


VARIETIES OF INTERFERENCE AND PROTECTION FROM INTERFERENCE IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

JEAN-GUY PRÉVOST

MAY 21, 2019

A CLASSIC DEFINITION OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (Prewitt, 2010)

« Political interference is the attempt to gain partisan or regional advantage by shaping the production of a statistical product against the judgment of a non-partisan and apolitical statistical agent. More specifically, I define political interference as including:

1. The politically motivated suppression of an agency's responsibility to offer its best judgment on how to most accurately and reliably measure a given phenomenon;
 2. The politically motivated decision to prevent an agency from using state-of-the-art science;
 3. The politically motivated insistence on preclearance of a major statistical product that is based on state-of-the-art science. »
- 

TYPES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (1)

Political discretion over statistical matters

- citizenship question in the US 2020 census: over the Bureau of Census's advice that it would affect participation
- 2011 long form census in Canada, obligation or not: over StatCan's advice that it would lower participation and quality

TYPES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (2)

Manipulation of data in the course of their production

- CPI in Argentina, 2005- ...: basket content, sampling, rounding
- debt and deficit statistics in Greece, 2000-2010: lack of information, unwillingness to comply with ESA rules, deliberate misreporting, ...

TYPES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (3)

Judicial proceedings

- the undercount controversy in the 1990 US census: has set a pattern where significant resources are dedicated to legal defence
- the Georgiou affair in Greece: redefining statistical issues in the language of crimes and misdemeanours

TYPES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (4)

Methodological “sloppiness”

- Japan’s monthly labour survey (2019): sampling, data collection

Not to be confounded with genuine methodological controversy:

- unemployment in France (2007)
- real and perceived inflation in Italy (2000)



TYPES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (5)


Misuse of data to address public opinion

- crime statistics in the UK and elsewhere
- pre-release access to ministers (?): possibility of spin




PROTECTIONS AGAINST POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (1)

Legal commitments

- independence entrenched in law (23 OECD countries, 7 correlates, 5 no)
 - government official (written) commitments
 - credible monitoring bodies (ex.: UKSA)
- 


PROTECTIONS AGAINST POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (2)

Professional instruments

- codes of practice (FPOS, ESCP, national codes)
 - quality frameworks and assessments
 - peer reviews (2 Eurostat rounds)
- 

PROTECTIONS AGAINST POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (3)

Naming and shaming

- calling on the (international) epistemic community
 - admonishing misuse of data
 - decertifying data
- 

