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Estimating Party Policy Positions: Japan in Comparative Context

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Abstract

This paper first reviews a number of epistemological and methodological issues relating to the estimation of party policy positions, particularly in a comparative context, with special reference to the methodology of 'expert surveys'. It is argued that expert surveys, as systematic summaries of the views of country specialists, have a particular role in assessing the content validity of other types of estimates of party policy positions. The paper moves on to analyze the positions of Japanese political parties in a comparative context, using results from a new 47-country expert survey. Attention is paid both to the substantive policy content of the left–right dimension in Japan, and to the locations of Japanese parties in policy spaces, relative to the locations of comparable parties in other political systems.

Introduction

Spatial models of politics are all characterized by the grounding assumption that some kind of underlying political space can be used to describe the preferences and choices of key actors. Such models have become widely used and have provided a fertile basis for intuitively compelling models of political decision making. The essential idea behind any spatial representation of politics is that of a perceived psychological 'distance' between pairs of political stimuli. Thus many people find it intuitively reasonable, when thinking for example about two politicians X and Y, to express the view that 'X is closer to me politically than Y'. Thinking of two potential political outcomes, P and Q, the intuitively meaningful statement 'I prefer P to Q' can be translated, apparently without loss of meaning, into the statement 'P *is closer than* Q to the outcome I would most prefer'. Once we accept the concept of political distance, in this sense, we have a political space. This is because distance implies at least the potential for movement – the potential for two points to become closer or further apart. Movement has direction. Direction is

described in terms of a set of basis vectors, or dimensions. A set of basis vectors spans a space. Political distance is the key concept in the spatial analogy. Everything else follows from this.

Given the pervasive role of the spatial analogy in models of political decision making, one of the key empirical projects in political science involves the need to do following.

- *Operationalize or make assumptions about the key parameters used to describe a political space.* Thus, for example, political scientists often set out to estimate the 'policy positions' of real political actors; they need operationalizations of the underlying theoretical concepts to do this. In contrast, political scientists typically assume (many without realizing they are doing this) that political actors behave as if they use a Euclidean metric to measure the distance between two policy positions. Despite the fact that the Euclidean metric is simply one of a literally infinite number of possible metrics that could be used, the use of Euclidean metric rather than some plausible alternative is *very* rarely justified in published work.[1]
- *Use these operationalizations to estimate key parameters of assumed political spaces in particular real contexts.*
- *Interpret these estimated parameters in terms of substantively meaningful basis vectors* – often described in rather vague terms as ideological/policy/issue dimensions.

The very fact that we write 'ideological/policy/issue dimensions' when characterizing the basis vectors of political spaces implies that we need to be careful, when interpreting the meaning of any given estimated policy space, to be clear about whether we see this as describing very general orientations of the actors concerned or their rather precise preferences about particular matters that may be up for decision. While ever-alert to this distinction, and sometimes using it explicitly, we use the term 'policy' dimensions in the general discussions that follow. We leave on one side the difficult issue of whether to interpret a given political space as describing the 'sincere' preferences

[1] The Euclidean metric is a special case of the Minkowski metric – a Minkowski metric of the order 2. The number of possible Minkowski metrics we could choose is infinite. Indeed the ∞-metric seems intuitively compelling in some political science applications, assuming that the distance between two points is simply the distance between them on the dimension on which they are farthest apart. The 1-metric (aka City Block metric) also has claims on our attention, assuming that the distance between two points is the sum of the distances between them on each dimension. Deep psychological assertions underlie the assumption we make, when using the 'Euclidean' 2-metric, that the distance between two points is the square root of the sum of the squares of the distances between them on each dimension. Of course, the Minkowski metric is itself just a special case of a much larger class of metrics. Prosaically, on the basis of many conversations with highly sophisticated political science modellers, the conclusion one is forced to draw is that the Euclidean metric is used by those who are actually aware that they have made a decision on the matter because it permits the deployment of highly developed analytical techniques of differential calculus, and that the methods for solving the same problems assuming different metrics are unclear or intractable. Intriguingly, the rise of interest in computational methods for attacking difficult problems in political science may allow us to explore the implications of assuming the use of different distance metrics by political decision makers.

of the actors (which may be known only to their subconscious selves and thus very difficult to retrieve), or the preferences they reveal to the outside world (which may be misrepresentations, either unintended or consciously 'strategic', of their sincere preferences and thus very difficult to interpret).

An important decision to be made when interpreting political spaces concerns the substantive meaning of the basis vectors or dimensions that are used in any interpretation. We can find two distinct approaches to this in the literature. The first can be thought of as the *a priori* approach. The underlying assumption in this approach is that the key substantive policy dimensions in any given political decision-making environment are known in advance of the empirical estimation of its political space, this knowledge being implicitly grounded in the accumulated wisdom of country specialists. The essential empirical task is thus to estimate the unknown positions of political actors on known policy dimensions. Methodologically, the empirical project is one of unidimensional scale building. In terms of current research practice, the most clear-cut examples can be found in expert surveys, which ask country specialists to locate political actors on predefined policy dimensions (see for example Castles and Mair, 1984; Laver and Hunt, 1992; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Benoit and Laver, 2005).

The second approach is essentially *inductive*, the underlying assumption being that the number and precise meanings of key policy dimensions are not known in advance and indeed are important matters for investigation. The essential empirical task is to find the most plausible empirical representation of the policy space under investigation. Methodologically, the empirical task is one of dimensional analysis, using techniques such as multidimensional scaling or factor analysis. The substantive meaning of the derived dimensions is provided by *a posteriori* interpretation, for example on the basis of the loadings of interpretable policy indicators on inferred dimensions, and/or of the (interpretable) relative locations of key political actors on these dimensions. This *a posteriori* interpretation, too, is implicitly grounded in the accumulated wisdom of country specialists. In this regard it is crucial to note that, *if the spatial locations of key political actors are used in the selection of the most plausible empirical representation*, then these locations are not *output* data generated by the analysis. Rather they are *input* into the empirical analysis, the essential output of which is an inferred structure of policy dimensions that is subsequently given substantive meaning. In terms of current research practice, we can find two very different manifestations of this approach. One can be seen in the estimation of policy spaces using what is essentially the multidimensional scaling of roll call voting in legislatures, found for example in the growing body of published work using the NOMINATE method (see for example Poole and Rosenthal, 1997; Hix, 2001). Another can be found in the content analysis of party manifestos. Thus early work by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) set out to estimate, using factor analysis, low-dimensional policy spaces on the basis of data derived from coding large numbers of party manifestos into a 56-category coding scheme (Budge *et al.*, 1987) – generating a 56-dimensional data space. Subsequently, Gabel and Huber (2000) proposed a purely inductive method for using the same data to estimate the

most important policy dimension in any political system, again essentially using factor analysis. (An eclectic set of discussions of different methods for estimating the policy positions of political actors can be found in Laver, 2001.)

