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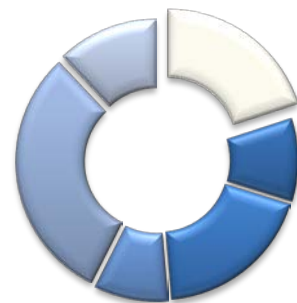
Expert Survey of German Political Parties after the Bundestag Election of 2017

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Introduction

The German party system has undergone considerable change in recent years (Niedermayer 2013). The gradual weakening of the two major parties – particularly the Social Democrats (SPD) – and the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) are two cases in point. The implications for this became apparent in the long and complicated attempts at forming a viable government coalition following the Bundestag election of 2017. It took nearly six months after the election of 23 September 2017 to form a coalition under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel on 14 March 2018. A bargaining duration of this length is completely unprecedented in German political history since 1949 and is clearly a result of the much more fragmented party system, which is also characterized by a larger number of salient policy dimensions than in the past. Hence, despite the important efforts of the Manifesto Research Group (Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2013) or the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2012), it is time to add a new ‘wave’ to one of the most influential expert surveys in comparative politics, the surveys started by Laver and Hunt (1992) in the early 1990s.

The spatial policy positions of political parties can be established in a number of ways. The most frequent methods are the content analysis of election manifestos employing various methods, self-placement of party elites in surveys (e.g., Schmitt-Beck et al. 2009; Wüst et al. 2006) or population surveys where respondents rate the positions of political parties and, not least, surveys of ‘experts’, usually academics and other knowledgeable persons (Benoit, Laver, and Mikhaylov 2009; Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003; Lowe et al. 2011; Volkens 2007). Following Laver and Hunt’s (1992) seminal expert survey published in the early 1990s, various research projects have repeatedly interviewed experts to place political parties in various policy spaces. These efforts include, amongst others, Benoit and Laver (2006) or the so-called ‘Chapel Hill Expert Surveys’ (Bakker et al. 2012).

In 2017-2018, the study by Benoit and Laver (2006) was repeated in a project directed by Daniela Giannetti, Luca Pinto and Andrea Pedrazzani. Within the context of that project, Thomas Saalfeld and his team organized a repeat of the German survey Benoit and Laver had initiated in the early 2000s. A small research team of Lucas Geese, Julian Hohner and Thomas Saalfeld compiled a completely new list of experts on political parties in Germany and implemented the questionnaire. This very first and brief report produces some information on the research strategy and first descriptive results.

Identifying Experts on German Party Policy

While the use of expert surveys is an established tool in the social and human sciences (Benoit and Laver, 2006: 108), it remains a matter for discussion how to identify suitable experts. Benoit and Laver (2006: 109) define ‘experts’ as

'people with expertise in party politics in their own national contexts, having considerable knowledge about the policies positions of those parties. ... When chosen properly, however, experts who are knowledgeable in a field are much more capable of rendering accurate information than those who are less knowledgeable, and have also been shown to be less prone to overestimate the confidence of their answers. In addition, research results show that experts are less subject to biases than non-experts; not only do they possess superior knowledge, but they also are far less affected by ordering effects and other irrelevant factors.'

The experts are asked to locate political parties on predefined scales from one to 20. 'The estimates of party group positions are then taken to be the statistically aggregated judgment of the experts, on each pre-defined dimension' (ibid., 110). It is obvious that the knowledge of the experts is crucial for the aggregated scores to be valid. We sought to identify the population of academics inside and outside of Germany specializing in German political parties and electoral politics. Like in Benoit and Laver's (2006) study, these persons were generally familiar with surveys and expert surveys. In a first step, we used a recent membership list of the German Political Science Association (DVPW) to identify all persons specializing in these fields. We used this list also to identify universities and research institutes in Germany that had research units, teams of researchers, or professorships in Political Science with a specialization in German politics and government. In addition, further experts were identified that may not have been members of the DVPW at the time. Finally, we used the membership list of the International Association for the Study of German Politics to identify experts outside Germany. This exercise yielded a total of 751 experts whose email addresses could be found via institutional websites. This group constituted the base for our survey.

