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THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS, 1936–1985

TOM W. SMITH

Social scientists, political strategists, and others who study public opinion focus on the answers—how many of what group voted for whom or favored what. But before the answers come the questions. The choice of what questions to ask and how to ask them determines what answers one gets and what analyses might emerge. Deciding what to cover and how to measure it are basic, routine steps in fielding surveys. When the survey has a particular substantive focus, such as Stouffer's 1954 civil liberties study or Roper's studies on taxation for H&R Block in the 1970s, the content and questions are chosen to address theoretically relevant aspects of the topic under investigation. Most public opinion surveys, however, have no narrow focus, but rather are omnibus and ongoing efforts to monitor American society in toto. Probably the manner in which the content of these surveys is chosen is similar to the process by which editors decide what is news. (The media and polling have, of course, been intimately connected from the very start of survey research.) Survey researchers have also long pondered *how* to ask questions. George Gallup conducted split-ballot experiments on question wording, format, and order virtually from the start of the Gallup Poll, and from Cantril's *Gauging Public Opinion* through Payne's *Art of Asking Questions* and Sudman and Bradburn's *Response Effects* to Schuman and Presser's *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys*, survey methodologists have studied how alterations in question stimuli change response patterns.

Despite the mass of survey results that have been collected and published in the academic and mass media and the large number of investigations of survey methodology, little systematic information exists about the content of the accumulated survey data, the form of the questions, or how either has changed over time. This article examines what kind of information is typically collected by public opinion surveys, what type of questions are used, and how these have changed over the last 50 years from the inception of modern polling in the mid-1930s until the mid-1980s.

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Data

Questions are usually the interrogators, drawing information out of people. Here, questions themselves become the subject of investigation. To discover how the art and practice of asking questions have changed over the last 50 years, a sample of survey questions was drawn in the following manner:

1. To cover the 50-year history of national polling the years 1936/37, 1948/49, 1960/61, 1972/73, and 1984/85 were selected. Since preliminary analysis indicated that the content of polls varied notably between presidential election years and other years, each point sampled was a pair comprising a presidential election year and the following year. This omits midterm congressional election years and years immediately preceding presidential election years.
2. A list was compiled of all national, general population surveys held by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago; and the Louis Harris Data Center, University of North Carolina. This list was divided into two strata, one containing Gallup surveys, and the other containing non-Gallup surveys. Five Gallup and five non-Gallup surveys were randomly selected for each biennial period. However, since there are no non-Gallup surveys from the 1936/37 period,[1] 10 Gallup surveys were selected for these years, and for 1960/61 only four non-Gallup surveys were readily available. There is a total of 30 Gallup and 19 non-Gallup surveys included in this study. Altogether, they yielded a sample of 2,822 questions.
3. The survey house by time period distribution of studies is shown in Table 1. These studies can be thought of as representative of public opinion surveys of national, general population surveys held by the three archives. Covered are all of the major polls that are routinely conducted for or included in the mass media (e.g., Gallup, Harris, CBS/NYT, Los Angeles Times, Yankelovich, etc.). This omits, however, a large part of the survey field. Among the chief segments not covered are proprietary surveys, especially market and campaign research and governmental fact-gathering surveys such as the Current Population Survey.

Two weights were used in this study. The first combines the Gallup and non-Gallup surveys into a representative sample of all available surveys. This weight eliminates 1936/37 because no non-Gallup surveys were available. For the other periods the weight adjusts the proportion of Gallup and non-Gallup surveys so each stratum represents its proportion of all surveys. The second weight is used among Gallup surveys to compensate for the double sampling of Gallup surveys in 1936/37. Since most analysis of Gallup surveys is by year, this weight is seldom used.

Table 1. Survey House and Distribution of Studies, over Time

	Time					
House	1936/37	1948/49	1960/61	1972/73	1984/85	Total
Gallup	10	5	5	5	5	30
Non-Gallup						
Roper	0	2	3	0	1	6
NORC	0	2	1	1	0	4
Harris	0	0	0	3	1	4
Psychology Corp.	0	1	0	0	0	1
Trendex/GE	0	0	0	1	0	1
ABC/WP	0	0	0	0	1	1
NBC	0	0	0	0	1	1
CBS/NYT	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	10	10	9	10	10	49

