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Abstract

Wlezien examines the seven-point ideological placements of groups in the 1997 Pilot Study. He finds that respondents tend to place groups on the ideological scale and that the distribution of mean placements is sensible. He also finds that group placements are interrelated and reflect an underlying structure, one that is linked to placements of the two political parties. Exploratory factor analysis of group and party placements reveals three dimensions: (1) a "partisan" dimension that contains Christian fundamentalists, gays and lesbians, and the political parties; (2) a "minority" dimension that includes placements of blacks, women, and also gays and lesbians; and (3) a "majority" dimension consisting of whites and men. Wlezien finds that measures of absolute self-group ideological distance are correlated with thermometer evaluations of the two, more ideologically extreme social groups, but not the other, less extreme demographic groups. He recommends including the seven-point group placement items in at least one additional Election Study, in order to provide a more complete assessment. To provide such an assessment, Wlezien recommends using a larger number of groups.

Date: February 1, 1998

To: NES Board

From: Christopher Wlezien

Re: Liberal-Conservative Evaluations of Groups in the 1997 Pilot Study

The 1997 Pilot Study included seven-point ideological placements of six groups. The specific groups, which were used in various other batteries within the Pilot Study, are: men, women, blacks, whites, gays and lesbians, and Christian fundamentalists. Discussions during the meeting of the Planning Committee suggested that ideological placements might work nicely in conjunction with the other group batteries. The discussions also suggested that ideological placements might be useful unto themselves. In this report, I focus on the placement items, and leave their utility for the other batteries to those responsible for the separate group-related reports.¹

Descriptives:

The frequencies and descriptive statistics for the seven-point placements of the six groups are shown in Table 1. Notice first that respondents, for the most part, do place the groups on the scale, slightly (3-9 percent) less frequently than they place the two political parties. There is some variation in placements across groups, however: respondents were more likely to place demographic groups, namely, blacks, whites, women, and men (valid n = 403-411 of 429), than the two social groups, namely, gays and lesbians and Christian fundamentalists (valid n = 385-389 of 429).²

The mean placements of the six groups and placements of self and the two political parties are as we might expect, as can be seen in Figure 1. The means for gays and lesbians and Christian fundamentalists are respectively well left and right of center, just outside the means for the two political parties. The means for women and, especially, blacks are left of center, though inside the Democratic party mean, and the means for men and whites cluster around mean self identification.

Correlational Structure:

Intercorrelations among the group placements and party and self placements are shown in Table 2. Here we can see that placements of certain sets of groups are related. Placements of blacks, women, and gays and lesbians are positively related; placements of men and whites also are positively related. Placements of Christian fundamentalist are negatively related to placements of gays and lesbians and, though to a lesser extent, blacks. Placements of groups also are correlated with placements of the parties, which implies a partisan structure that may partially account for the correlations among group placements. In effect, the more extreme one's placements of the parties, the more extreme the placements of (positively and negatively) associated groups.³

Factor analysis of the six group placements reveals two factors, which largely, but imperfectly, summarize the correlational analyses (see Table 3). The first factor contains blacks, women, gays and lesbians, and Christian fundamentalists, and the directions of the loadings are as expected; the second factor captures the separate, positively related placements of men and whites. The results suggest that group ideological placements reflect a broad partisan/minority dimension and a very different majority dimension.

Including placements of the political parties changes things somewhat, as can be seen in Table 4. Here there are three factors: the first contains Christian fundamentalists, gays and lesbians, and the two political parties; the second contains blacks, women, and also gays and lesbians; and the third includes whites and men. These results suggest that group ideological placements reflect separate partisan, minority, and majority group dimensions.

External Prediction:

One very basic way to assess the utility of the group placements is to examine correlations between self-group ideological distance measures and the group thermometers. Two distance measures for each group are used here: (1) a directional distance measure, which represents self placement minus group placement; and (2) an absolute distance measure, which represents the absolute value of the directional distance measure. The correlations between these two distance measures and the corresponding group thermometers are shown in Table 5.⁴

These results are mixed. Notice first that absolute distance measures seem to work better than the raw, directional distance measures.⁵ Even the absolute distance measures do not predict thermometer ratings for all six groups, however; only four of the correlations are appropriately (negatively) signed and only two of these are statistically significant ($p < .01$), for Christian fundamentalists and gays and lesbians. The pattern suggests that group placements are particularly useful for predicting ratings of more partisan, ideologically extreme groups. It is difficult to say for sure given the limited set of groups in the Pilot Study.

Observations and Recommendations:

Respondents tend to place groups on the seven-point ideological scale and the placements reflect an underlying structure. The utility of the measures is mixed, however. Absolute self-group ideological distance measures are correlated with thermometer evaluations of the two, more ideologically extreme social groups, but not the other, less extreme demographic groups. The group placements also may be of use for the various group-related batteries in the Pilot Study or in other ways altogether, as mentioned above. Even based on my fairly basic analysis, however, there is reason to include the group placement items in at least one more survey, if only to provide a more complete assessment. Such an assessment, in my mind, requires the inclusion of a larger number of groups, as reflected in the battery of thermometers, for example. If the items are

included in future surveys, all respondents should be asked to provide placements, not only those that offer self placements.

