

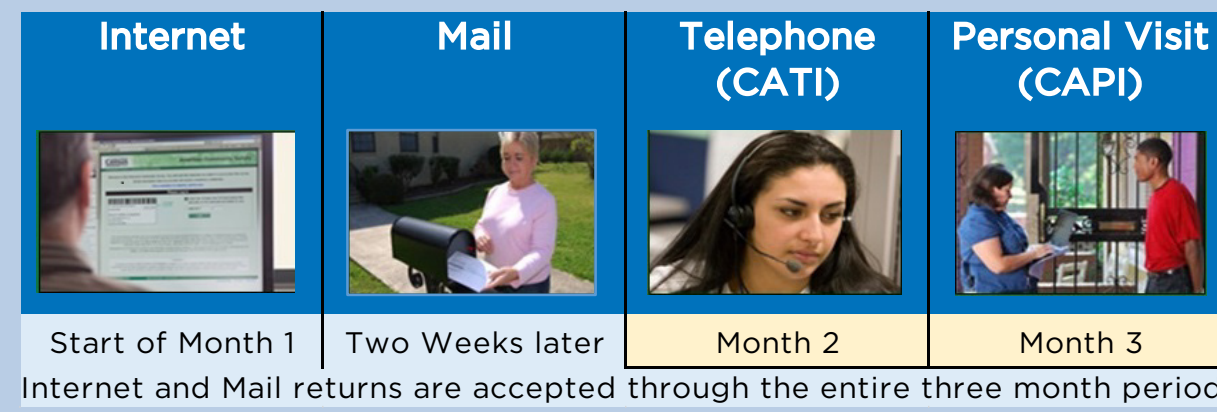
When is the Best Time to Field Your Survey? Trends in American Community Survey Response Rates

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Introduction

- The American Community Survey (ACS) is a continuous, multimode survey that has been in the field nationwide since 2005.
- Data Collection Modes:
 - Internet—2013-present
 - Mail—2005-present
 - Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)—2005-2017
 - Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI)—2005-present
- Data collection for each monthly panel takes place over three months:



- For more information about the ACS, please visit: <https://www.census.gov/acs>.

