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Bureau of Labor Statistics
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SUBJECT: 2024 Estimation Response Rates for CE's Interview
and Diary Surveys

This memo shows 2024 response rates for the Interview and Diary Surveys. They are 40.6% for the Interview Survey, and 40.2% for the Diary Survey.

To be precise, they are “*estimation*” response rates.

There are two basic kinds of response rates – “collection” and “estimation” – and this memo shows estimation response rates. Collection response rates are the percent of eligible households that participate in a survey, and estimation response rates are the percent of eligible households that provide usable data to a survey. The difference between them is the eligible households that participate in a survey but provide unusable data. For CE that mostly means households in the Diary Survey that report so few expenditures they fail the minimal expenditure edit.

In 2024 the estimation response rate for the Interview Survey was 40.6%. That means 40.6% of “eligible” CUs participated in the survey and provided usable data. The table below shows this 2024 response rate along with those for 2020 through 2023 as a comparison.

Interview Survey

Collection Year	Independent Addresses Designated for the Survey	Type B or C Nonresponses	Total Eligible CUs	Type A Nonresponses	Interviews	Response Rate for Eligible CUs
2020	50,939	8,027	42,912	22,667	20,245	47.2%
2021	51,944	7,306	44,638	24,304	20,334	45.6%
2022	52,173	7,168	45,005	25,444	19,561	43.5%
2023	52,586	7,081	45,505	26,515	18,990	41.7%
2024	52,917	7,218	45,699	27,125	18,574	40.6%

In 2024 the estimation response rate for the Diary Survey was 40.2%. That means 40.2% of “eligible” CUs participated in the survey and provided usable data. The table below shows this 2024 response rate along with those for 2020 through 2023 as a comparison.

Diary Survey

Collection Year	Independent Addresses Designated for the Survey	Type B or C Nonresponses	Total Eligible CUs	Type A Nonresponses	Interviews	Response Rate for Eligible CUs
2020	36,132	5,693	30,439	19,824	10,615	34.9%
2021	36,106	5,902	30,204	18,137	12,067	40.0%
2022	36,334	5,790	30,544	17,835	12,709	41.6%
2023	36,506	5,599	30,907	18,518	12,389	40.1%
2024	36,642	5,502	31,140	18,633	12,507	40.2%

Type B or C nonresponses are housing units that are vacant, nonexistent, or ineligible for interview. Type A nonresponses are housing units which the interviewers were unable to contact or where the respondents refused to participate in the survey. The response rates stated above are based only on the eligible housing units (i.e., the designated sample less Type B and C nonresponses).

New Kinds of Type A Nonresponses

Beginning in November 2023, new protocols for interviewing CUs generated two new kinds of Type A nonresponses for the Interview and Diary surveys. For the Interview Survey, they are: (1) A “stop work” protocol which means that after 8 unsuccessful contact attempts, a case is pulled from an interviewer’s workload and no additional attempts to get an interview are made; and (2) A “wave 4 not fielded” protocol which means that after a case refuses in the first three waves, the case is pulled from the interviewer’s workload for its fourth wave and no attempt to get an interview is made. For the Diary Survey, only the “stop work” protocol applies. These new protocols began in fiscal year 2024 as cost cutting strategies, which are meant to reduce the resources spent on unproductive cases.

COVID-19’s Impact on Response Rates

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a decrease in the response rates from 2019 to 2020, from 53.7% to 47.2% in the Interview Survey, and from 52.8% to 34.9% in the Diary Survey. In large part, the decrease was caused by changes to data collection protocols at the Census Bureau.

From mid-March until the end of June 2020, the Census Bureau stopped personally visiting CUs and instead started contacting them exclusively by telephone. The Census Bureau was able to find telephone numbers for most addresses in the survey, but not all of them. That meant some of the CUs had an unknown eligibility status. The impact was bigger in the Diary Survey than in the Interview Survey because most CUs in the Diary Survey were being contacted for the first time and many of their telephone numbers were unknown, while most CUs in the Interview Survey had already been contacted in a previous quarter and their telephone numbers were known. CUs with unknown eligibility were treated as Type A nonresponses, which caused a noticeable drop in the response rates.

After June 2020, the Census Bureau gradually resumed its usual data collection protocols, and the response rates gradually returned to their expected levels – around 40% in the Diary Survey fluctuated over time. From 2020 to 2021, there was a relatively small decrease in the response rates for the Interview Survey, from 47.2% to 45.6%, and a relatively large increase in the response rates for the Diary Survey, from 34.9% to 40.0%. Then from 2021 to 2022, there was

another small decrease in the response rates for the Interview Survey, from 45.6% to 43.5%, and a small increase in the response rates for the Diary Survey, from 40.0% to 41.6%. Since 2022, there were relatively small fluctuations in the response rates for both surveys. The Interview and Diary surveys now have response rates of about forty percent.

After June 2020, the Census Bureau gradually resumed its usual data collection protocols, and the response rates gradually returned to their expected levels – around 40% in the Diary Survey, and 45% in the Interview Survey. By 2023 the response rates settled down to around 40% for both surveys.

The Sample Expansion’s Impact on Sample Sizes

The “sample expansion” in 2020 contributed to an increase in the number of “Independent Addresses Designated for the Survey,” from 47,799 to 50,939 in the Interview Survey, and from 24,566 to 36,132 in the Diary Survey. The sample expansion went into effect in April 2020 in the Interview Survey and in January 2020 in the Diary Survey. The reason for the expansion is that in 2020 the CE survey added some outlet-related questions to its questionnaires to replace CPI’s outlet information formerly collected by the TPOPS survey, and this meant the sample size in urban areas needed to be increased to ensure outlet sampling frame sufficiency in those areas.

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