Measuring Party Positioning and Issue Salience with Media-Data: Characteristics and Research Questions

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the characteristics of media data when we measure party positions and issue salience. We thereby contribute in developing new methodologies to analyze political parties and in operationalizing new theoretical models of political competition. Following other studies that have compared indicators based on different data, we seek to highlight the characteristics of media data in comparison with the more traditional manifesto- and expert-data. We will show that media-data measure similar dimensions regarding positions, but salience constructs that are different from other data. Contrary to our expectation, media data do not better reflect how ordinary citizens perceive political parties. We however have reasons to believe that media-data are a finer-grained instrument and more sensitive than other data to explore short-term changes, diverging positions over sub-issues and intra-party dissent.

Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the Swiss Political Science Association, University of St. Gallen, January 8, 2009
Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, methodological research on the measurement of political parties' policy positions has been continually growing. This scholarly interest in developing new methodologies to locate political parties in policy and/or ideological spaces is motivated by the need to operationalize a range of new and fairly sophisticated theoretical models of political competition (Laver 2001: 6). Some of these models are not only concerned with issue positions, but also with issue salience, that is the relative importance of particular issues to some parties. The underlying idea is the assumption that party competition is not mainly a direct confrontation of opposing positions on the same issues, but that parties compete by emphasizing those issues on which they hold comparative advantages (e.g., Budge and Farlie 1983).

There is a wide variety of methods to generate data on party positions and issue salience, but one can draw a basic distinction between survey data and document-driven data (Keman 2007: 77). Among the former, expert judgments are certainly the typical example, among the latter, the coding of party manifestos is the dominant approach. Expert surveys and party manifestos have become standard techniques to estimate party positions and issue salience, and both approaches have given rise to flourishing networks of international research collaboration. More recently, scholars have made some attempts at comparing these two approaches systematically by cross-validating their respective measures and indicators (e.g., Marks et al. 2007; Netjes and Binnema 2007; Ray 2007; Steenbergen and Marks 2007). Most often, these cross-validations have focused on the left-right dimension or on the issue of European integration.

In this paper, we concentrate on European integration and introduce media data as an additional source for the measurement of party positions and issue salience. While the use of media data has a long tradition in social movement research, the media have been an underused data source in the analysis of party positions (see however Kriesi et al. 2008, Statham et al. 2008). Recently, however, eminent party specialists such as Peter Mair (2006: 162) have compellingly argued that the literature on European integration has

"relied perhaps too heavily on standardized quantitative variables that can be used directly in quite highly-abstracted cross-national research. One example of this is

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1 Previous versions of this paper were presented at the staff seminar of the Department of Political Science, University of Geneva and in the Social Statistic Speakers Series of the Department of Political Science, McGill University, Montreal. We thank seminar participants for valuable comments and suggestions.
the research effort that has been made to identify party positions on Europe […] In some cases, this research has relied on the sort of crude but easily accessible data provided by expert judgments (Ray 1999; Hooghe et al 2004), while in others it has been based on analyses of the contents of party programs […] What is really needed here, however, particularly given that this is a new and often exploratory avenue of research, is a much more systematic, inductive, and largely bottom-up comparison of political discussions at the national level – whether as revealed in parliamentary debates, or in contests surrounding European referendums, or in the ebb and flow of the arguments used in national election campaigns […]”.

Media data are a means to do exactly this, and to examine how Europe actually plays in political party competition at the national level. In a similar vein, Netjes and Binnema (2007: 42, 48) call for the cross-validation of traditional salience measures based on expert surveys and party manifestos with "a 'harder' measurement of salience, utilizing content analysis of national and EP election campaigns in the printed media". While Kriesi (2007: 92) has made a first step in this direction using media data and party manifestos, he neither reports his results in detail nor does he offer a systematic comparison between various methods and data sources.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to introduce content coding of the media as an alternative method for the estimation of party positions and issue salience. We concentrate on the issue of European integration mainly for practical reasons such as the availability of empirical data and the comparability with previous studies on the validity of indicators derived from different methods. Moreover, as the above-cited statement by Peter Mair illustrates, a growing literature is concerned with how national parties adapt to European integration, and it is therefore important to think about the characteristics and comparative advantages of different indicators used to measure party positions and issue salience in this particular policy field.

This paper is structured as follows. We first introduce two different techniques to derive indicators of party positions and issue salience from the media—the core sentence approach and political claims analysis. In relation with manifesto- and expert-data we then discuss the characteristics of media data and formulate on this basis some arguments in which situation and for which research questions media-data are more suitable than the traditionally used data.
Our analyses show that media-data capture similar information about party positions as other indicators, but that they measure different underlying constructs when it comes to issue salience. Contrary to our expectation, media-data do not better reflect how ordinary citizens perceive political parties. We however have reasons to believe that media-data are a finer-grained instrument and more sensitive than other data to explore short-term changes, positions over sub-issues and intra-party dissent.

