

# Reflections on the European integration dimension

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The present economic and political state of the European Union (EU) provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the methodological toolkit of political scientists studying European integration. The political events during the first decade of this century have marked an accelerated and increasingly complex integration process. The EU has managed to overcome Cold War divisions between East and West to include an unprecedented number of countries. At the same time, the EU has successfully reformed its institutions through the Treaty of Lisbon after an almost decade-long process full of obstacles. Following this expansion and institutional reform, the EU faces yet another crossroads after a severe European debt crisis has put the future of the common currency, and thereby the future of political and economic integration of Europe, into question.

Knowing where political parties stand on Europe is therefore not just a measurement exercise in political science. Party position measures allow researchers to examine important substantive questions, ranging from explaining how party systems across Europe work, how election campaigns are run, or how governments deal with new economic, fiscal, and political challenges. Scholars studying Europe will therefore continue to demand valid and reliable party position estimates on European integration. Any continued effort to produce data for the scholarly community should thus be complimented.

Given the prominence of the integration dimension in research on the European Union, we investigate in this forum section how well parties can be distinguished on this dimension. Using data from different sources, including expert surveys, voter surveys, and roll call votes in the European Parliament (EP), we find that

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the scale reliability of this dimension may be overstated when the data are analysed across sub-ranges of the scale. Typical cross-validation measures, i.e. correlation coefficients across the full data range, hide an important feature of the data: while the estimates strongly agree on the placement of Euroskeptical parties, there is less agreement over the location of Europhile parties. In other words, the differences between anti- and pro-European parties can be recovered easily using any available approach, but additional metric information appears to be difficult to capture. While we do not deny that a continuous European integration dimension exists, the data suggest that it is hard to place moderate integrationist parties. The overall distribution of parties appears to be largely bimodal – a distribution we characterize as ‘weakly continuous’. We note that our analysis in no way suggests that previous studies using EU integration positions are wrong – if anything, previous results may actually be understated. Rather, we suggest that any approach may run into an unusual form of measurement error, where a latent scale that may possibly be dichotomous is instead estimated in a continuous manner.

We begin by discussing how the contributions in this special issue raise important points about the dimensionality in European politics. Subsequently, we discuss three main sources of party position data on the EU integration dimension – expert surveys, voter surveys, and EP roll call votes. Our analysis cross-validates these data across different subsets of parties. We conclude by suggesting two easy robustness tests for scholars using the European integration dimension in their analysis.

## Aspects of dimensionality in this special issue

The contributions to this special issue of *European Union Politics* raise a set of important issues when thinking about dimensionality in European politics. Benoit and Laver (2012) draw attention to the tendency among researchers to have a priori expectations about the nature of the political conflict and the corresponding dimensionality of politics. They discuss the two basic approaches that researchers can pursue: either one can construct dimensions using substantive knowledge about politics a priori, or one can use available data that relate to political conflict and reduce them to a dimension that is then interpreted. In both instances, prior knowledge of the researcher is involved, but at different stages – in the former during the research design and selection of the dimensions, in the latter during the interpretation of the estimated dimensions. Benoit and Laver recommend that the de facto knowledge of relevant dimensions should be part of the estimation process. The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, in quantitative text analysis, one way to combine prior knowledge about the dimensions with a parametric scaling model is to consider only relevant sections as input, thus limiting the data to a policy area of substantive interest (König et al., 2010; Slapin and Proksch, 2008).

Actual party competition may be conducted on very few dimensions if party positions on a priori dimensions correlate highly. This is what Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2012) examine by comparing and correlating the dimensions of the Chapel

Hill expert survey (CHES), one of the most widely used data sources for party positions on European integration. They find that there is a substantial amount of variation across countries, with some countries exhibiting *de facto* low dimensionality (e.g. UK and Poland) and other countries (e.g. Austria and Latvia) higher dimensionality. This variation transcends conventional conceptions of the differences between West and East European countries.

The two contributions by Rovny (2012) and De Vries and Hobolt (2012) examine dimensionality in the context of partisan strategy. Rovny argues that parties might benefit from combining issue emphasizing and blurring in a multidimensional world of party competition. For the European integration dimension, he finds that extreme parties are more likely to emphasize EU issues – anti- and pro-European parties alike – and that these parties are also less likely to blur their positions. De Vries and Hobolt tackle a different party strategy, that of issue entrepreneurship, which they define to mean the attempt to restructure political competition by taking an extreme stance on a previously non-salient issue in order to gain votes. They expect that challenger parties – those parties that are not part of the mainstream party system – use European integration as a new issue dimension to generate votes. To examine the effects of partisan issue entrepreneurship, they multiply each party's EU salience score from the Chapel Hill expert survey with the distance of this party to the mean party position on the European integration dimension. Their results suggest that such parties do indeed attract new voters in elections.

