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# **Public confidence in official statistics**

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# Executive summary

This report presents findings from the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey on public attitudes to ONS and official statistics. Questions were based on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Model Questionnaire on trust in official statistics, allowing comparisons with similar surveys in other countries.

## Awareness

- Public awareness of ONS is high (71%). However, it still lags behind awareness of other British institutions, and is lower compared with public awareness in Australia, Sweden and Denmark of their countries' national statistical institutes.
- A quarter (24%) of the British public has used statistics produced by ONS.

## Trust

- Trust in ONS as an institution is high – 88% of those who expressed an opinion either trusted it a great deal or tended to trust it. This was higher than for all the other institutions asked about and similar to the level of trust expressed in Australia in relation to their statistical institute (though slightly lower than trust in Denmark in Statistics Denmark).
- However, a high proportion (23%) said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS. This was higher among those who said they had not heard of ONS.
- When those who said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS are included in the base, 68% of the British public as a whole said they trusted ONS a great deal or tended to trust it
- Trust in the statistics produced by ONS was slightly lower than trust in ONS as an institution – 81% of those who expressed an opinion, compared with 88% for ONS as an institution. Overall levels of trust in ONS statistics were broadly in line with international comparator figures.

## General attitudes to official statistics

- Most people (73% of those who expressed a view) agree that official figures are generally accurate.
- However, the British public does not appear to have much confidence in how they are used by the government or newspapers – only 28% agreed 'the government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies' and only 19% agreed that 'newspapers present official figures honestly'.
- While people are sceptical about government use of official figures, most people (66% of those who expressed an opinion) think ONS figures themselves are free of political interference.
- Most people (71%) would prefer official statistics to be made equally available to everyone, including the public, at the same time, rather than sticking with the current rules whereby Government ministers have early sight of them pre-release.

## Attitudes to specific statistical series

- Perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics in fact vary quite widely depending on the specific statistical series in question – while 85% of those who expressed an opinion agreed that the census accurately reflects changes in the UK, just 63% said the same of crime statistics.

- Similarly, some statistics are more likely to be seen as subject to political interference than others – just 39% agreed crime figures were free of such interference, compared with 72% for the census.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report presents findings on public attitudes to official statistics in the UK, based on results from the 2014 *British Social Attitudes* survey (*BSA*), conducted by NatCen Social Research<sup>1</sup> (NatCen). It explores levels of awareness, use of, and trust in official statistics in Britain. It also explores changes in attitudes to official statistics over time, and compares the views of the general public in Britain with the public in other countries and with regular users of official statistics in the UK.

The research was commissioned by the UK Statistics Authority,<sup>2</sup> an independent body at arm's length from government. Its executive office, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), is the UK's National Statistical Institute and largest producer of official statistics. The Authority also has an independent regulatory function, which ensures that statistics are produced and disseminated in the public interest and acts as a watchdog against misuse of statistics.

The Statistics Authority previously commissioned NatCen to conduct a survey of public confidence in official statistics in 2009<sup>3</sup>. The 2009 questions were asked as part of NatCen's Omnibus survey. Earlier surveys of public confidence in official statistics were conducted in 2004, 2005 and 2007, as part of the ONS Omnibus survey. Since the 2009 survey, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) has developed, cognitively tested and published a new Model Questionnaire for measuring trust in official statistics<sup>4</sup>. This was developed through harmonisation of existing national surveys on public trust in statistics, including the questionnaire previously used in the UK. This OECD Model Questionnaire formed the basis for the questions relating to statistics asked on *BSA* 2014 and has the advantage of allowing comparison with relevant data collected for other countries using similar methods. More details of the questions included can be found in Appendix C.

In addition to this research project, which focused on public attitudes to statistics, an additional survey was conducted in 2014 by the UK Statistics Authority with 'regular users' of official statistics. These regular users of official statistics were asked the same questions as those asked in the 2014 *BSA* survey. This separate survey was completed online, with the survey being hosted on the Royal Statistical Society's (RSS) StatsUserNet website<sup>5</sup>. Key findings from this separate survey are included at the end of this report and in Appendix D, enabling comparisons of the views of the public as a whole with those of regular users of official statistics.

## 1.2 Report structure

The remainder of this chapter includes a brief explanation of the methods used to collect the data included in this report and some of the associated limitations, particularly in relation to comparisons over time and with other countries.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/strengthening-user-engagement--final-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/std/Stat%20newsletter%20final%20for%20the%20web.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/StatsUserNet/Home/>

The main substantive discussion is included in Chapters 2 to 7 and covers:

- Awareness of ONS, the UK Statistics Authority and participation in and use of official statistics
- Trust in ONS and in official statistics
- General attitudes to official statistics, including perceptions of their accuracy, their use by government and the media, whether or not they are seen as free from political interference, and views about their release
- Attitudes to specific statistical series, including the Census, Consumer Price Index, employment and unemployment statistics, Gross Domestic Product and crime statistics
- Variations in attitudes to official statistics by gender, age, education and socio-economic class, and
- Comparisons between the views of the general public and the views of regular users of statistics.

International comparisons and analysis of any changes in attitudes over time are included wherever possible (subject to the limitations discussed below).

## 1.3 Methods and limitations

### 1.3.1 *British Social Attitudes* (BSA) public attitudes to statistics module

As described above, a module of questions on public attitudes to official statistics was asked on the *British Social Attitudes* survey (BSA) in 2014. While most of the survey was based on the OECD Model questionnaire, a small number of questions that were not in the OECD Model questionnaire were also included. NatGen also worked with the UK Statistics Authority to ensure that the OECD model questions worked in the UK context.

BSA is run annually and allows clients to buy their own questionnaire space. The survey is designed to yield a representative sample of adults aged 18 or over in England, Wales and Scotland, using a sampling frame drawn from the Postcode Address File (PAF). The module of questions on public confidence in official statistics was asked of a random two-thirds of the sample (1,907 respondents). Interviews are conducted using Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI).

Fieldwork took place between 1 August 2014 and 3 October 2014. A total of 1907 interviews were undertaken with adults aged 18 or older. The response rate was between 46.8% and 47.3%.

More information on the survey methodology and response rate can be found in Appendix B.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

### 1.3.2 Terminology and focus

In the UK, while ONS is the largest producer of official statistics, official statistics are also produced by a range of other public bodies, including components of the

devolved administrations and UK government departments. This cross-government network of producers of official statistics is known as the Government Statistical Service. Many other countries have a more centralised statistical system, where all official statistics are produced by the National Statistical Institute. So as to be comparable between countries, the questionnaire used for this survey focused on the National Statistical Institute, ONS.

### 1.3.3 Change over time

Where possible, this report compares findings from *BSA* 2014 with findings from the previous British public trust in statistics surveys, particularly the most recent survey carried out 2009. However, the introduction of the OECD Model Questionnaire for the 2014 survey means that question wording and answer categories are often different from those used in previous surveys, and findings are not always straightforwardly comparable.

### 1.3.4 International comparisons

The focus of international comparisons in this report is on Australia (2010),<sup>6</sup> Denmark (2012) and Sweden (2014), as these are the only countries for which nationally representative surveys of the general population are available. However it is important to note methodological differences between the surveys – in particular relating to data collection methods and the independence of the organisation collecting the data.

- *BSA* was carried out face-to-face and by NatCen Social Research, which is wholly independent of ONS and the UK Statistics Authority.
- In Denmark, the survey was completed using a mixture of telephone (two thirds of the sample) and online (one third). The survey was carried out by Denmark's official statistical agency, Statistics Denmark, which may have biased results towards more positive answers.
- The Swedish and Australian surveys were both carried out by independent companies by telephone. The response rate to the Australian survey was low, at 26%, and the Australian Statistics Bureau advise readers to interpret the results with caution.

There are also some differences in the exact wording used, reflecting adjustments for language and particular national contexts.

It is not possible to quantify what difference these variations in methodology make to the findings, but it is important to be aware of them when interpreting cross-national comparisons. It is also important to note that the authors did not have access to the raw data for Australia, Denmark and Sweden – the figures cited in this report are taken from reports made available to the authors by the UK Statistics Authority. Further details of the methods used in the international comparator surveys are included in Appendix E.

### 1.3.5 Data reporting conventions

The following conventions have been used in data tables:

- \* to indicate percentage of less than 0.5

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<sup>6</sup> Report available at [http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/0/553dde916ab833e9ca2577b50072bf2f/\\$FILE/Trust%20in%20ABS%20and%20ABS%20Statistics.pdf](http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/0/553dde916ab833e9ca2577b50072bf2f/$FILE/Trust%20in%20ABS%20and%20ABS%20Statistics.pdf)

- 0 to indicate a percentage of 0
- figure not shown because the unweighted sample size is too small.

Percentages equal to or greater than 0.5 have been rounded up (e.g. 0.5% = one per cent; 36.5% = 37%) unless otherwise stated.

The effect of rounding, means that percentages will not always add up to 100%.

The bases shown in the tables (the number of respondents who answered the question) are printed in small italics. The weighted percentages and the unweighted bases are shown for all tables.

## 2 Awareness of ONS and use of official statistics

### Key points

- Public awareness of ONS is high (71%). However, it still lags behind awareness of other British institutions, and is lower compared with public awareness in Australia, Sweden and Denmark of their countries' national statistical institutes.
- Only a minority of people in Britain (14%) say they know ONS 'well'. In addition to the quarter (27%) who have not heard of it at all, a quarter say they have only heard the name (24%).
- Awareness of the UK Statistics Authority is much lower than awareness of ONS – 58% said they had not heard of the UK Statistics Authority prior to taking part in the survey.
- 64% of people recall taking part in an ONS study, with the Census by far the most commonly mentioned (62% of all respondents).
- A quarter (24%) of the British public have used statistics produced by ONS.

