

Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010

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Abstract

This article reports on the 2010 Chapel Hill expert surveys (CHES) and introduces the CHES trend file, which contains measures of national party positioning on European integration, ideology and several European Union (EU) and non-EU policies for 1999–2010. We examine the reliability of expert judgments and cross-validate the 2010 CHES data with data from the Comparative Manifesto Project and the 2009 European Elections Studies survey, and explore basic trends on party positioning since 1999. The dataset is available at the CHES website.

Keywords

European politics, expert surveys, party politics, reliability and validity

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Introduction

Causal inference on political competition requires systematic knowledge of the positions that political parties take in a political space. Much scholarly effort has been dedicated to the measurement of party positions by means of manifestos, roll-call data, voter placements and expert judgments. Expert surveys have some notable advantages. They allow researchers to obtain positions for a large number of parties irrespective of their size, parliamentary status, whether they have a manifesto or not, and independent from the electoral cycle (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2009).

This article provides a comprehensive report of 2010 national party positioning on ideology, European integration and 13 policies in 28 countries based on expert judgments. These data are the most recent wave of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (henceforth CHES) collected at regular intervals since 1999 and now bundled in a trend file combining four waves: 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2010.¹ This article has three distinct goals. First, we briefly describe the coverage, focus and question wording of the CHES data project. Second, we analyse changes in party positioning over time in Western and Eastern Europe. Finally, we examine the reliability and validity of the 2010 CHES party placements.

The Chapel Hill expert surveys

CHES collects policy and ideological stances of the leadership of national political parties for all member states of the European Union (EU) other than Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta. The 2010 wave also encompasses two non-EU European countries, Norway and Switzerland, as well as recent EU member Croatia and long-time candidate Turkey. The 2010 survey was conducted in the spring of 2011 and covers 237 national parties in these 28 countries.²

CHES data serve two main purposes. First, the surveys monitor the ideological positioning of parties on a general left–right dimension and, since 1999, also on the economic left–right and the social left–right dimension (‘new politics’ or green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) to traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) dimension). Second, the surveys bring together data on party stances towards the EU. As such, the data have allowed researchers to investigate dynamic trends in party positions, and track the relationships between the ideological placement of parties and their position on European integration. For example, while in 1984 the relationship between left–right ideology and support for the EU was largely linear, from 1992 until 2002 the association resembles an inverted U-curve where opposition towards the EU is found on the left-wing and right-wing poles of the political spectrum (Hooghe et al., 2002).

The core of the CHES questionnaire consists of four items: (1) general party positioning on the left–right

dimension, (2) party positioning on economic left–right, (3) party positioning on the GAL–TAN dimension, and (4) general party positioning on European integration.³ The wording has remained essentially identical throughout the period (for discussion of question wording in the 2002 and 2006 surveys, see Hooghe et al., 2010). The following question wordings were used in the 2010 CHES round:

General Left–Right: ‘We now turn to a few questions on the ideological positions of political parties in [country] in 2010. Please tick the box that best describes each party’s overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).’

Economic Left–Right: ‘Parties can be classified in terms of their stance on economic issues. Parties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right emphasize a reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state.’ *An 11-point scale ranges from 0 (extreme left) to 5 (center) to 10 (extreme right).*

GAL–TAN: ‘Parties can be classified in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. “Libertarian” or “postmaterialist” parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. “Traditional” or “authoritarian” parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues.’ *An 11-point scale ranges from 0 (libertarian/postmaterialist) to 5 (center) to 10 (traditional/authoritarian).*

European integration: ‘How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2010?’ *A 7-point scale ranges from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favor).*

Similar to the 2002 and 2006 wave, the 2010 CHES survey includes questions that gauge party position on the following EU policies: cohesion policy, internal market, foreign and security policy, European parliament and enlargement to Turkey. For the first time, experts also placed political parties on the EU benefit question, which is a staple question in Eurobarometer surveys. As in 2006, the 2010 edition includes questions on positioning and salience for the 13 policy dimensions originally surveyed by Benoit and Laver (2006), including positions on taxation, redistribution, law and order and immigration. While the trend file allows for time-series analysis of general trends in party positions on major dimensions, these more specific policies allow researchers to analyse the relationships between specific issues and more general dimensions in all countries.

