

General Social Survey (GSS)

The General Social Survey (GSS) is a nationally representative survey of adults in the United States that has been conducted since 1972. The GSS is primarily funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and conducted by the non-partisan and objective research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. The GSS is the single best source for sociological and attitudinal trend data covering the United States. It allows researchers to examine the structure and functioning of society in general, as well as the role played by relevant subgroups and to compare the United States to other nations. The GSS collects data on a variety of topics in contemporary American society to monitor and explain trends in opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Introduction to the General Social Survey (GSS)

The General Social Survey (sometimes, General Social Surveys) is a series of nationally representative cross-sectional interviews in the United States that have occurred since 1972. The GSS collects data on contemporary American society to monitor and explain trends in opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. The GSS has adapted questions from earlier surveys, thereby allowing researchers to conduct comparisons for up to 80 years. Originally proposed and developed by James A. Davis, the GSS has been administered by NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) and funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) since its inception. Currently, the GSS is designed by a set of Primary Investigators (PIs), with input from the GSS Board, comprised of notable researchers within the scientific community.

The GSS contains a standard core of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, plus topics of special interest. Among the topics covered are civil liberties, crime and violence, intergroup tolerance, morality, national spending priorities, psychological well-being, social mobility, and stress and traumatic events. Altogether, the GSS is the single best source for sociological and attitudinal trend data covering the United States. It allows researchers to examine the structure and functioning of society in general, as well as the role played by relevant subgroups and to compare the United States to other nations. The GSS aims to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policymakers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting.

The GSS has been tracking trends in public opinion since 1972. Throughout, the GSS has taken great care to keep the survey methodology as comparable over time as possible, which includes everything from keeping the same sampling approach to not changing question wording. This is done to minimize potential changes due to changes in methodology and support the study of trends in public opinion in the United States over time.

However, due to the global COVID19 pandemic, the 2021 GSS Cross-section implemented significant methodological adaptations for the safety of respondents and interviewers, most notably shifting to an address-based sampling with push to web and a web self-administered

questionnaire. The 2022 GSS Cross-section bridges the traditional face-to-face data collection of the GSS from 1972-2018 with the web-based collection of 2021, keeping many of the questionnaire changes brought about by the new mode, while reverting to a mixed mode data collection that include face to face, web and telephone. The 2022 GSS was designed to facilitate a comparison to the 2018 GSS; that is, the 2022 study aimed to resemble the 2018 GSS. Additionally, the 2022 GSS retained several methodological experiment conducted in the 2021 GSS that are specific to the web mode. The 2022 GSS is the first round of a multi-round transition to a mixed-mode survey, fielded both face-to-face and via web self-administered questionnaire.

The GSS comprises a core set of items (the Replicating Core) that are repeated every round, as well as topical modules, which may or may not be repeated. The GSS is currently composed of three separate ballots (A, B, and C), as well as two separate forms (X and Y), which allow for up to six different paths through the interview itself (in addition to paths determined by respondent answers, such as questions about spouses or partners, or questions on employment). Not every question in the Replicating Core is asked of every respondent; most only appear on two of the three ballots. However, every item in the Replicating Core overlaps on at least one ballot with every other item in the Replicating Core, ensuring that researchers can estimate inter-item correlations. Forms are used for experiments such as wording variations within questions, ensuring that half of the respondents on each ballot see the experimental or control conditions of each relevant variable. Within the GSS, these form experiments are usually assigned mnemonics that end in -Y.

Topical modules are typically assigned to either two full ballots (e.g., A and B) or one full ballot and one half-ballot (e.g., A and BX), covering two-thirds or half of sample respondents, respectively. However, some topical modules are included on all ballots. Modules are usually assigned to specific ballots based on one of two conditions: overlap with other key questions (either ensuring that respondents to specific items also receive specific modules or that respondents to specific items do not receive specific modules), or time constraints. The GSS tries to balance the length of all six paths to be approximately equal. Topical modules may be administered via interviewer in any mode or completed by self-administered questionnaire, depending on the sensitivity of the items included.

