
Factsheet: Will You Count? Latinos in the 2020 Census

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 billionⁱ 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.

Latino households are at risk of being undercounted.

Latinos have been undercounted for decades, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods.ⁱⁱ There are 56.5 million Hispanicsⁱⁱⁱ in the United States.^{iv} Roughly one in three Latinos live in hard-to-count census tracts.^v Latino children are among the most undercounted populations in the United States. Hispanic children under age five were overlooked at twice the rate of young non-Hispanic White children in the 2010 Census;^{vi} up to 400,000 young Latino children were missed.^{vii} Also, young Latino men are at risk of being undercounted, in part because they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and also have lower rates of citizenship.^{viii} Additionally, a range of stakeholders, from state officials to immigrant advocates, fear the recent increase in negative political rhetoric and federal enforcement operations that have targeted the immigrant community also could reduce participation among the Latino community.^{ix}

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

There are many characteristics that make the Latino community hard to enumerate. That is why special attention is needed to reach these households and make sure they complete a 2020 Census questionnaire.

- **Language barriers:** Almost three quarters of Hispanics (73.3 percent) speak a language other than English and almost a third of Hispanics (31.1 percent) speak English less than “very well.”^x Historically, areas with low rates of English proficiency have also been undercounted.^{xi}

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- **Poverty:** Overall, Hispanics have an official poverty rate of 22.6 percent,^{xii} which is significantly higher than the official U.S. poverty rate of 13.5 percent.^{xiii} It is widely believed that households in poverty are difficult to enumerate.^{xiv}
- **Education:** About two thirds of Hispanics (61.6 percent) have a high school degree or less, which is higher than the U.S. average of 40.4 percent.^{xv} About 14.8 percent have a BA or higher, which is less than half the U.S. average of 33 percent and the lowest rates of any of the groups, according to the 2015 American Community Survey one-year estimate.^{xvi} Areas with lower educational attainment are also hard to enumerate.^{xvii}
- **Immigrant status:** More than a third of the Latino community (35 percent) is foreign-born.^{xviii} People immigrating to the United States from Latin America made up more than half of the undocumented population in 2016.^{xix} A range of stakeholders, from state officials to immigrant advocates, fear the recent increase in negative political rhetoric and federal enforcement operations that have targeted the undocumented community also could reduce participation among immigrant communities—making immigrant households at greater risk of being hard-to-count.^{xx} Because of these tensions and new methodologies that include the use of administrative records from other government agencies, a growing segment of immigrant households may be reluctant to respond to the census questionnaire due to concerns about data confidentiality.^{xxi}
- **Latino children:** Latino children make up more than 24 percent of U.S. children under five.^{xxii} More than half of Latino children under five (55 percent) live in a household with complex living arrangements. Some young children have complicated living arrangements, moving among various relatives or caregivers.^{xxiii} One-quarter of young Latino children also live in a linguistically isolated household where adults have difficulty speaking English.^{xxiv} Each of these characteristics are correlated with risk of being hard-to-count. Latino children make up more than 36 percent of the total net undercount for all children under age five.^{xxv}

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

It is especially important to make sure that the 2020 Census accurately and fairly captures the growing Latino community. Latinos are already the nation's second largest racial or ethnic group, accounting for 18 percent of the U.S. population; a fair and accurate census is impossible to achieve without a fair and accurate count of the Latino population. From 2014 to 2015, the U.S. Hispanic population increased by 2.2 percent, which made up 48 percent of the total population increase for the entire country.^{xxvi} This growth is projected to continue.^{xxvii} They are also the youngest demographic group in the United States with a median age of 27, and almost 60 percent of Hispanics are part of the Millennial generation.^{xxviii} This change is taking place in pockets around the country—the most growth has come in areas that did not have large Latino populations before. Though these pockets exist across the country, the South in particular has seen 43 percent of the U.S. Latino community's growth,^{xxix} and more than half of the Latino population (53 percent) lived in metro areas in 2014.^{xxx}

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Potential changes to the census' race and ethnicity question could improve data.

