

Census 2020 in the San Joaquin Valley

An Empirical Assessment of Strategies to Activate Populations That Have Been Historically Undercounted

Joanna Lee and Jennifer Ito

Commissioned by:
The Center at Sierra Health Foundation

April 2023



USC Dornsife
Equity Research Institute

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are deeply appreciative of Cindy Quezada, Ed Kissam, Jo Ann Intili, Gregg Robinson, and Manuel Pastor for the generosity of their time, guidance, and insights shared throughout this project. We were also fortunate to have Sarah Ramirez provide background research, interview and outreach support, and to contribute her own experiences and insights into this project. Special thanks to Noemi Avalos, Maurice Samuels, and The Center at Sierra Health Foundation whose feedback and support shaped and made this report possible. We feel deep gratitude for the work and wisdom of the community-based organizations who conducted census outreach, who spoke with us, and who participated in the October 2022 project convening. Additional thanks to Amy Arambula, Camila Chavez, Alejandra Gonzalez, Marina Magdeleno, Nataly Santamaria, Naindeep Singh, and Reyes Uviedo for sharing your expertise and experiences in 2022 to inform this report. We also want to thank Siyue (Lena) Wang, UCLA doctoral student and University of Southern California Equity Research Institute (USC ERI) research assistant, for the literature reviews and summaries; Sabrina Kim and Paris Vilorio of USC ERI for graphic design support; Austin Mendoza for mapping support, and Cristina Rutter of Sunny Day Design for her graphic design.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ensuring a complete and accurate count for the decennial census is central to equity and the well-being of all people. It is the foundation of our democracy as the results affect political representation through congressional reapportionment and redistricting. Census data are also used to distribute billions of federal dollars for essential services and inform private sector and philanthropic investments. Furthermore, the decennial census serves as a basis for annual surveys, such as the American Community Survey, that provide more detailed data that is central for measuring and making the case for racial, social, and economic equity.

While every decennial census faces challenges in counting every person, the 2020 Census was particularly fraught with issues that jeopardized a full count: the federal administration's proposal to add a question about citizenship status, the global COVID-19 pandemic, racial uprisings, and shifting census deadlines. These unanticipated challenges added to known structural barriers resulting from the U.S. Census Bureau's efforts to modernize its operations, such as shifting to a primarily online-

based census and re-engineering its procedures for compiling addresses. In communities like San Joaquin Valley, these new procedures are likely to produce diminished data quality, affecting the accuracy of the count.

Aside from the unique challenges of 2020, every decennial census requires concerted effort and community investment to locate people who reside in places that census operations overlook, equip every household with a census form, persuade people that it is safe and important to complete and return the form, and assist people in answering each question accurately. U.S. Census Bureau's partnerships with state and local governments, philanthropy, and community-based organizations are an important strategy to develop place-based and population-specific outreach plans.

This report, commissioned by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation (The Center) and conducted by the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California, examines a grassroots, community-driven strategy to increase participation among communities in California's

San Joaquin Valley that have been historically undercounted in the decennial census. Through its management of a philanthropic funding collaborative and in its role as the Administrative Community-Based Organization (ACBO) partner for California Census Region 6, comprising the five counties of Fresno, Tulare, Kings, Kern, and Inyo, The Center leveraged over 6.5 million dollars from public and philanthropic funds to support organizations to reach out to communities.

The Center provided grants to community-based organizations with established relationships to the region's diverse rural and urban communities, such as farmworkers; Latino families and Latino immigrants; African American communities; Lao, Cambodian, and Hmong immigrant and refugee populations; Middle Eastern and North African populations; high-school and college-age young people; migrant communities from Mexico, and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and additional identities used by community members. Additionally, it fostered collaboration and coordination of census outreach efforts by providing regular

updates on progress, identifying priority areas for outreach, facilitating exchange of best practices, and distributing communications materials and messaging.

This report assesses the extent to which door-to-door canvassing paired with phone banking in neighborhoods with the highest “hard-to-count” index scores resulted in measurable gains in self-response rates. It is based on census-tract level data on daily self-response rates, hard-to-count index scores calculated by the California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office, and daily canvassing and phone-banking data tracked by the Center and its community-based organizational partners. It also highlights other strategies employed by community-based organizations, learnings from the field outreach, and recommendations for the next decennial census.

The Center’s partners in the Southern San Joaquin Valley engaged in a widespread outreach program focused on “hard-to-count” areas that lasted from mid-2019 through the end of the census reporting period in October 2020. Their efforts were primarily focused on reaching tracts with “hard-to-count” index (HTCI) scores of 69 and above and also 57 and above. However, outreach went beyond “hardest-to-count” tracts. From mid-2019 through October, partners reached, via in-person

canvassing and/or phone-banking, 87 percent of all census tracts in the 6-county ACBO 6 region.

Though outreach, primarily education and awareness, began in 2019, notices to respond to the census were not sent out until March 2020. On March 20, the Census Bureau began publishing daily self-response rates by census tract. Between March 20 and mid-October 2020, which was the most intensive census outreach period, 80 percent of all census tracts were reached by partners. During this time, The Center’s partners reached all census tracts in Kings County, nearly all in Fresno County (99 percent), and three-quarters of tracts in Tulare County.

During the most intensive outreach period of March through October 2020, The Center’s partners reached 362 tracts, 59 percent of which had HTCI scores of 57 and above. Among those “hard-to-count” tracts, nearly all of them were canvassed at least once. For example, 91 percent of tracts with an HTCI score of 90 and above were canvassed at least once compared to 39 percent of those “easier-to-count” tracts with scores of less than 57. While outreach began mostly with phone-banking due to stay-at-home orders, in-person, door-to-door canvassing ramped up in the summer, with ebbs and flows due to increases in COVID-19 cases, wildfires, extreme heat waves, and other issues.

Finding #1: Participation improved in “hard-to-count” tracts, but remained lower than “easier-to-count.”

Overall statewide final response rates, including the Southern San Joaquin Valley region, improved between 2010 and 2020. However, rates among “easier-to-count” tracts improved while tracts that were “hard-to-count” (hard-to-count index scores of 57 and above) did not improve over the decade. Additionally in 2020, both in California and in the Southern San Joaquin Valley, final response rates among tracts with highest HTCI scores of 90 and above were much lower than “easier-to-count” tracts (scores below 57). This points to potential equity implications as the divide increases between hard and easier to count areas. Gains in self-response rates during the March through October 2020 period points to improvements among all tracts regardless of HTCI score, however, the gain is lower among “hard-to-count” tracts with scores of 57 and below (gains of 45.8 to 48.9) compared to the larger gain among “easier-to-count” tracts with scores below 57. Disaggregating the data by county shows a similar pattern of lower gain among “hard-to-count” compared to “easier-to-count” census tracts, despite large gains in responses between March and October among the “hard-to-count” tracts.

Finding #2: There were measurable improvements in self-response among census tracts that were canvassed and phone banked.

Though overall response rates were lower among tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores of 57 and above, self-response rates among “hard-to-count” tracts that received outreach by The Center’s partners were higher than rates among tracts with the similar scores that received no outreach. For example, among tracts with “hard-to-count” scores of 69 to 79, the percentage point gain in self-response rate for tracts that received outreach was 47.9 compared to 42.6 percentage points for tracts with no outreach— a 5.3 percentage point difference. Additionally, canvassed tracts saw weekly improvements in self-response rates that were above tracts not canvassed the same week.

Finding #3: Tract-level comparisons illustrate that outreach efforts increased census response.

While aggregate data on outreach illustrates modest improvements in self-response in areas that received outreach, census tract-level comparisons offer another perspective of how outreach boosted self-response in the region. For example, a tract in Calwa, a census-designated

place in Fresno County, had a self-response rate of 9.9 percent in March and ended with a self-response rate of 63.3 percent in October—a 53 percentage point gain. The tract’s self-response rate jumped 10 percentage points in August, mirroring a large increase in canvassing in the areas by The Center’s partners that same month. Two adjacent census tracts in Bakersfield (Kern County) had similar HTCI scores, with one having a lower starting self-response rate in March than the other (12.8 percent vs 14.3 percent). The Center’s partners canvassed the tracts with the lower self-response rate and by October, the tract with the lower rate had a larger percentage point gain, ending at a very similar final self-response rate to the tract that had a higher starting response rate but received no canvassing (60.1 percent vs 60.6 percent). The Center’s partners focus on rural communities with high HTCI scores resulted in large percentage point gains. For example, in the western portion of Fresno ,a tract with an HTCI score of 100 and a self-response rate of 9.9 percent in March, ended with a score of 53.7 percent.

The Center’s partners shared six key takeaways from on-the-ground efforts to encourage participation in the 2020 Census that are important learnings for 2030 and beyond:

1. Early census outreach was effective when the effort was identifiable.
2. Flexibility for those doing the on-the-ground outreach is key to reaching communities often excluded due to perceived barriers to contact.
3. Hiring staff that are from the local community is critical in building a robust and culturally competent outreach effort.
4. Census outreach is very effective when paired with other community services and outreach efforts.
5. Technology was useful when paired with trust community canvassers.
6. Technological tools and databases were helpful but data about communities that have been historically undercounted was missing from conventional sources of information.

Considerations for 2030 Census

- Prepare for the unanticipated by investing in local communities who are equipped to pivot and adjust their outreach strategies under (almost) any circumstance.
- Fund community engagement at all levels of census planning and data gathering.
- The technology needs to be ready for community canvassers before Census Day 2030.
- Anticipate and curtail attempts to undermine a full count.
- Ongoing advocacy and research are crucial to ensure a fair and accurate count.

LIST OF TERMS

Canvassing: A type of outreach involving direct, in-person widespread contact with individuals, typically by going to people's homes, to educate and activate people toward an action. This is often called "door-knocking" or "face-to-face outreach". Canvassing is often used for a variety of purposes including during a political campaign to encourage voting, providing information to residents on community issues, and activating residents to participate toward a civic purpose such as completing their census form.

Census PDI: A mobile-accessible application provided to California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office contracted partners to support canvassing, phone-banking, and household lookup. Contracted partners were required to upload data on their canvassing and phone-banking activities to the app which was then uploaded to the state's SwORD database for use in their mapping portal.

Get-out-the-count campaign (GOTC): A campaign to encourage people to participate in the census that includes outreach activities, messaging to encourage participation, use of media to spread the word, and other strategies.

Hard-to-count (HTC): A term used by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify census tracts that may be difficult to enumerate during the decennial census count.

Hard-to-Count Index (HTCI): The California Hard-

to-Count index is a metric created by the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit. This index is modeled on the U.S. Census Bureau's hard-to-count score of previous censuses. The index is a score assigned to each census tract in the state, determined by multiple socio-economic variables (e.g. households without broadband subscription, households where no one 14 years and above speaks English very well). For more information, see <http://www.census.ca.gov/california-htc/>.

Nonresponse follow-up (NRFU): The Census Bureau's door knocking efforts to reach households that did not fill out the census form on their own. This is done typically toward the end of the outreach period. For California, NRFU was between August 11 and October 15.

People of color: Those who do not identify as non-Hispanic white and reported to the Census Bureau a race and ethnicity other than both "white" and "non-Hispanic".

Phone-banking: A type of outreach involving calling a large number of residents by telephone to educate and activate people toward an action. Phone-banking is often used for a variety of purposes including during a political campaign to encourage voting, providing information to residents on community issues, and activating residents to participate toward a civic purpose such as completing their census form.

Self-response rate (SRR): The percent of known housing units (addresses in the Census Bureau's Master Address File, not including group quarters) in a particular area, such as a census tract, that have responded to the census via the internet, with a paper questionnaire, or by telephone according to the California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office.

Statewide Outreach and Rapid Deployment (SwORD): A GIS mapping portal initiated by the California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office to provide maps and data on "hard-to-count" communities as well as a way for state-funded partners to report and track census outreach activities in their areas of focus. Contracted partners were required to use SwORD as a condition of funding.

Update Leave: Update Leave is The Census Bureau's special operation to drop 2020 Census invitation packets at households in areas where the majority of households may not receive mail at their home's physical location, such as small towns where mail is only delivered to post office boxes or areas recently affected by natural disasters while updating the addresses. For California, "Update Leave" occurred between May 4 and June 12. See <http://www.census.ca.gov/covid19/>.

INTRODUCTION

CENSUS AS CENTRAL TO EQUITY

Ensuring a complete and accurate count for the decennial census is central to equity and the well-being of all people. It is a foundation of our democracy as the results affect political representation through congressional reapportionment and federal, state, and local redistricting. It is tied to healthy communities as census data are used to distribute billions of federal funds to localities for healthcare, housing, education, transportation, and other essential services. The decennial count also serves as the basis for annual surveys, such as the American Community Survey (ACS), that provide more detailed data for measuring and making the case for racial, social, and economic equity. The data are used to not only steer government dollars but private sector and philanthropic investments as well.

OVERLAPPING, COMPOUNDING CHALLENGES

While every decennial census faces challenges

in counting every person, the 2020 Census was particularly fraught with issues that jeopardized a full count. Before the count officially began, the federal administration at the time attempted to undermine the census count. One of its strategies involved proposing the potential addition of a citizenship question on the census form in order to discourage broad participation. The debate about adding a question on citizenship coupled with anti-immigrant hostility expressed at the highest levels of government and federal actions such as the federal ban on Muslim Americans and immigration raids produced a chilling effect among immigrant communities - and calls for solidarity among allied communities.

Early research in 2018 by the San Joaquin Valley Census Research Project estimated that citizenship question would dramatically decrease the willingness of Latino Immigrants to participate in the 2020 Census. The study projected that about 188,000 Latino first- and second-generation immigrants would be left out of the count in the San Joaquin Valley, an historically undercounted region.¹ Although the question did not appear on

the final form, community organizers shared that immigrants were still reluctant to fill out the form, with some believing that only citizens were able to complete the census.

