

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

Cornelia Zuell and Evi Scholz

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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)

left



right

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"?

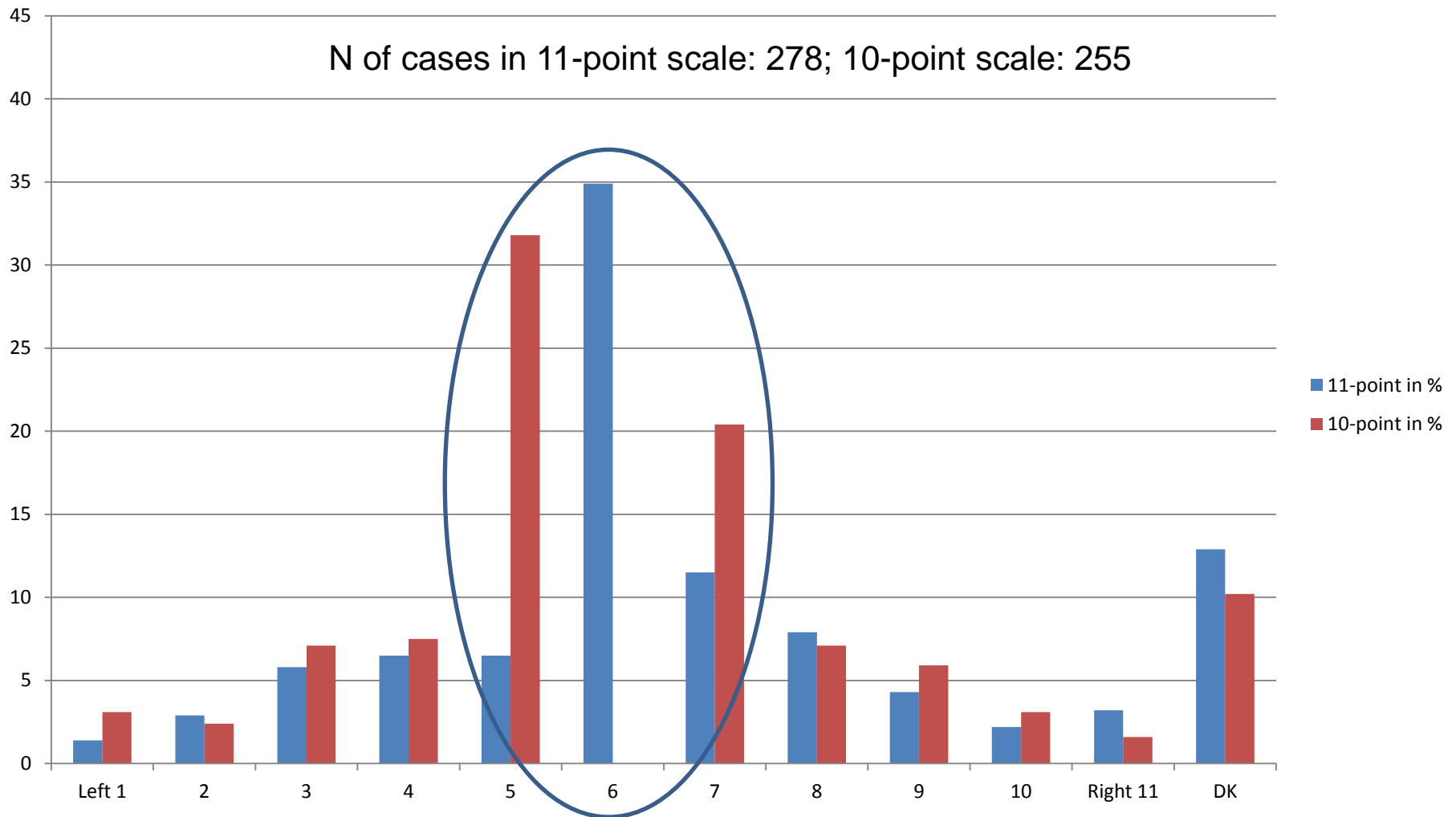
Social Desirability: Most Frequent Answers to Probe Questions on the Meaning of “Left”

