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Is It Necessary to Reimburse Cellphone Respondents?

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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Introduction

Respondents who take a Pew Research Center survey on a cellphone are currently offered a \$5 reimbursement for their cellphone minutes for completing the survey. This policy is a legacy of the days when cellphone plans included a limited number of monthly voice minutes and charged per minute beyond that. But is it still necessary in the age of unlimited talk and text, even for some prepaid cellphone plans? From the survey sponsor's perspective, the cost of the reimbursement is not limited to the amount actually paid to the respondents, as it also includes the time it takes the interviewer to collect the respondent's name and address, as well as the processing fees from the survey contractor.

The Pew Research Center experimented with not offering the cellphone reimbursement to a random portion of respondents in its February, March and May 2015 political polls. While the response rate was actually narrowly higher for the group not offered the money, the partisan composition of the sample was affected, with the share of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents ticking upward. Because of the impact on the partisan makeup of the resulting data, we decided to continue offering reimbursements.

Background

Currently, in the standard Pew Research Center survey introduction, all cellphone respondents are told: "If you would like to be reimbursed for your cellphone minutes, we will pay all eligible respondents \$5 for participating in this survey." At the end of the survey, they are told: "If you would like to be reimbursed for your cellphone minutes, we can send you \$5" (see Appendix A for full wording). In a typical monthly political survey, roughly one-in-five cellphone respondents take the reimbursement when offered. The introductory language is similar to a typical contingent incentive in soliciting participation, though the description of the \$5 as a "reimbursement" rather than a "gift" or "token of appreciation" is different from the language used in many survey incentives. And the language at the end of the survey is also phrased less like an incentive, as it tells respondents they may have the money if they want it, rather than attempting to provide it to all cellphone respondents. This, in conjunction with some respondents' reluctance to provide a name and

Only About One-in-Five Take Reimbursement When Offered

Among respondents to whom \$5 was offered as reimbursement

	Unweighted %
Respondent took money	21
Respondent did not want the money	79
N	1938

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

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contact information, may be the reason that only 21% of cell respondents actually give the necessary information to receive the money.

Cellphone respondents who accept the reimbursement differ demographically from those who do not. Using data from Pew Research Center's February, March and May 2015 monthly political polls, the analysis suggests those who take the money are more likely to be non-Hispanic black, less educated, of lower income, a Democrat or lean Democratic and to have a cellphone number flagged as prepaid by Targus; they are less likely to be senior citizens. However, since those who take the money are, on average, only 21% of the cellphone sample, the resulting total sample looks much more like those who do not take the money than those who do. The full demographic composition of the two groups can be found in Appendix B.

Those Who Accept \$5 Reimbursement Differ Demographically

Demographic profiles of all cell respondents, cell respondents who accepted the reimbursement and cell respondents who did not when offered

	Total Cell Sample Unweighted %	Offered Money and Accepted Unweighted %	Offered Money and Did Not Accept Unweighted %
18-29	22	23	22
30-49	32	33	33
50-64	28	31	26
65+	17	13*	18
White, non-Hispanic	67	56*	69
Black, non-Hispanic	10	21*	7
Hispanic	15	15	14
Other	7	8	7
High school grad or less	32	39*	30
Some coll/Assoc. degree	27	27	25
College grad or higher	41	33*	44
<\$30,000	29	45*	24
\$30,000-74,999	31	30	31
\$75,000+	33	18*	38
Rep/lean Rep.	42	39	45
Dem/lean Dem.	47	51*	44
Not a prepaid phone	60	52*	61
Prepaid phone	15	24*	13
Unweighted N	3255	413	1525

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between 'accepted' and 'not accepted'

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Not surprisingly, those who are offered and accept the money are also more likely to report being worried about using too many cellphone minutes this month than those who don't accept the money. This question was asked in March and May only.

The analysis suggests, then, that certain demographic groups are more likely to accept the offer of financial reimbursement than others. It does not automatically follow,

however, that without that reimbursement, they would turn into non-responders. This is obviously a key question for survey researchers, because maintaining a demographic balance in the sample, and maintaining or increasing response rates among hard-to-reach groups, is of paramount concern. This is what was tested in the experiment below.

