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Party ideology and legislative agendas: Estimating contextual policy positions for the study of EU decision-making

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Abstract

This article introduces a novel approach for generating agenda-related estimates of the policy positions of political parties from party manifestos and expert surveys. We show that current party estimates provide for little variation across policy areas and over time. In response, we propose to relate the issue-specific ideological preference profiles of political parties to the legislative context. For the dimensional representation of policy positions of political parties our procedure weights the issue-specific preference profiles by their prominence on the agenda of each policy area. We apply this procedure to EU legislation and locate national political parties on a national/supranational and left/right dimension, which can be used for the analysis of Council decision-making.

Keywords

EU decision-making, EUR-Lex, issue saliences, legislative agenda, party ideology

Introduction

In recent years, the quantitative analysis of decision-making in the European Union (EU) – whether for legislative, implementation, or enforcement

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politics – has made enormous progress. Scholars have successfully gathered rich datasets, most of them extracted from official databases of the EU (Häge, 2011; Hertz and Leuffen, 2011; König et al., 2006; Schulz and König, 2000), and explored the impact of various characteristics over a large number of Commission policy proposals and EU legislative acts. They found that institutional provisions matter at all stages of EU decision-making. These include the voting rules in the Council of Ministers and the participation of the European Parliament at the legislative stage (Golub, 1999, 2007; Golub and Steunenberg, 2007; Hagemann and Høyland, 2010; Hertz and Leuffen, 2011; König, 2007; Schulz and König, 2000), the type of instrument and the delegation of power at the implementation stage (Franchino, 2007; Franchino and Høyland, 2009; König and Luetgert, 2009; Luetgert and Dannwolf, 2009; Thomson and Torenvlied, 2011), and the volume of the act and the institutional fit at the enforcement stage (Börzel et al., 2010; König and Mäder, 2013; Steunenberg, 2010; Thomson et al., 2007). And yet, in order to fully understand the impact of these characteristics, scholars are still searching for reliable and robust estimates of actors' policy positions, which can capture variation across areas and over time.¹

This article argues that variation in actors' policy positions is essential for evaluating the empirical implications of decision-making theories, which make assumptions about actors' strategies and choices in policy contexts. These theories have in common that they predict the political behaviour of individual and collective actors by their choice to set a policy agenda, to amend and adopt policies, and to implement and comply with them. For EU decision-making, some authors classify these theories according to their (non-)cooperative assumption and distinguish between bargaining and voting (Selck, 2004: 205) or refer to an important feature of the theory, such as Commission appointment (Crombez, 1997; Crombez and Hix, 2011), policy stability (König and Pöter, 2001; Tsebelis, 2002, 2008), policy delegation (Franchino, 2007; König and Mäder, 2008), and parliamentary involvement (Franchino and Høyland, 2009). As variation in actors' policy positions is indispensable for this research, we will introduce a procedure that produces area- and time-variant policy positions for EU decision-making.

Until now, scholars of EU decision-making have been forced to make strong assumptions about actors' policy positions. Except for a few studies, many analyses control for changes only by crucial events, such as the accession of new member states, the coming into force of a new treaty, or changes of government composition in the member states, with dummy variables that may indicate confounding effects (Bechtel and Leuffen, 2010; Golub, 1999, 2007; Golub and Steunenberg, 2007). Controlling for real time has often revealed a significant effect in EU decision-making but it remains speculative whether this confounding effect indeed comes from the political phenomenon under investigation, or from some other event. A typical example is Golub's (2007) discussion of the so-called Thatcher effect in 1984 for the duration of EU decision-making, whereas the UK position empirically changed only in 1979 (when Margaret Thatcher became

Prime Minister) as well as in 1997 (when Tony Blair came into office) and was more moderate than the narratives suggest (König, 2008: 161).

In the remainder of this article, we start with a brief discussion of the pros and cons of existing estimates of *ideological* positions of political parties on EU politics. Although hand coding of party manifestos (e.g., into CMP categories; Comparative Manifestos Project; Volkens, 2005; Volkens et al., 2011; Werner et al., 2011) and expert surveys (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; Laver and Hunt, 1992; Ray, 1999; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007) are important sources from which researchers can draw inferences on the behaviour of political actors, all existing estimates provide for little variation. We show that quantitative scholars of EU decision-making are therefore forced to impute most data. To overcome this deficit we follow Lowe et al. (2011) and identify *issue-specific* ideological preference profiles. Unlike salience theory, which claims that political parties compete by individually emphasizing particular issues (for example, Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Petrocik et al., 2003; Rovny, 2012), we weight the entire set of issue-specific party positions by their agenda prominence when aggregating them to a left/right and national/supranational dimension. To apply our procedure, we generate a large dataset for the study of EU decision-making, which covers nine Council policy areas and seven Commission terms in the period from 1983 to 2009.²

In addition to their area- and time-variant nature, a major advantage of these estimates is that they are reliable and robust in the sense that they can be replicated by following the description of our procedure. We also report the measurement uncertainty for our estimates, that results from (in)consistency between actor-specific and agenda-related issue saliencies. Finally, our estimates are not restricted to one-dimensional situations and can therefore be applied to analytical concepts such as the core and the win-set in higher-dimensional policy spaces (Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Hammond and Miller, 1987; Hinich and Munger, 1997; König and Bräuninger, 2004; McKelvey, 1976, 1979; Tsebelis, 2002, 2008).

