

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Ditas Katague

JVN [00:00:01] Welcome to "Getting Curious". I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Ditas Katague, director of the California Complete Count Office for the State of California, an expert in multi-ethnic outreach and civil engagement. Today, we are discussing the importance of the Census. What you need to know and dispelling myths around the population count. Welcome to "Getting Curious". This is Jonathan Van Ness and I'm so excited to talk about a very important topic that I think really we hear people talking about it, but we don't know how important it is and how it is so ingrained in the constitutional fabric of our country and really the importance of it. And that is our good friend, the Census. And to talk about the Census, honey, we are welcoming Ditas Katague, director of California's Complete Count. Welcome.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:00:55] Thank you so much. I'm so glad to be here.

JVN [00:00:57] I'm so glad to have you here. The cobalt blue of your dress is so beautiful.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:01:02] Thank you.

JVN [00:01:02] B.T. Dubs. Just if anyone's, my grandma always used to like to have been to my apartment so that she could if we were chatting on the phone, she could like, imagine where I was sitting in the apartment. So I'm just painting a picture for you guys. There's a very gorgeous blue dress happening in this room. And I'm in a black lace Prada dress. So.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:01:18] Looking gorgeous.

JVN [00:01:19] Ew. I didn't mean to name drop Prada. I'm so sorry. I really didn't mean to, it just happened. Anyway. Census. What is she?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:01:27] Well, it is something that happens only every 10 years. So a lot of people just don't even know about it. Right? And it's something that the U.S. government does. It's in the Constitution, as you said, and it's to count every single person that lives in the country, so that we can get a count and the data. And it's used for two really key things, Jonathan. It's really about power and about money.

JVN [00:01:52] So the Census is every 10 years.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:01:54] Yes.

JVN [00:01:54] The last time we did one was in 2010. And the next one that we're doing is coming up in 2020. That's correct. And you're saying that, that we do it because it determines two important things, which is power and money.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:02:05] Yes.

JVN [00:02:05] But more directly, it also, the however many people end up reporting to be present in the county, it directly correlates to what? The electoral college.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:02:15] Yes. And the, how we divide up, reapportion our 435 congressional seats.

JVN [00:02:21] What does reapportion mean?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:02:23] Reapportion means every 10 years, when we get this data, we divide up by the population. How many Congress people that we have in each state. So there's a finite pie of 435. And California has 53 right now, which is the most of any state.

JVN [00:02:41] So based on how many people are in each state and I didn't know this, there's 435 is the finite pie for the Congress, or for the House of Representatives.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:02:50] That's correct.

JVN [00:02:50] No, no. You're so right. Because people use Congress and House of Representatives interchangeably. Yes. But I, I always like to do Congress is Congress and Senate is Senate, because otherwise I feel like people get confused. But whatever. That's just like how I talk about it.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:03:03] Yes.

JVN [00:03:03] But I didn't realize that there's 435 and that was a finite pie. So that's how we determine the House of Representatives. What does the Census have to do with state Congress and Senate? Does that? Does it? Does that apply to state houses as well?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:03:14] It does, so with that's called reapportionment. When we look at the U.S. overall. And then each state redistricts. Right? So they re-draw the lines.

JVN [00:03:24] So the federals, we are talking about reapportions. And that is for the 435 specifically, and then there's redistricting that also happens from the Senate.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:03:31] Yes. And it decides, well, the state houses decide how the lines are drawn for all kinds of things, school districts, but also for the state assembly and the state Senate. But then those seats that we get, we have 53 right now, they will draw the lines of where a person's congressional district is. So it's, that's where gerrymandering comes. So when you let the state houses do that, there gets to be sometimes, you know.

JVN [00:03:58] So the state, so OK. So after the Census, the federal government will say, all right, California, you have. I'm just keeping math simple because I'm not a good mathematician. You have 10 billion people, California. So that means this year you're gonna get 56 seats instead of 53. So then at that point, the state house of California gets to come in and they will now decide how the 53 go into 56? And they get to draw that themselves?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:04:24] Actually, they used to do that. In 2010, they switched to a citizen redistricting commission, which is really cool. And I'm not sure how many states have that. But in other states, they let the elected do it-.

JVN [00:04:37] Which I want to talk about that actually really, really, really, really, really quickly. Then I want to come back to California how does it. Because that's what we're seeing these these gerrymandering cases in the Supreme Court coming out of Virginia and I think South Carolina. And I think there was, or West Virginia, whatever. But there is some redistricting cases. And basically in those we found that the state houses had really used the Census to draw very like crooked, jagged all over the place lines to racially and economically like coerce the election to come one way or the other. Is that correct? Kind of.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:05:07] Well, so they, they call them communities of interest. They know they're no longer call them, but we know what they are, their communities, most racial and economically. And they do draw them so to guarantee seats for one party or the other.

JVN [00:05:19] And it's been happening. I think it's happened on both sides. I think there was a case of like Democrats doing it in Maryland and there's been more cases of Republicans doing it, obvi, but it has happened on both sides. So to combat that problem here in California in 2010, we. And when I say we, I mean you.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:05:36] Yes.

