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Research Note on LR Update

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Introduction

In March 2011, the Manifesto Research Group (CMP; Volkens *et al.* 2011) published a new data set containing all data currently available. Since then, further updates have been made available. The updated data extends the time series to facilitate the analysis of party positions for several countries from 1944 to 2010. These data sets include not only new cases of recent elections, but contain additional data points in the past, e.g. Swedish election manifestos from 1944 or the State's Rights Party and the Progressive Party 1948 in the United States. Furthermore, some data points were corrected, e.g. the manifesto codings of three Spanish parties in 1996. These cases naturally alter the empirical estimates of the Left-Right (LR) index as presented in the article "Conceptualizing Left and Right in Comparative Politics: Towards a Deductive Approach" (Jahn 2011).

As we will show, the core index remains fairly stable, but in the Spanish and Swedish cases, as well as the case of the United States, the regressions we ran to identify extra statements are affected to a slight extent. However, the question emerges to which degree minor parties shape the Left-Right discourse. For instance, in 1948, the State's Rights Party and the Progressive Party gained 0.1% of votes in the United States according to the CMP data. The inclusion of minor parties into the CMP data set does not seem to proceed in a systematic way. For example, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Scottish National Party or the Democratic Unionist Party were covered three times (1992, 1997 and 2001). Although they have consistently gained seats in the British House of Commons since the 1970s the recent data set excludes them again and analyzes only the three major parties in the United Kingdom for 2005 and 2010.

Another issue of concern is that the CMP data contains "estimates", i.e. data extrapolated from previous or consecutive manifestos in case of missing programs. As a result there is no real data regarding party positions. Using the estimated data therefore suggests stability of parties which may not exist and double weights the results of certain elections.

Taking those changes and shortcomings of the CMP data into account, we decided to revise our indices completely by updating the data. Concerning the "estimates," we decided to drop them (i.e. cases coded "3" for the CMP variable *Proctype*). Concerning small parties, we estimated a parties' average vote share (based on CMP variable *Pervote*) and excluded cases

with less than 2% – but not if they won seats. Although this threshold seems arbitrary these parties did not gain seats, while parties above this limit usually entered parliament.¹ In addition this leaves “singular” parties like protest parties untouched, which competed successfully only once but most often gained a considerable amount of votes (and seats in parliament), so that one could speak of a temporary, but meaningful participant in the national discourse. Applying this filter eliminates (only) those parties where it is questionable if they had an influence on the (national) discourse of Left and Right at all.

In a second step, we introduced a standardization of the LR indices. While the RILE of the CMP group (Budge *et al.* 2001) reaches from -100 (radical left) to +100 (radical right), the original LR scale is not limited, but open for various degrees of radicalism of different statements. The indices are constructed by weighting each category (*per* in the CMP nomenclature) with its stimuli score, i.e. the leftness or rightness of each category (Jahn 2011, 755-6). If a party emphasizes only the most radical *per*, the final position on the LR scale depends on the stimulus score of the category. While this gives important insights into different degrees of radicalism of the same topic across countries, a drawback is the loss of comparability of party positions across space and time.

Granted that the most radical statements (not necessarily the same *per*) have a stimulus score of -1.0 in one country and -2.0 in another. Parties emphasizing these *pers* to 100% would score -100 and -200 respectively on the LR scale. Because the composition of extra statements varies across space and time, these positions are not comparable, strictly speaking. However, in their national context both parties occupy the most extreme positions. In order to facilitate cross-country comparison we therefore standardized the indices by dividing the party positions through the most radical stimulus score. This results in a standardized scale from -100 (extreme left) to +100 (extreme right).² While the maximum for the LR_{core} is constant across time and space, the maxima for the LR_{plus} are time- and country-specific. In the above mentioned case both extreme parties now score -100 representing the most radical left party in their country. Compared to the original index (Jahn 2011, 755-6) the formulae changed as follows:

¹ Hence, opting for a 3%-threshold would exclude too many parties which actually gained seats, so we made the filter more conservative applying only a 2%-limit.

