

# HOW CENSUS DATA ADVANCE LGBT EQUALITY



movement advancement project

Beginning with the 1990 decennial census, researchers have used census data to study individuals in same-sex couples. First, researchers relied on individuals reporting having a same-sex "unmarried partner" living in their home and later "spouses." For the 2020 decennial census, researchers will be able identify individuals who report either a same-sex "unmarried partner" or a "same-sex spouse."



While the U.S. Census Bureau does not ask about the sexual orientation or gender identity of individuals in the census, the data collected is still useful to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) advocates in a number of ways. **This highlights the importance of LGBT people participating in the Census.**

## COUNTERING MYTHS ABOUT WHO LGBT PEOPLE ARE & WHERE WE LIVE

- **Given that few surveys include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, identifying same-sex couples in the census remains the largest dataset to date.** The magnitude of the U.S. Census means that it can be used to examine demographics of individuals in same-sex couples in detail that can be challenging in smaller surveys. Such data allow researchers and advocates to better understand disparities and experiences, as well as to better advocate for policy responses to those disparities.
- **Pairing census data with other data sets allow for impactful estimates of LGBT people.** There are surveys such as the Gallup Daily Tracking Poll and the National Health Interview Survey that includes sexual orientation and gender identity questions. By taking estimates of the LGBT population and applying them to estimates from the census, advocates can obtain accurate estimates of the population. For example, in 2016, the Williams Institute produced state estimates of transgender adults by pairing data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau. These estimates were helpful in advocating for keeping transgender nondiscrimination protections in Massachusetts in 2018.
- **Maps showing where same-sex couples live are useful in countering the myth that all LGBT people live in big cities.** Whether meeting with lawmakers or advocating for community resources, being able to show that same-sex couples live in 93% of U.S. counties, including in rural areas, helps advocates make the case to legislators that, for example, LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination laws are important for rural communities too.
- **Statistics showing the number of children being raised by same-sex couples helped demonstrate the need for marriage equality.** That more than 210,000 children are being raised by same-sex couples was compelling to the U.S. Supreme Court the 2015 *Obergefell* ruling, which extended the ability to marriage to same-sex couples across the country. The Court wrote in the majority opinion:  
  
*"As all parties agree, many same-sex couples provide loving and nurturing homes to their children, whether biological or adopted. And hundreds of thousands of children are presently being raised by such couples."*