Survey Research Methods
Boston University
Political Science 846
Spring 2026

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Course Description

Survey research is an important method that political scientists often use to understand people in the world around us. By asking a standardized set of questions to a random sample of respondents, we can make inferences regarding the opinions and behavior of the larger population from which it was drawn. Surveys also offer numerous opportunities for experimental research, allowing scholars to make confident causal claims about the determinants of public opinion and behavior. In recent decades, the advent of Internet-based surveying and online recruitment of respondents has "democratized" survey research, allowing many graduate students and scholars with limited resources to design and conduct their own surveys from scratch. Surveys are also increasingly conducted around the world, outside of the context of advanced democracies where this method originated. Yet these developments have introduced new challenges in terms of ensuring that inferences drawn from survey research are valid.

This course is a survey research practicum for political science graduate students. It will equip students to a) critically evaluate existing survey research in the discipline, and b) design and conduct their own original surveys. Topics include sampling, survey modes, questionnaire design, survey experiments, pre-analysis plans, ethics and the Institutional Review Board, focus groups, and analyzing survey data. While much of the canonical survey research literature focuses on the United States, this course also pays special attention to the often unique challenges that are entailed by conducting surveys in other countries, especially in the Global South. Over the course of the semester, students will work toward the final project for the course: a proposal for original survey research, including a review of existing studies, a complete questionnaire and survey design, an implementation of the survey using Qualtrics software, a pre-analysis plan, and an Institutional Review Board application. The goal is to have a survey research project that is virtually ready to go, if and when funding is obtained.

Required Materials

The textbook for the course is:

> Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. 2009. *Survey Methodology*, 2nd edition. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

It is available new via Amazon.com for about $52; you can also buy it used at a somewhat cheaper price. It should also be stocked by the BU Bookstore. If you get an electronic copy (which is currently more expensive than print via Amazon), I recommend doing so via the publisher's website (wiley.com) rather than the Kindle version, since the latter does not preserve the original page numbers and formatting.

Additional readings beyond the textbook will be available via Blackboard.

Assignments and Grading Criteria

Grade Breakdown:
Participation: 20%
Weekly exercises: 30%
Final project: 50%

Participation: Students are expected to carefully complete the required readings prior to class and participate actively in discussions. Clarification questions are as valid a form of participation as fully-formed insights, so don't feel like you need to know all the answers in order to speak up! In addition to discussing the readings each week, we will regularly discuss students' survey research plans as they develop throughout the semester.

Weekly email: Each week, most likely on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning, I will send out an email that will help orient students toward the readings for the coming week. It will indicate what we plan to discuss each day and will pose questions to focus on as you complete them.

Reading reactions: Each week that reading is assigned, students should post to the Blackboard Discussion Board at least one comment or question about that week's reading—something you found interesting, something that was puzzling or confusing, etc. You can start a new thread, respond to a classmate's thread, or both. Your question/comment does not need to be long (a couple sentences is fine) or particularly profound. I just want to get a sense of your reactions to the reading and potentially generate some online discussion. The deadline is Tuesday at 10 a.m. so that I have time to review them before class at 11. Individual reading reactions are not graded and returned, but completing them is part of your overall participation grade.

Weekly Exercises: Each week of the course there is a written assignment asking you to submit a short memo (approximately 2–3 pages) applying that week's topic to your survey research plan. These assignments are described briefly below, in the schedule of readings; more details will be

included in each weekly email. The due date for these memos is Wednesday at 5 p.m. (except for the weeks of March 23 and 30, when they will be due Monday at 5 p.m. since there is no reading assigned for those weeks). Exercises should be submitted via the Groups function in Blackboard so that we all have access to them. Before class on Thursday, please review your classmates' submissions so that we are prepared to discuss them. I provide comments on weekly exercises but do not grade them, though you must complete them all to get full credit for this portion of the course grade.

