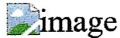


# WSJ Print Edition

*Does Trump's nominee for BLS have a plan to make data more reliable?*



## All E.J. Antoni's Labor Statistics

### REVIEW & OUTLOOK

President Trump did himself no favors by firing the Bureau of Labor Statistics head because he didn't like last month's jobs report. He also did no favors for his nominated BLS replacement, Heritage Foundation chief economist E.J. Antoni, who will now have to overcome public skepticism to show the data can be trusted.

Stipulate first that the BLS data has become increasingly volatile in recent years. Last month's jobs report revised down gains by 258,000 for May and June. This suggested that growth stalled this spring. Mr. Trump then claimed without evidence that the numbers were "RIGGED in order to make the Republicans, and ME, look bad."

The truth is that the recent sharp downward revisions are a result of declining business survey response rates that require agency statisticians to rely more on models and guesswork. Numbers are later revised when more data is collected. Declining survey response rates are a real problem for the BLS and other federal statistical agencies. **← NOTE**

The response rate for the BLS establishment survey, which is used for the monthly jobs report, has fallen to 43% from 61% over the last decade. Response rates for the household survey that feeds into the unemployment and labor force participation rates have declined to 68% from 88%. Inflation reports may also be affected by falling response rates in calculating shelter prices (14 percentage-point decline over a decade) and weights for items in the consumer price index (28 point decline).

One result is that numbers can swing from month to month, especially for demographic sub-groups. Another risk is that survey responders may not be representative. Small businesses are typically less likely and later to respond, so initial monthly jobs reports may not reflect changes in their hiring and layoffs.

Another problem: A funding shortage has caused BLS to stop collecting some granular data that can illuminate economic changes. The BLS this month will stop calculating some 350 individual producer price indices showing which industries pay for goods and services.

Criticizing the BLS as Mr. Antoni has from the back benches is easy, but what is his plan to make the data more reliable? Senators might ask during his confirmation hearing. One imperative is to eliminate bureaucratic silos so statistical agencies can more easily collect and share data. Another is to modernize survey collections. Some data is still collected by fax. Mr. Antoni's commentary at Heritage has been highly partisan, but the BLS job demands nonpartisan professionalism. Last week he cited BLS survey data—yes, despite previously criticizing it as unreliable—to argue that Mr. Trump's immigration policies have caused a surge of employment of nativeborn Americans as "artificially cheap labor is removed" from the economy. The data he cited is questionable because it also shows that the native-born population over age 16 grew by 4.5 million since last December. That's unlikely in half a year. It increased by about 1.5 million annually on average last decade and flatlined in 2023 and 2024. See the nearby chart. Perhaps immigrants told surveyors that they were born in the U.S. because they were afraid of being deported.

Few people trust China's economic data because they know the government serves the interests of the ruling Communist Party. Mr. Antoni will have to take off his MAGA hat if he wants to ensure that the public and markets can trust BLS data.

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