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Right-Wing Extremism

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Abstract

Right-wing extremism should preferably be considered a separate political ideology. This is true for the theoretical as well as the empirical level. Starting from the idea that several components on one and the same dimension constitute right-wing extremism, the analyses show that if we are to speak of true right-wing extremism, at least one component from an ingroup-outgroup differentiation cluster (i.e. ethnocentrism, racism and xenophobia) and one component from a 'hierarchy' cluster (i.e. authoritarianism and nationalism) have to be present.

1 Introduction

One of the most remarkable political phenomena of the last two decades has been the rise (in the 1980s) and the growth (mainly in the 1990s) of 'the extreme right' in Western Europe. At different levels extreme right ideas are said to be gaining ground. Extreme right parties, i.e. parties that are perceived as and labelled extreme right by large sections of the media and scholarly community, are achieving electoral results which were previously unprecedented in post-war Europe. For example, the French *Front National* has consistently won over 10 per cent of the votes in national elections in the 1990s, as did the Flemish *Vlaams Blok* in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, while the Italian *Alleanza Nazionale* surpassed the 20 per cent mark and (shortly) even participated in government. At the same time, extreme right violence is said to have been on the rise throughout Europe, varying from attacks on asylum seekers in Germany to attacks by (though mainly within) the neo-Nazi scene in Scandinavia (e.g. Bjørgo & Witte 1993; Bjørgo 1995, 1997; Koopmans 1996).

In the Netherlands the rise of the extreme right has been noticed mainly on the basis of the electoral results of the so-called *centrumstroming* (centre movement). In 1982, Hans Janmaat entered the Second Chamber on the ticket of the *Centrumpartij* and apart from a three year interruption in 1986 to 1989 he has been in parliament ever since. In the 1994 parliamentary election Janmaat and his party *Centrumdemocraten* increased their electoral result to

2.5 per cent of the votes and thereby gained a total of three (out of 150) seats in parliament (see Mudde & Van Holsteyn 1994). And, as in other countries, the (increased) violence against 'foreigners' and asylum seekers has been used as an indicator of the growing strength of the extreme right in the Netherlands (e.g. FOK 1993; Van Donselaar 1993; Witte 1993).

In addition to a public and political debate, the (resurgent) extreme right has also initiated a scholarly debate and has given rise to an increasing number of studies and publications. However, many of these studies seem to ignore an essential aspect: what *is* right-wing extremism? What does it contemplate? What is its significance? This question is at the heart of this article. First, we will argue that right-wing extremism should be considered a political ideology (section 2). Then we will describe how our research into the existence of this ideology was constituted and executed (section 3), and we will see whether the theoretical construction (concept) is indeed useful and sustainable in practice (section 4). Finally, the possibilities our findings offer for future research are discussed (section 5).

2 Right-wing extremism

What exactly constitutes right-wing extremism is rather difficult to ascertain. An unambiguous description of the term is lacking and there is no consensus within the field of scholars (Ueltzhöffer 1983; Pfahl-Traughber 1993; Kowalsky & Schroeder 1994b). The conceptual confusion is in part caused by the fact that, on several occasions, the term has been stripped of its meaning by drastic stretching and dilution in the public and political debate (e.g. Knütter 1991). But, even when this kind of deterioration of the term is left aside, the problem is not solved: within the scholarly community the term is used in a (wide) variety of ways and given a variety of meanings. Some authors have seen this babel-like confusion as a reason to abandon the term altogether and to replace it with another (e.g. Elbers & Fennema 1993). Another possibility, which is preferred here, is to limit the meaning of the term by describing it carefully and clearly.

Herz (1975: 29-47) distinguished six different meanings or interpretations of the term right-wing extremism, referring to party organization, goals, means and tactics, the social structure of the electoral support, the personality structure of these voters and, finally, ideology. The most important, and from a scholarly point of view the most useful interpretation was ideology. Accordingly, we use the term right-wing extremism exclusively in this way.

