Reaching Spanish-Speakers in Self-Administered Surveys

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Abstract
Decisions on public policy can be affected if important segments of the population are systematically excluded from the data used to drive the decisions. In the US, Spanish-speakers make up an important subgroup that surveys conducted in English-only underrepresent. This subgroup differs in a variety of characteristics and they are less likely to respond to surveys in English-only. These factors lead to nonresponse biases that are problematic for survey estimates. For surveys conducted by mail, one solution is to include both English and Spanish materials in the survey package. For addresses in the US where Spanish-speakers are likely to be living, this approach is effective, but it still may omit some non-English-speakers. Traditionally, including both English and Spanish materials for addresses not identified as likely to have Spanish-speakers was considered problematic due to concerns of a backlash effect. The backlash effect is that predominantly English-speakers might respond at a lower rate because of the inclusion of Spanish materials. Prior research found no evidence of a backlash, but used a two-phase approach with a short screener questionnaire to identify the eligible population for an education survey. In this paper, we report on experiments in two surveys that extend the previous research to criminal victimization and health communication single-phase surveys. These experiments test the effect of the inclusion of Spanish language materials for addresses not identified as likely to have Spanish-speakers. Our findings confirm most results of the previous research; however we find no substantial increase in Spanish-only participation when the materials are offered in both languages for addresses that are not likely to have Spanish-speakers. We offer some thoughts on these results and directions for future research, especially with respect to collecting data by the Internet.

Keywords: Response rates, nonresponse bias, Web-push, Internet data collection
1. Introduction

Over 20 percent of people over the age of five who live in the United States (U.S.) speak a language other than English at home. Some non-English speakers speak English fluently, but about 9 percent of the total population report that they do not speak English very well, and nearly 50 percent of the foreign-born do not speak English very well. More recent immigrants and those with lower levels of education are more likely to not speak English well (Gambino, Grieco, and Acosta 2014; Krogstad 2016).

Non-English speakers differ in a variety of ways from English-only speakers (Shin and Kominski 2010). Some of these differences are obvious, such as a much higher proportion of the non-English speakers are not U.S. citizens and are much more likely to be born outside the U.S. Other differences, noted by the authors, is that non-English speakers have lower education levels and are younger on average than English-speakers. Flores and Tomany-Korman (2008) examine a number of health-related characteristics and show that non-English speakers were much more likely to have health disparities. For example, they were much more likely to have poor health, be overweight, and have teeth in fair or poor condition.

Public policy necessitates information on all populations that might be affected by the policy. For example, education and health policy require accurate data on those with different backgrounds, abilities, and conditions in order to structure programs to serve those most in need. Surveys of these populations are the main tool for gathering and disseminating this type of information.

Surveys done in English-only may not adequately gather data from non-English speakers. Frayne et al. (1996) show how common it is to do research only in English, where 40 percent of researchers contacted excluded non-English speakers in their study. The consequence of a survey that is done solely in English is that it will exclude people who are not fluent in English.

When survey methods ignore non-English speakers, the estimates from the survey will be biased. This type of bias is called nonresponse bias. Nonresponse bias in the estimates is large when both the nonresponse rate is high and the characteristics of the respondents and nonrespondents are very different (Brick 2013). For people who do not speak English well, both of these conditions may be satisfied if the survey is done only in English. Non-fluent English speakers will be much less likely to respond to the survey and they are different on many policy outcomes (e.g., health, education, employment). This will lead to the potential for large nonresponse bias. The bias may be especially problematic for estimates of subgroups in which non-English speakers are more prevalent.

In this paper we describe experiments conducted to increase survey response rates for the largest group of non-English speakers, those people who speak Spanish. Spanish-speakers are 62 percent of those who speak a language other than English at home. McGovern (2004) shows that response rates among Spanish speakers are roughly half the rate of monolingual English speakers when all the survey materials are English-only. This research extends the work of Brick et al. (2012) for

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1 Tabulation from the 2009-2013 American Community Survey.
self-administered surveys conducted by mail, who experimented with sending the materials to households in both English and Spanish.

