## How Does Alabama Rank?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Alabama Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population, 1997</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of population 65 years and over, 1996</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons per square mile of land area, 1997</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons not covered by health insurance, 1995</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent crimes per 100,000 resident population, 1995:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible rape</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons killed in alcohol-related crashes as a percent of all person killed in crashes, 1995</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal funds and grants, 1996</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing starts of single family units, 1996</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor union membership, 1996</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below the poverty level, 1995:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income, 1995</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income for a 4-person family, 1995</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita energy expenditures, 1994</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Column shows rankings 1 through 50, not actual values or percentages.

1 Includes nonnegligent manslaughter.

2 Related children under 18 years.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, *State and Metropolitan Area Data Book, 1997-98.*
Mailing out census forms and having people mail them back worked well in 1970 and 1980. The mailback rate for 1970 was 78 percent and for 1980 the rate was 75 percent. But the mailback rate for 1990 was 65 percent! What's going on? Why has the response rate declined?

When so many people did not mail back the 1990 census form, the Census Bureau began some research to find out why not. They discovered:

- There is a growing distrust of government.
- Americans are overloaded with junk mail.
- Americans busy lifestyles (particularly among two-earner families) mean they are more reluctant to spend time filling out forms.
- The forms strike some people as too complicated.
- Some respondents consider the questions too nosy.

The Census Bureau also found out that some of Congress's hostility to the Census Bureau has been because Members hated the Census form.

Having people mail back their census forms has several advantages:

- It saves the expense of sending an enumerator to the household.

People are more honest when filling out a self-administered questionnaire than when they answer a face-to-face interview.

So, the Census Bureau has redesigned the Census form for 2000 hoping to improve the mailback response rate. The final design had to meet these criteria:

1. Appeal to a broad range of people
2. Be easy to understand
3. Be cost effective (that is, cheap for the Census Bureau).

The Census Bureau has found that people are more willing to fill out and mail back a Census form if:

1. The form assures respondents that their answers will be kept confidential.
2. The form helps explain the purpose of the census and how statistical data helps individual communities.
3. Respondents understand that answering the census is required by law.

The form itself must:

1. Stand out from the stacks of commercial mailings that people receive every day
2. Yet it must retain its dignity and look like an important, official document.

It must also:

- Meet all federal and U.S. Postal Service requirements
- Ask the necessary questions
- Include all legal statements
- Meet printing, processing, delivery, and cost requirements.

Testing different methods has revealed five ways that dramatically improve response rates:

- An advance notice letter (6% improvement)
- A user-friendly questionnaire (3% improvement)
- A thank you or reminder postcard (8% improvement)
- A replacement questionnaire sent 3 weeks later to households that have not sent the original back (10% improvement)
- Printing a message on the questionnaire envelope that says Your Response is Required by Law: U.S. Census Form Enclosed (10% improvement)

New 2000 Census forms have been tested for ease and clarity. The Census Bureau was looking at:

New Design for the 2000 Census Form
Census results are used to establish local eligibility for government programs. The census is as important to our state as highways and telephone lines. Federal and state funds supporting schools, libraries, employment services, housing assistance, road construction, hospital services, programs for the elderly, and more are distributed based on census figures.

The census short form. Most housing units in the country (about 83 percent) will receive the short-form questionnaire in Census 2000. The Census 2000 short form will be the shortest form in 180 years. Five subjects that were on the 1990 census short form have moved to the Census 2000 long form:

- Marital status
- Units in structure
- Number of rooms
- Value of home, and
- Monthly rent.

The census long form. Five subjects that appeared on the 1990 census long form were dropped:

- Children ever born
- Year last worked
- Source of water
- Sewage disposal, and
- Condominium status.

These subjects were not explicitly mandated or required by federal law.

Only one new subject was added to the Census 2000 long form: grandparents as caregivers. This information was needed for the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (welfare reform).

The long form provides socioeconomic detail needed for a wide range of government programs and federal requirements. Nationwide, it goes out to one in six housing units. But to assure the same level of accuracy everywhere, a larger share of housing units in small towns and rural counties will receive this form.

For more information: Visit the Census Bureau’s Internet site at http://www.census.gov, or call the Regional Census Center in Atlanta at 404-331-0573.
Why Do We Need the Census?

Community leaders use the long form for planning a wide range of activities, including *neighborhood revitalization, economic development and improved facilities and services*. To build highways, roads, bridges, and tunnels in areas that need them, planners need information about where people live and work and the times they leave for work.

To *speed disaster relief* to affected areas, emergency management agencies use census numbers to estimate the number of people displaced by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters.

Community leaders use census numbers to *decide where to locate police and fire stations and other public services*. The census helps local government and community organizations locate facilities such as day-care centers, senior citizen community centers, health-care clinics, and even playgrounds.

Your individual answers are confidential. By law the Census Bureau cannot share your answers with others, including welfare agencies, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Internal Revenue Service, courts, police, and the military. Anyone who breaks this law will receive up to five years in prison and $5,000 in fines. The law works—millions of questionnaires were processed during the 1990s without any breach of trust.