Conducting quantitative studies with the participation of political elites: best practices for designing the study and soliciting the participation of political elites

Vis, Barbara; Stolwijk, Sjoerd

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Vis, B., & Stolwijk, S. (2021). Conducting quantitative studies with the participation of political elites: best practices for designing the study and soliciting the participation of political elites. *Quality & Quantity*, *55*(4), 1281-1317. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01052-z

Quality & Quantity (2021) 55:1281–1317
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01052-z

Conducting quantitative studies with the participation of political elites: best practices for designing the study and soliciting the participation of political elites

Barbara Vis[1] · **Sjoerd Stolwijk**[2]

Accepted: 10 October 2020 / Published online: 22 October 2020

Abstract
Conducting quantitative research (e.g., surveys, a large number of interviews, experiments) with the participation of political elites is typically challenging. Given that a population of political elites is typically small by definition, a particular challenge is obtaining a sufficiently high number of observations and, thus, a certain response rate. This paper focuses on two questions related to this challenge: (1) What are best practices for designing the study? And (2) what are best practices for soliciting the participation of political elites? To arrive at these best practices, we (*a*) examine which factors explain the variation in response rates across surveys within and between large-scale, multi-wave survey projects by statistically analyzing a newly compiled dataset of 342 political elite surveys from eight projects, spanning 30 years and 58 countries, (*b*) integrate the typically scattered findings from the existing literature and (*c*) discuss results from an original expert survey among researchers with experience with such research ($n = 23$). By compiling a comprehensive list of best practices, systematically testing some widely held believes about response rates and by providing benchmarks for response rates depending on country, survey mode and elite type, we aim to facilitate future studies where participation of political elites is required. This will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of political elites' opinions, information processing and decision making and thereby of the functioning of representative democracies.

Keywords Political elites · Surveys · Experiments · Large-n interviews · Methodology

✉ Barbara Vis
b.vis@uu.nl

Sjoerd Stolwijk
sjoerdstolwijk@gmail.com

[1] Utrecht University School of Governance, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

[2] NPO, Hilversum, The Netherlands

1 Introduction

Having knowledge and understanding of the opinions and attitudes of political elites (e.g., members of parliament, party leaders, local politicians) and of how they process information or take decisions, is key for political scientists. Obtaining this information may require conducting research with political elites as participants. Such studies need to be *quantitative* in nature if they have one or both of the following aims: (*a*) *To systematically test theories*, such as motivated reasoning (Baekgaard et al. 2019), or to assess whether the effects that hold among "the rest of us" also hold for political elites (like the reflection effect, see e.g., Linde and Vis 2017; Sheffer et al. 2018). And (*b*) to *identify general patterns*, such as politicians' role orientations (e.g., Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006) or their attitudes towards European integration (e.g., Freire et al. 2014). To meet such aims, the number of observations needs to be sufficiently high. Since the population of political elites is usually small by definition, a certain response rate is required to achieve a sample size that allows for meaningful statistical analysis. Against this backdrop, one of the key challenges when conducting quantitative studies with the participation of political elites is obtaining a sufficiently high response rate. The population of political elites is not only small, but getting them to participate may also be difficult because they have busy schedules and are regularly shielded by gatekeepers (Druckman and Lupia 2012; Hoffmann-Lange 2008). Of source, the latter issue is faced by quantitative and qualitative researchers alike. Contrary to the relative abundance and coherence of literature on, for example, *qualitative* elite interviews (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Efrat 2015; Goldstein 2002; Harvey 2011; Lilleker 2003), the literature on conducting *quantitative* studies with the participation of political elites is less integrated and more scant (e.g., Dahlberg 2007; Hunt et al. 1964; Maestas et al. 2003; Montgomery et al. 2008; Robinson 1960; Walgrave and Joly 2018). Consequently, we lack systematic knowledge on what are the best practices for: (1) *designing the study*, such as what survey mode to use (e.g. face-to-face or online), what type of questions to use (closed vs. open) and when to field the study?; and (2) *soliciting the participation of political elites*.[1] Our study will provide such knowledge, which is indispensable for addressing the challenge of obtaining a sufficiently high response rate.

By collecting and discussing experiences, lessons and recommendations on conducting quantitative studies with political elites as participants, this paper makes three contributions to the existing literature. Our first contribution is to systematically investigate the drivers of response rates. We lack systematic knowledge about this, as noted by Bailer (2014) and Goldstein (2002), and such knowledge will provide further insights into how best to design a study. Therefore, we compiled a new dataset of 342 political elite surveys from eight large-scale, multi-wave survey projects, covering 30 years and 58 countries. Our second and third contributions are to integrate the scattered existing findings and to present and to discuss the results of an original expert survey among researchers with experience in conducting quantitative studies with political elites ($n = 23$). This will allow us to identify best practices for designing the study and for soliciting the participation of political elites.

By compiling a comprehensive list of best practices, systematically testing some widely held believes about response rates and by providing benchmarks for response rates depending on country, survey mode and elite type, we aim to facilitate future studies with the

[1] Note that some design choices, such as what survey mode to use, also affect political elites' likeliness to participate. This means that the distinction between (1) designing the study and (2) soliciting the participation of political elites is mostly a heuristic one.

participation of political elites. This will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of political elites' opinions, information processing and decision-making and thereby of the functioning of representative democracies.

2 Existing quantitative research with political elites as participants

There is a substantial body of quantitative literature with political elites as participants. We focus on those quantitative studies in which political elites *knowingly and voluntarily* participate.[2] Some of these studies are largely descriptive, examining political elites' opinions, attitudes, and self-reported behavior typically by means of surveys (e.g. Deschouwer et al. 2014; Wessels 2005). Other studies are more explanatory, examining how political elites process information, reason and decide, oftentimes by means of (survey) experiments (e.g. Baekgaard et al. 2019; Linde and Vis 2017; Sheffer et al. 2018). Table 3 in "Appendix 1" provides an overview of examples of quantitative studies with political elites as participants, describing the study's aims and/or research question(s), the country or countries in which the study was conducted, the type of data that were collected (e.g., survey or interview), how the politicians were contacted and the response rate. This overview shows that a large number of studies examine political elites' attitudes and role orientations, focusing mostly on politicians from western Europe and the United States and typically using surveys (e.g. Carey et al. 2006; Deschouwer and Depauw 2014; Esaiasson and Heidar 2000; Herrick 2010; Katz and Wessels 1999; Loewenberg and Mans 1998; Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006; Wessels 2005). An early example of a study on political elites' opinions is the first wave of the *Dutch Parliamentary Study* (DPS) from 1968, in which all Dutch MPs were interviewed about their attitudes and political behavior. Five waves of the DPS followed, the latest completed in 2006 (e.g., Andeweg and Thomassen 2010; Thomassen and Andeweg 2004; Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006). Another example is the so-called PartiRep study among members of parliament in 15 countries[3] and in 73 statewide and substate parliaments that ran between spring 2009 and winter 2012 (Deschouwer and Depauw 2014).

Another strand of work focuses on the behavior of political elites, including their information processing, again studying mostly politicians from western Europe and the United States (e.g. Baekgaard et al. 2019; Helfer 2016; Linde and Vis 2017; Sheffer et al. 2018; Walgrave and Dejaeghere 2017) but also from China (e.g. Meng et al. 2017). These studies often use non-incentivized survey experiments (Baekgaard et al. 2019; Butler and Dynes 2016; Butler et al. 2017; Fatas et al. 2007; Harden 2013; Helfer 2016; Meng et al. 2017; Walgrave et al. 2018). In a non-incentivized experiment, participants do not receive a

[2] This means that we do not focus on audit studies, because with a few exceptions (e.g., Broockman and Butler 2017; see e.g., Loewen et al., 2010), political elites do *not* know they are taking part in such studies. Instead, in audit studies, political elites assume to be doing their "regular job" (for instance, by responding to a constituency service request). While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss field or audit studies in detail, let us note that some of our expert-respondents were (very) wary of them. Because audit studies de facto involve deception, expert-respondents indicated that we should not conduct them. Note that this does not apply to field studies in which political elites decide to participate themselves; such studies are probably best seen as a co-production between politicians and researchers (e.g., Broockman and Butler 2017).

[3] Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Norway, Poland, and the Netherlands.

financial payoff based on their decision; in an incentivized experiment, they do (Ponte et al. 2020).[4] An example of an incentivized survey experiment with politician participants is Linde and Vis (2017).

Both for quantitative studies with political elites that aim to systematically test a theory and for studies that want to identify general patterns, achieving a large enough sample size—and thus a sufficiently high response rate—is a challenge (Bailer 2014; Maestas et al. 2003). Response rates varied substantially between the studies we reviewed (see Table 3 in "Appendix 1"): from 10% (for mail or online surveys of US state legislators or members of Congress) (e.g., Fisher III and Herrick 2012) to 90% (for a few MP studies, e.g. Thomassen and Andeweg 2004; Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006). As also noted in previous overviews (Maestas et al. 2003; Bailer 2014), studies that collected data by means of interviews (e.g. Loewenberg and Mans 1998) typically have higher response rates than online surveys (e.g. Butler and Dynes 2016; Harden 2013). The variation across countries in response rates is large, with response rates being substantially larger in Belgium than in, for instance, Canada or France.

