

ANES 2016 Time Series Proposal: Propensity-To-Vote (PTV) items

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Synopsis

We propose the inclusion into the ANES of a small battery of PTV (propensity-to-vote) items. First introduced in the Netherlands in 1982, such items have since then become routinely employed in a growing number of countries (including, on several occasions, the U.S.). They are aimed at tapping into voter preferences and utilities associated by the respondent to each of the available political parties; as such, while not particularly expensive in terms of questionnaire space, they have proved extremely productive – in a number of countries through time – for studying party preferences, especially in terms of how such preferences *overlap* across different parties; they also yield a specific additional potential for studying partisanship in the U.S.

Question wording

[Battery introduction]:

We have several political parties in the U.S., each of which presents candidates who would like to get your vote. How likely is it that you will ever vote for a candidate of the following parties?

Please answer on a scale where '0' means "not at all likely" and '10' means "very likely"'

[Battery item to be repeated for each party]:

If you think of [party name], what mark out of ten best describes how likely it is that you will ever vote for a candidate of this party?

This wording is our own adaptation to the U.S. context of the wording routinely used for administering PTV questions in multiparty systems (both parliamentary and semi-presidential).¹ The battery may include, in its basic version, only the two main parties (Democratic and Republican) or, in an extended version, even minor parties with presidential candidates and ballot access in most states (the Libertarian, the Green and the Constitution party). However, the applications presented below (except for just one category) only require the *basic*, two-party version of the battery.

Basic characteristics and aims

The historical aim of the introduction of PTV items was to capture *overlapping party preferences*,² i.e. the presence among R's of positive attitudes (which might lead to a potential vote choice in the future) towards *more than one party* (van der Eijk 2002; van der Eijk et al. 2006; van der Eijk and Marsh 2007). While there are already other types of attitude scales that separately assess comparable and independent scores for multiple objects (e.g. feeling thermometers), the wording adopted in PTV items is specifically designed to measure a party-oriented attitude that is explicitly connected to voting behavior. As a result, PTV scores:

¹ This adaptation is based on the most recent formulation present in the EES (European Election Study), a survey administered in the 28 EU countries, whose original formulation (2014) reads: "We have a number of political parties in (OUR COUNTRY) each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please answer on a scale where '0' means "not at all probable" and '10' means "very probable"; If you think of ..., what mark out of ten best describes how probable it is that you will ever vote for this party?"

² First introduced in the Netherlands in 1982, PTV measures have been present in all the multi-country European Election Studies since 1989, and are now almost routinely included in the National Election Studies in the Netherlands, Britain, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Italy, and in many other European countries.

a) are valid indicators of voting intentions: in comparative tests across many countries, the party which receives R's highest PTV score corresponds very strongly with the party mentioned in vote intention and vote choice (Tillie 1995, van der Eijk and Franklin 1996); direct comparative tests have also shown that such predictive ability of highest-PTV outperforms alternative scales on a variety of aspects (Van der Eijk and Marsh 2007);

b) at the same time, they go well beyond vote intentions. The multiple-party nature of the PTV battery provides a wealth of additional information about R's party preference schedule, well beyond the elementary information on preferences that is revealed by single-party choice or vote intention. The non-ipsative wording of the battery (the word "ever" performs the function of a *projective device*, relaxing any constraints about a specific party choice in a specific election) allows – and frequently yields – high scores for multiple parties from the same R, and does not constrain in any way the sum of scores across all parties (Van der Eijk et al. 2006, 432–3).³ This sets PTV measures apart from various measures of vote intention, and gives them a substantial added value compared to e.g. ipsative probability assessments of a future party vote.

These reasons explain the widespread adoption of PTV measures in many countries, in addition to more traditional measures of partisan attitudes and voting intentions.

Potential applications in the ANES

Apart from opening up the possibility of replicating analyses previously conducted on such PTV items in other countries (see point 5 below), we argue that the introduction of a PTV battery in

³ The measure is aimed at capturing the *current state* of respondent party preferences through responses that are *not restricted* by the typical restrictions encountered in actual decision-making. Also, respondents are not expected to have prognostic powers, nor do they – in actual research experience – perceive any expectation to formulate a prognosis.

the ANES would open up a great potential for the study of U.S.-specific research questions and topics, related to partisan attitudes and voting behavior. This goes in a variety of directions:

1. Providing a quasi-cardinal measure of partisanship, yielding a rigorous monotonic relationship with a variety of partisan attitudes

Part of the PTV potential was recently tested in a U.S.-specific application, where a two-item PTV battery (measuring PTV scores separately for the Democratic Party and the Republican Party) was administered to a YouGov/Polimetrix CAWI sample. Results show that an index of partisanship based on such two items:⁴ a) appears as a valid indicator of party identification; b) presents a consistently monotonic relationship with a variety of other partisan attitudes⁵ (Paparo, De Sio, and Brady 2015). This might solve what is a historical problem related to the traditional Michigan measure of partisanship: while it allows the construction of an ordinal 7-point scale of partisanship, it does so through two separate items that refer to different aspects such as *partisanship* and *leaning*, so that the resulting scale presents in fact a non-monotonic relationship with partisan attitudes (Petrocik 1974; Alvarez 1990; Keith et al. 1992; Petrocik 2009). The non-monotonicity of the Michigan measure of partisanship and the potential improvement introduced by the PTV-based measure are presented in Figure 1.

