

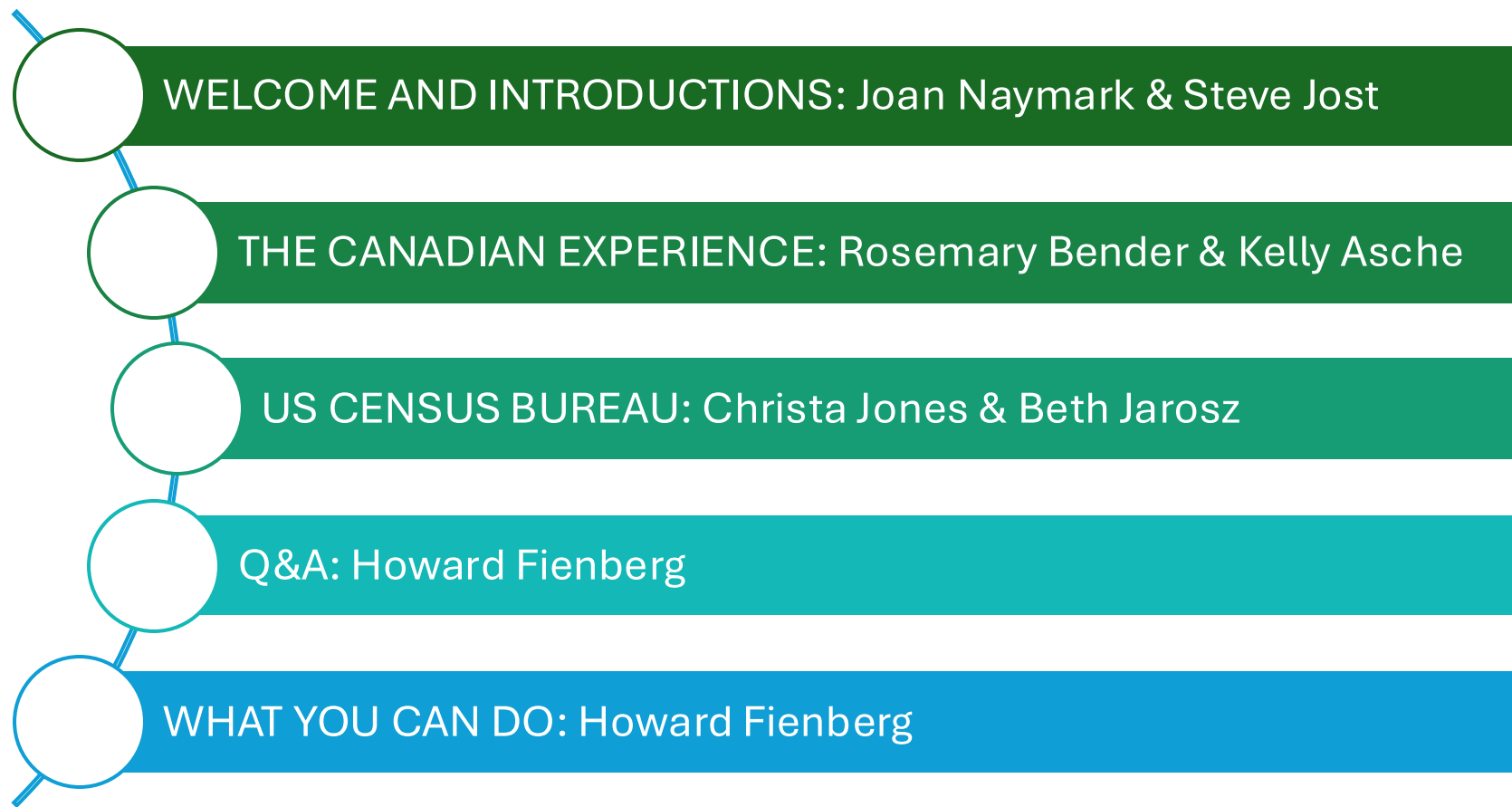
# BLACKOUT: Communities without Vital Data

