

Guide for the (Soon-to-be) Perplexed:
Considerations for Scholars Launching and Leading Survey Data Harmonization Journeys*

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ABSTRACT

This article synthesizes the key opportunities and challenges for researchers to consider when launching and leading research projects that include survey data harmonization. Focusing on the ex-post harmonization of cross-national survey data from multiple survey programs on topics related to political attitudes and behavior, we integrate insights from relevant literature with interviews of researchers who have expertise in survey data harmonization. We conclude by identifying best practices to inform future research.

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Introduction

Constructing ex-post harmonized datasets across multiple cross-national survey programs is gaining prominence as a strategy for producing innovative scholarship in political science and related fields. This approach is intuitively attractive for both early-career researchers who lack research funds to generate original data, and for senior scholars advancing multi-year grant projects. Yet the challenges of harmonizing survey data to produce high-impact research are not always apparent to researchers just beginning this work.

In this article, we synthesize insights for researchers launching and leading research projects that include survey data harmonization, focusing on both individual-level data and country-year measures aggregated from individual-level indicators. Our contribution is similar in spirit to the classic book of Jewish theology “Guide for the Perplexed” (Maimonides [1190] 1963), a work intended to help students to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable knowledge sources (specifically, Jewish theology and Aristotelian philosophy). With an appropriate dose of humility, we tackle a parallel task of integrating insights from experienced scholars who seek to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable, namely, harmonizing survey data not originally designed for this purpose.

Despite the increased prominence of ex-post survey data harmonization in recent research in political science and related fields, it is not a standard research strategy taught in graduate school, and is generally learned through trial and error. Our contribution is therefore intended primarily for researchers who may be unaware of both the unique scholarly opportunities of survey data harmonization, and the common challenges encountered by scholars who have successfully used this research strategy.

Prominent Examples of Survey Data Harmonization

Our focus on survey data harmonization aligns with Slomeczynski et al.’s description of “a process that aims to produce equivalent or comparable measures of a given characteristic across datasets” (2023, 2). We focus on studies that harmonized surveys that were not originally designed to be combined, i.e., “ex-post harmonization.”

Any comprehensive review of studies using this approach faces terminological challenges, as relevant studies do not consistently use the term “harmonization” or related terms.

Given terminological challenges, we aimed to identify several prominent survey data harmonization publications and projects in a specific area of scholarship, namely, the study of political attitudes and behaviors. Our identification strategy is based on three sources: The review paper by Kołczyńska (2022); a systematic search in the Web of Science in social sciences journals for terms related to survey data harmonization (see Appendix A for details); and recruiting leading scholars in the field as interviewees to note projects and studies that they view as exemplary studies on these topics (see the following section for interview methodology details).

Our implementation of this identification strategy identified projects that have produced multiple high-impact contributions on these topics include Claassen’s research on “Democratic Mood” (e.g., Claassen 2020), Neundorf’s “Global Citizen Politics” project (e.g., Neundorf et al. 2020), and Solt’s “Dynamic Comparative Public Opinion” lab (e.g., Hu and Solt 2025). Additional prominent political science studies investigate core topics in the field, including affluence and representation (Lupu and Warner 2022), political ideology (Caughey et al. 2019), political participation (Dassonneville et al. 2021; Kostelka and Blais 2021), and political trust (Valgarðsson et al. 2025). These studies exemplify the approach of combining multiple cross-national datasets from several different survey programs (See Appendix A for documentation of additional relevant literature, data sources, and research projects).

Researchers’ Insights

This brief overview indicates the high-impact contributions that recent studies using this approach have made on important topics. To better understand the opportunities and challenges of this type of research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with researchers with expertise in survey data harmonization in political science and related fields. We recruited interviewees by sending email invitations to authors of survey data harmonization publications, with a particular focus on authors of political science articles in selective journals. We sent invitations to 30 authors, and conducted 22 interviews—a larger number than our initial intention of 15. The semi-structured interview instrument includes questions that prompted interviewees to discuss their own contributions to the field. Following Seidman’s (2006) canonical guide to interviewing as qualitative research, we asked open questions that encouraged interviewees to think reflectively about both the opportunities and the challenges of this type of research. In addition,

the anonymity of the interviews—noted in the IRB-approved consent form signed by each interviewee and emphasized verbally at the beginning of each interview—encouraged researchers to articulate meaningful critiques of their own work and the field as a whole with the intention of providing useful insights for scholars using this research strategy. See Appendices B for IRB-approved consent form; C for additional interview methodology documentation; and D for interviewee characteristics.

