Everyone knew that Hispanics were at risk of being undercounted in the 2020 Census, because the Trump administration gave every indication of wanting them undercounted. The administration’s [hard-line anti-immigrant policies](https://www.npr.org/2021/02/15/967783477/immigration-hard-liner-files-reveal-40-year-bid-behind-trumps-census-obsession" \o "https://www.npr.org/2021/02/15/967783477/immigration-hard-liner-files-reveal-40-year-bid-behind-trumps-census-obsession), after all, extended to the census. As commerce secretary, Wilbur Ross attempted to get a citizenship question added to the survey, but the effort was blocked by the Supreme Court. Still, [election data experts](https://tucson.com/news/state-and-regional/arizona-fails-to-gain-seat-in-u-s-house-after-2020-census/article_f21e13fe-a6b2-11eb-9679-53113c292642.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=user-share) and advocacy groups warned that no matter the outcome, the battle would have a chilling effect on response rates among Hispanics.

The [reapportionment numbers](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2021/dec/2020-apportionment-map.html#:~:text=Apportionment%20is%20the%20process%20of,which%20each%20state%20is%20entitled.) released last month seemed to confirm this fear. To be sure, nationally, counts came in remarkably close to pre-census [predictions](https://www.electiondataservices.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NR_Appor20wTableMaps.pdf). (Those predictions were made using birth and death records, data on international migration, and Medicare records.) The total population, nearly 332 million, [exceeded](https://github.com/jcervas/R-Functions/tree/main/apportion) pre-census [estimates](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/research/evaluation-estimates.html) by a mere 0.7 percent. That suggests a high degree of accuracy, especially considering the difficulties of counting under pandemic conditions. But the accuracy was not the same everywhere. The greatest underperformance, in terms of total headcount relative to projections, occurred in [three Sun Belt states](https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/27/census-latinos-count-484846) — Texas, Florida and Arizona — where counts fell short of projections by 177,000, 163,000 and 262,000, respectively. These three states also have some of the [highest proportions](https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/hispanic-population-by-state) of Hispanics in the country: 40 percent in Texas, 26 percent in Florida and 32 percent in Arizona.

Two of those states, Texas and Florida, are red, and Arizona is a closely divided purple state, which means Republicans did not do themselves any favors: Their actions may have suppressed census responses in places where the GOP would benefit from more seats in Congress.

That’s because the [consequences](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-apportionment-data.html) for congressional representation largely mirror the regional differences in the census results. Each of those three states received one fewer seat than was expected based on pre-census estimates: Texas gained only two seats, Florida gained one seat, and Arizona gained [none](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/26/3-takeaways-which-states-gain-lose-new-census-report/). As a result, these states will send fewer members than expected to the House — and have fewer electoral votes for the presidency.

Other evidence suggests that the Trump administration’s efforts had a suppressing effect: Two other states that are more than one-fifth Hispanic, Colorado and Nevada, were also among the worst seven states when it comes to the number of people missed by the census.

There were more factors at play in the undercounts than Trump administration hostility, however. Arizona was undercounted relative to pre-census predictions by more than 262,000 people, or 3.5 percent, the highest percentage shortfall in the country. Meanwhile, neighboring New Mexico, which is 49 percent Hispanic, reported nearly 14,000 more people than pre-census estimates, a slight overcount of 0.7 percent, a figure in line with the national average. And California, which is 39 percent Hispanic, likewise reported an 0.5 percent overcount. What accounts for the different outcomes? Those states [invested](https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/state-efforts-to-support-the-census.aspx) in the census as a matter of self-interest. New Mexico [spent](https://www.kob.com/albuquerque-news/new-mexico-triples-spending-on-census-participation/5640678/) nearly $12 million on outreach efforts, and California [laid out](https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/08/15/why-is-california-spending-187-million-on-the-2020-census-we-ask-secretary-of-state-alex-padilla/)a whopping $187 million. The investments will pay off, since many [federal benefits](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/2020-census-is-critical-for-your-community.html) are based on census population totals. And although California lost a House seat for the first time, its high-quality count forestalled the [potential loss](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-citizenship-question-could-cost-california-and-texas-a-seat-in-congress/) of an additional seat.

Meanwhile, Arizona and Florida spent [no money at all](https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/state-efforts-to-support-the-census.aspx) on outreach, and Texas’s efforts were limited to a [last-minute ad campaign](https://www.texastribune.org/2020/09/01/texas-census-ad/). Costly outreach is anathema to the small-government attitude of Republicans, an especially unfortunate stance when so many GOP-leaning states have low population density and may be harder to count.

But reapportioned seats are not the end of the story. All states now face the ultimate translation of population growth into power — namely, [redistricting](https://redistricting.lls.edu/redistricting-101/what-is-redistricting/), which will start in the fall. Redistricting has even higher stakes than reapportionment, because a gerrymander can assign power in a lopsided manner no matter what citizens’ political leanings are. For example, in the 2010 Census cycle, Texas gained [four](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2010/dec/2010-apportionment-data.html) congressional seats, driven in large part by Hispanic growth, yet [Hispanic membership](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/texas-latinos-come-up-short-in-house-races/2012/05/30/gJQAf1Tm2U_story.html" \o "https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/texas-latinos-come-up-short-in-house-races/2012/05/30/gJQAf1Tm2U_story.html)in the congressional delegation did not grow in 2012, in large part because districts were redrawn to diminish their power.

Both Democrats and Republicans have it in their reach to prevent a recurrence of this harm. The Democratic incentive is obvious: Latinos lean toward that party. Democrats in Congress can reintroduce H.R. 4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which passed in the last session of the House before dying in the Senate. H.R. 4 would restore the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act — struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013 — that mandate the review of new election laws in states that have a poor history of voting rights. That includes redistricting, and Texas and Florida were formerly on the list of scrutinized states. Passage of H.R. 4 would potentially hold back racial gerrymanders that would once again disenfranchise Hispanics. The last time the Voting Rights Act was renewed, in 2006, it passed by overwhelming bipartisan majorities; granted, the odds are much stiffer now, but principle demands that it be given a hearing.

It’s also not out of the question that Republicans could revise their thinking about Hispanic voters, since in several parts of the country, including [Tejanos](https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/11/17/trump-latinos-south-texas-tejanos-437027) in south Texas and [Cuban-Americans](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/election/article247233684.html) in southern Florida, substantial numbers of them shifted to Donald Trump last November. If Republicans want to demonstrate to Hispanics that they aren’t interested in disempowering them — and in fact plan to compete for their votes — they could take steps that compensate for the census undercount. State districting rules allow legislators to draw slightly underpopulated legislative districts, a move that, of course, enhances the power of each voter in such a district. By doing this in districts rich in Hispanics, Republicans would signal that they, too, want to be a multiracial party. And it could start to rewrite today’s national narrative linking race and party.

Hispanics appear to have been undercounted in several key states, but the battle isn’t over. The redistricting fights ahead may yet give them seats at the congressional table.

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