

Behind Left and Right.
The meaning of left-right orientation in
Europe

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Für meine Eltern

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Abstract

The left-right concept is considered to facilitate communication and orientation in the political world. It has a long tradition in European politics due to its capacity to absorb different associations over time. However, this dynamic nature of the concept requires periodical reassessments in order to assure that a common conceptualisation endures. This dissertation focuses on reassign what individual left-right orientation means. Usually, this is measured by asking people to place themselves on a scale labelled 'left' and 'right' at its endpoints. The first empirical analysis of this dissertation shows that this measure is comparable across groups and countries. Thereafter, the relationship between an individual's issue preference and left-right orientation is considered. The second empirical analysis shows that this relationship is conditioned by the importance people assign to the respective issues. The final analysis demonstrates that what explains left-right orientation is contingent on individual and contextual factors. This implies that in order to understand left-right orientation, it is not enough to identify what has an impact on a person's position but also account for all those factors that predict variation between individuals. Given this complexity, my conclusion is that the left-right concept runs the risk of becoming too complicated to serve as an analytical tool to shed light on political attitudes and behaviour.

Resum

El concepte esquerra-dreta és considerat com un factor facilitador de la comunicació en el món polític. Té una llarga tradició en la política europea degut a la seva capacitat d'absorbir diferents associacions a través del temps. Tanmateix, aquesta natura dinàmica del concepte requereix revisions periòdiques per assegurar que persisteix una conceptualització comuna. La present tesi es centra en resagnar el que significa l'orientació esquerra-dreta. Normalment, es mesura tot demanant als enquestats posicionar-se a ells mateixos en una escala que va de l'esquerra a la dreta. El primer anàlisi empíric de la present tesi mostra que aquesta mesura és comparable entre grups i països. Seguidament, es considera la relació entre les preferències temàtiques dels individus i llur orientació esquerra-dreta. El segon anàlisi empíric mostra que aquesta relació està condicionada per la importància que les persones assignen als temes respectius. L'anàlisi final demostra que el que explica l'orientació esquerra-dreta depèn de factors contextuais i individuals. Això implica que per entendre l'orientació esquerra-dreta no és suficient identificar què té un impacte en la posició d'una persona sinó també una explicació per a tots aquells factors que preveuen la variació entre individus. Donada aquesta complexitat, la meua conclusió és que el concepte esquerra-dreta corre el risc de convertir-se en massa complicat per a servir com a eina analítica per a l'estudi de les actituds i el comportament polítics.

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

How people develop political preferences and take political decision is a core interest in political science. As it is well known, it is almost impossible for individuals to have complete information in order to take the decisions that are in their best interest. For this reason, people rely on rule of thumbs or shortcuts. Political scientists have identified a number of heuristic devices which help people to make sense of politics. One of the most prominent devices is the left-right concept. The left-right concept is so attractive because it allows reducing the complexity of the political world into a one-dimensional space. Once people are able to position themselves in the left-right dimension, they can use it as an orientation to evaluate politics and make political choices. In this sense, many studies have shown that individual left-right orientation is a strong predictor of political attitudes and behaviour. Nonetheless, the literature also establishes that the left-right concept is dynamic. Given its spatial nature, over time it seems to be able to absorb any meaning that follows a binary schema, i.e. that it can be uniquely associated with either the left or the right, but not with both at the same time. Therefore, the associations of the concept vary over time, context and between individuals. But in order to serve as a shortcut, people need to have, at least, a basic common understanding of its meaning. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to reassess the meaning of the left-right concept for individuals. Meaning here is to be understood as any association the concept encompasses. It is necessary to define left-right orientation in order to be able to use it as an analytical tool to explain political attitudes and behaviour. Hereafter, I explain the left-right concept more in detail, in order to elaborate the research questions which are of interest in the three following empirical studies.

1.1 The left-right concept

For more than 200 years the European political sphere has been divided by a one-dimensional concept labelled ‘left’ and ‘right’ at its end points. Its origin dates back to the French *Assemblée* in 1789 (Laponce 1981). What Cochrane (2012) considers “purely an accident of history”, has its origin in the traditional seating arrangements of the time: the place of honour was on the right of the president and belonged to the aristocracy, those loyal to the *Ancien Régime*. On the opposite were the radical republicans, the *Montagnards*, who wanted to abolish the monarchy (Goodsell 1988), and in between a majority favouring moderate and gradual change (Gauchet 1994: 247). In this way, those who sat on the right wanted to maintain the status quo, whereas those who sat on the left favoured change. This is a division of society which has existed throughout centuries and still characterizes the ‘left’ and ‘right’ to this day. However, Gauchet (1994: 247) marks this as a “false start” because only from 1820s onwards did the ideological labels gain recognition in the French political sphere and not until the turn of the twentieth century did the ideological labels begin to hold prominence beyond France (White 2012: 199). In the 1960s, the “end of ideology” was declared (Bell 1960, 2000) and several scholars agreed with this prediction (for a summary see Waxman 1968). However, only a decade later, based on an empirical study in nine European countries, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976: 243) point out that “The end of ideology did not materialize. On the contrary, there are indications that presumably ideological concepts such as left and right are taking new life and new meaning for Western politics”. Ever since, scholars are intrigued by the left-right concept.

The enduring interest in studying the left-right concept is motivated by the fact that this parsimonious single concept is a powerful predictor of mass attitude and political behaviour (Coughlin and Lockhard 1998; Potter 2001). It is the spatial nature of the concept which makes it so relevant, at least, in European politics (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 206). Spatial theory posits that individuals know their self-interest and base their evaluations and choices on it. They are expected to behave rational in order to maximize their own

utility. Under the condition of complete information, they will then, for example, cast their vote for the political party or candidate that is the closest to them (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 3). As the assumption of complete information is a utopian scenario, individuals are confronted with the effort and cost to get all relevant information. Yet they do not have much incentive to gather and absorb all the necessary information but can compensate this by relying on information shortcuts or heuristics (Downs 1957). Law and Redlawask (2006: 25) define heuristics as “cognitive shortcuts, rules of thumb for making certain judgments or inferences with considerably less than the complete search for alternatives” which are often employed automatically or unconsciously (Lau and Redlawask 2001: 952). In this way, they serve to “keep the information processing demands of the task within bounds”, as Abelson and Levi (1985: 255) find. Heuristics might represent an alternative to full rational computation, but not a mean of compensating for information *per se* (Druckman et al. 2009: 494). Political science identified a number of heuristics or shortcuts which individuals can employ to make sense of politics, such as the ideological position of political parties, evaluations of leaders and candidates, incumbents or public opinion polls. Nonetheless, one of the most prominent of these shortcuts or heuristic devices remains the left-right divide due to the functions it performs.

The left-right concept serves two purposes. At the collective level, it serves social orientation and facilitates political communication (Downs 1957; Converse 1964; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Hinich and Munger 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). It functions as a symbolic frame of references which allows political parties to position and distinguish themselves from others, and thereby relate their policy stance to this position. At the individual level, it helps people to make reasonable political evaluations and choices (Knight 1985; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Popkin 1991; Hinich and Munger 1994). However, in order to serve these communication and choice functions, individuals must share common conceptions of the ideological labels (Zechmeister 2006: 152). This is the crucial condition which is often ignored in the literature (Gunther and Kuan 2007: 261), and is at the core of this dissertation. If people do not have a common understanding of the left-right schema, the concept can neither serve to help orient nor facilitate communication. In this

way, the concept fails its purposes and runs the risk to become redundant.

1.2 Measurement of left-right orientation

Scholars studying effects of individuals' left-right orientation on their political behaviour, have to rely on the positions that individual place themselves in when asked to do so. Respondents have to make use of a scale labelled left and right at its endpoints and a number of categories in between, allowing for opinion differentiation. Thus, left-right placement is simply a request for an answer as any other, and therefore, bares all challenges of public opinion research.

The underlying assumption on which public opinion research proceeds is that respondents have an *ex ante* opinion which they report when asked to state it (Zaller and Feldman 1992: 579). However, decades of research on how people respond to requests for answers show that this assumption is dubious. Choosing a position on a scale with left and right on its extremes does not require any knowledge but rather only the willingness to answer (Luskin 1987: 877). This refutes the conventional proof that the left-right concept endures merely because people choose a position. For example, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976: 192) show that the recognition of the left-right dimension in the countries included in their study is well above 85%. Two decades later Knutsen (1998: 305) finds that the willingness towards self-placement increased. More recently, Dalton (2011: 107) states that the majority of the public in most of the thirty-five countries included in the Comparative Study of Electoral System, Model II can locate themselves on the left-right scale. Fuchs and Klingemann (1989: 208) assume that recognition is the lowest level of understanding, yet there seems to be no reason for this assumption. Respondents may state their position because they are asked to do so in a survey.

Furthermore, the literature on response effects highlights that survey questions do not simply and straightforwardly measure public opinion. The way a request for an answer is formulated can also shape and channel the observed responses (Zaller and Feldman 1992: 582). Regarding left-right self-placement, scholars studied the

length of the scale (Kroh 2007) and whether the response scale should contain an even number of categories (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 162; Schuman 1981: 128; Converse and Pierce 1986; Potter 2001: 11-12) or include a midpoint. The argument for omitting a midpoint is that this category is often chosen as a “concealed form of non-response” (Deutsch et al. 1966). The midpoint then is, as Converse and Pierce (1986: 128) put it, “an obvious selection for a person who is neutral, uncommitted, and even thoroughly indifferent to or ignorant about this generic axis of dispute.” In particular, respondents with low levels of political sophistication, low levels of education, and who are less political active tend to use the midpoint of the left-right scale as alternative to not responding (Scholz and Zuell 2012: 29). The authors favouring a midpoint are distinguished by researchers who consider it a valid moderate or centrist ideological position (Knutsen 1997: 303; Kroh 2007: 208) and those who argue that it can also be an anchor for respondents’ answers that may increase the derived data quality (Nemeth and Endicott 1976; Saris 1988b). However, the more important anchors are the fixed reference points. If no fixed reference point is given, individuals will independently choose one in their own way. As a result, the observed answers cannot be compared because the relationship between the opinion and the response, which is called the response function, is not the same for all respondents (Saris 1988a; Saris and Rooij 1988). This leads to two questions regarding the measure of left-right orientation: Are the ideological labels ‘left’ and ‘right’ fixed references points? Do people use the response scale in the same way? Only in the case of an affirmative answer to both questions, we can be sure that the measurement of left right orientation can be compared across groups and countries.

1.3 Conceptualisation

After having considered the comparability of the measurement of left-right orientation, I will now turn to a discussion on the conceptualisation of the left-right schema, as depicted in the literature. The focus is on what explains this orientation and thereby derive an understanding of the common conceptualization of the left-right schema. The literature in this field of research identified

several factors which have an impact on an individuals' left-right orientation.

First of all, it is not necessary that an individual acquires all of the potential meanings of the concept in order to use it. It is sufficient if individuals have a basic understanding, if they can select some of the meanings and assign them correctly to their position in the left-right dimension (Klingemann and Fuchs 1989: 207). Given that the ideological labels 'left' and 'right' are abstract entities, their acquisition and use is linked to individuals' cognitive abilities, which in turn vary with the level of education (Campbell et al. 1960, 250-256; Converse 1964, 224-227; Klingemann 1973, Table 7; Knight 1985; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 208; Freire and Belchior 2011). Moreover, political interest and political knowledge increase the capacity to clearly understand the different policy alternatives, as well as their cognition on the left-right dimension (Fiske et al. 1983; Lodge and Hamill 1986; McGraw and Pinney 1990; Zaller 1992). The combination of political interest, knowledge and attentiveness is considered political expertise or sophistication (Luskin 1987). The higher one's level of political sophistication, the easier it is for him or her to develop political preferences and relate them to the left-right divide (Converse 1964; Sniderman et al. 1991: 24-25; Zaller 1992; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lachat 2008; Kroh 2009: 222). Consequently, the more sophisticated individuals are, the more likely they are to share the common understanding assigned to the left-right schema by a given society (Klingemann 1979; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990; Evans et al. 1996).

Ideological labels, such as the left-right, are culturally defined (Barnes 1971: 244; Barnes and Pierce 1971; Sani 1974; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976) and depend on political parties or elites. Freire (2008: 203) finds that individuals' left-right orientation depends heavily on the (autonomous) behaviour of the political parties. The mechanisms which explain this are outlined by Knutsen and Kumlin (2005): The more coherent political parties present their policy alternatives under the label ideological labels 'left' or 'right, the more individuals can assign a meaning to the labels. The more frequently political actors use the ideological labels, the more individuals will do so, too. The more frequently individuals use

those labels to express their opinion, the more emotionally strong, and thereby more accessible in people's mind they become. In turn, people can only use their value orientation, policy, issue preferences or group loyalties as a reliable guide if they know which political parties share them and which do not. Therefore, they need 'cueing information', i.e. incoming information which consists of 'contextual information' about the ideological implication (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992: 45). The more polarized the party conflict, the more cueing information is generated.

A higher degree of ideological polarization of political parties can be found in multi-party systems (Sartori 1976). Two-party systems are associated with a unimodal distribution of voters' preferences over the left-right dimension, with the majority in the centrist position and political parties competing to satisfy the preferences of those median voters (Downs 1957: 114-141). To compete effectively, parties take vague issue positions that are only weakly linked to ideology (Huber 1989: 601). In contrast, multi-party systems are associated with multimodal distributions of voters' preferences over the left-right dimension. In multi-party systems, political parties have therefore more incentives to mark their distinction from other parties and focus on specific segments of the electorate. This situation causes ideological distance between political parties.

Nonetheless, as mentioned, the ideological distance between political parties only affect people's understanding of the left-right dimension if the political elites present their policy alternatives under the labels 'left' and 'right'. Thereby, as Noël and Thérien (2008: 51) state, a longer experience with democratic rule is more likely to produce a public with a coherent understanding of what the left-right schema means. However, it is not the time of democratic experience *per se* but the political discourse in terms of left-right. For example, Markowski (1997) finds that, only shortly after the transition to democracy, politicians in the Czech Republic managed to divide the party spectrum so clearly between pro- and anti-market forces that, in a matter of only a few years, they generated only in a few years a clear ideological divide of the population. Contrary, in the case of Hungary at the same time, there was no understanding of

the political sphere in term of 'left' and 'right' due to the consensual transition.

Several studies have confirmed that the ideological polarization of political parties affects individuals political preferences and behaviour (Nie and Anderson 1974; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Knutsen and Kumlin 2005; Van der Eijk et al. 2005; Freire 2006b; Dalton 2008; Freire 2008; Lachat 2008; Weßels and Schmitt 2008). Freire (2008) finds that what best explains countries' variation in left-right total anchoring is indeed the ideological polarization of political parties. Thereby, it should be highlighted that it is not the direct effect of party polarization on an individual's left-right orientation that matters, but its contingent effect on the determining factors of left-right orientation. Political parties are thought to be the principal agents in transforming specific issues or, more in general, societal conflicts into the left-right divide (Barnes 1966; Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 26; Knutsen and Scarbrough 1995: 494; Gunther and Kuan 2007: 258).

Ideological polarization, also known as party polarization, matters less for those who identify with a specific political party. When individuals feel close to a specific party, they can adopt its ideological label for themselves. Downs (1957: 98-99) suggests that it saves voters the cost of being informed about a wider range of issues by relying on the preferred party's ideology. If people develop a party identification or loyalty they can use this, just like the left-right orientation, as a shortcut to compensate for missing information. In this way individuals could even adopt labels that are unrelated to their current issue position (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 244).

The seminal study of Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) find that the partisan component, which refers to the just mentioned loyalty to a political party, has the greatest impact on individuals' left-right orientation. This finding was also caused by the fact that people who did not state a party choice were excluded from their analysis (Knutsen 1997: 195). Follow-up studies included non-voters but differed in their operationalization of the partisan component: feeling of closeness to the specific political party, party choice at the last election and also vote intention (Huber 1989; Knutsen 1997;

Freire 2006a, b, c, 2008; Freire and Belchior 2011) was employed. The first of these indicators is the one which in principle scholars are interested in; the latter two are used as approximations. However, the problem with measuring party identification is that it appeared to reflect current voting intention rather than long-term stable commitment to a political party (Thomassen 2005: 11). Then, employing directly voting choice as indicator for party identification runs the risk of tautology: voting choice is explained by left-right orientation which is determined mainly by the partisan component operationalised as voting choice. Moreover, according to Huber (1989: 600), if party identification is the central component of left-right concept it is unclear to what extent they are measuring citizen attitudes and it is doubtful that this would allow cross-national studies. The problem is that the acquisition of partisan preferences and left-right orientation go hand in hand, as Sani (1974: 207) finds. Though they are not a surrogate for each other, analyzing both on the same level of analysis is theoretically uninteresting (Rossi 1959). Van Deth and Geurts (1989: 20) explained: “it will be hardly surprising to find that people who place themselves on the right prefer parties on the right, or people on the left preferring leftist parties”. Or in the words of Prewitt and Nie (1971: 487): “We would not be surprised to learn that persons who call themselves Catholics are more likely to be found on Sunday in Catholic than in Protestant churches”. Empirically only longitudinal data could pin down the precise sequence of the emergence of party and left-right orientation (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 269). However, political orientation is developed early in a person’s life, and, to my knowledge, longitudinal data covering such a long period of time does not exist. Moreover, both concepts can be dynamic and mutually influential, making the identification of the causal relationship between them even more unlikely. As far as this dissertation goes, only cross-sectional data is employed. This means all variables of interest are observed at the same time, hence partisan loyalties cannot be accounted for.

But political parties are not the only group which can be a reference for an individual’s left-right orientation. The social surrounding, its corresponding social identities and social group loyalties can serve likewise. This is referred to as the social component or factor (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 245; Freire 2008: 5). For a long

time it was considered to have a minor impact on an individual's left-right orientation (see e.g., Van der Eijk et al. 2005: 174) until Freire (2006a), inspired by cleavage theory (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 215; Bartolini 2000: 15-25) reassessed its influence. The cleavage theory of Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Bartolini (2000) stressed the necessity of the socio-political articulation of social divisions to become relevant for the political realm. They highlight three fundamental dimensions of social divisions: socio-structural, organizational, and normative-identity. Freire (2006a: 361) adjusts this to the concept of left-right. His work differentiates itself from all previous studies as it adds social identity to the already included socio-structural or organizational aspects. Social identity is measured through individual attitudes toward social groups, interest organizations, and institutions that represent them. Although Freire (2006a: 361) states that not all three aspects of the social factor have to be present at the same time, his study highlights the impact of social identity on left-right orientation. Unfortunately there are not many datasets which contain sufficient information as to allow assessing this aspect. Therefore, most empirical studies can only rely on the structural and organizational aspects of social factors. The structural dimension encompasses social class or religiosity, while the organizational dimension refers to actually being a member of some organization, e.g. trade union or church. These aspects of social factors can affect the left-right orientation but only if their political implication is perceived (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 247).

The partisan and social factors give a symbolic meaning to the left-right dimension as reference to relevant political or social groups. Many studies showed that this symbolic meaning is more prominent than the actual policy stance or issue priority (Zechmeister 2006: 153). However, those political or social groups also stand for certain policies and issues. Thus, even though an individual's left-right orientation may be based on his or her loyalty to a political party, or being a member of a church or trusting trade unions¹, ultimately they do not only reference to those groups but also to the policy stances they represent. Social or political groups can only be linked to a position in the left-right dimension by a certain policy or issue

¹ As an indicator for social identity according to Freire (2006a).

positions in the past or present. This is also shown by the fact that any particular group does not serve as a reference for left-right orientation. We would not expect that active membership and strong identification with the neighbourhood bowling club affects an individual's left-right orientation. At least, as long as the members of the bowling club do not articulate a political claim.

Therefore, in order to determine at least the basic common conceptualisation of the left-right concept, it needs to be filled with content. The mere use of the abstract label without any generalised meaning does not serve for orientation or communication. The labels have to be respecified and linked up with practical activity. Nonetheless, the left-right schema does not admit an indefinite number of associations nor would too many associations serve its purpose (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 206). The minimal definition of ideology offered by Gerring (1997: 980) can be adopted: "a set of idea-element that are bound together, that belong to one another in a non-random fashion". This leads to the core interest of this dissertation: what are those "idea-elements" or associations which are encompassed in the left-right concept? How can they be assessed?

In their influential work, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) summarized this under the label "ideological component" which is made up by value orientations and political issues. The authors identify a "persistent and pervasive theme" (257) which distinguish those who call themselves leftist from those who are rightists: the support for equality versus the preservation of the hierarchical order. Both in fact are, as Knutsen (1997) labels them, security values. Jost et al. (2003b; 2003a; 2007: 990) also find that these values are expressions of motivations which originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. In their study, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) operationalise them by, as they admit, rough measures. Respondents are asked to rank four items² which should reflect on the underlying values as societal goals. They do indeed find some impressive relationships with

² The items are: 1) Seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities; 2) Giving people more say in important government decisions; 3) Maintaining order in the nation; 4) The fight against crime.

one's left-right position and the orientation toward order versus equality but mainly among the more politicized strata. In the same line, Fuchs and Klingemann (1989: 233) argue that the left-right schema measures generalized political positions. It is neither a summary statement of the many issue positions of the day nor is it ideological self-identification, at least for the majority. Based on this, Knutsen (1995) focuses on value orientations. He goes beyond the classical societal divide between equality and hierarchical order, and shows that newer value conflicts are incorporated into the left-right schema³. This highlights the impressive absorptive power of the concept but also that the left-right is associated with different meanings to different people. In a later study, Knutsen (1997) establishes that value orientations have the largest impact on left-right orientation when considered prior to party choice. Along this line, Gunther and Kuan (2007) have recently explored values by considering four socio-political orientations⁴ based on nine attitudinal orientations.

Although, value orientations were recognized to be the core of the ideological component of the left-right orientation, scholars frequently relate people's issue priorities to the left-right schema in order to assess its substantive meaning. In particular, studies which aim to explain voting choice and find that left-right orientation remains its major predictor are inclined to employ an individual's issue preferences to explain left-right orientation. More general, scholars do not emphasize the differences between values, attitudes and issue preferences but rather use the terms interchangeably (Davidov et al. 2008: 584; Milic 2008). The reason for this seems to be that values are considered the ultimate underpinnings of attitudes. Values are relatively stable and lend constancy to evaluations and behaviour (Inglehart 1977; Feldman 2003: 479). They are the base for attitudes and, in turn, attitudes are measured by an individual's preferences regarding issues. This leads many scholars to make use of issue preferences as indicators for the

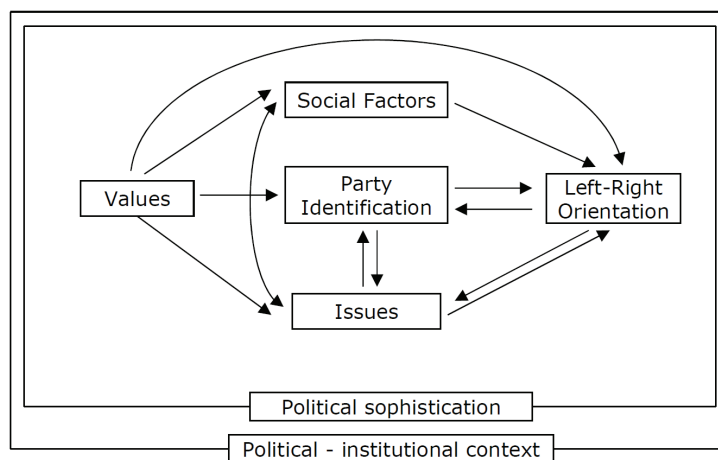
³ Namely, materialist/post-materialist values add to left-right materialist values, while religious/secular values become outmoded.