MEASURING STATISTICAL INDEPENDENCE

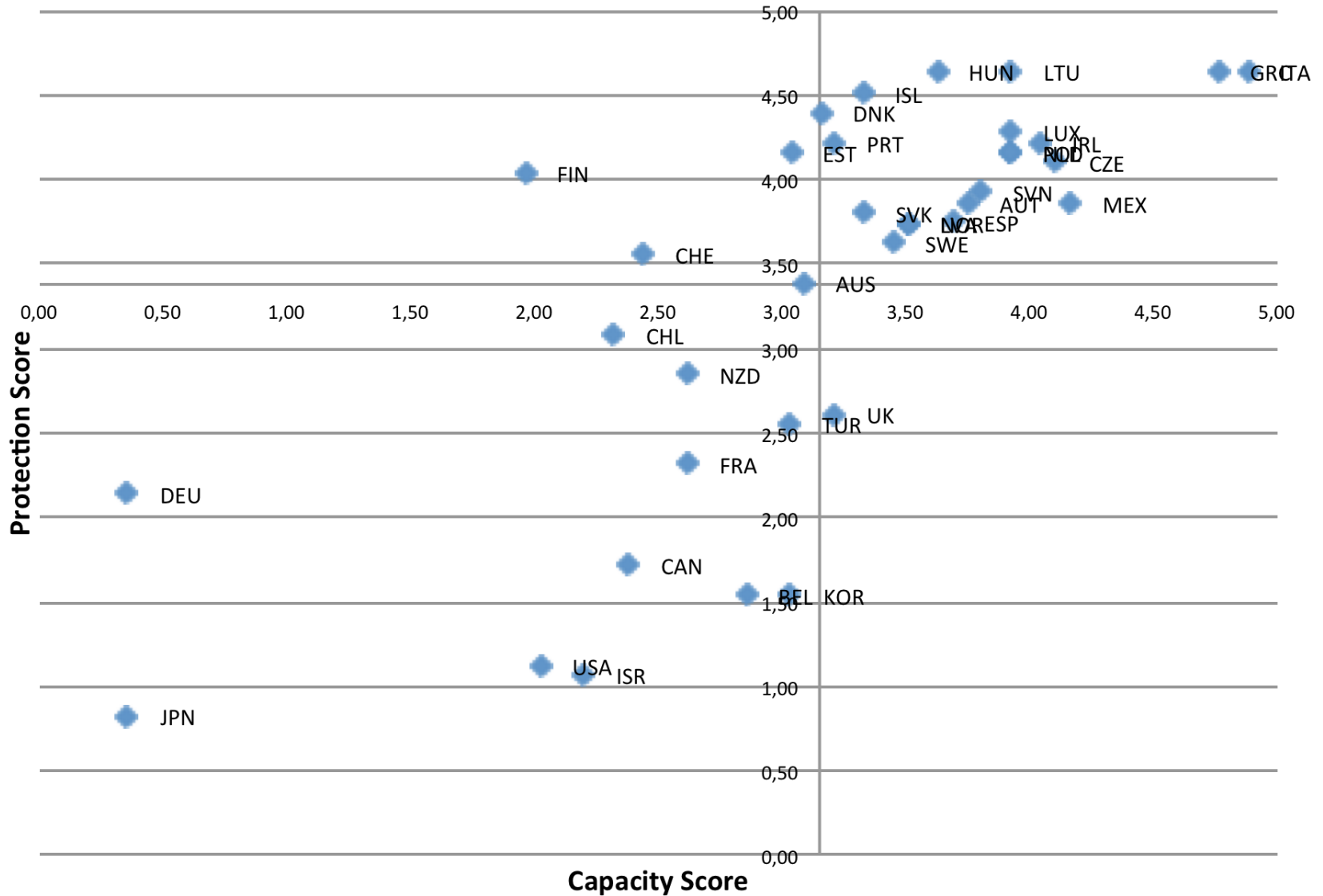


	Formal Independence	Informal Independence
Protection	<p>A.1 Mention of independence in law</p> <p>A.3 Chief statistician's position</p> <p>A.4a Authority of NSO/CS regarding overall operations</p> <p>A.4b Authority over methodology</p>	<p>B.1 Code of Practice</p> <p>B.2 Quality assessment</p> <p>B.4 Pre-release policy</p>
Capacity	<p>A.2 Position of NSO inside government</p> <p>A. 4c Authority over statistical programme</p> <p>A.4d Authority over dissemination</p> <p>A.5 Mandate for collecting data from other agencies</p> <p>A.6 Statistical Council</p>	<p>B.3 Dissemination calendar</p> <p>B.5 Visibility of Statistical Council</p>



Western Europe	Total Score	Ex Communist Bloc	Total Score	Rest of the world	Total Score
Greece GRC	9,40	Lithuania LTU	8,57	Mexico MEX	8,03
Italy ITA	8,81	Hungary HUN	8,27	Australia AUS	6,48
Ireland IRL	8,26	Czech Republic CZE	8,21	Turkey TUR	5,59
Luxemburg LUX	8,21	Poland POL	8,09	New Zealand NZL	5,46
Netherlands NLD	8,09	Slovenia SVL	7,73	Chile CHL	5,41
Iceland ISL	7,84	Latvia LVA	7,25	South Korea KOR	4,58
Austria AUT	7,61	Estonia EST	7,20	Canada CAN	4,10
Denmark DNK	7,55	Slovakia SVK	7,14	United States USA	3,15
Spain ESP	7,44			Japan JPN	1,18
Portugal POR	7,43				
Norway NOR	7,25				
Sweden SWE	7,08				
Switzerland CHE	6,00				
Finland FIN	6,00				
United Kingdom UK	5,83				
France FRA	4,94				
Belgium BEL	4,40				
Germany DEU	2,50				
Mean	6,93		7,81		4,89
Standard Error	1,71		0,56		1,97

Capacity and Protection Scores



CONCLUSIONS

Importance of the epistemic community: national, regional, international (Generic law on official statistics)

The “(re-)starting from scratch” effect: former Eastern European countries, Greece post-2010

Problem: distinguishing “projected image” from “living reality”

