

The first number is an *estimate*, not a final count

One mechanism of official statistics — why the jobs and GDP figures are revised for months after release, and why a revision is the system working, not a cover-up.

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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Preliminary Estimate vs. Revised Figure

Prima Non Ultima

Governing precedent / case BLS/BEA revision schedules Status Recurring every release cycle

OBSERVED SPECIMEN	MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT SITUATION; QUARTERLY GDP
<i>The monthly jobs number is a first estimate from an incomplete survey sample; it is revised in each of the next two months as more responses arrive, and again in an annual benchmark against near-complete tax records. GDP is estimated three times a quarter — advance, second, third — and again in annual and comprehensive revisions. A downward revision of hundreds of thousands of jobs is regularly framed as the government having “admitted it lied,” when the revision is the published, scheduled process of replacing an estimate with better data.</i>	

THE HOOK	THE MECHANISM
A later, different number is treated as proof the first one was fake, rather than as the same figure with more data behind it.	First releases trade accuracy for speed. Agencies publish revision schedules in advance and document the average size of revisions; the numbers converge as late responses and administrative records come in.

Field mark: before reading a revision as an admission, check the release calendar — the estimate was always labeled preliminary, and the revision date was set before the first number came out.

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 · BLS

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Situation Technical Note” and CES benchmark revision documentation.

<https://www.bls.gov/ces/notices/2024/preliminary-benchmark-revision.htm>

BLS's own explanation of the preliminary and final benchmark revisions to payroll employment.

AGENCY METHODOLOGY · BEA

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “GDP: Revisions and Release Schedule.”

<https://www.bea.gov/help/faq/1004>

BEA documents the advance/second/third estimate sequence and why estimates change.

Reading a Revision: A Gut Check

four questions before a revised figure becomes proof the first one was a lie

1 Find the label

First releases are marked ‘advance’ or ‘preliminary’ — the estimate never claimed to be final.

2 Check the schedule

Revision dates are published before the first number; the correction was planned, not forced.

3 Size it against history

Agencies report the average revision; ask whether this one is unusual or routine.

4 Watch the direction

Revisions run up and down over time; a single downward one is not a trend or a confession.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 2 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.