

# 2020 Census Urban Areas Update



Urban Areas Team  
Geography Division  
U.S. Census Bureau

# Agenda

1. About Urban Areas.
2. Key criteria changes for 2020 Census Urban Areas.
3. Key 2020 Census Urban Area trends.
4. Recent updates.
5. What's next for urban areas.

# What, why, and how of the Census Bureau's Urban Areas

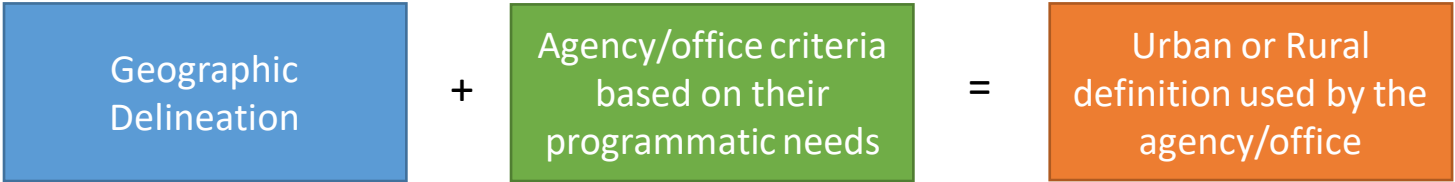
# How does the Federal Government Define Urban and Rural?



It varies. There is no single “urban” or “rural” definition.

Tribal, federal, state, and local agencies and offices develop different urban and rural definitions depending on their programmatic needs and uses, including:

- allocating program funds,
- setting program standards, and
- implementing and measuring aspects of their programs.



# How does the Federal Government Define Urban and Rural?






U.S. Small Business Administration



# How does the Federal Government Define Urban and Rural?

Commonly used federal geographic delineation sources used by federal agencies in defining urban and rural:

Geographic Delineation	Unit of Geography	Primarily based on...
Census UAs and Rural Territory 	Census Blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing unit and population counts and densities.</li> <li>• Land use.</li> <li>• Commuting.</li> </ul>
Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (Core Based Statistical Areas) 	Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Census UAs.</li> <li>• Commuting.</li> </ul>
Rural-Urban Commuting Areas (RUCA) 	Census Tracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Census UAs.</li> <li>• Commuting.</li> </ul>

# What are Census UAs?

- Census Bureau UAs:
  - Represent densely developed territory.
  - Encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses.





# Why does the Census Bureau delineate UAs?

**The Census Bureau delineates UAs for statistical data tabulation, publication, and analysis.**

However, the Census Bureau recognizes that many tribal, federal, state, and local governments define their program requirements based on the urban and rural delineation.

For this reason, the Census Bureau:

- Invites all stakeholders to actively participate in reviewing and commenting on proposed updates to the UA criteria via the *Federal Register* Notice leading up to the Decennial Census.
- Invites all stakeholders to ask questions. The Census Bureau works with tribal, federal, state, and local agencies as well as other stakeholders to ensure understanding of our classification.





