The Measurement of Party Identification in the United Kingdom

Technical Details and Codebook

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**Background**
This data was collected for the project entitled ‘The measurement of party identification in the United Kingdom’ which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No. R 000 222 711). The aim of this project was to examine the effect of a different question wording on reports of party identification in Britain.

This data was collected between February 1999 and January 2000 by the Gallup Organisation on behalf of the University of Essex (Dr. John Bartle and Professor Ivor Crewe). The data was used to compare party identification levels with those derived from the traditional BES question, data on which was provided by Professor Harold Clarke of the University of North Texas. Data on this question was not deposited, but may be available upon request from Professor Clarke.

**Technical Details**
The Gallup survey was conducted by telephone using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Sampling was based on Random Digit Dialling. Gallup made at least five attempts per survey to contact a particular number or respondent.

The sample is representative of the adult population (19+) of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales).

Quotas were set for region.

At the tabulating stage the sample was weighted, where possible, to give the correct proportion by sex, age class, care ownership and home tenure within region.

**Questions**
The data relate to voters’ responses to the following two questions:

Q 1. If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

Q 2. Many people think of themselves as being Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat (or Nationalist), even if they don’t always support that party. How about you? Generally speaking do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat (or Nationalist), or don’t you think of yourself as any of these?

**Related Materials**
In another part of this project three focus groups were studied in order to assess their reaction to a wide variety of different questions relating to party identification. The resulting transcripts were deposited at the Qualidata Archive based at the University of Essex.
Reading
The following paper provides some of the background to this project and presents the findings from earlier research carried out in March 1998.


Contact details
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Codebook
This data set contains the aggregate party identification levels and vote intention figures for a 12 month period between February 1999 and January 2000.

CONID Proportion identifying with Conservative Party in response to Q2.
LABID Proportion identifying with Labour Party in response to Q2.
LIBID Proportion identifying with Liberal Democrat Party in response to Q2.
NOID Proportion identifying with no party and Don’t Knows in response to Q2.
CONVOTE Proportion intending to vote Conservative in response to Q1.
LABVOTE Proportion intending to vote Labour in response to Q1.
LIBVOTE Proportion intending to vote Liberal Democrat in response to Q1.
DKNONE Proportion intending to vote for none or don’t know in response to Q1.
Report on the measurement of party identification in Britain

Award No. R 000 222 711

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1. Background

The concept of 'party identification' has been central to debates about British voting behaviour ever since its introduction by Butler and Stokes in their path-breaking study Political Change in Britain (1969). In its original formulation, party identification was held to represent an enduring emotional attachment to a political party that was quite separate from current political preference. It was thought to be largely the product of both childhood socialisation and cumulative political experience, but unresponsive to current political preferences. In recent years party identification has been re-interpreted in more cognitive terms as representing a 'standing decision' or a running tally of retrospective evaluations (Fiorina, 1981; Achen, 1992). Whatever its interpretation however, the apparent temporal stability of party identification has been used to justify its designation as a 'long-term' factor influencing both voting behaviour and other contemporary opinions. It has also permitted the construction of vote models using relatively straightforward recursive models (Miller and Shanks, 1996).

The concept of party identification was imported from the United States where it had been applied with great success by Campbell et al in their classic study, The American Voter (1960). Evidence from the United States suggested that voters readily distinguished between their enduring sense of identification and current political preference, since those who switched vote in any pair of elections tended to (1) retain their prior sense of party identification and (2) return 'home' to their party after the short-term forces that had caused them to 'defect' have vanished (see also Converse, 1964). Moreover, a large - and from the 1960s increasing - portion of the electorate apparently rejected an identification and chose to describe themselves as 'Independents' even though they expressed a current preference or vote intention (Nie et al., 1979; Keith et al., 1992).

