census data are distinct from other sources of survey data in at least two respects: First, census data provide the necessary detail of the distribution of goods, and needs at the *local* level (Owen 1999; Ballard 1998). Other sources of data (i.e. Labor Force Surveys) may not provide adequate detail, particularly if the community of interest is small, or thinly dispersed across several localities. Second, and more importantly, census data provide the standards for the classification systems used by most government agencies. Consider the following reaction to the introduction of an ethnic item in the U.K. census: "The inclusion of a deliberately formulated ethnic question in the 1991 census... and the *consequent use of a similar question in all manner of other data-collection exercises*, was undoubtedly a major step forward" (Ballard 1998:17, emphasis added). As a result, "being

classified" in censuses has benefits beyond categorical recognition in other government-sponsored data collection exercises.

Next, we consider the extent to which these benefits are accessible. If ethnic classification schemes are rigid, then these benefits are permanently out of the reach of unclassified communities. As it turns out, there seems to be considerable flexibility in the construction of the ethnic classification systems used in censuses.

Flexibility in the Construction of Ethnic Categories

Ethnic categories are sufficiently ambiguous, as suggested above, to allow for some flexibility in their construction. Consider the construction of the ethnic categories used in the U.K. census, shown in Appendix A.1. An "ethnicity" item was included in U.K. census for the first time in 1991, prior to which ethnicity was implied through "country of origin" data. However, this earlier system leaves 'second generations' statistically invisible. This has substantial policy implications, as it was estimated that by 1991, at least 40,000 'second-generation' Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants were living in the England, who were "invisible" under the old classification system. Therefore, following rapidly changing demographics, and public concern for the poor quality of the 1971 census data, a Government White Paper stressed the need for data on the ethnic composition of the U.K. population. These data were deemed necessary to ensure that the Government and local authorities were fulfilling their responsibilities under the Race Relations Act, and to comply with standards of the European Economic Community (Leech 1989). In the late 1970s, and throughout the 1980s a series of tests were conducted throughout the U.K. on a number of different ethnic classification schemes (Leech 1989). The main criterion for the evaluation of these categories was the response rate and conceptual clarity.¹⁰

¹⁰ In fact, the reason why an ethnicity item was not included in the 1981 census was that during a pretest, response rates were so low that it was felt that the quality of the data would be seriously compromised. Note however, that it was not the classification scheme that discouraged response, but rather the inclusion of the item itself. A local organization conducted an extremely convincing campaign that suggested that the ethnicity data would be used by government agencies to discriminate against members of minority communities.

Table 2: Proposed UK Census Classifications of Race and Ethnicity

1975 (Survey)	1977 (Survey)	1979 (Harginey)	1985 (Bradford, Leamington and Leicester)	1986 (Birmingham, Cardiff, Brent and Haringey)	1986 (Greater London)	1989 (Test Census in Wandsworth, Merton, Birmingham, Scarborough, Edinburgh, East Lothian and Berwickshire)
White (European descent)	White	English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish Other European	White Black British	White: British Other White Black: British West Indian/ Afro-Caribbean African Other Black	White Black (West Indian or African)	White Black-Caribbean Black-African Black-Other
West Indian	West Indian	West Indian or Guyanese	West Indian or Guyanese			
West African	African	African	African British Asian	Asian: British Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese Other Asian		
Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi	Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi	Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi	Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi		Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi	Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi
Arab	Arab	Arab	Arab		Arab	
Chinese	Chinese Turkish	Chinese	Chinese Turkish or Turkish Cypriot		Chinese East African Asian	Chinese
Any other race or ethnic origin Mixed descent	Other	Any other racial or ethnic descent	Any other racial or ethnic descent	Any other race of ethnic group	Any other	Any Other Ethnic Group

Source: Leech (1989).

