



# Policy Positions in the Eyes of the Beholder

Voters' Understanding of Parties' Positions on the Left/Right and on European Integration

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# Research Question

- How accurate are voters in identifying the positions of parties in salient policy domains?
- What are the determinants of accurate placement of parties on a left/right spectrum and an EU integration spectrum?

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# Who Cares?

- Informed public understanding of party positions is necessary for representative democracy to work properly.
  - Parties adjust positions according to public preferences.
  - Public votes based on party position
  - If the public is uninformed, this model doesn't work.

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# Determinants of Accurate Party Placement

- Party characteristics
- Party-system characteristics

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# Party Characteristics

## ■ Party size

- Attempt to preserve past agendas and distinguish selves from competitors regarding policies.

  - L/R dimension is dominant

  - More info on large party's L/R position

- EU integration depoliticized

  - Larger parties collude on issues of EU integration

  - Less info on large party's EU position

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# Party Characteristics

## ■ Governing status

- Parties in government have greater visibility, and comment on current affairs and reaffirm policy position.

- L/R is the dominant policy dimension

- Voters should have more information on government party positions on L/R dimension

## ■ EU integration depoliticized

- Government avoid discussing EU integration

- Non-government parties politicize EU integration

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# Party-System Characteristics

## ■ Fractionalization

- More fractionalization means parties strive to be ideologically distinct
- Leads to parties taking sides on L/R and EU integration issues and more policy information
- Public should be more accurate for both dimensions

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# Party-System Characteristics

## ■ Polarization

- More polarization means a differentiated ideological supply
- Differentiated ideological supply means more information on policy positions
- Public should be more accurate for both dimensions

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# Hypotheses

- Greater party size → greater accuracy on L/R
- Greater party size → no effect on accuracy on EU
- Government party → greater accuracy on L/R
- Government party → less accuracy on EU
- Fractionalization → greater accuracy on L/R
- Fractionalization → greater accuracy on EU
- Polarization → greater accuracy on L/R
- Polarization → greater accuracy on EU

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# Dependent Variables

- Public accuracy in placing parties on a L/R dimension and on an EU integration dimension.
  - 2009 EES Voter Study and Euromanifestos data
    - Voter Study
      - Placed parties on LR and EU (0-10)
      - Mean placement
    - Euromanifestos
      - LR position and EU position (-100 to 100)
      - Rescaled (0-10)
  - |Mean voter placement-Parties' "true" placement|

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# Dependent Variables

- |Mean voter placement-Parties' "true" placement|
  - Unit of analysis: Party
  - Left/right spectrum
    - 0.004 (Latvian People's Party) to 3.90 (French Extreme Left)
    - Mean: 1.56; SD: 1.01
  - EU integration spectrum
    - 0.006 (Slovenian People's Party) to 2.96 (Basque Nationalist Party)
    - Mean: 0.72; SD: 0.60

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# Independent Variables

## ■ Four main independent variables

- Party size: Vote share in last national parliamentary election
- Governing status: Dummy denoting if party was in government in 2009
- Fractionalization: Inverted Herfindahl index of government parties (1=more fractionalization)
- Polarization (Dalton 2008)
- $PI = \sqrt{\sum (\text{party vote share}) * ([\text{party L/R score}_i - \text{party system average L/R score}] / 5)^2}$

