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New York State geographic primer

Understanding the different levels of geography in New York State

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Preface

The first people walked across New York State over 13,000 years ago and much has changed since, with the population reaching 20 million in the 2020 Census. By 1100 C.E., two main cultures, the Iroquoian and the Algonquian had emerged before European discovery in 1524, The original 1664 charter of the Province of New York was a much larger area including parts of present-day New England. New York ratified the U.S. Constitution in 1788 becoming the 11th state to join the Union. Shortly after, the first U.S. Census was conducted in the summer of 1790, recording a population of just over 340,000- the fifth most populous state in the nation. New York quickly became the most populous state and held that title between 1810 and 1960 Censuses. Today, the state remains as the fourth most populous (following California, Texas, and Florida) with just over 6% of the total U.S. population.

With so many people to count, the U.S. Census Bureau organizes data collection into smaller geographies to measure how many people live in each village, town, city, and more. Data from the Census Bureau and other data providers are then arranged by these geographic areas, such that data users can find the data they need for the area of interest. However, there are many types of geographic boundaries, especially within Census Bureau data. Because of this, it can be hard to see the forest through the trees. This geographic primer was written to help New York State data users to easily manage and understand commonly published geographic entities and state-specific areas and terminology.

Data presented throughout this document are derived from different Census 2020 data products.

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1 Introduction

Geography is the organizational foundation of all data produced by the Census Bureau. This primer outlines the terminology and codes you need to work with these geographies and provides descriptions and examples of each geography type. Data and geographic boundaries used in this primer are based on the 2020 Census, with the exception of those from earlier years. Geographies are classified by type and assigned appropriate codes and identifiers, usually found in a geographic header file. All geographic entities within the Census Bureau geographic system fall into one of the following categories: legal/administrative, statistical, or legislative.

Legal or Administrative boundaries are outlined in official documents such as treaties, charters, legislation, resolutions, and ordinances. These areas are usually represented by elected government officials and/or stakeholders. Legal boundaries, however, are flexible and can be modified through a local legal process and updated in the Census geography through the annual Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS)where governments of counties, incorporated places, and minor civil divisions may submit boundary updates to the Census Bureau.

Statistical geographic areas on the other hand are designated by the Census Bureau for the purposes of data tabulation and presentation. Unlike legal/administrative geographic entities, statistical geographic entities do not require official documentation for creation or delineation of their boundaries and are not usually represented by government officials or stakeholders. Most statistical geographies are updated every ten years for decennial census data tabulation.

Finally, legislative geographic areas differ from legal/administrative and statistical geographic areas where the process of redistricting is decentralized. These geographies are areas from which members are elected to legislative chambers such as the state's House and Senate. Between states, the redistricting process is either undertaken by the state legislature, an independent redistricting commission, or independent bodies with legislative approval required. States usually redistrict legislative boundaries to account for population shifts between censuses.

1.1 Summary Level Variable (SUMLEV)

The Census Bureau identifies geographic areas using two main types of identifiers. Summary levels represent the geographic type while geographic identifiers (GEOIDs) identify specific geographic areas. Summary levels explain how to read the GEOID and the GEOID locates the area in space.

Depending on the application, different summary levels might be required for precision in data analysis or mapping. The following list highlights the most commonly used summary levels with examples:

040: State

The primary governmental divisions of the United States are termed states. Besides the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Island Areas (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) are statistical equivalents of states. Each state is assigned a unique two-digit code in the GEOID.

Example: 0400000US**36** refers to the state of New York

050: State-County

The primary legal divisions of most states are termed counties. Parishes in Louisiana, boroughs in Alaska, municipios in Puerto Rico, and planning regions in Connecticut are treated as statistical equivalents of counties. Each county or statistical equivalent entity of a state is assigned a unique three-digit code in the GEOID unique to the state.

Example: 0500000US36**059** refers to Nassau County, New York

060: State-County-County Subdivision (Minor Civil Division)

The primary administrative or legal divisions of counties (or equivalents) are termed minor civil divisions (MCDs). These divisions are subject to local naming conventions with common names of townships, towns, and districts. Each minor civil division is assigned a three-digit code in the GEOID, unique to the county.

Example: 0600000US36029**828** refers to the town of Grand Island in Erie County, New York

140: Tract

The Census tract is a relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county (or statistically significant equivalent). Tracts usually contain between 1,200 and 8,000 people with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Boundaries are delineated with the intention of being maintained over decades to allow for statistical comparisons between census observations. Census tracts are assigned a six-digit code in the GEOID, unique to the county.

Example: 1400000US36109**000400** refers to tract 4 in Tompkins County (tract with many Cornell University dormitories)

150: Block Group

The block group is a statistical division of census tracts and usually contains between 600 and 3,000 people. A block group is a cluster of blocks within the same census tract which are defined by the first digit of the four-digit block number. A block group usually covers a contiguous area and at least one block group exists in each census tract. Block groups are nested within (cannot cross) state, county, or census tract boundaries, but may cross other geographic entity boundaries such as places (cities, towns).

There exist tribal census tracts and tribal block groups within federally recognized American Indian reservations. These are separate and different from standard tracts and block groups for the same area; tribal tracts and block groups may cross state and county boundaries.

100, 750: Block

The Census block is the fundamental statistical unit across the United States and outlying areas. This is the smallest geographic area for which decennial data is collected. Blocks are formed by both visible physical and cultural features (streets, railroads, etc.) and legal boundaries (towns, cities, etc.). Census blocks are assigned a four-digit number unique to the block group. The 2020 redistricting file uses summary level 750 for blocks, but other products and the redistricting file on data.census.gov use summary level 100.

Example: 1000000US360610076001**001** refers to block 1001 in tract 76 in Manhattan (Census block containing the Empire State Building)

160: Place

A place is a center of population. New York State officially recognizes a set of incorporated places with official boundaries; these are the cities and villages. But there also many unincorporated places that are locally recognized. In New York they are often referred to as hamlets. Many of these unincorporated places have unofficial boundaries in the Census geography and are classified as Census Designated Places (CDP).

1.2 GEOID and the GEOCODE

Each geography in the Census is assigned a unique identifying code that acts as a fingerprint. The GEOID is a concatenation of the following elements:

- SUMLEV (3 characters) - specifies the geographic type
- GEOVARIANT (2 characters) - specifies the version of the geographic entity if boundary updates are needed between Census releases (for example, redrawn legislative boundaries)

- GEOCOMPONENT (2 characters) - specifies the subset of a given geographic entity (e.g., urban/rural)
- Country Code (2 characters) - specifies the country of the geographic entity (usually US)
- GEOCODE (variable character) - the code of the specific geographic entity

As each GEOID is unique, the GEOCODE is constructed in a way to differentiate between the thousands of identically numbered four-digit blocks throughout the state. The GEOCODE is concatenated for geographic areas that nest within other geographic areas. In general, the more specific the geographic entity, the longer the GEOCODE.

Area Type	GEOCODE Structure	Example Geographic Area	Example GEOCODE
State	STATE (2)	New York	36
County	STATE + COUNTY (3)	Tompkins County, NY	36109
County Subdivision	STATE + COUNTY + COUSUB (5)	Ithaca City, Tompkins County, NY	3610938077
Place	STATE + PLACE (5)	Rochester city, NY	3663000
Census Tract	STATE + COUNTY + TRACT (6)	Census Tract 3 in Tompkins County, NY	36109000300
Block Group	STATE + COUNTY + TRACT + BLOCKGROUP (1)	Block Group 1 in Census Tract 3 in Tompkins County, NY	361090003001
Block	STATE + COUNTY + TRACT + BLOCK (4)	Block 1031 in Census Tract 3 in Tompkins County, NY	3610900030001031

1.3 FIPS codes and other codes (Education, health, SWIS)

Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) codes are fingerprints for geographical entities where each FIPS code uniquely identifies geographic areas. The length of FIPS codes depends on the geographic level. For example, states only have a two-digit FIPS code and blocks have a fifteen-digit FIPS code. New York has a state FIPS code of 36 and each of its 62 counties are assigned a three-digit county FIPS code ranging from 001 to 123.

