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Be Counted, America! How're we doing?

An analysis of the first week of participation in the 2010 Census

The Center for Urban Research at the CUNY Graduate Center has analyzed the latest participation rates from the 2010 decennial census to help outreach groups understand what areas are not fully being counted and why. The census aims to count everyone, but historical returns show that some areas are counted more fully than others. Who's lagging behind in the 2010 Census? And can we compare the participation rates with local demographic characteristics to better understand why?

In addition to our analysis, CUR has added the latest participation rates to its Census 2010 Hard to Count mapping site, at www.CensusHardToCountMaps.org. You can find the lowest performing rates by tract in any county nationwide, to help census advocates zero in on areas that need the greatest help with completing and sending in their forms. We'll be updating the map daily with the Census Bureau's data, in coordination with the Bureau's Take 10 map.

The Census Bureau began publishing 2010 participation rates on March 23. Here are our findings for the participation rates one week later, as of March 30, 2010:

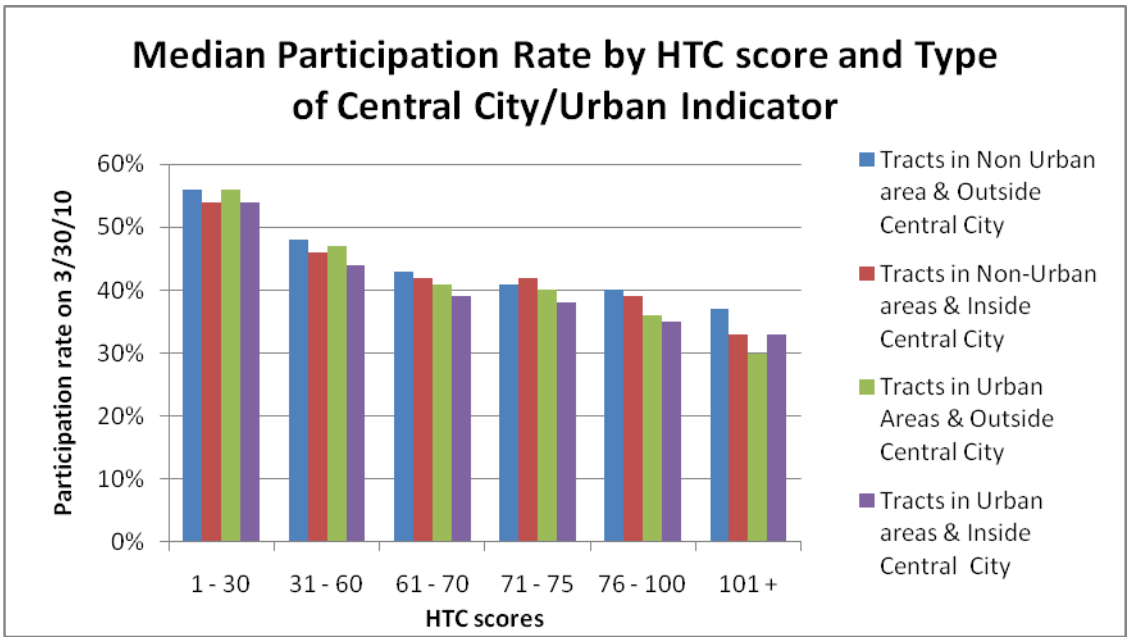
- **Census tracts in urban cities have much lower participation rates than areas outside these urban inner city areas.** The median participation rate as of Tuesday in tracts located in central cities in urban areas was 43%, while tracts in cities but in non-urban areas as well as tracts in other non-urbanized areas of the country had median participation rates of 49 and 54%, respectively.[1]

- **Nonetheless, rates are rising across all these areas.** The participation rate data from a day earlier (March 29, 2010) was 5 percentage points lower. In Census tracts in urban central cities the median rate was 39%, while tracts in cities in non-urban areas and other non-urbanized areas of the country had a median participation rate of between 45 and 49%, respectively. (The tracts in cities but not in urban areas are within city limits but in areas of land characterized as non-urban by the Census.)

- **The Census Bureau's "hard to count" (HTC) scoring system seems to be a good predictor, so far, of what areas are mailing back more of their Census forms.** The HTC index ranges from 1 to 130. The median HTC score for inner city (and, so far, low participation) areas was 53, while the median HTC scores for non-urban areas and even cities in non-urbanized regions are between 16 and 26, respectively. Generally, tracts with HTC scores of 61 or more are considered particularly hard to count.

