

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Department of Political Science

3324 Turlington Hall
Gainesville, Florida 32611

Phone (904) 392-0262

February 15, 1988

TO: NES Board of Overseers
FROM: Stephen Craig, Richard Niemi, Richard Shingles
RE: 1987 Pilot Study

The questions we developed for the 1987 pilot study were designed to measure five separate attitudinal dimensions: (1) internal efficacy, (2) regime-based external efficacy (RBE), (3) incumbent-based external efficacy (IBE), (4) regime-based trust/diffuse support (RBT), and (5) incumbent-based trust (IBT).

Although the initial report and recommendations made to the Board by Shingles and by Craig/Niemi were substantially different, most of those differences revolved around a single issue, i.e., the importance of response set. Where Shingles found "strong evidence" for the existence of five dimensions, Craig and Niemi believed that the results were sufficiently contaminated by response set biases that only four dimensions--IBE being the exception--could be discerned from the analysis. The specific items preferred in the two reports reflected this underlying disagreement.

At the same time, however, our differences should not obscure the areas where our conclusions are very similar. We all believe that the data strongly support adoption of most internal efficacy items, and that two of the four RBT/diffuse support questions should be included in the 1988 survey. We also agree that there is a good case to be made for a number of the RBE measures.

The biggest unresolved problem is whether IBE and IBT constitute empirically separate dimensions and, regardless of the answer, whether some or all of the original trust questions should be continued. What we propose to do for 1988 is to ask seven trust questions: three of the originals in the pre-election wave, plus four altered (i.e., not in agree-disagree format) versions of our new questions in the post-election

wave. Not only would this help in the development of an improved IBT scale, but it also would permit us to determine whether IBE is a separate dimension after all.

We hope that the recommendations presented in Attachment A will be accepted for the 1988 NES. Three of the proposed scales (internal, RBT, and RBE) are clearly justified by our 1987 results, while a fourth (IBT) is based on those results as well. Only IBE remains an issue, but this could be resolved by comparing our three IBE questions with the reformatted IBT measures.

As for the future, we would very much like to participate in another pilot study--if there is one--so that we could have an opportunity to test reformatted versions of our internal, RBT, RBE, and IBE scales. Response set obviously is a serious problem, even though it did not prevent our making substantial progress toward developing new and improved indicators of these attitudinal dimensions. It would therefore be extremely helpful if we were able to take the present analysis one further step.

ATTACHMENT A

Based on our findings in the pilot study, the following items are recommended for inclusion in the 1988 NES survey:

Internal Efficacy: The results here are generally clear and consistent with our expectations.

1. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.
(SELFQUAL, V5267, agree)
2. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
(PUBOFF, V5270, agree)
3. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
(COMPLEX, V5170, disagree)
4. I often don't feel sure of myself when talking with other people about politics and government.
(NOTSURE, V5271, disagree)
5. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.
(INFORMED, V5272, agree; Note that this is slightly re-worded from the pilot study version, i.e., "better informed" instead of "as well informed"—the latter following a successful item tested previously by Shingles)
6. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.
(UNDRSTND, V5268, agree)

Omitted: OTHERS (V5269).

Comment: COMPLEX and NOTSURE are given relatively high priority because they are worded in the opposite direction from the rest, plus COMPLEX provides continuity with previous surveys.

Priorities: It is our strong preference here to have at least five items, if not all six. If limited to five, COMPLEX would be our reluctant first choice to be cut (despite the continuity argument, it simply is weaker than the rest). If limited to four items, UNDRSTND also would be cut because of its positive direction of wording.

Regime-Based External Efficacy: The results here are more ambiguous than those obtained for internal efficacy, but a separate dimension does emerge and we believe that several of the indicators are strong enough to warrant adoption.

1. There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does.
(LEGAL, V5171, agree)
2. Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office.
(FINALSAY, V5175, agree)
3. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
(NOSAY, V5169, disagree)
4. If public officials are not interested in hearing what the people think, there is really no way to make them listen.
(MAKELSTIN, V5330, disagree)
5. How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think--a good deal, some, or not much?
(ELECRESPI, V5277)
6. Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what people think when it decides what to do--a good deal, some, or not much?
(GOVRESPI, V5278)

Omitted: FEWPOWER (V5172) and VOTING (V5174).

Comment: NOSAY is included in this list largely because it would provide continuity. The two CPS responsiveness items are included because they seem to tap regime orientations more than attitudes toward incumbents, and also because they have the virtue of not being in agree-disagree format.

Priorities: In the order listed above. Note that ELECRESPI is preferred to GOVRESPI if only one of the two responsiveness questions is retained.

