

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY: AN ANALYSIS OF USAGE OF
THE GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY, 1972-1982

By Tom W. Smith

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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 and in 1980 and 1982 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 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 priorities. 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 and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan.

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 (1982), lists 870 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 870 papers in the bibliography have a total of 1,364 authorships; 15 with institutional authors, 504 with single authors, 245 with two authors, 77 with three authors, 23 with four authors, 4 with five authors, and 2 with six authors. Most authors (87.3 percent) are academics with college affiliations. They are followed by associates of research centers, foundations, or associations (7.6 percent), government employees (2.1 percent), journalists and editors (1.3 percent), and unknown (1.6 percent). Among the academics, Sociology predominated (70.4 percent), followed by Political Science (12.0 percent), Business Administration/Management (5.3 percent), Communications (2.9 percent), Criminal Justice and Law (2.5 percent), Psychology (1.9 percent), Medicine/Health (1.7 percent) and others, including anthropologists, statisticians, geographers, educators, etc. (3.3 percent). Within Sociology almost every speciality is covered including gerontology, demography, religious studies, statistical and survey methods, rural and urban studies, cross national comparisons, social deviance, social change, social control, stratification, mobility, etc.

What¹

The counting of variables 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 536 variables. Of these, fully 95 (.177) are not used in any of the papers analyzed here. While this seems like a high number of unused items, it is actually misleading. Of the 95 unused variables, 48 appear only in the 1982 survey, and 14 in only the 1980 (total of 62). 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 338 papers, 1973 in 449, 1974 in 461, 1975 in 380, 1976 in 354, 1977 in 316, 1978 in 208, 1980 in 72, and 1982 in 8. The more recent the survey the less opportunity there has been to use it.) Excluding these variables from consideration we find that 33 (.070) of the remaining variables have never been used.

The largest group of 10 unused variables consists of the Department of Labor's measures of general education and vocational training needed per occupation; and accompanying prestige score for respondent, father, and spouse; and spouse levels for data, people, and things (DOTPRES, SPDOTGED, SPDOTSVP, SPDOTPRE, PADOTGED, PADOTSVP, PADOTPRE, SPDOTDATA, SPDOTPEO, SPDOTTHN).

Another 8 unused variables consist of items which appeared in only a single survey: respondent's and spouse's days and shifts of work (SPDAYS, SPHOUR, WORKDY, WORKHR) which appeared in only the 1972 survey, interviewer's ranking of cooperation (COOP2) used in 1972, a variant wording on marijuana

¹This section is based on the 751 papers that have been abstracted in the Annotated Bibliography. It excludes the 119 papers in the supplement.

legalization (GRASSY) used in 1978, smoking cigarettes during last week (CIGWEEK) used in 1977, and racial interaction of employer-employee (RACSUPS) used in 1977.

Other (6) 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, BIRTHMO), hours normally worked by spouses temporarily not working (SPHRS2), and branch of armed forces (VETKIND).

Finally, the other unused variables consist of the following 9 miscellaneous items: number of children expected (CHLDSOON), filters to the equal rights question (ERAREAD,ERAMEANS) and several life trauma items (CHLDDTH, HOSREL4, UNREL4, TRAREL1, TRAREL5, TRAUMA5, SIBDEATH).

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 some of the trauma items 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, race, sex. The top cultural 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 indicated 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 dozen groups of items include three on race relations, three on crime and punishment, the confidence scale, the Stouffer civil liberty items, the anomia scale, the spending priority items, a sexual morality item, and an item on personal trust. 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 five to nine times, expectation of war nine times, support for the United Nations 12 times, and involvement in foreign affairs, 19 times.

When

The GSSs have gained usages with time. There was only a single use in 1972, six in 1973, 21 in 1974, 49 in 1975, 74 in 1976, 58 in 1977, 140 in 1978, 139 in 1979, 156 in 1980, 131 in 1981, and 92 in 1982 or forthcoming and

three 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. This growth has continued despite the fact that from 1978 to 1982 the GSS was conducted on a biennial basis. The large number of papers already recorded for 1982 suggests continued growth of usages¹.