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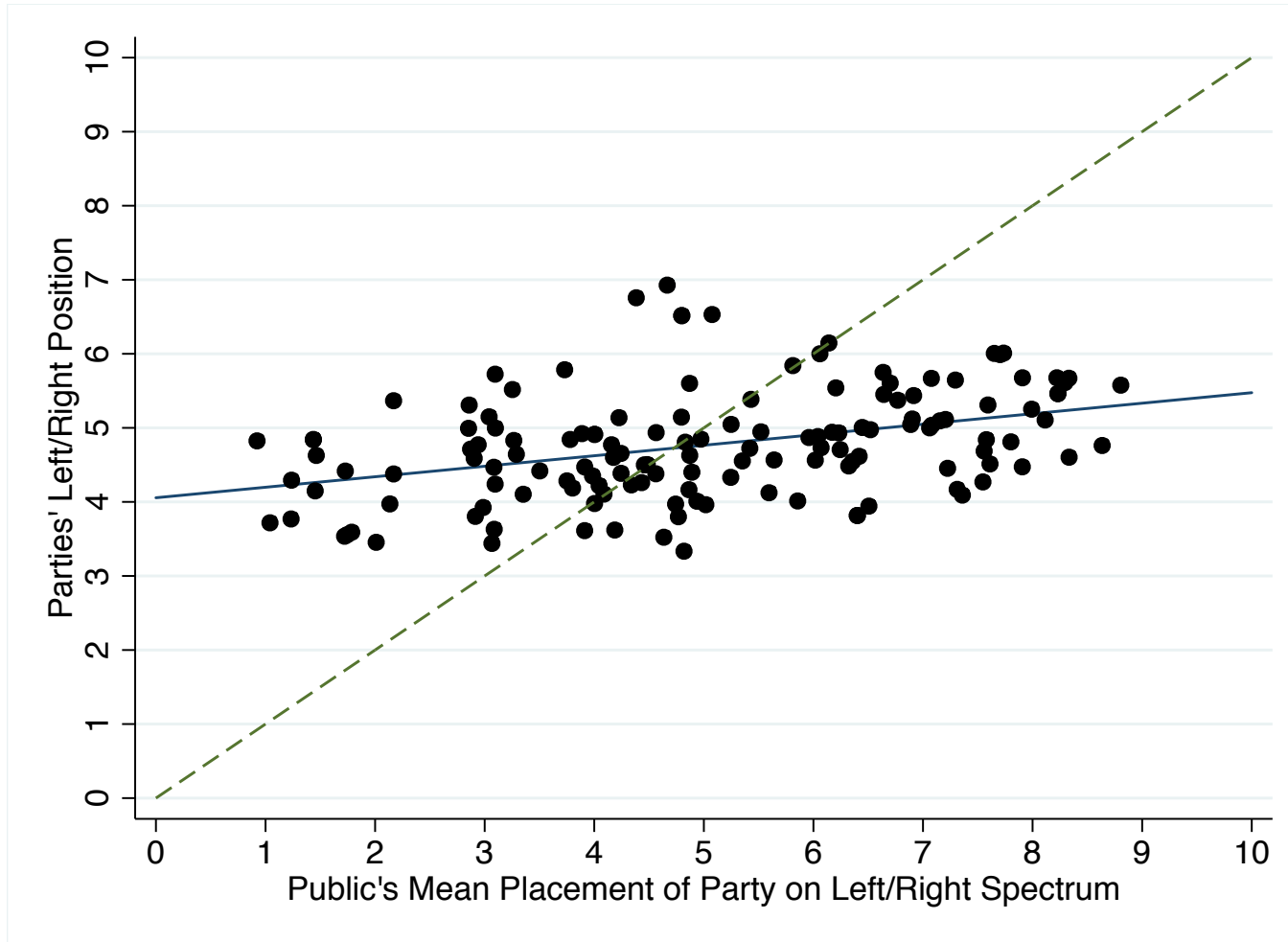
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# Analytical Strategy

- Political parties are nested within countries
- We include predictors at both party and party-system level
- Linear mixed models with varying-intercepts

