



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Hanson, T. & Fitzgerald, R. (2022). Developing a self-completion version of the European Social Survey: results from an experiment in Austria. Paper presented at the 2022 AAPOR Annual Conference, 11-13 May 2022, Chicago, USA.

This is the presentation version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/38122/>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

Developing a self-completion version of the European Social Survey: results from an experiment in Austria

Tim Hanson, Rory Fitzgerald

ESS ERIC HQ

AAPOR Conference, Chicago, 11 May 2022



europeansocialsurvey.org

ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)



Introduction to ESS and Round 10

Introduction to the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Academically-driven cross-national survey measuring attitudes and behaviour across Europe
- Conducted every two years since 2002; Round 10 nearing completion
- 38 countries have participated in total; 32 at Round 10
- For Rounds 1-9: Fully face-to-face approach across all participating countries; consistency of methodology important
- Central fieldwork specification and central planning/oversight – but decentralised fieldwork contracting and delivery
- Random probability sampling; mix of sample frames across countries
- 1,500 target effective sample in most countries (800 in small countries)
- Interview length c. 1 hour

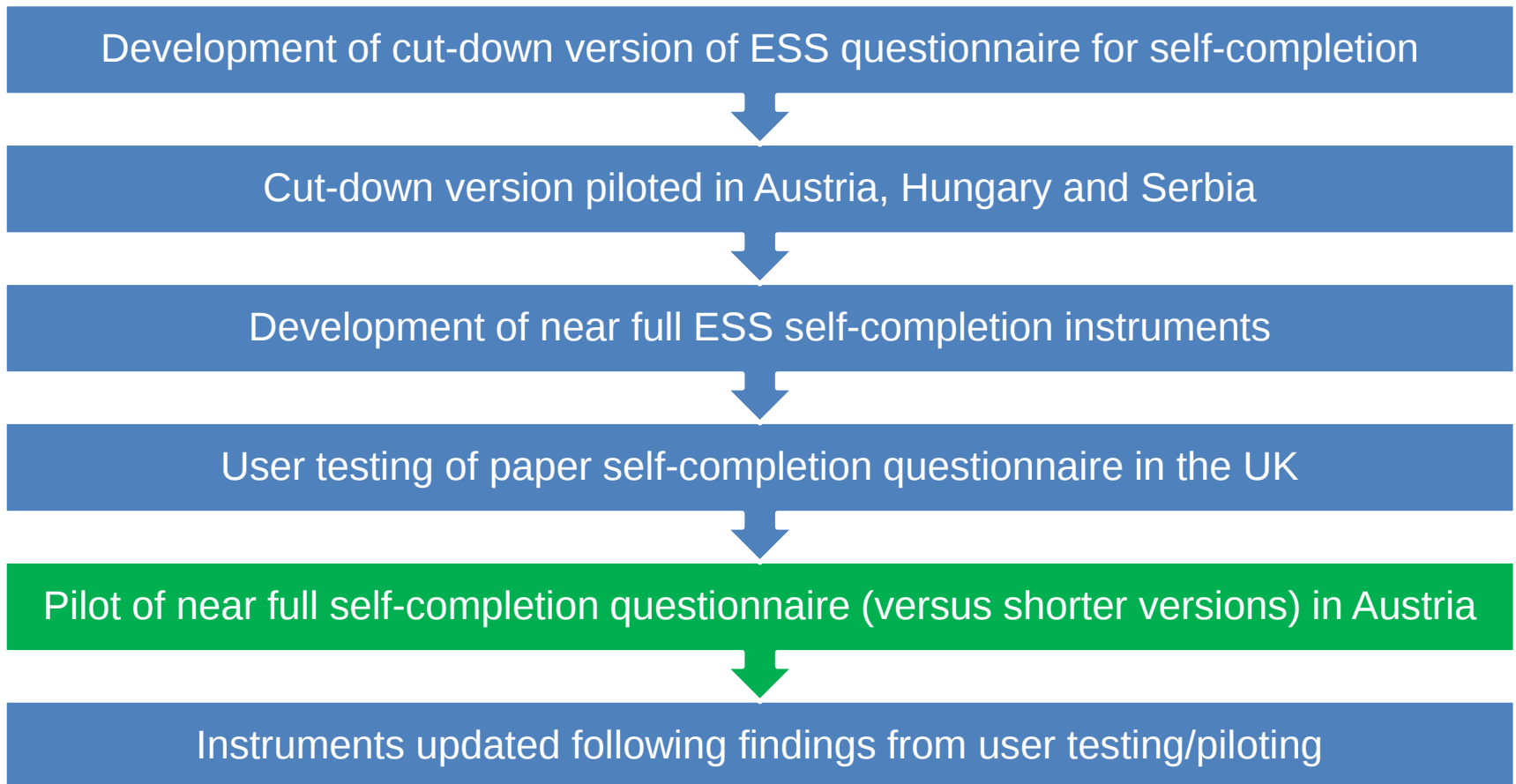
ESS Round 10 and COVID-19

- Fieldwork for Round 10 of ESS was due to run from September 2020 to January 2021 using the usual face-to-face approach in all countries
- COVID-19 pandemic presented major challenges to deliver usual face-to-face approach
- Contingency measures introduced:
 - Continuing to prioritise a face-to-face approach where possible – but with greater flexibility on timings and other adaptations to specification
 - Preparing a self-completion approach to be implemented by any countries that could not deliver face-to-face fieldwork (no mixing of modes permitted)
- Developmental and experimental work to inform/prepare self-completion approach:
focus of today's presentation

Developing a self-completion approach for ESS

Can we develop a self-completion version of ESS that includes the majority of content from the face-to-face survey (with limited adaptation) while delivering ‘acceptable’ response rates, sample composition and data quality?

