

# [How Far Have European Political Parties Followed the Americans to the Right in the Later Post-War Period?]

## A Textual Analysis

**Abstract:** Before answering the general question posed in the title this article first considers the different types of analysis which can be applied to texts, and the procedures followed in quantitative content analysis – with particular reference to the Comparative Manifestos Project, now MARPOR, from which our data are drawn. These show that the considerable Rightwards movement of the US parties in the later post-war period is not matched in Western Europe nor in Europe generally. As many countries drift Leftwards as Rightwards and some, like Germany, remain largely stable. We conclude by considering the practical policy consequences of changing party commitments and how the analysis of covert meanings in texts might be synthesised with the study of overt meanings reported here.

**Keywords.** Textual Analysis, Political Parties, United States, Europe, MARPOR, Manifestos

### *Introduction :Analysing Texts for Information about Public Policy*

Texts have always been a major, if not the central, source of evidence for political events. At least until the advent of systematic archaeology in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century they were all that historians had to go on in reconstructing the past. Sometimes they reported numbers (censuses) or produced administrative returns which could be analysed quantitatively. But mostly they were records, minutes, works of devotion and fiction which could be selectively used and reported to give a picture of life or account of events in the past.

Historians of course have never taken texts entirely at face value. For one thing many texts contradict each other and have to be reconciled by considering which is the most likely interpretation. Moreover texts written long after the event have never been taken exactly as they stand. An example often quoted in documents classes is of an eleventh century saint's life written in the mid-thirteenth century which recounts the holy man's miraculous escape from a crowd of hostile pagans in a sieve which carried him upriver to the bridge. The only sure fact to take away from this is that there actually was a bridge at that point in the mid-thirteenth century.

Historical deconstruction of texts, discounting for bias etc. does therefore take place but in a relatively unsystematic, qualitative and subjective way highly dependent on the talents and insight of the individual historian. In the last century two approaches to textual analysis emerged out of this historical-linguistic matrix which have dominated different social sciences ever since. One, associated particularly with sociology and anthropology and adopting a strongly philosophical approach, are the theories of language as a system of dominance and power. From this point of view texts have both a surface, overt, purpose and meaning – stimulating devotion to a particular saint and the heavenly luminaries she served for example – and implicit ones of justifying the Church and its position in society, along with all the other social relationships involved. Political texts serve similar purposes according to

pioneering theorists like Gramsci (1971) and his neo-Marxist followers of the 1970s (e.g. Lukes 1974: Foucault 1978) – ostensibly describing the world and specifying action for the common good but actually buttressing the power of particular elite groups and rendering criticisms literally undiscussable as there is no way in the dominant discourse to even raise questions about them. Orwell's (1948) *Newspeak* might be the culmination of this process – a language purged to the extent that it is impossible even to formulate subversive thoughts.

While the historical-linguistic, philosophical, approach lends itself to detailed and perceptive analysis of individual texts its generalizations are not there to be tested by textual analyses but to guide them. In the course of the twentieth century however another, quite different approach to texts - content analysis - developed independently, with the aim of carrying out large-scale documentary investigations to answer largely descriptive questions. The only way of summarizing large masses of documents such as newspapers was to quantify them, abandoning any attempt at insightful individual analysis in favour of relatively crude measures such as counting the occurrence of a particular word. This approach was pioneered in the United States in the 1930s.

The first large scale study examined the proportion of space in American newspapers taken up by foreign policy in an effort to understand what policy area editors regarded as most important (Madge 1953). In this and similar studies coverage was measured by a ruler applied to a copy of the paper and results reported in column inches. On the outbreak of war H.D. Lasswell was commissioned by the US government to measure the attention paid in the Press to other countries, with a view to predicting shifts in foreign policy (e.g. the reduction in mutually negative references in both German and Russian newspapers before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Berelson 1952).

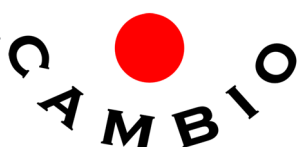
While column inches have been replaced by hand-coding of (quasi-) sentences into more detailed policy categories (Budge *et alii* 2001) or even computerized counts of words distinguishing political parties (e.g. Slapin, Proksch 2008) the basic principle remains the same: intentions and policies can be measured by examining the attention paid to them in the texts written by political actors, mainly collective ones like parties and governments.

Ideology enters in because both ordinary discourse and theoretical analyses see the best summary of overall policy and preferences as being in Left-Right terms, partly because the constant use of this simplification over the last 200 years has itself shaped political discourse, and partly because it is easily represented as a spatial dimension as in the graphs presented below. It was a political theorist, David Robertson (1976), who first coded the most authoritative statements made by political parties – their electoral manifestos or platforms - into a limited set of policy categories which could be combined into a Left-Right scale which mapped British party policy changes from 1922-1974, thus enabling theories – including theories of ideological change and continuity – to be checked empirically against textual evidence in the way we describe in the next section.

In relation to the socio-linguistic discourse theories briefly considered above, we should note that content analysis of “words (or sentences) into numbers” in many ways represents a more radical “deconstruction” of texts than qualitative analyses of “words by words”. While largely utilized to investigate the overt meanings of texts and the messages intended by the communicators to be read into them, the technique is not inherently bound to any particular theoretical standpoint and can equally be applied to what is omitted in political discourse as to what is said. It is surprising therefore that the two approaches to textual interpretation have developed largely independently of each other and indeed seem largely to ignore the others’ existence. Hopefully the report below will help bring the two sides together and perhaps stimulate a more systematic and quantitative analysis of hidden and omitted meanings. As we shall show the overt messages sent by political parties also have major implications for political and social change.

