

Policy positioning in the European Parliament

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Abstract

Party politics in the European Parliament (EP) consists of competition between transnational party groups, each consisting of multiple national member parties from the 27 member states of the European Union (EU). Identifying the policy space that these parties inhabit and their ideological positions is both practically and conceptually challenging. In this article we characterize this policy competition by tracking EP political groups from three separate, original expert surveys taken in 2004, 2007 and 2010. We look at the relative positioning of the groups on multiple dimensions of policy, as well as changes in party group policy since 2004. Additionally, we characterize the policy cohesion of party groups by examining the relative positions of each group's constituent parties, using independent national-level expert surveys. The results reinforce previous findings that EP party groups occupy the entire range of the left–right spectrum and, moreover, that their national party makeup consists of parties that are broadly cohesive in terms of their policy locations.

Keywords

European Parliament, expert surveys, legislative politics, party cohesion, party competition, policy positions

Introduction

Political groups in the European Parliament (EP) consist not of legislators elected directly as party group members, but rather of collections of representatives elected as members of distinct national parties. Members of the European Parliament

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(MEPs) thus answer to both national- and EP-level principals, giving rise to a dual agent problem, with the associated difficulties of maintaining discipline and cohesion (Hix et al., 2007; McElroy and Benoit, 2010; Meserve et al., 2009; Raunio, 1997). The difficulty in maintaining cohesion is further exacerbated by the very dynamic nature of party competition in the 27 member states of the European Union (EU), where parties enter and exit the political arena in response to changing national conditions.

This dynamism in policy competition at the national level directly affects EP political groups. Over time, party groups split and merge, some cease to exist and new ones are created. In addition, national party members as well as individual MEPs may switch affiliation in between elections. Party groups must formulate and reformulate their policy positions on a number of political dimensions, not only before European elections but also between elections. Though much of this policy positioning is to attract additional national parties into the ranks of EP groups, it also serves to represent the party group directly to the European electorate and to guide its stance on the legislative issues that arise in the Parliament.

A key question from students of the EU therefore is how best to locate EP party groups in policy space, and what this means both conceptually and practically. Placing parties in policy space has long formed a challenging measurement problem for political researchers in general, because one can never know directly and objectively what are the dimensions, metrics and correct measurement tools (see Benoit and Laver, 2006). Locating EP political groups poses an even greater challenge owing to their multi-party character and the particularly dynamic environment in which they operate (McElroy and Benoit, 2007). It is our contention that expert surveys offer one of the best means for measuring the policy positioning of European party groups, since they take into account all meaningful aspects of party policy as perceived by knowledgeable observers. Manifesto-based measures are limited, in the context of the European Parliament, by the fact that not all political groups issue Euro manifestos. Expert surveys also tend to be much more informed than measures based on mass opinion surveys – indeed, so few European voters are familiar with EP party groups that the standard placement question is not even asked in European election surveys.¹

In this article, we apply expert survey methodologies to update the McElroy and Benoit (2007) measures of EP party group policy positions taken in 2004. Our update covers the mid-term of the 6th legislative session (2007) and the first period of the 7th EU legislature (early 2010). First, we outline the party structure of the European Parliament and the process by which political groups form and evolve, and we trace the main changes in political groups since enlargement. Next, we report estimates of EP party group policy positions using two previously unpublished expert surveys, one taken during the middle of the 6th Parliament, and one taken nine months after the 2009 elections. We then profile the diversity of national party members in each party group using the most recent national-level expert survey estimates of party policy.

The party structure of the European Parliament

Party politics in the European Union is characterized by competition at two different levels: national and transnational. National political parties remain the basic organizational unit for both the national and European elections whereas the political groups in the European Parliament, composed of these multiple national-level political parties, are the units of legislative competition.

Over the course of the European Parliament's history there has been a considerable degree of fluidity in the party system within the Parliament. National parties frequently change their affiliation, and both EP party groups and national parties come and go, change their names and also change their policy position over time. In total, more than 20 political groups existed between 1979 and 2010, with upwards of 10 groups at any one time.² In addition to changes in the party groups themselves, national parties also switch affiliation between existing groups. This type of switching is often motivated by factors internal to the European Parliament, such as disagreements over policy or the spoils of parliamentary office, but may also be driven by domestic concerns.

Despite such fluidity in the EP party system, the main party groups have become increasingly cohesive and powerful over time (Hix et al., 2007; Raunio, 1997). Levels of voting cohesion have been rising across parliamentary sessions, especially for the three largest political groups, notwithstanding increases in the overall size of the EP (from its original 142 MEPs to its current 735) and the number of member states. We thus have an interesting juxtaposition of high membership turnover in the EP of both individual MEPs and national parties with the continued institutionalization of the political groups built around national parties and their MEPs.

There are numerous reasons to expect changes during the 2004–2010 period in both the positions and the number of the political groups and the principal policy dimensions on which these groups compete. First, the EU expanded significantly during this period, with two rounds of enlargement to the east, thus increasing the size of the EP by 25 percent from 626 members to (temporarily) 785 members. These new members constitute 27 percent of the current 735 elected representatives. This sudden increase in numbers may have acted as a realigning shock to the system, especially when one considers that the new members are from party systems that are not fully institutionalized and in which the old social cleavages of Western Europe do not neatly apply.

