

Presentation on the Findings and Recommendations of the American Statistical Association Task Force on 2020 Census Quality Indicators

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Conclusions

1. Indicators released to date by the Bureau do not permit a thorough assessment of the 2020 Census data quality. For example, the percentage of completed enumerations in a state is not sufficient to draw conclusions about the quality of the count. Although the Task Force proposed a variety of possible indicators about census operations that could help evaluate the quality and accuracy of the data more quickly and thoroughly than in previous censuses, thus far, only a limited set of indicators have been publicly released, and the task force only had access to state-level indicators that are composed of process statistics; that is, statistics about the conduct of various 2020 Census operations.
2. Despite concerns that census numbers could be jeopardized by political interference, the Task Force found no evidence of anything other than an independent and professional enumeration process by the Census Bureau. The Bureau appropriately delayed release of data products to ensure careful review and processing of the data and according to Bureau quality standards.
3. Across the limited set of state-level process statistics evaluated by the Task Force, we find no major anomalies that would indicate census numbers are not fit for use for purposes of apportionment.
4. Our ability to more thoroughly evaluate the quality, accuracy, and coverage of the 2020 Census has been hampered by limits on available information and research. Many of the proposed indicators could not be calculated because household characteristics data were not yet available. For several of the process statistics calculated, the Task Force has not found research that provides a clear enough understanding of their implications for erroneous or incomplete enumerations.
5. The set of process statistics evaluated by the Task Force is relevant for evaluating the quality of census numbers for apportionment, but not for redistricting or distribution of federal funds. These and other assessments require scrutiny at more detailed levels of geography and for subgroups of the population.

Recommendations

1. The Census Bureau is to be commended for entering into work with the National Academy of Sciences Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) and other experts to conduct a more thorough assessment of 2020 Census data quality. This evaluation should expand the set of process statistics the Task Force's outside experts accessed and should examine patterns at more detailed levels of geography (e.g., census tracts) and for population subgroups. The evaluation should scrutinize the increase in missing household characteristics, the new procedures for counting overseas population, the late-breaking changes in methods for using administrative records to enumerate nonresponding households, increased uses of imputation including for group quarters, and prompt determination of any increase in undercount of Blacks, Hispanics, and children relative to 2010 based on Demographic Analysis.
2. Planning for the 2030 Census should incorporate explicit attention to evaluating and reporting on data quality. In particular the Census Bureau needs to invest in the research necessary to enable the use of process statistics for evaluating data quality before apportionment counts are released for future censuses. The historic approach to census quality assessments (e.g., coverage assessments based on the post-enumeration survey) happens long after the release of census data products, but this is no longer sufficient as process statistics and other data can be available much sooner.

10 Process Indicators

MAF Development

1. MAF revisions

Self Response

2. Questionnaires without identification (ID) not on MAF (Non-Matching No IDs)
3. Multiple responses
4. Usual Residence at College

Nonresponse Follow Up

5. Responses obtained by proxy
6. Enumerations with only a population count (Count Only)
7. Enumerations with Administrative Records

Data Processing

8. MAF addresses having imputed status (Status Imputation)
9. Occupied housing units with imputed population counts (Count Imputation)

