

MEMORANDUM ON CONTACT METHODOLOGY

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: RAGNAR RESEARCH PARTNERS
DATE: APRIL, 2021

One of the foundational beliefs of Ragnar Research is that survey research needs to drag itself out from the early 2000's. To this end, we've made a point of releasing information on what we've noticed during each election cycle. In 2018, we studied the differences between landline and cell phone interviews. This cycle, among other things, we explored text-to-web.

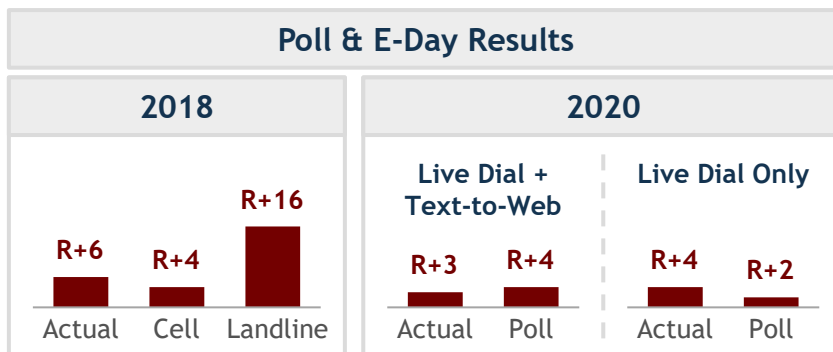
Here are our most important takeaways:

- **Cell phones remain the most viable method for voter research**, whether using live-dial interviews or a text-to-web approach.
- **Text-to-web can be an aid in accessing difficult to reach populations** and respondents who are potentially more engaged with your research subject.
- **It must be used in a mix-modal approach.** Like with any contact method, text-to-web introduces too many biases to be relied upon as the sole methodology.
- **Text-to-web won't replace live-dial interviews.** Ongoing legal cases and actions from phone carriers make the future of text-to-web unclear, and our industry will need to pay close attention to these evolving decisions.

Why Cell Phones Remain The Most Viable Contact Method

For the purposes of political polling, cell phones remain the most effective way to reach voters - whether through live-dial interviews or text-to-web. This is due to the high proliferation of cell phones in the US. The CDC estimates that as of 2018, on average roughly 3 in 4 households in each state were either cell-mostly or cell-only households.¹ Further, access to a cell phone of some kind is significantly higher than access to laptop or desktop computers (96% own cell phone, 74% own computer).²

Beyond simply being able to reach respondents, we continue to see that including live-dial cell phone interviews ensures the most accurate results. In 2018, we noted that landline respondents were significantly more skewed toward Republican candidates while cell phone respondents were more likely to predict final election day results. Similarly, in 2020, we found that both blended and exclusively live dial studies conducted in the final weeks predicted the ballot within 1-2 points of the final results.



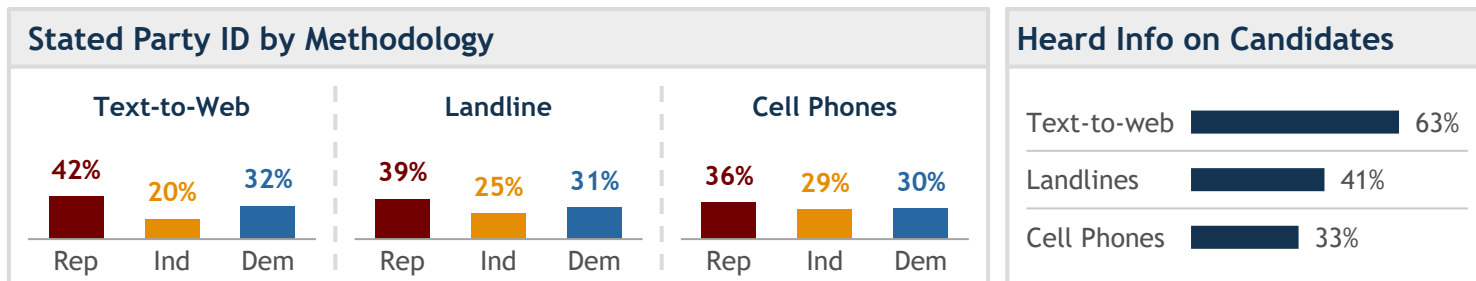
Combined polling & election results from regionally disparate interviews in US.

