

**Measuring Perceived Effectiveness of Political Institutions:
Report on the ANES Pilot Study 2006**

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Abstract

The ANES Pilot Study 2006 included four questions measuring perceptions of how much the President and the U.S. Congress can influence what is happening in the nation or in the personal lives of citizens. The responses collected show that Americans think the President has a slightly stronger impact than the U.S. Congress and that for both the societal impact is larger than individual impact.

Respondents who watch more televisions news are more likely to believe in a higher effectiveness of political institutions. Similarly, there is some evidence that perceived effectiveness, especially on the personal lives of the respondents, increases with the amount of attention citizens pay to governmental affairs. However, there is only weak evidence that perceived effectiveness increases the likelihood to vote in an election. Similarly, no clear resolution could be found for a simple experimental manipulation of the questions wording for the general impact of political institutions ('nation' vs. 'United States' as the object of reference).

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The ANES Pilot Study 2006 included four questions measuring citizens' perceptions of how effective the President of the United States and U.S. senators can be in influencing the personal lives of individual citizens as well as shaping the nation in general.

The original proposal introduced these questions as a new dimension of political efficacy. However, I am now using the label 'perceived effectiveness of political institutions' which more accurately reflects the subjective assessment of political institutions and individual political actors by citizens. Nonetheless, the proposed construct of perceived effectiveness of political institutions might complement the self-perception measurements of political efficacy. The new measure is, as are dimensions of political efficacy, "primarily a cognitive concept, a set of beliefs about one's citizenship role in relationship to governmental institutions".¹

This report proceeds as follows: First, I will describe the questions, response options, and manipulations used in the ANES Pilot Study, including some descriptive results. Next, I will show how the questions relate to other characteristics of the respondents. Then, I will turn to evaluate the questions in terms of their validity.

¹ Sullivan, John L., and E. Riedel. 2001. Efficacy: Political. In *International encyclopedia of social & behavioral sciences.*, eds. Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes, 4353-4356. Amsterdam / New York: Elsevier.

Questions Used and Descriptive Results

Four questions were included in the ANES Pilot Study 2006, with an experimental manipulation in two of the questions:

1. How much would you say the work and decisions of the President of the United States can affect what happens in the [United States / nation]? (respondents were randomly assigned to receive one of the two ending phrases.)
2. How much can the U.S. Congress affect what happens in the [United States / nation]? (respondents were randomly assigned to received one of the two ending phrases.)
3. How much would you say the President of the United States can affect how you personally live your life?
4. How much can the U.S. Congress affect how you personally live your life?

The response options for all four questions were 'not at all', 'a little', 'a moderate amount', 'a lot', 'a great deal'. All respondents in the ANES Pilot Study 2006 were asked these questions. For the analyses presented here I am using the 'Advance Release' of the ANES Pilot Study 2006 data set with a total of 665 respondents (released on January 10th 2007). Respondents were first asked about their evaluation of the President and then on the U.S. Congress (the second questions are slightly shorter because the introductory phrase 'would you say' is omitted). The distributions of answers for each question are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1: Distributions of Responses to Questions on National Effectiveness