Note that a low response rate is not necessarily problematic if participants do not differ from non-participants (Montgomery et al. 2008).[5] Groholt and Higley (1972), for instance, found that an extra effort to increase response rates did not result in bias in the outcome of interest, indicating that (non) participants were similar. Hoffmann-Lange (2006) added that while getting elites to participate may be difficult, once they do they are generally cooperative. This leads to survey responses with fewer missing values and a higher data quality than those of general population surveys. Somewhat related, Fisher and Herrick's (2012) experiment of the comparative efficiency of mail versus Internet surveys among US state legislators shows that while the response rates of mail surveys are substantially higher than those of Internet surveys (approximately 30% vs. 10%), in terms of being representative for the full population, both survey modes result in representative samples. Still, to be able to conduct meaningful statistical analyses, the number of observations should be sufficiently high.

Most of the current methodological advice on conducting quantitative research with political elites as participants, including how to obtain a sufficiently high response rate, comes from researchers who discuss on their own experience (Dahlberg 2007; Groholt and Higley 1972; Hunt et al. 1964; Robinson 1960; Walgrave and Joly 2018), or who analyze

[4] An incentive has been shown to lower socially desirable answers (Camerer and Hogarth 1999; see Bardsley et al, 2010: chap. 6 for an extensive discussion on incentives), which can be welcome. In that case, the approach by Linde and Vis (2017) might be an interesting one to follow: Instead of paying the politician-respondents directly, the participants could select a charity from a list to which the researchers made the payment. An older study, Godwin (1979), examined whether a monetary incentive would increase the response rate and response quality to a lengthy questionnaire (> 100 close-end questions and 15 open questions). Godwin (1979) sent the study to almost 300 experts in 60 countries. Overall, a monetary incentive did increase the response rate somewhat, but this effect was not significant. The amount of the incentive–$25 or $50–had no effect. Maestas et al. (2003) rightly note that monetary incentives are often inappropriate for political elites, in which case promising a report with a practical analysis of the findings of the study can be a good alternative.

[5] This issue is related to response bias. Our expert-respondents examined several things to deal with response bias, including the over- or underrepresentation of particular parties and of political elites' characteristics, such as party affiliation, gender or political experience. Several expert-respondents compared their sample with the full population of political elites. The public nature of political elites makes it easier to find the characteristics of the full population from which the sample was drawn. This facilitates various ways to deal with response bias after data collection, such as weighting or using selection models (see Berinsky 2008; Lohr 2019; Stolwijk and Schuck 2019).

a single study (Montgomery et al. 2008). There are a few exceptions to this general observation. Maestas et al. (2003), for example, analyzed 73 studies with political elites as participants that were published in seven top political science journals between 1975 and 2000—34 of which using primarily surveys and five a combination of surveys and interviews—to make recommendations for future research. A more recent example is Bailer (2014), who provides an overview of the larger survey projects and shortly summarizes some key methodological points, hereby also drawing on Maestas et al. (2003). A final example of a more methodologically-oriented study is Fisher and Herrick's (2012) field experiment mentioned in the previous section. Bailer's (2014) and Maestas et al.'s (2003) recommendations, as well as Fisher and Herrick's (2012) findings will come back later in this article. Since many issues faced by researchers conducting quantitative studies with the participation of political elites are similar to those faced by researchers working in a qualitative tradition, we also make use of the literature on conducting (qualitative) interviews with political elites (e.g., Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Bailer 2014; Efrat 2015; Goldstein 2002; Harvey 2011; Lilleker 2003). In the following, we first discuss our newly compiled dataset on large-scale survey projects (Sect. 3) and present findings from the dataset's analysis (Sect. 4). Subsequently, we discuss additional findings from our expert survey in relation to the existing literature and our statistical analysis (Sects. 5 and 6).

3 New dataset on large-scale survey projects

While there are ample hunches on what influences the response rate—see the next section "How to account for differences in response rates?"—, there is hardly any systematic evidence on the effect of study characteristics (like country, survey mode, year, and elite type) on response rates (cf. Bailer 2014). Such evidence is important, because it provides insights into how to design the study. Therefore, we provide some first evidence based on a statistical analysis of a newly compiled dataset with 342 survey samples of political elites. To avoid issues with publication bias, we selected samples from eight larger, multi-wave survey projects that publish methodological information regardless of whether the data are subsequently used in a published article or not. Our analysis focuses on four core variables that emerged from the existing literature and our expert survey on which we could collect data: (1) *survey mode* (face-to-face vs. paper vs. online), (2) *elite level* (national vs. local; candidate vs. elected official), (3) *country* in which survey is fielded, and (4) *year* of the survey. While the latter variable is not about the study's design, it provides insights on developments of response rates over time, allowing us to test some widely held assumptions. To analyze the influence of these four variables separately from the idiosyncratic effect of the specific survey project, we needed survey projects that were large enough to show sufficient variation on these four variables. In this way our fixed effects model can control for the survey project in question.[6] We selected all major survey projects that met this criterion for which we could find information.

[6] For example, a survey project conducting two survey waves of politicians in a single country only yields information on the effect of time, since its information on its specific country is fully collinear with the effect of the survey-project. For reasons of parsimony such projects are not included in our sample. A survey sample was included if it had been part of a survey project consisting of seven or more survey samples, and information on sample population, survey mode and response rate could be obtained.

To compile the dataset, we first consulted the publicly available information. Here, we frequently encountered unclarities that we tried to resolve first by looking for additional information in published articles using the dataset and, subsequently, by contacting the researchers involved.[7] We also extended our database by looking at precursors of these projects for which information was available (Allen and Birch 2012; Evans and Norris 1999; Giebler et al. 2009, 2013; Lovenduski and Norris 2003; McAllister et al. 2018; Norris and Lovenduski 1989, 1995; Schmitt et al. 2002),[8] especially since these older waves allowed us to evaluate the dynamics of response rates over time. The resulting newly compiled dataset spans a period of 30 years (1987-2017), covers 58 countries, and includes studies of members of European parliament (MEPs), parliamentary candidates, elected national parliamentarians and local politicians, using face-to-face, paper and online survey modes to research them.

In our analyses, we used two fixed effects models: (1) one clustered by country with survey project dummies, which allows us to compare survey projects to each other, and (2) one clustered by survey project with country dummies, which allows us to compare countries to each other. Clustering on one variable (e.g., survey project) might correlate strongly with another variable (e.g., survey mode), making it harder to determine either variable's influence. In such cases, using a fixed effects' model is a conservative choice: controlling for country and survey project diminishes our chance of finding relations between response rate and the variables of interest (survey mode, elite type, year of study). Luckily, our dataset contains many cases in which different surveys of the same project are fielded in different countries, study different elites, in different years and using varying survey modes, allowing us to estimate our models using these strong controls.

4 How to account for differences in response rates?

What is the effect of four key variables—survey mode, elite level, country and year—emerging from the existing literature in explaining differences in response rates between and across elite surveys? We first briefly summarize the expectations regarding these variables and discuss their operationalization before turning to the results. Regarding *survey mode*, Bailer (2014) indicates that paper and online surveys typically have lower response rates than face-to-face (see also Maestas et al. 2003). What is more, in their overview of studies, Maestas et al. (2003) found no systematic difference between mail and telephone surveys. Fisher and Herrick (2012), conversely, did find a higher response rate for the mail survey compared to an online survey in their experiment on the effect of survey mode. This indicates that the evidence on the effect of survey mode is inconclusive.

In our empirical analysis, we only explore the main differences between survey modes: is the survey mainly distributed by *mail* (n = 84 surveys), *online* (n = 104), *both mail and online* (n = 47)[9] or *face-to-face* (n = 98)? We created a "mixed"-category for the 10 surveys that did not fit these categories. These latter studies often used phone calls and face-to-face interviews to boost what was otherwise a disappointingly low response rate. A survey was

[7] We would like to thank the researchers and their collaborators for their interest in and cooperation with our study.

[8] Australian Election Study (AES), British Election Study (BES), German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES), which are all precursors for the "Comparative Candidates Survey" (CES), see https://www.australianelectionstudy.org/about.html; and http://www.comparativecandidates.org/node/3.

[9] For whether to combine survey modes or not, see e.g. Bayart et al. (2009) and De Leeuw (2005).

coded as "mixed" if over 10% of the respondents were contacted through a method that did not fit into the other four categories. The more intricate differences (for example whether an introduction letter was sent before the survey request or not, how many phone calls exactly, et cetera) are often not easily comparable between the different projects, because they are not consistently reported for each individual survey. The main differences in the way the political elites are approached—other than survey mode—tend to vary with the survey project involved. Therefore, these are taken up by the fixed effects survey project dummies, because of which the effect of survey mode comes out more clearly.

Elite level is the second independent variable we focus on. The literature suggests that more senior politicians respond to survey requests less often than do more junior politicians and that regional politicians respond more often than national ones do (Bailer 2014; Deschouwer and Depauw 2014; Walgrave and Joly 2018). Candidates are also believed to respond more often than parliamentarians (Lovenduski and Norris 2003). As far as we know, neither of these intuitions has been subjected to a systematic empirical analysis yet.[10] Like for the variable survey mode, we focus on the main differences in elite level, differentiating between national elected politicians (n = 109 surveys),[11] candidates to a national legislature (n = 63), sub-national (regional or local) elected politicians (n = 13), elected members of the European Parliament (n = 122) and candidates to the European Parliament (n = 38).

