January 25, 1996

MEMO TO: NES Board of Overseers

FROM: Adam Berinsky and Steven Rosenstone

RE: Evaluation of Environmental Policy Items on the 1995 NES Pilot Study

Population growth, industrialization, and the concentration of people into urban centers are placing steep demands on the world's natural resources, producing global environmental changes of enormous proportions. These global changes pose a wide range of profound public policy questions -- from loss of biodiversity, to hazardous waste disposal, energy conservation, and air and water pollution. The political manifestations of the debate over these questions are plainly visible. The environmental movement has been a powerful social and political force in polities around the world. Social movements, political groups, and parties have organized to shape public opinion, social and political behavior, to influence who gets elected to public office, and to prevail on the kinds of policies that governments and the private industry adopt.

It is unlikely that environmental issues are going away anytime soon. Stratospheric ozone depletion, toxic waste, air pollution, and climate change will not be resolved in the short run. Sensational catastrophes like Three-mile Island, Chernobyl, Love Canal, and the Exxon Valdez, as well as the environment movement itself, are sure to sustain environmental concerns in the public's consciousness.

Most scholarship on environmental public opinion has been descriptive and largely designed to measure public perceptions of various environmental problems. Some research has been conducted on the origins of public opinion; some on trends in opinion; but little, if any, on the political consequences of environmental issues. For example, the Gallup "Health of the Planet Survey" (Dunlap, Gallup, and Gallup 1993) focused on concern about environmental issues and problems, perceptions of environmental quality, and perceptions of the causes of these problems. It contained few questions on public policy towards the environment and no questions about political parties, candidates, or electoral choice. The 1993 survey of the International Social Science Programme (ISSP) carried a module on the environment that focused on concern about environmental problems; environment vs. economic growth; tradeoffs of personal economic well-being vs. environmental protection; environmental information; and recycling. The module included few questions on environmental policy and no questions about other political issues, political parties, candidates, or electoral choice.

The National Election Studies set out to understand the political manifestations of environment issues, specifically: the nature of public opinion on environmental policy questions, the antecedents of those opinions, and the broader consequences of all this for politics. The focus of this effort to has been on developing measures of public opinion on environmental policy questions that will support detailed scientific analysis of the way in which citizens' views on the environment do or do not become part of the considerations that citizens bring to bear on their evaluations of government, parties, and candidates.

As a first step, NES tested 30 questions on environmental policy as part of its 1995 NES Pilot Study. Our purpose in this memo is to evaluate the performance of those items with an eye towards identifying those items that are mostly likely to sustain important insights into the political consequences of environmental issues in national electoral politics. At this stage of the enterprise our focus is exclusively on measurement issues and construct validity. This memo is quite consciously not a substantive exercise into the political consequences of opinion on environmental policy issues.

The two closing sections of this report provide a succinct summary of our recommendations for the 1996 NES.

1. The Government Effort on the Environment Questions

One battery of items (V2161-V2167) asked respondents about the amount of effort that the government should put into various environmental activities:

Do you think the government should put less, the same amount, or more effort into ...

		Less Effort	*The Same Effort*	*More Effort*
V2161	Improving and protecting the environment?	11.2	33.1	55.7
V2162	Reducing air pollution?	5.8	35.5	58.7
V2163	Managing natural resources that are important to our economy, such as timber and fisheries?	9.2	27.9	62.9
V2164	Cleaning up parks for recreation such as hiking and boating?	7.5	35.3	57.2
V2165	Cleaning up hazardous or toxic waste?	2.5	19.2	78.3
V2166	Reducing solid waste and garbage?	4.0	26.2	69.9
V2167	Addressing global warming?	20.0	36.9	43.1

Responses to these questions are highly inter-correlated (mean correlation = .41), so much so that we doubt that the items are really capturing independent policy evaluations.