More information about county FIPS codes and how to construct GEOIDs for geographic areas can be found in the Appendix.

Other identifying codes:

Statewide Information System (SWIS) codes which span the state of New York and are assigned by the State Office of Real Property Tax Services (ORPTS). SWIS codes uniquely identify each county, town, and village in the state, as well as the portion of towns outside incorporated villages. The SWIS code is a six-digit identifier not associated with FIPS codes.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) district IDs provide identification for all public-school districts across the US and territories. There are records for 1,091 school districts in New York State with charter districts having as few as one school per district and some districts in New York City with over 50 schools. NCES district IDs are seven digits long and start with the FIPS code of the state.

Example: 3602460 refers to the Albany City School District (NCES district ID)

The New York State Department of Education (NYSED) has its own set of public school district codes assigned to each public school district in the state excluding charter school districts. These codes are distinct from the national NCES district IDs. These codes are six digits long and start with a two-digit number assigned to each county which is different from the county FIPS code.

Example: 010100 refers to the Albany City School District (NYSED code)

The MAF/TIGER Feature Class Code (MTFCC) is a five-digit code that classifies and describes geographic objects or features. This code is assigned by the Census Bureau and can be found in TIGER/Line products. MTFCC codes can be assigned to point, linear, and areal features. The code is composed of a single letter followed by four numbers.

Example: MTFCC code **C3022** identifies mountain peaks or summits whereas code **L4150** identifies a coastline

The legal/statistical area description (LSAD) code is a two-digit code that describes the particular typology of geographical entities. For legal entities, the LSAD code describes how the geographic entity is referred to in legal documentation. For statistical entities, the LSAD term is assigned by the Census Bureau to define the entity. The LSAD is composed of two alphanumeric characters.

Example: The town of Binghamton is assigned an LSAD code of **43** which identifies it as a town while the city of Binghamton is assigned an LSAD code of **25** (city). Although both Bronx County and Broome County are both counties or equivalent features, the Bronx is assigned a LSAD code of **21** as legal documents refer to the region as the Bronx borough. However, Broome County has a LSAD code of **06** since legal documents refer to the area as a county.

1.4 Other fields in the geographic header files

Part of all Census releases is a geographic header file. The geographic header file contains all identifying information for geographic entities across the US. These codes are especially helpful when differentiating areas that share the same name or areas that cross legal jurisdictions. Additional fields in the geographic header files are below:

1.4.1 Geographic Component (GEOCOMP)

The geographic component (GEOCOMP) code is a two-digit code that identifies subsets of a given geographical entity based on its geographic or population characteristics. These are the two characters immediately following the summary level code and are commonly 00 which refer to the whole geographic entity while 01 and 43 are used to indicate urban and rural parts.

Example: 0500**00**US36017 refers to the entirety of Chenango County, New York and 0500**43**US36017 refers to the rural part of Chenango County

1.4.2 Type of place (PLACECC) and type of County Subdivision (COUSUBCC)

The place and subcounty class codes are two-character code that helps differentiate between different classes of populated places, sub counties, census units, and institutional facilities. The class code distinguishes between active, inactive, and nonfunctioning local governments and can capture details such as an incorporated place serving as the statistical equivalent of a county. The first character is a letter and the second is a number. Places are also assigned an eight-digit National Standard (NS) code.

Example: **T2** is the class code of an active county subdivision that is coextensive with a census designated place while **T5** is the class code of an active county subdivision coextensive with an incorporated place.

1.4.3 Functional Status (FUNCSTAT)

The functional status code (FUNCSTAT) is a single letter that denotes the functional status of a geographic entity. This code can be used to differentiate geographic areas with active/inactive governments or as legal/statistical entities.

Example: **A** is the functional status code for an active government providing primary general-purpose functions while **M** is the code for active legal real property entities with quasi-legal functions such as military installations.

Statistical areas are identified with an **S** and **F** is for "Fictitious entity created to fill the Census Bureau geographic hierarchy".

1.4.4 Other

The geographic header file also contains additional information about the areas, like land area and geographic coordinates of a central point. The land area is expressed in square meters (2,589,988.1 square meters in a square mile) and is often used for the calculation of population and housing density. The central point coordinates can be helpful in mapping applications to represent places with a single symbol or to place labels.

2 Introduction to Administrative Boundaries

Legal or administrative geographic entities are defined by official documentation and are represented by elected government officials or stakeholders. Administrative units include counties, towns, cities, villages, American Indian Reservations, and school districts.

Administrative entities follow a nesting order as shown in the Appendix. County subdivisions in the state include towns, cities, and American Indian Reservations. These entities exist wall-to-wall across the state and are geographically exclusive, meaning that an individual cannot be in a town and a city simultaneously. Of these county subdivisions, only towns are nested within counties in New York. Cities may cross county boundaries within states, and American Indian Reservations may cross both county and state lines. Villages and school districts may also cross county boundaries within the state. The total population for the state can be found by summing the population for all county subdivisions in New York.

2.1 State (SUMLEV 040)

States are the primary legal divisions of the United States. Besides the 50 states, the Census also treats the following areas and territories as statistical equivalents of states: the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

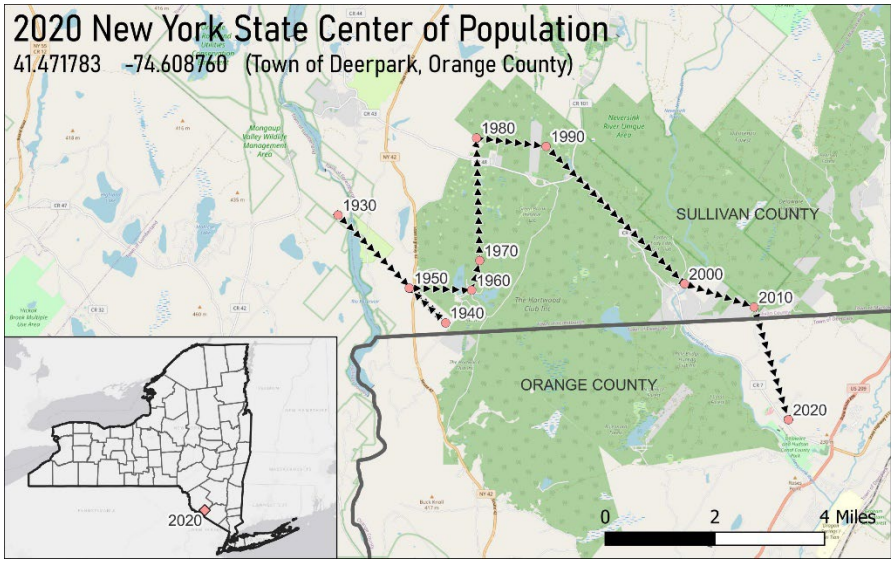
New York is in the Mid-Atlantic region and borders six other states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont). New York also has an international border with Canada and a waterfront along the Atlantic Ocean.

