

An Analysis of GSS Research, 1972-2003

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GSS Project Report No. 26

April, 2004

Introduction

Both to monitor use among researchers and to provide content for the General Social Survey Data and Information Retrieval System (GSSDIRS), the project periodically compiles a bibliography of GSS research. This report analyzes data from the latest (2004) GSS bibliography and examines the level and content of GSS research and how it has changed over time.

Data

The first step in analyzing GSS research uses is the compilation of a bibliography. The bibliography intends to cover GSS uses in books, journals, professional conferences, degree-conferring student research (e.g. Ph.D. dissertations and masters' theses), and some unpublished work (e.g. in the working paper series of institutes). It excludes articles in newspapers, student research not conferring a degree, and most unpublished work. The bibliography is compiled from various sources: 1) computerized databases including ABC-CLIO, Amazon.com, CSA, Dissertation Abstracts, EBSCO, Factiva, FindArticles.Com, FirstSearch, Google.com, JSTOR, Lexis-Nexis, Ovid, Sciencedirect.com, Social Science Citation Index, and Social Work Abstracts; 2) various conference programs and proceedings (e.g. American Association for Public Opinion Research, American Sociological Association, American Statistical Association), and 3) references and uses from authors and publishers sent directly to the GSS. Once a confirmed use is found it is entered into our bibliographic database. In our latest round of updating that finished in January, 2004 8,662 uses were identified.

This number falls far short of total usage. This is because of poor citation practices by researchers and limited project resources to find usages. Several techniques were used to estimate total usages. They indicate that total uses exceed documented uses by at least 20% and perhaps 50%. First, past experience shows that each succeeding GSS bibliography turns up more uses even from early years. For example, the 7th edition of the bibliography counted 134 citations dated 1984 and the updated bibliography documented 160 uses from 1984, an increase of almost 20%. (The undercount is greatest for the most recent years (Smith, 2000).) Second, a manual search of 12 journals showed that database searches of these journals found only 57% of total GSS uses. This is because data sources used are infrequently mentioned in abstracts so only databases with full-text searches are likely to reveal GSS use. Third, database searches come up with less than half of all entries in the ISSP bibliography. The majority come from citations sent in by users. Fourth, books are especially difficult to document since few databases allow full-text searches.

The second step is to obtain copies of as many of these uses as possible.

The third step is to abstract the entries in the bibliography indicating what years of the GSS were utilized, what variables were

analyzed, and what other survey data were employed.

The final step is to take the data in the abstracted entries and code various information about each item including: date of publication, type of use (e.g. book, journal article, conference paper), number of authors, affiliation of authors, journal published in (if applicable), conference presented at (if applicable), years of the GSS analyzed, and use of International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data.

Since the 8,662 identified uses were far too many to process in this manner, a random sample of 396 bibliographic entries was drawn and fully entered and coded as described above. This represents approximately a 1-in-22 sample.

Analysis of Research Usages

A majority of usages (59%) have a single author (counting a small number of anonymous and corporate references as involving only one author). But since multiple authors are common, this means that there were a total of about 13,600 authorships for the 8,662 identified publication (about 1.6 authors per item).

There are three measures of the what type of authors use the GSS. The first covers all cases and is the affiliation of authors at time of publication. The second is the type of journal an article was published in. The third is the type of conference that papers were presented to.

Based on the affiliation of first authors, 82% of the work was done by researchers at universities, 12% by those at non-university research institutes or foundations, 4% by editors and journalists, and 2% by the government and other. Sociologists were the largest user group (45%), followed by political scientists (12%), researchers in law and criminal justice (5%), psychologists (4%), economists (3%), researchers in health and medicine (2%), researchers in communications and journalism (2%), statisticians (2%), other social scientists (e.g. anthropologists, geographers) (2%), non-social scientists (e.g. religion, business administration) (3%), unspecified university researchers (2%), and non-university researchers (18%).

For journal articles 41% were in sociology, 9% in survey research, 8% in political science, 6% in religion, 6% in psychology, 6% in law, 3% in journalism and mass communications, 3% in health and medicine, 3% in economics, 2% in business administration and management, 4% in other and interdisciplinary social sciences, and 8% in all other areas.

For conference papers 61% were in sociology, 10% in survey research, 3% in political science, 2% in journalism and mass communications, 2% in business administration and management, 2% in economics, 3% in other social sciences, 7% at conferences on specific topics, and 11% at all other types of conferences.¹

¹Conferences outside of sociology and survey research are underrepresented in the GSS bibliography.

Overall, the analysis of authors' affiliations and the journals and conferences at which usages appear indicate that research is predominately among university-based academics, especially sociologists with appreciable representation among political scientists, economists, psychologists, researchers in law, religion, medicine/ public health, journalism/mass communications, and other social scientists.

As Table 1 indicates, relative usage by sociologists has changed little from the 1980s to the 2000s. Relative use has declined among political scientists and academics in religion (excluding sociologists of religion) and among those in non-university research center, foundations, and associations. Relative usage has grown for researchers in medicine and public health, business administration, and economics and has risen for those in the general media and government.

