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Abstract

This paper examines the civic obligation items in the 1985 Pilot Study. Two separate forms, using different question wording formats but containing parallel substantive items, were tested in the Pilot Study. In both instances, the civic obligation items were designed to tap attitudes towards a general sense of obligation to the country, as well as specific obligations to vote, perform jury duty, pay taxes, and obey the law. Conover and Feldman conclude that neither question format produces reliable or substantively interesting results. Separate scales of civic obligation constructed from the two forms have low reliability and are skewed to the civic obligation end. Moreover, inter-item correlations and factor analyses of both sets of items suggest that there is no general underlying dimension of "civic obligation." Rather, people have a piece-meal view of their general and specific obligations as citizens. Finally, while both civic obligation scales appear to be correlated with engagement in political participation activities, this relationship is driven by the voting activity items included on both forms. Without the voting items, the scales are virtually unrelated to levels of political participation.