Designing the Questionnaire and Identifying Relevant Parties

We used Benoit and Laver's (2006: 125) criteria for the identification of parties to be included in the questionnaire: 'The parties we asked experts to locate included all that met any one of the following two criteria: We automatically included every political party that won seats in the Bundestag at the 2017 general election. In addition, we included every existing national party that had won at least one percent of the vote nationally at the same election. This led us to include the following parties (in alphabetical order):

1. Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)
2. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
3. Christlich-Demokratische Union (CDU)
4. Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU)
5. Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP)
6. Freie Wähler
7. Die Linke
8. Die Partei
9. Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)

The questionnaire replicated the questionnaire used in the survey by Laver and Benoit (2006) in 2005. Unlike Laver and Benoit we did not give respondents the choice of either an online or a paper questionnaire. Rather, all experts were invited by email to participate in an online survey. In the questionnaire, they were asked to rate parties' policy positions in nine issue dimensions

as well as the importance of each issue dimension for the parties on scales from 1 to 20. Table 1 provides an overview of the issue dimensions and their left- (=1) and right-end (=20) policy position labels. Furthermore, respondents were asked to locate each party on a classical left-right scale as well as to assess the distance of their personal left-right position to those of each party.

Table 1: Issues and their description on the left and right end of the scale

Issue	Left-end of the Scale	Right-Ende of the Scale
Economy	Promotes raising taxes to increase public services.	Promotes cutting public services to cut taxes.
Social	Favours liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia.	Opposes liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia.
Deregulation	Favours high levels of state regulation and control of the market.	Favours deregulation of markets at every opportunity.
Environment	Supports protection of the environment, even at the cost of economic growth.	Supports economic growth, even at the cost of damage to the environment.
Decentralization	Promotes decentralisation of all administration and decision-making	Opposes any decentralisation of administration and decision-making.
Immigration	Favours policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants integrate into German society.	Favours policies designed to help asylum seekers and immigrants return to their country of origin.
EU: Authority	Favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy.	Favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy.
EU: Accountability	Promotes the direct accountability of the EU to citizens via institutions such as the European Parliament.	Promotes the indirect accountability of the EU to citizens via their own national governments.
EU: Neutrality	Favours German involvement in European security and peacekeeping missions.	Opposes any German involvement in European military affairs.

Field Phase

All 751 experts were sent a first email with a link to the questionnaire on January 25, 2018. Attending to increase the response rate, we sent out two reminders, on February 14 and February 21.

Table 2: Response Rate of the Expert Survey in Germany

	Incomplete	Complete	Total	E-Mails sent
Number of participants	85	163	248	751
Response Rate	11 %	21.7 %	33.02 %	/