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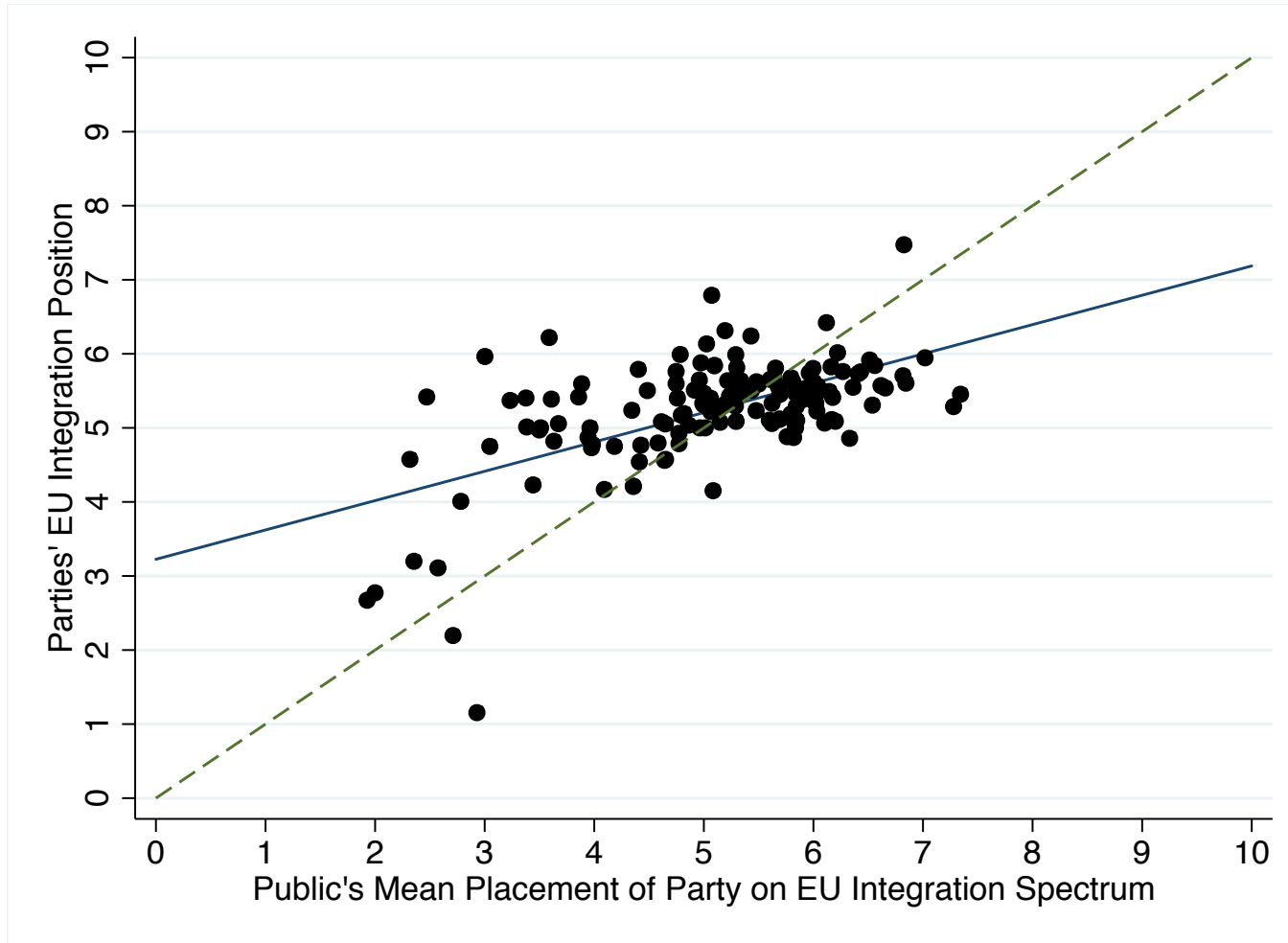
# How Accurate is the Public?



Scatterplot of Parties' L/R Positions and Public's Placement of Parties

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# How Accurate is the Public?



Scatterplot of Parties' EU Positions and Public's Placement of Parties

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# Results

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Party Characteristics</i>				
	Coefficient (SE)			
Party Size	.	0.01** (.007)	.	-0.01* (.004)
Member of Government	.	-0.13 (.18)	.	0.12 (.10)
<i>Party-system Characteristics</i>				
Fractionalization	.	0.06* (.04)	.	-0.04* (.02)
Polarization	.	0.02** (.009)	.	-0.002 (.005)
<i>Controls</i>				
EU/LR Spectrum Accuracy	.	0.27** (.15)	.	0.07* (.05)
Education	.	-.40 (.28)	.	0.39*** (.15)
2004 Member State	.	0.08 (.23)	.	0.03 (.13)
Original Member State	.	0.25 (.25)	.	-0.22 (.13)
Constant	1.55*** (.11)	1.82** (.94)	0.72*** (.06)	-0.46 (.52)
<i>Random-effects Parameters</i>				
Variance of Constant	0.14 (.08)	0.02 (.05)	0.02 (.02)	0.001 (.01)
Variance of Residual	0.87 (.11)	0.78 (.11)	0.34 (.04)	0.27 (.04)
N	143	134	143	134

Notes: Table entries are linear mixed model regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable in the analysis is the parties' position on a left/right or an EU integration spectrum.

