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Is Left–Right from Circleland?

The issue basis of citizens' ideological self-placement

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November 2009

Abstract

The left–right scale is the concept most often used to describe political actors' positions. However, there is strong evidence that electoral competition in Western Europe is structured by two dimensions: economic and cultural. How can a single dimension be sufficient to orient oneself in a two-dimensional political space? This paper suggests that the left–right scale corresponds to a curve in a two-dimensional political space rather than to a straight line. Dimensionality is thus ambiguous, which is a situation analogous to Weisberg's concept of 'Circleland'. This paper analyses the relations between citizens' left–right position and issue preferences in five West European countries. The findings strongly support the paper's hypothesis by showing non-linear relations between voters' left–right position and issue preferences.

Introduction

In a 1974 article, Herbert Weisberg (1974) suggested that the dimensionality of spatial representations is not always unequivocal. In particular, he demonstrated that certain solutions of scaling techniques usually interpreted as multidimensional could be viewed as one-dimensional and vice-versa. Weisberg's ideas are useful in interpreting some potentially contradictory findings about the dimensionality of the political space in Western Europe. In particular, they may help explain why despite much evidence of two-dimensionality, the one-dimensional left–right scale remains useful for describing political positions.

The left–right scale is salient in the political (science) discourse. It is the most universally used reference to qualify political positions (Benoit and Laver 2006), and it frequently is used by politicians, political pundits, political scientists, and citizens. The pervasiveness of the left–right scale lends support to the idea that citizens' and parties' political positions are structured by a single dimension. However, this seems to conflict with much evidence from research on the dimensionality of the political space. Several authors have demonstrated that two dimensions (at least) are necessary to explain the structure of political positions in Western Europe – at the level of parties (Hix 1999; Warwick 2002), voters (Kitschelt 1995; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009), or both (Kitschelt 1994; Kriesi et al. 2008). Most common in this literature is to distinguish between an economic and a cultural dimension (e.g., Kitschelt 1994). These findings that the political space is structured by two largely independent dimensions lead to a puzzling situation. How can citizens and political actors orient themselves in a two-dimensional political world by referring to a single dimension? If the economic and cultural dimensions are to a large extent independent from one another, the left–right scale should not be sufficient to describe political positions.

Can these contradictory views about the dimensionality of the political space be reconciled? I do not suggest that one of the concepts is wrong and that the political space is definitely one-dimensional or two-dimensional. Rather, following the ideas developed by Weisberg (1974), both views may be valid. Herein I suggest that the political space may be an instance of what Weisberg calls 'Circleland'. Imagine a representation of political actors' positions in a two-dimensional Cartesian space in which the positions to be described form a circle. The space in which the actors' positions are represented is two-dimensional, and both dimensions seem necessary to represent this circular alignment. However, the positions all lie on a line and may thus be considered to be on a single dimension. The same ideas can be applied to any case in which the positions one wants to describe form a curved line when represented in a two-dimensional space. In such situations, the question of dimensionality is difficult to answer

unequivocally. I suggest that this type of situation applies to the left–right scale. This *hypothesis of a curved left–right scale* means that while the left–right scale is by nature unidimensional, its relationship with the economic and cultural issues that often are used to describe the dimensions of the political space is non-linear. In other words, a given change along the left–right scale does not always mean the same in terms of economic preferences or cultural preferences. More specifically, I expect the various left-wing positions, from extreme-left to centre-left, to differ strongly from one another in economic terms but to be relatively similar as far as cultural issue preferences are concerned. The reverse pattern should characterize the range of right-wing ideological positions. This paper investigates this hypothesis *at the level of voters*. A similar hypothesis could eventually be made at the level of parties, but it is for voters that the two-dimensionality of issue preferences has been most clearly established (e.g., van der Brug and van Spanje 2009). My analysis is restricted to West European democracies in the 1990s and 2000s, which seem to share a relatively similar structure of issue preferences and party competition (Kriesi et al. 2008).

The next section briefly reviews the literature on the dimensionality of the political space. Section three turns to the relationship between left–right ideology and more specific political issues. It presents in more detail the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale. The data and the variables' operationalization are introduced in section four, followed by the presentation of the main results. These offer strong support for the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale. In the nineteen surveys studied here, the relationship between left–right ideology, on the one hand, and the cultural and economic issues, on the other, is not the same for left-wing and right-wing citizens. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for our understanding of the left–right scale.

The dimensionality of citizens' issue preferences

Several studies have shown that two dimensions structure the national political space in West European democracies (Kitschelt 1994; Kriesi et al. 2008; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009). The exact definition of these dimensions varies among authors, but most scholars distinguish between an economic and a cultural or social-cultural dimension. There is little controversy about the meaning of the economic dimension. It is generally described as a conflict about the role of the State in the economy and about redistributive policies. It corresponds largely to the traditional class cleavage identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). This dimension represents an opposition between the State and the market. Kitschelt (1994), for instance, described it as a conflict between socialist and capitalist politics. Citizens and

political actors on the left of this economic dimension favour a greater role of the State in economic matters. They defend the welfare state and redistributive measures. Citizens on the right of the political spectrum defend a lesser role of the State and favour the free allocation of resources through market mechanisms.