Second, the period also witnessed a significant rise in the number of Eurosceptic MEPs. Once seen as a fringe group, Eurosceptic MEPs have moved centre stage, reflecting a general rise in Euroscepticism in EU member states (De Vries and Edwards, 2009). All of the member states now have some form of a Eurosceptic party competing in European elections. In the 2009 elections, far-right parties also won substantial support in some member states where they were not traditionally powerful, such as in the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Finland and the United Kingdom. This strengthening of the right and far-right should have an impact on

the axes of competition in the EP, given that both groups are strongly Eurosceptic and socially conservative.

Third, electoral volatility at the national level and the associated party system change and fragmentation caused the vote shares of established and incumbent parties to drop generally in the last decade. In Germany, for instance, the share of the vote of the main parties dropped from the traditional 75 percent to less than 68 percent. This volatility is only magnified at the European elections. An extraordinary 45 percent of all national parties represented in the European Parliament in May 2004 were not represented in the post-2009 European Parliament. This level of turnover and volatility can be expected to have an impact on party competition within the EP itself.

Finally, EU treaty changes may have had some impact on internal EP party competition. The passage of the Lisbon Treaty (anticipation and eventual ratification) had a significant impact on the internal legislative processes of the European Parliament. The co-decision (now ordinary legislative) procedure was extended to nearly 50 new areas of policy, increasing the powers of the EP in a host of key areas such as asylum, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and policies relating to the 'general economic interest'. We should expect these issue areas to become more important in internal parliamentary politics as a result. For instance, given the redistributive nature of the CAP and the contested question of immigration, we might expect the salience of these issue areas to increase now that the EP is a veto player in these policy areas.

On the other hand, the balance of power in the EP has remained constant over the course of the past decade. The European People's Party (EPP) wrested control of the top spot from the Party of European Socialists (PES) in 1999 and has not relinquished it in subsequent elections, with its overall share of seats remaining surprisingly constant at around 36 percent. The second-largest group, the Socialists, have seen their overall share of seats drop slightly from 28 percent to 25 percent but they are still far larger than the Liberals, whose share of seats, although increasingly slightly, still places them firmly in a distant third position, but potentially holding the balance of power (Hix and Noury, 2009). This element of stability and continuity in political groups may dampen the impact of any of the realigning factors outlined above.

Party groups in the Parliament elected in 2009

The immediate post-election period in the European Parliament is generally a time of change and the 2009 election was no different. Two new political groups were formed, over 50 national parties represented in the previous legislature failed to elect any MEPs, and almost 70 new national parties gained representation.

The dissolution of the Union for a Europe of the Nations (UEN) group in 2009 was one of the more notable features of the post-election realignment. The UEN had been in existence in one form or another since 1994 but was not reconstituted after the 2009 elections. The largest national party within the UEN, the Italian

National Alliance, had merged at the domestic level with Berlusconi's Forza Italia in March 2009 to form the People of Freedom and stuck with Forza Italia's prior affiliation with the EPP. Another key player in the group, Ireland's Fianna Fáil, had long been looking for an alternative group to join as it was uncomfortable with the Eurosceptic profile of UEN and took the opportunity to join the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

The disappearance of the UEN had repercussions for the Independence/Democracy Group (iD), as it was one of the main suitors for those parties of the UEN left homeless. Lega Nord, Order and Justice (Lithuania) and the Danish People's Party launched the new Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group with what was left of iD after the election. The remaining national parties from the UEN – For Fatherland and Freedom (Latvia), Law and Justice (Poland) and Christian Union (Netherlands) – joined the other new Eurosceptic political group in the EP, the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR). This latter group was spearheaded by the British Conservative Party, which left the EPP after many tense years. This new group is based on conservative values and a shared belief in a non-federal Europe.

Table 1 summarizes the composition of the political groups at the time of our three expert surveys, which took place in June 2004, October 2007 and April 2010.

Table 1. Political party groups in the European Parliament, 2004–10

EP party group	Label	Percentage of seats			No. of seats
		2004	2007	2010	2010
European People's Party	EPP	37.5	35.4	36.0	265
Party of European Socialists/Socialists & Democrats	PES/S&D	29.5	27.5	24.9	183
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	ALDE	8.4	13.2	11.6	85
European United Left/Nordic Green Left	GUE/NGL	7.0	5.2	4.8	35
Greens/European Free Alliance	Verts/EFA	6.0	5.4	7.5	55
Union for a Europe of the Nations	UEN	3.8	5.6		
Europe of Democracies and Diversities	EDD	2.2			
Independence/Democracy group	iD		3.1		
Identity Tradition and Sovereignty group	ITS		2.9		
Europe of Freedom and Democracy group	EFD			4.1	30
European Conservatives and Reformists group	ECR			7.3	54
Non-affiliated	NI	5.6	1.7	3.8	28
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	735

Source: European Parliament official website.

