

APPLICATION TO THE MAYOR'S CITIZENS
COMMITTEE FOR OFF-TRACK BETTING
FOR A GRANT-IN-AID OF RESEARCH

from

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PROPOSAL FOR A STUDY
of
ATTITUDES TOWARD BETTING AND BETTING PRACTICES
in
NEW YORK CITY

PART I

ATTITUDES TOWARD BETTING IN NEW YORK CITY

The Problem

To establish the attitudes of residents of New York City concerning gambling in general, and the legalizing of such gambling at places within the City other than race tracks and bingo games.

The Background

There is no question that much gambling occurs in New York City and its metropolitan area. Since the legalization of pari-mutuel betting in the area, the per capita wagering in New York has been among the highest in the country.

Further, there is no question that much illegal gambling exists in New York. This is such common knowledge that the point is not worth laboring. Illegal gambling not only encourages crime and criminal organizations but also deprives local, state, and the federal government of legitimate tax revenues.

In many other countries this problem has been met by legalized lotteries and agencies which provide legal forms of betting on horse races without actually attending a race track. It has been suggested that a system of off-track betting be established in New York City.

The Mayor's Citizens Committee on Off-Track Betting of the City Of New York published a report on the subject in February of 1959. This report summarized many of the arguments both pro and con concerning the desirability of setting up an off-track betting facility. It looked at the procedures in some other countries, and concluded with a recommendation that the facility be established. However, the Committee pointed out that in its attempt to analyze attitudes about gambling, it

discovered that "There were varying degrees of conviction which could not be expressed within the simple words of "yes" and "no". It is the purpose of this research to investigate these "varying degrees of conviction", and to establish with some degree of certainty the existing attitudes of residents of New York City.

The Method of Research

It is proposed to design a research instrument which will separate the two basic dimensions of opinion towards gambling, will establish a pro and con differentiation for each dimension, and will determine the degree of intensity with which the differentiation is held. This instrument will then be pre-tested, and later administered to a representative sample of the inhabitants of New York City. Given the limits of time and resources of the Committee, the sample will be a form of stratified random sampling usually known as quota sampling. This can be compared with a smaller sample for which confidence limits can be computed, and a form of probability sample thus secured. The data secured will be coded and transferred to punch cards. These cards can then be manipulated to correlate the findings. Age, sex, and ethnic group data which are easily visible will be added by the interviewer. Correlations with demographic factors can then be obtained. Again depending upon time and the resources of the Committee, other factors such as income and family status might be included. Occupation might also be relevant.

The Research Instrument

Exploratory pre-testing in the Providence, Rhode Island, metropolitan area, which has two race tracks within its limits and in which many of the same gambling problems of New York City are present, was used to construct the research instrument. This testing shows that differences exist in the moral and the economic-legal attitudes toward gambling. The difference holds in spite of a striking consensus regarding the ubiquity of gambling behavior. This means that the pro and con differentiation in the instrument must be set up in terms of these two dimensions for purposes of analysis. Individuals may be morally against gambling but will at the same time approve of its legalization for economic reasons. Conversely, people who have no moral objection to gambling will disapprove of its off-track legalization because they feel it will interfere with their sport or their living as derived at

present. This is particularly true of those associated with the race tracks themselves and those who patronize them regularly.

The Results

The results of such a survey should: (1) provide a test of the Committee's finding that "Every attempt to sample public opinion in the New York City area within the last decade has indicated that at least two-thirds of those questioned have favored the legalization of off-track betting"; (2) place in a proper perspective the arguments pro and con regarding off-track betting which the Committee summarized; and (3) predict with some accuracy the results of a potential referendum. If the study shows that people approve of gambling morally as well as legally, and if the intensity of this feeling proves to be strong, the recommendations of the Committee may be adjusted accordingly.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

I. Do you think people will always gamble?

This question serves as an opening question which arouses interest in the subject.
It also serves to establish a perspective for the attitude questions which follow.
In the pre-test only one person did not answer "yes" to the question.

II. Do you think gambling is good or bad for people?

This question is the indicator of the most favorable attitude toward gambling.
The word "good" establishes the moral dimension of the attitude without other emphasis. In the pre-test this question scaled as the extreme.

III. Do you think gambling is all right for anybody who wants to gamble?

This question sets up the mid-point of those favorable toward gambling. In the pre-test it scaled between question II and question IV.

IV. Do you think gambling is all right for people with extra money?

This question establishes that attitude which is the least intensely held while at the same time favorable toward gambling. In the pre-test it scaled after both II and III.

V. Do you think any kind of gambling is wrong?

Although this question is not absolutely necessary for the scale in question, it was included as a check upon those least favorable toward gambling. In the pre-test its inclusion did not increase the scale error, so it may be eliminated if desired.

VI. Do you think that betting away from the race track should or should not be legalized?

This question establishes the legal as against the moral dimensions of the problem. In the pre-test it was set up in a yes-no form and followed with the "Why" question. In the pre-test it was asked as the VIth question.

VII. Why do you think betting away from the race track should (should not) be legalized?

In the pre-test it was first attempted to pre-code this question. However, an open ended question seemed to produce better results. Coding should be relatively easy since nearly all of the answers fell in the following four categories: (1) Taxation (2) Crime decrease (3) Character development (4) Business reasons. Based upon answers secured, other categories can be established if needed.

In the pre-test no demographic factors were included, but there is no reason why such as sex, color, approximate age, and the like cannot be checked off by the interviewer. Some of the correlations might prove interesting.