The nature of the second dimension has been defined in more varied ways, in part because its character has changed over time (Kriesi et al. 2006). The social and cultural issues that structure party competition in Western Europe have been affected by several developments. Religious cleavage, for instance, was central to the structure of party competition in many democracies in the post-World War II period (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). However, the secularisation process means that the importance of religion in structuring political attitudes and political choices has decreased (Dalton et al. 1984; Franklin et al. 1992). Thus, issues linked with moral values and Christian ethics should have become less relevant in explaining the structure of citizens' preferences. In parallel to these developments, new issues have become more salient and have influenced the nature of the cultural dimension. Central among these is the rise of post-materialist values and of issues associated with New Politics and with the social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s (Inglehart 1977; van Deth and Scarbrough 1995; Dalton 2002). The resulting dimension has been labelled the 'New politics' dimension, the 'libertarian–authoritarian' dimension (Kitschelt 1994, 1995), or the 'GAL–TAN' dimension (Green–Alternative–Libertarian vs. Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalism, in Hooghe et al. 2002). More recently, the content of the cultural dimension seems to have changed again under the influence of globalization and of the process of European integration. The associated economic, cultural, and political forms of competition have given rise to new political conflicts at the national level (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). The issues of immigration and of European integration, in particular, have become more salient in Western Europe and they have become central in structuring voters' preferences and party positions.

The status of the left–right scale

While there is strong evidence that citizens' political attitudes are structured by two dimensions, the left–right ideological scale remains a central reference. It often is the only dimension used to describe voters' preferences or party positions. This scale has been described as a kind of 'super-issue' with a strong integrative capacity (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Inglehart 1984; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; van der Eijk et al. 2005), thus new issues tend to be integrated in this ideological conflict. All relevant political issues, be they of an economic or cultural nature, should align along the left–right scale. This implies

that issue positions can to a large extent be inferred from left–right orientation (or vice-versa). The variety of political issues should boil down to a single dimension of political competition. The use of a left–right dimension of political competition is not only pervasive in the political science literature, but most citizens also are willing to position themselves on this scale (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976), and citizens as well as political experts can use it to locate political parties. The meaning of the left–right scale is likely to vary across time and space (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Benoit and Laver 2006). For example, it may be more strongly influenced by economic orientations in some contexts than in others. However, in a variety of political contexts there seems to be a shared understanding of what left and right mean (Benoit and Laver 2006).

This widespread use of one-dimensional representations of the political space is puzzling. If voters' attitudes really are structured by two dimensions, as the evidence reviewed above suggests, one-dimensional models should be misleading. Reducing the diversity of political positions to a single scale implies a loss of important information. The results pointing to a two-dimensional structure of voters' attitudes mean that the economic and cultural issue dimensions are largely independent from one another. It should not be possible to predict citizens' cultural preferences simply by knowing where they stand on economic matters.

One way out of this paradoxical situation is to argue that while political positions are structured by two dimensions, parties compete on a single dimension. Van der Brug and van Spanje (2009), for instance, argued that parties have strong incentives not to emphasize issues that are not aligned on the main axis of competition (see also McDonald and Budge 2005). This would mean that the left–right scale does not relate to all of the political issues that define the political space. While this may apply to parties, it does not seem to be the case among voters. 'Their' political space still appears to be two-dimensional (e.g., van der Brug and van Spanje 2009).

Herein, I suggest a different argument that requires thinking more carefully about the distinction between one- and two-dimensional representations. Let us consider a two-dimensional Cartesian space with two orthogonal axes that correspond to the economic and cultural dimensions. This is a relatively standard model of the political space. How can the left–right scale be represented in this space? Typically, it would be represented as a straight line. This ideological axis could run from a pro-State and culturally liberal position, corresponding to the left end of the scale, to a pro-market and culturally conservative profile that characterizes the right end of the scale. Depending on the relative importance of economic and cultural issues, the slope of this line can vary. One example of such a

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configuration is represented in the left-hand panel of Figure 1. If parties' positions are more or less aligned along such a line, one can conclude that party competition is one-dimensional. Such a left–right scale would capture most of the variation in citizens' political positions. The cultural and economic dimensions would be very strongly correlated and it would not be necessary to distinguish among them. The same argument can be made if the line representing the left–right scale is flatter or steeper.

'Fig. 1 about here'

Following the ideas of Weisberg (1974), however, a straight line is not the only possible alignment that can be qualified as one-dimensional. The right-hand panel of Figure 1 shows an alternative. Here, a curve runs from the upper left quadrant to the lower right one. The curve is almost horizontal in the left-hand portion and becomes very steep in the right-hand portion. If the left–right positions one wants to summarize are aligned in this way, they can be said to form a single dimension because they are located on the same line. However, the cultural and economic dimensions cannot be said to merge into a single dimension. Contrary to the scenario depicted in the left-hand panel, the relationship of this left–right scale with the economic and cultural dimensions is not linear. In the upper left quadrant, movements along this line imply important changes on the economic dimension but with virtually no changes on the cultural dimension. The reverse situation applies to the lower right quadrant. This also implies that the economic and cultural dimensions should be less strongly correlated than in the scenario depicted in the left-hand panel of Figure 1.

