Article

Which way from left to right? On the relation between voters' issue preferences and left–right orientation in West European democracies

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Abstract
The left–right scale is the concept most often used to describe citizens' and parties' political positions. Its prevalence suggests that political preferences are structured by a single ideological dimension. However, much research shows that citizens' issue preferences in Western Europe are structured by two dimensions: economic; and social–cultural. How can a single dimension be sufficient to orient oneself in a two-dimensional political space? This article suggests a solution to this paradox: among citizens, the left–right scale and more concrete political issues are related in a non-linear way. Economic issue preferences should be more strongly related to ideological differences among left-wing citizens (e.g. between extreme-left and centre-left citizens) than among right-wing individuals. The reverse pattern should characterize the relation between sociocultural issues and ideological self-placement. The analysis of 28 elections in five West European countries offers strong support for the hypothesis of a non-linear relation.

Introduction

The left–right scale is very salient in political (science) discourse. It is the most widely used way to describe political positions (Benoit and Laver, 2006) and is frequently used by politicians, experts, and citizens. The pervasiveness of the left–right scale supports the idea that citizens' issue preferences and parties' political positions are structured along a single dimension. If citizens and political elites can meaningfully describe preferences and positions using the left–right scale, the main political conflicts and issues should align in a single dimension.

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However, several authors have demonstrated that two dimensions (at least) are necessary to explain the structure of issue positions in Western Europe – at the level of parties (Albright, 2010; Hix, 1999; Warwick, 2002), voters (Kitschelt, 1995; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009), or both (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2008). It is common in this literature to distinguish between an economic and a sociocultural dimension (Hooghe et al., 2002; Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2006). The economic dimension corresponds to the traditional class cleavage and contrasts pro-state and pro-market views. The sociocultural dimension in West European countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s has been shown to combine mainly issues of cultural liberalism and attitudes towards immigration (Dalton, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009).

Determining that issue positions are structured by two largely independent dimensions leads to a puzzling situation. One may wonder how citizens can orient themselves in a two-dimensional political world by referring to a single left–right dimension. If economic and sociocultural issues are, to a large extent, independent from one another, the left–right scale should not be sufficient to meaningfully summarize citizens' issue positions. On the other hand, if the left–right scale really captures the main conflicts structuring citizens' issue preferences, then we should not find that these attitudes are indeed structured by two independent dimensions, as much research shows.

Can these contradictory views about the structure of citizens' political preferences be reconciled? This article suggests that this is indeed possible. The argument rests on a different conception of how citizens' left–right positions relate to their attitudes towards more concrete economic and sociocultural issues. The traditional interpretation of the left–right scale is that it represents a linear combination of various political issues (Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1995). The assumption of linear relations means that the strength of the relation between left–right ideology and preferences on a given issue is the same at all positions along the left–right scale. Consider, for instance, attitudes towards welfare state expansion, a typical example of an economic issue. If the relation is linear, the difference in welfare state preferences between far-left and centre-left citizens will be of the same magnitude as the difference between centre-right and far-right citizens. Instead, this article suggests that, in many West European democracies, the relations between citizens' issues preferences and left–right ideology *should be nonlinear*. The strength of the association between ideology and specific issues should vary depending on the exact location on the left–right scale.

This general hypothesis is derived from two arguments. First, much literature has shown that citizens' interpretation of the left–right scale is influenced by the conflicts they observe in their political system (Huber, 1989; Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Knutsen, 1998). Left and right are abstract concepts that citizens interpret in relation to the political actors that claim or are ascribed these ideological positions and to the political issues that divide them. Second, research on political parties and electoral competition in Western Europe shows that the main lines of conflicts that structure party positions may differ between the left and the right (Cochrane, 2013; Grunberg and Schweisguth, 1997; Kriesi et al., 2006). Left-wing parties are generally supportive of 'libertarian' positions on the sociocultural dimensions. On the economic axis, however, their positions differ more strongly, with radical left parties being much more extreme in their rejection of capitalism and their defence of economic equality (March and Rommerskirchen, 2015). The positions of right-wing parties, on the other hand, differ more strongly from one another on the sociocultural dimension than on the economic one. Most right-wing parties favour economic liberalism rather than state intervention (although nationalist parties may also advocate for protectionist measures in order to shelter the domestic market from international economic competition). On the sociocultural dimension, by contrast, there is a large divide between mainstream and radical right parties, with the latter standing out by their nationalist and xenophobic positions (Mudde, 1996).

