

# LOUISIANA

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 populations<sup>1</sup> 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 Louisiana based on review of secondary data, and interviews with key actors involved (n=2).

<sup>1</sup>We 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

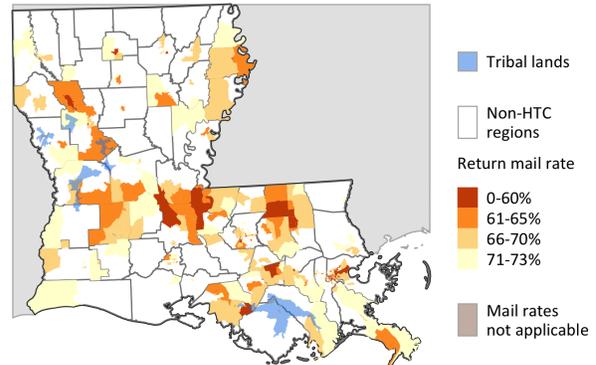
**4,663,616**

TOTAL POPULATION

**1,636,713**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY



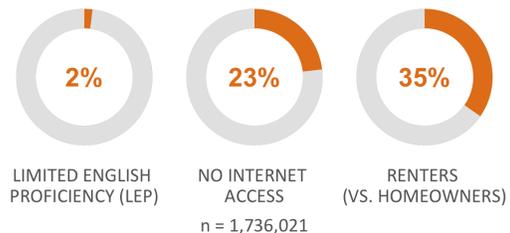
Special update/enumerate method used for counting as mail return rates are not applicable

## 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](http://www.CensusHardToCountMaps2020.us).

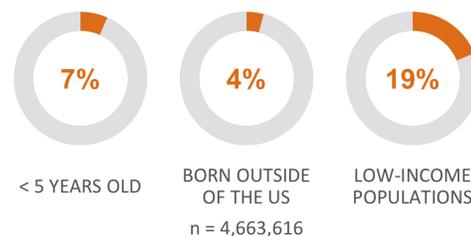
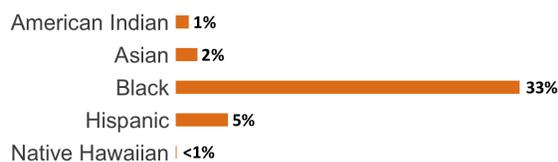
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

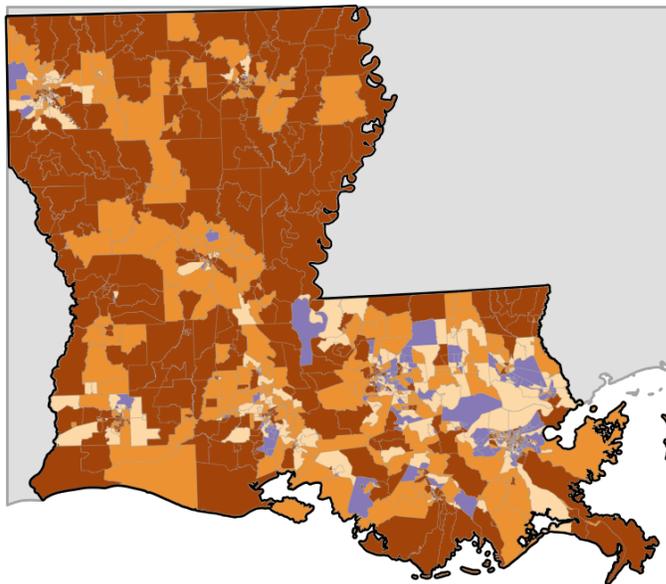




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>60.4%</b>	<b>-0.6</b>
2010	61.0%	

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

The state of Louisiana has historically had a low census self-response rate—ranked 43rd in the nation for 2020—and also a disproportionately high poverty rate, both of which shaped its efforts at promoting a fair and complete count. Efforts first began in 2019 with the launch of a state-focused resource guide and census education webinar series by Crescent City Media Group’s Center for Civic Action (CCMG/CCA) and partners across four southern parishes. By January 2020, a statewide collaborative partnership began taking shape, bringing together over 100 partners representing nonprofit organizations, neighborhood associations, churches, social service agencies, historically Black colleges and universities, and community leaders around census activities. Serving as a hub for organizing, community-based Power Coalition for Justice and Equity (Power Coalition) developed a network across the state, leveraging existing partnerships as well as developing new relationships with community leaders and officials.

