Civics: 1 requirement Naturalization

- Permanent residents for 5 years
- “good moral character”
- Oath to support the Constitution
- $675 application fee
- Passing score on the Civics Test (& the English test)
Civics: 1 requirement Naturalization

• The questions are designed to test “knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the United States”

• (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952)
The Civics Test -- Structure

Five sections

• American Government
• System of Government
• Rights and Responsibilities
• American History
  • Colonial Period and Independence
  • The 1800s
  • Recent American History and Other Important Information
• Integrated Civics
  • Geography
  • Symbols
  • Holidays
Civics Test – Administration & Scoring

• 100 open-ended questions (all with fixed responses) --- NOT Multiple Choice

• 10 are selected and orally administered by an immigration officer

• Passing score = 6/10

• 1/3 applicants fail the Civics test, the English test, or both
Investigating the Reliability of the Civics Component of the U.S. Naturalization Test

Paula Winke

Language Assessment Quarterly, 8: 317-341

https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2011.614031
Research questions

RQ1: Are the 100 civics items on the U.S. Naturalization Test interchangeable?

RQ2: Are all the items reliable? That is, do they reliably measure civics knowledge?

RQ3: Would U.S. citizens who have not prepared for the test mostly pass?

RQ4: Are the individual items easier for citizens than noncitizens?
Methods

- Michigan State University

- 414 individuals: 187 noncitizens; 225 citizens asked 20 Qs

- 2 10 item forms (1 odd #s, 1 even #s) = 20 items
  - 6 unique items, 4 common items on each form
RQ1: Are the 100 civics items on the Civics Test interchangeable?

NO ---

- wide range of difficulty

- selection of items will result in very difficult, very easy forms
Research questions

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Less Able Persons | Less Difficult Items | Low-level Knowledge |
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Example items – difficult → easy

07. How many amendments does the Constitution have?

66. When was the Constitution written?

68. What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?

83. During the Cold War, what was the main concern of the United States?

97. Why does the flag have 50 stars?

28. What is the name of the president of the United States now?
07. How many amendments does the Constitution have?  
- Twenty-seven

66. When was the Constitution written?  
- 1787

68. What is one thing Benjamin Franklin is famous for?  
- U.S. diplomat  
- oldest member of the Constitutional Convention  
- first Postmaster General of the United States  
- writer of "Poor Richard’s Almanac"  
- started the first free libraries

83. During the Cold War, what was the main concern of the United States?  
- Communism

97. Why does the flag have 50 stars?

28. What is the name of the president of the United States now?
RQ2: Are all the items reliable? That is, do they reliably measure civics knowledge?

**Not all --**

14 items that exceeded acceptable fit indices:

97. During the cold war, what was the main concern of the U.S.?

50. Name one right only for U.S. citizens.

95. Where is the Statue of Liberty?

55. What are two ways that citizens can participate in their democracy?
Research questions

RQ3: Would U.S. citizens *who have not prepared* for the test mostly pass?

**YES ---**

83% CITIZENS vs. 13% NONCITIZENS

-- 4% (passed 1 form/failed 1 form)
-- Citizens Average score 70%
RQ4: Are the individual items easier for citizens than noncitizens?

Yes – but not always

10 items favor citizens
13 items favor noncitizens (examples below)

• 1. What is the supreme law of the land?
• 7. How many amendments does the constitution have?
• 66. When was the constitution written?
Considerations for Purdue

High stakes tests (e.g., citizenship, graduation) should meet professional standards for reliability and validity.

The Civics Test, as designed and administered as part of the naturalization process, appears to have some problems with reliability.

If adopted at Purdue to determine the civics literacy of undergraduate students, we should examine the test’s reliability and validity for our purposes, in our context.

Thank you ---