

Rapid Response American Time Use Survey (ATUS)

July 2025



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Panelists

Liana Sayer - Director, Maryland Time Use Lab, at Univ. of Maryland

Brigid Schulte - author of *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has Time*

Denice Ross - former U.S. Chief Data Scientist

Meghan Maury - former Senior Advisor for Data Policy at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy



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About the ATUS

What: Data on what, when, where, & with whom Americans spend time

Who: Collaboration between Bureau of Labor Statistics & Census Bureau

How: Computer-assisted phone interview of 1 person age 15+ per household from outgoing rotation of the CPS

24-hour time diary (4am-4am) unbiased way to collect information on all daily activities

When: Annually (since 2003), data published each summer are for prior calendar year. (U.S. is unique in annual data collection)

Where: Nationally-representative (with state and substate geography and population subgroup detail)



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Photo: Indra Projects, Unsplash

What's in ATUS?

Population-level data on



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About the ATUS

- **What (cont'd):** Data on what, when, where, and with whom Americans spend time
 - Rich information about respondents and household members (linked with CPS)
 - Co-presence of others
 - Location and mode of transportation
 - Secondary childcare and elder care
 - Includes supplements with focused items—paid work leave & flexibility, eating & health, well-being
 - 6-digit activity coding scheme (400+ activities)

ATUS Modules

- Leave and Flexibilities Module fielded in 2017-2018 (2025 module)
 - Workplace leave & flexibilities policies and daily time use
 - Types of jobs with greater time/place/WFH flexibility
 - Variations in time use, leave, workplace flexibility, and ability to work from home by gender, race-ethnicity, class, etc.
 - Developed and funded by the Women's Bureau
- Well-Being Module fielded in 2010, 2012-2013, 2021
 - Experienced happiness, meaning, sadness, stress, pain, and fatigue for three randomly selected activities
 - How does well-being vary across different activities and population subgroups?
 - How is well-being associated with the co-presence of others?
 - Developed and funded by NIA, NICHD, NSF