These experiments were with self-administered surveys by mail, but also have implications for self-administered surveys conducted using the Internet. Many surveys have been moving from using the mail to deliver paper questionnaires to a “Web-push” approach in which households are asked to go to the Internet to respond; those households who do not respond on the Internet are then sent paper versions of the instruments as a followup (see Messer and Dillman 2011). The Web-push and paper mail surveys share many attributes so the lessons from these experiments in mail surveys apply to Web-push surveys. Two key commonalities are self-administration and the mode of contact. Self-administration makes the measurement properties of the data collection very similar (Dillman, Smith, and Christian 2014) and contrasts significantly with interviewer-administered methods. Second, the method of contacting the sampled households for both Web-push and mail surveys is by sending the sampled address a letter or package. For households, email addresses are not available so mail is the only feasible mode of contact. Thus, the mechanism to encourage response in both English and Spanish are similar. Details on the application of the results of the experiments described in this article to Web-push surveys are discussed in the last section.

Providing survey materials in Spanish does not, by itself, remedy the problem of gaining participation of those who do not speak English well. All aspects of the survey should be designed and implemented to convey the importance and value of the survey. Ramirez, Willis, and Rutten (2017) describe general population survey methods for reaching Spanish-speakers and show how cognitive interviewing can improve the instrumentation for a survey and the overall quality of response from Spanish-speakers. Padilla (2004) discusses some challenges of doing research with ethnic groups and proposes additional methods to overcome obstacles. While this paper does not discuss these other aspects of the survey process, we fully recognize that integrating Spanish materials into the whole survey development process is important to achieve the goal of increasing the participation of Spanish-speakers.

The next section summarizes key research previously done on methods for self-administered surveys for including survey materials in both English and Spanish. We then present the experiments conducted in two studies that extend the findings of Brick et al. (2012), and show the findings from those two experiments. In the final section, we discuss the implications for using these methods to include Spanish-speakers in self-administered surveys including those conducted on the Internet.

2. Methods for Surveying in Spanish

Marin and Marin (1991) reviewed methods for conducting surveys of Hispanics, but that review is nearly 30 years old and much has changed since then. The costs of conducting face-to-face interviews has increased substantially, making this mode of interview less frequently used than it was in the past. Telephone surveys have also become less popular in recent years because the response rates for these surveys have dropped precipitously (AAPOR 2017). This has resulted in a trend to move from interviewer-administered surveys by face-to-face and telephone methods to self-
administered surveys (i.e. administered by mail or web).

With interviewer-administered surveys, a typical approach was to have English-speaking interviewers identify households with “language problems” that were later contacted by interviewers who could speak the language the initial interviewer thought the household spoke (often restricted to Spanish). In some cases, areas or clusters of cases that were expected to have a large concentration of Spanish-speakers were assigned bilingual interviewers to avoid this handoff. Link et al. (2009) report on using real-time interpreters for a large telephone study.

These methods for interviewer-administered surveys have not been carefully evaluated. It is likely that these methods ameliorated the nonresponse bias due to excluding Spanish speakers to some extent, but some bias is likely to have persisted due to the logistical and operational complexities of the methods. Large, interviewer-administered surveys have intricate logistical issues and make it hard to apply special-purpose interventions. For example, in face-to-face surveys it is much easier and less expensive to employ bilingual interviewers in areas with high concentrations of Spanish than it is to have bilingual interviewers travel to areas with few Spanish-speakers. Thus, the application of these methods is likely to reduce the bias more in some areas than in others, but bias is not eliminated entirely.

