Respondent Confidentiality Concerns in Multilingual Pretesting Studies and Possible Effects on Response Rates and Data Quality for the 2020 Census

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Motivation for Research

- Researchers in the Center for Survey Measurement (CSM) anecdotally reported respondents (Rs) were spontaneously expressing concerns about confidentiality during multilingual pretesting projects conducted in 2017:
  - Respondents referenced legal residency status, immigration, and certain current events like changes to the DACA program

Goals of Research

- Evaluate multilingual pretesting studies conducted in 2017 and 2018 to provide a qualitative overview of confidentiality concerns expressed by respondents.

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Data

Cognitive Interview Studies	Sample Size	Timeframe	Language	Type	Researchers	Purpose
Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators (CBAMS)	10 Rs	Summer of 2017	Spanish	Cognitive interviews	CSM	Pretest Spanish translation of CBAMS paper questionnaire
Privacy Act Round 1	9 Rs	Spring of 2018	Spanish	Cognitive interviews	CSM	Pretest Spanish translation of Privacy Act language and confidentiality messages
Privacy Act Round 2	10 Rs	Spring of 2018	Spanish	Cognitive interviews	CSM	Pretest Spanish translation of Privacy Act language and confidentiality messages
Multilingual Focus Groups	42 groups (6 per language, 366 Rs total)	Spring and Summer of 2017	English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic	Focus Groups	CSM, RTI, RSS	Pretest multilingual doorstep introductions with monolingual and bilingual speakers of 7 languages

Methods

- The lead researcher developed a coding scheme to quantify confidentiality concerns that emerged during multilingual pretesting studies in 2017 and 2018.
  - This coding scheme was based on concerns that were observed during a Spanish usability project conducted in the Spring of 2017 to pretest the 2017 Census Test online instrument
- Coders reviewed summaries of cognitive interviews and usability interviews, and transcripts of focus groups.
  - To facilitate transcription analysis, instances of the following terms were highlighted: *immigrant, immigration, citizen, ICE, confidential, deport, DHS, INS, privacy, agency, Muslim, religion, illegal, undocumented, resident, residency, status, visa, papers.*

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Codes

Codes	Example	Possible Codes
Non-response	R left a question blank, or reported that they would not answer the survey in real life, specifically because they were worried about their confidentiality.	Present/absent
Fear	R specifically used terms like "fear," "terror," "afraid," "scared," etc. when expressing concerns about confidentiality and the government.	Present/absent
Data sharing	R mentioned being concerned about the Census Bureau sharing data with another federal agency.	Present/absent
Law enforcement	R mentioned being concerned about law enforcement activities like immigration raids or being deported.	Present/absent
Targeted groups	R mentioned that members of particular groups (e.g., immigrants, people from certain countries) are targeted	Present/absent

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Limitations

- Coding was completed by 1 coder, with a 2nd coder who double coded 1 case from each study (16 cases / 113 = 14% of cases) to provide a basic check on interrater reliability
  - IRR was 86% out of 112 codes (7 per case X 16 cases)
- The sample sizes were small and non-representative and the respondents were not randomly sampled.
- The research was completed prior to the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census

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Focus Group Analysis

Study	Sample Size (FGs)	Non-Response	Fear	Data sharing	Law enforcement	Targeted Groups
English	6	2	(4)	3	2	0
Spanish	6	(4)	(6)	3	(5)	0
Chinese	6	3	1	0	1	0
Vietnamese	6	3	3	0	1	0
Korean	6	(5)	3	0	1	1
Russian	6	(4)	(4)	0	2	0
Arabic	6	(4)	2	0	0	3
Total	42	25 of 42 (60%)	23 of 42 (55%)	6 of 42 (14%)	12 of 42 (29%)	4 of 42 (10%)

◯ = concerns were expressed in more than half the focus groups in particular language

- Non-response, fear, and law enforcement activities were salient in many focus groups, and concerns varied across languages

Focus Groups Findings

- In terms of non-response, not opening the door came up across languages:

  - **Korean Focus Group:** "There is an online forum for immigrants... which discusses about how to deal with this issue…. And they say 'Never open the door!' This alert has been spread to everywhere now."

  - **Russian Focus Group:** "In the present situation, if a person is illegal, it's likely he won't open the door or would refuse."

- Anchoring concerns to the "present situation" is a theme that emerged across topics (highlighted in red throughout).

Focus Group Findings

- Variations on the theme of "fear" came up across languages, and sometimes seemed to be anchored to current events:
  - **Spanish Focus Group:** "With the situation that we are all living through at this moment in the country, the insecurity that a large part of the Hispanic community is suffering from, I think that [Census interviewers will] have to…be a little sensitive to this situation…. 'Don't worry!...None of the information you give me here will affect you in terms of your immigration status. We understand the situation the country is living through, that Hispanics feel a little frightened.'"

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Focus Group Findings

- Respondent perception that certain groups are targeted:
  - **Korean Focus Group:** "This 2020 Census will be conducted under the [current] administration. By that time, the anti-immigration policy and policing the undocumented will be fully settled….You need to have highly trained interviewers, interviewers who are perfectly prepared for that kind of situation."
  - **Arabic Focus Group:** "In light of the current political situation, the immigrants, especially the Arabs and Mexicans, would be so scared when they see a government interviewer at their door steps."

