

# Some Interesting and Some Troubling Amateur Radio License Statistics

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I stumbled upon an interesting website with several tables and graphs of amateur radio license data for the United States ([US Amateur Data](#)). Most of the information was updated as of December 31, 2024. Where this is not the case, I will note the date for that data.

First, some of the interesting information. By far, the most common first prefix letter is "K" with just over 72% of amateur licenses. "W" and "N" are at ~14% and ~11%, respectively; while "A" is the first prefix letter for only 3.2% of amateur licenses. These numbers surprised me because I felt like I have made many more contacts with A, N and W prefixes than the above percentages. To check on this, I sorted my ALog file by callsign and exported all of the A, K, N and W contacts as adif files. I deleted the contacts that were not US states (mainly Puerto Rico) and "re-enumerated" the adif list to get the totals. I compare the web data to my contacts in the table below.

<b>First Letter of Call</b>	<b>US Data</b>	<b>N5JGE Data</b>
<b>A</b>	3.2%	8.2%
<b>K</b>	72.3%	47.3%
<b>N</b>	10.6%	18.8%
<b>W</b>	13.8%	25.8%

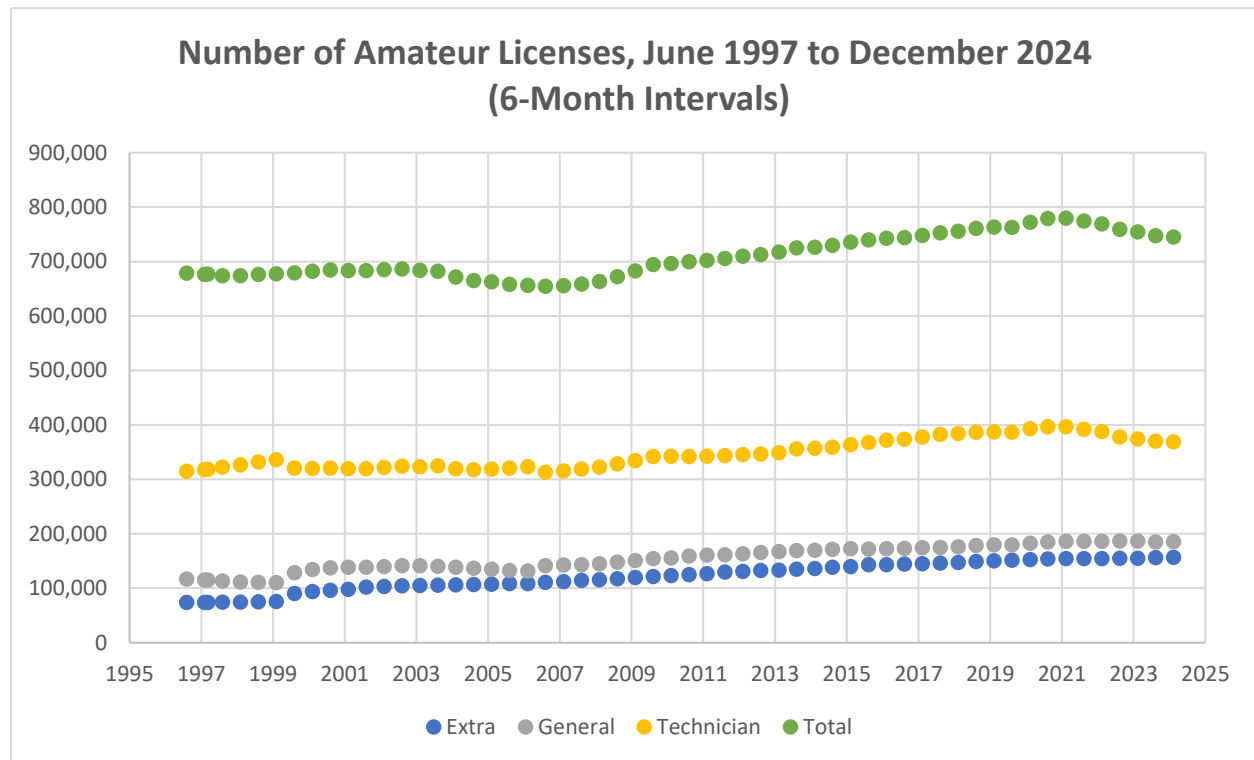
As I suspected, the A, N, and W prefix contacts in my log are much higher than they are in the US amateur license database. In trying to find the reason for this, I looked at the top 50 POTA activators. Of the top-50, 39 were US operators. The percentage of A, K, N and W prefixes among those POTA activators was added to the table and shown below. POTA activators have a much higher percentage of A and N prefixes and a slightly higher percentage of W prefixes than US amateurs in general. So, the fact that I do a lot of POTA hunting seems to explain some of the differences between my contacts compared to US licenses overall. Perhaps if looked at larger sample of POTA activators, the number of N and W prefixes would become closer to my contact data.

<b>First Letter of Call</b>	<b>US Data</b>	<b>N5JGE Data</b>	<b>POTA Activators</b>
<b>A</b>	3.2%	8.2%	10.2%
<b>K</b>	72.3%	47.3%	46.2%
<b>N</b>	10.6%	18.8%	28.2%
<b>W</b>	13.8%	25.8%	15.4%

Another statistic that was surprising to me is that only 21% of amateurs have vanity callsigns, while 79% of amateurs kept their FCC-issued callsigns. I thought the vanity callsigns would be

higher based hams that I know. One statistic that was not provided is the number of hams that have region numbers different than the region that they actually live in. This is one FCC change that I wish was not done because it would be nice to know from their callsign about where a ham was located. Of course, with modern logging software or online databases (like QRZ and POTA), you can instantly find that information and much more if you are online with your cellphone or PC while operating.

Now for some of the troubling data. The graph below shows the number of licensed amateurs from 1997 until the end of 2024. The overall trend is positive, but the rate of growth is very slow. The trendline over this time shows 4137 new licenses per year or a growth rate of only 0.56% / year. There was a dip in the number of licensees from 2003 to 2007, followed by a steady increase from 2007 through 2020. The rate of growth during that period was twice that of the overall period (1.1% or 8510 new licenses / year). The number of licenses has decreased every year since then at an average rate of 4.4% as detailed in the table below the graph. (For the graph and table, I am not showing the Novice and Advanced license classes. However, the data for those license classes are included in the total license numbers.)



Amateur Radio Operators by Class, December 2021 to December 2024						
License Class	Dec 2021	Dec 2022	Dec 2023	Dec 2024	4-Yr. Change	% Change
<b>Extra</b>	154,347	154,442	155,126	156,532	2,185	1.42
<b>General</b>	185,997	186,324	186,742	185,273	-724	-0.39
<b>Technician</b>	396,232	387,548	374,440	368,992	-27,240	-6.87
<b>Total</b>	779,554	769,156	754,534	745,283	-34,271	-4.4

