

2010 Census Urban Area FAQs

Urban-Rural Classification Program

When did the Census Bureau begin defining urban and rural areas?

The Census Bureau first defined urban places in reports following the 1880 and 1890 censuses. At that time, the Census Bureau identified as urban any incorporated place that had a minimum population of either 4,000 or 8,000, depending on the report. The Census Bureau adopted the current minimum population threshold of 2,500 for the 1910 Census; any incorporated place that contained at least 2,500 people within its boundaries was considered urban. All territory outside urban places, regardless of population density, was considered rural.

The Census Bureau began identifying densely populated urbanized areas of 50,000 or more population with the 1950 Census, taking into account the increased presence of densely settled suburban development in the vicinity of large cities. Outside urbanized areas, the Census Bureau continued to identify as urban any incorporated place or census designated place of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

The Census Bureau introduced the urban cluster concept for Census 2000, replacing urban places located outside urbanized areas. Urban clusters are defined based on the same criteria as urbanized areas, but represent areas containing at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

"Rural" continues to be defined as any population, housing, or territory outside urban areas.

Why does the Census Bureau delineate urban areas?

The Census Bureau delineates urban and rural areas for statistical purposes; that is, to tabulate and present data for the urban and rural population, housing, and territory within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. The Census Bureau's urban and rural classification provides an important baseline for analyzing changes in the distribution and characteristics of urban and rural populations.

The Census Bureau's delineation of urbanized areas and urban clusters also supports the Office of Management and Budget's delineation of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people form the urban cores of metropolitan statistical areas; urban clusters of at least 10,000 and less than 50,000 people form the urban cores of micropolitan statistical areas.

Who uses the Census Bureau's urban and rural definitions?

- Data users and researchers interested in analyzing data for urban and rural population and housing use the Census Bureau urban and rural areas, and data tabulated for those areas.
- Analysts use urban area data to study patterns of urbanization, suburban growth and development, and urban/rural land area change.
- Various federal and state agencies use the Census Bureau's urban and rural definitions as the basis for their own urban and rural definitions and settlement classifications for use in tabulating and presenting statistical data. The National Center for Education Statistics uses the Census Bureau's urban and rural definitions in its locale codes classification. The US Department of Agriculture uses the Census Bureau's urban-rural classification as the basis for various urban and rural classifications used to analyze and report on demographic and economic patterns in rural areas.
- Other government agencies use the Census Bureau's urban and rural definitions to determine program eligibility and funding formulas. For example, the Federal Highways Administration uses Census Bureau urbanized areas to qualify Metropolitan Planning Organizations. For rural health programs, a clinic qualifies as a rural health clinic if it is located outside the boundaries of a Census Bureau urbanized area.

How often does the Census Bureau update the boundaries of urbanized areas and urban clusters?

The Census Bureau reviews and updates urbanized area and urban cluster boundaries every ten years, following the decennial census. Census blocks provide the "building blocks" for measuring population density and delineating each urban area. Because population estimates and American Community Survey data are not available at the census block-level, the Census Bureau does not possess a nationally consistent set of population data at the level of geographic detail needed to delineate urban areas between censuses.

Does the Census Bureau allow local governments and other groups to participate in the delineation of urban area boundaries?

No. The Census Bureau's urban and rural area definitions provide a baseline for a wide variety of data users, researchers, and analysts; it is important to our statistical data users that we define urban areas in a nationally consistent and objective manner. In addition, although the Census Bureau does not take into account the needs of specific non-statistical programs, we are aware of the potential programmatic advantages or disadvantages deriving from urbanized area and urban/rural status. For that reason also, it is important that we define urbanized areas and urban clusters in an objective manner, applying the same criteria and delineation methodology throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

Prior to each decennial census, the Census Bureau publishes in the Federal Register proposed criteria for delineating urban areas for public review and comment, in addition to meeting with various data user and stakeholder groups to ensure that the urban area concept and criteria continue to meet users' needs and expectations, while maintaining continuity with previous decades' definitions. The final criteria adopted for application with decennial census and other data to delineate urban areas reflects the comments received through the Federal Register comment process.

Is there an appeal process if I disagree with the location of an urban area boundary?

The Census Bureau does not have an appeal process. The Census Bureau applies published criteria with statistical and other publicly available data to identify a nationally consistent set of urban areas, defined in as objective a manner as possible. Prior to each decennial census, the Census Bureau publishes in the Federal Register proposed criteria for delineating urban areas for public review and comment. The final criteria adopted for application with decennial census and other data to delineate urban areas reflects the comments received through the Federal Register comment process.

