

TO: CCES Planning Committee
From: Steve Ansolabehere
Date: May 6, 2006
RE: Common Content

I have sketched out a proposal for the common content for the Collaborative Congressional Election Survey. My goals are to capture what I see as the primary opportunity (measuring distributions of preferences in states and districts and the general features of representation), to include items that will be of interest to all research in this collaborative, and to incorporate topics that are of interest to a large number of the collaborators.

My rule for choosing these items has been to ask (1) for which topics do we need to use all of the cases or for which all participants will use the questions, (2) what questions will be of general use, and (3) what questions can be used for many different sorts of analyses? To measure representation, we will need to use all of the sample. The idea is to measure the distributions of preferences and to see if the legislators actual and perceived positions are consistent with their districts or states. We will also need questions tailored to the actual behavior of politicians (their roll call votes), so we can use the behavior of politicians to measure their revealed preferences. We will also need to measure how voters perceive the politicians' positions. Such measures will be useful in studying the vote as well as studying representation.

The design of this battery is to choose 8 key roll call votes across a variety of topics, including abortion, taxes, gay marriage, and the war in Iraq. To nail down a dimension requires two to three such questions, and 8 seems to be the minimum to get economic, moral, and foreign policy preferences. It would be good to include additional issue position questions, but we're at the limit for the common content given the other demands.

A second class of questions focuses on state-level policy preferences. There is an excellent opportunity to produce state-level measures of the distributions of policy preferences across a large number of different policies, most importantly preferences on taxation and expenditures. This will be of considerable interest to those studying state politics (especially gubernatorial elections and divided state government), policy-making, state-level political competition, and so forth. I have included several items

Midterm elections include Congressional and state elections and those interested in various aspects of midterm elections, such as split ticket voting, congressional elections, and state elections, will be able to use questions on voting and knowledge of

A fourth broad interest lies in campaigns and information during the election season. I count at least 10 schools wanting to work on such questions. A core set of measures are provided to this group including ideological placements of candidates, name recognition, and perceived party affiliation of House member, Senators, Governor, and AGs. In

addition, I added two basic information items to the post test – which party controls the House and which party controls the Senate.

The group interested in religious and cultural issues (about 6 schools) has asked for a more detailed religious affiliation question. We will have frequency of church attendance and broad denominations. In addition, we will ask about importance of religion in your life and whether you believe in the word of the bible (ANES question). This will be of value in getting state and district level distributions of religiousness. These questions are in the post test.

A final group consists of those interested in modes of voting and problems voting. At least 4 schools (and the EAC) are interested in these items. I have included 2 questions. Problems voting, such as registration foul ups or discrimination at the polling places, are low probability events, and a very large sample is required to detect such events.

There are a large number of additional questions I would love to include – NES issue positions on abortion, environmental regulation, etc; Wendy Rahn's battery of cultural liberalism questions; etc.

Doug and I have had an initial set of discussions about main tenets of sample design. I've recruited several colleagues to advise us on the sample design questions.

I would like to propose as a next step that we discuss the proposed common content in the coming week. Please review the sketch of the common content. Keep in mind that groups will emerge to add to this content on their own and that individual schools will add materials as they see fit, and we will try to coordinate to gain any further economies of scale. The memo is at the limit of the common content – 15 minutes, 4 questions per minute.

Please suggest revisions and then have a phone conversation at the beginning of next week, say Monday afternoon.

Pre-Election Questions (10 minutes, approximately 40 questions)

Political Background (10)

National Party ID (free)

State Party ID. Thinking about the politics in your state, do you consider your self a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?

Presidential approval, overall

Presidential approval, foreign affairs

Presidential approval, economy

Presidential approval, managing government [this is to capture the “Katrina” effect]

Approve job Congress is doing? [Alternate: Approve job majority party doing in Congress?]

Approve job your member of Congress is doing?

State of the Economy.

Turnout 2004

Presidential Vote 2004

Use: These are standard, general use questions. Models of the Congressional Vote typically begin with party identification, incumbency, presidential approval, member approval, and approval of majority party in Congress as the key variables.

Representation and Roll Call Votes (18)

Perceived party of representative.

Ideological placement of representative (left to right scale) [if Rep not running for reelection]

Key votes. 8 issues, 2 questions each, distributed across economic, foreign, racial, and moral issues. We might choose a larger set (say 20) and randomly rotate questions through to construct a scale.

Key votes in 2005/2006 (example): Extension of Tax Cuts. Partial Birth Abortion. Gay Marriage. Iraq War Financing. Ethics reform. Immigration.

