

A NEW QUESTION ON GROUP AFFILIATIONS
IN THE 1986 NES PILOT STUDY

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May 20, 1986

From the beginning of the series in 1948, the NES has contained few questions about the organizational context of voter choice. Questions about membership in trade unions and churches have been in almost every instrument, and the question on group membership used by Verba and Nie was included in 1972, but no systematic effort has been made to create a comprehensive picture of the organizational relationships between citizens and the social order, or to discover how these relationships affect the broad range of public attitudes and behavior.

Churches and trade unions may have dominated the scene in the late 1940's, but in the last 35 years the civil rights, environmental, consumer, and women's movements have emerged, followed by the "new right" and other political backlashes. Business and trade associations have greatly increased in number, along with associations representing professionals in education, social welfare, and health care. There are many groups today representing the elderly, or promoting the interests of children, single parents, or the rights of the handicapped. A new technology of direct mail solicitation has been developed, spawning large computerized campaigns leading to millions of dollars in contributions for political causes, and the greatly reduced cost of long distance telephone lines have allowed political entrepreneurs much greater direct access to their members and supporters.

All this activity must be altering the costs and benefits of different forms of political activity in important ways, but the data needed to investigate these phenomena do not exist. In order to assess the significance of the recent increases in organizational activity we developed a question on group affiliations for the 1986 Pilot Study that measures the degree to which respondents are affiliated with voluntary associations. We hope to show in this paper that better information about

the organizational context of voter choice will significantly increase our understanding of electoral behavior.

The Development of a Standard Question on Group Membership

When researchers in the past have sought to collect data on group memberships they have turned to a familiar question on this subject currently being used by the General Social Survey at NORC. It is essentially the same question used by Verba and Nie, Almond and Verba, Jennings and Niemi, the NES in 1972, and most other recent researchers. The persistence of this question is itself an interesting study in the sociology of knowledge. Its roots are in the survey of community organizations conducted in 1924 by the Lynds for the Middletown study. Drawing on this pioneering work, researchers from Columbia developed an open question for the Elmira study in 1948 that read: "Do you happen to belong to any groups or organizations in the community here? If yes, which ones? Any others?" A coding scheme was used in the Elmira study that included fifteen group types that are closely modeled on the categories employed in the Middletown study. These categories present a good picture of the organizations that were operating in Muncie, Indiana some 60 years ago:

- Fraternal groups
- Service clubs
- Veteran's groups
- Political clubs
- Labor unions
- Sports groups
- Youth groups
- School service groups
- Hobby or garden clubs
- School fraternities or sororities
- Nationality groups
- Farm organizations
- Literary, art, discussion or study groups
- Professional or academic societies

Church affiliated groups

As the Middletown/Elmira study item was incorporated into national studies it was modified in two important ways. First, the phrase "in the community here" was dropped, prompting respondents to mention memberships in national organizations. Second, in an effort to simplify and regularize the data collection and coding process, respondents were presented with a card that included the familiar coding categories from the Elmira study, and they were then asked: "Here is a list of various kinds of organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?"

These two modifications -- used consistently by NORC from 1971 through 1985 -- have virtually crippled the question as a reliable device for collecting information about group memberships. There are three fatal shortcomings:

(1) The Middletown coding categories were created long before the emergence of the civil rights, environmental, or consumer movements, and also prior to the creation of hundreds of specialized associations representing the elderly, the handicapped, children, the mentally ill, and other disadvantaged groups. There also is no category that easily covers national, non-partisan, ideological groups like the Moral Majority or Common Cause. Even more serious is the lack of a category for charitable organizations like the American Cancer Society or the Red Cross, organizations that have become increasingly active during the past thirty years, both in making contact with the public and in lobbying the government in Washington. Because of the lack of currency of the categories listed on the show card in the GSS question, respondents may have reported some memberships under inappropriate types, or they may have failed to mention them altogether.

(2) More serious than the lack of relevancy of the coding categories on the show card is the problem that the GSS approach records only one membership within each group type. Many respondents are members of several associations of the same kind. Within the category of professional or academic societies, for example, a person conceivably might be a member of the APSA, the AAUP, the AAAS, and perhaps a specialized organization like the Public Choice Society, or the American Society for Public Administration. In the GSS question, however, such a highly active person would appear to have only one membership. By allowing for respondents to mention more than one membership within the same group type in our question on the 1986 Pilot Study we discovered that memberships were increased from 708 when only one membership per type was allowed, to 929 -- an increase of 31 percent.