The final contribution to this special issue by Stimson, Thiébaud and Tiberj (2012) uses an impressive amount of survey data to investigate the evolution of policy dimensionality in France over time. In doing so, the authors pursue both the *a priori* strategy of substantively defining the dimensions and the *a posteriori* strategy of reducing the data to a low-dimensional solution. Stimson et al. first sort survey issue items into two categories, socioeconomic and cultural. They then estimate latent dimensions for each and demonstrate that the two are strongly correlated. Subsequently, they pursue the alternative, a dimensional reduction of the survey items, without making any *a priori* assumption and show that this unconstrained estimation produces a 'statistically discernible, but theoretically meaningless second dimension of politics. This analysis leads them to conclude that the two most important dimensions of politics in France are not independent. Notably, Bakker, Jolly and Polk corroborate this result using expert survey data and find that France has the fourth highest correlation between the left–right dimension and the 'new politics' dimension. Thus, Stimson et al. come to the same conclusion as Benoit and Laver, namely that substantive knowledge is crucial in the estimation process.

In this forum section, we focus on one specific dimension: European integration. We are interested in what we can learn from different measurement approaches about political party positions on this *a priori* defined dimension of politics. In contrast, we do not examine how this dimension relates to other dimensions, what factors explain why parties take a certain position on European integration or what

strategies parties pursue with this dimension in electoral campaigns. Thus, the reader should view our analysis as complementary to the excellent contributions in this special issue, all of which address these themes at great length.

## Measuring party positions on Europe

It seems appropriate to begin our examination with a survey of different approaches used to measure party positions on the European integration dimension. There is general agreement in the literature that this dimension ought to reflect the conflict between national sovereignty, on the one hand, and full political integration in Europe on the other (e.g. Hix, 1999; Hix and Lord, 1997; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999; Tsebelis and Garrett, 2001). In other words, parties take positions regarding the extent to which policies should be decided at the European level, thus Euroskepticism is a natural endpoint of this dimension (for a discussion on the sources of Euroskepticism, see the special issue edited by Hooghe (2007)). Rather than examining how this dimension relates to other dimensions of party competition – notably the left–right dimension (see the discussion by Bakker et al. in this special issue) – we are primarily concerned with its measurement.

Party positions are latent variables that are fundamentally unobservable and scholars need to indirectly infer them from observed behaviour. In an ideal world, a party position estimate should be reliable and valid.<sup>1</sup> We would like to examine three main sources more closely: (1) voter surveys, which ask respondents about their perceptions of parties, (2) expert surveys, which constitute the most frequently used data source of party positions on European integration, and (3) EP voting behaviour.<sup>2</sup> For instance, since the 1999 EP election, the European Election Surveys have asked respondents about their attitude towards European unification and about their perceptions where the respective national parties stand. The question reads as follows (EES, 2011):

Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means unification ‘has already gone too far’ and 10 means it ‘should be pushed further’. What number on this scale best describes your position? And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?

To estimate a party position, a set of individual perceptions are averaged. Note that a status quo is implicit in the wording of the question. The scale defines the endpoints with regard to changes to the status quo and makes it easy for voters to distinguish between anti- and pro-European parties. The question wording facilitates placing parties at the status quo (at 5), anti-European parties to the left of the status quo (below 5), and pro-European parties to the right (above 5). Other points, however, are not further defined. Note that as the status quo shifts (i.e. European integration deepens), parties can, in theory, appear to become less pro-European over time without ever changing their position. Taking into account the different

changes to the Treaties, a respondent who reads the scale closely might update the information about the status quo over time (e.g. pre-Euro and post-Euro, or pre-Treaty of Lisbon and post-Treaty of Lisbon) and locate the parties respectively at different points. The question requires, of course, a great deal of information from the voter about the status quo, including how many policy jurisdictions are regulated at the European level and how individual parties would change the current set of rules. Despite these problems which make comparisons over time difficult, this question remains important in European electoral research because it offers one of the few opportunities to compare individual responses with party positions.