To further complicate the count, California's San Joaquin Valley, like much of the state, experienced multiple, compounding disasters.² First, the global COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place orders in March 2020 disrupted plans for in-person activities beginning with get-out-the-count efforts as groups were gearing up for Census Day on April 1. While many community-based outreach efforts began well in advance of Census Day, the inability for trusted messengers to knock on doors, talk to people face-to-face, and provide survey assistance during the critical self-response period was a major, unanticipated hurdle. Added to that was the fact that populations at highest risk of being undercounted were also the hardest-hit by COVID in terms of exposures, positive cases, and deaths. Groups pivoted to other outreach strategies until some were able to return to the field in June, though the pandemic remained a source of disruption and a health and

safety concern during the entire outreach period through the fall.

In addition, the San Joaquin Valley also faced extreme environmental conditions throughout the summer and fall that included record-breaking heat waves, lightning, and some of the largest wildfires in California's history.³ Weeks of extreme weather hampered door-to-door efforts that were occurring throughout the summer of 2020. The region, already known for having some of the nation's worst air quality,⁴ faced unhealthy levels of air quality due to the raging wildfires in Northern California and northern San Joaquin Valley, creating hazardous conditions for door-to-door canvassing and other outdoor outreach activities. Local wildfires in Fresno, Kern, and Tulare counties produced dangerous conditions as well. For example in September, the Creek Fire in Fresno County, the fourth largest wildfire in state history,⁵

“...One day you had decent air quality which means here in the valley that you can breathe it. And then, the second half of the day, you can't even see through it. You had to be nimble and switch to phone banking and just be strategic.”

– REYES UVIEDO, VALLEY FORWARD

generated both extreme heat and unhealthy air conditions throughout the region.

The spring and summer of 2020 was also a period of intense uprising in response to the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans at the hands of police and white supremacists. This pivotal movement for justice centered important conversations on systemic racism and required diverting attention from census efforts to support the call for change.

Amidst all of this, the Census shifted its timeline for data collection⁶ throughout the process, introducing additional confusion. The original end date of July 31 changed multiple times before abruptly ending on October 15, creating challenges with planning, pacing, and messaging. The extended timelines also put additional strains on organization's time, resource, and capacity. Many of the groups active in “Get-Out-The-Count” (GOTC) efforts were civic engagement community-based organizations who focused regularly on engaging low propensity voters—many of whom lived in communities that have been historically undercounted. As the census deadlines kept getting extended, census work began to overlap with critical voter engagement work leading up to the one of the most consequential elections, the November 2020 general election.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO AN ACCURATE COUNT

First, a note about the term “hard-to-count:” We use the term in this report as it relates to the “hard-to-count” (HTC) index. For Census 2020, the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit developed an index based on 14 demographic, housing, and socioeconomic variables.⁷ The state used the index in its allocation of census outreach funds. Areas with high shares of the state's population with the highest HTC indices received a higher share of the funding. The Center used the index—as well as daily self-response rates—for prioritizing census tracts for high-touch outreach.

We recognize that there are multiple structural reasons for undercounts in enumeration efforts that are beyond any individual's “choice” in participating. A particular population or neighborhood may be labeled as “hard to count” because the Census Bureau has assessed that these communities may be 1) hard to locate (e.g. “hidden household”), 2) hard to contact (e.g. highly mobile or living in a gated community), 3) hard to persuade (e.g. mistrustful of government), and/or 4) hard-to-interview (e.g. language barriers).⁸ These barriers are not mutually exclusive but are useful for pointing to

different interventions and the need for continued improvement in the Census Bureau's survey process in order to reach all communities.

The San Joaquin Valley Census Research Project (SJVCRP) explored structural factors that impact census participation, particularly among Latino immigrants.⁹ Their research highlighted structural barriers to participation including complex households, language/literacy, and internet access among others.

For example they identified the inability for the Census Bureau to adequately identify and create processes to reach complex households. These households may be where multiple families live under the same roof or live in a hidden housing units (e.g., backyard trailers, sheds, converted garage). Complex households often share a mailbox or use a P.O. Box, which prevents them from receiving the census survey.

Language and literacy are also barriers, particularly for the region's diverse immigrant communities. Literacy constraints may affect self-response among two thirds of the Latino immigrants in the San Joaquin Valley, even if they receive a bilingual (Spanish English) form.

Immigrants who speak indigenous languages like Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui had lower levels of Spanish literacy, which further prevents

them from taking part in the census. Limited availability of census forms in multiple languages also discourages language minorities including Hmong, Punjabi, and Khmer from accessing the census. The reliance on technology and online surveys overlooks the technology disparities among immigrants.

The 2020 census was also the first primarily online-based census, though paper forms were distributed in some areas. The SJVCRP identified this as a serious concern as nearly one-quarter of Latino immigrant survey respondents lacked internet access. A California analysis comparing response rates in 2010 and 2020 showed that response rates increased over the decade in tracts with high rates of internet connectivity and declined in "hard-to-count" tracts with low rates of internet access.¹⁰

Furthermore, the U.S. Census' streamlined procedures to modernize and re-engineer Census 2020 were likely to have resulted in diminished data quality for the San Joaquin Valley. With each successive stage in census operations, starting with the compilation of the Master Address File, there is a "cascading" or cumulative effect of diminishing data quality that affects the accuracy of the count. Streamlining census procedures have limitations for communities with higher-than-average concentrations of non-citizens.

Jakara Movement engaged in various types of outreach activities focusing its efforts on the Sikh community throughout the San Joaquin Valley. The Center relied on organizations like Jakara Movement to provide in-person outreach and assistance to groups whose languages were not supported by the Census Bureau. Through canvassing and phone banking, Jakara encountered large groups of community members who shared immigration-related fears, had difficulty accessing the internet outside of their cell phones, and often lived in complex households with people renting rooms in houses and in tenements.

When there are high levels of household non-response, the Census Bureau must use additional procedures such as statistical procedures and administrative data, that aid in generating tabulations of the raw data. These methods are meant to fill in gaps created by non-response but also introduce error, which can lead to an undercount.¹¹ These procedures and the heavier reliance on internet responses threatened to widen disparities between “easy-to-count” and “hard-to-count” communities.

THE CENTER’S ROLE IN CENSUS 2020

Community-based organizations throughout California participated in GOTC efforts with the financial and technical assistance from public and private philanthropic funding sources. In California’s San Joaquin Valley, The Center at Sierra Health Foundation (The Center) played a critical role. In 2018, The Center made early investments in the census including the San Joaquin Valley Census Research Project mentioned earlier. It also began planning and developing partnerships at the state, regional and county levels around census outreach. By the end, it was able to direct over 6.5 million dollars from the State of California and philanthropic partners to increase community-driven census outreach in

the San Joaquin Valley.

The Center served as the California Administrative Community-based Organization (ACBO) partner for Region 6 coordinating high-touch, high-quality grassroots outreach and assistance for a diversity of populations in the counties of Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, and Tulare. The Center also complemented activities funded under its state contract through the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund (SJVHF), a community-driven funder collaborative,¹² augmenting grants, funding additional groups, supporting other outreach activities, and extending its reach into Merced, Madera, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin counties.

It leveraged its established partnerships with local and regional organizations that have history, experience, and expertise in serving, organizing, and building power with the region’s diverse populations. Organizations were funded who work with farmworkers; Latinos and Latino immigrants; African American communities; Lao, Cambodian, and Hmong immigrant and refugee populations; Middle Eastern and North African populations; high school and college-age youth; Indigenous migrant communities from Mexico; Native American Indian populations; disabled people; two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and additional identities used by community members; and other prioritized

Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO) was one of the organizations reaching out to indigenous populations in the valley. CBDIO partnered with indigenous agricultural farmworker foremen or “mayordomos” to reach out to farmworker crews in the fields. Folks from CBDIO traveled across the San Joaquin Valley following the harvest crops to reach large and dispersed farmworker communities. They shared information about the census with farmworkers in their indigenous languages in addition to distributing promotional materials that included masks and sanitizer. They also created a census hotline serving Mixteco, Zapoteco, Triqui, and Tlapaneco speakers, which was used heavily during the final days of the census.

communities.

Beyond funding groups to increase the count, The Center aimed to foster collaboration and coordination of census outreach efforts across the San Joaquin Valley by supporting a network of community-based organizations across eight counties, facilitating exchange of best practices and challenges, providing regular updates on progress and best practices, and distributing communications materials and messaging. It was part of statewide conversations on outreach to farmworkers; it connected with Complete Count Committees in each county; it supported events with elected leaders; it worked with county governments in the San Joaquin Valley and their subcontractors; and it was part of national and state census stakeholder calls.

“In Vision y Compromiso, we do a lot of advocacy. We [work on issues like] immigration, health, and everything that has to do with the social change to better our communities and to help our people. So it was only logical for us to be involved in the census.”

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Upon request by The Center, University of Southern California Equity Research Institute (ERI) conducted an empirical analysis of the funded in-person outreach efforts and census response rates in communities less likely to be able to participate in the census, often called “hard-to-count” (HTC). Those who work closely with HTC communities recognize the effectiveness of in-person, face-to-face outreach in education, activating, and assisting people to complete their census forms. There is no replacement for a trusted messenger often from a community-based, nonprofit organization who can assuage the fears, concerns or apathy that holds people back from participating in the count.¹³ This assessment seeks to bolster that knowledge with a census-tract level analysis based on daily canvassing and phone-banking data made available between March 20 and October 15, 2020.

This analysis pairs daily self-response rate data and hard-to-count index scores reported by the California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office with daily canvassing and phone-banking data that were tracked on a regular basis by The Center and its partners through Census PDI. As a result, we can look at areas where these two civic engagement strategies were used to encourage

census participation and the resulting census response rates. While in-person, door-to-door canvassing can be the most effective strategy for reaching and activating communities, we include phone-banking in our analysis due to the multiple external factors discussed earlier which limited canvassing activities. We also include phone-banking because it is used as part of an overall civic engagement strategy when paired with door-to-door outreach. Throughout the census outreach program, The Center used the census-reported data to track progress and support their funded partners whose focus was on “hard-to-count” communities. The Center met weekly with partners starting in the spring of 2020 to provide census tract level progress and helped coordinate outreach to ensure efforts were maximized throughout the region. Similarly, this assessment pulls on these data to help measure and identify how census participation was affected by the presence of community-based outreach efforts in the region.¹⁴ For more on the data and methodology including limitations see *Appendix D*.

This analysis uses this data to help answer two key questions:

- How did participation in the census change in the region, particularly among those in “hard-to-count” census tracts?

- How did census participation change in areas where community-based organizations employed civic engagement strategies to encourage census response? Was there any difference when organizations used these tactics to reach hard-to-count census tracts?

We recognize that our focus on canvassing and phone-banking activities does not capture the resilience, full capacities, and creativity of community-driven outreach efforts by funded partners. In this report, we do not attempt to assess the effectiveness of creative tactics or light-touch activities, like flyering, nor broad communications strategies. We do not want to imply that such activities were not effective in getting people to complete their census questionnaires; it is simply beyond the scope of this report.

This report is structured as follows: We begin with a brief introduction of the San Joaquin Valley region, focusing primarily on the southern portion, by discussing its changing demographics and its positionality as one of the hardest-to-count regions in the state. We also discuss the types of community engagement used to encourage participation. In the next section we use data to illustrate the scale of outreach used to activate communities to participate and provide key findings on how these strategies affected census

response rates across the region. Finally, we provide learnings from The Center's community-based partners and recommendations to help support planning and development for the 2030 Census.

We hope this report is relevant and actionable to the U.S. Census Bureau, other state and local government agencies, and philanthropy. As such, this report seeks to demonstrate the importance of high quality, in-person outreach, that investments in partnerships with community-based organizations as trusted messengers and effective mobilizers pays dividends, and using regional, local, and census-tract level analysis can reveal more nuanced issues with reaching historically undercounted communities that may be masked by looking only at state level outcomes.

CENSUS 2020 OUTREACH IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

CALIFORNIA'S SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

Getting a full and accurate count in the Southern San Joaquin Valley is important for the overall state. What the California Complete Count Office defines as Region 6 includes the five counties of Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, and Tulare (see Figure 1). Though the “Southern San Joaquin Valley” region does not include Inyo County, for the purposes of this analysis Inyo is included due to their inclusion in Census Region 6.

This five-county census region comprises just under seven percent of the statewide population, or about 2.6 million residents. The region grew about 9 percent between 2010 and 2020, a rate higher than the state overall (six percent). Though demographic projections show population growth slowing statewide, this region is estimated to continue to see growth at a higher rate than California overall through 2060.¹⁵

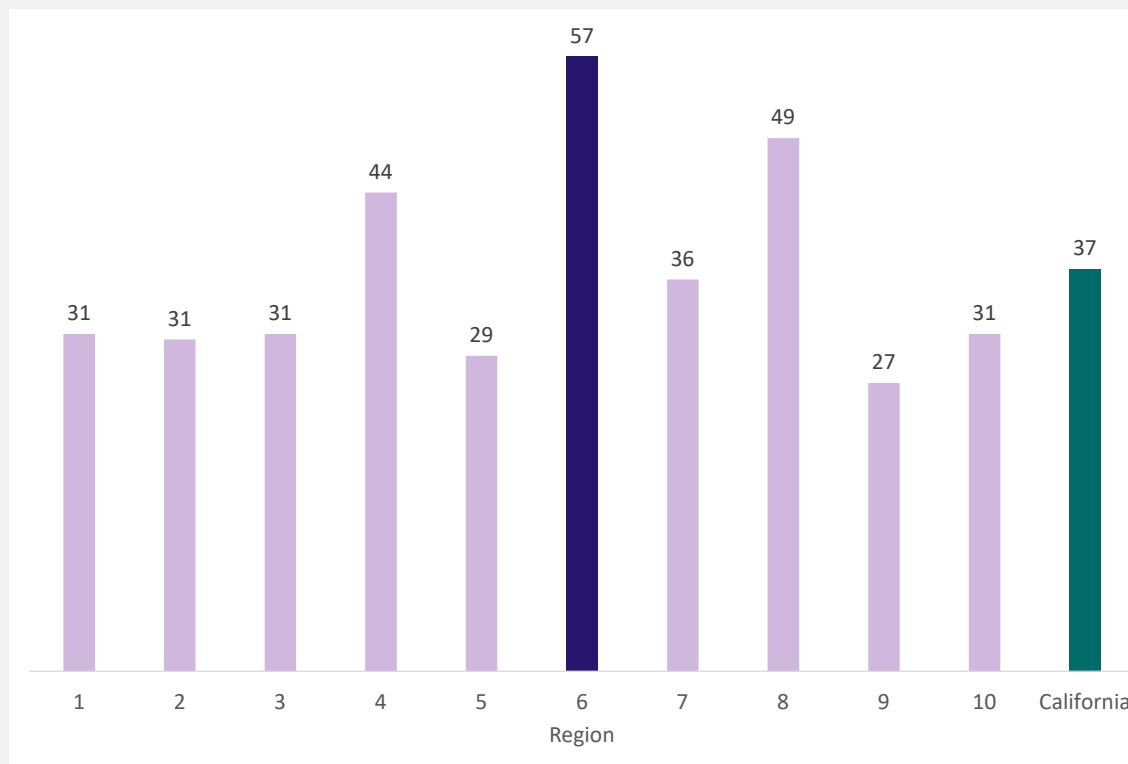
In Fresno, Kern, Kings, and Tulare counties, people of color accounted for all of the growth in population between 2010 and 2019 according to estimates from the National Equity Atlas. These estimates also show the number of people of color increasing while the number of white people decreases in these four counties between 2020 and 2050.¹⁶

