

Population Undercount in Miami-Dade County



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Understanding the Population Undercount

One of the core functions of the U.S. Census Bureau is the decennial census, which tasks the bureau with providing an accurate population count in the U.S. every ten years. This important function helps determine the distribution of federal funds among states as well as their political representation in congress. Unfortunately, many people in the U.S. are not counted in the census for a variety of reasons. The most difficult to count, according to the US Census Bureau, fall within these two conceptualized groups: the Hard-To-Count (HTC) and the Historically Undercounted Population (HUP), which is an important subset of HTC. ⁽¹⁾

The HTC population consists of four segments:

- **Hard to locate:** People who live in homes that are not currently on the Census Bureau's list of addresses as well as people who want to remain hidden.
- **Hard to contact:** People who are highly mobile, or experiencing homelessness, or for whom physical access barriers prevent contact, such as in gated communities.
- **Hard to persuade:** People who are suspicious of the government or have low levels of civic engagement.
- **Hard to interview:** People whose participation is hindered by language barriers, low literacy, health issues, or technological barriers (e.g., lack of internet access).

Some examples of the HTC population include, (but are not limited to): Racial and ethnic minorities.

- People who speak languages other than English.
- Low-income populations.
- Undocumented immigrants.
- People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer.
- People with disabilities.
- People who do not live in traditional housing.

1. U.S. Census: Stempowski, Deborah (November 2023). <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2023/10/understanding-undercounted-populations.html#:~:text=In%20our%20efforts%20to%20develop%20the%20best%20methods.subset%20of%20those%2C%20the%20historically%20undercounted%20populations%20%28HUPs%29.>

Below are examples of the HTC subset - HUP (the Historically Undercounted Population):

- The Black or African American population.
- The American Indian and Alaska Native population living on reservations.
- People who indicate that they are of some ethnicity other than the categories offered.
- The Hispanic or Latino population.
- Young children, ages 0-4.
- Renters.
- Males, ages 18-29 and ages 30-49.

These descriptions of the HTC and HUP help conceptualize the potential size of the undercounted population in Miami-Dade County.

How large is the population undercount in Miami Dade County?

This study considers two estimates of the population undercount in Miami-Dade County. The first estimate, by the author, is derived strictly from census data that is readily accessible and easily verified. An alternative estimate, from the FL-DSSG (Florida Data Science for Social Good), is more complex and combines multiple data sources with a proprietary methodology that is not available to the public. ⁽²⁾ It is assumed that the author's first estimate is the low count - and the alternative estimate, which is likely to be more realistic, is the high count.

The first estimate begins with the latest population data for Miami-Dade County, as seen in the following chart with estimates for the years 2010, 2020, 2023 and 2024. ⁽³⁾ It is interesting that the population estimate indicates a decrease of -0.06% from 2020 to 2023.

2. FL-DSSG.

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/florida.data.science.for.social.good.fl.dssg/viz/FloridaCensusUndercountEstimates/FPNOverview>

3. Census Quick Facts. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamidadecountyflorida/POP060210>

This chart also contains relevant information about the HUP classified by Race and Hispanic origin. Considering the size and relevance of these two groups, it is logical to assume that Miami-Dade's population is significantly undercounted. For example, people identified as Hispanic and Latino represented 69.1% of the county's total population while the Black alone group was 16.9%. So, at least 86% of Miami-Dade County's population potentially falls within the Census' Hard to Count (HTC) and Historically Undercounted Population (HUP) classifications.

U.S.Census Estimates for Miami-Dade County ⁽³⁾	
Population	
Population estimates, July 1, 2024, (V2024)	2,838,461
Population estimates, July 1, 2023, (V2023)	2,686,867
Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2024)	2,701,751
Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2023)	2,701,776
Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2024, (V2024)	5.1%
Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2023, (V2023)	-0.6%
Population, Census, April 1, 2020	2,701,767
Population, Census, April 1, 2010	2,496,435
Race and Hispanic Origin	
White alone, percent	79.6%
Black alone, percent (a) (a)	16.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a) (a)	0.4%
Asian alone, percent (a) (a)	1.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a) (a)	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent	1.4%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b) (b)	69.1%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	13.9%
Methodology differences may exist between data sources, and so estimates from different sources are not comparable. The vintage year (e.g., V2024) refers to the final year of the series (2020 thru 2024). Different vintage years of estimates are not comparable.	
(a) Includes persons reporting only one race	
(b) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories	