Trends in journals show that the relative share of publications in sociology and miscellaneous social science journals have decreased (Table 2). There has been a rise in the proportion appearing in journals in psychology, religion, journalism and mass communication, and economics. Other areas have shown ups and downs (e.g. law and survey research).

Since a number of the trends for affiliations and for journal publications are different, it is hard to definitively characterize shifts in disciplinary use. However, since journals only represent a sub-set of all uses, more weight should be given to the trends based on authors' affiliations.

Usage has notably grown over time. In the 1970s there was an average of 85 uses per annum, this grew to 175 annually in the 1980s, 427 annually in the 1990s, and 515 in the 2000s (plus 22 of unknown vintage).

Most usage has appeared in journals (56%), followed by books/ book chapters (19%), conference papers (16%), and unpublished reports and student dissertations/theses (9%). With the exception of books being somewhat more prominent in the 1980s and 1990s (22-23%) than in the 1970s or 2000s (12%), the types of usages have remained quite stable across the years.

Almost 65% of usages have utilized 2 or more surveys. 22% used 2-5 surveys, 13% 6-10 surveys, and 30% used 11+ surveys. After the 1980s proportion using single years and using 11+ surveys both increased. Studies using a single GSS were 17% in the 1980s, 40% in the 1990s, and 37% in the 2000s. Using 11+ surveys were 14% in the 1980s, 36% in the 1990s, and 41% in the 2000s. The use of a single year increased because of the expansion of topical modules on the GSS which only rarely appear in more than one survey. The use on 11+ survey grew as more and more time series obtained that level of occurrence (1984 was the earliest year in which a variable could have appeared 11 times). What has remained stable is what percent of all possible studies were used. For example, a 1984 publication could have used a maximum of 10 GSSs (1972-1983). If a publication used 10, it is scored 100%; if it used 5, 50%. For 1974-1998, usages utilized from 38-49% of possible GSSs, with no clear trend. Uses were lower in 2000 and 2002 (29% and 16% respectively) because

many post-2000 studies had not accessed the latest cumulative files and once work in the pipeline has surfaced, it is expected that the level of utilization will be similar to that in earlier years.

Cross-national uses (almost all involving the ISSP) constitute 17% of all GSS uses. In addition, there are ISSP uses that do not analyze the American data and thus do not use the GSS. Thus, the GSS bibliography has 1,489 ISSP uses, but there are 1,621 known ISSP uses overall (132 more). Among the 1,621 known ISSP uses, 518 are journal articles, 340 conference papers, 304 book chapters, 215 unpublished reports, 95 books, and 71 dissertations, theses, or equivalent by students. As with GSS uses in general, the known ISSP uses undercount total, actual ISSP uses. Based on increases from earlier years, it is estimated that at least 1,871 ISSP uses have already occurred (Smith, 2004). Cross-national usage has naturally expanded over time since the first planned comparative research involving on the GSS and Germany started in 1982 and the multi-country ISSP commenced in 1985. Cross-national uses rose from 0% of those in the 1970s, to 5% in the 1980s, 21% in the 1990s, and 26% in the 2000s.

Conclusion

The GSS/ISSP has collected an enormous amount of high quality, national and international data over the last 32 years. These data have been made available to users as quickly as possible on an open and equal basis. The substance and quality of the data and researchers easy access to same has led to the widespread use of the GSS/ISSP in research (as well as teaching). Research usage has grown notably over the years and is widespread among the social sciences in the United States and around the world. Usage is greatest in sociology followed by virtually all of the other social sciences and other fields such as law, business, and medicine/health.

Table 1
Trends in Author Affiliations

	1980s	1990s	2000s
Universities			
Sociology	46.3	43.6	48.9
Political Science	17.5	12.3	6.4
Psychology	5.0	1.5	6.4
Religion	2.5	0.5	0.0
Journalism/Mass Communications	1.3	2.6	1.1
Medicine/Health	1.3	2.1	3.2
Economics	1.3	2.6	7.4
Law	1.3	8.2	2.1
Business Administration	0.0	1.0	2.1
Other Social Sciences	1.2	6.1	1.1
Other	1.3	1.0	2.1
Research Centers	15.0	13.8	9.5
General Media/Authors	2.5	3.1	6.4
Government	0.0	1.0	2.1
Other	3.8	0.5	1.1

Table 2

Trends in Discipline of Journals

	1980s	1990s	2000s
Sociology	52.3	39.5	36.8
Survey Research	6.8	11.5	6.7
Political Science	4.5	11.5	6.7
Psychology	4.5	4.8	8.3
Religion	4.5	3.8	11.7
Journalism/Mass Communications	2.3	2.9	3.3
Medicine/Health	2.3	1.9	3.3
Economics	2.3	1.0	8.3
Law	2.3	8.7	3.3
Business Administration	2.3	1.0	1.7
Other Social Sciences	6.8	5.8	0.0
Other	9.1	7.7	10.0

References

Smith, Tom W., "The 2004 ISSP Bibliography: A Report," NORC, 2004.

Smith, Tom W., "Who, What, Where, When, and Why: An Analysis of Usage of the General Social Surveys, 1972-2000," GSS Project Report No. 22. Chicago: NORC, 2000.