I expect the relationship between the left–right scale and the economic and cultural dimensions to correspond to this second situation. I will refer to this as the *hypothesis of a curved left–right scale*. The shape of this 'left–right curve' should be such that the relations between ideological position and economic and cultural issues are not the same for left-wing and right-wing citizens. The differences between various positions on the left, such as between centre-left and far-left citizens, should be strongly related to economic issue preferences but weakly related to cultural issue preferences. Among right-wing citizens, in contrast, the reverse situation should apply. Citizens on the far right should be culturally much more conservative than centre-right respondents. However, these two groups of citizens should have relatively similar economic preferences. For this hypothesis to be supported the 'shape' of the left–right scale does not need to correspond exactly to the picture in Figure 1; Figure 1 is meant only to be illustrative. The important message is simply that economic issue

preferences have a stronger impact on ideology among left-wing than right-wing respondents, whereas the impact of cultural issue preferences is stronger on the right than on the left. This runs counter to the traditional hypothesis of linear relations between left–right ideology and issue preferences (e.g., Budge and Robertson 1987; Huber 1989; Huber and Inglehart 1995). The hypothesis of a curved left–right scale is based on the idea that citizens' interpretation of the concepts of left and right is strongly influenced by the conflicts they observe in their political system. The 'meaning' of the left–right scale and its association with concrete political issues should depend on the political parties and actors that claim or are ascribed these positions (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Huber 1989). In Western Europe, the configuration of the main parties is increasingly triangular (Grunberg and Schweisguth 1997; Kriesi et al. 2008). Left-wing, moderate right-wing, and conservative right-wing parties form the three main poles of this configuration. Left-wing and moderate right-wing parties differ strongly on economic terms but only moderately on cultural issues. They both tend to share culturally liberal positions. Moderate right-wing and conservative right-wing parties, in contrast, have relatively similar economic positions but differ strongly on cultural terms. I expect the same pattern to be found when comparing the issue preferences of citizens taking different positions on the left–right scale.

Data and methods

To test the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale, I examine the relations between voters' attitudes and ideological self-placement in five countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In each country, all national elections since the mid 1990s are analysed. The choice of these countries and of this time period is influenced by findings of previous research on the dimensionality of the political space. As explained in the previous section, the expectation of a curved left–right scale is linked with the configuration of party positions. In the five countries analyzed here, this configuration has been shown to be triangular or tripolar in the recent years (Kriesi et al. 2008).[1]

Citizens' positions on the left–right scale were measured in a similar way in all five countries. In each survey, respondents were first told that left and right were concepts often used to describe political attitudes or classify political actors. They were then invited to indicate their own position on that scale. Answers were coded using seven-point scales (France 1995 and

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[1] I also include more recent elections than those covered by Kriesi et al. (2008), as I expect the tripolar configurations to be an enduring feature of West European party systems in the contemporary period. However, this study does not include Austria, the sixth country covered by Kriesi et al. The available election surveys in Austria did not include any item on left–right self-placement.

2002), ten-point scales (the Netherlands 1994, 1998 and 2003; Germany 1994), or eleven-point scales (Swiss, British, and remaining Dutch, French, and German elections). Comparing attitudes—or relationships between attitudes and ideology—across such surveys is not straightforward. While questions about left–right orientations are formulated in roughly similar terms across countries, more specific attitudinal items may vary widely. A direct comparison of attitudes is therefore difficult. Comparisons can be made easier by focusing on more general issue categories, such as support for European integration or for the welfare state. One or more indicators for such categories are available in a large number of election studies. This approach allows one to build a smaller number of summary indicators and is the strategy used in this study. I distinguish between eight categories of issues.[2] Two categories correspond to economic attitudes: support for the welfare state and for economic liberalism. Six categories tap cultural issues: support for cultural liberalism, European integration, restrictive immigration, national defence, law and order, and culture.[3] When one of these issue categories is represented by a single indicator in an election study, the standardized version of that indicator is used to measure voters' attitudes. When several indicators are available, I summarize them with a principal-component factor analysis. With few exceptions, these analyses result in a single factor. When a given set of indicators appears to form two dimensions, the corresponding subsets of items are factor analyzed separately to build two summary measures. This happens mostly with the category 'cultural liberalism', for which a second category is necessary in six elections. The indicators for the category 'restrictive immigration' also form two dimensions in the 1998 Dutch election study. The list of items used to operationalize each of these categories and the results of the corresponding factor analyses are available in an online appendix.[4] Depending on the country and election survey, two to eight issue categories are measured (this includes the eventual second summary index for immigration and cultural liberalism). All variables are coded so that a higher value means stronger support for the goal by which the category is labelled (for welfare state, for economic liberalism, etc.).

