

The Statewide Implications of Undercounting Latino Children

Promoting a Full and Accurate Census to Safeguard North Carolina's Future



Introduction

The accuracy of the decennial Census is critical to American democracy and to North Carolina's future prosperity. Each person missed in the Census count forfeits a portion of the more than \$16 billion annually in federal investment to North Carolina.¹ These are federal funds used for essential programs such as roads, infrastructure, school lunches, and many more programs that North Carolina families depend on. Each person missed also represents a missed opportunity for fair political representation through Congressional apportionment and redistricting.

Young Latino children are particularly likely to be undercounted, as they are overrepresented in populations considered hard-to-count by the U.S. Census Bureau, which include:

- Children under age 5,
- Racial and ethnic minorities,
- Linguistic minorities,
- Low-income families, and
- Migrant families.²

Nearly 109,000 of North Carolina's children under age five (17.8 percent) are Latino.³ Without concerted effort to reach their families ahead of the 2020 Census, the state's demographic data will almost certainly be inaccurate, jeopardizing democratic, economic, and social outcomes over the next decade.

This brief will explore leading theories behind the persistent undercount of young and Latino children in the decennial Census and highlight the particular importance to North Carolina of ensuring that Latino residents under age five are counted. The author will share strategies put forward by the U.S. Census Bureau and census advocates from other states to more effectively engage Latino families and ensure an accurate count in North Carolina.

North Carolina Has a Lot to Lose in an Undercount

Nearly 300 federal programs that provide support to families rely on data derived from the Decennial Census. In North Carolina alone, more than \$16 billion annually in federal funding is dependent on an accurate count.⁴ The state has a vested interest in the accurate count of every young Latino resident. More than half (\$9.2 billion) of the federal funds that come to North Carolina through programs using census data are determined using a formula known as the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). Based in part on the state's Decennial Census count, this measure is calculated annually and determines how much money North Carolina receives to administer five major federal programs that support children and families:

- Medical Assistance Program (Medicaid),
- State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP),
- Title IV-E Foster Care,
- Title IV-E Adoption Assistance, and
- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).

Four of these five programs solely support children, and while Medicaid is also available to adults, two thirds of enrollees in the state are children.⁵

Terminology

The U.S. Census Bureau introduced the term **Hispanic** in 1980, and the term **Latino** became more commonly used in the 1990s. Recently, younger Latinas and Latinos have introduced the gender-neutral term **Latinx**. Different terms are preferred in various Hispanic/Latino populations. In this brief, NC Child uses the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably.

SOURCE: Carolina Demography, UNC-Chapel Hill Carolina Population Center

To simplify interpretation, we refer to data presented in this report as the **undercount**, defined as the difference between Census Bureau population estimates and census counts. Technically, these differences include undercounts, overcounts, and estimate errors. The **undercount rate** is the undercount as a percent of the total population.

SOURCE: *The Invisible Ones*, Child Trends Hispanic Institute

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The FMAP formula is based on each state’s per capita income (PCI) over the most recent three calendar years compared to the national average for those years.⁶ Because of the relationship of the per capita income calculation and the census population count, an undercount results in a reduction in the FMAP. This in turn reduces the federal funding a state receives for FMAP-based programs.³ By this measure, FY2015 estimates indicate that each person missed in North Carolina during the 2010 Census resulted in a loss of \$988 in FMAP-based funds annually. For every additional one percent of residents undercounted, the state lost \$94,218,427.⁷

Previous Census results have shown young children, children of color, low-income children, and children in immigrant families to all be at high risk of being undercounted. Latino children are represented in large numbers across these groups, and if missed in the count, stand to suffer significantly from reductions in funding to vital children’s programs. In addition, an undercount of young Latinos would also equate to huge reductions in federal funding for more general needs statewide, like

Medicare Part B payments, and highway planning and construction.

