

Multiracial population grew in almost every county in the US. It doesn't mean racism is over

By Nicole Chavez, CNN

Updated 9:55 AM EDT, Sun August 15, 2021



Sarah Gaither, left, and Bárbara Abadía-Rexach, right, say people have questioned their racial and ethnic identities since they were children for being of mixed race families.

(CNN)— Bárbara Abadía-Rexach spent months appearing in webinars and radio shows talking to Puerto Ricans about why they should identify as Black or more than one race on the 2020 Census.

“If you are constantly being described as non-White, why would you still choose White?” said Abadía-Rexach, a Black Latina and member of Colectivo Ilé, an anti-racism group of educators and organizers in Puerto Rico.

The figures released by the Census Bureau Thursday show that the multiracial population in almost every county in the United States grew between 2010 and 2020. In Puerto Rico, half of the people said they were more than one race – a trend that demographers say happened across the US as people shifted to multiracial identities.

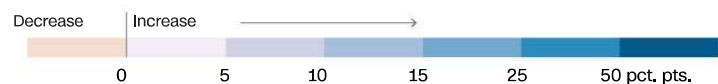
“Our analysis of the 2020 Census results show that the US population is much more multiracial, and more racially and ethnically diverse than what we measured in the past” said Nicholas .Jones, the director and senior adviser of race and ethnic research and outreach in the <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/15/us/census-2020-multiracial-nation/index.html>

than what we measured in the past," said Nicholas Jones, the director and senior adviser of race and ethnic research and education in the US Census Bureau's population division.

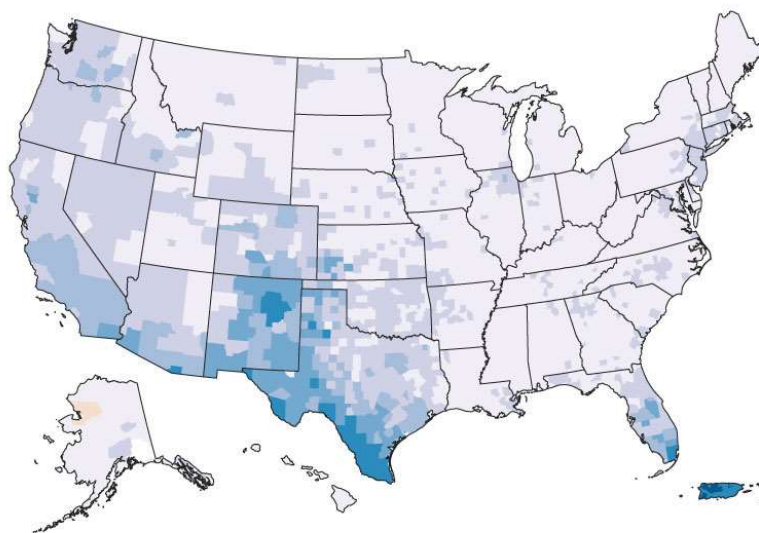
The multiracial population grew in almost every county between 2010 and 2020

New data released by the US Census Bureau shows that the percentage of people who identified as two or more races, independent of whether they identified as ethnically Hispanic or Latino, increased in nearly every county. The most pronounced growth was in Puerto Rico and the Southwest region of the country.

Change in share of county population that is multiracial from 2010 to 2020



Comparable data not available



Note: Data includes people who identified with two or more of the five census race categories (White, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native). It does not include people who identified with one race and as Hispanic or Latino.

Source: US Census Bureau

Graphic: Priya Krishnakumar, CNN

While the Census Bureau has cautioned that comparisons on race and ethnicity between 2010 and 2020 should be "made with caution" due to the changes made to its latest survey, the agency said it is confident the figures "likely reflect actual demographic changes in the population over the past 10 years."

Clarissa Martínez-de-Castro, deputy vice president of policy and advocacy at UnidosUS, said the changes in the survey "allow us to fully own" being a multiracial community and the preponderance of one race was "more of a result of the choices we weren't given."

"I think rather than a change, what you're seeing is that we have a more accurate option of how to express who we are," Martínez-de-Castro said.

'It makes you feel like less of a person'

Sarah Gaither, a biracial Black and White woman, said the Black Lives Matter movement and events from last year led her to feel much more strongly about her mixed-race background than ever before.

