

Author(s): Zaller, John

Title: Analysis of News Exposure Items from the 1995 Pilot

Date: January 24, 1996

Dataset(s): 1995 Pilot Study

Abstract

Zaller examines and evaluates the 1995 Pilot Study items designed to measure exposure to television news programming. The Pilot contained three general types of exposure items: self report exposure items, tests of domain specific information, and willingness to rate media personalities on feeling thermometer scales. Because each of the batteries have different advantages and drawbacks, Zaller considers each separately. Zaller finds that the domain specific items, which test knowledge of news anchors, perform as expected. That is, the anchor information items function as valid measures of political information, but also tap a dimension of information somewhat independent of the NES political information scale. Furthermore, the anchor information items are not simply another opportunity for respondents to show they are well informed; only respondents with both high levels of political information and high news exposure score well on those items. Thus, the anchor information items seem to function as the sort of domain specific measure of television exposure that they were designed for. The "willingness to rate" anchor items, on the other hand, capture a factor somewhat correlated with political information, but largely independent of it. Thus, the willingness to rate items seem to be little more than a flawed measure of political information. Turning to the self-reported exposure items, Zaller argues that the traditional NES measure is inherently problematic and probably suffers from significant over-report. Zaller finds little evidence to suggest that either a longer exposure question battery or embedding the exposure item in a sequence of related items improves the performance of that item. In conclusion, Zaller argues that the new items, by and large, do not improve the measurement of media exposure. The one exception is that the anchor information items seem to be both a valid and reliable indicator of exposure to television news.