\* $p \leq .075$ , \*\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$  in a one-tailed test.

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# Why the Strange Findings?

- Findings are somewhat puzzling
  - Larger parties: factions may confuse voters on left/right dimension, fewer factions on EU dimension
  - In fractionalized or polarized system number of parties may create noise along L/R dimension
  - There may be less noise in fractionalized systems and with larger parties along the EU dimension.
  - Election effects?

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# Implications

- Findings have important implications for understanding political representation and responsiveness.
  - Larger parties should be more responsive to public on EU dimension (in EP elections)
  - Parties in more fractionalized and/or polarized systems will be less responsive to public on left/right dimension (in EP elections)
  - Parties in more fractionalized systems will be more responsive to public on EU dimension (in EP elections)

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# Future Research

- Theoretical development to explain findings
- Multiple elections
  - 2014 EP elections
  - National elections
- Additional measures of parties' "true" positions

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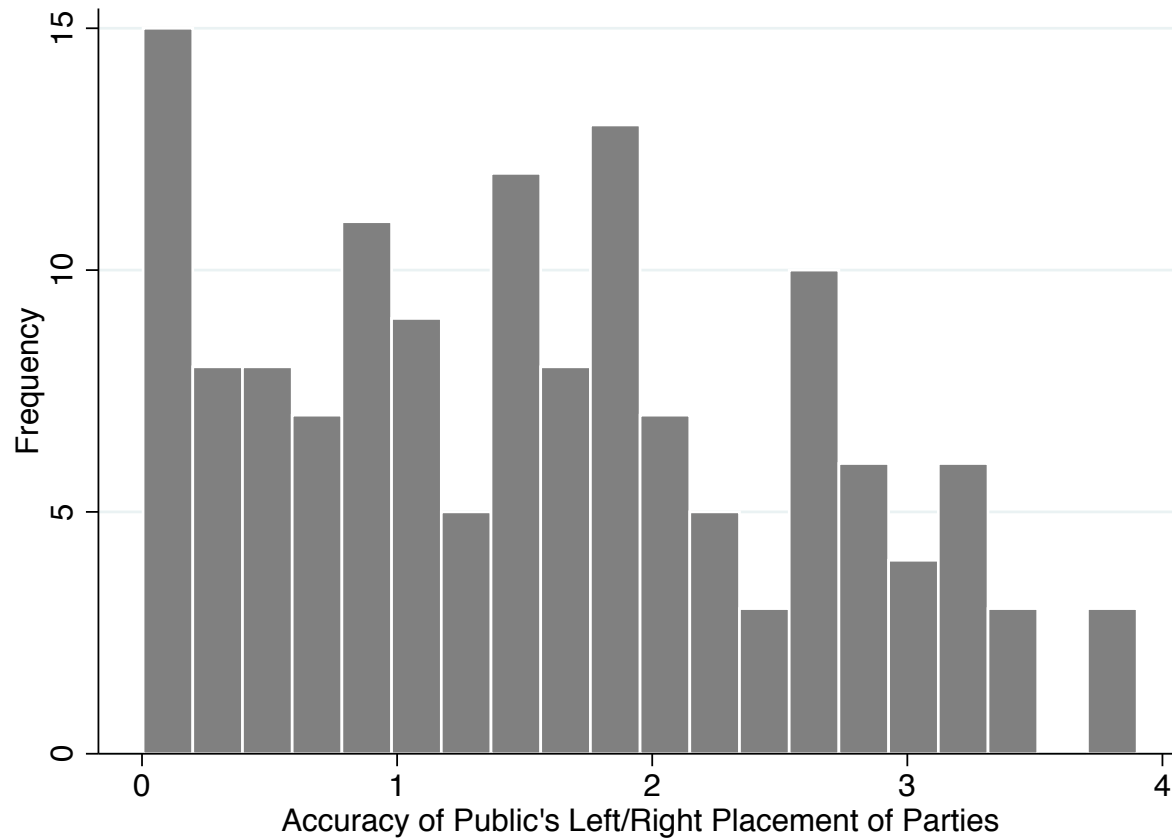
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# Control Variables