	V2161	V2162	V2163	V2164	V2165	V2166	V2167
V2161	1.000						
V2162	0.596	1.000					
V2163	0.476	0.384	1.000				
V2164	0.341	0.412	0.373	1.000			
V2165	0.407	0.452	0.391	0.453	1.000		
V2166	0.333	0.424	0.327	0.410	0.506	1.000	
V2167	0.459	0.511	0.397	0.286	0.364	0.384	1.000

While carrying all these items forward onto the 1996 NES might provide useful descriptive insights into 's priorities for environmental policy, these are not independent evaluations. In particular, they do not have distinct causes or distinct political consequences. It probably makes more sense to think of the 7 items as alternative measures of a single, underlying dimension: support for government efforts to improve and protect the environment.

A very reliable scale can be constructed from 5 of the items as seen in the following results from a confirmatory factor analysis:

LISREL (Maximum Likelihood) Estimates

	Item Reliability	Item Loading
V2161	.731	.534
V2162	.812	.659
V2163	.655	.428
V2165	.569	.324
V2167	.625	.390

Scale Reliability: .861

Measures of Goodness of Fit for the Whole Model:
Chisquare with 4 Degrees of Freedom = .93 (p = .920)
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index = .997

To give a sense of the relative reliability of the 5-item "support for government efforts to improve and protect the environment scale," we compare it to other scales that NES has carried (e.g. in the 1992 Election Study):

NES Scale	Number of Items	Scale Reliability	Average Correlation Among the Items
Environmental Effort	5	.86	.44
Egalitarianism	6	.72	.29
Racial Prejudice	4	.75	.43
Moral Traditionalism	4	.65	.33
Government Intervention	3	.72	.46

By our usual standards, "the support for government efforts to improve and protect the environment scale" is very reliable.

Beyond the face validity of the scale, it has predictive validity as well. Here we examined the relationship between the "support for government efforts to improve and protect the environment scale" and feeling thermometers for groups seeking to protect the environment, Gore, Clinton, and Dole. In each equation, we controlled for partisanship and ideological self-identification. The expectation is that the strength of the relationship between the scale and the thermometers should decline as one moves from evaluations of environmental groups to Gore, to Clinton, to Dole. We would also be surprised if the scale has much relationship, if any, to evaluations of Dole. The results, summarized below, fit our expectations:

Relationship Between the "Support for Government Efforts to Improve and Protect the Environment Scale" and Environmental Groups, Gore, Clinton, and Dole Feeling Thermometers
Controlling for Partisanship and Ideology
(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates)

Dependent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Environmental Groups	48.96**	3.84

Gore	16.50**	4.65
Clinton	13.60**	4.65
Dole	-3.23	4.22

** $p < .05$

In sum, the "support for government efforts to improve and protect the environment scale" has appropriate predictive validity.

2. Is there any Difference Between the Traditional NES "Government Spending on the Environment" Question and the new "Government Effort on the Environment" Question?

Since 1980, NES has asked respondents their views on whether the level of federal spending on the environment should be increased, decreased, or kept about the same. On the face of it, this spending battery item appears similar to the pilot study question on whether the government should "put less, the same amount, or more effort into improving and protecting the environment" (V2161). As one would expect, these two items are strongly correlated (r = .52). V2161 is more strongly associated than is the governmental spending item (V817) with the other governmental efforts items piloted in 1995. V2161 is also more strongly associated than the spending item with responses to the 6 environmental tradeoff questions and self-identification as an environmentalist. Moreover, adding the government spending item to the 5-item governmental effort scale reported above does not increase the scale's reliability.

We also examined the relative performance of the governmental spending and governmental effort questions in their ability to predict feelings towards environmental groups and evaluations of Gore, Clinton, and Dole. We first regressed the thermometers on both the governmental spending item and the government effort item, controlling for partisanship and ideology, and then regressed the thermometers on each measure separately.