Webinar 11/10/2025

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# Agenda





# Canadian Census vs. US Census

Canada	United States
Census Short Form - quinquennial	US Census - decennial
<b>Census Long Form</b> - quinquennial survey	American Community Survey - annual

***The strength of the Canadian Long Form Census and the American Community Survey is in the detailed demographic and socio-economic data they provide for communities, large and small.***




# Changes to Canadian Census

Happened twice

- **1986** : Census cancelled (cost)
- **2011** : Census Long Form changed from mandatory to a voluntary National Household Survey (privacy)



# Why is a Mandatory Long Form Important?

- **Response rates much lower** for voluntary surveys 
- Non-respondents generally have **characteristics that differ** from those of respondents.
- This can **create biases** in the data, affecting data accuracy and usefulness.



# Impact on making Canadian Survey Voluntary: Significant Drop in Response Rates

2006 Long Form (mandatory)	94%
2011 National Household Survey (voluntary)	69%
2016 Long Form (mandatory)	98%



## Resulting Headlines...

CANADA

### Who filled out the National Household Survey? (and why did Statscan cut its census standards in half?)

By Patrick Cain • Global News

Posted October 2, 2013 12:13 pm · Updated November 28, 2014 5:21 pm · 4 min read



National Household Survey provides blurred look at housing

Bloomberg

• Live TV Markets Economics Industries Tech Politics Businessweek Opinion More

Canada

### Loss of long-form census leads to spotty demographic data: experts

By CTVNews.ca Staff

### The Tragedy of Canada's Census

The country's political climate led to the switch from a mandatory census form to voluntary one. It's been a disaster for policymakers.



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# Who were the non-respondents?

**They tended to be:**

- Rural
- Lower income
- Youth
- In need of social services
- Immigrants



***These groups already run the risk of being underrepresented in census data***



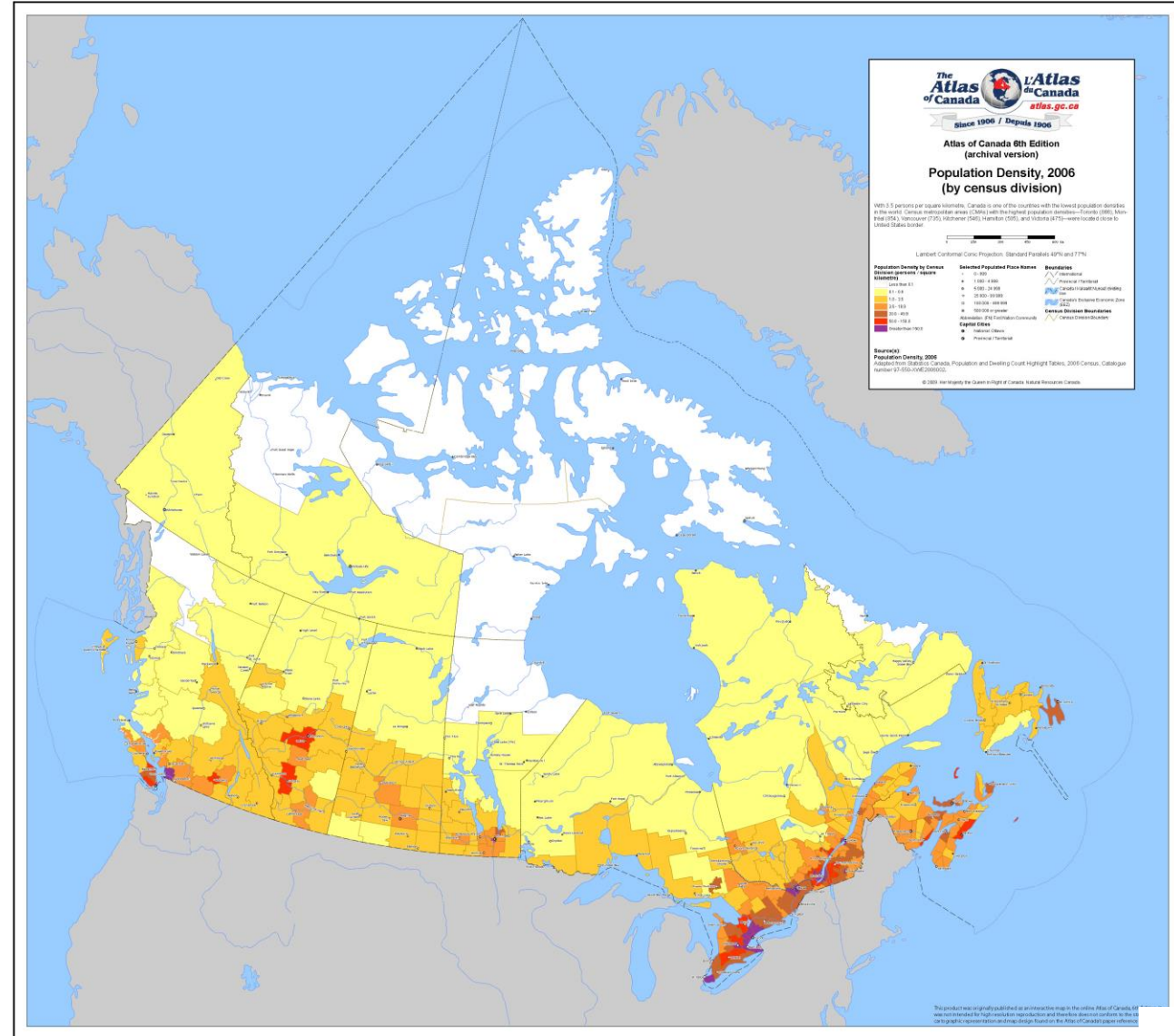
# ...This resulted in significant data suppression

