



Neighbors Online

One in five Americans use digital tools to communicate with neighbors and monitor community developments.

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<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Neighbors-Online.aspx>

Pew Internet & American Life Project

An initiative of the [Pew Research Center](#)

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Overview

Americans use a range of approaches to keep informed about what is happening in their communities and online activities have been added to the mix. Face-to-face encounters and phone calls remain the most frequent methods of interaction with neighbors. At the same time, internet tools are gaining ground in community-oriented communications.

In a poll conducted at the end of last year, we asked about online connections to communities and neighbors and found that in the twelve months preceding our survey:

- 22% of all adults (representing 28% of internet users) signed up to receive alerts about local issues (such as traffic, school events, weather warnings or crime alerts) via email or text messaging.
- 20% of all adults (27% of internet users) used digital tools to talk to their neighbors and keep informed about community issues.

Overall, physical personal encounters remain the primary way people stay informed about community issues. In the twelve months preceding our survey:

- 46% of Americans talked face-to-face with neighbors about community issues
- 21% discussed community issues over the telephone
- 11% read a blog dealing with community issues
- 9% exchanged emails with neighbors about community issues and 5% say they belong to a community email listserv
- 4% communicated with neighbors by text messaging on cell phones
- 4% joined a social network site group connected to community issues
- 2% followed neighbors using Twitter

These findings come from a national telephone survey conducted November 30 to December 27, 2009 among 2,258 Americans (including 565 reached on a cell phone). The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based internet users (n=1,676) the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points.

Who knows who in neighborhoods and how neighbors interact

We asked our survey respondents whether or not they knew the names of the neighbors who live close to them and found that 19% said that they knew the names of all of their neighbors, and 24% said that they knew most of them.¹ The remaining three-fifths of Americans know either some (29%) or none (28%) of their neighbors by name. These figures are unchanged from the last time we asked this question in July 2008. As we have consistently found in previous research, internet use is not correlated with a reduced likelihood of knowing the names of others in one's neighborhood. Indeed, daily internet users are just as likely as less frequent internet users—and more likely than non-users—to know some or all of their neighbors by name.

Americans use a range of tools to interact with their neighbors and keep up with community events—from face-to-face discussions to local blogs and listservs. These specific approaches are discussed in more detail below.

Face-to-face

When Americans need to find out what is happening in their community, they frequently meet with their neighbors for a face-to-face talk. Nearly half of all the adults we surveyed (46%) had talked face-to-face with their neighbors about community issues in the preceding twelve months, making it the most common activity we measured in this study.

Having face-to-face interactions with neighbors about community developments is tightly linked with factors such as age, socio-economic status and race. Latinos, 18-29 year olds, those without a high school diploma and those with a household income of less than \$30,000 per year are among the groups that are least likely to speak to neighbors in person about community issues. These groups are also relatively unlikely to know most or all of their neighbors by name; there is a strong correlation between knowing one's neighbors and having face-to-face interactions to discuss community issues.

Parents (52%) are more likely than non-parents (43%) to meet with neighbors face-to-face to discuss community issues, and there are no differences on this question based on geographic location—urban, suburban and rural adults are equally likely to have these face-to-face discussions. Additionally, internet users are no less likely than non-users to discuss community issues with their neighbors (indeed, 50% of internet users have done so, compared with 35% of non-users).

¹ For this question, we allowed respondents to interpret for themselves the definition of “neighbors who live close to you”.

Those who know their neighbors are more likely to have face-to-face talks around community issues

	Know all or most of neighbors	Talk face-to-face with neighbors about community issues
All adults	42%	46%
Gender		
Male	40	47
Female	44	46
Race/Ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	49	50
Black, non-Hispanic	28	43
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	23	29
Age		
18-29	27	31
30-49	42	48
50-64	50	58
65+	52	45
Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	27	29
High school graduate	40	40
Some college	41	47
College+	54	63
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	31	35
\$30,000-\$49,999	42	46
\$50,000-\$74,999	43	58
\$75,000 or more	56	61

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.

Telephone

Talking on the phone about community issues is roughly half as common as talking face-to-face; one in five adults (21%) did this in the last year. By and large, speaking with neighbors about community issues on the phone is common with the same groups that engage in these conversations face-to-face:

- **Those ages 50 and older** – One quarter (26%) of 50-64 year olds and 29% of those 65 and older talked on the phone with neighbors about community issues in the previous year, significantly higher than the percentage of 18-29 year olds (12%) or 30-49 year olds (19%) who did so.
- **College graduates** – 28% of those with a college degree did this, significantly higher than all other education levels.
- **Non-Hispanics** – 23% of whites and 22% of African-Americans had a phone conversation about community issues, compared with 14% of Latinos.

