

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND WHY:
AN ANALYSIS OF USAGE OF THE GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY, 1972-1989

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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 (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. Most GSS questions are replicated 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 four 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 (1990), lists 2,260 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.¹

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?

¹ GSS usages are difficult to locate in part because of poor citation practices. Joan E. Sieber ("Investigators' Concerns About Data Sharing," Paper presented at the Public Health Service Workshop, Bethesda, Maryland, April, 1990) found that in a sample of published articles known to use the GSS 12% did not in any way identify the GSS and 87% did not name the principal investigators. In our own searches in Dissertations Abstracts we find that about half of the located usages did not mention the GSS in their title or abstract. This probably means that many usages are never located.

Who

The 2,260 papers in the bibliography have a total of 3,462 authorships; 43 with institutional authors, 1,326 with single authors, 651 with two authors, 181 with three authors, 49 with four authors, 8 with five authors, and 2 with six authors. Most authors (84.6 percent) are academics with college affiliations. They are followed by associates of research centers, foundations, or associations (9.7 percent), journalists and editors (1.7 percent), government employees (1.1 percent), others (0.6 percent) and unknown (2.3 percent). Among the academics, Sociology predominated (66.5 percent), followed by Political Science (13.5 percent), Business Administration/Management (4.6 percent), Psychology (2.7 percent), Communications (2.3 percent), Medicine/Health (2.2 percent), Criminal Justice and Law (1.6 percent), Religion (1.3 percent), Economics (1.1 percent) and others, including anthropologists, statisticians, geographers, educators, etc. (4.1 percent). Within Sociology almost every speciality is covered including gerontology, public health, demography, religious studies, statistical and survey methods, rural and urban studies, cross national comparisons, social deviance, social change, social control, stratification, mobility, etc.

What²

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 (1972-1990) contains 1,668 variables. Usage has been highest among replicating items that have been asked over a long period. Among these demographics have been the most heavily used (Table 1). 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 15 groups of items include five on race relations, two on crime and punishment, the 13-item confidence scale, the 15 Stouffer civil

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This section is based on the 2,036 papers that have been abstracted in the Annotated Bibliography. It excludes the 224 papers in the supplement.

liberty items, the 9-item anomia scale, the spending priority items, the seven-item abortion scale, 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 particular substantive area. Reflecting the smorgasbord content of the GSS, the use of variables has been wide-ranging and varied. Perhaps the one area among the replicating core items in which usage has been relatively light is foreign affairs. The seven national thermometer questions (excluding Russia) have been used only 18 to 29 times, expectation of war 30 times, support for the United Nations 38 times, and involvement in foreign affairs 58 times.

Variables that have appeared in the topical and cross-national modules have also attracted considerable use. For example, the 1985 social networks module has been used 21 times and the 1985 cross-national module on the role of government has 17 uses.

Only four types of items have had little use. First, various experimental variations (e.g. TRUSTY) which have appeared on a single form in a single year have only been used once or twice. Second, various substantive items that have appeared in only a single year and which were not part of a supplement or module have been little used (e.g. PROWAR, SPDUE). Third, a number of minor demographics have been used only occasionally (e.g. the DOT characteristics of spouse's job). Finally, variables added in the last few years have seen little use yet (e.g. VOTE88 and the 1988 and 1989 modules).

When

The GSSs have gained usages with time. There were only two uses in 1972, seven in 1973, 22 in 1974, 53 in 1975, 82 in 1976, 70 in 1977, 145 in 1978, 167 in 1979, 183 in 1980, 187 in 1981, 159 in 1982, 125 in 1983, 145 in 1984, 177 in 1985, 132 in 1986, 136 in 1987, 171 in 1988, 163 in 1989, 130 in 1990 or forthcoming, and four 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

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There has not yet been sufficient time for these variables to be widely used by the social science community. The 1972 survey was used in 813 papers, 1973 in 1,063, 1974 in 1,108, 1975 in 1,018, 1976 in 994, 1977 in 1,009, 1978 in 829, 1980 in 684, 1982 in 472, 1983 in 349, 1984 in 336, 1985 in 262, 1986 in 165, 1987 in 112, 1988 in 69, and 1989 in 16. The more recent the survey the less opportunity there has been to use it.

the spreading familiarity of the GSS to the social science community. Usage has been in the 150-190 range per annum since 1978. Based on actual counts and projections usage probably exceeds 200 per annum in 1989 and 1990 (Table 2).