⁴ Traditional Conservatism opposed to Individualism and Liberalism; (Socio-Economic) Liberalism versus (Socio-Economic) Socialism; Social Democratic opposed to (Socio-Economic) Liberalism and Materialism versus Post-Materialism.

underlying values. In empirical research, scholars usually regress people's left-right self-placement on their preferences regarding issues they consider theoretically related to the left-right schema. This implies that people's preferences affect their left-right orientation, and do it so in the same way for all people.

Hereafter, I summarize the entanglement of all different factors related to left-right orientation discussed here. Figure 1.1 illustrates the causal relationships between the different factors. One-headed arrows indicate a causal relationship and double-headed arrows specify a correlational relationship.

Figure 1.1: Causal relationships



Value orientations are formed early in life and tend to endure in later changes in life (Inglehart 1977, 1990; Abramson and Inglehart 1995). Values are standards guiding attitudes, behaviour, evaluation and justifications (Rokeach 1968: 550) and therefore, have an impact on all other factors. Social factors can affect left-right orientation directly and indirectly through party identification and issue preferences but nowadays this is only expected if the identity component is taken into account. If social factors are only considered as social positions they will not have this impact as scholars repeatedly have shown (e.g., Lipset 1981; Inglehart 1990; Franklin et al. 1992). Thus, only if people identify with a certain

social group it can affect their party loyalties, issue preferences or left-right orientation. The same holds for party identification. If people identify with a specific political party which is correlated with their social position and identity, they can use this as a shortcut to determine issue preference or their position in the left-right dimension. However, in general, party identification is declining (Dalton 1996). Therefore, as social and political ties vanished, issue priorities are expected to compensate for them (Franklin et al. 1992: 400). Given cognitive mobilization and decreasing information costs due to the expansion of mass media over the last decades, citizens are expected to be able to deal with the complexity of politics, define their own political preferences and make their own political decisions. Thereby, they tend to focus on specific issues of immediate or personal importance (Dalton 1996: 347). If people possess political expertise they do not need to rely on cues. The lower the level of political sophistication, the more likely people are to rely on shortcuts. Therefore, the level of political sophistication conditions the impact of all other factors mentioned so far. In the same way, the political-institutional context moderates the relationship between all factors. I focus here on the ideological polarization between political parties but there are potentially other contextual factors which can have a contingent effect. In sum, all factors that add to the conceptualisation of the left-right schema are highly interrelated and conditioned by other factors. Since social and partisan factors lost their importance over the last half century for the majority of individuals, I concentrate on issues and values. More concretely, I will address the following questions: Do issue preferences explain left-right orientation? In other words, do issue preferences allow determining the common understanding of the left-right concept? Furthermore, as issue preferences are supposed to reflect on the underlying values, do value orientations help to understand what people have in mind when they declare themselves leftist, centrist or rightists?

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

In Chapter 2 I test whether the ideological labels ‘left’ and ‘right’ are fixed reference points for individuals with different levels of political interest, different levels of education, and across countries with different time periods of democratic experience. I compare the

responses people give on the typically used response scale labelled “left-right” to those given when using an “extreme left-extreme right” labelled scale. Thereby the assumption is that adding the word ‘extreme’ would make the endpoints of the scale fixed reference points for everyone as there would not be a position more to the left or right than extreme left or extreme right. Providing a response scale with fixed reference points should make the response function equal for everyone. This is necessary in order to assure the equivalence of the measurement instrument (Dijkstra and Zouwen 1982) which is an essential precondition for comparison. To my knowledge, no such approach has been previously considered in regards to left-right self-placement.

In Chapter 3, I reconsider, with my co-author, the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation. As it was well established in the literature, two opposed directions of causality are possible: individuals can base their position in the left-right dimension on their issue preferences but they can also use their left-right orientation to determine issue preferences (Downs 1957). We argue that the direction of causality is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the issue in question. People who consider an issue important care more deeply about it (Krosnick 1988). This motivates them to seek additional relevant information on it (Zaichowsky 1985; Berent and Krosnick 1993) and to carefully process it (Berent 1990). Consequently, they are more aware of the issue and do not need to rely on their left-right orientation in order to determine their preferences. In contrast, people who do not consider an issue important, can use their left-right orientation as a shortcut to substitute information they do not have available and hence, base their issue preference on their left-right orientation. Theoretically, we also consider the option of a cross-pressure situation which leads to ambivalence or withdrawal (Horan 1971: 651; Lodge et al. 1995; Meffert et al. 2004). This can be expected when individuals consider two equally important issues that are contradictory to each other, or at least, connected to opposite positions on the left-right scale. Empirically, this third scenario could not be tested because the available data did not contain issues which create a cross-pressure situation. The selection of the dataset was restricted by the fact that we needed a dataset that contained sufficient information to test a reciprocal causation. Only

in this way we could make sure that we are not opposing a direction of causality on the data.

Taking the finding of chapter 3 into account, in Chapter 4, I identify further reasons why employing issue preferences in order to determine the common understanding of the left-right schema may not be the best way. Firstly, issue preferences are used as indicators for attitudes and attitudes are related to self-image and social acceptance. If respondents want to preserve a positive self-image, they may answer in a socially desirable manner rather than in a true way (Krosnick 1991, 1999). Secondly, it is difficult to list all important political issues (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 257). Thirdly, the importance of issues varies across time, context and individuals (Dalton 2006; Mair 2007). Fourthly, reported issue preferences may merely be ad hoc reactions to the current political debate or simply to the question posed (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). In summary, it seems that issue preferences are not optimal indicators to determine a common understanding of the left-right schema that could transcend individuals, context or time.

Notwithstanding, one should bear in mind that issue preferences are actually employed to reflect on the underlying value orientations. Lipset et al. (1954: 259) define that “By Left we shall mean advocating social change in the direction of greater equality – political, economic, or social; by Right we shall mean supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality.” Jost et al. (2003b; 2003a) conclude from their meta-analysis over 50 years of research that this distinction originated in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. While tradition and stability provide reassurance and structure, social change implies greater chaos and unpredictability (Jost et al. 2003b, a; Jost et al. 2007: 990). Consequently, the value orientations towards equality and tradition express these motivations and create a two-dimensional space which finds its expression in the one-dimensional left-right divide. Then, those on the left are advocating social change and favour equality, whereas those on the right reject social change and accept inequality. This appears to be a more generic approach that would allow comparing the meaning of individuals’ left-right orientation over time, across context and among individuals. Nonetheless, as

described above, the left-right labels are culturally defined, its meaning depends on the political context and on individuals' characteristics. Therefore, I test the social cognitive framework but account also for contextual and individual variables. More precisely, I test whether value orientations toward equality and tradition affect left-right orientation, and whether these effects are contingent on the ideological polarization of the political parties in a country and on a person's interest in politics. Thereby, I also control for other individual variables identified in the literature.

The final chapter focuses on the present and the future of left-right orientation. I summarize the findings of the previous chapters as well as outline some directions of future research. As this dissertation consists of three empirical studies there are also limitations due to the available data. However, precisely those limitations can be taken as directions for future research. Finally, I embed the findings into a greater debate about the left-right concept and its purpose to serve as a device to understand political behaviour.

1.5 Data

The analyses of this dissertation are based in cross-sectional data retrieved from the European Social Survey and the Panel Component of the European Social Survey. The European Social Survey (ESS) is a large-scale survey conducted biannual since 2002 and includes in each round more than twenty European countries. It aims to develop and conduct a systematic study of changing values, attitudes, attributes and behaviour patterns within European polities, and is therefore suitable to study the left-right orientation.

In Chapter 1, I employed the European Social Survey Round 4, 2008 because it offered the unique opportunity to study measurement equivalence of the left-right self-placement among individuals and across twenty-five European countries. This dataset contains repetitions of the left-right self-placement question in the supplementary questionnaires. In the core questionnaire the commonly used question is asked: "In politics people sometimes talk about 'left' and 'right'. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means left and 10 means right?" For

the repetitions the split ballot multitrait-multimethod (SB-MTMM) design (Saris et al., 2004) was employed, i.e. one random group gets one type and another random group another type of question. Group one was asked exactly the same question again and got exactly the same answer categories. Group two got also the same question but the answer categories change to 0 “extreme left” and 10 “extreme right”, all other categories remain unlabelled. The following countries were included in the analysis: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Ukraine. The response rate varied between 48 % in Germany to 78.7% in Cyprus and the sample size between 1,216 in Cyprus and 2,576 in Spain.

The research question of Chapter 2 required a research design which allows for reciprocal causations and a dataset which contains sufficient information to test this relationship empirically. The Panel Component of European Social Survey conducted in the Netherlands fulfilled this condition. It provides not only indicators for issue importance but also sufficient other variables to identify a model with reciprocal causation. The panel started with the European Social Survey Round 5, 2010. Following the ESS standard respondents were recruited by probability sampling of households, being representative of the Dutch population over 16 years of age. The total number of valid interviews was 1,829 which correspond to a response rate of 60.03%. For the three subsequent waves in an eight months interval, 1,500 of those respondents were approached to participate in the panel study, 500 of them were randomly selected for face-to-face interviews and the remainder for online interviews. The response rate in the second wave which took place from July to August 2011 was 72% and 69% in the third wave which took place from March to June 2012 was. Participants of the panel were asked in the first wave about their demographic characteristics and afterwards only if they stated that something changed. Therefore, all three waves will be employed, although only the third wave contains questions about issue preferences and issue importance. 753 people participated in the third wave.

In Chapter 3, I also employed the most recent round of the European Social Survey, Round 5, 2010. The ESS has the advantage that it contains not only social and attitudinal indicators but also measure of human values. The human values included Schwartz's *21-item portrait values questionnaire* (PVQ) as suitable measure of the core components of the social cognition framework. Respondents are asked to state how much they are like the portrait drawn. In this way respondents are asked to compare the portrait to themselves, rather than themselves to the portrait, and therefore, focus on the similarities rather than the differences between the portrait and themselves (Schwartz 2007). In this last chapter the following countries are included in the analysis: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The response rate ranges from 47.1% in France to 81.4% in Bulgaria. The sample sizes vary from 1,083 in Cyprus to 3,031 in Germany.

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Chapter 2

Testing for measurement equivalence of individuals' left-right orientation^{*}

Abstract

Subjective variables such as opinions, attitudes or preferences cannot be measured directly. Researchers have to rely on the answers people give in surveys, and whenever those answers shall be compared it is required that people answer these questions in the same way. Only then a concept can be used in different contexts. This paper deals with the measurement of the left-right concept: it analyses whether people make a distinction between a scale labelled 0 left and 10 right to one which is labelled 0 extreme left and 10 extreme right and tests whether the instrument is equivalent across groups. Following the three steps of invariance testing, configural, metric and scalar invariance, I find that the left-right response scale is on average equivalent across groups with different levels of political interest and different levels of education. This finding holds also in 23 of the 25 European countries tested, with the exception of the eastern part of Germany, Finland and France. In order to estimate how serious the difference between these two groups of countries is, I compare the observed means (which are affected by the difference) to the latent means (which are free of those effects), and the effect of the observed variable "attitude towards government's intervention in the economy" on the observed variable "left-right self-placement" with the effect between these variables after correcting for scale difference. It was found that countries' means can be compared but that the relationship with other variables might not be comparable among East Germany, Finland, France and the remaining countries.

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2.1 Introduction

Ever since Downs (1957) ideology is seen as a key-factor influencing political behaviour, and in European democracies the most common used ideological concept is the left- right dimension which describes a one-dimensional political spectrum. It shall help people to orientate themselves in the world of politics, has a communication function for the political system (Knight 1985; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Popkin 1991; Hinich and Munger 1994), and was found to be a major predictor of voting decisions (Franklin et al. 1992; Gunther and Montero 2001 ; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). Therefore it is a crucial concept in political science but at the same time it remains a black box. Scholars find that the concept varies over time (Inglehart 1985), across countries (Gunther and Montero 2001 ; Van der Eijk et al. 2005; Klingemann et al. 2006) and among individuals (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Weber and Saris 2010). However, so far the literature did not contest the comparability of the left-right response scale. Thereby, the distinction between individuals' left-right orientation (opinion) and the position individuals take when they are asked to place themselves on the left-right scale (response) should be emphasized.¹ In this study the focus is on the response. I attempt to fill the gap in the literature by assessing the comparability of the measurement which is also known as functional equivalence or invariance of measures. As Wu et al. (2007) state "unless evidence is demonstrated, construct comparability should never be naively assumed" because observed differences might reflect systematic biases of response or different understanding of the concept across countries or individuals rather than substantive differences, or the other way around observed similarities might hide substantive differences (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998).

Most frequently two types of comparison are made: comparison of means and comparison of relationships with other variables (Saris and Gallhofer 2007: 329). In order to test the comparability of the measurement of individuals' left-right opinion multigroup

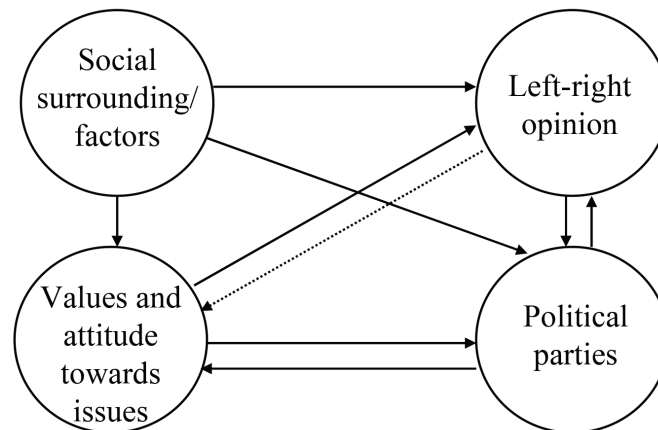
¹ People's left-right orientation will be called left-right opinion in order to highlight the distinction to the response they give when asked to place themselves on the left-right scale.

confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) (Jöreskog 1993; Billiet 2002) is employed, following three steps of invariance testing, configural, metric and scalar invariance (Meredith 1993). Before conducting the test and presenting the results, the particularities of the left-right concept are described and a case for fixed reference points is made.

2.2 The left-right scale – a challenged concept

Ever since Inglehart and Klingemann's (1976) seminal article there has been a consensus that there are three major components of the left-right concept: the social, value and partisan components. Freire (2008) constraints this consistency only to Western Europe. The social component refers to individuals' location in a social surrounding, which corresponds with their social identity and their left-right opinion (Freire 2008: 5). The value component refers to the link of values and attitudes towards certain issues and the left-right self-placement. The partisan component refers to the link between individuals' ideological orientation and political parties (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Huber 1989). I followed the literature by calling these variable sets "components", however, this term is rather misleading as the term "component" implies being a constituent part of the left-right ideology but those elements are in relation with it. In other words, the three variable sets are not parts of individuals' left-right opinion but are separate variables related with the left-right opinion (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Elements which are in relation with the left-right concept



Whenever scholars study the left-right opinion or its relationship with the three elements or other variables they assume that individuals use the left-right response scale as offered in surveys in the same way, this means that persons with the same left-right position will give the same answer to the question. The same use of the left-right scale is an essential precondition for any comparison among individuals or countries, and for any conclusion drawn including this concept. As this precondition is so crucial, this study intends to test whether this assumption is actually met.

2.3 The use of the left-right scale

The left-right self-identification, like other subjective variables such as opinions, attitudes or preferences, cannot be measured directly. Researchers have to rely on the answers people give in surveys. The majority of cross-national surveys such as Eurobarometer, European Election Studies, European Social Survey, World Value Survey but also national election studies ask people to place themselves on a scale this scale is the adequate instrument to measure people's left-right orientation. However, as Kroh (2007: 205) points out only few studies examine the data quality of different instruments for surveying the left-right dimension and shows with data from the German Socio-Economic Panel that the 11-point scale in comparison to the 10 or 101-point scales performs the best. Yet besides the length of the scale the labels may also affect the quality and equivalence of the instrument. This shall be the focus of this study.

In order to assure equivalence of the measurement instrument, the fundamental assumption that the response function is the same for all respondents has to be fulfilled (Dijkstra and Zouwen 1982). Response function refers to the relationship between opinion (here the true left-right orientation) and the response given when asked (here the placement on the left- right scale), and can be formulated, assuming a linear function, as:

$$R = \tau + \lambda O + \zeta \quad (1)$$

R : Response

τ : Intercept

λ : Loading

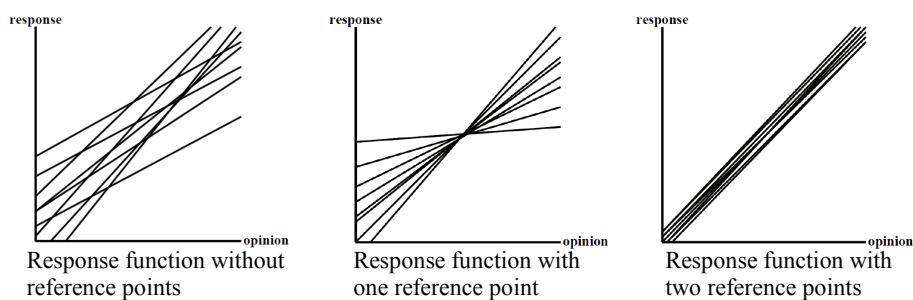
O : Opinion

ξ : Error term

If the assumption is true, then $\tau_1 = \tau_2 = \dots = \tau$ and $\lambda_1 = \lambda_2 = \dots = \lambda$, i.e. the intercepts and slopes are the same for everyone which means that all respondents understand and use the left-right response scale in the same way (H_0).

This null hypothesis is not necessary true. For instance, Saris (1988b) has demonstrated in several studies that people can use very different response functions if the scale is not fixed. Saris et al. (1988: 168) find that there is large variation in the response function if no reference point is given because then people have to choose it themselves and everybody will do it in a different way. If one reference point is provided in the question there is still large variation because respondents still have the freedom to choose their own scale as just one reference point is fixed. Finally the variation is more limited when at least two reference points are given and respondents have a linear response function. Those three scenarios are illustrated in Figure 2.2.

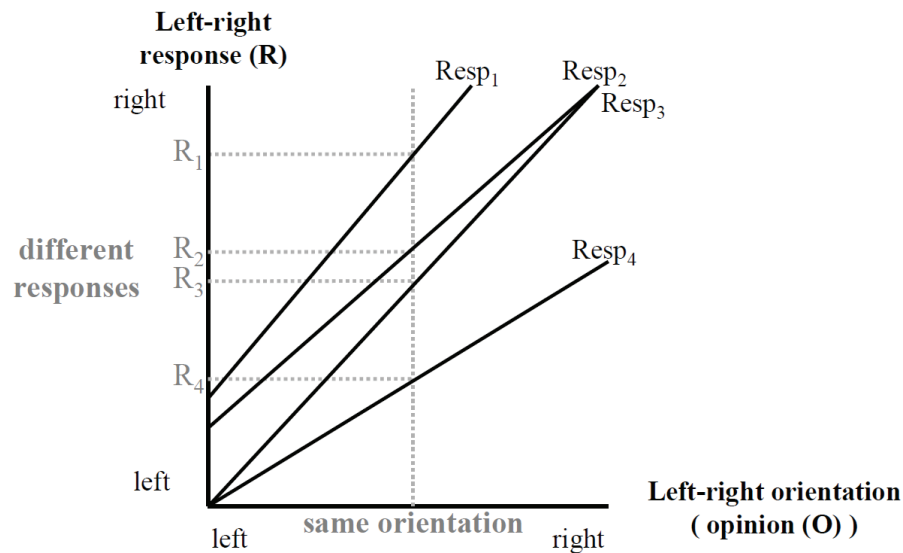
Figure 2.2: Response function with no, one and two reference points



Yet it is not enough to introduce any two reference points, they have to be chosen in such a way that there is no doubt in the mind of all respondents what the positions are of the reference points on their subjective opinion scale (Saris and Rooij 1988: 217). Saris already stated in 1988 that “the very common measurement of ideological orientation cannot be operationalised with the reference point left and right because many people will see these terms on different positions on the scale” (Saris 1988a: 223). Figure 2.3 illustrates how misleading the left-right self-placement may be if

people see the terms left and right on different positions on the scale. The given responses appear different but the actual opinion of all respondents is the same.

Figure 2.3: Relationship between opinion and response without fixed reference points and variation in response style



The illustrated phenomenon is not impossible because one can imagine that a person whose opinion is “right” will provide a response 10 but another person with the same opinion could think that the scale goes from extreme left to extreme right and so, as the labels are left and right, choosing the category 9 or 8. It appears clearly that these people would use the response scale in a different way. At the left side of the scale the same can occur, of course. This suggests that the response scale can be used by different people in different ways when as usually done, the scale is labelled with left and right. In order to prevent this problem it is necessary to fix the relation between the subjective opinion scale and the response scale for all respondents in the same way using what Saris and de Rooij (1988) call “fixed references points”. The addition of the term “extreme” will fix this relation for the left-right scale as there is no doubt that the most leftist (rightist) position on the scale is the extreme left (right). So the opinion scale of all respondents and the

response scale are equally starting from “extreme left” and ending with “extreme right” which describes this political dimension definitively. Respondents may adjust their answer given the new response scale with fixed reference points and thus make a distinction between the left-right and extreme left-right response scale. It can be expected that respondents perceive the difference between the two scales more, the more they are interested in politics and thus are more aware of or familiar with the left-right concept (H_1). People with higher levels of education are equally expected to be more aware of the concept and thus to make a distinction between the two scales (H_2). Moreover, the use of the left-right ideology depends on the time of the democratic history of a country. The longer a country is democratic and thus allows political actors with different left-right positions to participate, the more the political debate incorporates the concept and the more individuals will be familiar with it. Therefore, the longer a country is democratic, the more people are likely to make a distinction between a scale labelled left/right and one with extreme left/right (H_3).