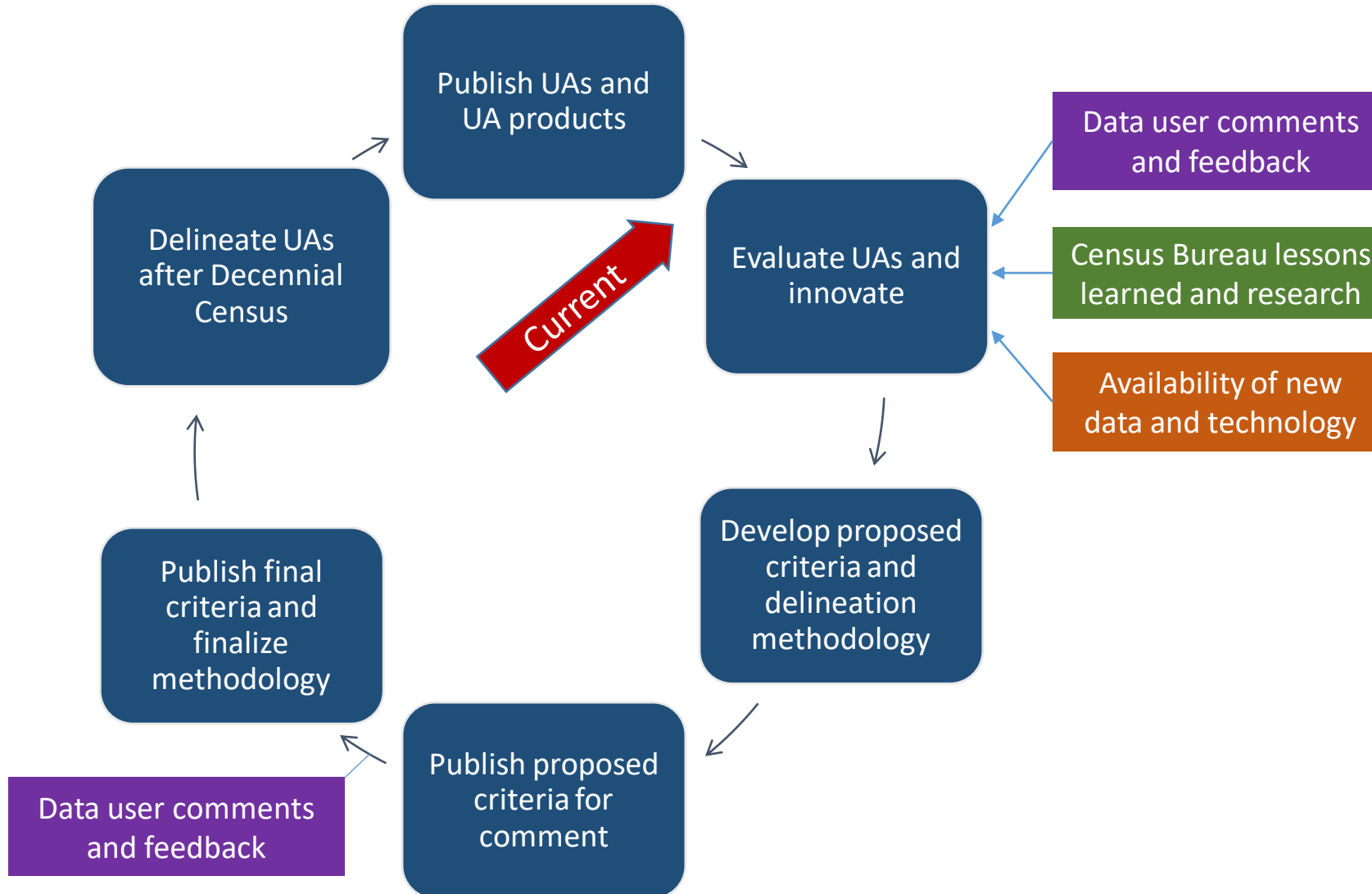
# How are UAs Delineated?

The Census Bureau uses a nationally-consistent, objective approach, to create UAs and rural territory. These areas are designed to meet the needs of a broad range of analysts and users interested in the definition of and data for urban and rural communities for statistical purposes.

In 2020, the final delineation criteria were implemented using:

- Python-based delineation software.
- Census blocks and Decennial Census block-level housing unit and population data.
- Impervious surface, hydrography, and wetlands data.
  - Sources: Census MAF/TIGER System, National Land Cover Dataset, and Coastal Change Analysis Program.
- Commuting data.
  - Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES).

# UA Program Cycle



# Key 2020 Census UA Criteria Changes

# 2020 Census UA Delineation Key Criteria Changes

1. Minimum threshold for qualification as urban raised from at least 2,500 people in 2010 to **at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people in 2020.**
2. Delineation based primarily on **housing unit data** at only the census block level instead of only population data at various geographic levels.
3. Maximum jump distance reduced from 2.5 miles to **1.5 miles.**
4. Introduced the use of **commuter data** to determine where to split large urban agglomerations.
5. No longer distinguish “**urban areas**” as “urbanized areas” or “urban clusters”.