Once a substantive political space has been estimated empirically, it is of course important to assess the validity of this estimate. At its simplest, validity in the context of measuring party positions on policy refers to the correspondence between the measures of this position, and the actual policy position held by the party. Because parties' actual policy positions are intangible and ultimately unknowable, our confidence in the validity of our measures must rely on context. The two most commonly used approaches we find in published work in this field are to assess the 'face validity' of the resulting estimates, and to compare new estimates with published and cited alternatives. A conclusion that an estimated policy space has face validity essentially relies upon informal judgements that the estimates have certain familiar and expected properties – for example that the positions of prominent actors are more or less in their 'correct' positions. Such judgements, once again, are implicitly grounded in the accumulated wisdom of country specialists. If we were to challenge a judgement that a particular set of estimates has face validity, we would be referred to published work by a relevant country specialist. A clear example of this approach can be found in more recent publications by the CMP, in particular their book *Mapping Policy Preferences* (Budge *et al*., 2001). Here, the face validity of the CMP's left–right ideological scale is investigated by assessing the plausibility of its measured movements of party left–right positions in a series of country-by-country discussions, The ultimate arbiters of this 'plausibility' are, implicitly, specialists in the politics of each country.

A conclusion that an estimated policy space has been cross-validated against an independent published alternative is, of course, only convincing if this itself is widely accepted as valid – as some sort of benchmark against which to measure alternatives. When two sets of published estimates differ in substantively different ways, then we can either engage in a methodological investigation of the potential sources of this difference, or we can appeal for arbitration to some independent third-party source of substantive validity. Once more, we are led to the substantive knowledge of country specialists.

Expert surveys of policy positions

'Expert surveys' set out to estimate key political parameters by conducting systematic surveys of people who are specialists on the political system under investigation. Such surveys are fundamentally grounded in the *a priori* approach to estimating political scales, since they almost invariably proceed by presenting predefined scales and asking respondents to use their best judgements to locate specified political objects on these. To locate a party's economic policy position, for instance, an expert survey might present a ten- or twenty-point scale anchored by two short characterizations of an extreme left position on one end, and an extreme right position on another, and ask respondents to locate each party at a position on the scale. The expert scorings of each

party on the left–right economic policy dimension are then summarized statistically in order to measure the party positions as well as the range of certainty and consensus over these positions.

Complex methodological issues surround the issues of sampling and statistical inference in analysing the results of expert surveys. Expert surveys have an important difference from opinion surveys, in that the objective is to uncover a descriptive 'truth' – the true spatial location of a party's policy position, which is assumed fixed – rather than to characterize the attitudes of the expert population from the sample, as in traditional survey methodology. The sampling frame of an expert survey is typically presented as the *population itself* of qualified experts in the field under investigation – for instance, all experts from some independently supplied and valid register of country specialists. Of course, the notion of the 'population of experts' in some particular decision-making environment is almost metaphysical. However, if the researchers take their list of the population of experts from some external source that is widely accepted as valid (as opposed to choosing experts themselves according to what amount to haphazard criteria), then we might agree that valid inferences can be drawn from a survey of all members of this list. At the very least, the results of the expert survey represent a summary of the judgements of the members of the population surveyed. Because of this key difference between expert surveys and traditional (opinion) surveys, a statistical summary of expert survey scores is not an estimate of a population, but rather the description of a population. This distinction has substantive implications for how we may use expert surveys to construct valid measures of party positions.

The main implication is that the paramount concern of opinion survey methodology, obtaining a *random* sample, is much less important in conducting expert surveys. Opinion surveys strive for random samples in order to avoid selection bias, so that an unknown population is not being characterized on the basis of an unrepresentative sample. In asking experts to locate political parties on predefined policy scales, however, our concern with bias is only that the expert locations of a party's position is not systematically different from the party's true position. Sample selection can only introduce bias in this fashion if the selection mechanism for the expert respondents is somehow correlated with their response content. This is not so much a question of the representativeness of the sample as it is in more directly avoiding a response sample which contains a subset of biased respondents.

The focus of concern with this type of 'sample' bias is then whether the respondent locations are systematically related to some expert characteristic – for instance a respondent's own political preferences or closeness to a particular party or set of parties – and the respondent sample is skewed with regard to this characteristic. For example, if we were surveying party positions in a country whose experts were predominantly left-wing socialists, and left-wing socialists tended to rank left-wing parties as more centrist than in truth, and right-of-center parties as more right-wing than in truth, then our conclusions from this expert survey would be biased. This sort of bias can be detected empirically, however, and even corrected, by also asking respondents to rate

their closeness to each political party whose positions they locate. This method was used by Laver and Hunt (1992) and by Benoit and Laver (2005) in their cross-national expert surveys. The chief concern is not so much obtaining an ideologically representative sample of experts, but with ensuring that there is no systematic relationship between an expert's own policy preferences and his or her location of party's policy positions.

Increasing the sample size of experts also increases our confidence that a statistical summary of the expert positions (for instance, the sample mean) represents a party's true policy position. Put another way, if we were always certain that every expert would accurately locate of party policy positions, then we would need ask only a single expert in each country. In practice of course, expert locations of the same party on the same policy dimension will vary, and this is why it remains important to sample not only a number of experts, but also experts from a range of perspectives. Our confidence in our sample statistics as an accurate description of a true party position therefore increases according to the classical rules of sampling, with confidence intervals shrinking as we increase the number of expert respondents.

Three compelling justifications follow for the use of expert surveys. The first relates to the statistical character of expert sampling, namely the property that gathering more information increases our certainty in the accuracy of our estimates. According to well-understood statistical rules, we can also separate out how much variability in our estimates come from fundamental uncertainty in the form of the inherent differences of expert opinion on a party's policy position, and how much variability is a function of sample size. In other words, we can directly increase our confidence in our measures of party positions by adding more information, because the sample mean of expert positions will collapse to a party's true policy position as more expert locations are added to the sample. This simple estimator property, known statistically as *consistency*, is not shared by any non-survey-based method of estimating party positions on policy.

A second obvious reason to use expert surveys is that they are frequently the quickest and cheapest way to gather data on party positions. While this justification is not particularly uplifting in intellectual terms, it is nonetheless often the case that the alternative to expert survey data in a given context is no data. The expert survey used below to set Japanese party politics in comparative context, for example, estimates the positions of large numbers of political parties on a large set of policy dimensions in 47 countries, allowing models of political decision making to be applied using comparable data in many different decision-making contexts. It would have been extraordinarily difficult, complex, and expensive to have assembled equivalent data using any other method.

A final comparative justification for expert surveys arises from their very explicit use of the *a priori* approach to estimating key political parameters. The scales on which political objects are placed by experts are usually defined in advance very explicitly by the researchers. While we may always worry that different experts read different meanings into the same scales, we nonetheless know with reasonable certainly that, asked to place object X on scale Y, the aggregate judgement of experts on this matter is Z. When we

offer explicitly defined policy scales, for example, we can summarize the judgements of country specialists about the positions of particular political parties on those scales. This minimizes ad hoc *a posteriori* interpretation of results by the researcher and the consequent (quite possibly unconscious) temptation to read substantive meaning into the tealeaves that make patterns even in a completely random dataset.