2.4 Case and data

The left-right concept is a European concept as it has its origins in the seating arrangements of the French National Assembly 1789 where the right belonged to the aristocracy and the left to the radical republicans (Goodsell 1988). The concept is also used in other continents but has the longest tradition in Europe. Therefore, this analysis concentrates on European countries, and the European Social Survey Round 4, 2008/09 (ESS 4) is employed.² This dataset has the advantage that it contains repetitions of the left-right self-placement question in the supplementary questionnaires. In the main questionnaire the commonly used question is asked: *“In politics people sometimes talk about ‘left’ and ‘right’. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means left and 10 means right?”* For the repetitions the split ballot multitrait-multimethod (SB-MTMM) design (Saris et al. 2004) was employed, i.e. one random group gets one type and another random

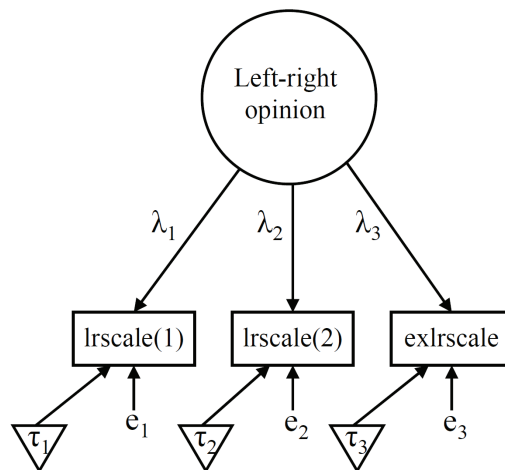
² ESS Round 4: European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008). Data file edition 1.0. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

group another type of question. Group one was asked exactly the same question again and got exactly the same answer categories. Group two got also the same question but the answer categories change to 0 “extreme left” and 10 “extreme right”, all other categories remain unlabelled. The main questionnaire is always conducted by face-to-face interviews and the supplementary questionnaires in the majority of the countries as well with the exception of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden where they were self-completed by the respondent. Given that between the repetition of the question lays more than 20 minutes memory effects are avoided (Meurs and Saris 1990).

2.5 Methods

The most widely used method to test for measurement invariance is multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) (Jöreskog 1993; Billiet 2002). For our analysis the measurement model is specified as presented in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: Measurement model



Where the “left-right opinion” is the unobserved latent concept, lrscale(1) is the observed variable in the main questionnaire, lrscale(2) and exlrscale are the observed variables in the supplementary questionnaires, λ_i is the loading, τ_i is the intercept

and e_i is the disturbance terms for the i^{th} method. It is assumed that the disturbance terms have a mean of 0, and are uncorrelated with each other and with the latent variable.

The items $\text{lrscale}(1)$ and $\text{lrscale}(2)$ are identical questions with the same answer categories. As van Meurs and Saris (1990) find that memory effects disappear if the time interval between the questions is at least 20 minutes which is in the ESS the case, it is reasonable to expect people answering both questions in the same way; therefore the loadings and the intercepts are set to be equal: $\lambda_1 = \lambda_2$, $\tau_1 = \tau_2$.

As argued before, the end points of the response scale should have fixed positions on the opinion scales of all respondents and extreme left/right provides those fixed reference points for the left-right dimension. Therefore, the scale of the latent variable is set to be equal to the scale of the extreme left-right scale, by fixing the loading of exlrscale to one and the intercept to zero: $\lambda_3 = 1$, $\tau_3 = 0$. This is the formulation of the assumption that fixed references points create a more equivalent scale which then reduces the possible error to merely random error. Moreover, in this way the scale of the latent variable is also specified: it is expressed in the same units as the observed variable exlrscale .

2.5.1 Testing measurement invariance

Measurement invariance means that individuals' answers are not dependent on their group characteristics (Mellenbergh 1989; Meredith and Millsap 1992; Meredith 1993). There are three different levels of invariance testing, in order: configural, metric, and scalar invariance. Configural invariance is achieved if the model of interest fits across the groups. Metric invariance is a necessary condition for comparing relationships with other variables, and it requires that the loadings are the same across groups.

$$\begin{aligned}\lambda_{1i} &= \lambda_{1j} \dots = \lambda_1 \\ \lambda_{2i} &= \lambda_{2j} \dots = \lambda_2 \\ \lambda_{3i} &= \lambda_{3j} \dots = \lambda_3\end{aligned}\tag{2}$$

λ : Loading

i, j : Different countries

These two requirements are sufficient for comparison of relationships with other variables. The comparison of means requires scalar invariance which means that the intercepts of the items are also equal across groups (Horn 1983; Meredith 1993; Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998).

$$\begin{aligned}\tau_{1i} &= \tau_{1j} \dots = \tau_1 \\ \tau_{2i} &= \tau_{2j} \dots = \tau_2 \\ \tau_{3i} &= \tau_{3j} \dots = \tau_3\end{aligned}\tag{3}$$

τ = Intercept

i, j: Different countries

The null hypothesis that people use the left-right scale in the same way across groups (H_0) implies that loadings and intercepts will be equal across groups. If this model is rejected the alternative hypotheses might be considered.

2.5.2 Testing the measurement model

For estimation the maximum likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.57 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2005) is used and for model evaluation and testing I rely on JRule software (Van der Veld et al. 2008) based on the procedure developed by Saris, Satorra and van der Veld (2009). Saris et al. show that the commonly used evaluation procedures for structural equation models cannot be trusted as the test statistics and Fit indices are unequally sensitive for different misspecifications. They propose using the modification index (MI) as test statistic for detection of misspecifications (expressed as expected parameter change; EPC) in combination with the power of the MI test. The criterion for misspecification in this analysis is a deviation of .1 between the groups. Data have been generated in order to see if the above specified tests would have sufficient power to detect a deviation in parameter values are equal or larger than .1. It turned out that this was in general indeed the case.³

2.5.3 Separation of the sample

In order to test the hypotheses the sample will be separated sequentially by political interest, by education levels, by countries,

³ The only exception was if the values of the parameter λ_1 and λ_3 would be exactly equal. However that is unlikely and was also not the case as we will show below.

and finally by the combination of political interest or education with countries. Political interest is measured in the ESS by the question: *“How interested are you in politics?”* The categories offered are: 1 Very interested, 2 Quite interested, 3 Hardly interested and 4 Not at all interested.

The education level is asked in each country differently but then harmonised to seven levels in order to allow comparability across countries: Not completed primary, Primary or first stage of basic, Lower secondary or second stage of basic, Upper secondary, Post secondary, Non-tertiary, First stage of tertiary, and Second stage of tertiary education. The countries are categorized as presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Countries

First and second wave of democratization	Third wave of democratization
Belgium	Bulgaria
Denmark	Croatia
Finland	Czech Republic
France	Cyprus
Great Britain	East Germany ⁴
The Netherlands	Estonia
Norway	Greece
Sweden	Latvia
Switzerland	Poland
West Germany ⁴	Portugal
	Romania
	Russia
	Slovakia
	Slovenia
	Spain
	Ukraine

⁴ Note that Berlin had to be excluded from the analysis as it belonged to East and West Germany.

2.5.4 Comparison of means and relationships with other variables across groups

If variation across the groups is found, the follow-up question is whether this does not allow across-group comparisons. Therefore, the observed means will be compared with the means after correction for the difference of scales (means of the latent variable, the opinion), and the relationship with another variable as observed and after correction for scale difference (latent variable) will be compared too.

There is consensus among political scientist that the content of the left-right dimension is linked to economic issues (among other issues). The conventional interpretation is, among others, that “left” is associated with support for government control of the economy, meanwhile “right” is linked to support for free market (Eisinga and Ooms 2007: 54). Therefore, the attitude towards governments’ intervention in the economy in order to reduce differences in income levels is employed as independent variable affecting the left-right self-placement. Even though the direction of causality could also be the other way around (Weber and Saris 2010), for the sake of this analysis assuming this relation will be sufficient. The regression coefficient of the observed variables is compared with the one of the latent variables after correcting for measurement error. The attitude towards income equality is measured by the following question: *“Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.”* The answer categories are: 1 Agree strongly, 2 Agree, 3 Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Disagree and 5 Disagree strongly.

2.6 Test of hypotheses

When the intercepts and slopes are set to be equal for the four groups of political interest, JRule does not detect any misspecifications even though the power of the test is very high $>.9$ which means that the likelihood of detecting misspecifications is high. This means that scalar invariance holds and that there is one response function for all groups which is specified below with the standard error in brackets and beneath the t-values:

$$\begin{array}{rccccccc} \text{Response} = & & -.41 & + & & 1.06 & * & \text{Opinion} \\ & & (.04) & & & (.01) & & \\ & & -1.78 & & & 149.91 & & \end{array}$$

Thus, we have to reject the hypothesis H_1 that the more people are interested in politics, the more they are familiar with the left-right concept and make a distinction between the two differently labelled scales. Likewise, we have to reject H_2 that people with higher education would make a distinction between the two scales as we find that scalar in- variance holds over all groups with different education level. Finally, when we test for scalar and metric invariance across countries, JRule detects misspecifications in East Germany, Finland and France. The deviations are not in agreement with hypothesis H_3 that the longer a country is democratic, the more people are likely to make a distinction between a scale labelled left/right and one with extreme left/right and thus we have to reject this alternative hypothesis. Given that all alternative hypotheses had to be rejected and East Germany, Finland and France can be considered outliers, overall we cannot reject the null hypothesis that people use the left-right scale in the same way across groups.

2.7 Further exploration

Following the suggestions for modifications provided by JRule we detect the following response function (with the standard error in brackets and beneath the t-values) for all countries except East Germany, Finland and France:

$$\begin{array}{rccccccc} \text{Response} = & & -.31 & + & & 1.06 & * & \text{Opinion} \\ & & (.04) & & & (.01) & & \\ & & -8.75 & & & 156.99 & & \end{array}$$

And a different one for these three remaining countries:

$$\begin{array}{rccccccc} \text{Response} = & & -1.31 & + & & 1.28 & * & \text{Opinion} \\ & & (.14) & & & (.03) & & \\ & & -9.57 & & & 47.34 & & \end{array}$$

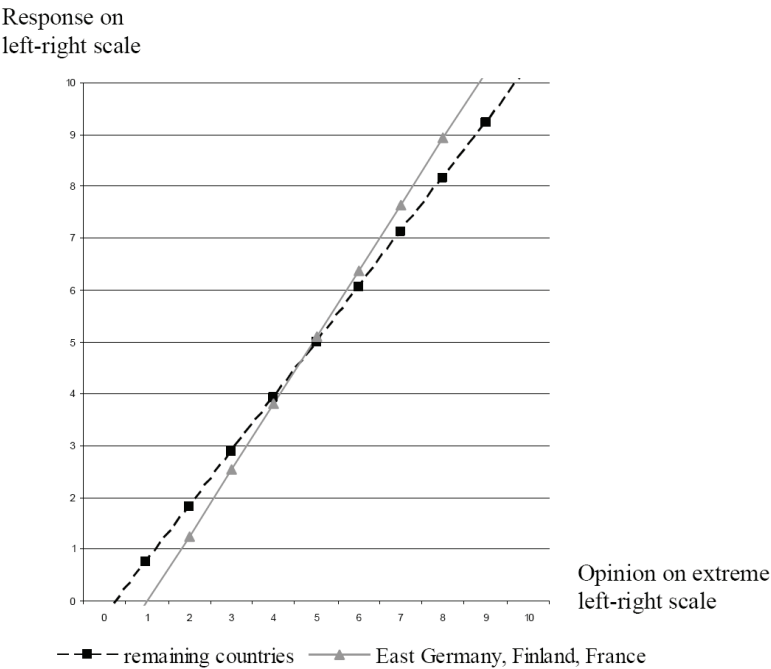
Table 2.2 and Figure 2.5 show the relations between the opinion and response on average for people in the countries of the two groups, and highlights the difference. It appears that people in East Germany, Finland and France clearly make a distinction between

the two response scales meanwhile people in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Great Britain, Greece, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Ukraine and West Germany do not make this distinction.

Table 2.2: Relation between opinion and response on average in the two country groups

Opinion Response	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Most countries	-0.31	0.75	1.81	2.87	3.93	4.99	6.05	7.11	8.17	9.23	10.29
East Germany, Finland, France	-1.31	-0.03	1.25	2.53	3.81	5.09	6.37	7.65	8.93	10.21	11.49
Difference	-1	-0.78	-0.6	-0.3	-0.1	0.1	0.32	0.54	0.76	0.98	1.2

Figure 2.5: Relation between opinion and response on average in the two country groups



2.8 Consequences of the differences

Given that statistically significant variation was found in the comparison of the European countries the question is whether it is so serious that it does not allow cross-country comparisons? Therefore the means and the relationship with another variable are considered. As Table 2.2 shows, the differences in the response function only matter towards the end points of the left-right scales in the two groups. So if most people are in the middle of the scale the difference in the means will not matter much. As this is the case for all countries (Figure 2.A.1 in the Appendix), the ranking of country's mean changes only slightly when the observed and the latent mean are compared as shown in Table 2.3. The Pearson's correlation between the observed means (affected by the difference in response function) and latent means (free of these effects) is .99 and the Spearman's rank correlation between the observed and latent rank ordering is .99. This implies that even though differences in the use of the left-right response scale across countries were found, countries' means can still be compared.

As the differences seem to be relevant towards to the end of the scale this might not be captured by the means but might still affect the relationship with other variables. Therefore, the effect of the attitude towards government's intervention in the economy on left-right self-placement as observed is compared to the effect between the variables after correcting for the scale difference. Table 2.4 shows the results. We find differences between the observed and latent regression coefficient $>.1$ in Croatia, Finland and France. However, overall this also has only a minor effect as the Pearson's correlation is .99 and the Spearman's rank correlation of the rank ordering is .99. Yet, this may only be true for this specific analysis of the relationship of left-right self-placement and the attitude towards governments' intervention in the economy as the differences between regression coefficient between the observed variables and the one after correction for the scale difference depends also on the size of the observed regression coefficient.

Table 2.3: Comparison of observed and latent mean and percentage of non-response by country

Country	observed mean	ranking observed mean	ranking latent mean	latent mean	Missing
Belgium	4.93	10	10	4.91	4.60 %
Bulgaria	4.92	8	6	4.83	27.89 %
Croatia	5.26	17	20	5.32	24.66 %
Cyprus	5.07	12	12	5.08	16.54 %
Czech Republic	5.42	22	21	5.38	9.66 %
Denmark	5.31	19	19	5.27	3.98 %
East Germany	4.00	1	1	4.13	21.67 %
Estonia	5.19	16	14	5.12	4.97 %
Finland	5.72	24	23	5.47	5.98 %
France	4.79	5	5	4.82	7.79 %
Great Britain	5.01	11	11	5.04	1.03 %
Greece	5.12	13	13	5.11	17.18 %
Latvia	5.75	25	25	5.68	16.21 %
Netherlands	5.15	15	15	5.12	4.05 %
Norway	5.33	20	17	5.26	2.07 %
Poland	5.75	26	26	5.69	16.80 %
Portugal	4.83	6	8	4.87	32.49 %
Romania	5.59	23	24	5.65	31.13 %
Russia	5.39	21	22	5.43	36.66 %
Slovakia	4.73	4	4	4.77	14.31 %
Slovenia	4.63	3	3	4.69	2.53 %
Spain	4.54	2	2	4.53	19.72 %
Sweden	5.12	14	16	5.17	2.90 %
Switzerland	4.92	9	9	4.9	7.42 %
Ukraine	5.26	18	18	5.26	42.93 %
West Germany	4.86	7	7	4.86	8.34 %
Pearson's correlation of observed and latent mean: .99					
Spearman's rank correlation of rank ordering: .99					

Table 2.4: Comparison of observed and latent effect of the attitude towards income equality on left-right self-placement by country

Country	rank	observed reg. coeff.	stand. error	rank	latent reg. coeff.	stand. error	differ- ence
Belgium	8	.19	.04	8	.18	.04	.01
Bulgaria	11	.32	.06	12	.3	.06	.02
Croatia	4	.12	.08	2	.01	.08	.11
Cyprus	18	.41	.10	18	.38	.10	.03
Czech Republic	26	.71	.04	26	.68	.04	.03
Denmark	25	.69	.05	25	.65	.04	.04
East Germany	7	.17	.07	4	.08	.06	.09
Estonia	14	.37	.05	15	.35	.05	.02
Finland	23	.63	.04	23	.5	.03	.13
France	22	.53	.05	19	.42	.04	.11
Germany	16	.39	.03	13	.31	.03	.08
Great Britain	15	.37	.04	16	.35	.03	.02
Greece	20	.48	.07	21	.45	.07	.03
Latvia	2	.06	.07	3	.05	.07	.01
Netherlands	21	.49	.04	22	.46	.04	.03
Norway	24	.66	.05	24	.62	.05	.04
Poland	1	-.01	.06	1	-.01	.06	.00
Portugal	6	.15	.07	7	.15	.06	.00
Romania	9	.21	.08	9	.20	.08	.01
Russia	5	.14	.05	6	.13	.05	.01
Slovakia	19	.45	.06	20	.42	.05	.03
Slovenia	3	.09	.09	5	.09	.09	.00
Spain	10	.27	.05	10	.26	.05	.01
Sweden	27	.95	.05	27	.89	.05	.06
Switzerland	17	.39	.05	17	.36	.04	.03
Ukraine	12	.34	.07	14	.32	.06	.02
West Germany	13	.35	.04	11	.33	.04	.02
Pearson's correlation of observed and latent mean: .98							
Spearman's rank correlation of rank ordering: .98							

2.9 Conclusion

In this study I tested the equivalence of the measurement for individuals' left-right orientation. There was reason to believe that the terms "left" and "right" would be seen by many people on different positions on the scale as they are not fixed reference points. Therefore, I compared the extreme left-right to the usually employed left-right scale and argued that people who are more aware and/or familiar with the concept will be more likely to make a distinction between these scales. I reasoned that these people are those with more interest in politics, those who are more educated and those who live in a country with a longer democratic history as democracy allow political actors with different political positions to participate which facilitates the incorporation of the concept in the political debate and thus make individuals more familiar with the concept.

Variation was not found across the groups with different political interest and the seven education levels but across the countries. I found that on average people in East Germany, Finland and France perceive the two scales differently and adjust their responses accordingly. One response function was identified for these three countries which is significantly different to the one found for the remaining 22 countries and West Germany. Explaining this variation goes beyond the scope of this study but it seems that differences in the formulation of the request for answer could be the reason for the divergence in the case of Finland and France. Further research on this issue is needed. Thus, with the exception of East Germany, Finland and France the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for the other groups. It appears that people on average independent of their education, their interest in politics and their residence use the left-right response scale in the same way.

However, the differences between the countries due to the time of their democratic experience may not be captured by the approach of this study. Given that the use of response scales was analysed, only those who actually responded could be considered. However, the particular high non-response among people from countries with a shorter democratic history is striking: with the exception of Estonia

(4.97%), it varies from 9.66% in the Czech Republic to 42.93% in the Ukraine. In comparison, the Western European countries have much lower non-response rates: it varies from 1.03% in Great Britain to 8.34% in West Germany. Unfortunately my approach does not allow finding out whether non-respondents make a difference between the two response scales and whether they would place themselves differently on them.

To sum up, this analysis yields an important finding for scholars who are studying the left-right concept as it was shown that the precondition for comparing group means of left-right self-placement is fulfilled. However, this was not found for the relationship with another variable, here government's intervention in the economy. Given that people on average in the two groups of countries use the left-right response scale differently, the relationship after correcting for the scale difference changes. In this study these differences were not very salient, but as they also depend on the size of the coefficients, in another analyses this could be more pronounced and thus may not allow comparisons of East Germany, Finland and France with the remaining European countries. Therefore, the regression coefficients for these three countries should always be corrected for the scale difference by dividing them by the ratio of the two slopes $1.28/1.06$ as the slope has an increasing effect on the size of the effect of the unstandardized regression coefficient between the left-right scale and another variable.

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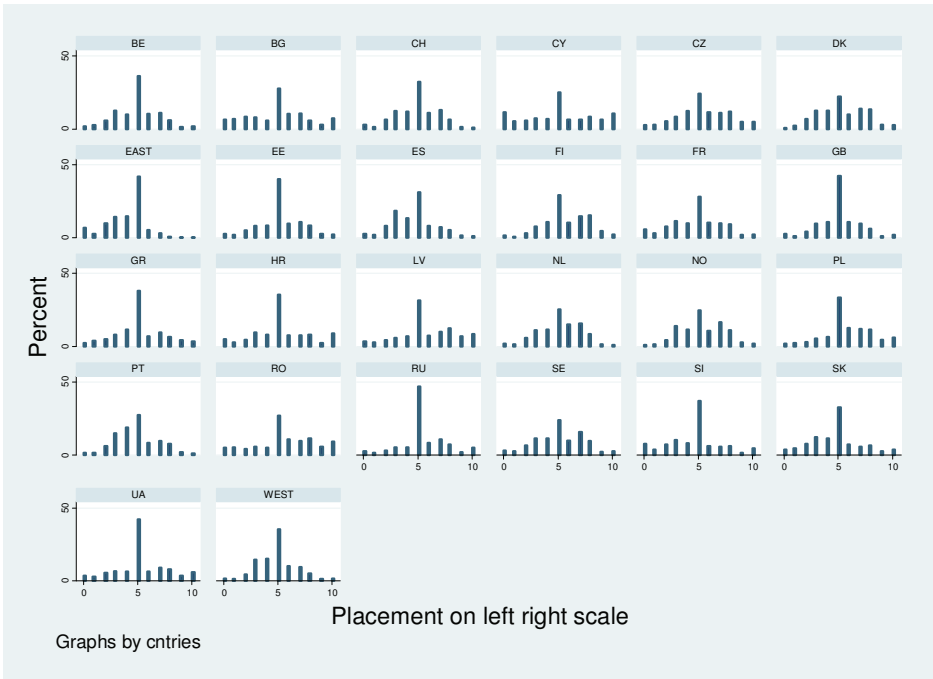
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Appendix

2.A.1 Placement on left-right scale in all countries



Chapter 3

The relationship between issues and an individuals' left-right orientation^{*†}

Abstract

The major body of the literature about left-right orientation finds that values and attitudes determine an individual's position in the left-right dimension. Regarding values, it is assumed that these are stable over (a long period of) time, and hence affect individuals' left-right orientation. Attitudes are usually measured as issue preferences, which can change over time, cross-nationally and also in their importance for individuals. Therefore, the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is less clear, and requires more research. We argue and show with data from the European Social Survey Panel Component (2010-2012), conducted in the Netherlands, that the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation is conditioned by the importance that individuals give to the respective issues. Issues which are important for individuals affect their left-right orientation, while they can use their left-right orientation to form an opinion about an issue which they do not find important.

* Co-authored with Willem Saris, Research and Expertise Centre for Survey Methodology, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

† Revise and resubmit in Acta Politica

3.1 Introduction

Ever since Anthony Downs' *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), ideology is seen as a key influential factor on political behaviour. Downs' rich theoretical discussion on party comportment includes its dependence on (voter's) ideology: "In a world beclouded by uncertainty, ideologies are useful to parties as well as to voters. Each party realizes that some citizens vote by means of ideologies rather than policies; hence it fashions an ideology which it believes will attract the greatest number of votes." (Downs 1957: 100). Based on rational choice theory, Downs explains that with ideology "a voter can save himself the cost of being informed upon a wider range of issues" and "since it is much cheaper to keep informed about ideologies than about issues, from then on [once he knows which party's ideology is more beneficial for him] he does the former as a rational short cut to the latter" (Downs 1957: 98-99).