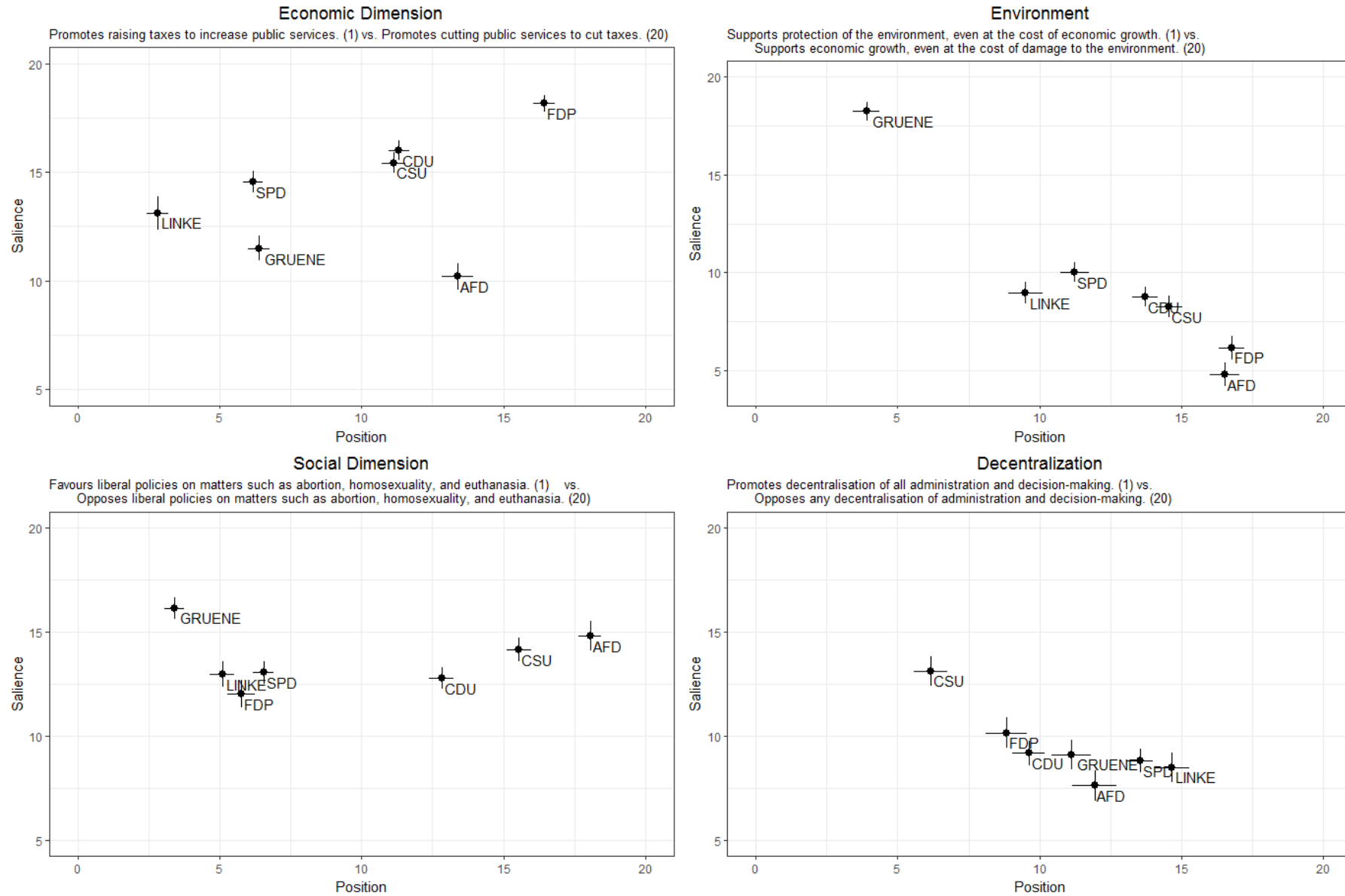
As can be seen in table 2, a total 163 out of 751 questionnaires (21.7%) were completed. A further 85 (11%) were incomplete. In Summary, 248 (33.02%) questionnaires were answered. Following Kaplowitz et al. (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine 2004: 98) the given response rate is far above the average rate for an external online-based survey, while the number of respondents enables us to conduct reliable statistical methods.

It is noteworthy that responses for two minor parties, “Freie Wähler” and “Die Partei”, are marked by a broad and therefore unreliable distribution of answers with regard to both aspects of a number of issue dimensions, policy positions and issue salience. The response rate of an expert declines by 40.11 % respectively 45.11 % if the party of interest is “Freie Wähler” or “Die Partei”. For this reason, we exclude these two parties in the following descriptive results section.

First Descriptive Results

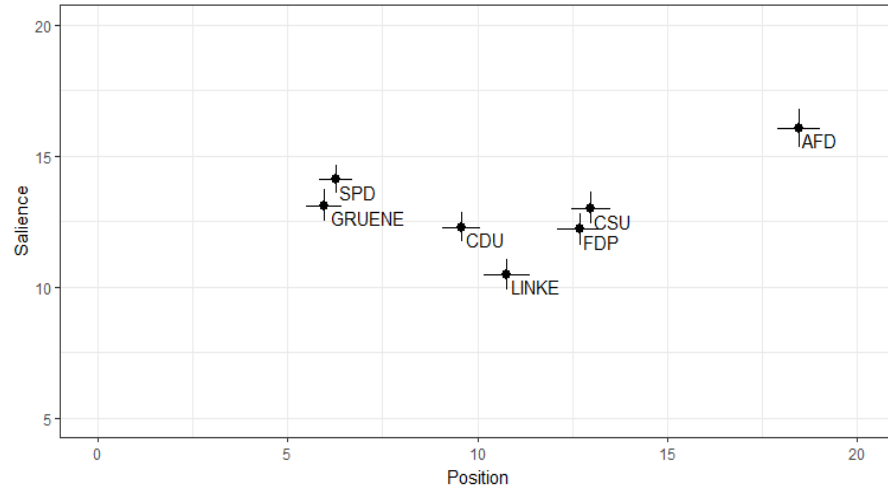
Figure 1 plots the policy positions and issue salience of parties represented in the Bundestag in each issue dimension as averages of expert evaluations. The horizontal position indicates the mean policy position with 95% confidence intervals. The vertical dimension reflects the mean issue salience, where high values express a bigger importance of this issue for the specific party, again with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1: Party position and salience on nine issue dimensions, on an overall left-right scale and their spatial proximity to the respondents in an expert survey



