

Testing the de Gaulle hypothesis

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Abstract

We investigate the effect of cheese on the quality of government. Cheese is negatively related to government effectiveness.

How can you govern a country
which has two hundred and
forty-six varieties of cheese?

Charles de Gaulle, 1962

The literature on the quality of government is now extensive, and whilst a variety of potential explanatory factors have been canvassed, we believe that the role of dairy production as a determinant of governmental effectiveness has been overlooked. Whilst the link has been raised before, both in political (de Gaulle, 1962) and scholarly outlets (Schauer, 2003, p. 278), it has not, as far as the author is aware, been subjected to rigorous empirical testing. This article aims to remedy that oversight.¹

1 Data

As a proxy measure of the number of cheeses in a country, we use the number of cheeses which currently have, or are in the process of obtaining, either a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), or a Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) Status under European Union Regulation no.s 509/2006 and 510/2006 of the 20th March 2006. Information came from the EU's Database of Origin and Registration (DOOR).² Our sample was composed of all twenty-four EU member states which had

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¹ This research is orthogonal to that other famous example of agropolitics, viz., the effect of consumption of beer versus wine or butter versus olive oil on cleavage formation within Europe (Davies, 1996, p. 77)

² http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/database/index_en.htm, accessed 15th March 2010.

Table 1. Model of government effectiveness

	Model 1
Intercept	-9.70* (1.33)
Cheeses	-0.01* (0.00)
log(GDP per capita)	1.11* (0.13)
<i>N</i>	24
R^2	0.77
adj. R^2	0.75
Resid. sd	0.32

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

made some application for PDO/PGI/TSG status; of these twenty-four, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Finland, Hungary and Romania had no cheese applications, and were thus imputed a score of zero.

Our measure is likely an under-estimate of the number of cheeses, and certainly does not fully capture the de Gaulle measurement: France, whilst having considerably more cheeses than the mean number of cheeses per country (76 as compared to 10.6), falls considerably short of the figure of 246. Nevertheless, we believe the indicator to be unbiased.

Our data on government effectiveness and purchasing-power adjusted GDP per capita come from [Kaufmann et al. \(2009\)](#) and [Heston et al. \(2009\)](#) respectively.

Results

Our results are shown in Table 1. Our model explains a great deal of the variation in government effectiveness, with an R^2 of 0.75. The coefficient for number of cheeses is, as expected, negative and significant at the 0.05 level. However, the substantive impact of the number of cheeses is fairly limited: each additional cheese reduces the score on government effectiveness by only 0.01 units on a scale ranging from 2.22 (Switzerland) to 0 (Bulgaria) – although this does mean that an increase from zero cheeses to de Gaulle’s stipulative total of 246 cheeses would have disastrous effects on a country’s governability.

Discussion

Our work is methodologically limited: more extensive data holds out the prospect of better capturing the functional form of the cheese-government effectiveness link, as well as identifying threshold values such as those identified by de Gaulle.

Our work is also substantively limited: our current knowledge does not yet permit us to address the question of whether, say, rennet-based cheese production is equally deleterious to government than vegetarian alternatives, nor to explore the considerable differences between hard and soft cheese production. Nor have we been able to address the issue of functional alternatives to cheese in countries where lactose-intolerance is more common, though one may speculate that nattō and other species of bean curd would be likely candidates. Only by addressing both these issues will researchers be able to pursue dairy-related political science that both employs cross-nationally comparable functional categories (Gregor, 1968) at the same time as benefitting from the rigour afforded by the dominant explanatory paradigm (King et al., 1994).

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