**Media data**

Over the last two decades, newspapers have become a primary data source in various study fields (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Koopmans et al. 2005; Koopmans 2007; Kriesi et al. 1995; Kriesi et al. 2008; Trenz 2005; de Vreese 2003). There is little doubt in the literature that the mass media constitute the most important arena for public debates on politically relevant issues (see Ferree et al. 2002; Bennett et al. 2004). An analysis of newspaper articles allows us to analyze the statements of political actors as they can be perceived by their opponents, policy makers and the broader audience.

We rely on two different approaches: the core sentence approach and political claims analysis. Both methods rest on newspapers to generate indicators of party positions and issue salience and can be characterized as "relational content analysis" (Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001: 163). Another commonality of these two approaches is that their unit of analysis is not the article but, as we will see, elements within articles, namely core sentences or political claims. Having two kinds of data at our disposition, we are in a better position to generalize our arguments and to make sure that our findings do not depend on specific coding methods. In the following, we mainly discuss those aspects of the two methods that directly concern the measurement of party positions and issue salience. Additional facets regarding the coding of variables that are not relevant for our purposes will be left out. For extensive methodological discussions see Kleinnijenhuis et al. (1997) for the core sentence approach and Koopmans and Statham (1999) for the political claims analysis.

**Core sentence approach (CSA)**

The core (or nuclear) sentence approach has its origins in early theoretical elaborations by Wittgenstein (1984 [1921]) and was first practically implemented in concrete coding instructions by Osgood (1956) and Axelrod (1976). Recently, it has been revived for the analysis of
party systems (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1997). Additionally, Franzosi (2004: 60f.) has provided theoretical and empirical evidence that the method – which he calls ‘story grammars’ – is a useful device for the social sciences in general. ‘Core sentences’ represent an inductive approach that aims to capture the full complexity of the political debate without imposing strong theoretical expectations (e.g. in terms of previously fixed category schemas) on the data.

The basic idea of this method comes in the notion that the content of every written document can be described as a network of relationships between objects. To analyze party positions, for example, every relationship between 'political objects' (i.e. between a political actor and a political issue) that appears in the text is coded. Each sentence is reduced to its most basic structure (the so-called ‘core sentence’), indicating only its subject (political actor) and its object (issue), as well as the direction of the relationship between the two. In substantive terms, such a core sentence represents an actor’s opinion on an issue.

Let us give a short, illustrative example of what core sentences are: “Party X supports the European Constitution but opposes EU accession of Turkey”. This grammatical sentence consists of two core sentences. While the subject is the same in both sentences, its object and direction change (see Table 1). It appears that a core sentence is always embedded in a grammatical sentence and that a grammatical sentence might consist of several core sentences.

Table 1: Examples of core sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core sentence</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Party X</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>European Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Party X</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>EU accession of Turkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political claims analysis (PCA)

PCA, developed by Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (1999), is based on protest event analysis as well as political discourse analysis and has also been inspired by Franzosi’s idea to use the structure of linguistic grammar to code contentious events (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Koopmans et al. 2005: 254-265). The method has been developed out of the deficiency that protest event analysis is too “protest-centric” and does not account for more routine and conventional action forms (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 204-205). Integrating political discourse analysis into protest event analysis and combining approaches that have so far been
considered as competing paradigms within the social movements field enables researchers to study two social phenomena at the same time and to relate collective mobilization variables to discursive and institutional contextual variables.

Especially with regard to positions, PCA shares many ideas of CSA while using a different vocabulary: ‘claimant’ instead of ‘subject’; ‘issue of claim’ instead of ‘object’ (see Table 2). The specific vocabulary however indicates one crucial difference between the two methods. PCA is not simply interested in positions but mainly in claims. Instances of claim-making must be the result of purposive strategic actions of the claimant and refer to an ongoing or concluded physical or verbal action in the public sphere. In other words, simple attributions of attitudes or opinions would not be coded. The above-presented example of core sentences would not qualify as claims-making. It must become clear that the claimant has intentionally undertaken an action. Such intentions or actions are mostly indicated by verbs such as ‘stated’, ‘demanded’, ‘criticized’ etc. (Koopmans et al. 2005: 258). Accordingly, if we replace the verb in our example, the sentence would be coded: “Party X has decided to support the European Constitution but to oppose EU accession of Turkey”. Contrary to the logic of CSA, this grammatical sentence does not consist of two claims but of one claim with two issues. According to the specific research question, this claim might constitute one observation (with regard to the appearance of actors, for example) or two observations (with regard to an actor's positions).

Table 2: Example of a political claim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Claimant</th>
<th>Issue 1 (Direction)</th>
<th>Issue 2 (Direction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Party X</td>
<td>European Constitution (+1)</td>
<td>EU accession of Turkey (-1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Media coverage as a source for measuring party positions and issue salience**

Media data in comparison

In this section, we discuss the characteristics of media data by directly relating them to two of the most widespread data sources, namely party manifestos and expert surveys, along the arguments presented by Marks et al. (2007: 26-27).² In contrast to them and many others, we

² We only discuss characteristics that are presented by Marks et al. (2007: 26-27) and concern the data themselves. Of course, further aspects of manifesto- and expert-data are discussed in the literature, but they rather pertain to the way the data are collected. For example, a source of contestation is that the coding of party manifestos relies on a priori fixed, thematic categories, which might become inappropriate over time because the
deliberately speak of ‘characteristics’ and not of ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ of different data sources as their appropriateness always depends on the specific research questions one wants to address.