When the concept of party identification was applied in Britain however, Butler and Stokes found that (1) those who switched vote also tended to switch their reported party identification and (2) the 'homing tendency' was far weaker. Moreover, very few voters appeared to classify themselves as non-identifiers. Later aggregate level evidence from monthly opinion poll data has suggested that party identification is only 'mildly exogenous' to current political preference (Clarke et al., 1997). Butler and Stokes (1974: 44) concluded that 'British voters are less likely than the American to make distinctions between their current electoral choices and more general partisan dispositions' (see also Brynin and Sanders, 1995; Johnston and Pattie, 1996, Bartle, 1999). They attributed this to differences between the two party systems, such as the greater number of elections in the United States, where ignorance about the specific candidates forced voters to rely on party labels and 'generalised beliefs about their ties to party' (1974: 44). It has also suggested that the unique practice of registering as a 'Republican' or 'Democrat' in America compelled many voters to give some consideration to their long-term loyalties.

Other analysts have argued that the British voters are just as likely as their American cousins to distinguish between their enduring loyalties and their current preference, but that this is obscured by limitations of the survey methods employed. It has been suggested, for example, that differences in the order in which the vote and party identification questions are asked between the United States and Britain can account for the apparent inability to distinguish between the two (Heath and Pierce, 1992). In the United States the NES first asks about the voter's party identification and then about their vote. It therefore moves from the general (party identification) to the specific (current preference). In Britain, the BES questionnaire reverses that order; asking first about vote and then about party identification. It therefore moves from the specific (how one voted) to the general (party identification). This order is held to be far less psychologically satisfying and causes respondents to bring their reported party
identification into line with previously reported vote. However, later analysis (McAllister and Wattenberg, 1995) has demonstrated that this makes little or no difference to reported party identification, at least with the current BES question.

Other scholars have suggested that differences between America and Britain may be the result of differences in the response categories offered to respondents (Johnston, 1992). The NES question, for example, reads:

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

While the BES question reads:

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal, or what?

The BES question contains no equivalent of ‘Independent’. The reason for this difference is simply that Butler and Stokes found that the word ‘Independent’ failed to resonate with the British public. They noted that when Gallup offered the option ‘Independent’ to people in 1966, only 3 per cent ‘given this explicit prompting, chose Independent’ (1974: 44 fn. 1). They also asserted that there was ‘no real British equivalent’ and that alternatives such as ‘floating voter’ were a ‘term of art’ (1974: 44). They therefore omitted ‘Independent’, while retaining the ‘or what’ clause. Thus while the NES question has a clear non-identification option, the BES only has a much vaguer ‘or what’? The very vagueness of this option deters its selection. Indeed, it is difficult to see how one can answer the question ‘or what’? Respondents have to devise their own response category, such as ‘I am none of these’, ‘I’m an Independent’ or simply shrug
their shoulders. However, it is probably simpler to bring reported party identification into line with vote – especially since they have reported their vote (or vote intention) just a few moments earlier. The practical effect of this may be that reported party identification is brought into line with previously reported vote – just as Butler and Stokes, Brynin and Sanders (1993) and Clarke et al., (1997) observe.

Experiments in question wording have demonstrated that differences in question order, question wording and response categories can all have substantial influence on people’s responses (Zaller, 1992; Schuman and Presser, 1996). We therefore believe that it is vitally important to improve our measures of this important theoretical construct.

Objectives

The aims of this study were (1) to assess the validity of various measures that had previously been used to measure party identification and (2) to arrive at recommendations as to the measurement of the concept in future studies of British electoral behaviour.

Methods

1. We commissioned the Gallup Organisation to collect monthly data on vote intention and party identification using a new measure of party identification that had been pre-tested in March 1998 (Bartle, 1999). We agreed to exchange our data with Professor Harold Clarke (University of North Texas) for whom was Gallup were already collecting data on party identification using the traditional BES measure. This ensured that the two measures were collected using exactly the same survey methodology.
2. We also commissioned MORI to undertake three focus groups in order to examine voters’ reactions to three measures of party identification and to establish what sort of question was most likely to allow voters to distinguish between their current political preferences and their enduring political allegiances.

