



ISSUE BRIEF

Money and Power:

The Economic and Political Impact of the 2020 Census on Illinois

Executive Summary

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This is the second issue brief in a series written by the Research and Policy Center (RPC) at the Chicago Urban League. The RPC will produce timely briefs in response to important issues that impact the African American community in Chicago.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To the average person, the census may seem inconsequential, simply a form to fill out once a decade. But that form plays a major role in shaping the day to day lives of people all around the country. Through the census, the federal government keeps track of the US population, and allocates funding based on that data. The census also determines political representation. So although many people may view the census as “just another form,” what it really represents is *money and power*.

Money. The Census count determines how the federal government allocates funding for more than 100 different services and programs, including: health and human services; education; roads and infrastructure; and a variety of programs focused on rural areas.

- In Fiscal Year 2016, under the 55 largest programs, *nearly \$35 billion* was disbursed to the state of Illinois based on 2010 census data. Adjusted for inflation, this amounts to \$36.2B today.
- Based on FY2015 data, a 1% undercount would result in the loss of \$122M per year in Medicaid (Federal Medical Assistance Percentage) – the *5th highest* loss in the nation, after Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida and Ohio
- Over a 10-year period, a 1% undercount would conservatively amount to a \$1.2B cut in Medicaid Funding alone.
- More than 70% of census dollars allocated to Illinois (over \$24B in FY 2015) was spent on just five programs, including Medicaid, student loans, SNAP benefits, and highway construction funding.
- Census derived allocations for rural programs in Illinois amounted to \$425M in FY 2016, and Illinois ranked 6th in per capita allocations for rural programs among the 10 most populous states. These dollars are also at risk if there is an undercount.

Power. Illinois has lost population and is likely to lose at least one Congressional seat and perhaps two if there is an undercount in the state. The US Census is used to apportion political representation in Congress as well as in the electoral college.

- In 2010 Illinois lost one Congressional seat due to loss of population;
- From 2014-2017, Illinois has experienced population loss each year and population declined by more than 150,000 people, the largest decrease in the Midwest.

To avoid further loss of both money and power, it is essential to ensure that *every resident in the state of Illinois is counted*. An undercount in *any* part of the state – of *any* population – impacts both fiscal allocations from the federal government and political representation. *Each Illinoisan is equally important in completing the census to retain our state’s money and power.*

Barriers to Participation to Ensure an Accurate Count. Unfortunately, trust in the federal government has reached a historic low point. Changes to the way data is gathered raises concerns as well. Both of these factors are likely to result in an undercount:

- According to the Pew Research Center, just 17% of Americans say that they can trust the government to do what is right most of the time (14%) or always (3%).
- The census moving primarily online also presents new barriers, including lack of access to the internet (the “digital divide”).

- The reduction in on-the-ground enumerators, cut by one-third (600K to 400K) since the 2010 census.

Focus groups conducted by Census Bureau found significant barriers, including: 1) Lack of Knowledge about the census and what it is used for; 2) Confidentiality and privacy concerns; 4) Distrust of Government; 5) The citizenship questions and the ramifications of completing the census; 6) Access to the Internet; 7) Concerns about Internet breaches and privacy.

Hard to Count (HTC). The Census Bureau defines Hard to Count (HTC) populations based on a number of variables, including high non-response rates on the census in previous years. African Americans are the most undercounted racial group. Other HTC populations include: 1) Children under age 5; 2) rural populations; 3) renters; 4) ethnic and Racial minorities; 5) immigrants; 6) non-English speakers; 7) people without access to the Internet; 8) young, mobile people; 9) disabled individuals; 10) low income individuals. This list by no means encompasses *all* HTC populations, but represents some of the groups who are historically undercounted. In Illinois:

- Sixteen percent of residents live in Hard to Count census tracts, making up more than 2M people;
- The five counties with the highest non-response rates in 2010 included Cook (25%), Jackson (23%), Champaign (23%), Alexander (23%), and St. Clair (23%).
- Among the 10 most populous states, Illinois ranks fourth in households without access to Internet (16% or 2M Illinoisans);
 - In four counties, at least 50% of the population did not have Internet access: Scott (50%), Hardin (50%) De Witt (56%) and Alexander (65%) Counties.

Nationally, Illinois ranks 6th highest in the number of specific Hard to Count populations living in HTC areas, for example:

- Nearly 42% of African Americans in Illinois live in HTC census tracts, numbering more than 800,000 Illinoisans;
 - Counties with the highest percentage of African Americans include Alexander (34%), Pulaski (32%), St. Clair (30%), Cook (24%), and Lawrence (20%);
- About 33% of Latinx Illinoisans live in HTC census tracts – nearly 700,000 people;
 - Illinois counties with the largest percentage of Latinx residents include Kane (31%), Cook (25%), Lake (21%), Boone (20%), and Cass (18%);
- Nearly 20% of children under age 5 live in HTC census tracts—more than 150,000 of Illinois’ children;
 - The top five Illinois counties with the highest percentage of children under age 5 includes Kendall (8%), Kane (7%), Peoria (7%), Alexander (7%), and Douglas (7%).

Chicago in particular is home to a number of HTC populations, including:

- Chicago ranks second in the country in the number of African Americans (600,000) who live in HTC tracts, and two-thirds of African Americans in Chicago (66.7%) live in HTC tracts;
- More than 55% of children under age 5 live in HTC census tracts – more than 100,000 of Chicago’s children, and the second most among all cities in the nation.
- More than 60% of Chicago’s Latinx residents live in HTC tracts—more than half a million people, third highest number in the nation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that 2020 census participation messaging and outreach is tied to community benefits, comes from trusted voices in communities, and is customized for each targeted community or population.
2. Provide adequate funding at the state and local levels for trusted community leaders and organizations. At the state level, allocate at least \$33M for FY2020. While this may seem like a generous appropriation, \$33M is just 27% of what Illinois stands to lose in Medicaid funding in just one year (\$122M) if there is even a 1% undercount, or less than 3% over a decade.
 - a. Ensure these funds are targeted toward Hard to Count populations.
 - b. Create a fair and transparent process for the selection and distribution of grant funds.
 - c. Involve community experts in the determination of grant allocations.
3. Ensure that the Illinois Complete Count Commission is funded for staffing positions and operational costs. While the enacting legislation created two positions, no funding was allocated for staff or operational activities. This funding is needed to ensure coordination of all Illinois census activities. This is particularly important because of the reduction in staff at the Census Bureau.