

THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF SWEDISH SOCIAL SCIENTISTS*

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We study the political opinions of Swedish social scientists in seven disciplines and find indications of a left-right divide, with sociology and gender studies being the most left-leaning disciplines, with business administration, economics, and law being the most right-leaning ones, and with political science and economic history being located somewhere in between. This pattern is found when looking at party preferences, left-right self-identification, and positions on economic policy issues. Overall, there is a slight dominance in sympathies for the right, although there are more academics to the left among those most involved in activities with a potential to influence decision-makers. (JEL: A11; A13; A14)

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I. Introduction

An increasing number of studies investigate the political views of academics. Most of them have been conducted in the US, where the results indicate that social scientists predominantly support the Democratic Party, although the degree of dominance varies substantially between disciplines. We contribute to this literature with an analysis of Swedish social scientists in business administration, economic history, economics, gender studies, law, political science, and sociology. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in a Nordic country.

We find evidence of a left-right divide between disciplines, with gender studies and sociology most to the left and with economics and business administration most to the right. We look at party sympathies, left-right self-identification, and attitudes towards policy proposals on economic issues and find the same left-right divide in each case. The differences between disciplines remain also when controlling for various background characteristics. The most evident policy consensus is that a large majority of the social scientists oppose tariffs on goods from countries outside the EU with an overwhelming resistance among economists. Overall, there is a slight dominance of sympathies for the right.¹ Not all academics lean left relative to the political culture to which they belong, not even in a country like Sweden. Signs of a left orientation emerge, however, when looking at the potentially most influential academics in the public-policy area.

Studying Sweden contributes to the literature in providing information on the policy views of social scientists in a Nordic country, a part of the world with extensive welfare-state arrangements and a socially progressive tradition. The Swedish tradition of running politics according to rationalist and modernist precepts has given ample room for social scientists to affect policies in many direct ways (e.g. as politicians and

advisors) and also in indirect ways (as teachers and in the media).²

Early studies of academics indicated a left and Democratic (as opposed to Republican) inclination among US academics (Spaulding and Turner 1968, Lipset and Ladd 1972, Ladd and Lipset 1975, Lipset 1982, Hamilton and Hargens 1993). This was especially the case for humanist and social-science faculty, whereas natural-science and business faculty tended to be less left-oriented. Later studies give a similar picture. Rothman et al. (2005) find that liberals and Democrats outnumber conservatives and Republicans by large margins, and the differences are not limited to elite universities or to the social sciences and humanities. Klein and Stern (2004, 2005a,b, 2006a,b,c, 2007a) find a dominance of Democrats among social scientists and, based on a survey of members of the scholarly associations in anthropology, economics, history, legal and political philosophy, political science, and sociology, that their policy preferences generally are such that partisan identification are in line with left/right ideal types. They also find that the diversity of policy views is greatest in economics and that those who deviate from left views are as likely to fit a libertarian profile as a conservative one.³ To our knowledge, there is no longitudinal study of the political views of academics, but Klein and Stern (2009, p. 15) summarize existing cross-discipline studies from different time periods in the United States. Their main finding is that “few professors in the social sciences and humanities today are not on the left, and that there has been a decline since the 1960s in professors

² See e.g. Myrdal (1960), Carlson and Jonung (2006), and Bergh and Erlingsson (2009).

³ Similar results are reported by Lee (1994), the Brookings Institution (2001), and Tobin and Weinberg (2006). The results on party preferences are reinforced and to some extent validated by voter-registration studies – see e.g. Horowitz and Lehrer (2002), Zinsmeister (2002), Cardiff and Klein (2005), and Klein and Western (2005). Cardiff and Klein e.g. find an average Democrat-Republican ratio of 5:1 across universities and disciplines. However, Zipp and Fenwick (2006, p. 320) dispute the claims of the previous literature and present results that indicate that “the American academy has not become a liberal hegemony; if anything, there has been a slight trend toward moderation – from both ends of the political spectrum toward the center.” For a reply, see Klein and Stern (2007b).

¹ The terms *left* and *right* are used in accordance with standard usage in Swedish discourse, which is not automatically comparable to usage in other political cultures.

who are not on the left, as indicated by Republican voting, self-identified conservative leanings, or policy views.”