### 2.1 Awareness of ONS

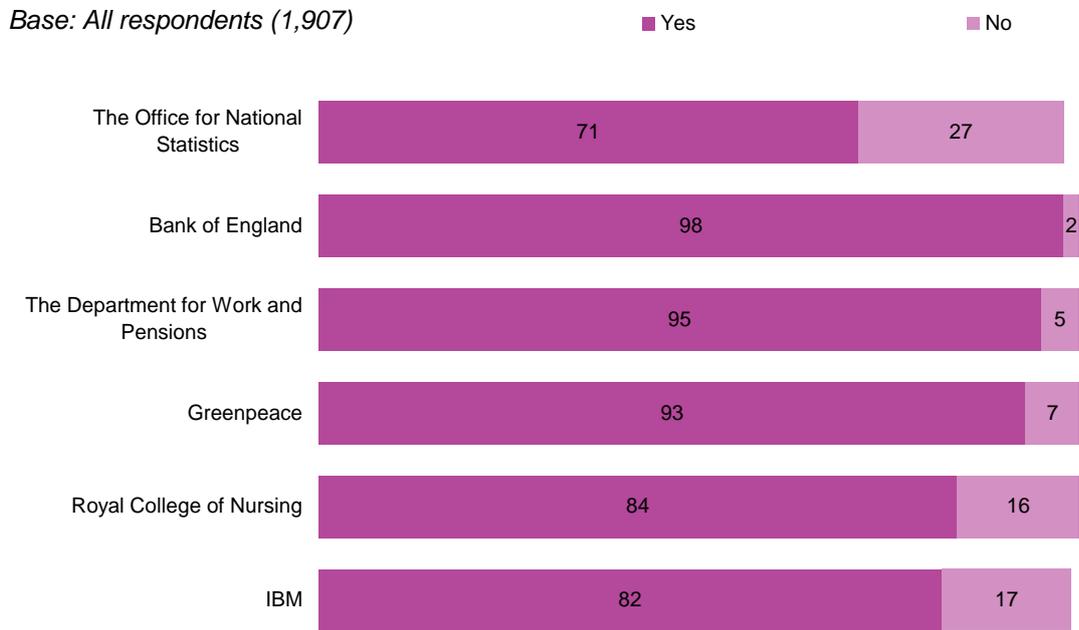
As described in the Introduction, the ONS is the largest producer of official statistics in the UK. In order to benchmark levels of awareness of ONS, respondents were asked whether they had heard of a range of organisations, including ONS, either on radio, TV, in newspapers or somewhere else.

As Figure 2.1 shows, levels of awareness of ONS are quite high – 71% of the British public have heard of it. However, awareness of ONS was lower than for all the comparator organisations we asked about (see Figure 2.1). For example, apart from ONS, the organisation with the lowest level of public awareness was IBM<sup>7</sup>, which 82% of the public had heard of.

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<sup>7</sup> IBM stands for the International Business Machines Corporation and is an American multinational technology and consulting corporation.

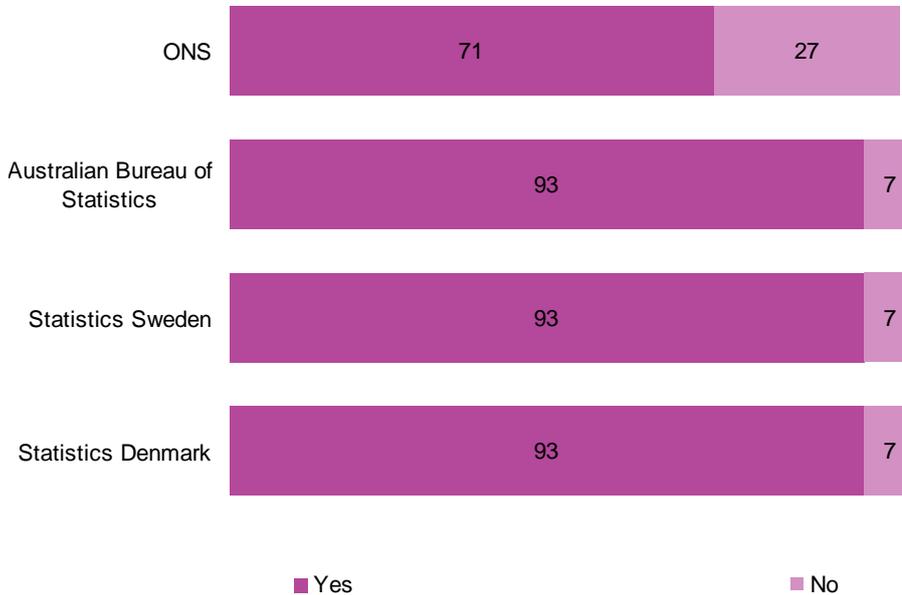
**Figure 2.1** Ever heard of organisation on radio, TV, newspapers, or somewhere else?



Note – where figures do not sum to 100%, this is because a small proportion of respondents said they did not know whether or not they had heard of the relevant organisation.

As Figure 2.2 illustrates, the British public appears to have a lower level of awareness of ONS than the Australian, Danish and Swedish populations have of their National Statistical Institutes. Around 9 in 10 people in each of these countries claimed to have heard of the equivalent statistical organisation.

Figure 2.2 Ever heard of organisation? (International comparison)



### 2.1.1 Depth of awareness of ONS

Having looked at the broad level of awareness of ONS amongst the population, we can also look more closely at the depth of awareness reported. As shown in Table 2.1, only 14% of people in Britain (20% of those who have heard of ONS at all) reported knowing the ONS ‘well’. A further 32% say they know it ‘somewhat’, while a quarter have only heard the name.

Base: All respondents	% (all respondents)	% (excluding those who had not heard of ONS)
Heard of it and knew it well	14	20
Heard of it and knew it somewhat	32	45
Heard of it and only heard the name	24	34
Heard of it and not sure to what extent knew it	1	1
Not heard of it	27	-
Don't know if heard of it	1	-
Base	1907	1379

As with the overall level of awareness of ONS, the depth of familiarity people report appears lower in Britain compared with Denmark and Sweden (although comparisons

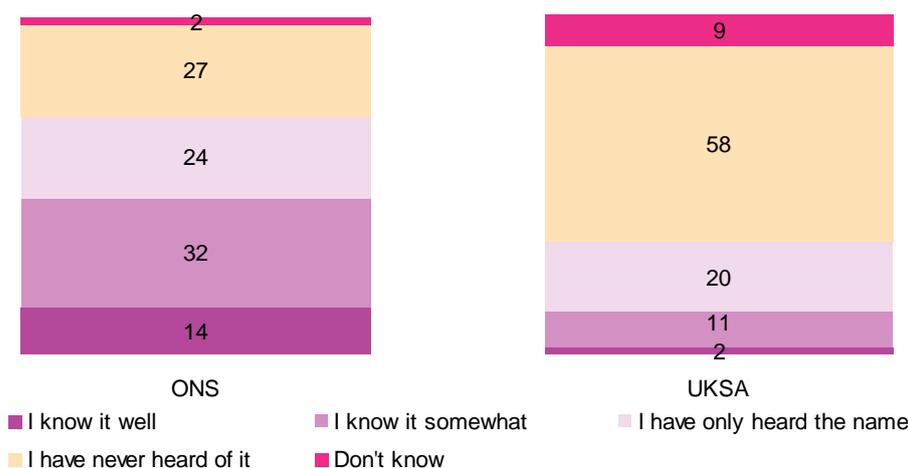
with Sweden are complicated by differences in precise question wording)<sup>8</sup>. Thirty-three per cent in Denmark reported knowing their statistical institute ‘well’, while 35% in Sweden reported knowing ‘pretty much’ or ‘very much’ about Statistics Sweden. In Australia, the depth of awareness of the Australian Bureau of Statistics was more comparable – although more people had heard of it overall, only 15% of those who had heard of ABS rated themselves as ‘very knowledgeable’ about it.

## 2.2 Awareness of the UK Statistics Authority

As Figure 2.3 shows, the British public has far lower levels of awareness of The Statistics Authority than of ONS. As reported above, 14% of people said they knew ONS well, while 32% said they knew it ‘somewhat’. In comparison, just 2% knew the UK Statistics Authority well and a further 11% ‘somewhat’. Almost 6 in 10 (58%) said they had never heard of the UK Statistics Authority, compared with 27% for ONS.

Figure 2.3 To what extent knew ONS/UK Statistics Authority before this survey?

Base: All respondents (1,907)



## 2.3 Participation in and use of official statistics

As well as asking them whether they had heard of ONS itself, *BSA 2014* measured awareness of ONS’s surveys and products by asking respondents whether they had taken part in any of the surveys run by ONS or in the Census and whether they had used any of the statistical outputs ONS produces.<sup>9</sup>

A majority (64%) of people recalled participating in any of the surveys run by ONS or in the Census. Unsurprisingly, there was a big difference in the proportion of people who recalled taking part in the Census (62%) and those who recalled taking part in

<sup>8</sup> For example, in Sweden respondents were asked to choose how well they know Statistics Sweden on a 5 point scale, from ‘very much’ to ‘not at all’.

<sup>9</sup> Comparable questions on participation in surveys and use of statistics are not included in the reports for Australia, Sweden and Denmark.

any ONS survey based on a sample of the population (from 1% for the Labour Force Survey to 4% for the International Passenger survey – Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Participation in ONS surveys (including the Census)				
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	Yes	No	Don't Know	<i>Bases</i>
Census	62	38	*	1907
International Passenger Survey	4	96	*	1907
Labour Force Survey	1	99	*	1907
Other ONS survey	2	98	*	1907

Twenty four per cent of the British public have used or referred to statistics produced by ONS for some purpose, such as study, work or personal interest. Four per cent say they use these statistics frequently, 14% use them occasionally and 6% used them 5 years ago or more (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Have you ever used or referred to statistics produced by ONS for any purpose, such as study, work or personal interest?	
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	%
Yes, frequently	4
Yes, occasionally	14
Yes, at least 5 years ago	6
No	76
Don't know	*
<i>Base</i>	1907

## 3 Trust in ONS and official statistics

### Key points

- Trust in ONS as an institution is high – 88% of those who expressed an opinion either trusted it a great deal or tended to trust it. This was higher than for all the other institutions asked about and similar to the level of trust expressed in Australia in relation to their statistical institute (though slightly lower than trust in Denmark in Statistics Denmark).
- However, a high proportion (23%) said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS. This was higher among those who said they had not heard of ONS.
- Trust in the statistics produced by ONS was slightly lower than trust in ONS as an institution – 81% of those who expressed an opinion, compared with 88% for ONS as an institution. Overall levels of trust in ONS statistics were broadly in line with international comparator figures.
- The most common reason for trusting ONS statistics was that ONS does not have a vested interest in the results (32% of those who trust ONS statistics).
- The most common reason for distrusting ONS statistics were that the figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media (29%).