Synthesizing insights from the literature and these interviews, we identify key *opportunities* for survey data harmonization, followed by key *challenges*. Before detailing specific insights, we highlight a dominant meta-theme: the importance of continually revising a project’s highest priority *research questions* in dialogue with the identification of fully harmonizable data. One senior researcher articulated an “abundance of riches” challenge, as this approach can tempt even the most experienced researchers to “get lost like kids in a candy store” and lose sight of the importance of addressing clearly defined questions. Another senior researcher described a related “iterative process” challenge stemming from the time-intensive balancing act of creating a harmonized dataset that accounts for technical harmonization challenges (e.g., question wording, response categories, country-year data availability), while clarifying the possible scope of theory-informed analysis based on harmonizable data. Experienced researchers strongly advised asking: Can the same (or similar) findings be produced without survey data harmonization? If the answer is “yes,” researchers suggested skipping the data harmonization journey. Conversely, researchers noted that survey data harmonization can be optimal for answering certain kinds of questions, best articulated by one interviewee as follows: “Survey data harmonization is one of the only ways to say something truly meaningful about political attitudes and behaviors across diverse contexts, and over long time periods.” The concluding discussion details best practices based on the interviews and describes the second meta-theme in our interviews: the importance of investing in scholarly community due to this strategy’s unique combination of opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities

The interviewees discussed two main categories of opportunities: first, data and analysis, including both technical and theory-oriented opportunities; and second, research impact, including the potential for ground-breaking research.

Opportunities, Part 1: Data and Analysis

Computing infrastructure and open science: Advances in computing power have provided individual researchers with online data access and efficient computing and software systems. These developments facilitate sophisticated data transformation and statistical analyses on large datasets that were not feasible even a decade ago. Related advances in “open science” have meaningfully strengthened norms and practices that encourage researchers to publicly post their data and replication materials online (Rinke and Wuttke 2021).

Methodological innovations: Building on these advances in computing infrastructure and open science, recent methodological innovations make survey data harmonization more feasible and robust, particularly for country-level aggregated measures. As detailed in this Symposium’s article on modeling aggregate trends (Koc and Kołczyńska 2026) these innovations include latent variable models that harmonize survey items that are not fully comparable (e.g., Claassen 2019).

Similar survey items: Our overview of prominent publications that include survey data harmonization clarifies that similar indicators are available for important topics. As survey data waves have accumulated over time, it can seem deceptively simple to combine survey data to broaden researchers’ investigations.

Statistical power: An advantage noted by most interviewees is the potential to increase sample size and statistical power, which is particularly important as analytical models become more complex. Additionally, research shows that statistical power is important for replication success (Arel-Bundock et al. 2024).

Heterogeneous sample: A related but distinct opportunity is the potential to obtain a more heterogeneous sample. For example, although the European Social Survey is often described as among the highest quality survey programs (Jabkowski et al. 2023), its geographic scope is relatively limited in relation to important contextual characteristics, such as democratic quality and economic performance. With increased focus on multilevel politics in this era of democratic backsliding (Blauberger et al. 2025), a more heterogeneous sample enables the analysis of contextual and longitudinal effects.

Opportunities, Part 2: Research Impact

Prominent approach: As documented in our discussion of prominent examples of research using survey data harmonization, this approach has become an increasingly high-impact research strategy, including multiple highly-cited publications in leading journals. This growing literature signals to early-career researchers that survey data harmonization can create a data infrastructure that yields impactful research.

Team-building: A central theme of the interviews was that the collaboration of multiple researchers is needed for the success of ambitious harmonization research. Even researchers who published solo-authored studies discussed the importance of working with skilled research assistants, consistent with the discussion of quality assurance processes in this Symposium's article on data wrangling (Hu, Tai, and Solt 2026). Several researchers discussed opportunities that this collaboration between senior and junior researchers creates for training students, and for developing a collaborative research community.

Grant support: This research strategy is a natural fit for multi-year grants from agencies such as the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the European Research Council (ERC). These funding opportunities, which generally have a 3–5-year timeline, encourage project proposals with complex and time-intensive research strategies. These opportunities, however, are also linked to important challenges regarding long-term scholarly contributions, discussed in the following section.

