

An Overview & Introduction to Polling & Public Opinion Research

MU MVZ 449
Spring 2010
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Masaryk University

Class Meetings, Rest of the Semester

- Here's the schedule for the rest of the term:
 - 07 April: Public Opinion Measurement & Polling
 - 14 April: Who Votes, How They Vote, What They Want
 - 14 April: Release of Midterm Exam. Due TWO WEEKS LATER.
 - 21 April: Media Effects & Media Role in Elections

 - **NO CLASS: Wednesday, 28 April 2010**
 - **MIDTERM DUE by 4 pm, Department Office Mailbox**

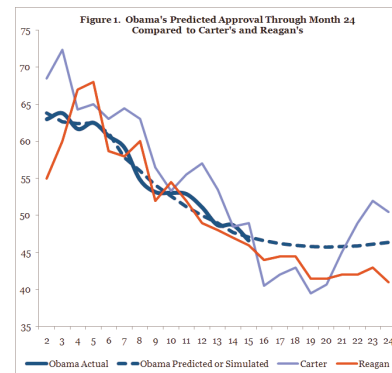
 - 05 May: Media, continued & Changing Demographics of Elections
 - 12 May: Campaign Finance Systems
 - 19 May: Wrap-up, Campaign Effects Thesis / Final Exam released

What We're Seeing With Polls Today

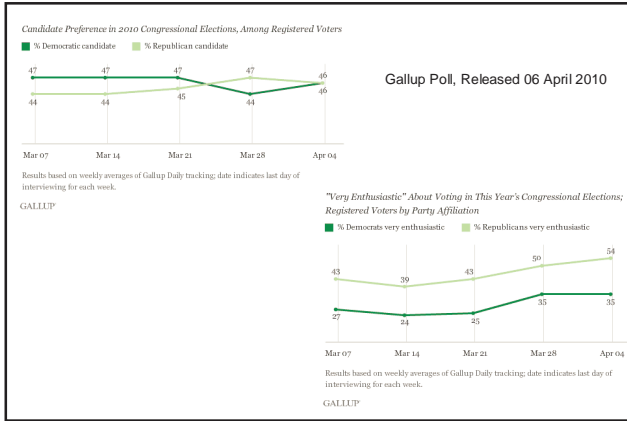
Table 1. Presidential approval ratings: Predictors & Effects, 1959-2008

Predictor	Effect
Job Approval in previous month	+
Honeymoon (January-May of first year; except that Johnson gets two such periods, one in 1963 and another in 1965, and Ford's Honeymoon lasts only one month)	+
Change in real disposable income in previous month	+
Unemployment in previous month	-
Change in seasonally adjusted consumer price index (CPI) in previous month	-
Republican President	+
Democratic President	-
Cumulative Vietnam War Dead (Johnson only)	-
Cumulative Iraq War Dead (G.W. Bush only)	-
Watergate	-

N=579



Source: UVA, Center for Politics, April 2010



What We Cover:

- Measuring change & opinion among agents of socialization
- Why is measuring public opinion more important?
- Who are involved in measuring public opinion?
- How do we measure public opinion & Sampling Theory?
 - Telephone polls
 - In-person interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Internet polls
 - Television and radio monitoring systems
- How do we design samples for public opinion measurement?
 - Sample designs
 - Weighting of data for non-response
 - Special populations

What We Should Consider Here:

- How do we design poll questions?
 - Election polls
 - Issues polls
- How do we interpret poll results?
- How do we respond to the controversies in polling
 - Accuracy
 - Inappropriate use
 - Misrepresentation of results
 - Ethical concerns about collection of data
- Special issues?
 - Polling internationally
 - Polling on race
 - The media's use of polls

Why Election Polling is More Important?

- Much larger and more diverse voting population
- Much less loyalty to political parties
- More interest in issues
- Decline of interest in election campaigns
- Growth of "floating" voters
- Possibility in some countries of government "stealing" the elections

Why Issues Polling is More Important?