# Key urban area trends for the U.S. (2010 – 2020)

# Key 2020 UA Trends, As Compared to 2010 UAs

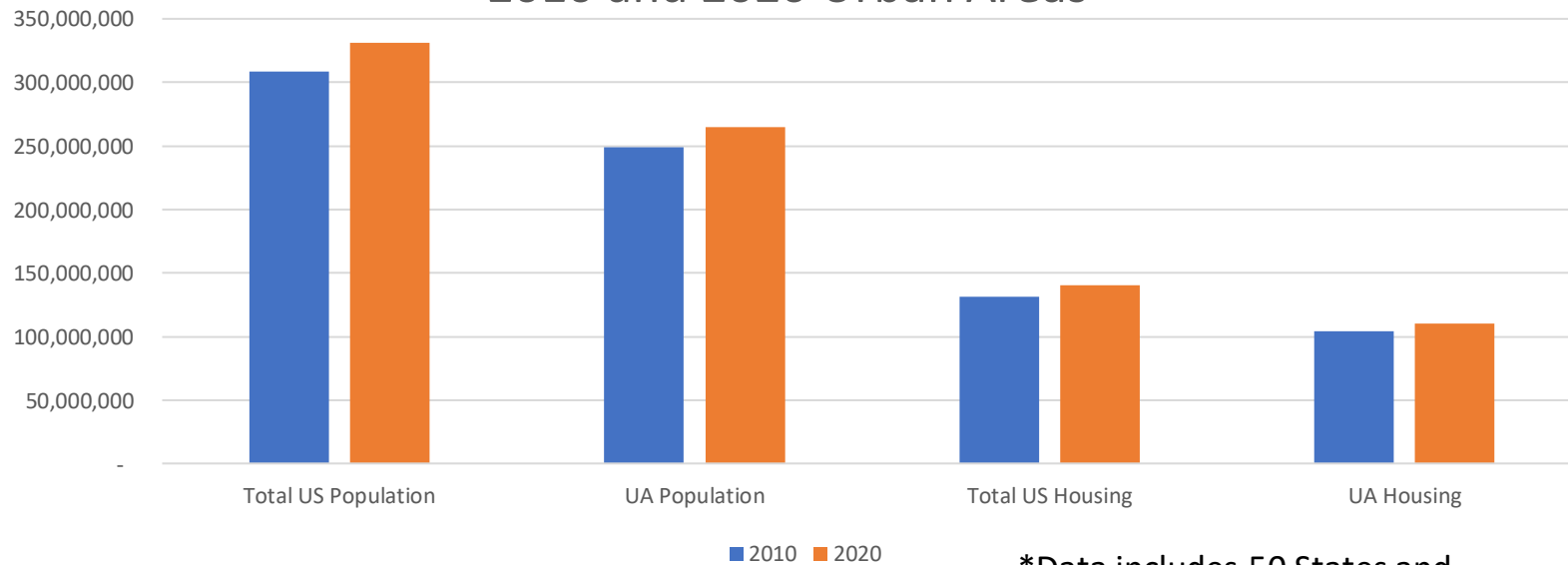
- Similar percent of population and housing units urban vs. rural.
- Decrease in total number of UAs; but an increase in the number of UAs  $\geq 5,000$  population.
- Decrease in many UAs' size/land area; increase in population and housing density of UAs.
- Some 2010 UAs became two UAs in 2020.
- Some 2020 UAs include areas with densely developed seasonal housing.

Note: These are national-level trends, and trends vary by region and state.

# 2010 and 2020 Census UAs

	2010				2020			
	Total Population	UA Population Percent	Total Housing	UA Housing Percent	Total Population	UA Population Percent	Total Housing	UA Housing Percent
Total*	308,745,538		131,704,730		331,449,281		140,498,763	
Urban	249,253,271	81%	104,019,731	79%	265,149,027	80%	110,692,318	79%
Rural	59,492,267	19%	27,684,999	21%	43,596,511	20%	29,806,418	21%

2010 and 2020 Urban Areas



\*Data includes 50 States and District of Columbia. Does not include UAs located in Puerto Rico and Island Areas.



# Decrease in UA Size/Land Area; Increase in Population Density

		2010 Urban Areas	2020 Urban Areas	Percent Change
U.S.*	Land Area (mi <sup>2</sup> )	106,386	103,872	-2%
	Pop Density (people/mi <sup>2</sup> )	2,343	2,552	9%

Sources: 2010 and 2020 state-sorted lists of urban areas on [Urban and Rural \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/urban-rural/)

Primarily resulting from criteria changes:

- Max jump distance to noncontiguous territory reduced from 2.5 miles to **1.5 miles**.
- Move from tract-based to only block-based delineation.