Results

Opinion Poll Data

The Gallup Organisation collected responses to the BES and Essex questions each month from February 1999 to January 2000. The surveys were conducted by telephone using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Sampling was based on random digit dialling with Gallup making at least five attempts per survey to contact a particular number or respondent. The sample was representative of the adult population aged 19 and above in Great Britain.²

The full wording of the questions are set out below:

The BES Question

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal, or what?
The Essex Question

Many people think of themselves as being Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat (or Nationalist), even if they don't always support that party. How about you? Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat (or Nationalist), or don't you think of yourself as any of these?

The results of this experiment are set out in Table 1. To summarise our findings:

1. The vote intention figures are virtually identical for both groups, suggesting that any differences between them are not the result of differences in the partisan composition of the samples.

   [TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

2. The Essex question elicited a far higher proportion of non-identifiers than the traditional BES question. Over the full 12 months of the experiment Gallup suggested that the Essex question elicited up to three times as many non-identifiers (an average of 32.0 per cent, compared with 11.7 per cent with the BES question). When respondents are provided with a clear non-identification response category they take it.

3. The Essex question elicited a far lower proportion of Labour identifiers than the BES item. Over the full 12 months of the experiment the average identification with Labour was 44 per cent with the BES question and 31 per cent with the Essex question. This suggests that a large portion of those who indicate that they are

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\(^2\) Due to a computer programming error at an early stage Gallup did not interview those aged 18. This
Labour identifiers in response to the BES question may not really be identifiers at all, but temporary supporters who have been persuaded to vote Labour by more short-term factors (e.g., the personal appeal of the party leaders, party images and policies).

4. The Essex question suggests that, on average, fully 44 per cent of young voters (aged 19-34) are non-identifiers, compared with just 18 per cent as measured by the BES question at the last election. This suggests that a large portion of the youngest generation of voters are currently unaligned and potentially volatile in their behaviour. It is unclear whether this is a ‘life-cycle’ or a ‘cohort’ effect given the data currently available, but this finding suggests a new and exciting area of research.

5. The aggregate levels of identification – as indicated by their standard deviations – are more variable in the case of the Essex question, suggesting that they are slightly less stable than the BES. Since party identification is an enduring attachment, one would naturally expect the more valid measure of party identification to be more stable. However, it may be relevant to note that the standard deviations for the vote intentions are also greater in the case of the Essex group, suggesting that some other – non-obvious – factor may be at work. In the absence of individual level data on the stability of party identification, the aggregate figures cannot be conclusive in themselves. Evidence from the focus groups provides good grounds for believing that the Essex measure may represent a more valid measure of enduring party identification.

6. On average, fully 88 per cent of those who currently intended to vote Conservative thought of themselves as a Conservative identifier according to the BES question.
Equally, 83 per cent of those who currently intended to vote Labour thought of themselves as Labour identifiers and 68 per cent of those who currently intended to vote Liberal though of themselves as Liberal according to the BES question. The equivalent figures using the Essex question as the measure of party identification are all lower 71, 56 and 42 per cent respectively. The Essex question therefore suggests that a lot of Labour’s current support is the result of more ‘short-term’ factors such as evaluations of economic competence or the party leaders. These results are substantively important and offer a very different - and intuitively plausible - interpretation of contemporary electoral politics. For example, Labour currently leads the Conservatives by 42 points to 20 points among ‘non-identifiers’. If William Hague can merely reverse these figures he can cut Labour’s lead (which in January 2000 stood at 19 points) to a mere 3 points. Unfortunately his party has averaged merely 16.5 points on average in the last year.

Focus Groups

One focus group took place at Ipswich (26 April 1999) and two at Nottingham South and Rushcliffe (12 May 1999). The group members were selected on the basis of strength of identity (as measured by the BES question) and age, since these variables have been found to be related to political awareness and we wished to have relatively homogenous groups who would be willing to discuss the issues (Bartle, 1997). Participants were given £20 for attending the groups. Full details of each group’s characteristics are in Table 2.