Effect of Government Spending Question and Government Effort Question on Environmental Groups, Gore, Clinton, and Dole Feeling Thermometers
Controlling for Partisanship and Ideology
(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates with Standard Errors in Parentheses)

	Spending Question	Effort Question	Adjusted R-Squared
Environmental Groups			
Equation I	18.36**	26.77**	.49
	(3.00)	(2.92)	
Equation II	-	35.78**	.44
		(2.58)	
Equation III	32.61**	-	.37
	(2.58)		
Gore			
Equation I	7.85**	6.81**	.26
	(3.83)	(3.76)	
Equation II	-	11.48**	.26
		(3.21)	
Equation III	11.32	-	.26

	(3.21)		
Clinton			
Equation I	4.55	5.68	.38
	(3.86)	(3.77)	
Equation II	-	8.70**	.38
		(3.22)	
Equation III	7.48	-	.38
	(3.22)		
Dole			
Equation I	4.70	-3.12	.21
	(3.47)	(3.40)	
Equation II	-	-1.22	.20
		(2.90)	
Equation III	2.87	-	.21
	(2.98)		

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Both the spending and effort items each appear to be significant determinants (in both a statistical and substantive sense) of evaluations of environmental groups, Gore, and Clinton (in that order). Neither item has a significant effect on evaluations of Dole. Although each item seems to mop up some unique variance in the equation for environmental groups, one would be hard pressed to argue that one item contributes anything unique over the other in explaining evaluations of Clinton, Gore or Dole.

3. Environmental Tradeoff Items

A second set of environmental policy questions focused on the tradeoffs (or costs) associated with the pro-environment position:

Some people think it is important to protect the environment even if it costs some jobs or otherwise reduces our standard of living. Other people think that protecting the environment is not as important as maintaining jobs and our standard of living.

	Strongly Favor Protecting Environment	*Somewhat Favor Protecting Environment*	*If Forced To Choose, Favor Protecting Environment*	*If Forced To Choose, Favor Maintaining Jobs*	*Somewhat Favor Maintaining jobs*	*Strongly Favor Maintaining Jobs*
V2172A	35.1	20.2	2.4	4.4	20.0	18.0

Some people think that we need much tougher government regulations on business in order to protect the environment. Other think that regulations to protect the environment are too much of a burden on business.

	Strongly Feels Tougher Regulations Needed	*Not So Strongly Feels Tougher Regulations Needed*	*Not So Strongly Feels Regulations Burden Business Too Much*	*Strongly Feels Regulations Burden Business Too Much*
V2190A	51.9	15.5	10.2	22.3

Some people have different ideas about how best to manage the environment and our natural resources. Which of these comes closest to your view: One, Nature exists for our use and enjoyment. Or, Two, We should preserve and protect nature for its own sake.

	Feels Strongly That Nature Exists For Our Use And Enjoyment	*Feels Not Strongly That Nature Exists For Our Use And Enjoyment*	*Feels Not Strongly That Nature Should Be Persevered For Its Own Sake*	*Feels Strongly That Nature Should Be Persevered For Its Own Sake*
V2212A	17.7	4.9	7.2	70.2

		Support	*Oppose*
V2222	Would you support a ban on gasoline-powered garden appliances, such as lawn mowers in order to reduce air pollution, or would you oppose such a ban?	29.8	70.2
V2223	Would you support paying higher taxes on gasoline in order to discourage consumption and cut down air pollution caused by automobiles, or would you oppose such a ban?	26.0	74.0

The estimated cost of anti-pollution equipment on a new car is fifteen hundred dollars. Do you think this is worth paying in order to protect the environment, or would you rather see the price reduced even if the car pollutes more? What about if adding more anti-pollution equipment costing an additional fifteen hundred dollars, could make the car pollute even less? Do you think that would be worth paying in order to protect the environment, or would you rather not see the price increased to make the car pollute less?

