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Title: How Representative is the 1986 Post-Election Survey?

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Abstract

The response rate for the 1986 NES Post-Election survey is 68%, a full 4% lower than the response rate for the 1984 Pre/Post-Election Survey. The lower response rate raises two questions: do the respondents for the 1986 survey look any different from the respondents in previous NES surveys, and how well does the 1986 survey represent the voting age population of the United States? Brehm finds that the lower than usual response rate did not demonstrably change the demographic distributions of the 1986 study. In comparison with the four previous surveys, the 1986 respondents look very much the same on the most stable demographic variables and other changes are consistent with changing demographic patterns over time. In comparison to CPS November estimates of the population, the 1986 fares no better or worse than any of the four previous surveys. All five of the surveys under represent some groups: males, those with less than high school education, low income families, the elderly. This appears to be non-response bias in general, but not a bias that increased with the drop in response rate.