

The Political Origins of Critical Social Science

Presentation at UiO

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University of Copenhagen . University of Oslo

November 4th, 2025

Roadmap

Motivation

Measurement

Validation

Descriptive Results

Correlational Results

Conclusion

Where does social science come from?



Source: <https://byggeprosjekter.bygg.no/2022-oslo/eilert-sundts-hus-blokk-b/2347853>

Where does social science come from?



Source: <https://www.universitas.no/da-studentopprøret-kom-til-blindern/199533>

The rise and influence of 'critical social science'

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The rise and influence of 'critical social science'



- Critical of existing power structures and dominant ideologies

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- Concerned with emancipation and social justice

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- Often associated w. post-positivist and/or interpretivist traditions

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Today, Foucault is most assigned author across university syllabi (>2x Plato, Kant, Weber)

<https://analytics.opensyllabus.org/record/persons?size=100>

Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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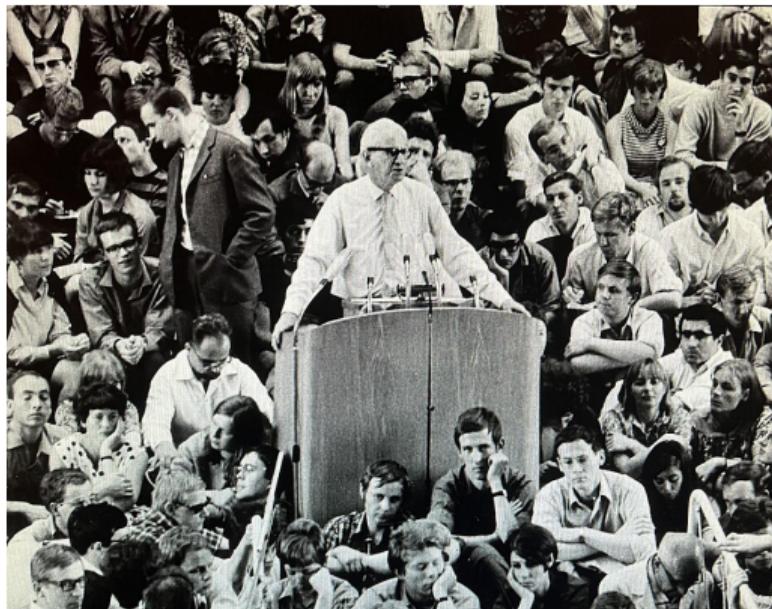
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Critical social science and student activism

Critical social science and student activism



Herbert Marcuse

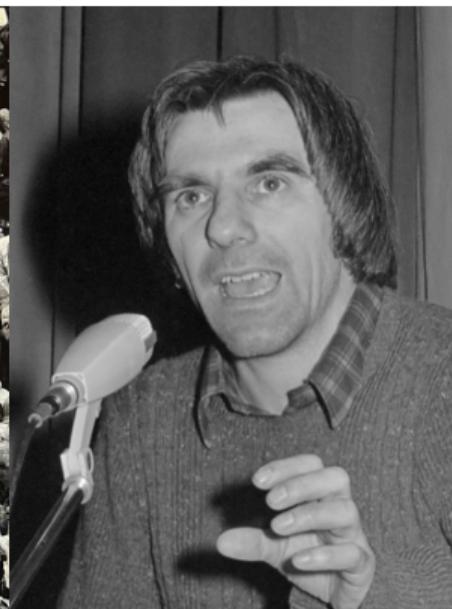


Rudi Dutschke

Critical social science and student activism



Herbert Marcuse



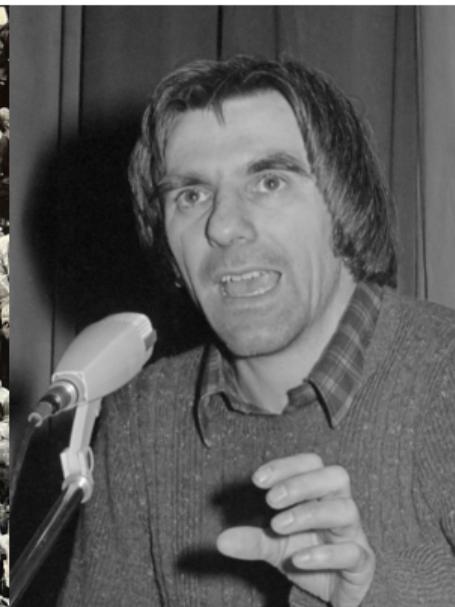
Rudi Dutschke

- “Long march through the institutions”: create radical change from within government and society.

Critical social science and student activism



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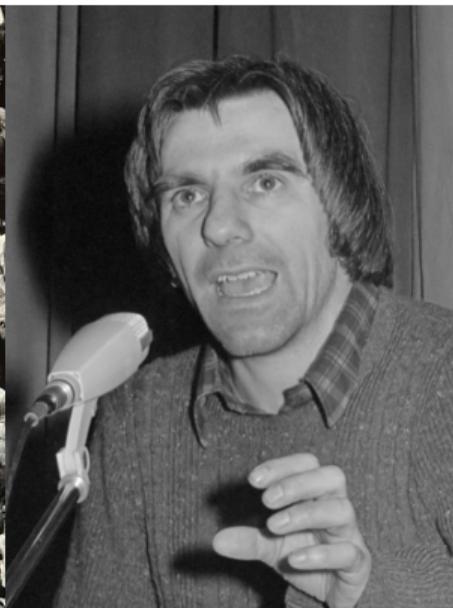
Rudi Dutschke

- “Long march through the institutions”: create radical change from within government and society.
- The ‘long march’ in academia: new departments, curricula, hiring strategies

Critical social science and student activism



Herbert Marcuse



Rudi Dutschke

- “Long march through the institutions”: create radical change from within government and society.
- The ‘long march’ in academia: new departments, curricula, hiring strategies
- ⇒ More critical social science in places w. history of student activism

Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Our contributions

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1. New measure of critical social science (CSS), measured across millions of published (Web of Science) articles

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(e.g., Ballandonne and Cersosimo, 2023; Jacobs, 2022; Magness and Makovi, 2023)

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~~ in this version: (i) descriptive evidence, (ii) preliminary correlational evidence

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Validation

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Correlational Results

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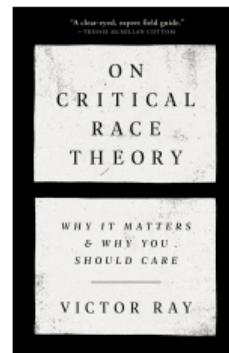
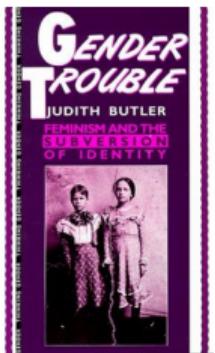
Data

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L'archéologie du savoir
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MICHEL FOUCAULT

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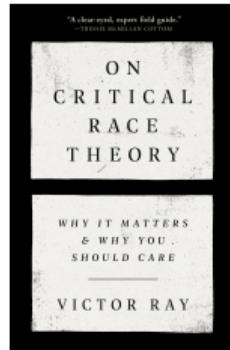
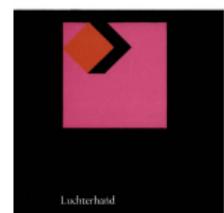
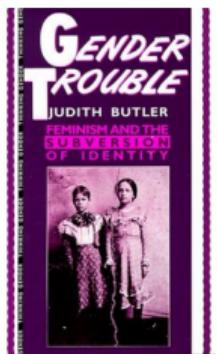
1 'Seed books': foundational books in CSS (\Leftarrow examples)