In all periods the EPP was the largest group, with over 35 percent of the seats. The Party of European Socialists (renamed the Group of Socialists & Democrats in 2009) maintained its position as the second-largest group, with about a quarter of the total seats in both 2007 and 2010. The Liberal group (ALDE) experienced a temporary boost in numbers with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in early 2007 and, although their overall percentage of seats marginally decreased in the 2009 elections, it was in line with their 2004 election seat share. The Greens experienced a significant boost in the 2009 elections, increasing their presence from 5.5 percent to over 7 percent, and are now ranked as the fourth-largest group in the EP, despite once again failing to win any seats in the 12 newest member states.

Table 1 shows that the 2009 election did not radically affect the general balance of power in the European Parliament. With the exception of the demise of the UEN and creation of the new ECR group, the 2007 and 2009 party systems are rather similar to those in 2004. It is worth repeating, however, that the aggregate numbers hide a significant amount of change within the party groups themselves, which may be reflected in overall group policy positions as well as the importance they place on particular policy dimensions.

Updating the expert surveys of EP policy positions

Our expert survey methodology applied in 2007 and 2010 followed the same basic procedure as that of McElroy and Benoit (2007). After updating our list of academic experts on the European Parliament, we sent individual invitation emails containing a link to the web-based, English-language survey questionnaire. Approximately three weeks later, a follow-up email was sent reminding experts to participate had they not yet done so. For the 2007 survey we received a total of 25 responses based on 68 invitations, for a response rate of 37 percent. In the 2010 survey, we received 19 responses from 42 invitations, for a response rate of 45 percent.³ These compared with a 67 percent response rate from the 2004 exercise, which solicited 36 experts. In total, the experts provide a more than ample number of placements on which to formulate estimates of policy positions, close to the median response rate of 21 obtained by the Benoit and Laver (2006) expert surveys.

The only substantive changes we made to the survey questionnaire concerned the updating of the party groups to be located, and the addition of a dimension related to decentralization policy, which had been omitted from the 2004 questionnaire. This dimension was worded as follows:

Decentralization/Subsidiarity

Insists on the subsidiarity principle in all administration and decision-making. (1)

Accepts more centralized EU-level administration and decision-making. (20)

Results from the expert surveys

Left–right positioning

A full statistical summary of the 2010 results of the expert locations of the party groups on each policy dimension is presented in web appendix B.⁴ Figure 1 portrays the differences in left–right positions in the 2010 survey, along with 95 percent confidence intervals.

At the far-left of the political spectrum is the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), with a mean value of 2.9 (95 percent CI: 2.3, 3.5), followed by the Greens (Gr/EFA) at 4.4 (3.7, 5.1). The three largest party groups – the S&D, the ALDE and the EPP – occupied positions at the left of centre, centre and right of centre at 7.8 (7.2, 8.4), 11.9 (11.0, 12.7) and 13.5 (12.9, 14.2), respectively. On the far-right of the policy scale, we see the newly formed or reformed groups European Conservatives and Reformists group and Europe of Freedom and Democracy, scoring 17.1 (16.3, 17.9) and 18.6 (17.9, 19.4), respectively.

The positioning and ordering of these main groupings are completely consistent with the 2004 survey results reported in McElroy and Benoit (2007), although the ECR and EFD are new incarnations of right-leaning, Eurosceptic party groups that did not exist in earlier surveys. In addition, each group’s position is statistically distinguishable from the positions of its neighbours, based on the 95 percent confidence intervals. Party groups not only span the entire left–right policy spectrum in the EP, but also occupy regions of the left–right policy space that are distinct from one another.

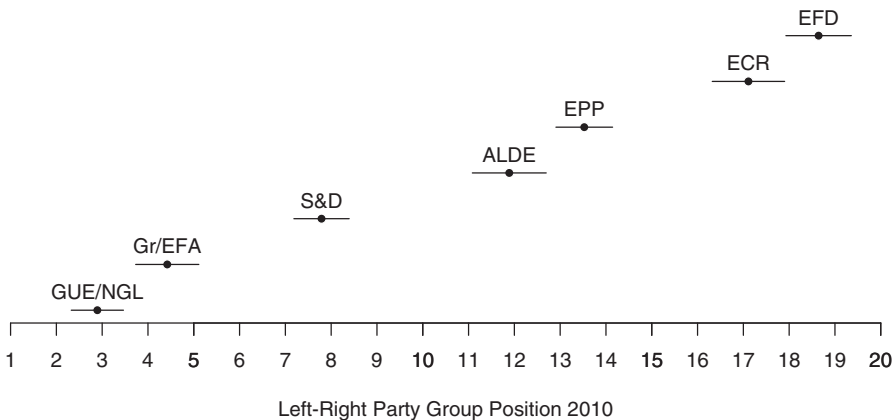


Figure 1. European party groups on the general left–right scale, 2010.

