



# 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study (CBAMS) Survey and Focus Groups: Key Findings for Creative Strategy

October 31, 2018







# CBAMS Overview

## Purpose



Understand attitudes, barriers, & motivators toward the census



Inform & inspire creative strategy



Increase self-response to the 2020 Census

## Research Questions

1. Who intends to respond to the census?
2. Where do gaps in knowledge about the census exist?
3. What barriers would prevent people from completing the census?
4. What would motivate people to complete the census?

## Methodology



Quantitative Survey



Qualitative Focus Groups

## 2 Study Design



# Study Design: CBAMS Survey

The 2020 CBAMS Survey was administered from February to April 2018 to **50,000 households** in all **50 states and Washington, D.C.**

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Questionnaire consisted of **61 questions**



**Adults 18+** were eligible to participate via mail or web



Households in the sample **received a prepaid incentive** and up to **five mailings** inviting them to participate



**Oversampled** Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and other small-sample races.



Roughly **17,500 people** responded to the survey

# Study Design: CBAMS Focus Groups

2020 CBAMS Focus Groups held in March and April 2018.

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**42 focus groups** conducted with **11 audiences** across **14 locations**



**16 focus groups** were **non-English**



**Focus group transcripts** went through a rigorous process to ensure intercoder reliability



Transcripts were analyzed **to identify themes** among response barriers and motivators

# Study Design: CBAMS Focus Groups

2020 CBAMS Focus Groups conducted among the 11 audiences.

American Indian And Alaska Native

Black or African American

Chinese – Cantonese and Mandarin

Low Internet Proficiency

Middle Eastern And North African

Native Hawaiian And Pacific Islander (NHPI)

Rural

Spanish (Puerto Rico)

Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

Vietnamese

Young And Mobile



# Key Findings Areas



Intent to Respond



Knowledge Gaps



Concerns &  
Attitudinal Barriers



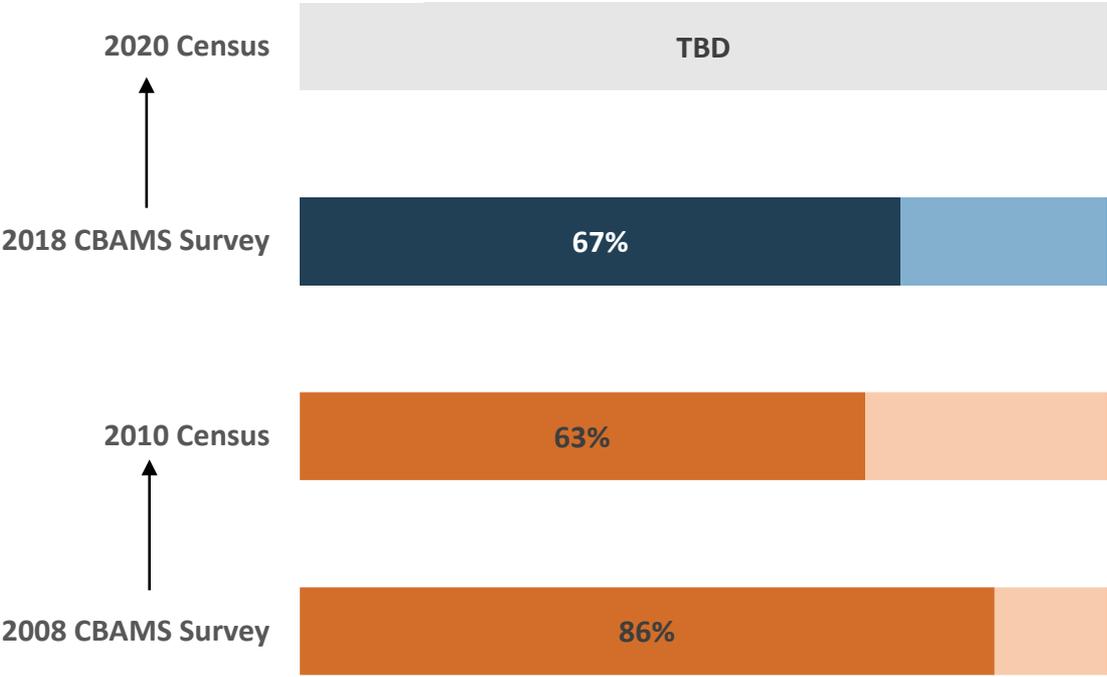
Motivators

# 4 Baseline



# Only 7 in 10 said they were likely to respond

CBAMS Survey and Decennial Census  
Measured vs Observed Response Rate



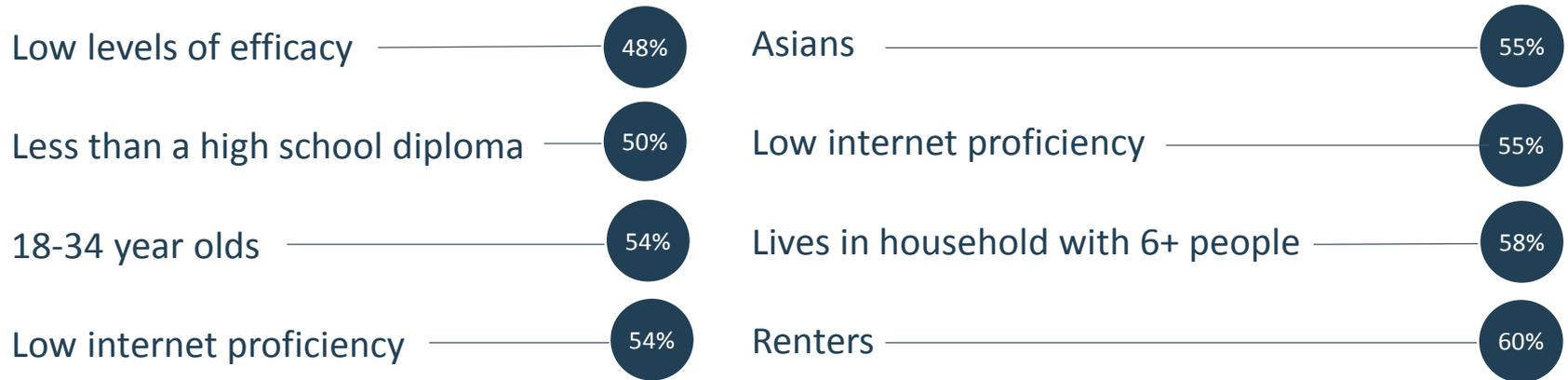
The mail response rate to the 2010 census was **22.5 pts lower** than measured in the 2008 CBAMS Survey



CBAMS measures those who are “extremely” or “very” likely to fill out the census form if the census were held today

# Intent to respond is very low among some

## Select groups with the lowest intent to respond



# Experiences with the census varied

## Positive

“

*I thought it was kind of fun...it didn't bother me. I had some trust that they weren't going to use it against me or whatever...so I was fine with it.”*  
— Rural

“

## Negative

*The experience was negative because it got to be tedious, monotonous, and you went like, ‘Gosh, what is the purpose of what we’re trying for here? Does it need to be that complicated?’”*  
— Low Internet Proficiency

## Others chose not to respond in the past

“

*I didn't [participate] basically from lack of knowledge. I didn't know anything about it, so push it to the side. **It was quite frankly [a] lack of knowledge.***

— *Black or African American*

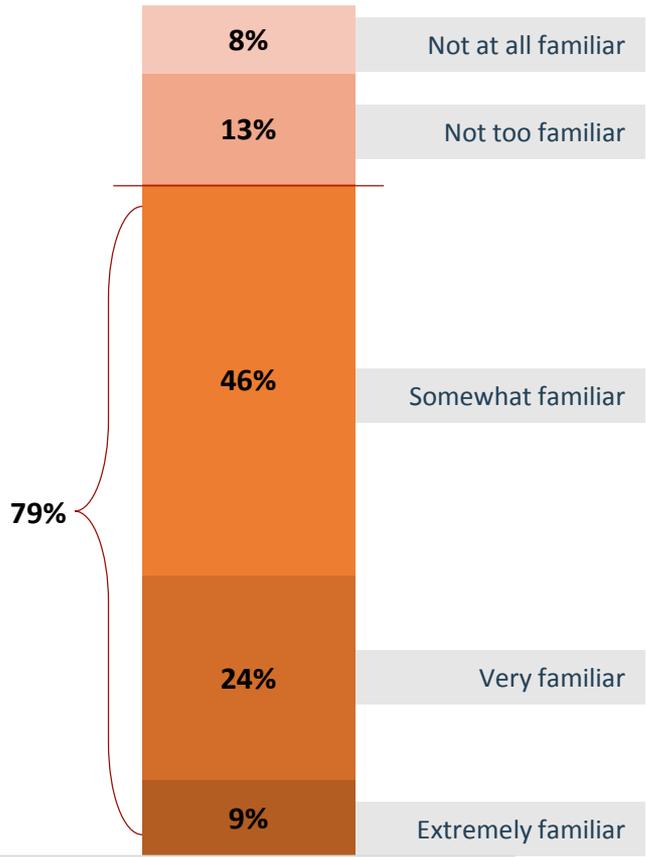
“

*Someone came to our door when we first moved in our neighborhood, and **my youngest was a baby**. She was almost two when we moved in there and I also had three daughters, so you know – it was going to take a while, and I ended up just telling them that **I did not have the time to do it.***

— *Low Internet Proficiency*

# Many know the census basics, but not much more

How familiar are you with the U.S. census?

