



**Pew Internet**  
Pew Internet & American Life Project

a project of the  
**PewResearchCenter**

# Americans and text messaging

**31% of text message users prefer texting to voice calls,  
and young adults stand out in their use of text  
messaging**

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<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Cell-Phone-Texting-2011.aspx>

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## Summary of findings

Some 83% of American adults own cell phones and three-quarters of them (73%) send and receive text messages. The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project asked those texters in a survey how they prefer to be contacted on their cell phone and 31% said they preferred texts to talking on the phone, while 53% said they preferred a voice call to a text message. Another 14% said the contact method they prefer depends on the situation.

Heavy text users are much more likely to prefer texting to talking. Some 55% of those who exchange more than 50 messages a day say they would rather get a text than a voice call.

Young adults are the most avid texters by a wide margin. Cell owners between the ages of 18 and 24 exchange an average of 109.5 messages on a normal day—that works out to more than 3,200 texts per month—and the typical or median cell owner in this age group sends or receives 50 messages per day (or 1500 messages per month).

Overall, the survey found that both text messaging and phone calling on cell phones have leveled off for the adult population as a whole. Text messaging users send or receive an average of 41.5 messages on a typical day, with the median user sending or receiving 10 texts daily – both figures are largely unchanged from what we reported in 2010. Similarly, cell owners make or receive an average of 12 calls on their cells per day, which is unchanged from 2010.

These results come from a nationally representative phone survey of 2,277 adults ages 18 and older conducted from April 26-May 22, 2011, including 755 cell phone interviews. The margin of error for the whole survey is +/-2.3 percentage points, while the margin of error for cell phone users is +/-2.7 percentage points.

*A note on the terminology used in this report:* Throughout this report, we will refer to the “average” (or mean) number of texts or calls per day, as well as to the number of texts or calls made by the “typical” (or median) user. The median is the midpoint that separates the upper half from the lower half of a given group, while the mean is a numerical average.

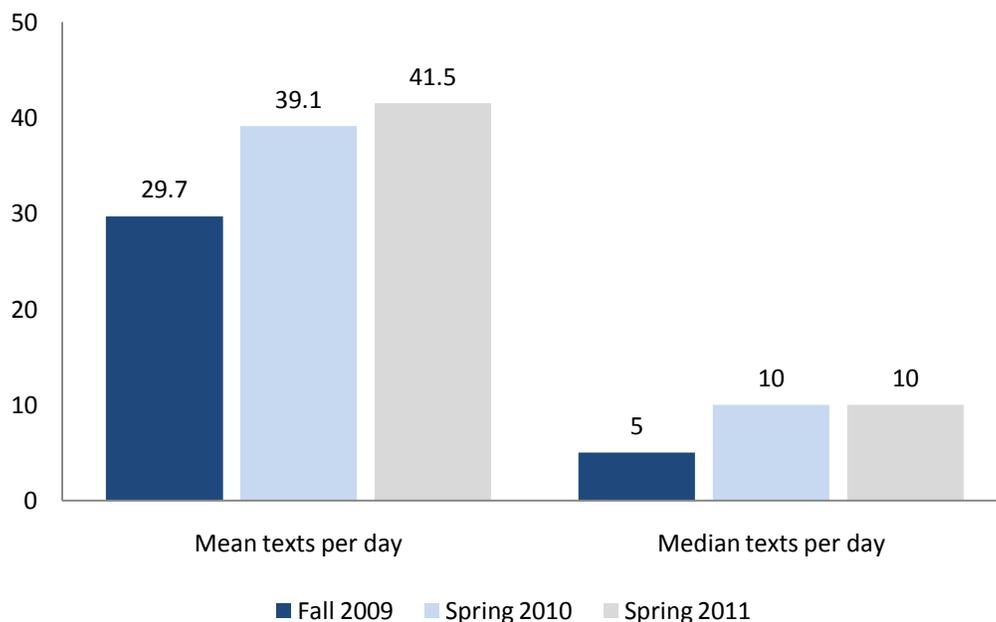
## Text messaging leveled off somewhat between 2010 and 2011, even as users send or receive more than 40 texts per day on average

Along with taking photos, text messaging is the most common non-voice application Americans use on their mobile phones. Some 73% of adult cell owners use the text messaging function on their phone at least occasionally (nearly identical to the 72% of cell owners who did so at a similar point in 2010). Text messaging users send or receive an average of 41.5 messages per day, with the median user sending or receiving 10 texts daily. Each of these figures is a notable increase from late 2009, and similar to what we found the last time we conducted an in-depth study of text messaging in the spring of 2010—at that point, the average number of texts sent or received per day was 39.1, with a median of 10.