- Much larger and more diverse population
- Decline in trust in political leaders
- Decline in trust in government decision makers
- Decline in trust in experts and authority figures

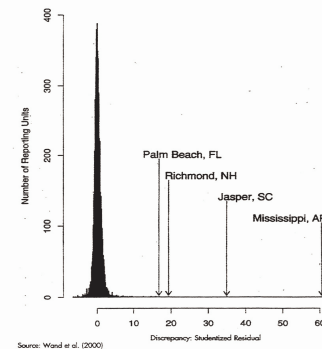
Final Public Opinion Polls: Pre-Election 2000

Candidate	Bush	Gore	Nader	Buchanan	Lead
Final result	48%	49%	3%	0%	-1%
Reuters/MSNBC	46%	48%	5%	1%	-2%
CBS	47%	48%	4%	1%	-1%
Fox	48%	48%	3%	1%	0%
Harris	47%	47%	5%	0%	0%
CNN/USA Today/(Gallup)	48%	46%	4%	1%	2%
Washington Post	49%	46%	3%	1%	3%
Newsweek	49%	46%	5%	0%	3%
ABC	49%	46%	3%	1%	3%
NBC/WSJ	49%	46%	3%	2%	3%

Sources: AEL PollingReport.com, WP

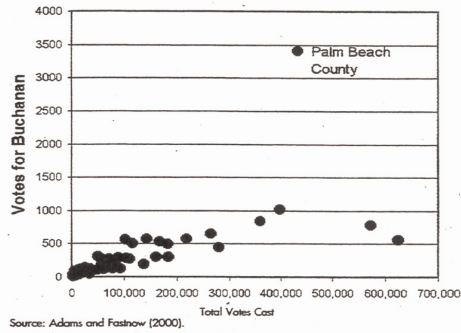
Butterfly Ballot Example – Palm Beach County, FL (2000)

FIGURE 1
Histogram of Discrepancies
From Expected Vote for Buchanan
4481 Reporting Units in 46 States



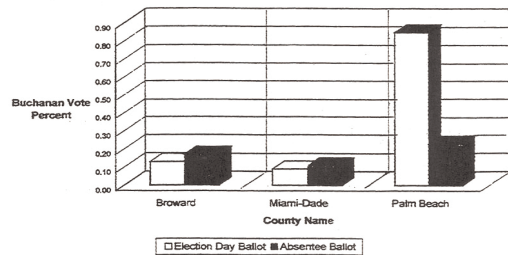
Source: Wood et al. (2000)

FIGURE 2
Presidential Election Results for Florida, by County



OFFICIAL BALLOT GENERAL ELECTION PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA NOVEMBER 7, 2000		OFFICIAL BALLOT GENERAL ELECTION PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA NOVEMBER 7, 2000	
<input type="radio"/>	(REPUBLICAN) GEORGE W. BUSH - PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	(REFORM) PAT BUCHANAN - PRESIDENT KELLA PASTER - VICE PRESIDENT
<input type="radio"/>	(DEMOCRATIC) AL GORE - PRESIDENT JOE LIBERMAN - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	(SOCIALIST) DAVID MACFETHY - PRESIDENT MARY CAL HOLLIS - VICE PRESIDENT
<input type="radio"/>	(LIBERTARIAN) HARRY BROWN - PRESIDENT ART OLIVER - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	(CONSTITUTION) HOWARD PHILLIPS - PRESIDENT JUDITH FRAZER - VICE PRESIDENT
<input type="radio"/>	(GREEN) RALPH NADEAU - PRESIDENT WINONA LADOUCE - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	(WORKERS WORLD) MONICA MOOREHEAD - PRESIDENT OLIVIA La RIVA - VICE PRESIDENT
<input type="radio"/>	(SOCIALIST WORKERS) JAMES HARRIS - PRESIDENT MARGARET TROWER - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	WRITE-IN CANDIDATE To vote for a write-in candidate, follow the directions on the long stub of your ballot card.
<input type="radio"/>	(NATURAL LAW) JOHN HAGEM - PRESIDENT NAT GOLDBERGER - VICE PRESIDENT	<input type="radio"/>	

FIGURE 3
Buchanan Vote by Ballot Type and County



Recall Our Agents of Political Socialization

- SES determinants
- The Family - monopolizes early years, evidence suggests parents influence children's beliefs.
- Mass Media - provides political information.
- Schools - Civics courses, history, this Academic Dept, student government.
- Friends and Colleagues - Who we surround ourselves with influence our political beliefs.
- Church - Church goers are likely influenced by others in church and politically relevant beliefs in church.

