The Census 2020 Low Response Score (LRS) Pittsfield and Berkshire County, Massachusetts

Berkshire County Population Characteristics

Berkshire County taken as a whole has population characteristics that put it at a low risk for undercount in the upcoming Census. According to the latest ACS estimates, the Berkshire region's population includes:

- a higher than average proportion of homeowners versus renters, at 68.4% compared to 62.1% state average
- a very small percentage of residents who speak English less than "very well", 2.6% compared with the state's 8.9%
- Despite ongoing concerns about access to broadband internet, 82.8% of all households in Berkshire County have broadband internet subscriptions, slightly lower than the state average of 86.8%.
    - For comparison, the most current map (2015) of the Mass. Broadband Institute states that there were 19 municipalities without broadband. While this represents 60% of Berkshire municipalities, 5-year ACS data indicates these communities represent 15% of all households.

In contrast, the one factor that may negatively influence responses is the area's vacant housing units, as the county has more than twice the rate of vacancies, 19.8% versus the state's 9.8%. While Berkshire County taken as a whole has many factors that support an expected high response, a few key differences are notable in some of its larger municipalities-

- North Adams and Pittsfield both have higher proportion of renter-occupied housing units, with 45.9% and 39% respectively, compared to 37.9% statewide.
- While less than the state average (10.9%), Great Barrington has a considerably higher percentage of Hispanic residents (10.7%) who speak English less than "very well" (7.8%), being 3 time the county average (2.6%)
- Williamstown, reflecting the influence of Williams College has a larger proportion of residents age 15-24, comprising 36.8% of the population compared to the county and state averages of 13.4% and 14.1% respectively

The Low Response Score

In preparation for the 2020 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau has developed a new hard-to-survey metric called the *Low Response Score (LRS).* This score identifies block groups and tracts whose characteristics predict low census mail return rate and are highly correlated (negatively) with census and survey participation. To calculate this score, the Bureau uses 2010-2014 American Community Survey data and looks at variables including housing, demographic, and socioeconomic, together with census operational data, including the 2010 Census Mail Return Rate for each block group and tract.

The LRS can be interpreted as the percentage of households predicted to NOT self-respond to the Decennial Census; the higher the LRS is in a census tract, the harder that area may be to survey. So, for example, if LRS=25, Census estimates that 25% of households in that tract will not self-respond to the Census. As a general rule of thumb, areas with a LRS of over 29 are considered the hardest to count in the upcoming Census.
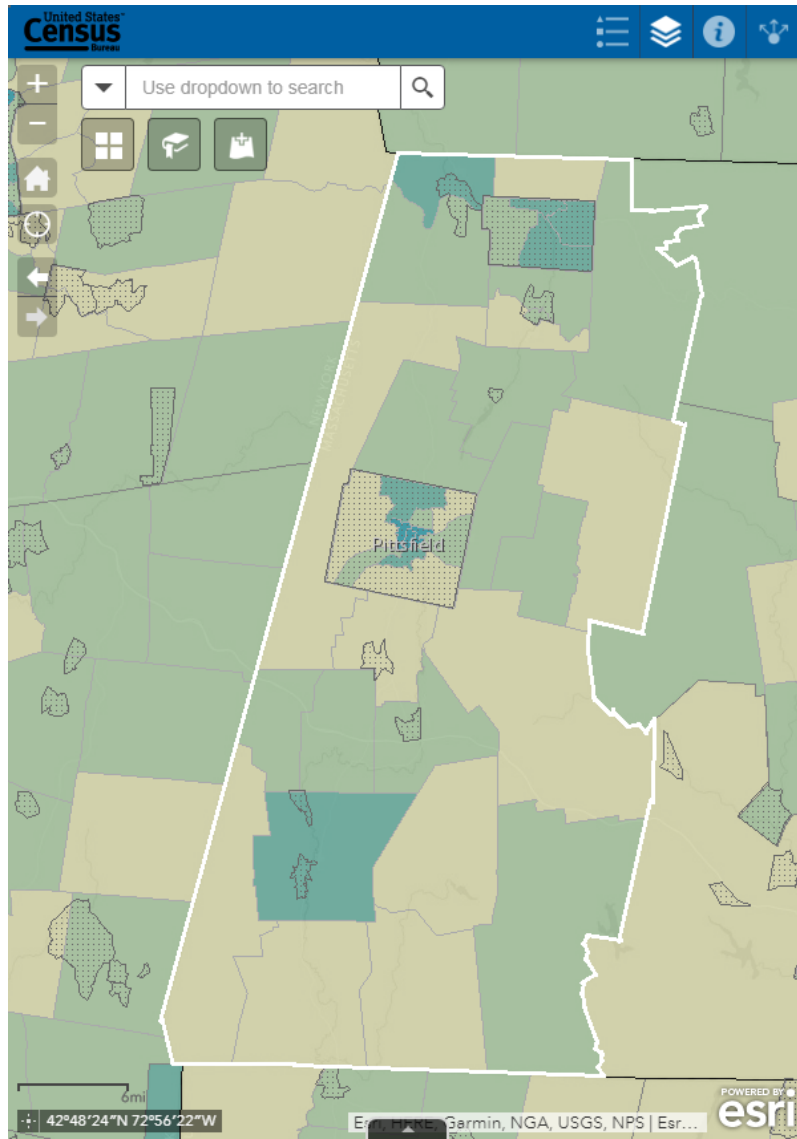
Factors that increase a geography's Low Response Score include high percentages of:

- vacant units
- Hispanic population
- % of single female head-of-households
- households at or below the poverty level college-aged population (18-24 years
- renters versus homeowners

Key Response Characteristics for Selected Berkshire County Cities and Massachusetts Average
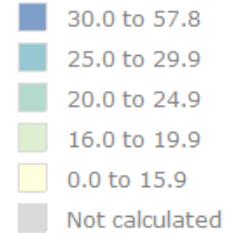
Key Demographics	Massachusetts	Berkshire County	Great Barrington	North Adams	Pittsfield	Williamstown
Ages 15-24	14.1%	13.4%	18.6%	17.4%	11.2%	36.8%
Hispanic	10.9%	4.1%	10.7%	4.1%	5.5%	7.2%
Female householder, no husband present, family	12.5%	12.2%	7.8%	14%	17.2%	7.8%
Vacant housing units	9.8%	19.8%	18.2%	14.9%	9.3%	21.4%
Poverty level, all people, w/in past 12 months	11.4%	12.4%	5.4%	18.9%	16.7%	11.4%
Renter-occupied	37.9%	31.6%	33.1%	45.9%	39%	26.5%
Owner-occupied	62.1%	68.4%	66.9%	54.1%	61%	73.5%
Households with broadband internet subscription.	86.8%	82.8%				
Foreign-born	15.7%	5.8%	12.7%	3.4%	6.2%	10.1%
Speak English less than "very well"*	8.9%	2.6%	7.8%	1.8%	3.8%	1.9%

UMass Donahue Institute. Source: 2016 ACS 5-year estimates for Massachusetts and Berkshire County, Massachusetts; ID DP02, DP03, DP04, DP05.

