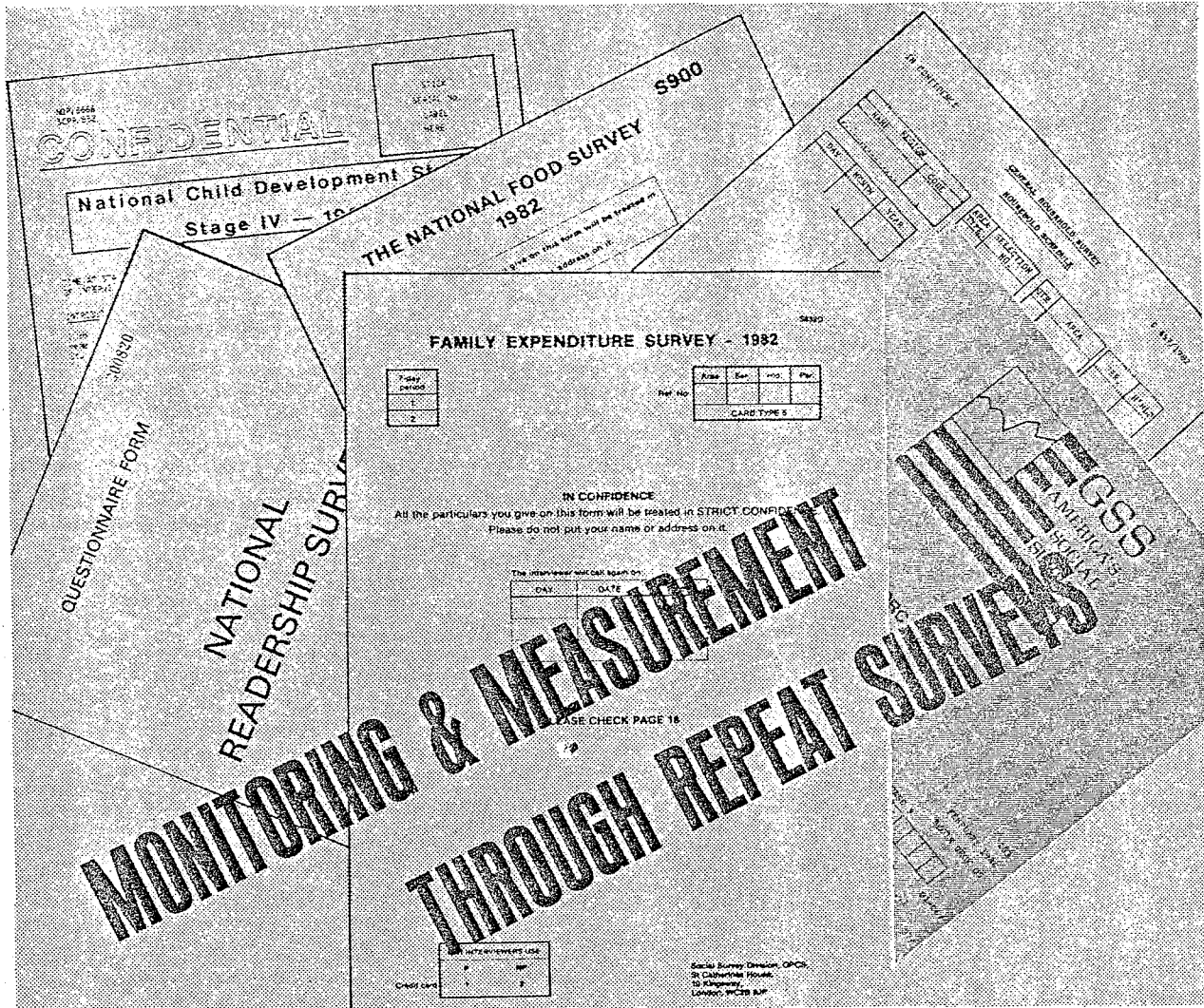


SURVEY METHODS NEWSLETTER

Winter 1983/84



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Advance notice for the May 1984 SSRC Survey Methods Seminar – page 12

International Conference on Methodological Research – page 4

Ethical Guidelines, ISI and SRA codes of practice – page 2

Contributions would be welcome for future issues of the Newsletter. Of particular interest are short research notes or abstracts of working papers on aspects of survey methodology. The Newsletter can also be used to give notice of meetings and to draw attention to published papers about survey methods.

All items of interest should be sent to: The Secretary, Social and Community Planning Research,
35 Northampton Square, London EC1V 0AX. Telephone: 01-250 1866.