For self-administered surveys, the literature on reaching and obtaining interviews with Spanish-speakers is limited. Much of the research on surveying Spanish-speakers has been done at the Census Bureau because both the size of the decennial censuses and the American Community Survey (ACS) and the importance of full coverage of the population are critical. The decennial census and the ACS rely on self-administration to obtain most of the responses, with face-to-face collection only for nonrespondents. McGovern (2004) discusses the quality of the efforts to gain participation of non-English speakers in the ACS. Both the decennial and ACS have recently been using the Web as the first mode of response in multi-mode protocols, but we have not found reports on research associated with contacting respondents in other languages on the Web. The 2014 Internet Test report (Zelenak, 2016) reports on the overall test, but not on this topic. This report did find that only two items on the ACS had high missing data rates in the test, and one of them was whether the household spoke a language other than English.

Bouffard and Tancreto (2006) report on a test done in 2005 to improve response rates for the 2010 Census using a mail instrument. One of the techniques they tested was targeting areas of high concentrations of Spanish-speakers and sending a bilingual form to households in those areas. This bilingual form is sometimes referred to as a “swimlane” version since one column was in English and one was in Spanish. The bilingual form had about a 2 percentage point higher response rate than the English-only version, and that difference was statistically significant. A benefit of the “swimlane” design that may have contributed to the response increase is that both languages are presented parallel to each other, allowing respondents to potentially respond in English while reading the Spanish column. They also noted that the concern about a backlash effect – a reduction of English-speaking response rates due to the form containing both languages – did not occur.
Brick et al. (2012) expanded upon this research to study the effects of using Spanish materials in a survey not conducted by the Census Bureau (and where participation is not required by law). Their experiments were done in the National Household Education Survey (NHES), a two-phase mail survey that was transitioning from a telephone survey. The sample was selected from a national address-based sampling (ABS) frame from a commercial vendor based on U.S. Postal Service delivery files. In this two-phase methodology, the first phase was a screening questionnaire that determined if children were present in the household and thus eligible for the topical interview. If the household returned the screener and had children, then they were mailed the second-phase topical instrument appropriate for the age or grade of the child.

They used materials in Spanish for addresses where Spanish-speakers were expected to be highly concentrated. They defined high concentration as having one of two characteristics: 1) the address was in a census track with at least 13 percent of households in the tract classified as linguistically isolated Spanish-speakers from the 2000 census definition, or, 2) the name for resident at the address had a surname that was likely of Hispanic origin. We refer to these addresses as targeted addresses because they are most likely to have Spanish-speakers. We often refer to these as non-targeted areas.

The NHES experiment had four screener language treatment groups that were used in a supplemental sample selected from the targeted addresses:

- Dual – used separate English and Spanish materials in the same package for all screener mailings;
- Bilingual – used bilingual materials (English and Spanish in one instrument similar to the Census Bureau’s approach) for all screener mailings;
- English – used English-only materials for all screener mailings (Spanish speakers were notified with a reminder postcard to call in for Spanish materials; and
- English/English/Dual – used English-only in the first two mailings of the screener, but dual materials in the final nonresponse mailing.

In addition to the supplemental sample they experimentally tested these same treatments in their national sample, although they did not include the Bilingual treatment. If the respondent filled in the Spanish screener, then a Spanish topical instrument was mailed in the second phase.

In the targeted areas, the response rates were improved by including materials in both languages consistent with the earlier findings of the Census Bureau. These findings confirmed that response rates could be improved by mailing in both languages in targeted areas.

Brick et al. (2012) also found that sending the materials in both languages in areas without a high concentration of Hispanics could improve response rates – a new result. The difference between the Dual treatment and the English-only treatment was 8 percentage points, but the sample size was small and the difference was not statistically significant. This 8 percentage point difference was in the overall rate (the product of the screener and the topical response rates), and was largely due to the much higher response rate at the topical
phase. This was associated with those responding in Spanish getting the more extensive topical questionnaire in Spanish. At the screener level, the difference was only small and not statistically significant. As noted above, the Bilingual treatment was not tested in the non-targeted sample, but produced generally the same results as the Dual treatment in the supplemental sample in the targeted areas.

