

TO: NES Pilot Study Committee and Board of Overseers  
FROM: Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman  
RE: 1985 Pilot Study Measures of Civic Obligation

Our original goal was to outline a strategy for studying citizenship. As a starting point, we assumed that citizenship had at least two distinguishable components: (1) "patriotism", a deeply felt affective attachment to the nation which constitutes the symbolic side of citizenship; and (2) "civic obligation", a general sense of responsibility to carry out the obligations associated with citizenship. We offered several justifications for developing new measures of citizenship. First, citizenship is obviously important from the standpoint of democratic theory. Because of this normative prescription, we argued that it is intrinsically worthwhile to devise measures of citizenship and to begin to track variations over time in the public's sense of citizenship. A second reason for studying citizenship is that it may have an important influence on political attitudes and behavior. In particular, new measures of civic obligation may improve our ability to predict political participation.

With those justifications in mind, we devised new measures of both patriotism and civic obligation. Both sets of measures were pretested in a local survey conducted in Lexington Kentucky during June 1985. Based on the results of that survey, we strongly recommended that a modified version of the patriotism scale be included on the pilot study; and initially we also recommended that a version of the civic obligation scale be included though we considered it a lower priority. Based on our recommendations and the Board of Overseer's deliberations, the civic obligation scale, but not the patriotism scale, was included on the pilot study. This report examines that civic obligation scale.

### The Questions

Several substantive considerations guided our construction of items to tap a sense of civic obligation. First, in contrast to previous empirical work on citizenship that has focused more on people's notions of what generally constitutes a good citizen, we concentrate on people's own sense of civic obligation--the extent to which they are personally willing to carry out the obligations of citizenship. Second, unlike previous studies that have focused almost exclusively on the duty to vote, our measure of civic obligation is much broader. It includes items that tap a general sense of obligation to the country as well as specific obligations to vote, perform jury duty, pay taxes, and obey the law.

From a methodological standpoint, two different question wording formats were included on the pilot study. Form A is composed of ten five-point Likert items. Form B is made up of ten four-point non-Likert items. In terms of substance, the Form B items parallel the Form A items as closely as possible given the differences in format. For example, question 1 on both forms

performed. In both instances, the ten item scales had relatively low reliabilities (coefficient alpha): .55 for Form A and .53 for Form B. And, as illustrated in Table 2, the average inter-item correlations for the full sets of items were quite low.

Given this, the best six items from each set were combined to form a scale ranging from 0 to 1, with high scores indicating a strong sense of civic obligation. The characteristics of each scale and the items composing each one are presented in Table 3. As can be seen there, both scales still have relatively low reliabilities, though the Form B scale is a bit more reliable. And the distributions of both scales are skewed toward the civic obligation end. Substantively, the Form A scale contains more items dealing with specific obligations while the Form B scale includes some of the more general items. But, it is important to note that both scales contain two "voting" items.

#### Scale Correlates

Despite the relatively low reliabilities of the two civic obligation scales, they still might prove to be highly correlated with various political attitudes and political participation. To explore this possibility, we correlated the two scales with a variety of measures (for details on the measures see Appendix A). Specifically, the background variables include age, education, income, social class, sex and race; on these variables, high scores indicate, respectively, old age, high education, high income, upper class, female and non-white. In terms of political attitudes, four variables are considered: interest, trust, efficacy and party identification. High scores indicate, respectively, high interest, high trust, high efficacy and a "strong Republican" identification. The participation measures are registered to vote, whether voted in the 1984 Presidential election, the number of campaign activities engaged in, the willingness to work with others on community problems, and the number of non-electoral political activities engaged in. Finally, two Reagan performance measures are considered (high scores indicate approval). Presented in Table 4 are the correlations of the two six-item civic obligation measures with these variables.

As in the Lexington pretest, civic obligation is related to certain background characteristics, but the pattern of relationship varies depending on which form of the scale is considered. Both forms are strongly related to age with older people expressing a greater sense of civic obligation. The Form A scale is moderately related to income and social class, but not education. The reverse is true of the Form B scale. But, with respect to background variables, the most striking difference of the two scales is in the relationship with sex: on the Form A scale women are more likely to express a sense of civic obligation while on the Form B scale the relationship is reversed. Taken together, such findings suggest that the substantive differences--recall, the Form A scale deals more with specific obligations while the Form B scale contains more of the

participation. For the Form A scale, the only significant relationships remaining are between civic obligation and political efficacy and registration. For the Form B scale, the correlations with political attitudes decline somewhat; and more striking, with only one exception (work with others in the community), the relationships with the participation measures virtually disappear. However, the relationship of the four-item Form B scale with performance evaluations actually increases. By dropping the two voting items, we appear to have brought the Form B scale even closer to becoming some sort of measure of patriotism. (In support of this interpretation, the new Form B scale is positively related to attitudes toward Central America; Pearson's  $r$  equals .22).

