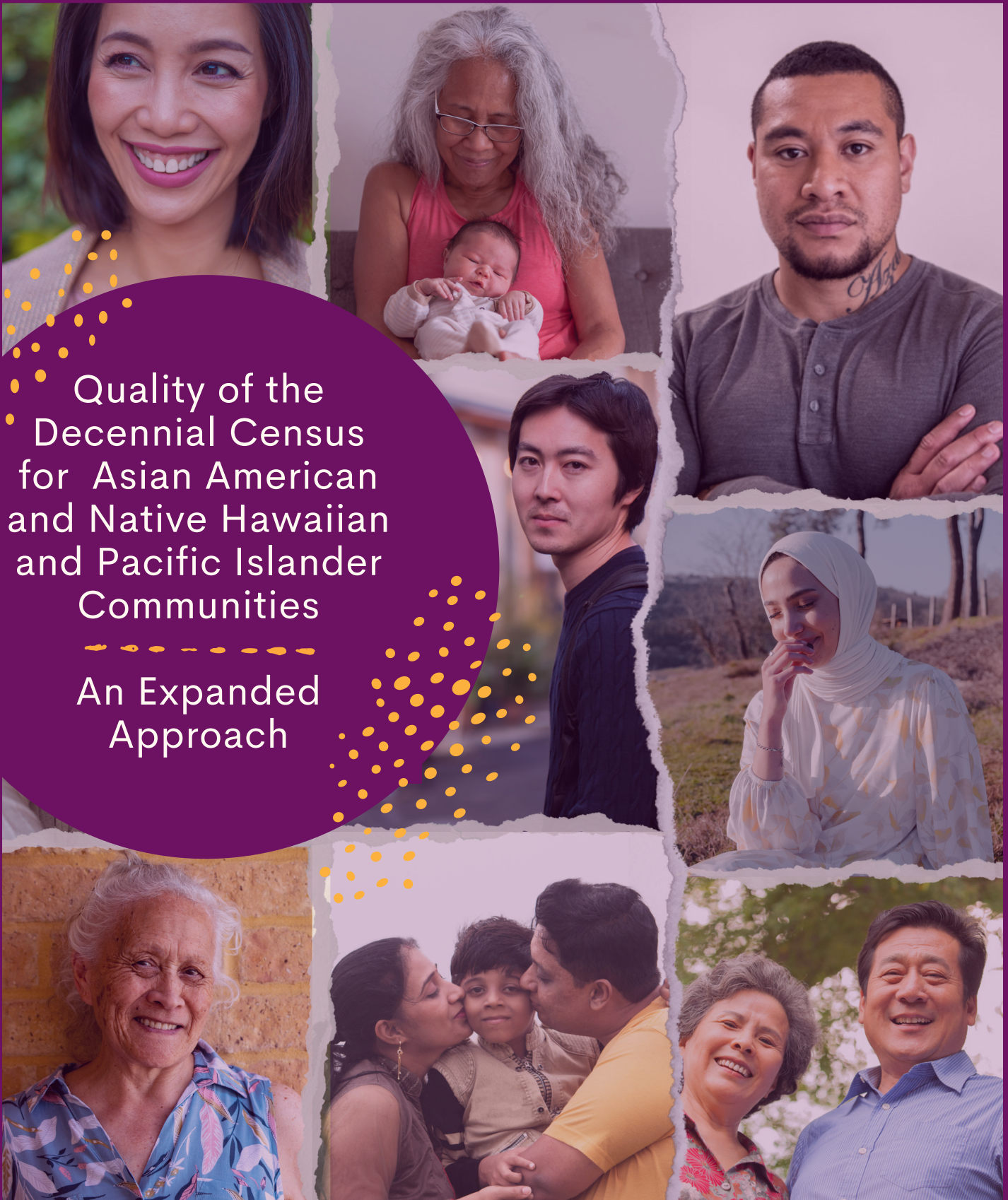


Executive Summary



Quality of the
Decennial Census
for Asian American
and Native Hawaiian
and Pacific Islander
Communities

An Expanded
Approach



ASIAN AMERICANS
ADVANCING
JUSTICE
AAJC



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYTICS
ADVISORS



Executive Summary

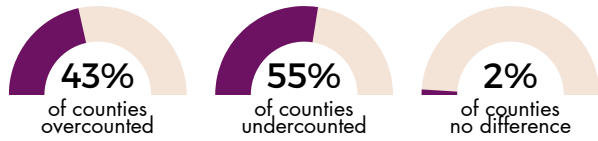
The census is the foundation of our democracy. The U.S. Constitution mandates census data collection to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and to redraw district lines at all levels of government. The government also uses census data to distribute federal and state funding. Despite the central importance an accurate decennial census plays in our democracy, the census lacks data on census coverage for Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities at geographies below the national level.