What is Political Socialization?

- The process through which an individual acquires his or her particular political orientations— his knowledge, feelings, and evaluations regarding his or her political world.
- Often includes “socio-political” attitudes, opinions related to “culture wars” have come under study relative to political socialization.

Public Opinion

- Democracy: A method of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to citizen preferences.
- Given this definition, why is public opinion important in the United States?
- How well does American democracy respond to citizen preferences? Depends on the institution, but most scholars suggests that the US government is quite responsive.
- Electoral forces (shifts in who governs and anticipated responses) tend to be the key to this.

Contradictory Expectations of the Public

- We want the president to be a leader vs. a responsive president.
- Flexibility and willingness to bargain vs. Decisive, firm and consistent principled stands.
- An open administration vs. a president in control.
- An average person that can identify with typical person vs. Someone who's a cut above, different, virtuous.

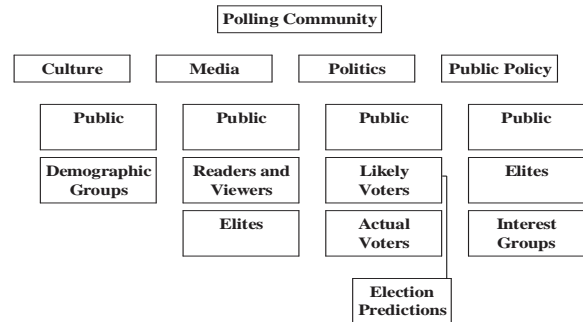
Problems with Polls

- Are politicians leading or following the polls? Evidence suggests both. Government hardly insulated from public opinion, as Founders designed.
- Many polls aren't scientific. Many are, however.
- Findings may change due to question wording & question ordering.
- People draw conclusions from polls that aren't really in the poll.

The Public Opinion Poll

- Polls are used to identify the distribution of the population's beliefs about politics and policy.
- Developed by George Gallup and others in the 1930s.
- Scientific polling uses Samples, which include a small proportion of the population selected to represent the population as a whole.
- Important polling concepts: Random sampling and Sampling.

The World of Polling: Focus



Key Historical Events in Polling

- (1935) First national newspaper policy poll/Gallup/Washington Post
- (1936) *Literary Digest* fiasco
- (1936) Gallup/Roper/Crossley victory
- (1940) First presidential use of polls for policy / FDR
- (1948) Truman polling disaster
- (1960) First presidential candidate use of pollsters
- (1962) First election projections/CBS/Harris
- (1990) First unified network exit poll
- (2000) Polling calls, Bush vs. Gore, General Election

The Nature of American Public Opinion

- The Public's knowledge on issues is extremely low. Most people are dumb when it comes to policies and issues.
- Individuals rarely hold stable opinions.
- Public opinions often contradict and can be difficult to interpret.
- Policies are complex; people don't spend the time to understand them.
- Collective opinion IS rational fluctuating predictably with events and the economy.

How People Form Opinions

- Opinions are often based on our own core values, but fluctuate (w/ new information) much more than our values.
- People use heuristics (or short-cuts) to help form their opinions. Often take the form of environmental cues including:
 - political party (Party ID – PID – often influences our opinion)
 - What's salient in the media?
 - Conversations with friends, colleagues, etc.