(3) The third shortcoming of the standard question on group memberships is the use of the concept of membership itself. Much of the growth in group affiliations during the past three decades has taken place not through the expansion of membership in the conventional sense of the term, but by individuals joining in the activity of a group by making small financial contributions. In order to reflect reality, a question seeking to provide information on the connections between individual citizens and the group system must take into account the possibility that citizens can make regular contributions and receive many communications from groups without considering themselves members in any formal sense. A hint of this phenomena appeared on a Gallup Poll in 1981 when respondents were asked whether they were members of a list of groups dealing with nuclear power, abortion, consumer rights, and other controversial topics. Only 13 percent of the sample reported that they were formal members of these groups, but in response to a further question about whether they sent money to such groups, 23 percent of the respondents -- some of whom were also members -- reported that they made contributions. A total of 26 percent of the

respondents either reported that they maintained memberships, made contributions, or both.¹

By allowing for only one membership for each group type, the standard GSS question seriously underestimates the extent of group membership within the population, and by ignoring the growing importance of financial contributions as a form of group affiliation, the standard question also badly misestimates the size and nature of public involvement in the group system. Not all forms of group activity attract contributions, so this new form of affiliation strengthens some types of groups more than others. The increasing willingness of the public to send a check without taking part more formally in the activities of a group has altered the shape of the interest group universe, and greatly increased the resources available for lobbying and advocacy in American politics. The connections between the lobbyists financed through this system and the public they claim to represent will remain unclear, however, as will the impact of all this heightened activity upon electoral behavior and political participation, until accurate data are collected that covers the full scope of public involvement in the group system.

A New Question on Group Affiliations

Since public involvement in the group system has changed in fundamental ways during the past three decades, any new question about the phenomena must be designed to capture the full range of group affiliations. Because financial contributions are an increasingly popular form of involvement, we use the term "affiliation" rather than "membership" to describe the activities we are seeking to measure. A question about group involvement must include both the possibility for formal membership and

1. Gallup Poll Report, 1981.

financial contribution, and must capture all the memberships that individuals maintain and the contributions they make.

We also believe that the data collected from such a question will be much more useful to future researchers if the actual names of the groups to which respondents are affiliated are collected. One of the reasons that data about group affiliations are difficult to use in social research is that they are usually so unwieldy. Data of this kind cannot be used unless they are aggregated in some way, but as we have shown in the case of the standard GSS question, efforts to build typologies into the question format have often led to gross distortions of reality. If researchers have access to the actual names of the associations to which respondents are affiliated, new classification schemes can be created that fit many theoretical needs, and which reach beyond the common sense categorizations borrowed from the GSS question via the Elimra and Middletown studies.²

The question we developed for the Pilot Study avoids the shortcomings of the GSS question and meets the specifications we have established. Our question begins as follows: "Now we would like to know about the groups and organizations you might belong to. I am going to read a list of different types of organizations. For each type, could you tell me the names of any organizations you belong to or have given money to in the past twelve months." Interviewers then read the following list of probes while recording the names of each group mentioned on a work sheet:

- National or local charities such as the United Way, the Red Cross, the March of Dimes, or any similar organization
 - Labor unions or employee associations
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2. See the Appendix for a coding scheme we devised using the Pilot Study data that generates a flexible typology of groups that would greatly enhance our ability to tie these data on individual group affiliations to studies of the interest groups themselves.

- Any association or group connected with a business or profession
- Veterans organizations
- Any association that looks after the interests of some kinds of people, such as the elderly, the handicapped, children, or some other similar group
- Any association that is concerned with social issues, such as reducing taxes, protecting the environment, promoting prayer in the schools, or any other causes
- Sports, recreation, community, neighborhood, school, or youth organizations
- Fraternities, lodges, nationality, or ethnic organizations
- Cultural, literary, or art organizations³

As our question was revised during the pretest of the Pilot Study, we decided to drop a probe that concerned church affiliated groups. This was done in part to avoid confusion among the respondents about what constituted a church affiliated group and what should be regarded as a church. We also believed that we could make use of the data already collected in the NES on church membership to describe this part of the group universe. We suspected that the GSS question about church affiliated groups -- 33.8 percent of the respondents in the 1985 GSS say that they are members of church affiliated groups -- actually was picking up a great many conventional church memberships. After our experience with the Pilot Study we would like to return the probe about church affiliated groups to this question when it is used on the 1986 NES. (See the Appendix for a further discussion of the problem of church affiliated groups.)

3. See the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire, and the worksheet employed by the interviewers.

The group types used in our question are meant to be similar to those employed by the GSS with some additions to bring the list up to date, but they are regarded as probes, and respondents are allowed to list as many groups under each one as they recall. Interviewers record each group mentioned, and for each mention they follow up with a question about the type of affiliation the respondent maintains with the group: "active member; member, but not active; sent money only; active and sent money; not an active member, but sent additional money." (Question J1a) In a second series of questions, the interviewer also asks whether the respondent believes that each group mentioned takes "stands on or discusses public issues or tries to influence governmental actions." (Question J2) For each group, therefore, the data file includes its name, the probe that stimulated the respondent to mention it, the type of affiliation the respondent has with the group, and whether the respondent regards the group as being involved in public affairs.

