

CURRENT RESEARCH

This section of the *Quarterly* is reserved for brief reports of research in progress, discussions of unsolved problems, methodological studies, and public opinion data not extensively analyzed or interpreted. Succinct case histories are welcomed, as well as hypotheses and insights that may be useful to other students of public opinion. Usually, material in this section will be shorter, more informal, and more tentative than in preceding pages of the *Quarterly*.

HOW BEING INTERVIEWED AFFECTS VOTING: AN EXPERIMENT*

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Public opinion researchers and other social scientists are accustomed to interviewing a respondent and then once they have the data, forgetting about what effect such an interview might have upon the respondent. For most respondents, however, an interview is a very unusual event and could have important consequences for his or her future attitudes and behavior. Yet, so far as we know, only one social scientist has examined the behavior of respondents after being interviewed.

While attempting to assess the extent of response invalidity in the 1964 Survey Research Center (SRC) election survey, Clausen seren-

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dipitously discovered that persons interviewed before the election by the SRC voted in greater proportion than those not interviewed beforehand.¹

Clausen arrived at this finding by process of elimination. He noted that post-presidential-election surveys from 1948 to 1964 consistently overestimated the official turnout by 12 to 15 per cent. By comparing his 1964 data with those from a contemporaneous United States Bureau of the Census survey, correcting for differences between the sample bases of the two surveys and the official voting estimate, and checking the report of SRC respondents against actual voting records, Clausen was able to rule out or control for the following possible distorting factors: (1) non-interview biases—differences in voting rates between the 75 per cent of the SRC sample who were interviewed and the 25 per cent who, for one reason or another, could not be interviewed; and (2) response invalidity—respondents lying about or misreporting their actual vote. Yet, even after these distortions were dealt with, the SRC survey still overestimated the voter turnout by approximately 3.5 per cent.

Clausen then tentatively concluded that the SRC subjects had truly voted at a higher rate than both the Census Bureau subjects and the population as a whole. He attributed this difference to the effects of the pre-election interview, which only the SRC respondents had experienced. To account for this interview effect, he proposed what he called a "stimulus hypothesis,"² which held that the interview itself aroused the respondent's interest and "awakened his citizen conscience sufficiently" to send him to the polls.³

The critical reader, however, might have reason to doubt both the finding and the "stimulus hypothesis" that Clausen invoked to account for it. We shall examine the finding here and address ourselves to the "stimulus hypothesis" in the discussion below. The finding may be challenged on at least three grounds. First, though the SRC and Census Bureau samples were large, the data used to examine sources of response invalidity were at times only rough estimates and the final effect attributed to interviewing was both small and possibly unstable. Second, even if the unexplained effect were stable, Clausen arrived at it by process of elimination; thus, other sources of overestimation of voter turnout, neglected by Clausen, could reduce the effect even further. Finally, while his comparison of the SRC data with the Census Bureau data approximated a quasi-experimental

¹ Aage R. Clausen, "Response Validity: Vote Report," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 32, 1968, pp. 588-606.

² Clausen, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

design⁴ in which the former were interviewed before and after the election and the latter only after, the two surveys were based on independent samples from two *approximately* equal universes; hence, one cannot rule out the possibility that, despite Clausen's careful work, the small effect could have resulted from sample differences.

While these technical criticisms cast doubt on the finding on interview effect, the empirical studies of campaign techniques lend it some support. Both experimental⁵ and correlational⁶ studies of techniques for turning out the vote have found that party activity, and especially personal contact with voters, can increase the voting rate, at least in local elections.

The results of Clausen's work and the findings of the campaign researchers suggest that when a potential voter is personally contacted by someone from the electoral apparatus, an opinion interviewer or a campaign worker, *something* happens to increase the likelihood that the contacted individual will go to the polls. The experiment described below attempted to demonstrate the interview effect more directly than Clausen could. Three possible explanations for this effect, are also discussed.

METHOD

Subjects. As part of other research on ethnic identification, the experimenters randomly sampled 104 subjects with Italian surnames from the list of registered voters in the 14th ward in New Haven, Connecticut. The subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental interview group and the comparison noninterview group, thus

⁴ Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1966.

⁵ I. M. Gertzog, "The Electoral Consequences of a Local Party Organization's Registration Campaign," *Polity*, Vol. 3, 1970, pp. 247-264; C. W. Hartman, "A Field Experiment on the Comparative Effectiveness of 'Emotional' and 'Rational' Political Leaflets in Determining Election Results," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 31, 1936/37, pp. 99-114; S. J. Eldersveld, "Experimental Propaganda Techniques and Voting Behavior," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 50, 1956, pp. 154-165; S. J. Eldersveld and R. W. Dodge, "Personal Contact or Mail Propaganda?," in Daniel Katz *et al.*, eds., *Public Opinion and Propaganda*, New York, Dryden Press, 1954, pp. 532-542. Also see J. B. McConahay, "Experimental Research," in J. Knutsen, ed., *Handbook of Political Psychology*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1973, pp. 356-382.