They noted that the increased participation by Spanish-speakers was supported by accommodation theory (Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone 1994), which is similar to social psychology theories used in surveys such as reciprocity (Groves, Caildini, and Couper 1992), and social exchange theory (Dillman, Smith, and Christian 2014). These theories suggest that when the survey request affirms group values we can expect more participation. In the case of areas with low representation of Spanish-only speakers, exchange theory predicts the opposite of a backlash effect where participation is driven by survey evidence of support and inclusion of other groups motivating response.

3. Experiments in Two Surveys

Below, we describe subsequent experiments in two very different surveys that attempted to expand on the work of Brick et al. One study is a criminal victimization survey, and the second is a health communication survey. These two surveys also differ from the NHES because they are one-phase surveys, whereas the NHES had two-phases (screening for eligibility then following up with a topical questionnaire in eligible households). The two surveys discussed below did not have separate screening and topical instruments.

As described above, the experiment in the NHES confirmed Census Bureau results that mailing survey materials in both English and Spanish to targeted addresses where Spanish-speakers were most likely to be living was successful in increasing the response in these areas. Furthermore, the response rate of those who were not Spanish-speakers was not lower as a result of including the Spanish materials. As a result, both of the surveys below accepted this approach as best practice and always sent materials in both languages in the targeted areas.

The two surveys undertook experiments in the non-targeted areas, because the NHES results were the first to assess this treatment and they were based on small samples. They also extend the research to determine whether the results of the NHES experiments could be extended to a single-phase survey where the first mailing involved a full topical questionnaire rather than a screener questionnaire. This is an important extension because the two-phase approach is primarily restricted to the situation where the eligible survey population is a relatively small subgroup of the population. For example, in the NHES the subgroup eligible for the topical instrument was parents of children who were in elementary or high school.

3.1 Local-Area Crime Survey

In 2015 and 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and Westat tested a mail survey that could be used to supplement the U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The NCVS is a national stratified multistage probability panel survey in which the first interview with a household is conducted face-to-face. The survey design of the NCVS is described in U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014). The mail survey
that was tested is called the American Crime Victimization Survey (ACVS), later named the Local-Area Crime Survey. It asked sampled households to report their experiences with criminal victimization, their views about the safety of their neighborhoods, and their rating of local police. The goal of the ACVS was to develop and conduct a field test of an instrument that local jurisdictions could field to measure changes in victimization and community perceptions since the NCVS is too expensive to sample and complex to administer at this geographical level.

Brick and Lohr (2018) describe the experimental design of the ACVS and the tests of different questionnaire formats and protocols. The test was performed in the 40 largest (by population) Core-Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) in the United States (these are large urban areas). Addresses were randomly sampled within each CBSA, and the sampled addresses then were randomly assigned to different experimental factor levels independently within CBSAs.

Separate samples in the same CBSAs were fielded in both years for experiments unrelated to the Spanish questionnaire test. A questionnaire was mailed to each sampled address that any adult in the household could complete and return. Both English- and Spanish-language questionnaires and letters were sent to all sampled addresses in Census tracts with a high percentage of linguistically isolated households or that had a Hispanic surname. This was not an experiment and we consider this best practice (based on the findings from Brick et al. 2012). As a result, data from these areas are not discussed fully here. The NHES definition of targeted or high concentration addresses was used in this study.

In the tracts outside linguistically isolated areas and for addresses not associated with Spanish surnames, bilingual survey materials were sent to a subsample of addresses across all 40 CBSAs. The bilingual survey materials included separate English and Spanish questionnaires with a cover letter printed in both English and Spanish similar to the NHES Dual treatment. In 2015, a random subsample of 2,000 addresses were sent the bilingual materials while the rest of the sample (over 201,000 addresses) were sent English-only materials. In 2016, a subsample of 2,352 addresses were assigned to the bilingual treatment and the remainder (almost 146,000) were sent English-only materials.

