

**Empirical Research Methods**  
POLS W3708  
Columbia University, Fall 2012  
MW 11:40-12:55  
Professor Donald Green

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Course overview: This course provides an introduction to empirical research methods in political science. Central topics include measurement, sampling, surveys, and experiments. The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the conceptual and methodological challenges that arise when researchers attempt to measure political phenomena, assess change over time, or demonstrate a causal relationship between policies and social outcomes. In order to reinforce core ideas and link them to ongoing political debates, students will conduct a series of hands-on research projects involving sampling, questionnaire development, and experimental design.

Prerequisites: This course is intended for political science majors, but non-majors are welcome. Familiarity with statistics and statistical software is helpful but not required. We will be working with data in class throughout the term.

Readings: Students are expected to keep up with each week's reading. A course reader packet contains each of the selections below. The course reader is available at Village Copier (1181 Amsterdam Ave.; 212-666-4777; [villagecopier118@nyc.rr.com](mailto:villagecopier118@nyc.rr.com)).

Assignments: We will have a take-home assignment for each of the four modules (measurement, sampling, surveys, and experiments). Each assignment will count for 10% of the overall grade. There will also be an in-class exam at the end of each module. Each exam will count for 10% of the overall grade. The in-class final exam will count for 20%.

The class will conduct an exit poll of New York City voting locations on November 6. Data collection and analysis will be the basis of the take-home assignment and exam for the survey module.

The course schedule is as follows:

September 5: Introduction and Overview

September 10 and 12: Concepts and Measures

Babbie, Earl R. 2011. *The Basics of Social Research*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 129-166. This reading provides an overview of basic terminology.

Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, Chapters 1-2. Dahl offers a multifaceted definition of democracy that has been used by subsequent researchers to classify regimes.

September 17: No class

September 19: Measurement: Which countries are democracies?

Both readings for this week grapple with ongoing debates about how to define and measure democracy for purposes of over-time and cross-sectional comparison.

Munck, Gerardo L., and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices. *Comparative Political Studies* 35: 5-34.

Coppedge, Michael, et al. 2011. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach. *Perspectives on Politics* 9: 247-267.

September 24: Measurement: Has racial prejudice diminished over time?

Schuman, Howard, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo. 1985. *Racial Attitudes in American: Trends and Interpretations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 71-138. Arguing that expressions of racial attitudes vary depending on whether they focus on principle or policy, the authors assess trends in white Americans' opinions. The findings are interesting but dated; we will use the General Social Survey to update and re-evaluate these trends.

Concerned that survey respondents report low levels of out-group prejudice that do not reflect their true attitudes, researchers have devised other methods for measuring prejudice. But are they valid?

Jones Edward E. and Harold Sigall. 1971. Bogus Pipeline -- New Paradigm For Measuring Affect And Attitude. *Psychological Bulletin* 76: (5) 349.

Kuklinski, James H., Michael D. Cobb and Martin Gilens. 1997. "Racial Attitudes and the 'New South'." *Journal of Politics* 59:323-349

October 1: Unobtrusive measurement

Skeptical of conventional survey measures of prejudice (or curious to see whether survey results coincide with alternative measurement approaches), researchers have devised an array of unobtrusive measurement strategies.

Crosby, Faye, Stephanie Bromley, and Leonard Saxe. 1980. Recent Unobtrusive Studies of Black and White Discrimination and Prejudice: A Literature Review. *Psychological Bulletin* 87: 546-563.

Iyengar, Shanto, Solomon Messing, Kyu Hahn, Mahzarin Banaji, and Christopher Dial. 2011. Explicit and Implicit Racial Attitudes: A Test of their Convergent and Predictive Validity. Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University.

Stephens-Davidowitz, Seth. 2012. The Effects of Racial Animus on a Black Presidential Candidate: Using Google Search Data to Find What Surveys Miss. Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University.

October 3: In-class exam on measurement

October 8 and 10: Sampling and sampling distributions

Textbook readings provide an overview of terms and formulas. Freedman et al. give a lucid description of sampling theory. Babbie illustrates some important variations the use of simple random sampling.

Freedman, David, Robert Pisani, and Roger Purves. 2007. *Statistics*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 288-307 and 333-394.

Babbie, Earl R. 2011. *The Basics of Social Research*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 202-243.

October 15 and 17: Survey samples and sources of bias

Although dated, the Roll and Contrl chapter provides a nice illustration of various traditional forms of sampling, including an extended example on stratified sampling. Bates and Harmon remind us of the perils of allowing respondents to self-select into the sample. Couper discusses the rapid transformation of survey data collection.

Roll, Charles W., and Albert H. Cantril. 1972. *Polls: Their Use and Misuse in Politics*. Cabin John, MA: Seven Locks Press, pp. 65-93.

Bates, Benjamin, and Mark Harmon. 1993. Do “Instant Polls” Hit the Spot? Phone-in vs. Random Sampling of Public Opinion. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 70: 369-380.

Couper, Mick P. The Future of Modes of Data Collection. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75: 889-908.