Ideological preference profiles on EU politics

Data about the ideological preference profiles of political actors allow scholars to investigate important questions, which range from the evolution of a political system to the functioning of 'day-to-day'-politics. In this article, we are interested in the preference profiles of political actors in EU decision-making, in particular in those that can be used for the quantitative study of the Council. Before presenting our concept, data source, and method, we briefly discuss the (dis)advantages of existing estimates for measuring such policy positions.

Roll calls and mass surveys

In addition to expert surveys (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; Laver and Hunt, 1992; Ray, 1999; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007) and party manifestos (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Wüst and Volkens, 2003), scholars

have employed the protocols of the Council's secretariat to estimate ideological positions from roll-call data (Hagemann, 2007; Hagemann and Høyland, 2010; Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace, 2006; Heisenberg, 2005; Mattila, 2004, 2009; Mattila and Lane, 2001) or inferred attitudes from supporters and opponents in public opinion surveys such as Eurobarometer (Hug and König, 2002; Schmitt, 2003) and European Parliament voter studies (EES, 2009a; van Egmond et al., 2010).

Although these sources are available for a longer term, there remain serious drawbacks in the data-generation process of roll-call data and inferring mass survey values. While the member states pursue different interests in policy-making, the committee system of the Council facilitates logrolling within and across areas, which can explain the high rate of consensus (König and Junge, 2009). Most importantly, member states report their votes to the Council secretariat only *ex post* and decide case by case whether to make their vote public. A few legislative transparency reforms began in the mid-1990s, but acts concerning international relations and (inter-)institutional measures are still excluded. As a result, studies using Council roll-call data, which report consensus with very little variation of No-votes and abstentions, risk selection bias by strategic considerations of the member states.

Mass surveys make strong assumptions about the information level of voters and the aggregation of interests, discounting principal-agent problems between the attitudes of voters and the ideological positions of political parties. For small parties, it is also almost impossible to make inferences from a very small number of voters. And, perhaps more seriously, the attitudes often refer to broader issues of European integration than to the more specific policy issues that arise from the legislative agenda in the Council. What remains is information from either party manifestos or expert judgements on political parties, which can be used for estimating ideological preference profiles on EU politics.

Expert surveys and party manifestos

The advantage of expert surveys is that they are relatively inexpensive, with response rates of about 30 percent for the Benoit and Laver (2006) dataset and roughly 40 percent for the Chapel Hill dataset (Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). Expert surveys rely on the verdict of national specialists, who are asked about the ideological positions of political parties on a set of predefined scales. However, Proksch and Lo (2012) demonstrate that expert measures hide an important feature of the EU when national specialists strongly agree on the placement of Eurosceptic parties but differ with regard to the location of Europhile parties. More seriously, expert survey estimates simplify the ideological positions of political parties at a higher level of abstraction, where the left/right and pro-/anti-European scales are the prime examples of simplification, which may lie behind a more issue-specific distribution of preference profiles. This becomes obvious for the pro-/anti-European scales of Ray (1999) and Chapel Hill, where expert

questions mostly refer to constitutional matters with standard deviations that are higher for these values than those for left/right scales. Even the more policy-specific Chapel Hill questions hardly reflect the Council's legislative agenda, i.e. the changing content of secondary (Council/European Parliament) and tertiary (Commission) legislation.

Compared with expert surveys, party manifesto data were originally compiled to test theories of democratic representation by political parties, which explains the composition of the coding scheme of the CMP categories (Manifesto Project; Budge et al, 1987; Budge et al, 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Volkens, 2005; Volkens et al., 2011; Werner et al., 2011) and EMP categories (Euromanifesto Project; Braun et al., 2007; Braun et al., 2010; EES, 2009b; Wüst and Volkens, 2003). Apart from pledges to the voters, party manifestos also serve other purposes, such as to signal policy goals to other political parties for coalition-building or to remind and discipline members on the programme of their own political party.

To extract this information from manually coded CMP and EMP categories, some authors apply factor analytical (Gabel and Huber, 2000) or multi-dimensional scaling techniques (Veen, 2011a), which collapse the whole set of categories into a smaller number of ideological components. Alternatively, Laver and Budge (1992), Benoit and Laver (2007), and Lowe et al. (2011) assign a priori CMP categories to ideological issues that have been used for studying EU decision-making (for example, Warntjen et al., 2008), while Franchino (2007) and König (2007) attempt to distinguish between policy areas by assigning CMP categories; Veen (2011b) by assigning EMP categories. Even though this procedure provides more variation across areas, the existing a priori assignments of categories are also less than optimal for four reasons.

First, the available categories differ quite substantially in their number per policy area. Second, Commission proposals and EU legislative acts often refer to more than one category. For example, *Protectionism/positive* is frequently mentioned in both competitiveness and agricultural affairs and we find many references to *Social justice/positive* in general as well as in social and educational affairs (see the keyword search described in the fourth section of this article). Third, the CMP/EMP categories generally reflect ideological rather than area-specific policy positions. Fourth, variation in ideological positions results from own input, which changes only through election campaigns.

In our view, CMP/EMP and expert survey data remain the most useful sources of information on actors' ideological positions. To offset their shortcomings for the quantitative study of EU decision-making, including their area- and time-invariant nature, we start by estimating issue-specific ideological preference profiles which we aggregate to the two prominent dimensions in the study of EU decision-making. We will further show how these profiles, which we derive from party manifestos and expert surveys, allow for additional variation when we consider the relevance of each issue by the area- and time-specific contents of the EU's legislative agenda.

