## Local Snapshots: Asian American Case Studies

Case studies allow us to examine the quality of the decennial census count for the Asian American community at a more detailed scale. Asian Americans comprise just over 7\% of the population of the United States, but they are not distributed evenly geographically. We selected four locations with sizable or distinctive Asian American communities. Our first case study, Los Angeles County, California has one of the largest populations of Asian Americans in the United States. Second, King County, Washington has seen rapid growth of the Asian American population. Our third case study, Houston, is distinctive not only for its growth, but also given the large Vietnamese and Asian Indian populations. Finally, we examine the five counties that make up New York City (NYC). We chose NYC given the long history of Asian Americans in the city and the significant Bangladeshi concentration here.

## Common Findings: Census Coverage and Self-Response

Throughout the report we discuss how the recent net overcounts for the Asian American population do not mean that the Asian American population was overcounted everywhere. Our case studies reinforce this conclusion. In some of our local snapshots we find undercounts for the Asian American community, while in others we find overcounts. These coverage errors changed over time-in fact, before 2000 the Asian American population was undercounted. Put another way, in one decennial census an area may have experienced a net overcount, while in another they experienced a net undercount.

Below, we outline the key findings and avenues for future research across all of our case studies before analyzing each case study individually.

## Key Findings

At the national level, the census appears to have overcounted Asian Americans. States with large Asian American populations-including California and New York-were especially likely to have overcounts. But Asian Americans were not overcounted everywhere. For example, our case studies show undercounts for both Los Angeles County and King County, Washington (for the Asian Alone population only in 2020).

Future research should focus on improving our understanding of these coverage issues by attending to which data source is causing the error, as well as why it is occurring.

## Impact of Age on Census Accuracy

Comparing our case studies to the national average reveals where specific age groups don't follow national patterns.

The Asian American Alone population experienced a noticeable national undercount of young children ages 0-4 (Alone or in Combination did not experience a national undercount for these ages). All our case studies also show an undercount of young children for the Asian Alone population, and most of the case studies show an undercount for young children for the Asian Alone or in Combination population. This shows how persistent the undercount of young children is.

We also find that for older children and young adults (ages 10-29), there is a larger average overcount than in any other age group. This is the case in nearly all of our case studies, and holds for both the Alone and the Alone or in Combination population.
Adults (ages 30-64) are closest to net zero coverage error on average. Again, these findings generally hold for our case studies, with some interesting exceptions. King County in Washington and some of NYC's counties show interesting patterns for some ages within this span. Ages 65 and above have net undercounts on average. Some of our case studies follow this pattern, while others do not.

More research is needed to better understand these age patterns. Are there differences based on how much is spent on outreach? Is outreach more effective when it's done by members of the impacted group, and does the timing of the outreach matter? Perhaps there are differences in the subgroups that make up each of these age cohorts in these different geographic locations. Additional research is needed to answer these questions.

## Self-Response: Impact of Contextual Variables

Contextual variables-including citizenship status, housing tenure, and English language ability—are thought to impact self-response rates. Self-response provides valuable insight into where people are, and are not, responding to the census. Researchers have hypothesized that self-response rates correlate with overall census accuracy even though self-response rates are not technically a direct measure of decennial census accuracy. ${ }^{97}$

Our case studies are limited in what we can say about the relationship between census quality and self-response generally. Places like Los Angeles County, which had lower response rates in areas with larger Asian American populations, experienced an undercount in 2020. King County, Washington also experienced an undercount in 2020 despite having higher self-response rates (both overall and in areas with larger Asian

American populations) than the national average. Places like New York City, which had many areas of low self-response rates, experienced overcounts in 2020. In sum, some of our case studies suggest a relationship between self-response rates and census quality, while others do not.

Regardless of any correlation, self-response is important because it is the highest quality response type-thus, knowing self-response rates is a critical first step in planning on how to best improve self-response in our communities. We find some evidence of the potential impact of citizenship status, housing tenure, and English language ability on self-response, but none are supported all the time.

In general, census tracts with large, non-citizen Asian American populations tend to experience lower self-response than other census tracts.

More research is needed to better understand how self-response impacts overall census quality for the Asian American population, which also requires the Census Bureau to begin providing measures of self-response by race. Additional research can help show the extent to which self-response impacts overall census quality, and if it does so differentially by race, ethnicity, age, or sex. Moreover, while housing tenure and English language ability do seem to have some impact on self-response, more data are needed to better define the relationship between these factors and self-response. ${ }^{98}$ Experts should study what other contextual variables impact self-response rates.