SSRC Survey methods seminar series

report of the October seminar

Monitoring and measurement through repeat surveys

This report summarises the main contributions to the survey methods seminar held on 26 October, 1983, at The City University. The seminar was one of a series sponsored by the Social Science Research Council and administered by SCPR. The series is planned by a committee of representatives of the London School of Economics, The City University and SCPR.

The main aim of the seminar was to discuss the purpose and use of survey series, such as the General Household

Survey and the General Election Survey in Britain and the General Social Survey in the USA. Roger Thomas (Social Survey Division, OPCS), Tom Smith (NORC, Chicago) and Anthony Heath (Jesus College, Oxford) were the principal speakers. In addition, Manfred Kuchler (ZUMA, Mannheim) and Roger Jowell (SCPR) briefly outlined the development of social survey series in Germany and Britain. Bob Barnes (OPCS) chaired the seminar.

Roger Thomas : survey series carried out by OPCS

Roger Thomas opened the seminar by describing four continuous surveys carried out by the Social Survey Division of OPCS: the Family Expenditure Survey; the National Food Survey; the General Household Survey; and the Labour Force Survey.

The Family Expenditure Survey (FES) has been running continuously since 1957. It was started as a survey of household expenditure and, in particular, as a source of weighting factors for the Retail Price Index. This is still one of its central uses and it continues to be sponsored by the Department of Employment as the department responsible for producing the Index. However, over the years the FES has become very much an income and expenditure, or household budget, survey. In the process it has acquired users in all the government departments concerned with the consumer economy, with the incidence of benefits and taxation and with the ways in which households and individuals get or spend their money. The FES has to be a continuous survey because economic variables vary continuously, both cyclically and non-cyclically, and because users of the information want quarterly and annual results.

Collection of data for the FES is complicated and expensive. Respondents are paid to complete diaries. All adult members of households living at a probability sample of 10,752 domestic addresses are asked to keep a comprehensive diary of personal and household expenditures for two weeks. In addition, they are questioned at length about regular expenditure and about sources and amounts of income.

The data structure generated by the FES is broadly two level (individuals and households). Income variables can be analysed for both individuals and households (or alternatively for families, tax units and benefit units). However, expenditure cannot be allocated to individuals and is analysed for households only.

Some users are interested mainly in aggregate estimates, say of total household expenditure on a particular commodity; others are interested in detailed cross-analyses and hence in the reliability of household and individual measures. Time series based on the FES and the framework that it provides for analysing the incidence of taxation and benefits have become very important in government.

Prime responsibility for managing and disseminating the data from the FES in suitably anonymised form rests with the Department of Employment. Data sets are now distributed fairly widely within government departments and elsewhere and are routinely deposited at the SSRC Data Archive. The limiting factor on further dissemination is the lack of the computing resources and expertise needed to handle large and complicated data sets.

The National Food Survey (NFS) is the oldest continuous OPCS survey, having run without a break since 1941. It is sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and concentrates on expenditure and consumption. It covers a narrower spectrum than the FES and priority is given to cheapness and speed in its design. The contrasts between the FES and the NFS reflect a difference in users' priorities. FES users give top priority to exploiting a powerful but expensive survey instrument. NFS users' top priority is to keep costs down while getting reliable results out fast.

The NFS sample is again a national probability one, but households are asked to complete a one-week, rather than a two-week, diary covering the amount, type and cost of food purchases only. These items are recorded and coded in detail, but coverage of income is minimal. Unlike the FES, the NFS relies on information supplied by the one person in each household who is held to be chiefly responsible for household food purchases. Food bought by other household members to eat outside the home is not covered. No payment is made to co-operating households.

The timetable for production of results imposes considerable stress upon the survey. Food purchasing varies markedly by season, as well as over time, and there is an insistent demand for timely output of results for each quarter. Nutritionists played an important part in establishing the NFS, but the dominant users of the data in recent years have been economists interested in food production and distribution.

The General Household Survey (GHS) is the OPCS continuous survey best known to social scientists and others interested in social policy. Planned from the outset as a general purpose social survey, it has been running for 11 years, and has arguably become part of the framework within which research and debate on social policy are conducted.

The GHS has always met its multi-purpose, multi-user specification. Each of its annual reports has chapters on demography and household structure; economic activity and employment; housing and household amenities; health and usage of the NHS services; and educational qualifications and participation. In addition, special topics are included each year. Some fall under the general headings — for example studies of housing costs, of the prevalence of particular health conditions, or of behaviour, such as smoking, that affects health. Others are separate — for example leisure behaviour — and others again cover a different slice of social policy — for example the circumstances and problems of elderly people living in the community.