Those Who Accept Reimbursement Are More Likely To Be Worried About Using Too Many Minutes

	Total Cell Sample <i>Unweighted</i>	Offered Money and Accepted <i>Unweighted</i>	Offered Money and Did Not Accept <i>Unweighted</i>
	%	%	%
Worried about minutes	7	20*	4
Not worried about minutes/have unlimited minutes	92	79*	96
<i>Unweighted N</i>	2277	282	1066

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in March-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between 'accepted' and 'not accepted'

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Methods for the Experiment

An experiment was conducted on three Pew Research Center political surveys in 2015 (February, March and May) to determine whether not offering the \$5 cellphone reimbursement would affect the response rate and demographic composition of the resulting sample. A random 60% of the cell sample was offered the reimbursement (described as “the reimbursement group” below); the remaining 40% (described as the “no reimbursement group”) were not. Below are response rates, demographics and select substantive responses of the two groups. A Targus flag provided by SSI was appended to all completed cellphone interviews to indicate whether the phone was a prepaid cellphone or not. Additionally, in March and May, cellphone respondents were asked at the end of the interview whether they worried about using too many cellphone minutes that month. Full survey methodology can be found in the About the Surveys section in Appendix D.

Findings

The response rate was higher for the no reimbursement group than for the reimbursement group (10.5% and 9.2%, respectively). This was driven by the 17.1% cooperation rate among the no reimbursement group and the 14.9% cooperation rate among the reimbursement group. This result was unexpected, since contingent incentives have been shown to increase response rates. Perhaps framing the offer as a “reimbursement for your cellphone minutes” deters respondents because they think the survey must be very long in order to warrant reimbursement.

While 21% of cellphone respondents accepted the money when offered, very few respondents asked for money when it was not offered. Only 2% of respondents did so across the three surveys.

Demographically, respondents in the reimbursement and no reimbursement groups were very similar. They did not differ on age, race/ethnicity, education, income or whether

or not the cellphone used was a prepaid phone. This supports the hypothesis that many of those who accept the money when it’s offered would still respond even when the money is not offered. In other words, while non-Hispanic blacks and lower income and less educated individuals were more likely to accept the money when offered, the resulting sample of respondents in the reimbursement group did not differ from the no reimbursement group. The full demographic composition of the two groups can be found in Appendix C.

Slightly Higher Response Rates Among Those Not Offered Reimbursement

Contact rates similar for both groups, cooperation rates differed

	Contact Rate	Cooperation Rate	Response Rate (RR3)	Sample Size
Combined Feb-May				
Reimbursement Group	61.7	14.9*	9.2*	21,081
No Reimbursement Group	61.1	17.1	10.5	12,588
February 2015				
Reimbursement Group	61.7	15	9.3	6,364
No Reimbursement Group	61.1	16.5	10.1	3,853
March 2015				
Reimbursement Group	56.1	14.0*	7.9	7,500
No Reimbursement Group	55.4	15.9	8.8	4,373
May 2015				
Reimbursement Group	67.6	15.6*	10.5*	7,217
No Reimbursement Group	66.9	18.6	12.4	4,362

RR3 is the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s Response Rate 3. Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between reimbursement group and no reimbursement group.

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The exception to this finding is that Republicans and Republican-leaning independents made up a slightly higher share of the reimbursement group than the no reimbursement group. There are about equal numbers of Democrats (46%) and Republicans (44%) in the reimbursement group, while Democrats outnumber Republicans 49%-40% in the no reimbursement group. Relatedly, those in the no reimbursement group are less likely to identify as conservative and to disapprove of President Obama's job performance.

It's not clear what accounts for this paradoxical result.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to accept a reimbursement when it is offered, but constitute a larger share of the sample when a reimbursement has not been offered.

It is tempting to drop the \$5 reimbursement, given that this experiment suggests that doing so would result in a small increase in the response rate of the cellphone sample, while at the same time bringing down its cost. However, the experiment also suggests that removing the reimbursement option might reduce the share of Republicans and conservatives in the sample, and without more extensive testing, we don't know whether that would make the poll more or less accurate. Accordingly,

the center has decided not to drop the reimbursement at this time, but will conduct further testing to better understand how the framing of the offer affects a respondent's decision to participate.