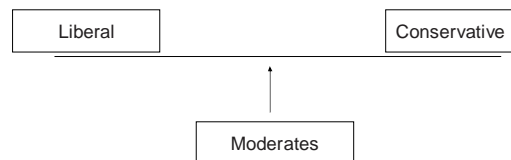
Political Ideologies - Caveats

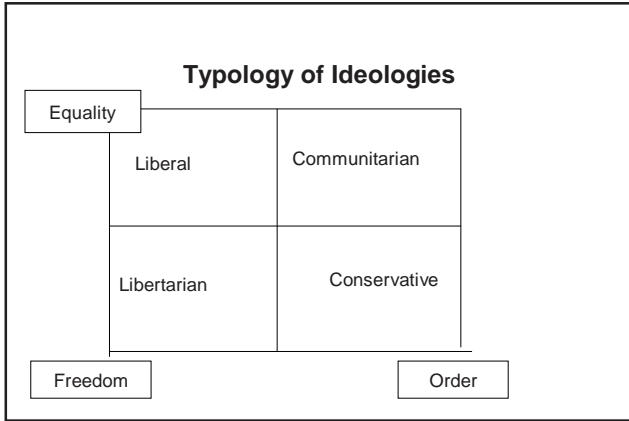
- Usually discussed on a liberal to conservative scale.
- The scale only captures one dimension. Ideology has more than one dimension.
- Conservative, Liberal, Libertarian, Communitarian
- Types of voters based on ideology (*The American Voter*):
 - Ideologues (about 10%)
 - Group Benefit Voters (about 40%)
 - Nature of Times voters (about 25%)
 - No issue content voters (about 25%)

Political Ideologies

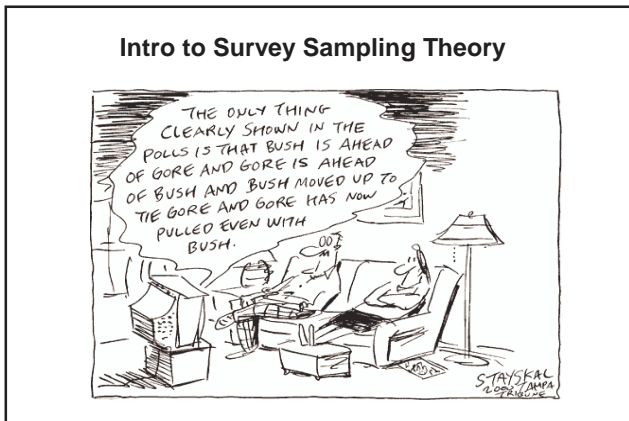
- Ideology is a difficult subject, because most Americans do not fit on the typical ideology scale, of left to right.
- Ideology defined: A consistent relation between individual opinions.
- Liberals: Believe in a strong role for government in regulating equality. A weak role for government in regulating order.
- Conservatives: Believe in limited government in regulating equality, strong gov't in regulating order.

The Left-Right Continuum, on size of government





- ### The Distinct American Ideology
- Based on the conservative belief of Limited Government. Americans are suspicious of government, thus they limit government's capacity to govern.
 - Two elements of this ideology:
 - Individualism: liberty or freedom for autonomous individuals. Freedom from government intrusion.
 - Equality: specifically, equality of opportunity as opposed to equality of results.



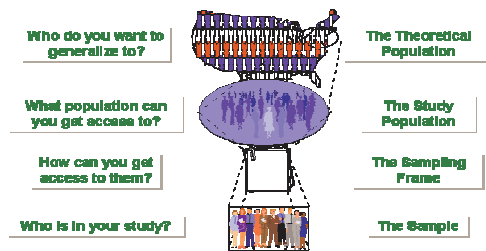
The intuition behind the science

Question: How can the views of 1,000 individuals chosen at random accurately depict the views of 280,000,000 Americans?

George Gallup's answer (paraphrased): You don't have to eat an entire stockpot of soup to know if it you like it ... you only need to have a taste.

Survey sampling is the "science of tasting."