	Worth Paying $3000	*Would Pay $1500/DK About Additional $1500*	*Would Pay $1500 Only*	*Additional $1500 Is Not Worth Paying*
V2225A	51.0	3.7	28.1	17.3

Looking at the distribution of responses to these items suggests obvious problems with V2212a (nature exists for use and enjoyment vs preserve and protect nature for own sake); with V2222 (bans on gas-powered garden appliances); and with V2223 (higher taxes on gasoline). The correlations among the tradeoff items as well as the correlations between the tradeoff items and the effort items further suggests problems with three or four of the tradeoff items:

	2172A	2190A	2212A	V2222	V2223	V2225	Average Correlation With Environmental Effort Items
V2172A	1.000						.260
V2190A	0.451	1.000					.372
V2212A	0.302	0.372	1.000				.244
V2222	0.245	0.282	0.172	1.000			.216
V2223	0.253	0.142	0.134	0.267	1.000		.168
V2225	0.409	0.327	0.159	0.143	0.213	1.000	.231

Two of the tradeoff items (V2172A [jobs and standard of living vs protecting the environment] and V2190A [tough regulations vs burden on business]) seem to have strong convergent validity with each other and with the environmental effort items. The remaining tradeoff items are weakly associated with the other tradeoff items and with the environmental effort questions.

The two surviving tradeoff items appear to have strong convergent validity as well. Each tradeoff item is strongly associated with evaluations of environmental groups, Gore, and Clinton. Each tradeoff item is unassociated with evaluations of Dole as seen below.

Relationship Between the Environmental Tradeoff Questions and Environmental Groups, Gore, Clinton, and Dole Feeling Thermometers
Controlling for Partisanship and Ideology
(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates)

Independent Variable: Jobs and Standard of Standard Living vs Environment	Dependent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
	Environmental Groups	18.13**	2.52
	Gore	10.02**	2.72
	Clinton	6.15**	2.72
	Dole	-1.28	2.42

Independent Variable:

Tough Regulations vs Burden on Business	Dependent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
	Environmental Groups	22.79**	4.86
	Gore	8.18**	2.63
	Clinton	7.08**	2.63
	Dole	.72	2.41

** $p < .05$

4. Placements on Environmental Tradeoff Items

Placements were asked on two of the tradeoff items (the jobs and standard of living vs protecting the environment and the tough regulations vs burden on business):

Some people think it is important to protect the environment even if it costs some jobs or otherwise reduces our standard of living. Other people think that protecting the environment is not as important as maintaining jobs and our standard of living.

		Strongly Favors Protecting Environment	*Somewhat Favors Protecting Environment*	*Somewhat Favors Maintaining Jobs*	*Strongly Favors Maintaining Jobs*
V2175A	Clinton	13.9	20.9	41.1	24.1
V2178A	Dole	7.7	9.7	42.5	40.1
V2181A	Gore	42.6	17.3	26.3	13.8
V2184A	Democratic Party	16.4	17.9	37.1	28.6
V2187A	Republican Party	8.0	10.4	38.1	43.5

Some people think that we need much tougher government regulations on business in order to protect the environment. Other think that regulations to protect the environment are too much of a burden on business.

		Strongly Feels Tougher Regulations Needed	*Not So Strongly Feels Tougher Regulations Needed*	*Not So Strongly Feels Regulations Burden Business Too Much*	*Strongly Feels Regulations Burden Business Too Much*
V2194A	Clinton	38.9	28.4	21.2	11.5
V2198A	Dole	19.4	17.9	25.1	37.6

V2201A	Gore	59.1	22.7	13.5	4.7
V2204A	Senator 1	40.2	18.2	19.9	21.7
V2208A	Senator 2	34.7	19.2	24.5	21.7

At first blush, it appears that respondents were able to place the political figures and parties in sensible ways. Gore is correctly identified as the most pro-environment figure, followed by Clinton, then Dole. Respondents placed the Democratic party to the left of the Republican party as one would expect.

There is, of course, lots of missing data here with between a fifth and a quarter of the respondents saying they "don't know" the political leader's position. Moreover, the pattern of "don't knows" make sense: they are higher for Dole and the U.S. Senators than for Clinton and Gore. The "don't knows" are not missing data in the usual sense; they provide data on how much information citizens have about the environmental policy positions of government leaders.