The third variable is the *country* in which the survey was fielded. Cross-national differences in response rates were emphasized by several of our expert-respondents as well as mentioned in the literature (Deschouwer and Depauw 2014; Efrat 2015; de Heer 1999; Walgrave and Joly 2018). Hunt et al. (1964), for example, indicates that institutional differences in legislators' accessibility may drive differences in response rates across countries. Our dataset includes surveys from 56 different countries, with the number of surveys per country ranging from 1 (Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Israel and Iceland) to 18 (UK, $M = 6.1$ surveys per country).

The fourth and final variable is *year* of the survey. The findings on the influence of timing (year) of the survey on response rates is conflicting. Brick and Williams (2013) found that for household surveys, non-response appears to be steadily increasing over time, suggesting that this might also be the case for elite surveys (see also de Heer 1999). However, Maestas et al. (2003) report that response rates of political elite surveys have remained stable over the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

We coded the surveys for the year in which they are collected. When data collection spanned multiple years, we coded the year in which the data collection was finished. The earliest survey is from 1987; the most recent one is from 2017. Most surveys (n = 176) were collected between 2000 and 2010. Moreover, we included 16 surveys from the 1980s, 87 from the 1990s and 66 are from 2011 or later. Figure 1 shows the response rates per survey over time grouped per survey project, revealing considerable variation in response rates between surveys within and across survey projects.

What explains the variation in response rates between surveys within and between survey projects? Table 1 displays the results of our regression analysis with fixed effects for country and survey project. Response rates are expressed as percentages, allowing the coefficients to be interpreted as the estimated percentage above or below the reference

[10] Note that the available data do not allow us to test the effect of seniority on response rates.

[11] The category "nationally elected politicians" includes seven samples of both lower and upper house members, because differentiating elite type further would result in very small categories for which the estimated effects would likely too much depend on the idiosyncratic factors of the study involved.

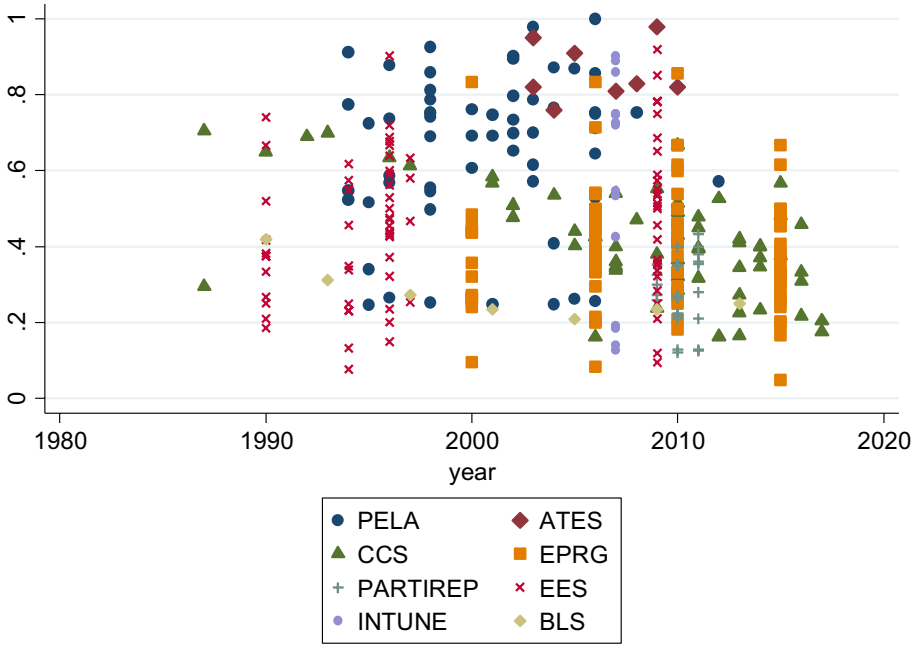

Fig. 1 Response rates of political elite surveys over time per survey project. *ATES* Asahi-Todai Elite Survey, *BLS* Brazilian Legislative Survey (Power and Zucco 2011), *CCS* Comparative Candidates Survey (2018), *EES* European Election Studies (2018), *EPRG* European Parliament Research Group survey (Hix et al. 2016), *GLES* German Longitudinal Election Study, *PELA* Parlamentarias de América Latina survey (2018)

category. For *survey mode*, face-to-face (=reference category) surveys obtained the highest response rates, followed by surveys sending out both paper and online surveys (14% lower response rates). Surveys that mainly relied on sending paper surveys by mail achieved about equal response rates as those that relied mainly on online surveys (21% vs. 23%; lower than face-to-face, $p < 0.001$, but not differing significantly between themselves). The category reported here as "mixed" comprises 10 surveys. As a group, they achieved the lowest response rates. With respect to *elite type*, surveys of national candidates and subnational elected officials result in the highest response rates: respectively 18% and 16% higher than a survey of elected members of the European Parliament (=reference category) (both significant at $p < 0.05$). There is no structural difference between candidates for office and elected officials, as illustrated by the lack of a significant difference in response rates between candidates for the European Parliament and elected members of the European Parliament (=reference category). Similarly, national-level elected politicians are not more or less likely to respond to a survey than their MEP counterparts (=reference category).

Overall, the results for the *year* of the survey, presented in Table 1, reveal no clear time trend: after controlling for country, survey project, survey mode and elite type, samples do not have increasing or decreasing response rates over time. Figures 2 and 3 in "Appendix 4" visualize the development over time by depicting the response rates for survey projects with multiple waves in the same country and sampling the same elite type. Overall, Figs. 2 and 3 confirm that there is neither a general upward nor a downward trend in response rates over time. In addition, these figures suggest that survey fatigue because of invitations for successive scientific survey waves does not influence response rates in general.

Table 1 Response rates by elite type, survey mode and year of survey

	Response rate (SE)
Elite type	
National candidates	0.18*
	(0.08)
National elected	0.06
	(0.05)
Mostly sub-National level	0.16*
	(0.08)
MEP candidates	0.04
	(0.05)
Survey mode	
Online and paper	−0.14**
	(0.05)
Mostly online	−0.23***
	(0.05)
Mixed	−0.29***
	(0.06)
Mostly paper	−0.21***
	(0.04)
Over time trend:	
Year	−0.00
	(0.00)
Fixed effects per country	Yes
Fixed effects per survey project	Yes
N	343

*$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$. For elite type the reference category is MEP (Elected Members of European Parliament). For survey mode the reference category is face-to-face

Finally, "Appendix 5" discusses the differences in response rates between *countries* controlling for elite type, survey mode, survey project and year. The results indicate that there are structural differences between countries, although there is no straightforward pattern that might explain these differences. We come back to this finding in the discussion.

5 Best practices for soliciting the participation of political elites

In addition to compiling a quantitative dataset on large-scale survey projects, we have also collected original qualitative data to identify best practices for quantitative research with the participation of political elites. Specifically, between mid-June 2017 and mid-September 2017, we fielded an expert survey among researchers with experience in this type of research; see "Appendix 2" for the text of the survey. We identified relevant researchers through published work (see Table 3 in "Appendix 1"), our networks and through suggestions of already contacted researchers. In total, we invited 42 researchers to participate in our survey. After one round of reminders, we had received responses from 23 experts (response rate ± 55%). All expert-respondents indicated that they want to improve our

understanding of the functioning of representative democracy, which is why they conducted quantitative research with the participation of political elites. In terms of data collected, many respondents have used surveys–sometimes including an experimental component–or have conducted face-to-face interviews. A wide variety of political elites have participated in studies of the expert-respondents, including cabinet ministers, members of Congress or (European) parliaments, party group leaders, regional politicians and local politicians. Prospective candidates for elected offices have also been included. The range of countries that has been covered is broad, although there is a Western bias (mostly north America, west European countries and Israel).

Since our expert-respondents do not comprise the full population of researchers who have experience in doing quantitative studies with political elites as participants, our sample may not be representative for this full population. However, it was also not our intention to obtain representativeness. Instead, the expert survey aimed to gather information, largely qualitative in nature, on issues that are typically not discussed in publications but that are relevant for the research community. Below we present our findings, where possible in relation to the existing literature.

5.1 Designing the study

What are best practices regarding the design of the study? Some literature advises to conduct face-to-face interviews. Such interviews facilitate communication, might help to get the attention of political elites (Bailer 2014; Walgrave and Joly 2018) and political elites seem more willing to accept an interview than to fill in a survey.[12] This is reflected in findings on response rates across types of study: response rates for interviews are typically substantially higher than for surveys (Bailer 2014; Maestas et al. 2003)—which is what we also find in own statistical analysis. Going against this recommendation to meet in person, Harvey (2011) indicates that in his experience many political elites preferred the flexibility of an interview via telephone. This suggests that when opting for interviews, a mixed approach may be optimal.[13] When rather using an online method of data collection, Dahlberg (2007) warns that elites sometimes may not often use their official e-mail. Asking them for their preferred contact mode through telephone first might be a safer option.

When to field the study—it should be well-timed, a busy period of the year should be avoided (e.g., December), as should an election campaign period (also see Robinson 1960; Maestas et al. 2003).[14]

In terms of closed versus open questions, it is argued in the literature that elites typically do not like closed-ended questions but prefer open questions that allow them to articulate their views in more detail (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). The type of questions may be

[12] In terms of location, a drawback of meeting in, for instance, parliament is that the MPs may be called away easily-parliament offers many distractions—so the interview or survey should be short. To avoid such distractions, meeting in a café or restaurant may be better.

[13] Note that the responses might be influenced by specific survey mode (Herrick 2012), with women being less likely to complete online surveys than men, and older elites being more likely to complete mail surveys than younger elites. This is an argumentation to try to combine different survey modes to avoid such biases. However, combining different survey modes has its own pitfalls, see e.g. Bayart et al. (2009) and De Leeuw (2005).

