

CALSPEAKS | California State University, Sacramento

Pre-General Election Survey of Political Attitudes in CA | August 2016

CALSPEAKS METHODOLOGY

The Pre-General Election Survey of Political Attitudes in California was administered using the CalSpeaks Opinion Survey Panel, a representative panel of California residents, which uses probability-based sampling methods to monitor citizens' perspectives online. The survey panel includes 3,617 Californians who have agreed to participate in approximately four surveys a year.

Respondent Sampling/Recruitment

CalSpeaks panelists were originally recruited using three distinct sampling methodologies (two that are random probability-based and a third that was quota-based), the quota portion of the sample is extremely small and was phased out. We distinguish panelists according to the methodology used to recruit them throughout their tenure on the panel. The purpose of this multi-mode recruitment has been to facilitate research regarding the relative efficiency and representativeness of these different methodologies.

Our primary method of recruitment uses a random sample of the United States Postal Service Delivery Sequence File (USPS DSF) of California residential addresses (stratified geographically by five regions and weighted by population density). Sending postcards to the residences, we invite adult residents to join the panel (via a URL address, or by calling us to indicate a preference for participation by mail). We include one follow-up to non-responding addresses, budget permitting.

We conduct panel recruitment in English and Spanish, as well as other languages as necessary.

All sampling methodologies produce initial samples that diverge by varying degrees from population parameters. Accordingly, we apply sampling weights to the estimates we obtain in each individual survey we collect (more details below).

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Sacramento has reviewed and approved CalSpeaks' recruitment procedures for protecting the rights of human research subjects (a preference for mail participation).

Consenting and Initial Profiling

During recruitment (and at the beginning of each subsequent survey), panelists learn that their participation is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to opt out at any time. They also learn that their survey responses are strictly confidential.

Immediately upon agreeing to join the panel, panelists complete a 15 minute profile survey that includes questions pertaining to demographics, political identity, background, interests, personality profile, and household composition. This profile information is merged with future survey data collections, thereby reducing survey burden (i.e., redundant questioning) on panelists over time.

Online Survey and Panel Management Platforms

CalSpeaks uses the Qualtrics Research Suite online survey platform. The survey panel consists of residents who have agreed to participate in multiple surveys over time. In recent years, in response to the declining response rates (and reliability) associated with telephone surveys, online survey panels have proliferated at the national level (e.g. GfK's Knowledge Panel, Yougov's Omnibus Panel, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC)'s Amerispeak Panel, the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel), increasingly using probability-based sampling methods (defined as a randomized selection process where everyone in the population has a chance of being invited to participate). CalSpeaks was the first California-focused panel to use such probability-based methods. The CalSpeaks panel includes more than 3,000 Californians (non-institutionalized residents, 18 and over).

Survey Procedures

Contracted surveys using the CalSpeaks panel undergo review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Sacramento, and the CalSpeaks' research team manages this IRB review process on behalf of its non-academic clients. Researchers send panelists a url to the online survey format (via Qualtrics) and send up to four reminders to complete a survey, and ask that panelists complete survey within two weeks following the initial invitation.

Panelists completing a survey receive a \$5 Tango gift card, delivered directly to his or her email inbox (or home), which is redeemable at most online retailers.

Generally speaking, the research team designs CalSpeaks surveys to be completed in ten or fewer minutes. In instances when the mean completion time for a survey exceeds 15 minutes, CalSpeaks panel administrators award respondents larger incentives.

Finally, CalSpeaks researchers follow AAPOR standards for response rate reporting, as published in AAPOR's Standard Definitions. Thus, we include contact rates, break-off rates, and overall response rates, as applied to each stage of the respondent participation process (panel recruitment, retention, and individual survey sub-sampling).

Survey Weighting

For each survey, the weighting protocol proceeds in stages. It starts using the original base weights that account for the panelists' probability of being selected from the sampling frames to receive an invitation to participate in the panel. Next, the propensity-adjusted base weights for panelists are calibrated responding to a particular survey to population benchmarks using "raking."

Panel Management

Panel administrators try to maintain regular contact with panelists, sending birthday and holiday well wishes, CalSpeaks updates, and links to CalSpeaks -related press, reports related to specific surveys, academic research publications, and other relevant news. Panel administrators also monitor (1) how often individual panelists are invited to take surveys, (2) how many surveys individual panelists complete over time, (3) how often they complete surveys, (4) individual panelist response rates, and (5) individual panelist "quality" (average time to complete, and whether a panelist's completed survey has ever been rejected by an attention check validation).