

ARKANSAS

August 2021

Census data determines the allocation of federal and other funds to vital social programs, guides redistricting, and informs research. Therefore, an accurate census that captures historically undercounted populations¹ is crucial for our democracy. Since 2016, a collaborative of philanthropic funders has worked to align and pool funding to build and strengthen the infrastructure needed to support a fair and accurate count.

The Democracy Funders Collaborative's Census Subgroup, which is the steering committee for the census funder collaborative, engaged ORS Impact as a partner to develop state-level reports that provide an overview of philanthropic efforts to promote the 2020 Census within and across the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This report provides a summary of census efforts for the State of Arkansas based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=5).

¹We have opted to use the term "historically undercounted populations" in our narrative, but the term is interchangeable with "hard to count," which we use when our informants opted to do so



OVERVIEW GOING INTO 2020 CENSUS

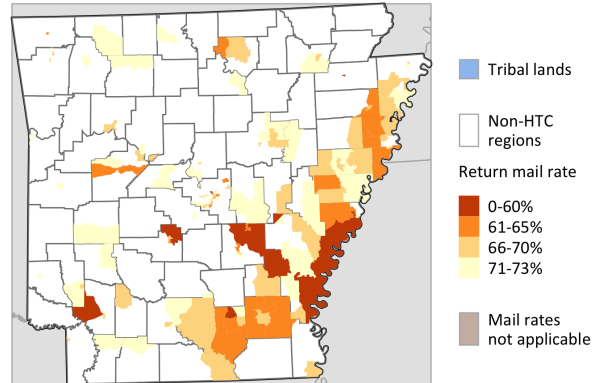
2,990,671

TOTAL POPULATION

597,471

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



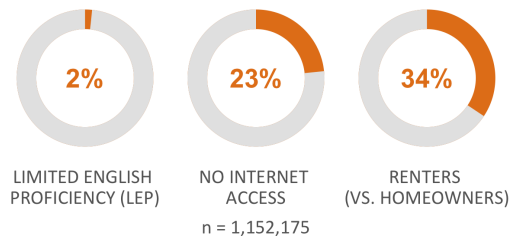
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

Population

Past analyses of Census data have consistently shown differences in self-response rates based on household or individual characteristics, indicating that certain populations are at higher risk of being undercounted. The following graphs show the distribution of selected populations within the state that have historically been more likely to be undercounted. Data for all maps and graphs provided by CUNY Graduate Center via the Census 2020 Hard to Count/Response Rate map at www.CensusHardToCountMaps2020.us.

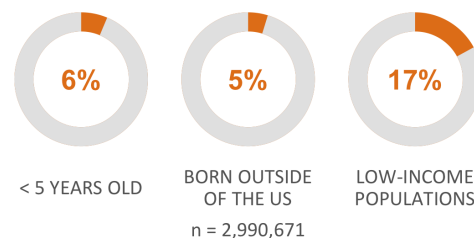
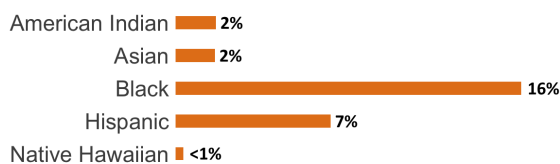
HOUSEHOLDS

Percent of total number of households in the state that have the following characteristics:



INDIVIDUALS

Percent of total number of individuals in the state that have characteristics of historically undercounted populations:

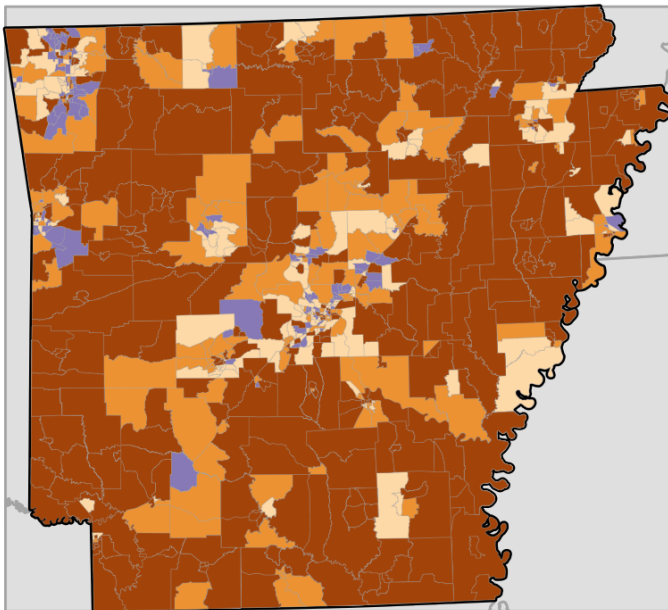




OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
2020	60.6%	-1.7
2010	62.3%	

CENSUS TRACTS WHERE 2020 CENSUS RETURN RATE WAS LOWER THAN 2010



- No comparable 2010 rate
- 2020 rate < 2010 rate by 10+ points
- 5-10 points below
- Up to 5 points below
- 2020 rate at or above 2010

