Measuring the Ideology of Political Parties Worldwide

Jean Lavallée* *ENSAE*

Benjamin Marx† *Boston University, CEPR & NBER*

Vincent Pons‡ *Harvard University, CEPR & NBER*

Vincent Rollet§ *MIT*

November 2025

Abstract

This note introduces a new database that measures the ideological positions of over 4,000 political parties in 180 countries. The dataset harmonizes information from expert surveys and party manifestos to capture stances on redistribution and taxation, market regulation, trade, and social values. We link these parties to the results of all presidential and parliamentary elections held worldwide since 1945.

1 Introduction

Understanding where political parties stand along key ideological dimensions is essential to studying political competition, policymaking, and coalition formation. Measures of ideology allow researchers to assess how electing parties with different leanings affects policy and economic outcomes; how coalitions emerge and persist; whether party platforms reflect voter preferences; and how economic shocks reshape ideological demand.

To meet this need, a large body of theoretical and empirical research has developed methodologies to quantify the ideological positions of political parties, accompanied by diverse data sources that measure party ideology. These include electoral surveys, expert assessments, roll-call vote analyses, and textual analyses of speeches and political documents. Beyond their methodological differences, these sources also vary in the ideological dimensions they capture, as well as in their geographic and temporal coverage.

We seek to advance this literature by consolidating and harmonizing a broad range of data sources into a unified database that measures the ideological positioning of political parties worldwide from 1945 onward. Building on 18 preexisting datasets, our database provides comparable estimates of party positions across multiple ideological dimensions, including the traditional left-right spectrum, attitudes toward immigration and free trade, and perspectives on domestic and foreign policy issues. Specifically, our dataset provides information on the ideological positioning of 4,066 unique political parties across 180 countries, along 30 policy dimensions. The dataset includes 313,883 observations at the party $\times$ year level and 1,296,554 observations capturing party positions across individual policy variables. This comprehensive scope enables a detailed analysis of ideological trends at the party and national levels. To understand the interplay between parties' ideological stances, their electoral performance, and policy

*ENSAE. Email: jean.lavallee@ensae.fr.
†Department of Economics. Email: bmarx@bu.edu.
‡Harvard Business School. Email: vpons@hbs.edu.
§Department of Economics. Email: vrollet@mit.edu.

and economic outcomes, we match our dataset with the results of all presidential and parliamentary elections held worldwide since 1945, assembled in Marx et al. (2025).

The remainder of this note proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces and presents the existing datasets we build on. Section 3 describes how we harmonize ideology variables across datasets, and Section 4 shows how we merge them into a single database. Finally, Section 5 tests the robustness of our measures by comparing ideology estimates derived from different datasets.

2 Existing Datasets

2.1 Data sources

To construct our database, we first conducted a comprehensive review to identify the datasets providing information on political parties' platforms and ideological positions since 1945. In total, we rely on 18 individual datasets described below. Some of these sources cover a particular geographic region (as the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys, Ray, 1999), or only recent years (as the Global Party Survey or DALP, Norris, 2020; Kitschelt, 2013). Others have a global coverage (e.g., V-Party, Manifesto Project, or Wikipedia).

There are four key types of data allowing the measurement of parties' ideology: (i) political texts or electoral manifestos issued by parties; (ii) parliamentary speeches or roll calls at the individual level; (iii) voter surveys; and (iv) expert surveys.[1] To build our dataset, we focus on expert surveys and political texts, as voter surveys, parliamentary speeches, and roll-calls-based measures are mainly available in a limited sample of country-specific datasets.

