



**Pew Internet**  
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## **17% of cell phone owners do most of their online browsing on their phone, rather than a computer or other device**

*Most do so for convenience, but for some their phone is their only option for online access*

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<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Cell-Internet-Use-2012.aspx>

## Key Findings

Some 88% of U.S. adults own a cell phone of some kind as of April 2012, and more than half of these cell owners (55%) use their phone to go online. We call these individuals “cell internet users” throughout this report, and this represents a notable increase from the 31% of cell owners who said that they used their phone to go online as recently as April 2009.

Moreover, 31% of these current cell internet users say that they *mostly go online using their cell phone*, and not using some other device such as a desktop or laptop computer. That works out to 17% of *all adult cell owners* who are “cell-mostly internet users”—that is, who use their phone for most of their online browsing.

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### The size of the cell-mostly internet population

*Based on U.S. adults within each group*

	<u>% of cell internet users who...</u>	<u>% of all cell owners who...</u>
Go online <i>mostly</i> on cell phone	31%	17%
Use internet on cell phone, but go online mostly using other device	60	33
Use both equally / It depends	9	5
Don't go online using cell phone	n/a	45

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-3.7 percentage points based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone (n=929).

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Young adults and non-whites are especially likely to use their cell phones for the majority of their online activity:

- Nearly half of all 18-29 year olds (45%) who use the internet on their cell phones do most of their online browsing on their mobile device.
- Half (51%) of African-American cell internet users do most of their online browsing on their phone, double the proportion for whites (24%). Two in five Latino cell internet users (42%) also fall into the “cell-mostly” category.

Additionally, those with an annual household income of less than \$50,000 per year and those who have not graduated college are more likely than those with higher levels of income and education to use their phones for most of their online browsing.

When asked for the main reason why they conduct most of their online browsing on a mobile phone, these cell-mostly users point to three major factors:

- *Cell phones are convenient, always available* – 64% of cell-mostly internet users mention factors related to convenience or the always-available nature of mobile phones when asked for the main reason why they do most of their online browsing on their cell phone.
- *Cell phones better fit people’s usage habits* – 18% of cell-mostly internet users say that their online habits (or the habits of those around them) make their cell phone a simpler, more effective choice for going online. Just under one in ten (7%) say that they do mostly basic activities when they go online and do not require a more advanced device, while 6% say that they simply find their cell phone to be easier to use than a traditional computer.
- *Cell phones fill access gaps* – 10% of cell-mostly internet users point towards a lack of other access options as the main reason why they primarily use their phone to go online, with 6% saying that they do not have access to a computer and 4% saying that they do not have any other source of internet access beyond their mobile connection.

## About this survey

These are the findings from a national telephone survey conducted March 15-April 3, 2012 among 2,254 adults age 18 and over, including 903 interviews conducted on the respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for all cell phone owners (n=1,954) is plus or minus 2.6 percentage points, and the margin of error for cell phone owners who go online using their phones (n=929) is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