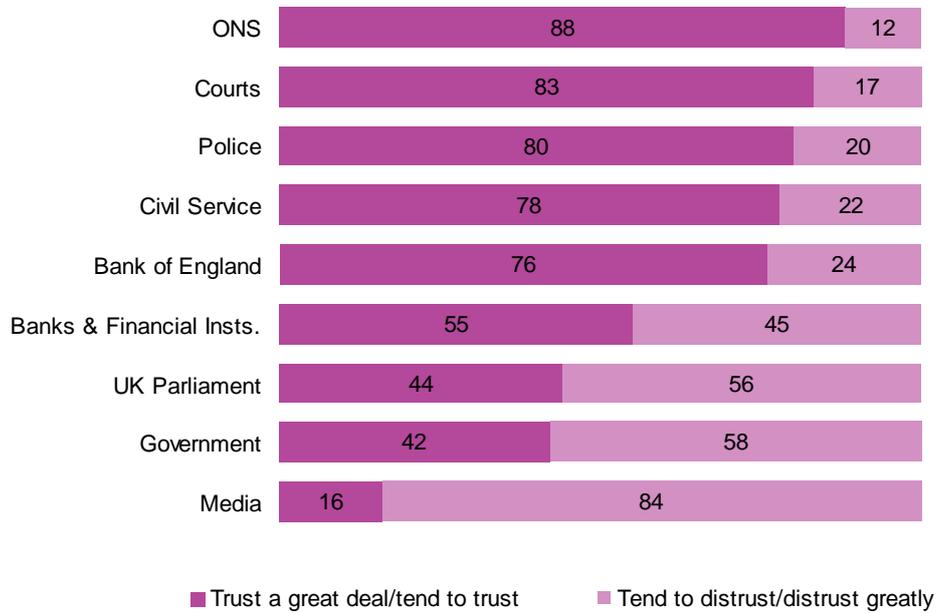
### 3.1 Trust in the ONS

In addition to comparing *awareness* of ONS with awareness of other institutions, the 2014 *BSA* also compared *trust* in ONS with trust in other British institutions. Respondents were asked to say, for each institution, whether they tend to trust or tend to distrust it.

Two key findings are apparent from Figures 3.1 and 3.2. First, trust in ONS as a institution is high – excluding those who said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS, 88% of the British public said they either trusted ONS a great deal or tended to trust it (Figure 3.1). This level of trust was higher than that expressed in any of the other organisations asked about. Second, however, the proportion of people who said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS was in fact higher compared with the other organisations asked about (23%, compared with 3%-7% for other organisations – Figure 3.2). When those who said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS are included in the base, 68% of the British public as a whole said they trusted ONS a great deal or tended to trust it.

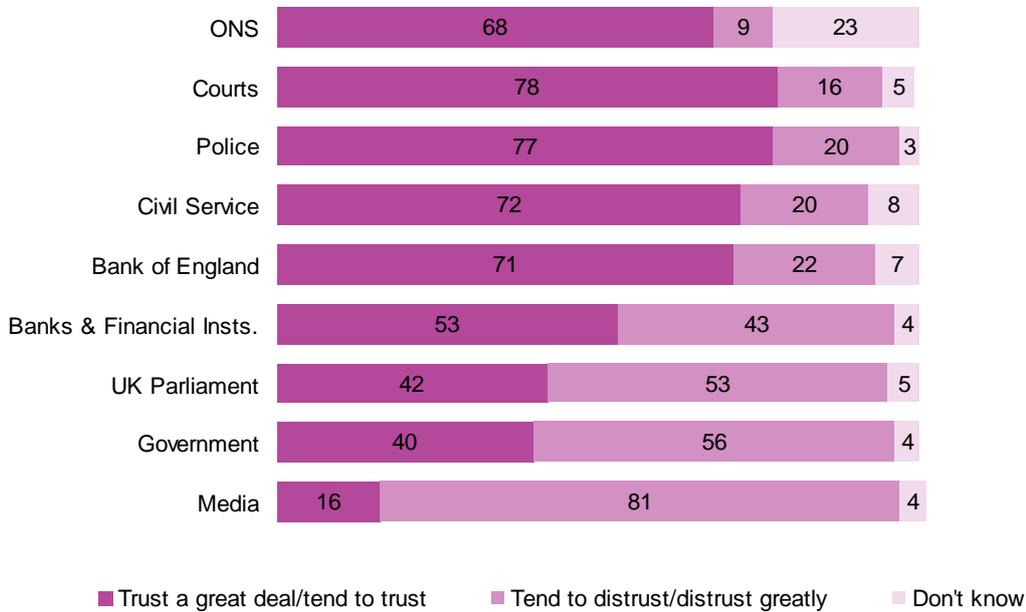
**Figure 3.1** Trust in the ONS and other organisations excluding 'don't know' responses

*Base: All respondents excluding those who answered 'don't know'*



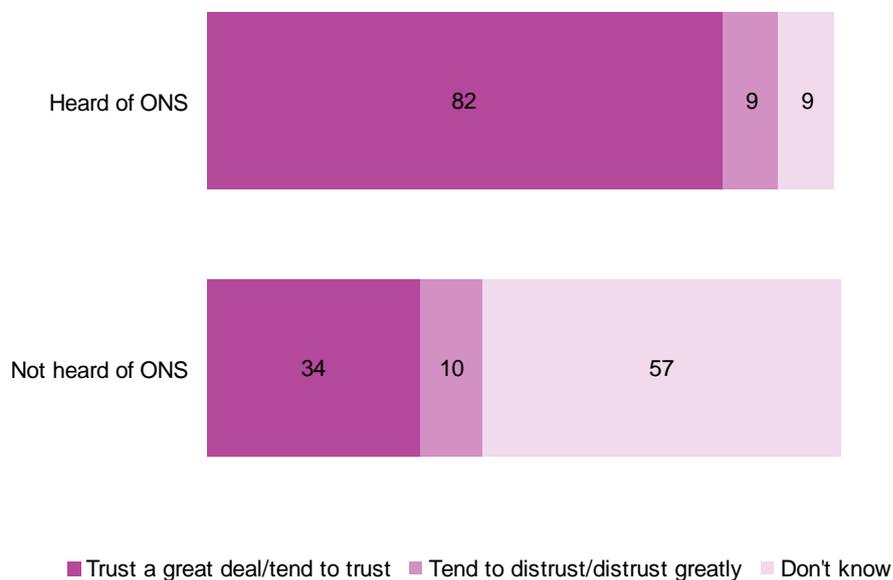
**Figure 3.2 Trust in the ONS and other organisations (including ‘don’t knows’)**

Base: All respondents (1,907)



Trust and awareness of ONS were in fact strongly correlated (Figure 3.3). Among those who had heard of ONS, 82% said they trusted it and only 9% distrusted it (9% were unsure). Among those who had not heard of ONS, unsurprisingly most (57%) said they did not know whether or not they trusted it (Figure 3.3). However, it is perhaps surprising that even among those who claimed never to have heard of ONS prior to the survey, 34% nonetheless said they trusted it – perhaps indicating a general propensity to trust official statistics.

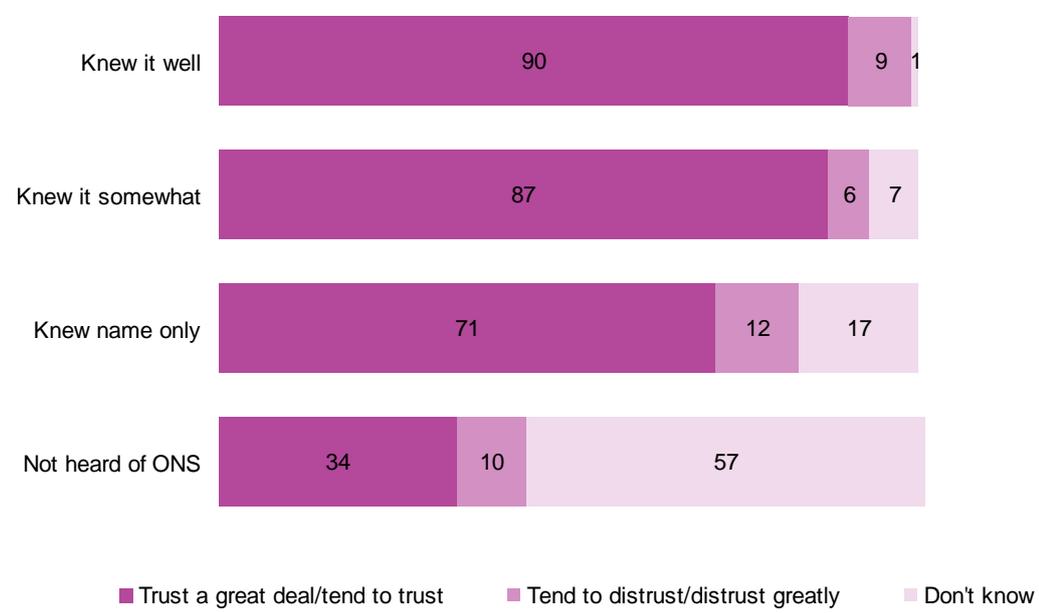
Figure 3.3 Trust in the ONS by awareness of ONS



Bases: Heard of ONS = 1,379; Not heard of ONS = 502

Trust was also higher among those who said they knew ONS 'well' prior to taking part in the survey (90%) compared with those who knew it 'by name only' (71%). Most of those who said they knew it by name only did nonetheless express a view as to whether or not they trusted ONS as an institution (Figure 3.4).