Table 2 lists these various ethnic classification systems that were considered for inclusion in the U.K. census. There are several important differences in the way the categories were constructed: First, note that several ethnic categories are dropped over the test period. For instance the Arab, and Turkish categories were discarded in the later trials.¹¹ One might suspect that this is because the size of these communities shrank relative to other "classified" communities throughout the test period. However, as shown in Table 3, this seems not to be the case (Owen 1996): Over the test period, the size of the Arab community increased (albeit not at the same rate as other minority communities), while the number of those who classified themselves as "West Indian" decreased considerably.¹² Second, the labels applied to some ethnic categories vary throughout the test period, with implications for the definition, relative size and characteristics of these categories. For instance, "West Indian" becomes "West Indian or Guyanese," then "Black: West Indian/Afro-Caribbean" and then "Black (West Indian or African)." Finally, note that respondents, who would have characterized themselves as of "Mixed descent" in the 1975 test, were instructed to select the single ethnicity that was "most appropriate" in later studies, and the census. All of this implies that there is considerable flexibility in how census systems of ethnic classification were constructed in the U.K..

Table 3. Changing Composition of the British Minority Population, 1981-1991

	Estimated Population (000s)		Estimated Change in Population, 1981-1991	
	1981	1990	(000s)	(%)
Indian	727	792	65	8.94%
West Indian	528	455	-73	-13.83%
Pakistani	284	485	201	70.77%
Mixed	217	309	92	42.40%
Chinese	92	137	45	48.91%
African	80	150	70	87.50%
Other	60	154	94	156.67%
Arab	53	67	14	26.42%
Bangladeshi	52	127	75	144.23%

Source: Adapted from Owen (1996).

¹¹ It seems to have been expected that both of these groups would select "Other" in the final census classification scheme (Al-Rasheed 1996:206). However, it seems that significant proportions of both groups identified themselves as "White."

An analysis of the ethnic classification systems that have been used in the American censuses provides further evidence of this flexibility. Unlike the U.K. census, questions on race and ethnicity have always been included in American censuses. In spite of this, there seems to have been little stability in the ethnic categories provided and the labels applied to these categories in the census classification systems, as shown in Table 4. The most startling evidence concerns the classification of the Indian population: From 1920 to 1940, Indians were classified as "Hindus" in the U.S. censuses. Then, from 1950 to 1970, ethnic Indians were classified as "White." Finally, since the 1980 census, this community has been categorized as "Asians or Pacific Islanders" (OMB 1995). Indeed, the "identification of ethnicity is fluid and self-perceptions of race and ethnicity change *over time and across circumstances* for many people" (OMB 1995:3). This fluidity is compounded by changes in state policy over time: As in the case above, even if self-perceptions of ethnic identity remain constant, how individuals are classified by the state seems to vary over time and across circumstances. It, therefore, seems to be the case that the ethnic classification systems are sufficiently ambiguous to allow for considerable flexibility in the construction of ethnic categories, and for political competition to influence this construction. In fact, this variation in the number of, and labels applied to, ethnic categories, some researchers argue, is evidence of the "political process behind classification practices" (Lee 1993:82; Starr 1992; Robbin 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

¹² Note, the decrease in the size of this community may be compensated for by an increase in the number of those classifying themselves in the "Mixed" category.

Table 4. US Classifications of Race and Ethnicity, 1890-1990

Year	White	Black/Negro	Native Peoples	Chinese	Japanese	Other Asian or Pacific Islander
1850		Black, mulatto				
1860		Black, mulatto	Indian			
1870	White	Black, mulatto	Indian	Chinese		
1880	White	Black, mulatto	Indian	Chinese		
1890	White	Black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	
1900	White	Black	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	
1910	White	Black, mulatto	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	
1920	White	Black, mulatto	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Hindu, Korean
1930	White	Negro	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Hindu, Korean
1940	White	Negro	Indian	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Hindu, Korean
1950	White	Negro	American Indian	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino
1960	White	Negro	American Indian	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Hawaiian, part Hawaiian
1970	White	Negro or black	Indian (American)	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean
1980	White	Black or Negro	Indian (American), Eskimo, Aleut	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan
1990	White	Black or Negro	Indian (American), Eskimo, Aleut	Chinese	Japanese	Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, or other Pacific Islander

SOURCE: Edmonston and Schultze (1995), Table 7.1 "Census Race Categories, 1850-1990".