Since the survey is so wide-ranging, it is possible in principle to transcend narrow policy interests and boundaries and to look at, for example, relationships between education, employment status and health, or between income and leisure activities for different socio-economic groups.

The effective GHS annual sample includes about 10,500 households, 11,200 families, 3,550 families with dependent children, 20,500 adults, and 27,000 household members including children. The sample is large enough to provide stable estimates of population means and percentages for important variables based on major population subgroups and to allow for fairly complex and refined analyses. As an equal probability sample, however, the GHS sample is too small for analysis needs, e.g., analysis of small areas.

An OPCS monitor giving important trend figures but no complex analyses for the previous calendar year is published in May or June, by which time the flow of priority prespecified tables to customer departments has begun. The production, annotation and checking of these tables takes precedence over other analysis and publication, so that the GHS annual report does not appear until about 18 months after the fieldwork. An annual data set is lodged with the SSRC Data Archive at about the same time.

Undoubtedly OPCS and its customers inside and outside government seriously underestimated the technical problems of data management: the mainly computer-based processes whereby coded interview data are edited and organised into a structure amenable to the types of analysis mentioned above. If the scale and implications of the computing problems had been foreseen, the original survey design might have been adjusted to minimise them. However, experience over the last 12 years has shown that a continuous survey *is* continuous. Unless expensive extra resources are made available off-line to develop and test a new design, trying to change methodological horses is extremely difficult and risky, since one is always in mid-stream.

One of the reasons that the GHS is a continuous, rather than an annual survey is that some of the phenomena that it was designed to measure — such as employment or usage of health services — vary on an annual cycle and are not adequately represented by annual survey. However, another important consideration in a multi-survey organisation is that quality control and resource management are easier if large surveys run on a steady and continuous cycle than if they come in waves. Yet another reason may be that when the GHS was conceived thinking was influenced by commercial 'Omnibus' surveys.

As a consequence of joining the European Community, the UK incurred an obligation to carry out a biennial Labour Force Survey (LFS). The sample sizes adopted in Great Britain have been in the range of 80,000-85,000 households. Surveys on this scale were carried out by OPCS in 1973 and then every other year up to and including 1983, under the sponsorship of the EEC and the Department of Employment.

Survey operations on this scale are rather like a census, and, particularly up to 1979, the LFS made much use of the OPCS Census machinery and methods of working. The LFS methodology has been somewhere between that of the UK Census and that typical of social surveys.

Over the last 12 months two developments have presented OPCS with a great technical challenge. The EEC is seeking agreement to make the LFS annual, rather than biennial, from 1984, and the Department of Employment has asked OPCS to start a Continuous Labour Force Survey (CLFS), the fieldwork for which began in October 1983.

In the second quarter of each year the data from the two surveys will be combined to provide the large-sample, point-in-time estimates required by the EEC; and these will also serve to 'anchor' the estimates of change in labour force variables provided by the continuous survey.

In several respects, the design of the continuous survey is a departure for OPCS. A stratified, clustered national sample of 3,000 new addresses enters the survey each quarter and one-third of these addresses are allocated to each month of the quarter. Thus 12,000 new addresses enter the survey each year. However, each address is then recontacted at quarterly intervals, making five contacts in all. Thus in any given quarter the total number of addresses contacted is about 15,000, 12,000 of which have been in the survey before. The main weight of the estimates of change in labour force variables, such as unemployment, rests on this overlapping sample. However, good estimates of the level of these variables can also be derived by using the data from the 'new' part of the continuous survey sample, from the 'overlapping' part of the continuous survey sample and from the large 'boost' provided by the annual LFS sample.

While interviewers visit all addresses entering the sample for the first time, where possible subsequent contacts are by telephone. In practice over half of all interviews are by telephone.

A key use of the new CLFS will be to provide timely statistics on employment and unemployment — an important consideration now that the basis of unemployment registration has been changed and administrative sources no longer provide a complete count. The specification of the survey therefore requires rapid and reliable production of quarterly results.

The combined LFS and CLFS 'package' is of great interest to other departments whose data needs it could satisfy. Experience with other continuous surveys and with ad hoc surveys sponsored both within and outside govern-

ment, combined with pressure on costs, is sharpening customer awareness of the relationships between data requirements, methodology, quality and cost.