² However, our data sets provide both the standardized and the unstandardized indices in order to allow for comparisons.

$$LR_{core} = \frac{\sum LRC_{per} * LRC_s}{\max(LRC_s)} \quad (1)$$

$$LR_{plus} = \frac{\sum LRX_{per} * LRX_s}{\max(LRX_s)} \quad (2)$$

$$LR = \frac{\sum LRX_{per} * LRX_s + \sum LRC_{per} * LRC_s}{\max(LRX_s | LRC_s)} \quad (3)$$

Explanation: LRC = core statements; LRX = extra statements identified through regression analysis; per = percentage of the i's statements; S = stimulus coordinate score of the i's statement.

The standardization alters moderate positions only to a small degree, but renders the comparison of radical parties more easily. In the next section we apply the filter and the standardization and report the differences compared to the original index.

Updating the LR_{core} index

In the first step we carried out the Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) for the LR_{core} index. The results remain stable and only slight changes of the leftness or rightness of each statement occur.

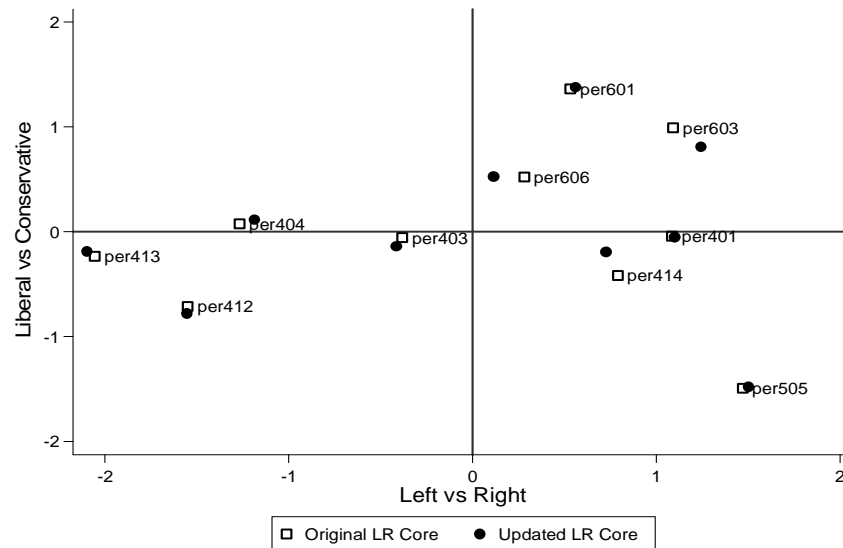
Table 1: Comparison MDS original and updated LR_{core} index

	original LR_{core}	updated LR_{core}
N	792	745
No. of Iterations	5	6
Stress Value	.10461	.10500
RSQ	.93753	.93732
<i>Stimulus Coordinates Dimension 1</i>		
per413	2.0566	2.0977
per412	1.5496	1.5531
per404	1.2677	1.1873
per403	.3822	.4161
per601	-.5336	-.5613
per603	-1.0919	-1.2463
per606	-.2812	-.1144
per401	-1.0871	-1.1010
per414	-.7909	-.7281
per505	-1.4714	-1.5031

The number of cases decreases due to the exclusion of the very small parties and the “estimates” as described above. The MDS now needs an additional iteration and the stress value increases slightly, while the RSQ value drops. However, the input data still accounts for almost 94% of the variance of the MDS space. The correlation between both indices is very high with Pearson's $r = .9970$ (significant at the 0.001-level). Furthermore, as Figure 1 shows,

the triangle of socialism vs. liberalism and conservatism is still clearly apparent. Note that the stimulus scores are multiplied with -1, to arrive at a more intuitive order.

Figure 1: Derived stimulus configuration plot (Euclidian distance model) original and updated LR_{core} index



Updating the LR_{plus} index

As a result of these changes of the left- and rightness of the core statements the final party score varies. Since the core index is used as the dependent variable to identify extra statements, changes to the party scores consequently influence the regression results. We therefore ran the regressions again to identify further country- and time-specific *pers*, which make up the left-right axis. This time, like for the core index, we excluded the “estimates” and minor parties.