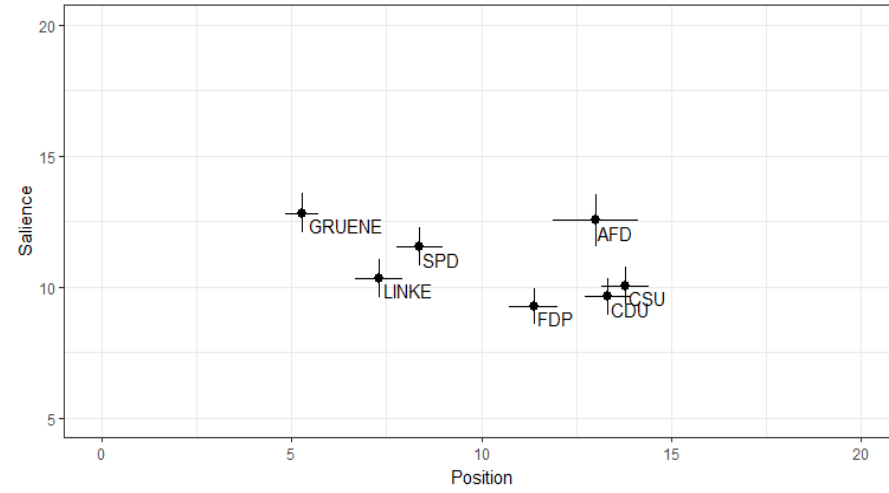
EU: Authority

Favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy. (1) vs.
Favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy. (20)



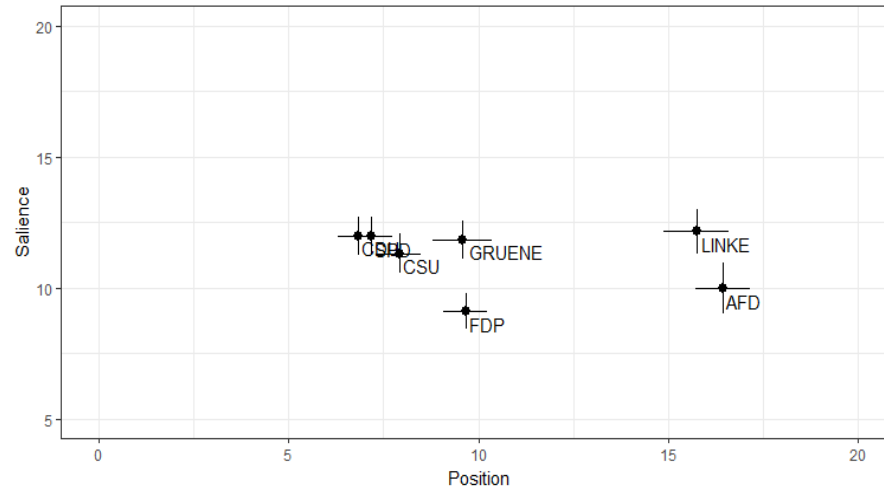
EU: Accountability

Promotes the direct accountability of the EU to citizens via institutions such as the European Parliament. (1) vs.
Promotes the indirect accountability of the EU to citizens via their own national governments. (20)