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40 Soziologische Texte

Herbert Marcuse
Der eindimensionale
Mensch



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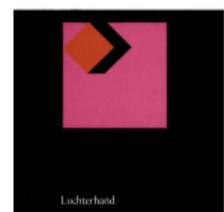
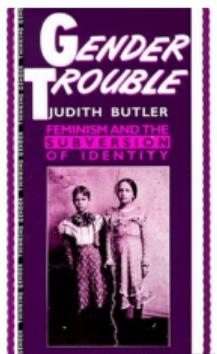
2 2,360,541 humanities and social science article abstracts + metadata obtained through the Web of Science API

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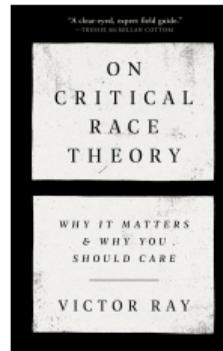
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COLLECTION CRITIQUE
GILLES DELEUZE
FÉLIX GUATTARI
CAPITALISME ET IMMONDICE
MILLE PLATEAUX

LES ÉDITIONS DU REVEAU

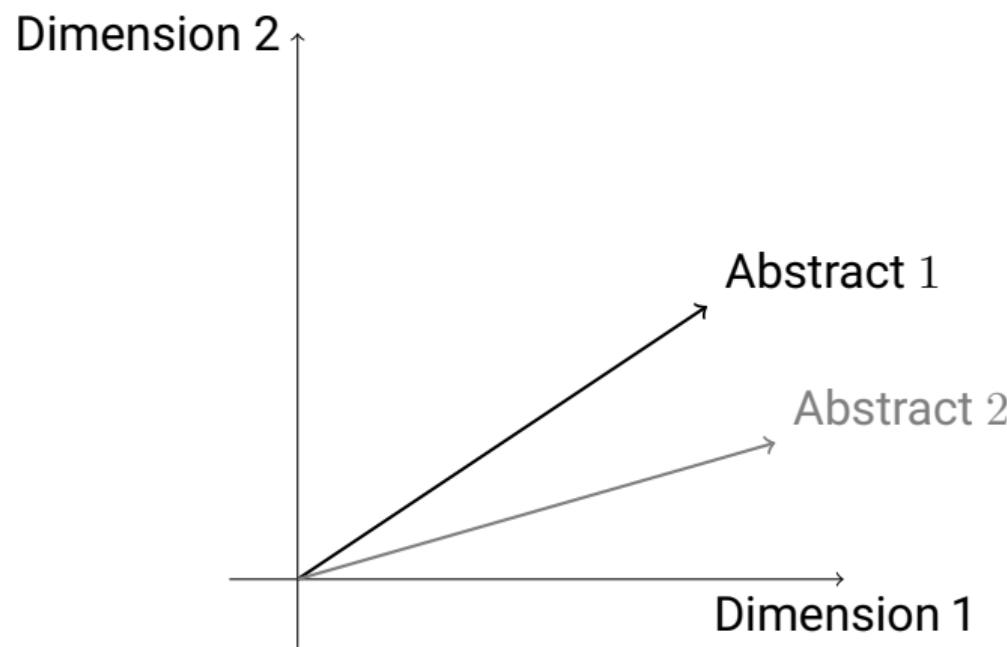


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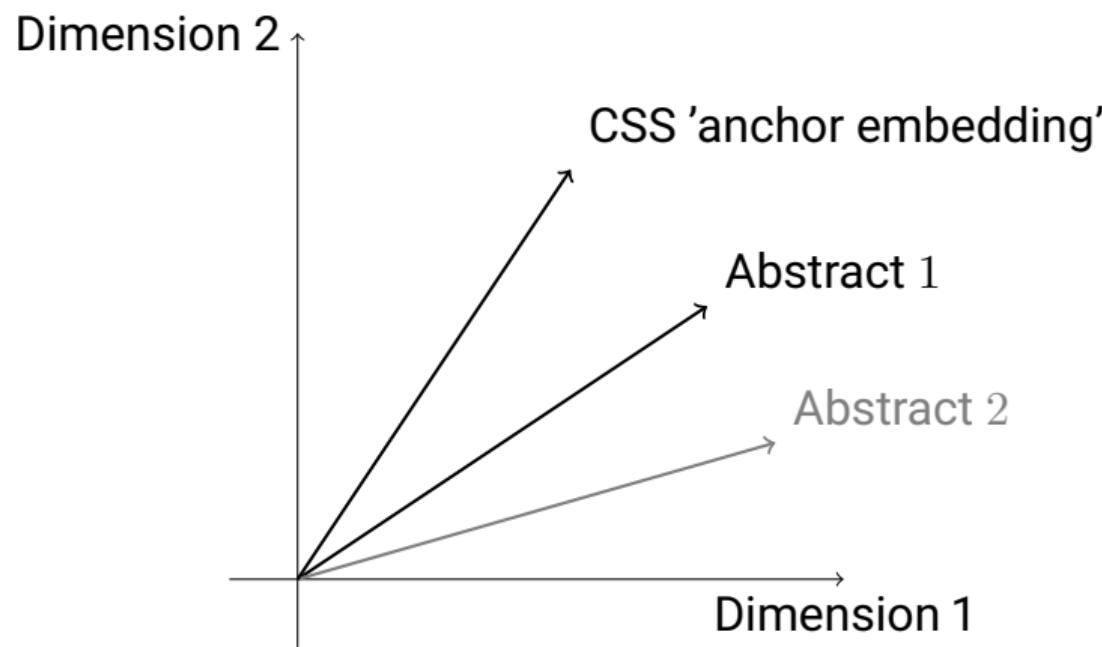
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- Goal: develop article abstract-level 'CSS score'