Exploring trends in the CHES data

The CHES trend file enables us to inspect the dynamics of the ideological and policy stances of political parties in

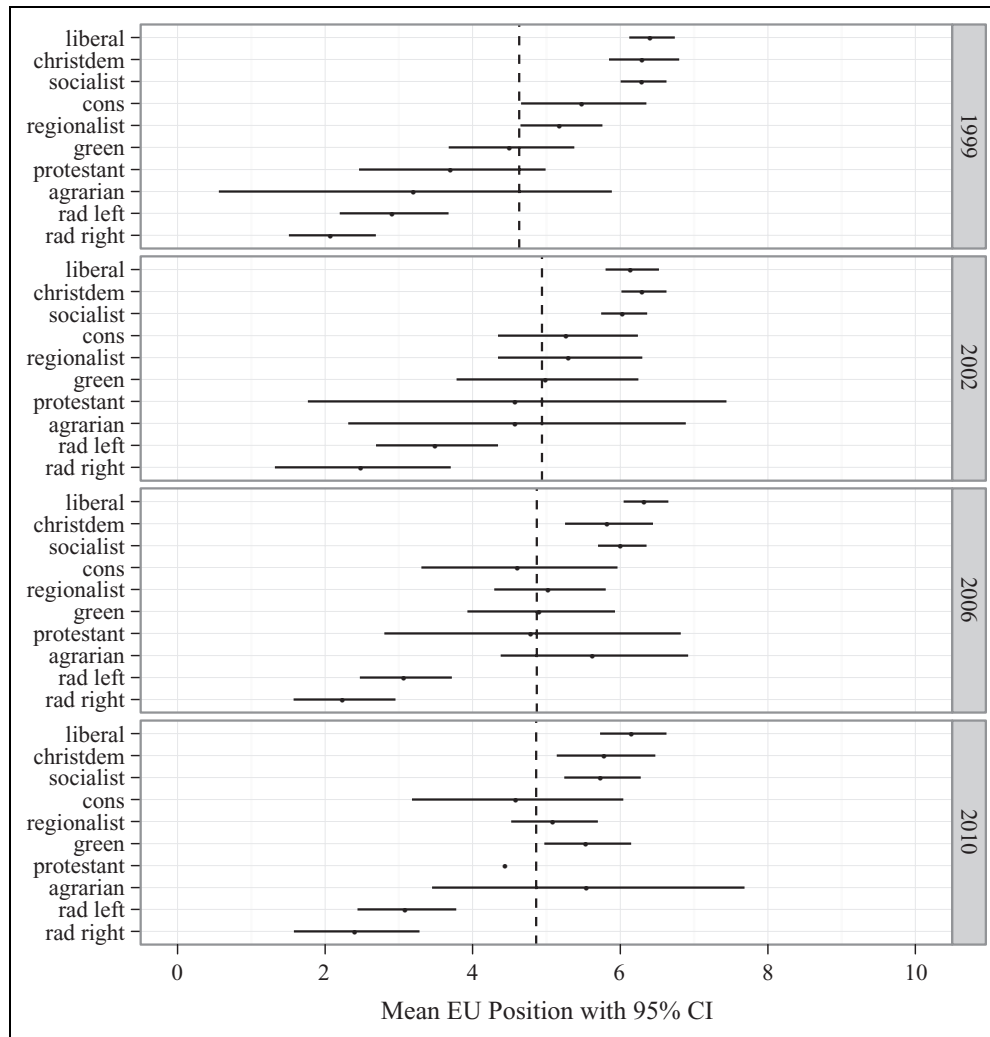


Figure 1. EU-14 mean party family position toward EU.

East and West over more than a decade. The average level of party support for European integration in EU-14 member states was 4.72 (on a 7-point scale where 7 represents strong support for integration) in 1999. Support for integration increased to 5.21 in 2002 before dropping to 4.78 in 2006 and to 4.59 in 2010.⁴ Average party support for European integration has been relatively high and quite stable in the 10 Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Their average score was 5.39 in 2002, 5.45 in 2006 and 5.26 in 2010, and these small changes in position are not statistically significant. These data show that support for integration is higher and more stable among the parties of the CEEC than among the parties of the EU-14.⁵