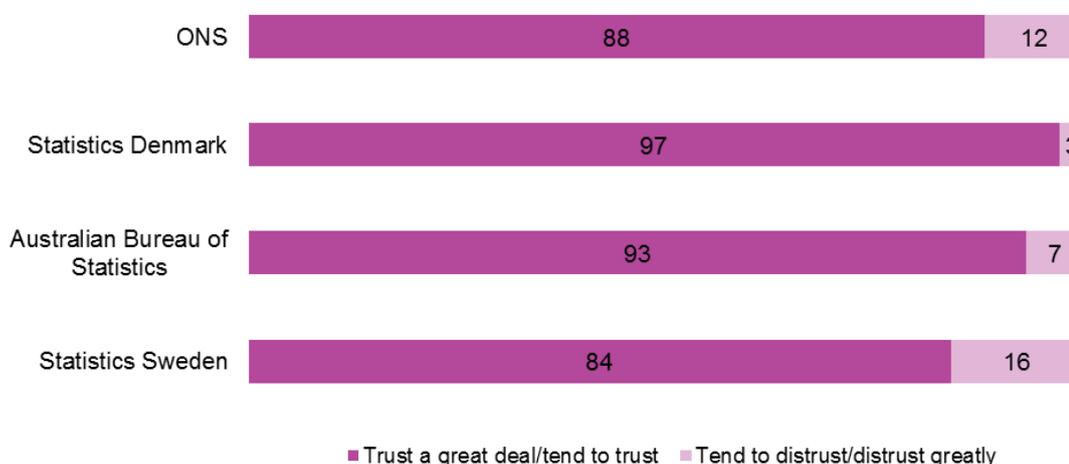
**Figure 3.4 Trust in the ONS by extent to which heard of ONS before survey**



Bases: Knew it well = 284; Knew it somewhat = 620; Knew name only = 455; Not heard of ONS = 502.

The levels of trust expressed by the British public in ONS (88% excluding ‘don’t knows’) were similar to that recorded in Australia for the Australian Statistics Bureau (92% of those who expressed a view), but slightly lower than those recorded for Statistics Denmark (97% of those who expressed a view – Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Trust in ONS compared with trust in Statistics Denmark and the Australian Statistics Bureau (excluding Don't knows)



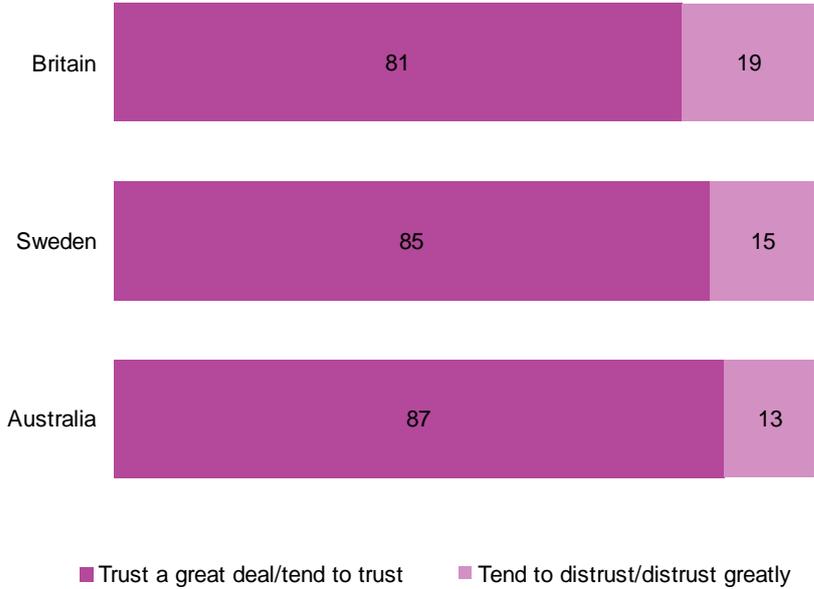
## 3.2 Trust in statistics produced by ONS

In addition to exploring trust in the institution of the ONS, *BSA 2015* also asked whether people trusted in statistics produced by the ONS, giving the examples of statistics on unemployment, inflation, economic growth or life expectancy. Excluding those who did not know whether or not they trusted ONS statistics, 81% said they trusted them 'greatly' or tended to trust them (Table 3.1). However, the proportion who said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS statistics was again quite high (17%). That said, more people felt able to say whether or not they trusted ONS statistics than whether they trusted ONS itself – 17% said they did not know whether or not they trusted ONS statistics, compared with 23% who did not know if they trusted ONS. Although the survey did not ask about awareness of specific examples of ONS statistics, this finding suggests that perhaps people are more aware of ONS's statistical outputs than of ONS as an institution.

	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Trust them greatly	10	13
Tend to trust them	56	68
Tend not to trust them	13	16
Distrust them greatly	2	3
Not sure or don't know	17	-
<b>Trust</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Distrust</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1580</i>

Overall, levels of trust in Britain in ONS statistics were broadly in line with those expressed in Australia (87%) and Sweden (80%) in the statistics produced by their national statistical institutes (Figure 3.6).<sup>10</sup>

Figure 3.6 Trust in statistics produced by ONS, Statistics Sweden and Australian Bureau of Statistics (excluding 'don't knows')



Directly comparable time series data is not available from the 2009 survey for this question, since that survey did not ask a general question about trust in the statistics

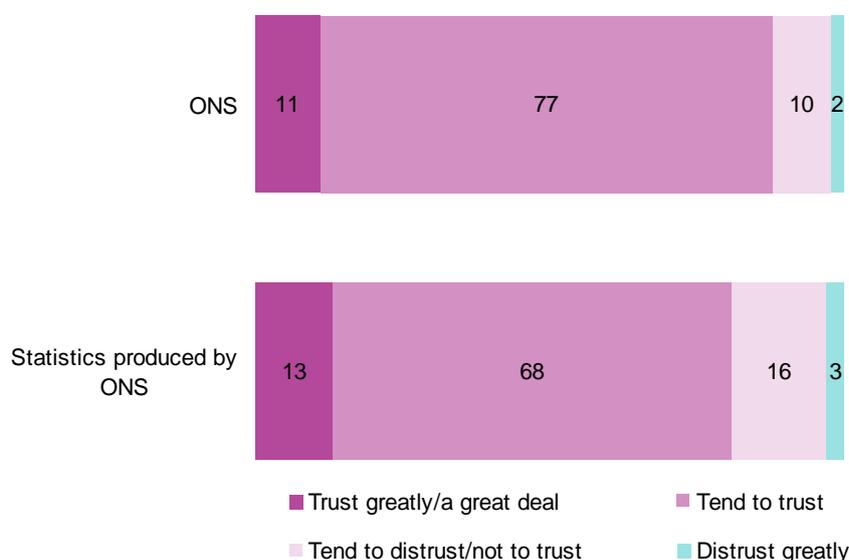
<sup>10</sup> An equivalent question was not asked in Denmark.

produced by ONS. However, in 2007, the Eurobarometer survey asked people in a number of European countries, including the UK, a similar question, worded as follows – ‘Personally, how much trust do you have in official statistics in the UK, for example the statistics on unemployment, inflation or economic growth? Would you say you tend to trust these official statistics or tend not to trust them?’ This recorded a much lower level of trust in official statistics (33%). However, differences in the question wording (for example, the fact that it did not mention ONS, which perhaps attracts higher trust than asking about ‘official statistics’ in general) and in the answer scales mean we cannot confidently conclude that the differences reflect a genuine increase in trust in official statistics over time, rather than simply differences in wording.

### 3.2.1 Trust in ONS statistics and trust in ONS as an institution

Figure 3.7 shows that, among those who expressed a view, trust in the figures produced by ONS was actually a little lower than trust in ONS as an institution – 81% said they either ‘greatly’ trusted ONS statistics or tended to trust them, compared with 88% of those who expressed an opinion who said the same of ONS itself. Levels of distrust were also higher in relation to ONS statistics than in ONS as an institution – 19% compared with 12% (among those who expressed a view).

**Figure 3.7 Trust in ONS and trust in statistics produced by ONS (excluding ‘Don’t knows’)**



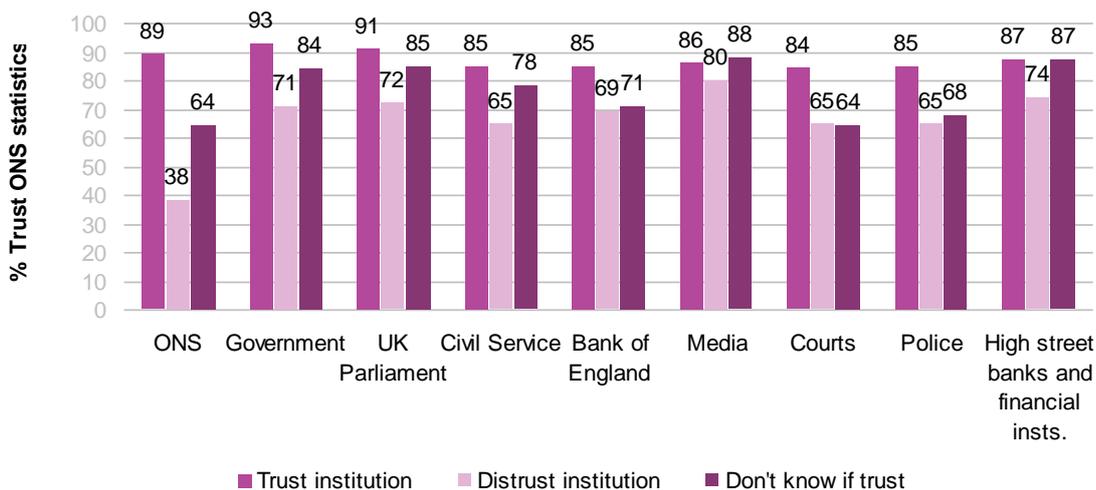
A similar gap in trust was reported in Australia, between the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the statistics produced by ABS (92% trust ABS vs. 87% trust in ABS statistics).