Among the ten regions statewide, the Southern San Joaquin Valley was one of the hardest-to-count regions. When comparing each region's



Figure 1. Census Region 6

Figure 2: Median “Hard-to-Count” Index Score by Census Region, California, 2020



median “hard-to-count” index score, region 6 (which includes Southern San Joaquin Valley) had a score of 57, higher than any other region, with the statewide median at 37 (Figure 2).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of each region’s “hard-to-count” index scores statewide. About 50 percent of all tracts in Southern San Joaquin Valley (Region 6) were “hard-to-count” (score of

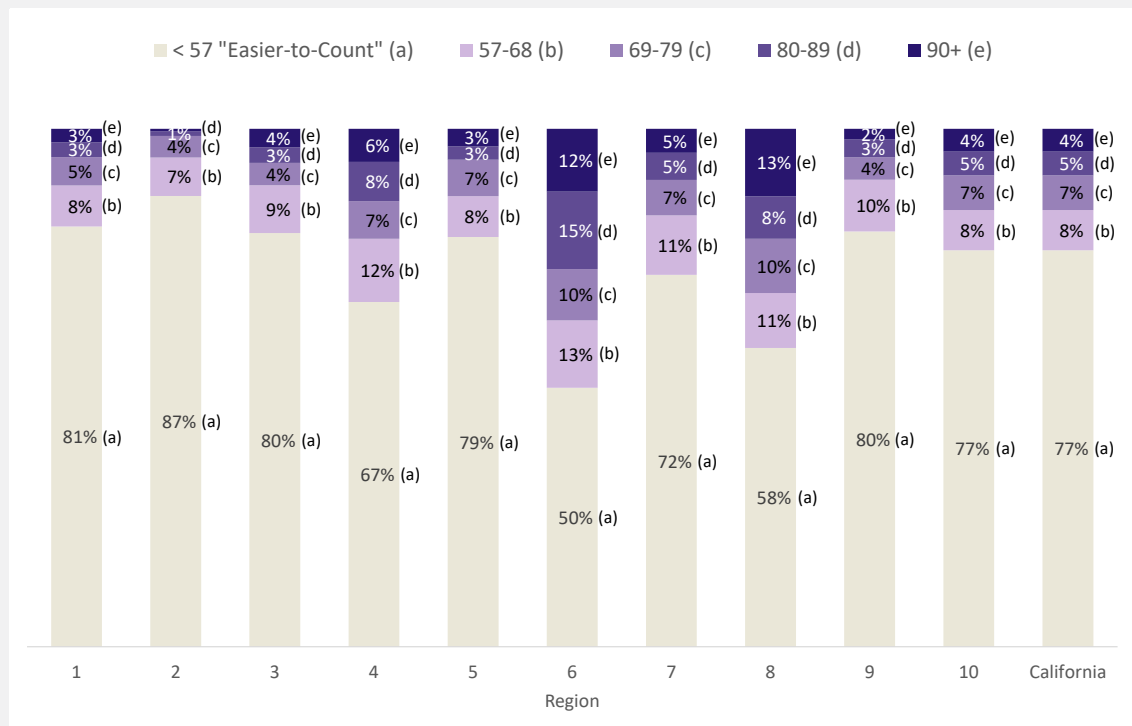
Region	Counties
1	Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo, Yuba
2	Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma, Trinity
3	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano
4	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tuolumne
5	Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Ventura
6	Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Tulare
7	Riverside, San Bernardino
8	Los Angeles
9	Orange
10	Imperial, San Diego

57 or above) compared to 23 percent statewide. In comparison, 42 percent of Los Angeles County's (Region 8) tracts were "hard-to-count." Region 6 includes just under 6 percent of the state's census tracts but nearly 10 percent of the state's "hard-to-count" census tracts.¹⁷ Additionally, Fresno, Kern, Kings, and Tulare were among the top ten counties statewide with the highest median "hard-to-count" index (HTCI) score. For the "hardest-to-count" areas, 12 percent of Region 6 census tracts have an HTCI score of 90 or higher as compared to 4 percent statewide.

"We actually don't even use the term "hard to reach" because we do not believe there is a hard to reach community. It's just that they don't know the approach. Or not everybody doesn't reach to them actually. They're not hard to reach. They're there. You just gotta go to the communities."

– NATALIE, VISION Y COMPROMISO

Figure 3: Share of Tracts By "Hard-to-Count" Index Score, by Region, California, 2020



COMMUNITY-CENTERED OUTREACH

The Center's partners understood the importance of a full census count and recognized it as an opportunity to increasing civic participation, community power, and a regional voice. According to one community leader, it was important for community organizations to participate in this work because the move to an online census form was going to mean that some communities, especially rural communities, would not be able to participate due to a lack of digital access at home.

Drawing on their expertise as community organizers and trusted messengers, partners decided that their regional outreach strategy would focus on a diverse set of strategies but be rooted in phone-banking and canvassing, two traditional voter turnout strategies.¹⁸ Partners designed a multi-pronged grassroots outreach approach centered on their expertise in base-building in the Southern San Joaquin Valley region around a host of issues. Their strategy relied on high-quality, face-to-face interactions (as much as possible), discussing key concerns, and, armed with wi-fi enabled tablets, offering on-the-spot assistance with completing the census.

Though the pandemic reduced the amount of in-person contact, once the stay-at-home order

The Center's partners designed and implemented a grassroots, community driven outreach strategy — from the personnel and volunteers who came from communities that have been historically undercounted to the messaging rooted in cultural elements characteristic of the populations they work with. Partners reached residents directly where they were, ready to assist those requiring internet access, translation, help with utilizing computer devices or any other needs.

was lifted, partners engaged residents at their doors and on the phones but also went to where people worked, shopped, and received services. The Center's partners also mobilized community members to engage in the census process by hiring and training outreach volunteers and workers from prioritized communities, activating social networks and as a result, multiplying their

organizational capacity. Engaging respected local leaders, such as Hmong clan leaders in Fresno, to share about the importance of the census, was another strategy to build trust and address concerns that folks might have about completing the census.

Partners also used a variety of creative strategies tailored to connect with specific communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Partners integrated culturally-specific popular culture elements into their outreach and awareness campaigns. Some of the strategies included community murals and art projects; radio programs that included original songs and skits; online videos, shows and events; and car "caravans" that included DJs and music, all while encouraging census participation. Many of these creative strategies were presented in specific languages spoken by those in the region (e.g. Spanish, Punjabi, Hmong, and others) to spread the word and increase census participation. In addition to culturally specific content, organizations created several different types of the same content to reach multigenerational audiences. For example, Jakara Movement created songs in two different styles: a contemporary sound to reach younger generations and a traditional "old school" version for elders (see next page).

EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE STRATEGIES USED BY COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO EDUCATE AND ACTIVATE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY RESIDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

Youth Public Art

The Urbanist Collective engaged communities in participatory art projects in Tulare, Fresno, and Merced Counties. In Tulare County, Lahu and Lao speaking youth in Tulare County designed creative public art pieces and materials to spread the word about the census to the local community in Lindsey.

Online shows

The Fresno Center held online video competitions to share census information, hosting online shows that included cooking tutorials on Southeast Asian traditional dishes, comedy segments, and skits to connect with local communities while sharing census information.

Census Caravans

Dolores Huerta Foundation and SHE-Power, a Black-led organization in Bakersfield, organized census caravans, where cars would drive around accompanied by a DJ while canvassers knocked on doors to encourage census participation and provide a helping hand.

Pop Culture Public Service Announcements

Radio Bilingüe's media campaign produced non-traditional public service announcements using popular culture references to encourage census participation. These pieces included a cumbia-styled vignette and a mariachi song with the Census Bureau's Spanish hotline number in the lyrics to make it easier for people to remember and a trilingual rap in Spanish, English, and Mixteco to urge listeners to complete the census. Radio Bilingüe produced a radio skit based on a very popular Mexican song called, "La de la Mochila Azul," or "the one with the blue backpack." It featured a married couple, as the wife is getting ready to canvass her neighborhood in a blue vest. The husband modifies the lyrics and sings "la del chaleco azul" which translates to "the one with the blue vest" to her. The recognizable tune and play on words helped to introduce and normalize the presence of canvassers wearing blue vests. Radio Bilingüe also leveraged the popularity of sonidero culture to provide census information, and give "shout-outs" to "hard-to-count" census tracts to motivate people from these places to respond. Listeners called in to request greetings for their friends as they learned about the census.

TA' COnrado?

In the final weeks of the census self-reporting period, some of The Center's partners held a TA' COnrado? Tour, which is a play on words in Spanish that means "Are you counted?" and also spells out taco. The promotional events featured taco giveaways and DJ entertainment to motivate those who may not respond to the census to participate.

FINDINGS: EXAMINING CENSUS OUTREACH AND SELF-RESPONSE RATES AMONG “HARD-TO-COUNT” COMMUNITIES

SCALE OF OUTREACH: A FOCUS ON THE HARDEST-TO-COUNT AREAS BUT WIDESPREAD REACH

From 2019 through October 2020, organizations’ phone banking and canvassing efforts reached 87 percent (or 395 tracts) of census tracts in Region 6 focusing on the hard-to-count areas but also reaching many other areas as well.

Though outreach activities spanned two years, March through October 2020 was the most intensive census outreach period as this was when forms had been distributed and the Census Bureau was tracking and reporting daily changes in participation. During this time, the amount outreach “coverage” across the region was extensive. All tracts in Kings County and 99 percent of tracts in Fresno County were either phone banked, canvassed or both. Overall in the region about 80 percent of the tracts received some sort of outreach, with the largest proportion receiving both calls and in-person visits (Figure 4). About 58 percent of tracts received both calls and in-person visits (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Percent of Census Tract “Coverage” by Southern San Joaquin Valley County, March through October 2020

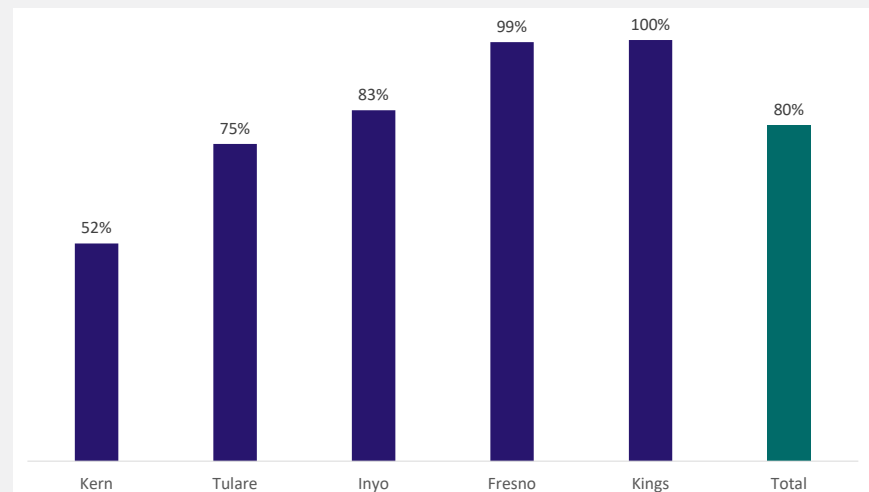
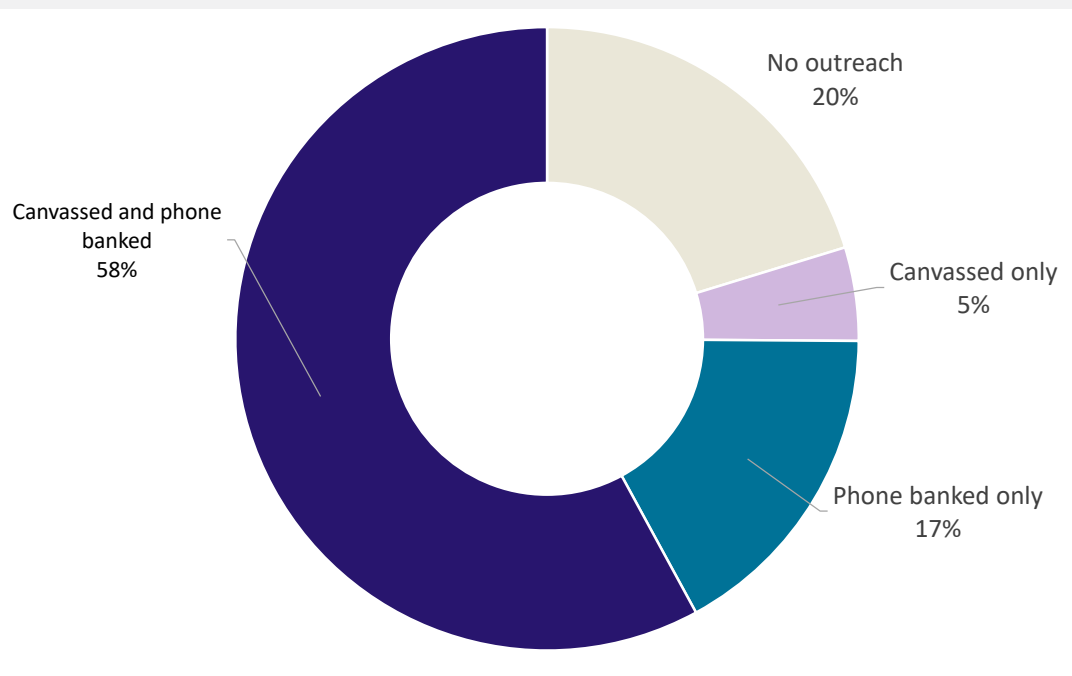


Figure 5: Percent of Tracts by Type of Outreach, Southern San Joaquin Valley Region, March through October 2020



The Center’s partners focused on residents living in census tracts with a “hard-to-count” index score of 57 and above (the median HTCI score in the region), and also those with a score of 69 and above. Given this focus we refer to “hard-to-count” tracts as those with a score of 57 and above and those with less than 57 as “easier-to-count”. Our assessment breaks down scores above 57 to provide more detail on the number of tracts that were the hardest to count (Figure 6).