Table 3: Characteristics of media-, manifesto- and expert-data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media coverage</th>
<th>Party Manifestos</th>
<th>Expert surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Mass-mediated positions/salience</td>
<td>- Self-declared positions/salience</td>
<td>- Reputational positions/salience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Short and long time periods, any points in time (during election campaign/debates)</td>
<td>- Long time periods, specific points in time (before elections)</td>
<td>- Long time periods, specific points in time (dates of surveys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information on intra-party dissent</td>
<td>- No information on intra-party dissent</td>
<td>- Information on degree of intra-party dissent, but not on deviant factions/individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retrospective analysis possible</td>
<td>- Retrospective analysis possible</td>
<td>- No retrospective analysis/temporal constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Document-driven data</td>
<td>- Document-driven data</td>
<td>- Subjective/reputational data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reliance on one clear criteria (media coverage), but some possible conflation between declarations and behavior</td>
<td>- Reliance on one clear criteria (manifestos), separating party declarations and actual behavior</td>
<td>- Reliance on diverse sources of information, risk of conflating declarations and behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flexibility, but analysis constrained by what appears in the media</td>
<td>- Flexibility, but analysis constrained by what appears in party programs</td>
<td>- Much flexibility: any topic can be studied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data aggregation necessary to generate indicators</td>
<td>- Data aggregation necessary to generate indicators</td>
<td>- Direct quantification possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Small parties are less visible in the media</td>
<td>- Small parties often have shorter manifestos</td>
<td>- Experts have less knowledge about small parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Very time-consuming and personnel-intensive</td>
<td>- Somewhat time-consuming and personnel-intensive</td>
<td>- Little time-consuming and personnel-intensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information on manifesto- and expert-data adapted from Marks et al. (2007: 26-27)

As shown by Table 3, media data share many of the characteristics of manifesto data, but they differ from each other in mainly three respects. First, an important feature of media data is that they reflect how political parties appear in the publicly visible, mass-mediated political debate—during or between election campaigns. In other words, party positions and issue salience are coded as they can be perceived by the wider public, whereas manifestos mirror self-relevance of certain issues may change. This is however a problem related to a decision taken by the Comparative Manifestos Project. Additionally, we ignore specific reliability problems as they are also more related to the way data are collected than to the nature of the data itself.
declared positions and issue emphases defined by political parties themselves. Yet the overall relevance of party manifestos can be questioned because few voters actually read them (Kriesi et al. 2008: 66-67).

Second, as manifestos are published at the beginning of an election campaign, they cannot capture the dynamics of public debates and might miss important topics that come up in the course of or between election campaigns. Short-term changes in issue positions or salience can therefore not be measured. While manifesto-data are available for only one specific point in time per legislature, media-data can be gathered over both shorter and longer time periods in order to study the ups and downs of particular issues and to track cross-temporal changes of party positions. Whereas parties decide by themselves how much importance they attach to various issues in their manifestos, the salience of issues in the public debate is very much shaped by the agenda setting strategies of other actors as well as by exogenous events such as economic crises or natural catastrophes. Third, manifestos provide no information on intra-party dissent. To the extent that electoral programs are official, authoritative statements strategically designed to put a party in a positive light, they generally do not touch on sensitive issues and present a party as a coherent unity. Media data, for their part, not only give information on the party as such, but also on positions of individual party members or deviant groups and factions. Thus, intra-party divisions are made public and appear in the media. Based on news value theory (e.g. Galtung and Holmboe Ruge 1965), it might even be argued that the media are particularly interested in covering intra-party heterogeneity as conflict increases the newsworthiness of a message. As a consequence, the media may tend to focus on controversial topics and to overemphasize party divisions. This should be kept in mind when interpreting analyses of issue salience.

To some extent, intra-party heterogeneity can also be captured by expert surveys. Yet, while expert surveys sometimes measure the degree of intra-party dissent, they generally fail to identify dissenting voices and offer no information on deviant (groups of) actors. Such controversies within political parties may also affect experts’ evaluations of their overall position on a policy issue. In fact, experts may exclusively refer to the dominant opinion of the party leadership when locating a party and completely discard the opinions of factions, or they may report some mean value accounting for diverging positions within a party. This possibility points to one important characteristic of expert data: they rely on subjective judgments supposedly derived from diverse sources of information (e.g. Budge 2000, see however Steen-
bergen and Marks 2007 for a reply). While some experts may refer to the positions of party leaders, others may think of the views of party activists or the opinions of party electorates, and all may simultaneously rely on simple rhetoric and on actual behavior. This makes these data inappropriate to analyze the impact of preferences on behavior (Marks et al. 2007). In addition, it is difficult for experts to assess party positions and issue salience in the past. Given that expert surveys can hardly be used retroactively, they only provide a snapshot and cannot detect any changes within short periods of time either.

