

**Outline of Survey Items:**

1 to 3: First response to notice, and reasons for that response

4 to 7: Initial questions about likelihood/legality of suit and credit reporting in response to notice

8 to 9: Questions about likelihood/legality of suits from future debt collectors

10 to 17: Questions about likelihood/legality of suits, with specific actions from Person A as prompts

18 to 20: Scenario 2 (amount is wrong)—First response to notice, and reasons for that response

21 to 24: Scenario 2--Questions about likelihood/legality of suits, with specific actions from Person A as prompts

25 to 28: Comprehension questions about disclosures, after text is specifically pointed out to respondents

29: Question about respondents' reaction to request for signed form

30 to 32: Questions about respondents' reaction to hypothetical notice about lawsuit

33: Attitudinal questions about debt collection

34 to 36: Behavioral questions about debt collection and credit report

37 to 38: CFPB financial well-being scale

## INTRO SCREEN

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your opinions are very important to us. Participation is voluntary and will take about 20 minutes of your time.

Your answers will be grouped with those of all the other participants to help the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) better understand how you and others perceive the current debt collection process.

The CFPB will not obtain or access any personally identifiable information about survey participants. The CFPB will treat the information received consistent with its confidentiality regulations at 12 C.F.R. Part 1070, et seq.

### **Privacy Act Statement**

#### **5 U.S.C. 552(a)(e)(3)**

The information you provide through your responses to ICF will assist the study sponsor, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (“CFPB”), in evaluating a draft version of a survey on the topic of debt collection.

The CFPB will not obtain or access personally identifiable information. The agency will only obtain and access de-identified results and aggregated analyses of those results. However, there will be individuals from the CFPB and ICF sitting behind the glass window observing the focus group.

Information collected on behalf of the Bureau by ICF will be treated in accordance with the System of Records Notice (“SORN”), [CFPB.022-Market and Consumer Research Records SORN, 77 FR 67802](#). This information will not be disclosed as outlined in the Routine Uses for the SORN. Direct identifying information will only be used by ICF to facilitate the study and will be kept private except as required by law.

This collection of information is authorized by Pub. L. No. 111-203, Title X, Sections 1013 and 1022, codified at 12 U.S.C. §§ 5493 and 5512.

For the assurances of privacy provided to respondents by KnowledgePanel, please see:

<http://www.knpanel.com/participate/privacy2.html>.

### **Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:**

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3170-0055. It expires on 11/30/2018. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average approximately 1 hour per response. The obligation to respond to this collection of information is voluntary. Comments regarding this collection of information, including the estimated response time, suggestions for improving the usefulness of the information, or suggestions for reducing the burden to respond to this collection should be submitted to the Bureau at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Attention: PRA Office), 1700 G Street NW, Washington, DC 20552, or by email to [CFPB\\_PRA@cfpb.gov](mailto:CFPB_PRA@cfpb.gov).

Participation in this study is voluntary, you are not required to participate or share any identifying information with ICF, including name and contact information, and you may withdraw participation at any time. However, if you do not include the requested information, you may not participate in the study.

Please read the following scenario about someone named Person A. After you read the scenario, you will be shown a financial notice that relates to the scenario. Please read the notice and respond to the questions that follow. We are interested in your perceptions and understanding of what you read, so please answer the questions from your own perspective.

Person A purchased a couch from Main Street Store [3 years ago/ 8 years ago] using a Main Street Store credit card. Person A has not yet paid off the bill and is being contacted by North South Group, a debt collector, on behalf of Main Street Store. Person A receives an envelope from North South Group in the mail and it looks important. Person A opens the envelope and sees a notice about the debt. Click below to see the notice, and read it carefully before continuing to the questions.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Panel Relations at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

[PAGE BREAK; PARTICIPANT IS SHOWN ONE OF THE VERSIONS OF THE NOTICE. THAT PAGE CONTAINS A BUTTON TO CLICK WHEN THE PERSON IS DONE READING.]

Person A is not sure exactly how much of the debt is still owed, but the amount indicated on the notice looks about right. While it would not be easy, Person A probably could find a way to come up with money to pay the debt. Given the scenario you read earlier and the notice you just saw, please answer the following questions. **You can refer back to the notice at any time by clicking the button on the left of the screen.**

1. If you were in Person A's situation, which of the following describes what you would do in response to the notice you just saw? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS.

