

Democracy North Carolina

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WHICH COUNTIES FACE THE HIGHEST RISK OF LOSING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS FROM A CENSUS UNDERCOUNT?

With 2010 Census forms due in mailboxes this week, a new analysis shows that one fourth of North Carolina's counties are at a high risk of losing millions of dollars in future federal funding because a significant portion of their residents will likely not mail back a completed Census form.

Another one fourth of the counties face an elevated risk of losing money, because they have a history of low mail-back rates in past census years or a significant share of residents who typically have low response rates, such as families living in poverty or in substandard housing.

"More than \$400 billion in federal funds are allocated each year based on the population count or about \$1,500 per person," said Bob Hall, director of Democracy North Carolina, the nonpartisan group that conducted the analysis. "For every 1,000 residents not counted, a county could lose \$1.5 million a year for school programs, health care, job training, housing, senior centers and more."

Robeson County ranks as the county with the highest risk of losing money, followed by Duplin, Edgecombe, Scotland, Bladen, Vance, Halifax, Columbus, Hoke and Sampson. *[See chart below.]*

In 2000, more than 40 percent of the housing units in these counties did not return a Census form. Follow-up visits by Census workers and statistical adjustments produced the final population count for North Carolina. In September 2001, the US Census Monitoring Board determined that the number was 1.3% below the true population count, but further analysis put the gap at from -0.1% to +0.4%.

If the 2010 Census ends up with a 1% undercount for North Carolina's roughly 9.5 million people, the state would lose more than \$140 million a year, said Hall.

According to Democracy North Carolina's analysis, counties with highest risk of losing their fair share of money are those with the lowest percent of households that responded to the 1990 and 2000 Census forms and the highest percent of residents who fit the "hard to count" profile. The Census Bureau has identified 12 types of people who disproportionately make up "hard to count" groups, including people who lack a high-school education, live in poverty, don't speak English, live in a multi-family dwelling, rent, receive public assistance, or are unemployed.

"The high risk counties are poor and exactly the ones that most need help from government programs, so their elected leaders, school officials and service providers have an extra incentive and responsibility to make a concerted effort to promote a big response to the Census," Hall said.

He noted that Robeson County is distributing 50,000 flyers developed by Democracy North Carolina through 41 public schools and two dozen participating churches to increase awareness. "Ideally, every school system in the state would provide material about the Census for kids to take home this week or next," Hall said. "This is the peak moment, when the form is in people's hands."

Facing the challenge of more unemployment, more immigrants and more foreclosures, some counties (e.g., Guilford and Chatham) have devoted staff to Census awareness campaigns, but more is needed, Hall said. "Shifting staff resources now will pay off handsomely for communities." Democracy North Carolina is working with many partners on outreach programs, including a "Count All Souls" campaign among hundreds of faith-based groups. See www.democracy-nc.org for more.