While outreach was primarily focused on tracts with “hard-to-count” scores and above, outreach occurred among tracts in both “hard-to-count” and “easier to count” categories. During the March through October 2020 time period, about 362 tracts or 80 percent received outreach (phone banking or canvassing). About 213 or 59 percent of outreached tracts were considered “hard-to-count.” In the 92 tracts that did not receive any outreach by The Center’s partners, only 15 percent were considered “hard-to-count” (Figure 7). Among all “hard-to-count” tracts in the region, 94 percent were canvassed or phone banked during the March through October 2020 Census outreach program.

Figure 6: Map of Census Tracts by “Hard-to-Count” Index Score, Southern San Joaquin Valley, 2020

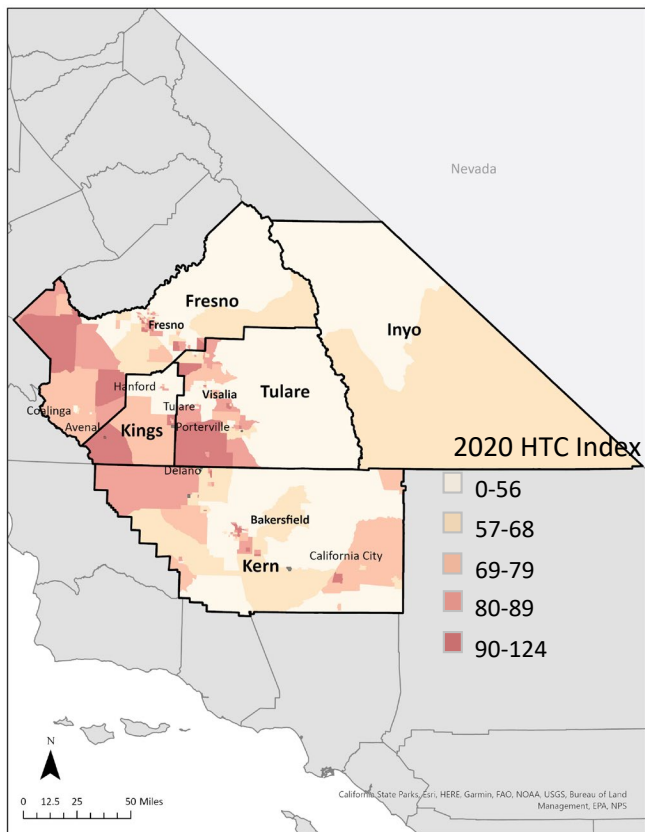
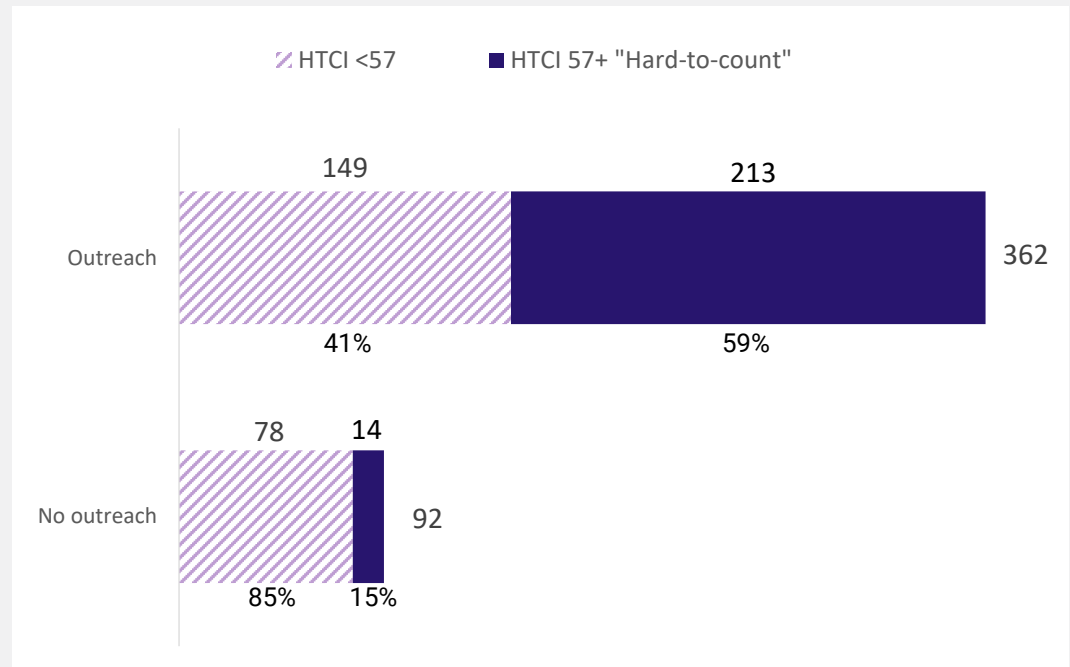


Figure 7: Number of Census Tracts Reached by Type of Outreach and “Hard-to-Count”, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020

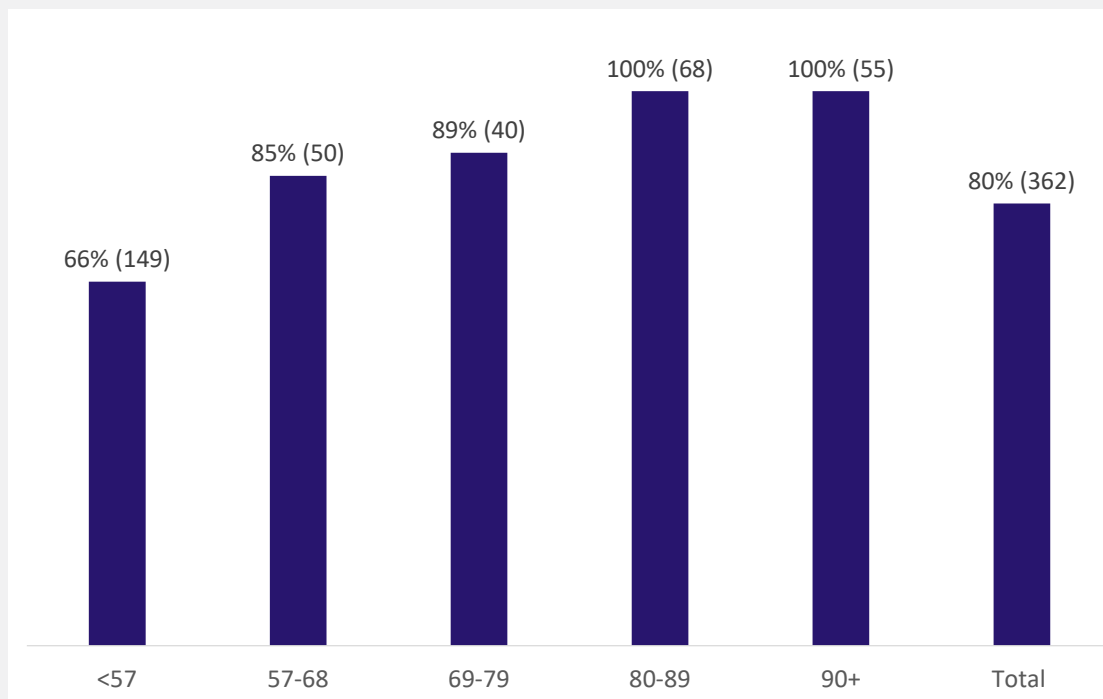


All tracts with a “hard-to-count” index score of 80 or above were outreached during this time, while 89 percent of those with scores between 69 and 79, and 85 percent of those with scores of 57 to 68 were outreached. In comparison 66 percent of “easier-to-count” census tracts with a score of 57 or less received outreach during this period (Figure 8). Additionally, among tracts with the highest hard-to-count index scores, nearly all of them were canvassed in person at least once between March and October 2020. For example, 90 percent of tracts with an HTCI score between 80 and 89 and 91 percent of tracts with HTCI score above 90 were canvassed.

“A lot of people confuse the Census with voting, especially in rural areas where people are most disconnected. They also have a lot of fear or think that they cannot participate – this was a big obstacle for us.”

– VISION Y COMPROMISO

Figure 8: Percent of Census Tracts Receiving Outreach by “Hard-to-Count” Index Score, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020 (N=454)

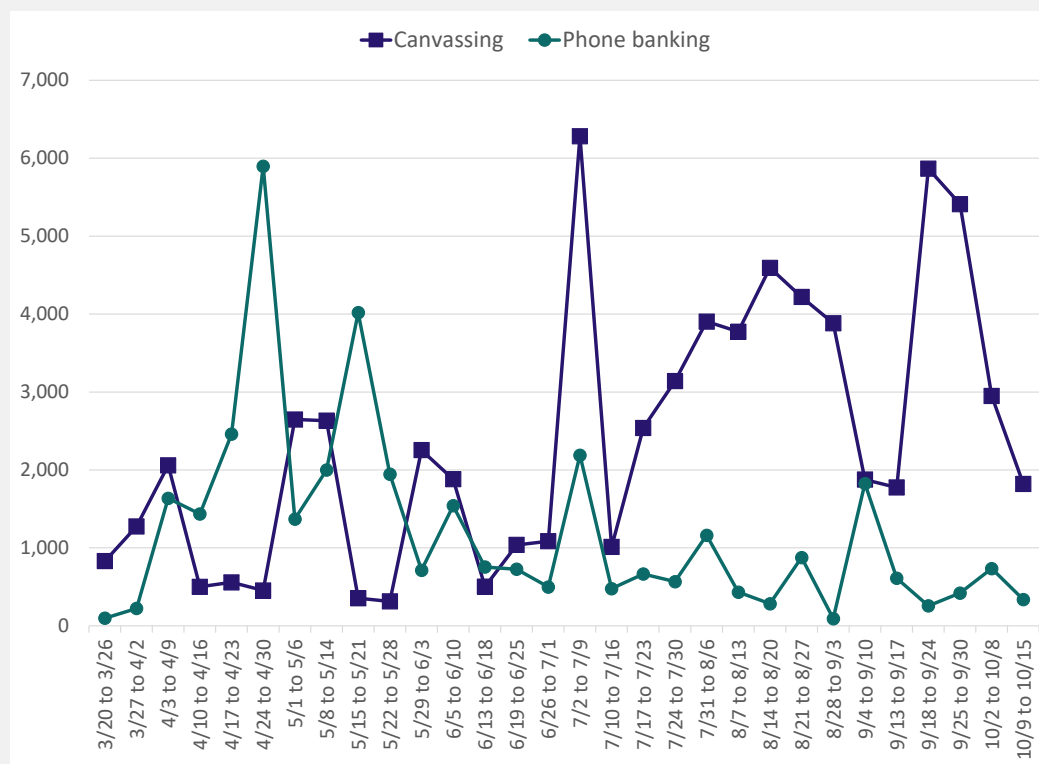


In the spring, “outreach” consisted mostly of phone banking, with in-person canvassing ramping up in June and lasting throughout the self-response and Nonresponse Followup period. Weekly tracking of the number of households reach during this time shows ebbs and flows, possibly related to the increase in COVID-19 cases, wildfires, extreme heat waves, and other issues preventing large scale outreach during this time (Figure 9).

“We heard from many community members who had never participated in the Census. One of our community members in Caruthers, who lived in the U.S. for years, thought that the Census was only for U.S. citizens. After we explained the importance and benefits of filling out the Census, he filled it out. He also connected us with his family to ensure they filled it.”

– CENTRO BINACIONAL PARA EL DESARROLLO INDÍGENA OAXAQUEÑO (CBDIO)

Figure 9: Total Number of Households Canvassed and Phone Banked by Week, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020



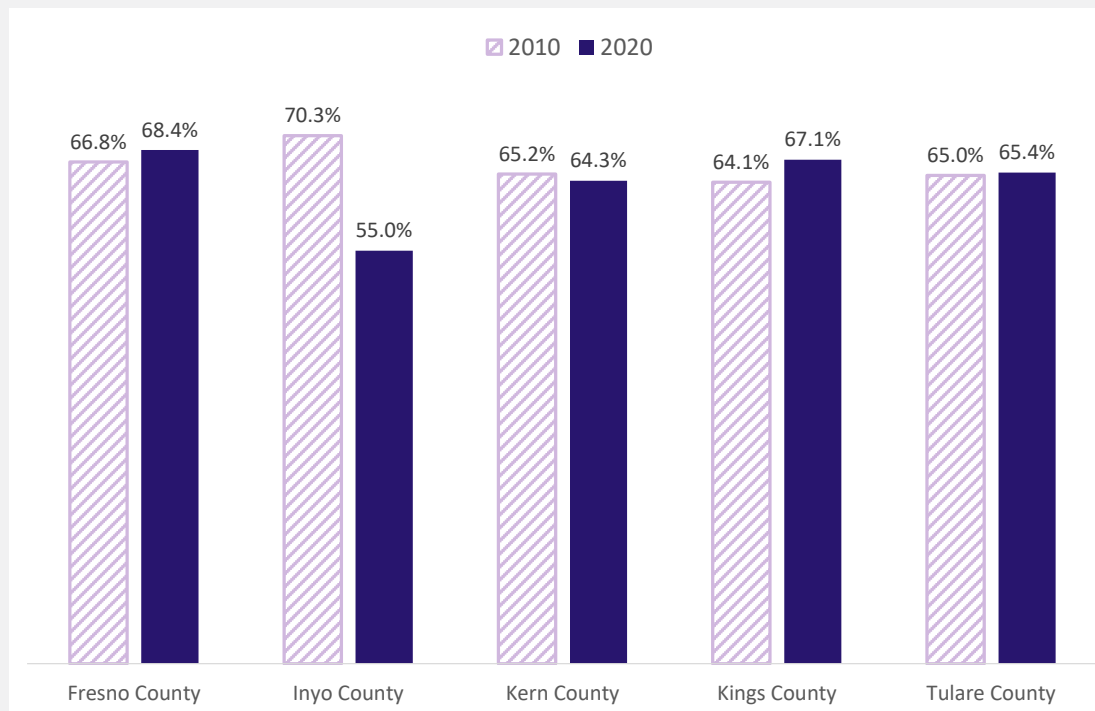
FINDING #1: PARTICIPATION IMPROVED IN “HARD-TO-COUNT” TRACTS, BUT REMAINED LOWER THAN IN “EASIER-TO-COUNT” TRACTS

Data on final response scores show that California’s overall census self-response rate improved in 2020 with a rate of 69.6 percent compared to 68.2 percent in 2010. Final response scores for all regions except for two regions saw improved 2020 self-response rates compared to 2010. The Southern San Joaquin Valley Region’s final self-response rate was slightly higher in 2020 at 66.2 percent, compared to 65.6 percent in 2010 (Appendix B).

