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## MONTHLY ADVANCE ECONOMIC INDICATORS REPORT, JANUARY 2021

Release Number: CB21-32

**Statement Regarding COVID-19 Impact:** The Census Bureau continues to monitor response and data quality and has determined that estimates in this release meet publication standards. For more information, see [COVID-19 FAQs](#).

**February 26, 2021** — The U.S. Census Bureau announced the following international trade, wholesale inventories, and retail inventories advance statistics for January 2021:

	 <b>ADVANCE INTERNATIONAL TRADE: GOODS DEFICIT</b>	 <b>ADVANCE WHOLESALE INVENTORIES</b>	 <b>ADVANCE RETAIL INVENTORIES</b>
<b>JANUARY 2021</b>	\$83.7 Billion +0.7% <sup>°</sup>	\$661.6 Billion +1.3%	\$625.1 Billion -0.6%
<b>DECEMBER 2020</b>	\$83.2 Billion	\$652.8 Billion (R)	\$628.9 Billion (R)
<b>Next release: March 26, 2021.</b>			
<small>* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero. ° Statistical significance is not applicable or not measurable. Data adjusted for seasonality but not price changes. Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Advance Economic Indicators Report, February 26, 2021.</small>			

### Advance International Trade in Goods

The international trade deficit was \$83.7 billion in January, up \$0.5 billion from \$83.2 billion in December. Exports of goods for January were \$135.2 billion, \$1.9 billion more than December exports. Imports of goods for January were \$218.9 billion, \$2.5 billion more than December imports.

### Advance Wholesale Inventories

Wholesale inventories for January, adjusted for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$661.6 billion, up 1.3 percent ( $\pm 0.4$  percent) from December 2020, and were up 0.5 percent ( $\pm 0.7$  percent)\* from January 2020. The November 2020 to December 2020 percentage change was revised from up 0.3 percent ( $\pm 0.4$  percent)\* to up 0.5 percent ( $\pm 0.4$  percent).

### Advance Retail Inventories

Retail inventories for January, adjusted for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$625.1 billion, down 0.6 percent ( $\pm 0.2$  percent) from December 2020, and were down 5.8 percent ( $\pm 0.5$  percent) from January 2020. The November 2020 to December 2020 percentage change was revised from up 1.2 percent ( $\pm 0.2$  percent) to up 1.9 percent ( $\pm 0.2$  percent).

#### Data Inquiries

International Trade Indicator Branch: 301-763-2311 [eid.international.trade.data@census.gov](mailto:eid.international.trade.data@census.gov)

Retail Indicator Branch: 301-763-2713 [eid.retail.indicator.branch@census.gov](mailto:eid.retail.indicator.branch@census.gov)

Wholesale Indicator Branch: 301-763-6856 [eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov](mailto:eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov)

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The February 2021 Advance report is scheduled for release on March 26, 2021. View the full schedule in the Economic Briefing Room: <[www.census.gov/economic-indicators/](http://www.census.gov/economic-indicators/)>. The full text and tables of this release can be found at <[www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html](http://www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html)>.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Intention to Revise: Revisions to the Wholesale and Retail adjusted and not adjusted monthly estimates are scheduled for release in March 2021 and April 2021, respectively. Estimates will be revised to reflect the results of the 2019 Annual Wholesale and Annual Retail Trade Surveys and the results of the 2017 Economic Census. Revisions to the Monthly Wholesale estimates will be reflected in the February 2021 Advance Economic Indicators release scheduled for March 26, 2021. Revisions to the Monthly Retail estimates will be reflected in the March 2021 Advance Economic Indicators release scheduled for April 28, 2021.

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### International Trade in Goods

#### **Goods (Census Basis)**

Data for goods on a Census basis are compiled from the documents collected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and reflect the movement of goods between foreign countries and the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and U.S. Foreign Trade Zones. They include government and non-government shipments of goods and exclude shipments between the United States and its territories and possessions; transactions with U.S. military, diplomatic, and consular installations abroad; U.S. goods returned to the United States by its Armed Forces; personal and household effects of travelers; and in-transit shipments. Data for U.S. exports to Canada are derived from import data compiled by Canada. For more information on the data exchange and substitution please refer to the FT-900. The General Imports value reflects the total arrival of merchandise from foreign countries that immediately enters consumption channels, warehouses, or Foreign Trade Zones.

For imports, the value reported is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection appraised value of merchandise—generally, the price paid for merchandise for export to the United States. Import duties, freight, insurance, and other charges incurred in bringing merchandise to the United States are excluded.

