



EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON QUALITY IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS 2024 ESTORIL - PORTUGAL

Studying the relation between data quality and trust in official statistics

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Disclaimer: The views are those of the authors and not the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. State Department, or NORC.
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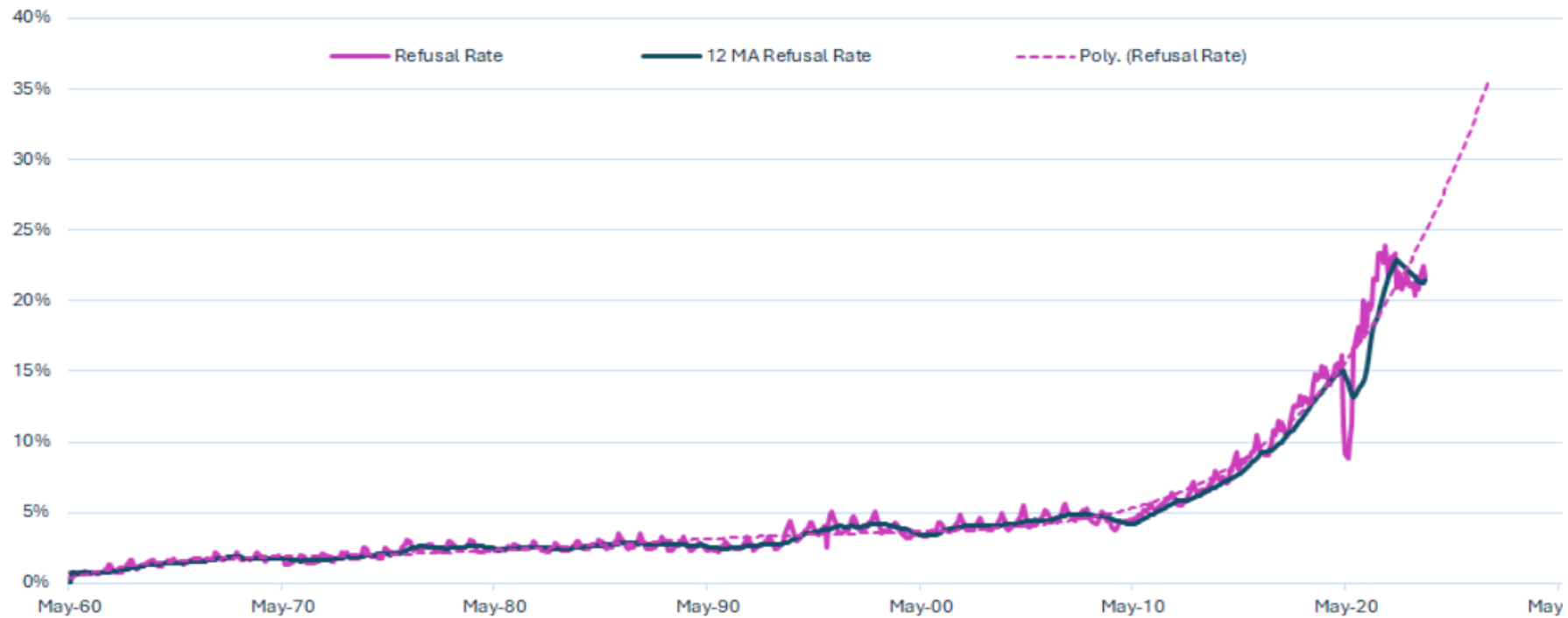


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Current Population Survey (CPS) Refusal Rate by Month, January 1960-February 2024



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 1960-2024 (unweighted)



Nonresponse paradox

- How does one reconcile official statistics as one of the pillars of democracy with the decline in government survey response rates?
- For the first 50 years of the CPS, refusal rates never climbed above 5%
- As recently as February 2024, over 20% of the eligible, sampled population were not represented in the CPS by choice
- Not much has changed with the CPS in 64 years
- Possible reasons (also measures of democracy):
 - Feel no civic duty to respond
 - See no value in responding
 - Afraid of responding
- As society has become more individualistic, people are responding less to government surveys
- Example: Social media algorithms that reinforce our ideas, including our fears