A complete list of GSS variables and their availability can be found on the GSS Data Explorer at <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/>. The Replicating Core has gone through several revisions over the course of the GSS; the most recent replicating core is broken down below.

The GSS Replicating Core

Brief glossary of key terms

- Items ending in /y indicate that two different forms of the variable exist, with a wording experiment between the two forms. This experiment is differentiated by the “form” variable associated with each GSS case (X and Y). For example, SPKATH vs. SPKATHY is administered

in form X and form Y of a given ballot since it aims to compare gendered references in wording. (SPKATH: If such a person wanted to make a speech in your (city/town/community) against churches and religion, should *he* be allowed to speak, or not? vs SPKATHY: If such a person wanted to make a speech in your (city/town/community) against churches and religion, should *this person* be allowed to speak, or not?)

- Items beginning in:
 - SP- are focused on the respondent's married spouse
 - CO- are focused on the respondent's unmarried cohabiting partner
 - MA- are focused on the respondent's mother, mother substitute, or female head of household growing up
 - PA- are focused on the respondent's father, father substitute, or male head of household growing up
- Items ending in -1 (e.g. HUNT1) indicate that they are new modifications of an older variable. The most recent modification concerns the addition of unmarried cohabiting partners to the GSS who are now treated with the same significance as spouses. Note that this naming convention does not apply to variables ordered in a sequence (e.g. RACECEN1-3)
- The document presents variables as included in the dataset. However, it is worth noting that some variables are created based on other raw variables. For example, variable AGE is created based on three raw variables: BRTHMO (Month), BRTHDY (Day) and BRTHYR (Year), which are not made public due to confidentially reasons. Variables that depend on recoding of raw variables are noted.

Items Appearing on All Ballots

Demographic, Household Characteristics, Paradata, and Process Data

Demographic and life-course data

- Age: AGE (recode from date of birth), ZODIAC (recode from date of birth)
- Birth cohort: COHORT
- Sex: SEX, SEXBIRTH1, SEXNOW1
- Race: RACECEN1, RACECEN2, RACECEN3, RACE
- Ethnicity: ETHNIC (recode from ETH1-3), ETH1, ETH2, ETH3,
- Hispanic Origin: HISPANIC
- Siblings: SIBS
- Marital status or cohabitation status: MARITAL, WIDOWED, DIVORCED, MARTYPE, POSSLQ/Y
- Number of children: CHILDS
- Age at birth of first child: AGEKDBRN
- Geocoded variables: REGION, XNORCSIZ, SRCBELT, SIZE (recode from respondent address)
- Education: EDUC, DEGREE, MAJOR1, MAJOR2
- Religious affiliation: RELIG, DENOM, OTHER, JEW, RELITEN, FUND
- Household income: INCOME, INCOME16, CONINC (recode from INCOME16, base 2000 dollars), REALINC (Recode from INCOME16, base 1986 dollars)
- Citizenship status: USCITZN, FUCITZN, MNTHSUSA, YRSUSA
- Language: OTHLANG, OTHLANG1, OTHLANG2, BETRLANG, SPKLANG

Work/employment data

- Employment status: WRKSTAT, EVWORK, WRKSELFFAM
- Industry: INDUS10 (recode from open-ended variable)
- Private or public sector: WRKGOVT
- Number of employees: NUMEMPS
- Labor supply: HRS1, HRS2, WEEKSWRK, PARTFULL
- Occupation: OCC10 (recode from open-ended variable), ISCO08 (recode from open-ended variable)
- SEI and Prestige: PRESTG10, PRESTG105PLUS, SEI10, SEI10EDUC, SEI10INC
- Income from occupation: RINCOME, RINCOM16, CONRINC (recode from RINCOM16, base 2000 dollars), REALRINC (recode from RINCOM16, base 1986 dollars)
- Size of workplace: LOCALNUM
- Superiors/subordinates in workplace: WKSUB1, WKSUBS1, WKSUP1, WKSUPS1
- Veteran Status: VETYEARS

