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# Periodic Atlas of the Metroscope: Counting Oregon

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# Periodic Atlas of the MetroScape

## Counting Oregon

by Mac Cunningham, Xi Wei, and Randy Morris

Every United States census has challenges ensuring that every person responds and is counted. Individuals who are missed in the census count or “undercounted” for various reasons are often referred to as “hard-to-count” populations. Hard-to-count populations include rural residents, people of color, immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, children under age five, renters, and more.

For the 2010 census, the final mail return rate in Oregon was 76 percent. Census tracts with a mail return response rate of 76 percent or less are highlighted on the map on this page. Response rates closest to the state’s final response rate are light yellow, and those with lower response rates are shown in darker shades of orange and red. Over the next few pages, this article will identify the populations that are potentially being undercounted in these selected census tracts throughout the state.

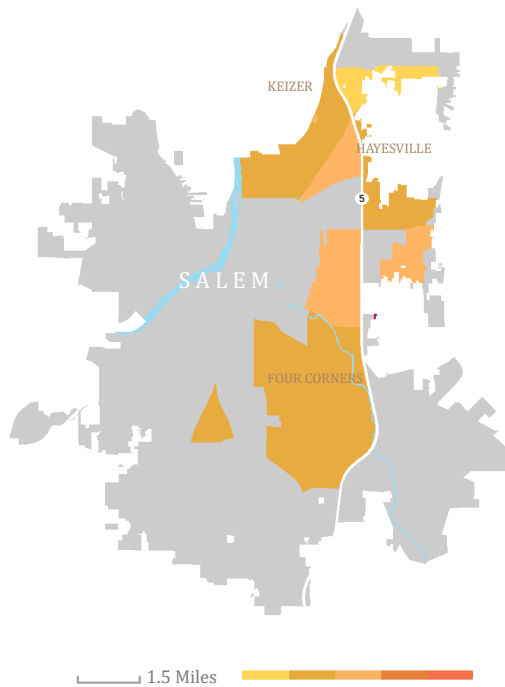
This map shows pockets of census tracts with lower response rates in southern and eastern Oregon, Douglas, Josephine, and Jackson counties. Klamath and Lake counties are all defined as rural with the major potential driver of lower response rates from potentially unoccupied or vacant housing units. Additionally, in southern Klamath County along the border with California, this rural census tract has a higher percentage share of foreign-born people, in addition to potentially vacant or unoccupied housing units.

East of the Cascades, all of the highlighted census tracts qualify as rural. For most of the census tracts, the potential driver of the undercount, like in southern Oregon, is unoccupied or vacant housing units. There may be other causes, however. The undercount in the census tracts of the city of Umatilla and parts of Hermiston are not due to unoccupied or vacant housing. Instead, for the city of Umatilla, the potential driver of this tract's lower response rate is undercounts of people of color and foreign-born residents. This is the case in parts of Hermiston and the surrounding area as well. In addition, in the Hermiston area, there may be undercounts of children under age five. In the census tract containing the towns of Tutuilla, Mission, Kirkpatrick, and more, the potential hard-to-count drivers, in addition to the potentially unoccupied or vacant housing units, include people of color. The combination of these two factors may be why this tract had a lower response rate than the other tracts in Umatilla County. Meanwhile, in western Pendleton, the potential driver is the area’s high population of renters. In the northern part of La Grande, the drivers for lower response rates were the population under five and a higher percentage of renters. It is worth noting, the tract with the lowest hard-to-count population response rate is in Jefferson County and home to the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs reservation. Indigenous populations have historically had the lowest response rates for the US census.



# Hard-to-count Oregon

Each census has challenges capturing responses from hard-to-count populations; however, these maps can help decision makers tailor their outreach campaigns for parts of the state with the lowest response rates. For much of southern and eastern Oregon, all of the tracts with lower response rates are rural, and the largest driver for much of these areas is vacant and unoccupied housing. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs reservation in eastern Oregon features the lowest response rate due to systemic barriers that limit Native American populations from completing the census. Meanwhile, in more urban areas like Medford, Eugene, Salem, and the Portland metro area, renters, people of color, children under five, and foreign-born residents are the likely sources of lower response rates.



