Expert Survey

Expert survey is a widely used method to locate political parties in a policy space. This approach was made popular thanks to a well publicized study by Castles and Mair (1984) who asked experts (that is political scientists) in 17 countries to locate political parties in their own country on an 11-point left-right scale. This was followed by a more ambitious study of left-right party location in 42 countries (Huber and Inglehart 1995). It was the first study that tried to frame the political space of many post-communist countries by asking national experts to define the content of the left-right scale. These two studies have inspired a large body of country-specific studies using expert surveys to locate political parties on a range of issues such as economic policy, environment, and public expenditures (for a sample, see Laver and Hunt 1992; Laver 1998). For reviews of the data on party placement and on self placement on policy spaces using the mass or expert survey method see Knutsen, 1998; Laver and Garry, 2000.

Expert surveys use a priori deduction to locate political parties on a pre-defined space, usually left-right, and a pre-defined scale, that can be a 10 or 20-point scale. Surveys also estimate party location by asking people rather than relying on a closed set of texts. These two characteristics are sources of both strength and weakness in estimating the position of political parties in a space. Recent studies have shed light on several strengths and weaknesses of the survey method (Mair 1999; Budge 2000; Marks, Hooghe et al. 2007).

Strengths:
1. Quantification of party positions;
2. Flexibility about issues and topics;
3. Validity: expert use multiple sources of information to base their judgment.

Weaknesses:
1. Subjective judgment;
2. Informational asymmetry among respondents;
3. Conflating preferences and behavior: Do experts evaluate party rhetoric or action?
4. Temporal constraints on retroactive judgment.

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