



Measuring citizens' perception of the public sector

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Istanbul, OECD Workshop on Measuring Progress in
Regulatory Reform: Perception Surveys (21-22 June
2010)

How you measure matters!

- Do the respondents really have an opinion?
- Is the measured opinion a reflection of an existing opinion, or is it created by the measurement?
- How stable is this opinion?

Measuring an opinion where there isn't one



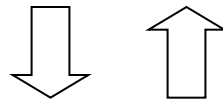
A. The Agricultural Trade Act

Standard		Filtered	
<p>“Congress has been considering the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978. Do you favor or oppose the passage of this act?”</p>		<p>“Congress has been considering the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978. Do you favor or oppose the passage of this act <i>or</i> do you not have an opinion on that issue?”</p>	
Favor	19%	Favor	
Oppose	12	Oppose	
DK (if volunteered)	69	No opinion	
Total	100		
N	(387)		

Source: The data in Table 6.5 panel A are from the University of Michigan's Survey of Consumer Attitudes, November and December 1978, combined. (The different ratio of N's (cited in Schuman, 2008)

Validity - what are you really measuring?

I think quality of regulation is low



I don't like government

- Goodsell (1983) 'The case for bureaucracy'
 - Satisfaction with individual bureaucratic encounters, but negative about public services as a whole

- Katz et al. (1977): evaluate public and private sector services in general, and a recently used public and private sector service.



Was there an opinion prior to the measurement?

- “When I asked the standard survey question “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?” many volunteers said something like what Carolyn said, “Most of the time. Well, at least I’d like to think it’s most of the time. Of course, I’m not so sure it really *is*. But I hope it is. So, I’d say ‘most of the time’. Yes, put ‘most of the time’.” (Eliasoph, 1998: 20)



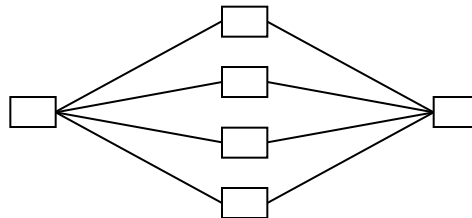
Questionnaire may create answers - priming

- Communication Canada survey (2002):
 - Generally speaking, how would you rate the performance of the government of Canada. => 29% good
 - Now that you have had an opportunity to think about the Government of Canada's priorities and performance in more detail I'd like to ask you again- generally speaking, how would you rate the performance of the Government of Canada? => 40% good

