

Privacy and Confidentiality Views Toward Surveys Collected in the Era of COVID-19

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This presentation is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion. The views expressed are those of the authors and not those of the U.S. Census Bureau. The paper has been reviewed for disclosure avoidance and approved under CBDRB-FY21-CBSM002-020, CBDRB-FY20-CBSM002-001 and CBDRB-FY21-CBSM002-001. Additional data are from the Integrated Communications Contract Order 18: Campaign Monitoring and Optimization.

2020 Census Surveys, Privacy and Confidentiality

Data Source	General description
2020 Census Privacy and Confidentiality Study	A mailout survey with phone and in-person follow-up, specifically examined privacy and confidentiality views toward the census.
2020 National Privacy Concerns Survey	An online survey sampled from an address-based, probability-based frame, focused on how concerned respondents were about the privacy of individual items on the census.
2020 Census Tracking Survey	A dual RDD-probability and non-probability-web survey, collected data on views towards data confidentiality, among other topics.

Research Questions

- What are current privacy and confidentiality concerns of respondents?
- Do these differ by demographic groups?
- What other attitudinal or behavioral variables predict confidentiality concern?

2020 Census Privacy and Confidentiality Survey

2020 Evaluation of Privacy and Confidentiality

- National multimode (English/Spanish) survey
 - General opinions on privacy and confidentiality, specific attitudes concerning decennial items, importance of 2020 Census, attitudes about administrative records, demographics
- Qualitative Component designed to reach hard-to-count populations
 - Focus groups with Community Partners
 - Interviews with National Partners
 - Observation of partnership events

Pandemic effects on Qualitative Component

- Focus groups planned in-person were held virtually and somewhat delayed
- Adjusted focus group protocol
 - Anticipated that participants would want to talk about Covid-19
 - Asked questions about pandemic before asking about privacy and confidentiality issues
 - Opportunity to ask how the pandemic affected partnership work and how it affected hard-to-count respondents in terms of 2020 Census response

How might the pandemic have affected attitudes about privacy? *Preliminary Findings*

- Pandemic needs overshadowed importance of the census
 - Organizations pivoted to pandemic
 - Census described as “trivial”
- Amplified mistrust that was already present
 - Most issues with Census and the pandemic were not specific to Covid-19 but were already present
- Unable to counteract misinformation due to cancelation of events
 - No counternarrative
- No extension of the census and potential undercount

2020 National Privacy Concerns Survey

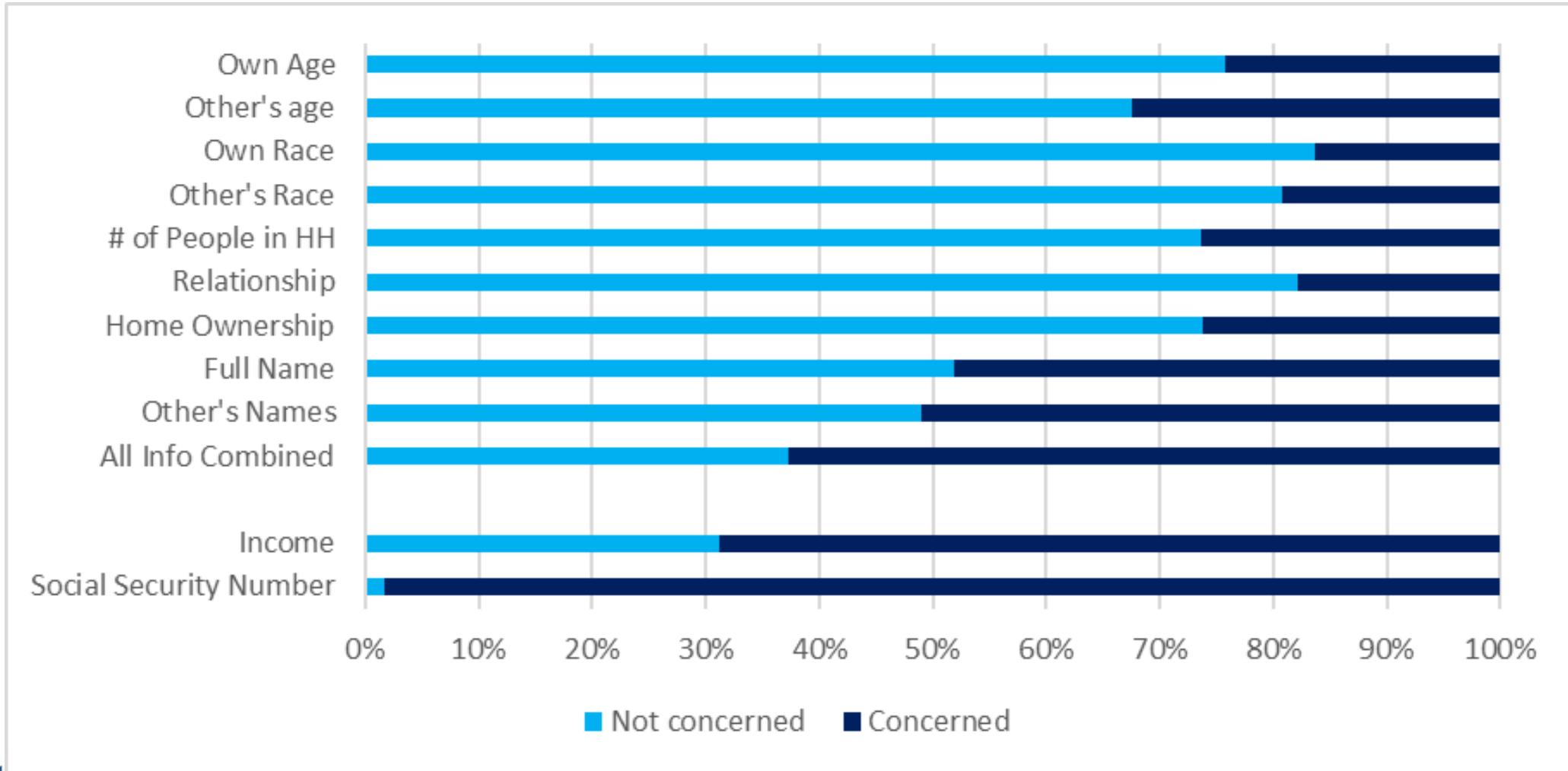
National Respondent Privacy and Confidentiality Concerns Survey

