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RESPONSE RATE TO CENSUS 2020 CONTINUES TO LAG IN HARD-TO-COUNT COMMUNITIES: FOCUS ON DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS

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A. Background

Report Advisory No.4 follows three previous Report Advisories that we issued regarding progress on the Census 2020 that discussed potential problems in achieving an accurate count in hard-to-count (HTC) communities in Dallas County, Texas. These advisories are issued as a public service to inform community residents, data users and public officials about the progress that is being made towards an accurate count of the population since an under-count threatens the allocation of federal dollars and political representation over the next ten years. Dallas County, Texas was chosen as the geographic area of interest for two reasons: (a) Dallas County is located in a large and culturally diverse metropolitan area, and (b) Dallas County is one of the few 3,142 U.S. counties that funded a Census 2020 campaign to improve population counts in hard-to-count communities. With such financial support at their disposal, the Census 2020 response rates achieved by Dallas County could serve as the model that other communities might emulate. However, our analysis of the most recent self-response rates provided by the Census Bureau (<https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>) as of May 30, 2020 suggests that the Dallas County campaign is struggling to engage hard-to-count communities.

Consistent with the previous series of Report Advisories, we retrieved the data file of Census 2020 response rates as of May 30, 2020 and analyzed the information to

evaluate the progress that has been made by the current Census 2020 campaign in improving response rates, especially among hard-to-count communities. This progress report is especially important since little or no information has been made publicly available to evaluate the campaign's progress for Dallas County,

B. Analysis and Results

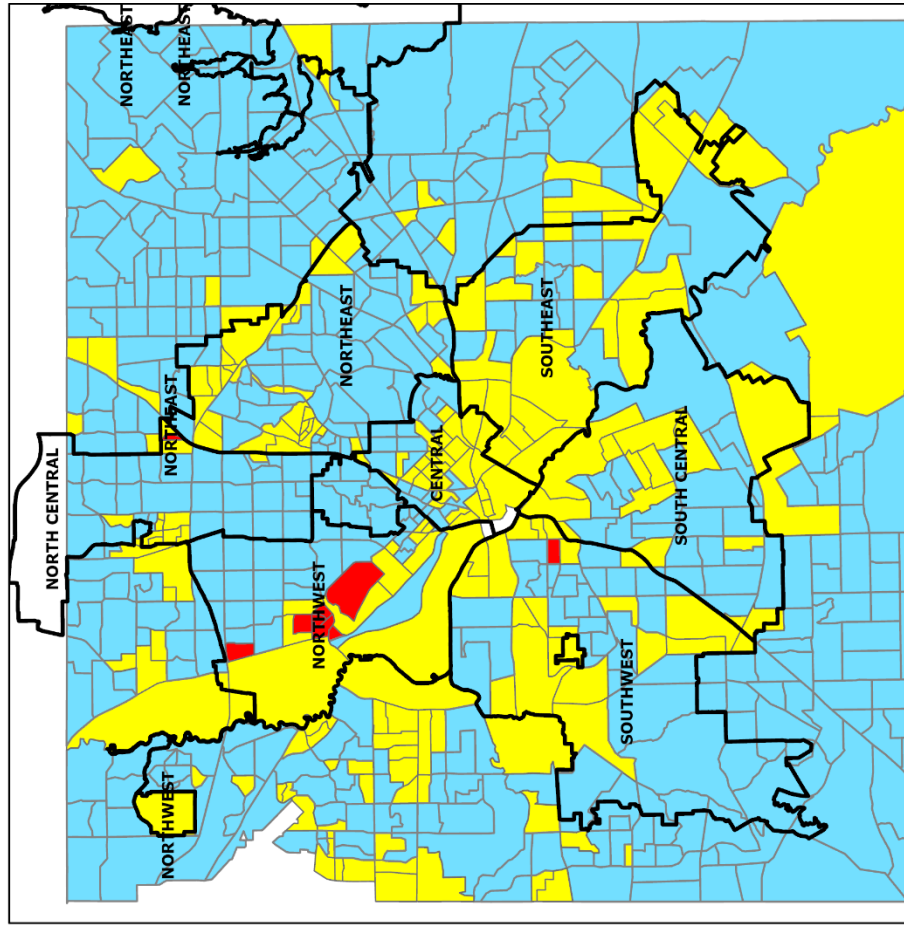
Figure 1 on the following page presents the cumulative self-response rates in Dallas County by census tracts as of May 30, 2020. A total of 644 census tracts were classified into three categories: "Critical" with self-response rates less than or equal to 30 percent; "Sub-optimal" with self-response rates of 31 to 50 percent; and "Best" with self-response rates of 51 percent or higher. Of the 644 census tracts displayed in Figure 1, only 9 tracts (1.4%) were classified as "Critical," 193 tracts (30.0%) were classified as "Sub-optimal" while 442 tracts (68.6%) were classified as "Best." As a point of comparison, overall self-response rates for Dallas County (56.3%) are keeping pace with Texas (55.1%) but somewhat behind the U.S. rate (60.4%).