The preceding discussion of epistemological issues in the estimation of political spaces raises the possibility of a third, and deeper, justification for using expert surveys. Political scientists may with some justification consider what they do to be science but they nonetheless lack the measurement benchmarks of many of the empirical natural sciences. There is no political science equivalent of the atomic clock against which to calibrate alternative measurements of time, no universally accepted measuring stick against which to calibrate alternative measurements of distance. When discussing alternative approaches to measuring the key parameters of political spaces, we often make reference to the need to appeal to the 'accumulated wisdom of country specialists', whether used implicitly or explicitly, when assessing the substantive content validity of particular empirical measurements. The obvious problem when doing this is that, since country specialists are never in complete agreement on any matter, and since their discursive writing is always subject to *a posteriori* interpretation by the reader, there is a danger that the work of country specialists will be used at best haphazardly and at worst selectively when resolving any issue about the content validity of particular empirical estimates. What expert surveys of a population of country specialists do, on the other hand, is to summarize their accumulated wisdom in a systematic way, seeking an unbiased estimate of their judgements on particular matters that are specified *a priori*. As such, they may well be the most systematic source of reference on questions that might arise about the validity of estimates derived using other methods. Instead of referring to a haphazard selection of country specialists when assessing the 'face validity' of some estimate, our best estimate of the collective wisdom of the population of country specialists is available in more systematically collected and summarized expert survey results.

Setting the policy positions of Japanese political parties in context

The expert surveys

In the rest of this article, we explore how to use expert surveys to set Japanese party politics systematically in a broader comparative context, locating Japanese parties in policy spaces that can be compared with those in a range of different political systems. There are both methodological and substantive reasons to do this. Substantively, when we set out to characterize party systems, we are engaged in an intrinsically comparative endeavour, part of which involves characterizing the relative policy positions of different parties in the system. We might for example think of a party system as being dominated by a large party of the right (as in Japan or Italy), of the left (as in Norway or Sweden), or of the centre (as in Ireland), for example, or as being characterized by an

alternation of power between substantial parties of the left and the right (as in Britain or Spain). Each of these characterizations combines information about the profile of party sizes in the system with information about their relative policy positions, with an implicit assumption that at least relative policy positions can be compared across party systems. Methodologically, attempting to set the positions of parties in one country in a more general comparative context offers us the potential to explore the extent to which the careful definition of a priori policy scales can generate party policy positions for which inter-country comparisons appear to have at least face validity.

In what follows, therefore, we compare expert survey estimates of party policy positions in Japan with party policy positions derived from expert surveys conducted by us in 46 other democracies. An expert survey was simultaneously conducted for Japan by Junko Kato, in a format consistent with that of the other surveys. These surveys, a full report on which can be found in Benoit and Laver (2005) replicated the approach developed by Laver and Hunt (1992) and extended this in several ways. For example, native languages were used wherever possible; extensive use was made of the world wide web to deploy surveys and collect information; country coverage was extended to include all of Eastern and Western Europe, Russia, North America, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, and Israel. As in the Laver–Hunt survey, country specialists were asked to use their best judgement to locate political parties on substantive policy dimensions. Each dimension was titled in terms of its substantive content and anchored at each end by two short phrases setting out substantive policy positions.[2] Substantive policy dimensions covered in the survey included a set of four 'core' dimensions deployed in every country in the study. These were: increase spending vs. reduce taxes, 'social' policy, environmental policy, and decentralization. Also included for many countries, on the basis of advice from local country specialists, were policy dimensions dealing with, among other matters: immigration, deregulation, privatization, religion, treatment of former communists, media freedom, EU policy, security policy, health care, and foreign ownership of land. For each dimension, country specialists were also asked to locate each party on a scale measuring the importance of the policy dimension to the party in question. In a significant extension of the Laver–Hunt approach, we also asked experts to locate all parties on a general left–right dimension.

[2] Examples of anchoring phrases include:

Dimension: Increase spending vs. reduce taxes
Promotes raising taxes to increase public services. (1)
Promotes cutting public services to cut taxes. (20)

Dimension: Social policy
Favours liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia. (1)
Opposes liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia. (20)

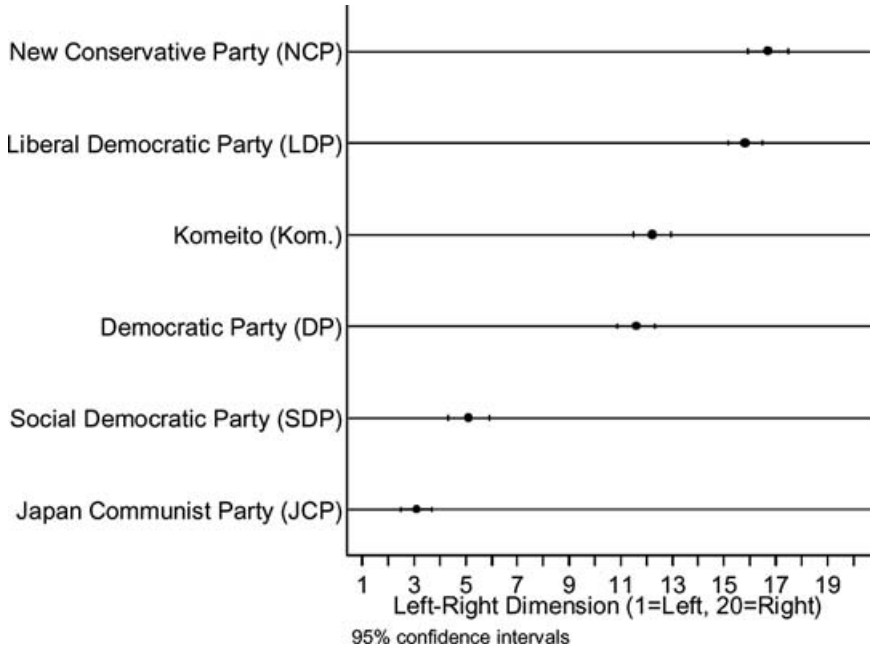

Figure 1 Expert judgements of Japanese party positions on left–right dimension

The general left–right dimension in Japan

In what follows, we set out basic results for Japan so that we can place these in a comparative context. Figure 1 reports the mean judgements of Japanese country specialists about party positions on a general left–right scale, together with estimated 95% confidence intervals around these. As most people would expect from a general knowledge of Japanese politics, these positions show LDP and NCP on the right. NCP appears a little to the right of LDP but this difference is not statistically significant. Figure 1 shows both JCP and SDP on the left, with JCP significantly to the left of SDP. And it shows DP and *Komeito* in statistically indistinguishable positions on the centre-right. These results clearly have good face validity.