Table 2.1—Basic Information

FIPS Code	36
Population (2020)	20,201,249 persons (4th)
Housing Units	8,488,066 units (4th)
Land Area	47,123.58 sq mi (30th)
Population Density	428.69 persons/sq mi (7th)
Percent Change in Population (from 2010)	+4.2%
Center of Population	41.471783, –74.608760 (Deerpark, Orange County)

Fun Facts:

- Before becoming a state, New York had territorial claims in present day Maine, Vermont, and Pennsylvania. The last change to the state boundary was made in 1855 through the annexation of Boston Corner from Massachusetts.



2.2 Counties (SUMLEV 050)

Counties are the primary legal division of most states. New York State is divided into 62 counties with the five boroughs of New York City operating as county equivalents.

Table 2.2—Distribution of Counties by Population, Housing Units, and Area in New York

	Minimum	Median	Maximum	If each county had equal…
Population (2020)	Hamilton (5,107)	Wayne (91,283)	Kings (2,736,074)	325,826 persons/county
Housing Units	Hamilton (7,826)	Wayne (42,257)	Kings (1,077,654)	136,904 units/county
Area (sq mi)	New York (22.81)	Rensselaer (665.08)	St Lawrence (2,760.79)	760.06 sq mi/county
Population Density (persons/sq mi)	Hamilton (2.83)	Oswego (115.50)	New York (74,294.42)	
Percent Change in Population (from 2010)	Schoharie –9.3%	Yates –2.2%	Kings +9.2%	

Fun Facts:

- Hamilton County is the only county in New York State where the total number of housing units exceeds the population. Whereas the ratio of persons to housing units is between 1.9 and 2.25 for most counties in the state, Hamilton County has a ratio of 0.653 persons per housing unit. This figure is due to the high vacancy rate (68.3%) of housing units in the county.
- Despite the extremely high population density in New York City, New York State is ranked seventh out of all fifty states in terms of population density (at 417.216 persons/sq mi). All the states with higher population densities have smaller populations, but also much less land area than New York.

2.3 County subdivisions (SUMLEV 060)

County subdivisions serve as the primary divisions of counties or statistically equivalent entities, known in New York as minor civil divisions (MCDs). These MCDs are legally incorporated municipal corporations which serve

as general-purpose local governments, commonly as cities and towns. New York City's five boroughs are not considered to be functioning governmental units.

Not all areas within a county are covered by cities or towns. Most American Indian Reservations do have areas outside the cities and towns. In the Census hierarchy those areas count as county subdivisions but have a functional status code F (Fictitious entity created to fill the Census Bureau geographic hierarchy).

Bodies of water are also not always part of a city or town. The areas of the counties that are within the great lakes and also Chautauqua Lake are not covered by towns or cities. The areas in the great lakes also have functional status code F, but Chautauqua Lake shows up as Unorganized Territory (UT) with functional status code S (Statistical area).

There are 933 towns in the state each governed by a town supervisor/manager and a town council/board. Town governments are considered true corporations within the state and thus are granted home rule powers to regulate quality of life in the community and to provide direct services to citizens. Everyone who lives in New York outside a city or American Indian Reservation lives in a town.

Table 2.3—Distribution of Towns by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	5%	25%	50%	75%	95%	Largest
Population	Red House (27)	Georgetown (648)	Ashland (1,510)	New Bremen (2,785)	Porter (6,513)	Warwick (32,027)	Hempstead (793,409)
Area (sq mi)	Green Island (0.95)	Little Falls (22.21)	Victory (34.45)	Greenwood (41.36)	Granville (56.22)	Hector (112.49)	Brookhaven (510.41)
Population Density (persons/sq mi)	Red House (0.433)	Coldspring (10.17)	Saranac (33.16)	Danby (63.53)	Hamilton (154.06)	Smithtown (1,053.00)	Palm Tree (22,231.33)

There are 62 incorporated cities in New York, which like towns, serve as county subdivisions. Cities are independent of towns and American Indian Reservations. Each city carries out autonomous legal powers and duties through its charter granted by the State Legislature, but the governmental structures widely vary between cities. New York City is comprised of five boroughs which are not considered to be functional governmental units but are considered minor civil divisions.

Table 2.4—Distribution of Cities by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	25%	50%	75%	Largest	State Total (within cities)
Population	Sherrill (3,077)	Fulton (11,389)	Lackawanna (19,949)	Rome (32,127)	New York (8,804,190)	11,085,095 persons
Area (sq/mi)	Mechanicville (0.96)	Newburgh (4.29)	Cattaraugus (6.17)	Schenectady (10.94)	New York (470.32)	1,094.55 sq mi
Population Density (persons/sq mi)	Rome (425.95)	Hudson (2,538.97)	Auburn (3,203.44)	Ithaca (5,296.29)	New York (18,719.70)	10,127.54 persons/sq mi

Fun Facts:

- The town of Palm Tree in Orange County is the most recently founded, splitting from Monroe town on January 1, 2019. This is the first new town since 1981 and it has the highest population density among towns in the state with a density similar to Queens County.

- Just over 11 million or about 55% of the state population lives in incorporated cities.
- There is no formal progression for municipalities from village to city status as well as no population or area minimums for the State Legislature to incorporate communities as cities. Of the 62 cities in the state, 51 cities have a population smaller than the largest village in the state (Hempstead – 59169 persons).
- The city of Geneva is the only city in New York that is split over two counties (Ontario and Seneca counties), but the area in Seneca County is all in Seneca Lake and doesn't contain any land area, nor any population.

2.4 Incorporated Places (SUMLEV = 160 and FUNCSTAT = A)

Like towns and cities, villages are also granted home rule powers in New York. Villages and cities are both considered incorporated places. Often confused with hamlets, villages have defined boundaries and met statutory requirements to incorporation set by Village Law. Hamlets, on the other hand, are unincorporated and do not define a formal community like a city, town, or village. There are 533 villages in New York as of the 2020 Census.

Summery level 160 in all Census products include all incorporated places, but also Census Designated Places (CDP). CDPs will be explained in this primer as part of the statistical areas. The name of the place can be very helpful to determine what kind of place it is, and so is the field PLACECC or FUNCSTAT in the geographic header file.

Table 2.5—Distribution of Incorporated Places by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	5%	25%	50%	75%	95%	Largest
Population	Dering Harbor (50)	Millport (301)	Lyndonville (771)	South Floral Park (1,741)	South Blooming Grove (3,973)	Dobbs Ferry (11,541)	Hempstead (59,169)
Area (sq mi)	South Floral Park (0.10)	Rensselaer Falls (0.32)	Cheektowaga (0.79)	Philmont (1.24)	Islandia (2.22)	Massena (4.71)	Speculator (47.06)
Population Density (persons/sq mi)	Speculator (8.63)	Angelica (338.20)	Margaretville (740.20)	North Hornell (1,375.69)	East Aurora (2,412.18)	Great Neck (8,198.11)	Kaser (31,969.68)

Exceptions:

There are five town-villages in New York where the village is coterminous with the town of the same name. The town and village share the same boundaries and the governing body of one unit of the coterminous government may serve as the governing body of the other unit. The following municipalities are town-villages: Green Island (Albany County), East Rochester (Monroe), Scarsdale, Harrison, and Mount Kisco (Westchester). The villages of Pelham and Pelham Manor are coextensive with the town of Pelham in Westchester County.

Fun Facts:

- The geographical boundaries of villages are not constrained by towns or counties. There are 69 villages which lie across two towns and six which span three towns; eight villages span two counties. An example is Saranac Lake (population of 4887 and just under 3 square miles) which is found in Harrietstown (Franklin County), North Elba (Essex), and St. Armand (Essex).
- The village of Hempstead in Nassau County is currently exploring how to become a city which would be the first new city since 1942.

