

# Privacy Concerns and the Use of Administrative Records by the Census Bureau

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# Background

# What are administrative records?

- **Administrative record** = data from government and commercial sources used for providing programs/services, such as:
  - Tax Return data from Internal Revenue Service (IRS),
  - Address data from United States Postal Service (USPS)
  - Phone numbers and other contact information from telephone service providers

# Administrative Records and the Decennial Census

- In 2010, 28% of households did not respond initially to the census and required costly in-person follow-up
- Census Bureau is considering expanding use of administrative records for the non-response follow-up operation (NRFU) of the 2020 Census
- Likely uses:
  - Occupied/vacant status
  - Person counts

# Methodology

# Research Questions

- Do people favor or oppose the use of administrative records to obtain census information?
- Do people view the use of administrative records for decennial enumeration as a violation of privacy?
- Does it matter what type of information is gathered from records (vacant status, household count, name and DOB)?
- How do privacy perceptions of administrative record use compare to current practice of proxy (neighbor) interviews?

# Survey Items

- “If your household did not return a census form in 2020, do you feel it would or would not be an invasion of your privacy to use information from other government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, to find out...”
  - “IF ANYONE was living at your address?”
  - “HOW MANY people were living at your address?”
  - “NAMES AND AGES of the people living at your address?”

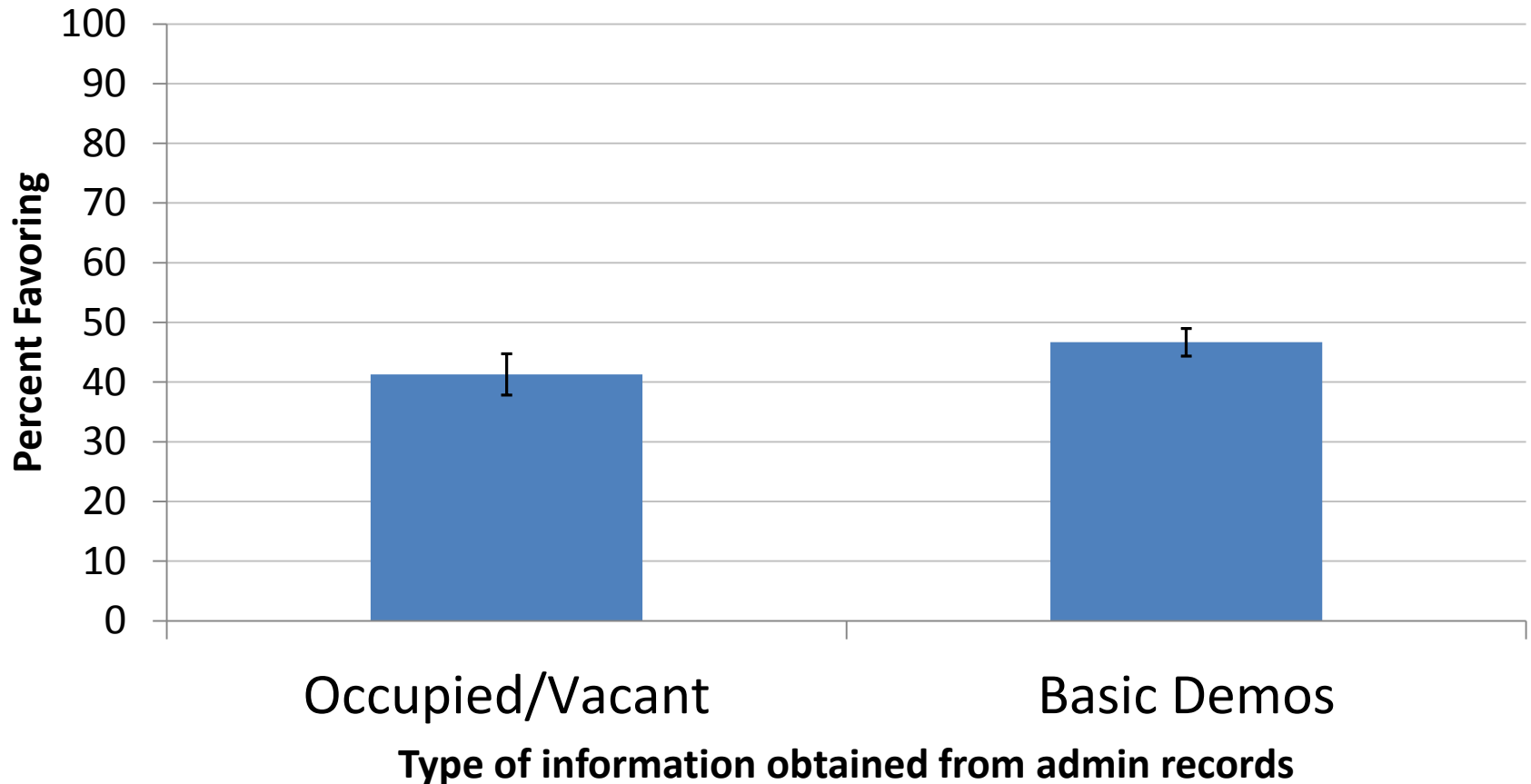
# Survey Items

- Also asked about:
  - Privacy perceptions of using administrative records **INSTEAD** of mailing a census form
  - Privacy perceptions of getting information from **NEIGHBORS**
  - Whether it is more respectful of privacy to use records or ask neighbors for non-response