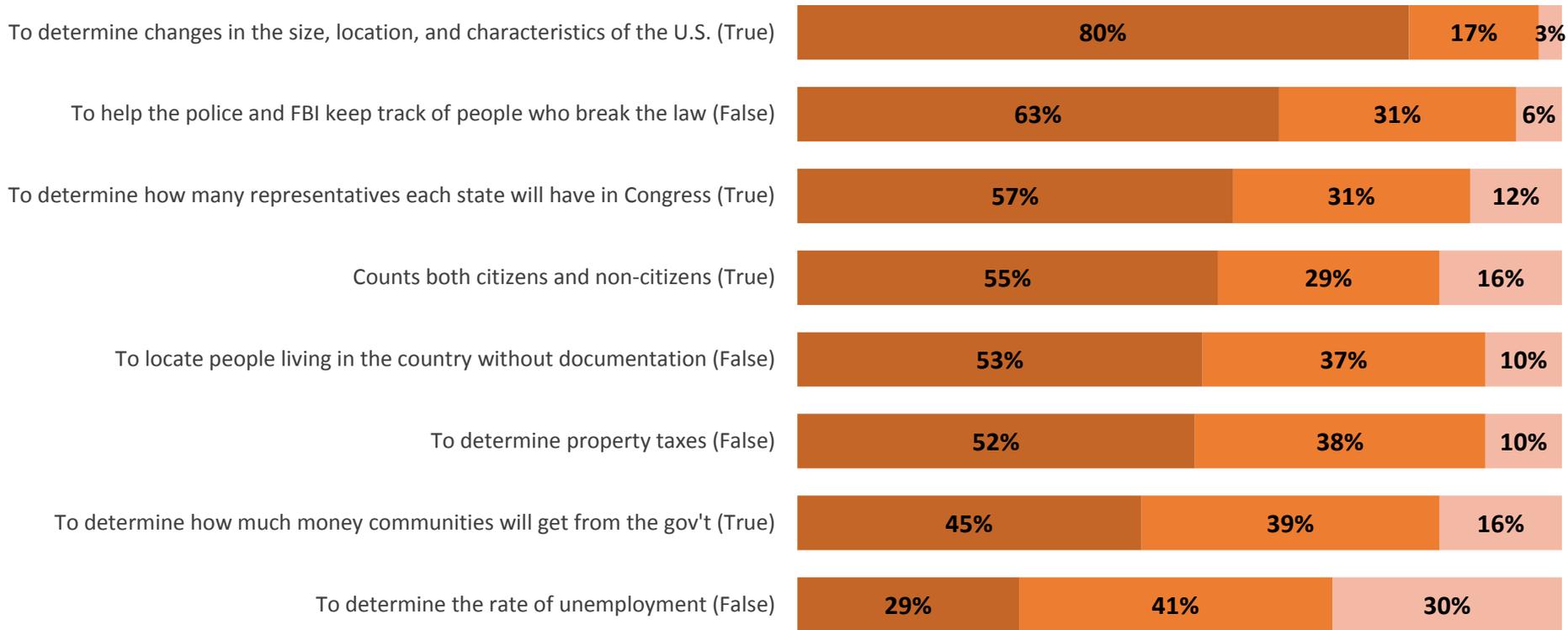


## In their own words

*[What comes to mind when I hear 'census'?] I don't know. Isn't that like the people that want to know like everything? They send you letters to your house."*  
— AIAN

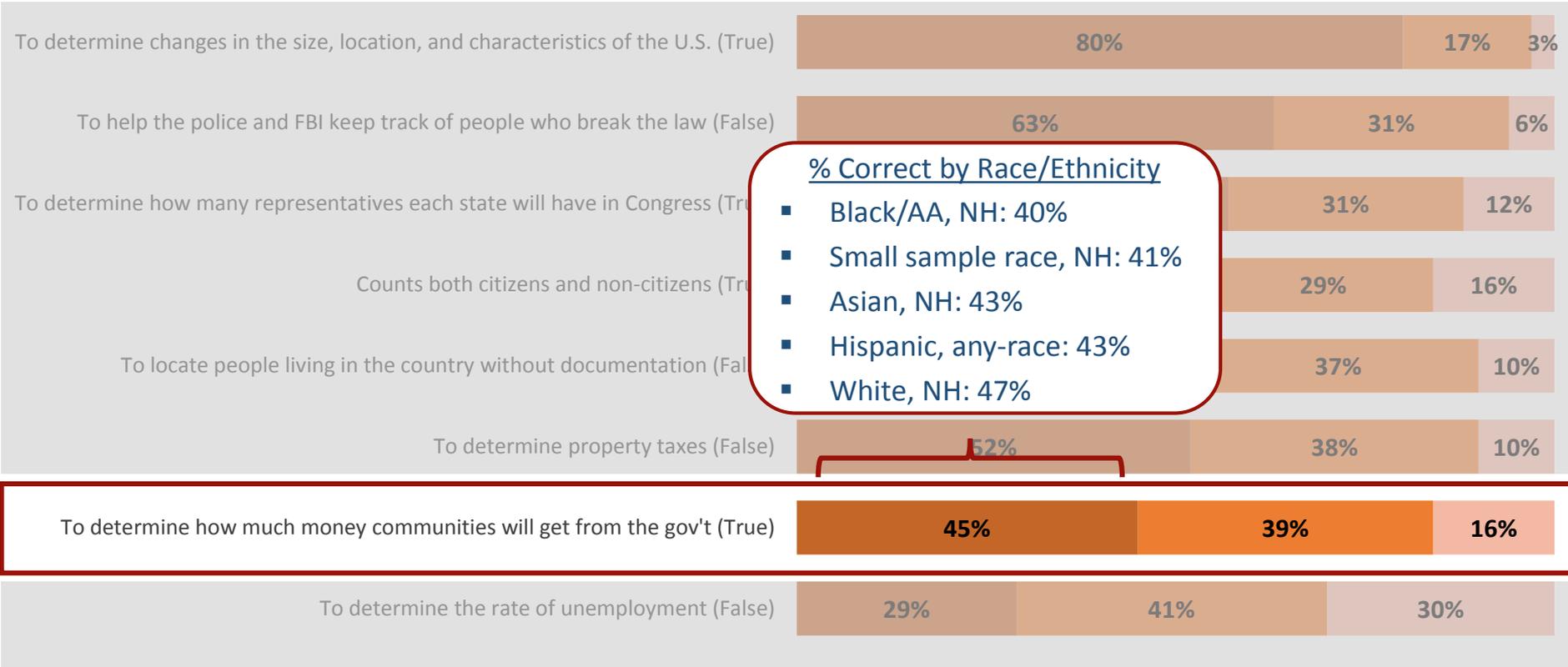
# Overview of knowledge gaps

As you understand it, will the 2020 Census be used in any of the following ways or not?



# Knowledge about funding from census data is low

As you understand it, will the 2020 Census be used in any of the following ways or not?

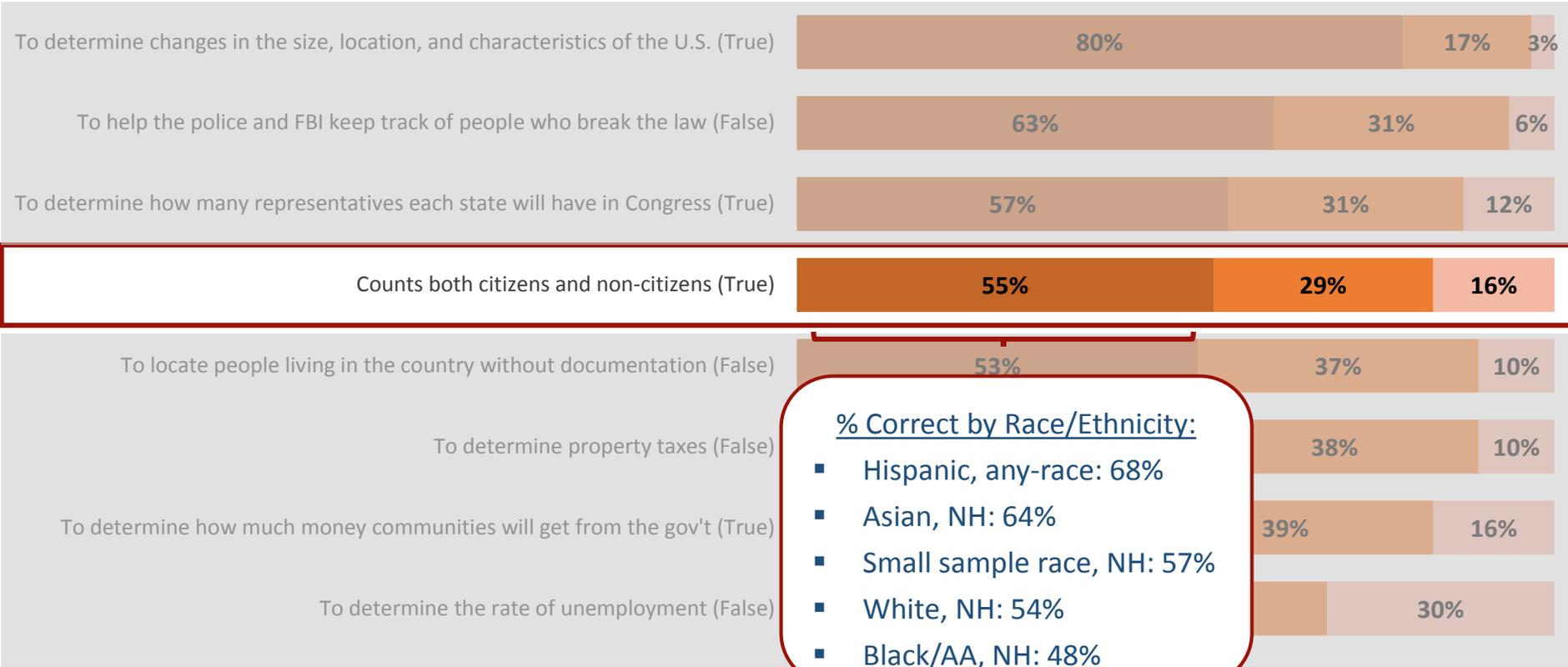


% Correct by Race/Ethnicity

- Black/AA, NH: 40%
- Small sample race, NH: 41%
- Asian, NH: 43%
- Hispanic, any-race: 43%
- White, NH: 47%

