Census Tracts

What you should know about the
Participant Statistical Areas Program
(PSAP)

United States Census Bureau
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
census.gov

Classes of Census Geography

- **Political** Geography: (Good for Comparative Analysis)
  - States, Counties, Cities, American Indian Reservations, Townships, etc…
    - These boundaries *may* change between censuses
- **Statistical** Geography: (Best for Spatial Analysis)
  - Census Tracts, Block Groups, Census Blocks, Census Designated Places (CDPs)
    - Designed for planning, research, and analysis in the public and private sector
    - Tracts and block groups do not change between censuses…tracts have ”comparability”

Statistical Geography Hierarchy

State

County

Census Tract → **CDPs** (sub-county, do not nest)

Relatively homogeneous population characteristics

Population Criteria: 1,200 – 8,000 optimum: 4,000

Block Group

Smallest Geography for American Community Survey data

Population Criteria: 600 - 3,000 optimum: 1,500

Census Block

Bounded on all sides by visible and nonvisible features

A city block in urban areas

Basic building block for all other census geography

Why Census Tracts?

- In 1906, Dr. Walter Laidlaw, director of the Population Research Bureau of the New York Federation of Churches, published an article putting forth the idea of delineating and using small geographic areas as a method of studying neighborhoods in New York city.
- https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/tracts_and_block_numbering_areas.html

History of the Census Tract

1790 First Decennial Census

1890 First delineation of small geographic areas called “sanitary districts”

1906 Dr. Walter Laidlaw suggested the delineation of permanent, small geographic areas that would retain their boundaries from census to census

1910 Dr. Laidlaw divided NYC into “districts” and asked Census to do the same for seven other cities

1940 The census tract became an official geographic entity for which the Census Bureau would publish data. Census tracts covered major cities and block number areas (BNAs) covered many other cities.

1990 Census tracts **or** BNAs covered the entire nation (and so do blocks)

2000 The BNA concept was retired and census tracts were defined nationwide

Birth of Census Demographics?

From: Mintz, S., & McNeil, S. (2016). *Digital History*. Retrieved 05/11/2018 from: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu

The **New Deal** did not end the Depression. Nor did it significantly redistribute income. It did, however, provide Americans with economic security that they had never known before…..

The New Deal's greatest legacy was a shift in government philosophy. As a result of the New Deal, Americans came to believe that the federal government has a responsibility to ensure the health of the nation's economy and the welfare of its citizens.

Why are Tract Data Important?

Since the ***New Deal***, Census demographics have helped business and industry identify needs for resource distribution:

- Emergency response by federal and state agencies
- Health care providers plan for services and staff
- Retail business plan for outlet locations
- Non-Profits applying for funding such as CDBG and other grants
- Transportation officials plan and construct infrastructure based on need

In a study conducted at The George Washington University, data from the 2020 Census will help distribute over $500 billion dollars through 16 Federal Assistance Programs…

