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Title: Morality Items on the 1985 Pilot Study

Date: May, 1986

Dataset(s): 1985 Pilot Study

Abstract

Conover and Feldman describe the development and testing of a general moral values scale, constructed from items included in the 1985 Pilot Study. The authors note that all the Pilot Study items included in the scale tap a common substantive dimension. In addition, their aggregate morality measure is fairly reliable and has good variance. Examining the determinants of moral values, Conover and Feldman find that older people and the more religious are likely to score high on the morality scale. But the authors also find that the morality scale has a large impact on a number of social issue positions and group evaluations, independent of age and level of religious beliefs. Specifically issue positions on women's rights, gay rights, the death penalty, and prayer in public schools are all influenced by the morality dimension. In addition, though the morality scale has little effect on domestic issue positions, moral values prove to be strong predictors of foreign policy positions on relations with Russia and involvement in Central America. Moral values are also bound up with attitudes on racial matters in several different ways. As African-American groups grow more controversial in nature, moral values are a more important determinant of feeling thermometer levels toward such groups. In addition, the effect of moral values is strong on those issues where government assistance to blacks most intrudes on the personal lives of whites. Where issues are more abstract and less personally threatening, morality makes much less of a difference. Finally, positions on the morality scale prove to be important determinants of attitudes toward Mondale and, especially, Ferraro, but not Reagan or Bush.