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Title: Analysis of Old-Age Policy Items in the 1991 Pilot Study

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Dataset(s): 1991 Pilot Study

Abstract

Huddy evaluates the experimental items concerning views about old-age policies included in the 1991 Pilot Study. The traditional NES item asks whether spending on Social Security and Medicare should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. The experimental items, on the other hand, gauge attitudes on the appropriate level of old-age benefits and the financing of those benefits. Huddy concludes that the experimental items are superior. Specifically, Huddy finds: (1) The current NES item does not predict political attitudes nearly as well as the Pilot Study benefit-related items. Moreover, the traditional NES item masks generational differences in attitudes toward the Social Security program. (2) The financing (or cost) related items were far less politically consequential than the benefits items. Still, Huddy recommends retaining the cost items because they could measure emerging opinion trends as the problem of how to fund old age programs becomes more salient. In addition, it is clear that the cost items tap a different dimension of public opinion than the benefit items. Huddy includes a supplement to her report in which she adds: (1) The benefits item gauging support for Medicare is substantially more successful in explaining the reactions of older people to their elected officials than the traditional NES item. (2) The traditional item is "most salient among younger respondents" and should, perhaps, be retained in conjunction with the experimental items. The supplement also includes further arguments for retaining the experimental cost-related items.