Development stages for self-completion approach

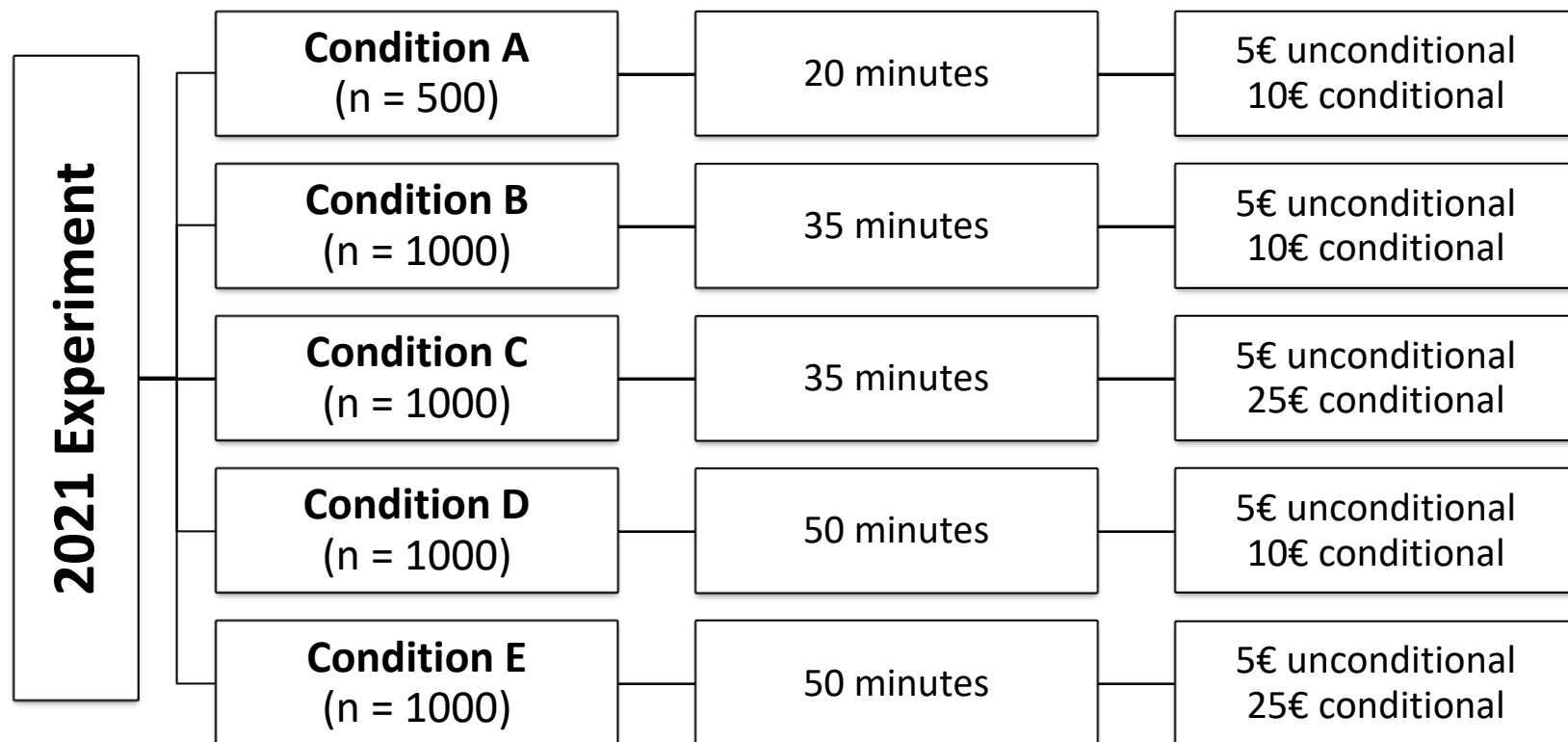


ESS self-completion experiment in Austria

Research questions

1. Is it feasible to field a (near) full-length version of the ESS questionnaire?
comparison of c. 50 minute questionnaire vs. 35 minutes and 20 minutes
2. What is the impact of different conditional incentive amounts on participation and data quality?

