
Will You Count? Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) in the 2020 Census

Why is the census important?

The decennial census is the most inclusive civic activity in our country, covering every person in every household. The U.S. Constitution requires an accurate count of the nation's population every 10 years. Moreover, the census is integral to our democracy. The data collected affect our nation's ability to ensure equal representation and equal access to important governmental and private sector resources for all Americans, including across racial and ethnic lines. Census results are used to allocate seats and draw district lines for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures, and local boards; to target more than \$800 billion¹ annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families; and to guide community decision-making affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investment, and much more. These functions depend on a fair and accurate census.

Unfortunately, certain population groups – referred to as “hard-to-count” – are at a higher risk of not being fully counted in the census. Some of these groups have been historically underrepresented in the census for decades; some may experience new or increased vulnerability due to major changes in methodology, such as relying on the internet as the primary way for households to respond to the 2020 Census; and some may be reluctant to respond due to concerns about data confidentiality.² Being hard-to-count can lead to unequal political representation and unequal access to vital public and private resources for these groups and their communities.

Asian American and NHPI households are at risk of being undercounted.

Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) have been undercounted for decades, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods.³ Today, roughly one in five Asian Americans live in hard-to-count census tracts, along with one third of NHPIs.⁴ Some Asian American and NHPI communities are especially at risk of being missed. They have greater challenges in finding stable and affordable housing, have higher incidences of poverty and unemployment and lower educational attainment, and encounter greater language barriers than other subgroups within this broad race category.⁵ Furthermore, the Asian American and NHPI communities are very diverse, and overall statistics can easily mask the characteristics and challenges facing subgroups.

What are the 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:⁶

- **Language Barriers:** Three-fourths (75 percent) of Asian Americans and 41 percent of NHPIs speak a language other than English, with 34 percent of Asian Americans⁷ and 13 percent of NHPIs⁸ speaking English less than “very well.” Limited English proficiency rates are almost 70 percent for some groups, such as Burmese Americans.⁹ Historically, areas with low rates of English proficiency have been undercounted.¹⁰
- **Poverty:** Overall, using the official poverty measure, about one in eight Asian Americans is in poverty (12 percent),¹¹ while the same is true for one in five NHPIs (18 percent).¹² However, when you look among different subgroups, the proportion of people in poverty can range from as high as 23 percent for Micronesians, to below 10 percent for Filipino Americans.¹³ It is widely believed that households in poverty are difficult to enumerate.¹⁴
- **Education:** More than four-fifths (87 percent) of Asian Americans¹⁵ and 86 percent of NHPIs have a high school degree or higher.¹⁶ On the surface, Asian Americans and NHPIs appear to

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have among the highest levels of educational attainment; however, there are great disparities within different subgroups. For example, while at least 95 percent of Japanese Americans have a high school degree or higher, only 53 percent of Burmese Americans do.¹⁷ Areas with lower educational attainment are also hard to enumerate.¹⁸

- **Housing Insecurity:** Irregular housing is considered a factor that can hinder enumeration.¹⁹ Almost half (47 percent) of Asian Americans who are low-income and 40 percent of NHPIs who are low-income live in locations with the highest housing costs in the country, often leading to greater challenges in finding stable and affordable housing.²⁰ In addition, the majority of NHPIs are renters (62 percent)²¹ compared to 42 percent of Asian Americans.²² The NHPI community is also affected by homelessness, as almost one third of the homeless population in Hawaii is made up of Native Hawaiians and another 27 percent is made up of other Pacific Islanders.²³

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

It is especially important to make sure the 2020 Census accurately and fairly captures the diverse Asian American and NHPI communities, because they are growing so rapidly. The Asian population²⁴ grew by 46 percent from 2000 to 2010, which was about four times faster than the growth of the total U.S. population and the fastest growth among any racial or ethnic group.²⁵ The NHPI population grew almost as quickly, increasing by 35 percent in that same time period.²⁶ In fiscal year 2015, there were 21.4 million Asian Americans and more than a million and a half NHPIs in the United States, making up 6 percent and 0.2 percent of the U.S. population, respectively.²⁷ This demographic shift is taking place across the entire country – in 2015, the Asian American population grew by at least 30 percent in every state, except Hawaii.²⁸ NHPIs experienced the most growth in the South.²⁹

What are the consequences of undercounting Asian American and NHPI communities?

When the Asian American and NHPI communities are undercounted, political boundaries may not accurately represent reality. Undercounting results in Asian Americans and NHPIs being denied a full voice in policy decision-making. As a result, their communities' different needs may not be represented or prioritized according to their real share of the population.