- Pay the amount listed in the notice
- Ignore the notice
- Contact the debt collector
- Pay part of the amount listed in the notice
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

a) (If Q1 = "Contact the debt collector") How would you contact the debt collector? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS

- By sending a letter to the debt collector

- By telephone
- By mailing in the tear-off form at the bottom of the notice
- Through the debt collector's website
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) (If Q1 = "Contact the debt collector") Which of the following would be your primary reason for contacting the debt collector? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS

- To ask additional questions about the debt
- To dispute the debt
- To pay or set up a payment plan
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure/don't know

2. Think about the answer you just gave about what you would do in response to the notice. What are the most important reasons that led you to this decision? Please feel free to list as many reasons as you'd like.

3. Thinking again about the answer you gave about what you would do in response to the notice, how important was each of the following reasons in leading you to this decision? RANDOMIZE SUB-QUESTIONS

a) Whether or not I expect to be sued

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

b) Whether or not I expect the debt to appear on my credit report

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

c) Whether or not I expect the debt to affect my current or future employment status

- 1 Not important at all
- 2

- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

d) Whether or not I expect my family or friends to find out about the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

e) Whether or not I expect the debt collector to continue contacting me until I pay off the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

Now think of Person A again. Remember that:

- Person A purchased a couch from Main Street Store using a Main Street Store credit card [3 years ago/8 years ago], and has not yet paid off the bill.
- Person A is not sure exactly how much of the debt is still owed, but the amount indicated on the notice looks about right.
- While it would not be easy, Person A probably could find a way to come up with money to pay the debt.

4. Using a 5-point scale where 1 means “very unlikely” and 5 means “very likely,” *how likely do you think it is* that the debt collector will sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt if Person A does not pay it?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

5. Do you think the debt collector *is legally allowed* to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt if Person A does not pay it?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

6. Imagine that two months have passed after Person A received the notice, and Person A has not taken any action in response to the notice. Now Person A is applying for a car loan and the dealer is checking Person A's credit report.

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that this debt will appear on Person A's credit report?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

7. Do you think the debt is legally allowed to appear on Person A's credit report?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

8. Now imagine that sometime in the future the debt mentioned in the notice is turned over to a different debt collector who becomes responsible for collecting the debt.

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that the *new* debt collector will sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

9. Do you think the *new* debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt if Person A does not pay it?

- Yes
- No

- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

For the following questions, we will ask you to imagine that Person A took some action with regard to the debt referenced in the notice. Please answer the questions about these various actions. RANDOMIZE THE PAIRS OF QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION.

10. Imagine that **Person A made a payment of \$100 toward the debt referenced in the notice.**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the remaining amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

11. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the remaining amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

12. Now imagine instead that **Person A had some questions about the debt and sent a letter to the debt collector. Person A begins the letter by writing something like, "I know I owe the debt, but I have some questions about it before I pay."**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

13. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

14. Now imagine instead that **Person A had some questions about the debt and called the debt collector. Person A begins the call by saying something like, "I know I owe the debt, but I have some questions about it before I pay."**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

15. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

16. Now imagine instead that **Person A ignored the notice and took no action.**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means "very unlikely" and 5 means "very likely," how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

17. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No



- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

We would now like you to imagine that Person A thinks that *the amount North South Group is asking for is wrong* and that the amount owed is actually less than the amount indicated on the notice.

18. If you were in Person A's situation, which of the following describes what you would do in response to the notice you just saw? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS.

- Pay the amount listed in the notice
- Ignore the notice
- Contact the debt collector
- Pay part of the amount listed in the notice
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

a) (If Q18 = "Contact the debt collector") How would you contact the debt collector? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS.

- By sending a letter to the debt collector
- By telephone
- By mailing in the tear-off form at the bottom of the notice
- Through the debt collector's website
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

b) (If Q18 = "Contact the debt collector") Which of the following would be your primary reason for contacting the debt collector? ROTATE RESPONSE OPTIONS.