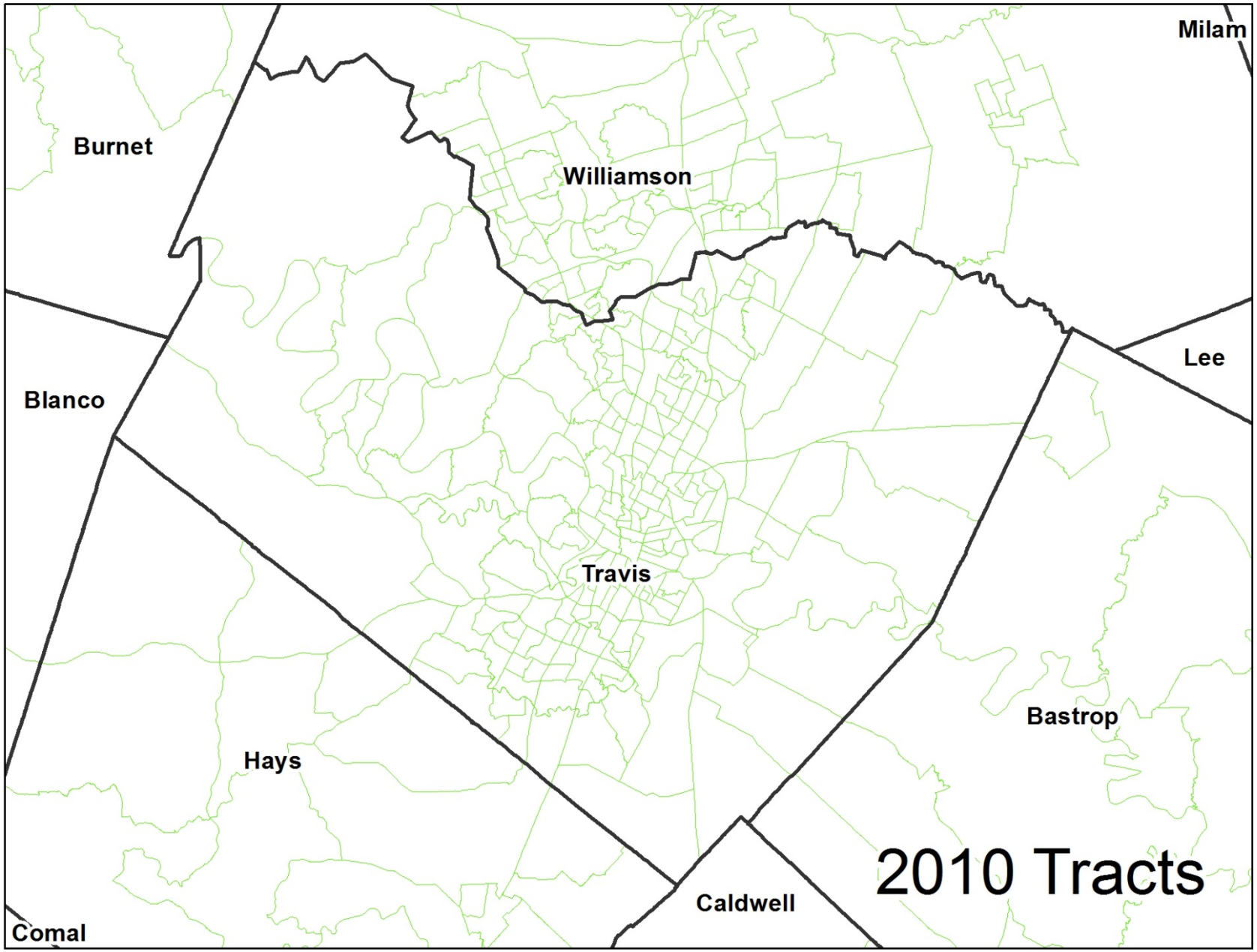
Table 1

Sixteen Large Federal Assistance Programs that Distribute Funds on Basis of Decennial Census-derived Data, FY2015

Program Name	Dept.	Type	Recipients	Obligations
Medical Assistance Program (Medicaid)	HHS	Grants	States	$311,975,766,352
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	USDA	Direct Pay	House-holds	$69,489,854,016
Medicare Part B (Supplemental Medical Insurance) – Physicians Fee Schedule Services	HHS	Direct Pay	Providers	$64,176,725,988
Highway Planning and Construction	DOT	Grants	States	$38,331,904,422
Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers	HUD	Direct Pay	Owners	$19,087,549,000
Title I Grants to Local Education Agencies (LEAs)	ED	Grants	LEAs	$13,859,180,910
National School Lunch Program	USDA	Grants	States	$11,560,852,485
Special Education Grants (IDEA)	ED	Grants	States	$11,233,112,681
State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP)	HHS	Grants	States	$11,089,152,000
Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments Program (Project-based)	HUD	Direct Pay	Owners	$9,238,092,008
Head Start/Early Head Start	HHS	Grants	Providers	$8,259,130,975
Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	USDA	Grants	States	$6,347,680,031
Foster Care (Title IV-E)	HHS	Grants	States	$4,635,733,000
Health Center Program	HHS	Grants	Providers	$4,181,407,055
Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)	HHS	Grants	States	$3,370,228,288
Child Care and Development Fund – Entitlement	HHS	Grants	States	$2,858,660,000
Total				**$589,695,029,211**