Among the region’s counties, Fresno, Kings, and Tulare had 2020 final response rates that exceeded 2010 (Figure 10).¹⁹

Though overall scores improved over the decade, there is a difference in how the response rates changed depending on their “hard-to-count” (57 and above) and “easier-to-count” (below 57) index scores both in California as a whole and in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. Statewide, self-response rates for tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores improved in 2020 compared to 2010 however tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores

Figure 10: Final Self-Response Rates by County, Southern San Joaquin Valley, 2010 and 2020

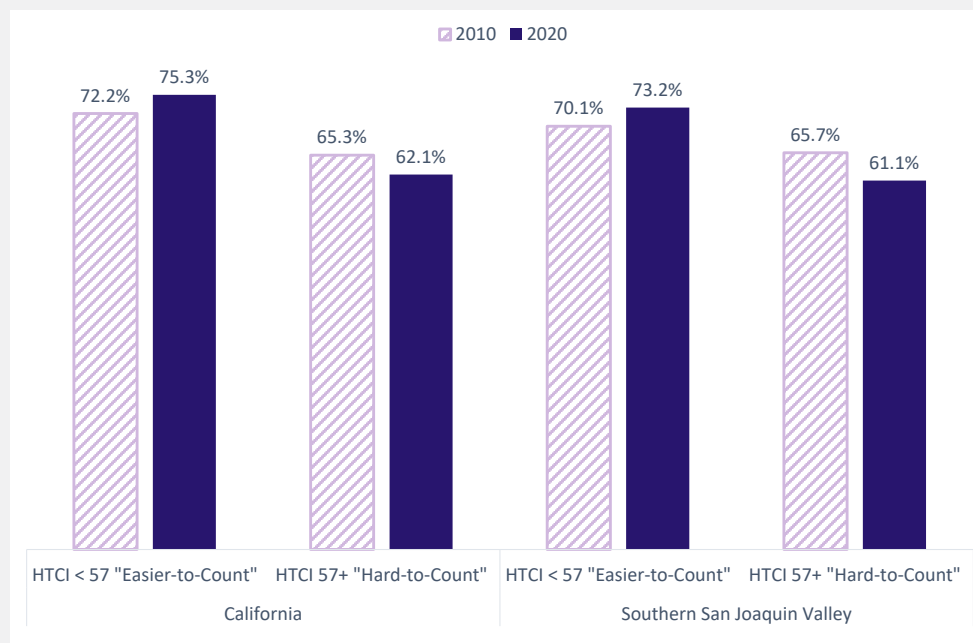


did not do as well; in fact, the 2020 response rate fell by 3.2 percentage points from 2010. Southern San Joaquin Valley shared the same pattern, with median final self-response rates in tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores improving (70.1 percent to 73.2 percent), while tracts with “hard-to-count” scores did not improve over the decade (65.7 percent compared to 61.1 percent in 2020) and the decline was greater than for the the state as a whole (-4.6 percentage points versus -3.2 percentage points). Among tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores, median final self-response rates for both California and Southern San Joaquin Valley were lower than tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores (Figure 11).

Figure 12 shows how tracts with the highest “hard-to-count” index scores had lower self-response rates both in California as well as in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. This points to potential equity implications as the divide increases between harder and easier to count areas.

Tracts with the highest index scores of 90 and above had the lowest median final self-response rates compared to those in the other harder-to-count categories above 57. Though Southern San Joaquin Valley’s median final self-response rates mirror the state’s across each hard-to-count category, Southern San Joaquin Valley’s

Figure 11: Median Final Self-Response Rates by “Hard-to-Count” and “Easier-to-Count” Scores for Census Tracts, California and Southern San Joaquin Valley, 2010 and 2020



Note: Self-response rates are reported by the Census Bureau for each individual census tract and not reported by sub-category (e.g. “Hard-to-Count” index score of 57 or above). In order to illustrate how these sub-categories are faring, we use the median self-response rate of each sub-category to help provide a comparison point between groups.

median final self-response rate for tracts in the hardest to count category was slightly higher than the state median (58.1 compared to 56.8). Between March and October 2020, Southern San Joaquin Valley’s self-response rates continued to increase, though among “hard-to-count” the overall changes were smaller. Overall, the regional median percentage point change in self-response rates during this time was 50.3, lower than the statewide median percentage point change (53).²⁰ Regionwide, tracts with higher “hard-to-count” index scores had lower percentage point increases than tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores. For example, tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores had a percentage point change in median self-response rates of 53.9 compared with 48.9 percentage points change for tracts with scores of 57 to 68 (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Median Final Self-Response Rates by “Hard-to-Count” Index Score Categories, California and Southern San Joaquin Valley, 2020

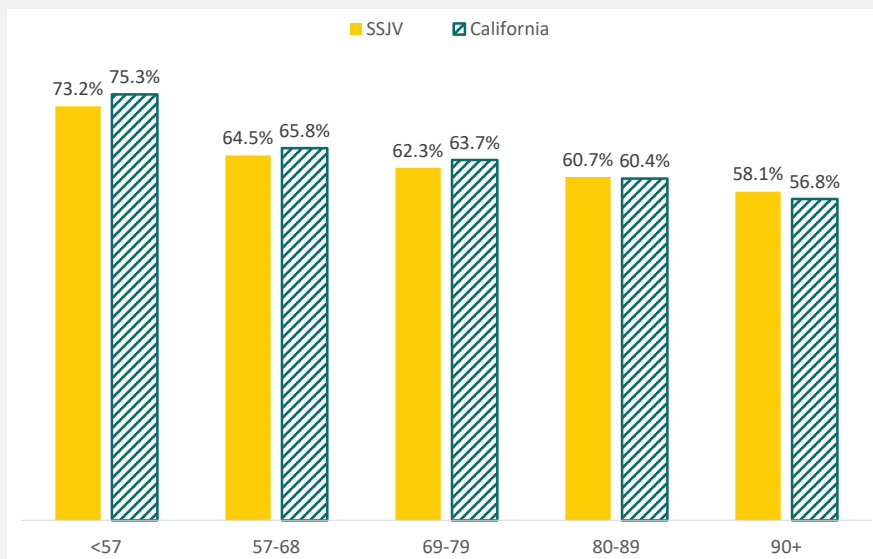
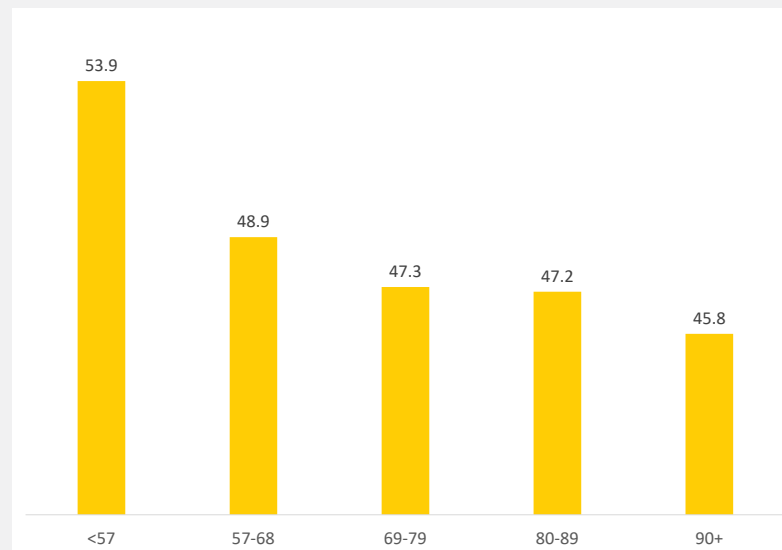


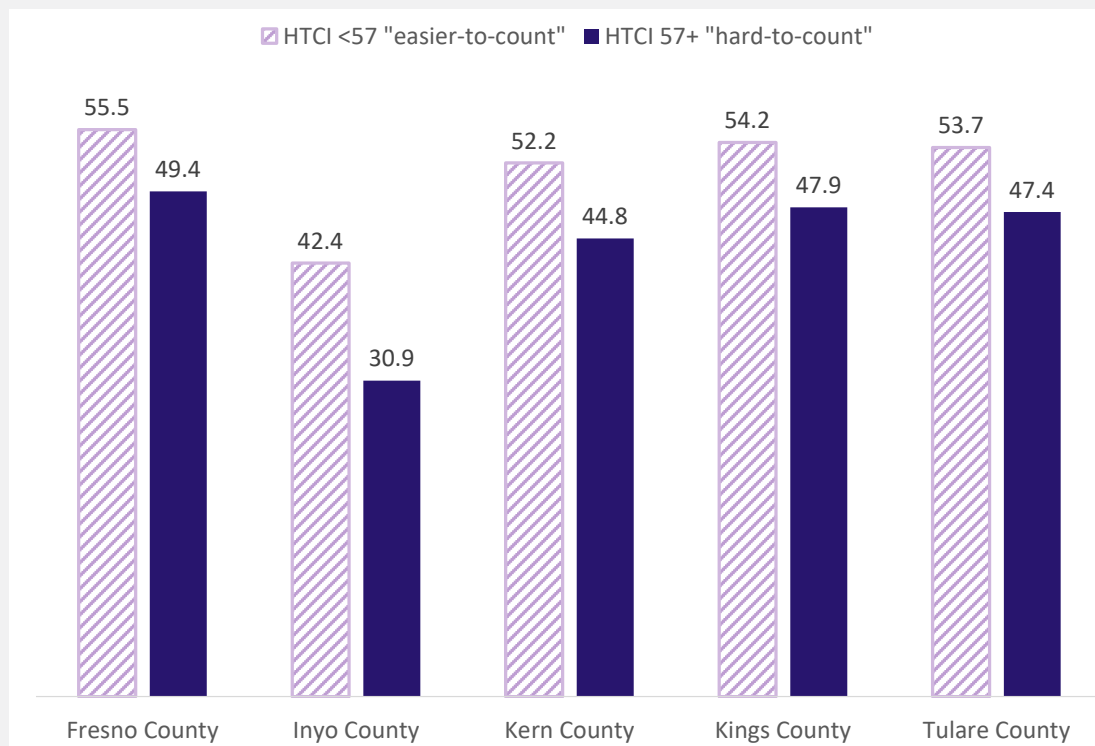
Figure 13: Percentage Point Gain in Median Self-Response Rates, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020



Similarly among counties, tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores had larger percentage point changes in median self-response rates than tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores (Figure 14).

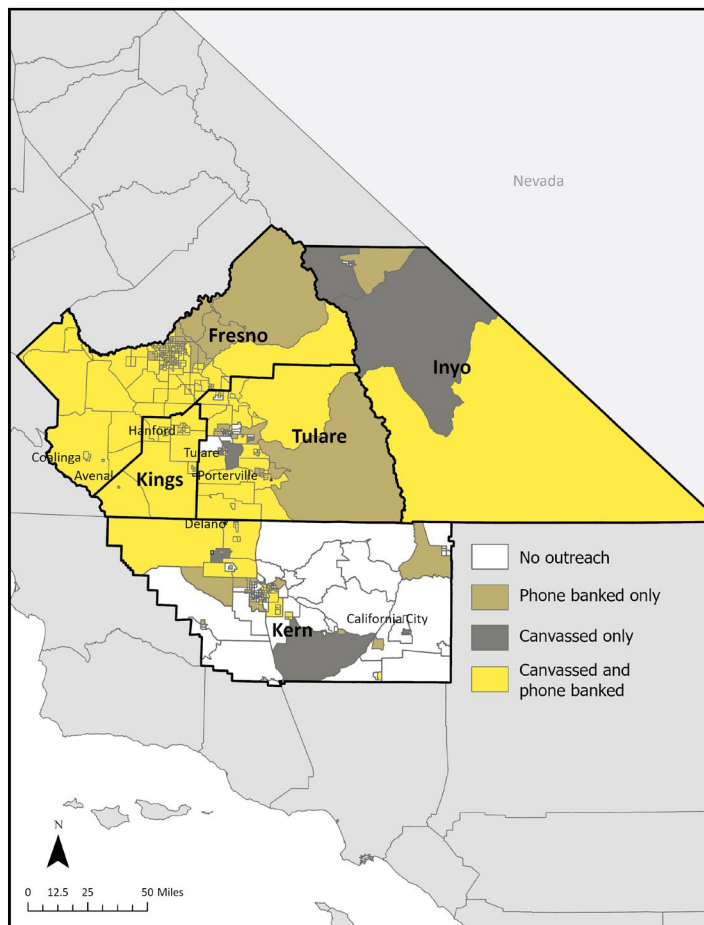
While there were large increases in participation over time during the height of the census outreach period in 2020 in certain areas, there were fewer overall gains for those areas that might be considered hardest-to-count. Most counties experienced a 6 to 7 percentage point difference in median self-response rates between those tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores of 57 and above and “easier-to-count” index scores of less than 57, except for Inyo County, which had a wider difference of about 11.5 percentage points but also had very few census tracts (6). During this time, Fresno County’s “hard-to-count” tracts had the largest percentage point change in median self-response rates among the five counties, with Kings, and Tulare counties following.