JVN [00:05:36] Yes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:05:37] Proposition 11 was passed by, by, by the residents of California to have an independent citizen's redistricting commission. And so right now, they're actually recruiting for people to be on it. So you could apply to be on it. And then they go through this whole public process where they go to the communities, communities get to weigh in. And this will be in 2021. They start that process. That's after the Census data in March of 2021 is delivered to all of the states to say this is what your population looks like. And then go to it. Go do your mapping or, you know, if it's done by their elected, they do it. But here in California, it's done by a citizen's commission. They redraw the lines.

JVN [00:06:16] So the state houses and state Senate are really very important for two reasons as it relates to the Senate, because not only do they decide the districts that are going to be voted on to represent the federal Congress. They also decide the shape and area of the districts that vote on their own state districts.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:06:33] Yes.

JVN [00:06:33] So it seems like that is a huge issue to be having the people that are governing and legislating, also being the ones that decide who and where the lines are that get voted on.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:06:45] Yes.

JVN [00:06:45] That seems like a huge fundamental conflict of interest.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:06:48] Yes. It's like having the fox in the henhouse kind of thing.

JVN [00:06:50] Yeah. So it's really important to like this is like why, you know, we always talk about a state legislature needs to be thought of as a more sexy issue and especially like who you're voting in for those places, because like John Oliver has talked about this, Erin Gibson and Brian Saffy who we're obviously huge fans of and they like when, on their show on "Throwing Shade", they talked about these like really terrible state legislatures that are elected like all over the country. And it's really something that we all need to do a better job of becoming aware of, like who is being elected to these seats because they are so important. It really affects people's lives.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:07:20] Right.

JVN [00:07:20] And as we're seeing all these, like, heartbeat bills popping up all over the country as well. Like that happens from rogue state houses. I mean, I'm going on a tangent there, but so that's that. So that's what the Census is important for.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:07:31] For power.

JVN [00:07:32] For power. That's where the power is. And then the money happens.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:07:35] Right.

JVN [00:07:35] So what is unique about the 2020 Census coming up?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:07:38] So, as you know, this is my third Census in this role. I worked for four governors.

JVN [00:07:42] Tell us about, yeah. I want to know more about your gorgeous role and what you do in California.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:07:46] Right. So the U.S. Census is a federal operation, right? It's the largest outside of going to war. So the U.S. Census Bureau, the feds, they're doing what they can. They're really mobilizing. But what we're doing here in California is we don't actually enumerate folks, but we know that Californians know California best and that we need to reach out to Californians because people are afraid they may distrust because the U.S. Census is trying to do this nationally. Sometimes they don't do a great job, you know, locally.

JVN [00:08:14] Yes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:08:14] So the governor and the legislature have put an unprecedented amount of investment of California dollars, 187 million. That just blows my mind. No other state is even investing. Many other states just aren't investing at all. They're just expecting the federal government to do it. But, you know, California, we've said-

JVN [00:08:30] How much should we invest?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:08:32] 187 million.

JVN [00:08:33] Wow.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:08:34] So California, the governor and the legislature, we pretty much said we're not going to leave the fate of our state in the hands of this administration.

JVN [00:08:41] Right.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:08:42] And that's why we're doing the outreach to do that. And we've shown, I did this in 2000, that with our investments to our local communities. Right? It's really not all about advertising. It's really about building that grassroots network of getting folks to talk to each other and to have trusted messengers that are maybe allaying the fears of like, oh, is the government going to take my data? Is it confidential? Really having the right people connect on the ground to build that infrastructure, to say, yes, we're trusted messengers, we're going to have, to stand up, be counted for our community.

JVN [00:09:14] Well, what is on a Census form? When you fill it out?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:09:17] So there's 10 questions. So they ask about, usually it's a head of household that fills it out and they use, they ask for your age. You self identify the race, then you would fill out those items. There's no citizenship question this time. And then for your second person, senior household, like I have my daughter, you would say for that same thing, the name

and the address. And then you'd say what your relationship is to the first person filling it out. So it's really to get a count, an understanding, it's really a portrait of America.

JVN [00:09:48] And so there's no citizenship question on it. And so what are the people when you reach out to them, California's Complete Count? What are the typical most commonly heard fears and concerns over filling out and completing a Census form?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:10:03] Many residents of California. We have a lot of foreign born residents. They are, even folks that have been here for a long time. They're a little bit afraid about giving any type of information about themselves to the government. We're such a diverse state that many folks that have migrated over, you know, say some Cambodia, from, from areas that maybe the government wasn't so nice to them. They still have a lot of that, of those fears. And so anytime the government is asking for information, people are afraid to give it. And then there's other people who are just like, I don't want to give anybody my, you know, I wanna keep everything private. Not that anything's private these days, but there's a lot of fears that way.

JVN [00:10:40] What happens? Why is it important for those communities that, that are not counted or overlooked or have distrust like what happens when a count is off?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:10:50] So if your community isn't counted, you lose actual dollars. There's over 600 billion dollars that come back. So if you think about this, Jonathan, if you think on April 15th, what does everyone do? They pay their taxes, right? There's this like electronic sucking sound from your bank account to the U.S. federal treasury. Every single year on April 15th. But on April 1st, on years, everyone is on zero. So only once every 10 years do we get, our communities get to say, bring that money back to my community. Fund my schools, fund my roads, my community centers, my health care centers. All those dollars come back through federal programs, and they're distributed based upon our count, based upon our population in our communities.