In subsequent literature great importance is attached to shortcuts, abstract concepts, and other heuristic aids as they serve individuals for their orientation in the world of politics. Heuristics are described as problem-solving strategies, often employed automatically or unconsciously, which serve by keeping the information processing demands of the task within bounds (Abelson and Levi 1985: 255; Lau and Redlawsk 2001: 952). Among the most prominent of these devices are ideological labels (Zechmeister 2006: 151), and the most commonly used across (Western) democracies is the left-right schema. On the one hand, it helps people to make up their mind about political issues, government performance and politicians, and to come to a voting decision (Knight 1985; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Popkin 1991; Hinich and Munger 1994). A person can simply choose the policy preference or support a political actor that is most similar to his or her more general ideological stand (Jacoby 1991: 179). On the other hand, the left-right concept has a communication function for the political systems: politicians can transmit information by structuring their ideas or policy preferences in the political spectrum along this dimension. The concept is attractive as Sartori (1976: 342) states "in a mass communicating world characterized by mass politics a maximum of visual simplicity coupled with a maximum of manipulability represents an almost

unbeatable combination”. It provides the most prevalent symbolic foundation of the ideological space (Badescu and Sum 2005: 1) and as Hix (1999: 73) finds “on a functional level, the left-right is a remarkable invention, in that it enables politics to be simplified into either a dichotomy or a single continuum”. Finally, as Grendstad (2003: 1) states “the left-right dimension is also valuable and versatile since so many experts, journalists and citizens employ it daily”. However, in order to serve these communication and choice functions, individuals must share common conceptions of the left-right schema (Zechmeister 2006: 152). Therefore, scholars repeatedly assess the abstract concept, trying to grasp the common understanding by relating it to an individual’s issue preferences. In this study, we show that this approach is misleading because the relationship between left-right orientation and issue preferences is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the respective issue and therefore, not the same for everyone.

The paper proceeds as follows: First, we will introduce the left-right concept and highlight the relationship between left-right orientation and their issue preferences. In Section 3.2 we argue that this relationship is conditioned by the importance that individuals assign to issues. A dataset conducted between March and June 2012 in the Netherlands allow for testing the direction of causality between an individual’s issue preferences and left-right orientation. In Section 3.3 we introduce this dataset and in Section 3.4 the methodology. Section 3.5 presents the finding and in Section 3.6 we conclude.

3.2 Conceptualisation of left-right orientation

Recalling Inglehart and Klingemann’s seminal article (1976), there are three components of the left-right concept: 1) the social, 2) the partisan and 3) the value, issue-based or ideological component. Freire (2008) restricts this to Western Europe. 1) The social component refers to an individual’s location in a social surrounding and the corresponding social identities (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 245; Freire 2008: 5). 2) The partisan component refers to an individual’s orientation reflecting partisan loyalties (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 244; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 2007; Huber 1989; Knutsen 1997: 3). 3) The final component will be the focus of this study: value, issue-based or ideological component which refers to the link between values or attitudes towards issues and the left-

right self-placement (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Huber 1989). We followed the literature by calling those variable sets ‘components’. However, the term ‘component’ is rather misleading as it implies being a constituent part of the left-right concept whereas the three variable sets do not form individuals’ left-right orientation, they are merely variables that are somehow related with the concept (Weber 2011: 2).

3.2.1 Values and issues

Many researchers have argued that values are the ultimate underpinnings of attitudes, that they are relatively stable and thus lend constancy to evaluations and behaviour (Feldman 2003: 479). In a causal sense they are prior to attitudes, issue preferences and left-right orientation, i.e. values affect all three. The literature in the field does not emphasize the differences between values, attitudes and issue preferences. In fact, the terms are used interchangeably (Davidov et al. 2008: 584; Milic 2008). Values are seen as base for attitudes and attitudes are usually observed by individuals’ issue preferences and, therefore, many scholars use issue preferences to draw conclusions about the underlying values. However, not all issues serve as indicators for values every time. In particular, in empirical research, scholars have to bear in mind that given issue preferences may be ad hoc reactions to the current political debate but do not actually reflect an underlying value (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). We therefore argue that it is crucial to distinguish between values and issue preferences. For the remainder of this paper we use the terms issues and issue preferences interchangeably when we actually refer to individuals’ issue preferences.

3.2.2 Issues and left-right orientation

Once the distinction between issues and values is taken into account, the relationships with an individual’s left-right orientation have to be reconsidered. Values are supposed to be stable over a long period of time and hence will affect the left-right orientation, but the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is less clear.

In empirical research, scholars usually regress the left-right orientation on issue preferences in order to determine a substantive

meaning of the left-right divide, or to detect whether the left-right concept still endures. For example, in this way Knutsen (1995) finds that issues which capture the materialist/post-materialist orientations explain left-right orientation which therefore shows that new meanings of the left-right concept are added to old ones. Potter (2001) also finds that the meaning of left and right is expanded to include issues surrounding post-materialism and furthermore to European integration. More recently, Lewis-Beck and Lobo (2011) explain the left-right orientation of Portuguese voters, amongst social factors, by issues which are supposed to reflect on moral values, economic and pre-democratic attitudes. By doing so, these kind of studies imply that not only issue preferences affect the left-right orientation but that these effects are also the same for all people.

As initially described ever since Downs (1957), ideology is seen as a key factor influencing political behaviour as it is much cheaper for voters to be informed about ideologies than about an infinite number of issues. This implies that once people have determined their left-right orientation, they will use it to form opinions about issues. Thus, this suggests the opposite causal relation as stated before, i.e. individuals' left-right orientation determines their issue preferences.

As the arguments for either of the two directions of causality are reasonable, it seems that effects in both directions can occur. This poses the question what determines the direction of causality between issues and left-right orientation? We believe that it is individuals' awareness and salience of issues. We expect that *the relationship of issues and left-right orientation is a function of the importance people assign to the respective issues (H1)*. Moreover, as individuals can perceive different issues important, *the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is not the same for all individuals (H2)*.

This is in line with the study of Carsey and Layman (2006) who find that party identification (which is similar to left-right orientation considered a heuristic) and issue preferences can both cause changes in each other depending on the awareness and salience of issues. People who consider an issue to be very

important to them personally, care deeply and are especially concerned about it (Krosnick 1988). This motivates them to seek relevant information for this issue (Zaichkowsky 1985; Berent and Krosnick 1993) and to think about that information (Berent 1990). Consequently they are more aware of those issues. Therefore, those issues will have more influence on their behaviour and people will be less inclined to rely on their left-right orientation as a shortcut.

The information people find also contains an ideological attribution as it is ideologically framed by its source or sender. For example, when people seek for information about whether the government should intervene in the economy they encounter the discourse of political actors whose positions in the left-right dimension are known. This way, they perceive that left-wing political actors support this issue, while right-wing political actors oppose it and favour a free market. Thus, whatever opinion people support, they know where this is to be found or placed in the political spectrum. Consequently, people who do find the issue important may also take over the position on the political spectrum connected with this issue. Therefore, it can be expected that *people will base their position on the left-right scale on those issues which are important for them (H3)*.

However, individuals can use ideology as a shortcut to reduce information and decision costs (Downs 1957; Kahneman et al. 1982; Popkin 1991; Sniderman et al. 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). They may use their left-right orientation as a shortcut to substitute information they do not have available and make up their mind about an issue which is not important for them. Note that they may rely on their left-right orientation but do not necessarily have to. Determining the reason for this goes beyond the scope of this study. However, we take this possibility into account and expect that *individuals' left-right orientation can affect their issue preferences regarding issues which are not important to them (H4)*.

A final scenario should be considered. Individuals are dealing with an indefinite number of issues and this could lead to a cross-pressure situation. Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) introduced the concept of cross-pressure in order to explain voting behaviour whereby any social category could be thought of as a pressure upon the political

behaviour of category members. As individuals can be members of several categories, those pressures can be complementary or opposing. The latter case is expected to cause cross-pressure and the consequence can be political instability, withdrawal or ambivalence (Horan 1971: 651; Lodge et al. 1995; Meffert et al. 2004). Applying this to the left-right self-placement, we suggest that people may assign importance to opposed issues which can provoke a cross-pressure situation that leads to political ambivalence and makes expectations about the relationship between issues and left-right orientations impossible.

To sum up, we argue that the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation is conditioned by the importance people assign to the issues. We suggest that issues which are seen as important by people will determine their left-right orientation meanwhile they may use the latter to form an opinion about those issues which are of less importance to them. Whereby what issue is considered to be important can vary from person to person. Therefore, the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is not the same for all people.

3.3 Case study

In order to test whether the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation is indeed conditioned by the importance people give to the respective issues, we need a research design which allows for reciprocal causations and a dataset which contains sufficient information to test this relationship empirically. The European Social Survey Panel Component¹ carried out in the Netherlands provides not only indicators for issue importance but also sufficient other variables to identify a model with reciprocal causation. The study was carried out for the first time from October to December 2010, and afterwards in an eight month interval, the second wave from July to August 2011 and third way from March to June 2012. Participants of the panel were asked in the initial study about the demographic characteristics and afterwards only if they stated that something had changed. Therefore, all three waves will be employed, although only the third wave contains questions

¹ We gratefully thank Kees Aarts and Sedef Turper for the provision of the dataset.

about their issue preferences and issue importance. 753 people participated in the third wave (see Appendix 3.A.1).

3.4 Methods

We use structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the reciprocal relationship between issues and left-right orientation and employ the Maximum likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.57 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2001). From a point of view of identification models containing reciprocal effects are problematic but not impossible to solve (Bollen 1989). A simple solution is to introduce for each endogenous variable one exogenous which only affects this endogenous variable (Saris and Stronkhorst 1984). This approach will lead to an over-identified model. So even if some extra effects have to be introduced or some effects are not strong enough the model remains in general identifiable.

3.4.1 Model evaluation

To evaluate whether a model fits the data we will follow the conventional practise by reporting the chi-squared test and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), although it has been shown that these commonly used evaluation procedures for structural equation models cannot be trusted for various reasons: They do not take the power of the test into account, the test statistics are affected by characteristics of the model which have nothing to do with misspecifications in the model and are unequally sensitive for different misspecifications (Saris et al. 2009). Therefore, we rely on JRule software (Van der Veld et al. 2008), which is based on the procedure developed by Saris, Satorra and Van der Veld (2009). They propose using the Modification index (MI) as test statistic for detection of misspecifications (expressed as expected parameter change (EPC)) in combination with the power of the MI test. This way they specify four situations for which the decision concerning the presence or absence of misspecifications can be made (Saris et al. 2009: 579). This is presented in Figure 3.1. If a misspecification has been detected we will introduce step-by-step the theoretically reasonable adjustments suggested by JRule.

Figure 3.1: Decisions to be made in the different situations defined on size of the modification index (MI) and the power of the test

	High power ($>.8$)	Low power ($<.8$)
Significant MI	Inspect Expected Parameter Change (EPC)	Misspecification present
Nonsignificant MI	No misspecification	Inconclusive

3.4.2 Testing procedure

The testing procedure used in this study is as follows: To test whether there is any reason to believe that the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the issues (H1) and that it is, therefore, not the same for all individuals (H2), we first test the two equally valid causal relationships established in the literature and both directions of causality at the same time: Model 1 contains only effects from issue preferences on left-right orientation, Model 2 contains only effects from left-right orientation on issue preferences, and Model 3 contains effects in both directions. In all three models the effects are assumed to be the same for all individuals. However, as we expect that the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the issues, we need to separate the sample according to issue importance (Section 2.6). Not doing so leads to averaged effects which could cancel out the differences between the groups. Therefore, we use the Multiple group option of SEM and restrict the effects to be equal across groups when we test Model 1, 2 and 3. As elaborated previously, we expect that Model 1 and 2 are incorrect and therefore, will be rejected. Model 3 may not be rejected and it may appear that effects in both directions are possible. We believe that this is due to the fact that all groups are tested together. One group may cause one direction of the effect, another group the opposite direction. We expect that the direction of the causal relationships between issues and left-right self-placement is conditioned by the importance people give to the issues. Therefore, if Model 1 and 2 are rejected and Model 3 cannot be rejected, we will test the models as theoretically elaborated above for each group separately in order to

see whether the differences between the groups is the cause of the reciprocal relationships. We will start in each group with a model containing the reciprocal relationships, correct for misspecifications and only after no more reasonable misspecifications are suggested, we will stepwise eliminate the effects which are not significant.

3.4.3 Variables

The described condition for model identification determines the selection of issues we employ in this study. We opt for two issues captured by the following questions: *“Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels”* (1 Agree strongly, 2 Agree, 3 Neither agree nor disagree, 4 Disagree, 5 Disagree strongly), and *“To what extent do you think the Netherlands should allow people from the poorer countries outside Europe to come and live here?”* (1 Allow many to come and live here, 2 Allow some, 3 Allow a few, 4 Allow none).

These two issues are not contradictory which means they will not cause a cross-pressure situation. A person can be in favour of the government’s intervention in order to achieve income equality and be against people from poorer countries outside of Europe to come and live in the Netherlands, or vice versa. Therefore, we cannot test whether a cross-pressure situation would lead to ambivalence.

Individuals’ left-right orientation is measured by the question: *In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*

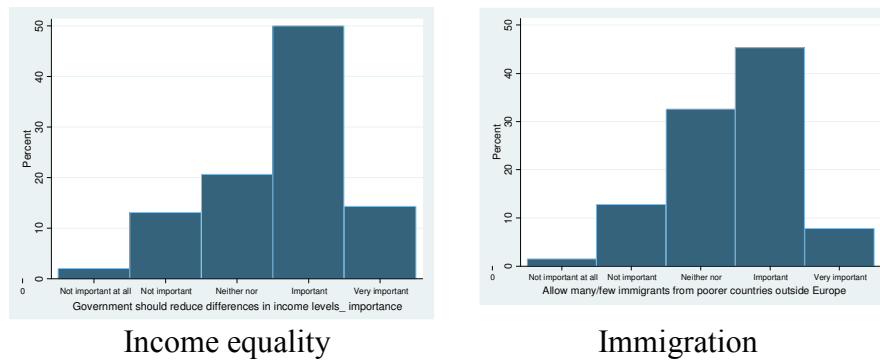
We employ the following exogenous variables: respondents’ Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status affecting left-right self-placement, respondents’ household income and the feeling about household’s income on the issue affecting income equality, and the degree of urbanisation affecting the issue of immigration from poorer countries outside of Europe (see Appendix 3.A.2).

The Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status is considered capturing part of the structural component of individuals' social anchors that affect their left-right orientation (Freire 2006). Household's net income, as objective and subjective measure, is expected to affect individuals' preferences regarding income equality. From an economic utilitarian perspective, individuals with lower income are expected to favour income equality because it would mean their income rises without having to depend on the market, which had not given them the income they desired (Kaltenthaler et al. 2008: 224). This can be expected for the objective and the subjective income. The degree of urbanization where respondents live can be used as an exogenous variable for their preferences regarding immigration from poorer countries outside of Europe. The reason for this is that in the Netherlands the big cities have the highest proportion of foreigners (Van Huis et al. 2004; Nicolaas 2006). However, the effect is conditioned by other characteristics and consequently not expected to be linear. Therefore, we introduce this variable only for the matter of model identification. The advantage of our testing procedure is that it detects whether further effects caused by the exogenous variables have to be introduced.

3.4.4 Groups by issue importance

As mentioned before, we need to separate the sample according to the importance people assign to the two issues. For both they were asked to indicate how important these issues are for them on a five point scale from 'not important at all' to 'very important'. Figure 3.2 presents the importance people assign to both issues.

Figure 3.2: Importance of the issue of income equality and immigration



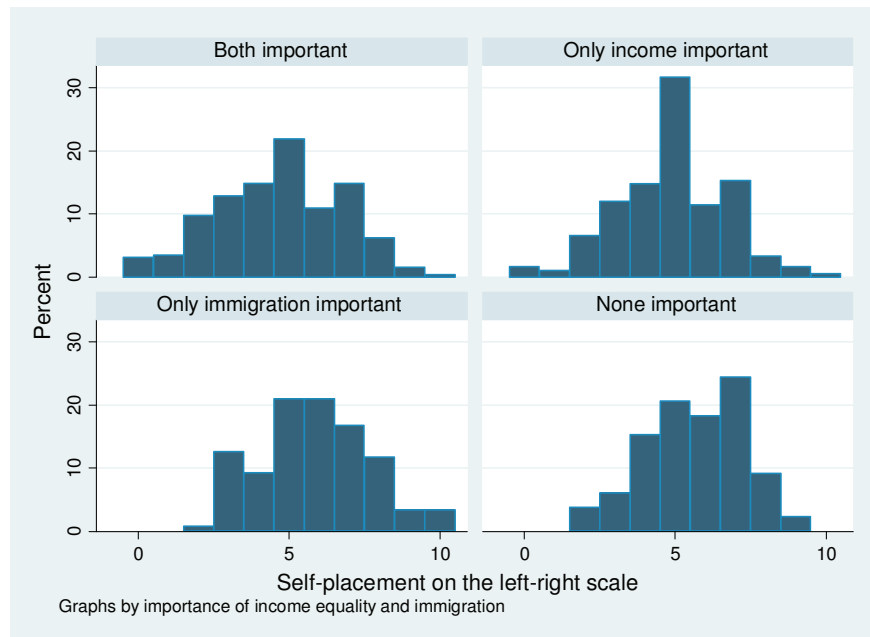
We group the answers ‘not at all important’, ‘not important’ and ‘neither important nor not important’ together as not important, while ‘quite important’ and ‘very important’ are considered important. Table 3.1 presents the resulting separation of the sample as well as some characteristics of the four groups.

Besides the importance people assign to the issue of immigration and income equality, they differ regarding their left-right orientation and other characteristics. T-tests confirm that people who find both issues important and those who consider only income equality important place themselves on average more to the left than people who consider only immigration an important issue or those who do not assign any importance to either issue. These differences become more meaningful when the distribution along the left-right scale is considered. Figure 3.3 illustrates this. It appears that the distribution is skewed towards the right for people who consider only immigration important or neither of the two issues; whereas people who consider both issues or only income equality important are spread over the entire left-right scale.

Table 3.1: Separation of the sample and means of group characteristics

	Immigration important		Immigration not important
	Group 1		Group 2
Income equality important	4.68	Left-right self-placement	4.90
	2.10	Income equality	1.99
	2.31	Immigration	2.38
	5.72	Household income	5.22
	3.90	Education level	3.33
	2.11	Political interest	2.21
	1959	Year born	1957
	267 (36.83%)	Number of observations	198 (27.31%)
	Group 3		Group 4
Income equality not important	5.83	Left-right self-placement	5.64
	3.42	Income equality	3.20
	2.49	Immigration	2.58
	6.61	Household income	6.55
	4.23	Education level	4.22
	2.11	Political interest	2.27
	1962	Year born	1961
	121 (16.69%)	Number of observations	139 (19.17%)

Figure 3.3: Left-right self-placement

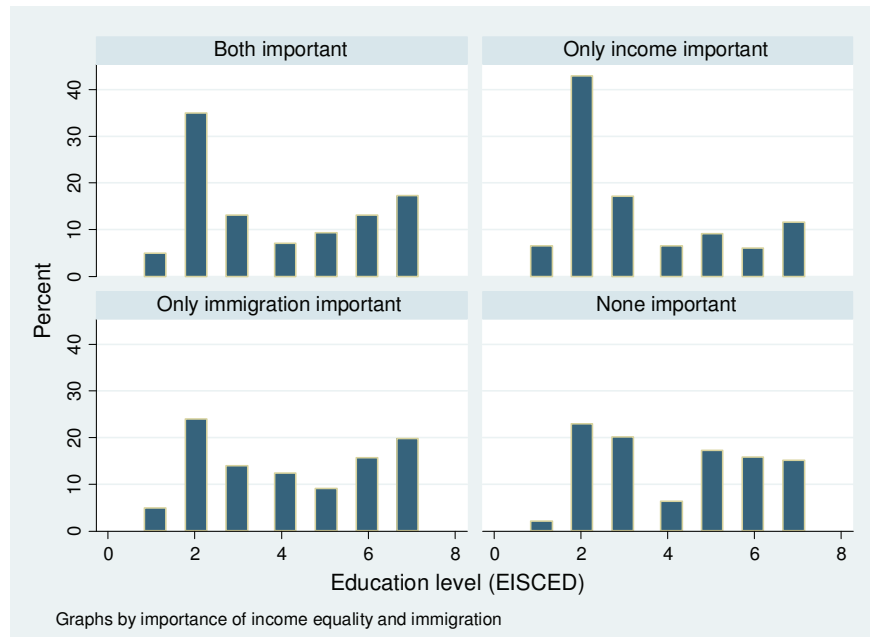


Individuals' preferences regarding the issue of income equality do not differ significantly among those who consider the issue to be important but differ among all others. Those considering the issue important agree on average more that the government should reduce differences in income levels. Considering the issue of immigration, only those who do not assign importance to either of the two issues are significantly different to those concerned about income equality. The biggest group among those who do not consider income equality or immigration important would allow only few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe to come and live in the Netherlands. For all other groups the majority of people answered that they would allow some immigrants (see Appendix 3.A.3).

Regarding the education level, those who are only concerned about income equality are significantly different from the rest, and have on average a lower education level than all other groups. However, the distribution seems again more meaningful. Figure 3.4 shows that most people who find income equality important are among

those with lower secondary education (according to ES-ISCED coding, see Appendix 3.A.2), while in the other two groups secondary education is not outstanding.

Figure 3.4: Education level



Regarding household's net income we can also observe that people who do not consider income equality an important issue earn on average significantly more than those who consider that income equality is an important issue. Those who think that only the issue of immigration is important are on average younger than the rest (see Appendix 3.A.4). Finally, the majority of people in all groups are quite interested in politics. Only those who do not consider either issue important are on average significantly less interested in politics than those who consider income equality an important issue.

Given these differences, we control for the effect of education, age and political interest by introducing them into the model as correlated with the other exogenous variables but without specifying their effects on the endogenous variables. Our testing procedure allows for such an approach as it will detect if those control variables affect the endogenous variables.