# Recent Updates

# Corrections Made

## Impacted 2020 Census Urban Areas

### California

- San Francisco--Oakland, CA Urban Area
- San Rafael--Novato, CA Urban Area

February 2023

### Georgia

- Atlanta, GA Urban Area
- Gainesville, GA Urban Area

July 2023

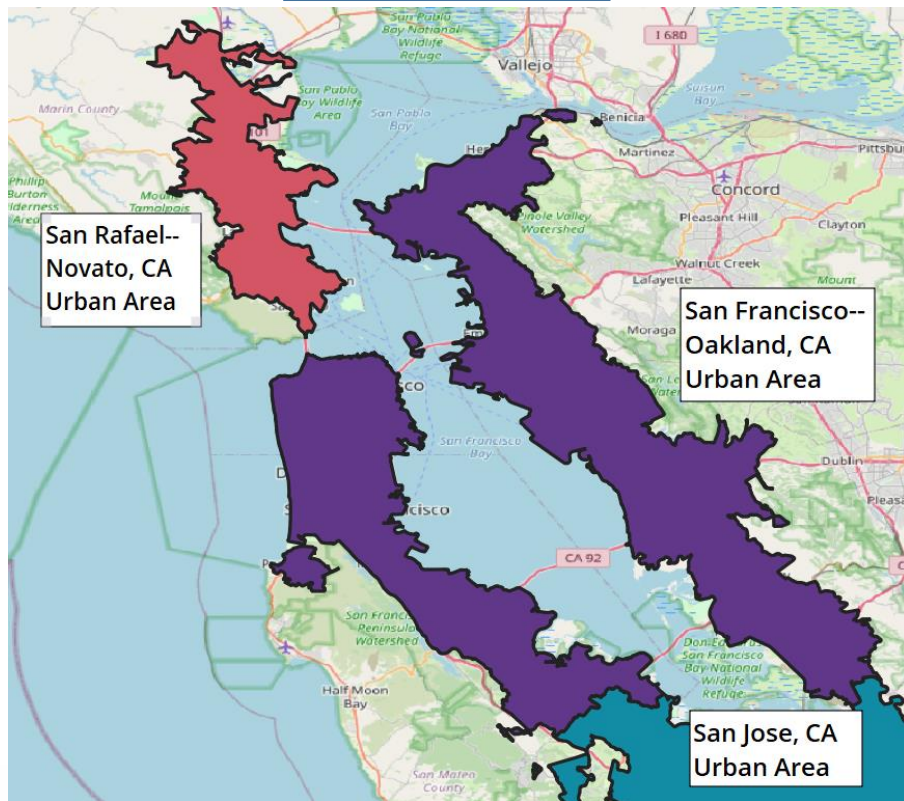
### Louisiana

- New Orleans, LA Urban Area
