

Increased Ideological Confusion? Willingness to Utilize the Left-Right Dimension for Party and Self-Placements in Finland between 1994 and 2011

Introduction

Have parties become more difficult for ordinary citizens to understand ideologically? Are people finding it increasingly difficult to place parties on the left-right dimension? Answers to these questions have profound implications for modern representative government, which has traditionally built on party systems organized along the left-right dimension. As Ronald Inglehart and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1976: 244) have argued, the left-right dimension is a 'super-issue' that engulfs other ideological labels such as socialism, conservatism or fascism. As such, the left-right dimension is a useful aid for ordinary citizens in their attempts to make sense of the complexities of (party) politics (Fuchs & Klingemann 1990: 203). Aware of this, parties try to organize their political platforms and messages in terms of left and right in order to make themselves understood. Also the media presents political issues and events through the left-right dimension to make politics more comprehensible (Inglehart & Klingemann 1976: 244). If, as is often claimed, the salience of the left-right dimension has declined, confusion among citizens may have increased and they will find it more difficult than before to understand and engage in politics.

The dominant position of the left-right ideological dimension has been questioned for decades. Some critics have argued that social inequality has so greatly diminished in the Western world that left-right politics in its original meaning has become irrelevant. According to others left-right politics has not reached its historical end, but instead become less salient as new cross-cutting dimensions have emerged. (Knutsen 1995 for review) Recent analyses have shown that European integration and immigration (e.g. Mattila & Raunio 2006; van der Brug & Spanje 2009; Mattila & Raunio 2012; Thomassen 2012) are manifestations of a new cultural ideological dimension, which is not incorporated in the left-right dimension. Indeed, electoral support for traditional leftist or social democratic and rightist parliamentary parties has declined dramatically during the past few decades in many European countries (Paloheimo 2014: 20).

The usefulness of the left-right dimension, for citizens and parties alike, depends to a great extent on the ability of citizens to employ it. If citizens no longer can comprehend politics by conveniently and efficiently putting left-right labels on parties, politicians

and issues, the left-right dimension has lost its practical meaning. Since the saliency of the left-right dimension has allegedly diminished during the past several decades, it seems appropriate to examine changes over time. To this end, the study uses the common survey item, which asks respondents to place parliamentary parties as well as themselves on the left-right dimension. More specifically, it considers respondents' refusals to provide a self-placement and party placements as indicators of ideological confusion. Refusals could reflect either unwillingness, inability or both. The two are different things, but together they capture two aspects of ideological confusion. Most importantly, refusals arguably indicate the degree of conceptual clarity regarding the left-right dimension in the minds of ordinary citizens.

The analysis is based on Finnish survey data from 1994 to 2011. Finland is a suitable case study for the inquiry, because it presents an example of a Western democracy with a party system built on the left-right dimension that is now facing challenges from new cleavages concerning European integration and immigration.

The contemporary relevance of the left-right dimension

The left-right dimension originates from the establishment of a legislature during the French revolution. Royalists grouped to the right and their opponents to the left of the speaker, creating a division that since then has defined most aspects of Western political life (see e.g. Lapointe 1981). But as Freire (2006: 359) notes, the end of the left-right based ideological divide has been professed since the 1950's. Summarizing Kitschelt & Hellemans (1990), Knutsen (1995: 65-67) distinguishes three variants of the contention:

- 1) *Transformation theory* says that traditional leftist values have transformed into postmaterial, whereas rightist values have transformed into materialistic values.
- 2) *Pluralisation theory* argues that although the conflict between labor and capital persists, its significance has weakened and partly vanished through the emergence of new conflicts.
- 3) *Irrelevance theory* claims that left-right politics lost its importance as the industrial era ended, because all cleavages are time-bound. A transformation from industrial to postindustrial society meant fundamental changes to societies' cleavage structures.

Countering these claims, persistence theory argues that the confrontation between workers and the owning class is still the major feature of the left-right dimension and that the new postmaterial qualities of the modern world are simply a new manifestation of this conflict (Knutsen 1995: 66).