Political Figure	% Don't Know Position
Clinton	20.3
Dole	29.4
Gore	20.0
Senator 1	23.9
Senator 2	28.1

As plausible as all this seems, in the Pilot Study debriefing, interviewers did report that they thought that some respondents had guessed where to place the political figures based upon the figure's partisanship.

We conducted one further test to assess the validity of the Clinton placements. Here we regressed the Clinton feeling thermometer on the respondent's partisanship, ideological proximity to Clinton, and proximity to Clinton on the jobs and standard of living vs protecting the environment and tough regulations vs burden on business tradeoff questions. By controlling for ideological proximity to Clinton, we hoped to control for the effect of general proximity to Clinton while at the same time mopping up some of the projection effects that are likely at work here. The results of this analysis are mixed: Proximity to Clinton on the jobs and standard of living vs protecting the environment question has a tiny (2 point) and statistically insignificant effect on overall evaluation of Clinton. Proximity to Clinton on the regulation vs burden on business tradeoff question contributes 12 points to overall evaluations of Clinton (and the effect passes the usual statistical hurdles).

The evidence that we can muster to demonstrate that the questions asking for placements of political figures and the parties on the environmental tradeoff items are working is respectable, but not overwhelming.

5. Local versus National

Several pilot study questions were devoted to measuring perceptions about local/national differences both in the quality of the environment and the level of government that should be responsible for taking

actions to deal with environmental problems.

Which level of government do you think should be most involved with dealing with environmental problems -- the federal government, state governments, or local governments?

	Federal Government	*State Government*	*Local Government*
V2168	33.9	45.8	20.3

Overall, how would you rate the air quality in ...

		Very Good	*Fairly Good*	*Fairly Bad*	*Very Bad*
V2213	Our nation	5.9	59.7	26.9	7.6
V2214	Your local community	29.1	48.6	15.1	7.2

Overall, how would you rate the safety of drinking water in ...

		Very Good	F*airly Good*	*Fairly Bad*	*Very Bad*
V2215	Our nation	11.2	56.2	26.0	6.6
V2216	Your local community	34.8	44.3	14.5	6.4

Surely the difference in the distribution of responses to the air and water questions is interesting, -- perhaps reminiscent of the distinctions respondents make between Congress as a whole versus assessments of their own members of Congress. But, it is difficult to muster strong evidence on behalf of these items. Specifically, our analysis examined whether perceptions of national and local air quality affect the willingness of respondents to endorse government action to reduce air pollution, controlling for the respondent's general endorsement of governmental environmental effort.

Effect of Assessments of Environmental Quality at the National Level and in the Local Community on Governmental Effort to Reduce Air Pollution
(Maximum Likelihood Ordered Probit Estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Asymptotic Standard Errors
More Government Environmental Effort	2.27**	0.19
Quality of National Air	-0.33	0.32
Quality of Local Air	-0.79**	0.27
Quality of National Water	-0.34	0.34
Quality of Local Water	-0.03	0.30
μ_1	-1.42	
μ_2	0.45	

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Positive evaluations of air quality at the local level reduce the tendency of people to want more government effort to reduce air pollution; evaluations of national air quality nationally have no effect. As one would expect, evaluations of water quality (at either the local or national level) have no effect on opinions concerning government action on air pollution

A second test of the utility of these items focused on whether assessments of local and national environmental quality predict the level of government that respondents say should deal with environmental problems. Here we estimated the effect of perceptions of national and local air quality on whether respondents identify the federal government (as opposed to the state or local government) as the one that should deal with environmental problems. As before, we controlled for the respondent's general endorsement of governmental environmental effort.