## Main findings: A majority of adult cell owners (55%) now go online using their phones

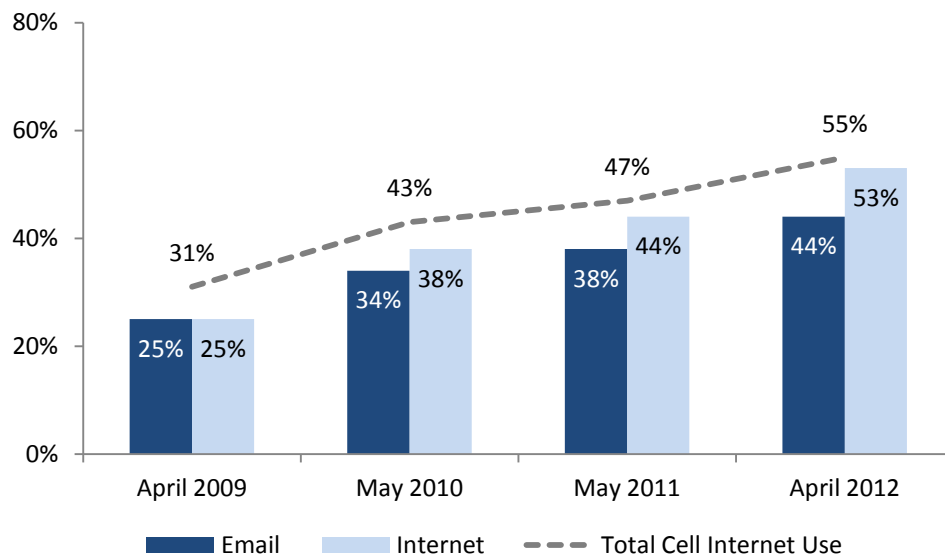
More than half of all adult cell owners now use their phones to go online as of April 2012. Our definition of a “cell internet user” includes anyone who uses the internet or email on their cell phone, and 55% of all adult cell phone owners use their phones for one or both of these reasons. Because 88% of U.S. adults now own a cell phone, that works out to 49% of *all* U.S. adults who go online using a cell phone at least occasionally. Three-quarters of these cell phone internet users (74%) say that they go online using their phone on a typical day<sup>1</sup>—meaning that on a typical day fully 41% of all cell owners are using their phones to go online.

Online access using cell phones has become steadily more commonplace since the Pew Internet Project began measuring this behavior in the spring of 2009. At that point 31% of cell owners used either the internet or email on their mobile devices. This increase in cell phone internet use has occurred in tandem with the recent explosion in smartphone adoption. Just over half of American cell owners (53%, representing 46% of all U.S. adults) now [own a smartphone](#) of some kind, and 90% of these smartphone owners say that they use their phone to go online.<sup>2</sup>

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### More than half of adult cell owners go online using their phones

*% of adult cell owners who use the internet or email on their phone*



**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project tracking surveys. 2012 figures based on March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Margin of error is +/-2.6 percentage points based on cell phone owners (n=1,954).

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<sup>1</sup> Overall, 82% of all internet users say that they go online on a typical day.

<sup>2</sup> On a typical day, 81% of these smartphone internet users go online using their phone.

## The demographics of cell phone internet usage

Cell phone internet usage is generally highest among groups with relatively high levels of smartphone ownership, and every major demographic group is more likely to engage in this activity in 2012 than was the case in 2009. The fastest-growing group over that time period is 25-34 year olds—fully 80% of cell owners in this age group now use their phones to go online, a 37-point increase from the 43% of such cell owners who did so in 2009.

Other age groups with high levels of cell phone internet usage include young adults ages 18-24 (75% of cell owners in this age group use their phones to go online) and those ages 35-44 (68%). On the other hand, seniors (defined as those 65 years of age or older) have joined the cell internet user ranks in modest numbers. Although seven in ten seniors now own a cell phone, just 16% of them use their phones to go online—this is by far the lowest usage rate of any major demographic group.

In addition to age, other key demographic differences in cell phone internet use include:

- **Race/Ethnicity** – Roughly two-thirds of black and Latino cell owners go online using their mobile phones, compared with half of whites.
- **Geographic location** – Even though the proportion of rural cell owners who go online using their phones has more than doubled since April 2009, urban and suburban cell owners remain significantly more likely than their rural counterparts to go online using their phones.
- **Household income and Educational attainment** – Along with having high overall levels of smartphone ownership, the relatively well-off and well-educated are more likely than cell owners with lower levels of income and education to use their phones to go online.