In order to undertake this research, more geographically granular measures of census quality are sorely needed. ${ }^{99}$ For instance, being able to examine how self-response correlates with net coverage error at the county or city level can tell us a lot more than the state or national levels. Lastly, researchers should study why factors such as housing tenure, citizenship, and English language ability impact self-response and whether other variables may also affect self-response rates in Asian American communities.


## LOS ANGELES COUNTY ASIAN POPULATION



TOP 10 ASIAN SUBGROUPS
Alone or in Combination 2020


Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2020

Asian Americans make up approximately $15 \%$ of the 10 million people who live in the incredibly diverse and geographically large Los Angeles County ${ }^{100}$-where the percentage in the county is more than double the percentage of the Asian American population in the United States overall. ${ }^{101}$ The graphics below provide data on Los Angeles County, comparing Los Angeles's Asian American community to the rest of the nation.

Based on PA, Los Angeles County had a potential overcount in 2010, but then flipped to a potential undercount in $\mathbf{2 0 2 0}$ for the Asian Alone population.

|  | Coverage | Asian Alone | Asian Alone or in Combination |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 2000* | Population Estimates | 1,285,291 | 1,285,291 |
|  | Census Population | 1,207,397 | 1,311,755 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 6.3\% undercount | 2.0\% overcount |
| 2010 | Population Estimates | 1,327,782 | 1,433,295 |
|  | Census Population | 1,393,578 | 1,311,755 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 4.8\% overcount | 6.9\% overcount |
| 2020 | Population Estimates | 1,495,320 | 1,630,180 |
|  | Census Population | 1,489,041 | 1,639,661 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 0.4\% undercount | 0.6\% overcount |

HOUSING TENURE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY

| Asian Alone 2020 |  | Los Angeles County | California | United States |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Housing Tenure | Homeowners | 54\% | 60\% | 60\% |
|  | Renters | 46\% | 40\% | 40\% |
| Native Born | Overall | 35\% | 38\% | 35\% |
|  | LEP** (ages 5+) | 7\% | 7\% | 7\% |
| Foreign Born | Overall | 65\% | 62\% | 65\% |
|  | LEP** (ages 5+) | 53\% | 47\% | 43\% |
|  | Naturalized Citizen | 66\% | 65\% | 59\% |
|  | Non-Citizen | 34\% | 35\% | 47\% |

[^0][^1]
## IMPACT OF AGE ON CENSUS ACCURACY

- The undercount of young children is higher for the Asian American Alone group in Los Angeles County than in the United States as a whole. While national data shows a slight overcount for young children in the Asian American Alone or in Combination group, there is an undercount of them in Los Angeles County.
- The error of closure is very close to zero in Los Angeles County for ages 30-34, while a significant Asian American overcount occurs for the same group for the United States as a whole.
- The undercount of the older population in Los Angeles County is smaller than it is in the country as a whole.



## SELF-RESPONSE RATES

- Areas with relatively large Asian American populations in the 2020 Census had relatively high response rates. This measure reveals why the Asian American count should be relatively good in Los Angeles County.
- When a tract has an Asian American population of $50 \%$ or more, we consistently see self-response rates over $50 \%$, with most near 75\%.

Response Rate by Census Tract


Source: United States Census Bureau, Tract Level Response Rates, 2020. Note: Census tracts in white indicate no self response data reported.

## CITIZENSHIP

- Some evidence suggests that citizenship status may have impacted response rates. Census tracts with a lower level of response among the Asian American population tended to have more noncitizens.

Response Rate by County Tract
Percentage of Asian Alone Population and Citizenship: 2020


Non-Citizen Population
Asian Alone 2020


A relatively large Asian American community lives in King County-the largest county in Washington State that includes Seattle and several of its suburbs. According to the 2020 Census, Asian Americans are 23.3\% of the population of the county-where more than $2,269,675$ people (or $29.5 \%$ of Washington State's population) reside.

Because the Asian American community in King County is similar to the national Asian American community on most measures (including ethnicity, renter/owner proportions, and English language ability), we expect similar net coverage patterns to national averages. While there are some differences in the distribution of coverage by age, like the national average, King County showed an estimated overcount in both the 2010 and 2020 Censuses.