Power Coalition led the civic engagement table for Louisiana, which provided the overall organizing structure for census outreach at the state level, bringing together Census Bureau leaders and nonprofit organizations interested in a fair and accurate count to coordinate their efforts. Power Coalition was also an active participant on Louisiana’s State Complete Count Committee, as well as on five other local complete count committees across the state. While different groups implemented their own outreach efforts, the loose collaborative structure helped actors involved to identify where gaps in outreach existed based on preliminary response rates. CCMG/CCA continued as a resource provider and facilitator of census campaigns with college campus, neighborhood associations, and other partners in targeted areas across the southern parts of the state. The Urban League of Louisiana also played an important role, developing a census messaging toolkit and leveraging their network to reach the African American community.

Efforts were most concentrated in the Southwest, Southeast and most populous regions of the state, with local groups playing pivotal roles in reaching certain populations and regions. For example, Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance focused on reaching those with housing needs, Voices of the Experienced (VOTE) connected with the formerly incarcerated, and VAYLA New Orleans organized the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. Similarly, the Micah Project played a leading role in mobilizing the faith community to Get Out the Count (GOTC). By engaging with communities as trusted partners, organizations could adapt their strategies, stay responsive to outreach needs, and authentically deliver messaging about the importance of the census to encourage a complete count.

Philanthropic and business partners were essential for providing infrastructure funding and resources. National funders, such as the National Census Equity Fund and the Bauman Foundation, provided key resources to efforts in Louisiana. While the state of Louisiana did form a State Complete Count Committee, the state did not provide financial resources to support outreach activities.

Table 1: Key actors involved in Census Efforts<sup>2</sup>:

Actor	Role
<b>Power Coalition for Justice and Equity</b>	Power Coalition served as a hub and organizer for census efforts in the state. They oversaw census communications efforts, including development of a website; engaged community nonprofits as a regranter for their census campaigns; and contributed to strategies across the state through various complete count committees.
<b>Crescent City Media Group’s Center for Civic Action</b>	CCMG/CCA organized and supported efforts to reach undercounted communities for census participation. They cultivated partnerships, created and shared resources, and actively participated in digital and in-person complete count events. In unified efforts against the citizenship question, they leveraged the advocacy and communication efforts of Census Counts.
<b>National organizations and funders</b>	The National Census Equity Fund, the Bauman Foundation, and other national funders provided critical support and resources to efforts in the state.
<b>Nonprofit organizations; state and local complete count committees</b>	Many organizations across the state contributed to outreach efforts in relation to the 2020 Census.

<sup>2</sup>Data 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

The Louisiana government funds were not allocated to state GOTC efforts. Instead, Louisiana census efforts were supported by pooled funding from the national Census Equity Fund and individual funders such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. State Voices also worked closely to build capacity of census work and provide regrating dollars to support services programing.

Overall, those involved in the efforts estimate that **over \$1,455,000 were leveraged within the state**, mostly in philanthropic dollars, as well as through an unknown amount of in-kind contributions. Of this total, \$840,000 came from the National Census Equity Fund.

**Table 2: Funding for 2020 Census Outreach<sup>3</sup>**

Funding Source and Amount	Funding Purpose
<p><b>Philanthropy:</b> <b>\$1,455,000</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of the total, the national Census Equity Fund provided a grant of \$840,000 to support Power Coalition’s work. In addition, Power Coalition received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, and Wellspring for an additional \$225,000. Funds went to staffing the campaign, producing materials, and regrating to small community-based organizations across the state.</li> <li>• The National Census Equity Fund also provided grants totaling \$250,000 each to the Micah Project and the Urban League of Louisiana, to support census work in New Orleans and neighboring areas in the southeastern part of the state. The Micah Project focused on mobilizing the faith community, while the Urban League of Louisiana developed a communications campaign and toolkit for sharing with partners across the state.</li> <li>• CCMG/CCA received \$40,000 from the Southern Power Fund and \$100,000 from Project South by way of the SPLC/Community Foundation of Atlanta (Vote Your Voice Grant) in support of census complete count activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State Government: \$0</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The state chose not to allocate funding to support the work of the State Complete Count Committee.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup>Funding 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

<b>In-Kind Contributions: Unknown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many organizations contributed staff time and other resources to census efforts within the state.</li> </ul>
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## DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**Organizations used a series of outreach tools and tactics to communicate the importance of the census in areas with high poverty within the state of Louisiana**, centering messaging on the importance of a complete count to generating federal dollars to the state and boosting funding for public programs and social services. Through Power Coalition’s organizing hub, groups could access outreach materials like digital toolkits, postcard mailers, and one-pagers, and could become as involved in GOTC activities as their capacity or interest allowed. CCMG/CCA provided resource guides, toolkits, public service announcements, pledge cards, t-shirts, youth-focused media vignettes with local schools, and score cards for municipalities indicating how prepared they are for the first digital census. They shared their materials through a newsletter with statewide reach to about 300,000 people of color, businesses, and church organizations.