## Changes in cell phone internet use by demographic, 2009-2012

*% of cell owners within each group who use the internet or email on their cell phone*

	<u>April 2009</u>	<u>April 2012</u>	<u>Change</u>
<b>All cell owners</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>+24 percentage points</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	35	57	+22
Women	27	54	+28
<b>Age</b>			
18-24	45	75	+30
25-34	43	80	+37
35-44	38	68	+30
45-54	28	53	+25
55-64	17	30	+13
65+	7	16	+9
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, non-Hispanic	27	52	+25
Black, non-Hispanic	44	64	+20
Hispanic	44	63	+19
<b>Household Income</b>			
Less than \$30,000	26	50	+24
\$30,000-\$49,999	31	52	+21
\$50,000-\$74,999	29	60	+31
\$75,000+	43	69	+26
<b>Education Level</b>			
Less than High School	28	45	+17
High School Grad	24	49	+25
Some College	35	57	+22
College+	36	64	+28
<b>Geographic Location</b>			
Urban	30	62	+32
Suburban	25	56	+31
Rural	17	44	+27

**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-2.6 percentage points based on cell phone owners (n=1,954). 2009 data based on March 26-April 19, 2009 tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 561 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone.

## 31% of cell internet users go online mostly using their cell phone, rather than using a computer or some other device

When asked what device they normally use to access the internet, 31% of cell phone internet users say that they *mostly go online using their cell phone*. Throughout this report, this group will be referred to as “cell-mostly internet users.” Meanwhile, six in ten cell internet users (60%) say that they *mostly go online using some other type of device*, such as a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer. This group will be referred to as “cell-occasionally internet users.” An additional 7% volunteered that they use their cell phone and some other device equally to go online, and 2% said that their choice of device depends on the situation at hand. Since just over half of all cell owners use their phones to go online, this means that the cell-mostly group represents 17% of *all* adult cell phone owners in the United States.

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**Source:** Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-3.7 percentage points based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone (n=929).

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The 31% of cell internet users who go online mostly using their phones is similar to the 27% of such internet users who went online mostly using their phone the first time we asked this question in May 2011. And as we saw in our 2011 survey, certain groups are especially likely to say that they conduct most of their online browsing using a mobile phone:

- Young adults – Nearly half of cell internet users ages 18-29 (45%) do most of their online browsing on their phone.
- Non-whites – Half (51%) of black cell internet users do most of their online browsing on their phone, double the proportion for whites (24%). Two in five Latino cell internet users also fall into the “cell-mostly” category.
- Those with an annual household income of less than \$50,000 per year, and those who have not graduated college.

## Which cell internet users go online mostly using their phones?

55% of cell owners use the internet or email on their phones, and 31% of these cell internet users go online MOSTLY using their cell phone instead of some other device. (Example of how to read this chart: 45% of cell internet users ages 18-29 go online mostly using their phone, rather than some other device)

Total for cell internet users (n=929)	31%
<b>Gender</b>	
Men (n=469)	29
Women (n=460)	32
<b>Age</b>	
18-29 (n=260)	45**
30-49 (n=383)	29*
50+ (n=274)	11
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White, non-Hispanic (n=601)	24
Black, non-Hispanic (n=137)	51*
Hispanic (n=115)	42*
<b>Household Income</b>	
Less than \$30,000 (n=173)	43*
\$30,000-\$49,999 (n=138)	36*
\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=136)	24
\$75,000+ (n=341)	21
<b>Education level</b>	
High school grad or less (n=278)	39*
Some college (n=234)	38*
College+ (n=412)	16
<b>Geographic Location</b>	
Urban (n=291)	33
Suburban (n=481)	28
Rural (n=118)	32

**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Margin of error is +/-3.7 percentage points based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone (n=929). \*Represents significant difference compared with non-starred rows in group. \*\*Represents significant difference compared with all other rows in group.

Compared to the overall population, these cell-mostly internet users have roughly similar ownership rates of various technology assets. However, they are considerably less likely than the “cell-occasionally”



group (those who go online using their phones but who *usually* use some other device) to own a desktop or laptop computer, to own an e-reader device, or to have a broadband connection at home.

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## How the “cell-mostly” population compares when it comes to technology usage and ownership

*% within each group who...*

	<u>All adults</u>	<u>“Cell-mostly” internet users</u>	<u>“Cell- occasionally” internet users</u>
Own desktop computer	58%	48%	71%*
Own laptop computer	61	72	81*
Own tablet computer	18	26	32
Own e-book reader	18	20	27*
Have broadband at home	66	70	89*

**Source:** Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults, +/-7.6 percentage points based on cell-mostly users (n=228) and +/-4.6 percentage points based on cell-occasionally users (n=621). \*Represents statistically significant differences between cell-occasionally and cell-mostly groups.

