

to participate more fully in government, and to promote government accountability. Even prior to the release of the OMB guidelines in March, Representative English initiated a General Accounting Office comprehensive review of the State Department's handling of FOIA requests. In 1984 when the Defense Department granted 92 percent of their FOIA requests, the State Department, one of the most zealous followers of the Rose Memorandum, granted only 29 percent. "The State Department," English has charged, "has the worst reputation among all Cabinet departments for the quality and timeliness of its FOIA operation." Although the final GAO report has not been completed, GAO in a preliminary briefing to the House Subcommittee on Government Information has documented an unacceptably high number of errors in the Department's basic FOIA tracking system. When the final GAO report is completed in early 1988, English plans to conduct hearings in the House and Senator Leahy has also indicated plans to hold hearings on a variety of FOIA issues.

The scholarly community needs to move on two fronts to support the FOIA. There is a need, first, to gather information on as many specific cases of egregious denials as possible and, second, to encourage congressional leaders who wish to restore the FOIA to its intended purposes of opening not denying information. The National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History will be providing congressional committees with relevant information as the time for the hearings approaches. Please contact me if you have had experiences with FOIA requests that would be pertinent. The address is NCC, 400 A St., SE, Washington, DC 20003. If you wish to contact congressional leaders directly, below are two key subcommittees with oversight responsibility for implementation of the FOIA.

*Senate Subcommittee on Technology and Law of the Judiciary Committee.* Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Chairman; Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), and Gordon Humphrey (R-NH), Ranking Minority. Address: U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

*House Subcommittee on Government Infor-*

*mation of the Government Operations Committee.* Glenn English (D-OK), Chair; Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Bill Grant (D-FL), Edolphus Towns (D-NY), John Spratt (D-SC), David Skaggs (D-CO), Al McCandless (R-CA), ranking minority, Amory Houghton (R-NY), Dennis Hastert (R-IL). Address: U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

## **The General Social Survey: A National Data Resource for the Social Sciences**

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Duane F. Alwin  
The University of Michigan<sup>1</sup>

**T**he National Science Foundation has recently announced renewal of support to the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago) for the *National Data Program for the Social Sciences*, the major focus of which is the General Social Survey, or GSS. The principal investigators of the GSS project are James A. Davis (NORC and Harvard University) and Tom W. Smith (NORC). The major goal of this project has been to provide the social science community with large-scale substantively important annual survey data of high quality (about 1,500 respondents each year). The GSS has been conducted in 14 years between 1972 and 1987. The new award covers the period 1988-1992.<sup>2</sup>

For several years the National Science Foundation has supported the GSS, along with two other major on-going survey data collection efforts (Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the Michigan Election Studies) as national data resources for the social sciences. These three datasets (among others) represent an important part of the infrastructure of modern social science. Many universities and colleges have access to these data through their membership in the University of Michigan's ICPSR (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Re-

search). The GSS data are also distributed at cost by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, P.O. Box 440, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06268.

The GSS, affiliated with NORC's Center for the Study of Politics and Society, is run by Davis, Smith and a small staff of research assistants. The GSS staff launches a survey within the first several months of each year, and routinely produces a machine-readable data set for distribution annually in early July. Since 1977 the data have been released as a cumulative data file, consisting of all GSS data from 1972.

## Background

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The GSS has existed since 1972, when James A. Davis initiated a national survey of 1,600 responding households selected to represent the U.S. population, with the intention of replicating the content of the survey on an annual basis. Committed to monitoring trends in social attitudes toward a wide range of relevant social issues and governmental policies, Davis constructed a questionnaire that assessed important attitudes, feelings and reports of behavior. In putting together the first GSS questionnaire, Davis relied on input from some 105 sociologists and social scientists who reviewed drafts of the questionnaire, suggested revisions and additions, and expressed their question preferences. In 1973, through National Science Foundation support, the GSS was expanded to include many additional trend-type items. This effort was assisted by a small group of advisors, including Otis Dudley Duncan, James Short, Otto Larsen, Philip Hastings, and Stephen Withey.

The purpose of the early GSS was to monitor trends in social attitudes and behavior, and so most of the questions selected for the first survey had been asked two or more times previously on national U.S. surveys conducted by other social science survey organizations, such as the National Opinion Research Center, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, and the major commercial polling organizations, such as Gallup. During this era the inclusion of questions in the early annual surveys was governed by a rotational scheme that resulted in most

attitude items appearing in two of every three successive surveys. A core set of demographic and social position variables was replicated every survey year.

The existence of the original GSS rotational scheme has not meant that the item content of the GSS has been unchanged since its inception. The GSS has been modified incrementally over the years via suggestions made by GSS data users, other members of the social science community, and the GSS Board of Overseers. Beginning with the 1988 survey the GSS will change its design to include all recurring GSS items in each annual survey on two-thirds of the sample, rather than the inclusion of a given item or item-battery in two or every three years.