In contrast, expert surveys not only offer an “attractive combination of economy and access” (Benoit and Laver 2006: 75), but also much flexibility since information can be gathered on any topic according to the needs of the researcher, whereas the analysis of the media and of party manifestos is constrained by what appears in these sources. Typically, minor or more technical issues are unlikely to get reported by the media or to be included in electoral programs, but experts may be available to locate political parties on such issues. Similarly, expert surveys are a convenient source for direct quantification. While experts can answer a simple question on whether a party is rather for or against the European integration process, positions on such general issues can hardly be found in the media or in party manifestos. They rather reflect positions on sub-issues such as monetary policy or EU enlargement, which then have to be aggregated by the researcher into a more general indicator of positions towards the European integration process. All three data sources however share the common characteristic that measurements of positions – on large issue categories or their sub-dimensions – tend to be more reliable for large (governing) parties than for smaller (opposition) parties at the extremes of the left-right scale. While experts often have not enough information and knowledge about small parties, they generally get less coverage in the media and have shorter electoral manifestos than larger parties, thus leaving the researcher with an insufficient number of coded observations.

The last two aspects – the reliability problem for small parties and the problem of generating general indicators – point to another particularity of media coding: data collection is much more time-consuming and personnel-intensive than in the other two approaches. To make valid and reliable statements about party positions and issue salience, a huge number of articles has to be coded. Contrary to a ‘quasi sentence’ in a manifesto that can be considered as representing the dominant opinion within a party, we cannot know whether one particular core sentence or political claim in a newspaper article reflects the general opinion of a party.
Similarly, we do not know from one core sentence or claim whether the respective issue is central to the general debate or concerns a rather minor sub-issue. This insecurity can only be overcome with a large number of observations.

This problem is aggravated by the need to code different newspapers at the same time. Newspapers generally have a distinctive ideological position represented in their editorial line, which might influence their selection of political information (e.g. Page 1996). To correctly represent the public debate, it is therefore advisable to code several newspapers with different editorial profiles. It is quite common to code either a left-wing and a right-wing newspaper or a qualitative newspaper and a tabloid. Koopmans and Statham (1999: 207) have however shown that there are no significant differences in the positioning of political actors between quality papers and tabloids. There are, however, differences with regard to the amount of coverage of particular issues as the coverage of tabloids is much more limited and concise (Koopmans et al. 2005: 261). Although newspapers cover some issues more extensively than others and tend to grant more visibility to the positions of political actors that fit into their editorial line, they generally do not distort reported positions (e.g. Hagen 1993). In other words, the measurement of political positions should be similar across newspapers while the salience of issues may vary according to the type of paper (tabloid vs. quality paper) and/or their editorial line (left- vs. right-wing paper).

When to use media data

While media-data share many of the characteristics of expert- and, especially, of manifesto-data, media-data seem to be more suitable for certain research questions than the other two approaches. Let us briefly highlight three aspects:

Generally, we think that the choice of an indicator for particular research questions matters more for the measurement and analysis of issue salience than of party positions. In our view, parties are unlikely to change their positions over short periods of time, but for strategic reasons they might choose to abandon some issues over the course of a political debate and to stress other, more promising issues instead. Moreover, as argued above, while the media can be expected to truthfully report the positions of political actors, their selection behavior probably affects the salience of issues. As a consequence, we expect indicators of party positions derived from media coverage to be closely related to indicators based on other data sources, whereas the various indicators of issue salience should be less strongly related.
More specifically, we believe that media-data are more useful when the analysis focuses on public debates and aims at comparing the supply side (what parties offer) with the demand side (what citizens require and how they perceive positions). Given that most citizens learn about politics from the media (see Robertson 1976) and that the media have the power to influence how political actors and issues are perceived (e.g. Iyengar and Kinder 1987), we should observe that indicators generated from mass survey-data are closer related to media-than to manifesto- and expert-data.

Finally, we contend that media-data are a more sensitive and finer-grained instrument to measure party positions and issue salience as they are not restricted to a single point in time every four to five years, but allow studying the dynamics of actual debates. It is therefore possible to analyze short-period effects. Moreover, debates can be grasped much more appropriately because media coverage offers information on intra-party dissent. Provided that newspapers are coded without an a priori fixed coding scheme, information can be gathered on all possible sub-issues. The problem is that we cannot empirically test these aspects by comparing media data with other data as the latter simply do not provide information on positions of party factions, positions on sub-issues or changes over relatively short periods of time.\(^4\) If, however, we are able to show with media-data that dissenting voices and short-time changes really exist and occur, we can make a strong case for a more generalized use of media-data in the study of party positions.