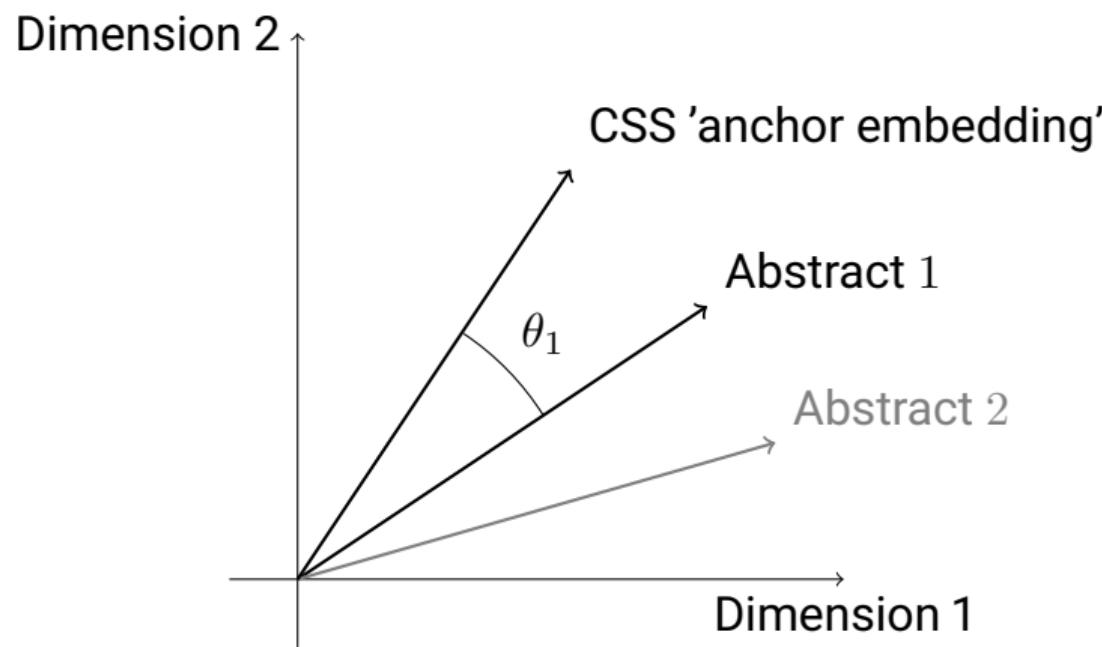
Measurement I: Word embeddings



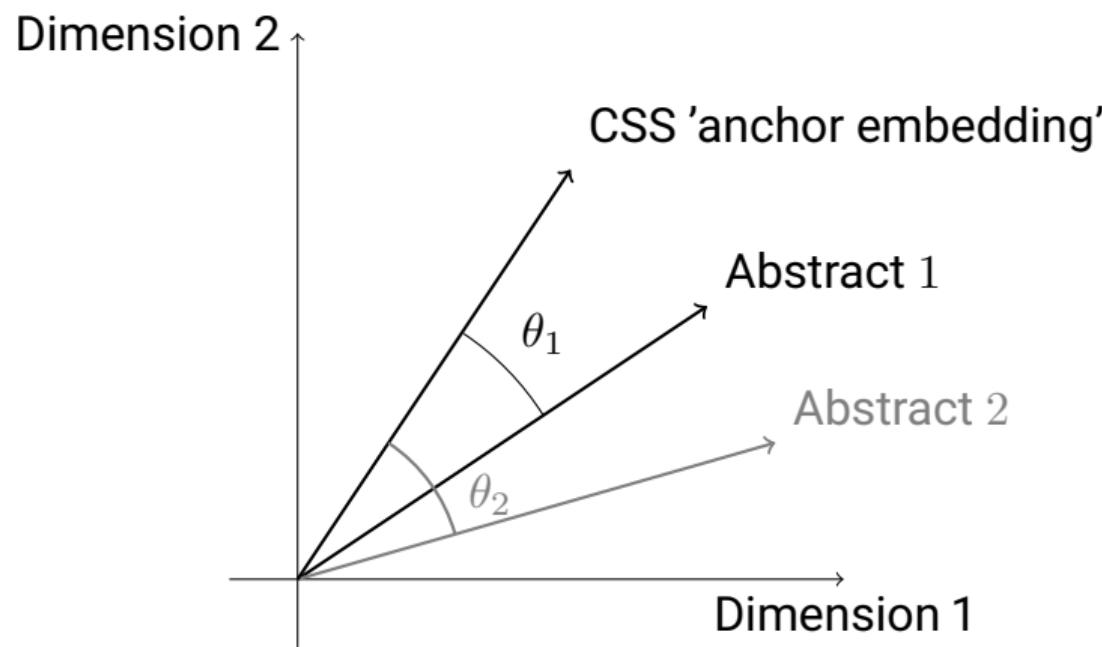
Measurement I: Word embeddings



Measurement I: Word embeddings



Measurement I: Word embeddings



Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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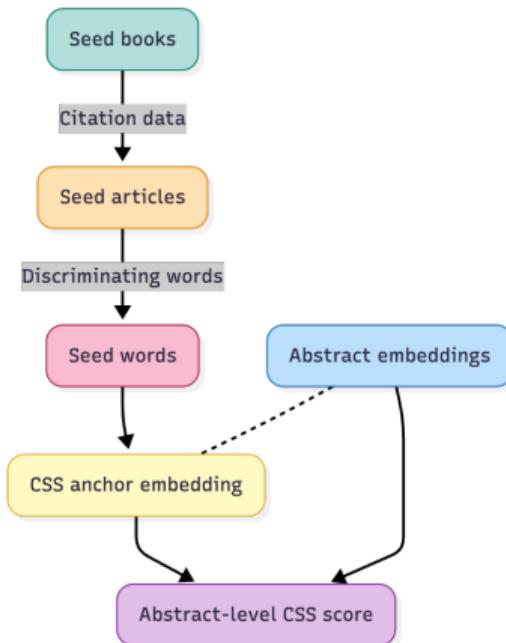
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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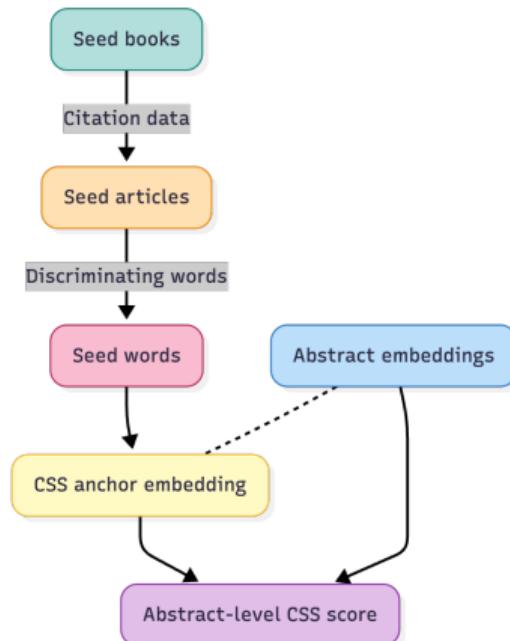
References

Measurement II: From seed books to CSS scores

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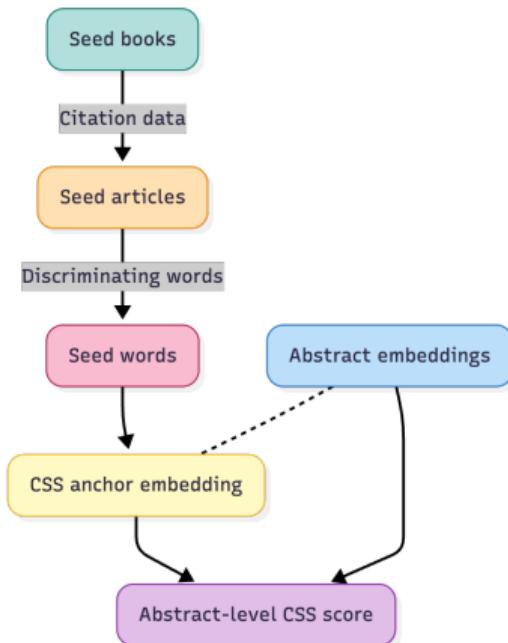