Data infrastructure creation: As noted in Kołczyńska's (2022) overview of ex-post survey data harmonization research, two distinct types of studies use survey data harmonization techniques. First, *study-specific* projects tend to focus on information-sharing about dataset construction to meet journals' replication requirements. Second, *infrastructure-oriented* projects in political science and related fields seek to produce harmonized data infrastructure designed for wider scholarly use, although this vision can be difficult to realize (for further details see Kołczyńska [2022, 63-64]).

Challenges

While researchers enjoyed discussing opportunities, they had even more to say about challenges. Two main challenges paralleled the opportunities in the previous section. First, parallel to the opportunity of "Data and Analysis," researchers discussed the challenge of "Workflow and Replication." Second, parallel to the opportunity of "Research Impact," interviewees discussed "Scholarly Challenges."

Challenges, Part 1: Workflow and Replication

Replication transparency: Responding to what has been called a "replication crisis" in the social sciences (Freese & Peterson 2017), scholars have endeavored to create clear replication standards. As detailed in this Symposium's "data wrangling" article, replication documentation ideally guides researchers from the moment of downloading data through to the replication of published findings. The myriad data transformation decisions required to produce a harmonized dataset make it challenging to create documentation that is both comprehensive and transparent to project "outsiders."

Data availability: A technical challenge for seamless replication is that most survey programs' user agreements require users to download data from the program's websites, while digital object identifiers (DOIs) that uniquely identify the same dataset over time are not always available. This means that data available today may not be available in identical form by the time future researchers follow data replication instructions. Additional challenges include time-intensive ethical approval required by some programs to protect respondent anonymity, as well as

programs that require payment. These data availability issues create challenges for authors aiming to generate transparent and stable replication files.

Workflow for harmonizing new survey data waves: Most relevant programs for cross-national data harmonization regularly publish new waves and important revisions to prior waves, including additional countries and error corrections. As a result, a harmonized dataset can become outdated the moment it is produced, underscoring the need for clear harmonization project workflows and timelines.

Software language and programming infrastructure: While software language and programming infrastructure are rarely mentioned in the literature, interviewees viewed this as a central component of successful survey data harmonization. Most senior researchers described an evolution of their training that generally began with SPSS, proceeded to Stata, and then in some cases to R and GitHub. The consensus of early-career and senior researchers is that open-source software such as R, with version control like GitHub, is an optimal infrastructure—but only if all researchers involved can invest in training to develop this common language. As software will clearly continue to evolve, researchers advised making clear decisions about programming infrastructure that facilitates transparent collaborative documentation.

Challenges, Part 2: Scholarly Challenges

Conceptual and empirical equivalence: The important challenge of conceptual and empirical equivalence across datasets is addressed in this Symposium's article on *conceptual* challenges (De Sio, Katsanidou and Borghetto 2026), and the article on *empirical* data harmonization challenges (Slomczynski, Tomescu-Dubrow, and Wysmulek 2026), such as whether and how to harmonize variables with different question wording and response options. Additional important topics for equivalence across datasets include *sample type*, *quality*, and *weights*, which can be affected by data collection challenges in different countries and regions (Jabkowski et al. 2023; Joye et al. 2023; Montalvo et al. 2018), as well as numerous operational challenges related to *translation methods*, *interviewer training*, *field supervision*, and *survey mode* (Lyberg et al. 2021).

Descriptive contributions in a causal inference era: A scholarly challenge discussed by multiple researchers leading ambitious projects is that survey data harmonization focuses on observational data analysis, and is therefore primarily descriptive at a time when causal inference is often considered a more meaningful scholarly contribution. Yet, several studies discuss an evolving scholarly appreciation for high-quality descriptive research, including “Mere Description” (Gerring 2012), “Defense of Observational Research” (Stokes 2014), “A Case for Description” (Holmes et al. 2024), and “Good Description” (de Kadt and Grzymala-Busse 2025). In addition, recent work shows the inferential power of combining high-quality observational analysis with experimental designs (e.g., Pereira 2021).