What voters perceive does not necessarily equate to what parties actually want, especially on an issue that remains secondary in election campaigns. Thus, a straightforward alternative are surveys of experts who should be more knowledgeable about parties than voters. Several expert surveys have generated, or continue to generate, data on party positions on European integration (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; McElroy and Benoit, 2007; Ray, 1999; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2007; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). The key insight is to ask a group of informed experts, usually researchers studying the respective party systems, about their perceptions of the parties. One of these expert surveys, the Chapel Hill expert survey, conducted in regular intervals since 1999, has become the primary source for cross-national party positions on the EU.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, studies of European integration would be unthinkable without the rich datasets that the Chapel Hill expert surveys have provided. In the 2006 version, the survey – receiving on average 10 expert evaluations per country – asked the following question:

How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2006? For each party, please circle the number that corresponds best to your view, scaled from 1 (strongly opposed to European integration) to 7 (strongly in favour of European integration).

The seven-point scale describes each value (strongly opposed, opposed, somewhat opposed, neutral, somewhat in favour, in favour, and strongly in favour). This wording is somewhat different from the voter survey question in the European Election Study. Whereas the voter survey asks about the party in general, this question focuses on the party leadership. Thus, the wording rules out one ambiguity in measurement and helps to narrow down the set of observations (e.g. elite speeches, legislative votes, manifestos) that may be relevant for the party position. The question is similar to the voter study in the sense that the midpoint of the scale is neutral, akin to a status quo position. There are other expert surveys, notably the Benoit and Laver expert survey (Benoit and Laver, 2006). However, their survey did not directly pose a question relating to European integration. Instead, the survey asked separate questions about joining the EU, strengthening the EU, making the EU larger and stronger, and EU authority, the latter of which comes closest to a general preference over political integration in Europe.

How strongly do the expert surveys agree? Studies typically find very strong correlations between different measures of party positions regarding European integration, with correlation coefficients often well beyond  $r = 0.9$  (Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007; Whitefield et al., 2007). Visual inspections of these data are rare. A notable exception is the study by Whitefield et al. (2007) who show that the expert survey scores correlate robustly across the full range of the scale and that the correlation is not unduly influenced by extreme outliers. This would suggest that the European integration dimension can be accurately measured, independent of which experts are being asked. In the following section, we investigate the integration dimension across sub-ranges of the scales, making use of simple scatterplots, and discuss an unresolved puzzle in the research on dimensionality in the EU.

## Comparing parties on the European dimension

We pose a specific question – how well can we distinguish parties on the EU integration dimension? Although there is widespread agreement that numerous Euroskeptic and Europhile parties exist, it is widely assumed that a large number of political parties fall between the two extremes – an assumption we wish to investigate more closely. Although this may be an issue that also concerns other dimensions of interest, we focus on EU integration because it has been the subject of a significant amount of theoretical and empirical interest. In virtually all instances, both theoretical and empirical models assume a continuous measure.

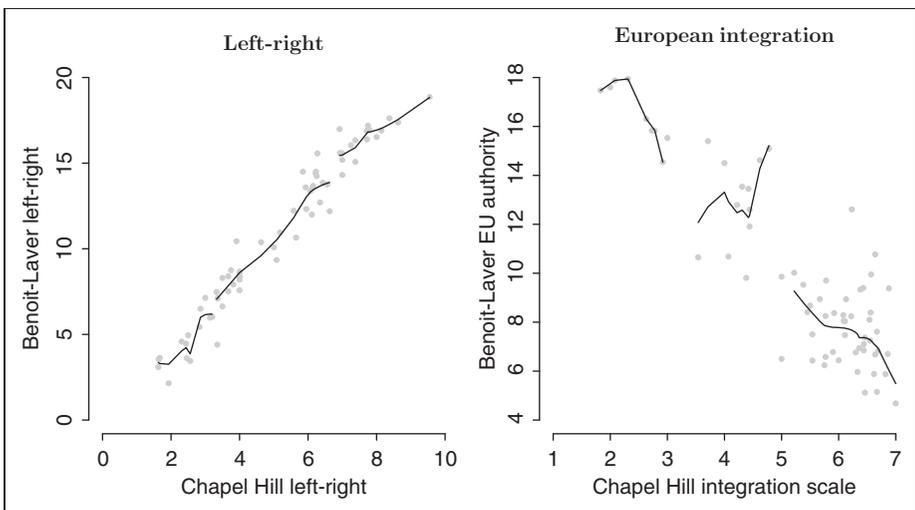
Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we compare results between two well-known expert surveys. We then compare expert survey estimates to those obtained through voter surveys. Finally, we examine how well expert survey positions compare to estimates derived from EP voting records. Consistent with earlier validation studies, we find strong evidence through correlational measures that the convergent validity of all of these measures is high when the full range of the data is used. However, we also find evidence in all three cases that this high scale reliability may be somewhat overstated when the data are analysed across sub-ranges of the scale. In particular, scale reliability is very weak among the pro-integration parties which comprise the majority of parties in the European political system, and there is little to no agreement between the three approaches on placements of the moderate integrationist parties on the scale. While scale reliability will frequently be weakened in cases where only sub-ranges of the data are used, we argue that our results cannot be explained by this phenomenon alone. In all cases, we find that comparable sub-ranges of the left–right scale correlate to a much higher degree than those of the integration scale.