Furthermore, federal agencies rely on census data to monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more. In particular, under Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), Asian Americans are included as a "language minority group."³⁰ Section 203 of the VRA requires that language assistance be provided throughout the electoral process wherever there are "more than 10,000 or over 5 percent of the total voting age citizens in a single political subdivision" of the same language minority group whose Limited English Proficiency could hinder their full participation in the political process.³¹

Undercounting Asian Americans and NHPIs in the 2020 Census could also impact how federal funding is allocated to states and localities. Many programs that impact Asian American and NHPI communities are based in whole or in part on census-derived data, including:³²

- **Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies – \$13.9 billion.** Title I provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers of low-income children to help ensure that all children are meeting state academic standards. Thirty percent of Asian American

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and Pacific Islander students attend high-poverty schools that are targeted by Title I.³³ In the 2014-15 school year, Title I served almost a million Asian American and Pacific Islander children.³⁴

- **Head Start Program – \$8.3 billion.** This program provides grants to local public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies to provide child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.³⁵ Approximately one tenth of Asian American and one third of NHPI children and pregnant women³⁶ participated in Head Start and Early Head Start during the 2015-16 school year.³⁷
- **SNAP – \$69.5 billion.** SNAP is the most important tool to prevent hunger and malnutrition among families in the United States.³⁸ More than 40 million low-income people rely on federally funded SNAP subsidies that are administered to them through state governments. More than one-fifth (23 percent) of Pacific Islanders and 7 percent of Asian Americans receive SNAP benefits.³⁹
- **Medicaid – \$312 billion.** Medicaid is a federal-state insurance program that provides health coverage to low-income families and individuals, parents, seniors, and people with disabilities.⁴⁰ In 2016, 26 percent of Asian Americans and 37 percent of Pacific Islanders were enrolled in Medicaid or some other public insurance program.⁴¹

You can help – right now.

There are many ways in which stakeholders, including advocates, funders, and civic leaders, can improve the count of all Asian American and NHPI households in the 2020 Census. There are opportunities to join or support work on policy development, community organizing, and “Get Out the Count” campaigns for the 2020 Census. Here are some ideas:

- **Help your members of Congress understand why it’s important to support adequate resources for the Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census in a way that will count all in the Asian American and NHPI communities.** The Census Bureau needs a major funding ramp up several years before a decennial census to perform critical tests and build out a massive infrastructure. Already – due to funding constraints – important activities needed for a fair and accurate 2020 Census have been postponed or canceled, putting the Asian American and NHPI communities at risk of being severely undercounted. If Congress does not increase the Census Bureau’s budget, a complete count will be in jeopardy, and census costs could increase by billions of dollars.
- **Stay informed about key census policy and operational developments.** Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (<https://advancingjustice-aaajc.org/>) works to ensure that the census collects the fullest and most accurate data on Asian American and NHPI communities. The Census Project (<https://thecensusproject.org/>) provides regular updates of census-related activities in Congress and the administration. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights also publishes many helpful resources at <https://civilrights.org/census/>.
- **Educate state and local leaders about the issues the Asian American and NHPI communities face in the census.** As the 2020 Census approaches, advocates can join Complete Count Committees that will be established to help ensure a complete census.⁴² It is important that Complete Count Committees include voices for the Asian American and NHPI community to remind leaders and local census staff of this critical constituency.

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- **Become a Census Bureau partner and help ensure that the Census Bureau’s partnership program gets the resources it needs.** Budget shortfalls are also putting this important program at risk. Partners (organizations, associations, institutions, and the like) get timely updates from the Census Bureau as well as promotional material.⁴³

If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Terry Ao Minnis, director of the census and voting programs for Asian Americans Advancing Justice / AAJC, at tminnis@advancingjustice-aaic.org.

¹ Reamer, Andrew. “Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds.” GW Institute of Public Policy, 17 April 2018. Available at <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/census/CountingForDollars-Intro.pdf>.

² Goldvale, Casey and Indi Dutta-Gupta. “Counting Everyone in the Digital Age.” Leadership Conference Education Fund and Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2017. Available at http://www.georgetownpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/LCEF_2020_Census_Poll_Report-Final-002.pdf.

³ “DSSD Census Coverage Measurement Memorandum Series #2010-G-01: 2010 Census Coverage Measurement Estimation Report: Summary of Estimates of Coverage for Persons in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau, 22 May 2012. Available at https://www.census.gov/coverage_measurement/pdfs/g01.pdf.

⁴ Based on calculations from the 2010 Decennial Census mail return rates.

⁵ Lowenthal, Terri Ann et al. “Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Improving Data to Capture a Multiethnic America.” The Leadership Conference Education Fund, September 2014. Available at <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Census-Report-2014-WEB.pdf>.

⁶ Data within this section is based on 2016 American Community Survey estimates unless otherwise noted.

⁷ “Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S0201//popgroup~012.

⁸ “Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S0201//popgroup~050.

⁹ “Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S0201//popgroup~073.