Where

Papers using the GSSs have appeared in a wide variety of places. Journal articles lead with 1,072 occurrences followed by books with 470, presentations at scholarly meetings with 456, reports with 164, and student dissertations and theses with 98. 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 84 and followed by the Journal of Marriage and the Family (60), the American Sociological Review (49), and Social Forces (42). 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 general scientific nature (e.g., Science and Scientific American), religious journals (e.g. The Tablet), medical journals (MMWR), economic journals (e.g. Economic Inquiry), and journals of a general political or policy nature (e.g., American Enterprise, The Nation, or New Republic). 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

The analysis of the GSS usages demonstrate that the GSS is widely used by a large number of scholars in sociology and the other social sciences, by the government, and by people in many other areas. The GSSs have been used in an extensive and varied number of places including over 310 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 has opened 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 Variables	Number of Papers
<u>Demographics</u>	
Years of Schooling (EDUC,DEGREE)	1023
Age (AGE)	989
Sex (SEX)	888
Race (RACE)	873
Occupational Standing (OCC,PRESTIGE)	730
Total Family Income (INCOME,INCOME72,INCOME77,INCOME82)	612
Religion (RELIG)	573
Marital Status (MARITAL)	435
Region (REGION)	423
Size of Place (NORCSIZ2,NORCSIZE,XNORCSIZ,SIZE,SRCBELT,PSUSIZE)	333
<u>Personal Evaluations</u>	
Personal Happiness (HAPPY)	263
Job Satisfaction (SATJOB)	204
Family Satisfaction (SATFAM)	185
Happy Marriage	166
Friendship Satisfaction (SATFRND)	157
Financial Satisfaction (SATFIN)	152
Community Satisfaction (SATCITY)	137
<u>Attitudes</u>	
Abortions ABNOMORE(290),ABPOOR(255),ABHLTH(239),ABDEFECT(246), ABSINGLE(245),ABRAPE(230)	139-290
Spending Priorities NATFARE(228),NATEDUC(202),NATCITY(173), NATENVIR(189),NATHEAL(189),NATARMS(213),NATRACE(182), NATCRIME(149),NATDRUG(139),NATAID(131),NATSPAC(123)	123-228
Capital Punishment (CAPPUN,CAPPUN2)	244
Interracial Marriages (RACMAR)	194
Stouffer (Civil Liberties) SPKATH(131),SPKCOM(194),SPKSOC(78), SPKHOMO(135),SPKMIL(86),SPKRAC(82),LIBATH(151),LIBCOM(142), LIBSOC(66),LIBHOMO(115),LIBMIL(68),LIBRAC(67),COLATH(142), COLCOM(149),COLSOC(65),COLHOMO(116),COLMIL(65),COLRAC(66)	65-192
Sexual Morality PREMARSX(190),XMARSEX(152),HOMOSEX(177)	152-190
Feminism Scale FEPRES(162),FEWORK(148),FEHOME(164),FEPOL(125)	125-164
Court Severity (COURTS)	148

Confidence in Institutions CONBUS(139),CONFED(143), CONLABOR(127),CONLEGIS(136),CONMEDIC(123), CONPRESS(122),CONEDUC(116),CONCLERG(132), CONJUDGE(132),CONARMY(134),CONSCI(104),CONFINAN(86), CONTV(96)	86-143
School Integration (RACSCHOL)	142
Open Housing (RACSEG)	138
Blacks Pushing to Much (RACPUSH)	138
Anomia ANOMIA1(59),ANOMIA2(61),ANOMIA3(58),ANOMIA4(73), ANOMIA5(136),ANOMIA6(131),ANOMIA7(126),ANOMIA8(73),ANOMIA9(72)	58-136
Legalize Marijuana (GRASS)	132
School Busing (BUSING)	132
<u>Behavioral and Related</u>	
Church Attendance	358
Membership in Various Organizations MEMUNION,UNION(123), MEMFRAT(55),MEMSERV(56),MEMCHURH(71),MEMHOBBY(52), MEMLIT(56),MEMNAT(51),MEMPOLIT(57),MEMSPORT(55), MEMYOUTH(49),MEMFARM(50),MEMGREBK(47),MEMOTHER(40), MEMPROF(65),MEMSCHL(54),MEMVET(57)	40-123
Watch TV (TVHOURS)	88
Visit Friends (SOCFRIEND)	86
Visit Relatives (SOCREL)	81
Own Gun (OWNGUN)	77
Visit Neighbors (SOCOMMUN)	73
Frequent Bars (SOCBAR)	56
Voting in 1972 Election (VOTE72)	53
Burglarized (BURGLR)	41