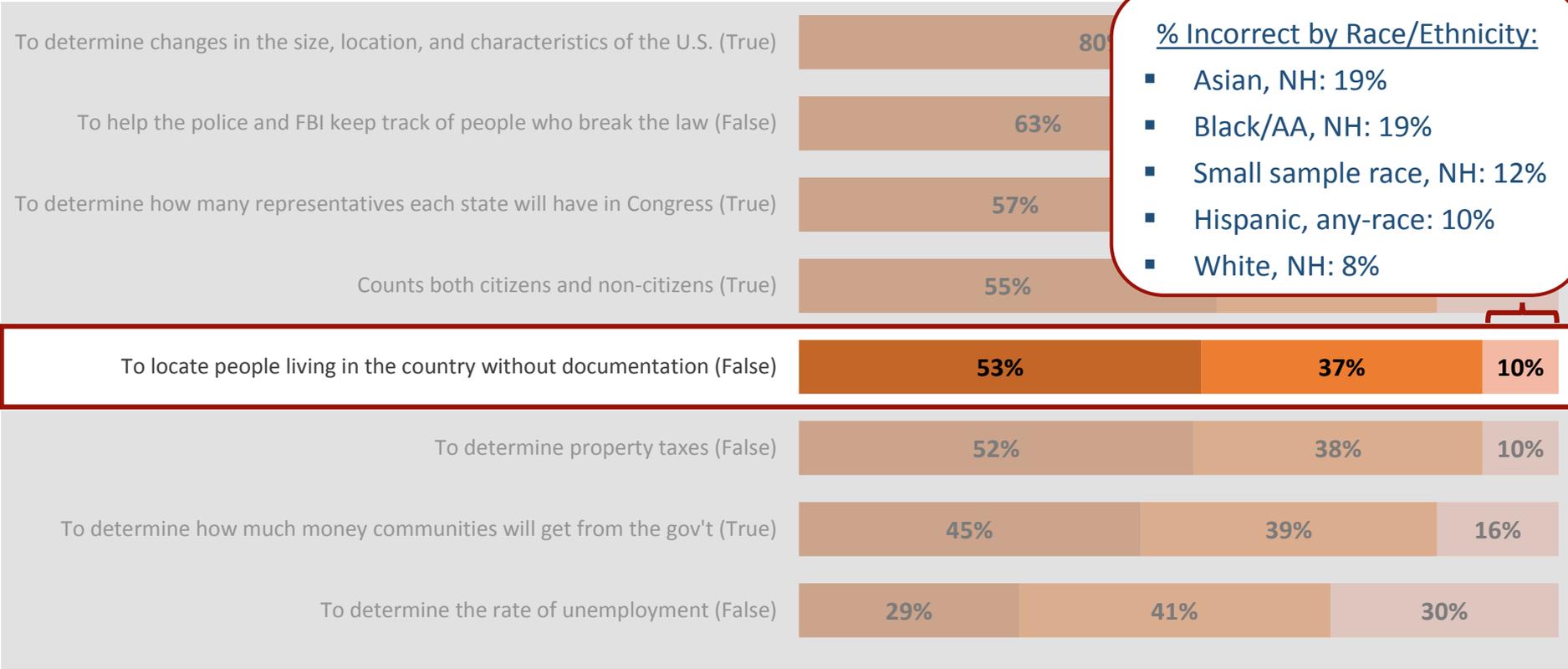
# Hispanics & Asians know census counts non-citizens

As you understand it, will the 2020 Census be used in any of the following ways or not?



# Asians & Blacks are misinformed about use of census

As you understand it, will the 2020 Census be used in any of the following ways or not?



# Hispanics believe the census would be used to find undocumented people

“

*I feel that it does go to the immigration agency.”*  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

“

*[I would not participate in the census because] they [immigration] will know where we are and what our names are and where we live...”*  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

“

*For example, let's say in my house two people would be affected...And sometimes, it is the opposite. Sometimes the others can't be affected, but we can. The heads of households. **So, in any case, one is at risk** [by filling out the census].”*  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)



# Major barriers to participation in the 2020 Census



Apathy & Efficacy



Concerns about data confidentiality & privacy

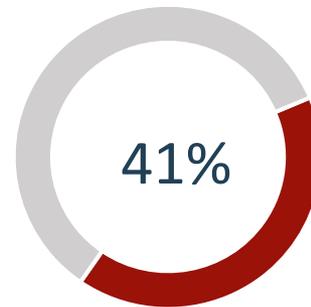


Fear of Repercussions



Distrust in Government

# Low levels of efficacy across audience groups

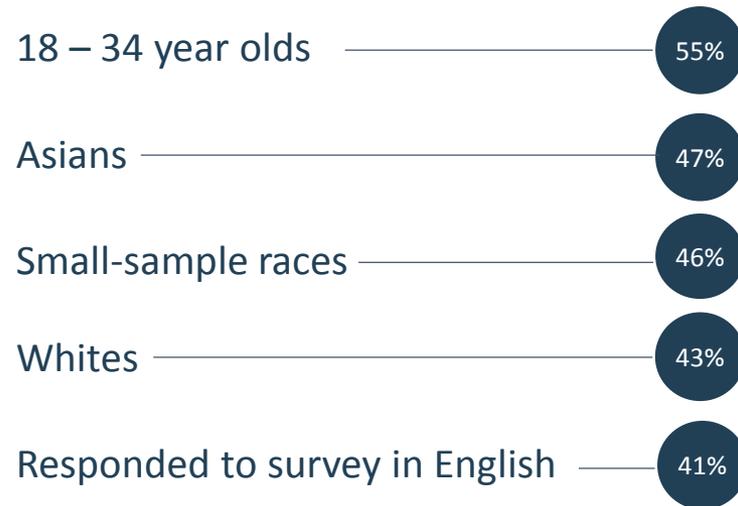


said it only matters “a moderate amount,” “a little,” or “not at all” if they are personally counted in the census.

# Low levels of efficacy across audience groups



## Select groups with the lowest levels of efficacy



Some were apathetic – they didn't care



## Apathy

*[I would not fill it out] just for not wanting to do it. **Just not feeling like it... it kind of seems like taking a survey or something. Almost kind of pointless, like it doesn't mean anything. It's not going to help anyways or do anything. It's more bothersome or more of a nuisance than anything, I guess.***  
— Low Internet Proficiency



*[I would not fill out the census because] I **just don't care.*** — Chinese

Others lacked efficacy – it didn't matter if they were counted



## Lack of Efficacy

*They won't ever come into the hood, give us stuff that we need, or give us anything. You go out where she at [a suburb] and you see parks and they get cleaned up, you see areas and centers and everything. Well, we have none of that. That's why I see a thousand kids on the block every day...So many high schools been closed. [It's connected to the census] because they not helping. **They not giving us no money. Then they up there counting, taking counts for everybody for what?"***

— Black or African American

## Census' definition of confidentiality

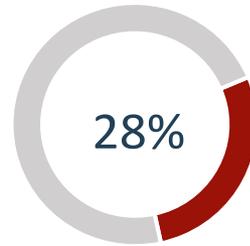
The U.S. Census Bureau is bound by Title 13 of the United States Code. It provides strong protection for the information we collect from individuals and businesses.

The Census Bureau has one of the strongest confidentiality guarantees in the federal government.

It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish any census or survey information that identifies an individual or business.

This is true even for inter-agency communication: the FBI and other government entities do not have the legal right to access this information.

# Respondents worry about confidentiality

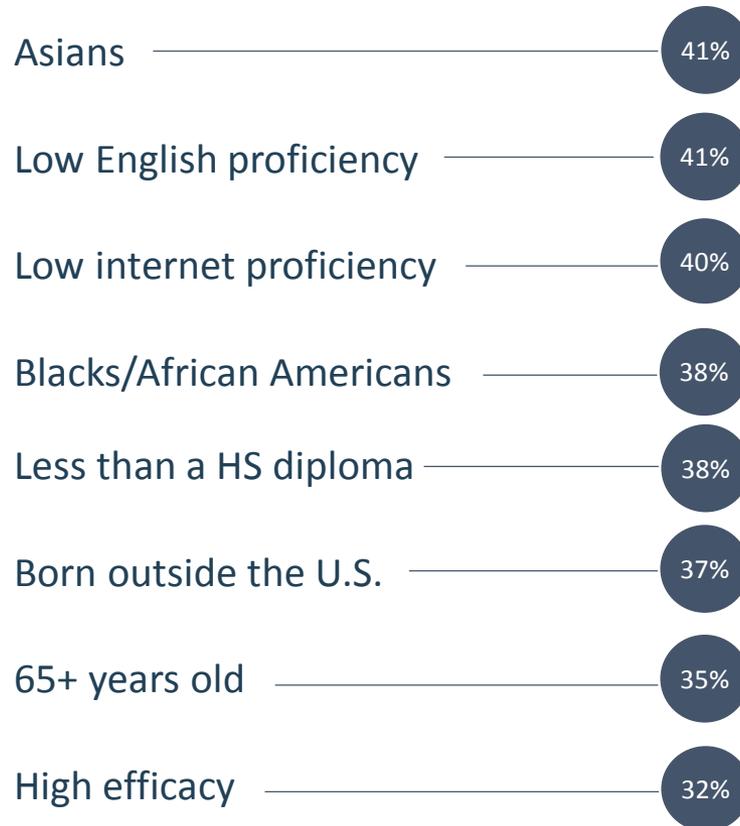


were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” that the Census Bureau would not keep their answers confidential.

