

Redefining what counts is *not* the same as faking it

One mechanism of official statistics — why agencies periodically change definitions and classifications, and why a documented change is not manipulation.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to the official statistics the government publishes — jobs, prices, crime, output, deaths — the numbers themselves and the way they are read, examined the same way regardless of which party the figure happens to help or hurt. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with agency methodology, official records, and nonpartisan scholarship listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS — OFFICIAL DATA REPORTING

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Methodology Change Framed as Fudging

Regula Mutata

Governing precedent / case Definitional and classification changes Status Recurring at each methodology update

OBSERVED SPECIMEN	POVERTY, CRIME, EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH MEASURES
<i>Agencies update how a statistic is built as the world changes: the Census Bureau publishes a Supplemental Poverty Measure alongside the official one; the FBI moved crime reporting to NIBRS; disease surveillance revises case definitions. Each change is documented, dated, and usually released with a bridge to the old series. When a number jumps at a methodology change, the shift is attributed to the agency “moving the goalposts to hide the truth,” when the change is public and the old series remains available for comparison.</i>	
THE HOOK A number shifts when the method changes, and the change itself is read as the manipulation.	THE MECHANISM Definitions and classifications are updated through documented, published processes, typically with overlap periods or bridged series so users can compare old and new.

Field mark: when a statistic jumps at a redefinition, check the agency's methodology notes — a change that is documented, dated, and bridged to the old series is a revision, not a fabrication.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

AGENCY METHODOLOGY · CENSUS

U.S. Census Bureau, “The Supplemental Poverty Measure” alongside the official poverty measure.

<https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/supplemental-poverty-measure.html>

Two officially published poverty measures, documented, released together — a definitional choice, not a swap.

AGENCY METHODOLOGY · CDC

CSTE/CDC, “Surveillance Case Definitions” and their published revisions.

<https://ndc.services.cdc.gov/>

The formal, dated process by which disease case definitions are set and revised.

Reading a Methodology Change: A Gut Check

four questions before 'they changed the definition' becomes proof of a cover-up

1 Find the notes

Methodology changes are documented and dated by the agency.

2 Look for a bridge

Agencies usually publish an overlap or crosswalk to the old series.

3 Separate change from motive

A redefinition can help or hurt; documentation shows it is not covert.

4 Compare on one method

Trend claims need the same definition on both ends.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 10 of the Official Data Reporting section within Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens is listed on the cover. This section joins Elections and Federal Laws within Civics, with local government and institutional communications planned beyond it. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.