### *Quantifying Party Platforms and Manifestos*

While computerized analyses of electronically scanned texts might seem the most modern and advanced method for content analysis, their practical limitation to words as the unit of analysis and word-counts as their main technique imposes severe restrictions on their generalizability over countries and time. This is because words are not the basic unit of sense in most languages – that is rather the phrase or the sentence. We can for example distinguish Left-wing from Right-wing parties on the basis of the words unique to their manifestos (Slapin, Proksch



2008). But political word-usage changes quite quickly over time so the same sets of words cannot be used over say a fifty year period or over many countries in order to distinguish clearly between the parties and ‘map’ their ideological movements in the way we do below. Even “predefined” computer dictionaries cannot precisely track party changes and often locate them in the same place over time, ignoring dynamic change (Bara 2001).

Computer-based analyses may eventually replace human coding of texts, but not yet. The field is still dominated by essentially the same techniques as were applied 50 years ago. That is, a set of coding categories are developed by reading through relevant texts and devising commonsense categories (welfare, foreign policy etc.) which the exemplars themselves may also use to group their arguments. These basic categories can be aggregated in various ways according to researchers’ own interests and needs – for example into a Left-Right scale constructed either *a priori* and deductively (these are policies which classical discussions indicate will be mentioned together either on Left or Right) – or inductively by seeing empirically (e.g. through factor analysis) which emphases go up or down together over all the texts. Inductive relationships will of course alter as the textual corpus expands and new material comes in. Hence a deductively derived scale is more generalizable – more invariant over space and time – than an inductive one which varies with the texts from which it is derived. However its relevance and fit are not guaranteed statistically in the same way, so it has to be continually validated against external evidence, such as historical accounts of what actors actually did, if we are to believe in the results we get from it.

These technical points can all be illustrated through the example of the Manifesto Research Project, (Budge *et alii* 2001; Klingemann *et alii* 2006) the most sustained and far reaching set of content-analyses in the field today. We give a brief account of its approach before going on to examine results in the shape of the graphs and estimates of party Left-Right movements presented below.

Quantitative textual research into party manifestos – the only truly authoritative statement of what the party stands for in ideological and policy terms, made for each general election – began with David Robertson’s (1976) study of British manifestos 1922-74, and was extended to 19 post-war democracies by the Manifesto Research Group (1979-1989). This subsequently became the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and now MARPOR (Manifesto Research on Political Representation), based at the Wissenschaftszentrum at Berlin, and generously financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Coverage now extends to 54 post-war democracies (for further information consult its Website [www.manifestoproject.wzb.eu](http://www.manifestoproject.wzb.eu)).

The techniques of analysis developed by the MRG have been maintained throughout the 30 year lifetime of the project for the sake of consistency and comparability cross-nationally and over time. Each manifesto (or equivalent<sup>1</sup>) is divided into its constituent (quasi<sup>2</sup>) sentences and these are assigned into one of the 56 policy-categories summarized in Table 1, (or classified as non-assignable). The frequency distribution is then percentaged to control for the varying length of documents. These percentage scores then permit us to trace the endorsement given by one party to the various policies covered in the coding scheme, and to compare this on a one to one, or holistic basis, to the endorsement given by other parties to the same policies (and of course to trace variations in endorsements by the same party over time).

1 About 30 per cent of the document collection are the nearest equivalent to a manifesto which could be found, either because the party itself chose to state policy in a different way (e.g. a radio-TV broadcast rather than a written pamphlet), or because the manifesto itself was missing, in which case a newspaper or other summary, or a related policy document, might be used.

2 A “quasi-sentence” is defined as an argument or phrase which is the verbal expression of one idea or meaning. Long sentences, common in some languages, may contain more than one idea or meaning so they need to be broken up into quasi-sentences. (Klingemann *et alii* 2007: xxiii).

Table 1 The full set of manifesto coding categories

## DOMAIN 1: EXTERNAL RELATIONS

- 101 Foreign Special Relationships: Positive
- 102 Foreign Special Relationships: Negative
- 103 Anti-Imperialism: Negative
- 104 Military: Positive
- 105 Military: Negative
- 106 Peace: Positive
- 107 Internationalism: Positive
- 108 European Community: Positive
- 109 Internationalism: Negative
- 110 European Community: Negative

## DOMAIN 2: FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

- 201 Freedom and Human Rights: Positive
- 202 Democracy: Positive
- 203 Constitutionalism: Positive
- 204 Constitutionalism: Negative

## DOMAIN 3: POLITICAL SYSTEM

- 301 Decentralization: Positive
- 302 Centralization: Positive
- 303 Governmental and Administrative Efficiency: Positive
- 304 Political Corruption
- 305 Political Authority: Positive

## DOMAIN 4: ECONOMY

- 401 Free Enterprise: Positive
- 402 Incentives Positive
- 403 Market Regulation: Positive
- 404 Economic Planning: Positive
- 405 Corporatism: Positive
- 406 Protectionism: Positive
- 407 Protectionism: Negative
- 408 Economic Goals: Positive
- 409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive
- 410 Productivity: Positive
- 411 Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
- 412 Controlled Economy: Positive
- 413 Nationalization: Positive
- 414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
- 415 Marxist Analysis: Positive
- 416 Anti-Growth Economy: Positive

## DOMAIN 5: WELFARE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

- 501 Environmental Protection: Positive
- 502 Culture: Positive
- 503 Social Justice: Positive
- 504 Welfare State Expansion
- 505 Welfare State Limitation
- 506 Education Expansion
- 507 Education Limitation

