Mapping Response Rates for a Fair and Accurate Census: Final Overview

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2020 Census Response Rate Analysis through Oct. 17

Presented to National Conference of State Legislatures on October 23, 2020
“Final” self-response rates

• On September 29 the nation **met its 2010 self-response rate of 66.5%**

• **Since then the nationwide self-response rate has increased to 67%**
  ➢ Coming close to the 67.4% self-response rate achieved in 2000

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**Note:** the Census Bureau plans to publish assessment report in early 2021 with final 2020 self-response rates.

(NB: self-response analyses from March to Oct. are online at [www.gc.cuny.edu/CUR-research-initiatives](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUR-research-initiatives))
Some reasons why self-response rates matter

• Census Bureau research shows that data collected via self-response is more reliable than via door-knocking

• Low self-response rates are correlated with people being missed in the census

• The NYC Dept of City Planning says self-response is “the gold standard in decennial census data collection and ... the most accurate and efficient source of data.”

• In 2010 even with a 66.5% rate, the U.S. still had undercounts. An early stakeholder goal for 2020 was to surpass the 2010 rate, hoping this would minimize risk of undercounts.
Every 10 years, here’s how the Census Bureau counts us:

1. Self-Response phase:
   • Census Bureau mails information about the decennial questionnaire to almost all households (starting in March 2020, continuing through April).
   • For 2020, some households will be mailed the actual questionnaire, most households will be mailed a website link to fill out the form online, & everyone will have the opportunity to mail in the form or call-in their responses.

   The most accurate & complete population data is submitted during this phase.

2. Non-Response Follow Up phase:
   • The Census Bureau hires 100s of thousands of people to go door-to-door to count every household that didn’t self-respond (after April 1, 2020).
   • Much more expensive than the self-response phase ($2 BILLION in 2010).
   • During this phase, the risk is greatest that people will be missed or counted inaccurately.
   • Areas with large shares of households that don’t self-respond are therefore “hard to count”. Almost every community will have some households that don’t self-respond. But in many communities 25% or more of their households didn’t mail in their forms and needed to be counted in person. We’ve mapped these communities to help ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census.

(NOTE: this slide pre-dates COVID, and was used in early presentations to clarify self-response vs NRFU)
2020 state-by-state response trends (plus DC & PR) thru Oct 15

compared with U.S. rate of increase in 2010*

*NB: Remember the differences in census operations b/w 2010 & 2020 when viewing graph.
What impacted self-response increases?

Between **March and April 30** ("typical" self-response period)
- Substantial rate increases in March coincide with early census push only beginning to be complicated by COVID-19
- April 1 Census Day outreach helped provide a substantial increase, then rates started leveling off (COVID-19 impacts were widespread; U/L already suspended)

From **May through August 8** (extended timeframe, until NRFU)
- The “long slog” of GOTC/self-response (as Terri Ann Lowenthal has called it); 3+ months, twice as long as “typical” self-response operation!
- GOTC greatly impacted by COVID-19; U/L doesn’t restart till May/June

From **August 9 till now** (during NRFU)
- NRFU “complicates” GOTC, but rates still rise (albeit slightly more slowly)
- NRFU helps prompt self-response; GOTC continues; 7th mailing by Census Bureau
Geographic patterns of meeting or surpassing 2010 rates

28 states met or surpassed their 2010 rates

185 congressional districts

1,171 counties (out of approx. 3,130)
  ➢ Across all states

6,967 cities-incorporated places (out of approx. 19,200)
  ➢ Across all states

39,948 census tracts (out of approx. 84,000)
  ➢ Almost half of all tracts nationwide
Oct 14 self-response rates compared with 2010

Areas that have not met their 2010 self-response rate have needed a greater amount of NRFU in a shorter amount of time.

Even if an area has met or surpassed its 2010 rate, if the current rate is still low it still had a substantial need for NRFU.

Map link: https://bit.ly/341rTjp
Sept 18 self-response rates compared with 2010
July 29 self-response rates compared with 2010
During NRFU, some notable demographic shifts

In the census tracts with self-response rates in the lowest fifth nationwide (i.e., requiring the most door-knocking follow up):

- by mid-Oct these tracts had shifted so now the Hispanic population in the current universe of “bottom 20%” tracts is smaller by more than 1 million people (from over 13 million to 12 million; a 7.8% reduction) than in early August;

- these tracts now have a foreign-born population smaller by more than 870,000 people (from 8 million to 7.2 million; an 11% reduction) than in early August; and

