Survey Research (2)

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Housekeeping

• Midterm on Friday
• Homeworks back at the end of class
Survey Design: Step by Step

• First: Don’t write what you can steal
  • Using established, validated measures is usually better than developing a new measure
  • It takes time to learn all the ways a question is likely to be interpreted

• Second: Write questions
  • **Simple**, clear, unambiguous questions
    • Avoid memory-intensive questions
    • Avoid math-in-head and complex rankings
  • Workshop it with fellow academics
Surveys in Translation (Step 2.5)

• The goal is 100% conceptual equivalence between the two versions.
  • This will never be perfect

• Reverse translation: Person 1 translates the survey from English to Georgian
  • Person 2 translates it from Georgian back to English
  • The two English versions should be identical
  • This takes several rounds of translation

• BOTH languages should be cognitively pretested and piloted.
  • Many concepts are culturally specific
  • What is a “loaded” word in one language may not be in another
Survey Design: Step by Step

• Third: Cognitive pretest
  • Individuals FROM THE POPULATION YOU’RE STUDYING
  • These are detailed conversations about what each question makes them think about, what makes them uncomfortable, etc.
  • Can be done individually or in focus groups
  • The focus here is on the questions and their ordering.
Survey Design: Step by Step

- Fourth: The Pilot
  - This is the miniature version of the survey
  - Take a real random sample, do everything as you will do it in the full roll-out
  - The focus here is not just on the survey instrument, but on logistics as well
  - Especially survey non-response, item non-response

- Fifth: The full roll out
  - Nothing ever goes smoothly
  - The importance of good field notes
  - Good research is transparent
Sensitive Questions

• Sensitive questions:
  • Any questions where a respondent may be uncomfortable answering accurately and directly
  • Enumerators are strangers

• Types of sensitive questions:
  • Questions about morally/ethically/legally dubious behavior
  • Taboo topics (e.g. sexuality, religion, corruption)
  • Questions about emotional topics
What Happens if You Ask a Sensitive Question Directly?

• A. They lie and give you the socially desirable response
  • Result: Biased measurement

• B. They say “I don’t know,” or refuse to answer, or terminate the survey
  • Result: High non-response that could also bias the data
It doesn’t have to be THAT sensitive

• Wait until Mid-April and then ask people whom they picked as the champ in their March Madness bracket.
  • People will lie and say they picked the winner, even when they didn’t
How to Handle Sensitive Questions

• Avoid them

• A. Find a different way to measure the same concept
  • Example: Check public records instead of asking about past arrests or divorce history

• B. Find a less sensitive concept that can still be used to test your theory
  • Example: Ask firms about their entertainment budget instead of asking them about corruption
How to Handle Sensitive Questions

• Frame them
  • A. Try to help respondents feel that any response would be OK.

• Example: Before asking about whether firms hire their owners’ family members, the enumerator states that “family business” is a common practice.
Shielded Response Techniques

• Sometimes we can learn how prevalent a behavior is at the group level, without knowing WHO exactly is engaging in the behavior
Randomized Response

• Example Question: Has your firm paid any bribes to customs officials in the past year?
• Step 1: Have the respondent flip a coin (the enumerator does not look, or do this in a written survey)
• Step 2: If the coin is heads, answer “Yes”
• Step 3: If the coin is tails, answer the question accurately.

• How would we interpret these results?