

Items dropped from the core questionnaire in ESS Rounds 5 and 6

After the ESS Round 4 fieldwork, National Coordinators and the ESS Core Scientific Team (CST) raised concerns that the mean interview length had become overly long. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) therefore established an 'Interview Duration Committee' (IDC) to examine ways to control the duration going forward. With the core questionnaire full, there were also concerns that there was no space at all for innovation in the ESS core questionnaire. However, it was acknowledged that cutting items from the core questionnaire in a time series would be challenging and potentially damaging, leaving some data users without items they may like to use.

The IDC recommended that a total of around 30 items¹ be permanently cut from the ESS core questionnaire. In addition, from Round 7, it was recommended that the two rotating modules be reduced to 30 items each. In parallel, efforts have been made to try and further standardise interviewing technique across and within countries to reduce interviewer driven variance in questionnaire length. The recommendations of the IDC were approved by the SAB and the CST.

The cuts were implemented in the core questionnaire in ESS Rounds 5 and 6. A subset of items was excluded already in Round 5 as a temporary solution to reduce questionnaire length. Before Round 6, most of those cuts were confirmed as permanent and additional items were dropped. Table 1 summarises the items that have been removed in both rounds and includes a short description of the rationale that informed the decisions. The decision to choose permanent cuts rather than introducing some form of rotation was taken due to the poor quality or questionable utility of the selected items, along with the difficulty of identifying a sound strategy for rotation of large sections of the core questionnaire. Space for 10 new items was created via this process to allow some innovation in the core questionnaire in future rounds.

In addition to the cuts from the core module, the total number of (test) items included in each version of the supplementary questionnaire was reduced from 12 to 9 starting with Round 6².

The ESS Interview Duration Committee was chaired by Piet Bracke (SAB). Other members included Rory Fitzgerald (CST), Anna Andreenkova (NC Russia), Ann-Helen Bay (SAB), Michael Braun (CST), Lizzy Gatrell (CST), Yilmaz Esmer (SAB), Peter Martin (CST) and Alice Ramos (NC Portugal). The SAB and CST are very grateful to them for their work on this very challenging task.

¹ Items were calculated taking into account the proportion of respondents asked the question following any filtering.

² Four versions of the supplementary questionnaire will be administered in future rounds rather than 3 to allow the same number of experiments with slightly smaller sample sizes.

Table 1: Items dropped from the ESS core questionnaire in ESS Rounds 5 and 6

Question number (R4)	Variable name (R4)	Variable label (R4)	Introduced in	Dropped in	Reason for dropping
A3	RDTOT	Radio listening, total time on average weekday	Round 1	Round 6	These items no longer capture the reality of modern media consumption in an era when media is accessed through a wide variety of routes (e.g. radio accessed through the internet) and require respondents to be very precise about their media consumption. ³
A4	RDPOL	Radio listening, news/politics/current affairs on average weekday	Round 1	Round 6	
A5	NWSPTOT	Newspaper reading, total time on average weekday	Round 1	Round 6	
A6	NWSPPO	Newspaper reading, politics/current affairs on average weekday	Round 1	Round 6	
A7	NETUSE	Personal use of the internet/email/www	Round 1	Round 6	
B2	POLCMPL	Politics too complicated to understand	Round 1	Round 5	Analysis conducted on the existing political efficacy measures suggested that the topic is not being measured comprehensively nor effectively along the two components of subjective competence (internal efficacy) and system responsiveness (external efficacy). These have been shown to be theoretically and empirically distinct and would need to be treated as separate concepts. ⁴ It is therefore proposed to drop these items and to undertake the development of alternative items based on more accurate measurement models. ⁵
B3	POLDCS	Making mind up about political issues	Round 1	Round 5	
B21	MMBPRTY	Member of political party	Round 1	Round 6	The prevalence of party membership is generally very low (around 5%). These items also have very low use in publications.
B22	PRTMBxx	Member of which party, [COUNTRY]	Round 1	Round 6	

³ New measures of media consumption and internet use were introduced starting with ESS Round 8.

⁴ See Saris, W.E. & Torcal, M. (2009). *Alternative measurement procedures and models for Political Efficacy*. RECSM Working Paper No. 3, Barcelona ([pdf](#)).

