Midpoint Placement on the Left-right Scale in a Cross-national Perspective

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CSDI Workshop
Midpoint or No Midpoint

Scale with midpoint
• Anchor
• Neutral position

BUT
• Hidden DK

Scale without midpoint
• Easier interpretation

BUT
• Forced placement
• Skewed distribution

Cross-national consistency?
Left-Right in Political Science Research

- Left-right dimension central element in political science research;
- Left-right self-placement scale to measure ideological orientation in minimalist way;
- Often designed as 11-point scale with true midpoint or as 10-point without true midpoint.
Research Questions

- Do respondents in the 10-point left-right scale without a true midpoint use the middle categories 5 or 6 as a substitute?
- Does social desirability pushes into different directions in cross-national perspective?
Data

- Experimental web survey conducted in six countries in January 2011 (Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and U.S.);
- Non-probability online access panel;
- Target population: citizens of respective countries aged 18 to 65;
- Quota sample: based on gender, age, and education;
- 3835 respondents;
- Survey conducted in each countries’ most prominent language.
Left-Right Self-placement and Open-ended Questions

Many people use the terms "left" and "right" to designate different political positions. We have a scale here that runs from left to right. Where would you position your own political views on this scale? (incl. 11-point vs. 10-point experiment)

We have just asked you to place yourself on a scale from left to right. Now please tell us what ideas you associate with the term "left".
And what ideas do you associate with the term "right"?
### Social Desirability: Most Frequent Answers to Probe Questions on the Meaning of “Left”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Equality</td>
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<td>Freedom</td>
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### Social Desirability: Most Frequent Answers to Probe Questions on the Meaning of “Right”

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<td>National socialism</td>
<td>Conservatism &amp; tradition</td>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>Patriotism</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Patriotism</td>
<td>Liberalism</td>
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<td>Capitalism</td>
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<td>Individualism</td>
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</table>
Left-Right Self-placement: Canada

N of cases in 11-point scale: 278; 10-point scale: 255
Left-Right Self-placement: Germany

N of cases in 11-point scale: 536; 10-point scale: 535
Left-Right Self-placement: Hungary

N of cases in 11-point scale: 285; 10-point scale: 274
Left-Right Self-placement: Spain

N of cases in 11-point scale: 293; 10-point scale: 264
Left-Right Self-placement: U.S.

N of cases in 11-point scale: 254; 10-point scale: 293
Left-Right Self-placement: Denmark

N of cases in 11-point scale: 273; 10-point scale: 285
Social Desirability: Push in 10-point LRS?
Conclusion

- If a midpoint in the 10-point LRS is not offered, respondents use a middle scale points as a substitute of the true midpoint.

- If a 10-point scale (without midpoint) is offered, there is a push into the social desirable direction of the scale.

However:

- Design effects are not consistent across countries and not clear.

- LRS does not work similarly in cross-national perspective.
Thank you for your attention

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