
Will You Count? Latinos 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.

Latino households are at risk of being undercounted.

Latinos have been undercounted for decades, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods.³ Latino children in particular are among the most undercounted populations in the United States.⁴ Today, there are 56.5 million Hispanics⁵ living in the United States,⁶ and roughly one in three live in hard-to-count census tracts.⁷

What are the hard-to-count characteristics of the Latino community?

There are many characteristics that make the Latino community hard to count, requiring special attention to reach these households and make sure they complete a 2020 Census questionnaire:

- **Language Barriers:** Almost a third of Hispanics (31 percent) speak English less than “very well.”⁸ Historically, areas with low rates of English proficiency have been undercounted.⁹
- **Poverty:** Hispanics have an official poverty rate of 21 percent,¹⁰ significantly higher than the official U.S. poverty rate of 13 percent.¹¹ It is widely believed that households in poverty are difficult to enumerate.¹²
- **Education:** More than 60 percent of Hispanic adults have only a high school degree or didn't complete high school,¹³ compared to 40 percent of the total population.¹⁴ Areas with lower educational attainment are also hard to enumerate.¹⁵
- **Immigrant Status:** More than a third of Latinos (34 percent) are foreign-born.¹⁶ People immigrating to the United States from Latin America made up more than half of the undocumented population in 2016.¹⁷ A range of stakeholders, from state officials to immigrant advocates, fear the recent increase in negative political rhetoric and federal detention and deportation operations targeting the undocumented community could reduce participation among immigrant communities – placing immigrant households at greater risk of being undercounted.¹⁸ Because of these tensions,¹⁹ a growing segment of immigrant households may be reluctant to respond to the census questionnaire due to concerns about data confidentiality.²⁰

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- **Latino Children:** Latino children make up more than 24 percent of U.S. children under five.²¹ Fifty-five percent live in a household with complex living arrangements, sometimes moving between various relatives' or caregivers' residences.²² One-quarter of young Latino children also live in a linguistically isolated household where adults have difficulty speaking English.²³ Each of these characteristics is correlated with heightened risk of being hard-to-count. In 2010, Latino children made up more than 36 percent of the total net undercount for all children under five, more than double the undercount of non-Hispanic White children.²⁴

Latinos are one of the fastest growing groups in the United States.

It is especially important to make sure that the 2020 Census fairly and accurately captures the growing Latino community,²⁵ as Latinos are already the nation's largest racial or ethnic minority group, accounting for 18 percent of the U.S. population.²⁶ From 2014 to 2015, the Hispanic population increased by 2 percent and represented almost half of the nation's total population growth.²⁷

Official race and ethnicity questions need to accurately reflect the Latino community.

Since 1980, the census has asked about Hispanic identity separately from racial identity. Recent Census Bureau testing indicates that combining the Hispanic ethnicity with the general race question would more accurately reflect the Latino population.²⁸ The bureau proposed changing questions about Hispanic origin and race into one combined question in 2017.²⁹ However, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) did not accept the bureau's recommendations.³⁰ Though the bureau plans to improve the question by allowing Hispanic respondents to identify with multiple subgroups, it announced in January 2018 that it will yet again ask about race and ethnicity separately.³¹ Unless Congress adopts new standards via legislative action, the 2020 Census will not meet the need for a combined race and ethnicity question.³²

What are the consequences of undercounting the Latino community?

When the Latino community is undercounted, political boundaries may not accurately reflect reality. Undercounting results in Latinos being denied a full voice in policy decision-making. As a result, the community's 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), Latinos are included as a "language minority group."³³ Section 203 of the VRA requires that language assistance in a designated group's first language be provided through the electoral process if they make up "more than 10,000 or over 5 percent of total voting-age citizens in a single political subdivision" to help ensure their full political participation.³⁴ Without an accurate count of the Latino population, some political subdivisions may not receive the necessary language assistance.³⁵

Undercounting Latinos in the 2020 Census could also impact how federal funding is allocated to states and localities. Many programs that impact the Latino community are based in whole or in part on census-derived data, including:³⁶

Children and Education

- **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

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ensure that all children are meeting state academic standards.³⁷ In the 2014-15 school year, Title I served more than 24 million children, about 34 percent of which (over 8 million) were Latino.³⁸

- **Special Education Grants – \$11.2 billion.** To help schools comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Special Education Grants are used to provide resources to students with a disability.³⁹ These grants help states provide early intervention services for 1.3 million Latino infants and toddlers (0-2) and their families, according to the latest estimates.⁴⁰
- **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 low-income children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.⁴¹ In the 2015-16 school year, Hispanic children comprised 37 percent (about 340,000) of participants in the Head Start Program.⁴²
- **Child Care and Development Fund – \$2.9 billion.** This fund assists low-income families, families receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in obtaining child care so they can work or attend training and education.⁴³ Latino children made up about 21 percent (294,000) of the children who received care through the program in 2014.⁴⁴
- **Federal Foster Care Program – \$4.6 billion.** This program helps to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until they are safely returned home, permanently placed with adoptive families, or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency.⁴⁵ Hispanics made up 21 percent of all foster youth in 2015.⁴⁶

Food and Nutrition

- **SNAP – \$69.5 billion.** SNAP is essential in preventing hunger and malnutrition among families in the United States.⁴⁷ Nearly a quarter (21 percent) of Hispanics receive SNAP benefits.⁴⁸
- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – \$11.6 billion.** NSLP provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to low-income children in public and nonprofit schools.⁴⁹ In FY 2012, more than 31 million children used NSLP.⁵⁰ Hispanics were 24 percent of participants in 2004-2005.
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – \$6.3 billion.** WIC gives nutrition assistance through vouchers used to buy nutrient-rich food for pregnant women and children under five.⁵¹ Latino women and children made up 42 percent (more than 4 million) of the participants in 2012.⁵²