The Contents of Surveys

We often talk of surveys as public opinion polls, a choice of terminology that is clearly reflected in the title of this journal. And given the limitations on the universe of surveys for this article, it comes as little surprise to find that attitudes and other subjective measures have made up the majority of survey questions over the last 50 years (Table 2).[2] Second in frequency, making up typically around a third of the questions, are demographics and other factual questions about objective attributes. The remaining two categories, knowledge (mostly measures of the informational basis for attitudes, particularly whether a person had "heard or read" about a particular person or matter) and behaviors (measures of present and past actions and activities) appear relatively

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[1] There were at least three polling organizations active in the 1936–37 period besides Gallup—Elmo Roper, Archibald Crossley, and the Psychology Corporation. No surveys from these (or any other organizations) survive in the archives. Partial reports on the Roper Polls can be found four times annually in *Fortune* starting with the July 1935 issue.

[2] We are not primarily interested in differences between houses, and in any event differences tend to be relatively minor in most of the areas we have examined. (On house style see Converse and Schuman, 1984.) As a result, we will usually present only the combined trends and/or the Gallup trends.

Table 2. Trends in Question Type by House (1936–1984)

	Gallup	Non-Gallup	Combined
Attitudes			
1936/37	47.7%	—	—
1948/49	46.0	57.9%	51.4%
1960/61	50.7	53.3	51.6
1972/73	59.6	79.2	74.1
1984/85	39.1	62.9	60.1
Behaviors			
1936/37	9.7	—	—
1948/49	7.7	3.3	5.7
1960/61	7.9	4.2	6.6
1972/73	0.9	1.1	1.0
1984/85	5.2	4.0	4.1
Demographics and other factual matters			
1936/37	41.3	—	—
1948/49	37.5	27.9	33.1
1960/61	33.9	40.2	38.0
1972/73	33.5	17.9	22.0
1984/85	53.8	30.7	33.5
Knowledge questions			
1936/37	1.3	—	—
1948/49	8.9	10.9	9.8
1960/61	7.5	2.4	5.8
1972/73	6.0	1.8	2.9
1984/85	2.0	2.4	2.4
	(1290)	(1532)	

infrequently (1% to 10%). In general, polls ask what you think and who you are and touch only lightly on what you do and know.

While there has been some significant variation over time in the type of questions asked, the basic distribution of question types has not changed, nor have many long-term trends been apparent (the decline of knowledge questions since 1948/49 being the most notable secular change).

To examine the purpose of attitude questions, we classified them according to what type of information they sought. Most items (about 90%) are expressions of preferences or affect toward an object (see Table 3). Other items consist of explanations for people's preferences—often the simple "Why?" follow-up question (5%), evaluations of what others, the local community, or the country as a whole thinks or of how things have changed (4%), and a small miscellaneous group (1%). Among the preference questions most are directed toward policy preferences (support for some specific legislation or governmental action) and electoral preferences (voting intention or candidate evaluations). Other questions about public matters but without direct policy connections account for 24%. Items about personal tastes (e.g., liking or disliking short skirts, favorite vacation spot, satisfaction with family life, etc.) make up only 11%. When we consider that most of the explanation and evaluation questions are tied to policy and electoral items, it is clear that polls are primarily aimed at measuring what Gallup once called the "pulse of democracy." They center on the views of people as citizens toward issues of government.

Table 3. Type of Attitude Items (1948–84, Combined)

Preferences	
Public	
Policy	43.1%
Electoral	12.1
Other Public	24.1
Personal	10.7
Explanations	4.8
Evaluations	4.1
Miscellaneous	1.1
	(1617)

Demographics, in turn, chronicle the background character of the citizens. Only a small core of demographic items has been asked consistently in surveys since the 1930s: age, occupation and labor force status, race, sex, region, and community type or size of place. In fact, since region and size of place are usually coded from sampling information and sex and race are often coded by observation, only age and occupation/labor force status have been asked regularly over the entire period. Other demographics have been added to the standard list over time: party identification, religion, union membership, and education in the 1940s, household size in the 1950s, income in the 1960s, and marital status in the 1970s. In addition, two earlier measures of socioeconomic status (interviewer's evaluation of the status or class of the household and automobile ownership) were dropped in the 1950s and 1940s, respectively, as they were in part replaced by measures of education and income.

