ANES

A New Opportunity to Add Contextual and Other Auxiliary Variables to the 2008 ANES Time Series and Panel Study Datasets

In recent study years, the ANES has released an auxiliary data file as part of the final release of its surveys.   In 2002 and 2004, these files included candidate biographical data, information on past elections, campaign expenditures, House and Senate member records and ratings, and district and state descriptions. The ANES included this data to make it easier for scholars to integrate potentially relevant contextual variables into their analyses.

This year, we are changing the way that we are assembling the auxiliary data file. The rationale for the change is that there are hundreds of contextual and other auxiliary variables that ANES could potentially include in the final release and that scholars vary tremendously in the type and number of such variables that they find interesting. In the past, the ANES has made decisions about which variables to include and exclude from the auxiliary datasets on its own. By centralizing this process, it is possible that the ANES has included variables in the auxiliary file that are of little or no use to scholars while simultaneously excluding variables of high analytic value. Moreover, the ANES has also collected such data on its own in the past rather than collaborating with other scholars and projects who may possess higher-quality data that they are willing to share.

This year, we are decentralizing the process by which the auxiliary data file is developed. Instead of centralizing decisions about which contextual variables to include and exclude, we are asking the ANES user community to participate in this decision making process. And instead of collecting such variables on our own, we are making an open call for collaboration with anyone who has relevant data to share.

Hence, we are calling on members of the research community to help us gather and make contributions to the 2008-2009 version of the ANES auxiliary data file through contributions to a dedicated forum on the ANES Online Commons www.electionstudies.org/onlinecommons.htm The goal of the ANES Online Commons is to improve the quality and scientific value of each of our data collections, to encourage the submission of new ideas, and to make such experiences more beneficial to and enjoyable for individual investigators. The ANES has used the Online Commons with great success in the past to develop questionnaires for the 2006 ANES Pilot Study, the 2008 ANES Time Series Study, and the 2008-2009 ANES Panel Study. Now, we are using the Online Commons to change how the auxiliary file is assembled.

The new "auxiliary data" forum on the ANES Online Commons is open to anyone who wants to make constructive suggestions regarding sources of contextual data that researchers may find useful. The proposals that are most likely to be successful will have the following characteristics:

- Thorough description of the variables proposed for inclusion. [Please note that the primary mandate of ANES is to explain vote choices and turnout. However, this mandate can be advanced in many different ways that incorporate insights from many different disciplines or approaches.]

- An explicit argument about why the proposed variable(s) merit inclusion in the ANES data sets.

- An explicit argument about the kinds and range of statistical analyses that the variable(s) allows and the benefit of such analyses to science (and society). Clear presentations of modeling frameworks, power statistics, or analogous analytic concepts will make arguments more persuasive.

- An explicit argument about the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the variable(s).

- Evidence about the empirical performance of such questions. Such evidence will make a proposal much more persuasive.

- Evidence that the proposed way of measuring the concepts in question are valid and at least as reliable as obvious alternate ways of measuring the same concept(s).

- If the proposal advocates including a variable that ANES has included in previous auxiliary datasets, the proposal will be more persuasive if it includes explicit evidence about the breadth and depth of the variable's previous usage and impact in the scholarly literature. Do not assume that readers already know about prior uses of the variables or will research prior uses on their own.

- Five keywords that we can use to identify the proposal in a search algorithm.

Greater specificity about such attributes of your proposal can help Online Commons readers and ANES more effectively evaluate the likely benefits of including your proposed variables in the dataset.

Proposals are limited to ten pages with font no smaller than 12 point, one-inch margins, and double spacing. Of course, scholars may submit multiple proposals.

Scholars who wish to alert people to detailed materials to support their arguments may do so in the text of their proposal. All such references must include a URL for a publicly-accessible website.

Any Internet user can view the Online Commons, but you can post a proposal on the "auxiliary data" forum only if you register for an Online Commons membership. Membership is free to any scholars and there are no strings attached. The sole purpose of the Online Commons is to provide a means for scholars to contribute to the development of ANES questionnaires. You can learn more about how to register here: www.electionstudies.org/onlinecommons_reghelp.htm

In addition to proposing variables for the auxiliary dataset, we also encourage you to post comments about the other proposals that are made. Constructive comments of this kind can be very helpful to the ANES as it assembles the dataset.

All proposals for the 2008 edition of the Auxiliary dataset must be received by 3:00 Eastern/Noon pacific on Tuesday, December 1, 2009.

If you have any questions about the new "Auxilary dataset" forum, or about the Online Commons, in general, please let us know via e-mail to anes@electionstudies.org.

We hope to hear from you!

Sincerely,
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