

PLSC 308: Introduction to Political Research

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Survey Research

Three broad steps:

1. Design

- Structure
- Sampling
- Mode
- Question Matters (form/type, wording, order, etc.)

2. Execution

- Survey Administration
- Coding and Data Entry / Preprocessing

3. Analysis...

Two Big Things

1. Design Follows Research Goals.
2. Tradeoff: Cost vs. Reliability / Validity.

Temporal Structure

Cross-Sectional

- A single population measured at a single point in time.
- Advantages: *Cost*, internal validity
- Weaknesses: Lack of *causality*

Longitudinal

- Different populations measured at repeated intervals.
- Advantages: “Trend” analysis; stronger causal claims.
- Weaknesses: Relative cost; concerns about validity

Panel

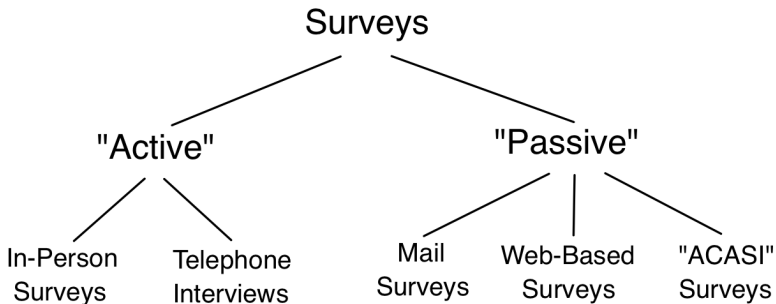
- A *single sample* measured at repeated intervals.
- Advantages: “Trend” analysis + strongest causal claims.
- Weaknesses: Most costly; mortality / maturation

(See Chapter 7...)

Practical Survey Sampling

- Simple random sampling is best...
- In practice: cluster sampling > quota sampling > simple random
- Also: Nonresponse (+ attrition) → response rates
- Critical in panel studies

Survey Modes



Survey Questions: Type

- Filter Questions
- Branching Questions (“Skip Logic”)
- Substantive Questions
- Demographic Questions
- Survey Quality Questions

Survey Questions: Form

Closed-Ended / Structured (Qualitative/Quantitative)

- *Continuous* vs. Categorical
- If categorical: *Mutually exclusive* and *exhaustive* choices
- → Statistical analysis (inductive or deductive)

Open-Ended / Unstructured (Qualitative – ?)

- Open-ended text responses
- → qualitative / interpretive analysis
- Often best for exploratory / pilot / inductive work
- Q: Length limits?

Survey Questions: Wording

Some Guidelines:

- Clarity:
 - Factually Correct
 - Precise
 - Avoid Jargon / “8th Grade Rule”
- “Single-Barrel”
- Avoiding Biases:
 - “Loaded” Language
 - Social Desirability Bias
- If possible: Pilot / Pre-test the Questions

Survey Questions: Order

The Concern: “Framing” (or “Order”) Effects

- *Contrast* Effects: Question Order leads to Greater Differences (e.g., Civil Unions following Gay Marriage)
- *Assimilation* Effects: Question Order leads to Greater Similarity (e.g., GOP and Democratic cooperation)
- *Priming* Results (for Open-Ended Questions)
- *Demographic* Questions: Always Come Last

General Information

- The [AAPOR](#) (American Association for Public Opinion Research)
- [CASRO](#) (Council of American Survey Research Organizations)
- Eric Plutzer's *Survey Research Methods* course(s)