

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

Fitchburg Population Characteristics

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

- A higher than average proportion of renters versus homeowners, at 47.3% compared to 37.6% state average.
- A higher percentage of people under the poverty line within the last 12 months at 17.9% with a Massachusetts average of 11.1%.
- A Hispanic population over twice the state average, at 26.5% in Fitchburg compared to 11.2% in Massachusetts.
- A larger population of Spanish speakers to accompany the larger Hispanic population, with 20.4% of the population as Spanish speakers compared to the state average of 8.8%.

Key Response Characteristics for Fitchburg and Massachusetts Average

Key Demographics	Massachusetts	Fitchburg
Ages 15-24	14.0%	17.5%
Hispanic	11.2%	26.5%
Female householder, no husband present, family	12.3%	16.6%
Vacant housing units	9.7%	11.2%
Poverty level, all people, w/in past 12 months	11.1%	17.9%
Renter-occupied	37.6%	47.3%
Owner-occupied	62.4%	52.7%
Foreign-born	16.2%	11.4%
Speak English less than "very well"*	9.1%	9.1%
*Languages spoken other than English		
Spanish	8.8%	20.4%
Speak English less than "very well"	3.6%	6.6%
Other Indo-European languages	8.8%	4.2%
Speak English less than "very well"	3.1%	1.2%

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

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 housing, demographic, and socioeconomic variables from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey data together with census operational data, including the Census 2010 Census Mail Return Rate for each block group and tract.

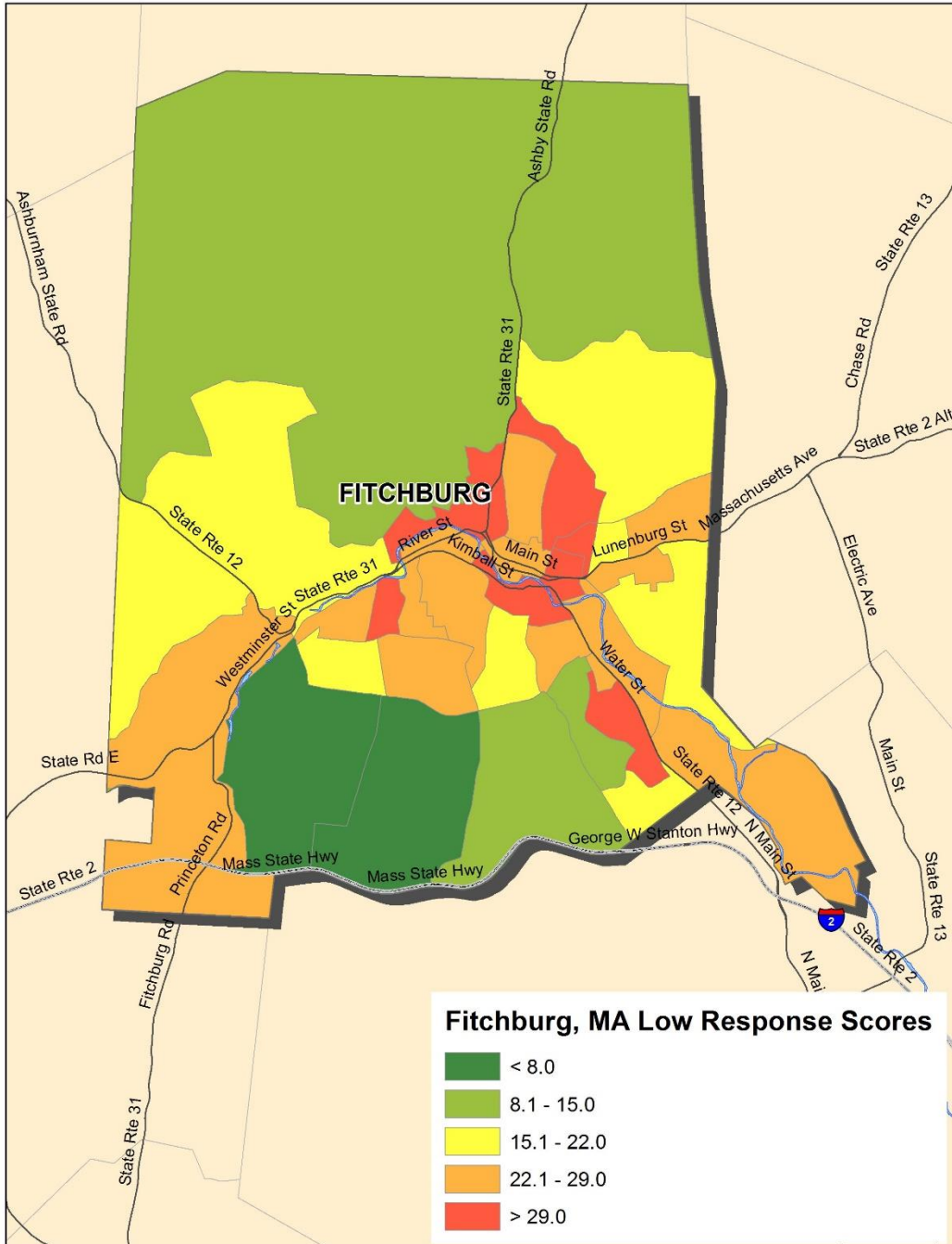
The LRS can be interpreted as the percentage of households predicted to NOT self-respond to the Decennial Census; the higher the LRS is in a census tract, the harder that area may be to survey. So, for example, if LRS=25, Census estimates that 25% of households in that tract will not self-respond to 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

Low Response Score Map, Fitchburg

- Of all 4,889 Census block groups with LRS numbers in Massachusetts, the average LRS is 18.
- Of all 32 block groups with LRS numbers in Fitchburg, the average LRS is 23, with 18 scoring 25 or higher and ranging up to 36 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.