---  Salem

*In Salem and the surrounding area, the tracts with the lowest response rates among hard-to-count populations are concentrated outside the central city to the north and east. The tracts with the lowest response rates in the Salem area tend to have high proportions of people of color, foreign-born residents, renters, and children under five. The tract with the lowest response rate, located in Keizer, had low response rates among all four of these groups.*



---  Medford

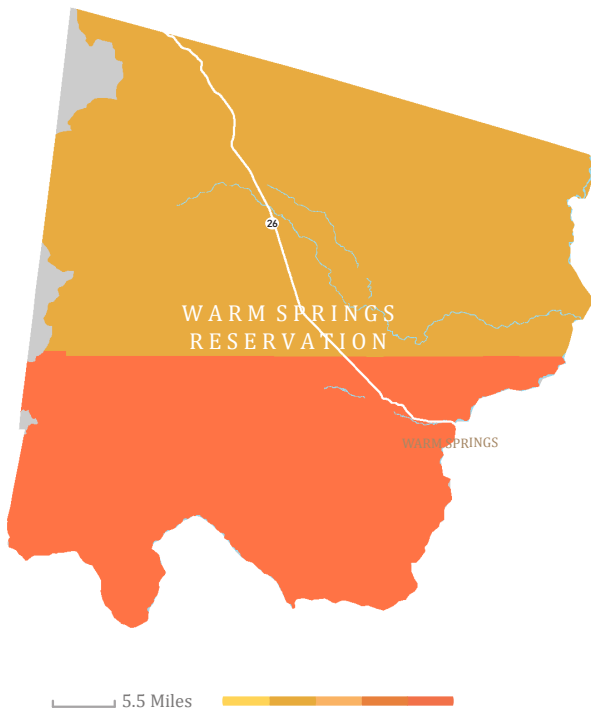
*In the census tracts containing Medford and the surrounding area, the most common potential driver of the undercount was the low response rates for children under age five and renters. In addition, for most of the census tracts in the downtown core and west of Interstate 5, the other major potential drivers of lower response rates were a high percentage of people of color, and in the tract containing most of downtown, a higher share of foreign-born people.*

**About the authors**

*Mac Cunningham is a rising second year MURP student originally from Baltimore, Maryland focusing on issues related to affordable housing development and policy as well as the racial wealth gap.*

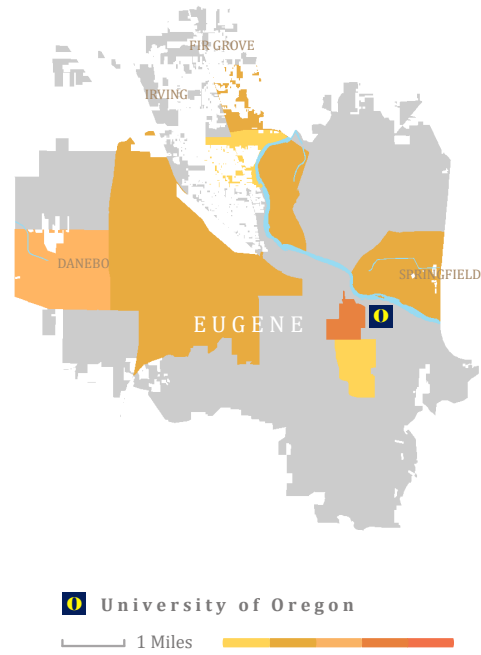
*Xi Wei is an urban planner, trained cartographer, and PhD student who dedicates to observe, create and promote inclusive planning environments.*

*Randy Morris is a research geographer and instructor at Portland State University, as well as a member of Portland's Mapping Action Collective (MAC).*



---  **Warm Springs Reservation**

*In 2010, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in Jefferson County had one of the lowest response rates in Oregon (36.6%). The census tract has a population share of 95 percent people of color and a large population share of children under age five. Native Americans and indigenous populations have traditionally had the lowest response rates for the census due to unique counting challenges. Often, indigenous residents on tribal lands do not have street addresses and instead use post office boxes, which the US Census Bureau does not send census forms to.*



