

WLS Variable Conventions

Variable Naming

If the variable name is a mnemonic, then that variable is from the 1957–1977 (Rounds 1 through 3) surveys. From 1993 (Round 4) onward, variable names consist of a combination of letters and numbers that allow for convenient identification of the round and mode of the survey.

Variables that differ only by year of the survey have identical names for every character past the first letter. Please note that the fielding of some surveys spanned multiple years. While some rounds were in the field for multiple calendar years, the table below simplifies the year of data collection by listing the year where the greatest number of surveys were completed.

Round	Mode	First Letter Grad	First Letter Sib
R04 1993–94	Phone	r	s
	Mail	m	n
R05 2004–05	Phone	g	c
	Mail	i	d
	Spouses	a	b
R06 2011	In-Person	h	k
	Mail	j	p
R07 - R10 2020–2026	Phone/In-Person	q	o

Missing Values

The following codes are used to indicate varying types of non-response or missingness in the latest WLS 1957–2022 dataset (v 15.0).

Value	Label
-1	DON'T KNOW
-2	INAPPLICABLE
-3	REFUSED
-4	NOT ASCERTAINED
-5	CASE NOT FIELDDED

Previous versions of the WLS dataset employed slightly different conventions. In the latest updated missing values conventions, all missing value codes and labels have been standardized and use the -1 through -5 scheme shown above and all null or system-missing values have been recoded to -5.

“DON'T KNOW” is used when a respondent indicated they don't know the answer to a question. In CATI/CAPI modes this response was verbalized by the respondent; in SAQ modes, “DON'T KNOW” was a valid response option or a marginal comment by the respondent.

“INAPPLICABLE” is used when a question was not asked of a respondent because of skip patterns, routing, or filtering. The [online codebooks](#) further detail the specific reasons for coding variables as “INAPPLICABLE”.

“REFUSED” is used when the respondent declined to answer a question. In CATI/CAPI modes this response was indicated by the respondent; in SAQ modes “REFUSED” was a valid response option or a marginal comment by the respondent.

“NOT ASCERTAINED” is used when a valid response was requested or expected but was not provided, or when none of the other non-response codes apply.

“CASE NOT FIELDDED” is used when a case was not fieldded for a specific Round of data collection. Such cases will not have any valid data for a specific Round. For some administrative or constructed variables, cases may not be consistently coded as -5 across variables within a Round.