

U.S. Census Bureau News

U.S. Department of Commerce • Washington, D.C. 20233

Profile America
Facts for
Features

CB14-FF.08
REVISED
May 13, 2014

Census Bureau Celebrates 20 Years on the Web

In 1994, the U.S. Census Bureau became one of the first government agencies to be on the World Wide Web. The Census Bureau had long been a pioneer in using technology to improve its data collection and tabulation processes, inventing the first electrical tabulating machines for the 1890 Census and using the UNIVAC computer for the 1950 Census. The Census Bureau developed the Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing or “TIGER” geographic reference files in the 1980s, thereby automating mapping for the entire country. Today, the Census Bureau is making statistics easier to access by redesigning its website and offering new data tools.

262,035,634

The U.S population in March 1994. Originally, the information published on the website only contained 1990 Census results. Today, the Census Bureau’s redesigned website provides billions of statistics from not only the once-a-decade census but also from annual surveys, such as the American Community Survey.

Source: 1994 Population Estimates

<<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/national/files/US-EST90INT-07-1994.csv>>

Back in 1994 ...

March 1994

The date the Census Bureau went live with its website. The site debuted around the five-year anniversary of the World Wide Web.

#1

The most popular feature on census.gov since 1994 is the population clock. The “pop clock” estimates the world and U.S. population every second of the day. To this day, the population clock continues to be one of the most popular areas of census.gov, with more than **23,000** page views daily.

12,000

The number of pages visitors viewed per day on census.gov in 1994. Today, there are more than 650,000 page views per day, a **5,417 percent** increase from 20 years ago.

3

The number of URLs visitors could use to get to census.gov in 1994. The URLs included the World Wide Web (www.census.gov), Gopher (<gopher://gopher.census.gov>) and FTP (<ftp://ftp.census.gov>).

17,000

The number of paper data inquiries by mail or fax that were requested between January and November 1993.

The Evolution of Accessing Statistics

“For much of the past two centuries, only the most data-savvy researchers and librarians could access — let alone digest — statistics collected by the Census Bureau, but all of that has changed during the past decade,” then-Commerce Secretary Don Evans said in a [news release](#) 10 years ago highlighting the 10-year anniversary of census.gov.

56

The number of pages used to distribute the 1790 census results, the first Census conducted for the United States.

1940

The first year cities with a population of more than 50,000 had access to block-level census data. In 1960, some cities with a population of less than 50,000 had access to block data population. This information was housed in published books accessible at libraries and town halls.

1970

The year the Census Bureau started using computer tape files called “Counts” to release the census results. Counts one, two and three contained complete count data for block groups/enumeration districts, census tracts and minor civil/census county divisions, and blocks, respectively. The fourth through sixth Counts provided sample data for geographic areas of varying population size.

1985

The year the Census Bureau became the first government agency to make information available on CD-ROM, a new and relatively untested medium. Six years later, detailed census data, which for several decades had been available only to organizations with large mainframe computers, became accessible to anyone with a personal computer.

2000

The first year the Internet became the principal dissemination medium for a census. All four of the detailed data files, now called summary files, were available to be downloaded as soon as they were released. Individual tables could be viewed through the Census Bureau’s online database, known as American FactFinder. Additionally, these files were available for purchase on CD-ROM and DVD.

996

The number of datasets available in primary data tools, like American FactFinder and Data Ferret.

8

The number of tools created in 2012 to access Census Bureau statistics. The most notable were the open application programming interface (API) and the Census Bureau’s first mobile app, America’s Economy. Two more data tools were added in 2013, Census Explorer and dwellr.

5,400

The number of developers who have requested a key to the API since its launch in 2012. These developers have created Web and mobile apps like the Sunlight Foundation's Sitegeist.

2009

The year the Census Bureau joined a social media site, starting with [YouTube](#) (January 2009). Robert Groves became the first Census Bureau director to [blog](#) with his first post on Oct. 22, 2009. The Census Bureau joined [Facebook](#) in late 2009 and [Twitter](#) in early 2010.

A Quick Look at the Nation's Computer and Internet Use

53.1%

The percent of the 65-and-older population in 2012 that used the Internet, with 14.5 percent of this group using a smartphone. Of those ages 25 to 34, 88.1 percent used the Internet and 70.6 percent used a smartphone.

Source: Current Population Survey, Select Years

<https://www.census.gov/hhes/computer/files/2012/Computer_Use_Infographic_FINAL.pdf>

18.0%

The percent of households that had Internet at home in 1997. In 2012, 74.8 percent of households had Internet at home.

Source: Current Population Survey, Select Years

<<http://www.census.gov/hhes/computer/files/2012/table4.xls>>

22.9%

The percent of households that had a computer at home in 1993. In 2012, 78.9 percent of households had a computer.

Source: Current Population Survey, Select Years

<<http://www.census.gov/hhes/computer/files/2012/table4.xls>>