

Using a Probability-Based Online Panel to Survey American Jews

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Statement of problem/hypotheses

Surveying rare populations has become more methodologically challenging in recent years because of declining response rates and the increased cost of survey research. The rising costs of surveying American Jews, who likely comprise less than 2% of the American population, exemplify the challenges researchers face when surveying such low incidence populations. One possible solution to this problem is to employ probability-based online panels as a low-cost alternative to RDD probability-based sampling of the American Jewish population. This poster demonstrates potential uses of a probability-based online panel to conduct survey research on American Jews including administering surveys to rare populations on time sensitive issues, correcting for bias in list-frames in dual-frame studies, and conducting benchmark studies on rare populations at a fraction of the cost.

Explanation of design and methodology

The study used Knowledge Networks' KnowledgePanel® a non-volunteer access panel, in which potential panel members are chosen via a statistically valid sampling method (ABS) and using known published sampling frames that cover 97% of the U.S. population (for more information on KnowledgePanel® methodology, please see <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/knpanel>). Jewish panel members were identified by a question about religion which is included in the a survey sent to all members when they join the panel. Because many people with Jewish background identify as non-religious, two follow-up questions were asked of panelists who selected "No Religion" to determine if they considered themselves Jewish for any reason or had a Jewish mother or father.

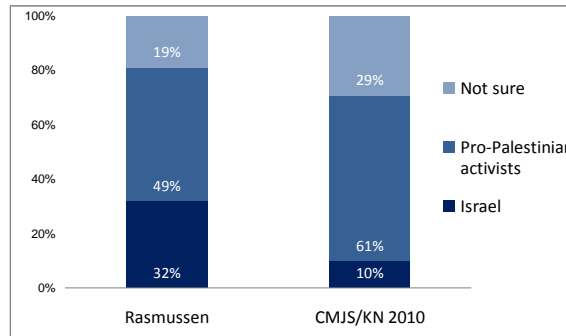
Results

Three surveys were conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Knowledge Networks that illustrate the potential uses of online panels for surveying rare populations.

Survey 1

In May 2010 Israeli forces boarded a Turkish ship carrying supplies to Gaza, and nine people on the ship were killed in the ensuing violence. Within a month of the incident a survey was fielded asking about reaction to the incident as well as a battery of question on opinions and attitudes towards Israel in general. The survey found that American Jews were more likely to blame the pro-Palestinian activists for the violence than the US population.

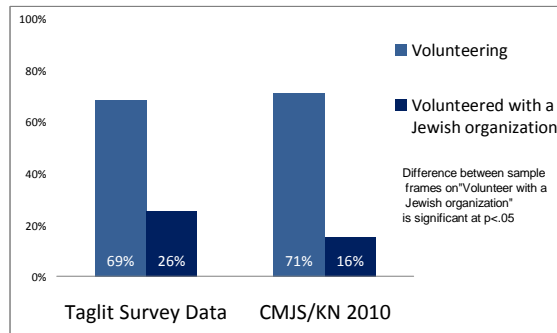
Figure 1: Blame for the Flotilla Incident



Survey 2

Surveying young adults poses significant methodological problems due to the group's high reliance on cell phones and high mobility. A study of young adults who are members of a rare population is thus an even more daunting challenge. In the fall of 2010 a second study examined the volunteer habits of Jews between the ages of 18-35. A dual-frame study was conducted using applicants to the Taglit-Birthright Israel program as the primary list frame and the young Jewish adults in KnowledgePanel® as a supplemental area frame. A comparison of the two frames found that while both had similar levels of overall volunteer participation the Taglit-Birthright frame overestimated participation in Jewish volunteer organizations.

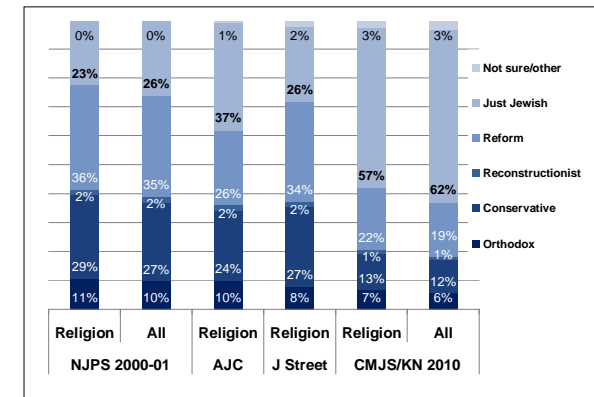
Figure 2: Volunteer Habits by Sample Frame



Survey 3

In December 2010, in an attempt to replicate previous efforts at creating benchmarks of the American Jewish population, a study was administered asking about religious affiliation, ritual practice, and a number of other measures of interest to the Jewish community. The study found a substantially higher proportion of Jews without any particular denominational affiliation in compared to previous studies. There are a number of possible sources for this discrepancy, including differences in question wording between the surveys and actual changes in Jewish denominational affiliation in the past 10 years. While it is not clear what fully accounts for the differences, it is likely caused by bias either in the KnowledgePanel® or in other surveys of American Jewry.

Figure 3: Jewish Denominational Affiliation by Survey (for Jews by Religion and All Jews)



Conclusions and Implications

The paradox inherent in efforts to examine the effectiveness of a given mode of surveying rare populations is that if valid benchmark estimates existed then the search of alternative methods would likely be moot. The methodological rigor of the Knowledge Networks sample suggests that estimates of Jewish characteristics derived from it are the most accurate available. However, the only sources available as comparison estimates all have some methodological characteristics that cast doubt on their representativeness. Although additional work is needed to resolve disagreements between different data sources and address potential bias in the KnowledgePanel®, probability based-online panels have the potential to serve many useful purposes in studies of rare populations such as American Jews.