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[2] This is based on a schema suggested by Kriesi et al. (2008). Four of the categories defined by these authors are not used here: 'Budgetary rigor' is part of the group of economic issues, but there are no corresponding indicators for the election studies considered here. 'Infrastructure' and 'Institutional reform' are not easily categorized as economic or cultural. 'Environmental protection' is also difficult to classify. It is usually more strongly related to economic than cultural issues. But there are exceptions, and the issue is definitely not part of traditional economic issues.

[3] While attitudes toward European integration have both economic and cultural components, previous analyses have shown that they align most strongly with the cultural dimension. See Kriesi et al. (2008).

[4] The online appendix is available at http://www.romain-lachat.ch/papers/circleland_appendix.pdf.

In the majority of cases, left–right positions and issue questions come from a post-election survey or from the same wave of a panel study.[5] When data stem from multiple waves of a panel study, left–right self-placement is measured after or at the same time as issue positions. The 2001 British election panel study is the only exception: Left–right orientations are measured in the second wave, whereas issue preferences are based on questions from a posterior self-completion questionnaire. Thus, in that case the dependent variable is measured before the independent variables. Conclusions based on that study should be taken with a grain of salt.

I use regression models to analyse whether the relation between issue preferences and ideological orientation differs between left-wing and right-wing citizens. While the hypothesis was introduced with a graphical representation, using such figures to test it would be of a limited utility. It would mean selecting only two issue categories for each figure and would represent only an approximate test of the hypothesis. Thus, I focus instead on the central implication of the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale, that is, on the expected differences in the relation of issues and ideology between left-wing and right-wing citizens. To this end, the left–right scale is regressed on issue preferences separately for respondents on each side of the ideological scale. The dependent variable in these models is thus a 'half left–right scale'. This is a three-point scale in the 1995 and 2002 French election studies and a five-point scale in all other cases.[6] As this variable is ordinal, the models are estimated with ordered probit regressions. An alternative estimation method is truncated regression, as only respondents in a certain range of values of the left–right scale are included in each model. Accordingly, all models also are estimated as truncated regressions. The two procedures lead to identical conclusions.

Results

Tables 1 to 5 present the estimated coefficients and fit statistics of the ordered probit regressions, country by country. A few general tendencies can be identified when comparing the results of the different elections. I will first comment on these and try to draw some general conclusions. The results will then be discussed in more detail, country by country. What is perhaps most striking when looking at these results is the strong difference between the two models estimated for each election. In all but one election, some issue categories have

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[5] Table A1 in the online appendix gives an overview over the election studies used and indicates in which waves issue preferences and left–right positions were measured.
[6] When the left–right scale has an uneven number of categories, respondents in the middle category are excluded from these analyses.

a significant impact on ideological orientations in one group of voters but not in the other. Furthermore, such differences most often point to substantially large contrasts. It is not just that a given issue category has a weakly significant impact in one group and an almost significant impact in the other. Quite to the contrary, one can often observe that the variables with the strongest effects in one group are almost entirely irrelevant in the other group of voters. The first election presented in Table 1, the 1995 French presidential election, is a case in point. Economic liberalism is the variable with the strongest impact among left-wing respondents but it has no impact among right-wing voters. The reverse pattern applies to the effect of attitudes toward immigration. In this case, it appears that economic issue preferences exert a strong impact among left-wing respondents but not among right-wing citizens. The latter are, however, strongly influenced by their preferences about immigration policy. This is just one example of a pattern that can be observed in a large number of elections.

These results offer strong support for the premise that the determinants of ideological positioning are not the same for left-wing and right-wing citizens. Do these differences generally match the expected contrast between economic and cultural attitudes? As far as economic attitudes are concerned, the observed differences largely fit with this paper's hypothesis. Economic attitudes have a very strong impact on the ideological positioning of left-wing respondents (i.e., whether these citizens position themselves on the centre left or on the far left). Among right-wing respondents, in contrast, economic attitudes usually have no impact. The contrast is less sharp for cultural issue categories; their impact on ideological positioning usually is strong among both left-wing and right-wing respondents. However, it often is not the same categories of issues that matter most for left-wing and right-wing respondents. It cannot be concluded that cultural issue preferences are only relevant among right-wing respondents, but the role of the various cultural issue categories still varies between the two groups of citizens.

The goodness-of-fit of the estimated models may appear to be relatively low. This is in part a consequence of the estimation method. One should not interpret these values as the explained variance from ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions (these would be substantially higher if the model was estimated with that method).[7] Another reason for the relatively low goodness-of-fit is simply that the association between issues and ideology is weaker once the sample is split into two groups. Clearly, there may be strong differences between left-wing and right-

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[7] Estimating the same models with OLS regression results in values of the R^2 statistic that are typically 2.5 or 3 times higher than those of Tables 1–5.

wing citizens, but the focus of the present study is on the variation *within* each of the two ideological groups.[8]

'Tables 1–5 about here'

Considering the French case in more detail, Table 1 shows that the expected contrast in the effect of economic issue preferences occurs in all elections. Their impact is strong among left-wing respondents but not significant among right-wing citizens. In the latter group, ideological orientations are strongly influenced by attitudes toward immigration and by preferences on law and order and on European integration (in 2007). At first glance, the 2007 election may give the impression of smaller differences than in earlier elections. The categories of national identity (a subgroup of cultural liberalism) and European integration have a significant impact in both models. However, note that the effect of attitudes toward Europe is positive in one case and negative in the other. Those with negative attitudes toward the European Union tend to be further to the right if they are right-wing citizens and further to the left if they are left-wing citizens! A similar pattern is observed in 1995 with the category law and order. These attitudes matter for all voters, but the relationship with left–right self-placement clearly is non-linear.