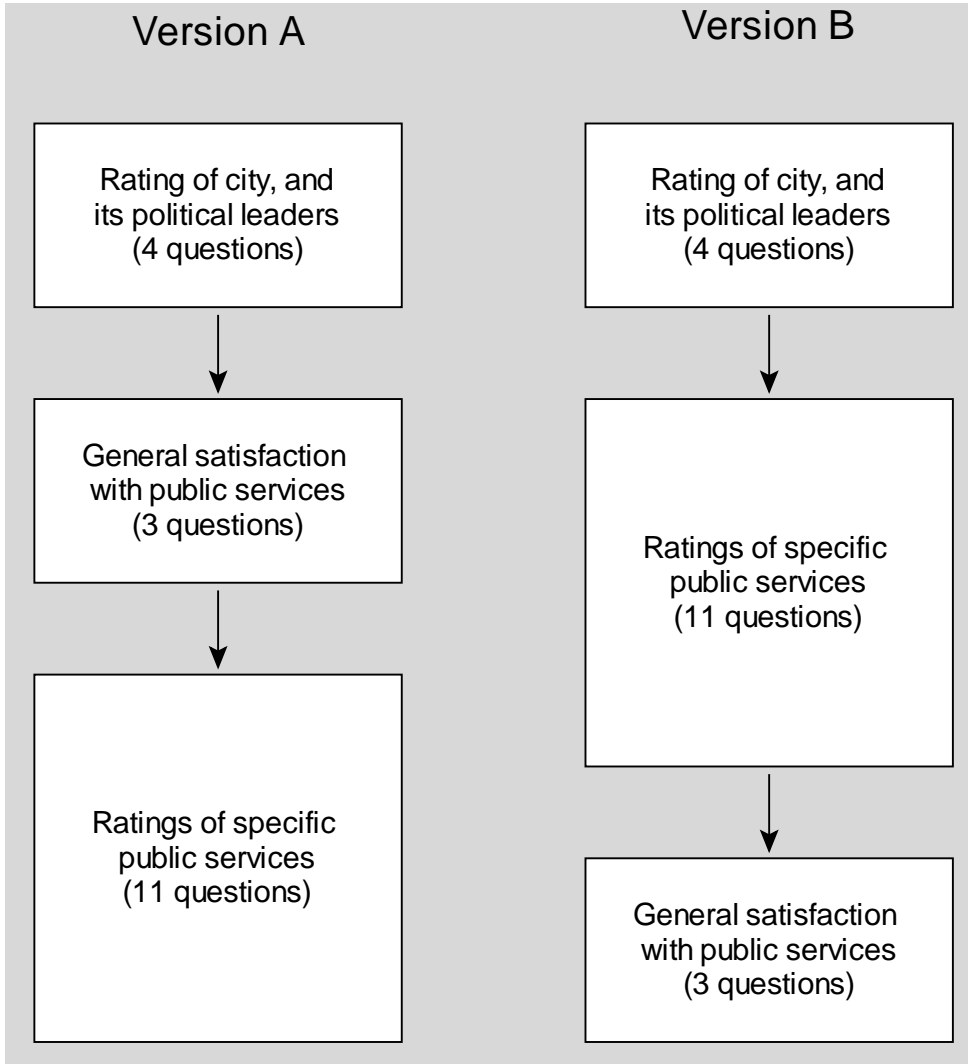


Priming – public sector examples (II)

- Benton & Daly, 1991: survey experiment in two cities in Florida
 - service-specific questions first: 71.9 % rates overall quality of services as good
 - general question precedes the service-specific questions: 63.8 % rates overall quality of services as good



A split-ballot experiment ...



Van de Walle, S., & Van Ryzin, G. (2010, forthcoming). The order of questions in a survey on citizen satisfaction with public services: Lessons from a split-ballot experiment. In: *Public Administration*

Effect on explanations – drivers of satisfaction



	Version A						Version B					
Model summary	R-sqr = 0.502						R-sqr = 0.656					
	Top 5						Top 5					
Coefficients	B	SE	Beta	betas	T	p-value	B	SE	Beta	betas	T	p-value
Cleanliness of streets and sidewalks	3.10	0.80	0.161	2	3.88	0.000	2.36	0.68	0.116		3.47	0.001
Street and road maintenance	2.15	0.66	0.125	4	3.26	0.001	2.62	0.62	0.134	4	4.24	0.000
Parks and playgrounds	1.23	0.69	0.067		1.78	0.075	2.66	0.67	0.130	5	3.98	0.000
Public libraries	0.41	0.66	0.022		0.62	0.539	0.91	0.61	0.045		1.49	0.137
Garbage collection	1.64	0.67	0.084	5	2.46	0.014	0.12	0.63	0.006		0.19	0.852
Police protection	1.23	0.85	0.065		1.45	0.147	4.48	0.80	0.228	1	5.62	0.000
Police-community relations	2.61	0.81	0.142	3	3.21	0.001	2.75	0.77	0.144	3	3.59	0.000
Fire protection	0.61	0.77	0.028		0.79	0.431	-2.19	0.71	-0.096		-3.07	0.002
Public education (K-12)	3.47	0.61	0.196	1	5.70	0.000	2.41	0.55	0.123		4.36	0.000
Ease of car travel	0.62	0.52	0.038		1.18	0.238	1.63	0.47	0.095		3.47	0.001
Ease of travel by public transportation	0.87	0.49	0.053		1.76	0.079	3.34	0.42	0.193	2	7.92	0.000
(Constant)	-8.42	2.73			-3.08	0.002	-16.61	2.30			-7.21	0.000

Strategic answers and social desirability

(in Tourangeau et al. 2000: 75)

- Survey on religious behaviour in the US
 - “Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days, or not?”
=> 40%
 - “I would like to ask you about the things you did yesterday – from midnight Saturday to midnight last night. Let’s start with midnight Saturday. What were you doing? What time did you finish ?” Etc.
=> 29%



