

At a Glance | February 13, 2020

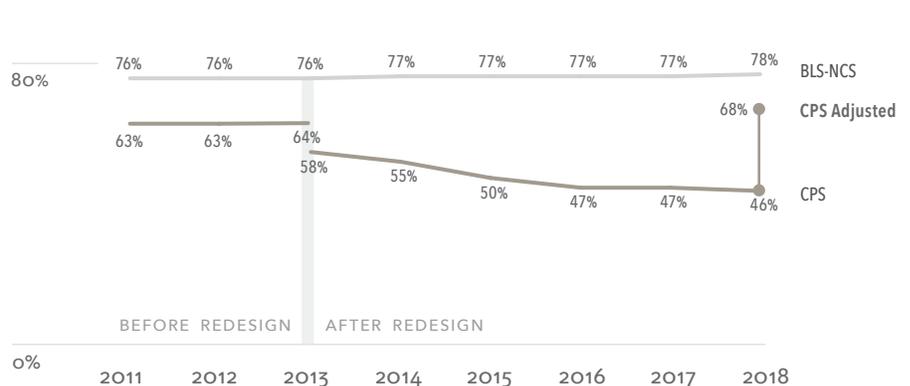
The 2019 Current Population Survey: New Questions, Improved Results?

EBRI looks at the impact of new Current Population Survey questions related to income earned in retirement accounts.

RELIABLE ESTIMATES?

Since a 2014 redesign, the Current Population Survey (CPS) retirement plan participation estimates have been much lower and trended downward, contradicting other data sources. New questions added in 2019 on income in retirement accounts give hope for a better and more accurate read on employment-based retirement plan participation.

Percentage Participating in Employment-Based Retirement Plans¹
CPS vs. Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey (BLS-NCS)



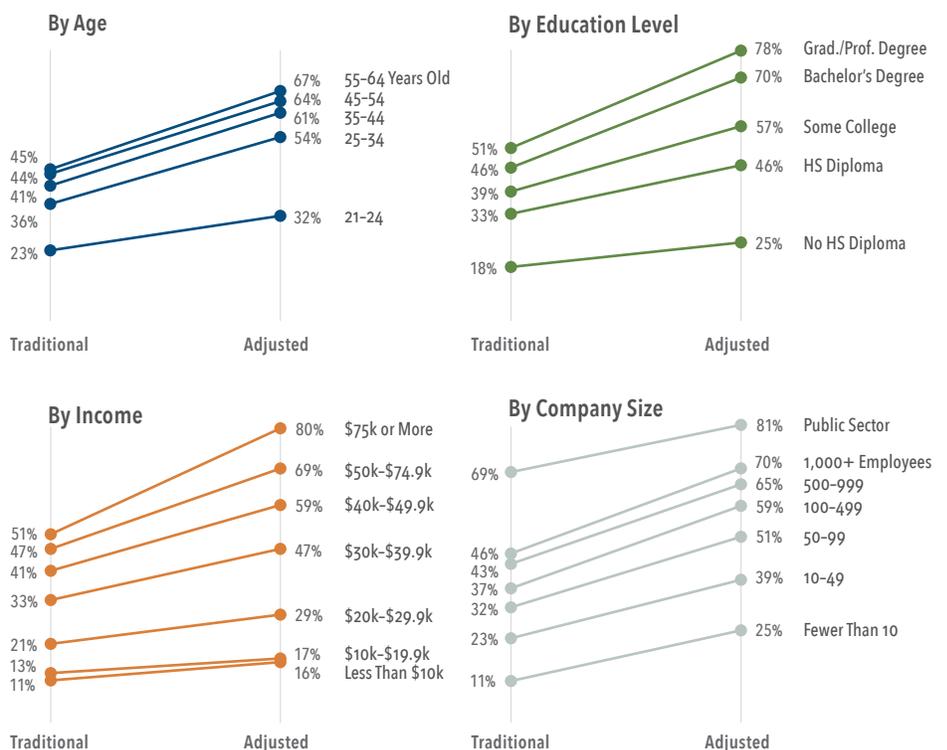
NEW VARIABLES, NEW ESTIMATES

The Current Population Survey dataset is important as it has the most current annual data on retirement plan participation on a worker-level basis, allowing analysis by worker demographics.

New questions allow for the potential of correcting for the apparent undercounting of retirement plan participation in defined contribution (DC) plans. The adjusted levels resulted in estimates more in line with other sources.

Once more years of data are available, the new methodology can be assessed by comparing the levels and trends across various other data sources.

Participation in Employment-Based Retirement Plans by Worker Demographics, 2018
Traditional Estimates vs. Adjusted Estimates (Incorporating New Questions)



SOURCE: Craig Copeland, "Retirement Plan Participation and the Current Population Survey: The Impact of New Income Questions on These Estimates," *EBRI Issue Brief*, no. 499 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, January 30, 2020).

1. Percentage of wage and salary workers working for private-sector employers with 500 or more employees participating in an employment-based retirement plan (both defined benefit and DC plans).