

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY: AN ANALYSIS OF USAGE OF
THE GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY, 1972-1985

By Tom W. Smith

GSS Project Report No. 14
National Opinion Research Center

July, 1986

This research was done for the General Social Survey Project directed by James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith. The project is supported by the National Science Foundation, Grant No. SES-8118731.

The National Data Program for the Social Sciences is a data diffusion project and program of social indicators research. Annually from 1972 (except in 1979 and 1981) the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, has conducted the 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 (1986), lists 1,498 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 1,498 papers in the bibliography have a total of 2,336 authorships; 27 with institutional authors, 876 with single authors, 455 with two authors, 125 with three authors, 37 with four authors, 3 with five authors, and 2 with six authors. Most authors (87.2 percent) are academics with college affiliations. They are followed by associates of research centers, foundations, or associations (8.1 percent), government employees (1.4 percent), journalists and editors (1.4 percent), others (0.7. percent) and unknown (1.1 percent). Among the academics, Sociology predominated (69.6 percent), followed by Political Science (11.6 percent), Business Administration/Management (5.4 percent), Communications (2.9 percent), Psychology (2.5 percent), Medicine/Health (2.0 percent), Criminal Justice and Law (1.6 percent), and others, including anthropologists, statisticians, economists, geographers, educators, etc. (4.3 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.

What

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 (1972-1984) contained 755 variables. Of these, fully 104 (.138) have not been used in the papers analyzed here. While this seems like a high number of unused items, it is actually misleading. Of the 104 unused variables, 80 appear only in the 1984 survey. There has not yet been sufficient time for this survey to be widely used by the social science community. (The 1972 survey was used in 579 papers, 1973 in 763, 1974 in 791, 1975 in 700, 1976 in 679, 1977 in 674, 1978 in 514, 1980 in 360, 1982 in 174, 1983 in 76, 1984 in 51, and 1985 in 25. The more recent the survey the less opportunity there has been to use it.) Excluding these variables from consideration we find that 24 (.032) of the remaining variables have never been used.

The largest group of 13 unused variables consist of items which appeared in only a single survey: interviewer's ranking of cooperation (COOP2) used in 1972, a social class scale (USCLASS1-4,6,7) used in 1983, three racial items (RACNOBUY, RACMIX, and RACTRUST) asked of blacks in 1982, and two ERA follow-ups (ERAWHY1, 2) asked in 1982.

Other (5) of the unused items can be classified as minor, detailed demographics. Variables of this type include date of birth (BIRTHDAY), hours normally worked by spouses temporarily not working (SPHRS2), and branch of armed forces (VETKIND), and two DOT occupation variables for spouse (SPDOTPEO, SPDOTTHN).

¹This section is based on the 1302 papers that have been abstracted in the Annotated Bibliography. It excludes the 196 papers in the supplement.

Finally, the other unused items consist of three ratings of the dwelling (DWELLING, DWELCITY, DWELNGH), two parental church attendance items (MAATTEND, PAATTEND), and a filter to the equal rights question (ERAMEANS).

In general, the unused items tend to deal with minor details, be partly duplicated by other variables, appear only on a single survey and/or appear only in recent surveys.

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 fifth and sixth. Coming right behind education are the three basic biological attributes: age, sex, race. The top cultural demographic--religion--ranks seventh, followed by the geographic variables--region and size of place--at ninth and tenth, and marital status at eighth. 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 14 groups of items include four on race relations, two on crime and punishment, the 13-item confidence scale, the 15 Stouffer civil liberty items, the 9-item anomia scale, the spending priority items, three items on sexual morality, the four women's rights items, and an item on legalization of marijuana. Behavioral and related items are topped by a wide edge by church attendance. Then come group memberships, TV viewing, 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 relatively light is foreign affairs. The seven national thermometer questions (excluding Russia) have been used only 14 to 18 times, expectation of war 21 times, support for the United Nations 14 times, and involvement in foreign affairs 34 times.

