

The Pulse Survey

Discussant Comments

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Context

- **The COVID-19 Threat to Health**
- **The Resulting Constraints on Social and Economic Activity**
- **Managing Those Constraints – Trading off Economic Activity and COVID-19 Mortality**
- **Timely Data to Inform Policymaking Regarding that Tradeoff**

The Augmented MAF

The HPS is a great use of the Master Address File (MAF), particularly linked with phone numbers (88%) and e-mail addresses (80%).

Suggestion: A (restricted) version of the HPS with ACS (or other) data at a fine geographic level (e.g. Census tract) matched to each respondent.

This would allow us to understand which characteristics of communities helped predict relative success or failure in confronting the pandemic.

Some examples:

- ✓ Food insecurity, matched to whether the respondent is in a food desert
- ✓ Educational challenges, matched to Census of Government data on school district funding

Representation

- The pandemic (and other shocks) are being experienced differently in and out of metropolitan areas.
- The HPS is representative for states and for the 15 largest MSAs.
- **Suggestion:** Make future Pulse Surveys representative for MSA status by state (or at least by Census region).

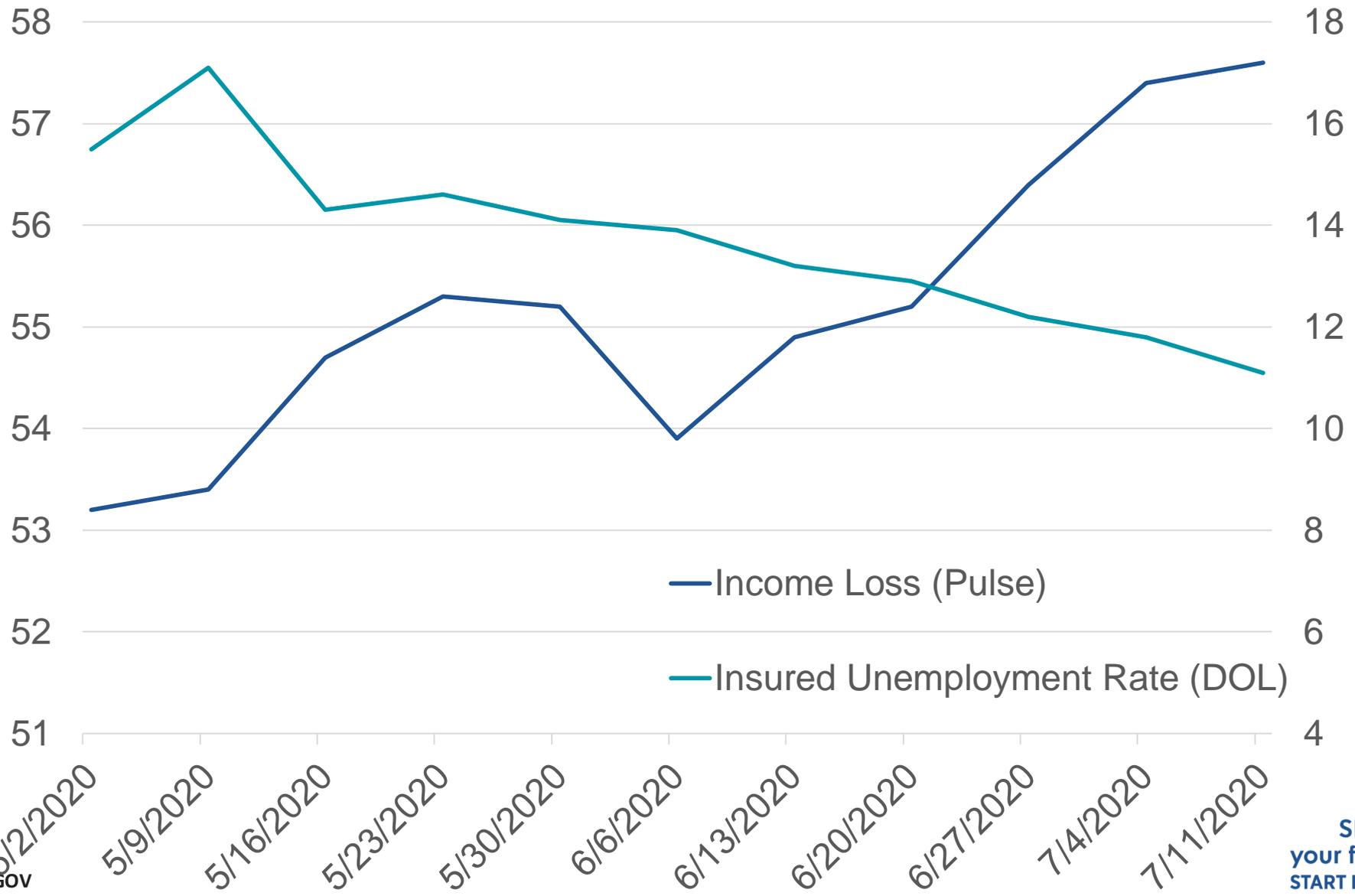
Weekly Frequency

- Is policy changing this frequently, and thus you are measuring a policy response?
- Are there important reasons to believe key indicators are changing this frequently?
- Compare the results of the Pulse Survey to other studies using existing, monthly surveys. For example, Han, Meyer, and Sullivan (August 2020) use the CPS to study [Income and Poverty in the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- **Suggestion:** Formally test for the incremental value of having weekly as opposed to only biweekly or monthly data.

Cross-Validation

- Some of the data in the Pulse Surveys is comparable (not identical) to data in other surveys, collected monthly or weekly.
 - ✓ Weekly [Initial UI Claims](#)
 - ✓ Monthly [Current Population Survey](#)
 - ✓ Monthly [Current Employment Statistics](#)
 - ✓ Monthly [ISM Reports on Business](#)
- **Suggestion:** Investigate the correlations between Pulse data and existing data, to determine whether the former measure the same economic phenomena.

Comparing Weekly Indicators



Choice of Topics

- I like the emphasis in both surveys on asking questions that would be hard to answer without household interviews.
- In the HPS, this includes the questions on expectations, mental health, food sufficiency, and educational disruptions.
- **Suggestion:** Since so much of any given household's experience depends on how the whole community responds to COVID-19, include questions on the household's perception of the community's adherence to wearing masks, social distancing, quarantining, etc.

Choice of Topics (Continued)

- In the SBPS, this includes the questions on supply chain disruptions, access to credit, and the obstacles to resuming normal operations.
- **Suggestion:** Since so much of the federal government's response was in the form of potentially forgivable loans administered through banks, the health of the local banking sector is important to understand. Perhaps include questions about the performance of the banking sector in administering these programs.

Final Comments

- The Pulse Surveys reflect the Census Bureau's comparative advantage – direct surveys of representative samples.
- There have been many other data collection efforts, relying more often on passively collected data. For example:
 - ✓ [Transaction-level data from financial intermediaries](#)
 - ✓ [Social network data aggregated from Facebook](#)
 - ✓ [A survey of small businesses in the Alignable network](#)
 - ✓ [Smartphone location data](#)
- **Suggestion:** When time and resources permit, compare the conclusions drawn with each type of data, and integrate them into a comprehensive report on the pandemic.