By interpreting right-wing extremism as a political ideology we have solved only part of the puzzle. An ideology consists of a *complex* of integrated opinions, that is, a more or less coherent entity of opinions about the desired organization of (the relations between) state and society. Consequently, the

question of which different opinions or features constitute right-wing extremism has to be addressed. Once again no consensus exists within the field. Some scholars define right-wing extremism on the basis of only one single feature, such as xenophobia (e.g. Husbands 1981), the opposition to progress (Hartmann, Steffen & Steffen 1985) or an anti-democratic ideal (e.g. Doll 1990). In general, however, a combination of two or more features is mentioned. For example, a combination of nationalism, racism and xenophobia (Macridis 1989); nationalism, racism, militarism, anti-communism and anti-democratic attitudes (Fielding 1981); or a minimum repertoire of "a strong nationalism, anti-communism, sexism and racism, a non-democratic attitude and a call for law and order and a strong army." (Pennings & Brants 1985: 44) In some cases the enumeration of features has the character of a true shopping list, counting over ten different features (e.g. Jaschke 1987; Falter & Schumann 1988). This notwithstanding, on the basis of some thirty definitions of right-wing extremism – taken from an international field of scholars to downplay possible country-specific factors – six key features can be listed which were mentioned in one form or another by a majority of the authors: nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, and anti-democratic attitudes such as the longing for a strong leader (Van Holsteyn & Mudde 1992a; also Van Holsteyn & Mudde 1992b; Mudde 1995; 1998).

It would not be appropriate to describe each feature in detail in this article (for this, see Van Holsteyn & Mudde 1992b; Mudde 1995). We will, however, discuss each feature in short to provide a better understanding of these often ambiguous features. In the case of *nationalism* not only a dominant loyalty of the individual to the nation state is central (see Kohn 1965), but also a political doctrine which holds that state and nation should be congruent (Gellner 1985; Hobsbawm 1990). The nation state strives for a situation characterized by internal homogenization and external exclusiveness: "Not only should all who live in x-land be x-people, but also all x-people should live in x-land." (Koch 1993: 17) The term *ethnocentrism* is used for a variety of attitudes and opinions. Characteristic, however, is the combination of a strong positive attitude towards one's own ethnic group (ingroup) with a strong negative attitude towards other ethnic groups (outgroups) (e.g. Eisinga & Scheepers 1989). *Xenophobia* can be seen as a special type of ethnocentrism in which the fear for or hostility towards 'aliens' is dominant (Mudde 1995). We use the term *racism* in the classical meaning with at the core the idea of natural, biological and hereditary differences between races, in which the idea of a hierarchy of races is central (Geiss 1988). Although this classical meaning has lost ground as a consequence of a more cultural interpretation of the term racism, we prefer this classical interpretation to the so-called "new racism" (Barker 1981) or "ethnopluralism" (Backes 1989) because of its clarity and because it is easier to delineate it from the other terms as a result of its restricted reach. Since

the appearance of the study *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950), the term *authoritarianism* has become well established and constitutes a constant part of almost all (empirical or survey) research on right-wing extremism (see Meloen 1997). For us, the most important point is that right-wing extremism includes attitudes that emphasize discipline, mental toughness and respect for authority. A description of anti-democratic attitudes is very difficult to provide, given that it is so dependent on the (contested) concept 'democracy'. For our purpose, however, it suffices to note that the content of *anti-democracy* primarily refers to democracy as a procedure and on the rejection of the fundamental equality of citizens. In a more positive description it refers to the idea of the organic state (see Meeuse 1981; Mudde 1995). The *longing for a strong leader* is a more concrete interpretation that fits the complex of anti-democratic attitudes.

At the theoretical (conceptual) level the complexities of the term right-wing extremism can thus be caught/understood, albeit with some difficulty. The question is whether this theoretical (re)construction holds practical relevance. In other words: does right-wing extremism – i.e. the political ideology that includes a combination of nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and anti-democratic attitudes such as the longing for a strong leader – exist not only on paper but also at the level of actual individual citizens?