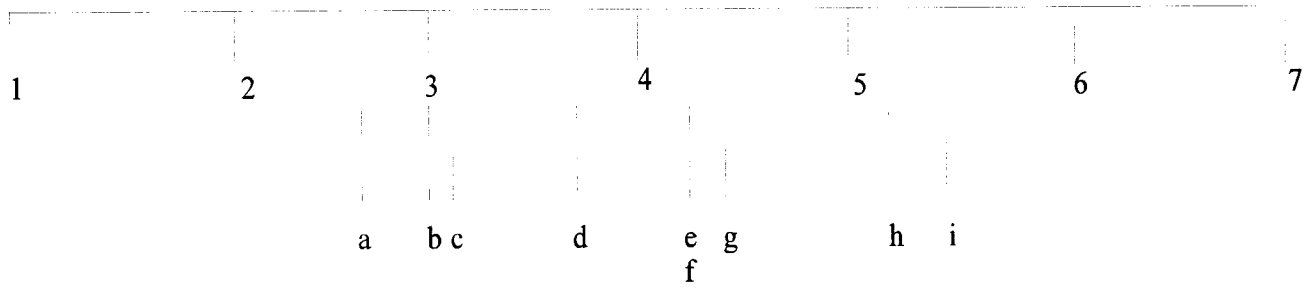
Notes

1. I owe special thanks to Christopher Carman for assistance with data analysis.
2. Only 429 (of the 551) respondents were asked to place the groups on the seven-point scale, which includes those (441) respondents who provided a self placement minus the (12) respondents who were not asked to place the groups for other reasons.
3. Notice that the placements of both parties are negatively related to self placement, which reflects a broader pattern in the placement of political institutions--see Carman and Wlezien's 1997 Pilot Study report on "Ideological Evaluations of Government Institutions and Policy." The tendency has little effect on the correlational structure described in Table 2.
4. To correct for positivity bias, the thermometers were adjusted using each respondent's average thermometer evaluation of four other groups: liberals, conservatives, labor unions, and big business. Specifically, the respondent's average rating of these four groups was subtracted from the respondent's thermometer rating of each of the six groups of interest. This adjustment does not make much difference for the correlational analyses.
5. Separate regression analyses (not reported here) that include both measures indicate that absolute distance outperforms directional distance.

Table 1: Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items

		Self	Blacks	Whites	Men	Women	Christ. Fund.	Gays	Dem. Party	Rep. Party
Ext. Liberal	1	7	9	1	3	2	2	52	30	3
	2	47	94	9	7	33	11	143	145	7
	3	69	159	44	49	145	31	91	122	30
Moderate	4	133	114	195	160	157	47	81	70	52
	5	81	22	138	148	62	66	11	35	116
	6	95	4	22	38	10	143	6	16	192
Ext. Conservative	7	9	1	0	2	2	89	1	4	23
Valid N		441	403	409	407	411	389	385	422	423
IN AP	0	-	122	122	122	122	122	122	122	122
DK	8	110	25	18	22	18	40	41	6	6
NA, RF	9	-	1	2	0	0	0	3	1	0
Sys. Miss. N		110	148	142	144	140	162	166	129	128
Total N		551	551	551	551	551	551	551	551	551
Mean		4.26	3.15	4.29	4.39	3.69	5.44	2.68	3.00	5.22
Standard Deviation		1.38	0.97	0.83	0.94	0.96	1.37	1.15	1.27	1.14

Figure 1: Means of the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items



- a 2.68 Gays and Lesbians
- b 3.00 Democratic Party
- c 3.15 Blacks
- d 3.69 Women
- e 4.26 Self Placement
- f 4.29 Whites
- g 4.39 Men
- h 5.22 Republican Party
- i 5.44 Christian Fundamentalists

Table 2: Correlations Among the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items

	Self	Blacks	Whites	Men	Women	Christ. Fund.	Gays	Dem. Party	Rep. Party
Self	1.00								
Blacks	-0.04	1.00							
Whites	0.04	-0.05	1.00						
Men	-0.02	-0.04	0.42**	1.00					
Women	0.11	0.29**	0.12	-0.08	1.00				
Christ. Fund.	-0.09	-0.14*	0.01	-0.00	-0.10	1.00			
Gays	-0.14*	0.33**	-0.00	0.00	0.24**	-0.30**	1.00		
Dem. Party	-0.19**	0.40**	0.06	0.03	0.18**	-0.35**	0.34**	1.00	
Rep. Party	-0.13*	-0.32**	0.13*	0.24**	-0.16**	0.40**	-0.20**	-0.48**	1.00

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

Table 3: Factor Analysis of Group Placement Items

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Blacks	.70	
Whites		.86
Men		.84
Women	.65	
Christ. Fund.	-.52	
Gays/Lesbians	.74	
Eigenvalue ^a (rotated)	1.73	1.45

^aNext highest eigenvalue .97
 Extraction Method: Principal Components
 Rotation Method: Promax

Table 4: Factor Analysis of Group and Party Placement Items

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Blacks		.76	
Whites			.83
Men			.85
Women		.80	
Christ. Fund.	.77		
Gays/Lesbians	-.54	.51	
Democratic Party	-.76		
Republican Party	.75		
Eigenvalue ^a (rotated)	2.20	1.84	1.53

^aNext highest eigenvalue .78
 Extraction Method: Principal Components
 Rotation Method: Promax

Table 5: Correlations between Feeling Thermometers and Self-Group Distance Items

	Blacks	Whites	Men	Women	Christ. Fund.	Gays
Dir. Distance ^a	-0.09	0.05	0.09	0.11	0.36*	-0.31*
Abs. Distance ^b	-0.11	-0.03	0.12	0.24	-0.45*	-0.38*

* $p \leq .001$

^a Directional Distance is computed using the formula:
Dir. Distance = Self Placement - Group Placement

^b Absolute Distance is computed using the formula:
Abs. Distance = | Self Placement - Group Placement |