Time investment: A deeply-felt challenge emphasized by researchers is that survey data harmonization requires a time-intensive investment. Multiple researchers contrasted the demanding nature of this approach compared to experimental research. Those experienced with multiple research methods noted that researchers and grant project referees consistently underestimate how much time this research strategy requires.

Peer review: Researchers discussed a recurring challenge posed by reviewers who draw on their inevitably selective familiarity with specific surveys to advocate for using more fine-grained variables than those in the harmonized dataset, even when the less detailed dataset is optimal for the project’s theory-informed goals. Several researchers noted this challenge as particularly acute for reviewers with Americanist expertise who lack familiarity with cross-national datasets. One strategy proposed to address this challenge is to prepare robustness tests based on the most commonly used surveys.

Academic credit: Both early career and senior researchers noted the challenge of receiving appropriate academic credit for their scholarly investment in this type of research. We already discussed related challenges of multi-researcher coordination, and this strategy’s relatively time-intensive demands, which can lead to sub-optimal data- and information-sharing.

Long-term infrastructure: As noted in the “opportunities” section, survey data harmonization projects are an appropriate fit for the common time horizons of relatively large research grants to

individual Principal Investigators, such as NSF and ERC. As discussed further in this Symposium’s concluding article (Boomgaarden et al. 2026), an important long-term challenge is sustaining the valuable data infrastructure created by these projects after the conclusion of generous but time-limited project funding.

Conclusion

Informed by these findings, Table 1 documents best practices in four main categories. First, *theory* best practices include conducting a “harmonization necessity check”; engaging in iterative research question clarification; and embracing descriptive contributions. Second, *replication preparation* requires clarity on software and programming infrastructure; data availability; and survey program-specific robustness tests. Third, *dataset construction and analysis* requires researchers to define the conceptual and empirical focus of variable selection and recoding; assess sample type, quality, and weights; and consider whether individual-level or country-year level harmonization is optimal. Finally, and oft-noted by interviewees as most important, *timeline and teamwork clarification* requires researchers to proactively (re-)assess feasible timelines; define research team roles and credit; and engage in a broader scholarly community.

<Insert Table 1 Here>

We conclude by highlighting the final best practice in this list of building a *scholarly community* of colleagues conducting survey data harmonization, which is also emphasized in de Jong’s (2025) discussion of international and cross-culturally comparable research. Echoing our first meta-theme of the importance of clearly defined *research questions*, experts in data harmonization argued that while *scholarly community* is important for advancing social science research writ large, it is even more fundamental for survey data harmonization. Given the unique combination of this research strategy’s opportunities and challenges, researchers emphasized the importance of proactively engaging in scholarly dialogue to advance team members’ methodological training, and to learn about relevant adjacent projects. While still relatively small, a meaningful community of survey data harmonization researchers has evolved, making it all the more important to conclude with best practices gleaned from master teachers.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

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Table 1. Best Practices: Cross-national Survey Data Harmonization

Best Practice	Description
<i>Symposium sources for additional practical guidance</i>	
<i>I. Theory</i>	<i>See Boomgarden et al. (2026); De Sio et al. (2026)</i>
Harmonization necessity check	Assess whether theoretical goals can be achieved without survey data harmonization
Research question clarity	Articulate clear research questions that are continually prioritized and iteratively revised as the dataset is constructed
Descriptive contribution clarity	Be prepared to argue for the contribution of descriptive research
<i>II. Replication preparation</i>	<i>See Hu et al. (2026); Slomczynski et al. (2026)</i>
Software and programming infrastructure	Define the project's common programming language, and establish team protocols that support full replication
Data availability	Clarify usage agreements to prepare for harmonized dataset-sharing beyond project collaborators
Survey program-specific analyses	Be prepared to conduct survey program-specific robustness tests as part of the review process
<i>III. Dataset construction and analysis</i>	<i>See De Sio et al. (2026); Hu et al. (2026); Koc and Kolczyńska (2026)</i>
Variable selection and recoding	Define the conceptual and empirical focus of variable harmonization
Sample type, quality, and weights	Assess optimal weighting procedure for each survey program as part of the survey selection and harmonization process
Individual-level variable harmonization vs. country-year aggregation	Consider optimal level of survey data harmonization with attention to recent country-year aggregation approaches
<i>IV. Timeline and teamwork</i>	<i>See Boomgaarden et al. (2026); Hu et al. (2026)</i>
Timeline	Proactively (re-)assess feasible timelines, including potential end date and post-project data availability
Research team roles	Clarify the collaborative roles of multiple researchers contributing to the project
Broader scholarly community	Engage with researchers working on similar topics to benefit from collegial information-sharing and potential collaboration

