

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY: AN ANALYSIS OF USAGE OF
THE GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY, 1972-1978

2nd edition

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The National Data Program for the Social Sciences is a data diffusion project and program of social indicators research. Annually from 1972 to 1978 the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, has conducted a General Social Survey (GSS). The GSSs contain a wide range of demographics covering respondent and parental characteristics; behavioral items such as group membership and voting; personal, psychological evaluations of anomia, happiness, misanthropy, life satisfactions, and other aspects; and attitudinal questions on such public issues as abortions, crime and punishment, race relations, sex roles, and spending propriorities. The GSS questions are replicated either each survey or according to a fixed rotation pattern. In addition since many GSS questions were chosen from previous surveys, the GSS points not only serve as base years for the building of social indicators series, but also as contemporary anchors for series already up to three decades long.

The National Data Program for the social Sciences has made the GSS data available at cost to all interested parties for use in research, teaching, or other applications. Each survey is publicly available within a few months of collection and is distributed by the Roper Center, University of Connecticut; the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan; and Conduit.

This report analyzes the usage patterns of the GSSs by examining the papers that have employed the GSSs as part of their data base. The Annotated Bibliography of Papers Using the General Social Surveys, (1980 edition) lists 403 papers using the GSS. While it is known that this falls short of all actual uses of the surveys, it is believed that it represents a sufficiently large, varied, and important body of uses to provide an informative source for analysis.

In examining the use pattern of the GSSs we ask the standard journalistic litany of inquiries:

Who uses the GSSs?

What variables are used?

When have the uses appeared?

Where have they appeared?

Why have the GSSs been used?

Who

The 403 papers in the bibliography have a total of 635 authorships; 9 with institutional authors, 224 with single authors, 116 with two authors, 42 with three authors, 9 with four authors, 1 with five authors, and 2 with six authors. The leading authors with the number of papers they authored or co-authored are:

Charles N. Weaver	- 32
No ryal Glenn	- 20
Andrew M. Greeley	- 17
D. Garth Taylor	- 17
Tom W. Smith	- 15
James A. Davis	- 13
Jon P. Alston	- 12
Stephen J. Cutler	- 8
Everett Carll Ladd	- 8

Most authors are Sociologists. Of the top ten listed above there are seven Sociologists, one Political Scientist (Ladd), one Sociologist-Historian (Smith), and one professor of Business Management (Weaver). Sociologists also predominate among authors in general but many other disciplines are also represented. They include Political Science, Communications, Economics, Psychology, Statistics, Social Work and such interdisciplinary and subfields as gerontology, demography, criminology, religious studies, urban studies, and survey methodology.

What

The counting of variables on surveys is a somewhat arbitrary matter depending on how filters are handled, whether several questions are used for determining one variable or one question coded to form several variables, and other matters. The cumulative GSS files currently contain 446 variables. Of these fully 79 (.177) are not used in any of the papers analyzed here. While this seems like a high number of unused items, its is actually misleading. Of the 79 unused variables 27 appear only in the 1978 survey, 7 in only the 1977 survey, and 5 only in 1977 and 1978 (total of 39). There has not yet been sufficient time for these surveys to be widely used by the social science community. (The 1972 survey was used in 180 papers, 1973 in 246, 1974 in 226, 1975 in 175, 1975 in 140, 1977 in 104, and 1978 in 47. The more recent the survey the less opportunity there has been to use it.) Excluding these variables from consideration we find that 40 (.106) of the remaining variables have never been used.

The largest group of 12 unused variables consist of the Department of Labor's measures of general education and vocational training needed per occupation; an accompanying prestige score for respondent, father, and spouse; and spouse levels for data, people, and things (DOTGED, DOTPRES, DOTSVVP, SPDOTGED, SPDOTSVVP, SPDOTPRE, PADOTGED, PADOTSVVP, PADOTPRE, SPDOTDATA, SPDOTPEO, SPDOTTHN). Next comes the 10 words making a vocabulary test (WORDA, WORDB, WORDC, WORDD, WORDE, WORDF, WORDG, WORDH, WORDI, WORDJ) which are of little interest since a summary variable (WORDSUM) gives a person's total score on the test. Other (7) of the unused items can be classified as minor, detailed demographics. For example, the four questions about

respondent's current religion and religion of origin and spouse's current religion and religion of origin each consist of three variables: the person's major religious group, the major denominations of Protestants, and other Protestant denominations not prelisted. While the four religion and four major Protestant denomination variables have been used, two other Protestant variables (SPOTH, SPOTH16) have never been used. Other variables of this type include date of birth (BIRTHDAY, BIRMONTH, ZODIAC), hours normally worked by those temporarily not working (HRS2, SPHRS2), and branch of armed forces (VETKIND).