Thus, for both forms of the scale, it appears that the relationship of civic obligation with political participation is due primarily to the two voting items. For the most part, without the voting items both forms of the scale are virtually unrelated to political participation. This judgment was confirmed by regression analyses that compared the effects of civic obligation on political participation with those of political attitudes (party identification, trust and efficacy) and background variables (age, education, income, sex and race).

### **Recommendations**

Our findings are disappointing to say the least. The problems hinted at in the Lexington pretest were not solved by devising a new question format. There still appears to be a social desirability bias involved in this type of question. Even with two different question formats of ten questions apiece, we had difficulty in creating a reliable scale of civic obligation. Our examination of the inter-item correlations and factor analyses of both sets of items suggests that there is no general underlying dimension of civic obligation. Rather, people have a piece-meal view of their obligations as citizens. Whether a person feels obligated to obey minor laws has little to do with his/her sense of obligation to perform jury duty. Moreover, once we move beyond the duty to vote, it is evident that civic obligations have little to do with political participation.

Given this, we recommend against including the full civic obligation scale on the 1986 NES. Inclusion of the full scale cannot be justified based on its predictive abilities. Instead, the only possible justification for including the full six-item scale would be the intrinsic worth of having an ongoing measure of this sort. We, however, do not find that to be a compelling justification given the space limitations on NES.

Let us conclude on an upbeat note. Building on this analysis, future work in this area might take several directions. Several of the voting items might be used as the basis for developing an explicitly more political type of measure. Or, the four items in the revised Form B scale might be considered as a basis for a different approach to measuring patriotism.

TABLE 2  
Inter-Item Correlations

FORM A

	#1 Vote	#2 Tax	#3 Laws	#4 Sacr.	#5 Jury
#1 Vote	1.00				
#2 Tax	.15%	1.00			
#3 Laws	.10	.30%	1.00		
#4 Sacrifice	.26%	.08	.01	1.00	
#5 Jury	.03	.06	.02	.02	1.00
#6 Vote	.31%	.19%	.10	.09	.03
#7 Ideals	.22%	.11	.04	.03	.09
#8 Benefit	.29%	.20	-.02	.21%	.06
#9 Laws	.11	.13	.54%	.00	-.11
#10 War	.15%	.00	.12	.18%	.15%

(cont.)

	#6 Vote	#7 Id.	#8 Benef.	#9 Laws	#10 War
#6 Vote	1.00				
#7 Ideals	.13	1.00			
#8 Benefit	.32%	.12	1.00		
#9 Laws	.15%	-.06	.10	1.00	
#10 War	-.01	.12	.07	.02	1.00

FORM B

	#1 Vote	#2 Tax	#3 Laws	#4 Sacr.	#5 Jury
#1 Vote	1.00				
#2 Tax	.04	1.00			
#3 Laws	.20%	.02	1.00		
#4 Sacrifice	.20%	.00	.13%	1.00	
#5 Jury	.04	.06	.07	.11	1.00
#6 Vote	.63%	-.11	.16	.16%	.03
#7 Ideals	.25%	-.11	.03	.19%	-.05
#8 Benefit	.21%	-.02	-.03	.18%	-.11
#9 Laws	.01	.15	.31%	.07	-.01
#10 War	.11	.07	.07	.30%	.13

(cont.)

	#6 Vote	#7 Id.	#8 Benef.	#9 Laws	#10 War
#6 Vote	1.00				
#7 Ideals	.28%	1.00			
#8 Benefit	.22%	.37%	1.00		
#9 Laws	.00	-.04	-.09	1.00	
#10 War	.04	.10	.37%	-.02	1.00

AVERAGE INTER-ITEM CORRELATIONS:	FORM A	FORM B
All ten items	.12	.11
Wave 1 items	.11	.09
Wave 2 items	.10	.12
Wave 1 with wave 2 items	.13	.11

\* equals  $\pm .05$

TABLE 4  
Civic Obligation Correlates

	FORM A		FORM B	
	Δ Item	Δ Item	Δ Item	Δ Item
<b>Background Variables</b>				
Age	.32*	.30*	.32*	.23*
Education	.08	.01	.18*	.06
Income	.22*	.15*	.03	.05
Social Class	.27*	.15*	.12	.07
Sex	.20*	.27*	-.18*	-.28*
Race	.05	.02	-.08	-.06
<b>Political Attitudes</b>				
Interest	.18*	.04	.27*	.21*
Trust	.02	.03	.08	.10
Efficacy	.24*	.15*	.20*	.13*
Party Id	.00	.03	.22*	.23*
<b>Political Participation</b>				
Registered	.26*	.14*	.31*	.05
Voted in '84	.27*	.13	.33*	.04
Campaign activ.	.13*	.02	.16*	.07
Work with others	.05	-.06	.25*	.18*
non-electoral activities	.14*	.07	.13	.04
<b>Performance Evaluations</b>				
Reagan-general	.02	-.03	.15*	.23*
Reagan-foreign affairs	.09	-.01	.25*	.27*

\* equals p < .05