

The General Social Survey



Adjusting the ANES Module in the 2024 General Social Survey Mid-Fielding

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Authors:
Benjamin Schapiro
Rachel Sparkman
Andrew Stern
Olivia Hanley
Stephen L. Morgan



SUMMARY

Building on a prior collaboration in 2020, the American National Election Studies (ANES) and General Social Survey (GSS) partnered again in 2024 to measure the political attitudes and voting intentions among a subset of GSS respondents, including measures on voting intentions for the 2024 U.S. presidential election. On July 21, 2024, President Joseph Biden withdrew as the presumptive Democratic nominee for the 2024 presidential election and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to run in his place. This presented a major challenge for the GSS/ANES data collection effort. The ANES module on the 2024 GSS was already in the field and asked respondents, “In the November election for President, do you think you will probably vote for Donald Trump, Joe Biden, someone else, or will you probably not vote?” In the days that followed, the GSS and ANES teams rapidly coordinated to revise the item to maintain its relevance, ensure comparability within the time series, and reduce respondent confusion. The project teams’ action was to update the question to remove references to President Biden and to replace his name with that of Kamala Harris, the new presumptive Democratic nominee. This report examines the implications of a measurement change on a survey in the field and outlines the design and operational steps taken to preserve data quality. The result included a split in data to reflect changing presidential candidates: WHOVOTE24 (voting intention before July 25, 2024) and WHOVOTE24A (voting intention after July 25, 2024), as well as a time-series version of both variables that follows voting intention by political party for the fielding period (WHOVOTETS). Variables WHOVOTE24, WHOVOTE24A, and WHOVOTETS are available to download on the GSS website¹ and on the GSS Data Explorer.²

BACKGROUND

The General Social Survey and American National Election Studies

The GSS has been a cornerstone of social science research for more than fifty years. As one of the most-cited sources in academic journals, the GSS provides nationally representative data on a wide range of attitudes, behaviors, and demographic characteristics. Likewise, the ANES is the leading source of information on voter participation and electoral behavior during U.S. presidential elections. In 2020, these two long-standing National Science Foundation (NSF) programs began a partnership that continued in 2024, incorporating an ANES-designed module into the GSS questionnaire for all eligible respondents. In turn, GSS invited eligible participants to complete the ANES surveys.

In the summer of 2024, the GSS asked an ANES-designed module on political attitudes and voting intentions, notably, regarding the upcoming 2024 Presidential Election. At the time of survey design, the two frontrunner candidates were President Joseph Biden and Mr. Donald Trump. On July 21, 2024, approximately halfway through data collection, President Biden withdrew from the race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris for the Democratic nomination. To ensure the question about presidential voting intentions remained relevant, action needed to be taken quickly to update the GSS questionnaire.

Adjusting the Questionnaire

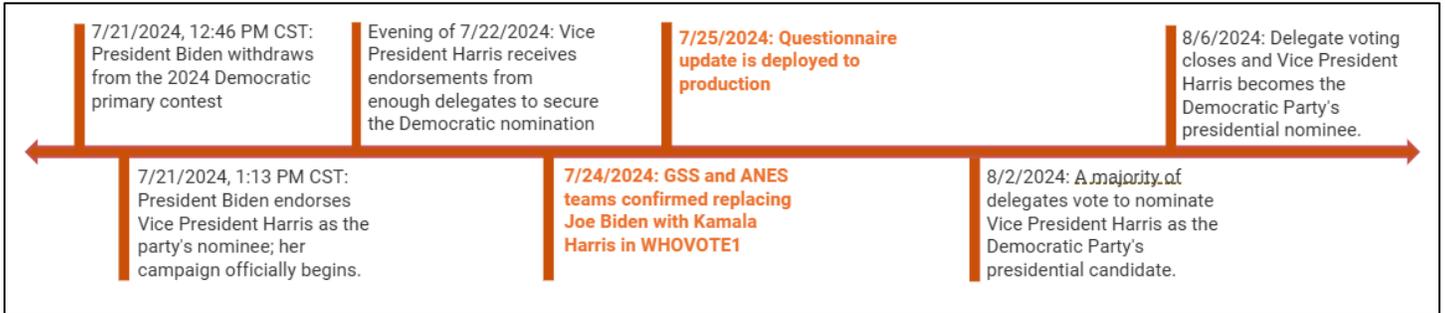
Though the GSS/ANES team considered other alterations to the questionnaire, the team settled on an edit to WHOVOTE1, which asks voting intention in the upcoming presidential election. The GSS team collaborated with

¹ <https://gss.norc.org/get-the-data.html>

² <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/>

ANES to quickly update the questionnaire, and the decision was ready to implement in the field on July 25, 2024.³ Exhibit 1 reports a timeline of events starting with President Biden’s withdrawal from the 2024 Democratic primary. The GSS and ANES confirmed the survey question update on July 24, with deployment on July 25 ahead of the official nomination of Vice President Harris to become the Democratic Party nominee on August 6, 2024.