Expert surveys are particularly valuable. Indeed, their reliance on country specialists ensures that party positions are assessed with deep contextual knowledge and accuracy (Saiegh, 2009). Furthermore, they are easily comparable across countries (Marks et al., 2007), and they have been found to provide robust measures of ideology—for instance, there is limited variance of the ideology scores coded by different experts for a given party (Steenbergen and Marks, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2002). The expert surveys we use are the following:

- V-Party (Lindberg et al., 2022)
- The 1999-2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES Europe) Trend File (Jolly et al., 2022), complemented with two Special Edition CHES surveys (Hooghe et al., 2024; Rovny et al., 2022) and the 2007 and 2019 Candidate Countries Surveys.
- The Global Party Survey (GPS) (Norris, 2020).
- The Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (DALP) dataset (Kitschelt, 2013).
- *Party Policy in Modern Democracies* (PPMD), a book by Benoit and Laver (2006).
- The data gathered by Ray (1999) from his own survey and the existing literature (Laver and Hunt, 1992; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Hix and Lord, 1997; Marks et al., 2007).
- The Populism and Political Parties (POPPA) dataset (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020).

[1] While Wikipedia, which associates parties with tags describing their ideology, does not fit neatly into these categories, it serves as a secondary source that compiles and summarizes information from primary sources, including those mentioned above.

- The Ethnonationalism in Party Competition (EPAC) dataset (Zuber and Szöcsik, 2019; Szöcsik and Zuber, 2015).
- The 2020 CHES Latin America dataset (Martínez-Gallardo et al., 2023) (CHES Latin America).
- The 2021 and 2022 CHES Israel surveys (Zur and Bakker, 2025) (CHES Israel).
- Data from Castles and Mair (1984).

We complement these expert surveys with two additional data sources with extensive temporal and spatial coverage:

- The Manifesto Project dataset (Lehmann et al., 2024), compiled by the Manifesto Research Group on Political Representation (MARPOR) (Lehmann et al., 2024). MARPOR continues the work of the Manifesto Research Group (1979-1989) and the Comparative Manifestos Project (1989-2009). The Manifesto Project leverages thousands of party election programs, divided into "quasi-sentences" that are assigned to policy categories (e.g., economy, welfare, law and order). This common taxonomy yields time series of issue salience and measures of ideological positioning (e.g., on a left-right axis).
- Wikipedia and Wikidata tags, retrieved in December 2024.

Table 1 sums up the main characteristics of each of these datasets.

2.2 Construction

After identifying sources of data on the ideological positioning of political parties, building our database required (i) identifying exploitable variables in each source; (ii) harmonizing measures of ideology across sources; and (iii) merging data from different sources through unique party identifiers.

2.2.1 Identifying variables

First, we identified in each source the variables for which we could reach satisfactory coverage. Specifically, we extracted from each source measures of ideology related to policy domains appearing in at least two sources, or that appear in a database with global coverage. Our final dataset covers the following 30 policy dimensions: abortion (`abort`), centralization versus decentralization (`decent`), economic issues (`econ`), elitism (`elitism`), environmental protection (`env`), ethnonationalism (`ethno`), European integration (`eu`), immigration (`immig`), involvement in international organisations (`intorg`), involvement in international peace initiatives (`intpeace`), civil liberties (`libaut`), democratic principles (`libdem`), market regulation (`markeco`), minority rights (`mino`), multiculturalism (`multic`), nationalism (`nat`), popular sovereignty (`people`), the dichotomy between "the people" and "the elite" (`popu`), liberal versus conservative policies (`prog`), trade liberalization and protectionism (`protec`), redistribution (`redis`), the role of religious principles in politics (`relig`), the overall left-right spectrum (`rile`), rural versus urban interests (`rural`), secessionism for regional parties (`sec`), state intervention (`state`), the balance between enhancing public services and reducing taxes (`taxes`), traditional authorities and values (`tradi`), public welfare policies (`welfare`), and women's role in society (`women`). Figure 1 reports variable coverage across sources.

