

Response to Marks, Steenbergen and Hooghe

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We would like to briefly respond to the points raised by Gary Marks, Marco Steenbergen and Liesbet Hooghe (2012), henceforth MSH. The authors focus on the cross-validation of expert survey data, which is only one of several analyses that we perform in our contribution. MSH raise three points: (1) that caution should be used when dichotomizing the dimension as a dependent variable, (2) that the conceptualization of the dimension must be theoretically motivated, and (3) that valuable information in the data should not be thrown out unnecessarily.

The examination of the expert scores by MSH reveals that the choice of the subrange can have consequences for reliability tests – a finding we clearly agree with. MSH point out that the division into subranges creates a small-*N* problem. We acknowledge that the correlation improves if the three additional parties in the middle range are included.¹ That said, the correlation for the middle subrange as defined by MSH is still only about half the size of the overall scale reliability of $r = -.88$ between CHES and Benoit and Laver (we keep the original scale orientation by Benoit and Laver). More importantly, the correlation for the vast majority of parties that are pro-European (two-thirds of all parties in the analysis) remains low, with a correlation of $r = -.26$. In short, we agree with MSH that one should pay close attention to the definition of the subranges in scale reliability analysis, but we believe our main point is largely unaffected by these relatively minor adjustments.

MSH write that we claim that ‘Europe is best conceived as a dichotomous issue’ (Marks et al., 2012). This is not what we proposed. Instead, we show in our analysis that the scale reliability of the European integration dimension is not as high as

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commonly thought, and that this is the case not just for expert surveys – the focus of MSH’s response – but also for other data sources.² We simply suggest that, given our findings, researchers can use a quick *robustness test* when using party placements as an *independent variable* by dichotomizing the scale (the reader of the forum section will note that we specifically suggest these robustness tests for studies on the *effect* of EU integration preferences).

MSH emphasize that the dichotomization of Europe in the context of the dependent variable does not make much sense. We absolutely agree, and we note that we neither propose a re-conceptualization, nor do we mention the robustness test in the context of a dependent variable.³ We acknowledge that all measures (not just expert surveys) suggest that preferences on Europe span a wide scale including numerous moderate integrationist parties. But we are convinced researchers need to be able to detect whether their results could be driven by the difference between Eurosceptics and strongly pro-European parties alone. We do not claim that this will always be the case, but that the proposed tests may aid researchers in checking whether effects are driven solely by extreme differences in the EU integration dimension.

Finally, we agree with MSH that the conceptualization of the European integration dimension must be theoretically motivated. It is certainly not a good idea to throw away valuable information contained in data, and the Chapel Hill expert surveys provide a rich source of party-level data on European integration. We believe that parties do take nuanced stances on Europe, and that this dimension is theoretically best thought of as a continuum – just to what extent all of the differences manifest themselves in various measurements across different data sets is somewhat more ambiguous.

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Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

Notes

1. The reader can see the difference between our middle tercile ($r = 0.21$, $N = 12$) and MSH’s middle tercile ($r = -.45$, $N = 15$) in Figure 1 of our forum section. MSH additionally include parties located at 3.0 and 5.0. As a result, there are two new influential parties that now define the extreme ends of the new subrange.
2. For example, the importance of considering other data sources (MEP voting, voter placements) is evident when investigating neutral positions in more detail. MSH point out that there are a number of parties with ‘neutral’ stances on Europe. Our analysis of alternative data sources suggests that, while there are a number of moderate integrationists, little agreement exists over which parties take these neutral stances.

3. We further agree that even in a robustness test, there are many valid and reasonable ways to dichotomize. Our only point was that dichotomization *could* produce a scale reliability comparable to what would be observed across subsets of the original data. We note that other dichotomizations in our forum section (not reported) produce similar results.

Reference

- Marks G, Steenbergen M and Hooghe L (2012) To dichotomize or not dichotomize? *European Union Politics* 13(2): 309–314.