

Under what conditions do countries go to war? What is the influence of the 2008–2009 economic crisis on the vote share of radical right-wing parties in Western Europe? What type of people are the most likely to protest and partake in demonstrations? How has the urban squatters' movement developed in South Africa after apartheid? There is hardly any field in the social sciences that asks as many research questions as political science. Questions scholars are interested in can be specific and reduced to one event (e.g., the development of the urban squatter's movement in South Africa post-apartheid) or general and systemic such as the occurrence of war and peace. Whether general or specific, what all empirical research questions have in common is the necessity to use adequate research methods to answer them. For example, to effectively evaluate the influence of the economic downturn in 2008–2009 on the radical right-wing success in the elections preceding the crisis, we need data on the radical right-wing vote before and after the crisis, a clearly defined operationalization of the crisis and data on confounding factors such as immigration, crime, and corruption. Through appropriate modeling techniques (i.e., multiple regression analysis on macro-level data), we can then assess the absolute and relative influence of the economic crisis on the radical right-wing vote share.

Research methods are the “bread and butter” of empirical political science. They are the tools that allow researchers to conduct research and detect empirical regularities, causal chains, and explanations of political and social phenomena. To use a practical analogy, a political scientist needs to have a toolkit of research methods at his or her disposal to build good empirical research in the same way as a mason must have certain tools to build a house. It is indispensable for a mason to not only have some rather simple tools (e.g., a hammer) but also some more sophisticated tools such as a mixer or crane. The same applies for a political scientist. Ideally, he or she should have some easy tools (such as descriptive statistics or means testing) at his or her disposal but also some more complex tools such as pooled time series analysis or maximum likelihood estimation. Having these tools allows

political scientists to both conduct their own research and judge and evaluate other peoples' work. This book will provide a first simple toolkit in the area of quantitative methods, survey research, and statistics.

There is one caveat in methods training: research methods can hardly be learnt by just reading articles and books. Rather, they need to be learnt in an applied fashion. Similar to the mixture of theoretical and practical training a mason acquires during her apprenticeship, political science students should be introduced to methods' training in a practical manner. In particular, this applies to quantitative methods and survey research. Aware that methods learning can only be fruitful if students learn to apply their theoretical skills in real-world scenarios, I have constructed this book on survey research and quantitative methods in a very practical fashion.

Through my own experience as a professor of introductory courses into quantitative method, I have learnt over and over again that students only enjoy these classes if they see the applicability of the techniques they learn. This book follows the structure as laid down in Fig. 1.1; it is structured so that students learn various statistical techniques while using their own data. It does not require students to have taken prior methods classes. To lay some theoretical groundwork, the first chapter starts with an introduction into the nuts and bolts of empirical social sciences (see Chap. 2). The book then shortly introduces students to the nuts and bolts of survey research (see Chap. 3). The following chapter then very briefly teaches students how they can construct and administer their own survey. At the end of Chap. 4, students also learn how to construct their own questionnaire. The fifth chapter, entitled "Conducting a Survey," instructs students on how to conduct a survey in the field. During this chapter, groups of students test their survey in an empirical setting by soliciting answers from peers. Chapters 6 to 9 are then dedicated to analyzing the survey. In more detail, students learn how to input their responses into either an SPSS or STATA dataset in the first part of Chap. 6. The second part covers univariate statistics and graphical representations of the data. In Chap. 7, I introduce different forms of means testing, and Chap. 8 is then dedicated to bivariate correlation and regression analysis. Finally, Chap. 9 covers multivariate regression analysis).

The book can be used as a self-teaching device. In this case, students should redo the exercises with the data provided. In a second step, they should conduct all the tests with other data they have at their disposal. The book is also the perfect accompanying textbook for an introductory class to survey research and statistics. In the latter case, there is a built-in semester-long group exercise, which enhances the learning process. In the semester-long group work that follows the sequence of the book, students are asked to conceive, conduct, and analyze survey. The survey that is analyzed throughout is a colloquial survey that measures the amount of money students spend partying. Actually, the survey is an original survey including the original data, which one of my student groups collected during their semester-long project. Using this "colloquial" survey, the students in this study group had lots of fun collecting and analyzing their data, showing that learning statistics can (and should) be fun. I hope that the readers and users of this book experience the same joy in their first encounter with quantitative methods.

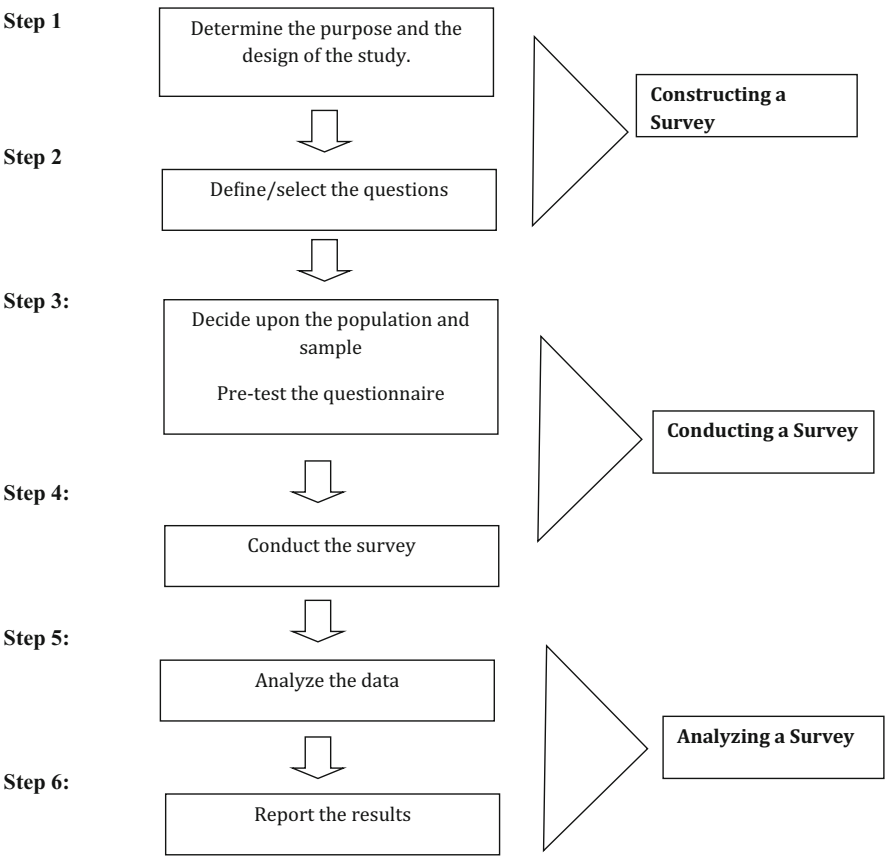


Fig. 1.1 Different steps in survey research