

US Census Response Rates on American Indian Reservations in the 2010 and 2020 Censuses

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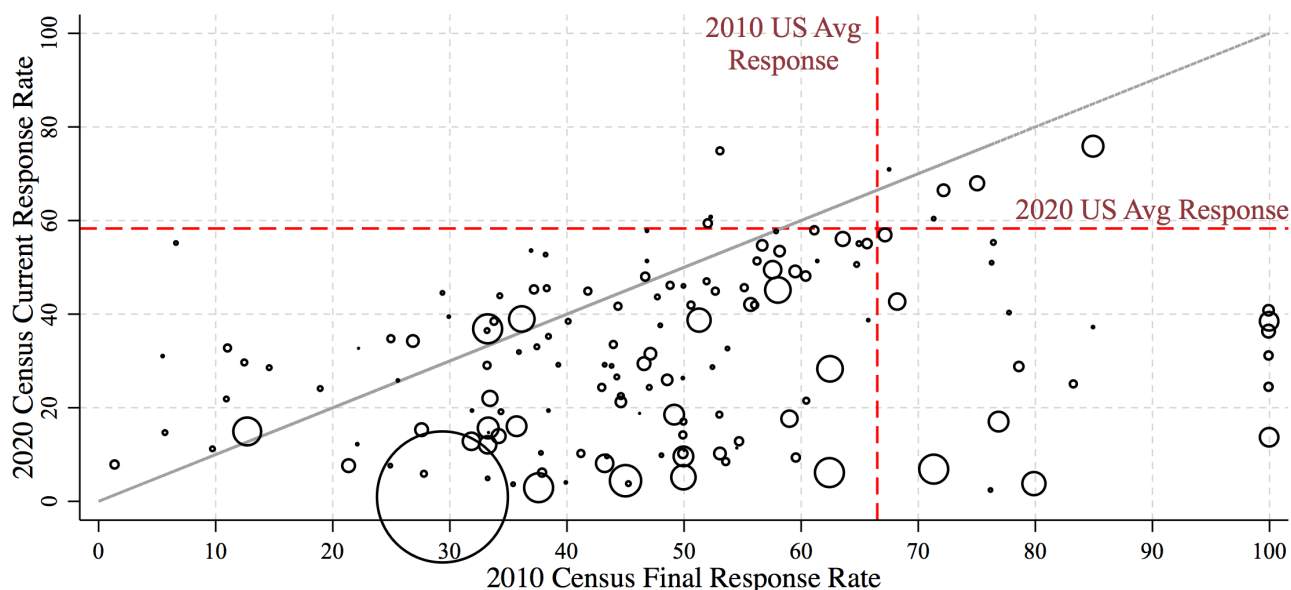
The U.S. Census is used to determine proportional representation in Congress and other legislative bodies, allocate public services and funds, and provide population counts for vital statistics estimates. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau is undertaking its 24th Census amid one of the most difficult enumeration periods in history as the country faces the dual threats of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic shutdown. In particular, the impact on American Indian and Alaska Native nations and communities is potentially severe, exacerbating the ongoing problem of census undercounts.

We show, in the figure below current as of May 13, 2020, the American Indian tribal reservation 2020 Census self-response data and compare it to the 2010 self-response rate. The size of the circles reflects the size of the population on reservation for the AIAN alone population. We exclude Oklahoma tribes and Alaska Natives in this analysis.

We find that:

- Only **seven** tribal reservations have response rates greater than the current national average of 60% response (they are above the red horizontal line).
- In 2010, only **23** tribal reservations were above the national average response rate of 67% (to the left of the red vertical line).
- **50** tribal reservations have a higher response rate in their current 2020 response rate than their 2010 final response (above the 45-degree line).
- **118** tribal reservations have 2020 responses that are lower than their 2010 response rate (below the 45-degree line).

Figure 1: Census Response Rates for Tribal Nations in 2010 and Current 2020 by Population



The low self-response rate during the first phase of the 2020 Census will create major challenges for the second phase, the non-response follow-up in-person interviews. Low self-response means many more labor-intensive contacts will be needed, which is particularly difficult during the pandemic due to health risks to Census workers and households. Ultimately, this may produce a significant undercount of American Indians. It is critical that we act now to reduce the response gap as much as possible and to use updated information on the location and magnitude of the gap to more effectively guide outreach efforts in the near future. Partnerships with tribal nations to ensure full and accurate counts of American Indians on reservation lands are critical.