Statistics Canada had to **suppress data for about 25%** of all municipalities and for certain immigrant, Indigenous and low-income subgroups due to quality concerns.

***Suppression was based on the Global Non-response Rate (GNR), a combination of total and partial non-response.***



Canada's rural and small communities (in orange) most affected by a voluntary National Household Survey





Less data  
published in  
more rural  
provinces

Provinces and Territories	Population	Published census subdivisions (municipalities)		
		Number	%	% Population
Canada	33,476,688	3439	75.3	96.6
Newfoundland and Labrador	514,536	241	69.5	83.9
Prince Edward Island	140,204	77	70.0	79.4
Nova Scotia	921,727	76	85.4	96.4
New Brunswick	751,171	191	71.5	88.7
Quebec	7,903,001	979	84.3	97.8
Ontario	12,851,821	429	81.4	98.5
Manitoba	1,208,268	190	70.6	92.1
Saskatchewan	1,033,381	456	57.4	81.7
Alberta	3,645,257	293	75.1	96.7
British Columbia	4,400,057	437	82.6	97.2
Yukon	33,897	15	62.5	84.4
Northwest Territories	41,462	34	100.0	100
Nunavut	31,906	21	84.0	87

Note: CSDs not published for confidentiality reasons are excluded from this table. They have an estimated population less than 40.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 Census and NHS User Guide



# Pushback

- Government departments
- Media
- Municipalities
- Private sector
- Regional and economic development
- Housing, immigration, social program officials
- National rural development organizations
- Academia
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)



**MESSAGE:** These data are vital for municipal and regional planning for social and economic development in areas such as health, education, labour, poverty and immigration.