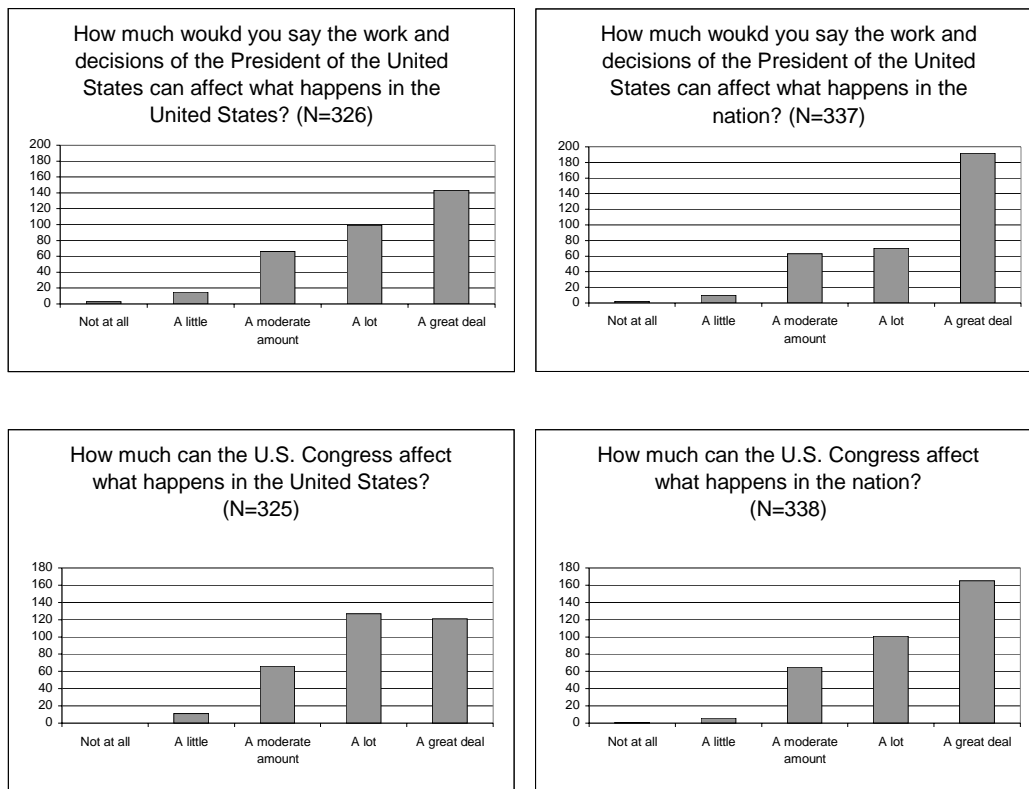
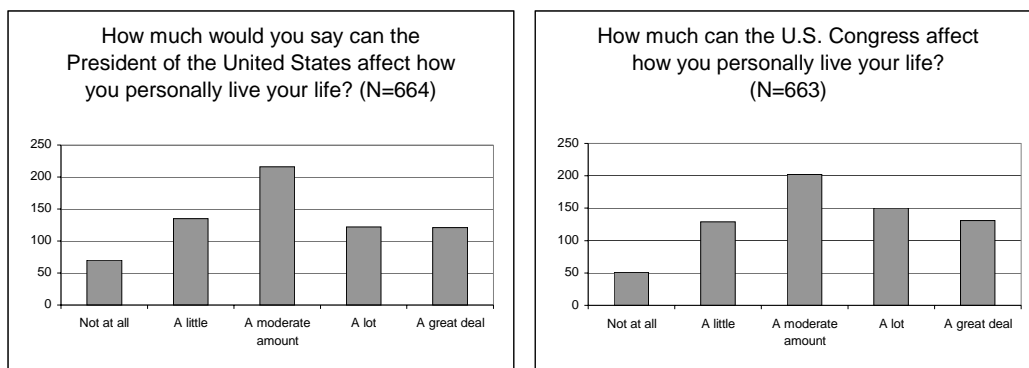


Figure 2: Distributions of Responses to Questions on Personal Effectiveness



On the national level respondents generally see the President as slightly more effective than the U.S. Congress (sign test: $p=.02$; $N=662$). However, respondents consider both the President as well as the U.S. Congress to be very effective in having a general impact on the nation and society, only very few respondents selected one of the lower scale points. It seems both questions using 'the nation' as a reference point are somewhat more likely to shift respondents in the higher category than the two questions using 'the United States' as a reference point (Kruskal-Wallis test for President: $p=.007$; $N=663$; Kruskal-Wallis test for U.S. Congress: $p=.02$; $N=663$).