Average scores mask interesting differences across party families as well as between East and West. Figures 1 and 2 disaggregate these data to present the degree to which party families across Europe have changed their positions toward EU integration. The vertical dotted line represents

average support for the EU across party families within each sample (EU-14 or CEEC, respectively).⁶

From 1999 to 2010 in the West, opposition to European integration was two-sided, with the populist right joining the extreme left in resisting further integration. This represents a change from the 1980s when opposition to integration was almost exclusively an economic left phenomenon. Among the parties most strongly opposed to further integration in 2010 were the British National Party and the *Mouvement pour la France*, both extreme right parties, and the Democratic Unity Coalition in Portugal and *Enhedslisten* in Denmark, both of the extreme left. This pattern is also present in the East between 2002 and 2010, although less pronounced.

Liberals remain the strongest supporters of further integration, and are joined by Christian democrats and social democrats in many countries in the West. The confidence intervals around the means show remarkable cohesion among these mainstream pro-EU party families. A similar

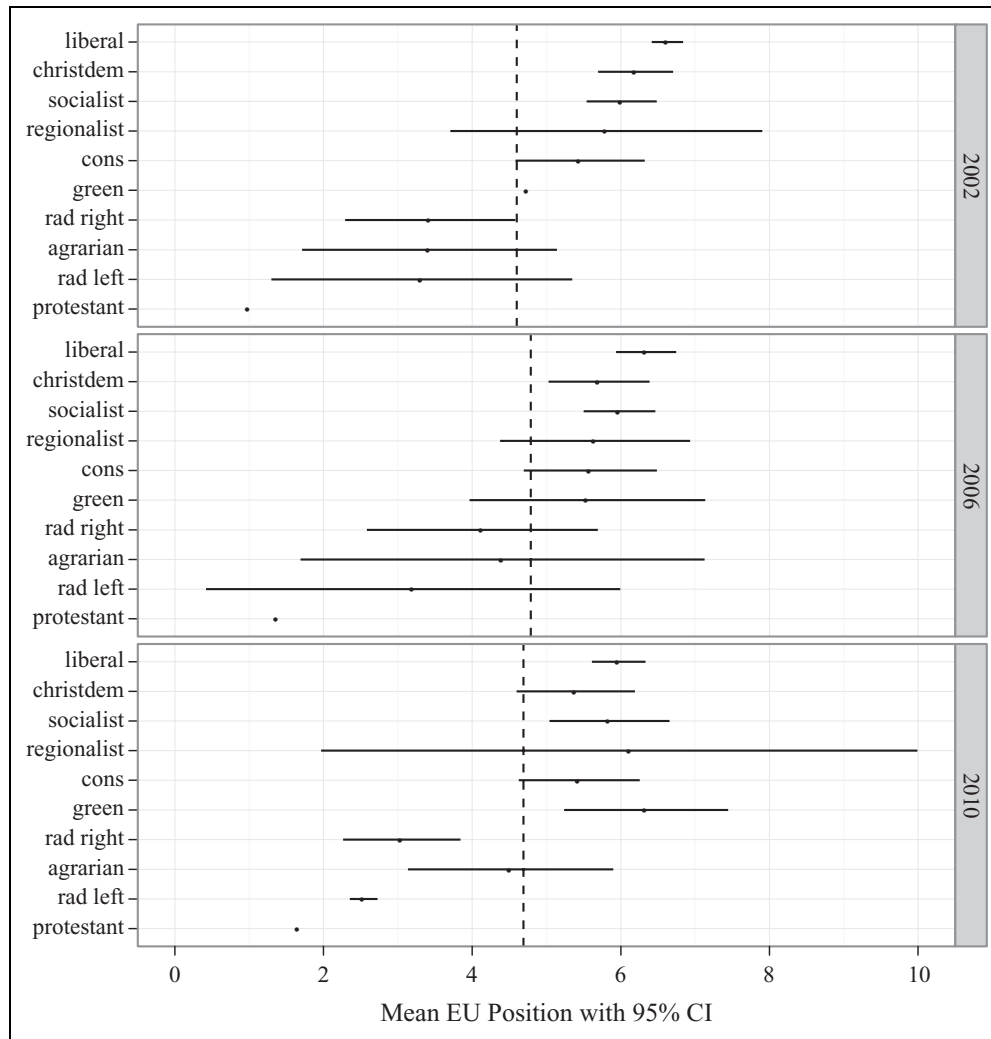


Figure 2. CEEC mean party family position toward EU.

pattern holds in the CEECs, with liberals emerging as the most pro-Europe party family in each of the survey years, though the regionalist, socialist and Christian democratic parties are not far behind.