---  **Eugene**

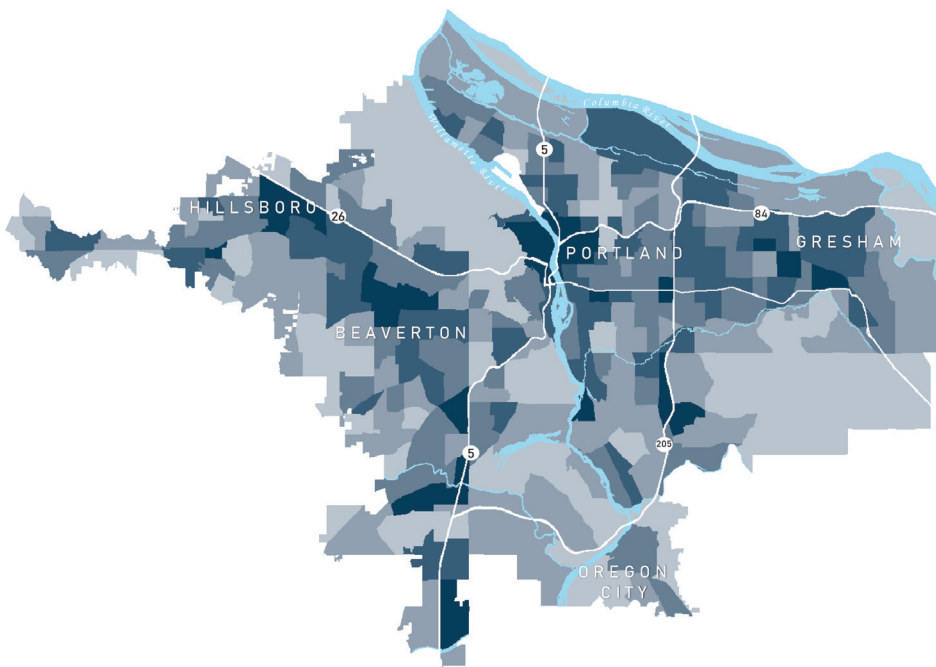
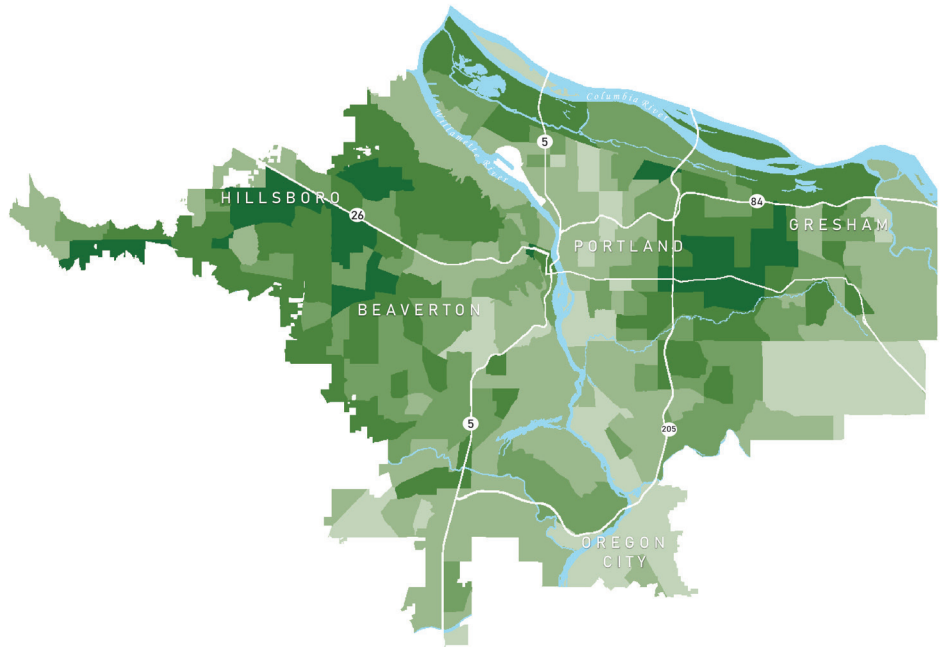
*For much of Eugene and Springfield, the largest driver of low response rates is likely the high percentage of renters in the region. The tract with the lowest response rate is adjacent to the University of Oregon campus and has an extremely high percentage of renters who are likely students. In the census tracts of western Eugene, people of color and children under age five are the potential drivers of lower response rates.*

# Hard-to-count Portland

## Foreign-born population



For the Portland Metro region, many of the census tracts with the lowest response rates are located in North Portland, East Portland, and eastern Multnomah County, the southeastern suburbs, and the western suburbs. The western suburbs, as well as East Portland and eastern Multnomah County, feature a higher percentage of foreign-born residents and these roughly overlap with many of the census tracts with lower response rates.