Before discussing the questions the moderator (Simon Atkinson of MORI) asked participants to describe their area and some local issues. Once participants were feeling relaxed, we moved on to discuss the questions. Full transcripts of these discussions will shortly be deposited with the Qualidata Archive at the University of Essex for consideration by interested scholars.
The BES Question

In our original proposal we argued that there were two major problems with this question (1) The ‘Generally speaking…’ clause failed to emphasise the extended temporal dimension of the concept and (2) The ‘or what’ did not indicate to respondents that it was perfectly possible not to ‘think of yourself’ as belonging to any particular party and did not reveal a self-identity. Our findings suggest:

1. Most participants thought the clause ‘Generally speaking…’ in the BES question referred to something that is ‘long-term’ in nature. It therefore appears that our initial concern – that respondents did not realise that the identity had an extended temporal dimension – was largely misplaced. However, among the group of ‘not very strong’ and ‘non-identifiers’ there was some genuine confusion about the time horizon implied in the question. Some thought that it was referring to current preferences. Given the relationship between political awareness and strength of partisanship (Bartle, 1997), this suggests that voters with low levels of political awareness are either less likely to distinguish between their long-term allegiances and short-term preferences or less likely to understand questions that try to reveal them. This heterogeneity of interpretation suggests that the BES question is unsatisfactory.

2. Most participants thought the ‘or what’ clause in the BES question was unduly restrictive and that it referred to simply ‘other political parties’, rather than providing them with a clear non-identification option. It appears reasonable to argue that all but
the most determined of respondents will bring their reported party identification ‘into line’ with their previously reported vote. Thus, for some people at least, their sense of identity is not the result of a self-identity, but one imposed by the question itself. The BES question may therefore overstate the incidence identifications in the electorate.

3. Some participants also regarded the ‘or what’ clause as being designed to identify the politically unaware or ignorant. The suggested that they would report a party identification because they could ‘never think of themselves as an ‘or what’”. This form of ‘social desirability response set’ again would lead to the overstatement of identifications (Schuman and Presser, 1998: 110).

The problems outlined in 2 and 3 above, may help explain why:

(a) The relationship between party identification and vote in Britain is so strong; and

(b) Vote and reported party identification move together in Britain.

In sum, the current BES question is coercive. It lacks even basic ‘face validity’ since the identity is imposed on the respondent by the question form.

The Essex Question

This question was intended to clarify the extended temporal dimension by (a) including a pre-amble making it clear that it is possible to currently support one party while thinking of oneself as another (‘Many people think of themselves… ’) and (b) inviting them to stop
and think about the question in order to canvass longer-term considerations (‘How about you?’). This question was also intended to clarify that it is perfectly possible to ‘think of yourself’ as not belonging to any party by including the phrase ‘or don’t you think of yourself as any of these?’

Our findings suggest that, while most participants, greatly preferred the ‘or don’t you think of yourself as any of these clause’, they expressed the following reservations:

1. Most participants regarded the question as too long and some thought that its very length might introduce confusion in the minds of some survey respondents. Some thought that the ‘stop and think’ clause was redundant and some even regarded it as containing two slightly different questions.

2. Some participants thought the use of the word ‘Many’ may cause some people to think that it is normal to ‘think of themselves as being Conservative, Labour etc’ and reduce the number of self-reported non-identifiers. ‘Social desirability response set’ may be at work, though this may be reduced by replacing ‘many’ with ‘some’.

3. Some participants thought that listing the major parties in the question was not appropriate, since those who identified with a minor party would be deterred from naming it. (It is certainly interesting to note that similar problems have plagued the measurement of party identification in multi-party systems such as the Netherlands (Thomassen, 1976)).

The Leaning Question

The third question reads: ‘Many people lean towards a particular party for a long time, although they may occasionally vote for a different party. How about you? Do you in
general lean towards a particular party? If so, which? This question had previously been used on the 1992 BES cross-section study, forming part of the self-completion supplement. It was included in the focus group discussion because it is representative of the more ‘open-ended’ format which asks respondents to name the parties without prompting. It therefore offered an interesting contrast with the BES and Essex questions.

Unfortunately, since this was the last question to be asked, many of the focus groups comments merely repeated those made earlier about the BES and Essex questions. Moreover, by this stage the attention of most group members was flagging and so the responses were less informative. We therefore think that a high degree of uncertainty must attach to our findings about this item.