### 3.2.2 Trust in ONS statistics by trust in other institutions

Figure 3.8 shows in more detail the relationship between trusting statistics produced by ONS and trust in various institutions, including ONS. Unsurprisingly, there is a strong (though not perfect) relationship between trusting ONS as an institution and trusting ONS statistics – 89% of those who trust ONS also trust ONS statistics. However, even among those who distrust ONS as an institution, 38% say they trust the statistics they produce.

The relationship between trust or distrust in other institutions and trusting ONS statistics was far weaker – although in general those who trusted each institution were more likely than those who distrusted it to say they trusted ONS statistics, well over half of those who distrusted each institution nonetheless trusted ONS figures. So while some people appear to have a higher propensity to trust in general, it is still the case that ONS figures attract high levels of trust, even from those who are otherwise not particularly trusting of government or other British institutions.

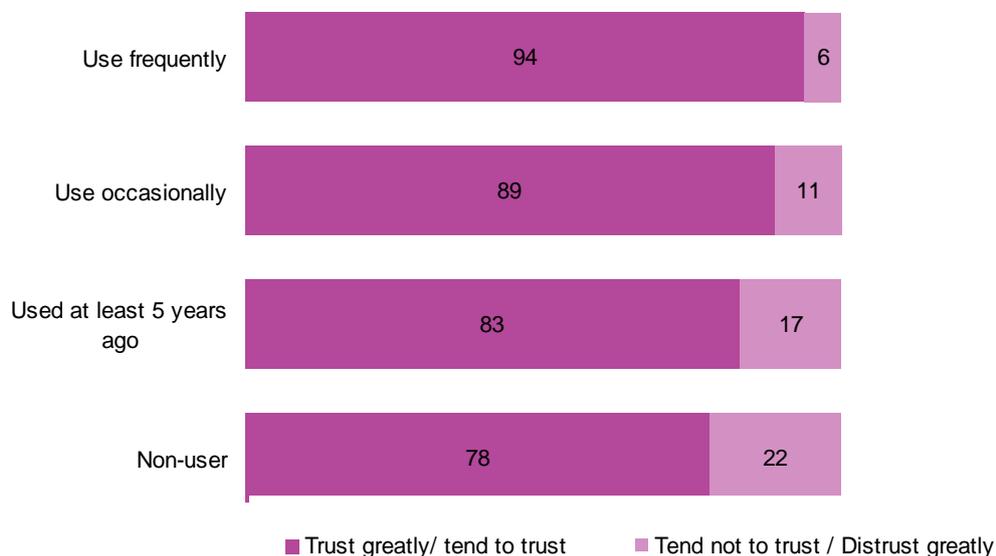
Figure 3.8 % Trust ONS statistics (excluding ‘Don’t knows’), by whether trust/distrust/don’t know if trust various institutions



### 3.2.3 Trust in ONS statistics by use

Those who have used official statistics are more likely to trust them than those who have not used them, though trust is high even among non-users. As Figure 3.9 shows, trust increases from 78% among non-users, to 94% among frequent users of ONS figures.

**Figure 3.9** Trust in statistics produced by ONS (excluding ‘don’t knows’), by use of ONS statistics for any purpose



Bases: Use frequently = 67, Use occasionally = 244, Used at least 5 years ago = 99, Non-user = 1167.

### 3.2.4 Reasons for trusting ONS statistics

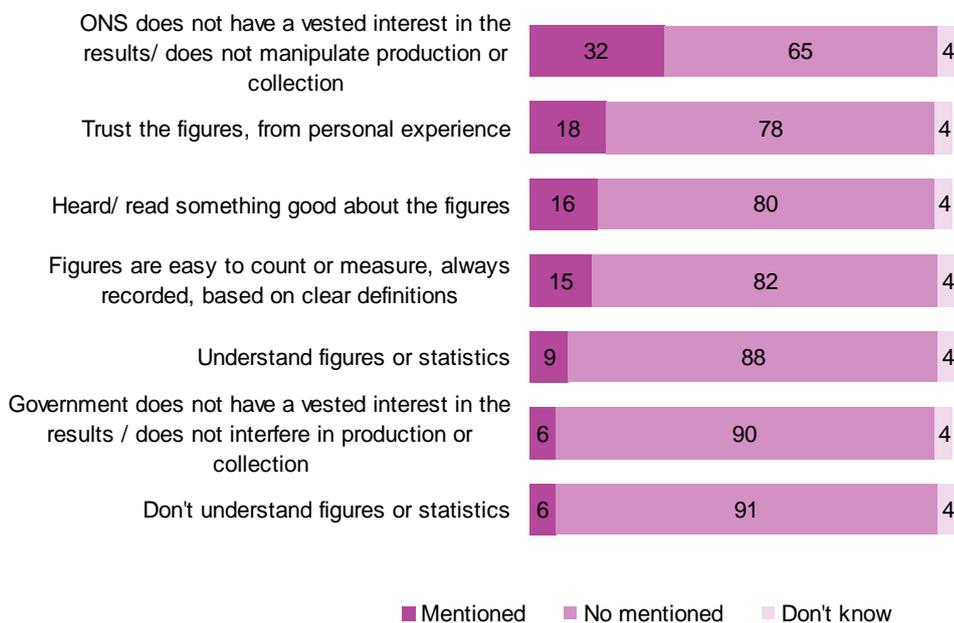
Respondents who said that they trusted statistics produced by the ONS were asked why they said that. They were not prompted but interviewers coded their answers using a pre-determined code-frame, with an option for recording ‘other’ responses that did not fit any of these codes.

The most popular reason respondents gave for having trust in official statistics was that ONS does not have a vested interest in the results (mentioned by 32% of those who said they trusted official statistics – Figure 3.10). The next two most common reasons for trusting official statistics were trusting in the figures due to personal experience (18%), and from having heard or read something good about the figures (16%).

Fourteen per cent of respondents provided reasons for trusting statistics produced by the ONS that fell outside the pre-determined code frame provided to interviewers. These other reasons related to: ONS as an organisation (e.g. it is independent, professional, national and regulated institution); methodology of data collection (e.g. randomly select respondents, representative sample size, confidential, evidence-based findings, transparent processes); and respondents ‘gut feelings’ (e.g. no reason not to trust ONS, intuition).

**Figure 3.10 Reasons for trusting statistics produced by ONS**

Base: All respondents who trust ONS statistics (1,263)



In 2009, respondents were asked about their level of trust in specific official data series (the rate of inflation, hospital waiting list figures, domestic burglary figures, the size of the population, and the unemployment rate) and the reasons why they did or did not trust each of these. At that point, relatively few people mentioned ONS not having a vested interest as a reason for trusting specific statistics – the highest was 13% in relation to population estimates. The most popular answers given for respondents having trust in each of the statistical series asked about were either from personal experience or because the figures were easy to count or measure.

Comparisons between the 2009 and 2014 figures are clearly complicated by the fact that the former asked about specific statistical series, rather than ONS figures in general. However, it is possible that the increase in the proportion of people citing ONS not having a vested interest in the results as a reason for trusting their outputs may, in part, be caused by the establishment of independence for ONS and the creation of the independent UK Statistics Authority in April 2008. Prior to these changes, ONS reported directly to Government Ministers.

### 3.2.5 Reasons for distrusting ONS statistics

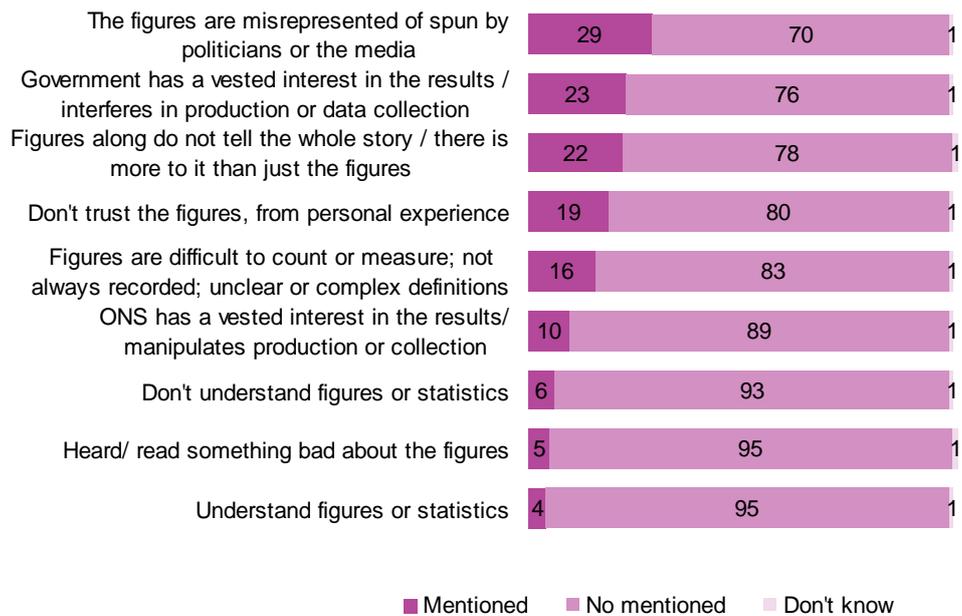
Those participants who said that they did not trust statistics produced by the ONS were asked to give the reasons for this. The most commonly reported answer was that the figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media (29% - Figure 3.11). The next most popular reasons for distrusting official statistics were the belief that Government has a vested interest in the results (23%) and that figures alone do not tell the whole story (22%).