TABLE 2
OBSERVED AND ESTIMATED USAGES BY YEAR

Year	Observed	Estimated
1972	2	--
1973	7	--
1974	22	--
1975	53	--
1976	82	--
1977	70	--
1978	145	--
1979	167	--
1980	183	--
1981	187	--
1982	159	--
1983	125	--
1984	145	--
1985	177	182 ^a
1986	132	142
1987	136	146
1988	171	190
1989	163	226
1990	82	300+ ^b
Forthcoming	47	--
Unknown	4	--

(2260)

^a These are the mean estimates based on the number of additional citations discovered between earlier editions of the Annotated Bibliography. For example, the 7th edition counted 134 citations dated 1984 while the 8th edition two years later picked up 11 additional usages for a total of 145 and an increase of 7.6%. These estimates are not calculations of the total number of research usages as defined in the bibliography, but projections of the number of such usages our search procedures will eventually locate.

^b Being based on a small number of cases and a large multiplier, the 1990 projection is much less reliable than that for earlier years.

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF JOURNALS AND CONFERENCES BY FIELD

	Journals	Conferences
A. Summary		
Sociology and Related	47.6%	59.4%
Gerontology	(2.7)	(3.7)
Criminology	(2.1)	(1.1)
Demography	(1.3)	(1.1)
Political Science	5.1	6.1
Psychology	3.8	0.2
Religion	6.6	3.1
Management	2.3	4.6
Communications	2.3	1.1
Education	1.2	0.7
Survey Research	11.1	9.2
Interdisciplinary	6.0	3.5
Public Interest/Commentary	6.6	2.9
Government	0.6	--
Miscellaneous	6.8	9.3
	100.0	100.1
	(1,072)	(456)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. Journal Appearances (continued)	
Public Opinion Quarterly	84
Journal of Marriage and the Family	60
American Sociological Review	49
Social Forces	42
Public Opinion	38
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion	33
Review of Religious Research	30
American Journal of Sociology	25
Sociology and Social Research	19
American Academy of Political & Social Sciences	18
Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Sciences	18
Social Science Quarterly	15
NSSReport	13
Journal of Gerontology	12
Sociological Focus	12
Sociological Quarterly	11
Sociological Analysis	10
Journal of Communications	10
Social Indicators Research	10
American Journal of Political Science	9
Political Science Quarterly	9
American Demographics	9
Pacific Sociological Review/Sociological Perspectives	8
Ethnicity	8
Society	8
American Politics Quarterly	8
Annual Review of Sociology	8
Rural Sociology	8
Family Planning Perspective	8
Journal of Applied Psychology	7
Social Biology	7
International Journal of Sociology of the Family	7
Social Science Research	7
Phylon	6
Psychology Today	6
Personnel Psychology	6
Social Problems	6
Journal of Family Issues	6
Sociological Methods and Research	6
Academy of Management Journal	5
Communication Research	5
Social Networks	5
Criminology	5
Gerontologist	5
Public Perspective	5
International Journal of Aging and Human Development	5
Sociological Spectrum	5
Journal of Clinical Psychology	4
IASSIT Newsletter	4
Review of Public Data Use	4
Contemporary Sociology	4

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. Journal Appearances (continued)	
Sex Roles	4
Science	4
America	4
Journal of Black Studies	4
Social Science Review	4
Research on Aging	4
Journal of the American Statistical Association	4
Teaching Sociology	4
Political Behavior	4
Sociological Inquiry	4
Sociological Methodology	4
Human Relations	4
Public Interest	4
Social Policy	3
Resources for the Future	3
Personnel	3
Western Journal of Black Studies	3
Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology	3
Journal of Political and Military Sociology	3
American Journal of Public Health	3
Demography	3
Social Psychology Quarterly	3
American Political Science Review	3
Journal of Contemporary Studies	3
Sociology of Education	3
Population and Development Review	3
Journal of Politics	3
Journal of Social Psychology	3
Political Methodology	3
Work and Occupation	3
Journalism Quarterly	3
American Behavioral Scientist	3
Archives of Sexual Behavior	3
Fortune	3
Journal of Social Issues	3
Social Science Journal	3
Sociological Forum	2
Sociological Symposium	2
Marquett Business Review	2
Journal of Voluntary Action Research	2
TV Guide	2
Library Trends	2
Sociological Studies of Child Development	2
International Review of Sociology	2
ASA Footnotes	2
Population Research & Policy Review	2
Esquire	2
Peace and Change	2
Computers and the Humanities	2
Educational Research Quarterly	2