# Stronger public outcry when Census cancelled

## 1986

- Canadians reacted immediately and strongly. They understood the importance of the Census (planning schools, hospitals, social programs, agriculture)
- Media amplified outcry from business associations, municipalities and NGOs
- Federal govt cited legislative requirements

The 1986 Census cancellation was reversed a month later

## 2011

- Public reaction more muted, as changing to a voluntary survey more subtle, impact much less understood.
- Less reaction from business community
- Strong reaction from public and private data users

The 2011 Survey proceeded with a larger more costly sample to salvage data at provincial level (no benefit to rural and small communities)

# Pushback from users continued post 2011

## From data users

- Caution when using 2011 National Household Survey data
- Data not comparable to previous censuses or to other surveys, especially income data
- Trend analysis not possible
- Hindered local planning and policy development

## For suppressed areas

- **No data available - a vital data gap.**
- **The data cannot be deduced from larger regional or provincial data** – the characteristics of the populations are too different.

# Decision on voluntary NHS was reversed in 2015

- Mandatory Census Long Form **reinstated** in 2016 by new government in 2015
- Changes to legislation in 2017 ensure a **permanent mandatory Census** Long Form.

**In 2017, changes to legislation also strengthened the independence of the Chief Statistician with regard to methodology and collection methods**





# In Closing

*A voluntary national household survey cannot produce quality and useful data for municipal, rural and regional planning for social and economic development in areas such as health, education, labour, poverty, diversity and immigration.*







## Original purpose of the American Community Survey (ACS)

Replace the decennial long form with annual, reliable estimates for all states, counties, tracts, and census block groups

- Provides small area data—including small communities, neighborhoods, and rural areas
- Continuous measurement—see how communities change over time
- Data customization and exploration opportunities—combined with other data or alternative methods can provide enhanced insights





# 2004 ACS Voluntary Test Summary Results

## VOLUNTARY TEST SUMMARY RESULTS – 2004 ACS

	Initial Sample	Interview Rate	Completed Interviews	Total Cost
Voluntary Test	3.7 million	60 percent	2.2 million	\$214m
ACS Mandatory	3.0 million	72 percent	2.2 million	\$155m
Difference	0.7 million increase	12 percentage point decrease	maintained	\$59m increase





if the American Community Survey was a voluntary survey it would become **less reliable, more burdensome, and more expensive...**

Under the voluntary methods, the percentage of households requiring **more expensive** in-person follow up rose from 31.6 percent to 44.3 percent, over a 12 percentage point increase.

The greatest relative increase in the sample collected by personal visit was for whites and non-Hispanics.

Higher non-response rates would result in **increased personal visits and/or loss of sample cases** in the ACS, and either or both of these in effect would **reduce reliability** unless there would be an increase to the ACS sample. Moreover, the impacts of these effects would have been differential.

An increase in the ACS sample would have been **more expensive and more burdensome to the public.**

