



2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

Understanding Communities at Risk of an Undercount

Louisiana

Every 10 years, Americans are asked to fill out and return their Census questionnaires. It is an important decennial event, given that the population count guides billions in federal spending, determine congressional apportionment and plays a key role in shaping future policies. The Census Bureau's goal is to "count everyone once and only once," yet demographic analysis and post-census surveys show that the census consistently misses racial and ethnic minorities, low-income households, limited English proficient residents, renters, people experiencing homelessness, people with lower educational levels, and children, especially those aged 0-4, at disproportionately high rates. The opposite is true for homeowners and non-Hispanic Whites who, according to the census Bureau's own analysis, were *over-counted* in 2000 and 2010. The gap between the over-count and under-count represent the extent to which populations are underrepresented. Thus people who are historically undercount by the census reflect those likely to lose the most as a result of the undercount.

What is at stake for Louisiana?

At the national level, under-counts and mistakes made on census forms resulting in over-counting effectively cancel each out to some degree, but they are much more problematic at the local level where populations tend to be more homogenous and may be subject to widespread underreporting. These discrepancies lead to disparities in the allocation of political representation as driven by redistricting and over \$800 billion in government funding for about 300 services and programs. For Louisiana, the census will effect policy measures touching on Louisianans' everyday lives, such as redistricting, Community Development Block Grants, and Medicaid.

Redistricting

In Louisiana, plans to redistrict at both the state and local level must be passed in a bill. Individuals and organizations can participate by either proposing their own plans to legislatures or by testifying for or against proposed redistricting plans at public hearings. Redistricting plans created by individuals and organizations may be considered by the committees in the Louisiana House of Representatives or the Louisiana Senate if they meet the minimum requirements outlined in the respective committee's adopted rules for redistricting. If testifying in the legislature, it is advisable to have hard copies of the testimony to present to the Committee at the hearing with enough copies for all committee members, staff, and the secretary. To inquire further about when to provide testimony regarding redistricting plans, contact the House and Government Committee and Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee at (225) 342-2040, which are tasked with forming the initial redistricting plans. To contact the House and Government Affairs Committee, call (225) 342-2403 or email obriens@legis.la.gov. To contact the Senate and Government Affairs Committee, call (225) 342-2101 or email s@legis.la.gov.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

A prevalent issues in North Carolina is the lack of resources for community development. The amount of funding allocated to a state for the Community Development Block Grant is decided based on census data, and eligibility for the program is linkged to the percentage of individuals living in poverty and general



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income data. In Louisiana, crime rates are a concern in these communities and more funding could create more resources for law enforcement including training. Additionally, many cities in Louisiana are still rebuilding after Hurricane Harvey and funds could be used for construction work on schools and housing.

Medicaid

At stake for Louisiana is \$4.7 billion in Federal Medicaid money. Medicaid provides financial assistance to States for payments of medical assistance on behalf of cash assistance recipients, children, pregnant women, and the aged who meet income and resource requirements, and other categorically-eligible groups. With an accurate census count in 2020, Louisiana would be eligible for up to 664 dollars in federal reimbursement assistance for every 1,000 dollars spent on Medicaid. However, even a 2% undercount could mean a loss in millions of Medicaid funding. This loss of funding will have devastating effects to the overall health care system that serves all Louisiana residents. Medicaid pays for half of all births and 60 percent of all nursing home care. Health care providers in rural Louisiana, including hospitals, are particularly reliant on Medicaid funding and could be forced to stop providing key services if a Census undercount led to significant Medicaid cuts. Such cuts would trigger job loss, as federal health care dollars disappear from the state and local economies.

Measuring Hard to Count Communities

It is well understood that communities that have low mail response rates are most likely to be miss-counted. Accordingly, the Census Bureau defines “hard to count” as census tracts where the mail-in response rate is less than 73%. To determine the mail response rate, census statisticians compare the number of completed Census survey forms to the number of occupied housing units that received them. The national return rate in 2010 was 79.3 percent, but it varied significantly by state and region. Less than three-quarters of households responded in Alaska, Louisiana and New Mexico, while nearly 86 percent did so in Minnesota. Louisiana ranks 49th with just under three quarters of households responding. In certain counties, less than 65% of households return their forms, and some parts of cities responded at even lower rates.