- the number of renter households in census tracts with the lowest self-response rates is now smaller by 360,000 (from 9.2 million to almost 8.9 million; a 4% reduction) than in the lowest-rate tracts in early August.
But “bottom 20%” tracts still disproportionately people of color, people w/lower incomes, immigrants

Demographic characteristics of “bottom 20%” tracts compared to U.S. population:

- **Non-Hispanic White** population: 23.3 million (46.3% of population in bottom 20%)
  - non-Hispanic Whites make up 60.2% of overall US population

- **Non-Hispanic Black** population: 11.3 million (22.4%)
  - non-Hispanic Blacks make up 12.3% of overall US population

- **Hispanic** population: 12 million (24%)
  - Overall US population is 18.3% Hispanic
Demographic characteristics compared to the overall U.S. population (continued):

• Non-Hispanic **Asian** population: 1.5 million (3% of population in bottom 20%)
  - Overall US population is 6% Asian (but share of Asian pop. in “bottom 20%” increased compared with 2010, when it was 2.8%)

• **Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander** population: 90,000 (0.2%)
  - Overall US population is also 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

• **American Indian/Alaska Native** population: ~900,000 (1.8%)
  - American Indians/Alaska Natives make up 0.7% of overall US population

• Population with **incomes below poverty line**: 12.1 million (25.2%)
  - 13.1% of US population has income below poverty line

• Foreign-born population: 7.2 million (14.3%)
  - 13.7% of US population is foreign-born
Average response rates have been increasing for communities of color.

The analysis omits tracts with units in Update/Enumerate or Remote Alaska but includes all tracts regardless of Update/Leave. Also omits tracts with fewer than 100 people in households (i.e., tracts with large group quarters populations).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities by population size</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White (non-Hispanic)</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUTSIDE METRO AREAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small town (&lt; 50k)</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>62.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not in an incorporated place</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>56.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>RURAL OVERALL</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>58.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN METROPOLITAN AREAS</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town (&lt; 50k)</td>
<td>47.4</td>
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<td>75.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>70.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not in an incorporated place</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>70.2</td>
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<td>METRO, NON-CITIES OVERALL</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>70.3</td>
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<td>METRO AREA CITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium city (50k to 300k)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>68.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large (300k to 1 million)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>64.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Largest (over 1 million)</td>
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<td>64.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>61.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>METRO CITIES OVERALL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. average</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Average tract-level increases in same categories from August 20 to October 14, summarized by region type

Notable increases especially for predominantly Asian, Black, and Hispanic tracts in cities, and for American Indian tracts in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary by region type</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White (non-Hispanic)</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RURAL OVERALL</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>METRO, NON-CITIES OVERALL</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METRO CITIES OVERALL</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. average</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: there are only about 200 tracts nationwide that are plurality American Indian / Alaska Native.
Despite impressive response rate increases on the previous slide in predominantly American Indian tracts, rates have remained low overall on most tribal lands.

- Almost two-thirds (195 of 315 tribal areas) have rates of 50% or less.
Key takeaways of demographic picture of hardest-to-count communities

• Self-response rates during NRFU improved in urban neighborhoods that are predominantly Black, Hispanic, or Asian, as well as small number of rural / suburban communities that are predominantly American Indian; but

• Rates in communities of color nationwide (except for predominantly Asian tracts) still tend to be lower than non-Hispanic White communities; and

• Majority of tracts that are predominantly Black, Hispanic, or American Indian (and substantial share of Asian tracts) ended up with rates less than 2010.

Upshot: communities of color needed a greater share of door-knocking enumeration than non-Hispanic White areas (similarly in large cities for predominantly Asian tracts).

To the extent door-knocking enumeration created a greater risk of undercounts or data quality concerns (either due to the general nature of door-knocking effort and/or due to cutting the count short), this risk fell disproportionately on communities of color.
Final thoughts

Don’t make mistake of confusing self-response rates with the overall share of households (or people!) counted in 2020
• We continue to see this misunderstanding in news articles & social media posts.

The self-response just refers to the share of housing units that filled out the form on their own. The remaining housing units have been “accounted for” via NRFU (though we don’t know how well the population of those remaining units was actually counted).

Now that data collection for the 2020 Census is done, the self-response rates are limited in what they can tell us. The question isn’t “What was the overall response rate?” (The Bureau has said it was 99.9% everywhere.)

The real question is how accurate and fair is the 2020 count of the population (not just housing units) and the demographic characteristics of the population. For that we need to wait for the 2020 data itself, the “post-enumeration” analysis, and other metrics.
Contact for questions, additional information:


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