

THE STANDARD RIGHT-LEFT SCALE

Ian Budge <budgi@essex.ac.uk>

Essex University

March 2013

Terms of Debate

MARPOR and its predecessors have never been in the business of telling users what they must do with the Manifesto estimates and measures. Clearly users should and will adapt the estimates to their own research purposes. In terms of a Right-Left scale this means they will often create their own versions - even decomposing Left-Right into two or more constituent parts (Tavits, 2007). Or they may factor analyse the data to create their own inductive measure (Albright, 2010).

On the other hand it is often easiest for users to fall back on a general measure which suits their purposes; and it is certainly necessary for MARPOR to have its own summary measures to check data validity and carry through other diagnostic and substantive research. For such purposes it is best to rely on one standard measure whose results are invariant over time and space as we detail below.

It is in this spirit that MARPOR and its predecessors have reported party positions on RILE (and the derived Right-Left positions of median voters and government). From our point of view its most important aspect is that parties mostly present policies in Left-Right terms and that RILE is the best summary indicator of policy tendencies over the whole of the party programme.

Many external commentators in contrast want a Left-Right measurement of party positions as such and are not concerned with its qualities as a summary measure of programmes across countries and times. The distinction between the two positions is a fine one. However, the shift in viewpoint often leads external commentators and critics to cast the debate in terms of finding the best and purest measure of Right-Left positions which they then suggest everyone should adopt. This suggestion then makes it seem as if MARPOR views RILE in the same terms.

MARPOR on the other hand has no desire to dictate the approach users should take. If users see reasons to create other measures of Left-Right positions we are perfectly happy for them to do so. In the following, we lay down the arguments for using RILE as a summary measure of programmes across countries and times.

Reasons for Creating and Operating RILE as a Standard Measure

RILE encapsulates the kind of holistic analysis that Manifesto data were originally designed to support. By drawing on all the information available in the data-set, either directly or indirectly, the left-right measure cancels out non-systematic error and gives an overview of the main political processes which the data tap into.

Because of this RILE is the variable of choice for most users of the Manifesto data, either as a purely descriptive indicator (where do particular parties stand at particular points of time? especially in relation to other parties) or as the dependent or independent variable in more complex analyses.

These are functions that could also be served by factor-analytic, inductively derived, measures (e.g. Gabel and Huber 2000). RILE is different in having been created before its application to the data by characterising the original coding categories as Left, Right or neutral on the basis of theoretical writings of around 1900. Its *a priori*, deductive nature is important in allowing its application in all places at all times without the qualifications about content or context which apply to inductive scales. It is a substantively invariant measure whose numeric values always carry the same meaning.

Of course the invariant interpretation given to the scores also depends on the extent to which its constituent parts do fit together. A Polish party for example might get a score of -15 towards the left because it stressed State intervention in support of Welfare, while a Spanish party might get -15 because it favoured détente and Peace without taking a very clear position on domestic matters. If -15 gives these parties a comparable left-right position we have to show reasons why State Intervention, Welfare and Peace hang together on the Left - as opposed to Freedom, Traditional Values, and internal and external Security on the Right. These are the broad oppositions underlying the more detailed category assignments to RILE Table 1.

These 'Left' topics were linked in Marxist and progressive political analyses of around 1900, and contrast with 'Right' topics linked together in opposing analyses broadly supporting the existing order. Thus Lenin (1917/29), drawing on a wide variety of Marxist and non-Marxist writers commenting on Marx and Engels, argues that the Western Capitalist States had reached the limits of their ability to exploit their own proletariat – partly owing to the political resistance organised through their own Unions and par-

ties. Capitalism had however kept going by external aggression and exploitation of Third World resources. Popular opposition to capitalism entailed pressure not only for domestic social reforms but for a progressive and peaceful foreign policy which would choke off Capitalism's final mode of survival.

This argument makes sense of equating support for Welfare and Peace as both indicating a Leftist stance. They are stressed equally in the original arguments so there are no grounds for weighting one more than the other. They are bound together by being essential parts of a detailed and intricate analysis of Western internal and international relations.

The same may be said of Tradition, Freedom and Security on the Right-wing side. These had been loosely joined together in Disraeli's (1804 - 1881) 'One Nation' Conservatism and more systematically by philosophers such as T. H. Green (1836 - 1882). Freedom under the law appeared from this perspective as an aspect of the traditional values characterizing the nation-states which had emerged as the 'fittest' from the 'struggle for survival' as proposed by Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903). Social Darwinism lent wider philosophical validity to traditional conservative ideas about 'Realpolitik' and the 'Balance of Power' between internally united and cohesive nation-states, stressing both domestic unity and external strength.