Figure 14: Percentage Point Gain in Median Self-Response Rates by County, March through October 2020



FINDING #2: THERE WERE MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS IN SELF-RESPONSES AMONG CENSUS TRACTS THAT WERE CANVASSED AND PHONE BANKED

We used reported daily response rates from the California Complete Count – Census 2020 Office and outreach data reported to Census PDI data by The Center’s partner organizations to assess the change in self-response rates for tracts that received outreach compared to those that did not. Data on daily response rates were available starting in late March through October 2020. Outreach data that was reported to Census PDI includes in-person, door-to-door canvassing and contact via phone. As previously mentioned, groups reached most of the San Joaquin Valley region. About 80 percent of all census tracts in the region received outreach, either in person or by phone, during the March through October 2020 outreach period. About 59 percent of these tracts had “hard-to-count” index score of 57 above which was nearly all (94 percent) of the “hard-to-count” tracts in the region (Figure 15).

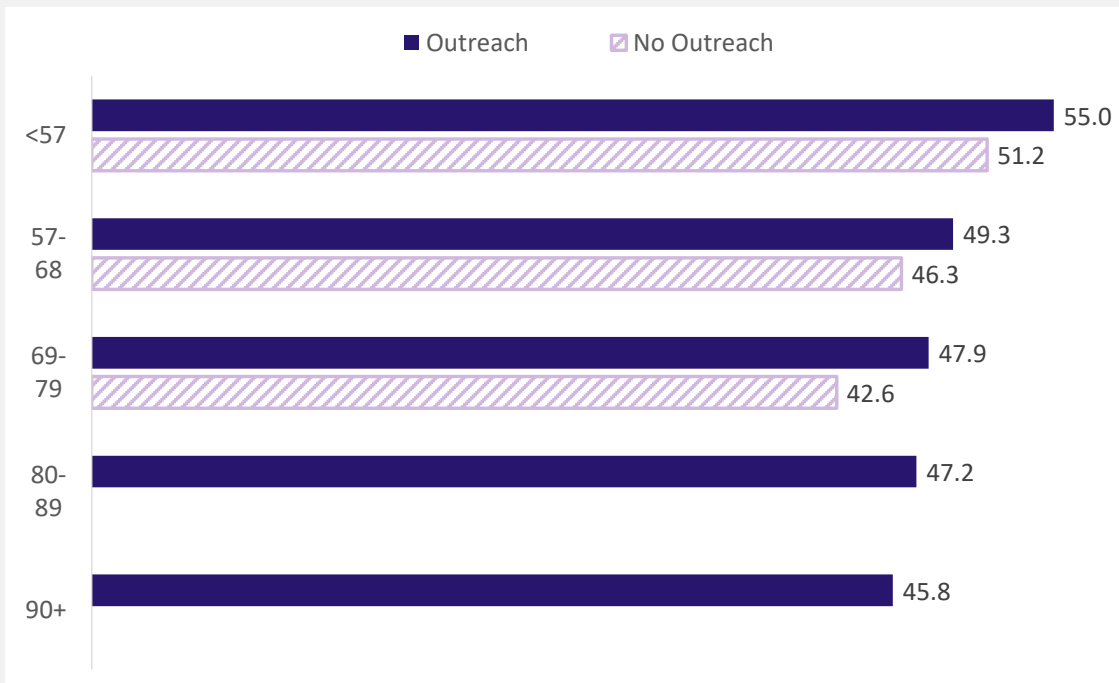


“One day one of our canvassers approached a community member to inquire if they had completed the census form. She told us she would appreciate us helping her complete her form online and we proceeded to do so. She told us that she felt more comfortable with our approach than with a census bureau worker who had previously approached her and felt that we were trustworthy individuals.”

– RURAL WESTSIDE COLLABORATIVE

Figure 15: Map of Tracts By Type of Outreach Received, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020

Figure 16: Percentage Point Gain in Median Self-Response Rates, Southern San Joaquin Valley, March through October 2020



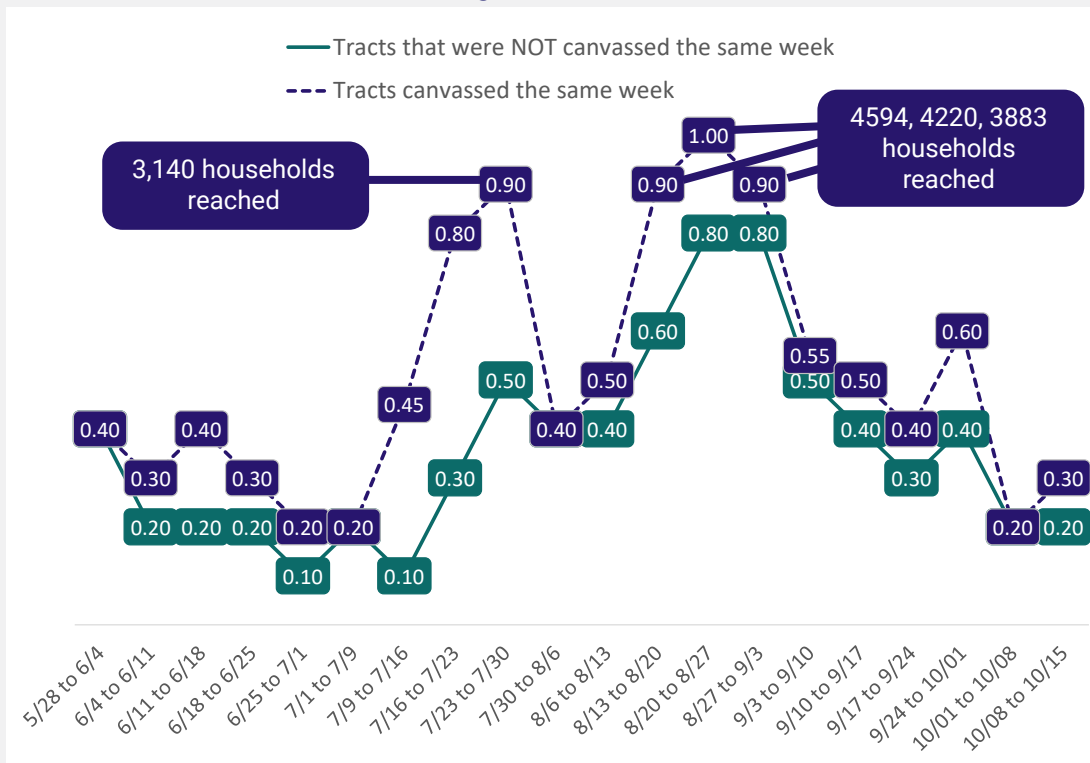
While overall, self-response rates were lower among tracts with “hard-to-count” index scores than tracts with “easier-to-count” index scores, data show that within “hard-to-count” index score categories, tracts receiving outreach by The Center’s partner organizations had higher increases in self-response rates than tracts that received no outreach by partners (Figure 16). For example, among all tracts with “hard-to-count” scores of 67 through 79, the percentage point change in median self-response rates for tracts that received no outreach by partners was 42.6 compared to 47.9 percentage points—a 5.3 percentage point difference—for those tracts that received outreach in March through October 2020. Even among tracts with “easier-to-count” scores of less than 57, tracts receiving outreach increased 3.8 percentage points more than those with no outreach. We were unable to assess differences among tracts with the highest “hard-to-count” scores of 80 and above as all of these tracts were reached by The Center’s partners.

Data on the number of households reached by census tracts show that tracts with higher number of households contacted had higher median percentage point change in self-response rates between March and October 2020. For example tracts where less than 75 household contacts had been reported had a median percentage point change of 46.1 compared to 49.6 for tracts

where 500 or more household contacts had been reported.²¹

Additionally, tracts that were reached through in-person door-to-door canvassing had higher week-by-week percentage point changes in self-response rates compared to those that received no outreach that week in May through October 2020 (Figure 17). Though specific tracts saw higher weekly increases, data for all tracts canvassed shows that in the last two full weeks of July, tracts canvassed saw a nearly 1 percentage point increase in median self-response rates (0.8 and 0.9) while those not canvassed saw 0.3 and 0.5 percentage point increases, respectively. During each of those two weeks, The Center’s partners reached over 2,500 and 3,100 households in the region. In August, when census workers were in the field as well as The Center’s partners, the weekly percentage point change increased for tracts canvassed and not canvassed however those tracts that were canvassed still had higher increases in self-response over the week. The Center’s partners reached over 4,000 households weekly during this time. The ebbs and flows of canvassing shown on the graph may be due to COVID-19 surges, heat, fires, and other challenges faced in 2020. Overall those tracts that had been canvassed saw weekly improvements above those tracts not canvassed by The Center’s partners.

Figure 17: Weekly Percentage Point Gain in Median Self-Response Rates for Tracts Canvassed and Those that Were Not Canvassed, Southern San Joaquin Valley, May through October 2020



FINDING #3: TRACT-LEVEL COMPARISONS ILLUSTRATE THAT OUTREACH EFFORTS INCREASED CENSUS RESPONSE

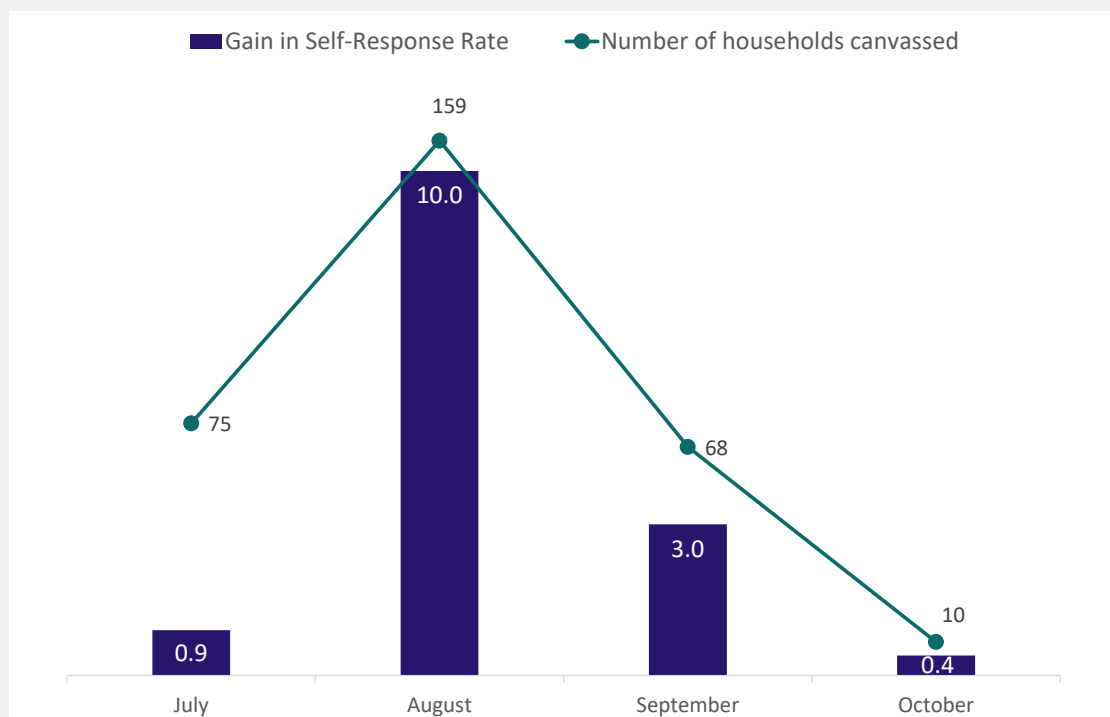
Aggregate data on overall outreach efforts illustrates modest improvements that outreach made across the region, however census-tract level comparisons offer another perspective of how outreach boosted self-response in the region.

The Center’s partners canvassed the most households during the March through October period—over 18,000 doors were knocked. Looking closer at canvassing activity and self-response rates, data show that Fresno County had the largest gains in self-response rates in the region. For example, in August the statewide median percentage point gain in self-response rate was about 3 percent, however some tracts in the Fresno County were seeing gains in self-response rates of 6 to 10 percentage points. These six tracts with the largest self-response rate gains in August had sizable self-response rate gains between March and October,

Figure 18: Top Fresno County Census Tracts With Largest August Gain in Self-Response Rate, 2020

Census Tract	Area Description	Self-Response Rate Percentage Point Gain in August	Number of Canvassed Households in August	Self-Response Rate Percentage Point Gain (March through October)	Final 2020 Response Rate
13.03	Calwa	10	159	53	63.3%
29.05	Olive/Belmont, Chestnut/Peach neighborhood	7	98	47	61.6%
14.07	Sunnyside	6	326	51	59.9%
62.01	Sanger	6	189	54	64.9%
82.00	Tranquility, San Joaquin, Cantua Creek	6	308	44	45.2%
85.02	Parlier	6	231	51	62.3%

Figure 19: Monthly Percentage Point Gain in Self-Response Rates and Canvassing Totals, Calwa (Tract 13.03), July through October 2020



Note: No Canvassing data was recorded before July for this census tract.

ranging from 44 to 54 percentage points gained. All of the six tracts were in communities that have been historically undercounted and had “hard-to-count” index scores between 77 and 92. Five of the six tracts achieved The Center’s goal of reaching a final self-response rate of about 60 percent or above (Figure 18).