These findings lead to the hypothesis of nonlinear relations between citizens' left–right positions and their issue preferences. In countries that present such a configuration of party positions,

citizens on the extreme left should support pro-state policies much more strongly than centre-left citizens. Among right-wing citizens, by contrast, differences in economic preferences should be smaller. The reverse pattern should hold for sociocultural issues.

These hypotheses suggest a different interpretation of the substantive meaning of citizens' left–right positions. They may also solve the apparent paradox about the dimensionality of the political space. While the left–right scale is, by definition, one-dimensional, its 'shape' in a two-dimensional representation of the political space may not correspond to a straight line (Daalder, 1984; Weisberg, 1974). Rather, it could correspond to a curve or a broken line, with the various left-wing positions being more widely spread on the economic than on the sociocultural dimension, and the various right-wing positions being relatively homogeneous on the economic dimension but farther apart on the sociocultural dimension. In the following sections, the relations between issue preferences and left–right position will be discussed in more detail. The empirical analysis focuses on five West European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) over the last two decades. These are countries in which the configuration of party positions follows the pattern described above (Kriesi et al., 2006). The results offer strong support for the hypothesis of non-linear relations between issues and ideology. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for our understanding of the left–right scale.

Left–right ideology and the structure of citizens' issue positions

The use of a left–right dimension of political competition is pervasive in the political science literature. Most citizens, at least in West European democracies, are willing to position themselves on this scale (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Mair, 2007), and citizens as well as political experts use it to locate political parties. In a variety of political contexts, there seems to be a shared understanding of what left and right mean (Benoit and Laver, 2006). Yet, it is difficult to give a *general* definition of the substantive meaning of this ideological divide (Mair, 2007). Most authors agree that it is related to preferences towards redistributive issues and the role of the state in the economy (Hellwig, 2008). But the left–right divide is related to other issues as well, both economic and non-economic (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1989). This strong integrative capacity also implies that the issues associated with the left–right dimension – and hence the meaning of this ideological divide – can vary across time and space (Benoit and Laver, 2006; De Vries et al., 2013; Huber and Inglehart, 1995).

The continuing dominance of the left–right concept is surprising when considering findings on the dimensionality of the political space. Several studies show that two dimensions, economic and sociocultural, structure citizens' attitudes towards political issues in West European democracies (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). There is some variation across authors in the exact definition of these dimensions. However, for the countries and in the time period considered in this analysis, the political space has been shown to be structured in a similar fashion (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008). The economic dimension corresponds largely to the traditional class cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) and represents an opposition between the state and the market (Kitschelt, 1994). The sociocultural dimension is mainly structured by citizens' attitudes towards cultural liberalism and immigration (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009).

The widespread use of a left–right scale and the finding that citizens' issue positions are structured by two dimensions lead to a paradoxical situation. A two-dimensional structure of citizens' attitudes means that the economic and sociocultural dimensions are largely independent of one another. It should not be possible to predict citizens' preferences on a sociocultural issue, such as immigration, simply by knowing where they stand on economic issues. One-dimensional models

of the political space should thus be misleading. Yet, the widespread use of the left–right scale suggests that this concept is still meaningful.

Relating issue attitudes and ideological orientations

In order to solve this potential paradox, we need to reconsider a central assumption about the left–right scale. In the above reasoning, it was implicitly assumed that left–right ideology and issue positions are linearly related. That is, positions on the left–right scale are conceived of as a linear combination of attitudes towards more specific economic and sociocultural issues (e.g. Budge and Robertson, 1987; Huber, 1989; Huber and Inglehart, 1995). This implies that a change of a given magnitude along the left–right scale always results in the same changes in terms of issue preferences. Differences in attitudes towards immigration or high income taxation, for example, should be of the same magnitude when moving from the leftmost to the middle position of the ideological scale than when moving from the middle to the rightmost location.

This is illustrated in the left-hand panel of Figure 1. In this two-dimensional political space, the left–right scale runs from a pro-state and culturally liberal position to a pro-market and culturally conservative profile. Depending on the relative importance of economic and cultural issues, the slope of this line could be flatter or steeper. But as a long as left–right is represented by a straight line, it is implicitly assumed that it relates in a linear way to the more specific political issues defining the economic and cultural dimensions. This figure thus summarizes the paradoxical situation exposed above. If citizens' political preferences are meaningfully represented by such an ideological scale, they would indeed be one-dimensional. Such a left–right scale would capture most of the variation in citizens' political positions. The cultural and economic issues would be very strongly correlated with one another and they would not build two distinct dimensions.

