



Estimating the prevalence of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Germany: A comparison of randomized response and direct questioning

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ABSTRACT

An experimental CATI-survey ($N = 2041$), asking sensitive questions about xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Germany, was conducted to compare the randomized response technique (RRT) and the direct questioning technique. Unlike the vast majority of RRT surveys measuring the prevalence of socially undesirable behaviors, only few studies have explored the effectiveness of the RRT with respect to the disclosure of socially undesirable opinions. Results suggest that the RRT is an effective method eliciting more socially undesirable opinions and yielding more valid prevalence estimates of xenophobia and anti-Semitism than direct questioning ('more-is-better' assumption). Furthermore, the results indicate that with increasing topic sensitivity, the benefits of using the RRT also increase. Finally, adapted logistic regression analyses show that several covariates such as education and generalized trust are related to the likelihood of being prejudiced towards foreigners and Jews.

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1. Introduction

Many surveys include so-called 'sensitive questions', i.e. questions that ask about socially undesirable answers indicating the violation of a social norm. Due to self-presentation concerns, many respondents misreport on sensitive behaviors such as drug use (McAuliffe et al., 1991; Näher and Krumpal, 2011), abortion (Lara et al., 2004, 2006), shoplifting (Coutts and Jann, 2011), plagiarism (Coutts et al., 2011; Jann et al., 2012), noncompliance with social benefit rules (van den Hout et al., 2010) and voting (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010), as well as sensitive attitudes such as racism (Krysan, 1998), sexism (Roese and Jamieson, 1993), and xenophobia (Stocké, 2004, 2007). Facing an interviewer, respondents tend to underreport socially undesirable behaviors or attitudes and overreport socially desirable ones. As a consequence of misreporting, prevalence estimates are often distorted by social desirability bias.

To combat deliberate misreporting in sensitive surveys, the randomized response technique (RRT; Warner, 1965) was developed to protect the respondent's privacy in the interview situation and obtain more valid self-reports to sensitive questions. All RRT schemes rely on the principle that a random mechanism is used in order to generate a probabilistic relationship between the sensitive question posed and the response given. The respondent uses a randomizer (e.g. coins or dice) to determine whether he will answer to the sensitive question or a surrogate. Since the interviewer is unaware of the outcome of the random experiment, a given answer does not reveal anything definite about the respondent's true status. Given the assumption that respondents understand the RRT scheme and comply with the procedure, more accurate self-reports to sensitive questions are expected compared to direct questioning.

In the following, Warner's original scheme is described to illustrate the rationale of RRT schemes in general: The respondent is confronted with two statements, the socially undesirable one (e.g., 'I think that Jews, more than other people, work

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with tricks and deception') and its negation (e.g., 'I do not think that Jews, more than other people, work with tricks and deception'). The interviewer asks 'Do you somewhat agree with the following statement?' Using a randomizer, the respondent determines which of the two statements he will answer. For example, the respondent may be given a box of seven colored marbles, four red and three blue marbles, and told to take one marble out of the box and to respond to the first statement if a red marble is selected, but to respond to the second statement if a blue marble is selected. Without revealing the outcome of the random experiment to the interviewer, the respondent answers with either a 'yes' or a 'no' according to his attitude towards Jews. Since the meaning of the answer given is obscured, Warner (1965) assumed that the respondent's cooperation and the validity of self-reports in sensitive surveys would increase.

In Warner's design, the prevalence of the unsocial opinion can be estimated on the basis of elementary probability theory: The expected value ϕ of observing a 'yes' answer can be modeled as $\phi = p\pi + (1 - p)(1 - \pi)$, where π is the unknown proportion of anti-Semites in the population, and $p(p \neq 0.5)$ is the probability that the statement 'I think that Jews, more than other people, work with tricks and deception' is selected. Since the observed sample proportion of 'yes' answers is an estimate of ϕ , and the selection probability p is given by design, the population prevalence of the unsocial opinion π can be estimated. Such probabilistic link between the observed answer and the respondent's true status is also at the heart of alternative RRT schemes (overviews of proportion and variance estimators for different RRT schemes can be found in Fox and Tracy, 1986).

