

The General Social Survey



Graphical Tools for Monitoring GSS Data Collection Progress

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INTRODUCTION

In collecting data for the General Social Survey (GSS), we closely monitor progress to meet target completion numbers and to support the precision of GSS estimates. This brief Methodological Report outlines one of the tools we use for monitoring: graphical comparisons of data collection progress between the current and previous survey rounds. These routine graphical assessments provide the GSS team with a mid-data collection understanding of how data collection is doing and provide insight into anticipated progress for the remainder of the field period. In this report, we describe the monitoring approach and present two example charts to illustrate its application.

DATA COLLECTION MONITORING METHODS

The 2024 GSS included target goals for the final number of completed interviews for two experimental groups in the sample design: (a) sample members initially recruited to complete the survey via a web questionnaire before a subset was selected for face-to-face follow-up (Web-first), and (b) sample members recruited through face-to-face outreach before being offered the web version of the questionnaire (Face-to-Face-first or FTF-first). For detailed information on the 2024 GSS sample design and methodology, refer to the [2024 GSS Documentation and Public Use File Codebook \(Release 3\)](#). These same two experimental groups were also used for the 2022 GSS.

To monitor data collection progress for both groups, we compared the 2024 progress with that observed at similar time points during the 2022 GSS round. Exhibits 1 and 2 present charts used in 2024 monitoring for the Web-first and FTF-first groups, respectively, based on data collected through Week 23. The 2024 data are only shown through Week 23 to demonstrate how these charts were used as live tools to monitor progress during data collection. In both charts, weekly interview completions were tracked as a percentage of each group's target. Given the planned data collection period of approximately 33 weeks, we graphically compared these 2024 series with corresponding 2022 series calculated as the percentage of interviews completed each week relative to the total number completed by Week 33 of the 2022 round. That is, although 2022 data collection was longer than 33 weeks, we used a 2022 comparison matching the number of planned weeks for 2024 data collection. Because the 2022 Web-first sample was released in multiple batches, we focused our comparison on the first batch of the 2022 Web-first sample.

Additionally, the charts included annotations indicating approximate dates of key data collection milestones, particularly the 2022 mailing schedule and planned mailings for 2024. These annotations provided context for interpreting data collection progress and illustrated how data collection responded to specific mailings. For example, noticeable increases in 2024 completions as a percentage of final targets were observed following the Week 7 Reminder FedEx mailing for the Web-first sample and the Week 16 Reminder FedEx mailing for the FTF-first sample. Including this descriptive information in the charts helped the GSS team anticipate similar increases in completions following future mailings.

When the 2024 percentage-of-target series exceeded the 2022 percentage-of-final-completes series, it gave the team greater confidence in meeting the target, based on expectations for continued progress. Conversely, when the 2024 series lagged behind the 2022 series, it raised concerns that remaining data collection efforts might fall short of achieving the targets. These insights informed decisions about how to adjust 2024 data collection strategies to meet completion targets and to ensure the desired precision of estimates.

These graphics represent one of several tools the GSS team uses to monitor data collection progress. Other tools include tracking estimated response rates, completions by various sample characteristics, and representativity indicators (R-indicators; Schouten et al., 2017).

The Web-first mailing interventions shown in Exhibit 1 include the following. Note that this list of mailings includes key mailings, while it is not the full list of mailings sent to sampled households.

Invitation Mailing. Includes the invitation letter and information for starting the survey, with inserts in a full-color envelope to encourage participation in the study.