Where

Papers using the GSSs have appeared in a wide variety of places. Journal articles lead with 452 occurrences followed by presentations at scholarly meetings with 184, books with 120, reports with 66, and student dissertations and theses with 48. As Table 2 details, most have appeared at conferences or in journals in the field of sociology. Virtually every major sociological and survey research journal has had articles using the GSSs with the Public Opinion Quarterly leading with 37 and closely followed by Social Forces (28), the Journal of Marriage and the Family (27) and the American Sociological Review (23). 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 (American Political Science Review), psychology (American Psychologist), and education (Journal of Research and Development in Education),

¹Our coverage is less complete for the more recent years. In our analysis of usage in the 1981 edition of the Annotated Bibliography we counted 197 uses for 1972-1977, 127 for 1978, 122 for 1979, 134 for 1980, and 77 for 1981 or forthcoming. Our current count shows an increase of 6.1 percent for 1972-1977, 11.1 percent for 1978, 13.9 percent for 1979, 16.4 percent for 1980, and 70.1 percent for 1981. This probably means that usage is continuing to expand.

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, inter-generational 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 III 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 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 politics and policy.

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 over 140 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, is for even more extensive and diverse usage in the coming years.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PAPERS USING GSS VARIABLES BY VARIABLE TYPE

GSS Variable	Number of Papers
<u>Demographics</u>	
Years of Schooling (EDUC,DEGREE)	408
Age (AGE)	383
Race (RACE)	349
Sex (SEX)	347
Occupational Standing (OCC,PRESTIGE)	261
Total Family Income (INCOME,INCOME72,INCOME77)	250
Religion (RELIG)	213
Size of Place (NORCSIZ2,NORCSIZE,XNORCSIZ,SIZE,SRBELT,PSUSIZE)	157
Marital Status (MARITAL)	155
Region (REGION)	153
<u>Personal Evaluation</u>	
Personal Happiness (HAPPY)	115
Job Satisfaction (SATJOB)	102
Family Satisfaction (SATFAM)	81
Financial Satisfaction (SATFIN)	80
Friendship Satisfaction (SATFRND)	76
Leisure Satisfaction (SATHOBBY)	71
<u>Attitudes</u>	
Abortions ABNOMORE(93),ABPOOR(83),ABHLTH(78),ABDEFECT(78), ABSINGLE(77),ABRAPE(69)	69-93
Capital Punishment (CAPPUN,CAPPUN2)	78
Stouffer (Civil Liberties) SPKATH(74),SPKCOM(77),SPKSOC(43), SPKHOMO(41),SPKMIL(24),SPKRAC(22),LIBATH(58),LIBCOM(61), LIBSOC(40),LIBHOMO(33),LIBMIL(19),LIBRAC(18),COLATH(57), COLCOM(62),COLSOC(39),COLHOMO(38),COLMIL(20),COLRAC(18)	18-77
Interracial Marriages (RACMAR)	79
Confidence in Institutions CONBUS(71),CONFED(76),CONLABOR(65), CONLEGIS(73),CONMEDIC(69),COMPRESS(68),CONEDUC(64), CONCLERG(65),CONJUDGE(69),CONARMY(69),CONSCI(57),CONFINAN(39)	39-76
Spending Priorities NATFARE(72),NATEDUC(63),NATCITY(64), NATENVIR(63),NATHEAL(65),NATARMS(68),NATRACE(58),NATCRIME(60), NATDRUG(52),NATAID(47),NATSPAC(48)	47-72

TABLE 1 (Continued)

GSS Variable	Number of Papers
Court Severity (COURTS)	67
Anomia ANOMIA1(37), ANOMIA2(36), ANOMIA3(36), ANOMIA4(45), ANOMIA5(64), ANOMIA6(60), ANOMIA7(60), ANOMIA8(44), ANOMIA9(43)	36-64
Premarital Sex (PREMARSX)	61
School Busing (BUSING)	56
Afraid to Walk at Night (FEAR)	55
Black Dinner Guest (RACDIN)	54
Trusts People (TRUST)	54
<u>Behavioral and Related</u>	
Church Attendance	121
Membership in Various Organizations MEMUNION, UNION(46), MEMFRAT(27), MEMSERV(23), MEMCHURH(31), MEMHOBBY(24), MEMLIT(27), MEMNAT(24), MEMPOLIT(26), MEMSPORT(26), MEMYOUTH(23), MEMFARM(22), MEMGREEK(21), MEMOTHER(18)	18-46
Visit Friends (SOCFRIEND)	30
Visit Relatives (SOCREL)	27
Voting in 1972 Election (VOTE72)	27
Own Gun (OWNGUN)	24
Visit Neighbors (SOCOMMUN)	24
Robbed (ROBBRY)	24
Burglarized (BURGLR)	24
Presidential Choice in 1972 (PRES72)	21
Frequent Bars (SOCBAR)	16

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF JOURNALS AND CONFERENCES BY FIELD

