Hackers, Phish, and Breaches: Census Bureau Research on Respondent Perceptions of Privacy and Data Security from 2012 to 2018

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Privacy and Confidentiality Research

- Led by Jennifer Hunter Childs
- Primary research area in preparation for 2020
- Quantitative collection vehicles
  - Gallup Census Module: Core and rotating questions since 2012
  - Opt-in, non-probability panel
- Qualitative data collections
  - Focus groups
  - Cognitive interviews
  - Web probing studies

Qualitative P&C Research

Year	Name of Study	N	Type of Study
2012	Federal Statistical System Public Opinion Survey Focus Groups	45	Focus groups
2014	P&C Census Test Focus Groups	39	Focus groups
2015	P&C Census Test Focus Groups	52	Focus groups
	Respondent Confidentiality Messaging	303	Web probing
		40	Cognitive interviews
2016	P&C Census Test Focus Groups	57	Focus groups
	SCOPE Confidentiality Pledge Testing	360	Web probing
		30	Cognitive interviews
2017	Re-Identification Survey Cognitive Test	28	Cognitive interviews
2018	Privacy Act Cognitive Testing	38	Cognitive interviews

Themes

- Data security from Snowden to Equifax
- Trust, response, and the socio-political climate
- Expectations of privacy

Data security from Snowden to Equifax

- High profile data breaches are a salient reference point
  - "I guess everything is in the cloud now. The facilities aren't necessarily that secure. Kids can hack into DoD computers, NSA people leak information. Is there a safe place to store it? I don't know" (Responder, Washington Metro 2014).
- Both government and private sector are vulnerable
  - I mean in the last 18 months, how many companies have been broken into like digitally? We would like to hope that the government has better security than a normal hacker, but, I mean … (18-29 African-American, Savannah 2015)

Data security from Snowden to Equifax

- Shift from selective online behavior to active protection
  - Selective Behavior: “I still do all my bills by mail. I know the bank and I know the credit union is truly upset with me, but I can’t do the online thing. I actually cancelled it. I had bill payer online. I said it was just too much” (50+ African-American, Savannah 2015).
- Active protection
  - “I guess, the more that they have, the more they could get. Someone could get a credit card with that information but with credit monitoring and such I would be able to catch it and do something about it” (Re-Identification, 2017).
  - “I have LifeLock. If anybody even looks at my birthday, I will get a notification” (Non-Hispanic White, Houston 2016).

Data security from Snowden to Equifax

- "The Wrong Hands" are usually hackers and phishers
  - Respondents mainly afraid of identity theft, financial loss
  - Safety of children, financial future
  - Russians, North Koreans, and Nigerian Princes
- Other examples:
  - Stalkers, bill collectors, marketers
  - Age or race-based discrimination, medical discrimination

Trust and the socio-political climate

- Respondents tie political and policy events to levels of trust
  - "Unfortunately it's a trust issue and the way things are going today there is less and less trust. There should have never been a sequester last year but there was one and we're not comfortable with what the officials are doing in our country necessarily. I don't speak for everyone but I know a lot of people were disgruntled, feeling like they don't even know what people want. Distrust is a factor in trying to get information from people" (Responder, Washington Metro 2014)
  - Mentions of the Patriot Act in 2014 focus groups; fear that rules will change

Trust and the socio-political climate

- Perceptions that some groups are safer than others
  - America has always been a country of immigrants, a melting pot of races and all that. But today that's all being threatened. I don't think anybody is safe. Everybody is like, what do you want that [information] for. Right now, I don't trust anybody (PACT, 2018).
  - In the current political climate, I do [have concerns about government data collection]. It's not going to stop me from answering censuses. I also get that I'm in a pretty safe demographic. If I were of a different socio-economic class, that could be different (PACT, 2018).
  - Due to the politics of this country, I doubt we would be targeted. I'm a white woman in a house of white men. I'm secular. I cant imagine any kind of ethnic or religious targeting. So then I thought about wealth and robbery (Re-Identification, 2017).

Trust and the socio-political climate

- Local politics and social issues also affect trust
  - You know, you're telling us that we're doing census to keep counting, and we going to save money and want to help. But then you have stuff like the 2010 when we was out speaking and telling people we promise. And you know, if you take the census, maybe good things may happen. We won't promise anything, but we're talking about, you know, like we said grocery stores and parks in the areas, and then you're living in your city and you see stuff only get paid for like trees getting cut down on Victory so Victory can live a little better. That don't help the community. You know, so it's like what did we take the census for? Like now you're telling us you want to save money. For what reason? Like we're never going to see it (18-29, AA, Savannah 2015).

Expectations of Privacy

- Low expectations of privacy and resignation to it
  - Well, like, the government can access any information they'd like. So, I'm saying, you know, without, whether I allow them to or not. So, you know (Houston, English, 2016).
  - All they're going to find out is I really like cherries a lot and, you know, I shop a lot. I'm a shop-a-holic and they know what I buy, and they know what I eat. And it doesn't bother me. Everything. It doesn't matter. They know exactly … you know, if they want to know, they know. You're going to go to a hospital, they can get your records. They could read about it. Anything medically or whatever you're doing, a reprimand at work, they'll know about it. So it doesn't matter. You know, you've got to accept. That's the society we live in and it's been that way since I was born. I've been here all my life, and, you know, it's just something that I've accepted. But it doesn't really bother me (Non-Hispanic, Los Angeles 2016).

Expectations of Privacy

- Perception that the government already knows everything
- People think the government has access to everything that any agency collects at any time
  - "Big Brother"
  - "It goes in their computer memory banks and they can pull up anything on you" (African-American, 50+, Savannah, 2015).
  - Well, I think once you pay taxes, that's it. Your information is available to any Federal agency that wants it (Maricopa, 50+, White, 2015).

Expectations of Privacy

- Perception of age differences in expectations of privacy
  - Younger generation has “put themselves out there” and made their own information public (Re-Identification, 2017)
- Census data is seen as generally available/googleable
  - I don’t think really I do because the questions that they ask me are stuff like practically – if someone was good at hacking computers or anything, they could probably find that through Facebook, so – and like she was saying, those are just questions that don’t necessarily get too personal with me as a person (18-29, White, Maricopa 2015).
  - General sense that information is “already out there”

Impacts for 2020 Census

- Response
  - Perceptions of data security likely affected by any high profile breaches closer to 2020
  - Anticipate a highly politicized election year for the 2020 Census
- Reputation of the Census Bureau
  - Census data was not seen as particularly sensitive
  - Increased need for transparency