⁴ Specifically, the PTV score *gap* between the highest-ranking and the second-ranking party (van der Eijk 2011). A large gap implies that the respondent clearly differentiates between the preferred party and *all* other parties: something that is close to the very core of the idea of an *identification*, which by definition cannot be with more than one party.

⁵ Ranging from feelings toward party leaders to policy positions on different groups of major policy issues.

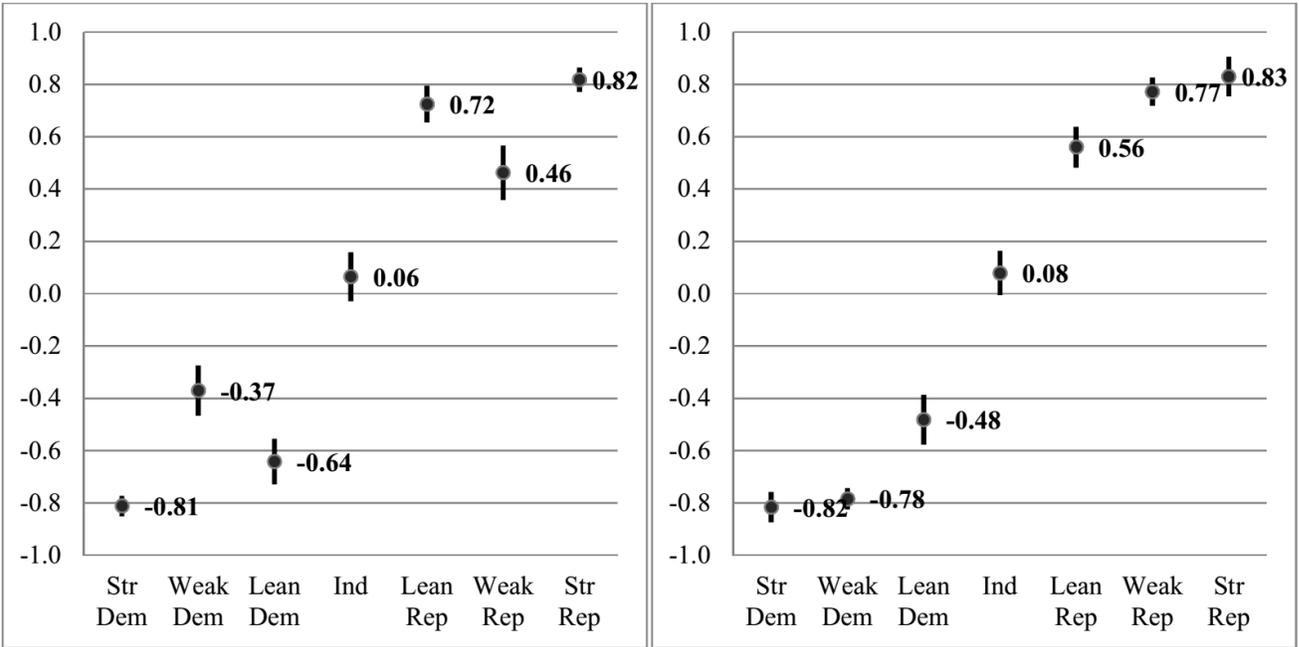


Figure 1 – Closeness to Democratic (-1) or Republican (+1) party positions on economic issues for different groups of partisans, identified through the classic Michigan measure (left pane) or through a PTV-based measure (right pane). While the PTV-based measure (right) shows a perfectly monotonic relationship between partisanship and partisan attitudes, the Michigan-based measure (left) suffers from a non-monotonic relationship. Source: Paparo, De Sio, Brady (2015).

If confirmed in a higher quality sample (with higher external validity) such as that provided by the ANES, the ability of this PTV-based index of partisanship to yield monotonic partisan attitudes would lead to a valid quasi-cardinal measure of partisanship, opening up a variety of applications that might derive more accurate, unbiased results from a quasi-cardinal operationalization of partisanship: from OLS regression to factor analysis, to the estimation of quantitative ATEs on partisanship for experimental treatments, etc.