3 Data collection and method of analysis

3.1 Data collection

The theoretical construction was tested on the basis of two different sets of data. The first set of data resulted from research concerning societal and political issues in general and right-wing extremism in particular, which was executed by a group of Leiden political science students in the spring of 1992 (see Van Holsteyn & Mudde 1992a). For practical reasons the research was set up in cooperation with the local daily newspaper *Haarlems Dagblad*, which had agreed to publish an announcement in which readers were urged to cooperate (dd. 20 May 1992). 2,000 people were randomly chosen from the subscription records to take part in the research – all of whom lived in the region of Haarlem. The second set of data resulted from similar research carried out in Almelo, a medium-sized town that resembles Haarlem in various aspects, by another Leiden political science student at the end of 1993 (see Van Driel & Van Holsteyn 1994). In this case a random sample of 1,000 people age 18 years plus was drawn from the municipal register of inhabitants.

In both cases data sampling took place by means of self-administered questionnaires. In the case of the Haarlem survey an accompanying letter

explained that the person in the family who would celebrate his or her birthday next, and was 18 years or older, was required to answer the questionnaire. Of the 1970 questionnaires that were sent, 754 were returned in time and in a manner suitable for use in the research. This means that the response was approximately 40%. From the actual response it could be concluded that the instruction, such as explained above, was not understood correctly by everyone; i.e. a disproportional amount of the questionnaires was completed by a male member of the households. In Almelo 465 of the 1,000 questionnaires were returned in a form suitable for use in further research: a response of 47%.

In Almelo a comparison of the response (the sample) with a number of characteristics of the population was possible, as the distribution of the population was known with respect to such demographic characteristics as sex, age, education and religion. This comparison showed a slight overrepresentation of highly educated persons. However, such an overrepresentation does not necessarily diminish the value of the research, since our main interest is to discover possible *connections* or *correlations* between dimensions of right-wing extremism as an ideology (see e.g. van der Eijk and Irwin 1988: 230). The same line of argument holds for the fact that the two populations were not sampled in the same manner, i.e. in Haarlem households were selected on the basis of their subscription to a newspaper.

3.2 Structural equations modelling

The description of the concept 'right-wing extremism as ideology' can be used to make a formal mathematical representation, that can be analysed using a structural equations model. For this purpose we used EQS, a programme for analysing such models (see e.g. Bentler & Weeks 1980, 1982; Dunn, Everitt & Pickels 1993). Our model can be described as a particular submodel of the more general structural equations model. The model with which we started this research is a relatively simple one common factor model with five scales and one latent variable (see Model A in Figure 1). The scores on these five scales were derived from the sum of scores on a number of five-point rating scales. These scales will be discussed in the next section; see Table 1 for the indicators used.

4 Results of the analyses

Does our theoretical construction of right-wing extremism as a political ideology have practical relevance? In an earlier report based on our research we made the point that the fitted second order factor model we explored first

Table 1 Scales used in the second order factor analyses model

CONSTRUCT	INDICATOR
Nationalism	
NAT 1	An important task for the educational system is teaching patriotism to the students
NAT 2	Each Dutchman should show the proper respect for our national symbols such as flag and anthem
NAT 3	I am proud to be a Dutchman
Racism	
RAC 1	It is not only our environment, but also our race that should be kept pure
RAC 2	Marriages between persons of different races should be forbidden
Ethnocentrism	
ETN 1	There is too little understanding of guest workers in the Netherlands
ETN 2	Foreigners form a threat to our culture
ETN 3	It is correct to allow foreigners who have lived here for several years to bring their families to the Netherlands
ETN 4	Foreigners misuse social services more than Dutchmen
ETN 5	If more than half of the people in my street are foreigners, I will move away
ETN 6	Our social services are not meant for foreigners
Authoritarianism	
AUT 1	The most important thing that children must learn is discipline and respect for authority
AUT 2	What children should first learn is self-control and dedication
AUT 3	The most important thing a teacher must be able to do is to keep order
Xenophobia	
XNO 1	You must be extra careful if you do business with Jews
XNO 2	Gypsies can never be trusted