Note: Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Policy positioning in two dimensions

Policy positioning in the European Parliament is at least two-dimensional (Gabel and Hix, 2004; Hix and Lord, 1997; McElroy and Benoit, 2007), consisting of a dimension of left–right policy as well as relative preferences concerning the scope and character of further European integration. In national political settings, Benoit and Laver (2006) demonstrated that nearly all political competition can be plausibly placed on two separable dimensions of policy, one related to economic left–right, and a second related to social liberalism versus moral conservatism. In Figures 2 and 3, we plot the two-dimensional positions of the main party groups on both pairs of dimensions, tracking their positioning over time across the 2004, 2007 and 2010 surveys. Here we have abstracted the precise groupings into their broad categories, such that the ‘Liberal’ grouping (for example) consists of the

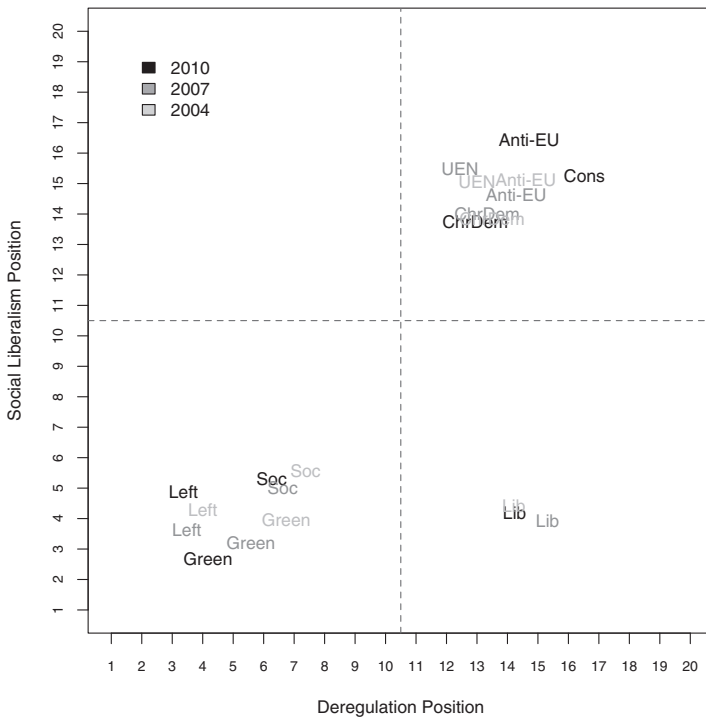


Figure 2. EP party group positioning on the economic versus social policy dimensions, 2004, 2007 and 2010.

Note: Left: – GUE/NGL; Green: – Greens/EFA, Verts; Soc: – PSE, S&D; Lib: – ELDR, ALDE; ChrDem: – EPP, EPP-ED; Cons: – ECR; Anti-EU: – EDD, iD, EFD; UEN: – UEN; ITS:- ITS.

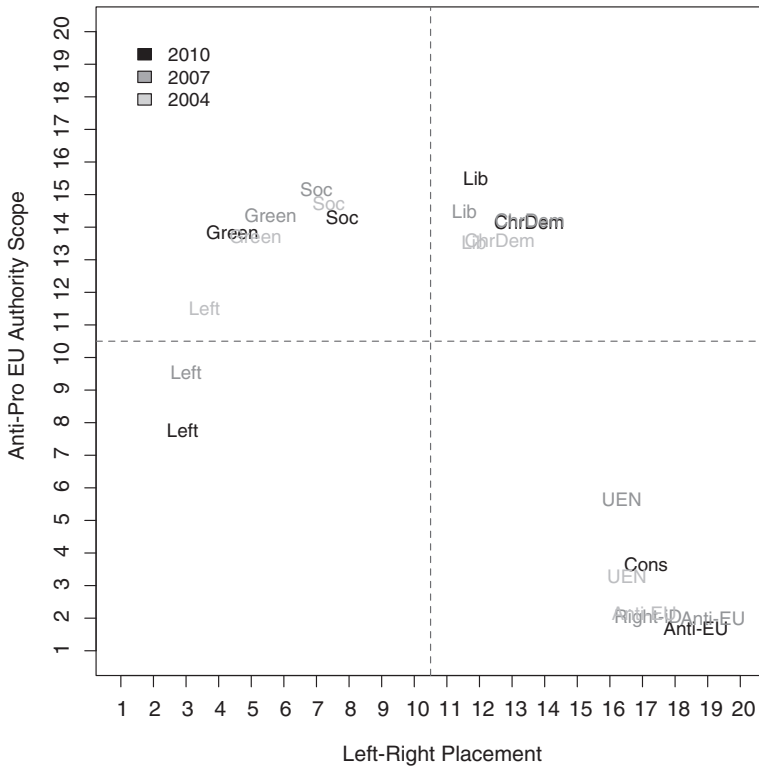


Figure 3. EP party group positioning on the left–right versus European policy dimensions.
 Note: Left: GUE/NGL; Green: Greens/EFA, Verts; Soc: PSE, S&D; Lib: ELDR, ALDE; ChrDem: EPP, EPP-ED; Cons: ECR; Anti-EU: EDD, iD, EFD; UEN: UEN.