Exports are valued at the free alongside ship value of merchandise at the U.S. port of export, based on the transaction price including inland freight, insurance, and other charges incurred in placing the merchandise alongside the carrier at the U.S. port of exportation.

Additional information on coverage and valuation are available in the Guide to Foreign Trade Statistics, <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#coverage](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#coverage)> and <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#valuation](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#valuation)>, respectively.

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## **Nonsampling Errors**

Goods data are a complete enumeration of documents collected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and are not subject to sampling errors. This report presents current month statistics which reflect nearly complete coverage. Current month statistics reflecting complete coverage will be published in the upcoming U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services report (FT-900). Statistics for other months shown reflect complete coverage and appear in the most recently published FT-900. Quality assurance procedures are performed at every stage of collection, processing, and tabulation. However, the data are still subject to several types of nonsampling errors. Information on nonsampling errors and other quality issues are available in the Guide to Foreign Trade Statistics, <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html)>.

The U.S. Census Bureau recommends that data users incorporate this information into their analyses, as nonsampling errors could impact the conclusion drawn from the results. For a detailed discussion of errors affecting the goods data, see U.S. Merchandise Trade Statistics: A Quality Profile (October 2014), available at <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/aip/quality\\_profile10032014.pdf](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/aip/quality_profile10032014.pdf)> or from the Economic Indicators Division, U.S. Census Bureau.

## **Adjustments for Seasonal and Trading-Day Variations**

Goods data are presented on a seasonally adjusted and not seasonally adjusted basis. Seasonally adjusted (and/or trading day adjusted data) are produced using X-13ARIMA-SEATS software to develop monthly adjustment factors. Goods data are initially classified under the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (Harmonized System), which is an internationally accepted standard for the commodity classification of traded goods. Combining trade into approximately 140 export and 140 import end-use categories makes it possible to examine goods according to their principal uses. These categories are used as the basis for computing the seasonal and trading-day adjusted data. These adjusted data are then summed to the six end-use aggregates for publication. For more information, visit the seasonal adjustment section of the Guide to Foreign Trade here: <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#seasonal](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#seasonal)>

## **Retail and Wholesale Inventories**

National estimates of end-of-month inventories are based on data from the Monthly Retail Trade Survey and the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey. Additional information for each survey can be found at <[www.census.gov/retail](http://www.census.gov/retail)> and <[www.census.gov/wholesale](http://www.census.gov/wholesale)>. The advance estimates contained in this report are not incorporated into the full MRTS and MWTS time series.

The MRTS and MWTS samples selected to measure inventories consist of a stratified simple random sampling method of approximately 11,000 retail firms and 4,200 wholesale firms located in the United States. The retail and wholesale samples include firms of all sizes and are updated on a quarterly basis to account for new retail and wholesale firms, deaths, and other changes to the universe.

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Data for nonresponding firms are imputed based on data for similar-sized firms classified in the same kind of business. For surveyed Retail companies, approximately 43.7 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 58.4 percent. For surveyed Wholesale companies, approximately 53.9 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 57.1 percent.

MRTS estimates cover companies with one or more establishments that sell merchandise and related services to final consumers. Nonemployers are represented in the retail estimates through benchmarking to prior annual survey estimates that include nonemployer sales based on administrative records.

MWTS estimates cover wholesale merchants who sell goods on their own account and include such businesses as wholesale merchants or jobbers, industrial distributors, exporters, and importers. Sales offices and branches maintained by manufacturing, refining, or mining firms for the purpose of marketing their products are not covered in this report. Also excluded is NAICS Industry Group 4251: Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers.

### **Reliability of Estimates**

Because the retail and wholesale estimates are based on a sample survey, they contain sampling error and nonsampling error.

Sampling error is the difference between the estimate and the result that would be obtained from a complete enumeration of the sampling frame conducted under the same survey conditions. This error occurs because only a subset of the entire sampling frame is measured in a sample survey. Standard errors and coefficients of variation are estimated measures of sampling variation.

The margin of sampling error gives a range about the estimate which is a 90 percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percentage change estimate is +1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.9 percent, then the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.753 \times 0.9$  percent or  $\pm 1.6$  percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is  $-0.4$  percent to  $+2.8$  percent. If the interval contains 0, then one does not have sufficient evidence to conclude at the 90 percent confidence level that the change is different from zero and therefore the change is not statistically significant. Estimated changes are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the estimated coefficient of variation is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value  $\pm 1.753 \times CV \times$  (the estimated monthly total).

