**POL2017 – Week 5 Surveys Seminar Questions**

1. **What are some of the main advantages and limitations of survey research?**

**Advantages**

* We can gather lots of information from lots of people relatively quickly
* Low cost compared to a lot of other research methods
  + Especially if using self-completion surveys vs face-to-face surveys or interviews
* Good external validity
  + Ability to generalise our findings to other contexts
* Reliable measures
  + Having similar sets of questions used consistently allows for direct comparisons across times and space
  + E.g. Can compare answers over time, or across different countries
* Versatile
  + Surveys can be used to study a huge range of topics, and take different forms:
    - Government Census of entire population
    - Political and public opinion polling
    - Health questionnaires, Official statistics
    - Survey experiments

**Limitations**

* Inflexible
  + Once we field our survey, we are stuck with the questions we have included. We can’t change them once it is out.
  + This means we can’t ask respondents to expand on or explain their answers
  + No flexibility to change questions or follow up on topics or issues we may have missed
    - E.g. In contrast to conducting interviews
* Internal validity
  + Can we measure our key concepts using survey questions?
  + Are the responses accurate?
  + Human behaviour is complex! We are often interested in multidimensional abstract concepts, responses to short questions can only ever partially address our questions.
* Bias
  + Survey data often contains systemic biases in term of: who we ask; who responds; how our questions are worded.
  + This may lead to (un)intentionally over or underrepresenting certain views within our sample of respondents
* Lack of depth
  + We can ask lots of people lots of questions, but often surface level questions rather than in-depth examination of their experiences and reasoning behind their answers.
  + This makes it difficult to try and measure complex multidimensional concepts
  + Always a trade of between depth and scope

1. **What types of research questions can we answer using surveys?**

* **Descriptive research questions**
  + We can use surveys to describe patterns in people’s attitudes, behaviour, or knowledge
  + E.g. What does this group think about X?
  + We use this to study research questions inductively
    - Form a research questions, collect survey data, inspect the data for patterns or trends, use this to generate theories to answer our research questions
* **Explanatory research questions**
  + We can use surveys to explain the relationship between different variables
  + Does X cause Y?
  + We can use survey questions to collect data on independent and dependent variables of interest.
  + We can use statistical modelling to test this relationship.
  + And use a deductive approach to test our theories using our survey data
    - Research question, theory you want to test, construct hypotheses, compare expectations from your hypotheses against the patterns you actually find in the data, evaluate your hypotheses and theory in light of your results.

1. **What makes a good survey question?**

* **Wording & comprehension**
  + We want our questions to be as clear and concise as possible.
  + Avoid jargon and be specific in what you ask.
  + Provide clear instructions for how you want people to respond.
* **Recall**
  + People often forget things!
  + Try to avoid asking questions about things that happened a long time in the past and/or about unmemorable events
  + Which party did you vote for in the most recent UK general election? (ok)
  + Which party did you vote for in the 1997 UK local council elections (bad)
* **Avoid double-barrelled questions**
  + Avoid asking about multiple issues with a single survey question
  + As we can’t be sure which part respondents are answering about
    - E.g. Do you love studying Politics and History?
    - What if we have one but like the other?
  + Separate out your questions, to ask one thing at a time.
* **Avoid leading questions**
  + Try and word your questions as neutrally as you possible can.
  + Avoid leading questions that prime a certain response
    - E.g. How much do you hate Donald Trump?
    - Vs. What is your opinion on Donald Trump?
* **Response options**
  + If using closed questions, where you give respondents a fixed set of options to choose from, try to make sure that response options:
    - Cover the full range of potential values
    - Should include a ‘Don’t know’ option or not
    - If you want any follow up questions (e.g. ‘If you answered ‘other’ to the previous question, please write in your response here’)

**Group Task 1**

**Applying what we have learned, what are strengths and weaknesses of the following survey questions? How would you improve them?**

**Original question: Did you vote in the most recent election?**

* The question is still very broad
* Which type of election? (Student Election, General election, European Parliament, Local election, Devolved election)
* People may interpret this very differently
* Which country are we talking about?
* People might also not want to disclose that they did not vote (social desirability bias)

**Better question:** Did you vote in the UK General Election that took place in June 2024?

* British Election Study question wording (to help avoid social desirability bias):
  + ‘Talking to people about the General Election on July 7th 2024, we have found that a lot of people didn’t manage to vote. How about you – did you manage to vote in the UK General Election?’

**Original question: On average, how many minutes do you spend on TikTok each month?**

* First we would need to establish whether this is also accompanied by other questions
  + People might not know what TikTok is, especially older respondents
  + If people don’t have or use TikTok then the question will be irrelevant to them
* This is less problematic is we included an initial question of:
  + ‘Do you use the social media platform TikTok?’
  + And if they answer ‘Yes’, then we ask this this question about usage.
* The response scale here is also problematic. Asking about average minutes over a full month period is really confusing. We could instead ask about how many days per month or week on average, or average minutes per day

**Better Question: ‘**On average, how many minutes do you spend on TikTok each day?’

**Original question: What are your views on Russia?**

* Similar to the first question, still very broad
* What about Russia? Views on the country, the people, the government, food, Olympic team?
* Include the specific thing you want to find out about.
* You could also provide a specific example of an event or policy

**Better Questions:** How big a threat to peace and security in Europe, if at all, do you consider Vladimir Putin to be?

**Group Task 2**

In your groups, construct a survey question(s) to collect data about one of the following concepts:

* What will you ask?
* What type of response options will you provide?

**Education**

* Lots of different questions you could ask, with open and closed questions:
  + What is the highest level of qualification you have achieved?
  + What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  + How many years have you been in full time education?
* You might also want to ask about type of education as well
  + Did you attend a state or private secondary school?
  + What degree subject did you study at University?

**Attitudes towards the EU**

* You could directly ask people ‘What is your opinion of the EU?’ as an open ended question
* You could provide statements about the EU, and ask whether people agree or disagree
  + E.g. ‘The United Kingdom should rejoin the European Union’, ‘The EU has a positive impact on people’s daily lives.

**Attitudes towards Donald Trump**

* Similar as above, can ask directly about your views on him, or give examples of policies or behaviours and ask about agreement or support
  + Has Trump been a good president?
  + Do you think Donald Trump is right or wrong to talk directly to Vladimir Putin on a negotiated peace settlement in Ukraine?