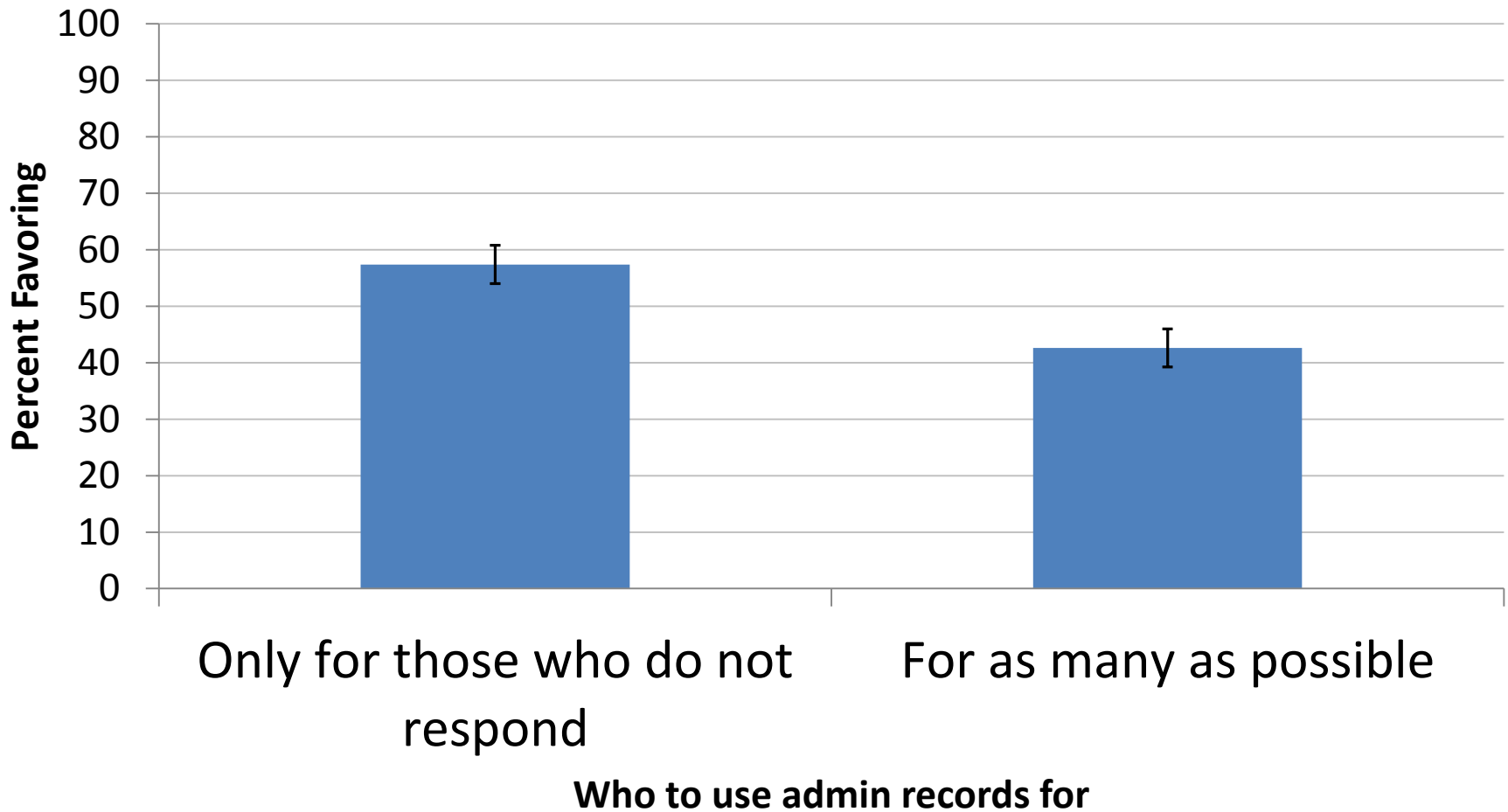
# Results

# Favoring Use of Administrative Records for Occupied/Vacant and Basic Demographics



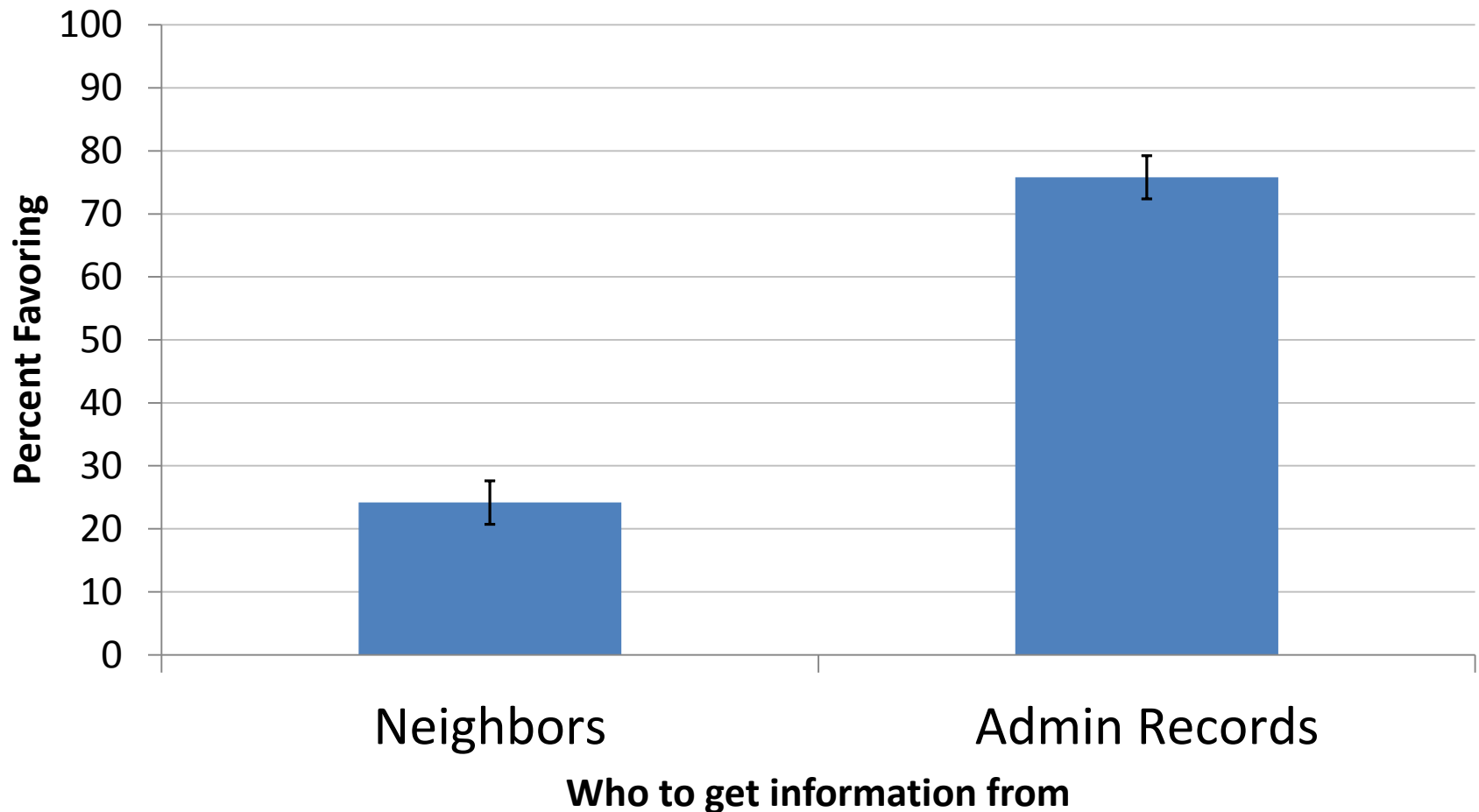
Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2013-Oct. 2013. Not intended for point estimates