Question format: Three to four sentence description of the competing arguments made in Congress followed by two short questions: {Randomize Order}

How do you think your member of the U.S. House of Representatives voted?

How would you have voted?

EXAMPLE: Now we'd like to ask about proposals to ban a type of late-term abortion sometimes called "partial-birth abortion". Some argue that late-term

abortion is a barbaric procedure and should be banned. Others argue that late-term abortions are extremely uncommon and used only in exceptional circumstances best determined by a doctor, not the Congress. The proposed legislation could also be the opening to a broader ban on abortion.

1. How about you? If you were faced with this decision, would you vote for or against banning late-term abortion?
 - For (that is, to ban late-term abortion)
 - Against (that is, not to ban late-term abortion)
 - Don't Know

2. How about your member of the House of Representatives? Do you think he or she voted for, or against banning late-term abortion?
 - For (that is, to ban late-term abortion)
 - Against (that is, not to ban late-term abortion)
 - Don't Know

Use: I see this battery as the core of the CCES.

1. Measure representation at the individual and aggregate level. We will be able to measure (i) whether the member of Congress holds a set of positions consistent with her or his constituents (i.e., is the member seen to be on the same side as a majority of his or her constituents), (ii) the difference between perception and actuality, (iii) what issues matter in Congressional job approval and vote at the individual level.

2. Measure left-right issue preference distributions. Use respondents own preferences to construct issue preferences scores, like MC roll call voting scores.

3. Map the distribution of issue preferences within districts and states. Are the preferences polarized at the district and state level or centrist?

4. Measure discrepancies between perceptions and actuality in representation. To what extent do people know actual votes/positions taken by representatives? How much is party projection and how much reflects representatives' behavior? Do more active campaigns lead to more information about issue positions? Does the aggregate electorate and voting behavior differ if the electorate is fully knowledgeable (a la Gilens, Bartels, and others)?

Campaigns/Candidates/Knowledge (13)

Name recognition/recall (8): both candidates for (i) House, (ii) Senate, (iii) Governor, (iv) Attorney General.

Ideology Placement of House and Senate Challengers and Incumbents and Self (5)

Use: (1) Total and specific name recognition as information measures. Want AG to get variation from highly salient (governor) to less salient (AG, House). Also use ideology

placement and roll call vote data as information measures. (2) Measure information gain during campaigns and trace that to the volume of advertising, campaign spending, etc.

One issue is the exogeneity of these measures, especially affect, to the vote. We might want to measure affect and ideological placement in the post election survey.

Post Election (5 minutes, approximately 20 questions)

Voting Behavior (7)

Turnout

Mode of voting: precinct on election day, absent, early

Difficulties voting

Vote choice:

House,

Senate,

Governor,

AG or other statewide if AG not up.

Information/Ideology (6)

Ideological placement of candidates for House, Senate, Governor.

Use: Changes in these from pre-election to post-election measures changes in information over the last month of the campaign. This is one way to lessen the endogeneity/omitted variables problems associated with affect and vote.

Which party controls House of Representatives?

Which party controls US Senate?

[I think this is good to ask in the post election as a way to see if the respondent is knowledgeable about the election.]

State Politics/ Fiscal Priorities and Preferences (3) [Move to Post Election?]

Spending v. Taxes.

If your state were to have a budget deficit this year it would have to raise taxes on income or sales or cut spending, such as on education, health care, welfare, and road construction. What would you prefer more raising taxes or cutting spending? [A scale from all from tax increases to all from spending cuts]

Income v. Sales taxes (tax progressivity)

In your state, xxx percent of revenue comes from income taxes and xxx from sales taxes. If your state government had to raise taxes, what share of the tax increase should come from increased income taxes and what share from increased sales taxes? [A scale from 100% from sales to 100% from income.]

Federal Budget

The federal budget is currently running a \$400 billion deficit. If the Congress were to balance the budget it would have to consider cutting many programs and raising taxes. What do you think should be Congress' priorities? Rank order the following ways to balance the federal budget, cut domestic spending, cut defense spending, raise taxes, or increase government borrowing.

Use: (1) Measure taxation and expenditure preferences/size of government preferences in addition to roll call voting questions; (2) Measure distribution of preferences over taxation within and across states and districts. No measures exist in political science or economics. Big contribution from a couple of questions, and these will be used by others outside of this collaboration.

Religion items (3)

Importance of religion in your life

Truth of the Bible

Refined Denomination

[We will have coarse denomination (Prot, Cath, Jewish, other) and church attendance already]