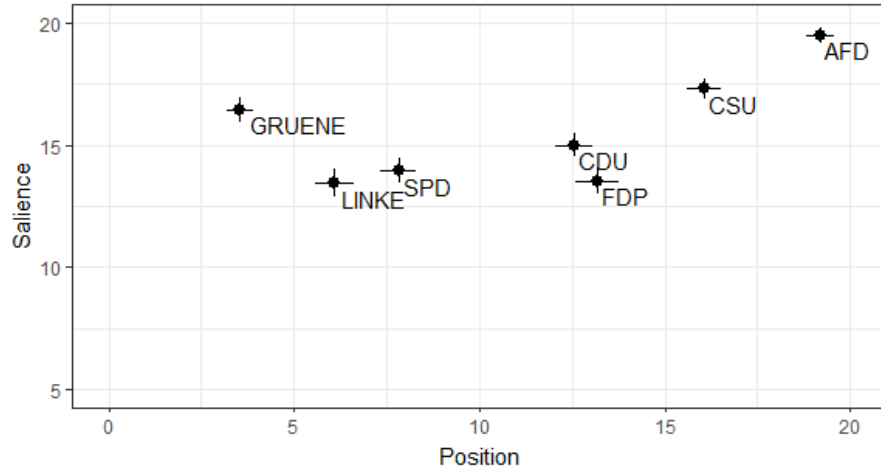
EU: Neutrality

Favours German involvement in European security and peacekeeping missions. (1) vs.
Opposes any German involvement in European military affairs. (20)



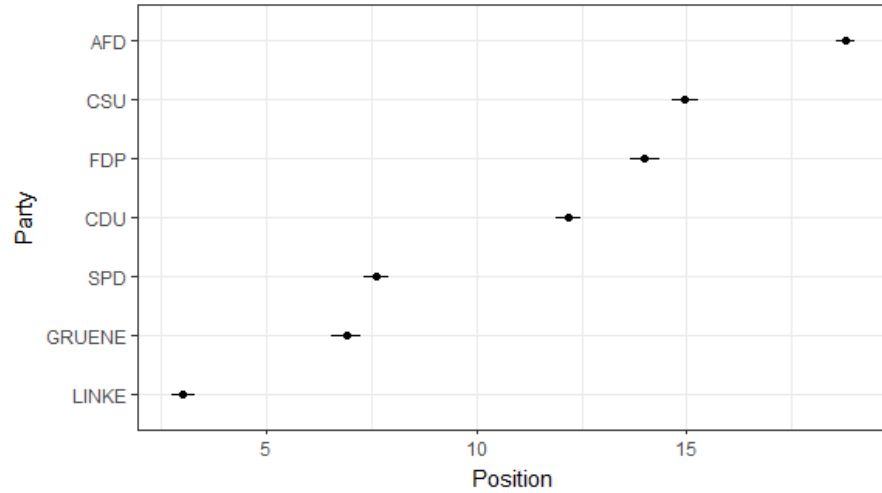
Immigration

Favours policies designed to help immigrants integrate into German society. (1) vs. Favours policies designed to help and immigrants return to their country of origin. (20)



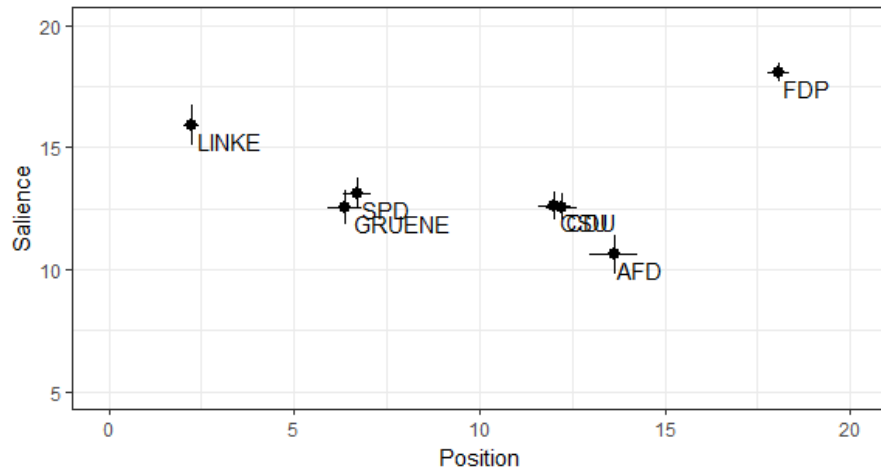
Left-Right

Left (1) vs. Right (20)