Recent scholarship supports persistence theory, at least as far as citizens' willingness to self-placements on the left-right dimension is concerned. Dalton et al. (2011: 86-87) report that on average almost 90 % of the public in a very mixed group of nations placed themselves on the dimension. They used relatively recent CSES and World Values Survey data from the beginning of 2000s, which suggests that the left-right dimension has quite recently been salient in many parts of the world. Mair (2007: 210) offers similar figures from Europe from the same period. Using the first two rounds

of the European Social Survey, Mair finds that on average about 12 % of respondents in Western Europe were unwilling or unable to place themselves on the dimension. In Eastern Europe the percentage was approximately 20 %. In this comparison Finland is marked by a particularly low percentage of refusals, only around 5 %.

Self-placements are, however, only one side of the matter. Placing parties is another. Instead of reflecting personal preferences, party placements on the same dimension link those preferences to parties and candidates. Summarizing previous research, Dalton et al. (2011: 110) conclude that citizens' display reasonably good capability in placing parties on the left-right dimension in various Western democracies. The placements are rather stable over time and the vast majority of survey respondents are willing to place parties. Their own analysis shows that about 80 % of survey respondents from a number of old and new democracies are willing to position the two largest parties in the country on the left-right dimension. The authors interpret this as indicating that the left-right dimension continues to offer a firm base for understanding political competition in spatial terms, which is further support for the persistence theory.

Hypotheses

While this study does not conduct a similar cross-country comparison, it offers two additions to the current state of knowledge in the field. Firstly, it looks at whether the number of respondents who – for whatever reason – fail to place themselves or parties on the left-right dimension has increased over time. Secondly, the study compares the individual determinants of refusals.

If the supreme saliency of the left-right dimension has been questioned since the 1950's, why examine citizens' willingness to place parties on that dimension during those past few decades covered by our data? Is there a reason to expect that something particularly interesting has happened during this period? Arguably yes. A wealth of evidence suggests that West European party politics can nowadays be understood in terms of two co-existing dimensions: the traditional left-right dimension and the European integration dimension (van der Brug & Spanje 2009; Mattila & Raunio 2012). According to Thomassen (2012), immigration is another aspect of the integration dimension, and cannot be positioned in the left-right continuum. For Finland, where the data comes from, both the European integration issue and the immigration issue have changed the game during the 1994-2011 time frame. Finland entered the EU in 1995, which understandably put European integration on the political agenda and forced the parties to form stands on the issue. The entry of immigration as a major issue in Finnish politics also coincides with the time period. As Kestilä (2006) notes, Finland stands out as somewhat of an anomaly in Western Europe as a country where far-right, anti-immigration parties have not had much support until the very recent years. Given this background, Finland seems potentially a case where ideological clarity in terms of the salience of the left-right dimension may have decreased. Consequently, the following hypothesis is drawn:

H1: The number of citizens who will not position parliamentary parties or themselves on the left-right dimension has increased during 1994-2011 in Finland.

Turning to the other intended contribution of the study, it seems natural to ask who, if anyone, has become more confused about the left-right dimension? The framework of cognitive engagement provides one suitable approach for analyzing this question. As Nie et al. (1996: 15), among many other theorists, argue, the functioning of democracy requires that citizens are willing and able to identify their own political preferences and get engaged in politics in order to transform their own interests into expressions of political will. For this approach, cognitive political engagement is the crucial linkage between citizens' preference formation and political action. The normative assumption is that citizens should be politically interested and aware in order to effectively participate in politics. Individual differences in cognitive political engagement are associated with differences in political attitudes, values and behaviors. Consequently, cognitive engagement is a potential determinant of refusals on self- and party placements on the left-right dimension.

Several conceptualizations and empirical indicators of cognitive political engagement have been used (e.g. Gabriel 2012: 167 or Rapeli 2013: 12-17 for review). Firstly, cognitive engagement in politics is fundamentally a matter of finding politics interesting to begin with. Politically interested people become exposed to politics voluntarily (see e.g. Lupia & Philbot 2005: 1122). As explained by Verba et al. (1995: 345), 'citizens who are interested in politics - who follow politics, who care about what happens, who are concerned with who wins and loses - are more likely to be politically active'. Political interest could therefore be seen as a prerequisite for recognizing the left-right dimension as well as for the propensity to utilize it.

