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

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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 ten years. Moreover, the census is integral to our democracy. The data collected every 10 years affects 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 \$600 billion<sup>i</sup> 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 decennial census. Some of these groups have been historically underrepresented in the decennial 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. 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.<sup>ii</sup> Roughly one in five Asian Americans live in hard-to-count census tracts, along with one third of NHPI.<sup>iii</sup> 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.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Why are Asian Americans and NHPIs missed so often in the census?**

Combining Asian American and NHPI communities into overly broad groups obscures characteristics that can make many of these households hard-to-count (data is based on 2015 American Community Survey estimates):

- **Language barriers:** More than three-fourths (76 percent) of Asian Americans and 40 percent of NHPI speak a language other than English, with 34.3 percent of Asian Americans<sup>v</sup> and 12.3 percent of NHPI<sup>vi</sup> speaking English less than “very well.” Limited English proficiency rates can even surpass 70 percent for some groups, such as Burmese Americans.<sup>vii</sup> Historically, areas with low rates of English proficiency have been undercounted.<sup>viii</sup>
- **Poverty:** Overall, using the official poverty measure, one in eight Asian Americans is in poverty (12 percent),<sup>ix</sup> while the same is true for one in five NHPIs (18.9 percent).<sup>x</sup> However, when you look among different subgroups, the proportion of people in poverty

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- can range from as high as one-third (34.9 percent), such as for the Nepalese American community and 25.4 percent for Micronesians, to below 10 percent for Filipino Americans.<sup>xi</sup> It is widely believed that households in poverty are difficult to enumerate.<sup>xii</sup>
- **Education:** More than four-fifths (87 percent) of Asian Americans have a high school degree or higher and about half (52 percent) have a BA or higher.<sup>xiii</sup> For NHPIs, 88 percent also have a high school degree or higher while 16 percent have a BA or higher.<sup>xiv</sup> Comparatively, 66.6 percent of Hispanics, 87 percent of African Americans, and 88.8 percent of White Americans have a high school degree or higher.<sup>xv</sup> On the surface, Asian Americans and NHPIs appear to have among the highest levels of educational attainment; however, there are great disparities within different subgroups. For example, at least 96 percent of Japanese Americans have a high school degree or higher, which is almost double the relatively low completion rate among Burmese Americans (50.1 percent).<sup>xvi</sup> The rates of attaining a B.A. also range widely, from 13.5 percent for Samoan and less than 19 percent for all NHPI groups,<sup>xvii</sup> to almost three-quarters (77.4 percent) for Taiwanese.<sup>xviii</sup> Comparatively, 15.5 percent of Hispanics, 22.5 percent of African Americans, and 32.8 percent of White Americans have a B.A. or higher.<sup>xix</sup> Areas with lower educational attainment are also hard to enumerate.<sup>xx</sup>
  - **Immigrant status:** The majority (67 percent)<sup>xxi</sup> of Asian Americans are foreign-born, which is higher than other large immigrant populations, including Latinos (35 percent)<sup>xxii</sup> and Arab Americans (46 percent).<sup>xxiii</sup> Immigration status is strongly correlated with undercounting.<sup>xxiv</sup> On the other hand, eight out of 10 NHPI are native-born.<sup>xxv</sup>
  - **Housing tenure:** 47 percent of poor Asian Americans live in locations with the highest housing costs in the United States, while 40 percent of poor NHPIs do, which can lead to greater challenges in finding stable and affordable housing.<sup>xxvi</sup> The majority of NHPIs are renters as well, as 60.3 percent are renters<sup>xxvii</sup> compared to 42.3 percent of Asian Americans.<sup>xxviii</sup> The NHPI community is also affected by homelessness, as one third of the homeless population in Hawaii is made up of native Hawaiians and another one-third is made up of other Pacific Islanders.<sup>xxix</sup> Irregular housing is considered a factor that can hinder enumeration.<sup>xxx</sup>

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

When the Asian American and NHPI communities are undercounted, they are denied a full voice in policy decision-making. Every person recorded in the decennial census is included in the population totals used for congressional reapportionment and the drawing of legislative district boundaries, regardless of age or citizenship status. When the Asian American and NHPI communities are undercounted, political boundaries may not accurately represent reality, and the community's different needs may not be represented or prioritized according to their real share of the population.

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Asian Americans are also included as a “language minority group” under Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act.<sup>xxxii</sup> Tracking these subgroups is important because there is a statutory requirement in Section 203 that if there are “more than 10,000 or over 5 percent of the total voting age citizens in a single political subdivision” (which is covered separately for American Indian and Alaskan Native reservations) of the same language group whose Limited English Proficiency could hinder their full participation in the political process, language assistance must be provided through the election process in their first language.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Not only do representatives and state legislators make decisions about programs that serve the Asian American and NHPI communities, but, every year, at least \$600 billion in federal funds is allocated to states and localities based on census data. Here are some of the programs whose funding is based in whole or in part on census counts that impact the Asian American and NHPI communities:

- **Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies – \$13.8 billion.** Thirty percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander students attend high-poverty schools that are targeted by Title I, which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or percentages of low-income children. In the 2006-07 school year, Title I served more than half a million Asian American and Pacific Islander children.<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- **Head Start – \$8.2 billion.** The Head Start 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. Approximately one tenth of Asian American and one third of NHPI children and pregnant women<sup>xxxiv</sup> participated in Head Start and Early Head Start during the 2015-16 school year.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Children in lower-income Asian American and NHPI families can also benefit from resources that provide financial security for their families and economic development for their communities based on census-derived data:

- **SNAP – \$69.4 billion.** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (previously known as food stamps) is the most important tool to prevent hunger and malnutrition among families in the United States. More than 45 million low-income families rely on federally funded SNAP subsidies that are administered to them through state governments. More than one-fifth (22.2 percent) of Pacific Islanders receive SNAP benefits, while 7.5 percent of Asian Americans use them.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- **Medicaid – \$311.9 billion.** Medicaid is a federal-state insurance program that provides health coverage to low-income families and individuals, parents, seniors, and people with disabilities.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In 2008, 1.4 million Asian Americans and 85,372 Pacific Islanders were enrolled in Medicaid or some other public insurance program.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

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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. In fiscal year 2015, there were 17 million Asian Americans and more than a half million NHPI in the United States, making up 5.6 percent and 0.2 percent of the U.S. population, respectively.<sup>xxxix</sup> The Asian population<sup>xi</sup> also grew by 43 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. The NHPI population grew almost as quickly, increasing by 35 percent in that same time period.<sup>xii</sup> This change is taking place across the entire country—in 2015, the Asian American population grew by at least 30 percent in every state, except Hawaii.<sup>xiii</sup> NHPIs experienced the most growth in the South.<sup>xiiii</sup> The 2020 Census will be critical to ensure federal data, funding allocations, and political representation reflect the Asian American and NHPI communities' share of the population.

### You can help – right now.

There are many ways in which stakeholders, including advocates, funders, and civic leaders, can improve the count of 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 annual 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. Without 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.** Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (<http://advancingjustice-aaajc.org/>) works to ensure that the Census collects the most full and accurate data on Asian American and NHPI communities. 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’ website also includes a number of helpful census resources (<http://civilrights.org/census/>).
- **Educate state and local leaders about challenges 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 in many states and localities. It is important that Complete Count Committees include voices for the Asian American and NHPI communities, to remind leaders and local census staff of this critical constituency. These committees work with the Census Bureau and local communities to help ensure a

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complete census. As a reference, the 2010 Complete Count Committee guide can be found at <https://www.census.gov/2010census/partners/pdf/cccGuide.pdf>

- **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.

*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-aaajc.org](mailto:tminnis@advancingjustice-aaajc.org).*

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<sup>i</sup> Reamer, Andrew. “Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds.” GW Institute of Public Policy, 4 June, 2017. Available at:

<http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/census/CountingForDollars-Intro.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Brownrigg, Leslie and Manuel de la Puente. “Sociocultural Behaviors Correlated with Census Undercount.” Paper prepared for presentation in Special Session 2 15 to the American Sociological Association, August 22, 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> Based on calculations from the 2010 Decennial Census mail return rates.

<sup>iv</sup> “Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Improving Data to Capture a Multiethnic America.” The Leadership Conference Education Fund. Available at: <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Census-Report-2014-WEB.pdf>.

<sup>v</sup> Table: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. Available at:

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

<sup>vi</sup> Table: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. Available at

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Supra note 1.

<sup>ix</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>x</sup> Supra note 5.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Fernandez, Shatuck and Noon. Presentation at the Southern Demographic Association Conference, October 2016

<sup>xiii</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>xiv</sup> Supra note 5.

<sup>xv</sup> Ryan, Camille and Kurt Bauman. “Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015.” U.S. Census Bureau, March 2016. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvii</sup> Supra note 5.

<sup>xviii</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>xix</sup> Supra note 15.

<sup>xx</sup> Supra note 1.

<sup>xxi</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>xxii</sup> <sup>xxii</sup> “Table: Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. Available at:

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

<sup>xxiii</sup> “Selected Population Profile in the United States: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. Available at:

[https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_15\\_1YR\\_S0201&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_S0201&prodType=table).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Supra note 1.

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<sup>xxv</sup> “Fact Sheet: What You Should Know about Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islands (NHPI’s).” White House Initiative on Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/asian-americans-initiative/what-you-should-know.pdf>.

<sup>xxvi</sup> 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>.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Supra note 5.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>xxix</sup> “Facts.” Hope Services Hawaii, 2017. Available at: <http://hopeserviceshawaii.org/message-from-the-ceo/facts/>; 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>.

<sup>xxx</sup> Supra note 1.

<sup>xxxi</sup> “Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act.” U.S. Department of Justice. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/section-4-voting-rights-act>.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Supra note 3.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> “Asian American and Pacific Islander Families and the 2010 Census.” The Leadership Conference Education Fund, Available at: <http://www.protectcivilrights.org/pdf/census/asian-american-and-api-families-and-the-2010-census.pdf>.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> 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. Available at: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/early-head-start-programs>.

<sup>xxxv</sup> 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> and “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> and 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>.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Supra note 4.

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

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Supra note 4.

<sup>xxxix</sup> “Table: 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, 2013.” U.S. Census Bureau. Available at: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>; “Table: QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau.” U.S. Census Bureau, Available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>.

<sup>xl</sup> Includes any household identifying as Asian, either alone or in combination with another race or Hispanic ethnicity.

<sup>xli</sup> “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>.

<sup>xlii</sup> 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](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf); “2010 Census Shows Asians are Fastest-Growing Race Group.” U.S. Census Bureau, March 21, 2012, Available at: [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb12-cn22.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-cn22.html).

<sup>xliii</sup> Supra note 37.

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