Salience of substantive policy dimensions in Japan

In addition to the general left–right dimension, party positions were estimated on a range of substantive policy dimension. The set of four 'core' substantive policy dimensions used in every one of the 47 surveys of country specialists was expanded in the Japanese survey to include six additional substantive policy dimensions. The set of ten policy dimensions estimated in Japan can be seen in Table 1, together with the weighted mean relative salience[3] of each dimension, both in the 2003 survey and an

[3] For a given policy dimension this is calculated as the mean of the estimated party specific saliency scores each score weighted by party vote share.

Table 1. *Weighted mean salience of ten policy scales: Japan, 2003 and 2000*

	Weighted mean salience	
Policy dimension	2003	2000
Social policy	10.6	9.7
Immigration	10.0	*n.a.*
Environment	9.4	9.8
Decentralization	8.1	8.4
Deregulation	7.6	7.6
National identity	7.5	6.8
Deficit bonds	7.3	6.2
Increase spending *vs.* reduce taxes	6.8	7.0
US Affairs	5.9	6.1
Defence Policy	5.4	6.1

earlier Japanese expert survey conducted in 2000 (Kato and Laver, 2003). This shows social and environmental policy as two of the most salient substantive dimensions in 2003, as they were in 2000, with social policy increasing somewhat in importance between the two surveys. The most substantial change from 2000 was a decline in the salience of foreign and defence policy. A new policy dimension was introduced in the 2003 survey, in Japan as well as in many of the other countries in the Benoit–Laver study. This concerned immigration policy and, as Table 1 shows, it proved in 2003 to be one of the three most salient policy dimensions investigated in Japan.

Substantive policy content of left and right in Japan

The substantive meaning of left and right in any given country is (often implicitly) left by many empirical researchers as an open question. And, as we have seen, it has been treated by analysts such as Gabel and Huber (2000) as a quite explicitly inductive matter – with left and right in any given country comprising whatever is the substantive policy content of the primary policy axis of political competition. If the substantive policy content of left and right is liable to vary between countries, and indeed over time within the same country, this obviously undermines inter-country comparisons of left–right placements – as well as 'time series' of left–right placements within any given country. In order to derive more specific information on this important matter, our survey asked the same country specialists to locate the same parties on both substantive policy dimensions and on a left–right scale. This allows us to explore, for any given country, what was in the country specialists' minds, in terms of substantive policy, when they placed parties on the left right scale. We do this for Japan by using OLS regressions to predict Japanese country specialists' left–right placements of given parties from their placements of the same parties on the ten substantive policy dimensions deployed in the Japanese survey.[4] The results of doing this are reported in Table 2 and give us a clear

[4] Thus a case in this analysis is one Japanese country specialist's placement of one party.

Table 2. *OLS regression using experts' placements of individual parties on substantive policy dimensions to predict their placement of the same party on the left–right dimension*

Dependent variable: left–right score Independent variable: policy scores	Coef.	Std err.
Environment	**0.26**	(0.043)
Defense policy	**0.21**	(0.055)
Social policy	**0.18**	(0.037)
Deregulation	**0.18**	(0.038)
National identity	**0.10**	(0.032)
US affairs	0.10	(0.053)
Immigration	0.02	(0.043)
Deficit bonds	0.01	(0.028)
Decentralization	−0.04	(0.035)
Taxes vs. spending	−0.04	(0.025)
Constant	0.18	(0.572)
N	256	
Adjusted R2	0.82	
Root MSE	1.91	

Note: Weighted by party vote share. Bold coefficients are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

insight into what was in Japanese country specialists' minds when they placed Japanese parties on the left–right scale.

Table 2 suggests that the policies of the parties on the environment and defense had the greatest influence on their left–right placement by Japanese country specialists, followed by social policy and deregulation, with national identity also having an independent impact on left–right placements. Thus, as far as economic policy was concerned, it was policy on deregulation rather than on tax cuts vs. public spending that drove left–right placements. As far as social policy was concerned, left–right placements were driven more by policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia than by immigration policy, which did not have an independent impact on left–right placements.

We can continue the investigation of what constitutes left and right in the Japanese policy space by using a factor analysis to extract the principal components of the various substantive dimensions of Japanese party policies. Table 3 presents the results of an unrotated factor analysis of expert placement of parties on all issue dimensions. Three orthogonal factors emerge. The first factor emerges most clearly as a left–right dimension of politics in Japan, grouping largely the same set of dimensions as those found to be correlated with the left–right scores from Table 2. The only exceptions are Deregulation, correlating with left–right in Table 2 but loading most strongly on Factor 2, and the strong loading of Immigration in Table 3, which does not emerge as a statistically significant correlate in Table 2 when other dimensional positions are held constant. The second factor consists of decentralization, deregulation, and deficit bonds. The final orthogonal dimension consists of the economic issue of taxes

Table 3. *Principal components analysis of expert judgements of party positions (weighted by vote share)*

Principal Components Factor Analysis ($n = 256$)

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion	Cumulative
1	4.45	0.45	0.45
2	1.82	0.18	0.63
3	1.01	0.10	0.73
4	0.83	0.08	0.81
5	0.49	0.05	0.86
6	0.41	0.04	0.90
7	0.35	0.04	0.94
8	0.30	0.03	0.97
9	0.24	0.02	0.99
10	0.09	0.01	1.00

Factor Loadings				
Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**Uniqueness**
US affairs	**0.91**	0.13	−0.05	0.16
Defense policy	**0.91**	0.18	−0.04	0.15
Environment	**0.85**	−0.09	−0.07	0.27
Immigration	**0.76**	−0.38	0.04	0.27
Social	**0.74**	−0.40	−0.08	0.29
National identity	**0.73**	0.33	0.07	0.35
Decentralization	0.36	−**0.74**	0.06	0.33
Deregulation	0.54	**0.66**	0.03	0.28
Deficit bonds	0.11	**0.61**	0.11	0.61
Taxes vs. spending	0.07	−0.08	**0.99**	0.02

Note: The bold figures in the factor loadings identify, for each variable, the factor which had the highest absolute loading.

versus spending. A very striking substantive feature of these results is that, while in comparative context left and right are typically driven by economic policy, in Japan none of the economic dimensions (deregulation, tax v. spending, and to a lesser degree, deficit bonds) loaded with the highly dominant first factor of the policy space. The local meaning of left and right in Japanese politics seems to have much more to do with social, immigration, environmental, and foreign policy issues than with economics.

