TEXAS CENSUS INSTITUTE

The 2020 Census Undercount of Young Children in Texas Counties

Part 3 of 5, Research Series, The Children's Census Initiative

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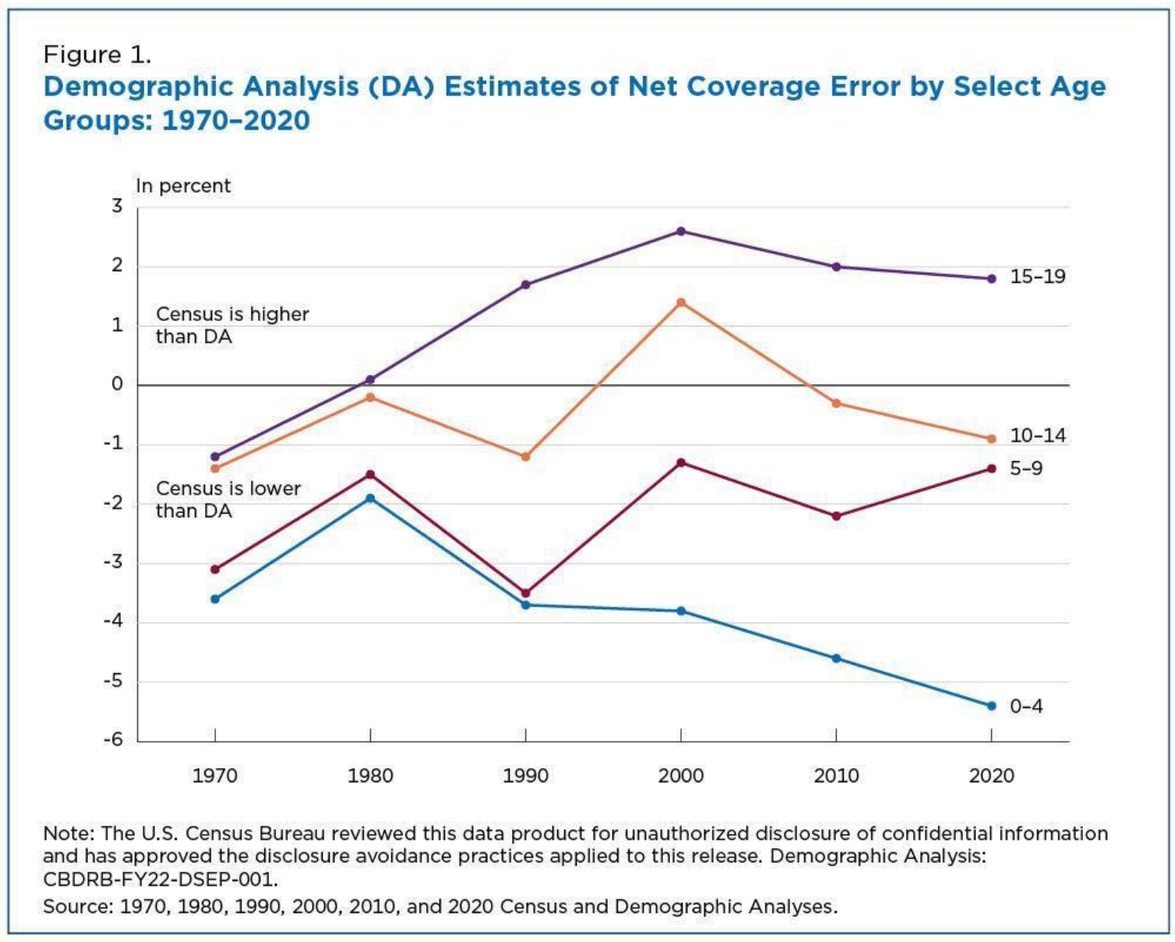
RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Estimates suggest the 2020 Census undercounted 155,855 young children in net terms (7.9% of Texas young children). While these state-level numbers are informative, some counties experienced much higher undercount rates. To inform this issue, we examine the 2020 county-level high net young child undercount in Texas and study its spatial distribution using data from the 2020 Census and the Vintage 2020 Population Estimates. This study builds on the work of Dr. William P. O'Hare, who finds Texas had more counties with high net undercounts of young children than any other state (either in number or rate terms).

MAIN FINDINGS

- Of the 1,975,115 young children in Texas reflected in the Vintage 2020 Population Estimates, the 2020 Census undercounted 155,855 young children (7.9%).
- 184 of 254 Texas counties (72.4%) had a high net young child undercount (rate, number, or both)
- 85.8% of Texas young children live in a county with a high undercount (rate, number, or both).
- Of the 184 Texas counties with a high net young child undercount, 31 Texas counties had a high net young child undercount rate and number, with a net 134,421 young child undercount (9.5% of their children).
- 12 of the 14 Texas counties on the U.S.-Mexico border have high net young child undercounts (rate, number, or both).
- Altogether, the 14 counties on the U.S.-Mexico border have a net young child undercount of 31,666 (15.2% of their young children).

Figure 1 Net undercount rate for children's age groups: 1970–2020.



Source: Jensen, E. B. Census Bureau Expands Focus on Improving Data for Young Children. United States Census Bureau. U.S. Census Bureau. America Counts Series (2022).

Note: Negative and positive values indicate net undercounting and net overcounting, respectively.

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

The net undercount of children (age 0 to 17) in the U.S. Census is high and has been growing in recent decades. This study provides a detailed analysis of high child undercounts at the county level in Texas and explores its regional patterns. These results can serve as a roadmap for deeper analysis.

Census-related data is used to determine the distribution of funding for 350+ federal programs, totaling more than $2.8 trillion each year. Counties with an undercount will not receive the full federal funding they are entitled to, impacting budgets for things like schools, health centers, and childcare centers. Furthermore, counties with an undercount will not have accurate data for future planning.

To address the impact of an undercount, leaders may want to explore ways to compensate counties that experience a high undercount of children. Similarly, leaders in counties with a high undercount of children may want to work with the Census Bureau to look for additional ways to correct the undercount of children in future censuses. The results shown here can be used to start building a targeted approach to increasing the count accuracy of children in the 2030 Census.