When

The GSSs have gained usages with time. There were only two uses in 1972, seven in 1973, 22 in 1974, 53 in 1975, 81 in 1976, 67 in 1977, 146 in 1978, 161 in 1979, 179 in 1980, 179 in 1981, 149 in 1982, 117 in 1983, 137 in 1984, 146 in 1985, and 48 in 1986 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. Usage has been in the 150-180 range per annum since 1978, and, as Table 2 indicates, usage may again be moving up.

Where

Papers using the GSSs have appeared in a wide variety of places. Journal articles lead with 750 occurrences followed by presentations at scholarly meetings with 309, books with 263, reports with 107, and student dissertations and theses with 69. As Table 3 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 60 and followed by the Journal of Marriage and the Family (48), the American Sociological Review (37) and Social Forces (33). 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), 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 225 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. In addition, the collection and distribution of the cross national and topical modules opens up many new research opportunities. The prognosis for the future, based on past trends and recent developments, 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)	704
Age (AGE)	671
Sex (SEX)	608
Race (RACE)	603
Occupational Standing (OCC,PRESTIGE)	449
Total Family Income (INCOME,INCOME72,INCOME77,INCOME82)	433
Religion (RELIG)	373
Marital Status (MARITAL)	296
Region (REGION)	276
Size of Place (NORCSIZ2,NORCSIZE,XNORCSIZ,SIZE,SRCBELT,PSUSIZE)	268
<u>Personal Evaluation</u>	
Personal Happiness (HAPPY)	185
Job Satisfaction (SATJOB)	149
Family Satisfaction (SATFAM)	131
Financial Satisfaction (SATFIN)	117
Friendship Satisfaction (SATFRND)	112
Happy Marriage	108
Community Satisfaction (SATCITY)	104
<u>Attitudes</u>	
Abortions ABNOMORE(188),ABPOOR(166),ABHLTH(158),ABDEFECT(160), ABSINGLE(160),ABRAPE(148)	148-188
Stouffer (Civil Liberties) SPKATH(137),SPKCOM(144),SPKSOC(62), SPKHOMO(91),SPKMIL(57),SPKRAC(53),LIBATH(106),LIBCOM(106), LIBSOC(54),LIBHOMO(74),LIBMIL(43),LIBRAC(41),COLATH(102), COLCOM(107),COLSOC(54),COLHOMO(75),COLMIL(43),COLRAC(40)	40-144
Spending Priorities NATFARE(137),NATEDUC(130),NATCITY(118), NATENVIR(123),NATHEAL(126),NATARMS(133),NATRACE(114), NATCRIME(100),NATDRUG(95),NATAID(88),NATSPAC(86)	86-137
Interracial Marriages (RACMAR)	129
Capital Punishment (CAPPUN,CAPPUN2)	126

TABLE 1 (Continued)

GSS Variable	Number of Papers
Sexual Morality PREMARSX(120),XMARSEX(101),HOMOSEX(105)	101-120
Confidence in Institutions CONBUS(110),CONFED(114),CONLABOR(104), CONLEGIS(108),CONMEDIC(103),COMPRESS(102),CONEDUC(93), CONCLERG(102),CONJUDGE(105),CONARMY(104),CONSCI(86),CONFINAN(66), CONTV(77)	66-114
Court Severity (COURTS)	103
Feminism Scale FEPRES(103),FEWORK(92),FEHOME(90),FEPOL(73)	103
School Integration (RACSCHOL)	101
Anomia ANOMIA1(49),ANOMIA2(49),ANOMIA3(49),ANOMIA4(61), ANOMIA5(97),ANOMIA6(90),ANOMIA7(91),ANOMIA8(61),ANOMIA9(58)	49-97
Black Dinner Guest (RACDIN)	90
School Busing (BUSING)	90
Legalize Marijuana (GRASS)	90
<u>Behavioral and Related</u>	
Church Attendance	244
Membership in Various Organizations MEMUNION,UNION(76), MEMFRAT(38),MEMSERV(39),MEMCHURH(43),MEMHOBBY(35),MEMLIT(39), MEMNAT(35),MEMPOLIT(39),MEMSPORT(39),MEMYOUTH(33),MEMFARM(33), MEMGREEK(31),MEMOTHER(27),MEMPROF(44),MEMSCHL(35),MEMVET(38)	27-76
Watch TV (TVHOURS)	54
Visit Friends (SOCFRIEND)	52
Visit Relatives (SOCREL)	50
Own Gun (OWNGUN)	47
Voting in 1972 Election (VOTE72)	44
Frequent Bars (SOCBAR)	35
Visit Neighbors (SOCOMMUN)	31
Burglarized (BURGLR)	24