3.4.5 Correction for measurement error

Finally, we correct for measurement error which means that we make a distinction between the given answer to a question (the observed variable) and the real variable of interest (the unobserved or latent variable). The difference between the two is measurement error (Saris and Gallhofer 2007: 183). We correct for measurement error by introducing the variance of the measurement errors for all variables in the model as fixed parameters. The fixed parameters are estimated using different procedures. For the International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI), and household's income the quality coefficients given by the literature (Alwin 2007) are used. For the other variables the quality is predicted using the program Survey Quality Prediction (SQP, Saris et al. 2011). SQP offers Authorized Predictions based on meta-analysis of the estimates of the reliability and validity of approximately 4,000 survey items, estimates from Multitrait Multimethod (MTMM) experiments, and allows coding a request for answer if no prediction is offered yet (Saris et al. 2011). Once the quality coefficients are known the error variance can be calculated as follows:

$$\text{var}(e_i) = (1 - q^2) * \text{var}(x_i) ,$$

where $\text{var}(e_i)$ is the error variance of the indicator i , q is the quality coefficient, and $\text{var}(x_i)$ is the variance of the observed indicator i . The quality coefficients and the error variance for the variable used in this study are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Quality coefficients and error variances

	Quality coeff.	Source	Error variance for each group			
Endogeneous variables:			1	2	3	4
Left-right self- placement	0.81	SQP own coding	1.55	1.13	1.16	0.94
Immigration	0.87	SQP Authorized Prediction	0.28	0.19	0.17	0.21
Income equality	0.84	SQP MTMM Estimate	0.24	0.11	0.23	0.18
Exogenous variables:						
ISEI	0.80	Alwin (2007: 328)	0.90	0.87	0.76	0.84
Household income	0.92	Alwin (2007: 328)	1.19	1.06	0.84	1.01
Feeling about income	0.81	SQP own coding	0.22	0.21	0.10	0.12
Urbanization	0.79	SQP own coding	0.58	0.51	0.56	0.49
Education	0.95	Alwin (2007: 328)	0.42	0.34	0.40	0.35
Political Interest	0.69	SQP own coding	0.14	0.16	0.15	0.14
Year born	1.00	Alwin (2007: 328)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

3.5 Findings

Table 3.3 presents the results for the analysis of the models which test the casual relationship as argued in the literature, and the reciprocal causation. The traditional fit indices do not allow for being able to conclude whether the models can be accepted or have to be rejected. RMSEA <.08 would allow accepting the models 1 and 3, however, the p-value <.05 indicates that the models have to be rejected. This once more highlights that the traditional fit indices should not be used as explained in section 2.4.1. JRule detected misspecifications, suggesting reciprocal relationships, in each group in Model 1 and 2. Therefore, those models have to be rejected. For Model 3 only one misspecification between the endogenous variables was detected. Although this model fits the data, we believe that the reciprocal relationships are a consequence of the analysis of all groups at the same time. Therefore, we continue the analysis with Model 3 but for each group separately.

Table 3.3: Unstandardized solutions for Model 1, 2 and 3

Effect			Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
equality	→	lrscale	.70*		1.28*
equality	←	lrscale		.21*	-.39*
immi	→	lrscale	.78*		1.24*
immi	←	lrscale		.16*	-.21*
Fit of the model	χ^2		166.92	181.65	157.36
	df		86	86	84
	p-value		.00	.00	.00
	RMSEA		.077	.084	.074

Number of detected misspecifications between endogenous variables (out of 6 possibilities):

Group 1	1	1	
Group 2	2	4	
Group 3	4	4	1
Group 4	3	2	

JRule also detected misspecifications between the exogenous and endogenous variables for group 1, 2 and 3. We corrected for them by adding an effect of education on immigration in these three groups, introducing an effect of age on the issue of income equality in group 2 and of households' net income on the issue of immigration in group 3. Table 3.4 presents the final model for each group after the misspecifications were corrected and non-significant effects between the endogenous variables were left out.

Table 3.4: Unstandardized, statistical significant estimators with standardized coefficients in brackets

Effect		Group 1: Both issues important	Group 2: Only income equality important	Group 3: Only immigration important	Group 4: None of the issues important
income → lrscale equality		0.85* (.47)	.84* (.44)		
	income ← lrscale equality			0.39* (.76)	
immi → lrscale		0.76* (.34)		1.27* (.63)	
	immi ← lrscale				.11* (.26)
Fit of the model	χ^2	17.89	15.19	21.42	16.77
	df	16	15	15	18
	p-value	.33	.51	.12	.54
	RMSEA	.02	.00	.06	.00
	R ² of lrscale	.42	.30	.41	0.
N (% of sample)		236 (36.83%)	173 (27.31%)	108 (16.69%)	122 (19.17%)

* significant

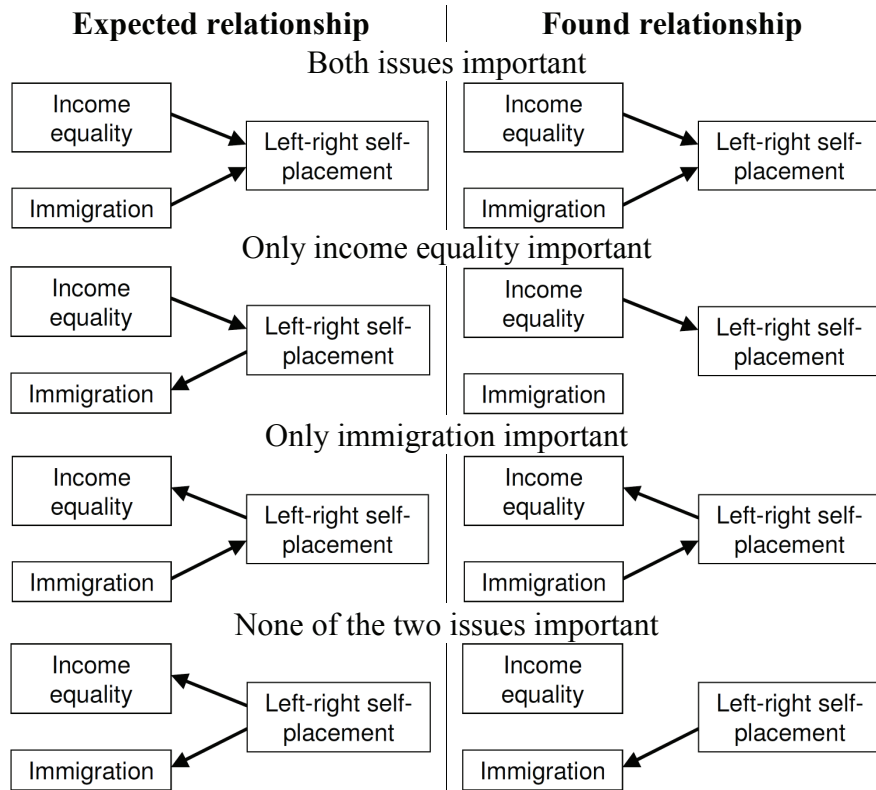
The effects we find in all groups are in the direction as one would expect: The less people agree that the government should take measures to reduce differences in income level, the more they place themselves more to the right. The less people would allow immigrants from poorer countries outside of Europe to come and live in the Netherlands, the more they place themselves to the right.

Our analysis reveals that the relationship between issues and left-right orientation is indeed conditioned by the importance people give to issues. We find different models for the four groups

separated by the importance people assign to issues. Therefore, we cannot reject the hypothesis that the relationship of issues and left-right orientation is a function of issue importance (H1) and that it is not the same for all individuals (H2). People who assign importance to the selected issues partially base their left-right orientation on these issues. Income equality affects left-right self-placement similar among those who assign importance to the issue, independent to the importance they assign to the issue of immigration (group 1: .85, group 2: .84). This similarity in the strength of the effect is not the case for people who consider immigration an important issue. For those who only consider this issue important, the effect on their left-right self-placement is much more pronounced (1.27) compared to those who also consider income equality important (.76). For those considering both issues important, income equality (.47) has a stronger effect than immigration (.34). However, the relative strength of the effects was not subject of our theoretical elaboration. We only expected that people base their position on the left-right scale for those issues which are important to them. Therefore, this hypothesis (H3) cannot be rejected.

Moreover, we argued that individuals can use their left-right orientation as a shortcut to determine their issue preferences regarding issues which are of no importance to them. Our findings show that this hypothesis (H4) cannot be rejected. For those considering only the issue of immigration important (group 3) their left-right orientation is affecting the issue preference regarding income equality (.39). For people who consider none of the issues important their left-right orientation only serves as a shortcut to determine their preferences regarding immigration (.11). Those who are only concerned about the issue of income equality (group 2), do not use their left-right orientation to form a preference about the issue which is not important for them. However, this does not mean that we have to reject the hypothesis (H4) because we argued that people may or may not use their left-right orientation as a shortcut, but investigating the reasons for this is subject for another study. Figure 3.5 illustrates the expected and found relationships between issues and left-right orientation.

Figure 3.5: Comparison of expected and found relationship between issues and left-right orientation



Finally, although not the main interest of this study, we observe that the exogenous variables affect the endogenous variables differently in the four groups. The Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) has only a significant effect on individuals' left-right orientation among those who consider income equality important (group 1 and 2). Whereby the lower the ISEI, the more people place themselves to the left. Household's net income is affecting the issue preference regarding income equality only for those who consider both issues important or none of them (group 1 and 4). The higher the income, the more they disagree that government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. Among those who only consider the issue of immigration important, their household's net income does not affect their preference regarding

income equality but regarding the issue of immigration. The higher the income, the less they allow immigration from poor countries outside of Europe. The subjective feeling about household's income has a significant effect on the issue of income equality for those who are not concerned about immigration (group 2 and 4). For those who consider income equality to be an important issue, the more difficult it is to live on present income, the more they agree that the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. For those who do not assign any importance to either of the issues, the more difficult it is to live on the present income, the less they agree that difference in income levels should be reduced by the government. Education has a significant effect on the issue of immigration for those who assign importance to at least to one issue (group 1, 2 and 3). The more educated people are, the more they support immigration from poorer countries outside of Europe. For those who do not find either of the issue important, it is the degree of urbanization which affects their issue preference regarding immigration. The more rural respondents describe the area they live in, the more they are against immigration. The other two control variables are negligible. Age has a marginal yet significant effect on income quality among those who consider this an important issue and political interest does not have an effect on the issue preference or the left-right self-placement. Table 3.5 presents the effect of the exogenous variables.

Table 3.5: Effects of the exogenous variables – unstandardized, statistical significant estimators with standardized coefficients in brackets

			Group 1: Both issue important	Group 2: Only income equality important	Group 3: Only immigrati on important	Group 4: None important
ISEI	→	left-right self-placement	-.28* (-.20)	-.41* (-.35)	-.05 (-.04)	-.07 (-.06)
Income	→					
Feeling about income	→					
Urbanization	→					
Education	→					
Political Interest	→					
Age						
ISEI	→	income equality				
Income	→		.16* (.43)	-.07 (-.21)	.04 (.11)	.26* (.73)
Feeling about income	→		-.03 (-.02)	-.52* (-.43)	.08 (.05)	.73* (.45)
Urbanization	→					
Education	→					
Political Interest	→					
Age	→			.01* (.22)		
ISEI	→	immigration				
Income	→				.17* (.50)	
Feeling about income	→					
Urbanization	→		.10 (.13)	.03 (.06)	.12 (.16)	.18* (.28)
Education			-.10* (-.26)	-.14* (-.49)	-.21* (-.54)	
Political Interest	→					
Age	→					

* significant; cursive are those effects which had to introduced according to the suggestions of JRule

3.6 Conclusion

In this study we intended to shed light on the relationship between individuals' left-right orientation and issue preferences. According to the literature, there are two opposing directions of causality of this relationship: On the one hand, people base their left-right orientation on issue preferences, on the other hand, they can use their left-right orientation to determine their preferences regarding issues. We tested both directions of causality and both models had to be rejected. We expected these results as we argued that the relationship of left-right orientation and issues is not the same for all people and would be conditioned by the importance people assign to the respective issues. Important issues have more influence on individuals' behaviour and we argued that issues which are important for individuals have an effect on their left-right orientation; meanwhile they may use their orientation as a shortcut to form preferences about issue which are of less importance to them. Our analysis confirmed these expectations. We find in a dataset from Netherlands 2012 that the relationship between individuals' left-right orientation and their issue preferences is indeed different than proposed in the literature. It is different for different people depending on how important a particular issue is for them.

This variation has implications for the study of political behaviour. The strength of the left-right ideology at the individual level is seen at its simplicity: the ratio between its relatively narrow information base versus its wide explanatory scope (Grendstad 2003: 17). In empirical research, individuals' left-right self-placement is used as an independent predictor in a wide range of models, including those of partisanship and voting behaviour (Potter 2001). It appears to be a major predictor of one's voting decision, and it was found that its importance increased in many countries over recent decades (Franklin et al. 1992; Gunther and Montero 2001 ; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). However, those models of voting usually assume that all voters make up their mind in the same way and consequently fit one single causal structure (Rosema 2006: 474). The alternative is the "assumption of causal heterogeneity": that voters might use several heuristics to come to a voting decision (Rivers 1988; Sniderman et al. 1991). Our finding make the causal structure even more

fragmented as the use of a single heuristic, the left-right orientation, is based on different variables for different people and is conditioned by the importance individuals give to issues.

However, this does not narrow the explanatory power of the left-right orientation for the study of political behaviour but scholars should be attentive that the issues that explain left-right orientation may not be the same issues for all people, and that even if they are their effects on individuals' left-right orientation may vary. As reasoned initially a differentiation between values and issues is crucial, and while we expect values to be stable over time, we know that issues change through time, across countries and among individuals. Moreover, taking the other sets of variables, the social and partisan variables, into account as well we can expect even more variation on the individual level which makes generalisations of the reasons why people placing themselves on the left-right scale very difficult. This calls for further research investigating whether and how individuals' left-right orientation is comparable.

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Appendix

3.A.1 European Social Survey Panel Component

The Panel Component of European Social Survey is a developmental project aiming at facilitating biannual cross-sectional European Social Survey and funded by Dutch Research Foundation, NWO (project no.471-09-003). The project grant is awarded to Kees Aarts and research is conducted at the University of Twente by Sedef Turper and Kees Aarts. The panel is designed as to have four subsequent waves with 8-months intervals in between and started with European Social Survey Round 5, October 2010. Respondents were recruited by probability sampling of households, being representative of the Dutch population over 16 years of age. The total number of valid interviews was 1,829 which correspond to a response rate of 60.03%.

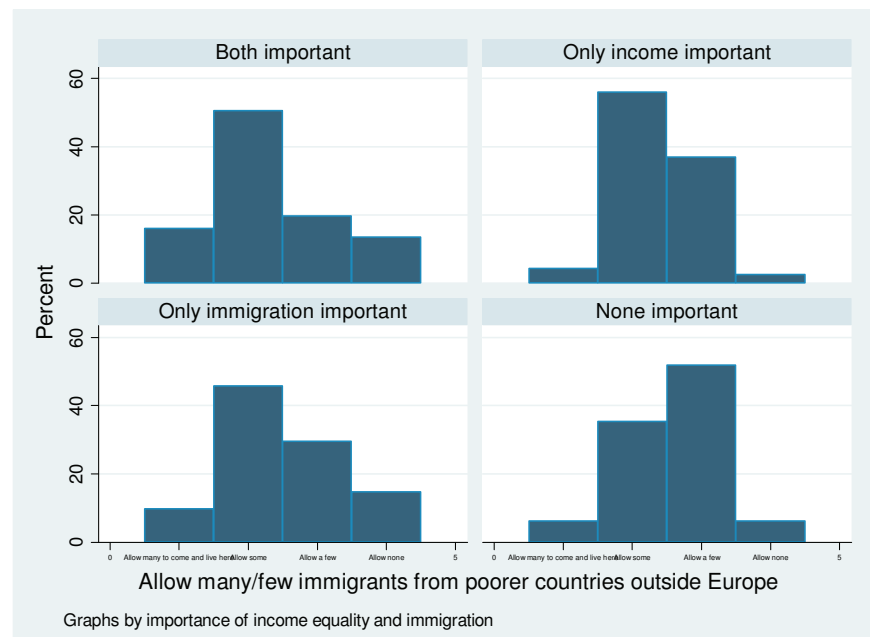
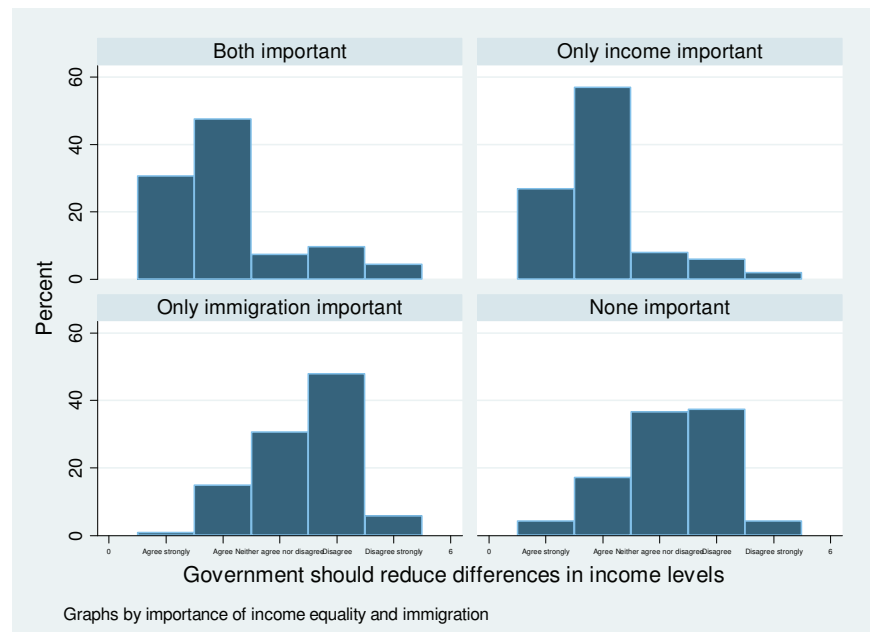
For a detailed description of the sampling method and response rates we refer to the documentation report of the ESS Round 5 (ESS Round 5: European Social Survey (2012): ESS-5 2010 Documentation Report. Edition 2.0. Bergen, European Social Survey Data Archive, Norwegian Social Science Data Services). For the subsequent waves, 1,500 of those respondents were approached to participate in the panel study, 500 of them were randomly selected for face-to-face interviews and the remainder for online interviews. The response rates were 72% and 69% for the second and third waves, respectively.

3.A.2 Exogenous variables

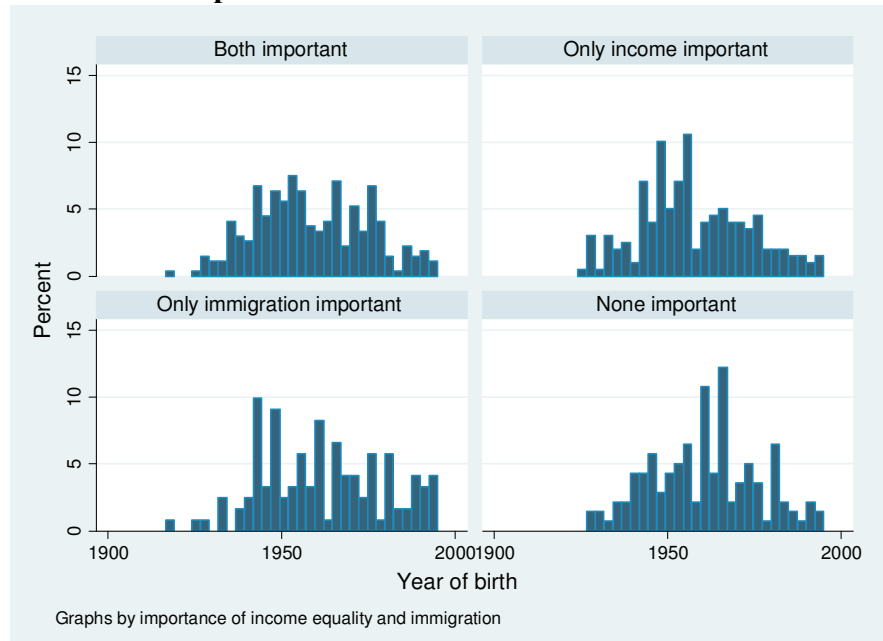
Variable of interest	Operationalization																																												
ISEI	International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI, Ganzeboom et al. 1992) ranges from 16 for non-skilled worker to 90 for judge.																																												
Highest level of education	1 ES-ISCED I . less than lower secondary 2 ES-ISCED II. lower secondary 3 ES-ISCED IIIb. lower tier upper secondary 4 ES-ISCED IIIa. upper tier upper secondary 5 ES-ISCED IV. advanced vocational. sub-degree 6 ES-ISCED V1. lower tertiary education. BA level 7 ES-ISCED V2. higher tertiary education. >= MA level																																												
Household’s net income	Using this card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate. Use the part of the card that you know best: weekly, monthly or annual income.																																												
<table><tr><td></td><td>Approximate</td><td>Approximate</td><td>Approximate</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>WEEKLY</td><td>MONTHLY</td><td>ANNUAL</td></tr><tr><td>1</td><td>€ 250 to under € 325</td><td>€ 1000 to under € 1400</td><td>€ 13.000 to under € 17.000</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>€ 325 to under € 380</td><td>€ 1400 to under € 1600</td><td>€ 17.000 to under € 20.000</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>€ 380 to under € 460</td><td>€ 1600 to under € 2000</td><td>€ 20.000 to under € 24.000</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>€ 460 to under € 550</td><td>€ 2000 to under € 2400</td><td>€ 24.000 to under € 29.000</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>€ 550 to under € 650</td><td>€ 2400 to under € 2800</td><td>€ 29.000 to under € 34.000</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>€ 650 to under € 750</td><td>€ 2800 to under € 3250</td><td>€ 34.000 to under € 39.000</td></tr><tr><td>7</td><td>€ 750 to under € 900</td><td>€ 3250 to under € 3800</td><td>€ 39.000 to under € 46.000</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>€ 900 to under € 1100</td><td>€ 3800 to under € 4800</td><td>€ 46.000 to under € 58.000</td></tr><tr><td>9</td><td>€ 1100 or more</td><td>€ 4800 or more</td><td>€ 58.000 or more</td></tr></table>			Approximate	Approximate	Approximate		WEEKLY	MONTHLY	ANNUAL	1	€ 250 to under € 325	€ 1000 to under € 1400	€ 13.000 to under € 17.000	2	€ 325 to under € 380	€ 1400 to under € 1600	€ 17.000 to under € 20.000	3	€ 380 to under € 460	€ 1600 to under € 2000	€ 20.000 to under € 24.000	4	€ 460 to under € 550	€ 2000 to under € 2400	€ 24.000 to under € 29.000	5	€ 550 to under € 650	€ 2400 to under € 2800	€ 29.000 to under € 34.000	6	€ 650 to under € 750	€ 2800 to under € 3250	€ 34.000 to under € 39.000	7	€ 750 to under € 900	€ 3250 to under € 3800	€ 39.000 to under € 46.000	8	€ 900 to under € 1100	€ 3800 to under € 4800	€ 46.000 to under € 58.000	9	€ 1100 or more	€ 4800 or more	€ 58.000 or more
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Feeling about household’s net income	Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays? 1 Living comfortably on present income 2 Coping on present income 3 Difficult on present income 4 Very difficult on present income																																												
Urbanization	Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live? 1 A big city 2 Suburbs or outskirts of big city 3 Town or small city 4 Country village 5 Farm or home in countryside																																												

Age	And in what year were you born? 1914-1995
Political Interest	How interested would you say you are in politics ? are you? (recoded) 0 Not at all interested 1 Hardly interested 2 Quite interested 3 Very interested

3.A.3 Attitude towards income equality and immigration



3.A.4 Year respondents were born



Chapter 4

Reassessing the common understanding of the left-right orientation

Abstract

One of the most prominent shortcuts people can use to make sense of the political world is, at least in European countries, the left-right concept. It can serve to facilitate communication and orientation. However, the fundamental condition for this is that people have a common understanding of the left-right schema. Therefore, much research has been done to fill the abstract labels with content. Usually scholars employ issue preferences to assign a substantive meaning to the concept. In this study I highlight the drawbacks of this approach and test whether value orientations towards equality and tradition help to understand what people have in mind when they declare themselves leftist, centrists or rightist. The value orientation towards equality and tradition are assumed to express underlying motivations that originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. Tradition provides reassurance, while social change, which is necessary to achieve equality, implies greater chaos and unpredictability. Leftist are considered to favour social change and equality, whereas rightist are expected to accept inequality in order to maintain the status quo. Therefore, this approach appears to offer an interpretation which goes beyond selective issues and hence, can be compared across time, context and individuals. However, as previous research shows, the use and meaning of the left-right concept is conditioned by the political context and an individual's expertise in politics. Taking this into account I test this with data from the European Social Survey Round 5, 2010. I find that value orientations towards equality and tradition do indeed affect an individual's left-right orientation but that this effect is conditioned by the ideological polarization between political parties and an individual's interest in politics.