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### Number of texts sent/received per day, 2009-2011

*Based on adults who use text messaging on their cell phones*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. \*May 2010 data is for English-speaking Hispanics only.

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## Young adults are far and away the most active users of text messaging

Young adults stand far above all other demographic groups when it comes to their usage of text messaging. Fully 95% of 18-29 year olds use the text messaging feature on their phones, and these users send or receive an average of 87.7 text messages on a normal day (with the median user in this age group sending or receiving 40 text messages per day).

The youngest adults (those between the ages of 18 and 24) are even more proficient in their texting habits. Both cell ownership and text messaging are nearly universal among 18-24 year olds—95% own a cell phone and 97% of these cell owners use text messaging—and the number of daily text messages this group creates or encounters on a daily basis is far and away the largest of any group:

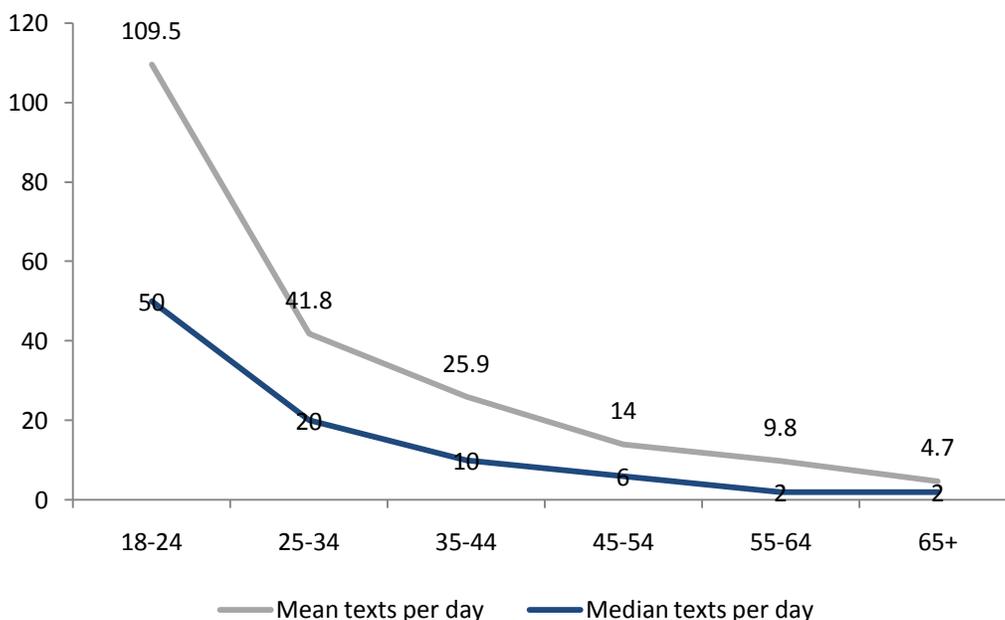
- 18-24 year olds send or receive an average of 109.5 text messages per day—that works out to more than 3,200 messages per month. The median 18-24 year old texter sends or receives 50 texts per day (or around 1,500 messages per month).
- One quarter of 18-24 year old text messaging users (23%) report sending or receiving more than 100 texts per day.
- Just over one in ten (12%) say that they send or receive more than 200 messages on an average day—that equals 6,000 or more messages per month.

To put these numbers in comparison, the average of 109.5 texts per day among 18-24 year olds is more than double the comparable figure for 25-34 year olds, and twenty-three times the figure for text messaging users who are 65 or older.

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### Number of texts sent/received per day, by age group

*Based on adults who use text messaging on their cell phones*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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No group compares to young adults when it comes to text messaging, although several other groups do text on a daily basis at higher-than-average levels. For example, non-whites (African Americans in particular) text more often than whites, and those with lower levels of income and education text more often than those at the higher end of the income and education scale. Smartphone owners (mean=52.0, median=20) also send and receive a significantly larger number of texts per day than owners of more basic phones (mean=29.7, median=10).