Yet, we know that citizens' interpretation of left–right ideological positions depends in part on the political conflicts they observe in their country (Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1998). For citizens, the meaning of the left–right scale should depend on what divides the political actors that claim to be left-wing or right-wing, moderate or radical, or who are ascribed such positions in the media or political debates. In the countries and time period considered in this article, the issues on which the

Figure 1. Two models of the relations between issues and the left–right scale: (a) left–right scale as a straight line; and (b) curved left–right scale.
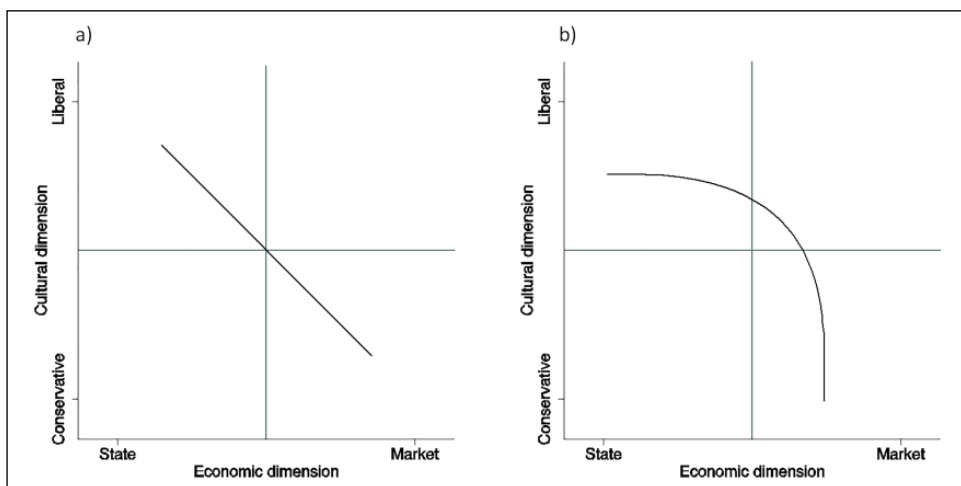
various right-wing parties differ most strongly from one another are not necessarily the same as the issues which structure left-wing parties' positions (Bornschier and Lachat, 2009; Grunberg and Schweisguth, 1997; Kriesi et al., 2008). Right-wing parties are strongly divided on sociocultural issues. Radical-right parties take much more extreme positions on immigration or minority rights than centre-right parties. On economic issues, by contrast, differences are not as systematic. At the same time, left-wing parties tend to present more homogeneous positions on sociocultural issues, but to differ more strongly from one another on economic issues. Going back to the model of the political space in Figure 1, it means that no party is usually located in the third quadrant, combining economically left-wing and culturally conservative positions. Rather, the alignment of parties from left to right corresponds to a curve, similar to the right-hand panel of that figure. Such a configuration of party positions can be observed in the countries on which this study is based (Bornschier and Lachat, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2008), as well as in other West European countries (Camia and Caramani, 2012: 69; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009: 324).

Another way to think about this expected contrast between left and right is to consider the specificities of extreme parties. Radical right parties mainly stand out in terms of their cultural issue positions. The common denominator among the various definitions of extreme right or radical right ideology are positions such as xenophobia, nationalism, or racism (Lubbers et al., 2002; Mudde, 1996; Van der Brug et al., 2000). By contrast, it is mainly on economic issues that radical-left parties differ from mainstream or centre-left parties. It is their rejection of the capitalist economic system that places them further to the left (March and Mudde, 2005; March and Rommerskirchen, 2015; Ramiro, 2016). This leads me to reassess the hypothesis that citizens' left–right ideology and political issue positions are linearly related. Note that this assumption of linear relations had already been criticized in earlier studies (e.g. Daalder, 1984). In a two-dimensional political space, the left–right scale should correspond to a curve, rather than a straight line (Figure 1, right-hand panel). The left–right dimension still runs from the upper left to the lower right quadrant. But it is less steep on the left than on the right of the ideological spectrum. This captures this article's two central hypotheses. The relation between economic issue positions and left–right ideology should be stronger among left-wing than among right-wing citizens (Hypothesis 1). In contrast, preferences on sociocultural issues should relate more strongly to ideological preferences among right-wing citizens than among left-wing citizens (Hypothesis 2). For these hypotheses 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 central point 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*.