[1] We used ArcGIS geographic information system (GIS) software to determine which tracts were located in urbanized areas, based on Census Bureau geographic classifications (see http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/uaucbndy.html). We also separately determined which tracts were located in central cities based on metropolitan statistical areas. Central cities can be inside or outside urbanized areas.

- Generally speaking, **hard to count tracts have lower participation rates – regardless of urban/non-urban location – than tracts with lower HTC scores.** See chart and table below.



The following table shows the median participation rates for the chart above:

Median Participation Rate by HTC score and Type of Central City/Urban Indicator

	Non-Urban Areas		Urban Areas		
HTC Score	**Tracts Outside Central City**	**Tracts Inside Central City**	**Tracts Outside Central City**	**Tracts Inside Central City**	**Nationwide median in each HTC range**
1 - 30	56%	54%	56%	54%	**56%**
31 - 60	48%	46%	47%	44%	**46%**
61 - 70	43%	42%	41%	39%	**40%**
71 - 75	41%	42%	40%	38%	**39%**
76 - 100	40%	39%	36%	35%	**36%**
101 +	37%	33%	30%	33%	**33%**
Median rate across all scores	**53%**	**49%**	**52%**	**43%**	**50%**

The distribution of tracts in each of these four geographic categories is as follows:

	Tracts in Non-Urban area and Outside Central City	Tracts in Non-Urban area and Inside Central City	Tracts in Urban area and Outside Central City	Tracts in Urban Area and Inside Central City
# of tracts	24,928	1,033	19,894	20,315
% of tracts	37.7	1.6	30.1	30.7

At the county level, we compared the latest participation rates with 2008 race and ethnicity data from the Census Bureau's population estimates program (http://www.census.gov/popest/counties/asrh/). The table below shows the correlations between participation rates by county as of March 30, and percent of a county's population that is white (non-Hispanic), black (non-Hispanic), Asian (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, and other races (non-Hispanic). There is a strong positive correlation at the county level between participation rates and the percent of the population that is white, while there are somewhat more moderate negative correlation between participation rate and the size of the Hispanic or Black population. In general, participation rates in the first week of the 2010 Census tend to be higher in counties with a greater percentage of whites. On the other hand, participation rates tend to be lower in counties with a greater percentage of blacks and Latinos. The following chart provides the correlation statistics for these findings:

Correlation of County-level Population Characteristics with Participation Rates (as of March 30, 2010)

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Number of counties
Percent White	.508	.000	3,112
Percent Hispanic	-.353	.000	3,112
Percent Black	-.317	.000	3,112
Percent Asian	-.044	.014	3,112
Percent All Others	-.191	.000	3,112

We also mapped the changing participation rates by county nationwide between March 23 and March 30, and compared the latest rates to the county-level rates in 2000. Several regional patterns are emerging:

- The Midwest so far has the highest rates, consistent with that region's participation rate in the 2000 Census.
- Initial participation in the 2010 Census was highest in the Midwest but has been spreading out along both coasts, the Pacific Northwest, and to some extent into the South.
- The greatest increases so far have been in counties in Tennessee and western Pennsylvania, as well as generally in the Pacific Northwest and Florida. The states of Michigan, Virginia, North Carolina, Connecticut and Massachusetts all have seen solid increases in participation in this first week of the census.
- A handful of counties have already exceeded their 2000 participation rates, but many are still 25% or more lower than their 2000 rates. In particular, several counties along Texas's southern border are still between 30 and 50 percentage points below their 2000 rates.

Counties exceeding their 2000 rates by 5% or more are:

County	2000 Rate	2010 Rate	Difference 2010 to 2000
Nye County, NV	13%	45%	32%
Dare County, NC	35%	48%	13%
Baylor County, TX	51%	64%	13%
Bladen County, NC	42%	51%	9%
Brunswick County, NC	46%	55%	9%
Union County, TN	52%	58%	6%
Hancock County, TN	53%	59%	6%
Chisago County, MN	54%	60%	6%
Perquimans County, NC	57%	62%	5%
Botetourt County, VA	60%	65%	5%

Will other areas across America do better this time, and will we have a more accurate count nationwide and by community? Only if you and your friends, family, and neighbors send in your forms. Be counted!

For more information, contact:

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