The Opportunity for Interest Groups to Influence Systems of Ethnic Classification

Most scholarly research on the construction of ethnic categories to be used in censuses emphasizes the testing process (e.g. Dixie 1998; Sillitoe and White 1992; White 1990; Leech 1989; Starr 1987). "Decision-making" in these studies involves only the evaluation of the appropriateness of various category labels, according to some empirical standard. However, this "laboratory" approach to the study of how systems of ethnic classification are devised is highly misleading. This section of the discussion shows that, in both the U.K. and U.S., interest groups were given formal opportunities to influence the decision-making process (i.e. to make use of "boardroom" strategies), and were also able to exert tremendous influence over the construction of ethnic categories in less formal ways (i.e. through grass-roots strategies). Following Gormley (1983), the grass-roots strategies are found to be most effective in influencing the construction of ethnic classification systems.

Interest Group Strategies and the Construction of Ethnic Categories in the U.K.

Interest groups were invited to comment on the construction of the ethnic classification system to be used in the U.K. census on several occasions. In 1982 and 1983, the Home Affairs Committee held public hearings on the construction of the 'ethnic question.' Appendix B.1 provides a list of some of the interest groups who testified at these hearings, on behalf of their communities.¹³ It was at these hearings that organizations representing the black communities expressed concern over the labels applied to these categories (noted above). Concern was also expressed by interest groups representing Jewish communities, who felt that "any attempt to formally classify the population on racial terms must be vigorously opposed" (Ballard 1996:11). There is some evidence that the administrators chairing the hearings were not receptive to interest group testimony: Apparently, the committee had already decided upon the question to be used (Leech 1989: 10). As a result, although these hearings encouraged interest group participation on this issue throughout the rest of the decade, it seems unlikely that those that pursued "boardroom strategies" along influenced the construction of the final classification system in a substantial way.

It seems to be the case, however, that grass-roots strategies were more effective: Following the 1988 publication of the *White Paper on the 1991 Census*, which included a

proposal for the question format, the ONS and Home Affairs Committee came under increasing public pressure. The proposed question grouped all of the black communities under in the single category, "Black (West Indian, African)". This was not received well by the black communities, and after grass-roots initiatives by several organizations in various cities throughout the U.K., the question was further revised such that the "Black- British" classification was subdivided into "Caribbean," "African," and "Other" categories. More recently, the few revisions in the 2001 census classification system (the inclusion of an "Irish" category, and a voluntary religious identification item) seem also to have been the result of similar grass-roots interest group strategies (Dixie 1998).

Perhaps the best example from the U.K. to demonstrate the effectiveness of the grass-roots strategies is the following: Although the 1991 census was the first to include an ethnic/racial identity item, the item was supposed to be included in the 1981 Census. Following the publication of the *White Paper on the 1981 Census*, the Government began testing various systems of classification to ensure that the data would be highly reliable. Minority communities objected, expressing concern that these data would be used to justify discriminatory practices. This objection peaked in 1979, when the Census Office conducted tests in the London Borough of Harigney:

Cooperation from the public, in both the census test and the social survey was seriously affected by a campaign by some local organizations which urged people not to answer any questions about their ethnicity, their birthplaces, their parents' country of birth, or their nationality, on the grounds that the collection of information was linked to proposals to change nationality laws in a manner that would jeopardize the status of all ethnic minorities in Britain. (Sillitoe and White 1992: 146).

As a result, members of the legislature and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in particular, lobbied to have the ethnic identity item dropped in order to preserve the overall quality of the census data. Therefore, these interest groups, through their 'informal' grass-roots strategies, had a tremendous deal of influence over the decision-making process in the U.K.. A close examination of this process in the U.S. results in similar findings.

¹³ Pending the receipt of the minutes of these hearings, a more complete list will be tabulated.

Interest Group Strategies and the Construction of Ethnic Categories in the U.S.

