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Title: Analysis of Information Items in the 1985 NES Pilot Study

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the political information items contained in the 1984 National Election Study and the 1985 Pilot Study. Zaller describes the construction and testing of three types of information scales: domain specific scales based on the 1985 Pilot Study, a general information scale constructed from 1984 NES items, and a general scale based on 1985 Pilot Study questions. Zaller finds that the general purpose measures of political information perform almost as well as the domain specific measures, across a range of different tests. Moreover, a factor analysis of the 1985 Pilot Study items indicates that it is difficult to achieve discriminant validity among domain-specific scale items. These results imply that information is a relatively, though not entirely, general trait. Zaller, therefore, concludes that political information can be effectively measured with a general purpose information scale. Zaller also finds that it is unnecessary to use the specific experimental political information items, employed in the Pilot Study, to create such a measure. Instead, a reliable political information scale can be constructed from the existing NES questions, given a few minor modifications to some items and interviewing protocols.