

The globalisation of public opinion research
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Abstract

As the process of globalisation has opened up channels of communication between different countries and increased interest in cross-national analysis, so the process of public opinion survey research has expanded its reach in the world. This article examines both the breadth and the depth of the globalisation of public opinion research, first examining the growth of cross-national surveys such as the World Values Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, the European Social Survey, and the various Global Barometers, and second, discussing the extent to which this growth has been (a) high-quality survey research, and (b) comparable (or of equivalent meaning) with survey research in other countries. Finally, the article suggests a new standard for ‘grading’ cross-national programs of survey research, based upon debates in evidence-based medicine.

Keywords: Survey methodology, cross-national research, comparative research, survey history

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Introduction

If globalisation is “the emergence of a global culture system...brought about by a variety of social and cultural developments” (Marshall, 1998; p.258), these social and cultural developments connote a number of processes more specific to public opinion and survey research. For one, the greater ease and speed of communication between different countries, seen in the close collaboration between national teams, makes these cross-national programmes of survey research feasible. Another connotation of globalisation would be the export of western technology and practices to less developed countries, seen in the export of survey research methodologies across the globe. And a third is the penetration of global brands to markets around the world. Thus in the context of public opinion research and globalisation, this article aims to explore the extent to which there has been the spread of a global “brand” or “product” of public opinion research across the world, and what the current limitations and intellectual assumptions of such a brand might be.

We begin with a brief history of the spread of public opinion surveys, particularly noting growth amongst commercial, government and academic surveys, and most specifically the growth of cross-national survey endeavors, around the world. We then turn to the issues of data quality and comparability: has the globalisation of survey research meant the spread of a standard “product” of known and equivalent quality to diverse countries? Can survey research in diverse countries and contexts deliver meaningful comparisons of public opinion? And finally, has globalisation led to the dominance of a particular intellectual framework and set of assumptions that may not be quite so appropriate outside their original homes?

Although in this review we focus largely on academic survey research, rather than on government or commercial opinion polls, and we focus particularly on the widely-used and highly-regarded cross-national survey programs, a great deal of what we say will

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also apply to academic surveys (and indeed to government and commercial ones) that are not part of these cross-national programs.

A brief history

Commercial polls

While roots of the survey method can be traced back to the 19th century (see, e.g., Marsh 1982, Converse 1987), the start of systematic public opinion research is usually taken to be the work of George Gallup in the USA during the inter-war years (Worcester 1987, Bulmer 1998, Osborne and Rose 1999). Although there were opinion polls before Gallup's, his contribution was the use of systematic samples of the population:

If a sample is accurately selected, it represents a near replica of the entire population. It is a miniature electorate with the same proportion of farmers, doctors, lawyers, Catholics, Protestants, old people, young people, businessmen, laborers and so on, as is to be found in the entire population (Gallup 1948: 22-3).

The key features of survey research established by Gallup—and followed ever since—were the use of random samples from a defined population (typically quota rather than probability samples), the use of standardised 'closed' questions to measure subjective attitudes and demographic characteristics of respondents, the administration of face-to-face surveys by trained interviewers, and the quantitative analysis of the results. The focus of these early surveys was on political attitudes and behaviour and, most famously, Gallup successfully predicted Roosevelt's win in the 1936 Presidential election (in contrast to the *Literary Digest*, whose prediction of an Alf Landon victory was made using a non-representative sample) (Osborne and Rose 1999). Gallup exported his approach and methods to Britain in 1937 and France in 1938, and

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commercial public opinion research rapidly spread during the war years to other wealthy industrialised countries, reaching Australia, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, West Germany, Finland, Norway and Italy by 1946 (Worcester 1987). In nearly all of these countries, Gallup polls (and others) continue to thrive, although (mainly due to cost concerns) with the gradual replacement of face-to-face interviews with telephone interviewing.

A continuing theme for these commercial opinion polls has been the political opinion poll (for which commercial sponsors such as the mass media can readily be found). By the beginning of the 1980s political polls were being conducted in nearly all Western democracies and a growing number of communist and lesser-developed nations (Crespi 1989); today that number is even larger—Gallup’s most recent survey, *The Voice of the People* (<http://www.voice-of-the-people.net>), included 51 countries in 2003, including a number of Middle Eastern, West Asian and African countries. It would now be rare to have a general election in a democracy without a pre-election poll (although as Smith (2004) notes, bans on polls during the immediate run-up to an election still exist in some countries).

Government-sponsored polls

A second broad category of polls, government-sponsored surveys, also began to grow around the same time that Gallup’s methods were being exported. Government polls, however, were designed to meet government needs for knowing about (and perhaps influencing) their citizens, and had the potential to be somewhat less benign than commercial polls. One of the earliest examples is the ‘survey’ of each British county demanded by the ‘Defense of the Realm Act’ of April 1798, conducted by the British government to ascertain the willingness of the (male) public to fight against the French in the event of an invasion (Colley 1992). More contemporarily, however, Samuel Stouffer and his team in the Research Branch of Information and Education Division of the US War Department conducted surveys of the US Army Services Forces between

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1942 and 1945. These studies, collectively known as *The American Soldier*, used polling techniques to examine the attitudes and morale of soldiers, injecting for the first time social psychological questions and questioning subjective opinions and preferences (Stouffer et al 1949a, 1949b, 1950a, 1950b, Rose and Osborne 1999, Kuechler 1998). Interestingly, non-democratic governments also have a history of carrying out opinion polls. When Krushchev came to power in the Soviet Union, his criticisms of the lack of reliable information on his publics led to the formation of the Institute for Concrete Social Research, and the appointment of Boris Grushin as the head of a center for studying public opinion in 1969 (Worcester 1987). And in the former Czechoslovakia, although the previously-established Institute for Public Opinion Research was abolished and condemned as ‘bourgeois pseudo-science’ by the Communist Party in 1948, it was re-established in 1965 within the newly-formed Institute of Sociology. As Otava (1988) notes however, the “empirical” results of these studies were not always used in good faith:

...in the first issue of the *Sociological Journal* for 1987, a regular feature entitled ‘Empirical Surveys’ presented the results of an investigation called ‘Public Opinion on Questions of War and Peace’...It begins with the sentence: ‘The empirical results confirm a positive evaluation of the foreign-policy orientation of the USSR. The opinion that the USSR is working for peace was unanimous...’ (1988: 252-3).

At best, government polls can give citizens a voice—although at worst they can be a source of political manipulation. The growing need to obtain the assent of the governed in an advanced society means that such government surveys have also become more global. Most recently, for example, the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq commissioned public opinion surveys to help formulate its policy.

An additional weakness of government-sponsored opinion surveys is that they are rarely available for secondary academic analysis. One important exception, however, is

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the Eurobarometer (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/) sponsored by the European Commission. In 1962 the then EEC commissioned the 'Attitudes to Europe' survey of Germany, France and the Benelux countries. This was a prelude to the Eurobarometer, a biannual survey starting in 1970 and including all European member states since 1973. Its coverage has expanded as the EU has grown in size and has recently been supplemented by the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (CC-EB), launched in 2001 as a replacement for the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (CEEB). As both of these surveys have EU funding, their primary purpose has been meeting the needs of the EU; however the Eurobarometers have also had substantial academic input, notably collaboration with the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan and the ZUMA Centre for Survey Research and Methodology at the University of Mannheim. These two institutes have also made the data available for secondary analysis, and the data have been widely used in academic research (c.f., Inglehart 1990, 1997).

Academic surveys

Our main focus in this paper however is on a third category of surveys, namely academic surveys, funded by research councils or charities and directed by independent research institutes. Some of the earliest academic surveys of public opinion were again in the US but were based on local samples. The Columbia studies of Erie county in 1940 and Elmira county in 1948, funded initially by the Rockefeller Foundation and guided by Berelson and Lazarsfeld, examined individuals in two particular communities to study how voters made up their minds during presidential election campaigns. Both studies were panel studies, and focus was given to a number of individual variables as well as contextual variables, such as the mass media (largely in the Erie study) and interpersonal associations (in Elmira) (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1948, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, Rossi 1949).

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Published several months before the Elmira studies, but examining the 1952 election, was another study of the American electorate conducted by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan. The SRC's Michigan Studies (later the American National Election Studies (ANES)) differed from the Columbia studies by using relatively small but nationally-representative probability samples, and using standardised, largely closed-ended questions, focusing on individual 'motivations' for party preferences, via face-to-face interviews. Campbell developed the socio-psychological intellectual framework embodied by the Michigan Studies in the classic works *The Voter Decides* (1954), followed by *The American Voter* (Campbell et al 1960). The Michigan Studies shortly became the gold standard in electoral research, and have conducted studies of every presidential and congressional election since 1948. The National Science Foundation took over funding the studies in 1977, formally establishing the ANES.