ONLINE APPENDIX

Guide for the (Soon-to-be) Perplexed:

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A. Expanded Literature Documentation

This section includes documentation of our Web of Science query to identify survey data harmonization publications (A.1), a selective summary of methodology-oriented sources relevant for survey data harmonization (A.2), and a brief overview of relevant cross-national survey programs (A.3). In addition, we include two tables that provide expanded literature documentation:

Table A1. Illustrative Publications, Cross-national Survey Data Harmonization

Table A2. Illustrative Data Harmonization Projects

A.1. Web of Science literature search

To conduct a systematic search of publications in all social science categories that use survey data harmonization despite the lack of standardized terminology in the field, we searched the index date range of 1965-01-01 to 2024-12-31 using the following search term:

- "data*" near/2 "harmoniz*" (Topic) and "survey*" (Topic)

This search term, documented in the Web of Science url copied below, yielded 154 records when last conducted on December 18, 2025.

- <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/325755c1-7188-4070-862d-7f5aece0c2c7-019159a895/relevance/1>

A.2. Brief summary of methodology-oriented sources

Relevant methodology-oriented sources worthy of note include Berwick and Caughey's (2025) introduction of a new approach for multidimensional scaling of aggregate survey data; Caughey and Warshaw's (2015) dynamic estimation of latent opinion; Cichocki and Jabkowski's (2023) study of linear stretching of response scales; Kołczyńska et al.'s (2024) use of Bayesian explanatory item response theory models to analyse public attitudes cross-nationally and longitudinally; and Kołczyńska and Bürkner's (2024) simulation study of latent trend models. See this Symposium's article on modeling aggregate trends (Koc and Kołczyńska 2026) for additional methodology-oriented sources on aggregate-level indicators.

A.3. Overview of relevant cross-national survey programs

To assist the reader who is not yet familiar with the most commonly used survey programs in cross-national survey data harmonization that are noted in Table A1 by acronym, we provide the following summary:

Relevant data sources combined in the studies documented in this section include survey programs that conduct sophisticated methodological research, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), as well as surveys with a broader geographic reach but comparatively less consistency in survey questions across country-years and less uniform sampling procedures, such as the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and the World Values Survey (WVS). Additional survey programs commonly harmonized in leading research include elections studies, such as the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), and the European Election Studies (EES); as well as surveys focused on public opinion in specific regions, such as the European Values Survey (EVS), and the Barometers surveys. Some of these survey programs have consistently offered harmonized datasets for their own program's country-year survey waves (such as the ESS); while other programs only recently made cumulative datasets available following researchers' initiatives (such as the CSES and the Eurobarometer); and still others do not provide harmonized versions of their data (e.g., some of the regional Barometers), or provide a harmonized dataset for a fee (e.g., LAPOP's AmericasBarometer). Additional examples of surveys commonly used in cross-national survey data harmonization can be found in Lyberg et al. (2021, p. 21).

Table A1. Illustrative Publications, Cross-national Survey Data Harmonization

Authors (Year)	Journal / Press	Title (selectively abbreviated)	Surveys (selected)
Caughey, O'Grady, and Warshaw (2019)	APSR	Policy Ideology in European Mass Publics, 1981–2016	ESS, Eurobarometer, ISSP, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, WVS
Claassen (2020)	AJPS	Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?	Barometers, ESS, EVS, Pew Global Attitudes, WVS
Claassen and McLaren (2022)	BJPS	Does Immigration Produce a Public Backlash or Public Acceptance?	ESS, Eurobarometer, ISSP, Pew Global Attitudes Survey, WVS
Dassonneville et al. (2021)	EJPR	Policy Responsiveness to All Citizens or Only to Voters?	CSES, ESS, Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer, WVS
Hu and Solt (2025)	BJPS	Macrointerest Across Countries	ESS, EVS, ISSP, WVS
Huijsmans, Rijken, and Gaidyte (2022)	Political Studies	The Income Gap in Voting: Moderating Effects of Income Inequality and Clientelism	AsianBarometer, ESS, ISSP, LAPOP, WVS,
Kostelka and Blais (2021)	World Politics	The Generational and Institutional Sources of the Global Decline in Voter Turnout	CSES and select national election studies
Kostelka et al. (2025)	PSRM	Electoral Participation and Satisfaction with Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe	Panel studies from 6 countries
Lachat (2017)	IPSR	Which Way from Left to Right?	Election studies in 5 countries
Lupu and Warner (2022a)	JOP	Affluence and Congruence	CSES, Eurobarometer, LAPOP, WVS
Lupu and Warner (2022b)	EJPR	Why Are the Affluent Better Represented Around the World?	CSES, Eurobarometer, LAPOP, WVS
Mauk (2020a)	Oxford Univ. Press	Citizen Support for Democratic and Autocratic Regimes	Barometers (Afro, America, Arab, Asian, Latino), WVS
Mauk (2020b)	PRQ	How Democratic Value Orientations Affect Political Trust in Different Regimes	Barometers (Afro, America, Arab, Asian, Latino), WVS

