

What is the General Social Survey?

The General Social Survey (GSS) has been conducted almost annually since its inception in 1972 with the 28th round completed in 2010. The goals of the GSS are threefold: to examine the structure and functioning of society and the role of subpopulations; to monitor societal changes and the increasing complexities within the United States, which can then be compared to other countries; and to make quality data available to academics, students, policy practitioners and others at minimal cost and time. The GSS is the only full-probability, personal-interview survey designed to monitor changes in attitudes and social characteristics of individuals living in the United States. There are core demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal variables that have remained unchanged since 1972, making the GSS a widely accepted source of data on societal trends. Cross-national and comparative research using the GSS and social surveys in Germany commenced in 1982, and since 1985, a cross-national module has been developed as part of the [International Social Survey Programme \(ISSP\)](#) – which currently has 49 member states. The GSS is conducted by the [National Opinion Research Center \(NORC\)](#) housed on the campus of the University of Chicago. It is also the largest funded social science, cross-national research project with funding by the National Science Foundation.

What does the GSS offer family scholars?

The GSS provides core items on socio-demographic as well as social and political attitudes and behavioral measures. Researchers can use the core items in the GSS to investigate topics on child wellbeing outcomes; employment and occupational status and income; family planning intentions and fertility; gender roles; household size, composition, and generations in the household; immigration; marriage and family; racial attitudes and stereotypes; sexual behavior; and subjective wellbeing and social life orientations. A more detailed list of core items for research is in the technical document – [The Replicating Core](#) (found under the subheading “Additional Technical Documentation”).

Family scholars can also examine items from a comprehensive list of topical modules in the GSS. In addition, comparative research is available based on ISSP cross-national and topical modules (e.g., information on environment; family and changing gender roles; national identity and citizenship; religion; role of government; social networks and support systems; and work orientation). Both sets of modules are found in the Introduction document of the 1972-2010 [GSS Codebook](#), (found under the subheading “Codebook Sections”).

What is new in the 2010 GSS?

The 2010 GSS was the first round to completely implement a new, three-round rolling panel design, which began in 2006, the base year for the first panel. The 2008 GSS consisted of a new cross-section, plus re-interviews from the 2006 GSS panel. The 2010 GSS is comprised of a new cross-section, the first re-interviews from the 2008 panel, and the second and final re-interviews from the 2006 base panel. In 2012 and later releases of the GSS, wave one of a new panel and panel cases from waves one and two of the preceding releases will be introduced.

A second new feature of the GSS is the creation of the GSS-NDI (General Social Survey-National Death Index) dataset. Records from the 1978-2002 waves of the GSS are linked to death records through 2008 from the National Death Index. Due to few deaths occurring among GSS respondents in the years 2002 through 2006, later GSS data have not yet been linked. This new dataset allows researchers to better

examine how social factors (e.g., ideas, beliefs, attitudes, actions, and social connections) influence health outcomes. The construction of this dataset was made possible through a grant provided by the National Institute on Minority and Health Disparities ([NIMHD](#)).

How do I access the GSS data?

The following public-use GSS datasets are available in [SPSS](#) and [Stata](#) formats:

- The GSS 1972-2010 Cross-Sectional Cumulative Data file*
- The 3-wave GSS Panel 2010, merged with all cases and variables
- The 2-wave GSS Panel 2008
- The baseline wave GSS Panel 2006
- The GSS-National Death Index File for 1978-2002
- Individual year data sets (Cross-section only)

*The 1972-2010 cumulative file is also available at

1. [Roper Center](#), University of Connecticut
2. Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research ([ICPSR](#))
3. [Survey Documentation Archive](#), University of California, Berkeley

The GSS provides users access to quick downloads of data in SAS and Stata, and it allows users to produce customized downloads in over a dozen formats such as SAS, Stata, SPSS, NDStat, Excel, and DBase. These downloads can be found in the Downloads section of the [NESSTAR](#) data environment. An additional feature of the GSS is that users can [browse GSS variables](#) and perform basic data analysis such as produce frequencies and cross-tabulations, find correlations, and run regressions without downloading data. In particular, users can visit the [NESSTAR](#) data environment and [SDA](#) websites to run these analyses.

Restricted GSS Data

GSS provides geographic identification code files (including data on State, Primary sampling units (PSUs), County and Census tract) to researchers under special contract with NORC. However, in no circumstances will identifying information (e.g., name and address) be provided. For further information regarding restricted data use, see [Obtaining GSS Sensitive Data Files](#) (found under the subheading “Additional Technical Documentation”).

How do I use the GSS data?

The [GSS 1972-2010 Codebook](#) is now available online. Other supporting documentation including [questionnaires](#) and [technical reports](#) are found on the GSS website. A quick link to the GSS User’s Guide and additional documentation relating to previous waves of the GSS is also found on the [Documentation](#) page of the GSS website.

Reports using the GSS Data

The GSS provides numerous reports highlighting topics of interest for family scholars. The [GSS Reports](#) are placed under the following headings:

- Cross-national Reports
- Methodological Reports

The Data Source: General Social Survey

Julissa Cruz & Larry Gibbs



- Project Reports
- Social Change Reports
- Topical Reports

Where can I learn more about the GSS?

For more information about the GSS, visit the General Social Survey's [main webpage](#). Specific questions and/or requests can be made electronically to gss@norc.org or via the GSS [Contact Us](#) page.

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