Political Differences Exist Between Cellphone Respondents Offered and Not Offered Reimbursement

Political profile of all cell respondents, cell respondents who were offered the reimbursement and cell respondents who were not

	Total Cell Sample	Reimbursement Group	No Reimbursement Group
	Unweighted	Unweighted	Unweighted
	%	%	%
Rep/lean Rep.	42	44*	40
Dem/lean Dem.	47	46*	49
Very conservative	7	7	8
Conservative	29	30*	26
Moderate	36	36	36
Liberal	18	17	19
Very liberal	8	8	8
<i>Obama job approval</i>			
Approve	47	46	49
Disapprove	48	49*	45
<i>National satisfaction</i>			
Satisfied	32	31	33
Dissatisfied	64	65	63
Unweighted N	3255	1938	1317

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between 'offered' and 'not offered'

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

RANDOMLY ASSIGN 60% OF CELL PHONE SAMPLE TO OFFER=1 AND 40% FOR OFFER=2.

ASK IF CELL SAMPLE AND OFFER=1 (CELL PHONE INTRO):

Hello, I am _____ calling on behalf of the Pew Research Center. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey about some important issues facing this country today. I know I am calling you on a cell phone. If you would like to be reimbursed for your cell phone minutes, we will pay all eligible respondents \$5 for participating in this survey. This is not a sales call. **[IF R SAYS DRIVING/UNABLE TO TAKE CALL; Thank you. We will try you another time...].**

ASK IF CELL SAMPLE AND OFFER=2 (CELL PHONE INTRO):

Hello, I am _____ calling on behalf of the Pew Research Center. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey about some important issues facing this country today. This is not a sales call. **[IF R SAYS DRIVING/UNABLE TO TAKE CALL; Thank you. We will try you another time...].**

ASK ALL CELL PHONE SAMPLE:

CELL_MIN Thinking about the cell phone you are using right now, are you worried about using too many cell phone minutes this month, or is that not something you are worried about?

- 1 Worried about minutes this month
- 2 Not worried about minutes this month
- 3 Have unlimited minutes **(VOL.)**
- 9 Don't know/refused **(VOL.)**

ASK IF CELL PHONE SAMPLE AND OFFER=1:

MONEY2 That's the end of the interview. If you would like to be reimbursed for your cell phone minutes, we can send you \$5. I will need your full name and a mailing address where we can send you the money? **[INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R does not want to give full name, explain we only need it so we can send the \$5 to them personally.]** {QID:money}

- 1 **[ENTER FULL NAME] – INTERVIEWER: PLEASE VERIFY SPELLING**
- 2 **[ENTER MAILING ADDRESS]**
- 3 **[City]**
- 4 **[State]**
- 5 **CONFIRM ZIP from above**
- 9 **(VOL.) Respondent does not want the money**

FOR INTERVIEWER ONLY, IF CELL PHONE SAMPLE AND OFFER=2:

ASKMONEY Did respondent ask to be paid for their cell phone minutes at any time during the interview?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

IF YES (ASKMONEY=1), ASK:

ASKMONEY2 Earlier you asked to be reimbursed for your cell phone minutes. We can send you \$5. I will need your full name and a mailing address where we can send you the money.
[INTERVIEWER NOTE: If R does not want to give full name, explain we only need it so we can send the \$5 to them personally.]

- 1 **[ENTER FULL NAME] – INTERVIEWER: PLEASE VERIFY SPELLING**
- 2 **[ENTER MAILING ADDRESS]**
- 3 **[City]**
- 4 **[State]**
- 5 **CONFIRM ZIP from above**
- 9 **(VOL.)** Respondent does not want the money

Appendix B: Full Demographics of Those Who Did and Did Not Accept Money When Offered

Those Who Accept \$5 Reimbursement Differ Demographically From Those Who Don't

Demographic profiles of all cell respondents, those who accepted the reimbursement and cell respondents who did not when offered

	Total Cell Sample Unweighted	Offered Money and Accepted Unweighted	Offered Money and Did Not Accept Unweighted
	%	%	%
Male	60	57	62
Female	40	43	38
18-29	22	23	22
30-49	32	33	33
50-64	28	31	26
65+	17	13*	18
White, non-Hispanic	67	56*	69
Black, non-Hispanic	10	21*	7
Hispanic	15	15	14
Other	7	8	7
English interview	93	92	94
Spanish interview	7	8	6
High school grad or less	32	39*	30
Some coll/Assoc. degree	27	27	25
College grad or higher	41	33*	44
<\$30,000	29	45*	24
\$30,000-74,999	31	30	31
\$75,000+	33	18*	38
Registered to vote	69	68	70
Rep/lean Rep.	42	39	45
Dem/lean Dem.	47	51*	44
Unweighted N	3255	413	1525

