

Author(s): Rosenstone, Steven J., John Mark Hansen and Donald R. Kinder

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Abstract

Rosenstone, Hansen, and Kinder evaluate the 1983 Pilot Study questions relating to personal economic well being. In addition to the traditional question -- which asks whether respondents are better or worse off financially than one year ago -- the Pilot Study included a series of less intrusive questions, probing whether the respondent's family income had declined over the last year. As a second experimental design, the survey administered to one-half the sample contained questions which asked respondents to detail economic changes over the previous six months. The other half of the sample responded to a survey which followed the traditional one year time frame question format. Rosenstone, Kinder, and Hansen find that: (1) Nearly every question in the survey produces a healthy variance of responses. (2) The traditional better/worse off question is valid, but relatively unreliable. The convergent validity of that measure can, however, be improved by adopting the follow-up five-category experimental probe. (3) The predictive validity of the perceptual dimension scale, constructed from responses to experimental questions, is greater than the five category version of the better/worse off financially question. (4) The one-year and six-month questions have comparable predictive validity and reliability within the sample. The authors, however, believe that this result is a residue of the specific time frame covered by the survey and argue that the six-month time frame might be more important in other contexts.