

# The Undercount of Young Children in the Decennial Census and Demographic Surveys: How We Move Forward

**Eric Jensen**

Senior Advisor for Population Estimates and Coverage Measurement

U.S. Census Bureau

**2023 ACS DATA USERS CONFERENCE**

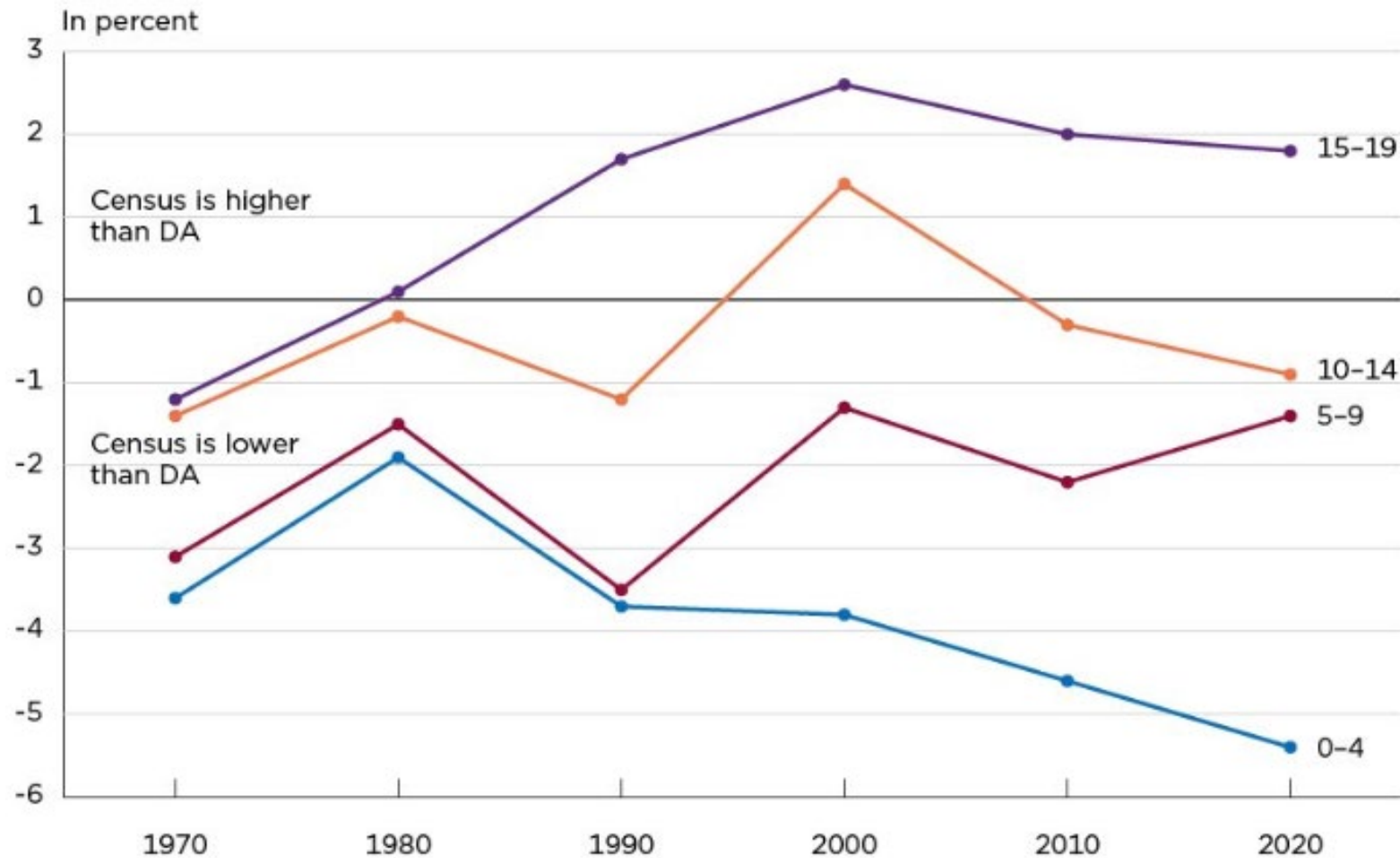
**May 16-18, Washington, DC**

*This presentation is released to inform parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion in progress. Any opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views of the U.S. Census Bureau.*

