

# OKLAHOMA

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 Oklahoma 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

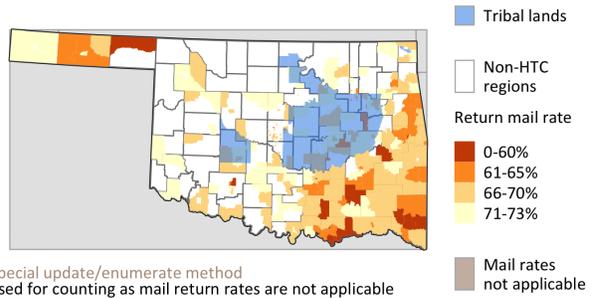
**3,918,137**

TOTAL POPULATION

**1,331,481**

TOTAL POPULATION LIVING IN HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED CENSUS TRACTS

## HISTORICALLY UNDERCOUNTED TRACTS BY COUNTY

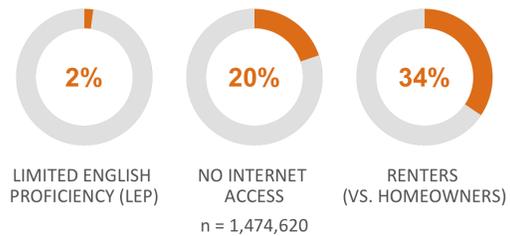


## Population

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).

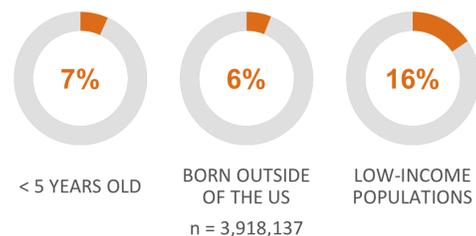
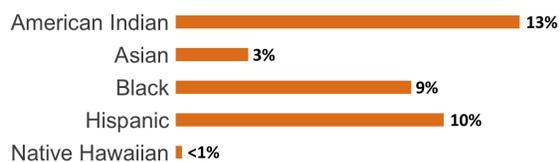
### HOUSEHOLDS

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:

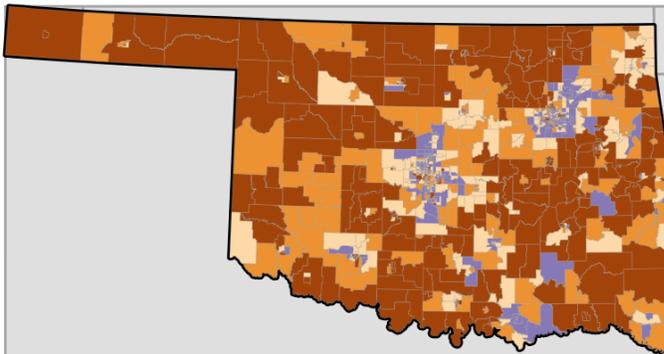




# OVERVIEW OF CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES

YEAR	SELF RESPONSE	CHANGE
<b>2020</b>	<b>61.0%</b>	<b>-1.3</b>
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

The story of the Get Out the Count (GOTC) effort in Oklahoma centers on the collaboration of local nonprofits and foundations in the state. Neither the state nor the federal government provided any funding for the effort, necessitating nonprofit conveners such as the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits and the Oklahoma Policy Institute (OKPI) to play an instrumental role in organizing local groups and cultivating an outreach approach. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce formed an unfunded collective that included the two local foundations in the state: the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the Zero Foundation. These foundations have deep ties within Tulsa and Oklahoma City, and they funded local city government to conduct outreach in undercounted populations, particularly among Black and 0-5 communities. Through funding from these nonprofit partners, cities were able to conduct outreach via local neighborhood groups and community organizations. After receiving funding in late 2019, OKPI focused outreach efforts solely on rural areas, allowing the cities to focus on urban areas. OKPI also provided stipends to five nonprofits who conducted their own individual campaigns about census in rural communities. Finally, OKPI also collaborated with some smaller, city-wide complete count committees in the cities of Lawton and Ardmore.

The Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits convened several nonprofits to mobilize their communities to complete the census. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy was part of the collective, as were some foundations that came in later 2019 to provide funding. The tribes of Oklahoma, including the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw Nations, were active in the GOTC efforts from the beginning; they funded their own efforts and were able to bring in national funders as well.

The Oklahoma legislative session is short (running from January to May) and was cut even shorter by stay-at-home orders imposed due to the pandemic in March 2020. As a result, advocates such as the OKPI were unable to advocate for funding, and no funding was appropriated in the budget or the emergency legislative funding. All funding flowed through the Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Zero Foundation.

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

Actor	Role
<b>City of Tulsa and City of Oklahoma City</b>	Funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Zero Foundation to launch place-based GOTC initiatives within cities

<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

<b>Oklahoma Policy Institute</b>	Local nonprofit and policy organization that coordinated efforts around rural outreach and provided stipends to local organizations
<b>Oklahoma Department of Commerce</b>	Formed and led a state collective that included local foundations and city governments

## FUNDING FOR CENSUS OUTREACH

The national Census Equity Fund provided a grant totaling \$350,000 to the Oklahoma Policy Institute. We were unable to obtain other information on philanthropic, government or in-kind funding for 2020 Census efforts in Oklahoma.

## DESCRIPTION OF 2020 CENSUS OUTREACH

**The state government of Oklahoma conducted media campaigns featuring videos broadcast across social media platforms.** OKPI, focusing on rural outreach, centered their work in Southeast Oklahoma, a predominantly Choctaw and Chickasaw population. Anticipating demographic shifts, OKPI also focused on the growing Latino and migrant population based in the panhandle of the state. OKPI staff did not have existing relationships in this area; therefore, it was critical to build trust using outreach volunteers.

**OKPI partnered with the tribes and the local nonprofits they funded to focus on the following populations within rural areas: homelessness, churches, urban Indian organizations, and Latino populations.** In urban centers, groups such as the Oklahoma Indian Methodist Church produced digital media aimed at the urban Indian community that was then distributed to all other populations in the state for use by GOTC advocates. OKPI also used digital media created from national partners for Latino populations, so bilingual content was easily accessible, and also used materials from national partners for Black and 0-5 outreach.

**Oklahoma has the lowest access to broadband across the country, which signaled an early problem to GOTC advocates using digital messaging.** This compounded the issue of low access to computers in rural populations. OKPI and their partners pivoted to radio spots to reach these communities, including bilingual spots that OKPI funded, and to bilingual messaging and resources from national efforts.

**OKPI identified additional organizations to fund that were involved in COVID-19 relief efforts within the rural communities.** OKPI partnered with local food banks and provided computers for visitors to fill out the census. Overall, the GOTC effort did not get high engagement from houseless and incarcerated populations or non-urban Latino communities.

**The governor of Oklahoma did encourage residents to complete the census, but there was very little overt political support for the GOTC efforts.**

**Oklahoma is a diverse but segregated state with a longstanding urban and rural divide.** Faith partners such as the Oklahoma Conference on Churches helped bridge that gap by acting as a coordinator among all churches in Oklahoma to provide resources and outreach to rural Oklahomans.

**The state's conservative politics scared certain populations (especially immigrant populations) into not participating in civic life.** This dynamic emerged in the census GOTC efforts and was amplified by the rhetoric and confusing messaging from the Trump administration around the census.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Trusted messengers are key for census outreach efforts; starting early is beneficial:** In a large state like Oklahoma, it's imperative to have community members act as trusted ambassadors to get messaging out about the census early on—earlier than the efforts in 2020, which began 1 year earlier.
- **Depoliticizing the census could aid outreach efforts.** There must be some narrative shifting, because the census has become a politicized issue, and repositioning of language in local media (which rural communities depend on) around the census in ways that are tailored to specific communities.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Metropolitan communities in Tulsa and Oklahoma City enabled were the locus of efforts related to the 2020 Census. For the next census, advocates will seek to work more closely with legislators to acquire funding early and bring a more diverse set of voices to the table that have an in-depth understanding of the communities being reached. In addition, efforts will seek to better leverage national census data to bolster efforts.



## DATA SOURCES

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

- Oklahoma Policy Institute (n=2)