After their establishment in the US, the Michigan Studies were exported, in a not dissimilar fashion to Gallup's export, via links with scholars in other countries. The model was first exported to Britain, with the famous collaboration between Donald Stokes (part of the *American Voter* team) and the British psephologist David Butler. They began with a 1963 pre-election survey and instituted panel studies of electoral behaviour and opinion. This led to the classic work on British politics and public opinion, *Political Change in Britain* (Butler and Stokes 1974), and helped to establish the British Election Surveys (BES), in which panel research continues to play a large role. The Michigan Studies were also exported in rather similar fashion to India with a 1967 survey (Eldersveld and Ahmed 1978), and established what remains a notable tradition of Indian electoral research.

Many other wealthy societies now have regular election surveys funded by national science foundations and intellectually independent of national governments or other interested bodies; however only a few have long histories like the ANES or BES. France, for example, has still to acquire a series of this kind, and while a series of

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election surveys can be constructed for Germany going back to 1949, it is not a formal series in the American or British sense. However, over the last twenty years or so there has been a rapid spread of election studies around the world and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, <http://www.umich.edu/~cses>), a cross-national collaboration that includes a standardised 'add-on' module to individual country election surveys, now covers over fifty states. The first module, running from 1996 to 2001, was completed in more than 30 diverse countries, including the Ukraine, Israel, Korea, Thailand and Peru.

In addition to the ANES, a second widely-copied model has been the American General Social Survey (GSS), which began in 1972, funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and the NSF. The GSS has a broader remit than the election survey and includes standardised, closed questions on social attitudes and values as well as political issues; the survey was annual until 1994, and has been biennial since. Like the ANES it is a nationally-representative probability sample, with face-to-face interviewing. The British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, starting in 1983, is largely the British equivalent of the GSS, holding a similar remit. In Germany, the Allgemeinen Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften (ALLBUS), begun in 1980, also serves as a biennial survey of social behaviours and attitudes.

Although collaboration between the ALLBUS and the GSS occurred as early as 1982, in 1984 these three social surveys, in conjunction with representatives from the Research School of the Social Sciences at the Australian National University, agreed to a further and more developed program of cross-national collaboration, eventually in the form of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP, <http://www.issp.org>). The

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founding countries—US, Britain, Germany and Australia—devised the format of ‘add-on’ modules of standardised closed questions, designed by the cross-national team, with identical wording in each participating country. The ISSP to-date continues to conduct annual surveys, investigating a new topic each year, and now includes thirty eight countries, predominantly Western, but including Bangladesh since 1996 and South Africa since 2001, as well as Japan, Chile, Venezuela, and a number of former communist countries. Table 1 gives details of the countries that have been included in the ISSP (and in other major cross-national programmes) since its inception.

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Table 1
Country coverage in cross-national research programs

	ISS P ¹	W VS/ EV S ²	Glob al- baro meter s ³	C S E S ⁴	E S S ⁵	Eu ro - ba ro m ete rs ⁶
Albania		WVS: '95				CC- EB: '91- 96
Algeria		WVS: '00				
Argentina		WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00	Lat: '88, '95-04			
Armenia		WVS: '95				CC- EB: '92- 96
Australia	'85- 88, '90-02	WVS: '81, '95		' 9 6		
Austria	'85- 89, '91- 95, '98-02	WVS: '90 EVS: '90, '99	NE: '91, '98, '04		' 0 2	EB: '94- 04
Azerbaijan		WVS: '95				
Bangladesh	'96- 97, '99-00	WVS: '95, '00				
Belarus		WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '92- 93, '95, '98, '04	' 0 1 a		CC- EB: '92- 96
Belgium	'00, '02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99		' 9 9	' 0 2	EB: '74- 04
Bolivia			Lat: '96- 04			
Bosnia- Herzegovina		WVS: '95				
Botswana			Afro: '99, '03, '05			

¹ Annual waves, reported 1985-2002; Date listed is date of wave, not necessarily of fieldwork (Source: www.issp.org ('85-00) and http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/index.htm ('01-02))

²WVS: Four waves: 1981-84, 1990-93, 1995, 2000; EVS: Three waves: 1981-84, 1990-93, 1999 (Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org)

³ Afrobarometer (*Afro*): Rd. 1: 1999-2001, Rd. 2: 2002-04, Rd. 3: 2005 (planned), plus additional time-series in some countries (Source: www.afrobarometer.org); East Asia (*EAsia*): No systematic waves (Source: www.eastasiabarometer.org); Latinobarometro (*Lat*): 1988 pilot, annual since 1995 (except 1999) (Source: www.latinobarometro.org); New Europe (*NE*): Annual 1991-95, 1998 (as New Democracies Barometer), 2001, 2004 (Source: www.cspp.strath.ac.uk)

⁴ Module 1: 1996-01a; Module 2: 2001b-05 (Source: www.umich.edu/~cses/)

⁵ Round One: 2002 (Source: www.europeansocialsurvey.org)

⁶ Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (formerly Central and Eastern Eurobarometer) (*CC-EB*): Annual 1990-97, Biennial 2001-03; Eurobarometer (*EB*): Biennial 1985-2004 (Sources: http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/ and http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/eurobarometer/)

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Brazil	'00-02	WVS: '90, '95	Lat: '88, '95-04			
Bulgaria	'92- 00, '02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '99	NE: '91- 95, '98, '01, '04	' 0 1 b		CC- EB: '90- 97, '01- 03
Canada	'92-01	WVS: '81, '90, '00		' 9 7		
Cape Verde			Afro: '02, '05			
Chile	'98-02	WVS: '90, '95, '00	Lat: '88, '95-04	' 9 9		
China		WVS: '90, '95, '00	EAsia: '94, '02			
Colombia		WVS: '95	Lat: '96- 04			
Costa Rica			Lat: '96- 04			
Croatia		WVS: '95 EVS: '99	NE: '92- 93, '95, '98, '04			CC- EB: '95- 96
Cyprus	'96-02					CC- EB: '01- 03
Czech Republic	'93-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '91- 95, '98, '01, '04	' 9 6	' 0 2	CC- EB: '90- 97, '01- 03 EB: '02
Denmark	'98-02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99		' 9 8	' 0 2	EB: '74- 04
Dominican Republic		WVS: '95	Lat: '02, '04			
Democratic Republic of the Congo		WVS: '95				
Ecuador			Lat: '96- 04			
Egypt		WVS: '00				
El Salvador		WVS: '95	Lat: '96- 04			
Estonia		WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '98, '01			CC- EB: '91- 97, '01- 03
Finland	'00-02	WVS: '81, '90, '95 EVS: '81, '90, '99			' 0 2	EB: '93- 04
France	'96-02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81,		' 0 2	' 0 2	EB: '74- 04

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Georgia		'90, '99				CC-EB: '92, '94-'96
		WVS: '95				
Germany⁷	'85-'02	WVS: '81, '90, '95 EVS: '81, '90, '99	NE: '04	'98 '02	'00 '02	EB: '74-'04
Great Britain	'85-'02	WVS: '81, '90, '95 EVS: '81, '90, '99		'97 '01	'00 '02	EB: '74-'04
Ghana		WVS: '95	Afro: '97, '99, '02, '05			
Greece		EVS: '99			'00 '02	EB: '80-'04
Guatemala			Lat: '96-'04			
Honduras			Lat: '96-'04			
Hong Kong			EAsia: '94, '01	'98 '02		
Hungary	'86-'02	WVS: '81, '90, '95 EVS: '81, '99	NE: '91-'95, '98, '01, '04	'98 '02	'00 '02	CC-EB: '90-'97, '01-'03 EB: '02
Iceland		WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99		'98 '02		EB: '03
India		WVS: '90, '95, '00				
Indonesia		WVS: '00	EAsia: TBC			
Iran		WVS: '00				
Ireland	'86-'96, '98-'00, '02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99		'00 '02	'00 '02	EB: '74-'04
Israel	'89-'91, '93-'94, '96-'02	WVS: '00		'98 '02	'00 '02	
Italy	'85-'01	WVS:				EB:

⁷ Prior to 1990, typically West Germany only

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		WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99			0 2	'74- 04
Japan	'93-02	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00	EAsia: TBC	' 9 6		
Jordan		WVS: '00				
Kazakhstan						CC- EB: '94- 96
Kenya			Afro: '03, '05			
Latvia	'95-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '98, '01			CC- EB: '91- 97, '01- 03
Lesotho			Afro: '00, '03, '05			
Lithuania	'94	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '98, '01	' 9 7		CC- EB: '91- 97, '01- 03
Luxembourg		EVS: '99			' 0 2	EB: '74- 04
Macedonia		WVS: '95				CC- EB: '93- 96
Malawi			Afro: '99, '03, '05			
Mali			Afro: '01, '02, '05			
Malta		EVS: '99				CC- EB: '01- 03
Mexico	'00, '02	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00	Lat: '95-04	' 9 7 ' ' 0 0		
Moldova		WVS: '95	NE: '04			CC- EB: '92
Mongolia			EAsia: TBC			
Montenegro		WVS: '95, '00	NE: '98			CC- EB: '96
Morocco		WVS: '00				
Mozambique			Afro: '02, '05			
Namibia			Afro: '99, '02, '03, '05			
Netherlands	'87-89, '91, '93-95, '97-00, '02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99		' 9 8	' 0 2	EB: '74- 04
New Zealand	'91-02	WVS: '95		' 9 6 ' ' 0 2		
Nicaragua			Lat: '96-04			

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Nigeria		WVS: '90, '95, '00	Afro: '00, '01, '03, '05			
Northern Ireland	'01-02	WVS: '81, '90 EVS: '81, '90, '99			' 0 2	EB: '75- 04
Norway	'89-02	WVS: '81, '90, '95 EVS: '81, '90		' 9 7	' 0 2	EB: '90, '92- 04
Pakistan		WVS: '95, '00				
Panama			Lat: '96- 04			
Paraguay			Lat: '95- 04			
Peru		WVS: '95, '00	Lat: '95- 04	' 0 0 ' ' 0 1 a		
Philippines	'91-02	WVS: '95, '00	EAsia: '02			
Poland	'87, '91-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '91- 95, '98, '01, '04	' 9 7 ' ' 0 1 b	' 0 2	CC- EB: '90- 97, '01- 03
Portugal	'97- 00, '02	WVS: '90 EVS: '90, '99		' 0 2	' 0 2	EB: '85- 04
Puerto Rico		WVS: '95, '00				
Romania		WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '90, '99	NE: '91- 95, '98, '01, '04	' 9 6		CC- EB: '91- 97, '01- 03
Russia	'91-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '04	' 9 9		CC- EB: '90- 96

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Senegal			Afro: '02, '05			
Serbia		WVS: '95, '00	NE: '98, '04			CC-EB: '96
Slovakia	'96, '98-00, '02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '99	NE: '91-95, '98, '01, '04			CC-EB: '92-97, '01-03
Slovenia	'91-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '90, '99	NE: '91-95, '98, '01, '04	'9 6	'0 2	CC-EB: '92-97, '01-03
South Africa	'86, '01	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00	Afro: '94, '95, '97, '98, '00, '02, '05			
South Korea		WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00	EAsia: '94, '96, '98, '99, '01	'0 0		
Spain	'92-02	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00 EVS: '81, '90, '99	Lat: '01-04	'9 6 ' 0 0	' 0 2	EB: '85-04
Sweden	'92, '94-00, '02	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00 EVS: '81, '90, '99		'9 8	'0 2	EB: '94-04
Switzerland	'87, '93, '98-02	WVS: '90, '95 EVS: '90		'9 9	'0 2	
Taiwan	'02	WVS: '95	EAsia: '94, '98, '01	'9 6		
Tanzania		WVS: '00	Afro: '01, '03, '05			
Thailand			EAsia: '01	'0 1 a		
Turkey		WVS: '90, '95, '00 EVS: '99				CC-EB: '01-03
Uganda			Afro: '00, '02, '05			
Ukraine		WVS: '95 EVS: '99	NE: '92-93, '95, '98, '04	'9 8		CC-EB: '92-96
United States	'85-02	WVS: '81, '90, '95, '00		'9 6		
Uruguay		WVS: '95	Lat: '88, '95-04			
Valencia		WVS: '95				
Venezuela	'99-00	WVS: '95, '00	Lat: '95-04			
Vietnam		WVS: '00				
Zambia			Afro: '93,			

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Zimbabwe			'96, '99, '03, '05			
e			Afro: '99, '04, '05			

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Most extensive of the academic survey programmes has been the World Values Survey (WVS, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>), which can make some claims to being global. It began in 1981 as the European Values Survey (EVS, <http://www.europeanvalues.nl/>) covering ten West European societies. The funding for the initial survey was provided by a private foundation, and the focus of the research was on changing moral and social values, particularly emphasising Christian values and ‘alternative’ meaning systems (c.f. Halman 2001). The EVS has now completed three rounds of surveys, the latest commencing in 1999, and continues to be focused on values and value-systems amongst European countries. The WVS grew out of the EVS; after the successful completion of the 1981 EVS, the survey was replicated in twelve non-European countries. Following the success of this wave, subsequent waves were conducted in 1990-93, involving 42 countries; 1995-97 in 54 countries; and in 60 countries for the most recent wave, 1999-2001. Surveys have now taken place in almost 80 societies covering all major regions of the world, although as WVS documentation notes, illiterate rural respondents, whilst being interviewed, have been underrepresented. All WVS surveys are carried out in face-to-face interviews, using a standardised sampling universe of adult citizens aged 18 and over. Fieldwork in each country is typically supported by funding from within the given country, and although the WVS has a relatively stable questionnaire, since the 1990 survey, participants from all six continents have been involved in design, fieldwork, analysis and interpretation.

Akin to the WVS in some respects (although consciously modelled on the Eurobarometer) are the various branches of what is now known as the ‘Global Barometers’ (<http://www.globalbarometer.org>). The New Europe Barometer (<http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk>; formerly New Democracies Barometer) series was founded by Richard Rose at Strathclyde University ‘to monitor mass response to the transformation of polity, economy and society in post-Communist countries’. The study has regularly surveyed the eight new EU countries and three applicant countries (Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania), as well as intermittent surveys in Serbia, Moldova

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and, for comparison, Austria and re-unified Germany. The Latinobarómetro (<http://www.latinobarometro.org>) was established next in 1995, following a four-country pilot study in 1988, covering initially eight countries in Latin America (excluding the Caribbean) but expanding to 17 countries in 1996. The Latinobarómetro is designed as a time-series with a rotation of topics included in the survey, such as attitudes towards international trade and the environment, patterns of political participation, and gender and discrimination. Funding for this series has been provided by the Corporación Latinobarómetro, a private, non-profit initiative, and a large international board of notable academics oversees the project. The Afrobarometer (<http://www.afrobarometer.org>) completed its first round of studies covering twelve countries in 2001, and commenced a second wave in 2002. Funding for the Afrobarometer has been provided through a number of African and non-African governmental agencies, including the NSF and the US Agency for International Development. From Round Two, an identical survey instrument has been used in all countries, and sample sizes within countries range from 1200 to 2400. Finally the East Asia Barometer (<http://www.eastasiabarometer.org>) is the newest of the Global Barometers, beginning surveys in late 2001, securing funding from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China. To-date, surveys have been conducted in Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, mainland China and Mongolia, with additional fieldwork in Indonesia and Japan pending. However, no results are yet available publicly, nor technical information about the fieldwork itself. A new five nation 'State of Democracy in South Asia' survey (<http://www.lokniti.org/projects.htm#sdsa>), organized by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, is now under way; this survey could be thought of as a South Asian Barometer, and may perhaps be the next to join the conglomerate of Global Barometers.

Whilst most cross-national surveys such as the ISSP or WVS are administered by different organizations in different countries with different sampling and fieldwork methodologies, the European Social Survey (ESS,

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<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>) was established in 2002 with an emphasis on methodological rigour and uniformity. Twenty-two nations participated in the first round, namely the then fifteen member states of the EU plus four accession states (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) and three non-EU members (Israel, Norway and Switzerland). All are based on face-to-face probability samples and detailed rules on sampling and fieldwork are provided for adherence by all participating countries, including study-wide targeted response rates of 70 percent and strict rules regarding sampling (Lynn et al 2004). Overall the ESS aims to be a cross-national social survey that achieves “uniform methodological standards that make it at least as rigorous as the very best national surveys within Europe” (O’Shea et al., ND).

Finally, the most recent foray into cross-national survey research has been the Pew Global Attitudes Project (<http://people-press.org/pgap>), started in 2002. This survey, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, lacks the academic oversight of previously discussed surveys, but in terms of coverage is far-reaching. The 2002 survey included 44 nations, involving more than 38,000 people. Of particular interest to this first wave of studies were global attitudes about America, particularly in light of the 9-11 attacks, and particularly amongst Muslim communities. The Global Attitudes Surveys mark some of the first large-scale survey experience in the Middle East, including samples from Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Subsequent waves have included individuals from 50 populations. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of these main cross-national survey programmes.

