

2020 Census Completion Rates: Frequently Asked Questions

What makes up the 99.9 percent total response rate?

As of October 16,¹ well over 99.9 percent of addresses nationwide have been accounted for in the 2020 Census, with 67.0 percent accounted for through self-response online, by phone or by mail, and 32.9 percent accounted for through our Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) operation. The self-response rate is higher than the final self-response rate for the 2010 Census. Over 99.9 percent of addresses have been resolved in 49 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The remaining state, Louisiana, was 99.0 percent complete as of October 16.

The majority of occupied housing units in the NRFU operation were completed by a census taker interviewing a member of the household. The balance were completed by interviews with proxy respondents or using high-quality administrative records.

As of October 16, approximately 24.1 percent of occupied housing units in the NRFU workload have been enumerated by proxy response, which is similar to the 2010 rate. As we continue to resolve cases and remove duplicate responses during data processing, we expect the 2020 final proxy rate to stay about the same or potentially decrease. (See below for more on the use of enumeration by proxy.)

As of October 16, approximately 5.6 percent of addresses nationwide have been completed using high-quality administrative

records, which is 13.9 percent of the NRFU workload. We use administrative records when census taker efforts to contact the housing unit are unsuccessful and our analysis shows very high confidence the administrative records are complete and correct. Completing 13.9 percent of the NRFU workload using administrative records is much lower than our expected 22.5 percent of cases with high-quality administrative records that would have been used if the first visit was not a successful enumeration or a self-response was not received. The use of administrative records to enumerate nonresponding households and resolve addresses is one of the Four Key Innovation Areas in the 2020 Census, and part of our 2020 Census Operations Plan.² (See below for more on the use of high-quality administrative records.)

How many enumerations were completed by proxy?

Each decade, the census uses “proxy responses” to account for some addresses that do not respond to the census. If census takers can’t get a response directly from a household after three visits (except where high-quality administrative records are available), they try to get information about the address from a proxy such as a neighbor, landlord, or building manager. Because COVID-19 delayed the start of census taker visits, we anticipated that we might need significantly more proxies this decade. However, we are pleased to report that the proxy rate is actually similar to the 2010 proxy rate. The 2010

¹ Data collection ended on October 15. The October 16 data reflects additional responses that have been processed, particularly the resolution of online responses submitted without a Census ID.

² 2020 Census Operational Plan, Version 4.0, Issued December 2018 at <<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/planning-docs/2020-oper-plan4.pdf>>.

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Census Nonresponse Followup Operations Assessment Report³ notes that 23.8 percent of the Nonresponse Followup interviews for occupied housing units were conducted using proxy respondents. As of October 16, approximately 24.1 percent of occupied housing units in the NRFU workload have been enumerated by proxy response, which is similar to the 2010 rate. We will provide a final proxy rate for the 2020 Census once we finish collecting and processing the data, as the U.S. Census Bureau has done for prior censuses. As we continue to resolve cases and remove duplicate responses during data processing, we expect the 2020 final proxy rate may even decrease.

How many enumerations were completed by use of administrative records?

This decade, a new and advanced feature of the 2020 Census design is the use of high-quality administrative records, when available, to count people who do not self-respond to the census. These include Internal Revenue Service (IRS) records, Medicare and Medicaid records, Social Security Administration information, and 2010 Census data. If a household doesn't respond after one or more census taker visits, we check to see if these data sources can provide the same information for that address. We use these existing data sources only if we are confident of their quality and accuracy for that household. Otherwise, we continue to visit the household and, if necessary, try to get information about the address from a neighbor.

As of October 16, approximately 5.6 percent of addresses nationwide have been resolved using high-quality administrative records, which is 13.9 percent of the NRFU workload.

What was the enumeration rate on American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) lands?

As of October 16, we have completed 99.77 percent of the NRFU workload on AIAN lands. We made progress even in areas closed due to COVID-19 by working with tribal leaders and coordinating permission for census takers to work on their lands or to do follow-up phone enumeration.

What quality measures do you provide to assess the accuracy of a decennial census?

Each census, we produce coverage estimates⁴ and conduct extensive assessments that we share with the public. We plan to do the same again following the 2020 Census; the completion rates are just early indicators.

There are two main ways of evaluating the quality of a census: comparing the results to other population totals and evaluating how well the process of conducting the census worked. As we do after every recent decennial census, the Census Bureau will share information from each method as it becomes available over the coming months and years. In terms of comparing the results to other population totals, the Census Bureau will produce estimates from Demographic Analysis in December 2020.

The Census Bureau is also currently conducting a Post-Enumeration Survey, which will give estimates of the undercount by demographic group and geography. The first results from this survey are expected in November 2021. Additional results are set to be released in February 2022. In terms of evaluating the process, the Census Bureau does extensive evaluations of how the census was conducted. These evaluations include data, such as the

³ 2010 Census Nonresponse Followup Operations Assessment Report at <<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2010/program-management/5-review/cpex/2010-memo-190.pdf>>.

⁴ More information about coverage estimates is available at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/coverage-measurement.html>.

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final proxy rate, that in many cases can be compared to previous decades.

We will release these evaluations as they become available; many won't be available until after the census response data has been processed.

What quality checks were done on proxy responses?

In accordance with the 2020 Census Operation Plan v.4 (Dec. 2018), all proxy interviews were subject to the same quality checks as any other census taker interviews. All cases were matched to administrative records as an initial check. In addition, a sample of proxy cases were interviewed again by a second census taker to check the quality of the original interview.

How many proxy respondents did a census taker contact for a nonresponding household?

Census takers first tried to contact a household directly. In accordance with the 2020 Census Operation Plan v.4 (Dec. 2018), if the census taker still couldn't get an interview on the third (and subsequent) attempt(s) to contact/visit the household, the census taker was instructed to contact up to three other people to try to get information about the household. If the first neighbor wasn't available or didn't know enough information, the census taker tried contacting a second proxy and then a third, if needed.

How did Hurricanes Laura and Delta affect NRFU in the state of Louisiana?

As a result of hurricanes Laura and Delta, many of the areas surrounding Lake Charles, LA, were restricted, and even in locations where the Census Bureau had limited access, a substantial portion of the population had not returned home. Lake Charles is part of the Shreveport ACO which completed 93.9 percent of their total NRFU workload.

The reports from the final day of data collection show a 0.4 percentage point increase in the total response rate for the state of Louisiana, from 98.6 percent to 99.0 percent.

We were able to complete the majority of NRFU production work in all parishes in Louisiana, through the tenacity of our field staff and excellent outreach by trusted voices on the ground promoting self-response. In all but four parishes in Louisiana, we were able to complete over 99.99 percent of the NRFU workload.

We had over 2,900 census takers working in the state, including 1,700 who traveled within and from outside of the state to help with enumeration. After Hurricane Laura, it was more than a month before the bulk of residents returned home to evacuated areas.

How did the total response rate for Louisiana increase 0.4 percentage points in one day?

This increase was primarily due to final close-out of cases eligible to be enumerated as occupied, vacant, or delete by administrative records. Our operational design was to enumerate cases as occupied, vacant, or delete using administrative records after a specified number of visits (i.e., one or six visits depending on case type). However, as we ended the NRFU operation, some cases in Louisiana that were eligible for administrative records enumeration had not reached the minimum visit thresholds due to the challenges from hurricanes Laura and Delta. We allowed the cases to be enumerated via administrative records since it wasn't possible to conduct the additional visits. Our administrative records enumeration strategy ensures that cases for which we have high-quality administrative records are enumerated more accurately using those records than they otherwise would have been in post data collection processing.

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