

General Perceptions of Privacy and Security with regard to Federal statistics and data collections

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Overview

- Data sources
 - Focus groups with respondents and nonrespondents
 - Gallup Trust in Federal Statistics Survey
- Attitudes toward privacy and confidentiality
 - Context for attitudes
 - Risks and benefits

Privacy and Confidentiality – Definitions

- Privacy – Characteristics of data, whether/how they should be shared
- Confidentiality – Protections are required by law
 - Security – Specific IT protections, procedures
 - Use “confidentiality” and “security” interchangeably
- Smirnova and Scanlon (2013)
 - Difficult to disentangle the concepts of privacy and confidentiality
 - Stated attitudes vary depending on how the questions are framed

Focus groups

- Three rounds – 2014, 2015, 2016
- 23 focus groups, ~157 participants
- Exploring public concerns about privacy/confidentiality
 - New contact and response modes
 - Administrative records
 - General concerns

Gallup Survey – Trust in Federal Statistics

- Gallup Nightly Survey
 - Telephone – landline and cellphone
 - Subsample of National RDD Sample
 - ~121 responses daily
 - AAPOR Response Rate 3 = 8-11%
 - * Data are not meant for official estimates.
- Census sponsors additional questions
- Purpose – Determine whether trust in federal statistics is affected by external events

Gallup/Trust questions

Personally, how much trust do you have in the federal statistics in the United States?