Note: This table documents a select number of high-impact and well-cited publications in political science and related fields that use a variety of different modeling approaches to analyze cross-national survey data on topics related to political attitudes and behavior.

Table A1 (cont'd). Illustrative Publications, Cross-national Survey Data Harmonization

Authors (Year)	Journal / Press	Title (selectively abbreviated)	Surveys (selected)
Mongrain (2023)	EJPR	The Impact of Social Networks on Citizens' Forecasting Ability	Election studies (district, regional, etc.) in 10 countries
Neundorff, Gerschewski, and Olar (2020)	CPS	How Do Inclusionary and Exclusionary Autocracies Affect Ordinary People?	Barometers, CSES, ESS, WVS
Solt (2008)	AJPS	Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement	EES, Eurobarometer, WVS,
Tai, Hu, and Solt (2024)	APSR	Democracy, Public Support, and Measurement Uncertainty	Barometers, ESS, EVS, Pew Global Attitudes, WVS
Valgarðsson and Devine (2022)	PRQ	What Satisfaction with Democracy?	Barometers, CSES, WVS
Valgarðsson et al. (2025)	BJPS	A Crisis of Political Trust?	Barometers, election studies, ESS, ISSP, WVS
van der Meer, Ackermann, Pellikaan (2024)	CEP	Can We Aggregate Voters' Perceptions of Political Parties' Left–Right Positions?	CSES, longitudinal analyses in 3 countries
Woo, Goldberg, and Solt (2023)	BJPS	Public Gender Egalitarianism	Barometers, EVS, Pew Research Center, WVS

Note: This table documents a select number of high-impact and well-cited publications in political science and related fields that use a variety of different modeling approaches to analyze cross-national survey data on topics related to political attitudes and behavior.

Table A2. Illustrative Data Harmonization Projects

Project leader(s)	Project name	URL (last accessed December 18, 2025)
Bechert, Quandt, May, Werhan (2025)	ONBound: Religion and Nation in Constitutions worldwide	https://www.gesis.org/en/services/processing-and-analyzing-data/data-harmonization/onbound
Claassen (2025)	Democratic Mood	https://chrisclaassen.com/data.html
Huijsmans, Arieke, and Gaidyte (2019)	POLPART: How Citizens Try to Influence Politics and Why (PI: Klandermans)	https://osf.io/gztky/
Neundorf (2025)	Global Citizen Politics	https://globalcitizenpolitics.net
Schmitt (2021)	True European Voter dataset; see Schmitt, Segatti and van der Eijk (2021)	https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13601
Słomczyński et al. (2023)	Survey Data Recycling, SDR2 Database	https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/YOCX0M
Solt (2025)	Dynamic Comparative Public Opinion	https://dcpo.org/team/fsolt.html

Note: See Appendix Reference List (Section E) for full references to projects when relevant; see also Kołczyńska (2022, 63-64) for a discussion of survey data harmonization projects.

B. Interview Participant Consent Form

Title of Study: Guide for the (Soon-to-be) Perplexed: Considerations for Scholars Launching Survey Data Harmonization Journeys
Principal Investigator: Prof. Jennifer Oser, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel
Co-author: Barak Zur, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Institute: Department of Politics and Government, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

General Information

The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical and practical discussion of considerations scholars should take into account when launching and leading a survey data harmonization research project. This study is designed as a symposium article as part of a journal symposium issue proposal accepted by *PS: Political Science & Politics* in October, 2024.

