

STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, PHILOSOPHY
AND HISTORY OF IDEAS 10

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Hopes and Anxieties in Europe

Six Waves of the European Social Survey



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EDITION

Introduction

The European Social Survey is a well-anchored and methodologically rigorous survey which aims to match the standards of the best national surveys, attempting to achieve the highest quality in international research. It was started in 2002 and, up to 2012, has included six rounds that allow analysis of changes in European societies. This volume grew out of an international conference in Warsaw based on these data, with participants including sociologists, students, politicians, and NGO workers.

In consecutive rounds the ESS contribution was organised around both substantive and methodological questions.

In addressing substantive questions the ESS aims to explore and test issues that focus on: changes in attitudes, values, behavioural patterns, social stratification, the welfare state, issues of governance and efficacy at the national and international level, immigration and political asylum, social inclusion and exclusion, well-being, health and security, human values, demographic composition, education and occupational background, financial circumstances and household circumstances. Many specific results in the context of the changing Europe are clear although broader interpretation of them is needed.

Concerning methodology, one of the main tasks is to discover and calibrate cross-national differences in people's responses and to make the survey as comparative across countries and as constant as possible. In order to achieve 'optimal comparability' in the operationalisation of the ESS, a detailed project specification is made, which is revised in the light of each successive round.

This book devotes attention to both topics. First, we discuss pertinent issues in Europe and debate questions that require examination in depth. Second, we address selected methodological questions, quantifying the reliability and validity of certain measures in the interview, coverage errors, measurement errors, and non-response.

The four articles in the first part of the volume, deal with relations between legitimization, subjective well-being, voting patterns, and the role of social cohesion in determination of political culture. In Chapter 1, Andrzej Rychard considers the relationships between trust, legitimacy, procedural justice, social capital, and policing styles. Empirical studies over many years have assumed trust and legitimacy to be conceptually distinct. Rychard discusses this thesis in the context of weak legitimization of political institutions in Poland. The chapter makes a broad overview of past work, with an insightful commentary

on many specific studies which summarize that work. Rychard hypothesizes that social capital is an excessively ‘psychologised’ concept referring to declarative formal expressions and overlooking informal mechanisms. His analyses, based mainly on Polish data, reveal that capital of trust is one of the components of social capital and a form of institutional capital. The author is clear that these conclusions are limited to mass survey results and require more intensive research, to which the hypotheses presented here can be at most a preamble.

In Chapter 2 Tomasz Panek presents analysis of subjective well-being in the countries of the 2012 survey in comparison with those surveyed in 2006. Partial, group and composite indicators for measurement of subjective well-being are applied. The empirical results show the differences between countries in terms of levels of subjective well-being, and the positive changes taking place in most of these countries. The analysis provides an overview of the nature of subjective well-being for different groups of respondents. In most dimensions of subjective personal well-being the lowest levels are observed in the group of respondents living in large cities. In subjective social well-being the highest scores are recorded among the group of respondents living on farms or in homes in the countryside. The lowest level of trust is declared by respondents from big cities, while the lowest level of supportive relationships is declared by respondents living in the suburbs or outskirts of a big city.

There is ongoing debate in democratic societies about the extent to which class stratification is obliterated by “alternative” social divisions related to sex, age, religion, and immigration. In Chapter 3, using data containing information on voting behaviour in elections, the reader will find whether such a tendency has been present in the face of reconfigurations taking place in the growing European Union. Henryk Domański, Artur Pokropek and Tomasz Żółtak apply a multinomial multilevel model to show that class membership still exerts a significant impact on voting behaviour. Although some changes in these associations had taken place, “class” membership appeared to be no more significant as a determinant of voting behaviour in 2012 than in 2002. Moreover the patterns of this association (which class votes for which party?) remained basically unchanged in that representatives of higher managers and professionals predominated in the electorate of the “rightist” parties, farmers voted for “peasant” parties, and the working class was politically indifferent.

Analyses presented in Chapter 4, by Zbigniew Sawiński, Kazimierz M. Słomczyński, and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, focus on determinants of legitimacy measured in terms of country-level societal trust (social cohesion) and people’s personal trust at the individual level. Empirical analyses presented in this chapter support the hypothesis about cultural roots of legitimization. The

hypothesis is supported that legitimacy – reflected in how individuals evaluate the economy, democracy and the government – is statistically determined by societal trust (cohesion). Living in countries with greater social cohesion leads to greater approval of systemic institutions than living in countries with less social cohesion. A complementary expectation that legitimacy is strongly determined by economic political development, measured by GDP per capita and the *EIU Democracy Index*, respectively, is also confirmed. The authors claim that trust on both the country and the individual level affects legitimacy. The clear policy lesson here is that any strategies to build a sense of systemic legitimacy need to focus on social cohesion and personal trust.

The driving force behind efforts to present the ESS data was our conviction that instruments allowing valid measures of survey research were badly needed. This book should be viewed as an addition to the relevant literature on methods of comparative research, attempting thereby to define better instruments. The second part of this volume comprises contributions on concepts and indicators concerning non-response errors and optimal cross-national comparability.