Nonsampling error encompasses all other factors that contribute to the total error of a sample survey estimate. This type of error can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of businesses, mistakes in the recording and coding of data, and other errors of collection, response, coverage, or processing. Although nonsampling error is not measured directly, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the process to minimize this type of error.

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The U.S. Census Bureau recommends that individuals using retail and wholesale estimates incorporate this information into their analyses, as sampling error and nonsampling error could affect the conclusions drawn from the estimates.

### Adjustments for Seasonal Variations

Concurrent seasonal adjustment is used to adjust the retail and wholesale inventories estimates for seasonal variations. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-13ARIMA-SEATS program. The factors derived from the program are applied to the retail and wholesale estimates of current and previous month inventories and for inventories estimates a year ago as well.

### Data Availability

The Advance Economic Indicators Report is available at [www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html](http://www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html). For archived versions of the Advance Economic Indicators Report please visit the Historical Data tab at the following: [census.gov/econ/indicators/historical\\_data.html](http://census.gov/econ/indicators/historical_data.html).

## RESOURCES

### API

The Census Bureau's application programming interface lets developers create custom apps to reach new users and makes key demographic, socio-economic and housing statistics more accessible than ever before.

[www.census.gov/developers/](http://www.census.gov/developers/)

### FRED Mobile App



Receive the latest updates on the nation's key economic indicators by downloading the FRED App <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/fred-mobile/> for both Apple and Android devices. FRED, the signature database of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, now incorporates the Census Bureau's 13 economic indicators.

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\* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. There is insufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero.

° Statistical significance is not applicable or not measurable for this survey.

(R) Revised from the last published Monthly Retail Trade Report and Monthly Wholesale Trade: Sales and Inventories Report

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**Table 1. U.S. International Trade in Goods by Principal End-Use Category (1)**

In millions of dollars. Details may not equal totals due to seasonal adjustment and rounding. (X) - Not applicable

	Goods - Census Basis (2)						
	Monthly				Percent change		
	January 2021 (a)	December 2020	November 2020	January 2020	January 2021/ December 2020	December 2020/ November 2020	January 2021/ January 2020
<b>Seasonally Adjusted</b>							
Balance	-83,740	-83,190	-86,113	-66,193	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	135,162	133,254	127,368	136,169	1.4	4.6	-0.7
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	13,826	14,478	13,116	11,085	-4.5	10.4	24.7
Industrial Supplies (3)	45,879	43,494	41,689	45,527	5.5	4.3	0.8
Capital Goods	41,548	39,980	38,882	44,592	3.9	2.8	-6.8
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	12,600	13,267	12,415	13,039	-5.0	6.9	-3.4
Consumer Goods	16,107	16,670	16,321	16,447	-3.4	2.1	-2.1
Other Goods	5,203	5,365	4,945	5,480	-3.0	8.5	-5.0
Imports	218,902	216,444	213,481	202,362	1.1	1.4	8.2
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	13,781	12,956	13,400	13,006	6.4	-3.3	6.0
Industrial Supplies (3)	43,147	42,372	39,663	42,239	1.8	6.8	2.2
Capital Goods	59,324	58,900	58,270	55,375	0.7	1.1	7.1
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	31,579	33,136	31,170	29,188	-4.7	6.3	8.2
Consumer Goods	62,813	59,608	61,509	52,877	5.4	-3.1	18.8
Other Goods	8,258	9,473	9,470	9,678	-12.8	0.0	-14.7
<b>Not Seasonally Adjusted</b>							
Balance	-76,407	-82,918	-85,722	-67,404	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	127,530	132,565	127,024	128,993	-3.8	4.4	-1.1
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	14,154	15,223	15,019	10,669	-7.0	1.4	32.7
Industrial Supplies (3)	44,344	43,168	40,457	44,512	2.7	6.7	-0.4
Capital Goods	38,582	41,294	37,740	41,781	-6.6	9.4	-7.7
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	10,541	11,664	12,635	11,239	-9.6	-7.7	-6.2
Consumer Goods	15,131	15,566	16,218	15,728	-2.8	-4.0	-3.8
Other Goods	4,779	5,650	4,955	5,063	-15.4	14.0	-5.6
Imports	203,937	215,483	212,746	196,397	-5.4	1.3	3.8
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	13,483	13,249	12,966	13,162	1.8	2.2	2.4
Industrial Supplies (3)	41,632	41,401	37,605	42,235	0.6	10.1	-1.4
Capital Goods	54,049	60,662	58,110	52,277	-10.9	4.4	3.4
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	28,607	33,441	31,887	27,103	-14.5	4.9	5.6
Consumer Goods	58,632	57,058	62,825	52,223	2.8	-9.2	12.3
Other Goods	7,533	9,673	9,353	9,398	-22.1	3.4	-19.8

