Privacy Risks and the Census

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With great computational power comes great responsibility of securing privacy while maintaining accuracy. The article is about the concerns of confidentiality and accuracy of the census data while “differential privacy” is adopted by the Census Bureau. Arguments supporting both sides of the issue are represented here:

* **Confidentiality:**
  + **Pro Confidentiality:** In today’s hi-tech world, where there is nearly no limit to the computational power, it is not a distant vision but a ground reality that the individual’s privacy is breached as there is a high risk of getting re-identified from the aggregate data. Differential privacy is an innovative new framework which determines the amount of “noise” that can be added to the data before releasing it. This ensures privacy and the data quality/accuracy is also retained.
  + **Concerns:** In another school of thought, the experts suggest that this new framework of differential privacy would prove as an impediment for research as the noise or impurity in the data would introduce uncertainty and degrade the data quality. This would have a direct impact on purposes like redistricting, enforcing the Voting Rights Act, or conducting academic research where the data is not accurate enough to produce any meaningful outcomes.
* **Accuracy of Data:**
  + Pro Accuracy: Data is the new gold, and the purity of the gold is of utmost importance. Similarly, accuracy of data is also important to achieve meaningful insights out of it. Moreover, the broader purpose of census data is to utilize the same for policy making and academic research. In the previous system the censes data enabled the researchers and policy makers to access a highly accurate data for drawing valuable insights and predictions.
  + Accuracy Concerns: The article mentions about a reconstruction exercise, where the aggregate tables were used to successfully match the actual records with high accuracy which is alarming and a threat to individual’s confidentiality. Having a highly accurate dataset possess risk of Individual’s privacy and violation of Title 13 of the US code to keep each person’s information private, and it’s responsibility to provide useful data.

Upon analysing both the perspectives, I would prioritise protecting individual’s privacy. While an accurate data can facilitate research and help make important policies, it is of utmost importance to protect individual from confidentiality breaches which may have profound implications. Privacy is not the only concern; unethical utilization of the precise data can also put national security at risk. In my opinion, implementing differential privacy by the Census Bureau is important and necessary. This will reassure public trust in the census process.

Data is the new gold! Protect it!

**References:**

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