PART II

ESTIMATING PRESENT AND FUTURE AMOUNTS OF OFF-TRACK BETTING IN NEW YORK AREA

The second part of the study proposes to attach to the questionnaire of Part I additional questions concerning actual and potential betting practices. If great difficulty is encountered in proceeding with this survey, owing to interviewee resistance or distortion, a special survey will be designed and employed, using depth interviewing on a small group of citizens. In both cases, supplementary analysis will be made of other existing and procurable data. It is possible that no single method can be devised for estimating with any degree of accuracy the amount of off-track betting now existing or the probable amount of off-track betting in the event that such betting is legalized. The attempt is considered, however, to be worthwhile.

The legality of betting and the status factor involved in illegal betting with bookmakers affect the ability to obtain accurate estimates of present off-track betting. When a respondent is asked by an interviewer how much he has bet on horses in the past week or month, his first reaction toward a relative stranger is to deny such clandestine activity. It takes a large degree of rapport before this understandable reticence can be broken down. Here, depth interviews may be functional. However, the time and cost factors in this type of interview are well known and must be considered. It seems obvious that the Committee cannot afford, nor would it desire, a Kinsey type of interviewing procedure. But something less intimate will probably not exceed the Committee's time and cost budget, and may bring good results.

Further, even when rapport is established, illegal betting is not the type of activity which people like to discuss. Aside from fear of consequences, the embarrassment of indulging in a low-status activity will tend to repress the admission of such activity. It can be fairly assumed that a large majority of those who bet with bookmakers are not so well-to-do that the betting can be justified as a harmless pastime. Moreover, in many families there will be some member who deplors betting on horses, and the active individual will tend to give a low estimate of his activity. We may find it practical to interview two members of the same family so as to get a greater validity out of their contradictory responses.

Moreover, the problem of recall is a very serious one. Granting that the respondent is willing and honest, very few keep any kind of records of betting activity. When the

better loses, he tends to forget how much he had bet. When the bettor wins, he may increase his next wagers, and again tends to forget how much he has bet in a certain period.

The problems involved in obtaining estimates from bookmakers themselves are obvious. As for the police, the accuracy of their estimates is once again open to question. Probably the best means for obtaining relatively accurate estimates of present betting involves the same basic approach as that of a quota-controlled sample. On the basis of experience in countries which already have legal off-track betting, such factors as accessibility for placing bets, income levels, urban-rural differences, family structure, and age composition of the population might be matched against the prevailing pattern of on and off-track betting. Proportions can be secured which might be applied to the population of the New York area. For example, a quick review of the Committee's report shows that in the French provinces the amount of off-track betting is about the same as for on-track betting, while in Paris the relation is almost 3:1 in favor of off-track betting. Similar factors could be derived from existing data which the Committee possesses or can secure.

As for considerations of possible amounts of betting in the event that off-track betting is legalized, the same general factors apply. For instance, the large amount of off-track betting in Paris may be a function of the accessibility of such betting. Many hundreds of agencies are set up in Paris, most of them in cafe-tabacs where the worker stops in the morning on his way to work for a cafe or a vin rouge. If the only permissible betting were confined to a few large betting halls, the amount might be much different since access to these halls might be as difficult for the worker as is access to the race track. The ubiquity of bookmakers in industry is in large measure a question of access to the worker. If legalized betting does not provide such access, the bookmaking business will probably continue.

The question of status also arises in future estimates. In most European countries, racing has a very high status. Children are not forbidden access to race tracks; on the contrary, special children's tickets are issued to encourage a knowledge of horse-racing. It may be that with the legalization of off-track betting, the actual amount of wagering will not increase over the amount now being wagered, unless racing undergoes a change in social evaluation.

The question of familiarity with racing must be considered in the New York area. Betting on horse races is a relatively esoteric form of gambling, involving some familiarity

with breeding, condition, performance, and like variables. It may be that the Committee should consider alternative forms of gambling such as a lottery which involves luck rather than predictive skill. The extent of the numbers racket has been well documented, and arguments that the legalization of off-track betting will decrease activity of bookmakers may not be defensible when the numbers gambling is considered. Indeed, many bookmakers prefer numbers bets to horse bets since the usual take from horse betting is from 25% to 30% while the numbers play gives them an edge of 40% to 50% depending upon the odds paid. The present project does not contemplate study of other forms of betting, however, It does suggest that many sociological and psychological factors enter into estimates of future betting behavior, and that a present study of these may have permanent utility.

In sum, then, it appears that an academic analysis based upon existing and procurable data is suitable as supplementive estimates of present and future off-track betting activity derived from polling. But as with polling, there will be a number of difficulties that increase costs and preclude advance certainty of obtaining highly valid results.

DRAFT OF PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

I. Do you know people who have done a little betting?

An introductory question, but one with useful factual results.

II. Do you have any personal experience with betting? Would you mind saying a little about it?

Depending on the answers to these questions, a fuller probe can be undertaken by several subsequent questions in this category.

III. Would it make any difference to your acquaintances, do you think, if betting were made legal and easier? Would they bet more, do you think? Less maybe?

Self-explanatory.

IV. What about yourself? Do you think that you might be inclined to place a bet now and then (or a little more often) if it were easy to do so?

V. Would you say, by the way, what about how often you bet at the present time? I see. Do you feel that you've been betting a little more lately than you used to or a little less?

You know, if betting were legal, your record of winnings would be there if the government were interested in income taxes? Would this make any difference to you? How so?

Of course, betting might be cheaper too because there would be less people taking a cut. Isn't that so?

(Note: These questions are suggestive of how the whole interview would be approached. They would undergo considerable testing and revision, with a number of new questions, before the final questionnaire would be administered to the full sample.)