- Laplace--Lutcher--Gramercy, LA Urban Area

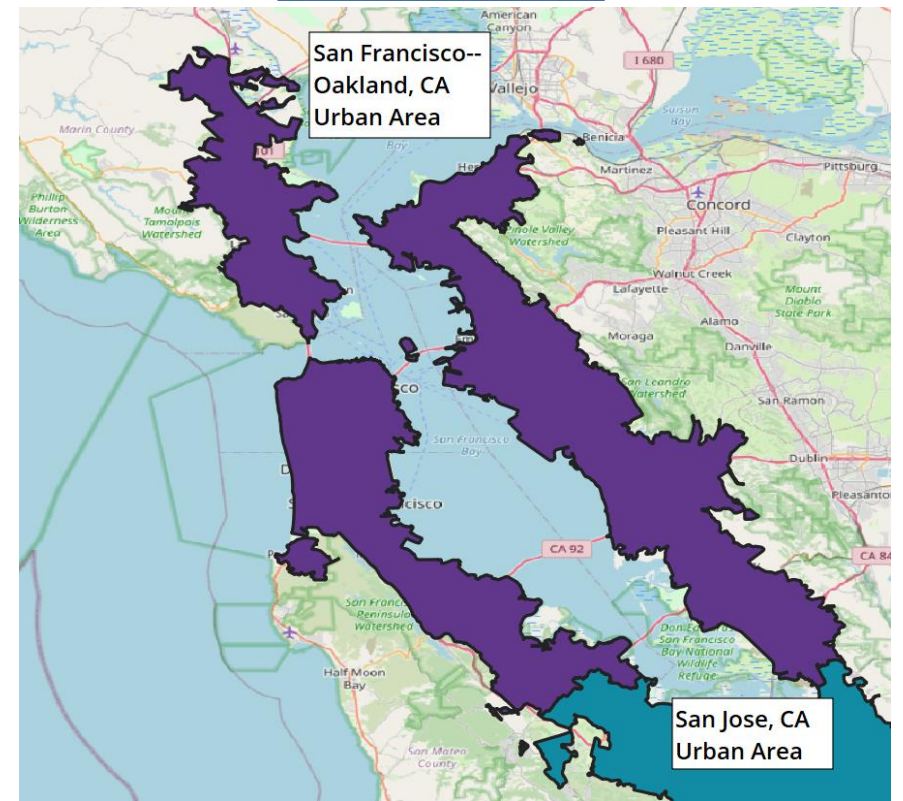
July 2023

# San Francisco--Oakland, CA and San Rafael--Novato, CA Urban Areas

Original



Corrected

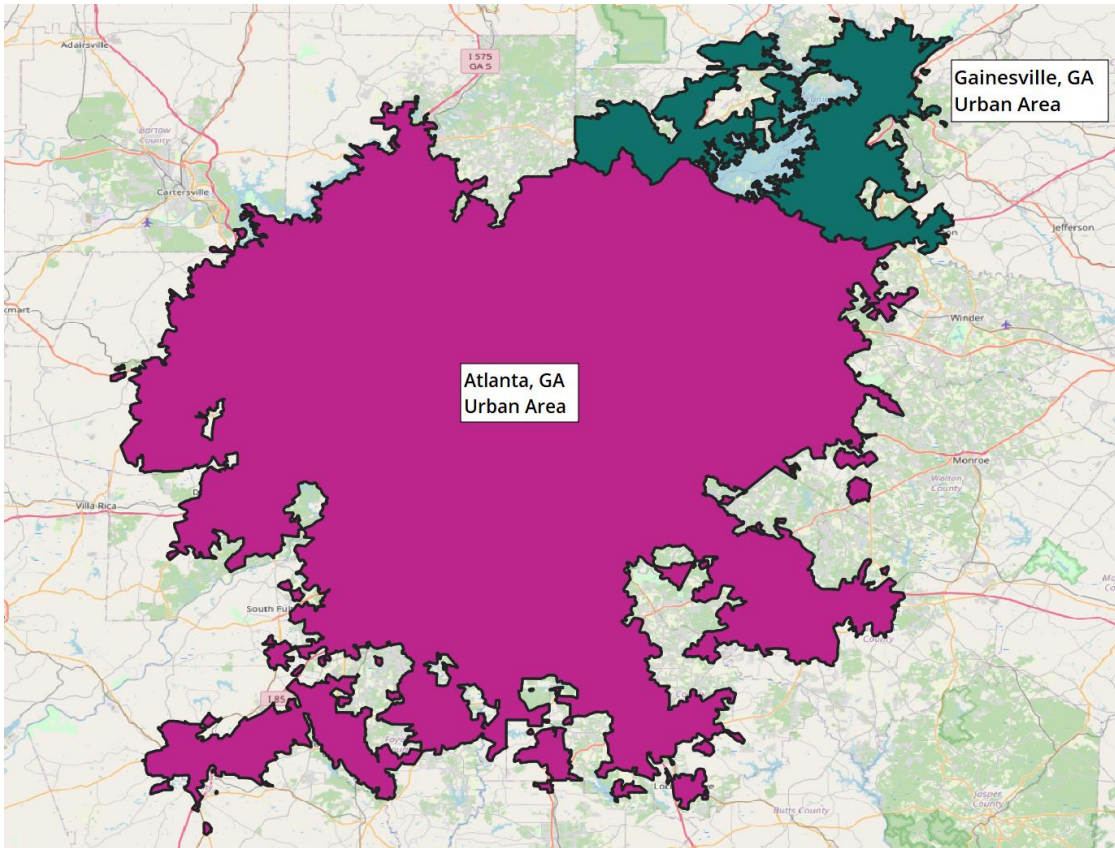


San Rafael--Novato, CA urban territory combined into San Francisco--Oakland, CA Urban Area.

