

## Theme Overview: Amplifying the Rural Voice: 2020 Census Challenges and Opportunities

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The U.S. 2020 Census, like previous decennial census efforts, will be critical for apportionment of political representation; distribution of funds at the federal, state, and local levels; determination of policy priorities and program eligibility; and a wide range of planning to inform community and economic development initiatives. Although the decennial census is constitutionally mandated and major efforts are made to obtain a complete count of the population, some groups and places have traditionally had lower counts. Geographically, this variation is evident in county-level analysis from the 2000 Census and the 2010 Census, which have apparent patterns of regional concentration; many of the counties with the lowest rates of participation are in rural areas. Factors associated with census participation include respondent age, race/ethnicity, language, education, income, level of trust in the government, and geographic location. The characteristics of place—the context in which people live—may be particularly important to census participation, especially when combined with poverty and rural isolation. That some people and places are harder to count is not a new phenomenon, but there are important changes taking place with the 2020 Census—particularly the option and push for online participation, which challenges rural areas with limited Internet access—that warrant additional attention. These three articles focus attention on these issues and rural places and address (i) the factors associated with lower counts and data analysis to inform what we might anticipate participation in the 2020 Census to look like across the rural–urban continuum and between county types, (ii) promising strategies for improving participation in the Census, and (iii) the importance of the Census to Co-operative Extension programs and services across the United States.

Tian, Goetz, and French examine the factors that affect the response rates in census participation and focus on the difference in the low response rate across county types defined by the rural–urban continuum. They also estimate that Internet access increases census

### Articles in this Theme:

- **[Problem of Low 2020 Census Participation Will Vary with Sociodemographic Factors and Distance from Metro Areas](#)**  
*Zheng Tian, Stephan J. Goetz, and Charlie French*
- **[Using Community Engagement Approaches to Bolster 2020 Census Participation](#)**  
*John J. Green, Heather Hanna, Lynn Woo, Rachel Haggard, and Anne Buffington*
- **[The Impact of Demographic Changes on Funding for Community Development Programs across the United States](#)**  
*Sreedhar Upendram, David W. Hughes, and Victoria Campbell*

participation, with the greatest impact occurring in rural areas.

Green, Hanna, Woo, Haggard, and Buffington examine the use of community engagement activity to address historically hard to count (HTC) areas. An initiative in Mississippi provides a model for community engagement efforts to encourage census participation in HTC areas.

Upendram, Hughes, and Campbell provide an overview of the U.S. Census, key datasets, federal funding programs, and the mechanism through which monies are allocated across the United States. They focus on Co-operative Extension Service (CES) programs and the impacts of an accurate demographic count on CES (agricultural and natural resources, community development, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H) programs across the United States.

Every U.S. decennial census is important and the 2020 Census is no different. What is different is the utilization of the Internet to reach a large portion of the population.

These articles highlight the need for active participation by all of us if we are to acquire an accurate picture of our nation for the next decade.

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