[14] It is recommendable to avoid conducting a study during an election campaign period for another reason as well: to allow for comparability of such a study's findings to other studies fielded outside of an election campaign period. If examining the effect of the campaign on, for instance, the behavior of the political elites, the study should of course be fielded in exactly this period.

less important for non-response. Walgrave and Joly (2018) tested for item non-response in their survey of parliamentarians in Belgium, Canada and Israel and did not find any differences between open, closed and experimental questions. Adding an open question at the end of the interview or survey may offer intriguing insights that can either inform the current study or may be useful for future research.

5.2 Soliciting the participation of political elites

What are best practices for *soliciting the participation of political elites*? A common approach is by mail first (these days usually email, but see "Appendix 3"), followed by phone (cf. Lilleker 2003). Dahlberg (2007) and Goldstein (2002) warn against providing the survey link right away and advise to send out an invitation first. The first contact is key, many expert-respondents stressed. Positive experiences are with the principal investigator—preferably a professor from a well-known university and ideally someone who the political elites know (of)—making the first contact and also the follow-ups by phone (see also Aberbach and Rockman 2002). Efrat (2015) added that, for junior researchers, an introduction letter from a more senior researcher might help. One expert-respondent, as well as several methodological articles, advised using Dillman's tailored design: that is, sending a post card first and then contacting again (Dillman 2007; Fisher III and Herrick 2012; Maestas et al. 2003).

Several expert-respondents recommended to first approach the speaker of parliament, party leader or local chairperson to solicit participation of the political elites (also see Groholt and Higley 1972). The looming risk here is that if this person says "no", you lose a whole party group (one of the respondents indicated that this may be a risk with newer populist parties, but we ourselves experienced it with other parties, too). To gain access, several expert-respondents stressed, knowing someone who knows someone et cetera helps a lot. The same holds for a colleague's recommendation. What many expert-respondents agreed on, is that persistence is key and that following up is crucial. Several of the expert-respondents indicated that they send out 2–3 reminders,[15] others send one reminder first and then call. Going against the perhaps intuitive idea not to be too pushy—which is supported by many expert-respondents mentioning that they usually follow up 2–3 times—some respondents stressed that you can, and actually should, follow up until you have received a "hard" no (cf. Dahlberg 2007 vs. Walgrave and Joly 2018). One respondent indicated that it may take up to six contact moments before scheduling an appointment; Walgrave and Joly (2018: 2227) even mention up to nine contact moments. To get the political elites to participate, it is especially the study's social and political relevance that should be emphasized, according to the expert-respondents. Groholt and Higley (1972) emphasize that the study's explanation should be simple and general, since political elites may be more likely to defer the survey to a staff specialist if the explanation is too detailed. Other issues researchers need to address in their invitation letter are anonymity and the duration of the study (Efrat 2015; Fisher III and Herrick 2012; Goldstein 2002; Maestas et al. 2003). Quite a few of the lessons and recommendations of our expert-respondents were also rather obvious. For example, researchers must make sure that the invitation letter looks professional (e.g., is printed on official letter head) and that it is personalized. "Appendix 3" presents some further practical suggestions from our expert-respondents.

[15] Whereby some respondents mentioned that they, in this second step, provide the opportunity to get the questionnaire on paper instead of electronically.

6 Pitfalls, opportunities or other issues and new developments

In addition to asking our expert-respondents about how to solicit the participation of political elites and design the study, we have also asked them to reflect on *pitfalls, opportunities or other issues* regarding conducting quantitative research with the participation of political elites. There were no real patterns in their responses, but some responses stood out. A pitfall mentioned was that with surveys that are filled in without a researcher present (such as most Internet surveys), it might not be the political elites themselves who answer. The easy-to-implement recommendation here is to add an additional question at the end of the survey asking whether he or she is a politician or a staff member. The fact that political elites talk to each other was seen both as an opportunity and a pitfall, since it might help to obtain higher response rates but may also result in spillover effects. Several respondents mentioned the potential of a new initiative of having a global sample of political elites. These elites could be surveyed one or two times per year, avoiding survey fatigue, with a combined survey by multiple researchers (see also Maestas et al. 2003). The survey's global nature would enable asking questions that hitherto could not be addressed and would likely generate sufficiently high response rates, since a global partnership could signal quality and status.

Finally, we asked our respondents about *new developments in studying political elites* that they were working on, or that they had heard of and were enthusiastic about. Here, several of the expert-respondents mentioned the opportunities arising from conducting survey experiments or lab experiments with political elites. It is important here, some mentioned, that researchers do not "pollute" their respondents with too many studies—the global approach we mentioned earlier would be a way to accomplish this. Another exciting development mentioned is trying to get politicians to participate in group tasks, despite the obvious logistic hurdles here. Several respondents also mentioned the opportunities arising from working *with* political elites and getting them involved actively in the study.

7 Discussion and conclusion

For a better understanding of the functioning of representative democracy, it is important to conduct research with the participation of political elites. To identify best practices for (1) designing such studies and (2) soliciting the participation of political elites, we compiled a new dataset of large-scale survey projects ($n = 342$), conducted an expert survey to obtain original qualitative data ($n = 23$) and integrated scattered existing findings. Table 2 summarizes key findings on designing the study from our statistical analysis (top of table). The table also presents some best practices from our expert-respondents on both designing the study (top of table) and soliciting the participation of political elites (bottom of table). While the type and number of responses to the expert survey do not allow us to test the recommendations systematically, the expert survey did provide much information that is usually not reported in published work. This survey also illustrated the potential of this kind of research, as our expert-respondents were unanimously positive about their experience with conducting quantitative research with political elites. While the lessons the researchers learned and what they recommended varied, there was also substantial overlap across the responses and with the existing literature.

Our statistical analysis allowed us to systematically test several variables that were hypothesized and/or found to influence response rates. Interestingly, the findings

Table 2 Best practices on designing the study and soliciting political elites' participation

Designing the study	*Findings from statistical analysis* Conduct survey face-to-face to obtain the highest response rate A second-best option, in terms of response rates, that is less time intensive, is to send the survey both on paper and online Target political candidates for national office or local politicians if the objective is to obtain sufficiently high response rates, and if these populations are appropriate given the research question; Adjust your survey mode to obtain a sufficiently high response rate if conducting your survey in countries in which response rates are typically lower *Additional findings from expert survey* Keep the study short Add an open question at the end of the study Think about the timing of the study Make sure the political elite is the person filling out the study
Soliciting the participation of political elites	*Findings from expert survey* Realize that first contact is key Contact first by (e-)mail and follow up by phone; regular mail might be best Make use of "someone who knows someone" Emphasize the study's social and political relevance Use an institute's standing + seniority of principal investigator for making contact Try to meet in person Promise a practical report of study results Persistence is crucial (2–3, to up to 6–9 contact moments)

Based on the results of our statistical analysis ($n = 342$) and our expert survey ($n = 23$)

contradicted some widely held intuitive beliefs about response rates. For example, we did not find that national-level parliamentarians were less likely to respond to surveys than members of the European parliament. Neither did we find that elected officials were less likely to respond than political candidates. Instead, for the variable *elite type*, we found the highest response rates for surveys of national candidates and sub-national politicians.[16] For *survey mode*, we did not find a significant difference between paper surveys and online ones, but we did confirm the expectation that face-to-face surveys would have higher response rates compared to these other two categories. While there were structural differences in the response rates across countries, the pattern here was not fully clear. The differences across countries in response rates may be a reflection of differences in countries' survey traditions (Couper and De Leeuw 2003; De Leeuw 2005). Mediterranean countries had

[16] Note that 56 out of 63 samples with national candidates originate from the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS)-study, which also hosted four out of 13 samples of subnational elites. This means that this specific result could be an artifact of the CCS-approach. What the finding might indicate, is that researchers expect different populations to have different response rates and that they adapt their approach accordingly. This might explain why we do not find a consistently lower response rate for national elected politicians than for other elite types. When studying national elected politicians, researchers more often use the most labor-intensive approach: 81 out of 109 samples conducted on-site interviews to collect the survey data. Perhaps this approach works particularly well for national elected politicians compared to other elite types, because the former are generally a smaller group of people who know each other and might encourage oth-

somewhat lower response rates, which is in line with cross-national surveys on screening (e.g. O'Neill et al. 1995) and smoking (Huisman et al. 2005). Explaining why this variation across countries exists is an interesting avenue for further research.

Finally, and contrary to what is generally observed in the literature on surveys (Couper 2017; Stedman et al. 2019; but see Maestas et al. 2003), we did not find a decreasing trend in response rates over time. What might explain this remarkable finding? The surveys in our sample were all drawn from large scale survey projects, since these allowed us to compare the effects of survey mode, elite level, country and year while also controlling for the specific survey project. Our finding that the response rates did not systematically decline over time supports the suggestion by some of our expert-respondents that the reputation of a large-scale survey project helps boost response rates compared to single shot studies. With the increasing number of surveys with the participation of political elites that are currently conducted by researchers, it might soon be possible to more directly investigate this reputation effect. Having a sample based on a very large number of single shot studies would allow for the large-n assumption that variation in survey project approach is random. Under that assumption, no control dummies per survey project are necessary, allowing the model to assess the influence of the size of the survey project. Such follow-up studies can also further investigate what drives the differences in response rates across countries and elite types.