TABLE 2
OBSERVED AND ESTIMATED USAGES BY YEAR

Year	Observed	Estimated
1972	2	--
1973	7	--
1974	22	--
1975	53	--
1976	81	--
1977	67	--
1978	146	--
1979	161	--
1980	179	--
1981	179	--
1982	149	--
1983	117	132-156 ^a
1984	137	157-169
1985	146	195-201
1986	30	--
Forthcoming	18	--
Unknown	4	--
	1498	

^a These are the mean estimates based on the number of addition citations discovered between earlier editions of the Annotated Bibliography. For example, the 5th edition counted 106 citations dated 1982 while the 6th edition two years later picked up 43 additional usages for a total of 149 and an increase of 40.6%. The mean estimates from various of these past discovery rates were used to estimate the probably number of usages that will be discovered by five years after publication. Two estimates are given because two slightly different procedures were used in estimation.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF JOURNALS AND CONFERENCES BY FIELD

	Journals	Conferences
A. Summary		
Sociology and Related	48.4%	66.0%
Gerontology	(3.5)	(3.9)
Criminology	(2.4)	(1.0)
Demography	(1.2)	(0.6)
Political Science	5.1	6.1
Psychology	4.1	--
Religion	5.7	2.9
Management	3.2	2.9
Communications	2.5	1.0
Education	1.5	0.6
Survey Research	9.5	5.5
Interdisciplinary	6.4	2.9
Public Interest/Commentary	7.5	2.9
Government	0.7	--
Miscellaneous	<u>5.5</u>	<u>9.1</u>
	100.1	99.9
	(750)	(309)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (continued)	
Public Opinion Quarterly	60
Journal of Marriage and the Family	48
American Sociological Review	37
Social Forces	33
Public Opinion	29
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	23
Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Sciences	17
Review of Religious Research	17
American Journal of Sociology	14
Sociological Focus	11
Journal of Gerontology	11
Ethnicity	8
Journal of Communications	8
American Journal of Political Science	8
Pacific Sociological Review/Sociological Perspectives	8
Journal of Applied Psychology	7
Sociological Quarterly	7
Rural Sociology	7
Family Planning Perspective	7
Sociology and Social Research	7
International Journal of Sociology of the Family	6
Social Science Research	6
American Demographics	6
Social Science Quarterly	6
Social Biology	6
Phylon	6
Society	6
Sociological Analysis	6
Gerontologist	5
Academy of Management Journal	5
Personnel Psychology	5
Social Problems	5
Social Indicators Research	5
Political Science Quarterly	5
Annual Review of Sociology	5
Communication Research	5
Contemporary Sociology	5
Criminology	5
American Politics Quarterly	4
Review of Public Data Use	4
Sociological Methods and Research	4
International Journal of Aging and Human Development	4
Journal of Clinical Psychology	4
Sex Roles	4
Journal of Family Issues	3