Secondly, a related aspect of cognitive engagement is political sophistication, which is typically measured as factual knowledge of politics. Sophistication refers to political expertise, which is seen as the ability to organize knowledge about politics into structured form so that it can be exploited (Luskin 1987, 1990). Sophistication seems particularly important in the Finnish case where, in addition to self-placement, up to eight parliamentary parties need to be placed on the left-right dimension. Better equipped to grasp the ideological nature of (party) politics, politically sophisticated individuals could be expected to be better able to place themselves and the relevant parties.

Whereas sophistication through the measurement of knowledge offers objective evidence of a mental preoccupation with politics, political efficacy refers to a subjective sense of a person's ability to grasp what is happening in politics. It is a self-reported measure of the extent to which one understands politics (e.g. Morrell 2003: 589) and will be used to measure subjective cognitive engagement.

While the above three conceptualizations all emphasize a general awareness of politics and ability to comprehend it, party attachment or sense of closeness to a party adds another element to cognitive engagement. Party closeness³⁰ is considered to indicate

³⁰ I choose to use the term 'party closeness' because it best matches the operationalization in the analysis. In previous literature the term 'party identification' or 'party attachment' are perhaps more widely used. While the nuances are different, all terms refer to the same thing, namely a person's sense of being more close to some party in comparison with other parties.

a psychological engagement with politics (Verba et al. 1995: 347-348). A perceived proximity to a party is a reflection of a person's relation to party-based politics and the underlying abstract ideological constructions. Party closeness simplifies political messages, similarly as ideological dimensions, helping citizens make choices without enormous information costs (Budge et al. 2010: 3). A stronger feeling of closeness with a party might also be associated with a stronger tendency to think about politics in ideological terms and therefore predicts greater willingness to make use of the left-right dimension.

The cognitive political engagement literature suggests a negative connection to refusals to party and self-placements: people who are mentally engaged in politics are probably more prone to place themselves and parties on the dimension, because such individuals are more likely to follow politics and understand it. The heuristics thesis, however, offers a counterargument. It suggests that ideologies and party attachments are shortcuts for people with low sophistication, through which they are able to arrive at the same conclusions about politics as more sophisticated individuals (Popkin 1991; Lupia & McCubbins 1998). From this perspective refusals to use the left-right dimension could equally well be a characteristic of highly sophisticated persons, because it is assumed that heuristics are employed particularly actively by low sophistication individuals. Moreover, if the left-right ideology has become less relevant and ambiguous, people with low sophistication would be more likely to continue utilizing the ideological shortcut under such circumstances, whereas people with high sophistication would abandon it as useless. Ignorance could be bliss also in terms of ideologies. Two competing hypotheses concerning the impact of cognitive political engagement are therefore drawn:

H2₁: Ideological confusion has increasingly become negatively related to cognitive political engagement.

H2₂: Ideological confusion has increasingly become positively related to cognitive political engagement.

These hypotheses thus assume that there is a statistically significant association between the indicators of cognitive political engagement and deployment of the left-right dimension, and only hypothesize about its direction. Although the focus is on cognitive political engagement, several other variables will be included in the analysis. Along with data description, these variables will be presented in the following section.

Data and variables

Three surveys will be used in the analysis. The surveys for 2003 and 2011 are Finnish national election studies, for 1994 the analysis relies on a survey that was conducted in conjunction with a referendum concerning Finnish EU membership. All surveys have been conducted during a period of heightened political debate and electoral campaigning. All surveys are also representative of the Finnish voting age population in terms of age, gender and place of residence.