During the last 10 years the proportion of OPCS surveys that are truly 'ad hoc' has decreased, partly because of the growth in continuous surveys and partly because many surveys are repeats of earlier surveys. Similarly, more surveys are sponsored with a view to repeating them later. Roger Thomas pointed out that this is what ought to happen as the social policy field is better charted and research and cumulative statistics are available.

Examples of this tendency are: the series of surveys that started in 1968 and is planned up to 1986 on the dental health of children and adults; two surveys in 1975 and 1980 on infant feeding, with another planned for 1985; a series of surveys of alcohol consumption, drinking behaviour and attitudes that started in 1972; a series of surveys on housing, with particular reference to sharing, moving and the use of privately rented accommodation; and the 'Family Finances' research into the circumstances of poorer families.

In no case has one survey exactly repeated another, but samples and data collection instruments have been aligned as appropriate. In each case the sample, subject matter or depth and detail required have made the issue under examination unsuitable for a continuous survey.

The interplay and interdependence between continuous and ad hoc surveys have also been increasing steadily. For example, a large continuous survey can provide a sample of households or individuals in a rare or hard-to-sample subgroup who become the subjects of a special follow-up survey. Then again, questions developed and tested in an ad hoc survey may be selected for periodic inclusion in a continuous survey. As another example, the continuous survey provides control statistics for the population, with which the results of a special survey focusing on a subgroup can be compared.

The ultimate aim of the increasing integration is to put together cost-effective packages of the different types of survey design for research and monitoring in all areas of interest to social policymakers. Continuous repeated and ad hoc surveys all make an indispensable contribution.

Tom Smith : the role of the General Social Survey in the social sciences

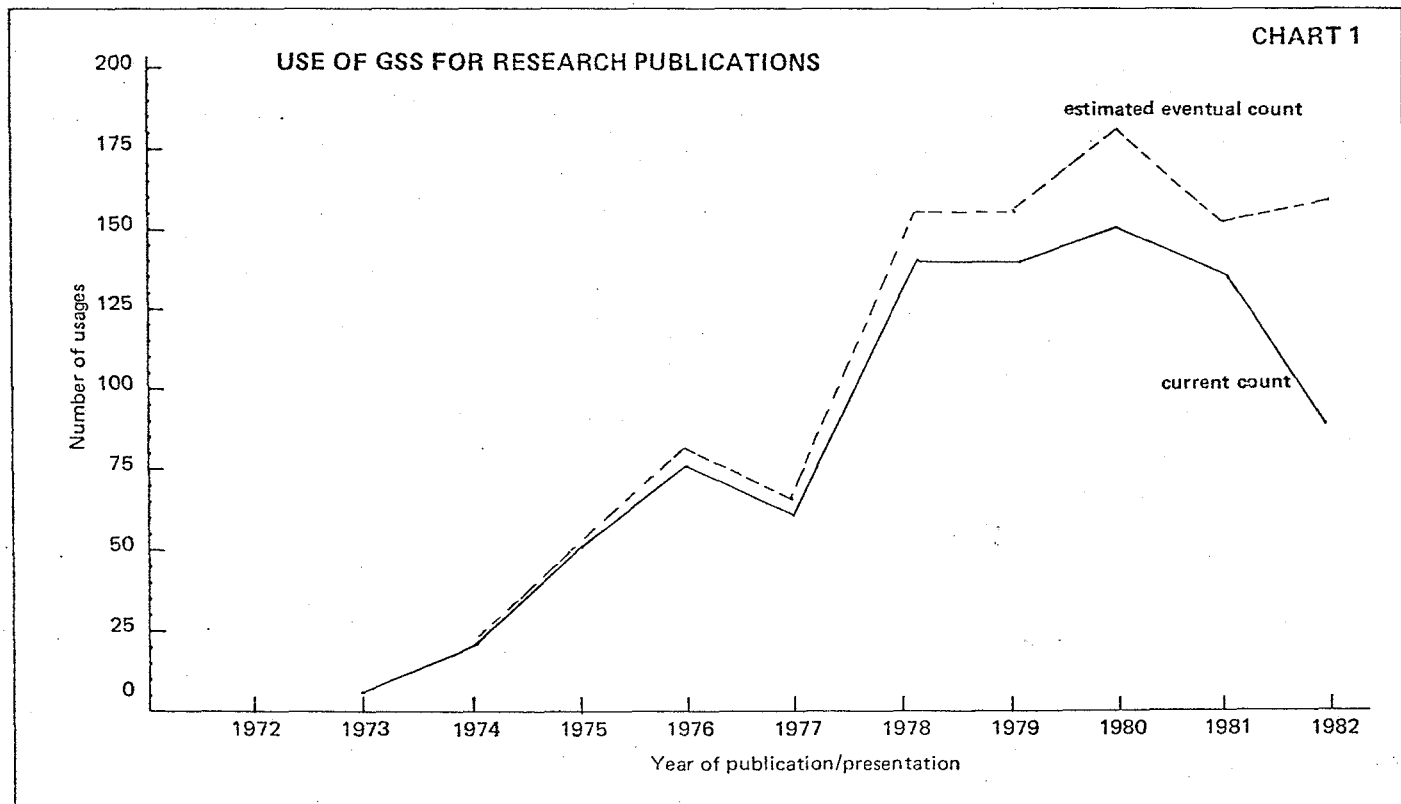
The General Social Survey (GSS) has been carried out in the USA by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) since 1972. Ten surveys have been conducted since then (annually except for 1979 and 1981), funded mainly, but not exclusively, by the National Science Foundation.

