

Political Science 501, Baumgartner
Short paper topics/discussion points
Week 8: Measurement

Readings: N&N Ch. 7, 11, 12, 18, skim Ch. 9

Review the following in detail and be prepared to discuss. If you want to do a paper, the paper should focus on one of these issues as it has been mishandled in the published literature.

Measurement issues

- ?? Random v. systematic measurement error
- ?? Systematic measurement error v. mis-specified theoretical model. Which is worse? What are the effects of each?
- ?? Tests for validity
- ?? Tests for reliability
- ?? Practical problems in measurement and observation in field research settings.
- ?? Unobtrusive measures v. obtrusive measures. Administrative records and other sources of accurate, unobtrusive, measures.
- ?? Self-reports in interviews v. other forms of measurements of activities in field research.

Questionnaire construction:

- ?? Response set; leading questions; double-barreled questions; threatening questions; respondent engagement and rapport; break-offs; refusals; etc.
- ?? Open and closed ended questions. The temptation of vague and general questions. Pushing the hard decisions on to the coders. Not a good strategy in all cases.

Index construction

- ?? Why construct an index when a single measure would do? CPI v. the price of gas. But what all goes into the CPI?
- ?? Shifting the base
- ?? Methods of aggregation and weighting
- ?? Why aggregate by simple addition? Why weight? How to determine proper weights?
- ?? Which items fit into an index? How to determine this question? Discriminative Power scores. Reliability tests. Simple correlations.
- ?? Guttman scales and how to know if you have one. Coefficient of reproducibility.
- ?? Factor analysis.