The responses to personal effectiveness for both President and U.S. Congress are much more distributed over the full range of the scale. The amount to which the President (sign test; $p<.001$; $N=662$) or the U.S. Congress (sign test; $p<.001$; $N=661$) can influence the personal lives of the respondents is perceived to be smaller than their impact on the nation as a whole. However, U.S. Congress is considered to be slightly more influential than the President when it comes to the personal lives of respondents (sign test; $p<.001$; $N=663$).

A simple analysis shows that all items for perceived effectiveness are correlated with each other (see Table 1). However, a factor analysis (principal-component factors) with the common selection criterion of Eigenvalue <1 only resulted in one distinct factor with 52.20 % of the variance explained. A closer inspection revealed that a second factor barely missed the selection criterion (Eigenvalue for the second factor: .9961) and when the factor analysis is expanded to two factors and then rotated with a varimax-rotation to generate orthogonal factors, two meaningful factors emerged (explained variance 77.11 %, see Table 2). On the first factor the two items reflecting personal effectiveness items

are assembled, on the second factor the two items representing national effectiveness are represented.

Table 1: Spearman-Correlations between items

	President: <i>National Effectiveness</i>	President: <i>Personal Effectiveness</i>	U.S. Congress: <i>National Effectiveness</i>
President: <i>Personal Effectiveness</i>	.35		
U.S. Congress: <i>National Effectiveness</i>	.40	.20	
U.S. Congress: <i>Personal Effectiveness</i>	.18	.70	.33

All p 's < .001.

Table 2: Factor Analysis: After factor loadings after varimax-rotation (N=660)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
President: <i>National Effectiveness</i>	.17	.81
U.S. Congress: <i>National Effectiveness</i>	.14	.82
President: <i>Personal Effectiveness</i>	.91	.16
U.S. Congress: <i>Personal Effectiveness</i>	.91	.12
<i>Explained Variance</i>	42.75 %	34.36 %

Predictors of Perceived Institutional Effectiveness

Are there specific characteristics of respondents that make it more likely for them to perceive politicians and political institutions as more influential either on their personal lives or on the national in general? This question will be investigated in this section.

I used four regression models predicting answers to the four different questions on perceived institutional effectiveness with several different variables describing the respondents. The independent variables were gender, age, squared age, education (omitted: no high school degree), two dummies for race (African-American and Hispanic,

omitted are all other categories), a variable for strength of party affiliation, two dummy variables for whether the respondent identified himself/herself as a Democrat or a Republican, and variables on media use (the new items included in the ANES Pilot Study 2006; the number of minutes per day the respondents watches TV, the number of minutes using the internet, listening to the radio or reading print news during a week; log-transformed). All variables (except the log-transformed media use variables) were recoded to range from 0 to 1 and then simultaneously entered into ordered logit regressions. The results are shown in Table 3. When squared age was non-significant, it was excluded from the regression, and the regression was re-run.

Table 3: Ordered Logit Regressions: Predictors of Perceived Effectiveness of Political Institutions

	President, National	President, Personal	U.S. Congress, National	U.S. Congress, Personal
Democrat	.31 #	-.01	.11	.12
Republican	-.29 #	-.36 +	-.22	-.27 #
Strength of Party ID	.50 +	.42 #	.42 #	.46 +
TV	.07 *	.07 *	.09 **	.08 *
Internet	.01	-.03	.01	.02
Print	.04	.06 #	.04	.07 +
Radio	.00	.03	.01	.06 +
Age	-.20	2.19 +	-.01	2.95 *
Age, squared		-2.65 *		-3.47 **
Male	.26 #	.31 *	.06	.01
African-American	.70 *	.23	.35	.21
Hispanic	.05	.96 *	.68 #	1.35 **
Education: High School	.16	.07	.47	.17
Education: Some College / College	.08	-.21	.53	-.01
Education: Advanced Degree	.34	-.24	.57	.01
N	647	648	647	647

p < .15; + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** < p < .001;

Stronger party identification implicates a stronger belief in the power of political institutions which is reasonable if strength of party identification is also a reflection of

political involvement. Older respondents are more likely to see stronger personal implications of political decisions of both the U.S. Congress and the President. Republicans are less likely to believe in the effectiveness of political institutions on both the nation and their personal lives than Independents, although those effects are barely significant. However, the differences between Democrats and Republicans are significant (President, National: $p=.002$; President, Personal: $p=.06$; U.S. Congress, National: $p=.08$; U.S. Congress, Personal: $p=.03$).