Urban, rural and suburban residents are equally likely to discuss community issues over the telephone, although (in contrast to face-to-face interactions) parents and non-parents are equally likely to speak over the phone about these issues.

Email

Just over one in ten email users (13%, representing 9% of all adults) exchanged email with their neighbors about community issues in the twelve months preceding our survey.² Neighbor-to-neighbor communications via email are popular with many of the same groups that use face-to-face and telephone interactions:

- **College graduates** – 21% of online college graduates exchanged email with neighbors about community issues. Among email users who have not graduated college, just 9% have done this.
- **Those ages 30 and older** – Among email users just 8% of 18-29 year olds exchange emails with neighbors about community issues, compared with 15% of those ages 30-49, 14% of those ages 50-64 and 19% of those 65 and older.
- **Parents** – 17% of email-using parents and 11% of non-parents have exchanged email with neighbors about issues in their community.

Compared with telephone and in-person communication, racial differences are somewhat less pronounced when it comes to using email to communicate about neighborhood issues. Among email users 15% of whites and 9% of both African-Americans and Hispanics shared email with neighbors about community issues in the preceding year, differences that are not statistically significant. Similarly, there are no significant differences on this question based on geographic location.

Community blogs

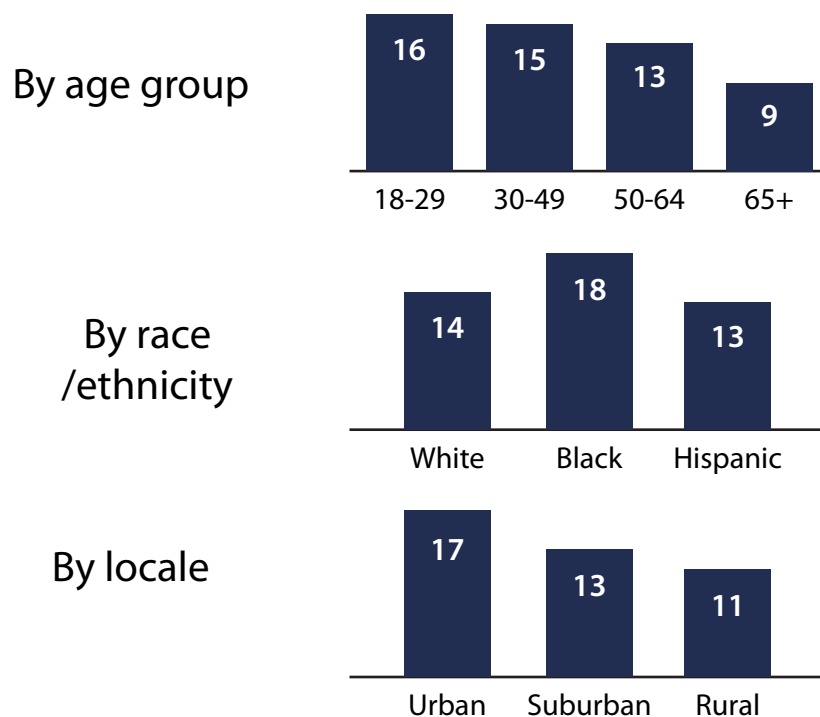
Fourteen percent (14%) of internet users – or 11% of all American adults – read a blog dealing with community issues in the twelve months preceding our survey, making community blogs as common as email communications as a way to keep up with neighborhood events. In contrast to face-to-face, telephone and email interactions, neighborhood blogs are relatively popular with young adults: 16% of online 18-29 year olds read a blog dealing with community issues, similar to the rate for those ages 30-64 (15%) and significantly higher than internet users 65 and older (9% of whom have done so).

² In addition to asking about sharing emails with neighbors, we also asked a separate question about membership in neighborhood listservs and online discussion groups. Membership in these groups is discussed later in this report.

Community blogs are particularly popular among residents of urban areas, as 17% of wired urbanites read a blog dealing with community issues. This is significantly higher than the 11% online rural residents who read such blogs. Online whites (14%), blacks (18%) and Hispanics (13%) are equally likely to read community blogs, and there is relatively little variation on this question based on income and education.