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## Why people go online mostly using their phones—a matter of convenience for many, but a necessity for some

For the first time ever in our May survey, we asked these cell-mostly internet users (the 31% of cell phone internet users who go online mostly using their phones) to tell us the main reason why they use their phone for the majority of their online browsing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This was asked as an open-ended question. Interviewers did not probe survey respondents to elaborate on their answers, and did not ask respondents to provide additional reasons for their usage patterns.

## Main reasons for going online mostly using cell phone

17% of adult cell phone owners say that they go online mostly using their cell phone instead of some other device; these are the factors they cite as their MAIN reason for doing so.

Cell phone is more convenient	38%
Cell phone is always with me	23
Mostly do basic activities online	7
Don't have a computer at home	6
Cell phone is easier to use than a computer	6
Use phone for work, or to go online while at work	4
Only have internet access on phone / No internet at home	4
Speed / Phone is faster than computer	2
Someone else is usually using computer	1
Other	6
Don't Know / Refuse	3
<b>Summary of reasons</b>	
<b>Convenience/Availability</b> (is more convenient + is always with me + speed/faster)	64%
<b>Usage</b> (mostly do basic online activities + easier to use + use for/at work + someone else usually on computer)	18
<b>Access</b> (don't have computer + no other internet access)	10

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, March 15-April 3, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,254 adults ages 18 and older, including 903 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-7.6 percentage points based on those who mostly use the internet on their cell phone (n=228).

Although the "cell-mostly" group is too small to conduct a detailed sub-group analysis of the reasons people do most of their browsing on a cell phone, their responses point toward three major themes that might influence this decision:

*Cell phones are convenient, always available* – Nearly two-thirds of cell-mostly users mention factors related to convenience or availability. Some 38% of cell-mostly users cited the convenience of cell phones as the main reason why they do most of their online browsing on their phone, and an additional 23% cited the fact that their cell phone is always with them.

*Cell phones better fit people's usage habits* – Roughly one in five cell-mostly users say that their online habits (or the habits of those around them) make their cell phone their preferred choice for going online. For example, 7% say that they do mostly basic activities when they go online and do not require a more advanced device, while 6% say that they simply find their cell phone to be easier to use than a

traditional computer. An additional 4% cite the demands of employment—they use their phones to stay connected with their jobs when out of the office, or to go online for personal reasons while on the job.

*Cell phones fill access gaps* – A total of one in ten cell-mostly users point towards a lack of other access options as the main reason why they primarily use their phone to go online, with 6% saying that they do not have a computer at home and 4% saying that they do not have any other source of online access at home.

Interestingly, the proportion of cell-mostly users who cite access concerns as the main reason why they do most of their browsing on their cell phone is substantially smaller than the proportion who do not have a broadband connection or home computer (for example, 30% of these cell-mostly users do not have a broadband connection at home, but just 4% cite a lack of access options as the main reason why they conduct most of their internet use on their phone).

Although we do not have the ability to account for this discrepancy directly, several intriguing possibilities suggest themselves:

- Access issues may be a second- or third-order concern for some cell-mostly users. Because we only asked for the *main* reason people mostly use their phones to go online, our data would not capture these secondary concerns.
- Some cell-mostly users may be choosing to opt out of traditional internet access in favor of their cell phone for the other reasons listed (i.e. cell phones are a more convenient form of access and/or fit better with their usage patterns).
- Even if they lack a computer or broadband connection *at home*, some of these users may be having their access needs sufficiently met elsewhere (such as at work or school).

# Survey Questions and Methodology

## Spring Tracking Survey 2012

Data for March 15–April 3, 2012

Princeton Survey Research Associates International for  
the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project

Sample: n=2,254 national adults, age 18 and older, including 903 cell phone interviews  
Interviewing dates: 03.15.2012 – 04.03.2012

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,254]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone owners [n=1,954]

Margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points for results based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone [n=929]

**Q17** Please tell me if you ever use your cell phone to do any of the following things. Do you ever use your cell phone to [INSERT ITEMS; ALWAYS ASK a-b FIRST in order; RANDOMIZE c-f]?