Of course, these hypotheses do not imply the absence of systematic differences between left and right. Quite to the contrary, individuals on the left of the political spectrum should differ strongly from right-wing citizens *on both economic and sociocultural issues* (Hypothesis 3). This, again, should reflect the differences observed at the party-level. Left-wing parties, on average, are clearly more state-oriented and more libertarian than right-wing parties. This third hypothesis is not new, and it fits with the literature showing that the left–right scale is related to many different issues (e.g. Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1998). It will, however, also be tested below, to provide some benchmark with which to compare the results of separate analyses of left-wing and right-wing citizens.

Data and methods

To test the hypotheses, this study examines the relations between citizens' issue preferences and ideological self-placement in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. I use data from all national election studies since the mid-1990s.[1] As mentioned above,

the expected non-linearity is a consequence of the configuration of party positions. For these countries and time period, previous research has shown that the political space is structured by two similar dimensions, and that the issues which structure party positions follow the pattern exposed above (Kriesi et al., 2008). Given the decision to focus on these countries, data from national election studies have the advantage that they typically include a large number of issue questions, which focus on the precise issues which are salient in a given electoral campaign. It also allows testing the article's hypotheses with several datasets for each country.

For each of these election surveys, I analyse the relations between citizens' attitudes and their left–right self-placement. Left–right positions are measured similarly in all cases. 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, using a seven-point scale (France, 1995 and 2002), 10-point scale (Germany, 1994; the Netherlands, 1994, 1998, and 2003), or 11-point scale (Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the remaining elections in France, Germany, and the Netherlands).

While questions about the left–right scale are formulated in very similar terms, the attitudinal items vary more strongly, reflecting the variation between countries and elections in the specific issues which are considered to be most relevant. For that reason, issue items are grouped into more general categories, in order to build a smaller number of summary indicators. This study distinguishes between four issue categories: economic liberalism, support for the welfare state, cultural liberalism, and attitudes towards immigration. When one of these issue categories is represented by a single indicator in an election study, the standardized version of that indicator is used. When several indicators are available, they are summarized with principal component factor analysis. With few exceptions, this produces a single factor. When the analysis leads to a two-factor solution, the corresponding subsets of items are factor-analysed separately to build two summary measures. This happens mostly with attitudes towards cultural liberalism, for which a second factor is necessary in ten elections. Attitudes towards immigration also form two dimensions in the 1998 Dutch election study. The detailed operationalization of the issue categories is presented in the article's online appendix. All of these issue variables are standardized and they are coded so that a higher value corresponds to a pro-market or authoritarian position. The four issue categories are not available in every election study. But at least one economic and one non-economic issue category can be included in each model (with the exception of the 2005 German election, in which only economic items are available). All variables usually come from a post-election survey or from the same wave of a panel study.[2] 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.[3]

I use ordered probit regressions to analyse how the impact of issue preferences on ideological orientation varies between left-wing and right-wing citizens. The left–right scale is regressed on issue preferences separately for respondents on each side of the ideological scale.[4] 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.[5] For each election, a third model is estimated, in which the dependent variable is a dummy, indicating whether a respondent is left-wing or right-wing (in order to test Hypothesis 3). The corresponding models are estimated with probit regressions. All analyses are performed separately for each election study. Since no hypotheses about country differences or differences over time were formulated, one could argue that pooling the data would be a more appropriate strategy. This is not possible, however, since the set of available issue categories varies from election to election. Furthermore, separate analyses are more flexible as they allow the relative importance of different issue categories to vary between cases.

Results

Tables 1 to 5 present the results of three models, election by election: two ordered probit regressions with either the left or right half of the ideological scale as the dependent variable; and a probit regression with a left-versus-right dummy as the dependent variable. The article's main hypotheses, regarding differences between left-wing and right-wing citizens in how issues and ideology are related, can be tested by comparing the first two models. The third model, in contrast, is relevant for Hypothesis 3. Starting with the latter, the results clearly show that the contrast between left and right is related to citizens' preferences on a large number of issues. Right-wing citizens differ on many issues, both economic and non-economic, from left-wing citizens. Economic issue preferences are always related to this contrast, with a single exception (preferences toward the welfare state in the 2001 UK election). Most sociocultural items are also related to the left–right contrast. These results offer strong support for Hypothesis 3 and confirm findings from previous research.