- Public's accurate placement of party on L/R or EU spectrum
- Average education level in country
- EU accession dummies
  - Original member state
  - 2004 or after

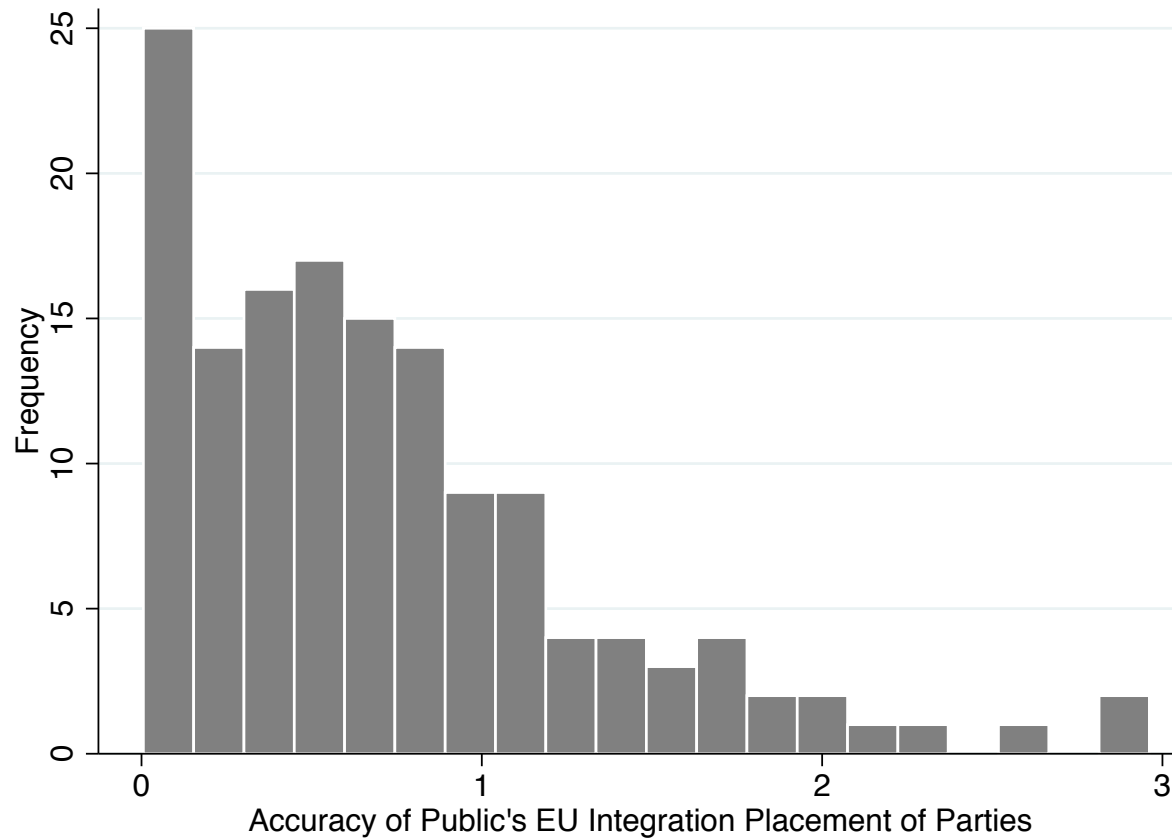
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# Distribution of Accurate Placement (L/R Dimension)



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# Distribution of Accurate Placement (EU Dimension)



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# Descriptive Statistics

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
<b>Party Size</b>	162	15.35	12.70	0.60	49.30
<b>Govt. Member</b>	208	0.26	0.44	0	1
<b>Party Fractionalization</b>	180	3.82	2.54	0	7.08
<b>L/R Polarization</b>	208	21.33	9.89	6.21	43.88
<b>EU Polarization</b>	208	20.69	10.52	5.70	47.81
<b>L/R Accuracy</b>	143	1.56	1.01	0.004	3.90
<b>EU Accuracy</b>	143	0.72	0.60	0.006	2.96
<b>Education</b>	180	3.37	0.35	2.44	3.91
<b>2004 Member State</b>	208	0.48	0.50	0	1
<b>Original Member State</b>	208	0.18	0.39	0	1

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