The main purpose of the survey series is to provide social indicators to monitor and help explain social change. It offers the social science community high-quality data based on a standard questionnaire, with identical questions appearing in every survey or in rotation. Copies of the data can be obtained from NORC at cost as soon as the field-work and data preparation have finished.

The sample for each survey is about 1500 people aged 18 and over. Data can be pooled from a series of surveys to provide larger numbers for subgroup analysis (e.g. by culture or occupation subgroups).

As the series has developed, its uses have extended beyond its original purpose. For instance, it has been used extensively for methodological research. Split ballot methods have been used to look at question wording, order and context effects. Non-response bias and the use of alternative sampling schemes have also been studied.

Another extension has been cross-national comparisons with data from Germany, Britain and Australia. GSS data



are also used as a teaching aid on sociological courses.

The main function of the series, however, continues to be to provide information for scientific study and monitoring of social trends, and the GSS is widely used by many academic and policy researchers.

Chart 1 shows the gradual development of the use of GSS for research publications. Over 1,000 articles, scholarly papers, books, or dissertations have made use of data from the first nine General Social Surveys. Examples are listed at the end of this section.

The most obvious use of the data is for examining changes over time. As Alice Rossi, president of the American Sociological Association, remarked, "One of the important things that has developed in the last 10 or 15 years within the social sciences is the realization that we're really historical sciences. Because any humans we study are the products of one time and one place, our generalisations have to be modest until we know why things change".

The GSS has contributed to the studies of many aspects of sociology, in particular, to the documentation of the growth of liberalism up to the mid 1970s. It has generated work on topics such as civil liberties (Davis, 1975), racism (Taylor, Sheatsley and Greeley, 1978; Smith, 1981; Condran, 1981), feminism (Cherlin and Walters, 1981; Spitze and Huber, 1979; Smith, 1976), and abortion (Evers and McGee, 1981; Tedrow and Maloney, 1979).

The GSS can also be used to examine subgroups. For example, Dons (1982) developed an ethnic typology that revealed striking differences in attitudes between racial, regional, religious and nationality subgroups. Chart 2

below shows the large differences between subgroups in the numbers who support abortion for married women who do not want more children.

The following publications are a few examples of work based on the GSS.

Jon P. Alston, "A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Church attendance Patterns in the United States and France," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 16 (Fall, 1975), pp 268-80.

Mark Evers and Jeanne McGee, "The Trend and Pattern in Attitudes Toward Abortion: 1965-1976," *Social Indicators Research* 7 (January 1980), pp 251-267.

Robert M. Hauser, Peter J. Dickinson, Harry P. Travis, and John N. Koffel, "Structural Changes in Occupational Mobility among Men in the United States", *American Sociological Review*, 40 (October 1975), pp 585-598.

Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformation of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s*. 2nd Ed. New York: Norton, 1978.

Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Rebecca Adams, Carol A. Heimer, Kim Lane Scheppelle, Tom W. Smith and D. Garth Taylor, *Crime and Punishment: Changing Attitudes in America*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

James D. Wright and Sonia R. Wright, "Social Class and Parental Values for Children: A Partial Replication and Extension of the Kohn Thesis," *American Sociological Review*, 41 (June 1976), pp 527-537.

