

Survey Experiments in Practice

Thomas J. Leeper

Assistant Professor in Political Behaviour

London School of Economics and Political Science

Instructor Bio – Thomas Leeper

Thomas J. Leeper is an Assistant Professor in Political Behaviour in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He studies public opinion dynamics using survey and experimental methods, with a focus on citizens' information acquisition, elite issue framing, and party endorsements within the United States and Western Europe. His research has been published in leading journals, including *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Political Psychology* among others.

Overview

Survey experiments have emerged as one of the most powerful methodological tools in the social sciences. By combining experimental design that provides clear causal inference with the flexibility of the survey context as a site for behavioral research, survey experiments can be used in almost any field to study almost any question. Conducting survey experiments can appear fairly simple but doing them well is hard.

This course will use published examples of experimental research to demonstrate a variety of ways to leverage survey experiments for testing social science theories. The course will teach participants how to use different survey experimental designs and how to address challenges related to sampling, survey mode, ethics, effect heterogeneity, and more. Students leave the course with a thorough understanding of how survey experiments can provide useful causal inferences, knowledge of how to design and analyze simple and complex experiments, and the ability to evaluate experimental research and apply these methods in their own research.

Schedule

Session 1: Survey Experiments in Context (July 6, 9:00-11:00)

The first session will provide an overview of the course, discuss the history of survey experiments and experiments in general, and provide a conceptual and notational framework for design, analyzing, and discussing experiments.

Class Schedule

- 9:00-9:30 - Introductions and Course Overview
- 9:30-10:00 - History of the Survey Experiment (and Experiments, generally)
- 10:00-10:50 - Potential Outcomes Framework of Causality

Readings

- Druckman, J. N., Green, D. P., Kuklinski, J. H., and Lupia, A. 2006. "The Growth and Development of Experimental Research in Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 100: 627-635.
- Kuklinski, J. H. and Hurley, N. L. 1994. "On Hearing and Interpreting Political Messages: A Cautionary Tale of Citizen Cue-Taking" *The Journal of Politics* 56: 729-751.
- Holland, P. W. 1986. "Statistics and Causal Inference." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 81: 945-960.

Session 2: Examples and Paradigms (July 6, 11:00-13:00)

While the first session demonstrated the advantages of experimentation as a research design, designing experiments can be challenging without a solid grounding in a relevant theoretical literature. This session will discuss common paradigms for survey experimental research and discuss how to design experiments to test social science theories.

Class Schedule

- 11:05-11:30 - Translating Theories into Experiments
- 11:30-13:00 - Paradigms (Question Wording, Vignettes, Sensitive items, etc.)

Readings

- Schuldt, J. P., Konrath, S. H., and Schwarz, N. 2011. "'Global Warming' or 'Climate Change'?": Whether the Planet is Warming Depends on Question Wording." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75: 115-124.
- Glynn, A. N. 2013. "What Can We Learn with Statistical Truth Serum?: Design and Analysis of the List Experiment." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 77: 159-172.
- Albertson, B. L. and Lawrence, A. 2009. "After the Credits Roll: The Long-Term Effects of Educational Television on Public Knowledge and Attitudes." *American Politics Research* 37: 275-300.

Session 3: External Validity (July 7, 9:00-11:00)

Experiments are typically performed at one point in time, on a specific sample or set of respondents, on a limited range of issues or topic, using a finite set of measurement techniques. Yet researchers' ambitions are often broader, with aims to make claims that extrapolate beyond the particular study's context, sample, and focus. This session will address various forms of external validity, how to maximize generalizability, and the trade-offs involved with such efforts.

Class Schedule

- 9:00-9:30 - External Validity
- 9:30-10:00 - Model-based and Design-based Representativeness
- 10:00-11:50 - SUTO; Effect Heterogeneity due to Settings and Respondents

Readings

- Gaines, B. J., Kuklinski, J. H., and Quirk, P. J. 2007. "The Logic of the Survey Experiment Reexamined." *Political Analysis* 15: 1-20.
- Druckman, J. N. and Leeper, T. J. 2012. "Learning More from Political Communication Experiments: Pretreatment and Its Effects." *American Journal of Political Science* 56: 875-896.
- Mullinix, K. J., Leeper, T. J., Druckman, J. N., and Freese, J. 2015. "The Generalizability of Survey Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science*: In press.

- Green, D. P. and Kern, H. L. 2012. "Modeling Heterogeneous Treatment Effects in Survey Experiments with Bayesian Additive Regression Trees." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76: 491-511.
- Warren, J. R. and Halpern-Manners, A. 2012. "Panel Conditioning in Longitudinal Social Science Surveys." *Sociological Research & Methods* 41: 491-534.

Session 4: Practical Issues in Survey Experimental Research (July 7, 11:00-13:00)

This session will cover a number of remaining issues, especially related to the practical implementation of survey experiments.

Class Schedule

- 11:00-11:30 - Effect Heterogeneity due to Treatments and Outcomes
- 11:30-12:00 - Lingering Issues (Attention, Satisficing, Self-Selection, Ethics)
- 12:00-12:45 - Handling of "Broken Experiments"
- 12:45-13:00 - Summary and Conclusion

Readings

- Clifford, S. and Jerit, J. 2015. "Do Attempts to Improve Respondent Attention Increase Social Desirability Bias?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 79: 790-802.
- Bolsen, T. 2013. "A Light Bulb Goes On: Norms, Rhetoric, and Actions for the Public Good." *Political Behavior* 35: 1-20.
- Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., and Yamamoto, T. 2015. "Validating Vignette and Conjoint Survey Experiments Against Real-World Behavior." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*: In press.
- Leeper, T. J. "[The Role of Media Choice and Media Effects in Political Knowledge Gaps.](#)" Working paper, London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Hertwig, R. and Ortmann, A. 2008. "Deception in Experiments: Revisiting the Arguments in Its Defense." *Ethics & Behavior* 18: 59-92.