

The ADSS Pre-test Post-test Quasi Experiment

This document provides additional information on the survey, its respondents, and the variables that we developed.

Survey response rates

In terms of the survey, its response rate for forum invitees was 65 percent (301 respondents from a random sample of 462 people who were invited to the forum) and the response rate for the random sample of Phoenix residents was 71 percent (236 of 331). Almost all of the interviews took place over the telephone. The one exception was that in an effort to further reduce nonresponse we asked a small percentage of the participants (10 percent, or 29 out of the 301) whom we could not reach by telephone to complete a pen-and-paper version of the 15 to 20 minute questionnaire in a private room outside the convention hall before the forum began.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Given our focus on comparing respondents before and after the ADSS forum, it is particularly important to examine closely the characteristics of the ADSS participant sample (i.e., those who agreed to attend the forum) and the random sample. As Table 3.1 shows, the respondents in the participant sample and the random sample are quite similar with respect to gender, percent Hispanic, and income. However, the two groups vary somewhat by race, age, education, employment status, and whether they currently receive Social Security. Those who agreed to attend the forum are more likely than the random sample respondents to be age 65 and over (22 percent versus 15 percent), married (65 percent versus 58 percent), highly educated (46 percent with four years of college or more versus 32 percent), retired (29 percent versus 17 percent), and

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although not shown in the table, currently receiving Social Security (32 percent versus 19 percent).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents in the pre-forum entire sample and in the panel: an examination of comparability and attrition

	Entire Sample Respondents				Panel Respondents			
	Forum		Random Sample		Forum		Random Sample	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Gender								
Male	47	140	45	106	47	112	45	66
Female	53	158	55	130	54	129	55	82
Total		298		236		241		148
Race								
White	86	249	81	188	85	197	82	120
Black	2	7	0	1	3	7	0	0
Hispanic	8	23	9	21	8	19	9	13
Other	4	10	10	23	4	9	9	13
Total		289		233		232		146
Age								
17-34	29	83	29	67	26	62	28	42
35-49	22	63	34	79	23	53	32	48
50-64	28	81	23	55	29	68	24	36
65-90	22	64	15	34	22	52	15	22
Total		291		235		235		148
Income								
Less than \$20,000	22	58	22	47	22	46	22	31
\$20,000 to 29,999	13	34	15	32	13	28	17	24
\$30,000 to 39,999	13	33	12	27	14	29	9	13
\$40,000 to 59,999	24	64	25	54	26	55	26	36
\$60,000 to 99,999	21	55	18	40	20	42	17	24
\$100,000 or more	7	19	9	19	7	14	8	11
Total		263		219		214		139
Marital Status								
Married	65	189	58	136	65	155	60	88
Separate	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	1
Widowed	10	28	9	22	11	25	7	10
Divorced	7	21	14	34	6	14	14	21
Living w/ Someone	1	2	4	9	1	2	3	5
Never Married	17	51	14	34	17	40	16	23
Total		293		236		237		148

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Table 1 (continued)

	Entire Sample Respondents				Panel Respondents			
	Forum		Random Sample		Forum		Random Sample	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Education								
Less than High School	4	12	7	17	5	11	9	13
High School Graduate	16	46	27	64	17	39	28	41
Some College	35	101	33	78	33	79	30	45
4 yrs. of College+	46	133	32	76	46	108	33	49
Total		292		235		237		148
Employment Status								
Self-Employed	11	33	12	28	11	27	12	18
Employed Full-Time	37	107	51	120	33	77	49	73
Employed Part-Time	9	27	6	14	10	23	5	8
Unemployed	8	23	4	10	8	19	4	6
Retired	29	83	17	40	31	72	16	24
Homemaker	6	18	10	24	8	18	13	19
Total		291		236		236		148
Partisan Identification								
Democrat	40	117	29	67	41	96	29	42
Independent	8	24	9	22	9	21	9	13
Republican	45	130	46	108	43	101	47	69
Other Party	3	10	0	1	4	9	0	0
No Party	3	10	16	37	3	8	16	23
Total		291		235		235		147
Ideology								
Liberal	15	41	17	39	15	34	15	21
Moderate	50	140	43	99	48	110	46	66
Conservative	36	101	40	93	37	84	40	58
Total		282		231		228		145

Note: Column percentages do not always sum to 100% due to rounding. Although there are 301 respondents in the full forum group and 236 in the full random sample group, individual categories vary because respondents did not always report full demographic information. The figures in the parentheses indicate the number of respondents in each category.

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Panel studies often experience attrition between the first and second wave measurements. The University of Michigan's National Election Studies (NES) panel surveys during the early 1990s witnessed attrition rates near 50 percent by the end of the third wave of a three year cross-national panel survey (National Election Studies 1999). Fishkin's National Issues Convention had a 36 percent overall response rate because 72 percent of people responded to their initial survey and then only half of those people attended the forum (Merkle 1996, p. 598). Our study experienced attrition on par with both the NES and National Issues Convention. In follow up calls to our participant sample after the forum, NORC successfully interviewed 80 percent of those people who agreed to attend the forum – i.e., 241 of an initial 301 (given that we originally started with a contact group of 462, this is an overall response rate of 52 percent – 241/462). NORC successfully retained 63 percent of the random sample respondents – 148 of an initial 236 (given that we originally tried to reach 331 respondents, this is an overall response rate of 45 percent for the random sample – 148/331).ⁱ

To understand more about the nature of the attrition we compared the demographic characteristics of those respondents who were interviewed at both pre-forum and post-forum (the panel respondents) to those who were interviewed at pre-forum. The third and fourth columns of Table 3.1 shows the striking similarity on both demographic characteristics (gender, race, age, income, marital status, education, and employment status) and political characteristics (party identification and ideology). The similarity between the demographic and political characteristics of the full samples at pre-forum and the panel samples at post-forum allow us to be reasonably confident that attrition does not bias the conclusions.