In this article, we integrated the existing literature and presented findings of an original expert survey to identify best practices regarding designing quantitative studies and soliciting participation of political elites. Moreover, we tested some widely held assumptions about what explains the variation in response rates across and between large-scale survey projects, which can also help to successfully launch a quantitative study with the participation of political elites. It is our hope that these contributions will facilitate and encourage the already increasing trend in conducting such studies, hereby providing indispensable knowledge and understanding of the functioning of representative democracies.

Acknowledgements This study was funded by a VIDI grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research awarded to Barbara Vis (NWO, Grant No. 452-11-005). A previous version of the article has been presented at the ECPR General Conference 2017. We thank the participants of the panel for their helpful suggestions. We also thank the reviewer of *Quality* and *Quantity* for the constructive comments.

Appendix 1: Overview of quantitative studies using political elites as participants

See Table 3.

Footnote 16 (continued)
ers to participate as well-making use of "knowing someone who knows someone", as our expert-respondents recommended. This could explain national elected politicians' rather high response rates even after controlling for survey mode.

Table 3 Some characteristics of quantitative studies using political elites

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Studies at the national level or beyond					
Loewenberg and Mans (1998)	Aim: Identifying the individual and structural influences on perceptions of legislative norms	Belgium, Italy and Switzerland Respondents included a sample of 150 (of 212) members of the Belgian Chamber of Deputies; samples of 70 (of 315) members of the Italian Senate and 110 (of 630) members of the Italian Chamber of Deputies; and 192 (of 200) members of the National Assembly (Swiss parliament) and 43 (of 44) members of the Council of States (p. 158, note 1)	Elite interviews (n = 990)	Not reported	Belgium: 71% Italy: 22% (Italian Senate); 17% (Italian Chamber of Deputies) Switzerland: 96% (National Assembly); 98% (Council of States)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Katz and Wessels (1999)	RQ: What are the role orientations and attitudes towards European integration of members of 11 European parliaments?	Candidates to the European Parliament, Members of the European Parliament and Members of National Parliament See also columns 4 and 5	Four surveys The European Election Study 1994 (EES 94); the European Candidates Study 1994 (ECS 94); the Study of Members of the European Parliament 1996 (MEP 96); and the European Members of Parliament Study (MNP 96), of which the last three are elite surveys	See also column 3 ECS 94: carried out by mail questionnaire, in the weeks ahead of the 1994 European Parliament election, in 10 (of 12) EU member states (Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) MEP 96 and MNP 96: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden No further details reported	See column 4: ECS 94: 35% on average (large variation across countries, from 4% in Spain to 86% in Sweden) MEP 96: ± 50% (large variation across countries, from ± 25% in France to ± 90% in Sweden) MNP 96: ± 37% (large variation across countries, see MEP 96)
Esaiasson and Heidar (2000)	Aim: Examining the attitudes and political behavior of members of the parliaments of the Nordics	Members of five Nordic national parliaments See last column for countries	Survey	Per mail	Finland: 61% Denmark: 63% Iceland: 72% Norway: 88% Sweden: 96% (Source: "Appendix 1", p. 441)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Thomassen and Andeweg (2004) and Thomassen and Esaiasson (2006)	Aim: Examining the attitudes and political behavior of members of Dutch parliament and of the parliaments of the Nordics	Members of parliament in the Netherlands (survey data from 2001 in an ongoing project) and the Nordics (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden	Survey	Not reported	Netherlands: 90% Other countries: see above for Esaiasson and Heidar (2000): ≥ 60%
Wessels (2005)	RQ: What are the role orientations and attitudes towards European integration of members of 11 European parliaments? (cf. Katz and Wessels 1999)	Members of 11 national parliaments of European countries (part of the *European Representation Study*, see Katz and Wessels 1999 and the German Members of Parliament Study 1996 and 2003)	Survey	Not reported	Not reported in article (but see Katz and Wessels 1999)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Fatas et al. (2007)	RQ: Do framing effects disappear with expertise?	Spain The expert-respondents (n = 32) come from 4 elected parliaments and cabinets (the European Parliament, the Spanish National Parliament, Regional Parliaments and Local Councils) and some non-direct mandates (e.g., mayors who must be elected directly by the majority of the town councilors). All respondents studied in Spain and hold a PhD in Economics	Experiment in the form of a questionnaire, including five problem sets (i.e., nested experiments) Non-incentivized	Personal invitation. Experiment (in the form of a questionnaire) filled in private, but with a researcher around (i.e., outside participant's office)	84% (32 of total population of 38)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Deschouwer and Depauw (2014) See also Deschouwer et al. (2014) for information on case selection, data collection, et cetera	RQs: How do elected representatives see and fulfil their roles in representative democracies? Especially, how do they perceive their representative roles? (How) do they keep in touch with voters, how do they behave and vote in parliament, and how do they try to get reelected?	Members of national parliament (MPs) from 15 countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Norway, Poland, and the Netherlands)	Survey or interviews (see column 5)	Combination of web-based and print questionnaires (in most countries): a personalized introduction letter and email with information on project (stressing its comparative nature), anonymity policy and invitation to the web-based survey In the UK: party leaders and senior party members' endorsements were added At least 2 online reminders were sent, except for 'hard' refusals, and a print questionnaire option was provided The final invitation was frequently by phone to boost response rates In Austria: only print questionnaires; in Hungary, Israel, and the Netherlands: interviews instead of surveys (all information Deschouwer and Depauw 2014: 10)	±25% on average, with variation across the 15 countries

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Helfer (2016)	RQs: What aspects of a news report make politicians act? And are some politicians more likely to act than others?	German-speaking members of the Swiss Lower House (i.e., parliament) (sample: n = 50; population: n = 200)	Factorial survey experiment	The researcher approached respondents by two methods: personally, in parliamentary buildings with a tablet computer (n = 20) and via e-mail containing a link to the online survey. MPs were informed that the study conducted by Leiden University investigated what made news reporting politically relevant. This led to an overall response rate of 47 percent, or sixty-one MPs. Some MPs had not filled in the complete survey, resulting in an N of fifty for all analyses presented. This equals 39 percent of contacted MPs and 31 percent of the Swiss Lower House's membership' (pp. 241–242)	39% (see column 5)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Baekgaard et al. (2019)	RQs: Does evidence help politicians make informed decisions even if it is at odds with their prior beliefs? And does providing more evidence increase the likelihood that politicians will be enlightened by the information?	Danish city councilors (n = 954 of 2445) and a representative sample of Danish population from Danish YouGov sample (n = 1006)	Survey including three randomized survey experiments Respondents participated either in experiment 1 or 2 and all participated in experiment 3	Email including information on the study and a personalized link to survey. Two reminders were sent	39%

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Linde and Vis (2017)	RQ: Do politicians take risks like the rest of us?	Members of Dutch parliament (n = 46 of 150) Plus a student sample (n = 176), mainly to assess the validity of the experimental design	Survey experiment including "seminal" scenarios from the work of Kahneman and Tversky on prospect theory plus several newly developed hypothetical political decision-making scenarios Incentivized	First, the PI contacted the chairperson of the caucus to inform whether one or both researchers could attend, for instance, a caucus meeting in which the MPs would participate in the experiment (in the form of a survey) in the presence of the researcher. There was only one party that accepted this proposal. One party gave a hard decline and from one party, nothing was heard Second, the researchers used their networks to get access. The MPs were contacted usually first by email and followed-up by phone. Appointments were made to come to the MP's office (or another location of his/her choosing), where the MP would go through the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher	±30%

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Meng et al. (2017)	RQ: Are autocrats willing to incorporate citizen preferences into policy?	Provincial and city level leaders in China (n = 1377, of 1800 distributed surveys)	Survey (list) experiment, part of a larger survey (Local Governance and Public Goods Survey, which took place from May to August 2013) List experiments help to elicit truthful answers in a survey, which is especially important in this case since participants may have an incentive to conceal their true opinions The experiment was pretested	'Surveys were distributed to officials in all 15 of the [carefully selected] cities as well as the two [carefully selected] provinces based on a quota sampling method aimed at reaching a certain number of respondents by the type of state unit and the rank of the respondent' (pp. 412–413)	77%
Walgrave et al. (2018)	RQ: How do politicians respond to incoming information?	Party leaders, cabinet ministers, and members of parliament at the federal (Israel [n = 65, out of 159 contacted]) or deferral and regional level (Belgium [n = 269 out of 413 contacted]] and Canada [n = 76 out of 278 contacted])	Framing experiment as part of a survey Between-subjects design Non-incentivized	The researchers contacted the politicians via telephone and scheduled a face-to-face interview with them NB: The procedure to collect the data used in this study are discussed extensively in Walgrave and Joly (2018)	±51%
Studies at the sub-national level					

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Herrick (2010)	RQs: What is the nature of state legislators' public support for gay and lesbian rights? And are these positions shaped by personal concerns or political calculations?	US state legislators (n = 1765)	Survey	Data came from the Vote Smart Project, which conducts 'a survey of candidates running for numerous offices designed to offer voters an understanding of candidates' preference on various issues' (p. 929)	24%
Ter Bogt (2003) and Ter Bogt (2004)	RQs: Which criteria and performance evaluation styles do Dutch aldermen use? And what are their opinions on and the use of different sources of performance?	Dutch aldermen of municipalities with ≥ 20,000 inhabitants (n = 262 of 698)	Survey	A brief questionnaire was sent to the Alderman	±38%

