

Author(s): Brehm, John

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Abstract

Brehm describes the difficulties encountered in coding the three series of economic conditions questions and explains the final schema used to code the responses to those items. The economic condition questions were structured as stem questions -- inquiring whether respondents thought that their family/group/the nation were better off or worse off financially than one year ago -- followed by an open ended questions -- which probed why respondents thought things had gotten worse/stayed the same/gotten better. Because these questions elicited a wide range of different answers, the coding of responses was difficult. Ultimately, NES decided to divide the answers into four dimensions which measured (1) the topic and (2) direction of responses, as well as (3) mention of specific political actors, and (4) explicit causal links. Brehm finds that this coding schema gives reasonable levels of intercoder reliability (80 to 90 percent in each dimension) and preserves the independence of the four dimensions. Most disagreements between coders arose from either missing data code or disputes over the number of independent mentions contained in the open-ended response. Brehm suggests that improvements in the reliability and ease of the coding process could be gained by changing the question series to directly reflect the four response dimensions identified above.