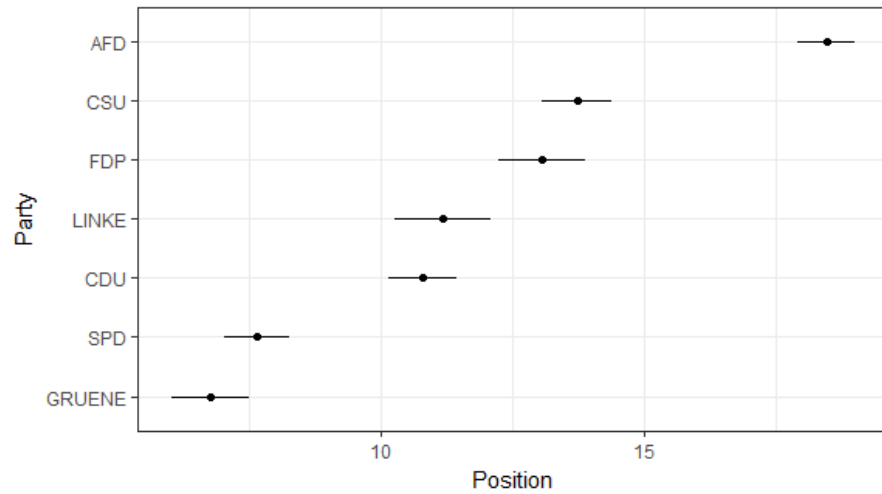
Deregulation

Favours high levels of state regulation and control of the market. (1) vs. Favours deregulation of markets at every opportunity. (20)



Spatial Proximity to Respondent

Same as respondent. (1) vs. Farthest from respondent. (20)

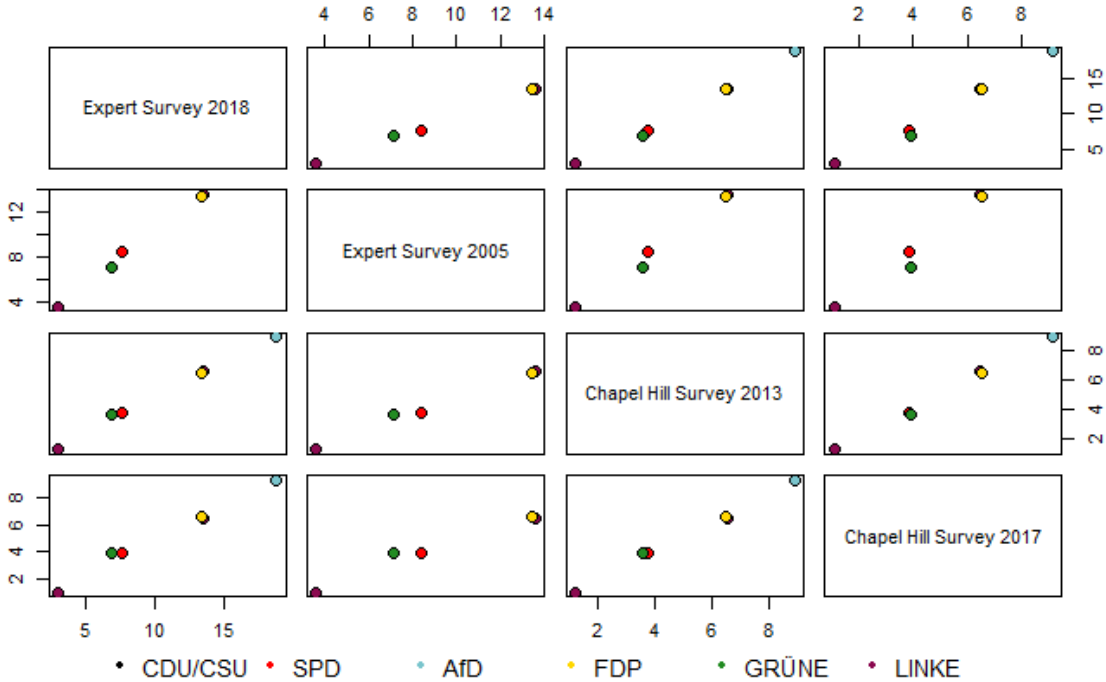


Brief Commentary on the Descriptive Results

Our first step in evaluating and validating our data is to compare them to the data Benoit and Laver (2006) collected for Germany in 2005. Where do the experts see the new parties in German politics, especially the AfD for which we do not have a great deal of spatial data yet? How do our results regarding the other parties compare to earlier studies or alternative approaches in measuring party positions? Do any differences we are observing correspond to similar observations of change in other studies?