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Carey et al. (1998) and Carey et al. (2006)	RQ: What is the effect of term limits on state legislators? NB: the 2006-article is a follow-up of the one in 1998 and uses the same design and approach	US state legislators (1998-article, n ± 2000; 2006-article: n = 2982)	Survey	1998-article: The survey was mailed to every member of the upper house and to roughly three-quarters of the members of the lower house in all 50 states 2006-article: A four-page survey was mailed to every member of both chambers in all 50 states (n = 7399). The researchers followed up three times, once with a postcard reminder and twice with new questionnaires and complete instructions	±47% (1998-article); ±40% (2006-article)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Harden (2013)	RQ: Which factors determine legislators' representational priorities?	US State legislators	Two survey experiments Non-incentivized	'The data (…) come from two survey experiments administered online to American state legislators (…). I e-mailed the survey link to 6678 legislators from 46 states, or about 90% of the population of 7382 state legislators in 2011. The e-mail asked potential respondents to take an anonymous survey "about the job of a state legislator" and specifically mentioned that either the legislator or a staff member could provide the response; 1362 recipients clicked on the link and 1175 respondents from all 46 states reached the end of the survey. Of those completions, 246 (±21%) reported being a member of the legislator's staff. Each respondent was given a total of 10 questions, and the median completion time was five minutes' (p. 166)	±14%

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Butler and Dynes (2016)	RQ: How do politicians discount the opinions of constituents with whom they disagree?	US. State legislators and elected local officials	Two survey experiments Experiment 1, the survey was emailed to the ± 7000 US state legislators. A randomly selected subset of legislators participated in this experiment to minimize the time burden. About half of > 1000 responses were included in this experiment (p. 978) Experiment 2, embedded in the 2012 American Municipal Official Survey. 'The survey was administered online with an e-mail invitation that was sent to municipal officials from cities of all sizes across the United States and had a response rate of 20%. The supporting information provides more details about the survey' (p. 981)	See column 4 A question was included to ask who was filling in the questionnaire (e.g., staff member)	Experiment 1: < 15% (see column 4) Experiment 2: ± 20% (see column 4)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Aims/Research question(s) [RQ(s)]	Countries and type of politicians included	Type of data (survey, interview, et cetera)	How were politicians contacted?	Response rate
Butler, Volden, Dynes and Shor (2017)	Aim: To use an experimental research design to the study of policy diffusion to better understand how political ideology influences policymakers' willingness to learn from one another's experiences	US elected municipal officials	Survey experiment Non-incentivized	Invitation per email, with two follow up reminders in the subsequent week	±23%

This table includes only studies that have been published

Appendix 2: Expert survey

Dear madam or sir,

First of all, we want to thank you for participating in our expert survey. The goal of this survey is to sample information from experts, like yourself, on the *opportunities and pitfalls of using political elites in research*. All reflections or observations are very much appreciated. Please feel free to write as much or as little as you like. You can *type your answers in this document* and send it back to us by replying to this email (xxx). If you could do so by xxx, that would be great. If you need more time, please let us know. The results will be processed so as to guarantee your *anonymity*. If you are interested in the *results of this survey*, please let us know and we will send you the results.

Reasons for using political elites and types of elites

- What is (are) your *main reason(s)* for using political elites in your research? And *in what role* have you used them in your research (e.g., as survey respondents, interviewees, et cetera)?
- What *type of political elites* did you use in your research (e.g., heads of state, members of national parliament, mayors, municipal council members, et cetera)?

Contacting the elites, non-response and following up

- In terms of *contacting* political elites to participate in your study or studies, what are some of the positive and negative experiences you have had? Based on your experiences, how would you *recommend to contact political elites* for the purpose of participating in a study (e.g., by phone or by email followed up by a phone call, et cetera)? And what would you advice against?
- How did you deal with initial *non-response*? Did you use follow ups? What are your recommendations for other researchers in this regard?
- What, in your view and based on your experience, is a *reasonable response rate* for studies with political elites? How much can *follow up efforts* help to boost response rates? If you obtained a *high response rate*, what was or were the main factors that contributed to that? And which factor(s) may have hindered obtaining a high response rate?
- Did you check for *response bias*, and if so, how? If you conducted multiple studies with political elites, please also indicate whether this is something you always do and how you do this.

General questions

- If you would do your most important study with political elites again, *what would you do differently and why*?
- Are there any *pitfalls, opportunities, or any other matter* relating to using political elites in research that you want to bring to our attention?
- What are *new developments* in the study of political elites that you are working on, or that you heard and are enthusiastic about?

Appendix 3: Practical suggestions on how to conduct a quantitative study with the participation of political elites

In addition to the results from the expert survey we present in the main text, our expert-respondents also gave many practical suggestions that may be relevant for some readers. This appendix presents these practical suggestions.

We asked our respondents whether they would do anything differently if they would do their study again. Most of them would not. Since a study with political elites as participants is usually a one-shot event, researchers may prepare their study better than if they would, for example, use existing and readily available quantitative data. The expert-respondents who would do something differently would generally make small adjustments only. There was no systematic pattern here, but what the expert-respondents mentioned is a series of practical suggestions.

- Send the first invitation letter by regular mail instead of email to stand out—since politicians get so many emails these days—and to make the hurdle of "removing" the letter higher.
- Shorten the survey and reword questions to make them easier.
- Use more (wo)manpower to increase response rates by following up more.
- Test the survey earlier among a small number of elites.
- Schedule interviews instead of an online or paper survey (because political elites may be more responsive to an interview-request).
- Try and get access from the top to increase the participation rate.
- Better time the study.
- Use more sophisticated data gathering techniques, such as measuring response times per question.

Some other responses of our expert-respondents were practical suggestions:

- Rent a booth in the exhibit hall of a conference of political elites, inviting them to participate in the study on the spot (for a similar suggestion, see Efrat 2015);
- Use more standardized measures—as in economics and psychology—to allow for the accumulation of findings.

Finally, one of the present authors experienced that political elites were highly wary of the term "experiment" being used in the invitation letter, which probably reduced the willingness to participate considerably. While this suggests that political elites do not like "being experimented upon", one of the expert-respondents noted that political elites do not seem to mind if they are. It seems plausible that semantics matter here; if the study's aim is explained properly—possibly without using the term "experiment"—, political elites may have little problem with it.

Appendix 4: Development of response rates over time in multi-wave surveys

Figure 2 shows a clear decreasing pattern for the Australian Election Study (AES, national-level candidate survey), a somewhat decreasing pattern for the Brazilian Legislative Survey (BLS, national-level elected politician survey) and the German Longitudinal Election

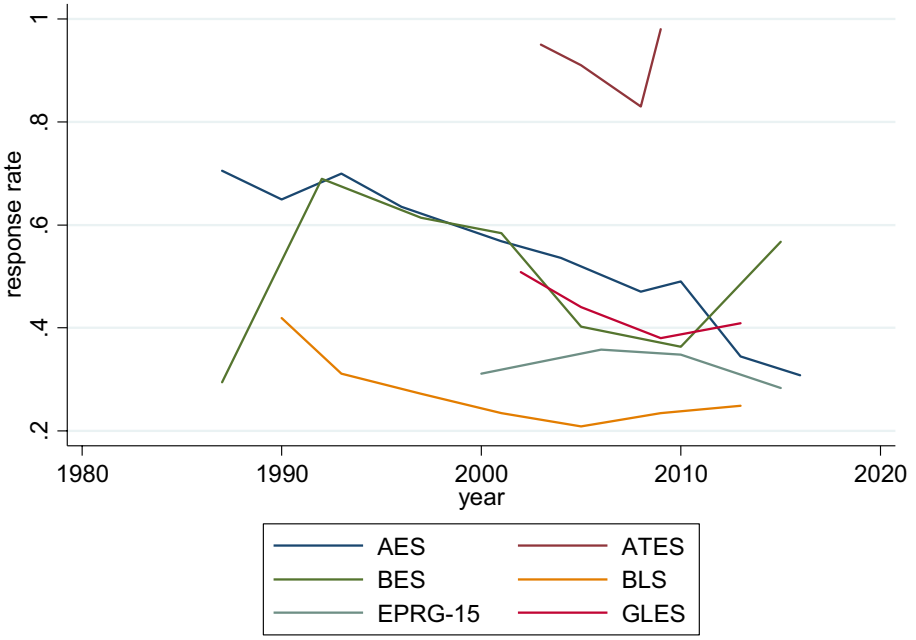

Fig. 2 Response rates in multi-wave political elite surveys over time. *AES* Australian Election Study, *ATES* Asahi-Todai Elite Survey, *BES* British Election Study, *BLS* Brazilian Legislative Survey, *EPRG* European Parliament Research Group survey, *GLES* German Longitudinal Election Study