Issue-specific ideological preference profiles on EU politics

Data generation of estimates for actors' policy positions raises questions about concept and sources, measurement and cross-validity as well as coverage and variation. Conceptually, we can distinguish between one- and multi-dimensional policy spaces with potential impact on the explanatory power of decision-making theories. Similarly, several algorithms exist for calculating actors' locations in this one- or multi-dimensional policy space (Lowe et al., 2011). Finally, it is appropriate to compare the new data with existing estimates before we can evaluate their coverage and variation. We discuss each of these concerns below.

Two dimensions in the study of EU decision-making

For the study of EU decision-making, scholars use either a national/supranational and/or a left/right dimension (Gabel and Hix, 2002; Hix and Høyland, 2011; Warntjen et al., 2008). Marks and Steenbergen (2002) distinguish four concepts for the EU policy space: the international relations concept, with European integration as the single dimension; the regulation concept, with a single left/right dimension; the Hooghe-Marks concept, with both dimensions strongly related to each other (Hooghe and Marks, 1999); and the Hix-Lord concept, with both dimensions orthogonal to each other (Hix and Lord, 1997). Theoretically, König and Bräuninger (2004) provide a theoretical foundation for the Hix-Lord concept, according to which EU decision-making is represented by input and output dimensions. In this model, the input side considers the more country-specific preference for (supra)nationalism, while the output side refers to the more party-specific preference for the level of state activity in a selected policy area.

Benoit and Laver (2012) recommend that de facto knowledge of relevant dimensions should be part of the estimation process. To estimate issue-specific preference profiles on each of the two dimensions, we follow Lowe et al. (2011) and assign standard CMP categories to ideological issues, which we relate to one of the two dimensions. Instead of EMP, we use CMP categories for our application to the Council. The ministers in the Council are delegated by national parliamentary parties, which often build coalitions to form governments in the member states (and/or require parliamentary support for minority governments). As our key units are national parties pursuing their own party interests in the Council, we extract their issue-specific preference profiles from CMP data.

From these CMP categories we generate issue-specific preference profiles for three national/supranational and 13 left/right issues for the period between 1983 and 2009. The intuition for this procedure is that political parties differ in their issue-specific ideological positions, which we aggregate to the two dimensions. Applied to the agenda of secondary and tertiary legislation, our first dimension accounts not only for the location of policies at the EU or national levels but also for the relationship between the EU and non-member states and for the national implementation of EU policies. The second dimension refers to left/right in a more

general sense comprising economic, societal, and (post)materialist issues. Table 1 lists our assignments.

From the 56 standard CMP categories, we assign 38 to one of the two dimensions, with three national/supranational (i101–i103) and 13 left/right (i201–i213) issues. This set includes ten bipolar pairs and six additive scales.³ With respect to existing classifications, our *quality of life* issue is identical to the environmental protection scale proposed by Lowe et al. (2011: 139) and the *freedom* and *welfare state* issues resemble the policy scales of Veen (2011b: 270–271) for justice/home affairs and welfare/social security. Except for *national way of life*, the issues on the national/supranational dimension are highly correlated. On the left/right dimension, *protectionism* and *quality of life* differ notably from the overall preference profile. On closer inspection, we find that country- and party family-related patterns explain the variation on both dimensions.⁴

Calculating estimates and cross-validation

For calculating ideological positions on these issues, we take into account the length and composition of party manifestos, using the absolute number of quasi-sentences per CMP category. To apply the recommended logit scale, we add a constant term of 0.5 to each pole of the underlying national/supranational and left/right dimension, before we calculate the issue-specific position for each party (Lowe et al., 2011). We finally aggregate the issue-specific positions for each dimension by summing across all issues and dividing by the number of issues. Note that this procedure excludes individual saliencies of political parties and assumes no weighting of each issue. To provide insight into measurement uncertainty, we bootstrap each manifesto by drawing 2,000 random samples from a multinomial distribution (see Benoit et al., 2009).⁵ This generates mean values and standard errors for both the underlying CMP categories and the two ideological dimensions. Formally, we generate our estimates for the national/supranational and left/right dimension in the following manner:

$$p_{ns} = [(\log(p_{101s} + 0.5) - \log(p_{101n} + 0.5)) + \dots + (\log(p_{103s} + 0.5) - \log(p_{103n} + 0.5))]/3$$

$$p_{lr} = [(\log(p_{201r} + 0.5) - \log(p_{201l} + 0.5)) + \dots + (\log(p_{213r} + 0.5) - \log(p_{213l} + 0.5))]/13$$

For cross-validation with original CMP and expert survey estimates, Figures A1 and A2 in the Web Appendix firstly display kernel density plots of these values on the national/supranational and left/right dimensions. The national/supranational values of the original CMP scores, which are based on individual party salience, suffer from very high density close to 0 because there are only two categories for measuring this dimension (see Lowe et al., 2011; Veen, 2011b: 273–274). We also detect a skewed distribution owing to high density on very positive EU values in all expert surveys, which suggests that experts have difficulty in locating the ideological positions of political parties on the first dimension. In this vein,