⁶ M. F. Gosnell, *Getting Out the Vote*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1927; David E. Price and Michael Lupfer, "Volunteers for Gore: The Impact of a Precinct-Level Canvass in Three Tennessee Cities," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 35, 1973, pp. 410-438; G. Kramer, "The Effects of Precinct-Level Canvassing on Voter Behavior," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 34, 1970, pp. 560-572; W. J. Crotty, "Party Effort and Its Impact on the Vote," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65, 1971, pp. 439-450.

assuring lack of bias across groups far better than any method of matching could. It also allowed an estimate of the inequality of groups on all dimensions at the time of randomization through the statistics that test for their post-experimental manipulation differences.⁷

The interview. Eight graduate students interviewed the experimental subjects on their preferences for several real and imaginary candidates for public office. Although the interviewers were not unaware of the hypothesis guiding this experiment, it was not salient to them because they believed they were aiding research into ethnic identification and voting preference among Italians.

The interviews, which were completed in about two weeks, were conducted at the subject's home. If the subject was not at home but the interviewer could speak to another member of the household, he described his purpose and promised to return. If no one was home at the subject's address, the interviewer returned. Interviewers made between one and four tries to contact the subject; an average of two visits took place before each subject was contacted. Four subjects could not be contacted at all; two refused to be interviewed but had some indirect contact with the interviewer and knew that someone was interested in their political opinions. The subjects who refused to be interviewed or were not contacted were retained in the experimental group for all the analyses that follow.

When respondents were contacted, they were given a standardized introduction to the interview based on recommendations from the SRC's *Interviewer's Manual*.⁸ Interviewers introduced themselves as students from Yale University's political science department gathering baseline data in order to study the effects of campaigning on electoral preference. Subjects were assured that they would not be contacted again by the interviewer.

Questions about political preferences, party affiliation, ethnic identification, and other demographic data were asked. The political preference questions required the subjects to choose between pairs of fictitious candidates for public office and between the potential Democratic and Republican candidates for the 1970 United States Senate race in Connecticut.

Data collection. The dependent variable was the voting rate of the experimental and comparison groups in two primary elections. In May, about two weeks after the interviewing, there was a Democratic primary election to determine that party's candidate for the United States House of Representatives from the third congressional

⁷ Campbell and Stanley, *op. cit.*, 1966.

⁸ Survey Research Center, *Interviewer's Manual*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF GROUP VOTING IN PRIMARY

<i>Experimental Condition^a</i>	<i>May Primary</i>		<i>August Primary</i>	
	<i>Total N</i>	<i>Per Cent Voting</i>	<i>Total N</i>	<i>Per Cent Voting</i>
Ward ^b	1686	17%	1702	31%
Experimental	52	48	52	50
Comparison	52	21	52	31

^a Voting in the experimental condition significantly differed from voting in the comparison condition for both the May and the August primaries ($z = 2.95$, $p < .005$, 2 tailed; and $z = 1.99$, $p < .05$, 2 tailed). The Primary by Experimental Condition interaction was not significant ($z = .84$, n.s.).

^b Excludes experimental and comparison group.

district. In August, about four months after the interviewing, Connecticut held a primary for the Democratic candidate to the United States Senate.

For each of the two primary elections, the investigators submitted a list of the subjects to a Democratic party official who examined party records to determine whether each subject had voted. The party official did not know the hypotheses of the study or the treatment condition of the subjects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the experiment are summarized in Table 1. In general, the interview effect was replicated. In the May primary which immediately followed the interviewing, the turnout rate among the experimental subjects was more than twice that of the comparison subjects ($z = 2.95$, $p < .005$, 2 tailed)⁹ while comparison subjects did not differ significantly from the turnout rate in the ward as a whole.¹⁰

The results of the August primary were similar. The experimental group voted more than the control group ($z = 1.99$, $p < .025$, 2

⁹ The z test for proportions used to test the interview effect in May and in August was suggested by R. P. Abelson. (See E. J. Langer and R. P. Abelson, "The Semantics of Asking a Favor: How to Succeed in Getting Help Without Really Dying," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 24, 1972, pp. 26-32.) The z test for the interaction (date of primary by experimental condition) was computed by a similar procedure using a correction in the "within subject" or error variation for the correlated May and August proportions. (See C. Gilson and R. P. Abelson, "The Subjective Use of Inductive Evidence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, 1965, pp. 301-310.)