## DOMAIN 6: FABRIC OF SOCIETY

- 601 National Way of Life: Positive
- 602 National Way of Life: Negative
- 603 Traditional Morality: Positive
- 604 Traditional Morality: Negative
- 605 Law and Order: Positive
- 606 Social Harmony: Positive

- 607 Multiculturalism: Positive  
 608 Multiculturalism: Negative

DOMAIN 7: SOCIAL GROUPS

- 701 Labour Groups: Positive  
 702 Labour Groups: Negative  
 703 Agriculture: Positive  
 704 Middle Class and Professional Groups: Positive  
 705 Minority Groups Positive  
 706 Non-Economic Demographic Groups: Positive

We need not of course stick with individual policies in analysing party behaviour. The endorsement given to these may fluctuate a lot with the circumstances of each election. A better picture of the overall party programme and an insight into its current ideological position can be obtained by grouping categories to produce a general Left-Right scale. Repeated research both at electoral, (Eriksen, Stimson, McKuen 2002) party and governmental levels (Budge, Robertson, Hearl 1987, eds) has shown that this is the predominant way in which political actors organise their discourse. So summarizing party positions and movements on such a scale gives the best possible summary of where they have been and where they are going in policy and ideological terms.

Table 2 shows operationally how the transmission can be made from a party's 56 individual policy scores (Table 1) to a single Left-Right score summarizing its overall position.

Table 2 The MRG-CMP Left-Right Scale

RIGHT EMPHASES: SUM OF %S FOR		LEFT EMPHASES: SUM OF %S FOR	
Military: Positive		Decolonization, Anti-Imperialism	
Freedom, Human Rights		Military: Negative	
Constitutionalism: Positive		Peace	
Political Authority		Internationalism: Positive	
Free Enterprise		Democracy	
Economic Incentives		Regulate Capitalism, Market	
Protectionism: Negative	minus	Economic Planning	
Economic Orthodoxy		Protectionism: Positive	
Social Services Limitation		Controlled Economy	
National Way of Life: Positive		Nationalization	
Traditional Morality: Positive		Social Services: Expansion	
Law and Order		Education: Expansion	
Social Harmony		Labour Groups: Positive	

The overall percentage of quasi-sentences devoted to “Left” policies is simply subtracted from the overall percentage devoted to “Rightist” policies. Doing so allows not only explicit Left and Right categories in the coding scheme to determine the party position but also the other categories not classified as either “Left” or “Right”. The rationale for this is that parties wishing to moderate their stance can most easily do this not by directly altering their explicit Left or Right position but by diluting it by referring more to other matters. This will appeal to other electors without alienating their own supporters too much. In terms of the scale in Table 2 this will show up overall as a move to the Centre. Methodologically, constructing the scale (RILE) on the basis of all categories makes it a better summary of the overall policy stance<sup>3</sup>.

The key question of course is how one defines “Left” and “Right” categories. There are two alternatives – one is to use an *a priori* deductive approach as the various Manifesto Project groups have always done, and the other to derive the scale inductively through some kind of dimensional analysis of the data. The problem with the latter approach is that the relevant data-set is constantly expanding and changing as new elections and countries are added. Not only would derived dimensions (though almost certainly Left-Right in broad terms) constantly change in detail between different data-sets. They would also produce different party scores which would render over-time analysis impossible as like would not be compared with like.

To avoid these and other problems the Manifesto Project has always employed the same Left-Right scale which organises individual policy categories in terms of the Left-Right distinctions identified by political theorists of round about 1900, when the classic Party Families of today emerged. Thus Lenin (1950) drawing on Hobson’s (1905) and others’ reflections on Marx and Engels, saw Capitalism in its current stage as bolstering its returns in the face of domestic worker resistance, and newly acquired welfare and other rights, by exploiting the Third World. This analysis associated internal State intervention on the workers’ behalf, primarily in regard to Welfare, with support for peaceful internationalism abroad. While there is no purely logical reason why these topics should be put together, there is a coherent argument which does so and which still underlies Left-wing as opposed to Right-wing programmes. The same may be said of the association of traditional values with security (both internal and external) and freedom on the Right.

The great virtues of this *a priori*, deductive method of scale construction is that it is transparent - one is clear about the Left-Right differences involved - easy to calculate in terms of adding and subtracting percentages, theoretically based, and invariant across time and space. Differences between parties and other actors are produced by them scoring differently on the same measure, rather than the measure itself changing. The big question is whether the coherent arguments which bring the various policy categories together as Left, Right or neutral are still relevant today. One often hears comments for example that the scale should be updated to bring in ecology on the Left or the EU on the Right, to make it more contemporary. But if we changed it we would then be unable to say whether Social Democrats today for example were more or less Leftist than 50 years ago, as we would by changing the scale have changed the measurement of Left and Right themselves, rendering them non-comparable over time.

Fortunately the scale as it stands seems well able to distinguish between parties in plausible and expected ways, and to accord with historical experiences (Budge *et alii* 2001: 25-50; Budge *et alii* 2012). This frees us to use it

<sup>3</sup> Of course researchers can either construct a purer Right-Left scale based solely on Left-Right references (R-L/R+L) or other scales depending on their research needs.

both descriptively, as in the next Section of this paper, and analytically as we do in considering the implications of party-ideological moves for actual policy.

