

REJOINDER

We would like to thank Dan Melnick for his fruitful comments on our paper. We were particularly intrigued by the variation on our proposal which he offers in his discussion.

One other general comment might be in order before we get into the details. We do not advocate in our paper "a complete shift to administrative census-taking." Supplementary procedures will be required. What we do advocate is that research be conducted to see whether a mixed strategy of conventional census-taking, in some areas (e.g., rural) or for some groups, combined with administrative records could be an improvement over present approaches.

Specific Issues Raised

Dan rightly raises as unresolved issues several questions that any proposed research on an Administrative Record Census (ARC) would have to try to answer. We do not have the answers to these questions now. It might be useful, however, to give partial responses to his concerns based on reasonable extrapolations of what is likely to happen.

1. Some population characteristics data would be available in the Administrative Record Census at the block and tract levels, assuming the nine-digit zip code could be relied upon. As we indicated in our paper, for rural areas special methods may be needed because of the address problems with administrative records, so aptly raised by John Leyes.
2. Most safeguards on confidentiality and privacy needed by the Census Bureau to conduct an ARC already exist. The Census Bureau's applicable Code sections and related regulations are very strong and can be relied upon to give the same protection to ARC data that would be afforded to conventional census information. Indeed, the Census Bureau already uses most of the administrative record data which is discussed in the paper, as part of its intercensal estimates program and for revenue sharing purposes; thus, giving these records to the Census Bureau would not be novel in any respect. It is only the combined use of these records which is new. Also, it is not new for the Census Bureau to obtain information through the addition of special questions on administrative forms; the 1980 experience in asking for addresses on the individual income tax return is a case in point.
3. Comparability between censuses would obviously be greatly affected by a switch to an enumeration approach which relied heavily on administrative records. A partial answer,

here, would be to overlap the two techniques in order to benchmark the new series on the old (something we strongly advocate). Contents and coverage evaluations could, then, still be conducted as they are now after each census. Initially, at least, these are likely to be more expensive since the approach advocated is so unfamiliar.

4. It is very difficult to predict what the impact of the Administrative Record Census would be on survey operations in government and elsewhere. We think that, to the extent household surveys employ area probability selection techniques, the impact might be very small. To the extent that Census Bureau surveys employ addresses obtained in a decennial enumeration for use during the intercensal period, the impact would obviously be greater (since the addresses to be used would be coming, at least partly, from "perfected" administrative records). Here it might be noted that the administrative records offer the ability to update the addresses during intercensal periods when this is needed for some special purpose. Updating, for example, in the primary sampling units in which the CPS is conducted might be done more often than each decade, as is now the case. Such an update can greatly improve the sampling and would allow for certain kinds of stratification not now attempted in the current survey program at the Census Bureau.
5. We are very troubled by problems with geographic coding. It might be noted, though, that geographic coding of addresses is always extremely difficult, whether the addresses are obtained in a census or from some other source, such as administrative records. Concerns about residential vs. mailing addresses are great and, as we indicated in the paper, it probably would be essential to obtain residence information on the administrative record in order to be sure that people were counted where they live.

Concluding Comment

The subject of an Administrative Record Census is obviously one of some complexity. Our exposition of the idea was quite a challenge to us, and we feel that we would have had even less success in clarifying our viewpoint had it not been for Dan Melnick and John Leyes. Our thanks, again, to both of them and to the several other individuals (particularly Richard Irwin, from the Census Bureau) who commented on the approach at the meetings.