Measurement II: From seed books to CSS scores



1. Seed books

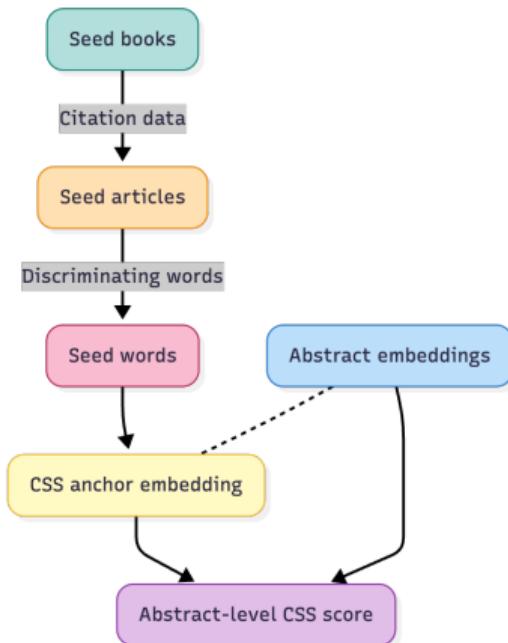
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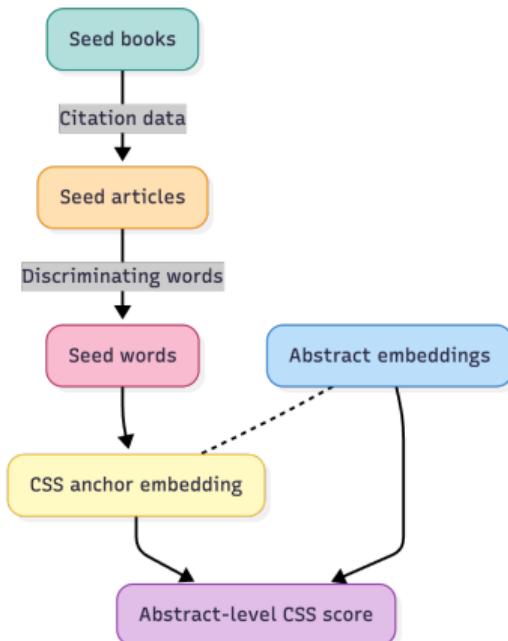
2. **Seed articles:** most central citing articles (Citation data from inciteful.xyz)

Measurement II: From seed books to CSS scores



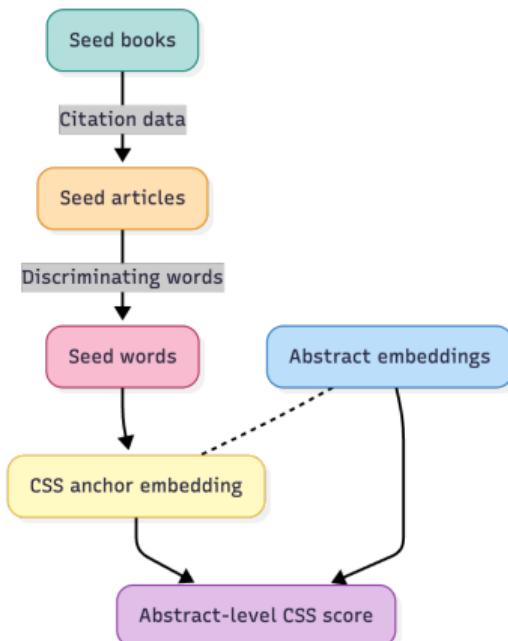
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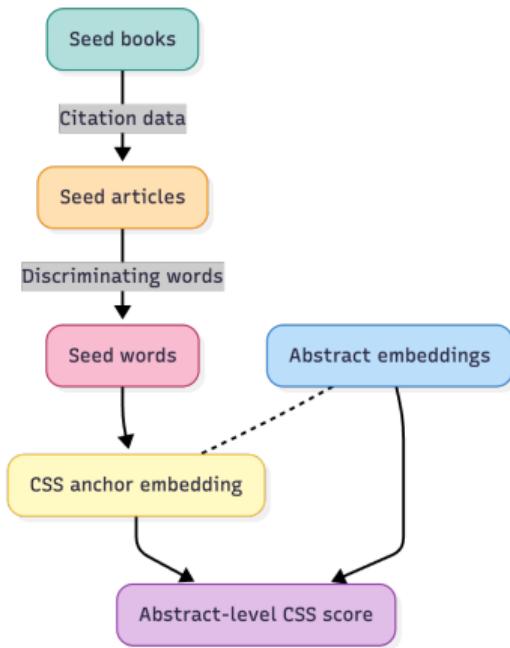
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4. **CSS anchor embedding**: embedding capturing most vs. least distinct seed words

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6. **Abstract-level CSS score**: abstract proximity to anchor embedding

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Descriptive Results

Correlational Results

Conclusion

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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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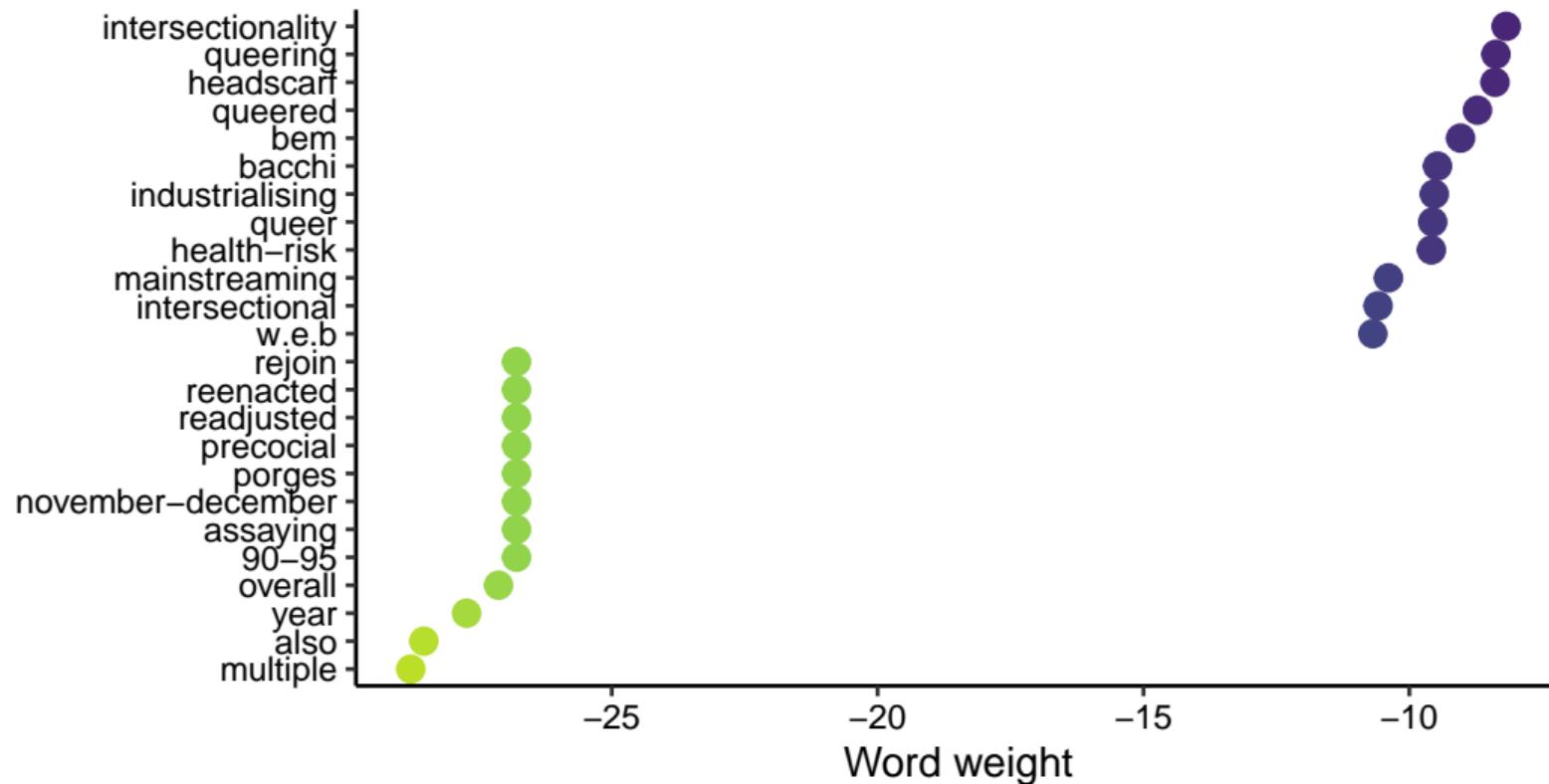
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Validation I: Seed words