### *Post-war Party Ideology*

Figure 1 now shows how American parties have moved in Left-Right terms over the post-war period and also includes the movements of the Median Voter position as estimated based on Manifesto data.<sup>4</sup> One immediate outcome of the Manifesto research in fact was to shatter the myth prevalent even among political scientists in the first half of the post-war period that the US parties were largely non-ideological, pragmatic and compromising (APSA 1950, Downs 1957, 117-125). In fact as the Figure demonstrates, the American Democrats look very much like European Social Democrats, and the Republicans like European conservative parties. The only difference is that after 1976 they shift noticeably to quite an extreme Rightist position, which they consistently retain up to the present. This presumably pushed the Democrats into moving Rightwards themselves in the late 80s, into a Centre Right position which they have occupied with some variation ever since. Consequently, as the parties move to the Right, so does the Median Voter position. While during the initial post-war period it was on the Left side of the political spectrum, it has been continuously on the Right since the 1980s. Moreover, the gap between the parties in Left-Right terms has remained much the same, casting some doubt on the common perception that there is a greater ideological difference than before (think of the 1930s!). But clearly the whole tenor of the debate has shifted Rightwards. There is now - to use terms commonly applied in Britain - a “Neo-Liberal” rather than a “Social Democratic Consensus” in operation, shaping the whole of the political debate.

<sup>4</sup> To calculate the Median Voter position based on Manifesto data, the approach proposed by Kim and Fording (1998 2003) will be employed. The formula used is

$$M = L + [(50 - C) / F] * W$$

where

M = median voter position;

L = lower end on the left-right scale of the interval containing the median;

C = cumulative vote percentage frequency up to but not including the interval containing median;

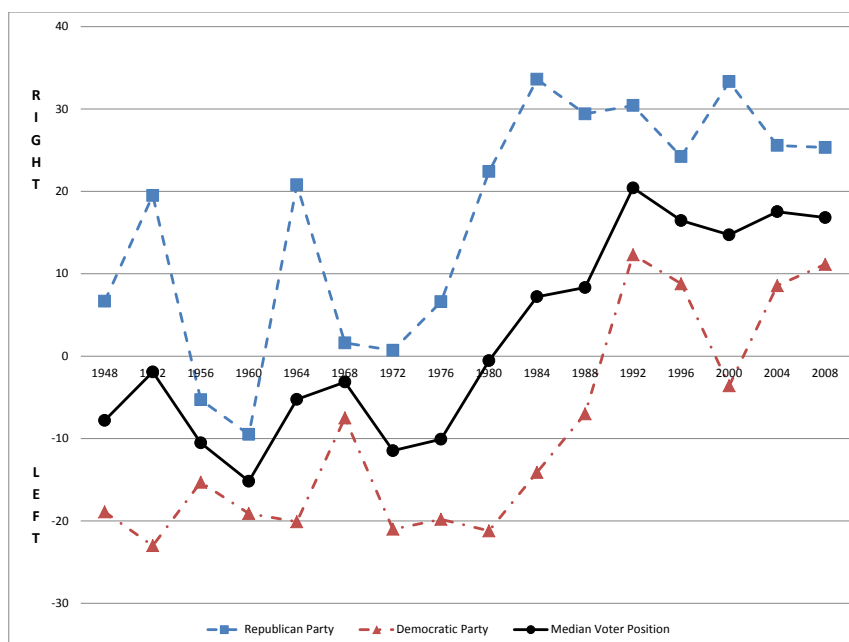
F = vote percentage of the party in the interval containing the median;

W = width of the interval containing the median;

and 50 is replaced by 50% of the total percentage from parties that are covered by the dataset. In articles with Cremona (2006) and Mendes and Budge (2004), McDonald proposes two small additional adjustments to the formula for the case that the farthest left or farthest right party in a system is involved in the formulation of either L or W. These adjustments correct the formula for the assumption that the voter distribution of a given party is symmetrically aligned on both sides around its policy position. Since this can make a significant difference in cases of two-party systems like in the United States, the adjusted Kim-Fording Median Voter position will be used in the following.



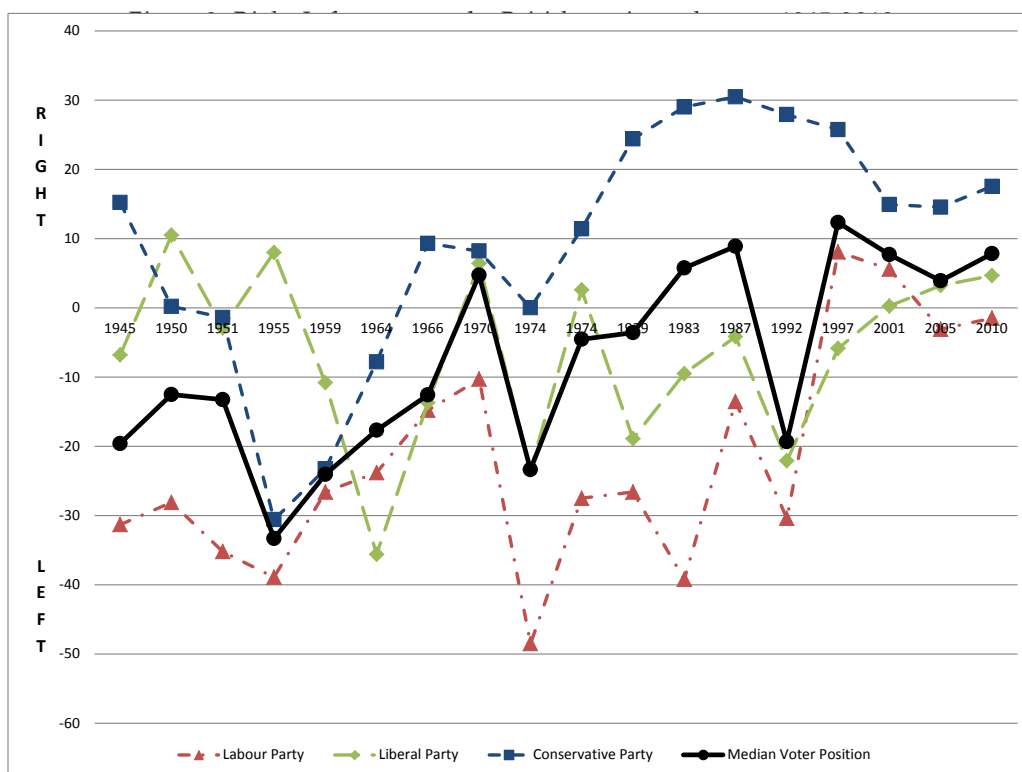
Figure 1: Right-Left movement by American parties and voters 1948-2008



