

CONFERENCE ON CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS MEMORANDUM

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This memorandum is concerned with the use of the CPS election studies for the purpose of researching the nature of the relationship between Members of the House of Representatives and their constituencies. The suggestions offered here arise from my interest in the problem of representation, from my experience working with the SRC-CPS series of election studies in my research on the question, and from my own future research agenda. I anticipate working intensively with these materials for the foreseeable future, but there are a number of problems with the election series as it stands that prevent a more complete examination of the "linkage" problem. In this memo I shall deal first with several design limitations which conceivably could be corrected, possibly in time for the 1978 study, and secondly with some basic theoretical questions that could be addressed (at least in a preliminary fashion) within the context of the present design, but with modification and expansion of the current interview schedule.

Design Improvements

An obvious design deficiency for purposes of the study of representation is the fact that the primary sampling unit is the county rather than the congressional district. At the very least, the effect of this is an inefficient use of the interviews if the purpose of the study is to move to the district (or sub-district) level of analysis by aggregating individual policy preferences. Throughout the time series included in

SEP 26 1977

my research (1956-1972), for example, I found the number of interviews per district to vary tremendously from a low of one to a high of some ninety. Studies that utilize the district as the p.s.u. are able to control the number of interviews taken in the district much more closely and thus there is less variance around the mean. Moreover, there is a bias in the distribution of sample size in the present CPS design: smaller district samples tend to come from urban areas where the size of the congressional district is smaller than the county so that the county's interviews are more likely to be spread among several congressional districts, whereas rural counties are likely to be contained entirely within the district thus yielding all of the p.s.u.'s interviews to the estimate of a district's opinion.

These and similar problems could easily be obviated by changing the sampling unit to the congressional district and need not be elaborated upon here. There are several additional benefits to a design change in the p.s.u., however, which I will mention since they have a more direct bearing on the kinds of theoretical questions future researchers will be able to address. First, with the district as the primary sampling unit it would be possible to oversample theoretically interesting districts such as marginals (a "vanishing" breed these days), districts which are experiencing or have recently undergone redistricting and contests that do not include an incumbent. Obviously the possibilities are endless, but particularly if one is restricted to one election study, questions basic to democratic theory involving turnover or the effects of electoral competition are difficult to study at the district level with survey data.

In my own work, for instance, I have had to examine such issues with a data matrix "stacked" across the time series in order to build a sufficient number of cases. Of course there would be real benefits in being able to examine period effects in the data when such questions are treated.

A second theoretical benefit to this design change would be to facilitate longitudinal analysis. I believe the most satisfactory way to think of the relationship between the representative and his constituency is in a dynamic sense and such a framework permits one to examine a number of questions that are essentially intractable with cross sectional data.\* The change to the congressional district as the p.s.u. would assure the analyst that over a series of studies, cross time comparisons will be possible without the substantial attrition I have found in my research.

In addition to the proposed p.s.u. change, a second set of design improvements would greatly enhance the utility of the data for scholars interested in representation. Obviously it would be beneficial to replicate the 1958 study and interview congressional candidates in order to ascertain their perceptions and motivations. For example, my own work would benefit tremendously from the ~~cap~~ability to examine the conditions under which Representatives are able to perceive constituency change and then respond to that change in their policymaking behavior. My research indicates that there is very little behavioral response to changing constituency opinion, but I can only make rough inferences about the causes of nonresponse. I have also discovered some tentative evidence that Representatives influence

\*Walter J. Stone, "A Panel Analysis of Representation in Congress," APSA paper, 1977.

constituency opinion and in pursuing that finding would benefit greatly from data on the motivations and activities of Representatives beyond their roll call voting behavior as they interact with their constituents. Finally, a number of scholars such as Fenno and Fiorina are suggesting that the relationship between congressmen and constituencies is characterized by more than a policymaking-policy preference relationship so that data on "service" activities and efforts at building support in the constituency are necessary to a more complete mapping of the relationship.

The study of representation would perhaps benefit most of all from a design which included not only survey data on constituents and representatives, but also attempted to identify the attitudes and behaviors of intervening elites within the district. These elites help to form the perceptions of both the elected representative of his constituents' attitudes, but also no doubt influence constituents' awareness and evaluation of the representative's activities. It is almost surely the case, for example, that if there is influence from the representative on the constituency's opinion, that influence is indirect and dependent on opinion leaders within the district. In addition, a sample of elites or activists within the district would greatly enhance research which seeks to identify the "actual" constituency within the district to which the representative responds, and the conditions promoting response to an elite or relatively narrow constituency. For example, one plausible hypothesis is the more publicity surrounding an issue, the more the representative will respond to the broader mass

public within the district. Are less visible issues more likely to be dominated by narrower "personal" or "primary" constituencies? With simply a mass survey design empirical research on this "constituency problem" is severely limited, yet it is clearly a question of crucial importance.

Among the design changes mentioned, the switch to the district as the primary sampling unit and extending the design to include interviews of congressional candidates raise the fewest conceptual difficulties (though they may require a substantial time lag and funding commitment). The inclusion of constituency elites in the design raises these problems as well as a number of more difficult questions: How are these elites to be identified? What conception of representation is implied by a particular strategy for identifying constituency elites? What distinctions (if any) are to be made between "policy" and "process" elites, and what are the implications of these distinctions? Finally, why remain strictly within the congressional district in identifying influentials? Obviously, any research design must be bounded but these questions need to be addressed as we move closer to an "ideal" design.

