

Methodological Challenges in Survey Research



FORS is studying some of the key methodological challenges in survey research associated with the quality of the samples of surveys. Here we present a study example which investigates the representation of foreign national minorities in general “population representative” surveys in Switzerland.

Contact: Oliver.Lipps@fors.unil.ch, Francesco.Lagana@unil.ch, Isabelle.Renschler@fors.unil.ch

Representation of foreign national minorities in Swiss surveys

Research question: Switzerland’s population is increasingly diversified. One challenge is to represent foreign groups in surveys in all their facets. How adequately are foreign national groups represented in measuring social indicators, opinions, and poverty rates for the general population? These measures can influence policy decisions. The survey data that we used were from the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), the European Social Survey (ESS), and the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS), as well as the Census 2000.

Results: The representation of foreign national minorities was biased. According to their nationality and educational level, these groups were either over- or under-represented. Data from the SLFS 2002 show that people with higher education are generally over-represented within national minorities, including the Swiss. In addition, while some national minorities (Turkey and Ex-Yugoslavia) are generally under-represented (see figure 1), the national minorities from neighbouring countries are not.

Remedies so far: The remedies apply to both data analysis and to fieldwork: Regarding data analysis, weights for foreigners are introduced (see figure 2), but these do usually not distinguish between groups. As a result, while these weights have the effect to over-represent well represented minorities (DE, FR, IT), a bias remains for highly under-represented minorities. Additional languages were offered for the SLFS 2003, but only with limited positive effect.

More remedies are needed. With respect to additional languages: First contact with foreign national minorities should be conducted in the language of the foreign national minorities. Incentives for the interviewers not to choose “easy” cases first could be an additional measure.

Figure 1: Distortion by origin and educational status (SAKE 2002)

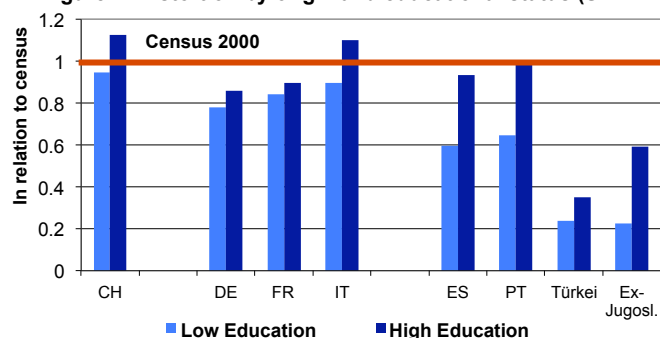
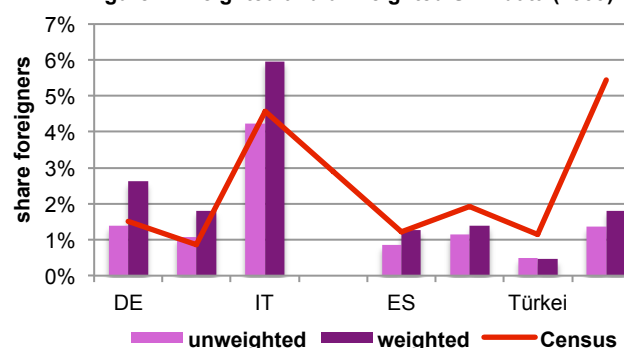


Figure 2: Weighted and unweighted SHP-data (1999)



Publications:

Francesco Laganà, Guy Elchereth, Sandra Penic, Brian Kleiner, and Nicole Fasel. National minorities and their representation in Swiss surveys (II): Which practices make a difference? FORS Working Paper 2011-3.

Oliver Lipps, Francesco Laganà, Alexandre Pollien, and Lavinia Gianettoni. National minorities and their representation in Swiss surveys (I): Providing evidence and analysing causes for their underrepresentation. FORS Working Paper 2011-2.

Renschler, Isabelle, Brian Kleiner, and Martina Bichsel. Dialect-driven interviewer adaptation: experiences from Switzerland. FORS Working Paper 2010-3.

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