Again, comparisons with the 2009 survey are not straightforward given the difference in focus (specific statistical series, rather than ONS statistics in general). However, in that survey, the most popular reason given for not trusting specific sets of statistics

tended to be that people did not trust them from personal experience (e.g. 36% said this about cost of living figures while 40% said it about hospital waiting figures). In 2014, only 19% respondents mentioned personal experience as a reason for not trusting ONS figures in general.

### Figure 3.11 Reasons for distrusting statistics produced by ONS

Base: All respondents who distrust ONS statistics (317)



## 4 General attitudes to official statistics

This chapter moves on from discussing levels of trust in official statistics to general attitudes relating to their accuracy; use by government, media and others; release; and importance.

### Key points

- Most people (73% of those who expressed a view) agree that official figures are generally accurate.
- However, the British public does not appear to have much confidence in how they are used by the government or newspapers – only 28% agreed ‘the government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies’ and only 19% agreed that ‘newspapers present official figures honestly’.
- While people are sceptical about government use of official figures, most people (66% of those who expressed an opinion) think ONS figures themselves are free of political interference.
- Most people (71%) would prefer official statistics to be made equally available to everyone, including the public, at the same time, rather than sticking with the current rules whereby Government ministers have early sight of them pre-release.
- Most people in Britain (75% of all respondents) agreed that ONS statistics are important to understanding our country.
- There was almost universal agreement that it is important for an independent body, like the UK Statistics Authority, to ensure official statistics are free of political interference and to speak out publically against misuse of official statistics.

### 4.1 Accuracy, use and handling of official statistics

#### 4.1.1 Perceived accuracy of official statistics

Respondents to *BSA 2014* were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that official figures are generally accurate. Excluding those who were unsure how to answer, 73% agreed that official figures were generally accurate and just 27% disagreed (Table 4.1). However, it is also important to note almost 1 in 5 (19%) were not sure how to answer this question, again highlighting a lack of knowledge or awareness of official figures among a significant minority of the public.

Table 4.1 'Official figures are generally accurate'		
	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Strongly agree	7	8
Tend to agree	52	64
Tend to disagree	17	21
Strongly disagree	5	6
Not sure or don't know	19	-
<b>Agree</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1535</i>

In previous years, a similar question was included, but with a middle-option of 'neither agree nor disagree'. This found lower levels of agreement that official figures are generally accurate. Excluding those who said they did not know or neither agreed nor disagreed, the proportion that agreed official figures were generally accurate was 43% in 2009, compared with 73% in 2014. However, some caution is required in comparing these two figures given the differences in wording - it is difficult to say what effect the inclusion of a 'neither agree nor disagree' category had on the way people responded to this question. It is likely that the inclusion of a middle option prompts some people who are not completely sure whether they agree or disagree to 'sit on the fence' and choose this option.

### 4.1.2 Use of official statistics by the Government and media

The British public do not appear to have much confidence in the honesty with which official statistics are presented by the Government or by newspapers. Excluding those who could not give an opinion, only 28% agreed that 'The Government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies', while only 19% agreed that 'Newspapers present official figures honestly'.

**Table 4.2** How strongly agree or disagree that government/newspapers present official figures honestly

	Government		Newspapers	
	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Strongly agree	2	2	1	1
Tend to agree	23	26	16	18
Tend to disagree	39	45	43	48
Strongly disagree	23	27	30	33
Not sure or don't know	13	-	9	-
<b>Agree</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>81</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1659</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1732</i>

Again, comparisons with earlier surveys are complicated by changes in the answer categories used. However, excluding those who, in 2009, either said 'don't know' or chose 'neither agree nor disagree', figures were fairly similar to those recorded in 2014, with 19% in 2009 agreeing that governments present official figures honestly and the same proportion saying this of newspapers.

### 4.1.3 Whether ONS statistics are free from political interference

Although the findings above suggest that people are sceptical about how official figures are used by government, this does not appear to translate into scepticism about political interference in the figures themselves. Two-thirds (66%) of those who expressed an opinion agreed that 'Statistics produced by ONS are free from political interference'. However, again, around a quarter (23%) were unsure how to answer this question (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3** 'Statistics produced by ONS are free from political interference'

	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Strongly agree	8	10
Tend to agree	43	56
Tend to disagree	21	28
Strongly disagree	5	7
Not sure or don't know	23	-
<b>Agree</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1464</i>

The level of agreement in 2014 that statistics produced by ONS were free of political interference was substantially higher than the 20% of people who, in 2009, agreed that official figures are free from political interference. However, again, direct comparisons between the two figures are complicated by the fact that the 2009 question referred to 'official figures' rather than 'statistics produced by ONS'<sup>11</sup> and that the 2009 question again included a 'neither agree nor disagree' response option which was not offered in 2014. But even taking into account these differences in wording, the public's perceptions of the extent to which ONS figures are free of political interference in 2014 does look significantly better compared with perceptions of official statistics in 2009.

Danes appear to be more likely to agree that statistics produced by Statistics Denmark are free from political interference – among those who expressed a view, 90% agreed.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Release of official statistics

Under current government rules, Government ministers in the UK are shown official statistics prior to their release to the public. Respondents to *BSA* 2014 were given this information, and then asked to say whether they thought the current rules were right, or whether they should be changed so that official statistics are made available to everyone at the same time.

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents said official statistics should be made equally available to everybody, including the public, at the same time. Just 25% felt that the current rules, whereby Government ministers are shown official statistics before they are released, are right.

<sup>11</sup> Precise wording was: 2009 - How strongly do you agree or disagree that official figures are produced without political interference? 2014 - How strongly do you agree or disagree that statistics produced by ONS are free from political interference?

<sup>12</sup> This question was not reported in the Australian report and the answer options included in Sweden were different.

A similar (though not identical) question asked in 2009 found a higher level of support for early access to statistics by Government ministers (38%, compared with 25% in 2014).<sup>13</sup> Although comparisons between the two questions are complicated by the change in wording, the 2014 findings indicate an increasing consensus that statistics should be released to everyone at the same time.

## 4.2 Perceived importance of official statistics

Most people in Britain agree that the statistics produced by ONS are important to understand our country – 75% of all respondents and 90% of those who expressed a view felt this (Table 4.4). While very few disagreed with the importance of ONS statistics, just under 1 in 5 (17%) were not sure whether they were important or not.

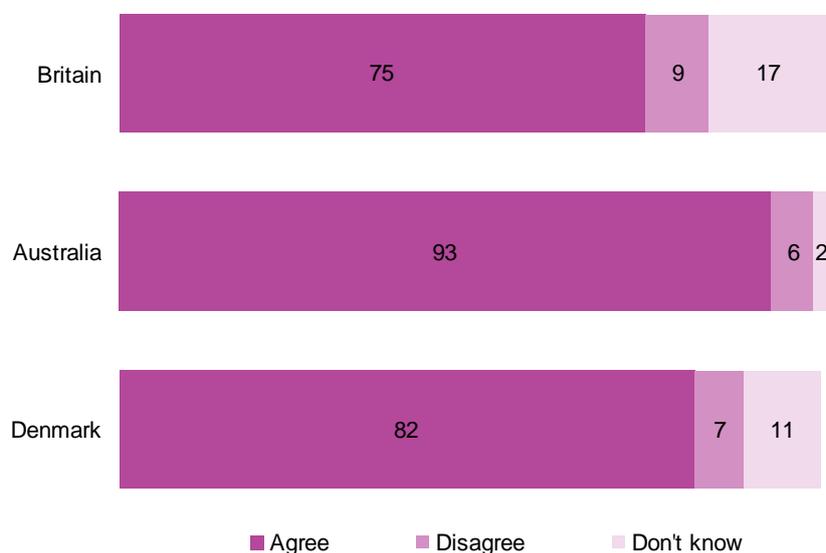
	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Strongly agree	22	26
Tend to agree	53	64
Tend to disagree	7	9
Strongly disagree	2	2
Not sure or don't know	17	-
<b>Agree</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1559</i>

The Australian public appeared to have less difficulty deciding on the importance of figures produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to understanding their country – 93% agreed, just 6% disagreed and only 2% said they did not know (compared with 17% 'don't knows' in Britain – Figure 4.1). Figures for Denmark were more similar to Britain, although the level of 'don't knows' was still slightly lower (11%).

<sup>13</sup> The 2009 question was worded as follows: And finally, Government ministers can be shown official statistics (the day before [in England]/five days before [in Scotland or Wales]) they are made public. Some say this is right because it gives ministers time to provide considered comment on the statistics when they are published, or to respond quickly to any questions. Other people disagree because they think it gives ministers a chance to influence how the statistics are presented to the public, or an unfair advantage over everyone else. Looking at this card, what do you think...

- Government ministers should be given early access to official statistics (38%), or
- Government ministers should not be given early access to official statistics (59%)?

Figure 4.1 Agree statistics produced by national agency are important to understanding the country



Note that the Swedish survey did not ask a comparable question.

The 2009 survey of public confidence in official statistics included a similar question to that reported above, but again not identical. People were asked to say how important they considered official statistics to be as a basis for decision making in society. Seventy per cent said official statistics were very or fairly important – similar to the 75% who, in 2014, agreed that ONS statistics are important for understanding our country.

### 4.3 Perceived importance of the UK Statistics Authority's role

As well as asking whether or not ONS people agree that statistics are important, *BSA* 2014 also asked people whether they agreed or disagreed that:

- 'It is important for an independent body, such as the UK Statistics Authority to ensure that official statistics are produced without political interference' and
- 'It is important for an independent body such as the UK Statistics Authority to speak out publically against the misuse of official statistics'.

Among those who expressed a view, there was almost universal agreement that the UK Statistics Authority should play each of these roles (97%/98%).