### *Experts compared*

We begin by comparing estimates of EU integration positions from the Chapel Hill and Benoit–Laver expert surveys conducted between 2002 and 2003. Integration

preferences are measured using the Chapel Hill integration question described earlier in the paper, while they are measured using the EU authority question from the Benoit–Laver survey. The EU authority scale endpoints were defined as (1) favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy and (20) favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy (Benoit and Laver, 2006). Since the scales are worded differently, a high scale reliability in this instance will be indicated by a *negative* correlation between the two measures. Although the two scales employ different wordings, both scales attempt to measure party stances towards the political integration of Europe within a single cross-section in time. Note that this is an extremely conservative test, as it is likely that both expert surveys share a significant overlap in the experts they employ. Hence, the potential for correlated errors in measurement is very real, making a finding of poor scale reliability across sub-ranges of expert-generated scales highly unlikely.

Figure 1 plots the relationship between Benoit–Laver and Chapel Hill on two scales, the left–right dimension and the EU integration dimension.<sup>4</sup> We plot the  $N=67$  common parties that are measured in 2002 across both expert surveys, along with lowess smoothers of the data across each Chapel Hill tercile. We find very strong correlations on both dimensions across the full data range at  $r=0.97$  (left–right) and  $r=-0.88$  (European integration) respectively, corroborating earlier cross-validation research. We argue that while this is a good starting point, demonstration of scale reliability using all of the data is a necessary, but not a sufficient requirement. In their discussion of graphs in statistical analysis, Tufte (1969) and Anscombe (1973) note that correlation coefficients are highly sensitive to endpoints.



**Figure 1.** Expert placement comparisons for Chapel Hill and Benoit–Laver expert surveys (2002).

In cases where a relationship appears correlated, the linear relationship that is implied may in fact only hold at the extreme ends of the data. In such cases, one solution is to check reliability across different ranges in the data to ensure that the relationship appears consistently throughout narrower ranges of the data.

Our lowest smoother does indeed provide visual evidence of low reliability across terciles on the EU integration scale, which we demonstrate more carefully in Table 1. While the correlation between the EU integration scales on the first (i.e. Euroskeptic) tercile is very high at  $r = -0.89$ , the same scale reliability does not appear in the second (i.e. moderate) or third tercile (i.e. pro-European), which correlate at  $r = 0.21$  and  $r = -0.27$  respectively. The poor correlation in these scales, which includes a sign flip for the middle range, does not appear to be due to a lack of cases – in particular, the third (pro-European) tercile alone contains 46 of the 67 parties. It also does not appear to be the case that ideological scales separated by tercile always perform poorly – in fact, reliability across all three terciles for the left–right scale is uniformly high.

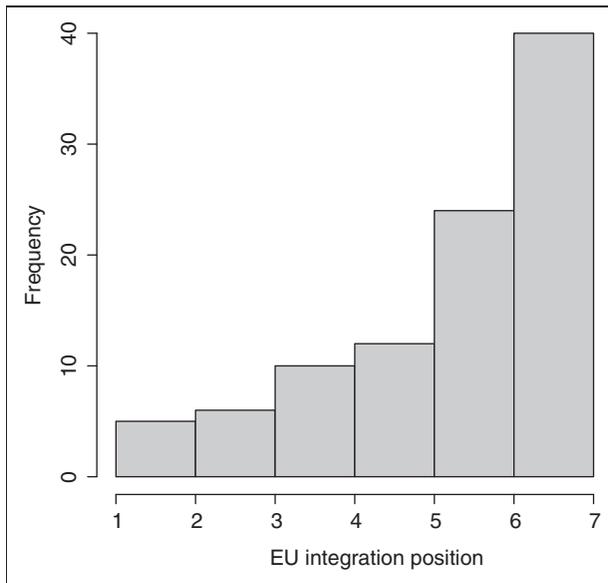
The results suggest that experts can reasonably recover left–right positions at any interval of the scale, but have problems doing so on the European integration dimension. While they strongly agree on the Euroskeptic parties, there is less agreement over Europhile parties. One reason for this discrepancy could be that moderate parties do not take clear positions on Europe – an argument supported by the data as the mean standard deviation of expert placements for the moderate integrationist tercile is significantly higher than those of the other two (1.23 vs. 0.68,  $t = 5.94$ ).<sup>5</sup>