Table 1: Data Sources

Dataset	ID	Period	Coverage	Var.	Parties	Countries	P × Y × V obs.
CHES Europe	`ches`	1997-2025	Europe	21	562	39	161,933
CHES Israel	`chesisr`	2016-2025	Israel	11	16	1	1,678
CHES Latin America	`chesla`	2015-2025	Lat. America	15	97	12	16,005
CM	`cm`	1977-1987	Global	1	119	17	1,309
DALP	`kitschelt`	2004-2014	Global	11	504	88	43,098
EPAC	`epac`	2006-2022	Europe	6	270	22	20,297
GPS	`gps`	2014-2024	Global	8	1,005	163	79,343
Manifesto Project	`manifesto`	1945-2025	Global	10	1,319	66	238,126
PPMD	`ppmd`	1995-2009	Global	10	368	46	31,768
POPPA	`poppa`	2013-2023	Europe	8	250	28	22,000
Ray (1999)	`ray`	1979-2001	Europe	1	183	17	4,021
Laver and Hunt (1992)	`lh`	1987-1997	Europe	7	127	16	9,581
Huber and Inglehart (1995)	`hi`	1988-1998	Europe	1	296	41	3,256
Hix and Lord (1997)	`hl`	1992-2002	Europe	1	125	17	1,375
Marks et al. (2007)	`ms`	1994-2004	Europe	4	141	14	6,204
V-Party	`vparty`	1960-2024	Global	10	1,790	166	382,082
Wikipedia	`wikipedia`	1945-2025	Global	1	2,702	0	89,021
Wikidata	`wikidata`	1945-2025	Global	1	1,261	0	40,345
Total	—	1945-2025	Global	21	4,066	180	1,296,554

Notes: This table reports descriptive statistics about the 18 datasets we use as sources. The column "Period" gives the time coverage of the dataset after interpolating and extrapolating existing values (see Section 3.4). The column "Coverage" describes the geographical coverage of the dataset. The column "Variables" reports the number of variables that we keep from the dataset. Finally, the columns "Parties", "Countries", and "Party × year obs." report the number of unique parties and countries that appear in the dataset, and the number of party × year × variable observations we obtain from this source after interpolation and extrapolation.

2.2.2 Aggregating variables

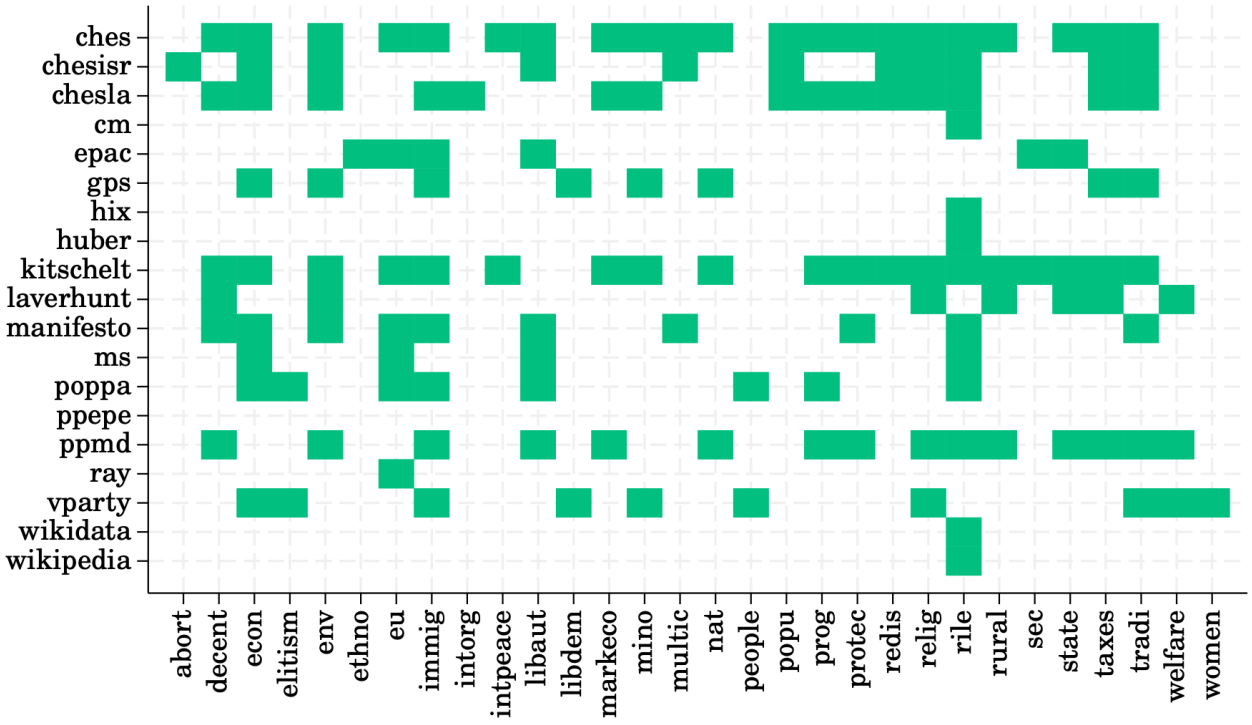
Sources differ in how they measure ideological positioning on each policy domain, requiring some aggregation. In some cases, this process was straightforward owing to the near-identical wording of questions posed to experts.For example, the variable `rile` was constructed by aligning expert assessments of political parties' left–right positions across multiple datasets:

- CHES: "0 = Extreme left; 5 = Center; 10 = Extreme right"
- DALP: "1 = Party is best located at the 'left' of the national political spectrum based upon its overall policy positions and ideological framework; 10 = Party is best located at the 'right' of the national political spectrum based upon its overall policy positions and ideological framework."
- Ray: "0 = Party is at the extreme left of the ideological spectrum; 10 = it is at the extreme right"
- V-Party: "0 = Far-left; 4 = Far-right"

These variables were consolidated into a unified "right-left" metric (`rile`).

In other cases, we aggregated variables based on conceptual similarity. For instance, the DALP dataset solicited expert evaluations of parties on a scale from " 1 = Party supports increasing economic transfers from central government to counties and municipalities in the periphery; 10 = Party supports reducing economic transfers from central government to counties and municipalities in the periphery."

Figure 1: Variables by dataset



Notes: This figure maps sources to the variables they cover.

Conversely, the CHES datasets (encompassing CHES Europe, CHES Candidate Countries, CHES Israel, and CHES Latin America) employed a scale ranging from "0 = Strongly favors political decentralization; 10 = Strongly opposes political decentralization." These were amalgamated into a common "decentralization" variable (`decent`).

However, some variables posed challenges for aggregation because of differences in how questions were framed across expert surveys. The CHES datasets, for example, asked experts to position parties on a "religious principles" axis, where 0 signifies strong opposition to religious principles in politics and 10 indicates strong support. In contrast, the V-Party dataset inquired, "To what extent does this party invoke God, religion, or sacred/religious texts to justify its positions?" with a scale from "0 = Always or almost always" to "4 = Never." Similarly, Laver's study asked "To what extent is the party pro-clerical," with 1 denoting "pro-clerical" and 20 indicating "anti-clerical." Despite these disparities, these variables were integrated into a composite variable measuring the importance of religion in politics, `relig`.

3 Harmonizing Datasets

3.1 Harmonizing expert surveys

After mapping variables from different sources to a common set of policy domains, we harmonized them to a uniform scale. Sources varied in how they reported ideological leanings. The CHES surveys,

for example, use a 1–7 scale for EU-related variables and a 0–10 scale for all others. Similarly, the GPS and EPAC datasets report variables on a 0–10 scale. By contrast, the DALP dataset codes its variables on a 1–10 scale, while the Ray dataset uses a 1–7 scale for EU variables and a 1–20 scale for others. Finally, the V-Party dataset primarily employs a 0–4 scale. To ensure comparability, we rescaled all variables to a common [0,1] interval through simple linear transformation.

3.2 Recovering ideological positions from manifestos

After expert surveys, the second source of data we rely on most is text data from political manifestos, particularly from the Manifesto Project. Initially developed by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) in the early 1980s, the Manifesto Project compiles nearly all election manifestos issued by political parties in parliamentary democracies since that period. The group's original objective was to operationalize the "saliency" theory of party competition, which posits that parties compete by emphasizing different issues rather than by taking opposing stances on the same ones. According to this theory, each party highlights the issues it considers most important and endorses only one side of each issue. Accordingly, the Manifesto Project was designed to measure the relative emphasis that parties place on various policy domains within their manifestos, rather than their precise positions on these issues.

