

Question in Project:

Left-Right Scale & Income Differences (PAWCER Project) (English Version)

Question Topic:

Politics/ Attitudes, appraisals, & ideologies

Construct:

Classification on political right-left scale

General Information:

Note: The item was tested in German. This is an English translation of the original German wording.

Question Text:

In politics one sometimes speaks of "left" and "right".

Where on the scale on this list would you rate yourself if 0 was left and 10 was right?

[In der Politik spricht man manchmal von "links" und "rechts".

Wo auf der Skala auf dieser Liste würden Sie sich selbst einstufen, wenn 0 für links steht und 10 für rechts?]

Answer Categories:

00 Left *[Links]*

01

02

03

04

05

06

07

08

09

10 Right *[Rechts]*

Refusal [Keine Angabe]

Don't know [Weiß nicht]

Cognitive Techniques:

General Probing, Specific Probing, Emergent Probing.

Findings for Question:

Half of the ten test persons located themselves at scale point five in the exact middle on the left-right scale (TP 01, 05, 07, 11, 12). One test person (TP 03) chose the value six, and two test persons each placed themselves on the left half of the scale on the values two (TP 02, 09) and three (TP 04, 08). In this context, it is noticeable that two of the test persons first selected other scale values. Test subject 07 first classified himself on value six and, after closer consideration, preferred value five, since value is more neutral (*"I have now thought about it for a longer time and I see myself rather in the middle of left and right, since I am neither left nor right."*) Test person 11 also corrected the originally chosen scale value from ten to five, and would prefer a value between five and six. She explains her original choice for the value 10 as follows: *"Because I have no idea about the left. I have heard it, but what they do... I only know that the left has no great sympathy. They try everything possible, but still don't get through. Without success."* On the other hand, she justifies her final scale value (5.5) with a lack of political interest (*"If someone has no interest at all, he is best placed in the middle."*)

Some test persons also spontaneously commented on the left-right scale. Test person 03 in particular rejects a query of political orientation on the basis of the left-right scale and would prefer the Hayekian value triangle instead (*"There is the Constitution of Freedom by Hayek. There is a triangular model. They say we have people who put the individual at the centre, people who put the community and the group at the centre. That's a wonderful model. You have three directions. You have the national conservatives, then you have the right-wing liberals, left-wing liberals, social democrats, communists and Nazis. This thing is wonderful for depicting such scenarios."*). In addition, some test persons expressed discomfort with this item due to their lack of political interest:

- *"Oh, politics. Those are always the dangerous questions. What was the question again? [...] Politics is so not my world."* (TP 01)
- *"God, it's full of political issues. [Laughs] almost unbearable. [Sighs] I don't know anything about that."* (TP 07)
- *"Please don't torture me with politics."* (TP 11)

The test persons were also asked to explain their choice of answers in more detail. The five test persons who had chosen the answer value five gave different reasons for their choice. Two of the test persons (TP 05, 12) chose the middle point of the scale because they are both socially liberal and conservative and saw this point as a kind of "middle value" between these orientations (*"I mean, I am somewhat socially oriented. It just moves me to then choose the four or the three. On the other hand, [...] I am a bit conservative. This goes more in the direction of 6 and 7."*). On the other hand, test person 01 preferred the

scale value five because she is impartial, test person 07 because she is neither left nor right and test person 11 because she is not interested in politics.

The respondents were also asked to explain their choice of answer in more detail. Test subject 03 chose the scale value six because she herself is in the conservative area. The two test persons, who were placed on the value two (TP 02, 09), justified this on the one hand with their own political background (TP 09: "*Falcon group founded with 14, in the district council with 16 and special permission, very active in the party at the time.*") and on the other hand with the social policy represented by the individual parties (TP 02). The two test persons, who chose the answer value three, named their own political thinking (TP 04) as well as the location of certain parties on the scale (TP 08: "*Of course, one always has one party in mind and knows the parties one would rather vote for, even where they are located.*") as an explanation.

Some respondents also explained how they used the scale in choosing the response value. Most test persons used the middle of the scale as an anchor point:

■ "*I looked first, from 0 to 10, where the middle is. The middle is 5. And then I moved a little to the left and looked, 2/3 is where I see myself and 3 is perfect.*" (TP 02)

■ "*That's a good question. In the first step, I thought about it, it's an odd scale [...]. 5 is the middle out of feeling, I tend more to the right and have thought about what is on the far right. Then I assigned the scale values of 6-10 groupings. And the NPD is 9, the Ku Klux Klan is 10 [...]. So I graded, I am somewhere around 6.*" (TP 03)

■ "*I have assumed that 5 is social democracy, then I am bit more left.*" (TP 04)

■ "*I have counted how many categories I have. To find out if we have a middle or not, but I do that with all scales. [...] I first looked to see if there was a middle point on this scale or not, and then I located myself there.*" (TP 08)

On the other hand, some of the participants (TP 09, 11, 12) were located at the end of the scale due to the scale end points. Test person 12 explains: "*Not on the right side at all, I know what that means. On the left I also know that, they are too 'lenor-rinsed'. So, four or five.*"

