

Author(s): Weisberg, Herbert F., and Arthur H. Miller
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Abstract

Weisberg and Miller discuss three methodological concerns related to the use of feeling thermometers. First, they examine the utility of adopting a thermometer reference card with only the 0, 50 and 100 degree marks labeled. This experimental design was proposed because the traditional card, which has nine labeled points, in practice effectively converts the interval scale into an ordinal nine-point scale. The authors find that the new thermometer does a better job eliciting interval-measure responses, though it also increases the number of "50 degree" responses in the process. Second, Weisberg and Miller assess whether the thermometer scales induce respondents to give ratings to candidates that are more favorable than their actual feelings. Using candidate support ratings for comparison, they find that responses to the old thermometer card do show a slight positivity effect. The new thermometer format generally does not suffer from this problem. Finally, Weisberg and Miller ask whether it is appropriate to use comparative thermometer ratings to determine candidate preference order. Overall, they find this to be a valid assumption; candidate pairs are ranked in the opposite manner by thermometer and preference order questions only 10 percent of the time. Weisberg and Miller also include an appendix in which they conclude that the thermometer question format should not be replaced by either the preference ordering format or the candidate approval format because missing data problems are more severe with the later question types.