To integrate the information from these manifestos into our measures of ideological positioning, we proceeded as follows. First, we averaged variables across existing expert surveys at the party-year level. We then regressed these variables against related Manifesto Project variables. We then used the coefficients from these regressions as weights to obtain predictions from the Manifesto Project data that are comparable to the expert surveys.

3.3 Wikipedia and Wikidata data

We supplement data from expert surveys and from the Manifesto Project with information collected from Wikipedia and Wikidata. These sources are often used in the literature—Herrmann and Döring (2023) indicate " a Wikipedia-based approach yields valid and reliable left-right scores comparable to scores obtained via conventional expert coding methods." Therefore, we collected tags for ideology and political position on the left-right axis, which can be found in the summary box on the right side of parties' Wikipedia page,[2] or in parties' Wikidata pages.[3] For instance, Wikipedia indicates that the French Socialist party has a centre-left to left-wing political position, and that its ideologies include "Social democracy" and "Pro-Europeanism". At the same time, Wikidata indicates that it is located at the centre-left to left-wing part of the left-right axis, and that its ideologies belong to "Social democracy", "Social Ecology" and "Social liberalism".

For both Wikipedia and Wikidata, we adopt a straightforward procedure to assign parties to an ideological positioning on the left-right axis. Each tag is mapped to one of seven ordinal categories: 0 = far-left, 1 = left, 2 = centre-left, 3 = centre / big-tent / syncretic, 4 = centre-right, 5 = right, and 6 =

[2] In Wikipedia, this information is structured in seven main categories (far-left, left-wing, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right-wing and far-right) and five other categories (big tent, syncretic politics, syncretism, Stalinism and radical centrism)

[3] In Wikidata, "political position" can take 21 values. We only keep tags belonging to the Wikidata object type `Q28819924` ("political alignment"), with nine values: far-left, radical left, left-wing, centre-left, centrism, centre-right, right-wing, right-wing extremism and syncretic politics.

far-right. We then compute the average of all tags assigned to each party.[4] For instance, a party that has been indicated to be "left to center-left" would get the score $(1+2)/2 = 1.5$.

When a party lacks a political position tag in Wikipedia, we infer its ideology score from its ideology tags. Specifically, we use the subset of parties for which both ideology tags and left–right positions are available to estimate the average `rile` score associated with each ideology tag. These estimated values serve as reference points: for any party without a reported political position, we assign an ideology score equal to the average of the scores corresponding to its ideology tags.

3.4 Interpolation, extrapolation and averaging

Expert surveys are available only for specific years. For instance, GPS has been implemented only once, CHES is available every five years on average, and Ray (1999) conducted his surveys every four years between 1980 and 1992. Consequently, these data often do not align with national election dates or are missing for several years. We choose to linearly interpolate between available values. For instance, CHES Europe gives a 0.385 score to the French Socialist Party in 2002, and a 0.289 score in 2006 for the `rile` variable. Therefore, we assign the value 0.361 to 2003, 0.337 to 2004 and 0.312 to 2005, as in Figure 2b.

Similarly, we extend available values for each dataset five years before (resp., after) the first (resp., the last) survey. For instance, Castles and Mair (1984) give a 0.26 score to the French Socialist Party in 1982, and we assign this value to the party from 1977 to 1987 (represented in Figure 2b with a dark red line).

Finally, we average scores across datasets. In 1982, the French Socialist Party appears in Castles and Mair (1984) (with a score of 0.26), Manifesto (with a score of 0.12) and Wikipedia (with a score of 0.25). We average those scores, and assign a mean score of 0.21 (represented by the thick red solid line in Figure 2c).