Another selection issue concerns the participants themselves. Although all 241 respondents in our participant panel were invited to the forum, not all attended. As is often the

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case, a portion of people who make plans to do something must change those plans. That happened occasionally in this instance. About 35 percent of those people NORC interviewers were able to contact after the forum said they planned to attend the forum but simply were unable to do so. Of these invitees who did not attend, about 17 percent said they got sick, 15 percent said they had too much to do at work, 11 percent said there was a family medical problem, and 9 percent said they had too much to do at home. Only 6 percent said they simply decided they didn't want to go, and only 1 percent said they did not attend because they had told the interviewer everything they wanted to say about Social Security in the first interview and thus simply had no desire to discuss the issue further.

Those people who expected to attend the ADSS forum but did not attend ("invitees") compose a third sample whose views we will study in addition to the random sample and the sample of forum attendees. The invitees are similar to the actual "attendees" on most dimensions – gender, income, marital status, and education – but they differed somewhat on others. Of these characteristics, age most strikingly differentiates non-attending invitees from attendees: invitees are significantly younger (they are 20 percent more likely to be between ages 17-34 and 23 percent less likely to be aged 65 and over). Nonetheless, if the forum had an effect on the attendees, we would expect the attendees to change in the hypothesized direction but we would not expect the non-attending invitees to change. That is, we would not expect them to change their views at the post-forum measure unless they knew someone who attended the forum and talked with that person about the forum. Only 10 percent of the invitees knew someone else who attended, and of these only about half said they talked "a lot" with that attendee. Thus, we feel that these non-attending invitees are also a useful comparison group in addition to our random sample respondents.

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Survey Questions and Variable Construction

We designed our survey to develop three core variables for analyzing the impact of ADSS. The first variable is salience and is constructed using several survey items. If respondents answered “yes” to an initial question was a filter question, they received the following four specific questions, each with the choice categories of never, less than once a week, once a week, two or three times a week, once a day, or more than once a day:

- *Thought, Talked, Read about Social Security Recently*: “Think about the week before you made plans to attend the forum on Social Security. In that week, did you spend any time thinking about, talking about, or reading about Social Security?” [After the forum, this question changed for the participant sample to, “Think about the time period since May 30 when the forum on Social Security was held. In that period since the forum, have you spent any time thinking about, talking about, or reading about Social Security?”]
- *Thought about Social Security*: “How often did you think about Social Security? Would you say never, less than once a week, once a week, two or three times a week, once a day, or more than once a day?”
- *Talked about Social Security with Family*: “How often did you talk about Social Security with a family member? Would you say never, less than once a week, once a week, two or three times a week, once a day, or more than once a day?”
- *Talked about Social Security with Friends*: “How often did you talk about it with friends or colleagues at work or other places?”
- *Read about Social Security*: “Read about it?”

The second core variable is knowledge, which was assessed using indirect and direct indicators. In terms of the indirect route, respondents were asked, "How would you rate your own understanding of what the Social Security program is and what it does? Would you say your understanding of Social Security is excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" Another indirect measure of knowledge was the interviewer’s rating of the respondent. After the interviewers finished administering the survey to each respondent, the interviewers completed a question asking them to rate each respondent's general level of understanding.

Our more direct measure of knowledge came in the form of asking respondents six objective Social Security fact questions. Respondents were asked to say whether the first four

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statements below were true or false and for the next two questions were asked to choose the correct answer from among several possible responses:

- The Social Security trust fund invests in government treasury bonds (correct = true).
- Social Security currently has a large budget deficit (correct = false).
- Social Security faces financial difficulties in the next century because fewer workers will be available to pay Social Security taxes (correct = true).
- Social Security payroll taxes collected from workers today are used to pay benefits for current retirees (correct = true).
- Would you say that the Social Security tax rate that workers pay is about 3 percent, about 6 percent, about 9 percent, or about 15 percent (correct = about 6 percent)?
- About what percent of the federal budget goes to Social Security? Would you say less than 5 percent, about 10 percent, about 20 percent, about 40 percent, or 50 percent or more (correct = about 20 percent)?

The third core variable is political participation and, specifically, the plans of respondents to be politically involved in the future. This battery began with interviewers informing respondents that "I'm going to list some things you might possibly do in the future and you tell me how likely you think it is that you would do them." They were then asked about their possible participation in three activities:

- *Contact Congress*: "Contact your representative to Congress to express your views on Social Security. Would you say that would be very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?"
- *Participate in Organization*: "Participate in an organization that is committed to discussing the future of Social Security?"
- *Talk to Family or Friends*: "Talk to a family member, friend, or neighbor about Social Security?"

ⁱ According to the NORC, part of the attrition was due to the timing of the interviews. In Arizona, beginning in June (the time of the post-forum interviews), some people choose to leave and escape the heat. NORC reported that more attrition was due to failure to reach the respondent than to refusal by the respondent to be re-interviewed.