COUNTIES RANKED FOR RISK OF UNDERCOUNT, 1 = HIGHEST RISK*

	Risk Level	RANK: 1= Highest Risk	FINAL SCORE	HARD-TO-COUNT INDEX		2000 CENSUS RETURN RATE		Mail Response Rate, All Housing Units: 2000 Census	Mail Response Rate, All Housing Units: 1990 Census
				Index Number	Rank: 1=Highest Share of Hard to Count in Pop.	Final Return Rate for Occupied Housing	Rank: 1= Lowest Return Rate		
Alamance		61	266.6	73.4	62	74.2	55	67	65
Alexander		84	315.9	78.3	83	76.6	76	69	72
Alleghany		79	304.8	71.5	54	80.3	98	57	64
Anson	HIGH	22	177.3	64.3	32	69.0	12	61	55
Ashe		89	320.3	74.5	65	80.9	99	58	68
Avery	ELEVATED	48	241.5	67.9	40	74.6	59	46	53
Beaufort	ELEVATED	38	229.8	63.9	31	74.9	60	60	63
Bertie	HIGH	14	155.9	52.5	7	71.4	24	57	67
Bladen	HIGH	5	136.7	59.2	20	56.6	1	45	62
Brunswick		62	266.8	68.1	42	76.7	80	47	47
Buncombe		76	294.1	77.0	79	75.0	62	66	61
Burke	ELEVATED	32	218.4	72.8	60	69.5	15	61	67
Cabarrus		95	335.1	82.5	96	76.6	78	69	70
Caldwell		64	270.8	75.6	74	73.2	47	64	65
Camden		100	370.6	87.0	100	81.6	100	71	70
Carteret		88	319.3	74.8	68	79.5	97	51	52
Caswell	ELEVATED	28	202.7	66.8	36	71.9	27	61	64
Catawba		77	298.3	75.7	76	75.6	69	66	66
Chatham		81	311.7	80.6	91	75.1	64	69	62
Cherokee	ELEVATED	37	229.6	71.1	53	72.4	33	52	61
Chowan		54	249.3	58.9	18	78.4	92	65	68
Clay		96	335.3	78.6	84	78.7	94	54	60
Cleveland		52	247.6	72.9	61	72.8	41	64	63
Columbus	HIGH	8	142.0	57.0	14	66.0	5	56	61
Craven		73	290.4	74.0	64	76.4	74	65	66
Cumberland	ELEVATED	30	214.3	67.9	39	72.5	35	62	58
Currituck		75	290.5	81.7	94	72.8	42	46	53
Dare		91	326.2	80.6	92	76.6	77	36	41
Davidson		71	284.4	77.6	81	73.7	51	64	65
Davie		98	355.5	82.7	97	78.8	95	71	70
Duplin	HIGH	2	128.8	48.7	2	68.1	9	59	65
Durham	ELEVATED	31	215.9	62.1	26	73.8	52	68	64
Edgecombe	HIGH	3	130.9	49.8	3	68.1	10	57	55
Forsyth		68	282.4	72.0	57	76.4	75	69	67
Franklin	ELEVATED	36	229.5	68.4	44	73.0	44	62	53
Gaston		57	255.5	74.9	69	72.6	38	65	62
Gates		65	273.4	71.6	55	75.8	70	63	71
Graham	ELEVATED	45	237.4	62.3	27	76.1	72	48	53
Granville	ELEVATED	43	235.9	74.7	67	71.2	23	64	60
Greene	HIGH	12	152.1	50.6	5	71.6	25	62	57
Guilford		58	255.9	70.4	52	74.5	57	67	69
Halifax	HIGH	7	141.1	49.8	4	70.2	17	56	59
Harnett	HIGH	21	176.5	62.0	25	70.5	19	61	51

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Haywood		93	331.3	80.2	90	77.1	84	60	63
Henderson		92	329.7	77.7	82	78.0	90	66	65
Hertford	HIGH	11	150.0	58.2	16	67.8	7	61	68
Hoke	HIGH	9	142.2	55.6	13	67.6	6	59	49
Hyde	ELEVATED	42	235.8	59.0	19	76.8	81	51	61
Iredell		87	318.2	80.8	93	75.4	67	65	69
Jackson	HIGH	23	184.7	63.9	30	70.8	20	48	53
Johnston	ELEVATED	39	230.7	75.6	73	69.1	13	60	58
Jones	ELEVATED	27	202.2	64.9	33	72.3	31	61	70
Lee	ELEVATED	40	234.1	70.4	51	72.7	40	63	63
Lenoir	ELEVATED	29	212.3	61.4	23	74.0	53	62	64
Lincoln		72	285.3	79.1	86	73.2	45	66	69
Macon		55	252.6	73.8	63	72.8	43	49	52
Madison		78	304.1	76.9	78	76.2	73	60	63
Martin		56	253.4	68.3	43	75.1	65	66	67
McDowell	ELEVATED	44	236.9	63.4	29	75.5	68	64	67
Mecklenburg	ELEVATED	47	241.4	67.9	41	74.4	56	68	68
Mitchell		80	309.8	76.2	77	76.7	79	60	65
Montgomery	HIGH	16	158.6	58.4	17	69.2	14	47	51
Moore		85	317.1	77.1	80	77.0	82	65	57
Nash	ELEVATED	49	242.0	72.3	58	72.6	39	63	61
New Hanover		59	260.5	71.9	56	74.6	58	61	60
Northampton	HIGH	15	157.5	51.4	6	72.0	28	58	57
Onslow	HIGH	24	197.7	67.6	38	71.1	21	59	57
Orange		69	282.9	69.1	47	77.8	87	68	66
Pamlico		66	280.6	68.6	45	78.0	89	58	61
Pasquotank		53	248.0	65.1	34	75.9	71	65	70
Pender	ELEVATED	35	225.7	69.2	48	72.5	36	53	57
Perquimans		67	281.8	68.9	46	78.0	88	58	64
Person		90	325.8	78.8	85	77.0	83	68	64
Pitt	HIGH	17	167.0	57.9	15	71.1	22	62	67
Polk		97	350.6	82.1	95	78.5	93	66	69
Randolph		63	270.7	75.4	72	73.3	48	65	66
Richmond	HIGH	13	153.9	61.8	24	64.2	4	55	54
Robeson	HIGH	1	113.2	47.1	1	63.1	2	56	52
Rockingham	ELEVATED	41	234.7	72.5	59	72.3	30	64	66
Rowan		51	247.1	75.0	70	72.1	29	64	65
Rutherford	ELEVATED	46	238.7	69.5	49	73.2	46	63	66
Sampson	HIGH	10	147.8	55.5	12	68.2	11	58	66
Scotland	HIGH	4	132.8	55.2	11	63.6	3	56	50
Stanly		74	290.5	79.1	87	73.4	49	65	67
Stokes		94	332.0	79.7	88	77.3	85	70	67
Surry		50	245.9	74.5	66	72.4	32	64	73
Swain	HIGH	20	176.5	62.9	28	69.6	16	48	54
Transylvania		99	357.7	84.3	98	79.4	96	60	63