A closer look at the self-response rates for one tract (13.03) in Calwa, a census-designated place, shows that the tract started at 9.9 percent in March and ended at 63.3 percent in October—a 53 percentage point increase over the 2020 outreach period. With a “hard-to-count” index score of 88, this tract had a higher percentage point change than the regional average of just over 50 percentage points during this time and higher than other tracts in its same “hard-to-count” index score category of 80 to 89. This tract was mentioned during interviews with The Center’s community-based organizations as a place where there was not only door-to-door canvassing but was also close to where organizations employed creative strategies such as painting a mural in the community (Figure 22). Additionally, increases in canvassing mirrored an increase in self-response

Figure 20: Tract 13.03 in Calwa, Fresno County

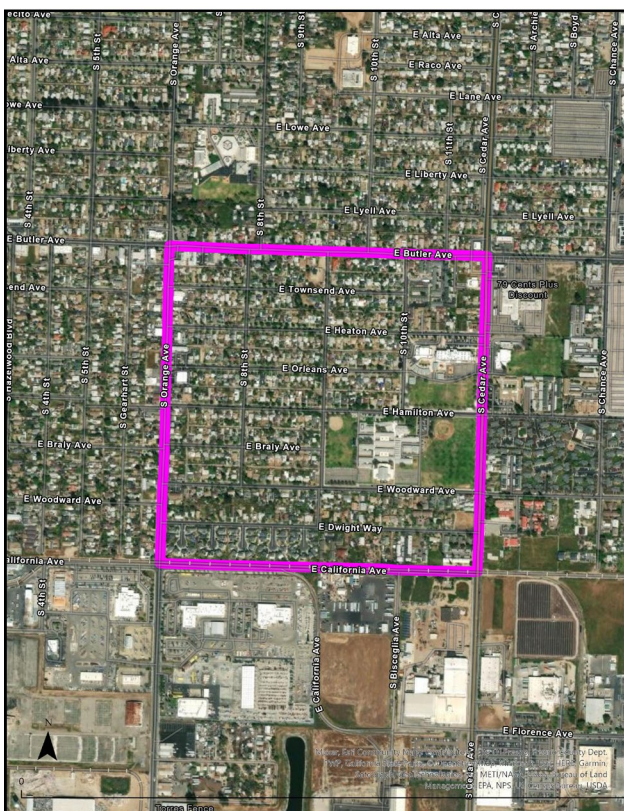


Figure 21: Map of Tract 13.03 and Hard-to-Count Index Scores, Fresno County, 2020

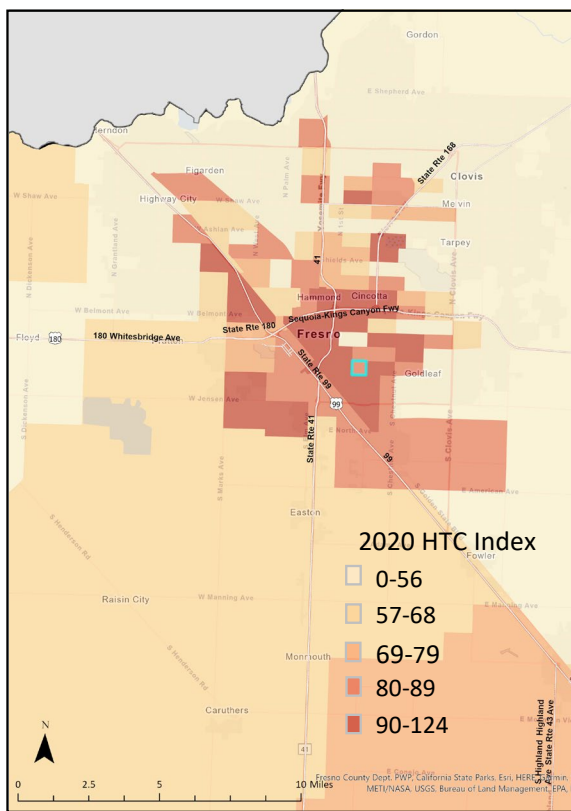


Figure 22: Census 2020 Mural Created by Calwa Community Urbanists Collective, 2020



The mural in Calwa was one of the Urbanists Collective's creative outreach strategies. Located in a well-trafficked corner located across the street from a very popular restaurant and the only local grocery market within five miles, the mural features elements of local culture and landmarks that locals recognized and identified with.

rates in August when the tract experienced a 10 percentage point change in self-response rates during the height of outreach efforts (Figure 19).

As noted in the second finding, tracts that had been phone banked or canvassed seemed to have a higher percentage point change than ones in similar hard to count categories. Though most tracts with high “hard-to-count” index scores had received outreach, one neighborhood in Kern County provided an opportunity to compare adjacent neighborhood results (Figure 23). In the southeastern portion of the city of Bakersfield in Kern County, two tracts had similar “hard-to-count” index scores but only one had been canvassed while the other one did not receive any outreach. The canvassed tract had a “hard-to-count” index score of 70 while the non-canvassed tract had a score of 67. The canvassed tract started out with a lower self-response rate, 12.8 percent in March than the non-canvassed tract, 14.3 percent. By October, the two tracts had very similar final self-response rates at around 60 percent. The canvassed tract made a larger gain in its response rate than the not-canvassed tract.

Additionally, many of the region’s rural census tracts received outreach in the form of both phone calls and in-person door-to-door visits by The Center’s partners and some saw substantial increases in self-response rates. For example in

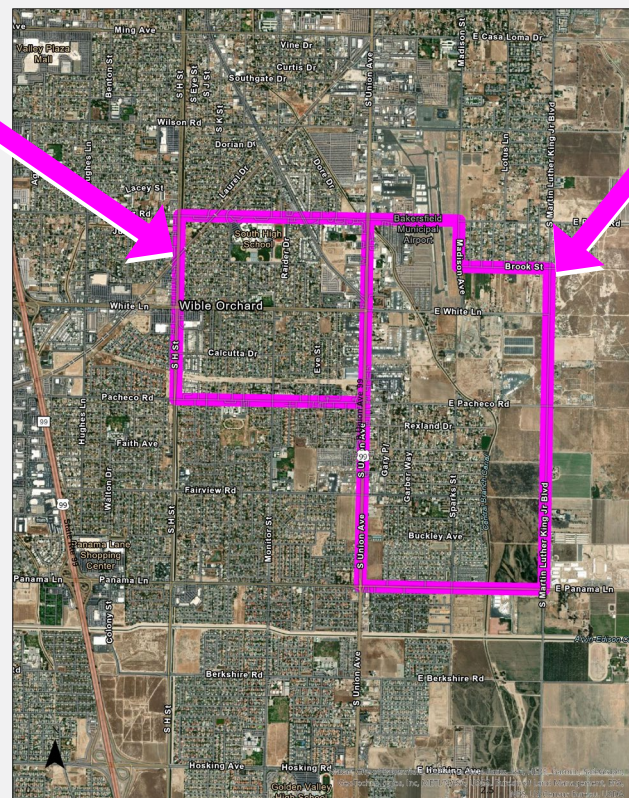
Figure 23: Comparison of Canvassed and Non-Canvassed Tracts, Kern County, March through October 2020

**Canvassed
(Tract 31.21)**

- 70 HTCI Score**
- 12.8% Starting Self-Response Rate**
- 47.3 Percentage Point Gain**
- 60.1% Final Self-Response Rate**

**Not Canvassed
(Tract 31.03)**

- 67 HTCI Score**
- 14.3% Starting Self-Response Rate**
- 46.3 Percentage Point Gain**
- 60.6% Final Self-Response Rate**



Fresno County, two rural tracts between Parlier and Reedley that had received outreach, 85.01 and 68.02, had self-response rates in March of 9.0 percent and 12.2 percent, respectively. These two tracts saw large increases by October of 54.8 percent and 55.7 percent, respectively (Figure 24). The two tracts had “hard-to-count” index scores of 108 and 82, respectively. Census tract 83.02 in the western rural portion of Fresno, west and southwest of Mendota, with a “hard-to-count” index score of 100, received outreach and had a March self-response rate of 9.9 percent and a final rate of 53.7 percent (Figure 25). None of these tracts were part of the “Update Leave” census operation, which drops 2020 Census invitation packets at household doorsteps in areas where the majority of households may not receive mail at their home’s physical location. The goal of the operation is to improve response rates in rural and remote areas that might be harder to deliver mail or respond online.²² In interviews with The Center’s partners, many mentioned the concerted efforts made by local community-based organizations to reach those in rural areas of the region who were often busy working long hours as farmworkers and or lacked digital access to fill out the form. In fact, data reported to Census PDI on households reached in tract 83.02 show that this tract had one of the largest numbers of household contact reached via canvassing.²³

Figure 24: Census Tracts 85.01 and 68.02, Fresno County, 2020 (2010 geography)

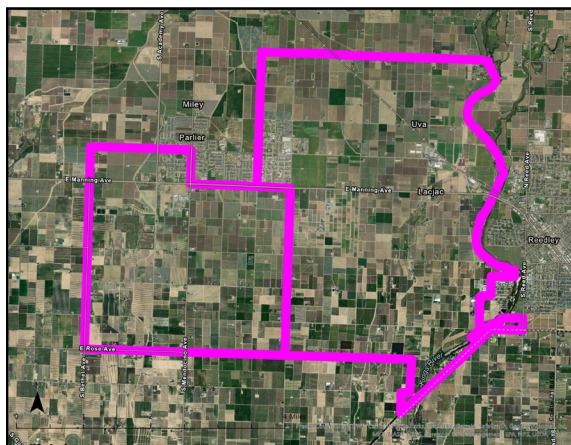
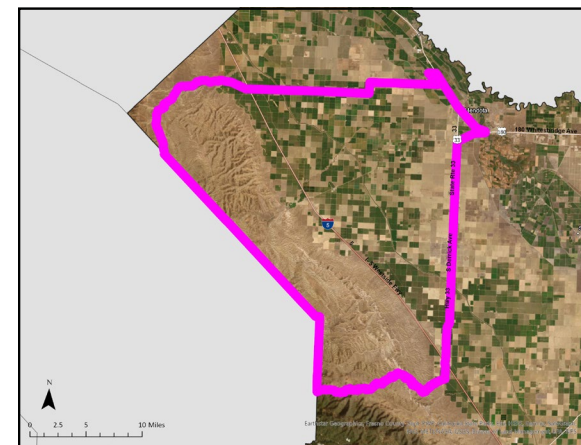


Figure 25: Census Tract 83.02, Fresno County, 2020 (2010 Geography)



LEARNINGS FROM THE CENTER'S CENSUS OUTREACH PARTNERS IN SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

We partnered with The Center to reconvene 20 of its 2020 census partners on October 5, 2022 to share preliminary findings and capture learnings for 2030 and beyond. Drawing on their expertise, below are key takeaways from the conversation that provide more insight into the on-the-ground efforts used to encourage participation in the 2020 Census.

Early census outreach was effective when the effort was identifiable: Folks said that they were able to garner early interest when teams went out to neighborhoods wearing census branded t-shirts, turquoise vests, and a census button together with scripts and materials, similar to voter engagement campaigns.

Flexibility for those doing the on-the-ground outreach is key to reaching communities often excluded due to perceived barriers to contact: From the pandemic and natural disasters, to national efforts to intimidate and suppress the count,

particularly among immigrants and people of color, organizers working in the field needed to be able to pivot strategies and quickly respond to the changing landscape. For example, those reaching areas with more farmworker populations found that going to their homes during the day was not effective as many worked long hours. Organizers realized that meeting folks at worksites at hours that ensured workers would have time to talk could supplement their attempts to reach folks at home. Based on these experiences, state and philanthropic funding should take into account the need to be flexible and adaptable in the moment.

Hiring staff that are from the local community is critical in building a robust and culturally competent outreach effort: Partners shared that there is a need to hire canvassers with documentation statuses and language capacity that reflects the local community. Hiring trusted community members who know the dynamics of their local communities including sharing the same

vernacular and lived experiences was critical to participation. Retaining these canvassers was also challenging due to the shifting census timeline, as some could no longer canvass in order to take more stable, long-term employment opportunities.

Census outreach is very effective when paired with other community services and outreach efforts: Partnerships with organizations with existing programs such as food distribution, immigration, and other safety net services including health services, aided in reaching community members, many of whom were worried about losing their jobs, putting food on the table, and staying healthy. For example, promotoras from Vision Y Compromiso provided important health information and resources to their local community members while encouraging them to fill out the census. Folks from Dolores Huerta Foundation said this was the first time they had done census outreach at food banks. Westside Family Preservation

Services Network integrated their outreach into existing food distribution and services, following up with people over the phone to see if they needed assistance filling out their census form. Connecting folks to services while encouraging census participation helped communicate the importance of the census while providing critical services to communities.

Technology was useful when paired with trusted community canvassers: Partners shared that having the tablets was an important tool to help residents fill out the form at their door. Having broadband-connected tablets to assist folks who lack quality broadband or being able to connect someone on the phone to a hotline was critical in closing the digital divide. While increasing internet connectivity in areas that lack access is also important, combining community messengers with internet-enabled devices was key in bolstering participation particularly in areas where digital literacy was low. Community organizations also employed social media to supplement their in-person outreach, using Facebook and YouTube to hold forums and provide information and links, particularly when they had to pivot from not being able to engage in door-to-door outreach. The Fresno Center shared with The Center that they “emerged a strong, more networked, digitally savvy, and more creative

organization” as a result of their census work.

Technological tools and databases were helpful but data about communities that have been historically undercounted was missing from conventional sources of information:

This year was the first time Census PDI was used to track and report census outreach, which helped to provide a more consistent tracking system. However, folks felt that the PDI system was not adequate for rural communities and those lacking phone numbers. Some mentioned having to add addresses into the database and other expressed frustration with being unable to tag houses as reached. Those not included in commercially available databases were often left out of these tools, making it critical to leverage the existing relationships of local trusted messengers.

Recognizing the census as ongoing work that needs to be funded earlier and for the long-term can support the success of an accurate count in 2030 and beyond.

The participation required for successful outreach cannot be galvanized at the last minute, even with the help of trusted messengers. Groups expressed that census outreach was an important piece of their ongoing regional work. Funding every ten years is not sufficient for local

communities to plan and prepare for a robust outreach program. Additionally, opportunities for local-serving organizations to build and strengthen relationships with the community and other stakeholders including other community-based organizations, funders, and county/state agencies, as well as foster leadership among staff and community members were important components of The Center’s coordinated, regionwide census outreach program. Many of the relationships strengthened by coordinated work on COVID-19 response and the census continued on through redistricting, which included opportunities for community-based organizations to work with others across generations, racial groups, and geography. The work is ongoing, particularly as there has been an erosion of trust in the government both due to unjust policies aimed at immigrants and people of color as well as misinformation by those who seek to undermine public trust in democratic institutions.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2030 CENSUS

Those engaging in on-the-ground efforts to increase census participation have the expertise, institutional knowledge, and community understanding to help the Census Bureau and other organizations involved in the count understand how to improve its processes. With this in mind, we offer the following considerations as we shift toward planning for census 2030:

Prepare for the unanticipated by investing in local communities who are equipped to pivot and adjust their outreach strategies under (almost) any circumstance.