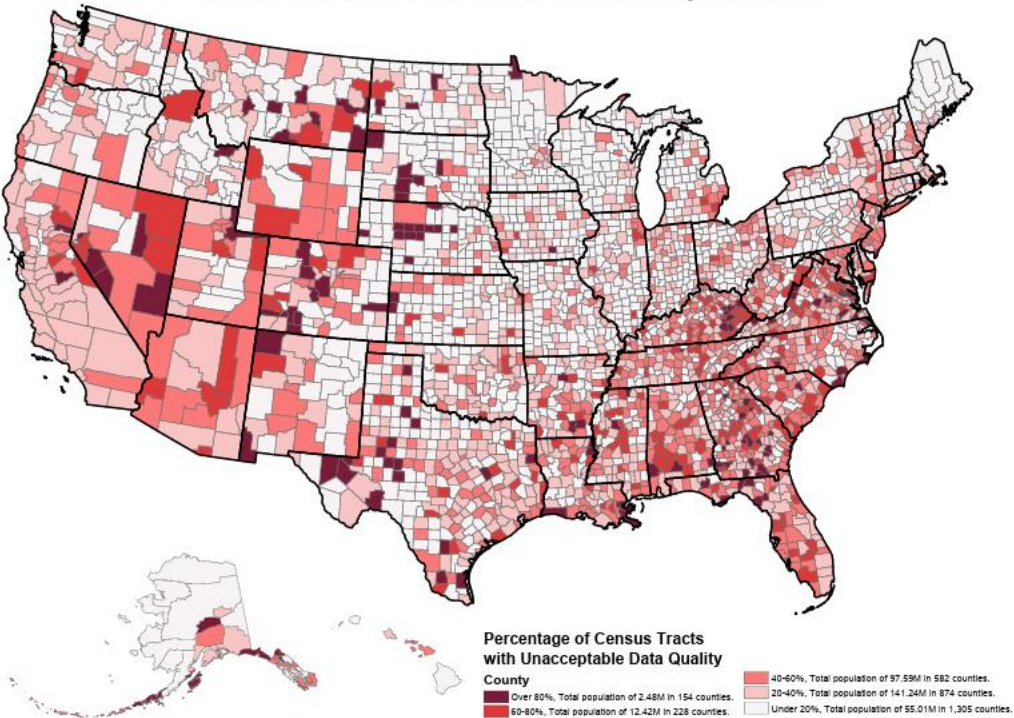




# Mandatory vs. Simulated Voluntary : *Red = Danger*

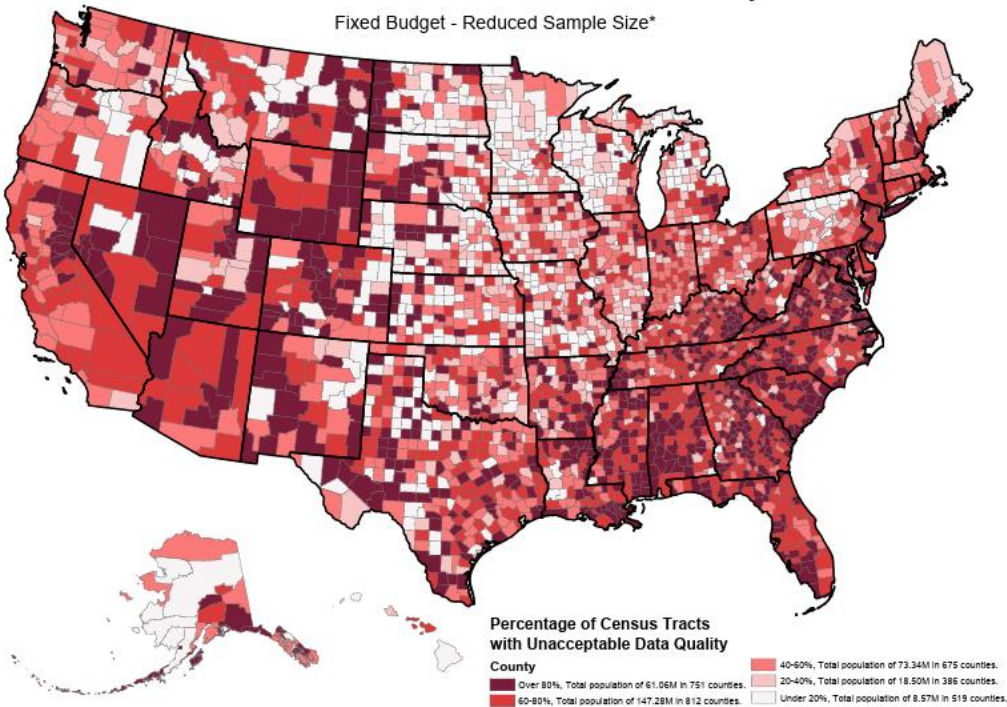
## Comparison of mandatory vs simulated voluntary ACS at fixed budget acceptable quality data for 2006-2010

2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Under Mandatory Methods



2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Under Simulated Voluntary Methods

Fixed Budget - Reduced Sample Size\*



\*Voluntary Effect Modeled based on the 2003 ACS Voluntary Test Results

Population figures are 2010 Census total population.