**Data and operationalization**

Our *media-data based on CSA* stem from the comparative research project “National Political Change in a Globalizing World” coordinated by Hanspeter Kriesi from the University of Zurich and Edgar Grande from the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (Kriesi et al. 2008).\(^5\) This project studies party competition in the context of national election campaigns in six Western European countries (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) and covers, in each country, three campaigns from the 1990s and early 2000s, and one from the mid-1970s (for an overview, see Dolezal 2008: 57). The research team content analyzed all articles (except for commentaries) related to the electoral contest or

\(^4\) Expert surveys are a partial exception as some of them enquire about intra-party dissent and positions towards several sub-issues.

\(^5\) This project was financed by the German Research Foundation (SFB 536 – Project 5C) and by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Project Nr. 1214-68010.02).
to politics in general for the two months prior to the four elections in one quality paper and
one tabloid for each country. The headlines, the lead and the first paragraph of the selected
articles from a sample of issues in case of quality papers and from all issues in case of tab-
loids were coded sentence by sentence. Actors were coded according to their party mem-
bership, and represent a total of 36 different parties (for a list of parties per country, see Dolezal
2008: 69-70). Issues were captured with a fine-grained, open coding scheme and later aggre-
gated into twelve broader issue categories, one of which is European integration. The direc-
tion of a relationship between actors and issues was quantified on a scale ranging from +1 to -
1 (with three intermediary positions), and the position of a political party on Europe is there-
fore computed by averaging all core sentences involving this party and the issue of European
integration. Issue salience is given by the frequency with which a given political party takes a
position on European integration, relative to the total of all its statements.

The comparative research project “The Transformation of Political Mobilization and Com-
munication in European Public Spheres” (Europub.com) provides us with media-data based
on PCA. In this project directed by Koopmans and Statham (2002), political claims pertain-
ing to agriculture, monetary politics, immigration, troops deployment, retirement and pen-
sions, education, and European integration were analyzed in four newspapers – were available
two quality papers, one regional paper and one tabloid – in seven Western European countries
(France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) for
the years 1990, 1995, 2000-2002. In contrast to media data from CSA, media data from PCA
is not tied to national election campaigns, but studies political contestation in general. Based
on a sampling scheme, articles in the international, national and economic sections of each
newspaper were retrieved and coded in full length. From this large dataset, we extracted all
political claims made by actors with a party affiliation on topics related to European integra-
tion. Overall, representatives from 60 different political parties are included in this dataset.

6 The following newspapers were selected: Die Presse and Kronenzeitung in Austria, The Times and the Sun in
the UK, Le Monde and Le Parisien in France, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Bild in Germany, NRC Handelsblad and
Algemeen Dagblad in the Netherlands, and Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Blick in Switzerland.
7 This project was financed by the European Commission in the context of its 5th framework program (HPSE-
CT2001-00046). The Federal Office for Education and Research funded the Swiss part of this study (BBW
8 The newspapers that were chosen are: Le Monde, Le Figaro, Ouest France, L’Humanité in France, Süddeut-
ische Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Leipziger Volkszeitung, Bild-Zeitung in Germany, La Repub-
blica, Il Corriere della Sera, Il Mattino, La Nazione in Italy, De Volkskrant, Algemeen Dagblad, Leeuwarder
Courant, De Telegraaf in the Netherlands, El País, Abc, La Vanguardia, El Mundo in Spain, Neue Zürcher Zeit-
The Sun in the United Kingdom.
9 For more information on sampling schemes and coding rules, see Koopmans (2002).
Positions were coded on a scale ranging from +1 to -1, and we obtained our indicator of party positions by calculating an average for each party for the period 2000-2002 and for 1995 respectively. However, we refrained from computing an indicator of issue salience for different reasons. For one, and contrary to CSA, each political claim is only coded once, that is positions that repeatedly appear in one (or several) newspaper article(s) are not duplicated. Second, political claims were coded with a closed coding scheme, and while some issue categories such as agriculture were narrowly defined, the issue of European integration was a very broad category. As a result, European integration appeared to be the most salient issue for (almost) all parties in all countries. While such an indicator can be validly used to compare the relative salience of different parties in the dataset, it cannot be used in comparison with other data sources.

We contrast party positions and issue salience derived from these two sets of media-data to measurements obtained from the more commonly used party manifestos, expert and mass surveys. We have no space here to present the respective datasets in detail and restrict the discussion to the operationalization of positions and issue salience. In the manifesto dataset (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006) there are two-EU related categories, labeled “European Integration: Positive” (per108) and “European Integration: Negative” (per110). Whereas the first category contains all favorable mentions to the EU in general, desirability of expanding the EU and/or of increasing its competence, as well as the desirability to join the EU (or to remain a member country), the second category refers to exactly the opposite and also includes opposition to specific European policies. In order to measure party positions, we follow McDonald and Mendes (2001: 94) who advise researchers to privilege ratio measures (rather than subtractive measures) when the intention is to locate a party on a given policy dimension regardless of salience. We therefore operationalize party positions on the pro/anti-European dimension as the percentage of positive statements relative to the total of positive and negative mentions of European integration. Given that the manifesto approach is based on saliency theory, all data entries are percentages (standardized by the total number of quasi-sentences in a given manifesto), and we obtain our indicator of salience by summing up the pro- and anti-EU scores (see Netjes and Binnema 2007: 41).
To measure party positioning and salience based on expert-data we rely on data collected by Ray (1999) for the year 1996 and by the Chapel Hill group for the year 2002. To measure party positions, both surveys asked experts to evaluate the overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration on a seven-point scale (ranging from 1 ‘strongly opposed’ to 7 ‘strongly in favor’). Issue salience, for its part, is captured by a question asking experts about the relative importance of European integration in the party’s public stance in the year of the surveys (5-point scale, ranging from 1 ‘no importance, never mentioned by the party’ to 5 ‘the most important issue for the party’).