JVN [00:11:31] And that's one way that the Census increases the long standing systemic racism of this country and increases the distrust of communities of color. Because there is this, there is a hesitancy to share this information. And then, like, we can't get the funds to where they need to go. And then if your community is dealing with crumbling schools, crumbling infrastructure, how can we fight for those funds if we don't know that the people are there?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:11:55] Right. And it's 10 years. So say you had-

JVN [00:11:58] So you're screwed for a long time.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:12:00] Right. If you had a baby, and you didn't count them. And children, zero to five, are historically undercounted. Well, then, like by time they get to first grade. Is there a seat in that classroom or is it overcrowded because they didn't know? Right?

JVN [00:12:09] Wow. And also, we know that, like, children's psyches are so often formulated from the time they're like zero to seven. So it's like when we're, that's like a really big decisions. So it's really, really important. So the Census is really something that's like very overlooked. I think that's something that is interesting, is that things that we take for granted, in this country and how things work. But it seems to me that a lot of Republicans and a lot of more rural and lower population have made a concerted effort to keep this information under wraps because they don't want the information, the power to be spread. And it's actually easier to control people through fear than it is to be upfront with them about like what decisions, you know, about how things work.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:12:50] Right.

JVN [00:12:51] So what happens after someone-? I'm sorry. I just I really, I hate, you know, racism, these people fucking suck. You know? Like people, these like power hungry nightmare people. You know? Yeah, OK good. Anyway, so we're minding our own business. We fill out the Census form. There's no citizenship question on there. And then we send it off. And what happens to it once we send it?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:13:10] Well, actually, you know, there's a couple ways. One of the big things that's different from 2010 is it's online for the first time ever, which is great for-

JVN [00:13:18] Only?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:13:20] Well, there's, you can answer online. You can call on the phone or you can eventually get a form. But the majority, they really want people to respond online. And it's great if you're my 16 year old daughter that can do that. But my 84 year old mother?

JVN [00:13:32] I was thinking my-. Yeah.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:13:34] And she's like, you know, can't really hear that well, anyway. So she would want to answer in Tagalog.

JVN [00:13:38] Yes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:13:39] Because I'm Filipino. Luckily though, they have it online in Tagalog. So, but my daughter will have to go over there and pull up the iPad and like, help her fill it out. So we're really worried, particularly for folks that aren't, you know, that great online or for folks, because California has a lot of rural areas that don't have broadband or frankly, sometimes broadband subscriptions are so darn expensive. Right? So how do we, how do we help those folks? So that's part of what our campaign is doing, is to educate people why it's so important and how do you fill it out.

JVN [00:14:07] And all 50 states, it's going to be online this year.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:09] Yes.

JVN [00:14:10] Wow.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:10] Yes. But you can call on the phone, too, which is good. They got 800 numbers and they'll have it in twelve languages, which is great.

JVN [00:14:17] Standby. Standby. I'm so sorry. We're going to a really quick break. We're gonna be right back with more with Ditas from California's Complete Count right after the break. Ditas?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:34] Yes.

JVN [00:14:35] Who gave you permission to be such a good interview subject? That's I want to know.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:39] Well, I've been doing this for a while.

JVN [00:14:41] So you gave yourself permission. I love that.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:44] Yeah.

JVN [00:14:44] Empowered person just nailing it. OK. So what we were-, tell me.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:47] So I was going to tell you that I am the national expert in this area, mainly because everybody else has died.

JVN [00:14:54] Wow.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:14:55] Got to outlive them, you know.

JVN [00:14:56] Yeah, that was like, well, I didn't see that was a, in my standup comedy bits, I called that a hard right. Where like, where like, I don't expect someone to say something like whoa. Yes, I love that. But OK, so let's take it back to right, previous to the break, before we heard those two ads that you just heard in your ear, which you didn't hear, Ditas, because we did, well, because you, I don't even know what they were yet. We'll see what it was going to be. I'm sure I've approved them, you guys, but anyway. Actually, I have, I already know I have, I just don't know what they're gonna be for this week's episode. Focus. So right before the break, we were talking about something.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:15:24] Oh, the languages and how to fill out the form.

JVN [00:15:25] Yes. Yes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:15:26] Yes.

JVN [00:15:26] So yes. So it can be phone but it's mostly online. All 50 states. And so that's the thing that's really different this year is that it's going to be very much online. And so that's what Complete Count is doing, is really making sure that everyone knows how to do that.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:15:38] Right. We're trying to make sure, we're trying to remove any barriers, whether it be fear, whether they don't have access to it. A big problem out there is language access. The U.S. Census Bureau is going to have it in 12 languages. But here in, gosh in L.A. County, in the schools, they speak over 192. Right? And so people are hard to count because maybe their limited English proficient. And that's where I find that the youth are going to make a huge difference. Even more so than in 2010. One, the youth are, they're kind of mad because they weren't really happy about not being able to vote in 2016.

JVN [00:16:09] Right.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:16:09] So my 16 year old is like, I still can't vote. And are you guys going to mess it up in 2020 also? So they really, we want to get them to rally around. You can't vote, but you can count and you can get everybody to count. So yeah.

JVN [00:16:21] Ooooh.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:16:21] Youth. We need to get them super engaged.

