

Survey Incentives and Response Behavior

Case Study: “Proyecto Mi Barrio” Phone Survey, Medellín, Colombia

There is a vast literature on how incentives affect response rates as well as response quality in cross-sectional (one point in time) and longitudinal surveys (repeated observations) in higher income countries. However, there is more [limited evidence](#) around applicability to lower- and medium- income countries (LMICs). IPA Colombia tested how the effect of an increase in incentive size affects response rates, response quality, and response distributions. Consistent with prior research, they found no significant differences in response rates, item non-response, and no pattern of differences in responses when incentive amounts were increased.

Motivation & Design

There is some consensus that monetary incentives increase response rates by reducing refusal rates, but do so with diminishing returns as the size of incentives increases ([Singer & Ye, 2012](#)). There is a very limited amount of evidence on the role that incentives play on the quality of responses. Incentives may affect response quality by motivating strategic responses or decreasing satisficing ([Stecklov, Weinreb & Carletto, 2017](#); [Medway, 2012](#)).

As part of an IPA project called “Proyecto Mi Barrio”, led by Christopher Blattman, Benjamin Lessing, Gustavo Duncan, and Santiago Tobón, IPA Colombia randomly assigned respondents to groups with one of two incentive amounts: 10,000 Colombian pesos (about \$2.69 USD) or 15,000 Colombian pesos (about \$4.04 USD).

The study was implemented in the first 10 days of data collection, resulting in 979 attempted surveys. Incentives were promised at the start of the survey, with the incentive amount mentioned in the introduction text. Incentives were delivered as air-time recharge to the respondent’s cellphone.

Results

The objective of the survey was to analyze how the organized crime groups of Medellín were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and items in the survey focused on citizens were reporting those behaviors. The effects of incentives were analyzed considering three variables: changes in response rates, non-response, and response distributions.

Changes in compensation did not affect response rates significantly, nor did it affect rates of item non-response within the survey. More importantly, there were no significant or substantively meaningful differences in the answers between the two incentive values. Table 1 displays the differences for 8 different indexes (ranging from 0 to 1) that are used as outcomes from the study. Each index summarized a set of questions on how respondents reported on how various groups are responding to the pandemic. One index, lockdown shortage, showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.10$ level. This is not indicative of a pattern of response bias.

Table 1: Impact of higher incentive on reported behaviors

Behavioral Index	Effect size of increased incentive	P-value
Lockdown enforcement		
State	-0.02	0.886
Combo	0.07	0.519
Mayor	0.06	0.567
Lockdown compliance		
Citizen	0.15	0.134
State	-0.05	0.639
COVID Governance		
Combo	0.04	0.743
Mayor	-0.04	0.702
Lockdown shortage	0.20*	0.057

Note: Sample sizes range from 375 to 396. * statistically significant at $p < 0.10$ level; ** Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level

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