Some members of the groups were particularly supportive of this question, since it did not lead people by listing the names of the parties. However, the groups did have the following reservations:

1. Some participants thought the question too long and potentially ambiguous.

2. It was also suggested that the use of the words ‘Most people...’ would prompt some people to follow this cue and report that they ‘lean toward’ a particular party in order to appear just like ‘most people’. Social desirability response set is therefore a potential problem, though – once again – this may be removed by the use of the word ‘some’ instead of ‘many’.

3. Some participants voiced doubts about the appropriateness of the ‘lean towards’ language. It was thought to be unnatural and not reflect the ordinary language of politics.
Participants Suggestions

Toward the end of the focus group meeting participants were given the opportunity to make their own suggestions as to what sort of question would do the job of revealing party identification. Some suggested asking if people were ‘floating voters’ or ‘dyed in the wool’ supporters. These suggestions are problematic, since they assumed that everyone will share similar interpretations of those terms. However, one participant in the ‘fairly strong’ identifiers group suggested that a hybrid question of the form:

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Nationalist or don’t you think of yourself as any of these?

We believe his question would have a number of advantages.

1. It is shorter than the current Essex question and, as a result, possibly less ambiguous.

2. Adding the word ‘usually’ helps clarify the extended temporal dimension.

3. The resulting question would be very similar in form to the question traditionally used in the NES and thus permit comparison.

4. The inclusion of the open-ended ‘or don’t you think of yourself as any of these’ would eliminate the more coercive ‘or what’ clause.
5. The very shortness of the question would mean that it is far more likely to be used by commercial polling organisations.

We therefore believe that urgent research is required on this new question.

Conclusions
The exploratory nature of this study means that we should be wary of drawing strong conclusions. While we have unearthed more evidence we certainly do not regard our study as having - in any way - settled all the issues relating to the measurement of party identification. In particular, we are aware that we only have monthly data on two party identification questions and that our focus groups were too small to allow us to generalise to the population as a whole. However, we find the focus group evidence highly suggestive for the simple reason that - in many cases - they point to some ‘obvious’ defect with the questions used. These caveats aside we offer the following conclusions:

1. Different questions produce different answers (Converse and Pierce, 1985). It is therefore vitally important that researchers pay careful attention to the details of measuring party identification and specify their assumptions about their measurement model.

2. The current BES measure of party identification is fundamentally flawed. It does not allow non-identifiers to easily report their non-identification and may coerce them into accepting a party identification they do not hold (Blais, 1999). The current BES question is therefore of little use in explaining either individual vote decisions or
aggregate outcomes (Bartle, 1998). Those interested in maintaining time series data on this measure could commission special surveys at small cost, but it has not place on the BES schedule.

3. We have not decisively settled on the most appropriate measure of party identification. At this stage we are agnostic as to whether the major parties should be listed in the replacement question; though preliminary evidence from the BHPS suggests that responses to such questions are unstable over time. The BHPS question reads:

   Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one particular party?

   Those who answer ‘yes’ are then asked:

   Which one?

Responses to this question indicate that around one-half of respondents are non-identifiers - even higher than that suggested by responses to the Essex question. However, responses to the BHPS question appear unstable. Only 79 per cent of those who responded ‘yes’ in 1991 also responded ‘yes’ in 1992, and this fell to 70 per cent in 1993. This apparent instability may be removed by the addition of the adverb ‘usually’ to read, ‘Generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as a supporter of any one particular party?’ However, this modified BHPS question needs to be tested alongside others.
Future research priorities

1. It appears to us that the Essex question – or some modified version of it – is potentially a more valid measure of party identification than the BES question. At this stage however, we are unwilling to dismiss the more open-ended question such as that typified by the BHPS question. If party identification is a psychological reality, then the more open-ended questions are arguably the most effective way of measuring it. We therefore require more data. In particular, we need a three-wave panel survey evidence in order to assess the temporal stability of vote and party identification as measured by:

   (a) The Essex Question.

   (b) The short-Essex question.

   (c) The modified BHPS question.