Table 1. Issue-based dimensions derived from CMP categories

Dimension	Issue	Poles
national/supranational	i101 Internationalism	p101n_109 Internationalism/negative
national/supranational	i102 European integration	p102n_110 European integration/negative
national/supranational	i103 National way of life	p103n_601 National way of life/positive
left/right	i201 Military	p201l_105 Military/positive
left/right	i202 Freedom	p201l_106 Peace/positive
left/right	i203 Administration	p202l_201 Freedom and human rights/positive
left/right	i204 Enterprise	p202l_202 Democracy/positive
left/right	i205 Market	p203l_404 Economic planning/positive
left/right	i206 Protectionism	p203l_405 Corporatism/positive
left/right	i207 Macroeconomics	p204l_412 Controlled economy/positive
left/right	i208 Quality of life	p204l_413 Nationalization/positive
left/right	i209 Welfare state	p205l_403 Market regulation/positive
left/right	i210 Traditional morality	p206l_406 Protectionism/positive
left/right	i211 Multiculturalism	p207l_409 Keynesian demand management/positive
left/right	i212 Labour groups	p208l_416 Anti-growth economy/positive
left/right	i213 Target groups	p208l_501 Environmental protection/positive
		p209l_503 Social justice/positive
		p209l_504 Welfare state expansion/positive
		p210l_604 Traditional morality/negative
		p211l_607 Multiculturalism/positive
		p212l_701 Labour groups/positive
		p213l_705 Underprivileged minority groups/positive
		p101s_107 Internationalism/positive
		p102s_108 European integration/positive
		p103s_602 National way of life/negative
		p201r_104 Military/positive
		p202r_605 Law and order/positive
		p203r_303 Governmental and administrative efficiency/positive
		p204r_401 Free enterprise/positive
		p205r_402 Incentives/positive
		p206r_407 Protectionism/negative
		p207r_414 Economic orthodoxy/positive
		p208r_410 Productivity/positive
		p209r_505 Welfare state limitation/positive
		p210r_603 Traditional morality/positive
		p211r_608 Multiculturalism/negative
		p212r_702 Labour groups/negative
		p213r_704 Middle-class and professional groups/positive

Proksch and Lo (2012) have shown that the strong correlation between expert survey estimates on this dimension does not hold for Europhile parties when differentiating between terciles in the range of data. Regarding the second dimension, CMP Rile and our issue-based data are more normally distributed than the left/right expert values, for which we observe bimodal distributions.

Finally, we apply a strong cross-validation test with expert data and evaluate the preference profiles of political parties across all member states instead of only checking their domestic ordering. In general, the correlation between estimates from different data sources (party manifestos versus expert surveys; see Benoit and Laver, 2007) is considerably lower than the correlation between estimates from the same sources (comparison of expert surveys; see Hooghe et al., 2010). In order to cross-validate our estimates with issue-based scales derived from expert surveys, we calculate the ideological position of each political party by summing the issue-specific scores across all issues and dividing by the number of issues. Note that we cannot apply a logit scale because data about ideological poles are missing.

Table 2 reports high Pearson and Spearman correlations for all left/right estimates and lower correlations on the national/supranational dimension. There are two reasons for the latter results. First, the distributions of other estimates are

Table 2. Correlations between issue-based scales derived from CMP and other positional estimates

Dimension	Measurement	N	Pearson correlation	Spearman correlation
national/supranational	CMP EU integration	686	0.53	0.63
national/supranational	Ray EU integration	346	0.49	0.41
national/supranational	Chapel Hill EU integration	418	0.47	0.37
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	418	0.46	0.36
national/supranational	Benoit-Laver EU	113	-0.53	-0.43
left/right	CMP Rile	686	0.71	0.77
left/right	Ray LRGEN	320	0.75	0.77
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	95	0.81	0.85
left/right	Chapel Hill LRGEN	418	0.68	0.71
left/right	Benoit-Laver left/right	108	0.66	0.65
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	113	0.62	0.62

Notes: CMP reference years: election years (without extrapolation). Ray reference years: 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996. Laver-Hunt reference year: 1989. Chapel Hill reference years: 1999, 2002, and 2006. Benoit-Laver reference year: 2003. Chapel Hill issues: EU foreign and security, EU fiscal, EU asylum, EU employment, EU internal market, EU cohesion, EU agriculture, and EU environment. Benoit-Laver issues: EU authority, EU larger, EU strengthening and nationalism. Laver-Hunt issues: foreign, taxes/public services, religion, social, public ownership, urban/rural, and environment. Benoit-Laver issues: peacekeeping, spending/taxes, religion, immigration, civil liberties, social, privatization, deregulation, urban/rural, and environment.

cumulated, with either very high density close to 0 (original CMP) or positive values (expert surveys). Second, and more importantly, other estimates disregard *internationalism* and *national way of life* issues, but these are important in secondary and tertiary legislation.

Interestingly, the correlation coefficients calculated for different ranges of our issue-based national/supranational data are by far the highest with regard to the national tercile. This corroborates the findings of Proksch and Lo (2012), according to which expert agreement on the location of Eurosceptic parties is stronger. In sum, our demanding cross-validation test reveals similar orderings of the ideological positions of the political parties in the member states. This suggests that our issue-specific ideological estimates are in accordance with existing estimates.

Coverage and variation

For the period between 1983 and 2009, our dataset contains 689 values for political parties represented in the national parliaments of the member states, which change their national/supranational and left/right position only in election years.⁶ For the quantitative study of EU decision-making in the same period, the data matrix contains 3,583 cells (27 years times the number of political parties from ten to 27 member states). Given our 689 observations, we must impute 2,619 party values for the time in-between electoral years⁷ and extrapolate 275 party values for entries where CMP data are still missing. These numbers are typical for CMP applications to quantitative legislative analysis because CMP data provide variation only between election periods. They would further increase to 32,247 area-specific observations if we additionally distinguished nine policy areas in the Council.

