Book review

H.-D. Klingemann, A. Volkens, J. Bara, I. Budge, and M. McDonald, *Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments in Eastern Europe, European Union and OECD 1990-2003*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, ISBN 0199296316, £53.00

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Policy preferences of political parties are used in many studies. They help explain how elections are fought, why people vote for certain parties and why parties form certain coalition governments, If you want to know if parties represent citizens' views and whether they manage to enact these views, you need data on what parties want. To test whether parties really get more alike in terms of policy, as is often argued, one has to analyse policy preferences over time. And the rise of supranational institutions like the European Parliament tables questions which require comparison of party positions across countries.

Party preferences are generally measured in one of three ways: by conducting a mass surveys, by using an expert survey or by analysing the content of election manifestos. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) is easily the largest and best-known example of the latter method. The new volume *Mapping Policy Preferences II* presents data on Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries for the first time. This addition of party policy preferences in newly formed democracies presents an important test for the project, which claims to produce estimates that are comparable across time and space. The new book also includes updated results for the EU and OECD countries that were already included in the first volume.

The most important feature of the book for many political scientists will be the CD-ROM that ships with it. It includes a unique dataset on party policy preferences for the 1990-2003 period. A total of 1,341 policy preference estimates from 51 countries is included. The CMP uses a 56-category coding scheme to classify the sentences of political parties' election manifestos using human-coded content analysis. This scheme is based on the 'saliency theory' of party competition, which argues that parties do not confront each other on the same issues, but instead emphasize different sets of issues. This results in a coding scheme which includes many one-directional categories, for example 'Environmental protection'. It is argued that parties which are sceptic about environmental protection will generally not oppose it directly in their manifesto, but rather emphasize different issues, for example economic growth or infrastructure. To allow for the specific circumstance in CEE countries, a number of subcategories were used in these countries. These can,

however, be aggregated into their respective standard categories. The dataset contains the relative number of sentences of each manifesto in every coding category.

The authors use their dataset in a particular way. Instead of comparing parties' relative attention for all of the 56 issue categories, they construct a Left-Right scale. This scale is calculated as the total percentage of manifesto sentences designated to 13 'right' categories minus the total percentage of manifesto sentences that concerns 13 'left' items. All other policy categories have only an indirect effect on the scale, namely by reducing its maximum range. For example, a party with 60 right-wing statements and 40 left-wing statements, would receive a +20 score. A party that also pays attention to 100 issues that are right nor left, would only receive a +10 score. The Left-Right scores that are obtained this way are used throughout the book.

The first volume of *Mapping Policy Preferences* focused mainly on saliency theory and the method of data measurement. The new volume broadens the scope by exemplifying how the data may be used. One chapter shows how the Left-Right dimension can be used to check the programmatic coherence of European Parliament party groupings. The various party groups are found to be relatively coherent in terms of policy preferences: based on their policy preferences, 68% of the parties could be correctly classified in one of the party groupings. It also shows, according to the authors, that the coding scheme works to compare party positions cross-nationally. Other chapters examine the link between voters' and parties' Left-Right positions and the link between manifesto preferences, legislative preferences and government preferences.

Mapping Policy Preferences II equals its predecessor in providing detailed information on the data collection and in discussing the methodological issues involved. It focuses particularly on the validity and reliability of the data. The validity of the data collection method is defended arguing that it passes 'the test of face validity' (p. 63) and that the Left-Right estimates are roughly similar to the results of expert surveys. Furthermore, applying the coding scheme to Central and Eastern European countries yields 'plausible' Left-Right estimates (p. 24). Especially in Central Europe, which is institutionally rather closely linked to Western Europe, one can understand party competition by looking at Left-Right positions. As the reliability of CMP data is subject to ongoing debate, two chapters are (partly) devoted to it. The authors emphasise the importance of their 'centrally controlled and carefully worked out coding procedures' (p. 106), which they deem more important than inter-coder reliability tests.

The CMP has faced many criticisms over the years. These invole criticism on both the method data collection, i.e. reliability and the set-up of the coding scheme, and the use of the data, especially the construction of the Left-Right scale. Unfortunately, Klingemann et al. do not fully address these criticisms.

The author's discussion on the reliability of the data is rather elaborate, but it does not substantially address the problem of inter-coder reliability. The dataset only provides some information on how the coders performed their very first training test. It seems reasonable to expect inter-coder reliability tests on at least part of the dataset

to show that different coders apply the same codes to the same sentences. The authors use the retest method to check the reliability of the results, but as they note themselves the difficulty with this method is to 'separate actual changes in party positions from differences due to errors of measurement' (p.90). Furthermore, they do not take the estimated error into account in their own analyses in the rest of the book.

From a comparative perspective the single CMP coding scheme that is used for all countries and years is a major asset. But even if most manifestos do fit this scheme, one should be careful when comparing scores through place and time. What does it really mean when the Bulgarian Socialist Party in 1990 is more right-wing than the UK Labour party in 2005? The fact that the sentences in their manifestos could be classified using the same scheme does not guarantee that the meaning of the categories is the same. Party manifesto are a reaction to the status quo – when the status quo is very different, the interpretation of the manifesto must be different. Furthermore, the world continues to change, but the CMP coding scheme does not. For example, the dataset does not show the single most important topic of the 2002 Dutch elections: immigration. Whereas using one scheme for all cases has obvious merits in terms of comparability, it also has significant drawbacks.

The CMP's relative emphasis approach has always been under a 'certain amount of criticism' (p. 112). These criticisms mainly concern the way the coding results are combined in a single Left-Right scale. Party positions on the CMP Left-Right scale are based on how much a party writes about a set of 'left' and a set of 'right' issues. The consequence of this approach is, for example, that a leftist party is considered less leftist when also adopting a green agenda, which is considered neither right nor left. An alternative approach to party competition may argue that there is no necessary connection between a party's position on an issue and the saliency of the issue for that party: parties can take extreme positions on issues that they deem not very important or moderate positions on issues that they think are very important. Although *Mapping Policy Preferences II* offers a brief description of how the CMP data can be used in a more confrontational fashion, it does not compare the confrontational and relative emphasis approach.

The Left-Right scale is constructed by combining a priori ideas and the results of exploratory factor analyses (p. 6). This process involves multiple stages of combining variables based on empirical and intuitive evidence and then re-entering the combined variables into the analysis. This method offers much room for discretion. When proposing a standard for comparing party preferences across time and countries, one might expect a more thorough justification of the choices than the authors present in *Mapping Policy Preferences II*. Another limitation of the Left-Right scale is that it largely ignores country-specific variance. The scale is based on the common denominator. For some countries, the Left-Right scale may be a poor summary of party preferences.

Mapping Policy Preferences II offers an important addition to the existing manifesto dataset. For one, the authors fare well at stressing that they have an 'essential data source' (cover) which is truly 'uniquely!' (p. 1). One problem with the book,

however, is that it offers little new insight in the collection and use of the data. Most chapters are either replications of previous analyses or have appeared in journals and other books recently. That does not alter the fact that it includes a rich dataset that can be of great use in many comparative studies, when used appropriately. Even if one might criticise some of the project's methodological choices, it remains the standard in manifesto analysis.