Validation I: Seed words



Motivation
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Descriptive Results
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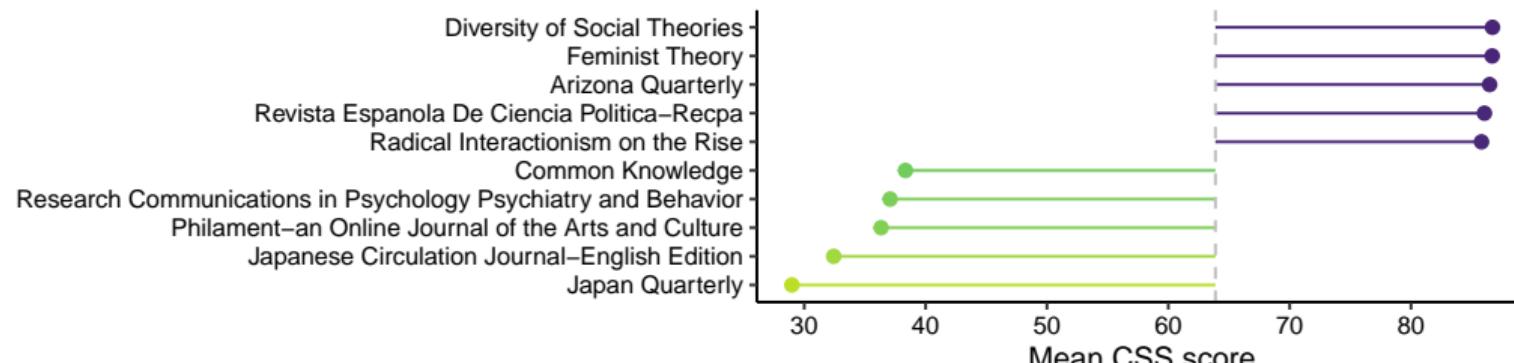
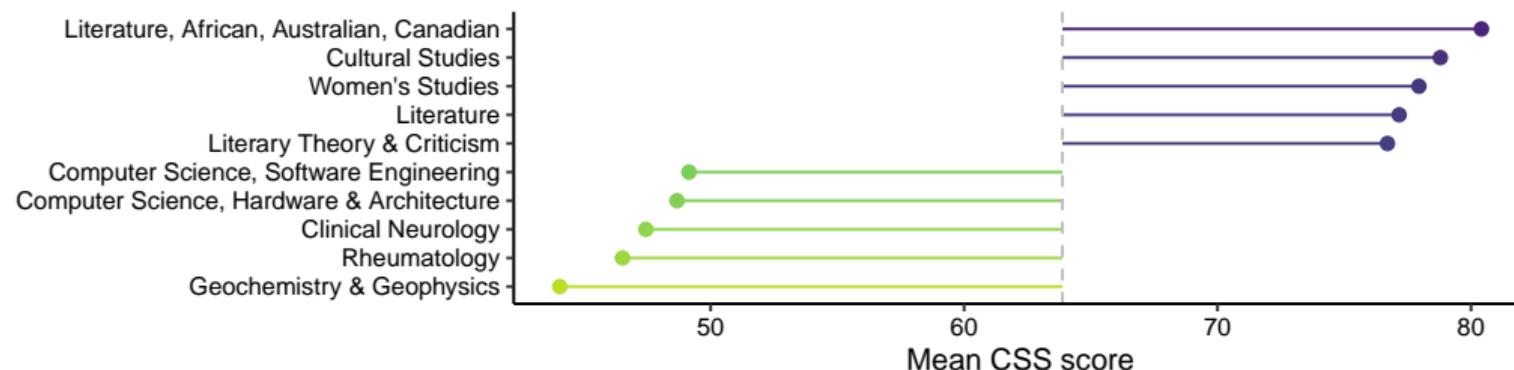
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Validation II: Subfields + journals

Validation II: Subfields + journals



Motivation
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Measurement
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Descriptive Results
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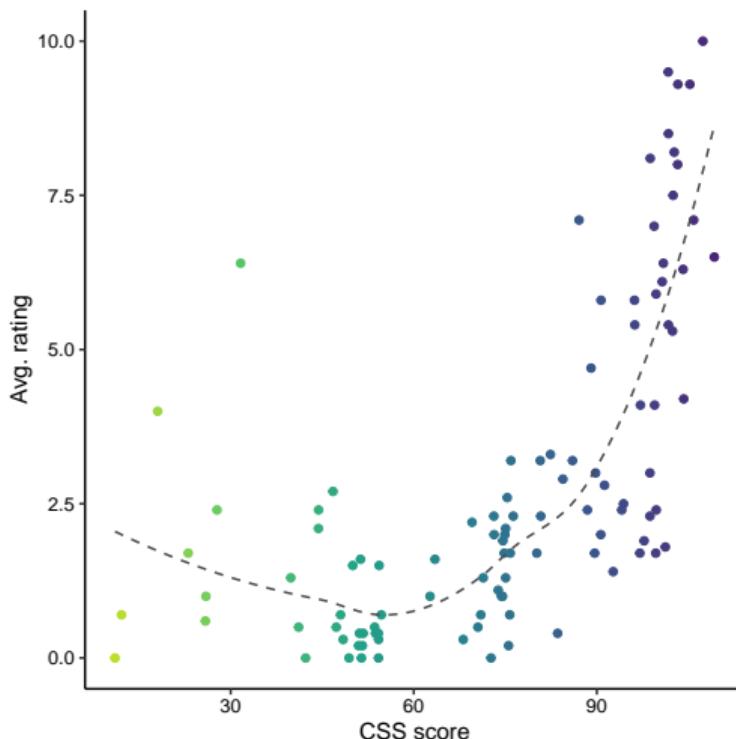
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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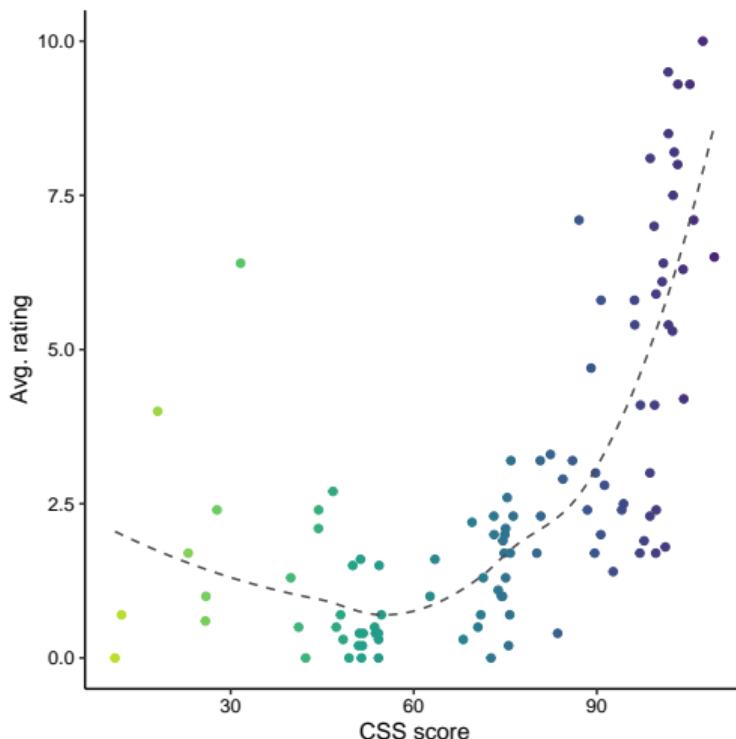
Validation III: Human annotation

