Cross-National Public Opinion Research

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Introduction
More and more countries are routinely conducting surveys and the volume of cross-national survey research is increasing. This hallmarks an era of unprecedented opportunity for the scientific and comparative study of human society, but also underscores the great challenges that face survey research in general and comparative survey research in particular. As the total-survey-error paradigm indicates, conducting valid and reliable survey research is a complex and daunting activity with many sources of error distorting results and invalidating findings. When it comes to comparative analysis, the challenges multiply (Smith 2010a). Cross-national survey research needs not only to be valid and reliable in each survey in each society measured, but functional equivalence across surveys and societies is required (Smith 2010c).

This article covers: (1) the development of cross-national survey research in general, focusing on the evolution of the field of comparative survey research and its major components; (2) the contemporary situation including conditions in a) the academic, governmental, and commercial sectors, b) data resources and archives, c) international academic, professional, and trade associations, d) journals, and e) the development of international standards and guidelines; (3) the methodological challenges of conducting reliable and valid cross-national research; (4) illustrative findings from cross-national research; and (5) future prospects for further growth and methodological improvement.

Historical Development
Since its inception in the 1930s, cross-national survey research has gone through three distinct phases of development (Smith 2010b). In the first phase lasting until about 1972, comparative survey research was ad hoc, consisting of a fairly limited number of studies that covered a restricted number of societies, were led by a small group of researchers, and were conducted on a one-time, topic-specific basis. Soon after the start of national representative surveys in the United States in the mid-1930s (Converse 1987), survey research took root in other countries. In 1937 Gallup established a counterpart to its American Institute for Public Opinion (AIPO) in the United Kingdom, the British Institute for Public Opinion (BIPO), and at least as early as 1939, AIPO and BIPO were asking parallel questions on their surveys. Within a few years Gallup had established affiliates in a dozen countries and a spin-off of the Roper Organization, International Research Associates, under Elmo Wilson, was also establishing survey research organizations around the world. The first large-scale cross-national survey was the 1948 Time magazine survey on freedom (Roper 1948).

Cross-national survey research was also stimulated during and immediately after World War II by the Allies who conducted public opinion research and established local organizations in the occupied countries. A special example of coordinated cross-national survey research by the Allies was the Strategic Bombing Surveys conducted by the US government in Germany and Japan at the end of World War II which measured the impact of the Allied bombing on the enemy civilian population (MacIsaac 1976).

Early collaborations were also fostered by social scientists. These included the How Nations See Each Other Study in nine countries in 1948–49 by William Buchanan and Hadley Cantril (Buchanan and Cantril 1953), the Comparative Study of Teachers' Attitudes in seven countries (Rokkan 1951), the Civic Culture Study in five nations in 1959–60 by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (Almond and Verba 1963), the Pattern of Human Concerns study by Cantril (1965) in 14 countries in 1957–1963; the Attitudes towards Europe Study in five countries in 1962 as part of the European Community (EC), and the Political Participation and Equality Study in seven nations in 1966–1971 by Verba, Norman Nie, and Jae-On Kim (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1978). Two of these early studies (Teachers and Attitudes toward Europe) were restricted to Europe and with the notable exception of Cantril's Human Concerns study, the rest were Euro-centric with 13 surveys from Europe and 8 from the rest of the world (Smith 2010b).

In the second stage running from 1973 to 2002, comparative, survey research expanded in scope
and became sustained and collaborative. More studies were organized and the number of countries typically included in each study notably expanded. Instead of being only one-time, intermittent enterprises directed by a small research team often representing only a few of the covered countries, cross-national research was established on an on-going basis with research teams of social scientists drawn from most, if not all, of the participating societies or with a study formally representing an association of countries such as the EC.

This second phase is signaled by the advent of the EC’s Eurobarometer which grew out the earlier Attitudes towards Europe Study and the two rounds of the European Communities Studies in 1970–71 (www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=2911). It was established as a biannual study in 1973–1974 and has grown over time as the European Union (EU) has expanded (see http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

A second group of studies during this period represents collaborative, research programs of social scientists:

1. The related European and World Value Surveys (EVS/WVS) were started in 1981 and across four rounds have grown from 20 to 71 countries (www.worldvaluessurvey.org)
2. The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) which has conducted 26 annual studies from 1985 through 2010 while expanding from 4 to 46 countries (Smith 2007b)(www.issp.org)
3. The Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) which started in the late 1980s, has had three rounds and 19 participating countries (www.cnep.ics.ul.pt)
4. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) which is now engaged in its third round since its start in 1996 and round 2 covered 38 countries and it expects to have data from about 45 countries in round 3 (www.cses.org)

Of course the ad hoc studies that characterized the first period also continued during this phase. They also increased in number and scope. Notable examples include the World Fertility Study carried out in 61 countries (including 41 developing nations) in 1974–1982 (Cleland and Scott, 1987; Cornelius, 1985) and the International Social Justice Project in 12 countries in 1991 with later follow-ups in some countries (http://www.isjp.de/).

During the third phase starting in 2002, cross-national survey research has become an integral part of the social-science infrastructure. Most importantly, the degree of central coordination and control increased appreciably. This development is hallmarked by the establishment of the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2002 which conducts surveys biennially (Jowell et al. 2007) (www.europeansocialsurvey.org). Like the WVS, ISSP, and CSES, the ESS is a collaboration of social scientists, but unlike these earlier consortia, it has centralized funding for the design, direction, and methodological monitoring of the national surveys. While the surveys themselves are funded nationally, the centralized resources and coordination of the ESS distinguishes it from collaborations starting earlier.

Additionally, the number and size of cross-national studies has continued to expand. Also increased collaboration has occurred across the major international collaborations. The ISSP and CSES have discussed coordinated research and the ESS and GSS have planned joint projects.

**Contemporary International Data Collection**
Globalization has expanded both the necessity for and existence of cross-national, survey research. The number, size, and complexity of cross-national, survey research have grown many fold from a handful of small, ad hoc studies a few decades ago to dozens of large-scale studies being conducted on a continuing basis today. Contemporary, cross-national survey research can be classified into several major types according to geographic coverage, topic, target population, and project organizers.

First, there are the global, general-topic, general-population, social-science collaborations discussed above (e.g., the CNEP, CSES, Globalbarometers, ISSP, and WVS). These are large, on-going, and expanding collaborations that seek comprehensive coverage of societies across the globe (Smith, Kim, Koch, and Park 2006).