

Exploring the results of pre-testing questions developed for the ESS: Comparing findings from omnibus surveys, SQP coding and cognitive interviewing.

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Outline of Presentation

- Overview of ESS question design & pre-testing process
- Pre-testing methods used - SQP coding; omnibus surveys and cognitive interviewing
- Findings from each method and comparison of similarities / differences
- Reflections on analysis

ESS

Questionnaire & pre-testing



■ Core section

- around 130 questions; a range of topics; same questions each round
- enables comparisons to be made and changes over time to be monitored

■ Rotating Modules

- each focuses on a specific topic; sometimes repeated in later rounds
- designed by teams of academics & ESS researchers over 20 months
- 50-60 questions from modules are pre-tested
- pre-test Qs using survey quality predictor (SQP) coding; omnibus surveys & cognitive interviewing

Omnibus Testing

- 55 questions – measuring personal and social well being and understanding and evaluation of democracy
- Fielded on commercial omnibus surveys
- Three countries – GB, HU, PT (N=1000)
- Experiments - question order & alternative question wording
- Checking - item non-response; balanced distributions (across response scale / categories) and for relationships between variables

SQP Coding

- Coded questions in British English (designed for the omnibus surveys)
- Questions coded by researchers at UPF to predict quality using Survey Quality predictor program (SQP 2.0 - <http://sqp.upf.edu/>)
- Quality prediction - based on formal question characteristics & results of multi-trait multi-method experiments conducted in the ESS previously
- Quality score & suggestions for changes to improve questions

Cognitive interviewing

- 16 questions tested using cognitive interviewing
- Five countries – GB, PT, AT, BG, IL following a standardised interview protocol
- Explore understanding of question overall, key terms within a question and ability to answer
- Focus on problems experienced when answering
- Focus on successes where question worked as intended by designers

Comparing methods



- All methods used in parallel BUT not all methods used on all questions
- Choice of method dependent on what we wanted to know
- Pre-testing took place in different countries BUT can only compare findings from same language / country
- Comparisons:
 - SQP quality score v. omnibus data (GB)
 - Omnibus data v. cognitive interview data (GB)
 - Omnibus data v. cognitive interview data (PT)
 - SQP score v. omnibus v. cognitive interview (GB)
- Compare: overall Q quality score (SQP); responses & INR (omnibus) and understanding of Q & key terms (CI)

Rule of law

To what extent would you say everyone living in [country] is treated equally by the law? Please use this card where 0 means Not at all and 10 means Completely

Not at
all

Completely (Don't
Know)

00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 88

Results from GB:

- SQP – reasonable quality .60
- Omnibus – most common response = 5 (18%); second most common response = 10 (17%); all scale points used to some extent; item non-response = 2%

Type of electoral system

Would you say political parties in [country] are in government together far too often or far too rarely? Choose your answer from this card.

**Far too
often**

**Far too
rarely (Don't
Know)**

00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 88

Results from GB:

- SQP – slightly lower quality of .55
- Omnibus – most common response was 5 (mid-point) 28%; item non-response = 16%

Personal control

Using this card please say how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

‘I have little control over many of the important things in my life’

Agree strongly	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Disagree strongly	5

Results from GB:

- Omnibus – ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ chosen most often (39% and 27%); 17% chose middle category; very low item non-response (0.6%)
- Cognitive interviewing – Rs generally understood the Q but there was some inconsistency in use of the middle category

Personal control

Using this card please say how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

‘I have little control over many of the important things in my life’

Agree strongly	1
Agree	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Disagree strongly	5

Results from PT:

- Omnibus - balanced responses across categories - ‘agree’ & ‘neither agree nor disagree’ chosen most often (28%; 27%); 24% chose ‘disagree’; 6% item non-response
- Cognitive interviewing – Rs able to answer Q but found the response scale confusing

Rule of law

Firstly, using this card tell me how important would you say it is for democracy that everyone is treated equally by the law?

**Not at all
important**

**Extremely (Don't
important Know)**

00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 88

Results from GB:

- SQP – high quality .70
- Omnibus – most common response = 10 (56%); second most common = 8 (13%); all other scale points = less than 8%; 2% item non-response
- CI – most common response = 10; Rs able to give an answer; unclear which elements of the law is meant
www.europeansocialsurvey.org

Reflections

- Not all questions tested using the same methods – makes comparisons difficult
- Can compare methods *within* countries and/or *between* countries
- How decide what criteria to use for the basis of comparisons?
- Should the focus for comparisons be *within* methods and/or *between* methods?
- How decide what counts as a ‘similar’ or ‘different’ finding?

Thank you

If you have any questions or feedback please contact:
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