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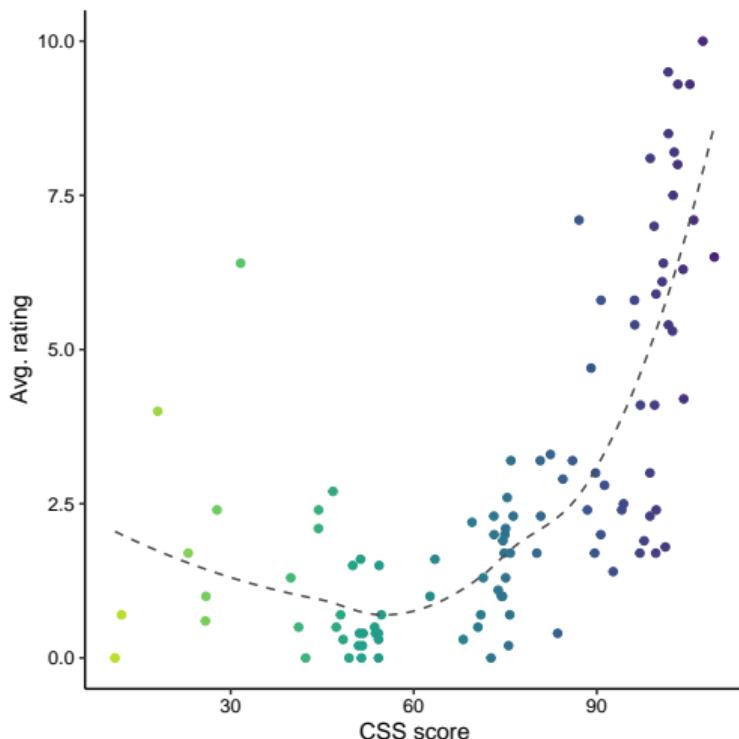
- RA manually annotated stratified sample of ~100 abstracts

Validation III: Human annotation



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- ← very strong agreement at top range, more noisy for low-CSS abstracts ($\beta = .07, p < .001$)

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- across 20 abstracts jointly coded by 2 RAs, high intercoder reliability $\alpha = .84$

Roadmap

Motivation

Measurement

Validation

Descriptive Results

Correlational Results

Conclusion

Motivation
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Measurement
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Descriptive Results
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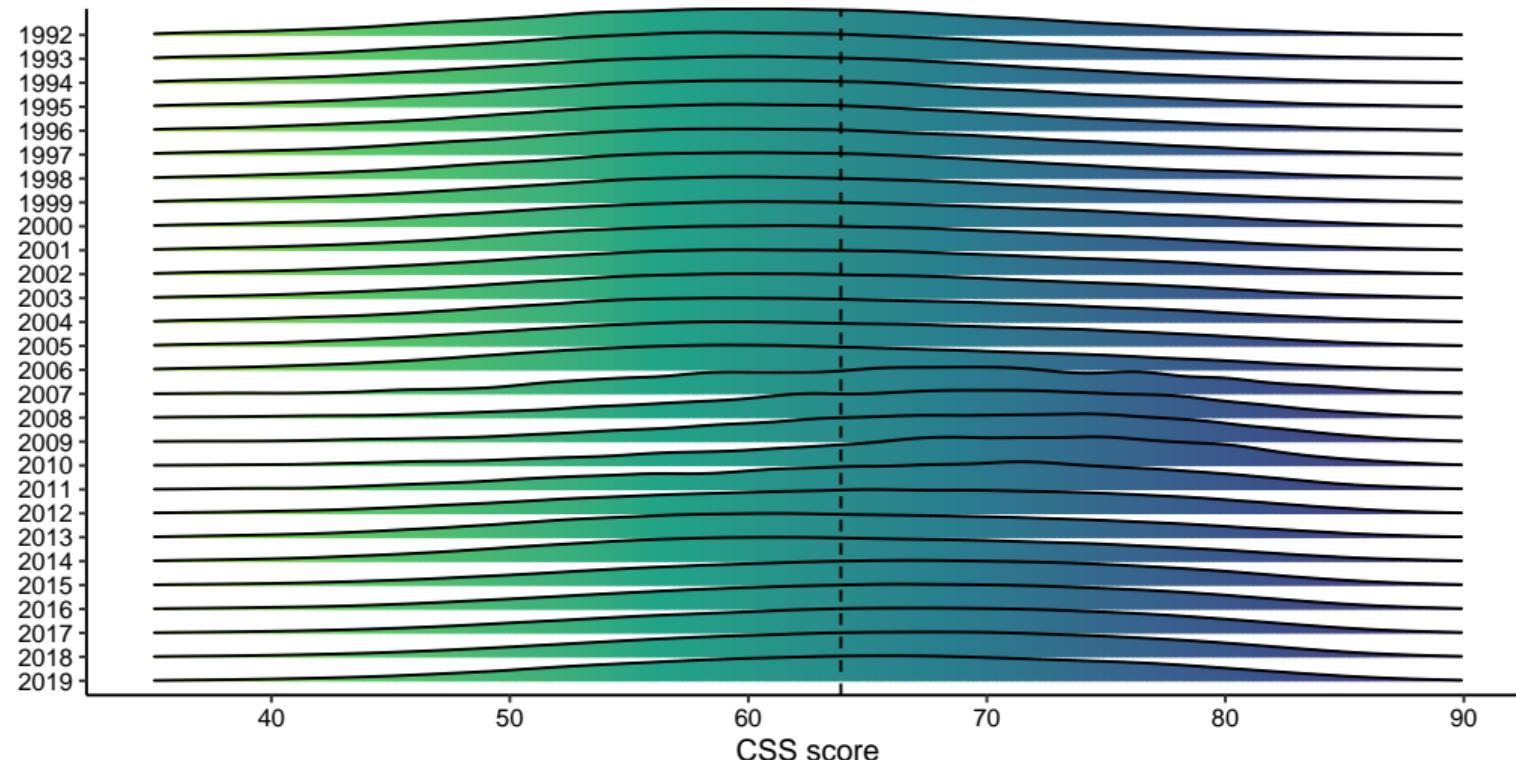
Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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Temporal Trend

Temporal Trend



Motivation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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References

