2020 Census Response Rates Show Young Children Are Likely to Have a High Net Undercount Rate Again

By

Dr. William P. O'Hare

President, O'Hare Data and Demographic Services LLC

Consultant to Count All Kids Committee

In the 2010 Census, young children (ages 0 to 4) had a net undercount of 4.6 percent while adults (age 18+) had a net overcount of 0.7 percent. The net undercount of young children was much higher than any other age group. Consequently, it is important to monitor the likely undercount in the 2020 Census by tracking self-response rates.

The Population Reference Bureau (2020) produced a database which identifies every census tract in 689 large counties (those with at least 5,000 children under age 5 in 2010) where young children have a very high risk of being missed in the 2020 Census. Tracking the 2020 Census response rates in those tracts will help us gauge what the final 2020 Census results will look like for young children.

We have now had two months when households could self-respond to the 2020 Census and it is worth noting that the self-response rates in census tracts where very high risks of young child undercounts are predicted trail overall response rates by a substantial margin.

Table 1 shows the average response rates in very-high-risk of young child undercount census tracts in the 34 counties with the largest number of young children living in such census tracts. These 34 counties account for slightly more than half of all

young children living in such tracts based on the Population Reference Bureau database described above.

Based on self-response rates through May 7 2020,, the average response rate across all 34 counties in these very-high-risk of young child undercount tracts is 51.1 percent compared to a national response rate on May 7th of 57.7 percent; a difference of 6.6 percentage points.

Of course, these are tract-level response rates rather than response rates for specific households, but I feel confident about inferring low response rates for households with young children based on this data in combination with a lot of other data related to the undercount of young children. For example, young children typically have young parents and young adults have low self-response rates in the Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

Of the 34 counties shown in Table 1, seven counties had self-response rates for very-high-risk of young child undercount census tracts above the national self-response rates on May 7th. Six of these counties are in California and one in Maryland. It is worth noting in this context that the state of California allocated more money than any other state for 2020 Census promotion and outreach. Perhaps the investment is paying off.

On the other hand, there were 10 of the 34 counties where the average self-response rates in these targeted tracts are 10 percentage points or more below the national rate. The 10 are concentrated in the Northeast region of the county. The very low response rate for Hidalgo County, Texas, is probably due in part to the fact that

many households in that county are supposed to be counted in the update leave operation which has been postponed or delayed.

Why are self-response rates important? The empirical evidence from the 1990, 200 and 2010 Censuses indicates that groups and states that have low self-response rates tend to have higher net undercount and omissions rates (O'Hare 2018 and 2019).

The empirical relationship between self-response rates and census accuracy has been recognized by the Courts. After listening to several days of expert testimony and reading many expert witness reports, in the Maryland citizenship question case *(Kravitz v. United States Department of Commerce*: 2019, page 50) Judge Hazel concluded, "The court next finds that demographic groups with lower self-response rates are more likely to be undercounted. This straight line between lower participation ultimate undercount is supported by common sense and the preponderance of the evidence." Judge Hazel goes on to conclude, "Thus, the Court is comfortable finding that Plaintiffs have demonstrated a causal relationship between decreased Census participation and an increased likelihood of net undercounting by a preponderance of the evidence.

In the New York citizenship question case (*State of New York v United States Department of Commerce*, page 133) Judge Furman concluded, "The Court concludes just that: Dr. O'Hare's testimony provides affirmative evidence that self-response declines among specific subpopulations directly cause net undercounts of those subpopulations. For the purposes of this litigation, a preponderance of the evidence supports that conclusion."

The low self-response rates in census tracts with large numbers of young children at a very high risk of being missed in the Census combined with the link

between self-response rates and Census accuracy mean the 2020 Census is at risk of continuing the very high net undercount of young children.

The data provided in Table 1 indicate the net undercount of young children is likely to be high in 2020 without focused and robust intervention in the next few months. The data provided here indicate exactly where the Census Bureau and census advocates should focus their outreach efforts over the next few months to get a better count of young children in the 2020 Census.