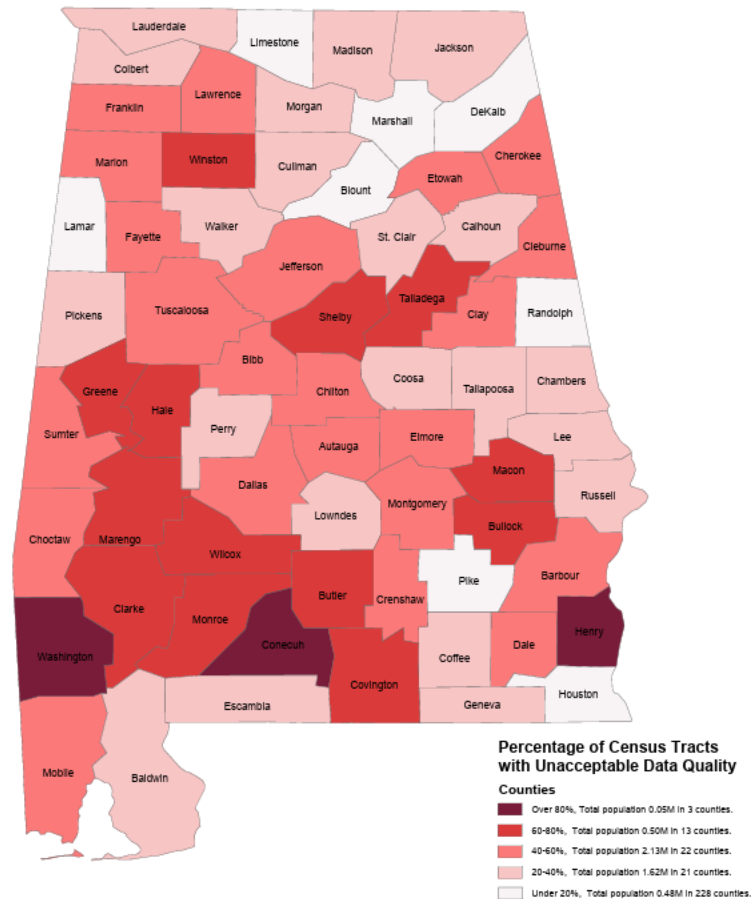




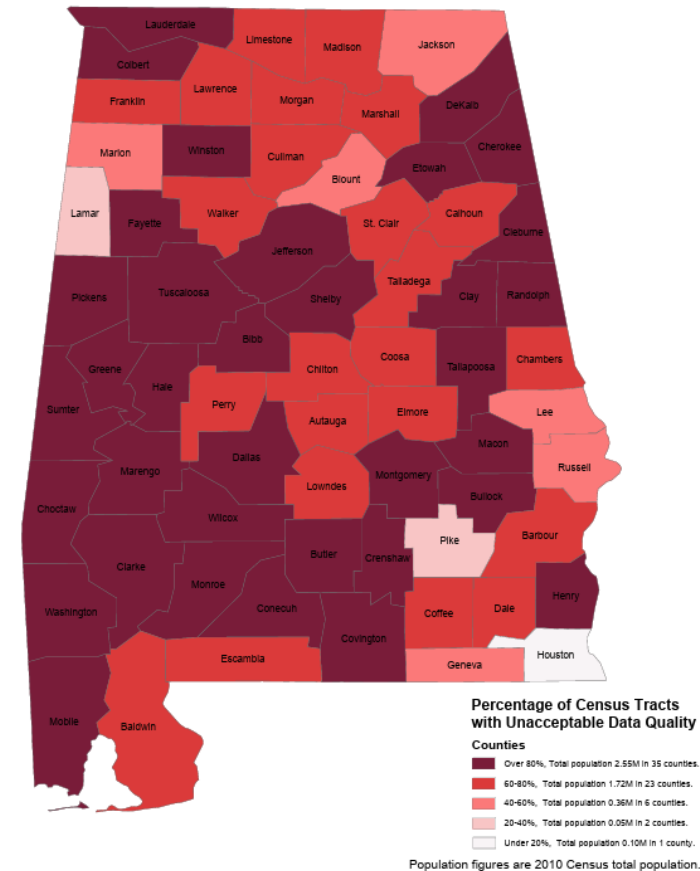
# Mandatory vs. Simulated Voluntary : *State Example*