¹⁰ “DSSD Census Coverage Measurement Memorandum Series #2010-G-01: 2010 Census Coverage Measurement Estimation Report: Summary of Estimates of Coverage for Persons in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.

¹¹ “Table S0201.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S0201//popgroup~015|019|020|024|055.

¹⁴ Fernandez, Shatuck and Noon. Presentation at the Southern Demographic Association Conference, October 2016.

¹⁵ Gao, George. “The Challenges of Polling Asian Americans.” Pew Research Center, 11 May 2016. Available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/11/the-challenges-of-polling-asian-americans/>.

¹⁶ “Table S0201.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

¹⁷ “Table S0201: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S0201//popgroup~022|073.

¹⁸ “HTC 2020.” CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center, 2017. Available at <http://www.censusshardtcountmaps2020.us/>.

¹⁹ “DSSD Census Coverage Measurement Memorandum Series #2010-G-01: 2010 Census Coverage Measurement Estimation Report: Summary of Estimates of Coverage for Persons in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.

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²⁰ Ishimatsu, John. "Spotlight on Asian American and Pacific Islander Poverty: A Demographic Profile." National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, June 2013. Available at <http://assetbuildingpolicynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/National-CAPACD-Asian-American-and-Pacific-Islander-Poverty.pdf>.

²¹ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

²² "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

²³ Bussewitz, Cathy. "Hawaii Struggles to Deal with Rising Rate of Homelessness." *Los Angeles Times*, 15 November 2015. Available at <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-adna-hawaii-homeless-20151115-story.html>.

²⁴ Includes any household identifying as Asian, either alone or in combination with another race or Hispanic ethnicity.

²⁵ Hoeffel, Elizabeth et al. "The Asian Population: 2010." U.S. Census Bureau, March 2012. Available at www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf.

²⁶ "2010 Census Shows More than Half of Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders Report Multiple Races." U.S. Census Bureau, 8 May 2012. Available at <https://www.census.gov/2010census/news/releases/operations/cb12-83.html>.

²⁷ "Table: PEPSR5H Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2 January 2018.

Available at <https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/PEP/2016/PEPSR5H?slice=Year~est72016>; "Table: QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>.

²⁸ Hoeffel, Elizabeth et al. "The Asian Population: 2010." 2012.

²⁹ "2010 Census Shows More than Half of Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders Report Multiple Races." U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.

³⁰ "Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act." U.S. Department of Justice, 4 December 2017. Available at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/section-4-voting-rights-act>.

³¹ Lowenthal et al. "Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Improving Data to Capture a Multiethnic America." 2014.

³² Funding figures within this section are for FY 2015 unless otherwise noted. Reamer. "Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds." 2017.

³³ "Factsheet: Asian-American and Pacific Islander Families and the 2010 Census." The Leadership Conference Education Fund, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at <http://www.protectcivilrights.org/pdf/census/asian-american-and-api-families-and-the-2010-census.pdf>.

³⁴ "Table: Children in Title I Schools by Race and Ethnicity." Kids Count Data Center, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8418-children-in-title-i-schools-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/1381,1246,1124,1021,909/167,168,133,3,185,107/17042>.

³⁵ "Factsheet: The 2010 Census and Latino Families." The Leadership Conference Education Fund, Retrieved 13 December 2017. Available at <http://www.protectcivilrights.org/pdf/census/latino-families-and-the-2010-census.pdf>.

³⁶ Early Head Start (EHS) programs serve infants and toddlers under the age of 3, and pregnant women. EHS programs provide intensive comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families, and to pregnant women and their families. For more information see: "Early Head Start Programs." Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, Administration for Children and Families., Retrieved 13 December 2017 Available at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/early-head-start-programs>.

³⁷ Authors' estimation, based on "Head Start Program Facts Fiscal Year 2016." Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, June 2017. Available at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/docs/hs-program-fact-sheet-2016.pdf>; "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Single Year of Age, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April, 2010 to July 1, 2016." U.S. Census Bureau, 2016. Available

at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>; Monte, Lindsay and Renee Ellis. "Fertility of Women in the United States: 2012." U.S. Census Bureau, July 2014. Available at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p20-575.pdf>.

³⁸ "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 3 October 2017. Available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

³⁹ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

⁴⁰ "Policy Basics: Introduction to Medicaid." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 16 August, 2016. Available at <http://www.cbpp.org/research/health/policy-basics-introduction-to-medicaid>.

⁴¹ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

⁴² As a reference, the 2010 Complete Count Committee guide can be found at "Complete Count Committee Guide." U.S. Census Bureau, 2008. Available at <http://www.census.gov/c2010/completecountcommittee/guide.pdf>. The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States.

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⁴³ For more information, see “Partnerships.” U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 11 December 2017. Available at <https://www.census.gov/geo/partnerships/>.

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