The next aspect of survey content we examined was what topics or subject matter are covered. One is immediately struck by the wide

Table 4. Topics Covered in Polls and Relevant Events

	Topics	Relevant Events
1936/37	Economics	Great Depression
1948/49	Labor	Taft/Hartley Act
	Military	Start of Cold War
	Foreign affairs	Start of Cold War
1960/61	Presidential elections	1960 election and New Frontier
1972/73	Government	Watergate
	Quality of life	Counterculture
1984/85	Government budgets/taxes	Government deficit
	Foreign affairs	Nuclear disarmament talks

diversity of subjects that appear.[3] No topic or set of topics dominates any period, and usually the diversity of topics within individual surveys is quite high. The degree of topical diversity persists across time, but the distribution of particular topics shows significant variation from period to period. These changes tend to be moderate in magnitude and episodic in pattern. In general, the polls cover what is "in the news," and this coverage ebbs and flows with the passage of events and the change of conditions. Table 4 shows the peaks in the coverage of topics and the relevant events of the period.

For example, on Gallup surveys 2.8% of all questions dealt with economics, but 6.8% of the questions in 1936/37 concerned economics. Similarly, foreign affairs reached a high point in 1948/49 at 13.7% of the Gallup questions and 24.6% of non-Gallup surveys (compared to averages of 5.5% and 9.1%, respectively).

In addition to the episodic changes in topical coverage, there is also a strong periodicity in topics that follows the election cycle. In presidential election years 35.5% of questions (excluding demographics) deal with elections or the president, while in postpresidential election years only 14.1% of questions are devoted to these topics. This pattern persists across time and across houses.

Two opposing forces shape the topical content of surveys. The desire to be newsworthy pushes content toward today's headline, but the

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[3] Up to two topics were coded for each question. Several hundred topical codes were created. For analysis these were collapsed into 19 groups. The categories are Background, Leisure, Race, Feminism, Housing, Labor, Economics, Government Spending and Taxes, Government, Social Control, Quality of Life, Family Finances, Government Policies, Elections, Religion, the Military, Foreign Affairs, the President, and Miscellaneous. Detailed distributions and codes are available from author.

Table 5. Trends in the Timelessness of Questions (Gallup–demographics excluded)

	% Serviceable
1936/37	71%
1948/49	52
1960/61	66
1972/73	81
1984/85	87
	(871)

aim of covering American society in general spreads content around. The net result of these factors is a high degree of diversity with peaks in topics as events shift.

The final aspect of survey content that we examine is the timelessness of questions. We evaluated whether each question could be asked today just as it had originally been asked. As Table 5 shows, most questions asked even 50 years ago could be reasked today. They would not always be as relevant and in some cases, as we discuss below, the wording might be a bit dated, but the question would still be serviceable—understandable and meaningful. In general, of course, questions do become outdated over time.[4] The unexpectedly high percentage of serviceable questions in 1936/37 comes from Gallup's tendency in early surveys to ask relatively general questions that were abstractly phrased and were not tied to specific events and personalities.

The major reasons for questions becoming dated are references to particular people or events that have passed into history. The question "Would you like to have King Edward marry Mrs. Simpson?" combines the three most common reasons for a question becoming outdated. It (1) refers prospectively to an event now in the past, (2) mentions people dead (or in other cases merely out of office or no longer involved in public events), and (3) deals with events of little or no current relevance. By contrast, "timeless" questions usually deal with a topic of perennial interest, such as the most important problem facing the country or the most admired woman in the world today, or constitute general inquiries about issues of enduring social and political consequence, such as support for capital punishment, willingness to vote

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[4] Not all technically outdated items are useless for trend analysis. In particular the presidential job approval questions are probably the most frequently asked of all attitudes. While only the 1984/85 Reagan questions are not dated, comparative analysis of the popularity of presidents can be done using parallel items going back to Roosevelt.

Table 6. Original Terms and Contemporary Meaning

Date Asked	Original Term	Translation
1935	$200	$2000
1936	Compulsory old-age insurance plan	Social Security
1936	War munition industry	Defense industry
1937	Relief	Welfare
1949	Backward countries	Less developed nations/ Third World
1949	North Atlantic Security Pact	North Atlantic Treaty Organization/NATO

for a woman as president, whether the government should own the railroads, or if relief payments should be increased (all asked by Gallup in 1936/37).