A related line of research, initiated by Brittan (1973) and Kearl et al. (1979), is less focused on studying party sympathies or self-characterizations but rather highlights views on specific policy issues, and some investigate the extent to which academics (especially economists) are in agreement on various issues. For instance, Fuller and Geide-Stevenson (2003) and Whaples (2006) report a considerable amount of consensus among economists over various policy issues. There have also been such surveys of economists in countries other than the US. Generally, the studies report a high degree of consensus within countries, but there are, as shown by e.g. Frey et al. (1984), sometimes clear differences between economists in different countries.⁴

There are two dominant rationales for the line of inquiry pursued in this paper. First, academics tend to be influential in any society. In particular, the views of teachers and professors are transmitted to students.⁵ Other channels of influence open to and used by academics, as members of the elite with access to political circles, are publications, the media, and a role as advisor (Hoffman-Lange 2007, p. 918). Only by knowing what academics actually believe and think is it possible to critically discuss their influence. Second, heterogeneity, plurality and non-conformism are often viewed as central el-

ements of a healthy academic environment. A dominance of a certain perspective in a discipline could be detrimental for an open inquiry into issues, especially into those of policy relevance. However, homogeneity could also be interpreted as consensus, i.e. as an indication that scholars have tried various ideas in open discourse and come, through careful analysis, to certain insights of high certainty.

We do not evaluate these alternative interpretations in this study but leave for others to analyze and discuss the positive and negative effects of our findings. Our study can best be seen as descriptive and explorative and as a foundation for further, more explanatory work. To date, there is no unified general theory of political preferences. Frequent explanations include social background (Campbell et al. 1960), group membership (Mutz and Mondak 1997), as well as macro- and microeconomic models (Fair 1978; Elinder et al. 2008), and it would be interesting for future research to develop and test theories in this area.

We now turn to the Swedish case.

2. The Survey

2.1 *Invitees and Respondents*

The basis for this study is a web-based survey that was conducted in December 2005–January 2006. E-mail invitations were sent to 4,301 Swedish academics, which constitute “all” academics who are doctoral students and university employees doing research and/or teaching at 25 colleges and universities in the disciplines business administration, economic history, economics, gender studies, law, political science, and sociology.⁶ The choice of colleges and universities was motivated by there being a presence of at least one department that clearly rep-

⁴ For more US studies, see e.g. Alston et al. (1992), Blendon et al. (1997), Fuchs et al. (1998), Heckelman and Whaples (2003), Colander (2005), and Whaples (2006). For non-US studies, see e.g. Block and Walker (1988), Ricketts and Shoemith (1992), Anderson and Blandy (1992), Anderson et al. (1993), Nakhaie and Adam (2008), and De Benedictis and Di Maio (2009).

⁵ Frank et al. (1993) and Frank and Schulze (2000), among others, claim that university teachers influence economics students by making them more selfish. This claim has been disputed by e.g. Frey and Meier (2005). Even if the latter are correct, it may be that other forms of influences prevail. Guimond (1997) finds that the main subject studied by students is a significant predictor of change in sociopolitical attitudes for college students. There are also indications that civic education under certain conditions affects teenagers towards greater acceptance of democracy and the market economy (Slomczynski and Shabad 1998). Cf. Ladd and Lipset (1975, pp. 306–311), Banks and Roker (1994) and Blyth (2002).

⁶ Note that we will use tests of statistical inference even though we invited the entire population – not a random sample – of academics in the seven disciplines. These tests could still be used for inference if all non-responses were randomly determined. Alternatively, they can be used to extrapolate to a larger universe of possible populations (Blalock 1979).

resented at least one of the seven disciplines.⁷ As for the choice of disciplines, we restrict ourselves to the social sciences and do not include e.g. the natural sciences or the humanities. The reason is that we are interested in disciplines that are relevant to policy-making, in the sense that they deal with socially relevant matters which frequently form the basis for political opinions and decisions. On the basis of this criterion of policy relevance, we also exclude some social sciences, most notably cultural geography, psychology, and social anthropology. When we speak of social scientists, we refer to the seven disciplines included in this study.

The e-mail addresses were located from the web pages of the respective colleges and universities, and only the academics with listed e-mail addresses were contacted. Two reminding e-mails were sent out in line with Schaefer and Dillman (1998), who find this to be a good way to increase the response rate. The number of replies was 1,512, which gives a total response rate of 35.2 percent.⁸ A detailed non-response analysis suggests that our respondents are representative of the population on important indicators.⁹ The largest numbers of invitations were sent to Stockholm University (625), Lund University (535)

and Uppsala University (533). Further details for each institution in the study are available in Appendix B in the online supplement.

2.2 *The Survey*

When invitees visited the web page with the survey (www.policystudy.se, no longer operational) they first received information and instructions. Everything was in Swedish, so here we translate as necessary. After a specification of the purpose of the study, there followed a specification of the length of time it would take to complete it (about 15 minutes), a guarantee of anonymity, and information about the three researchers. There were 73 questions in all. Here, we utilize only a subset, primarily relating to politics and policy views. The questions are specified below when the results are presented.¹⁰

3. *Results and Analysis*

3.1 *Preliminaries*

Before presenting the results, we wish to clarify a few matters.

