How do I choose which vintage (or year) of TIGER/Line Files or Shapefiles to use?

The TIGER/Line Files and Shapefiles page includes tabs for each yearly release (or vintage) of the TIGER/Line Shapefiles and for the three available versions of the TIGER/Line Files.

TIGER/Line Shapefiles

The vintages from 2007 through the current year are in shapefile format. The Census Bureau releases new versions of the TIGER/Line Shapefiles annually, usually in August.

With all of these different vintages available, choosing which one to use can be confusing. It is tempting to think that you should always use the most current vintage of the files available. However, if you are mapping statistical data, the key is to make sure that you are using the geographic boundaries that were in effect at the time that your data were tabulated. Because it can take a while to tabulate and release the statistical data, the most recent geographic boundary files available are usually about a year ahead of the most recent statistical data files available. Here are some rules of thumb for selecting TIGER products to join with statistical census data:

- For 2010 Census data, always use 2010 TIGER products.
- For Census 2000 data, always use 2000 TIGER products.*
- For ACS data, use the TIGER products for the last year in the range for the ACS estimates. For example, if using ACS 2007-11 estimates, use 2011 TIGER products.**
- If you are interested only in features, such as roads, railroads and rivers, use the most recent vintage available.

*Note that Census 2000 TIGER products exist in two locations. The files under the Census 2000 tab are ASCII text files and portray the features and boundaries exactly as they appeared in the TIGER database in the year 2000. You can also find shapefiles for the 2000 boundaries under the 2010 tab. These files show the boundaries that were in effect in 2000, but they are based on the linear features as they appeared in the MAF/ TIGER database in 2010, so they are more spatially accurate.

**There a few exceptions to the ACS rule that apply to geographies that were delineated after the 2010 Census. For example, ACS estimates released for 2010 and 2011 for urban areas and PUMAs were tabulated using the Census 2000 boundaries. ACS estimates released for 2010, 2011, and 2012 were tabulated using the 2009 CBSA definitions. In addition, the 2012 ACS data released for Congressional Districts were tabulated using the 113th Congressional District boundaries, which can be found in the 2013 TIGER products or in the special CD113 release. For complete information on the boundaries used to tabulate ACS estimates, see the American Community Survey Geography Documentation.