Based on PA, King County had a potential overcount in 2010, but then flipped to a potential undercount in 2020 for the Asian Alone Population.

| Coverage |  | Asian Alone | Asian Alone or in Combination |
| :---: | ---: | :---: | :---: |
| 2000* | Population Estimates | 189,340 | 189,340 |
|  | Census Population | 201,237 | 234,030 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | $\mathbf{6 . 1 \%}$ overcount | $\mathbf{2 1 . 1 \%}$ overcount |
| $\mathbf{2 0 1 0}$ | Population Estimates | 276,018 | 312,682 |
|  | Census Population | 286,648 | 333,338 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | $\mathbf{3 . 8 \%}$ overcount | $\mathbf{6 . 4 \%}$ overcount |
|  | Population Estimates | 457,740 | 519,071 |
|  | Census Population | 453,230 | 527,853 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | $\mathbf{1 . 0 \%}$ undercount | $\mathbf{1 . 7 \%}$ overcount |

HOUSING TENURE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY

| Asian Alone 2020 |  | King County | Washington | United States |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Housing Tenure | Homeowners | 58\% | 62\% | 60\% |
|  | Renters | 42\% | 38\% | 40\% |
| Native Born | Overall | 33\% | 34\% | 35\% |
|  | LEP** (ages 5+) | 6\% | 6\% | 7\% |
| Foreign Born | Overall | 67\% | 66\% | 65\% |
|  | LEP** (ages 5+) | 40\% | 41\% | 43\% |
|  | Naturalized Citizen | 50\% | 54\% | 59\% |
|  | Non-Citizen | 50\% | 46\% | 41\% |

**LEP (Limited English Proficiency): those who speak English "less than very well"
Source: ACS 2020


TOP 10 ASIAN SUBGROUPS
Alone or in Combination 2020


30\%

Source: ACS 2020
*For the data from 2000, the estimated population numbers come from the 1990 population estimates-before the census offered the option to select multiple races. For the first time in 2000, the census allowed respondents to select multiple races. Therefore, while we cannot differentiate between Alone and Alone or in Combination for the Population Estimates, we can make that differentiation for the census population.

## IMPACT OF AGE ON CENSUS ACCURACY

- King County and the United States as a whole have almost identical undercount rates for the young (ages 0-4) Asian American Alone population.
- There is a significant overcount that is much larger than the national average for the young (ages 0-4) Asian Alone or in Combination population. One potential reason for this could include people reporting race differently between birth certificates and the decennial census. ${ }^{102}$ Specifically, they might only report one race (not Asian) on birth certificates while reporting multiple races (including Asian) on the decennial census. These children could be duplicates in the decennial census or miscounted for other reasons.



## SELF-RESPONSE RATES

- Few tracts overall have response rates below 50\%.
- There is not a strong pattern between response rates and the percentage of a tract population that is Asian American. While some areas with a relatively large proportion of Asian Americans have very high response rates, others have low response rates relative to the King County average of 77\%. There are relatively lower rates in the eastern part of King County, in southern King County, and up into downtown Seattle.

Response Rate by Census Tract


Source: United States Census Bureau, Tract Level Response Rates, 2020 Note: Census tracts in white indicate no self response data reported.

## CITIZENSHIP

- Census tracts that have a higher proportion of Asian Americans and have a higher percentage of non-citizen Asian Americans tend to self-respond at lower rates than places with more Asian Americans that are citizens.

Response Rate by County Tract
Percentage of Asian Alone
Population and Citizenship: 2020


Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Tract Level Response Rates (2020), and ACS (2016-2020).


## HARRIS COUNTY ASIAN POPULATION



TOP 10 ASIAN SUBGROUPS
Alone or in Combination 2020


Source: ACS 2020

[^2]
## IMPACT OF AGE ON CENSUS ACCURACY

- The estimated coverage error by age for the Asian Alone population in Harris County is similar to the national average.
- The estimated overcount is higher for the young adult population (ages 15-29), and the undercount for the oldest population (ages 85 and above) isn't quite as large.
- For the Asian Alone or in Combination population, the pattern compared to the national average is similar for all groups except the youngest (ages 0-4). In Harris County there is an estimated undercount, compared to a slight overcount at the national level. This means that in the 2010 Census, fewer children were identified as Asian (Alone or in Combination) than in birth records.



## SELF-RESPONSE RATES

- Areas with higher proportions of Asian Americans generally have higher response rates, with a few exceptions.
- Low and high response rates are not distributed evenly across the county.
- Many of the lower response rates are clustered around downtown, in part of northern Harris County, and sprinkled in a few areas in both the east and west.

