# Population size

The decennial U.S. Census provides a full count of the population every 10 years (e.g., 2010, 2020). However, population numbers in non-census years are **estimates**, which fall into two main categories:

* **Intercensal Estimates:** These estimates use two census counts (e.g., 2010 and 2020) as anchors and interpolate population changes for the years in between. By incorporating both the start and end points of a decade, intercensal estimates adjust for any errors in the previous census and are generally more accurate.
* **Postcensal Estimates:** These estimates start with the most recent census count (e.g., 2020) and project population changes forward based on demographic data like births, deaths, and migration. Because postcensal estimates lack a second census count for correction, they tend to be less accurate over time as the projection extends farther from the anchor year.

Both types of estimates rely on the **Cohort-Component Method**, which updates the base population by accounting for:

* **Births** and **Deaths**: Data collected from state and local vital statistics offices.
* **Migration**: Estimates of both domestic and international migration derived from administrative records (e.g., IRS, Medicare, and Department of Homeland Security data) and surveys like the American Community Survey (ACS).

In summary, intercensal estimates provide more reliable population figures due to their ability to reconcile errors with two census anchors. Postcensal estimates, while still useful for planning and decision-making, are less precise, especially in years further from the last census.

**CALIBRATION ISSUE:**The challenge we're facing is that the Census Bureau has not yet published the 2010-2020 **intercensal estimates**. The Census Bureau provides the following update on its guidance page:

“*The 2010-2020 Intercensal Estimates of Population by Demographic Characteristics are tentatively scheduled to be released in Fall 2025 (specific timeline for release forthcoming). The Vintage 2020 estimates were modified to account for differences between these estimates and the results of the 2020 Census, resulting in a consistent time series from the 2010 Census to the 2020 Census*.”

This statement explains why there is a noticeable jump in population counts between 2019 and 2020, reflecting adjustments made to align the Vintage 2020 estimates with the results of the 2020 Census. We had hoped the intercensal estimates would be available this year to inform our final calibration. However, with their release now delayed until at least 2025, we’ll need to address the associated uncertainties in a more systematic and principled way.