Other factors that tend to date questions are references to outmoded technology and deflated dollars. For example, in 1937 Gallup asked, "Would you prefer to get national news from a daily newspaper or from a radio?"—a still askable question that unfortunately misses television. Similary, inflation has changed the meaning of all questions with dollar amounts, sometimes making the questions nearly ludicrous. Thus the highly generous Townsend plan of the 1930s that proposed giving $200 per month to each couple over 65 now sounds miserly.

Of course, dollar amounts are a specialized case in which the meaning of words has changed over time so that the same phrase either does not mean the same or has become archaic. Table 6 shows certain terms with their (approximate) contemporary translation.

The notable thing is really how very few terms have become outdated, with even several of the terms cited above still usable although no longer colloquial. However, despite a general resistance to change in meaning, there are some notable examples where the basic intention of questions would no longer be understood. For example:

1. Would you rather go to a movie in color, or rather go to see it if it wasn't in color? (Gallup—1937)
   Today people would probably interpret this as referring to colorization of black-and-white films.
2. Do you object to movie scenes of women smoking? (Gallup—1937)
   In 1937 this was a question about the loose morals of modern women. Today it would be seen as a public health issue. (And in the heyday of marijuana use one may have wondered what she was smoking.)
3. Have you heard any criticism or talk against the Jews in the last six months? (Opinion Research Corporation; NORC; Gallup—1940–1959)
   Even by 1957 this question was changing from an evaluation of the level of domestic anti-Semitism to a question about Israel.
4. Have you ever heard or read about "test-tube babies" (artificial insemination)? (Gallup—1949)
   Until you hit the parentheses this seems like a foresightful future indicator about *in vitro* fertilization.
5. Which American city do you think has the gayest night life? (Gallup—1954)
   Now presumably San Francisco would finish well above its 5th place showing in 1954.

As these examples make clear, frames of reference and the changing meaning of terms *can* make identically worded questions produce inconsistent measurements. But interesting and instructive though these examples are, they are rare exceptions. For the vast majority of items that are not outdated by the turnover of personalities and the passing of specific events, the intent and meaning of questions has remained consistent and valid for trend analysis.

The Form and Structure of Surveys

Back in the 1930s surveys were brief encounters, typically lasting only about 10 minutes and often conducted on the street or in stores and offices.[5] Since then surveys have vastly increased in length, complexity, and respondent and interviewer burden. As Table 7 shows, the number of questions per survey has increased and the questions themselves have lengthened. Thus, in terms of total number of words (Table 7C), the length of surveys has increased four- to sevenfold.[6]

Calculations of the Flesch "ease-of-reading" scores from other samples of survey questions also indicates that longer survey questions may be difficult for less educated respondents, and that the difficulty

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[5] Most surveys were essentially community intercept samples that filled quotas by interviewing people wherever they could be located. For example, in two 1948 Gallup surveys (AIPO423T and AIPO425T) 55.5% were interviewed at home, 11.3% on the street, 10.3% in offices, 4.2% in stores or restaurants, 5.4% at work, and 13.3% at other places (e.g., lobbies, libraries, train stations).

[6] In particular, the Gallup figures on questions per survey and total input underestimate the growing magnitude of surveys. Gallup frequently includes propriety questions on the Gallup Poll surveys. These are censored from the released documentation. It appears that these extra questions are more frequent in the last two periods than in earlier years.

Table 7. Trends in Questions per Survey and Words per Question by House (1936/37–1984/85)

	Gallup	Non-Gallup
A. Questions per survey (mean)		
1936/37	24	—
1948/49	50	37
1960/61	56	84
1972/73	50	112
1984/85	61	91
B. Words per question (mean)		
1936/37	12.5	—
1948/49	17	19
1960/61	17	21
1972/73	14	17
1984/85	20	22
C. Words per survey (mean # questions × mean words per question)[a]		
1936/37	300	—
1948/49	830	677
1960/61	974	1789
1972/73	705	1949
1984/85	1196 (1290)	1992 (1532)

[a] Numbers differ because of rounding.

level has increased over time (Terris, 1949; Payne, 1949; Belson, 1981; Converse and Schuman, 1984).

