

NOMINATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Left-right political scales

Left-right political scales: Some ‘expert’ judgements

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Abstract. Although left-right scales are an inherent feature of much cross-national research, they have necessarily been created on a somewhat ad hoc basis, since the empirical foundation for valid cross-national scales rarely exists. This paper seeks to provide such a foundation by using judgements of party ideological position which are both explicit and non-idiosyncratic across a wide range of countries. These judgements derive from a so-called ‘expert’ survey of leading political scientists in Western Europe, the USA, and elsewhere. It is our hope that the scales which we derive in this way may prove useful in a wide variety of contexts of comparative research.

Nomination:

‘Some expert judgements’ live on

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When I nominate an article that has made ‘a particular contribution to political science’, I do it after serious deliberations – with myself. As the founding editor of this journal has pointed out, I happen to be the only living scholar who has been actively involved with the *EJPR* from the very beginning and till this very day. Therefore my memory must be longer than the memory of all of the other good colleagues who take part in this academic Voxpop. Fortunately that is not the case. An editor reads manuscripts, hundreds and hundreds, makes decisions and communicates with authors – and tends to forget about the rest of the process. I certainly did not re-read all the manuscripts when they appeared in print. The journal issue found its place on the shelf together with other tools of scholarly work. Therefore I mostly remember some difficult

cases and borderline rejects, some cultural clashes, and exchanges with a few authors who did not accept entirely the wise editorial decision.

Browsing through the pages today I am struck by many good articles, which never really caught the attention of the profession – partly, probably, because our American colleagues did not read the journal as much as they ought to. Next, my eyes fall upon some odd articles, like e.g., Weber's content analysis of British Speeches from the Throne over several centuries (Weber 1982) and Barricelli's radical proposal for a new type of government (Barricelli 1985). These were articles taken in exactly because they were not only good, but also somewhat removed from mainstream political science. A number of special issues, which brought European political scientists together for a while, deserve mention, if not nomination. Rose & Mackie's annual electoral data reports also stand out as a useful, indeed highly valuable, contribution – but hardly eligible in this context. I end up with a small number of candidates for the nomination, but also with a sad feeling, because I see the point that was once made by Gunnar Sjöblom about the lack of cumulation (Sjöblom 1977). The *EJPR* has over its span of existence provided an outlet for articles on electoral systems, parties and party systems, political economy and a few other issues, but apart from these fields it is in retrospect difficult to see a policy in operation, leading to cumulation. On the other hand, the official policy of the journal did not encourage specialization – the old editor may just have a fit of spleen. . . .

A few contributions stand out, because they created a lively discussion. Other contributions, because they were useful for comparative scholars. Strangely enough one author has done more than others to stimulate discussion and also provided one of the most useful pieces that I know of. This author has spent the last many years 'Down Under', and from his outpost there he has served the journal in many capacities, including also delivering exciting articles and polemics. Francis G. Castles is the name, and the list of articles written for *EJPR* is impressive. At least ten articles, mostly on aspects of public policy in advanced democracies, starting with the well-known 'Does politics matter?' (Castles & McKinlay 1979), and – until now – ending with a discussion with Göran Therborn on the relationship between religion and public policy (Castles 1994a, b).

My favourite among these articles appeared in 1984. It was a product coming out of an EUI-project, directed by Rudolf Wildenmann, and the authors were Frank Castles, then at the Open University, and a younger EUI-scholar, Peter Mair. Around 1982 members of the ECPR Council and assorted others received a questionnaire from these two colleagues, in which respondents were asked to enter the parties of their own nation into a ten – or was it eleven? – point scale which was called a 'Left-Right'-scale. I