We can then select the ‘better’ measure according to the three criteria set out on p. 2 above (whether defectors retain their prior party identification, whether identifiers ‘home’ and the proportion of the electorate that are classified as ‘non-identifiers’). Yet even such an ‘ideal’ study may not provide conclusive evidence, since if nothing happens in the ‘real world’ to disturb vote intentions the tests may not provide clear-cut answers. It may therefore take considerable time to refine our measures of party identification. However, the theoretical and empirical pay-offs of such an experiment are enormous.

2. Most researchers recognise that it is often misleading to rely upon a single – potentially fallible – measure of an underlying non-observable theoretical construct.
We therefore believe that future research should give urgent consideration to a measure of party identification that is based on a battery of questions. The advantages of this approach would be:

(a) We would not be placing undue faith in a single item.

(b) Such a battery may also be used to distinguish between two different sources of party identification: (i) the emotional (or affective) identifier as set out by Campbell et al. in *The American Voter* and (ii) the cognitive identifier of the sort suggested by Fiorina in *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (1981) and defended by Achen (1992). This approach has recently been used in the United States and could be applied (with some modification) in Britain (Greene, 1999a; Greene, 1999b).

**Activities**

1. A paper entitled ‘Focus groups and measures of party identification: an exploratory study’ was presented to the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties conference held at the University of Northampton in September 1999.

2. A revised copy of the paper ‘Focus groups and measures of party identification: an exploratory study’ was submitted to the journal *Electoral Studies*. The author (John Bartle) is awaiting a response from the editors.
3. A paper incorporating all the project findings (provisional title, 'Measuring party identification (or not, as they case may be)') is being prepared at the moment. It is intended to submit this paper to either The American Political Science Review, The American Journal of Political Science or The British Journal of Political Science.

4. A preliminary version of the paper mentioned in 3 above was presented at the Department of Government seminar at the University of Essex on 21 March 2000.

5. A revised version of the paper mentioned in 3 will be presented at the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties conference held at Edinburgh in September 2000. We will convene a special panel on party identification that will include Professor Harold Clarke (University of North Texas) and Professor David Sanders (University of Essex).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BES Mean</th>
<th>BES s.d.</th>
<th>Essex Mean</th>
<th>Essex s.d</th>
<th>Difference (BES - Essex)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Con Identification</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>23.6</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<td>(-16.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-20.3</td>
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Table 2 Characteristics of the focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Strength of Identification</th>
<th>Date of Focus Group</th>
<th>No. in Group</th>
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<td>&gt;40</td>
<td>Fairly Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nottm. South</td>
<td>&lt;40</td>
<td>Not very strong &amp; Non-Identifiers</td>
<td>12 May 1999</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rushcliffe</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>12 May 1999</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No age restriction was imposed, due to the very small number of very strong identifiers in the population.
Bibliography


PARTY IDENTIFICATION FOCUS GROUPS

Topic Guide

Introduction
Name
Family etc
Work Status
Length of time in area
(if appropriate where they moved from)
Mention (very generally) what we are trying to do

Fill in self completion questionnaire - comprises 5 questions on separate sheets:
1) the Michigan question
2) the “Gallup” question (“many people think of...”)
3) the “many people lean toward a particular party” question
4) Which party, if any, did you vote for at the last GE...
5) Which party would you vote for if there were a GE tomorrow
Ask respondents to write down any comments about the questions on the sheets
- we will come back to talk about these questions later...

Party Support
All have been invited because they support a political party (tailor as appropriate)
Go round room - which party do you support? PROBE FOR “VOTING HISTORY”
- When did you first vote for that party?
- Why did you make that choice?
Why do you support that party?
PROBE FOR
- Habit/always voted that way (did people’s parents vote that way as well)
- leaders
- policies
- the nature of the party
- reputation in the country
- reputation locally
- etc
(DEVELOP INTO SMALL SELF COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE - AT END)
- To what extent is their choice of party a “positive” choice, or is it more a reflection of their dislike of other parties?

