Author:   Ed Nelson
Department of Sociology M/S SS97
California State University, Fresno
Fresno, CA 93740
Email:  ednelson@csufresno.edu

**Note to the Instructor:** 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 this Field Poll have been recoded to make them easier to use and some new variables have been created.  The data have been weighted according to the instructions from the Field Research Corporation.  This exercise uses FREQUENCIES to get frequency distributions and CROSSTABS to explore relationships between variables.  In CROSSTABS students are asked to use percentages.  Chi Square and measures of association will be considered in a later exercise.  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 Research and Instructional Center's website.](http://ssric.org/node/582)  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. Included with this exercise (as separate files) are more detailed notes to the instructors, the SPSS syntax necessary to carry out the exercise (SPSS syntax file), and the SPSS output for the exercise (SPSS output file). These, of course, will need to be removed as you prepare the exercise for your students.  Please contact the author for additional information.

I’m attaching the following files.

* [**Data subset which is a SPSS data file**](http://ssric.org/files/field_2013_subset_for_classes_GUN_CONTROL.sav) (.sav format).
* [**Extended notes for instructors**. MS Word (.docx) format](http://ssric.org/files/Extended_Notes_for_GUN_CONTROL3G.docx).
* [**SPSS syntax file**](http://ssric.org/files/SPSS_Syntax_for_GUN_CONTROL3G.sps) (.sps format).
* [**SPSS output file**](http://ssric.org/files/SPSS_Output_for_GUN_CONTROL3G.spv) (.spv format).
* [**This page**](http://ssric.org/files/GUN_CONTROL.docx) in MS Word (.docx) format.

## Goals of Exercise

The goal of this exercise is to explore the relationship between several measures of political views and behavior and opinion on gun control.  The exercise also gives you practice in using several SPSS commands –FREQUENCIES and CROSSTABS.

### Part I—Political Views and Behavior

We’re going to use a Field Poll conducted in 2013 for this exercise.  The Field Poll is a statewide poll of registered voters in California conducted by the Field Research Corporation.  For this exercise we’re going to use a subset of this Field Poll. Your instructor will tell you how to access this data set which is called Field\_2013\_subset\_for\_classes\_GUN\_CONTROL.sav.

The Field Poll contains several political variables that might be related to how people feel about gun control.

* Political views
	+ P1\_q102a asks respondents the following question – “Generally speaking, in politics do you consider yourself as conservative, liberal, middle-of-the-road, or don’t you think of yourself in these terms?”  Additionally, some respondents reply that they don’t know.
	+ Respondents who say that they don’t think of themselves in these terms or don’t know are asked the following question – “If you had to choose, would you consider yourself as being conservative, liberal, or middle-of-the-road?”  Based on the respondents’ answers to these questions, another variable was created, P4\_political\_views. [[1]](%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1%22%20%5Co%20%22)   Respondents are classified as conservative or leaning conservative, middle of the road (i.e., don’t lean either way), and liberal or lean liberal.
	+ P5\_regparty is the party in which they registered.  Remember that the population for this sample is all registered voters in California.
		- Republican
		- Democrat
		- Non-partisan, independent, or decline to state
		- Another party including Green, Libertarian, American Independent, Natural Law, or some other party
	+ P6\_votehist describes their vote history in four elections – 2008 primary, 2008 general election, 2010 primary, and 2010 general election.  It records the number of these elections in which the respondent voted (i.e., 0 through 4).  This information is available from the list of registered voters.
	+ P7\_permabs records whether the respondent is registered as a permanent voter by mail.  Note that almost half of the respondents (46%) are permanent voters by mail.  This information is also available from the list of registered voters.

Let’s start by running FREQUENCIES in SPSS to get the frequency distribution for these variables (P1\_q102a, P4\_political\_views, P5\_regparty, P6\_votehist, and P7\_permabs).  (See Chapter 4, FREQUENCIES, in the online SPSS book mentioned on page 1 of this exercise.)

There are five columns in the output that SPSS gives you.

* The first column is the value label for the response category.
* The second column is the number of cases or frequency for each response.
* The third column is the percent.  The denominator for the percent is the total number of cases in the sample (834).
* The fourth column is the valid percent.  Here the denominator is the number of valid cases.  This is the number of respondents who actually answered the question.  The number of valid cases is the total number of cases in the sample (834) minus the number of cases with missing data.
* The fifth column is the cumulative percent.  Notice that these percents cumulate and eventually equal 100.0 for the last of the valid response categories.

The percents and valid percents are very close for these variables and in some instances they are identical.  That’s because there were only a few respondents who didn’t answer the questions.  When there are more cases with missing information, these percents can be quite different.

Write a paragraph describing what these frequency distributions tell you about the political views and behavior of respondents.  Use the percents to help you.  While the percents and valid percents don’t differ much for these variables, you should use the valid percents in your paragraph.  The valid percents use the number of respondents who answered the question in the denominator when computing the percents.

### Part II – Political Views

There are two variables that describe a person’s political views or outlook.  Both are based on respondents’ self-classification of their own political views.  P1\_q102a classifies respondents as conservative, middle-of-the-road, or liberal.  In addition, respondents are given the option of saying they don’t think of themselves in these terms.