ACS Response Rates

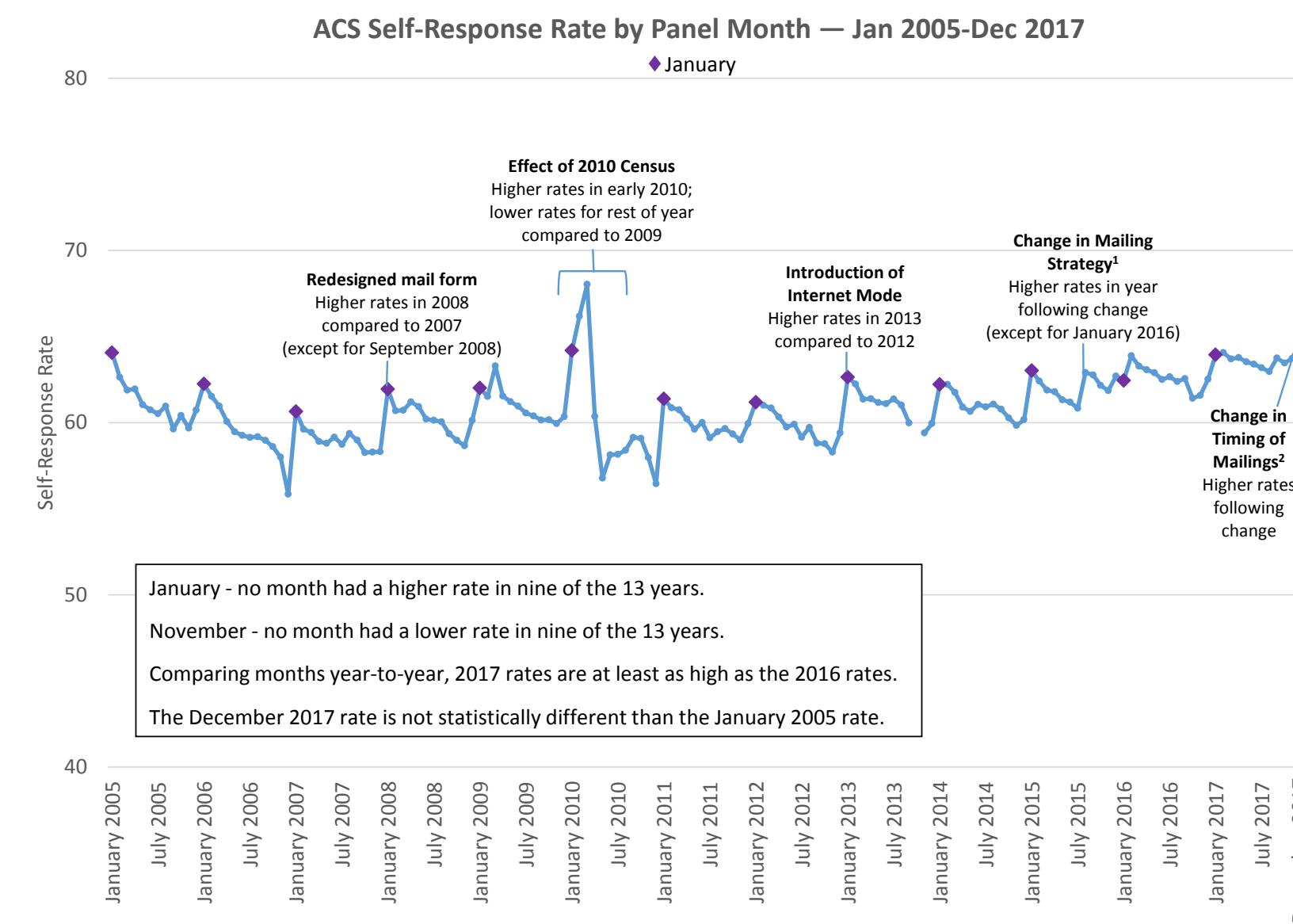
- Typically reported annually for all modes combined (95% in 2016), but vary by mode and month.
- Impacted by:
 - Methodological changes (e.g., changes in mailing materials and timing) intended to increase self-response rates.
 - Efforts to reduce respondent burden (e.g., CAPI stopping rule) may lower response rates.
 - CAPI interviewers encourage households to complete survey via Internet.
 - Changes in the willingness of households to respond.
- This research examines trends in monthly response rates for 2005-2017 by mode.

