

Multi-Item Scale for Project:

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 5 (English Version)

General Information:

***Note:** The items were tested in German. These are English translations of the original German wordings. The translations do not correspond exactly to the formulations in the English [CSES source questionnaire](#).*

Question Text:

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

[Inwieweit stimmen Sie den folgenden Aussagen zu?]

Instruction:

INT.: Read answer categories aloud for the first three items, then as required. *[INT.: Antwortkategorien für die ersten drei Items jedes Mal vorlesen, danach nur bei Bedarf.]*

Answer Categories:

Strongly agree *[Stimme voll und ganz zu]*

Somewhat agree *[Stimme eher zu]*

Neither agree nor disagree *[Weder noch]*

Somewhat disagree *[Stimme eher nicht zu]*

Strongly disagree *[Stimme überhaupt nicht zu]*

Refused *[Verweigert]*

Don't know *[Weiß nicht]*

Findings for Answer Categories:

The respondents were also asked how they understood the answer option "weder noch" ("neither agree nor disagree"). Seven respondents think it is a sort of evasive option for those respondents who don't care about the topic, do not have an opinion on it or cannot decide. Hence, they view it as a kind of "don't know"-category. The remaining respondents interpret "weder noch" as "teils/teils" ("partially agree/partially disagree"), that is, as the answer option that those respondents would pick who partially agree and disagree with the statement. Two respondents (ID 05, 06) explicitly state that they would prefer the phrasing "teils/teils", because "weder noch" would not fit in this context:

"Weder noch is not correct here. Maybe partially understand? It is partially correct or I partially agree, something like that would be nice here. I know what 'weder noch' is supposed to mean, but it just does not sound right here." (ID 06).

Recommendations for Answer Categories:

Given that the wording of the middle category ("weder noch", "neither agree nor disagree") does not fit the context of some items, we recommend to replace it with the wording "teils/teils" (partly agree, partly disagree).

Cognitive Techniques:

General Probing, Specific Probing, Comprehension Probing

All Items for Question(Question Text):

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

[Inwieweit stimmen Sie den folgenden Aussagen zu?]

-> Tested Items:

Item Text:

a) You feel that you understand the most important political issues of this country. *[Ich glaube, dass ich die wichtigsten politischen Themen in diesem Land verstehe.]*

Recommendations:

No changes recommended.

Findings:

14 respondents "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with this statement, while only two respondents (ID 01, 07) "strongly disagree" or "somewhat disagree".

Those who agree with the statement believe they are sufficiently informed on most important political matters to be able, for example, to discuss them competently:

- "I believe that when it comes to most topics, or those topics that are most important to me, I know what I am talking about. For example, the refugee crisis or the emission scandal. I have my own opinion on those topics and would be able to discuss them." (ID 04)
- "After all, I have been following political events for 55 years, reading the newspaper. I understand domestic policy with ease, and am also well informed on foreign policy. It is also my ambition to be able to understand this."

The respondents mainly think of topics such as the refugee crisis, the environment, pension policy and TTIP while answering this item.

Both respondents who disagree with the item (ID 01, 07) explain that they have no interest in political matters and often find them to be too complex to talk about.

The respondents were also asked how they understood the answer option "weder noch" ("neither agree nor disagree"). Seven respondents think it is a sort of evasive option for those respondents who don't care about the topic, do not have an opinion on it or cannot decide. Hence, they view it as a kind of "don't know"-category. The remaining respondents interpret "weder noch" as "teils/teils" ("partially agree/partially disagree"), that is, as the answer option that those respondents would pick who partially agree and disagree with the statement. Two respondents (ID 05, 06) explicitly state that they would prefer the phrasing "teils/teils", because "weder noch" would not fit in this context: *"Weder noch is not correct here. Maybe partially understand? It is partially correct or I partially agree, something like that would be nice here. I know what 'weder noch' is supposed to mean, but it just does not sound right here."* (ID 06).

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

c) Most politicians do not care about the people. *[Die meisten Politikerinnen und Politiker kümmern sich nicht um das Volk.]*

Recommendations:

Due to the finding that the phrase "sich um das Volk kümmern" ("care about the people") is interpreted differently by different respondents, we recommend to modify the item:

"Most politicians are indifferent to the people's opinion."

["Den meisten Politikerinnen und Politikern ist die Meinung des Volkes gleichgültig."]

Findings:

Six respondents "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree", while five respondents "somewhat disagree" with this item. Three respondents "neither disagree nor agree" (ID 03, 08, 11) and two respondents (ID 01, 13) answer "don't know".

Respondent 01 explains her answer of "don't know" with her lack of interest in politics and because she doesn't know any politicians personally – and therefore cannot judge them. For this very same reason she also answers "don't know" on item d). Respondent 13 would answer this item differently depending on whether the item is about politicians on the communal or federal level. As this is not specified in the item, she cannot answer this item (as well as item d)).