While Asian American and NHPI communities were overcounted nationally, some states had undercounts in both 2010 and 2020. This is a problem because, despite a reported national overcount of these communities in 2020, some Asian American and NHPI communities were still undercounted at lower levels of geography. Moreover, these overcounts and undercounts were not evenly distributed geographically, as shown in Figure i, or in terms of age, as seen in Figures ii and iii.

While both Asian American and NHPI communities were overcounted in the 2010 and 2020 Censuses, most counties were actually undercounted. This tells us that the counties with reported estimated overcounts had substantially larger overcounts of Asian American or NHPI communities than counties that were undercounted. For small communities, including the NHPI community, no single method can currently provide reliable measures of coverage. Further work is required to create more stable estimates of coverage for this group.

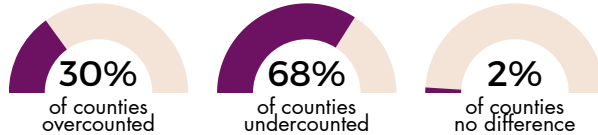
Figure i

2000 Census Accuracy: AANHPI Alone

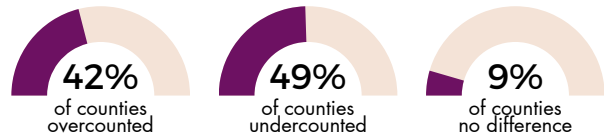


Asian Americans and NHPs were overcounted or had net coverage that was not statistically different from zero in the 2000, 2010, and 2020 Censuses at the national level. However, in each decade more counties were actually undercounted than overcounted.

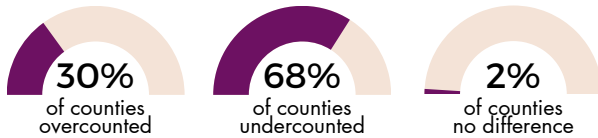
2010 Census Accuracy: Asian Alone



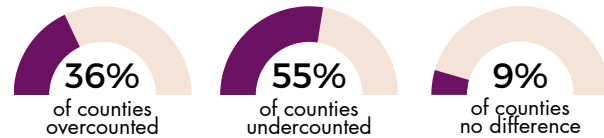
2010 Census Accuracy: NHPI Alone



2020 Census Accuracy: Asian Alone



2020 Census Accuracy: NHPI Alone

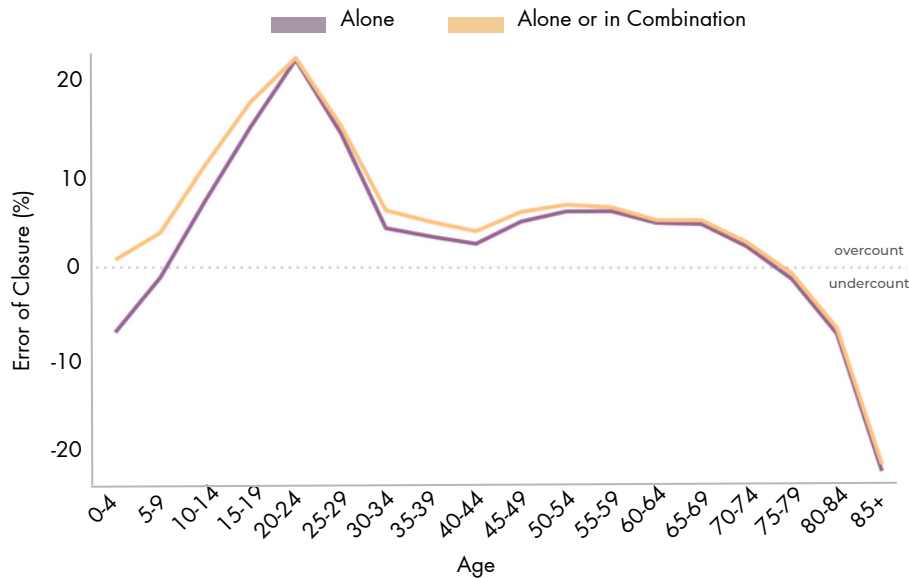


Source: Authors' calculations using United States Census Bureau decennial census and postcensal population estimates data for 2000, 2010, and 2020.