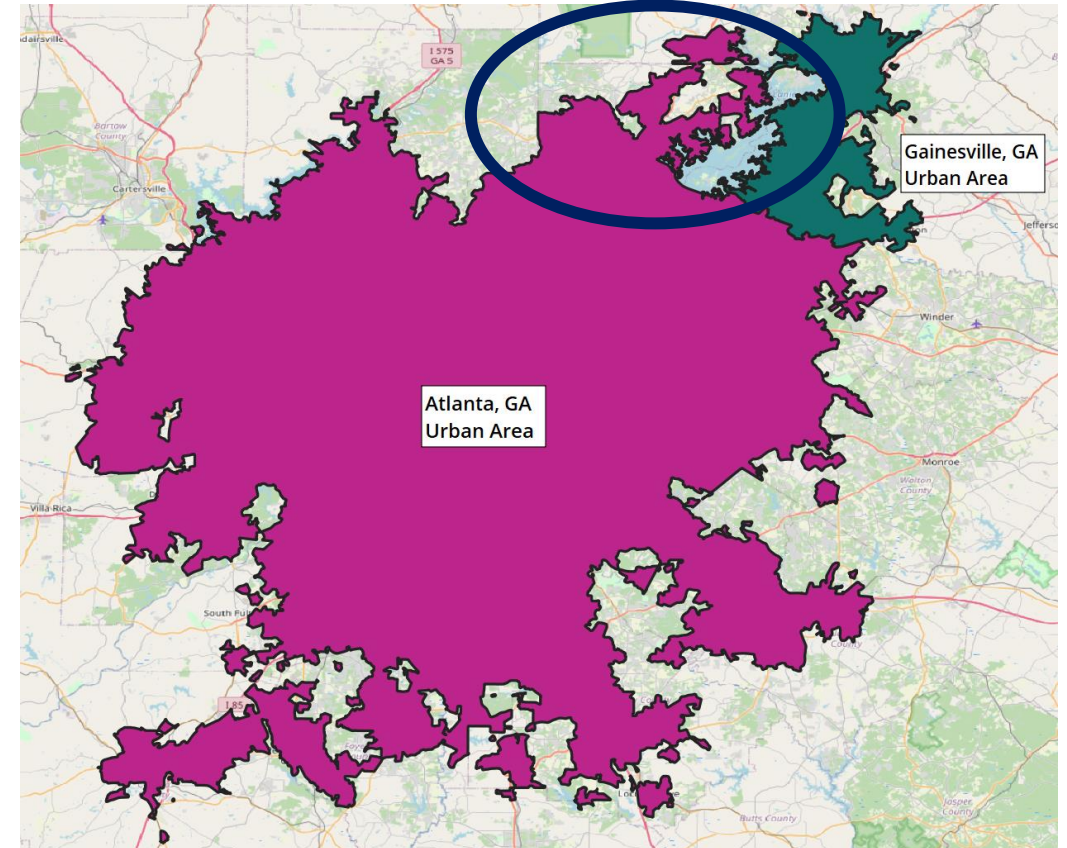


# Atlanta, GA and Gainesville, GA Urban Areas

Original



Corrected

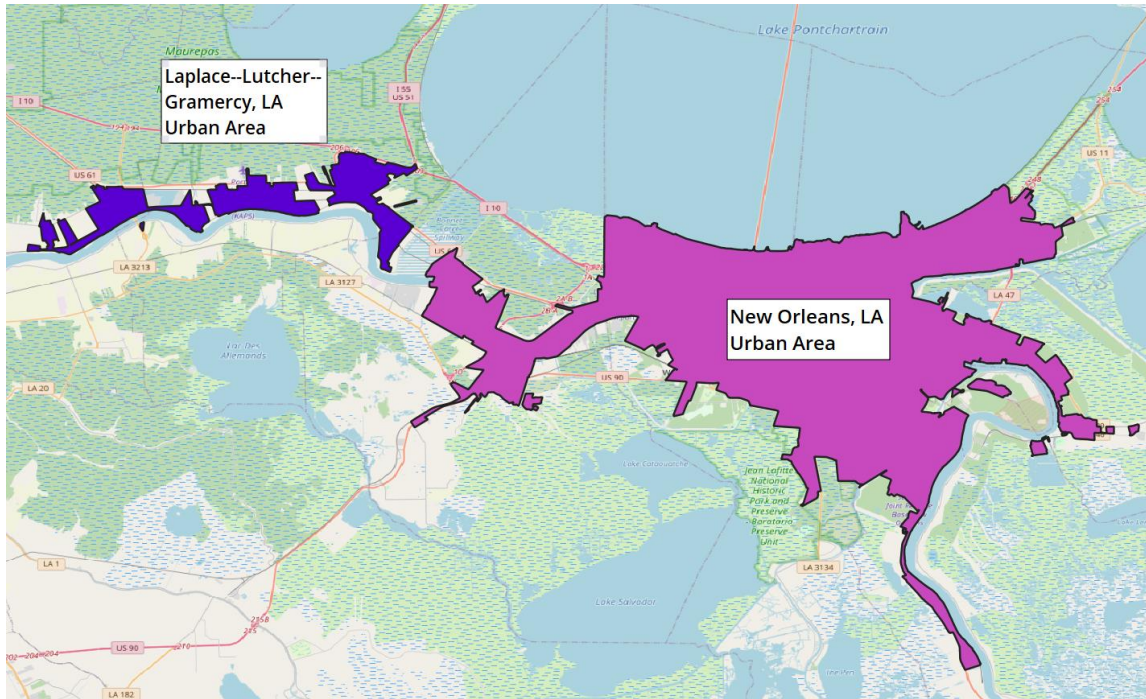


Some urban territory from Gainesville, GA Urban Area reassigned to Atlanta, GA Urban Area.