Most important for this article's hypotheses, however, is to analyse the associations between issue preferences and ideology within each of the two broad ideological groups. The results of models 1 and 2 in the various elections show that the exact ideological position among left-wing or right-wing citizens is related to a smaller number of issues. Furthermore, it is generally not the same issues that are relevant on the left and on the right. In 25 out of 28 elections, some issue categories have a significant impact in one group of respondents but not in the other. Furthermore, such differences most often point to substantially large contrasts. The 1995 French presidential election is a case in point (Table 1). Economic liberalism is the variable with the strongest impact among left-wing respondents, but it has no impact among those on the right. Left-wing citizens who are more strongly opposed to economic liberalism locate themselves farther away from the centre of the ideological scale. Among citizens on the right, by contrast, the positioning between the centre-right and the far-right is unrelated to economic issue preferences. The reverse pattern applies to the effect of attitudes towards immigration: It strongly influences the ideological location of right-wing citizens but has no impact at all among left-wing citizens. 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 sociocultural attitudes? As far as economic attitudes are concerned, Hypothesis 1 is strongly supported. 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). In all elections, one or both of the economic items exert a significant impact on ideological position in this group of respondents. Yet, among right-wing respondents, the impact of economic preferences is much weaker. In 16 elections, attitudes toward the welfare state and economic liberalism have *no impact at all* on the ideological position of right-wing respondents.[6] Furthermore, in eight additional cases, one or two of the economic variables have a significant impact, but the overall effect of economic variables is weaker than among left-wing respondents (German 1994, Netherlands 1998 and 2010, Switzerland 2007, 2011 and 2015, UK 2010 and 2015). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is clearly supported in 24 out of 28 elections. In the 1994 and 2006 Dutch elections (Table 3), as well as in the 1999 Swiss election (Table 4), in contrast, Hypothesis 1 can be rejected, as the impact of economic variables is of similar magnitude in both ideological groups. These are the only three elections in which the traditional assumption of a linear relation between (economic) issues and left–right ideology is supported. The last case is the 2005 German election (Table 2). It is particular in the sense that attitudes toward the welfare state are related to ideology in both groups of respondents, but the relation goes in different directions. More favourable attitudes toward the welfare state are associated with a position further left among

Table 1. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement: France.

	1995			2002			2007			2012		
	Scale: left-half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.29***	0.02	0.67***	0.26***	−0.02	0.70***	0.18***	0.06	0.43***	0.33***	−0.02	0.22***
Welfare state				−0.05	0.06		0.14**	−0.07	0.38***	0.25***	−0.03	0.75***
Cultural liberalism	0.01	0.09*	0.26***	0.01	0.03	0.23***	−0.07	0.24**	0.26***	−0.18***	0.03	0.06
Traditional values			0.39***			0.17***				0.01	0.08	0.04
National identity							0.13***	0.09*	0.20***			
Anti-immigration	−0.04	0.37***		0.09	0.35***	0.18***	0.08	0.31***	0.40***	−0.05	0.32***	0.65***
Constant			0.04			−0.22***			−0.20***			−0.15***
Log-likelihood	−1,082.3	−1,058.0	−1,132.8	−932.4	−605.3	−787.2	−1,233.4	−1,096.7	−811.8	−1,073.6	−915.0	−569.7
McFadden R^2	0.02	0.04	0.27	0.02	0.05	0.30	0.02	0.05	0.31	0.04	0.03	0.41
N	1,110	1,124	2,234	977	685	1,662	919	784	1,703	771	622	1,393

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Models for the left–right dummy are estimated with probit regressions, models for the half left–right scales with ordered probit (cf. online Appendix for cutpoints).

Table 2. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement: Germany.

	1994			1998			2002		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.08*	0.09*	0.21***	0.24***	0.02	0.29***	0.19***	0.03	0.26***
Welfare state	0.16***	0.02	0.11***						
Cultural liberalism	0.09**	0.05	0.14***	0.23***	0.11	0.33***	0.20***	0.09	0.35***
Anti-immigration	0.22***	0.25***	0.27***	0.13**	0.26***	0.30***	0.25***	0.25***	0.33***
Constant			−0.37***			−0.66***			−0.35***
Log-likelihood	−1,606.1	−846.9	−1,098.3	−970.7	−373.8	−513.3	−752.4	−439.7	−488.0
McFadden R^2	0.03	0.02	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.14	0.05	0.02	0.15
N	1,152	655	1,807	730	280	1,010	554	317	871

	2005			2009			2013		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.18***	−0.16***	0.10***				−0.02	−0.11	0.13**
Welfare state				0.18***	0.08	0.33***	0.21***	−0.07	0.30***
Cultural liberalism							0.11*	−0.01	0.28***
Anti-immigration				−0.06	0.22***	0.33***	0.12**	0.18**	0.28***
Constant			−0.37***			−0.43***			−0.59***
Log-likelihood	−2,430.1	−1,397.2	−1,679.5	−1,221.8	−536.1	−746.3	−1,026.6	−400.1	−591.1
McFadden R^2	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.01	0.13
N	1,676	920	2,596	864	437	1,301	804	326	1,130

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Models for the left–right dummy are estimated with probit regressions, models for the half left–right scales with ordered probit (cf. online Appendix for cutpoints).

