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**MEMO** November 11, 1996

**TO:** Colleagues Interested in the American National Election Studies

**FROM:** Virginia Sapiro, Chair, 1997 Pilot Study Committee  
David C. Leege, Chair, ANES Board of Overseers

**RE:** Call for Recommendations for the 1997 Pilot Study

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Now that the 1996 electoral season has (finally) drawn to a close, we would like to turn your attention to planning for 1998. In anticipation of the 1998 National Election Study, the NES Board will conduct a national pilot study in 1997, just as it has in odd-numbered years since 1983. Like its predecessors, the 1997 Pilot Study will provide an opportunity to develop and test new instrumentation, assess and improve measures used in previous studies, devise innovations and refinements in survey methods, and take intellectual risks that might lead to advances in our knowledge of elections, public opinion, political participation, and the many interesting and important scholarly areas of inquiry that employ these data.

Although the major purpose of this Pilot Study is to try out questions, strategies, and refinements that might then be included in the 1998 Election Study, over the years the theoretical, methodological, and substantive innovations that emerged from these small data collections have been of sufficient quality to appear as published research articles and monographs. These data enter the public domain immediately and are archived and available to the entire research community through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).

This letter invites you and all interested colleagues to submit concrete recommendations for 1997 Pilot Study content. Recommendations might range from suggestions for single questions to longer batteries to embedded experiments of a variety of sorts; they might be aimed at substantive, theoretical, or methodological improvement.

**Suggested Themes:** The Board, in its deliberations, has developed the following list of themes of special interest. We invite you to offer your ideas in these or other areas. Please note that your recommendations need not fall into one of these categories; we are open to all good suggestions.

*Congressional Elections and Campaigns:* The 1998 ANES marks roughly the twentieth anniversary of the initial engagement of the ANES in the serious study of congressional elections. A substantial amount of congressional election research has employed the ANES. Some of the original measures have outlived their usefulness and were dropped in 1996. Research findings and new directions in congressional research should suggest new strategies. The NES Board, for example, has taken a special interest in finding better ways to investigate the impact of campaigns.

*Mass Media Exposure and Impact:* The NES has been working closely with many people in the community of communications scholars to improve our ability to study the role of the media in elections and public opinion. Following some developmental work in the 1995 Pilot Study, the 1996 ANES included an extensive battery of new media exposure, reception, and attention items. We remain interested in further development in this area.

*Group Mobilization, Interest Articulation, and Representation:* Many social scientists have been returning to one of the perennial themes in the study of politics: the group basis of political mobilization and influence. While many bodies of scholarship have contributed pieces to the puzzle, we believe there is more to be done, and that the ANES could do more to provide data for this research. One especially important area needing further

development revolves around the ways that interests are articulated and represented through grass-roots mobilization. The power of grass-roots lobbying lies in the capacity of groups to persuade their representatives to think or act in a prescribed manner, to shape the information environment from which the member of Congress samples public opinion. Thus, we need to know: What kinds of people are mobilized for grass-roots activity? Of what sorts? When is grass-roots mobilization likely to occur? With what effects? To what extent do voters link their political activity and legislators' responses to their group interests and values?

*Race:* The ANES has developed a considerable inventory of items on racial attitudes, race policy, and stereotyping. We welcome Pilot work that would reassess our holdings and/or offer new and fruitful avenues for change.

*Issues:* Issue attitudes are a crucial element of elections and public opinion, and the considerable range of measures ANES has used over the years reflect that. But the nature of some broad issue areas changes over time, and new ones come into play. The Pilot Study is the place to develop and test issue questions that will be needed for studies in the coming election cycles. Can you provide better issue questions on health care, crime, welfare, or taxes? How do the foreign and defense policy items stand in this era? Are changes needed in other areas? Are we missing important issues? Is there a better strategy for tapping issues?

*Human and Social Capital:* Do we have an appropriate inventory for exploring the impact of *human capital*, or the skills and capabilities people possess that they can transform into political participation, and *social capital*, or the web of cooperative, civic, and social relationships and orientations that appear to facilitate participation in democratic politics? See the 1992 and 1996 questionnaires for recent NES developments in these areas.

*Social Choice:* In recent years, scholars pursuing rational choice approaches have increasingly emphasized the importance of low-information rationality and cue-taking in mass voting behavior. Do we have an appropriate inventory of questions for testing key propositions in this literature? Are there some new strategies we should consider for rendering the National Election Studies more useful for these approaches?