Note:

The indicators form reliable scales for five features; the feature 'anti-democracy' was deleted for statistical reasons in an early stage of the analysis (see Meijerink, Mudde & Van Holsteyn, 1995: 387). An indication of the reliability of the five scales is obtained by computing Cronbach's alpha. For Haarlem and Almelo this yields the following results: the reliability of the nationalism-scale is 0.74 for both Haarlem and Almelo; the reliability of the ethnocentrism-scale is .83 for (again) both Haarlem and Almelo; the reliability of the authoritarianism-scale is 0.77 and 0.809 respectively. The scale for racism and xenophobia are each made up of just two items. The two racism-items are correlated 0.65 and 0.61 respectively; the correlation between the two xenophobia-items is 0.52 and 0.58 respectively.

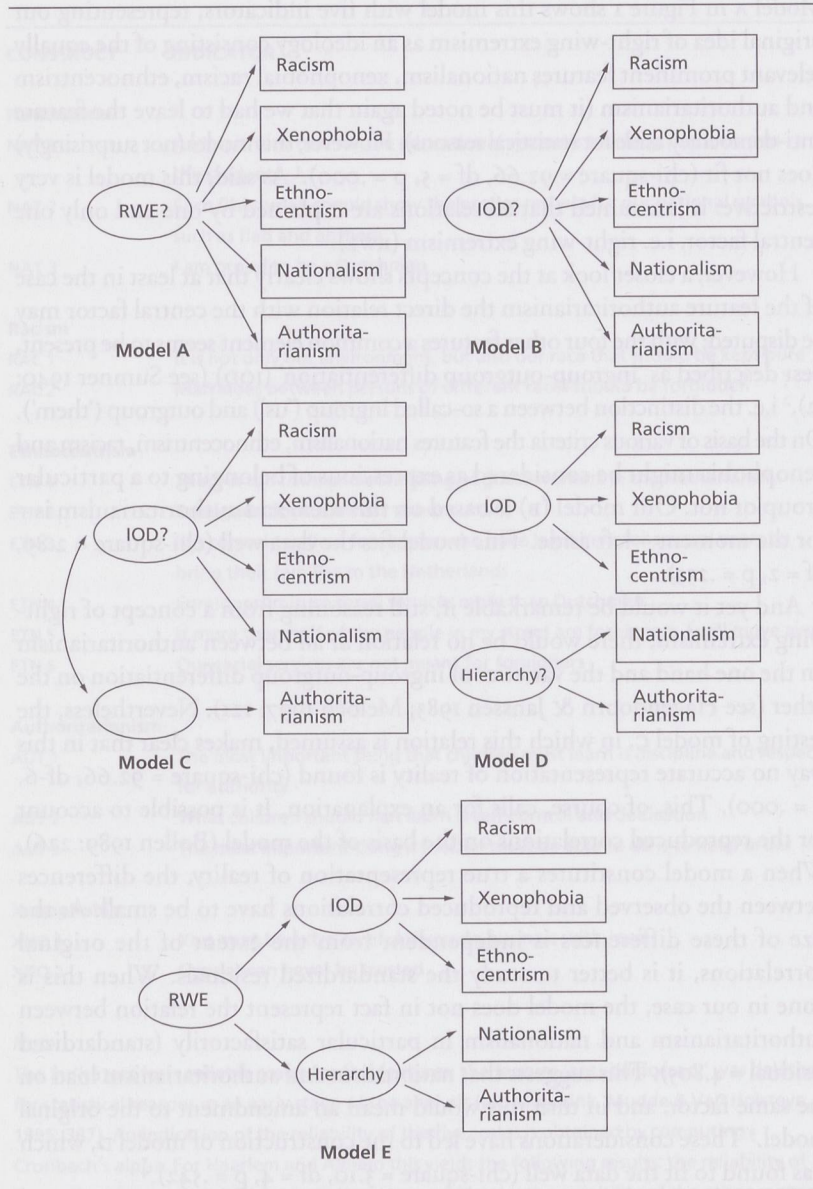
was exceptionally restrictive (see Meijerink, Mudde & Van Holsteyn 1995). Model A in Figure 1 shows this model with five indicators, representing our original idea of right-wing extremism as an ideology consisting of the equally relevant prominent features nationalism, xenophobia, racism, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism (it must be noted again that we had to leave the feature anti-democracy aside for statistical reasons). However, this model (not surprisingly) does not fit (chi-square = 92.66, $df = 5$, $p = .000$).¹ As said, this model is very restrictive: it is assumed that all relations are explained by one and only one central factor, i.e. right-wing extremism (RWE).