This Census information for Miami-Dade County was combined with the results of their latest Post-Enumeration Survey - or PES. ⁽⁴⁾ The PES measures the accuracy of census data by independently surveying a sample of the population. According to the findings of the Census 2020 PES, the national average undercount rate for Hispanic and Latinos was 4.99%, and for Black or African Americans it was 3.30%. Both of these rates were found to be statistically significant.

When these net national average undercount rates are applied to the 2023 Miami-Dade population, the Hispanic and Latino undercount estimate is about **92,645.6**, while the undercount for the Black Population is about **14,984.7**. This yields a grand total of about **107,630**. This is a conservative estimate that is most likely too low - considering the county's unique demographic composition. The undercount rates for the HTC and HUP groups in Miami- Dade are expected to be much higher than the average undercount rates for the nation.

An alternative estimate of Miami-Dade's undercount was published by the FL-DSSG (Florida Data Science for Social Good) in 2023. According to the FL-DSSG website, Miami-Dade's population undercount was **189,425**. This figure is significantly larger and relies on data from the Tax Watch Organization as well as the 2020 census. It also uses a methodology developed by the Texas Census Institute that incorporates dimensional analyses which contain personal data, census-demographic data, campaign relations data, and other contributing factors. ⁽²⁾

To provide some perspective of the magnitude of these population undercounts, the Tax Watch Organization estimated the state of Florida's population undercount in 2020 to be about 750,000 or 3.48% of the total population. ⁽⁵⁾ This means anywhere from 14% to 25% of Florida's undercounted population is likely to be residing in the Miami area. These

4. PES. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/2020-census-estimates-of-undercount-and-overcount.html#:~:text=The%20Hispanic%20or%20Latino%20population%20had,significant%20undercount%20rate%20of%204.99%25>

5. Tax Watch. <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/720801-florida-taxwatch-report-says-census-undercount-cost-florida-billions-in-federal->

percentages are based on the ratio of the low and high estimates of the undercount relative to the state's population size in 2023.

Why is it important to minimize the undercount in Miami Dade County?

There's a lot at stake in having a population count that is as accurate as possible, especially in the state of Florida. Here, a more accurate count means more political representation for the state - and more federal funds to support Miami-Dade's health, education and infrastructure needs. Consider the evidence below.

An article appearing in the Miami Herald in 2022 reported the following: ⁽⁶⁾

Florida's estimated population undercount could have kept Florida — “one of the fastest-growing states in the country — from receiving a second additional seat in Congress, as many demographics experts predicted would happen prior to the census' conclusion. After each census, states are awarded seats in the House of Representatives based off population, a process called reapportionment. In April 2021, when the Census released its apportionment results, Florida received one additional seat in Congress, bringing its total to 28. Census officials said that Florida fell just short of having the population growth necessary to be awarded the additional district.”

Also worth noting is the latest figure reported by the FFIS (Federal Funds Information from States) that shows the State of Florida receiving \$1,647 per person in 2023 from the federal government. ⁽⁷⁾ If we multiply this dollar figure by the county's undercount population estimates of 107,630 versus 189,425, it is likely that Miami-Dade will be losing from **\$177,266,610 to \$311,982,975** in federal funding each year - until the next Census concludes in 2030. Therefore, it is imperative that the population undercount be minimized as much as

6. Miami Herald: Omar Rodriguez Ortiz and David Smiley, (2022). *A 2020 Census Undercount may have cost Florida an extra seat in Congress*. Miami Herald.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article261604937.html#storylink=cpy>

7. FFIS (Federal Funds Information for States).

<https://ffis.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FY-2023-Per-Capita-Florida.pdf>

possible to ensure the county receives the federal funding it is entitled to and desperately needs.