2. Studying partisan polarization at the mass level

A growing body of literature has highlighted an increase of partisan polarization in the U.S. in the last decades, with scholars debating whether such polarization is as strong among the mass public as it is among the party elites. The PTV battery would allow a novel investigation of

polarized partisan attitudes at the mass level. As its distinctive feature is to separately assess attitudes towards different parties (with a formulation that does not discourage high scores for more than one party), it would allow scholars to discriminate between different groups of respondents with different levels and patterns of party-polarized attitudes (e.g. R's with high scores for a party and zero for the other; R's with similar scores for both parties; R's with high scores for a party and lower but still nonzero scores for the other party, indicating the lack of a prejudice towards the other party, etc.). Measures of partisan polarization obtained through a PTV battery (impossible to obtain through existing, ipsative items) could then be studied e.g. across social groups and over time, in order to comparatively assess the presence and characteristics of partisan polarization.

3. Studying partisan mobilization and inclusion

Starting from the *partisan dealignment* hypothesis, an important literature has suggested that, in advanced post-industrial societies such as the U.S., high levels of cognitive mobilization might not necessarily lead to partisan involvement. A PTV battery would make it possible to discriminate – especially among independents – respondents who give *high* scores to both parties from those that give *low* or zero scores to both parties. While inevitably lumped together (in the *independent* category) by traditional measures of partisan attitudes, these two groups – which clearly would be linked by very different relationships with politics and political parties – could be fruitfully studied compared. Also, continuous measures of overall attitudes towards the party system (such as e.g. the average PTV across the two parties) might be effectively used for studying electoral participation vs. other forms of political and non-political participation.

4. Assessing the role of minor parties in the American party system

While our core proposal involves a two-item battery, only including the Democratic and the Republican party, the structure of the PTV battery would easily allow the inclusion of the other parties that regularly present candidates for a variety of offices at the state and federal level – and which have ballot access in a large number of states – such as the Libertarian, the Green and the Constitution party. Extant evidence from multi-party systems shows that small parties often receive relatively high PTV scores in a share of the sample that is much larger than their actual share of votes. This suggests that PTVs are more a measure of simple *utility* (the utility the voter would receive from a party victory) rather than *expected utility* (the previous utility, multiplied by the actual chance that the party might obtain representation, which becomes extremely low for small parties). Moreover, PTVs are extremely useful for studying minor parties, as a party-specific score is obtained from virtually *all* respondents, rather than a vote intention from only a minimal (often zero) number of respondents. As a result, the inclusion of minor parties in the battery would allow scholars to assess the potential relevance of minor parties, and whether their underrepresentation is due to policy or issue considerations, or rather simply to a path dependency from their past electoral irrelevance (which might change in the future).⁶

5. Opening up comparative applications

As of 2015, PTV batteries have been administered (often regularly) in a large number of countries. They have been included in the multi-country European (Parliament) Election Studies since 1989 (now covering 28 countries), and are now almost routinely included in National

⁶ The PTV questions were included in the 2013 MIT module of the CCES by Charles Steward on behalf of Mark Franklin. In that PTV battery the Green Party, Constitution Party and Libertarian Party were included, along with the Democrats and Republicans. Analysis of these data show no more than 30 percent of respondents stating that they would definitely never vote for any of these three minor parties while between 6 and 7 percent say they would certainly vote for one or other of these parties at some time.

Election Studies in the Netherlands, Britain, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Italy, among other European countries. Such inclusion has made possible a number of innovative analyses, including (but not limited to): party switching; cross-country assessment of the general determinants of vote choice; studies of party preferences across large and small parties (virtually impossible with vote choice items); studies of the non-linear impact on vote choice of changes in the economy – produced by linear increases in individual-level party utility levels measured through PTVs (Tillie 1995; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; van der Eijk et al. 2006; van der Brug, van der Eijk, and Franklin 2007; van der Brug et al. 2008; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009; van der Eijk and Franklin 2009; De Angelis and Garzia 2013); studies of voters’ “choice sets” and “consideration sets”; analyses of the overall structure of political competition; studies of voters’ relation with the political system in general (Dassonneville and Hooghe 2013; Enyedi and Deegan-Krause 2013).

As a result, the inclusion of a PTV battery in the ANES would allow: a) the replication of such analyses in the U.S. context; b) rigorous comparative studies, contrasting any (or all) of such countries with the U.S., on any of the aspects outlined above, or even on the U.S.-specific questions presented previously. This appears especially relevant for measures of partisanship (where the ANES measures have historically proved impossible to replicate fully in multi-party systems): there, a PTV-based measure of partisanship would allow for the first time a rigorous comparison of U.S. partisanship with partisanship in many multi-party systems.

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