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Cognitive Interview Analysis

Study	Sample Size (Rs)	Non-Response	Fear	Data sharing	Law enforcement	Targeted Groups
CBAMS	10	0	1	4	0	0
Privacy Round 1	9	0	6	1	5	1
Privacy Round 2	10	1	7	5	5	1
Total	29	1 of 29 (3%)	14 of 29 (48%)	10 of 29 (34%)	10 of 29 (34%)	2 of 29 (7%)

◯ = more than half of respondents in the study expressed concerns

- Fear, data sharing, and law enforcement activities were salient in many interviews

Cognitive Interview Findings

- Concerns about law enforcement:

  - **Spanish-speaker:** "There are many people who are afraid of giving their information because they are illegally in this country...so they are afraid of being deported or that they will come knock on their door. 'Are you illegals? Ok, we are going to throw you out of here.' Many of the older people have children and those children are legal{ly in the country}. So, leaving them behind here alone - that causes uncertainty, stress. It's terrible. It breaks up families."

- Concerns about Census Bureau sharing data with other agencies:

  - **Spanish-speaker:** "For example, if my name and address will be shared with other agencies, they could come to look for me. More than anything I'm thinking about Immigration."

Preliminary Message Testing Findings

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Preliminary Message Testing Findings from Privacy Act Studies

- Messages about immigration status seemed to be reassuring to many Spanish-speakers, e.g.:

  - "None of the questions in this survey will ask about immigration status. By law, your answers cannot be shared with Immigration and Customs Enforcement."

- Testing conducted prior to addition of citizenship question to 2020 Census

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Preliminary Message Testing Findings from Privacy Act Studies

- Some Rs understood the messages, but did not believe them:
  - **Spanish-speaker:** "But for someone who doesn't have papers, sometimes the law doesn't matter. They don't feel protected even by the law….They do not feel that the government will protect them because of what they have seen in their community."

Preliminary Research Looking for Trends over Time

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Preliminary Research Looking for Trends Over Time

Study (Conducted Before 2017)	Sample Size
2014 Spring Census Test	8
2015 Spring Census Test Round 1	10
2015 Spring Census Test Round 2	6
2015 Fall National Content Test	10
2016 Spring Census Test	3
Total (Prior to 2017)	**37**

Study (Conducted After 2017)	Sample Size
2017 Spring Census Test	5

- All studies consisted of usability testing versions of online census instrument in preparation for the 2020 census
- All interviews conducted in Spanish by CSM researchers
- Instrument was relatively consistent across years (minor changes in layout and wording)

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Preliminary Research Looking for Trends over Time

- In this analysis we coded the same 5 variables (non-response, fear, data sharing, law enforcement, targeted groups) as well as 2 additional variables of interest: hesitation and changing answers.

  - The hesitation code was used when respondents hesitated to answer a question but ultimately did answer it, and their hesitation was due to a concern about confidentiality. Hesitation with an interviewer present might indicate a break-off if the R were competing the survey at home.

  - The changing answers code was used when respondents reported changing their answer due to confidentiality concerns (e.g., purposely reporting fewer people on the household roster than actually lived in the household).

Online Census Instrument Analysis

2014 – 2016 Data								
Study	Sample Size	Non-Response	Hesitation	Changing Answer	Fear	Data sharing	Law enforcement	Targeted Groups
2014 Census Test	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2015 Census Test Round 1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2015 Census Test Round 2	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2015 National Content Test	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2016 Census Test	3	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total (Prior to 2017)	37	0	2 of 37 (5%)	0	2 of 37 (5%)	0	0	0
2017 Data								
2017 Census Test	5	1 of 5	2 of 5	2 of 5	2 of 5	1 of 5	0	1 of 5

Online Census Instrument Findings

- There were a small number of instances of hesitation and fear from 2014 to 2016. None of the Rs referenced current events, changed their answers, or refused to answer any questions from 2014 to 2016.

- In 2017, a few Rs referenced current events and displayed behaviors (changing answers, refusing to answer) not seen in the interviews from 2014-2016.

- In 2017 we only conducted 5 interviews. More research is needed before we can draw any conclusions about the nature or prevalence of concerns over time. This is just a starting point to continue tracking this in the coming years.

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Online Census Instrument Findings from 2017

- Changing answers:
  - **Spanish-speaker:** R redacted detailed origin from "Mexican" to "Hispanic." "No, I want to [deselect] that. With the whole [administration] having us classified….We really are fearful….I don't want to write my status."
  - **Spanish-speaker:** "I didn't include like 4 or 5 people" on the household roster.

- Hesitation:
  - **Spanish-speaker:** "I'm really worried to enter information in this survey because of the current situation in this country. If I were at home alone, I would not fill out this survey."

- Non-Response:
  - **Spanish-speaker:** "I only decided to write a first name and not last name because of the situation in which we live."

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Discussion

- During multilingual pretesting studies conducted in 2017 and 2018, respondents expressed concerns about participating in Census Bureau surveys because of fears about their confidentiality.

- These concerns seemed related to respondents' perception of the current climate relating to topics like immigration.

- These concerns seemed to vary across languages.

- More research is needed to quantify the extent to which these concerns represent a change from years prior to 2017, as well as the prevalence of these concerns.

Implications

- Respondents with confidentiality concerns could potentially:
  - not answer survey questions
  - provide incomplete or inaccurate data on survey questions
  - refuse to participate in a survey altogether.

  This could negatively impact data quality and coverage for the 2020 Census and federal surveys in general.

- If these concerns are particular to a certain population, they could introduce bias into survey data.

- These concerns may have a disproportionate impact on an already "hard to count" population: immigrants.

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Future Research

- Systematic research across languages is needed with respondents, interviewers, and cultural experts to understand the nature and prevalence of respondent concerns and to design respondent messages and interviewer training to address them.
  - This data was collected in the course of researching other topics, and was not part of a larger research initiative to systematically research this topic.
  - Qualitative data collected to date cannot tell us how prevalent these concerns are.
  - All research was completed prior to the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census, so up-to-date research is needed.
- Quantitative analysis of changes over time in metrics like response rates, item non-response, etc. by population characteristics (e.g., US-born v. foreign-born, etc.) in production surveys is needed

Questions?

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