## The Cumulative GSS Data

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Annual GSS surveys were conducted through 1978, when the GSS temporarily went on a biennial schedule. Thus, no GSS data are available for 1979 and 1981. With re-funding of the GSS in 1983 the project returned to an annual schedule. Thus, since 1982 there have been six successive annual surveys. In addition, in 1982 and 1987 the GSS cross-sectional sample was supplemented with an over-sample of Black households. Under the new NSF award, the GSS will be carried out in four years: 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

The GSS data include a wide range of variables, touching many areas of current interest to social scientists. Over 1,100 different variables are in the GSS cumulative data file. These include standard socioeconomic and demographic variables, and a range of demographic and background variables, attitudes, self-reports of behavior and personal evaluations.

Through its inclusion of demographic and background variables, the GSS cumulative file contains a broad array of repeating items on pre-adult and earlier adult experiences, such as parental education, father's occupation, the religion in which the respondent was raised, whether or not the respondent's mother worked outside the home at different stages of the respondent's childhood, whether or not the parents divorced before the respondent was age 16, whether or not a parent

died before the respondent was age 16, size of the community lived in at age 16, region lived in at age 16, number of siblings, and the respondent's estimate of the relative economic standing of the family of orientation, among others.

Adult background characteristics include age at first marriage, whether or not the respondent has ever been divorced or legally separated, and the number of children ever born to the respondent.

Social psychological measures cover several broad topic areas, such as attitudes toward abortion, crime and punishment, sex roles, foreign affairs, institutional leadership, national spending priorities, race relations, religious beliefs, taxation and income distribution, tolerance, violence, the work ethic and child-rearing orientations. Behavioral reports include measures of drinking and smoking, gun ownership, organizational memberships, political affiliation and voting, social interaction patterns, major life events and life stress.

Personal evaluations include measures of alienation or anomie, general subjective well-being, and satisfaction with aspects of one's job, marriage, finances, family, friends, place of residence, health and leisure time.

### Other Available GSS Data

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A unique characteristic of the GSS has been its repeated cross-section design, permitting the study of time-trends in its various attitude measures and the pooling of data from several years so that subgroup analyses may be performed. And while its primary focus continues to be one of monitoring social changes in attitudes and behaviors, more recent GSS activities have moved beyond this focus.

**Methodological Studies.** Methodological experimentation has been a standard feature of the GSS. Through the use of randomized experiments (or split ballots), special scales, and test-retest measurement, the GSS data allow the assessment of some sources of errors in attitudinal measurement. For example, GSS surveys have been a source of data on the effects of question wording, form and context.

The findings from special studies are documented by the GSS Technical Report Series, which may be obtained directly from the GSS staff.

**Topical Modules.** In-depth studies of a particular theme, called topical modules, have been an important vehicle for the GSS to innovate in the areas covered by the survey. The first topical module was conducted in 1977. It expanded existing scales on abortion, women's roles, and race relations. Since 1984 the inclusion of a topical module has occurred on an annual basis. Topics are typically selected from those suggested by the GSS user community and the GSS Board. The topical module design of current and past GSS surveys is an enhancement of the basic design that permits innovation and the development of new measurement approaches, in addition to the replication of earlier items.

In 1985 the GSS included a topical module focusing on social networks. The inclusion of this subject area grew out of efforts by the GSS PI's and Board of Overseers to critically evaluate the content areas of the GSS relevant to sociological analysis. The focus on social networks, spearheaded by Ronald Burt (Columbia University) was targeted for the 1985 annual survey. Utilizing the theoretical tools of social network analysis, this module asked respondents about people with whom they had discussed "matters important to you" during the last six months. The network battery also assessed the strength of ties with these persons, the existence of ties among the named persons, and measured the social characteristics of network members. This approach, which has also been utilized in modified form in later surveys, is expected to enhance the understanding of responses to GSS social psychological content, and it has generated substantial interest in the research community of network researchers.

In the 1986 survey the GSS topical module was on the feminization of poverty. This effort, developed by Richard Berk (University of California-Santa Barbara), Karen Mason and Greg Duncan (both of the University of Michigan), employed a number of questions on ali-

mony and child support, receipt of government assistance, minimum income needs of a family of four, and attitudes about the effects of welfare. This module included the use of Peter Rossi's factorial vignette measurement approach to measure respondent's judgements regarding welfare entitlements. This approach permits an assessment of the potential normative criteria that influence individual's beliefs regarding welfare entitlements. This module is expected to generate interest among public finance economists concerned with the public's level of demand for redistributive programs such as AFDC for younger women and their children and the SSI program for the elderly.

In 1987 the GSS conducted its third annual topical module, a 15-minute set of questions devoted to the topic of socio-political participation. This module, developed by a committee consisting of Lawrence Bobo (University of Wisconsin), Thomas Guterbock (University of Virginia), David Knoke (University of Minnesota), included the exact replication of several indicators of political attitudes and behavior from a 1967 national survey, conducted by Sidney Verba (Harvard University) and Norman Nie (University of Chicago) and reported in their *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). This module also included new measures of members' participation in their voluntary organizations, items of the political content of members' egocentric social networks, using methods first developed for the 1985 topical supplement, and new items on race and gender consciousness.