Effect of Assessments of Environmental Quality at the National Level and in the Local Community on Federal Government Involvement in Environmental Policy
(Probit Estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Asymptotic Standard Errors
More Government Environmental Effort	.81**	.20
Quality of National Air	. 58*	.31
Quality of Local Air	-.18	.25
Quality of National Water	.28	.34
Quality of Local Water	.18	.30
Constant	-1.5	

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

The bottom line: respondents who perceive problems with the nation's air quality or drinking water are no more likely to endorse federal government action than respondents who are satisfied with these environmental conditions.

6. Self-Identification as an Environmentalist

Do you consider yourself to be an environmentalist or not? Would you say you're a strong environmentalist or not (a strong environmentalist)?

	No, Not Environmentalist	*Yes, Not Strong Environmentalist*	*Yes, Strong Environmentalist*
V2217-V2218	52.9	19.2	27.9

The environmentalist self-identification question has good convergent validity with the various measures of environmental policy. Environmentalists are more likely to support increased government spending on the environment (r = .31); they are more likely to support increased government efforts on

behalf of the environment (average correlation with the governmental effort questions = .24); they are more likely to take the pro-environmental position on the jobs/standard of living and business regulations tradeoff questions (average correlation = .33).

The environmentalist identification question, however, has weak predictive validity. Though associated with the feeling thermometer for environmental groups, environmentalist identification is unassociated with the feeling thermometers for Gore and Clinton once partisanship and ideological self-identification have been held constant:

Relationship Between Environmentalist Self-Identification and Environmental Groups, Gore, Clinton, and Dole Feeling Thermometers
Controlling for Partisanship and Ideology
(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates)

Dependent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Environmental Groups	13.36**	2.37
Gore	1.00	2.53
Clinton	- .49	2.49
Dole	.76	2.28

** $p < .05$

In short, it doesn't appear that we are likely to buy much with carrying forward into the 1996 NES the question that measures self-identification as an environmentalist.

7. Clinton Approval/Disapproval on Handling of Environmental Issues

In addition to the usual array of questions asking about presidential approval, the NES Pilot Study also included an item that asked about approval of the President's handling of environmental issues:

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton in handling environmental issues?

	Strongly Approve	*Not So Strongly Approve*	*Not So Strongly Disapprove*	*Strongly Disapprove*
V2221A	23.9	33.4	23.4	19.3

Our concern here is whether responses to this question are merely projections of the respondent's general evaluation of Clinton or whether responses have some "environmental" content to them.

At first glance, the prospects for this item do not look good. Responses to the handling of the environment question are strongly correlated with the global evaluation of Clinton's handling of his job as President (r = .62). Furthermore, neither the environmental effort scale nor the environmental tradeoff items have significant effects -- either substantively or statistically -- on the Clinton environmental approval item. We regressed Clinton's handling of the environment onto these measures of support for environmental policy controlling for the respondent's global evaluation of Clinton's handling of his job as President, her partisanship, and ideological self-identification. (Only one measure of environmental policy appeared in each trial to avoid collinearity problems.) None of the measures of the respondent's preferences on environmental policy has an independent *linear* effect on evaluations of Clinton's

handling of environmental issues. In other words, those most supportive of strong environmental policies (whether measured by the 5-item governmental environmental effort scale, the regulation tradeoff question, or the jobs vs protecting the environment tradeoff question), were not more likely to approve (or disapprove) of Clinton's handling of environmental issues than were those most opposed to strong environmental policies.

There is, however, strong evidence of a *curvilinear* relationship:

Effect of the 5-Item Environmental Governmental Effort Scale on Evaluations of Clinton's Handling of Environmental Issues
Controlling for Partisanship and Ideology
(Ordinary Least Squares Estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Clinton Approval	.49**	.05
Environmental Effort Scale	1.17**	.29
Environmental Effort Scale Squared	- .90**	.22

** $p < .05$

Those who stake out the middle-of-the-road position on the environment are most supportive of Clinton's handling of the environmental issues; respondents at either extreme (either the very supportive of government action or very opposed to it) negatively evaluate Clinton's performance on environmental issues. This makes perfect sense.