There is a consistent positive relationship between watching television news and the perceived personal and national effectiveness of politicians. Because the direction of causation is unclear in this correlation setting, two explanations are possible: either the respondents who are exposed to political information (news, campaign ads, etc.) are exposed to more information on what politicians do and therefore consider them to be more influential, or respondents who believe in the effectiveness of political institutions have more incentives to observe what is happening in the political world. Nonetheless, these results are somewhat in contradiction to other suggestions that television might drive cynicism and frustration with political institutions.

Validity of Measuring Perceived Political Effectiveness

The NES Pilot Study further provides a possibility of testing the validity of the questions. To test the validity, and potentially discriminate between the two question wordings for the national effectiveness questions, one has to assume some plausible theoretical relationship to another variable and test the validity of the measurement.

The relationship between perceived political effectiveness and seven different dependent variables was investigated. The first five dependent variables (column 1

through 5 in Table 4) are the responses to a series of questions on attention to and interest in political affairs. All these models used ordered logit models. Because respondents were randomly assigned to either the first three or the last two questions, the number of observations for each of these regressions is around 330. The other two dependent variables are the participation in the 2004 and 2006 election, measured for all respondents. Both are coded as 0 when the respondent did not vote in the election and as 1 when he or she did cast a vote in the election. Logit regressions are used to estimate parameter values. Voting in 2004 was measured in 2004 during the post-election wave of the survey, voting in 2006 was measured in the Pilot Study 2006 itself. The measures of effectiveness are recoded to range from 0 to 1 in all regressions, where 0 is the lowest scale point and 1 is the highest scale point.

The general expectation for all these models would be a positive, significant relationship between perceptions of the effectiveness of political institutions and the dependent variables, indicating that respondents who believe in the impact of political institutions should have more incentives to follow governmental affairs, be interested in politics and vote in elections.

Table 4: Ordered Logit Regressions: Predictors of Perceived Effectiveness of Political Institutions

	<i>How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>How closely do you pay attention to information about what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in the political campaigns this year?</i>	<i>Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?</i>	<i>Voted in 2006</i>	<i>Voted in 2004</i>
	Ordered Logit (N=334)	Ordered Logit (N=335)	Ordered Logit (N=335)	Ordered Logit (N=328)	Ordered Logit (N=328)	Logit (N=664)	Logit (N=663)
Bivariate Regressions							
President, National	.55	.40	.22	1.21 **	1.10 *	.05	.19
U.S. Congress, National	.17	-.20	.08	1.44 **	1.03 *	.86 *	.58
President, Personal	.70 *	.41	.74 *	.77 *	.81 *	-.08	.14
U.S. Congress, Personal	1.19 ***	.76 *	.88 *	1.40 ***	1.01 **	.30	.56 #
Combined Regression							
President, National	.82 #	.82 #	.07	.73	.68	-.10	.15
U.S. Congress, National	-.86 #	-1.01 +	-.47	.70	.46	.84 +	.31
President, Personal	-.59	-.60	.23	-.35	.13	-.51	-.52
U.S. Congress, Personal	1.73 **	1.34 **	.81 #	1.31 *	.61	.46	.80 #
<i>Joint test (χ^2, df=4)</i>	17.29 **	9.97 *	7.33 #	18.67 ***	10.91 *	5.96	3.87
Combined Reg. w/controls							
President, National	.70	.51	.01	.63	.92	-.50	.16
U.S. Congress, National	-1.01 #	-1.11 +	-.58	.58	.25	.92 +	-.08
President, Personal	-.04	.23	1.00 +	-.22	.60	-.12	-.26
U.S. Congress, Personal	1.54 **	.75	.21	1.24 *	.14	-.03	.42
<i>Joint test (χ^2, df=4)</i>	18.24 **	7.84 +	9.16 +	12.73 *	10.22 *	3.27	.60
Question Wording: Interactions							
President, National	.90 #	.11	.70	1.36 +	1.48 *	.18	.94
Question Wording: Nation (=1)	.08	.51	.77	.65	.21	.62	1.19 #
President, National*QW	-.39	-.05	-.71	-.61	-.31	-.79	-1.66 +
U.S. Congress, National	.92	-.13	.02	.86	.40	1.10 #	-.10
Question Wording: Nation (=1)	1.17	.56	.42	-.24	-.59	.60	-.46
U.S. Congress, National*QW	-1.74 #	-.58	-.26	.55	.74	-.84	.42

