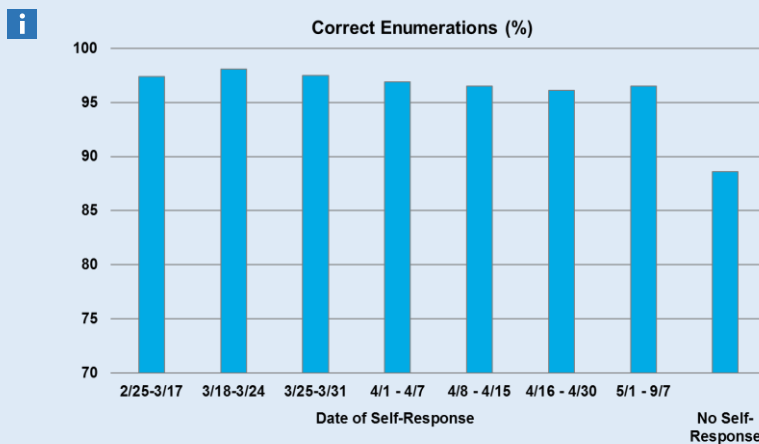# The Importance of Self-Response in the 2020 Census

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1. Key Premise: The citizenship question will lower self-response

"…the Court finds that the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 census will cause an incremental net differential decline in self-responses among noncitizen households of at least 5.8%. The Court further finds that that estimate is conservative and that the net differential decline could be much higher (Ruling of Judge Jesse M. Furman, January 15, 2019, page 119)
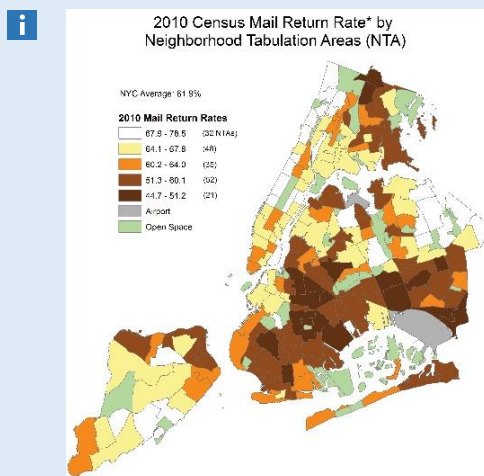
…But why does it matter?

2. Self-Response is the Gold Standard

Correct Enumerations (%)

Data collected via self-response are more accurate than those obtained in nonresponse follow-up (NRFU) operations

3. Self-response varies geographically and is disproportionally low among minority groups and young children

2010 Census Mail Return Rate* by Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTA)

- Groups with low self-response are more likely to be undercounted and that undercount will affect some groups much more than others

- The black population of New York City had the lowest mail return rate in 2010 and, likely, the highest undercount

- Young children have also been undercounted at a high rate, likely the result of complex family arrangements and missed persons within enumerated households
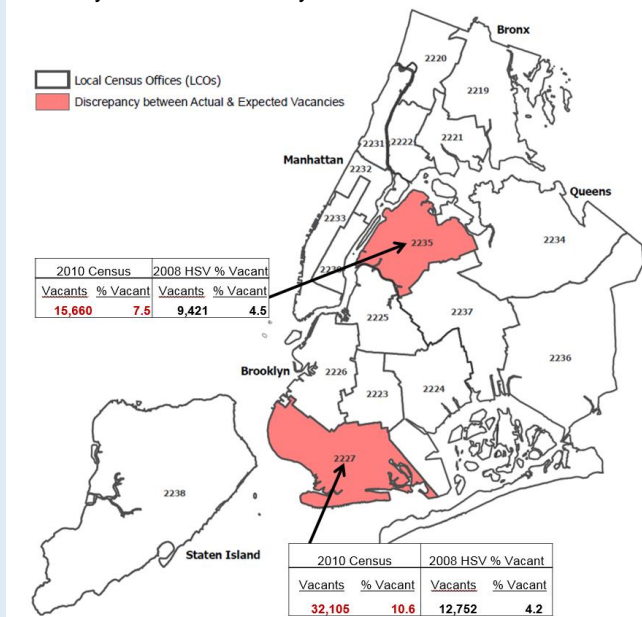
4. Too much NRFU = Less Accurate Census

- ℹ️ • NRFU makes use of methods that introduce error and decrease data quality because of a reliance on less knowledgeable **proxy respondents**, such as neighbors and postal workers.

- • **Administrative records** will be used to handle non-response by determining whether housing units are vacant and, if they are found to be occupied, to assign characteristics for non-responders. However, minority groups tend to have less accurate administrative data, if such records exist at all.

- • If all else fails and the housing unit is determined to be occupied, all persons in the household will have their characteristics assigned using **statistical imputation**, using data from those who respond in a neighborhood to substitute for those households that fail to respond. This introduces more error.

5. Effects at the Local Level

ℹ️ Local communities and vulnerable populations suffer from systematic error introduced in NRFU

EXAMPLE 1: Housing units in parts of Queens and Brooklyn were erroneously classified as vacant in 2010

EXAMPLE 2: In NYC, neighborhoods that needed high levels of imputation were more likely to be black and composed of single and very small multi-family housing.

	Tracts with >6% Substitution	City Average
% Black	46.8	24.6
% Single Moms	20.1	14.4
% of lots with one to two housing units	25.6	17.6
% of lots with three to four housing units	20.3	12.1

6. Maximizing Self-Response

- ℹ️ • Support efforts to **remove the citizenship question** from the 2020 Census questionnaire.

- • "Make the census personal" by asking constituents to **self-respond**, so that cities can get their fair share of political representation and federal funds for services vital to neighborhood residents.

- • At least **2,000 nation-wide Census Bureau Partnership Specialists** are needed, who will cooperate with local "trusted voices" to ensure that the public knows that it's safe to respond to the census.

- • Provide funding for Census Bureau **Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs)**, which will give the Bureau a physical "footprint" in the communities of the city, as was the case in previous censuses.