

## More Information

*The information on the Census and the Right to Self-Identify in this pamphlet is provided by UNITED SIKHS.*

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*Recognize the Human Race as One*

## UNITED SIKHS

### Know Your Rights: The United States Census and the Right to Self-Identify



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# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## What is the Census?

The United States Census Bureau officially recognizes and quantifies the existence of minority groups within its territory. The Census, constitutionally mandated to be taken every ten years, is used by government for a variety of reasons, **including monitoring and enforcing compliance with civil rights statutes, such as voting, employment, housing, lending, education, and anti-discrimination laws.** The accuracy of the census **directly affects** the nation's ability to ensure **equal representation and equal access** to important governmental resources for all Americans.

**Currently the Census Bureau refuses to count Sikhs as a distinct ethnic minority.**



## What constitutes an “Ethnic Minority”?

Under international law, the most common definition for an ethnic minority is:

*A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population, in a non-dominant position, consisting of nationals of the State, possessing distinct ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics and showing a sense of solidarity aimed at preserving those characteristics.*

## Why should Sikhs be counted as an “Ethnic Minority” in the Census?

Sikhs have been in America for over 130 years, and have a rich history in the nation. Rough estimates project that the entire population of Sikhs in America is between **400,000 and 1,000,000**. Persons belonging to the American Sikh minority have a **distinct language**: Gurumukhi script, and Panjabi (spoken). They have a **distinct religion**: followers of Guru Nanak and his successors. In addition, **Sikh culture possesses distinct features** including unique music and dance forms. They share a **common ancestry** originating from particular parts of the **Panjab region** in India. Most American Sikhs identify as an **“ethnic minority,”** because the identity of a Sikh is actually a combination of culture, ethnicity, race, and religion. However, **Sikhs are denied their right to self-identify** as an ethnic group on the Census.

The United States is obligated under Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to recognize minorities that self-identify as such as long as they fulfill the objective criteria set out in the definition (see above).

UNITED SIKHS has been in detailed discussions with the U.S. Census Bureau and has been informed that, even if a Sikh marks “other” on the Census form and writes in “Sikh,” under the category of “Race,” the write-in is automatically tabulated and coded as “Asian Indian.” While many other communities are able to ask for special disaggregation of data specific to their communities after the Census is completed, **data about Sikhs is not disaggregated separately and so there is no way to obtain vital and accurate information about the community at large.**

## Why is it so important for Sikhs to be counted separately in the Census?

After the tragic events of 9/11, the **lack of awareness** about Sikhs proved **dangerous for the community** as Sikhs were often targets of bias-based harassment and frequently referred to as “terrorists,” due to their unique identity (ie: articles of faith, namely, the turban). Many Sikhs have been targets of **hate crimes, bullying, racial profiling,** and in some cases **police brutality.** Hate crimes cannot be properly reported and categorized **unless Sikhs are recognized as a separate ethnic group** and counted by the Census because there is no way to know what percentage of the community has been affected by hate crimes without having an accurate number for the population as a whole. Counting Sikhs separately will help the government document, prosecute, and prevent hate crimes by collecting accurate data about the population.

The request by the Sikh community to be counted correctly is important **because the right to self-identify is a human right** and the need for correct tabulation is **vital in order to monitor and prove discrimination.** Additionally, being counted in the Census is helpful to ascertain the level of political or social access that the Sikh community has. **Failing to allow Sikhs to self-identify exacerbates problems** that the community already faces because Census data is used “extensively in civil rights monitoring and enforcement covering areas such as employment, voting rights, housing and mortgage lending, health care services, and educational opportunities” and without such data, **protecting the civil rights of marginalized communities like Sikhs is made more difficult than it has to be.**

UNITED SIKHS will continue to tirelessly advocate for the Sikh communities’ **right to self-identify and be counted in the Census,** until Sikhs are classified as a minority ethnic group and can claim rights that other minority groups in America already possess.