	Journals	Conferences
A. Summary		
Sociology and Related	50.6%	69.2%
Gerontology	(4.4)	(5.5)
Criminology	(2.2)	(1.1)
Demography	(1.3)	--
Political Science	4.8	6.0
Psychology	4.6	--
Religion	4.4	2.2
Management	3.1	2.8
Communications	2.6	1.1
Education	1.8	0.5
Statistics	--	4.9
Survey Research	9.7	3.3
Interdisciplinary	5.5	1.6
Public Interest/Commentary	7.7	2.8
Government	0.7	--
Miscellaneous	<u>4.4</u>	<u>5.5</u>
	99.9	99.9
	(454)	(182)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u>	
Public Opinion Quarterly	37
Social Forces	28
Journal of Marriage and the Family	27
American Sociological Review	23
Public Opinion	17
Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Sciences	13
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	12
Journal of Gerontology	10
American Journal of Sociology	9
Sociological Focus	8
Ethnicity	8
Journal of Applied Psychology	7
Review of Religious Research	7
American Journal of Political Science	6
Journal of Communications	6
Rural Sociology	6
Gerontologist	5
Sociological Quarterly	5
Academy of Management Journal	5
Social Science Research	5
Communication Research	4
Contemporary Sociology	4
Criminology	4
Family Planning Perspective	4
Social Problems	4
Social Indicators Research	4
Pacific Sociological Review	4
Review of Public Data Use	4
American Demographics	3
Personnel Psychology	3
Human Relations	3
Public Interest	3
Social Policy	3
Resources for the Future	3
American Politics Quarterly	3
Sociology and Social Research	3
Social Psychology Quarterly	3
Psychology Today	3
Sociology of Education	3
Teaching Sociology	3
Demography	3
International Journal of Aging and Human Development	3
Political Science Quarterly	3
Journal of Social Issues	2
Marquett Business Review	2
Society	2
Omega	2
Social Science Quarterly	2
Archives of Sexual Behavior	2
Journal of Black Studies	2
Journal of Social Psychology	2

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (Continued)	
Social Biology	2
Research on Aging	2
Journal of Clinical Psychology	2
Fortune	2
Sociological Symposium	2
Sociological Methods and Research	2
Journal of Family Issues	2
Sociological Analysis	2
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare	2
International Journal of Sociology of the Family	2
Daedalus	2
Annual Review of Sociology	2
Journal of Homosexuality	2
Social Studies of Science	2
Texas Business Review	2
Political Methodology	2
Phylon	2
Population and Development Review	2
Dissent	1
The Nation	1
University of North Carolina Newsletter	1
Cornell Journal of Social Relations	1
Journal of Research and Development in Education	1
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	1
The American Scholar	1
Social Science Review	1
Scientific American	1
Status	1
Science	1
High School Behavioral Science	1
New Republic	1
America	1
Environmental Affairs	1
The Critic	1
Southern Journal of Criminal Justice	1
Sex Roles	1
Business Horizons	1
Personnel Administration	1
Personnel	1
Computers and the Humanities	1
Our Sunday Visitor	1
Discovery	1
Journal of Sex Research	1
Journal of Broadcasting	1
Mid-American Review of Sociology	1
American Political Science Review	1
American Psychologist	1
Journal of Market Research	1
Psychometrika	1
Public Relations News	1
Wilson Quarterly	1

	Number of Papers
<hr/>	
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (Continued)	
Overview	1
EPA Journal	1
Sociological Methodology	1
Journalism Quarterly	1
Historical Methods	1
Media Politics	1
Wyoming Issues	1
Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology	1
Monthly Labor Review	1
Multivariate Behavioral Research	1
Community and Development Issues	1
Intercom	1
Qualitative Sociology	1
Journal of Management	1
Human Organization	1
Public Administration Review	1
Journal of Geography	1
Anthropological Quarterly	1
Social Indicators Newsletter	1
Political Behavior	1
Forum for Liberal Education	1
American Journal of Orthopsychiatry	1
Educational Research Quarterly	1
Youth and Society	1
Journal of Conflict Resolution	1
Jewish Journal of Sociology	1
Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology	1
Journal of Educational Technology Systems	1
College Student Journal	1
Journal of Studies on Alcohol	1
Administrative Science Quarterly	1
Research in Public Policy and Management	1
Inside Illinois Politics	1
Perspectives: The Civil Rights Quarterly	1
Education	1
IASSIT Newsletter	1
Journal of Police Science and Administration	1
Organizational Behavior and Human Performance	1
Texas Law Review	1
Co-Existence	1
Research in the Sociology of Work	1
Journal of Health and Social Behavior	1
Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior	1
Family Coordinator	1
Addictive Diseases	1
Curriculum Inquiry	1
Law and Contemporary Problems	1
Addictive Behavior	1
International Journal of Sport Psychology	1
