

Proposed Questions for the 2016 ANES Time Series Study

Attitudes towards Services in Spanish (Bilingualism)

Proposal Overview

The presence of Spanish in the United States is in constant progression. Not only is the proportion of the Hispanic population in growth (Humes et al. 2011), but the range of services offered in Spanish by the government (federal, state and local) and private businesses are also increasing (Helpford 2015, Macías 2014). The case can be made that Spanish has become a *de facto* national language of the United States.

The changing face of America has arguably impacted its politics. For example, political debates have taken a more nativist tone, as witnessed by the current Republican presidential nomination contest. But recent research has also shown that exposure to the Spanish language influences Americans' sociopolitical attitudes (Hopkins et al. 2014).

Though the place of the Spanish language is growing in American society, political scholarship has seemingly not followed this trend. To the best of our knowledge, only Hopkins and colleagues' study (2014) has expressly examined the impact of the presence of Spanish on the sociopolitical attitudes of Americans. We believe that the major reason for the lack of political research on the Spanish language in America is the dearth of data that would permit to explore its influence.

Therefore, measuring Americans attitudes towards the increasing presence of Spanish in their society will allow greater insight into the development of a range of sociopolitical attitudes (immigration, intergroup feelings, etc.) as well as political behaviors (vote choice, partaking in a protest, etc.).

It will also provide an opportunity to compare with other countries the antecedents and consequences of attitudes towards national minority languages. For example, the Canadian Election Study and the Finnish National Election Study ask respondents their attitudes towards bilingualism, specifically towards the place in society of the main minority group's language (French in Canada and Swedish in Finland). This comparative opportunity will allow to ascertain whether Americans' attitudes towards bilingualism develop and influence in a distinct manner or if the phenomenon is similar to other Western, liberal countries with important linguistic minorities.

The ANES provides a tremendous opportunity to grasp the relationship between the presence of the Spanish language and American politics.

Related survey questions

In the last edition of the ANES, there were no questions on attitudes towards Spanish.

There was however a question that asks respondents who identified as Hispanic: "How important do you think it is that everyone in the United States learn to speak English?" Besides only being

presented to Hispanics, this question explores attitudes on immigrant integration rather than the place of Spanish in American society.

The 2012 ANES also asks respondents their feelings towards Hispanics: “Using the same thermometer scale which you used earlier in the interview, how would you rate: Hispanics?” This question does not permit to grasp attitudes on Spanish. However, questions on the Spanish language will contribute to understanding attitudes towards Hispanics.

Proposed New Questions for the 2016 ANES Time Series Study

In order to grasp Americans attitudes towards the Spanish language in society, we propose the following question:

I would like you to tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

In the United States, services from the government and from private businesses should be offered in Spanish.

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree somewhat
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree somewhat
5. Disagree strongly
6. Don't know/Refuse

However, if the space on the questionnaire permits, it will be optimal to separately measure the attitudes towards Spanish in government and in the private sector. The political symbolism of the former is arguably greater as it essentially represents *de facto* bilingualism and hence an important change to the conception that some may have as to the cultural anchors of the United States.

Therefore, the following two questions are preferable to the previous one:

I would like you to tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

In the United States, services from the government should be offered in Spanish.

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree somewhat
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree somewhat
5. Disagree strongly
6. Don't know/Refuse

In the United States, services from private businesses should be offered in Spanish.

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree somewhat
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree somewhat
5. Disagree strongly
6. Don't know/Refuse

Furthermore, it will be important to adjust for the influence of contact with the Spanish language in order to avoid the common assumption of uniform exposure within a geographic context. We are therefore inspired by the question used for this purpose by Hopkins and colleagues (2014). However, we believe it is important to take the question a step further than do its initial conceivers and to also ask respondents about contact with written Spanish and not just contact with spoken Spanish.

We therefore propose the following question:

In your day-to-day life, how frequently do you hear Spanish spoken or see Spanish written?

1. Never or almost never
2. Less than once a month
3. 1-3 times per month
4. At least once a week
5. Everyday

This question will also have the added benefit of grasping whether actual contact with the Spanish language has a positive or negative impact of a range of sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors.

Statistical Information

The proposed question(s) on attitudes towards Spanish could be incorporated as a dependent variable or an independent variable in multivariate models. As for the question on contact with Spanish, it will serve as a control variable in multivariate models.

References

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Macías, R. F. 2014. Spanish as the second national language of the United States: Fact, future, fiction, or hope? *Review of Research in Education*. 38(1): 33–57.