A similar trend can be observed in Great Britain and is illustrated by Figure 2, which shows the movements of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Party along the Left-Right scale since the first post-war election in 1945. Mirroring the developments in the US, the Conservative Party here starts out on a rather moderate stance and then even takes positions Left of the centre during the 1950s and early 1960s. However, after the first 1974 election (which produced a hung parliament and led to a second election less than eight months later) a strong Rightist shift takes place that is only slightly moderated after the start of the new millennium. While during the first post-war decades the Liberal Party often jumped back and forth between positions on the Left and Right of the political spectrum between different elections, they have more recently shown a distinct Rightist trend as well, which saw them moving from a Leftist stance in the 1980s and 1990s to their current Rightist position. The Labour Party shows a movement that is strikingly similar to the US Democrats, starting out at a clearly Leftist position and then continuously moving to the Right, especially after the Conservative's push to the Right in the 1970s, resulting in their current Centre to Centre Right position. The Median Voter movements again confirm this observation and with the possible exception of the 2001 election, the gap between the two main parties remains significantly large, indicating clearly distinct ideological positions.



Figure 2: Right-Left movement by British parties and voters 1945-2010



Figures 3 to 5 repeat the analysis for Germany, Italy and Belgium, illustrating the respective country's post-war party movements for the three main parties. When analysing movements in those multi-party systems, the Median Voter position plays an especially crucial role as its calculation includes all parties competing in a given election, controls for their respective size and thus provides a more stable picture of a country's general opinion movements across time than single party movements are able to.