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Tyrrell	ELEVATED	25	201.0	54.0	9	75.0	63	56	62
Union		83	313.9	84.7	99	74.2	54	68	66
Vance	HIGH	6	137.8	53.8	8	68.0	8	58	57
Wake		86	317.4	75.4	71	78.0	91	71	66
Warren	HIGH	19	171.0	54.6	10	72.5	34	52	46
Washington	ELEVATED	33	220.4	61.3	22	75.0	61	61	68
Watauga	ELEVATED	34	223.9	65.2	35	73.7	50	54	55
Wayne	ELEVATED	26	201.6	67.0	37	71.6	26	62	60
Wilkes		60	261.2	75.7	75	72.6	37	63	67
Wilson	HIGH	18	168.8	59.3	21	70.4	18	63	61
Yadkin		82	312.4	80.1	89	75.2	66	67	69
Yancey		70	283.4	69.7	50	77.8	86	60	63
STATE			244.2	70.4		73.8		64	63

***NOTES:**

- This chart provides one way to view North Carolina counties at above-normal risk of an undercount, based on the county’s previous Census responses and demographics. In truth, all counties are at risk; this chart highlights the 49 counties at elevated or high risk.
- Counties are ranked on a Final Score that is a composite of each county’s Hard-to-Count Index, Census Return Rate in 2000, relative ranking on those two indicators, and extra points for exceeding the state’s average Mail Response Rate for the 2000 Census and 1990 Census.
- The data for the Hard-to-Count Index and Census Return Rate for 2000 come from the Census Bureau’s 2000 Planning Database: <http://2010.census.gov/partners/research/>. The information is provided for each Census tract. Democracy North Carolina combined the tracts for each county, giving equal weight to each person or occupied housing unit to yield county totals.
- The Mail Response Rates for the 2000 and 1990 Census tell how many housing units returned a Census form by mail, used a Be Counted form, or provided Census responses over the telephone or Internet. The final response rate was 67% for the US and 64% for North Carolina in 2000 (see: www.census.gov/dmd/www/response/2000response.html) and it was 63% for North Carolina in 1990 (see: <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/response/disp-mro.37>)
- The Census Bureau notes that the Mail Response Rate should not be confused with Census Return Rate in the previous column. The Mail Return Rates exclude vacant housing structures from the calculation to give a truer measure of census “returns.”

HOW TO READ THE CHART - Using the descriptions above, here’s what the numbers mean for **Wilson County**, for example: It ranks #18 among the 100 counties for overall risk, so it is in the High Risk group of counties. Looking at the last two columns, Wilson had a Mail Response Rate of 63% for all housing units in the 2000 Census and 61% in 1990, which are below the statewide rates of 64% and 63% in 2000 and 1990. The Mail Return Rate shows it wound up with a 70.4% return rate for the occupied housing units, 18th worse among all counties and below the state rate. Wilson County’s Hard-to-Count Index is 59.3, well below the statewide 70.4, indicating it has a much larger portion of residents living in “hard-to-count” groups or tracts than the state average.