How will my area's classification affect my funding?

Program eligibility and funding formulas are determined by the federal and state agencies making the grants. For information about how the new urban and rural definitions may affect your area's funding, please contact the respective grant-making agencies.

Urban and Rural Definition

How does the Census Bureau define "urban" and "rural?"

The Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is fundamentally a delineation of geographical areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural areas of the nation. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. For the 2010 Census, an urban area will comprise a densely settled core of census tracts and/or census blocks that meet minimum population density requirements, along with adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land uses as well as territory with low population density included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters.

The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas:

- Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people;
- Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

"Rural" encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.

The specific criteria used to define urban areas for the 2010 Census were published in the Federal Register of August 24, 2011.

How has the Census Bureau's urban-rural definition changed over time?

From the 1910 Census through the 1940 Census, the Census Bureau defined "urban" as any incorporated place that contained at least 2,500 people within its boundaries. Additional criteria were

applied to classify certain New England towns and other areas as urban through "special rules." This accounted for selected geographic areas that had urban characteristics but were not identified as incorporated places by the Census Bureau.

Increasing suburbanization, particularly outside the boundaries of large incorporated places led the Census Bureau to adopt the urbanized area (UA) concept for the 1950 Census. At that time, the Census Bureau formally recognized that densely settled communities outside the boundaries of large incorporated municipalities were just as "urban" as the densely settled population inside those boundaries and the large unsettled or sparsely settled areas inside those boundaries were just as "rural" as those outside.

[How do urbanized areas \(UAs\) and urban clusters \(UCs\) compare to the Office of Management and Budget's metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas?](#)

Urbanized areas and urban clusters form the urban cores of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, respectively. Each metropolitan statistical area will contain at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more people; each micropolitan statistical area will contain at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 and less than 50,000 people. Metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas represent the county-based functional regions associated with urban centers (hence, the generic term "core based statistical areas").

[Were there changes to the urban area delineation criteria for the 2010 Census?](#)

Yes. A description of differences between the 2010 Census urban area criteria and Census 2000 urban area criteria are available on our website.

Changes include:

- use of census tracts instead of block groups for the initial identification of urban area cores;
- at least 1,500 people must reside outside institutional group quarters for an area to qualify as its own urban area;
- no additional hops after a jump;
- inclusion of census blocks with a high degree of impervious surfaces (added to the criteria to help identify blocks containing non-residential urban land uses);
- criteria for merging and splitting urban areas were modified to ensure that any Census 2000 urbanized area will continue to be separately identified as an urbanized area for the 2010 Census, provided that the area still has a population of at least 50,000;
- central places are no longer identified;
- inclusion of airports with annual enplanements of at least 2,500 passengers and located within 0.5 miles of an urban area.

[What are hops and jumps?](#)

"Hops" and "jumps" provide a means for connecting outlying densely settled territory with the main body of the urbanized area or urban cluster. A hop provides a connection from one urban area core to other qualifying urban territory along a road connection of 0.5 miles or less in length; multiple hops may be made along any given road corridor. This criterion recognizes that alternating patterns of residential development and non-residential development are a typical feature of urban landscapes. A jump provides a connection from one urban area core to other qualifying urban territory along a road connection that is greater than 0.5 miles, but less than or equal to 2.5 miles in length; only one jump may be made along any given road connection. The jump concept has been part of the urbanized area delineation process since the 1950 Census, providing a means for recognizing that urbanization may be offset by intervening areas that have not yet developed. The Census Bureau changed the maximum jump distance from 1.5 miles to 2.5 miles with the Census 2000 criteria.

Urban Area Delineation Results

How many urbanized areas and urban clusters are defined for the 2010 Census? How has this changed from Census 2000?

A total of 3,601 urban areas are defined for the 2010 Census, of which 497 are urbanized areas and 3,104 are urban clusters. The United States contains 486 urbanized areas and 3,087 urban clusters, while Puerto Rico contains 11 urbanized areas and 8 urban clusters and the Island Areas of Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands collectively contain 9 urban clusters.

When compared to the urban areas defined for Census 2000, these tallies represent an increase in the number of urbanized areas (465 in 2000) and a decrease in the number of urban clusters (3,169 in 2000), for an overall decrease in the total number of urban areas (3,634 in 2000).

How many new urbanized areas are there for the 2010 Census?