Another sign of the growing size of surveys is the rising number of categories per closed-ended question. (More response categories slightly increase burden because respondents must master more difficult scales and make finer distinctions in their answers.) In 1936/37 Gallup questions averaged 3.1 response categories per question.[7] This increased to 4.2 in 1948/49 and 1960/61, 6.1 in 1972/73, and 5.6 in 1984/85. Non-Gallup surveys show less increase because by 1984/85 most were done over the telephone, and telephone surveys use fewer response categories than personal surveys. The average increase comes from shifts from simple trichotomies (e.g., favor/oppose/DK) to more 5- and 7-point scales and the 11-category scalometer favored by Gallup. More complex measures such as feeling thermometers and magnitude/ratio estimates do not appear in these surveys (Converse and Presser, 1986). Given the tremendous increase in the burden of the average public opinion survey, one wonders whether the widely heralded rise in refusals might come in part from negative reactions on the part of respondents or lowered expectations on the part of the interviewers.

The second major change in the form and structure of questions is a movement away from natural language into a more specialized survey dialect. One example of this change is the demise of the unbalanced question. In 1936/37 80% of Gallup questions were unbalanced, mentioning the affirmative response without explicitly citing the negative options (e.g., "Would you approve further loans to our World War allies in case they resume payment of the debts they now owe?"). By 1948/49 this form had slipped to 31%. Among both Gallup and non-Gallup surveys this form fell to 8% in 1960/61, 4% in 1972/73, and only 1.5% in 1984/85. While the actual impact of formally balancing questions appears to be small (Schuman and Presser, 1981), a balanced question seems more equitable and has been adopted for that reason. This shift probably marks a shift from natural language, since in everyday speech people tend to omit the balancing option.

The second way that survey questions have deviated from natural speech is in the decline of open-ended questions. As Table 8 shows, open-ended questions of all types (i.e., those calling for name, number, or a full, "essay" response) have declined from 33% in 1936/37 to 12% in 1984/85, and the full open-ended question rose from 12% in 1936/37 to 19% in 1948/49 before falling to 3% in 1984/85.[8] Clearly, closed questions have won the open–closed-ended struggle of the late 1930s and early 1940s (Converse, 1984). An unnoted aspect to this shift is that this also represents a shift away from natural language. Conversations, even those involving mostly inquiries by one party, are usually open-ended and seldom involve the mentioning of closed and structured response categories.[9]

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[7] We counted Don't Knows and similar codes as response categories so a simple favor/oppose item with a Don't Know code has three categories. We dual-coded eight surveys counting instead the number of response options mentioned or implicit in the question (e.g., a simple favor/oppose item would be counted as having two categories). There was a mean difference of 1.0 response category per survey according to these two methods.

[8] Converse and Schuman (1984), however, show no change in the open–closed ratios for Gallup although thev do show a decline for Michigan's American National Election Studies.

[9] With questions becoming wordier and open-ended responses becoming rarer, interviewers are probably doing a higher percentage of the talking than in earlier years. Of course, respondents usually say a lot more in response to questions than the minimal "yes/no, agree strongly, etc." that would suffice, and we do not know how responses in general have changed, only that the amount required from interviewers has increased while that from respondents has declined.

Table 8. Trends in % Open-Ended Question for Gallup and Gallup/Non-Gallup Combined (Demographics Excluded)

	Gallup		Combined	
	All Open-Ended	Full-Open-Ended Only	All Open-Ended	Full Open-Ended Only
1936/37	33%	12%	—	—
1948/49	26	19	24%	16%
960/61	31	17	28	15
1972/73	8	5	9	7
1984/85	12	3	5	4
	(872)		(2145)	

Another shift from natural language is an increase in the use of show cards (Table 9). These came into use at least partly because of the increase in questions with more response categories noted above. Cards were not used by Gallup in 1936/37. Their use expanded at least until 1972/73. Since then the increasing use of telephone surveys has curbed the use of show cards. As with the other changes discussed above, the increase in the use of cards deviates from normal conversational modes.

Table 9. Trends in the Use of Show Cards (Demographics Excluded) for Gallup and Gallup/Non-Gallup Combined

	Gallup	Combined
1936/37	0%	—
1948/49	4	6%
1960/61	11	11
1972/73	36	14
1984/85	16	14.5
	(872)	(2145)

Summary

The surveys that we examined can appropriately be called public opinion polls. They are public in three senses. First, they are samplings of the general adult population, the American public. Second, these surveys are mostly conducted either for the mass media (e.g., Gallup, Harris, and Yankelovich) or by the mass media (e.g., CBS/NYT, NBC, Los Angeles Times) and thus the results of the polls are routinely made public.[10] Finally, the surveys deal mostly with public matters, what people want government to do (or not do), and how they feel about their leaders and candidates for leadership.