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Table 2
Features of cross-national survey programs⁸

Series	I n c e p t i o n ⁹	C o u n t r i e s c o v e r e d ¹⁰	F r e q u e n c y	S u r v e y t y p e	M o d e o f d a t a c o l l e c t i o n	A v a i l a b l e d a t a	W e b s i t e
Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)	1996	36	M o d u l e e v e r y 5 y e a r s	M o d u l e	F a c e - t o - f a c e, t e l e p h o n e , a n d s e l f - c o m p l e t i o n	P u b l i c a r c h i v e s	www.umich.edu/~cses

⁸ This table is an expansion of the table presented by Norris (2004)

⁹ In all cases but the CC-EB and the New Europe Barometer, pilot studies and forerunners (such as the European Community Study which preceded the Eurobarometer) have been excluded. As the CC-EB replaced the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (CEEB), the CEEB's date of inception is listed; similarly the New Democracies Barometer preceded the New Europe Barometer and thus its date of inception is listed

¹⁰ Number of countries included in at least one survey

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Eurobarometers:							
Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (CC-EB)	19990	24	Annual	Standard online	Face-to-face	Public archives	http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/
Eurobarometer	1973	19	Bi-annual	Standard online	Face-to-face ¹¹	Public archives	http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/
European Social Survey (ESS)	2002	22	Biennial	Standard online	Face-to-face	Public archives	www.europeansocialsurvey.org
European Values/World Values Surveys (EVS/WVS)	1981/1998/2003	33/77	~5 years	Standard online	Face-to-face	Public archives	www.worldvaluessurvey.org www.europeanvalues.nl/index2.htm
International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)	1985	39	Annual	Multiple	Face-to-face and self-	Public archives	www.issp.org

¹¹ Interviews in Sweden for survey 42 were carried out by telephone

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			l	e	com pleti on		
Gallup Int'l Voice of the People Survey	2 0 0 2	6 0	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l l o n e	Tele phon e and face- to- face	Tabl es only	www.voice-of-the-people.net/
Global barometers:							
Afrobarometer	1 9 9 9	1 6	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l l o n e	Face -to- face	Publ ic archi ves	www.afrobarometer.org
East Asia Barometer	2 0 0 1	9	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l l o n e	Face -to- face	Non e to- date	www.eastasiabarometer.org
Latinobarómetro	1 9 9 5	1 9	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l l o n e	Face -to- face	Tabl es only	www.latinobarometro.org
New Europe Barometer	1 9 9	1 8	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l l o n e	Face -to- face	Tabl es only	www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/

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	1		u a l	n d a l o n e			
Pew Global Attitudes Survey	2 0 0 2	4 9	A n n u a l	S t a n d a l o n e	Tele phon e	Tabl es only	http://people-press.org/pgap

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Of course there have also been many academic social surveys that have neither been part of a regular national series or of these cross-national survey programs. Particularly notable is Almond and Verba's pioneering five-nation civic culture study of 1959, covering the US, Britain, Italy, Germany and Mexico (Almond and Verba 1963, 1989). The civic culture studies were unusual for their extensive use of open-ended questions but this has not become the norm in cross-national research. The eight-nation *Political Action* surveys, conducted between 1973 and 1975 in Britain, West Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, US, Italy, Switzerland and Finland, were similarly purpose-built, examining forms of political participation in industrialised countries (Barnes and Kaase 1979). It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to document or discuss these.

As this section has shown, the expansion of survey research throughout the world has been to-date rapid and relatively far-reaching. Whereas in the 1950s and 60s, academic public opinion research was largely relegated to a handful of wealthy industrialised Western countries, by the early 1980s this tradition had grown to include most of North America and Europe, although the majority of these countries were still predominantly wealthy. Coverage of Latin America and Asia began throughout the 1990s, and Africa and the Middle-East have begun to see systematic public opinion research undertaken only over the past five years. Thus while public opinion research has clearly been affected by the pursuits of globalisation, only very recently could it be considered a global phenomenon.

And there is clearly an extent to which it is not yet completely global. Certain areas of the world, particularly the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa are still underrepresented within large cross-national programs, and illiterate and rural populations are underrepresented in nearly all parts of the world. And whilst the acceptance of public opinion research and cross-national comparisons as valuable has grown since the 1950s, Smith (2004) notes that independent surveys are still banned in a number of nations, including Burma, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Turkmenistan, and

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in other countries, such as China, Venezuela and Iran, polling topics and/or the publication of results are restricted (Spangenberg 2003, Rohme 1997).

Whilst this section has focused on the breadth of cross-national research, understanding the extent to which public opinion research has been globalised also requires an understanding of the depth of the research—in other words, how does the quality of public opinion research in newly-defined markets compare with standards for research in established markets; or more importantly, how comparable are the surveys undertaken by cross-national survey programs? The following section will explore these methodological issues in more depth.

Methodological issues in cross-national research

Although there is no strict division, cross-national survey research can be thought of as being affected by both general methodological issues relevant to any survey (survey quality) as well as the extent of similitude amongst responses from different countries (equivalence of meaning). The spread of public opinion research to a greater number and diversity of countries almost certainly entails greater problems of equivalence of meaning and comparability of survey quality. Harkness (1999) argues that, in the cross-national context, discussions of quality are rare compared with discussions of equivalence of meaning. This section will examine both of these issues separately; however we begin with issues of survey quality since these issues are, in a sense, prior. (We recognize that our terminology here is somewhat different from the usual one, where issues such as equivalence of meaning would be treated as one aspect of data quality. However, our distinction is a more pragmatic one between the quality of the surveys implemented by the separate national teams and the problems of the questionnaire content designed by the central coordinating committee of the cross-national program.)

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Quality issues

Data quality is an issue with all surveys, including those in the affluent democratic societies, but there are particular issues with the extension of survey research to the countries outside the traditional core. While the GSS may be considered the ‘gold standard’ of survey research, the extension of such research has by no means meant the application of the same survey methods used in the GSS. In short, surveys have not been a standard product exported across the world.

There are a large number of reasons why different survey methods are used in different countries, even if they are part of the same cross-national project. Different countries and survey research institutions have different kinds of sampling frames, legislation regarding survey practice, traditions of how to pick samples, technical expertise, methods of recruiting and training interviewers, access to experienced interviewers and supervisors, access to computer equipment for computer assisted personal/telephone interviewing (CAPI/CATI), experience of survey research in the population, levels of willingness to participate in survey research, and practices of using call-backs and/or conversion techniques for non-respondents and refusals.

Groves (1987, 1989) distinguishes a number of components of survey quality: coverage error, non-response error, sampling error and measurement error. We examine each of these in turn.

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Coverage error refers to “the discrepancy between sample survey results and the results of a full enumeration of the population under study which arises because some members of the population are not covered by the sampling frame” (Groves 1987: S159). Lynn et al (2004) also argue that equivalent study populations are one of two fundamental criteria for comparable sample design (the other being similar precision of sample-based estimates, which we examine later). Usually in public opinion research the population is taken to be the adult population, although the definition of when adulthood starts is far from clear cross-nationally. The ESS for example takes the target population to be all residents in private households fifteen years or older, whereas the sampling universe for the WVS is all adult citizens aged 18 and older.

True levels of coverage, however, tend to depend upon the nature of the sampling frames and of the cost of reaching some of the groups included in the frame. Sample frames vary from complete records of the resident population (e.g., the Danish Central Person Register), lists of households (e.g., the “SIPO” database in the Czech Republic), registers of addresses (e.g., the Postcode Address File in the UK), electoral registers (e.g., in India), or none at all (e.g., in Bosnia-Herzegovina) (Lynn 2003a, 2003b). Complete registers of the population are valuable as sample frames because they enable researchers to pick equal-probability samples; but even when they exist, the availability of registers to academic researchers varies and they are sometimes restricted for use by the national statistics institute only. Coverage problems can also exist due to parochial practices. Park and Jowell (1997) note that in the 1995 ISSP, five countries (mostly European) imposed an upper age cut-off for the sample at 74; institutional populations in many countries (e.g., the UK) are also often overlooked in sampling designs.

Problems of coverage have been growing even in the affluent West where cost issues have seen the growth of telephone interviewing and the consequent restriction of the sample to individuals with access to telephones. Cost has also tended to limit coverage of face-to-face surveys to accessible areas, e.g., exclusion of the highlands north of the

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Caledonian Canal in many British surveys because of the expense of reaching potential respondents.