In Table 4 we confirm the identification of the first factor with the left–right dimension, regressing the expert scores on the left–right dimension against rotated factor scores derived from the analysis in Table 3. The results indicate a very high correlation of Factor 1 with the left–right dimension (coefficient estimate 4.05, SE 0.12). Factor 2 is also associated with the left–right dimension, although this correlation is negative and substantively much weaker (estimate –0.73, SE .12). Consistent with our previous analysis, Factor 3 (consisting mainly of the taxes and spending dimension) is completely uncorrelated with left–right positioning (estimate –0.18, SE .12). Every aspect of our analysis, therefore, contributes to the same conclusion: parties' positions

Table 4. *Regression of left–right positions on rotated factor scores (weighted by vote share)*

Dependent variable: left–right		
Variable	Coefficient	SE
Factor 1	**4.05**	0.12
Factor 2	**−0.73**	0.12
Factor 3	−0.18	0.12
Constant	**12.17**	0.12
Adjusted R2	0.81	
Root MSE	1.96	
N	256	

on the left–right dimension in Japan are driven not by their economic policies, but rather by their positions on matters of foreign and domestic social policy.

Relative salience of policy dimensions

While the precise set of substantive policy dimensions deployed varied from country to country in the set of expert surveys we are discussing, according to their circumstances of local party competition, the four core substantive dimensions were used in every country. Outside Eastern Europe, two additional substantive dimensions were used in many countries; these related to immigration and deregulation.[5] Table 5 shows the weighted mean salience of these six widely used substantive dimensions in a range of countries, together with their weighted mean salience across all counties (in which they were deployed) in the study. Comparisons *across countries* of the salience of a given dimension are problematic, as can be seen clearly from the results for Japan in Table 5. These clearly suggest that Japanese country specialists were less inclined than their colleagues in other countries to rate *any* policy dimension as extremely salient. However, we can usefully compare the relative salience of policy dimensions *within countries*.

Table 5 highlights in bold the policy dimensions with the highest weighted mean salience in each country, or the two most salient dimensions if these are effectively indistinguishable. The patterns are quite striking. In almost every other country but Japan, one or other of the two economic policy dimensions deployed was rated as the most salient. The exceptions are Denmark and Luxembourg, for which immigration policy is rated as the most salient. In the case of Japan, as we have already seen 'social policy' on matters such as abortion and homosexuality was rated as the most salient – Japan was the only country for which this was true.

In relation to the two alternative measures of economic policy, tax/spend and deregulation, policy on deregulation was the more salient across the entire set of

[5] Two additional dimensions were deployed in each post-communist country related to the privatization of state assets and the treatment of former communists.

Table 5. *Weighted mean salience of six 'core' policy dimensions, by country*

Country	Deregulation	Taxes vs. spending	Immigration	Decentralization	Social policy	Environment
DE		**15.91**	14.08	10.38	13.58	12.84
US	14.00	**15.54**	10.40	10.02	15.21	14.15
AU	**15.62**	**15.53**	15.30	11.49	12.94	14.18
CH	14.94	**15.41**	14.73	11.53	12.96	11.80
UK	14.11	**14.99**	13.31	11.96	12.30	10.87
ES	**15.50**	14.83	14.28	14.49	12.87	10.54
IT	14.28	**14.71**	14.31	12.28	12.86	10.65
CY	**15.82**	14.48	11.87	12.76	10.06	10.20
CA	14.07	**14.41**	13.60	13.54	13.35	11.51
AT		**14.29**	**13.97**	12.53	12.70	12.54
LU	12.89	14.25	**14.92**	11.38	13.57	12.49
SE	**14.19**	**14.22**	12.45	11.45	12.02	12.25
DK		14.18	**15.72**	10.63	10.49	11.26
GR	**15.36**	14.16	13.49	11.85	9.11	11.02
NO	**14.22**	**14.13**	12.65	11.40	11.63	12.97
FI	**14.13**	**14.04**	10.90	12.20	11.74	12.52
IE		**13.90**	11.62	10.26	11.09	10.82
NZ	**13.77**	**13.79**	13.18	10.80		12.82
BE	**14.12**	13.75	**14.11**	12.91	14.00	11.80
NL	**13.90**	13.54	**14.05**	9.15	11.80	10.47
PT		**13.49**	13.00	13.11	12.31	11.66
FR		**13.43**	**13.73**	12.25	12.59	10.85
IL	**12.79**	**12.96**			10.98	6.77
IS	**14.24**	12.59	8.06	10.06	7.96	**13.95**
TR	**13.56**	12.40	9.46	**14.09**	9.83	9.08
MT	**12.17**	**12.35**	8.13	10.76	11.43	11.46
JP	7.60	6.82	10.04	8.14	**10.63**	9.36
47 country mean	**3.69**	13.25	12.61	12.09	11.14	10.49

countries surveyed, taken as a whole. However, there was considerable variation between individual countries on this. Japan is firmly in the group of countries for which economic policy is more about deregulation than about the trade-off between reducing taxes and increasing public spending. Also in this group, we find Spain, Greece, Turkey and Cyprus. In a number of countries, economic policy appears to remain more about the tax/spend trade-off than about deregulation. In this group of countries we find the United States, Britain, Italy and Luxembourg, for example.

Turning to the two alternative measures of social liberalism and conservatism – immigration policy on the one hand and policy on matters such as abortion and gay rights on the other – we see that both are equally important in Japan. They are also among the most salient policy dimensions in a national context. The strong trend in

Table 6. *Spearman's rank-order correlations between mean party placements on left–right scale and on six 'core' policy dimensions*

Country	Deregulation	Taxes vs. spending	Immigration	Decentralization	Social policy	Environment
NZ	**1.00**	**1.00**	**0.81**	−0.48		**0.93**
GR	**1.00**	**1.00**	0.80	0.40	0.40	0.80
NO	**1.00**	**1.00**	**0.76**	0.26	0.52	**0.79**
SE	**0.93**	**0.96**	**0.82**	0.11	0.75	**0.89**
BE	**0.86**	**0.96**	**0.97**	−0.26	**0.81**	**0.94**
PT		**0.94**	**1.00**	**0.83**	**0.94**	**0.83**
IE		**0.94**	**0.89**	**0.94**	0.54	**0.89**
IS	**1.00**	**0.94**	0.71	−**0.83**	0.49	**0.90**
CA	**0.94**	**0.94**	0.71	−0.43	**0.94**	**1.00**
ES	**0.90**	**0.90**	**1.00**	0.10	**1.00**	**0.90**
NL	**0.93**	**0.90**	**0.87**	−0.58	0.52	**0.73**
UK	**1.00**	**0.90**	0.70	**0.90**	0.20	0.70
CY	**0.79**	**0.88**	0.60	−0.65	−0.23	0.48
DK		**0.86**	**0.90**	0.12	**0.75**	**0.93**
CH	**0.65**	**0.84**	**0.98**	−**0.75**	**0.82**	**0.75**
JP	**0.94**	**0.83**	**0.94**	0.26	**0.94**	**0.94**
LU	**0.94**	**0.83**	**0.94**	0.12	**0.84**	**0.89**
AU	0.37	**0.83**	**0.94**	0.14	**0.83**	0.77
FI	**0.93**	**0.81**	**0.74**	0.07	**0.71**	**0.74**
AT		0.80	**1.00**	−0.60	**1.00**	**1.00**
TR	0.10	**0.76**	**0.98**	0.48	**0.88**	0.67
IT	0.49	**0.71**	**0.95**	0.03	**0.81**	**0.89**
IL	0.35	0.51			**0.64**	**0.82**
MT	0.87	0.50	**1.00**	−0.50	**1.00**	0.50
DE		0.27	**0.95**	0.31	**0.88**	**0.67**
All 47 countries	**0.78**	**0.76**	**0.86**	0.01	**0.61**	**0.58**

Note: Correlations significant at < 0.05 level in bold.