Another 4 unused variables consist of items on respondent's and spouse's days and shifts of work (SPDAYS, SPHOUR, WORKDY, WORKHR) which appeared in only the 1972 survey. Finally, the other unused variables consist of the following 6 miscellaneous items: number of children expected (CHLDSOON); interviewer's ranking of cooperation and understanding of respondent (COMPRED, COOP2, COOP); who respondent would have voted for president if she/she had voted (IFWHO68), and spouse's industry (SPIND). In general the unused items tend to deal with minor details, be partly duplicated by other variables, or appear only on a single survey. There are, however, several items whose lack of use is more surprising such as the interviewer evaluations of respondents and the fertility expectation question.

Turning from the wallflowers of the GSS to its cheerleaders, we see in Table 1 a list of the most popular items by question type: Demographics are the most heavily used. The list is headed by education with the other major stratification variables occupation and income coming in fourth and fifth. Coming right behind education are the three basic biological attributes: age, sex, and race. The top cultural

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PAPERS USING GSS VARIABLES BY VARIABLE TYPE

GSS Variable	Number of Papers
<u>Demographics</u>	
Years of Schooling (EDUC,DEGREE)	231
Age (AGE)	213
Race (RACE)	205
Sex (SEX)	198
Occupational Standing (OCC,PRESTIGE)	151
Total Family Income (INCOME,INCOME72,INCOME77)	145
Religion (RELIG)	131
Size of Place (NORCSIZ2,NORCSIZE,XNORCSIZ,SIZE, SRCBELT,PSUSIZE)	95
Marital Status (MARITAL)	93
Region (REGION)	81
<u>Personal Evaluations</u>	
Personal Happiness (HAPPY)	61
Job Satisfaction (SATJOB)	54
Financial Satisfaction (SATFIN)	48
Family Satisfaction (SATFAM)	45
Marital Happiness (HAPMAR)	36
<u>Attitudes</u>	
Abortions ABNOMORE(61),ABPOOR(53),ABHLTH(50), ABDEFECT(50),ABSINGLE(49),ABRAPE(45)	45-61
Interracial Marriages (RACMAR)	47
Capital Punishment (CAPPUN,CAPPUN2)	45
Confidence in Institutions CONBUS(43),CONFED(43), CONLABOR(40),CONLEGIS(42),CONMEDIC(36),CONPRESS(41) CONEDUC(37),CONCLERG(37),CONJUDGE(37),CONARMY(36), CONSCI(31),CONTV(32),CONFINAN(19)	19-42
Court Severity (COURTS)	40
Stouffer (Civil Liberties) SPKATH(36),SPICOM(36), SPKCSOC(20),SPKCHOMO(17),SPKMIL(5),SPKRAC(5), LIBATH(28),LIBCOM(28),LIBSOC(18),LIBHOMO(15), LIBMIL(3),LIBRAC(3),COLATH(26),COLCOM(28), COLSOC(17),COLHOMO(16),COLMIL(4),COLRAC(3)	3-36

TABLE 1 (Continued)