One of the three respondents who "neither agrees nor disagrees" (ID 08) highlights the same argument and states that they cannot answer the item as they do not know any politicians personally. Therefore, this respondent uses the answer category of "neither agree nor disagree" as a "don't know" answer (see findings item a). The other two respondents (ID 03, 11) partially agree and partially disagree with the statement (*"At first they say they will raise the retirement pensions, and shortly after that you have to work longer. They care and then don't care after all."*, ID 11)

Those six respondents who agree with the statement explain that they are wary of politicians, as they primarily think of their own interests and do not take into account the will of the people outside of electoral campaigns:

- "We might be allowed to vote regularly, but when it comes to topics that really are important, then groups of people decide who might not even be affected by it and there are no referendums." (ID 02)
- "It seems to me as though first of all, they look out for themselves. Initially, it doesn't matter what the people want. They don't ask us, they deal with it among themselves." (ID 04))
- "As of late I always think of lobbying when it comes to politicians. Or when you think of their pay raise, you get the feeling it overlooks the people and is only egoistical." (ID 07)

On the other hand, those five respondents who do not agree with the statement have a positive attitude towards politicians and trust most of them:

- "At the moment I occasionally get the feeling that there are isolated incidents where they care more about their own interests. But I would say those are exceptions. Really, I have confidence in politics." (ID 05)
- "I think that there are many who are very dedicated and who do care within their abilities. Of course there are some black sheep, as is always the case." (ID 12)

Finally, the respondents were asked how they understood the phrase "sich um das Volk kümmern" ("care about the people"). Two kinds of interpretations emerge: Ten respondents think "caring about the people" means taking into account the will of the people ("*Listening to the people, asking the people for their opinion. Responding to what the people want.*", respondent 04), whereas the remaining six respondents think of the preservation and enhancement of the welfare state ("*To make sure, that the welfare state is maintained and performs as intended. For example, consider the pension system, where the inter-generation contract cannot be upheld. Or health insurance, taking steps to improve employee rights, and so on.*", ID 07).

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

e) Politicians are the main problem in Germany. [*Die Politikerinnen und Politiker sind das Hauptproblem in Deutschland.*]

Recommendations:

No changes recommended.

Findings:

Two problems emerge:

1. Respondent 01 ("somewhat agree") misunderstands the question by assuming it means

that politicians are needed in order to represent the people in taking care of the main problems..

2. Respondent 07 ("neither agree nor disagree") claims not to know what the main problem in Germany is and therefore is actually not able to answer the question. ("I don't know what the main problem in Germany is, I wouldn't be able to settle on one.") Still, the respondent chooses the middle answer category instead of not answering the question (see also findings item a) and c)).

The remaining 14 respondents either state (1) that they do believe politicians to be the main problem in Germany, as they ignore the will of the people (ID 04, 09), (2) that they do not believe politicians to be the main problem in Germany as there are different, more problematic issues such as the refugee crisis (ID 02, 04, 05, 06, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16) or (3) that they cannot pass a blanket judgement as there are politicians who show misconduct, while others try to do the right thing (ID 03, 08, 10)

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

f) Having a strong leader in government is good for Germany even if the leader bends the rules to get things done. [*Eine starke Führungspersönlichkeit in der Regierung zu haben ist gut für Deutschland, auch wenn diese sich nicht so genau an die Regeln hält um Dinge Vorwärts zu bringen.*]

Recommendations:

Due to the finding that the wording "auch wenn diese sich nicht so genau an Regeln hält um Dinge vorwärts zu bringen" ("bend the rules to get things done") leaves room for interpretation and is understood as "violating the laws" by some respondents, we recommend to modify the item:

"Having a strong leader in government is good for Germany, even if the leader now and then decides things single-handedly to get things done."

["Eine starke Führungspersönlichkeit in der Regierung zu haben ist gut für Deutschland, auch wenn diese ab und zu Dinge im Alleingang entscheidet, um sie voran zu bringen."]

Findings:

Six respondents "strongly agree" (ID 10, 11) or "somewhat agree" (ID 01, 04, 07, 16) with this statement, while five respondents "somewhat disagree" (ID 02, 05) or "strongly disagree" (ID 03, 12, 15). Four respondents answer with "neither agree nor disagree" (ID 06, 08, 09, 14), while one respondent "doesn't know" (ID 13).

It is obvious that all respondents favor a strong leader in government ("Someone with a clear-cut profile, who isn't afraid to go against the current, even if there is resistance from their own party," ID 12). Some respondents (e.g. ID 07, 11) think of specific politicians, such as Angela Merkel, Helmut Schmidt or Lothar Späth, when hearing the term "strong leader".

Respondent 13, who answered "don't know" also agrees on the importance of a strong leader, however faces a *"moral dilemma"* due to the second part of the sentence "even if the leader bends the rules to get things done".

