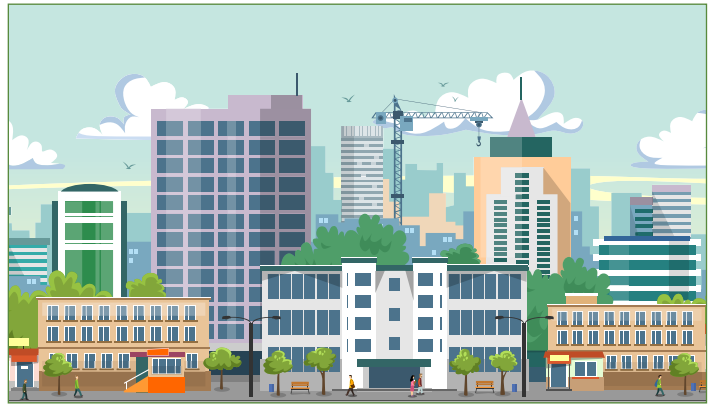


2020 Census Urban-Rural Classification Fact Sheet



The U.S. Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is a delineation of geographic areas, identifying individual urban areas of the nation. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory and encompass residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. Urban areas are defined primarily based on housing unit density measured at the census block level. The Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial census by applying specified criteria to decennial census and other data that provides an important baseline for analysis of the distribution and characteristics of urban and rural populations and economic activity.

Rural encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.

Following the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau defined two types of urban areas:

- Urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more.
- Urban clusters with at least 2,500 people but fewer than 50,000.

Following the 2020 Census, there were several key changes to the Census Bureau's urban area concept and criteria that included:

- An increase in the minimum population threshold to qualify as urban, from 2,500

to 5,000, and the addition of a minimum housing unit threshold of 2,000 as an alternative to qualification based on population size.

- The use of housing unit density instead of population density.
- A reduction in the jump distance from 2.5 miles to 1.5 miles that did not include the low-density census blocks making up the intervening jump corridor. This results in noncontiguous urban areas, unlike in previous decades.

Why Does the Census Bureau Delineate Urban Areas?

The Census Bureau delineates urban areas for statistical purposes—tabulating and presenting data for the urban and rural population, housing, and territory within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. The Census Bureau's urban-rural classification provides an important baseline for analyzing changes in the distribution and characteristics of urban and rural populations and supports the Office of Management and Budget's delineation of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Urban areas of 50,000 or more people form the urban cores of metropolitan statistical areas. Urban areas of at least 10,000 people and less than 50,000 people form the urban cores of micropolitan statistical areas.

Why Are These Changes Made Every 10 Years Following the Decennial Census?

Periodic review of criteria and measures assures their continued relevance for analysis, planning, and decision-making. Reclassification also ensures urban-rural classification keeps pace with changes in settlement patterns, development, and with interpreting the extent of urbanization.

Is There an Appeals Process If I Disagree With the Location of an Urban Area Boundary?

The Census Bureau does not have an appeals process. The Census Bureau applies published criteria with statistical and other publicly available data to identify a nationally consistent set of urban areas, defined as objectively as possible. Prior to each decennial census, the Census Bureau publishes proposed criteria in the *Federal Register* for delineating urban areas for public review and comment. The final criteria adopted for application with decennial census and other data to delineate urban areas reflects the comments received through the *Federal Register* comment process.

How Will My Area's Classification Affect My Funding?

Program eligibility and funding formulas are determined by the federal and state agencies that distribute funds. For information about how the new urban and rural definitions may affect your area's funding, contact the respective agencies.

Urban and Rural References

- [Urban Area Criteria in *Federal Register* Notices](#)
- [Brief: "Defining Rural at the United States Census Bureau"](#)
- [County Classification Lookup Table](#)
- [Rural America: How Does the U.S. Census Bureau Define "Rural?" Interactive Story Map](#)
- [A Century of Delineating a Changing Landscape: The Census Bureau's Urban and Rural Classification, 1910 to 2010](#)