Table 3. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement: The Netherlands.

	1994			1998			2002			2003		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.24***	0.21***	0.38***	0.13**	0.09*	0.36***	0.27***	0.06	0.34***	0.31***	0.03	0.37***
Welfare state				0.27***	0.14**	0.16***						
Cultural liberalism	0.20***	0.33***	0.26***	0.16***	0.32***	0.39***	0.24***	0.19***	0.46***	0.13**	0.20***	0.16***
Ethnic minorities	0.02	0.33***	0.35***									
Euthanasia										0.15**	0.04	0.22***
Foreigners												
Anti-immigration	0.01	−0.15*	−0.00	−0.00	0.12*	0.10*	0.16**	0.22***	0.38***	0.32***	0.34***	0.50***
Enfranch. foreigners				0.13***	−0.08	0.13***						
Constant			−0.04			−0.05			0.14***			−0.19***
Log-likelihood	−895.0	−804.8	−731.2	−1,047.0	−920.1	−841.6	−693.5	−864.6	−627.0	−926.2	−693.5	−654.7
McFadden R^2	0.03	0.05	0.16	0.05	0.04	0.19	0.06	0.03	0.24	0.07	0.04	0.20
N	637	624	1,261	764	727	1,491	549	649	1,198	663	527	1,190

	2006		2010			2012		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.28***	0.09*	0.40***	0.10*	0.52***	0.34***	0.06	0.41***
Welfare state	−0.02	0.14***	−0.03	0.05	0.15***	−0.01	0.03	0.17***
Cultural liberalism	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.15***	0.24***	−0.05	0.15***	0.21***
Ethnic minorities								
Euthanasia								
Foreigners	0.06	0.20***	−0.01	0.20***	0.33***	−0.01	0.24***	0.32***
Anti-immigration	0.07	0.20***	0.10	0.29***	0.27***	0.06	0.08	0.29***
Enfranch. foreigners								
Constant					0.18***			0.24***
Log-likelihood	−948.8	−1,170.7	−977.5	−1,145.9	−796.1	−610.4	−762.7	−543.6
McFadden R^2	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.25	0.03	0.03	0.24
N	668	929	694	853	1,547	455	584	1,039

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Models for the left–right dummy are estimated with probit regressions, models for the half left–right scales with ordered probit (cf. online Appendix for cutpoints).

Table 4. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement: Switzerland.

	1995			1999			2003			2007		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism				0.13*	−0.09*	0.18***				0.25***	0.02	0.27***
Welfare state	0.32***	0.05	0.50***	0.25***	0.21***	0.48***	0.27***	0.08	0.52***	0.21***	0.18***	0.50***
Cultural liberalism	0.02	0.16**	0.39***	0.03	0.26***	0.47***				0.17***	0.34***	0.61***
Anti-immigration	0.04	0.23***	0.36***	0.05	0.15**	0.28***	0.23***	0.30***	0.65***	−0.16*	0.19***	0.24***
Constant			0.15***			0.26***			0.12**			0.31***
Log-likelihood	−685.2	−829.3	−560.7	−718.3	−879.1	−541.7	−792.4	−843.0	−575.6	−692.5	−926.3	−523.9
McFadden R^2	0.02	0.03	0.27	0.02	0.04	0.30	0.03	0.02	0.27	0.04	0.04	0.33
N	522	581	1,103	493	636	1,129	541	596	1,137	482	659	1,141

	2011			2015		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: right half	Scale: left half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism						
Welfare state	0.37***	0.19***	0.62***	0.39***	0.16***	0.68***
Cultural liberalism						
Anti-immigration	0.17**	0.46***	0.74***	0.30***	0.34***	0.67***
Constant			0.13**			0.35***
Log-likelihood	−621.8	−670.3	−435.4	−2,067.4	−2,774.3	−1,414.4
McFadden R^2	0.04	0.05	0.34	0.05	0.04	0.38
N	450	500	950	1,328	1,841	3,169

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Models for the left–right dummy are estimated with probit regressions, models for the half left–right scales with ordered probit (cf. online Appendix for cutpoints).

Table 5. Impact of issue positions on ideological self-placement: The United Kingdom.