For the most part, the inquiries about these public issues are solicitations of people's opinions, mostly about their affect toward policies and personalities along with their evaluations of how others feel about such matters. The polls also include basic background information about the respondent (and to a lesser extent about his or her household), but knowledge questions are relatively rare and in decline and behavioral inquiries are also infrequent.

The content of polls is determined by the opposing goals of covering what is making news and covering all the news. Polls are thus reactive to history in general and current events in particular. Topics get covered when events make them newsworthy. Thus, questions about the role of women appear during World War II in response to the upsurge of female labor force participation (especially in nontraditional jobs) and then virtually disappear until the rise of the women's movement in the late 1960s. Similarly nuclear energy questions proliferated after Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. This approach closely follows the way the media cover events, giving greater coverage and more prominent display to topics that are deemed more newsworthy. But understandable though it is, this reactivity to events hinders the study of trends and social change since it concentrates observations during unusual periods, times in which something is astir. This tendency to go with the headlines is constrained, however, by an opposing desire to monitor news (or society) in general. This keeps the content of most surveys fairly eclectic.

In terms of their form and structure, surveys started in the mid-1930s as short, simple inquiries that were "what d'ya know, what d'ya say" conversations close to natural speech. Surveys have tried to keep the common denominator communicability of these early surveys as a major goal over the years, but they have changed in various ways (Converse and Presser, 1986). Surveys have grown in size, with more categories and words per question and more questions per poll. This has greatly increased the richness of the data collected, adding more demographic information, and, usually, more items per topic[11] and more topics per survey. They have also moved away from natural language with the adoption of balanced questions, the decline of open-ended inquiries, and the increased use (at least on personal interviews) of show cards. Other changes, such as the adoption of Likert scales and scalometers, have also made surveys a specialized form of communication distinctly different from the natural conversations they once resembled more closely. This shift parallels other professionalizations and specializations such as the development of the technical language and formalized interactions of the courtroom.

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[10] The data and questions are, of course, in the public domain for replication or analysis.

In brief, surveys of public opinion have undergone notable changes in form and structure over the last 50 years, adopting more specialized styles to facilitate the collection of information and collecting more information on each survey. But their content and purpose seem to have remained basically the same, to monitor society and measure the "pulse of democracy."

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[11] More explicit, multi-item scales are used in more recent periods.

SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES

EVIDENCE FROM SAMPLE SURVEYS

NORVAL D. GLENN

There have been many trend studies of U. S. sample survey data dealing with specific topics, and those studies have contributed considerably to an understanding of social, cultural, and political change during the past few decades. My task here is different; it is to look at the various series of survey data as a whole and to ask what they reveal about the overall pattern of social and cultural change.

Others have undertaken a similar task (e.g., Davis, 1980; Smith, 1982) but have not tried to cover the entire half century during which the *Public Opinion Quarterly* has been published. I cannot cover the entire period either, because of problems of comparability between the earliest and the later U. S. national survey data,[1] but I have examined data gathered from 1952 through 1986. It is clear from others' studies and my own that in general change has been in a liberal direction, with conservative reactions in the 1950s and in the late 1970s and early 1980s, even though not all of the series show net change in a liberal direction.[2] It seems to me, however, that this generalization about the

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[1] In the 1930s and early to middle 1940s, all of the national survey organizations used quota control samples (see Stephan and McCarthy, 1958, for a description of those samples), whereas in recent decades all of the major organizations have used full probability samples or "probability sampling with quotas" (see Stephenson, 1979). This change in sample design accounts for an unknown amount of the change in responses to questions asked before and after it occurred. Furthermore, the most active of the national survey organizations during the 1930s and 1940s—the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup)—designed its quota samples at that time to represent the electorate—the voters—rather than the entire adult population (Gallup and Rae, 1940), which means that the early Gallup samples severely underrepresented women, southerners, blacks, and people at the lower socioeconomic levels (Glenn, 1975).

[2] For instance, approval of the death penalty for persons convicted of murder increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s when most attitudinal changes were in a liberal direction.

In assessing the trends, I considered those attitudes to be liberal that are usually considered to be liberal, but it is hard to find a definition of liberalism according to which they would all be liberal. This, of course, is one reason why the liberal–conservative distinction is not very useful.

Using time series beginning in the 1950s might seem to pose a problem, since that

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