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Title: An Analysis of Information Items on the 1990 and 1991 NES Surveys: A Report to the Board of Overseers for the National Elections Study

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Dataset(s): 1990 National Election Study, 1991 Pilot Study

Abstract

The 1991 Pilot Study contained several items measuring knowledge of American political institutions and processes. Delli Carpini and Keeter examine whether these "civics items" allow for the more accurate measurement of respondents' political knowledge. They find that the Pilot Study civic items are reasonably reliable measures and seem to tap a single dimension of knowledge. The authors conclude that the experimental items represent a potentially more reliable and stable measure of political knowledge than NES items currently in use. Delli Carpini and Keeter also reexamine the political knowledge items used in the 1990 National Election Study and 1991 Pilot Study. While these items seem to be organized along four factors -- measuring knowledge of civics, political leaders, political parties, and the Gulf War -- the civics, leaders, and party dimensions are highly intercorrelated, indicating that political knowledge is largely a general trait. This finding is consistent with those of previous Pilot Study reports. The Gulf War dimension, on the other hand, is only weakly related to the other political knowledge dimensions. This finding suggests that knowledge of certain issues may be distinct from general political knowledge.