As the protests began last summer, Gaither, 36, began getting messages from other biracial people, questioning their identities and their role in the movement. It reminded her of her childhood years and led her to write an essay to help them see their unique opportunities to create change.

MAP: Race and ethnicity across the nation

Growing up in the mid-1980s in Sacramento, California, Gaither was able to play with dolls and toys from her different racial backgrounds, but she couldn't find any terms to accurately describe her identity.

For her parents, Gaither says, it was really important to make sure that as a young girl, she knew she was "lots of different things at the same time." Although, she would see her father, a Black man, constantly being treated differently by strangers than her mother who is White.

One of the hardest things for her, she says, was filling out school enrollment and job application forms.



courtesy Sarah Gaither

Sarah Gaither, left, and her parents Kathy and Clifford pose with her brother Adam who graduated college in 2012.

"That experience of asking anyone to choose a box that doesn't represent who they are, is really a sense of identity threat," Gaither said. "It makes you feel like less of a person, and it forces you to question who it is you are and how you fit into society."

If there was an "other" option on a form, Gaither says she would choose that even when the term made her uncomfortable and she felt a further lack of belonging.

Gaither, who is now an assistant professor in the psychology and neuroscience department at Duke University, says her experiences motivated her to focus her work on how race and ethnic identity shapes how people think about themselves and treat others.

Changing identities doesn't mean racism is over

The option to select more than one race on Census forms continues to be very new and experts say people have slowly embraced the option. Americans were only given the choice to pick one race before the 2000 survey.

Yet, the growth in the multiracial population in the 2020 Census was significant. There were 9 million people in 2010 who identified with two or more races compared to 33.8 million people in 2020. That's a 276% increase.

Like the options in the survey, other factors like family trees, where people live, how people are perceived by others and views about race and ethnicity in America are constantly changing and influencing how people answer the survey, said Carolyn Liebler, a sociologist at the University of Minnesota who studies identities among mixed-race people.

One of those factors is whether a person marries outside their racial or ethnic groups. A higher percentage of Hispanic people, 39% and <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/15/us/census-2020-multiracial-nation/index.html>

One of those factors is whether a person marries outside their racial or ethnic groups. A higher percentage of Hispanic people, 39%, and Asians, 46%, born in the US have a spouse of a different race or ethnicity, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

Liebler says the 2020 census findings will likely encourage more people to report their multiple races in the future “because they will see that it’s not a small group” anymore.

In Puerto Rico, one of the places where the most pronounced growth of multiracial population was reported, many people struggle to see themselves as Black or of African descent because they link it to slavery, racism and racial violence, Abadía-Rexach said.

Her family never discussed why her mother always straightened her thick, curly hair to help her blend among her majority light-skinned classmates or how to react to microaggressions, the 40-year-old said.

The Colectivo Ilé worked for months to try to change the way the community sees race and show them that answering the census would be a way to make a point about Puerto Rico’s relationship with the US.

“We wanted to show Congress that Puerto Rico is not a White country, it’s not our reality, especially for all the people of African descent who are extremely vulnerable and living in poverty,” said Abadía-Rexach, who is also a Latina/Latino studies professor at San Francisco State University.

While Gaither says she’s excited for her children to grow up in a society where they can get exposed to a diversity of experiences, she and Abadía-Rexach worry the increased number of multiracial people could create a false idea that racist tendencies, including systemic racism, have ceased to exist.

“Even if the White individuals in our country are decreasing numerically, it doesn’t necessarily suggest that they’re losing any of their power. These power structures are built into our systems, historically and will still be built pretty strongly going forward,” Gaither said.

CNN’s Priya Krishnakumar contributed to this report.

Paid Links

-
-
-
-
-



Log In

Live TV

Audio

World

US Politics

Business

Health

Entertainment

Tech

Style

Travel

Sports

Videos

Features

Weather

More



FOLLOW CNN



[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#) [Ad Choices](#) [Accessibility & CC](#) [About](#) [Newsletters](#) [Transcripts](#)

© 2022 Cable News Network. A Warner Bros. Discovery Company. All Rights Reserved.
CNN Sans™ & © 2016 Cable News Network.

