




MONTHLY ADVANCE ECONOMIC INDICATORS REPORT, AUGUST 2021

Release Number: CB21-157

September 28, 2021 — The U.S. Census Bureau announced the following international trade, wholesale inventories, and retail inventories advance statistics for August 2021:

	 ADVANCE INTERNATIONAL TRADE: GOODS DEFICIT	 ADVANCE WHOLESALE INVENTORIES	 ADVANCE RETAIL INVENTORIES
AUGUST 2021	\$87.6 Billion +0.9%°	\$731.0 Billion +1.2%	\$603.3 Billion +0.1%*
JULY 2021	\$86.8 Billion	\$722.3 Billion (R)	\$602.8 Billion (R)
Next release: October 27, 2021.			
<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, September 28, 2021.</small>			

Advance International Trade in Goods

The international trade deficit was \$87.6 billion in August, up \$0.8 billion from \$86.8 billion in July. Exports of goods for August were \$149.0 billion, \$1.1 billion more than July exports. Imports of goods for August were \$236.6 billion, \$1.9 billion more than July imports.

Advance Wholesale Inventories

Wholesale inventories for August, adjusted for seasonal variations and trading day differences, but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$731.0 billion, up 1.2 percent (± 0.2 percent) from July 2021, and were up 12.3 percent (± 1.2 percent) from August 2020. The June 2021 to July 2021 percentage change was unrevised from the preliminary estimate of up 0.6 percent (± 0.4 percent).

Advance Retail Inventories

Retail inventories for August, adjusted for seasonal variations and trading day differences, but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$603.3 billion, up 0.1 percent (± 0.2 percent)* from July 2021, and were up 2.3 percent (± 0.7 percent) from August 2020. The June 2021 to July 2021 percentage change was unrevised from the preliminary estimate of up 0.4 percent (± 0.2 percent).

The September 2021 Advance report is scheduled for release on October 27, 2021. View the full schedule in the Economic Briefing Room: <www.census.gov/economic-indicators/>. The full text and tables of this release can be found at <www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html>.

Data Inquiries

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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> and <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#valuation>, respectively.

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>.

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

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<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>

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> and <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.

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 46.6 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 55.5 percent. For surveyed Wholesale companies, approximately 55.3 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 57.7 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.

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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 ± 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.

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.

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](#).

Statement Regarding Natural Disasters: For information on the impact of natural disasters, including hurricanes, on the compilation of this report, please see [Wholesale Natural Disaster FAQs](#) and [Retail Natural Disaster FAQs](#).

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Data Availability

The Advance Economic Indicators Report is available at <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>.

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/>

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		
	August 2021 (a)	July 2021	June 2021	August 2020	August 2021/ July 2021	July 2021/ June 2021	August 2021/ August 2020
Seasonally Adjusted							
Balance	-87,600	-86,819	-92,006	-82,189	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	149,039	147,942	145,269	118,669	0.7	1.8	25.6
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	12,079	12,812	12,759	11,574	-5.7	0.4	4.4
Industrial Supplies (3)	56,838	53,686	53,507	39,015	5.9	0.3	45.7
Capital Goods	44,021	44,676	43,701	36,533	-1.5	2.2	20.5
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	11,128	12,185	11,572	12,019	-8.7	5.3	-7.4
Consumer Goods	19,245	18,816	18,006	14,977	2.3	4.5	28.5
Other Goods	5,728	5,768	5,725	4,551	-0.7	0.7	25.9
Imports	236,639	234,762	237,275	200,858	0.8	-1.1	17.8
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	15,666	15,930	16,011	13,387	-1.7	-0.5	17.0
Industrial Supplies (3)	56,862	55,191	56,853	38,249	3.0	-2.9	48.7
Capital Goods	63,190	63,354	63,421	54,544	-0.3	-0.1	15.9
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	27,990	29,558	28,484	27,841	-5.3	3.8	0.5
Consumer Goods	63,047	60,261	62,389	57,285	4.6	-3.4	10.1
Other Goods	9,883	10,467	10,117	9,552	-5.6	3.5	3.5
Not Seasonally Adjusted							
Balance	-97,127	-93,684	-95,152	-85,509	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	147,970	144,110	147,636	117,833	2.7	-2.4	25.6
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	11,780	12,100	11,899	10,777	-2.6	1.7	9.3
Industrial Supplies (3)	56,897	53,258	53,234	39,144	6.8	0.0	45.4
Capital Goods	43,285	44,209	45,665	36,115	-2.1	-3.2	19.9
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	11,882	11,273	11,960	12,899	5.4	-5.7	-7.9
Consumer Goods	18,393	17,593	19,135	14,371	4.5	-8.1	28.0
Other Goods	5,733	5,678	5,744	4,527	1.0	-1.2	26.6
Imports	245,096	237,793	242,788	203,342	3.1	-2.1	20.5
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	15,451	15,702	16,324	12,902	-1.6	-3.8	19.8
Industrial Supplies (3)	58,563	57,128	58,958	38,784	2.5	-3.1	51.0
Capital Goods	64,948	64,569	66,508	54,641	0.6	-2.9	18.9
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	28,984	28,603	29,170	28,462	1.3	-1.9	1.8
Consumer Goods	67,400	61,567	61,321	59,608	9.5	0.4	13.1
Other Goods	9,752	10,224	10,507	8,946	-4.6	-2.7	9.0

(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>.

(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>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Advance Economic Indicators Report, September 28, 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		
	August 2021 (a)	July 2021 (r)	August 2020 (r)	August 2021/ July 2021	July 2021/ June 2021	August 2021/ August 2020
Adjusted¹						
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	730,980	722,303	651,150	1.2	0.6	12.3
Durable goods	434,056	429,226	389,040	1.1	1.2	11.6
Nondurable goods	296,924	293,077	262,110	1.3	-0.3	13.3
Retail trade, total	603,306	602,752	589,790	0.1	0.4	2.3
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	452,394	449,537	408,254	0.6	0.5	10.8
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	150,912	153,215	181,536	-1.5	0.2	-16.9
Not Adjusted						
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	717,588	713,329	640,352	0.6	0.7	12.1
Durable goods	437,234	433,669	391,137	0.8	2.1	11.8
Nondurable goods	280,354	279,660	249,215	0.2	-1.3	12.5
Retail trade, total	593,181	589,539	578,323	0.6	-0.6	2.6
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	447,002	439,805	402,979	1.6	0.0	10.9
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	146,179	149,734	175,344	-2.4	-2.4	-16.6

(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		
	August 2021 (a)	July 2021 (r)	August 2020 (r)	August 2021/ July 2021	July 2021/ June 2021	August 2021/ August 2020
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	1.7	1.7	1.8	0.1	0.2	0.7
Durable goods	2.4	2.4	2.5	0.1	0.2	1.0
Nondurable goods	1.3	1.3	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.9
Retail trade, total	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.4
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	1.1	1.1	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.4
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	1.5	1.5	1.3	0.2	0.3	0.8

(a) Advance estimate

(r) Revised estimate

(1) Estimates are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variation and trading day differences, 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 for wholesale and at www.census.gov/retail/mrts/how_surveys_are_collected.html for retail.