In the 2015 experiment, the effect of including bilingual materials in the non-targeted addresses was a significant increase in the response rate of about 2.6 percentage points (s.e. 1.1%, p < .05) as compared to sending English-only instruments. The response rates for the experimental bilingual treatment was 47.3 percent and for the English-only treatment it was 44.7 percent. The difference (0.5 percentage points) is not statistically significant, but nominally this difference is in the opposite direction from the 2015 ACVS experiment. Figure 1 shows the estimated rates for both years.

\[ \text{In the 2016 experiment, the response rate for the experimental bilingual treatment was 36.7% and for the English-only treatment it was 37.3%}. \]

2 The 2016 sample excludes the subsample of addresses that were included in surveys for both years to assess the effect of going back to the same cases over time.
The response rate increase for 2015 is in the same direction as reported in Brick et al. (2012), but the differences are not as large as the overall NHES estimate. The sample sizes in the Brick et al. experiment were much smaller than those in the ACVS experiments. The 2016 ACVS experiment showed no statistically significant difference in the response rate for the two treatments. These findings suggest that although mailing in both languages to non-targeted addresses does not reduce overall response rate, it is likely to have a small or null effect on response rates. Later, we speculate on the possible reasons that might account for differences between the ACVS and NHES.

![Figure 1. Response rates for ACVS bilingual experiment in non-targeted areas, 2015 and 2016](https://archivesofpsychology.org)

While the overall response rate is important, the primary goal of mailing in both English and Spanish is to increase response from those households that speak Spanish primarily or exclusively. Brick et al. (2012) showed this effect for the targeted cases (in high concentration areas or those with Hispanic surnames). The ACVS results supported the finding that sending both language instruments is effective for targeted addresses. For example, 26 percent of completed questionnaires in the targeted areas used the Spanish instrument in the ACVS done in 2015.

In the ACVS experimental cases in 2015 that were not targeted, only about two percent of the completed interviews were from the Spanish language instruments. This is considerably lower than the 26 percent of completed questionnaires that were done in Spanish in the targeted addresses. While the lower percentage is expected given the nature of the areas, the return in Spanish is still relatively small for the non-targeted cases. In 2016, the percentage of completes in the non-targeted areas done in Spanish was very similar to those from 2015 (i.e., just under 2 percent done in Spanish in the non-target areas).
Another measure of the effectiveness of the bilingual mailing is the percentage who report they are of Hispanic or Latino origin. There was no evidence that sending the materials in both languages increased the percentage of adults who were of Hispanic or Latino origin in either the 2015 or 2016 ACVS experiments. This result is in sharp contrast with the Brick et al. finding that the provision of Spanish materials substantially increased the percentage of persons of Latino origin (although the sample size was very small in that experiment).

3.2 Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS)

HINTS is a cross sectional survey sponsored by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) that collects nationally representative data on health communication and health outcomes. Westat does the data collection. HINTS is administered about once per year to a fresh sample of approximately 14,000 households and achieves response rates around 34 percent (AAPOR RR1) in recent years. HINTS began in 2003 as a telephone survey; starting in 2011 HINTS converted to exclusively mail data collection using an ABS sampling frame. Each HINTS data collection cycle includes a core set of questions along with several rotating and special interest modules, so each survey cycle differs somewhat in content.

In 2013 and 2014, HINTS conducted experiments to evaluate the impact of bilingual materials for non-target households. Prior to this, bilingual materials were only mailed to addresses identified as likely Hispanic based on the same two indicators used by the NHES study (located in a linguistically isolated census tract or had a Hispanic surname); non-targeted households could request a Spanish questionnaire. In both 2013 and 2014, the bilingual materials included separate English and Spanish questionnaires and cover letters. As with the ACVS experiment, this is similar to the NHES Dual treatment.

