



The 2020 Census and the Consequences of Miscounts for Fair Outcomes: New York

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November 2021

Key Takeaways

We estimate in New York:

- The official 2020 Census resident population was 20,201,249 on April 1, 2020.
- Urban projects a 2020 Census undercount of 224,638 people in New York, meaning 1.1 percent of the state's population was not officially counted.
- We project a net undercount of 5.48 percent fewer children under age 5 in the state than were officially counted.
- For Black residents, we project a net undercount in the 2020 Census by 3.14 percent. We project a net undercount in the 2020 Census of 2.48 percent for Hispanic residents and a net undercount of 0.04 percent for White, non-Hispanic/Latinx residents.
- We project a net undercount of 3.88 percent for people living in households that had at least one noncitizen.
- We project a net undercount of New York-Newark-Jersey City's total population by 240,989.
- New York would gain a seat in the US House of Representatives in a "hypothetical full count" of the 2020 Census.

Every ten years, the decennial census counts the residential American population. Factors throughout the decade—whether related to operations, politics, social dynamics, or natural disasters—can impact the accuracy of the final counts. No census is ever perfect, and those who are hardest to count—including Black and Hispanic/Latinx people, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, foreign-born people, and young children—historically are more likely to be missed. Census accuracy can mask fairness when not all people and places are counted. This may shortchange some communities of funding and political representation because of miscounts.

The Urban Institute has produced a new method to explore the 2020 Census, plausible miscounts, and consequences for fairness in apportionment and funding. We use the best available data from the US Census Bureau as the foundation for a microsimulation model exploring different scenarios for the 2020 Census. The findings show how various populations could be miscounted overall in the 2020 Census—the result of some people being erroneously included (overcounts) or omitted (not counted, resulting in undercounts)—and implications for each state, including political representation and funding for programs like Medicaid.

Learn more about New York's projected population, census count, and miscounts, and how a fair count would have yielded different results.

New York's Estimated Miscounts in the 2020 Census

According to the official 2020 Census resident population counts released on April 26, 2021, New York had an official population count of 20,201,249. The Urban Institute projects that New York's population was undercounted by about 224,638 people, or 1.1 percent.

The Urban Institute's best-guess assessment of the national performance of the 2020 Census total population—based on shifting demographics since 2010 and changes in self-response to the census—suggests that it could have about 4.1 percent omissions and 3.6 percent erroneous inclusions, for a net undercount nationwide of about 0.5 percent.

Until the US Census Bureau releases the PES results at the end of December 2021 and beyond, we will not know the official accuracy assessment of the 2020 Census.

If the count were truly fair—if all groups were accurately counted—we would have different outcomes. We explored what a census might look like if New York had a fair and accurate count in 2020. In a “hypothetical full-count” census, New York would have a population of 20,425,887.

New York Demographics: A Plausible Preview of the 2020 Data

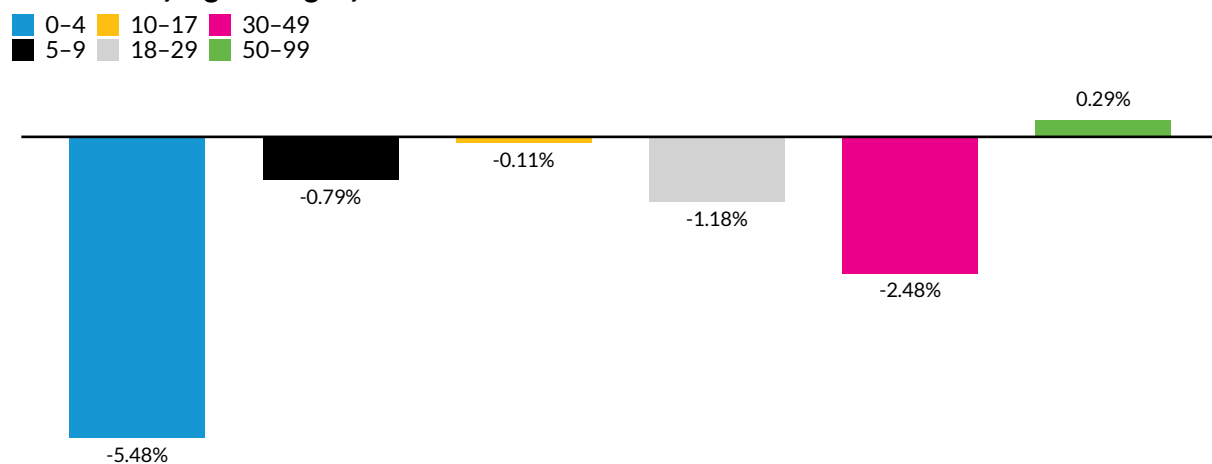
The Census Bureau released population characteristics from the 2020 Census in mid-August 2021. Here we present Urban's projections for New York by various demographic characteristics, as well as their likely miscounts.

Age

Previous censuses have had difficulty counting children from birth through age 4. If we project the same pattern to continue in 2020, then New York's population age 4 and younger counted at 1,094,825 was 5.48 percent below its projected true population in that age group.

FIGURE 1

Miscounts by Age Category in Urban's Simulated 2020 Census: New York



Source: Urban's Simulated 2020 Census data.

