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Abstract

Rosenstone and Diamond evaluate several of the seven-point scales NES has used to measure public opinion on political issues and assess the merits of an alternate opinion measurement device. The Pilot Study contained several questions which employed an experimental unipolar measure of public opinion concerning various political issues, based on four-point agree/disagree scales. This approach was tested against the traditional seven-point polar scale in two issue domains; New Deal social welfare liberalism and support for women's rights. Rosenstone and Diamond find that the unipolar policy issue questions perform about as well as the bipolar items, but do not increase NES' ability to measure political issues in a meaningful way. Additionally, the experimental scales do not reveal any new information concerning the origins of candidate evaluations and voting decisions. The unipolar question format, however, allows for the examination of underlying policy dimensions and, unlike the seven-point scale, may be used in the same manner for both telephone and face-to face interviews. The unipolar items also allows NES to assess the reliability of the seven-point scales and provides guidance for determining the "anchor questions" for those scales. Rosenstone and Diamond close the report with some specific conclusions about seven-point scales. Specifically, they find that respondents who place themselves at "4" on the seven-point scales are really somewhere in the middle of the policy opinion continuum. The authors also discuss the debate concerning whether issue items should ask about principles or about policies. Rosenstone and Diamond suggest that the specific question format employed should depend on how the policy debate is framed in the political community.