


Government Statistical Agencies and the Politics of Credibility

Who decides how official statistics are produced? Do politicians have control or are key decisions left to statisticians in independent statistical agencies? Interviews with statisticians in Australia, Canada, Sweden, the UK and the USA were conducted to get insider perspectives on the nature of decision making in government statistical administration. While the popular adage suggests there are ‘lies, damned lies and statistics’, this research shows that official statistics in liberal democracies are far from mistruths; they are consistently insulated from direct political interference. Yet, a range of subtle pressures and tensions exist that governments and statisticians must manage. The power over statistics is distributed differently in different countries, and this book explains why. Differences in decision-making powers across countries are the result of shifting pressures politicians and statisticians face to be credible, and the different national contexts that provide distinctive institutional settings for the production of government numbers.

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978-1-108-81175-0 — Government Statistical Agencies and the Politics of Credibility

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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108811750
DOI: 10.1017/9781108867962

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First published 2021
First paperback edition 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-108-49122-8 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-108-81175-0 Paperback

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For Mum, Dad and Saoirse

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Acknowledgements and Declaration

I started this project on government statistical agencies in 2004. In the intervening years, many people and organisations have helped to make the research possible. I would like to acknowledge the support of the Killam Trusts in providing me a post-doctoral fellowship to start this project in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. I also received a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to fund part of the research that informs this book.

This project would not have been possible without the support of statistical agencies in the five case countries. I would like to thank the following organisations for allowing me access to interview staff: the Australian Bureau of Statistics; Statistics Canada; in Sweden: the National Agency for Education, National Institute of Economic Research, National Mediation Office, Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, Swedish National Debt Office, National Board of Health and Welfare, Statistics Sweden, and Transport Analysis; in the United Kingdom: HM Revenue and Customs, Department for Work and Pensions, the Office for National Statistics, Statistics Commission and United Kingdom Statistics Authority; in the United States of America: the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Energy Information Administration, National Centre for Health Statistics, Office of Management and Budget, Social Security Administration and the United States Census Bureau. I would also like to thank the Royal Statistical Society for allowing me to interview members.

I am grateful to the following statistical professionals for commenting on drafts of case study chapters: Richard Alldritt, Johanne Ascoli, Magnus Häll, Brian Harris-Kojetin, Cathy Kruger, Larry Shute, and Katherine Wallman. All errors and omissions are mine.

A number of academic colleagues have been extremely helpful with this research. I was assisted in securing SSHRC funding at the University of Victoria by Herman Bakvis, who also provided input into the initial design of the research. Rebecca Sergeant provided research assistance in the early phases of the project. At Griffith University, many of my colleagues in the School of Government and International Relations and Centre for Governance and Public Policy have given helpful feedback on my work along the way. I would particularly like to acknowledge Duncan McDonnell, Haig Patapan, Patrick Weller, and Xu Yi-Chong for their comments and suggestions. I would also like to acknowledge Dennis Grube, who collaborated with me on an earlier case study of Canadian official statistics (Grube and Howard 2016) and whose input has influenced my analysis in this volume.

No project of this size and duration is possible without the personal support of friends and loved ones. I want to thank my mum, Lucienne Fontannaz, and my dad, Ian Howard for their encouragement and advice. I would also like to thank Julia Smith for her care and inspiration.

Finally, I would like to declare that I was engaged by the Canadian Ministry of Industry in 2016 on a consultancy basis to provide a written report on options for strengthening the independence of Statistics Canada.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABARES	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACS	American Community Survey
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AMLPS	Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey
BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis
BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
CBCS	Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics
CPI	consumer price index
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DBS	Dominion Bureau of Statistics
DM	Deputy Minister
EIA	Energy Information Administration
EU	European Union
FTE	full-time equivalent
GDP	gross domestic product
GSS	Government Statistical Service
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
ICSP	Interagency Council on Statistical Policy
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MLFC	Mandatory Long Form Census
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service
NCHS	National Center for Health Statistics
NDP	New Democratic Party
NHS	National Household Survey
NPG	new political governance
NPM	new public management
OMB	Office of Management and Budget

ONS	Office for National Statistics
PA	Presidential Appointee
PAS	Presidential Appointee Position Requiring Senate Confirmation
PSB	public service bargain
RCAGA	Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration
RSS	Royal Statistical Society
SCB	Statistiska Centralbyran/Statistics Sweden
SNA	System of National Accounts
StatCan	Statistics Canada
UKSA	United Kingdom Statistics Authority
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WB	World Bank