Not surprisingly, there are many more pro-European than anti-European parties in the dataset. Figure 2 plots a histogram of  $N = 97$  parties on the seven-point 2006 Chapel Hill EU integration scale, with higher values denoting greater support for EU integration.<sup>6</sup> We note two important patterns in this histogram. First, the distribution of party placements on the EU integration scale is heavily left-skewed,

**Table 1.** Correlation of expert survey positions

Range	Left–right		EU integration	
	Correlation	<i>N</i>	Correlation	<i>N</i>
Full range	0.97	67	–0.88	67
First tercile	0.82	14	–0.89	9
Second tercile	0.93	36	0.21	12
Third tercile	0.83	17	–0.27	46

*Note:* Data are the Chapel Hill expert survey (2002) and the Benoit–Laver survey (2006), conducted in 2002. Ranges are for separate terciles of the scale, as shown by the separate lowest smoothers in Figure 1. While a high scale reliability for left–right is indicated by a positive correlation, a high scale reliability for the European integration dimension is indicated by a *negative* correlation between the two measures because the endpoints of the European integration scales are reversed in the expert surveys.



**Figure 2.** Histogram of party positions on EU integration, Chapel Hill expert survey (2006). Note: The data cover  $N=97$  parties for which estimates are available in both the 2006 Chapel Hill survey and the 2009 European Election Study. The seven-point scale increases in support for EU integration, with '4' denoting a neutral preference.

with a small number of Euroskeptical parties and many more pro-European parties. More importantly, the histogram also illustrates the assumption that many political parties occupy intermediate positions on EU integration. Of the  $N=97$  parties in this data set, 50 parties (52%) have estimated EU integration positions between 2 to 6 on the seven-point scale.

### *Experts and voters compared*

We move on to investigate whether a similar pattern holds for the comparison between voters and experts. Following Campbell and Fiske (1959), we assess the convergent validity of the Chapel Hill EU integration scale (the more frequently used one out of the two previously mentioned expert surveys) by testing the correlation of the scale against an alternative measure of the same concept. Our first alternative measure is the positions of political parties on EU integration, measured from the 2009 European Election Study. Similar to the expert surveys, we obtain positional estimates by taking the simple mean of voter placements of each political party. Across all  $N=97$  parties in our data, we find that the two sets of EU integration estimates correlate at  $r=0.64$ , suggesting a reasonable level of convergent validity between the scales.

As before, we divide up the scale into different subsets – the parties estimated by the Chapel Hill expert surveys to be relatively pro-integration (defined as parties with EU integration placements above 4), parties between the extremes (defined as parties with EU integration placements between 2 and 6), and parties that are relatively Euroskeptic (defined as parties with EU integration placements below 4). These correlations are reported in Table 2. For Euroskeptic parties, Chapel Hill expert surveys and voter placements correlate reasonably at  $r=0.58$ . In contrast, correlation for moderate integrationist parties is  $r=0.38$ , while parties strongly supporting EU integration only correlate at  $r=0.35$ .

Again, the results suggest that voters and experts distinguish between extreme Euroskeptics and extreme integrationists well across the full range of the data, but have difficulty identifying moderate EU integrationists. Stated differently, we argue that one could obtain comparable results in most studies of EU integration if one replaced the continuous EU integration measure with a dichotomous anti- vs. pro-European dummy variable.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, the evidence for our argument is suggestive at best. Furthermore, we do not claim that no parties occupy moderate EU integration positions – although a correlation of  $r=0.35$  suggests a weak relationship, it is not altogether absent. However, we would argue that the data are at least suggestive of the possibility that the European party spectrum is dominated by strong Euroskeptics and strong integrationists. In addition, a reliability of  $r=0.35$  is weak not only in an absolute sense, but in a relative sense against a competing characterization of the EU integration scale as largely dichotomous. We test this by generating a dichotomous version of the EU integration scale, calculated as 1 if the Chapel Hill EU integration party estimate is above 2 and 0 if otherwise. We find that a dichotomous measure correlates with voter estimates at  $r=0.50$  – a higher level of reliability than what we observe in subsets of the continuous data. We note that this hypothesis in no way suggests that previous studies using EU integration positions are ‘wrong’ – if anything, it suggests that previous results may actually be