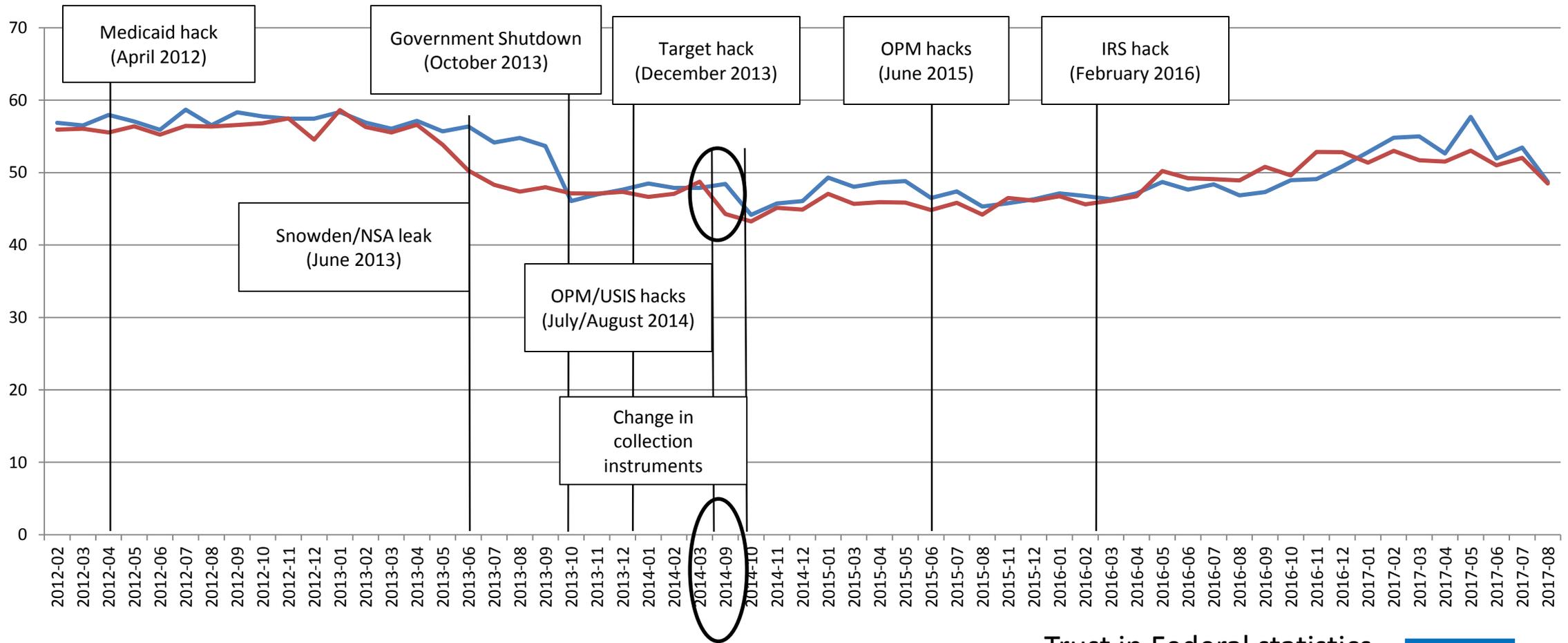
– Tend to Trust / Tend not to Trust

Agree/disagree? People can trust federal statistical agencies to keep information about them confidential.

– Likert scale: Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree

Trust in statistics and confidentiality over time

% Trust FSS / confidentiality by Month



Trust in Federal statistics —
 Belief in confidentiality —

Qualitative evidence

- Focus groups
- Gallup/Trust survey – Open-ended probes
 - Asked randomly after core questions
 - Why do you say that?
 - Intended to provide context of Rs' thoughts when responding

Perceptions of privacy and security

- Individuals attitudes are varied and complicated
 - Informed by personal experience, climate, assumptions, attitudes toward government
 - They consider
 - Benefits vs. risk
 - Requesting agency
 - Data being requested

Survey experience

Survey experience

- Participants have experience with a variety of surveys:
 - Customer service surveys, product reviews, market research
 - Political preferences
 - Surveys sponsored and/or advertised by their workplaces, health care providers, social media platforms, universities, etc.
- Very few mentioned experience with government surveys.

Survey experience

- People are generally reluctant to give out personal information
 - Annoyance at being asked for their information
 - Irritation that it is unclear what happens to their information
 - Concerns about selling of personal information

“Sometimes I’ll take [a survey]...and then a few days later I start getting all these phone calls and come to find out what they did is they take that information [and] sell it to other companies.”

Information security climate

Information security climate

- Characterized by:
 - Loss of control over personal data
 - Concerns about hacking, identity theft, scams, spyware, etc.
 - Perception that hacking is inevitable

Information security climate

- Loss of control, resignation

“You don’t have that much to hide these days. I mean it’s all out there.”

“I’ve just accepted that there are hackers out there.”

"There’s nothing you can do about that."

"I expect it even though I don’t like it."

Information security climate

- Risk is salient

“...We see it every day in the news, that they’ve just stolen data from Target, that they’ve just stolen data from Home Depot. I also say, for example, Snowden and all the information he left with to go to Switzerland.”

“... You don't ask for bank information. But it's just, I've had identity fraud and it's been such a pain.”

Attitudes toward government

Attitudes toward government

- Mix of positive and negative attitudes
- Government intrusiveness
- Distrust of government, potential misuse of information
- Uses of data – beneficial and otherwise

Government intrusiveness

- The federal government does not respect people's privacy in collecting data.
- Some comments about not answering any census questions that are
 - “not the business of the government”
 - “anything other than who you are and how many people are in your house.”

Government intrusiveness

- Government collects “all” data on individuals, permanently keeps them in central “computer memory banks” and shares among agencies.

“Well, like, the government can access any information they'd like.”

“...Just visiting the site sponsored by the government... I'm allowing them to see what's on my computer just by visiting the site.”

"The Government is so interconnected with each other anyway, it's going to pass through no matter what."

Gallup responses: Federal Statistics Respect Privacy

Positive Comments

“I wouldn’t want to think that the federal government blatantly invades people’s privacy for the sake of getting information.” (May 2015)

“Because they generally don’t collect identifying information, I think they are trying to collect aggregate information.” (October 2014)

Negative Comments

“Don’t believe the federal government should be involved in our daily lives.” (April 2015)

“In following the news and hearing the reports about the IRS and various agencies that track you I’m not sure that that’s right.” (August 2015)

Potential for government misuse

“My idealistic side will say that Census information will be used exclusively for purposes outlined in the legislation. My suspicious side says it will be used for anything that is executively deemed permissible or necessary in the future for any and every reason.”

