

Cross-cultural analysis with the European Social Survey (ESS)

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The European social survey (ESS) is a bi-annual major source of data for researchers across the social sciences. Data are collected in several European countries since 2002. Now with four rounds of published data (2002-3, 2004-5, 2006-7 and 2008-9), the survey covers over 30 nations. It is designed to provide comparability over most European countries, and opens new opportunities for substantive and methodological research – but also raises challenges. Attitudinal variables, which are central components in the ESS datasets, include, for example: attitudes towards immigration, perceived ethnic threat, political efficacy, trust in politics, social trust, ‘universal’ basic human values, citizenship, aspects of economic morality, religious involvement, media use, political participation and political orientation, life satisfaction, feeling of being discriminated, attitudes toward medical treatment, and various sociodemographic variables. The ESS website provides theoretical background papers. In the seminar participants are expected to conduct theoretically-based empirical analyses of data from the ESS in a cross-cultural framework.

Course structure:

1) First part (weeks 1-4):

In the first part of the seminar, participants will present their theoretical question and how they intend to study it empirically with the ESS. Literature search and studying which variables are available in the ESS should precede the presentation. The following components should be included in the presentation: the theoretical background with references, research question, and testable hypotheses. It should also be clear how you plan to operationalize your theoretical concepts. Finally, report which countries/cultural units (such as west/east Germany, French and Flemish speaking parts of Belgium) you intend to analyze and why.

2) Second part (weeks 5-8):

The second part of the seminar will be practice-oriented. We will meet in the PC-room and you will have the opportunity to learn the ESS data, download it, analyze and ask questions related to your data analysis. A special focus in the analysis will be given to the comparative aspect: consider in advance how you intend to analyze several countries. It will be based on individual work and you will get support from the teacher/s in the lab. In the last two weeks of this session you should invest time to interpret your results substantively.

3) Third part (weeks 9-13):

In the third part you will make your final presentation. The presentation will include your theoretical background and refined research question/s, hypotheses, report about the countries you chose and why, description of the country setting, description of variables and indices used (scales, word formulation), descriptives of your data (means, standard deviations), results of your multivariate analysis, conclusions and summary and discussion. Emphasize what we can learn from your study: which ‘hole’ in the literature does it fill? Points to consider: What are your conclusions regarding similarities and differences between countries in means and in regression coefficients? Did you use interaction effects and how did you interpret them?

4) The last meeting will be devoted for open questions and for explanations how the final essay you submit should be structured. In a nutshell: it should follow the same steps as

your final presentation. Look at other papers, explore how other authors structure their empirical study, and see whether you can learn from these studies about ‘the best/the good practice’.

The seminar is designed to provide training as to how an empirical work should be structured and reported. These principles are relevant not only for the seminar, but also for other studies you will conduct in the future such as a theoretically-oriented empirical essay you write, an MA-thesis or a paper to be submitted to a scientific journal.

At the end of the seminar each participant has to write an essay (about 10 pages, double space, Font 12) summarizing the main theoretical arguments based on literature, hypotheses, method used, variables, empirical results (descriptive and multivariate analysis), their interpretation and a short discussion.

Proposed literature:

General literature about cross-cultural analysis:

- Jowell, Roger, Caroline Roberts, Rory Fitzgerald and Gillian Eva (2007). Measuring attitudes cross-nationally. Lessons from the European Social Survey. Chapters 1, 3, 9, 10 and 11.
- Van de Vijver, F. and K. Leung (1997). Methods and data analysis for cross-cultural research. London: Sage. Chapters 1,2,4,5 and 6.
- Harkness, Janet. A., Fons J. R. Van de Vijver and Peter Ph. Mohler (Eds.) (2003). Cross-Cultural Survey Methods. New York, NY: John Wiley.

Some applications:

- Rajjman, R., E. Davidov, P. Schmidt, and O. Hochman (2008). What does a nation owe non-citizens? National attachments, perception of threat and attitudes to granting citizenship rights in a comparative perspective (2008). *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 49(2-3), 195-220.
- Davidov, E., Bart Meuleman, Jaak Billiet and Peter Schmidt (2008). Values and support for immigration: A cross-country comparison. *European Sociological Review*, 24(5), 583-599.
- Davidov, E., P. Schmidt, and S. H. Schwartz (2008). Bringing values back in: The adequacy of the European Social Survey to measure values in 20 countries. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(3), 420-445.

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/> (see theoretical background papers).