*Theories of the Survey Response:* Surveys not only measure public opinion but also shape, provoke, and occasionally create it. These are problems, but also opportunities. Because surveys are necessarily intrusive and public opinion malleable, surveys can become useful tools in the investigation of how opinion is shaped and how it changes. In previous pilot studies, the Board has sponsored several ventures of this sort. Some have involved experimental alterations in question format or order; others have included probes that go "underneath" the survey response to ingredients of opinions. The Board invites suggestions intended to illuminate both how NES should put its questions and how citizens formulate their opinions.

*These themes, of course, do not define the limits of what will be considered for inclusion; they offer suggestions based on our discussions and consultation with many colleagues.*

**Design of the 1997 Study:** During the summer of 1997, NES will re-interview, for 40 minutes, a subsample of 500 respondents from the 1996 Election Study. The 1997 Pilot data will be merged with the data from the 1996 Post-Election Study. You will want to consider the limitations the modest sample size imposes on the design of Pilot material, but also the opportunities posed by the panel dimension. As in previous studies, the 1997 Pilot may employ multiple forms of the questionnaire to permit random experiments in which alternative question formats can be tested and compared. (In the past social scientists have carried out over forty such experiments in the context of the ANES Pilot Studies.) This Pilot Study will once again use Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), another important opportunity to bear in mind when writing suggestions. With CATI, the survey is embedded in a computer program permitting complicated skip patterns and follow-up questions that are hand-tailored to prior responses.

**Format for Suggestions:** Suggestions may be from individuals or teams of scholars. Recently these have come from everyone from graduate students to senior scholars. A memo on a single topic or a number of topics, or a separate memorandum for each topic would be equally welcome. We are committed to the cumulative and collective nature of high quality research in the broad social science community; just as many data collection

efforts and research projects over the years have incorporated questions and strategies initiated by the ANES, we are also very interested in recommendations based on the fruits of other projects.

Although individuals and teams of scholars obviously submit ideas that speak to their own research interests, the Pilot Studies, like all NES data, are *public* data, designated by the National Science Foundation as a national resource, and therefore suggestions will be evaluated on their potential contribution to the research community more broadly. NES data collection projects are not and cannot be designed as "omnibus" studies; no portion of the surveys "belong" to any specific individual or group.

Your submission may take either of two forms. One would be a memo of general reactions to any of these ideas or other suggestions for consideration during the course of Pilot development. But especially if you have specific ideas about changes that should be made, new material that should be developed, or experiments that should be run, we suggest you take the second option: a concrete and detailed research recommendation. Here is how to assure the most favorable consideration possible:

Research recommendations should:

1. justify the proposed new line of inquiry in theoretical or conceptual terms;
2. lay out the proposed new instrumentation as clearly as possible (in draft form; if we decide to pursue this idea there will be time for more work);
3. sketch the kinds of analysis that will demonstrate how the new questions accomplish your research objectives. No pilot study is complete without a clear strategy for testing the utility of the proposed questions or strategies. You should outline the list of measures (e.g. which demographic data or other previous ANES questions) that must be on the survey in order to do the necessary tests.

Memoranda that miss out any of these elements are less likely to be convincing. Recommendations that accomplish this mission tend to be in the 5-10 page range (exclusive of appendices and bibliography).

The ANES Website has many resources that can help you design your suggestions including, among other things, recent interview schedules and data, the list of the NES question inventory (see the Continuity Guide), information about the recent pilot studies and abstracts of all the pilot study reports (some with full text of the reports available) written on the basis of the data collected, and all the recent embedded experiments.

The Board of Overseers will consider *all* submissions on their scholarly merits for possible inclusion in some form in the 1997 Pilot Study. We may engage in further consultations with you about your suggestions. Based on the submitted memoranda, the Board also expects to invite some members of the NES community to join the planning committee for the 1997 Pilot Study and participate in the planning and evaluation of the Pilot data, and the preparation of reports and recommendations to the Board.

Your research memorandum must arrive in Ann Arbor by Monday February 3, 1997. It should be mailed to:

The 1997 Pilot Study  
American National Election Studies  
Institute for Social Research  
P.O. Box 1248  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

You can also reply by email to [anes@electionstudies.org](mailto:anes@electionstudies.org) or by fax: (734) 764-3341.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or if you would like to chat about an aspect of a proposal you are working on, please feel free to contact us or any member of the ANES Board of Overseers. We look forward to working with you.

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