⁵ New measures of political efficacy were tested in ESS Round 7 and included in the core questionnaire starting with ESS Round 8.

Question number (R4)	Variable name (R4)	Variable label (R4)	Introduced in	Dropped in	Reason for dropping
B32	PRTYBAN	Political parties that wish to overthrow democracy should be banned	Round 1	Round 6	These items are not frequently used in publications. B33 in particular appears to have poor quality in terms of face validity.
B33	SCNSENV	Modern science can be relied on to solve our environmental problems	Round 1	Round 6	
B34	EUFTF	European Union: European unification go further or gone too far	Round 2	Round 5	As other surveys (e.g. Eurobarometer) cover this subject extensively and the answers are not relevant in the context of the Round 5 rotating modules, it was agreed to exclude this item on a provisional basis and to reassess the decision before Round 6. ⁶
C7	BRGHMWR	How often worry about your home being burgled	Round 3	Round 6	These items are felt to cover a narrow view of 'insecurity' in society, not capturing other domains (e.g. 'job security'). Items C5 and C6 will still ensure the crime domain is covered.
C8	BRGHMEF	Worry about home burgled has effect on quality of life	Round 3	Round 6	
C9	CRVCTWR	How often worry about becoming victim of violent crime	Round 3	Round 6	
C10	CRVCTEF	Worry about becoming victim of violent crime has effect on quality of life	Round 3	Round 6	
C11	TRRENYR	How likely terrorist attack in Europe during next 12 months	Round 3	Round 5	These items were designed at a time when terrorism was highly salient following attacks in Madrid, London and Moscow. However, the case for including them in the ESS core going forward was not felt to be clear. In particular, civil rights implications of terrorism are a detailed topic which is not comprehensively covered by the two existing items (C13-C14).
C12	TRRCNYR	How likely terrorist attack in [COUNTRY] next 12 months	Round 3	Round 5	
C13	TRRPRSN	Terrorist suspect in prison until police satisfied	Round 3	Round 5	
C14	TRRTORT	Torture of suspected terrorists	Round 3	Round 5	
F6a	EDUFLD	Field or subject, highest qualification	Round 2	Round 5	This item has questionable quality from a face validity perspective. It is considered a lower priority compared to other education questions and has low evidence of use.
F34	BRWMNY	Borrow money to make ends meet, difficult or easy	Round 1	Round 6	Although potentially important for social capital research and displaying large variation between countries, it was felt this is not a key domain for the

⁶ This item was subsequently reinstated in the core questionnaire starting with ESS Round 6, as it was felt that the topic was still very salient.

Question number (R4)	Variable name (R4)	Variable label (R4)	Introduced in	Dropped in	Reason for dropping
					ESS core.
F43	EMPLNOP	Number of employees partner has	Round 1	Round 6	ESS social stratification experts suggest these items are low priority, and are unlikely to be used as independent variables. The quality of some of the items is also questionable, since they ask for subjective information on behalf of another person. Additionally, items F51-F52 and F57-F58 also posed recall problems, as they asked respondents about a potentially very distant point in time.
F44	JBSPVP	Partner responsible for supervising other employees	Round 1	Round 6	
F45	NJBSPVP	Number of people partner responsible for in job	Round 1	Round 6	
F46	WKDCORP	Partner allowed to decide how daily work is organised	Round 2	Round 5	
F47	IOACTP	Partner allowed to influence policy decisions about activities or organisation	Round 2	Round 5	
F51	EMPLNOF	Number of employees father had	Round 1	Round 6	
F52	JBSPVF	Father responsible for supervising other employees	Round 1	Round 6	
F57	EMPLNOM	Number of employees mother had	Round 1	Round 6	
F58	JBSPVM	Mother responsible for supervising other employees	Round 1	Round 6	
F71	FXLTPH	Fixed-line telephone in accommodation	Round 3	Round 6	These items are not used as independent substantive variables – they were included for methodological purposes related to a possible switch to mixed mode interviewing, and it is believed that sufficient information was collected from these items by now. Additionally, some of this information can be gained from other sources. The items may be more useful in some countries than in others and can still be included in specific countries where the information is needed.
F72	MBLTPH	Personally have mobile telephone	Round 3	Round 5	
F73	INTTPH	Use the internet for calls at home	Round 3	Round 5	