

# Evaluation of Response Behavior on Open-ended Questions: Who Took the Burden to Answer on the Meaning of Left and Right?

Cornelia Zuell & Evi Scholz  
GESIS, Mannheim, Germany

11th International Workshop on Comparative Survey Design and Implementation, Stockholm, March 21-23, 2013.

Mitglied der

# Left-Right in Political Science Research

- Left-right dimension central element of political science research.
- Facilitates citizens' political orientations and decision-making processes in a complex world.

# Research Background

## High cognitive burden to answer open-ended questions

1. Understanding & interpretation; deducation of intend
2. Information retrieval
3. Translation into answer and wording

# Reasons for Answering the Open-Ended Questions on the Meaning of Left & Right

1. Personality traits: extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism
2. Cognitive abilities: education, political knowledge, and political socialisation background
3. Motivational aspects: political interest and survey participation willingness
4. Left-right self-placement

# The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS)

- German, continuous academically-driven social survey;
- Founded in 1980 and run as biannual survey;
- Face-to-face interviews;
- Target population: adults of any nationality residing in Germany;
- Random sample of persons registered at place of residence;
- Focus on some main topics + ALLBUS standard BV;
- ALLBUS 2008 main topic: political attitudes and behavior.

# Left-Right Self-Placement and Open-Ended Questions

Many people use the terms “left” and “right” when they want to describe different political views.

Here we have a scale which runs from left to right. Thinking of your own political views, where would you place these on this scale?

Left

Right

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
F	A	M	O	G	Z	E	Y	I	P

Could you tell me what you associate with the term “left”?

And could you tell me what you associate with the term “right”?

# Regression

	<i>personality traits</i>	<i>cognitive abilities</i>	<i>motivation</i>	<i>self- placement</i>
<b>Personality Traits</b>				
<i>Extraversion</i>	<b>.91*</b>	.96	1.00	1.00
Neuroticism	1.04	1.06	1.07	1.04
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	1.08	1.08	1.09	1.08
Openness	<b>.70***</b>	<b>.82***</b>	<b>.86**</b>	<b>.86**</b>
<i>Agreeableness</i>	.96	.97	.98	.99
<b>Cognitive Abilities</b>				
General school education		<b>1.30***</b>	<b>1.24***</b>	<b>1.21***</b>
Political knowledge		<b>1.48***</b>	<b>1.34***</b>	<b>1.26***</b>
Socialization (East)		<b>2.00***</b>	<b>2.24***</b>	<b>1.89***</b>
Socialization (outside of Germany)		0.77	0.81	0.88
<b>Motivation</b>				
Political interest			<b>1.42***</b>	<b>1.29***</b>
Survey participation			<b>1.13*</b>	1.12
<b>Left-right Self-placement</b>				
Left orientation				<b>2.05***</b>
Right orientation				.84
Left-right self-placement				<b>6.79***</b>

## Nagelkerke's R<sup>2</sup>

Personality:	.04
Cogn. abil.:	.17
Motivation:	.19
Selfplacement:	.28

## Regression differentiated by respondents' ideological orientation

	Respondents' Orientation at the Left-right Scale	
	Left	Right
<b>Personality Traits</b>		
<i>Extraversion</i>	.78	.94
Neuroticism	.88	1.08
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	.88	1.16
Openness	1.10	.90
<i>Agreeableness</i>	1.10	<b>.70*</b>
<b>Cognitive Abilities</b>		
General school education	1.28	1.14
Political knowledge	1.06	<b>1.49*</b>
Socialization (East)	<b>3.04**</b>	1.34
Socialization (outside of Ger.)	1.37	0.85
<b>Motivation</b>		
Political interest	<b>1.62*</b>	1.20
Survey Participation	1.32	.96



# Conclusion (1)

## Indicators influencing response behavior

- Cognitive abilities: formal education, political knowledge and political socialisation;
- Motivational aspects: political interest;
- Placement on the left-right scale:
  - Placement in general
  - Placement at the left vs. the right side of the scale

## Conclusion (2)

### Potential reasons for unexpected effects of personality traits on response behaviour

- Open-minded respondents with artistic interests and active imagination might be bored by answering open-ended questions.
- Validity of the measurement instrument.
- Survey response behavior is a rather specific behavior. Broad personality traits may not be as predictive as narrower personality traits.

**Thank you for your attention**

**Contact: [cornelia.zuell@gesis.org](mailto:cornelia.zuell@gesis.org)  
[evi.scholz@gesis.org](mailto:evi.scholz@gesis.org)**