The current American census classification system has its roots in "Statistical Policy Directive 15" (1977), which established the Office of Management and Budget as the authority on the standard for classifying race and ethnicity. This policy initiative has its roots in a Federal Interagency Committee on Education report *Higher Education for Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and American Indians* (1973) that "deplored the lack of useful data on racial and ethnic groups" (Robbin 2000a: 133). As a result, the OMB revised the standing ethnic categories, to include measures identifying Hispanic communities among other revisions, which were to be used by all relevant government initiatives, including the census. Throughout the 1980s however, there was already growing concern about the extent of "measurement error" in this classification scheme (Robbin 2000a). As a result, in 1988 the OMB issued a draft Statistical Policy Circular in the *Federal Register*, seeking public opinion on the re-construction of ethnic categories. The public response, particularly among the multiethnic and multiracial communities, was so overwhelming that in 1993, a series of congressional hearings were held by the House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel. "In the mind of many people inside government... these hearings were a watershed in the nearly 20 years of debates over the Directive, and congressional attention legitimated an OMB-initiated, formal government-wide assessment" (Robbin 2000a: 137). In 1994, the OMB linked the review of the census classification scheme to the plans for the 2000 census, and established an agenda for the review process (Robbin 2000a). In particular, "the review would determine 'the adequacy of the current categories, principles that should govern any proposed revisions to the standards, and specific suggestions for changes'" (Robbin 2000a: 137). The review process began with a series of hearings chaired by the OMB staff in Boston, Denver, San Francisco, and Honolulu. Following these hearings, tests similar to those conducted in the United Kingdom were conducted throughout the United States. Finally, in 1997, the OMB published its research and conclusions about the re-construction of the ethnic classification scheme. The most important revision proposed by the report was the incorporation of multiethnic identities, by allowing respondents to identify more than one race/ethnicity.

Beginning in the early 1990s, interest groups representing numerous ethnic communities actively attempted to influence the re-construction of the ethnic classification system. As in the U.K., these interest groups were given formal opportunities to participate in the decision-making process through public hearings. In the 1994 hearings alone, the OMB heard testimony from

nearly one hundred organizations, representing many different ethnic and racial communities (Robbin 2000a; a list of these organizations, with those who testified in 1993 and 1997 is included in Appendix B.1).¹⁴ In comparing however, the draft proposed in 1994 to the final recommendations made in 1997, it seems that these hearing had little influence over the revision of the ethnic classification system: Although new issues were raised through the hearings (i.e. the construction of a Cape Verdean category, among them), the final recommendations resemble those proposed in 1994 to a significant extent.

Interest groups who supplement their boardroom strategies with grassroots campaigns, however, seem to have been much more successful. Beginning in "the early 1990s, grassroots organizations had... formed to lobby local school districts and state legislatures for the addition of a "Multiracial" category on administrative forms, and began mobilizing to influence congressional representatives" (Robbin 2000a: 136). Representative and chair of the House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel Tom Sawyer (D-OH) was persuaded by the local organizations acting within his district and lobbied within Congress for support. Further, multiracial interest groups organized solidarity marches in Washington throughout the summer of 1996. Finally, the "grassroots organizations that supported the addition of a multiracial category initiated national letter-writing campaigns across the country, and their letters and petitions constituted more than half of the public comment that OMB received" (Robbin 2000a: 139). For example, in 1997, about 500 letters were sent on behalf of the Hapa Issues Forum, a group lobbying on behalf the mixed race Asian-Pacific Islander community. While the multiracial interest groups seem to have exerted the most grass-roots influence- with success- over the decision-making process, interest groups representing numerous other ethnic communities also lobbied OMB outside of the formal public hearings. For instance, Native American interest groups (who opposed the expansion of the "Native American" category to include Native Hawaiians) also conducted letter-writing campaigns, as did Native Hawaiian organizations (who opposed be including within the "Asian and Pacific Islander" category). In fact, the Native Hawaiians were responsible the 7,000 letters received by OMB after the Interagency Report, that rejected their proposals. The OMB, satisfying the interests of both communities, and in response to these efforts, created a new category "Hawaiians and Other

¹⁴ The author is grateful to Professor Alice Robbin for the provision of the transcripts of the 1994 series of hearings before the OMB Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs.

Pacific Islanders," against the recommendation of the interagency committee (OMB 1997b). In truth, throughout this period, "the OMB... became the focus of organized lobbying" by the interest groups representing America's ethnic communities (Robbin 2000b: 432). Therefore, there seems to be considerable evidence that, as seen in the U.K. case, interest group grass-roots strategies have been a significant influence in the construction of the American ethnic classification scheme.

Implications

This discussion has demonstrated that there is (at least preliminary) evidence that demonstrates that the types of strategies pursued by interest groups who represent ethnic communities are important factors in determining which ethnic which communities are classified in censuses, while others are not. There are both academic and policy implications following from this research: First, particularly in comparative analyses, researchers should note the potential for "selection bias" that results from these political process which results in ethnic classification systems. That is, classified communities may be different from unclassified communities (communities about whom there is little information) in systematic ways that may be important to the research question. For example, if one were interested in examining questions relating to the degree of mobilization of various ethnic communities, one might expect that classified communities are more organized and more mobilized, with better access to elites, policy makers, and other resources, than unclassified communities. As a result, researchers might wish to exercise caution in the comparison of ethnic communities with information derived from censuses.