Spouse/Partner data

- Education: SPEDUC, SPDEG, COEDUC, CODEG
- Employment status: SPWRKSTA, SPEVWORK, SPWRKSLF, COWRKSTA, COEVWORK, COWRKSLF
- Industry: SPIND10, COIND10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- Labor supply: SPHRS1, SPHRS2, COHRS1, COHRS2
- Occupation: SPOCC10, COOCC10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- SEI and Prestige: SPPRES10, SPPRES105PLUS, SPSEI10, SPSEI10EDUC, SPSEI10INC, COPRES10, COPRES105PLUS, COSEI10, COSEI10EDUC, COSEI10INC
- Religious Preference: SPRELIG, SPDEN, SPOTHER, SPJEW, SPFUND, CORELIG, CODEN, COOTHER, COJEW, COFUND

Parental/Social origin data (many of these measures are proxy reports referring to time while respondent was growing up, or when respondent was age 16)

- Birthplace: BORN
- Relative family income: INCOM16
- Family Type: FAMILY16/Y, FAMDIF16
- Father's education: PAEDUC, PADEG
- Mother's education: MAEDUC, MADEG
- Father's work status: PAWRKSLF, PAWRKSLFFAM
- Father's occupation: PAOCC10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- Father's industry: PAIND10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- Father's SEI and Prestige: PAPRES10, PAPRES105PLUS, PASEI10, PASEI10EDUC, PASEI10INC (recode from OCC + other vars)
- Mother's work status: MAWRKGRW, MAWRKSLF2, MAWRKSLFFAM
- Mother's occupation: MAOCC10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- Mother's industry: MAIND10 (recode from an open-ended variable)
- Mother's SEI and Prestige: MAPRES10, MAPRES105PLUS, MASEI10, MASEI10EDUC, MASEI10INC
- Parental birthplace: PARBORN

- Grandparents' birthplace: GRANBORN
- Region of residence: REG16
- Type of residence: RES16
- Geographic mobility since age 16: MOBILE16
- Religious affiliation growing up: RELIG16, DENOM16, OTH16 JEW16, FND16

Household variables (many of these are collected as part of the Household Enumeration Form, Household Relationships module (new in 2020) or derived from data contained in either module)

- Household size and composition: HOMPOP, BABIES, PRETEEN, TEENS, ADULTS (derived from HEF/Household Relationships information), UNRELAT
- Demographics and relationships of household members:
 - RELATE1-RELATE14, RELHHD1-RELHHD14, RELHH1-RELHH14, RELSP1-14
 - GENDER1-GENDER14
 - OLD1-OLD14
MAR1-MAR14
 - AWAY1-AWAY14
 - WHERE1-WHERE14
- Household race: HHRACE
- Household type: HHTYPE, HHTYPE1 (recode from HHTYPE)
- Generations in household: FAMGEN
- Respondent's relationship to Head of Household: RPLACE
- Presence of visitors: VISITORS, RVISITOR
- Earners in household: EARNRS
- Dwelling type: DWELLING

Racial composition of neighborhood

- RACLIVE

Technical data and Paradata

- Pre-interview: HLTHSTRT, HUADD, HUADDWHY, DWELLPRE, KIDSINHH, RESPOND, INCUSPOP, NEISAFE
- Post-interview: RLOOKS, RGROOMED, RWEIGHT, RHLTHEND, HUCLEAN, COOP, COMPREND
- Consent: CONSENT, ADMINCONSENT
- Other people: WHOELSE1-WHOELSE6
- Interview length: LNGTHINV (recode from timestamps)
- Interviewer characteristics: INTAGE, INTETHN, INTSEX, INTYRS, INTTHISP, INTRACE1-INTRACE3
- Respondent skin tone: RATETONE
- Interview mode: MODE
- Fees: FEEUSED, FEELEVEL
- Interview language: SPANENG
- Weights: FORMWT, OVERSAMP, WTSS, WTSSALL, WTSSNR, WTSSHH (weighting variables are all composites from many sources of information)
- Respondent ID: ID

