

Proposal to Drop the Follow-up to the ANES “Duty to Vote” Question for Some Respondents, and to Enhance the Response Categories for the “Care Who Wins” Question

Part 1: Dropping a Follow-Up on the “Duty to Vote” Question.

In a 2010 proposal to ANES, I documented the longstanding importance of “civic duty” in the literature on turnout, and I proposed a new question written by Andre Blais. The idea was to replace the old ANES versions that were used, beginning in the 1950s, and then were eventually dropped. We showed that the new question had worked well in other surveys, including the 2008 CCAP, with high over-time reliability and a powerful impact on turnout. Our proposal was accepted (as it has been in several national election surveys in other countries), and the 2012 ANES included a version of it. The purpose of this proposal is to review the success of that new question and to propose dropping the follow-up question for some respondents.

From the codebook, here is the question as it appeared in the 2012 ANES:

preswin_dutychoice

Label: [VERSION 1A] Does R consider voting a duty or choice

Position: Pre-election survey, section-item no. 37.6-9

Description: Attitudes and intentions toward coming elections

Question: Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a duty - they feel they should vote in every election no matter how they feel about the candidates and parties. For others voting is a choice - they feel free to vote or not to vote, depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting mainly a duty, mainly a choice, or neither a duty nor a choice?

Universe: IF R SELECTED FOR VERSION 1A OF VERSION 1A / VERSION 1B
SPLICE:

Logic: Create variable dutychc with cases randomly assigned to 1 or 2; Respondents assigned dutychc=1 are asked PRESWIN DUTYCHOICE and respondents assigned dutychc=2 are asked PRESWIN CHOICEDUTY. Ask if dutychc=1.

As it had in other surveys, the question worked nicely to create a roughly 50-50 split in opinion rather than the one-sided conventional agreement with the norm of voting that had plagued the

older duty questions. (There were 1408 “duty” and 1181 “choice” unweighted responses; the weighted proportions were even closer.)

For the 2012 ANES, I additionally proposed, and ANES accepted, a follow-up question (also due to Blais) asking “duty” respondents how strongly they felt about it. The point was that duties come in all sorts of strengths, and the question should tap that. On the other hand, Blais and I felt that no follow-up was needed after the “choice” response, because “It’s a little bit of a choice” or “It’s really strongly a choice,” while conceivably meaningful to some respondents, in the end didn’t correspond well, we felt, to either the theoretical literature or to street-level understanding of “choice.” One either has a choice or one does not.

Presumably in the interest of question balance, however, the ANES staff decided to give both “duty” and “choice” respondents a follow-up question about the strength of that response. Here is the follow-up wording for “choice” (the follow-up for “duty” is essentially identical):

preswin_choicest

Label: How strongly does R feel that voting is a choice

Position: Pre-election survey, section-item no. 37.6-12

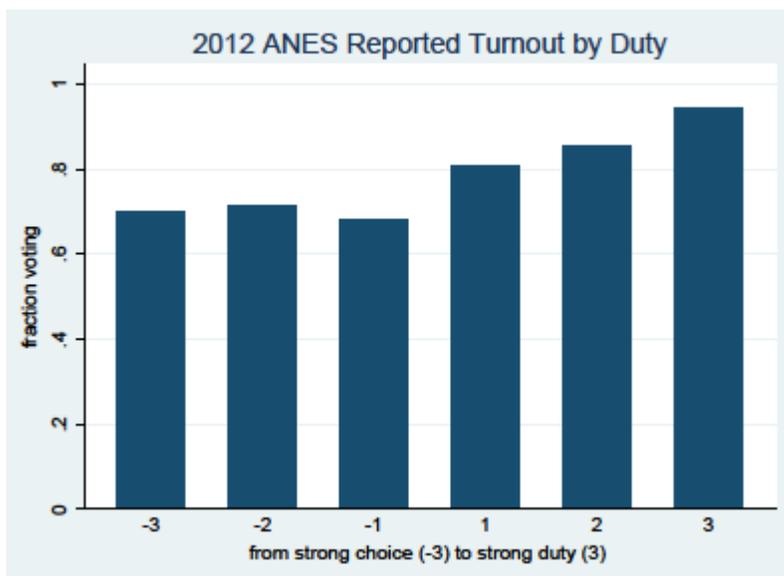
Description: Attitudes and intentions toward coming elections

Question: How strongly do you feel that voting is a choice? [very strongly, moderately strongly, or a little strongly / a little strongly, moderately strongly, or very strongly]?

Universe: IF R CONSIDERS VOTING A CHOICE:

Logic: Ask if PRESWIN DUTYCHOICE=2 or PRESWIN CHOICEDUTY=1, else skip

Thus the 2012 survey gives us the chance to see how well the follow-up worked for both “duty” and “choice” respondents in predicting turnout. Those who weren’t asked the question, did not respond, or did not grasp the question (responding “neither”) are omitted. The standard weights were used, and respondents from both modes were included. Here is the chart:



As the chart shows, differences in duty matter (the three right-most bars), but differences in choice do not (the left three bars). The same is true with additional controls.