Green parties experience the greatest change in position. They were, on average, neutral or Eurosceptic in 1999. By 2010 every green party in the EU-14 had become supportive of further integration. The Irish Greens, for example, were Eurosceptic in 1999 (2.3 on the 7-point scale), but by 2010 became a supporter of further European integration (5.0). Green parties increasingly see European integration as a means of advancing pro-environment policies, and the EU is also consistent with their cosmopolitanism and their counter-opposition to the populist right on immigration and national sovereignty.⁷

A second focus of the CHES data is to monitor ideological positioning of political parties on a general left–right dimension and on the economic left–right and the GAL–TAN (or social left–right) dimensions. The data enable us

to track the changing relationship between general left–right ideology and party support for European integration over time. In 1999 and 2002, opposition to integration was concentrated in both the extreme left and populist right, creating an inverted U-curve for Western Europe.⁸

By 2010, however, this relationship had become slightly more complicated as some parties in the centre of the general left–right scale were now placed lower on the EU integration scale, while parties on the centre–left and centre–right are the most pro-EU. The majority of the centrist parties with relatively low support for integration, such as the True Finns and Sweden’s June List, are located in Scandinavian countries. The inverted U-curve is discernible in the East as well, though the pattern is less pronounced than in the older EU member states. Although interesting differences between the parties of Eastern and Western Europe remain, the CHES data indicate that the relationship between general left–right ideology and support for European integration are increasingly similar in both parts of Europe. Figure 3 displays these results.

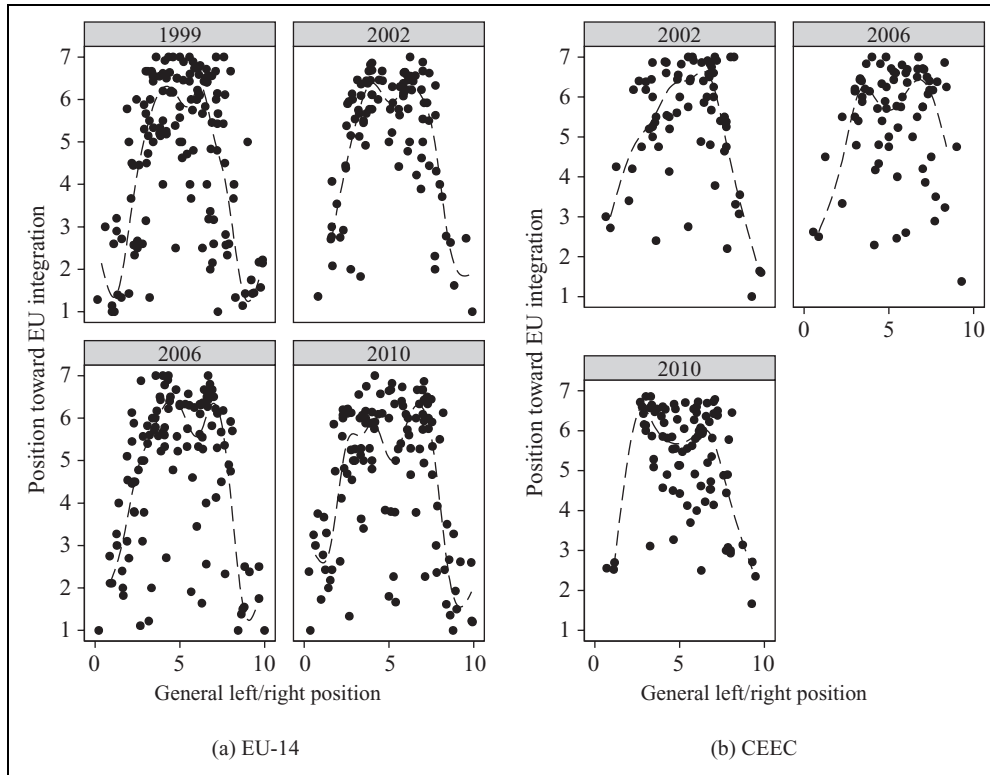


Figure 3. Left-Right and EU position.