The New Question Compared with the Old

The GSS last administered its question on group memberships in 1985, only one year before the 1986 NES Pilot Study went into the field, so the results of the two questions can be compared without fear that changing times would affect the results. The differences in the data generated by the two questions is clearly apparent in Table 1 where we compare the estimates of the number of respondents holding group memberships. In the column labeled GSS Replication, only formal memberships are counted for the Pilot Study data, and only one membership is recorded within each group type. When the Pilot Study data are treated in this way, the results are roughly similar to those generated by the GSS. The Pilot Study question turns up a somewhat larger percentage of people who report at least one membership -- 77.7 percent, compared to 67.5 percent shown by the GSS -- but the GSS shows larger numbers of respondents falling into the "3 to 5",

and the "6 memberships or more" categories. Some of these discrepancies are surely the result of differences in the two samples, the more timely group categories used as probes in the Pilot Study question, and the different ways that church affiliated groups are treated in the two studies, but despite these differences it would seem that when the Pilot Study question is administered in the same way as the GSS question, the results from the two are generally comparable.

TABLE ONE
COMPARISON OF 1985 GSS AND 1986 PILOT STUDY
WITH AND WITHOUT MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIPS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Number of Memberships or Affiliations	GSS 1985	NES Pilot Study 1986	
		GSS Replication	Total Affiliations
Zero	32.4%	22.3%	9.6%
1-2	41.2	60.0	33.4
3-5	20.5	17.1	33.0
6+	5.8	0.6	23.0
Total	99.9%	100.0%	99.0%

All comparability ends, however, when the total affiliations recorded from the Pilot Study question -- multiple memberships within types plus mentions of financial contributions -- are added to the first mentions of group membership within group types. When public involvement in group life is conceived in this more encompassing and realistic way, 91.4 of the sample reports some affiliation with the group system, and almost a quarter (23 percent) fall into the most active category of 6 affiliations or more. In the Pilot Study data, by recording all memberships and financial contributions, we uncovered a total of 2033 group affiliations, a increase of 187 percent over the 708 affiliations that would have been reported if we had followed the method used by the GSS of counting only the first mention of a group membership within each of the group categories.

The Characteristics of Group Members

The Pilot Study data on group affiliations reveal that the system of voluntary associations in American society has much more extensive roots in the general public than earlier studies based upon the GSS question have led us to believe. Even though the number of people involved in the group system is larger than earlier studies had shown, we did not expect to find many differences in the correlates of this form of social participation. We expected to find, as had all earlier researchers, that those from the highest social strata, having more education, and higher incomes, would tend to be the most active in voluntary associations. Since we have included financial contributions as a possible form of group affiliation, there was reason to believe that we would see even stronger relationships with social class and income than past studies had revealed.

TABLE TWO
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE HIGHLY ACTIVE IN GROUPS,
BY EDUCATION, INCOME, AND SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL CLASS

Level of Education, Income, or Social Class	Education (V819)	Family Income (V1119)	Social Class (V1125)
Low	20%	19%	20%
Medium	26	36	33
High	61	40	55

The data displayed in Table 2 show that our expectations were confirmed. When we investigated the social background of respondents to the Pilot Study we discovered that the degree to which they were affiliated with groups was directly related to their level of education, their family incomes, and their own description of the social class to which they belong. This result emerges no matter what types of groups respondents belong to and regardless of whether they are affiliated mainly through

conventional memberships or through financial contributions. The Pilot Study data clearly show that involvement in the group system reaches into all realms of the society, but this does not alter the fact that the middle and upper classes predominate in this form of social participation.

The Make-up of the Interest Group Universe

Even though middle and upper class people remain the most active in the system, no matter whether it is described through memberships only or with financial contributions included, the group universe pictured in the Pilot Study data differs substantially from the one depicted in the GSS data. When we examine the distribution of groups among types in the Pilot Study data in Table 3, we see that the most numerous group affiliations, by far, are with charities, not sports and recreation groups as previous studies have always indicated. Almost half of the affiliations mentioned in the Pilot Study (45.9 percent) are with some form of charitable group. Of course, only about 15 percent of the affiliations with charities take the form of memberships, but even if financial contributions were not counted as affiliations, only professional societies, and groups dedicated to local concerns (neighborhood improvement, sports, schools, youth groups, and other community issues) would show larger numbers of conventional members. Once multiple memberships are counted, there are about 40 percent more members of charitable organizations in the Pilot Study sample than there are members of trade unions.