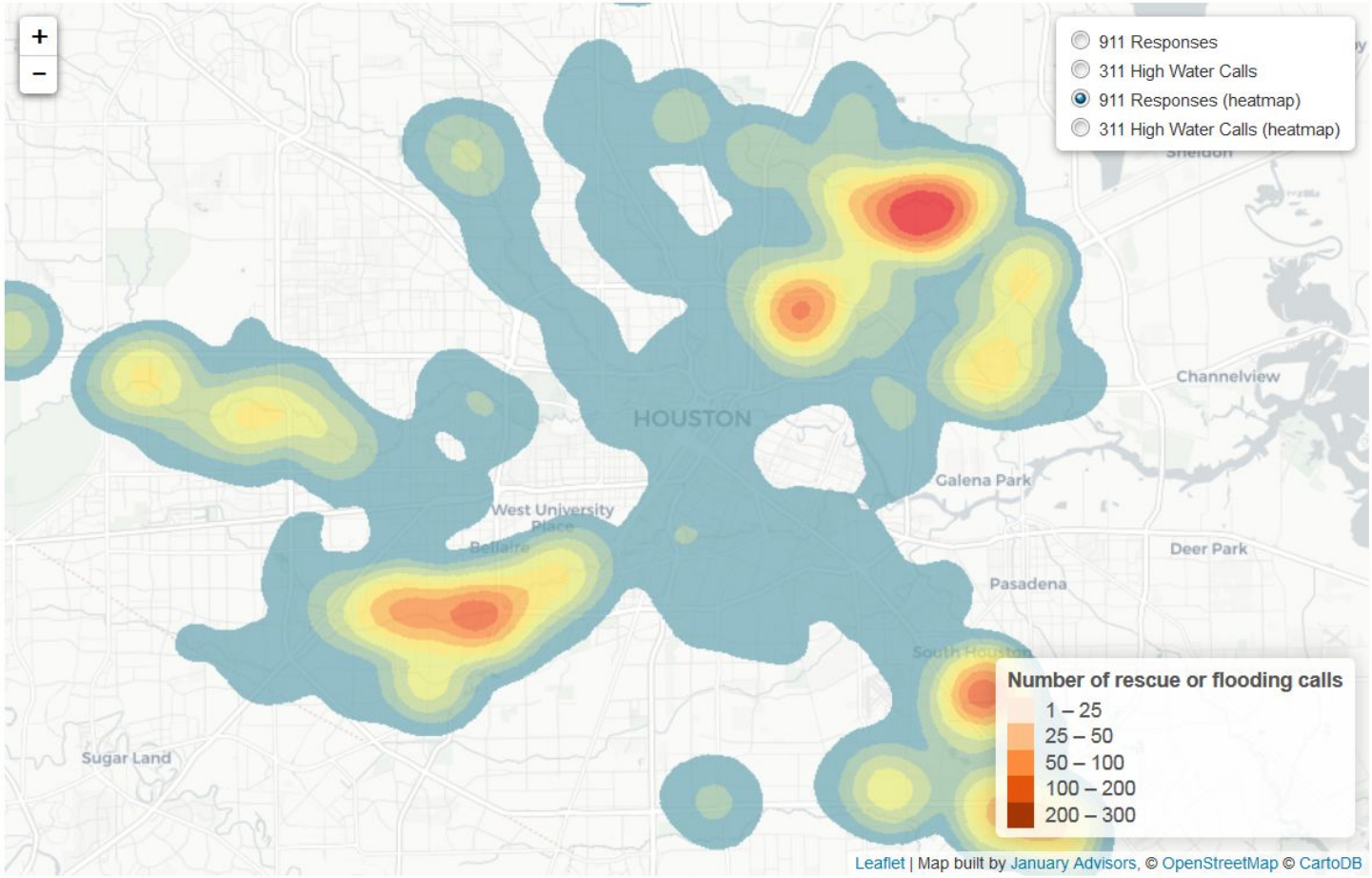
Tract Changes in Travis County 1940-2010

United States Census Bureau
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
census.gov