## Renters

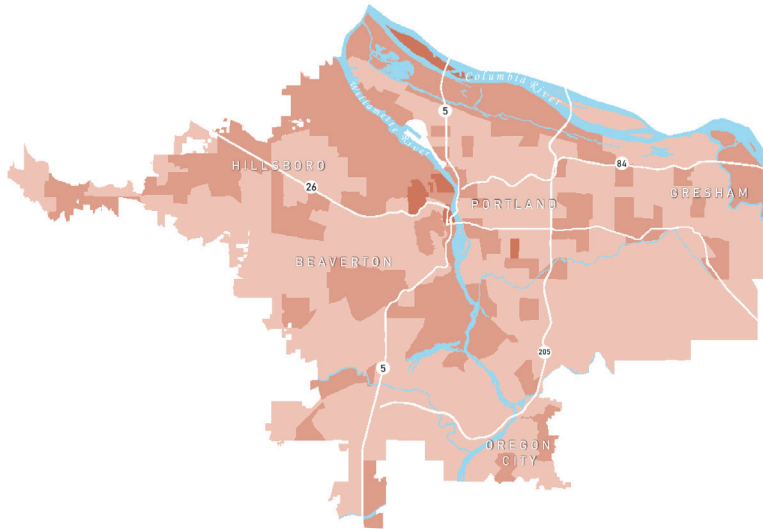


Census tracts containing a higher portion of renters tended to be located in the central city as well as near major transportation arteries such as freeways and public transit lines throughout the metro area. However, the tracts with a higher share of renters and lower response rates tended to be located in East Portland and eastern Multnomah County, as well as near Sunset Highway and Interstate 5 in Washington County.

## Occupied housing units



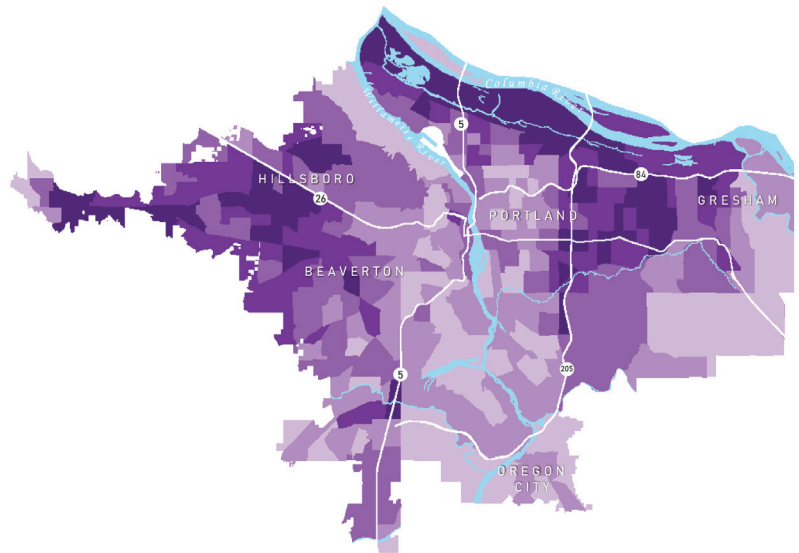
Interestingly, there is an area near Lake Oswego, southwest Portland, and Milwaukie that features a high percentage of units that may be unoccupied or vacant but does not overlap with the lower response rates map for the Portland region. Except for the northernmost areas of Portland, some areas near Interstate 205, Gresham, Hillsboro, and Beaverton, the housing occupancy map is close to the inverse of the map for populations of color.



## Population of color



Unsurprisingly, East Portland and eastern Multnomah County's percentage of foreign-born residents and people of color overlap. The tracts with the largest population share of people of color are located in East Portland and towards the city's northern border, eastern Multnomah County, and the western and southwestern areas of the Metro area in Washington County. These areas contain a higher portion of the census tracts with lower response rates compared to other parts of the Metro area.



## Age under 5



Children under the age of five are represented across the region except in Portland's central city area. However, this discrepancy also neatly overlaps with areas that feature fewer renters in northwest and southwest Portland, except for the downtown area.

