

RESPONSE TO THE FENNO-TUFTE MEMORANDUM

I confess that the Eulau and Fenno-Tufte memos leave me pretty much at loose ends about what to write. But I've taken a crack at it anyway because I do have a deep interest in questions associated with Congressional elections. Moreover, as one who has utilized CPS data on Congressional matters I am familiar with the gaps in the data base (chasms would be more like it), and have developed definite ideas about improvements.

Despite our future prospects, the overall picture is still discouraging in several respects. I think the most interesting and important questions about Congressional elections revolve around apparent changes taking place in the nature of such elections. We have reason to believe that the link between the electoral fates of legislative and executive candidates has progressively weakened. Consequently, mid-terms may have less significance as referenda on administration performance now than previously and coattails may be an historical curiosity. The entire standard for judgment of Congressional candidates may be shifting from a partisan-ideological one to a non-partisan constituency service one. The trouble is we really don't have much of a data base to pin down exactly how things were, so that even good new data may not enable us to say very accurately how much things have changed. We'll be able to get a pretty good picture of the present and future but will remain limited to rough inferences about the past.

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It seems to me our first priority for future studies should be to get information about the substance of citizen perceptions of their Congressman and their Congress. ~~It's not enough to find out~~ whether the citizen can name the guy, or get a yes or no answer about whether he's heard or read anything about the guy. What has he heard or read about his Congressman? I suppose CPS has refrained from asking such questions in the past because of the apparent lack of knowledge about Congressional candidates (inferred from the proportion who can name him). For several years Ferejohn and I have speculated that CPS was seriously underestimating information about Congressional candidates by utilizing a "fill in the blank" rather than a "multiple choice" format. For example, I ask Eulau, Fenno and Tufte, "Who is the Congressman from the California 22nd district?" Then I ask "Which of the following is the Congressman from the California 22nd district?"

- A. John Tunney
- B. Otis Chandler
- C. Carlos Moorhead
- D. John Shubeck

Maybe you fellows do equally well on both questions, but I'll wager that the average citizen doesn't. Dave Kovenock has independently pointed out to us that Senatorial name recognition varies as expected with question format (attached). Couldn't we pre-test these questions before 1978 and switch if the data come out as we expect?

For those who can pick out the Congressman we need a further probe: "Can you recall anything you've heard or read about him?"

(If so "What.", or maybe "What things might make you want to vote for (against) him?" I'd like a regular question about writing to Congressmen (asked irregularly). And furthermore, "What did you write to him about?"

Proceeding further, I think we need a question on approval-disapproval of Congressional performance analagous to the one now asked on Presidential performance (which I trust will continue). Furthermore, we need to probe the basis for the approval or lack of. We have all sorts of hypotheses about the divergence between approval of the members and approval of the institution, and finding out which are the most accurate is more than a matter of intellectual curiosity.

(Much as I'd love to see the above items appear on future surveys, I point out again that it would be worth selling one of our number to the devil to get 1950s surveys with comparable items.)

I agree with Tufte that the question of Congressional responsibility for the state of the economy (direct or passed through Presidential performance) needs much more attention. I agree with Ferejohn and Burnham that the role of party ID in Congressional elections has changed, but I'd like to find out more about why it has changed. I still agree with what I wrote earlier about the importance of determining the influence of constituency on the policy positions taken by their representative, although I suspect that as an empirical matter that influence is declining. Hell, I think we could make a good case for appropriating the entire survey for the investigation of Congressional elections. The more I read, research and observe the more convinced I am that as a discipline we have

terribly underestimated the empirical importance of Congress for the governance of this country.

M. Fiorina

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"Do you happen to know who is a U. S. Senator from this state, or not?" [IF "KNOW"]: "What's his name . . .?" "Do you happen to know the name of the other U. S. Senator from this state, or not?" [IF "KNOW"]: "What's his name . . . ?"†

Both correct	36.8%
Only one correct	23.4
Neither correct	3.7
"Don't know"/"not sure" re both	36.1
	100.0%
	(n = 14,824 [wtd.; 1,462 unwtd.])

*Q14c-14f in Louis Harris and Associates survey #2343, Sept.-Oct. 1973, national adult cross-section, n = 1,596. Note that 16 years earlier, only 21.7% of American adults could correctly name both of their Senators, 22.2% could correctly name one, 4.0% provided only incorrect names, and 52.1% said they "didn't know" either name. (See AIPO survey #584, June 1957 [national cross section, n=1,393], Q53: "Can you name the Senators from this state?")

COMMENT

Survey data indicating that fewer than 50% of adult Americans are able to name their U. S. Representative are frequently cited as evidence that Americans possess very little political information--and as evidence of their inherent limitations as putative "informed" voters in congressional elections. However, the data above suggest that while (in 1973) fewer than three in eight (36.8% of) adult Americans could immediately recall the names of both of their U.S. Senators, at least three in four (77.4%) were able to recognize both names. The dramatic difference between the two figures is undoubtedly due almost entirely to the difference between immediately recalling and recognizing the names of incumbents. One can plausibly argue that for purposes of informed voting, the latter is a necessary but not a sufficient condition--while the former is neither a sufficient nor even a necessary condition. (How many people does one know whose names one cannot instantly recall?)

See also Gerald C. Wright, Jr., Electoral Choice in America (1974), ch. 4, on voters' levels of "awareness" of (information about) 1968 senatorial (as well as gubernatorial and presidential) nominees.

". . . Here is a card with five names [OF U.S. SENATORS] on it. Could you tell me which two people are the United States Senators from this state?"†††

Both correct	77.4%
Only one correct	12.8
Neither correct	2.4
"Don't know"	7.3
	99.9%
	(n = 1,484)

*††Q98 in NORC study #1179, Dec. 1973, national adult cross-section, n=1,489. Note: If the 92.6% who attempted to select the correct names had simply picked two names at random from the list of five, we would expect one-tenth of them to get both names right by chance. Adjusting for this possibility, we may say that 75.7% of NORC'S respondents chose the two correct names for reasons other than chance, as:

$$\left(\frac{(77.4) - [(0.1)(92.6)]}{(92.6) - [(0.1)(92.6)]} \right) (.926) = 75.7$$