Figure 3: Right-Left movement by German parties and voters 1949-2009

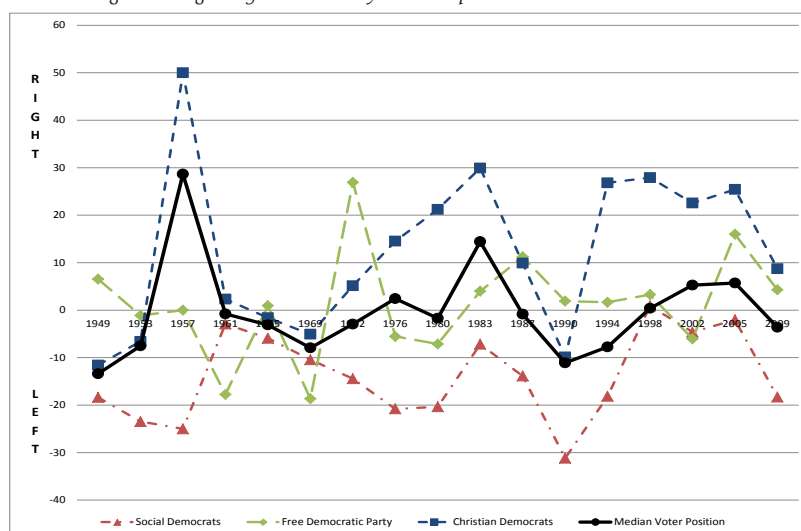


Figure 4: Right-Left movement by Italian parties and voters 1946-2008

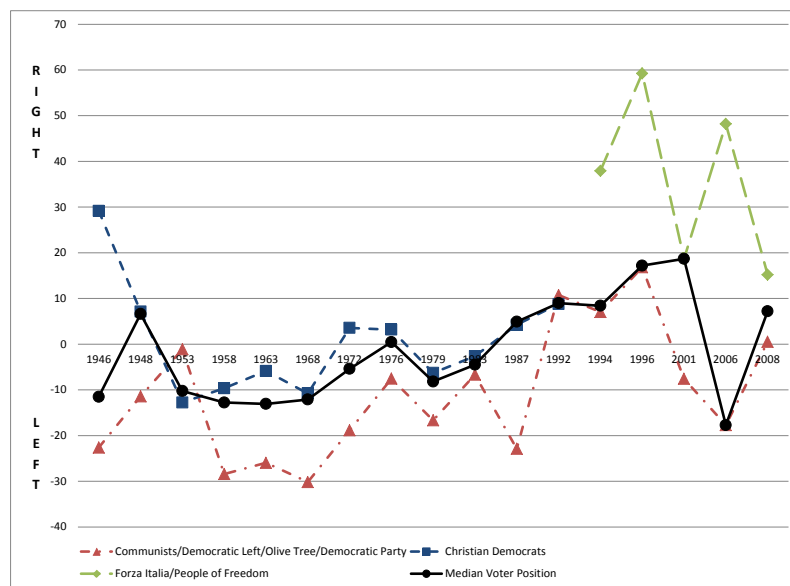
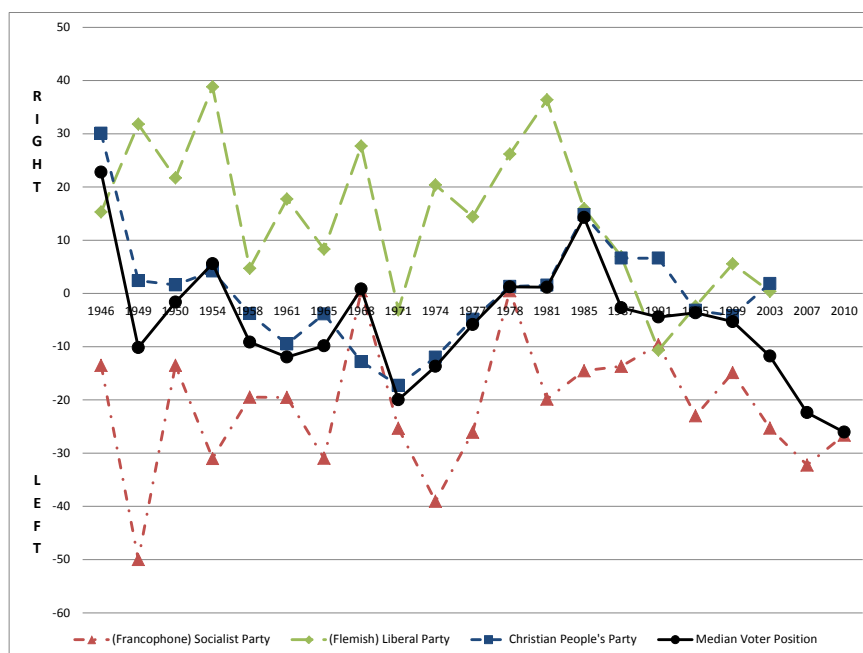


Figure 5: Right-Left movement by Belgian parties and voters 1946-2010



From Figure 3, the German political system does not show any signs of a clear one-sided trend. With the Rightist shift in the US and Great Britain in the 1970s, a similar trend can be observed in Germany as well with especially the Christian Democrats moving to the Right; however, during the 1980s both the Christian and Social Democrats move significantly to the Left instead of staying at more Rightist positions. Moreover it was at this point that the left-leaning Greens and PDS – (not shown on the graph) entered the system as a result of all this, the Median Voter position often switches from a Centre Right to a Centre Left position, but hardly ever takes a distinctive position on either side.

At first glance, Italy's political system in Figure 4 seems to develop in a rather stable and moderate way as well; however, upon closer examination both the Christian Democrats and the succession of Leftist parties show a slow but steady move to the Right over time, which is furthermore supported by the advent of Forza Italia and later on the People of Freedom. This leads to the Median Voter estimate slowly but steadily moving to the Right hand side of the scale, where it has recently (with the exception of Romano Prodi's narrow win in 2006) occupied a rather consistent position.

Finally and contrasting the developments elsewhere, Belgium's party system in Figure 5 shows a Leftwards trend over time. Whereas in most other countries the Leftist parties have often moved to the Centre or even to the Right, the Belgian Socialists have managed to retain a position clearly on the Left during the post-war period. The Christian Democrats constantly position themselves around the Centre of the Left-Right scale and the Liberal Party even shows a move to the Left, taking Centre Left positions in the early 1990s. This is again confirmed by the movements of the estimated Median Voter position, which starts out quite Rightist in the first post-war election of 1946, but then remains on the Left side of the scale for most of the time and shows a clear Leftwards trend after 1999.

Moving away from mere descriptions, the comprehensive data set provided by the Manifesto Project also allows for more detailed and statistically oriented analyses of party movements over time. Table 3 presents the results of repeated OLS regressions that were run to check for statistically significant party movements over time in either direction in all European countries included in the Manifesto data set as well as the US.<sup>5</sup> The first column reports the results for analyses with all parties covered by the Manifesto data set included. The second column only includes larger parties that manage to attract at least 5% of the vote share in a given election and the third column indicates whether a country's estimated Median Voter position has significantly moved to either the Left or the Right over time.

Table 3 Overall Left-Right movement by parties and voters in the countries of Western and Eastern Europe and the US, 1945-2011

	All parties	Larger parties (more than 5% of votes)	Median voter position
Sweden	0.144 (0.142)	0.079 (0.148)	<b>0.443**</b> (0.160)
Norway	-0.106 (0.134)	-0.167 (0.137)	0.107 (0.105)
Denmark	-0.045 (0.103)	-0.012 (0.121)	0.100 (0.103)
Finland	<b>-0.328**</b> (0.127)	<b>-0.348**</b> (0.133)	-0.174 (0.154)
Iceland	<b>-0.291**</b> (0.140)	<b>-0.299**</b> (0.143)	<b>-0.468**</b> (0.198)
Belgium	<b>-0.240***</b> (0.073)	<b>-0.212**</b> (0.089)	<b>-0.247*</b> (0.121)
Netherlands	0.033 (0.084)	-0.056 (0.089)	-0.023 (0.137)
Luxembourg	0.127 (0.108)	0.141 (0.102)	-0.039 (0.125)
France	-0.190 (0.143)	-0.171 (0.174)	<b>-0.351**</b> (0.141)

5 Russia, Ukraine and the German Democratic Republic were excluded from the analysis as the status of their respective democracies is highly disputed. Malta, Cyprus and Northern Ireland were excluded, because they only have a very limited number of elections and parties covered by the data set.

