Economics Made Easy

What is a representative sample?

Many surveys at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) use **samples** to collect data and calculate statistics on the economy. With a **random sample**, people are chosen randomly to respond. A **representative sample** includes people chosen because they have certain characteristics related to what we would like to know about. With representative samples, we can ask a specific portion of the **population** questions about the economy and then use their answers to talk about the population as a whole. For example, if you wanted to answer a question about high schoolers and sports, you might use a representative sample of high schoolers who play sports, rather than using a random sample and asking anyone.

Glossary

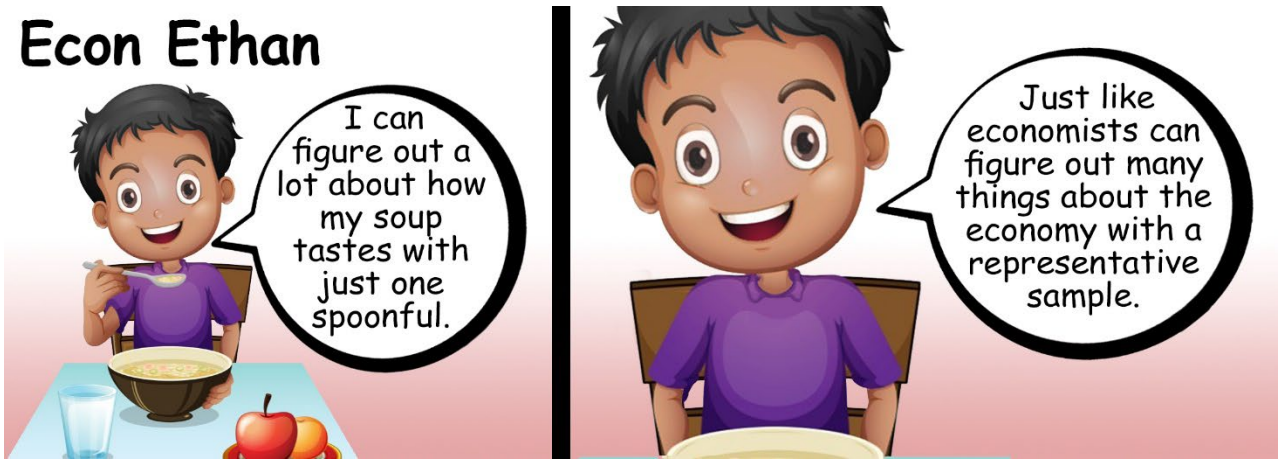
Sample — part of a population.

Random sample — part of a population chosen randomly.

Representative sample — part of a population chosen because they have certain characteristics.

Population — the entire group we are making conclusions about.

Survey — asking questions and collecting data using a sample.

In the news

Polls in the news often use samples of people to answer questions about elections, preferences, or other interesting topics.