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TO: NES Board

FROM: Celinda Lake, NES Staff

RE: Coding of Independent/Independents and Apoliticals
in the Party Identification Summary Code and
Apoliticals in the Rolling Cross-Section

Since 1978 the election study has used indicators of political interest to distinguish (in recoding the party identification summary) between independent/independents and apoliticals among respondents who indicate they have no party preference in our party identification sequence. Respondents who initially answer "no preference" to the question -- "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?" and who answer "neither," "don't know," or are not ascertained for the follow-up question -- "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?" are coded as "independent/independent" (Code 3) or as "apoliticals" (Code 8) in the party identification summary depending on their level of political interest and vote participation. Only respondents who have little interest in politics to all of a series of questions on interest remain coded as "apoliticals." The other cases are moved to independent/independent.

In presidential years the series used to measure interest includes interest in the current campaign, interest in public affairs in general, caring about the outcome of the presidential race, and self-reported turnout (for post-election studies)/expectations of turnout (for pre-election studies).

This recoding was done in all of the waves where possible in the 1980 series of studies. The question has come up whether this should be pursued for the monitoring in 1984.

Below is a table which shows for P1, C1, C3, and C3P0 in 1980 the number of respondents who answered "no preference" to the party series and how they were recoded in the party identification summary. For P1, C1, and C3 to remain coded as apoliticals in the party summary, respondents had to show little interest in politics by responding:

- a) "5: Not Much Interested" or "8: Don't Know" to Interest in the Campaign,
- b) "3: Don't Care Very Much" or "8: Don't Know" to Caring about which party wins the election,
- c) "4: Hardly at all" or "8: Don't Know" to General interest in public affairs,

and

- d) "3-5: No, Probably Not" or "8: Don't Know" to Whether they expected to vote in the 1980 presidential election.

In C3P0 actual self-reported turnout was substituted for expected turnout and caring about the election outcome was dropped because it was asked only in the pre-election survey.

We have included the figures for P1 (a Jan/Feb study), for C1 (a June study), and C3 (a Sept/Oct study) in the table to give some idea of what we can expect the impact of this recoding to be throughout the monitoring of the election season as campaign interest varies.

A substantial proportion--on average 40%--of the respondents who have been treated as independent/independents in our party identification summary have been moved from the original apolitical code to independent/independent because they showed some political interest.

Table 1

Analysis of the Coding "No Preference" Respondents
on Party Identification Summary

	P1	C1	C3	C3PO
Total # Cases who are coded 308, 309, 303 on the two party identification questions (i.e. No preference)	71	64	119	87
Coded Independent/ Independent "3" on PID Summary	60 (85%)	50 (78%)	84 (71%)	61 (70%)
Coded Apolitical "8" on PID Summary	11 (15%)	14 (22%)	35 (29%)	26 (30%)

Oddly, a higher proportion of respondents in C3 remained coded as apoliticals than in P1 or C1--contrary to what we might expect since political interest should remain the same or increase as the election draws near. In part this is an artifact of using for C3 the post-election question on general interest in public affairs (which was not asked in the C3 pre-election questionnaire). This question has a different distribution in the post-election survey than in the P1 and C1 surveys. In C3PO 15% of the respondents said they "hardly at all" followed what goes on in government and public affairs compared to 6% in P1 and 7% in C1 who so responded. In addition this question had to be ignored for respondents who did not have post-election interviews. Thus these respondents had only to pass 3 tests instead of 4 to be considered disinterested in politics. [1]

The monitoring does not at this time include any question on expectation of turnout, so to truly project the impact of the recoding of party identification for the monitoring--we need to look at how many additional cases would have been assessed as low interest in our presidential year surveys had we not used the expected turnout question. Actually, the difference is quite small though predictably (proportionately) greater in the early surveys. Without reports of

expected turnout 4 more cases in P1, 3 cases in C1, and 4 cases in C3 would have been considered low interest (and thus remain coded as apoliticals instead of being moved to independent/independents in the party identification summary). The impact of not using expected turnout is small because over 80% of the respondents in all three waves said they planned to vote.

This suggests that the summary of party identification would be different for the monitoring from past distributions, if the recoding of independents and apoliticals is not done. Furthermore even though we are missing one of the test questions, such recoding would be done without much impact to the percentage apolitical based on the three available questions. [2]

Footnotes

1. It should be noted that the distributions for the other test questions--all preelection survey items--are similar within sampling error for P1, C1, C3. Other possible explanations for the difference in C3 were tested but proved incorrect. Question wording, nonresponse rates, and the percentage of respondents who said they had no party preference to the initial party question were the same for P1, C1, and C3.

2. Below for reference is the distribution for the party identification summary for P1, C1, and C3.

PID Summary	P1	C1	C3
0. Strong Democrat	16.7%	17.0%	17.7%
1. Weak Democrat	23.3	25.5	23.1
2. Independent Democrat	10.1	10.2	11.4
3. Independent Independent	15.0	11.7	12.9
4. Independent Republican	10.0	8.5	10.2
5. Weak Republican	15.4	16.2	13.9
6. Strong Republican	8.3	9.1	8.5
7. Other	0.0	0.2	0.1
8. Apolitical	1.1	1.5	2.2
N	1005	962	1613