Meanwhile Christian Socialists and the Social Encyclicals of the late nineteenth century Popes defined a centrist position focused on the stability and dignity of the Christian family, combining support for traditional religious values with cautious reform, respect for property and overriding social justice (cf Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

These closely argued ideological positions defined political cleavages at the start of the twentieth century and became the policy basis for most of the political parties still with us today.

The justification for the RILE and the basis of its construction therefore, is not that its constituent policy categories go together empirically across the data, but that highly influential early modern theorists put them together in their political analyses. Of course the fact that the topics do empirically co-vary in the data-set as it stands is evidence for the continuing relevance of the ideologies, and of the scale based on them, to post-war democracies (Budge, Robertson, Hearl, 1987/2008: Hearl , 2001). As we have seen its heavy research use also attests to its continued validity.

Parallels to the use of ideological writings to construct a measure of party positions can be found in the party family classification (von Beyme 1985, 29-41). Developed before quantitative scaling came to the fore, it drew on ideological writings and distinctions to guide its division of parties into 'familles spirituelles'. However these catego-

ries remained largely qualitative in nature. More exact measurements of party positioning applied various scaling techniques to expert judgements (Castles and Mair, 1984), electoral feelings of closeness to parties (Budge and Farlie (1978), factor analyses of all kinds of data and discriminant analyses of party policy and rhetorical differences (Klingemann et al, 2006, 28-50; Slapin and Proksch, 2008). Most such analyses promoted their constructs as offering more exact measures of party positions for comparative analysis – without realizing they were crossing a major boundary between induction from inevitably limited data-sets, and deductive constructs which in principle could apply anywhere at any time. Inductive constructs must clearly be valid for the data they emerge from but are limited in their applications beyond these. The relevance of *a priori* deductive constructs is not guaranteed of course. But they are not in principle bound to any one context or data-set. They apply universally without having to be adjusted for particular contexts, and thus provide a promise of invariant and reliable measurement across limitations of time and space.

So common however is inductive scaling and so unusual nowadays is an *a priori* deductive approach, that it is hard even for users and constructive critics like Gabel and Huber (2000) or Jahn (2011) to appreciate the uniquely deductive nature of the Manifesto Project's left-right scale particularly as it comes along with the broader data-set. Often an inductive alternative to the scale is suggested to make it more nuanced or to 'update' it. This misses the point that updates would destroy its most valuable characteristic, its status as an invariant comparative and over time measure. Any changes it records can then (within limits of uncertainty and error) be interpreted as substantive, and not measurement, change.

Possible Alternatives to RILE and Reasons for not using them as Standard Measures

TABLE 1: THE MRG-CMP LEFT-RIGHT SCALE

Right emphases: sum of %s for	Left Emphases: sum of %s for
Military: Positive	Anti-imperialism
Freedom and Human Rights	Military: Negative
Constitutionalism: Positive	Peace
Political Authority	Internationalism: Positive
Free Market Economy	Democracy
Economic Incentives	Market Regulation
Protectionism: Negative	Economic Planning
Economic Orthodoxy	Protectionism: Positive

Right emphases: sum of %s for	Left Emphases: sum of %s for
Welfare State Limitation	Controlled Economy
National Way of Life: Positive	Nationalisation
Traditional Morality: Positive	Welfare State Expansion
Law and Order	Education Expansion
Civic Mindedness: Positive	Labour Groups: Positive

a) *'Ratio' scaling of Right-Left positions*

As Table 1 shows RILE draws on information over all 57 categories of the Manifesto coding scheme. Twenty six go directly into the measurement, with percentage emphases on thirteen Left categories being added and subtracted from the sum of 13 Right categories. Categories 'other' than the ones characterised as Left and Right also contribute to the calculation however as the percentages are calculated out of the total number of references to all categories. In terms of 'raw' numbers of quasi-sentences coded into each category the

$$(R - L) / (R + L + O)$$

where R represents Right categories, L Left categories and O 'other categories.'

Thus a party which makes 200 total statements with 100 (or 50%) being 'Left' references and 40 (or 20%) being 'Right' receives a score of -30 (20% - 50%). Imagine at the next election that the party says exactly the same things but adds 200 new statements about an issue not directly relevant to Left-Right (e.g. on the environment). Now the party is making 400 statements in all. Relative to that total they are now making only half as many Left statements (25%) and half as many Right (10%). On RILE the party's position is recorded as moving from -30 to -15. The party is thus scored as considerably less Left-leaning in the second election compared to the first. It has moved towards the Centre by virtue of devoting more attention to topics that are not purely Left or Right.

