

Author(s): Price, Vincent and John Zaller

Title: Evaluation of Media Exposure Items in the 1989 NES Pilot Study

Date: March 1, 1990

Dataset(s): 1988 National Election Study, 1989 Pilot Study

Abstract

Price and Zaller examine the performance of various measures of media exposure in the 1988 National Election Study and the 1989 Pilot Study. They find: (1) Over reporting of media use by respondents appears to be substantial. Efforts to reduce respondent exaggeration -- such as narrowing time-frame reference points -- should, therefore, be retained. (2) A question frame which asks respondents to detail media usage over a "typical" week produces a higher mean usage than a frame which surveys media use over the "past week." This distributional difference, however, does not affect the predicative validity of the media use item. The two versions perform comparably in estimating actual reception of the news. Price and Zaller recommend retaining the "past week" question frame to preserve survey continuity. (3) Self-reported rates of media exposure are only weakly predictive of actual news reception. A standard measure of background political information better discriminates which persons learn about major news events from the media. (4) The current NES media exposure question battery, though problematic, is as reliable and valid as any of the alternatives tested in the Pilot Study. (5) The direct assessment of news reception, through the use of rotating recall questions, is both practical and -- as demonstrated in two attached conference papers by Price and Zaller -- a highly useful survey technique.