Italy	<b>0.389***</b> (0.091)	<b>0.523***</b> (0.121)	<b>0.276**</b> (0.127)
Spain	0.058 (0.111)	-0.393 (0.263)	-0.121 (0.246)
Greece	0.215 (0.430)	0.280 (0.486)	-0.238 (0.416)
Portugal	<b>-0.498**</b> (0.214)	<b>-0.484**</b> (0.240)	-0.105 (0.481)
Germany	-0.098 (0.105)	0.006 (0.116)	0.010 (0.143)
Austria	0.007 (0.144)	0.052 (0.153)	-0.012 (0.209)
Switzerland	0.111 (0.142)	-0.112 (0.155)	-0.067 (0.136)
Great Britain	<b>0.339***</b> (0.109)	<b>0.396***</b> (0.131)	<b>0.499***</b> (0.122)
Ireland	<b>-0.327***</b> (0.121)	<b>-0.332**</b> (0.160)	-0.298 (0.192)
Albania	-0.088 (0.822)	-0.545 (1.264)	-2.616 (2.466)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	-0.609 (0.692)	<b>-1.522*</b> (0.744)	-2.341 (1.550)
Bulgaria	-0.281 (0.327)	-0.402 (0.300)	-0.486 (0.667)
Croatia	<b>-0.906***</b> (0.292)	<b>-1.396**</b> (0.516)	-1.415 (0.735)
Czech Republic	<b>-0.855**</b> (0.330)	<b>-0.674*</b> (0.344)	<b>-0.989**</b> (0.244)
Estonia	<b>-0.907**</b> (0.386)	<b>-1.099**</b> (0.437)	-0.430 (0.260)
Georgia	-0.562 (0.589)	-0.666 (0.867)	0.225 (1.219)
Hungary	<b>-0.739**</b> (0.284)	<b>-0.815**</b> (0.328)	<b>-0.699**</b> (0.239)
Latvia	-0.916 (0.812)	-0.773 (0.917)	-1.498 (0.564)
Lithuania	<b>-1.133**</b> (0.547)	-1.117 (0.714)	-1.779 (1.337)
Macedonia	-0.089 (0.624)	0.046 (0.658)	0.374 (5.391)
Moldova	0.283 (0.352)	0.283 (0.352)	<b>1.273*</b> (0.525)
Montenegro	<b>1.582*</b> (0.804)	<b>1.934**</b> (0.858)	0.859 (3.012)
Poland	-0.544 (0.357)	-0.453 (0.385)	-0.206 (0.681)
Romania	-0.275 (0.331)	-0.558 (0.460)	0.607 (0.607)
Serbia	-0.679 (0.430)	<b>-1.363**</b> (0.520)	-1.011 (0.691)
Slovakia	<b>0.537*</b> (0.293)	0.193 (0.339)	0.043 (0.484)
Slovenia	-0.476 (0.486)	-0.128 (0.427)	-0.324 (0.376)
United States	<b>0.454**</b> (0.178)	<b>0.533***</b> (0.155)	<b>0.531***</b> (0.120)
Europe	<b>0.056**</b> (0.024)	<b>0.052*</b> (0.027)	<b>0.086**</b> (0.038)
Western Europe	-0.031 (0.029)	-0.040 (0.033)	-0.015 (0.044)

Note: Entries are coefficients from OLS regressions of Right-Left scores against time as in Graphs 1-5. The respective equation is:  $RLscore = \alpha + \beta \cdot time$ . The coefficient estimates for  $\beta$  in the table indicate the average Left-Right change per election in a given country (and over all of Europe and Western Europe at the bottom). Thus the interpretation for Sweden when including all parties large and small (first column) is that during each post-war year the parties move an average of 0.144 Left-Right units to the right. Compared to the reported standard error this movement is so small as to be insignificant, so we conclude that Swedish parties have on average in fact remained pretty much the same in ideological terms over the post-war period. On the other hand, popular opinion as measured by the average (Median) Voter position has moved significantly Rightwards, almost by half a unit per year. Standard errors are in parentheses and significant results are reported in bold and starred as \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , according to a two-tailed test.

The table reports both coefficient estimates and estimated standard errors, where the standard errors allow us to conclude whether the estimated effects are statistically significant at conventional levels or not. In order to facilitate an intuitive interpretation of the table, statistically significant results are reported as starred, with more stars indicating a higher significance. For example, Italy has an estimated coefficient of 0.389\*\*\*, which means that the average party position is expected to move 0.389 units to the Right of the RILE scale on a yearly basis and that the result is significant at the 99% confidence level. This in turn means that we can be 99% confident that the observed effect is indeed an effect clearly distinct from being zero. When limiting the analysis to parties that gained at least 5% of the vote share, the effect becomes even stronger as the coefficient increases to 0.523 while remaining highly significant. While 0.523 might seem relatively small, this also suggests that in the five year period that often lies between two elections, parties would be expected to move an average of 2.5 units to the right on the Left-Right scale. Finally, the estimate for the movement of the Median Voter position is slightly smaller, but is also positive and statistically significant, further conforming the steady Rightist shift in the Italian political system in the post-war period.