Based on cell phone owners

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Send or receive email				
Current [N=1,954]	44	56	*	*
August 2011 [N=1,948]	42	58	*	0
May 2011 [N=1,914]	38	62	0	*
December 2010 [N=1,982]	38	62	*	*
November 2010 [N=1,918]	34	66	0	*
September 2010 [N=2,485]	34	66	*	0
May 2010 [N=1,917]	34	66	0	0
January 2010 [N=1,891]	30	70	0	0
December 2009 [N=1,919]	29	70	*	*
September 2009 [N=1,868]	27	73	*	0
April 2009 [N=1,818]	25	75	*	0
December 2007 [N=1,704]	19	81	0	--

**Q17 continued...**

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
b. Access the internet				
Current	53	46	*	*
August 2011	48	52	*	0
May 2011	44	56	0	0
December 2010	42	58	*	*
November 2010	39	61	*	*
September 2010	39	61	*	0
May 2010	38	62	0	0
January 2010	34	66	0	0
December 2009	32	67	*	0
September 2009	29	71	*	0
April 2009	25	74	*	*

**Q19** Did you happen to use the internet on your cell phone YESTERDAY?

Based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone

	CURRENT		MAY 2011
%	74	Yes, used the internet on cell phone yesterday	70
	25	No, did not use the internet on cell phone yesterday	30
	1	Don't know	*
	0	Refused	0
	[n=929]		[n=746]

**Q20** Overall, when you use the internet, do you do that mostly using your cell phone or mostly using some other device like a desktop, laptop or tablet computer?

Based on those who use the internet or email on their cell phone

	CURRENT		MAY 2011
%	31	Mostly on cell phone	27
	60	Mostly on something else	62
	7	Both equally (VOL.)	10
	2	Depends (VOL.)	1
	*	Don't know	*
	*	Refused	*
	[n=929]		[n=746]

**Q21** What is the MAIN reason why you use the internet mostly on your cell phone, instead of using some other device? [PRECODED OPEN-END]

Based on those who mostly use the internet/email on their cell phone instead of another device [N=228]

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	38	Cell phone is more convenient
	23	Cell phone is always with me
	7	Mostly do basic activities online
	6	Cell phone is easier to use than a computer
	6	Don't have a computer at home
	4	Use phone for work / Use phone to go online while at work
	4	Only have internet access on cell phone / Don't have internet access at home
	2	Speed / Phone is faster than computer
	1	Someone else in household is usually on computer
	6	Other (SPECIFY)
	1	Don't know
	2	Refused

This report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from March 15 to April 3, 2012, among a sample of 2,254 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,351) and cell phone (903, including 410 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,803), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender.

For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage corrected for different probabilities of selection associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent's telephone usage patterns. This weighting also adjusts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The Hispanic origin was split out based on nativity; U.S. born and non-U.S. born. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2010 National Health Interview Survey.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

**Table 2: Sample Disposition**

Landline	Cell	
33,738	22,143	Total Numbers Dialed
1,502	332	Non-residential
1,491	45	Computer/Fax
8	----	Cell phone
15,401	8,237	Other not working
2,746	404	Additional projected not working
12,590	13,126	Working numbers
37.3%	59.3%	Working Rate
915	135	No Answer / Busy
3,472	4,465	Voice Mail
66	5	Other Non-Contact
8,137	8,521	Contacted numbers
64.6%	64.9%	Contact Rate
523	1,382	Callback
6,161	5,654	Refusal
1,453	1,485	Cooperating numbers
17.9%	17.4%	Cooperation Rate
52	43	Language Barrier
----	498	Child's cell phone
1,401	944	Eligible numbers
96.4%	63.6%	Eligibility Rate
50	41	Break-off
1,351	903	Completes
96.4%	95.7%	Completion Rate
11.1%	10.8%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 11 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 10.8 percent.