Methodology

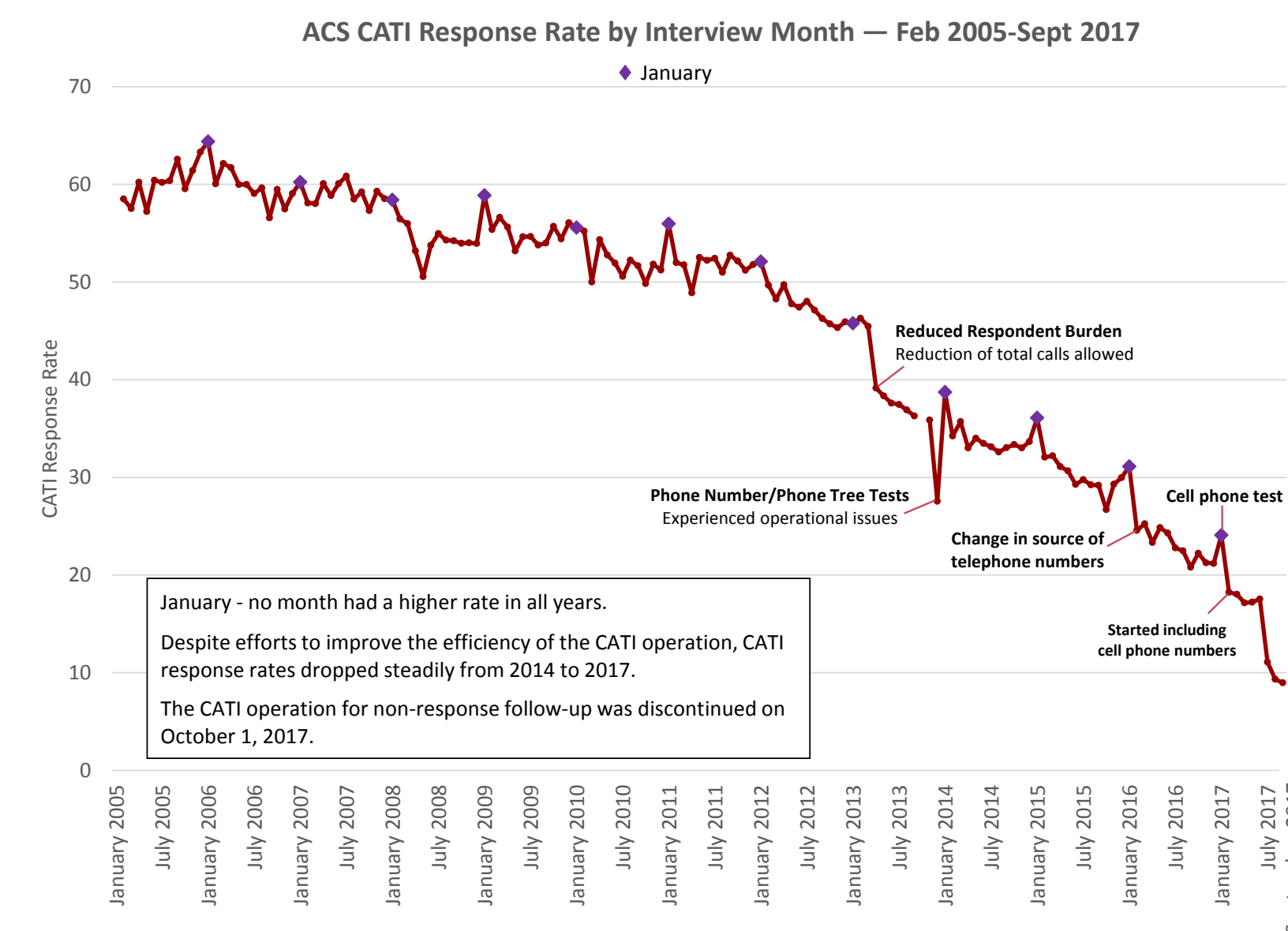
- Used 2005 through 2017 panel ACS paradata at the national level.
- Computed mode-specific response rates as:

$$\frac{\text{Weighted number of responses received via mode}}{\text{Weighted addresses eligible to respond via mode}} * 100$$
- Weights take into account probability of selection, including CAPI subsampling when appropriate.
- Calculated standard errors using replicate weights and performed statistical testing to determine if the rates are statistically significant at the 0.10 significance level.
- Excluded:
 - Addresses used to test methodological changes to the survey.
 - Addresses in the October 2013 panel due to the government shutdown (shown as gaps in charts).
- The month in the self-response and Internet rates graphs is the first month of data collection.

...With a self-response option?