Not surprisingly coverage is likely to be a particular issue in less developed countries with less urbanised populations and with greater difficulties of access to much of the rural population. Inglehart is admirably frank about the problems when writing about the 1991 WVS:

In Chile, the sample covers the central portion of the country, which contains 63% of the total population; the income level of this region is about 40 percent higher than the national average. In Argentina, sampling was limited to the urbanized central portion of the country ... which also has above-average incomes. In India, the sample was stratified to allocate 90 percent of the interviews to urban areas and 10 percent to rural areas, and to have 90 percent of the [interviews] with literate respondents (who are slightly less than 50 percent of the population). In Nigeria, the fieldwork was limited to urban areas plus a sample of rural areas within 100 kilometres of an urban center. In China the sample is 90 percent urban. The samples have been weighted accordingly to make the samples replicate the national population parameters more closely (Inglehart 1997: 346).

The Afrobarometer Sampling Protocol (2002) also notes that areas experiencing armed conflict are excluded from sampling, and judgments are made on a case-by-case basis as to whether to include areas experiencing political unrest. The Pew Global Attitudes survey restricted areas even further, limiting its surveys in some countries to only major cities—e.g., Luanda in Angola and Cairo in Egypt.

The extent to which weighting can deal with the problem of lack of coverage is an unresolved (and in many cases perhaps an irresolvable) question. The crucial issue is whether the opinions of the non-sampled population are in fact similar to those of their

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notional equivalents in the sampled population. For example, are rural Nigerians who live more than 100 kilometres from an urban center similar in their opinions to rural Nigerians who live within 100 kilometres? In other words, is there an interaction effect between rural residence and distance from an urban centre on public opinion?

This is in principle a researchable question. For example, in India the National Election Survey is a probability sample of the adult population (drawn from the electoral register and hence with some problems of coverage); it could be used to explore whether such interactions are present and whether weighting of India's WVS survey, with its more limited coverage, would be sensible. However, in general such research has not been carried out and users of cross-national datasets need to be warned of the potential problems of differing coverage.

Non-response error has been a major concern of western survey research organizations, and there appears to be a widespread decline in response rates in affluent, urbanised countries. For example GSS response rates have fallen from more than 80 percent in the early 1990s to 70 percent in 2002 (GSS website 2004). Even for the most methodologically rigorous of the cross-national programs, the ESS, with a target response rate of 70 percent for all countries, there was considerable variation in response rates during their first round, with five countries having response rates below 50 percent, the lowest being 33.5 percent for Switzerland (Lynn et al 2004). Add-on modules favoured by ISSP and CSES may well have lower response rates than the main survey.

The identification of low response rates is compounded by the fact that the globalisation of survey research has not led to the globalisation of good survey documentation. As Harkness (1999) points out, documentation about details such as

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response rates are often either not available or can only be found after considerable detective work. We believe that it should be the responsibility of the cross-national programmes themselves to provide this documentation for the participant surveys.

The problem is compounded further by differing usages of sampling methods. Response rates cannot of course be calculated for quota samples, random route methods or sampling methods that permit substitution, which are often used in cross-national programmes, particularly in less developed countries where there is little infrastructure for survey research. Although the ESS strictly forbids both substitution and quota sampling, other survey programs continue to make use of these methods. During the 2001 ISSP, three countries reported using quota sampling at different stages, and twelve reported some level of substitution (Klein and Harkness 2003). However as Groves (1987) points out, non-response bias is not simply a matter of non-response rates but also of the difference of means for respondents and non-respondents; thus bias is ultimately the key issue—not the response rate per se.

Checks on the size of the bias can sometimes be carried out directly for public opinion surveys, especially electoral surveys where the official records of aggregate vote will be available. Where an up-to-date and accurate census is available, checks can also be carried out on the demographic profile of respondents against census figures. It is not known how non-response bias varies across countries (or indeed between surveys within a country), but clearly it could be a significant problem in cross-national research. Given the problem of declining response rates in the case of probability samples, methodologists should perhaps pay more attention to estimating the extent of non-response bias arising from different sorts of sampling procedure.

In contrast to coverage error and non-response error, the principles of sampling error are well understood, at least in the case of probability samples. However, there are

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some issues in the spread of survey research that need more investigation. The ‘standard of academic acceptability’ has been a probability sample with a sample size of around 1000 (assuming population estimates with a confidence interval of +/- 3 percent are required). Most cross-national surveys programs, including the EVS/WVS, the ISSP, the Eurobarometer and the CC-EB tend to target samples of this size.

There are several problems, however, with this standard. Clustering is often used (for cost reasons) and this will tend to reduce the effective sample size. Many of the highest quality surveys report design effects – the ratio of the variance of a variable to that which would have been obtained under simple random sampling. Since a clustered design increases the variance, design effects are nearly always greater than one but tend to be relatively low in Western Europe. Modern software allows one to take the clustering into account in the analysis stage, although because of increased ethical concerns about disclosure, it is becoming increasingly rare for the datasets released to investigators to have the necessary information about which cluster a particular respondent is in. Most analysts therefore tend to ignore the sampling error due to clustering, either because it is small or because they do not have the information to do so (c.f. Kish 1965 and Lynn et al 2004 for more on design effects).

However, it is not clear that design effects will always be small. They may generally be small in a relatively homogeneous western European society (e.g., in the ESS, the average predicted design effects were calculated as around 1.5 in Great Britain, Germany, and France), but even in these countries we find that ethnic groups tended to be geographically concentrated and much larger design effects are associated with variables strongly related to ethnicity. This may also be true for ethnically diverse societies such as India or many African countries, and may be both a methodological and a substantive problem. The precision of sample estimates may therefore vary across countries in unknown ways, and the substantive influence of local contexts on public opinion may be neglected. A practice that in the past was broadly acceptable in Western Europe may not be a good model for more heterogeneous societies.

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It is also unclear that the standard sample of 1000 found in many cross-national programs is equally appropriate everywhere. This will depend in part upon the purpose of the survey. We will not always be interested in simple population estimates of public opinion, as in the typical opinion poll of government popularity. We will also be interested in relations between variables; for example in a divided society such as Northern Ireland, polarized between Catholics and Protestants, a larger sample size will be needed in order to have sufficient power to determine how far Catholic and Protestant public opinion differs. Divided societies will therefore need much larger sample sizes than homogeneous ones and a target sample of 1000 may be quite misleading. The surveys may simply not have the power to detect differences in public opinion, and these differences may be the most important aspect of public opinion(s) in that country. In principle there is no technical difficulty in designing appropriate sample sizes for diverse or divided societies. The Afrobarometer, for example, has set larger sample sizes (N=2400) for those countries it considers “extremely heterogeneous,” namely South Africa and Nigeria, and this must be considered the correct strategy.

Measurement error – the discrepancy between respondents’ attributes and their survey responses – is perhaps the largest topic of all and has been extensively studied, particularly in the US by scholars such as Groves (see also Schumann and Presser 1981, Lyberg et al 1997). Groves distinguishes the measurement errors arising from “the influence of the interviewer, the weakness of the survey questions, failures of the respondent to give appropriate answers to the questions, and effects of the mode of data collection on survey answers” (1987: S162). We deal with some aspects of the weakness of survey questions in the next section on equivalence of meaning, but a few observations relevant to the globalisation of survey research may be in order.

It is perhaps most useful to distinguish between what we might call noise and bias. For example, in countries with shorter traditions of survey research and a less well-trained

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field force, there may be greater interviewer variability in their conduct of the interview (e.g., how strictly they adhere to the interviewer instructions) and there may be less supervision of interviewers to weed out ‘bad practice.’ (As with most issues that we cover, we must emphasise that there will be important within-country variations, as well – a cheaper survey in an affluent Western society may well involve a trade-off with measurement error.) This variability could lead to greater noise, and this in turn could lead to weaker observed relationships between variables—although if we are simply interested in population estimates, this may not affect the mean and therefore would be less important. However, noise clearly could be important if our interest is in studying relationships between variables, as in most academic research on public opinion. If we discover, for example, that social class is less strongly associated with socialist versus free-market values in developing countries than in developed ones, we cannot be sure whether this is because the values (or, indeed, social class) have been measured with more error or whether the ‘true’ relationship is actually weaker. Interviewer assessment of social class or self-coded measures of class, for example, will almost certainly have greater noise than more expensive office-coded measures based on details of occupation. This strikes at the heart of a great deal of cross-national research.

Bias is a separate matter. While noise is of particular concern when looking at relationships between variables, bias becomes a central concern when estimating population means, proportions or other quantities of interest. Differences in methods of survey administration, such as different modes or different sorts of interviewer, can lead to bias, but perhaps the main sources of bias will arise from questionnaire content, which we turn to in the next section.