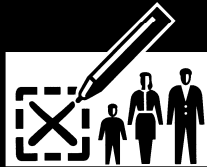
Although the implications of this research are important for academic analyses, the policy implications of this research are undoubtedly of more consequence. However, the significance of the hypothesized relationship between ethnic community influence and classification in censuses, lies in consideration of the unclassified communities: If "being classified" comes as the result of gaining influence, and a particular community lacks the resources to gain influence, then the needs of this statistically invisible community are unlikely to be met, and its circumstances will be perpetuated.

APPENDIX A.1 U.K. 2001 CENSUS FORM: ITEMS ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

APPENDIX A.2 U.S. 2000 CENSUS FORM: ITEMS ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Person

1



Your answers are important!
Every person in the Census counts.

1 What is this person's name? Print the name of Person 1 from page 2.

Last Name

First Name

MI

2 What is this person's telephone number? We may contact this person if we don't understand an answer.

Area Code + Number

3 What is this person's sex? Mark ONE box.

- Male
 Female

4 What is this person's age and what is this person's date of birth?

Age on April 1, 2000

Print numbers in boxes.

Month Day Year of birth

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Questions 5 and 6.

5 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. ↗

6 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
 Chinese
 Filipino
 Japanese
 Korean
 Vietnamese
 Other Asian — Print race. ↗
- Native Hawaiian
 Guamanian or Chamorro
 Samoan
 Other Pacific Islander — Print race. ↗

- Some other race — Print race. ↗

7 What is this person's marital status?

- Now married
 Widowed
 Divorced
 Separated
 Never married

8 a. At any time since February 1, 2000, has this person attended regular school or college?

- Include only nursery school or preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, and schooling which leads to a high school diploma or a college degree.
- No, has not attended since February 1 → Skip to 9
 Yes, public school, public college
 Yes, private school, private college



APPENDIX B.1 INTEREST GROUPS WHO TESTIFIED IN U.K. CENSUS HEARINGS

Over ten days of hearings in 1983, the Home Affairs Committee heard testimony from representatives of various city council members, various government agencies, and other organizations. In sum, the Home Affairs Committee gathered over 100 memoranda. The following groups were among those who testified, and submitted briefs:

- Board of Deputies of British Jews
- West Indian Standing Conference
- Association of Jamaicans (UK) Trust
- Union of Muslim Families
- British Turkish Committee
- Trade Union Congress
- Labour Party Race Action Group
- Runnymede Trust

As suggested in the main body of the text, this is a preliminary list that will be expanded pending the acquisition of the minutes of these hearings.

APPENDIX B.2 INTEREST GROUPS WHO TESTIFIED IN U.S. CENSUS HEARINGS

The following organizations testified before the Hearings before House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel (April 14; June 30; July 29; November 3, 1993), the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (July 7; July 11; July 14; July 17 and 18, 1994), and the House Subcommittee on Government Management, Information and Technology (April 23; May 22; and July 25, 1997):

