Replication

Another Look at the Measurement of Political Knowledge

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Many theorists argue that deliberation helps citizens become more informed, but to what degree does discussion affect actual levels of political knowledge? I examine the potential for enlightenment through political discussion by replicating and extending Jeffery J. Mondak’s “Reconsidering the Measurement of Political Knowledge” (Political Analysis 2000, 8:57–82) and then cross-validating his study through similar analyses with a new data set. Mondak demonstrated that political discussion in the 1992 National Election Studies survey reduced the proportion of “don’t know” responses relative to the proportion of correct answers. My analysis using the same grouped-data multinomial logit model on the same data produces identical results. I obtain similar results in an extension of his 1992 NES analysis when I include 215 cases that were excluded; the direction and statistical significance remain the same, but small differences in the magnitude of specific coefficients and their standard errors are observed. A third investigation generates a comparable pattern of increased proportions of correct knowledge relative to the “don’t know” responses in two cross-sectional surveys conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates in 1998. Taken together, these analyses reveal that discussion increases political knowledge, but it does so selectively. While grouped-data multinomial logit models may be used in this manner to detect subtle differences in forms of information, they still might not be a solution to the fundamental validity problem plaguing studies of political knowledge.

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