However, some of the respondents who said they don’t think of themselves in these terms actually did indicate on another question in the Field Poll that they lean one way or another.  P4\_political\_views classifies respondents as conservative or leaning conservative, middle of the road (i.e., don’t lean either way), and liberal or lean liberal.

From what you know about politics, write a hypothesis that indicates what you would expect the relationship to be between political views and opinion on gun control?  A hypothesis specifies the relationship that you expect to find between variables.  It should be clear and succinct.  You should write two hypotheses since we have two different measures of political views (i.e., P1\_q102a and P4\_political\_views).

It’s important to distinguish between our dependent variable and our independent variable.  The dependent variable is what you are trying to explain and the independent variable is the variable that you think will help you explain the variation in your dependent variable. We want to explain why some people favor increased controls on guns and why others oppose it.  We think that political views will help us answer this question.  In other words, it will help explain the variation in people’s opinion about gun control.  The variable that measures opinion on gun control is G1\_q13.

In order to test our hypotheses run two CROSSTABS in SPSS (i.e., one for each hypothesis).  One crosstab will be for P1\_q102a and G1\_q13 and the other will be for P4\_political\_views and G1\_q13.  (See Chapter 5, CROSSTABS, in the online SPSS book.)  When you run your crosstabs, be sure to put the independent variable in the column and the dependent variable in the row of your table.  If you do this, you will always want to tell SPSS to compute the column percents.  Remember to compare the percents straight across, not down or on the diagonal.

Write a paragraph for each hypothesis.  Describe what the percents tell you about the relationship between the two variables.  Use the percents to help you interpret the tables.  Be sure to indicate whether the data support your hypothesis.

### Part III – Political Party Registration

In addition to variables that measure respondents’ political views, we also have a variable (P5\_regparty) that tell us whether the person registered as a Republican, Democrat, independent, or some other party.  Run FREQUENCIES in SPSS to get the frequency distribution of P5\_regparty.  Write a paragraph describing what the distribution tells you about political party registration in California.

Before we look at the relationship between party registration and opinion on gun control, let’s look at the relationship between party registration and political views.  Run CROSSTABS in SPSS to get the crosstabulation of P4\_political\_views and P5\_regparty.  Since we want to compare Republicans, independents, and Democrats, we’re going to use P5\_regparty as the independent variable and P4\_political\_views as the dependent variable.  Write a paragraph answering the following questions.

* Who is more conservative – Republicans or Democrats?  Compare the percent of Republicans who are conservative with the percent of Democrats who are conservative.
* Who is more liberal – Republicans or Democrats?  Compare the percent of Republicans who are liberal with the percent of Democrats who are liberal.
* Are independents closer to Republicans or Democrats in terms of their political views?
* Lots of respondents say they are middle-of-the-road.  In other words, they are neither conservative nor liberal.  What percent of Republicans, Democrats, and independents say they are middle-of-the-road?
* What does all this tell you about the relationship of party registration and political views?

Clearly there is a strong relationship between party registration and political views.  But even though there is a strong relationship, it’s not a perfect relationship.  There are Republicans who are liberal and Democrats who are conservative.  Moreover, independents are spread out across all types of political views.

Now let’s look at the relationship between party registration and opinion on gun control.  Run CROSSTABS to get the crosstabulation of P5\_regparty and G1\_q13.  Think carefully about which is your independent variable and which is your dependent variable.  Be sure to put the independent variable in the columns of the table and the dependent variable in the rows.  Make sure that you get the column percents.  Write a paragraph describing the relationship between these two variables.  Use the percents to help you interpret the tables.

### Part IV – Vote History

The U.S. has a much lower voting turnout than most developed countries.  Voter turnout is not as easy to measure as you might think.  One way to measure turnout is the percent of the voting-age population that actually votes.  The Pew Research Center has a good article on voting turnout.  Take a few minutes and click on this [link](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/06/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/) to read the article.

The Field Poll has a measure of voting turnout in state elections – P6\_votehist.  The state voter registration list records whether a person voted in each election.  The Field Poll focused on the following California elections – the 2008 primary, 2008 general election, 2010 primary, and 2010 general election.  The variable records the number of these elections in which respondents voted.  Respondents with a value of four voted in all these elections and those with a value of 0 voted in none of them.

Let’s look at the relationship between vote history and opinion on gun control.  Run CROSSTABS to get the crosstabulation between P6\_votehist and G1\_q13.  Think carefully about which is your independent variable and which is your dependent variable.  Be sure to put the independent variable in the columns of the table and the dependent variable in the rows.  Make sure that you get the column percents.  Write a paragraph describing the relationship between these two variables.  Use the percents to help you interpret the tables.

### Part V – Voters by Mail

It has become common for many people to vote by mail.  Voters can request that they automatically receive a ballot that can be mailed in for every election.  The state voter registration list records whether a person is registered as a permanent voter by mail.  Let’s see if this variable is related to opinion on gun control.  Run CROSSTABS to get the crosstabulation of these two variables.  Write a paragraph describing the relationship between these two variables using the percents to help you interpret the table.

### Part VI – Conclusions

Write a paragraph describing what you learned about the relationship between all these measures of political views and behavior and how people feel about gun control.

[[1]](%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ednref1%22%20%5Co%20%22) This variable was originally not part of the Field Poll.  Rather I created the variable based on other variables.