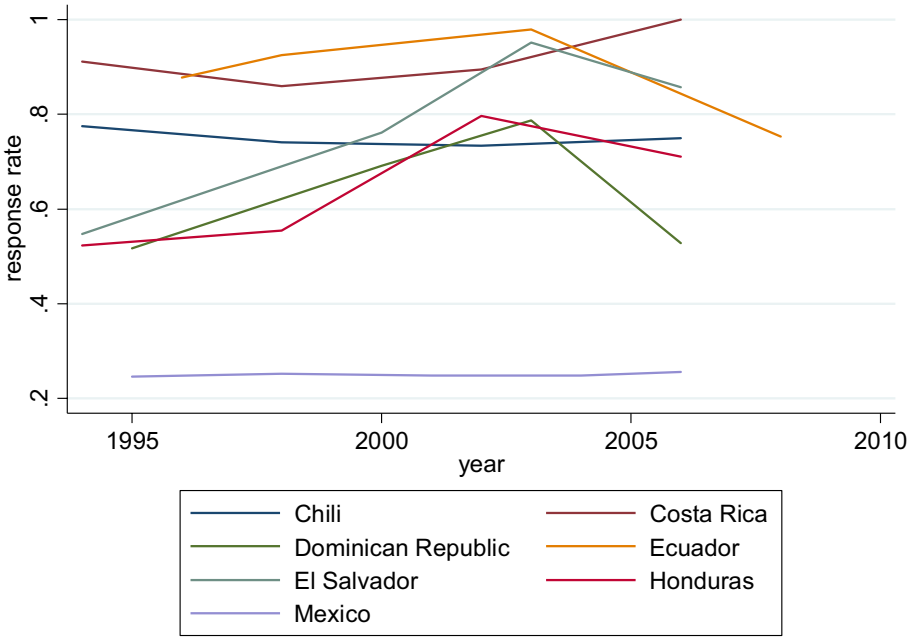

Fig. 3 PELA response rates in countries with four or more waves over time. *PELA* Parlamentarias de América Latina survey

Study (GLES, national-level candidate survey), while no clear upward or downward trend is visible for the Asahi-Todai Elite Survey (ATES, national-level candidate survey), the British Election Study (BES, national-level candidate survey) and the samples from 15 countries which were included in all four waves of the European Parliament Research Group survey (EPRG, elected members of the European Parliament survey).[17][17] Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK. Figure 3 shows that, if anything, the seven countries that were included in four or more waves of the Elites Parlamentarias de América Latina survey (PELA, elected national parliament member survey, face-to-face) showed an upward trend in response rates over time.

Appendix 5: Response rates by country

Table 4 shows how the response rates differ per country in percentages compared to Argentina, controlling for survey project, survey mode and elite level. Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Uruguay show the highest response rates, while samples from France, Brazil and Mexico had lower response rates. Except for France (n = 8 samples), the samples for these countries belong to the PELA-project, whose face-to-face method generally yielded high response rates (M (PELA) = 66.39%). The methodological information provided for the various PELA-samples comes in a standard form, with many standard sentences which are similar across samples, consequently they provide little information on any particular methodological differences that can explain the variation in response rates achieved in different countries.

Since the number of samples per country is generally low ($M = 6.1$; range [1;18]), and the dummy-variables for various countries correlate highly with particular survey projects, elite levels, or survey modes, the individual country estimates should be interpreted with great care. Therefore, Table 5 lists the country estimates for countries with ten samples or more. These latter twelve countries can be compared more directly. The results confirm that political elites from these countries differ structurally in their response rates. No obvious pattern emerges from Table 5 to explain these differences, except that southern European countries appear to have lower response rates than northern ones.

Table 4 Response rates by country

	Response rate (SE)
Costa Rica	0.53***
Ecuador	0.50***
Panama	0.50***
Uruguay	0.40***
Iceland	0.38
El Salvador	0.37***
Chile	0.36***
Guatemala	0.36***
Serbia	0.31
Peru	0.31*
Paraguay	0.31**
Slovenia	0.30
Bolivia	0.29**
Cyprus	0.28
Nicaragua	0.28*
Honduras	0.26*
Malta	0.25
Dominican Republic	0.24*
Latvia	0.23
Sweden	0.23
Australia	0.22
Colombia	0.20
Luxembourg	0.19
Croatia	0.17
Canada	0.16
Denmark	0.14
Finland	0.14
Belgium	0.13
Estonia	0.13
Norway	0.13
Ireland	0.12
Netherlands	0.11
Slovakia	0.10
Bulgaria	0.09
UK	0.09
Venezuela	0.08
Czech Republic	0.08
Austria	0.06
Switzerland	0.06
Germany	0.04
Poland	0.02
Portugal	0.02
Lithuania	0.01
Greece	−0.01
Hungary	−0.01
Romania	−0.01

Table 4 (continued)

	Response rate (SE)
Israel	−0.03
Spain	−0.03
Italy	−0.04
Montenegro	−0.05
France	−0.09
Brazil	−0.12
Mexico	−0.14
Controlling for survey mode	Yes
Controlling for surveyproject	Yes
Controlling for year	Yes
Controlling for elite type	Yes
N	343

*$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$. Significance levels refer to the difference compared to the reference category of Argentina. For Albania and Japan insufficient data was available to estimate their effect on response rate after using the controls mentioned above

Table 5 (Estimated) response rates for countries with 10+ samples in dataset

Country	#samples in dataset	Estimated response rate coefficient	Uncorrected mean response rate	Included in survey project:
Australia	10	0.22	0.54	CCS
Belgium	15	0.13	0.45	CCS, EES, EPRG, PartiRep
Ireland	15	0.12	0.44	CCS, EES, EPRG, PartiRep
Netherlands	11	0.11	0.45	CCS, EES, EPRG, PartiRep
UK	18	0.09*	0.42	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
Austria	12	0.06*	0.38	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
Germany	16	0.04**	0.37	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
Portugal	14	0.02**	0.36	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
Greece	11	−0.01***	0.34	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne
Spain	12	−0.03***	0.34	EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
Italy	13	−0.04***	0.27	CCS, EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep
France	12	−0.09***	0.25	EES, EPRG, IntUne, PartiRep

*$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$. To highlight how the response rates differ within this specific set of countries, significance levels are based on a separate calculation using Australia as the reference category, while (for reasons of consistency) the coefficients are those taken from the general model displayed in Table 1 which uses the reference country of Argentina. The uncorrected mean response rates are just the mean response rates recorded in these countries for the studies included here. *CCS* Comparative Candidates Survey, *EES* European Election Studies, *EPRG* European Parliament Research Group survey

References

Aberbach, J.D., Rockman, B.A.: Conducting and coding elite interviews. PS Polit. Sci. Polit. **35**(4), 673–676 (2002)

Allen, N., Birch, S.: On either side of a moat? Elite and mass attitudes towards right and wrong. Eur. J. Polit. Res. **51**(1), 89–116 (2012)

Andeweg, R.B., Thomassen, J.: Pathways to party unity: sanctions, loyalty, homogeneity and division of labour in the Dutch Parliament. Party Polit. **17**(5), 655–672 (2010)
Baekgaard, M., Christensen, J., Dahlman Mondrup, C., Mathiasen, A., Grund Petersen, N.B.: The role of evidence in politics: motivated reasoning and persuasion among politicians. Br. J. Polit. Sci. **49**(3), 1117–1140 (2019)
Bailer, S.: Interviews and surveys in legislative research. In: Martin, S., Saalfeld, T., Strøm, K.W. (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2014). https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199653010.013.0011
Bardsley, N., Cubitt, R., Loomes, G., Moffatt, P., Starmer, C., Sugden, R.: Experimental Economics: Rethinking the Rules. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford (2010)
Bayart, C., Bonnel, P., Morency, C.: Survey mode integration and data fusion: methods and challenges. In: Bonnel, P., Lee-Gosselin, M., Zmud, J., Madre, J.-L. (eds.) Transport Survey Methods: Keeping Up With a Changing World, pp. 587–611. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley (2009)
Berinsky, A.J.: Survey non-response. In: Donsbach, W., Traugott, M.W. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Public Opinion Research, pp. 309–321. SAGE publications, London (2008)
Brick, J.M., Williams, D.: Explaining rising nonresponse rates in cross-sectional surveys. Ann. Am. Acad. Polit. Soc. Sci. **645**(1), 36–59 (2013)
Broockman, D.E., Butler, D.M.: The causal effects of elite position-taking on voter attitudes: field experiments with elite communication. Am. J. Polit. Sci. **61**(1), 208–221 (2017)
Butler, D.M., Dynes, A.M.: How politicians discount the opinions of constituents with whom they disagree. Am. J. Polit. Sci. **60**(4), 975–989 (2016)
Butler, D.M., Volden, C., Dynes, A.M., Shor, B.: Ideology, learning, and policy diffusion: experimental evidence. Am. J. Polit. Sci. **61**(1), 37–49 (2017)
Camerer, C.F., Hogarth, R.M.: The effects of financial incentives in experiments: a review and capital-labor-production framework. J. Risk Uncertain. **19**(1–3), 7–42 (1999)
Carey, J.M., Niemi, R.G., Powell, L.W.: The effects of term limits on state legislatures. Legis. Stud. Q. **23**(2), 271–300 (1998)
Carey, J.M., Niemi, R.G., Powell, L.W., Moncrieff, G.F.: The effects of term limits on state legislatures: a new survey of the 50 states. J. Legis. Stud. **31**(1), 105–135 (2006)
Comparative Candidates Survey (2018) http://www.comparativecandidates.org/
Couper, M.P.: New developments in survey research. Ann. Rev. Sociol. **43**, 121–145 (2017)
Couper, M.P., De Leeuw, E.D.: Nonresponse in cross-cultural and cross-national surveys. In: Harkness, J., van de Vijver, F., Mohler, P.P. (eds.) Cross-cultural Surveys Methods, pp. 157–177. Wiley, New York (2003)
Dahlberg, S.: Web-based expert surveys. QoG Work. Pap. Ser. **2007**, 7 (2007)
De Leeuw, E.D.: To mix or not to mix data collection modes in surveys. J. Off. Stat. **21**(2), 233–255 (2005)
Deschouwer, K., Depauw, S. (eds.): Representing the People. A Survey among Members of Statewide and Sub-state Parliaments. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2014)
Deschouwer, K., Depauw, S., Audrey, A.: Representing the people in parliaments. In: Deschouwer, K., Depauw, S. (eds.) Representing the People: A Survey among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments, pp. 1–18. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2014)
Dillman, D.A.: Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method. Wiley, Hoboken (2007)
Druckman, J.N., Lupia, A.: Experimenting with politics. Science **335**(6073), 1177–1179 (2012)
Efrat, A.: Cross-national interviewing at international conferences: how to make the most of a unique research opportunity. Int. Stud. Perspect. **16**(3), 302–311 (2015)
Elites Parlamentarias de América Latina (PELA) (2018). https://oir.org.es/pela/en/
Esaiasson, P., Heidar, K. (eds.): Beyond Westminster and Congress: The Nordic Experience. Ohio State University Press, Columbus (2000)
European Election Study (2018). http://europeanelectionstudies.net/
Evans, G., Norris, P. (eds.): Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-term Perspective. SAGE publications, London (1999)
Fatas, E., Neugebauer, T., Tamborero, P.: How politicians make decisions: a political choice experiment. J. Econ. **92**(2), 167–196 (2007)
Fisher III, S.H., Herrick, R.: Old versus new: the comparative efficiency of mail and internet surveys of state legislators. State Polit. Policy Q. **13**(2), 147–163 (2012)
Freire, A., Teperoglou, E., Moury, C.: Awakening the sleeping giant in Greece and Portugal? Elites' and Voters' attitudes towards EU integration in difficult economic times. South Eur. Soc. Polit. **19**(4), 477–499 (2014)

