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Census Bureau Geography and Maps Frequently Asked Questions

Please take a few moments to review this page before sending questions concerning the Gazetteer application, Maps, ZIP Codes® and other U.S. Census Bureau geography. You will find the answers to most of the questions we receive here, or we provide links or suggestions of other places to look.



Information about Census 2000 data is located at [Your Gateway to Census 2000](#)

Select a topic from the menu below or scroll down to view answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

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• Cemeteries

We do not maintain a complete list of cemeteries, nor do we have a list of names of those buried in cemeteries. Our database contains a few cemeteries that were used as landmarks for our field interviewers, but we have no need to maintain a complete list. [Top of page](#)

• Census Tract/Block Numbering Areas

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130605073702/http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/tigermap.html#ZIP>

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While you can turn on **Census Tract/Block Numbering Area boundaries**, the Census Tract/Block Numbering Area **numbers are not available on the map**. Street names are not shown. If one wants to identify Tracts or Block Numbering Areas for address coding or other purposes there are a variety of resources available. Try the Reference Map feature of the [American FactFinder](#). Here is a [list of resources](#) for determining an address's census tract number. Link to [Empowerment Zone Resource](#) information. [Top of page](#)

- **City Data and Maps**

We do not have a list of cities of the world with their locations. However, for information about **U.S. Metropolitan Areas**, definitions and the component parts of each try the link to the [Metropolitan Areas](#) page. For information on the **land area** of various levels of geography try this [link](#). For a **ranking** of cities by land area try this [link](#). For leads on other possible sites for foreign city information start at this URL: <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/gis-gateway.html>. Another possibility is using one of the WWW search engines such as Yahoo or Alta Vista using the term "city". [Top of page](#)

- **Driving Directions**

We do not give driving directions between points nor do we have bus or subway maps. However, there are a number of commercial sites that do. Try looking for them with one of the Web search engines using the key word "maps". [Top of page](#)

- **Elevation Data**

Our data base **does not contain topographic, elevation or terrain information** so we can't display contours. We do not need this information for our work and, even though it might be useful to others, we would not be permitted to expend the resources to add it. Try this link to the [U.S. Geological Survey](#) for information on Digital Elevation Models (DEM). [Top of page](#)

- **Genealogy**

We cannot look up **genealogical information** or family histories. The only information we have about this subject is on our [Genealogy page](#). **We cannot help you find relatives or where individual people live now or where they lived in the past.** [Top of page](#)

- **Glossary**

See this page for a [Glossary](#) of Census 2000 Geographic terms. For detailed information on Census Bureau geographic terms and concepts see the [Geographic Areas Reference Manual](#). [Top of page](#)

- **Maps of other countries**

We don't have **maps of other countries**. There is some population data about other countries in the [Population Area](#) pages. Another possible source of **population data, current and historical**, is the [CIESIN](#) project, but they are not affiliated with the Census Bureau. [Top of page](#)

- **Other Maps and Types of Information: Contour, general purpose, State and County, etc.**

We do not have general purpose city, county or state maps. If you are looking for **general purpose maps** for use as graphic images, try some of the commercial clip art collections (some have both vector and raster images) or graphics design packages. Some of the word processing software suites also have them. A good source for general purpose **paper and digital maps** is the [U.S. Geological Survey](#). They are also the source of geological and land use maps. Also, try your state/local Department of Transportation. For aeronautical and nautical charts try the [National Ocean Service](#).

We do not have historical census maps available online. We do have paper copies of tract maps dating from the 1960 Census available for purchase from our Jeffersonville, Indiana office at 812-288-3402.

The [National Archives and Records Center](#) also has Census maps dating back to 1880. Although Federal census schedules date from 1790, the preparation of Enumeration District maps did not occur until 1880. These records, prepared on a decennial basis, include maps of counties, cities, towns, and unincorporated settlements, showing boundaries of the districts covered by the Census-takers (enumerators).

We do not have maps showing **historical county boundaries**. We understand that there are sites on the Web with this information but we don't know how accurate their information is.