The study aims to synthesize the relevant literature, and to glean insights from leading scholars' experiences conducting survey data harmonization projects.

Participation in this study involves an interview of up to 1 hour, in person or online, in which you will be asked to answer questions about your experience conducting survey data harmonization. The interview will be recorded, and the content will remain anonymous unless you provide explicit approval for non-anonymized quotes.

Participation is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

Processing and Protection of Personal Data

The researchers will retain minimal personal data necessary for the purpose of the study, including name, contact information, and background information. The researchers will also retain the interview recordings. All non-anonymized data will be stored in secure environments that are password-protected, and will be de-identified if data are transferred to any person/institution beyond the collaborators on this project. Personal data will be retained for a period of 10 years, after which all electronic and non-electronic files containing personal data will be permanently destroyed.

The data and anonymized quotes may be published in journals and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity. Non-anonymized quotes from interviews will be possible only upon your explicit approval.

Your personal information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) available at <https://gdpr.eu/tag/gdpr/>.

Your personal data as well as the interview recordings will be held by Ben-Gurion University as data controller. Data protection services for BGU are provided through a contractual agreement with the legal offices of Tulchinsky Marciano Cohen Levitski & Co., Law Offices, 4 Berkowitz St. (Museum Tower) Tel Aviv 6423806. The permanent email address of the DPO for Ben-Gurion University is dpo@bgu.ac.il.

Contact Information

If you have any further questions, you may contact the Principal Investigator (oser@post.bgu.ac.il).

Participant Consent

I confirm that

1. I have read and understood this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study.
2. I have received a copy of this form for my records.
3. I agree to the arrangements for data storage, archiving, and sharing.
4. I agree to be contacted in the future for a further interview or for subsequent studies related to this research, should that be required.

Date:

Participant's Name:

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Name:

Researcher's Signature:

C. Interview Methodology Documentation

Supplemental Methodological Information

A key question documented in the survey instrument in the following section invited researchers to reflect critically on their prior work by asking “What do you wish you had known when you first started on your survey data harmonization research, particularly in relation to producing high-impact peer-reviewed academic research? Can you think of advice you would now give to your younger self before starting this journey?” Similar to Manucci’s (2022) interviews with experts on populism, and Munck and Snyder’s (2007) interviews with leading researchers of comparative politics, the interviews created an opportunity for researchers to discuss their contributions in the broader context of the field.

Semi-structured Survey Instrument

1. Describe your prior survey data harmonization research project that you view as making the most impactful contribution, and why you chose to use this approach. You’re welcome to describe more than one project.
2. What do you view as the most important *promises* or *opportunities* of survey data harmonization for making original scholarly contributions?
3. In your experience, to what extent did you find that the promises or opportunities that made you decide to conduct survey data harmonization were fulfilled in your research?
4. What do you view as the most important *challenges* of conducting research that uses survey data harmonization?
5. What do you wish you had known when you first started on your survey data harmonization research, particularly in relation to producing high-impact peer-reviewed academic research? Can you think of advice you would now give to your younger self before starting this journey?
6. Are there other published studies or scholars who inspired you to decide to embark on the survey data harmonization research that you undertook?
7. What data management tools and infrastructures did you use to conduct the survey data harmonization (e.g., Stata, R, Python, crosswalks in xl files, specific data harmonization tools)? What advice or warnings would you give researchers about optimal data management tools for data management and analytic replication?
8. Are there any other insights you would like to share with the broader readership of scholars considering launching a survey data harmonization journey?

D. Interviewee Characteristics Summary

Table D1. Interviewee Summary Table

Summary of key characteristics of the interview sample (n=22).

Characteristic	Interviewee summary
Gender	11 women; 11 men
Academic rank	7 early career; 7 mid-career; 8 senior scholars
Current geographic region	4 U.S.; 15 W. Europe; 3 E. Europe
Primary academic disciplines	13 political science; 4 sociology; 5 multidisciplinary

Note: All interviewees conduct political science research, and some also have expertise in related fields of sociology, economics, demography, and psychology. We intentionally recruited interviewees with diverse backgrounds regarding gender, academic rank, and geographic region.

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