

Author(s): Stoker, Laura L.

Title: Morality and Politics: Conduct and Control. A Report on New Items in the 1987 National Election Pilot Study

Date: September, 1987

Dataset(s): 1986 National Election Study, 1987 Pilot Study

Abstract

Stoker compares the performance of the 1987 Pilot Study items designed to measure moral conservatism to the "moral traditionalism" items used in the 1986 National Election Study. Stoker finds that the moralism scale constructed from the moral traditionalism items is highly correlated with the scale constructed from the Pilot Study items. In addition, the two scales demonstrate many similar relationships with demographic variables and general political orientations and evaluations. The moral conservatism scale, however, shows stronger linkages to measures of religiosity and levels of political information. Stoker concludes that the moral conservatism scale is a superior measure for research purposes because it allows for a better understanding of the linkages between morality and politics. In particular, it is a more reliable and valid indicator of the moral conservatism of the "New Right." The moral conservatism scale also provides readily interpretable results of respondents' evaluations of Gary Hart, whereas the moral traditionalism scale yields unexpected and puzzling results. The moral conservatism scale, however, is not perfect. Stoker finds that the moral traditionalism index taps important dimensions that the moral conservatism index fails to, such as the political effect of evaluations of the women's movement. In addition, the moral conservatism scale has relatively low discriminatory power. Stoker also evaluates the 1987 Pilot Study items designed to measure support for moral autonomy. She finds that these items have poor scaling properties, but exhibit moderately strong relationships with religious and moral variables in expected directions and perform well in several multivariate analyses.