The dependent variables, party and self-placements on the left-right dimension, have been regularly used in surveys since the 1960's to gauge public perceptions of parties (Kroh 2007: 205). The scales have been varied, but according to Kroh (2007), the 11-point scale ranging between 0 and 10 provides the most reliable results. The three surveys in this study all use this scale. What nevertheless varies between the surveys is the number of parliamentary parties the respondents were asked to place. In 1994 the parties were the Centre Party, National Coalition, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Greens. In addition to these, the Left Alliance, the Swedish People's Party (SPP) and the Christian Democrats (CD) were in the 2003 and 2011 surveys. These parties are included in the analysis. The Finns Party, currently the third largest party in the Finnish parliament, is only available in the 2011 survey, which does not allow an analysis of temporal change. Consequently, that party is excluded from the analysis.

Self-placement and party placement refusals are closely related to one another, as shown by Table 1 below (see also Appendix for variable codings). Consequently, they are combined to form scales for each year of observation. The closeness of self- and party placements is most obvious in 2011. Those who refused a self-placement on average also refused to position five out of seven parties. This is indicated by the value 5.04 in the last column in Table 1. In contrast, those who placed themselves on average only refused .24 party placements. This means that persons who placed themselves almost without exception also placed all seven parliamentary parties included in the analysis.

The dependent variables for each time point are scales consisting of the number of refusals to place parties on the left-right dimension and refusal to place oneself. A respondent who, for example, did not place three out of four parties on the dimension and also refused to place him-/herself, will get the value four on the scale (3+1).

TABLE 1. *Average number of 'no answers' and self-placement.*

	1994	2003	2011
Self-placement			
Yes	.13	.39	.24
No	1.83	3.68	5.04

For 1994 the number of 'no answers' ranged between 0 and 5, for 2003 and 2011 between 0 and 7. In all cases the differences in means between 'yes' and 'no' groups are statistically significant at the .001-level.

Several independent variables will be included. Cognitive political engagement will be measured as political knowledge, efficacy, party closeness and political interest. The question wordings and coding are explained in the Appendix. The standard socioeconomic and demographic controls age (/100), gender, education and income seem particularly relevant in the context of the left-right ideology, which is an expression of a fundamentally socioeconomic cleavage. Belonging to a certain social class is, however, not only a matter of personal income or educational attainment, but also a subjective feeling or an emotional attachment to a certain societal layer.

Class identity will be included as a dichotomous measure indicating whether a person thinks he/she belongs to a certain social group or not. (Sosnaud et al. 2013) Finally, a measure of political participation will also be included, because cognitive engagement is widely understood to form the psychological foundations of participation. Voting (in parliamentary elections) will be used in the analysis as a standard indicator of participation.

Analysis

Table 2 provides a descriptive view into how the Finnish voting age population has positioned parliamentary parties and themselves in 1994, 2003 and 2011. The larger the placement value on the 11-point scale, the further to the right is the party/individual.

TABLE 2. *Party and self-placements on the 11-point left-right dimension in 1994-2011.*

Parties	1994		2003		2011	
	Placement (sd)	Mode	Placement (sd)	Mode	Placement (sd)	Mode
Coalition	8.0 (1.9)	10	7.5 (2.1)	8	8.1 (1.8)	10
Centre	6.4 (1.7)	5	6.2 (1.6)	5	6.3 (1.6)	7
CD			5.9 (1.9)	5	6.0 (1.9)	5
Greens	4.8 (1.5)	5	4.7 (1.7)	5	4.9 (1.8)	5
Left	1.5 (1.4)	1	2.3 (1.8)	1	1.9 (1.6)	1
SDP	3.7 (1.6)	3	4.7 (2.0)	4	4.3 (1.8)	4
SPP			6.2 (2.2)	5	6.9 (2.0)	8
Self-placement	5.6 (2.0)	5	5.6 (2.0)	5	5.3 (2.3)	5

The results show only few noticeable changes during the 1994-2011 period. The National Coalition is consistently furthest to the right and the Left Alliance furthest to the left. SDP took a sharp turn to the right between 1994 and 2003, moving from 3.7 to 4.7. Also the Left Alliance moved sharply to the right at that point, but returned close to its original position in 2011.

