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Title: Evaluation of Environmental Policy Items on the 1995 NES Pilot Study

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Abstract

Berinsky and Rosenstone examine the performance of the environmental policy items in the 1995 Pilot Study. They find: (1) The seven items measuring respondents' desired level of government effort in improving the environment are highly inter-correlated and are almost certainly not distinct measures. However, scaling five of the items produces a highly reliable scale that has strong predictive ability. (2) The environmental tradeoff items have strong convergent validity with each other and are related to the feeling thermometers of Clinton, Gore, and environmentalists in predictable ways. Of the three tradeoff questions, the "regulation vs. business" item performs the best. (3) Respondents place political figures on the tradeoff questions in predictable ways. However, even though many respondents abstained from placing the political figures on the tradeoff items, interviewers reported that some respondents seemed to use partisanship as a guide to place those figures. Berinsky and Rosenstone therefore question whether the placement questions work as expected. (4) The questions gauging respondents' assessment of air and drinking water conditions do not perform well. Respondents who perceive problems with the nation's air quality or drinking water are no more likely to endorse government action than respondents who are satisfied with environmental conditions. (5) Self identification as an environmentalist has good convergent validity with various measures of environmental policy, but weak predicative ability. In addition, interviewers reported that many respondents did not recognize the term "environmentalist." Berinsky and Rosenstone, therefore, recommend that the environmentalist item be dropped. (6) Approval of Clinton's environmental policies is correlated with overall Clinton approval in a curvilinear manner. Those respondents who stake out a middle-of-the-road position on environmental protection are most supportive of Clinton's handling of environmental issues; respondents at either extreme -- the very supportive of government action and the very opposed -- evaluate Clinton's performance on environmental issues in a negative light.