- Household informant information: HEFINFO
- Respondent number in Household roster: RESPNUM
- Year of interview: YEAR
- Date of interview: DATEINTV
- Ballot of interview: BALLOT
- Wording form of interview: FORM
- Did respondent complete ISSP: ISSP
- Does R have telephone: PHONE
- Sampling information: SAMPLE, SAMPCODE, PHASE

Attitudes and Opinions

Priorities for national spending

- NATSPAC/Y, NATENVIR/Y, NATHEAL/Y, NATCITY/Y, NATCRIME/Y, NATDRUG/Y, NATEDUC/Y, NATRACE/Y, NATARMS/Y, NATAID/Y, NATFARE/Y, NATROAD, NATSOC, NATMASS, NATPARK, NATCHLD, NATSCI, NATENRGY

Voting and political preferences

- Voting in recent election: VOTE16, VOTE20
- Presidential vote: PRES16, PRES20
- Hypothetical presidential vote: IF16WHO, IF20WHO
- Political views: POLVIEWS
- Party affiliation: PARTYID (recode from a series of political affiliation questions)

Religious attitudes and behavior

- Attendance at religious services: ATTEND
- Frequency of Prayer: PRAY
- Life after death: POSTLIFE
- Feelings about the Bible: BIBLE
- Papal authority: POPESPKS
- Belief in God: GOD
- Born again experiences: REBORN
- Proselytizing for Christianity: SAVESOUL
- Religious and spiritual identity: RELPERSN, SPRTPRSN

Class identification and economic well-being

- Subjective social class placement: CLASS
- Satisfaction with financial situation: SATFIN
- Trend in financial situation: FINALTER
- Subjective assessment of financial situation relative to average: FINRELA
- Rank in society: RANK

Subjective well-being and social life orientations

- General happiness: HAPPY

- Happiness in relationship: HAPMAR, HAPCOHAB
- Satisfaction with work: SATJOB

Attitude and opinion items (abbreviated as A&O in appendix A)

- Capital punishment: CAPPUN
- Criminal Courts: COURTS
- Likelihood of world war: USWARY

Items only appearing on Ballots A and B

Behaviors and Non-opinion Measures

Verbal ability

- WORDA, WORDB, WORDC, WORDD, WORDE, WORDF, WORDG, WORDH, WORDI, WORDJ, WORDK, WORDL, WORDM, WORDN, WORDSUM (recode from WORDA-WORDN)

Computer and internet usage

- Use computer: COMPUSE
- Use web via mobile device: WEBMOB
- Time spent on email per week: EMAILHR, EMAILMIN
- Use internet: USEWWW
- Time spent on internet per week: WWWHR, WWWMIN

Socializing with personal contacts

- Relatives: SOCREL
- Neighbors: SOCCOMMUN
- Friends: SCOFRIEND
- Bar: SOCBAR

Media use/contact

- Time spent on TV: TVHRS
- Read newspaper: NEWS

Attitudes and Opinions

Gender roles

- Affirmative Action: DISCAFFW, DISCAFFM, FEHIRE, FEJOBFAFF,
- Working mothers: FECHLD, FEPRESCH
- Traditional gender roles: FEFAM
- Women in politics: FEPOL
- Households suffer when men overwork: MEOVWRK

Racial Attitudes and Stereotypes

- Racial preference in employment: AFFRMACT
- Causes of racial inequality: RACDIF1/Y, RACDIF2/Y, RACDIF3/Y, RACDIF4/Y
- Blacks should work way up: WRKWAYUP
- Racial stereotypes, Wealth: WLTHWHTS, WLTHBLKS, WLTHHSPS
- Racial stereotypes, Hardworking: WORKWHTS, WORKBLKS, WORKHSPS
- Racial stereotypes, Intelligence: INTLWHTS, INTLBLKS, INTLHSPS
- Neighborhood composition: LIVEWHTS, LIVEBLKS
- Attitudes to marriage: MARWHT, MARBLK, MARASIAN, MARHISP