Final Project: The final project for this course is the survey research plan that you will be developing over the course of the semester. It should consist of the following components:

- A literature review, as in a standard term paper, in which you introduce the topic, provide a theoretical framing, and critically analyze existing work on this topic
- A pre-analysis plan for your survey, with sampling details, a complete questionnaire, hypotheses, and the specifics of how you will test those hypotheses using your survey
- Your survey coded up in Qualtrics, either for self-administration via web browser/mobile phone or for in-person interviews using the Qualtrics Offline App
- A draft application to BU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for your survey

The literature review and pre-analysis plan (not including the questionnaire) should be at least 15 pages in length but can be longer. The questionnaire and IRB application should be submitted as appendices and are not counted toward overall page length. The final project must be submitted via Blackboard, and by sharing the Qualtrics survey with the instructor, by midnight on May 8.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to do their own work and to accurately and honestly give credit for information, ideas, and words obtained elsewhere. Plagiarism in written assignments will be dealt with strictly according to the Academic Conduct Code. The career consequences of academic dishonesty at the graduate level can be particularly severe (just Google "Michael LaCour"). The thought should never even cross your mind.

Note that the standard norms regarding plagiarism in academic writing do not apply to survey questionnaires. When writing one's own survey, it is a very common and often recommended practice to copy some existing questions verbatim from other questionnaires, especially "gold standard" surveys like the American National Election Studies (ANES) or AmericasBarometer. No one will get in trouble for doing this, either with me or anyone else, and you do not need to formally cite the source. However, for the purposes of this course, please put the source in brackets after the question, e.g., [ANES 2020] or [modified from ANES 2020], which helps me evaluate your thought process in drafting a questionnaire.

AI Policy: As a PhD-level course in political science, this course adheres to the department's draft AI Policy for Political Science PhD Students, which will be circulated separately, and to evolving norms and practices in the discipline, including current AI disclosure practices for journal publishing. The key points are as follows:

- You *may not* submit any AI-generated text as your own written work. This includes the reading comments, weekly exercises, and final paper. Doing so will be considered plagiarism and treated as a violation of the Academic Conduct Code.
- You *may* use AI for purposes other than composing final text, including brainstorming, researching, checking your work for errors, drafting and refining survey questionnaires (following the "questionnaires are not subject to plagiarism" standard noted above), and so on. If you do so:
    - You must disclose how you used AI, via a note at the start of the relevant written work and also preferably in class discussions. This mirrors current policies at peer-reviewed journals, which require disclosure of all uses of AI when submitting manuscripts. Being transparent also allows us to learn along with you what AI is good for and what it is not good for.
    - You are responsible for the accuracy of any AI-informed content, just as you are with any non-AI-informed content. If AI-generated mistakes are present in your work, you will be penalized.

Schedule and Required Readings

January 20, 22: Introduction to Survey Research
Exercise (due January 21): Submit a proposal for a topic that you could design a survey to study, including some of the key constructs you would measure.

Readings:
- Groves et al., Chs. 1–2.
- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36: 579-616.
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2017. "Measuring public opinion with surveys." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 309-329.
- Lupu, Noam, and Kristin Michelitch. 2018. "Advances in survey methods for the developing world." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 195-214.
- Barrington, Lowell W. 2012. "Fragile snapshot or stable relationships? What the Orange and Rose revolutions reveal about the stability of cross-sectional survey data." *Comparative Political Studies* 45.3: 312-340.

Recommended:
- Johnson, Timothy, Patrick Kulesa, Young Ik Cho, and Sharon Shavitt. 2005. "The Relation between Culture and Response Styles: Evidence from 19 Countries." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 36(2): 264-77.

January 27, 29: Sampling: General Populations
Exercise (due January 28): Sketch out a probability sampling plan for your proposed survey. Assume you have sufficient time and resources to carry it out.

Readings: Probability sampling

- Groves et al., Ch. 4
- "Sample Design for the Brazilian Electoral Panel Study, Wave 1."
- Driscoll, Jesse, and Nicholai Lidow. 2014. "Representative surveys in insecure environments: A case study of Mogadishu, Somalia." *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 2: 78–95.