¹⁰ The generally low voting rates were due partly to low interest in primary

tailed). While the difference between the experimental and control groups was smaller in the August election than in the May election, the decrease in the size of the interview effect was not statistically significant (for the interaction, $z = .84$, n.s.).

These data provided unequivocal support for the hypothesis that being interviewed increases the likelihood of voting in a subsequent election. The mechanism or mechanisms for the interview effect, however, are still unclear. We shall suggest and discuss three plausible hypotheses for future research: Clausen's stimulus hypothesis, an alienation reduction hypothesis, and a self-concept hypothesis. There are, of course, other possible hypotheses that might be suggested by the data now that the outcome is known.

Stimulus and salience. Clausen did not spell out his stimulus hypothesis in any detail. In his summary statement, the hypothesis was little more than a restatement of the results: ". . . the pre-election interview stimulates voting participation among the least interested voters, who are most susceptible to short-term influences."¹¹ We can infer, however, that what he had in mind was a sequence in which the interview raised the salience of politics in the respondent's life. As a result, people not usually interested in politics became more aware of the upcoming election and of their class or group interests in it. This, along with an aroused "citizen conscience," spurred them to vote.

The plausability of this hypothesis appears quite low to us for two reasons. First, in Clausen's own data there were contradictions. As the stimulus hypothesis predicted, and as Clausen noted, the interview effect was larger among whites than among blacks and declined among whites as education increased (11 per cent for grade school *versus* 1 per cent for college). Since interest in and knowledge of politics generally increase with education,¹² and since blacks were bombarded with attempts to make them aware of their interest in defeating Goldwater, both findings were consistent with the stimulus hypothesis. However, among the 10,340 blacks in the two samples, the interview effect increased with education and the biggest effect of all occurred among college-educated blacks (1 per cent for grade school *versus* 21 per cent for college-educated blacks). This is incon-

elections and partly to the fact that only Democrats could vote. Approximately 15 per cent of our experimental sample was not eligible to vote in a Democratic primary because it consisted of Independents or registered Republicans.

¹¹ Clausen, *op. cit.*, p. 606.

¹² Cf. D. O. Sears, "Political Behavior," in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson, eds., *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 2nd ed., Vol. 5, Mass., Addison-Wesley, 1969, pp. 315-458; and P. E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in D. E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*, New York, Free Press, 1964, pp. 206-261.

sistent with the stimulus or salience hypothesis because data from about the same era revealed that college-educated blacks were quite knowledgeable and sophisticated politically and were highly politicized.¹³ Thus, among blacks—the group that was already most political and for whom the election would be most salient—the impact of being interviewed had the most powerful effect.

The plausibility of the stimulus hypothesis is further reduced by our data. If only a simple stimulus or salience mechanism were operating, then the novelty of the interview would wear off in the four-month interval between the interview and the August election. Hence, the voting rate in the experimental group would decline over time. This was not the case. The experimental group differed significantly from the control group in August as well as May, and the August interview effect was not significantly less than the May effect. Furthermore, 24 of the 25 subjects in the experimental group who voted in the May election also voted in the August election. These data suggest that the effects of the interview were long-lasting and strong, and cannot be attributed simply to the temporary salience of politics that may follow a political interview.

Alienation reduction and self-concept change. Two additional explanations for the impact of personal contact upon voter turnout are suggested by alienation theory¹⁴ and self-concept theory.¹⁵ The alienation reduction hypothesis proposes that personal contact alters the individual's perception of the political environment. Because a representative from the environment has contacted him, the individual becomes less likely to perceive the electoral process as distant and isolated from him. Personal contact breaks the psychological barrier that many citizens see as cutting them off from participation in the political process. This reduction of alienation, along the isolation dimension, therefore, increases the person's likelihood of voting.

A self-concept hypothesis suggests that after answering questions or interacting with the campaign worker, the individual begins to

¹³ D. O. Sears and J. B. McConahay, "The Politics of Discontent," in Nathan Cohen, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots*, New York, Praeger, 1970, pp. 413-479.

¹⁴ M. Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 24, 1959, pp. 783-791; K. Keniston, *The Uncommitted*, New York, Dell, 1960; A. W. Finifter, "Dimensions of Political Alienation," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, 1970, pp. 389-411; W. Erbe, "Social Involvement and Political Activity," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 29, 1964, pp. 199-215; M. E. Olsen, "Two Categories of Political Alienation," *Social Forces*, Vol. 47, 1949, pp. 288-299.