	1997			2001			2005		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.16	−0.07	0.37***	0.17*	0.02	0.43***	0.37***	−0.02	0.15**
Welfare state	0.19*	0.04	0.35***	0.10	−0.08	0.01			
Cultural liberalism	0.06	0.11	0.17*	0.12	0.25***	0.37***			
National identity	0.04	0.21***	0.25***						
Traditional values									
Anti-immigration	0.01	0.03	0.10	0.04	0.16*	0.10	−0.14	0.23***	0.36***
Constant			0.05			0.05			0.49***
Log-likelihood	−699.4	−741.8	−514.0	−505.1	−584.4	−444.4	−669.5	−1,368.9	−938.9
McFadden R^2	0.02	0.02	0.26	0.03	0.03	0.19	0.04	0.01	0.07
N	600	614	1,214	371	408	779	564	995	1,559

	2010		2015		
	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Scale: left half	Scale: right half	Left–right dummy
Economic liberalism	0.41***	0.20**	0.22***	0.24***	0.54***
Welfare state	0.17*	−0.09	0.22***	0.01	0.33***
Cultural liberalism	−0.16	−0.00	0.10	0.03	0.11*
National identity					
Traditional values			0.09*	0.11*	0.12**
Anti-immigration	0.55***	0.25**	−0.05	0.19***	0.16**
Constant					0.04
Log-likelihood	−303.5	−324.7	−791.1	−805.1	−637.0
McFadden R^2	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.25
N	259	257	599	619	1,218

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
Models for the left–right dummy are estimated with probit regressions, models for the half left–right scales with ordered probit (cf. online Appendix for cutpoints). In 1997, 2001 and 2005, observations are weighted to compensate for the overrepresentation of respondents from Scotland and Wales.

left-wing respondents, but with a position further right in the other ideological group. Thus, in that election, neither Hypothesis 1 nor the traditional assumption about the issues–ideology relation are supported. Nonetheless, considering all elections, there is strong support for this article's hypothesis that left–right ideology is more strongly related to economic issue preferences among left-wing than among right-wing citizens.

The impact of sociocultural issues on ideology also differs between left-wing and right-wing respondents in most elections. Attitudes toward cultural liberalism can be included in 22 out of 28 elections. In two of these (France 2002, and UK 2010), they are not significantly related to ideological self-placement in any of the two ideological groups. Among the remaining elections, three cases only fit with the traditional assumption of linear relations (Netherlands 2002 and 2003, UK 2015), showing that the relation between attitudes toward cultural liberalism and left–right ideology is the same on both sides of the ideological divide. The number of elections that fit with Hypothesis 2 is much larger. In 12 of the races examined here, preferences on issues of cultural liberalism exert a stronger impact on ideology among right-wing citizens than among left-wing respondents.[7] In the last five cases (the 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2013 German elections, as well as the 2012 French election), neither the traditional assumption of constant effects, nor Hypothesis 2, are supported. Cultural liberalism is significantly related to ideological self-placement among left-wing, but not among right-wing respondents. These cases thus display non-linear relations, but not following the pattern expected by this article's hypothesis. The pattern of relations between attitudes toward cultural liberalism and left–right ideology is thus distinct in Germany. In the other countries, however, support for Hypothesis 2 (with respect to cultural liberalism) is quite strong.

The last issue category is immigration, which can be measured in all elections, but the 2005 German contest. In most cases, these attitudes are significantly related to ideology in at least one group of respondents (the exceptions are Britain in 1997 and the Netherlands in 2012). The usual assumption that such attitudes are linearly related to ideological self-placement is supported in five elections.[8] Support for this assumption is thus somewhat stronger than in the case of cultural liberalism or economic attitudes. Nonetheless, there are many more elections in which the impact of immigration preferences varies between left-wing and right-wing respondents. Such differences can be observed in 20 elections, 17 of which fit with Hypothesis 2, by showing that immigration attitudes exert a stronger impact on the right than on the left.[9] The other three elections revealing a non-linear pattern are 1994 elections in the Netherlands, 2007 in Switzerland, and 2010 in the UK. In these, the direction or strength of the immigration effect varies between left-wing and right-wing respondents, though not following the pattern predicted by this article's Hypothesis 2.

