

LANGER RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN • MANAGEMENT • ANALYSIS

Methodology: ABC News telephone surveys

Methodological details of ABC News telephone surveys produced by [Langer Research Associates](#) before 2024 are provided below. See details of more recent ABC News surveys [here](#).

Langer Research Associates has provided survey research design, management and analysis services to the ABC News Television Network from 2010 to present. Company founder Gary Langer previously served as ABC's in-house pollster from 1990-2010.

ABC News surveys were conducted via random-digit dialed, computer-assisted telephone interviewing from 1981 through 2023, with field work services provided by a succession of firms: Chilton Research Services, TNS Intersearch, SSRS, SRBI and Abt Associates.

Before October 2008, full-length ABC/Post polls were conducted by calling samples of landline telephone numbers only. From October 2008 through June 2015, we added cell phone interviews via a non-overlapping dual-frame sample design, with separate sampling frames for landline and cell phone-only respondents, as detailed in this [paper](#). The cell phone-only proportion, based on data from the National Health Interview Survey, grew from 100 out of 1,000 interviews to 335 per 1,000 during this period.

The non-overlapping design served well, especially through a time in which cell phone interviews were much costlier than landline interviews. However, the cost differential flattened over time and the incidence of cell phone use continued to grow, producing a shortfall in the number of young adults reached via the non-overlapping design. As a result, in July 2015 we adopted an overlapping dual frame sample design, in which cell phone respondents were interviewed regardless of whether or not they also had a landline.

The proportion of cell phone interviews again was driven by the NHIS estimate of cell phone-only respondents. To achieve our target, from July 2015 through February 2020 65 percent of all interviews were conducted by cell phone, with the remaining 35 percent interviewed via landline. We shifted this proportion to 75/25 percent in March 2020.

Sampling

Cell phone and landline samples were produced by Survey Sampling Inc. For landline interviews, SSI selected a sample of landline households in the continental United States via random digit dialing, in which all landline telephone numbers, listed and unlisted, have an equal probability of selection. Landline numbers were drawn proportionate to their estimated distribution in the country's nine Census divisions.

SSI's process started with a database of all listed landline telephone numbers, updated on a four-to six-week rolling basis, 25 percent of listings at a time. This database of directory-listed

numbers was then used to determine all active blocks – meaning contiguous groups of 100 phone numbers for which more than one residential number is listed. All possible numbers in active blocks were added to the random digit database.

Each telephone exchange in the landline sample was assigned to the county where it was most prevalent. In the first stage of selection, the database was sorted by state and county, and the number of telephone numbers to be sampled within each county was determined using systematic sampling procedures from a random start, such that each county was assigned a sample size proportional to its share of possible numbers. In the second stage of selection, telephone numbers were sorted within county by area code, exchange and active block, and using systematic sampling procedures from a random start, individual phone numbers within each county were selected. The sampled phone numbers were pre-dialed via a non-ringing auto-dialer to reduce dialing of non-working numbers.

For the cell phone sample, SSI's process began with a monthly listing of every existing telephone area code and exchange. About half of these were pooled by their producers in contiguous groups of 10 100-block phone numbers, or 1,000-blocks, with information including whether each pooled 1,000-block does or does not include cell phone numbers, either solely or on a shared basis with landline numbers.

All cell-inclusive 1,000-blocks were included in the cell phone sample. For numbers that were not 1,000-block pooled, cell phone service information was available at the exchange level only; therefore all numbers in those exchanges also were included. All numbers used in cell phone sampling were then handled at the 100-block level. Given the absence of any cell phone directory, all 100-blocks in dedicated wireless exchanges and 1,000-blocks used for sampling purposes were considered active.

For exchanges or 1,000-blocks that were classified by their carrier as providing both landline and wireless service, each 100-block was compared to the database of landline 100-blocks; 100-blocks that appeared on the landline frame were removed from the wireless frame and 100-blocks with no directory-listed numbers were retained. This ensured that the wireless frame and list-assisted RDD frame were mutually exclusive while still providing coverage of prefixes and 1,000-blocks that were classified as including both landline and wireless service.

