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Abstract

This paper examines the utility of traditional and experimental measures of partisanship. Weisberg and Boyd first assess the feeling thermometer measures used in the 1979 Pilot Study. The authors find that the new "political independents" and "political parties" feeling thermometers are useful because the questions relating to a respondent's degree of independence track a new dimension, separate from the traditional Democratic-Republican continuum. The authors also find that there are no systemic differences between the 1964-1976 partisan group thermometers (which asked questions concerning feelings about "Republicans and Democrats") and the 1978 party items (which surveyed reactions to the Republican and Democratic parties). Finally, the authors evaluate the new party identification questions. Weisberg and Boyd find that: (1) The measures of "strength of independence" correlate well with other meters of independence; (2) The new partisanship questions tend to bunch more respondents in the middle category than traditional questions; and (3) It is common for respondents to think of themselves as both partisan and Independent, indicating that the two categories are not mutually exclusive concepts. This last finding is supported by a factor analysis of the dimensions of partisanship which uncovers both pro/anti party and a pro/anti independent scales.