¹⁵ L. A. McArthur, C. A. Kiesler, and B. P. Cook, "Acting on an Attitude as a Function of Self-Percept and Inequity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 12, 1969, pp. 295-302; J. L. Freedman and S. C. Fraser, "Compliance Without Pressure," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 4, 1966, pp. 195-202.

view himself as more politically inclined than previously; having engaged in political activity, he begins to think of himself as politically active, somewhat involved in politics, and this increases the likelihood that he votes. Both the alienation reduction and the self-concept hypotheses involve altered perceptions. In the first case, the perception of the political environment is altered and in the second, it is the perception of the self.

Though the stimulus hypothesis cannot account for the strength of the interview effect on educated blacks or the persistence of the interview effect in our experiment, both the alienation reduction and the self-perception hypotheses can. Paradoxically, college-educated blacks in the mid 1960s were both politically sophisticated and highly disaffected and isolated from the American political system.¹⁶ If these blacks could be made to see the political system as inviting participation or to see themselves as the type of persons who normally do participate politically, the changed perception could be expected to increase powerfully the voting turnout from this stratum. In addition, both theories predict that the act of voting reinforces any changes in perception and thus maintains the increased voting turnout in subsequent elections.

While our data do not definitively distinguish between the alienation reduction and self-concept hypotheses, we think that alienation reduction is the most likely explanation for our experimental results. Our interviewers did not make any overt attempt to change the individual's self concept. They simply contacted the subjects and asked them questions. Hence, the rather powerful cues and manipulations usually required to manipulate self concept were absent or severely limited during our interviews.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

This experiment found that being interviewed by a public opinion pollster increased the probability that the respondent would vote in subsequent elections and we have suggested that this effect was mediated by a reduction in political alienation or perceived isolation from the political system.

Although, logically, the findings of this experiment can apply only to our sampling universe—Italian voters in one New Haven ward—and to our dependent measure—voting in primary elections—they

¹⁶ Sears and McConahay, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ E. Aronson and D. Mettee, "Dishonest Behavior as a Function of Differential Levels of Induced Self-Esteem", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 9, 1968, pp. 121-127.

probably generalize to other ethnic groups and to other low turnout elections with minimal publicity such as local elections and referenda. If replications establish the reliability of the interview effect, then future research should concentrate upon looking for causal mechanisms. Though we think alienation reduction is the most plausible explanation, this conclusion is quite tentative. Perceptions of both the environment and the self may have been changed. Research that manipulates the two factors orthogonally or measures the mediating perceptions is needed to enable us to assess their relative power with any degree of certainty.¹⁸

The empirical finding, regardless of its cause, has important implications for both public opinion research and practical politics. Clausen's research suggested that persons who vote as a result of the interview are also subject to the same short-term influences that alter the "normal vote" in a given election.¹⁹ Hence, in small towns or small congressional districts, sample surveys used to predict the outcome of an election may conceivably not only predict but also determine the outcome of the election. Our results suggest that something like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle may apply to humans as well as to subatomic particles. If so, this raises a fundamental question in survey research: can public opinion researchers measure something without at the same time changing it?

¹⁸ Some might think the appropriate explanatory mechanism was the Rosenthal effect (experimenter bias) or the Hawthorne effect. The first appeared unlikely to us since it is theoretically mediated by the experimenters' and data collectors' knowledge of the hypothesis being tested. Though our experimenters (interviewers) were aware of our hypothesis, it was not at all salient to them. Our primary data collector, a Democratic party official, had no knowledge of our hypothesis or of which people on the list were interviewed. It may be, however, that a Hawthorne effect was operating in our experiment. The problem, then, is to explain what makes the Hawthorne effect work, something upon which various social scientists cannot agree. Both the isolation reduction and self-concept modification hypotheses, however, might be invoked as possible explanations of the Hawthorne effect. Since naming the phenomenon does not explain it, and may only confuse the issue, we prefer to avoid the use of the Hawthorne label. For discussions of these two effects, see R. Rosenthal, "Interpersonal Expectations: Effects of the Experimenter's Hypothesis," in R. Rosenthal and R. L. Rosnow, eds., *Artifact in Behavioral Research*, New York, Academic Press, 1969; F. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1939; G. C. Homans, "Group Factors in Worker Productivity," in H. Proshansky and B. Seidenberg, eds., *Basic Studies in Social Psychology*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, pp. 592-604.

¹⁹ Clausen, *op. cit.*; Philip E. Converse, "The Concept of a Normal Vote," in Angus Campbell *et al.*, eds., *Elections and the Political Order*, New York, Wiley, 1966, Chap. 2.