

Census Information

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WHAT IS THE CENSUS AND WHY IS IT TAKEN?

The first national census was taken in August 1790 and has been conducted every decade since. The Census is mandated by the United States Constitution and the results are used to allocate seats in the House of Representatives, government program funding, and to define legislature districts.

The census has changed considerably since the first questions were asked over 200 years ago. No two censuses have been exactly alike. These changes reflect the changes in our society, economy, and technology. The first census asked for simple head counts of free persons and slaves. For example, the census asked for the name of the "head of the family", number of people in each household and their status (free or slave), and age. As the need for statistics for planning and legislative decision-making increased, so did the number of questions.

The following provides a history the Census from 1790-2000 with each year's questionnaire:

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/pol02-ma.pdf>.

Census data in print format is available on Level 3 of the Thomas Jefferson Library. Some historical Census data is available beginning with 1790 and continuing to Census 2000. Beginning with the 1990 Census and continuing with the 2000 and 2010 Censuses, information is available from the Census Bureau web-site (<http://www.census.gov>) and through the Bureau's search service called American FactFinder (factfinder2.census.gov). This service allows individuals to create tables and reports, as well as browse pre-formatted data.

CENSUS GEOGRAPHY

The census provides data for more types of geographic areas than any other major data source. It provides data on the following familiar governmental units: states, counties, and cities. The Bureau also provides data for geographic areas defined for statistical purposes: MSAs (Metropolitan Statistical Areas), census tracts, and census blocks.

METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS (MSA)

Most MSAs consist of a city of 50,000 or more inhabitants and the county in which it is located. Contiguous counties are included in an MSA if they are socially and economically integrated with the central county. The inclusion of contiguous counties in an MSA is based primarily by census data on commuting patterns. Effective with the 1980 census, a central city (as in the case of St. Louis) can be any size as long as it has an urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants and a total metropolitan area population of at least 100,000.

INCORPORATED PLACES

These concentrations of population, such as cities, have legally prescribed boundaries, powers and functions.

CENSUS TRACTS

Census tracts are statistical areas averaging about 4,000 in population, although they can have between 2,500 and 8,000 residents. Tracts generally have stable boundaries. When census tracts are established, they are designed to be relatively homogenous areas with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions. Tract boundaries are established with the intention of being maintained over a long time so that statistical comparisons can be made from census to census. When sufficient population increases occur, tracts are subdivided. It is easy to recombine the new tracts for comparison with older tracts. Other changes have included combining two or more tracts and minor realignments of tract boundaries to

reflect new or better recognized physical features. Census tracts observe county lines and cover all of the territory within each tracted county. Within a county, tract boundaries may be split by other geographic boundaries. In the case of independent cities, like the City of St. Louis, which is not in a county, the independent city is treated like a county and appears at the end of all of the county tables.

BLOCK GROUPS

These are groups of blocks, as defined below, averaging approximately 1,100 in population. They are the second smallest type of census area.

BLOCKS

These are the smallest type of census area. They average about 70 people and most commonly are small rectangular areas bounded by four streets. Only populated areas were previously assigned block numbers. With the increased need to track population shifts and trends and the advent of computer technology making this easier, the Census Bureau has created block and/or block numbered areas (BNA) for the entire nation beginning with the 1990 census.

For a more complete listing of Census Geography go to: http://www.census.gov/geo/www/2010census/gtc_10.html

USING THE AMERICAN FACTFINDER TO FIND CENSUS DATA

The *American FactFinder* main page is located at: factfinder2.census.gov

There are several ways of accessing the information in the *American FactFinder*. Below are a few examples:

Keyword: To search for information using a keyword, use Quick Start located in the middle of the screen. For example, to find the population of the St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical area for 2010, type “Population” into the box labeled “Topic or Table Name.” From the dropdown menu, choose “DP-1: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010.” In the next box labeled “Geography,” type St. Louis. From the dropdown menu, choose “St. Louis, MO-IL Metro Area.” Next, click on the link to display the table.

Topics: To search by a predefined topic, click the Topics tab on the left. You can search by several topics including People, Housing, Business and Industry, Program, and Dataset. Choose your desired topic and then click on a table displayed in the center of the screen. NOTE: You can also search within the predefined topics by typing a keyword in the box in the left of the screen that says “Search within Results for...”

Geographies: To search using geography, click on the Geographies tab on the left side of the screen. If you wanted to find demographic information about Missouri, type “Missouri” in the search box in the overlay. Next, check the box next to Missouri under Geography Name and click “Add.” After you add Missouri, close the overlay. Then, you will see a list of options to choose for demographic information about the state. Click whichever option you want and a table will display that information. NOTE: You can also search within the results displayed by typing a keyword in the box in the left of the screen that says “Search within Results for...”

Population Groups: This option, also located on the left side of the screen, allows you to search for data by ancestry group, ethnic group, tribe, or race. This search function works the same way as the Geographies tab. Once you click on the tab, type a population group in the search box and follow the same directions as above.

Industry Codes: This overlay allows you to search economic from the Economic Census and the Annual Economic Surveys. To search for data, enter the industry or product name or code in the search box and follow the directions above.

For more detailed tutorials and instructions for using the American FactFinder visit the U.S. Census Bureau at: <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/aff2.html>.