TABLE THREE
 COMPARISON OF 1985 GSS AND 1986 PILOT STUDY
 WITH AND WITHOUT MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIPS AND CONTRIBUTIONS
 BY GROUP TYPE

Group Type	Memberships, One per Group Type		Total Affiliations	
	Numbers	Percent	Numbers	Percent
Charity	102	14.4	933	45.9
Local	144	20.3	319	15.7
Professional	93	13.1	178	8.8
Union	97	13.7	111	5.5
Categorical	67	9.5	109	5.4
Fraternal	59	8.3	88	4.3
Issue	33	4.7	78	3.8
Veterans	25	3.5	77	3.8
Church	53	7.5	76	3.7
Cultural	32	4.5	58	2.9
Other	3	0.4	6	0.2
Total	708	100.0	2033	100.0

It is not surprising that a coding scheme which counts financial contributions as a legitimate form of group affiliation shows that charities are the most common object of group affiliation. Table 3 further demonstrates, however, that when both multiple memberships within group types and contributions are included, the number of affiliations with veterans groups increase by 208 percent, with issue oriented groups by 136 percent, with local groups by 122 percent, and even with professional societies by 91 percent. The number of affiliations with unions are increased by only 14 percent with our method of data collection and coding, but in many other areas of the group universe it is not unusual for more people to affiliate by giving money than through conventional memberships.

The data in Table 3 point toward an important conclusion about individual motives for joining groups in American society. The overwhelming majority of people's connections with the associational world are through groups that operate mainly in their immediate communities, whose purposes are essentially altruistic, or which promise some form of recreation or

personal growth. Most people do not affiliate with groups in order to pursue overtly political aims. Only about 27 percent of the affiliations reported in the Pilot Study are with the types of associations that are most openly engaged in public affairs -- trade unions, professional societies, veterans groups, organizations meant to represent people in need, and groups engaged in the advocacy of causes.

We suspect, however, that participation in the non-political parts of the group universe may also prompt individuals to become more involved in conventional political activities like voting, or heighten their interest in public affairs. When individuals become affiliated with a group of any kind they are more likely to receive communications about civic and political affairs, and often are encouraged by other group members to take an active part in community life. The question of the impact upon political behavior of affiliations with non-political groups is another of the central questions we wish to investigate with the data that would be generated if our new question on group affiliations were included on the 1986 NES. Before such an analysis can be undertaken, however, we must be certain that our respondents share our understanding of which groups are non-political and which are political. When they join a group that appears to be actively engaged in public affairs, are our respondents aware of its political role?

Political Activity in the Interest Group Universe

Although we have referred to some types of groups as political and others as non-political, we realize that such a sharp distinction among groups is quite dubious. In recent years, charitable groups have been heavily involved in lobbying campaigns to revise the tax code, increase funding for medical research, and encourage more aggressive administration of the civil rights laws. Politics and religion are increasingly entwined in contemporary debates over public affairs, and the government has become

one of the most important patrons of the arts in America. Many groups that paid no attention to public affairs in the past are now actively engaged in bringing pressure to bear upon their elected representatives. In order to make accurate estimates about the affect of participation in the group system upon political behavior, we need to know when a respondent is joining an overtly political group in order to advance a non-political aim, and when a non-political group is being joined with political aims in mind. In order to make this determination, we asked our respondents whether each group they mentioned took "stands on or discuss[ed] public issues or [tried] to influence governmental actions?"

TABLE FOUR
 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAYING THAT GROUP
 IS INVOLVED IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS
 BY TYPE OF GROUP

Type of Group	% Saying Group is Involved in Public Affairs
Political Groups	
Social Issue	83
Unions	68
Veterans	67
Professional	66
Categorical	57
Non-Political Groups	
Local	40
Cultural	32
Fraternal	25
Charities	22

Because of the way these data have been collected and coded, it is possible to divide groups into politically active and inactive types objectively according to the group type, or subjectively according to the respondent's own report about the political activities of the group. The results of this question, displayed in Table 4, show that, for the most part, the groups that we believe to be the most overtly political -- issue

oriented groups, trade unions, professional societies, veterans organizations, and groups representing special segments of the population, such as the elderly or the handicapped (those listed in the top section of Table 4), are perceived by a majority of those affiliated with them as being involved in public affairs. It might be a bit surprising that 17 percent of those affiliated with groups that were described in the probe as "concerned with social issues" report that their groups are not engaged in public affairs, but even more surprising is the fact that 32 percent of those who are affiliated with "cultural, literary, or art" groups report that these organizations are engaged in political advocacy, as did 22 percent of those who were affiliated with charities.

Respondents who reported that the non-political groups they were affiliated with engaged in public affairs were often among the most active members, and so possibly were aware of activity that would escape the notice of those who merely send money to the organizations. About 40 percent of the most active members of charitable organizations, for example, said that their groups were involved in political activity. The Pilot Study data also show that those employed by governments are more likely than those who are employed by firms in the profit making sector of the economy, and more than twice as likely as those employed by not-for-profit agencies, to be affiliated with objectively political associations, and also to believe that any organizations they are affiliated with are engaged in political advocacy or lobbying.

Indexes of Participation in Groups and in Politics

Having answered the question of who participates most actively in the group system, having identified the types of groups in which they participate, and having uncovered some evidence about the motives of our respondents in joining groups, the next step in our analysis will be to

assess the impact of involvement in groups upon political participation. We want to supply at least tentative answers to the question: what difference does group participation make? Before that can be done, however, we must devise efficient ways to measure group participation and political participation.