On the whole Table 2 points toward stability in left-right assessments during 1994-2011. Standard deviations have, however, grown during the time frame. The mean standard deviation was 1.7 in 1994 but 1.9 in both 2003 and 2011. This suggests a growing amount of uncertainty or disagreement. Again most changes are found between 1994 and 2003.

Table 3 provides more direct evidence relating to H1, which anticipated an increase in refusals to utilize the left-right dimension for self- or party placements during the observed time period. The table offers modest support for H1 by showing that most of the changes have a plus sign, indicating increased unwillingness or inability to utilize the left-right dimension.

TABLE 3. *Percentage of 'no answer' to party and self-placements on the left-right dimension 1994-2011.*

	1994	2003		2011		
Parties	% no answer	% no answer	Change 1994 → 2003	% no answer	Change 2003 → 2011	Change 1994 → 2011
Coalition	4.8	9.7	+4.9	8.3	-1.4	+3.5
Center	4.2	7.8	+3.6	8.2	+0.4	+4.0
CD		11.9		11.4	-0.5	-0.5
Greens	6.0	11.9	+5.9	10.6	-1.3	+4.6
Left	4.4	8.3	+3.9	8.5	+0.2	+4.1
SDP	4.2	8.3	+4.1	8.6	+0.3	+4.4
SPP		12.3		11.4	-0.9	-0.9
Average	4.8	9.7 ¹	+4.9	9.6	-0.1	+4.8
Leftist parties ²	4.3	8.3	+4.0	8.6	+0.3	+4.3
Rightist parties ³	4.5	10.4	+5.9	9.8	-0.6	+5.3
Self-placement	6.0	9.5	+3.5	8.9	-0.6	+2.9

¹ CD excluded

² Averages for Left alliance and SDP

³ Averages for Coalition, Center, CD and SPP

On average almost 5 % of the respondents did not place a party on the dimension in 1994. In 2003 and 2011 almost 10 % refuse to do so. Refusals doubled between 1994 and 2003, but remained stable between 2003 and 2011. The last column indicates that refusals increased for all those parties for which data is available during the observed period. Dividing the parties into rightist and leftist, it can be seen that unwillingness to place parties increased more for parties on the right. The Green League, CD and the SPP have been particularly difficult for respondents to position. The number of respondents who did not provide a self-placement increased less than in the case of party placements. The development over time nevertheless suggests that ideological confusion increased among the Finnish respondents more in terms of the party than self-placements during 1994-2011.

Addressing H2 and the impact of cognitive engagement, Table 4 reports the multivariate regressions for each time point. All variables have been recoded into values between 0 and 1. This allows a more reliable comparison of the relative importance of each predictor through the Wald statistic. The greater the (statistically significant) Wald value, the larger is the impact of that variable on the response variable. The response variable in Table 4 is the scale consisting of the number of refusals to place either oneself or parties on the left-right dimension.

TABLE 4. *Refusal to place oneself and parties on the left-right dimension (ordinal logistic regression).*

	1994		2003		2011	
	Estimate (se)	Wald	Estimate (se)	Wald	Estimate (se)	Wald
Political interest	-1.171 (.557)	4.424*	-1.101 (.297)	13.697***	-1.646 (.367)	20.128***
Political knowledge	-1.426 (.632)	5.083*	-1.541 (.325)	22.545***	-1.852 (.389)	22.627***
Political efficacy	-.756 (.620)	1.484	-.462 (.294)	2.467	.454 (.315)	2.074
Party closeness	.301 (.295)	1.040	-.561 (.164)	11.649***	-.607 (.189)	10.267***
Voting	-.756 (.448)	2.853	-.305 (.179)	2.890	-.345 (.226)	2.328
Female	.567 (.300)	3.583*	.552 (.153)	12.975***	.597 (.182)	10.707***
Age/100	1.193 (.958)	1.552	.149 (.458)	.105	-1.405 (.478)	8.656**
Education	-1.835 (.663)	7.672**	-.497 (.308)	2.604	-.730 (.325)	5.029*
Income (ref: low)						
Middle	-.319 (.316)	1.020	-.063 (.166)	.145	-.471 (.205)	5.254*
High	-.616 (.453)	1.850	-.540 (.230)	5.535**	-.478 (.244)	3.842*
No subjective class	n/a	n/a	.398 (.221)	3.240	.300 (.268)	1.260
Nagelkerke	.126		.180		.190	
-2 Log likelihood	539.938***		2046.148***		1448.031***	