4.1 Introduction

For more than two centuries the European political sphere has been divided by a one-dimensional concept labelled 'left' and 'right' at its endpoints. This left-right dimension has two functions: at the collective level it serves social orientation and facilitates political communication (Converse, 1964; Downs, 1957; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Hinich and Munger, 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997 Corbetta 2009: 623) and at the individual level it helps people to make reasonable political evaluations and choices (Knight 1985; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Popkin 1991; Hinich and Munger 1994). Empirical studies have proved the importance of the concept. Findings show that an individual's left-right orientation is a major predictor of the individual's political behaviour and in particular of their voting decision (ibid. Markowski 1997; Gunther and Montero 2001 ; Van der Eijk et al. 2005; Gunther and Kuan 2007). However, the underlying assumption is that people have a common conceptualization or understanding of the left-right schema. If they have not even a basic common understanding, the concept can neither serve to help orient nor facilitate communication. In this way, the concept fails its purposes and becomes redundant.

It is precisely because of this that many scholars are intrigued by what people have in mind when they declare themselves to be leftist, centrists or rightist. Usually, scholars choose issues which theoretically are in relation with the left-right divide and test empirically whether people's preferences regarding those issues indeed affect their left-right orientation. This approach is problematic as I will outline in this study and has the major drawback of this approach is that it does not allow comparisons over time, across context or among individuals (Dalton 2006; Mair 2007). Another, more appealing generic approach is the one taken, for instance, by Jost et al. (Jost et al. 2003b, a; 2007: 990), who use a motivated social cognition framework to explain the same phenomenon. This framework takes the psychological motives underlying left-right orientation into account. According to the authors, it is the way in which people deal with uncertainty and threat, expressed by their value orientation toward equality and

tradition, that explains their left-right orientation. This framework appears to offer an interpretation of the common understanding of the left-right concept which goes beyond selective issue preferences. That way it seems to permit comparisons across time, context and individuals. However, as appealing as this approach seems in determining the common conceptualization of the left-right schema, its explanatory power is conditioned by contextual and individual factors.

As Huber and Inglehart (1995: 110) find, the left-right dimension can be found almost wherever political parties exist, but its meanings vary in systematic ways with the underlying political and economic conditions in a given society. This is due to the fact that political actors use the left-right divide as a symbolic frame of references which allows them to position themselves, distinguish themselves from others, and thereby relate their policy stance to this position. The clearer the political alternatives are bundled together under the ideological labels ‘left’ and ‘right’, the more likely it is that there is a common understanding of the concept. In that way, individuals perceive not only the information but additionally its ideological implications, a process often referred to as ‘cueing information’ (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992: 45). The more ideologically polarized the party conflict is, the more cueing information is generated, and the more likely it is that there is a common understanding of the left-right schema.

However, although the political context can provide cueing information, individuals also have to perceive them. This depends on individuals’ characteristics such as their level of education, political interest and political knowledge. The higher those are, the more likely individuals are to use the abstract left-right concept, to perceive the ideological implications of the political actors and their policy stance, and to be able to connect the former to the latter. In sum, the value orientations toward equality and tradition appear to offer a generic interpretation of common understanding of the left-right schema, but only if individuals are offered clear political alternatives labelled “left” and “right”, and if they are capable of understanding the ideological implications. I will test this with data from the European Social Survey, Round 5, 2010.

I develop the analysis in the following steps: First, I summarize the explanations scholars find for left-right orientation, highlight the reasons why issue preferences and values need to be distinguished, and argue why the value orientation regarding equality and tradition are better *explanans* than the usually employed issue preferences (Section 3.2 to 3.4). Second, I contend that the effect values have on left-right orientation is conditioned by the ideological polarization of political parties in the country (Section 3.5) and by an individuals' level of political sophistication (Section 3.6). Third, I present further *explanans* identified in the literature (Section 3.7) and discuss them. Afterwards, the case selection and the methodology are introduced (Section 3.8 and 3.9). Finally, I present the results and draw conclusion from them (Section 3.10 and 3.11).

4.2 Substantive meaning of the left-right concept

Most scholars studying left-right orientation depart from the seminal study by Inglehart and Klingemann (1976). In this study the authors identify three components which are in relation with the left-right orientation. Freire (2008) restricts this to Western Europe. The three components are: 1) the social, 2) the partisan and 3) the value, issue-based or ideological component. However, I stated already elsewhere that what in the literature appears as components are in fact merely variable sets or factors (Weber 2011: 2). The term "components" implies being a constituent part of a left-right orientation, but the sets of variables are only related with left-right orientation. Therefore, I will refer to the variable sets as factors as follows: 1) The social factor refers to people's location in a social surrounding and their corresponding social identities (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 245); 2) The partisan factor refers to people's orientation reflecting partisan loyalties (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 244; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 207; Huber 1989; Knutsen 1997: 3; Freire 2008: 5); 3) The value, issue-based or ideological factor refers to the link between values or attitudes towards issues and left-right self-placement (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Huber 1989). The latter factor is particularly interesting in order to assign a substantive meaning to the left-right divide. Yet scholars differ in their understanding and operationalization of the value, issue-based or ideological factor which may have its seeds in the classic study of Inglehart and Klingemann (1976). The authors call this factor

issue, issue-based and ideology component. They find that it is difficult to capture because if issues are considered, it is complicated to list all those which matter, since they are numerous and often fleeting. Moreover, key issues may vary from one society to another and they may even change polarity in relation to the left-right dimension. Inglehart and Klingemann (1976: 257) recognized that the issue content of the left-right dimension had changed but they “identify a persistent and pervasive theme” (257). The authors refer to Lipset et al. (1954: 259), who twenty years before proposed the definition that “By Left we shall mean advocating social change in the direction of greater equality – political, economic, or social; by Right we shall mean supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality.” Inglehart and Klingemann (1976: 258-259) state that

“salience of economic equality may have declined somewhat in recent years but the left remains characteristically the advocate of change aimed at greater equality, stressing the importance of participation on an equal footing in political and social life. Whereas the right is characterised by its emphasis on hierarchical order, justifying the hierarchy established in a given society on the grounds that it is an essential defence against the disorders that criminals, dissenters or foreign enemies might bring.”

Thus, they conclude, the inherent dilemma in politics can be summarized as the opposition between equality and (the traditional) order (1976: 258). To test this Inglehart and Klingemann employ questions from a series intentioned to tap into various value domains. Respondents were asked to rank those issues as societal goals (see Appendix 4.A.1). Although they are clearly trying to grasp the underlying value dimensions of left-right, they label this the “key ideological theme involved in the left-right dimension”. Thus, many scholars have followed this approach ever since, using values, issue preferences, and attitudes interchangeably (Davidov et al. 2008: 584; Milic 2008). However, a clear distinction of values, issues and attitudes is necessary for studying them (Rokeach 1968). In the following section I will elaborate on this.

4.3 Distinction between values, attitudes and issue preferences

Rokeach (1968) explicitly distinguishes between values and attitudes: values transcend specific objects and situations, while attitudes focus directly on specific objects and situations. They are a standard or yardstick guiding not only attitudes but also behaviour, evaluations, and justifications of oneself or others. Moreover, values set behavioural norms and are a distinct preference for a specified end-state of existence (Rokeach 1968: 550). Attitudes can be seen as consistent tendencies to evaluate a particular object positively or negatively (Davidov et al. 2008: 584) and are usually directly measured by asking people for their opinion about a certain issue, i.e. their issue preference. However, attitudes are related to self-image and social acceptance, and therefore if respondents preserve a positive self-image, they may answer in a way that feels socially acceptable rather than correct. This is known as social desirability (Krosnick 1991, 1999).

Moreover, as values are defined as “prescriptive beliefs which set behavioural norms and may determine attitudes and identities people should adopt towards specific objects and labels” (Rokeach 1973), many scholars employ issue preferences as a substitute for values in empirical research assuming that issue preferences would reflect the underlying value orientation (Knutsen and Kumlin 2005). Besides the problem of social desirability, I argue that this approach is misleading for four further reasons: First, as already found by Inglehart and Klingemann (1976: 257), it is difficult to list all important political issues. Given the diversity of issues across time or nation, it is complicated to compare the impact of specific issues (e.g., Van Wijnen 2001; Aardal and Wijnen 2005). Secondly, while values are supposed to be stable over (a long period of) time (Inglehart 1977) and have an effect on left-right orientation, issue preferences may vary over time (Knutsen 1995). In fact, they should shift across time since they are a dynamic part of elections (Dalton 2011: 105). Thirdly, the causal direction of the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the respective issue (Weber and Saris 2010). People who consider an issue important base their left-right orientation on this issue preference, whereas if an issue is not

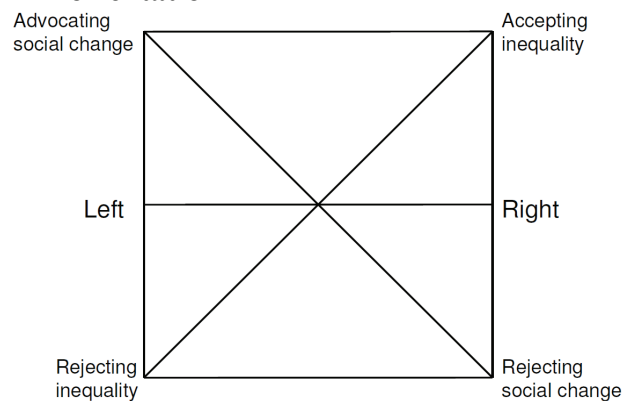
important for people they can rely on their left-right orientation as a shortcut to make up their mind about that issue. This means that issues related to the left-right concept do not only vary across time and context but also among individuals. (Dalton 2006; Mair 2007). Finally, issue preferences may simply be *ad hoc* reactions to the current political debate or when asked to state them but do not actually reflect values (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992). Therefore, issue preferences are measures of attitudes. They are no surrogate of values. Consequently, I argue that they can be omitted for the explanation of left-right orientation once the effect of values is controlled for, and in order to prevent further confusion this factor should only be labelled *value factor*. Moreover, if scholars need to operationalise the value orientations by means of issue preferences, they should explicitly specify why and how those issues reflect the underlying values. This conclusion leads to the task of specifying the value factor which I do hereafter.

4.4 The value factor

The inherent dilemma in politics, as Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) call it, indeed exists throughout the centuries, causing a binary division in societies along those two core dimensions: equality and hierarchical order. Tarnopolsky (2010) reports that in ancient Greece, during the 5th and 6th century, aristocrats were those desiring to maintain the status quo or tradition and opposing social change, while democrats were promoting greater equality which required social change. The reason for this long-lasting division finds its origin in the psychological needs and motivations expressed by these distinct values. More than half a century ago Adorno et al. (1950: 176) stated that an “individual’s pattern of thought, whatever its content, reflects his personality and is not merely an aggregate of opinions picked up helter-skelter from the ideological environment.” Tomkins (1965) argues that there are distinct cognitive and motivational styles that characterize leftists and rightists, and that these emerge even in domains which are not explicitly political. Based on their thorough literature review and meta-analysis over 50 years of research, Jost et al. (Jost et al. 2003a, b) find that a number of different epistemic motives (dogmatism–intolerance of ambiguity; cognitive complexity; closed-mindedness; uncertainty avoidance; needs for order, structure, and closure),

existential motives (self-esteem, terror management, fear, threat, anger, and pessimism), and ideological motives (self-interest, group dominance, and system justification) are all related to the expression of a rightist (versus a leftist) political orientation. They conclude from this seminal study that all of those motives originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. While tradition and stability provide reassurance and structure, social change and equality imply greater chaos and unpredictability (Jost et al. 2003b, a; Jost et al. 2007: 990). Consequently, the value orientations towards equality and tradition express these motivations and create a two-dimensional space which finds its expression in the one-dimensional left-right concept: Those on the left are advocating social change and favour equality, whereas those on the right reject social change and accept inequality. Therefore, I expect that *the value orientations toward equality and tradition affect left-right orientation (H1)*. Figure 4.1 illustrates the social cognition framework and the left-right orientation.

Figure 4.1: Social cognition framework and left-right orientation



I argued that attitude and its associated measure issue preference have to be distinguished from values and the motivations expressed by value orientations. However, while those motivations will also explain people's attitudes and issues preferences, they should not be confounded. For example: same-sex marriage and immigration are very different issues and may matter at one point in time or in one context more than in another. If these issues are related to left-right orientations, the conclusions drawn across contexts or over time

might be ambiguous, whereas the underlying motivation can be clearly compared and interpreted. If people oppose either of those issues, it shows that they reject (social) change and accept inequalities, and they will place themselves typically towards the right. Therefore, the social cognition framework seems to allow comparisons across time, context and individuals. However, I argue hereafter that its explanatory power is conditioned by contextual as well as individual factors.

4.5 Accounting for country differences

People make political decisions and act politically as individuals who are embedded in political contexts that can affect their choice and behaviours (Dalton and Anderson 2011: 3). The context can thereby affect individuals directly, indirectly or interactively. The authors who developed the social cognition framework are aware of this and recommend that further research should take the complex characteristics of social and political systems, institutions, and organizations into account (Jost et al. 2003b: 369). Thorisdottir et al. (2007) follow this advice and test the model comparing Western Europe with Eastern Europe. They argue that a great deal of the theory on the nature and psychological basis of political ideology comes from the work carried out on Western Europe, largely democratic nation states, and proceed to test whether the theory also applies in Eastern Europe. Given the distinct political regime history of Eastern Europe and its rapid transition from communism to democracy, the authors expected differences between both parts of Europe. They find that in all countries traditionalism is associated with right orientation, while equality is only associated with a left orientation in Western Europe. Moreover, in Western Europe, equality is a stronger predictor of left-right orientation than traditionalism. However, their analysis is limited due to the fact that they could include only four Eastern European countries in the analysis, namely: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The different patterns Thorisdottir et al. find in East and West Europe seem to confirm that a longer experience with democratic pluralism is more likely to produce a public with a coherent understanding of what the left-right schema means (Noël and Thérien 2008: 51). However, an earlier study by Markowski

(1997), focusing only on East European countries¹ shortly after the transition to democracy, highlights that it is not the experience with the authoritarian repression but the current ideological distance between the political parties that affects the recognition of the left-right schema in a society.

Several other studies have shown the same, namely that ideological polarization affects political preferences and behaviour (Nie and Anderson 1974; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Knutsen and Kumlin 2005; Van der Eijk et al. 2005; Dalton 2008; Freire 2008; Lachat 2008; Weßels and Schmitt 2008). Along these lines, political parties are thought to be the principal agents in transforming specific issues or, more in general, societal conflicts into the left-right divide (Barnes 1966; Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 26; Knutsen and Scarbrough 1995: 494; Gunther and Kuan 2007: 258).

Knutsen and Kumlin (2005) identify three mechanisms that may be at play: First, the more political parties present coherent policy alternatives that they bundle together under the label left or right, the more individuals learn to use the value-laden concepts with their respective labels themselves. Second, the more political actors make frequent use of those ideological labels, the more individuals will do so too. The more frequently individuals use those labels to express their opinion, the more emotionally strong, and thereby more accessible in peoples' minds they become (Sears 1993; Lavine 2002). Thus, political actors can increase the impact of values on political orientation or behaviour by making them more emotional and more accessible in peoples' minds. Third, people can only use their values as a reliable guide if they know which political party or actor shares them and which do not. Thus, they need "cueing information", i.e. incoming information which consists of 'contextual information' about the ideological implication (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992: 45). The more polarized the party conflict, the more cueing information is generated and, as a result, the impact of values on left-right orientation increases. Therefore, I expect that ideological polarization conditions the effect value orientations have on left-right orientation. More precisely, I expect *the greater the ideological polarization between political parties,*

¹ Namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia from 1992 to 1994.

the more the value orientations towards equality and tradition affect left-right orientation (H2).

4.6 Accounting for individuals' characteristics

The ideological polarization of political parties and the cueing information it generates is only half of the story. Individuals also have to perceive this. It was found that one's likelihood of using relatively abstract and general concepts, like the left-right divide, to orient oneself towards politics varies with the respondent's level of formal education (Campbell et al. 1960: 250-256; Converse 1964: 224-227; Klingemann 1973: Table 7; Knight 1985; Freire and Belchior 2011). Moreover, better education makes a person more tolerant and cosmopolitan, which has benefited the moderate left. Everything else being equal, the higher the level of education, the more likely a person is to be left (Inglehart 1997: 237-266; Norris 2004: 112-113; Noël and Thérien 2008: 47). Furthermore, political interest and political knowledge also increase the understanding of the clarity of party alternatives, as well as cognition of the left-right divide (Fiske et al. 1983; Lodge and Hamill 1986; McGraw and Pinney 1990; Zaller 1992). The combination of political interest and knowledge is considered political expertise or sophistication (Luskin 1987). The higher an individuals' level of political sophistication, the easier it is for them to develop political preferences and relate those to the left-right divide (Converse 1964; Sniderman et al. 1991: 24-25; Zaller 1992; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lachat 2008; Kroh 2009: 222) (Rossi 1959). Therefore, I expect *that the higher the political sophistication, the more value orientations towards equality and tradition affect left-right orientation (H3).*

4.7 Further anchors of left-right orientation

As initially mentioned, most studies depart from the work of Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) who identified, besides the value factor, two further factors which affect left-right orientation: the partisan and social factors. The former refers to an individual's orientation regarding partisan loyalties (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 244; Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 207; Huber 1989; Knutsen 1997); the latter to an individual's location in a social surrounding,

their corresponding social identities and social group loyalties (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976: 245).

Analysing party and left-right orientation on the same level of analysis makes the relationship between both concepts theoretically uninteresting (Rossi 1959). The acquisition of partisan preferences and left-right orientation go hand in hand (Sani 1974: 207), therefore, as Van Deth and Geurts (1989: 20) put it: “it will be hardly surprising to find that people who place themselves on the right prefer parties on the right, or people on the left preferring leftist parties”. Or in the words of Prewitt and Nie (1971: 487): “We would not be surprised to learn that persons who call themselves Catholics are more likely to be found on Sunday in Catholic than in Protestant churches“. Only longitudinal data could pin down the precise sequence of the emergence of party and left-right orientation (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 269). However, political orientation is developed early in a person’s life, and, to my knowledge, longitudinal data covering such a long period of time does not exist. Thus, when researchers employ cross-sectional data they need either to apply methods which allow accounting for the possibility of a reciprocal causal-relationship between both orientations, or choose the more parsimonious approach and omit partisan orientation for the explanation of left-right orientation. As the main interest in this study is the effect of value on left-right orientation, I opt for the second option. Party loyalties will not be regarded in this study.

By contrast, social factors shall be included, particularly since Freire (2006) has shown their relative and absolute importance. Inspired by cleavage theory (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Bartolini 2000: 215), Freire reassesses social factors and stresses the importance of the aspect of social identity. Previous studies had mainly focused on socio-structural or organizational aspects, and thereby underestimated the importance of social factors. The main argument is that not only being a member of a social group or organization but also the attitude towards social groups, organization and institutions matters for left-right orientation. Freire (2006: 361) argues that the three aspects do not have to be present at the same time, which is crucial for empirical research because few surveys contain measures of all three aspects.

4.8 Case selection

The left-right concept is a European concept that has its origins in the seating arrangements of the French National Assembly of 1789, where the right belonged to the aristocracy and the left to the radical republicans (Goodsell 1988). Although the concept only gained recognition in the French political sphere from the 1820s on and beyond France not until the turn of the twentieth century (Gauchet 1994: 247; White 2012: 199). The concept is also used on other continents (see e.g., Gunther and Kuan 2007; Jou 2010) but has the longest tradition in Europe (Laponce 1981). Therefore, I will here only consider European countries. I make use of the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 5, 2010 as it includes social and attitudinal indicators, and employs the most rigorous methodologies. The following countries are included in the analysis: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

4.9 Methods

4.9.1 Operationalization

The elaboration indicated that not only individual variables but also the contextual variable can have direct and contingent effects on left-right orientation.

$$\text{Left-right orientation} = f(\text{individual characteristics,} \\ \text{contextual characteristics})$$

In order to account for this, I will employ a linear hierarchical model.

The contextual variable I am interested in is the ideological distance between political parties which is known as ideological or party polarization. Therefore, I employ Dalton's Polarization index (PI, Dalton 2008) which is given by the formula:

$$PI_j = \sqrt{\{\sum_i VS_i * ([P_{ij} - \bar{P}_j] / 5)^2\}} \quad ,$$

where $\overline{P_j}$ is the weighted mean parties' position along the left-right scale, whereby each party is weighted by its vote share, P_{ij} is the left-right position of party i in country j and VS_i is the vote share in percent for party i . The Polarization index ranges from 0 when all parties occupy the same position on the left-right scale to 10 when spread between the two extremes of the scale. The data about parties' positions come from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). For the countries involved in this analysis, this indicator ranges from 0.68 in Poland to 6.68 in Switzerland (see Appendix 4.A.2). In order to facilitate the interpretation of this variable it is recoded to range from 0 to 1, whereby 0 is Poland and 1 is Switzerland.

The main individual variables of interest are the value orientations towards *equality* and *tradition*. I follow Thorisdottir et al. (2007: 185) who judge the following two items of Schwartz's *21-item portrait values questionnaire* (PVQ) as suitable measure of the core components of the social cognition framework. The portrait is drawn in two sentences: for tradition it is "Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family."; and for equality it is "He thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. He believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life.". Respondents have to answer: "How much like you is this person?". Answers are given on a 6 point asymmetric bipolar categorical scale (1 very much like me, 2 like me, 3 somewhat like me, 4 a little like me, 5 not like me, 6 not like me at all). This way, respondents are asked to compare the portrait to themselves, rather than themselves to the portrait, and therefore focus on the similarities rather than the differences between the portrait and themselves (Schwartz 2007).

Education is introduced as the harmonized seven categories of the European survey version of ISCED, ES-ISCED (ESS Data Report 2010 Edition 2.1 Appendix 1: Education) which allows for comparison of education levels across countries.

Furthermore, I control for the social anchors Freire (2006) identifies. The indicators for the "structural component" employed are *social class* operationalized as the International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (Ganzeboom et al. 1992), and *religiosity* as measured by the frequency with which someone

attends religious services other than special occasions such as weddings or funerals (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere 1995). The ESS provides only one indicator for the “organizational component” which is *trade union membership*, and there are no indicators to grasp the “identity component” of the social factor. Table 4.1 lists all the individual variables, partly recoded as used in the analysis.

