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 US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Frame, and then contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations.

AmeriSpeak Panel Recruitment. Between October 2014 and August 2015, 7,752 households were recruited to the AmeriSpeak Panel. The AAPOR RR3 (response rate) for the panel recruitment during this time frame is 36.6% (weighted to take into account selection probabilities). The estimated cumulative AAPOR RR3 for client surveys is 13% to 20% (varying according to study parameters and taking into account all sources of non-response including panel recruitment, panel household attrition, and survey participation). Key statistics with respect to the 2014-2015 recruited households are as follows: 48% recruited via the non-response follow-up recruitment using face-to-face methodology (with NORC field staff visiting households); 24% indicated a preference for the telephone mode of data collection for participating in AmeriSpeak studies; 22% of the recruited households are non-Internet; 71% are cell-phone only or cell-phone mostly; 18% are African-American and 13% Hispanic; and 34% have household income below $30,000 (compared to ACS benchmark of 29%). Panel recruitment expansion is scheduled for February – August 2016 to expand the AmeriSpeak panel to 20,000 households, with additional recruitment in 2017 to expand the panel to a total of 30,000 households.

AmeriSpeak Projects. In the January through June 2015 time frame, AmeriSpeak fielded NORC-designed surveys collecting background data form panelists with respect to political attitudes and behavior, public affairs, health conditions, use of health services, and financial status. In June, 2015, AmeriSpeak began client studies with the launch of AmeriSpeak Omnibus. AmeriSpeak has completed or is currently conducting studies either commissioned or funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Kaiser Family Foundation, Stanford University, Northwestern University, Consumer Reports, and the Associated Press. NORC is currently including AmeriSpeak as a sample source in proposals to RFPs issued by Federal agencies.

Sampling Methodology. The sample frame is the NORC National Frame, an area probability sample frame constructed by NORC providing sample coverage of 97 percent of U.S. households for AmeriSpeak, the General Social Survey, the Survey of Consumer Finances, etc. The National Frame contains almost 3 million households, including over 80,000 rural households added through the in-person listing of households that were not recorded on the USPS Delivery Sequence File. For the 2014-2015 AmeriSpeak recruitment, a stratified random sampling approach was used to select sample units from the National Frame including an oversample of households in Census tracts or block groups higher in young adults and/or Hispanics and African-Americans. AmeriSpeak attempts to recruit all English-speaking members age 13 and older in the sampled households. Spanish-language recruitment will be introduced in February 2016.

Panel Recruitment Methodology. Recruitment is a two-stage process. In the initial recruitment, sample units are invited to join AmeriSpeak by visiting the panel website AmeriSpeak.org or by phone (in-bound/outbound supported).

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1 The response rate calculation incorporates the selection probabilities of the samples for the initial recruitment and non-response follow-up stages, as calculated by the US Bureau of the Census for the American Community Survey.
Study invitations are communicated via an over-sized pre-notification postcard, a USPS recruitment package in a 9”x12” envelope (containing a cover letter, a summary of the privacy policy, FAQs, and a study brochure), two follow-up post cards, and also email contacts and telephone follow-up for matched sample units. The second-stage non-response campaign targets a random sub-sample of the non-responders from the initial recruitment. Units sampled for the non-response follow-up campaign are sent by express mail 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 in AmeriSpeak by taking the action of joining AmeriSpeak via the AmeriSpeak.org web portal or by calling the AmeriSpeak toll-free telephone number.

All cooperating households first register for AmeriSpeak by providing name and contact information for validating the sample unit, followed by documenting informed consent and agreement to the study’s Privacy Policy and Terms and Conditions. Afterwards, AmeriSpeak panelists complete an introduction survey of about 15 minutes by web or by CATI phone to collect information useful for sampling, weighting, and analysis of sample representativeness.

Data Collection Methodology. Panelists may participate in 2 to 3 AmeriSpeak Panel studies per month via online (computer, tablet, or smartphones) or by CATI phone. CATI phone mode respondents represent a population currently under-represented in web panels. 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 15% to 20% of the completed interviews are completed by the telephone mode.

2014 Pilot Study. The AmeriSpeak Pilot Study was conducted in October-November 2014 in a test of study procedures. In total, 406 households were recruited. For the reported results below, the analysis is restricted to the 352 recruited households where the two-stage recruitment design was implemented. The AAPOR RR3 weighted response rate was 26%. Fifty percent of the initially recruited household registered and completed the introductory survey by CATI phone (half by web). Consistent with expectations, the households recruited by the non-response follow-up (by field interviewers) provided enhanced representation of typically hard-to-contact and recruit populations. Compared to the panelists recruited during the initial stage, the panelists recruited by the non-response follow-up had higher percentages of non-white racial groups (34% v. 28%), persons with only a high school degree or less (28% v. 19%), younger adults age 18-34 (31% v. 22%), household income less than $35,000 (27 % v. 25%), cell-phone only (40% v 27%), home renters (32% v. 26%), those not reading a newspaper regularly (55% v. 47%), and those who did not get news online yesterday (45% v. 35%), among other results.

Sample and Data Quality Metrics. For all AmeriSpeak studies, a sample quality analysis is provided called NORC Card that documents sample representativeness and non-response bias measures, the AAPOR response rate, and other metrics of sample and data quality.

2015-2017 Panel Recruitment and AmeriSpeak Study Capacity. NORC’s initial offering for 2015 is the general population panel of 7,500 households, with plans to expand the panel sample size to 20,000 households in 2016 and 30,000 in 2017. Sample supplementation using AmeriSpeak Calibration (blending AmeriSpeak samples with other probability and non-probability samples) will be used for studies requiring additional sample capacity.

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