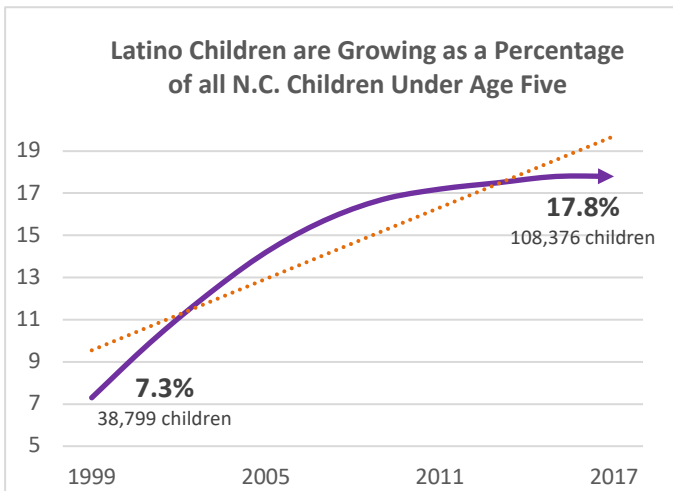
North Carolina’s Latino Population is Growing but Remains at Risk of Being Undercounted

Estimates indicate that by 2050 the majority of children in North Carolina will be children of color.⁸ Although currently only 9.5 percent of the population statewide is Hispanic or Latino, the state’s Hispanic population is growing quickly, and nearly 1 million Hispanic or Latino residents lived in North Carolina in 2017.⁹ In some counties, Latino residents account for nearly 20 percent of the population.

In the decade since the last census, North Carolina has become a popular location for Latino families to set roots and grow their families. From 2010 to 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that North Carolina’s Hispanic population grew by 132,000 new residents, representing a 16.5 percent increase.¹⁰ This rapid population growth is primarily the result of births to current North Carolina residents, and migration of U.S.-born Hispanic residents from other states, according to research conducted at the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina.¹¹

³ Per capita income is determined by dividing residents’ total income by the total population in that state. The lower a state’s PCI, the higher the FMAP, and the more cents on each program dollar spent by the state that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

will reimburse. While a census undercount of young Hispanics – or any residents – would have no effect on the state’s total income, it would cause per capita income to rise.



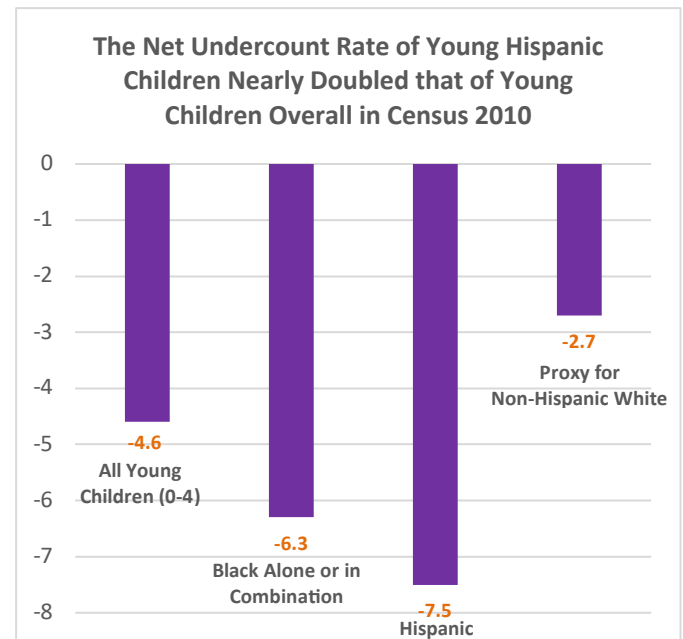
SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Because North Carolina’s Latino population is relatively youthful, the state’s overall youth population is disproportionately Latino. Although Latinos account for less than 10 percent of the population statewide, approximately 18 percent of North Carolina’s children under age five are Latino.¹²

The 2020 Census will be the first in which North Carolina can capture the magnitude of the state’s young Latino population growth. Most of the state’s estimated population growth of Latino children has occurred since 2010, so the upcoming census will be integral in obtaining an accurate count which fully reflects that growth. This will be particularly difficult, because children under age five, and Hispanic or Latino children accounted for two of the top three populations with the highest net undercount rates in the previous census.¹³ If North Carolina is to receive its due share of congressional representation and financial resources from the federal government, the state will need to take significant steps ahead of 2020 to reach the families of young Latinos.