Response Rate by Census Tract


Source: United States Census Bureau, Tract Level Response Rates, 2020. Note: Census tracts in white indicate no self response data reported.

## CITIZENSHIP

- There is a clear correlation between citizenship and response rates for Asian Americans in Harris County.

Response Rate by County Tract
Percentage of Asian Alone
Population and Citizenship: 2020


Non-Citizen Population Asian Alone 2020


## NEW YORK CITY ASIAN POPULATION



## TOP 10 ASIAN SUBGROUPS

Alone or in Combination 2020

*For the data from 2000, the estimated population numbers come from the 1990 population estimates-before the census offered the option to select multiple races. For the first time in 2000, the census allowed respondents to select multiple races. Therefore, while we cannot differentiate between Alone and Alone or in Combination for the Population Estimates, we can make that differentiation for the census population.

## County-Level Demographics

## PA Analysis, Housing Tenure and English Language Ability

## Bronx

Population: 1,472,654


Brooklyn
Population: 2,736,074

## Asian Alone 2020

## Asian Alone 2020

|  | Foreign |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Born |  | Overall | LEP |
| :---: |
| (ages 5+) | | Naturalized |
| :---: |
| Citizen |$\quad$| Non- |
| :---: |
| Citizen |

Source: ACS 2020

| Coverage: New York County |  | Asian Alone | Asian Alone or in Combination |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 2000* | Population Estimates | 169,637 | 169,637 |
|  | Census Population | 151,033 | 162,381 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 11.6\% undercount | 4.4\% undercount |
| 2010 | Population Estimates | 184,390 | 195,662 |
|  | Census Population | 184,345 | 203,376 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 0.02\% undercount | 3.9\% overcount |
| 2020 | Population Estimates | 204,630 | 222,556 |
|  | Census Population | 222,265 | 250,582 |
|  | Net Coverage (\%) | 8.3\% overcount | 11.9\% overcount |

## Queens

Population: 2,405,464


## Staten Island

Population: 495,747

Asian Alone 2020


## IMPACT OF AGE ON CENSUS ACCURACY

- All counties show an estimated undercount of young (ages 0-4) Asian American children (both for the Alone as well as the Alone or in Combination population). In the United States nationally, there is not an undercount among the Asian American Alone or in Combination population ages 0-4.
- For Richmond County (Staten Island), there is a much larger undercount for young children (ages 0-9) than for the rest of the boroughs or the United States as a whole. New York County (Manhattan) has a much larger estimated overcount for the young adult population than the other boroughs or the United States nationally.

Asian Alone Coverage by Age Group: 2010


Source: Authors' calculations using United States Census Bureau decennial census and postcensal population estimates data for 2010.

Asian Alone or in Combination Coverage by Age Group: 2010


[^3]- The overall variability of response rates by tract is fairly high in New York City overall. Tracts with more Asian Americans also vary in their response rates.
- The relationship between the proportion of Asian Americans in a tract and selfresponse seems to be non-linear. That is, in tracts where 50-60\% of the population is Asian American, the response rate tends to be very high. There are declines in self-response in tracts where more than 70\% of the population is Asian American.

Response Rate by Census Tract: 2020


Source: United States Census Bureau, Tract Level Response Rates, 2020. Note: Census tracts in white indicate no self response data reported.

- Clusters of low self-response rates exist in each of the boroughs, and tend to cluster more in Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn.


## CITIZENSHIP

- The Asian American non-citizen community is not evenly distributed throughout New York City.
- Some of the areas with relatively high non-citizen populations are also areas with relatively low self-response rates.
- There is evidence of citizenship impacting Asian American response rates. We can see that in tracts with lower response rates with Asian Americans that the population tends to be a higher proportion of non-citizens.

Non-Citizen Asian Alone Population


Response Rate by Census Tract Percentage of Asian Alone Population and Citizenship State: 2020


[^4]
[^0]:    **LEP (Limited English Proficiency): those who speak English "less than very well"

[^1]:    *For the data from 2000, the estimated population numbers come from the 1990 population estimates-before the census offered the option to select multiple races. For the first time in 2000, the census allowed respondents to select multiple races. Therefore, while we cannot differentiate between Alone and Alone or in Combination for the Population Estimates, we can make that differentiation for the census population.

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[^3]:    Source: Authors' calculations using United States Census Bureau decennial census and postcensal population estimates data for 2010.

[^4]:    Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Tract Level Response Rates (2020), and ACS (2016-2020).