**A grant program helped get census resources to community organizations to conduct outreach.** Through Power Coalition’s grant program, organizations with ideas on how to engage with communities around the census could apply for grants. Power Coalition regranted \$58,000 to 29 community-based organizations and also provided over 200 mini-grants to other civic and church groups across the state. Generally, grant funds were awarded responsively and on a rolling basis so that data on the real-time response rate could inform resource allocations.

**Beyond empowering organizations with toolkits, efforts to actively inform the public and engage communities to complete the count involved “Census Days of Action,” “Power Hours,” and speaking events with the governors across the largest metro areas.** Power Coalition-led “Days of Action” events encouraged census participation among undercounted groups, and Power Hours engaged nontraditional partners, such as the National Pan-Hellenic Council of Black sororities and fraternities (also called the Divine Nine) and other Greek-letter organizations, to boost organizational phone banking and texting and reach members within their communities. Some groups promoted the census through joint “Get Out the Count/Vote” events and census job fairs targeted in rural and undercounted areas.

**In response to the pandemic, groups shifted to socially distanced community events, phone banking and texting, auto-generated tele-town halls targeting rural and elderly populations, and talk radio to provide instruction on completing the count and to dispel misinformation.** Recognizing the risk of not being able to engage with people in person, organizers tried to address accessibility and engagement challenges by designing sophisticated visual materials, coordinating online events, and organizing social and digital media campaigns that enabled wider public reach to those with internet access. The tools enabled a wide reach:

Facebook advertising generated over 2.6 million geo-fenced total impressions and 530,000 individual impressions. Add to that the 50,000 mailers, 450 radio ads, and over 350,000 contacts made via text message, which further provided census updates and encouraged participation. “Fill Out Your Form” virtual parties coordinated by CCMG/CCA gathered census partnership specialists, public officials and popular local DJs to engage the public. Partnerships with United Way and other groups providing mutual aid to respond to the pandemic also provided opportunities for in-person engagement after the pandemic began.

**Groups leveraged existing resources and relationships to encourage a complete count across the state.** For its own outreach efforts, Power Coalition channeled existing programs that engage with infrequent voters of color every year, reaching those who may be feeling apathetic toward or unrepresented by the government in places with low voter turnout. There was focused engagement with schools, community groups, and faith-based organizations, the latter of which played an especially important role in GOTC activities while regular community programming was put on hold due to the pandemic. Partners like the State Library Association worked to make libraries available for census outreach activities and to loan technology tools to organizations coordinating GOTC activities. Wi-Fi hotspots were secured to help rural communities access broadband and complete the online count.

**Among harder to count populations, the state’s history of structural racism and the lack of information provided at the federal level in regard to the citizenship question both created additional outreach challenges.** A sense of mistrust and apathy of government within the growing Black, Brown, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities hampered efforts in some areas. Groups responded by using more time-intensive, personalized messages and postcards from known community leaders to help build community trust in the census, which paid dividends in increases in response rates in some areas. Culturally responsive translation of materials into Vietnamese, Spanish, and Haitian French, among other languages, was also essential through the fumbling of the citizenship question. Phone banking and text banks were also provided in Spanish through partners within the Garifuna community in New Orleans East.

**Some actors used data from the American Community Survey on the distribution of Black and Brown populations.** This data was used by some local organizers and local business groups, such as the Black Chamber of Commerce in New Orleans, to make important decisions on where groups should focus their efforts to reach historically undercounted populations.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Clearer guidance and more consistent collaboration with the Census Bureau could have enhanced efforts.** While some census outreach activities in partnership with census staff worked well, other collaborative efforts could be improved. For example, during some collaborative meetings early on, Census Bureau representatives did not provide clear information and guidance to some groups working on the ground, making it difficult to align efforts. Though collaboration improved over time, equal support across all activities would benefit efforts, especially as organizations initially align around strategy.
- **Existing civic engagement infrastructure and relationships were leveraged in new and exciting ways, demonstrating the importance of engaging a wide-ranging coalition when doing this sort of work.** Although partnerships existed prior to GOTC, collaborating with state and federal census groups was vital and new. At the state level, nonprofit collaboration with the governor's office was strong, and there is hope that these relationships can be utilized for other efforts in the future.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Census results for Louisiana indicate a promising future for organizing civic engagement work. Although the state ultimately ranked as having one of the lowest total self-response rates overall, it improved on its 2010 Census ranking and, most encouragingly, the urban southeastern parishes around New Orleans demonstrated a significant jump in completion. Pandemic-specific relationships such as civic engagement partnerships with faith-based leaders and organizations seeking ways to connect when people could not attend church will likely continue in some form. 2020 Census efforts built a stronger statewide network of organizations committed to improving conditions for the people of Louisiana and lay the groundwork for Get out the Vote work that commenced shortly thereafter and involved many of the same groups.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Power Coalition for Justice and Equity
- Crescent City Media Group's Center for Civic Action