

RESULTS FROM TELEPHONE DEBRIEFING INTERVIEWS:  
THE CENSUS BUREAU'S SPANISH FORMS AVAILABILITY TEST<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1993 the Census Bureau implemented the Spanish Forms Availability Test (SFAT). The SFAT was part of a research and development program by the Census Bureau designed to assist in formulating policy and design options for the Year 2000 Census of Population and Housing. The purpose of the test was to determine the effect of the availability of mailing Spanish forms to targeted areas with high concentrations of persons who speak Spanish and who do not speak English well or at all. Specifically, the test sought to determine whether making Spanish forms available would increase response rates in target areas, assess the reaction of non-Hispanics living in those areas to receiving Spanish forms and determine the effect on item nonresponse.

This study reports the results from debriefing interviews with a sample of SFAT respondents to assess their reactions to receiving a Spanish language census form along with an English language census form in the mail. This information will be used to assist in planning and formulating policy options for the 2000 Census.

## BACKGROUND

In two earlier reports on the SFAT we provided the results of an item nonresponse analysis. The first reported item nonresponse rates overall and by language of census form, separately by stratum (de la Puente, Manuel and Wobus, Peter 1994a). The second reported item nonresponse rates for Hispanics and non-Hispanics separately by stratum and by panel (de la Puente, Manuel and Wobus, Peter 1994b).

The test universe for the SFAT was comprised of two strata, the first including households in block groups that were between 15% to 30% linguistically isolated (LI) and the second block groups that were 30% or more LI. A LI household is defined as one with no members 14 years of age or older who speaks English or one where no one speaks English very well. Stratum definitions were based on 1990 census data. The targeted sample size was 24,000 households.

For the telephone debriefing survey the universe was a subsample of 12,000 households. About 4,800 households within this subsample returned census forms; but only 3,663 contained working phone numbers.

In all about 3,400 (or 28 percent) completed telephone debriefing interviews were conducted.

Excluded from this study were people in households that received a census form who did not respond. An unknown number of nonrespondents could have opted not to fill out and return the census form because they were annoyed at receiving a Spanish language census form in the mail. Our findings are based on these relatively small number of completed debriefing interviews. This constitutes a limitation of this study.

The SFAT had three panels. Panel one, the control, was an English language census form. The second, dual forms panel, consisted of separate English and Spanish language census forms. The third, bilingual forms panel, had English questions on one side and Spanish ones on the other. In all, 81.2% of returned forms were English and the remaining 18.8% were Spanish language forms.

## ANALYSIS

There are four parts to this analysis. In the first are the initial thoughts noted by the respondents upon the receipt of a Spanish language census form in the mail. The second part focuses on respondents' reasons for selecting the English or Spanish language census forms as their response option. Part three is a discussion of the extent to which receiving a Spanish language census form in the mail influenced the respondent's decision to fill out and return the SFAT census form. The analysis concludes with an examination of the opinions of those interviewed concerning the mailing of Spanish language census forms to areas where many Hispanics speak Spanish and little or no English.

As the first table shows, a greater proportion of non-Hispanics in the SFAT sample returned an English language form but among Hispanics over 2/3 returned an English language form. Most Hispanics and non-Hispanics who received both an English and a Spanish language form returned the English language form.

The next two tables show the reactions by Hispanic origin and by home language of debriefing respondents in the dual and bilingual panels who answered Q-9: "What did you first think when you saw the Spanish language version?".

Table II shows that when Hispanics first saw the Spanish language census form, 48.2 percent said it was either "a good idea" (26.8 percent) or said "did not think anything of it" (21.4 percent). The corresponding

percent for non-Hispanics is 37.5 percent (13.1 percent said it was "a good idea" and 24.4 percent said "did not think anything of it"). Over 12 percent of non-Hispanics but only 1.3 percent of Hispanics thought it was a bad idea.

Reactions of Hispanic respondents in panels II and III to receiving both an English and Spanish census form were cross tabulated by their responses to another debriefing question "What language or languages do you speak when you are at home?" The results are presented in Table III.

An almost equal proportion of Hispanic debriefing respondents in panels 2 and 3 reported speaking Spanish only at home (44.7 percent) or Spanish and English at home (46.5 percent) while about 9 percent of the Hispanic respondents noted that their home language is English only. As expected, virtually no respondents whose home language is Spanish viewed the receipt of a Spanish language census form as a bad idea. Additionally, less than 2 percent of those who reported speaking both Spanish and English at home held this view and only 5.5 percent of English only speakers expressed this view. Also as expected, a little over 30 percent of Spanish only speakers first thought upon seeing the Spanish census form that it was helpful for Hispanics. This feeling was shared by a much smaller percentage of English only speakers (10.1 percent) and bilingual Spanish and English speakers (12.1 percent).

Debriefing respondents who were in the dual or bilingual panels were asked why they chose to fill out and return the English or Spanish language census form (question Q-8). Table IV reports the response to this question by Hispanic and non-Hispanic origin for those who returned the English language census form.