Previous research

- Harris-Kojetin and Tucker (1999)
- Extended this work: Used time-series regression to explore the relation between economic and political conditions on CPS refusal rates over the period 1960-2015 (Larsen et al., 2020)
 - Lower refusal rates:
 - Increases in presidential approval
 - Higher refusal rates:
 - Increase in jobs added to the economy
 - A decrease in the not-in-labor-force population
 - Whether it was a census year
- Previously unable to identify a reliable time series to represent the social aspect of the social-economic-political construct of survey nonresponse



Current research

- Study the relation between the social-economic-political construct and survey participation.



Theoretical framework

- Common perception that trust in government is the main driver of survey participation
- Distrust in all levels of government was high among all studied demographic groups (Census Bureau, 2019)
- No relation between trust and cooperation (Bauer et al., 2019)
- **One's social, political and economic environment may influence an individual's estimation of the costs and benefits of responding to a survey**
- We have shown that the political and economic environment are important predictors of survey participation (Larsen et al., 2020)
- Other studies have shown that those more socially engaged are more likely to respond to a government survey (Amaya, 2015)
- Expect to also find that social factors are important



Data source

- 2020 Census Tracking Survey
- Nationally representative
- Tracked public awareness of the 2020 Census
- Respondents were asked about:
 - Basic demographic information
 - 2020 Census participation
 - Mode of participation
 - Likelihood of encouraging others to participate in the 2020 Census
 - Questions from major government surveys (as measures of data quality)
 - Measures of one's own environment that might be related to one's attitude toward participating in a government survey:
 - Political and economic sentiment
 - Attitude toward government
 - Civic engagement
 - Empathetic concern



Logistic regression model

Included:

- Age, race, education, home ownership, sex, marital status, and language, as well as their interactions
- Census Division (East North Central, East South Central, Middle Atlantic, Mountain, New England, Pacific, South Atlantic, West North Central, West South Central)
- “Tracking month” starting at 1 for September 2019 and ending with 10 for June 2020
- Social-economic-political-attitudinal regressors:
 - 4 political and economic sentiment
 - 3 civic engagement
 - 2 attitude toward government
 - 2 attitude toward others



Findings: Demographic, spatial, and temporal variables

Category	Factor	Intent ... likely
Demographic	Younger adults	Less
	Higher education	More
	Married	More
	Home ownership	More
Temporal	Closer to 2020 Census	More
Spatial	New England	More
	West South Central	Less



Findings: Social-economic-political module and related variables

Category	Factor	Intent ... likely
Economic view	Good job situation	Less
Political view	Satisfied with the way the country is governed	(marginally) Less
Civic engagement	Attended religious services	More
	Contacted a government official	More
	Don't volunteer	Less
Attitude gov't	Don't trust federal statistics	Less
	Fear responses will be used against them	Less
Attitude others	Don't strongly try to see both sides of an issue	Less
	Others' misfortunes don't disturb them	(marginally) Less



Discussion

- Although informed decision-making is a pillar of democracy, more and more of us have been making the conscious choice not to be represented in official statistics
- Explored factors related to reported 2020 Census participation
- Findings support a complex social-economic-political model of survey participation
- **Lack of participation from those who report some type of complacency or mistrust, but increased participation among those who are civically engaged**
- Limitations:
 - Respondents were anonymized, so we cannot verify responses
 - Results generally support previous finding but might not extend to other types of government surveys or other countries



Discussion

- Statistical agencies' ability to manage trust in official statistics is limited
- Larger paradigm shift required
- Education as a key component of that shift
- Is the decline in response tied to a decline in democracy?



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Thank you!



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