JVN [00:16:22] Yeah. That's amazing. I love that. So what about people that do, like what are the requirements for filling out like the Census? Like what if you are someone who is like a temporary worker or you're someone who's like, what is that rule?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:16:35] So, to the Constitution? Everyone that resides in the country on April 1st, it's like a little snapshot should be counted. Right? And there'll be a form or a postcard. So you'll get a postcard. You'll go online. I worry about folks that, there's a lot of folks because of our housing issues here in, in California, that may be experiencing, I'll say, experiencing homelessness, maybe not even on the street, but maybe they're couch surfing. Maybe they're staying, you know, yeah, friends that are like, hey, can I stay on your couch for awhile? Where are they going to be counted? Will they fall through the cracks? You know, what about-? And then what about people who are definitely out on the streets? How do we count them?

JVN [00:17:11] Especially, that just makes me think of like. Yeah. So people on the streets. Wow. Yes. I feel like I didn't mean to interrupt you because my brain went somewhere else. But I want to talk about because really people that are, what my brain which is like people like, oh, I can't even read the news. I just, you know, I don't like to read it. I just go to work. Like people that kind of had their head in the sand. And it's so important that people that don't have their head in the sand is really talking about the Census, because if you guys remember that episode that we did on "Getting Curious" about, with Sister District, about the episode where, I think it was last year. But it was about midterms. And 2010 was actually the largest loss of democratically held seats in midterm election history. We lost over a thousand elected seats in that year. It was a whole generation of democratically elected or Democrat leaders that were kind of like swept out in that election. And a lot of the things that happened with that was that the Republicans that were elected in that Tea Party wave of 2010 determined the Census rules and did so much to censor and manipulate that Census of the redistricting that year. And that's why like Virginia and South Carolina and a lot of these things happened. So it really is so important that we are all engaged and talking about, like what the Census does and like and how it does it and why it does it. So language, reach out, language barriers is an issue, obviously in California and probably across the country. So but if you go online and you submit it that way like what happens with the information, where does it go? Like whether you're calling in, onlining it in, and is mailing it in-?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:18:37] You can get a form too. Yes.

JVN [00:18:39] So all three of those are still an option. Is there anything on the radar about like by 2030 they want to have like mail in and call in like phased out or anything? Is not even being talked about?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:18:47] This came about because after 2010, Congress said basically too expensive, you need to save some money. So the Census Bureau did their due diligence, they said, how can we cut back? And putting stuff online. There will be forms available. About 20 percent of folks throughout the nation will actually get a form if we know that, you know, maybe they're older and they don't have that. You can call and get a form too. But if you're going to call, we kind of say, if you're on the phone anyway, why not-?

JVN [00:19:09] Why don't just do it here?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:19:09] Just be enumerated? Yes.

JVN [00:19:11] Yeah.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:19:11] And then-.

JVN [00:19:11] So enumerated means counted?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:19:13] Means counted. Yes.

JVN [00:19:14] OK.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:19:14] After that. So you, you'll get something in the mail mid-March next year. So after the California primary, after everybody's, that's done. Around March 12th, Californians will get like a postcard in the mail. Some will get a form if they think that, you know, they're probably not going to be able to call. And then every 8 or 10 days, if you don't go online, they're going to keep sending you stuff. And by the fourth time, which is mid April, you'll get a form and then come May 1st, if you still haven't answered. That's when they're going to come knock on your door. So that costs a lot of money. But so we here at California, we really want to make sure that people self respond because the data's a lot more accurate when you're doing it yourself. So we're trying to in California, eliminate all those barriers that can exist, you know, be it language, be it the overcrowded. And we also want to get the message out to folks. If you don't think you're counted, call. Right? Make sure, 'cause say maybe you live in the back, you know, in the granny unit in the back.

JVN [00:20:09] Right.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:20:09] Maybe it's legal. Maybe it's-, you know, and we don't, we don't care if it's legal or not, but we just want everyone to be counted. So we need to get that message out there.

JVN [00:20:15] So how do you know, like from the Census perspective, like if people have been double counted? Like for the conspiracy, like Trumpy theorists, like, how do you know people haven't been double counted, or like that is accurate and trustworthy and all that?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:20:30] Well, so all the data goes back to the U.S. Census Bureau and those supersmart people with statistics, they do matching and they look at the address and they eliminate any duplicates. Often there's overcount.

JVN [00:20:38] And they would do that. Would they do that by just running names?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:20:42] So addresses. Your name and your address. So if they see where your address is and then they go back and they look at it.

JVN [00:20:48] So then what if you are homeless? Like, what if I don't have an address?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:20:51] So with the homeless, it's a whole different count for them. It's called Service-based enumeration. So they go through service providers. And you know that housing and urban developed, they work with local folks. They work with them because they're already do the count, the point in time count, the pick count that they do every other January. So they're going to work with those service providers because they know where people are hanging out, you know, under which overpasses. And then there's three days right before April 1st. Where we'll go out in mass. The enumerators. I'm going to volunteer for it too, to help innumerate folks that are out there, like under the overpasses or on the riverbeds. And they get kind of a head count that way too.