**Table 2.** Correlation of party positions from European election survey (2009) and Chapel Hill expert survey (2006)

Variable	Correlation	N
EU integration, full range ( $1 < x < 7$ )	0.64	97
EU integration, Euroskeptic ( $x < 4$ )	0.58	21
EU integration, pro-integration ( $x > 4$ )	0.35	76
EU integration, moderates ( $2 < x < 6$ )	0.38	50
EU integration, dichotomized	0.50	97
Left–right, rightist parties	0.57	47
Left–right, leftist parties	0.71	50

Note: All positions from the 2006 Chapel Hill expert survey are correlated against the same parties and scales as estimated from the 2009 European Election Study.

understated. Nor does it imply that expert survey estimates are ‘wrong’. Rather, we suggest that any approach may run into an unusual form of measurement error, where a latent scale that may be largely dichotomous is instead estimated in a continuous manner.

Is the weak relationship artificially induced in all cases where reliability is tested only across subsets of the data? We test this hypothesis by examining the reliability of the left–right scale using the Chapel Hill survey and voter placements for parties to the right and to the left of the centre separately. We find that the two subsets of data correlate at  $r=0.57$  and  $r=0.71$ , respectively. The lack of reliability that we find for subsets of the EU integration scale therefore does not appear when the same tests are applied to comparable subsets of the left–right scale.

### *Experts and MEPs compared*

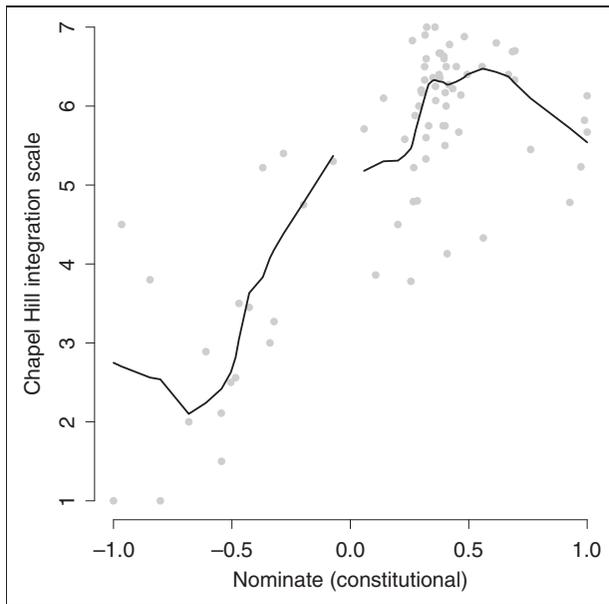
A valid criticism of our exercise is that voters have a hard time placing parties on European integration because Europe is not a salient campaign issue for most parties (but see De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Thus, an alternative hypothesis would suggest that moderate preferences over Europe manifest themselves only in actual lawmaking in the EP. We examine this possibility by investigating votes of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the 6th European Parliament relating to constitutional and inter-institutional affairs – the policy area that is directly germane to the issue of EU integration. The legislative period of the 6th European Parliament between 2004 and 2009 included consideration of the European constitution and the Treaty of Lisbon. If at all, we would expect political parties to express their preferences over Europe consistently in this forum and during this crucial time period. We first identify eight final passage roll call votes covering the constitution for Europe, the period of reflection, the roadmap for the European Union, the convening of an intergovernmental conference, the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, and the Treaty of Lisbon.<sup>8</sup> In all eight roll call votes, a ‘yes’ vote is consistent with greater support for European integration.

Across all eight votes, a vote sequence of eight ‘yes’ votes would denote strong support for EU integration, while a sequence of eight ‘no’ votes would denote strong opposition to EU integration. Moderate integrationists would therefore have preferences between these two extremes, expressed as vote sequences that include both a mixture of ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Excluding cases where parties abstain,  $2^8 = 256$  different vote sequences are possible (e.g. YNNYNNY or NYNYYYNY). Coombs (1964) has shown that 18 of these sequences are consistent with perfect voting in one dimension. Under the alternative hypothesis where large numbers of parties with moderate preferences on EU integration exist, we expect to see significant numbers of parties not voting in one of the two extreme manners. However, this does not appear to be the case. By measuring party preference as the expressed preference of a majority of the party delegation, we find that  $N=170$  parties have complete preferences (i.e. they express a

preference on all eight votes). Of these 170 parties, 120 voted 'yes' on all eight votes and 29 voted 'no' on all eight votes, so 87.6% of all parties voted in a manner consistent with one of the two extreme ends of the EU integration scale.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we only observe five of the 256 possible voting sequences across 170 parties, two of which are the vote sequences associated with the opposing ends of the EU integration scale. In summary, few parties in the EP vote in a manner consistent with moderate EU integration preferences.