First, there are seven parties in the *Riksdag* (the Swedish Parliament): the Christian Democrats, the Moderate Party, the Center Party, and the Liberal Party form a right bloc (in government from 2006, but making up the parliamentary opposition when the survey was conducted), while the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party, and the Green Party form a left bloc (with the Social Democratic Party forming a minority government with the support of the Left Party and the Green party at the time when the survey was conducted, but making up the opposition from 2006).¹¹ At the time when the survey was conducted, two challenging parties gained particular attention: the June List and the Feminist Initiative. Neither reached the 4 percent thresh-

⁷ There are, in total, 39 colleges and universities in Sweden.

⁸ This is somewhat similar to response rates in preceding studies (which, however, usually begin with a random sample of invitees, whereas we invited "all" academics in the chosen disciplines in Sweden). For example, Fuller and Geide-Stevenson (2003) had a response rate of 30.8 percent; Heckelman and Whaples (2003) got response rates of 34.4 percent, 33.2 percent and 29.6 percent; and Klein and Stern (2004, 2005a,b, 2006a,b,c,d, 2007a) report a response rate of 30.9 percent. Generally, web surveys seem to have lower response rates than mail surveys – around 20 percent compared to 40 percent (Sheehan and McMillan 1999).

⁹ We find few differences between respondents and non-respondents on variables with known values for the population: university or college affiliation, gender, academic position, and academic discipline. When it comes to variables with unknown values for the population we apply the "willingness-to-respond" approach and investigate whether early responses systematically differ from late responses that we received only after sending out one or two reminding emails (cf. Armstrong and Overton 1977). Differences between early and late responders are almost completely absent for the variables that we study (bloc preferences, policy views, self-reported left-right scale, and certain influential activities). The details can be found in Appendix A in the online supplement.

¹⁰ The full survey (in its original Swedish and in an English translation), covering 14 pages, is available upon request.

¹¹ The Green Party has now (in 2009) formed an alliance with the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party to the effect that they will all be part of the government if they win the 2010 election.

old in the September 2006 general election and hence do not hold seats in Parliament. For further details about the parties, see Box B1 in the online supplement.

Second, we make frequent use of the left-right terminology, both when discussing party sympathies, policy opinions and (naturally) self-identification on the left-right scale. This conforms to standard usage among political scientists and seems especially apt in a Swedish setting, where the scale is widely understood and used by voters to structure their political preferences.¹² Of course, left-right terminology entails simplification (see the discussion by Mair 2007), and it should be pointed out that there are differences between the parties within each bloc and that some are quite centrist on the scale. Traditionally, perhaps mostly the Liberal Party in the right bloc and the Green Party in the left bloc have been oriented towards the center. But in recent years, the bloc formations have been quite solid. The decision to include the Green Party in the left bloc has two bases: it has supported, together with the Left Party, Social Democratic governments since its entry into Parliament; and it is placed to the left by voters on the left-right scale (Grendstad 2003). Also, the terms left and right are to some extent understood differently in other political cultures.¹³ Left in Sweden and left in the US may mean quite different things – and for this reason, comparisons of the shares of left- and right-sympathizers are generally most meaningful when made within a political culture. Lastly, not all issues are easily described by the left-right scale. Still, for our purposes the left-right terminology is useful in providing approximate measures of ideological leanings.

Third, when results are reported for the different disciplines, this everywhere refers to the disciplines where respondents are currently active.

3.2 Party Sympathies

There are large differences between the disciplines when it comes to party sympathies, as

revealed in Table 1. It is based on the following question:

Even though one doesn't agree with a political party on each and every issue, one may have stronger sympathies for a certain party, compared to others. Which party do you have the strongest sympathies for?

There is a clear left dominance in sociology – with about five times as many who sympathize with the left as with the right bloc – as well as in gender studies. There is a milder left character to political science and economic history. There are three disciplines with a right dominance: economics, law, and business administration. In the former two, there are about twice as many who sympathize with the right as with the left bloc. In business administration, the sympathy ratio rises to about three. The result for all disciplines is included for comparison. The right bloc attracts 1.3 times as many of our academics as the left.¹⁴ We will return to these aggregate figures in more detail below.

Table 1. Bloc preferences of Swedish social scientists (percent).

	Left bloc	Right bloc	Ratio right bloc/ left bloc
Business administration	19.8	60.8	3.1
Economics	26.8	52.5	2.0
Law	24.6	46.6	1.9
Economic history	40.6	31.2	0.8
Political science	45.1	29.4	0.7
Gender studies	23.1	10.2	0.4
Sociology	57.4	11.0	0.2
All	33.2	41.7	1.3

Notes: The sum of the share that supports the right bloc and the share that supports the left bloc is not 100 percent since there are five reply alternatives that do not belong to any of these blocs: "Other", "None", "Do not know/Do not want to answer", the June List (Jl) and the Feminist Initiative (Fi), two parties that are not part of any of the blocs. The left bloc comprises the Social Democratic Party (S), the Left Party (V), and the Green Party (Mp). The right bloc comprises the Christian Democrats (Kd), the Moderate Party (M), the Center Party (C), and the Liberal Party (Fp).

