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**Title:** Excessive Reliance on Telephone Interviews and Short-Form Questionnaires in the 1992 National Election Study: Assessing the Consequences for Data Quality

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## **Abstract**

The implementation of the 1992 National Election Study departed from expectations in two ways. First, there was an excessive -- and unplanned -- reliance on interviews conducted by telephone. The second departure was the inappropriate -- and, again, unplanned -- use of short-form questionnaires in some instances. All told, 14 percent of the interviews were not administered as envisioned in the study design. This technical report assesses the consequences of these deviations for the quality of the 1992 NES data. Rosenstone, Petrella, and Kinder find: (1) Respondents interviewed over the telephone were, for the most part, indistinguishable on political grounds from those interviewed face-to-face. Telephone respondents, however, were distinctive demographically. They tended to be better educated, more affluent, and of higher status. (2) Similarly, short-form respondents were politically indistinguishable from respondents interviewed with the full-length questionnaire, though short-form respondents were better-educated and more affluent. (3) The missing data introduced by the excessive use of the short-form questionnaire produced a very slight increase in the standard errors of the questions that did not appear on the short form questionnaire. In addition, because the wealthy were more likely to be administered the short-form questionnaire, missing data are not random with respect to income. Thus, responses to questions included only on the full length questionnaire have a small downward class bias. (4) The main determinants of interview format had to do with indications of recalcitrance on the part of respondents and aspects of the field administration of the National Election Study. Thus, while the questionnaire assignment process was not random, the selection of respondents into the various interview format groups was random with respect to important respondent characteristics -- namely their political views, interests, and activities. (5) Some questions work differently over the phone than face-to-face. Phone respondents, for example, are more likely to evaluate political figures less warmly. Telephone administration of the survey, therefore, elicits different patterns of responses than face-to-face administration. But because only a small portion of the total interviews were conducted by telephone, the net impact of these surveys on the total sample is small. (6) Responses to questions asked over the telephone without benefit of show cards are sometimes different from those obtained from questioning the respondent face-to-face using show cards. These differences, however, do not lead to systematic deterioration in the data quality of telephone responses.