To derive party positions and issue salience from mass surveys we rely on the European Election Study (EES) from the years 1994 and 1999 (van der Eijk et al. 2002). To get a measurement of party positions, we resort to a question asking respondents to place the views of a list of political parties on a scale ranging from 1 'European unification has already gone too far' to 10 'European unification should be pushed further'. To tap issue salience, we rely on a question asking respondents to evaluate, on a four-point scale and for a list of parties, the importance of European integration as compared to other important topics in their home country.

Contrary to the manifesto-, expert- and mass-survey data, our media-data are only available for a restricted number of Western European countries. To augment the number of observations, we include two periods of time. As it appears in Table 4, for the CSA-, Manifesto- and National Survey-data we have chosen national elections in the mid-1990s and at the beginning of the new century, as the PCA-data were collected for these two periods. EES- and expert-data are also available for these two periods. As there are no expert and EES-data for Switzerland, we exclude this country from our analyses. A further difficulty concerns the number of parties: in order to directly compare the various position and salience indicators we have to make sure that our results are not distorted by composition effects. Therefore we include only parties in our analyses that are part of all dataset. Table 5a lists all 31 parties that are included when we compare the CSA-indicators with other indicators, whereas we find in Table 5b the 45 parties for the respective analyses with the PCA-indicators.

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10 These datasets are available from http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks
Table 4: Time periods and political parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dataset</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA, Manifestos</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>All countries</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2000-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td>All countries</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>All countries</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: Indicators: Core Sentence Approach (CSA), European Election Survey (EES), Political Claims Analysis (PCA).

Table 5a: Parties included for comparison with CSA-Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>FPÖ, GA, SPÖ</td>
<td>FPÖ, GA, ÖVP, SPÖ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>FN, PS, RPR, UDF</td>
<td>FN, PS, UDF, Verts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>D’66, GL, PvdA, VVD</td>
<td>CDA, D’66, GL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Labour, Tories</td>
<td>Labour, Tories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>CDU, FDP</td>
<td>CDU, FDP, SPD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5b: Parties included for comparison with PCA-Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>PS, RPR, UDF</td>
<td>PCF, PS, UDF, Verts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>D’66, PvdA, VVD</td>
<td>CDA, D’66, GL, PvdA, SP, VVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Labour, Tories</td>
<td>Labour, LDP, SNP, Tories, UKIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>CDU, FDP, Grüne, PDS, SPD</td>
<td>CDU, CSU, FDP, Grüne, PDS, SPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>AN, FI, LN, PCI, RC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>CiU, IU, PP, PSOE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political parties: (A) Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria), Die Grüne Alternative (GA, The Green Alternative), Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP, Austrian People’s Party), Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ, Social Democratic Party of Austria); (F) Front National (FN, National Front), Parti Communiste Français (PCF, French Communist Party), Parti Socialiste (PS, Socialist Party), Rassemblement pour la République (RPR, Rally for the Republic), Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF, Union for French Democracy), Les Verts (Verts, The Greens); (NL) Christen-Democratisch Appel (CDA, Christian Democratic Appeal), Democraten’66 (D’66, Democrats 66), GroenLinks (GL, Green Left), Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA, Labour Party), Socialistische Partij (SP, Socialist Party), Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD, People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy); (D) Christlich-Demokratische Union (CDU, Christian Democratic
Exploring the potential advantages of media-data

Convergent validity of party positions and issue salience

First of all we like to test our hypothesis according to which different indicators for party positions are closer related than the respective indicators for salience. To confirm this argument we have to cross-validate our data to find out whether or not the various indicators measure the same underlying dimensions. According to Bollen (1989: 184), “validity is concerned with whether a variable measures what it is supposed to measure.” We closely follow the lead of Marks et al. (2007), Ray (2007) and Netjes and Binnema (2007) who assess indicators of party position and issue salience, among others, in terms of their convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent validity involves the comparison of alternative measures of the same concept and discriminant validity the comparison of measures of different concepts (Ray 2007: 12). Valid measures of the same underlying construct are empirically associated and are therefore similar and ‘converge’. Two common instruments to assess convergent and discriminant validity are correlation tests and exploratory factor analysis. While correlation tests simply enable us to observe whether indicators converge or not, factor analysis allows us in addition to discriminate among different dimensions. In other words, if there is more than one underlying construct, factor analysis helps us show to which dimension an indicator belongs and how strongly it correlates with the respective dimension.