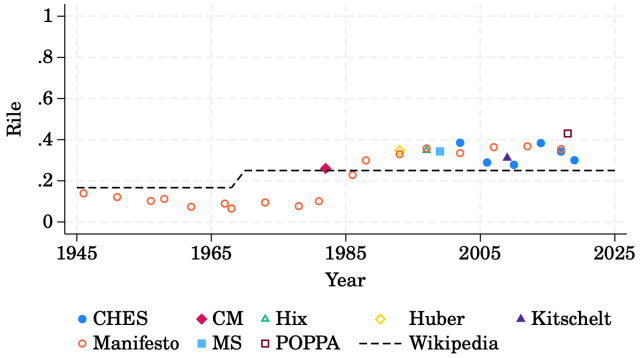
4 Merging Datasets

We linked parties across datasets in three steps. First, we relied on PartyFacts (Döring and Regel, 2019), an online database that consolidates information on political parties worldwide and provides crosswalks across major social science datasets. We linked all parties in our database to their PartyFacts unique identifier. When this identifier was missing (or recent databases or datasets not covered by PartyFacts), we built new unique identifiers. Finally, we aggregated the parties in PartyFacts to take into account changes in party names (e.g., when party A changed its name to B, and both A and B appear in PartyFacts, we aggregated them into a single entity). To track such name changes, we manually linked each party to its Wikipedia page, and retrieved from its Wikidata page the list of predecessors and successors.

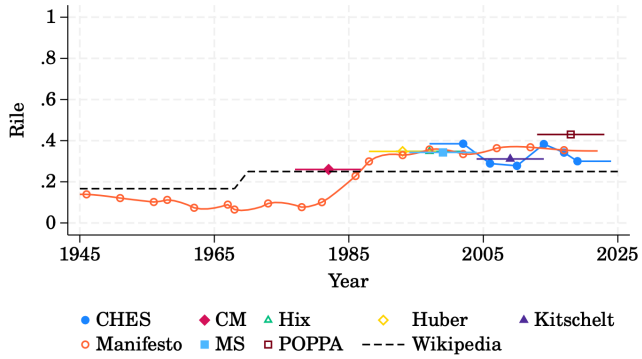
[4] Most political parties' Wikipedia pages list only one ideological position for their entire lifespan. When multiple time periods are available, we compute a distinct ideological score for each period.

Figure 2: Interpolation, extrapolation and averaging for the French Socialist party (`rile`)

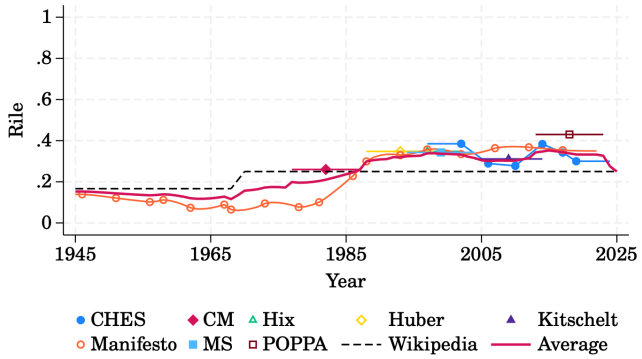
(a) Original data



(b) Interpolated/extrapolated data



(c) Averaged data



Notes: This figure plots raw data (Figure 2a), interpolated and extrapolated values (Figure 2b) and the final value averaged across datasets (Figure 2c) for the `rile` variable and the French Socialist Party.

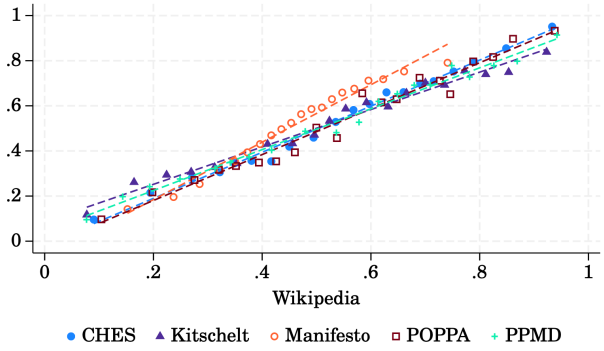
5 Consistency

Methods for measuring the ideology of political parties have advanced rapidly in recent years, prompting a growing literature that evaluates their validity and reliability. Yet, as noted by Dinas and Gemenis (2010), many of these studies "often fail to address the issue of face validity and only sporadically examine the reliability of the produced estimates, without rigorous examination of how each method stands up against the others."

