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Abstract

Hansen and Rosenstone examine the 1983 Pilot Study questions concerning nonelectoral forms of political participation. Pilot Study respondents were asked whether, in the last six months, they had: contacted their congressmen, signed petitions concerned with national issues, joined with others to solve community problems, or attended meeting concerned with school affairs. Hansen and Rosenstone find that: (1) The six-month time frame produces sufficient response variance. (2) The traditional one year time frame question format uncovers few additional participants relative to the six-month time frame format. (3) A respondent's ability to recall having participated in politics is inversely related to the number of months that have elapsed since she last did so. (4) The four forms of nonelectoral political participation examined in the Pilot Study are only moderately associated with each other. (5) A sizeable number of people participate in nonelectoral activities, more so, in fact, than participate in the campaign centered activities traditionally measured on the NES. However, people who engage in one form of nonelectoral activity are only slightly more likely to engage in another mode. (6) The people who participate in electoral politics are not the same set of people who participate in non-electoral activities. (7) Individual political participation patterns change over time. For example, there was little overlap between those who reported contacting their representatives up to 1982 and those who did so in 1983. (8) Variables currently available on the NES do not do a very good job of accounting for why people engage in nonelectoral forms of political participation.