



**Geography Standard:** Understands the nature, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

**Benchmark:** Understands demographic concepts and how they are used to describe population characteristics of a country or region

## The Census Counts

Starting with the first census in 1790, the U.S. has had a census every ten years. The census counts every person living in the U.S. on a certain date. It also includes American citizens, such as soldiers, living abroad. The census data gives useful **statistics**. It tells where Americans live and the size of their families. It tells how many people have come from other places. It shows the number of people in each age group. The census finds out what people do for a living, how much money they earn, and how much education they have. It reports the number of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. Although the census asks personal information, no names are attached to the public data. No one can find out another's private information—like age or salary.

The Constitution requires a census once a decade to decide how many people each state should have in the House of Representatives. The states with the biggest population send the most people to Congress. States with fewer people do not send as many. After a census, some states may gain seats in the House of Representatives. Other states may lose seats. Based on the 2000 census data, New York State lost two seats.

The government needs the census data for other reasons, too. They look to see if the population is growing. They can tell if it is increasing in some areas and decreasing in others. By looking at the age groups, they can see if people are living longer. They can figure out average life expectancy (how long a person usually lives). By looking at the number of births, it's possible to predict the number of babies to expect in the near future. If the number of children is rising, there may be a need for more schools and teachers.

Census data helps the government and businesses decide where to spend money. Census numbers determine how federal funds get spent on housing, schools, and welfare. Companies can use census data to choose where to build a new factory. They want to put it in an area with many workers. Stores want to be near plenty of shoppers.

Today, nearly 90 percent of the world's countries do a population census. The U.S. collects the most detailed data of all. The 2000 census resulted in over half a million pages of information.