The experiment conducted in HINTS 2013 focused on increasing Hispanic representation and overall response by extending mailing bilingual materials to non-targeted households. Details of the sample design and mailing protocol are found in Caporaso et al. (2013). For the treatment group (non-targeted households who were sent bilingual materials), 1 percent returned a Spanish questionnaire compared to a negligible 0.1 percent of the control group where the household needed to request Spanish materials in order for them to be mailed. Comparatively, 21 percent of households in targeted areas (where all households received bilingual materials) returned a Spanish survey. The response rate for the treatment group was lower (39.1 vs 41.5 percent), but not significantly different at the .05 level.

The experiment conducted in 2014 manipulated the saliency of the Spanish questionnaire by placing it on top of the English questionnaire in the mailing package. The mail package remains a bilingual package for households in the treatment group, but the potential for a backlash effect may be greater with the increased prominence of the Spanish materials. Details of the sample design for this cycle and data collection procedures are described in Westat (2014). The percentage returning a Spanish survey was nearly equivalent between the treatment (Spanish prominent) and control group (5.1% and 5.3%). This suggests that the ordering of materials had little effect on their saliency. Similar to the 2013 experiment, the response
rate for the group sent both languages was marginally lower than the response rate for English-only group (34.8% and 35.3%, respectively), and this difference was not statistically significantly. No statistically significant difference was observed between the groups in the percentage reporting being Hispanic (16.7% and 18.5%, respectively). Figure 2 shows the response rates for both the 2013 and 2014 experiments.

As observed in the ACVS, mailing bilingual materials to targeted areas in HINTS was effective for eliciting response from primarily or only Spanish-speaking respondents. While the bilingual materials did not result in significant increases in response, there was no substantial backlash effect from including both languages and the response rate was not affected by the order of the materials.

Figure 2. Response rates for HINTS bilingual experiment in non-targeted areas, 2013 and 2014

4 Discussion

Earlier studies in the decennial census, ACS, and the NHES established that mailing English and Spanish questionnaires and materials in areas with high concentrations of Spanish-speakers was effective. The mailing in both English and Spanish increased the response rates, the participation of Spanish-speakers, and the percentage of persons of Hispanic origin who completed the survey in these targeted areas.

Based on these findings, the ACVS and HINTS sent both languages to all those with targeted addresses. Although these surveys did not experiment in the targeted areas, their findings in terms of response rates and percentages completing the instruments in Spanish were consistent with the earlier studies. Based on the entire series of studies, it is clear that self-administered surveys should mail both languages for addresses with high concentration of Spanish speakers in most cases.
The experiments in the ACVS and HINTS built upon the previous research, especially the initial NHES findings, to determine if these methods for increasing response rates for Spanish-speakers in self-administered survey could be extended for the non-targeted areas. In non-targeted areas, the ACVS and HINTS did not replicate the increased response rate from mailing in both languages that was found in the NHES. The response rates for addresses sent materials in both languages in the ACVS and the HINTS were essentially the same as the response rate for those sent English-only materials. Using both languages did not depress response rates, but the extra cost of printing and mailing materials in two languages did not accomplish the primary goal of increasing the participation of Spanish-speakers or persons of Hispanic origin substantially. The postage and printing costs would be substantial for one-phase surveys like the ACVS and HINTS, and the insignificant yields in terms of Spanish questionnaires and persons of Hispanic origin may not justify these expenditures.

A number of differences in the ACVS and HINTS could have been responsible for the differences in the findings from the NHES. One possibility is that the very different topics (crime victimization in the ACVS, health communication in the HINTS, and education in the NHES) could account for some of the difference. Although this is possible, we suspect this is not a major contributor. Even though the ACVS and HINTS overall response rates were lower than the NHES rates, they are still good by today’s standards. It is not unusual for the survey topic to affect the overall level of response, but a differential effect for a subgroup like Spanish-speakers given the topics of the ACVS and HINTS seems unlikely. Furthermore, the effects of sending the materials in both languages in the targeted areas for the ACVS and HINTS was very similar to the effects in the NHES.