Table 1. 2020 Census Self-Response Rates for Census Tracts With a Very High Risk of Young Child Undercounts for 34 Counties with Most Young Children in Very-High-Risk Tracts (May 7, 2020)

Rank*	State	County	Major City	Average Response Rate for Very High Risk of Young Child Undercount Census Tracts May 7, 2020**	Difference Between County Rates in Very High Risk Tracts and National Response Rate (county rate-national rate)
1	California	Los Angeles County	Los Angeles	53.0	-4.7
2	Texas	Harris County	Houston	46.7	-11.0
3	Florida	Miami-Dade County	Miami	55.0	-2.7
4	Illinois	Cook County	Chicago	49.1	-8.6
5	New York	Kings County	New York City	41.8	-15.9
6	New York	Queens County	New York City	42.7	-15.0
7	New York	Bronx County	New York City	45.1	-12.6
8	Texas	Dallas County	Dallas	52.8	-4.9
9	Florida	Broward County	Ft Lauderdale	54.9	-2.8
10	Pennsylvania	Philadelphia County	Philadelphia	42.3	-15.4
11	Arizona	Maricopa County	Phoenix	51.0	-6.7
12	Texas	Hidalgo County	McAllen	39.6	-18.1
13	California	Orange County	Anaheim	66.9	9.2
14	Michigan	Wayne County	Detroit	48.9	-8.8
15	California	San Diego County	San Diego	61.5	3.8
16	California	San Bernardino County	Fontana	57.8	0.1
17	Texas	El Paso County	El Paso	54.7	-3.0
18	California	Santa Clara County	San Jose	66.8	9.1
19	Texas	Bexar County	San Antonio	51.7	-6.0
20	California	Riverside County	Riverside	53.7	-4.0
21	Texas	Tarrant County	Ft worth	51.4	-6.3
22	New York	New York County	New York City	49.7	-8.0
23	Florida	Orange County	Orlando	51.5	-6.2
24	Florida	Palm Beach County	Palm Beach	53.4	-4.3
25	New Jersey	Essex County	Newark	40.0	-17.7
26	Maryland	Prince George's County	Washington DC	57.0	-0.7
27	California	Alameda County	Oakland	62.6	4.9
28	Massachusetts	Suffolk County	Boston	45.8	-11.9
29	Nevada	Clark County	Las Vegas	55.3	-2.4
30	Tennessee	Shelby County	Memphis	45.9	-11.8
31	New Jersey	Hudson County	Jersey City	46.8	-10.9
32	Florida	Hillsborough County	Tampa	52.4	-5.3
33	Maryland	Montgomery County	Washington DC	64.4	6.7
34	California	Sacramento County	Sacramento	62.1	4.4

National Response Rate on May 7, 2020 = 57.7%

*based on number of young children living in very-high-risk of young child undercount census tracts

**Source: Special analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center

Note: Analysis omits tracts with 10% or more units covered by Update/Leave, tracts with fewer than 100 people in households, and tracts covered by Update/Enumeration or Remote Alaska

References

Kravitz et al. v. United States Department of Commerce (2019), IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND, Southern Division, Case No.: GJH -18-1041,Case 8:18-cv-01570-JGH Document 125, filed 4/5/2019

O'Hare, W. P. (2018). Expert Witness report, in STATE OF NEW YORK et al. v. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, et al. Case 1:18-cv-02921-JMF

O'Hare, W. P. (2019). Expert Witness report, *LA UNION DEL PUEBLO, ET.AL. v. ROSS, ET AL.* Case no. 18-cv-011570.

O'Hare, W. P. (2020)."Counties With Most Young Children At Risk of Being Missed in the 2020 Census", Count All Kids website https://countallkids.org/resources/targeting-young-children-in-2020-census-outreach-part-i/

Population Reference Bureau (2020). "Predicting Tract-Level Undercount Risk for Young Children" O'Hare W.P., Jacobsen, L. A., Mather, M. and VanOrman, The Population Reference Bureau, Washington, DC., https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/us-Census-undercount-of-children.pdf

STATE OF NEW YORK, et al. v. United States Department of Commerce, et al. Case 1:18-cv-02921-JMF Document 574 Filed 01/15/19 (2019).

U.S. Census Burau (2012). *Mail Response/Return rates Assessment,* 2010 Census Planning Memorandum Series, No. 198, Letourneau, E. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington DC.