

FAST FACTS

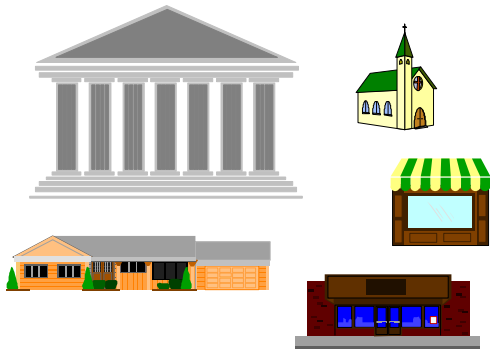
Recent Statistics from The Library Research Service

ED3/110.10/No. 137

November 25, 1997

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Only Three Out of Five American Communities Have Public Library Outlets



One of the quintessential landmarks in the Norman Rockwell image of the American town is the public library building. But, this traditional conception has little to do with contemporary reality.

In metropolitan areas, the public library is usually represented not by a single building, but by a large central library and numerous neighborhood branches. Many New England towns have multiple public libraries. In outlying rural areas, public libraries are occasionally found where there is not even a "wide spot in the road." Generally, however, most people assume that every place big enough to have a local government has a public library, whether it is a creature of the city or town in which it is located or part of a county-wide system or library district.

**Municipal Governments & Places with Public Library Outlets
By Region & Sub-Region, 1992/93**

Nation/ Region/ Sub-Region	Municipal governments (including townships in selected states) 1992	Places with public library outlets 1993	Ratio of places with public library outlets to municipal governments
United States	21,642	13,002	60%
Northeast	4,471	2,938	66%
New England	1,580	1,276	81%
Mid-Atlantic	2,891	1,662	57%
Midwest	8,484	4,454	52%
East North Central	3,907	2,478	63%
West North Central	4,577	1,976	43%
South	6,448	3,518	55%
East South Central	1,511	822	54%
South Atlantic	2,387	1,532	64%
West South Central	2,550	1,164	46%
West	2,239	2,092	93%
Mountain	1,121	831	74%
Pacific	2,239	2,092	93%

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Every five years (most recently in 1992) the Census Bureau conducts a Census of Governments that determines the number of municipal governments. That year, there were 21,642 municipal governments in the U.S., including cities and towns and, in the New England states and New York State, townships. (Note: The District of Columbia is excluded from this analysis.) In 1993, 13,002 places reported having public library outlets, including main or central libraries and library branches. These figures indicate that only three out of five U.S. communities have public library outlets.

Colorado Postscript

Colorado is slightly below the 74 percent norm for the Mountain West states: its 68 percent ratio (based on 266 municipal governments and 180 places with public library outlets) indicates that there may be a public library in two out of three communities in the state.

Sources

- **Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996** (Bureau of the Census, 1996).
- **Public Libraries in the United States: 1993** (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995)
Public library outlet file available on disk and at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/public.html>.