Suicide

- Physician-assisted suicide: LETDIE1
- Right to commit suicide: SUICIDE1, SUICIDE2, SUICIDE3, SUICIDE4

Sexual behavior

- Sex education in public schools: SEXEDUC
- Sexual attitudes: TEENSEX, PREMARSZ
- Birth control for teens: PILLOK

Work Orientation

- Job security: JOBLOSE, JOBFIND

Family & Children

- Approval of spanking: SPANKING
- Ideal number of children: CHLDIDEL
- Divorce law too lenient or restrictive: DIVLAW

Religion (Abbreviated as A&O: Prayer in Appendix A)

- Prayer in public schools: PRAYER

Immigration

- Number of immigrants increase or decrease: LETIN1A

Items only appearing on Ballots A and C

Behaviors and Non-opinion Measures

Firearms

- Gun ownership: OWNGUN, ROWNGUN, PISTOL, RIFLE, SHOTGUN
- Hunting: HUNT1

Home ownership

- Current home ownership: DWELOWN
- Home ownership at age 16: DWELOWN16

Subjective well-being and social life orientations

- Subjective health: HEALTH

Everyday Discrimination

- Treated with less respect: DISRSPCT
- Worse service in restaurants/stores: POORSERV
- Treated as unintelligent: NOTSMART
- People are afraid: AFRAIDOF
- Threatened or harassed: THREATEN

Attitudes and Opinions

Legalized abortion

- Fetal defect: ABDEFECT
- No more children: ABNOMORE
- Health risk: ABHLTH
- Financial wellbeing: ABPOOR
- Rape: ABRAPE
- Unmarried mother: ABSINGLE
- Any reason: ABANY

Civil liberties (Stouffer)

- Atheist: SPKATH/Y, COLATH, LIBATH/Y
- Racist: SPKRAC/Y, COLRAC, LIBRAC/Y
- Communist: SPKCOM/Y, COLCOM/Y, LIBCOM/Y
- Militarist: SPKMIL/Y, COLMIL, LIBMIL/Y
- Homosexual: SPKHOMO/Y, COLHOMO, LIBHOMO/Y
- Muslim clergy: SPKMLSM/Y, COLMSLM, LIBMSLM/Y

Sexual behavior

- Sexual attitudes: XMARSEX, TEENSEX, HOMOSEX
- Gay marriage: MARHOMO

Racial attitudes

- Closeness to other races: CLOSEBLK, CLOSEWHT
- Reverse discrimination: DISCAFF
- Open housing: RACOPEN
- Racial composition of workplace: RACWORK

Crime, punishment, and firearms

- Gun laws: GUNLAW
- Fear walking at night near home: FEAR

Tax attitudes

- Tax burden: TAX

Subjective wellbeing

- Subjective life feeling: LIFE

Economic well-being

- How to get ahead in life: GETAHEAD

Work orientation

- Work as central life interest: RICHWORK

Immigration

- Immigrants and crime: IMMCRIME
- Jobs: IMMJOBS
- Culture: ADOPTUS
- Fate of illegal immigrants: IMMFATE
- Specific immigration types: LETINHSP, LETINASN

Items only appearing on Ballots B and C

Behaviors and Non-opinion Measures

Work status

- Any unemployment in past 10 years: UNEMP
- Union membership: UNION1

Attitudes and Opinions

Confidence in institutions

- CONARMY, CONBUS, CONCLERG, CONEDUC, CONFED, CONFINAN, CONJUDGE, CONLABOR, CONLEGIS, CONMEDIC, CONPRESS, CONSCI, CONTV

Family & children

- Ideal qualities for children: HELPOTH, OBEY, THNKSELF, POPULAR, WORKHARD
- Co-residence of parents with adult children: AGED