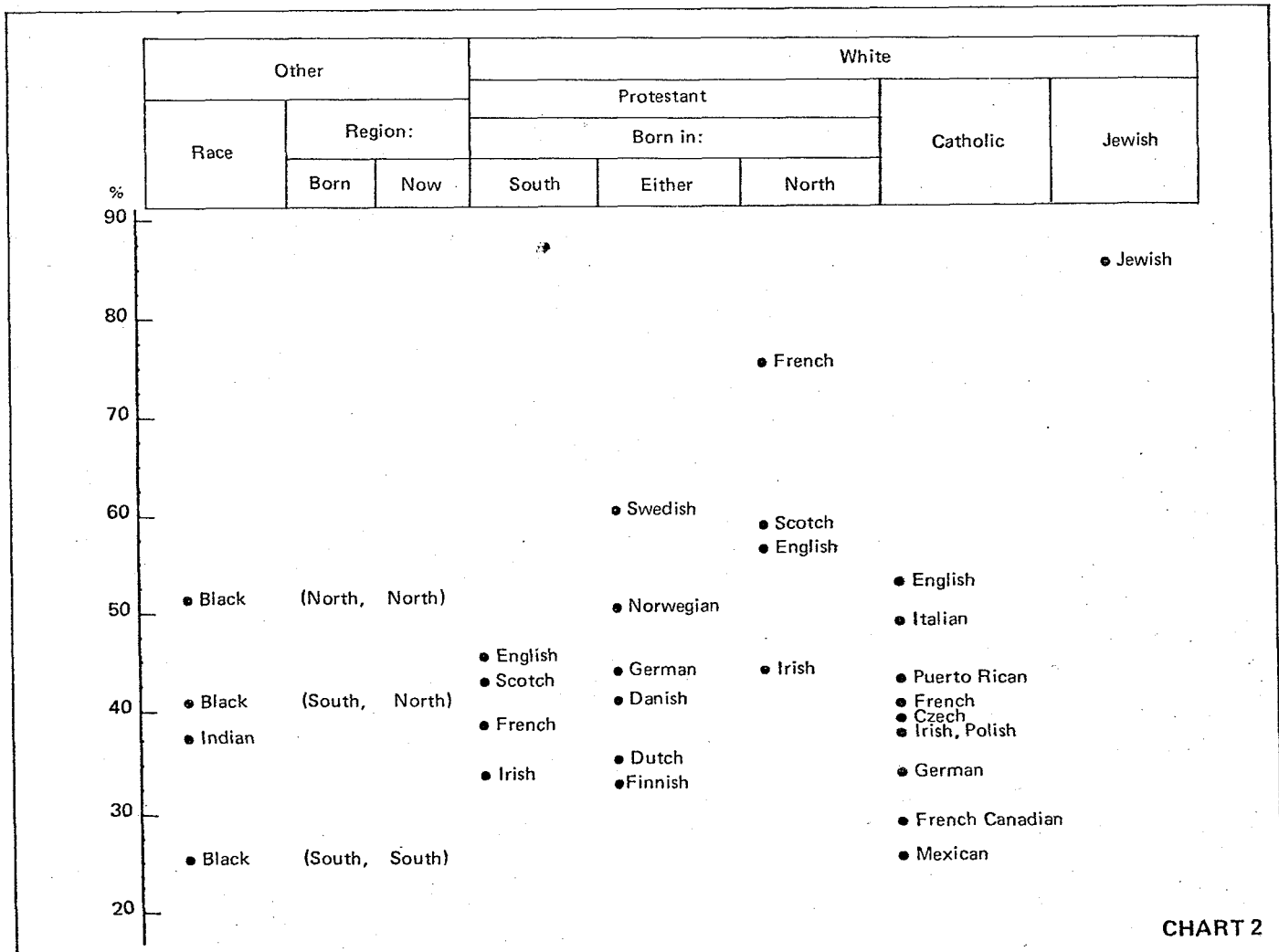


CHART 2

Manfred Kuchler : the Allbus project

The ALLBUSS project in Germany is modelled on the US General Social Survey. It provides primary data to the whole social science community and is designed as a repeated survey with shifting emphases on particular subject areas. The first survey was conducted in 1980, and the surveys have been repeated biennially. Funding comes from the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft" with — at present — Walter Muller (Mannheim), Franz Urban Pappi (Keil), Erwin K. Scheuch (Cologne), and Rolf Zeigler (Munich) as principal investigators. The ALLBUS project is carried out in co-operation with ZUMA (Centre for Survey Research & Methodology), an institution for academic social science research.

All data from the ALLBUS surveys (sample size around 3,000) are made immediately available to all researchers through the Central Archive in Cologne. A well-documented codebook is provided even before ALLBUS principal investigators have had a chance to do substantive

Roger Jowell : the British Social Attitudes Survey

The British Social Attitudes Survey was set up about a year ago with support from the Nuffield Foundation and obtained a grant from the SSRC towards the fieldwork for the first round in March and April 1983. The Monument Trust has agreed to fund three further years: four annual readings (sample size approximately 1,500) until 1986.