Canada	Germany	Denmark	Spain	Hungary	U.S.
Liberalism	Solidarity	Socialism	Equality	Solidarity	Liberalism
Socialism	Communism	Solidarity	Progressive	Socialism	Democrats
Progressive	Socialism	Socialde- mokraterne	Workers	Equality	Regulation
	Equality	Socialistisk Folkeparti	Solidarity	MSZP	
	PDS	Equality	Socialism	Communism	
			PSOE		
			Communism		
			Freedom		

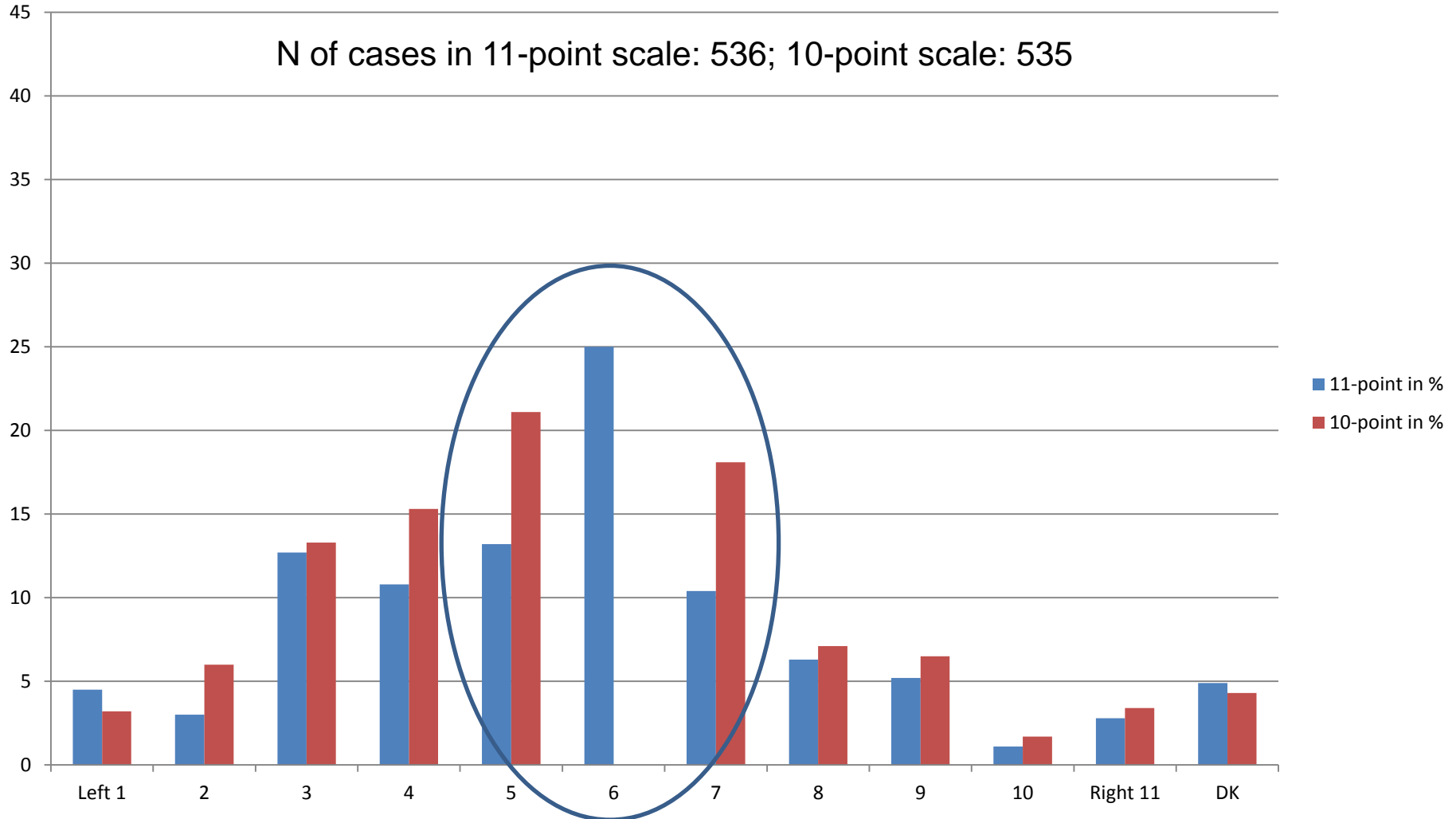
Social Desirability: Most Frequent Answers to Probe Questions on the Meaning of “Right”