If 2020 has taught us anything it's that the best laid plans might be pushed to the wayside but that when there is investment and support in organizations that are committed to high quality local engagement, groups will rise to the challenge.

Fund community engagement at all levels of census planning and data gathering.

A robust census effort starts early and includes community engagement at every stage in the process. Involving grassroots community-based organizations and community-engaged research can help to ensure that any attempts

to “streamline” preparation for 2030 do not negatively affect communities that need a more thoughtful approach. From informing the building of the Master Address File during the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) period, to testing new questions and new technologies being used to capture and track census responses, community organizers with expertise in reaching and tracking outreach can identify potential pitfalls that can disadvantage communities that have been historically undercounted even before the forms are sent out.

The technology needs to be ready for community canvassers before Census Day 2030.

While community engagement made strides in improving participation, challenges with new national and state-managed outreach tracking systems caused delays and lacked the sophistication needed by experienced canvassers. Testing and improvements in state and privately-provided tracking tools (e.g. Census PDI, SwORD) and any other emerging technologies needs to be developed in partnership with experienced community-based canvassers.

Anticipate and curtail attempts to undermine a full count.

In preparation for the 2020 census we saw consistent attempts to sabotage data collection efforts that included underfunding the Census Bureau, putting up administrative barriers, insufficient testing of operations and questionnaire, and reporting misinformation about the census. Ensuring that the Census Bureau is funded and able to do its job and that there is fair and equitable allocation of funds and representation are vital in building community trust in the census. Community members faced an uphill battle trying to convince folks that the data would be used for community good, not evil. Community engagement makes a difference—but there are larger structural issues at play that affect census participation.

Ongoing advocacy and research are crucial to ensure a fair and accurate count.

While the census remains a fairly technical process, community engaged research and advocacy remains crucial in strengthening census bureau procedures and processes. Community experts have been key in advocating for improved data collection, statistical procedures, and disaggregation. Continued advocacy ensures data can remain useful and paves the way for effective community outreach.

CONCLUSION

The decennial census is one of the most important foundational parts of our democracy: every person counts and must be counted. Yet this seemingly simple proposition is complicated in its implementation. Efforts by the U.S. Census Bureau to streamline and modernize the process inadvertently miss non-traditional households and living arrangements and those without access to digital technology. Broad public communications to educate and encourage the public to participate are insufficient to overcome distrust among those who do not see government as being for or by the people.

Closing the gap between those who are likely to be counted and those who are likely to be missed is not only important for a full and accurate count but also for its ripple effects on closing gaps in political, social, and economic opportunity. Community-based organizations and their philanthropic supporters are important partners because they are well-positioned to reach and engage communities that have been historically undercounted. It is often the same people who are knocking on doors to encourage census

participation who are providing services at food pantries, tabling at fairs to provide legal support for immigrants, and convincing infrequent voters to show up at the polls.

This study of a grassroots, community-driven strategy in California's San Joaquin Valley, a region with communities that have been historically undercounted, demonstrates the importance of in-person outreach particularly in neighborhoods with high concentrations of residents at risk of being left out of the count. It is likely that inequities in self-response rates for the 2020 Census would have been far greater without the highly intensive investment on the part of The Center and its community partners. Despite a contentious political environment, a global health and economic crisis, and environmental catastrophes, the final self-response rate for the region surpassed that of the 2010 Census.

Census outreach is becoming part of the continued work that many community-based organizations see as central to their core missions in ensuring a better future for all. The Census Bureau would be remiss if it did not take

into account the experiences, expertise, and engagement of grassroots community-based organizations at every stage of census planning, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, philanthropy should take advantage of every opportunity to build and strengthen the civic engagement capacities of grassroots community-based organizations. Ensuring that everyone is counted is part of the long-term march towards fulfilling the declaration that in this country everyone is equal.

APPENDICES

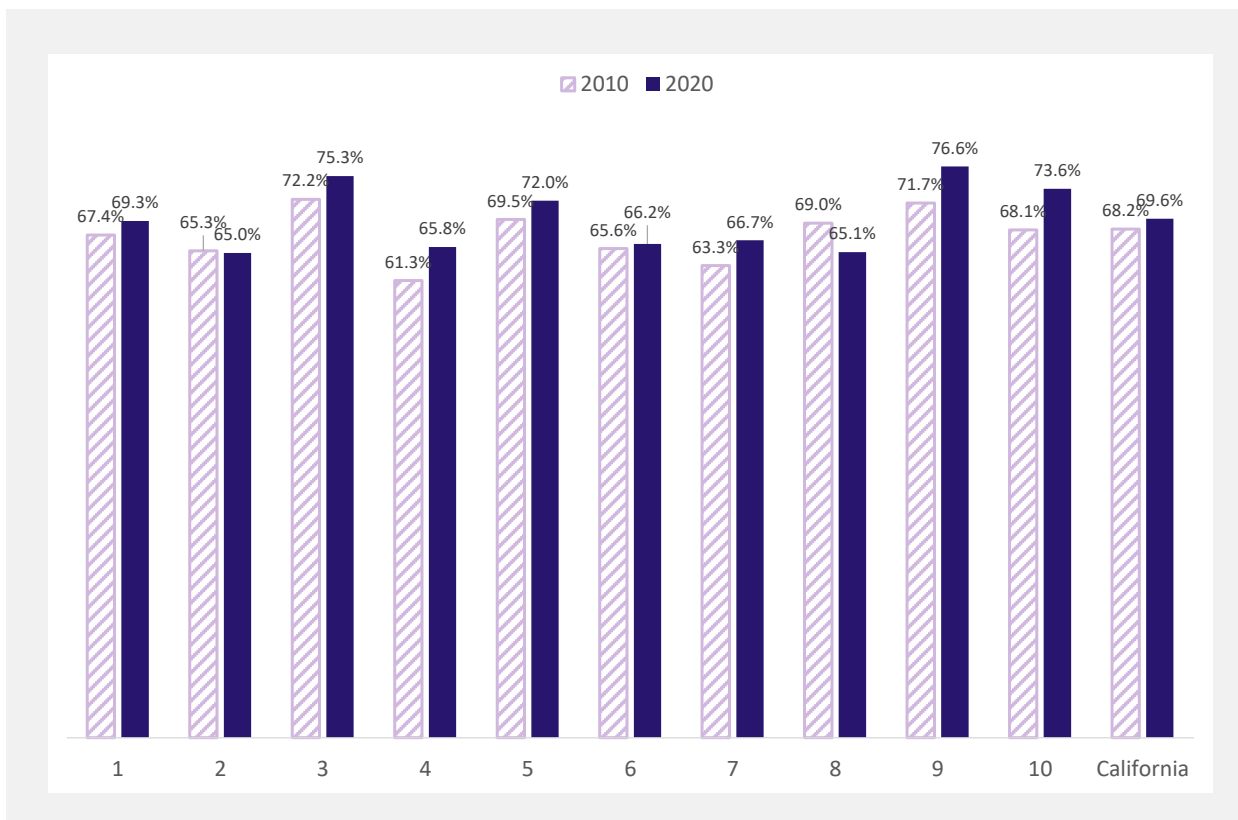
A. POPULATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY COUNTIES, 2019

	Fresno		Inyo		Kern		Kings		Tulare	
	Est	%	Est	%	Est	%	Est	%	Est	%
Total population	984,521		17,977		887,641		150,691		461,898	
Asian or Pacific Islander	100,687	10.2%	359	2.0%	41,845	4.7%	5,806	3.9%	15,573	3.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4,651	0.5%	1,828	10.2%	4,303	0.5%	1,282	0.9%	2,784	0.6%
Black	44,209	4.5%	141	0.8%	45,761	5.2%	8,779	5.8%	5,785	1.3%
Latinx	522,364	53.1%	4,020	22.4%	473,374	53.3%	82,116	54.5%	298,245	64.6%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	1,207	0.1%	34	0.2%	1,115	0.1%	241	0.2%	624	0.1%
Other/mixed race	22,960	2.3%	456	2.5%	19,133	2.2%	4,171	2.8%	7,795	1.7%
white	289,650	29.4%	11,173	62.2%	303,225	34.2%	48,537	32.2%	131,716	28.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05. ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

Note: Latinx includes all who identify as Hispanic or Latino; all other categories are non-Hispanic

B. FINAL CENSUS SELF-RESPONSE RATES, BY REGION AND STATEWIDE, 2010 AND 2020



Region	Counties
1	Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo, Yuba
2	Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma, Trinity
3	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano
4	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tuolumne
5	Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Ventura
6	Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Tulare
7	Riverside, San Bernardino
8	Los Angeles
9	Orange
10	Imperial, San Diego

C. CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

Hatzune Aguilar

Communities for a New California Education Fund

Amy Arambula

Amy Arambula Attorney at Law

Reina Canale

California Rural Legal Assistance

Jeannemarie Caris-McManus

Westside Family Preservation Services Network

Camila Chavez

Dolores Huerta Foundation

Mike Colvard

Fresno American Indian Health Project

Maria Eraña

Radio Bilingüe

Porchoua Her

The Fresno Center

Ed Kissam

WKF Fund

Jo Ann Intilli

WKF Fund

Lorena Lara

Faith in the Valley

Dao Lor

The Fresno Center

Jesus Martinez

Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative

Hugo Morales

Radio Bilingüe

Yesenia Ocampo

Dolores Huerta Foundation

Felipe De Jesus Perez

Westside Family Preservation Services Network

Brian Poth

The Source LGBT+ Center

Aurora Ramirez

Westside Family Preservation Services Network

Gregg Robinson

Project Advisor

Daniel Rodela

Faith in the Valley

Ines Ruiz-Huston

El Concilio California

Jensen Vang

The Fresno Center

HengSothea Ung

APSARA

D. DATA NOTES


Data for this analysis comes from two main sources established and managed by the California Complete Count - Census 2020 Office, SWORD (Statewide Outreach and Rapid Deployment) mapping portal and Census PDI reporting application.²⁴ These data were accessed by The Center and provided to ERI.

Data from SWORD, the state-managed mapping and data portal managed by The California Complete Count – Census 2020 Office, the statewide department in charge of managing the 2020 Census outreach program, included detailed census tract-level information from March through October, 2020. This data also included hard-to-count index score created by the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit, daily self-response rates, and other characteristic data by census tract. Daily self-response rates were available starting on March 20, however starting in June data were reported only from Sunday through Thursday. Though census data collection (“Non-response follow-up”) ended on October 15, final data tabulations were available from SWORD on October 27. The Center shared the last report downloaded from SWORD on October 27, 2020 with ERI. We used this date as the final day of reporting.

Data from Census PDI includes census tract-level outreach data for the complete census outreach period (July 2019 through October 2020). The Center and its partners self-reported community outreach data to Census PDI and used the website to track and manage their outreach efforts. All organizations receiving funding from the state were required to use Census PDI to log their outreach progress.²⁵ Data from Census PDI included reports on two types of outreach, daily number of households reached by phone-banking and in-person door-to-door canvassing, as well as the names of The Center’s funded groups working in each census tract. From interviews with partners and the discussion at the October convening, we learned that groups struggled with the newly implemented reporting system, which was based off of Political Data, Inc’s voter outreach management system. Some of the main concerns had to do with tracking return visits to households that had already been reached earlier in the process and tracking households not listed in the PDI system. Due to this concern, the outreach data is likely an undercount of actual number of households reached. Additionally, we identified tracts as having received outreach if data showed that at least one household were reached in that tract. Numbers of households

reached include those reached one or more times as community partners said that they had to go back to neighborhoods multiple times in order for folks to respond. We included data reported into PDI up through October 27, which is the date that the final adjusted self-response rates were reported in SWORD but after census’s official data collection ended on October 15 to account for final tallies that groups inputted into the system due to previously mentioned challenges with using Census PDI. These data also do not include those reached using “creative strategies” and large public outdoor events that organizations employed to encourage census participation.

All of the census-tract level data was provided in 2010 geography. Because census outreach began before new 2020 census tract geographies were made available, while the data is newer than 2010, it is mapped onto 2010 geography that was in place through part of 2020. For example, self-response rates are for the outreach period in 2020, but in 2010 census tract geography. Though the Census Bureau released a 2020 update to the census geography midway through the outreach process, these geography did not align with the census data currently available. Groups tracking progress used 2010 census geography in 2019 and in their planning and tracking efforts. The



California statewide census office retained the 2010 geography throughout the census outreach period. The dataset used in this analysis includes 8,003 census tracts which is short of the official 8,057 census tracts for the state of California in 2010. This is due to the exclusion of tracts with institutionalized populations, waterways and other tracts. Additionally data on census tracts that were part of the “Update-leave” census operation were included in the analysis as they were also part of The Center’s outreach program.

Outreach by The Center-funded groups was focused on census tracts with higher Hard-to-count (HTC) index scores in ACBO 6 and had lower response rates. Their “hard-to-count” benchmarks began with a focus on tracts with scores greater than 69 that had early self-response rates of under 50%, expanding out to those with scores of 57 and above with the goal of getting these tracts to reach at least 60% response rate. For the purposes of this analysis these HTC index scores, calculated by California’s Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit,²⁶ were grouped into five categories to capture tracts that were the focus of outreach efforts: HTC score 56 and below, 57 to 68, 69 to 79, 80 to 89, and finally 90 and above.

The Center’s outreach program between March and October also overlapped with the Census

Bureau’s operations where Census employees were deployed to interview households in-person. Those located in remote and or rural tracts identified as receiving the “update-leave” operation were reached in March through June, while the “non-response follow-up” operation began August 11, 2020.²⁷ Increases in response rates for “Update-leave” tracts were reflected in the data in June.

Data from the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit 2021 Population Projections, 2019 5-Year American Community Survey population data, and National Equity Atlas were also used to supplement this report. For more information on specific tables used, please refer to the end notes.

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