Healthcare and Housing

- **Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers Program – \$19.1 billion.** Section 8 vouchers are the nation's leading source of housing assistance for low-income seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children, helping them secure affordable rental housing in the private market.⁵³ About 16 percent of Section 8 voucher recipients, or more than 300,000 households, are Latino.⁵⁴
- **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.⁵⁵ About one fifth (20 percent) of those enrolled in Medicaid in 2012 were Hispanics.⁵⁶ About 18.0 percent of Hispanics are uninsured.⁵⁷
- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) – \$11.1 billion.** CHIP provides funds to enable states to maintain and expand child health assistance to uninsured, low-income children.⁵⁸ About 60 percent of all Latinos eligible for CHIP participate in the program.⁵⁹ About 10 percent of

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Latino children remain uninsured, making Latinos the most uninsured population group among U.S. children.⁶⁰

You can help – right now.

There are many ways in which stakeholders, including advocates, funders, and civic leaders, can improve the count of all Latino 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 Latino community.** 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 Latino community at risk of being severely undercounted. Without a sufficient increase in 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.** The NALEO Educational Fund (www.naleo.org) works to ensure that the census collects the fullest and most accurate data on Latinos, including on their ethnic, racial, and national origin identification. The Census Project (<https://thecensusproject.org/>) 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 at <https://civilrights.org/census/>.
- **Educate state and local leaders about the issues the Latino community faces in the census.** As the 2020 Census approaches, advocates can join Complete Count Committees that will be established to help ensure a complete census.⁶¹ It is important that Complete Count Committees include voices for the Latino community to remind leaders and local census staff of this critical constituency.
- **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.⁶²

If you would like to learn more about these or other ways you and your organization can be involved, contact Erin Hustings, Legislative Counsel of the NALEO Educational Fund, at ehustings@naleo.org, or Chris Harley, Census Counts Campaign Director, at harley@censuscounts.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 “Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount and Overcount in the 2010 Census.” United States Census Bureau, 22 May 2012. Available at https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-95.html.

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⁴ O'Hare, William P. *The Undercount of Young Children in the U.S. Census*. New York City: Springer Publishers, 2015. Table 3.2, Page 34.

⁵ In this factsheet, the terms "Latinos" and "Hispanics" are used interchangeably.

⁶ "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~400.

⁷ Based on calculations from the 2010 Decennial Census mail return rates.

⁸ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

⁹ "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.

¹⁰ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

¹¹ "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2016." U.S. Census Bureau, 12 September 2017. Available at: <https://census.gov/library/publications/2017/demo/p60-259.html>.

¹² Fernandez, Shatuck and Noon. Presentation at the Southern Demographic Association Conference, October 2016.

¹³ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

¹⁴ "Table S1501: Educational Attainment: 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 20 December 2017. Available at https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/16_1YR/S1501.

¹⁵ "HTC 2020." CUNY Mapping Service at the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center, 2017. Available at <http://www.censushardtcountmaps2020.us/>.

¹⁶ "Table S0201." U.S. Census Bureau, Retrieved 2017.

¹⁷ Krogstad, Jean Manuel. "5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the US." Pew Research Center, 27 April 2017. Available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>.

¹⁸ Kulish et al. "Reports of Raids Have Immigrants Bracing for Enforcement Surge." 2017; Phillips. "Could Trump's Anti-Immigration Rhetoric Hurt the Census?" 2017.

¹⁹ "2020 Census Operational Plan: A New Design for the 21st Century." U.S. Census Bureau, September 2016. Available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/planning-docs/2020-oper-plan2.pdf>.

²⁰ Goldvale, Casey et al. "Counting Everyone in the Digital Age." 2017.

²¹ O'Hare. *The Undercount of Young Children in the U.S. Census*. 2015.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Investigating the 2010 Undercount of Young Children – A Comparison of Demographic, Housing, and Household Characteristics of Children by Age." U.S. Census Bureau, 18 January 2017. Available at https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/planning-management/final-analysis/2010_Investigation_Undercount_Children.html.

²⁴ Jensen, E. B. et al. "Updating the 2010 Demographic Analysis Estimates of the Hispanic Population." Presentation at the 2016 Southern Demographic Association Conference, Athens, GA, 2016.; O'Hare, *The Undercount of Young Children in the U.S. Census*. 2015. Table 3.2, Page 34.

²⁵ "Latinos Are Shaping the Future of the United States: How the United States and Mexico Are Growing Together." Center for American Progress and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, November 2015. Available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2015/11/30/126178/latinos-are-shaping-the-future-of-the-united-states/>.

²⁶ "FFF: Hispanic Heritage Month 2016." U.S. Census Bureau, 12 October, 2016. Available at: <https://census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/cb16-ff16.html>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lowenthal, Terri Ann et al. "Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Improving Data to Capture a Multiethnic America." The Leadership Conference Education Fund, November 2014. Available at www.civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Census-Report-2014-WEB.pdf.

³⁰ "Census Policy Challenges: What's in Store for 2018?" Funders' Committee for Civic Participation, 13 February 2018. Available at <https://funderscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FCCP-policy-update-Feb2018.pdf>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Lowenthal et al. "Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Improving Data to Capture a Multiethnic America." 2014.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

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- ³⁶ 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.
- ³⁷ “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>.
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