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Research and Development Conferences
The National Election Studies
Center for Political Studies/ISR
426 Thompson Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

Dear NES:

I am responding to a request from Virginia Sapiro and Laura Stoker (letter of October 20, 1994) for suggestions concerning the formulation of approval voting and candidate preference-order questions in NES surveys. My comments are a follow-up of my letter of August 19, 1994 and are presented in the hope that they may be of use in the forthcoming research and development conference on Candidate Evaluation.

The following proposed approval voting questions are adapted from that used in the Pennsylvania Democratic Presidential Preference Survey taken among party leaders on December 17, 1983 (see Jack Nagel, "A Debut for Approval Voting," PS 17: 62-65, concerning this use of approval voting in the political arena):

(Approval Voting question for primaries)

Here is a list of candidates who were active in the Democratic (Republican) primaries. If you were voting for the Democratic (Republican) Presidential nomination and could vote for one or more candidates, which of these candidates would you consider acceptable and vote for?

(Approval Voting question for the general election)

Suppose the presidential election were held today with the following candidates on the ballot. If you could vote for one or more candidates, which of these candidates would you consider acceptable and vote for?

The following are suggested preference-order questions:

(Preference-Order question for primaries)

Here is a list of candidates who were active in the Democratic (Republican) primaries. I'd like you to rank the candidates according to your preference for President, giving a "1" to your first preference, a "2" to your second, etc. You may omit any name which you do not recognize or don't want to rank.

(Preference Order question for the general election)

Suppose the presidential election were held today with the following candidates on the ballot. I'd like you to rank the candidates according to your preference for President, giving a "1" to your first preference, a "2" to your second, etc. You may omit any name which you do not recognize or don't want to rank.

I would recommend that such questions be asked in reference to three groups of candidates:

- (1) Presidential candidates who were active in the Democratic primaries.
- (2) Presidential candidates who were active in the Republican primaries.
- (3) Presidential candidates in the general election.

Group (3) would be included only if three or more candidates were likely. For groups (1) and (2), I believe that the same set of candidates should be presented to respondents in all states. The sets of candidates on the separate state ballots vary greatly over states and would be difficult to analyze because single-state samples are small. On the other hand, inclusion of non-candidates (as in the thermometer score questions) in a ranking or approval-voting question would tend to contaminate the responses. Accordingly, I would recommend using fixed sets of candidates who were active in the primaries/general election for all respondents.

I appreciate your willingness to solicit input for the design of the NES surveys. I hope that these comments may be helpful.

Sincerely,



Samuel Merrill, III
Visiting Scholar

cc: Virginia Sapiro
✓ Laura Stoker



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Phone: (206) 543-1044
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August 19, 1994

Research and Development Conferences
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Dear NES:

I am responding to your open request for comments concerning Candidate Evaluation in NES surveys. I believe it would be valuable for researchers evaluating social choice procedures if the following information could be solicited in the 1996 NES:

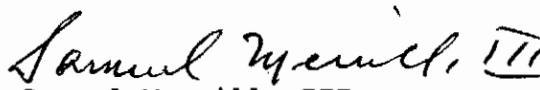
- a) A preference ranking of presidential candidates if there are three or more in the general election.
- b) A preference ranking within each party of candidates who participate in the primaries.
- c) Indication of which candidates would be voted for if the voter were allowed to vote for any number of candidates.

The current format permits preference order to be partially inferred from thermometer scores, but "warmth" for a candidate may not equate with preference for elective office. No current question bears directly on voting for more than one, as in approval voting.

Secondly, I would urge NES to resume its practice of soliciting candidate placement on all the issues for which self-placement on a 1-7 scale is obtained. For four issues in 1992 [health care (V3716), government help for blacks (V3724), urban unrest (V3746), and government support for women (V3801)], only self-placement was asked. Self-placement is of little use by itself in evaluating, for example, fit to a spatial model.

Finally, if there is a serious prospect of a third presidential candidate at the time the questionnaire is designed, I would hope that the voter-choice question would list that third candidate's name. Question V3805 in 1992 required that Perot's name be volunteered, seriously biasing the estimate of the proportion preferring Perot. Question V5609 in the Post-study did name Perot, but the results are biased by winner-induced inflation.

Sincerely,


Samuel Merrill, III
Visiting Scholar