

Re: Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission for OMB Review; American Time Use Survey

Dear Nicole Bouchet,

I submit this comment to underscore the critical value of the ATUS and to advocate for its continued, enhanced use in illuminating time allocation patterns that bear directly on policy debates about remote work, labor supply, well-being, and productivity.

1. Importance of ATUS time-diary data

The ATUS provides uniquely granular 24-hour time diaries, permitting researchers to study how people spend their time across a wide array of activities, including labor supply, leisure, home production, childcare, and commuting. This high resolution avoids recall bias inherent in surveys relying on retrospective estimates of hours worked. There is no other alternative—other datasets, like the Current Population Survey, measure weekly hours worked, but suffer from recall bias, lack of precision, and an absence of the many multiple dimensions of time use beyond hours at work. Furthermore, the ATUS contains information on *where* people allocate their time, e.g., at home versus the office, and who they are with during activities, e.g. alone versus with friends. These are critical questions.

2. Key findings from ATUS: remote work and reallocation of time

I have used the ATUS for over a decade in a variety of papers. Most recently, my paper “The Allocation of Time and Remote Work” examines ATUS diaries of full-time employees aged 25–65. I find that between 2019 and 2023, workers in more remote-intensive occupations reduced their average time in work activities by approximately 50–60 minutes per day while leisure increased by about 37–40 minutes, relative to 2019.

Notably, these changes are concentrated among males, singles, and those without children. For instance, single men over age 45 in high-remote occupations worked nearly two hours less per day in 2022 relative to 2019, and leisure rose by over an hour.

Strikingly, these shifts are not explained by increased job search activity or declining well-being: remote workers consistently reported similar or higher life satisfaction and restfulness, contradicting a simple “quiet quitting” narrative.

3. Policy implications and survey relevance

These patterns raise several policy-relevant concerns: labor supply responsiveness, gender and parental heterogeneity, and the relationship between time use changes and output.

For policy design—ranging from telework guidance and labor standards to well-being metrics—ATUS is indispensable. It allows analysts to track changes over time and across

demographic cohorts, providing input into remote-work policies, labor market flexibility, and human capital interventions. It also contains measures that help us learn more about isolation and mental health among people—that is, growing time spent (even in leisure) alone versus together in teams or with friends. This has societal implications.

4. Recommendations for ATUS continuation and improvement

- Maintain robust sampling, especially for working adults, to ensure sufficient statistical power to examine heterogeneity by age, sex, parental status, and occupation. This is the only dataset in the country on such time use activities.
- Incorporate or continue developing remote-work indicators in the dataset or linked metadata—such as occupation-level “remotability” scores—to facilitate analysis of location-based working and household trade-offs.
- Retain and, where feasible, expand well-being and subjective experience questions, which allow researchers to distinguish between reduced hours driven by disengagement versus reallocated non-work pursuits.
- Consider periodic supplementation or linkage to firm-level or industry data—particularly on remote-work—to enrich interpretation of observed time allocations.

5. Concluding thoughts

The ATUS is a rare public interface that yields detailed, behavioral data on how Americans allocate hours across the full range of daily activities. My own experience with the ATUS has been positive with research showing that, during the pandemic and post-pandemic period, significant shifts in time use have occurred—particularly among remote workers—with implications for productivity, satisfaction, and labor force dynamics.

Given these trends, continued investment in ATUS is essential. Improvements in occupational coding, remote-work identification, and subjective measures would further strengthen its utility for evidence-based policy. I urge the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Office of Management and Budget to preserve, refine, and contextualize ATUS as a foundational data source for labor economics research and public decision-making.

As far as the costs are concerned with implementing the survey, these I do not have direct visibility into, but I see no reason why it cannot be done. If modernization and efficiency upgrades are required, then let’s discuss them—but the survey must remain in tact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dr. Christos A. Makridis

Associate Research Professor, Arizona State University, W. P. Carey School of Business