

RESPONDENT: 2950859914 – John Pelican
SECTOR: Unknown - Individual

Q1 - What are your views of the different census approaches described in the consultation document?

The first approach would seemingly yield some continuity of statistics based on continuity of method, but that continuity would, I opine, be illusory, as the primarily-online nature of the survey would arguably make the latter unreliable in key geographic areas and key geodemographic categories of respondent, to a degree probably not reparable via the 1% detailed survey. Any online survey would leave non-enumerated (and potentially, later, less enfranchised and/or less represented politically than should be the case) significant groups of potential respondent, including 'offline' folk (including as at present some 'voiceless' folk within households) and transient folk. A real risk (needing serious management as no doubt already occurs) would I think, be 'gaming' by mischievous and/or malign groups to an extent not easily controllable by the ONS. The second approach would lack the relatively-uniform 'bedrock' of a recently-done 'traditional' decadal census. Also, use of administrative data would leave outwith ONS' control key aspects of data-capture, to a degree that should not be tolerated given the partial (and sometimes at the extreme proven venal) nature of just about all the agencies that would in reality be capturing the administrative data. I would have preferred a traditional field survey supplemented by online survey, done decennially, updated in subsequent years between decadal surveys to meet concrete needs by if-necessary compulsory but quite acceptably voluntary, administrative surveys done when need should have arisen. Given that a decadal survey done primarily offline is not on offer, I nonetheless opt for approach 1 as the lesser evil.

Q2 - Please specify any significant uses of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

None

Q3 - Please specify any significant additional benefits of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

None

Q4 - What would the impact be if the most detailed statistics for very small geographic areas and small population groups were no longer available? High, medium, low or no impact?

High

If medium or high, please give further information.

In my industry (insurance and including reinsurance) both hazard- and geo-demographic modelling have succeeded, now, in using high-granularity data based on census SAS/ OA analysis, more equitably to apportion risks and costs and charges as between geographic and geo-demographic categories of place and of person, whilst still respecting the basic (re)insurance assertion that there can be a pooling of risk from which everyone can benefit. The absence of a reputable, 'testable' bedrock of small-area statistics derived from a more-widely-applied, and uniform, survey, would make maintenance of a credible high-granularity apportioning of risks, costs and charges a lot more difficult than under the present framework. Also, abandonment of small-area statistics as above-defined would put at risk UK fine-granularity data-holding, data-analysing and data-mapping technologies that have been world-leading, and that have been driven in their development by the oddities of the UK legal and administrative 'landscape' and land-divisions. UK-sourced such software has to be very capable in order to cope with the incongruities of the UK scene, and that capability has made it easily exportable because it is flexible and adaptable.

Q5 - What would the additional benefit be if more frequent (i.e. annual) statistics about population characteristics were available for areas like local authorities and electoral wards? High, medium, low or no additional benefit?

Medium

If medium or high please give further information.

Proof of pudding would be in the eating; the accuracy and precision of the statistics would have to be assayed as best could be achieved, independently.

Q6 - Please specify any significant uses of census information for historical research that we have not already identified.

None that I'm aware of (but I feel that given current medical research and medical practice trends, the 'trackability' of individuals and their descendents across decadal surveys will probably become far more important, even than hitherto). I also have sympathy for those with a genealogical interest (I have no interest in antecedents and the like, but I observe that the people who do have such an interest seem to include a high proportion of 'solid citizens' whose interests ought on policy grounds to be given weight rather than ignored/demeaned.)

Q7 - What advantages or disadvantages for genealogical or historical research can you see from a move to a solution based on archiving administrative data sources?

Don't know

Q8 - What are your views of the risks of each census approach and how they might be managed?

In summary; approach 1 risks non-coverage (and hence non-representation) of perhaps-significant segments and/or proportions of the population not having any or enough internet-access to ensure coverage and hence representation. This risk cannot adequately be managed, I think, but maybe could be lessened by increasing the 'check' survey in width and depth. The first approach also risks IT-based malfeasance to at least some degree, which risk can, one trusts, be minimised by good IT management. Approach 2 risks lack of the relative uniformity of approach given by a recently-done 'traditional' decadal census. Approach 2 also risks leaving control of key procedures and data-management outwith control of any reputable manager, such as the ONS, and specifically including the ONS. I would be sceptical of the impartiality of any alternative manager of procedures and of data. Unfortunately I think that approach 2 would, in the real, commercialised and politicised world, quickly come to be seen as a dog's dinner of incommensurables and incompatible things, and would be abandoned as a national survey (in law quite conceivable as an outcome). Administrative surveys would continue to meet (not very well) statutorily-defined data-needs, and think-tanks could cobble those data plus other data together in ad-hoc-funded ways to yield estimates for previously-census-based metrics. In face of that, I guess that some other (national?) census agency would probably have to be asked to run later UK national surveys, as we would in the interim have lost the capability to run a national survey.

Q9 - Are there any other issues that you believe we should be taking into account?

Abandonment of a decadal (or other periodic) census requiring some substantial field enumeration of households in their dwellings risks the state losing acceptability in demanding any significant input from citizens (or in the UK case, 'subjects'). Could a state unable to mount a field-based census credibly re-launch conscription, for instance, in time of national emergency? Abandonment of the above-noted risks, also, the state losing the ability to execute large-scale, people-based projects of any kind. Is recruitment, training and supervision of a large field-force of students (multi-lingual as it would need to be) and the like, really, now, outwith the capability of the national survey agency? If so, is this an acceptable state of affairs? My personal greatest worry is that abandonment of the above-noted (faced as it has always been with a host of definitional, cadastral and operational challenges, on each of which compromise has been needed, and reached) puts at risk a hard-won national capability in mapping (traditional and modern) and in geodemographics, that has made the UK a world-leader in GIS, applied geomatics and traditional Geography.