Social desirability (Tourangeau et al. 2000: 277)

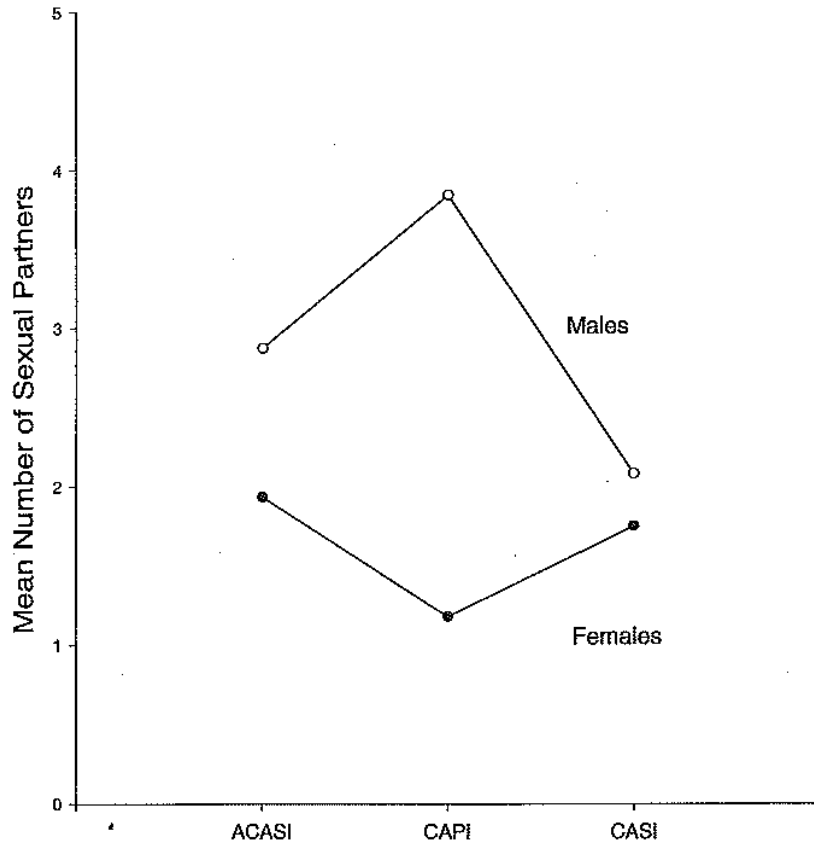


Figure 9.1 The mean number of opposite-sex sexual partners reported by men and women for the past year, by mode of data collection. The upper line shows the average number of sexual partners reported by men; the lower line shows the average number reported by women. ACASI refers to computer-assisted self-interviewing with audio; CASI, to computer-assisted self-interviewing without audio; and CAPI, to computer-assisted personal interviewing (in which an interviewer administers the questions). Data from Tourangeau and Smith (1996).



Answers suggest answers

- How many units of alcohol do you drink a week?
 - More than 50
 - 40-49
 - 30-39
 - 20-29
 - Less than 20

Answers suggest answers



V1	N	%	V2	N	%
more than 50	0	0,0	More than 20	4	28,6
40-49	0	0,0	16-20	4	28,6
30-39	1	7,1	10-15	2	14,3
20-29	5	35,7	5-9	2	14,3
less than 20	8	57,1	less than 5	2	14,3
total	14			14	

Comparing perceptions of regulatory quality

- Conceptual equivalence - simple concepts may mean different things
 - ‘How many rooms are there in your house?’
 - ‘How many hours do you watch TV on a normal day?’

- Example: World Value Survey ‘Confidence in the civil service’
 - Argentina Los funcionarios
 - Chile La administración pública
 - Mexico La burocracia pública
 - Venezuela La administración pública
 - Peru Los funcionarios públicos
 - Puerto Rico Los funcionarios de gobierno
 - Spain La Administración Pública: los funcionarios
 - Venezuela La administración pública



Cultural differences in response behaviour

- Procedural equivalence
 - Acquiescence bias – tendency to agree
 - Tendency to avoid substantial responses (e.g. DK)
 - Tendency to choose extreme responses
 - Tendency to choose middle position
 - Cultural interpretation of numerical scales