Canada	Germany	Denmark	Spain	Hungary	U.S.
Conservatism & tradition	National socialism	Conservatism & tradition	Capitalism	Patriotism	Conservatism & tradition
	Conservatism & tradition		Conservatism & tradition	Conservatism & tradition	Capitalism
	Xenophobia		PP	Fidesz	Freedom
Capitalism	Patriotism	Liberalism	Entrepreneurs & employers	Capitalism	Republicans
	Capitalism	Venstre	Religion		
	Right wing radicalism	Capitalism			
	Radical	Individualism			

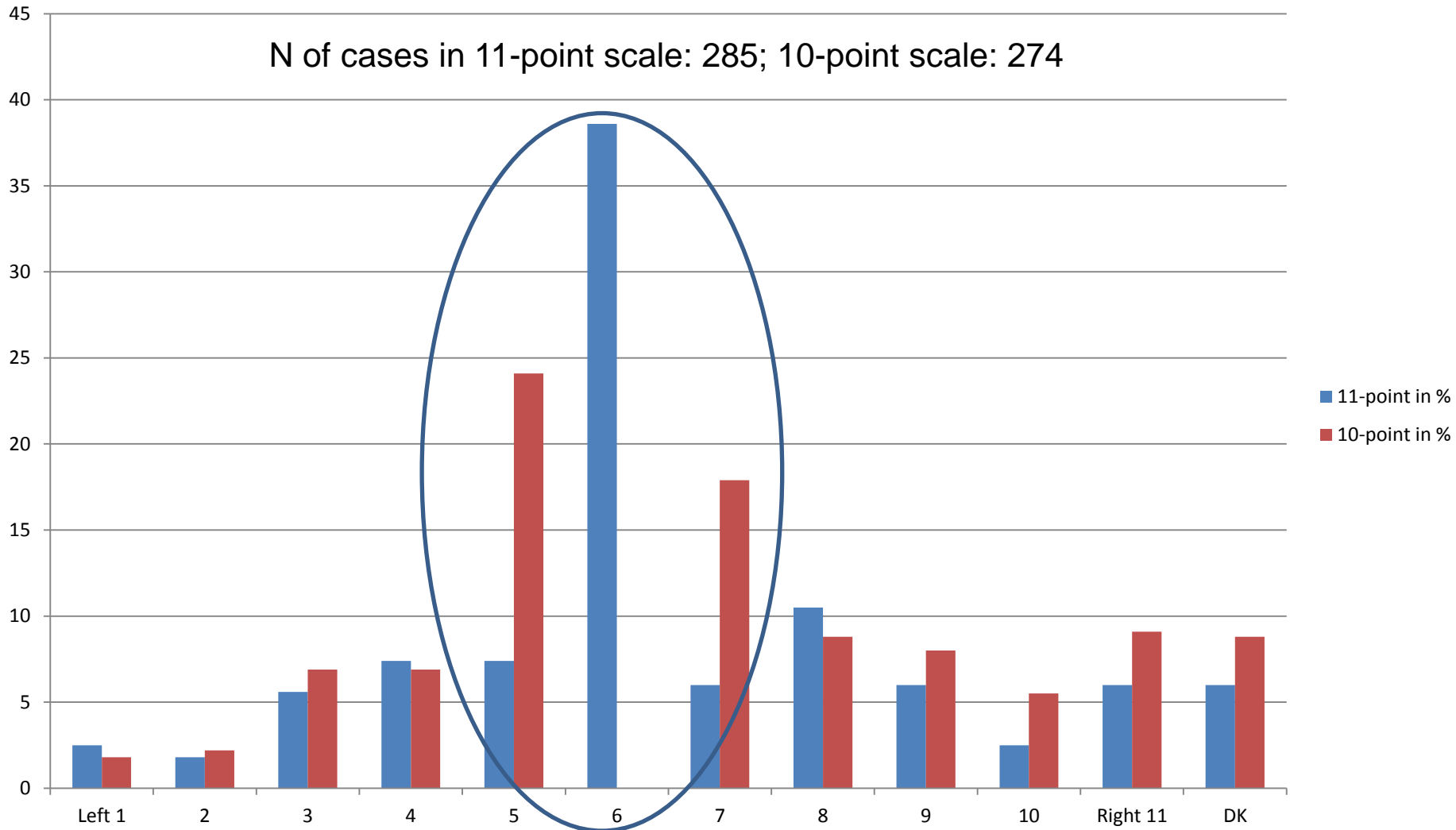
Left-Right Self-placement: Canada



Left-Right Self-placement: Germany

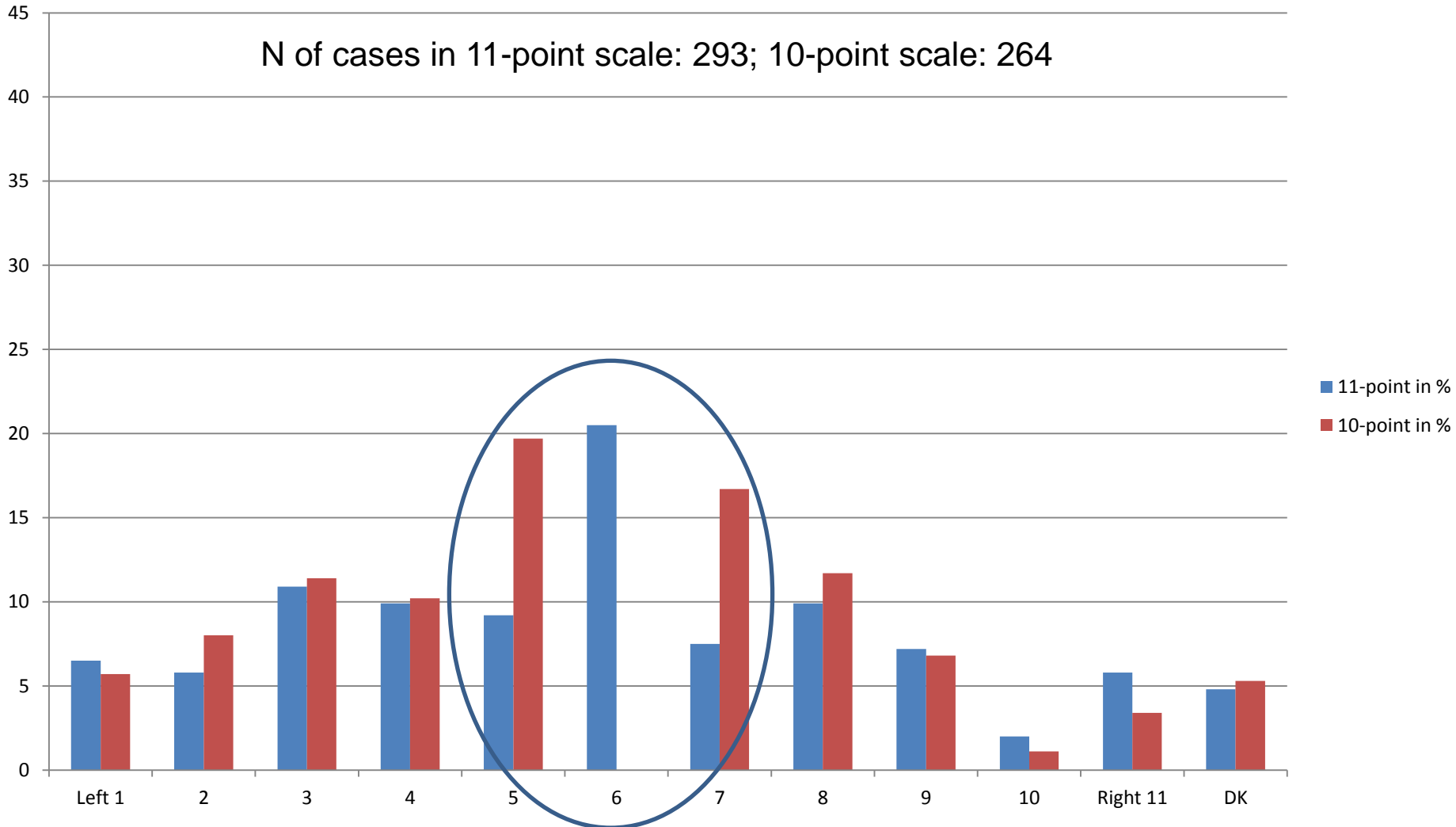


Left-Right Self-placement: Hungary



