

Report on the NES 2000 Pilot Election Items

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Faith in Elections

As part of the new instrumentation on trust, we proposed to Russell Sage that we would develop new items on faith in elections. Elections are the principal mechanisms in democracy for ensuring elite accountability, and citizens' compliance with election outcomes depends on their sense that electoral procedures are legitimate. As registered in the NES time series, citizens' faith in the electoral process has been declining, a trend that is "not simply a manifestation of more general public dissatisfaction with the political system" (Bartels 1997).

In developing the new items, we were inspired by a number of different sources, including Tom Tyler's work on legitimacy (), Benjamin Barber's (1983) on trust, Stephen Craig (1993) and Arthur Sander's (1990) in-depth interviews, and rational choice work that distinguishes between incentive- and dispositional-based trustworthiness (Hardin 1999; Brennen 1998). Larry Bartels, Jon Krosnick and Tom Tyler also provided advice at various stages. From a much longer list of new questions, we selected several items that we then presented to the 2000 Planning Committee in March. Based on the feedback we received, these items were redrafted with the assistance of Jon Krosnick and a smaller set of 4 selected to appear on the Pilot. These items are as follows:

- *Respect me*: How often would you say political candidates running for Congress and the Presidency say things that are NOT respectful to people like you? Would you say constantly, usually, sometimes, rarely or never?
- *Respect opponents*: How much respect do you think political candidates running for the Congress and the Presidency usually show toward the people they are running against? Would you say a great deal, quite a bit, some, a little, or none at all?
- *Promises*: How often would you say political candidates running for Congress and the Presidency make campaign promises they have NO intention of keeping? Would you say constantly, usually, sometimes, rarely, or never?
- *More elections*: If we had elections more often, would members of Congress and the President pay more attention to people like you, less attention to people like you, or would it have no effect on how much attention the President and Congress pay to you?

In the analysis that follows, these and other variables have been coded to range between 0 and 1, with more positive sentiments coded high. Table 1 presents the descriptive information for the new items and their intercorrelations.

As a set, the new items do not hang together very well. While *respect me* and *keep promises* are moderately correlated, *more elections* is not significantly related to any of the other items, and the two respect items are also not correlated significantly. The failure of the *more elections* item, we believe, stems from the fact that people who believe elections work and those who believe they don't work may both gravitate toward the middle, "no difference" response option, the former because things are working fine and no change is necessary, the latter because

elections are pointless and so more of them wouldn't make a difference. We are also concerned that the relationship between *respect me* and *promises* is to some degree propped up by the fact that these two items are negatively worded. As we will see below, this concern is well founded.

In Table 2 we present the correlations between the new election items and relevant variables from the 98 Post-election survey and the 2000 Pilot. Three of the four new items show moderate relationships with many of the traditional items, and once again, the *more elections* item appears to be distinct. Voters, people who have attended a local meeting, the political knowledgeable, and those who believe that in general, elections make government pay attention are more likely to subscribe to the view that more elections would increase the attention government pays to people. Many of the traditional items are either unrelated or negatively related to this new question, however. Also of interest is that of the new items, only *respect me* is significantly related to the traditional internal efficacy item, *politics is too complicated*. The fact that *respect me* is also significantly related to political knowledge suggests that the question may tap as much an attribution about the worthiness of oneself as it does a judgment about campaigners' behavior. A final observation is that the two social trust items from the 98 Post appear to be differently related to the new election items in sensible ways. Perceived fairness, but not general trustworthiness, is related most strongly to people's views about whether campaigners treat their opponents with respect. The latter, however, is related to beliefs about whether politicians are likely to keep their promises.

The usual standard for evaluating pilot items is whether the proposed additions add something to the study of elections not provided by existing inventory. We therefore sought to explicate further the relationship between old and new items using more powerful confirmatory methods.

We began with a naïve, one-factor model to serve as our baseline. The four new items, eight of the stalwarts, and the *vote difference* item¹ were specified to measure one latent factor, political satisfaction. In addition, we allowed the measurement errors of the negatively worded items of *respect me* and *promises* to correlate. *Government say* and *Government care* are also negatively worded, and so their measurement errors were also allowed to correlate.

The fit of this model is not horrible by most standards (see Table 3). The P^2 to degrees-of-freedom ratio is just over 3 and the GFI is .92, better than the .90 that is generally thought to be acceptable. However, as shown by the estimates in the table, the new questions fare considerably less well than the traditional NES workhorses as measures of political satisfaction. As expected, the errors of *govtsay* and *govtcare* are significantly correlated ($r=.50$) and to a lesser, but still significant extent ($r=.21$), so are the errors of the other negatively worded set, *respect me* and *promises*.