- Since there is no automatic progression from village to city status, 170 villages in New York have a population larger than the smallest city – Sherrill, population 3077. Most of these large villages are on Long Island or the Mid-Hudson region.
- Johnson City has City in its name but is a village and in Census products listed as Johnson City village.

2.5 Estimates primitive geographies (County subdivisions intersected with incorporated places)

The Census Bureau produces annual estimates of City and Town Population Totals. These also include estimates for all incorporated places. The building blocks for these estimates are so-called primitive geographies. These are the intersect of the sub county geography with the incorporated place geography. If a village crosses town boundaries, there are two village parts, one in each town. The village parts are the primitive geographies. The area of towns not covered by incorporated village is called the remainder of town and is also a primitive geography.

The GEOID for the primitive geography is STATE + COUNTY + COUSUB (5) + PLACE (5). The remainders of town have a PLACE code of 99990. With the exception of New York City, cities in New York are sub counties as well as places and the COUSUB and PLACE codes are the same.

Fun facts:

- There are 10 parts of villages without population. The village of Hamilton (Madison County) stretches over three towns but has a population only in one of them.

2.6 American Indian Reservations (with self-governance) (SUMLEV 280)

American Indian Reservations are legal and statistical entities that possess a nationhood status and retain inherent powers of self-government. Federally recognized tribes have a government-to-government relationship with the United States and possess both the right and authority to regulate activities on their lands independent from state government control. In the case of federal Indian reservations, the federal government holds title to the land on behalf of the tribe.

State Indian reservations, on the other hand, are lands held in trust by a state for an Indian tribe. These tribes are not subject to state property tax but are subject to state law.

There exist ten (10) American Indian Reservations in New York, eight of which are federally recognized and two having only state recognition.

The Seneca Nation has exercised sovereignty over their reservation lands particularly on the Allegany Indian Reservation. Nearly 75% of the city of Salamanca falls on tribal lands which are under tribal ownership. From a 1990s court battle, all land (including land owned by non-Natives) within the reservation boundaries is considered to be leased from the Seneca Nation.

Table 2.6—Distribution of American Indian Reservations by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	Largest	State Total (reservations)	Proportion of State Total
Population	Oil Springs Reservation (20)	Oneida Reservation (62,877)	79,392 persons	0.004
Area (sq mi)	Oil Springs Reservation (0.97)	Oneida Reservation (426.81)	671.66 sq mi	0.014

Fun Facts:

- The total number of individuals in New York identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native alone is nearly 150,000. By count, Queens County had the highest native population at 30,513 while Hamilton County had the fewest at 14 individuals. By percentage of total population, Tioga County had the lowest proportion of individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native at 0.2% while Franklin County had the highest proportion at 8.7% of the county population from the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation.
- Despite 20 people living within the boundaries of the Oil Springs Reservation, only one was reported as American Indian or Alaskan Native. This individual lives in the Cattaraugus County side of the reservation.
- The boundaries of the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation cross over the St. Lawrence River into the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

2.7 School Districts

School districts are geographic entities designated by the State Legislature to provide education services for residents within the area. There are 681 school districts in the state, divided into five types.

Table 2.6—Counts of Types of School Districts in New York

District Type	Count
Common School District	10
Union Free School District	149
Central School District	456
City School Districts	60
Central High School District	3
Total	678

Common School Districts have been in existence since 1812. These school districts have no legal authority to operate high schools, but still hold the responsibility to ensure secondary education for resident children. As a result, common school districts send students to designated high schools in neighboring school districts. As of April 2020, there were 10 common school districts in the state. Common school districts are usually governed by a sole trustee or by a three-member board of trustees.

Union Free School Districts were established in 1853, generally formed from two or more common school districts joining together to provide a high school. Early union free districts often had boundaries that were coterminous with villages or cities. As of April 2020, there were 149 union free school districts. Union free districts are governed by a board of education composed of three to nine members. 16 of them are ‘special act’ school districts that serve children placed there under Article 81 of the NYS Education Law. These don’t have boundaries like other school districts and also no population statistics are available.

Central School Districts were created by the Central Rural Schools Act of 1914 which aimed to provide a more comprehensive education than independent common districts of the time. As of April 2020, there were 456 central school districts in the state. A central school district may be composed of any number of common, union free, and central districts. Like union free districts, central school districts also have the authority to operate high schools. However, central school districts differ from union free districts as the board of education may consist of five, seven, or nine members with term lengths of three to five years.

City school districts are organized in two ways, depending on the population. There are a total of 60 city school districts in the state as of April 2020. School districts in the 55 cities with a population less than 125,000 are separate governmental units, each governed by its own board of education. Each district has independent taxing and debt-

incurring powers, and members are elected to a school board, consisting of five, seven, or nine members. Many of these city districts are larger than their respective cities, and thus, are referred to as "enlarged city school districts."

The five cities with populations greater than 125,000 (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, and New York City) have boundaries coterminous with their respective cities. The boards of these school districts, however, do not have the power to levy taxes or incur debt. Funding is instead provided by the overall municipal budget. Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse have separately elected boards of education, while the board in Yonkers is appointed by the mayor. The New York City public school system has been run as a city agency since 2002, headed by a Chancellor.

Central High Schools were authorized in 1917 to promote reorganization of smaller school districts and provide secondary education to students from at least two common or union free districts. Only three of these types of districts exist, as of April 2020, all of which are located in Nassau County.

In the Census products School Districts are split by the grades being thought in the School District. (Elementary, Secondary and Unified School Districts, summary levels 950, 960 and 970). In the 2020 Census Elementary and Secondary school districts can only be found in Nassau County.

The Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) is a program in which the New York State Legislature provides school districts with shared educational services. Individual school districts can join a BOCES to save money by pooling resources and sharing costs. BOCES do not have a statistical record in Census data but are valuable for policy analysis. There are 37 BOCES in New York and services are available statewide, except the "Big Five" school districts of New York, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and Syracuse

2.8 Update Process

The boundary update process in New York State is outlined in the State Legislation where annexations, consolidations, and dissolutions may be initiated by the local governmental board or residential petition. All changes to boundaries are implemented at the end of the following odd-numbered year.

Legal boundary changes need to be reported to the Census Bureau. The formal process to update administrative boundaries is administered by the Census Bureau through the annual Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS). Tribal, state, and local governments may review the Census Bureau's legal boundary data and have the opportunity to correct boundaries, names, or status information through the BAS.

3 Introduction to Statistical Boundaries

Like administrative entities, statistical entities also span the entire state. Blocks cover the entire state and are nested within block groups which are then nested within Census Tracts. These tracts are then nested within counties.

3.1 Tracts, Block Groups, Blocks

The Census tract is a relatively permanent statistical subdivision of a county (or statistically significant equivalent) which is used to approximate neighborhoods. Tracts usually contain between 1,200 and 8,000 people with an optimum size of 4,000 people. Boundaries are delineated with the intention of being maintained over decades to allow for statistical comparisons between Census observations. Each Census tract is assigned a six-digit code consisting of a four-digit identifier and an optional two-digit suffix. If a Census tract grows too large for statistical comparisons, the tract may be split, retaining its four-digit identifier with an appended suffix. For example, tract number 9702 may be split into 9702.01 and 9702.02.