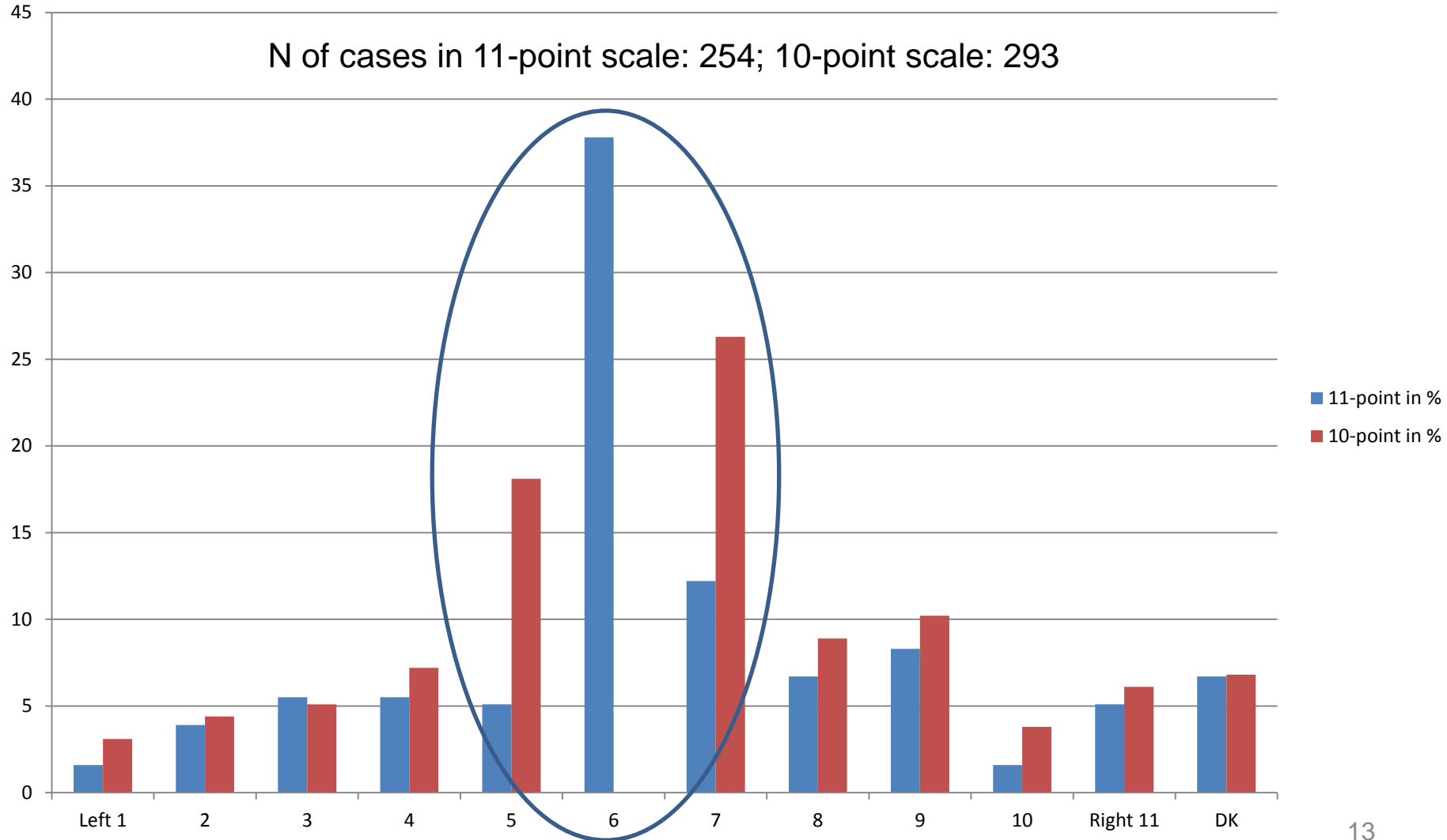
Left-Right Self-placement: Spain

N of cases in 11-point scale: 293; 10-point scale: 264

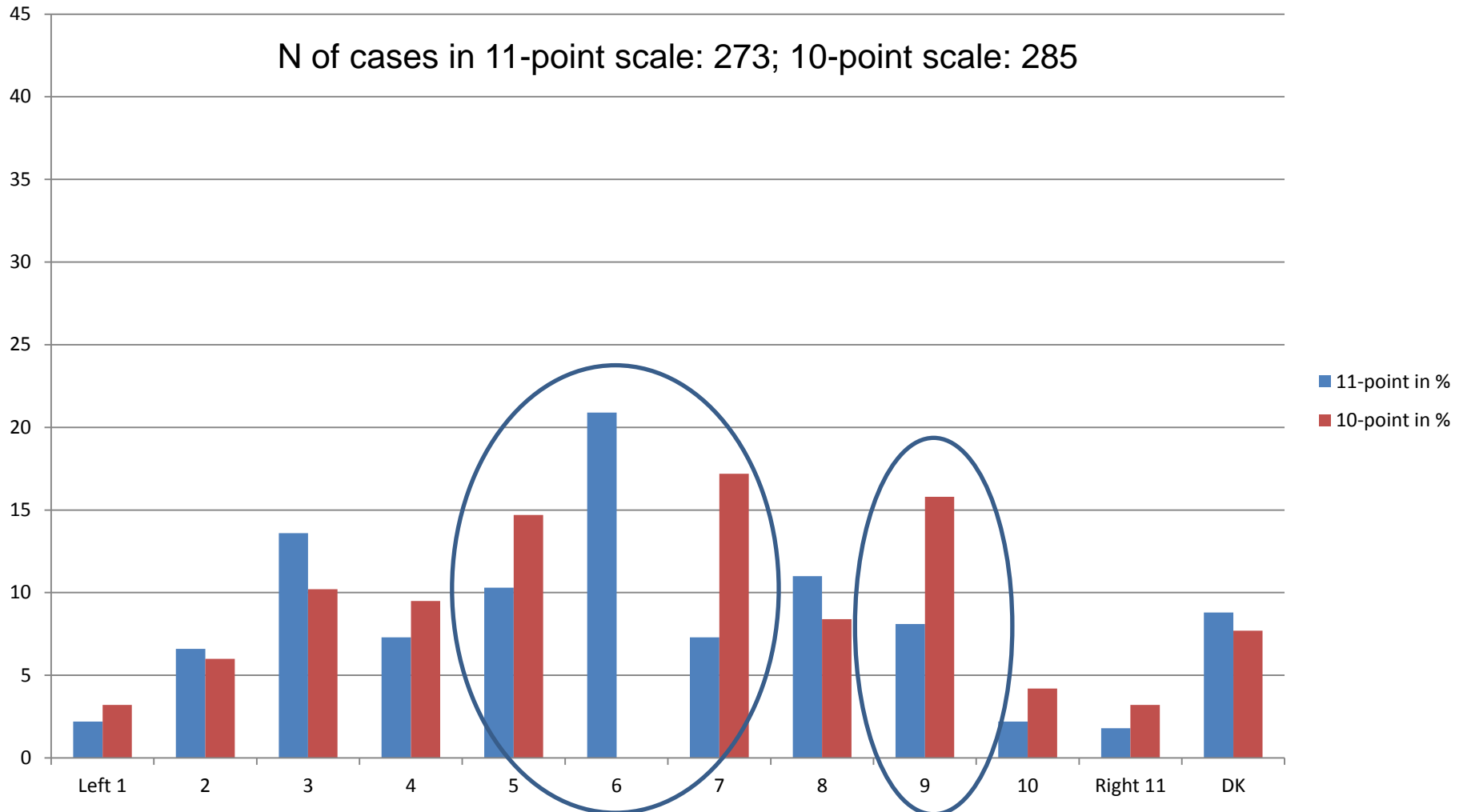


Left-Right Self-placement: U.S.