We turned next to a more theoretically informed specification drawing on the distinctions found in the literature we consulted. Our first latent factor is measured by one item, one of the traditional external efficacy items. As this question taps beliefs about the openness of the political system to citizen input, we prefer to label the underlying latent factor **Voice** rather than perpetuate the awkwardness of external efficacy. Our second latent factor is **Integrity**, which is

¹ The origin of this item is the CSES module on the 1996 Post-election survey.

measured by items that refer to the ethical qualities of political actors or institutions, including perceived lack of bias, deportment, and honesty. Measuring **Benevolence** are items that reflect people's sense that those in political roles have a concern for the well being of citizens. Our final factor, borrowing from Craig (1993), we term **Coercive Responsiveness**. It differs from Benevolence by its focus on institutional incentives as the means to secure elite accountability rather the personal virtue of those in political roles. To quote one of Craig's respondents: "Politicians [do listen] because they always have to keep an eye out for re-election. If they screw-up real bad, they know they're going to get axed." In Craig's in-depth interviews, this belief is accompanied by a strong commitment to the efficacy of voting. In his in-depth interviews, Arthur Sanders (1990) finds a similar mix of distrust of politicians' motives combined with faith in political activity as the means to root out the corrupt.

We initially assumed that each indicator was caused by only one of these four latent variables. In column 1 of Table 4 we report the estimates for this four-factor model. Both the P^2 and the GFI indicate that a four-factor provides a much better fit to the data than our naïve, one-factor model. The P^2 is driven down to .89 and the GFI improves to .97.

While four latent factors appear to better represent the data better than one, they are far from distinct. There is considerable overlap among them, ranging from the moderate correlation of .25 between control and integrity to the stronger .71 between benevolence and responsiveness (see column 1, Table 5).

In our final model, we relax the assumption that each indicator is caused by only one latent factor. We allowed the *benefits all* item to measure benevolence as well as integrity since its content overlaps these two dimensions. And since both the *government pay attention* and the *elections make government pay attention* item have been treated previously as measures of responsiveness (see Craig, Niemi and Silver 1990) we allowed the former to also load on our coercive responsiveness factor. In addition, we attempted to provide some more empirical justification for the notion that coercive responsiveness is distinct from moral virtue by allowing both the *promises* and (not) *crooked* items to serve as indicators of this factor. If Craig and Sander's interpretations of this orientation are correct, we should expect these items to have negative rather than positive loadings.

The revised 4-Factor provides a significant improvement in fit. The difference in P^2 of 20.9 with 4 degrees of freedom is significant at the $p < .001$ level. Three of the four newly freed parameters are statistically significant, and as expected, the signs on the *promises* and *crooked* items are negative for the coercive responsiveness factor. These changes helped to sharpen the distinction between benevolence and coercive responsiveness, as the correlation between these two latent factors declines from .71 to .55 (see Table 5). This is still, however, a sizeable relationship, indicating that at least in the public's mind, the dispositional and institutional bases of political accountability are not in competition with one another. Or as Madison might have said it in *Federalist 57*: "The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust."

Summary and Recommendation

The performance of the new election items is disappointing. Not only do they not cohere as a set, they are less reliable indicators of dimensions already tapped by existing inventory. Of the four items, two are clearly a bust, namely *more elections* and *respect me*. *Respect opponents* performed marginally better as an indicator of integrity than *respect me* did as an indicator of benevolence. A case might be made for it to be retained in order to measure concerns about incivility and negative campaigning, though there are probably more direct ways to ask about this, including the 98 Pilot's question on perceptions of campaign tone. More interesting is the *promises* item. In the revised model, it is not a bad measure of integrity, and it also appears to tap a sentiment that is related to beliefs about whether institutional incentives are necessary to insure the proper conduct of political elites.

In the end, however, one new item will not help to clarify people's implicit theories about the relationship between virtue (both honesty and benevolence) and incentives. Instead, the best course would seem to be additional R and D work along this lines, perhaps for possible inclusion in 2004.

Table 1. Correlations Among Election Items in 2000 NES Pilot

	Candidates Respect People Like Me	Candidates Respect Opponents	Candidates Keep Their Promises	More Elections Would Increase Govt. Attention
Candidates respect people like me	1.0			
Candidates respect opponents	.02	1.0		
Candidates keep their promises	.26***	.13***	1.0	
More elections would increase government attention	.06	.07	-.02	1.0
Mean	.52	.39	.36	.63
S.D.	.20	.23	.23	.32

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Table 2. Correlations Between New Election Items and Related Content from 1998 and 2000

