

in the United States where there is just one person per square mile. Overall, the average population density of the U.S. is about 88 people per square mile.

The natural features or characteristics of a region often influence where people live. Based on the map in Figure 5, there are more people in the eastern half than the western portion of the United States. It is easier for people to build communities on flat land. In addition, water provides resources and a means for transportation. These physical features act as pull factors in attracting people to settle near them. There are other physical features that act as push factors since it is difficult to live in certain environments such as mountains or deserts. Looking at the patterns in the map above, what physical features may explain why the population density is high in certain areas? Can you think of any physical features that may explain why the population density is sparse in other areas?

Similarly, people are not evenly distributed across the Earth. **Population distribution** refers to the spread or pattern of settlement in a given region. Population distribution is the spatial pattern you see when you look at the various population densities in a given area. Both the distribution and density of people on the Earth is related to differences in geographic features and the availability of resources such as jobs, food, water, and transportation.

Demographers study both population density and population distribution. Some questions that their investigations raise include:

- Is the world overpopulated? If the world is not overpopulated now, can it ever be? What criteria would you use to determine "overpopulation"?
- What problems might arise in crowded areas?
- How might living in a crowded place affect your quality of life?