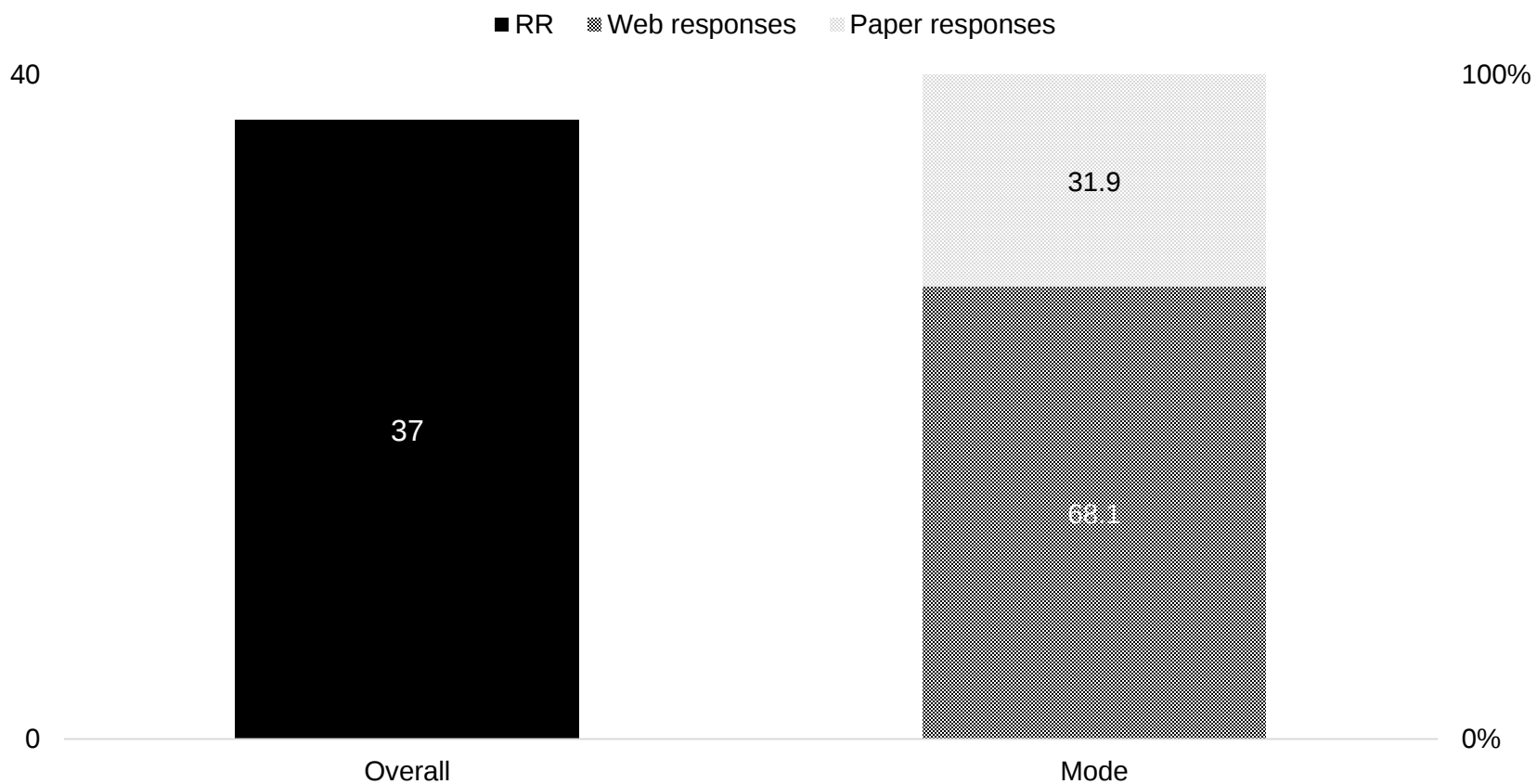
Research design



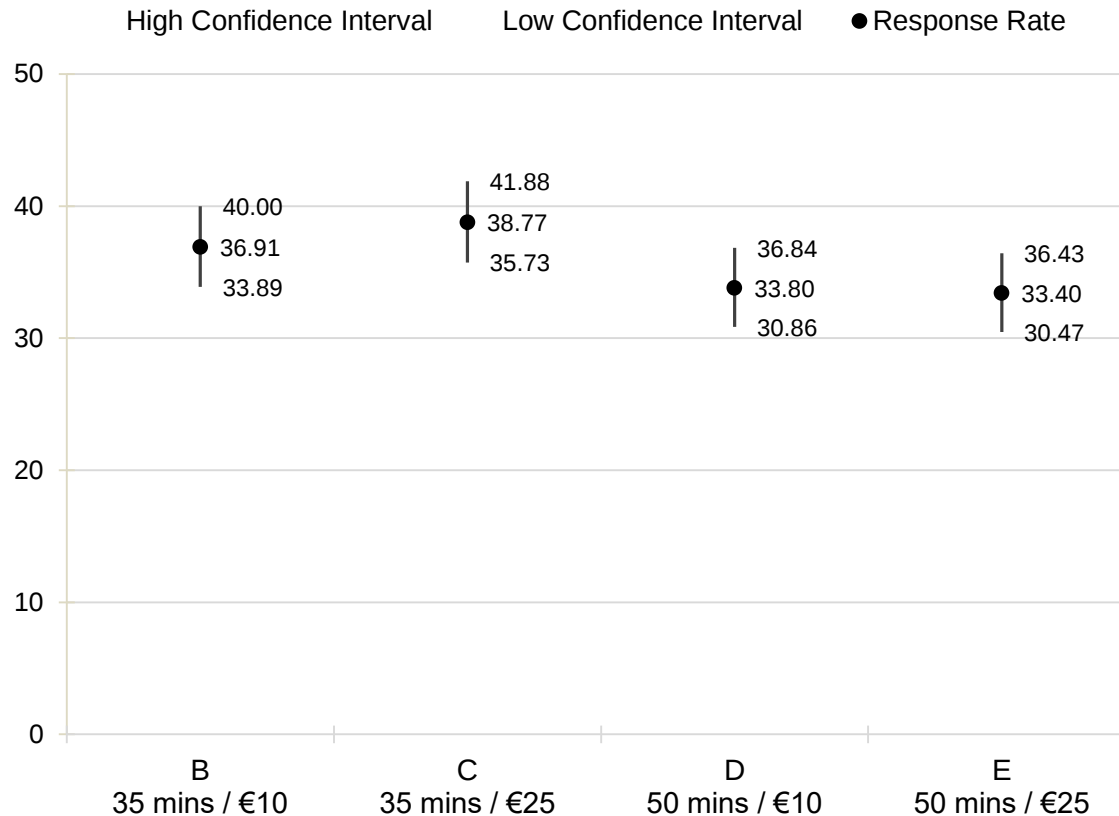
Summary of approach

- Push-to-web design with postal recruitment
- Address-based sample; person with next birthday in household instructed to complete the survey
- Sequential approach: web first and paper questionnaire sent to non-responders with second reminder (three reminders sent in total)
- Source instruments developed centrally – web survey in Qualtrics, paper questionnaire in InDesign (50 minute version equated to 36 pages)
- Fairly limited adaptation to questionnaire from face-to-face survey
- Data collection between April and June 2021

Response rates: Condition A



Response rates: Conditions B-E



- No significant differences in response rates across conditions
- Rates ranged from 33.4% (long questionnaire/ high incentive) to 38.8% (short questionnaire/ high incentive)
- Approx. 70-75% of responses by web across all conditions

Sample composition – sex – conditions B-E

	Condition					
Sex	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)	ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	45.1	47.0	45.5	48.2	45.9	48.7
Female	54.9	53.0	54.5	51.8	54.1	51.3

Sample composition – age – conditions B-E

	Condition					
Age group	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)	ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	%	%	%	%	%	%
18-29	12.8	12.3	13.2	11.0	13.3	17.7
30-49	31.5	33.2	33.5	31.5	30.7	32.7
50-64	28.6	32.9	31.9	33.1	28.2	26.6