# To Save Money, Who Should Census Use Administrative Records for?



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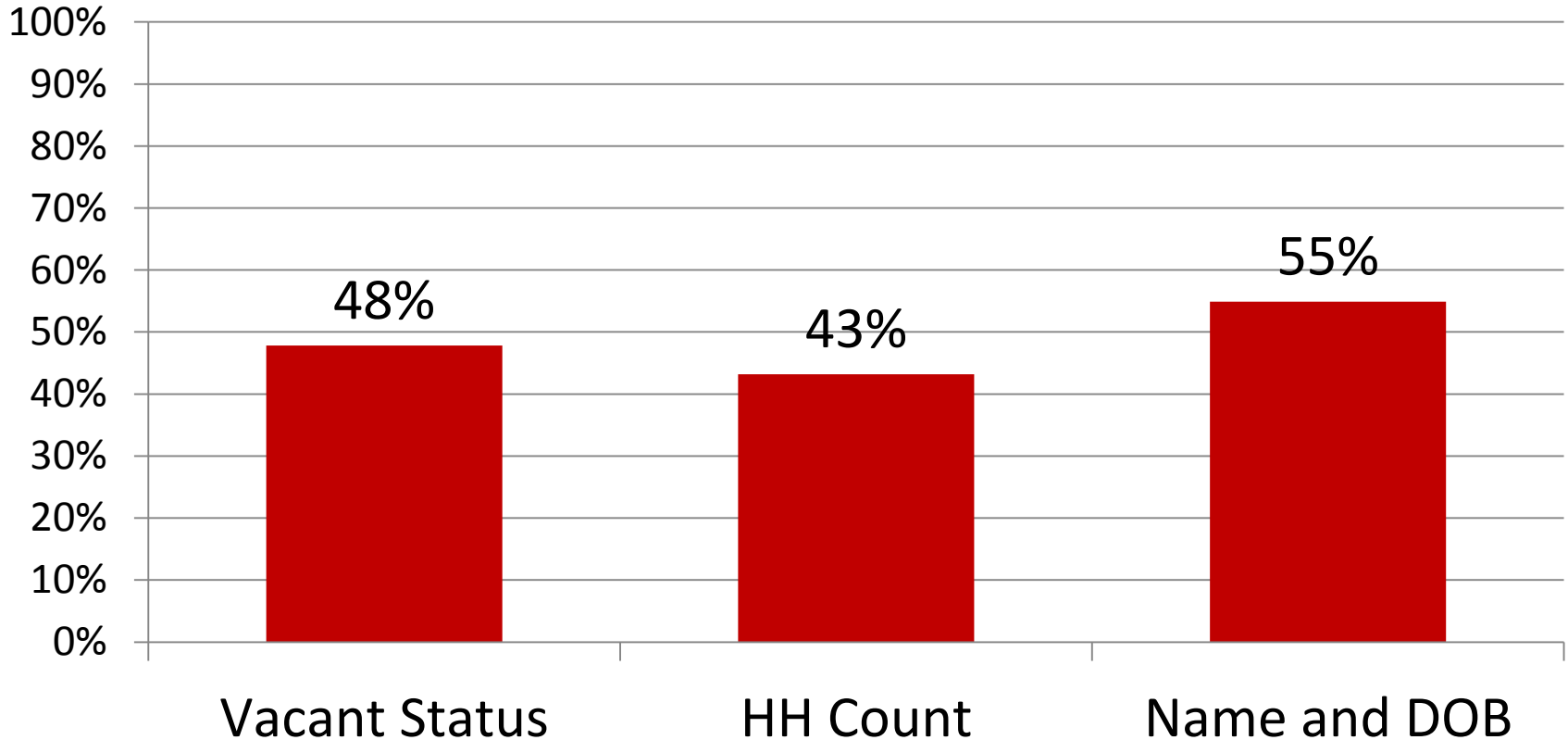
# For Non-Responders, Should Census Go to Neighbors or Records?