Suggestions for Minimizing the Population Undercount

Focus on Children: An important study by William O'Hare, et al (n.d.) entitled *Predicting Tract-Level Net Undercount Risk for Young Children* reported findings that may be relevant to minimizing the undercount population in Miami Dade county. ⁽⁸⁾ First, according to the 2010 census, they found that children under age 5 were more likely to be left out of the census count than any other age group. And second, the authors identified six statistically significant factors associated with the net undercount of young children in counties with large populations. See the table below:

Undercount Model for Counties with Populations of 250,000 or more
Percent of children under age 18 living in a female-headed household with no spouse present
Percent of children under age 6 who are in immigrant families (child is foreign-born or at least one parent is foreign-born)
Percent of adults ages 18-34 with less than a high school diploma, GED, or alternative
Percent of persons living in renter-occupied households
Percent of households that are linguistically isolated (no one ages 14+ speaks English "very well")
Percent of children under age 6 living with a grandparent householder
Note: Variables are shown in descending order by the strength of their association with the dependent variable, net undercount rate.

These findings suggest that efforts to reduce the undercount population in Miami-Dade should focus on data collected by agencies that provide child services in order to identify specific

8. O'Hare, William P., Linda A. Jacobsen, Mark Mather, and Alicia Van Orman, (n.d.). Predicting Tract-Level Net Undercount Risk for Young Children. PRD. <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/us-census-undercount-of-children-1.pdf>

census tracts where large numbers of HTC and HUP households with children are likely to reside.

Encourage more Census Participation: The Miami Foundation and the FIU Metropolitan Center collaborated on a report entitled *CENSUS 2020: Perspectives from Hard-to-Count Communities in Miami-Dade*.⁽⁹⁾ This report analyzed survey samples from the county's various HTC and HUP groups and sorted the responses into 5 groups: gender, race/ethnicity, age, household size, and highest level of school completed. It was determined that each group posed a distinct challenge as to how to best motivate voluntary participation in the next census. Here are their key findings:

1. Increase the residents' awareness of the purpose of the census.
2. Inform residents how the information will be used and how it will impact them.
3. Allay residents' concerns about privacy and data sharing among government agencies.
4. Educate residents about alternative ways to participate in the census, besides door-to-door surveys, such as online, via phone, or by mail.
5. Use a variety of outreach efforts and communication channels (social media, radio, TV, etc.) with messaging that resonates with each group of residents.

Conclusion

The population undercount in Miami-Dade County is too large to ignore and represents lost federal funding in the hundreds of millions of dollars for Miami-Dade County each year. This is money that could be spent on addressing the county's many social and economic issues – such as affordable housing, health care access, traffic congestion, infrastructure, disaster readiness, and more. It is recommended, therefore, that the county fully support and prioritize the Census Bureau's current efforts to address the population undercount in Miami-Dade County by accommodating their data requests and by reaching out to other interested parties such as the Miami Foundation, FIU Metropolitan Center, Florida Tax Watch, and the FL–DSSG.

9. The Miami Foundation and FIU Metropolitan Center, (n.d.). <https://metropolitan.fiu.edu/research/periodic-publications/recent-reports/2020-mia-census.pdf>

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<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamidadecountyflorida/POP060210>
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5. Florida Tax Watch. <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/720801-florida-taxwatch-report-says-census-undercount-cost-florida-billions-in-federal-funding/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20report%2C%20Florida,the%20Supplemental%20Nutrition%20Assistance%20Program.>
6. Miami Herald: Omar Rodriguez Ortiz and David Smiley, (2022). *A 2020 Census Undercount may have cost Florida an extra seat in Congress*.
<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article261604937.html#storylink=cpy>
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8. O'Hare, William P., Linda A. Jacobsen, Mark Mather, and Alicia Van Orman, (n.d.). Predicting Tract-Level Net Undercount Risk for Young Children. PRD.
<https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/us-census-undercount-of-children-1.pdf>
9. The Miami Foundation and FIU Metropolitan Center, (n.d.).
<https://metropolitan.fiu.edu/research/periodic-publications/recent-reports/2020-mia-census.pdf>