Introduction to Census Geographies
Fundamentals of Census Geographies
Census Geographic Entity Types

Legal/Administrative Areas

• Existence and boundaries officially prescribed through legal means to manage various programs
• Census Bureau generally accepts boundaries provided by official local entities

Statistical Entities

• Created based on the programmatic and analytical needs of data users for situations when geographic coverage of legal entities is inadequate
• Census Bureau cooperates with local entities to establish standards and boundaries
## Census Geographic Entities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regions</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divisions</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>States and Equivalent</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Areas</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanized Areas</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties and Equivalent</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Subdivisions and Places</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>60,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tracts</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>62,276</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block Groups</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blocks</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>7,017,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special-Purpose Entities</td>
<td>Legal/Administrative</td>
<td>404,583</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unique Geographic Entity Codes

Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS)

- Issued by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

American National Standards Institute Codes (ANSI)

- Issued by the InterNational Committee for Information Technology Standards (INCITS)
Census Geographic Entities

Nation

Regions

Divisions

States

Counties

Census Tracts

Block Groups

Blocks

Legal

Statistical
Regions and Divisions

Census Regions and Divisions of the United States

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States and Equivalents

• Assigned a unique 2-digit code in alphabetical order
  (Texas = 48)

Statistical Equivalent Entities

• District of Columbia
• Puerto Rico
• American Samoa
• Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
• Guam
• U.S. Virgin Islands
Counties and Equivalents

• Assigned a unique 3-digit code in alphabetical order within each state
  (Harris County = 201)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Entity</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>48 states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parishes</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities, Boroughs, Municipalities, and Census Areas</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated Places</td>
<td>MD, MO, NV, VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia and Guam</td>
<td>No subdivisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipios</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands and Districts</td>
<td>American Samoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>Northern Marianas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands</td>
<td>U.S. Virgin Islands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Counties in Texas
Census Tracts
Census Tracts

- Small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county
- Uniquely numbered in each county with a 6-digit numeric code XXXX.XX

Target Population

- Optimum population = 4,000
- Minimum population = 1,200
- Maximum population = 8,000
Census Tracts in Texas
Census Tracts Inside the Loop
Updating Census Tracts

- Updated decennially through the Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP)
- Census tracts > 8,000 are split
- Census tracts < 1,200 are merged
- Small boundary revisions allowed as long as a large amount of the population in the tracts is not affected.
- All changes documented in Census Tract Relationship Files so data can be compared between decades.
1980 Census Tracts
1990 Census Tracts
2000 Census Tracts
Montrose Census Tracts
Census Block Groups
Census Block Groups

- Statistical subdivisions of a census tract
- Uniquely numbered 0-9 in each census tract

**Target Population**

- Optimum population = 1,500
- Minimum population = 600
- Maximum population = 3,000
Montrose Census Block Groups
Census Blocks
Census Blocks

- Smallest statistical subdivision

- Bounded by visible features and non-visible boundaries

- Uniquely numbered 0000-9999 in each census tract

- No population requirements
Montrose Census Blocks
Example FIPS Codes

GEOID 482014106001018

- State 48 = Texas
- County 201 = Harris
- Census Tract 4106.00
- Block Group 1
- Block 1018
Nation Subdivisions
Census Geographic Entities

- Nation
- Regions
- Divisions
  - States
  - Counties
  - Census Tracts
    - Block Groups
      - Blocks

Urban Areas
Core-Based Statistical Areas
Urban Areas (UAs)

**Urbanized Areas (UAs)**
- Densely developed territory with 50,000 people or more

**Urban Clusters**
- Densely developed territory with 2,500 to 50,000 people

*Titles may contain up to 3 place names*
## Core Based Statistical Areas

### 2010 Geographic Entities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 Geographic Entities</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Statistical Areas</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micropolitan Statistical Areas</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Statistical Area (CSAs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Division</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Historic Geographic Entities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Geographic Entities</th>
<th>Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (CMSAs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs)

**Metropolitan Statistical Area**
- Contains at least one UA and > 50,000 people

**Micropolitan Statistical Area**
- Contains at least one UC and > 10,000 people
Core-Based Statistical Areas
Combined Statistical Areas (CSAs)

- Two or more adjacent CBSAs with substantial employment interchange
Combined Statistical Areas
Metropolitan Divisions

- Subdivisions of metropolitan statistical areas
- Population greater than 2.5 million
Metropolitan Divisions
State Subdivisions
Census Geographic Entities

- Nation
- Regions
- Divisions
- States
- Counties
- Census Tracts
- Block Groups
- Blocks
- Urban Areas
- Core-Based Statistical Areas

Places

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Incorporated Places

• Legally bounded entities established to provide governmental functions for a concentration of people
• Usually city, town, village, or borough

Census Designated Places (CDPs)

• Statistical entities derived by the Census Bureau
• Not legal boundaries
• Usually coincide with visible feature or adjacent legal boundaries
Places
County Subdivisions
Census Geographic Entities

- Nation
- Urban Areas
- Regions
- Core-Based Statistical Areas
- Divisions
- Counties
- Census Tracts
- Block Groups
- Blocks
- Places
- County Subdivision

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County Subdivisions

Minor Civil Divisions (MCDs)
- Legally bounded entities
- In 29 states
- May have a formal government with elected officials

Census County Divisions (CCDs)
- Statistical entities derived by the Census Bureau
- Not legal boundaries
County Subdivision Classification

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County Subdivisions in Harris County
Special-Purpose Entities
## Special-Purpose Entities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Area</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Districts</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Districts (VTDs)</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>148,872</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Districts</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>15,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
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<td>ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs)</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>40,000</td>
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