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# Privacy Perceptions

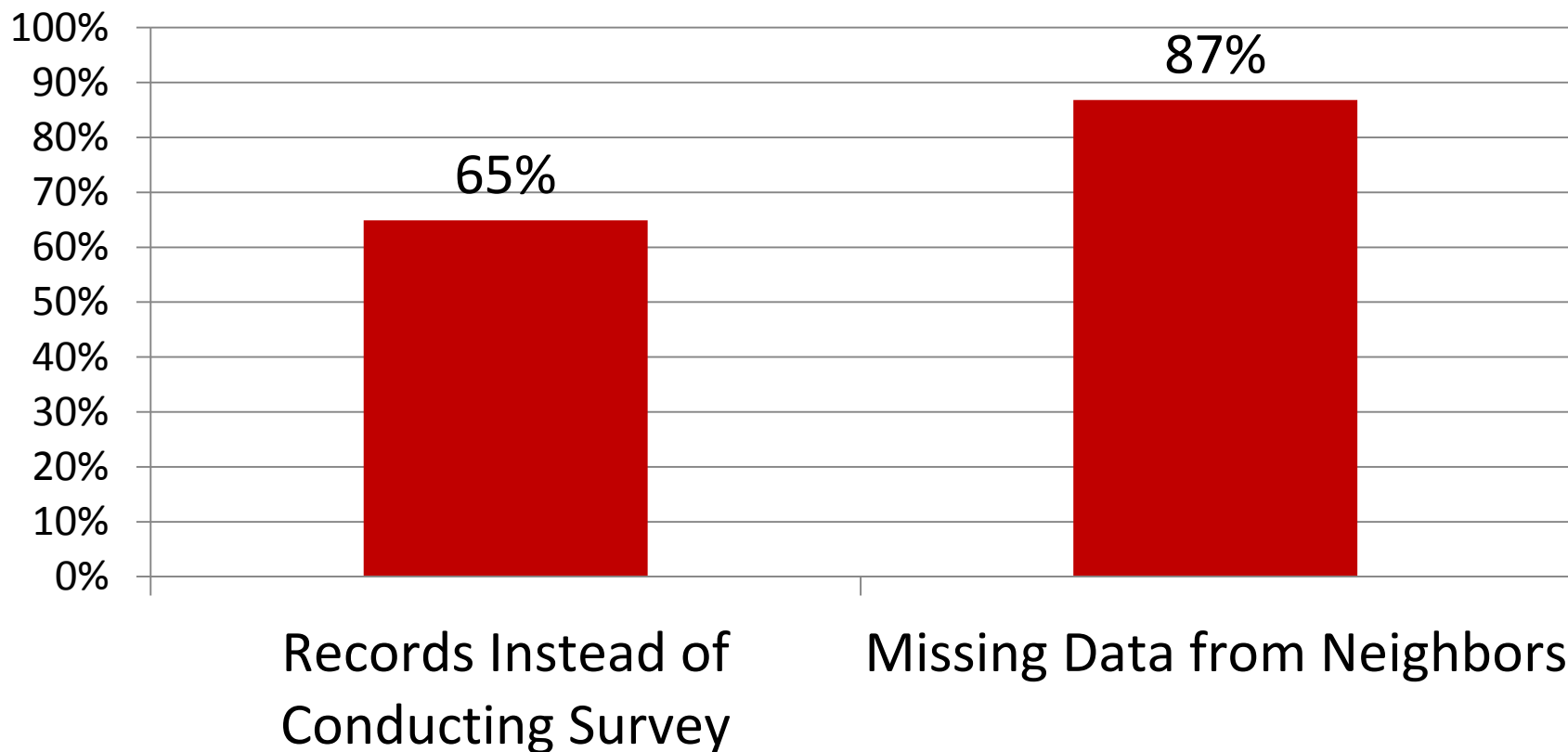
## Percent who view it as an invasion



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2016-Nov. 2016. Not intended for point estimates

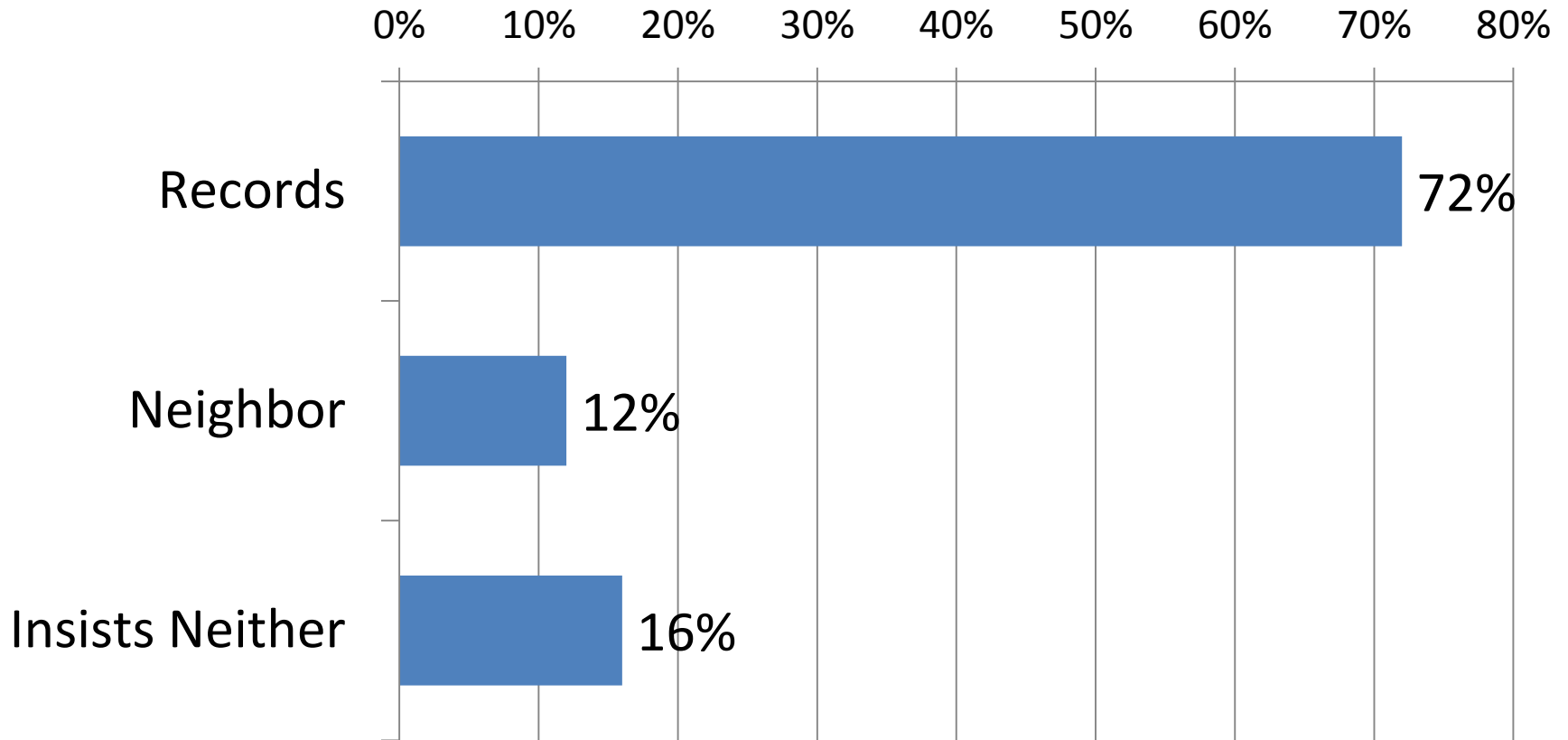
# Privacy Perceptions

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# Neighbor or Admin Record?



