

The Liberation of Truth

Willard Losinger

I.

Ostensibly, the Defense Manpower Data Center's primary function is to support the information management needs of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness with timely and accurate data drawn from personnel surveys intended to assess attitudes and opinions on a wide range of topics. --https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_Manpower_Data_Center

II.

For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver. --Ezekiel 21:21.

III.

It is a beautiful day. The temperature just above freezing. Cloudy. Dark. Humid. It rained last night. The pavement is wet. If there were a light drizzle or mist to freshen my face and invigorate me as I strode outside, then the day would be perfect. One cannot have perfection every day. Beautifulness is plenty good and invigorating enough.

IV.

The 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses sought to address topics such as the costs of relocating, spouse employment, financial status, child care, marriage support, well-being, military commitment, and satisfaction. The survey's purpose possessed importance not only in terms of assessing the impact of the extended deployments on soldiers' family lives, but also as a means of gauging future staffing and recruitment needs. The statistical methods were quite poor; accordingly, results derived from the survey are of negligible value. --Losinger WC. Notes regarding the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2010, 36(3):558-570.

V.

But indeed, that was quite a clever remark which Cato made many years ago: "I wonder," said he, "that a haruspex doesn't laugh when he sees another haruspex." For how many things predicted by them really come true? If any do come true, then what reason can be advanced why the agreement of the event with the prophecy was not due to chance? --Cicero, On Divination, Book 2.

VI.

There is no wind. I step down the stairs. It is not slippery—I don't need my cane. I saunter to the end of my fashionable sidewalk, and then turn left, to walk down the street towards the swamp. There are no mosquitoes nor gnats to upset my pleasant mood. My frame of mind is absolute zen. I pass by a couple of houses, and then the swamp on my right. Dry cattails serve as sentinels in the water. The ice is gone. Not typical for the middle of January. There are leafless deciduous trees, and a few evergreens. All is brown and green, until I get near a stand of white paper birch trees, that add their color to the tranquility. The smell of decaying leaves and plant material is absolutely calming. No odor in the world can compare. Not even a baby's exquisitely soiled diaper.

VII.

I identified a number of critical deficiencies with the sample design, sample selection, weighting, and estimation procedures for the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. Briefly:

- stratification of the sample without proper consideration of the survey objectives rendered impossible the attainment of reportable information for many desired population groups;
- when problems were observed in the sampling, no efforts were made to re-stratify to correct the problems--instead, the decision was made to accept the fact that some of the wanted information would be unattainable;
- extreme over-stratification caused many of the sampling strata to have very small numbers of respondents, both expected and actual;
- logistic-regression models (used first to adjust sample weights for unknown eligibility and subsequently for survey completion among eligible respondents) contained an extremely large number of explanatory variables (plus two-way crossings), which led to absurd weight adjustments--most weights were adjusted very little (or not at all), while a few weights received enormous adjustments (sometimes more than 100-fold);
- no efforts were undertaken either to examine or to mitigate the effects of excessively variable weight adjustments, which can cause severely warped estimates;
- post-stratification cells (used in the final post-stratification adjustment to the weights) were inconsistent with the survey objectives;
- the post-stratification adjustment demonstrated that many survey estimates following the second logistic-regression-model adjustment were off by quite a lot (as much as 42 percent);
- sampling strata were collapsed together to form new "variance strata" for variance estimation, which effected a downward bias in the variance estimates, in order to make the survey results appear more precise and accurate than they actually were. The variance estimates that resulted from the creation of the "variance strata" were inappropriate because the variance estimates did not reflect the actual sampling design. The margins of error presented with the survey results grossly misrepresented the actual uncertainty associated with the estimates.

--Losinger WC. Notes regarding the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2010, 36(3):558-570.

VIII.

While Hannibal was in exile at the court of King Prusias he advised the king to go to war, but the king replied, "I do not dare, because the entrails forbid."

"And do you," said Hannibal, "put more reliance in a piece of ox-meat than you do in a veteran commander?" --Cicero, On Divination, Book 2

IX.

As I walk, my shoes almost squeak with each step. I feel a pleasant pain in my feet and in the back of my knees. The pain reassures me that I am alive, and not merely a ghost or apparition dreaming the wonders that I see. I also feel a dull pain in my upper back, from my poor, slouched posture. This also reassures me that I am what I am.

X.

In future surveys, the Defense Manpower Data Center might want to contemplate stratification schemes that concentrate on the survey objectives. Ending up with table cells for which information is nonreportable because of small sample sizes, and having to create new strata for standard-error estimation because the original sampling strata were inadequate, are simply not desirable solutions...Enhancing the accuracy of survey results, through improved and more reasoned weight adjustment methods, would be a great service to the decision makers who rely on information from Defense Manpower Data Center surveys.--Losinger WC. Notes regarding the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2010, 36(3):558-570.

