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Title: How Good is This Excuse?: Correction of Overreporting of Voter Turnout Bias in the 2002 American National Election Study
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Abstract

In 2002, the NES used an experimental design to randomly assign half its respondents to a new version of the turnout question. This version has an identical introductory script, but offers the respondent a chance to seize onto a socially acceptable excuse in giving their response. This version of the question was also asked in the 2000 NES.

In this report, we assess the effectiveness of this new version of the turnout question. We find that it does indeed seem to mitigate the problem of overestimating the turnout rates, by about 8 percentage points. We did further analysis to determine if this new version of the question seemed to affect different groups of respondents in different ways. In particular, we were curious if the new version might systematically filter out certain groups that tend to overreport and not others. This report will focus upon demographic variables, attitudes that are known to predict turnout, and attitudes that might affect social desirability, notably patriotism.

Overall, we find that in addition to reducing overreporting by 8 percentage points, the experimental question provides new and important insights into the behavior of the American electorate. While the evidence suggests that the new version of the turnout question does not reduce overreporting for those most likely to vote, those least likely to vote are shown to vote at even lower levels than previously thought. In addition, it appears that asking the question to the same set of respondents in two separate elections reduces overreporting by these respondents in the second election.