How Text-to-Web Can Help Reach Certain Populations

Younger voters are the most notable population that text-to-web can help reach. Generally, younger generations prefer texting to talking on the phone.³ In polls conducted in the final weeks of the 2020 election, Ragnar saw evidence of this with text-to-web outperforming live-dials among voters 18-24. Text-to-web was also slightly more effective at reaching Hispanic voters but less effective at reaching other minorities, particularly African American voters. Thus, when it comes to meeting quotas, text-to-web should be used carefully as a way to boost response from *some* difficult to reach demographics but not a blanket solution.

It is also important to keep ideological biases in mind. **The text-to-web respondents in our surveys tended to lean more conservative in their responses** than live dial cell phone respondents. Text-to-web respondents were more likely to be Republicans than both live cell phones (+6%) and landlines (+3%).

Text-to-web respondents were also more engaged than live dial respondents. Text-to-web respondents generally were more likely to be aware of and have an opinion of candidates from both parties. Similarly, they were much more likely to have recently heard information about candidates from both parties.



Combined polling & election results from regionally disparate interviews in US.

Potential Roadblocks to Text-to-Web

Our industry needs to pay close attention to ongoing decisions in the Legislature, Courts, and by phone carriers, that will impact text-to-web. Currently, text-to-web is treated by the FCC in the same way as live-dial cell phones. While landlines can be autodialed, call centers may not use autodialers for calling or texting cell phones. A recent Supreme Court case, *Facebook, Inc. v Duguid*, sought to classify Facebook’s automatic text notification system as an autodialer. However, the Court held that Facebook was not in violation of the TCPA because Facebook did not use a system that uses “a random or sequential number generator.”⁴ This is favorable for pollsters who conduct text-to-web with voter lists or other predefined sample lists.

Phone carriers, however, are taking it upon themselves to further restrict access to their customers. For example, AT&T is implementing a system in which businesses must register and declare their text message campaign type(s), after which the business is assigned a “Trust Score”. The Trust Score is determined by an algorithm and can cause a businesses messages to be blocked. Businesses that don’t register will be subject to increased fees and more stringent message blocking by AT&T. AT&T has provided guidelines to best avoid being blocked, though following these guidelines doesn’t guarantee access.⁵ **These are just two cases that illustrate the shifting environment - both good and bad - of text-to-web communications.**

How Text-to-Web Can Help Reach Certain Populations

Ultimately, given our experiences in 2020, text-to-web is only viable “as part of a complete breakfast.” On its own it will have significant underlying biases, but combined with live dial on cell phone and landline these penalties can be offset, especially in the final weeks of the election. **It is a tool in the toolbox, not a panacea for lower response rates or higher costs.**

Citations

1. CDC. (2019, December). *National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program*. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/Wireless_state_201912-508.pdf
- 2, 3. Spiker, S. (2021, March). *What Role Will Text-to-Web Methodology Have in the Future of Survey Research?*
2. Pew Research. (2019, June). *Mobile Fact Sheet*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>
3. Newport, F. (2014, November). *A New Era of Communication Among Americans*. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/179288/new-era-communication-americans.aspx>
4. *Facebook, Inc. v Duguid*, 200 U.S. 321 (2021). https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/20pdf/19-511_p86b.pdf
5. Copilevitz, Lam & Raney, P.C. (2021, March). *AT&T’s New A2P 10DLC Requirements and the Ability of Mobile Telephone Providers to Block Text Messages*. <https://theaapc.informz.net/THEAAPC/data/images/White%20Paper%20-%20Text%20Blocking.pdf>