STRUCTURE OF CENSUS OUTREACH

Nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, including Arkansas Impact Philanthropy (AIP), Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, and the Arkansas Community Foundation, among others, were central to initial planning of outreach efforts for the 2020 Census in Arkansas. The earliest planning conversations among these organizations, as well as others within the state, began in late summer/fall of 2018 and centered around formulating a statewide response to the census. Throughout 2019, the AR Counts Campaign worked to recruit partners needed to support a strong campaign, recruiting groups such as the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, Arkansas United, and the Arkansas State Library Association. Ultimately, the resulting coalition coalesced into the Arkansas Counts Complete Count Committee, which included broad representation from nonprofit and philanthropic groups across the state. Groups such as AIP leveraged their networks to identify partners for the campaign. The Complete Count Committee designed and led the AR Counts Campaign, which conducted communications and outreach efforts focused on ensuring a fair and accurate count, with a specific focus on engaging historically undercounted groups.

Representatives from the governor's office participated in some of the early planning meetings for the AR Counts Campaign but were not formal members of the coalition. Due in part to advocacy from groups such as the Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, the governor only made the decision to form a State Complete Count Committee in the summer of 2019. The creation of the Committee helped create some momentum for the census within the state. In addition, the Committee contributed to efforts by implementing a public awareness campaign. However, the state did not allocate resources toward outreach on the ground to historically undercounted populations. State government actors did contribute to census efforts in the state in other ways. For example, the State Data Center provided mapping and statistics from the 2010 Census to inform efforts, while in many other states across the country, the state government took the lead in forming a State Complete Count Committee.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts²:

Actor	Role
AR Counts Campaign	Including representation from key nonprofit and philanthropic groups across the state, the AR Counts Campaign was the main group conducting outreach efforts related to the 2020 Census.
State Complete Count Committee	Formed by the governor's order, this group organized efforts on behalf of the state government.

²Data reflects the Census Bureau's last update of self-response data (published in January 2021), which differs from the CUNY maps that use data from October 2020

FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

There was a total of \$1,164,000 of Census Funding consisting of both state philanthropic support and funding from the National Census Equity Fund. There were 15 total philanthropic funders who pooled funding totaling \$854,000 to support efforts within the state.

Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach³

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
Philanthropy: \$1,164,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$854,000 was disbursed as grants and subgrants to organizations to conduct outreach activities. Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, Arkansas United, and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel received dedicated grants. Other funding went to support a subgrant pool. Much of the funding was focused on outreach within the Arkansas Delta region and Northwest Arkansas. • Of this total, \$310,000 came from the national Census Equity Fund.
State Government: None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
In-Kind contributions: None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

³Funding data should be taken as estimates. We included data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and Census Equity Fund (CEF) grants where applicable; other figures are estimates provided by key informants

DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

AIP managed the subgrant program, disbursing funding to local groups to conduct outreach activities. Sixty organizations comprised a collaborative structure which represented individuals through AIP, the Arkansas Counts Complete Count Committee, or a subgrantee of AIP. Most grants focused on outreach to historically undercounted communities, such as communities of color, non-English-speaking communities, rural communities, and aging communities.

Overcoming the digital divide was a key challenge for groups working on outreach. Arkansas is ranked 46th in the nation for access to broadband internet. This made it difficult for community members who did not have access to internet or technology to fill out the census digitally. Groups working on the ground found ways to bridge the digital divide. One effective strategy was using a mobile van to provide access to computers so people could complete the census. In addition, using mailings and following up in person were other strategies that bore fruit.

Partners in the campaign took the lead on outreach to specific historically undercounted groups based on their experience and existing relationships. For example, Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families prioritized outreach to families with children, as the organization had broad partnerships and relationships with other child advocacy-aligned organizations across the state. Geographically, the young child undercount data was mapped and identified among areas of high poverty, high immigrant populations, non-English-speaking populations, and other communities of color across the state. The diverse coalition that was the AR Counts Campaign was able to reach different communities to people with lived experiences representative of the membership in the AR Counts Campaign group. The AR Counts Campaign as a coalition did a good job at having community representatives conduct outreach in such communities.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, groups pivoted and limited direct in-person contact to alternative forms of engagement, such as socially distanced food deliveries and drive-up events at grocery stores.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Outreach strategies must take into account community access to broadband internet.** In areas with low internet connectivity, digital strategies will be less effective.
- **Leveraging organizations' expertise and existing relationships to historically undercounted groups was key to conducting effective outreach.** Groups leveraging relationships with community organizations were well positioned to reach certain groups and helped propel efforts.

LOOKING FORWARD

Retaining the infrastructure from the 2020 Census will be instrumental for future organizing efforts. The 60-person coalition at the subgrantee level will be held over to continue organizational efforts at the local and statewide levels. Most of the participants in this coalition can be relied upon to get ready in 2027 or 2028 to prepare for the 2030 Census. Continuous engagement will help maintain a census Get Out the Count foundation that can mobilize together on other issues facing Arkansas. Another important aspect that needs to be considered is to have a set-aside state government fund for census efforts instead of having a group or coalition that is not guaranteed funding and has to rely solely on external philanthropic funding.



DATA SOURCES

Representatives from the following organizations participated in interviews and/or contributed information for this report:

- AIP (n=2)
- Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families
- Arkansas Counts Complete Count Committee
- Arkansas Community Foundation