Conclusion

The left–right dimension is usually considered to be the main axis structuring citizens' preferences and parties' positions. It is generally assumed that it integrates a large number of more specific economic and sociocultural issues. The findings presented in this article put into question some aspects of this usual conception of the main ideological divide. On the one hand, the above results confirm the integrative capacity of the left–right ideological divide. Left-wing and right-wing citizens differ on a number of political issues, both economic and socio-cultural. At the same time, however, it was shown that the relations between left–right ideology and these more specific issues were not linear. When left-wing and right-wing respondents are analysed separately, one notices that the issues which explain the degree of extremity of their ideological self-placement are not the same. Economic issue preferences are strongly related to the ideological self-placement of left-wing citizens. Respondents on the far-left tend to oppose economic liberalism and to support the welfare state more strongly than centre-left citizens. In contrast, among right-wing citizens, there

usually is no such relation, or a weaker one. In a majority of the elections studied here, moderate right-wing citizens are not more or less supportive of economic liberalism or welfare than those on the far-right. The results related to sociocultural issues show the opposite pattern. Attitudes toward immigration, and particularly toward cultural liberalism, are strongly related to the exact ideological location of right-wing citizens, while the corresponding effect is significantly weaker among left-wing respondents. Such non-linear relations between socioeconomic issue preferences and left–right self-placement were evident in most elections considered here. This means there is only limited support for the traditional assumption of linear relations between issue positions and left–right ideology. However, not all instances of non-linear relations matched the expectation of Hypothesis 2. It is possible that some of these 'deviating' cases could be explained by looking in more detail at the configuration of parties' issue positions and at issue salience during the corresponding electoral campaign. Yet, this would have gone beyond the scope of the present article. But such a research design, combining individual-level and context-level characteristics, could be a promising avenue for extending this line of investigation. It would also allow going beyond the countries on which this article focused and exploring how variations in the meaning of the left–right divide may be structured by the configuration of the supply side of electoral competition.

The presence of nonlinear relations between left–right ideology and political issues has important implications. In particular, it means that inferring issue preferences from left–right self-placement may be more problematic than usually assumed. Changes along the left–right scale do not always mean the same in terms of issue preferences. In the traditional conception of the left–right scale, a move towards the right end of the ideological scale in a given context always means the same in terms of issue preferences. When left–right ideology is associated with attitudes towards economic liberalism, for instance, a move towards the right always implies more positive attitudes towards economic liberalism, whatever the starting position. In most of the elections studied here, however, a move towards the right cannot be interpreted unambiguously in terms of economic attitudes. The two are strongly related among left-wing citizens but not at all 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-right respondents are more on the right than both left-wing and moderate right-wing citizens. Although these far-right citizens are likely to be economically more liberal than the former, their economic attitudes should not differ much from those 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 between issue preferences and ideology are nonlinear, it is more complicated to infer ideological preferences from one's issue positions. Changes in attitudes towards a specific issue may be associated with changes in ideological preferences for some respondents but not for others.

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. On the contrary, the above results underscore the integrative capacity of the left–right dimension. Left–right ideological positions seem to reflect both the two-dimensional nature of citizens' issue preferences and what appears to be a one-dimensional '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 (Mair, 2008; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997). If several dimensions structure citizens' 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, 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 fears of a dysfunctional political representation in West European countries.

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Notes

1. See Table A1 in the online appendix.
2. See Table A1 in the online appendix for more details.
3. In the 2001 British election study and the 2012 Dutch study, however, some of the issue positions are measured in a drop-off questionnaire, whereas left–right self-placement was part of the post-electoral survey.
4. Alternatively, one could estimate a single model for each election, including a dummy variable to distinguish between left-wing and right-wing respondents, as well as interactions between this dummy and each issue category. In that case, however, the left vesrsus right dummy is a perfect predictor of the portion of the left–right scale in which each observation is located, and the standard errors of several parameters cannot be estimated.
5. When the left–right scale has an uneven number of categories, respondents in the middle category are excluded.
6. France: all elections; Germany: 1998, 2002, 2009, 2013; Netherlands: 2002, 2003, 2012; Switzerland: 1995, 2003; UK: 1997, 2001, 2005.
7. These cases are the 1995 and 2007 French elections, the 1994, 1998, 2006, 2010, and 2012 Dutch elections, the 1995, 1999, and 2007 Swiss elections, as well as the 1997 and 2001 British elections.
8. 1994 and 2002 in Germany; 1998 and 2003 in the Netherlands; 2015 in Switzerland.
9. With respect to attitudes toward immigration, Hypothesis 2 is supported in the following cases: France 1995, 2002, 2007, 2012; Germany 1998, 2009, 2013; Netherlands 2002, 2006, 2010; Switzerland 1995, 1999, 2003, 2011; UK 2001, 2005, 2015.

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