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between 'accepted' and 'not accepted'

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Those Who Accept \$5 Reimbursement Differ Demographically From Those Who Don't (continued)

Demographic profiles of all cell respondents, those who accepted the reimbursement and cell respondents who did not when offered

	Total Cell Sample	Offered Money and Accepted	Offered Money and Did Not Accept
	<i>Unweighted</i>	<i>Unweighted</i>	<i>Unweighted</i>
	%	%	%
Very conservative	7	7	7
Conservative	29	29	30
Moderate	36	35	36
Liberal	18	16	17
Very liberal	8	10	7
Protestant	45	47	45
Catholic	20	19	20
Other	8	8	8
Unaffiliated	25	25	26
Rural	17	19	17
Suburban	48	45	48
Urban	35	36	35
Dual cell/landline	42	43	43
Cell phone only	58	57	57
Not a prepaid phone	60	52*	61
Prepaid phone	15	24*	13
<i>Unweighted N</i>	3255	413	1525

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between 'accepted' and 'not accepted'

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Appendix C: Full Demographics of Cellphone Respondents Offered and Not Offered Reimbursement

Few Differences Between Cellphone Respondents Offered and Not Offered Reimbursement

Demographic profiles of all cell respondents, cell respondents who were offered the reimbursement and cell respondents who were not

	Total Cell Sample	Reimbursement Group	No Reimbursement Group
	Unweighted	Unweighted	Unweighted
	%	%	%
Male	60	61	59
Female	40	39	41
18-29	22	22	23
30-49	32	33	32
50-64	28	27	29
65+	17	17	16
White, non-Hispanic	67	66	67
Black, non-Hispanic	10	10	10
Hispanic	15	14	15
Other	7	7	7
English interview	93	93	94
Spanish interview	7	7	6
High school grad or less	32	32	30
Some coll/Assoc. degree	27	26	29
College grad or higher	41	42	41
<\$30,000	29	29	29
\$30,000-74,999	31	31	31
\$75,000+	33	33	33
Registered to vote	69	70	69
Rep/lean Rep.	42	44*	40
Dem/lean Dem.	47	46*	49
Unweighted N	3255	1938	1317

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between reimbursement group and no reimbursement group.

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Few Differences Between Cellphone Respondents Offered and Not Offered Reimbursement (continued)

% in each demographic group within each treatment

	Total Cell Sample	Reimbursement Group	No Reimbursement Group
	<i>Unweighted</i>	<i>Unweighted</i>	<i>Unweighted</i>
	%	%	%
Very conservative	7	7	8
Conservative	29	30*	26
Moderate	36	36	36
Liberal	18	17	19
Very liberal	8	8	8
Protestant	45	45	46
Catholic	20	20	21
Other	8	8	7
Unaffiliated	25	25	26
Rural	17	18	17
Suburban	48	47	50
Urban	35	35	33
Dual cell/landline	42	43	41
Cell phone only	58	57	59
Not a prepaid phone	60	59	60
Prepaid phone	15	15	15
<i>Unweighted N</i>	3255	1938	1317

Based on Pew Research Center political surveys in February-May 2015.

* Statistically significant difference between reimbursement group and no reimbursement group.

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Appendix D: About the Surveys

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted February 18-22, March 25-29 and May 12-18, 2015 among a combined national sample of 5,006 adults, ages 18 or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (1,751 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 3,255 were interviewed on a cellphone, including 1,876 who had no landline telephone). The data in this report focuses on the cellphone respondents. The surveys were conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cellphone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult age 18 or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The landline and cellphone sample for each poll are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2013 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cellphone only, or both landline and cellphone), based on extrapolations from the 2014 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cellphones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample (Feb-May)	3255	2.0 percentage points
Total sample (March-May)	2277	2.4 percentage points
Not offered reimbursement	1317	3.1 percentage points
Offered reimbursement	1938	2.6 percentage points
<i>Offered reimbursement and accepted</i>		
February-May	413	5.5 percentage points
March-May	282	6.7 percentage points
<i>Offered reimbursement and did not accept</i>		
February-May	1525	2.9 percentage points
March-May	1066	3.4 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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