Figure ii

Coverage by Age Group, 2010

Asian American, Alone and Alone or in Combination Populations



Source: Authors' calculations using United States Census Bureau decennial census and postcensal population estimates data for 2000, 2010, and 2020.

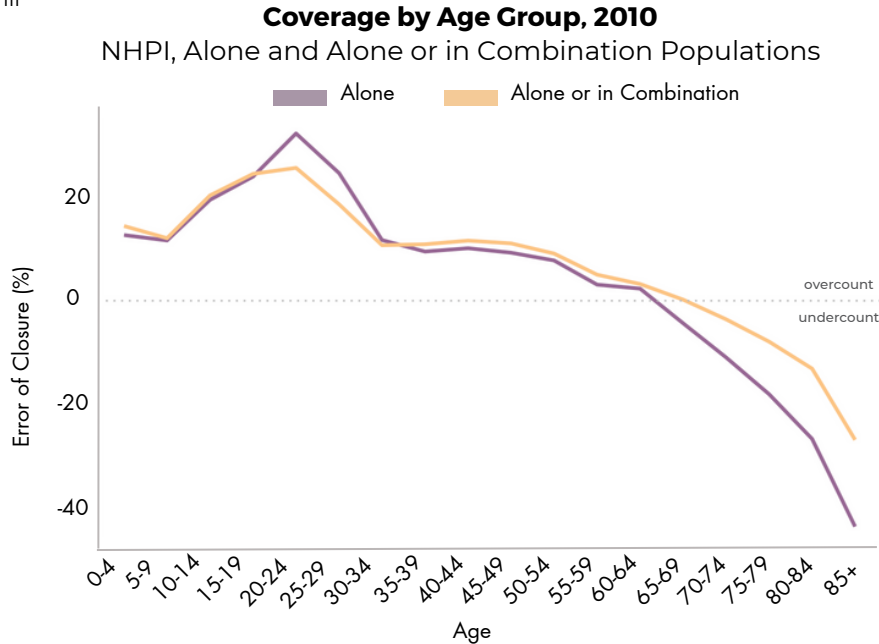
Asian American coverage differs significantly by age. Undercounts exist for the youngest (ages 0–4) and oldest (ages 75 and over), while young adults and working age adults are persistently overcounted.

Alone or Alone in Combination?

To capture the growing biracial and multiracial population, people can check more than one of the available races when filling out the Census.

The Census Bureau describes this as either “Race Alone” or “Race Alone or in Combination.” Whenever we use Race Alone, we mean those who only marked the specific race category. When we say Race Alone or in Combination, we mean anyone who marked that specific race category, regardless of what other races they may have also selected.

Figure iii



Source: Authors' calculations using United States Census Bureau decennial census and postcensal population estimates data for 2000, 2010, and 2020.

NHPI coverage differs significantly by age. The oldest (ages 65 and above) are undercounted, while all other ages are persistently overcounted. This is significant because, unlike other race groups, there is not an undercount of young NHPI children.

Key Findings

1. Census Coverage for Asian Americans and NHPs: Despite a national overcount of Asian Americans and NHPs, some Asian Americans and NHPs were still undercounted.

The national overcount of Asian Americans and NHPs masked important variation in Asian American and NHP coverage. Significant overcounts in some places concealed undercounts in others. When Asian American and NHP communities are undercounted, they not only lose political representation, they also miss out on valuable resources that would have otherwise been directed towards their communities.

2. Response Rates and Geography: Not all Asian American and NHP communities respond to the census at the same rate; instead, response rates vary geographically.