This works as a summary of overall programmatic tendencies, and can be justified on the grounds that programmes are not just a compilation of discrete policy stands but an integrated and complete statement all of whose constituent parts have been carefully considered in relation to each other by programme committees and party conventions and approved as a whole by the latter.

Criticisms of this procedure have focused on its alleged centrist bias (not evident however in the mappings of party movement reported in (Budge et al (2001) or Klingemann et al (2006) and contradicted by recent use of RILE to correct centrist bias in electoral and expert placements of parties (Best et al, 2012). To remedy this alleged bias however a 'ratio' scale has been proposed where only 'Left' and 'Right' emphases are used in the denominator, as follows:

$$(R - L) / (R + L)$$

This, it has been claimed, would reflect party Left-Right movements more precisely uncontaminated by ‘noise’ from other elements in the programme (Laver & Garry, 2000).

Our position here as in the case of other proposed alternatives to RILE is that any user should feel free to use an alternative scale if it suits their research needs better. In the case of some previously suggested alternative measures however the proposal is not simply for its possible use but for wholesale substitution of RILE by the alternative. MARPOR and its predecessors are thus criticised for adopting an inferior measure all these years and misleading users by reporting results from it when a better measure could have been used.

Entering into a full blown debate about the merits of RILE every time an alternative is proposed is however counterproductive, as so many differing (and sometimes contradictory) alternatives have been put forward (the latest by Koenig & Luig, 2012). In the case of the ratio scale described above the authors themselves have recently withdrawn their original proposal and agreed with the MARPOR position (Klingemann et al, 2006, 82-3) that such ‘confrontational’ formulations would create a ‘problem ... of forcing scores to the extremes’ (Benoit et al, 2012).

b) *A Logit Ratio Scale*

Alas, these authors have not withdrawn their suggestion entirely but proposed to correct its weaknesses through a logarithmic transformation of the resulting scores (Lowe et al, 2011; Benoit et al, 2012). Though they do not report this, the transformed scores from the logit procedures correlate with the original RILE ones at $r = .94$ (Budge & McDonald, 2012). Where they deviate this seems due to a substitution of .5 for zero where it occurs in the numerator or denominator of the ratio formula, and this derives from a rather arbitrary data assumption in place of a data fact. The same is even truer of the policy sub-scales they advocate using rather than a general Left-Right measure.

c) *Changing the basis of the Left-Right Conceptualisation*

The ratio scales retain the original characterisation of coding categories as Left or Right. Various suggestions have however been made for changing these, either on the grounds that the Left-Right division is essentially an economic one involving public versus private ownership (Laver & Hunt, 1992), or about equality (Jahn, 2011). Comparisons between these different formulations and RILE - insofar as they can be carried out - show reasonably high correlations between them (McDonald & Mendès, 2001, 130-141). Being a fairly comprehensive formulation of Left-Right RILE has a natural tendency to correlate with operationalisations

based on sub-sets of its categories. This buttresses its claim to operate well as a general measure.

d) *Inductive Left-Right Scales Produced by Factor or Dimensional Analysis of the Manifesto Estimates at Various Points in Time*

All of the preceding measures use an a priori characterisation of Left and Right categories to construct Left-Right scales, for the reasons mentioned above – a deductively-based measure can be applied generally over all the data as it does not derive from an analysis of them carried out at any particular point in time. Of course this may render it less sensitive for a particular time period or country than a measure which is derived inductively at that period and/or country. Most inductive scales are justified in fact in terms of their greater sensitivity and accuracy, which their proponents regard as offering more exact measures of party positions for comparative analysis (e.g. Gabel & Huber, 2000). They do not however generally realise that they are crossing a major boundary between induction from an inevitably limited dataset (in 2000 it was half the size it is now and in 1983 half the size of 2000 (Hearl, 2001)) and deductive reasoning which produces a measure invariant across data fluctuations.

