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Title: Measuring Popular Individualism

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Dataset(s): 1988 National Election Study, 1989 Pilot Study

Abstract

Markus describes the performance of the 1989 Pilot Study items designed to measure individualism on both abstract and domain-specific levels. Markus finds: (1) Bivariate correlation analysis and factor analysis uncover four dimensions of individualism -- personal autonomy, self-reliance, limited government, and laissez-faire capitalism. Scales constructed along these four dimensions are reliable and distinct from one another. (2) The individualism subscales correlate sensibly with measures of other political attitudes and orientations. (3) Correlation analysis indicates that the individualism scales are not equivalent to the NES political orientation scales. (4) The individualism subscales often outperform ideological self identification and party identification as predictors of political variables. (5) Contrary to expectation, pluralities -- and often majorities -- of respondents reject individualistic alternatives on both abstract and specific levels. Markus also prepared an addendum to his report in which he finds that: (1) The four individualism subscales are significant predictors of a wide range of policy preferences and feeling thermometer ratings, even when other values, ideological leanings, and partisanship orientations are taken into account. (2) The different components of individualism tend to come into play in distinct issue domains. Specifically, "limited government" is linked primarily to welfare spending items, "personal autonomy" to civil liberty issues, "self-reliance" to affirmative action policy preferences, and "laissez-faire" to business issues. (3) Within each of the policy domains examined by Markus, at least some of the individualism subscales are more potent than either ideological self-placement or party identification scales in predicting criterion variables. (4) Two of the four subscales -- self-reliance and limited government -- prove to be important predictors of vote choice in 1988.