Census participation is largely tied to a jurisdiction’s demographics. The last Census is estimated to have undercounted the nation’s black population by 2 percent, and Hispanics by only slightly less. Whites, particularly older white women, were over-counted. One of the toughest groups to count is children under the age of five, many of whom live in low-responding neighborhoods.

| <i>National Net Undercount</i> | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Demographic Group | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 0.68% * | -1.13% * | -0.84% * |
| Black (non-Hispanic) | 4.57% * | 1.84% * | 2.07% * |
| Asian (non-Hispanic) | 2.36% * | -0.75% | 0.08% |
| American Indian on Reservation | 12.22% * | -0.88% | 4.88% * |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 2.36% * | 2.12% | 1.34% |

In order to respond, people have to receive the forms in the first place. Renters are typically undercounted because the forms do not reach many of them, while homeowners are over-counted. Apartments with mail



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delivered to a single central location also pose problems. Enumerators follow up with nonresponding households, but aren't always successful. Visiting homes in-person comes at a much higher cost for taxpayers and is one reason why the Government Accountability Office reported the 2010 Census cost approximately \$98 per housing unit. Where enumerators are unable to contact the residents, the Census Bureau makes its best guess about the residents based on the statistical information of the surrounding neighbors. Thus demographic data about communities with low response areas are less likely to be accurate.

One major change that could help the agency curb costs is that, for the first time, responses will be submitted online. Respondents will be able to enter their information using a unique ID code mailed to their homes or by providing identifying information that matches administrative records. The agency expects the majority of Americans to file electronically rather than mail in their forms. But this added option could still fail to reach many low-income households because research suggests that nearly half of the poorest households across the U.S. -- those with annual incomes below \$20,000 -- still lack internet access. According to the latest American Community Survey Estimates, nearly one out of four households in Louisiana still have either dial up only access or no internet subscription at all. An analysis by the Center for Urban Research found congressional districts with lower mail return rates were correlated with higher percentages of households lacking internet subscriptions or having poor connections. Low-income households are more likely to use mobile phones to get online, which presents another potential hurdle for the 2020 Census. Mobile devices have longer load times, and respondents are more likely to not complete surveys than those using desktop computers.

Louisiana's hurricane disaster population shrinkage and subsequent return growth has largely stabilized, but it will hard to get a clear picture unless there is an accurate count. Unfortunately, communities hardest hit by natural disasters are also at the highest risk of an undercount. Louisiana's majority-minority parishes and census tracts are among the state's most undercounted areas. Fifty six out of the state's 100 parishes had hard to count areas in 2010. An accurate count could completely change the political landscape of the state, placing more participatory power in the hands of communities of color.

Census Outreach

One point that no one disputes: for communities that are determined to get an accurate count, the time to begin work is now. Reaching the hard-to-count requires trusted messengers in communities relaying information that resonates with communities' values. These can include pastors and faith groups who emphasize completing the Census, because it will benefit neighborhood schools. The attached spreadsheet is meant to help advocates identify neighborhoods in their state at most risk of an undercount and to learn details about those communities to help tailor outreach accordingly.

The spreadsheet contains demographic information about all of North Carolina's hard to count communities down to the census tract. These are organized by county in alphabetical order. Census tracts marked in bold have majority minority populations. In addition to

Census tracts are merely small subdivisions of a county that provide a stable set of geographic units for the presentation of statistical data, as opposed to say towns, which often have boundaries that shift over time. They generally have a population size between 1,200 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. A census tract usually covers a continuous area, however the spatial size of census tracts varies widely depending on the density of settlement.



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population figures for 2010 and 2016 by race and ethnicity, readers will find information about the portion of people living below the poverty level, people who rely on public assistance, the number of Spanish language households, and more. Almost all of the data is pulled directly from the official 2010 Census and the 2016 American Community Survey.

Example: Calcasieu Parish

For an advocate conducting census outreach in Calcasieu Parish, there are some steps they might follow. At a first glance, Calcasieu Parish as a whole seems to be in good shape for census participation. The census bureau would not categorize the county as “hard to count”, because the overall mail return rate is 76.3%. But a closer look presents a different story. Looking at the data spreadsheet, advocates will see that Calcasieu Parish has 10 hard to count census tracts, three of which are majority-minority. Moreover, 28.6% households in the parish do not have an internet subscription or dial-up only access. This means it will likely be a substantial hurdle for those households to fill out the census survey online.

Looking at the hard to count census tracts in Calcasieu Parish, a census advocate will next identify populations within those tracts that are at risk of an undercount in the 2020 census. For example, census tract 1202 has the lowest mail return rate in the county and therefore is at great risk of an undercount in 1202. Twelve percent of tract 1202’s population in 2010 was under the age of five. This indicates that a substantial number of families have school age children who might resonate with information about how census participation will affect their children’s schools. Moreover, 40% of residents in this tract live below the poverty line. Lastly, an advocate should note that 80% of the tract’s residents identify as black. A trusted messenger in this tract would be a member of the community or someone who can strongly identify with the concerns of the community.

For assistance on making sense of the data, contact Laura Wright at laurawright@scsj.org.