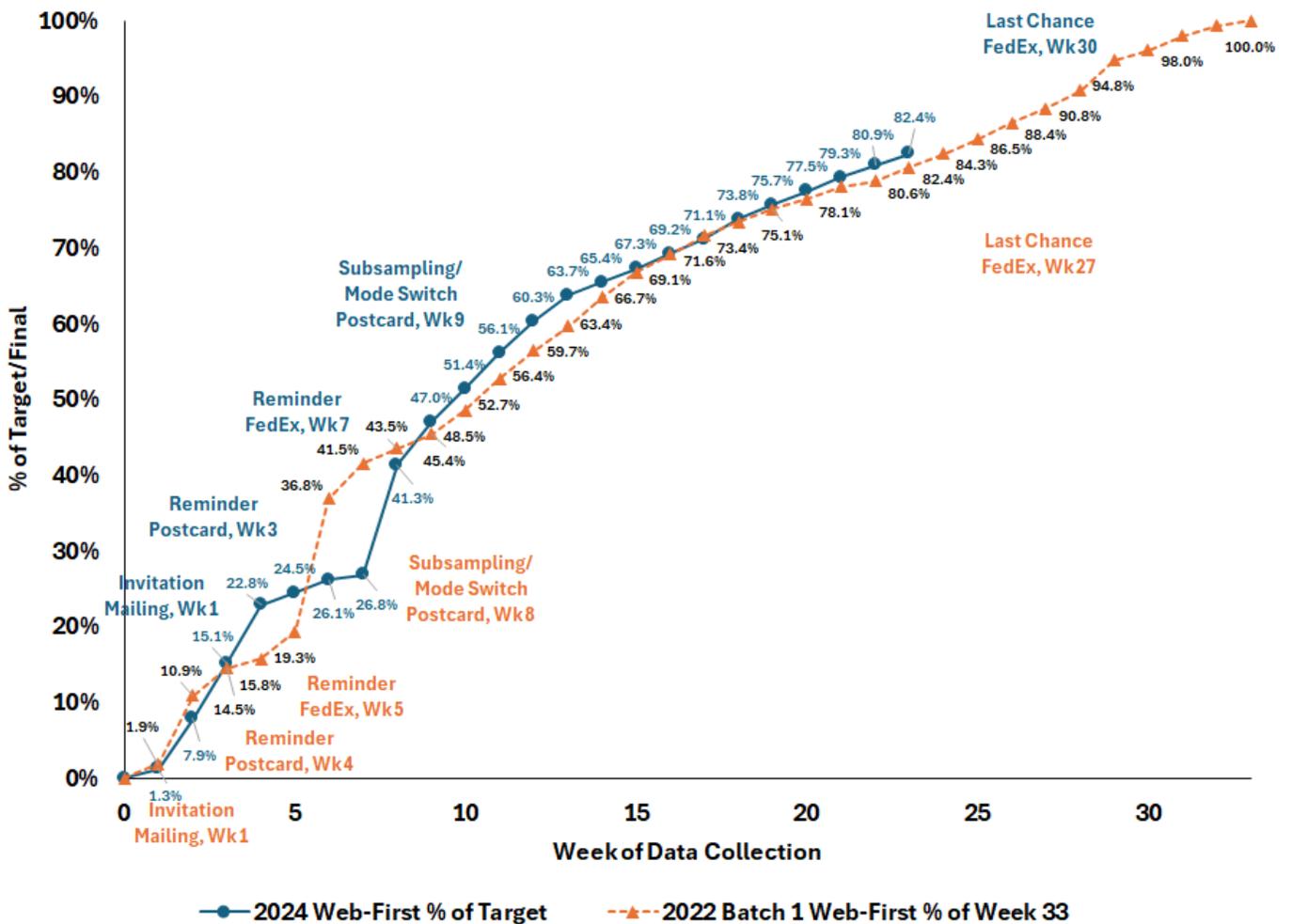
Reminder Postcard. Refers to the previous mailing and provides reasons to participate, with the customized PIN to access the survey provided underneath a scratch-off.

Reminder FedEx. Refers to the invitation packet and includes more engagement on GSS topics and facts, with an emphasis on the incentive offered.

Subsampling/Mode Switch Postcard. Announces the in-person option to cases previously invited to complete the survey on the web, with an emphasis on mode and scheduling flexibility.