Western Europe is for immigration policy to be substantially more salient than policy on matters such as abortion and gay rights – patterns that can be seen very clearly in countries such as Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Greece, and the Netherlands. In stark contrast we find the United States, where policy on matters such as abortion, euthanasia and gay rights far outweighs immigration policy in terms of relative salience for party competition.

Substantive correlates of left–right placements

Since the surveys of country specialists were adapted to the local circumstances of the country under investigation, it would confuse more than clarify to explore the content of left and right in a comparative context by reporting a set of regression results for every country in the study, analogous to those reported for Japan in Table 2. Table 6

thus presents some simple and robust indicators of the substantive policy correlates of left–right placements for the same set of countries as Table 5.[6] Within each country, Table 6 shows the rank-order correlations between estimated party policy positions on each substantive policy dimension, and estimated party positions on the left–right dimension. Thus, if parties are ordered in precisely the same way on a substantive policy dimension and the left right dimension, then the rank-order correlation will be +1.0. If parties are ranked in precisely the opposite order on the two dimensions, it will be −1.0. The closer to zero, the less the relationship between the two sets of party rankings. We thus take the rank-order correlations as robust indicators of the bivariate relationship between party placements on two policy dimensions. Countries in Table 6 are ranked according to the strength of the association between left–right party placements and placements on the tax/spend dimension.

The results show that, for Japan, party rankings are more or less the same on the left–right dimension and on five of the six main substantive policy dimensions. This could be interpreted to imply that policy based party competition in Japan is inherently one dimensional – no matter which substantive dimension of policy is considered, the parties are ranked in essentially the same way. The sole exception concerns party positions on decentralization, which are quite unrelated to their left–right positions – a feature Japan shares with most other countries in the study. This pattern in Japan is quite similar to that seen in many other countries in the study. Results for Japan look very similar to those for a group of countries as diverse as Spain, Finland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. This group is distinguished from those in which parties' positions on decentralization were also related to their left–right placements. In Britain, Ireland and Portugal, for example, parties favouring decentralization are on the left; in Iceland and Switzerland, in contrast, they are on the right. In a small third group of countries, Israel and Germany being striking examples, left–right placements are associated much more with positions on immigration and other social issues than they are with economic policy. Across the entire group of countries, we note that immigration policy is almost always more closely associated with left and right than the other dimension of 'social' policy, relating to abortion, gay rights, and euthanasia.

Substantive party placements

We saw from Table 1 that the substantive policy dimension in Japan with the highest weighted mean salience was social policy, and that the most salient economic policy dimension concerned deregulation. We can plot party positions on these two policy dimensions for many different countries in the study. Although we must always be extremely cautious when making inter-country comparisons of party policy positions,

[6] Countries such as the US with two-party system are excluded since rank-order correlations will always be 1 by definition.

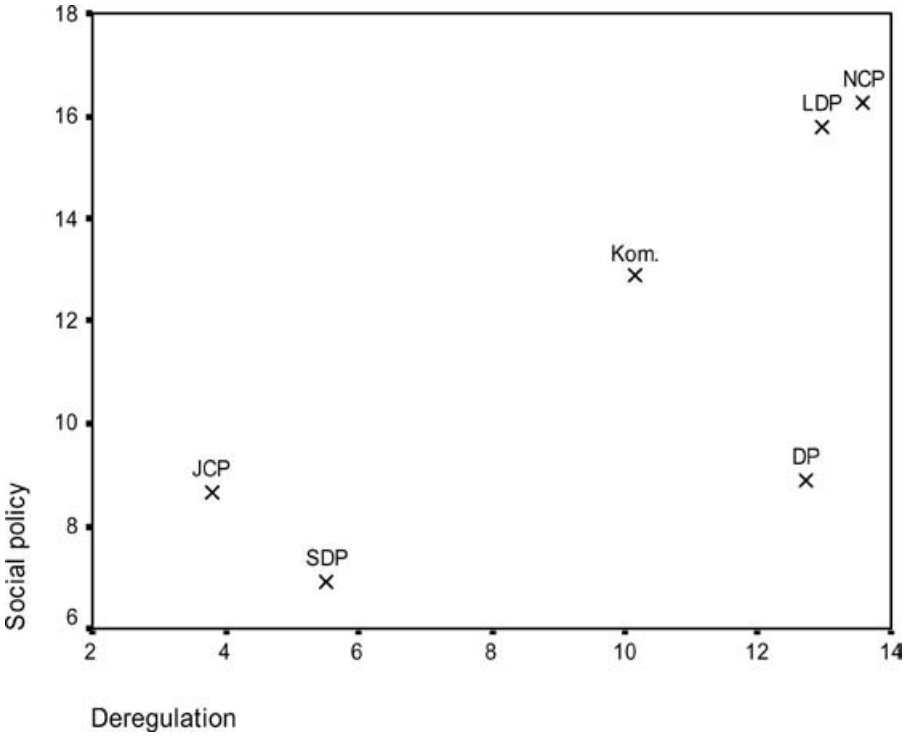

Figure 2 Japanese party locations in two-dimensional policy space

the fact that the substantive policy scales used in the expert surveys are anchored in precise definitions of each end point, translated where needed into the native language, means that these scales are at least *more* likely to be comparable across countries than unanchored general left–right scales.

Figure 2 shows estimated Japanese party positions for 2003 in the two-dimensional policy space generated by the deregulation and social policy dimensions. NCP and LDP are close together on the right of both dimensions, with JCP and SDP to the left of both. The high correlation between party positions on the two policy dimensions is evident, although *Komeito* and DP are distinguished on the centre-right by DP's more liberal position on social policy and its stronger support for deregulation. More generally, we can think of 'off-diagonal' party positions in this particular two-dimensional policy representation as reflecting 'libertarian' positions in the bottom right quadrant (pro-deregulation on economic policy, liberal on social policy) to 'neo fascist' in the top left quadrant (pro-regulation on economic policy, conservative on social policy).