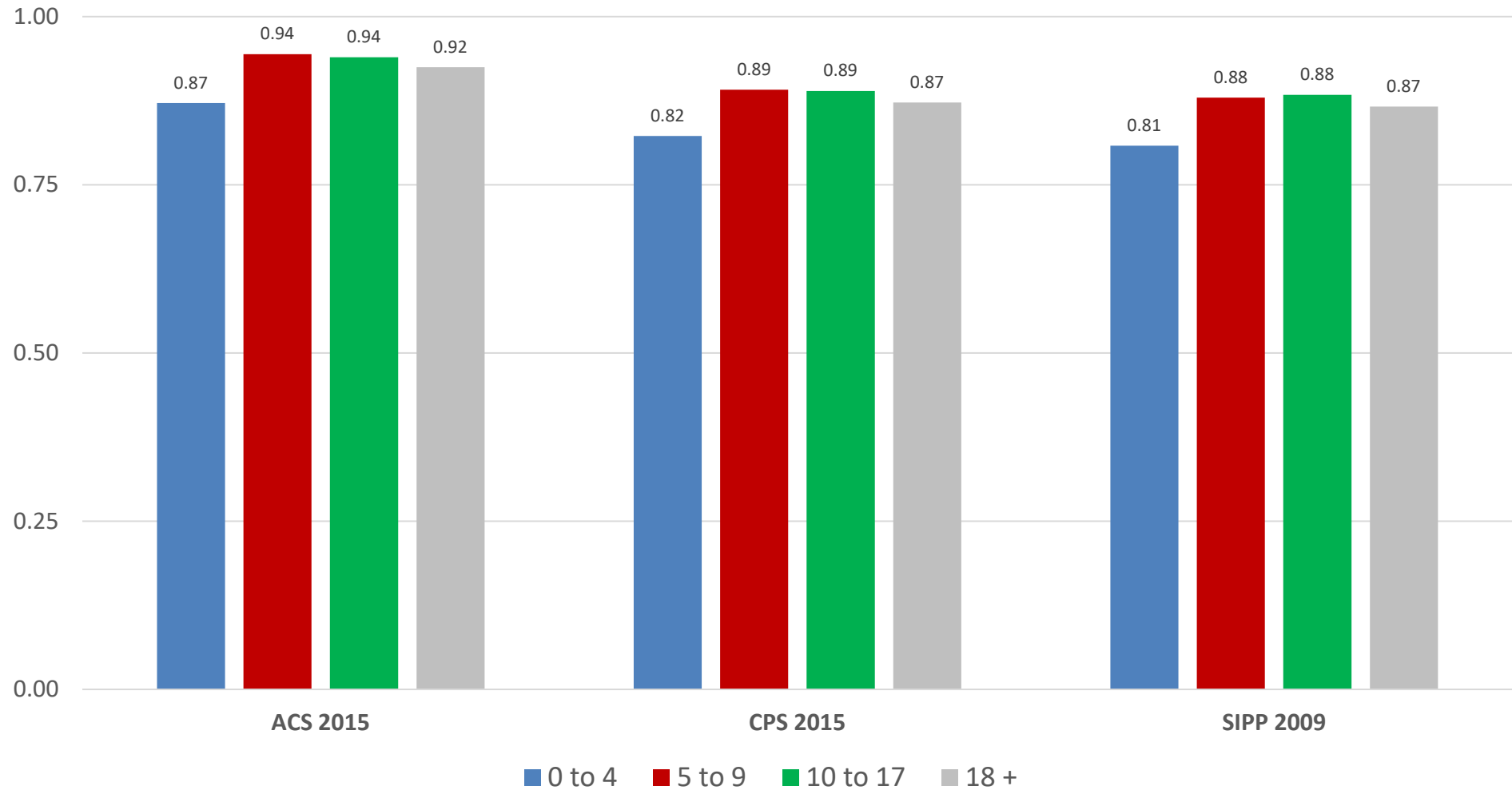
# What is the Issue?