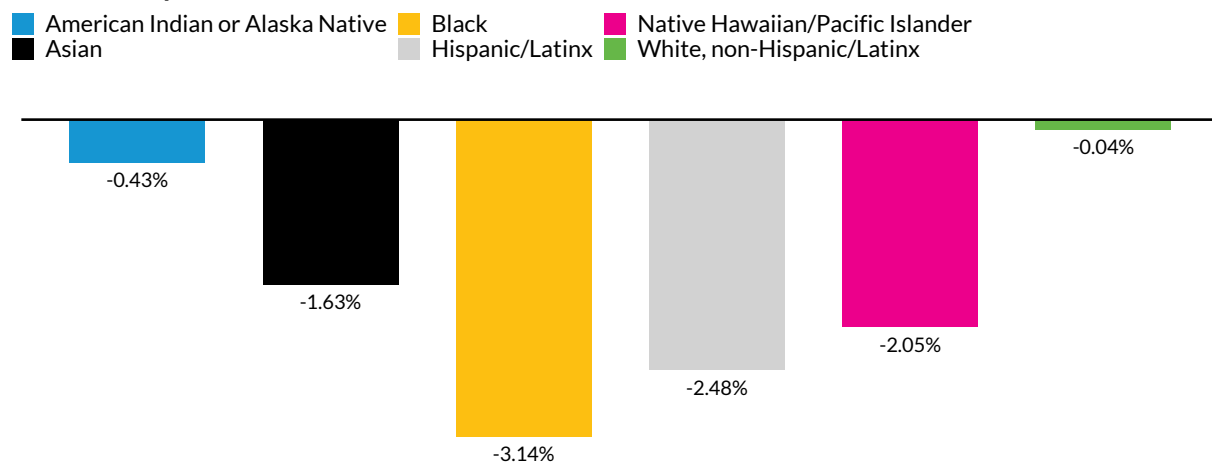
Race and Hispanic/Latinx Identification

Historically, the census has had net overcounts for White, non-Hispanic/Latinx people and net undercounts for people of color. In our data,

- American Indian or Alaska Native residents had a net undercount of 0.43 percent;
- Asian residents had a net undercount of 1.63 percent;
- Black residents had a net undercount of 3.14 percent;
- Hispanic/Latinx residents had a net undercount of 2.48 percent;
- Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents had a net undercount of 2.05 percent; and
- White, non-Hispanic/Latinx residents of New York had a net undercount of 0.04 percent.

FIGURE 2

Miscounts by Race and Ethnic Identification in Urban's Simulated 2020 Census: New York



Source: Urban's Simulated 2020 Census data.

People in Households with a Noncitizen

The political climate preceding the 2020 Census was not welcoming to immigrants and foreign-born people, including attempts by the US government to add a citizenship question to the census. Reports documented distrust of the government among noncitizen households and reluctance to participate.

In Urban's 2020 Census projections, New York's census count of people living in households with at least one noncitizen was an undercount of 3.88 percent.

New York-Newark-Jersey City Metro Area's 2020 Population and Likely Miscounts

Using information about self-response rates at the county level and local demographics, Urban produced projections of census miscounts by metro area. Our best estimate is that New York-Newark-Jersey City had a 2020 Census count 240,989 below the projected true population, for a net undercount of 1.16 percent.

Undercounts have consequences such as diminished funding for residents, including infrastructure, school, and health care funding, while overcounts mean some areas receive more than their fair share. Within metro areas nationwide, affluent homeowners have higher self-response rates, which further perpetuates inequities in funding and representation at the local level.

Miscounts Could Affect New York's Representation in Congress

The first release of data from the 2020 Census is the apportionment counts, used to determine the number of representatives each state has for the next ten years in the US House of Representatives. The 2020 Census officially allocated 26 seats to New York.

We replicated the census apportionment formula for our hypothetical full-count 2020 Census scenario to understand which states would be most variable. In a hypothetical full-count scenario, New York would have gained one representative.

Miscounts Could Affect New York's Federal Funding

One of the most direct consequences of an undercount for New York is budgetary. Hundreds of federal programs use decennial census data in their funding formulas, so if New York had an undercount, it would miss out on its rightful share of funding over the coming decade.

Medicaid is one of the largest federally funded programs that uses census data to determine the reimbursements states can receive. The FMAP formula—or the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage—is based partly on states' populations and calculates the reimbursement rate states can receive.

Using Urban's hypothetical full count of the 2020 Census, New York would not have a change in its FMAP because of population changes and would not have a loss in Medicaid reimbursement funds.

Additional Resources

For additional information about the data and methodology, please see Diana Elliott, Steven Martin, Jessica Shakesprere, and Jessica Kelly, *Simulating the 2020 Census: Miscounts and the Fairness of Outcomes* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2021).

Acknowledgements

This fact sheet was funded by the New Venture Fund 2020 Census Project. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at www.urban.org/fundingprinciples.

We are grateful to the many people who contributed to the creation of the fact sheet, including Rob Santos for generously sharing his expertise; Jessica Kelly, Michelle Menezes, Jessica Shakesprere, and Silke Taylor for their data and programming work; and Liza Hagerman and Laura Swanson for their editorial and writing contributions.