JVN [00:21:27] And is that something that we, that is done across the country, not just California? I mean, are there some states that are worse or better about, you know, reaching out to their communities that are homeless? Or there communities that maybe more distrusting or unable to or that maybe they're not English proficient?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:21:42] So for the homeless that's done throughout the country and the U.S. Census Bureau kind of drives it out, but they work with the local folks. But I will tell you, in terms

of just outreach in general, the reason why we've invested the dollars is because what we found, I'll tell you this little story about my Native American tribes in Northern California. I don't know if you, have you been up by the Oregon border?

JVN [00:22:01] No.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:22:01] It's beautiful, big, you know, pine trees, rivers, just gorgeous. Right? You can picture that. Right?

JVN [00:22:08] Yeah.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:22:08] So there's a tribe up there, the Hupa Tribe and the Census Bureau sent them an ad to put in their tribune. And it was a picture of like Sturgis, South Dakota, like wheat fields with tipis on it. That does not resonate at all with our Hupa tribe. Right? And so they sent it back saying, well, not quite us. That's like South Dakota. So then they sent back up a picture of a proud Native American man with a skyscraper, which is perfect for L.A. urban living Indians, not the Hupa tribe. So finally, they just said, we're going to create our own. And they took a picture overlooking the beautiful valley with the trees. And, with a man in their native costume and the headline was this, "If they don't know you're here, they will take our water". Now, that resonated with the locals to say, hey, I really do need to be counted because Native American tribes have historically, you know, tenuous relationship with the U.S. federal government.

JVN [00:22:59] Of course.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:23:00] So that's why we just say locally created content is so important. And we want to engage even local creators here in Los Angeles and throughout the state to create content that explains to folks why it's so important and what resonates. Because, you know, Madison Avenue advertisers maybe not get it right here in California.

JVN [00:23:19] So how do we calm people's fears of reporting for the Census? Like if they, if they have my name and my address and then they, and then this government, you know, what if they do use that as a road map to track me down or track my family down, like, what if I'm undocumented? What if I this? What if I that? Like, how do you? Is there protections in place to protect our, our information that is given to the Census Bureau?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:23:40] There is. It's called Title 13. So you'll hear that a lot. We're going to do a lot of education about that. It protects the confidential-, confidentiality of your data. It guarantees that Census workers cannot share your data with anyone. There's like fines. They can go to jail. 250,000 dollars if they shared your personal data. It also directs the U.S. Census. They cannot share your personal data with any other federal, you know, division.

JVN [00:24:08] Who runs the Census Bureau? What does that fall under?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:24:11] It falls under the U.S. Department of Commerce, so.

JVN [00:24:13] So that's why Wilbur Ross is going through what he is going through right now, because the director of the Commerce.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:24:20] He's the Secretary of Commerce. Yes.

JVN [00:24:22] So the Commerce Bureau.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:24:23] The Commerce Department.

JVN [00:24:25] Commerce Department.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:24:25] And it's a U.S. Census Bureau, so it's underneath it.

JVN [00:24:28] So Wilbur Ross. Got it. Got it. Got it. Got it. Got it. Got it. It's all becoming clear. And what basically what just happened with the-. So basically, the Trump administration wanted to add an 11th question to this Census. Is that what it was? Because there's 10 historically and they wanted to add an 11th, which has never been done. Like, how long is the Census had 10 questions?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:24:48] I'd have to ask my Census Bureau experts, it's been a long time. I think probably since the 70s.

JVN [00:24:56] And there's a, and there is a way that I think Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez outlined in that meeting of a, of a, of a specific way, that, it's a specific protocol that you're supposed to go through. If you wanted to add a question to the, to the Bureau or to the Census.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:25:11] Right. They do years of research. And the Census Bureau, I'd been, I was a national chair of the National Advisory Committee on Race, Ethnicity, and Other Populations, to the Bureau. So it was volunteer work over the past couple years and I really got an inside look at what they're doing, their research have researched for years. Before you put a question on. Years like between 8 and 11 years, and they really try out the questions to see if they work. What, does it make sense? They had this national content test where they were trying to look at how do we ask the race, ethnicity, Hispanic question? Like that, the way it was asked before, it doesn't really work. They researched it for the years and then they put a recommendation through on the advisory committee. Where we were able to weigh in, the scientific committee ways in, everybody kind of weighs in over like a decade before they change anything. And so adding one last minute was probably, you know, not a great process to do. And that's why a lot of people were like, whoa, wait a minute, you know, people put the stops on it. And as you saw, some of those lawsuits.

JVN [00:26:05] Yeah. And so, so basically, investigators from any other piece of the federal government cannot go to the Census to try to get your address, your name, your whatever.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:26:16] Absolutely not.

JVN [00:26:17] And if they did or you were able to prove that they did, like whatever it was like, wouldn't really be like admissible.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:26:23] Right.

JVN [00:26:23] Because it's like illegal.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:26:24] It's illegal. It would, it would be against Title 13.

