



FAQ – URBAN-RURAL Designations

The NHTS has a couple of urban-rural variables, so users have expressed interest in knowing more detail.

URBAN indicates that the household's address is in an urbanized area. (The source used is Urban Areas: 2000 Urbanized Areas: Cartographic Boundary Files. File ua00_d00.shp from [HTTP://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/GEO/WWW/COB/UA2000.HTML](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/cob/ua2000.html).)

An urbanized area consists of the built up area surrounding a central core (or central city), with a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile. Urbanized areas do not follow jurisdictional boundaries thus it is common for the urbanized area boundary to divide a county. For the 2001 NHTS, Urban Areas were calculated two ways.

- Variable URBAN uses the 2000 Urbanized Areas: Cartographic Boundary Files. File ua00_d00.shp from <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/cob/ua2000.html>.
- Variable URBRUR uses the 2000 Urbanized Areas: Cartographic Boundary Files. File ua00_d00.shp from <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/cob/ua2000.html>.

This designation changes over time based on the population density of specific areas, but the 2009 NHTS V2 and the 2001 NHTS both use the urbanized areas designated in the 2000 Census. Table 2 shows the 2001 and 2009 distribution of URBAN. Note that the codes for '1' in an Urban Cluster, and '2', in an Urban Area have different placements in 2001 and 2009.

Home address in urbanized area				
URBAN	Label 2001	Label 2009	2001 Pct	2009 Pct
-9	-	NA	-	0.02
1	In an urban cluster	In an urban area	11.13	66.65
2	In an urban area	In an urban cluster	67.92	10.6
3	In an area surrounded by urban areas	In an area surrounded by urban areas	0.21	0.09
4	Not in an urban area	Not in an urban area	20.74	22.64

URBRUR indicates whether the household's home address is in an urban or rural area. This variable is derived from URBAN. If URBAN is 1, 2 or 3, URBRUR is coded as '1' (Urban). Else, the code is '2' (Rural). Table 1 shows the percent of households in 2001 and 2009 designated as urban and rural.



NHTS 2009
National Household Travel Survey

Household in urban/rural area			
URBRUR	Label	2001 Pct	2009 Pct
-9	NA	-	0.02
1	Urban	79.26	77.34
2	Rural	20.74	22.64

In addition to these Census provided definitions, the 2001 and 2009 NHTS have variables appended from Claritas (now Claritas/Nielsen) to help identify the nature of the land-use around the sampled household.

The Claritas measure of urbanicity is more of a 'continuum' based on a contextual or 'floating' density measure. Claritas has divided the US land area into same-size units and used this grid to develop population density centiles. This reduces the impact of variation in the land area of census tracts and blocks groups, and helps to even out the effect of population lacunae in urban cores.

The two variables describing density at the household location are HBHUR and HTHUR, where B=block group and T=tract. The density is the population density of the grid square which the household's block or tract falls into. This measure is comparable across the country and over time.

There were changes in these designations between the 2001 and 2009 data collections. In 2009, Claritas has combined the separate categories of 'Town' and 'Rural' into a single category--'Town and Country'. Table 3 shows the distribution of households in 2001 and 2009 in these categories.

HBHUR designation	2001	2009
Urban	16.4	17.7
Second City	19.5	18.2
Suburb	23.5	24.3
Town	21.0	-
Rural	19.6	-
Town and Country	-	39.8
Not Ascertained	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0

To assign households as 'Rural', the Census variables URBAN and URBRUR can be used, each showing 22.64 percent of US households in rural areas. To assign households as 'Urban', the analyst should look to see if the Census definition from URBRUR is sufficient, or if a finer definition of area type, either URBAN or HTHUR/HBHUR, would be useful.