## # of text messages sent/received per day by different groups

*Based on cell owners who use text messaging*

	Mean	Median
<b>All text messaging users</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	40.9	10
Women	42.0	15
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	87.7	40
30-49	27.0	10
50-64	11.4	3
65+	4.7	2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	31.2	10
Black, non-Hispanic	70.1	20
Hispanic	48.9	20
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$30,000	58.7	20
\$30,000-\$49,999	40.2	15
\$50,000-\$74,999	25.9	10
\$75,000+	31.9	10
<b>Education level</b>		
Less than high school	69.4	20
High School diploma	45.4	15
Some College	53.0	15
College+	23.8	10

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

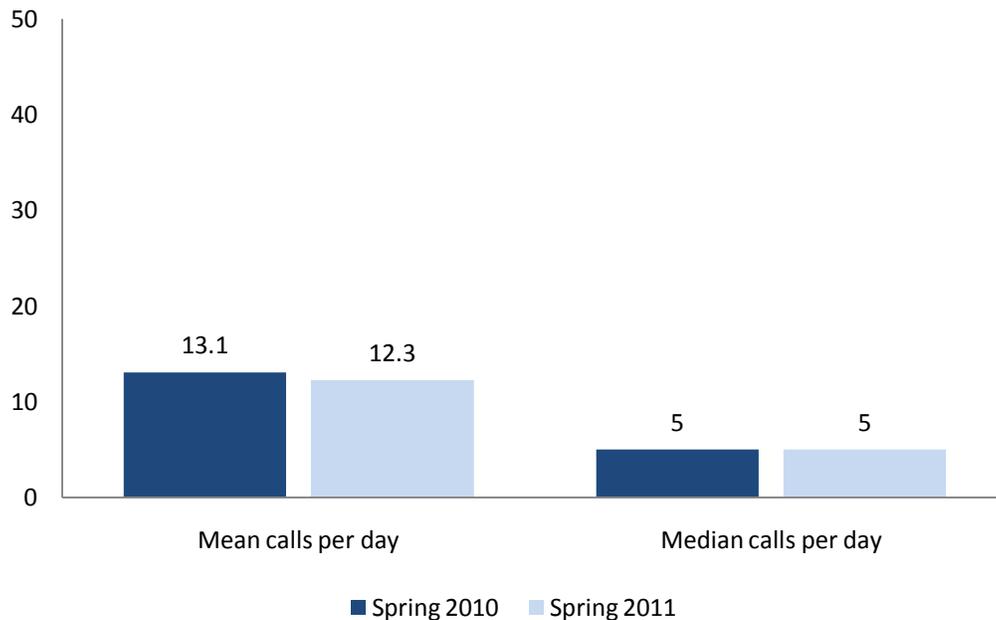
## How voice calling fits in

Like text messaging, voice calling has changed little on a year-to-year basis. Cell owners make or receive an average of 12.3 voice calls per day, with the median cell user engaging in five voice calls—both of these are largely unchanged from what we found in our May 2010 survey.<sup>1</sup> Voice calling remains extremely common overall, as just 4% of cell owners say that they make or receive no voice calls on an average day. By comparison 27% of cell owners do not use text messaging, even on occasion.

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### Number of calls made/received per day, 2010-2011

*Based on adult cell phone owners*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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Calling and texting are highly correlated, with cell owners who text often also making a large number of voice calls, and vice versa:

- Cell owners who send or receive 0-10 texts on a normal day, make or receive an average of 8.2 voice calls
- Cell owners who send or receive 11-20 texts on a normal day, make or receive an average of 13.6 voice calls

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<sup>1</sup> We have texting data going back to 2009, but 2010 was the first year in which we asked cell owners how many voice calls they make on an average day

- Cell owners who send or receive 21-50 texts on a normal day, make or receive an average of 18.6 voice calls
- Cell owners who send or receive more than 50 texts on a normal day, make or receive an average of 30.2 voice calls

Since calling and texting move in tandem, groups who engage in a high level of texting behavior (such as young adults and non-whites) also tend to engage in higher-than-average levels of voice calling.