¹² See Klingemann (1995), Bobbio (1996), Oscarsson (1998) and Grendstad (2003).

¹³ See e.g. Grendstad (2003) and Zechmeister (2006).

¹⁴ If each discipline is given equal weight irrespective of its size the ratio is 0.93 (a mild left dominance).

One can relate these findings to the ratio between Republicans and Democrats in the US in different disciplines. According to Klein and Stern (2005b), among sociologists and anthropologists, the ratio is 0.05 – that is, there are more than 20 times as many Democrats as Republicans. Among political scientists, it is 0.2 (more than five times as many Democrats); and among economists, it is 0.3 (three times as many Democrats). For social-science and humanities faculty in all they estimate the ratio to be 0.12 (eight times as many Democrats). There definitely seems to be more of a one-sided dominance in the US setting.

Looking specifically at sympathies for the different parties in the various disciplines, as well as for all 1,512 respondents, our study reveals that the Liberal Party (Fp) is the largest party in business administration, economic history, economics, and law. This is noteworthy, since this party is relatively small in the electorate at large, where the more conservative Moderate Party (M) is since long the largest party in the right bloc. This finding indicates that the sympathies for the right bloc are relatively centrist among the academics in our study. The Social Democratic Party (S) is the largest among political scientists – the only discipline for which this holds, in spite of this party being the biggest in the electorate. The Left Party (V) is the largest among sociologists (rendering the left character of the discipline more distinct than if the Social Democrats had been the largest party); and the Feminist Initiative (Fi) greatly dominates gender studies. For details, see Table C1 in Appendix C in the online supplement.

To see whether the differences in party sympathies observed across disciplines are due to compositional differences, we have regressed bloc sympathy on discipline, age, gender, and position in the academy. The logit results, and a detailed motivation of the control variables, are presented in Appendix D in the online supplement. The results reveal that the bloc differences between the disciplines are in qualitative agreement with the findings presented above. Being a scholar in sociology is associated with a higher probability for supporting the left bloc, whereas being a scholar in business administra-

tion, economics, and law is associated with a higher probability for supporting the right bloc. These findings are robust with regard to the set of control variables – from including age, gender and academic positions to including, in addition, family income, and academic affiliation.

The biggest party among all our respondents is the Liberal Party (Fp), a center-right party in the right bloc. If one looks at the two political blocs, the right bloc gets 41.7 percent and the left bloc gets 33.2 percent, a clear dominance (of 1.3:1) of the right.

The party-sympathy figures for the Swedish social scientists participating in our survey can be compared to those of Swedes in general in December 2005–January 2006, as reported by three opinion-poll institutes. There are great differences between the social scientists surveyed here and citizens in general. The Social Democratic Party is very small among our social scientists compared to citizens in general, but also the Moderate Party is substantially smaller. The party that is disproportionately large among our social scientists is the Liberal Party. For each left academic in our study, there are 1.3 right academics, whereas the corresponding figure for citizens in general is 1.1.¹⁵

3.3 Self-Reported Left-Right Scale

We also asked the following question, with reply alternatives from 1 to 10 and with the option “Do not know/Do not want to answer”:

¹⁵ A study by Asp (2006) indicates that among Swedish journalists (who, like academics, in many cases may be seen as potentially influential intellectuals), the share of support for the left bloc among those who support one of the seven main parties is 67 percent, whereas the corresponding share of support for the right bloc is 33 percent (in late 2005 and based on the question “Which party do you like best today?”). This is a major difference compared to the academics in our study, keeping in mind the slightly different party-sympathy question. With Asp’s way of counting, the share of support for the left bloc among those of our social scientists who support one of the seven main parties is 44 percent, whereas the corresponding share of support for the right bloc is 56 percent. Among journalists, the right/left ratio is 0.5, and among our social scientists, it is 1.3.

Where on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 equals the most left-wing member of the current parliament and 10 equals the most right-wing member of the current parliament, would you place yourself?

The differences between disciplines found for party sympathies are confirmed by distinct differences between the disciplines when it comes to self-identification on the left-right scale. The averages are presented in Table 2. Again, three groups appear. Sociology and gender studies have a left orientation, economic history and political science are quite centrist (with a mild left orientation), whereas law, economics, and business administration have a right orientation. In terms of standard deviations, law and economic history are the most heterogeneous whereas gender studies and sociology are the most homogeneous.¹⁶

Table 2. Left-right positioning in seven disciplines (means with standard deviations in parentheses).