- Decennial census questions
- Concern about census items
 - For the next set of questions, please think about the Census Bureau questionnaire you just completed and what would happen if someone was able to find out this information about you or your household. Would it concern you? How concerned would you be?
- Hacking and Reidentification
- Privacy-Accuracy Trade-Off
 - I am willing to share information about me and my household with some government agencies (like the Census Bureau) so the government can produce more useful data and statistics, even if it means having less control over that information OR
 - I would rather keep information about me and my household private even if it means the data and statistics produced by the government are less useful
- Privacy Behaviors

Methods: National Survey

- **Sample:** KnowledgePanel is recruited via postal mailing. All US residential non-institutional addresses are eligible for selection. Ipsos provides non-internet households a tablet with a mobile data plan. The sample was selected to generate 10,000 responses reflecting the national distribution of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, home ownership, education and income according to Census Bureau benchmarks. Results were weighted to these benchmarks.
- **Recruitment:** Panel respondents received an email invitation and reminders as well as a notification of the survey on the panel member portal.
- **Survey Administration:** The questionnaire was administered online only using the survey platform Qualtrics.
- **Field Period: June 11th – June 29th, 2020**

Individual Concern about Census Items



Predictors of Overall Concern (all decennial items)

More concerns

- Worried about hacking
- Worried about reidentification
- Non-response to income
- Younger (ages 18-24)
- Higher education (Bachelor's Degree and higher)

Fewer concerns

- Willing to share private info to benefit federal statistics
- Hispanic
- Black/African American

Predictors of Concern Across Items

- Pattern relatively consistent across other concern items:
 - Worry about hacking and reidentification stood out as strong and consistent predictors of concern
 - The two tradeoff attitude questions also frequently emerged as significant predictors of concern
 - Non-report of income as well as age and education were consistent predictors in the same direction (income non-reporters, 18-24 year olds, and those with a bachelor's degree or more consistent were more likely to report concern across items)
 - Race and ethnicity were often non-significant in these models, and when they were significant the direction varied by the particular concern

2020 Census Tracking Survey

2020 Census Tracking Survey

- Awareness, attitudes, self-reported intent to participate in the U.S. 2020 Census, perceptions about data usage concerns and selected topics on messages.
- Monthly (September to December 2019) and **weekly (from January to September 2020).**

Phone

- Nationally representative probability-based sample survey using dual-frame Random Digit Dialing (RDD) telephone interviews of adults
- 1,400 completed cases per month from Sept. to Dec. 2019.
- 200 interviews completed daily for a total sample size of 1,400 completed cases weekly from Jan. - Sept. 2020.
- English and Spanish.