p < .15; + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** < p < .001;

Table 5: Ordered Logit Regressions: Combined Predictors of Perceived Effectiveness of Political Institutions

	<i>How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>How closely do you pay attention to information about what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?</i>	<i>Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in the political campaigns this year?</i>	<i>Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?</i>	<i>Voted in 2006</i>	<i>Voted in 2004</i>
	Ordered Logit (N=334)	Ordered Logit (N=335)	Ordered Logit (N=335)	Ordered Logit (N=328)	Ordered Logit (N=328)	Logit (N=664)	Logit (N=663)
Bivariate Regressions							
National	.69	.29	.29	1.87 **	1.49 **	.62	.54
Personal	1.10 **	.68 +	.94 *	1.27 **	1.06 **	.13	.41
Combined Regression							
National	-.02	-.12	-.38	1.47 *	1.16 *	.66	.41
Personal	1.14 **	.72 +	1.04 *	.87 *	.73 +	-.06	.27
<i>Joint test (χ^2, df=4)</i>	10.13 **	4.00	6.87 *	15.38 ***	10.67 **	1.72	1.45
Combined Reg. w/controls							
National	-.20	-.36	-.35	1.23 +	1.15 +	.36	.07
Personal	1.49 ***	.92 *	1.17 **	.92 +	.78 +	-.15	.15
<i>Joint test (χ^2, df=4)</i>	14.25 ***	5.08 *	7.73 *	10.60 **	9.34 **	.42	.18
Question Wording: Interactions							
National	1.06	.35	.70	1.59 +	1.32	.88	.71
Question Wording: Nation (=1)	1.55 +	.37	.83	.21	-.27	.88	.67
National*QW	-1.55	-.37	-.77	-.06	.30	-1.16	-1.02

p < .15; + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001;

The first four rows in Table 4 are bivariate regressions between the four questions on perception of political effectiveness and the dependent variables. That is, each regression only included one of the questions on perceived political effectiveness individually. The four and fifth dependent variables show much stronger and more significant relationships than the first three questions which might be a result of different question wordings and response options used in the Pilot Study. However, personal impact of the U.S. Congress showed a significant positive relationship across all five questions on political interest and attention.

While personal relevance of political institutions overall seems to be a good predictor of all questions on interest and attention, they are only weakly related to participating in elections. All relationships to participation in the elections are only weak, one significant relationship can be found for the impact of U.S. Congress on society in general on participating in the 2006 election and election races in that year were primarily for positions in the U.S. Congress.

Investigating participation in the 2004 election, an election with a Presidential race, did not yield any significant relationships. However, the relationship of perceived effectiveness of the President to participating in the election is stronger, while the role of perceived effectiveness of the U.S. Congress is weaker than in the 2006 elections. Nonetheless, these differences are not statistically significant.

A plausible explanation for the lack of a significant relationship to participating in the 2004 election could be that perceptions of effectiveness change over time and that evaluations at the end of 2006 do not match those that might have driven respondents to participate in the elections two years earlier.