- In the 2020 Census, young children (0-4 years old) had a larger undercount than any other age group: **Net undercount 5.4%**
- This is a persistent issue in the census despite major efforts to improve the count leading up to 2020
- We also see this issue in demographic surveys:
  - American Community Survey (ACS)
  - Current Population Survey (CPS)
  - Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

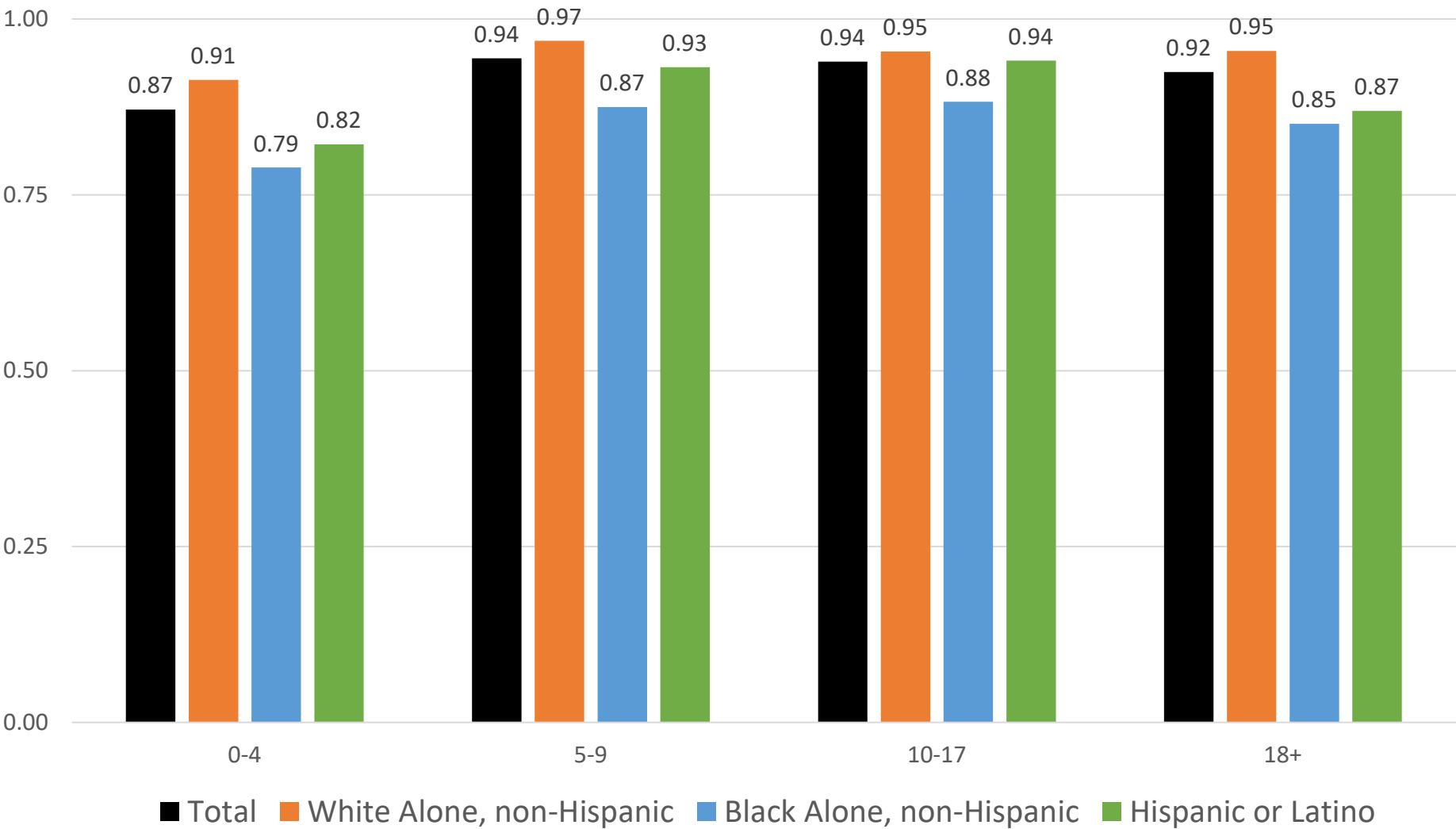
# Demographic Analysis Estimates of Net Coverage Error by Select Age Groups: 1970 to 2020



