

Proposed Questions for Tracking Survey on Official Statistics  
10/11/11  
Version 2

Introduction:

Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I work for \_\_\_\_\_. Thanks for agreeing to help us today. Let me start by telling you a little about what we will be doing. Today we are working on some questions that will be asked of people in a telephone survey. We are very much interested in your own opinions and thoughts today. There aren't any right or wrong answers, I just want to hear things from your perspective. After I ask you the survey questions, I'm really interested in what the questions meant to you, what you think they are getting at, so I'm going to ask you questions about the survey questions. There aren't any right or wrong answers there either. I'm just really interested in your thoughts.

Permission to Tape-Record:

Because it would be hard to keep track of everything you say today, I'm going to tape-record this session. HAND RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM. Please read this over and sign it. I want you to know that your responses will not be associated with your name and will only be seen by people working on this project. The tapes will be destroyed after we conduct our analysis. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can decline to answer any particular question.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. I will read you some numbers that you may have heard of or read about on the radio, TV, newspapers, the Internet or somewhere else. Please tell me if you have heard of them:
  - a. The Unemployment rate?
  - b. The total number of people in the United States, or the population count?
  - c. Obesity statistics?
  - d. The Consumer Price Index?
  - e. The Gross Domestic Product or GDP?
  - f. The Consumer Confidence Index?
  - g. The Dow Jones Industrial Average?
  - h. The Nielsen TV Ratings?

*[PROBE: For those mentioned, ask: Can you tell me a little bit about that? How did you come to hear or read about {fill name}? If no to all, ask: Are there any on this that think you might have heard of, but aren't sure? Tell me why you're thinking yes (or no).]*

- i. *If yes, You mentioned that you have heard of the unemployment rate. Do you happen to know who measures the unemployment rate? (blind coded)*
  1. Dept. of Labor
  2. Bureau of Labor Statistics
  3. Census
  4. Federal Government
  5. Media
  6. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Don't know

*[PROBE: How did you come to know this? How sure are you of your answer? If don't know: Have you ever thought about where this information comes from or have any guesses about where it comes from?]*

- i. *If yes, You mentioned that you have heard of the population count. Do you happen to know who conducts the population count? (blind coded)*
  1. Dept. of Commerce
  2. Census Bureau
  3. Federal Government
  4. Media
  5. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Don't know

*[PROBE: How did you come to know this? How sure are you of your answer? If don't know: Have you ever thought about where this information comes from or have any guesses about where it comes from?]*

- ii. *If yes, You mentioned that you had heard of obesity statistics. Do you happen to know who measures obesity statistics? (blind coded)*

1. Dept. of Health and Human Services
2. Centers for Disease Control
3. National Institute of Health
4. National Center for Health Statistics
5. Hospitals
6. Federal Government
7. Media
8. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
9. Don't know

iii. *[PROBE: How did you come to know this? How sure are you of your answer? If don't know: Have you ever thought about where this information comes from or have any guesses about where it comes from?]*

iv. *If yes, You mentioned that you had heard of the Neilson TV Ratings. Do you happen to know who calculates the Neilson TV ratings?*

1. Neilson Company
2. Federal Government
3. Media
4. Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. Don't know

*[PROBE: How did you come to know this? How sure are you of your answer? If don't know: Have you ever thought about where this information comes from or have any guesses about where it comes from?]*

2. When important decisions need to be made based on statistics, which of the following sources is more believable to you:

- a. A University
- b. An agency of the Federal government
- c. A private company
- d. A political party
- e. The media
- f. Don't care
- g. Don't know

*[PROBE: For those mentioned, ask: Can you tell me a little bit about that? Why do you feel that way? Why do you prefer (answer) over others?]*

3. Numbers like the unemployment rate, the population count and obesity statistics are statistics produced by agencies of the federal government. We call them “federal statistics.” Have you ever *used* or talked about federal statistics like the unemployment rate, the population count or obesity statistics for study, work, or any other purpose? (Yes, No, DK)

*[PROBE: If yes: Can you give me an example of what you’re thinking? How did you use the federal statistic? Or how have you talked about it and with whom?*

*If no: Have you ever thought about or used any kind of statistics? Which ones? Or has this never really crossed your mind?]*

- a. *(If yes): Have you used federal statistics frequently, occasionally, or only once or twice?*

*[PROBE: Can you tell me a little bit about that and give me an example of what you’re thinking? How, for example, did you use these statistics? What statistics did you use?]*

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about federal statistics?