It is not possible to quantify the extent of changes, but one can approximately say that half of the 23 countries experienced a “loss” or “gain” of one *per* per time period (with a mean of around 12 *pers* per period). Hence, the correlation for the LR_{plus} is slightly lower with Pearson’s $r = .9214$ (significant at the 0.001-level). The mean difference of party scores across all cases (N=2115) is $= -.801$ (standard deviation = 8.380) on a scale from -100 to 100. Table 2 presents a summary of the deviation of party scores and the correlation per country. The deviations are fairly modest and the correlation usually very high. Only party scores in Ireland changed to a bigger extent, which, however, does not alter the ranking order of the parties vis-à-vis its rivals.

Table 2: Summary statistics of differences in party scores between original and updated LR_{plus}

	Difference original – updated LR _{plus}			Number of Observations
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation	
Australia	-0.663	7.014	0.76	83
Austria	-1.246	5.954	0.94	60
Belgium	-0.372	6.490	0.83	146
Canada	1.126	7.522	0.87	71
Denmark	-1.593	8.366	0.99	210
Finland	2.550	9.011	0.90	129
France	-0.343	11.114	0.92	96
Germany	-4.292	5.516	0.98	76
Greece	-4.819	12.325	0.86	38
Iceland	-1.810	8.664	0.90	85
Ireland	-0.691	3.561	0.60	80
Italy	-1.020	5.659	0.93	133
Japan	4.637	6.644	0.87	88
Luxembourg	4.075	4.627	0.81	58
Netherlands	-2.644	9.398	0.99	108
New Zealand	0.449	2.869	0.98	67
Norway	-1.841	5.418	0.99	99
Portugal	-10.701	16.948	0.99	73
Spain	-1.313	2.964	0.88	105
Sweden	0.492	7.370	0.97	101
Switzerland	-1.139	9.862	0.90	114
United Kingdom	2.577	6.190	0.73	65
United States	-2.433	6.927	0.73	30
<i>Total</i>	<i>-0.801</i>	<i>8.380</i>	<i>0.92</i>	<i>2115</i>

Further impacts of the update

Compared to the LR_{Core} the LR_{plus} has changed to a slightly bigger extent. Because the final index LR is the sum of both indices (Jahn 2011, 756) it is affected as well. While the differences derive mainly from the changes of the LR_{plus} we are not going into detail at this point again (see above). The overall correlation is = .9745 (significant at the 0.001-level) and only the United States and Greece show a correlation below 0.93. The mean difference of party scores across all cases is = 1.098 with a standard deviation = 13.138.

Because the composition of the extra statements has changed, so have the importance indices, since they are the sum of each statement included in the LR indices (Jahn 2011, 756). Although the correlation for the LR_{Core Importance} should be 1 – the core *pers* are fixed – the CMP coding corrections of the three Spanish parties caused this slight deviation.

Table 3: Summary statistics of differences in importance estimates

	Differences original – updated LR			<i>Number of Observations</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Correlation</i>	
LR _{Core} Importance	-0.001	0.152	0.99	2115
LR _{Plus} Importance	-0.295	8.427	0.89	2115
LR _{Importance}	-0.296	8.437	0.90	2115

Conclusion

The publication of new CMP data gave us a reason to update the LR indices as proposed in the article "Conceptualizing Left and Right in Comparative Politics: Towards a Deductive Approach" (Jahn 2011). However, we encountered some problems which led us to doubt if minor parties have the same influence over the meaning of Left and Right in a national discourse if they never make it into parliament. Furthermore minor parties are only covered in a non-systematic way by the CMP group, but nevertheless affect the estimates. We therefore decided to exclude very small parties, and to exclude "estimated programs" because they do not contain real empirical data and may bias the results. In addition, we introduced a standardization of the indices in order to enhance the cross-country comparability of party positions, especially of more extreme parties.

Not surprisingly, party scores have changed, but the overall results remain fairly stable and parties have not changed vis-à-vis their rivals. This way, not only new data for the most recent elections is made available, but the comparability of parties' ideological positions has been improved as well.

References

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