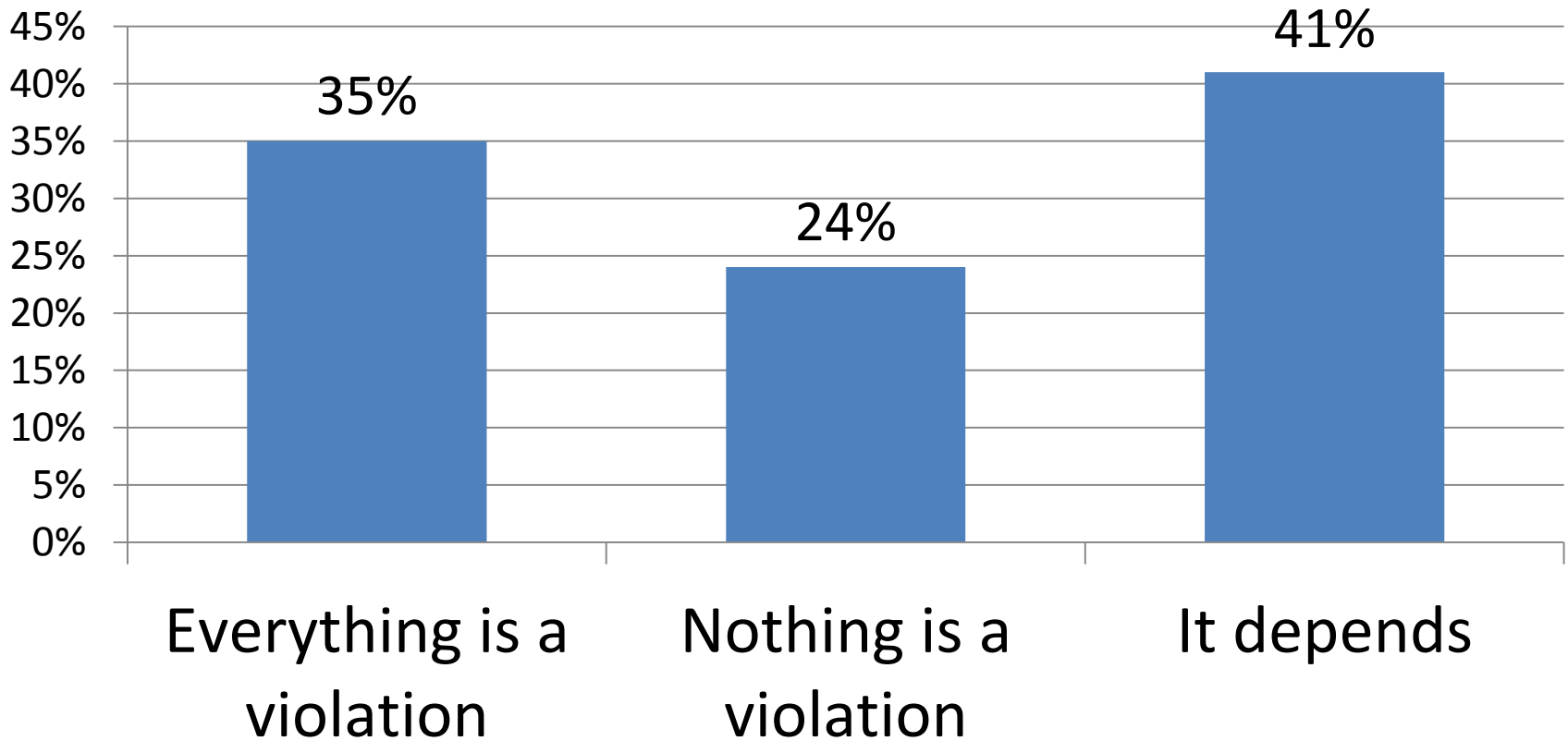
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# What predicts privacy perceptions?

- ATTITUDES! Especially trust in federal statistics and belief that they respect privacy
- A few item-specific predictors:
  - Non-White respondents see vacant status as a privacy violation more often
  - Oldest respondents see less privacy concerns with household size and name/DOB
  - Men less likely to view it as a privacy violation to replace survey with records or to ask neighbor



# Straightlining vs. Changing Opinions



Source: Gallup Daily Tracking Survey, Sept. 2016-Nov. 2016. Not intended for point estimates

# Who changes opinions?

- In terms of demographic characteristics, those who viewed all record use as a violation and those who changed opinions were similar:
  - Non-white respondents
  - Least educated (high school or less)
  - Lower income categories
  - Younger and older (as opposed to middle age group 44-65)
- Differences on trust and attitude questions (moderate views)

# Why Are Some Respondents Against the Use Of Records?

- Regardless of the source, many respondents cited:
  - Privacy/Confidentiality
  - Don't trust the government/Government is too big
- For respondents who mention privacy or trust, most indicated either:
  - Government has too much info about them
  - Concern about an unauthorized person gaining access to their information (e.g., government's ability to protect data)



# Overview of Other Findings Related to Administrative Records Use

- Many assume that government agencies already share identification data, such as name, address, and date of birth.
- Generally, respondents prefer the use of federal records over third-party commercial data.
- Framing matters – When respondents understand that using administrative data will save taxpayer money, save them time or effort, or help contribute to a quality census (that can have a positive impact on their community,) they are more likely to favor their use.

