

Geographic Area Reference

This information is taken directly from the 2000 Census information published by the Census Bureau www.census.gov.

Block Group

A statistical subdivision of a census tract (or, prior to Census 2000, a block numbering area), consisting of a cluster of census blocks having the same first digit of their identifying numbers within that tract. For example, for Census 2000, BG 3 within a census tract includes all blocks numbered from 3000 to 3999. (A few BGs consist of a single block.) BGs generally contain between 300 and 3,000 people, with an optimum size of 1,500 people. The BG is the lowest-level geographic entity for which the U.S. Census Bureau tabulates sample data from a decennial census. See tribal block group.

Block

An area bounded on all sides by visible and/or invisible features shown on a map prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau. A block is the smallest geographic entity for which the Census Bureau tabulates decennial census data. See block boundary, block number. For collecting information for Census 2000, each census block was identified uniquely within a county (or statistically equivalent entity) by a 4- or 5-digit number, which could be followed by an alphabetic suffix. All the collection blocks within a county had either four or five digits. For tabulating data for Census 2000, each census block is identified uniquely within a census tract by a 4-digit number. A 1990 census block number had three digits, with a potential alphabetic suffix.

County Subdivision: Census County Division (CCD)

A statistical subdivision of a county, delineated by the U.S. Census Bureau in cooperation with state and local government officials for data presentation purposes. The Census Bureau has established CCDs in 21 states that do not have minor civil divisions suitable for data presentation; that is, minor civil divisions have not been legally established, do not have governmental or administrative purposes, have boundaries that are ambiguous or change frequently, and/or generally are not well known to the public.

Place: Census Designated Place (CDP)

A geographic entity that serves as the statistical counterpart of an incorporated place for the purpose of presenting census data for an area with a concentration of population, housing, and commercial structures that is identifiable by name, but is not within an incorporated place. CDPs usually are delineated in cooperation with state, Puerto Rico, Island Area, local, and tribal officials based on U.S. Census Bureau guidelines. For Census 2000, for the first time, CDPs did not need to meet a minimum population threshold to qualify for tabulation of census data. See place.

Place: City

A type of incorporated place in all states and the District of Columbia. In agreement with the state of Hawaii, the U.S. Census Bureau does not recognize the city of Honolulu for presentation of census data. In Virginia, all cities are not part of any county, and so the Census Bureau treats them as equivalent to a county for data presentation purposes, as well as treating them as places; there also is one such independent city in each of three states: Maryland, Missouri, and Nevada. In 23 states and the District of Columbia, some or all cities are not part of any minor civil division, in which case the Census Bureau also treats these entities as county subdivisions for data presentation purposes.

Place: Incorporated Place

A type of governmental unit, incorporated under state law as a city, town (except in New England, New York, and Wisconsin), borough (except in Alaska and New York), or village, generally to provide a wide array of specific governmental services for a concentration of people within legally prescribed boundaries. New for Census 2000 are city and borough and municipality, which serve as both place- and county-level entities in Alaska. A few incorporated places do not have a legal description. See consolidated city, independent city, place.

Place: Independent City

An incorporated place that is independent of i.e., not part of any county. All incorporated places classified as cities in Virginia are independent cities, as are Baltimore, Maryland; St. Louis, Missouri; and Carson City, Nevada. The U.S. Census Bureau treats an independent city as equivalent to a county and county subdivision and as an incorporated place for data presentation purposes.

Census Tract

A small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county or statistically equivalent entity, delineated for data presentation purposes by a local group of census data users or the geographic staff of a regional census center in accordance with U.S. Census Bureau guidelines. Designed to be relatively homogeneous units with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions at the time they are established, census tracts generally contain between 1,000 and 8,000 people, with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Census tract boundaries are delineated with the intention of being stable over many decades, so they generally follow relatively permanent visible features. However, they may follow governmental unit boundaries and other invisible features in some instances; the boundary of a state or county is always a census tract boundary. When data are provided for American Indian entities, the boundary of a federally recognized American Indian reservation and off-reservation trust land is always the boundary of a tribal census tract. See block numbering area, tribal census tract.

Consolidated City

The U.S. Census Bureau refers to a governmental unit for which the functions of an incorporated place and its county or minor civil division have merged as a consolidated government. If one or more other incorporated places continue to function as separate governmental units within a consolidated government, the Census Bureau refers to the primary incorporated place as a consolidated city.

Consolidated Metro Area (CA)

Refer to the section below "About Metropolitan and Mircopolitan Statistical Areas"

County

The primary legal division of every state except Alaska and Louisiana. A number of geographic entities are not legally designated as a county, but are recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau as equivalent to a county for data presentation purposes. These include the boroughs, city and boroughs, municipality, and census areas in Alaska; parishes in Louisiana; and cities that are independent of any county in Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, and Virginia. They also include the municipios in Puerto Rico, districts and islands in American Samoa, municipalities in the Northern Mariana Islands, and islands in the Virgin Islands of the United States. Because they contain no primary legal divisions, the Census Bureau treats the District of Columbia and Guam each as equivalent to a county (as well as equivalent to a state) for data presentation purposes. (A county is a minor civil division in American Samoa.)