Each 100-block was assigned to a county based on the billing coordinates of the exchange. The database was sorted by county code, carrier name and 100-block. A sampling interval was determined by dividing the universe of eligible 100-blocks by the desired sample size. From a random start within the first sampling interval, a systematic nth selection of 100-blocks was performed and a 2-digit random number between 00 and 99 was appended to each selected 100-block stem.

Until 2005, ABC News followed the industry norm of excluding all listed business numbers (compiled from sources such as Yellow Pages directories and the Dun and Bradstreet Business Data database) from the sample. However, we found that this “cleaning” process excluded respondents who have home-based business-listed phones and no other lines at home on which

they take calls, creating 3 percent noncoverage of eligible households with no offsetting gains in productivity (Merkle, Langer, Cohen, Piekarski, Benford & Lambert, 2009, [*Public Opinion Quarterly*](#)). As a result of this evaluation, we discontinued excluding listed business numbers from landline samples, with the exception of those in business-only blocks or exchanges.

Interviewing

In each sample, phone numbers were released for interviewing in replicates by Census region (cell) or division (landline) to allow for sample control. Numbers were called multiple times during the field period in multi-night polls. Interviewers and their supervisors were trained in interviewing practices, including techniques designed to achieve the highest possible respondent cooperation.

For landline respondents, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest male or youngest female at home. Cell phone respondents were screened for age eligibility (18+). Respondents were not offered compensation, but a reimbursement check was offered to cell respondents if use of minutes was raised as an objection. Cell respondents' place of residence was checked and their Census region adjusted accordingly if necessary.

As of April 2013, Spanish-language interviewing was added to full-length ABC/Post polls for respondents who indicated a preference to be interviewed in Spanish.

Coverage

The sample excluded adults who didn't have cell or landline phone (3.2 percent, per the NHIS); who didn't speak English or Spanish (1.5 percent, per the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau); and who lived in institutional group facilities where individual telephone access was disallowed (chiefly, adult correctional facilities), about 0.9 percent. Allowing for some overlap of these groups, the frame covered approximately 95 percent of the target population, U.S. adults age 18+.

Weighting

Data were adjusted to account for the greater probability of respondents who have both a cell and landline phone, compared with those who are cell-only or landline-only. Data then were weighted using demographic information from the U.S. Census and NHIS to adjust for variance from population values. Weights may have included average partisan self-identification in current and recent ABC/Post data, based on a standardized rule.

Until 2008 we used cell-based weighting, in which respondents were classified into one of 48 or 32 cells (depending on sample size) based on their age, race, sex and education; weights were assigned so the proportion in each cell matched the Census Bureau's most recent Current Population Survey data. To achieve greater consistency and reduce the chance of large weights, in January 2008 we adopted iterative weighting, also known as raking or rim weighting, in which

the sample is weighted sequentially to Census targets one variable at a time, continuing until the optimum distribution is achieved.

From October 2008 to June 2015, data were post-stratified to Census region by sample type; rim weights then were calculated using Census parameters for age, race/ethnicity, sex and education. The precision of race/ethnicity weights was enhanced in April 2013. In July 2015, post-stratification by sample type was discontinued and Census region and phone service (landline only, dual service and cell-only) were added to the rim weighting variables. Weights were capped at lows of 0.2 and highs of 6.

Some telephone surveys are weighted to the number of telephone lines in each respondent's home to adjust for the higher probability of selection of multiple-line households. We found that such weighting carried the risk of distortion, and, when done properly, had no meaningful impact on the data (Merkle & Langer, [*Public Opinion Quarterly*](#), Spring 2008). As such, ABC News telephone surveys were not weighted to the number of phone lines.

Design effects due to weighting describe the overall impact of sample weights and are used in calculating a survey's margin of sampling error. ABC/Post poll design effects averaged 1.41 in 2022 and 2023, and were reflected in reported error margins.