By comparing our results of the overall ideological scale of parties to the findings of Chapel Hill Survey in 2013 and 2017 and to the results of Laver and Benoit (2006), we find a very high correlation. In fact, even though Chapel Hill uses an 11-point scale, our findings are nearly identical to the surveys plotted in Figure 2. This is a surprising result, since at least for the AfD there is a broad agreement that the party has moved strongly to the right in its first few years since the party was founded in 2013 (Lehmann and Matthieß 2017). On an overall left-right continuum, the German party system remains relatively stable over time according to our expert survey as well as in the Chapel Hill Survey (Saalfeld 2003).

Figure 2: Position of parties according to this expert survey, Laver and Benoit (2006) and the most recent Chapel Hill Surveys in terms of their overall ideological stance on a one-dimensional left-right continuum



To further analyze this assumption, we compare our results with the study of Benoit and Laver (2006: 213) in Table 3 on more specific dimensions. Regarding an overall left-right dimension, all parties except the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) are located slightly to the left of the results from Benoit and Laver’s study. However, it is impossible to say whether this reflects a change in the experts’ assessment of the parties or measurement error. Despite the differences, our data of 2017 are largely in line with the findings of Benoit and Laver (2006). The inference

of a slight move to the left would be in line with qualitative and quantitative work on the ideologies and policies of the German parties (Decker 2015; Gothe 2015; Slapin and Proksch 2008).

For the economic dimension, we observe a more sizeable difference. While this difference is directed towards rising taxes to increase public services in our 2017 survey (in this context: negative values), the values range between - 0.2 for “Die Linke/PDS” up to -4.6 for the Greens on a 20-point scale.

In contrast, there is a minor difference suggesting a move towards more traditional, authoritarian and nationalist values on the social dimension. The main difference is that CDU and CSU are now joined by the AfD on the traditionalist side of the spectrum whereas SPD, Greens and the Left Party are still on the liberal/libertarian end. The experts are locating the CDU/CSU, especially the CSU, on the right end of the scale (14.2, for the two parties combined) in relatively close proximity to the value of 18.0 for the AfD. As for the plot for the social dimension in Figure 1, this leads to a grouping effect between left and right and a further polarization of the party system on the social dimension.

Table 3: Comparison of Left-Right and GAL-TAN Dimensions between 2005 and 2018.

Party		Left-Right	Economic Dimension	Social Dimension
CDU/CSU	2005	13.6	14.4	15.9
	2018	13.5	11.2	14.2
	+/-	-0.1	-3.2	-1.7
SPD	2005	8.4	9.3	7.3
	2018	7.6	6.2	6.6
	+/-	-0.8	-3.1	-0.7
FDP	2005	13.4	18.7	5.3
	2018	14.0	16.4	5.8
	+/-	0.6	-2.3	0.5
Die Linke/PDS	2005	3.6	3.0	4.9
	2018	3.0	2.8	5.1
	+/-	-0.6	-0.2	0.2
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	2005	7.1	11.0	2.4
	2018	6.9	6.4	3.4
	+/-	-0.2	-4.6	1.0
AfD	2018	18.8	13.4	18.0

Note: Values are the mean for parties on a 20-point scale.

Furthermore, the experts distinguish clearly the CSU’s positions on the dimensions of immigration and decentralization from its “sister-party”, the CDU. While decentralization has traditionally been a special policy focus for the CSU to represent Bavarian interests, the CSU’s clear positioning to the right of the CDU on the issue of immigration is striking but in line with recent controversies between the two parties’ leaderships (Saalfeld, Bahr, and Seifert 2018).