(European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party) ELDR in 2004 and ALDE in 2007 and 2010.⁵

Figure 2 contrasts party group positions on two ‘standard’ dimensions of economic left–right, represented by attitudes toward the regulation of markets and by social liberalism versus moral conservatism.⁶ Broadly speaking, the alignment of party positions is one-dimensional, split into two broad camps of left and right. The exception is the Liberal grouping, which lies to the right on economic policy but to the left on social policy, consistent with classic liberal party positioning on these two dimensions. Interestingly, there are no party groupings in the centre of the space, and the two large clusters contain different party groups that are quite close to one another. On the right, the Christian Democratic grouping (EPP) is more centrist than the UEN, the Conservatives or the Anti-EU groups, but only by a few points on each dimension. On the left, similarly, the Socialists are more centrist than the Greens or Left groups, but not by much. Finally, the evolution of party positions over time shows remarkable stability, with only the Greens

appearing to have moved significantly, and then only on the economic dimension (to the left).

In Figure 3, the party groups are plotted on the two dimensions of general left–right and one of anti- versus pro-EU authority.⁷ Here we see a considerably different pattern, where the classic ‘inverted-U’ shape emerges from mapping support for EU integration onto left–right positioning (Hooghe and Marks, 2002). Party groups at both extremes are less favourable towards continued expansion of the scope of EU authority compared with more centrist parties. Although the Anti-EU, Conservative and UEN groups are highly Eurosceptic, as we expected, we also see the Left group as not only Eurosceptic but also becoming increasingly so with each survey. Despite having a pro-environmental component, the GUE/NGL’s position on the European policy dimension also clearly distinguishes it from the main Green grouping.

Policy change from 2004 to 2010

The analyses in two dimensions also suggested that movement of party groups in policy space was rather limited. To examine the question of change in more detail, we have compared the positioning of our broad groupings from 2004 to 2010. Figures 4(a) and 4(b) plot the change along each dimension of the major groupings, along with a 95 percent confidence interval for the change shown by the lines overlaid on each bar. When the capped line overlaps the origin, it means that the change cannot be distinguished statistically from no change. The results reinforce some of our earlier interpretations. On the question of EU authority, the Greens became more Eurosceptic (with the positive change here indicating greater scepticism towards further expansion of EU authority). The Greens also became more sceptical towards involving the EU in collective security missions. Finally, the Greens became even less federal in their vision of how the EU should function into the future.⁸ The Socialists moved slightly to the left on deregulation policy, and the Christian Democrats were placed slightly more to the right in 2010 than they had been in 2004. Finally, on the specific issue of immigration policy, the Socialists became more permissive, whereas the Christian Democratic grouping shifted slightly in the opposite direction.⁹

In sum, the analysis shows that the positions of the major party groups changed relatively little from 2004, with the important exceptions noted above.

The relative importance of policy dimensions

In addition to locating the policy positions of parties on each policy dimension, experts in our surveys also indicated how important each policy dimension was for each party, with a score of 20 indicating the most important (the full set of importance scores from the 2010 survey are detailed in web appendix Table B2). To get an average depiction of the most important political issues across party groups, we have averaged the importance scores across groups, weighting by the 2010 seat

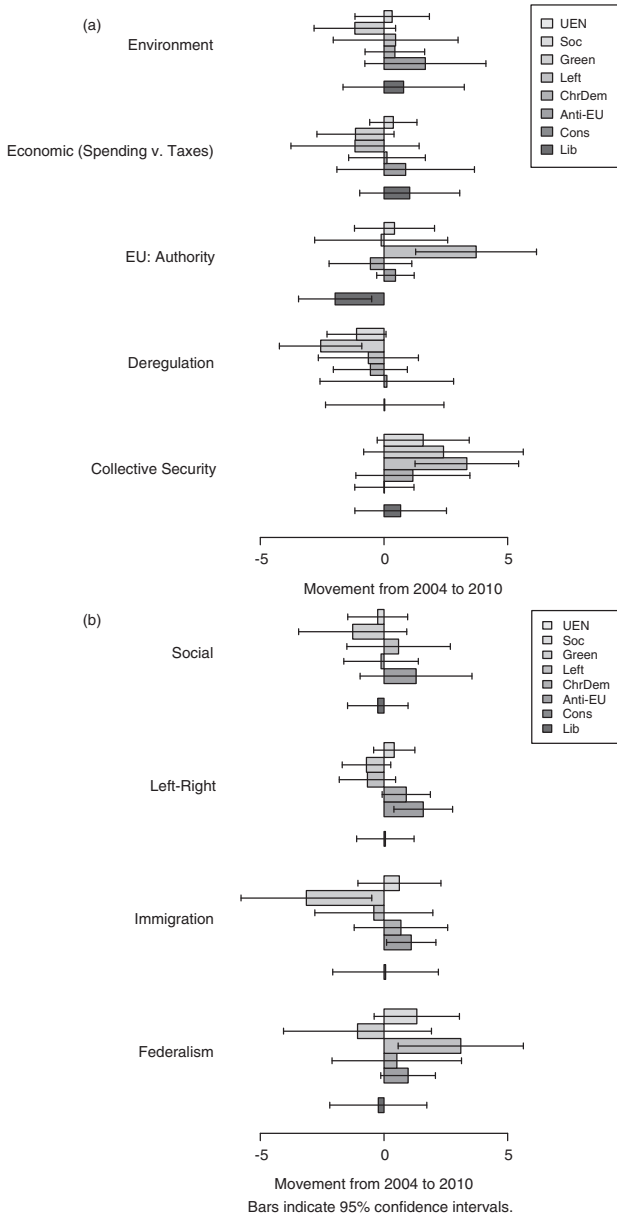


Figure 4. (a) Movement from 2004 to 2010 on constituent policy scales for broad categories of EP grouping. (b) Movement from 2004 to 2010 on constituent policy scales for broad categories of EP grouping.

