



POLIDATA Political Data Analysis

DATABASE DEVELOPMENT, ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION;
POLITICAL AND CENSUS DATA; LITIGATION SUPPORT

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PUBLISHER OF THE POLIDATA® DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL GUIDES AND ATLASES

OP-ED, RESPONSE TO EDITORIAL

Census 2000 & A Virtual America

The “actual Enumeration” was just one of several limitations on political power which the Founding Fathers placed in the Constitution. The Framers knew that the incentive for additional seats in the U.S. House would provide the states with a large incentive to inflate their “respective numbers”.

To minimize a potential problem for the new nation of having the interested party prepare the numbers by which political power would be apportioned, a linkage was made between representation and taxation. If a state inflated its number of persons to gain seats in the U.S. House, it would pay for the privilege through additional (direct) taxation.

The Framers provided another safeguard, to have the federal government undertake the process. As delegate Edmund Randolph stated, “the census must be taken under the direction of the General Legislature [Congress]. The States will be too much interested to take an impartial one for themselves.” (Ferrand I:580).

Yet another safeguard was installed by virtue of the language chosen. It is arguable that the Framers knew that a complete count was not the normal means of estimating the population of a nation. However, in the end, they opted for the “actual Enumeration”, creating another disincentive to the temptation set before political man.

Since the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment (allowing for the taxation of income), other than the moral imperative of the public trust, there is no disincentive for interested parties to manipulate the numbers for the benefit of those in power. In fact, there exist several incentives for self-interest. The billions of dollars of federal aid which are distributed on the basis of federal census results provide an economic incentive. The shift of potential Congressional seats among states and the probable shift of political districts among communities within a state provides a political incentive as well.

The Founding Fathers created institutional safeguards to curb the influence of temptation on those in power. The question is, will their successors resist the temptation now that the safeguards are not the same? Will there be a maximum effort at physically counting every American or will we enter the 21st century in a Virtual America?

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