Figure 3 superimposes onto the Japanese plot party positions in four large European countries – Italy, Spain, Britain and Sweden – chosen somewhat arbitrarily to provide a geographically and culturally diverse basis for comparison. Figure 4 does the same for Anglophone party systems on three continents – the USA, Britain, and

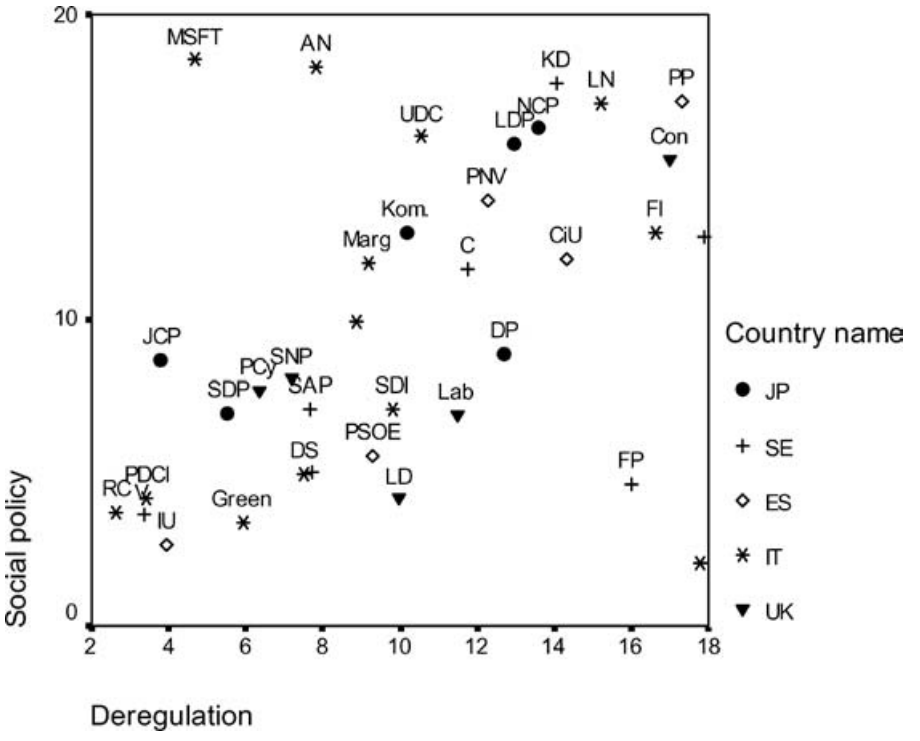

Figure 3 Japanese and European party locations in two-dimensional policy space

Australia. While bearing in firm mind the need to be cautious about any conclusions that we might draw, the patterns in Figure 3 do clearly hint that the different expert surveys are measuring more or less the same thing in different countries. First note the high level of association between party positions on the two dimensions across all countries. Second, note that the striking off-diagonal outliers are the Swedish Freedom Party (FP), in the 'libertarian' quadrant, and the Italian *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) and *Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore* (MSFT) in the 'neo-fascist' quadrant. These positions are very much to be expected. Third, note the international ideological company kept by the right-wing Japanese parties – LDP and NCP. In Italian terms they are to be found somewhere between the Christian Democrats (UDC) and Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI). They are somewhat to the left of the two large European secular conservative parties – the British Conservatives (Con) and the Spanish *Partido Popular* (PP), and very close to the position of the Swedish Conservatives (KD). As noted, all of these parties look *very* different from the 'libertarian' FP in Sweden or the two 'neo-fascist' parties in Italy.

Moving to the bottom left of this policy space, we see the European communist, radical left, and Green parties all anchoring this quadrant – well represented by the

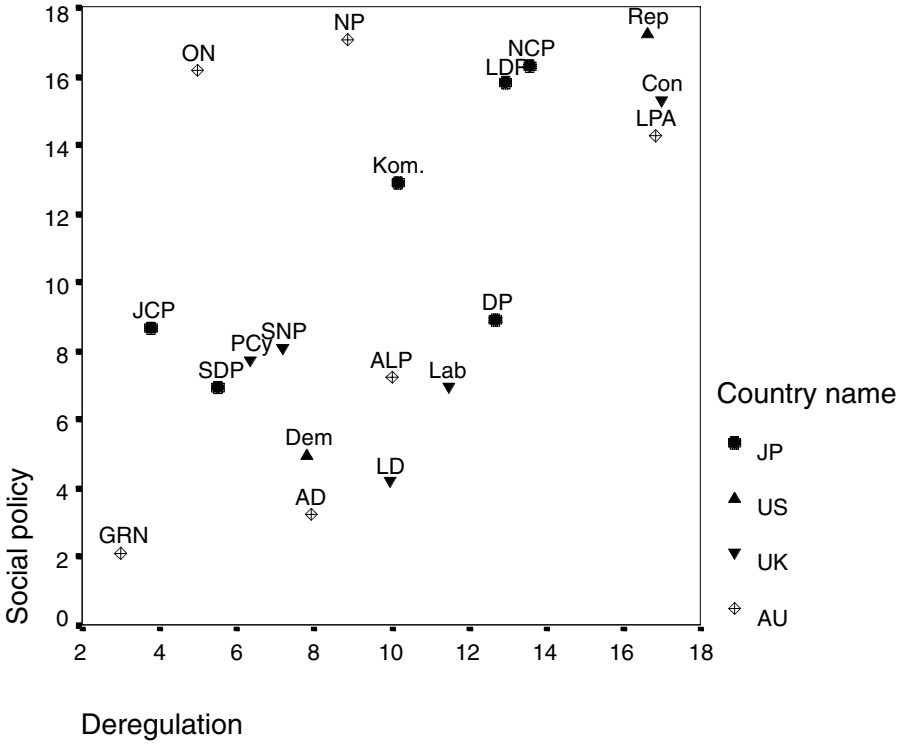

Figure 4 Japanese and other party locations in two-dimensional policy space

various splinters of Italian Communism (RC, PDCI, DS) and the Swedish Radical Left (V). Closer to the centre we find the Swedish (SAP) and Spanish (PSOE) social democrats, with the British Labour Party (Lab) a little further to the right again. The Japanese JCP and SDP are close together and seem to occupy a somewhat distinct position – somewhat more socially conservative than the European communist parties, but somewhat more left-wing on economic policy than the European social democrats. In the centre-right of this policy space, *Komeito* looks closest to *la Margherita* (Marg) in Italy or the formerly agrarian Centre Party (CP) in Sweden. The closest ideological neighbour for the DP, in contrast, is Tony Blair's New Labour in Britain. Moving to the intercontinental comparisons in Figure 4, and reminding ourselves once more about the very tentative nature of any conclusion we might draw, we find LDP and NCP somewhat to the left of the US Republicans (Rep), who themselves are very close to both the British Conservatives (Con) and the Liberal Party of Australia (LPA). The Australian Greens (GRN) stake out the same ideological territory on the left as the European Green and radical left parties (Figure 3), with nothing really like them to be found in the US, Britain, or Japan. The US (Dem) and Australian (AD) Democrats cluster closely with the Liberal Democrats (LD) in Britain. The Japanese DP actually looks most like New

Labour (Lab) in Britain or the Australian Labour Party (ALP), with the JCP and SDP in Japan again looking somewhat more conservative on social policy than comparable parties without the same economic policy positions. There is no 'libertarian' party in this comparison, while the 'neo-fascist' quadrant is anchored (plausibly) by the Australian One Nation (ON) party, which has no Japanese party close to it.[7]

Conclusions: party policy in comparative context

Left–right positions

We know *a priori* that, of the essence of the 'left–right dimension', it has no substantive policy 'anchors' that allow us to infer a common meaning for left and right in different countries. Empirically, we know both from Table 5 above and from country-specific versions of the regression Table 2 above (not reported here), that the substantive policy correlates of left and right vary from country to country. This implies that the substantive meaning of left and right does indeed vary across countries. We thus have strong *a priori* and empirical grounds to question the validity of inter-country comparisons of party positions on the left–right dimension.