While Asian American and NHP communities were overcounted *nationally*, some *states* had undercounts in both 2010 and 2020. Some states in the Mountain West and in the South showed potential

undercounts for Asian Americans, while states on the coasts, in the Upper Midwest, and in the Southwest generally showed estimated overcounts for the same group. Similarly, many states with high NHPI populations followed the national pattern with estimated overcounts in both 2010 and 2020. However, there were potential NHPI undercounts in some states in the Upper Midwest, the Northeast, and the South. If we dig down to the county level, we even saw some counties with large NHPI communities, such as Los Angeles and Hawaii counties, showing estimated undercounts in 2020. These unexpected differences could be due to many factors, including the fact that populations in these areas tend to be more mobile, more likely to be renters, and in some cases have a higher proportion of non-citizens.

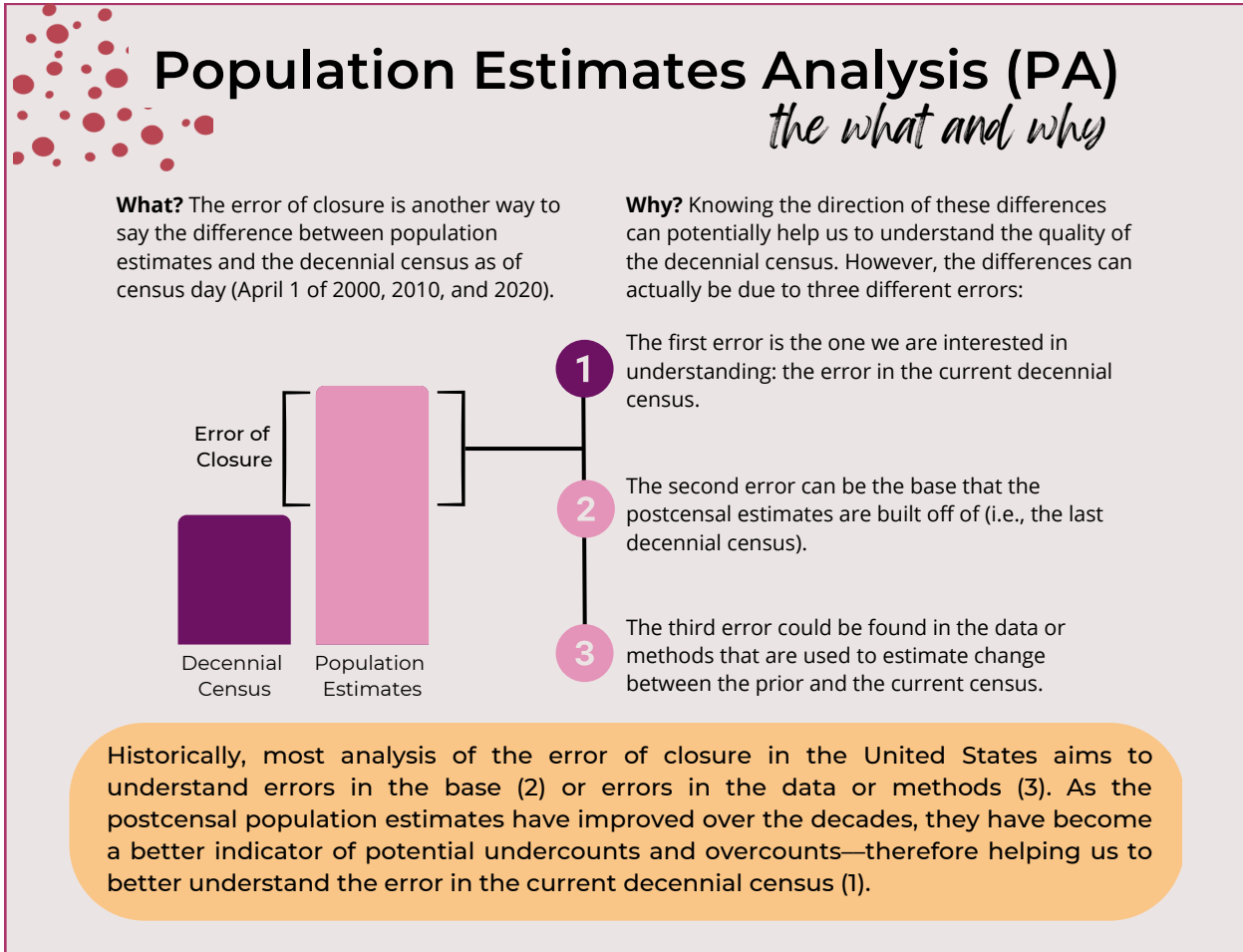
3. Coverage Errors and Age: Net coverage errors do vary by age for Asian Americans and NHPIs.