Thus I propose that ANES drop the follow-up question when the respondent says “choice” after the duty/choice question. This decision would be in line with the argument of my original proposal, which is now confirmed by the 2012 evidence. Of course, the follow-up when the respondent says “duty” should be retained.

Lastly, I note that this suggestion constitutes that rarity among proposals: It will *shorten* the questionnaire.

Part 2: Adding Response Categories to the “Care Who Wins” Question

The duty to vote is a key explanatory factor for turnout. The other key factor, of about the same empirical importance but far more discussed theoretically, is the “expressive benefit” of voting. That is, people vote if they care about the election. Thus one often sees journalists and politicians refer to the size of the turnout as a measure of voter interest. Riker and Ordeshook used both “duty” and “care” in their famous 1968 paper, for example.

The current ANES question concerning caring about the outcome is this:

preswin_care
Label: Care who wins Presidential Election
Position: Pre-election survey, section-item no. 37.6-1
Description: Attitudes and intentions toward coming elections
Question: Generally speaking, would you say that you personally CARE A GOOD DEAL who wins the presidential election this fall, or that you DON'T CARE VERY MUCH who wins?

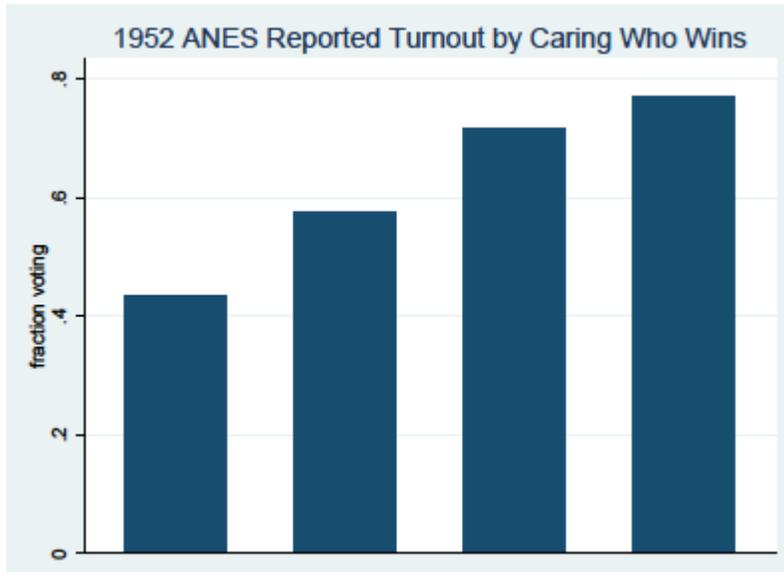
Thus the answer is dichotomous. And that is a bit sad: A great deal of information is lost when multiple-category variables are dichotomized. Additional measurement error is induced, and that messes up multiple-variable explanations, as any econometrics text explains and as I have seen in my own work with the “care” question.

Actually, ANES started out originally with a more nuanced set of categories. Here is the 1952 question, for example:

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VAR 520041 NAME-CARE MUCH WHICH PTY WINS
COLUMNS 212 - 212
NUMERIC
MD=GE 8
Q.18. GENERALLY SPEAKING, WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU
PERSONALLY CARE A GOOD DEAL WHICH PARTY WINS THE
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION THIS FALL OR THAT YOU DON'T CARE VERY
MUCH WHICH PARTY WINS.
.....
496 1. CARE VERY MUCH
682 2. CARE, CARE PRETTY MUCH
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12 3. PRO-CON, DEPENDS
373 4. DON'T CARE VERY MUCH, CARE A LITTLE
182 5. DON'T CARE AT ALL
18 8. DK
136 9. NA, OR NO PRE-ELECTION

These categories, arranged from “don’t care” to “care very much,” work very well in 1952 in predicting turnout. (I dropped DK, NA, and the 8 people who said “depends”; the survey has no weights.)



Obviously, all the categories make a difference; no one would recommend combining them.

So my second suggestion, like my 2010 proposal, again asks ANES to return to its roots, in this case by adding additional response categories to the “care” question. For example, the question might be worded like this (again borrowed from parallel work in other countries):

How much do you personally care who wins the presidential election this fall?

1. *not at all*
2. *a little*
3. *somewhat*
4. *a lot*

Plus residual codes for not sure, depends, DK, NA, etc.

A question of this kind has also worked well in 2008 CCAP study, of which I was a part, as well as in many Canadian surveys in which Blais has participated. In particular, the four response categories each predict turnout distinctly and independently in current surveys, just as they did in 1952, and thus add real information to the survey.

Again, I am not proposing adding a new question, just an expansion in the responses, going back to what ANES used originally. A slight question rewording might also be helpful, but I am agnostic about that.

Many thanks for considering me favorably last time, and for your attention to this proposal.