Table 4.1: Individual level variables

Variable of interest	Operationalization
Left-right orientation	In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? 0 left to 10 right
Equality	He thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. He believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life. 0 Not like me at all 1 Not like me 2 A little like me 3 Somewhat like me 4 Like me 5 Very much like me
Tradition	Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family. 0 Not like me at all 1 Not like me 2 A little like me 3 Somewhat like me 4 Like me 5 Very much like me
Highest level of education level	1 ES-ISCED I. less than lower secondary 2 ES-ISCED II. lower secondary 3 ES-ISCED IIIb. lower tier upper secondary 4 ES-ISCED IIIa. upper tier upper secondary 5 ES-ISCED IV. advanced vocational. sub-degree 6 ES-ISCED V1. lower tertiary education. BA level 7 ES-ISCED V2. higher tertiary education. >= MA level
Religiosity	Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays? 1 Never 2 Less often 3 Only on special days 4 At least once a month 5 Once a week 6 More than once a week

	7 Every day
Social class	International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI, Ganzeboom et al. 1992) ranges from 16 for non-skilled worker to 90 for judges.
Trade union membership	Are you or have you ever been a member of a trade union or similar organisation? IF YES, is that currently or previously? 0 No 1 Yes, currently

Unfortunately, the ESS does not contain items which allow estimation of respondents' political knowledge. Therefore, the concept of political sophistication cannot be operationalised. However, it does include a question about respondents' *political interest*, which allows us to at least approximate this aspect of the concept of political sophistication. Often education is used as proxy for political sophistication. I opt here for political interest because I expect a conditional effect of this variable on the relationship between values and left-right orientation, while education has a direct effect on left-right orientation.

Theoretically I argued that the impact of value orientations on left-right orientation depends on an individual's level of political sophistication as well as the degree of ideological distance between political parties in the country where the individual lives. Statistically, this would need to be tested as a multiplicative or three-way cross-level interaction term. Models containing three-way cross-level interactions are difficult to estimate and interpret. Therefore, I opt here for the more direct course of splitting the sample political interest, grouping those together who are 'not at all or hardly interested' (51.95% of the sample) and those who are 'quite or very interested' (47.6% of the sample)². This way I test whether party polarization impacts the way value orientations affect left-right orientation among people who are not interested in politics compared to those who are interested in politics.

Finally, I apply weights to reflect the survey design and size of the population in each country. Only in this way it is guaranteed that certain types of household are neither over- nor underrepresented,

² Only 0.44% of the total 42,748 respondents did not answer the question. Those will be omitted for the analysis.

and that each country is represented in proportion to its population size.

4.9.2 Model specification

Having specified all relevant predictor variables, we model the left-right self-placement for an individual i in country j as follows (Model 1):

$$\begin{aligned} LR_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \text{Equality}_{ij} + \beta_{2j} \text{Tradition}_{ij} + \beta_{3j} \text{Education}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{4j} \text{Social Class}_{ij} + \beta_{5j} \text{Religiosity}_{ij} + \beta_{6j} \text{Trade} \\ & \text{Union}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned} \quad (3.1)$$

This equation models an individual's left-right self-placement as a result of a country mean (β_{0j}) and individual deviations from it caused by the predictor variables and the individual-specific error (ε_{ij}).

In the next step, the country means are simultaneously modelled as a function of the contextual variable party polarization:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} (\text{Party polarization}_j) + u_{0j} \quad (3.2)$$

However, modelling only the intercept as a function of party polarization is theoretically meaningless. I am interested in testing whether the impact of value orientation on left-right orientation is conditioned by ideological polarization between political parties. Therefore, in Model 2, the contextual variable party polarization and the cross-level interaction between the values and party polarization are introduced. Finally, in Model 3 the affects of equality and tradition, the slopes, in each country j are modelled as a function of Party polarization, as follows:

$$\beta_{1j} = \lambda_{10} + \lambda_{11} (\text{Party polarization}_j) + u_{1j} \quad (3.3)$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \lambda_{20} + \lambda_{21} (\text{Party polarization}_j) + u_{2j} \quad (3.4)$$

The intercept (β_{0j}) and the slopes (β_{1j} and β_{2j}) are modelled as a function of both fixed and random effects; u_{0j} , u_{1j} , and u_{2j} , are second-level random effects, while all other parameters are fixed effects.

By substituting in the equation (3.1), the following full model specification is achieved:

$$\begin{aligned}
LR_{ij} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{1j}(\text{Party polarization}_j) + \\
& + \lambda_{10}(\text{Equality}_{ij}) + \lambda_{11}(\text{Party polarization}_j * \text{Equality}_{ij}) \\
& + \lambda_{20}(\text{Tradition}_{ij}) + \lambda_{21}(\text{Party polarization}_j * \text{Tradition}_{ij}) \\
& + \beta_3 \text{Education}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{Social class}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_5 \text{Religiosity}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{Trade Union}_{ij} \\
& + u_{0j} + u_{1j}(\text{Equality}_{ij}) + u_{2j}(\text{Tradition}_{ij}) + \varepsilon_{ij}
\end{aligned} \tag{3.5}$$

Where γ_{00} corresponds to the intercept estimate; λ_{10} is the slope coefficient for the relationship between equality and left-right self-placement when the party polarization equals zero; λ_{11} corresponds to the slope coefficient for the relationship between party polarization and equality; likewise λ_{20} denotes the slope coefficient for the relationship between tradition and left-right self-placement when the party polarization equals zero, and λ_{21} the slope coefficient for the relationship between party polarization and tradition. The effects of all other individual-level variables are β_3 , β_4 , β_5 and β_6 . They are assumed to have constant effects across countries. Finally, u_{1j} and u_{2j} are the disturbance terms for the randomly varying slope coefficients λ_{10} and λ_{20} ; u_{0j} is the disturbance term for the random intercept term; and ε_{ij} corresponds to the individual level disturbance term.

4.10 Findings

Table 2 presents the results for the two groups of political interest of the empty or so-called baseline model (M0), the random intercept models only with level-1 predictors (M1) and also with the level-2 predictor and the cross-level interactions (M2), and the random intercept random slope model (M3). The intermediate steps of model testing are presented in Appendix 4.A.3 and 4.A.4.

Regarding the fit of models, the Log-likelihood and AIC indicate that the model fit improved as more predictor variables were introduced. In Table 2 I also report the variance partition coefficient (VPC) which refers to the unexplained variance due to contextual differences. Often scholars evaluate the goodness of their models with a decrease of the VPC compared to the empty model, although the direct interpretation of this statistic has to be treated with caution (Snijders and Bosker 1999; Hox 2002). As in the analyses of the present study the VPC increases, this fact requires explanation. The

increase in VPC can have three reasons: first, a variable has almost no variation at one of the levels (Roberts et al. 2011: 221), second, including additional individual predictors can change the meaning of the intercept (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002: 149-152) and third, additional country-level predictors can increase the estimate for the country variance (Roberts et al. 2011: 221). Therefore, the increase in VPC does not lead to rejecting the models, neither does it challenge employing the multilevel approach. In this study I am interested in the relationship between individual variables conditioned by a contextual variable and therefore, multilevel modelling is the most appropriate method.

The intercept (γ_{00}) in the empty model (M0) equals the average left-right self-placement across countries, which is 5.17 for people who are not interested in politics and 5.20 for those who are interested in politics. The variance of the intercept (σ_{u0j}^2) and the variance of the residual (σ_{eij}^2) allow estimating the proportion of total variance the context is account for. The variance partition coefficient (VPC), also called Intra-class coefficient or rho, is given by the formula:

$$\rho = \sigma_{u0j}^2 / (\sigma_{u0j}^2 + \sigma_{eij}^2)$$

In the empty model, for people who are not interested in politics only 2.3% and for people interested in politics only 3.4% of the total variance is attributable to context effects. This rather small proportion is due to the fact that there is not much variation in the mean left-right positions in the different countries. The mean positions vary from 4.54 in Germany to 5.97 in Hungary (see Appendix 4.A.2).

However, there are two reasons to still follow the multilevel approach. First, the data employed is hierarchical because individuals are embedded in countries and consequently there is dependency. If a single level model would be employed, the standard error would be underestimated. The multilevel models will correctly estimate the standard error for all parameters. Secondly, I argued that the contextual variable party polarization conditions the effect of the individual value orientation on left-right orientation. As both levels are of interest, the multilevel model is the adequate method.

Table 4.2: Models

	Empty model (M0)		Individual variables (M1)		Contextual variables and cross-level interaction (M2)		Contextual variables and cross-level interaction (M3)	
	Not interested in politics	Interested in politics	Not interested in politics	Interested in politics	Not interested in politics	Interested in politics	Not interested in politics	Interested in politics
<i>Fixed Effects</i>								
<i>Individual effects</i>								
Equality (λ_{10})			-0.179*** (0.034)	-0.365*** (0.024)	-0.106* (0.048)	-0.289*** (0.061)	-0.093+ (0.049)	-0.257*** (0.055)
Tradition (λ_{20})			0.063*** (0.013)	0.229*** (0.028)	0.093** (0.033)	0.221*** (0.042)	0.077* (0.033)	0.212*** (0.040)
Education (β_3)			-0.020 (0.022)	-0.047** (0.015)	-0.019 (0.022)	-0.047** (0.016)	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.045** (0.016)
Social class (β_4)			0.005* (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)
Religiosity (β_5)			0.148*** (0.029)	0.214*** (0.033)	0.149*** (0.029)	0.214*** (0.033)	0.148*** (0.029)	0.213*** (0.032)
Trade union (β_6)			-0.177** (0.055)	-0.428*** (0.090)	-0.178** (0.055)	-0.429*** (0.090)	-0.181*** (0.054)	-0.432*** (0.091)
<i>Contextual effects</i>								
Party polarization (γ_{1j})					1.699** (0.651)	1.293 (1.084)	1.406*** (0.410)	1.540 (0.951)
<i>Cross-level interaction</i>								

Model 1 estimates the effect of the value orientations towards equality and tradition on left-right self-placement. In both groups of political interest, the value orientation towards equality has a significant effect on left-right orientations in the direction as expected: the more a person is concerned about equality, the further left he/she places him/herself. This effect is more pronounced in the group of people who are interest in politics (-.365) than in the group of people who are not interested in politics (-.179). This difference between the two groups is significant ($t=-4.47$, $p\text{-value}<.001$). The value orientation towards tradition is also significant from zero and in the direction expected: the more traditional a person is, the more he/she will place him/herself to the right. This effect is also more pronounced for those who are interested in politics (.229 compared to .063) and this difference is significant ($t=5.38$, $p\text{-value}<.001$). These finding indicate that the hypothesis (H3) that the higher one's political sophistication, the more the value orientations towards equality and tradition affect left-right orientation cannot be rejected. Moreover, Model 1 also includes the other individual control variables established in the literature. Education does have a significant effect on left-right orientation, implying that higher educated people place themselves further to the left, but only among those who are interested in politics. The groups difference is again significant ($t=-1.01$, $p\text{-value}<.05$). The indicator for social class is significant from zero but negligible in both groups. Taking the variance of the variable into account, it becomes clear that social class does not affect left-right self-placement. The standardized coefficient is .000 in both groups. Being a trade union member also affect the left-right self-placement significant. Trade union members place themselves further to the left. This effect is stronger for the political interested (-.428) than the uninterested (-.177). The difference between the two groups is significant ($t=-2.38$, $p\text{-value}>.001$). Likewise differ the two groups significantly regarding the effect of religiosity ($t=1.50$, $p<.05$). It is more pronounced for people who are interested in politics (.214) than those who are not (.148). In both groups this means that the frequently people attend church services, the more they place themselves to the right.

Model 2 tests the elaborated hypotheses that the value orientations toward equality and tradition affect left-right orientation (H1) and

that his effect is conditioned by the ideological polarization between political parties (H2). Therefore, I introduce the contextual variable party polarization and the cross-level interactions between the value orientation and party polarization. Adding these variables does not change the effects of the individual predictors education, social class, trade union membership and religiosity. Given that I introduce a cross-level interaction, the effects of equality and tradition are influenced. If party polarization is zero, which is the case of Poland after recoding the variable, then equality no longer has a significant effect on the left-right orientation of those who are not interested in politics. It remains significant only for those who are interested in politics. Value orientation towards tradition stays significant in both groups when party polarization is zero, and the group difference remains also significant ($t=2.4$, $p\text{-value}<.001$). In order to interpret the cross-level interactions, Table 4.3 presents the marginal effects and standard errors of the interaction terms. The marginal effects describe the effect of change in equality and tradition on left-right self-placement depending on the value of the conditioning variable party polarization. Table 4.3 present the effect when party polarization is one. For both groups it shows that equality has a significant effect on left-right orientation as party polarization increases. This effect is not different in the two groups ($t=-.19$, $p\text{-value}>.1$) Tradition only has a significant effect on left-right orientation as party polarization increases but only for those who are interested in politics. The difference between the two groups is significant ($t=2.79$, $p\text{-value}<.001$).

Table 4.3: Marginal effect of equality and tradition on left-right self-placement conditioned by party polarization (Model 2)

	Group I: Not or hardly interested in politics	Group II: Quite or very interested in politics
Equality	-.383*** (.112)	-.558*** (.929)
Tradition	-.148 (.098)	.250* (.104)

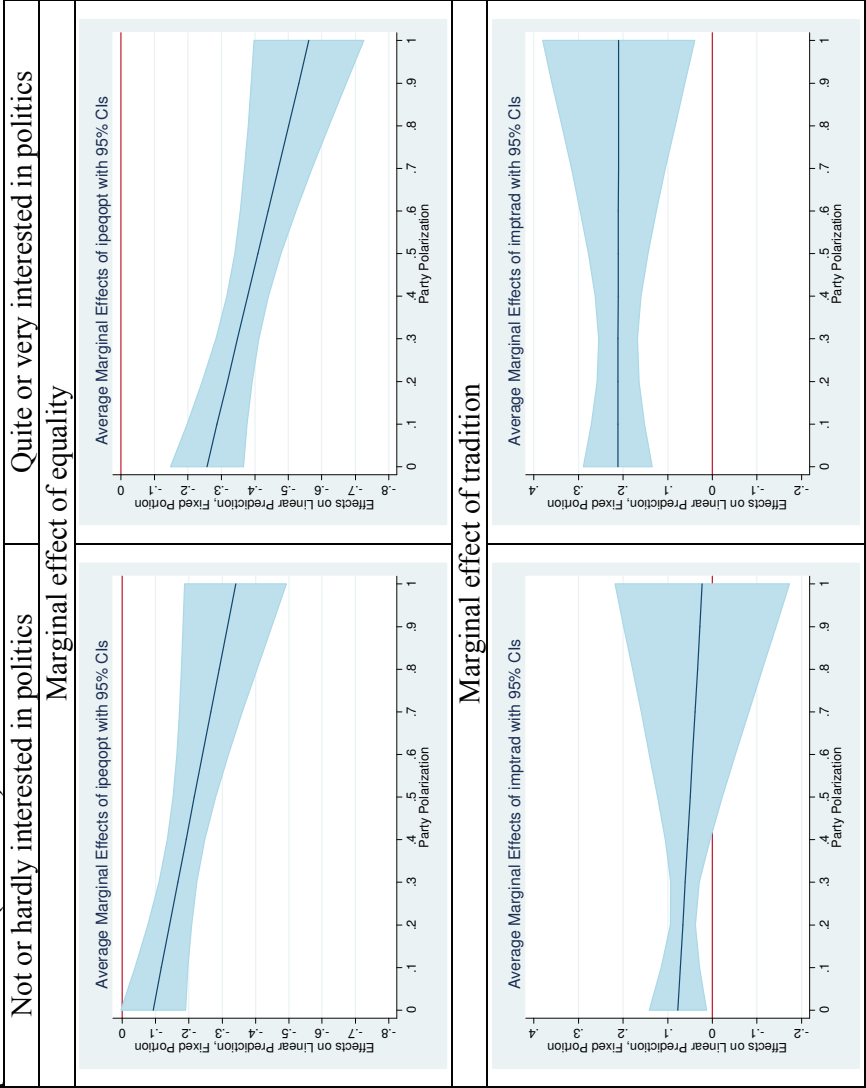
Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.1$

In Model 4 I let the effects of the value orientations vary across countries, and test whether the contextual variable and the cross-level interactions explain this variation. This does not affect the other individual predictors of left-right orientation, and changes the findings only slightly compared to the previous model.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the marginal effects of the interaction terms. The lines display the effect of the value orientations on left-right orientation as party polarization increases. 95% confidence intervals around the line allow determining the conditions under which party polarization has a statistically significant effect whenever the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval are both above or below the zero line. For people who are not interested in politics, it appears the tradition does not have a significant effect, while equality does have a significant effect but only if party polarization is higher than 0.1, on the 0-1 scale. The lines display that the effect of the value orientations towards equality on left-right orientation is stronger as party polarization increases in both groups of political interest. The effect in both groups is not significantly different ($t = -.35$, $p\text{-value} > .1$). In turn, the effect of tradition on left-right self-placement is significantly different in both groups ($t = 2.14$, $p\text{-value} < .001$). Only if people are interested in politics their value orientation toward tradition affects their left-right orientation.

Figure 4.2: Marginal Effect of equality and tradition on left-right self-placement conditioned by party polarization (Model 3)



These findings highlight the importance of contextual variable party polarization to explain an individual's left-right orientation. Model 1 which only included individual predictors supported hypothesis 1 that value orientations toward equality and tradition affect left-right orientation. The findings also suggested that hypothesis 3 cannot be rejected because the effects of the values are significantly different for the two groups of political interest. However, the results change once the contextual variable party polarization and its interaction with the values is taken into account. The value orientation toward equality remains significant but does not change depending on a person's interest in politics. In both groups the effect of the value orientation toward equality increases the more ideologically polarized the party conflict in a country is. In contrast, the value orientation toward tradition does change depending on political interest. Only the value orientation toward tradition of the political interested does affect their left-right orientation but this effect remains the same as ideological polarization between political parties rises. This means all three hypotheses have to be rejected as they were formulated for value orientations toward equality and tradition together.

4.1 Conclusion

In this study I aimed to understand the common conceptualization of the left-right schema. The ideological labels 'left' and 'right' can only serve their purpose at the individual level, being a shortcut to make reasonable political evaluations and choices, if individuals share a common conception of them (Zechmeister 2006: 152). This common understanding is usually assessed by relating people's issue preferences to the left-right divide. As outlined in this study, there are several reasons why this approach is problematic and ultimately does not allow comparisons among individuals, across context and over time and hence, no generalisable or comparative conclusions can be drawn. Therefore, in this paper, I tested the motivated social cognition framework to explain the phenomena (Jost et al. 2003b). According to this model, it is the way people manage uncertainty and anxiety

which forms their political orientation. These motivations are expressed in the value orientations towards equality and tradition. People who place themselves on the left are those who advocate change and equality, while people on the right resist change and accept inequality because this generally provides reassurance and structure, whereas the former implies greater chaos and unpredictability. Although this appears to be universally applicable, I argue that the impact of value orientations on left-right orientation depends on the clarity of political alternatives in a country and whether a person perceives this clarity.

The results of the analyses show that the social cognition framework does not help to understand the common conceptualization of the left-right orientation. The impact of its two core components, the value orientations toward equality and tradition, on left-right orientation are conditioned by a person's interest in politics and the ideological polarization of political parties in his or her country. Moreover, those conditional effects vary. The effect of the value orientation toward equality does not depend on an individual's interest in politics but is moderated by the degree of ideological polarization of the political parties in his or her country. The more polarized the political parties in a country are, the more the value orientation toward equality affects left-right orientation. In contrast, the value orientation toward tradition only affects an individual's left-right orientation when this person is interested in politics and this independent of the degree of ideological polarization of political parties. In sum, the value orientations considered in this study affect left-right orientation but only for some people in some countries.

These findings end up challenging, in some way, the utility of the left-right concept because this study confirmed once more that the left-right orientation is not comparable across countries and among individuals. However, this does not mean that the left-right concept has to be dismissed. Instead, it should motivate further research because although no empirical evidence was found, left-right orientation is not only a major predictor of political behaviour, but the concept

remains one of the most prominent heuristic aids employed daily by experts, journalists and citizens to communicate. The question remains: what do have people in mind when they declare themselves to be leftist, centrists or rightist?

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Appendix

4.A.1 Indicators for societal goals

Support for socioeconomic and political equality:

- 1) Seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities.
- 2) Giving people more say in important government decisions.

Hierarchical order:

- 3) Maintaining order in the nation
- 4) The fight against crime.