The Social Attitudes Survey series is designed to produce annual measures that will complement on the one hand government series like the GSS and FES, which deal largely with facts and behaviour patterns, and on the other hand the data on party political attitudes produced by the polls.

The questionnaire takes about 70 minutes to administer and is supplemented by a self-completion questionnaire — left for respondents to return — with another 20 minutes or so of questions. Broadly the questionnaire is in four sections:

1. Political attitudes and leanings, including views on constitutional and structural views.

Anthony Heath : the British Election Surveys

The British Election Surveys have taken place immediately after every General Election since 1964, giving a total of seven so far. Two non-election year surveys were also held in 1963 and 1969, and a postal referendum study in 1975. Additional Scottish studies were held in 1974 and 1979, and an additional Welsh study in 1979.

The series was originated by David Butler (Nuffield, Oxford) and Donald Stokes (Michigan), who directed the studies until 1970. The series then passed on to Ivor Crewe and Bo Sarlvik at the University of Essex (later joined by David Robertson), who organised the two 1974 surveys and the 1979 one. The 1983 study was directed by Anthony Heath (Jesus, Oxford), Roger Jowell (SCPR and The City University) and John Curtice (Liverpool).

Nuffield College found the bulk of the funds for initial fieldwork on the Butler and Stokes surveys until the SSRC was set up in 1965. The SSRC then became the major funding agency, wholly supporting the Crewe and Sarlvik

analyses. The objective of the ALLBUS project is to provide recent data "of high methodological standard, not to deliver final reports. ALLBUS data sets are the most often requested studies from the Central Archive, and have been used by numerous people for teaching and research.

Special efforts are made to enhance cross-national research. Questions have been exchanged with the US GSS and other surveys in Hungary, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands. These efforts will be continued.

As an additional feature, special methodological experiments are attached to the survey. ALLBUS 1980 concentrated on interviewer effects, and comparison of scales and scaling techniques in the United States and Germany was undertaken in ALLBUS 82 in co-operation with NORC, Chicago. ALLBUS 84 will highlight a study on the test-retest reliability of selected questions.

2. Economic and labour market attitudes, circumstances and expectations, including questions on unemployment, self-employment, and job security.
3. Public expenditure attitudes and welfare state issues, including questions on health, housing, education, taxation and public provision.
4. Social mores, moral issues (including those on which there has been legislation), including sexism, sex roles and sexual morality, racism, class allegiance and attitudes, crime and punishment.

In all there are about 400 questionnaire variables including a wide range of classification variables. About half of the questions will be repeated annually and the other half biennially, so that fresh topics will be introduced next year.

The reports, to be produced in the spring following each survey, will be no more than a guided tour to the main findings — descriptions of data obtained under various headings, and broad indications of changes in attitude. Data will be lodged in the SSRC Data Archive in Essex as soon as each report is published.

surveys. The Heath, Jowell and Curtice study has been jointly funded by SSRC, Pergamon Press and Jesus College, Oxford.

Broadly, the aim of the Election Studies series has been to explore the changing determinants of electoral behaviour in contemporary Britain. Initially it was modelled on the work of the Michigan School of Political Science in the USA (of which Donald Stokes was a member) and shared the Michigan interest in socialisation and partisan identification as major and stable influences on electoral behaviour. Since then, other interests have come to the fore, reflecting developments in academic political science (such as the rise of the 'consumer' theory of political choice) and changes in the political context (hence an interest in attitudes towards extra-parliamentary protests).

There has been substantial continuity and a common core of questions throughout the surveys. Questions have almost invariably been asked on electoral behaviour (turn-

out, party choice, and timing of the vote decision); on political perceptions and identification (perceived difference between the parties, political interest and party identification); on social and political attitudes (towards trade unions and big business, the death penalty, nationalisation, taxes and social services spending); on subjective data on social class and political antecedents; and on objective biographical data (education, housing tenure, trade union membership, occupation, religion, age, sex and marital status). Most of the political science community believes that this common core of questions is an essential component of the studies.

In conjunction with the sets of questions unique to individual surveys (notably those concerning topical political issues), the common core makes the Election Studies a particularly rich series of data sets, valuable both for cross-sectional and for time-series analyses. The Election Studies are unique in providing detailed data in a continuous series from 1963.