Not surprisingly almost 84 percent of non-Hispanics said that they returned the English language census form because they only speak English and not Spanish. Slightly over 6 percent said that they are more comfortable with English. This relatively small proportion most likely represents non-Hispanics whose primary language is not English. Among Hispanics, fully 20.2 percent reported not knowing Spanish. And another 44.3 percent reported that they filled out and returned the English language census form because they are more comfortable with English.

Since the SFAT survey does not have a measure of language ability (Spanish or English) it is not possible to determine if these responses refer to literacy in the given language, speaking ability or both literacy and speaking ability. Since question Q-8 refers to filling out a form and respondents represented in table IV returned an English language form it may be possible that to some extent the information presented in Table IV indicate levels of English language literacy. But this is

speculation. However, it is certain that most Hispanics when given a choice of completing an English or Spanish census form, selected the English form.

Individuals who were in the dual forms or bilingual forms panels were asked if receiving the Spanish language census form influenced their decision to participate in the SFAT test (question Q-10). Table V reports the "yes" or "no" responses to this question. Table V-a shows that a little over 60 percent of Hispanics and slightly over 95 percent of non-Hispanics said that receiving a Spanish language census form had no influence on their decision to fill out and return a census form. As expected, when Hispanics are considered separately and home language is taken into account, Table V-b shows that Hispanics who reported speaking Spanish only at home were more likely to report being influenced by the receipt of a Spanish language census form (60.6 percent) than Hispanics who said that they speak English only at home (10.0 percent) or both Spanish and English (22.9 percent).

A noteworthy feature of Table V-b is that slightly over 39 percent of Hispanics who reported speaking Spanish only at home say they were not influenced to participate in the SFAT test by the receipt of a Spanish language census form. This suggests that these individuals may have had sufficient proficiency in English or someone outside their household had sufficient English ability to enable them to fill out the English language census form. This finding may also indicate that some Hispanics who returned an English language census form went outside their household for help in filling out the form.

Table VI reveals that almost 49 percent of Hispanics said that they were influenced by the receipt of the Spanish language form because it was easier and faster to fill out than the English language form. This table also shows that, among Hispanics, almost 13 percent noted that they were influenced to respond upon receipt of the Spanish language census form either because responding is important (12.1 percent), or because they had no knowledge of English (12.8 percent) or because they felt that it is a duty to fill out and return the census form (13.0 percent). There is indication that receipt of a Spanish census form along with an English form can increase response rate in areas with a high concentration of linguistically isolated households. In stratum 2 of the SFAT sample the experimental panels (those offering a Spanish and English language census form) had response rates that were significantly higher than in the control panels (Corteville, 1994).

Table VII-a displays the distribution of responses by Hispanic and non-Hispanic origin to the question "What is your opinion about mailing out Spanish language census questionnaires to neighborhoods where many

Hispanics and Latinos speak Spanish and only little English?"

This table shows that significantly more Hispanics than non-Hispanics reported that it was a good idea (93.1 percent versus 69.6 percent) and significantly more non-Hispanics than Hispanics reported that it was a bad idea (18.4 percent versus 3.0 percent) or reported that it did not matter if the census form was in English or Spanish (11.9 percent versus 4.0 percent).

Table VII-b shows the responses of Hispanics only crosstabulated by their reported home language. The majority of Hispanics, regardless of home language, maintain that it is a good idea to mail out Spanish language census forms to areas where many Hispanics speak Spanish and little or no English.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most respondents, both Hispanics and non-Hispanics said that their initial reaction to the receipt of the Spanish language form was that it was either a good idea, that it was helpful for Hispanics, it was common to receive mail in both English and Spanish or it was something that they did not think anything about. Overall, less than 6 percent of respondents said that their initial reaction upon seeing the Spanish language census form was that it was a "bad idea." But this view was much more prevalent among non-Hispanics.

Home language does not seem to play a very important role in the initial reaction of Hispanic to the receipt of a Spanish language census form.

Receipt of a Spanish language census form along with an English language census form did not appear to influence most non-Hispanics to fill out and return their census form. However, almost 39 percent of Hispanics said that it did. The proportion was even higher - about 61 percent - among respondents who said their home language was Spanish, as might be expected.

Our findings suggest that mailing out Spanish language census forms could prompt Hispanics who would not otherwise respond to the census to fill out and mail back the census form.

Although we did not find overwhelming opposition to mailing both Spanish language and English language census forms, this finding must be considered with the understanding that the debriefing survey sample is selective -- interviews were completed with only 28 percent of those eligible and nonrespondents were not interviewed.

After considering our findings along with the aforementioned sample limitations, we recommend that

the Census Bureau continue its testing of mailing both English and Spanish language census forms to areas with high concentrations of linguistically isolated households. Additionally, we advise the Census Bureau to obtain a greater understanding of public reaction to this method before a final decision is made to mail out both English and Spanish language census forms in the year 2000.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article reports results of research undertaken by staff members of the Census Bureau. The views expressed are attributable to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Census Bureau.

### REFERENCES

Corteville, Jeffrey S. (1994) Spanish Forms Availability Test Completion Rate Evaluation. DSSD 2000 Census Memorandum Series #D-8. May 16, 1994.

