

Resources for Conducting Cross-national Survey Research

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September, 2014

GSS Cross-national Report No. 36.

Cross-national survey research is a complex and challenging endeavor. Designing a reliable and valid comparative study is notably more difficult than constructing a single monolingual/monocultural survey. Besides the whole array of components that encompass total-survey error in one survey, there is a parallel set of comparison errors that apply in cross-national surveys. Likewise, comparative analysis is complicated by these comparison errors and even well-conducted comparative surveys may produce erroneous results due to failing to achieve functional equivalence at the design, collection, and/or analysis stages. Even locating cross-national data for secondary analysis can be a challenge. This note describes some valuable resources, especially those available on the web, which can assist in conducting cross-national survey research.

The best, overall resource for conducting cross-national survey research is the Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines (CCSG- <http://ccsg.isr.umich.edu/index.cfm>). CCSG developed out of the International Workshop on Comparative Survey Design and Implementation (CSDI – <http://casdiworkshop.org>). The website version has 16 comprehensive chapters plus a glossary:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Study, Organizational, and Operational Structure
- 3 Survey Quality
- 4 Ethical Considerations in Surveys
- 5 Tenders, Bid, and Contract
- 6 Sample Design
- 7 Questionnaire Design
- 8 Adaptation of Survey Instruments
- 9 Translation
- 10 Instrument Technical Design
- 11 Interviewer Recruitment, Selection, and Training
- 12 Pretesting
- 13 Data Collection
- 14 Data Harmonization
- 15 Data Processing
- 16 Data Dissemination

These cover all major components of conducting cross-national survey research except for analysis. CCSG is frequently updated and a comprehensive revision is underway with release scheduled for 2015.

A second useful general source is Market, Opinion, and Social Research – Vocabulary and Service of the International Organization for Standardization’s Technical Committee 225 (http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=53439). It especially has good coverage of contracting and result reporting standards. Unfortunately, it is not free, costing 158 Swiss francs.

For the management of cross-national surveys, several tools are under development by the Data Service Infrastructure for the Social Sciences and Humanities project (DASISH) funded by the European Union (EU) (<http://dasish.eu/>). These include the Questionnaire Design and Development Tool, the

Question Variable Database, and the Translation Management Tool. These are designed for interoperability with each other. Additionally, there is proposal to the EU for Synergies for Europe's Research Infrastructure in the Social Sciences (SERISS) to further the work of DASISH on these and related tools and to coordinate work by the European Social Survey (ESS), the Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), the Generations and Gender Program, and the European Values Survey.

Besides the Translation Management Tool underdevelopment by DASISH, there are the ESS's Round 6 Translation Guidelines (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round6/methods/ESS6_translation_guidelines.pdf). These guidelines apply the TRAPD methodology (Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting and Documentation) for optimizing translation.

There are several programs designed to assess the quality of survey questions. Survey Quality Prediction 2.0 (<http://sqp.upf.edu/>) analyzes question text and various metadata fields about the items and produces quality predictions related to reliability and validity. It was developed in part using the ESS and Willem Saris and Daniel Oberski were awarded the Mitofsky Innovators Award by the American Association for Public Opinion Research in 2014 for its creation. The Question Understanding Aid (QUAID) <http://mnemosyne.csl.psyc.memphis.edu/QUAID/aboutquaid.htm> is a program to assess question wordings. It identifies problematic features of items that may confuse respondent and lower reliabilities. QUAID is designed to identify items with unfamiliar technical terms, vague or imprecise relative terms, vague or ambiguous noun phrases, complex syntax structures, and high demands on working memory. QUAID is based solely on English examples from American surveys (505 questions on 11 surveys developed by the US Census Bureau) and thus is not rooted in cross-national/cultural data. It was primarily developed by Andrew C. Graesse and colleagues (Graesser, A. C., Cai, Z., Louwerse, M., & Daniel, F. (2006), "Question Understanding Aid (QUAID): A web facility that helps survey methodologists improve the comprehensibility of questions," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70, 3–22).

To both find existing cross-national data for secondary analysis, documentation relating to these studies, and general information about cross-national survey research, one should consult both data archives and program-specific websites.

Major survey archives with notable cross-national/international collections include:

ASEP/JDS Banco de Datos: <http://www.jdsurvey.net/jds/jdsurvey.jsp>

Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA): <http://cessda.org>

GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences, University of Cologne: www.gesis.org/en/institute/gesis-scientific-sections/data-archive-for-the-social-sciences

Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan: www.icpsr.umich.edu

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (Norwegian Social Science Data Services), University of Bergen: www.nsd.uib.no

Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut: www.ropercenter.uconn.edu

Social Science Japan Data Archive at the University of Tokyo: <http://ssjda.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en>

UK Data Archive, University of Essex: www.data-archive.ac.uk

At these archival websites some especially useful resources for cross-national survey research are the following:

CESSDA's Data Catalogue: <http://www.cessda.net/catalogue/>

ICPSR's Browse International Data: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/international.jsp>

GESIS Data for Comparative Research: <http://www.gesis.org/en/institute/competence-centers/european-data-laboratory/data-resources/data-for-comparative-research/>

GESIS International Data Resources: <http://www.gesis.org/en/institute/competence-centers/rdc-international-survey-programmes/international-data-resources/>

GESIS Online Study Catalogue (ZACAT): <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/>

Roper Center's Latin American Databank: <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/latin-american/latin-american-databank.html>

UK Data Archives/ Data Services Variable and Question Bank: <http://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/variables>

The European archives are strong in their collection of comparative studies, especially those covering their continent. US archives are more likely to hold individual, international surveys. The Roper Center has surveys from 93 countries/regions including 12,299 from the US and 7,560 from other countries. ICPSR's Browse by Geography option lists studies from over 100 nations and regions.

Besides the major archives and the catalogues and search tools designed to access their holdings, there are the websites maintained by individual cross-national programs. Major general, social-science collaborations include the following:

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems: <http://www.cses.org/>

Comparative National Elections Project: <http://www.cnep.ics.ul.pt/index1.asp>

East Asian Social Survey: <http://www.eassda.org/modules/doc/index.php?doc=intro>

Eurobarometer: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

European Social Survey: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

European Values Survey: <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

Global Barometer:¹ <http://www.globalbarometer.net/>

Afrobarometer: <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

Arab Barometer: <http://arabbarometer.org/>

Asian Barometer: <http://www.asianbarometer.org/>

Latinobarometer: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

International Social Survey Program: www.issp.org

Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop>

World Values Survey: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>

There are also harmonization projects that merge and/or make more comparable studies not originally designed for comparative purposes such as the following:

Eurostat: <http://epp.eurostat.europa.eu>

Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International (IPUMS-I):

<https://international.ipums.org/international>

International Stratification and Mobility File: www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/da/Mobility/mobindex.html

Luxembourg Income Study (LIS): www.lisproject.org

United Nations: <http://unstats.un.org>

Sometimes the harmonizations consist of only aggregated data in the form of tables and reports, while in other cases microlevel datasets are produced (e.g. LIS and IPUMS-I).

Besides the general topic, general population social science and harmonized cross-national surveys, there are other types of comparative surveys. Many examples are listed in Tom W. Smith and Yang-Chih Fu, "The Globalization of Surveys," GSS Cross-National Report No. 34. Chicago: NORC, 2014 (<http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gss/documents//CNRT/CNR34.pdf>).

¹ The series of interrelated studies known variously as the New Democracies Barometers, the New Europe Barometers, and the Eurasia Barometers are also listed as affiliated with the Global Barometers, but are not directly linked nor integrated. They are organized by the Centre for the Study of Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde and many of these surveys are archived at the UK Data Archive.

The holy grail of having one search tool to locate study- and question-level information across surveys, time, and countries has not yet been developed, but progress towards that end is being made. CESSDA has as its major objective “to provide access to data across repositories, nations, languages, and research purposes.” Currently its data catalogue covers 8439 studies from its 13 European national partner archives and searches cover all of these linked holdings. Searches can be conducted by data provider (archive), topic, and keywords, but not by full text, date, or other fields. Another initiative is underway at GESIS. An integrated file has been constructed for all EVS surveys and variables and a menu categorizes and lists all variables and when clicked gives the question wording, in what years and what countries that variables was asked, and its original question number (<http://info1.gesis.org/EVS/Variables/>). GESIS is also working on a similar program for the ISSP.

Besides the archival catalogues and search programs mentioned above, there are other resources for locating questions and results. Polling the Nations (<http://www.orspub.com/>) allows question-level searches. It provides questions wordings, marginals, and some study-level information, but microlevel datasets are not available. It contains over 600,000 questions with tens of thousands from over 100 countries outside the US. It operates on a fee-for-search basis. IPOLL at the Roper Center (<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/home/index.cfm>) has over 600,000 questions, allows searches by date, topic, data collector, and full text. Besides the question wording, marginals, and study-level information, in many cases it provides selective cross-tabulations (RoperExplorer) and links to microlevel datasets (RoperExpress). IPOLL is restricted to US data and charges for searches and downloads.

While the resources discussed above focus on microlevel surveys and variables, macrolevel (especially country-level) variables are equally important and multilevel research designs are often optimal for cross-national research. The ESS routinely collects and makes available country-level data (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/essmd>). A few examples from the survey archives listed above include NSD’s Macro Data Guide (<http://www.nsd.uib.no/macrodataloguide/>) and European Election Database (http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/) and many of the listings under ICPSR’s Browse International (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/international.jsp>). Of course country-level data can also be secured from many other sources. For example, see the sources listed at the European Data Center for Work and Welfare (www.edac.eu) and the Association of Religion Data Archives (<http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/datasource.asp>).