Note: Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

share so that the overall importance average for an issue is not distorted by extreme positions held by the smaller groupings (for example, the extreme-right positions on the EU and decentralization policy held by the relatively smaller EFD).

Figure 5 plots the overall importance scores by issue, along with bootstrapped 95 percent and 80 percent confidence intervals (the latter indicated by the darker line segments).¹⁰ The two economic policy dimensions, not surprisingly, are foremost in importance to the parties. Second to these is the other ‘main’ dimension of social liberalism, further supporting the view that policy positioning takes place primarily on the two dimensions of economic and social policy. Although broadly consistent with the bulk of previous expert surveys of party policy in Europe (for example, Benoit and Laver, 2006), the high importance of the social dimension is rather different from the results of the 2004 expert survey of EP policy in McElroy and Benoit (2007), which placed the social dimension last in importance. This change in emphasis may reflect the growing strength of far-right and conservative parties in the EP.

A set of EU and related dimensions with international implications – EU authority, EU federalism, immigration and collective security – followed social policy in importance, with the environment and decentralization, interestingly, of least importance. Although several parties consider these ‘last’ dimensions as the most important, such as the Greens and the EFD, their smaller size contributes relatively less to the policy importance as a weighted average.

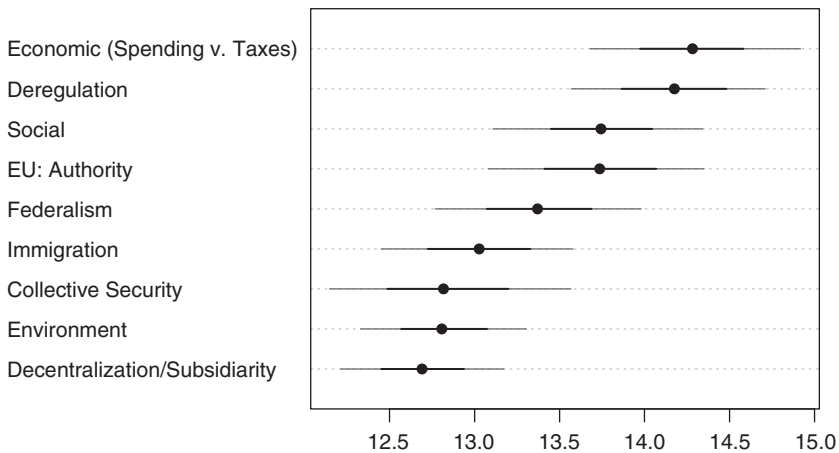


Figure 5. Overall importance of policy dimensions, 2010.

Note: Means averaged across party groups, weighted by seat shares. Error bars show bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals (thinner lines) and 80% confidence intervals (bold lines) from 2000 resamples of the respondent-level expert survey placements.

The policy coherence of party groups

Recent work explaining how national parties choose EP political group affiliations suggests that the process is mainly driven by a concern to minimize policy incongruence between the national and transnational levels (McElroy and Benoit, 2010). If this is the case, we should expect to observe strong similarities in policy positioning among the national parties within each EP party group. Additionally, we should expect the European political groups to be placed at the centre of the distribution of their member parties on each dimension of contestation.

Figure 6 portrays the kernel density estimate of member state party positions for each EP party group on the left–right dimension, as well as the mean of the EP party group position on this dimension. Each ‘rug’ line at the base of the plots indicates the position of a national member party. Data on the national-level placement of parties comes from the left–right positions from the expert surveys reported in Benoit and Laver (2006) and updated versions of these surveys