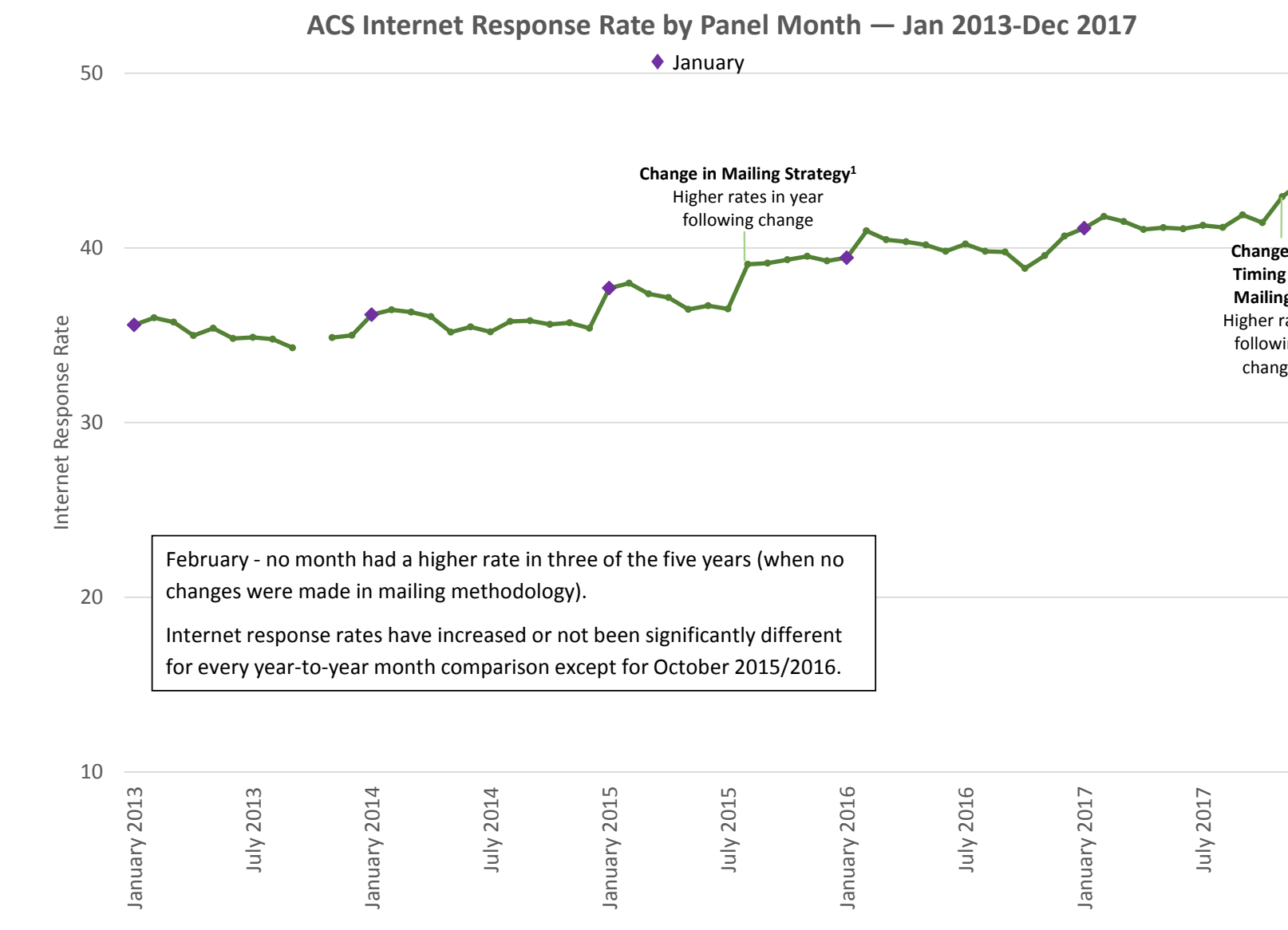


...With a telephone interview option?