Exhibit 1. Timeline of Events and Questionnaire Update.



- Sunday, July 21, 2024 at 12:46 PM CST: President Biden withdraws from the 2024 Democratic primary contest.
- Sunday, July 21, 2024 at 1:13 PM CST: President Biden endorses Vice President Harris as the party’s nominee; her campaign officially begins.
- Monday, July 22, 2024, evening: Vice President Harris receives endorsements from enough delegates to secure the Democratic nomination
- Wednesday, July 24, 2024: After deliberation, GSS and ANES teams decide to replace Joe Biden with Kamala Harris in WHOVOTE1.
- Thursday, July 25, 2024 at 12 PM CST: NORC deploys the questionnaire update is deployed to production
- Friday, August 2, 2024: A majority of delegates vote to nominate Vice President Harris as the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate.
- Tuesday, August 6, 2024: Delegate voting closes and Vice President Harris becomes the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee.

Exhibit 2 shows the question text for WHOVOTE until July 25, 2024, which has Joe Biden listed as a presidential nominee. Exhibit 3 shows the question text after July 25, 2024, in which Kamala Harris was then listed on the survey question.

Exhibit 2. Question Text Until July 25, 2024.

In the November election for President, do you think you will probably vote for Donald Trump, Joe Biden, someone else, or will you probably not vote?

- Donald Trump
- Joe Biden
- Someone else
- Probably not vote

³ Fortunately, Harris was already included in the ANES feelings thermometer items.

Exhibit 3. Question Text After July 25, 2024.

In the November election for President, do you think you will probably vote for Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, someone else, or will you probably not vote?

- Donald Trump
- Kamala Harris
- Someone else
- Probably not vote

This timeline created three distinct combinations of fact and question wording:

- Respondents completing the item before 7/21/2024 at 12 PM CST received a question that matched the then-presumptive nominees.
- Respondents completing the item between midday on 7/21/2024 and the release of the updated questionnaire received a question that incorrectly named Joe Biden as the Democratic nominee.
- Respondents completing the item after 7/25/2024 at 12 PM CST received a question that named Kamala Harris as the presumptive Democratic nominee.

The public datafile attempts to represent these conditions through three separate variables.

After discussion with the ANES team, eligibility for the joint GSS-ANES study was determined to end on July 21, prior to Biden's announcement. GSS respondents who completed the GSS survey before July 21, 2024, and were eligible for ANES survey, were invited to take the ANES pre-election survey. No participants who were invited to take the ANES saw the 'Harris' change in WHOVOTE, or, indeed, completed any aspect of the ANES module while Biden was not the presumptive nominee.

METHODS

Data

After the data collection period of the GSS ended, raw data and time stamps were used to generate several different versions of the WHOVOTE variable. Each of these versions serves a unique purpose – either representing the individual addressed in the question itself, or a harmonized generic candidate useful for time-series observations. The three versions of WHOVOTE available in the public datafile are as follows:

- WHOVOTE24: Voting intention in the 2024 election, Joe Biden.
- WHOVOTE24A: Voting intention in the 2024 election, Kamala Harris.
- WHOVOTETS: Harmonized version of WHOVOTE24 and WHOVOTE24A, with labels for “Democratic candidate” and “Republican candidate.”

WHOVOTE24 and WHOVOTE24A represent the question as asked to each respondent in the questionnaire, while WHOVOTETS is meant to be trended with the 2020 Panel ANES module's WHOVOTE variable, as well as WHOVOTETS in future rounds of the ANES/GSS collaboration.

Variable Construction

Variables were constructed using the raw WHOVOTE data, alongside a module timestamp for the ANES module, BTIMEC. If the ANES module was started before 7/25/2024 12PM, WHOVOTE24 contains a valid answer, and WHOVOTE24A is recoded to inapplicable. Any respondent who began the ANES module after 7/25/2024 12PM

had their response to the WHOVOTE item captured in WHOVOTE24A, and WHOVOTE24 was recoded to inapplicable. Following this, WHOVOTETS was calculated to capture “Republican candidate” if the respondent answered response 1 (Donald Trump) to either variable, and “Democratic candidate” if the respondent answered response 2 (Joe Biden, then Kamala Harris) to either WHOVOTE24 or WHOVOTE24A.

