

Participation Up: Help Census Takers

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According to recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, 70 percent of Alabama households have returned the 2010 Census questionnaire, compared to only 66 percent in the 2000 census. Alabama's participation in the 2010 census is expected to rise as more census takers go door-to-door to households that did not mail back their forms. We can't move forward until all households have participated. So, open your doors to the census takers!

Although Alabama's participation rate remains below the national rate, the gap is smaller now (70 versus 72) than it was in 2000 when the counts were completed (66 versus 72). This positive change is widely observed across the state. As of April 27, Alabama counties had already exceeded their 2000 census participation rates. Nonetheless, there are important differences between counties.

Current data show that Blount and Lamar counties have the highest participation rate in Alabama at 78 percent. This is higher than their 2000 census participation rates, which were 62 percent for Blount and 65 percent for Lamar. The lowest participation rate so far is from Bullock County, where only 33 percent of households have returned their 2010 census questionnaires. Bullock's participation rate in the 2000 census was 49 percent.

This year, Montgomery County's household participation rate reached 71 percent, the same level as Baldwin, Houston, and Tuscaloosa. All these four of these counties have exceeded their 2000 census participation rates.

What triggers these differences between counties? We analyzed correlations statewide at the county level between census participation rate and race/ethnic population characteristics and poverty. Our results show:

There is a positive association at the county level between the census participation rate and the percentage of the population that is white, and a negative association between participation rate and percentage of the population that is black. No significant effect was found in terms of percentage of population that is Hispanic.

County poverty level also explains county differences in census participation rate. There is a negative association between county-level census participation rate and percentage of persons below poverty in the county.

There is a positive association between the county population size and the census participation rate.

These findings are consistent with results from nationwide analyses. How does Alabama compare with other states in the region? Results from the April 27 data show that our state ranks higher than Mississippi (70 percent vs. 67 percent), same as Georgia (70 percent, and lower than Florida (72 percent) and Tennessee (74 percent).

You can check your county, city, or town's participation rate through the Center for Demographic Research's website in the News & Announcements, Press Room page.

The census is not over until all households have participated. Therefore, there is still time to increase our state's census participation rate. If a census taker visits your household, please take time to participate by answering the census questions. Every household's participation in the 2010 census is important and required by law (Section 221, of Title 13 of the U.S. Code).

Census takers are easy to recognize. They carry a badge from the U.S. Census Bureau and a bag with the census logo. Census takers will never ask to enter your home, nor will they ask for your Social Security, driver's license, or bank account numbers. They will not ask about immigration status or income.

The information we provide during the census is very important and affects several critical areas in our lives, including the number of seats our state will occupy in the U.S. House of Representatives, the number of federal and private programs, schools, hospitals, senior centers, emergency services, health care quality, and more. Do your part, answer census questions!

Did you know that the number of people in your community helps determine how many police officers, fire stations, and recreation facilities are needed? Do you wonder why some communities are growing, whereas others are declining? Investors, developers, church leaders, and business people use population information to make important decisions about opening new facilities or closing existing ones.

Let's make the 2010 census a complete count and a successful story for Alabama. Your participation is critical for a brighter tomorrow for everyone. If you have not returned your 2010 census questionnaire, be on the lookout for a census taker. Answer the door and respond to the census taker's questions. Our future is in your hands!

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