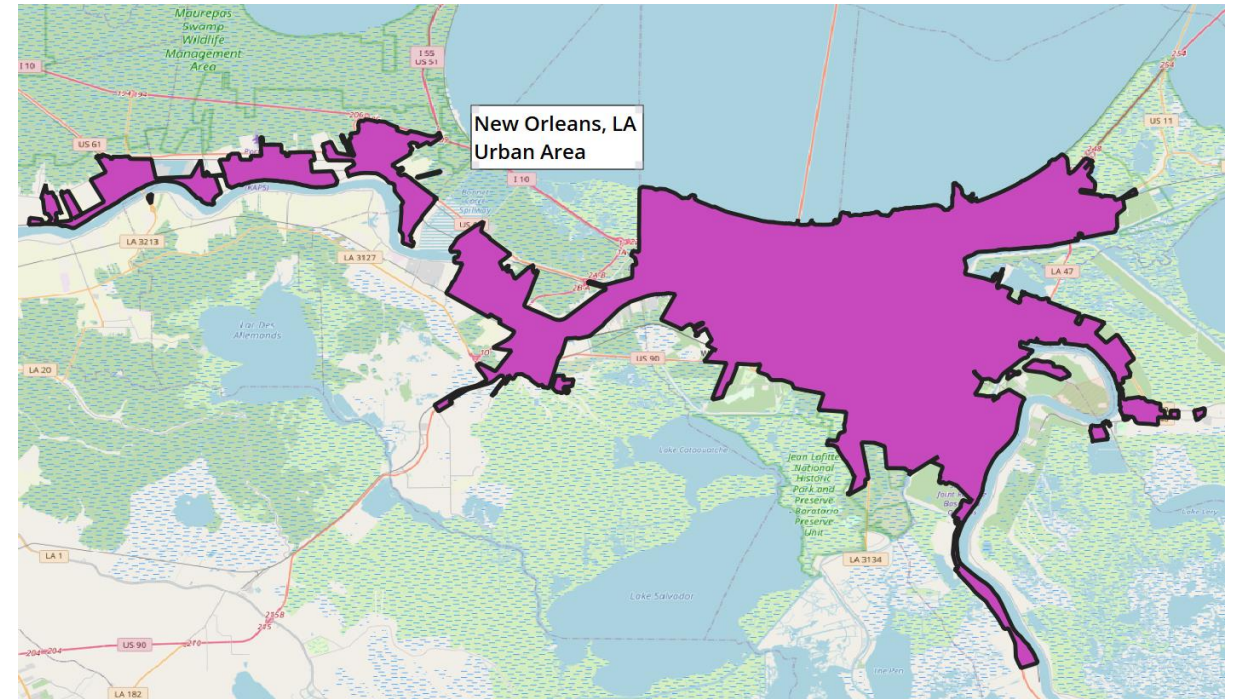


# New Orleans, LA and Laplace--Lutcher--Gramercy, LA Urban Areas

Original



Corrected



Urban territory combined into New Orleans, LA.