Globalisation has not, then, meant the spread of a standard social survey methodology across the world. While the gold standard may be achieved by the GSS and some (but by no means all) European surveys with complete coverage, high response rates and low non-response bias, known and appropriate precision of sample estimates, and

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minimal measurement error, it is clear that there are many shortfalls from this standard both within and between countries. While we have highlighted the problems of coverage in developing countries, the wide variety of response rates—even in such a methodologically rigorous program as the ESS—indicates that major problems exist even in the developed world with its relatively long tradition of survey research.

To be sure, the imposition of the same gold standard of survey methods in different countries, with their differing traditions of survey research, may well not be possible or desirable. For example, different modes of survey administration (CATI, CAPI, etc.) may well be appropriate in different countries with different histories and problems. Random route or quota samples may be quite acceptable alternatives in a country where probability samples could not be implemented effectively, providing they do not involve excessive levels of non-response bias.

However the requisite information to enable one to judge the quality of surveys or the appropriateness of the method to the particular country is not always available cross-nationally. As Harkness (1999) points out, the documentation for cross-national survey research needs to be especially thorough but is rarely available. Not only is standard documentation on methods in each country required, but meta-documentation for the programme as a whole explaining and highlighting the differences in the methods and contexts for the surveys, translation notes with guidance on the use of functional equivalence, and indications of the implications for analysis are also needed. Perhaps the biggest problem is that it is not easy to find the technical details of the surveys in order to make an informed judgement. The ESS is a model with information on its website about most aspects of fieldwork, including response rates, as well as some assessment of measurement error. And while the ISSP falls far short of meeting the strict ESS methodology (likely due to a lack of central organization and funding), it is also to be commended for including regular reports monitoring the study (c.f., Park and Jowell 1997, Klein and Harkness 2003).

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The consumer of cross-national research (whether the secondary data analyst or the reader) is thus often ignorant of the extent to which the quality of the ‘product’ varies and how this might affect the results and interpretation.

Equivalence of meaning

While there has not been a standard survey product with respect to survey design and implementation, there is something much closer to standardisation with respect to questionnaire content. While some of the early surveys, such as the Civic Culture project, made great use of open-ended questions, allowing respondents to articulate their opinions using their own concepts and language, usual survey practice has gone down the road of closed questions that can be asked in identical format in different surveys. However, these questions are often ‘decontextualised’ in order to achieve identical wording.

There are several different, albeit related, issues that are relevant when studying equivalence of meaning across countries. Perhaps most fundamentally, there simply may not be common concepts to measure (e.g., the concept of God may be specific to certain religious traditions). Secondly, there may be common concepts whose interpretation may vary in different contexts. Thirdly, poor translation may introduce errors. We deal with these issues in reverse order.

Translation of questions into different languages is inevitably fraught with problems and there are various surveys where translation has not been given enough attention. Sinnott (1998), for example, displayed how the Eurobarometer question on party identification had a systematically different meaning if it was derived from the English language version or the French language version of the original questionnaire. Whereas the English version of the survey asked the equivalent of ‘Are you close to a political party,’ the French version asked, ‘Are you closer to one party than the others?’ As Sinnott notes, “An individual who is only moderately or weakly aligned with a party

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could well answer no to the English version...and yes to the French version” (Sinnott 1998: 631). And indeed, Sinnott’s results reflect this disparity with more individuals answering yes to the relative (French) version of the question and no to the absolute (English).

The standard method of improving the quality of translation is to use ‘back translation’ - the translation of a question from one language into another and then back again by a separate translator. By comparing the original with the doubly translated question it should be clear whether there are any problems. However, Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) argue that in practical and theoretical terms (results, effort, costs, reliability, viability), it is one of the less recommendable procedures. Harkness (1999) describes back-translation as merely a procedure for checking translations. Warwick and Osherson (1973) similarly argue that back-translation is a method of achieving linguistic equivalence without taking account of more contextual factors.

Translation problems can often be solved, as for example in the Eurobarometer case described by Sinnott (1998) where a revision of the questionnaire appears to have led to greater comparability. They are probably not, in themselves, major sources of lack of comparability. Different interpretations of the same appropriately translated question can raise more difficult problems. For example, in its module on migration, the ESS has a question asking whether more individuals from “poorer countries outside Europe” should be allowed to enter. This is a question that can be asked in all countries with the same wording, but will it be interpreted in the same way in the different countries? In Israel for example migrants from poorer countries may be taken to mean Jewish migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, but in Britain it may be interpreted to refer to migrants from South Asia or the Caribbean. The question has been decontextualised in a way that permits standardisation of wording (and accurate translation) but perhaps lack of equivalence of meaning. One simple (but expensive) way of dealing with this particular question would be to include an open-ended follow-

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up asking respondents to name those groups they were thinking of when answering the question.

Other solutions to this problem of contextualisation have also been suggested. Przeworski and Teune (1967) for example recommend building scales composed of answers to several different questions to measure each concept. For each concept there needs to be a set of positively correlated questions that are valid in every country and can thus be used to measure the concept everywhere. These items they call ‘identities.’ In addition to identities there may be some culturally-specific items in a country that are positively correlated with the identities and which can thus contribute to the scale for that country. Items like these are referred to as ‘equivalents.’ A good example of an equivalent for political participation might be voting in elections, which is impossible (and thus irrelevant) in non-democratic countries, but a good measure of participation in democratic countries. Thus Przeworski and Teune recommend an ‘identity-equivalence’ procedure for measurement in which the same concept is measured with different scales in different countries, but each scale includes a common core of ‘identities’ and possibly some culturally-specific ‘equivalents.’

This kind of approach might be particularly useful if we are interested (as Przeworski and Teune are) in investigating relationships between variables in differing countries. What we want, it could be argued, is the best measure of the concept in question for a particular country rather than a standard measure that is more appropriate in some countries than in others (and for this reason will show weaker relationships in some countries than in others). The export of a standard measuring instrument, which was appropriate in the country of origin, may therefore give an illusory appearance of comparability. A simple example is that of educational level. Number of years of

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completed education may well be an excellent measure in some countries (e.g., the US) where it is isomorphic with the educational system, but less appropriate in European systems with their selective educational systems. In Europe, respondents with a similar number of years of completed education may have had very different educational experiences, and measures of education that focus on qualifications achieved may be much more appropriate.

The difficulty with ‘functional equivalence’, however, is the absence of any clear guidelines for knowing when equivalence has been achieved. These methods have not, therefore, acquired general support, nor are they useful for making population estimates.

King et al (2004) have recently proposed a novel method using vignettes of dealing with this problem. Their starting point is Sen’s (2002) observation that subjective assessments of health status may be highly context-dependent:

The state of Kerala has the highest levels of literacy...and longevity...in India. But it also has, by a very wide margin, the highest rate of reported morbidity among all Indian states...At the other extreme, states with low longevity, with woeful medical and educational facilities, such as Bihar, have the lowest rates of morbidity in India...In disease by disease comparison, while Kerala has much higher reported morbidity than the rest of India, the United States has even higher rates for the same illnesses. If we insist on relying on self-reported morbidity as the measure, we would have to conclude that the United States is the least healthy in this comparison, followed by Kerala, with ill-provided Bihar enjoying the highest levels of health. In other words, the most common measure of the health of populations is negatively correlated with actual health (Sen 2002: 860-1).

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As Sen explains, respondents in Bihar judge their health according to different yardsticks than do respondents in Kerala or the US, thus leading to the paradoxical results.

Table 3
Political efficacy vignettes (King et al 2004)

1 [Alison] lacks clean drinking water. She and her neighbors are supporting an opposition candidate in the forthcoming elections that has promised to address the issue. It appears that so many people in her area feel the same way that the opposition candidate will defeat the incumbent representative.

2 [Imelda] lacks clean drinking water. She and her neighbors are drawing attention to the issue by collecting signatures on a petition. They plan to present the petition to each of the political parties before the upcoming election.

3 [Jane] lacks clean drinking water because the government is pursuing an industrial development plan. In the campaign for an upcoming election, an opposition party has promised to address the issue, but she feels it would be futile to vote for the opposition since the government is certain to win.

4 [Toshiro] lacks clean drinking water. There is a group of local leaders who could do something about the problem, but they have said that industrial development is the most important policy right now instead of clean water.

5 [Moses] lacks clean drinking water. He would like to change this, but he can't vote, and feels that no one in the government cares about this issue. So he suffers in silence, hoping something will be done in the future.