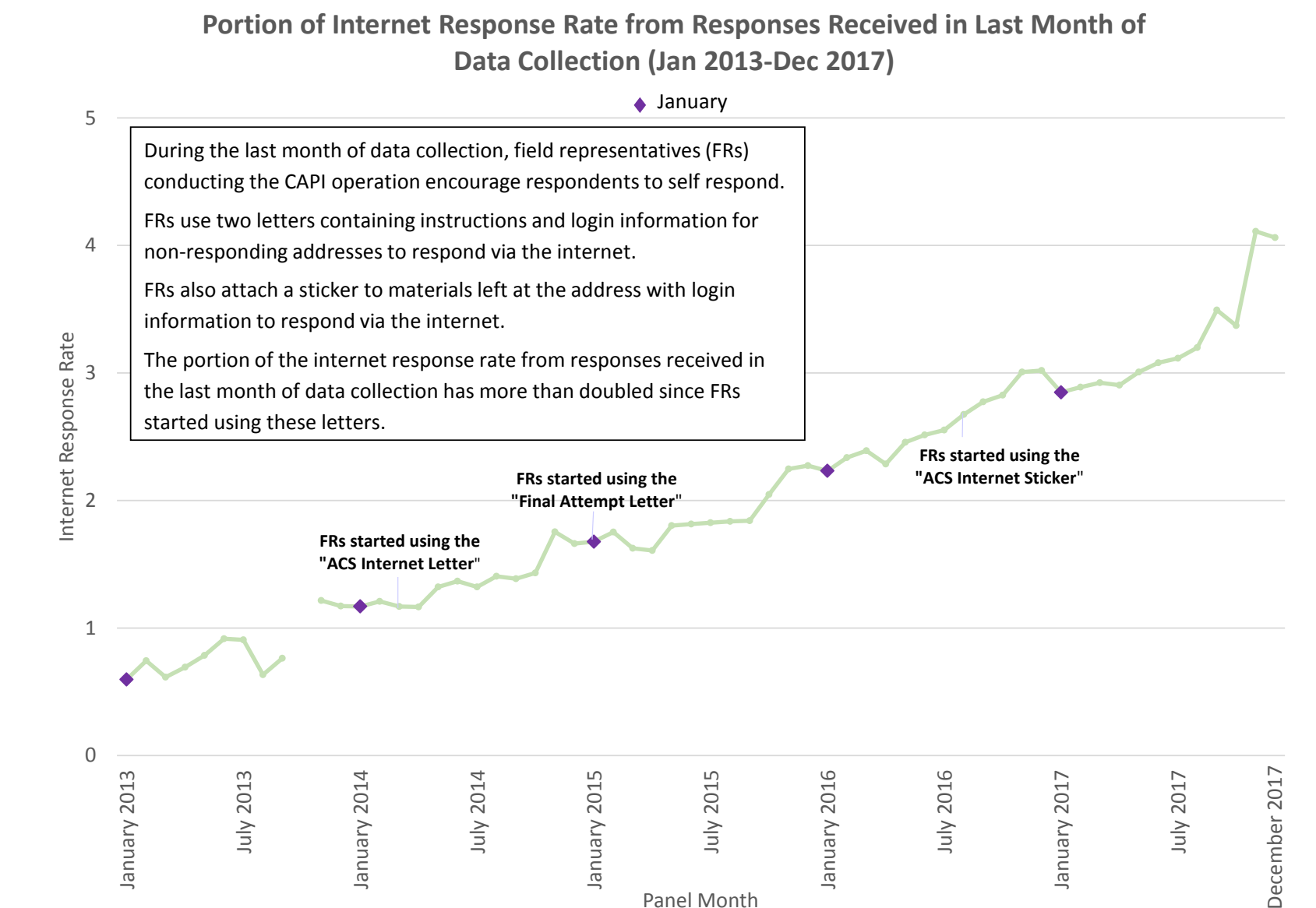
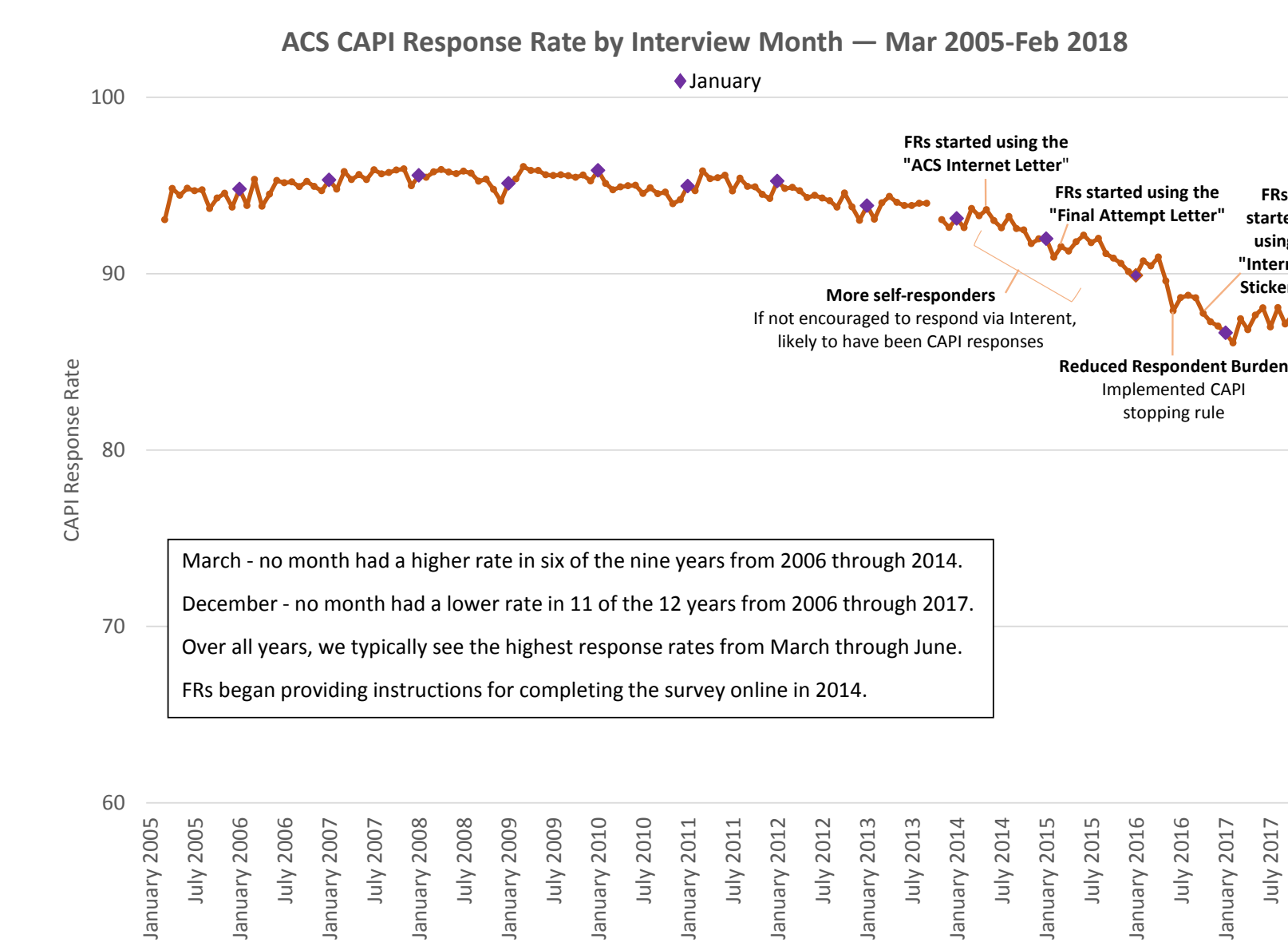


¹ Dropped the prenotice letter and replaced the first reminder postcard with a reminder letter (August 2015).
² Moved all mailings forward by one week and all non-responding addresses by the end of first month of data collection received a reminder postcard (November 2017).

...With an Internet option?



...With a personal interview option?



Conclusions

- Highest response rates observed at the beginning of year for all modes:
 - Self-response: January generally has highest rate.
 - Internet: February generally has highest rate.
 - CATI: January generally has the highest rate.
 - CAPI: Highest rates typically in March through June.
- CATI response rates initially at levels similar to self-response, but have sharply declined since 2012.
- CAPI response rates do not show the same degree of monthly peaks as seen for self-response and CATI.
- Recent declines in CAPI response rates relate to an increase in self-response by those completing the survey online in the third month of the panel.

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Source: 2005-2017 ACS Panel Paradata