

CENSUS DATA RELEASE SHOWS THE 2020 CENSUS HAD A HIGHER NET UNDERCOUNT  
OF CHILDREN THAN IN 2010

By

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Many Census stakeholders have been eagerly awaiting the Census Bureau's release of first detailed data from 2020 Census with hopes that it would shed some light on the accuracy of the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau's release of the redistricting data (Public Law 94-171) on August 12, 2021, provides the first opportunity to examine the coverage of children (population ages 0 to 17) and adults in the 2020 Census. The data from the Census can be compared to the estimates produced by the Census Bureau Demographic Analysis (DA) program to assess net undercounts and overcounts. .

The 2020 Census coverage for the total population, children (ages 0 to 17), Hispanic children, and adults (ages 18 and over) is shown in Table 1.

	2020 Demographic Analysis*	2020 Census **	2020 Census Number Difference (DA-Census)	2020 Census Percent Difference	Percent Difference 2010***
Children (Ages 0 to 17)	74,650,000	73,106,000	-1,544,000	-2.1	-1.7
Hispanic Children (Ages 0 to 17)	19,589,000	18,757,252	-831,748	-4.4	-2.1
Adults (Ages 18 and over)	257,939,000	258,343,281	404,281	0.2	0.7
Total Population	332,601,000	331,449,281	-1,151,719	-0.3	0.1

\* 2020 Demographic Analysis (DA) data from U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Analysis Release on December 15 2020 <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2020/2020-demographic-analysis.html>;

\*\*2020 Census data, U.S. Census Bureau August 12 2021, "Population Under Age 18 Declined Last Decade," <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/adult-and-under-the-age-of-18-populations-2020-census.html>

\*\*\* U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Analysis, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/popest/revised-2010-demographic-analysis-estimates.html>

Note. Data for the Hispanic child population count in the 2020 Census was provided by NALEO.

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The net undercount of 0.3 percent for the total population in the 2020 Census shown in Table 1, masks substantial differences for children and adults. There was a significant net undercount for children and a small net overcount for adults. This is the same pattern seen in the 2010 Census.

The net undercount for children (ages 0 to 17) increased from 1.7 percent in the 2010 Census to 2.1 percent in the 2020 Census. The net undercount of children was more than 1.5 million in 2020 compared to about 1.3 million in 2010.

The net undercount of Hispanic children in the 2020 Census was 4.4 percent which is more than double the rate in the 2010 Census (2.1 percent). This evidence

<sup>1</sup> 2020 Demographic Analysis (DA) data from U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Analysis Release on December 15, 2020 <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2020/2020-demographic-analysis.html>

<sup>2</sup> 2020 Census data, U.S. Census Bureau August 12, 2021, "Population Under Age 18 Declined Last Decade," <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/adult-and-under-the-age-of-18-populations-2020-census.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Analysis, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/popest/revised-2010-demographic-analysis-estimates.html>

suggests that the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Trump administration may have resulted in increased undercounting of Hispanics in the 2020 Census. The net undercount of Hispanic children increased from around 365,000 in 2010 to over 830,000 in 2020.