This adds weight to the assertion by Gabel and Huber (2000) that one way to interpret the left–right dimension in a comparative context is simply as the first principal factor in a high dimensional policy space. Put another way, we might see the left–right dimension as the primary axis of policy-based party competition in any given country. This is a purely empirical matter; we interpret any empirically estimated left–right dimension, *a posteriori*, in terms of the extent to which parties estimated to be on the left (or right) are those we have independent reasons to believe 'should' be on the left (or right). When we compare estimated left–right positions of parties in two different countries, in this context, we are not comparing like with like in terms of substantive policy content – we are instead comparing relative party positions on the principal axis of competition.

The strong likelihood that the substantive policy content of the left–right dimension varies between countries is coupled with a strong *a priori* likelihood that it varies over time within a single country. The calls into question the substantive meaning of any 'time series' of left–right party placements within one country. If we observe left–right movements in some party's 'position' over time, it is impossible to distinguish between the possibility that the substantive policy content of the party's position has changed, and the possibility that the substantive policy content of left and right has changed over time – as is almost certainly the case in recent years, for example, in relation to environmental and immigration policy. The bottom line is that, if we do indeed interpret the left–right dimension as the principal axis of policy-based competition in any given country, then our substantive policy interpretations of this

[7] NP is the National Party of Australia.

will by definition vary across space and time, with very significant implications for the empirical estimation of left–right placements from substantive policy positions.

Positions on substantive policy dimensions

Turning to the estimation of party positions on substantive policy dimensions, we have made an explicit attempt in our surveys of country specialists to give our scales construct validity by anchoring the end points of each scale in substantive policy positions. When the survey was translated into different languages, it was translated by a bilingual country specialist. Our claim, therefore, is that our substantive policy scales are more likely to form the basis of valid inter-country comparisons than an un-anchored general left–right scale. Of course it is possible that the same substantive scale definitions may 'mean' different things in different countries and that translation is a cultural as well as a linguistic matter. Nonetheless, we have made a very explicit attempt to 'anchor' the substantive meaning of the scales.

Given all of this, we can see from Figures 3 and 4 that superimposing party positions in different countries on the 'same' scales does give us results that seem intuitively plausible. Groups of parties in different countries that we feel have something in common (communist parties, social democratic parties, conservative parties) do cluster together in these plots. This is despite the fact that the positions of the different communist (or socialist, or conservative) parties in different countries were estimated using completely different groups of country specialists, working in completely different languages, but applying the same (translated) anchored scale definitions. In terms of content validity, therefore, such inter-country comparisons of scale positions at least pass the 'eyeball' test.

It is not immediately obvious how to move beyond such informal validation of cross-country comparisons of party positions on anchored substantive policy scales. Considering the content validity of party positions in individual countries we always have recourse to the accumulated wisdom of country specialists – as we have already noted, this is summarized in a systematic way in the expert surveys themselves. Considering the content validity of inter-country comparisons, the analogy is to seek comfort in the accumulated wisdom of comparativists – although we may then torment ourselves with the almost metaphysical question of what the empirical source of that accumulated wisdom might be?

About the authors

Michael Laver is Professor of Politics at New York University, having previously been Professor of Political Science at Trinity College Dublin. His main research interests are in the theory and practice of party competition, especially competition between elections within parties and governments and most especially the dynamic modelling of these, and on methods for estimating the policy positions of political actors, in particular the use of expert surveys and computerized text analysis. He has been co-editor of the *European Journal of Political Research* and is author or co-author of over

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Appendix A: Japanese party positions on policy dimensions

	Party					
Policy dimension	DP	JCP	Kom.	LDP	NCP	SDP
Social	8.9	8.7	12.9	15.8	16.3	6.9
	0.52	0.56	0.51	0.47	0.53	0.56
	3.9	4.2	3.8	3.5	3.6	4.2
	56	56	56	57	46	57
Immigration	8.5	7.7	11	14.4	15.3	6.5
	0.45	0.5	0.53	0.5	0.57	0.46
	3.4	3.8	4	3.8	3.8	3.4
	56	56	57	57	46	56
Environment	10.3	5.3	10.7	15	14.6	5.5
	0.45	0.41	0.45	0.4	0.42	0.44
	3.4	3.1	3.4	3	2.9	3.3
	58	58	58	58	48	58
Decentralization	5	10.4	9.4	10.6	10.3	8.8
	0.37	0.68	0.46	0.56	0.55	0.63
	2.8	5.1	3.5	4.3	3.8	4.8
	58	58	58	58	47	58
Deregulation	12.7	3.8	10.2	12.9	13.6	5.5
	0.39	0.36	0.39	0.53	0.55	0.29
	2.9	2.8	3	4	3.8	2.2
	56	58	57	58	48	57
National identity	14.4	4	12.5	17.7	17	7.4
	0.46	0.55	0.57	0.47	0.56	0.66
	3.5	4.2	4.3	3.6	3.9	5
	58	58	57	58	48	57
Def icit bonds	11.9	7.4	9	9.5	10.7	7.6
	0.5	0.5	0.52	0.75	0.76	0.49
	3.7	3.7	3.9	5.6	5.2	3.6
	56	56	56	56	46	55
Taxes vs. Spending	10.6	8.7	9.5	10.1	11.7	8.9
	0.6	0.63	0.52	0.7	0.78	0.48
	4.5	4.8	3.9	5.3	5.3	3.6
	57	57	56	58	46	57
US Affairs	10.7	1.6	12.2	17.4	17	3.1
	0.5	0.14	0.53	0.31	0.41	0.29
	3.8	1.1	4	2.4	2.8	2.2
	58	58	57	58	48	58
Defense policy	11.6	2.1	11.2	17	17	2.9
	0.47	0.23	0.52	0.33	0.4	0.29
	3.5	1.8	3.9	2.5	2.8	2.2
	58	58	57	58	48	58
Left–Right	11.6	3.1	12.2	15.8	16.7	5.1
	0.36	0.3	0.37	0.33	0.38	0.4
	2.8	2.3	2.8	2.5	2.7	3.1
	58	58	58	58	48	58
Sympathy	8.9	14	16	11.6	14.6	11.6
	0.58	0.81	0.52	0.91	0.91	0.89
	3.8	5.4	3.5	6.1	5.3	5.9
	44	44	44	44	34	44

(Mean, Std. Error, Std. Deviation, N; ranked by importance)

Note: Sorted by descending order of weighted importance.