- To ask additional questions about the debt
- To dispute the debt
- To pay or set up a payment plan
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not sure/don't know

19. Think about the answer you just gave about what you would do in response to the notice. What are the most important reasons that led you to this decision? Please feel free to list as many reasons as you'd like.

20. Thinking again about the answer you gave about what you would do in response to the notice, how important was each of the following reasons in leading you to this decision? RANDOMIZE SUB-QUESTIONS

a) Whether or not I expect to be sued

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

b) Whether or not I expect the debt to appear on my credit report

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

c) Whether or not I expect the debt to affect my current or future employment status

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

d) Whether or not I expect my family or friends to find out about the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

e) Whether or not I expect the debt collector to continue contacting me until I pay off the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

Now think of Person A again. Remember that Person A now thinks that the amount North South Group is asking for is wrong and that the amount owed is actually less than the amount indicated on the notice.

For the following questions, we will ask you to imagine that Person A took some action with regard to the debt referenced in the notice. Please answer the questions about these various actions. RANDOMIZE THE PAIRS OF QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION.

21. Imagine that **Person A disputed the debt by mailing in the tear-off portion on the bottom of the notice, checking the box that says “The amount is wrong.”**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means “very unlikely” and 5 means “very likely,” how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the remaining amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

22. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don’t know

23. Now imagine instead that **Person A disputed the debt by calling the debt collector.**

Using a 5-point scale where 1 means “very unlikely” and 5 means “very likely,” how likely do you think it is that the debt collector would sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- 1 Very unlikely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very likely

24. Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends

- Not sure/don't know

*[If respondent is has been shown Version X (i.e., one with no TBD, revival, or obsolescence disclosure), skip this section.]* Please look at this text that appears on the notice. You may or may not have already noticed this text when reading the notice. SHOW BOX WITH RELEVANT 1-2 SENTENCES.

Based on this text, please answer the following questions about whether or not the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A in each of the following situations.

25. Imagine that **Person A ignored the notice and took no action.**

Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

26. Now imagine instead that **Person A had some questions about the debt and called the debt collector. Person A begins the call by saying something like, "I know I owe the debt, but I have some questions about it before I pay."**

Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

27. Now imagine instead that **Person A made a payment of \$100 toward the debt referenced in the notice.**

Do you think the debt collector is legally allowed to sue Person A to collect the remaining amount owed on this debt?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

28. Now imagine that **two months have passed after Person A received the notice, and Person A has not taken any action in response to the notice. Now Person A is applying for a car loan and the dealer is checking Person A's credit report.**

Do you think the debt is legally allowed to appear on Person A's credit report?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Not sure/don't know

29. Now imagine that **Person A wants to pay the debt and sends a check to North South Group for the amount of the debt. Person A then receives a letter from North South Group stating that it cannot accept the payment unless Person A signs and returns a form stating that because of the age of the debt, the debt collector cannot sue Person A to collect the debt, and the debt generally cannot appear on Person A's credit report.**

If you were in Person A's situation, which of the following describes what you would do in response to North South Group's request to sign and return this form?

- Return the form as requested
- Ignore the request
- Call or write to the debt collector to ask why the form is required
- Contact an attorney
- Other

*(Show the following scenario and questions to a small subset of participants (approximately 500) instead of the dispute scenario and questions 18-29)*

Now imagine that Person A receives another notice from North South Group requesting payment for the same debt. The notice includes language like:

- North South Group intends to file a lawsuit against Person A to recover the debt
- The court could rule against Person A if he or she does not show up to defend him or herself
- Additional information about lawsuits to recover debts is available from a government agency website, including contact information for free or low-cost legal services providers

30. If you were in Person A's situation, which of the following describes what you would do in response to the notice?

- Pay the amount listed in the notice
- Ignore the notice
- Contact the debt collector

- Contact an attorney
- Pay part of the amount listed in the notice
- Visit the government agency website
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

31. Think about the answer you just gave about what you would do in response to the notice. What are the most important reasons that led you to this decision? Please feel free to list as many reasons as you'd like.