Why Young Latinos are Undercounted

Previous Census results have shown young Latinos to be at very high risk of being missed in the count. Children under age five had one of the largest net undercounts of any demographic group nationwide, at an overall undercount rate of 4.6 percent in the last Census. Within this group, African American children had an undercount rate of 6.3 percent, non-Hispanic white children had an undercount rate of 2.7 percent, and Hispanic children had an undercount rate of 7.5 percent.¹⁴



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

It is estimated that more than 25,000 young children in North Carolina were not counted in the 2010 Census.¹⁵ Of those young children missed in the count, more than one third (9,000) were Latino.¹⁶

“Latinos comprised more than one third of all young children missed in North Carolina’s last census count.”

Since 1980, the net undercount of young children in the Census has worsened, while coverage of older children and adults has improved.¹⁷ This phenomenon has been attributed primarily to the fact that young children tend to

be more concentrated in hard-to-count families and communities where most people are missed in the count. Census Bureau data indicate that most young children missed in the Census are not counted because their entire family is not counted. In 2010, a young child was the only family member missed in only 16 percent of households.¹⁸

Family and Community Characteristics

North Carolina's young Latino children disproportionately live in areas with characteristics that make them difficult for the U.S. Census Bureau to count. An estimated 17.2 percent of North Carolina's Hispanic population lives in hard-to-count census tracts, placing them in the bottom 20 percent of return rates nationwide in the 2010 Census. "Hard to count" tracts are defined as those with mail return rates of 73 percent or less. These areas often share characteristics that lead to the need for additional enumeration after the date of the Census.

Hard-to-count tracts often have many complex housing units with a high proportion of renters and multi-unit buildings. These factors increase the difficulty of locating and accurately counting all residents. These complex units may include subdivided housing structures, or those where non-residential areas – such as garages – are used for housing. These tracts are also characterized by high poverty, and in North Carolina, children of color are more likely than their white peers to live in low-income households.¹⁹ Between 2012 and 2016, an estimated 65,321 Hispanic and Latino children lived in areas of concentrated poverty in the state. In 2017, Latino children accounted for 40 percent of North Carolina's children in poverty under age five.²⁰

In addition to complex housing, young Hispanics are more likely than their peers under age five to live in complex households. These homes can include three or more generations of a single family, more than one family in a

shared dwelling, and in some cases, one or several individuals without a specific attachment to any other residents.²¹ Members of complex households have been found more likely to rent, to have moved within the past year, to be poor, and to include adults who have difficulty speaking or understanding English.²² Under these circumstances, residents may avoid the perceived complication of filling out a Census form, and the entire household may be missed. In other cases, children might be deliberately unreported due to a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Census. Research conducted by the Census Bureau found that while Hispanic respondents believed the Bureau is interested in information about adults, they were slightly more likely than others to believe that the Bureau is uninterested in information regarding children.²³

Public Trust

Respondents' understanding of and trust in the Census process are likely to be issues in the 2020 Census and may have affected the historically high undercount of young Latino children in North Carolina. The majority of Latinos living in the state are U.S.-born citizens (59%), but there is a large population of foreign-born and recent immigrant residents who may be unfamiliar with the importance of and process for taking the Census.²⁴

Beyond this concern, there may be reluctance among Latino residents to share identifying information with the government. There are no reliable data on the issue, but if one or more members of a household are undocumented, a family may be reluctant to respond to the Census form to avoid attention from the government and potential deportation.²⁵

New Challenges of the 2020 Census

The Census Bureau will conduct Census 2020 in a dramatically different way than Census 2010. The changes to the format and funding of the Decennial Census will present unique challenges for the accurate count of young Latinos in North Carolina. New challenges include funding and staffing limitations that have decreased the Census Bureau's capacity and ability to thoroughly test the new approaches for Census 2020; a poorly-tested digital response format; and the potential inclusion of a costly question regarding respondents' citizenship. These challenges could significantly impair the ability of the Bureau to obtain an accurate and fair count of North Carolina's population in Census 2020.