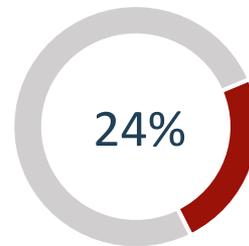
# Respondents worry about confidentiality



## Select groups with the highest levels of worry about confidentiality



# Some are concerned the census shares data



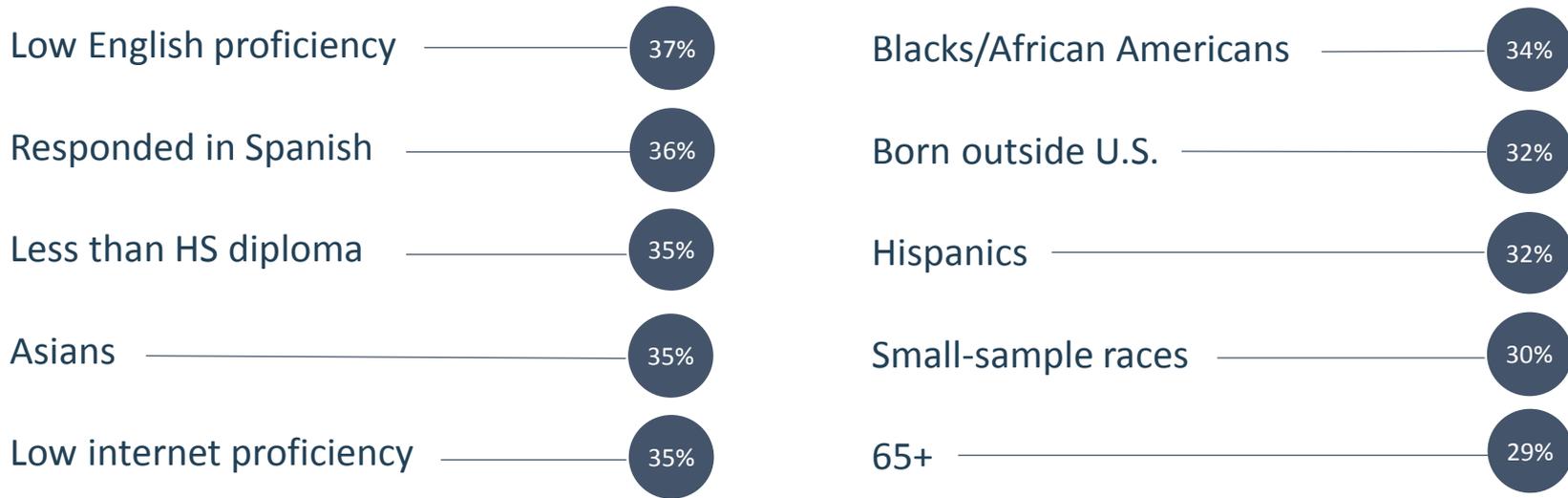
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were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” that the Census Bureau would share their answers with other government agencies.

# Some are concerned the census shares data



## Select groups with the highest levels of concern about data sharing





## Privacy Concerns

“

*Privacy [is a reason why people would not fill out the census]. I think there's a lot of people that are out there – I work in health and we have to keep things private – they probably think, **'Why do I have to give you this?'**”*

— AIAN



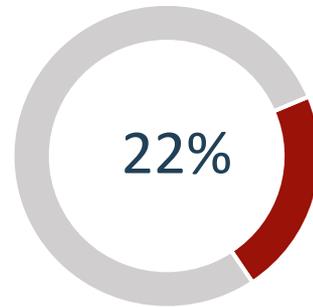
## Confidentiality Concerns

“

*Every single scrap of information that the government gets goes to every single intelligence agency, that's how it works...individual level data. Like, the city government gets information and then the FBI and then the CIA and then ICE and military...”*

— MENA

Nearly 1 in 4 respondents fear that their answers to the 2020 Census will be used against them



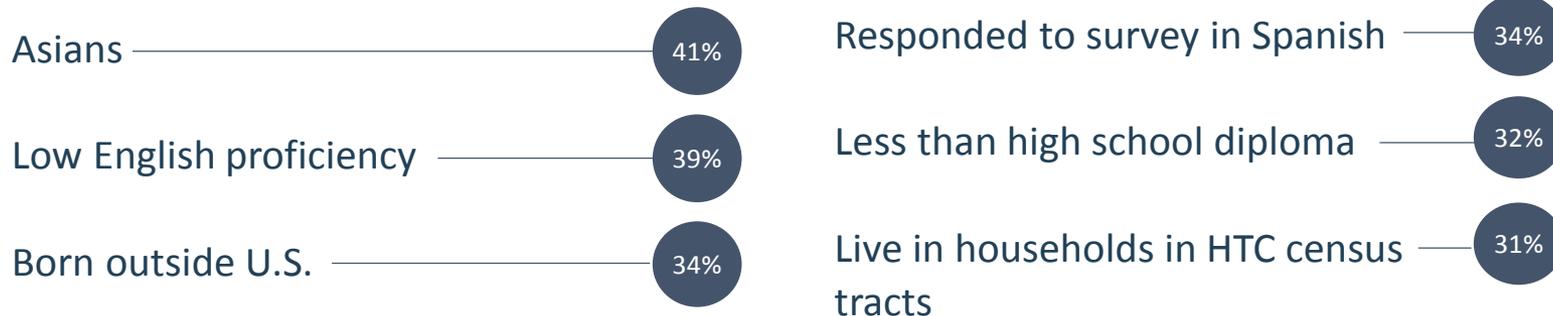
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were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” that their answers would be used against them.

# Nearly 1 in 4 respondents fear that their answers to the 2020 Census will be used against them



## Select groups with the highest levels of fear



Participants believed the government would use their data against them personally...



“

## Harm to the Community

*They could say, ‘Look, this community has, like, X amount of race or something; let’s avoid them, or let’s define that area’... you can see it sometimes where **they don’t fund certain schools because it’s in certain ‘bad areas.’**”*

— MENA



## Harm to Self

“

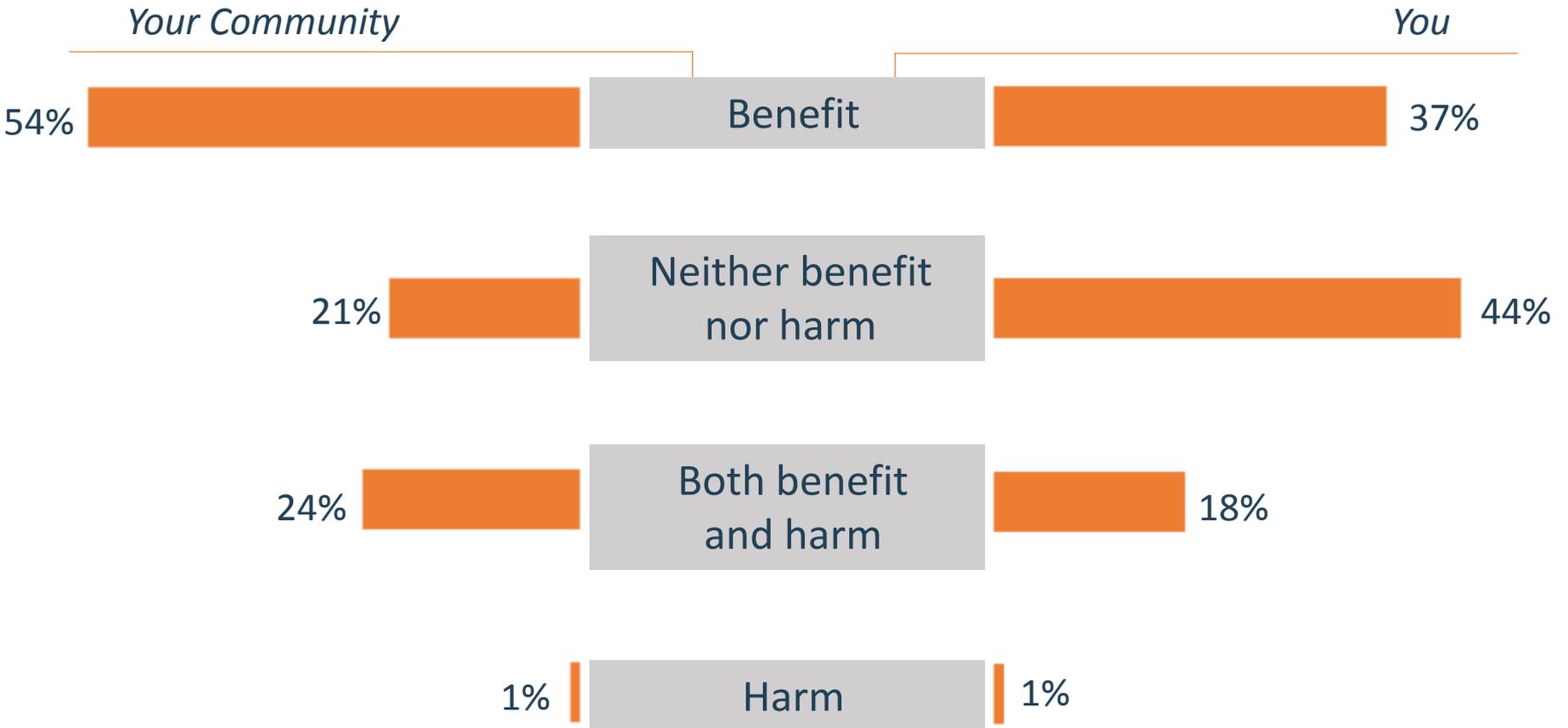
*[Someone might choose not to participate because] **it can come back and haunt them...** Like if you get food stamps, ...and they will be afraid that it's going to affect their food stamps if they report somebody else is there.”*

