

Do expert surveys produce consistent estimates of party stances on European integration? Comparing expert surveys in the difficult case of Central and Eastern Europe

Stephen Whitefield^a, Milada Anna Vachudova^b, Marco R. Steenbergen^b,
Robert Rohrschneider^c, Gary Marks^{b,d,*}, Matthew P. Loveless^c, Liesbet Hooghe^{b,d}

^a Oxford University, Oxford, UK

^b University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3449, USA

^c Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

^d Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract

Expert surveys have been subject to a number of criticisms concerning their ability to produce accurate estimates of party positions. Such criticisms have particular *prima facie* credibility in new post-Communist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, where party development is regarded as weak. This paper compares data from two expert surveys independently conducted between 2002 and 2004. We find, contrary to expectations, that there is a remarkable overlap in positions assigned to parties. This suggests the usefulness of expert surveys even in the ‘most difficult’ case of post-Communist party systems. It also suggests that parties in these countries have developed effective means of communicating their positions on major issues.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Survey; Expert data; Cross-validation; Central and Eastern Europe; European integration

1. Introduction

Expert surveys are frequently used by political scientists interested in measuring the positions of political parties on various issues (Castles and Mair, 1984; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Ray, 1999; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004). Such surveys offer a number of advantages, but they have also been subject to a range of criticisms regarding the validity and reliability of the measures produced (Budge, 2001). To date, expert surveys

have been conducted in the relatively stable, historically established and information-rich environments of Western party systems. Concerns about the validity of expert surveys in the arguably unstable and information-poor environments of new post-Communist democracies, therefore, are likely to be even sharper.

This article considers expert surveys in a ‘most difficult’ context by cross-validating measures obtained from two surveys of party stances towards European integration. One was undertaken by a team at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (henceforth Chapel Hill);¹ the other was conducted by Robert

* Corresponding author. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Center for European Studies, 223 E. Franklin Street, Chapel Hill 27599-3449, USA. Fax: +1 919 962 5375.

E-mail address: marks@unc.edu (G. Marks).

¹ Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Marco Steenbergen, Milada Vachudova, Erica Edwards, Moira Nelson, and David Scott.

Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield at Indiana and Oxford Universities (henceforth RW). A comparison of these measures reveals the capacity of expert surveys to obtain useful estimates of party positioning even in the difficult circumstances of the fluid party landscape of Central and Eastern European states.

1.1. *The two expert surveys*

The Chapel Hill survey commenced in September 2002 and was completed in May 2003; the RW survey took place between November 2003 and March 2004. Of the 87 parties in the RW survey and 73 in the Chapel Hill study, 57 parties from nine East European countries are common to both studies. For the purpose of this article, we therefore merged the data on these parties from the two data sets. The distribution of parties across countries is as follows: Bulgaria (4), Czech Republic (5), Hungary (5), Latvia (7), Lithuania (6), Poland (8), Romania (5), Slovakia (9), and Slovenia (8).

1.2. *Sampling*

Respondents were expected to know about the full range of electorally significant parties in a given country and to be familiar with the broad thrust of literature on party systems, though not of course with the particular hypotheses of the researchers. Master lists of respondents were compiled independently by each survey team. In both cases, this list included persons who fulfilled one or more of the following criteria: (1) they were employed at an academic institution and were known experts on the party system of the country in question; (2) they worked in a non-partisan think-tank and analyzed European integration in their country of expertise; (3) they had published two or more articles considering the domestic politics of the country's road to EU membership in English or in the local language; (4) they were recommended by known experts in the field. RW identified 264 experts of whom 111 (or 42 percent) completed the survey questionnaire for the 13 countries surveyed. Chapel Hill identified 291 experts for ten countries of whom 98 (or 34 percent) provided valid responses. The average number of experts for the overlapping countries included in both surveys is 8.7 (RW) and 9.9 (Chapel Hill). Both teams were somewhat surprised and gratified—given the results presented below—to find that only a total of five experts responded to *both* surveys. Any overlap in the positions ascribed to parties is thus not an effect of overlapping samples of experts.

2. Sources of error

Expert surveys are relatively flexible and inexpensive—virtues that help explain their popularity among researchers. But experts, like the rest of us, make mistakes. Depending on the phenomena the experts are asked to evaluate, their knowledge of the subject in question, and the way in which their expertise is tapped, their evaluations may not be accurate. Some degree of inaccuracy can therefore be taken for granted, and this is our point of departure.

In evaluating the relative validity of expert data it is useful to make a distinction between random error and systematic error (Marks, 2007). Random error arises when the sources of the error do not replicate across measurement instruments, i.e. experts. One expert may place a party to the left of where it is truly located, while another expert may locate it to the right of the actual location. If one aggregates these errors, no systematic pattern can be found; on the average, the errors cancel each other out. Random error appears to be at the heart of Budge's (2001) concerns about expert surveys. Budge fears that different experts may in fact be making different judgments. They may be evaluating different segments of the party (activists, leaders, or voters), different facets of the party (e.g. economic versus social ideology), different behaviors (rhetoric versus actual voting behavior in legislatures), or different time points. To the extent that experts differ in the judgments they render, random error in the placement of the parties would be likely. In statistical terms, a measure of this error would be given by the variance across experts.

Systematic error arises when errors are replicated across experts. For example, there may be a systematic tendency to place parties to the left (or to the right) of their actual positions. This kind of error can be described statistically as 'bias,' which measures the discrepancy between the average expert judgment and the true score. The problem of bias is connected to the concerns raised by McDonald and his collaborators in this issue. They worry that experts tend to rely on party family as a shortcut that allows them to place parties. To the extent that many, if not most, experts do this, one would expect to see a replication of errors that, in turn, would produce bias. For example, if experts were to think of party X as a member of the socialist family, they might attribute leftist orientations to that party on all sorts of issues, even if in reality the party may be moderate or to the right on some issues.

We can combine both error conceptions in the mean squared error (MSE—compare Groves, 1989). Let $\hat{\theta}$ denote the placement of a party by experts, then

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1052568>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1052568>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)