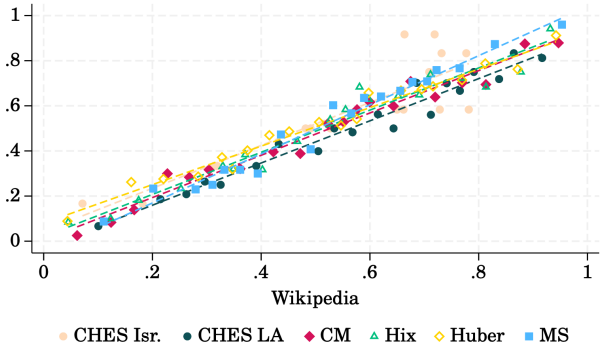
Te assess the consistency of our ideology measures when derived from different sources, we compare in Figure 3 each dataset's ideology positions with those from the most comprehensive benchmark for each axis (Wikipedia for the `rile` variable and V-Party for the `econ` variable). The points closely follow the 45-degree line, indicating that party positions are highly correlated across datasets. In other words, regardless of the party or year considered, our different sources tend to place parties at nearly the same point on the left–right spectrum.

Figure 3: Consistency of ideology measures across sources

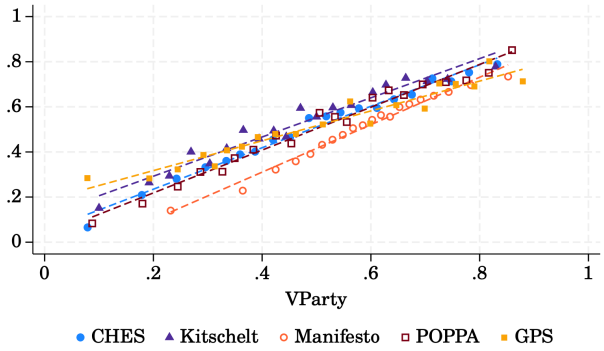
(a) `rile`, main sources



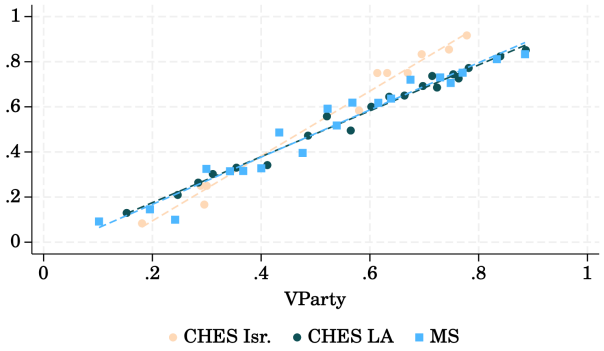
(b) `rile`, other sources



(c) `econ`, main sources



(d) `econ`, other sources



References

Benoit, Kenneth and Michael Laver, *Party Policy in Modern Democracies*, 1st edition ed., London: Routledge, 2006.

Castles, Francis G. and Peter Mair, "Left–Right Political Scales: Some 'Expert' Judgments," *European Journal of Political Research*, 1984, *12* (1), 73–88.

Dinas, Elias and Kostas Gemenis, "Measuring Parties' Ideological Positions With Manifesto Data: A Critical Evaluation of the Competing Methods," *Party Politics*, 2010, *16* (4), 427–450.

Döring, Holger and Sven Regel, "Party Facts: A database of Political Parties Worldwide," *Party Politics*, 2019, *25* (2), 97–109. Publisher: SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England.