We additionally validate our argument by considering the impact of amendments to these eight final passage bills. Incorporating amendments into our analysis yields the benefit of a considerable amount of additional information, bringing the total number of roll call votes that we can analyse to  $N=123$ . The inclusion of amendments may better reflect the continuous nature of the preferences because parties can strategically call for roll call votes on their own amendments in order to make a public statement. This is true as long as the amendments are germane, i.e. relate to the issue at hand. A problem induced by including the amendment votes is the amount of missingness in the data which prevents simple comparisons of the type that we conduct above, since it necessitates discarding far too many parties. We address this issue by applying Nominat (Poole et al., 2011) to constitutional and inter-institutional affairs votes. This allows us to obtain spatial estimates of the voting record of each legislator in the EP on European issues in one dimension. Following standard practice, we estimate ideal points only for legislators voting at least 50 times. We then take the mean of these legislator-level estimates by national party to produce party-level estimates of EP voting. As a quick validity test, we correlate our estimates using constitutional votes against those using all votes. Our constitutional estimates correlate at  $r=0.05$  against the first Nominat dimension, which is typically interpreted as a left-right dimension, and  $r=0.62$  against the second Nominat dimension, which is typically interpreted as a dimension that is 'less salient and less stable' and 'partly reflects pro- and anti-European integration positions of political parties' (Hix et al., 2007: 181).<sup>10</sup> Thus, our creation of a one-dimensional 'Constitutional Nominat' dimension appears to measure voting on EU integration issues.

Figure 3 presents a scatterplot of our EP-derived constitutional score against its Chapel Hill integration counterpart. The plot shows three trends that are largely consistent with earlier findings. First, constitutional Nominat scores lump together in a relatively bimodal manner, concentrated heavily around  $-0.5$  and  $0.4$ . Secondly, we continue to see a strong relationship across the full range of the data, with constitutional Nominat and Chapel Hill integration correlating at  $r=0.75$  ( $N=99$ ). Thirdly, this strong relationship does not appear to hold consistently across subsets of the data, a trend shown in the lowest smoothers drawn across the two halves of the Nominat scale. While the Euroskeptic (i.e. negative) half of the constitutional Nominat range correlates reasonably with Chapel Hill estimates at  $r=0.56$  ( $N=23$ ), the pro-integration half correlates extremely poorly at  $r=0.06$  ( $N=76$ ). In short, EP roll call data on constitutional issues reveals that parties tend to separate into a pro- and an anti-European camp. While the



**Figure 3.** Party position scatterplot of Nominat (constitutional votes only) vs. Chapel Hill integration scale (2006),  $N = 79$ .

anti-European camp is identified well by experts, there is again less agreement over the placement of those parties advocating more Europe.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this forum section, we examine the measurement of one dimension of particular importance to EU scholars – the dimension describing party preferences over European integration. Previous literature devoted to validating the construct validity of these measures focuses almost exclusively on correlational measures of EU integration positions across the full range of the data. Consistent with this earlier work, we also find strong correlations and reliability across the full range of the data. However, we argue that the strong scale reliability that is implied by these tests may be somewhat overstated. Across three different sources of data (expert surveys, voter surveys, and EP roll call votes), we find evidence that EU integration position estimates generated across more limited sub-ranges of the data correlate poorly and demonstrate much lower reliability. Substantively, our results suggest that party preference measures on European integration are best characterized as largely bimodal, with a large pro-integration mode containing about two-thirds of the parties and a smaller Euroskeptical mode comprising most, but not all, of the remaining parties. While we do not deny that moderate integrationist parties exist, these appear to be a small minority of the data and are difficult even for experts to identify consistently.

Why do these patterns occur? Three potential explanations come to mind. First, it is known that Europe is not a salient campaign issue for most parties. That means that some parties might genuinely not have a clear position on European integration. Second, even in policy making, moderate preferences may be revealed in an extreme fashion due to institutional constraints. This will produce error if different measures of party positioning are weighing observed behaviour differently. If this is true, we would indeed expect differences between what experts or voters perceive and how parties behave in the EP or in the Council. Third, it could be the case that some types of parties are systematically perceived in a different fashion than others. Specifically, one can think of the differences between opposition and government parties, with the latter possibly being more associated with decisions at the European level than the former (e.g. through publicly visible summits of the European Council). We leave these speculative hypotheses for future research.

