

African Americans in the 2020 Census

Why the Decennial Census is Important

The U.S. Constitution requires an accurate count of the nation's population every 10 years, and the decennial census seeks to count every person in every household. An integral part of our nation's democracy, census data affects the ability of our government to ensure equal representation and equal access to important federal and private sector resources for all Americans. Census data is used to allocate seats and draw district lines for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, and local governing boards; to target at least \$800 billion annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families; and to guide community decision-making affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investments, and much more.

“Hard-to-count” population groups are at higher risk of not being fully counted in the decennial census. While some groups have been underrepresented for decades; some may experience new or increased vulnerability due to major changes in census methodology: Using the Internet as the primary point of contact for the 2020 Census, or a reluctance to respond given concerns about data confidentiality. An undercount of the hard-to-count populations can lead to unequal political representation as well as unequal access to vital public and private resources for the people in greatest need.

African American households are at risk of being undercounted

The African American population has been historically undercounted in the decennial census, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods. In fact:

- The 2010 Census undercounted the African-American population by more than 800,000.
- Approximately seven percent of young African-American children were overlooked by the 2010 Census, roughly twice the rate for young non-Hispanic White children.
- African-American men have been historically undercounted in greater numbers than men of other racial or ethnic groups
- Today, more than one in three African Americans live in hard-to-count census tracts.

Why African Americans are missed so often in the census

- **Poverty:** Using the official poverty measure, 24 percent African American lives in poverty, which far exceeds the national poverty rate of 13 percent. Households living in poverty are hard to count.
- **Housing insecurity:** Fifty-eight percent of African American households rent their homes and are more likely to “double up” moving in with friends and family. Due to rising rental costs and stagnant wages, many renters experience housing instability, and individuals and families who rent are undercounted at higher rates than homeowners.

Consequences of undercounting the African American community

An undercount of African American communities will result in African Americans being denied a full voice in policy decision-making because political boundaries and congressional reapportionments most likely will not be based on real numbers. As a result, this hard-to-count community stands to lose important representation guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

In addition, federal agencies rely on census data to monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more. This is particularly important for African American communities, which have faced discrimination and have been historically disenfranchised from the voting process.

Undercounting the African American community in the 2020 Census could also impact how federal funding is allocated to states and localities. Many programs that provide financial security for low-income families and economic development for their communities are funded based, primarily, on census-driven data, including:

- Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies - \$13.9 billion
- Special Education Grants - \$11.2 billion
- Head Start Program - \$8.3 billion
- Child Care and Development Fund - \$2.9 billion
- SNAP - \$69.5 billion
- National School Lunch Program - \$11.6 billion
- Medicaid - \$312 billion
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers Program - \$19.1 billion

You can help - right now

Stakeholders (advocates, funders, and civic leaders) can improve the count of all African American households in the 2020 Census by joining or supporting work on policy development, community organizing, and the “Get Out the Count” campaign for the 2020 Census:

- **Show members of Congress why they need to support adequate resources for the Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census and accurately count all in the African American community.** Several years prior to a decennial census, the Census Bureau needs a major annual funding ramp up to perform critical tests and build out a massive program infrastructure. Due to financial constraints, important activities crucial to ensure a fair and accurate census have been postponed or canceled, putting the African American community at risk of a severe undercount.
- **Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments.** The [NAACP](#) works to ensure the census collects the most full and accurate data on the African American community. [The Census Project](#) provides regular updates on census-related activities in Congress and the administration. [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) also publishes many helpful resources.
- **Educate state and local leaders about the challenges the African American community faces in the census.** Advocates can join Complete Count Committees to help ensure a complete census and include voices from the African American community.
- **Become a Census Bureau partner to help ensure the Census Bureau’s partnership program gets the resources it needs.** This important program is at risk due to budget shortfalls. Partners (organizations, associations, institution, etc.) get timely updates and promotional material from the Census Bureau.

If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Andrew Aurand, Vice President for Research of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, at AAurand@nlihc.org or Chris Harley, Census Counts Campaign Director, at harley@censucounts.org.