In Germany (Table 2), the contrast in the effect of economic preferences is very strong in 1994, 1998, and 2002 and exhibits a pattern similar to that of France. In 2005, however, the results are more surprising. Attitudes toward the welfare state matter for all voters, but the direction of the effect is reversed. On the left, as on the right, supporters of a more generous welfare state are further away from the ideological centre. This could mean that right-wing extremism in Germany combines cultural conservative positions with economic protection (not unlike the 'welfare chauvinist' strategy identified by Kitschelt 1995). However, because this supposition is based on a single case and on one in which the model's explanatory power is particularly weak, this conclusion is only tentative. The 2005 German election is also the only one in all five countries in which such an asymmetric effect is observed with respect to economic issue preferences. Turning to cultural issue preferences, the contrast between left-wing and right-wing citizens is less sharp. Attitudes toward immigration are related to the ideological position of both groups of voters. For right-wing citizens, it actually is the only issue category that has a systematic impact on ideological positions. Among left-wing

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[8] When estimating the same models with both subsamples together, the R^2 of OLS regressions (a metric with which most readers are likely to be familiar) is 9 times higher on average than the values of Tables 1–5.

citizens, on the other hand, anti-immigration is the only one among several issue categories that affect ideological self-placement.

The contrast in the effect of economic issue preferences is somewhat weaker in the Netherlands than in France and Germany (Table 3). Attitudes toward the welfare state and economic liberalism influence ideological self-positioning among all voters in 1994, 1998, and 2006. The relation is stronger for left-wing than right-wing citizens in 1998 and 2006. In 2002 and 2003, economic attitudes are unrelated to the ideological positioning of right-wing citizens, as expected. The contrast between the two groups of citizens is weaker than expected as far as economic attitudes are concerned, but the contrast is in the hypothesized direction. A similar conclusion can be drawn with respect to cultural issue preferences. Attitudes toward cultural liberalism and immigration tend to be relevant for both groups of voters, but these effects tend to be stronger on the right than on the left. Furthermore, the effect of cultural issue preferences generally is weaker than that of economic issue preferences among left-wing citizens, while the reverse pattern is present among voters located on the right-hand half of the ideological spectrum.

In Switzerland (Table 4), the relation of economic attitudes and ideology varies between left-wing and right-wing citizens. Preferences regarding economic liberalism and the welfare state have a weaker impact on the right than on the left (1999 and 2007 elections) or no impact at all among right-wing citizens (1995 and 2003). This pattern resembles that seen in the Netherlands data and it lends additional support to the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale. Regarding cultural issue categories, the estimated coefficients reveal important differences between the two groups of voters. Similar to what we observed in the other countries, the ideological position of both groups of voters relates to cultural attitudes, but generally not to the same ones. Among right-wing citizens, left–right positioning is mainly related to preferences about cultural liberalism and immigration. On the left, a surprisingly strong influence of attitudes toward national defence is evident; this category plays a very marginal role in the other countries analysed. In the 1995 and 1999 Swiss elections, these attitudes have about the same impact on the ideological positioning of left-wing citizens as preferences regarding the welfare state. This surprising result is likely a consequence of the popular votes on issues of national defence since the late 1980s.[9] Another surprising result appears in the 2007 election. Attitudes toward immigration have a strong impact in both groups of citizens, but not in the same direction. Respondents supporting a restrictive immigration policy tend to

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[9] Most famous among these is the popular initiative for the abolition of the Swiss army. This initiative was endorsed by many left-wing parties and movements, and it was supported by more than a third of the electorate in a 1989 popular vote. See, .e.g., Church (2004).

be further on the right among right-wing citizens and further on the left among left-wing citizens. The non-linearity in the issue–ideology relation is thus particularly clear in this instance.

In the United Kingdom, finally, left–right ideology is related to a smaller number of issue categories (Table 5). Citizens on the left are influenced mainly by their economic attitudes, as seen clearly in the 2001 and 2005 data. In 1997, the estimated coefficients are not significant at conventional levels, but they display relatively large point estimates. This points to the problem of multicollinearity: Attitudes towards the welfare state and economic liberalism are strongly correlated, which makes it difficult to disentangle their respective effects and leads to larger standard errors. When the same model is estimated after removing one of these two variables, the remaining indicator of economic preferences has a strong and significant impact.[10] The only other variable that is significantly related to the ideological self-placement of left-wing citizens is the attitude toward national defence in the 2005 election. In that case, the corresponding indicators are related to Britain's involvement in the war in Iraq.[11] This relationship with left-wing ideology is likely a product of the particularly strong association between the Iraq War and Tony Blair (Clarke et al. 2009). This effect of attitudes toward the Iraq War is the only exception to what is otherwise a very clear contrast between left-wing and right-wing respondents. Ideological placement in the former group of respondents depends only on economic attitudes (with the exception just mentioned). Among right-wing citizens, in contrast, left–right self-placement is related to cultural issue categories only. Attitudes toward European integration are relevant in all three elections, whereas attitudes toward cultural liberalism and immigration also have an impact in 2001 and 2005, respectively.