Readings: Non-probability sampling
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Brian F. Schaffner. 2014. "Does survey mode still matter? Findings from a 2010 multi-mode comparison." *Political Analysis* 22, 3: 285-303.
- Dassonneville, Ruth, André Blais, Marc Hooghe, and Kris Deschouwer. 2020. "The effects of survey mode and sampling in Belgian election studies: A comparison of a national probability face-to-face survey and a nonprobability Internet survey." *Acta Politica* 55, 2: 175-198.
- Castorena, Oscar, Noam Lupu, Maita Schade, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. 2023. "Online Surveys in Latin America." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 56, 2: 273-280.

Recommended:
- Malhotra, Neil, and Jon A. Krosnick. 2007. "The effect of survey mode and sampling on inferences about political attitudes and behavior: Comparing the 2000 and 2004 ANES to Internet surveys with nonprobability samples." *Political Analysis* 15, 3 286-323.

February 3, 5: Sampling: Hard-to-Reach Populations and Convenience Samples
Exercise (due February 4): Sketch out a convenience sampling plan for your proposed survey.

Readings: Hard-to-reach populations
- Khoury, Rana. 2020. "Hard-to-Survey Populations and Respondent-Driven Sampling: Expanding the Political Science Toolbox." *Perspectives on Politics* 18(2): 509-526.
- Newby, Margaret, Sajeda Amin, Ian Diamond, and Ruchira T. Naved. 1998. "Survey experience among women in Bangladesh." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, 2: 252-275.
- Marcelli, Enrico, Louisa Holmes, David Estella, Fausto da Rocha, Philip Granberry, and Orfeu Buxton. 2009. *(In)Visible (Im)Migrants: The Health and Socioeconomic Integration of Brazilians in Metropolitan Boston.* San Diego, CA: Center for Behavioral and Community Health Studies, San Diego State University. Chapters 1–2.
- Boas, Taylor C. 2025. "Who Leads the Flock? Religion and the Radical Right among Brazilian Migrants." *Politics and Religion* 18, 1: 1–21.

Readings: Convenience samples
- Krupnikov, Yanna, H. Hannah Nam, and Hillary Style. 2021. "Convenience Samples in Political Science Experiments." In James N. Druckman and Donald P. Green, eds., *Advances in Experimental Political Science.* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 165–183.
- Boas, Taylor C., Dino P. Christenson, and David M. Glick. 2020. "Recruiting Large Online Samples in the United States and India: Facebook, Mechanical Turk and Qualtrics." *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, 2: 232–250.

Recommended:

- Berinsky, Adam J., Gregory A. Huber, and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2012. "Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk." *Political Analysis* 20.3: 351-368.

February 10, 12: Survey Design and Mode Challenges
Exercise (due February 11): What is a complication related to survey design or mode that might arise in your proposed survey, and how specifically would you address it?

Readings: Interviewer effects
- Blaydes, Lisa, and Rachel M. Gillum. 2013. "Religiosity-of-Interviewer Effects: Assessing the Impact of Veiled Enumerators on Survey Response in Egypt." *Politics and Religion* 6: 459-482.
- Adida, Claire L., Karen E. Ferree, Daniel N. Posner, and Amanda Lea Robinson. 2016. "Who's asking? Interviewer coethnicity effects in African survey data." *Comparative Political Studies* 49, 12: 1630-1660.

Readings: Online survey challenges
- Berinsky, Adam J., Michele F. Margolis, and Michael W. Sances. 2014. "Separating the shirkers from the workers? Making sure respondents pay attention on self-administered surveys." *American Journal of Political Science* 58.3: 739-753.
- Westwood, Sean J. 2025. "The potential existential threat of large language models to online survey research." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 47: e2518075122.

Readings: Panel studies
- Hillygus, D. Sunshine, and Steven Snell. 2015. "Longitudinal Surveys: Issues and Opportunities." In Lonna Rae Atkeson, and R. Michael Alvarez (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Recommended:
- Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Lauren Prather. 2019. "Do electronic devices in face-to-face interviews change survey behavior? Evidence from a developing country." *Research & Politics* 6, 2.