The planned topical module for the 1988 survey is on religion and religious experience. This work is being coordinated by a committee made up of Duane F. Alwin, Andrew M. Greeley, Wade Clark Roof and Tom W. Smith.

With the exception of the 1986 vignette measurement study, all of the data from these topical modules are distributed with the GSS cumulative file. The vignette data may be obtained as a separate file from the Roper Center.

### The International Social Survey Program.

Also initiated in 1985, the GSS now includes an annual international supplement, coordinated through a multi-country collaboration of the replication of social indicators. This international module is designed each year by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), a consortium of social scientists from Australia, Austria, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States and West Germany. The 1985 ISSP survey focused on the role of government, the 1986 survey on social networks and social support, the 1987 survey on beliefs about social inequality, and the ISSP module planned for 1988 is on the family.

The ISSP collaboration grew out of a bilateral cooperation in 1982 and 1984 between the GSS and the ALLBUS survey in West Germany, carried out biennially by the Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA) based in Mannheim, FRG.

The ISSP data set is initially to be released by the individual participating countries, but will eventually be released as a merged data set available through the German Zentrale Archiv based at the University of Koln, and it is expected that these data will be distributed to U.S. researchers through the ICPSR. The U.S. data from the ISSP surveys are available in the GSS cumulative file, and the GSS cumulative codebook documents the available ISSP data.

### The GSS Board of Overseers

Since 1983 the GSS has been advised by a Board of Overseers, which was chartered by the National Science Foundation to provide guidance to the project. The current GSS Board consists of Robert Abelson, Duane Alwin (Chair), Lawrence Bobo, Richard Campbell, Arne Kalleberg, David Knoke, Margaret Marini, Elizabeth Martin, Howard Schuman, Judith Treas and Andrea Tyree. Board members are selected from the social science community, and are elected to three-year terms. The composition of the Board ranges from 10 to 15 members, who serve staggered terms. Former members of the Board of Overseers (since 1983) include: James Ben-

niger, Richard Berk, Judith Blake, Ronald Burt, Stephen Cutler, Greg Duncan, Robert Groves, Herbert Hyman, Norval Glenn, Karen Mason, John Mueller, Stanley Presser, John Robinson, Peter Rossi (former Chair), James Short, Seymour Sudman, and Stephen Withey.

The General Social Survey seeks proposals for future topical modules, as well as smaller proposals seeking to improve the measurement of relevant social phenomena. For a detailed statement describing the guidelines for the development of such proposals, interested readers should write to Duane F. Alwin, Chair, GSS Board of Overseers, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248.

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### About the Author

Duane F. Alwin is professor of sociology at the University of Michigan and research scientist at the Institute for Social Research. He is chair of the Board of Overseers of the General Social Survey.

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### Notes

1. With contributions by Tom Smith and David Knoke.

2. In addition to the basic funding from the NSF, the GSS project will continue to receive supplemental support from Andrew M. Greeley for the battery of religion questions that has appeared on the GSS since 1983.

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## The Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation Project

**Terry Nichols Clark**  
University of Chicago

The Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation Project has become the most extensive study of local government in the world to date. In the U.S. it includes surveys of local officials in all cities over

25,000 population, nearly 1,000. In some 35 other countries analogous studies are in progress. While it is a more than \$6 million project, costs have been divided among the participating teams so that some have been able to participate with quite modest investments. The data are now being made available to interested researchers via the Interuniversity Consortium for Social and Political Research. The Project remains open to persons interested in participating in different ways, from attending conferences to analyzing the data or publishing in our Newsletter, annual volume *Research in Urban Policy*, and the new Sage Urban Innovation book series.

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### Origins

The project emerged in the summer of 1982. Terry Clark, Richard Bingham and Brett Hawkins had planned to survey the adaptation of 62 cities to austerity. We circulated a memo summarizing the survey and welcomed suggestions. The response was overwhelming: people across the U.S. (and several other countries) volunteered to survey leaders in their areas, covering their own costs. Participants were initially attracted by the opportunity to compare cities near them with others. As it seemed clear that we would cover most of the U.S., others volunteered to survey remaining states. The result was a network of some 26 U.S. teams using a standard methodology to survey local public officials; the teams pooled their data, and then made the information available to all.

While the Project emerged quite spontaneously, it built on experiences joining many participants. Research funds have progressively declined yet urban research has increased in sophistication and scale. In the past 15 years a few large empirical studies have had major impacts on urban policy analysis. Social scientists and policy analysts increasingly use such studies, but data collection costs are so high that individuals cannot find a grant to collect data they might desire. A collective effort thus offers clear payoffs. This situation, recognized in the late 1970s, was the focus of a conference in 1979 where 20 persons presented papers that reviewed the best urban policy research to date, outlined