*[PROBE: for each question below ask: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

- a. Federal statistics on unemployment, population, and health are important for understanding our society. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*

- b. Policy makers need federal statistics to make good decisions about things like federal funding. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*

- c. State and local government officials need federal statistics to make good decisions about things like where to locate hospitals and schools. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*

- d. Statistics provided by the federal agencies are generally accurate. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*

*[PROBE: Why do you think they are accurate (or not accurate)? What does it mean for a statistic to be accurate?]*

- e. Federal statistics give a good picture of life in the United States. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: Why do you agree (or disagree) that they give a good picture of life? What does that expression mean in your mind?]*
  
- f. Statistics provided by federal agencies are often biased. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: What do you think the word 'biased' is getting at in this question?]*
  
- g. Statistics produced by federal agencies, like the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, do not favor one political party or another. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*
  
- h. There is political interference in the work of federal statistical agencies. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: What does it mean.....? What are you thinking about here?]*
  
- i. People can trust federal statistical agencies to keep information about them confidential. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: What does it mean to keep information confidential? What are you thinking about here?]*
  
- j. Federal statistical agencies share too much information with each other. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: What does it mean to share too much information? Can you give me an example?]*
  
- k. All federal statistical agencies can get information collected by any one of them. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*
  
- l. Information collected to create federal statistics is sometimes used by the police and the FBI to keep track of people who break the law. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
*[PROBE: What kinds of things do you think this question means when it says 'keep track of people who break the law'? Can you give me an example?]*

- m. Federal statistical agencies give personal information about people to marketing firms. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
[PROBE: *What kind of information are you thinking about here?*]
  - n. If I needed to, I could easily find out exactly how federal statistics are produced. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*
  - o. Federal statistical agencies are honest and professional. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*  
[NOTE: *How would you know if a statistical agency was NOT honest and professional? What would that mean?*]
  - p. Private companies could produce more accurate statistics than Federal statistical agencies. *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?*
5. Sometimes federal statistical agencies need to get information such as employment history or retirement benefits. They can do it by getting the information from other government agencies or by asking people for it directly in a survey. Some people think people's privacy would be better protected if each agency collected the information directly through surveys. How do you feel about federal agencies collecting information directly? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, or strongly against?*
- a. How do you yourself feel about federal agencies trying to save government money and save people's time by sharing information with each other? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, strongly against?*

[PROBE: *why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?*]

6. When you fill out a form for a government agency about your own income, do you think they keep a record of that information?
- a. Yes
    - i. Which of the following best describes what you think happens to that record:
      - 1. The government agency does not share your information and uses it only for the purpose it was collected for.
      - 2. The government agency shares it with any other government agency that may need it.
      - 3. The government agency only shares your information with your consent.
    - ii. What do you think they should do with that record:
      - 1. Keep it only for themselves?
      - 2. Share it with other government agencies as needed?
      - 3. Ask you first, then share it if you say it is ok.
  - b. No

*[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

7. How about government programs, like food stamps or temporary aid to needy families - When you fill out a form to apply for government program, do you think they keep a record of that information?
- c. Yes
    - i. Which of the following best describes what you think happens to that record:
      - 1. The government agency does not share your information and uses it only for the purpose it was collected for.
      - 2. The government agency shares it with any other government agency that may need it.
      - 3. The government agency only shares your information with your consent.
    - ii. What do you think they should do with that record:
      - 1. Keep it only for themselves?
      - 2. Share it with other government agencies as needed?
      - 3. Ask you first, then share it if you say it is ok.
  - d. No

*[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

8. When you give your own information to one government agency, does that agency own that information or do you still own that information? Does another government agency have the right to ask for and get your information? What if they promise confidentiality?

*[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

9. Earlier we talked about the unemployment rate that the Bureau of Labor Statistics produces. Currently the unemployment rate is measured by asking people about their work experience directly in a survey.
  - a. Do you think the unemployment rate would be more accurate or less accurate if it was calculated from information already available to other government agencies, like your state unemployment office, or would it not make a difference?

*[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

10. Earlier, we also talked about the census that is conducted every ten years by the U.S. Census Bureau. Currently, the census asks for the number of people that live in each household, their ages, genders, race, ethnicity and relationships among household members.
  - b. Imagine that the census was conducted, in part, with information already available to other government agencies, like the Social Security Administration. Do you think it would be more accurate, less accurate, or it would not make a difference?
  - c. What if the census were conducted, in part, with commercial data from a private company? Do you think it would be more accurate, less accurate than asking people directly, or would it not make a difference?

*[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]*

11. Federal Statistical Agencies often need detailed, specific information to create statistics about people. They can either ask people for it directly or get it from another available source. Which do you think would be more accurate:
  - a. To get your earnings history information from you or from the Social Security Administration?
  - b. To get your current income information from you or from the IRS?
  - c. To get your employment information from you from a state agency, like the employment or workforce office?
  - d. To get your health services experiences from you or from Medicare?
  - e. To get your health services experiences from you or from your doctor?