## Coverage Rates for the American Community Survey, Current Population Survey, and Survey of Program and Income Participation by Age Group



# Coverage Rates in the American Community Survey by Age for Select Race and Hispanic Origin Groups: 2015



# Why are Young Children a Historically Undercounted Population?

Compared to older children, young children are more likely to live in:

- A complex household
  - Multigenerational households
  - Households with nonrelatives
- A renter-occupied household
- A household that was not enumerated by self response
- A family whose income is below the poverty line
- A different housing unit than one year ago

# 2022 Young Children Working Group

- This Young Children Working Group (YCWG) has an expanded focus relative to past efforts
- Cross-directorate team:
  - Research and Methodology
  - Demographic Programs
  - Decennial Census
  - American Community Survey
  - Communications
- Subject matter experts in demography, survey methodology, census/survey operations, statistics, coverage measurement, and stakeholder engagement

# Team Focus

## Research

- Better understand why young children have higher undercounts than other age groups

## Data Collection

- Making improvements to instructions, probes, and questions in surveys and the 2030 Census
- Administrative data

## Data Products

- Improving Census Bureau data on young children

## Outreach

- Draw on the experience and enthusiasm of the many stakeholder groups that we partnered with for 2020



# Research

- Looking at research questions developed by previous task force
- Assessing how research around the Census Bureau can incorporate young children – including research related to the 2030 Census
- Developing a research agenda
- Always interested in feedback