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### # of voice calls per day by different groups

*Based on cell owners*

	Mean	Median
<b>All cell owners</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	13.8	6
Women	10.8	5
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	17.1	7
30-49	14.5	6
50-64	8.8	5
65+	3.8	2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	9.4	5
Black, non-Hispanic	19.6	10
Hispanic	17.2	10
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$30,000	14.9	6
\$30,000-\$49,999	13.0	5
\$50,000-\$74,999	11.7	5
\$75,000+	11.9	6
<b>Education level</b>		
Less than high school	11.6	9
High School diploma	15.4	5
Some College	10.1	5
College+	11.2	5

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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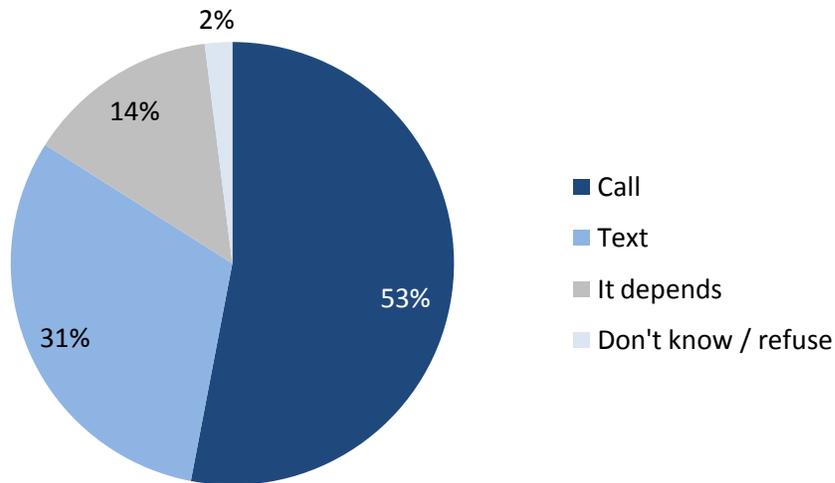
## A majority of cell owners prefer a voice call when they want to be reached, although the most active texters tend to prefer a text message

When asked how they prefer to be contacted if someone needs to reach them on their cell phone, a majority of cell owners (53%) say that they prefer a voice call, compared with 31% who say that they prefer to be contacted via text message. An additional 14% say that the contact method they prefer depends on the situation.

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### How cell owners prefer to be contacted

*Based on adult cell phone owners who use text messaging*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

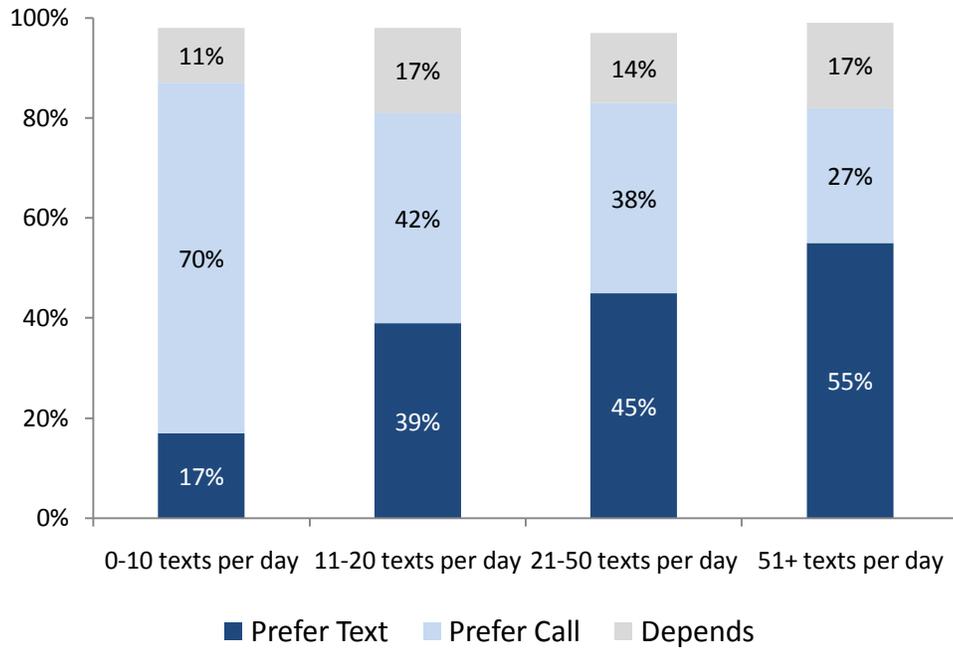
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Although a majority of cell owners prefer a phone call when someone needs to reach them, active text messaging users are much more likely to prefer texting to calling. Just under half (45%) of texters who send or receive 21-50 text messages per day say that they prefer it when people contact them using text messaging, while a majority of those who send or receive more than 50 texts per day (55%) say that text messaging is their preferred mode of contact (just 27% of these users prefer to be reached by voice call).