As summarized at the beginning of this section, these results offer strong support for the hypothesis of a curved left–right scale. The contrast between the two groups of respondents is particularly strong with respect to economic issues. In a large majority of cases, attitudes toward the welfare state and toward economic liberalism are significantly related to ideology among left-wing citizens but not among right-wing citizens. As far as cultural issue preferences are concerned, most of the elections show that they are related to ideology among all voters. However, in most cases it is not the same issue categories that matter for left-wing and right-wing citizens. Altogether, these results clearly support the idea that the relations

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[10] When the variable Welfare state is removed, the estimated coefficient of attitudes toward economic liberalism is significant at the 1 per cent level ($\beta=0.21$, $p=0.006$). When removing the variable Economic liberalism, the coefficient of the variable Welfare state is also significant at the 1 per cent level ($\beta=-0.24$, $p=0.008$).
[11] Cf. Table B53 in the online appendix.

between issue preferences and ideology are non-linear. These analyses were replicated with truncated regression models, and the results of the two estimation procedures are virtually identical as far as the direction, significance, and relative size of the coefficients are concerned.[12]

Discussion

This paper offers a picture of the left–right scale that differs in several respects from its traditional conception. As mentioned in the introduction, it is often assumed that the left–right dimension integrates a large number of more specific economic and cultural issues. The findings presented here do not question this integrative property of left–right ideology. The analyses confirmed that ideological preferences are related to a variety of different issues. Each of the issue categories used in the analyses was related to left–right ideology in one or several elections. At the same time, however, this study has shown that these relations usually are non-linear. The issues that influence left–right self-placement generally are not the same among left-wing and right-wing citizens. Attitudes toward the welfare state, for example, often are related to the ideological self-placement of left-wing citizens. Respondents on the far left tend to support the welfare state more strongly than centre-left citizens. In contrast, among right-wing citizens there usually is no such relationship. Moderate right-wing citizens are not more or not less in favour of the welfare state than those on the far right.

The hypothesis of a curved left–right scale seems to be largely supported by the analyses reported in this study. This has important implications for the analysis of ideology and issue preferences. In particular, it means that it may be problematic to infer issue preferences from left–right self-placement or vice-versa. Changes along the left–right scale do not always mean the same in terms of issues. If the left–right scale corresponded to the traditional interpretation, a move toward the right end of the ideological scale in a given context would always mean the same in terms of issue preferences. In a situation in which left–right ideology is associated with attitudes toward economic liberalism, a move toward the right would always imply a more positive attitude toward economic liberalism, whatever the starting position and the size of the move. In a situation similar to that of the 1995 French election, in contrast, a move toward the right cannot be interpreted in a straightforward way in terms of changing attitudes toward economic liberalism. The two are related among left-wing citizens but not among right-wing citizens. Being more on the right, thus, has no unequivocal meaning in terms of issue positions. It always depends on which positions are compared. Far-

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[12] Results from the truncated regression models are available in the online appendix.

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right voters are more on the right than both left-wing and moderate right-wing voters. Although they are likely to be economically more liberal than the former, their economic attitudes should not differ much from that of the latter group.

These findings mean that one must be cautious when inferring differences in issue preferences from ideological differences. They also point to potential problems in the reverse exercise. If the relations of issue preferences and ideology are non-linear, it is potentially misleading to infer ideological preferences from one's issue positions. Changes in the attitudes toward a specific issue may be associated with changes in ideological preferences for some voters but not for others. Continuing with the example of the 1995 French election, differences in attitudes toward economic liberalism are likely to be associated with ideological differences among left-wing citizens. In this group, those who are less in favour of economic liberalism tend to locate themselves further on the left. In contrast, among right-wing citizens, changes in preferences toward economic liberalism are not likely to have any consequence in terms of one's ideological self-placement. This means that measures of left–right orientations based on additive indexes or other linear combinations of attitudinal variables are potentially misleading.

Of course, these potential problems in the analysis of citizens' ideological preferences do not mean that measures of left–right self-placement are problematic per se. Quite to the contrary, the above results underscore the integrative capacity of the left–right dimension. Citizens' ideological positions seem to reflect both the two-dimensional nature of the political space and what seems to be a unidimensional 'space' of electoral competition. This result is encouraging from the standpoint of democratic representation. The unidimensionality of electoral competition is considered to be a central condition for a functioning system of political representation (Thomassen 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997; Mair 2008). If several dimensions structure voters' preferences and party positions, it becomes difficult for parties to claim a clear mandate from their electorate (Mair 2008). The two-dimensionality of the political space in Western Europe, as emphasized by several studies, could thus be a negative development. By showing how a single left–right dimension can be reconciled with a two-dimensional political space, the present study undermines the fears of a dysfunctional political representation in Western European countries.