In sum, we can observe that the expert ratings obtained in our study show considerable continuity with the previous expert survey by Benoit and Laver (2006) on the overall left-right scale and for the economic dimension. Insofar our differences with Benoit and Laver are not a result of measurement error but indicate a shift in the experts locating German parties, one

might conclude that the German party system of 2017/2018 is polarized more strongly along the social dimension. Especially in the case of the CSU the experts ratings suggest a clear shift of the party to the right and towards the AfD on the social dimension in general, and specifically on immigration. The experts seem to agree with the general perception that the party has responded to the challenge of the AfD by switching to a strategy of “accommodating” the AfD’s positions in Meguid’s (2005) terms (Harald Biskup 2016; Knight 2018). The same finding can be observed in the study by Marc Debus based on the two most recent party manifestos (2017) , who finds a similar right shift of the CSU in comparison to the election in 2013 on the social dimension.

This leads to the question of how the experts place the AfD on different issues. The general pattern in our survey seems to be that the AfD is systematically on the far right of each scale. This is in line with recent empirical qualitative and quantitative work on the issue (Arzheimer 2015; Berning 2017; Decker 2016; Lewandowsky 2016; Linhart 2017: 121). By splitting the issues plotted in Figure 1 into dimensions with low and high salience for the party, we can observe a consistent pattern (Table 3).

Table 4: Policy issues of high and low salience for the AfD

Salience	Policy Issues
High Salience: Value > 10	Social Dimension, EU: Authority, Neutrality and Accountability as well as Immigration.
Low Salience: Value < 10	Economic Dimension, Environment, Decentralization and Deregulation.

On dimensions with high salience, experts place the AfD on a far-right position, which differs significantly from every other party’s position¹. This pattern applies especially to the dimensions of Immigration, EU: Authority and the Social Dimension, confirming previous scholarship that tends to locate the AfD on the far-right end of the spectrum (Berning 2017; Lewandowsky 2016; Linhart 2017: 121). The experts seem to perceive the AfD as a “single-issue” party by assigning them above average salencies on social and EU-related topics (Meguid 2005; Mudde 1999). In contrast, on dimensions with low saliency the AfD is perceived to take the position of mainstream parties.

Although this is especially the case for the AfD, we find similar observation for every other party. The answers of the respondents scatter more, the lower they value the overall salience of a specific issue for each party. This results in broader confidence intervals on issues, where the salience is lower than the average salience of all issues. For example, the positional scale on European issues of neutrality and accountability as well as the issue of decentralization show broader confidence intervals than other issues while having an under average salience. Following this observation, respondents seem to get more uncertain of a party’s position the lower the salience of an issue gets.

This results in a general pattern over all plots shown in Figure 1. For almost every issue with an under average salience, there seems to be one party taking the role of an outsider in relation to every other party by having a. an extreme position or b. a high salience. From probably the most established outsider roles in Germany, the Greens take an outsider role for environmental

¹ An exception to this pattern applies to the dimension EU: Accountability. Here, confidence intervals are broader than on average for every party.

issues, to a strong position for decentralization in the case of CSU to a far-right position on deregulating the market in the case of FDP. In all those dimension, we can observe one extreme outlier party while on the other side, the remaining parties are located into a small area with low salience for this issue.

Finally, turning to the last plot visualising respondents' ideological closeness to each of the rated parties, our German experts seem to identify themselves more strongly with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), followed by a closely tied mixture of the remaining parties, while the experts' ideological stances do not seem to be proximate to that of the AfD.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Future investigations will explore the tendency of certain parties to be extreme outliers on highly salient dimensions, while on the other side "herding" the remaining parties in an indistinguishable cluster on issues with lower saliencies. It seems likely that this observation is a structural bias towards expert surveys of this manner and therefore making assumption about party position more unreliable. The results for the AfD being perceived as a "single-issue" party with an extreme outlying position on social and EU-related topics, while simultaneously being ascribed a high saliency on these dimensions, is also noteworthy with regard to recent research in (radical-right) populism. Here, the expert survey can contribute a data collection that is not directly derived from sources of electoral campaigns and therefore enables us to analyze research questions from a different stance.

In general, our findings are very much in line with existing expert surveys such as those by Benoit and Laver or the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2010, 2012; Polk et al. 2017). Where we do find differences in the positions (e.g., between Benoit and Laver's data collected in 2005 and our data collected in 2017/2018), careful reading of other quantitative and, above all, the vast majority of qualitative work suggests that the differences relate to real changes (rather than measurement error) not only in the views of experts but also in the parties' positions.

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