#### Revisions to the Current Interview Schedule

The suggestions I will make concerning the interview schedule are closely related to the design problems discussed above, but at the same time they could profitably be incorporated without any of the design changes (with the possible exception of the switch to the district as the primary sampling unit). While the design limitations in the present studies are dramatically clear to scholars interested in representation and

may actually prevent some from employing the CPS studies in their research, there are a number of areas where the questionnaires could be improved substantially with payoffs approximating those to be had by implementing design improvements. Certainly a case could be made that design improvements without revision of the interview schedule would not be worth the effort. I shall briefly discuss three problem areas that are most obvious to me from my research experience with the CPS studies: continuity, sensitivity to leadership, and the constituency problem.

Item continuity in the time series is so obvious a goal as to require only brief comment. There is a fair degree of continuity in the questions asked (primarily I mean the issue items here, although other sorts of questions apply equally) over the period 1956-1972, but the form of the question varies substantially, and frequently the content of the question changes as well even while the broad issue domain (e.g., civil rights) remains constant. This is obviously due to changing issue agendas on the national scene as well as attempts to increase the reliability of the items. But if representation is best thought of as a dynamic relationship between leaders and led, continuity becomes even more important than the usual "integrity of the time series" arguments. Indeed, I would argue from my work treating constituency estimates as a "panel," that the arguments for continuity are as compelling for the study of representation as they are when one is carrying out a panel study at the individual level. For example, the problem of longitudinal measurement equivalence is crucial when cross time comparisons are made. Moreover, if the same questions were asked in the same form it

would be possible to examine specific issues rather than resort to broad issue dimensions with a consequent refinement in theory and findings.

I alluded above to some crude findings in my work which suggest representatives have an impact on constituency opinion. No one doubts the complexity of the relationship we characterize as "representation" and most would admit that there is some reason to believe the relationship is transactional with influence flowing from bottom to top ("responsiveness," "accountability," etc.) and from top to bottom ("leadership?" "manipulation?" "education?"). I believe the only way to sort out the problem of what is causing what is with longitudinal data, but even with such data our studies must explicitly recognize the question and address it in the interview schedule. Such a recognition might take the form of attempts to measure "sensitivity to leadership" among constituents (and ultimately constituencies). For example, a number of exposure questions should be included-- particularly exposure to information about incumbent activities and exposure to evaluation of those activities. The present media exposure questions might be employed in a more detailed study of leadership especially since those who are influenced need not necessarily be aware of the source of the influence, nor need they be cognizant of the fact that they have been influenced. Thus, an individual who regularly reads the newspapers or watches the evening news might be expected to be more "sensitive to leadership" without necessarily knowing he had changed his opinions (if indeed that is the effect of "leadership") than a respondent who was more isolated from political stimuli.

Nonetheless, a much more detailed set of items probing exposure to and awareness of incumbent activity, salience of the incumbent and his behavior, and affect toward the representative would be extremely helpful.

Certainly opening the Pandora's Box of reciprocal influence raises not only complex statistical and design questions, but also basic theoretical issues that as yet have not adequately occupied our attention. Because we do not know very much about how representatives might influence their constituents, we do not know very much about how to measure that influence should it be present. But we do know enough to make a start. To return for a moment to the design, whenever we are interested in change whether in terms of response to leadership or because we are interested in studying leader perception and response to constituency change, a panel design is appropriate. In particular, it may be possible to exploit the two-four year panels we have in the CPS time series to study the transactional nature of representation. It is my hope that future CPS panels will be mounted with representation as the substantive focus, and with appropriate design modifications.

Finally, the "constituency problem" or the question, "To whom does the representative respond (within the district) and under what conditions?" should be recognized in designing the interview schedule. A number of scholars have recognized that the constituency is far richer in concept than the geographically defined district. One way of organizing different conceptions of the constituency is to think in terms of proximity to the representative. Proximity itself has a number of dimensions



including partisan proximity, personal proximity and policy proximity. Thus for example, Fiorina thinks of the constituency consisting of different groups each pursuing a particular policy objective. Questions ought to be included that help tap these "issue publics" within the district not only by measuring position, but more importantly by ascertaining salience and the probability of mobilization on behalf of the issue position. Personal and partisan proximity overlap to some degree, and may include constituency "elites" (such as those who play golf regularly with the congressman when he is in the district) and thus would entail design changes in order to be included. But even in a survey context, respondents should be asked more directly about their congressional voting history, organizational activity for or against the incumbent, personal contact with the candidates, and other sorts of political participation with a specific focus in the congressional campaign. In part, of course, the utility of these items would depend on a more efficient sampling design without so much variance around the average number of interviews per district, but they easily could facilitate not only constituency level analyses, but also more individual level analysis of the sort found in the electoral behavior literature focused on presidential elections.

The above suggestions both for design and interview schedule revisions are obviously tied to a substantive interest in representation and thus may be perceived as of rather limited utility. I would respond not simply by arguing that the problem of representation and the relationship between leaders and the led is of central interest to the discipline and is in some respects

ideally approached in the congressional context, but also that the "broader" concerns of electoral behavior are intimately related to the same problem. The vast literature on issue voting, for example, is interesting not simply as one of several competing models of individual choice, but more importantly for an understanding of the implications of how voters decide for popular control of public policy and the behavior of political leaders. Thus the problem of whether party identification is (still?) of primary importance in congressional elections, has important consequences for the ability (and likelihood) of constituencies to exert some control in the selection process. The study of congressional elections offers the opportunity to study the relationship between leaders and followers, to raise and begin to answer the question of who is responding to whom and under what conditions, and in the process to begin pulling together the well established but poorly linked findings of "diverse" elements in the discipline.