Incumbent-Based External Efficacy: While Shingles believes that IBE emerges as clearly separate, Craig and Niemi suggest that it may be impossible to distinguish between IBE and incumbent-based trust (IBT) in democratic cultures where the norm of governmental responsiveness is held by many (or most) citizens. Our recommendations both for IBE and below for IBT should be seen as an effort to resolve this dispute, which may be partly the result of response set problems.

1. Politicians are supposed to be the servants of the people, but too many of them think they are the masters.
(SERVANTS, V5221, disagree)
2. Generally speaking, those we elect to public office lose touch with the people pretty quickly.
(LOSETOUCH, V5222, disagree)
3. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.
(NOCARE, V5173, disagree)

Omitted: PEOTHINK ("Most public officials are truly interested in what the people think"; V5219, agree) and PEOVOTES ("Candidates for office are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions"; V5220, disagree).

Comment: The sole reason for placing NOCARE ahead of PEOVOTES is to provide continuity. If this is not an overriding consideration, then PEOVOTES actually performs somewhat better in our analysis and might be considered for adoption.

On the other hand, either of these combinations would present a high potential for error due to response set. Although PEOTHINK (the only positively worded question of the group) was perhaps the weakest in our tests, it might nonetheless be added as a fourth item if space permits. This would be especially valuable if our recommendations for IBT (below) are accepted.

Incumbent-Based Trust. Our initial proposals for IBT were substantially different. Shingles preferred adopting several of the new questions and keeping the CPS originals only if space were plentiful. Craig and Niemi suggested staying with three of the originals and perhaps reworking one or two of the new items to a similar format (i.e., not agree-disagree). After considering the various options, we strongly urge the board to do the following:

In the 1988 pre-election wave, stay with the existing questions (except for WASTETAX, V5273).

1. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?
(TRUSTDC, V5274)
2. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
(BIGINT, V5275)
3. Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?
(CROOKED, V5276)

In the 1988 post-election wave, ask the following questions—each of which is derived from one of the stronger items in our pilot study analysis.

4. How much of the time do you think you can trust the people who run our government to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?
(cf. TRUSTIRGT, V5320)
5. Do you think the people we elect to public office usually try to keep the promises they have made during the election, or do they forget those promises once the election is over?
(cf. PROMISES, V5325)
NOTE: The original version of this item was incorrectly worded in the pilot study, i.e., "elected" was used instead of "elect to public office."
6. When government leaders make statements to the American people on television or in the newspapers, how often do you think they are telling the truth—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?
(cf. TRUTH, V5323)
7. Do you think that most public officials can be trusted to do what is right without our having to constantly check on them, or will they only do what is right if they are constantly watched?
(cf. TRUSTED, V5218)

Omitted: FEWBIG (V5321), SERVEPUB (V5322), CLSEWICH (V5324), QUALIFY (V5216) and HONEST (V5217).

Comment: After analysis of the 1988 results, we should be able to select four or five of the best questions for future use. We also will have a much clearer understanding of whether IBT and IBE constitute separate dimensions.

Regime-Based Trust/Diffuse Support: Two of the items stand out, each being related—but not at all identical—to both (a) incumbent-based trust and (b) the pilot study Patriotism scale.

1. Whatever its faults may be, the American form of government is still the best for us.
(BESTGOVT, V5315, agree)
2. I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of.
(LIVEHERE, V5318, agree)

Omitted: PROUDGOV (V5316) and CHINGGOVT (V5317).

Voluntary v. Coercive (External) Efficacy: Although this question (VOLCOER, V5223) was not asked properly in the pilot study, a more important problem is that the N of 83 was simply too small to permit any real analysis. As a result, we would like to see it included in the 1988 survey. Depth interviews by Craig indicate that there is a real distinction between (a) people who feel that politicians are responsive because they want to be and (b) those who feel that responsiveness is a matter of political survival. The former are externally efficacious in a way that the latter clearly are not.

Option 1: If LOSETUCH from our proposed IBE battery is adopted ("Generally speaking, those we elect to public office lose touch with the people pretty quickly"), a follow-up would be asked of all respondents: For those officials who do keep in touch, is it because they really care what people think or because they are more interested in being reelected?

Since many people will say "both," this should be an explicit (but voluntary) response option on the interview schedule.

Option 2: If NOCARE is retained from the original efficacy scale ("I don't think public officials care much what people like me think"), the follow-up to all respondents would be the following: For those officials who do pay attention to what the people think, is it because they really care or because they are more interested in being reelected?

Again, "both" should be a response option on the interview schedule.