The previously seen increase in placement refusals is again reflected in Table 4. The growth in Nagelkerke values from 1994 to 2011 means that the variables explain least of the total variation in 1994 when there was least variation to explain. As ideological confusion grows, the explanatory variables do a better job at explaining the increased variation.

A comparison between the different time points suggests that cognitive political engagement, especially political knowledge and interest, are much stronger predictors of ideological confusion in 2003 and 2011 compared to the situation twenty years ago. The results support H2₁, which assumed that ideological confusion is negatively connected to cognitive political engagement. This means that highly knowledgeable and politically interested people more readily placed themselves and parliamentary parties on the left-right dimension.

An obvious change has occurred in party closeness. The feeling of being close to a party was unrelated to refusals in 1994, but in 2003 and 2011 it became one of the most powerful indicators, as shown by the large Wald statistics. The finding offers further support for H2₁ by showing that those who felt close to a party were much more likely to utilize the dimension. The different aspects of cognitive engagement seem to increase that propensity. Political efficacy, however, provides counter-evidence, because it is irrelevant throughout the analysis. A subjective feeling of being able to make sense of politics is therefore not related to a person's tendency to utilize the left-right dimension.

Voting does not either reach statistical significance. The lack of a clear understanding of left-right politics does therefore not seem to stop people from voting. In similar fashion, the lack of a subjective social class is unrelated to a person's awareness of left-right politics. Objective measures of social class and demographic indicators have, however, become slightly more important determinants in a temporal comparison. Compared to men, women have become much more strongly associated with refusals during the observed period. Also high income is more clearly linked to refusals in 2003 and 2011 than in 1994. The impact of education is modest throughout the observed period, which is likely due to the presence of the cognitive engagement variables in the models. These findings nevertheless suggest that high social status increasingly predicts willingness to utilize the left-right dimension.

Discussion

Measured by refusals to place oneself and parliamentary parties on the left-right dimension, ideological confusion among citizens concerning left-right politics increased during 1994-2011 in Finland. The amount of respondents who would not use the left-right dimension doubled between 1994 and 2003, but remained the same after that. In 2011 approximately 10 % of survey respondents would not use the dimension either for self-placement or for party placements. Although the growth is noticeable, it hardly seriously challenges the overall relevance and usefulness of the left-right dimension as a political yardstick. Despite the growth in what is here interpreted as ideological confusion, an overwhelming majority of the survey respondents still readily use the left-right dimension. There is, however, variation between parties. In absolute terms, placing the Green League, Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party has been most difficult. The increase in refusals was larger for parties on the political right than on the left.

Left-right confusion increased more between 1994 and 2003 than between 2003 and 2011. This suggests that something happened between 1994 and 2003 that made the left-right dimension less salient to the Finnish public. Interpretations are as tempting as they are unavoidably speculative. It is, however, likely that Finland's entrance into the EU in 1995 was a contributing factor. Available evidence indicates that European integration has caused a rift in the previously cohesive left-right ideological space in Europe. The European dimension emerged as a new cleavage in Finland as well and this is probably reflected in the results. The left-right dimension lost some of its relevance and utility in conjunction with the rise of the European integration dimension in Finnish politics after 1995.

Another similarly potential cause is the two consecutive SDP-led governments headed by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen during 1995-2003, almost exactly the same period during which the observed ideological confusion occurred. Although validating the claim empirically is outside the scope here, it is commonly asserted that the policies of these governments were incompatible with the social democratic ideology. For many observers the policies seemed typical of a rightist government, something that

undoubtedly undermined the ideological clarity of Finnish party politics. Against this background it is understandable that an increase in left-right confusion can be situated between 1994 and 2003, which was a period characterized by an intense debate about European integration and an ideologically confusing government.