— NHPI

# The 2020 Census benefits the community



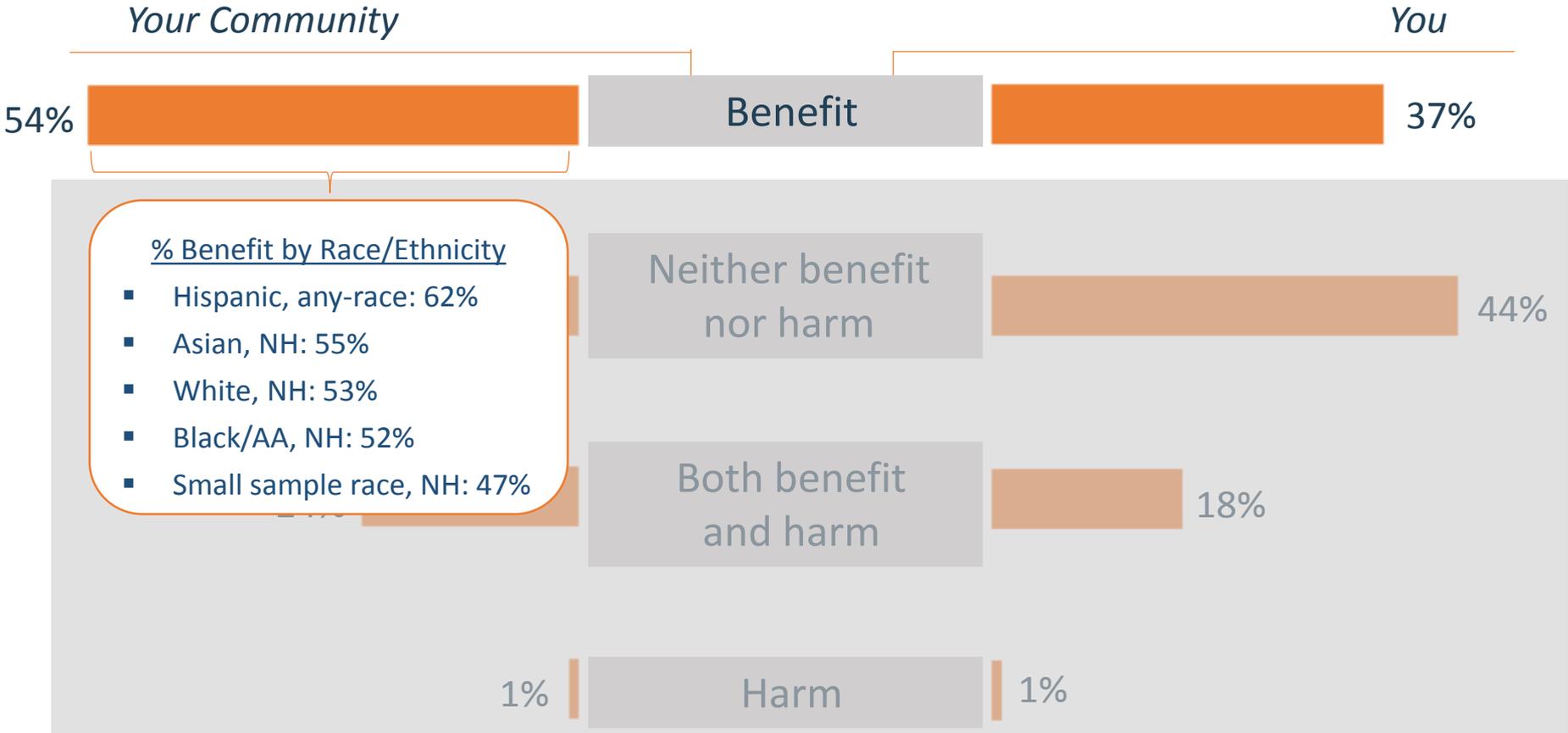
Do you believe answering your 2020 Census form could benefit or harm [your community/you] in any way?



# Hispanics most likely to believe in community benefits



Do you believe answering your 2020 Census form could benefit or harm [your community/you] in any way?



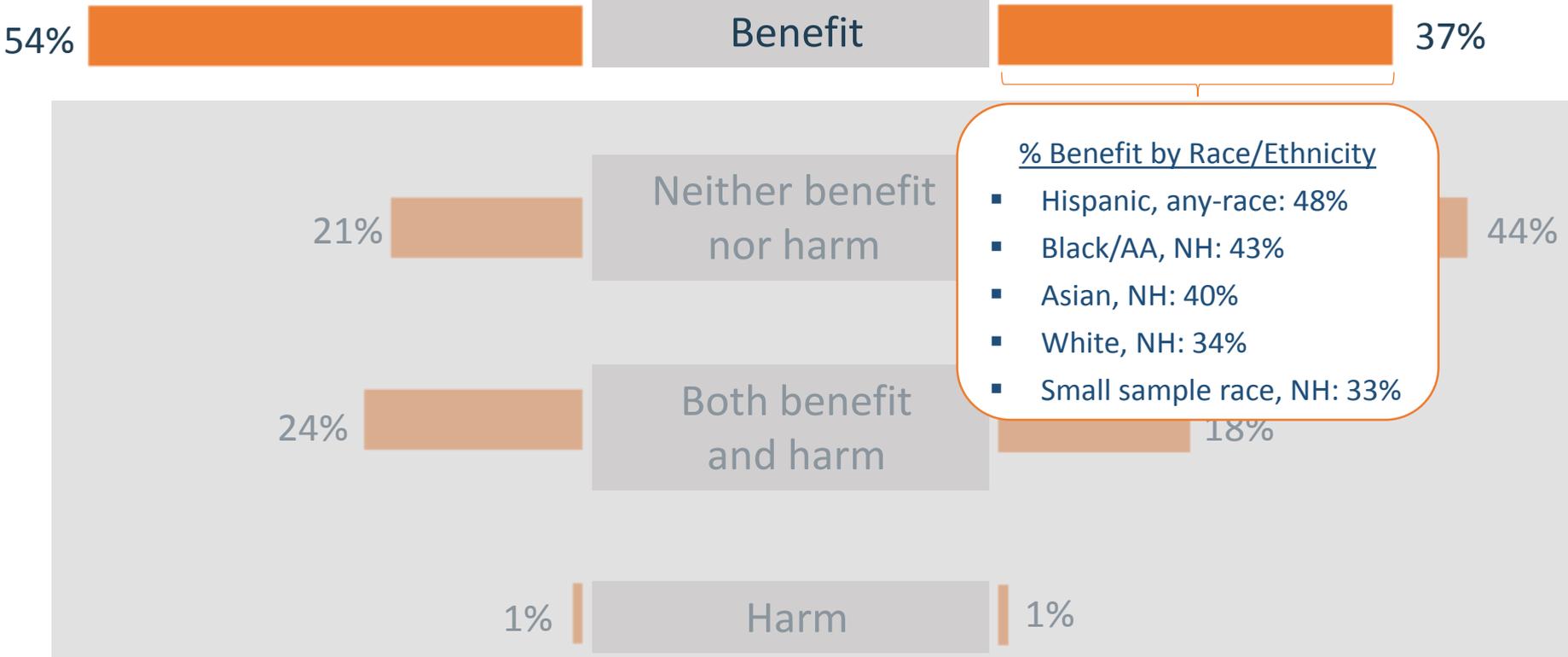
# Small-sample races & Whites perceive fewer personal benefits from responding



Do you believe answering your 2020 Census form could benefit or harm [your community/you] in any way?

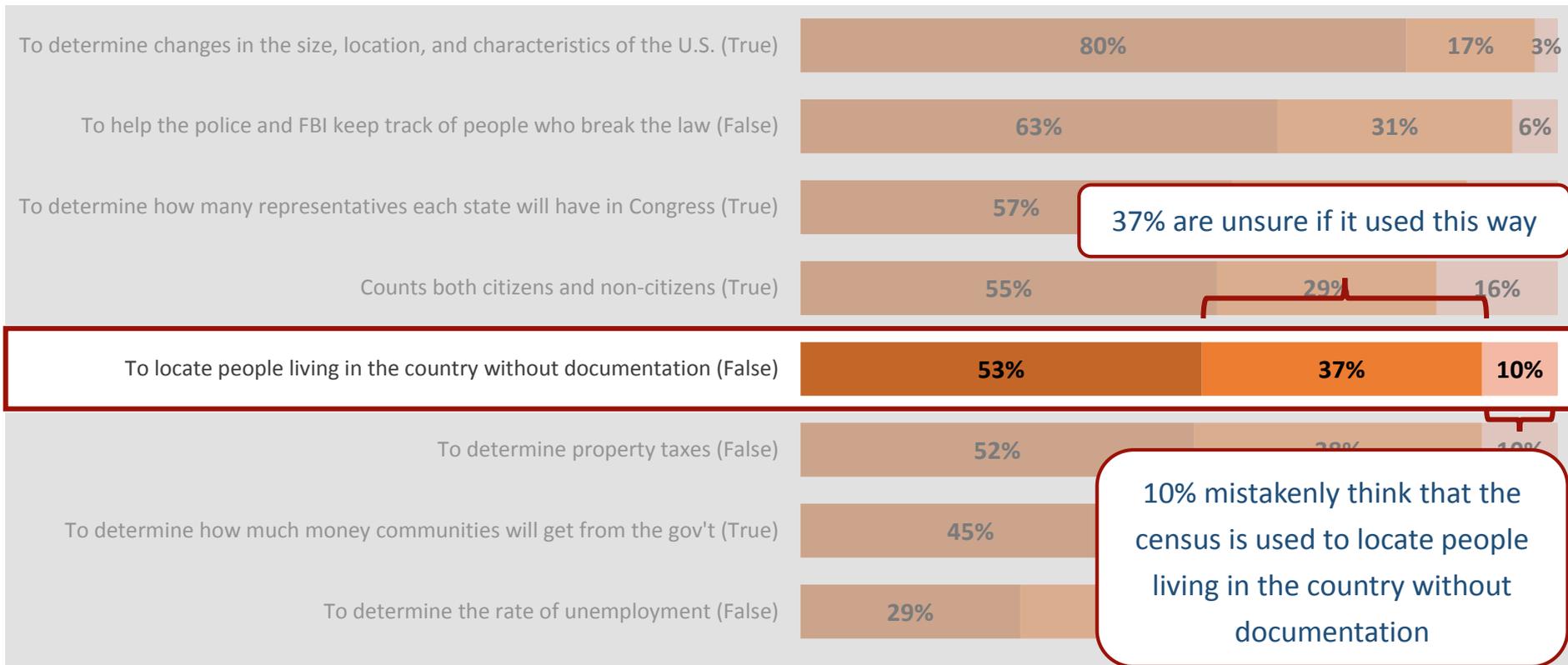
Your Community

You



# There are misperceptions about the census' purpose

As you understand it, will the 2020 Census be used in any of the following ways or not?