Country-level variation

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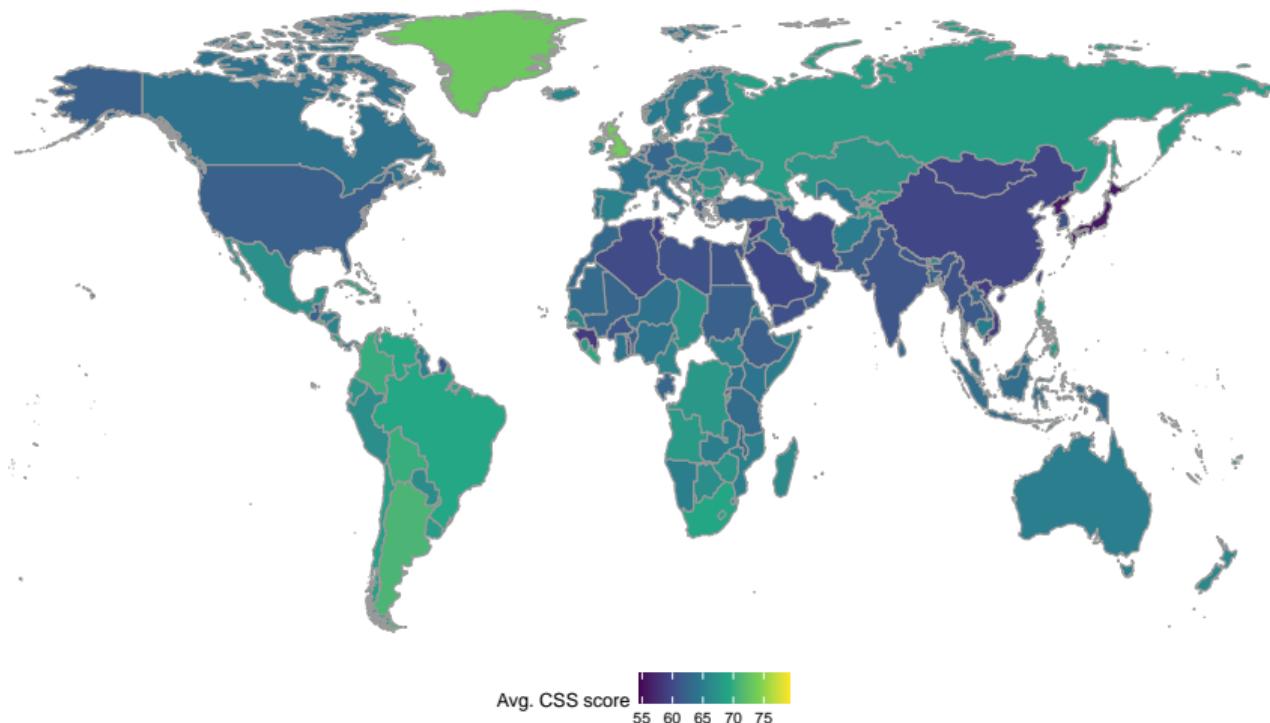
Descriptive Results
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Country-level variation



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Descriptive Results
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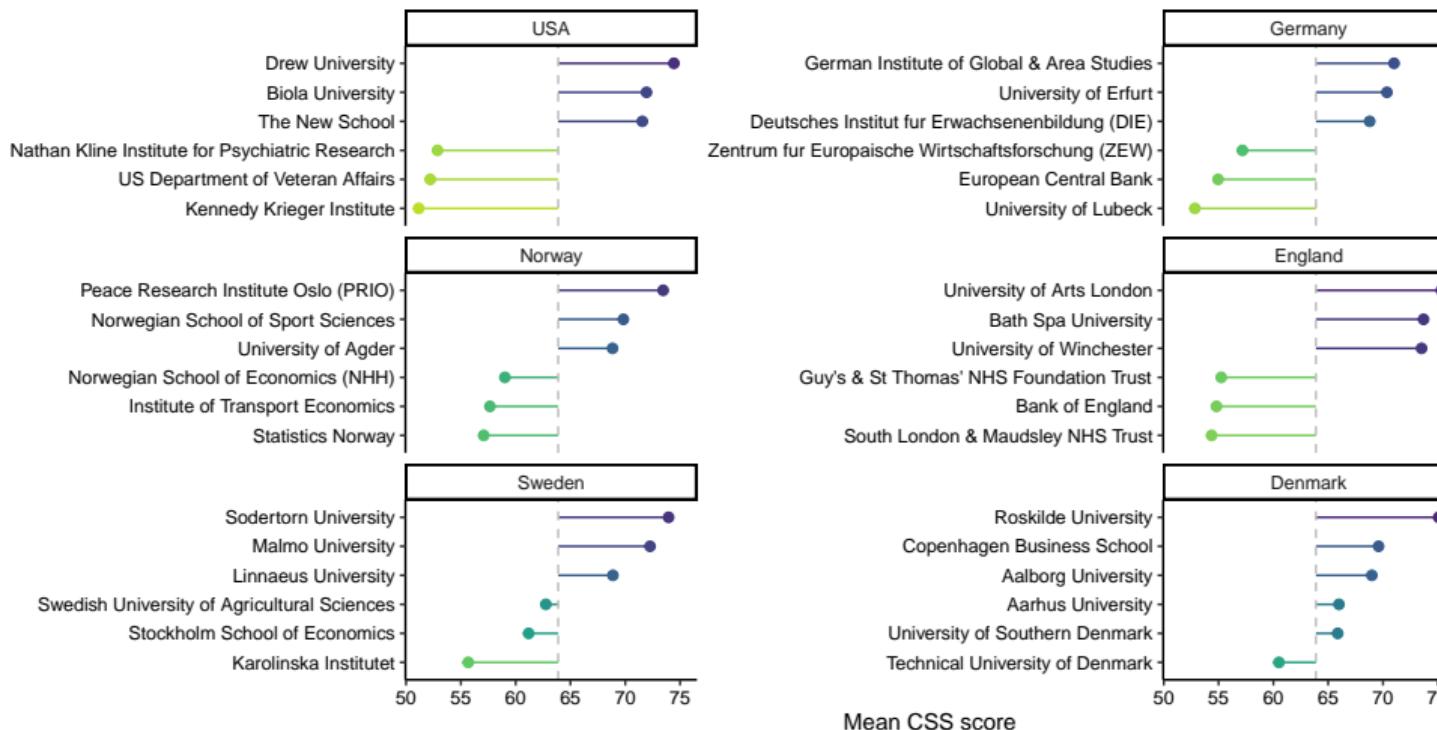
Correlational Results
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References

Institution-level variation

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Roadmap

Motivation

Measurement

Validation

Descriptive Results

Correlational Results

Conclusion

Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Country cross-sectional correlations

Country cross-sectional correlations

	Dependent variable:			
	Mean CSS Score			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Academic freedom index				0.571* (0.289)
Student Protest History			7.790** (3.748)	8.199** (3.713)
Civil War History		4.991*** (1.832)	6.155*** (1.885)	6.711*** (1.885)
Liberal Democracy	3.868*** (1.005)	4.831*** (0.982)	5.155*** (0.992)	2.361 (1.720)
GDP per capita	-0.026*** (0.008)	-0.028*** (0.008)	-0.026*** (0.008)	-0.023*** (0.008)
Log Population	-0.228* (0.137)	-0.664*** (0.170)	-0.761*** (0.175)	-0.772*** (0.173)
Constant	65.350*** (1.073)	67.797*** (1.270)	67.929*** (1.277)	68.351*** (1.281)
Observations	145	141	136	136
R ²	0.115	0.215	0.248	0.270

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Within-country variation



Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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References

Within-country variation: 1960s SDS chapters

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Within-country variation: 1960s SDS chapters



Source: Mapping American Social Movements Project, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/sds_map.shtml

Motivation
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Measurement
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Validation
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Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Within-country variation: 1960s SDS chapters



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Measurement
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Validation
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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1960s SDS Chapter and Present-Day CSS Score

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	(1)	(2)	(3)
SDS Chapter	0.643*	1.076**	1.107***
	(0.318)	(0.326)	(0.327)
Num.Obs.	632 544	632 544	529 904
R2	0.001	0.008	0.009
Std.Errors	by: cluster	by: cluster	by: cluster
FE by state		✓	✓
Post-2000 only			✓

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

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Measurement

Validation

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Conclusion

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○○○○○

Measurement
○○○○○○○

Validation
○○○○

Descriptive Results
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Correlational Results
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Conclusion
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Conclusion

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- Across + within countries, CSS correlated w. student protest

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 - other within-country data, e.g., European student protest movements

Conclusion

- We develop and validate a measure of ‘critical social science’
- Across + within countries, CSS correlated w. student protest
- Evidence for endogeneity of social science to politics
- Future extensions:
 - other within-country data, e.g., European student protest movements
 - measuring and explaining other social science traditions, e.g., global rise of US ‘positivist’ social science

Thanks for your attention!