4.A.2 Country characteristics

County	Left-right self-placement			Party polarization
	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Missing in %	
Belgium	4.98	1.94	3.58	2.44
Bulgaria	4.98	1.94	3.58	1.73
Croatia	4.87	2.39	21.53	1.97
Cyprus	5.14	2.85	26.22	0.82
Czech Rep.	5.30	2.44	9.30	2.63
Denmark	5.20	2.15	4.44	2.86
Estonia	5.43	0.20	16.29	1.41
Finland	5.71	2.00	4.84	2.02
France	4.70	2.29	5.26	2.75
Germany	4.54	1.78	6.90	2.69
Great Britain	5.07	0.19	15.69	1.67
Greece	5.11	2.02	30.05	1.65
Hungary	5.97	2.39	13.39	1.69
Ireland	4.96	1.72	14.21	0.69
Netherlands	5.3	2.00	4.87	2.04
Norway	5.49	2.1	2.65	5.03
Poland	5.63	2.21	14.45	0.68
Portugal	4.97	2.14	31.16	2.41
Slovakia	4.77	2.48	14.44	3.49
Slovenia	4.85	2.35	30.94	1.33
Spain	4.64	1.97	9.76	1.80
Sweden	5.54	2.29	3.34	3.25
Switzerland	5.12	2.00	5.44	6.68

4.A.3 Models: Not or hardly interested in politics

	Random Intercept							Random intercept – random slope		
	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7		
Fixed Effects										
<i>Individual effects</i>										
Equality (λ_{10})		-0.184*** (0.040)	-0.179*** (0.034)	-0.179*** (0.034)	-0.106* (0.048)	-0.095* (0.048)	-0.104* (0.050)	-0.093+ (0.049)		
Tradition (λ_{20})		0.120*** (0.014)	0.063*** (0.013)	0.063*** (0.013)	0.093*** (0.033)	0.095** (0.034)	0.076* (0.032)	0.077* (0.033)		
Education (β_3)			-0.020 (0.022)	-0.020 (0.022)	-0.019 (0.022)	-0.019 (0.022)	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.018 (0.022)		
Social class (β_4)			0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)		
Religiosity (β_5)			0.148*** (0.029)	0.148*** (0.029)	0.149*** (0.029)	0.148*** (0.029)	0.148*** (0.029)	0.148*** (0.029)		
Trade union (β_6)			-0.177** (0.055)	-0.178** (0.054)	-0.178** (0.055)	-0.180*** (0.054)	-0.179** (0.055)	-0.181*** (0.054)		
<i>Contextual effects</i>										
Party polarization (γ_{1i})				0.225 (0.268)	1.699** (0.651)	1.585*** (0.446)	1.498* (0.605)	1.406*** (0.410)		

<i>Cross-level interaction</i>							
Party pol. * Equality (λ_{11})							-0.247* (0.113)
Party pol. * Tradition (λ_{22})							-0.054 (0.129)
Intercept (γ_{00})	5.165*** (0.071)	5.494*** (0.179)	5.306*** (0.191)	5.241*** (0.215)	4.843*** (0.255)	4.795*** (0.239)	4.891*** (0.240)
<i>Random Effects</i>							
Std. Dev. Intercept (σ_{u0j})	.307*** (.030)	.288*** (.031)	.341*** (.039)	.341*** (.039)	.338*** (.040)	.513*** (.128)	.403*** (.098)
Std. Dev. Residuals (σ_{eij})	1.917*** (.055)	1.903*** (.055)	1.889*** (.057)	1.889*** (.056)	1.888*** (.057)	1.886*** (.056)	1.887*** (.056)
Std. Dev. Equality (σ_{u1j})						.090*** (.025)	.090*** (.024)
Std. Dev. Tradition (σ_{u2j})						.046 (.029)	.044*** (.040)
VPC	2.5%	2.2%	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%		
Observations	18,019	17,622	16,212	16,212	16,212	16,212	16,212
Number of groups	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
Log likelihood	-34,196.979	-33,285.025	-30,296.147	-30,295.920	-30,292.795	-30,289.533	-30,279.547
AIC	65,894.11	64,744.81	55,250.58	55,252.17	55,247.26	55,240.14	55,249.28
Robust standard errors in parentheses							
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + <0.1							

4.A.4 Models: Quite or very interested in politics

	Random Intercept					Random intercept - random slope		
	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Fixed Effects								
<i>Individual effects</i>								
Equality (λ_{10})		-0.381*** (0.026)	-0.365*** (0.024)	-0.365*** (0.024)	-0.289*** (0.061)	-0.256*** (0.055)	-0.294*** (0.061)	-0.257*** (0.055)
Tradition (λ_{20})		0.299*** (0.034)	0.229*** (0.028)	0.229*** (0.028)	0.221*** (0.042)	0.215*** (0.041)	0.222*** (0.039)	0.212*** (0.040)
Education (β_3)			-0.047*** (0.015)	-0.047*** (0.015)	-0.047*** (0.016)	-0.046*** (0.016)	-0.046*** (0.016)	-0.045*** (0.016)
Social class (β_4)			0.006*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)
Religiosity (β_5)			0.214*** (0.033)	0.214*** (0.033)	0.214*** (0.033)	0.216*** (0.033)	0.211*** (0.033)	0.213*** (0.032)
Trade union (β_6)			-0.428*** (0.090)	-0.428*** (0.090)	-0.429*** (0.090)	-0.429*** (0.090)	-0.433*** (0.091)	-0.432*** (0.091)
Contextual effects								
Party polarization (γ_{11})				0.300 (0.326)	1.293 (1.084)	1.441 (0.971)	1.386 (1.015)	1.540 (0.951)

<i>Cross-level interaction</i>									
Party pol. * Equality (λ_{11})									
Party pol. * Tradition (λ_{22})									
Intercept (γ_{00})	5.205*** (0.094)	5.735*** (0.150)	5.597*** (0.263)	5.511*** (0.290)	5.230*** (0.478)	-0.268+ (0.148) 0.029 (0.132)	-0.315* (0.126) 0.040 (0.130)	-0.255+ (0.146) -0.014 (0.116)	-0.305* (0.123) -0.002 (0.117)
<i>Random Effects</i>									
Std. Dev. Intercept (σ_{u0j})	.410*** (.066)	.372*** (.061)	.446*** (.069)	.443*** (.071)	.444*** (.071)		.628*** (.143)	.577*** (.072)	.727*** (.123)
Std. Dev. Residuals (σ_{eij})	2.179*** (.123)	2.112*** (.119)	2.081*** (.012)	2.081*** (.113)	2.080*** (.113)		2.079*** (.113)	2.077*** (.112)	2.075*** (.112)
Std. Dev. Equality (σ_{u1j})							.094*** (.037)		.098*** (.051)
Std. Dev. Tradition (σ_{u2j})								.086*** (.014)	.089*** (.030)
VPC	3.4%	3.0%	4.4%	4.3%	4.4%				
Observations	18,019	17,622	16,212	16,212	16,212		16,212	16,212	16,212
Number of groups	23	23	23	23	23		23	23	23
Log likelihood	-34,196.98	33,285.03	-30,296.15	-30,295.92	-30,292.80		-30,289.53	-30,279.55	-30,276.45
AIC	68,399.96	66,580.05	60,610.29	60,611.84	60,609.59		60,607.07	60,587.09	60,586.9

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + <0.1

Chapter 5

Conclusions:

The present and the future of left-right orientation

The aim of this dissertation was to reassess what explains that people declare themselves to be leftist, centrist or rightist. This is a common exercise in political science because the ideological labels 'left' 'right' contain a variety of associations which change over time, across context and among individuals. Therefore, revisiting the common understanding of the concept is crucial to reassess its importance. In this dissertation, I focus on individual left-right orientation and study three different aspects. Firstly, the measurement instrument of left-right orientation is considered because before any theoretical concept can be studied empirically it has to be sure that the measure of the same concept is comparable across groups and countries. The main questions set out to be answered were whether the ideological labels 'left' and 'right' are fixed references points and whether people use the measurement of left-right orientation in the same way.

Secondly, the relationship between an individual's issue preferences and left-right orientation was theoretically reconsidered because the literature establishes two opposite directions of causality between issue preferences and left-right orientation. Empirically, in this dissertation it was tested if and how the importance an individual assigns to the issues in question conditions this relationship, when it comes to answer the question of whether issues preferences allow determining the common understanding of the left-right schema. Finally, I also focus on the question of whether value orientations help to understand what people have in mind when they declare themselves leftist, centrist or rightists. Therefore, I tested an approach designed to explain the phenomena which appeared universally valid and, therefore, seemed to offer a valid explanation which could transcend time, context and individuals. However, as

the left-right concept is conditioned by individual and contextual factors, these were necessarily taken into account. Before embedding the findings of these three studies into the general debate, I will summarize briefly the main contributions of each chapter and discuss some directions for further research.

5.1 The measurement of left-right orientation

A commonly found explanation for the enduring existence and remaining importance of people's left-right orientation is that they are willing to place themselves on a scale labelled as 'left' and 'right' at its endpoints. Scholars argue that stating a left-right position implies that people recognize the left-right scale and that this implies the lowest level of the understanding of the concept. From then on, the left-right self-placement is used as an indicator for left-right ideology, left-right identity and left-right orientation. However, the terminology in the literature is deluding. Particularly, it needs to be clarified that placing oneself on the left-right scale means taking a position and, in consequence, it shall measure political orientation (Van Hiel 2011: 181). Nonetheless, it is just a response to a request for an answer. Therefore, to be sure that left-right self-placement can be used as an indicator for left-right orientation, it has to be verified that it measures the same concept across groups and across countries.

One reason to expect variation between groups and countries is that the 'left' and 'right' endpoints of the response scale do not necessarily reflect the endpoints of the left-right dimension. For example, Person A considering him- or herself a leftist uses the endpoint on the left of the scale to describe her position. A different person B, more leftist than person A, will use the same position as there is no further option to the left. Finally, a third person C, similar left as person A but aware of the fact that people like C use this endpoint to describe their positions, will then place himself further to the centre. This means that the relationship between the subjective opinion scale and the response scale is different for the three persons. A way to overcome this problem is to offer 'fixed references points' (Saris and Rooij 1988). In the case of the left-right scale, adding the term 'extreme' seems to fix this relation

between the opinion and response scale because there is no position further to the left/right than the extreme left/right.

In chapter 2, I compared the positions people take on the scale (mention the scales with extreme and without the extreme). I expected that people who have higher levels of education, and political interest and live within a country with longer democratic tradition would be more familiar with the left-right concept and, therefore, make a distinction between the two response scales. This expectation was not confirmed. On average only people in the eastern part of Germany, Finland and France make a distinction between the two response scales. However, this only matters for the relationship between left-right orientation and another variable of interest, and I offered a correction which then allows comparing also those three divergent cases to the rest. This means that measurement equivalence is assured which, to my knowledge, was not yet established. With the exception of the just mentioned cases, people perceive the ideological labels 'left' and 'right' as fixed reference points, and use the left-right response scale in the same way. Thus, the precondition for comparing left-right orientation is fulfilled.

5.2 Issue preferences as explanations of left-right orientation

After having established that the measurement of left-right orientation is comparable, the following chapters were dedicated to explain an individual's left-right orientation. Scholars have identified several factors that have a direct or contingent impact on left-right orientation. Those factors that affect left-right orientation directly contain political implications which allow shedding light on the meaning of left-right orientation. The political implications refer to policy or issue stances. Therefore, it is common practice to relate issue preferences to the left-right concept. In particular, as it is expected that an individual's issue priorities will compensate for vanishing social and political ties (Franklin et al. 1992: 400). However, as well established in the literature, two opposed, equally plausible directions of causality are possible: individuals can base their left-right orientation on their issue preferences but they can

also use their left-right orientation as a shortcut to determine issue preferences.

In Chapter 3, my co-author and I argue that the direction of causality is conditioned by the importance individuals assign to the issue in question. People who consider an issue to be very important to them personally, care much more deeply and are especially concerned about it (Krosnick 1988). This motivates them to seek relevant information about this issue (Zaichkowsky 1985; Berent and Krosnick 1993) and to think about that information (Berent 1990). Consequently, they are more aware of this issue and do not need to rely on their left-right orientation in order to determine their preferences. In contrast, people who do not consider an issue important, can use their left-right orientation as a shortcut to substitute information they do not have available and hence, base their issue preference on their left-right orientation. Theoretically, we also considered the option of cross-pressure situations which would lead to ambivalence or withdrawal. This can be expected when individuals consider two equally important issues that are contradictory to each other, or at least, connected to opposite positions on the left-right scale. Empirically, this third scenario could not be tested because the available data did not contain issues which could have created any cross-pressure situation.

We find that the relationship between issue preferences and left-right orientation is indeed conditioned by the importance people assign to the respective issues. If they find an issue important they will base their left-right position on it. If they do not find it important, they may or may not use their left-right orientation to determine their issue preferences. It was not the aim of this study to analyse when people use their left-right orientation as shortcut. However, the findings imply that issue preferences only matter for left-right orientation when people assign importance to the issue in question or if they rely on their left-right position to determine their issue preference. However, it is not any issue preference *per se* that serves to understand what people have in mind when they place themselves on the left-right scale.

5.3 The motivate social cognition framework as explanation of left-right orientation

In Chapter 4, I further consider issue preferences as an explanation for left-right orientation and identify four reasons why they do not seem to allow determining a common understanding of the left-right schema that could transcend individuals, context or time. First, issue preferences are used as indicators for attitudes but attitudes are also related to self-image and social acceptance. If respondents want to preserve a positive self-image, they may answer in a socially desirable manner rather than in a true way (Krosnick 1991, 1999). Secondly, it is difficult to list all important political issues (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 257). Thirdly, the importance of issues varies across time, context and individuals (Dalton 2006; Mair 2007). Finally, reported issue preferences may merely be *ad hoc* reactions to the current political debate or simply to the question posed (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992).

Notwithstanding, one should bear in mind that issue preferences are actually employed to reflect on the underlying value orientations. Lipset et al. (1954: 259) define that “By Left we shall mean advocating social change in the direction of greater equality – political, economic, or social; by Right we shall mean supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality.” Jost et al. (2003b; 2003a) conclude from their meta-analysis over 50 years of research that this distinction originated in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and fear. While tradition and stability provide reassurance and structure, social change implies greater chaos and unpredictability. Consequently, the value orientations towards equality and tradition express these motivations and create a two-dimensional space which finds its expression on the one-dimensional left-right divide. Then, those on the left are advocating social change and favor equality, whereas those on the right reject social change and accept inequality. Therefore, the motivated social cognition framework appeared to offer an explanation that seemed to be universally valid in the sense that it transcends time, context and individual characteristics.

But the literature in the field identified contingent effects of an individual's political sophistication and the degree of ideological conflict of the political parties on the factors affecting left-right orientation, as well as on each other. People who have a higher level of political sophistication, which is considered a combination of interest in, knowledge of and attentiveness to politics (Luskin 1987), can easier develop their political preferences and relate them to the abstract ideological labels 'left' and 'right'. Therefore, they also need to know where to locate their political preferences in this one-dimensional political space. This depends on the political actors in a country which use the left-right concept to position and distinguish themselves from others. The clearer they summarize their policy stances regarding issues under the ideological labels 'left' and 'right', the more individuals are able to relate those issues to their position in the left-right dimension. Furthermore, clearer policy alternatives are found in contexts with higher degrees of ideological polarization between the political parties.

For the stated reasons, I took the contingent effects into account when testing the motivated social cognition framework empirically. The findings of this study confirmed the contingent effects of political interest, used as the only possible approximation of political sophistication, and political polarization. The value orientation toward equality affects left-right orientation but the size of this effect is conditioned by political interest and party polarization. The value orientation toward tradition also affects left-right orientation but only for political interested people and independent of party polarization. This implies that the effect of values on left-right orientation is conditioned by individual and contextual factors and, hence, the motivated social cognition framework does not serve to understand unconditionally why people declare themselves leftists, centrist or rightists.

5.4 Limitations and direction for further research

This dissertation aimed to reassess empirically the theoretical concept of left-right orientation. As all empirical research, this dissertation is also limited by the available data. Given that the studies were based on cross-sectional data, it was not possible to include party orientation and left-right orientation on the same level of analysis because they influence each other mutually. Once people know their left-right position, they will favour the political party which is closest to them (Downs 1957). But the perceived party position can also be the reason to place oneself on the left-right scale (Converse 1964). As described in Chapter 3, estimating reciprocal effects is problematic but not impossible. However, given the data and complexity of the models which form part of this dissertation it was not possible to include party orientation.

Moreover, usually people are asked at the same time for their left-right orientation, the political party they feel closest to and for which party they voted in the last national elections. For instance, in the ESS, respondents are first asked if and for whom they voted in the last national elections, then about other political activities, afterwards if and to which political party they feel closer to, if and of which party they are a member of and only right afterwards for their left-right self-placement. Thus, party position may have a priming or projection effect on the later left-right self-placement. Longitudinal data would allow the detection of the direction of causality. Alternatively, experimental designs and survey experiments could be thought of to avoid asking about party identification, last casted vote, vote intention and left-right orientation, all in immediate sequence.

Additionally, it was not possible to operationalise social factors properly. Freire (2006a) highlights the importance of social identity but the data employed in this dissertation did not allow taking this aspect of social factors into account. Likewise, it was not possible to operationalise political sophistication as it is usually conceptualised in the literature. Cross-national surveys, such as the ESS, aim to allow cross-national comparison and, therefore, cannot

include country specific measures of political knowledge. However, the studies included in this dissertation highlighted the importance of conditional variables. Further research should include other conditional variables, at the individual and contextual level, which increase the amount of cueing information and affect people's perception of this information, such as political campaigns or media exposure. Finally, the multilevel approach taken in Chapter 4 did not allow correcting for measurement error as it was done in the previous chapters. This means that it was not possible to distinguish between the variation caused by individual or contextual variables, and the inherent measurement error. Given the advantage of multilevel modelling to account for individual and contextual variables, as well as the interaction between both levels, further research should also focus on developing multilevel techniques that allow correcting for measurement error.

5.5 General conclusion

For more than half a century scholars have repeatedly reassessed the factors which affect an individual's left-right orientation. The goal when analysing the left-right orientation, just like in this dissertation, is ultimately to understand what people have in mind when they use the ideological labels. Only if people have a basic common understanding of the left-right concept, it can serve to facilitate orientation and communication. People need to be able to select at least some of the possible meanings and assign them correctly to their positions in the left-right dimension. In so doing, these meanings can refer to social or political groups, issues or values. Whether they serve as referent for an individual's left-right orientation ultimately depends on the individual itself and the context he or she is surrounded by. Moreover, the groups, issues or values can be present or lie in the past because the left-right schema has the remarkable ability to accommodate new arising conflicts and new patterns of competition. The concept seems to be able to absorb any meaning that follows a binary schema, i.e. that it can be uniquely associated with either the left or the right but not with both at the same time (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989: 219). The more meanings are involved and the more often it is used in different settings, the more abstract the concept is and the more likely it is to

be employed for comparisons (Sartori 1970). In turn, if the concept absorbs too many associations, then it fails to serve the purpose of facilitating orientation and communication.

There are three main reasons why it appears that the left-right concept did not fail and it still serves its purposes. First, it is a major predictor for voting choice (Franklin et al. 1992; Gunther and Montero 2001 ; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). Kroh (2007) argues that this is the functional meaning of the left-right concept which justifies its relevance because it explains political attitudes and behaviour. The second reason is that people take a position on the left-right scale when they are asked to do so. It is argued that placing oneself on the left-right scale means recognizing it and shows the lowest level of understanding of the concept. The third reason is given by the fact that people, experts and journalists use it daily when referring to national politics but also to the political phenomena that occur in other countries. To illustrate this point, I offer some headlines of national newspapers that explain the election results in different countries: “*Franța, la stângă*” (18/05/2012, Cotidianul, Romania), “*Mitte-Links-Bündnis gewinnt Lokalwahlen in Rumänien*” (11/06/2012, Der Standard, Österreich), “*La Germania svolta a destra*” (28/09/2009, Corriere de la Sera, Italy), “*La izquierda italiana resucita con brío en las elecciones municipales*” (31/05/2011, El Pais, Spain) “*Spanish Right heads for biggest election victory in decades*” (19/11/2011 The Telegraph, United Kingdom), “*Élections. Et si les Anglais roulaient à droite?*” (15/04/2010, Libération, France). From these examples, it seems rather clear that the left-right concept has face validity. Or as Laponce (1981: 56) finds the left-right schema provides a kind of political esperanto used to explain politics across countries. People across countries understand what it means when journalists report that the centre-left coalition wins local elections in Romania or that Germany turns right. It seems they have the basic understanding which is necessary to keep the ideological labels left-right alive.

Nonetheless, political scientists run the risk of conceptual stretching if they analyse what and how much the left-right orientation explains before answering the fundamental question of what the concept means (Sartori 1970). Therefore, this dissertation aims to

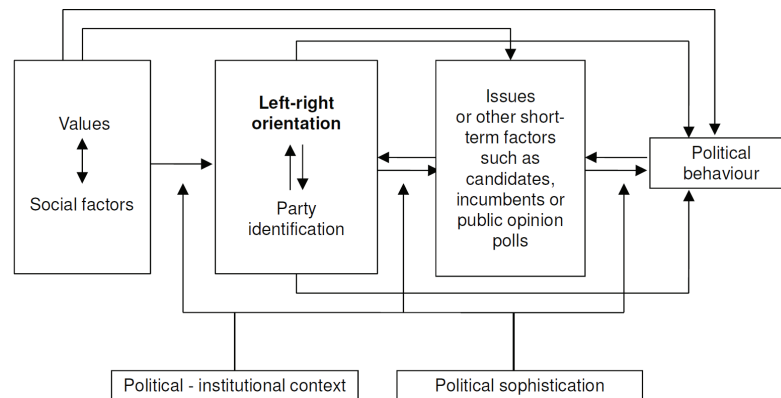
clarify the understanding of the left-right concept nowadays. It is crucial to reassess the explanations of the concept because of its changeable nature. Moreover, the work of Downs (1957), that stimulated thinking about political competition and voter alignment in the one-dimensional left-right scale, dates back more than half a century ago. Like the other original studies¹ of political behaviour, it was based on the stability of party preference of most voters, and their firm position in the cleavage structure of a particular given country. As Thomassen (2005) summarizes, just a decade later, the concern of scholars changed from explaining the persistence found, to explain change in the period of flux starting from then on. After the 1960s, the process of societal modernization along with the process of individual modernization started. The enormous rise of the average level of education increased individual's cognitive skills. This together with the increasing and diverse mass media which dramatically decreased information costs caused higher levels of political sophistication. The more sophisticated people are, the less they are expected to rely on shortcuts. Furthermore, the economic development, the growing importance of the service sector, and the geographical mobility made an individual's embedment in the social structure less stable. Therefore, traditional social cleavages, social class and religion, have become less important for political behaviour (Dalton 1984; Franklin et al. 1992; Kaase and Klingemann 1998). Likewise, the societal changes in the second half of the twentieth century led to the vanishing of party loyalties. The number of people identifying with a particular political party is declining (Kühnel and Fuchs 1998; Dalton 2000). Given these developments, my focus in this dissertation was mainly on issue and values. However, the changes which took place obviously did not affect everyone in the same way; neither did they necessarily mark the erosion in the importance of the left-right schema. But they require the reconsideration of the factors which have an impact on an individual's left-right orientation.

¹ The Columbian School, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), stressed the importance of individuals' position in the social structure and the Michigan School, Campbell et al. (1960), highlighted the importance of party identification.

The second reason that explains why the concept endures is because people position themselves on a scale labelled ‘left’ and ‘right’ at its endpoints. However, this has to be refuted by the fact that we cannot distinguish between the respondents who state their position just because they were asked to do so or because they truly have a left-right position.

Finally, this leaves the question of whether an individual’s left-right orientation persists as an analytical concept when it comes to explain political attitudes and behaviour. It is argued that left-right orientation is a parsimonious single concept that powerfully predicts mass attitudes and political behaviour (Coughlin and Lockhard 1998; Potter 2001). Additionally, people only need to know some of the meanings of the concept and assign them correctly to their positions in the left-right dimension. Thus, it seems to be enough to find certain associations under certain conditions or, to put it differently, to identify some associations and what systematically predicts variation in these associations. If this is the case, scholars using the left-right orientation to explain political behaviour have to take this into account and specify expectations for people with different characteristics in different surroundings at different times. Figure 5.1 illustrates the causal relationship of all the factors under consideration in this dissertation with an extension to political behaviour.

Figure 5.1: Causal relationships in connection with political behaviour



Yet, when one has to control for all possible factors, an individual's left-right orientation may end up losing its explanatory power. Several scholars have concluded that if the left-right concept itself becomes more complex and opaque, then it may no longer serve its purposes (Zechmeister 2006: 171; Mair 2007:220; White 2012: 19). In the two chapters of this dissertation that aim to understand the left-right concept, this complexity was also highlighted. More precisely, the studies show that scholars have to account for factors which directly affect left-right orientation as well as for individual and contextual factors, which condition the impact of the former. Moreover, all these factors are expected to vary through time. In sum, it appears that understanding what people have in mind when they position themselves on the left-right scale runs the risk of becoming too complicated to serve as an analytical tool. However, the good news that follows from this dissertation is that by establishing the comparability of the measure of left-right orientation, future research will be able to assess whether the left-right concept is indeed dated as analytical tool.

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