Decreased Census Bureau Capacity

The Census occurs only once every ten years. As the largest peacetime mobilization in U.S. history, it requires a large amount of resources for the Census Bureau to carry out the complex tasks involved in accurately enumerating the nation's population. The U.S. Census Bureau must hire enumerators, conduct statistical analyses, test technology and operational systems, and provide local support to locate and count an estimated 327 million people in 119 million households.²⁶ This is a large and costly operation, and it typically involves a "ramp up" in Census funding and staffing in the years immediately preceding the enumeration.

For these reasons, Congress increased funding for Census preparation from 1997 through 2008. In 2014, however, Congress mandated that the 2020 Census be conducted as a lower cost per household than the 2010 Census, without adjusting for inflation.

Staff capacity is also a concern. Federal appropriations law generally requires most federal employees to be U.S. citizens. In Census 2010, the federal government interpreted exemptions in that law to permit legal

permanent residents or other work-authorized non-citizens to serve as Census staff. However, for Census 2020, the Administration has failed to provide this exemption, essentially creating a new requirement that all Census staff be U.S. citizens, which is limiting the available workforce of trusted messengers in hard-to-count communities. The Census Bureau is currently working to obtain permission to provide this exemption for Census 2020.

Compounding these issues, in FY 2017, Congress appropriated only \$1.47 billion for the Census Bureau, which was more than \$300 million short of the funding needed to begin effectively preparing for decennial operations during a crucial period for the "ramp-up" for Census 2020.

The Census Bureau has found several ways to cut costs in response to these constraints. In some cases, the Bureau has not been able to move forward with important tests which would help it understand whether the new approaches it is employing affect the accuracy of the data it collects. In other cases, the Bureau's cost-savings measure will likely have a direct negative impact on response rates in Latino households. These measures include:

- Cancelling two of three scheduled field tests in 2017, including one with Puerto Rico's mostly Spanish-speaking population;
- Delaying or reducing the scope of its communications and partnership activities, which are critical for mobilizing Latinos to respond to the Census;
- Reducing the number of its regional offices from twelve to six; the number of local offices from 500 to 250; and the number of enumerators from 516,000 to 300,000; and
- Conducting the first ever Decennial Census which promotes primarily online response.²⁷

In Federal FY2018, the omnibus appropriations legislation allotted a promising, but insufficient \$2.8 billion for the Census Bureau. The Administration's FY2019 budget request for the Bureau grew this investment to only \$3.1 billion for nationwide census preparations. To mirror previous funding cycles, funding for 2020 would need to be roughly double that amount in order to stay on target.²⁸ In 2020, the Decennial Census will attempt to count more people with less support than ever before.

Digital Divide

The 2020 Census will be the first ever conducted primarily online. Households will still be able to respond by mail, by phone, or to an enumerator who comes to their residence, but the Bureau intends to heavily promote online response. While this approach costs less to implement than the "hard-copy questionnaire" approach used in Census 2010, it also creates challenges for households which do not have consistent and reliable internet access.

Public Mistrust

In addition to the logistic complications of the 2020 Census, the upcoming count must contend with growing public distrust of government and data privacy. Respondents may worry that the primarily online format of the upcoming census will make it easier for individuals both within and outside of the government to obtain their personal information and use it in a manner that would harm them or their families.

“The goal of the Census is not to enumerate residents on the basis of their citizenship status.”

North Carolina's Latino residents will not be immune to concerns about the use of their information by the

government. Census Bureau representatives have already reported widespread expressions of fear and distrust among immigrants and communities of color in response to other surveys from the Bureau.²⁹ The choice of the current Administration to require an untested question of respondents' citizenship status will likely inhibit responses in Latino communities, and in others with a large proportion of immigrant householders. This in turn will require more enumerators to follow up at residences regarding incomplete census questionnaires, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary expense. Several lawsuits regarding the inclusion of a citizenship question have been filed in federal courts across the country. As of this writing, a federal judge in New York has ruled against the Administration's inclusion of a citizenship question and ordered that it be removed. This ruling is expected to be appealed and, ultimately, to come before the Supreme Court.