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Figure 1. Two examples of one-dimensional alignments in a two-dimensional space

a) Left–right scale as a straight line

b) Curved left–right scale
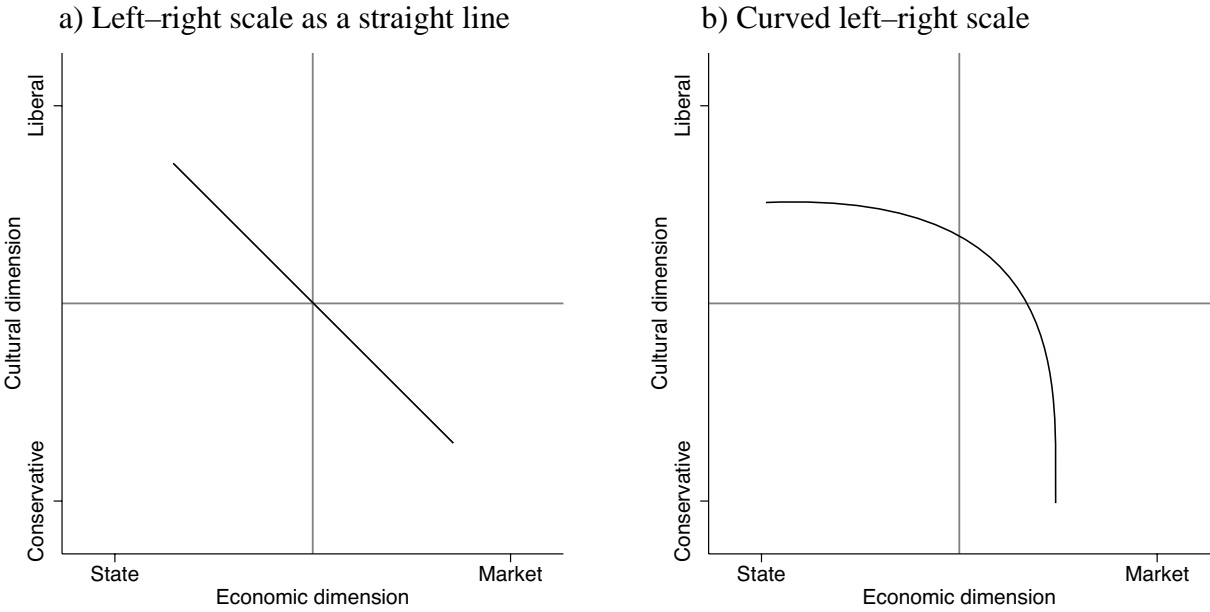
Table 1. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement by side of the left–right scale for France.

	1995		2002		2007	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Welfare state					–0.15**	0.06
Economic liberalism	0.26***	0.02	0.26***	–0.01	0.17***	0.08
Cultural liberalism	–0.04	–0.09*	0.07	–0.04	0.03	–0.11*
Traditional values			0.02	0.03		
National identity					0.11**	0.10*
European integration	0.10*	–0.03	0.16***	0.06	0.16***	–0.16***
Anti-immigration	0.04	0.30***	0.15*	0.37***	0.09	0.23***
National defence			0.07	–0.00		
Law and order	–0.12*	0.15***	–0.02	0.05	0.03	0.23***
Cutpoint 1	–1.12	0.22	–1.33	0.43	–1.81	–0.35
Cutpoint 2	–0.17	1.33	–0.27	1.35	–1.39	0.60
Cutpoint 3					–0.72	1.38
Cutpoint 4					0.23	1.83
Log likelihood	–1,006.20	–1,024.35	–814.03	–563.02	–1,198.25	–1,063.05
McFadden R^2	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.07
N	1,043	1,092	874	634	897	775

*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$*

Models estimated with ordered probit regressions

Table 2. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement by side of the left–right scale for Germany.

	1994		1998		2002		2005	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Welfare state	–0.18***	–0.02					–0.17***	0.17***
Economic liberalism	0.10**	0.06	0.24***	0.00	0.18***	0.08		
Cultural liberalism	–0.00	–0.06	–0.23***	–0.11	–0.20***	–0.11		
European integration			–0.00	0.09	0.11*	–0.09	–0.09***	–0.11**
Anti-immigration	0.16***	0.25***	0.14**	0.28***	0.29***	0.25***		
National defence	0.08*	0.10*						
Law and order	0.12**	–0.01						
Culture	–0.13***	0.01						
Cutpoint 1	–1.73	–0.01	–2.10	–0.18	–2.11	–0.22	–0.96	–0.67
Cutpoint 2	–1.16	0.77	–1.42	0.72	–1.38	0.55	–0.79	0.14
Cutpoint 3	–0.44	1.40	–0.47	1.43	–0.48	1.28	–0.20	0.50
Cutpoint 4	0.16	2.01	0.30	1.92	0.31	1.83	0.28	0.79
Log likelihood	–1,320.06	–737.40	–952.65	–366.18	–726.64	–428.59	–2,386.40	–1,373.90
McFadden R^2	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.01
N	962	575	718	275	538	312	1,653	907

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Models estimated with ordered probit regressions.

