

# B2.2 The Left-Right Ideology: Its Meaning Across Countries and Over Time



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## The Meaning of the Left-Right Dimension

- Left-right has been the primary dimension of political orientation, contestation and communication in the West.
- In Europe, it has been complemented by the integration-independence dimension, with left-right traditionally being the more powerful of the two.
- It is understood to serve as a generalized measure of political positions which is able to summarize the locations of individual actors on a multitude of more specific conflict dimensions (socio-political and political cleavages).
- The breakdown of communism at the end of the 1980s has been said to mark the end of left-right ideology.
- The change in the functionality of political parties puts an additional question mark behind the ongoing relevance of the left-right divide.

## Research Goals

- Identify the differences in the meaning of left and right across countries and over time.
- Investigate the ability of political parties to define the meaning of left and right (and of secondary ideological dimensions like integration-independence).
- Compare the content of and the partisan contribution to the left-right dimension with secondary conflict dimensions like the integration-independence dimension in Europe.

## Research Questions

- Are parties losing their capacity to define the major conflict lines in society?
- Is the left-right super issue losing its integrative capacity to represent the multitude of socio-political conflicts in recent years?
- What actually does it mean to be on the left or on the right in different times and at different places?
- What can we do about the endemic problem of endogeneity in social research? Is the confrontation of empirical evidence from different sources a viable solution?

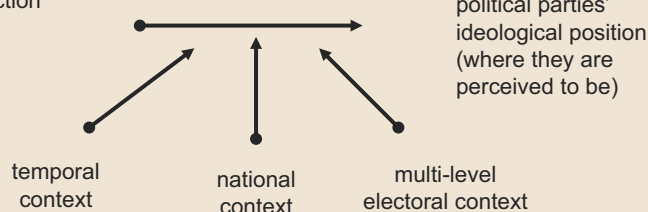
## Publications

### Conference Papers

- Schmitt, Hermann and Cees van der Eijk. „On the variable and changing meaning of left and right.“ (Under revision; the first version of this was presented at the IPSA World Congress in Santiago de Chile in 2010).
- van der Eijk, Cees and Hermann Schmitt. “Party Manifestos as a Basis of Citizens’ Left-Right Perceptions — A Study Across 10 European Countries.” (R & R, first presented at the APSA Annual Conference in Washington in 2010).
- Schmitt, Hermann, Bernhard Wessels and Cees van der Eijk. Forthcoming. “Parties, Candidates and Voters in the 2009 European Parliament Election.” (Under revision. A version of this was presented at the EPOP Annual Conference in Oxford, September 2012).

## Visualization of the Research Design

political parties’ election manifesto content (what parties say)



political parties’ ideological position (where they are perceived to be)

## Data Sources Analysed in the Course of the Project

Election studies’ survey information regarding public perceptions of party locations on the left-right and the integration-independence dimension. Both the data of National Election Studies (NES) and of European Election Studies (EES) are used.

Expert coders’ assessments of the content of political parties’ election manifestos (based on MRG/CMP and Euromanifesto codebooks) for those elections for which we have measures of public perceptions of political parties’ ideological positions.