The European Social Survey (ESS): An overview

www.europeansocialsurvey.org

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Outline

1. Introduction: The ESS at a glance
2. Methodological aspects of the ESS
3. The ESS individual-level data
4. The ESS multilevel data
5. Additional resources concerning the ESS
Facts and figures

Facts

- cross-national survey with a focus on Europe
- interdisciplinary, academic background
- established and first conducted in 2001/2002
- data for eight rounds currently available (2002-2016)
- winner of the Descartes Prize of the EU Commission 2005

Figures

- >35 participating countries
- ~375,000 interviews during the first eight rounds
- >3,000 scientific publications based on ESS data
- publications in ~475 academic journals
- ~135,000 registered users of ESS data
Main goals and objectives

1. to chart stability and change in the social structure, the conditions and citizens’ attitudes across European countries

2. to achieve and spread higher standards of rigour in cross-national research in the social sciences (e.g., questionnaire design and pre-testing, sampling, data collection, reduction of bias and reliability of questions)

3. to introduce sound indicators of national progress based on citizens’ perceptions and judgements of key aspects of their societies

4. to undertake and facilitate the training of European social researchers in comparative quantitative measurement and analysis

5. to improve the visibility and outreach of data on social change among academics, policy makers and the wider public.
Funding of the ESS

- round-based funding for the years 2002-2012
  - EU Framework Programs
  - European Science Foundation (ESF)
  - national funding agencies (e.g., DFG in Germany)

- awarded ESS ERIC status in 2013
  - status as "European Research Infrastructure Consortium"
    increases financial stability
  - central coordination costs are covered through membership fees
    and an additional amount according to a country’s GDP
  - national coordination costs and fieldwork expenses are covered by
    each participating country itself
Structure of the ESS

• collection and dissemination of individual-level data and dissemination of contextual-level data (‘multilevel’ and ‘media claims’)

• realization and repetition every two years

• structure of the ESS main questionnaire:
  
  • main part of the survey consisting of a ‘core module’ and so called ‘rotating modules’
  
  • the ‘core module’ comprises items of permanent scientific interest that are repeated (mostly unchanged) in every round of the ESS
  
  • the ‘rotating modules’ comprise more specific items that are not included in every ESS round (but may be repeated)
Scope of the ESS

Geographical coverage

1. in total 36 countries in the first eight rounds (2002-2016)
2. the composition of countries across ESS rounds is not constant (!)
3. 15 of 36 countries participated in all eight rounds
4. 27 of 36 countries participated in at least four ESS rounds
5. 7 of 36 countries participated in only one or two ESS rounds
6. clear focus on Europe (but Israel, Russian Federation, Turkey)
7. smallest country: Luxembourg; biggest country: Russian Federation
Questionnaire design and development in the ESS

- translation follows the so called TRAPD procedure (Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pre-Testing, Documentation)
- translation of the master questionnaire into any language that is spoken as a first language by five per cent or more of a country’s population
- verification: once a translation has been approved by the adjudicators, it is subject to further linguistic and semantic checks through the external service provider cApStAn (www.capstan.be)
- SQP coding: additional quality assessment which examines the formal structure of the original and translated questions to secure equivalent question wording across countries (http://sqp.upf.edu/)
- pre-tests based on a demographically balanced quota-sample of at least 30 persons
- documentation of the translation process by the NCs and provision for the CST
Sampling procedures in the ESS

- random probability sampling at all stages of the selection process (e.g., multi-stage or stratified random sampling)
- sampling frames for individuals, households or addresses, based on official lists
- "target population": representative samples for all individuals of at least 15 years of age living permanently in a private household
- intended ‘response rate’ of 70% in all participating countries
- "minimum effective sample size": 1500 in countries with more than 2 million inhabitants, 800 otherwise
Fieldwork and data collection

- common fieldwork period of 4 months for all participating countries (usually September-December)

- intended interview length of 60 minutes in English (main and supplementary questionnaire)

- standardized interviews (from ESS round 9 CAPI only)

- exclusive use of personal, face-to-face interviews at respondents’ homes (main questionnaire)

- harmonized briefing materials concerning the interview process for all interviewers

- a minimum of 4 personal contact attempts per sample unit over a period of two weeks (at different times, different days, once in the evening, once at the weekend)
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Topics and contents of the ‘core module’

1. Media and Social Trust
   - media usage (TV, radio, newspaper, internet), social trust

2. Politics
   - political interest, political trust, political participation, voting behavior, L-R placement, satisfaction, immigration

3. Well-Being, Exclusion, Religion, National and Ethnic Identity
   - happiness, social embeddedness, subjective health, feelings of safety, denomination and religiosity, discrimination, citizenship
Topics and contents of the ‘core module’

4 Gender, Year of Birth and Household Grid
   - gender, age, household composition

5 Socio Demographics
   - marital status, number of children, education, employment status, partner’s education and employment status, parents’ education, region

6 Human Values
   - 21-item ‘Human Values Scale’ as developed by the Israeli psychologist Shalom Schwartz
Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’

Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’ are based on a call in the Official Journal of the European Union which grants multi-national, academic research teams the opportunity to include up to 30 items on their topic of interest into the ESS.