County Subdivision

The primary legal or statistical division of a county or statistically equivalent entity.

Metro Statistical Area (MA)

Refer to the section below "About Metropolitan and Mircopolitan Statistical Areas"

County Subdivision: (CS)

The primary governmental or administrative division of a county or statistically equivalent entity in many states and statistically equivalent entities. The U.S. Census Bureau recognizes MCDs in 28 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. In 20 states and American Samoa, all or many MCDs are active general-purpose governmental units. See county subdivision, governmental unit, legal entity.

New England City/Town area (NC)

Refer to the section below "About Metropolitan and Mircopolitan Statistical Areas"

Place

A concentration of population either legally bounded as an incorporated place, or delineated for statistical purposes as a census designated place (in Puerto Rico, a comunidad or zona urbana). See census designated place, consolidated city, incorporated place, independent city.

State

A primary governmental division of the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau treats the District of Columbia as the equivalent of a state for data presentation purposes. It also treats a number of entities that are not legal divisions of the United States as the equivalent of states for data presentation purposes (see Island Areas).

United States

The 50 states and the District of Columbia.

About Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas

The United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas according to published standards that are applied to Census Bureau data. The general concept of a metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area is that of a core area containing a substantial population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Currently defined metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas are based on application of 2000 standards [[PDF](#) or <http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/00-32997.pdf> | [Plain text](#) or <http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/00-32997.txt>] (which appeared in the *Federal Register* on December 27, 2000) to 2000 decennial census data. Current metropolitan and micropolitan statistical area definitions were announced by OMB effective June 6, 2003.

Standard definitions of metropolitan areas were first issued in 1949 by the then Bureau of the Budget (predecessor of OMB), under the designation "standard metropolitan area" (SMA). The term was changed to "standard metropolitan statistical area" (SMSA) in 1959, and to "metropolitan statistical area" (MSA) in 1983. The term "metropolitan area" (MA) was adopted in 1990 and referred collectively to metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), consolidated metropolitan statistical areas (CMSAs), and primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs). The term "core based statistical area" (CBSA) became effective in 2000 and refers collectively to metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas.

OMB has been responsible for the official metropolitan areas since they were first defined, except for the period 1977 to 1981, when they were the responsibility of the Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards, Department of Commerce. The standards for defining metropolitan areas were modified in 1958, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas

The 2000 standards provide that each CBSA must contain at least one urban area of 10,000 or more population. Each metropolitan statistical area must have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants. Each micropolitan statistical area must have at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 population.

Under the standards, the county (or counties) in which at least 50 percent of the population resides within urban areas of 10,000 or more population, or that contain at least 5,000 people residing within a single urban area of 10,000 or more population, is identified as a "central county" (counties). Additional "outlying counties" are included in the CBSA if they meet specified requirements of commuting to or from the central counties. Counties or equivalent entities form the geographic "building blocks" for metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

If specified criteria are met, a metropolitan statistical area containing a single core with a population of 2.5 million or more may be subdivided to form smaller groupings of counties referred to as "metropolitan divisions."

As of June 6, 2000, there are 362 metropolitan statistical areas and 560 micropolitan statistical areas in the United States. In addition, there are 8 metropolitan statistical areas and 5 micropolitan statistical areas in Puerto Rico.

Principal Cities and Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area Titles

The largest city in each metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area is designated a "principal city." Additional cities qualify if specified requirements are met concerning population size and employment. The title of each metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area consists of the names of up to three of its principal cities and the name of each state into which the metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area extends. Titles of metropolitan divisions also typically are based on principal city names but in certain cases consist of county names.

Defining New England City and Town Areas

In view of the importance of cities and town in New England, the 2000 standards also provide for a set of geographic areas that are defined using cities and towns in the six New England states. The New England city and town areas (NECTAs) are defined using the same criteria as metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas and are identified as either metropolitan or micropolitan, based, respectively, on the presence of either an urbanized area of 50,000 or more population or an urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 population. If the specified criteria are met, a NECTA containing a single core with a population of at least 2.5 million may be subdivided to form smaller groupings of cities and towns referred to as New England city and town area divisions.

Changes in Definitions over Time

Changes in the definitions of these statistical areas since the 1950 census have consisted chiefly of:

- the recognition of new areas as they reached the minimum required city or urbanized area population, and
- the addition of counties (or cities and towns in New England) to existing areas as new decennial census data showed them to qualify.

In some instances, formerly separate areas have been merged, components of an area have been transferred from one area to another, or components have been dropped from an area. The large majority of changes have taken place on the basis of decennial census data. However, Census Bureau data serve as the basis for intercensal updates in specified circumstances.

Because of these historical changes in geographic definitions, users must be cautious in comparing data for these statistical areas from different dates. For some purposes, comparisons of data for areas as defined at given dates may be appropriate; for other purposes, it may be preferable to maintain consistent area definitions. Historical metropolitan area definitions are available for 1999, 1993, 1990, 1983, 1981, 1973, 1970, 1963, 1960, and 1950.

For more information, contact the Population Distribution Branch at (301) 763-2419.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division,
Population Distribution Branch*