Compared with CMP, expert surveys on the positions of political parties were carried out on a less regular basis. For example, the data by Ray (1999) have been compiled for 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 and contains 346 EU and 320 left/right values. Similarly, there are 418 values for EU and left/right from the Chapel Hill expert surveys (1999, 2002 and 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). The Benoit-Laver (2006) expert dataset, mostly compiled in 2003, contains 113 EU values derived from an inverse wording of the question for the first dimension (supranational/national) and 108 left/right values. In addition, 418 values exist for specific issues on common policies from Chapel Hill. For specific left/right questions it is possible to employ 95 values from Laver-Hunt (1992) and 113 values from Benoit-Laver.⁸ The data sources differ quite substantially in their coverage of ideological dimensions/issues, member states, and Commission terms, which include the Commissions Thorn (1983–4; full year assignment), Delors I (1985–8), Delors II (1989–92), Delors III (1993–4), Santer/Marín (1995–9), Prodi (2000–4), and Barroso I (2005–9) (see Table A1 in the Web Appendix).

Naturally, the original CMP data and our issue-based dataset derived from CMP are similar in their coverage of Commission terms. For four member states, the original CMP data (without extrapolation) are still incomplete. However, we also note that expert survey data are more affected by missingness.

Ray's expert data do not cover issue-specific items and generally omit Luxembourg. The Chapel Hill expert surveys ignore specific left/right issues and also fail to include Luxembourg, Cyprus, and Malta. The Laver-Hunt data were generated only once for left/right issues before the European Free Trade Association enlargements. Finally, the Benoit-Laver data reveal shortcomings on national/supranational issues, do not provide left/right values for France and cover Central and East European countries only before their accessions in May 2004 and January 2007. Compared with manifestos, which political parties commonly present before each election, expert surveys are generated on an ad hoc basis and have possible country effects, whereby the positions of political parties of some countries are generated before an election, and others after an election.

This overview demonstrates that scholars of EU decision-making must still impute/extrapolate most data when using existing estimates of the policy positions of political parties. In addition to their time-invariant nature, the available party values often force scholars to make strong simplifications for the area-specific representation of their policy positions on a national/supranational and a left/right dimension. As treaty revisions have amended the area-specific policy competencies of the Commission almost every five years in the past, it would be surprising if these changes did not have important implications for the legislative agenda.

EULIS: European Legislation and Ideological positions in policy Spaces

To overcome the area- and time-invariant nature of existing party estimates, we propose to relate the issue-specific estimates of party manifestos, expert surveys, or any other kind of data on parties' policy positions to their occurrence in the Commission's legislative agenda. For generating *agenda-related*, time- and area-specific variation on each of the two dimensions, we weight the issue-specific preference profiles by their prominence in EU legislative acts. This collective salience measure varies over time and area, quantifying the relative prominence of an issue on the legislative agenda. The intuition of our approach is that political parties pursue relatively constant ideological positions on each issue, whereas the relative importance of each issue in the dimensional representation of all parties might change owing to their prominence.

Identifying issue prominence in the legislative agenda

To specify issue prominence in EU legislative acts (see the overview of existing measures of salience in EU legislative politics presented by Warntjen, 2012), we download the documents of 79,543 legislative acts from the EUR-Lex service.⁹ In addition to directives, regulations, and decisions, we include other acts because they play a crucial role in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (common positions, joint actions, and common strategies), in the former Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (common positions and framework

decisions), and particularly in EU competition policy (merger and joint venture decisions). Our compilation contains the bibliographic notices and original texts of each secondary and tertiary legislative act that was adopted in the period between 1983 and 2009.

According to the directory code in the bibliographic notice, we assign each act to one of nine policy areas, which are oriented to the Council configurations before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. These areas distinguish between general affairs and external relations, economic and financial affairs, justice and home affairs, employment and social policy, competitiveness, transport, agriculture and fisheries, environment, and education. To relate the texts to the policy positions, we run a computerized keyword search in the volume of the documents, which we stored for each Council policy area per Commission term. This search starts by extracting keywords from the CMP coding instructions for the categories assigned to the issues, followed by counting the number of hits for these keywords (for codings, see Table A2 in the Web Appendix).¹⁰ Figure 1 exemplifies our approach for two issues of ideological contestation, *enterprise* and *quality of life*.

Both issues consist of two left CMP categories and one right category. In our example, we search for these issues by three keywords for each issue (*control* + econom* versus free* and competiti**; *ecolog* and free of* versus productiv**) with simultaneous use of exclusion terms. Whereas only one keyword is found for *enterprise*, there is one hit for each of the three keywords for *quality of life*. Consequently, *quality of life* counts for more than *enterprise* in the legislative act; that is, the issue salience of *quality of life* amounts to 75 percent. The two issues define the area-specific left/right ordering of the three actors A, B, and C as follows: actor A is located on a left/right scale (0 to 10) at value 1.0 for the first issue, whereas actors B (2.0) and C (5.0) pursue a more rightist position on this issue. On the second issue, the ordering is A with 1.0, C with 2.0, and B with 3.0. Without considering prominence on the legislative agenda, there is no difference in the weighting of the two issues and the two orderings add up to a dimensional preference profile for A of 1.0, for B of 2.5, and for C of 3.5. When weighting the prominence of each issue, the second issue (75 percent) is more important than the first (25 percent) for the overall preference profile. As a result, the ordering would be A with 1.0, but B and C share a policy position of 2.75. Hence, although we keep the ideological ordering at the issue level constant, the dimensional preference profile can change with the varying prominence of each issue.