Conclusions: Stick to RILE as a General Measure if it Serves your Research Purposes

At this point it is useful to restate the general MARPOR position in regard to Left-Right scales constructed on a different basis from RILE. That is, that users should always feel themselves free to use whatever Right-Left measure they want, whether constructed by themselves or others, and inductive or deductive as they feel appropriate. They should also feel free not to use a general Left-Right scale but specific policy scales if they need to. Only, they should also be aware that each choice involves certain (sometimes very strong) assumptions about how the political world is structured and how parties operate, and also provides more or less restricted scope for their analysis of the data. MARPOR offers RILE as a widely applicable and transparent measure which summarises the major policy stand of each document. The take-up of the measure by 80 to 90 per cent of current data users attests to its general usefulness and justifies MARPOR's reliance on it as a general indicator of party policy positioning and movement.

Many alternatives to it have been suggested (e.g. Jahn, 2011; Koenig & Luig, 2012) some of which we have considered here. It is however difficult to review them all in detail – too many have been suggested. Many may be useful for particular research purposes and users of the data are free to apply them. To ask MARPOR to reconsider using RILE every time a new alternative is suggested would however invite analytic

chaos and throw the whole enterprise of Manifesto collection and analysis into confusion. Only in the event of a generally accepted and incontrovertible alternative emerging could we consider substituting another measure for RILE and that is not likely to happen given the results of this and earlier (McDonald & Mendès, 2001) reviews.

References

- Albright, Jeremy J. "The multidimensional nature of party competition." *Party Politics* 16.6 (2010): 699-719.
- Benoit, Kenneth et al. "How to scale coded text units without bias: A response to Gemenis". *Electoral Studies* 31.3 (2012): 605-608
- Benoit, Kenneth, Mikhaylov, Slava, Michael Laver, Kenneth R. Benoit. "Coder reliability and misclassification in the human coding of party manifestos." *Political Analysis* 20.1 (2012): 78-91.
- Best, Robin E., Ian Budge, Michael McDonald. "Representation as a Median Mandate: Taking Cross-national Differences Seriously". *European Journal of Political Research* 51.1 (2012): 1-23.
- Beyme, Klaus von. "Political parties in Western democracies." Aldershot: Gower (1985).
- Budge, Ian. "Expert judgements of party policy positions: Uses and limitations in political research." *European Journal of Political Research* 37.1 (2003): 103-113.
- Budge, Ian, et al. *Mapping policy preferences: Estimates for parties, electors, and governments 1945-1998*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.
- Budge, Ian, Michael McDonald, 2012. Conceptualising and measuring 'centrism' correctly on the Left-Right scale (RILE) – Without systematic bias: A general response by MARPOR, *Electoral Studies* 31.3 (2012): 609-612.
- Budge, Ian, David Robertson, and Derek Hearl, eds. *Ideology, strategy and party change: spatial analyses of post-war election programmes in 19 democracies*. Cambridge University Press, 1987/2008
- Castles, Francis G., and Peter Mair. "Left-right political scales: some 'expert' judgments." *European Journal of Political Research* 12.1 (1984): 73-88.
- Gabel, Matthew J., and John D. Huber. "Putting parties in their place: Inferring party left-right ideological positions from party manifestos data." *American Journal of Political Science* (2000): 94-103.
- Hearl, Derek. "Checking the party policy estimates: Reliability." *Mapping policy preferences: Estimates for parties, electors, and governments 1945-1998* (2001): 111-25.
- Jahn, Detlef. "Conceptualizing Left and Right in comparative politics Towards a deductive approach." *Party Politics* 17.6 (2011): 745-765.
- Klingemann, Hans-Dieter, et al. *Mapping policy preferences II: estimates for parties, electors, and governments in Eastern Europe, European Union, and OECD 1990-2003*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- König, Thomas, and Bernd Luig. "Party ideology and legislative agendas: Estimating contextual policy positions for the study of EU decision-making." *European Union Politics* 13.4 (2012): 604-625.

Laver, Michael, Kenneth Benoit, and John Garry. "Extracting policy positions from political texts using words as data." *American Political Science Review* 97.02 (2003): 311-331.

Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Stein Rokkan, eds. *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives*. Vol. 7. Free press, 1967.

Lowe, Will, et al. "Scaling policy preferences from coded political texts." *Legislative studies quarterly* 36.1 (2011): 123-155.

McDonald, Michael D., and Silvia M. Mendés. "The policy space of party manifestos." Michael Laver (ed.) *Estimating the Policy Position of Political Actors* (2001): 90.

Slapin, Jonathan B., and Sven Oliver Proksch. "A scaling model for estimating time-series party positions from texts." *American Journal of Political Science* 52.3 (2008): 705-722.

Tavits, Margit. "Principle vs. pragmatism: policy shifts and political competition." *American Journal of Political Science* 51.1 (2007): 151-165.