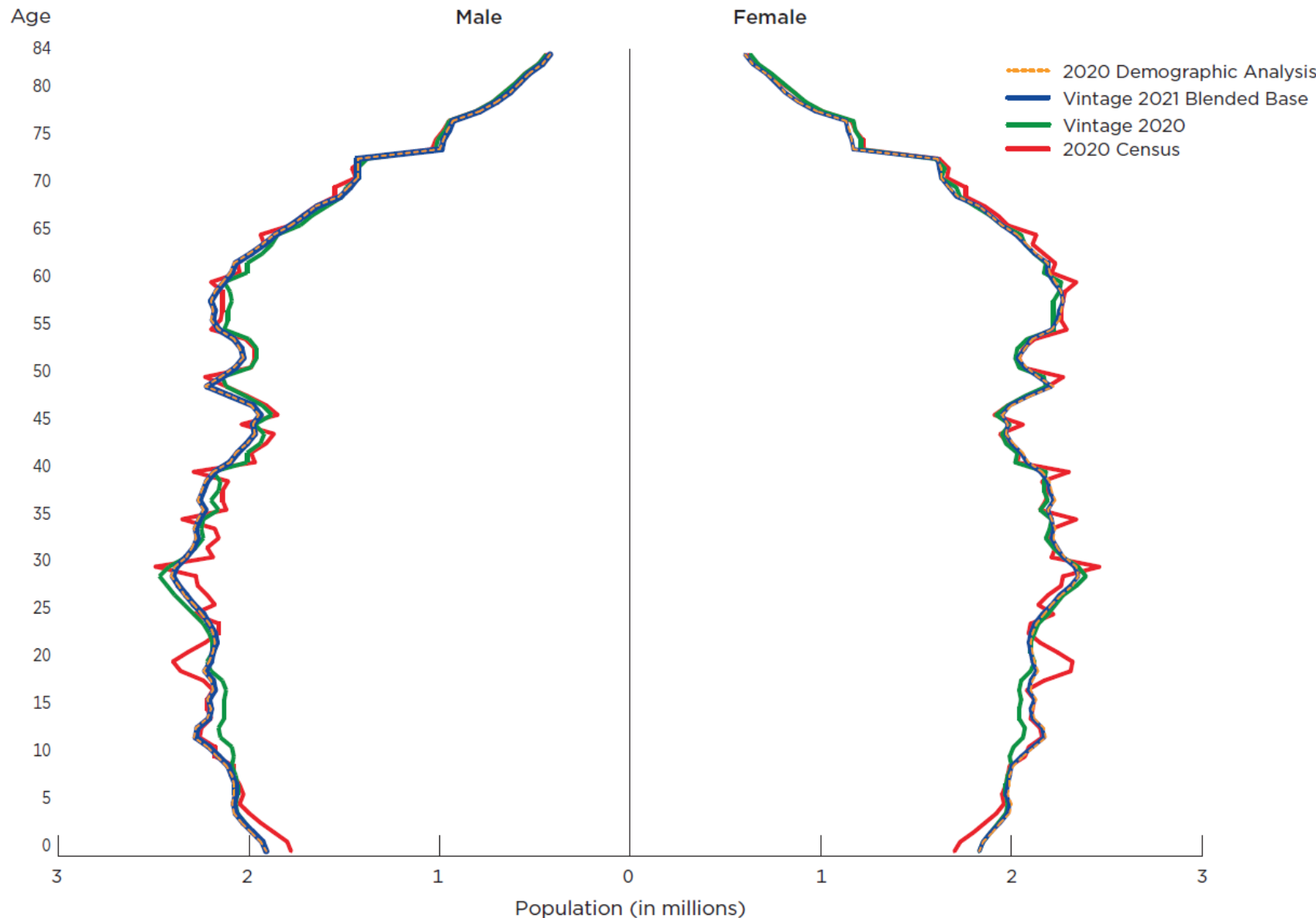
# Data Collection

- Making improvements to instructions, probes, and questions in surveys and the 2030 Census
- 2022 ACS Content Test
  - Testing improvements to how we make the list of household members (rostering)
  - These improvements are intended for all types of undercounted populations, but special consideration was taken for young children
- Cognitive testing on the age and date of birth questions

# Data Products

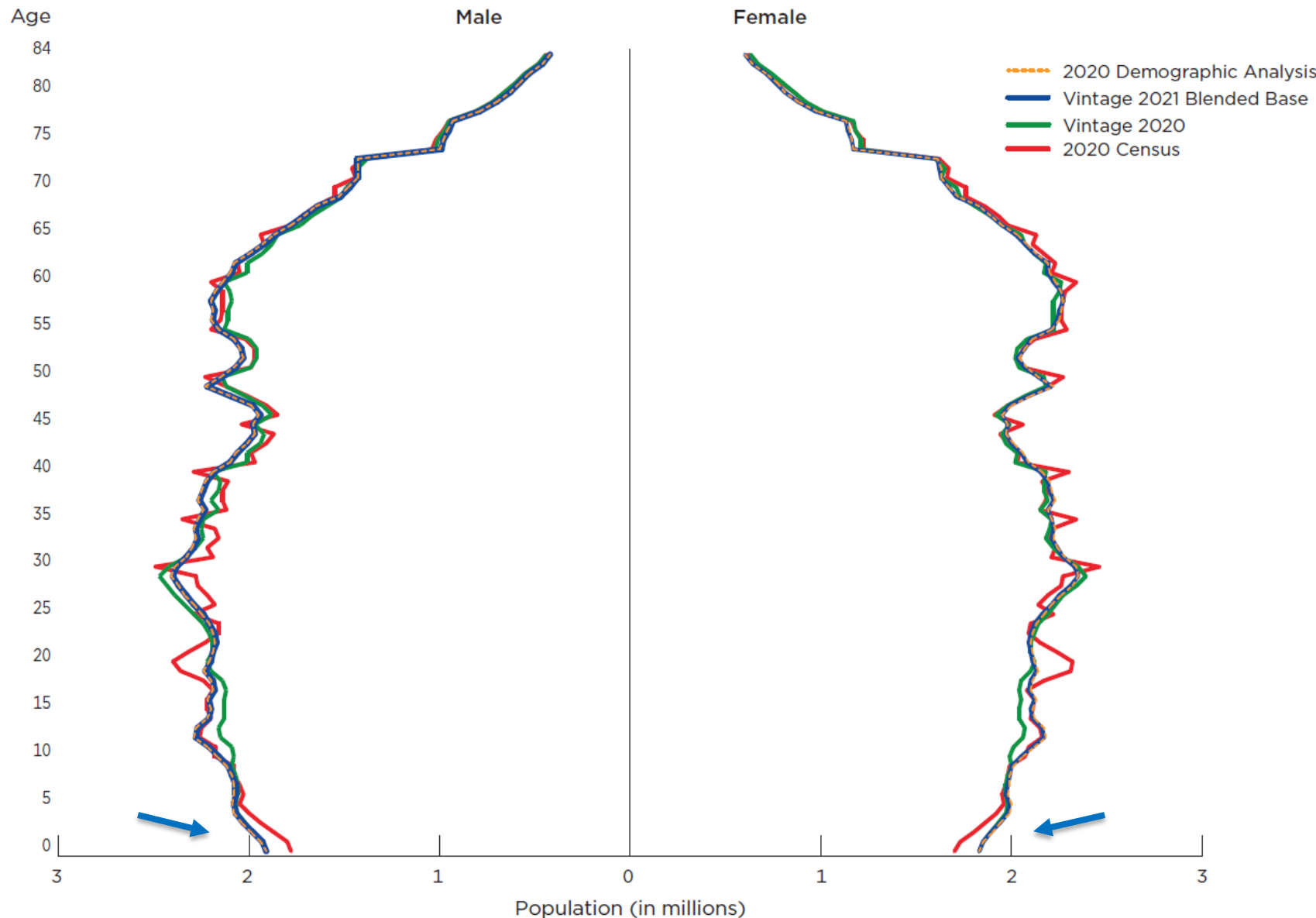
- Improving Census Bureau data on young children
- **Example:** Population Estimates Blended Base
  - The Population Estimates program traditionally uses decennial census counts as the base, or starting point
  - New Approach: The blended base for the population estimates incorporates data from the 2020 Census, the Vintage 2020 population estimates, and 2020 Demographic Analysis
  - Demographic Analysis estimates mitigate the undercount of young children in the 2020 Census