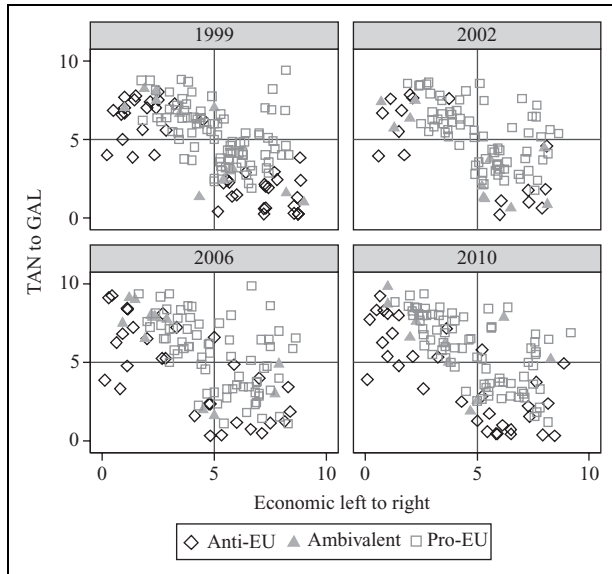


Figure 4. EU-14 Economic left-right, GAL-TAN and EU position.

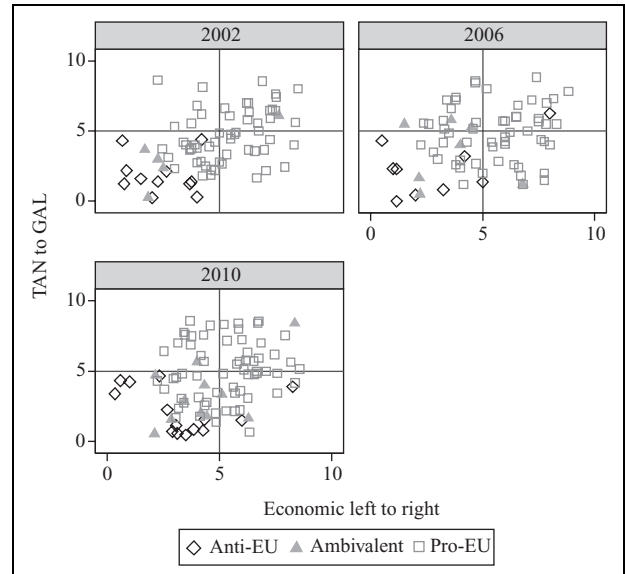


Figure 5. CEEC Economic left-right, GAL-TAN and EU position.

Charting patterns of support and opposition to European integration on the economic left-right and GAL-TAN axes allows us to further explore the inverted U-curve. In Figures 4 and 5, we first create scatterplots using economic and social left-right positions for all parties, and then we label these parties as pro-EU (support for EU greater than

4.5), ambivalent (support between 3.5 and 4.5) or anti-EU (support less than 3.5). These figures show that opposition is concentrated among TAN parties and extreme left parties, particularly in 1999 and 2002. However, Figure 4 shows that in Western Europe these two ideological extremes are represented by distinct parties, such as the

Table 1. Experts and political parties in the 2010 Chapel Hill expert survey.

Country	No. of parties	No. of experts	Response rate	Country	No. of parties	No. of experts	Response rate
Austria	6	14	46.7%	Latvia	10	7	25.9%
Belgium	14	16	35.6%	Lithuania	11	13	31.0%
Bulgaria	10	14	31.8%	Netherlands	10	14	41.2%
Czech Rep.	7	20	50.0%	Norway	7	11	47.8%
Denmark	9	11	31.4%	Poland	8	15	25.5%
Estonia	6	14	34.1%	Portugal	5	6	28.6%
Finland	8	10	47.6%	Romania	6	23	27.1%
France	9	9	23.7%	Slovenia	8	13	19.7%
Germany	6	18	36.0%	Slovakia	10	15	25.4%
Greece	7	11	50.0%	Spain	13	12	66.7%
Hungary	7	17	27.4%	Sweden	10	15	30.0%
Ireland	6	8	34.8%	Switzerland	12	12	66.7%
Italy	14	9	27.3%	UK	8	16	34.8%
				Total	227	343	32.9%

French Communist party and the *Front National*, found in different parts of the ideological space. By 2010, anti-EU parties in the West entered the centre of the political space. In contrast, Figure 5 shows that in Central and Eastern Europe cultural and economic opposition combine in parties such as the PiS (Polish Law and Justice party) and the NOA (Bulgarian National Union Attack), both of which are in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 5. Few anti-EU parties reside outside the Left/TAN quadrant (cf. Marks et al. 2006).