From population to sample



Non-probability sampling

- Accidental, haphazard, or convenience
- Purposive
- Volunteer subjects
- Quota
- Snowball

Probability sampling

- Simple random
- Stratified random
- Systematic
- Cluster (also area, multi-stage)

Simple random sampling

List of Clients



Random Subsample



Systematic sampling

$N = 100$

want $n = 20$

$N/n = 5$

select a random number from 1-5:
chose 4.

start with #4 and take every 5th unit

1	25	51	76
2	27	53	77
3	29	55	79
4	31	57	81
5	33	59	83
6	35	61	85
7	37	63	87
8	39	65	89
9	41	67	91
10	43	69	93
11	45	71	95
12	47	73	97
13	49	75	99
14	51	77	
15	53	79	
16	55	81	
17	57	83	
18	59	85	
19	61	87	
20	63	89	
21	65	91	
22	67	93	
23	69	95	
24	71	97	
25	73	99	
26	75	100	

Stratified random sampling

List of Clients



Strata



Random Subsamples of n/N

Stratified Sampling

Given
 N = target population size
 N_s = stratum population size
 n = sample size
 n_s = stratum sample size
 $f_s = n_s/N_s$

Proportionate Stratified Sampling

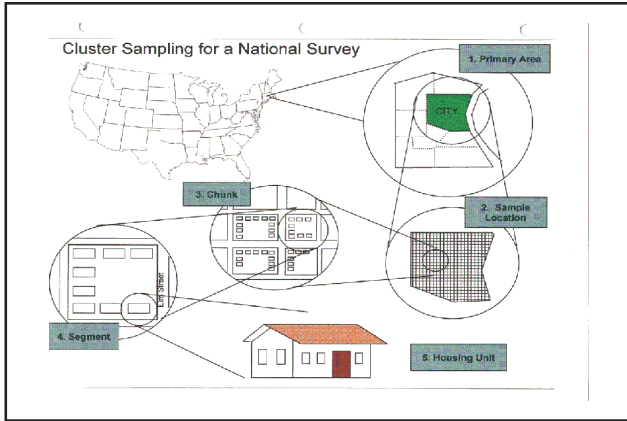
Each person within a stratum and across strata have an equal likelihood of being selected, i.e., f_s is the same across strata. n_s/n is proportional to N_s/N .



Disproportionate Stratified Sampling

Each person within a stratum has an equal likelihood of being selected, but not across strata, i.e., f_s is not the same across strata. n_s/n is defined by the sampler.





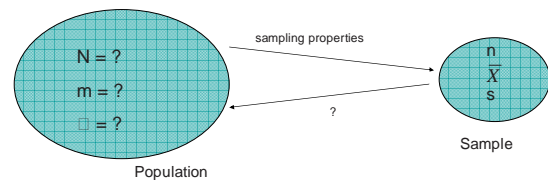
Exit poll methodology (CBS)

- State-by-state sample selection
 - 2-stage probability sampling
 - Selection made proportionate to size, stratified by geography and past vote
 - Past race used for size and party vote
 - Used in 2000 election with mixed results
- (from Frankovic, 2/9/02)

Interpreting survey results

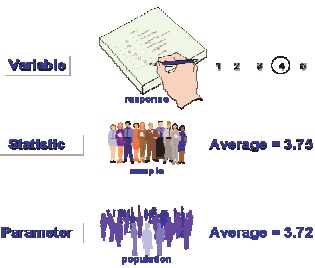
Question: How can the views of 1,000 individuals chosen at random accurately depict the views of 285,000,000 Americans?

Sampling theory

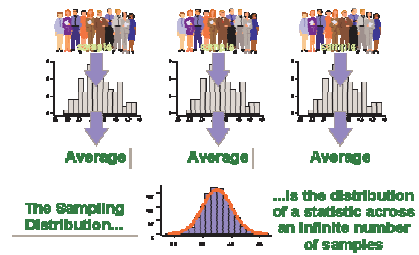


The key question is: how can we make an inference back to the population from the sample? We are not interested in the characteristics of the sample, only the characteristics of the population.