Table 4.4 How strongly agree or disagree that it is important for an independent body, such as the UK Statistics Authority, to ...

	... ensure that official statistics are produced without political interference		... speak out publically against the misuse of official statistics	
	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')	% (all)	% (excluding 'don't knows')
Strongly agree	57	66	62	70
Tend to agree	26	30	24	28
Tend to disagree	3	3	2	2
Strongly disagree	*	*	*	*
Not sure or don't know	13	-	12	-
<b>Agree</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Base</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1562</i>	<i>1907</i>	<i>1676</i>

## 5 Questions about specific sets of statistics

In addition to asking respondents about their awareness of, trust in and attitudes to ONS statistics in general, *BSA 2014* also included a number of questions about views of specific series of official statistics – the Census, the Consumer Price Index (described to respondents as ‘statistics on inflation’), employment and unemployment statistics, Gross Domestic Product or GDP, and crime statistics.

### Key points

- Perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics in fact vary quite widely depending on the specific statistical series in question – while 85% of those who expressed an opinion agreed that the census accurately reflects changes in the UK, just 63% said the same of crime statistics.
- Similarly, some statistics are more likely to be seen as subject to political interference than others – just 39% agreed crime figures were free of such interference, compared with 72% for the census.
- Nearly a quarter of people have used the census. Fewer have used GDP (14%), CPI (15%), employment statistics (16%) and crime statistics (18%). Users of employment/unemployment statistics and crime statistics were slightly less likely to feel that they gave them useful information when compared with users of the other data series mentioned.

### 5.1 Do statistical series accurately reflect what is happening in UK?

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that each of these statistical series accurately reflected what is changing in the UK. The results indicate that general perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics, discussed in section 4.1 above, mask some important differences in the ways in which the public views specific statistical series. While 73% of those who expressed an opinion agreed that ‘official figures are generally accurate’, for specific statistics the figure ranges from 63% for crime statistics to 85% for the census (Figure 5.1).

Lower levels of agreement with the accuracy of crime statistics may be related to concerns reported in the media during 2014 about the quality of police recorded crime data.<sup>1415</sup>

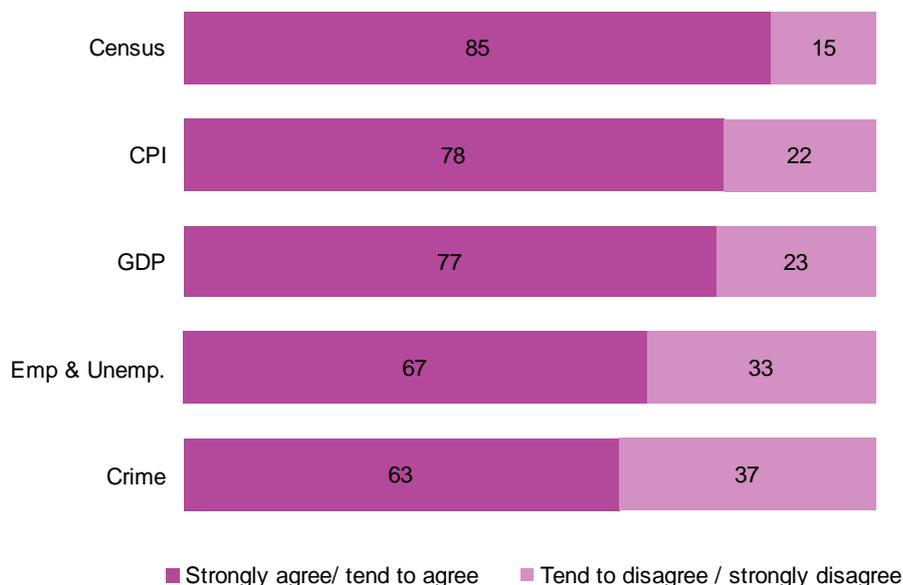
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<sup>14</sup> BBC. November 2014. Police fail to record one in five of all crimes reported to them, says report. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30081682>

<sup>15</sup> HM Inspectorate of Constabulary. November 2014. Crime- recording: making the victim count. <http://www.justiceinspectores.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/crime-recording-making-the-victim-count.pdf>

**Figure 5.1** Agree/disagree that 'changes over time in (NAME OF STATISTICAL SERIES) accurately reflect what is changing in the UK (excluding 'don't knows')

Base: All respondents (excluding 'don't knows')



The proportion of people who are able to give a response to these questions also varied, as indicated in Table 5.1 – 36% were not sure whether GDP figures accurately reflected change over time, compared with 18% who were not sure about the accuracy of the Census. Different statistical series are clearly more or less familiar to or easy to comment on for the public as a whole.

**Table 5.1** Agree/disagree that 'changes over time in (NAME OF STATISTICAL SERIES) accurately reflect what is changing in the UK

Base: All respondents	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure or don't know	Bases
Census	11	59	11	2	18	1907
Gross Domestic Product	6	44	12	3	36	1907
Consumer Price Index	5	49	13	3	30	1907
Employment and unemployment	7	47	20	7	20	1907
Crime	6	45	21	8	19	1907

Among the currently available international comparisons, Denmark was the only country to ask similar questions about specific statistics – namely GDP and

unemployment statistics. The proportion of people in Denmark who were able to give an opinion about the accuracy of GDP was much higher than in Britain – just 18% said they did not know, compared with 36% in Britain (Table 5.2). There was less difference in ability to comment on unemployment/employment figures. Among those who expressed an opinion (i.e. excluding ‘don’t knows’), 71% of Danes agreed that GDP figures accurately reflected changes in Denmark – just a little lower than the 77% of British Respondents who said the same of GDP figures for the UK. Identical proportions (67%) of people in Britain and Denmark who expressed an opinion agreed that unemployment/unemployment and employment figures were accurate.

**Table 5.2 Agree/disagree that ‘changes over time in (NAME OF STATISTICAL SERIES) accurately reflect what is changing in the UK/Denmark**

	Gross Domestic Product				Unemployment (Den) / Employment and unemployment figures (GB)			
	Britain		Denmark		Britain		Denmark	
	% All	% Excl. DK	% All	% Excl. DK	% All	% Excl. DK	% All	% Excl. DK
Strongly agree	6	9	9	11	7	9	10	11
Tend to agree	44	68	50	60	47	58	48	55
Tend to disagree	12	18	22	27	20	25	24	28
Strongly disagree	3	5	2	2	7	9	5	6
Not sure or don't know	36	-	18	-	20	-	15	-

## 5.2 Are specific statistics free from political interference?

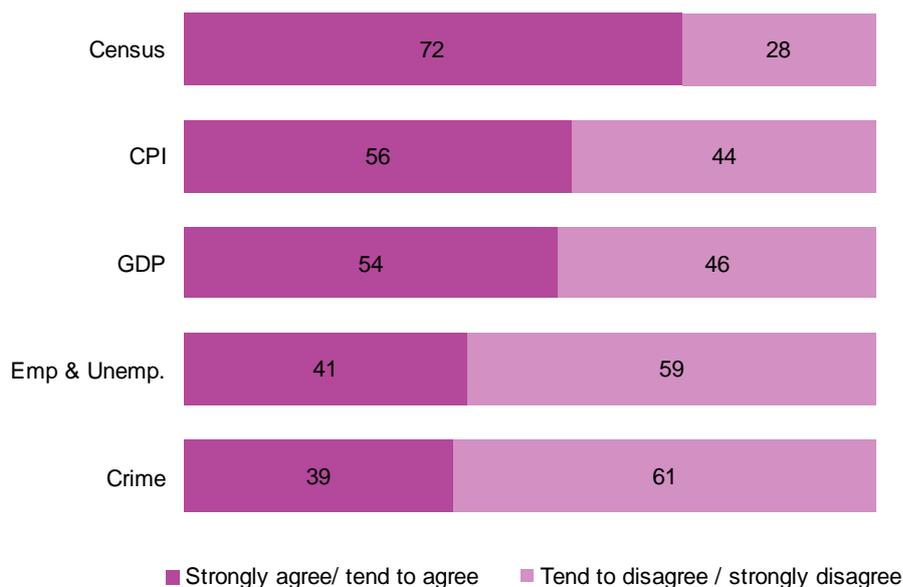
Findings on attitudes to specific statistics also suggest that the overall picture reported in 4.1.3 masks some differences in beliefs about the extent to which particular official statistics may be the subject of political interference. While two-thirds of those who expressed an opinion felt ONS figures in general were free from political interference, the proportion who felt that specific statistics were free of such interference ranged from just 39% for crime figures to 72% for the census (Figure 5.2). In fact, faith in the ONS in general appears to be higher than faith in all the official figures asked about, with the exception of the census.

People also appear to be considerably more sceptical about whether specific statistics are free from political interference than they are about their overall accuracy.

For example, while 63% of those who expressed a view agreed that crime figures accurately reflect changes in the UK, just 39% agreed that they were free of political interference.

**Figure 5.2** Agree/disagree that '(NAME OF STATISTICAL SERIES) is free from political interference (excluding 'don't knows')

Base: All respondents (excluding 'don't knows')



The proportions of people who felt unable to comment on whether each statistical series was free from interference were similar to those saying they did not know whether they accurately reflected change over time (Table 5.3). In fact, it appears to be largely the same people giving 'don't know' responses at each question – for example, 85% of those who did not know if GDP accurately reflects changes in the UK over time also said they did not know if GDP figures were free from political interference. It seems likely that these people are simply unfamiliar with these statistics and feel unable to comment on that basis.

<i>Base: All respondents</i>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know/ not sure	<i>Bases</i>
Census	12	46	19	4	20	1907
Gross Domestic Product	4	31	23	7	35	1907
Consumer Price Index	5	35	25	6	28	1907
Employment and unemployment	5	29	32	16	18	1907
Crime	4	27	34	15	21	1907

### 5.3 Usefulness and timeliness of specific statistics

Respondents were also asked if they had used any of these specific official statistics. Those who had used them were then asked to comment on the usefulness and timeliness of that series.