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King et al (2004) attempt to build-in this subjectivity by establishing what responses likely mean in different contexts. Their approach is best illustrated by their main example. The ordinal question ‘How much say do you have in getting the government to address issues that interest you?’ has been used to measure political efficacy in different countries. But it is not clear that similar answers mean the same thing in different political contexts. King et al show that when the answers are taken at face value, political efficacy is greater in China (a country that has never had a democratic election) than in Mexico (a country that has several elections of which one recently removed a long-standing government). However, when respondents are asked to assess the level of political efficacy of characters in a set of fictional scenarios (called vignettes, see Table 3), it becomes clear that the Chinese are much more likely than are the Mexicans to ascribe greater political efficacy to the characters in the vignettes than to themselves. Most strikingly, over 40 percent of the Chinese respondents assessed their own level of political efficacy below that of the vignette character who ‘suffered in silence.’

King and his colleagues claim that vignettes can be used to ‘anchor’ various survey questions and they propose both a simple and a more sophisticated method for using the information from the vignettes to rescale self-assessment responses. For the simple method, all that is assumed is consistency of response over the vignettes and self-assessment question, and vignette equivalence across societies. This method has two particularly attractive aspects. First, it is not necessary to administer the vignettes in conjunction with the self-assessment question every time the question is asked; rather the vignettes can be used to establish a rule for re-scaling a particular question for a particular society, and that rule could be applied to earlier or later surveys (although the extent to which rescaling rules are stable over time has yet to be established). Second, it is not limited to tackling issues of comparability between societies, but could also be used to identify and tackle instances of questions and concepts that are interpreted differently by different groups within the same society.

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This method does seem to be one of the most promising for dealing with equivalence of meaning, although it is not as yet clear whether appropriate vignettes can be developed to study other concepts of interest in public opinion research. The assumption of vignette equivalence across societies implies that there must be a set of vignettes (about five) for which there is essentially consensus on the rank order of the extent to which they illustrate levels of a particular concept. This may prove to be a rather demanding requirement.

Cross-national differences in social desirability bias may also lead to problems for equivalence of meaning. For instance, Jones (1963) suggests that acquiescence bias (a tendency to agree with whatever proposition the interviewer poses) is greater in South East Asia than elsewhere. Acquiescence bias, however, can often be dealt with through good design, with measuring instruments including questions with reverse wording. But this technique will not necessarily deal with social acceptability bias. If voting in elections is socially desirable, replacing, “Do you agree that it is everyone’s duty to vote?” with “Do you agree that it does not matter whether people turn out to vote or not?” is unlikely to get rid of social acceptability bias. Rather than treating social acceptability bias as a problem, however, it might be regarded as a real difference between societies in their expression of public opinion. It would however be important to know if the relation between opinion and behavior varied systematically in more or less “courteous” societies. The inclusion of some behavioural items is therefore important for gaining a fuller understanding of public opinion.

The most severe difficulties in equivalence, however, occur when the concept that a question is trying to tap into is less appropriate, or even non-existent, in some contexts. Jowell (1998) gives the example of the difficulties that the cross-national ISSP team faced when developing their module on religion:

... the Japanese delegation eventually came to the reluctant conclusion that there was no appropriate word or phrase in Japanese that approximated the

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concept of God. In the end, of course, they managed to come up with a doubtless somewhat tortuous circumlocution designed to get across the basic meaning of the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic concept of God. But beware of data that depend on such contrivances based on collegiality (Jowell 1998: 172).

However, limiting a survey to concepts that can be measured in all countries could result in a set of anodyne questions that necessarily focus on common features of belief systems rather than on the distinctive features that have no cross-national equivalents. This point was made almost forty years ago by Hodge and his colleagues in their classic comparative study of occupational prestige: “It is quite possible that much genuine diversity in occupational-prestige systems not captured by our analysis is reflected in the relative placement of occupations that are not comparable across societies, or even across subsectors of any given society. In Tiryakian’s study of the Philippines, for example, only a small number of occupations could be found about which it was sensible to ask both peasants in remote villages and the residents of Manila” (Hodge et al 1966: 311).

The globalisation of public opinion research does seem therefore to have led to the use of standardised closed questions around the world – something of a standard global product. The strong assumptions underlying this product are well-known, but the alternatives, such as the use of supplementary open-ended questions or the vignette method are likely to be time-consuming and expensive. A program of methodological work to determine which measuring instruments are particularly prone to problems of ‘equivalence of meaning’ would appear to be overdue.

The intellectual assumptions of cross-national surveys

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Rather broader intellectual questions should also be asked about the globalisation of public opinion research. It could be argued that there has been the export not only of standardised questions largely developed in the West but also (perhaps in consequence) the export of a broader intellectual understanding of public opinion and of the appropriate concepts for describing public opinion. Particular questions also embody particular intellectual traditions.

This can perhaps be seen most clearly in the 1960s export of the Michigan model of election studies, with its socio-psychological intellectual framework, rather than of the Columbia model, with its more sociological framework. Currently dominant intellectual approaches for understanding electoral behaviour tend to be individualistic, often based on rational choice theory. The questions asked, for example, in the CSES module cover the kinds of concepts (such as attitudes towards leaders, the left-right domain, and judgments of economic performance) that have been associated with this type of intellectual framework.

We do not, of course, mean to suggest that attitudes to leaders or the left-right dimension are unimportant aspects of public opinion; however, we can question whether the intellectual framework implicit in this particular battery of questions is as appropriate for, say, India (not actually a member of CSES) as it is for the US or Britain. An emphasis on attitudes towards issues or the national economy may well be appropriate in countries with literate electorates who read newspapers or view televised debates about key issues, but it may well be that in other parts of the world—such as India—the group processes of the sort investigated originally by the Columbia school (and more recently by Huckfeldt 1984, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995) might be as valuable in understanding public opinion.

Nor do we wish to be critical of the Michigan model and its export, which was at the time a highly progressive development. However, since many cross-national series (rightly) aim to chart change over time, there is a tendency to maintain previous

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questions, and this has been perhaps led to an institutional conservatism in questionnaire content and, hence, in intellectual approach.

A second, related, concern is the notion of public opinion itself. In the US, Converse, one of the key members of the Michigan team, raised the fundamental issue of attitudes and non-attitudes (Converse 1964 and the enormous ensuing debate). It is beyond the scope of this review to discuss this debate, but it may be of particular contemporary relevance with the globalisation of attitude research. There is clearly a risk that the administration of standard questions in surveys across the world might give a misleading impression that publics in different countries do vary in their attitudes towards the topics posed. The various barometers, for example, will often tabulate mean scores towards a topic, e.g., international trade relations, by country. But is there a danger that these findings are in part an artefact of the survey method? Might it not be the case that in some countries there is no public debate about international trade relations, and thus no good grounds for supposing public opinion is more or less supportive of this issue than in other countries?

An empirical example of this kind of problem can be seen with the measurement of economic left-right values. We can ask the same battery of questions that tap this dimension across the world (and there are questions in the WVS that can be used for this purpose), and then calculate mean scores on a scale derived from this battery. However, the more instructive finding may not be the calculated mean scores, but rather the finding that the internal reliability of the scale is almost meaninglessly low in some countries. Tilley (2002) for example shows that a scale of economic left-right values makes much better sense (as judged by internal reliability) in north-west Europe than it does in Latin America or Eastern Europe. This suggests that in these latter areas, either people do not respond to different economic issues in a way that is consistent with a unifying ideological position, as in north-west Europe, or there are problems with the applicability of the questions in the different contexts there..

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This is not, in itself, a criticism or limitation of cross-national survey research as checking internal reliability of scales is routine. Indeed, one important task of cross-national research could be to detect how far there actually is public opinion on certain domains.

But even if the problem of non-attitudes has been dealt with, a national mean score may not be appropriate in a divided society. We referred earlier to the problem of divided societies such as Northern Ireland when fixing sample sizes. In such cases it is quite conceivable that no-one in the society actually holds the national mean score, public opinion being polarised rather than normally distributed. This calls into question the idea of a single measure of national public opinion and suggests that the relevant unit of analysis may not be the state but some sub-unit. This may be particularly important in multi-nation states, such as the many countries in which nations and states are truly misaligned. Since the state is the usual administrative unit (both for sampling frames and for political decisions), it is understandable that public opinion research has tended to take the state (rather than the nation) as the unit of analysis. The subjective quality of 'the nation' makes it perhaps more appropriate as the subject matter of public opinion research than the basis of its conduct. However, there are many cases, such as Canada, Belgium and a number of the Indian states, where territorial subunits of the overall state make both effective administrative units and meaningful linguistic or ethnic groupings.

Conclusions

As the overview of cross-national survey programmes presented at the beginning of this paper showed, globalisation of academic public opinion research has indeed been occurring—but it is still far from complete. While the number of countries included in the major cross-national programmes continues to grow, there is still a predominance of the core established democracies of North America, Western Europe and Australasia.