(a) Advance statistics

(1) For a listing of the detail included in each end-use category, see <[www.census.gov/foreign-trade/reference/codes/enduse/exeumstr.txt](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/reference/codes/enduse/exeumstr.txt)>.

(2) Data are presented on a Census basis. The information needed to convert to a balance of payment basis is not available.

(3) Includes petroleum and petroleum products.

NOTES:

\* Current month statistics reflect nearly complete coverage; current month statistics reflecting complete coverage will be published in the upcoming U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services report (FT-900). Statistics for other months shown reflect complete coverage and appear in the most recently published FT-900.

\* For information on data sources, nonsampling errors, and definitions, see the explanatory notes in this release or at <[www.census.gov/econ/indicators/advance\\_report.pdf](http://www.census.gov/econ/indicators/advance_report.pdf)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Advance Economic Indicators Report, February 26, 2021.

## Table 2. Levels and Percent Changes for Inventories

Inventories estimates are shown in millions of dollars. Estimates are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey and the Monthly Retail Trade Survey.

	Inventories					
	Monthly			Percent change		
	January 2021 (a)	December 2020 (r)	January 2020 (r)	January 2021/ December 2020	December 2020/ November 2020	January 2021/ January 2020
<b>Adjusted<sup>1</sup></b>						
Merchant wholesale <sup>2</sup> trade, total	661,561	652,818	658,102	1.3	0.5	0.5
Durable goods	392,066	387,106	399,646	1.3	0.3	-1.9
Nondurable goods	269,495	265,712	258,456	1.4	0.8	4.3
Retail trade, total	625,066	628,886	663,231	-0.6	1.9	-5.8
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	435,425	436,463	432,444	-0.2	2.2	0.7
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	189,641	192,423	230,787	-1.4	1.1	-17.8
<b>Not Adjusted</b>						
Merchant wholesale <sup>2</sup> trade, total	675,139	658,001	668,393	2.6	0.3	1.0
Durable goods	390,710	380,974	398,120	2.6	-1.2	-1.9
Nondurable goods	284,429	277,027	270,273	2.7	2.5	5.2
Retail trade, total	618,860	620,376	657,239	-0.2	-3.9	-5.8
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	427,315	427,933	423,891	-0.1	-5.6	0.8
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	191,545	192,443	233,348	-0.5	0.2	-17.9

(a) Advance estimate

(r) Revised estimate

See footnotes and notes at the end of Table 3.

## Table 3. Estimated Measures of Sampling Variability

Estimates are shown as percents and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey and the Monthly Retail Trade Survey.

	Inventories					
	Monthly			Standard Error of		
	Coefficient of Variation			Percent Change		
	January 2021 (a)	December 2020 (r)	January 2020 (r)	January 2021/ December 2020	December 2020/ November 2020	January 2021/ January 2020
Merchant wholesale <sup>2</sup> trade, total	1.9	1.9	1.8	0.2	0.2	0.4
Durable goods	2.5	2.6	2.5	0.3	0.2	0.5
Nondurable goods	1.7	1.5	1.5	0.3	0.3	0.9
Retail trade, total	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.3
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.6
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	1.3	1.3	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.5

(a) Advance estimate

(r) Revised estimate

(1) Estimates are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variation, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available not adjusted estimates as input to the X-13ARIMA-SEATS program. The factors derived from the program are used in calculating all seasonally adjusted estimates shown in this table.

(2) The 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) defines merchant wholesalers as including manufacturers' sales branches and offices. However, the estimates included in this release exclude manufacturers' sales branches and offices. Note that this is not a change in coverage from prior releases and is consistent with the description used in the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey data products.

### NOTES:

Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates not adjusted for seasonal variation. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at [www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how\\_surveys\\_are\\_collected/monthly\\_methodology.html](http://www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html) for wholesale and at [www.census.gov/retail/mrts/how\\_surveys\\_are\\_collected.html](http://www.census.gov/retail/mrts/how_surveys_are_collected.html) for retail.