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. Journal Appearances (Continued)	
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
Journal of Conflict Resolution	2
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare	2
Monthly Labor Review	2
Journal of Research and Development in Education	2
Micropolitics	2
Showcase Forum	2
Columbia Journalism Review	2
Research in Race and Ethnic Relations	2
PS	2
International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy	2
Western Political Quarterly	2
Quality and Quantity	2
International Journal of Comparative Sociology	2
Conscience	2
Journal of Human Resources	2
Psychological Reports	2
American Educational Research Journal	2
The American Scholar	1
American Journal of Police	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
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
American Psychologist	1
Journal of Market Research	1
Psychometrika	1
Public Relations News	1
Wilson Quarterly	1
Overview	1
EPA Journal	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. Journal Appearances (continued)	
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
Visual Impairment and Blindness	1
The Humanist	1
The New York Review of Books	1
International Journal of Health Services	1
Tocqueville Review	1
Science, Technology, and Human Values	1
International Journal of Addictions	1
Journal of Psychiatric Treatment and Evaluation	1
Focus	1
IFO Digest	1
Michigan Law Review	1
Journal of Employment Counseling	1
Journal of Electrochemical Society	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
Our Sunday Visitor	1
Discovery	1
Journal of Sex Research	1
Journal of Broadcasting	1
Youth and Society	1
Jewish Journal of 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
Journal of Police Science and Administration	1
Organizational Behavior and Human Performance	1
Texas Law Review	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Number of Papers

B. Journal Appearances (Continued)

Scientific American	1
Status	1
High School Behavioral Science	1
New Republic	1
Environmental 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
Sociologus	1
New York Times Magazine	1
Atlantic Monthly	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
Marriage & Family Counselors Quarterly	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
Research Urban Policy	1
Survey Research Newsletter	1
American Banker	1
British Journal of Sociology	1
Atlantic Economic Journal	1
Intelligence	1
Journal of Educational Research	1
Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency	1
Victimology: An International Journal	1
Health Affairs	1
American Enterprise	1
US News and World Report	1
Journal of Traumatic Stress	1
Advances in Alcohol and Substance Abuse	1
Jet	1
Sozialwelt	1
European Sociological Review	1
Government Executive	1
Chronicle of Philanthropy	1
Ethics and International Affairs	1
Social Trends	1
Working Class and Contemporary World	1
Social Change Report	1
Le Journal des Elections	1
International Journal of Public Opinion Research	1
Professional Geographer	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Number of Papers

B. Journal Appearances (Continued)

ICPSR Bulletin	1
Political Behavior	1
Baylor Business Studies	1
Etudes Polemologiques	1
Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences	1
Comparative Political Studies	1
Ageing and Society	1
Political Psychology	1
Journal of Peace Research	1
American Health	1
Research in Political Sociology	1
New England Journal of Medicine	1
New Conversations	1
Politics and Society	1
Research in Nursing and Health	1
Perceptual and Motor Skills	1
Journal of Business Ethics	1
New England Journal of Black Studies	1
Euthanasia Review	1
Library Journal	1
Urban Affairs Quarterly	1
Alternative Lifestyles	1
Comparative Public Opinion	1
NORC Reporter	1
Congressional Quarterly	1
APA Monitor	1
Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality	1
The Milbank Quarterly	1
Journal of Youth and Adolescence	1
Journal of Psychoactive Drugs	1
Journal of Psychology	1
National Journal of Sociology	1
International Journal of Group Processes	1
The Tablet	1
Ethics	1
Intellect	1
Journal of Urban Affairs	1
Florida Public Opinion	1
Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought	1
Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report	1
Economic Outlook USA	1
College and Research Libraries	1
Glamour	1
University of Dayton Law Review	1
Journal of Counseling and Development	1
Presstime	1
International Journal of Sociology	1
Journal of Drug Education	1
Journal of Negro Education	1
Trotter Institute Review	1

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Number of Papers
B. Journal Appearances (continued)	
American Journal of Nursing	1
Social Security Bulletin	1
Journal of Criminal Justice	1