# Conclusion

# Summary

- Many respondents see admin record use as a violation of privacy (43% for least invasive)
  - Even more (87%) view neighbor proxy interviews as a violation of privacy
- 41% of respondents had variable privacy perceptions depending on specific record use factors
- Trust in federal statistics is key to predicting favorability toward administrative record use, privacy perceptions, and predicting opinion change across record use cases
- Demographic factors were associated with privacy perceptions but mostly became insignificant when controlling for attitudes

# Implications & Future Research

- Privacy concerns are an important potential factor in public response to administrative record use for the 2020 Census.
- Future research goals include (1) follow up with open-ended data about specific privacy concerns, (2) develop respondent messaging that explains admin record use while alleviating privacy concerns, (3) identify general ways to improve trust in the federal statistical system.

# References

- U.S. Census Bureau (2009) Administrative Records Handbook.
- Keller & Konicki (2016). Using 2010 Census Coverage Measurement Results to Better Understand Possible Administrative Records Incorporation in the Decennial Census. Presented at the Joint Statistical Meetings.



# Questions or comments?

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# Appendix

# Gallup Items - Introduction

For the next census in 2020, the Census Bureau is considering ways to save money, minimize inconvenience to households, and improve the accuracy of the data by using information that people have already provided to other government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration. Thinking about the following ways the Census Bureau might use this information from other agencies, please tell me whether you feel each one would or would not be an invasion of your privacy.

# Gallup Items – Instead of Survey

Do you feel it would or would not be an invasion of your privacy if the Census Bureau used information from other government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration, to complete your census form for you **INSTEAD** of mailing a questionnaire to your address?

# Gallup Items – Neighbor

If your household did not return a census form in 2020, do you feel it would or would not be an invasion of your privacy if the Census Bureau used information provided by your NEIGHBOR to complete your census form for you?

# Gallup Items – Neighbor or Admin Records

If your household did not return a census form in 2020, the Census Bureau could ask your neighbors to provide information about your household or it could use information you've already provided to other government agencies such as the Social Security Administration. Do you think it is more respectful of your privacy to get missing information from your neighbors or to get it from other government agencies?

# Gallup Items – Reasons for Opposing Record Use

Which of the following best describes your concern? The government having too much information about you, The information being used against you, The security of government computer systems, An unauthorized person, or hacker gaining access to your data, Or is something else a concern?

# Other evidence: Focus group data

	Earnings	Income	Employment	Health Services Experiences	Health Services Experiences	Home Value	Purchases	Total
	Social Security Administration	IRS	Employment Office	Medicare	Doctor	Private Company	Credit Card	
<b>In Favor</b>	23	20	17	18	17	12	10	121
<b>Against</b>	4	6	4	6	6	14	12	43
<b>Don't know</b>	4	2	1	0	2	0	0	9
<b>Total</b>	31	28	22	24	25	21	22	198

Source: Smirnova and Scanlon. 2013.



# Other evidence: Focus group data

- Assumptions that the government shares data between agencies
  - *"So it's all inter-connected where there's nothing we can do to stop it, so we might as well just get used to it."*
  - *"The Government is so interconnected with each other anyway, it's going to pass through no matter what."*
- Could make the Census easier
  - *"Yeah, you can save 100 trees by just comparing a couple of different databases and picking out this information that they need instead of sending out a whole bunch of letters"*
- Invasion of privacy
  - *"That and – I mean it would depend...did you leave it off because you didn't want to put it on there?"*

# Slides from Other Presentations

# Survey Methodology

- Gallup Nightly Survey
  - ≈121 responses daily
  - Subsample of National RDD Sample
  - Landline and Cellphone
  - AAPOR Response Rate 3 = 8-11%
- Goal: Understand public trust in federal statistical system and factors that predict trust
- Data collection: Various items collected at different times from 2012 to present (ongoing)
- Not intended for population estimates

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GALLUP

# Administrative Records

Reported favoring the use of administrative records is predicted by:

- Knowledge of federal statistics
- Trusting federal statistics
- Believing policy makers need good statistics to make decisions

Reported being against the use of administrative records is predicted by:

- Less confidence in institutions (newspapers/universities)
- DK/REF their income

# Why Are Respondents Against the Use Of Records?

- Regardless of the source, many respondents cited:
  - Privacy/Confidential
  - Don't Trust the Government / Government is too big.
- For respondents who mention privacy or trust, most indicated either:
  - Government has too much info about them
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# Overview of Other Findings Related to Administrative Records Use

- Many assume that government agencies already share identification data, such as name, address, and date of birth.
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# Overall Effects

Compared to “Info” from Social Security Administration...

- Less desirable:
  - Any data from the Internal Revenue Service
  - Income data from Social Security Administration
- No difference for:
  - Getting name and age from Social Security Administration
  - Contact info from the Dept. of Motor Vehicles
  - Data from public records

# Frameworks

- Both frameworks improved favorability by an average of about 15%
- Social Good
  - Local > National
  - This result is amplified for:
    - Income data from the Internal Revenue Service
    - Contact information from public records
- Save Money
  - No significant differences between overall and cost per household
  - Encouraging for programs that do not have a high overall cost



# Predictors

- Attitudes much stronger predictors than demographics
- Favoring use of administrative records predicted by:
  - Knowledge of federal statistics
  - Trust in federal statistics
  - Belief that policy makers need good statistics to make decisions
  - Belief that federal statistical agencies keep information confidential\*

# Predictors (cont.)

- Being against use of administrative records predicted by:
  - Less confidence in institutions (newspapers/universities)
  - Don't know/Refuse to report income

# Why Are Respondents Against the Use Of Records?

Which of the following best describes your concern? The government having too much information about you, The information being used against you, The security of government computer systems, An unauthorized person, or hacker gaining access to your data, Or is something else a concern?