Giebler, H., Gschwend, T., Schlote, S., Schmitt, H., Vollmar, M., Weßels, B., Zittel, T.: GLES Kandidatenstudie 2009: Motive, Nominierung, Wahlkampf, Repräsentation und Demokratie aus der Sicht der Kandidatinnen und Kandidaten der Bundestagsparteien zur Bundestagswahl (2009)
Giebler, H., Lichtblau, J., May, A., Melcher, R., Spittler, M., Wagner, A., Weßels, B.: GLES Kandidatenstudie 2013: Motive, Nominierung, Wahlkampf, Repräsentation und Demokratie aus der Sicht der Bundestagskandidatinnen und Bundestagskandidaten (2013)
Godwin, R.K.: The consequences of large monetary incentives in mail surveys of elites. Public Opin. Q. **43**(3), 378–387 (1979)
Goldstein, K.: Getting in the door: Sampling and completing elite interviews. In: PS—Political Science and Politics (Vol. 35, pp. 669–672) (2002)
Groholt, K., Higley, J.: National elite surveys: some experience from Norway. Acta Sociol. **15**(2), 168–183 (1972)
Harden, J.J.: Multidimensional responsiveness: the determinants of legislators' representational priorities. Legis. Stud. Q. **38**(2), 155–184 (2013)
Harvey, W.S.: Strategies for conducting elite interviews. Qual. Res. **11**(4), 431–441 (2011)
de Heer, W.: International response trends: results of an international survey. J. Off. Stat. **15**(2), 129–142 (1999)
Helfer, L.: Media effects on politicians: an individual-level political agenda-setting experiment. Int. J. Press Polit. **21**(2), 233–252 (2016)
Herrick, R.: Legislators' positions on gay and lesbian rights: the personal and political. J. Homosex. **57**(7), 928–943 (2010)
Hix, S., Farrell, D., Scully, R., Whitaker, R., Zapryanova, G.: EPRG MEP Survey Dataset: Combined Data 2016 Release (2016). https://mepsurvey.eu/
Hoffmann-Lange, U.: Methodological Developments in Elite Research, (July 2006), 9–14 (2006)
Hoffmann-Lange, U.: Studying elite vs mass opinion. In: Donsbach, W., Traugott, M.W. (eds.) The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research, pp. 53–63. SAGE Publications Ltd, London (2008)
Huisman, M., Kunst, A.E., Mackenbach, J.P.: Educational inequalities in smoking among men and women aged 16 years and older in 11 European Countries. Tob. Control **14**, 106–113 (2005)
Hunt, W.H., Crane, W.W., Wahlke, J.C.: Interviewing political elites in cross-cultural comparative research. Am. J. Sociol. **70**(1), 59–68 (1964)
Katz, R.S., Wessels, B. (eds.): The European Parliament, the National Parliament, and European Integration. Oxford University Press, Oxford (1999)
Lilleker, D.G.: Interviewing the political elite: navigating a potential minefield. Politics **23**(3), 207–214 (2003)
Linde, J., Vis, B.: Do politicians take risks like the rest of us? An experimental test of prospect theory under MPs. Polit. Psychol. **38**(1), 101–117 (2017)
Loewen, P.J., Rubenson, D., Wantchekon, L.: Help me help you: conducting field experiments with political elites. Ann. Am. Acad. Polit. Soc. Sci. **628**(1), 165–175 (2010)
Loewenberg, G., Mans, T.C.: Individual and structural influences on the perception of legislative norms in three European Parliaments. Am. J. Polit. Sci. **32**(1), 155–177 (1998)
Lohr, S.L.: Sampling: Design and Analysis, 2nd edn. CRC Press, Boca Raton (2019)
Lovenduski, J., Norris, P.: Westminster women: the politics of presence. Polit. Stud. **51**(1), 84–102 (2003)
Maestas, C., Neeley, G.W., Richardson, L.E.J.: The state of surveying legislators: dilemmas and suggestions. State Polit. Policy Q. **3**(1), 90–108 (2003)
McAllister, I., Bean, C., Gibson, R., Makkai, T.: Australian Election Study (AES) (2018) https://australianelectionstudy.org/
Meng, T., Pan, J., Yang, P.: Conditional receptivity to citizen participation: evidence from a survey experiment in China. Comp. Polit. Stud. **50**(4), 399–433 (2017)
Montgomery, J.M., Cooper, A., Reiter, J., Guan, S.: Nonresponse bias on dimensions of political activity amongst political elites. Int. J. Public Opin. Res. **20**(4), 494–506 (2008)
Norris, P., Lovenduski, J.: Women candidates for parliament: transforming the Agenda? Br. J. Polit. Sci. **19**(1), 106–115 (1989)
Norris, P., Lovenduski, J.: Political Recruitment. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1995)
O'Neill, T.W., Marsden, D., Matthis, C., Raspe, H., Silman, A.J.: Survey response rates: national and regional differences in a European Multicentre Study of vertebral osteoporosis. J. Epidemiol. Commun. Health **49**(1), 87–93 (1995)
Ponte, A.Del, Kline, R., Ryan, J.: Behavioral analysis in the study of politics: the con-flict laboratory. In: Redlawsk, D.P., Erisen, C., Hennes, E., Oxley, Z., Schreiber, D., Vis, B. (eds.) Oxford Research Encyclopedia in Political Decision Making. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2020)
Power, T., Zucco, C.: Brazilian Legislative Surveys (1990–2013). Harvard Dataverse, V5 (2011)

Robinson, J.A.: Survey interviewing among members of congress. Public Opin. Q. **24**(1), 127–138 (1960)
Schmitt, H., Wüst, A.M., Semetko, H.A., Karp, J.: Deutsche Kandidatenumfrage zur Bundestagswahl 2002 (Deutsche Kandidatenstudie 2002). GESIS Datenarchiv, Köln (2002)
Sheffer, L., Loewen, P.J., Soroka, S., Walgrave, S., Shaefer, T.: Nonrepresentative representatives: an experimental study of the decision making of elected politicians. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **112**(2), 302–321 (2018)
Stedman, R.C., Connelly, N.A., Heberlein, T.A., Decker, D.J., Allred, S.B.: The End of the (research) world as we know it? Understanding and coping with declining response rates to mail surveys. Soc. Nat. Resour. **32**(10), 1139–1154 (2019)
Stolwijk, S.B., Schuck, A.R.: More interest in interest: does poll coverage help or hurt efforts to make more young voters show up at the ballot box? Eur. Union Polit. **20**(3), 341–360 (2019)
Ter Bogt, H.: Performance evaluation styles in governmental organizations: how do professional managers facilitate politicians' work? Manag. Account. Res. **14**(4), 311–332 (2003)
Ter Bogt, H.: Politicians in search of performance information? Survey research on Dutch Aldermen's use of performance information. Financ. Account. Manag. **20**(3), 221–252 (2004)
Thomassen, J., Andeweg, R.B.: Beyond collective representation: individual members of parliament and interest representation in the Netherlands. J. Legis. Stud. **10**(4), 47–69 (2004)
Thomassen, J., Esaiasson, P.: Role orientations of members of parliament. Acta Polit. **41**(3), 217–231 (2006)
Walgrave, S., Dejaeghere, Y.: Surviving information overload: how elite politicians select information. Gov. Int. J. Policy Adm. **30**(2), 229–244 (2017)
Walgrave, S., Joly, J.: Surveying individual political elites: a comparative three-country study. Qual. Quant. **52**(5), 2221–2237 (2018)
Walgrave, S., Sevenans, J., Van Camp, K., Loewen, P.: What draws politicians' attention? An experimental study of issue framing and its effect on individual political elites. Polit. Behav. **40**(3), 547–569 (2018)
Wessels, B.: Roles and orientations of members of parliament in the EU context: congruence or difference? Europeanisation or not? J. Legis. Stud. **11**(3–4), 446–465 (2005)