GSS Variable	Number of Papers
<u>Attitudes (Continued)</u>	
Spending Priorities NATFARE(38), NATEDUC(37), NATCITY(34), NATENVIR(32), NATHEAL(33), NATARMS(31), NATRACE(29), NATCRIME(29), NATDRUG(27), NATAID(24), NATSPAC(23)	23-38
School Busing (BUSING)	34
Black Civil Rights Drive (RACPUSH)	33
Premarital Sex (PREMARSEX)	33
Gun Registration (GUNLAW)	32
Black Dinner Guest (RACDIN)	32
<u>Behavioral and Related</u>	
Church Attendance	69
Membership in Various Organizations (MEMUNION, UNION(27), MEMFRAT(18), MEMSERV(18), MEMCHURH(14), MEMHOBBY(16), MEMLIT(16), MEMNAT(16), MEMPOLIT(16), MEMPROF(18), MEMVET(16), MEMSCHL(17), MEMSPORT(16), MEMYOUTH(14), MEMFARM(14), MEMGREEK(14), MEMOTHER(14)	14-27
Visit Friends (SOCFRIEND)	18
Visit Relatives (SOCREL)	18
Voting in 1972 Election (VOTE72)	17
Presidential Choice in 1972 (PRES72)	16
Visit Neighbors (SOCCOMMUN)	15
Own Gun (OWNGUN)	14
Robbed (ROBBRY)	14
Burgarlized (BURGLR)	14
Frequent Bars (SOCBAR)	10

demographic, religion, ranks seventh, followed by the geographic variables size of place and region, at eighth and tenth and marital status at ninth. The prevalence of demographics, of course reflects their standard use as control variables and the first-place finish of education indicates that stratification and SES are still the central concerns of Sociology.

The other three types of items, personal evaluations, attitudes, and behaviors all have been used less frequently. Personal evaluations are led off by the measures of personal happiness and job satisfaction followed by other happiness and satisfaction items. Attitude items are headed by abortion attitudes and the top ten groups of items include four on race relations, three on crime and punishment, the confidence scale, the Stouffer civil liberty items, and a sexual morality item. Behavioral and related items are topped by a wide edge by church attendance. Then come group memberships, political participation, socializing, victimization, and gun ownership.

It appears that interest has been widely spread among a variety of attitudes, personal evaluations, and behavioral items and that attention has not been overly concentrated in any small substantive area. Reflecting the smorgasbord content of the GSS, the use of variables has been wide-ranging and varied. Perhaps the one area in which usage has been notably light is foreign affairs. The seven national thermometer questions have been used only one to three times; expectation of war and support for the United Nations, each four times; and involvement in foreign affairs, six times.

When

Like a snow ball rolling downhill, the GSSs have gained usages with time. There was only a single use in 1972, five in 1973, nineteen in 1974, forty-four in 1975, sixty-three in 1976, fifty-two in 1977, one hundred-four in 1978, eighty in 1979, 33 in 1980 or forthcoming, and two with dates unknown. The growth of uses reflects several factors, the natural lag time between data collection, analysis, and publication, the addition of more studies with opportunities for trend analysis or pooling, the addition of more questions, and the spreading familiarity of the GSS to the social science community. The trend toward an increasing number of annual usages seems likely to continue into 1980, but the impact of the shift to an every-other-year schedule may dampen the trend starting in 1980/81.

Where

Papers using the GSSs have appeared in a wide variety of places. Journal articles led with 226 occurrences followed by presentations at scholarly meetings with 72, reports with 52, books with 41, and student dissertations and theses with 12. As Table 2 details, most have appeared at conferences or in journals in the field of sociology. Virtually every major sociological journal has had articles using the GSSs with the Public Opinion Quarterly leading with 18 and closely followed by American Sociological Review with 16, Social Forces with 13, and the Journal of Marriage and the Family with 11. Outside of sociology journals using the GSS include such interdisciplinary journals as the Annals and Daedalus, journals in other fields such as business administration (e.g., Personnel Psychology), communications (Journal of Communications and Journal of Broadcasting), political science