Young, urban dwellers are most likely to read community blogs

The proportion of internet users within each group who read a blog dealing with community issues in the preceding 12 months



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older, including 1,676 internet users. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.



Text messaging

Nearly 70% of cell phone owners use their mobile devices to send text messages, yet texting is not currently a major tool for neighbor-to-neighbor interactions. Just 6% of these cell texters – or 4% of all American adults – exchanged text messages with neighbors about community issues and events in the twelve months prior to our survey.

Among cell texters there are few major demographic differences on the use of text messaging for com-

munity purposes. Interestingly, 10% of African-Americans who use text messaging have texted with others in their neighborhood about community issues; this is among the highest rates of any demographic group, although it is not measurably different from the 6% of white texters who do so.

Rural residents are slightly less likely than those in urban and suburban areas to use the text messaging function on their mobile devices. However, among those who use text messaging rural residents are just as likely to text their neighbors as their urban and suburban counterparts.

Social networking

Nearly one in ten social network users (8%) joined an online group focused on community issues in the preceding twelve months—that works out to 5% of all internet users and 4% of all American adults. Social network users ages 18-29 (9%) and 30-49 (10%) are equally likely to join such groups, while those ages 50 and older (5%) are relatively unlikely to do so. Other than age, there is little variation within the social networking cohort when it comes to using these services to keep up with community events.

Twitter

Among adults who use Twitter or other status update services, 14% use these sites to follow their neighbors—that works out to 3% of all internet users and 2% of all American adults. There are few demographic differences when it comes to following neighbors on status update services, although for many subgroups the sample size is too small to make detailed comparisons.

Local listservs and email lists

In addition to asking about communications practices, we also asked internet users whether they belong to a group email list, listserv or online discussion forum for their neighborhood. Seven percent (7%) of online adults – or 5% of all American adults – said that they do belong to such a list or forum, a figure that is largely unchanged from the 5% of internet users who responded affirmatively when we last asked this question in July 2008.

Online groups and email lists are especially popular with college graduates and high income-earners. Among internet users, 13% of college graduates belong to this type of online forum (compared with 6% of those with some college experience and 3% of those with a high school degree or less); similarly, 15% of internet users with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more belong to an email list or discussion forum, compared with just 2% of those with a household income of \$50,000 or less.

Unlike the other ways of keeping up with community events we have discussed thus far, women are more likely than men to belong to online neighborhood groups—9% of online women are part of such a group, compared with 5% of men. There is also some variation around race and ethnicity: among internet users whites (8%) are more likely than Latinos (3%) to belong to such groups (8% of online African-Americans belong to a community forum or email list).

Participation in these groups is also more prominent in urban and suburban areas than in rural parts of the country. Among internet users 10% of urban residents, 7% of suburbanites and just 2% of rural dwellers belong to a neighborhood list.

Participation in neighborhood listservs

The proportion of internet users within each group who belong to a neighborhood group email list, listserv or online discussion forum

All internet users 7%

Gender	
Male	5
Female	9
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	8
Black, non-Hispanic	8
Hispanic (English- and Spanish-speaking)	3
Educational Attainment	
Less than high school	--
High school graduate	4
Some college	6
Collegiate	13
Annual Household Income	
Less than \$30,000	2
\$30,000-\$49,999	3
\$50,000-\$74,999	7
\$75,000 or more	15
Geographic location	
Urban	10
Suburban	7
Rural	2

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.

When it comes to learning about what's happening in a community, the tools people use are associated with the people they know

Interestingly, the tools people use to keep up with community issues are related to whether or not they are on a first-name basis with their neighbors. As people know fewer of their neighbors by name, they become much less likely to discuss community issues face-to-face. Among those who know all of their neighbors by name, 70% have discussed community issues with neighbors in person, compared with just 12% of those who do not know any of their neighbors. When it comes to using the phone 33% of those who know all of their neighbors by name called someone in the past year to discuss local events, vs. 6% of those who don't know the names any of their neighbors. The numbers for email are 23% vs. 7%.