The gains of protection from RRT come at higher data collection costs. The procedure introduces additional random error to the data and increases standard errors of the parameter estimates. Thus, parameter estimates generated by RRT schemes have lower statistical efficiency compared to estimates generated by direct questioning (Fox and Tracy, 1986). Larger sample sizes are necessary to increase statistical power. In addition, RRT questions are more complex compared to more conventional interview methods. They impose a higher cognitive burden on the question-and-answer process (Stem and Steinhilber, 1984).

A recent meta-analysis of RRT research summarizes the results of six validation studies and 32 experimental studies without validation data comparing the RRT with other interview methods such as direct questioning (Lensvelt-Mulders et al., 2005a). In the first type of studies, individual 'true scores' were available so that researchers could assess the proportions of correct answers and compare these proportions across experimental conditions. In the second type of studies, prevalence estimates yielded via different data collection procedures were compared with respect to an increase of socially undesirable answers ('more-is-better' assumption). Overall, the results indicate that self-reports on sensitive issues were more accurate and more socially undesirable answers were elicited respectively when RRT was employed. However, other studies have found no superiority of the RRT and standard direct questioning sometimes elicited more socially undesirable answers than did the RRT (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010). Unlike the vast majority of RRT surveys measuring the prevalence of socially undesirable behavior like abortion or delinquency (for overviews see Fox and Tracy, 1986; Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010), only few studies have explored the effectiveness of the RRT with respect to the disclosure of unsocial attitudes such as racism (Ostapczuk et al., 2009).

This article shows results from an experimental CATI-survey yielding prevalence estimates of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Germany and comparing the RRT with direct questioning. In the next section, a short and selective review of the research on xenophobia and anti-Semitism will be presented. In the subsequent section, the study design and the implementation of the RRT will be described. The analysis section presents prevalence estimates and logistic regression models for RRT data to analyze the dependence of agreement with a xenophobic or an anti-Semitic statement respectively on a set of covariates. Finally, the results will be discussed.

2. Asking sensitive questions: xenophobia and anti-Semitism

Since the end of the Second World War, an extensive research interest in the origins of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and right-wing extremism has emerged from the traditional research line on authoritarianism in Germany (Adorno et al., 1950; Bergmann and Erb, 1986, 1991; Beyer and Krumpal, 2010; Decker and Brähler, 2005, 2006; Zick et al., 2008). Against the background of the recent electoral successes of rightist extremist parties on the federal state level (e.g. in the state elections in 2004, 2009 in Saxony and in 2006 in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD received 9.2%, 5.6% and 7.3% of the total votes and thus achieved representation in the 'Landtag', the German legislative assembly at the state level), public concern has risen and growing attention has been directed to the investigation of the causes of these parties' recent popularity. Besides the investigation of determinants of xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes, social scientists aim for providing accurate prevalence estimates in order to monitor the development of these attitudes in the general population.

While the term 'anti-Semitism' subsumes negative stereotypes and prejudice against Judaism and Jewish people, the term 'xenophobia' refers to the various ways of depreciation and rejection of immigrants and foreign nationals. Although anti-Semitism and xenophobia are strongly interrelated, they differ in terms of motives, prevalence and public acceptance (see Bergmann, 1997 for an overview): Prejudices toward Jews in Germany today are often being analyzed within the context of a historic perspective. The Holocaust and the subsequent decline of National Socialism resulted in reparations and feelings of guilt which in turn shaped attitudes toward Jewish people. Stereotypes about Jews and Judaism often assume an exorbitant financial strength and too much influence of obscure and strong forces using unethical means in order to manipulate media, economy and the political system. In an empirical study on right-wing extremism in Germany after re-unification

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