

Strengths and Limitations of the RIWI approach

RIWI's methodology achieves a random sample of anonymous, safe respondents, without capturing personally identifiable information. However, there is a trade-off to this methodology, and it is best employed in certain situations over others.

Due to the scale of internet users, and the ability of the technology to randomly sample the entire internet-using population of a country, it is possible not only to achieve very large samples in a short amount of time, but also to include large samples of previously unengaged or silent voices across the entire country. Respondents are not part of a panel or discussion group, who usually come from specific demographic subsets. Additionally, as the technology does not capture any personally identifiable information whatsoever, and never prompts respondents with a request for their identity, it is possible to ask extremely sensitive questions, garner honest responses, and maintain the respondent's safety.

The benefits are simultaneously the limitations. As an internet based technology, it cannot reach someone who has absolutely no access to the internet. Where no identifiable information is known about a respondent, it is not possible to follow up with a respondent later on. Respondents may leave the survey at any time – they are not paid with incentives or pressured to remain (introducing the risk of “straight lining” the survey, a significant data quality issue among other methodologies), however that means respondents do indeed leave the survey. Many measures and strategies are introduced to engage and retain online participants, including optimizing the survey instrument for ease of participation on all device screens and bandwidths, as well as clear, concise language for immediate comprehension. RIWI can elaborate on this in more detail if needed.

Other methodologies are best suited for research endeavours that require long term follow-up, group discussions, interviews with known key informants or known program participants, with those who have absolutely no access to the internet, or a miniscule demographic subset of the population (e.g. women police officers with three or more children). RIWI can perform an oversample and apply filters to reach many demographic subsets, however if the incidence rate is too low, other methodologies would be more efficient. However the benefit of anonymous, safe, honest responses to sensitive questions, gathering voices from a truly random sample of the internet population, including voices previously unheard from in data collection, all outweigh the drawbacks.

It remains that no one methodology is perfectly representative or accurate in its findings. This data is one stream of insight into four highly complex countries, and should be understood in tandem with other sources of data to collectively uncover the larger reality. Nor should all current efforts and findings be tossed out as a result of a single study. These findings can suggest how to nuance or adjust current efforts to better reflect what the citizens of these countries reveal are their values, priorities, and perceptions of democracy.