Group Quarters

10. Group Quarters with imputed counts (GQ Imputation)

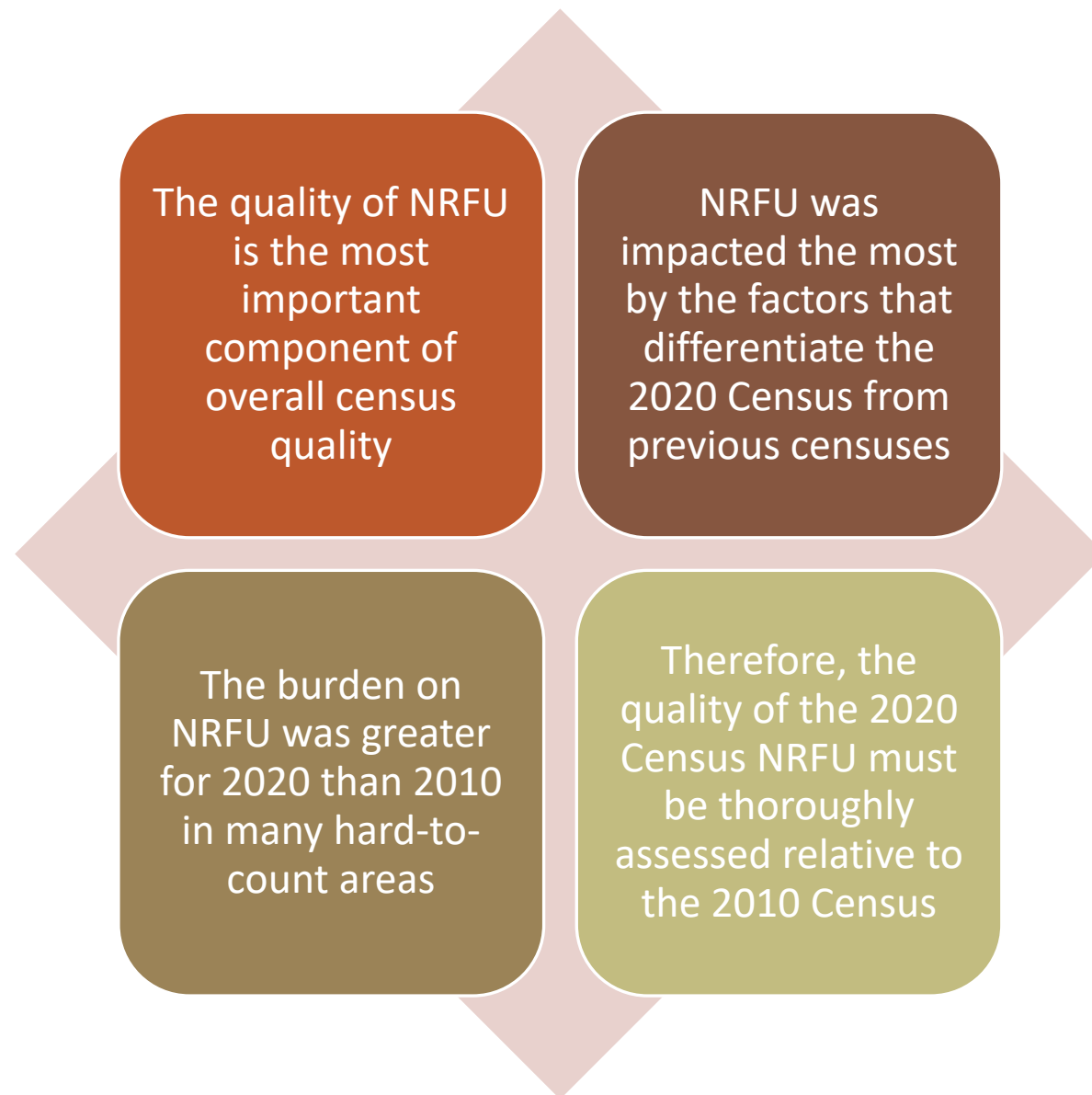
Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU)