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Left-right position</i>
Gender studies	3.19** (1.72)
Sociology	3.46** (1.79)
Economic history	4.75 (2.39)
Political science	4.82 (2.09)
Law	5.83** (2.44)
Economics	6.15** (1.95)
Business administration	6.30** (2.01)
All	5.35 (2.31)

Notes: ** 0.01, * 0.05 p-value using the Mann-Whitney test of equality of distribution across two independent samples using economic history as the comparison group, which is why it is marked in bold.

¹⁶ When looking at the distribution of all responses, the average is 5.4, and the median is 5. However, polarization can be seen here as well. For details, see Figure C1 in Appendix C in the online supplement.

3.4 Policy Views

In order to get a more granular picture of the political views of our Swedish social scientists, we asked them about their views on a number of proposed policy reforms. We focus on policy proposals on economic issues. The questions are supposed to capture “important” policy issues that have been publicly debated in Sweden and for which no apparent consensus exists.

We had seven economic questions in the survey:

1. What is your opinion of a proposal to raise or introduce tariffs on goods from non-EU countries in order to protect Swedish jobs?
2. What is your opinion of a proposal to abolish the right of labor unions to instigate boycotts against companies that don't want to sign collective bargaining agreements?
3. What is your opinion of a proposal to cut taxes?
4. What is your opinion of a proposal to downsize the public sector?
5. What is your opinion of a proposal to reduce income differences in society?
6. What is your opinion of a proposal to have more medical care/hospitals run by private companies?
7. What is your opinion of a proposal to cut down on social welfare benefits?

Each question had the following reply alternatives:

- Very bad proposal (1)
- Rather bad proposal (2)
- Neither a good nor a bad proposal (3)
- Rather good proposal (4)
- Very good proposal (5)
- Do not know/Do not want to answer.

(The numbers 1–5 did not appear.)

The responses from the different disciplines are shown in Table 3. Here, we exclude the “Do not know/Do not want to answer” replies to enable a mean and standard-deviation comparison. Since the underlying answers are ordinal, the

Table 3. Views on economic policy per discipline (means with standard deviations in parentheses).

	Business administration	Economic history	Economics	Gender studies	Law	Political science	Sociology	All
Raise tariffs	1.56** (0.73)	1.49** (0.59)	1.27 (0.55)	1.66** (0.76)	1.66** (0.79)	1.52** (0.61)	1.77** (0.80)	1.55 (0.72)
Abolish union boycotts	3.03 (1.41)	2.46** (1.42)	3.11 (1.39)	1.69** (1.01)	2.69** (1.46)	2.44** (1.26)	2.09** (1.29)	2.69 (1.42)
Undertake tax cuts	3.74 (1.13)	2.98** (1.23)	3.66 (1.03)	2.11** (1.03)	3.53 (1.25)	2.82** (1.26)	2.21** (1.10)	3.23 (1.29)
Downsize public sector	3.40 (1.22)	2.66** (1.31)	3.37 (1.07)	1.74** (0.83)	3.07* (1.27)	2.57** (1.20)	1.86** (0.96)	2.89 (1.29)
Reduce income differences	3.06 (1.15)	3.69** (1.21)	3.08 (1.15)	4.39** (0.79)	3.34* (1.19)	3.78** (1.13)	4.27** (0.96)	3.48 (1.21)
More private healthcare	3.66 (1.22)	2.95** (1.47)	3.62 (1.11)	2.26** (0.99)	3.40 (1.29)	3.03** (1.24)	2.37** (1.26)	3.25 (1.32)
Cut welfare benefits	3.08 (1.12)	2.33** (1.27)	2.95 (1.08)	1.67** (0.79)	2.75 (1.31)	2.33** (1.11)	1.83** (0.99)	2.61 (2.21)

Notes: Small numbers indicate opposition and large numbers indicate support. ** 0.01, * 0.05 p-value using the Mann-Whitney test of equality of distribution across two independent samples using economics as the comparison group, which is why it is marked in bold. An OLS regression with a dummy-variable using economics as the reference category yields no differences in results.

means have no exact interpretation and should only be seen as a pedagogical device that saves space and enables quick comparisons of the disciplines.

The value 3 (the reply “Neither a good nor a bad proposal”) can be interpreted as a neutral or mixed view of the policy proposals, whereas 1 and 2 indicate various degrees of opposition and 4 and 5 various degrees of support. Overall it seems fair to conclude that Swedish social scientists are not supportive of policy reforms aimed at raising or introducing protective tariffs on goods from non-EU countries: all disciplines have mean responses well below 3, with economists being most strongly opposed. Nor do they support abolishing union rights to boycott companies who do not want to sign collective bargaining agreements – weak resistance dominates, except in business administration and economics, where neutrality prevails. Cutting welfare benefits is not really supported in any discipline. Academics in business administration and economics are neutral, while academics in gender studies and sociology are quite strongly opposed to the proposal. On the other proposals the pattern is more mixed. Academics in business administration and economics are more supportive of tax cuts and of downsizing

the public sector than other social scientists. They are also more mixed than the others on reducing income inequality. Scholars in business administration, economics, and law favor more private health care, whereas political scientists and economic historians are neutral. Scholars in sociology and gender studies oppose the proposition. With one exception (raising tariffs) gender studies is most to the left and has the smallest standard deviation.

