

# ...The Ref Desk

An internal forum for communicating relevant information about new sources, admin issues or challenging questions at the reference desk.

Monday, August 16, 2021

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## 2020 Census data update

On August 12th the United States Census Bureau released [redistricting data from the 2020 Decennial census](#) to the public, alongside videos, visualizations, and other resources.

### About the 2020 Decennial Census redistricting data

These data capture the demographic characteristics of the nation on April 1st, 2020 at the state level and down to census blocks:

- Population totals
- Voting-age population (i.e. age 18 and up)
- Race and Hispanic/Latino origin
- Occupied and vacant housing units
- Population totals in group quarters (i.e. nursing homes, prisons, military barracks, and college dorms).

Population totals from the data are used by states to redraw electoral district lines (or, "redistrict") based on population size, and to determine where funding goes. North Carolina, for example, gained one seat in the US House of Representatives due to a 9.5% increase in the state population from 9.5 million people in 2010 to 10.4 million in 2020.

The redistricting data are the first 2020 Census data to have differential privacy applied using the new (and controversial) [Census Disclosure Avoidance System](#), meaning that false data, referred to as "noise," are intentionally added to the public dataset in an effort to protect the confidentiality of individuals represented by the data. **This generally means that data users (i.e. researchers, especially in the social sciences) who look at block-level data, or other areas with a very small population size, may need to adjust their methods.**

Future releases include easier-to-use versions of the redistricting data published on August 12th, which will be published on the [census.data.gov portal](#) by the end of September, and more detailed population and household statistics.

## Exploring and accessing Census data

The 2020 data has yet to be added to the census.data.gov portal, but is accessible via FTP download from the [US Census Bureau Redistricting Data webpage](#), along with a number of visualizations and web maps; my favorite is the [2020 Census Demographic Data Map Viewer](#), which is an interactive web map for exploring demographic data and statistics at the state, county, and census tract levels.

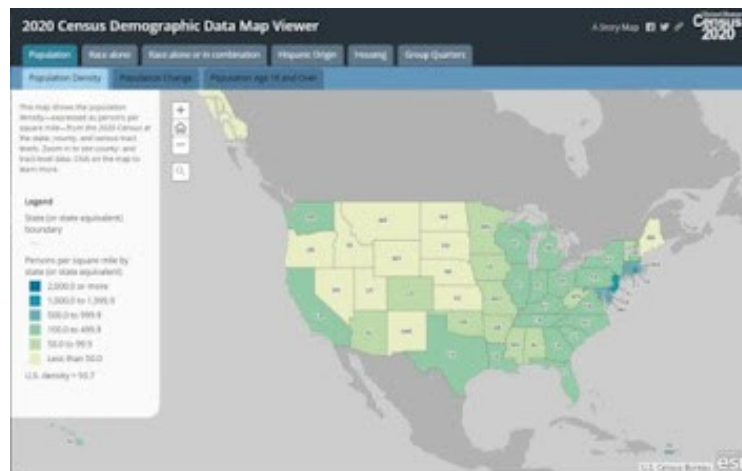


Image from the [2020 Census Demographic Data Map Viewer](#) page

A number of our library databases will eventually have data from the 2020 Decennial census, and currently have data from previous Decennial censuses (typically 2000 & 2010) and/or American Community Survey (ACS) estimates:

- [PolicyMap](#) (more info at: [Is the Census Data Ready Yet? | PolicyMap Mapchats Blog](#))
- [Data Planet](#)
- [SimplyAnalytics](#)
- [Social Explorer](#)

Some of these databases have "estimated current population data," which are estimated using previous Decennial censuses, ACS data, and other data sources; this is different from the Decennial census, which is a more accurate *count* of the entire country's population collected at one point in time, rather than an estimate derived from data collected throughout the year over several years for a sample of the population. Current year estimates are very useful until we get the 2020 Decennial census data, though, and as we pass beyond 2020 into nearly 2022 (oh jeez). And some datasets, like from the ACS (formerly the "long-form" census), have more detailed demographic data that you can't find in the Decennial census, like income, educational attainment, employment, housing, and more. (See [Steve's](#)

previous blog post about Census tools for the ACS!).

American Community Survey (ACS)		Decennial Census
1-year estimates	5-year estimates	10-year (count)
12 months of collected data	60 months of collected data	Point in time data collection
Example: 2015 ACS 1-year estimate	Example: 2010-2014 ACS 5-year estimate	Example: 2010 Decennial Census
Dates collected between: January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2015	Dates collected between: January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2014	Dates collected: April 1, 2010
Data for geographic areas with populations larger than 65,000 (county or metropolitan statistical area in HI)	Data for geographic areas down to census tract	Data for geographic areas down to census block
Smallest sample size	Larger sample size	Counts every person
Highest margin of statistical error	Smaller margin of statistical error than 1-year estimate	Smallest margin of error
Most current data	Less current data	Less current data
BEST USED WHEN	BEST USED WHEN	BEST USED WHEN
Data currency and detailed population characteristics are more important than precision of geographic areas	You want to be more precise about geographic area; not as concerned with currency of data	You can't get the data you want out of the ACS; only interested in general population characteristics
For Hawai'i, you are limited to data at the state, county, or metropolitan geographic area	For Hawai'i, you can examine populations as small as census tracts, ZICTAs, or Hawaiian Homelands	For Hawai'i, you may examine populations down to the census block group or block level

Image from the [University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library HLA Census Workshop 2016 guide](#).

Historical Census data, including the Decennial census, ACS, and others, can also be found in the library databases linked above (some further back than others), as well as:

- in the [United States Census Bureau Data Repository](#) (hosted by ICPSR)
- on the [United States Census Bureau website](#) (For example: [Decennial census data by decade](#))
- in the websites listed on the [UNCG Libraries Finding Data guide](#) under frequently used data sources.

## Sources and further reading

[U.S. Census Bureau Delivers Data for States to Begin Redistricting Efforts | US Census Bureau Press Release](#)

[Protecting Confidentiality | Redistricting Data: What to Expect and When | US Census Bureau Press Release](#)

[How We Complete the Census When Demographic and Housing Characteristics Are Missing | US Census Bureau Blog](#)

[Resources Available to Prepare for the 2020 Census Redistricting Data Release | US Census Bureau Blog](#)

[Everything you need to know about the 2020 US census release | USA Today](#)

Posted by Jo Klein at [10:00 AM](#)



Labels: [census](#), [data](#)