# Why Are Respondents Against the Use Of Records?

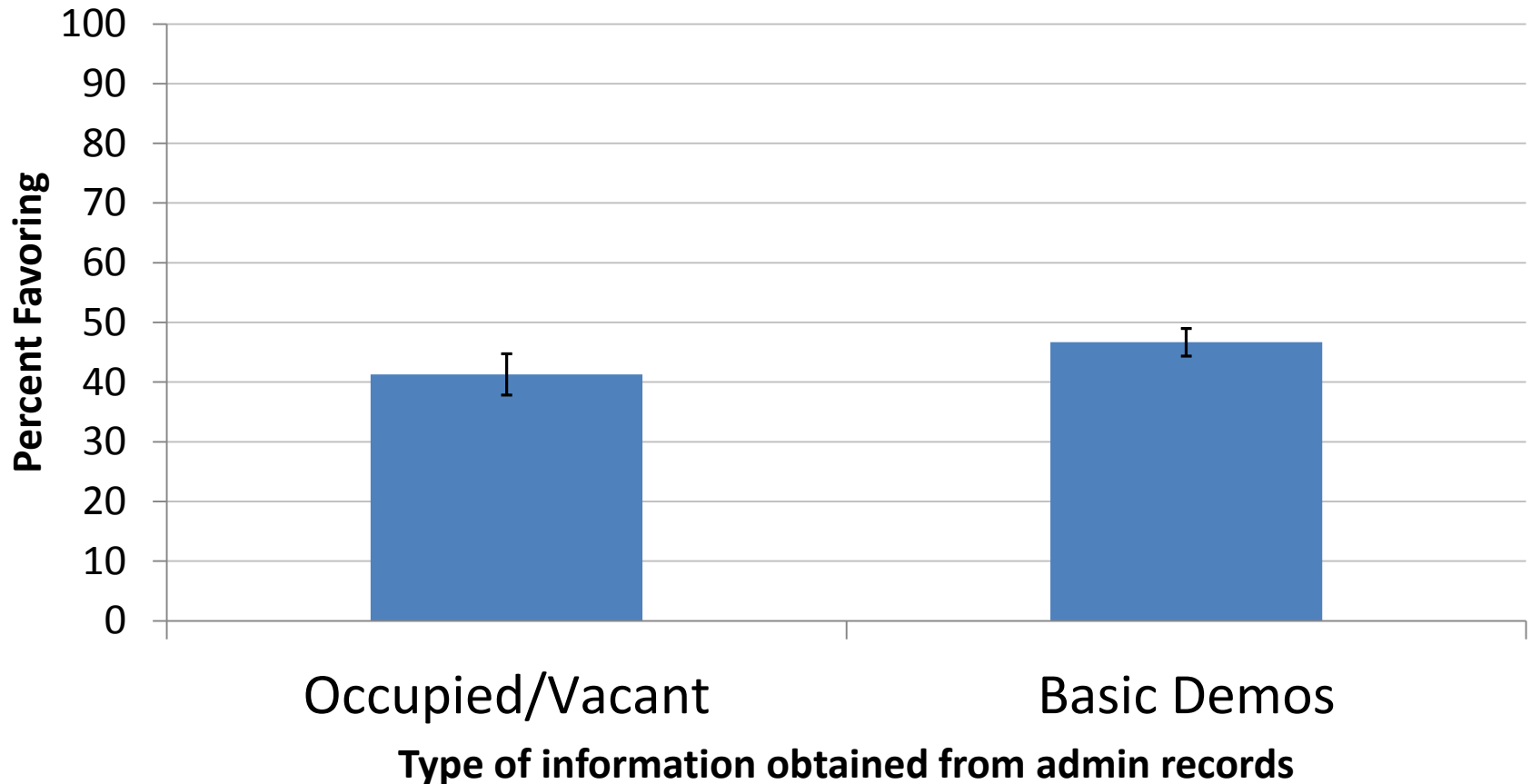
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# Experiment 2

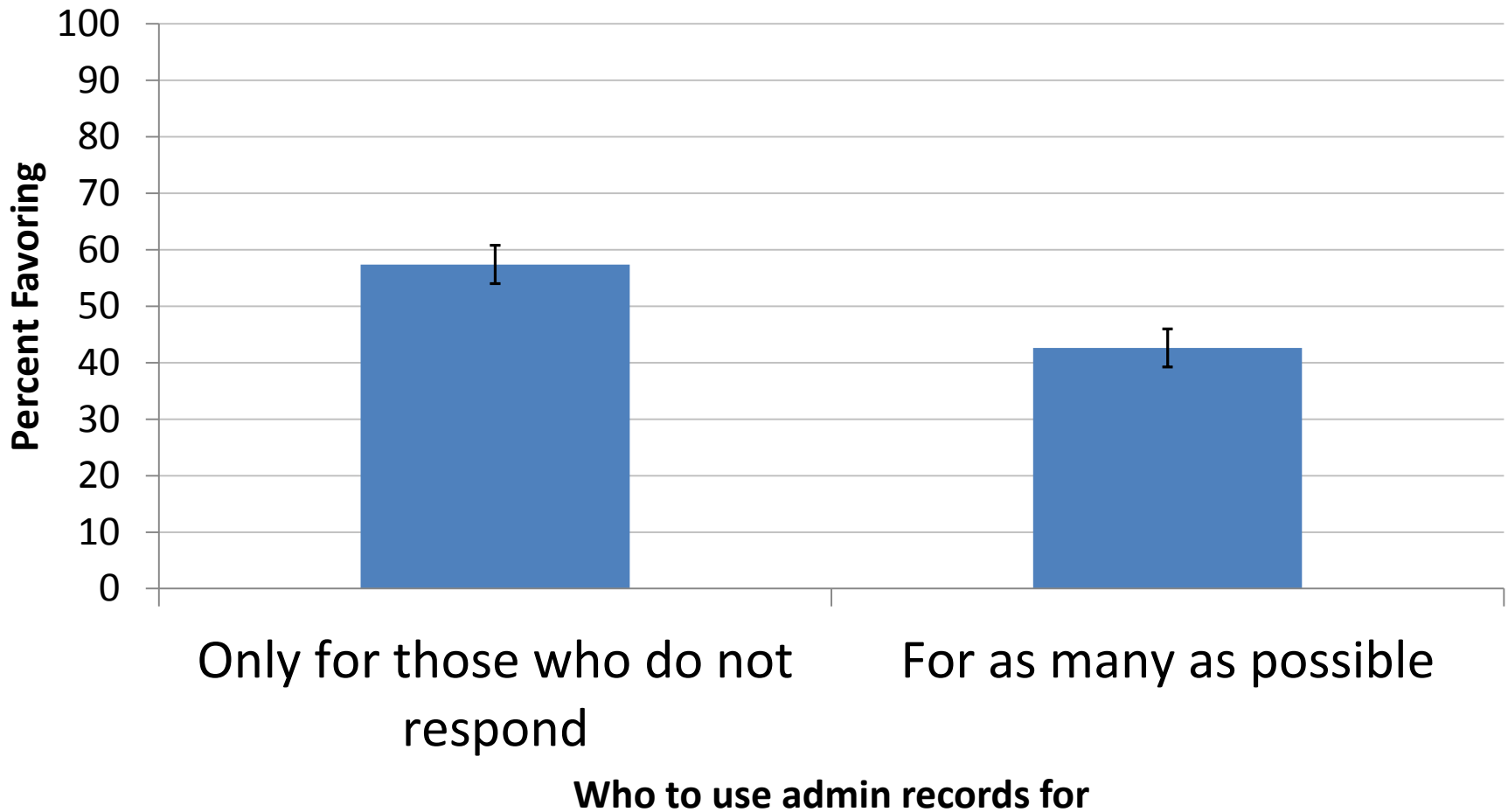
- What kind of data and for whom?
  - Contact information
  - Whether housing unit is occupied/vacant
  - Basic demographics
  - For nonrespondents only, or everyone?
  - Neighbors or records?

