Representative Surveys

POLSCI 4SS3

Winter 2024

Announcements

- I asked for classroom change but haven't heard any news yet `(as of January 24)`

Last week

- Overview of course topic, goals, evaluation, expectations
- We installed R and RStudio and explored them a bit
- Cloud option always available if all else fails
- Brief overview of MIDA framework
- More details in the course website

Today

- Start the topic of public opinion
- Representative surveys as the standard design
- **Takeaway:** Complete random sampling is the gold standard but too hard to apply in realistic settings
- **Discussion:** Getting surveys right
- **Lab:** Sampling and descriptive inference

Review

- What are the elements of a research design?
- What is a model?
- What is an inquiry?
- What is a data strategy?
- What is an answer strategy?
- Why are we doing this?

Public opinion

public opinion

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The way most ordinary people feel about something, or the thing they mainly believe, is *public opinion*. If *public opinion* supports a no smoking policy, you better put down that cigar.

Politicians car a lot about public opinion — it's what gets them elected, or ultimately leads to their losing their jobs. Brave legislators and public figures will say what they really believe, rather than what they thing will please public opinion, but that's rare. The term was coined by John Locke in a 1600s essay he wrote about politics and human understanding, inspired by the French *l'opinion*, "opinion."

https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/public%20opinion

Public opinion

- The study of self-reported **attitudes** and **behaviors**
- Primarily **among general public**
- **Goal:** Mapping **self-reports** to **actual** attitudes and behaviors

Two challenges

1. Asking the right **questions**
2. Asking the right **people**

Asking the right questions

Table 1
Reported Daily TV Consumption as a Function of Response Alternatives

Low-frequency alternatives	Daily consumption	High-frequency alternatives	Daily consumption
Up to ½ hour	7.4%	Up to 2½ hours	62.5%
½ hour to 1 hour	17.7%	2½ hours to 3 hours	23.4%
1 hour to 1½ hours	26.5%	3 hours to 3½ hours	7.8%
1½ hours to 2 hours	14.7%	3½ hours to 4 hours	4.7%
2 hours to 2½ hours	17.7%	4 hours to 4½ hours	1.6%
More than 2½ hours	16.2%	More than 4½ hours	0.0%

Note. $N = 132$. From "Response Categories: Effects on Behavioral Reports and Comparative Judgments," by N. Schwarz, H. J. Hippler, B. Deutsch, & F. Strack, 1985, *Public Opinion Quarterly, 49,* p. 391. Copyright 1985 by The University of Chicago Press. Adapted with permission.

Schwarz (1999)

Elements to consider

- Literal vs. pragmatic meaning
- Open vs. closed answer format
- Frequency scales `(e.g. more that 1 hour)`
- Reference periods `(last week, last year)`
- Rating scales `(0-10, -5-5)`
- Demand effects
- Priming effects

Asking the right people

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RESEARCH NOTE/NOTE DE RECHERCHE

Measuring Preferences and Behaviours in the 2019 Canadian Election Study

Laura B. Stephenson[1*], Allison Harell[2], Daniel Rubenson[3] and Peter John Loewen[4]

What is this?

The online study survey was programmed by the CES team and associates and hosted by the University of Western Ontario through its licensed Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics also recruited respondents, aiming for three-day samples that were stratified by region (Ontario, Quebec, West, East and North)[1] and balanced on gender and age within each region. Regions were sampled according to their approximate demographic weight. We also aimed for a language distribution of 80 per cent French and 20 per cent English within Quebec, 10 per cent French within the Atlantic region and 10 per cent French nationally. Respondents needed to be aged 18 or over and Canadian citizens or permanent residents in order to participate. The weights provided in the dataset are based upon age, gender, education and province census distributions. Traditional response rates cannot be calculated for online samples, but the re-interview rate for the PES was 27.3 per cent. The datasets were pre-processed by cleaning out any respondents who provided incomplete responses to initial demographics or the core survey, took the survey twice,

Sampling

- 📖: How units are selected for a study
- Which units?
- How will you reach them?
- **Sampling choices** are consequential to how we craft **answer strategies**

Some key sampling decisions

- Mode (`in-person, lab, phone, mail, internet`)
- Sampling frame
- Sample size
- Sampling procedure
- Oversampling

Random sampling

- **Simple:** Coin flip
- **Complete:** Exactly n of N sampled with *same inclusion probability*
- **Stratified:** Sort in groups or strata, then sample
- **Cluster random:** Sample whole groups of units
- **Stratified cluster:** *Take a guess!*
- **Multi-stage:** Sample clusters, then sample units

Summary

- We conduct surveys because we want to understand public opinion
- **Challenge:** Map *self-reports* to *attitudes* and *behaviors*

1. Ask the right questions `(meaning, format, scales, context)`
2. Ask the right people `(mode, sampling)`

→ **Why so many choices?**

Next Week

Sensitive Questions

Focus on: What to do when people lie in surveys?

Break time!


Lab