Examining the results for Western Europe in general, a rather mixed picture evolves. While countries like Finland, Iceland, Belgium or Ireland show a Leftwards trend, others like Italy or Great Britain move to the Right and in most countries time is actually only found to have an insignificant correlation with party movements. Consequently, the reported coefficient for all of Europe that is reported at the bottom of the table is extremely small. Since the estimate relies on a large number of observations, it does turn out to be statistically significant; however, with countries that undergo a Rightist shift and countries that show a Leftist trend “cancelling each other out” to a certain degree, the coefficient becomes so small that it is actually indicating ideological stability rather than real Left-Right change. Similarly, the estimate for Western Europe alone does not even reach significance at all, providing further support for the finding that when studied as a whole, Europe does not seem to follow the American shift to the Right.

Looking at the results for Eastern Europe more closely, it is clear that in contrast to Western Europe many countries like Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Lithuania are moving to the Left. However, one has to proceed with caution when interpreting those results and keep the specific circumstances of Eastern Europe’s transition to democracy and their effects on party system formation and stability in mind (Lewis 2000). In many cases, the former Communist regime was initially swept away by a (Centre) Right opposition who often took the first free elections in a landslide. When many Eastern European countries witnessed their welfare state and social provisions starting to break down as a consequence of the harsh transition to market capitalism during the 1990s however, many of them returned to Left wing governments in an attempt to regain their old levels of living standards. This explains some of the results in Table 3. Only after this move back to the Left did most post-communist party systems start to stabilize and move toward more moderate policies (Lewis 2006, Bakke and Sitter 2005).

Furthermore, trying to specifically analyse the effect American politics might have on European politics and whether the American shift to the Right might cause a similar reaction in Europe, we run additional models that regress the movement of the Median Voter position in European elections on the lagged movement of the Median Voter position in US elections. In other words, we examine whether the Left-Right change US voters exhibit between two elections has any effect on the Left-Right change among voters that is observed in the following elections in Europe. However, we are unable to find any evidence that would support such an assumption. When trying to explain shifts in European popular opinion by preceding shifts in US opinion, the result is highly insignificant ( $\beta = -0.09$ , s.e. = 0.12,  $p = 0.45$ ). Neither does restricting the analysis to Western Europe ( $\beta = -0.09$ , s.e. = 0.14,  $p = 0.54$ ) nor to Great Britain ( $\beta = -0.25$ , s.e. = 0.75,  $p = 0.75$ ) yield any meaningful and statistically relevant results.

In short, while the United States have seen their party system and popular opinion undergo a distinct shift to the Right during the post-war period, only a limited number of European countries have followed suit, while others have witnessed a trend to the Left and again others have not undergone any distinctive Left-Right change at all. Neither Europe as a whole nor Great Britain (which seemed to resemble to US’ development most closely) were shown to be driven by the US in their Left-Right movements.

*The Influence of Party Programmes and Government Targets over State Policy*

There is of course a considerable gap between party programmes for post-election action and the action which is actually undertaken. There are discrepancies even with post-election *targets* for action once the government is formed. There are indeed potential slippages at each stage of the process – between party priorities, often modified in coalition bargaining – and stated government policy and between stated and actual policy. This has created immense scepticism among members of the public who see parties as frequently and cynically lying in order to win votes and obtain government office: or if not actually lying at the time of the election at least giving up their policies very quickly in order to become parties of government – the process covered by the expressive Italian term “trasformismo”.

Whatever may happen in individual countries, comparative research however shows that in general party policies as stated in their manifesto do influence government action. One can for example systematically relate the Left-Right position parties take up in their programmes to expenditure overall and within the various policy areas. In doing so McDonald and Budge (2005: 217) find that a four-unit shift from Left to Right in government positions leads on average to a one unit decrease in total government spending as a percent of GDP. The typical distance between a Social Democratic and a Conservative party on the Left-Right scale is about 25 Left-Right units, as can be seen from our graphs, so such change is quite significant. Of course the trend can be disrupted by unexpected events such as wars and the current financial crisis and by external pressures.

All this is to say that a general ideological change across Europe, had we observed it, would not simply involve political rhetoric but would also have had practical effects for citizens as it was translated into real policy and spending. So the finding that there is no general movement, and at least as many Leftwards and Rightwards movements in individual countries, together with much individual stability – is important in overall policy terms. This remains true even if national political party influences have been pushed into the background recently by the Euro crisis and the transnational pressures that this has created.

*Conclusions: The Uses of Textual Analysis*

Hopefully this analysis has shown that quantified approaches to political texts produce their own insights – most obviously in terms of charting the direction political rhetoric is taking. This has profound implications for the way we conceive of the problems facing us as a society, economy, and territorial unit in the contemporary world. Party manifestos after all are the only equivalent democracies have to a medium term development programme. So their analysis offers at the least a considerable insight into how decision-makers are reacting to events. Certainly the approach described here only seeks to get at the overt meanings of texts leaving speculation about their covert meanings to the parallel tradition of linguistic-philosophical analysis. It is not impossible however that a quantitative approach might be adopted here too. Provided that we have a clear idea of what is relevant but might have been left out in the programme we can search for this too using a list of categories different from, but organised on the same lines as Table 1. Zero entries would then be particularly significant in the context.

This kind of analysis we have undertaken however also carries implications for the real world as well as the symbolic one we also inhabit. Parties do generally try to get their policies accepted in government at least to some extent – and governments do generally try to implement them. There are of course many obstacles to doing so – both internal and external – which slow down progress towards their goals. One can also say that it is harder for governments to take effective action in some countries as compared to others. Nevertheless it is easy to confuse slow and partial realisation of policy targets with complete failure to meet them. Seen in this way the analysis of overt meanings in texts does give some indication of what is to come and offers some idea of how effective party democracies are in matching popular demands for change with actual policies.

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