Table 3. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement by side of the left–right scale for the Netherlands.

	1994		1998		2002		2003		2006	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Welfare state			–0.26***	–0.13**					0.04	–0.15***
Economic liberalism	0.23***	0.21***	0.12*	0.09	0.27***	0.07	0.30***	0.03	0.32***	0.09*
Cultural liberalism	–0.22***	–0.34***	–0.14**	–0.30***	–0.23**	–0.19***	–0.12*	–0.19***	–0.04	–0.21***
Ethnic minorities	–0.05	–0.32***								
Euthanasia							–0.13**	–0.05		
Foreigners									–0.05	–0.06
European integration	0.08	0.05	0.02	–0.00	0.07	–0.04			0.11*	0.03
Anti-immigration	0.06	–0.14*	–0.01	0.11*	0.17**	0.19***	0.30***	0.29***	0.15*	0.15**
Enfranch. foreigners			0.13**	–0.08						
National defence	0.02	0.10*	0.11*	0.03					0.06	–0.01
Law and order	–0.07	–0.06	–0.00	0.03	–0.00	0.09	0.01	0.19***	–0.07	0.21***
Cutpoint 1	–1.78	–0.17	–2.00	–0.22	–2.42	–0.49	–1.83	–0.36	–1.73	–0.49
Cutpoint 2	–1.31	0.62	–1.36	0.74	–1.71	0.57	–1.21	0.46	–1.26	0.66
Cutpoint 3	–0.45	1.74	–0.44	1.74	–0.85	1.51	–0.30	1.66	–0.59	1.77
Cutpoint 4	0.38	2.07	0.36	2.21	0.15	1.96	0.35	2.20	0.36	2.31
Log likelihood	–808.83	–726.72	–987.92	–873.88	–666.50	–843.52	–898.29	–682.20	–822.96	–1,027.78
McFadden R^2	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.05
N	583	569	724	691	529	635	641	522	589	828

*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$*

Models estimated with ordered probit regressions.

Table 4. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement by side of the left–right scale for Switzerland.

	1995		1999		2003		2007	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Welfare state	–0.27***	–0.05	–0.26***	–0.18***	–0.29***	–0.07	–0.22***	–0.16***
Economic liberalism			0.12*	–0.07			0.25***	0.01
Cultural liberalism	0.06	–0.15*	0.07	–0.19***			–0.12*	–0.28***
European integration	–0.05	0.01	0.03	–0.08	0.06	–0.18***	–0.07	–0.13*
Anti-immigration	–0.02	0.20***	–0.02	0.12*	0.25***	0.26***	–0.20**	0.16***
National defence	0.29***	–0.04	0.23***	0.09			0.13*	0.06
Law and order	–0.01	0.19***	0.07	0.07			0.01	0.09
Cutpoint 1	–1.74	–0.40	–1.47	–0.39	–1.17	–0.60	–1.42	–0.45
Cutpoint 2	–1.51	0.35	–1.15	0.44	–0.96	0.38	–1.18	0.33
Cutpoint 3	–1.00	1.18	–0.55	1.36	–0.38	1.23	–0.56	1.26
Cutpoint 4	–0.10	1.41	0.29	1.57	0.42	1.43	0.24	1.44
Log likelihood	–654.84	–820.16	–684.72	–851.55	–772.26	–814.84	–646.92	–893.88
McFadden R^2	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.05
N	507	579	475	617	528	582	455	640

*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$*
Models estimated with ordered probit regressions.

Table 5. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement by side of the left–right scale for the United Kingdom.

	1997		2001		2005	
	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Welfare state	−0.18	−0.05	−0.10	0.05	−0.34***	0.06
Economic liberalism	0.16	−0.08	0.20**	0.03		
Cultural liberalism	−0.05	−0.10	−0.08	−0.21**		
National identity	−0.03	−0.11				
European integration	0.01	−0.14*	0.08	−0.17*	−0.04	−0.16**
Anti-immigration	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.16	−0.15	0.14*
National defence	0.09	0.08			0.19**	−0.07
Law and order	0.04	0.07	0.10	0.02	−0.16	0.03
Cutpoint 1	−1.60	−0.52	−1.85	−0.30	−1.87	−0.27
Cutpoint 2	−1.17	0.37	−1.45	0.48	−1.51	0.60
Cutpoint 3	−0.52	1.05	−0.78	1.06	−0.77	1.45
Cutpoint 4	0.29	1.27	0.12	1.36	0.09	1.84
Log likelihood	−795.13	−815.80	−471.36	−553.62	−623.17	−1,174.99
McFadden R^2	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.02
N (weighted)	454	479	372	383	489	942

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Models estimated with ordered probit regression. The observations are weighted to compensate for the overrepresentation of respondents from Scotland and Wales.