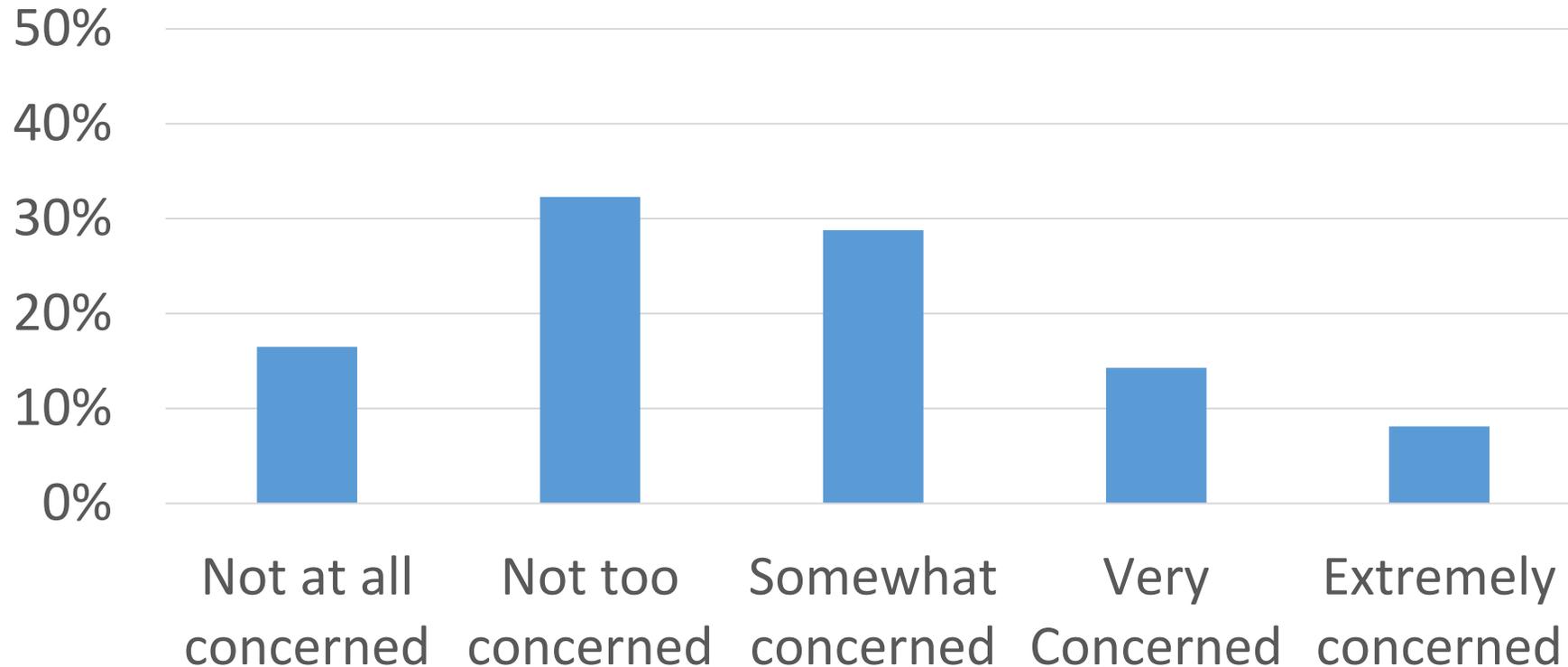
Web

- Nonprobability-based sample from two web panels
- 2,100 interviews per month between Sept. and Dec. 2019.
- 300 per day and, thus, 2100 per week from Jan. to Sept. 2020
- English and Spanish.

Confidentiality Concern Index

- How concerned are you, if at all, that the Census Bureau **will not keep answers to the 2020 Census confidential?**
- How concerned are you, if at all, that the Census Bureau **will share individuals' answers to the 2020 Census with other government agencies?**
- How concerned are you, if at all, that the answers you provide to the 2020 Census **will be used against you?**
- How concerned are you, if at all, that **an unauthorized person** from outside the Census Bureau will access your answers to the census?
 - Extremely concerned (5)
 - Very concerned (4)
 - Somewhat concerned (3)
 - Not too concerned (2)
 - Not at all concerned (1)

Confidentiality Concern Index



Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88

Predictors – Attitudes/Behaviors

- Examples of federal statistics are the population count, the number of deaths in the U.S. by different diseases, the crime rate, and the unemployment rate. **Have you ever used federal statistics for study or work?**
- Personally, how much trust do you have in the federal statistics in the United States? Would you say that you **tend to trust federal statistics or tend not to trust them?**
- How much, if at all, **do you think it matters if you personally are counted** in the 2020 Census?
 - A great deal
 - Some
 - A little
 - Not at all

Predictors – Demographics/Controls

- Age
- Sex
- Hispanic origin/Race
- Education
- Language spoken at home
- Country of birth
- Sexual Orientation
- Month of collection
- Mode of collection

Predictors of Confidentiality Concern

More concerns

- Tend not to trust Federal Statistics
- Hispanic and non-White
- Less education (less than high school; high school grad)
- Born outside the U.S. (or in a territory)
- Lesbian/gay, Bisexual or Other
- Reported on the web

Fewer concerns

- Believe it's important to be counted
- Do not use Federal Statistics
- Older (ages 45+)
- Females
- Speak only English at home
- Renter or occupied without payment

Conclusions

- Inconsistent findings across surveys (and constructs) for race and ethnic groups as well as education. We need to understand better why, how, and when the concerns vary by group.
- Important to keep into account the pandemic context. Have concerns changed during the year? Will those changes maintain? Is it different for different groups?
- For example, the 2020 Evaluation Privacy and Confidentiality Study found that people thought the census was trivial and that the context amplified distrust already present. Are these concerns visible in the other quantitative measures? Will this attitude maintain? Will it impact future response rates?

Next Steps

- Examine concerns over time by different groups:
 - Were concerns measured in January/February 2020 the same or different than those measured in August/September 2020?
 - Does this differ by demographic group?
- Examine discrepancies between the different surveys or constructs – differences in measured concern by race and ethnic group and by education.
- Examine regional differences by factors related to the pandemic.
- What are the critical constructs of privacy and confidentiality that we need to measure to understand sources of concerns across groups?

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