Our measure of political participation is a simple additive index that was based upon responses to the following NES variables: expressions of interest in politics (variable 101), discussion of politics (201), voting (5301), efforts to convince others about how to vote (5411), and whether respondents made contact with their elected representatives within the past year (5701). Respondents were given one point for yes answers to each of these questions (a high level of interest was employed for variable 101), and the resulting total of points received equals their political participation score, ranging from zero to five.

Our measure of participation in the group system was more difficult to construct because of the differences between the three kinds of group affiliations we have identified: active memberships, inactive memberships, and financial contributions. It is unlikely that the casual act of writing a small check once or twice a year can compare with the influences on an individual that stem from active membership in a national group with a strong political program. We have discovered 2033 affiliations, but we do not believe that they should be counted equally in constructing an index of group participation.

In order to establish the appropriate weights to be assigned to each affiliation we conducted a series of regression analyses in which affiliations of different kinds were regressed against our index of political participation. The B coefficient resulting from the regression of contributions upon political participation was .097, for inactive memberships it was .20, and for active memberships it was .23. These three

B coefficients were then used as weights in the construction of an index of group affiliation. A respondent, for example, who reported two contributions, one active membership, and two inactive memberships would receive a score on the group participation index of .794, which when multiplied by 10 would be entered as 7.94.

The Influence of Group Affiliations Upon Political Participation

When we relate our Index of Group Participation to our Index of Political Participation in Table 5, we can see that the extent of affiliation with the group system is closely associated with the level of participation in the political system. No matter how the data are divided, whether by our objective distinction between political and non-political groups, by the subjective reports of the respondents about the participation of their groups in public affairs, or when all groups are taken together, those with the lowest levels of group affiliation are less likely to participate in politics than those with higher scores on the group participation index. The strongest relationships exist between political participation and affiliation with subjectively political groups -- organizations that the respondents recognize as being engaged in advocacy or lobbying -- but there is not much difference shown when we use affiliations with objectively political groups as an independent variable. In both cases there can be no doubt that there is a close association between affiliation with the group system and the level of participation in politics.

TABLE 5 HERE

There also is evidence in Table 5 that participation in groups that appear to be non-political is associated with higher levels of participation in the political system. This is especially true among those who are most active in non-political groups. The levels of political

TABLE FIVE

THE RELATIONSHIP OF GROUP AFFILIATION WITH
FIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Level of Group Activity	Interest in Politics: High (V101)	Discuss Politics: Yes (V201)	Vote? Yes (V5301)	Convince Others? Yes (V5411)	Contact MC? Yes (V5701)	Index of Participation 4 or 5
All Group Affiliations						
zero	15%	59%	68%	17%	15%	8%
low	15	79	72	27	11	9
medium	34	75	82	39	15	19
high	46	86	92	52	28	38
Objectively Non-Political Group Affiliations						
zero	20%	81%	84%	30%	13%	19%
low	21	77	74	34	14	15
medium	34	77	82	40	15	18
high	42	87	90	47	26	34
Objectively Political Group Affiliations						
zero	22%	77%	76%	26%	14%	12%
low	24	77	84	43	18	22
medium	57	90	100	59	12	34
high	47	85	87	51	31	37
Subjectively Non-Political Group Affiliations						
zero	35%	82%	92%	31%	17%	21%
low	22	82	74	36	17	18
medium	32	76	82	37	15	16
high	42	82	87	52	26	36
Subjectively Political Group Affiliations						
zero	21%	72%	71%	28%	13%	12%
low	23	78	87	35	10	14
medium	51	85	87	46	24	25
high	52	96	93	61	34	48

participation recorded for those in the highest category of group participation are not much affected by whether the groups in which they are involved are political or non-political. It seems that these highly active "joiners" participate vigorously in many different types of community activities, and it is possible that many of them are involved at the same time in a number of both political and non-political groups. There may be a few such "joiners" who span the political and non-political realms, but we do not find a high correlation between affiliations with political and non-political groups. The Pearsonian R coefficient is only .29 between membership in groups that are objectively political and objectively non-political, and an even lower .10 between groups that are subjectively political and subjectively non-political. Our data suggest, in other words, that most of those who are highly active in the non-political realm concentrate their activity in areas that are far removed from public policy and government. Even though they avoid being identified with the political system, it seems that they are being influenced, nonetheless, to participate in politics at very high levels. Since there are almost three times as many people active in the non-political realm, it may have a larger overall impact on political participation than activities within the political groups, even though the impact of political groups upon political behavior is more potent.