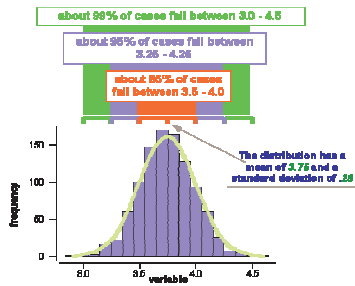
Statistical Inference



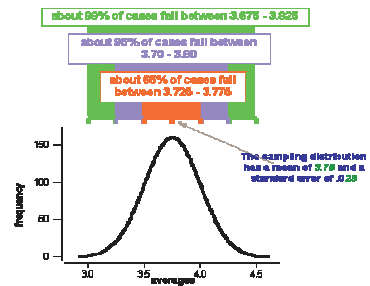
Statistical Inference



Sampling Error



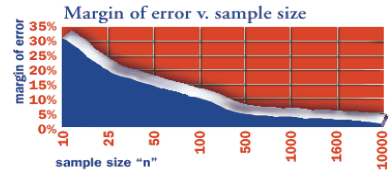
Sampling Error



How large a sample do I need?

Population proportion	Desired Margin of Error		
	0.05	0.03	0.01
0.1	138	384	3,457
0.2	246	683	6,147
0.3	323	896	8,067
0.4	369	1024	9,220
0.5	384	1067	9,604
0.6	369	1024	9,220
0.7	323	896	8,067
0.8	246	683	6,147
0.9	138	384	3,457

Diminishing returns to sample size

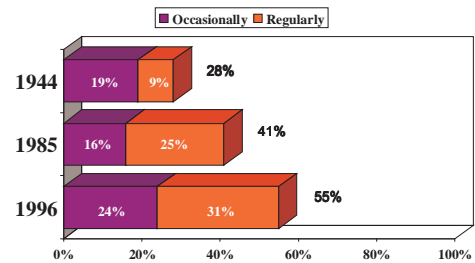


What else determines sample size?

Interpreting polls correctly

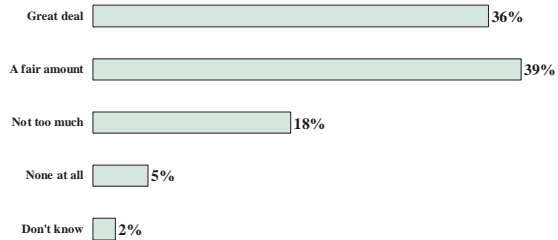
sample size	margin of error	Dem		Rep
40	16%	Men	45	52
185	7%	Women	51	46
600	4%	18-29	48	48
1000	3%	30-44	49	49
5000	1.4%	45-59	50	46
52,000	0.4%	60+	44	54
		whites	42	55
		blacks	88	11
		Latinos	59	35
		Asians	54	42

Americans Following the Results of Polls in the Media



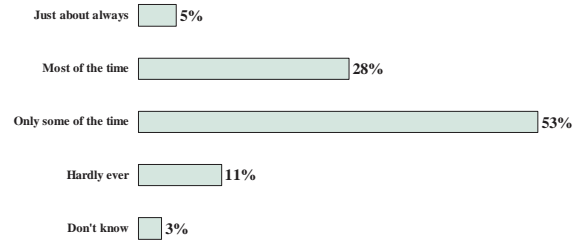
* Cantril, Gallup

How Much Attention Should Elected and Government Officials Pay to Public Opinion Polls



Brodie et al. *Public Perspective* (July/August 2001)

Do Polls Accurately Reflect What the Public Thinks?



Brodie et al. *Public Perspective* (July/August 2001)

Some Cultural Differences between Polls and Traditional Surveys (1)

Purpose

- To measure public response to current events or political issues that can **change quickly**
- To provide data for predicting election outcomes

Some Cultural Differences between Polls and Traditional Surveys (2)

Operational Issues

- Polls conducted over shorter periods of time
- Frequent measures seen as very important
- Concerns about fairness in design and presentation of paramount importance
- Costs of surveys a significant issue
- Response rates are a greater problem
- More difficult to "validate" the results

Summing Up

- Survey research is an excellent example of descriptive inference in the social sciences
 - Random sampling helps convince us that the cases we are looking at are similar to the whole universe that we care about
 - Research on the psychology of survey response has helped us develop rules that help us write questions that will actually measure our concepts
 - Whenever you run into an example of descriptive inference in the social sciences, compare it with survey research to see what its strengths and weaknesses are
- Experimentation is the best example of causal inference in the social sciences
 - Random assignment to treatment and control groups rules out confounding variables and helps ensure internal validity
 - Field experimentation can help ensure external validity as well
 - When you see a causal inference in the social sciences, compare the methods behind it with experimentation to see if it is credible
 - ALWAYS visualize your data & inform your analysis based on "the real world."

