

Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) Count in the 2020 Decennial 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.

Asian Americans and NHPI households are at risk of being undercounted

Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) have been undercounted for decades, resulting in considerable disadvantages for their families and communities. Roughly one-fifth of Asian Americans and one-third of NHPIs live in hard-to-count census tracts. They have greater challenges in finding affordable housing, higher incidences of poverty and unemployment, lower educational attainment, and greater language barriers.

Hard-to-count characteristics of Asian American and NHPI households

Combining Asian American and NHPI communities into overly broad groups obscures characteristics that can make many of these households hard-to-count, including:

- **Language Barriers:** Seventy-five percent of Asian Americans and 41 percent of NHPIs speak a language other than English, with 34 percent of Asian Americans and 13 percent of NHPIs speaking English less than “very well.” Historically, areas with low rates of English proficiency have been undercounted.
- **Poverty:** Using the official poverty measure, about 12 percent of Asian Americans and 18 percent of NHPIs live in poverty, and households that live in poverty are difficult to enumerate.
- **Education:** More than 84 percent of Asian Americans and 86 percent of NHPIs have a high school degree or higher. While these groups appear to have high levels of educational attainment, there are great disparities within different subgroups. Areas with lower educational attainment are hard to enumerate.
- **Housing Insecurity:** Irregular housing is a factor that can hinder enumeration. Forty-seven percent of Asian Americans and 40 percent of NHPIs who are low-income live in areas with the nation's highest housing costs, which leads to greater challenges in finding affordable and stable housing.

Asian American and NHPI communities are some of the fastest growing groups in the United States

The diverse Asian American and NHPI communities are growing rapidly in the U.S., which is why it is essential to get a complete count of these groups. This demographic shift is occurring throughout the U.S.: in 2015, the Asian American population grew by at least 30 percent in every state except Hawaii; the NHPI population experienced the most growth in the South.

Consequences of undercounting Asian American and NHPI communities

An undercount of the Asian American and NHPI communities will result in their 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, these hard-to-count communities stand 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.

Undercounting the Asian American and NHPI communities 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 Educational Agencies - \$13.9 billion**
- **Head Start Program - \$8.3 billion**
- **SNAP - \$69.5 billion**
- **Medicaid - \$312 billion**

You can help - right now

Stakeholders (advocates, funders, and civic leaders) can improve the count of Asian Americans and NHPI communities 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 Census 2020 and accurately count all Asian Americans and NHPI peoples.** 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 Asian Americans and NHPI communities at risk of a severe undercount.
- **Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments.** [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 Asian Americans and NHPI peoples face in the census.** Advocates can join Complete Count Committees to help ensure a complete census and include voices from the Asian American and NHPI communities.
- **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.