Since participation in groups is so closely related to social class, it is not very surprising that group affiliation is so closely related to political participation. Those with high incomes and good educations are likely to participate in groups, but they also are the most likely to vote, discuss politics, or contact their elected representatives. No investigation of the influence of group participation upon political behavior could be complete without checking to be sure that our elaborate measure of group participation is nothing more than another proxy for social class. In Table 6 we present evidence that it certainly is not. When

we related group and political participation in Table 6, while controlling for education, the relationship between the two variables holds, no matter how much education an individual has. The relationship is much stronger, moreover, for those in the lowest educational category. People who have not completed high school are the most deeply affected by participation in the group system. It would seem that those with few of the educational and financial resources required to engage in democratic politics on their own are influenced the most by the support and encouragement that comes from involvement in the group system.

TABLE SIX
THE RELATIONSHIP OF GROUP AFFILIATIONS AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY,
CONTROLLING FOR EDUCATION LEVELS

Index of Group Affiliation	% Scoring 4 or 5 on Index of Participation			
	Less than High School	High School	Some College	BA +
Zero	0.0	4.2	16.7	-
Low	11.4	3.9	14.7	6.7
Medium	10.4	13.7	31.6	21.1
High	30.2	34.3	47.6	37.7
Gammas	.52	.26	.34	.43

The group system's strong independent influence on participation appeared once again when we subjected these data to a multiple regression in which our index of group affiliation, respondent's level of education, family income, and social class designation were regressed upon our index of political participation. This regression model with four independent variables explained 18 percent of the variance, while the same model, excluding the group affiliation index, explained only 11 percent. The B coefficient for the group affiliation variable, furthermore, implied a much greater impact on political participation than the other three social background variables. (Group Affiliation index: .074; education: .054; social class: .046; family income: .024) The relationship between the group

affiliation index and the index of political participation was the only one of the set which was significant at the .001 level. (T ratios are as follows: group affiliation index: 5.12; education: 1.46; family income: 1.96; social class: 1.09)

Summary and Conclusion

Participation in the society's system of groups and voluntary associations is an important determinant of political behavior that should be measured regularly on the NES. The NES would be strengthened enormously by a systematic effort to gather accurate information about the organizational context of voter choice. The traditional question used to measure this behavior in the past has several serious flaws. In fact, its shortcomings are so severe that it has produced a badly skewed and misleading picture of the universe of groups. It has not only led to an underestimation of the number of affiliations between the public and the group system, but because of its concentration upon formal memberships and its neglect of financial contributions as a form of affiliation, sociologists employing the GSS data have failed to detect the growing importance of groups emerging from recent social movements, political groups that depend on direct mail solicitations, and the large and growing charitable organizations that have become the most prominent foundations of the group system.

The questions we propose as an alternative to those employed by the GSS produce a much more accurate picture of the size and scope of the group system and allow researchers to make much more reliable estimates of the impact of group affiliation upon political participation. Using the data produced by our new question, we are able to make a much more realistic estimate of the involvement of individuals in the group system because we have information both about their level of commitment to the groups they join, and about their participation in groups through financial

contributions. Our question allows us to divide the group system into political and non-political segments, and to measure the impact of each kind of contact on political behaviors and attitudes.

Using the data we have collected on the Pilot Study we have shown that participation in the group system makes a difference. Individuals who are affiliated with groups are likely to be much more active in the political system than would be expected, given their educations, incomes and social class. Participation in the group system is a strong independent influence on political behavior, and this is true even if the groups in which one participates are not involved in advocacy or lobbying about public policy questions. Group membership is an especially important influence on the behavior of those who do not have high incomes or many years of education. People of this type do not participate heavily in the group system, but those who do show extraordinarily high levels of political activity.

With data collected periodically from the NES it would be possible to monitor changes in the rapidly expanding group universe. If the growth of the system were monitored, investigations of the beginnings of attitude change would be possible, as well as studies of the impact of changing group affiliations upon political participation. A comprehensive accounting of the principal influences on voter choice must include the organizational contacts that citizens maintain. The dramatic expansion of the group system during the past few decades has provided significant bolstering for many individuals in their efforts to influence the political system. The increasing pressure being felt by Members of Congress because of these developments has been the subject of many newspaper articles, but no accurate data exist that would allow a careful scholarly assessment of the growing communication channels through the group system into the government. To some observers, any increases in public access to their

elected representatives are important steps forward, but other commentators issue warnings about government overload and propose institutional reforms that would restrict the exposure of government officials to the public through the group system. So far, this debate has taken place without the benefit of significant inputs from the scholarly community, and those who have tried to throw light upon the empirical questions at the heart of this debate have been frustrated by a serious lack of data on the group system. The NES has an excellent opportunity to help with the construction of an empirical foundation upon which scholars can launch studies of these centrally important problems of democratic government.