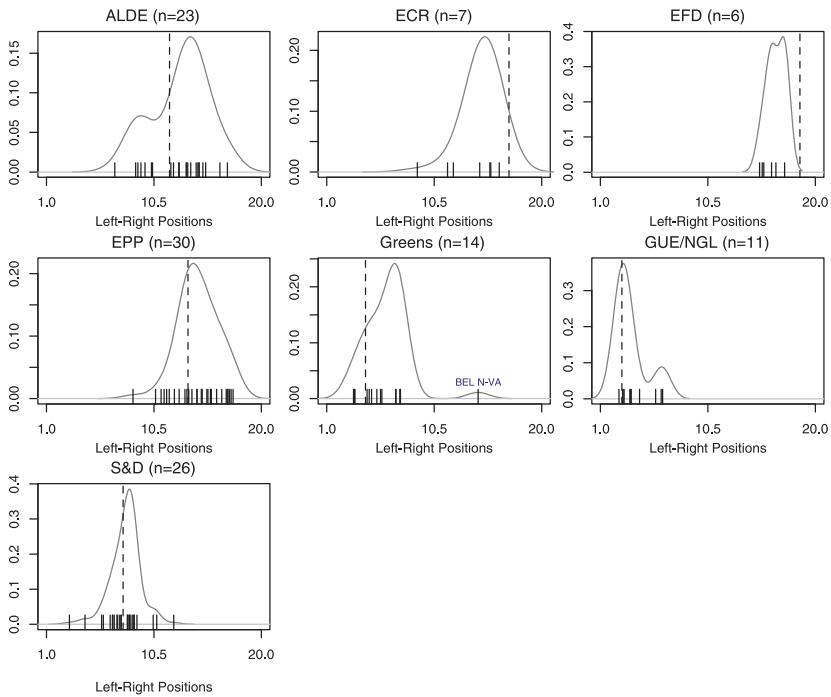


Figure 6. EP party group positions and the distribution of national member parties, left–right scores.

Source: Benoit and Laver (2006), as well as updated unpublished expert survey data (surveys from 2006 to 2010) for national party left–right scores.

conducted in the past five years. The graphs also indicate how many national member parties were included in each analysis (a full listing is provided in web appendix C). Several points of interest emerge from this figure. First, there is a clear correspondence between the political groups' location and the central tendency of the national parties' positions for EPP and S&D and the GUE/NGL. The former are the two largest groups and their left–right positions neatly reflect the central tendencies of their constituent parties. The Green group and the Liberals are more left than the central tendency of their member parties. In addition, a handful of extreme outlying national parties exist within some groups. Within the Green group, for instance, the expert placement of the Belgian New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) was far more centrist than any other Green party member that we measured.

In terms of the overall diversity of positions within party groupings, ALDE has the widest range of positions among its member parties. Since 2004, ALDE has actively recruited members from outside the ranks of the traditional liberal parties of Europe, notably in France, Italy and Ireland (Corbett et al., 2007: 85). In fact, the ALDE is purely a parliamentary construction, consisting of two separate European transnational groups, the traditional European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) and the more recently constituted European Democratic Party (EDP), though the bulk of national parties still come from within the ELDR tradition.

The second striking pattern in Figure 6 is that the newest political groups founded in 2009, the ECR and EFD, are significantly to the right of their constituent parties in terms of their position on the left–right dimension. The EFD appears to be particularly right of the national positions of its member parties. Overall, this pattern is not too surprising when one considers that these political groups are not primarily formed around left–right issues. As is evident from saliency scores, these political groups are primarily interested in questions of EU authority. The most important dimensions for both the EFD and ECR are (in order) EU federalism, EU authority and decentralization/subsidiarity (see Table B2 in the web appendix). The EFD, in particular, is largely unconcerned about traditional left–right dimensions such as taxes and spending. To explore this issue further we graphically present the member state party positions for each EP party group on EU integration (consisting of the 'EU authority' dimension), as well as the mean of the EP party group position on this same dimension in Figure 7.

On the EU authority dimension, both the ECR and the EFD are at the centre of the distribution of their member parties' views. Interestingly, however, on this dimension some of the larger political groups such as the EPP are far more pro-European than their constituent national parties. Whether this is because of the socialization process in the European Parliament (Scully, 2005) or selection effects (those attracted to a career in Brussels are more pro-Europe than their national counterparts in mainstream parties) remains to be answered. Overall, however, the conclusion that political groups are at the centre of the distribution of their member state parties on the dimensions that matter to them most is inescapable.

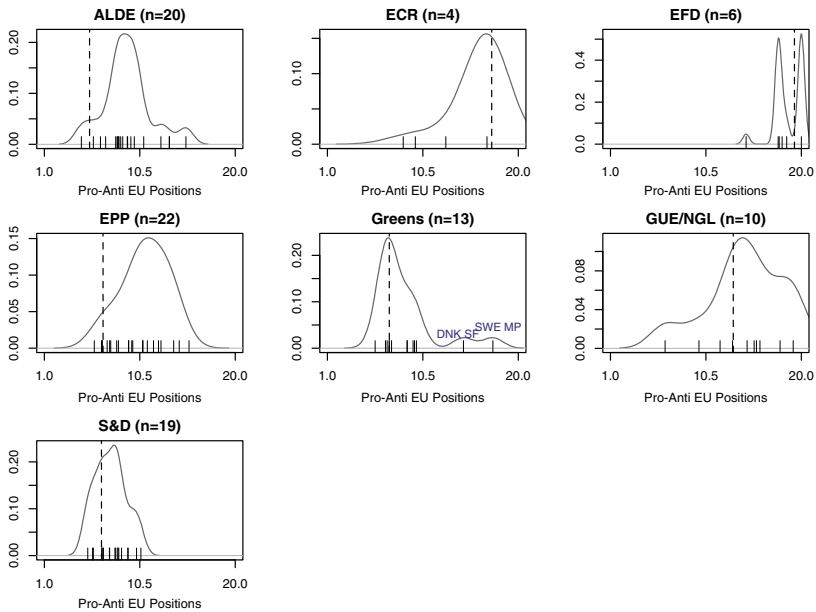


Figure 7. EP party group positions and the distribution of national member parties; Pro-/anti-European integration scores.