The impression from the analysis of party sympathies recurs: Business administration, economics, and law lean more to the right, whereas economic history and political science are moderately on the left, and gender studies and sociology are more distinctly on the left.¹⁷ But in no case is there a very strong desire to deviate from the status quo (except, perhaps, when it comes to reducing income inequality, which is strongly supported in gender studies and in sociology).

¹⁷ When we use the terms left and right in this section, we rely on the most common positions of the two blocs. For example, cutting taxes is considered a right position since the parties of the right bloc advocate this to a larger degree, while reducing income differences is considered a left position for an analogous reason.

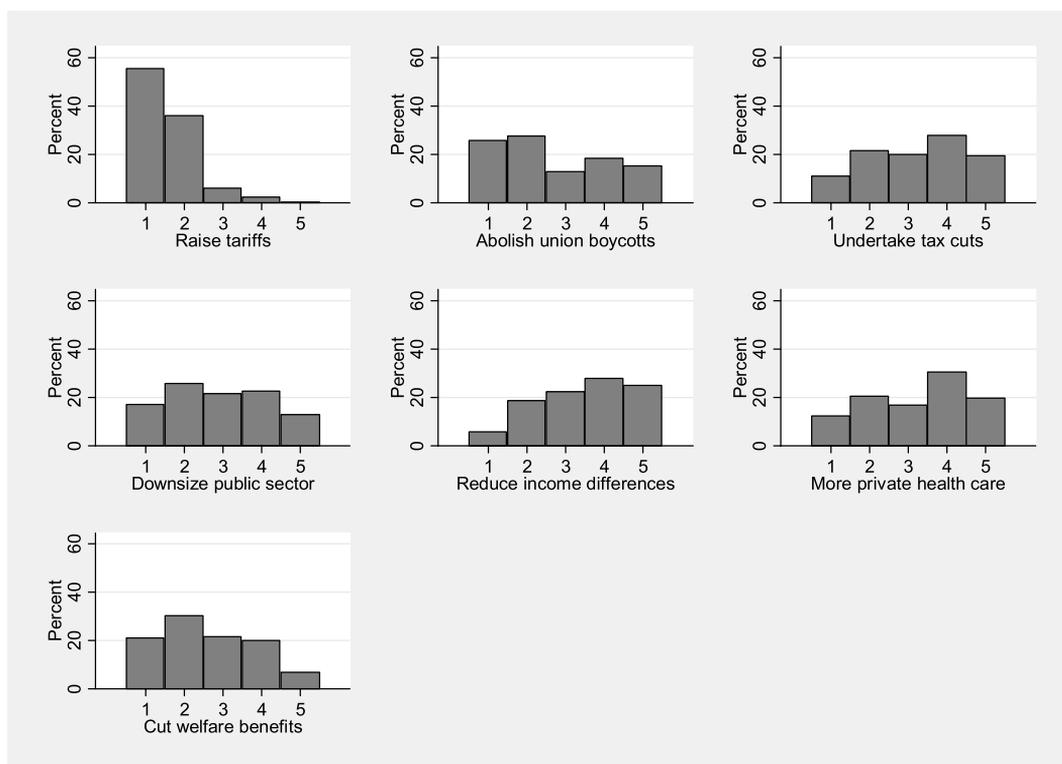


Figure 1. Views on economic policy (percent) of all respondents.

Notes: 1: Very bad proposal; 2: Rather bad proposal; 3: Neither a good nor a bad proposal; 4: Rather good proposal; 5: Very good proposal.

The responses from all respondents are shown in Figure 1.

Only on the first question is there an evident consensus. A large majority thinks that introducing or raising tariffs on goods from countries outside the EU in order to protect Swedish jobs is a rather or very bad proposal. This is also the issue where economists stand out the most, with an overwhelming resistance to tariffs (see Figure 2). On the other questions, there is no similar consensus among the respondents. There is no general support for radical policy change in either a left or a right direction.

Lastly, it should be noted that differences in replies may reflect both different preferences and different knowledge, but we are unable to differentiate between them and identify causal effects with our data.

3.5 Influential Activities

As has been argued above, a motivation for a study of this kind is the possible influence social scientists may exert over public discourse and politics. To see the extent to which our respondents have had such opportunities, we asked the following questions:

Have you participated in any SOU (Swedish government official report) or any other government commission?