- f. To get your home value from you or from a private company?
- g. To get information on your purchases from a credit card company you use?

[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]

12. If you knew your specific name and information would never be singled out and would only be used for statistics, would you be in favor of, or against a federal statistical agency:
- a. Getting your earnings history information from the Social Security Administration? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, or strongly against?*
  - b. Getting your current income information from the IRS? Are you strongly, etc.
  - c. Getting employment information about you from a state agency, like the employment or workforce office?
  - d. Getting your health services experiences from Medicare?
  - e. Getting your health services experiences from your doctor?
  - f. Getting your home value from a private company?
  - g. Getting information on your purchases from a credit card company you use?

[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]

13. In order to do a survey, Federal statistical agencies need contact information, like a phone number or an address, to locate people for a survey.
- a. How do you feel about a statistical agency getting your contact information from another government agency, like the post office? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, or strongly against?*
  - b. How do you feel about a statistical agency getting your contact information from a state office, like a state Department of Motor Vehicles? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, or strongly against?*
  - c. How do you feel about a statistical agency getting your contact information from a private company, like a commercial mailing list company? *Are you strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat against, or strongly against?*

[PROBE: why do you say {fill answer}? As needed: In your own words, what was that statement trying to say?]

IF YOU HAVE TIME:

14. Now I'm going to read you a list of organizations in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some or very little?

*[PROBE: for each question below ask: why do you say {fill answer}? What does it mean to have confidence (or not have confidence) in {fill institution}??]*

- a. The mass media, such as newspapers, radio, and television.
- b. Bloggers on the Internet.
- c. The Federal government.
- d. Federal statistics, such as the unemployment rate, the population count, or obesity statistics.
- e. Political polls.
- f. Your state government.
- g. Banks.
- h. Large corporations
- i. The U.S. Supreme Court.

15. Now just a few questions about some other topics:

*[PROBE: For each of these - why do you say {fill answer}? Can you give me an example of what you mean?]*

- a. In general, how worried are you about an invasion of your personal privacy: very worried, somewhat worried, not very worried, or not worried at all?
- b. Have you personally ever been the victim of what you felt was an invasion of privacy? (yes/no)
- c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?)
- d. The government knows more about me than it needs to. (Do you agree strongly agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?)

## Debriefing

I have just a couple of alternative questions I'd like to ask you:

1: Which one of the following statements do you believe is true?

- (1) The government has a single central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents.
- (2) There is no single government central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents, but there are separate databases with this information maintained by individual departments such as the Census, the Social Security Administration, and the IRS.
- (3) There are no single government nor individual departments' records of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents.
- (4) Don't know

2: And which, if any, of the following statements would you prefer to be true?

- (1) The government has a single central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents.
- (2) There is no single government central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents, but there are separate databases with this information maintained by individual departments such as the Census, and the IRS.
- (3) There are no single government nor individual departments' records of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents.
- (4) Don't know

3: And which, if any, of the following statements would you prefer to be true?

- (1) The government has a single central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents which is used only to help produce statistics on society and the economy.
- (2) The government has a single central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents which is used only for administrative purposes such as paying benefits or for tax returns.
- (3) The government does not have a single central database of the name, address and date of birth of all US residents.
- (4) Don't know

*The concept of federal statistics:*

These questions have focused a lot on what we're calling federal statistics. Does that term, federal statistic, have any meaning to you? Does it make sense or is something you've never thought about? What does 'federal government' mean to you? Does the fact that the federal government produces statistics on a variety of topics come as new information to you? Or was this something you already knew? Tell me what you're thinking. Can you give me examples?

What about the term "official statistics" or "government statistics"? Do they mean the same or different than "federal statistics"?

*The concept of confidentiality:*

When the questions asked about keeping information confidential, what do you think they were talking about? What does it mean to keep information confidential? How would confidentiality be broken?

*The concept of trust:*

Do you think most people trust numbers and statistics produced by the federal government? Why would or why wouldn't they? What would make that information trustworthy or NOT trustworthy? Why would we have reason to trust it or not trust it?

For analysis purposes, we need to get a little more information from you:

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Are you of Hispanic origin?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. What is your race? You may choose more than one. Are you:
  - a. White?
  - b. Black or African American?
  - c. American Indian or Alaska Native?
  - d. Asian?
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander?
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - a. Less than high school?
  - b. High school diploma or GED?
  - c. Some college?
  - d. Bachelors' Degree?
  - e. Graduate Degree?
5. Is your household's income:
  - a. Less than \$25,000 a year?
  - b. Between \$25,000 and \$50,000?
  - c. Between \$50,000 and \$100,000?
  - d. Over \$100,000?
6. How many people, including yourself and any adults or children live with you? \_\_\_\_\_