

**Strategy: | List experiments to measure sensitive behavior**

**How it works:** | The key idea of this strategy is to give respondents cover or greater anonymity when reporting illegal and socially undesirable behavior and attitudes or answering sensitive questions on a survey. Even when respondents are told that their responses are anonymous, they are often reluctant to answer these questions truthfully.

The strategy asks a (treatment) group of respondents how many of a list of items, including the sensitive item, apply to the respondent. This is compared to the average number given by a comparable (control) set of respondents who are asked about a list that does not include the sensitive item. The difference is an estimate of the proportion of respondents participating in the sensitive outcome. Comparable groups are formed by randomly assigning respondents to treatment and control.

This strategy has been used to measure racial attitudes, participation in vote buying, corruption, drug use, among others. For example, to measure the extent of vote buying offers by political parties in a given election, a list experiment can ask respondents: “how many of the following activities were carried out by candidates or activists during the last campaign?” The response card for the control group would include: putting up campaign posters, visiting your home, threaten you to vote for them. The response card for the treatment group would include the same items plus: they offer you a gift or favor in exchange for your vote. The difference between the average number of items in treatment and control group estimates the extent of vote buying offers.

**Data gathering strategy:** | Public opinion surveys

**SDG goals this could be used for:** | Could be used to measure either socially undesirable behavior, including paying bribes or participation in other forms of corruption, vote buying, non-democratic attitudes, or measuring sensitive outcomes such as gender violence or discrimination.

**Advantages:** | Anonymity reduces reporting bias (i.e. survey respondents answer questions about sensitive items more truthfully).

**Disadvantages:** | Requires the collection of survey data

**References:** | Gonzalez-Ocantos, E., C. K. de Jonge, C. Meléndez, J. Osorio, D. Nickerson, “Vote Buying and Social Desirability Bias: Experimental Evidence from Nicaragua” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 56, No. 1, January 2012, Pp. 202–217

Kuklinski, J., P. Sniderman, K. Knight, T. Piazza, P. Tetlock, G. Lawrence, and B. Mellers. 1997. “Racial Prejudice and Attitudes toward Affirmative Action.” *American Journal of Political Science* 41(2): 402–19.