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Title: A New Question on Group Affiliation in the 1986 NES Pilot Study

Date: May 20, 1986

Dataset(s): 1985 Pilot Study

Abstract

Walker and Baumgartner analyze the experimental 1985 Pilot Study question concerning group affiliations. This item differed from the traditional measure in a number of ways. The experimental question employed an open-ended probe, which allowed respondents to indicate more than one group affiliation per group category. In addition, the Pilot Study question measured a respondent's level of participation in each group. Finally, the suggested group categories were expanded and updated to better reflect modern interest groups and associations. Walker and Baumgartner find that the experimental question format is superior to the traditional format in several ways. The traditional question format seriously underestimates the number of affiliations between respondents and public and private groups. The new question also paints a more accurate picture of the interest group universe than the traditional measure. Specifically, the experimental measure reflects the fact that the overwhelming majority of peoples' connections with the associational world are through groups that operate in their immediate communities, and are concerned with altruistic and recreational activities. Most people do not join groups to pursue overtly political aims. Furthermore, for many people, the extent of affiliation to groups is limited to financial contributions. The authors also use the Pilot Study data to examine the impact of connections to groups on political participation. Walker and Baumgartner find that the extent of affiliation with the group system is directly related to the level of participation in the political system.