

**Performance and Recommendations Summary for  
1991 NES Pilot Variables #2828-2847**

Stephen Knack  
George Mason University  
Center for Study of Public Choice

January 24, 1992

**Reports:**

- A. Social Altruism and Voter Turnout
- B. Social Connectedness and Voter Participation
- C. Deterring Voter Registration Through Juror Source Practices

**Variables:**

**Social Cooperation**

#2828-30, 2844-47

An "altruism index" incorporating dichotomous charitable giving (2846), volunteer work (2829), community activism (2845), and attitude toward jury service (2844) strongly predicts validated turnout (see Report A). In contrast to its performance in an earlier survey conducted by the author, the census participation item (2828) is not significantly correlated with these other items, and in factor analyses fails to load on an "altruism" factor. Increasing passage of time since the census was conducted may erode the ability of respondents to accurately recall.

In a factor analysis of the altruism items and various political activity variables, turnout loads on the "altruism" factor rather than on the "political" factor, supporting the view of voter participation as basically socially-directed behavior rather than directed toward narrow political or self-interested goals (see Report A).

The continuous measures of volunteer work and charitable giving (2830, 2847) can be used as dependent variables; many predictors of voting should also help predict these if voting is basically an altruistic act. For example, number of neighbors known is correlated with amount of charitable giving. Unfortunately, the civic duty to vote item is not available; persons with a strong sense of social obligation as indicated by the strength of duty to vote would be predicted to volunteer more of their time and money to help others.

Recommendation: Retain 2829-2830, 2844-2847. Delete 2828; consider replacement such as tipping waiters, helping stranded motorists, etc. Consider adding several clearly self-interested behaviors, both political (such as the old "particularized contacting" item: contacting your representative about a problem concerning only you and your family) and non-political. Turnout, it is hypothesized here, will in factor analysis load on a "socially-interested" factor and not on the "self-interested" factor.

#2831-32

A "conditional cooperation" index of these two variables strongly predicts turnout (see Report A). The time trend in positive responses to 2831 has generally followed that of turnout in the past (Knack, Rationality and Society, April 1992).

Recommendation: Retain 2831, 2832.

## Social Connectedness

#2836-37

Number of neighbors known strongly predicts turnout (see Report B). This effect could be related to "enforcement" of voting norms, or to the prospect of positive social interactions with neighbors at the polls.

Recommendation: Retain 2836, 2837. Add item such as "when you talk to strangers around where you live, are they generally very friendly, somewhat friendly, or not so friendly?" This item would serve as both a measure of the anticipated social benefits of going to the polls, and as a third "conditional cooperation" variable.

#2838-2839

Neither variable significantly affects turnout, although they help determine the strength of "social sanctions" to vote (See Report B).

Recommendation: Delete 2838-2839; replace with items on number of living parents, number of living siblings, number of adult children (NES already asks about children < 18). Consider a more generally worded question on social interactions with friends and co-workers, instead of "social evenings."

#2834, 2835

The voting spouse variable more strongly predicts turnout than the simple marital status variable. A more interesting test, not possible due to the absence of the civic duty item in the 1990 Study and in the Pilot, would be to look at the effects of the respondent's strength of civic duty to vote on the spouse's turnout decision.

The "social sanctions" measure had a disappointingly small effect on turnout: 4 percentage points in a cross-tabulation, and an insignificant effect in a regression (see Report B). Still, 44 percent of Pilot respondents replied that they had associates who would view nonvoting unfavorably; presidential-year turnout as the dependent variable and a larger sample size should improve this item's ability to predict voting. It is also very useful as a dependent variable (see Report B), in determining what kind of relationships are most likely to involve interpersonal pressures to vote.

Recommendation: Retain 2834, 2835

## Jury Duty and Voter Registration

#2840-43

These perceptions of juror source practices proved useful for predicting registration, and for providing additional evidence that the effects of variables representing actual juror source laws are not spurious: many people are indeed aware that registration lists are used for juror selection (see Report C).

Recommendation: Retain 2840-43.

#2844

Interaction terms constructed from this variable and juror source variables fail to differentiate the jury-preferring from the jury-averse respondents' sensitivity of registration to jury source practices. This failure may be attributable to a failure to capture respondents' opportunity costs of serving (see Report C).

Recommendation: retain 2844 (see above discussion of item in context of social altruism). Add item determining respondents' opportunity costs of serving: e.g., "how inconvenient would you find it to serve on a jury, very inconvenient, somewhat inconvenient, or only a little?" (Record volunteered responses "extremely" or "not at all") A "net benefits" variable would then be constructed from 2844 and the new item for purposes of testing interaction effects.

-----

### Civic Duty in the NES

Recommendation: Restore the three civic duty items dropped after the 1980 survey.

Many observers believe the strength of civic duty to vote is declining (e.g., Pomper and Sernekos, 1989), and that this hypothesized decline plays a role in the turnout decline. Time-series comparisons would be greatly facilitated by the presence of all four traditional items, particularly as the sole remaining item is the most ambiguous: respondents believing one has a duty to cast a well-informed vote may give the "wrong" (i.e. low-duty) reply to this item.

The value of civic duty as a dependent variable would be significantly enhanced with the availability of all four items, from which an index could be constructed. The social connectedness and trust-in-people items should help predict the strength of civic duty; anomie will, it is believed here, detract from one's sense of obligation to vote, or to cooperate in other ways.