Source: Benoit and Laver (2006), as well as updated unpublished expert survey data (surveys from 2006 to 2010).

Political groups admit, and retain, political parties to their ranks that are congruent with their most important policy preferences.

Concluding remarks

Our updated analysis of the policy positions of European party groupings provides new empirical material on which to assess party and policy competition in the changing European Parliament. Using new and previously unpublished expert surveys from 2007 and 2010, our spatial location of the EP party groups shows that not only do party groups span the broad left–right spectrum, but they also occupy positions in that space that are clearly distinct from one another. In broad left–right terms, party groups range from far-left to far-right. On more specific dimensions of economic and social policy, party groups broadly occupy two opposed camps, one on the left and another on the right, with few located in between. An exception is the ALDE liberal grouping, located to the right on economic policy but to the left on social conservatism.

Party groups are also distinguished from one another on policy towards further European integration and expanding the scope and authority of EU-level institutions. Our analysis confirms the ‘inverted-U’ found in previous studies of the link

between left–right positioning and support for European integration. It also suggests important differences between party groups on the issue of European integration, differences that warrant further investigation.

In comparing the relative importance of policy dimensions to European party groups, our study found results consistent with previous studies (McElroy and Benoit, 2007), indicating that the economic dimension was foremost in importance, with environmental policy near the bottom of the list. The exception was the shift in importance of social policy, formerly measured at the bottom of average importance in McElroy and Benoit (2007).

Finally, in order to examine the policy cohesiveness of the party groups in 2010, we also looked at the relationship between the policy positions of the EP party groups with those of their national member parties. We found that, although the experts placed the main EP political group policy positions at the centre of the distribution of the positions of their member parties, there were important exceptions. Especially with regard to the more extreme-right party groups such as the ECR and the EFD, the expert locations of the party groups seemed to be more extreme than the typical national member party's position. However, these two political groups are representative of their members on a pro-/anti-European dimension. In general, party groups in the European Parliament tend to consist of parties with similar, but by no means identical, policy positions on the dimensions that matter to them most. The diversity of members in some significant groups such as ALDE and the EPP indicates that member parties are far from homogeneous when it comes to their policy positions, and further investigation into more specific dimensions of policy only reinforces this view. Given recent work on the difficulty of maintaining policy cohesion among party groups of diverse and dynamic member parties, the question of policy diversity and group cohesion suggests intriguing possibilities for further research.

Notes

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1. One further alternative is to weigh the voter positioning of all of the national parties that make up a group to arrive at a measure of policy position using, for example, European Election Study data (Gschwend et al., 2011). But this approach is very indirect and, as we demonstrate later in the article, political groups are more than the weighted sum of their parts.
2. Web appendix A lists all the political groups that have existed since the Parliament's foundation (http://www.kenbenoit.net/pdfs/MEPS2010_EUP_Appendix.pdf).
3. These were fairly evenly distributed by region: two from the United States, three from Ireland, five from the United Kingdom, seven from other West European countries, and two from Eastern Europe.

4. The table of results from the 2007 survey, data sets of both surveys, and the full survey questionnaires are available from a web-based appendix located at [http:// www.kenbenoit.net/pdfs/MEPS2010_EUP_Appendix.pdf](http://www.kenbenoit.net/pdfs/MEPS2010_EUP_Appendix.pdf).
5. The precise equivalencies are as follows. Left: GUE/NGL; Green: Gr/EFA and Verts (2004); Socialists: PSE/PES (2004–7), S&D (2010); Liberals: ALDE and ELDR (2004); Christian Democrats: EPP (2004, 2010) and EPP-ED (2007); Conservatives: ECR (2010); Anti-EU: EDD, iD, EFD. The UEN and ITS are represented as their own categories.
6. The wording of these two dimensions is as follows: deregulation: favours high levels of regulation and control of the markets, such as telecommunications (1), versus: favours deregulation at every opportunity (20); social: favours liberal policies on matters such as homosexual law, abortion and euthanasia (1), versus: opposes liberal policies on matters such as homosexual law, abortion and euthanasia (20).
7. Here the question wording was: EU authority: favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy (1), versus: favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy (20). In Figure 3, the scale is inverted so that 1 represents the anti-EU position.
8. The exact wording for the EU security and federalism policy dimensions was: collective security: favours a common defence and security policy for member states (1) versus: opposes development of common defence and security policy (20); federalism: promotes a federal vision for the EU (1), versus: promotes a Europe of nation-states (Europe des Patries) (20).
9. The wording here was: immigration: favours policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants integrate into European society (1) versus: favours policies designed to restrict access of asylum seekers and immigrants to Europe (20).
10. Because of the double-averaging procedure, including seat-share weights on the averaging across issues, we used bootstrap resampling from the expert placements to construct these confidence intervals, based on 2000 resamples.

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