To be sure, our analysis hardly constitutes definite proof that the European integration scale is 'weakly continuous'. In fact, all measures we use in this study (two expert surveys, constitutional Nominate scores in the EP, and voter placements) all independently suggest that preferences on European integration span a wide scale that includes numerous moderate integrationists. These measures also suggest that even among pro-integrationists that comprise the majority of parties in the EP, there are a range of attitudes on European integration. However, we show that these measures largely disagree with each other within the moderate integration and pro-integration subgroups. Notably, these disagreements do not appear when comparing and contrasting subgroups on the left–right dimension. What we do consistently find, however, is a strong separation between the Euroskeptic and pro-integration blocs, evidenced by the strong correlations across the full range of the data.

Our findings also suggest that, in studies of the effect of the EU integration dimension, findings of significant results will largely be driven by the presence of a few Euroskeptic parties. This in no way invalidates any previously published work on this subject. In fact, the attenuation bias that usually results from measurement error in an independent variable under ordinary least squares suggests that previously published work may actually be understating the substantive effects of EU integration preferences considerably. However, our cautionary note does suggest limits in how one should interpret results from such studies. In particular, counterfactual questions such as 'what would Y look like if party X changed its position on European integration slightly' are especially difficult to answer with models where the result is largely driven by differences between Euroskeptics and pro-integrationists alone.

Our argument also suggests two easy robustness tests for a range of studies on the effect of EU integration preferences. First, if preferences on European integration are largely bimodal, we argue that in most EU integration studies the substitution of a dichotomously coded version of EU integration preferences would not significantly harm, and may even improve, the fit of many of the models that are used. In our view, recoding of 'weakly continuous' EU integration preferences into a

dichotomous pro- and anti-integration variable might serve as a simple means of correcting for measurement error when using the scale as an independent variable. Secondly, we propose a simple placebo test. Our analysis suggests that pro-integration parties comprise the vast majority of parties in the EP, but differences between their positions correlate poorly against similar measures. This suggests that if Euroskeptical parties were to be dropped from studies of EU integration, previously found results may disappear with them. Stated differently, we assert that the measured positional differences among pro-integration parties may not be sufficiently reliable, even though a large majority of European parties fall in that range.

Research on the measurement of party positions has come a long way in the past decade, and the toolset meanwhile includes different approaches that allow scholars to generate data directly from observable behaviour (e.g. election manifestos, roll call votes, or legislative speeches) or indirectly by asking voters, experts, or political elites. We hope our research note will stimulate discussion about the future – a priori – definition and use of the European integration dimension as one of the crucial dimensions of European Union politics.

## Notes

1. One should add to this list four other criteria: estimates should be cross-nationally comparable, highlight position shifts over time, indicate the level of measurement uncertainty, and be useful in studies of party–voter interaction. As of yet, no measure alone is able to fulfill all of these criteria.
2. Of course, this list is not exhaustive. Notable other sources that we do not discuss here include national and European election manifestos (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Schmitt and Wüst, 2007; Wüst and Volkens, 2003), EP speeches (Proksch and Slapin, 2010), and MEP surveys (Farrell et al., 2011).
3. The expert surveys conducted by Leonard Ray served as a template (Steenbergen and Marks, 2007: 349).
4. Two outliers, the Danish People's Party and the Greek Communists, are omitted.
5. For this argument, see also the contribution by Rovny (2012) in this special issue. We also note, however, that the mean standard deviation for the middle tercile of the left–right scale is also significantly higher than for the other two (1.18 vs. 0.81,  $t = 2.47$ ).
6. The  $N = 97$  parties are the intersection of parties for which the Chapel Hill expert surveys provide estimates and the parties surveyed by the 2009 European Election Study that are used in the next section. Results do not substantively change when using the 2002 Chapel Hill scale.
7. An alternative, and more radical, interpretation of the results is that moderate integrationists are difficult to place simply because few exist.
8. In the roll call data set from Hix and Noury (2009), the vote IDs for these eight votes are 25, 231, 1326, 1837, 2868, 2976, 3501, and 3862.
9. In addition to the 170 parties which expressed preferences on all eight votes, there were an additional 55 parties that did not. In 47 of those 55 cases, parties voted uniformly yea or nay on all votes they expressed preferences on. While this result is inconclusive because we cannot know how those 47 parties would have voted, we can say that only eight of the 55 parties with missing values voted in a manner that was consistent with a moderate EU integration position.

10. According to Hix, the second dimension also ‘captures government-opposition dynamics at the European level, with parties represented in the Council and Commission voting one way and parties not represented voting the other way’ (Hix et al., 2007: 181).

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