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Title: Issue Scales versus "Effort" Items on 1995 Pilot Study

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Dataset(s): 1994 NES, 1995 Pilot Study

Abstract

The 1995 Pilot Study included a series of experiments comparing traditional issue scales with "effort" items in the areas of environment, crime, welfare, and jobs. Bartels finds that: (1) The effort items have substantially higher mean values and somewhat smaller standard deviations than the issue scale items. (2) A test-retest correlation of the 1994 and 1995 items demonstrates that the effort format is, if anything, more reliable than the issue scales format. (3) By comparison with the issue scales, the effort items are more strongly correlated with ideology and party identification, but are less powerful predictors of the feeling thermometers of major political figures. Bartels concludes that the effort items seem, in general, to perform about as well as the traditional issue scales, and sometimes perform better. At the same time, the effort format is not suitable for all issue areas -- the crime item, for example, is subject to a severe positivity bias. In addition, it is impossible to tell whether the effort items are better or worse than the spending items included in previous surveys. Thus, Bartels can not come to a definitive conclusion regarding the value of the effort items. In any event, because both the spending and effort items take far less time to administer than issue scales with follow-ups, they should be used whenever possible to cover issue areas that might otherwise be excluded from the NES because of time constraints.