- Alu Like
- American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
- American Samoa Congregational Christian Churches in Hawaii
- Arab American Institute
- Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum
- Asian and Pacific Islander Center for Census Information and Services
- Asian Law Alliance
- Asian Pacific State Employees Association
- Asian Specific Development Center
- Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans
- Board of Trustee Committee on Land and Sovereignty, Office of Hawaiian Affairs
- California Urban Indian Coalition of Employment and Training Providers
- Cambodian New Generation
- Chair of National Land Committee of Ka Lahui Hawaii
- Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate and Papa Ola lokahi
- Chinese for Affirmative Action
- Colorado Parent Teacher Association
- Conference of Americans of German Heritage
- Entertaining Diversity
- Equal Employment Advisory Council
- Foundation for Race, Sex Equality in the Spirit of Hawaiian Aloha (FRESHHA)
- French Creole Cultural Society
- Hawaii Association of College Admission Counselors
- Hawaiian Civic Clubs
- Hawaiian Inter-Council of Southern California, and Pacific Islander Community Council
- Hispanics and other Americans for Accurate Reporting
- Ho'omalulu Organization
- Hui O Hawaii of San Diego
- International Indian Treaty Council
- Irish Task Force
- Kokua Loa Institute
- La Ea O Hawaii Nei
- Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA)
- Massachusetts Parent Teacher Association
- Miko Decalage Tribal Town
- Mixed Race People of Color
- Multi-Racial Family Network
- Na Koa Ikaika
- NAACP
- National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium
- National Center for Education Statistics
- National Coalition for the an Accurate Count of Asians and Pacific Islanders
- National Congress of American Indians
- National Council of LaRaza
- National European American Society and the Society for German American Studies
- National Island Women's Association
- National Office of Samoan Affairs
- National Urban League
- Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce
- Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation
- Near Eastern Alliance
- Ohana Council
- Pacific American Foundation
- Prince Kuhio Hawaiian Civic Club
- Project RACE
- Samoa Hawaii Business Roundtable Association
- Samoan Council of Chiefs
- Samoan Federation of America
- Samoan Service Providers Association
- Southern California Indian Center
- Tamayo Lott Associates
- U.S Commission on Civil Rights
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Wandamala Health Center
- Workways

APPENDIX C. US FEDERAL LEGISLATION REQUIRING THE USE OF CENSUS DATA

EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Title 20 (Provisions on Strengthening Historically Black Colleges) ▪ Grants for Basic Skills of Dropouts ▪ Bilingual Education Act
EEOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal Affirmative Action Plans ▪ Federal Affirmative Action Programs ▪ Equal Employment Opportunity Act
EPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulatory Review ▪ Environmental Justice ▪ Resource Conservation and Recovery Act ▪ Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act
FEDERAL RESERVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975 ▪ Community Reinvestment Act of 1977
HHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Older Americans Act ▪ Public Health Service Act ▪ Native American Programs Act
HUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mortgage Revenue Bonds Program ▪ Low Income Housing Tax Credits ▪ Housing Improvement Program
JUSTICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Voting Rights Act-Bilingual Election Requirements ▪ Civil Rights Act ▪ Legislative Redistricting
LABOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment Practices of Government Contractors ▪ Immigration Act of 1990 ▪ Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986
USDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food Stamp Act
VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Veterans Benefits Program

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census (1997). *Preparing for the 2000 Census*.

Resources

- Al-Rasheed, M. (1996). "The Other-Others: Hidden Arabs?" in C. Peach (ed.) *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census* vol. 2. London: HMSO.
- Anderson, M. (1988). *The American Census: A social history*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Anderson, M. et. al. (2000). *Who Counts?*
- Ballard, R. (1996). "Negotiating Race and Ethnicity: exploring the implications of the 1991 Census." *Patterns of Prejudice* 30:3.
- Ballard, R. (1997). "The construction of a conceptual vision: 'Ethnic Groups' and the 1991 UK Census." [Review] *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20:1 182-194
- Bulmer, M. (1986). "A controversial census topic." *Journal of Official Statistics* no. 2 471-80.
- Bulmer, M. (1996). "The ethnic group question in the 1991 Census: the effect on ethnic group enumeration," in Coleman and Salt (eds.) *Ethnicity and the 1991 Census* vol. 1. London: HMSO.
- Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, Politics and Reality* (proceedings of the Joint-Canada-United States Conference on Measurement of Ethnicity, April 1-3, 1992). Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce and Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Coleman, D. et. al.,eds. (1996). *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census*, 4 vols.. London: HMSO.
- Coleman, D.; Salt, J. (1996). "The ethnic question in the 1991 Census: a new landmark" in Coleman and Salt (eds.) *Ethnicity and the 1991 Census* vol. 1. London: HMSO.
- Dale, A.; Holdsworth, C. (1997). "Issues in the analysis of ethnicity in the 1991 British Census: evidence from microdata." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20:1 160-181
- Edmonston, B.; Goldstein, J.; Lott, J. T.; eds. (1996). *Spotlight on Heterogeneity: The Federal Standards for Racial and Ethnic Classification (Summary of a Workshop)*. Washington: National Academy.
- Edmonston, B.; Schultze, C. (1995). *Modernizing the U.S. Census*. Washington: National Academy Press.
- Explanatory Notes for the Census (Amendment) Bill [H.L.] as brought from the House of Lords on 28th March 2000 [Bill 100]. Member in Charge, Jonathan Sayeed.
- Gerber, B. J.; Teske, P. (2000). "Regulatory Policymaking in the American States: A Review of Theories and Evidence." *Political Research Quarterly* 53:4, 849-886.
- Gormley, W. (1983). *The Politics of Public Utility Regulation*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh.
- Hann, C. (1994). "Census categories: should they be changed?" *Social Research Association News* (Nov. 4).
- House of Commons. Home Affairs Committee (1983). *Ethnic and Racial questions in the census: second report from the Home Affairs Committee*. HMSO.