# The citizenship question may be a major barrier



1. **Its purpose is to find undocumented immigrants**
2. **The political discourse is targeting their ethnic group – residents and citizens may also feel endangered**

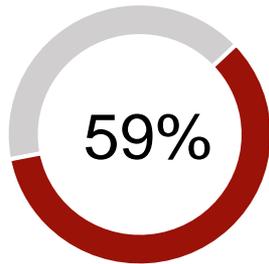
“ [The purpose is] to make people panic... Some **people will panic because they are afraid that they might be deported.**”  
— Vietnamese

“ ICE is working with different groups on **deportation sweeps, and it would make me feel like I’m aiding in that.** They’re doing a lot of illegal stuff, and so I wouldn’t fill out any of the questions.”  
— MENA

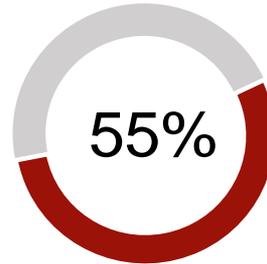
“ For this census, a lot of people are afraid. **It doesn’t matter if they ask you whether or not you’re a citizen.** The first question they ask you, are you Hispanic or Latino? And that’s enough. That’s all they need. And people are scared.”  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

“ [Latinos will not participate] out of fear...[there] is **practically a hunt** [for us] ...**Latinos are going to be afraid to be counted because of the retaliation that could happen** - it's like giving the government information, saying, ‘Oh, there are more here.’”  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

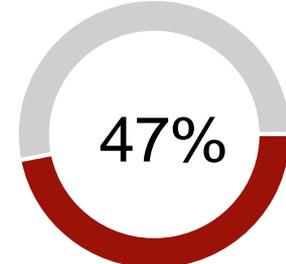
# Distrust is highest for the federal government



said they did not trust  
the federal government



said they did not trust  
their state government

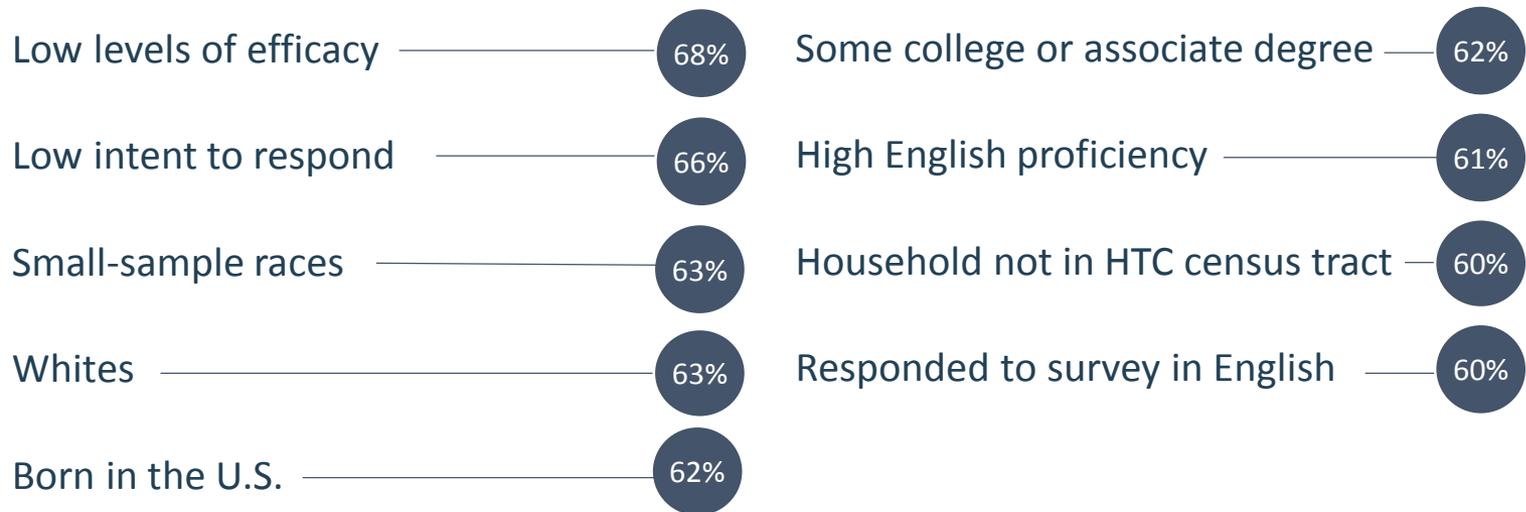


said they did not trust  
their local government

# Low intent to respond and high distrust



## Select groups with the highest levels of distrust in the federal government



# Those who distrust the government do so strongly



“  
[The government will sell personal information] in a heartbeat.”  
— Rural

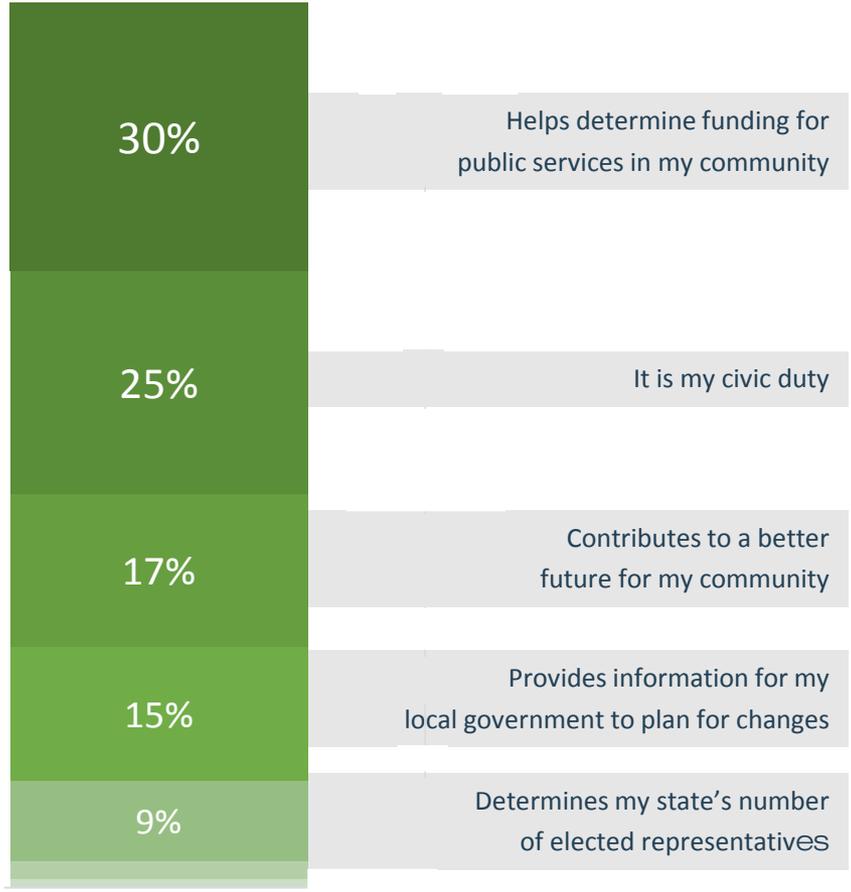
“  
**The government has always been intrusive as it is, and it's probably a level of intrusion. That's why people are like, 'Hold on, what you want to know what's in my bed, at my house, and who's using my toilet? You should go mind your business.'**”  
— NHPI

“  
The U.S. Census Bureau is connected to the U.S. government. **I don't trust the government not one bit**, so I wouldn't even if they told me this is what we're going to do I wouldn't.”  
— Black or African American



# Survey respondents chose Funding for Public Services as the single most important reason to respond

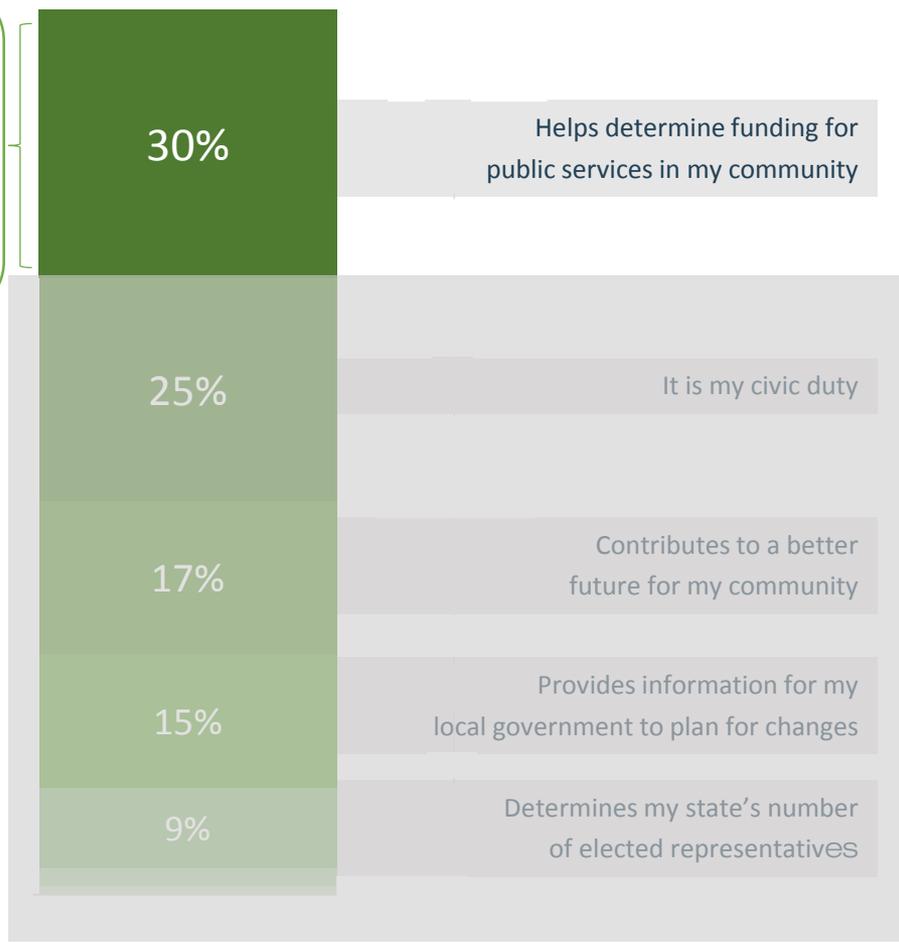
What is the one most important reason to fill out the census?