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (continued)	
Research on Aging	3
Sociological Symposium	3
Social Psychology Quarterly	3
Journal of Contemporary Studies	3
Psychology Today	3
Sociology of Education	3
Teaching Sociology	3
Western Journal of Black Studies	3
Demography	3
Human Relations	3
Public Interest	3
Social Policy	3
Resources for the Future	3
Social Science Review	3
Journal of Politics	3
Journal of Social Psychology	3
Political Methodology	3
Work and Occupation	3
Journal of Social Issues	2
American Behavioral Scientist	2
Marquett Business Review	2
Population Research & Policy Review	2
Fortune	2
Peace and Change	2
Archives of Sexual Behavior	2
Journal of the American Statistical Association	2
Journal of Black Studies	2
Educational Research Quarterly	2
Daedalus	2
Long Term Care & Health Services Administration Quarterly	2
Omega	2
Journal of Homosexuality	2
Social Studies of Science	2
Texas Business Review	2
Population and Development Review	2
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare	2
Monthly Labor Review	2
Journal of Research and Development in Education	2
Sociological Methodology	2
Journalism Quarterly	2
Micropolitics	2
Columbia Journalism Review	2
Research in Race and Ethnic Relations	2
American Journal of Police	2
Multivariate Behavioral Research	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (Continued)	
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
Research in the Sociology of Work	1
Journal of Health and Social Behavior	1
Dissent	1
The Nation	1
University of North Carolina Newsletter	1
Cornell Journal of Social Relations	1
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	1
The American Scholar	1
American Political Science Review	1
American Psychologist	1
Journal of Market Research	1
Psychometrika	1
Public Relations News	1
Wilson Quarterly	1
Overview	1
EPA Journal	1
Historical Methods	1
Media Politics	1
Wyoming Issues	1
Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology	1
Family Coordinator	1
Addictive Diseases	1
Curriculum Inquiry	1
Law and Contemporary Problems	1
Addictive Behavior	1
International Journal of Sport Psychology	1
PS	1
Psychological Reports	1
Visual Impairment and Blindness	1
The Humanist	1
The New York Review of Books	1
International Journal of Health Services	1
Tocqueville Review	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (continued)	
American Journal of Public Health	1
Science, Technology, and Human Values	1
International Journal of Addictions	1
Journal of Psychiatric Treatment and Evaluation	1
Focus	1
Journal of Political and Military Sociology	1
IFO Digest	1
Michigan Law Review	1
Journal of Employment Counseling	1
Journal of Electrochemical Society	1
American Educational Research Journal	1
Journal of Labor Research	1
Research in Action	1
Population and Environment	1
Survey Methods Newsletter	1
Reader's Digest	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
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
Scientific American	1
Status	1
Science	1
High School Behavioral Science	1
New Republic	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (Continued)	
America	1
Enviornental Affairs	1
The Critic	1
Southern Journal of Criminal Justice	1
Mid-American Review of Sociology	1
Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior	1
Co-Existence	1
Social Work	1
International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy	1
Sociologus	1
Journal of Voluntary Action Research	1
ASA Footnotes	1
New York Times Magazine	1
Atlantic Monthly	1
TV Guide	1
Bulletin of Peace Proposals	1
Psychology of Women Quarterly	1
Journal of the American Geriatric Society	1
Economic Inquiry	1
Research in Sociology of Education & Socialization	1
Search	1
International Journal of Social Psychiatry	1
Western Political Quarterly	1
Marriage & Family Counselors Quarterly	1
Sociological Inquiry	1
Ethology and Sociobiology	1
Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media	1
NCAN Newsletter	1
Deviant Behavior	1
Sociology of Health & Illness	1
Humboldt Journal of Social Relations	1
Sociological Spectrum	1
Research Urban Policy	1
Conscience	1
Survey Research Newsletter	1
American Banker	1
Journal of Human Resources	1
British Journal of Sociology	1
Atlantic Economic Journal	1
Intelligence	1
Journal of Educational Research	1
Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency	1
Esquire	1
Victimology: An International Journal	1
Health Affairs	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
<hr/>	
B. <u>Journal Appearances</u> (Continued)	
Social Networks	1
ICPSR Bulletin	1
Political Behavior	1
Baylor Business Studies	1
Etudes Polemologiques	1
Library Trends	1