Nonetheless, our analysis revealed that 320 census tracts (49.6%) in Dallas County had self-response rates below the overall Dallas County self-response rate of 56.3 percent – and most of these tracts were concentrated in such city service areas as the Southeast, South Central, Southwest, and Northwest which are populated primarily by hard-to-count segments like lower-income blacks, Latinos, renters and immigrants.

This pattern confirms the earlier concerns that we raised in previous Report Advisories about the potential difficulties that might be encountered by the County's campaign in engaging hard-to-count communities.

Figure 1: Dallas County Census 2020 Self-Response Rates by Census Tracts and City Service Areas, (As of 5-30-20)

320 census tracts (49.6%) revealed cumulative self-response rates less than Dallas County's rate of 56.3% and most were concentrated in the southern and northwest sector of Dallas County.



- City Service Areas
- Dallas County Census Tracts May30
- Overall Cumulative Self-Response Rate
 - ≤30.0% Critical
 - ≤50.0% Suboptimal
 - ≤85.3% Best

Self-Response Rate	
U.S.	60.4
Texas	55.1
Dallas County	56.3



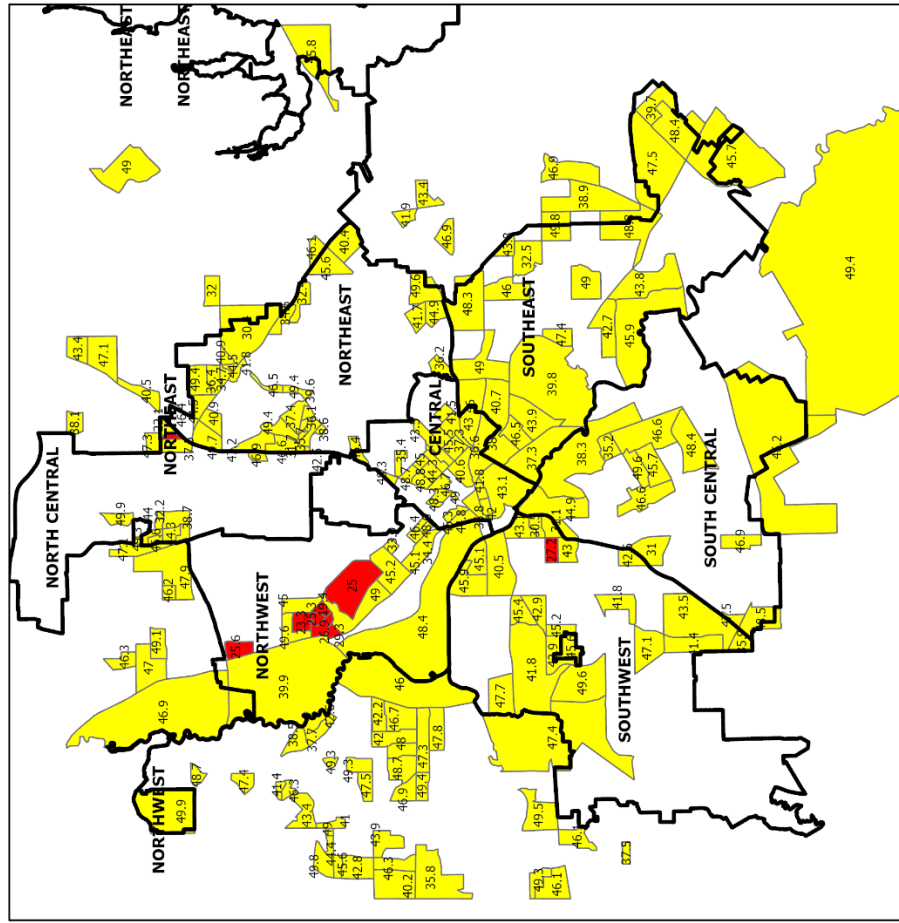
Source: Census Bureau Self-Response Rates File for 2020 Census tracts, File accessed on 5-30-20. Compiled by Edward T. Rincón, Ph.D.



Figure 2 on the following page displays only the distribution of the Critical and Sub-optimal census tracts as well as their cumulative self-response rates. Although most of the Sub-optimal census tracts are located in the southern and northwest areas of Dallas County, there are pockets of census tracts that are also located in the Northeast, North Central and Central service areas as well. Even more concerning is that 42 of the Sub-optimal census tracts show response rates ranging from 30% to 40% -- adding to the campaign's burden.

**Figure 2: Dallas County Census 2020 Self-Response Rates Below 50 Percent by Census Tracts and City Service Areas
(As of 5-30-20)**

320 census tracts (49.6%) revealed cumulative self-response rates less than Dallas County's rate of 56.3% and most were concentrated in the southern and northwest sector of Dallas County.



- City Service Areas
- Dallas County Census Tracts LT 50%
- Overall Cumulative Self-Response Rates
 - ≤30.0% Critical
 - ≤50.0% Sub-Optimal

Source: Census Bureau Self-Response Rates File for 2020 Census tracts, File accessed on 5-30-20. Compiled by Edward T. Rincón, Ph.D.



