The Census 2020 Low Response Score (LRS) and Amherst, Massachusetts

Amherst Population Characteristics

Amherst's unique population characteristics put the town at a high risk for undercount in the upcoming Census. According to the latest ACS estimates, Amherst's population includes:

- a higher than average proportion of renters versus homeowners, at 55.6% compared to 37.6% state average
- a large student population, with a youth demographic (15-24) comprising 60.8% of all residents, more than four times the state average of 14%
- a poverty level of 33.2%, 3 times the state average of 11.1%; the data does not separate this number from the student population, though this certainly bears influence over it

Key Response Characteristics for Amherst and Massachusetts Average

Key Demographics	Massachusetts	Amherst
Ages 15-24	14.0%	60.8%
Hispanic	11.2%	6.1%
Female householder, no husband present, family	12.3%	9.8%
Vacant housing units	9.7%	8.8%
Poverty level, all people, w/in past 12 months	11.1%	33.2%
Renter-occupied	37.6%	55.6%
Owner-occupied	62.4%	44.4%
Foreign-born	16.2%	15.8%
Speak English less than "very well"	9.1%	4.6%
Languages spoken other than English Spanish	8.8%	3.3%
Speak English less than "very well"	3.6%	0.5%
Other Indo-European languages	8.8%	6.0%
Speak English less than "very well"	3.1%	0.7%

UMass Donahue Institute. Source: 2017 ACS 5-year estimates Tables DP02, DP03, DP04, DP05 and 2015 ACS 5-year estimates Table B16001. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

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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.
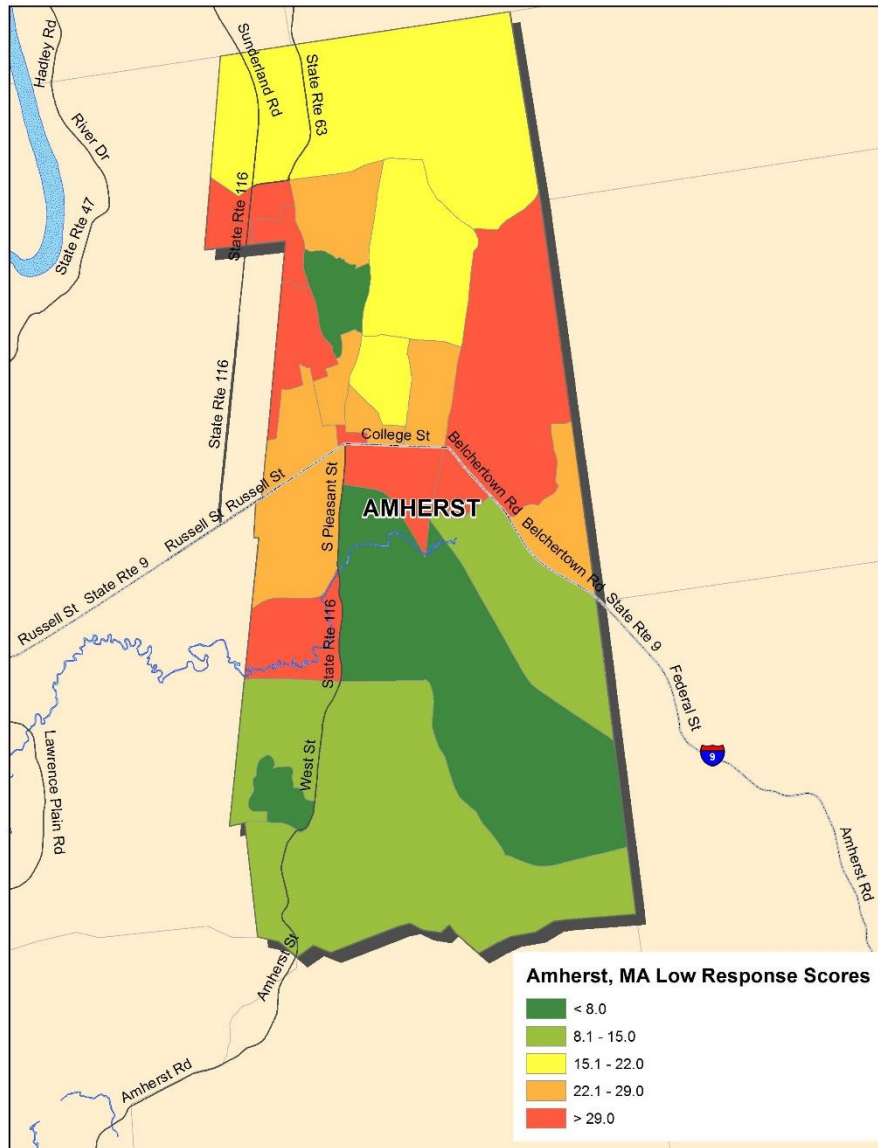
Factors that increase a geography's Low Response Score include high percentages of:

- 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

Amherst, Massachusetts Hard-to-Count Map

Low Response Score Map, Amherst

- Of all 4,889 block groups with LRS numbers in Massachusetts, the average LRS is 18.
- Of all 22 block groups with LRS numbers in Amherst, the average LRS is 22, with 8 block groups scoring 25 or higher and ranging up to 38 in the hardest-to-count Census block group.

Source: UMass Donahue Institute using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 Planning Database. The 2018 Planning Database uses 2010 Census data and 2012-2016 American Community Survey Data.