Part II Questionnaire Design in Surveys & Polls

MU MVZ 449
Spring 2010
Dave McCuan
Masaryk University

Why Care about Survey Questions?

Need to be a critical consumer of polling data
Many Americans trust no polls, but many others trust them far too much
Separate the good from the bad
Information must be reported to the consumer

Sources of Error

1. Measurement error (bias) – instrument
2. Sampling error – finite sample
3. Sampling bias – unrepresentative sample

Error: random missing, but right on average
Bias: wrong on average

Error usually known, bias usually unknown

Questionnaire Design

Questions themselves contribute to measurement error

Wording, order, coding of responses, context

Considerations: time is money, population is diverse, interviewers are part-time workers

Ask Precisely

Do you agree or disagree that people have a constitutional right to own guns and the government should not regulate gun ownership?

Problem: Double-barreled (and confusing)

Priming

Do you think the United States should let Communist newspaper reporters from other countries come in here and send back to their papers the news as they see it?

Do you think a Communist country like China should let American newspaper reporters come in and send back to America the news as they see it?

Problem: Question order causes priming
(percentages go up by 20 points when American question #2) is asked first)

Careful with Comparisons

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement:

Individuals are more to blame than social conditions for crime and lawlessness in this country.

Social conditions are more to blame than individuals for crime and lawlessness in this country.

Question Order Matters

Who is more to blame?

	Individuals First	Conditions First
Individuals	60%	43%
Conditions	40%	57%

Which in your opinion is more to blame for crime and lawlessness in this country – individuals or social conditions?

Multiple Parts

Taken altogether, how would you say things are these days: would you say that you are happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage: would you say you marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

Part-Whole Effects from Question Order

	General First	Marriage First
"Very Happy" marriage	70%	63%
"Very Happy" in general	52%	38%

Other Question Order Effects

- Political interest (self-reported)
- Party identification
- Presidential approval

Purposes: Control versus Realism

Which of these is the most important problem facing the country at present?

What do you think is the most important problem facing the country at present?

Open-Ended v. Closed-Ended

	Open-ended	Closed-ended
Crime/violence	35%	16%
Inflation	13%	13%
Welfare	3%	0%

Don't Know? as an Out!

Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?

Problem: No filter to screen out "nonattitudes"

4% DK as is – "or do you not have an opinion on that" increases DK to 19%

Defining Response Categories

Should divorce in this country be easier or more difficult to obtain than it is now?

Problem: No middle position available

Should divorce in this country be easier to obtain, more difficult to obtain, or stay as it is now?

Importance of a Middle Position

	Omitted	Offered
Easier	29%	23%
More difficult	45%	33%
Stay as is	22% (vol)	40%
Don't know	5%	4%

Balance

Are you in favor of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Do you think that smut-peddlers should be free to sell their filthy pornography to our children?

Problems: Leading, unbalanced

Compare "welfare" and "assistance to the poor"

Limits

The Supreme Court recently ruled that congressional district boundaries may not be drawn solely on the basis of racial considerations. Do you agree or disagree with this decision?

Problems: Complexity, acquiescence to authority figure

Touchy Subjects

Did you vote in the 19xx or 20xx presidential election(s)?

Problem: Social desirability

In talking to people about the election we often find that a lot of people weren't able to vote because they weren't registered or they were sick or they just didn't have time. How about you, did you vote in the elections this November?

Can you ask this?

How many times did you use heroin last week:
not at all, once or twice, three to five times, or
more than three times?

When did you stop beating your wife?

Conclusion

At a minimum, respondents should know the wording, response categories, and coding rules used or at least have some understanding of what is being asked.

FYI: <http://wikileaks.org/>

Document dated, "26 March 2010" and found at:

<http://file.wikileaks.org/file/cia-afghanistan.pdf>