Herrmann, Michael and Holger Döring, "Party Positions from Wikipedia Classifications of Party Ideology," *Political Analysis*, 2023, *31* (1), 22–41.

Hix, Simon and Christopher Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union*, London: Red Globe Press London, 1997.

Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole J. Wilson, "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?," *Comparative Political Studies*, 2002, *35* (8), 965–989.

_ , _ , Ryan Bakker, Seth Jolly, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova, "The Russian threat and the consolidation of the West: How populism and EU-skepticism shape party support for Ukraine," *European Union Politics*, 2024, *0* (0).

Huber, John and Ronald Inglehart, "Expert Interpretations of Party Space and Party Locations in 42 Societies," *Party Politics*, 1995, *1* (1), 73–111.

Jolly, Seth, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova, "Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file, 1999–2019," *Electoral Studies*, 2022, *75*, 102420.

Kitschelt, Herbert, "Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project," 2013.

Laver, Michael and Ben W. Hunt, *Policy and Party Competition*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

Lehmann, Pola, Simon Franzmann, Denise Al-Gaddooa, Tobias Burst, Christoph Ivanusch, Sven Regel, Felicia Riethmüller, Andrea Volkens, Bernhard Weßels, and Lisa Zehnter, "The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG / CMP / MARPOR)," 2024.

Lindberg, Staffan I., Nils Düpont, Masaaki Higashijima, Yaman Berker Kavasoglu, Kyle L. Marquardt, Michael Bernhard, Holger Döring, Allen Hicken, Melis Laebens, Juraj Medzihorsky, Anja Neundorf, Ora John Reuter, Saskia Ruth-Lovell, Keith R. Weghorst, Nina Wiesehomeier, Joseph Wright, Nazifa Alizada, Paul Bederke, Lisa Gastaldi, Sandra Grahn, Garry Hindle, Nina Ilchenko, Johannes von Römer, Steven Wilson, Daniel Pemstein, and Brigitte Seim, "Codebook Varieties of Party Identity and Organization (V–Party) V2," 2022.

Marks, Gary, Liesbet Hooghe, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Ryan Bakker, "Crossvalidating data on party positioning on European integration," *Electoral Studies*, 2007, *26* (1), 23–38.

Martínez-Gallardo, Cecilia, Nicolás de la Cerda, Jonathan Hartlyn, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, and Ryan Bakker, "Revisiting party system structuration in Latin America and Europe: Economic and socio-cultural dimensions," *Party Politics*, 2023, *29* (4), 780–792.

Marx, Benjamin, Vincent Pons, and Vincent Rollet, "National Elections Database (Version 2.0)," 2025.

Meijers, Maurits and Andrek Zaslove, "Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018 (POPPA)," 2020.

Norris, Pippa, "Global Party Survey," 2020.

Ray, Leonard, "Measuring Party Positions on European Integration: Results from an Expert Survey," *The European Journal of Political Research*, 1999, *36*, 283–306.

Rovny, Jan, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Marco Steenbergen, and Mikada Anna Vachudova, "Contesting Covid: The ideological bases of partisan responses to the Covid-19 pandemic," *European Journal of Political Research*, 2022, *61* (4), 1155–1164.

Saiegh, Sebastian M., "Recovering a Basic Space from Elite Surveys: Evidence from Latin America," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 2009, *34* (1), 117–145.

Steenbergen, Marco R. and Gary Marks, "Evaluating expert judgments," *European Journal of Political Research*, 2007, *46* (3), 347–366.

Szöcsik, Edina and Christina Isabel Zuber, "EPAC – a new dataset on ethnonationalism in party competition in 22 European democracies," *Party Politics*, 2015, *21* (1), 153–160.

Zuber, Christina Isabel and Edina Szöcsik, "The second edition of the EPAC expert survey on ethnonationalism in party competition – testing for validity and reliability," *Regional & Federal Studies*, 2019, *29* (1), 91–113.

Zur, Roi and Ryan Bakker, "The Israeli parties' positions in comparative perspective," *Party Politics*, 2025, *31* (2), 323–334.