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Abstract

Peffley and Hurwitz discuss the performance of the items in the 1987 Pilot Study designed to tap the more general and abstract foreign policy postures of respondents. The authors argue that such items should be a more appropriate tool to gauge foreign policy attitudes than traditional measures because they better reflect the public's cognitive foreign policy decision-making process and allow for the continuous study of foreign policy attitudes, independent of changing events. Peffley and Hurwitz find: (1) The three specific posture scales constructed from the Pilot Study items -- militarism, anti-communism, and isolationism -- perform well and have strong discriminate reliability, even though the militarism and anti-communism scales are highly correlated. (2) The militarism and anti-communism measures have a strong effect in predicting a wide range of specific policy positions. The impact of the isolationism scale is more narrow, though it emerges as an important predictor of positions on virtually all policies involving direct U.S. involvement abroad. (3) Overall, foreign policy postures do a poor job of predicting retroactive assessments of international conditions. (4) In this sample, postures were only indirectly related to evaluations of Reagan. However, the relative importance of postures and policies in shaping political evaluations is likely to vary across political contexts. Peffley and Hurwitz conclude that the general posture items perform as expected, and should be included in future surveys. The authors also prepared a supplement to this report in which they respond to questions raised by the NES staff. They argue that the militarism and anti-communism scales are distinct, albeit not orthogonal, constructs. Despite the fact that the two scales are correlated, they function quite differently as predictors of policy positions and have different sets of demographic and value orientation determinants. The authors also make specific recommendations for deletion of foreign policy posture survey items, in the event that all proposed items can not be included in future surveys.