Besides tracts based on population and housing counts, there are also special use tracts. Employment tracts are new in 2020 and could be delineated around centers of employment with a minimum of 1,200 jobs. Large water bodies can also be delineated as special use tracts. Special use tracts are numbered in the range 9800 to 9899.

The block is the smallest statistical area defined by the Census from which all other statistical entities are built. Blocks cover the entire territory of the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. Census blocks may be bound by visible features of the natural or built environment (e.g., streets or rivers) or nonvisible boundaries such as property lines or city limits. Blocks vary in size and shape, usually small and rectangular in cities, but may cover huge swaths of land in remote areas.

Each block is assigned a unique four-digit code within a census tract which nests with states and counties. The first number of the block code denotes the block group within the tract. Block numbers beginning with a zero (in Block Group 0) are intended to include only water areas.

Fun Facts:

- The largest block in terms of area that is not exclusively water is in Arietta Town in Hamilton County. This block is 121.71 sq miles and comprises nearly 7% of Hamilton County, making it larger than each borough of New York City. Despite its large size, the block has a population of only 16 as of April 2020.
- The block with the largest population is a block in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of New York County. As of April 2020, this block had 5,091 people, making the population nearly the same as the entirety of Hamilton County. However, Hamilton County is over 54,000 times larger than this block.
- There are 58,480 blocks (roughly 20% of total blocks) in the state with no recorded population.
- Hamilton County has the fewest number of blocks at 912 while Suffolk County has the greatest number of blocks at 24,757.
- There are 1,410 blocks with a population of over 1,000. Out of these, only 182 of these blocks are outside New York City, most of them containing group quarter facilities such as college dormitories.
- Hamilton County has the fewest number of block groups at 8, while Kings County has the greatest number of block groups at 2,114.
- Hamilton County has the fewest number of tracts at 4, while Kings County has the greatest number of tracts at 804.
- Five counties have less than 10 tracts while eleven counties have more than 100 tracts.

Table 3.1—Count of Blocks, Block Groups, and Census Tracts in New York

Geography	Count in New York
Block	288,819
Block Group	16,070
Census Tract	5,411

3.2 Unincorporated Places

Unincorporated Places are places outside of communities legally incorporated by state law. In other words, unincorporated places are all parts of towns outside of cities and villages. The Census organizes areas into Census Designated Places (CDPs) which act as statistically equivalent entities. Such places are colloquially known in New York as hamlets, but not all hamlets are CDPs.

CDPs represent unincorporated communities without a legally defined boundary or an active functioning government structure. CDPs are mutually exclusive with places and can exist within MCDs (towns in New York). CDPs may span across county lines but cannot cross state boundaries. All CDPs are unincorporated places, but not all unincorporated places are CDPs.

As of 2020, there are 693 CDPs in New York State, up from 572 CDPs in the 2010 Census.

Table 3.2—Distribution of Unincorporated Places by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	Median	Largest	Total in CDPs
Population	Byersville (44)	Watchtower (1,709)	Cheektowaga (76,829)	3,693,342 persons (18.28% of state)
Area (sq mi)	Saddle Rock Estates (*49.871 ac*)	Montrose (2.456)	Akwesasne (3,459.98)	2,666.14 sq mi (5.51% of state)

Fun Facts:

- Besides the five boroughs, Orleans and Schuyler County also have no CDPs.

3.3 Urban Areas

Formerly, the Census Bureau defined urban areas as places with a population of at least 50,000, while urban clusters had between 2,500 and 50,000 people. To be classified, urban areas and clusters would need an initial urban core of 1,000 persons per square mile, and the boundary would contain all continuous areas of at least 500 persons per square mile.

The boundaries for the Urban Areas are established after each Census and definitions of what constitutes an urban area varies over time.

For the 2020 Census, the minimum population threshold to qualify as urban increased to 5,000 or at least 2,000 housing units. In addition, housing density is now used instead of population density to define an urban core, and there is no longer a distinction between urban areas and clusters. To define an urban area, places need to meet the following thresholds:

- A high-density urban nucleus of 1,275 housing units per square mile
- An urban core of 425 housing units per square mile
- Remaining urban area of 200 housing units per square mile

As of April 2020, there are 94 urban areas entirely contained within New York state and 5 urban areas which stretch into neighboring states.

Table 3.3—Distribution of Urban Areas by Population and Area in New York

	Smallest	25%	50%	75%	Largest
Population (in New York)	Fire Island (1,022)	Wellsville (6,411)	New Paltz (11,264)	Gloversville (29,801)	New York (12,949,103)
Area (sq mi)	Chittenango (2.16)	Little Falls (3.38)	Catskill (6.42)	Rome (17.33)	New York, Jersey City, Newark (3,248.12 sq mi total)

In total, 18,033,602 people live within urban areas in New York comprising 89.2% of the state's population. Urban areas, however, only take up 3,907 sq mi, or 8.1% of the state's area. Within urban areas, the average population density is 4,615 persons/sq mi which is about the same density as Nassau County on Long Island.

3.4 PUMAs

Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are statistical geographic areas that cover the entirety of the United States. These areas are defined by counties and census tracts where each PUMA includes at least 100,000 people. Each of Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands has its single separate PUMA. American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands do not have PUMAs as each of their total populations are under the 100,000-person threshold.

The states, through the State Data Centers, have important input in the delineation of PUMAs. The delineation is done ahead of the Census. Among the delineation priorities in New York was that the PUMAs would nest within Economic Regions, making it possible to create custom ACS tabulations for the Economic regions for example. In New York City the PUMAs are as good as possible aligned with Community Districts and also numbered and named for those districts.

As of April 2020, there are 144 PUMAs in New York with 55 in New York City and 25 on Long Island.

Table 3.4—Distribution of PUMAs in New York as of April 2020

	Minimum	Median	Maximum	State Total
Population	Brooklyn CD 9 (100,103)	Manhattan CD 4 (129,265)	Queens CD 7 (270,930)	20,201,249 persons
Housing Units	Rockland County West (32,398)	Brooklyn CD 10 (55,045)	Manhattan CD 5 & 6 (141,694)	8,488,066 units
Area (sq mi)	1.42	29.20	6,539.07	48,419.16 sq mi

3.5 Core Based Statistical Areas (Metro– micropolitan)

Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) are statistical geographies that are composed of one county containing a core Census defined Urban Area of at least 10,000 along with adjacent counties with a high degree of social and economic integration with the core, measured through commuting ties. These areas are defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

Metropolitan Statistical Areas are a type of CBSA associated with at least one Urban Area with a population of at least 50,000. Similarly, micropolitan statistical areas are also CBSAs that are associated with at least one Urban Area but have a population between 10,000 and 50,000. Metropolitan statistical areas include the central county along with adjacent counties with a high degree of social and economic integration with the core.

As of July 2023, New York State has thirteen Metropolitan Statistical Areas and fourteen Micropolitan Statistical Areas. Table C.1 in the Appendix lists the CBSAs in New York.

Updates to CBSA delineations following the 2020 Census include:

- Name changes (same boundaries)
    - *Poughkeepsie-Newburgh-Newtown* to *Kiryas Joel-Poughkeepsie-Newburgh*
    - *Ogdensburg-Massena* to *Massena-Ogdensburg*
    - *Jamestown-Dunkirk-Fredonia* to *Jamestown-Dunkirk*
- Updated boundaries:
    - *New York-Newark-Jersey City* removed Pike County, PA
    - *Rochester* removed Yates County, NY
- New statistical areas:
    - *Monticello* – new Micropolitan Statistical Area formed from Sullivan County, NY
- Removed statistical areas:
    - *Malone* – removed Micropolitan Statistical Area composed of Franklin County, NY

Combined Statistical areas (CSAs) are created by grouping two or more adjacent CBSAs with substantial employment interchange. There are seven combined statistical areas in New York. Table C.2 in the appendix lists the CSAs in New York.

