

# Star-Telegram

## Census undercount could cost Texas money, political clout

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Think of it as the equivalent of tabulating Texas and forgetting Arlington.

An estimated 373,567 people in Texas were uncouned in the 2000 Census, second only to the 522,796 that were missed in California.

The undercount cost Texas about \$1 billion in lost federal funds, according to a PriceWaterhouseCooper report on the census. Fort Worth, where the undercount was pegged at 24,661, lost \$62.3 million in federal funds, the report said.

As the U.S. Census begins mailing its national questionnaire this week, it pays to be counted because power and money are at stake, says Gabriel Sanchez, regional census director for Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The once-a-decade head count determines congressional reapportionment, and State Demographer Karl Eschbach believes that Texas, which has been the big gainer in U.S. population in recent years, will be the overall winner in added political clout. He predicts that Texas will add four seats in the U.S. House.

A new report illustrates the fiscal power of the count.

In 2008, \$447 billion in federal funds were distributed based on the 2000 Census and later updates, according to the Brookings Institute, a nonprofit that examines U.S. public policy.

A Brookings study shows that 80 percent of the money tied to the census goes to state governments, many of which, like Texas, are struggling with budget shortfalls, said Andrew Reamer, who wrote the report.

In Texas, Reamer said, nearly \$1,000 in Medicaid funds will be returned to the state for every person counted. "The key point here is that census participation means more money locally," he said.

### Hard to count

Multiple factors make Fort Worth and Texas tough to tally, Sanchez said.

"Obviously, you have a lot of Hispanics and a lot of recently arrived immigrants. There has also been a lot of growth, and those people aren't as tied to the community as a family that has been here 25 years. You also have a lot of young children," who, historically, have been missed more often than people in any other age group, Sanchez said. "People forget about the baby."

The state also has 80 percent of the U.S.-Mexico border, which presents a different set of problems, he said.

"You have a lot of interaction back and forth across the border. And how those border communities feel about the federal government and how they interact with it – they have to be approached in a different way," Sanchez said. "There are also large number of immigrants from Mexico that aren't as integrated as one would hope, and that leads to language barriers and cultural barriers." Another factor is Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Ike, which destroyed vast tracts of housing in Texas and Louisiana, Sanchez said.

"We send forms to housing units, and if it's been destroyed we have problems. You might have one address with three trailers parked in the back," he said. "So we're hand-delivering questionnaires in the areas that have been hit by hurricanes."

Not to be discounted is the "true Texas independent spirit, which makes it a great place to live but a hard place to try to get a form back from everybody," Sanchez said.

Historically, the rural South has been an another undercounted population, and Texas has two parts of that equation, says William O'Hare, a demographer at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a charitable organization based in Baltimore.

"Notably, blacks in the rural South, Hispanics in the Southwest border region, and American Indians on reservations in the Southwest and Northern Plains are among the hardest to count populations," O'Hare said. "I think Texas is the only state where you are going to have the blacks of the rural South and the Hispanics on the borderland."

The common denominator in those demographics is poverty, he said.

"They may live in units that don't look like a housing unit to a census taker – it's so ramshackle that they think no one would live there – or they live so far off the beaten path that nobody can find them," he said, noting that poor people also tend to be transient, "moving around

from an aunt to an uncle to the street."

### 'We need those dollars'

A primary component of the Census Bureau's strategy for reaching hard-to-reach populations is to make outreach a community effort, Sanchez said.

"If there is one thing we've learned is that the census has to be a federal effort at the local level," he said. "We can't design a program in Washington that is going to work in Fort Worth or Abilene or El Paso. The program has to be designed locally."

The Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, one of the bureau's 38,000 partner groups in Texas, is promoting the count "everywhere we go," chamber President and CEO Rosa Navejar said.

Many Hispanics remain suspicious of the government effort because "they don't know what they don't know," Navejar said. "People don't realize the impact of not filling it out. Those are federal dollars we are leaving on the table, and we need those dollars."

Money talks, and even officials who aren't known for cozying up to Washington are buying in.

"It is in the best interest of our state for every Texan to be counted in the census, in terms of representation and our tax dollars flowing back to Texas," Gov. Rick Perry said in a release last week.

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