To reduce measurement error we generate a text corpus of EU legislative acts stored for Commission terms by Council policy area. Figure A3 in the Web Appendix shows the dispersion of each issue salience based on the standard deviation divided by the mean across Council policy areas and Commission terms, respectively. The coefficients of variation across Council policy areas and Commission terms show hardly any correlation ($r = .09$). Issues such as *labour groups* and *multiculturalism* reveal high area-specificity but relatively low

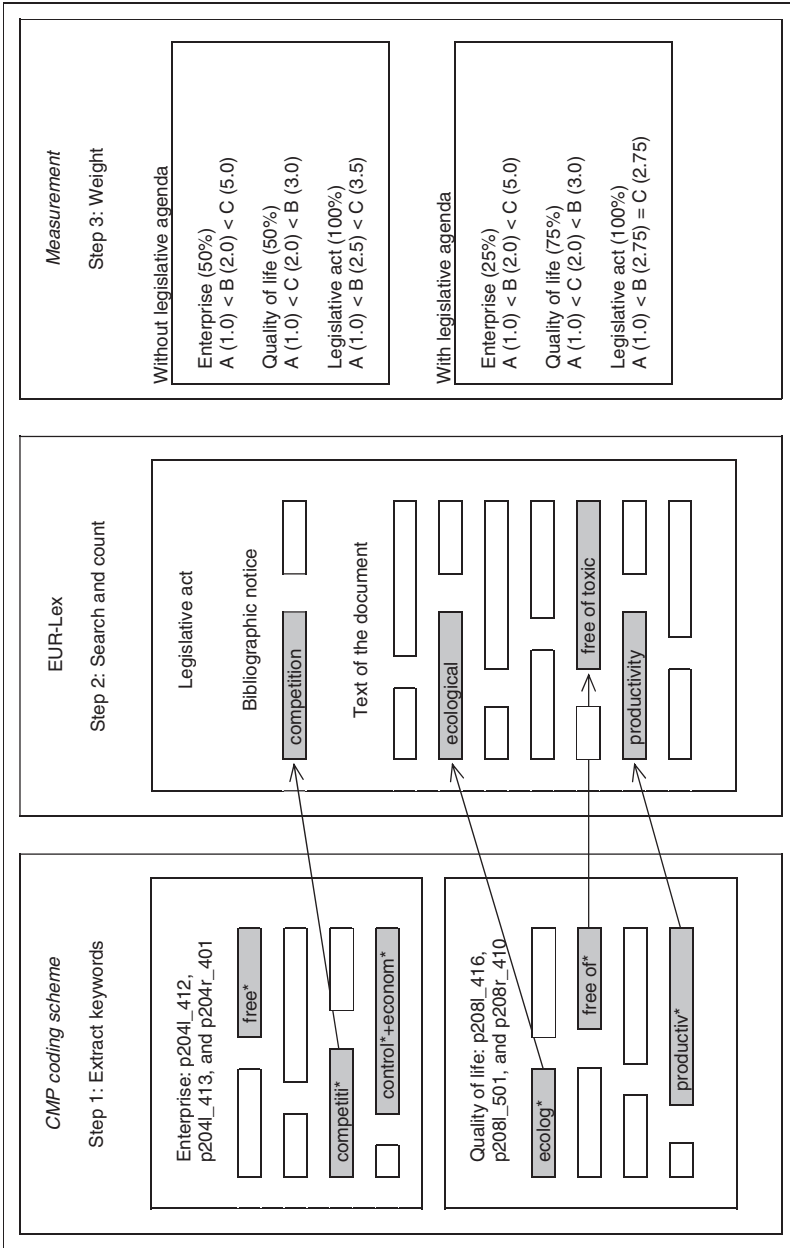


Figure 1. Smart tagging the legislative agenda with EULIS.

term-specificity. We observe the opposite for *administration* and *EU integration* issues. Only references to *protectionism* and *military* seem to be highly specific on both matters. This suggests that our approach identifies agenda-related estimates that vary considerably across areas and over time.

Calculating agenda-related point and uncertainty estimates

For relating the agenda prominence of each issue to domestic party competition, we multiply the issue-specific scores, derived from the logit scale proposed by Lowe et al. (2011), by the corresponding weightings extracted from the content of legislative acts and sum up across all issues. This algorithm considers issue salience (s_{101} – s_{213}) measured by the hits of keywords for each issue divided by the total number of hits per dimension and multiplied by 100. Again, we estimate the mean values and corresponding standard errors for each dimension by bootstrapping each party manifesto, drawing 2,000 random samples from a multinomial distribution (Benoit et al., 2009). Formally, we calculate EULIS estimates on the national/supranational and left/right dimensions in the following manner:

$$\text{eulis}_{\text{ns}} = [(\log(p_{101s} + 0.5) - \log(p_{101n} + 0.5)) \times s_{101} + \dots + (\log(p_{103s} + 0.5) - \log(p_{103n} + 0.5)) \times s_{103}] / 100$$

$$\text{eulis}_{\text{lr}} = [(\log(p_{201r} + 0.5) - \log(p_{201l} + 0.5)) \times s_{201} + \dots + (\log(p_{213r} + 0.5) - \log(p_{213l} + 0.5)) \times s_{213}] / 100.$$