32. Thinking again about the answer you gave about what you would do in response to the notice, how important was each of the following reasons in leading you to this decision? RANDOMIZE SUB-QUESTIONS

a) Whether or not I expect to be sued

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

b) Whether or not I expect the debt to appear on my credit report

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

c) Whether or not I expect the debt to affect my current or future employment status

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

d) Whether or not I expect my family or friends to find out about the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5 Very important

e) Whether or not I expect the debt collector to continue contacting me until I pay off the debt

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

f) Whether or not I found the language in the notice to be threatening.

- 1 Not important at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Very important

The questions in the remainder of the survey do not relate to the notice that you viewed earlier. Please base your answers on your own experiences and opinions.

33. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements about debt and debt collection, using a 5-point scale where 1 means “definitely disagree” and 5 means “definitely agree”. RANDOMIZE SUB-QUESTIONS

a) People should pay their debts even if it creates economic hardship.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

b) If someone borrows money and then experiences a financial shock (like an illness or losing a job), the person should not have to repay the amount he or she borrowed.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

c) Debt collectors generally have accurate information about the debts that they are collecting.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

d) If a debt collector is asking someone to pay a certain amount, it is because the debt collector has reviewed information from the creditor that indicates that person owes that amount.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree



e) If a debt collector sues a consumer, the collector knows it has a good chance of proving in court that the consumer owes the debt.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

f) Debt collectors will often sue consumers if they do not pay their debts.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

g) If a debt collector sues a consumer, the consumer is *not* likely to win in court.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

h) Debt collectors are generally trustworthy.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

i) Debt collectors generally don't care whether the people they are trying to collect debts from actually owe the debt.

- 1 Definitely disagree
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Definitely agree

34. How frequently do you check your credit report?

- 4 or more times per year
- 2-3 times per year
- Once per year
- Less than once per year
- I have never checked my credit report

35. Have you ever been contacted by a debt collector attempting to collect a debt from you?

- Yes, I have been contacted about five or more debts
- Yes, I have been contacted about two to four debts
- Yes, I have been contacted about one debt
- No

36. Have you ever been sued by a debt collector or creditor attempting to collect a debt from you?

- Yes, five or more times
- Yes, two to four times
- Yes, one time
- No

37. How well does each of the following statements describe you or your situation? RANDOMIZE  
SUB-QUESTIONS

a) Because of my money situation, I feel like I will never have the things I want in life

- Describes me completely
- Describes me very well
- Describes me somewhat
- Describes me very little
- Does not describe me at all
- Don't know

b) I am just getting by financially

- Describes me completely
- Describes me very well
- Describes me somewhat
- Describes me very little
- Does not describe me at all
- Don't know

c) I am concerned that the money I have or will save won't last

- Describes me completely
- Describes me very well
- Describes me somewhat
- Describes me very little
- Does not describe me at all
- Don't know

38. How often does each of the following statements apply to you? RANDOMIZE SUB-QUESTIONS

a) I have money left over at the end of the month

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

b) My finances control my life

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

## Validation notices for different treatments

- Validation notice without TBD disclosure (X)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure (“cannot”) (C)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure (“will not”) (W)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure (propose to use “cannot” for all versions below) and obsolescence disclosure v1 (i.e., the debt can’t appear on your credit report for most types of loans) (O1)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and obsolescence disclosure v2 (O2)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and non-obsolescence disclosure v1 (i.e. the debt could appear on your credit report) (N1)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and non-obsolescence disclosure v2 (N2)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and revival disclosure v1
  - Revival v1 with obsolescence v1 (R1O1)
  - Revival v1 with obsolescence v2 (R1O2)
  - Revival v1 with non-obsolescence v1 (R1NO1)
  - Revival v1 with non-obsolescence v2 (R1NO2)
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and revival disclosure v2 (etc...)
  - Revival v2 with obsolescence v1
  - Revival v2 with obsolescence v2
  - Revival v2 with non-obsolescence v1
  - Revival v2 with non-obsolescence v2
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and revival disclosure v3
  - Revival v3 with obsolescence v1
  - Revival v3 with obsolescence v2
  - Revival v3 with non-obsolescence v1
  - Revival v3 with non-obsolescence v2
- Validation notice with TBD disclosure and revival disclosure v4
  - Revival v4 with obsolescence v1
  - Revival v4 with obsolescence v2
  - Revival v4 with non-obsolescence v1
  - Revival v4 with non-obsolescence v2