It is always difficult to judge whether two indicators are closely related or not. There is no general standard to distinguish high from low correlations, for example. The best way to assess coefficients that come out of correlation tests or factor analyses is to compare them with other similar tests. In our discussion of the validity tests we will therefore consistently compare our results with those from Marks et al. (2007), Ray (2007) and Netjes and Binnema (2007). Of course, the comparisons have to be taken with a grain of salt as these other studies partly use different cases and indicators.
Table 6 reports the correlations of our six indicators for party positions. In the first part we run the correlations with the CSA- and in the second part with the PCA-data. All coefficients are positive and highly significant. On average the indicators correlate at the level of respectively 0.639 and 0.601. This is clearly above the average coefficient of 0.531 in Ray’s (2007: 19) convergent validity test. His analysis displays the highest correlations between the two perceptual measures of expert- and mass-surveys and between manifesto- and expert-data. In our analysis we get very high correlations between manifesto- and expert-data, expert- and CSA-data and manifesto- and PCA-data.

As most indicators correlate at a high level and the strength of correlations does not depend on the indicators, we can assume that there is no strong method effect and all variables reflect the same underlying dimension. This assumption is confirmed in our factor analysis in Table 7. All indicators display very high coefficients that are very similar to those in Ray’s (2007: 20) and Marks et al. (2007: 26) studies. The resulting factors explain respectively 74 and 70 per cent of the variance while 61 per cent and between 67 and 73 per cent of the variance is explained in Ray’s (2007: 20) and Marks et al. (2007: 26) factor analyses. In both factor analyses we get the highest factor loadings for the manifesto data followed by the expert-, the media- and the EES-data.

Table 6: Convergent validity of positions I: correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CSA-cases</th>
<th></th>
<th>PCA-cases</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EES</td>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>EES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.541***</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.643***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>0.401*</td>
<td>0.714***</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td></td>
<td>PCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>0.654***</td>
<td>0.878***</td>
<td>0.648***</td>
<td>Manifesto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of significance: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001
Notes: N in parentheses
Abbreviations: Core Sentence Approach (CSA), European Election Study (EES), Political Claims Analysis (PCA)
Table 7: Convergent validity of positions II: factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CSA-cases</th>
<th>PCA-cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>0.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>2.942</td>
<td>2.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained Variance</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: principal component analysis, varimax rotation
Abbreviations: Core Sentence Approach (CSA), European Election Study (EES), Political Claims Analysis (PCA)

Let us now test the convergent validity of the four dataset for which we have generated an indicator of salience.\(^{11}\) We clearly see in Table 8 that with one exception all coefficients are very low and not significant. In Netjes and Binnema’s (2007: 45) comparison of salience indicators, the coefficients are slightly higher and highly significant. Compared to the different analyses of party positions, it clearly appears that salience indicators are much less correlated. This also becomes clear when we run a factor analysis. While the three indicators used in Netjes and Binnema’s (2007: 45) study load on the same factor but at a lower level than the coefficients for positions in Ray (2007) and Marks et al. (2007) and explaining only 49 per cent of the variance, we even get two factors that explain respectively 35 per cent and 29 per cent of the variance (see Table 9). The two variables with the highest loadings are the manifesto data in factor 1 and the CSA media-data in factor 2. This finding suggests that the parties stress different issues in their party manifestos than during mass-mediated election campaigns. Or, put in other words, newspapers do not seem to cover the various issues in the same way as parties do it in their manifestos.

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\(^{11}\) As we have explained above, an indicator of salience cannot be generated with PCA media-data.
### Table 8: Convergent validity of salience I: correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CSA-cases</th>
<th>Experts</th>
<th>CSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.622***</td>
<td>-0.071</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of significance: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001
Notes: N in parentheses
Abbreviations: Core Sentence Approach (CSA), European Election Study (EES), Political Claims Analysis (PCA)

### Table 9: Convergent validity of salience II: factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>-0.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td>0.463</td>
<td>-0.544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue: 1.757 1.125
Explained Variance: 44% 28%

Notes: principal component analysis, varimax rotation
Abbreviations: Core Sentence Approach (CSA), European Election Study (EES), Political Claims Analysis (PCA)

### Comparing demand- and supply-side

Another advantage of media data that is sometimes put forward is that they supposedly reflect much better than other data how ordinary people perceive political parties as they do not read party manifestos and do not know parties the same way as experts (Kriesi et al. 2008: 66-67). To analyze public debates and to directly compare demand- and supply sides of political
struggles it might therefore be useful to use media-data. To know whether media data better reflect how people perceive political parties we simply have to compare the correlation coefficients between indicators based on survey data with the other indicators.

