



TECHNICAL OVERVIEW of the AmeriSpeak® PANEL

NORC's Probability-Based Research Panel

Overview. Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame, and then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone interviewers, overnight express mailers, and field interviewers (face-to-face). AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of NORC's clients.

In 2016, the AmeriSpeak Panel expanded the panel to 20,000 households, with a large oversample of young African-American, Hispanic, and Asian adults (age 18-30). AmeriSpeak will expand further in 2017 by creating new panels specific to Latino and teen research.

Sample Frame. In order to provide a nationally representative sample, AmeriSpeak leverages the NORC National Sample Frame, constructed by NORC to cover over 97 percent of U.S. households. The 2010 National Frame used a two-stage probability sample design to select a representative sample of households in the United States. The first stage—the sampling unit—is a National Frame Area (NFA), which is either an entire metropolitan area (made up of one or more counties) or a county (some counties were combined so that each NFA contains a population of at least 10,000). The largest NFAs with a population of at least 1,543,728 (0.5 percent of the 2010 Census U.S. population) were selected with certainty; these areas have a high-population density and are dominated by tracts with street-style addresses. These areas contain 56 percent of the population within 8 percent of the geographic area of the United States. The remaining areas were stratified into areas where street-style addresses are predominate, and areas that are less likely to have street-style addresses. The latter stratum ("rural" areas) comprises 81 percent of the geographic area but only 14 percent of the population.

Within the selected NFAs, the second stage sampling unit is a segment, defined either in terms of Census tracts or block groups, containing at least 300 housing units according to the 2010 Census. A stratified probability sample of 1,514 segments was selected with probability proportional to size. For most of the 1,514 segments, the United States Postal Service Delivery Sequence File (USPS DSF) provided over 90 percent coverage of the segment in terms of city-style addresses that are geo-codeable. For the 123 segments where the DSF provided insufficient coverage, we enhanced the DSF address list with in-person listing. The National Frame contains almost 3 million households, including over 80,000 rural households added through the in-person listing.

The National Frame involves addresses in almost every state. For the remaining states, AmeriSpeak added some address-based sampling (ABS) addresses in 2016 from the USPS DSF

CONTACT: J. Michael Dennis, Ph.D., Executive Director, AmeriSpeak and SVP, NORC

EMAIL: AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org

VISIT: AmeriSpeak.norc.org

CONTACT
NORC'S
AMERISPEAK

AmeriSpeak PANEL

TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

to assure AmeriSpeak sample representation for all U.S. states. As of October 2016, 0.9 percent of AmeriSpeak Panel recruited adults were sourced from the ABS (99.1 percent from the National Frame). Proper weights allow the full use of the combined sample.

Sample Selection for Panel Recruitment. The 2014-2016 AmeriSpeak Panel sample consists of nationally representative housing units drawn from the 2010 NORC National Frame and less than 1 percent from ABS. The 2010 National Frame is stratified based on segment (Census tract or Census block group) characteristics such as age and race/ethnicity composition of the segment, and then a stratified simple random sample of housing units is selected. Specifically, based on Census tract-level data, segments were classified as having a higher concentration of 18-24 year old adults or not, and a higher concentration of Hispanics, non-Hispanic African Americans, and other. Based on these strata definitions, 6 strata (2 based on age x 3 based on race/ethnicity) were used to oversample housing units in segments higher in young adults and/or Hispanics and non-Hispanic African Americans. This is referred to as the initial sample or first stage of panel recruitment.

In the second stage of panel recruitment, initially sampled but nonresponding housing units are subsampled for a nonresponse follow-up (NRFU). At this stage, consumer vendor data are matched to housing units, and housing units that are flagged (based on consumer vendor data) as having a young adult or minority (Hispanic and non-Hispanic African-American) are oversampled for the nonresponse follow-up. Overall, approximately one in five initially nonresponding housing units are subsampled for NRFU. However, as mentioned previously, selection of housing units for NRFU is a stratified simple random sample based on consumer vendor data. Due to NRFU, these initially nonresponding housing units have a much higher selection probability compared to the housing units that were recruited during the first stage of panel recruitment. Note that a small fraction of initially nonresponding housing units are not eligible for NRFU due to these housing units being classified as “hard refusals” or as having an appointment for a call back from NORC.

In summary, there are two reasons why the sampling design for AmeriSpeak Panel recruitment deviates from Equal Probability of Selection Method sampling: 1) oversampling of housing units in segments with a higher concentration of young adults and minorities results in the sample selection probabilities being higher for housing units in these segments, and 2) the nonresponse follow-up effort results in initially nonresponding housing units having a much higher selection probability. Furthermore, oversampling associated with NRFU results in higher selection probabilities for initially nonresponding housing units that are flagged (based on consumer vendor data) as having a young adult or minority.

AmeriSpeak Panel Recruitment Procedures. Recruitment is a two-stage process: initial recruitment using less expensive methods and then nonresponse follow-up using personal interviewers. For the initial recruitment, sample units are invited to join AmeriSpeak online by visiting the panel website AmeriSpeak.org or by telephone (inbound/outbound supported). English and Spanish language are supported for both online and telephone recruitment. Study invitations are communicated via an oversized pre-notification postcard, a USPS recruitment package in a 9” x 12” envelope (containing a cover letter, a summary of the privacy policy, FAQs, and a study brochure), two follow-up postcards, and also follow-up by NORC’s telephone research center for matched sample units.

