

DataFest 2009: Finding Answers with Census Data

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The U.S. Census Bureau serves as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy. Census data provides statistical snapshots of the country, states, and localities.

The Bureau provides population estimates; economic, social, demographic, and housing information; business and governmental survey results; and more. This data can be viewed as tables or maps.

Major Censuses and Surveys

Decennial Census -- Population and housing statistics for the entire country down to census blocks. Conducted every 10 years in the years ending in "0." Determines number of U.S. House seats for each state. Also used to draw congressional and state legislative district boundaries, to allocate federal and state funds, to formulate public policy, and to assist with planning and decision-making in the private sector.

The American Community Survey (ACS) - Updates population and housing statistics every year. Covers age, race, income, commute time to work, home value, veteran status, and other important data. Surveys about three million housing unit addresses annually.

Gives one-year estimates for geographic areas with a population of 65,000 or more, including 800 counties and 500 metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Three-year estimates: population of 20,000 or more (about 1,800 counties and 900 statistical areas); five-year estimates for areas with a population less than 20,000.

Other important Censuses and surveys include: **Economic Census, Population Estimates, Annual Survey of Manufacturers, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Census of Governments, Census of Agriculture, and Surveys of Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises.**

American FactFinder

American FactFinder (<http://factfinder.census.gov>) provides easy access to the decennial census, American Community Survey, economic censuses, and population estimates.

FactFinder includes (for various datasets):

Quick Tables (QT) have already been set up by the Census Bureau with basic, frequently requested information for a single geographic area.

Detailed Tables (DT) also have already set up but contain the most detailed data on all topics and geographic areas from the decennial censuses and the American Community Survey for a single geographic area.

Custom Tables (CT) are created by the user, who decides which variables and which geographic areas to include in the table.

Geographic Comparison Tables (GCT) allow users to compare data across geographic areas for a single topic in the same table (e.g., all counties in a state).

Thematic maps show the geographic patterns in statistical data.

Decennial Census Short vs. Long Forms

Short Form

Contains just 7 questions: name, household relationship, sex, age, Hispanic or Latino origin, race, tenure (whether your home is owned or rented). Since these 7 questions are also asked on the long form, the results are called **100-percent data or characteristics**.

The seven questions cover: number of occupants in the house, home ownership, sex, age, Spanish/Hispanic/Latino background, race, and name and phone number (which is not made available).

Long Form

32 questions (the 7 short-form questions and 25 more). Since only one in six housing units and people in group quarters received a long form, the results are called **sample data or characteristics**.

Decennial Census Summary Files

Decennial Census data is available through four summary files based on which form the questions were on and how detailed the racial and Hispanic breakdown is.

Summary File 1 Only 7 short-form questions 5 major race groups and combinations lowest level: Census block	Summary File 2*** Only 7 short-form questions 336 more-detailed race and Hispanic combinations lowest level: Census tract
Summary File 3 Long-form only questions 5 major race groups and combinations lowest level: Census block group	Summary File 4*** Long-form only questions 336 more-detailed race and Hispanic combinations lowest level: Census block group

***For Summary Files 2 and 4 only, must have more than 100 cases of a specific population group in a specific area.

- 100 % Data – short form - SF1 & SF2**
- Sample (1 in 6) Data – long form - SF3 & SF4**
- 5 major races breakdown – SF1 & SF3**
- More detailed race breakdown – SF2 & SF4**

For both data and maps, sometimes your choices get caught in the database. Click on the “Data Sets” breadcrumb. Then click on “Clear all selections.” Occasionally, you will have to close the window completely and start over to search for new data or a new map.

Census Geography

The Census collects data for individuals. The smallest geographic area for which data is available is a Census Block. Many blocks correspond to individual city blocks bounded by streets, but blocks - especially in rural areas - may include many square miles and may have some boundaries that are not streets. The Census Bureau then aggregates data into Census Block Groups and Census Tracts.

A Census tract is the basic geographic area below the county level. Characteristics of a tract:

- Small, relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county
- Designed to be relatively homogeneous units with respect to population characteristics, economic status, and living conditions

- Average about 4,000 inhabitants.
- Census tract boundaries normally follow visible features, but may follow governmental unit boundaries and other non-visible features in some instances. Census tracts do not cross county boundaries.

The Census then aggregates information at the country, states, national levels. Other aggregated geographies include zip codes and, for some data, school and voting districts.

For more information about Census **geography**, see *Reference Resources for Understanding Census Bureau Geography* (<http://www.census.gov/geo/www/reference.html>)

For more information about Census **terms**, see *Glossary* (<http://www.census.gov/main/www/glossary.html>)

Finding Decennial Census Data

Go to the Census home page (census.gov - <http://www.census.gov/>). On the left-hand column, click on **American Factfinder**.

On the left-hand column of the American Factfinder page, choose “Data Sets” and then “Decennial Census.” If you just found data in a search you’ve just done, click on “clear all selections” in the upper right.

At the Decennial Census page, click on the radio button for your Summary File number. Unless you want a very detailed breakdown by race, choose either SF1 for data for short-form questions or SF3 for data for other questions.

If you choose to see a “Data Profile,” after you specify which geographic area you want you will get five summary fact sheets - narrative, demographic, economic, social and housing – that will summarize the basic data for that area.

Or you may choose either “Detailed Tables” (easier but fewer options) or “Custom Table” (harder but more options).

At the “Select Geography” page, choose your geographic type (for example, county) and the specific geographic areas in that type and click “add.”

If you want to select more than one geographic type (say you want to compare the U.S., Tennessee, and Davidson County), repeat the previous step for the other geographic types (for example, nation and then state).

After you have added all of the geographic areas that you want to see, click on “next.”

At the “Select Tables” page, “choose a table selection method.” For the “by subject” and “by keyword” options, you have to click on “search” after you select your topic.

At the “Select Tables” page, select one or more tables and click “add.”

Click on “Show Result.” Viola!

American Community Survey

Updates population and housing statistics every year. Covers age, race, income, commute time to work, home value, veteran status, and other important data. Surveys about three million housing unit addresses annually.

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On the left-hand column of the American Factfinder page, choose “Data Sets” and then “American Community Survey.” If you just found data in a search you’ve just done, click on “clear all selections” in the upper right.

At the American Community Survey page, click on the radio button for which estimate you want. Choose one-year estimates if the geographic area is large enough.

If you choose to see a “Data Profile,” after you specify which geographic area you want you will get five summary fact sheets - narrative, demographic, economic, social and housing – that will summarize the basic data for that area.

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Address Search

Enter your street address and ZIP code at the lower left corner of the American Factfinder home page. Be sure to include whether the address is a street, road, drive, etc.

Example: 460 Ninth Avenue, Smyrna, Tennessee 37167-2010

In the Geographies box below the address , select the Census Tract (or other geographic area)

Then click on [OK] to get demographic, social, economic, or housing data, or click on [Map It] to print a map of the geographic area you chose.

Additional Address Information:

Real Estate Assessment Data – Tennessee. Comptroller of the Treasury (<http://www.assessment.state.tn.us/>) Information for assessing the value of real estate for property tax purposes. Data on this site exists for 88 of Tennessee's 95 counties. Direct links are provided at for Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Rutherford, Shelby and Williamson.

Example (Nashville):

Metro Maps/Online Property Maps - Nashville.gov (<http://www3.nashville.org/property/site/main.htm>)

Information on owners, selling prices, description and dimensions of parcel, appraisal, census tract, council district, and other information.

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