XI.

Again, when Caesar himself was warned by a most eminent soothsayer not to cross over to Africa before the winter solstice, did he not cross? If he had not done so all the forces opposed to him would have effected a junction. Why need I give instances — and, in fact, I could give countless ones — where the prophecies of soothsayers either were without result or the issue was directly the reverse of the prophecy? Ye gods, how many times were they mistaken in the late civil war! What oracular messages the soothsayers sent from Rome to our Pompeian party then in Greece! What assurances they gave to Pompey! For he placed great reliance in divination by means of entrails and portents. I have no wish to call these instances to mind, and indeed it is unnecessary — especially to you, since you had personal knowledge of them. Still, you are aware that the result was nearly always contrary to the prophecy. --Cicero, On Divination, Book 2

XII.

At the end of the swamp, the city has a well to source the city water. In front of the well station stands a small monument built of stone, out of which artesian well water trickles and flows towards the swamp. A lovely sight to behold. A sound as melodious as a string quartet.

XIII.

The Defense Manpower Data Center may wish to consider developing ways of making military families more aware of the importance of participating in surveys. If the Defense Manpower Data Center cannot increase response rates among people in strata typified by a low likelihood of participating in surveys, one option might be to limit surveys to strata where people are likely to participate...Another option might be to offer only sample results, and not population inferences, from strata with low response rates. Proper population inferences could be provided for strata that were less affected by nonresponse bias. --Losinger WC. Notes regarding the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2010, 36(3):558-570.

XIV.

Claudius then brought before the Senate the subject of the college of haruspices, that, as he said, "the oldest of Italian sciences might not be lost through negligence. It had often happened in evil days for the State that advisers had been summoned at whose suggestion ceremonies had been restored and observed more duly for the future. The nobles of Etruria, whether of their own accord or at the instigation of the Roman Senate, had retained this science, making it the inheritance of distinct families. It was now less zealously studied through the general indifference to all sound learning and to the growth of foreign superstitions. At present all is well, but we must show gratitude to the favour of Heaven, by taking care that the rites observed during times of peril may not be forgotten in prosperity." A resolution of the Senate was accordingly passed, charging the pontiffs to see what should be retained or reformed with respect to the haruspices. --Tacitus, *The Annals Book 9*.

XV.

Beyond the swamp is the entrance to a small nature preserve with a trail. The trail has been there my whole life. Since it became a nature preserve, a lot more people go to walk on the trail. Parked at the edge of the road is a fancy SUV. A family, consisting of a mother, father, two girls, a boy, and a dog are returning to the car. The mother stands next to her young son as he urinates into the miniature trough in the dirt beside the road. He finishes, and his mother lifts him into the vehicle.

XVI.

The Defense Manpower Data Center ought to undertake efforts to publicize its surveys to make the methods more transparent and the results more accessible to the public. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness makes decisions that affect millions of people, and topics

covered by Defense Manpower Data Center surveys would potentially be of high interest to a huge cross-section of the nation...Making complete survey results available through its Web site would represent a step toward elevating the Defense Manpower Data Center's visibility and significance and may tend to enhance people's level of trust and confidence in its surveys.--Losinger WC. Notes regarding the 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. *Armed Forces & Society*, 2010, 36(3):558-570.

XVII.

Transparency and Open Government Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

Government should be transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset...

Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions...

Government should be collaborative. Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government....President Obama, *Federal Register Volume 74, Number 15* (Monday, January 26, 2009) [Presidential Documents] [Pages 4685-4686].

XVIII.

I ask, "How is the trail? Is it muddy?"

"No. The trail is fine" the matriarch replies in a friendly voice.

XIX.

Forsooth, and in all candor, rather than counting on getting any valid information from Defense Manpower Data Center surveys, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness would be much better off sacrificing a sheep and hiring a haruspex to interpret the entrails. It would save money, and give the big shots something to eat after the ceremony.

XIX.

On January 30, 2008, Willard Losinger appealed to the Board from the January 14, 2008, reconsideration decision of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) denying his application for disability retirement under the Federal Employees' Retirement System...

...OPM's reconsideration is REVERSED.

OPM is ORDERED to grant the appellant's application for disability retirement. OPM must complete this action no later than 20 calendar days after the date this initial decision becomes final. --WILLARD LOSINGER, Appellant, v. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, Agency, DOCKET NUMBER CH-844E-08-0332-I-1.

XX.

I pass them by and proceed up the hill, called the Bull Moose Hill. Traffic is blocked for the winter, which makes it not only safe, but pleasant for walking. The extra effort required to advance up the hill fills me with joy. I'm the happiest man in the world.