

Stony Brook

Brown Luttberg

October 7, 1977

Board of Overseers
National Election Studies
P.O. Box Z
Stanford, CA 94305

Subject: Memorandum of Interest on Issue Voting Conference

Dear Sirs:

We would like to place before you four reform items which together make up a substantial proposal for the restructuring of the 1978 and succeeding election studies. Taken together, we feel that these changes would give researchers the ability to measure 1) the amount of systematic error in the individual's intra-election information processing, 2) the retention and flow of information in the electorate over time, and 3) the ability of campaign techniques to alter individual's perceptions of candidates and self in issue spaces. Further, we feel that our proposals will give the entire discipline a much more flexible tool to introduce and test techniques of gathering data. This paper will present the changes required in the survey, some data which support these changes, and some research possibilities which could be derived.

The changes for the proposed revised survey include:

1. A six wave panel design of 500 beginning in the December of the year prior to the election and finishing in the January after the vote. The waves would be conducted in December, February, April, August, (after the conventions) October, and January. The typical pre and post election sample of 1,500 would at least allow a partial assessment of the reactivity of the panel design.
2. Both for economy and convenience, the choice of questions given to the panel would be very limited. Questions would focus on factual political information questions to test the information being received by the electorate, personal issue positions, positions attributed to candidates and parties on the same issues, and party identification.
3. Telephone interviewing could be used for many waves after the first interview except when the panel joined the pre and post election sample. This would substantially lessen the costs of the many waves and experience suggests it would be less intrusive and increase cooperation.

4. Primary sampling units should be chosen to facilitate independent assessment of variations in information and the quality of information available to people. Such as those living in areas with public service committed television stations or professionally respected newspapers or those living in areas with well organized campaign organizations. Further, congressional districts rather than census districts would be advised.

We feel that such a restructure is warranted because of results that we have found from analyzing a five wave one year panel conducted in Tallahassee, Florida during the 1976 Presidential election. Our data show that individual decisions about candidate choice are indeed conducted over a long period of time and are characterized by a systematic reworking of perceptions of candidates on issues to accommodate their choice. In other words, we found that individuals were relatively stable on the issues over the course of a year but they drew their favorite candidate toward them and pushed the other candidate away. This tendency for consistency in the issue spaces was matched by consistency between choice and party identification. Thirty eight percent of our sample in December were members of the same party as their October choice. In contrast, in October two thirds of our panel called themselves members of the same party as their choice. Findings such as these indicate that over time there is a cognitive process in some voters which allows the individual to attain consistency between choice, distances in issue spaces and party identification. Clearly single wave snapshots fundamentally cannot aid in our understanding of the political decision making process.

The panel design we have advocated, has many possible uses besides the clarification of the individual's decision process. Multi-wave samples concentrated in Congressional districts will aid in uncovering the linkage between the voter and the candidates. The panel reports of factual information could be correlated with secondary analysis of both the media and with campaign speeches. One could then chart the flow of information from the candidates to the various groups in the electorate. Further, panel data especially if it were redundant over several elections is an invaluable data source to measure the impact of campaigns. For example, media impact could be measured almost in a controlled setting. The information of respondents could be correlated with ads. Over time, the presence and absence of the media or campaign technique could be correlated with the information levels on various candidates at the same level. If intra-election panels were instituted, the power of such data can hardly be overstated.

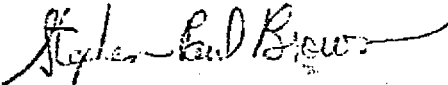
Finally, the intra-election panel's interface with the regular sample which may or may not be an inter-election panel, gives rise to several other combinations of research strategy. For example, various sampling techniques like partial overlap with a rotational design could be used in a sub sample of the panel to measure for contamination. If contamination were found, panel data offers myriads of possible sampling strategies to minimize its effect. Further longitudinal election studies afford more possibilities

for experimental measures to be tested on a wide scale sample. Psychophysical measures instead of or with category scales could be tested. This affords a large portion of the research community the ability to assess the differences between ordinal measures and magnitude estimation. Strengths and weaknesses of particular procedures could be ascertained. In other words, a short term repeated panel with a control group, which is based upon congressional district samples give the discipline the ultimate flexibility as a research tool and pays large dividends in terms of interesting substantive questions.

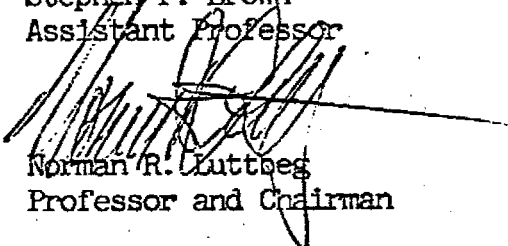
We realize that a six wave panel beginning in December is impossible for 1978. However, an incremental introduction in the 1978 election study could be accomplished. A small test panel could be surveyed in April, July, October and January. We appreciate, however, the need for as much lead time as possible.

We believe that conceptualizing "issue voting" as "calculated, instrumental approach to voting" may be misdirecting our theoretical development. Certainly the present "snapshot" surveys can afford little sight into such voting other than to note consistency between personal positions on issues, candidates' placement on those issues, party identification, and vote. Our Tallahassee data suggest such consistency, even if achieved, hardly follows a process that many of us would see as calculated and instrumental relative to getting one's personal positions ratified by government. The panel design affords insights into the process of consistency which should enrich our theorizing about citizen involvement in policy making.

Sincerely yours,



Stephen P. Brown
Assistant Professor



Norman R. Luttsog
Professor and Chairman

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