3.6 American Indian Reservations (without self-governance)

There is one Tribal Designated Statistical area in New York: Cayuga Nation Tribal Designated Statistical Area (TDSA). There were 2,572 residents in this area.

3.7 Zip Code Tabulation Areas

ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) are approximate representations of the Zonal Improvement Plan (ZIP) Code service routes as defined by the U.S. Postal Service. Since ZIP Codes largely do not align with Census tract or block group delineations, the Census Bureau defines ZCTAs at the block level. Each Census block is surveyed and assigned to a ZCTA based on the most frequently occurring ZIP Code for addresses within the block. Each ZCTA is a five-digit numeric code that may have leading zeros. Not all ZIP Codes used by the USPS may be represented by a ZCTA.

There are 1,794 ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) in New York State.

While Zip code service routes can change regularly, ZCTA boundaries are drawn only once a decade. There is a higher potential that ZCTA boundaries do not align with USPS zip codes as time passes since the drawing of ZCTA boundaries. The 2020 data products are using the newly drawn ZCTA boundaries.

4 Introduction to Legislative Districts

Both Congressional and State legislative districts are redistricted by the bipartisan state Redistricting Commission following the decennial Census. For the 117th United States Congress (2021-2023), New York had 27 congressional districts. For the 118th Congress (2023-2025), New York will have 26 congressional districts, losing one to 2020 reapportionment. There are currently 150 State assembly districts and 63 State senate districts. Legislative districts exist wall-to-wall over the entire state and may be redistricted following the decennial Census.

4.1 Congressional Districts

Congressional Districts are a form of a national legislative district from which people are elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. After each decennial census, states are apportioned a number of congressional seats proportional to their population for a national total of 435 districts. States are individually responsible for establishing congressional districts to elect representatives and these districts should be as equal in population as practicable.

Starting in 2020, New York congressional districts are drawn by the Independent Redistricting Commission. The Commission is composed of 10 members, eight of which are appointed by the state's legislative leaders and the remaining two appointed jointly by the first eight members. The Commission must hold at least 12 public hearings across New York State for input and feedback prior to submitting the redistricting plan to the Legislature. A minimum of seven Commissioners are required to vote in favor for submission. Legislative approval of the plan requires a vote of at least two-thirds of the members of both the Senate and the Assembly.

Districts are drawn, as best as practicable, to contain an equal number of constituents, with a contiguous territory, and are drawn as compact as possible. Districts should not result in denying or abridging racial or language minority rights. The Commission should also consider maintaining cores of existing districts and pre-existing political subdivisions (including counties, cities, and towns).

New York lost one congressional seat from the 2022 Redistricting process following the 2020 Census. Reapportionment resulted in a total of 26 congressional seats.

Table 4.1—Apportionment of Congressional Districts in New York

Year	State Population	Congressional Districts	State avg population per district	National avg population per district	Percent difference from national avg
1980	17,558,072	34	516,414	520,795	–0.84%
1990	17,990,455	31 (-3)	580,338	571,747	+1.50%
2000	18,976,457	29 (-2)	645,361	646,947	–0.25%
2010	19,378,102	27 (-2)	717,708	709,760	+1.12%
2020	20,201,249	26 (-1)	776,972	761,953	+1.97%

Fun Facts:

- New York had a high of 45 congressional districts in existence between 1945 and 1953. The state had approximately 14 million residents at the time, accounting for about 10% of the national population. Each district represented an average of 310,000 residents, less than half the number of constituents as the 2020 districts.
- New York just missed out on keeping its 27th seat after the Census. The resident count was just 89 residents shy of keeping it.

4.2 State Legislative Districts

The New York State Assembly is the lower house of the State Legislature. There are 150 districts from which assembly members are elected for two-year terms. Like congressional districts, the assembly districts are drawn by the Independent Redistricting Commission every 10 years following the decennial Census. In April 2022, the appellate division of the state Supreme Court declared the Assembly district boundaries invalid. Assembly elections in 2022 will use the maps approved in February 2022, but the 2024 elections will follow redrawn boundaries. Assembly districts represent an average of 134,626 inhabitants.

The New York State Senate is the upper house of the State Legislature. There are 63 districts from which state senators are elected for two-year terms. As with congressional and state assembly districts, the Independent Redistricting Commission redistricts the state senate districts every ten years after the decennial Census. Senate districts represent an average of 320,537 inhabitants.

Table 4.2—Population Estimates of State Legislative Districts (boundaries as of May 2023)

	Average	Smallest	Largest
NY State Assembly	134,626	128,101 (-4.84%)	141,283 (+4.95%)
NY State Senate	320,537	314,466 (-1.89%)	326,808 (+1.95%)

Fun Facts:

- The populations of State Assembly districts are no more than 6,700 people away from the average (varies by less than 5%), while the populations of State Senate districts are no more than 6,300 people away from the average (varies by less than 2%).
- New York City's population makes up approximately 43.6% of the population of New York State. Out of the 150 state assembly districts, 65 districts fall within city boundaries (43.3%). Out of the 63 state senate districts, 27 districts fall within city boundaries (42.9%).

5 Data availability in different Census products

The Census Bureau offers a variety of products with different geographic levels.

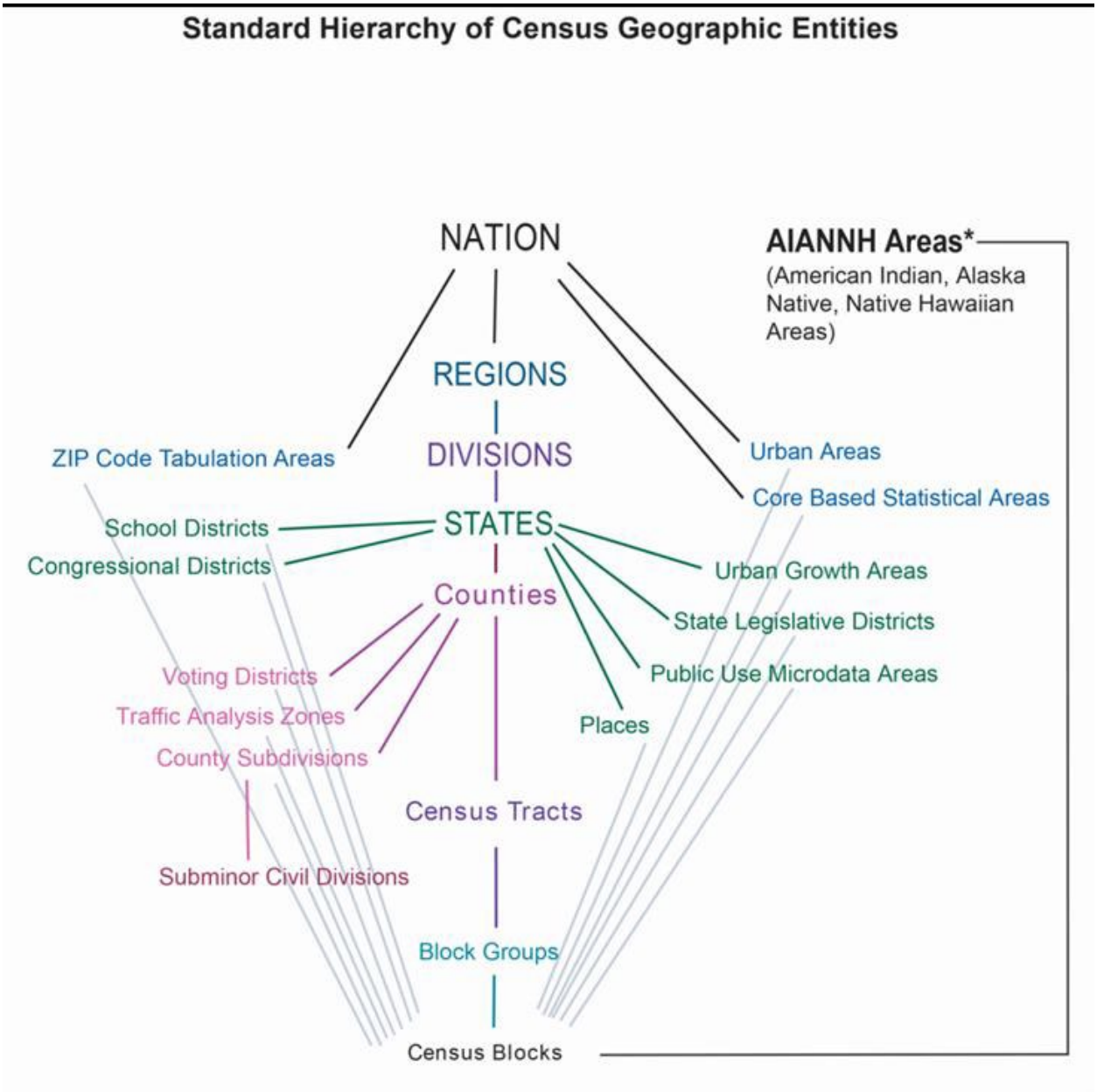
Table 5.1—Data availability in different Census products