1. Immigration (2002, 2014)
   - attitudes and evaluations on migration, attitudes towards migrants, evaluations of possible effects of migration

2. Citizen Involvement (2002)
   - civil society, social capital, social participation, voluntary associations, personal networks, norms of citizenship
Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’

   - perceptions of health and illness, attitudes towards medication consumption, attitudes concerning the relation between doctors and clients

   - normative foundations of markets in times of globalization, clients’ expectations towards producers and service providers, evaluations of practices like bribery or black labor

   - compatibility of family and career, working conditions and satisfaction at work, work-life balance
Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’

6 Timing of Life (2006)
- planning of life, possibilities to influence life, beliefs about the ideal age for marriage, work, retirement

- perceptions of personal well-being, evaluations of personal freedom, perceptions of how others are treating oneself in daily life

8 Welfare Attitudes (2008, 2016)
- welfare state retrenchment, assessments of the living standards of different social groups, attitudes towards the provision and effects of welfare state services
Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’

- **Ageism (2008)**
  - ageism and age-related perceptions, prejudices and stereotypes, perceptions of people of different age and their characteristics, self-assessment with regard to ageism

- **Justice (2010)**
  - attitudes towards the judicial system, legitimacy of and trust in the courts and the police, willingness to cooperate with the courts and the police, performance evaluations of the courts and the police

- **Democracy (2012)**
  - ideal images of democracy and how it functions in reality (comparison of expectations and evaluations)
Topics and contents of the ‘rotating modules’

12 Social Inequalities in Health (2014)
- social determinants of health, health measures (e.g., BMI), frequency of alcohol and nicotine consumption or "binge drinking", physical activity, preferences concerning medical treatments

13 Public Attitudes to Climate Change (2016)
- beliefs and attitudes towards climate change, concerns regarding climate change and energy security, preferences concerning energy use
Access to the ESS individual-level data

- data from all eight rounds of the ESS incl. all ESS documentation materials, guidelines and project specifications are provided on the int. ESS website

- for using the data a short registration is necessary

- data sets are available via download (formats: Stata, SPSS, SAS) or an Online Analysis Tool

- for individually modified data sets (only certain variables, countries or rounds), see the ‘ESS Cumulative Data Wizard’

- the Online Analysis Tool allows for basic analyses (cross tabulation, correlations, regression) without the need to download the data
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The research potential of the ESS individual-level data can be extended by the ESS multilevel data. The ESS multilevel data allows to complement the individual-level data with additional information on the context in which respondents live.

The ESS multilevel data provides information at three levels:

- **Individuals**: The ESS individual-level data of the respective ESS rounds
- **Regions**: NUTS 1, NUTS 2, NUTS 3, ESS Region (NUTS Mix), LAU
- **Countries**: participating countries of the ESS
Topics and contents of the ESS multilevel data

1. **Demography and Geography**: area size, population density, population size, percentage of foreigners, age distribution (median)

2. **Economy**: economic growth, Gini-coefficient, welfare spending, unemployment

3. **Health**: life expectancy, fertility rate, health care and expenditures, literacy rate

4. **Education**: matriculation rate, number of students

5. **Crime**: homicide rate, corruption (CPI)

6. **Political institutions**: political system, electoral threshold, electoral system, turnout, government composition, etc.

7. **Indices**: Human Development Index (HDI), Bertelsmann Index, Freedom in the World, etc.
Access to the ESS multilevel data

- **ESS Multilevel Data Download** (Download customizable data sets)

- **ESS Multilevel Bulk Download** (Download predefined data packages: complete, only single levels, only single ESS rounds; formats: SAS, SPSS, Stata)

- ‘Online Browsing’
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Additional information on the ESS

1. **ESS Infoclip**: short video clip on the ESS (in German)

2. **ESS EduNet**: E-learning courses and tutorials on a variety of topics regarding the ESS

3. **ESS Key Findings / Topline Series**: Brochures and booklets that summarize main findings from the ESS

4. **ESS Bibliography**: bibliography database containing all (scientific) publications based on the ESS

5. **International ESS Website**: the meta-resource on all topics relevant for the ESS (for information on the German part of the ESS, see the German ESS website)