
MFP National Mortgage Survey — Full Methodology

Design Rationale

A flat sample design — identical respondent targets regardless of state — creates two problems. It over-engineers coverage in small states, requiring a census-level effort in places like Wyoming or Vermont. And it ignores the practical fieldwork constraints that come with low-population markets where certain demographic segments (such as luxury home value tiers) may represent only a few thousand households statewide.

This survey uses a tiered sample design that aligns precision targets with the size of each state's active mortgage population, as estimated from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2022. Larger states receive higher-precision sampling with tighter margins of error. Smaller states receive a statistically defensible sample with a modest relaxation of margin of error and a simplification of the home value segmentation.

Every reported data point carries a stated margin of error at 96% confidence. Larger states report at $\pm 5\%$, medium states at $\pm 6\%$, and small states at $\pm 9\%$ — with all deviations disclosed in this methodology.

Statistical Parameters

Confidence Level

All sample size calculations target a 96% confidence level, corresponding to a Z-score of 2.054. This is one step above the 95% standard used in most published mortgage surveys, providing stronger protection against sampling error on metrics most sensitive to regional variation.

Margin of Error

Margin of error (MOE) is applied to proportion-based metrics — all percentage columns — as these require the largest samples and represent the binding constraint in the design. The formula used is:

$$n = Z^2 \times p(1 - p) / E^2$$

Where $Z = 2.054$ (96% confidence), $p = 0.50$ (worst-case proportion, which maximizes the required sample size), and E = the target margin of error for the applicable state tier.

Using $p = 0.50$ is deliberately conservative. It produces the largest required sample size and ensures the design is sufficient for every metric in the dataset, including those where the true proportion is near 50% — such as the rate negotiation metric (52.1%) and multiple lender application rate (55.0%).

Continuous Metrics

Satisfaction scores, fee transparency ratings, lender comparison averages, and similar scale-based metrics are far less demanding than proportion-based metrics. Based on observed standard deviations in the data, all continuous metrics achieve statistical significance at the segment level with as few as 40 respondents per segment. The proportion-based requirement of 131–422 respondents per segment covers all continuous metrics automatically.

Segmentation Structure

Each state's sample is distributed across a grid of demographic and loan-type segments. This grid is the unit of analysis — every reported cross-tabulation draws from a specific cell in this structure.

Full segment grid — large and medium states (24 segments per state)

Mortgage Type: Purchase / Refinance (2 categories). Age Group: 18–34 / 35–44 / 45–54 / 55+ (4 categories). Home Value Tier: Under \$300,000 / \$300,000–\$600,000 / Over \$600,000 (3 categories). Total: $2 \times 4 \times 3 = 24$ segments per state.

Collapsed segment grid — small states (16 segments per state)

In states where the over-\$600,000 home value tier represents a very small share of the mortgage population — estimated under 8% of mortgaged households — the two lower tiers are merged into a single "Under \$600,000" category. This prevents over-sampling a thin stratum while maintaining statistical integrity for the metrics most relevant to those markets. Mortgage type and age group segmentation remain unchanged.

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Tiered Sample Design

States are assigned to one of three tiers based on the estimated number of owner-occupied households currently carrying a mortgage, sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2022.

Large states — $\pm 5\%$ margin of error

422 respondents per segment \times 24 segments = 10,128 respondents per state.

Applies to 11 states with over 1 million mortgaged households: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey, and Michigan.

Medium states — $\pm 6\%$ margin of error

293 respondents per segment \times 24 segments = 7,032 respondents per state.

Applies to 22 states with 300,000 to 950,000 mortgaged households: Virginia, Washington, Arizona, Massachusetts, Maryland, Tennessee, Indiana, Colorado, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Carolina, Alabama, Oregon, Connecticut, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Utah, Nevada, Iowa, and Kansas.

Small states — $\pm 9\%$ margin of error

131 respondents per segment \times 16 segments = 2,096 respondents per state.

Applies to 18 states with fewer than 300,000 mortgaged households, using the collapsed home value segmentation: Arkansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Idaho, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Hawaii, West Virginia, Maine, Montana, Rhode Island, Delaware, South Dakota, North Dakota, Alaska, Vermont, Washington D.C., and Wyoming.

Even in the smallest states, the required sample represents under 3.5% of the available mortgage population. Wyoming requires 2,096 respondents from an estimated 65,000 mortgaged households — 3.2% of the available pool. No state requires a census-level effort.

National Sample Summary

Large states: 11 states \times 10,128 respondents = 111,408. Medium states: 22 states \times 7,032 respondents = 154,704. Small states: 18 states \times 2,096 respondents = 37,728. Total national sample: approximately 303,840 respondents.

A flat $\pm 5\%$ uniform design applied to all 51 geographies would require approximately 516,000 respondents. The tiered approach reduces that to approximately 303,840 — a 41% reduction — by relaxing the margin of error in medium states and simplifying the home value segmentation in small states, neither of which compromises the quality of large-market reporting.

Reporting Standards

Margin of Error Disclosure

Every published statistic from this survey carries the margin of error applicable to the state or states from which it is drawn. Where statistics are aggregated across multiple states or regions, the effective margin of error decreases as sample sizes combine. Regional-level statistics drawn from multiple states carry effective margins of error well below $\pm 3\%$ for most metrics.

Cross-State Comparisons

When comparing metrics across states from different tiers — for example, comparing a large-state finding ($\pm 5\%$) to a small-state finding ($\pm 9\%$) — the comparison is presented with the wider of the two margins of error. Direct statistical significance testing between tier groups is not recommended without pooling adjustment.

Weighting

Raw survey responses are post-stratified to match each state's actual distribution of mortgaged households by age group and home value tier, using ACS 2022 benchmarks. This corrects for panel recruitment biases and ensures that over-sampled segments do not distort state-level aggregates.

Data Sources

State-level mortgage population estimates used to assign tier classifications are derived from the following sources:

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2022, 1-Year Estimates — Table B25091: Mortgage Status by Selected Monthly Owner Costs. U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2022 — Table B25075: Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units (used for home value tier calibration). U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program 2023 — State-level population figures used for fieldwork feasibility calculations.

All mortgage household counts are approximations based on Census ACS data, which carries its own margin of error at the state level. Tier boundaries — 1,000,000 and 300,000 mortgaged households — should be treated as guidelines rather than hard cutoffs. States near a tier boundary may be reclassified at the fieldwork planning stage based on updated panel availability data.