We begin in Chapter 5 from discussion by Jaak Billiet, Bart Meuleman, and Eldad Davidov of a number of challenges regarding conceptual validity. Multilevel study of the relation between individual value orientations, cultural embeddedness, and attitudes toward immigration (*IVCEA*) is used as a stepping-stone example. This study characterized by an individual level dependent variable, and a mix of direct and derived measures offers an ideal opportunity to clarify and discuss several challenges to validity. Some validity challenges related to other designs characterized by a higher level dependent variable, are also discussed. The specific character of the borrowed context variable embeddedness in the *IVCEA* study draws attention to the necessity of equivalent measures at both the lower and the higher level. Billet et al. also emphasize important questions such as a requirement for studies that include mixed measures – across levels direct and derived, the need for a substantive theory, and for arguments concerning the causal mechanisms at the macro level. Other important questions concern the large amount of unexplained residual variance at the country level, i.e. unobserved heterogeneity when the number of potential relevant variables is too high given the small number of cases at the macro level, and the failure to accommodate causal complexity in conventional variable-centred explanatory models.

In Chapter 6 Dorothée Behr and Michael Braun summarize key findings concerning “satisfaction with democracy”, something which belongs among the central concepts in political science. There is much discussion of the question typically used to operationalise the concept measures: support for the

incumbent authorities, support for the political system itself, support for democracy as a general form of government, a combination of these or other aspects. In order to provide empirical evidence on the cross-national comparability of these questions, panellists of online access panels from Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Canada, and the United States were asked to give reasons for their answers directly after they had answered the closed-ended question in the ESS wording, “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?”. As a general evaluation, one may conclude that in a comparative perspective the satisfaction with democracy question is not a bad one. Policy outcomes, governance (e.g., incumbent politicians), and aspects of the concrete political system play an important role in all countries, while the question, at least in the countries in this study, is not a measure of support for democracy compared to other forms of government. On the whole, substantive argumentation patterns match the answers to the closed-ended question.

The two next chapters address questions arising from growth of non-response rates. They should be minimized as much as possible in order to decrease the likelihood of non-response bias. The aim is to provide better monitoring and study methods for non-response bias adjustment that could lead to more comparable cross-country datasets.

The objective of Chapter 7, by Hideko Matsuo and Jaak Billiet, is comparison of cooperative and reluctant respondents. This paper proposes a new approach for turning reluctant respondents into proxies for all non-respondents using paradata Z-variables (e.g. type of dwelling and neighbourhood). Two types of propensity scores (the focus is on ‘contactability’ and on ‘survey cooperation’) are obtained through logistic regression models and multiplied with each other to obtain non-response weights for reluctant respondents. The effectiveness of these propensity weights is assessed through (1) the level of absolute standardized bias, (2) the level of correlations between Z-variables and R variables (response outcome) and between Z-variables and Y-variables (substantive items), and (3) estimated statistics in substantive models tested between unweighted and weighted respondent samples. Each of these assessments of effect on improvement is also applied to the results of post-stratification weighting based on documented population statistics (age, gender and region). The effects of the two types of weights are different, showing a different measure of bias. The effects of propensity weights are generally weaker than those of post-stratified weights. The paper addresses data quality in paradata and in the fieldwork design on refusal conversion activities.

In Chapter 8, Paweł Sztabiński – national co-ordinator in Poland of the ESS in all rounds – pursues the question of repeated contact attempts in the surveys.

His analysis aims to determine whether or not repeated contacts help to include more diverse groups of respondents in the survey and whether or not this leads to a reduced risk of non-response bias. Two stages are applied: (i) comparison of answers given by harder-to-reach respondents with distributions for easy-to-reach ones and (ii) showing how the differences in those distributions translate into survey estimates. This allows determination of whether multiplying contact attempts is a productive effort and if so, how many times such contact attempts should be repeated. Sztabiński draws on the 2010 and 2012 European Social Survey data from Poland. His analyses disclose that although the responses to some questions were very different in subsamples identified by accessibility, this nevertheless did not translate into differences in survey estimates. They also suggest that repeated contact attempts do not lead to a significant change in the structure of the effective sample and have a very low effect on the degree of non-response bias.

The last chapter presented by Denisa Fedáková, Michal Kentoš and Jozef Výrost is a departure from empirical and methodological parts of this volume. This chapter is a report on the experience of conducting the European Social Survey in Slovakia. All three authors have been coordinating the ESS in Slovakia since 2003 and this tenth anniversary seems an appropriate time to re-evaluate this work and to highlight some fieldwork aspects that have been changed, improved, restricted or implemented and, moreover, how those involved have been taught to carry out the survey based on rigorous procedures in survey design, data collection and data archiving. First, general information about the history of the latest surveys is mentioned, followed by a description of the launching of the ESS in Slovakia. Second, the chapter addresses the survey methodology aspects such as sampling, interviewers' characteristics, response rates and non-respondents. Third, experience from event (contextual) data monitoring and analysis is described, along with dissemination activities by the Slovak national team. Finally, the fieldwork procedures and changes to them are discussed with emphasis on their applicability and utility.

Many thanks go to all those who provided comments to these chapters. Certainly, they include only a small part of the "pertinent issues" and methodological studies that can be derived using ESS data. This is one of the first books presenting results of the six rounds of the ESS, from 2002–2012. Data sets from all rounds and information on their methodology are available on the website www.europeansocialsurvey.org.

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