Two factors have impacted the 2020 Census much more than previous censuses

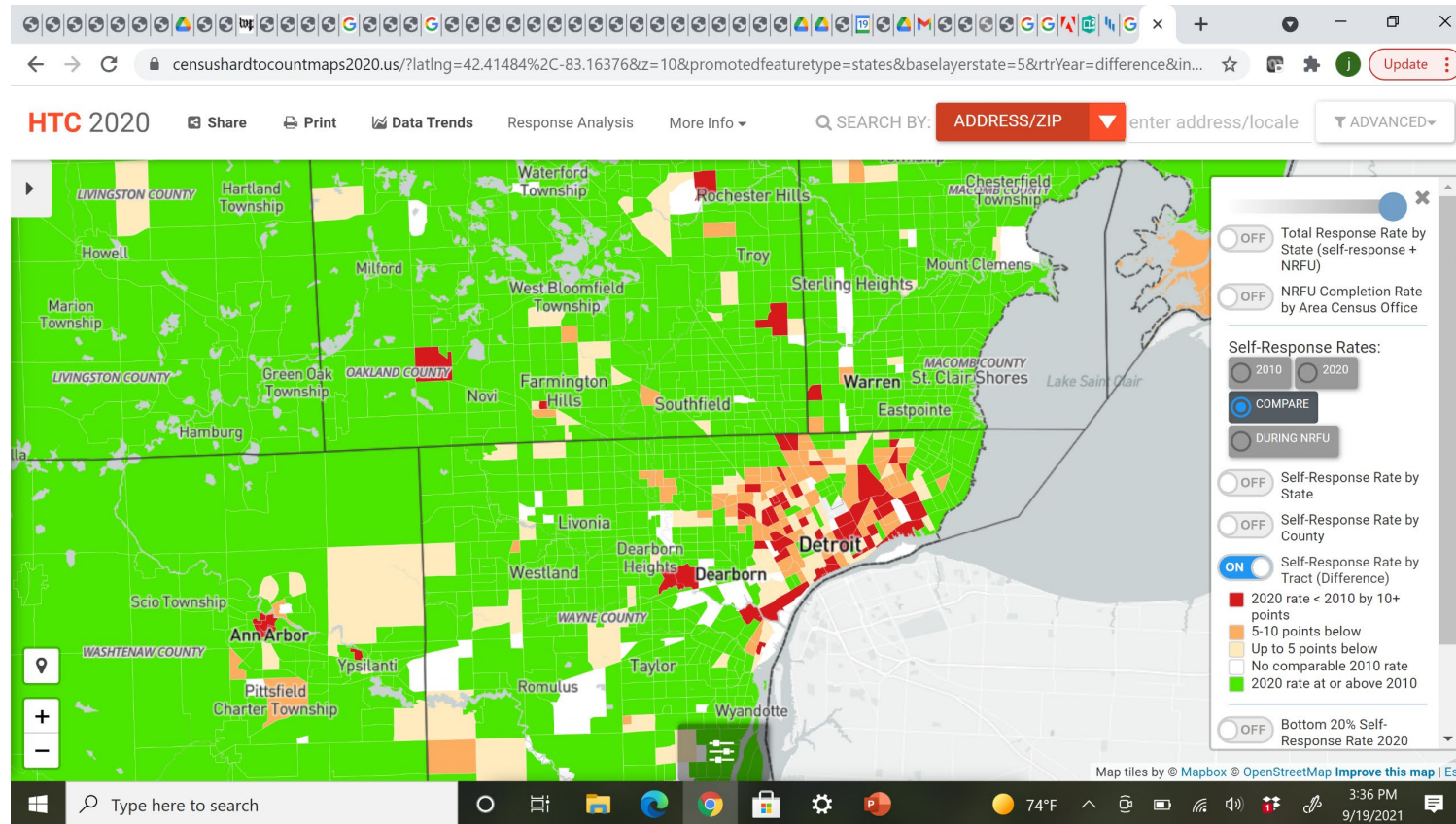
- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Unprecedented attempts to politicize the 2020 Census
 - Citizenship question
 - Truncation of the schedule for NRFU
 - Exclusion of undocumented persons from apportionment
 - Appointment of high-level political officials

Important to assess the effects of these factors on the 2020 Census relative to the 2010 Census

Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU)



CUNY Hard to Count Map September 19, 2021



Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU)

Potential Assessment Strategy:



Develop the 2020 and 2010 process statistics relevant to NRFU (5, 6, 8, and 9) for census tracts



For census tracts where self-response was lower in 2020 than 2010, determine whether the process statistics are systematically higher in 2020 than in 2010. Furthermore, are differences between 2020 and 2010 process statistics correlated to differences between 2020 and 2010 self-response rates.



Conduct a similar analysis for census tracts where the self-response rate was higher in 2020 than in 2010.

Missing Data

Missing data rates were higher in 2020 than 2010

Understanding the causal effects underlying this phenomenon would be very helpful for developing mitigation strategies for future data collection operations

However, this may be beyond the scope and available resources for the Panel

Administrative Records

Difficult to Assess Quality -Two areas in particular need further research:

Quality Thresholds: What thresholds were actually used at the end of the census? How are they being evaluated for accuracy and coverage?

Demographic Characteristics: should be (1) matched against the PES when it becomes available, if the PES is of sufficient quality; and (2) compared with the underlying characteristics of the local area from the census

Demographic Analysis

Modified Race File needs to be prepared and released sooner, rather than later.

Several areas to explore regarding potential undercounts

2030 Census Planning

Census should tie the process indicators more closely to quality (develop quantitative measures)

Then, in 2030, the quality measurement data could be produced in real time

- Provide feedback to partners and to managers of census field operations in time to focus resources
- Help inform fitness for use when apportionment and redistricting data are released instead of years later.

Questions and Discussion