The undercount of young children common in other racial and ethnic groups also exists among Asian Americans, though it is not evenly distributed throughout the country. In contrast, NHPI young children are not undercounted. Additional research should be conducted to determine why.

How We Measure the Accuracy of Asian American and NHPI Census Counts

We uncover Asian American and NHPI undercounts by utilizing a methodology that compares postcensal population estimates—the official population number for the United States in every year that does not have a decennial census—to decennial census data. We call this approach Population Estimates Analysis (PA) (See Figure iv). This allows us to identify the geographic distribution of potential overcounts and undercounts for Asian American and NHPI communities, illustrated by Figure iv. In so doing, we build upon traditional measures of census quality such as Demographic Analysis (DA) and Post-Enumeration Surveys (PES). DA, long touted as the only truly independent measure of decennial census quality, fails to provide any data on Asian American and NHPI communities. The PES, which retroactively surveys the population to determine who correctly responded (or did not respond)

Figure iv



to the decennial census, only provides coverage for the Asian American and NHPI communities at the national level.

PA helps address the challenges of applying traditional census quality measures to Asian American and NHPI communities. Figure v compares the strengths, limitations, and impact of traditional measures of census quality and our approach, PA. Though data precision prevents us from making claims about exact overcounts and undercounts for Asian Americans or NHPIs in the United States at the county level, we can show differential patterns throughout the country. Therefore, we strongly caution against making decisions based on national level numbers and recommend changes to Census Bureau research and planning, implementation, and review of census coverage measurement to improve census accuracy.

Understanding Census Quality

Demographic Analysis (DA)

- Near-complete independence from decennial census
- Uses high quality administrative data sources

Strengths

- Lack of coverage below the national level
- Lack of coverage of most race groups
- Can only look at net coverage

Limitations

- No additional information about Asian American and NHPI communities

Impact

Post-Enumeration Survey (PES)

- Relatively independent from the decennial census
- More granular look at census coverage by state and demographic characteristics
- Helps identify gross coverage

Strengths

- Potential for correlated errors and bias
- Only as good as the frame and execution of the sample survey
- Lacks estimates of coverage by race and ethnicity at the subnational level

Limitations

- Some additional information about Asian American and NHPI communities
- Shows relatively good net undercount and overcount numbers for Asian American community, along with NHPI community (though the margins of error for NHPI are quite high)
- Though net numbers are near zero, still significant duplications and omissions that require further understanding and study

Impact

Population Estimates Analysis (PA): Our Approach

- Identify potential undercounts and overcounts at the county level by race, and for all race groups by age
- Strong for identifying patterns that will signal areas for future research

Strengths

- Higher error than DA
- Unknown if error comes from the current census, prior census, or components of change

Limitations

- Coverage for the Asian American and NHPI communities varies throughout the country
- Differences for the NHPI community are large, showing the difficulties of coverage analysis for smaller racial groups, requiring more investment
- Coverage for the Asian American and NHPI communities varies by age, and likely subgroup (though this is harder to support with available data– see case studies)

Impact

Why Assessing the Accuracy of the Census Count Matters

Asian American and NHPI communities' decennial census data quality matters. Beyond ensuring accurate political representation for the next decade, understanding the differential coverage of these groups allows for better planning and outreach for the next decennial census.

It also facilitates a better awareness of the internal variation in coverage within Asian American and NHPI communities. Asian American and NHPI communities have been among the fastest growing over the last several decades. Often viewed as a monolith, Asian Americans and NHPs are highly diverse, including several dozen detailed subgroups that can differ dramatically across key social and economic indicators. The Asian American population is a majority immigrant community, while one in six Pacific Islanders are foreign-born and, depending on their country of birth, may hold different types of immigration statuses. Native Hawaiians and many Pacific Islanders born in Hawaii, Guam, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are U.S. citizens. Through a better understanding about census coverage of and within Asian American and NHPI communities, the decennial census can offer insight into the specific needs and concerns of different racial groups while simultaneously enhancing planning and outreach for future censuses.