APPENDIX

Index of group activity

The index of group activity is constructed by assigning different weights for each level of activity for each group affiliation for each respondent, then by summing these weights for all the groups with which the respondent is affiliated. For each group mentioned, a value of 2.3 is assigned if respondents claim to be active members of a group (whether or not they also indicate that they send additional money); 2 if respondents are active members; and .97 if respondents are either inactive members or only contributors. These weights stem from regression coefficients measuring the impact of different levels of affiliation on the index of political interest and participation. Once recorded, they are then summed across the twelve possible affiliations recorded for each respondent. The resulting index could range, therefore, from a score of zero for those with no group affiliations to a maximum possible score of 28.

This overall index was adapted in order to construct an index of activity in "political" groups, where the definition of political can be either subjective (based on the respondent's statement of whether the group is "active in public affairs" - Q. J3) or objective (counting only the following types of groups: union, professional, veterans, categorical, social issue).

The Expanded Coding Scheme

The eleven probes which are used in Q. J1 need not constitute an unyielding constraint for coding these data. If interviewers record the full name of the group, as was done in the Pilot Study, a much more elaborate coding scheme can be used which provides many options for further analysis. As an example, we have prepared the following possible expansion

of the original coding scheme for the 349 respondents of wave 2 of the Pilot Study.

Proposed Expanded Coding Scheme for NES Pilot Study

10. Charities

- 28.5% 10. General, national charities: Red Cross, March of Dimes, Salvation Army, United Way, Easter Seals, Goodwill
- 7.3% 11. Specialized national charities: lung association, heart association, cancer, arthritis, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, kidney foundation
- 1.1% 12. Hospitals, including university and religious hospitals, volunteer work in hospitals
- 2.3% 13. Missions, foreign or domestic, church related charities
- .7% 14. Disaster relief, African aid, farm aid, overseas relief
- 2.6% 15. Schools, centers for handicapped or disabled, special olympics
- .4% 16. Volunteer fire fighters, emergency technicians
- .2% 17. Battered women
- .7% 18. Police, Fire charities
- 2.9% 19. Other charities: scholarship funds, community fund for poor, adoption, run-away shelters, humane society

20. Labor Unions

- 4.6% 20. Unions, benevolent associations of police, fire
- .4% 21. Employee groups at workplace

30. Professional Associations

- 5.5% 30. National professional associations
- 1.7% 31. State or local associations
- 1.0% 32. General business associations: Chamber of Commerce, "downtown business" associations

40. Veterans' groups

- 2.2% 40. Veterans' groups: American Legion, VFW, etc
- 1.6% 41. Disabled veterans' groups

50. Categorical groups

- 3.7% 50. Retired, elderly, social security, meals on wheels
- 1.0% 51. Women, university women
- .3% 52. Tenant or homeowner rights
- .3% 53. Minority rights: NAACP, Urban League
- .1% 54. Religious
- .2% 55. College Alumni Groups
- .1% 56. Homemakers
- 57.
- 58.
- .5% 59.

60. Issue Groups

- 1.6% 60. Environmental groups, land protection
- .1% 61. Historical preservation

- .3% 62. Crime, drunk driving, drug abuse
- .3% 63. Tax reform, reduction
- .4% 64. Gun control, NRA
- .1% 65. Nuclear freeze, peace movement
- .1% 66. Abortion, right to life
- .1% 67. Civil rights, ACLU
- 68.
- .7% 69.

- 70. Sports, Recreation, Youth, Community

- 3.6% 70. Schools, PTO
- 4.3% 71. Youth, Scouts, Campfire, YMCA, YWCA
- 2.5% 72. Sports: leagues, coaches, teams
- 1.7% 73. Sports and recreation clubs, country clubs, scrabble club,
chess club, dog club, singles club, restaurant groups
- .8% 74. Religious youth groups
- 1.0% 75. Neighborhood groups
- 76.
- 77.
- 78.
- .2% 79.

- 80. Fraternities, social clubs

- 3.8% 80. Lions, Kiwanis, Elks, Shriners, Moose, Eagles, Jaycees,
Masons, other lodges
- .1% 81. Ethnic, nationality groups
- .4% 82. Greek letter fraternities not known as professional groups

- 90. Cultural

- 1.6% 90. Music, art, theater
- .4% 91. History, science, library, zoological
- .4% 92. Public radio, television
- .4% 99. Other cultural

- 01. Other

- .4% 01. Church groups, bible classes
- .3% 02. TV evangelists: Billy Graham, Hour of Power, 700 Club
- .1% 03. Political parties
- 2.9% 04. Church, parish

In this proposed coding scheme, the first digit of this two- or three- digit code remains the same as that of the original probes. In almost all cases, a trained coder can use the name of the group to code each group quickly. In the few cases (4.7% in the Pilot Study data) where such a judgment is not possible, the category under which the respondent mentioned the group (captured on the interview by the interviewer's check mark) can be used. In order to allow for this simple method of coding, it

is important that the interviewer's check mark be maintained in future studies.