Those respondents who agree with the statement explain that the end justifies the means:

- "If the decisions are right for the people, then sometimes they have to be made even if they are not quite within the framework. Here, the end justifies the means. If it is for the good of the country, it can be done occasionally." (ID 04)
- "If the end justifies the mean and is not that bad, then it's alright." (ID 10))

In contrast, those respondents who do not agree with the statement argue that while a strong leader is of importance, abiding by the law is more important:

- "Well I am in favor of a strong leader, who is charismatic, has a certain presence and is assertive. But I think everyone needs to abide by certain rules." (ID 02)
- "While this strong leader surely would be helpful, bending the laws at one's whim? You can see what this leads to in Turkey. I am strictly against that." (ID 12)

Those four respondents who "neither agree nor disagree" believe that while a strong leader in the government is important, so is playing by the rules (*"I do think it is important to have a strong leader, but at what cost? Bending the rules does bother me."*, ID 06)

Finally, the respondents were asked to name specific examples, where a strong leader bent the rules to get things done. Merkel's refugee policy was frequently listed (ID 01, 02, 07, 08, 11). Some respondents thought of non-compliance with current laws (ID 06, 10, 12, 13, 14), while others drew comparisons to dictators (Kim Yong Un, Adolf Hitler) or "autocrats" (Erdogan, Putin) who draw up legislation to their whim (ID 03, 05, 12).

It must be noted that the phrase "bend the rules to get things done" allows for a large scope of interpretation. While some respondents think of rather severe misdemeanors (i.e. breaking the law), others think of trivial offences (such as non-coordinated action with the general party opinion). In the latter case, the respondents tend to agree with the statement, whereas the respondents disagree in the former case.

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

i) Poor people should have a greater voice in politics. [*Arme Menschen sollten in der Politik mehr Mitspracherecht haben.*]

Recommendations:

In order to avoid that respondents think of a preferential treatment for the poor (i.e. a "poor people quota") when answering this question, we recommend to modify the item:

"The interests of poor people should better be represented in politics."
[*Die Interessen von armen Menschen sollten in der Politik stärker vertreten werden.*]

Findings:

Three respondents (ID 09, 10, 11) "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with this statement, twelve respondents "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree" and one respondent (ID 08) "neither agrees nor disagrees".

Those who agree with the statement argue that a) those affected, e.g. pensioners, should have a greater voice when it comes to pension reforms (ID 09), b) there should be more referendums in general so that poor people can have as much of an impact as wealthy lobbyists (ID 10), and c), that the government should concentrate more on taking into account the concerns of the poor (ID 11).

Respondent 08, who "neither agrees nor disagrees" thought of actively holding a political office when answering the question and sees no significant difference in the access

opportunities to politics between the rich and the poor: *"I don't completely understand the question. Are there differences in how easy it is for the poor and the rich to enter politics? Sure, the rich may have more opportunities just because of their better education. But other than that, I think that if someone wants to start a career in politics, in Germany, he or she can do so even without being wealthy."* (ID 08).

Those respondents who disagree with the statement explain that poor people are also often poorly educated and therefore do not have the necessary knowledge to decide on political matters competently (ID 03, 12, 15). Others think that neither poverty, nor any other criterion, should lead to preferential treatment (ID 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07, 13, 14, 16):

- "In politics, money rules. But that doesn't mean that people should be treated preferentially because they are poor. It's the same as the women's quota. Either I make it to the top through my performance or not. But not only due to my gender. It would be the same here: Simply because I don't have money, I would be elevated. I don't think that's good." (ID 04)
- "I don't think that fits into a democracy. Everyone has the same right to cast his vote, no matter whether they are poor or rich. Of course the voice of the socially deprived isn't heard as much, and their interests are not represented as much. But I don't believe it is right to override democratic principles." (ID 07)

When asked who the respondents understand to be "poor people", most name unemployed persons as well as people who are reliant on state support, such as Hartz IV recipients (16 mentions), pensioners (6 mentions), people from poorly educated social strata (4 mentions), and the homeless (3 mentions).

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

-> Not Tested Items:

Item Text:

b) In a democracy it is important to seek compromise among different viewpoints. *[In einer Demokratie ist es wichtig, Kompromisse zwischen verschiedenen Ansichten zu suchen.]*

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

d) Most politicians are trustworthy. *[Die meisten Politikerinnen und Politiker sind vertrauenswürdig.]*

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

g) The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions. *[Das Volk, und nicht die Politikerinnen und Politiker, sollte unsere wichtigsten politischen Entscheidungen treffen.]*

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite

Item Text:

h) Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful. *[Die meisten Politikerinnen und Politiker kümmern sich nur um die Interessen der Reichen und Mächtigen.]*

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Attitudes towards the political elite