

March 31, 2015

To: Ken Winneg

From: Chintan Turakhia, Courtney Kennedy

Hi Ken,

Courtney and I have carefully reviewed the memo you forwarded on March 26, 2015 from and here are our thoughts.

First, it is important to note that the goal of the study was never to generate nationally representative estimates specifically for the Native American population. The design and implementation of the 2004 NAES was appropriate for the main research goal of the study, which was to generate a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. Even very large probability-based samples, like the 2004 NAES, are not always effective for generating representative samples for all possible subgroups that may be of interest. Some subgroups, including Native Americans, have unique characteristics (e.g., multiple languages, unusual residential patterns) that require specialized survey designs if they are to be measured rigorously.

Native Americans are well known to be a relatively small and difficult to survey population. As noted in the memo, landline telephone penetration rates on reservations are significantly lower than they are elsewhere in the U.S. The experiences and attitudes of Native Americans living on reservations may very well be different from those living elsewhere. A survey designed specifically for Native Americans would therefore need to have a special protocol for reaching those living on reservations. Given that our goal was never to generate nationally representative estimates for Native Americans, these initiatives were not built into the design. Due to the above reasons, it is not appropriate to use NAES data to study this population. We feel it is also worth noting that this study was conducted over a decade ago (2004), and it is very possible that attitudes of Native Americans have changed since then, especially in light of the media attention to this issue. We feel it would be more appropriate for those engaged in this discussion to consider more recent research from studies designed specifically for the Native American population.

Furthermore, there is a large body of research showing that questionnaire context can have a significant effect on responses to attitudinal questions. We think the fact that this attitude was measured in the context of a survey focusing on electoral attitudes and behaviors matters. Research suggests that one should not necessarily expect the results obtained in that context to match the results obtained in a survey that focused solely on Native American issues/concerns, for example. Differences in measurement may partly explain why results from the NAES do not match other surveys.

There are other points made in the memo that, in our professional opinion, are either not valid or not germane. The memo criticizes the study sample for only having 1.1% Native American incidence versus the population incidence of 1.5%. This difference alone is not a valid critique of Native American estimates generated from the NAES because the representativeness of the set of Native American respondents is not solely a function of what proportion of all interviews they represent. The argument the memo tried to make on this point is not totally clear, but it seems to be one of nonresponse bias. The memo is incorrect, however, because it is possible for a sample of respondents (like Native Americans in the 2004 NAES) to not match the population proportion but still have zero nonresponse

bias on survey estimates. In order for there to be nonresponse bias, there must be a difference between the respondents and the nonresponse on one or more variables measured in the survey. A relatively low subgroup response rate alone is not evidence of such a difference between respondents and nonrespondents. We recommend Groves 2006, 2008<sup>1</sup> for a review of survey nonresponse bias. Additionally, in even the most rigorous RDD surveys, the un-weighted incidences for racial and ethnic minority groups rarely match the Census population figures exactly. The reason is that survey nonresponse varies by race and ethnicity. There is a large body of research showing that nonwhites tend to be less likely to respond to general population surveys than whites. So the expectation that the sample incidence should exactly match the population incidence is not appropriate. Post-stratification (raking) weighting is used to adjust for this form of differential nonresponse (and was used in the 2004 NAES), and it is very effective when the “missing at random” assumption<sup>2</sup> is justified.

The memo also alleges that NAES under-sampled various Native American groups, and there seems to be an implication that it was somehow intentional or otherwise a mistake that should have been avoided. This is false. As stated above, the main research goal of the 2004 NAES was to generate a representative sample of US adults. Best practice procedures for such studies do not include imposing regional quotas (or similar techniques) for small subgroups that were not central to the main research objectives.

Finally, the memo also alleges that the study failed to probe specific sub-categories of Native Americans. It criticizes the survey for over-representing people with no cultural or linguistic ties to Native American culture but who nevertheless describe themselves as part Native Americans (e.g., “Elizabeth Warren” Native Americans). This criticism is invalid because the race question administered in the 2004 NAES was designed to accept just one response (e.g., “Asian” not “white and Asian”). This means that adults from a multi-racial background had to choose what best described him/her at the time. For example, a Caucasian who was 1/16<sup>th</sup> or even 1/4<sup>th</sup> Native American in all likelihood would have reported “white” as their primary race, not “Native American” as implied by the memo.

If generating estimates specifically for the Native American population had been a main research goal of the study, then it would be reasonable to criticize how race measured. In reality, that was not the case, and the measurement was quite typical for general population studies conducted at the time. In 2004 the American Community Survey did not yet exist and according to the most recent Decennial Census (2000) just 2.4 percent of all Americans were of more than one race.<sup>3</sup> In light of this very low rate, it was quite reasonable that the 2004 NAES only collected one race report. It is completely inappropriate and unprofessional to imply that the question was racist, particularly in light of what the survey was and was not designed to achieve. To do so implies that most survey researchers working in 2004 were racist as so many asked questions like the one in NAES. It is worth noting that NAES questions have evolved over time since 2004 to reflect scientific, demographic and cultural trends. NAES is in no way an outlier in its practice in this regard.

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<sup>1</sup> Groves, Robert M. 2006. “Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Bias in Household Surveys.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 70: 646-675.

Groves, Robert M. and Peytcheva, E. 2008. “The Impact of Nonresponse rates on Nonresponse Bias: A Meta-analysis.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol 72: 167-189.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview, see Little, R. 1988. “A Test of Missing Completely at Random for Multivariate Data with Missing Values.” *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 1198–1202.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-13.pdf>