How many articles, chapters or books that can be classified as student literature or popular science publications (publication that inform the public about research within your field) have you written?

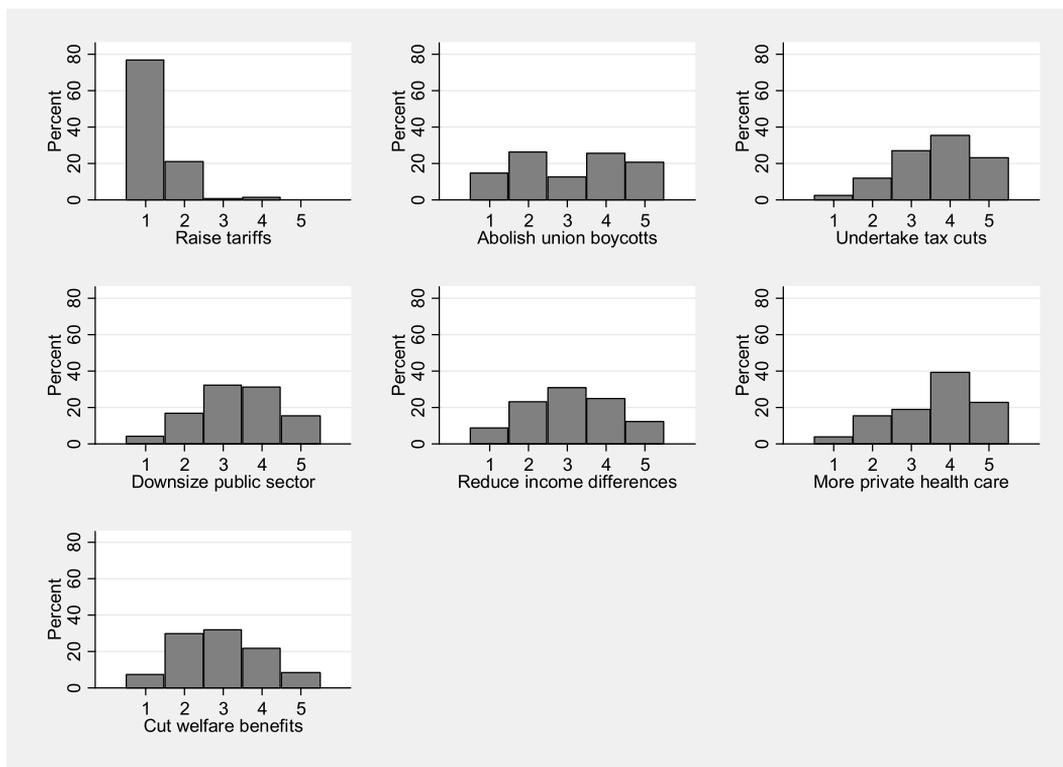


Figure 2. Views on economic policy (percent) of economists.

Notes: 1: Very bad proposal; 2: Rather bad proposal; 3: Neither a good nor a bad proposal; 4: Rather good proposal; 5: Very good proposal.

Have you participated in any radio or TV programs where you discussed or related to your research in a popular science way?

Participation in government commissions is the most exclusive of these activities, 14 percent of the respondents have participated once and 13 percent have done so several times. Radio and television are less exclusive, 35 percent have appeared at least once on these mass media. Publications are more common: 70 percent have written at least one publication classified as teaching material or popular science. There are also differences between the subjects. Table 4 reveals that academics in political science are quite involved in all three activities. Academics in gender studies also appear rather active, especially in radio and television but not in gov-

ernment commissions (which may have to do with its being a young discipline). Business administration appears to be the least active subject in this regard.

If we relate the mentioned activities to the ideological stance of the scholars, measured as their position on the left-right scale, we find no statistically significant differences between the most active and the most passive group when it comes to participation in government commissions or to publishing teaching material and popular science. For radio and television the mean left-right position is 4.98 for scholars who have appeared at least three times compared to 5.63 for those who have not appeared a single time.¹⁸

¹⁸ The distributions in the two groups differ significantly according to the Mann-Whitney test.

Table 4. Influential activities (percent).

