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The study of Issue Voting, Cognitive Processes and Rational Choice is severely hampered by major deficiencies in measuring political cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. We do not really know what we are measuring with our current instruments, or why we see the behaviors which we can observe. I believe, therefore, that the improvement of our measuring instruments should be the first order of business. If we do not have sound data to evaluate, more sophisticated theories or analysis techniques will get us nowhere.

My suggestions for securing data of higher quality than presently available are based on my experience with testing out questions from the CPS 1976 election survey in an intensive personal interview setting. The interviews were conducted over the period of an entire year with several small panels of voters. Each voter was interviewed ten times for a total of twenty to thirty hours of interviewing time. To alleviate major weaknesses in the current survey design, I propose the following procedures:

1. Each major survey should be preceded by extensive pilot testing to determine what the proposed questions mean to the

respondents and what meanings they attach to their answers. From the specific replies, we need to identify the factors which are generally involved in interpreting the meanings of questions and answers. We should then be able to classify respondents according to their cognitive patterns.

On the basis of pilot testing, several things ought to happen. (a) Many questions currently used will have to be reworded in light of our changing political climate. (b) Different wording may be required for respondents with different cognitive patterns and capabilities. We need to strive for equivalence of meaning over time and across respondents, rather than for equivalence of verbiage. (c) For some questions, the parameters which should be tapped in the answers should be indicated by the interviewer, or the respondent should be asked to specify what parameters (s)he is using. For instance, when respondents are asked to appraise the quality of a candidate's performance in office, it should be clear whether the appraisal is a specific comparison with another candidate, a general comparison with an array of past incumbents, a relative appraisal which takes situational difficulties into account, or an absolute judgment of actual accomplishments. Depending on the contingency, answers may vary substantially.

2. We need to take a fresh look at the electoral decision-making process, free from any social-scientific preconceptions. This requires observing respondents more closely and continuously over longer periods of time to discover how they conceptualize emerging political problems and what types of information they retrieve from

the political news available to them. Our present measures of issue and candidate conceptualizations are not only extremely crude; they also are , in many instances, totally unrealistic and based on a dream world of what ought to be. We impute conscious choices when choice may be happenstance , within culturally determined boundaries. We ignore differences in decision-making which occur because of individual situational factors, general political conditions, variations in candidate and candidate groupings, ballot factors, media factors, etc. We pay too little attention to political mood factors.

We have more or less adequate information on most of these factors and processes. But we have failed to integrate this information into the research designs used by the Center for Political Studies. The time has come to discuss how this knowledge can best be integrated into future surveys. The damage flowing from discontinuities in design must be weighed against the compounding damages of continuing defective designs.

3. Since party affiliation has weakened as a cue to voting behavior at many levels, we need to look more carefully at the cue system which is taking its place. In particular, the media to which survey respondents are exposed should be content-analyzed more carefully and imaginatively. Instead of traditional content analyses, which often measure cognitive cues which the average voter ignores or quickly forgets, these content analyses must capture the general impressions conveyed by mass media offerings. Some recent developments in Evaluative Assertion Analysis and related techniques look promising. Coupled with the advances in computer content analysis, which now make it feasible to analyze whole papers speedily and at

reasonable costs, these new techniques should make it possible to examine the relationship between information stimuli and the result which they produce in respondents.

The three areas of reform and development which I have sketched so briefly are , of course, only a beginning. It seems idle to discuss what needs to be built on this beginning since we do not know what goals will come into sight after we reconstruct current foundations. I believe that there is considerable support in the profession that the foundations of current research need to be rebuilt. I also believe that the steps outlined here are feasible approaches to this difficult problem.

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