WHOVOTETS is meant to mirror other time-series political items that are frequently created for analyzing the GSS but are typically not present in the GSS cumulative file. The primary example in this category are the PRES items associated with any given election year. The PRES variable lists the name of each associated candidate in the given election, e.g. “Joe Biden” and “Donald Trump” for PRES20. However, a PRES time series is possible to calculate, provided you associate the voting not with an individual person, but with a party. The GSS Data Explorer presents a clear presidential voting trend⁴ with generic candidates, harmonizing the various PRES variables into a PRESTS time-series variable. WHOVOTETS is meant to address a similar problem for the WHOVOTE item, pre-harmonizing voting intentions to the political party, rather than the individual candidate.

RESULTS

WHOVOTE24, WHOVOTE24A, and WHOVOTETS Variables

Tables 1-3 show the weighted proportions of the 2024 WHOVOTE variables. Table 1 reports voting intention in the 2024 election before July 25, 2024, before the survey question update. The voting intention for Donald Trump was 33.8%, and for Joe Biden was 31%, while 17.1% of respondents indicated they would vote for someone else, and 18.1% did not plan on voting for president in the upcoming election.

Table 1. Voting intention in the 2024 election, before July 25, 2024 (WHOVOTE24) (n=1,642).

Voting Intention	Weighted %
Donald Trump	33.8
Joe Biden	31.0
Someone else	17.1
Probably not vote	18.1

Table 2 reports voting intention in the 2024 election before July 25, 2024, with the survey question update. The voting intention for Donald Trump was slightly higher than those that were asked the previous version at 40.6%, and support for the new Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, increased to 37.5%. Respondents who indicated they would vote for someone else dropped to 5.3% and those who did not plan on voting for president in the upcoming election decreased slightly to 16.6% compared to respondents who answered the previous version of the question.

Table 2. Voting intention in the 2024 election, after July 25, 2024 (WHOVOTE24A) (n=1,454).

Voting Intention	Weighted %
Donald Trump	40.6
Kamala Harris	37.5
Someone else	5.3
Probably not vote	16.6

⁴<https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/trends?category=Politics&measure=pres&Measure%20Category=Voted%20for%20democratic%20candidate&Breakdown%20Label=Total>

Table 3 reports the results of the constructed time-series variable that includes responses from both WHOVOTE24 and WHOVOTE24A. The voting intention for the Republican candidate was highest at 37.6%, followed by the Democratic candidate at 34.6%, while 17.3% state that they would probably not vote, and 10.5% had someone else in mind to vote for in the 2024 presidential election.

Table 3. Constructed Variable of WHOVOTE24 and WHOVOTE24A (WHOVOTETS) (n=3,096).

Voting Intention	Weighted %
Republican candidate	37.6
Democratic candidate	34.6
Someone else	10.5
Probably not vote	17.3

DISCUSSION

This report provides a high-level examination and outlines the implications of making such a mid-field adjustment and describes the resulting split in the dataset into WHOVOTE24 (responses collected before July 25, 2024) and WHOVOTE24A (responses collected afterward), including the creation of the time-series variable WHOVOTETS that provides voting intention by political party. While the proportion of voting intention for the Democratic candidate fluctuates between WHOVOTE24 (31% for Biden) and WHOVOTE24A (37.5% for Harris), the Republican candidate Trump maintains a slight lead in both variables (33.8%, 40.6% respectively).⁵ This pattern is reflected in the time-series variable (WHOVOTETS) as well, where the Republican candidate has a slightly higher voter intention (37.6%) than the Democratic candidate (34.6%). This indicates there are no substantial impacts on data quality or trends that span field collection caused by the mid-fielding questionnaire update.

If analyzing these variables, please bear in mind that WHOVOTE24 and WHOVOTE24A are composite measures that include every response collected before and after July 25, 2024, respectively. They cannot by themselves provide insight into how voting intention shifted after President Biden withdrew from the race, nor can they account for shifts in intention during their respective time periods. Voter intention is not constant throughout the election cycle; further, respondents who complete later in the field period are quantitatively different than respondents who complete earlier in the field period.

⁵ Though there are two variables reflecting possibly early and late respondents, GSS research shows that these two groups are different but can be controlled for with demographic characteristics (Wells et al., 2024). You can read more about this research here: <https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdf2024/Wells%20et.al-2024-wps-demographic-early-late-responders.pdf>

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<https://gss.norc.org/content/dam/gss/get-documentation/pdf/reports/methodological-reports/GSS%20MR147%20Adjusting%20WHOVOTE%20Midfielding.pdf>