Reliability of the 2010 CHES

Next, we consider the reliability and validity of the CHES data in greater depth. Party positions cannot be observed directly, so researchers must rely on party material or behavioural evidence to infer party stances on major issues or ideological dimensions. The sources may include, for example, party manifestos, television debates, parliamentary speeches or roll-call voting. An alternative strategy is to use survey responses of voters, parliamentarians or third-party experts. Similar to Benoit and Laver (2006) and Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2009), the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys rely on placements by academic experts. Expert surveys have a number of virtues. For one, they can be administered at any time because they do not require specific sources of information, such as electoral manifestos or roll-call votes. Second, the expert survey combines what parties say and what parties do (Netjes and Binnema, 2007). If an expert is asked to place a party on an issue or ideological dimension, she will tap various sources of information, such as a party's manifesto, campaigning and parliamentary behaviour. Finally, expert surveys allow the researcher to ask a common set of questions, whereas roll-call votes or content analysing manifestos require researchers to construct dimensions only inductively.

The CHES project relies on a large pool of experts. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of experts per

country used in the 2010 survey: 1,044 experts were contacted and 34.9 percent responded.⁹

The number of experts per country and party allows for a more in-depth inspection of the reliability of the CHES experts' placements. One way to assess the reliability of party positions on the four core questions in the survey is to inspect the standard deviations among experts. To what extent do experts agree on the placement of parties on the ideological and EU scales?

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of expert scores on four questions covering the main dimensions of EU positioning, left–right (general, economic and social). The cell values are means and standard deviations by country across parties. That is, we compute the average position for each party and the standard deviation of the expert placements for each party. We then compute the mean of these measures. Lower standard deviations indicate more agreement across experts within country.

The standard deviations reported here are quite small, although we find some variation across countries and across issues. For instance, the experts less reliably estimate parties that receive a smaller vote-share, a finding consistent with prior research (Marks et al., 2007).

Cross-validating the 2010 CHES

In addition to the internal reliability of the CHES data, we examine the validity of the different measures in the survey. Comparing expert surveys with party manifestos, public opinion and surveys of MPs and MEPs, previous research reveals that evaluations of party positioning provided by academic experts and by political actors, particularly MPs and MEPs, are highly correlated (Netjes and Binnema, 2007), that evaluations produced by separately conducted expert surveys are convergent (Whitefield et al., 2007), and that expert surveys are more consistent with the evaluations of voters and parliamentarians than

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for 2010 CHES.