# Favoring Use of Administrative Records for Occupied/Vacant and Basic Demographics



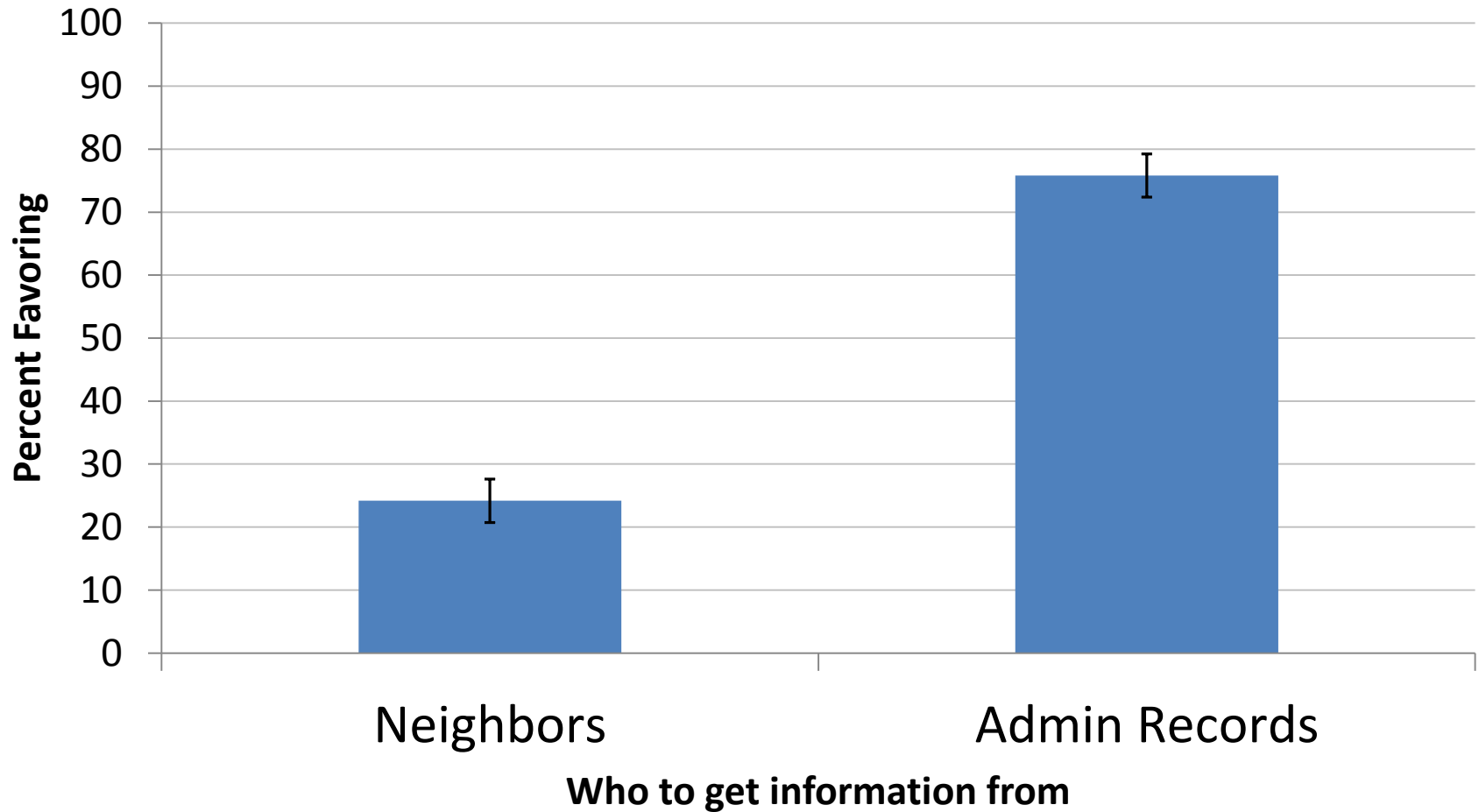
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# Predictors of Favoring Administrative Record Use

- Greater trust in the statistical system
- More educated respondents were more likely to prefer records over neighbors
- Presence of a child in the home predicts preferring more extensive administrative record use

# Conclusions

Focus administrative records messaging on:

- Data uses for social good
  - For policy
  - For local community
- Saving taxpayer money
- Trustworthiness of U.S. Census Bureau
- Confidentiality of data
- Increasing knowledge about census data
- Privacy
  - Only use records for non-responding units
  - Records are a good alternative to visiting neighbors