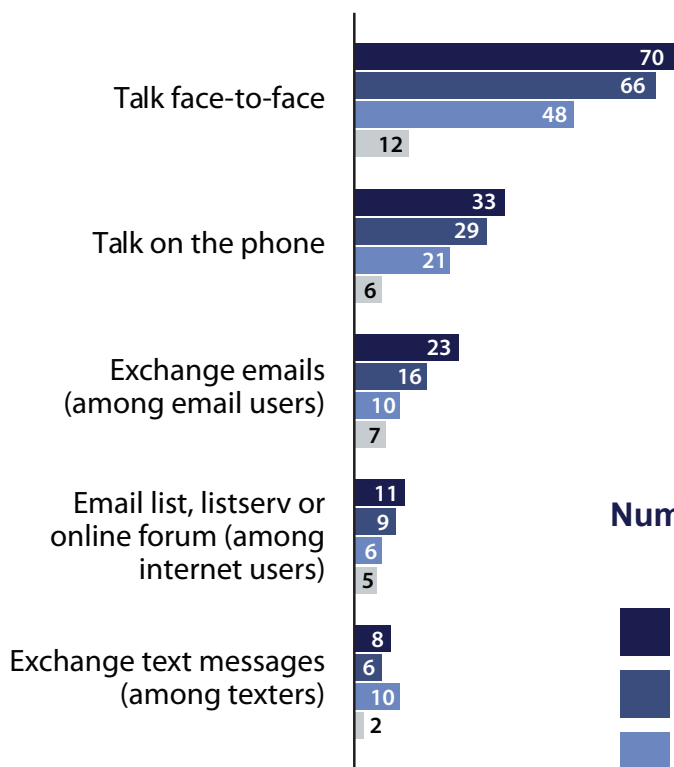
On the other hand, individuals who do not know their neighbors by name are just as likely to keep up with community events by reading community blogs (15% of internet users who know none of their immediate neighbors by name read community blogs, identical to the 14% of those who know all of their neighbors who do so) or by joining a community-focused group on an online social network.³

It is also notable that relatively large number of young adults and minority Americans use tools such as community blogs, social networking sites and text messaging to keep up with neighborhood events--especially since these groups are generally less likely than whites and older adults to talk about community issues via the telephone or face-to-face interactions.

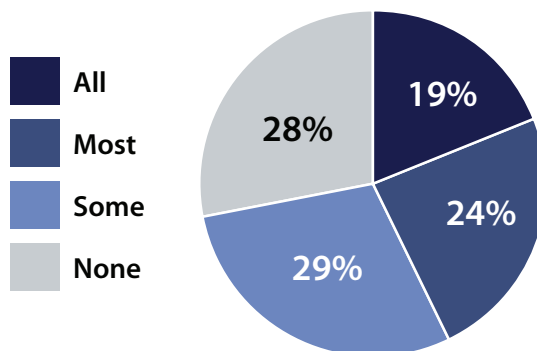
³ Note: due to the relatively small number of respondents who follow their neighbors on Twitter or another status update service, these services are not included in this analysis.

The tools you use to keep up with community issues vary based on who you know

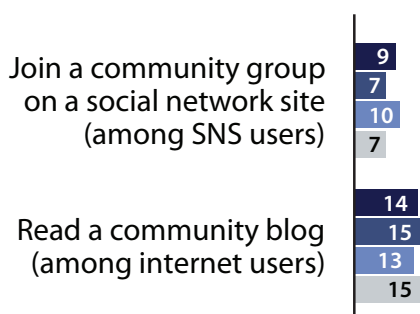
Tools used mostly by those who know their neighbors:



Number of neighbors known by name



Tools used equally by all groups:



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older, including 1,676 internet users. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.



One in five Americans have signed up for email or text message alerts about local issues

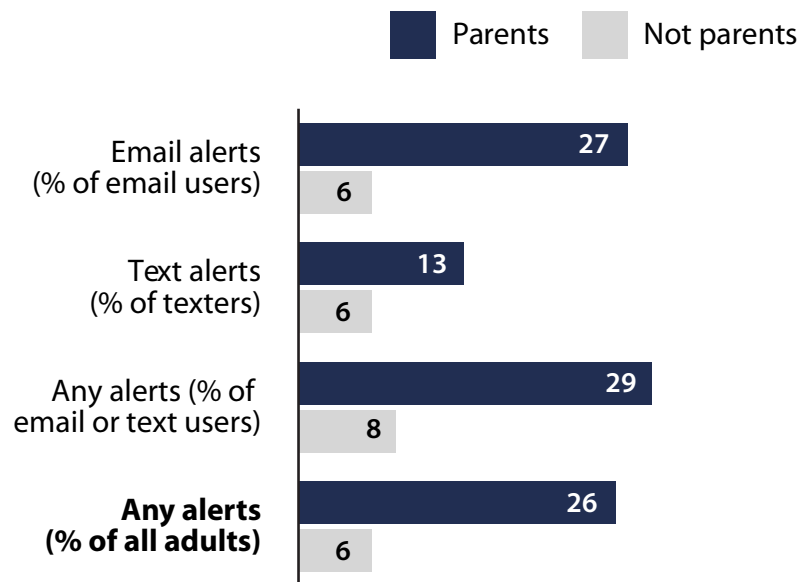
One in five Americans (22%) have signed up to receive alerts about community issues via text or email. This includes anyone who has signed up for alerts about one or more of the following issues:

- School events, such as school closings (13% of all adults have signed up for such alerts)
- Warnings about bad weather (11%)
- Crime in one's neighborhood (5%)
- Traffic congestion or road closings (4%)

These different activities are discussed in more detail below.

Parents are much more likely than non-parents to sign up for school alerts

The proportion within each group who have signed up for alerts about school events such as school closings via...



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older, including 1,676 internet users. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.



School events

Just over one in ten adults (13%) have signed up for alerts about school events, such as school closings. Fourteen percent of email users have signed up for email alerts about school issues (that represents 10%

of all adults) and 9% of text messaging users have signed up to receive such alerts on a mobile device (this represents 6% of all adults).⁴

Not surprisingly, school-related alerts are especially popular among adults with children living at home. One-quarter of all parents (26%) have signed up for some kind of school alert, compared with just 6% of non-parents. Other groups that tend to use school alerts more than the overall average include 30-49 year olds (20%), college graduates (20%) and those with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more per year (24%).

Weather updates

When it comes to local issues that people want to be alerted about, bad weather warnings are nearly as common as school updates—11% of all adults have signed up to receive alerts warning them of inclement weather. One in ten email users (10%, representing 8% of all adults) and 9% of phone texters (representing 5% of all adults) have signed up for weather alerts via email and text messaging, respectively.

Bad weather tends to impact everyone regardless of gender, income, geographic location or parental status—accordingly, there are few major demographic differences when it comes to signing up for weather updates or alerts.

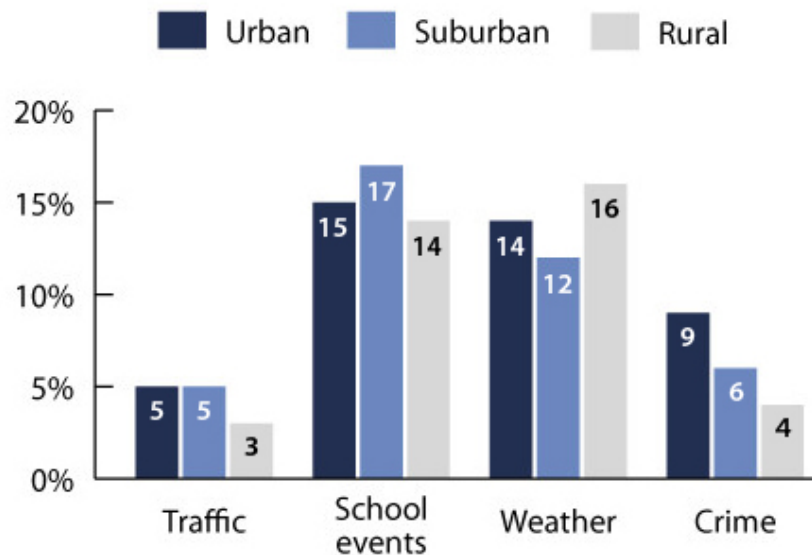
Crime and traffic alerts

Compared with schools and weather, relatively few Americans currently sign up to receive updates about crime in their neighborhood (5% do so) or traffic congestion and road closings (4%).

⁴ Respondents were allowed to say that they receive both email and text message alerts—as a result, the sum of text alert and email alert percentages may add to more than the total percent who receive an alert of any kind.

Other than crime, rural residents are just as likely as their urban counterparts to sign up for neighborhood alerts

The proportion of email/text users within each group who have signed up for alerts about...



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 30-December 27, 2009 Tracking Survey. N=2,258 adults 18 and older, including 1,676 internet users. Please see the Methodology section for margin of error calculations.