The sample sizes of the Election Surveys have varied from just over 1,000 to nearly 4,000. They have been designed to yield representative cross-sections of the electorate in England, Wales and Scotland (south of the Caledonian Canal). Northern Ireland has always been excluded. Many of the surveys have also included a panel of respondents interviewed on one or more previous surveys. The use of panels has a marked advantage over recall data in identifying respondents who have changed their voting behaviour between elections.

The series began with a stratified random sample of 2,000 respondents drawn from the electoral registers of 80 constituencies in Britain. In 1964 such respondents as could be traced and contacted from the 1963 list were interviewed, yielding 1,482 completed panel interviews. Ageing, death and migration made these surviving panel members unrepresentative of the electorate, so that names were also drawn from the new registers in the same constituencies. When appropriately weighted, these two elements give a representative cross-section of the electorate in 1964. (note, however, that panel members who had moved from their original addresses were excluded from the cross-section, with the result that the sample was smaller than the total number of interviews.)

This pattern, with variations, was followed up to and including 1979. The 1983 sample consisted of a cross-section only. A postal panel survey had been planned as an addition to, rather than as a component of, the sample but timing and lack of finance ruled it out.

Although the panel structure has advantages, and its inclusion reduces the cost of the cross-section, it also has draw-backs. There is a high rate of attrition of panel members. For example, of the 2,000 respondents interviewed in 1963, only 36% remained in 1970; and of the 2,464 new respondents drawn in February 1974, only 31% remained in 1979. Attrition does not seem to be a consequence solely of ageing, death and migration; response rates (after 'out of scope' names were eliminated) were lower in surveys with a panel component than in the pure cross-section samples. In general, response rates in surveys with a large panel component (for example, 1964, 1970 and 1979) have been about 10% lower than in pure cross-sections interviewed at about the same time (for example, 1963, 1969 and 1983), suggesting that response from the panel itself is lower still.

Non-response from the panel could be reduced if the characteristics of the panels (and cross-sections) were checked against the population characteristics known

from sources such as the Census. So far, only a few such checks have been made.

A second weakness of the series is the occasional omissions and wording changes in the core questions, usually in the attitudinal questions rather than those on electoral behaviour or biographical data. For example, the key nationalisation question is missing from the 1970 cross-section, while the wording of the questions on reducing taxes and spending more on social services differs from one survey to another.

The problem seems to arise because the Election Studies have been the projects of individual groups of researchers and not designed as a general resource for the academic community. Since the SSRC's Data Archive was created, the computer revolution has brought reanalysis of data sets within the reach of any numerate social scientist, and increased the number of social and political scientists able and willing to do it. Anthony Heath felt that for a project funded from public sources, the core questions need to be asked in standard form to ensure that the academic community gets as much value as possible from the answers. Non-core elements, varying from survey to survey with the researchers' interests and with developments in politics and political science, could also be included as in series such as the GHS.

The Election Studies are an invaluable resource. Opinion polls provide useful information for political scientists, but they are based on quota samples from a fairly small number of sampling points, use much shorter questionnaires, and lack the detailed (and expensive) occupational coding needed for academic study.

The Election Studies also have great (if so far under-used) value for exploring and charting social change. The detailed biographical information that they contain can be used to describe trends in social mobility, class differences in educational attainment, religious affiliation and marriage patterns. Although the GHS covers some of these topics over a much larger sample, it covers a shorter period and collects sparse occupational data. Again because of the cost of coding the size of the Election Studies is an advantage here.

Another big advantage of the Election Studies is that the cross-sections are manageable. Unlike the GHS, which has a complicated structure requiring sophisticated computing procedures, the Election Studies consist of straightforward data sets based on individual data that can be analysed with popular computing packages such as SPSS. This makes them a valuable teaching resource as well as making them easily accessible to researchers.

These advantages are reflected in the great popularity of the series among users of the SSRC Data Archive. In its January 1983 Bulletin, the Archive gave details of the data sets most often supplied in 1981-82. It noted that except for the Workplace Industrial Relations Study, all the data sets in regular demand came from series rather than one-off studies. This pattern appears to be typical and demonstrates the widespread academic interest in series such as the BES, GHS and FES. The Bulletin also notes that the Election Studies were the most popular single source of data sets, accounting for nearly a quarter of all requests for material from the Archive.

Partly by accident rather than design, the Election Studies have thus become the most widely used series of social-science data sets in Britain. A strong case can be made for consolidating the series and ensuring that the 'core' questions and detailed occupational data continue to be collected.