



The incomplete coronavirus map US territories left behind

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By now most Americans have heard about [Capt. Brett E. Crozier](#), the commanding officer of the USS Theodore Roosevelt who risked his career in an attempt to save the lives of his crew from a COVID-19 outbreak.

What most Americans don't hear about much is Guam, the Pacific island where the ship is docked, nor its place in the nation's coronavirus map.

Since the first coronavirus case was reported in the United States, the national media has paid little attention to the American citizens of the U.S. territories — Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands. U.S. nationals in American Samoa have also been overlooked. While disease and death rates of the U.S. territories are now included in many national news reports, the islands are mostly excluded from coronavirus maps of the United States.

A [review of several popular news outlets](#) shows that while they've kept up with the spread of the coronavirus in most of the country, they have failed to report on the five U.S. territories. This exclusion is not trivial. If you think it is, imagine how you would feel if you looked at a map and your state was missing.

Maps are a symbolic representation of our world. They influence our collective perception of reality by what they include and exclude. If a United States map were presented omitting nearly 4 million American citizens — a population almost equal to that found in the five least populated states combined — South Dakota, North Dakota, Alaska, Vermont and Wyoming — it would send a message that they are not a priority in the nation's war against COVID-19.

Daniel Immerwahr aptly made this point in [“How to Hide an Empire,”](#) when describing the “logo map” which only presents the 50 states, with Alaska and Hawaii typically shown where Mexico really exists. According to Immerwahr, the exclusion of the five territories is intentional and perpetuates the fiction that the United States is a republic — a government of the people, for the people — and not a covert colonial empire. The logo map also reinforces the notion that the peoples of the territories — who are of distinct ethnicities, racial and cultural make-ups — are different, foreign and therefore not entirely American.

This foreignness has deprived the American citizens from U.S. territories of their political and economic rights for over a century. The residents of [U.S. territories cannot vote](#) for president or Congressional representatives. They are not included in federal data collection programs that facilitate research, analysis and planning, inform decision-makers, all of which ultimately impact the distribution of resources.

In fact, the U.S. territories are so outside "the map" that last week a [Chinese satellite launching rocket exploded](#) over the Guamanian night skies and nobody in major national news reported it. Would the press remain silent if debris from a Chinese rocket fell over Hawaii? Probably not.

This invisibility combined with public health vulnerabilities has made the residents of the territories justifiably anxious over their ability to cope with the coronavirus pandemic. Unequal treatment in federal programs like Medicaid has left these remote islands with fragile health care systems. Underfunded and weakened by natural disasters — hurricanes Irma and Maria, typhoons Mangkhut and Yutu and the Puerto Rico earthquakes — the U.S. territories could be quickly overpowered by the coronavirus.

Take, for instance, Puerto Rico which is bankrupt and has had more [COVID-19 deaths than 17 states](#). Gov. Wanda Vazquez took early actions to enforce social distancing but the island lags behind in testing and contracts for testing kits with politically connected companies are being called into question.

[Guam](#) has 133 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 5 deaths. The military, however, controls nearly a third of Guam’s land. [COVID-19 infected sailors](#) from the USS Roosevelt are being moved to the Guam Naval Hospital. Sailors who test negative and are asymptomatic are being quarantined in hotels and kept under military surveillance. This latter move has local leaders and the general public [worried](#) that they could endanger the island’s overall health. If a U.S. carrier infected with hundreds of COVID-19 victims was docking in San Diego and putting up sailors in local hotels, the coverage might look a bit different.

The Northern Mariana Island had two COVID-19 fatalities and American Samoa had none. Contagion is difficult to assess in these islands as they both lack testing capacity and must send their specimens to Guam.

So far, the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#) are faring the best. They recently acquired testing capacity and closed their borders to keep the virus at bay. They only have one COVID-19 death to date.

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After a visit to Puerto Rico in 1906, [President Roosevelt told Congress](#) he wished to confer full American citizenship to its people as “a matter of right and justice.” With the health infrastructure strained to the max

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nationwide, it seems right and just that the lives of the American citizens of the U.S. territories be given the tools to fight the coronavirus.

Correcting the United States map will not guarantee a fair distribution of resources, but it will be a first step to ensure that the U.S. territories will not be ignored as the nation fights for its survival.

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