The most commonly used data series was the census – nearly a quarter (23%) had used it, with 17% having used it in the last 5 years (Table 5.4). The vast majority of people (95%) who have used information from the Census agreed that it provides them with useful information.

Fewer people had ever used Gross Domestic Product (14%), Consumer Price Index (15%), employment statistics (16%) and crime statistics (18%). Users of GDP and CPI data expressed similar views on the usefulness of the data to Census data users, with over 9 in 10 agreeing that both data series had provided them with useful information. Agreement that crime and employment statistics were useful was slightly lower, with 87% and 82% of data users respectively agreeing that these provided them with useful information (Table 5.5).

<i>Base: all respondents</i>	Yes, within the last 5 years	Yes, but not in the last 5 years	No	Don't know	<i>Bases</i>
Census	17	6	77	*	1907
Gross Domestic Product	10	4	86	*	1907
Consumer Price Index	13	2	85	*	1907
Employment and unemployment	13	3	84	*	1907
Crime	15	3	83	*	1907

**Table 5.5 Whether data provided by statistical series gives useful information**

<i>Base: Respondents reporting use of statistical series</i>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strong disagree	Not sure or don't know	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	Bases
Census	45	49	3	1	2	<b>95</b>	<b>4</b>	426
Gross Domestic Product	28	63	4	1	4	<b>91</b>	<b>5</b>	216
Consumer Price Index	21	73	3	1	2	<b>94</b>	<b>4</b>	259
Employment and unemployment	23	59	12	3	3	<b>82</b>	<b>15</b>	258
Crime	32	55	8	3	1	<b>87</b>	<b>11</b>	307

Users of these four other data series were more likely than Census data users to agree that the data are released quickly. Around 7 in 10 users of GDP, CPI and employment statistics agreed that these data are released quickly, compared with only half of Census users. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of users felt that crime statistics are released quickly (Table 5.6).

**Table 5.6 Whether data provided by statistical series gets released quickly?**

<i>Base: Respondents reporting use of statistical series</i>	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strong disagree	Not sure or don't know	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	Bases
Census	10	39	26	5	21	<b>49</b>	<b>30</b>	426
Gross Domestic Product	14	57	7	1	22	<b>70</b>	<b>8</b>	216
Consumer Price Index	16	55	7	1	22	<b>70</b>	<b>8</b>	259
Employment and unemployment	14	53	15	1	16	<b>67</b>	<b>17</b>	258
Crime	13	51	18	2	17	<b>63</b>	<b>20</b>	307

## 6 Demographic differences in attitudes to ONS and official statistics

Further analysis of the questions reported in Chapters 2 to 5 explored differences in attitudes to ONS and to official statistics by age, sex, socio-economic status,<sup>16</sup> and level of education. Appendix A of the separate volume of appendices that accompanies this report includes detailed tables showing breakdowns of questions by these respondent characteristics. This chapter briefly summarises the key differences of note.

### 6.1 Gender

Men were a little more likely than women to have heard of ONS (75%/67%). Men were also more likely than women to have used official statistics (27%/20%). However, men and women's level of trust in official statistics and their general attitudes to them were very similar.<sup>17</sup>

### 6.2 Age

Younger people were less likely than older people to have heard of ONS – 51% of 18-24 year-olds said they had heard of ONS prior to taking part in the survey, compared with 67% of 25-34 year-old and 73-79% of those aged 35 or older. Similar differences by age in levels of awareness of Statistics Denmark were in evidence in the Danish survey. There was no clear pattern by age in awareness of UK Statistics Authority – between 53% and 65% of all age groups said they had *not* heard of the Authority prior to taking part in the survey.

Younger people were also (unsurprisingly) less likely to recall having taken part in any ONS survey or the Census. Only 28% of 18-24 year-olds recalled taking part in the Census, compared with 52-75% of those aged 25 or older. Younger people are of course less likely to have yet taken the responsibility of completing a Census form on behalf of a household.

There was no clear pattern in trust in ONS or in the statistics ONS produces by age, although younger and older people were less likely to express an opinion in relation to trust in ONS as an institution.

In terms of general attitudes to official statistics:

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<sup>16</sup> As measured using a collapsed version of National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), described in full on the ONS website - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> Although men were slightly more likely to agree that official figures are generally accurate (64% compared with 56% of women), this was primarily a reflection of women being less likely to express an opinion on this issue – once those who said they did not know are excluded, the proportion of men and women agreeing that official figures are accurate was very similar (73%/72%). Differences in men and women's level of agreement/disagreement that ONS figures are free of political interference similarly disappear once the higher level of 'don't know' responses among women is taken into account.

- Younger respondents were more likely to agree that official figures are generally accurate – 62-67% of those under 45 agreed compared with 49-57% of those aged 45 and older.
- Respondents aged 18-24 were the mostly likely to agree (38%, compared with 21-22% of those aged 45 or older) that the Government presents official figures honestly. There was no pattern by age in views of media presentation of statistics.
- There was no clear pattern by age in perceptions of whether ONS statistics are free of political interference or in the perceived important of statistics to understanding the UK.

## 6.3 Socio-economic status and level of education

Awareness of ONS varied significantly by socio-economic status. Eighty eight per cent of those in managerial and professional occupations were aware of ONS, compared to 55% of respondents in semi-routine and routine occupations. A similar trend can be seen in relation to level of education. Eighty eight per cent of respondents with a degree had heard of ONS compared with 47% of those with no qualifications. Similar differences in awareness of the national statistical institute based on level of education were in evidence in the Danish survey. However, again, there were no clear differences by socio-economic group or education in awareness of the UK Statistics Authority – all groups were similarly unlikely to have heard of the Authority.

These differences in awareness of ONS were also reflected in differences in recollection of participating in the census (the ONS ‘survey’ people most commonly recalled having taken part in). Those in Managerial and Professional occupations were more likely than those in routine and semi-routine occupations to recall taking part in the Census (73%/54%). Similarly, those with higher educational qualifications were more likely to recall taking part. Of those with degrees, 68% recalled taking part, compared with 56% of those with no qualifications.

Use of official statistics is much higher amongst those in Managerial and Professional occupations (40%) and with degrees (50%), compared with those in Routine and semi-routine occupations (9%) and with no qualifications (4%).

Trust in ONS statistics is higher among those in managerial and professional occupations than among those in routine and semi-routine occupations. In part this reflects the fact that those in routine and semi-routine occupations are more likely to say they don’t know whether they trust statistics produced by ONS. However, even when these respondents are excluded, trust appears higher among those in managerial and professional occupations (86%, compared with 75% among those in routine and semi-routine occupations). The difference in trust between graduates and those with no qualifications is even more pronounced. Again, while this is partly explained by the higher proportion of those with no qualifications answering ‘don’t know’, the gap remains even when these respondents are excluded, with 90% of graduates compared with 67% of those with no qualifications saying they trust ONS statistics.

In terms of variations in general attitudes to ONS statistics by socio-economic class and education, in general those with higher levels of qualifications and in managerial and professional occupations are more positive than those with lower qualifications or in routine and semi-routine occupations. Some of this difference is explained by the occupations were more likely to give ‘don’t know’ responses for many of these questions. However, even after those respondents who were unable to express an

opinion are excluded from the base, differences by class and education persist. For example:

- People with higher levels of qualifications were more likely than those with lower or no qualifications to agree that official figures are generally accurate (72% of graduates compared with 40% of those with no qualifications). This difference is apparent even after the higher level of 'don't knows' among those with lower qualifications is taken into account (81%/63%).
- Those in managerial and professional occupations were similarly more likely than those in routine or semi-routine occupations to agree that official figures are generally accurate (68%/48%). Again, although this gap narrows when the higher proportion of 'don't know' responses among those in routine and semi-routine occupations is taken into account, it does not disappear (77%/69%).
- Those with higher educational qualifications and in managerial and professional occupations were much more likely than those with low or no qualifications and those in routine and semi-routine occupations to agree that ONS statistics are free of political interference, to agree that statistics are important for understanding our country, and to agree that it is important for the UK Statistics Authority to ensure that official statistics are produced without political interference. Again, although these gaps narrow when the higher proportion of people with low/no qualifications or in routine/semi-routine occupations giving 'don't know' responses is taken into account, they do not disappear.
- There was little clear variation by socio-economic class or education, however, in views of how government or newspapers present official figures.

## 7 The views of regular users

As discussed in the introduction to this report, the views of regular users of statistics were gathered via a separate data exercise. This group was identified and contacted via the Royal Statistical Society's StatsUserNet website. StatsUserNet is an online community for official statistics users and has a broad membership; members are from all sectors and their areas of interest span across the full range of government statistics. All 2,800 members of StatsUserNet were contacted via an email invitation, and the questionnaire was also promoted via the site itself. The questionnaire was adapted for self-completion online. Fieldwork was conducted from 2 September 2014 to 15 October 2014 and 306 responses were received.

The full questionnaire and topline findings from this regular users survey are included in Appendix D. Regular users of statistics routinely gave more positive answers than the public as a whole about ONS and ONS statistics. For example:

- 97% of regular users, compared with 88% of the public as a whole (excluding those who did not express an opinion) said they trusted ONS
- 96% of regular users, compared with 81% of the public as a whole said they trusted the statistics produced by ONS
- 88% of regular users who expressed an opinion, compared with 66% of the public as a whole said that ONS statistics are free from political interference.

One notable exception was that they were more likely to disagree (and less likely to be unsure) that the government and media present official figures honestly – 71% of regular users disagreed that the government presents official figures honestly (compared with 62% of the public) and 79% disagreed the media presents figures honestly (compared with 73% of the public). They were slightly more likely to feel that the current rules governing the release of official statistics, whereby Government ministers see them in advance, were right (35%, compared with 25% of the public), although a majority of both the public and regular users would prefer to see current rules changed. The Statistics Authority plans to produce more detailed analysis of this data in due course.