# Funding for Public Services is the one most important reason to respond for all races/ethnicities

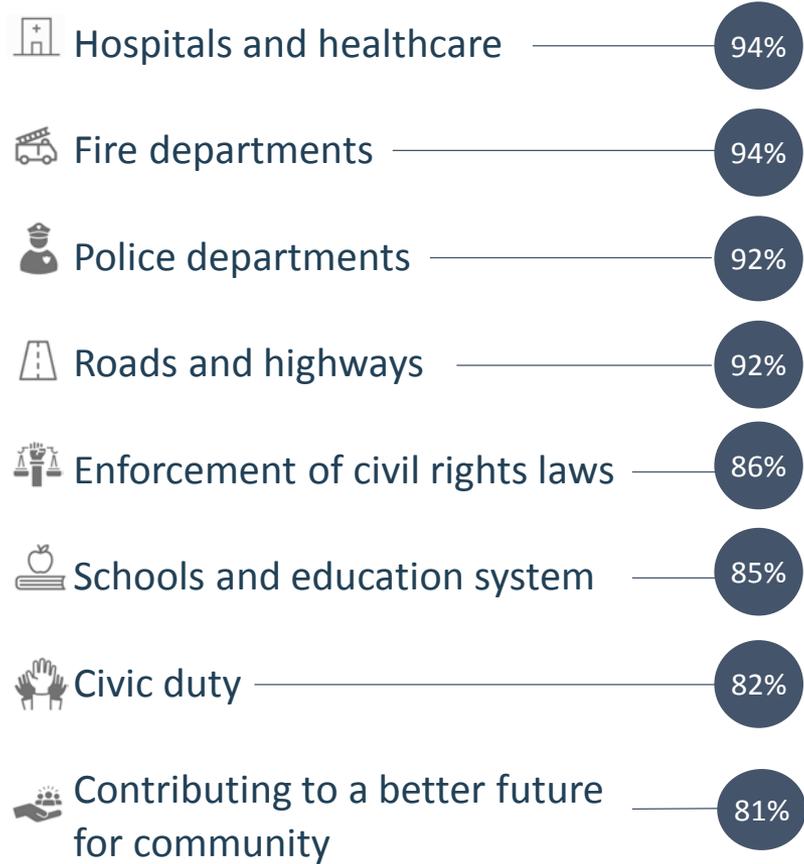
What is the one most important reason to fill out the census?

- % by Race/Ethnicity
- Black/AA, NH: 34%
  - Hispanic, any-race: 33%
  - Small sample race, NH: 29%
  - White, NH: 29%
  - Asian, NH: 27%



# Public services are important to nearly all respondents

## Most Important Motivators



# What would motivate people to participate?

## Conditions that need to be met to be most compelling

- 1 Information about the census and its impact
- 2 Tangible evidence
- 3 Connection to a better future



### Schools & Education System



*Our schools need help. **The schools here do need help.** It hasn't been that long since the school system was shook up pretty bad, so it does need help, and I don't know about the fire departments.”*  
— Low Internet Proficiency



### Better Future for Community



*[I would fill it out] **because that data is going to impact my community.** And if it's not my community, because I die, then **my grandchildren and my children.**”*  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

# How the community can assuage skepticism

**Trusted voices and organizations with deep community roots may facilitate participation among the most skeptical by:**

- **Providing information** about the community funding and the general census process
- **Assuring people** that participation is safe

## Trusted voices and organizations

“

*Those who are representing and helping the Hispanic communities [would assure me my information is safe]... Those who are independent, **who support all the Hispanics.** Those who are now helping [with] DACA and all those young people.”*  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

“

*Most definitely [my church would assure me if I had concerns about filling out the census form].”* — Rural

“

*Somebody raised in the city, **knows the hardships**, and something like that, not somebody that just got elected to be somebody.”*  
— Black or African American

7

# Select Audiences

*Audiences presented in alphabetical order.*



# Audience: AIAN



## Motivators to respond

- Participants expressed a desire to learn more about the census and its process, applications, and impact on them. Some also wanted to know what the Census Bureau is and what it does with census information.
- Participants stated a need for funding of community improvement projects. They identified the key institutions of schools and hospitals as the leading beneficiaries of such funding.
- Emphasizing the importance of trusted voices, some said they participated because they knew the person at the door.



## Attitudinal barriers

- Among all AIAN groups, concerns of privacy proved to be the most widely cited barrier for filling out the census form.
- In multiple cases, participants attributed their lack of previous or potential future participation to privacy concerns—whether it was not feeling comfortable divulging personal information to an unknown enumerator or sending private information through a form.

# Audience: Asian

 Intent to respond (55%) was lower than average

 Top misconceptions about the census the marketing campaign could address

- Used to locate people living in the country without documentation (false, 19% incorrect)
- Used by the FBI and police to keep track of people who break the law (false, 18% incorrect)
- Used to determine how much money communities get from government (true, 15% incorrect)

 Top attitudinal barriers

- Concern about confidentiality of answers (41%)
- Fear of repercussions (41%)
- Distrust in government (41%)

 Other considerations

- Focus group participants emphasized that language is a significant potential barrier to participation.
- Many Asian focus group respondents were particularly guarded about potential scams surrounding the census. Their concerns were heightened at the prospect of direct interactions with or visits to their homes by strangers in part because they are providing what they see as personal information.
- Many referred to filling out the census as a “responsibility as a citizen.” – but, particularly in multiple-family households, did not want to/feel it appropriate to fill out the census for others.

# Audience: Black/African American

 Intent to respond (64%) was lower than average

 Top misconceptions about the census the marketing campaign could address

- Used to count citizens and non-citizens (true, 21% incorrect)
- Used to locate people living in the country without documentation (false, 19% incorrect)
- Used to determine number of representatives in congress (true, 18% incorrect)

 Top attitudinal barriers

- Concern about confidentiality of answers (38%)
- Fear of repercussions (34%)
- Concern that answers will be shared with other government agencies (34%)

 Other considerations

- Focus group participants had little hope that the 2020 Census would benefit their communities, as they had not seen change result from the census in the past.
- The focus group discussions revealed that participants strongly distrusted the government (all levels) and, by extension, the census. Participants related this to personal experience and unmet expectations.
- Some focus group participants said the government uses the census to “control” aspects of the population, leading to poor conditions in their communities compared to other communities.

# Audience: Hispanic

 Intent to respond (65%) was slightly below average

 Top misconceptions about the census the marketing campaign could address

- Used to determine how much money communities get from gov't (true, 17% incorrect)
- Used to determine number of representatives in congress (true, 16% incorrect)
- Used to locate people living in the country without documentation (false, 10% incorrect)

 Top attitudinal barriers

- Concern about confidentiality of answers (34%)
- Concern that answers will be shared with other government agencies (32%)
- Fear of repercussions (33%)

 Other considerations

- Focus group participants expressed intense fear that information will be shared with other government agencies to help them find undocumented immigrants. Participants worried that their participation in the census could harm them personally or others in their communities/households they care about.
- When presented with the Census Bureau's promise of confidentiality, participants did not believe the promise would be kept.
- In Puerto Rico, Hurricane Maria displaced many people, and multiple families now occupy a single address, creating significant confusion about how to define a household.

# Audience: Households with Young Children

 Intent to respond (60%) was lower than average

 Top misconceptions about the census the marketing campaign could address

- Used to determine how much money communities get from government (true, 19% incorrect)
- Used to determine number of representatives in congress (true, 15% incorrect)
- Used to count citizens and non-citizens (true, 14% incorrect)

 Top attitudinal barriers

- Distrust in government (57%)
- Believe participating in the census will neither benefit nor harm them personally (43%)
- Fear of repercussions (24%)

# Audience: Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual



Intent to respond (67%) was average



Top misconceptions about the census the marketing campaign could address

- Used to count citizens and non-citizens (true, 14% incorrect)
- Used to determine how much money communities get from government (true, 12% incorrect)
- Used to locate people living in the country without documentation (false, 10% incorrect)



Top attitudinal barriers

- Distrust in government (64%)
- Believe participating in the census will neither benefit nor harm them personally (45%)
- Concern about confidentiality of answers (28%)

# Audience: MENA



## Motivators to respond

- Focus group participants wanted to feel that they counted and expressed that the inclusion of a MENA category would be an acknowledgement that they exist. The absence of a MENA category, on the other hand, can create feelings of exclusion as well as confusion about how to respond.
- Completing the census as a form of civic responsibility was a strong motivator among those who became naturalized citizens as adults, but was unconvincing among the native born and those who immigrated to the U.S. as young children.



## Attitudinal barriers

- Participants feared the government would use their information against them in the future for a reason they did not yet know. Many doubted the government would safeguard their data, especially after the travel ban that included many of their countries of origin.
- Others reported experiencing discrimination, both by the government and society. They believed the inclusion of a “Middle Eastern or North African” option could facilitate this discrimination by preventing the distribution of funds and opportunities to their communities by private or public benefactors.

# Audience: NHPI



## Motivators to respond

- Participants took pride in seeing their separate nations of origin as options on government forms. The Native Hawaiians were proud when “Native Hawaiian” became its own group in the census.
- While NHPI participants of other nationalities supported the Native Hawaiians, they wanted their own nationality to be an option.
- NHPI participants had a strong desire to help their community.