Yet another way to evaluate progress on response rates to the Census 2020 is to compare how Dallas County compares to other Texas counties. Table 1 on the following page presents the cumulative self-response rates for selected Texas counties that had funded Census 2020 campaigns and other large counties that did not announce that they funded such a campaign. Table 1 also shows for each county the size of their Hispanic population and percentage of Hispanics that were foreign-born. Of the various hard-to-count segments of the population that were predicted to be less likely to complete the Census 2020, Hispanic immigrants have experienced relatively higher levels of fear and anxiety resulting from the various programs and policies that the current administration has implemented to discourage their participation (see Report Advisory #2 for more detail). Therefore, counties with a higher proportion of Hispanic immigrants might have a greater burden in achieving a higher response rate than counties with lower proportions of Hispanic immigrants – all other things being equal. Of the three funded counties, Dallas County shows a self-response rate (56.3%) that is slightly higher than Harris County (55.1%) but decidedly better than Hidalgo County (43.6%). The funding level for Hidalgo County was quite modest (\$300K) when compared to Dallas County (\$1.9 million) and Harris County (\$4 million).

Interestingly, all of the other counties without specific Census 2020 campaign funding revealed self-response rates that were higher than Dallas County. Coupled with the previous finding that half of the Dallas County census tracts continue to show self-response rates under the overall county rate of 56.3 percent, one can only hypothesize about the likely reasons that can explain this unusual outcome.

Some additional insight is provided by the proportion of Hispanic immigrants that resided in each county in 2018. In general, one observes that each of the counties without campaign funding and higher response rates also revealed lower percentages of Hispanics who were foreign-born. Hidalgo and Bexar counties were two exceptions to this observation. Hidalgo County had a funded campaign and low proportion of Hispanic immigrants, but also showed the lowest response rate to the Census 2020. Bexar County,

by contrast, did not have a funded campaign, the lowest proportion of Hispanic immigrants, and achieved one of the higher response rates to the Census 2020. Clearly, the higher presence of Hispanic immigrants in Dallas and Harris counties may pose a challenge in achieving a higher response rate to the Census 2020, while counties that showed a lower proportion of Hispanic immigrants are achieving higher response rates despite the lack of specific campaign funding.

Table 1
Cumulative Self-Response Rates of Selected Texas
Counties/Cities by Census 2020 Campaign Funding Status

County/City by Funding Status/Funding Level	County Overall Cumulative Self-Response Rate*	County Hispanic Population, 2018**	Foreign-Born Pct. of Hispanic Population **
Funded Campaign			
Dallas County/City of Dallas / \$1.9 million	56.3	1,033,000	41.9
Harris County/City of Houston / \$4 million	55.1	1,958,963	40.2
Hidalgo County / \$300,000	43.6	781,681	28.3
Not Funded Campaign			
Tarrant County	62.2	576,242	32.0
Travis County	59.7	407,676	29.8
Bexar County	59.4	1,155,505	16.0
El Paso County	58.9	690,189	27.9

*Census 2020 response rates as of 5-30-20 / **American Community Survey 2018 5-Year File.

C. Conclusion

While some progress on Census 2020 response rates is being made since Dallas County initially launched its campaign in early 2020, there is considerably more work that needs to be done if civic leaders expect to surpass the County's self-response rate of 64 percent for the 2010 Census. Indeed, the higher proportion of Hispanic immigrants represents one of the most resistant hard-to-count segments of the population since they

have been consistent targets of the current administration to discourage their participation in the Census 2020. To overcome this formidable barrier, more knowledge and experience is needed from community members and experts who understand their local residents and how to engage them in such a politically toxic environment. Clearly, some of the counties included in our analysis appear to have effectively mobilized their communities to complete the Census 2020, while others may not have mobilized sufficient support or expertise to produce a higher response rate among hard-to-count communities, especially Hispanic immigrants.

Although there is time remaining for persons to enhance the self-response rates by completing the Census 2020 using an online, mail or telephone option, Census takers will begin interviews from August 11 to October 31 to homes that have not responded – a costly last step to complete the census counts in each community. These home interviews, however, will face a significant barrier if the current pandemic environment continues to threaten the personal health and safety of non-respondent households. Consequently, it is imperative that all government entities, whether funded or not, use the remaining time to escalate their efforts to engage hard-to-count segments of the population, especially Hispanic immigrants. Coupled with the significant economic losses that have resulted from the current pandemic, the added potential loss of millions of federal dollars that are tied to Census counts will have a devastating impact on the many programs that support community infrastructure and programs for food and nutrition, child care, healthcare, transportation and many others. Indeed, the stakes are high. Lastly, community leaders and organizations that are concerned about their Census response rates should monitor the Census-related campaigns or activities that are sponsored by local public agencies to ensure that the most productive strategies are being utilized to enhance Census 2020 response rates among hard-to-count segments of the population. At this point, there appears to be significant room for improvement.

Please direct any comments regarding this Report Advisory to Dr. Rincón at edward@rinconassoc.com.