



Census 2020 Hard to Count Areas

Congressional districts are redrawn and billions of federal dollars are distributed based on the Census Bureau’s once-a-decade effort to tally every person in the U.S. Despite the goal of a full count, some areas and populations have lower Census mail return rates than others. These so-called ‘hard to count’ (HTC) groups include children, immigrants, people of color, rural and low-income households, those who have been targeted by law enforcement, and more.

As a result, White middle- to upper-income people are more likely to be accurately represented in the Census than marginalized groups, reinforcing structural inequities nationwide. Inner core communities have most of Greater Boston’s HTC tracts, with more people of color, English language learners, and households below the poverty line than much of the region.

In 2018, the proposal to include a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, along with a push to move the Census online, raised concerns that participation rates will drop for non-citizens and those with limited Internet access. This, coupled with insufficient federal funding and limited testing of new methods, makes a full count more difficult. Public servants and advocates must reach HTC groups to avoid the negative consequences of under-counting our diverse region.

When a household doesn’t return its completed census questionnaire, the Census Bureau sends people into the field to talk with each non-responding household one-by-one. These households are considered “hard to count.”