The next set of coefficients is based on combined regression with all four questions entered simultaneously in the regression equation. Because the measures are correlated with each other (see Table 1), the estimated coefficients change. In addition to showing tests for statistical significance of individual coefficients, I also conducted a joint test for significance (reported in the last line of this block). The results look similar as before.

The third set of results are the same regressions with an additional set of control variables. Control variables used (and omitted in the table) are age, age squared, sex, gender, race, strength of party identification, and use of political media (TV, print, radio, internet). Overall results are almost unaffected by the inclusion of control variables, although some of the previously significant results now drop below the threshold for statistical significance.

The fourth set of regression coefficients in Table 4 investigates the potentially difference in validity between the two question wordings used for the effectiveness on the national level. Respondents were either asked to describe the perceived impact of the President and the U.S. Congress on ‘the United States’ or ‘the nation’. The validity was tested by investigating if either one of the two question wordings has a stronger relationship to any of the dependent variables used before. However, there is only one marginally significant interaction effect between question wording (coded as a dummy) and the perceived effectiveness scale for the vote in 2004. The result implies a slight advantage for the ‘United States’ question format, supported by the fact that the sign of most other interaction coefficient, despite not being statistically significant, are in the same direction.

Some of the coefficients in Table 4 might appear to be surprising, because they actually have a negative sign (although they never are statistically significant), implying that the perceived effectiveness can reduce the interest, attention or propensity to engage in an election. However, those coefficients almost only occur when all four variables are included simultaneously and are a result of correlations between the variables and the structure of the measurement, as discussed before. Therefore, I re-ran the models, this time grouping the combining both questions on general impact and both question on personal impact into single items (by addition and then re-scaling to range from 0 to 1). The results can be found in Table 5.

Some of the results are now more pronounced but general patterns remain. No significant effects for participating in elections can be found. Personal relevance is important for the first three questions on attention and interest, the other two questions are showing strong relations to both national and personal impact, although when both are included simultaneously it seems that national impact is more important. Not a single interaction effect was significant in evaluating the validity of the two different question wording, but six out of seven of them exhibit a negative coefficient.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report documented an evaluation of four questions on perceptions of the influence of political institutions such as the President or the U.S. Congress society in general or the personal lives of respondents. As with other lines of research on sociotropic voting, the results imply that impact on the nation in general and the personal lives of citizens are distinct dimensions. They also show different impact for the likelihood to participate in an election or to be interested in politics. While the

participation seems to be somewhat more guided by general concerns for society, surveillance of political events is more likely to be caused by the feeling that political decisions might influence ones own life.

Although there are some interesting connections to specific characteristics of respondents as well as to their interest in politics, the effects on voting behavior are surprisingly small. The fact that no significant relationships could be found for the participation in elections in 2004 might suggest that the perception of effectiveness is dynamically changing, for example it might be influenced by political campaigns and their portrayal of politicians as effective policy-makers (or not effective policy-makers in the case of negative campaigning).

Testing the difference between ‘United States’ and ‘nation’ as the reference object in questions on the perceived impact on society in general did not reveal a clearly preferable question wording. If anything, there are two reasons why ‘United States’ might be the better choice: firstly, the distribution of answer choices with this question wording is slightly less concentrated on the highest response option. Secondly, the test for difference in validity did reveal a similar trend supporting ‘United States’ as the reference object, despite almost never being statistically significant.

There are many extensions of the questions discussed here that would be very interesting for further research. One possible extension would be to personalize the question on specific persons (or candidates) or more specific offices (‘the congressman in your district’). Another possible extension could use more fine-grained measures on specific policy realms such as foreign policy, the environment, national security, the economy and so forth. It is very much conceivable that citizens differentiate in the

possible impact the President can have on foreign policy compared to what the U.S. Congress can do. These issue-specific perceptions of how effective politicians can be might then moderate the impact of retrospective evaluations on those issue-domains.