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Abstract

Traugott uses data from the 1980 National Election Study to compare and contrast the two versions of the abortion question contained in that survey. The first version -- used since 1972 -- asks the conditions under which abortions should be permitted. The second version -- used for the first time 1980 -- frames the abortion question in a legal context and contains alternate response wordings. Traugott finds significant variation in the distribution of responses to different forms of the abortion question. She concludes that both the alternate response wordings and the addition of the legal referent -- which allows respondents to distinguish between the legal and moral/ethical prohibition of abortion -- accounts for the more liberal skew of responses to the later version of the abortion item. Traugott concludes that the two items consistently measure different attitudes and any choice between the questions in future surveys should be based on an assessment of attitudes thought to be more useful in the study of political behavior.