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TABLE I

Percent of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Respondents Returning English versus Spanish language forms (All panels)

	Hispanics n=5,453	Non-Hispanics n=3,119
English language form	70.1%	99.4%
Spanish language form	29.9%	.6%

Table II

Respondents' reactions when they first saw the Spanish language census form.\*  
 By Hispanic Origin of the Debriefing Respondent  
 (Percent Distribution)

Response	Hispanic Origin	
	Hispanic (n=1248)	Non-Hispanic (n=785)
(01) Good idea	26.8	13.1
(02) It is Common to get info in Spanish/English	7.9	26.0
(03) Bad idea	1.3	12.5
(04) Did not see Spanish form	4.8	3.3
(05) Did not think anything of it	21.8	24.8
(06) Helpful for Hispanics	20.1	4.1
(07) For people who speak Spanish	4.9	6.2
(08) Other	.2	2.8
(09) Missing	12.2	7.2

$X^2 = 390.9$ ;  $df=11$ ;  $<.05$

\* Table provides information for respondents who answered question Q-9 "What did you first think when you saw the Spanish language version?" and who gave a reason why.

Table III

Hispanic Respondents' reactions when they first saw the Spanish language census form.\*  
 By the Home Language of the Debriefing Respondent  
 (Percent Distribution)

Response	Home Language		
	English Only (n=109)	Spanish Only (n=555)	Spanish & English (n=577)
(01) Good idea	24.8	27.7	26.5
(02) It is Common to receive info in English/Spanish	10.1	6.5	8.8
(03) Bad idea	5.5	.2	1.6
(04) Did not see Spanish form	2.8	3.8	6.1
(05) Did not think anything of it	26.5	15.5	26.0
(06) Helpful for Hispanics	10.1	31.6	12.1
(07) For People who speak Spanish	5.5	4.3	5.2
(08) Other	0	0	.5
(09) Missing	14.7	10.4	13.2

$X^2 = 115.8$ ;  $df=22$ ;  $<.05$

\* Table provides information for respondents who answered question Q-9 "What did you first think when you saw the Spanish language version?" and who gave a reason why.

Table IV

Reasons provided by respondents who chose the ENGLISH language form and who provided reasons why.\*  
 By Hispanic Origin  
 (Percent Distribution)

Response	Hispanic Origin	
	Hispanics (n=727)	Non-Hispanics (n=774)
(01) Don't know Spanish	20.2	83.4
(02) More comfortable with English	44.2	6.3
(03) Did not see Spanish form	10.5	.5
(04) Bilingual - could respond to English or Spanish	5.8	.3
(05) English is the official language of the U.S	1.8	1.3
(06) Other	10.6	1.6
(07) missing	6.9	6.6

$X^2=663.1$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $<.05$

\* Table provides information for respondents who returned an English language census form, who provided an answer to question Q-8 "The envelope sent to you by the Census Bureau contained a Spanish and an English version of the questionnaire, why did you choose to fill out the ENGLISH version?" and who provided an answer why.

Table V

Respondents's answers to question Q-10, "Did receiving Forms in Spanish  
 Influence Your Decision to Fill Out and Return a Questionnaire?"  
 By Hispanic Origin and by Home Language  
 (Percent Distribution)

	a. Hispanic Origin		b. Hispanic Respondent's Home Language		
	Hispanics (n=1148)	Non-Hispanics (n=721)	English Only (n=90)	Spanish Only (n=518)	Spanish and English (n=534)
Yes	38.9	4.9	10.0	60.6	22.9
No	61.1	95.1	90.0	39.4	77.1

$X^2 =267.7$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $<.05$

$X^2 =192.2$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $<.05$

Table VI

Reasons provided by Hispanic respondents who said that receiving a Spanish language census form DID influence their decision to fill out and return a questionnaire.\*  
(Percent Distribution)

Response		Hispanics (n=446)
(01)	Responding is important	12.1
(02)	Easier/Faster to fill out	48.7
(03)	Don't know English	12.8
(04)	Would fill out form anyway	2.7
(05)	Know English/Spanish	4.0
(06)	Duty to fill out form	13.0
(07)	Other	5.1
(08)	Missing	1.6

\* Table provides information for respondents who answer "Yes" to question Q-10 "Did receiving forms in Spanish influence your decision to fill out and return a questionnaire in this test?" and who gave a reason why (Q-11).

Table VII

Respondents' answers to question Q-17: "What is Your Opinion About Mailing out Spanish Language Census Questionnaires to Neighborhoods Where Many Hispanics and Latinos Speak Spanish and Only Little English?"  
By Hispanic Origin and by Home Language  
(Percent Distribution)

	a. Hispanic Origin		b. Hispanic Respondents' Home Language		
	Hispanics (n=1823)	Non-Hispanic (n=1151)	English Only (n=166)	Spanish Only (n=761)	Spanish & English (n=882)
A good idea	93.0	69.7	83.4	95.5	92.6
A bad idea	3.0	18.4	9.8	1.6	3.0
Does not matter if questionnaire is in Spanish or English	4.0	11.9	6.8	2.9	4.4

$X^2=297.9$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $<.05$

$X^2 =37.4$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $<.05$