Crime, punishment, and firearms

- Police striking adult male: POLHITOK/Y
- Police striking adult male using abusive language: POLABUSE/Y
- Police striking adult male murder suspect: POLMURDR/Y
- Police striking adult male attempting escape: POLESCAP/Y
- Police striking adult male attacking police: POLATTAK/Y
- Marijuana legalization: GRASS

Government Intervention

- Equalize incomes: EQWLTH
- Improve living standards: HELPPPOOR
- Solve national problems: HELPNOT
- Help with health costs: HELPSICK
- Help Blacks: HELPBLK

Economic well-being

- Standard of living relative to parents: PARSOL
- Projected standard of living relative to children: KIDSSOL

Sexual behavior

- Watched x-rated movie: XMOVIE/Y
- Laws around pornography: PORNLAW

Subjective well-being and social life orientations

- Social life feelings/Misanthropy: CANTRUST, FAIR, HELPFUL, TRUST

GSS Data Explorer

GSS Data Explorer (<https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/>) is a platform to make GSS data easier to use. The GSS DE platform includes curated tables and trends data so that users interested in how opinions changed over time could quickly look at important changes by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics without having to login into the platform. The DE features support connecting the GSS DE more effectively to the rest of the Internet by adding “social sign-in” options to login (i.e., Facebook and Google) and we made easier to share content from our Trends pages to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. We included features to give users the ability to download a PNG of the graph and the data in Excel so users can export the link and the graph to Facebook and Twitter (these can of course be exported to other sources as well such as Instagram). It provides capabilities for searching content,

creating analyses (tabulations), extract and store results (these are improvements to a section formerly named “Project pages” and “Variable cart”). Users have the ability to search by date, by all variable metadata, by variable description, by survey question, and by GSS Tags. Users can use existing tags or create their own tags. After analysis, users can save tabulation to their dashboard on “MyGSS,” where they can print, save or Export to Box or your Google Drive (users need to allow access to their digital drives and it will come as an encrypted file).

Additional video resources

The GSS hosts a **YouTube Channel** (https://www.youtube.com/@GSS_NORC/playlists) with a **GSS video series** of educational videos featuring the GSS. The videos are described as follows.

- (1) [Introduction to the GSS](#). This video focuses on a brief background about the GSS, its history, stakeholders, and select academic contributions based on the GSS. It positions the GSS as one of the best data resources for undergraduates and researchers.
- (2) [GSS Project Process & Life Cycle](#). This video covers the GSS survey lifecycle, from the Board review of submissions, cognitive and timing testing, final decisions, programming, pilot testing, actual data collection, data cleaning, dissemination, social media presence, and user support.
- (3) [The GSS Structure & Basics](#). This video focuses on what goes into fielding the GSS, including core content, experiments, cross-section and panel studies, ISSP modules, the call for modules, and balloting structure. It covers the basic techniques for using the GSS, such as how to navigate, download and interpret the data, who to contact for support, how to upload GSS data into common software packages, and other skills.
- (4) [Sampling in the GSS](#). This video explains the fundamental steps that are taken to draw a representative sample for the GSS.
- (5) [Total Survey Error in the GSS](#). This video discusses aspects about nonresponse error, coverage error, sampling error, and measurement error in the GSS.
- (6) [GSS Wording Experiments](#). This video provides examples of how the GSS has contributed to understand measurement effects due to wording (for example, national spending priority items).
- (7) [The GSS Data Explorer](#). This video provides a tutorial of accessing and using the Explorer and its online analytics and visualizations, as well as the new features in the DE 2.0.
- (8) [GSS for Educators](#). This video is targeted and tailored for professors as a guide for ideas and ways that the GSS and its data can be incorporated into lesson plans.
- (9) [GSS for STEM](#). This video focuses on “blending” or working with data beyond the survey response data on the GSS (e.g., paradata elements from the MLMS, death index linkage, etc.).
- (10) [Taking a deep dive into GSS content](#). This video provides an overview of variables and areas of interest for researchers interesting in knowing resources and recent trends.