



Results From a Knowledge Networks' Question Wording Experiment for Political Party Identification

J. Michael Dennis, Rick Li

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Contact author: Mike Dennis, mdennis@knowledgenetworks.com, (650) 289-2160

KN recently examined the differences between KN's wording of political party identification and the wording in gold-standard surveys such as those typically used by NES and Gallup. The wordings used by KN, NES and Gallup are very similar; however, in the follow-up question where non-Democratic and non-Republican respondents are probed as to where they tend to lean, there is a critical difference in question wording that in large part reflects the difference between interviewer-administered and self-administered surveys.

The following text shows the wording typically used by some telephone and in-person public opinion surveys:

A. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a REPUBLICAN, a DEMOCRAT, an INDEPENDENT, or what?

B. Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat/Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG [Democrat/Republican]?

[IF A=INDEPENDENT or OTHER]

C. Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or to the Democratic party?

VALID CODES:

1. Closer to Republican
 3. Neither {VOLUNTEERED}
 5. Closer to Democratic
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As shown in Question C above, the "Neither" response is volunteered. Respondents in some telephone and in-person surveys are not provided with the direct opportunity to select this answer. Persons that answer 'Independent' or 'Other' in the first question are, consequently, encouraged to be probed to select either Republican or Democratic in the followup question, and are finally coded as 'Independents' only if the response is volunteered by the respondent.

In the version KN has used to collect Party Id in the past, the "Neither" response is presented on the screen (unlike in the NES and Gallup model where the interviewer does not present the response option). Through other empirical research KN has conducted, when response categories are presented online that allow respondents to select the 'don't know' option, there is a substantial inflation in the number of respondents that will select this response option. Similarly, displaying the "Neither" option in the Party Id question in the KN context has also been shown to result in an inflation of the selection of this response option. As a result, KN's Party ID results (after probing) show approximately 15

percentage points higher respondents classified as Independent, compared to other surveys where the “Neither” option is not presented but is instead volunteered by the respondent.

KN’s tested solution to this “problem of comparability” (presumably caused in part by ‘satisficing’ behavior by online respondents) is as follows:

1. Do not display the response category that can cause respondents to ‘satisfice,’ as Jon Krosnick would describe the phenomenon, such as the Neither or Don’t Know options.
2. Give respondents instructions at the beginning of the survey that they may skip any questions to indicate “No opinion” or “Don’t know.”

These two approaches, when implemented together, succeeded in eliminating differences in mode of data collection and bringing KN’s online results very close to other survey results.

The test was conducted as follows. KN recently fielded the new party ID questions to a general population adult sample from its’ web-enabled panel. Based on the approximately 400 panelists that have responded so far, KN’s results are very similar to those published by NES and Gallup. The following table shows the latest Party Id distributions from NES and Gallup. KN’s results represent weighted distributions of the new question format before and after probing one’s party ID leaning tendency. The raking variables for post-stratification include gender, age, education, ethnicity, Census region, and metro status. The sample did not include Party Id as a pre-stratifying variable or as a raking variable in the poststratification weighting.

	NES 2004		Gallup 2005		KN 2005 (alternate wording)	
	Before Probing	After Probing	Before Probing	After Probing	Before Probing	After Probing
Rep	29%	41%	34%	45%	26%	42%
Ind	40%	9%	31%	7%	38%	8%
Dem	32%	49%	34%	48%	36%	50%

For surveys we conduct at KN where Party ID is a sensitive matter, we recommend consideration of this new ‘alternate’ question format based on the results obtained thus far that show that, after probing, the alternate wording produces results very similar to the results obtained by the gold-standard NES and Gallup surveys.