In the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau may change the race and ethnicity questions from two separate items to one combined question. Since 1980, census surveys have asked about Hispanic origin separately from race,^{xxxii} but results from 2020 Census testing suggest this new combined question format would better allow Latinos to choose the races and ethnicities with which they most identify, while also providing their national origins, rather than trying to fit into an inflexible categorization scheme.^{xxxiii} To realize this potential for more accurate self-representation, it's important for stakeholders to ensure the public understands how to complete the new question.

What are the consequences of undercounting the Latino community?

When the Latino community is 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 Latino community is undercounted, political boundaries may not accurately represent reality, and this community's different needs may not be represented or prioritized according to their real share of the population.

Latinos are also included as a "language minority group" under Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act.^{xxxiii} Tracking these subgroups is important because there is a statutory requirement that if there are more than 10,000 voting-age citizens of the same language group in an area whose Limited English Proficiency could hinder their full participation in the political process, certain materials must be provided in their first language.^{xxxiv}

Not only do representatives and state legislators make decisions about programs that serve the Latino community, 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 Latino community.

- **Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies-\$13.8 billion.** Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers of low-income children to help ensure that all children meet state academic standards.^{xxxv} In the 2014-15 school year, Title I served more than 22 million children.^{xxxvi} About 36 percent of students (more than 8 million children) benefitting from Title I funds are Latino.^{xxxvii}
- **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. Between 1992 and 2007, the percentage of Latino children in Head Start grew from about 19 percent to 32 percent.^{xxxviii} Hispanic children accounted for 37 percent of total Head Start enrollment in the 2015-16 school year.^{xxxix}

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- **Foster Care-\$4.6 billion.** Hispanics made up 21 percent of all foster youth in 2015.^{xi} The Federal Foster Care 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.
- **Special Education Grants-\$11.2 billion.** Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal government provides grants to states to assist them in ensuring a free public education environment that will allow children with disabilities to thrive. Through IDEA, federal funds assist states in providing early intervention services for 1.3 million Latino infants and toddlers (0-2) and their families, according to the latest estimates.^{xli}

Lower-income Latino households 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. Nearly a quarter (23.2 percent) of Hispanics receive SNAP benefits.^{xlii}
- **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 approximately 2 million households to secure affordable rental housing in the private market. About 16 percent of Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers recipients, or more than 300,000 households, are Latino.^{xliii}
- **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. About one fifth (19.9 percent) of those enrolled in Medicaid in 2012 were Hispanics.^{xliv} About 19.5 percent of Hispanics are uninsured.^{xlv}
- **State Children's Health Insurance Program-\$11.1 billion.** SCHIP was created in 1997 to reduce the number of uninsured children by providing subsidized insurance to children of the working poor through federal grants to states.^{xlvi} About 60 percent of all Latinos eligible for SCHIP participate in the program.^{xlvii} According to census data, Latinos are the most uninsured population group among U.S. children, with one out of five Latino children uninsured.^{xlviii}
- **National School Lunch Program-\$11.6 billion.** The National School Lunch Program offers reduced cost or free meals in public and nonprofit schools along with daycares on all school days.^{xlix} For FY 2012, 31.6 million kids used the program.¹ Hispanics made up 24 percent of participating students in in 2004-2005.^{li}
- **Child Care and Development Fund-\$3.4 billion.** The Child Care and Development 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

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- attend training and education. Latino families make up about one fifth (21 percent) of those who used the program from 2011-2013.^{lii}
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)-\$6.3 billion.** WIC gives nutrition assistance through vouchers that are used to buy nutrient-rich food for pregnant women and children under the age of five.^{liii} In 2012, there were 9.7 million participants in the program.^{liv} Latino women and children made up 41.5 percent of the participants.^{lv}

You can help – right now.

There are many ways in which stakeholders, including advocates, funders, and civic leaders, can improve the count of 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 Latino 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 Latino 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.** 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/>) also 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 Latino community faces 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 Latino 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 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.

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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.

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