- Lee, S.M. (1993). "Racial Classifications in the United States Census- 1890-1990." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16:1 75-94.
- Leech, K. (1989). *A Question in Dispute: the Debate about an "Ethnic" Question in the Census*. London: The Runnymede Trust.
- Ni Bhrolchain, M. (1990). "The ethnicity question for the 1991 Census: background and issues." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13:4 542-67.
- Owen, D. (1996). "Size, structure and growth of minority populations" in Coleman and Salt (eds.) *Ethnicity and the 1991 Census* vol. 1. London: HMSO.
- Owen, D. (1999). "A Question of Identity." *Connections* (Commission for Racial Equality).
- Peach, C. (1996) "Ethnic group data collection" in Dale, A. (ed) *Looking towards the 2001 Census*. Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Occasional Paper no. 46 39-44.
- Peterson, W. (1987). "Politics and the Measurement of Ethnicity" in W. Alonso and P. Starr (eds.) *The Politics of Numbers*. New York: Russell Sage, 1987.
- Rex, J. (1991). *Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Mobilization in Britain*. Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations: Research Monograph #5.
- Robbin, A. (1999). "The problematic status of u.s. statistics on race and ethnicity: An imperfect representation of reality." *Journal of Government Information* 26:5 467-83.
- Robbin, A. (2000a). "Classifying racial and ethnic group data in the United States: the politics of negotiation and Accommodation." *Journal of Government Information* 27:1 129-56.
- Robbin, A. (2000b). "The politics of representation in the US national statistical system: origins of minority population interest group participation." *Journal of Government Information* 27:3 431-453.
- Robbin, A. (2000c). "Administrative Policy as a Symbol System: Political Conflict and the Social Construction of Identity." *Administration and Society* 27:4 431-53.
- Sardar, Z. (2000). "At last we can stand up and be counted." *New Statesman* (June 26) 24.
- Schlager, E.; Blomquist, W. (1996). "A Comparison of Three Emerging Theories of the Policy Process." *Political Research Quarterly* 49, 651-72.
- Sillitoe, K; White, P.H. (1992). "Ethnic group and the British Census: the search for a question." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A*, no. 155, 141-64.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *200 Years of U.S. Census Taking: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1990*. (Washington, D.C.).
- U.S. Government. House Committee on Post Office and Civil Services (1993). *Review of Federal Measures of Race and Ethnicity: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personnel*. 103th Congress, 1st session (14 April; 30 June; 29 July; 3 November, 1997).
- U.S. Government. House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight (1997). *Federal Measures of Race and Ethnicity and the Implications for the 2000 Census: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology*. 105th Congress, 1st session (23 April, 22 May, 25 July 1997).

- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1994a). "Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity." *Federal Register* (June 9).
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1994b). Public Hearing in the Matter of Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Boston (July 7, 1994). Mimeo.
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1994c). Public Hearing on the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Denver (July 11). Mimeo.
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1994d). Public Hearing on Racial and Ethnic Standards. San Francisco (July 14). Mimeo.
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1994e). Public Hearing on the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Honolulu (July 17 and 18). Mimeo.
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1995). "Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity." *Federal Register* (August 1995).
- U.S. Government. Office of Management and the Budget (1997). "Recommendations from the Interagency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards to the Office of Management and Budget Concerning Changes to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity." *Federal Register* (September 9).
- Walter, B. (1998). "Challenging the black/white binary: the need for an Irish category in the 2001 Census." *Patterns of Prejudice* 32 73-86.
- White, P.H. (1990). "A Question on ethnic group for the census: findings from the 1989 census test post-enumeration survey." *Population Trends* 53 18-21.