2017 ACS 1-year estimates for Massachusetts and Berkshire County; ID DP02.

Low Response Score Map, Berkshire County
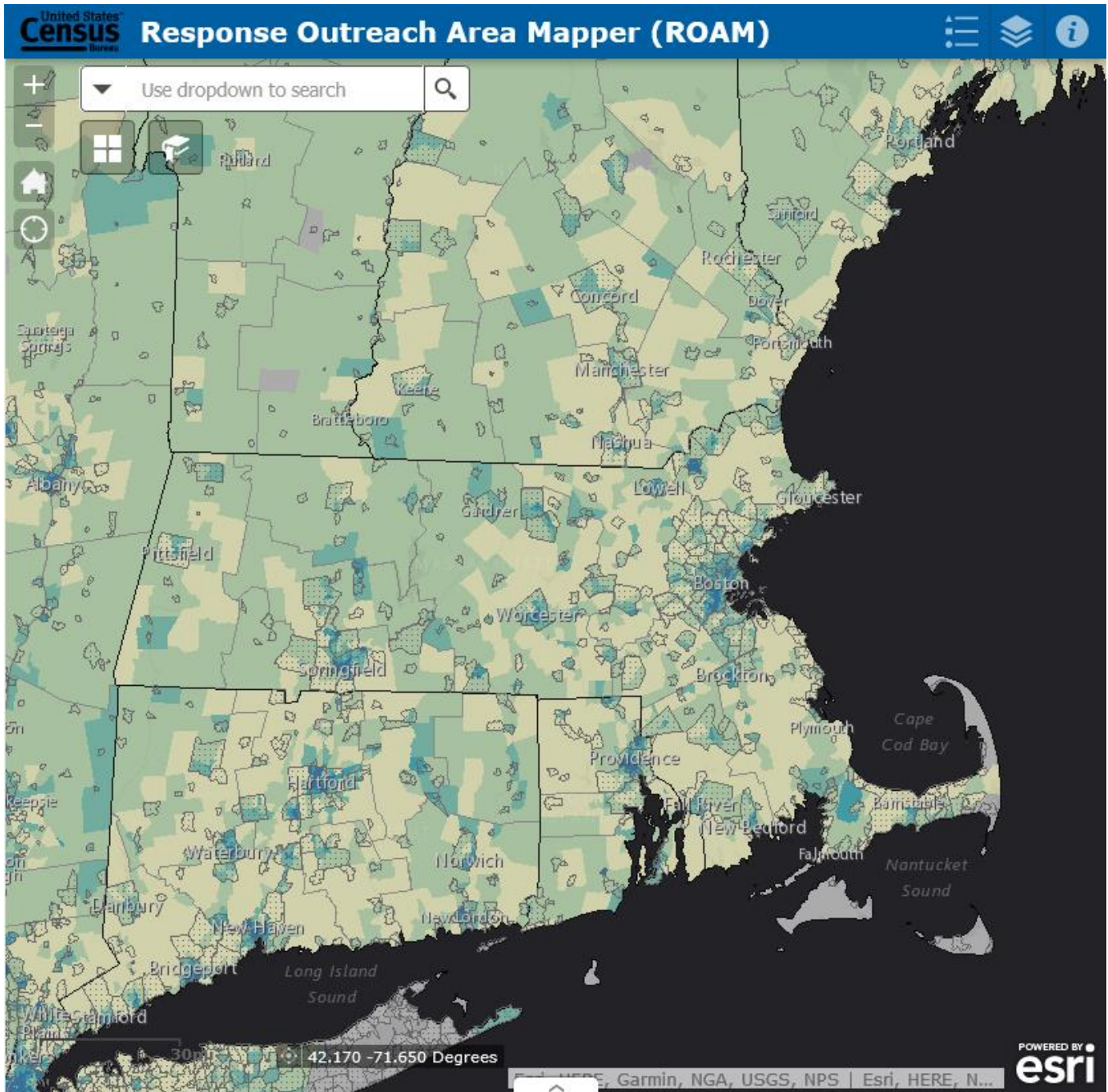

- Of all 1,445 tracts with LRS numbers in Massachusetts, the average LRS is 21.
- Of all 38 tracts in Berkshire County, the average LRS is 18.05, with 6 tracts scoring 21 or higher and ranging up to 27.6 in the hardest-to-count Census tract.
- Greater Barrington's sole tract has an LRS of 20.1
- North Adams' 4 tracts have an average LRS of 20.7
- Pittsfield's 11 tracts had an average LRS of 19.9, although 3 tracts in the denser city center have LRS scores exceeding 26
- Williamstown's 2 tracts have an average LRS of 19.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Response Outreach Area Mapper. Last revised July 31, 2018. Website: https://census.gov/roam

Low Response Score Map, Massachusetts

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Low Response Score by 2014 Census Tracts

Predicted Mail Non-Response Rate (%)

- 30.0 to 57.8
- 25.0 to 29.9
- 20.0 to 24.9
- 16.0 to 19.9
- 0.0 to 15.9
- Not calculated