

## **Empirical Legal Research: A Primer.**

By Kees van den Bos. (2020), 143 pages, ISBN: 9781789907209. \$135

**Subject:** Subject-area legal research (empirical legal research)

**Useful for:** Useful for anyone interested in conducting their own empirical legal research or for anyone who supports empirical research.

**Format:** Chapters, each with exercises and suggested additional readings, plus a subject index.

### **Reviewer's Comments:**

In this short, practical, and easily-digestible book, *Empirical Legal Research: A Primer*, Kees van den Bos provides a high-level, straightforward overview of an empirical legal research project. He explains how to take a topic and turn it into an empirical legal research project, shifts to basic research methods for your project (including how to interpret the data), and finishes with how to write up your research results. The book ends each chapter with exercises specific to the chapter's topic; in theory, if you work through them, you'll end up with a completed empirical research project! Likewise, the list of suggested readings at the end of each chapter is focused, providing targeted guidance based on the chapter's themes. And helpfully, the author repeatedly assures you that while you will likely need to consult experts in order to complete your project, this book will give you the tools and language to be able to discuss your empirical legal research project with those experts

My favorite part of this book is the author's enthusiasm and humor: he is clearly a big fan of empirical legal research, who wants you to enjoy it as much as he does. He repeatedly stresses, often through humor, that his goal is to make empirical legal research more accessible and that anyone can do it.<sup>1</sup> In furtherance of that goal, he uses specific examples from previous empirical legal research studies to provide context, allowing for greater understanding of the issues he's discussing. At the same time, he delineates the limits of the field as a whole and the specific methods that he discusses.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in Chapter 6 on data analyses, the author begins the chapter by shouting "Lawyers do not calculate!" before explaining "as a lawyer you can do anything," and thus "need not shy away from gaining some insights, . . . right?" (p. 83).

## RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

The book traces the empirical legal research project from beginning to end. Part 1 focuses on the critical parts of defining the problem, helping you design a research goal, research problem, and research questions that you must critically analyze and ensure that they align with each other. His point: “be both ambitious and realistic.” (p. 22). Part 2 dives into research methodology, discussing best practices, methodologies, and strategies for collecting data via interviews, surveys, and experiments. Part 3 then explains how to analyze the data you’ve collected and then write a research report summarizing your project (including “providing a bang to the end of your report” (p. 117) through a short coda conclusion<sup>2</sup>); and how to create a “program of research” (p. 125) by conducting multiple related empirical studies in order draw systemic conclusions from those projects.

Overall, this was a quick, easy read that provided a surprising amount of information about how to start and run an empirical legal research project from scratch. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in starting such a project or whose patrons are interested in these projects.

**Reviewed by:** Taryn Marks, Stanford University, in 2021.

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<sup>2</sup> He also offers this gem of advice when writing for “respected, peer-reviewed scientific journals[:] think Ernest Hemingway, not Marcel Proust,” and cites to Hemingway’s *On Writing* (p. 121).