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## Preferred contact method, by number of texts sent/received per day

Based on adult cell phone owners who use text messaging



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26 – May 22, 2011 Spring Tracking Survey. n=2,277 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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## Survey questions

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### Spring Change Assessment Survey 2011

Final Topline

5/25/2011

Data for April 26–May 22, 2011

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

Sample: n= 2,277 national adults, age 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews  
Interviewing dates: 04.26.2011 – 05.22.2011

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,277]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,701]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone users [n=1,914]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on SNS or Twitter users [n=1,015]

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**Q18** On an average day, about how many phone calls do you make and receive on your cell phone? [OPEN-END]

**Q18a** [IF DK or REF IN PREVIOUS QUESTION, ASK:] Well, on an average day, would you say you make or receive... [READ 1-6]

Based on cell phone users

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>MAY 2010</u>
%	4	No phone calls on your cell phone	5
	48	1-5 calls	44
	23	6-10 calls	23
	13	11-20 calls	15
	4	21-30 calls	5
	7	More than 30 phone calls	7
	*	(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Can't say/Could not guess	1
	*	(DO NOT READ) Refused	*
	[n=1,914]		[n=1,917]

**Q20** On an average day, about how many text messages do you send and receive on your cell phone? [OPEN-END]

**Q20a** [IF DK or REF IN PREVIOUS QUESTION, ASK:] Well, on an average day, would you say you send or receive... [READ 1-7]

Based on cell phone users who text message

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>MAY 2010</u>	<u>SEPTEMBER 2009</u>
%	7	No text messages on your cell phone	9	8
	43	1 to 10 text messages	51	56
	15	11 to 20	13	11
	19	21 to 50	13	13
	9	51 to 100	7	6
	3	101 to 200	3	3
	4	More than 200 text messages a day	5	3
	*	(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Can't say/Could not guess	*	*
	*	(DO NOT READ) Refused	*	*
	[n=1,212]		[n=1,189]	[n=1,075]

**Q21** In general, if someone needs to get in touch with you on your cell phone, do you prefer that they call you OR that they send you a text message?

Based on cell phone users who text message [N=1,212]

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	53	Call
	31	Text
	14	It depends (VOL.)
	1	Don't know
	1	Refused

## Methodology

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 April 26 to May 22, 2011, among a sample of 2,277 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,522) and cell phone (755, including 346 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=1,701), 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 weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. 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 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the January-June 2010 National Health Interview Survey. Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

**Table 2: Sample Disposition**

Landline	Cell	
32,909	19,899	Total Numbers Dialed
1,416	364	Non-residential
1,428	35	Computer/Fax
32	----	Cell phone
16,833	8,660	Other not working
1,629	287	Additional projected not working
11,571	10,553	Working numbers
35.2%	53.0%	Working Rate
543	96	No Answer / Busy
3,091	3,555	Voice Mail
53	10	Other Non-Contact
7,884	6,892	Contacted numbers
68.1%	65.3%	Contact Rate
489	1,055	Callback
5,757	4,618	Refusal
1,638	1,219	Cooperating numbers
20.8%	17.7%	Cooperation Rate
56	33	Language Barrier
----	426	Child's cell phone
1,582	760	Eligible numbers
96.6%	62.3%	Eligibility Rate
60	5	Break-off
1,522	755	Completes
96.2%	99.3%	Completion Rate
13.6%	11.5%	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 13.6 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11.5 percent.