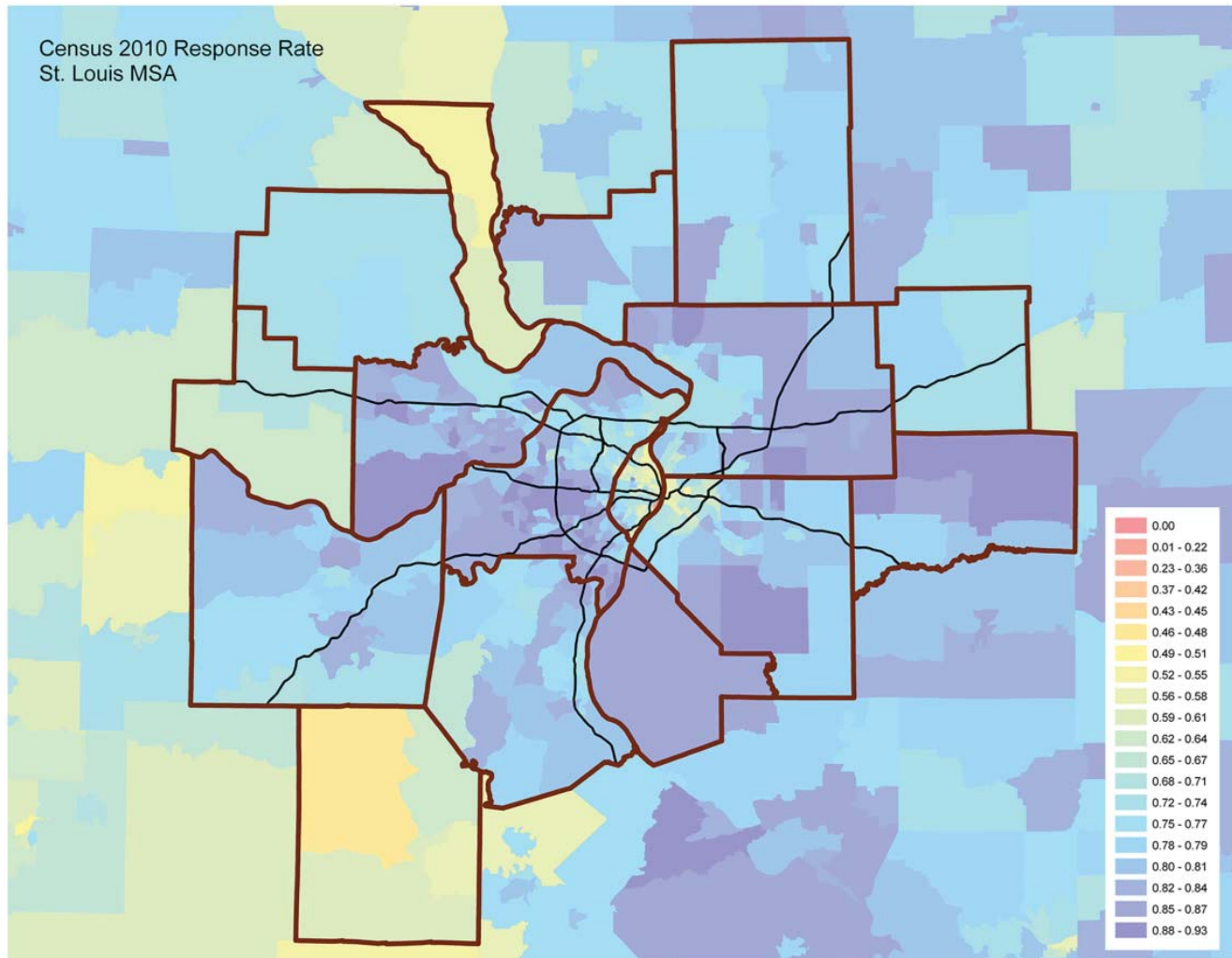




Metropolitan Mirror: Facts and Trends Reflecting the St. Louis Region

Posted March 2011

Census 2010 Response Rates - St. Louis MSA



A Census Primer

Conducting the decennial U.S. census is a complex and expensive undertaking. No process for counting population is perfect. The 2010 Census is no exception. For that reason, people will always be in a position to dispute the numbers. What follows is a brief review of the process as an aid in understanding the data generated by the Census Bureau.

At the core of the census process is a master address list for the approximately 145 million U.S. residences. The Census Bureau provides 11,500 tribal, state, and local governments with the addresses in their jurisdiction and asks for any updates the governments can provide. In addition field work conducted by Census Bureau canvassers looks for every place where people live, stay, or could live or stay and verify the block designation for the address to make sure the address is correctly located for apportionment purposes.

Another major component is the effort to inform the public about the importance of completing the census form. Extensive advertising is enhanced through complete count committees established at the tribal, state, and local levels to directly encourage participation. The Bureau contacted addressees three times, sending an advance letter, the questionnaire, and a reminder postcard.

In February and March 2010 the Census Bureau mailed a Census 2010 questionnaire to the master address list. The 2010 Census questionnaire was one of the shortest in history. It asked for name, gender, age, race, ethnicity, relationship, and whether the home is owned or rented. A second form was mailed to 35 million households in historically low- and moderate-response census tracts. As of April 19, 2010 the initial national mail response rate was 63 percent (continuing a trend of lower rates from the 1970 census with a mail response rate of 78 percent).

The next phase of the census process is nonresponse follow up (NRFU) to those addresses from which a questionnaire is not returned by mail. From April through July 2010, approximately 1.4 million Census enumerators made door-to-door visits to 46.6 million housing units. The primary tasks of the enumerators are to either obtain a completed census form by interviewing a household member over the age of 15 or report the address as vacant. In cases where the enumerator is unable to contact a household member, and the address is not classified as vacant, the options are:

1. Complete a proxy interview with a nonhousehold member, typically a neighbor
2. Record the address as a closeout interview - no interview is conducted and household information is later determined using statistical methods at Bureau headquarters during data processing.

The NRFU process also includes a vacant/delete check. Addresses are either determined to be vacant, or there is no building at the address in which case it is deleted from the master list, or supplemental (new addresses) are added to the master list.

While the NRFU process was completed on time and 29 percent under budget, the Government Accountability Office reports that approximately 30 percent of local census office managers were dissatisfied with their ability to meet production goals while maintaining data quality.

After the NRFU process the Census Bureau calculates a participation rate. While the response rate calculates forms returned by mail against the master list, the participation rate calculates forms returned by mail against occupied addresses, excluding those addresses determined to be vacant. In the St. Louis metropolitan area, the response rate ranged from 58 percent in Calhoun County to 81 percent in St. Louis County. Within St. Louis County the response rate ranged from 62 percent to 90 percent. In the City of St. Louis the response rate ranged from 41 percent to 90 percent. (see map)

Data on the final accuracy of the 2010 census count will be available in early 2012.

Sources:

- Government Accountability Office, December 2010, 2010 CENSUS Data Collection Operations Were Generally Completed as Planned, but Long-standing Challenges Suggest Need for Fundamental Reforms
- Government Accountability Office, December 2010, 2010 CENSUS Follow-up Should Reduce Coverage Errors, but Effects on Demographic Groups Need to Be Determined
- Government Accountability Office, December 2010, 2010 CENSUS Key Efforts to Include Hard-to-Count Populations Went Generally as Planned; Improvements Could Make the Efforts More Effective for Next Census



This data is provided through the Applied Research division of the University of Missouri—St. Louis's Public Policy Research Center.