We do have some information on the [land area](#) of various geographic areas. These data are based on the 1990 Census boundaries for these areas. Note that some counties and places have had changes in boundaries since 1990. We do not plan to update these data until we process the results of the Census 2000. [Top of page](#)

- **Population and Economic Statistics**

If you want demographic or other types of data follow these links for the latest [population](#) or [housing](#) statistics for various levels of geography (state, metropolitan area, county, tract, etc.). Another area with **population and economic data** at the state and county level is [State and County QuickFacts](#). These links should answer most questions, if not, go to the Census Bureau's [Subjects A - Z](#) page. [Top of page](#)

- **Property Line or Plat Maps**

We do not have maps that show **property lines** or that show ownership of property. Your local county/city assessment office is the place to look. [Top of page](#)

- **Special Research Requests**

We are **not funded to do free research or compile sets of statistics** for people doing papers or working on government contracts. We have the resources to put up much, but not all, of the Census Bureau's data on the Internet (some free and some for a fee). Most of it can be found by following the links from the [Subjects A-Z](#) page. If you have not been able to find the specific information you need after searching our Web site or need more background information, contact us using one of the e-mail links provided.

In some cases the Census Bureau will do special tabulations or research on a fee basis. For a specific special tabulation request, send a message to pop@census.gov for demographic statistics, or to econ@census.gov for economic statistics.

We do not provide information about, or the names of individual people or individual business establishments. [Top of page](#)

- **Street Names**

Street names are not labeled because we haven't had the resources to implement that feature. The [American FactFinder](#) Reference Maps do offer this feature. [Top of page](#)

- **Town and City Locations**

When you ask the system to place a map pin on a town's location it puts it at the approximate center of the polygon formed by the legal boundaries as given to us by the state/local government. That means it could fall away from the built up area or even in the middle of a body of water. Since there are close to 50,000 places in the U.S. we don't have the resources to edit these locations manually to put them in a more "logical" place.

The latitude and longitude we use comes from a data base that stores it in decimal degrees. The formula for converting back and forth from the more traditional degrees, minutes, and seconds format is given in [TIGER FAQ 22](#). In [TIGER FAQ 23](#) we discuss the level of precision (implied vs. real) in our coordinates.

Use the U.S. Geological Survey's [Geographic Names Information System \(GNIS\)](#) to find the county that a place is in.

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- **ZIP Code Information**

The Census Bureau does not have maps or digital files showing the boundaries of U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes. The fact that ZIP Codes aren't required to be polygons makes them difficult to map. They are networks of streets served by mail carriers or just individual post offices and are a tool for mail delivery. They also change periodically as required to meet Post Office operational needs. Various companies have created maps by interpolating boundaries between occurrences of ZIP Codes on the ground. However, this does not guarantee that the U.S. Postal Service delivery routes will follow this interpretation.

In the past, the Census Bureau produced the [1990 Census Gazetteer ZIP Code file](#) and a [1999 ZIP Code file](#). These files were produced as byproducts of Census Bureau internal operations. They were not developed as a formal product. However, the Census Bureau has made them available to the public "as is". There will be **no updated versions** of these files.

The Census Bureau will not be producing data files containing U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes either as part of the Census 2000 product series or as a post Census 2000 product. However, due to the public's interest in having statistics tabulated by ZIP Code, the Census Bureau has created a new statistical area called the ZIP Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) for Census 2000. The ZCTAs were designed to overcome the operational difficulties of creating a well-defined ZIP Code area by using Census blocks (and the addresses found in them) as the basis for the ZCTAs. For more information on the ZCTA delineation product and ZCTA-based products visit the [ZCTA™ Web page](#).

There is no correlation between U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes and U.S. Census Bureau geography. This is because individual U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes can cross state, place, county, census tract, block group and census block boundaries (just to name a few). The geographic entities the Census Bureau uses to tabulate data by are relatively stable over time. For instance, census tracts are only defined every ten years. In contrast, U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes are designed to meet the day-to-day operational needs of the U.S. Postal Service and tend to change more frequently than every ten years. Because of the ill-defined nature of ZIP Code boundaries, the Census Bureau does not have a file (crosswalk) showing the relationship between U.S. Census Bureau geography and U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes.

ZIP Codes and Metropolitan Statistical Areas. We do not have any file that will relate Metropolitan Statistical Areas to U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes.

ZIP Code Corrections. We cannot make ZIP Code corrections to our data sets based on e-mail messages. We can use only information that we receive through our cooperative operations with the U.S. Postal Service.

Further, **the Census Bureau does not offer "crosswalk" or "relationship" files that associate U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes to any legal and statistical census geography.** For the most accurate and up-to-date ZIP Code data, we suggest contacting the source for ZIP Code information: the [United States Postal Service](#). Again, for more definitive information on U.S. Postal Service ZIP Codes, contact the U.S. Postal Service.



Information about Census 2000 data is located at [Your Gateway to Census 2000](#)

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Measuring America—People, Places, and Our Economy

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