## ALABAMA - Comparison of mandatory vs simulated voluntary ACS 2006-2010

Counties Mandatory Methods



Counties Simulated Voluntary Methods



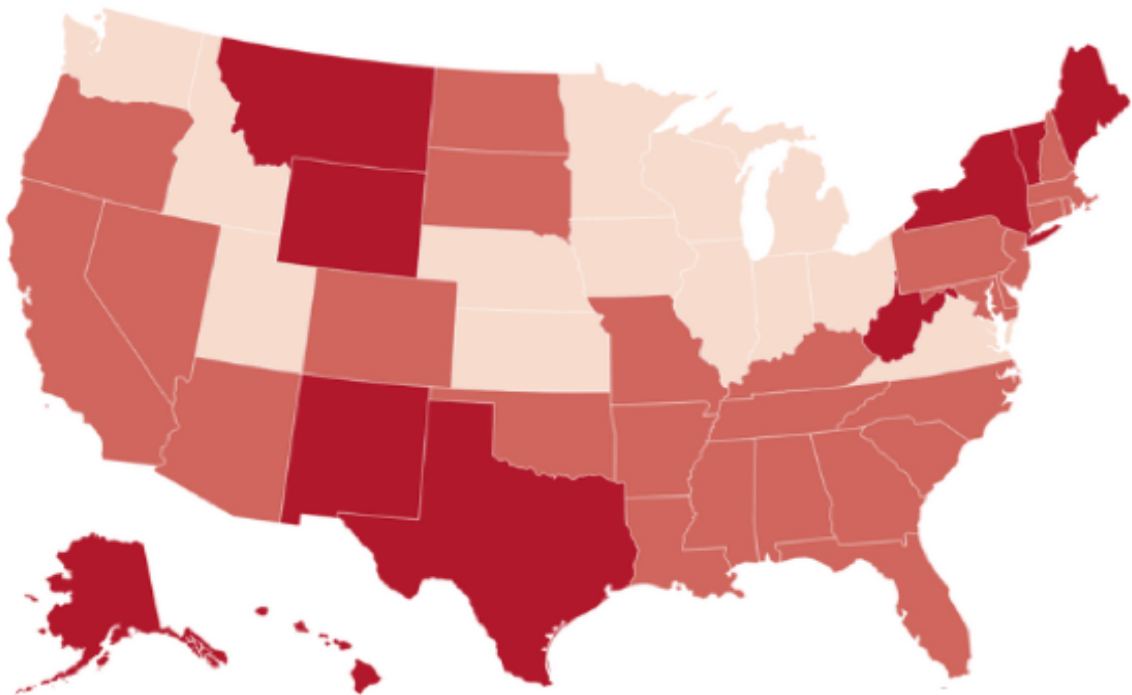


But what if the American Community Survey contact strategy was limited to only two contacts....

# 2020 Census Response after Two Contact Attempts

Percentage of housing units that responded to the 2020 Census as of March 25, 2020

<25% 25.1-30% 30.1-35%



Source: 2020 Census self-response rates, March 25, 2020. U.S. Census Bureau.