Detailed information on regional and subgroup variation in coverage further ensures that the Census Bureau, advocacy partners, and local government partners can accurately budget for and spend funds on achieving fair and accurate counts for both communities. Finally, identifying this coverage allows us to better assess potential deficiencies in previous census' representation for Asian Americans and NHPs, which in turn will allow us to track trends in coverage and identify potential causes of inaccuracies.

The reasons why some communities have overcounts and others have undercounts is beyond the scope of this report. However, areas with larger potential undercounts tend to have smaller Asian American or NHPI communities—and they tend to be newer, emerging communities in these states. Further investigation can help uncover why different communities experience undercounts or overcounts.

Key Takeaway

The Census Bureau continues to miss Asian Americans and NHPs in the decennial census. While these missing numbers have been offset by duplicate responses at the national level, assessing census accuracy by race at lower geographic levels illustrates that those missed and those overcounted are often coming from different neighborhoods. As a result, those most likely to be missed continue to lose out on their fair share of resources and political representation. As planning for the 2030 Census moves forward, it is imperative that policymakers, the Census Bureau, and other interested parties recognize that Asian Americans and NHPs continue to risk being missed in the census and other surveys. Thus, they must plan for a more accurate count by making policy decisions and outreach plans that mitigate the risk of overcounts and undercounts of Asian Americans and NHPs. The following recommendations provide a roadmap toward that end goal.

Recommendations

The Census Bureau and other stakeholders can take steps to mitigate the risk of overcounts and undercounts. These broadly applicable recommendations apply to and extend beyond Asian Americans and NHPs. Our chronologically organized recommendations offer suggestions for improvements before, during, and after the fielding of a census.

1. Census Coverage for Asian Americans and NHPs: Despite a national overcount of Asian Americans and NHPs, some Asian Americans and NHPs were still undercounted.

- Research how Asian American and NHP communities can be incorporated into DA. Can we use available data sources to build a DA for the Asian American and NHP communities?
- Develop a more robust plan for the PES in 2030 by incorporating input from stakeholder communities well in advance of launching the PES. This plan should include an increased budget to provide subnational estimates of coverage for race groups, at least above a reasonable population threshold.

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- Focus on a larger set of potential census quality measures, and maintain transparency in how the Census Bureau measures quality. This should include, at a minimum, a discussion of how our approach, PA, can be incorporated into analyses of census coverage.

2. Implementing the Census: Applying Research Findings to the 2030 Census

- Continue and enhance the promotion of Get Out the Count (GOTC) strategies for different subgroups. No group is a monolith, and a one-size-fits-all approach to census outreach will result in further inaccuracies and wasted resources.
- Continue to enhance operations and the targeted use of administrative data. While administrative data should be used in responsible and cost-effective ways, the Census Bureau should take a people-first approach and attempt to secure a response directly from the household. Generally, administrative records should be a last resort. Administrative data should lower the cost of the census for those that are easily counted in administrative records (and most likely in the census), while ensuring that the funding “saved” goes to efforts to enumerate those who are hardest to count by increasing outreach and Nonresponse Followup.

3. After Fielding the Census: Executing Best Practices in Post-Fielding Activities to Improve the Mechanics of the Count

- Continue to develop best practices for processing and resolving omissions and duplications. Along with its ongoing focus on addressing omissions, the Census Bureau should research how to better address and correct duplications or other erroneous enumerations that lead to overcounts.
- The Census Bureau should research and implement corrections for differential undercounts by race at the lowest level of geography possible. The Census Bureau has shown willingness to take on this tough problem through improvements to the population estimates base by using DA results by age. But much more should be done.

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- The Census Bureau should formally and publicly debrief and discuss plans for how to address these issues with all relevant stakeholders. This would include, but not be limited to, the Census National Advisory Committee and Census Scientific Advisory Committee.
 - The Census Bureau should increase investment in partnering with academics and other researchers to determine the causes of overcounts and undercounts, particularly as they impact different racial and ethnic groups. More investment is needed to understand the specific barriers to participation for differential racial and ethnic groups, as well as the subgroups within.



For more information, and our citations, please see our full report:
<https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/publication/quality-decennial-census-asian-american-and-native-hawaiian-and-pacific-islander>