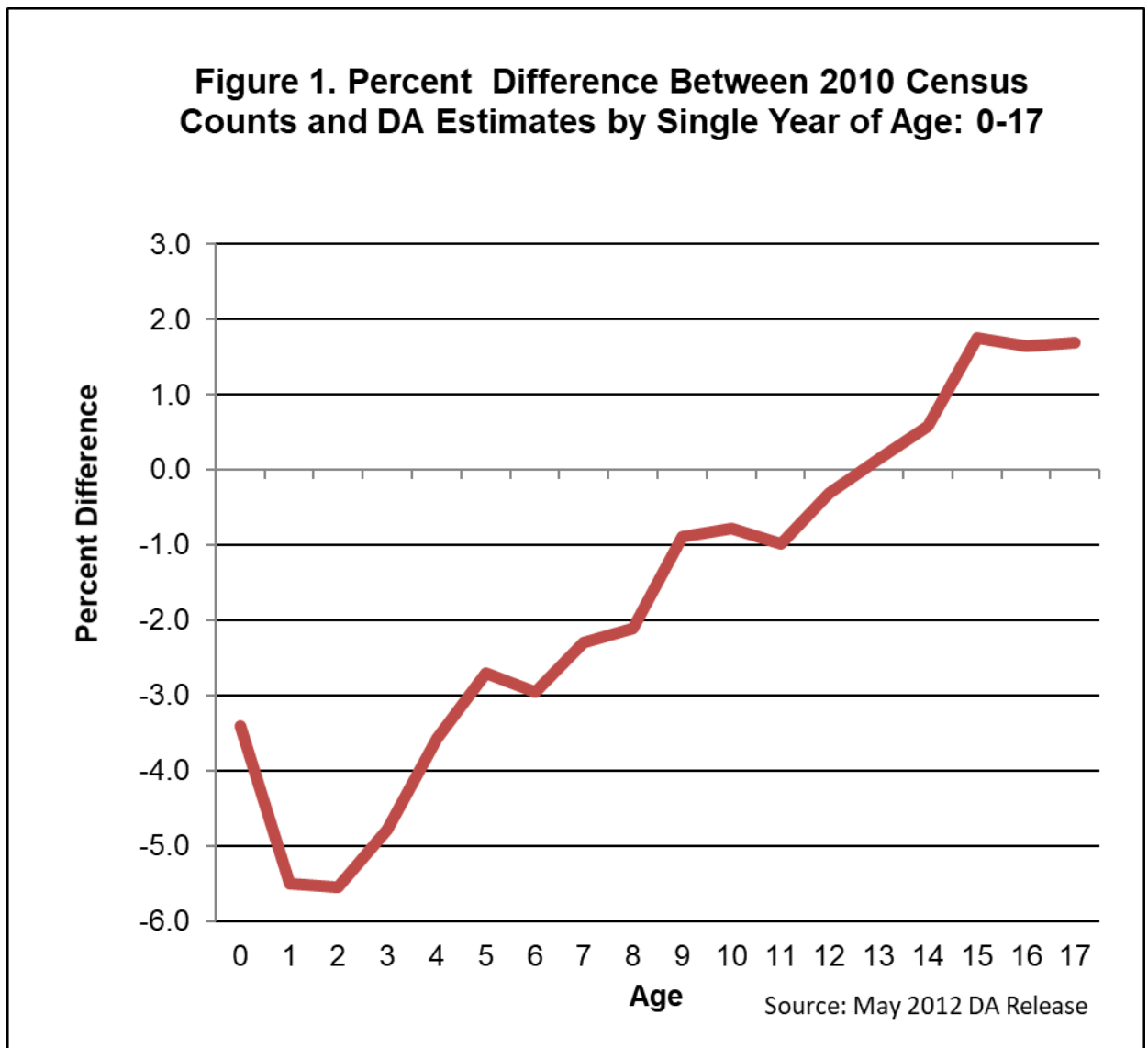
While the 2020 Census results and the DA data show data for black children, the figures are not comparable. One must wait until the Census Bureau releases the modified race file for the 2020 Census to make legitimate comparisons of the census counts and the DA estimates.

The coverage of the adult population (ages 18 and over) went from a net overcount of 0.7 percent in the 2010 Census to a net overcount 0.2 percent in the 2020 Census. The change between 2010 and 2020 is relatively small and it is not clear if it reflects decrease in overcounting or an increase in undercounting adults.

This information provides a little more information about the quality of the 2020 Census data but there are several points related to the undercount of children in the Census that should be noted.

It is important to recognize that there are substantial differences in coverage of children by age that are not reflected in the assessment of all children shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the coverage rates for children by single year of age from the 2010 Census. This shows that the figures for all children ages 0 to 17, is likely to mask big differences among children in different ages groups. In the 2010 Census, the net undercount of young children is very high compared to small overcounts for those in the 14-to-17-year-old group. In addition, there is evidence that young children (ages 0 to 4) have been undercounted at a high rate at least since 1950, and the rates have been

increasing since 1980 (O'Hare 2015). We will have to wait for the Census Bureau to release more detailed data by age to assess the age differences in the 2020 Census. The more detailed data by age will be in the 2020 Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics file which is not likely to be out before late 2022 or even 2023.



It is also important to understand that net undercounts do not reflect the number of the people missed in the Census. The number of people missed in the Census is called omissions. The net figures are a balance between those people missed and

those counted twice (O'Hare 2019b). In the 2010 Census, the net undercount of young children as 4.6 percent but the omission rate was a little over 10 percent (O'Hare 2019b).

Several reasons have been offered for why young children are missed so often in the Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2019; O'Hare 2015). One key piece of information is that fact that nearly 20 percent of adults in households with young children are not sure they are supposed to include a young child in their census questionnaire (Griffin and O'Hare 2020; O'Hare 2019a).

The data presented here does not address the undercount of young children in the 2020 Census directly, but the increase in the net undercount of all children suggests there is unlikely to be any improvement in the high net undercount of young children seen over the past several decades.

## References

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