Recommendations

Ensuring the fairness, accuracy, and privacy of the 2020 Census count is imperative for families and children to be successful in North Carolina. The following recommendations are proposed to more effectively enumerate North Carolina's Hispanic and Latino population:

Fully fund Census preparation.

Experts believe that the Census Bureau requires FY2019 funding of \$4.7 billion, with at least \$3.9 billion allotted for 2020 Census operations. At the state level, North Carolina should allocate at least \$1 million in the FY2020 state budget toward a coordinated plan of education and outreach to communities statewide. The return on this investment – federal funds provided to the state as a result of an accurate count – would more than compensate the state annually for its “down payment” on education and

outreach. Other states have already appropriated funding toward this cause. North Carolina needs to ramp up census preparation soon to carry out robust communications and partnership efforts that will improve the state's ability to reach the hard-to-count.

Oppose the addition of a citizenship question.

The goal of the census is not to enumerate residents on the basis of their citizenship status. The U.S. Constitution mandates a count of the entire population of the United States to occur every ten years. Nowhere is citizenship mentioned. Based on the constitutional purpose of the Census, Congress should reject the expensive, untested, and unnecessary addition of the citizenship question. North Carolina elected officials, community members, civic leaders and members of the public should contact their Members of Congress to urge them to take action against the addition of the question.

Form Complete Count Committees.

Complete Count Committees are usually organized by tribal, state, or local governments and comprised of a broad spectrum of government and community leaders from education, business, healthcare, and other community organizations. These trusted voices develop and implement a 2020 Census awareness campaign based upon their knowledge of the local community.

To ensure an accurate count of the Hispanic population, local governments and community-based organizations in North Carolina should coordinate with the state-level Complete Count Commission to cultivate creative partnerships with Hispanic and Latino outreach organizations. The best way to do this is by establishing a local Complete Count Committee with a subcommittee or working group focused on improving the count of very young Latino children.

The group should include all departments, agencies, and community organizations that have contact with Hispanic and Latino families. Working collaboratively with the state-level Commission and other local Complete Count Committees, members should develop and implement an outreach plan to educate anyone who contacts their organizations about the need for a full count.

Communicating with Hispanic and Latino elected officials and trusted community partners is key to educating Latino residents about the purpose of the 2020 Census and the importance of making sure every member of every household is counted.

Working with and within Hispanic communities will also enable census advocates to create more accessible opportunities for Latinos to complete the census form online, and with any necessary support (i.e. Spanish language assistance). Although a smart phone version of the form will be available, mobile sites can also be set up at libraries, community centers, churches, and other places that are trusted by and accessible to Latinos.

Finally, because the census occurs only once every 10 years, it is not currently a top priority for policymakers and community and civic leaders. By partnering with local agencies and organizations frequented by families with young children, Complete Count Committees will be able to expand their reach to more families to make them aware of the 2020 Census and the impact it will have on North Carolina. A broad array of public and private entities can form or strengthen partnerships to reach Hispanic families with young children, including public assistance programs; institutions and organizations which work with new or expectant Latino mothers, such as hospitals and maternity services; child care providers and early childhood education programs; and other organizations familiar with the needs of undercounted communities.

National advocates recommend a “surround sound” approach, in which Latino families hear about the Census “from several sources and at several points in the lead-up to Census Day.”³⁰ Families should hear about the Census in both Spanish and English at church, recreational, and community events, and in restaurants, grocery stores, and early education centers. By incorporating Census 2020 education and trust-building into the daily lives of North Carolina’s Hispanic population, Complete Count Committees may help to avoid an undercount of young Latino children and ensure North Carolina’s future.

Conclusion

Hispanic children under age five are representative of some of the country’s hardest-to-count populations. North Carolina’s growing population provides an opportunity to enhance its prosperity and strengthen its democracy. We will forfeit this opportunity if we do not accurately enumerate the state’s young Latino children in the 2020 Census. North Carolina must act now to ensure the funding and coordination of census efforts that will encourage a full and accurate census count in 2020. If we fail to improve our efforts, the state stands to lose billions of dollars in funding, fair representation in Congress, and a decade’s worth of additional opportunity for children.

End Notes

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