# Beyond 2020

# Beyond 2020: Next Steps

- Demographic data published in the Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC).
  - Published May 25, 2023.
  - Subjects: Age, sex, race, Hispanic or Latino origin, household type, family type, relationship to householder, group quarters population, housing occupancy, and housing tenure.
  - Some tables are repeated by race and ethnicity.
- Continue working with stakeholders.
  - The Census Bureau works with tribal, federal, state, and local agencies as well as other stakeholders to ensure understanding of our classification.
  - There are different advantages and disadvantages to urban qualification based on each individual program or funding agency and often qualification for one program may equal a disadvantage in a different program for the same entity.

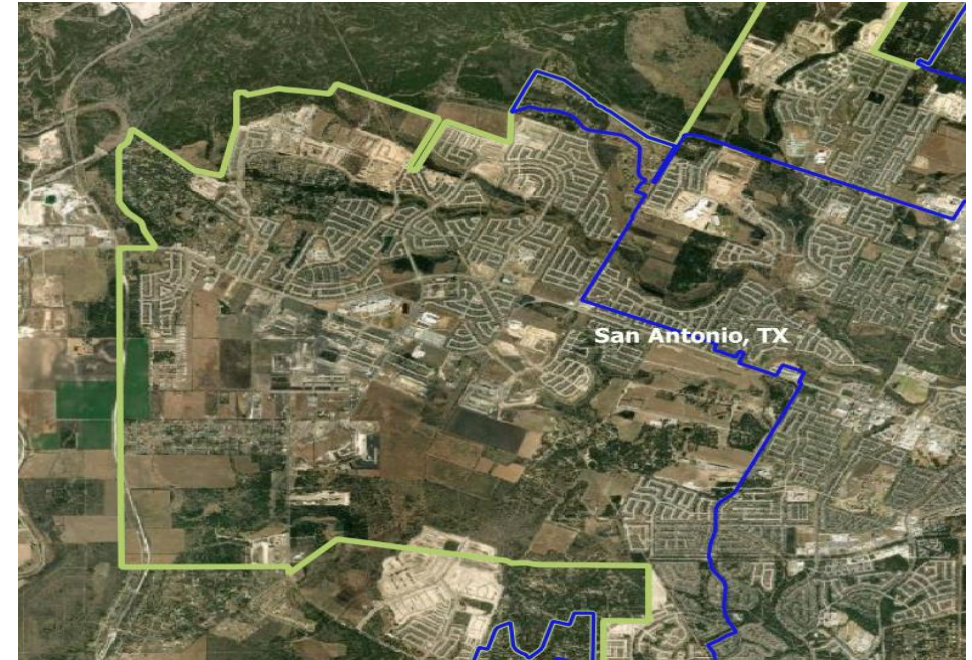
# Beyond 2020: UA Criteria

- Given data user feedback to date, the Census Bureau:
  - Does not anticipate significant UA criteria changes.
  - Will consider additional land use datasets to identify exempted territory.
    - Datasets must be nationally-consistent and freely-available sources.



# Beyond 2020: Additional Considerations

- Continuum and grid-based delineation in addition to “traditional” UA delineation?
  - Historical comparability.
  - Agency reliance on Census Bureau UAs for programmatic uses.
- Intercensal updates
  - Possibility post-2020 delineation since 2020 UAs are housing unit-based.
  - Options:
    - Additive update (most likely), e.g., “add urban” to the current delineation where development occurs.
    - Complete re-delineation.

Post-2010 development on the west side of the San Antonio, TX UA.



Legend:

-  2020 UA Boundary
-  2010 UA Boundary

# Questions?

U.S. Census Bureau  
Geography Division

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>

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