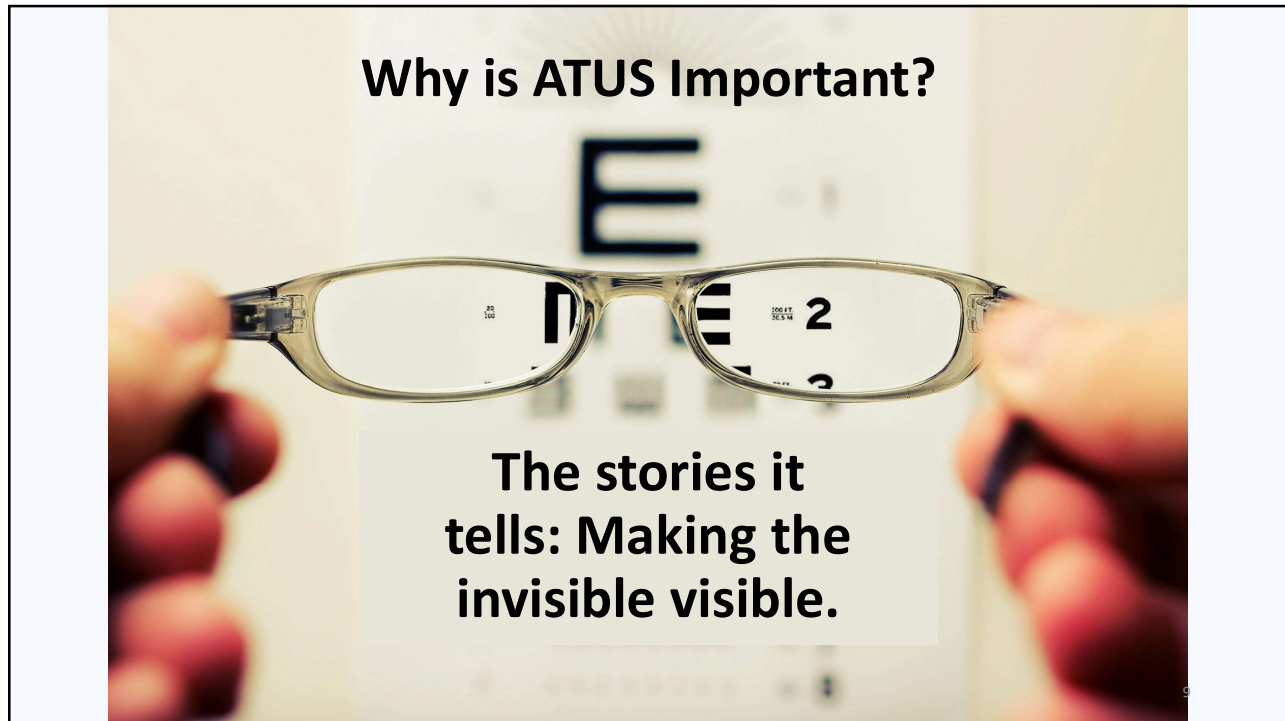
ATUS Modules

- Eating and Health Module fielded in 2006-08, 2014-2016, 2022-2023
- Data on food behaviors, nutrition, weight, food assistance programs, food safety, and food scarcity
 - How are everyday food behaviors, grocery shopping preferences, and being the usual shopper/meal preparer associated with daily activity patterns?
 - In 2022, how are these related to enjoyment of food shopping and meal preparation?
 - How are everyday food behaviors associated with food scarcity and nutrition, health, and well-being?
- Only federal source of data with information on online grocery shopping
- Developed and funded by Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Why is ATUS Important?

Why:

- Only population-level source of data on unpaid productive activity.
- Primary source for annual estimates of and trends in population time allocation.
- Enables research that illuminates relationships among social, economic, and policy contexts and population behavior.
- Helps understand tradeoffs between activities and trends in daily time use.



The story of Overwhelmed...

- Tracks the unpaid labor of home and care “non market work”
- Quantifies the “shadow economy” or the “care economy” – “hidden workforce” of caregivers
- Unveiled “Time poverty”
- Gender Roles. Gender Equality. The second shift
- Human capital – investments in children
- Truer picture of the extent of work hours - beyond the official work day - late-night emails, taking paperwork home

Policy Impacts of ATUS

ATUS Informs public and workplace policies and practices like...

- Flexible work, telework, shift work
- Child care, paid leave, elder care supports. Nutrition supports, after school programs
- Tax policy to support caregivers or recognizing parenting, and at-home parenting as important economic activity
- Unpaid labor
- Evidence base for programs addressing obesity, aging, social isolation
- Response to policy changes (work requirements, family leave in states, child tax credit, legislation on store opening hours for e.g.)



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Bodes well

- ATUS gets a mention in the BLS FY26 Budget (although with reduced sample size)
- 3 months before its expiration date, BLS submitted a request for an "extension without change" to the ATUS Information Collection Request
- Content of the ATUS is not explicitly misaligned with Administration priorities



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Bodes less-well

- No statutory requirement for the collection, and it is not a Principal Federal Economic Indicator
- Reduction in BLS budget leaves focus on core collections (which don't include ATUS)
- Survey findings might reveal negative impacts from Administration reductions in federal programs such as Head Start and Medicaid
- ATUS depends on Census Bureau interviewers at the National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, IN
- DOGE has indicated it is reviewing all Census surveys for termination
- Declining response rates and declining trust in government will likely impact quality and differential response rates



Department of Government Efficiency 
@DOGE



Besides the Census itself, the @USCensusBureau performs 102 additional surveys costing \$2.2 billion, many of them obsolete with the results not being used to drive any action nor even looked at.

The Census Bureau and DOGE are reviewing them one-by-one. So far, 5 wasteful surveys, totaling 493 pages of questions and \$16.5M in costs, have been terminated, with questions like:

- "In your entire life, have you had at least 12 drinks of any kind of alcohol, not counting small tastes or sips?"
- "Was this MOSTLY regular wine, wine coolers, or fortified wine?"
- "How frequently do you use the internet in your home?"

2:01 PM · May 20, 2025 · 1.2M Views

Respond to the Call for Comments

<https://tinyurl.com/ATUS-FRN>

Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission for OMB Review; American Time Use Survey

A Notice by the Labor Department on 06/26/2025

This document has a comment period that ends in 24 days. (07/28/2025)

SUBMIT A PUBLIC COMMENT



PUBLISHED DOCUMENT: 2025-11766 (90 FR 27342)

DOCUMENT HEADINGS
Department of Labor

ACTION:
Notice of availability, request for comments.

SUMMARY:
The Department of Labor (DOL) is submitting this Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)-sponsored information collection request (ICR) to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and approval in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA). Public comments on the ICR are invited.

DATES:
The OMB will consider all written comments that the agency receives on or before July 28, 2025.

Examples of Comments

RE: Public Comment in Response to Improving Performance, Accountability and Responsiveness in the Civil Service [Docket No. OPM-2025-0004]

I write to express my deep concern about reclassifying specific federal positions. This rule would erode necessary protections for staff in the federal statistical system, transforming positions which rely on specific expertise to political ones. The proposed rule would call into question the objectivity that both sides of the aisle rely on for needed evidence. Federal statistics play an essential role in informing the lives of all Americans and inform critical policy decisions with evidence that is timely, relevant, and accurate. Federal statistical agencies are particularly vulnerable to the proposed rule due to the following:

- **Polarization:** Schedule Policy/Career could lead to the politicization of the federal statistical workforce. Federal statistics clearly influence public policy of all sorts: monetary, fiscal, regulatory, etc. Thus, a President could classify many statistical agency positions as Policy/Career. Then, for example, BLS leaders could be fired for releasing or planning to release jobs or inflation statistics unfavorable to the President's policy agenda. They might also face pressure to change methodologies or reveal pre-release information. By making it easier to remove employees if a President determines that they are interfering with his or her policies, it increases the potential for passivity or political loyalty to be prioritized over expertise and experience. Politicization has had dramatic consequences for statistical agencies and their leaders in other countries, notably Argentina and Greece.
- **Importance of Trust, Impartiality and Objectivity:** Statistical agencies need professional autonomy to provide impartial, objective, reliable data. Professional autonomy is the ability to act independently from political or other undue external influence regarding its operations. Erosion of professional autonomy in the statistical agencies would undermine public trust in the data they produce.
- **Importance of Norms:** Schedule Policy/Career would deprioritize and thus weaken norms that uphold the ethical and professional standards that are critical to the success of statistical agencies. See Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency for examples of critical norms that leaders help craft, model and reinforce. These norms go beyond the laws, rules, and policy directives that govern agencies' operations. Weaker norms threaten trust, efficient operations, and data quality.
- **Erosion of Expertise and Institutional Memory:** Statistical agencies tend to hire without technical experts who see their career paths as less secure and merit-based than before. Loss of these could disrupt agency operations, hinder long-term planning and impair the quality and accuracy of the data.
- **Decreased Employee Morale and Productivity:** The uncertainty and fear of arbitrary dismissal could negatively impact employee morale, impair productivity and the ability to attract and retain top talent.
- **Importance of Modernization, Research, and Data Continuity:** To support their missions, statistical agencies must invest in long-term efforts such as critical modernization projects and efforts to ensure data access and continuity. Schedule Policy/Career could subject agencies to changing presidential priorities, increasing senior staff turnover and disrupting modernization, measurement of trends, and meaningful research.

[INSERT own language here, if desired]

Schedule Policy/Career seriously threatens the effectiveness of federal statistical agencies and the integrity and quality of their products. By undermining the principles of merit-based employment and threatening job security of career civil servants, Schedule Policy/Career could lead to politicization, loss of trust and expertise, less morale, and disrupted agency operations.

On behalf of U.S. businesses, the American public, and policymakers I urge that the truthfulness of federal statistics be protected by rejecting this rule or expeditiously excluding statistical agency staff from Schedule Policy/Career.

RE: Public Comment in Response to Improving Performance, Accountability and Responsiveness in the Civil Service [Docket No. OPM-2025-0004]

I am writing to oppose reclassifying federal civil service positions. I am concerned that such reclassification would prioritize politics over expertise, which would be a disservice to the American people.

For Early Warnings on Changes, Follow and Subscribe to dataindex.us



America's Data Index

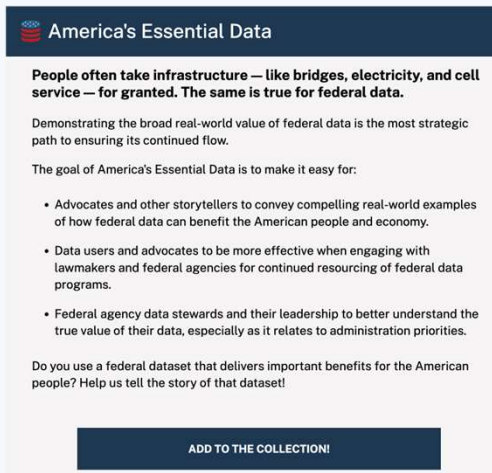
Monitoring America's federal data infrastructure from dataset availability and new releases to planned and unplanned changes to collections.

We are currently monitoring [23 datasets](#) and have tracked [710 change requests](#) to data collections in the last 30 days.



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Submit Use Cases to EssentialData.US



America's Essential Data

People often take infrastructure — like bridges, electricity, and cell service — for granted. The same is true for federal data.

Demonstrating the broad real-world value of federal data is the most strategic path to ensuring its continued flow.

The goal of America's Essential Data is to make it easy for:

- Advocates and other storytellers to convey compelling real-world examples of how federal data can benefit the American people and economy.
- Data users and advocates to be more effective when engaging with lawmakers and federal agencies for continued resourcing of federal data programs.
- Federal agency data stewards and their leadership to better understand the true value of their data, especially as it relates to administration priorities.

Do you use a federal dataset that delivers important benefits for the American people? Help us tell the story of that dataset!

ADD TO THE COLLECTION!



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To Keep Up to Date, Join the Federal Data Forum federaldataforum.prb.org



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Take Action

- dataindex.us
- EssentialData.US
- federaldataforum.prb.org
- <https://tinyurl.com/ATUS-FRN>



Write a Comment



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