Plan Overview

A Data Management Plan created using DMPonline

Title: Secondary Data Analysis Initiative: Mode Differences

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Project abstract:

1) Context

Survey mode matters. The ways in which data is gathered, whether through face-to-face interviewing, or by self-completion questionnaires on a device or on paper, can have effects on the types of people taking part (errors in representativeness) and/or the answers they provide (measurement error). In long-running repeated surveys conducted in the same, single mode, this is relatively unproblematic because these potential problems are priced in and changes in estimates can be assumed to be real world observations. But when there is a change of mode, as has widely been the case since the covid pandemic, users may struggle to judge whether an apparent change in a value is really that, or some artefact of this change of mode.

After experimenting out of necessity with self-completion in some countries during the pandemic, the European Social Survey in now transitioning from its traditional face-to-face mode to self-completion, primarily online but also offering a paper version. Its twelfth round will conduct a 'parallel run' with independent samples collected face-to-face and through self-completion. The Core Scientific Team has already begun a programme of research into mode effects on items within the core questionnaire that are repeated every two years, in order to help users navigate current and future datasets.

2) Challenges

As yet however, no thought has been given to one-off or less frequently fielded 'rotating modules', initially administered in face-to-face in past rounds, but in future through self-completion. Here there are additional complications: where the gap between modules is much longer than two years (usually between six and ten years) we can be less confident in discerning between real world change and mode effect. Worse still, so much time has elapsed that the items themselves may no longer capture the same underlying concept they were designed to do. And worse still again, this may be the case in some countries but not in others.

3) Approach

This project takes advantage of the Round 12 parallel run (2025-26) to conduct what is in effect a kind of natural experiment. Round 12 will repeat topics that have previously been fielded twice in face-to-face rounds. We will thus have access to two measures of a number of items where the mode is the same but the time is different, and two measures where the time is the same but the mode is different. Our analysis will first check for measurement equivalence of the items over time, before evaluating the extent to which differences between the R12 data and that from earlier years can be viewed as real-world changes, and the extent to which they are a function of data collection mode.

4) Relevance and outputs

Our analysis and resulting guidance will be of keen interest to a) the Core Scientific Team of the ESS, b) Coordinators of the survey in the relevant participating countries, c) users of ESS data and d) all survey practitioners who have or intend to implement mode changes in long-running surveys.

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Secondary Data Analysis Initiative: Mode Differences

Assessment of existing data

Provide an explanation of the existing data sources that will be used by the research project, with references

This project will use existing European Social Survey (ESS) data. As this project aims to investigate mode differences of repeated rotating modules, data from the repeated immigration module in ESS1 (2002), ESS7 (2014), and ESS12 (2025), and from the wellbeing module in ESS3 (2006), ESS6 (2012), and ESS12 (2025) for the UK and a select set of other countries will be used. Face-to-face data collection was used in ESS1, ESS3, ESS6, and ESS7, while ESS12 was a parallel run, with sample members randomly assigned to face-to-face or self-completion modes.

Provide an analysis of the gaps identified between the currently available and required data for the research

This data enables analysis of items in modules fielded irregularly across time using the face-to-face mode in previous rounds and takes advantage of the Round 12 parallel run in which sample members were randomly assigned to face-to-face or self-completion modes.

Information on new data

Provide information on the data that will be produced or accessed by the research project

As this research will use secondary data, no new data will be collected; however, a new dataset will be created or generated by combining data from multiple repeated rounds of the ESS. ESS data are freely accessible, without restrictions, to the public for not-for-profit purposes and can be downloaded from the ESS Data Portal (https://ess.sikt.no/en/).

Quality assurance of data

Describe the procedures for quality assurance that will be carried out on the data collected at the time of data collection, data entry, digitisation and data checking.

ESS data are accompanied by source questionnaires and documentation on how to use the data, including a codebook describing the variables. As part of this project, documentation detailing how data from different rounds are harmonised and appended will be produced, along with syntax files, to ensure that the process is reproducible.

Backup and security of data

Describe the data security and backup procedures you will adopt to ensure the data and metadata are securely stored during the lifetime of the project.

During the lifetime of the project, all the data will be stored securely within the City St George's approved institutional and cloud-based storage environments (Microsoft OneDrive), with no local storage.
The data will be accessed by authorised personnel using secure institutional credentials. Data files will not be transferred directly between processors, and copies will be destroyed after the project has ended.

Management and curation of data

Outline your plans for preparing, organising and documenting data.

The project will use secondary data obtained from the ESS Data Portal in accordance with the terms of access and use. Data will be reviewed and prepared for analysis, including harmonising variable coding and missing values to ensure consistency across rounds, using well-documented, reproducible syntax. Data files will be organised systematically, with original data retained separately from cleaned datasets. Documentation will also include information on the source and version of the data.

Difficulties in data sharing and measures to overcome these

Identify any potential obstacles to sharing your data, explain which and the possible measures you can apply to overcome these.

We do not anticipate any potential obstacles to sharing the dataset that will be generated from this project. The ESS data are already publicly available and the dataset generated will be deposited with the UK Data Service within three months of the end of the grant, enabling timely and responsible re-use. Data will be available in SPSS, Stata, and CSV formats. Similarly to the ESS Data Portal, data users must register with the UK Data Service and agree to terms and conditions of use.

Consent, anonymisation and strategies to enable further re-use of data

Make explicit mention of the planned procedures to handle consent for data sharing for data obtained from human participants, and/or how to anonymise data, to make sure that data can be made available and accessible for future scientific research.

As this is secondary data, the data are already anonymised and consent was sought when the data were collected as documented in the ESS data collection procedures. Generated dataset from this project will be deposited with the UK Data Service for further re-use.

Copyright and intellectual property ownership

State who will own the copyright and IPR of any new data that you will generate.

The copyright and Intellectual Property Rights will be owned by the UK Data Service and accessible under their terms and conditions.

Responsibilities

Outline responsibilities for data management within research teams at all partner institutions

Nhlanhla Ndebele will be responsible for the data management during the research, including the secure archiving of datasets and ensuring the secure destruction of all data held by the research team at the end of the project.

Preparation of data for sharing and archiving

Are the plans for preparing and documenting data for sharing and archiving with the UK Data Service appropriate?

The generated dataset will be deposited with the UK Data Service.

Is there evidence that data will be well documented during research to provide highquality contextual information and/or structured metadata for secondary users?

The generated dataset will be accompanied by documentation describing the source, purpose, variables, coding and derived measures, together with clear documentation of the methods. This documentation will be provided as part of the deposit with the UK Data Service to support interpretation and re-use by other users.