# Vintage 2021 Blended Base, Base Inputs, and 2020 Census Data by Sex for Ages 0-84: April 1, 2020



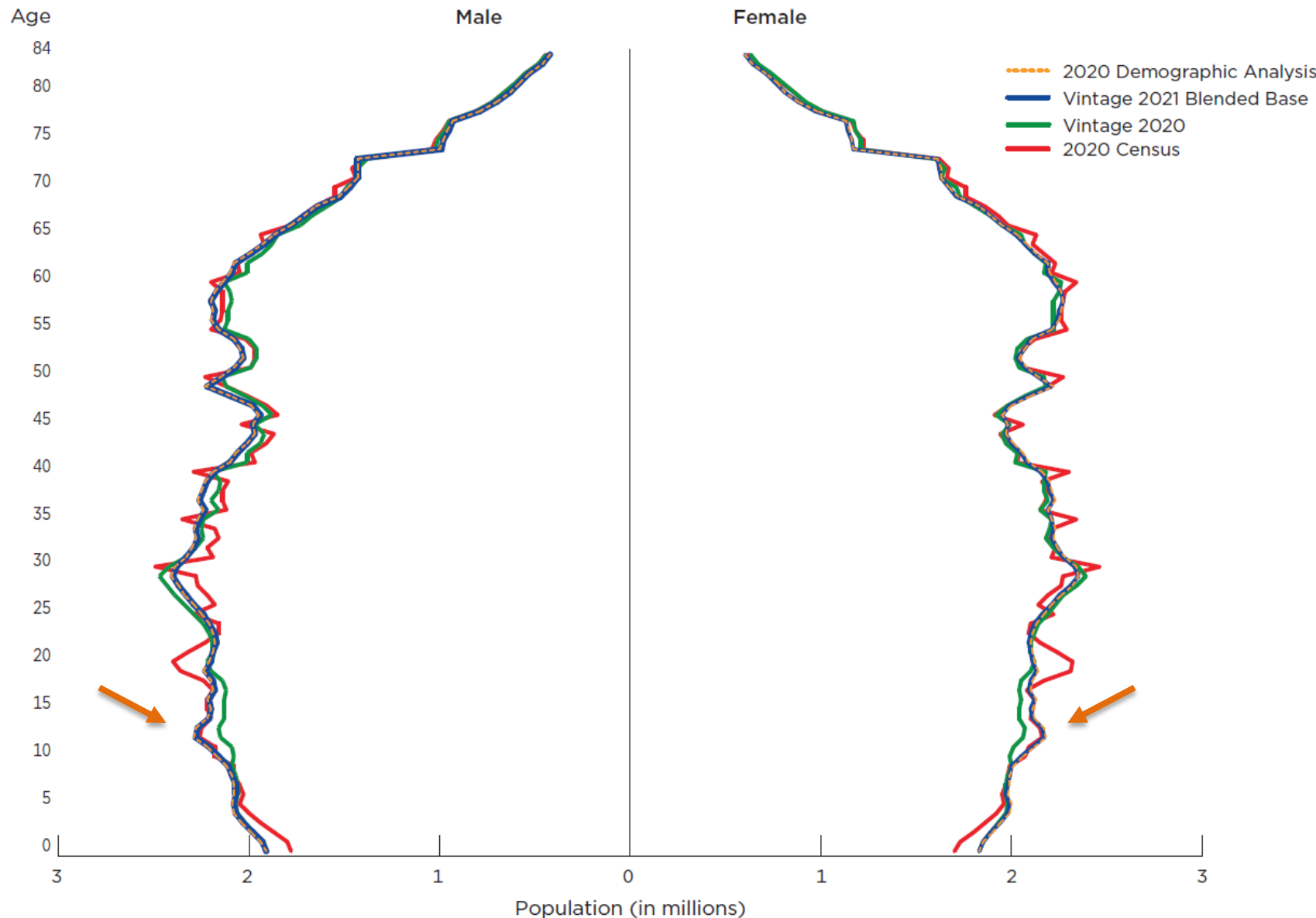
Note: These 2020 Census data by age and sex represent a special tabulation of the 2020 Census with confidentiality protections applied using the 2020 Census Disclosure Avoidance System. The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and has approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. (DRB clearance number CB-FY22-DSEP-001.)  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; 2020 Demographic Analysis; Vintage 2020 and 2021 Population Estimates.

# Vintage 2021 Blended Base, Base Inputs, and 2020 Census Data by Sex for Ages 0-84: April 1, 2020



Note: These 2020 Census data by age and sex represent a special tabulation of the 2020 Census with confidentiality protections applied using the 2020 Census Disclosure Avoidance System. The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and has approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. (DRB clearance number CB-FY22-DSEP-001.)  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; 2020 Demographic Analysis; Vintage 2020 and 2021 Population Estimates.

# Vintage 2021 Blended Base, Base Inputs, and 2020 Census Data by Sex for Ages 0-84: April 1, 2020



Note: These 2020 Census data by age and sex represent a special tabulation of the 2020 Census with confidentiality protections applied using the 2020 Census Disclosure Avoidance System. The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and has approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. (DRB clearance number CB-FY22-DSEP-001.)  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; 2020 Demographic Analysis; Vintage 2020 and 2021 Population Estimates.



# Outreach

- We are also working with internal and external stakeholders
- We are drawing on the enthusiasm of the many stakeholder groups who we partnered with for the 2020 Census
- Census Bureau's Partnerships Program will continue throughout the decade
- We want to hear from you!



# Stakeholders

**Including, but not limited to:**

## **Advisory Bodies**

- National Advisory Committee (NAC) and Census Scientific Advisory Committee (CSAC)

## **Advocacy Groups**

- Annie E. Casey Foundation, Partnership for America's Children, Coalition on Human Needs

## **Research Groups**

- Population Reference Bureau, Georgetown University

## **Umbrella Organizations**

- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Count All Kids, National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO)



# Conclusion

- Despite improvement efforts, the undercount of young children grew to 5.4% in 2020
- 2022 Young Children Working Group is dedicated to improving data on young children now and in future censuses and surveys

**Research**

**Data  
Collection**

**Data  
Products**

**Outreach**

Thank you!

Have questions?

[eric.b.jensen@census.gov](mailto:eric.b.jensen@census.gov)