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In addition, globalisation of public opinion surveys has not entailed a straightforward spread of a standardised “product” throughout the world in terms of survey conduct. While some of the key features – systematic sampling and standardised questionnaires administered by trained interviewers – have been present in virtually all the surveys included in the various cross-national programmes, huge diversity in sample designs and fieldwork methods remain. To a degree, this reflects the diversity of survey research methods in the core countries; but inevitably this also reflects the varying conditions under which survey research has to be conducted around the world. Potentially, however, these differences give rise to large, but often unknown, differences in quality between surveys and between countries. The World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR 2004) has suggested rules of practice regarding the documentation of surveys but these rules are all too rarely followed.

Globalisation has tended to lead, however, to a more standardised product with respect to questionnaire content; but this in itself may also be a source of non-comparability if different questions are interpreted differently within different contexts. And there has also perhaps been a globalisation of intellectual assumptions and frameworks partly reflecting the assumptions and theories of the originators. Intellectual frameworks developed to understand public opinion in urbanised, literate and relatively homogeneous societies should not be assumed to be appropriate for other contexts.

A number of writers have suggested rules for the conduct of cross-national research designed to address some of the technical aspects of non-comparability (c.f., Scheuch 1968, Kuechler 1987, 1998, Jowell 1998), and the ESS is a particularly impressive example of the implementation of rules designed to secure high quality surveys in all participating countries. Other scholars, however, suggest that if a country is of particular theoretical interest, even low-quality data might be acceptable, if that is all that is available (e.g., Inglehart 1997: 347).

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This debate is, in some ways, akin to debates in evidence-based medicine. On the one hand, we could insist only on the ‘gold-standard’ – in the medical case, double-blind placebo-controlled experiments. Knowing that experiments of this sort are often hard to come by, however, current medical practice is to use results from other less-rigorous research designs as well when deciding on treatment, but these are given less weight. Thus a grading system has been developed to aid in this delineation. Table 4 shows one such grading system (Eccles et al 1998). (For more detailed guidance on evidence-based medicine see <http://www.cochrane.dk/cochrane/handbook/hbook.htm>.)

Table 4
Categories of evidence about treatment (Eccles et al 1998)

Ia	Evidence from meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials.
Ib	Evidence from at least one randomised controlled trial.
IIa	Evidence from at least one controlled study without randomization.
IIb	Evidence from at least one other type of quasi-experimental study.
III	Evidence from non-experimental descriptive studies, such as comparative studies, correlation studies and case-control studies.
IV	Evidence from expert committee reports or opinions and/or clinical experience of respected authorities.

Our own sympathies are with the evidence-based medicine approach. We agree with the medical guidelines that the most weight should be given to meta-analysis of high-quality data and that the least weight should be given to non-systematic research. It may be more difficult than in the medical case to achieve consensus on the intermediate grades, but for the sake of argument, we propose a scheme along the lines of Table 5.

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We suspect that the great majority of the surveys involved in the cross-national programs described in this paper fall into the proposed categories II and III. While we sympathise with the aim of the ESS to drive up standards so that they all come into our top category, we believe that the reality is that most surveys will continue to be in category II at best and that public opinion analysts need to adjust to this reality. We believe it is a priority, therefore, for methodologists to establish empirically whether random route samples, for example, show different patterns of findings from those obtained by strict probability samples with high response rates. (In the evidence-based medicine field methodologists have been at pains to emphasise that scales of data quality have to be assessed empirically in just the same way as other measuring instruments and our proposed grading ought also to be validated by empirical research.)

Table 5
Proposed weighting of sample surveys

Ia	Evidence from meta-analysis of systematic samples with full documentation.
Ib	Evidence from at least one probability sample with response rate of 70% or above and full documentation following WAPOR rules of practice.
II	Evidence from at least one systematic representative survey (including random route or quota methods or probability samples with response rate below 70%) with full documentation following WAPOR rules of practice.
III	Evidence from at least one systematic survey lacking full documentation.
IV	Evidence from non-systematic non-representative studies, such as ‘snowball’ samples.

The need for schemes of this kind arose in medicine because of the sheer volume of research, of highly uneven quality, which the individual practitioner could not hope to study in the required depth. Public opinion research does not have the same volume of

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studies as medicine and so the need for meta-analyses may not be so evident. However, as Table 1 showed, there are now many countries which participate in several different cross-national programmes, and so the possibility of meta-analysis is there. Moreover, the uneven-ness of quality is certainly an issue, and where studies fall short of the gold standard (as the great majority do), it becomes all the more important to compare results from several different studies rather than to rely solely on the one that happens to have participated in the particular cross-national programme. In short, where studies fall short of the gold standard, analysts should be looking to check their results against those of other surveys covering the same topics.

To be sure, one reason why meta-analysis is rarely carried out is that the very standardisation of questions within cross-national programmes tends to lock the user into that particular programme making it difficult or impossible to compare findings with those of other programmes. Each programme tends to have developed its own, idiosyncratic questions and question wording even when it is studying a relatively common concept, such as left-right values. Again, public opinion researchers may have something to learn from medicine where there tend to be many standardised (and validated) measuring instruments which can be used in any study on the topic. Inglehart's postmaterialism index is one of the few such instruments in public opinion research. King's political efficacy vignettes deserve to become another such instrument. While there have been many criticisms of the postmaterialism index, the advantage of such a widely-used index is that its properties are now well-known. The wider use of such instruments in public opinion research would certainly aid meta-analysis.

We have in this paper raised a number of serious caveats about the use of standardised measures in different cultural contexts, and these caveats would necessarily apply to the use of standard instruments such as the postmaterialism index as well as to the standardised questions favoured by cross-national programmes. (However we must emphasise that our main reason for advocating standard instruments is that they permit

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cross-checking of results *within* a given country not necessarily for aiding cross-national comparison.). Given the current state of uncertainty about the equivalence of standard items across different cultural contexts, we advocate the use of a range of methods and the evaluation of these methods by systematic methodological research. We have for example advocated the use of supplementary open-ended material (as indeed advocated by Schumann and Presser in their classic work on questions and answers (1981)) and the use of King's vignette method. Przeworski and Teune's method of identities and equivalences also deserves to be revived: we believe that, in addition to the common questions designed by the central coordinating committee of the national programme, individual participating countries should be encouraged to include their own questions which are faithful to the local context.

Comparisons of public opinion between countries at a single point in time are the most vulnerable to problems of survey quality and comparability, even if they are statistically significant according to standard tests. The claim that Country X has greater support for democracy than Country Y could be misleading for numerous reasons; by contrast, a claim (supported by significance tests) that over the past five years support for democracy has increased in Country X but declined in Country Y is likely to be more robust. If there is continuity of methodology, the analysis of change in public opinion over time within countries and the comparison of trends across countries is much safer than single time point comparisons, since context-specific interpretations of questions and idiosyncrasies in sample design are likely to be relatively stable and should effectively cancel out when the difference between two time points is calculated within a country.

Whilst repeated cross-sections are valuable (but vulnerable to differences in survey quality over time given declining response rates), change is best calculated with a panel study in which the same individuals are interviewed more than once. It is unfortunate that there are no cross-national panel studies carrying a substantial number of social attitude items of interest to political scientists. While we began with the GSS as our

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gold standards in survey research, there is a growing tendency in social science to see the cross-section survey as second-best to a well-conducted panel. Perhaps a new process of the globalisation of panel studies needs to begin.

Finally, cross-national survey research needs to pay more attention to the unit of analysis. The state tends to be the usual unit, and there are some good practical reasons for this. But the nature of states is often contested by independence movements and it is not always clear that the state is sociologically the most appropriate unit, especially in diverse or divided multi-nation states. To take an extreme example, Czechoslovakia was a single state at the time of the 1991 WVS and was covered with a single survey but now there would be separate surveys in the independent states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, the ‘velvet divorce’ between the two parts of Czechoslovakia was presumably not unrelated to cultural and social differences of exactly the sort that public opinion research addresses. Similarly, Quebec almost certainly warrants a separate survey from the rest of Canada, Flanders from Wallonia or Scotland from England. To accept states as the unit of analysis is itself to accept a questionable normative position.

We recognise that many of our suggestions for larger samples, panel studies, vignettes, open-ended and country-specific questions are expensive. However, the Afrobarometer and the new State of Democracy in South Asia program indicate that there are practicable alternative ways forward. Rather than a simple export of western methods, assumptions and intellectual frameworks to non-western societies, public opinion research might benefit from imports in the reverse direction.

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