February 17, 19: No Class

February 24, 26: Questionnaires and Question Types
Exercise (due February 25): Draft some questions for your survey in a few of the categories discussed in this week's readings (e.g., Likert scales). Briefly explain your choices.

Readings:
- Groves et al., Ch. 7
- Krosnick, Jon A., and Stanley Presser. 2010. "Question and Questionnaire Design." In James D. Wright and Peter V. Marsden, eds., *Handbook of Survey Research*, 2nd ed. San Diego, CA: Elsevier, pp. 263–314.

- Lelkes, Yphtach, and Rebecca Weiss. 2015. “Much Ado about Acquiescence: The Relative Validity and Reliability of Construct-specific and Agree-Disagree Questions. *Research and Politics* 2, 3.
- Luskin, Robert and John Bullock. 2011. “Don’t Know Means Don’t Know: DK Responses and the Public’s Level of Political Knowledge.” *The Journal of Politics* 73(2): 547-557.
- Baker, Andy and Lucio Renno. 2019. “Nonpartisans as False Negatives: The Mismeasurement of Party Identification in Public Opinion Surveys.” *The Journal of Politics* 81(3): 906-22.

March 3, 5: Sensitive questions
Exercise (March 4): Write a sensitive question for your survey.

Readings: overview, randomized response, and endorsement
- Rosenfeld, Bryn, Kosuke Imai, and Jacob N. Shapiro. 2016. "An empirical validation study of popular survey methodologies for sensitive questions." *American Journal of Political Science* 60, 3: 783-802.
- Lyall, Jason, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai. 2013. "Explaining support for combatants during wartime: A survey experiment in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 107, 4: 679-705.
- Gingerich, Daniel W. 2010. "Understanding off-the-books politics: Conducting inference on the determinants of sensitive behavior with randomized response surveys." *Political Analysis* 18.3: 349-380.

Readings: list experiments
- Glynn, Adam N. 2013. “What can we learn with statistical truth serum? Design and analysis of the list experiment.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 77(S1): 159–172.
- Gonzalez-Ocantos, Ezequiel, Chad Kiewiet De Jonge, Carlos Meléndez, Javier Osorio, and David W. Nickerson. "Vote buying and social desirability bias: Experimental evidence from Nicaragua." *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 1 (2012): 202-217.

Recommended:
- Holbrook, Allyson L., and Jon A. Krosnick. 2010. “Social desirability bias in voter turnout reports: Tests using the item count technique.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74(1): 37–67.

March 17, 19: Survey Experiments
Exercise (due March 18): Draft a survey experiment to include in your survey.

Readings: overview and vignette experiments
- Mutz, Diana. 2011. *Population-Based Survey Experiments.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chs. 1, 4.
- Hainmueller, Jens, and Michael J. Hiscox. 2010. "Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: Evidence from a survey experiment." *American Political Science Review* 104, 1: 61-84.
- Boas, Taylor C., F. Daniel Hidalgo, and Marcus André Melo. 2019. “Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil.” *American Journal of Political Science* 63, 2: 385–400.

Readings: conjoint experiments

- Bansak, Kirk, Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto. 2021. "Conjoint Survey Experiments." In James N. Druckman and Donald P. Green, eds., *Advances in Experimental Political Science.* New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19–41.
- Meyer, Alexander and Leah R. Rosenzweig. 2016. "Conjoint analysis tools for developing country contexts." *The Political Methodologist* 23.
- Leeper, Thomas J., Sara B. Hobolt, and James Tilley. 2020. "Measuring subgroup preferences in conjoint experiments." *Political Analysis* 28, no. 2: 207-221.

Recommended:

- Clifford, Scott, Geoffrey Sheagley, and Spencer Piston. 2021. "Increasing Precision without Altering Treatment Effects: Repeated Measures Designs in Survey Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 115, 3: 1048–1065.

March 24, 26: Discussion of Draft Questionnaires
Exercise (due **Monday, March 23**): A complete draft of your questionnaire.

Readings: questionnaires from classmates.