Contrary to our expectation in the first columns of Table 6 we see that the EES data are both times closer related to manifesto- and expert-data than to media-data. One could argue that it is problematic to compare data that are not collected at the same moment. We therefore conducted the same analysis with data from national surveys that have been collected during the same election periods as the CSA- and the manifesto-data (results not shown here). But even the indicators based on the national surveys correlated at a higher level with manifesto- than with media-data.

As we already know, media data diverge from other data much more with regard to salience than positioning. It might therefore be that the hypothesis of a close relationship between media- and survey-data holds for salience indicators. As it appears in the first column of Table 8, however, no such strong relationship can be detected. The highest correlation coefficient is the one between manifesto- and EES-data that is however significant only at the 0.1 level.

Especially the generally strong correlations with the manifesto-data indicates that people (even if they do not read party manifestos) perceive much more a party's long term strategies than positions in short term struggles. Another result that points towards such a conclusion is the slightly stronger correlation between survey- and PCA- than between survey- and CSA-data. As PCA data have been coded for ‘periods of routine politics’, it might be that the positions taken in these periods are closer related to the long-term strategies of parties than the positions taken during the specific periods of election campaigns.

Observing heterogeneity
The last aspect we are interested in concerns the question whether media-data are a finer-grained and more sensitive to explore short-term changes, diverging positions over sub-issues and intra-party dissent. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to investigate these aspects with our own media-data, but some studies have already (at least partly) shown that diverging voices within a party and over sub-issues exist whereas changing positions over short periods of time have not yet been subject of empirical analyses. For instance, analyzing party families in six Western European countries, Helbling et al. (2008) confirm that the extremist parties at
the right and the left generally strongly oppose the European integration process while the established Social democrats and conservative parties take a rather ambivalent position and are internally divided. Since European integration consists of economic, political and cultural projects, it has been argued and empirically shown that parties take diverging positions on the different dimensions (see Helbling et al. 2008; Hooghe et al. 2004; Marks 2004: 241-343). For example, parties of the center-left are often said to be in favor of more integration if particular projects focus on ‘market-regulation’. Social democrats are in favor of diminishing cultural boundaries, but simultaneously are afraid of losing social achievements at the national level. On the other side of the political spectrum, those on the right increase their opposition to integration when the process concerns more than a simple economic and monetary union. Liberal conservative parties often support further integration as long as it mainly concerns market liberalization, and oppose further integration when political or cultural aspects are concerned (Kriesi 2007: 86-87).

Conclusion
The aim of this paper was to introduce the content coding of media coverage as an alternative approach to study party positions and issue salience in the field of European integration. Whereas the use of media-data has a long tradition in social movement research on contentious politics, party experts have rarely relied on the media to measure party positions about policies or the salience of issues although some eminent scholars have recently called for a move in this direction. To do so, we presented two different techniques to derive indicators of party positions and issue salience from the media: the core sentence approach and political claims analysis. Both methods focus on (the direction of) relationships between actors and issues and therefore produce relational data, which can be collected at any moment on any issue covered by the media during an undetermined period of time according to the needs of the researcher.

The results from our correlation and factor analyses provide evidence for convergent validity between our indicators of party positions derived from media-data and more established measures based on party manifestos, experts and mass surveys. In other words, our media indicators seem to capture largely the same information about party positions as other measures. This finding underlines that media-data constitute a valid alternative to more traditional and widely used data sources. Although different methods produce similar results on political parties' general location on the European integration issue, each has its particular strengths
and weaknesses. Depending on the specific research question, one method might be preferable to the others. In the case of media-data, we believe that its particular strength lies in the possibility to explore short-term changes, diverging positions on sub-issues and intra-party dissent. To answer such research questions, media-data have more to offer than other approaches because they are more sensitive and finer-grained. In such a case, the enormous and time-consuming coding effort may be justified by more detailed and balanced research findings. If, in contrast, one is primarily interested in political parties' general policy positions, a less costly and more accessible method such as expert surveys may be advisable.

The indicators to measure issue salience must be chosen even more carefully. In fact, our findings indicate that the salience indicators derived from various data sources measure different constructs and cannot be used interchangeably. We expected that media data better reflect how ordinary citizens perceive political parties and which importance they attach to specific issues. As it turned out however, this is not true. It seems that ordinary people perceive much more a party's long-term strategies. Nonetheless, we think that media data are more appropriate when public debates are at the core of interest and when we aim at exploring how parties compete with each other (see Netjes and Binnema 2007: 40). Since media data allow capturing short-term changes, we are in a position to explore how parties react to the agenda setting strategies of other parties and how they change their priorities in the aftermath of external events.

We have mentioned some of the studies that have already used data derived from media according to the two techniques we have presented (Kriesi 2007; Kriesi et al. 2008; Koopmans 2007; Koopmans et al. 2005). Further applications of media data are however necessary that explore in detail the research questions we have outlined in this paper. By doing so, we will gain further insights into the strengths and weaknesses of media data. Even though none of the various sources of data we have discussed in this paper has a monopoly of truth, it is possible to generalize about specific research questions for which some indicators are more appropriate than others.
References