Note that measurement uncertainty increases when issues rarely used in party manifestos are frequently identified in the legislative agenda. The agenda relationship expands the original 3,583 cases to 32,247 area-specific observations by considering nine Council policy areas. Table 3 shows how often the ordinal preference profiles of the member states change as a consequence of the applied agenda relationship per Council policy area and Commission term. Accordingly, 71 percent of all parties change their rank in the domestic preference profile for the national/supranational dimension and 79 percent for the left/right dimension, respectively. On closer inspection of the Council policy areas, we find the highest values on national/supranational in agriculture and fisheries as a traditional area of EU activities and in the newly conflictual field of employment and social policy. On the left/right dimension, we observe the highest values in justice and home affairs, where societal issues are of paramount importance, in environmental affairs, where the quality of life issue has the lion's share, and in the area of agriculture and fisheries, where different economic, societal, and (post-)materialist issue saliences explain the changes in the domestic preference profiles. Compared with existing estimates, these EULIS numbers illustrate the considerable amount of variation when we relate the policy positions of political parties to the legislative agenda of the Commission.

Table 3. Impact of EULIS on ordinal preference profiles in EU member states (percentages)

	national/ supranational	left/right
Commission term: Thorn	55.56	53.33
Commission term: Delors I	77.78	78.57
Commission term: Delors II	79.49	84.62
Commission term: Delors III	68.06	75.00
Commission term: Santer/Marín	70.18	79.53
Commission term: Prodi	73.89	84.44
Commission term: Barroso I	66.01	79.41
Council policy area: General affairs and external relations	71.68	74.34
Council policy area: Economic and financial affairs	70.80	77.88
Council policy area: Justice and home affairs	76.99	84.96
Council policy area: Employment and social policy	83.19	77.88
Council policy area: Competitiveness	61.95	84.07
Council policy area: Transport	58.41	71.68
Council policy area: Agriculture and fisheries	85.84	84.96
Council policy area: Environment	65.49	84.96
Council policy area: Education	62.83	73.45
Total	70.80	79.35

Notes: Calculations are based on observations in election years.

Cross-validity of agenda-related positional estimates

To cross-validate the EULIS estimates, we also apply our approach to the issue-based scales derived from the Chapel Hill, Laver-Hunt, and Benoit-Laver expert surveys. From the descriptions of their questionnaires, we extract keywords and search in the same body of secondary and tertiary legislation. Note that, although we are able to run our keyword search for all three expert surveys, the descriptions of these sources are less informative than the coding instructions for manual content analyses of CMP or EMP. Table 4 reports the correlations between the EULIS estimates and the agenda-related expert survey estimates, i.e. the Chapel Hill issues on national/supranational and the Laver-Hunt as well as Benoit-Laver issues on left/right.

Again, only correlations with Chapel Hill on the national/supranational dimension turn out to be generally low. However, we find moderate correlations in the area of general affairs and external relations, for which the national/supranational dimension is of particular importance. On the left/right dimension, there are high correlations with the Laver-Hunt and Benoit-Laver issues in several Council policy areas. Larger residuals are observed for the Laver-Hunt issues in the area of employment and social policy and for the Benoit-Laver estimates in justice and home affairs. These may result from the higher number of issues and broader coverage of substantive text using CMP

Table 4. Correlations between EULIS and other agenda-related positional estimates

Dimension	Measurement	Council policy area	N	Pearson correlation	Spearman correlation
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	General affairs and external relations	418	0.56	0.48
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Economic and financial affairs	418	0.49	0.38
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Justice and home affairs	418	0.51	0.43
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Employment and social policy	418	0.32	0.24
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Competitiveness	418	0.43	0.34
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Transport	418	0.40	0.33
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Agriculture and fisheries	418	0.51	0.43
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Environment	418	0.36	0.26
national/supranational	Chapel Hill issues	Education	418	0.42	0.35
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	General affairs and external relations	95	0.77	0.80
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Economic and financial affairs	95	0.76	0.77
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Justice and home affairs	95	0.67	0.70
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Employment and social policy	95	0.52	0.52
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Competitiveness	95	0.76	0.77
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Transport	95	0.78	0.80
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Agriculture and fisheries	95	0.59	0.59
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Environment	95	0.67	0.64
left/right	Laver-Hunt issues	Education	95	0.69	0.68
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	General affairs and external relations	113	0.66	0.66
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Economic and financial affairs	113	0.67	0.68
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Justice and home affairs	113	0.48	0.47
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Employment and social policy	113	0.57	0.56
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Competitiveness	113	0.59	0.58
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Transport	113	0.66	0.66
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Agriculture and fisheries	113	0.58	0.57
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Environment	113	0.58	0.54
left/right	Benoit-Laver issues	Education	113	0.57	0.60

Notes: Laver-Hunt reference year: 1989. Chapel Hill reference years: 1999, 2002, and 2006. Benoit-Laver reference year: 2003. Chapel Hill issues: EU foreign and security, EU fiscal, EU asylum, EU employment, EU internal market, EU cohesion, EU agriculture, and EU environment. Laver-Hunt issues: foreign, taxes/public services, religion, social, public ownership, urban/rural, and environment. Benoit-Laver issues: peacekeeping, spending/taxes, religion, immigration, civil liberties, social, privatization, deregulation, urban/rural, and environment.

categories. For example, the expert surveys do not address the classical *law and order* issue. Moreover, different linguistic usage in coding instructions and questionnaires (for example, *social policy* instead of *societal policy*) may cause some discrepancies. Nevertheless, the inspection of most area-specific left/right scales reveals high similarities across different agenda-related estimates.