Risk versus benefit

Personal risk

- Most concerns about information – identity theft, credit card theft
- Some concern about sharing between agencies:
 - A participant describing her name as “Middle-Eastern” was concerned about sharing data with the Department of Homeland Security:
 - “With my name...flying is not fun for me. I feel sometimes I am discriminated against because of it and I wonder if they have information about me from a different source.”
 - Scrutiny from IRS for excessive deductions
- Some concern about published statistics
 - “Even if [the data are released at a higher level than the] individual...[what if you have data that] this neighborhood gets lung cancer a lot? What does that mean for me as an individual when I need insurance?”

Beneficial uses of Census data

- Focus participants were aware of some uses of census data:
 - Congressional apportionment
 - Distribution of federal funds
 - Crime monitoring and prevention
 - Infrastructure and services for communities
 - “plan for the future”, “statistics”, “reports”
 - Genealogical research (74 year release)

Beneficial uses of Census data

“...the federal government, they help us. They have no reason to harm us. If you don’t owe anything, you have nothing to fear. You should help them when you can, so that they help us too.”

Gallup responses: Trust in federal statistics

Positive Comments

“Because we don’t have a better way. Collecting information and using it to make decisions is valuable, and we don’t have a better way of doing it. Generally, I trust them.” (October, 2014)

Negative Comments

“Because I’m very unhappy with what’s going on with Obama and the rest of the world and I just don’t have any trust in the government right now. And I’m afraid for our policeman with what’s going on with all the rights and I don’t think Obama is doing anything to help it.” (May, 2015)

Gallup responses: Policy makers need federal statistics

Positive Comment

“Because how else could they make their decisions, they aren’t going to go person to person so they need someone to gather a mass polling of the audience.” (March, 2015)

Negative Comment

“Because there aren’t any politicians that has the little guy’s back. The little guy has been getting the raw deal as far back as I can remember because my uncles are lot older than me and they grew up when everything’s real bad. If you you’re wealthy in this country you’re good to go. Or if you’re raised somewhere else and come here there are plenty of benefits for you but if you’re born and raised here there’s nothing for you.” (October, 2014)

Perceptions of Census data security

- There is “always a reason” to be concerned about information security.
 - These concerns were not particular to the government or the Census Bureau.
- Several participants indicated that the government is the “most reliable as far as the lockdown of information.”

Gallup responses: Belief in confidentiality

Positive Comment

- “Mistakes obviously get made – there are a lot of people doing that type of work. The people whose information is lost is relatively a small amount. It’s mostly private sector and not the federal government that people need to worry about.” (July, 2015)

Negative Comment

- “Son back from Navy has high security job. They got into his bank accounts. The only way they could have gotten is through government. Breach in computer.” (July, 2015)

Sensitivity of Census data

- The data Census requests are generally not sensitive
 - “The census no, it doesn’t...involve much.”
 - “Well, it doesn’t list your [Social Security] numbers.”
 - “...You don't ask for bank information...”
- Several stated that they had no concerns about government data collection as their information is already “out there.”

Lack of clarity – Purposes, protections of census data

- Most did not understand what is done with the data the Census collects.
 - Not understanding the purpose → hesitant to participate
- Security protections are unclear

“...There has to be some system or some way to better validate, if that site is really what it says it is. Because if you’re entering private information, it’s a sensitive matter to see where or to whom you’re giving this information.”

Conclusions

- Main concerns are about identity theft and financial loss
- Every organization is vulnerable to hacking
- Security of Census data not of concern because they are not sensitive and already “out there”
- Some concerns about government intrusiveness but Census generally seen as beneficial
- General antipathy toward government and personal experience affect stated attitudes toward statistics

Thanks!

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