Census Product	Nation	State	County	Tract	Block Group	Block	Urban/ Rural	Place/ MCD	ZCTA	AIANNH
Apportionment	X	X								
Redistricting Data Summary File		X	X	X	X	X		X		X
National Redistricting Data Summary File	X	X								X
Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC)	X	X	z	z	z	z	z	z	z	z
Demographic Profile	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Congressional District Summary Files		X	z	z				z		z
Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File A	z	z	z	z				z		z
Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File B	z	z	z	z				z		z
Supplemental Demographic and Housing Characteristics File	X	X								

X – All tables
z – Selected tables

Appendix A: Standard Hierarchy of Census Geographic Entities

Figure A.1—Standard Hierarchy of Census Geographic Entities (Census Bureau)



Appendix B: American Indian Reservations

Table B.1—American Indian Reservations

Reservation Name	Tribal Nation	Counties	Population	Area (sq mi)
Allegany Reservation	Seneca Nation Onödowá'ga:'	Cattaraugus	6,664	48.50
Cattaraugus Reservation	Seneca Nation Onödowá'ga:'	Cattaraugus, Erie, Chautauqua	2,676	34.41
Oil Springs Reservation	Seneca Nation Onödowá'ga:'	Cattaraugus, Allegany	20	0.97
Oneida Reservation	Oneida Nation Onʌyoteʔa·ká	Madison	62,877	426.31
Onondaga Reservation	Onondaga Nation Onöñda'gaga'	Onondaga	831	9.28
St. Regis Mohawk Reservation	St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Ahkwesáhsne	Franklin	3,663	20.98
Tonawanda Reservation	Tonawanda Seneca Nation Ta:nöwöde' Tahnawáteh	Niagara, Erie, Genesee	261	11.87
Tuscarora Reservation	Iroquois Confederacy Haudenosaunee	Niagara	1,145	9.08

Table B.2—American Indian Reservations – State

Reservation Name	Tribal Nation	Counties	Population	Area
Poospatuck Reservation	Unkechaugi band	Suffolk	436	108.91 acres
Shinnecock Reservation	Shinnecock Nation	Suffolk	819	1.35 sq mi

Table B.3—American Indian Reservations – Tribal Designated Statistical Area

Reservation Name	Tribal Nation	Counties	Population	Area
Cayuga Nation TDSA	Gayogo̱hó·nǫ' '	Cayuga, Seneca	2,572	73.46 sq mi

Appendix C: Core Based Statistical Areas

Table C.1—List of Core Based Statistical Areas in New York

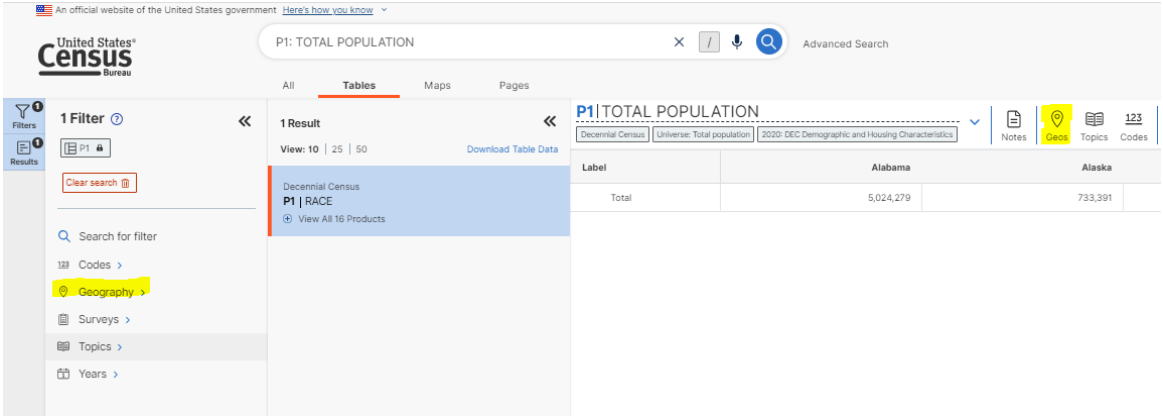
Metropolitan Area	Population	Micropolitan Area	Population
Albany-Schenectady-Troy	899,262	Amsterdam	49,532
Binghamton	247,138	Auburn	76,248
Buffalo-Cheektowaga	1,166,902	Batavia	58,388
Elmira	84,148	Corning	93,584
Glens Falls	127,039	Cortland	46,809
Ithaca	105,740	Gloversville	53,324
Kingston	181,851	Hudson	61,570
Kiryas Joel-Poughkeepsie-Newburgh	697,221	Jamestown-Dunkirk	127,657
New York-Newark-Jersey City	20,081,935	Massena-Ogdensburg	108,505
Rochester	1,065,361	Monticello	78,624
Syracuse	662,057	Olean	77,042
Utica-Rome	292,264	Oneonta	58,524
Watertown-Fort Drum	116,721	Plattsburgh	79,843
		Seneca Falls	33,814