Country	Position on European integration	General left–right Mean placement (SD)	Economic left–right	GAL–TAN
Austria	4.33 (1.10)	5.78 (0.98)	4.61 (1.34)	5.69 (1.39)
Belgium	5.19 (0.95)	5.21 (0.95)	5.03 (1.05)	4.63 (1.26)
Bulgaria	5.50 (0.93)	5.91 (1.67)	5.09 (1.77)	6.48 (1.74)
Czech Rep.	5.02 (0.84)	5.15 (1.10)	5.10 (1.23)	5.02 (1.79)
Denmark	4.53 (0.83)	5.16 (0.82)	5.12 (0.95)	4.49 (1.38)
Estonia	5.93 (1.01)	4.93 (1.25)	5.18 (1.23)	4.97 (1.61)
Finland	4.97 (0.85)	5.35 (0.96)	4.91 (0.86)	5.10 (1.73)
France	4.76 (0.70)	5.24 (0.69)	4.24 (1.56)	4.98 (1.59)
Germany	5.35 (0.84)	4.72 (0.89)	4.59 (1.09)	4.66 (1.62)
Greece	3.60 (0.97)	4.16 (1.26)	3.42 (1.57)	4.99 (1.67)
Hungary	5.46 (1.08)	5.88 (1.19)	4.30 (2.08)	5.43 (1.20)
Ireland	4.80 (0.92)	4.21 (1.00)	4.17 (2.36)	4.33 (1.45)
Italy	5.14 (0.94)	4.22 (0.91)	3.85 (1.09)	4.15 (1.10)
Latvia	5.10 (1.12)	5.30 (1.28)	5.52 (1.27)	5.78 (2.20)
Lithuania	5.54 (0.99)	4.89 (1.34)	4.81 (1.50)	5.74 (1.67)
Netherlands	4.15 (0.99)	5.23 (0.92)	4.86 (1.10)	5.23 (1.60)
Norway	3.55 (0.73)	5.09 (0.83)	5.07 (0.88)	5.33 (1.47)
Poland	4.94 (0.85)	5.37 (1.19)	4.14 (1.58)	5.79 (1.37)
Portugal	5.17 (0.82)	4.13 (0.51)	4.13 (0.73)	3.96 (0.53)
Romania	5.73 (0.89)	5.36 (1.93)	4.94 (1.44)	5.93 (1.68)
Slovenia	5.35 (1.16)	5.75 (1.51)	5.13 (1.44)	5.55 (1.61)
Slovakia	4.81 (1.05)	5.48 (1.09)	5.14 (0.98)	5.83 (1.78)
Spain	5.44 (1.29)	4.39 (0.95)	4.30 (1.11)	3.94 (1.18)
Sweden	4.39 (0.85)	5.54 (0.94)	5.47 (1.07)	4.45 (2.11)
Switzerland	3.74 (0.80)	5.62 (0.86)	5.09 (0.87)	5.36 (1.11)
UK	3.76 (0.72)	5.46 (0.89)	4.84 (1.24)	4.81 (1.31)

data currently available from party manifestos (Marks et al., 2007). A detailed examination of the 1999, 2002 and 2006 Chapel Hill dataset confirms these findings (Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007).

To cross-validate the 2010 Chapel Hill expert Survey (CHES) we consider two commonly used alternative sources of information about party positions: the 2009 European Election Study (EES, 2009), which captures where voters place parties on different policy issues, and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) dataset (Budge et al., 2001; Volkens et al., 2006, 2010), which infers positions from party electoral manifestos. We consider the most recent coded manifestos in each country; however, given the lag in manifesto coding, the time period of the comparison CMP data spans from 2000 to 2010. Unlike previous rounds, we cannot validate the 2010 CHES survey with another expert survey, as no other comparable expert study is available for this time point.

First, we consider the general left–right dimension.

The CHES dataset asks experts (Q15): Please tick the box that best describes each party’s overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).

Using EES, we consider how respondents place parties on the general left–right scale, when asked (Q47): How about the (Party X)? Which number from 0 to 10, where 0 means left and 10 means right best describes (Party X)?

The CMP dataset provides a left–right measure, called Rile, which combines the proportions of mentions of various political issues related to left–right placement in an additive scale.

Second, we cross-validate party positions on European integration.

The CHES dataset asks (Q1): How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2010?

EES respondents are asked to place parties on European unification with the following question: (Q81): How about the (Party X)? Which number from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘already gone too far’ and 10 means ‘should be pushed further’ best describes (party X)?

For the CMP dataset we derive two measures of EU position: manifesto ratio, which is the ratio of positive EU mentions to the sum of positive and negative EU mentions; and manifesto difference, which is positive minus negative mentions.

Principal component analysis for 104 political parties common to the three datasets (Table 3, column 1) reveals that a single factor explains almost three-quarters of the variance in positioning on the general left–right scale.¹⁰ The standardized loading of the CHES item is 0.62, and it corresponds particularly closely with the loading on the EES item (0.61). Principal component analysis for the 104 parties

Table 3. Cross-validating party placements on general left–right scale.

		East and west	West	East
CHES 2010	General left–right	0.62	0.62	0.63
EES 2009	Respondent placement of parties	0.61	0.61	0.60
CMP 2000–10	Rile	0.49	0.49	0.49
	Eigenvalue	2.31	2.35	2.27
	Proportion of variance explained	0.77	0.79	0.76

Principal Component Analysis. N (East and West) = 104; N (West) = 71; N (East) = 33.

Table 4. Cross-validating party placements on EU position.