Activity	Level of participation	Business administration	Economic history	Economics	Gender studies	Law	Political science	Sociology	All
Government commissions	No	77.3**	79.7*	65.2	76.9	68.5	60.3	70.0	70.5
	Low	11.1**	10.9*	14.1	12.8	16.4	19.1	15.2	14.0
	High	8.2**	6.2*	18.5	10.3	13.0	19.6	12.7	13.0
Teaching material and popular science	No	29.0	23.4	38.0	12.8**	29.4	24.5*	25.3	28.4
	Low	47.2	54.7	38.4	46.2**	47.3	51.5*	52.3	47.2
	High	22.3	20.3	22.8	41.0**	23.3	22.1*	21.5	23.2
Radio and television	No	64.6	59.4	60.5	35.9**	58.2	35.3**	44.3**	54.5
	Low	23.2	26.6	21.4	25.6**	22.6	31.4**	30.4**	25.1
	High	12.2	12.5	17.8	38.5**	19.2	32.8**	24.9**	20.0

Notes: For government commissions a low (high) level of participation is defined as once (several times). For teaching material and popular science a low (high) level of participation is defined as between one and five articles and books (more than five articles and books). For radio and television a low (high) level of participation is defined as between one and three times (more than three times). The response category “Do not know / do not want to answer” is not reported in the table. **0.01, *0.05 p-value using the Mann-Whitney test of equality of distribution across two independent samples using economics as the comparison group, which is why it is marked in bold.

There is however a connection between active participation in government commissions and sympathies for the Social Democratic Party, the party forming the government 1994–2006. The Social Democratic Party is the most sympathized-with party among the most active scholars with sympathies being 13.3 percentage units higher than in the least active group. On the one hand it seems as if the Social Democratic government has not engaged a representative sample of social scientists in government commissions when it comes to sympathies. On the other hand the overrepresentation of social scientists who support the Social Democrats makes the composition of government commissions more in line with the party sympathies of all Swedish citizens.¹⁹

Another way to study influence is to adjust for research quality by comparing old and large

universities with new and small university colleges. However, as reported in Table D1 in the online Appendix, the estimates of Academic affiliation are not statistically significant. Furthermore, when replacing the affiliation variables in column (3) of Table D1 by two dummy variables for academic quality, covering those universities that are on the 2006 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and on the 2006 Times Higher Education World University Rankings list, we find that the estimated coefficients are, in neither case, statistically significant.

4. Concluding Remarks

Academics tend to be influential in any society, affecting decision-makers through lectures, various publications, the media, and in some cases directly as advisors. It is therefore of interest to study the political persuasions of academics. Although such persuasions do not necessarily color their work, Myrdal (1969) and others have suggested that ideological sensibilities run deeper than many scholars realize or may be willing to admit.

¹⁹ *There are of course many explanations for the degree of influence activities in the different disciplines, as well as for the ideological character of those who undertake them. Some explanations are demand- and others are supply-induced. Of the three types of activity, the most demand-induced is probably the first. Writing a government report or being on a government commission is the result of being picked.*

We find that Swedish social scientists in seven disciplines can generally be classified as leaning slightly right on the whole. It turns out that 51.5 percent support the right bloc compared to 41.0 percent for the left bloc (a right-left ratio of 1.3), to be compared with 1.1 in the electorate in general. Behind these aggregate shares, we find a left-right divide. The most left-leaning discipline is sociology, where the left bloc achieves more than 5 times more support than the right bloc and where the Left Party is also the biggest party. The second most left-leaning discipline is gender studies. The most right-leaning discipline is business administration, where the right bloc achieves more than three times more support than the left bloc and where the Liberal Party is the most preferred. Economics and law are the second- and third-most right-leaning disciplines. When it comes to policy issues, the general picture – confirming the one stemming from party sympathies – is that scholars in business administration, economics, and law tend to favor reforms of the right whereas especially scholars in gender studies and sociology tend to favor reforms of the left – but the desire to change the status quo is weak overall.

Unlike US academics, who have been shown to tend towards the left in their political culture, Swedish social scientists seem to tend more to the right overall. Here we have to keep in mind that an American academic to the left may, in actual views, be close to a Swedish academic to the right.

In a multiparty system there are also important nuances within the two political camps. Among our academics the Liberal party is the preferred right-bloc party, in contrast to the Moderate Party that is the preferred right-bloc party in the electorate (and considered more “right” than the Liberals). Likewise, we see that the Left Party is the preferred left party among our academics, in contrast to the Social Democrats, the preferred party in the electorate (and considered more “right” than the Left Party).

When looking at heterogeneity, there seems to be less dominance within the disciplines and smaller differences between the disciplines compared with the US. The dominance of Democrats (which seems to hold in every discipline

in the US) is generally much larger than for the right bloc in Sweden, and the differences between the disciplines (in terms of how dominant the largest party or bloc is) are larger in the US. The most homogeneous discipline appears to be gender studies, with the lowest standard deviations on most policy issues.

In summing up our results, we do not claim that our findings can be used for causal inference. We report differences between the disciplines and leave the question of why these differences exist for future research. Nor do our findings necessarily indicate a problem. We do not say that a left dominance in sociology or a right dominance in business administration entail discrimination of colleagues in the minority position. Our study does not address such issues. However, we hope that the results can constitute an informed basis on which such issues can be addressed.

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