JVN [00:26:27] OK. So you guys, people, everyone. I love you so much. We're going to have to take one more really quick break. Go get you a cup of water. Make sure you're not distracted driving. You know, really get present. Take a deep breath. We're gonna be right back with more Ditas Katague from California's Complete Count right after that. Welcome back to "Getting Curious". This is Jonathan Van Ness. So we were just saying that, what were we just saying? We were saying that like other people from within, the federal government can't use the information that the Census has garnered. So we really don't need to be skeptical or afraid or distrusting of, of

giving our information to the Census department. Even though it is kind of scary giving it to a department that's run by Wilbur Ross. So that is a little bit scary. What? What is this Cen-, or what is the job that the California's Complete Count does to educate youth around the importance of sharing their Census information?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:27:25] Yes, we saw that in the past Census data, "Census in Schools", but it was done at the federal government and didn't quite make it down to the local level. So two years ago, we said, hey, let's invest in our curriculum and we engaged with Sacramento's local curriculum. Teachers, took some teachers out the classroom. We said, let's focus on 5th, 8th, 11th and 12th grade. Right? 'Cause the 12th grade, they're going to be voters. They study American government, U.S. history. We took their curriculum. We took some of the stuff that was already out there. And my goal was to say, make it easy because teachers have so much on their plate already. I want like in 10 minutes or less, this teacher can pull a module out and say, oh, I can tie this into what I'm already doing, whether it's like Western expansion or the 3/5s of a man compromise, right? And they can tie it in so that if our 5th, 8th, 11th, 12th graders become those sort of Census ambassadors, that it becomes more than just a glossary word. My daughter was in 8th grade. She said, "Mom, we talked about the Census today." And I go, "What was it? It was a glossary word." I said, "What did you say?" She said, she said, "No, everybody needs to know it's super important. The teacher didn't quite know what to say." And she says it is important because, you know, our representation, our schools are, you know, our gymnasium. All that stuff depends on it. So she knew. But we have to be able to get our young students to know how important it is, how it feeds into just civic engagement, how it feeds into voting, and how it will impact their future for the next 10 years.

JVN [00:28:47] So if a parent, or so if a teenager or like a kid who is 10, like parent, didn't report them online, the kid could report themselves?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:28:54] Well, I would hope that the kid would be well, usually most of, a lot of our youth end up filling out forms for their parents, particularly in some of our communities where English may not be the language spoken at home.

JVN [00:29:05] But what if your head of household isn't filling it out? Like are children, or like are people under 18 allowed to file a Census form?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:29:11] They are.

JVN [00:29:11] Yeah.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:29:11] They absolutely are. Yes. So that's great because they can't vote, but they can certainly make sure their household is completely counted.

JVN [00:29:17] So that's another really important thing to hit. Is like this is a place where we actually can empower our youth to, you know, affect their future in a way that is so important and under, and really underestimated a lot.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:29:26] Right.

JVN [00:29:27] So then when it comes to LGBTQ outreach and the Census, I feel like especially when it comes to our trans family members, trans people are subject to much, actually LGBTQ people, period, are more subject to homelessness. Trans people are more subject to violence, displacement, inability to get jobs, funding, research, education, all sorts of things. So what is California Complete Count doing to reach out to the LGBTQ plus community?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:29:57] Well, so we're partnering with Equality California. It's one of our key contractors that, their vendors, really a partner on the ground and they're making sure that they're using their intense network that's out there, whether they go to, you know, Pride parades. Where they're at the gender health centers to really educate why. I mean, and those facts are absolutely right. If you look at SNAP and other social services, the percentages of LGBTQ that are using those are proportionally a lot higher. And so we want the trusted mentors from Equality California to be able to talk one-on-one to say you really need to be counted because the services like this clinic get a lot of dollars, or, you know, the, the food services that you're getting. So we're making sure that it's not me during the outreach. But it's really those trusted messengers that are on the ground that can actually communicate culturally, appropriately and within a trusted venue to say it's okay to fill it out, you're safe.

JVN [00:30:51] So back to the questions that are actually on the Census. So there, is, there's not a question about, like, sexual orientation?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:30:57] Not yet.

JVN [00:30:57] So.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:30:58] Not this time.

JVN [00:30:59] But you would, there would, it would be obvious if you lived with your partner, or your husband. And it was like, you know, you're saying like spouse. And so there would be an inability for the government to get a sense of same sex couples in a Census account.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:31:13] Yes. Absolutely. And I had looked at the message and it really has to do with whoever the head of household is. And then when you put that person too, you put the relationships, so are you, you know, same sex, you know, married, same sex, you know, unmarried partner with them, roommate, you know, child.

JVN [00:31:25] Oh.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:31:26] So you're really, you have that head of household person that fills it out. And then when they fill out that second or third person, you talk about what the relationship between with them, between them. And so you are able to put same sex married or same sex, you know, unmarried, you know, partner.

JVN [00:31:41] And then what are the other questions?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:31:44] On the form?

JVN [00:31:45] Yeah, because we, we didn't get all the way through.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:31:47] Yes. So I would say there's the race question. So there's like different variations of Hispanic race. How many people are in the household? You have your address.

JVN [00:31:57] Gender.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:31:58] Oh, yes, gender, sorry.

JVN [00:31:59] Yes. Is nonbinary or trans an option?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:02] It's not on there yet.

JVN [00:32:04] OK.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:04] But I know that because I'm working with a task force, Mic and Mori over there. There's continuing to talk about that. So they're starting to do that research to ask for that. So maybe 2030. It takes a really long time.

JVN [00:32:16] Yes. And that's really good that we're vetting, you know, the questions in whatever area that they're coming from.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:21] Yes.