Items From 1998 NES	Items From 2000 NES Pilot			
	Candidates Respect People Like Me	Candidates Respect Opponents	Candidates Keep Their Promises	More Elections Would Increase Govt. Attention
Govt. pays attention to what people think	.11*	.18****	.09*	.04
Govt. cares about people like me	.20****	.11**	.06	.05
Hardly any people in govt. are crooked	.18****	.22****	.23****	-.08
Politics is not too complicated for me	.16****	.03	.05	-.01
Trust Govt. to do what is right	.20****	.11**	.16****	.08
Govt. is run for the benefit of all	.15****	.14****	.20****	.01
People like me have a say in govt.	.14****	.06	.01	.01
Govt. does not waste much tax money	.13****	.11	.17****	-.04
Elections make govt. pay attention	.06	.04	-.06	.12**
Voting can make a difference	.08	.04	.03	.01
People Fair (98 Post)	.07	.17****	-.03	.07
Trust People (98 Post)	.10**	-.01	.10**	.02
Voted in 1996	.05	-.03	.08	.11**
Voted in 1998	.04	-.04	.00	.10*
Contacted official	-.03	-.04	.08	-.01
Attended community meeting	.04	.07	.03	.13****
Returned census form	-.03	.06	.00	.06
Strength of partisanship	.10*	.10**	.13****	.04
Political knowledge	.10**	-.04	-.06	.10**
Clinton moral	.02	.17****	.11**	-.07
Clinton cares	.12**	-.01	.15****	-.01
Clinton knowledgeable	.05	.07	.03	.03
Clinton honest	.02	.11**	.15****	-.04
Clinton strong leader	.08	.06	.13****	-.02

Congress not too partisan	.04	.02	.05	-.03
Congress gets much accomplished	.13***	.06	.12**	.04
Congress cares what Americans think	.19***	.11**	.11**	-.01
Unified Govt. is better	.07	.11	.07	-.03
Incumbent Rep. is good at keeping in touch	.06	-.06	.12	.07
Favors term limits	-.11**	-.11**	-.08*	.03
Contacted by party	-.02	-.06	-.01	.06
Parties have important differences	.04	-.04	-.04	.01
Electoral involvement	-.01	-.08	-.02	.03
<u>Opinions of Two Party System</u>				
Continuation of two-party system	.08*	.06	.10**	.02
Elections with no parties	-.06	-.03	-.08	.06
Growth of new parties	-.03	-.04	-.03	-.08
Thermometer Avg.#	.05	.09*	.17***	.04

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Thermometer Average : Clinton, Congress, DEM Party, GOP Party (N = 388)

Note: The opinions of the two-party system are three dummies, one for each response.

1. A CONTINUATION OF THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM OF DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS
2. ELECTIONS IN WHICH CANDIDATES RUN AS INDIVIDUALS **WITHOUT PARTY LABELS**
3. THE GROWTH OF ONE OR MORE PARTIES THAT COULD EFFECTIVELY CHALLENGE THE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS

Table 3: Single-Factor LISREL Model

	Political Satisfaction
Candidates respect people like me	.84*** (.22)
Candidates respect Their opponents	.73*** (.21)
Candidates keep Their promises	.71*** (.21)
More elections would increase govt. attention	.15 (.18)
Voting can make a difference	1.00
Govt. pays attention to what people think	1.67*** (.27)
Elections make govt. pay attention	1.29*** (.27)
Govt. cares about people like me	1.67*** (.32)
People like me have a say in govt.	1.27*** (.27)
Hardly any people in Govt. are crooked	1.43*** (.29)
Govt. does not waste much tax money	1.51*** (.30)
Trust govt. to do What is right	1.54*** (.30)
Govt. is run for the benefit of all	1.80*** (.33)

Table 4. Unstandardized Factor Loadings from Four-Factor Models

	Control		Integrity		Benevolence		Coercive Responsiveness	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Candidates respect people like me	--	--	--	--	.41*** (.09)	.37*** (.09)	--	--
Candidates respect Their opponents	--	--	.47*** (.11)	.49*** (.11)	--	--	--	--
Candidates keep Their promises	--	--	.51*** (.11)	.69*** (.14)	--	--	--	-.26*** (.11)
More elections would increase govt. attention	--	--	--	--	--	--	.16* (.10)	.17* (.09)
Voting can make a difference	--	--	--	--	--	--	.75*** (.13)	.68*** (.12)
Govt. pays attention to what people think	--	--	--	--	1.02*** (.12)	.64*** (.16)	--	.37*** (.15)
Elections make govt. pay attention	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.00	1.00
Govt. cares about people like me	--	--	--	--	1.00	1.00	--	--
People like me have a say in govt.	1.00	1.00	--	--	--	--	--	--
Hardly any people in Govt. are crooked	--	--	1.00	1.19*** (.17)	--	--	--	-.17 (.11)
Govt. does not waste much tax money	--	--	.98*** (.13)	1.00	--	--	--	--
Trust govt. to do What is right	--	--	1.04*** (.13)	1.09*** (.14)	--	--	--	--
Govt. is run for the benefit of all	--	--	1.08*** (.17)	.85*** (.16)	--	.26*** (.11)	--	--

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Model 1

P² with 58 degrees of freedom =88.85 (p= .0057)
 RMSE=.037
 GFI=.97

Model 2

P² with 54 degrees of freedom=67.91 (p=.097)
 RMSE=.025
 GFI=.97

Table 5. Correlations among Latent Factors

	Control		Integrity		Benevolence		Responsiveness
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	
Control	1.00						
Neutrality	.25	.26	1.00				
Benevolence	.50	.49	.61	.56	1.00		
Responsiveness	.50	.46	.40	.41	.71	.55	1.00

Note: All correlations are statistically significant at $p < .01$