The local area
- What is the name of this constituency?
- Who is the local MP? What party do they represent?
- How long has the constituency been held by this MP/by their party?
- Are they doing a good job/bad job? How much do they hear about what their MP does?
- Do views on local MP impact on the way they vote? What about other people living in the area?

**Elections**
- Did they vote in 1997 General Election?
- Do they always vote at general elections?
- When are next local Elections?
- When are next European Elections?
- Do people vote in the same way as at general elections - if not, why? What considerations come into place?

**Information and Communication**
- How interested are they in politics
- Where do they get their information/views from
- Which sources of information do they trust
- Do they get information from political parties about local issues/campaigns? What do they think of this information?

**Party Identification**

USE FLIPCHART
- What do people think this phrase means?
GIVE SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE IDEA
- Do people stay loyal to parties through their lives? (Think about your friends/families). Is this due to habit, or because of deep-seated commitment to the party

**Exploring the different questions**

**1. Michigan Question**

- What do they think of this question? Does it work?
- Does it mean the same to all respondents?
- Is it clear? What, if anything, is unclear?

- What do they think “generally speaking” refers to
PROBE FOR
- over most issues
- over most elections (what kind of timescale)
- overall assessment of where they currently stand

- What do they think “or what” refers to:
  - or what other parties
  - or don’t they think of themselves as...
  - How do they react to the phrase “or what”?

- How many people would not currently vote for party they “identify with” (refer to Question 5)?
- What, if anything, do they see as the main difference between the Michigan question and the party support question (ie Question 5)
- How many people have voted for a party other than the one they “identify with” (refer to Question 4) and their election history

2. “Gallup” Question

- What do they think of this question? Does it work?
- Does it mean the same to all respondents?
- Is it clear? What, if anything, is unclear?
- Is further clarification needed?
- Is it too long?

- What do they think of the term “Many people....” Is this helpful, or do they think this invites people to go on to “think of themselves as” (TRY TO GET SPONTANEOUS REACTIONS: PROMPT IF NECESSARY)

- What do they think “generally speaking” refers to for this question (compare with Michigan question if necessary)
PROBE FOR
- over most issues
- over most elections (what kind of timescale)
- overall assessment of where they currently stand

- What do they think “or don’t you think of yourself as any of these” refers to:
PROBE FOR
- no party at all
- other parties
- How do they react to the phrase “or don’t you think of yourself...? compare with Michigan question)

- How many people would not currently vote for party they “think of themselves as” (refer to Question 5)?
- What, if anything, do they see as the main difference between this question and the party support question (ie Question 5)
- How many people have voted for a party other than the one they “identify with” (refer to Question 4) and their election history

- To sum up - what do they think of this question, compared with Michigan question
- What do they think of having the names of the party read out?

3. Many people lean towards...

- What do they think of this question? Does it work?
- Does it mean the same to all respondents?
- Is it clear? What, if anything, is unclear?
- Is further clarification needed?
- Is it too long?
- What do they think “leaning toward” refers to
  PROBE FOR
  - over most issues
  - over most elections (what kind of timescale)
  - overall assessment of where they currently stand
- Is “leaning toward” different from “thinking of yourselves as”
- How? In what way?

- What are the main differences between this and the “Gallup question”
  IF NOT MENTIONED SPONTANEOUSLY PROMPT:
- What is the difference between referring to ‘vote’ rather than ‘support’. Does this matter? Does this make a difference to the way they think about their answers?

- How many people would not currently vote for party they “think of themselves as” (refer to Question 5)?
- What, if anything, do they see as the main difference between this question and the party support question (ie Question 5)
- How many people have voted for a party other than the one they “identify with” (refer to Question 4 and their election history)

- To sum up - what do they think of this question, compared with Michigan and Gallup questions. Which, if any, do they think works best?

**Finally**

Any other issues we should be covering?
Have they changed the way they respond to the phrase “party identification”?
(Refer to flipchart)
Talk about aims of groups/probe for reactions
How do people feel if they vote for a party other than the one they identify with?

**SELF COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE TO SUM UP WHY THEY IDENTIFY WITH THE PARTY THEY DO/WHY THEY IDENTIFY VERY/FAIRLY STRONGLY ETC**