Conclusion

This article introduced a new approach for generating a comprehensive dataset with agenda-related estimates of political actors who make choices and adapt their strategies in different areas and terms of EU decision-making. A major challenge for our approach has been the identification of policy positions for an increasing number of actors with different orderings, who are confronted with a changing policy agenda in several policy areas. In our view, only manifesto and expert survey data – which commonly take political parties as units of analysis – provide reliable sources of information for estimating actors' policy positions. Using CMP data, we generated issue-based estimates for two dimensions of EU decision-making, namely a national/supranational dimension and a left/right dimension. The cross-validation with expert survey data reveals high correlations with our left/right values, whereas the values of existing measures for the national/supranational dimension suffer from both concentration on matters of primary legislation and skewed distribution.

For the quantitative study of EU decision-making, we showed that scholars are forced to use imputation/extrapolation for large parts of their datasets and thereby neglect the area- and time-specific policy agenda when using existing estimates. This calls into question their applicability for evaluating the empirical implications of EU decision-making theories. To overcome this deficit, we searched with keywords derived from the coding instructions for CMP categories and questionnaires of expert surveys in the (con)texts of the legislative agenda and weighted the issue-specific preference profiles by their percentage of agenda hits. Because variation in actors' policy positions is indispensable for empirical research, we produced area- and time-variant policy positions for EU decision-making.

Our procedure can also be applied to other data sources, such as EMP, or to other focuses of analysis, such as the agenda content of specific types of EU legislation. A major methodological advantage of our agenda-related EULIS estimates is that they vary across policy areas and over time in relation to changes in both domestic party competition and legislative agendas. We hope that our agenda-related estimates will facilitate analysis and improve the understanding of EU decision-making.¹¹

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Notes

1. Proksch and Lo (2012) specify four further criteria: estimates should be cross-nationally comparable, highlight position shifts over time, indicate the level of measurement uncertainty, and be useful in studies of party–voter interaction. No existing estimate alone currently fulfils all of these criteria.
2. Owing to incompleteness of comparable institutional and event data (see PreLex database, available at <http://www.ec.europa.eu/prelex/apcnet.cfm?CL=en>), our period of study starts in 1983. However, it is possible to extend our dataset back to 1967 when the Merger Treaty entered into force.
3. Drawing on the coding instructions, we also include categories with no natural policy opposites (see Lowe et al., 2011: 137). For example, the CMP category ‘Peace/positive’ is described by ‘peaceful means’ and ‘negotiations with hostile countries’, not by military peace-building or peacekeeping. We therefore classify it together with the category ‘Military/negative’ as ideologically left on the *military* issue.
4. We find particular country-related patterns for the Netherlands, where *internationalism* is strongly preferred (compared with *European integration*), *protectionism* is firmly rejected, and *multiculturalism* is very differently assessed. Furthermore, parties in South, Central, and East European countries reveal very rightist policy positions on the *quality of life* issue. On closer inspection of party family-related patterns, nationalist parties are opposed to ethnic and regional parties on the *internationalism* and *national way of life* issues, whereas special-issue parties and Christian democratic parties occupy the extreme positions on the *European integration* issue. Regarding the left/right scale, we often find contrasts between Green or left parties on the one hand and conservatives or nationalists on the other. The Christian democratic parties are the most rightist actors on *traditional morality* and the ethnic and regional parties are the most leftist on *multiculturalism*.
5. We employ 40 categories: the quasi-sentences coded in the 38 selected CMP categories (see Table 1), the uncoded quasi-sentences and the unselected quasi-sentences, i.e. the quasi-sentences from the unselected CMP categories.
6. We make use of the Manifesto Project Database including the updated dataset 2011b, available at <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>. We include only political parties represented in the national parliaments since the date of a country’s accession. Furthermore, we aggregate the CMP subcategories for political parties in Central and East European countries into the CMP standard categories.
7. In election years, we include observations before the election and after. Because two elections took place in Greece in June and November 1989, we exclude the three November values in our correlation analysis.
8. Chapel Hill issues are: EU foreign and security, EU fiscal, EU asylum, EU employment, EU internal market, EU cohesion, EU agriculture, and EU environment. Laver-Hunt issues are: foreign, taxes/public services, religion, social, public ownership, urban/rural, and environment. Benoit-Laver issues are: peacekeeping, spending/taxes, religion, immigration, civil liberties, social, privatization, deregulation, urban/rural, and environment. In contrast to the Laver-Hunt and Benoit-Laver issues, most Chapel Hill questions are obviously already concentrated on specific policy fields. However, each ideological

- question may be important in different areas of responsibility (for example, environment in transport policy or agricultural affairs).
9. This is available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/index.htm>.
 10. Technically, we compile an electronic dictionary by dropping special characters, purely technical coding instructions, words with little semantic content (such as articles, pronouns, prepositions, junctors, numeralia, quantors) and those with little ideological content. We expand the remaining words and multi-word terms in our dictionary by synonyms and inflected forms (except for institutions) suggested by WordNet, an English lexical database available at <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>, and then reduce words with five or more letters as far as possible by means of wildcards. Using a keyword-in-context analysis for a random sample of each keyword, we run a word sense disambiguation, which helps us to identify homographs (i.e. words that share the same written form but have different meanings) and inaccurate lemmatization or misleading wildcards indicating that exclusion terms are necessary. We finally cope with keyword overlaps using proportional weights.
 11. Our estimates can be downloaded from <http://www.eulis.de>.

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