October 22: In-class exam on sampling

October 24: Survey design

Questionnaire design falls somewhere between art and science. This week’s readings offer advice on how to write survey questions (and response options). Quattrone and

Tversky remind us that logically equivalent but differently framed questions may generate divergent results. Abelson et al. provide an elegant example of applying social psychological theories to the thorny practical problem of overreporting.

Sheatsley, Paul B. 1983. Questionnaire Construction and Item Writing. In *Handbook of Survey Research*, Peter H. Rossi, James D. Wright, and Andy B. Anderson, eds. New York: Academic Press, pp.195-230.

Quattrone, George A., and Amos Tversky. 1988. Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice. *American Political Science Review* 82: 719-736.

Abelson, Robert P., Elizabeth F. Loftus, and Anthony G. Greenwald. 1992. Attempts to Improve the Accuracy of Self-Reports of Voting. In *Questions about Questions: Inquiries into the Cognitive Bases of Surveys*, Judith M. Tanur, ed. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 138-153.

#### October 29: Exit polls

As we gear up to conduct our own survey, these readings offer some suggestions concerning sampling, measurement, and interpretation.

Bishop, George F., and Bonnie S. Fisher. 1995. "Secret Ballots" and Self-Reports in an Exit-Poll Experiment. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59: 568-588.

Barreto, Matt A., Fernando Guerra, Mara Marks, Stephen A. Nunu, and Nathan A. Woods. 2006. Controversies in Exit Polling: Implementing a Racially Stratified Homogeneous Precinct Approach. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39: 477-483.

#### October 31: Research Ethics and Survey Research

Before we venture into the field, we must reflect on the ethics of gathering data from human subjects. Babbie provides an overview of ethical considerations. The CFR lays out the requirements by which Columbia researchers (faculty and students) must abide.

Babbie, Earl R. 1973. *Survey Research Methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Chapter 19, The Ethics of Survey Research, pp. 347-357.

Department of Health and Human Services. 2009. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 Public Welfare, Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects.

Note: students must complete human subjects training via the portal at <https://www.rascal.columbia.edu/>

#### November 5: University holiday

November 6: Election Day – exit poll data collection

November 7: Analysis and interpretation of our exit poll results (and perhaps a word or two about the election itself)

November 12: In-class exam: surveys

November 14: What is an experiment?

The introductory chapters of this textbook define experiments, provide an overview of why they are useful, introduce potential outcomes notation, and illustrate the idea of a randomization distribution. Pay special attention to the three core assumptions that provide the basis for unbiased causal inference.

Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. 2012. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 1-93.

November 19 and 21: Core assumptions and causal inference

This week's readings are designed to illustrate the three core assumptions at work (or breaking down).

Page, Stewart. 1998. Accepting the Gay Person: Rental Accommodation in the Community, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 36 (2): 31-39

Hill, Russell A., and Robert A. Barton. 2005. Red enhances human performance in contests. *Nature* 435: 293.

Newhouse, Joseph P. 1989. A Health Insurance Experiment. In *Statistics: A Guide to the Unknown*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Judith M. Tanur et al., eds. Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, pp. 31-40.

November 26: Experiments in the lab

Use of laboratory experiments in political science grew rapidly in the wake of the Iyengar et al. study, especially among those who study the effects of the mass media. Mutz and Reeves is a recent example. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. Experimental Demonstration of the Not-So-Minimal Consequences of Television News Programs. *American Political Science Review* 76: 848–58.

Mutz, Diana C., and Byron Reeves. 2005. "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 1-15.

#### November 28: Experiments in the field (participation and representation)

These readings illustrate the use of experimentation to test propositions participation and representation. Gerber et al. test the effects of social norms on the probability that people vote. Butler and Broockman assess the conditions under which officials respond to requests from constituents depending on their putative race and party affiliation.

Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment. *American Political Science Review* 102: 33-48.

Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. 2011. Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators. *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 463-477.

#### December 3: Experiments in the field

These readings use randomized interventions to assess the effects of institutional design.

Peisakhin, Leonid, and Pinto, Paul. 2010. "Is Transparency an Effective Anti-Corruption Strategy? Evidence from a Field Experiment in India." *Regulation & Governance* 4: 261-80.

Olken, Benjamin A. 2010. Direct Democracy and Local Public Goods: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia. *American Political Science Review* 104: 243-267.

#### December 5: Beyond experiments?

What are the alternatives to experiments? Jones and Olken provide an illustration of how causal inferences may be extracted from quasi-experiments. Bateson provides a more conventional survey analysis that looks at the correlation between crime victimization and political participation. Neither study uses random assignment – how does that affect the persuasiveness of the results?

Jones, Benjamin F., and Benjamin A. Olken. 2009. Hit or Miss? The Effect of Assassinations on Institutions and War. *American Economic Journal* 1: 55-87.

Bateson, Regina. 2012. Crime Victimization and Political Participation. *American Political Science Review* 106: 570-587.

December 10: Review

TBD: In-class final exam