The second-stage nonresponse follow-up targets a stratified random subsample of the nonresponders from the initial recruitment. Stratification is based on consumer vendor data

AmeriSpeak PANEL

TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

and stratification variables from the initial recruitment stage in order to increase sample representation of young adults, non-Hispanic African Americans, and Hispanics. Units sampled for the nonresponse follow-up are sent by Federal Express a new recruitment package with an enhanced incentive offer. NORC field interviewers then make personal, face-to-face visits to the respondents' homes to encourage participation. NORC field interviewers administer the recruitment survey in person using computer-assisted personal interviewing or else encourage the respondents to register at AmeriSpeak.org or call the toll-free AmeriSpeak telephone number to register.

Recruiting Non-Internet and “Net Averse” Households. Under certain conditions, AmeriSpeak gives respondents a choice regarding their preferred mode for future participation in AmeriSpeak surveys. For the 2014-2016 recruitment, 79 percent of the recruited panelists were enrolled in AmeriSpeak to receive online surveys, while 21 percent of the recruited adults agreed to participate in AmeriSpeak telephone mode surveys. For the 2016 recruitment, respondents provided an option of online or telephone modes include: persons without internet access, persons whose only internet access is via a smartphone, and persons with internet access but unwilling to share an email address. A recruited household can consist of both web-mode and phone-mode panelists residing in the same household.

Impact of Nonresponse Follow-up. The nonresponse follow-up improves the representativeness of the AmeriSpeak sample with respect to certain demographic segments, including but not limited to rural and/or lower-income households, cell-phone-only households, persons age 18-34, African Americans, Hispanics, and persons without a high school degree or who have only a high school degree (no college). Compared to panelists recruited in the initial stage, panelists recruited via the nonresponse follow-up campaign are more politically conservative, are less knowledgeable about science, report less interest in current events and topics in the news (such as climate change), and are less likely to read a print newspaper.

AmeriSpeak Panel Recruitment Response Rate and Other Sample Metrics. Between October 2014 and October 2016, 20,939 households were recruited to the AmeriSpeak Panel. The American Association for Public Opinion Research response rate (AAPOR RR3) for the panel recruitment during this timeframe is 34.3 percent (weighted to take into account selection probabilities).¹ The estimated cumulative AAPOR RR3 for client surveys is 10 to 20 percent (varying according to study parameters and taking into account all sources of nonresponse, including panel recruitment, panel household attrition, and survey participation).² NORC documented the AAPOR RR3 calculation methodology for 2014-2015 recruitment.³

Key statistics with respect to the 2014-2016 recruited households are as follows: 51 percent recruited via the nonresponse follow-up recruitment using overnight Federal Express mailers and face-to-face methodology (with NORC field staff visiting households); 21 percent indicated a preference for the telephone mode of data collection for participating in AmeriSpeak studies; 25 percent of the recruited households are non-internet; 71 percent are cell-phone-only or cell-

1 The response rate calculation incorporates the selection probabilities of the samples for the initial recruitment and nonresponse follow-up stages, as calculated by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the American Community Survey.

2 A properly calculated AAPOR response rate for panel-based research takes into account all sources of nonresponse at each stages of the panel recruitment, management, and survey administration process. A common misapplication of the term “response rate” in online panel surveys is to represent the survey-specific cooperation rate as the “survey response rate.”

3 See “Response Rate Calculation Methodology for Recruitment of a Two-Phase Probability-Based Panel: The Case of AmeriSpeak,” by Robert Montgomery, J. Michael Dennis, and Nada Ganesh. The paper is available at AmeriSpeak.norc.org on the “Research” page.

AmeriSpeak PANEL

TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

phone-mostly; 18 percent are African-American and 15 percent Hispanic; and 33 percent have household income below \$30,000 (compared to the American Community Survey benchmark of 29 percent).

Mixed-Mode Data Collection. Panelists may participate in two to three AmeriSpeak Panel studies per month via online (computer, tablet, or smartphones) or by computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). CATI phone-mode respondents represent a population currently underrepresented in web panels that exclude non-internet households or “net averse” persons. NORC’s telephone interviewers administer the phone mode of survey questionnaires using a data collection system supporting both the CATI phone and web modes of data collection, providing an integrated sample management and data collection platform. For panelists using smartphones for web-mode AmeriSpeak surveys, the NORC survey system renders an optimized presentation of the survey questions for these mobile users. For general population client studies, approximately 20 percent of the completed interviews are completed by the telephone mode.

Panel Management Policies. NORC maintains strict rules to limit respondent burden and reduce the risk of panel fatigue. On average, AmeriSpeak panel members typically participate in AmeriSpeak web-based or phone-based studies two to three times a month.

Because the risk of panel attrition increases with the fielding of poorly constructed survey questionnaires, the AmeriSpeak team works with NORC clients to create surveys that provide an appropriate user experience for AmeriSpeak panelists. AmeriSpeak will not field surveys that in our professional opinion will result in a poor user experience for our panelists and in panel attrition.

ABOUT NORC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

As one of the world’s foremost independent research institutions, NORC at the University of Chicago delivers objective data and meaningful analysis to help decision-makers and leading organizations make informed choices and identify new opportunities. Since 1941, NORC has applied sophisticated methods and tools, innovative and cost-effective solutions, and the highest standards of scientific integrity and quality to conduct and advance research on critical issues. Today, NORC expands on this tradition by partnering with government, business, and nonprofit clients to create deep insight across a broad range of topics and to disseminate useful knowledge throughout society.

Headquartered in downtown Chicago, NORC works in over 40 countries around the world, with additional offices on the University of Chicago campus, and in the DC metro area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about AmeriSpeak or to share a Request for Proposal, please contact AmeriSpeak at AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org. Information about AmeriSpeak capabilities and research papers are available online at AmeriSpeak.norc.org.

Prepared by J. Michael Dennis, Ph.D., Executive Director, AmeriSpeak and SVP, NORC. Contact information: Dennis-Michael@norc.org. For more information, visit AmeriSpeak.norc.org or send email to AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org.