Overall there are relatively few demographic differences when it comes to the use of email or text alerts to get traffic and crime information. The primary difference relates to geographic location—crime alerts are more common in urban areas than in rural ones. Among email or text messaging users, 9% of urban residents have signed up for some sort of crime alert, more than double the rate for rural residents (4% of whom have done so). College graduates are also somewhat more likely to sign up for these types of alerts than those with a high school degree or less.

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between November 30 and December 27, 2009, among a sample of 2,258 adults, age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in both English (n=2,197) and Spanish (n=61). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,676), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, half of the time interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult male currently at home. If no male was at home at the time of the call, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult female. For the other half of the contacts interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult female currently at home. If no female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male at home. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's March 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. This analysis produces population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 1: Sample Dispositions

Landline	Cell	
21990	8100	T Total Numbers Dialed
1263	183	OF Non-residential
1068	6	OF Computer/Fax
10	0	OF Cell phone
9496	3132	OF Other not working
1130	140	UH Additional projected not working
9023	4639	Working numbers
41.0%	57.3%	Working Rate
377	47	UH No Answer / Busy
1201	1101	UONC Voice Mail
40	8	UONC Other Non-Contact
7405	3483	Contacted numbers
82.1%	75.1%	Contact Rate
668	642	UOR Callback
4868	1940	UOR Refusal
1869	901	Cooperating numbers
25.2%	25.9%	Cooperation Rate
66	27	IN1 Language Barrier
0	291	IN2 Child's cell phone
1803	583	Eligible numbers
96.5%	64.7%	Eligibility Rate
110	18	R Break-off
1693	565	I Completes
93.9%	96.9%	Completion Rate
19.5%	18.8%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 19.5 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 18.8 percent.

December Tracking Survey 2009 Final Topline

1/4/10

Data for November 30 – December 27, 2009

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life ProjectSample: n= 2,258 national adults, age 18 and older, including 565 cell phone interviews
Interviewing dates: 11.30.09 – 12.27.09

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,258]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,676]

Q27 Do you know the names of your neighbors who live close to you, or not? [IF YES: Do you know all of them, most of them or only some of them?]

	CURRENT		JULY 2008
%	19	Yes, know all of them	18
	24	Yes, know most of them	21
	29	Yes, know only some of them	30
	28	No, do not know any	29
	1	(VOL.) Do not have neighbors close by	1
	*	Don't know	1
	*	Refused	1

Q28 For these next few questions, I'd like you to think about activities you may or may not have done in your community. In the past 12 months, have you...[INSERT; ALWAYS ASK a & b FIRST IN ORDER, THEN RANDOMIZE]?

	YES, HAVE DONE THIS	NO, HAVE NOT	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Talked face-to-face with your neighbors about community issues	46	53	*	*
b. Talked on the phone with your neighbors about community issues	21	79	*	*
<i>Item C: Based on email users [N=1,613]</i>				
c. Exchanged email with your neighbors about community issues	13	87	*	*
<i>Item D: Based on all internet users [N=1,676]</i>				
d. Read a blog dealing with community issues	14	85	*	0
<i>Item E: Based on texters [N=1,113]</i>				
e. Exchanged TEXT MESSAGES with neighbors about community issues	6	94	*	0
<i>Item F: Based on SNS users [N=849]</i>				
f. Joined an online group focused on community issues on a social networking site	8	91	*	0

Item G: Based on Twitter users [N=307]

g. Followed your neighbors using Twitter or another status update service	14	86	*	0
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Q29 Do you belong to a group email list, list-serv or online discussion forum for your neighborhood?

Based on all internet users [N=1,676]

	CURRENT		JULY 2008 ¹
%	7	Yes	5
	93	No	94
	*	Don't know	1
	*	Refused	*

Q30 In some communities, people can receive alerts about community issues via email or text messages. In the past 12 months, have you signed up for alerts about [INSERT; RANDOMIZE]? [IF YES: Is that an email alert, a text alert or both?]

Based on email users or texters [N=1,738]

	YES, EMAIL ALERT	YES, TEXT ALERT	YES, BOTH	NO, HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Traffic congestion or road closings in your community	2	2	1	95	*	*
b. School events such as school closings	8	3	5	83	1	*
c. Warnings of bad weather in your area	7	4	3	86	*	*
d. Crime in your neighborhood	4	1	1	93	*	*

¹ July 2008 question wording was as follows: "Do you belong to an email list, list-serv or discussion forum for your neighborhood?" Question was asked of Total respondents, but results shown here have been recalculated to be based on all internet users.