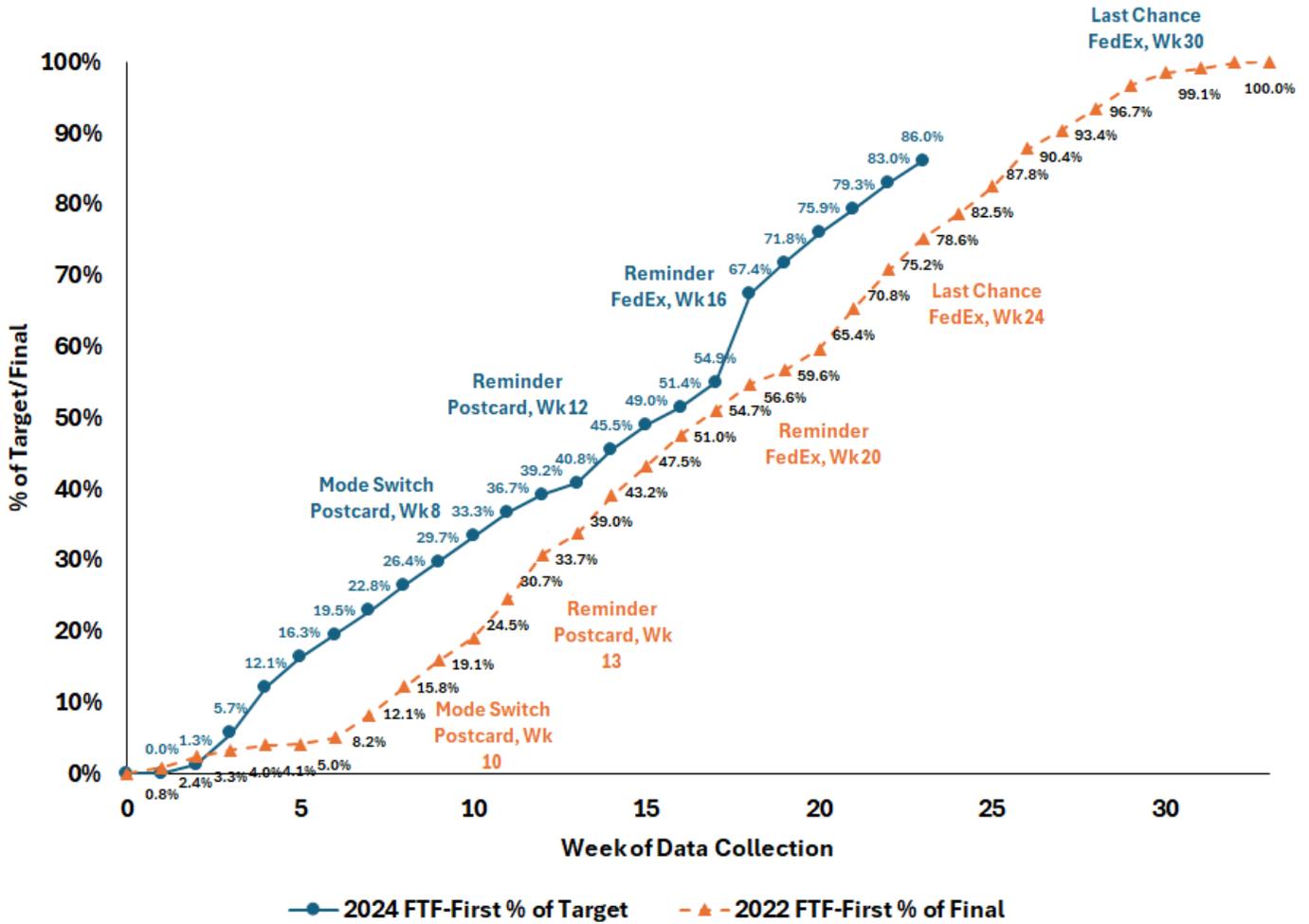
Last Chance FedEx. Informs recipients that the study is ending soon, with information on how to complete the survey and additional emphasis on the incentive offered.

Exhibit 1. 2024 GSS Monitoring of Web-First Completes as of Week 23 of Data Collection



Source: General Social Survey Data Collection Monitoring, 2024.
 Notes: Data for 2024 are only shown through Week 23 to demonstrate how this chart served as a live tool to monitor progress during data collection. Because 2024 data collection was planned for 33 weeks, 2024 data collection progress was compared with 33 weeks of 2022 data collection.

Exhibit 2. 2024 GSS Monitoring of Face-to-Face-First (FTF-First) Completes as of Week 23 of Data Collection



Source: General Social Survey Data Collection Monitoring, 2024.

Notes: Data for 2024 are only shown through Week 23 to demonstrate how this chart served as a live tool to monitor progress during data collection. Because 2024 data collection was planned for 33 weeks, 2024 data collection progress was compared with 33 weeks of 2022 data collection.

The FTF-first mailing interventions shown in Exhibit 2 include the following. As with the list above for Web-first, this list of mailings includes key mailings, while it is not the full list of mailings sent to sampled households.

Subsampling/Mode Switch Postcard. Announces the web option to cases previously approached via face-to-face visits, with the customized PIN to access the survey provided underneath a scratch-off.

Reminder Postcard. Refers to the initial invitation mailing and provides reasons to participate, with the customized PIN to access the survey provided underneath a scratch-off and an emphasis on the incentive offered.

Reminder FedEx. Refers to the invitation packet and includes more engagement on GSS topics and facts.

Last Chance FedEx. Informs recipients that the study is ending soon, with additional emphasis on the incentive offered.

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