65+	27.1	21.6	21.3	24.3	27.8	23.0

Sample composition – years of education – conditions B-E

	Condition					
	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)	ESS R9 unweighted	ESS R9 weighted
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Average years of education	13.5	13.8	13.7	13.7	12.6	13.3

Sample composition – citizenship – conditions B-E

	Condition					
Citizen-ship	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)	ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Austrian	96.4	91.4	96.7	92.1	93.9	83.4
Non-Austrian	3.9	8.6	3.3	7.9	6.1	16.6

No concerns with most data quality indicators but clear issues with item non-response for certain questions on paper

- Low levels of straightlining and ‘contradictory’ responses (no difference between conditions)
- Very few unfeasibly short completion times for web survey
- For most items, levels of item non-response not consistently / notably higher than in the face-to-face survey (no difference between conditions)
- **But – for all conditions – high levels of item non-response for some questions (especially on paper)**
- Item non-response highest for questions with ‘write-in’ response formats, (complex) routing instructions, and where knowledge may be lower

Conclusions and next steps

Reflecting back on our research questions

1. Is it feasible to field a (near) full-length version of the ESS questionnaire?
 - **Yes – reasonable response rates achieved, few differences in sample composition and most data quality indicators positive**

2. What is the impact of different conditional incentive amounts on participation and data quality?
 - **Very few differences – though some evidence that higher incentives may bring in more responses from non-Austrian citizens**

Next steps

- Based on this experiment and other experimental / development work decided to develop self-completion approach for ESS Round 10 fieldwork
- Slightly reduced version of questionnaire used (one section removed)
- Approach largely reflects that used for the Austria experiment (sequential, four mailings)
- Required €5 (or equivalent) unconditional incentive (ideally cash); recommended €10 conditional incentive; felt additional costs of larger conditional incentives could not be justified
- Self-completion approach being used for 9 countries to deliver their ESS R10 data collection; response rates so far between c. 20% and c. 40%
- Expect ESS will fully transition to self-completion (next 5+ years) – lots to learn from work so far; extensive further development/experimental work to be carried out

Acknowledgements

- Peter Grand (National Coordinator – Austria)
- Rory Fitzgerald and Eva Aizpurua (ESS ERIC HQ)
- Don Dillman (Design Consultant)
- NatCen Social Research UK (paper questionnaire design)

Thank you



Contact

✉ tim.hanson@city.ac.uk

🌐 europeansocialsurvey.org

📘 EuropeanSocialSurvey
in European-Social-Survey

🐦 [ESS_Survey](#)

📺 [EuropeanSocialSurveyERIC](#)