TABLE 2
COUNT OF PAPERS USING THE GSSs IN JOURNALS AND
AT CONFERENCES

	Number of Papers
A. <u>Journal appearances</u>	
Public Opinion Quarterly	18
American Sociological Review	16
Social Forces	13
Journal of Marriage and the Family	11
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	8
Public Opinion	8
Ethnicity	7
Journal of Gerontology	6
Journal of Communications	5
Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences	4
Journal of Applied Psychology	4
Contemporary Sociology	4
Gerontologist	4
American Journal of Sociology	4
Review of Religious Research	4
Personnel Psychology	3
Public Interest	3
Social Problems	3
Journal of Social Issues	2
Sociological Quarterly	3
Criminology	3
Marquett Business Review	2
Academy of Management Journal	2
Society	2
Social Policy	2
Social Science Research	3
Social Science Quarterly	3
Journal of Black Studies	2
Social Biology	2
Journal of Clinical Psychology	2
Social Focus	2
University of North Carolina Newsletter	2
Social Indicators Research	2
Sociology and Social Research	2
American Journal of Political Science	2
Resources for the Future	2
International Journal of Sociology of the Family	2
Sociological Symposium	2
Social Psychology Quarterly	2
Sociological Methods and Research	2
Dissent	1
The Nation	1

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
A. <u>Journal appearances</u> (Continued)	
Cornell Journal of Social Relations	1
Journal of Research and Development in Education	1
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	1
Intercom	1
Sociological Analysis	1
The American Scholar	1
Social Science Review	1
Teaching Sociology	1
Pacific Sociological Review	1
Daedalus	1
Annual Review of Sociology	1
Qualitative Sociology	1
Scientific American	1
Status	1
Journal of Homosexuality	1
Science	1
High School Behavioral Science	1
Aging and Development	1
New Republic	1
America	1
Social Studies of Science	1
Environmental Affairs	1
The Critic	1
Rural Sociology	1
Southern Journal of Criminal Justice	1
Sex Roles	1
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare	1
Business Horizons	1
Personnel Administration	1
Personnel	1
Demography	1
Review of Public Data Use	1
Computers and the Humanities	1
Our Sunday Visitor	1
Family Planning Perspectives	1
Discovery	1
Journal of Sex Research	1
Texas Business Review	1
American Politics Quarterly	1
Journal of Broadcasting	1
Mid-American Review of Sociology	1
American Political Science Review	1
American Psychologist	1

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
A. <u>Journal appearances</u> (Continued)	
Journal of Market Research	1
Psychometrika	1
Public Relations News	1
Wilson Quarterly	1
Fortune	1
Overview	1
International Journal of Aging and Human Development	1
EPA Journal	1
Political Methodology	1
B. <u>Conference Presentations</u>	
Other Sociology	22
American Sociological Association	14
Economic and Business Management	9
American Statistical Association	5
Politics	4
Other	19

(American Political Science Review), psychology (American Psychologist), and education (Journal of Research and Development in Education), journals of a popular scientific nature (e.g., Science and Scientific American), and journals of a general political or policy nature (e.g., Public Opinion, The Nation, or Society). In general, use has centered in sociology with secondary concentration in the other social sciences, and peripheral usages in a wide range of fields.

Why

The GSSs have been used for a number of purposes. Most commonly the GSSs have been used to carry out scholarly research in the social sciences on contemporary American society. This research consists of proposing and testing various hypotheses about the organization, operation, and function of various social phenomena, intergenerational studies of mobility and transmittances, trend analyses of social change, cross-national comparisons, and related matters.

In addition the GSSs have been used in social indicators reporting. Data from the GSS were used extensively in Social Indicators 1976 and in publications by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and the National Science Foundation.

The GSSs have also been used to study various questions of survey methodology by using the split ballot experiments on wordings and context, various items indexes to examine scaling, and using GSS data to illustrate the application of new statistical methods. Finally, the GSSs have been used as guides of item wording, questionnaire construction, and codebook organization; as a teaching tool for Sociology; and as a source for discussions of a policy and political nature.

Conclusion

From the brief analysis of the usage of the GSSs as reflected in papers employing the GSS, it appears that the surveys are being widely used by a growing number of scholars in Sociology and the other social sciences, by the government, and by people in other areas. The GSSs have been used in a large and varied number of places including eight dozen different journals by an equally varied and even larger number of authors. The set of scholarly hypotheses tested and trends analyzed has likewise been extremely diverse. With the exception of a few topics and groups where extensive usage has not developed, the GSSs have shown considerable success in providing useful data to the social science community. The prognosis for the future, based on past trends and a large number of papers received since the publication of the Annotated Bibliography, is for even more extensive and diverse usage in the coming years.