The role of cognitive political engagement for the willingness to utilize the left-right dimension is less speculative. High cognitive engagement in politics predicts active use of the left-right dimension. In other words, people who are mentally engaged in politics tend to be able and willing to deploy the left-right dimension. Their political thinking is more organized and they continue to use the left-right ideological dimension despite some added uncertainty. Especially politically knowledgeable people were very prone to place parties and themselves on the dimension, suggesting that a lack of ability to understand politics in ideological terms is connected to political ignorance. In a world characterized by increased ideological ambiguity, cognitive shortcuts such as ideologies can effectively be utilized by politically motivated and knowledgeable individuals, not by those who are in more critical need of such shortcuts.

All things considered, the results lend cautious support to both the persistence theory and the pluralization theory. The majority of the survey respondents representing Finnish voting age population are willing to position themselves and parliamentary parties on the left-right political space, although refusals to do so have increased during the past twenty years. A pluralization of the ideological space can be seen in the results, but it should not be overdramatized. Whether the results can be taken as evidence of increased ideological obscurity in the minds of the ordinary citizen is of course debatable. This analysis relied only on one thinkable indicator of confusion, the failure to use the left-right dimension for self- and party placements. But it is, arguably, a good indicator of confusion. If no obscurity exists, people have little reason to hesitate to place any and all parties and persons on the left-right dimension. If parties and issues can unequivocally be placed on the left-right dimension, survey respondents are likely to do so. But if, on the other hand, there is confusion many of them will not. Building on this premise, the analysis showed that much of the respondents' unwillingness to use the dimension is due to simple ignorance. It seems clear that it is the cognitively disengaged citizens who suffer from ideological obscurity, at least in terms of the left-right dimension.

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Appendix

	1994	2003	2011
Dependent variable			
Left-right placement refusals	Scale where each point corresponds to one refusal to place either a party or oneself on the left-right dimension. Ranges between 0 and 6 for 1994, for 2003 and 2011 between 0 and 8.		
Independent variables			
Political knowledge	Scale where each point corresponds to correct answer on four factual knowledge questions regarding the EU. The scale is recoded to values between 0 and 1.	Scale where each point corresponds to correct answer on seven factual knowledge questions. The scale is recoded to values between 0 and 1.	Scale where each point corresponds to correct answer on five factual knowledge questions. The scale is recoded to values between 0 and 1.
Political efficacy	'Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I don't really understand what is going on'. Coded 'completely agree = 0, partly agree = .33, partly disagree = .66, completely disagree = 1.		
Political interest	'How interested are you in politics?' Coded 'not at all (interested) = 0, just a little = .33, somewhat = .66, very = 1.		
Party closeness	'Are you a strong supporter of that party or not a very strong supporter?' (Follow-up question to 'If parliamentary elections were held tomorrow, what party would you probably vote for?') Coded strong = 1, not very strong or cannot say = 0.	'Would you say you are close to some party?' Yes = 1; No = 0.	
Voting	Voting in the 1991 parliamentary elections. 'Cannot remember, probably voted' responses coded as 'abstained', those who said they did not have right to vote excluded.	Voting in the 2003 parliamentary elections.	Voting in the 2011 parliamentary elections.
Subjective social class	Not available	'Coded 1 if respondent chose any social class in the question 'Which social class would you say you belong to?' (Working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class) and 0 if respondent chose 'no class' or 'cannot say'.	'Coded 1 if respondent chose any social class in the question 'Which social class would you say you belong to?' (Working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class) and 0 if respondent chose 'no class' or 'cannot say'.
Age	Age divided by 100		
Education	Continuous coding between 0 and 1 where 0 is comprehensive education or less and 1 is university education. The middle values are combinations of various vocational educations, depending on the original response categories.		
Gender	Female, reference category male		
Income	Bottom third as reference category for middle-category – dummy and top third – dummy.		