# Extended Notes for GUN\_CONTROL3G

The data set used in this exercise is Field\_2013\_subset\_for\_classes\_GUN\_CONTROL.sav which is a subset of a Field Poll conducted in February, 2013. Some of the variables in the poll have been recoded to make them easier to use and some new variables have been created. The data may be downloaded at this site. You have permission to use this exercise and to revise it to fit your needs. Please send a copy of any revision to the author.

The Field Poll is a poll of registered voters in California conducted by the Field Research Corporation. The Field Poll was established in 1947 by Mervin Field and covers a wide range of political and social topics. It’s one of the major statewide public opinion polls in California and is conducted approximately three to seven times per year. An archive of reports can be found on their [website](http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/index.html).

## Methodology[[1]](#endnote-1)

Sampling. This Field Poll is a sample of 834 registered voters in California. There were two forms of the poll referred to as Form A and Form B. Some questions were asked of all respondents while other questions were asked of a random half of the total sample. That means that for some questions the sample size is 834 and for other questions the sample size is half of that. It also means that questions that were included in Form A only cannot be crosstabulated with questions that appeared in Form B only.

Data Collection. The poll was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish. Up to six attempts were made to reach respondents in the sample while varying the day and time of the week they were called. Respondents were called on the telephone number they included on their voter registration which means some calls were made on the respondents’ landline and others on their cell phone.

Weighting. A weight variable (WEIGHT) was constructed by the Field Research Corporation so the data would better represent the population from which the sample was selected. This weight variable should always be used when analyzing the data. The data set for this series of exercises was saved with the data already weighted so students will not have to weight the data when they open the file. It will already be weighted.

Data Access. Students, faculty and staff at the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU)[[2]](#endnote-2) may use all available Field Poll data. However, the Field data are subject to a two-year embargo period for the general public and those at other academic institutions. This means the general public may access the poll data two years after the date of the polls. The 2013 Field Poll, therefore, is available to the general public.

Questions and Variables.The Field Poll included questions on a variety of topics. I created a subset of these variables focusing on those topics I thought would be of the most interest to students. I renamed the variables to make it easier for students to find related variables using the following scheme.

* Questions on economic conditions all start with the letter “EC.”
* Questions on gun control all start with “G.”
* Questions on global warming all start with “GW.”
* Questions on immigration all start with “I.”
* Questions on marijuana all start with “M.”
* Questions on same-sex marriage all start with “SSM.”
* Demographic or background questions (e.g., age, income, sex) all start with “D.”

There was more than one question on all these topics. For example, there were ten questions on gun control. Following the initial letter(s) described above, there is a number that refers to each particular question. For gun control, there is G1 and G2 through G10 which are then followed by an underscore (\_). Following the underscore is the name of the variable in the original Field Poll data set. Thus the first variable on gun control is named G1\_q13 since this variable was named q13 in the original Field Poll data set. The advantage of this system is that students can easily find categories of variables that have the same focus. At the same time, you also know the name of the variable in the original Field Poll data set and can easily use the Field Poll codebook provided with the data set. This codebook, along with the questionnaire, can be downloaded from this website. However, you probably won’t have to use the codebook since the SPSS variable label includes the exact question wording. The variable label also tells you which form (A or B) of the poll the question appears in. If there is no form mentioned, then the question was included in both forms.

Missing Data. The Field Poll includes two different types of data – opinion data and demographic or background data. Opinion data includes questions that ask a person’s opinion about some issue such as gun control. Most respondents will either favor or oppose a particular approach to gun control. But some respondents will not have an opinion or they will say they don’t know or refuse to answer the questions. Demographic questions ask respondents about their age or income or marital status. Some respondents will refuse to answer particular questions. Missing values are assigned to missing data. So respondents who refuse to tell interviewers their age are assigned a missing value for that variable. But what about those who say they have no opinion on a question such as gun control. The Field Poll does not consider this to be missing data because they are telling us an important piece of information about themselves. They haven’t formed an opinion on this issue yet. So no opinion answers are not considered missing data and are not assigned a missing value. Missing values can be changed. Chapter 2 in the online SPSS book described below explains how to change missing values.

## Notes on this Exercise

The goal of this exercise is to explore the relationship between political views and behavior and how people feel about gun control. Another goal of the exercise is to give students practice using SPSS. This exercise uses FREQUENCIES to get frequency distributions and CROSSTABS to explore the relationships between variables. In CROSSTABS, students are asked to use percents in their analysis. Chi Square and measures of association will be introduced in a later exercise. This exercise does not explain how to use these SPSS commands. Rather it gives students practice in using them. A good reference on using SPSS is *SPSS for Windows Version 23.0 A Basic Tutorial* by Linda Fiddler, John Korey, Edward Nelson (Editor), and Elizabeth Nelson. The online version of the book is on the Social Science and Instructional Council’s [website](http://ssric.org/node/582). This would be a good introduction to the use of SPSS commands. I have included in the exercise where students can find help with the SPSS commands in this online book.

In order to avoid having to show students how to recode variables, I have recoded several variables and included the recoded variables in the data set. If you would like to use this exercise to teach recoding, you could delete the recoded variables from the data set and add information on recoding in SPSS to the exercise. Chapter 3 in the online SPSS book describes how to recode.

This exercise does not explain the statistical tools used. Rather it gives students practice using and interpreting these tools. It assumes that you have covered frequency distributions and percents in class. You may want to add information on these statistics to the exercise.

To avoid students overwriting the data file, it is important that you make the data file a read only file.

Included with the exercise are the SPSS syntax needed for the exercise and the SPSS output which includes the syntax. These, of course, should be removed when preparing the exercise for students.

## Permission to Make Modifications

Feel free to revise the exercise in any way you want. Just recognize the source of the original exercise. Please send me a copy of the revised exercise so I can see how others are using it. If you find errors in the exercise or the data set, please email me and I’ll make corrections and post the corrected version on our website.

## Contacting Me

If you would like to contact me, please email me at [ednelson@csufresno.edu](mailto:ednelson@csufresno.edu). I’m Professor Emeritus at California State University, Fresno in the Sociology department. I taught research methods, statistics, and critical thinking before retiring and now teach a critical thinking course part time.

1. A more detailed description of the methodology for the Field Poll can be found on their [website](http://field.com/fieldpoll/methods.html). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. CSU campuses must subscribe to the social science data bases in order for their students and faculty to be exempt from this two-year embargo. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)