“The Political Origins of Critical Social Science”

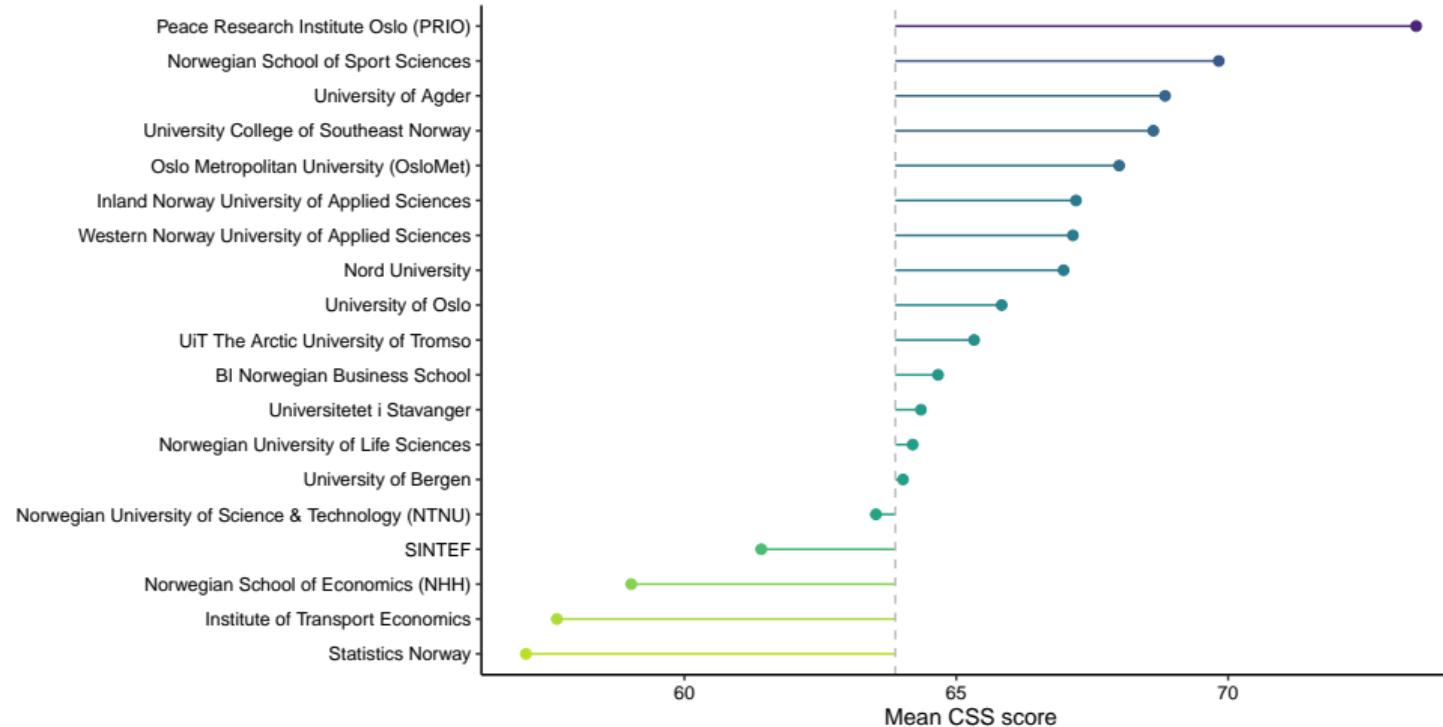
Frederik Hjorth · Tore Wig · Eli Baltzersen · Martin Søyland

University of Copenhagen · University of Oslo

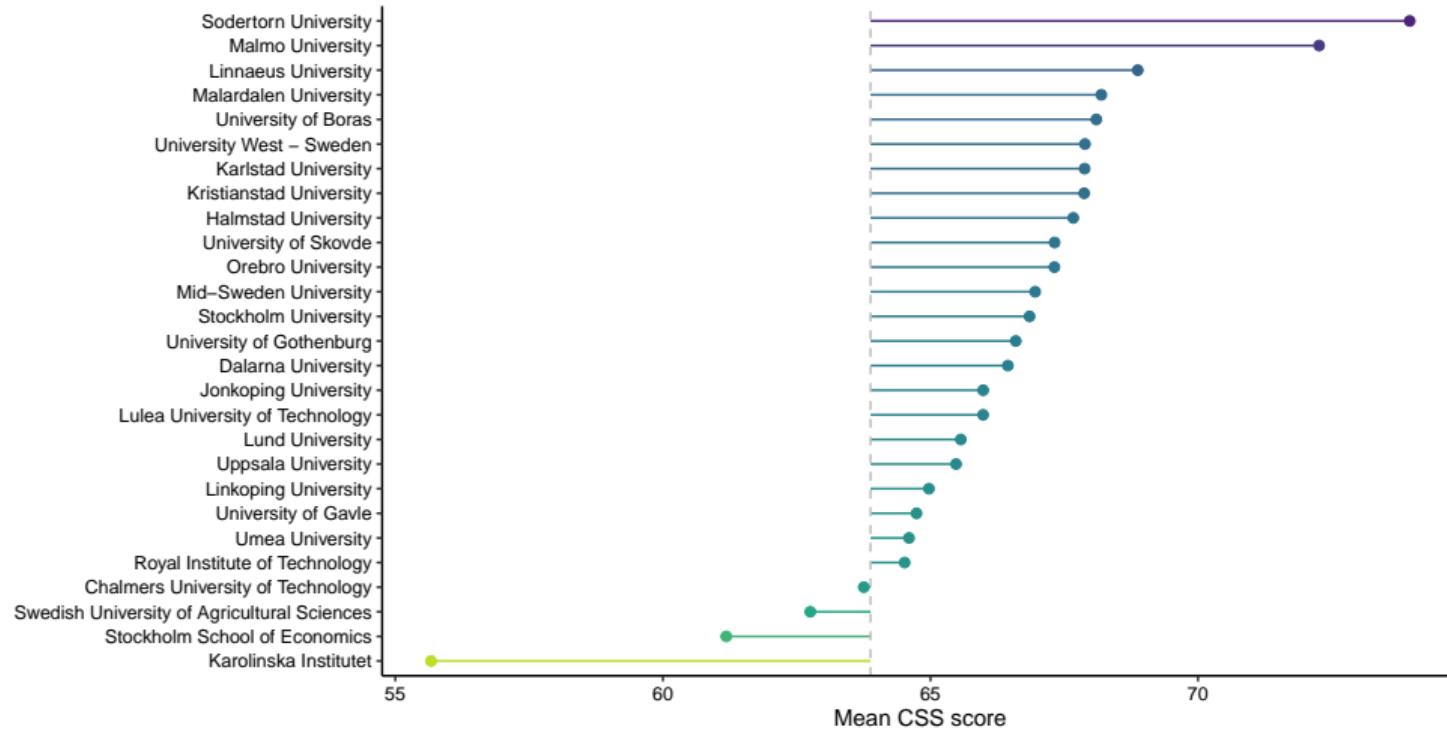
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Institution means: Norway



Institution means: Sweden



Institution means: Denmark