		East and West	West	East
CHES 2010	EU position	0.51	0.51	0.48
EES 2009	Respondent placement of parties EU	0.50	0.51	0.50
CMP 2000–10	EU difference (positive–negative)	0.51	0.52	0.48
CMP 2000–10	EU ratio (positive / total)	0.47	0.46	0.54
	Eigenvalue	2.77	2.89	2.23
	Proportion of variance explained	0.69	0.72	0.56

Principal Component Analysis. N (East and West) = 104; N (West) = 71; N (East) = 33.

Table 5. Placement correlations.

		CHES 2010 General left–right
EES 2009	Respondent placement of parties	0.886
CMP 2000–10	Rile	0.575
		CHES 2010 EU Position
EES 2009	Respondent placement of parties EU	0.747
CMP 2000–10	EU difference (positive–negative)	0.590
CMP 2000–10	EU ratio (positive / total)	0.481

All correlations are significant at the 0.05 level.

common to the datasets on EU positions (Table 4, column 1) explains over two-thirds of the variance. The standardized loading of the CHES item is 0.51. These results are generally consistent if we separate the sample by region.

Table 5 additionally reports the pairwise correlations of the CHES measures with those from the EES and the CMP datasets. The correlation between the CHES general left–right measure and the EES respondent placement of parties on the general left–right is particularly strong (0.89). This is arguably the more appropriate comparison, since it compares almost contemporaneous party placements, while the CMP data includes placements that are as much as a decade removed from the time period measured by CHES.

Overall, the analyses suggest relatively high levels of common structure across the different measures. The 2010 CHES survey produces information that is in line with alternative sources.

Conclusion

This research note presents information about trends in party positioning and assesses the validity and reliability of the longest running data collection project compiling expert party placements in the European context. As more researchers use CHES data to examine party competition and political representation (e.g. Adams et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2012; Jolly, 2007; Karreth et al., 2013; van de Wardt, 2012), establishing the validity and reliability of expert placements is of key importance. Our results suggest that CHES data display quite high levels of inter-expert reliability and considerable common structure with different measures. This is good news for scholars aiming to examine the positions of parties on a variety of ideological and policy dimensions in a longitudinal and cross-national perspective.

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Notes

1. The CHES datasets for 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2010 are available online at: www.unc.edu/~hooghe. Estimates of national political party positions on EU and general left–right go back to 1984 using precursors to the current CHES data (Ray, 1999) and are available at the website. All surveys were funded by the European Union Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

2. Included are political parties that obtain at least 3 percent of the vote in the national election immediately prior to the survey year or that elect at least one representative to the national or European parliament.
3. The trend file also includes questions on internal party dissent and the salience of European integration for each party.
4. The first two changes meet conventional standards of statistical significance based on independent samples *t*-tests, treating year as the grouping variable, but the change between 2006 and 2010 is not statistically significant. We computed *t*-tests for all pairwise comparisons across years for both the EU-14 and the CEECs.
5. We also computed weighted means (with parties weighted by vote-share). For the EU-14 these are 5.49, 5.56, 5.46 and 5.32 (from 1999–2010), while for the CEECs they are 5.72, 5.54 and 5.53 for 2002, 2006 and 2010, respectively.
6. These dot plots show the mean for each party family, along with a 95 percent confidence interval. In a few party families in the CEEC (e.g. Greens in 2002), there is only one party, so there is no confidence interval.
7. The 2010 CHES also asks experts to rate the salience of European integration and internal dissent. Salience has been at a medium–high level throughout the period: on a 4-point scale, around 2.98 in the East and 2.75 in the West. However, dissent on integration follows different trajectories in East and West. In the East, it reached a peak in 2002 with an average score of 3.01, and tapered off to 2.71 in 2010. In the West, dissent increased steadily for nearly all party families. In 1999, the mean level for parties in the West was 1.75 (on an 11-point scale), while in 2010 it reached 2.81. The Socialist Party (PS) in France illustrates this change. In 1999, the dissent score for the PS was 2.50; by 2010 experts placed the party at 5.44. In the West, internal party debate on the EU has become increasingly contentious.
8. The plot coordinates for Figure 3 show the conjunction of a party's general left–right position and its EU stance. The line gives the LOWESS fit.
9. At least nine experts responded in all but three countries: Ireland, Latvia and Portugal.
10. Table 3 presents unweighted factor loadings. We also conducted the analysis weighting for parties' vote-share with substantively identical results.

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