JVN [00:32:22] With the Census question and Wilbur Ross's nightmare ass. So that whole thing, it kind of just went after the Supreme Court. And basically for that, for this, this time around, the working consensus, is that it will not be added. No way. No how.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:34] Yes. I sure hope.

JVN [00:32:36] For 2020.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:37] Yeah.

JVN [00:32:37] But Trump has said that he does want to think about it for future Censuses.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:32:41] And he also has said that he's going to gather that data from other federal departments because he wants to know citizen count.

JVN [00:32:47] But he wouldn't be able to use that data from other federal governments against what the Census Bureau has from the Census constitutionally? Because you can't use, like the Census Bureau information is protected. So if he was able to get that, he wouldn't be able to, like, cross.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:33:05] No. And find out names or any of that. No.

JVN [00:33:07] Right. So but I think that that is the concern because he is so used to, you know, going about, you know, using the Constitution and all sorts of unconstitutional ways, whether it's like reappropriating funds for the border wall or, you know, violating the emoluments clause or using his family to enrich themselves and all, you know, in all sorts of ways. I think it's like, really scary, like, you know, for us people to trust him. But I do think that the risk of not participating in, the risk of not participating in the Census is scarier than doing it. Like it's really important.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:33:38] Yes. And I mean, if you think about just the dollars. There are estimates between a thousand and 2000, depending on the state per person, per year. So let's say I leave my daughter off. That's going to be like 10,000 dollars that doesn't come back to the community. Besides the fact they won't know if they're supposed to be a high school there or not.

JVN [00:33:54] And when you think about how much we pay in taxes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:33:56] Right. And it doesn't come back.

JVN [00:33:58] And we want that money back.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:33:59] Yes. I mean, California, we donate to everybody else, right?

JVN [00:34:03] Oh, that's what I'm talking about. Yes. So wait. So schools. It determines school funding.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:34:08] Yes.

JVN [00:34:08] Hospital funding?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:34:09] Hospital funding, transportation funding. Health care, nutrition.

JVN [00:34:15] And health care. Let's really think about health care, because when you think about things like HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, like all those like STIs that are just exploding all over the place. If the government doesn't know, like the number of people there, like, how can they like staff the hospitals and like the-

DITAS KATAGUE [00:34:34] And clinics.

JVN [00:34:34] And the county clinics and stuff to be able to treat the things that are going on there? And like there is an epidemic of like so many different things happening really, really right now. So it really is so important that we can allocate the necessary funds where we need to. So it sounds like California Complete Count is doing really, really good work. Is there? Have you heard anything about other states doing similar programs or taking any of this information, trying to emulate it across the board?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:34:56] Well, I've gotten a couple calls. Illinois called us and said, hey, how did you figure out where to put your money? And all the money that we're looking at, it's all based upon Census data, obviously, and knowing where people are in areas that are hard to enumerate, hard to count and dividing those dollars up. So, like, I'm not going to do outreach in some fancy area that, you know, doesn't have people that are afraid. You don't, those would be like high propensity voters. I don't want to spend my money on that. We're really focusing on the hardest of hardest to count the people who are invisible. The people who are disenfranchised, the people who are super afraid. So Illinois is like, how did you do that? We said, look at the data. I just saw that New York City gave 1.4 million to their libraries, to say, hey, they're going to be places where people can fill out the forms. So part of our outreach on the ground is to allow people like in the Boys and Girls Club, they can walk in there and use their computers or in like the Asian Health Center, there will be somebody that will speak their language. Right? So they can go and they could translate for them, help them fill out the form. We want to remove any barriers that are out there to getting people, you know, to fill out the form. We don't want the count suppressed because there are people who will want it, like people in California are not counted. But that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to clear out, knock down all those barriers.

JVN [00:36:09] Where do people want the count suppressed? Like who would want to suppress the Census?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:36:15] Well, if you think about what's at stake, power and money. California could stay even with their 53 congressional seats or they could lose one or if they have a really poor turnout or count, could lose up to two congressional seats, right? Two, two House of Reps. Where would those go? They could go to Texas. They could go to North Carolina. And I always say, I don't even want to lose a football game to North Carolina.

JVN [00:36:38] Yes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:36:38] Let alone two congressional seats. Because if you think about two seats, think about, and I know you watch the votes that go on on the House floor, the American, the Affordable Care Act, they keep challenging that. Sometimes it only stays because of one or two votes, right?

JVN [00:36:54] Right.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:36:54] It only is saved. So imagine if those two California seats, who would probably be voting to save it, are gone and they are going to Texas or some other state. We could, national policy could change based upon, you know, California losing representation in, in Washington.

JVN [00:37:10] Which is a really big deal.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:37:12] Yes. And scary, too, right?

