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Title: NES Pilot Study of Issue Position Centrality Measures

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Abstract

This paper discusses the construction and testing of issue position centrality measures in the 1983 Pilot Study. An issue centrality probe was asked in conjunction with two questions in the Pilot Study; one that inquired about the proper role of the Federal government in achieving racial integration in schools, and another concerning the tradeoff between reducing federal spending and providing social services. Krosnick finds that this experimental centrality measure behaves as expected. Specifically: (1) The responses to the probe are distributed in a roughly normal manner, though almost no respondents placed themselves in the lowest centrality category. (2) As expected, the associations between the centrality measure and measures of education, political interest, and political participation are weak. (3) The centrality measure specifies attitude polarization quite effectively, as theory and empirical research suggest it should. (4) There is no tendency for high centrality respondents to give consistent responses more often than low centrality respondents. (5) Associations between issue attitudes and desired levels of government action increase as the importance of a given issue increases. (6) Attitudes concerning issues on which candidates have taken clear stands play a larger role in determining candidate evaluations, as the centrality of those issues increase.