In sum, these results suggest that the question concerning Clinton's handling of environmental issues, though highly correlated with global evaluations of Clinton's performance as President, is probably tied to preferences on environmental policy.

8. Recommendations Concerning Items to be Retained and Items to be Dropped

Items with the Highest Priority for Inclusion in the 1996 National Election Study

Government Effort on the Environment

V2161 Improving and protecting the environment

V2162 Reducing air pollution

V2163 Managing natural resources that are important to our economy

V2165 Cleaning up hazardous toxic waste

V2167 Addressing global warming

Tradeoffs

V2172A Jobs and standard of living vs. Protecting the environment

V2190A Tough regulations vs. Burden on business

Items with the Next Priority Items for Inclusion in the 1996 National Election Study

Placements

Parties and presidential candidates on jobs vs protecting the environment tradeoff question

Parties and presidential candidates on tough regulations vs burden on business tradeoff

Local versus National

V2213 Air quality in nation

V2214 Air quality in local community

V2215 Safety of drinking water in nation

V2216 Safety of drinking water in local community

Clinton Approval/Disapproval on Handling of Environmental Issues

Items to Drop

Effort on the Environment

V2164 Cleaning up parks for recreation

V2166 Reducing solid waste and garbage

Tradeoffs

V2212a Nature exists for use and enjoyment vs preserve and protect nature for own sake

V2222 Bans on gas-powered garden appliances

V2223 Higher taxes on gasoline

V2225A Worth paying for cost of air-pollution equipment on a new car

V2217-V2218 Environmentalist self-identification

V2168 Level of government that should deal with environmental problem

Placement of Senators on tradeoff items

9. General Recommendations Regarding Themes that Should be the Focus of the Study of Environmental Politics in the 1996 National Election Study

Instrumentation on the environment that is carried forward to the 1996 National Election Study should support a variety of research enterprises dedicated to understanding the nature and political

consequences of preferences on environmental policy. In thinking about the 1996 NES, it is important to remember that what distinguishes the NES effort from all other studies of the environment is our ability to embed the study of the environment in the broader context of national politics and to unpack the political consequences of the environment on the ways that citizens evaluate candidates and make vote choices in national elections. This is our comparative advantage -- our niche. It is what distinguishes our effort from being just another survey on the environment. There are several themes to keep in mind as we embark on the 1996 National Election Study:

1. How do environmental issues affect citizen evaluations of Presidential and Congressional candidates? How much impact do environmental issues have on vote choice in Presidential and Congressional elections? Our analysis here indicates that the items concerning respondent positions on environmental issues work well; the items on candidate placement less so. To further our inquiry in this area we might examine measures of salience of environmental issues as well as retrospective evaluations of the performance of the government and incumbent administration on environmental issues.

2. If environmental issues have only a negligible effect on candidate evaluation and vote choice, why? Several hypotheses surfaced at earlier Board and Planning Committee discussions. (The opposite of each hypothesis could be explored as well if one finds that environmental issues have a big effect.) They include:

- The environment is not a salient issue in the campaign. The candidates don't talk about it.
- Differences between candidates are indistinguishable because candidates do not offer choices to which voters can respond.
- Citizens do not perceive the environment as being a big enough problem to warrant much concern.
- The environment is not a very salient issue for most citizens
- Other issues are much more salient in the campaign and to most citizens
- Citizens perceive problems, but don't think they should be solved at the national level
- Environmental issues cut across traditional (and more powerful) cleavages.

The environmental items surviving from the 1995 NES Pilot Study will allow us to take a first cut at these questions.

3. In what ways is the character and structure of public opinion on environmental issue similar to or different from public opinion other political issues? Here the idea would be to get comparative and to examine the similarities and differences between the public opinion on the environment and public opinion on other issues. This will require parallel instrumentation across the issues being compared to permit comparisons regarding the level of opinionation; in the distribution and intensity of opinion; in the salience of the issue; in the way issues get defined; in the ideological coherence of opinion; in the source of opinion and in the nature of the social cleavages that prevail.

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