Despite the formidable appearance of our proposed expanded code, it would not be unduely time consuming to code an average of 5 group affiliations per respondent, even if the sample size approached 2,000 respondents, as it would in a national sample. With the names of the groups already entered into a computer file, many of the most common mentions (red cross, salvation army, church groups, boy and girl scouts, etc.) can be assigned automatically. Based on our experience with the Pilot Study data, a single coder can easily code well over 250 mentions per hour, and that number would increase in a larger study because even more group names could be added to the computerized coding system.

A special note on church groups

In the pre-test to the pilot study, Q. J1 included a probe for church-affiliated groups. This led to the mention of many churches and religions which were not groups at all, and the probe was dropped in the pilot study. After analyzing these data, however, we now believe that a probe for church-affiliated groups should be added to the question when it is used on the NES. Virtually all previous versions of this question in other surveys have probed for church groups and have been able to avoid the mention of simple church or parish memberships. A precise coding rule must be worked out, and the inclusion of the probe will somewhat complicate the coding process, but the omission of this probe presents several problems. First of all, it leads to under-reporting of church group affiliations, which makes it difficult to compare our results with those from other surveys. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we believe that it has produced a biased set of responses in the Pilot Study data. A small number of respondents mentioned church affiliated groups despite the absence of a probe, but most of these mentions appear to be "radical right" evangelical

groups which are not at all representative of church affiliated groups in general.

SECTION J

J1. Now we would like to know about the groups and organizations you might belong to. I am going to read a list of different types of organizations. For each type, could you tell me the names of any organizations you belong to or have given money to in the past twelve months.

INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWERS:

- *READ THE LIST OF TYPES OF GROUPS WHICH APPEARS ON THE NEXT PAGE, PAUSING AFTER EACH ITEM TO GIVE THE RESPONDENT TIME TO THINK.
- *RECORD ON THE WORKSHEET IN COLUMN 1 THE EXACT NAME OF EACH SPECIFIC GROUP THE RESPONDENT MENTIONS. USE AS MANY WORKSHEETS AS NECESSARY.
- *IN COLUMN 2 ON THE WORKSHEET INDICATE THE ITEM LETTER ("A," "B," ETC.) CORRESPONDING TO THE TYPE OF GROUP.
- *ASK J2 ABOUT EACH GROUP THE RESPONDENT MENTIONS.
- *WHEN THE LIST OF GROUPS IS COMPLETE, ASK J3 ABOUT EACH GROUP MENTIONED.

IF R ASKS:

- >"I GET THEIR MAGAZINE, DOES THAT MEAN I'M A MEMBER?" OR "WELL, I PAY DUES. DOES THAT MEAN I'M A MEMBER?" RECORD R'S QUESTION, AND SAY "YES."
- >"I AM A MEMBER AND I SENT MONEY." CHECK "ACTIVE MEMBER" AND "SENT MONEY."
- >"I BELONG TO (NAME OF GROUP). DO YOU THINK IT BELONGS IN THIS CATEGORY?" SAY "YES." ACCEPT A GROUP MENTIONED UNDER WHATEVER CATEGORY R CHOOSES.
- >IF R MENTIONS A GROUP TWICE, SAY, "OH, I ALREADY HAVE THAT ONE DOWN. ARE THERE ANY OTHERS IN THIS CATEGORY?"

J1. (CONTINUED) (RESPONSES ARE RECORDED ON THE "WORKSHEET.")

ITEM TYPE OF
LETTER: GROUP:

- A. National or local charities such as the United Way, the Red Cross, the March of Dimes, or any similar organization
- B. Labor unions or employee associations
- C. Any association or group connected with a business or profession
- D. Veterans organizations
- E. Any association that looks after the interests of some kinds of people, such as the elderly, the handicapped, children, or some other similar group
- F. Any association that is concerned with social issues, such as reducing taxes, protecting the environment, promoting prayer in the schools, or any other causes.
- G. Sports, recreation, community, neighborhood, school, or youth organizations
- H. Fraternities, lodges, nationality, or ethnic organizations
- J. Cultural, literary, or art organizations
- K. Any other groups

**AFTER COMPLETING THE WORKSHEET,
GO TO NEXT PAGE, J3**

WORKSHEET FOR 1985 NES PILOT STUDY

INTERVIEWER'S NUMBER: _____

ID# from Coversheet Label: _____

PAGE ___ OF ___

DATE OF INTERVIEW: _____

(1). NAME OF ORGANIZATION	(2). ITEM LETTER	J2. Are you an active member, a member but not active, or have you given money only?	J3. Does (FIRST GROUP MENTIONED) take stands on or discuss public issues or try to influence governmental actions? Does (SECOND GROUP MENTIONED)...? (ASK ABOUT EACH GROUP MENTIONED)
1		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW
2		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW
3		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW
4		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW
5		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW
6		<input type="checkbox"/> 1. ACTIVE MEMBER <input type="checkbox"/> 2. MEMBER, NOT ACTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> 3. SENT MONEY	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. YES <input type="checkbox"/> 5. NO <input type="checkbox"/> 8. DON'T KNOW