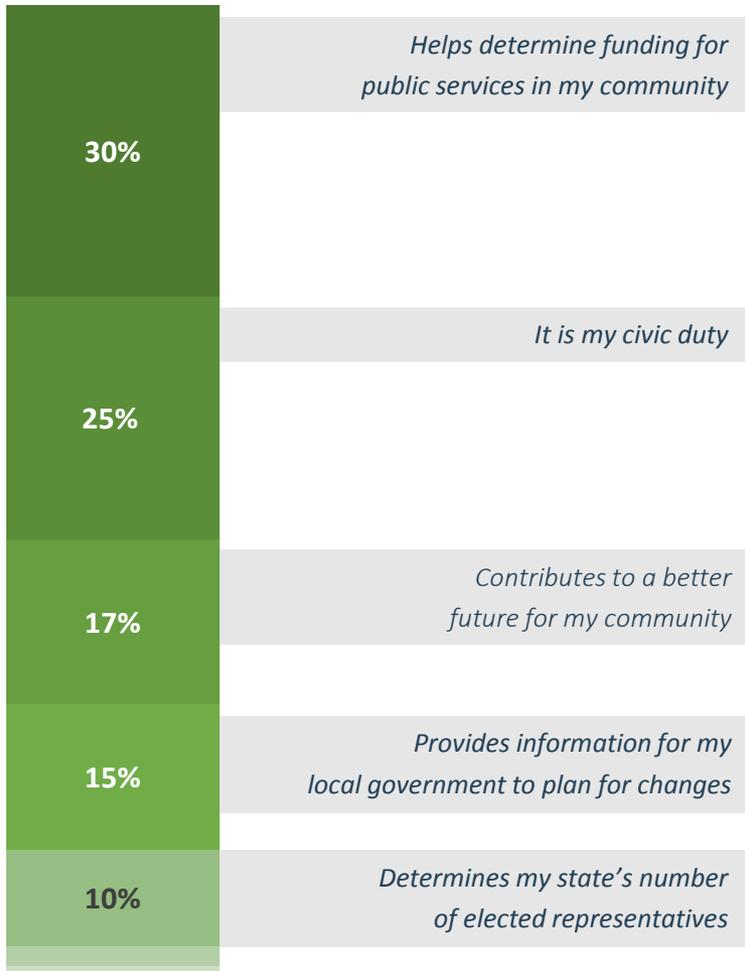


## Attitudinal barriers

- Multiple participants found the census questions (e.g., how many people live in your household) too intrusive and did not feel comfortable filling out the form.
- Focus group participants often expressed fear of their information being shared due to their living situations and perceived risk of eviction. Many lived in large, complex households with a number of people in their house—more than the property owner knew.
- Focus group participants didn’t know why the census collects their information, and connected their negative experiences with the government to potential repercussions (e.g., eviction, loss of food assistance eligibility) for completing the census.



# Connecting Census & Community Funding



Although people identified “helps determine funding for public services in my community” as the most important reason to fill out the census...

...only **45%** of people know that the census is used to determine community funding.

# Big Picture Conclusions



## Knowledge Gaps

- There is a general lack of knowledge about the census' scope, purpose, and constitutional foundation



## Barriers

- Apathy and lack of efficacy
- Privacy concerns
- Fear of repercussions
- Distrust of government



## Motivators

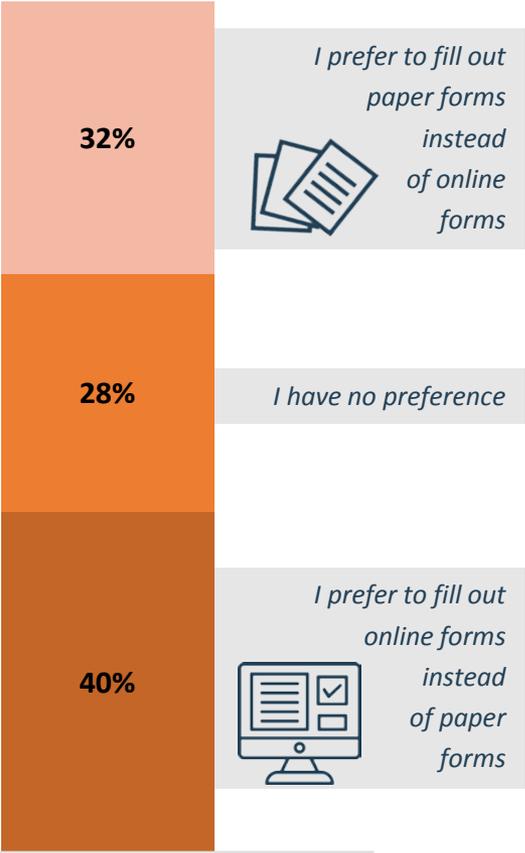
- Funding for community needs is the most influential motivator across audiences
- Services such as hospitals, fire departments, and schools are important to many respondents

- ✓ Connecting census participation to support for *local* communities addresses apathy and lack of efficacy
- ✓ Informing the public on the census' scope, purpose, and process addresses privacy and confidentiality concerns and fear of repercussions
- ✓ Engaging trusted voices addresses trust-based concerns, especially among the most skeptical and disaffected



# People are divided on mode preference

Which comes closest to your view?



“ Give two options [to complete the census]. If you want to fill it out online, you can do or provide the document and say, ‘Look, you can do it in writing and send it by mail.’”  
— Spanish (Puerto Rico)

“ There needs to be both because you have people who aren’t used to computers.”  
— Black or African American

“ I would prefer [online] than having to speak to someone. I feel like if you go on a website, they’re more likely to give more information than if they just hire someone to go in front of you and ask you.”  
— Young and Mobile

# Appendix

**Table A.1: Percentage of knowledge about the census**

| Knowledge Question  | Answered Correctly | Answered Incorrectly (Includes "Don't Know") |
|---|--------------------|--|
| The census is used to determine what changes have taken place in the size, location, and characteristics of the people in the United States. [True] | 80%                | 20%  |
| The Census Bureau is required by law to keep information confidential. [True]   | 71%                | 29%  |
| The census is used to help the police and FBI keep track of people who break the law. [False]   | 63%                | 37%  |
| The census is used to determine how many representatives each state will have in Congress. [True]   | 57%                | 43%  |
| The census counts both citizens and non-citizens. [True]  | 55%                | 45%  |
| The census is used to locate people living in the country without documentation. [False]  | 53%                | 47%  |
| The census is used to determine property taxes. [False]   | 52%                | 48%  |
| The census is used to determine how much money communities will get from the government. [True]   | 45%                | 55%  |
| The U.S. Constitution requires the census be conducted. [True]  | 34%                | 66%  |
| The census is used to determine the rate of unemployment. [False]   | 29%                | 71%  |
| The law requires you to answer the census questions. [True]   | 25%                | 75%  |

Notes: (1) Based on the question format, "Is the census used to \_\_\_\_\_, or is it not used for this?"

# Appendix

**Table A.2: Percentage of respondents who chose each motivator as the ONE most important reason to fill out the census**

| Reason   | Weighted Percentage of Respondents |
|--|------------------------------------|
| It helps determine funding for public services in my community like schools and fire departments | 30%                                |
| It is my civic duty (along with voting, jury duty, paying taxes)                                 | 25%                                |
| It contributes to a better future for my community   | 17%                                |
| It provides information for my local government to plan for changes in my community              | 15%                                |
| It determines how many elected representatives my state has in Congress                          | 10%                                |
| It is used to enforce civil rights laws  | 2%                                 |
| It shows that I am proud of my cultural heritage   | 1%                                 |

*Notes: (1) Based on the question, "Which ONE of the following is the most important reason, to you personally, that you should fill out the census form? Select only one answer."*

# Appendix

**Table A.3: Percentage of respondents who identified each motivator as “extremely important” or “very important”**

| Motivator   | Weighted Percentage of Respondents |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Hospitals and healthcare                            | 94%                                |
| Fire departments                                    | 94%                                |
| Police departments                                  | 92%                                |
| Roads and highways                                  | 92%                                |
| Enforcement of civil rights laws                    | 86%                                |
| Schools and education system                        | 85%                                |
| Civic Duty  | 81%                                |
| Contributing to a better future for your community  | 82%                                |
| Information for local government planning           | 76%                                |
| Determining number of congressional representatives | 72%                                |
| Job training programs                               | 61%                                |
| Public transportation                               | 57%                                |
| Displaying pride in cultural heritage               | 56%                                |
| Daycare for children                                | 50%                                |

*Note: Based on the question “How important, if at all, is each of the following to you personally? (a) Extremely important (b) Very important (c) Somewhat important (d) Not too important (e) Not at all important.”*

# Study Design: CBAMS Focus Groups

Team Y&R conducted the CBAMS Focus Groups among the following audience groups.

| AUDIENCE CATEGORIES                         | RECRUITMENT CRITERIA  | PARTICIPANTS |
|---|---|--------------|
| American Indian And Alaska Native           | Identifies as AIAN; speaks English at home  | 41           |
| Black or African American                   | Identifies as Black or African American; has a high school education or less, or has a household income under \$30,000/year | 29           |
| Chinese – Cantonese and Mandarin            | Speaks Chinese at home  | 31           |
| Low Internet Proficiency                    | Uses the internet a few times a month or less; speaks English at home   | 31           |
| Middle Eastern And North African            | Identifies as MENA; speaks English at home  | 30           |
| Native Hawaiian And Pacific Islander (NHPI) | Identifies as NHPI; speaks English at home  | 28           |
| Rural                                       | Identifies as White, Non-Hispanic; lives in a Zip Code Tabulation Area identified as rural in the 2010 Census               | 15           |
| Spanish (Puerto Rico)                       | Resident of Puerto Rico; speaks Spanish at home   | 32           |
| Spanish (U.S. Mainland)                     | Speaks Spanish at home; is a resident of mainland U.S.  | 32           |
| Vietnamese                                  | Speaks Vietnamese at home   | 29           |
| Young And Mobile                            | Is 18 to 24 years old and not married; rents home   | 10           |
| <i>Total Seated</i>                         |   | <i>308</i>   |