CQR | CENSUS QUALITY REINFORCEMENT TASK FORCE

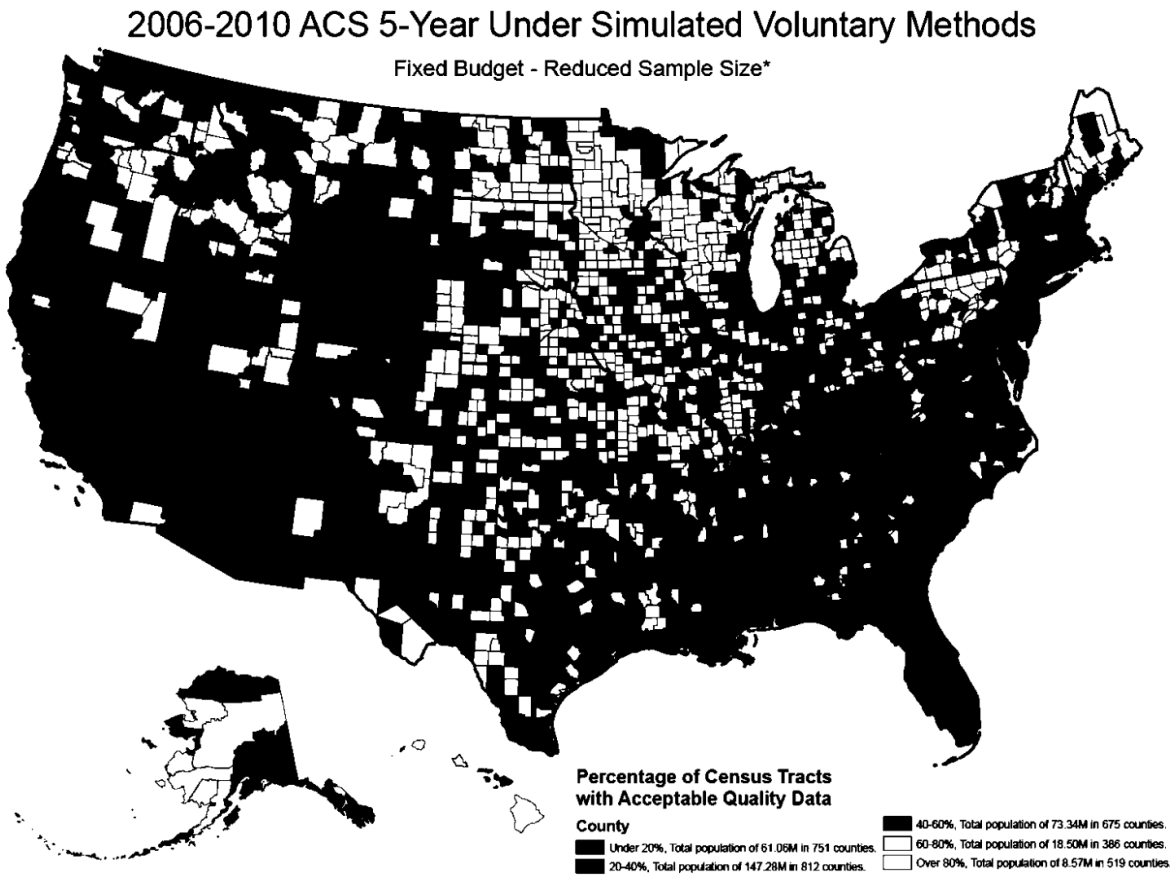


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# Simulated Voluntary Under 60% threshold

Blacked out areas under the 60% threshold for usability







What would be lost?



Figure 1.  
Social Vulnerability in North Carolina Counties With a Major Disaster Declaration



# Q&A

Put your question in the **Q&A section** on your screen.

Questions will be answered live or in the materials distributed after the webinar.



# What can you do?

- Share this webinar and the follow-up materials.
- [Contact your elected representative and senators](#) – Section 605 is harmful to our communities.
- Visit the [Census Project](#) to learn more and join the growing coalition of [businesses](#), [organizations](#) and [individuals](#) who are speaking out.
- Support the [Census Project funding request](#) for the Census Bureau – FY2026 (see Census Project stakeholder recommendation)
- [Sign up for updates](#) with The Census Project. MN attendees can sign up for updates with [MACS](#).



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