However, a closer look at the concepts shows clearly that at least in the case of the feature authoritarianism the direct relation with the central factor may be disputed; with the four other features a common element seems to be present, best described as 'ingroup-outgroup differentiation' (IOD) (see Sumner 1940: 12),² i.e. the distinction between a so-called ingroup ('us') and outgroup ('them'). On the basis of various criteria the features nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism and xenophobia might be considered as expressions of belonging to a particular group or not. Our model (B) is based on this idea, and authoritarianism is – for the moment – left aside. This model fits the data well (chi-square = 2.89, $df = 2$, $p = .235$).

And yet it would be remarkable if, still reasoning from a concept of right-wing extremism, there would be no relation at all between authoritarianism on the one hand and the varieties of ingroup-outgroup differentiation on the other (see Hagendoorn & Janssen 1983; Meloen 1997: 121). Nevertheless, the testing of model C, in which this relation is assumed, makes clear that in this way no accurate representation of reality is found (chi-square = 92.66, $df = 6$, $p = .000$). This, of course, calls for an explanation. It is possible to account for the reproduced correlations on the basis of the model (Bollen 1989: 226). When a model constitutes a true representation of reality, the differences between the observed and reproduced correlations have to be small. As the size of these differences is independent from the extent of the original correlations, it is better to study the standardized residuals. When this is done in our case, the model does not in fact represent the relation between authoritarianism and nationalism in particular satisfactorily (standardized residual = 4.805). This suggests that nationalism and authoritarianism load on the same factor, and in turn this would mean an amendment to the original model.³ These considerations have led to the construction of model D, which was found to fit the data well (chi-square = 3.10, $df = 4$, $p = .542$).⁴

The estimated correlation between the two latent variables of model D is 0.679. Because there is a relatively high correlation the question whether there might be a factor behind it becomes highly relevant again. Hence, the original idea that there is something like right-wing extremism as a more or less coherent and consistent whole of (complexes of) attitudes and opinions

Figure 1 Models of right-wing extremism



returns, though in a slightly changed form. This is all graphically represented in model E,⁵ which is shown to fit the data well too (chi-square = 3.10, df = 3, $p = .377$). Thus we conclude that the model as described in our earlier article was insufficiently differentiated. Further analysis of the same data clearly

demonstrates that it is indeed possible to speak of a right-wing extremism factor. But, contrary to what we thought earlier, this does not involve a single factor that explains the correlations between the five distinguished features (for which reliable scales could be constructed; see the note in Table 1), but we are dealing in fact with a factor on the basis of which the correlations between two first order factors can be understood properly.⁶

5 Discussion

Having established the existence of something like right-wing extremism as a political ideology at the empirical level, we will discuss the possibilities this finding offers for future research:

1) In answering the question what right-wing extremism is, a better founded choice can be made. Starting from the idea that right-wing extremism is constituted from several components (i.e. the five features for which reliable scales could be constructed), it is possible to speak of right-wing extremism when all components are present or when a particular combination of components is present. Regarding the latter, three approaches can be distinguished: the quantitative (an x-number of components is present, and which components is irrelevant), the qualitative (the presence of one or more particular components is decisive), and the mixed (in any case components from specific larger clusters need to be present) (see Meijerink, Mudde & Van Holsteyn 1995: 391-392; Mudde 1995: 218-219). The results presented here clearly support the mixed approach: if we are to talk of real right-wing extremism, at least one component from the ingroup-outgroup differentiation cluster (i.e. ethnocentrism, racism and xenophobia), and one component from the 'hierarchy' cluster (i.e. authoritarianism and nationalism) has to be present.⁷

2) The existence and measurability of right-wing extremism as a political ideology offers prospects for comparison. First, it will become possible to compare different subgroups of the population. Second, it will become possible to study the development of right-wing extremism over time. On the basis of repeated measurements we would be able to come to well-founded observations on the (quantitative) development of right-wing extremist thinking. Is there a growing or declining support for the right-wing extremist ideology, for example, in the Netherlands? And is there any shift in the composition of right-wing extremism, for instance a movement away from ethnocentrism towards racism?

Third, and in our opinion of greater importance, it is possible to employ the developed model in cross-national comparative research. In the current situation it is common practice to measure the national level of right-wing

extremism by the electoral support of an alleged extreme right party (or parties) in that country. Such an indicator is unfortunate for several reasons. No distinction is made between protest-voters and real supporters among the electorate of extreme right parties. And at the same time the number of right-wing extremists among the electorates of the other parties or among the group of non-voters remains invisible. Also, when the number of votes for an extreme right party is used as indicator of right-wing extremist thinking, insufficient account is given to factors within the political system that also determine this kind of support; such as the electoral system, the presence of an electoral threshold, and the existence of compulsory voting. The Netherlands would probably not be considered right-wing extremist (at the national level) if it had a threshold like Germany or a district system like the United Kingdom (as Janmaat and his two faction members would then not have become representatives in the Second Chamber). On the other hand, it would presumably be judged very right-wing extremist if compulsory voting still existed, as in Belgium.

There have been other attempts to come to a right-wing extremism scale (which could possibly be employed in comparative research). Most notably, De Witte, Billiet and Scheepers (1994; see also De Witte & Billiet 1990) constructed such a scale, which entailed information with regard to racism, extreme ethnic nationalism, the leadership principle (authoritarianism), the rejection of parliamentary democracy, and the rejection of everything that is left-wing. They used a total of six indicators (two indicators for the anti-left component) and came to the rather resolute conclusion that the thus measured "far right thinking" is one-dimensional (De Witte, Billiet & Scheepers 1994: 90). This conclusion is contestable, not only because the corresponding Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 is not really high, but, moreover, because they dealt with a deterministic model while a probabilistic model (such as the one we have developed) appears to be much more appropriate in this context. If the idea of a one-dimensional structure existed, testing on the basis of a probabilistic model would have been obvious. And if this test would have been executed, it would most likely have shown that the one-factor model does not fit the collected data and that some nuancing would have been in order. It is our conviction that, because of the use of multiple indicators for each feature and the use of a probabilistic model, we have developed a more robust instrument to determine the level of right-wing extremist thinking.

- 3) Obviously, right-wing extremism should not be considered in isolation. The developed and above delineated model E provides opportunities for further research into, on the one hand, the explanation of right-wing extremism (as dependent 'variable') as a political ideology. On the other hand, it can be utilized as an independent factor, in particular to consider

the role right-wing extremist thinking plays in the choice for an (alleged) extreme right party. Regarding the latter, a vital contribution could be made to the hoary controversy regarding the question if, and to what extent, voters of extreme right parties are motivated by genuine sympathy for the party and its ideas, or whether they have let themselves be directed by feelings of protest (see Stöss 1994: 51-52).

