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

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November 2021

Key Takeaways

We estimate in Texas:

- The official 2020 Census resident population was 29,145,505 on April 1, 2020.
- Urban projects a 2020 Census undercount of 377,187 people in Texas, meaning 1.28 percent of the state's population was not officially counted.
- We project a net undercount of 5.31 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 2.57 percent. We project a net undercount in the 2020 Census of 2.32 percent for Hispanic residents and a net undercount of 0.03 percent for White, non-Hispanic/Latinx residents.
- We project a net undercount of 3.66 percent for people living in households that had at least one noncitizen.
- We project a net undercount of Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington's total population by 72,516 and a net undercount of Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land's total population by 98,290.
- Texas would not lose or gain a seat in the US House of Representatives in a "hypothetical full count" of the 2020 Census.
- Texas would hypothetically gain $247,362,988 in Medicaid reimbursement funds in 2021 because an accurate full count of the state's population would change its per capita income and Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage.

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 Texas's projected population, census count, and miscounts, and how a fair count would have yielded different results.

Texas's Estimated Miscounts in the 2020 Census

According to the official 2020 Census resident population counts released on April 26, 2021, Texas had an official population count of 29,145,505. The Urban Institute projects that Texas's population was undercounted by about 377,187 people, or 1.28 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 Texas had a fair and accurate count in 2020. In a "hypothetical full-count" census, Texas would have a population of 29,522,692.

## Texas 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 Texas 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 Texas's population age 4 and younger counted at 1,905,953 was 5.31 percent below its projected true population in that age group.

FIGURE 1

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

■ 0–4 ■ 10–17 ■ 30–49
■ 5–9 ■ 18–29 ■ 50–99
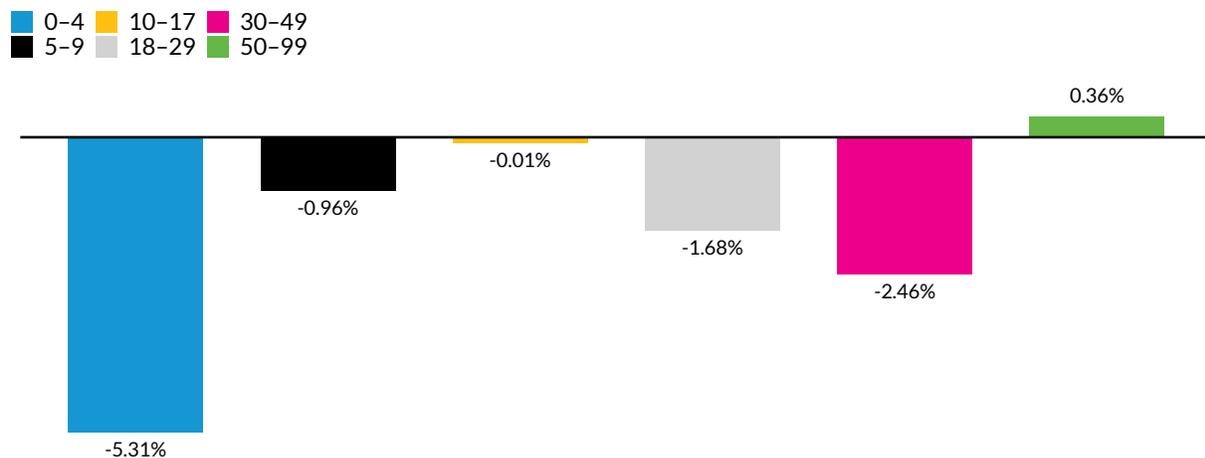
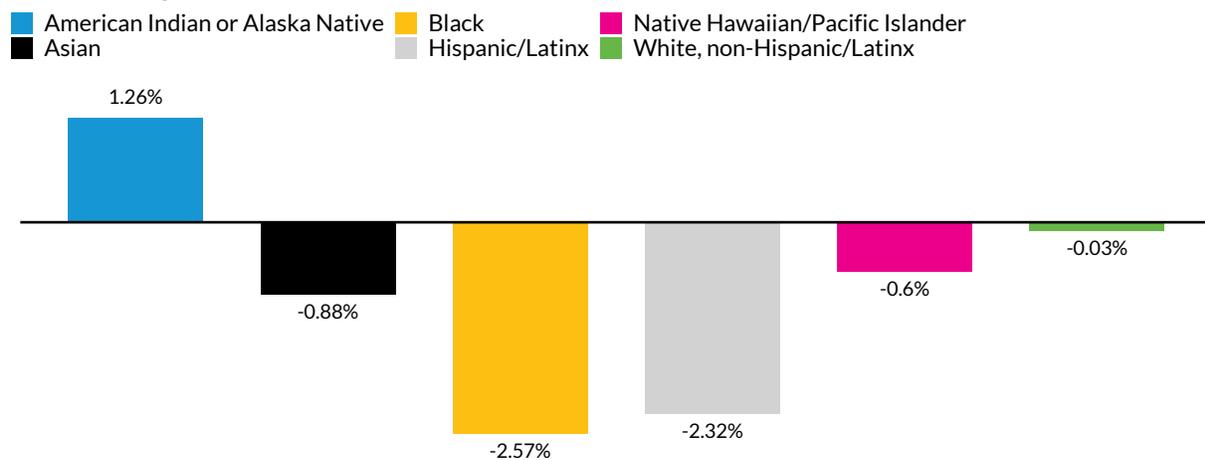**Source:** Urban's Simulated 2020 Census data.

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 overcount of 1.26 percent;
- Asian residents had a net undercount of 0.88 percent;
- Black residents had a net undercount of 2.57 percent;
- Hispanic/Latinx residents had a net undercount of 2.32 percent;
- Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents had a net undercount of 0.6 percent; and
- White, non-Hispanic/Latinx residents of Texas had a net undercount of 0.03 percent.

FIGURE 2

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

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, Texas's census count of people living in households with at least one noncitizen was an undercount of 3.66 percent.

Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington and Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land Metro Areas' 2020 Populations 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 estimates are the following: Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington had a 2020 Census count 72,516 below the projected true population, for a net undercount of 0.96 percent. Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land had a 2020 Census count 98,290 below the projected true population, for a net undercount of 1.38 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 Texas'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 38 seats to Texas.

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, Texas would not have changed their number of representatives.

Miscounts Could Affect Texas's Federal Funding

One of the most direct consequences of an undercount for Texas is budgetary. Hundreds of federal programs use decennial census data in their funding formulas, so if Texas 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, Texas would hypothetically gain $247,362,988 in Medicaid reimbursement funds in 2021 because an accurate full count of the state's population would change its per capita income and FMAP.

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