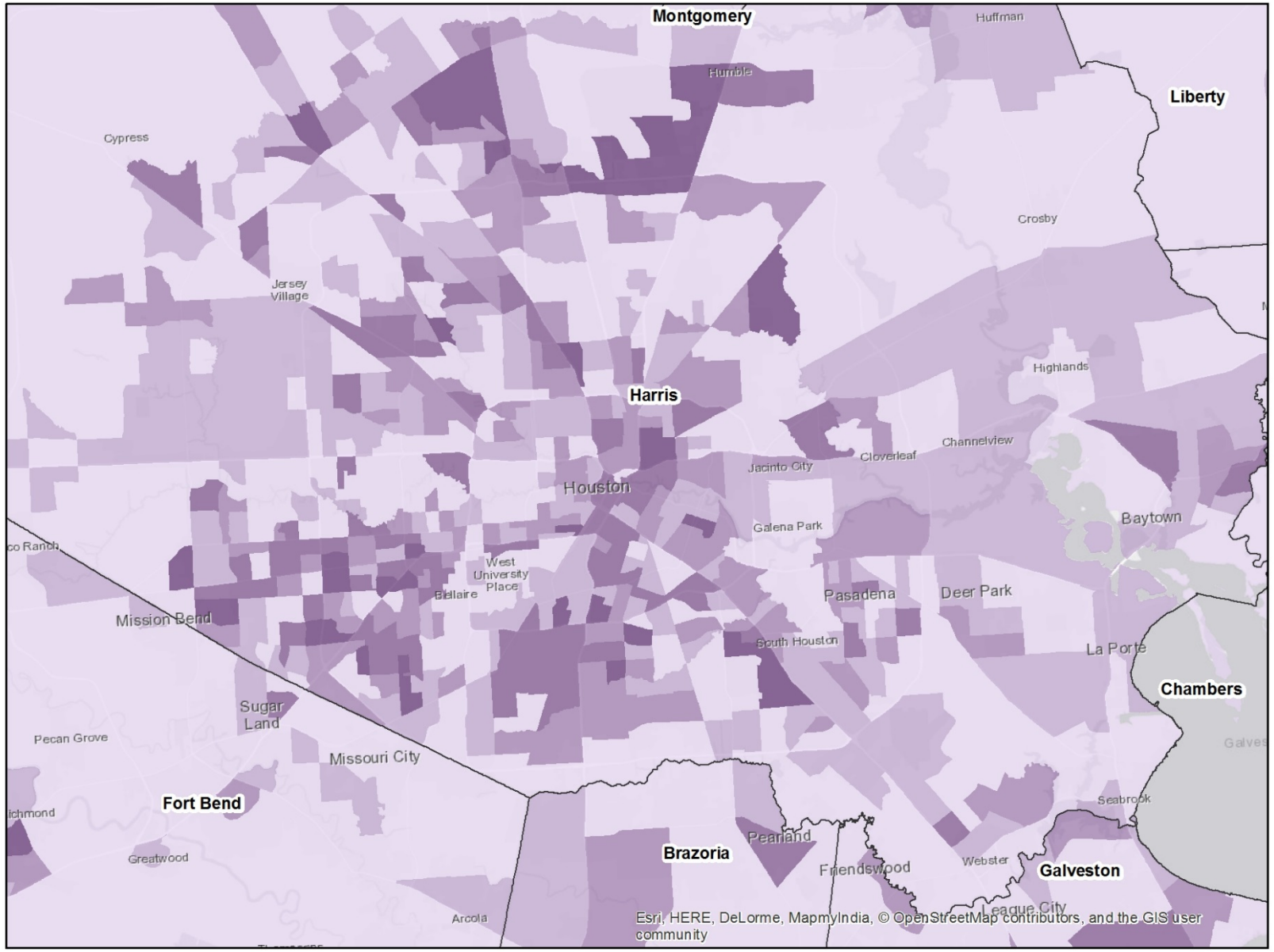


United States Census Bureau

Tracts for Emergency Management



Renter Occupied, No Vehicle Present



United States Census Bureau

Resources

- National Historical GIS (Historical tract boundaries and data)

https://www.nhgis.org/

- Houston by the Numbers (Hurricane Harvey Data)

https://houstonrecovers.org/numbers/

- TIGER/Line® downloads and TIGERWeb REST services

https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/tiger.html

- Economic Development Administration

https://www.eda.gov/programs/disaster-recovery/