JVN [00:37:13] Yeah, we don't like that story at all. So what do, what do you think are the biggest-? Having done this research for this, for this many years, how can we get this word out to the places that need to be counted the most? Like the most, which to me in my mind is the places where, like racism is the most rampant, which is giving me my Mitch McConnells. It's giving me my Kentuckys, my Arkansas, my Alabama, my, my Tennessee, my, all of the-. How can we get the word out there to get education to those people?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:37:44] So on a national level, there's groups like Ford Foundation, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. They're doing a lot of that work because they say, oh California, you guys have got it going on, but let's take what you're doing. And they're trying to do on the ground work with their groups, you know, NAACP is doing stuff on the ground to make sure that those messages are coming from organizations that these folks trust. Right? They're not going to trust like the parish or the county government coming out or even the state government coming out and telling them to be counted. And they're definitely not going to trust when the, the U.S., you know, Census' process, "Yeah. Come out and be counted". They're going to you know, they're going to wonder, "Hm, I don't know about you guys." So locally trusted folks are really going to help.

JVN [00:38:23] So that's really, really important. It's like people that we trust, people we look to like within our community. Yeah. I think the most important thing to stress there is that there's like really good laws in place, like that Title 13 to prevent, like, anyone from able to use the Census Bureau's information.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:38:36] Confidentially is the key message. And the key messengers, we can do with our faith based partners. Right? Whoever your house of worship is, whether it's a temple or a mosque or a church or what have you. Having them tie that in. So we're doing a lot of sort of prayer breakfasts. We're giving sort of talking points to those, to those heads of the wor-, you know, houses of worship because people go there. Also health care providers. That doesn't work in all of our sort of vulnerable populations. But many populations go to their nurses or their nurse practitioners or their doctors to listen, to be like, "Oh, I have to fill this out. Why?" And of course, teachers. Teachers are so key. They're really that frontline to our students. And then again, the youth go back home and they say, hey, mom, do you know, if I don't fill this out, you know, my, I'm going to have 50 people, students in my classroom, right? That they need to know that we're here.

JVN [00:39:25] What the consequences are.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:39:26] Yes.

JVN [00:39:26] 'Cause that's another thing I was just thinking about. It's like there's, there's no real straightforward penalty for not filling out your Census form except for the benefits that your community doesn't get. And those take years to feel, like to feel the effects of that.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:39:39] Right, Yeah.

JVN [00:39:39] 'Cause it's not like you have to send in like a ten dollar fee if you or a three dollar, you know, I mean. So it really the what is it? I just, because we're approaching like our last three minutes. So it's like what, what are the long term implications of like not participating in the Census? What do you stand to lose?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:39:55] Well, first of all, if you don't stand up, you're invisible, right? To exist, we've got to resist. Right? And your community is depending on you to stand up, be counted so that those dollars come back. I mean, it is a community building thing.

JVN [00:40:08] Is there a question in the Census about like the criminal past? Is there like anything-?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:14] No.

JVN [00:40:14] No.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:15] Absolutely not. They can't ask that.

JVN [00:40:15] Yeah. So there's really nothing to be afraid of.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:18] Right. Right.

JVN [00:40:20] Other than just like not knowing. It's like, why is the government sending me this form? Like, why do they want to count me? It's feeling scare scare. Well, it's because like we need to figure out like how to allocate the funds and the votes.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:29] Yes. And it is the foundation of our democracy. And that's why I come back every time to help.

JVN [00:40:33] Go into that, for these last few minutes, why is the Census the foundation for democracy?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:36] Because it's a representation.

JVN [00:40:39] And we're a representative democracy.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:40] Exactly.

JVN [00:40:41] So break that down a little bit more. Like pretend like someone has no idea what the Census is and they've been, like, making out this whole time, like on a date on this whole podcast. Or maybe they've been sleeping and they're just waking up to like these last two minutes and 30 seconds.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:40:54] Right. So you have to be counted because our government, our community, the whole fabric, social fabric of our society here in the United States is based upon

representative democracy. It's about power and it's about money. And if you want your communities to thrive. If you want that pothole filled. If you want schools, if you want hospitals, if you want an emergency room to be 10 minutes closer for your loved one to get to. You got to fill out the form. You got to stand up and be counted and make sure that everyone in your household is counted.

JVN [00:41:27] Wow, that's really good. I love that story. Is there anything that we missed? That we need to drive home?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:41:33] I just think that it's, people should be involved locally, get involved through the local Complete Count.

JVN [00:41:38] Why do you think that people, that Censuses just fell off the radar in general? Like, why do people not understand why it's so important?

DITAS KATAGUE [00:41:45] It only happens every 10 years. Yeah. My daughter was six last time around, right? Now she's more aware. But they don't, they lose that connection. And I think people have become more civically unaware over the past decade. And so we're using this, I want to build, my vision is to have a social movement infrastructure here in California based off these Census dollars that can be used for any issue that comes up in the future.

JVN [00:42:09] Wow. Ditas Katague, thank you so much for your work and thank you so much for the work of complete-, or California Complete Count. I really, really appreciate it. I appreciate your time so much.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:42:17] Thank you.

DITAS KATAGUE [00:42:18] Thank you. You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Ditas Katague. You'll find links to Ditas's, the Census's and CA Complete Count's socials in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter at CuriousWithJVN. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quin. Thank you so much, Queen, for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend. It's on Spotify, honey. It's everywhere. Get that, get that Stitcher app, get on that Spotify. Get on that Apple, honey. We love all of them. Show them how to subscribe. Show me how to do all of it. You know? "Getting Curious" is produced by Emily Bossak, Julie Carrillo, Rae Ellis, Harry Nelson and Colin Anderson. Booking consulting by Mary O'Hara.