A stronger case can be made that a major reason is the difference between the two-phase and one-phase nature of the surveys. The NHES two-phase approach had a short screener with a longer topical questionnaire that was only sent to the eligible households. The ACVS and HINTS were one-phase surveys where there was no screening for eligibility. Thus, a longer questionnaire was sent to all addresses in the ACVS and HINTS. This survey request may have seemed more burdensome to the sampled households in the ACVS and HINTS than with the NHES because the package was bulkier with much longer surveys. Perceived burden may have reduced response rates slightly as a result (Crawford, Couper, and Lamias 2001). It is also the case that those requiring a Spanish questionnaire are less educated (Gambino, Grieco, and Acosta 2014; Krogstad 2016). The longer surveys may have deterred them from responding to a greater extent than the NHES short screener.

Yet another possibility is that the NHES findings for the non-targeted areas may have been due to the small sample sizes, and the rates would not be replicated in other two-phase surveys. Brick et al. (2012) raised this possibility when discussing their original findings.

This new research raises some additional observations. First, the HINTS experiment that found no effect due to the placement of the Spanish instruments suggests that households consider Spanish materials to be an acceptable practice in government surveys. Just a few years ago, survey managers were worried about a possible backlash effect when mailing in both languages. For most surveys, this effect seems to be nonexistent.
We indicated earlier that the results of these experiments may also be extended to self-administered surveys conducted on the Internet. Web-push and Web-only (surveys conducted solely on the Web) surveys are increasingly replacing surveys conducted only by paper. The language research from mail surveys needs to expand to deal with these new approaches.

Most Web-push and Web-only surveys use address-based samples and start by mailing sampled households a letter asking them to go to the Web to complete the survey. After additional contacts to increase Web participation in Web-push designs, the nonrespondents are sent a mail questionnaire to boost the overall response rate, as well as to allow households without Web access the ability to respond. HINTS has moved in this direction, as well as the ACS and the 2020 Decennial Census.

Web-only surveys follow the same general procedures, but request all respondents to use the Web; no questionnaire is ever mailed to any households. Research done in the early 2010s found Web-only surveys had lower response rates than those that used mixed modes or paper questionnaires only (Messer and Dillman 2011), but this has been changing as more households use the Web on a regular basis. For example, the American National Election Survey (DeBell et al. 2018) was able to obtain a response rate of 44 percent using Web-only.

When the Web is used as the first or only response mode, the materials mailed to sampled households is essentially only a letter requesting participation. In this regard, Web surveys are much more like the two-phase screener. The additional cost of printing is minimal and postage may be slightly different if two languages are used instead of English-only. We hypothesize that using both languages in the non-targeted areas could increase the participation of Spanish-speakers and persons of Hispanic origin. Because all the research findings to date show no loss in response rate from using both languages, we strongly encourage further research into this area.

The web also offers the additional option of allowing respondents to tailor the language of the instrument to their preference. Respondents can choose their language and the program can route the individual to the appropriate instrument. Future research should incorporate the feasibility of using this approach for those Web-push and Web-only response modes.

Including materials to allow Spanish-speakers to respond to a self-administered survey easily is essential to obtaining their participation. Sending targeted addresses the materials in both languages is especially important because this greatly increases the yield in terms of the number of Spanish-speakers and persons of Hispanic origin, and it does so at a relatively low cost. The value of sending materials in both languages to non-targeted addresses depends on a number of factors. If it does not increase costs substantially, as we argue should be the usual case in Web or Web-push surveys, then there is potential value using both languages. Based on most of the findings, this additional effort is not expected to have substantial effects in terms of the percentage of persons of Hispanic origin. Nevertheless, in very large sample size surveys, the mailing in both languages is likely to have some positive effect in terms of yield. Sending English-only to the non-targeted addresses is more justifiable in one-phase surveys where the printing and postage costs are higher. In these surveys, the additional yield may be too low to justify the expense.
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