

## Embedded Experiments in the Mexico 2006 Panel Survey

The Mexico 2006 Panel Survey included a series of randomized experiments and novel question wordings designed to advance survey research methodology. Some of these innovations exploited the panel nature of the data; others were limited to a single cross-section. Overall, they were intended to address issues such as response stability, response effects, question wording, interviewer-induced bias, social desirability bias, and other topics. Specific innovations included:

- Gender of Interviewer Effects. Male and female interviewers were randomly assigned in urban polling sites. The items relevant for this experiment were those that describe the gender of the interviewer (p93, p85\_2, p85\_3) and the gender of the supervisor (supsex1, supsex2, supsex3). Preliminary results from this experiment are forthcoming in “Effects of Interviewer Gender on Survey Responses: Findings from a Household Survey in Mexico,” by Francisco Flores-Macías and Chappell Lawson, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. This research note reports substantively and statistically significant effects for “gender-sensitive” questions, such as abortion rights and the role of women in the workforce (p28j, p41, p50\_2, p52\_2, p35\_3) for male respondents in certain social contexts.
- Interviewer’s Social Distance. Questions p97, p98, p89\_2, p90\_2, p90\_3, p91\_3, p51, p52, p59\_2, p60\_2, p43\_2, p44\_2, p45\_2 captured demographic information about the interviewer, such as skin color and educational attainment. The primary objective of collecting these data was test whether perceived social distance between the participants of the interview process affected responses, especially to social inequality questions. Preliminary results on social distance can be found on the website for the Mexico 2006 Panel Study.
- Response-Order Effects. A common issue in survey research is the tendency of respondents to select the last option read to them in orally administered questions (the “recency effect”). In order to test this claim, for several questions on political attitudes, interviewers were not only asked to rotate the order in which responses were read but was also to write down which option had been read last. It is thus possible to identify after the fact which types of respondents, if any, are more susceptible to this type of effects. The relevant questions for this experiment were p52b\_2, p53b\_2, p59b\_2, p60b\_2, p37b\_3, p43b\_3, p44b\_3, p45b\_3 as well as p97b\_2 in the two cross-sectional surveys. Preliminary results from this research are reported in “Disentangling Recency and Primacy Effects in Orally Administered Surveys” by Chappell Lawson and Francisco Flores-Macías; this paper is to be presented at the Annual Conference of the World Association of Public Opinion Research (Berlin, Germany, September 2007).
- Ballot-Order Effects. A related methodological question relates to the tendency, documented by prior research, of respondents to select the first choice presented to them in visually-administered questions. One of the more dramatic

manifestations of this effect is for respondents to select parties or candidates listed at the top of the ballot. In order to test this claim, the first cross-sectional questionnaire (which coincided with the second wave of the panel survey) used two versions of the sample ballot for congressional races: one with the PAN listed at the top left corner (as in the official ballot) and one with the PRD in that position. In other words, the parties that were effectively listed first and third were switched. The relevant questions are p10a\_2 and p10b\_2. Preliminary results are posted on the website for the Mexico 2006 Panel Study (Francisco Flores-Macías and Chappell Lawson, “Ballot Order Effects in Mexican Elections”). These results suggest that substantively important ballot-order effects may well exist, although the results do not reach traditional level of statistical significance in the small sample of voters in the cross-section ( $p = .11$ ).

- Anchoring Vignettes. In their article “Enhancing the Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability of Measurement in Survey Research” (*American Political Science Review*, 1994), Gary King and colleagues introduced the concept of “anchoring vignettes” in survey research. The ostensible goal of this technique is to craft questions that are comparable across cultures and social contexts; third-person vignettes can also be used to avoid social desirability biases. The Mexico 2006 Panel Study employed such an approach to gauge the effectiveness of clientelism (p102\_2 and p67\_3).
- Turnout. Respondents often report having voted when in reality they did not; so far, questions designed to avoid such biases have proven only moderately effective. At the end of the questionnaire (p70\_3) for the third wave of the panel, interviewers checked to see if respondents’ voter identification cards had been marked (as should be the case if the respondent voted). These results could then be checked against self-reported turnout (p5\_3). The discrepancy is provided an estimate of the percentage of participants who over-reported turnout. (See Chappell Lawson and Alejandro Moreno, “El Estudio Panel México 2006: Midiendo el cambio de opiniones durante la campaña presidencial”, *Política y gobierno* 2007). A separate item in Wave 1 recorded the distance between the respondents’ home and the polling station where he or she was expected to vote for those living in rural areas; this figure was a powerful predictor of actual turnout.
- Other novel items. The Mexico 2006 Panel Survey also collected information about the respondents not commonly associated with political behavior, such as whether the respondent was a first-born child (cp10), whether he or she was left-handed (cp17), and how long he or she had lived in the area (cp14). Although the principal purpose of collecting this data was to ensure that interviewers re-contacted the correct respondent in each panel wave, this type of information could be useful for researchers doing work outside of traditional topics in political science.

As with the field research itself, all of the approaches described above were administered by the polling team at *Reforma* newspaper, under the direction of Alejandro Moreno.