Table C.2—List of Combined Statistical Areas in New York

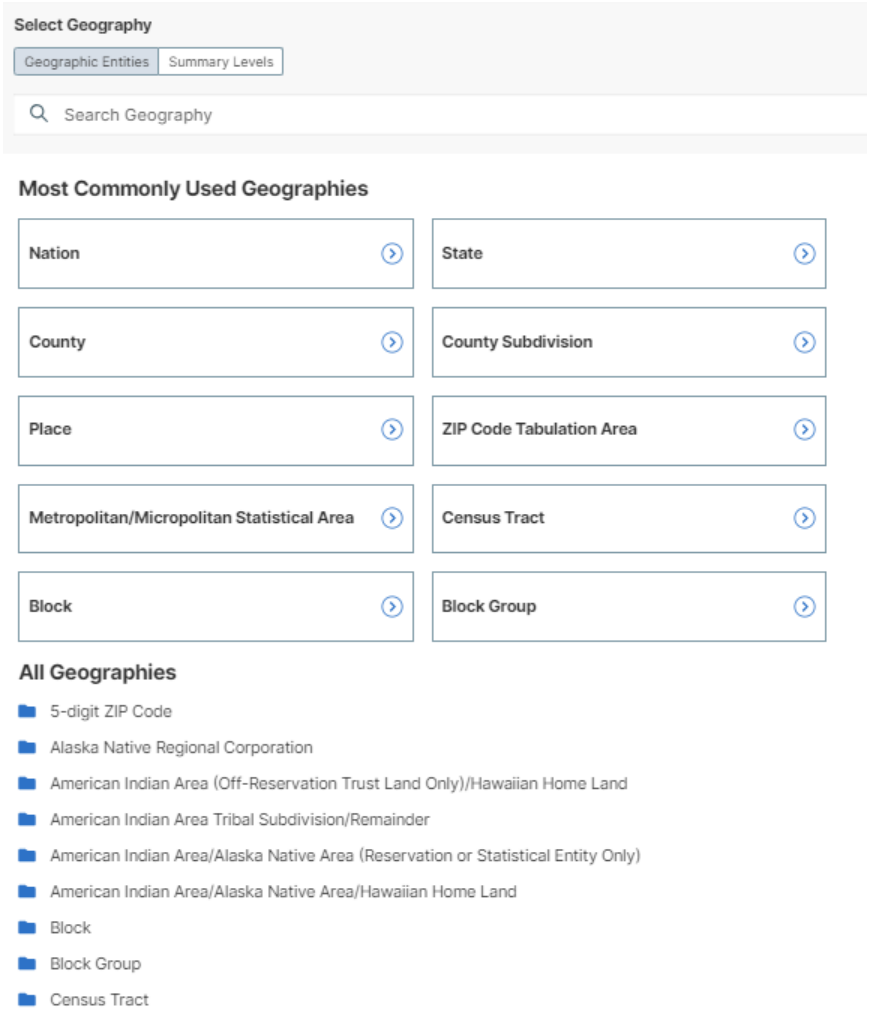
Combined Statistical Area	Core Based Statistical Areas	Population
New York-Newark (NY, NJ, CT, PA)	New York-Newark-Jersey City (NY-NJ) Kiryas Joel-Poughkeepsie-Newburgh (NY) Kingston (NY), Monticello (NY) Trenton-Princeton (NJ) Bridgeport-Stamford-Danbury (CT) Hemlock Farms (PA)	23,582,649 (total) 14,124,034 (in NY)
Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Olean	Buffalo-Cheektowaga, Olean	1,243,944
Albany-Schenectady	Albany-Schenectady-Troy Amsterdam, Glens Falls Gloversville, Hudson	1,190,727
Rochester-Batavia-Seneca Falls	Rochester, Batavia, Seneca Falls	1,157,563
Syracuse-Auburn	Syracuse, Auburn	738,305
Elmira-Corning	Elmira, Corning	177,732
Ithaca-Cortland	Ithaca, Cortland	152,549

Appendix D: Using Summary levels in data.census.gov

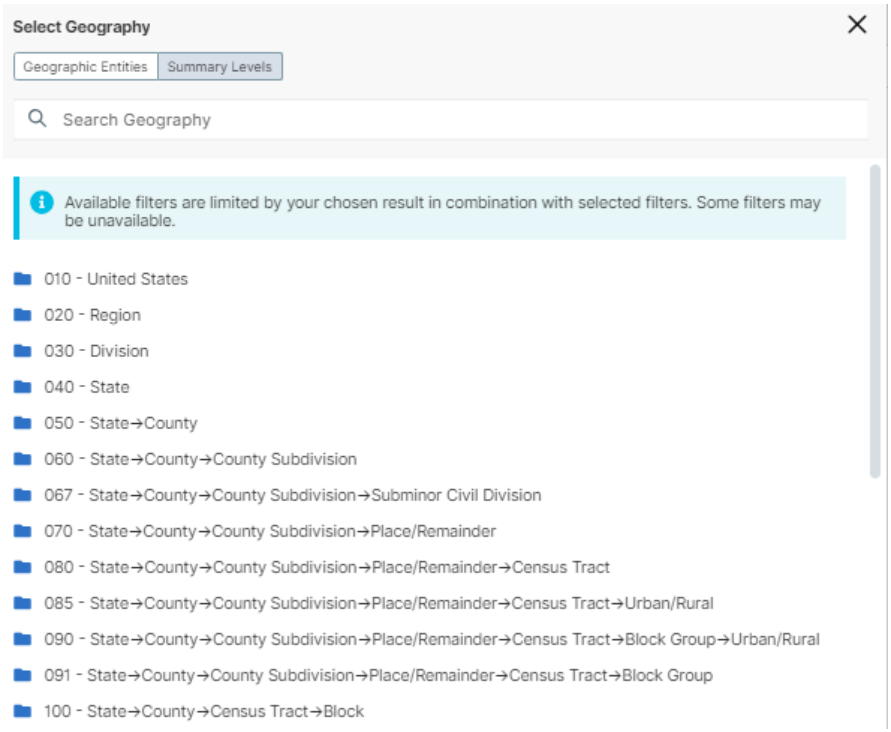
In the Census Bureau's data retrieval tool data.census.gov there are two places that open a dialogue for users to select or change the geographies. On the left hand side as part of the filters, or above the table to change the selected geography.



Either way will open a dialogue that looks like:



In the top part you will find the most commonly used geographic summary levels and underneath a more exhaustive list geographic summary levels. If that is not enough, users can also click on the little button on top that says “Summary levels”



This opens an even longer list of summary levels and include the three-digit SUMLEV we referenced throughout this document.

Appendix E: References and resources

In New York State

This Local Government Handbook provides a brief history and a comprehensive and authoritative overview of our local, state, and federal governments
https://dos.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/06/localgovernmenthandbook_2023.pdf

At the Census Bureau

More information on many of the terms and codes can be found in the Census Bureau Glossary and the technical documentation that is published with each data release.

The Census Bureau glossary contains many definitions
https://www.census.gov/glossary/

Technical Documentation with the 2020 redistricting release contains many of the codes for the different fields:
https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/summary-file/2020Census_PL94_171Redistricting_StatesTechDoc_English.pdf

TIGERweb is an interactive application developed by the U.S. Census Bureau that contains many of the boundaries of the geographies mentioned in this document.

- TIGERweb Decennial shows the boundaries used in the 2020 Census:
  https://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerweb2020/
- The TIGERweb application shows the current boundaries:
  https://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerweb/

Guide to State and Local Census Geography:
https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/guidestloc/ny_gslcg.pdf

Shapefiles can be downloaded through
https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files.html

At Cornell Program on Applied Demographics

On the web site from the Cornell Program on Applied Demographics published overview maps of:

- A reference map with the 2020 boundaries of the cities, towns and villages
  https://pad.human.cornell.edu/maps2020/maps/ReferenceMaps.pdf
- 2020 Urban areas:
  https://pad.human.cornell.edu/maps2020/maps/UrbanAreas2020.pdf
- 2020 Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA)
  pad.human.cornell.edu/census2020/PUMA2020maps.cfm

Other

Census Geographies Project at Georgetown University Massive Data Institute:
https://mdi.georgetown.edu/census-geographies-project/

Wikipedia article about the administrative divisions in New York:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_divisions_of_New_York_(state)