Notes

1. The indicators are reliable scales for the five features; see Table 1. In the first instance, and for the sake of convenience, only the results from the Haarlem data are presented; the results from the Almelo data do not deviate substantially.

2. This description comes close to the broad definitions of ethnocentrism used in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (see Levinson 1969: 150; Eisinga & Scheepers 1989: 12). We, nevertheless, prefer the term ingroup-outgroup differentiation as (1) ethnocentrism is defined more narrowly in other traditions (mainly the German, see Geiss 1988: 31); (2) even in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which is dominant in the field of empirical research (as both are heavily influenced by the famous *The Authoritarian Personality* study, see Adorno et al. 1950), ethnocentrism is usually reserved for differentiations on the basis of ethnicity (see also our definition in section 2).

3. Note that this relation could be explained in part by the specific operationalization used, particularly in the case of nationalism, in which the emphasis has come to be put somewhat on aspects like pride and respect (see Table 1).

4. In this changed model the absolute values of the standardized residues are smaller than 1.698 and according to a QQ-plot there is an approximation of a normal distribution of the residues.

5. We have used the phrase structural equation models in a general sense for all our models A to E. Strictly speaking, however, the first four models (A to D) should be classified as measurement models in which there is no causal structure assumed between the latent variables.

6. Analysis of the Almelo data lead to the same conclusion. There is otherwise enough ground for further generalization, as the specified model E proves to fit also under the assumption that the two separate samples stem from the same population (chi-square = 6.50, df = 6, p = .370). A next step to generalizability of the results concerns the assumption that the Almelo and Haarlem data do not only produce equal factor structures, but that, furthermore, the same numerical values are applicable to factor loadings, measurement errors and regressions weights in the two samples. A test under this assumption resulted in a good fit (chi-square = 10.89, df = 18, p = .899). In sum, on the basis of the two local studies there is sufficient elaboration for the thesis that model E is an accurate model for the collected data, and possibly also for a wider population.

7. In further refining and elaborating the concept of right-wing extremism particular attention will have to be paid to the anti-democratic attitudes and

opinions, which have not been accounted for in the analysis in this study for purely statistical reasons. Likewise, alternative operationalizations of the feature nationalism, which fit the core of the concept more closely, will have to be tested.

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Research Note

A Wave-Analysis of Distributional Bias, Substantive Bias and Data Quality in a Mail Survey among Dutch Municipalities

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Abstract

This paper discusses a study of the consequences of enhancing the response rate for distributional bias, substantive bias and data quality in a mail survey among Dutch municipal officials on the local implementation of a national caravan sites policy. We found both distributions and relationships to be seriously biased at a response level of 46%. Higher response levels (62% and 74%) led to better results: distributional and substantive biases decrease as the response rate increases. However, even at a final response rate of 74%, distributions and relationships are still biased to some extent. This is due to the fact that the remaining non-respondents are composed more and more of specific, 'extreme' subgroups. There are indications that the quality of the data deteriorates somewhat at later waves. However, the effects are not so damaging that response-enhancement is unwarranted. Nevertheless, data quality remains an important topic of concern, especially when trying to enhance response rates even more to obtain almost complete response.

1 Introduction

Survey response has been declining for decades (Goyder 1987; Hox and De Leeuw 1994). Falling response is a cause for concern because results may be no longer representative or valid due to non-response bias. Non-response bias is a function of both response rate and differences between respondents and non-respondents. Most attention has been directed to response rates, because, almost by definition, little is known about non-respondents, especially with respect to their attitudes and behaviour.

In all likelihood, most survey researchers are of the opinion that the higher the response rate the better the survey: surveys with higher response rates are considered more representative and more valid than surveys with lower response rates (Groves 1987: 516; Dillman 1991: 229). This assumes that the higher the response rate the smaller the differences will be between respondents