There are 36 new urbanized areas for the 2010 Census. Thirty-five were formerly designated as urban clusters; the Williamsburg, VA area previously was part of the Virginia Beach, VA-NC urbanized area. The new urbanized areas are:

- Albany, OR
- Arroyo Grande--Grover Beach, CA
- Beckley, WV
- Bloomsburg--Berwick, PA
- Cape Girardeau, MO--IL
- Carbondale, IL
- Cartersville, GA
- Casa Grande, AZ
- Chambersburg, PA
- Conway, AR

- Daphne--Fairhope, AL
- Delano, CA
- East Stroudsburg, PA--NJ
- Grand Island, NE
- Grants Pass, OR
- Hammond, LA
- Homosassa Springs--Beverly Hills--Citrus Springs, FL
- Hanover, PA
- Hilton Head Island, SC
- Kahului, HI
- Lake Havasu City, AZ
- Lexington Park--California--Chesapeake Ranch Estates, MD
- Los Lunas, NM
- Manhattan, KS
- Mankato, MN
- Midland, MI
- New Bern, NC
- San Marcos, TX
- Sebring--Avon Park, FL
- Sierra Vista, AZ
- Staunton--Waynesboro, VA
- Walla Walla, WA--OR
- Watertown, NY
- West Bend, WI
- Williamsburg, VA
- Woodland, CA

Did any Census 2000 urbanized areas fail to qualify as urbanized areas for the 2010 Census?

Three former urbanized areas in the United States are now classified as urban clusters: Danville, Va.-N.C. (49,344), Galveston, Texas (44,022) and Sandusky, Ohio (48,990).

The former Saipan urbanized area, in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, is now classified as the Garapan—Dandan urban cluster, with a population of 46,203.

How many people reside in urban or rural areas for the 2010 Census? What percentage of the U.S. population is urban or rural?

The urban areas of the United States for the 2010 Census contain 249,253,271 people, representing 80.7% of the population, and rural areas contain 59,492,276 people, or 19.3% of the population. In Puerto Rico, 3,493,256 people, or 93.8% of the population, reside in urban areas, and 232,533 people, or 6.2% of the population, reside in rural areas. In the Island Areas, 92.6% of the population, 347,487 people, live in urban areas, and 7.4% of the population, 27,678 people, live in rural areas.

Did the percentage of the U.S. population residing in urban areas increase from 2000 to 2010?

Yes. The urban population of the United States increased from 79% in 2000 to 80.7% in 2010. Interestingly, this growth occurred primarily in urbanized areas, rather in urban clusters. The percentage of the U.S. population living in urbanized areas rose from 68.3% to 71.2% between the two years, while the percentage living in urban clusters dropped from 10.7% to 9.5%.

In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, the percentage of the population living in urban areas decreased between 2000 and 2010, from 94.3% to 93.8%.

Where can I find data for urban and rural areas?

The Urban Area Program at the U.S. Census Bureau maintains a website that contains data for urban and rural areas at www.census.gov.

This site includes lists and maps of the 2010 urban areas, relationship files, and documents explaining the criteria used to define the 2010 urban areas.

Census data tabulated by the 2010 urban areas will be available in the fall of 2012 in the Urban/Rural Update to the Summary File 1.

How do I find out if my city is within an urban or rural area defined by the U.S. Census Bureau?

The U.S. Census Bureau defines urban and rural at the block level. Therefore, a place, such as a city, may be urban (located wholly within an urban area), rural (located entirely outside an urban area), or contain both urban and rural territory (only the densely settled portion of the city is within an urban area). There are a several tools to help determine the urban/rural status of a city.

Relationship files are available for places, counties, county subdivisions, NECTAs, and 2000 urban areas. The relationship file for places has at least one record for every place the Census Bureau recognizes. Search for your city name in the PLNAME column to determine the corresponding urban area from the UANAME column. If your city is not in an urban area, 'Not in a 2010 urban area' will be displayed in the UANAME column. If your city name has more than one record, portions of the city may be in more than one urban area or portions of the city may fall outside of the 2010 urban area boundaries.

Reference maps of each urban area are available. TIGERweb contains urban area boundaries. Finally, if you have access to GIS software, you can also use TIGER/Line shapefiles.

How do I find out if my address is within an urban or rural area according to the U.S. Census Bureau?

Reference maps of each urban area are available on the Census Bureau's website. TIGERweb has also been updated with urban area boundaries. In addition, the American FactFinder Address Search Tool contains urban and rural information.