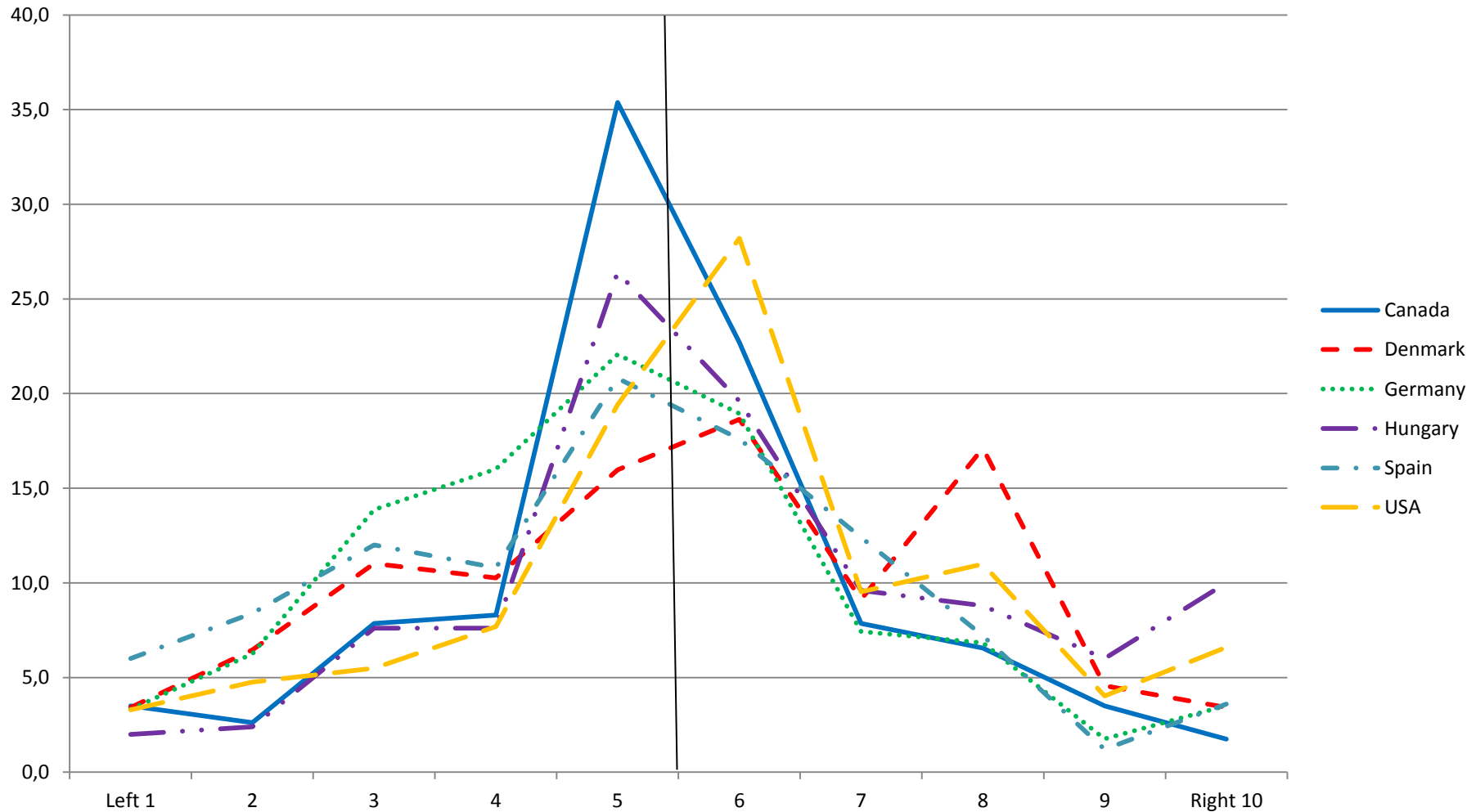
N of cases in 11-point scale: 254; 10-point scale: 293



Left-Right Self-placement: Denmark



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

Contact: cornelia.zuell@gesis.org
evi.scholz@gesis.org