The respondents were also asked what it means to them when someone places themselves on the left, in the middle or on the right. In this question, respondents named a variety of different meanings for the different political directions. For the respondents, a ranking on the left side of the scale means that this person attaches particular importance to social justice (TP 02, 04, 09), that he or she is a socialist/communist (TP 02, 05) and that he or she stands up for workers' rights (TP 02). Respondents associated with the left scale endpoint also the ideas of community and equality (TP 03), as well as openness and tolerance (TP 09) and environmental protection (TP 02, 08). In addition, the respondents attributed a cosmopolitan and international orientation (TP 03, 08) to the "left", which is also reflected in a globalization and EU-friendly position (TP 08). Test person 12 considers the "left" to be too "*lenor-rinsed and wishy-washy*", and test

person 07 was unable to give an answer here due to a lack of knowledge ("*Unfortunately, I cannot answer that. I don't know my way around that well. I do not know. Impossible to say.*").

On the other hand, the respondents equated the right-hand end of the scale with a conservative (TP 02) and national (TP 02, 09) orientation, which is not in line with Europeanization and globalization efforts (TP 08). Respondents also thought of concepts such as national pride (TP 08), National Socialism (TP 09) and described "right" as "totalitarian" (TP 04), "racist" and "discriminatory" (TP 02, 04), as well as "radical" or "radical right" (TP 07, 12). Test person 03 defined right as "*the community of my group, in which everyone should be equal and better than the others.*" Two test subjects (TP 02, 05) assign an extremely capitalist attitude to the right.

Although the respondents had a clear idea of the meaning of "left" and "right", this does not seem to be the case for the "middle". Although two of the respondents name concrete associations such as liberalism, free market economy (TP 02) and social democracy (04), the remaining respondents describe the meaning of the political middle in very vague terms such as "*meeting in the middle*" (TP 01, 05, 08, 12), "*balanced*" (TP 12), "*neutral*" (TP 07), "*undecided*" and "*current situation*" (TP 08).

In addition, the test subjects were asked about political issues that they believe are usually represented by the left, right and center. A typical political topic of the left was social justice in general (TP 04, 08, 09), and wage justice, property justice (TP 03) and tax justice (TP 09) in particular. In this context, three test persons thought of a liberal asylum and refugee policy (TP 01, 08, 12) and two test persons thought of the support of socially disadvantaged persons by providing social housing and unemployment benefit/Hartz IV (TP 02, 12). Other political topics assigned to the left were the environment (TP 07) and the family (TP 09). Respondents to this demand also mentioned keywords such as "*nationalization*" (TP 05), "*the opposite of elite*" (TP 03) and "*EU-friendliness*" (TP 08).

Diametrically opposed to this, the scale points on the right were associated with restrictive refugee and integration policies (TP 01, 02), as well as xenophobia (TP 04, 09, 12) and national-focused policies that manifest themselves in economic protectionism and resistance to the EU and the EURO (TP 08). Furthermore, some test persons saw the right-wing issues as characterized by an improved position of the majority population (TP 07, 09, 12), elitist thinking, segregation and "*thinking in structures and order*" (TP 03). Test person 02 also thought of the "*historical processing of German history*" and a conservative family policy. Test person 05 associated a liberal economic policy with the right.

With regard to the political topics of the middle, the test persons thought of economic topics (TP 02, 04), such as "*minimum taxes for all*" and "*minimal political intervention in the market economy*" (TP 02), and social issues (TP 04). Test person 05 also mentioned a balanced relationship between unions and employers (TP 05). The remaining test subjects do not associate clear political issues with the centre and either describe the political issues of the centre vaguely (TP 12: "*what the chancellor does*") or cannot name any issues. Test person 03 assumes that the middle group "*have no statement. The middle does not exist*" and test person 01 sees the middle as "*impartial*". Subject 07 and

09 state that they have no idea what political issues the centre stands for. Interestingly, subject 07 has chosen the value five on the scale, i.e. the political middle.

Finally, the test persons were asked about political parties that are located on the left, right or in the middle. Most of the test persons associate the left end of the scale with the left (TP 02, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09) and occasionally with the DKP, KPD (TP 04), the Greens [die Grünen] (TP 07), SPD (TP 09) and FDP (TP 12). Some test persons classified the Greens [die Grünen] (TP 05, 11) and the Punk Party [Punkpartei] (TP 04) as rather left-wing. For the test persons the SPD (TP 01, 03, 04, 07, 11), the CDU/CSU (TP 01, 03, 08, 12), the FDP (TP 02, 04, 05, 09) and the Greens [die Grünen] (TP 01, 12) are parties of the middle. On the right scale spectrum, some respondents rated the CDU/CSU as more to the right (TP 04, 05, 11) or right (TP 09). The AfD (TP 01, 02, 04, 07, 08, 09), the NPD (TP 03, 04, 05, 09, 12) and the Republicans [Republikaner] (TP 12) were also classified on the right. Test person 04 also named "Pegida" and the "Reichsdeutschen" in this context.

Recommendations:

Since the pretest was only exploratory in nature, no recommendations were made.

Question documented in ZIS (DOI):

<https://zis.gesis.org/DoiId/10.6102/zis83>