- Absolute scores and frequency counts are useless in country comparisons



Scale interpretation

- On a scale from 0 to 10...
 - 5=pass?
 - or 5,5 (Netherlands)
 - or 6 (Brazil)
 - or 4 (Albania)

- And what if one is not familiar with 0-10 scale?
 - 2-6 (Bulgaria)
 - -3-12 (Denmark)



Do not overestimate the precision of numbers



TABLE 5.5 Distribution of Responses to Three Probability Items

	Loss of Health Insurance	Burglary	Job Loss
Value			
0, 100	49.1%	14.2%	37.3%
Other multiples of 10	30.0%	47.7%	30.8%
25, 75	3.0%	3.7%	2.7%
1-5, 95-99	15.8%	30.7%	26.5%
Other raw values	2.2%	4.8%	2.8%
Total n	2,060	2,050	1,837

Source: Dominitz and Manski (1997). Copyright © 1997. Reprinted with permission of the University of Chicago Press.

(Dominitz & Manski 1997, in Tourangeau et al 2000)

Do not overestimate the precision of numbers

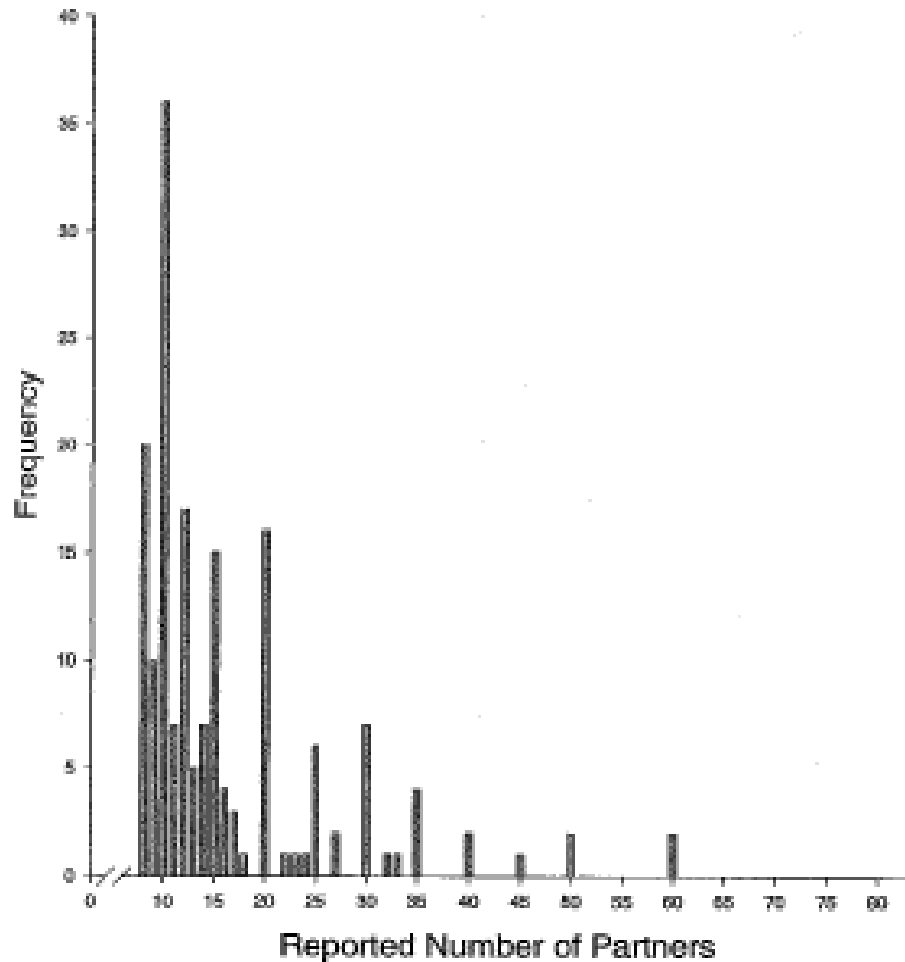


Figure 8.1. Distribution of reported lifetime sexual partners. Data from Tourangeau, Rasinski, Jobe, Smith, and Pratt (1997).

©St (Tourangeau et al. 2000: 233)

More information



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