Visit from Vidhu Mukundan to discuss her in-person survey in Hyderabad, India.

March 31, April 2: Qualtrics
Exercise (due **Monday, March 30**): Program your questionnaire in Qualtrics.

Readings: Qualtrics help pages, training videos, and sample surveys, TBD

Visit from Brandon Sullivan to discuss his online surveysa of U.S. financial professionals.

April 7, 9: Pre-Analysis Plans
Exercise (due April 8): Draft one or more hypotheses and specify how you will operationalize key variables from your survey needed to test those hypotheses.

Readings:

- Burlig, Fiona. 2018. "Improving transparency in observational social science research: A pre-analysis plan approach." *Economics Letters* 168: 56-60.
- Chen, Lula, and Chris Grady. 2019. "10 Things to Know about Pre-Analysis Plans." Methods Guide, Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). https://egap.org/resource/10-things-to-know-about-pre-analysis-plans/.
- Ofosu, George K., and Daniel N. Posner. 2023. "Pre-analysis plans: an early stocktaking." *Perspectives on Politics* 21, 1: 174–190.
- Brun, Estelle, and Taylor C. Boas. 2025. "Political Behavior in Cultural Spaces: A Survey on Eurovision Voting: Pre-Analysis Plan." Optionally, you can also read the paper conveying results.

- Enders, Adam M., and Jamil S. Scott. 2019. "The Increasing Racialization of American Electoral Politics, 1988–2016." *American Politics Research* 47.2: 275-303, AND the study's Pre-Analysis Plan: https://osf.io/63yw9.

April 14, 16: Ethics and Institutional Review Boards
Exercise (due April 15): Draft a consent form for your survey.

Readings:
- Complete CITI training (https://www.bu.edu/researchsupport/compliance/human-subjects/human-subjects-training/): "Human Subjects Protection Training: Social & Behavioral Focus"
- Groves et al., Ch. 11
- "Tips for Creating a Consent Document," https://www.bu.edu/researchsupport/compliance/human-subjects/tips-for-creating-a-consent-document/
- Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2016. "Encountering your IRB 2.0: What political scientists need to know." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49, 2: 277-286.

April 21, 23: Focus Groups
Exercise (due April 22): Submit a proposal for how you might use focus groups in conjunction with your survey, including draft questions, recruitment details, and who would moderate.

Readings:
- Cyr, Jennifer. 2019. *Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cyr, Jennifer. 2019. "An integrative approach to measurement: Focus groups as a survey pretest." *Quality & Quantity* 53: 897–913.
- Boas, Taylor C. 2024. "Who Participates in Focus Groups? Diagnosing Self-Selection." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, 3: 384–389.
- Review Boas (2025), "Who Leads the Flock?" from February 3, paying attention to the use of focus groups.

April 28, 30: Analyzing survey data
Exercise: none (work on your paper!)

Readings: overview and multiple imputation
- Groves et al., Ch. 10
- King, Gary, James Honaker, Anne Joseph, and Kenneth Scheve. 2001. "Analyzing incomplete political science data: An alternative algorithm for multiple imputation." *American Political Science Review* 95, 1 (2001): 49-69.
- Arel-Bundock, Vincent, and Krzysztof J. Pelc. 2018. "When can multiple imputation improve regression estimates?" *Political Analysis* 26, 2: 240-245.

Readings: weights and complex designs

- DeBell, Matthew. 2010. “How to Analyze ANES Survey Data. ANES Technical Report Series no. nes012492. Palo Alto, CA, and Ann Arbor, MI: Stanford University and the University of Michigan.
- Castorena, Oscar. 2021. “Survey Weights in AmericasBarometer Data.” AmericasBarometer Methodological Note #007.
- Hartman, Erin, and Inés Levin. 2019. “Accounting for Complex Survey Designs: Strategies for Post-stratification and Weighting of Internet Surveys.” In *Oxford Handbook of Electoral Persuasion*, eds. Elizabeth Suhay, Bernard Grofman, and Alexander H. Trechsel. New York: Oxford University Press.

May 8: Final papers due