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Relative versus Absolute Party Positions: A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

Most studies have argued that the Left-Right scores estimated on the basis of the Party Manifesto Data (PMD) provide a fairly accurate depiction of where parties are located in the political space (Klingemann et alii, 2006). However, both Pelizzo (2003) and Franzmann and Kaiser (2006) suggested that the PMD-based Left-Right scores provide a fairly inaccurate depiction of party positions and indicate instead party direction. Pelizzo (2007) argued that that PMD-based left-right have a directional nature only under specific circumstances.

Though the directional interpretation of the PMD has not directly been challenged, several scholars working within the PMD paradigm (Adams et alii, 2006; Adams and Stoll, 2007), have implicitly suggested that the directional interpretation of the PMD is wrong. This claim was based on the fact even when the Italian data are removed from large N-statistical analyses, there is no detectable improvement in the results. This evidence is used to argue that the PMD-based left-right scores do provide an accurate estimate of party positions outside Italy and that maybe they were not so misleading in the Italian case either.

The purpose of the present paper is to show why scholars have reached contradictory and mutually exclusive conclusions concerning the validity of the directional interpretation of the Party Manifesto data. There are three possible ways in which this question can be resolved. One could argue that Pelizzo (2003) was mistaken in suggesting that in some countries the PMD provide an inadequate assessment of party positions, or one could argue that the reason why the coefficients of the statistical models did not improve when Italy is removed from the datasets is that the PMD data are wrong not only in the Italian case but also in the other case. But if we assume, as we do in this paper, that neither Pelizzo (2003) nor the others scholars (Adams et alii, 2006; Adams and Somer-Topku, 2007a; Stoll, 2007) are mistaken in formulating their conclusions, there must be a third solution for this problem. In this respect we suggest that the reason why these studies reach contradictory conclusions as to the validity of the PMD is that they use the PMD for different purposes and that whether the PMD are the proper methodological tool depends on what the purpose for which PMD are employed. Specifically, we argue that while PMD provide very precise estimates of how parties are ordered on the Left-Right continuum and of how they are placed relative to one another, they provide less precise estimates of parties' absolute positions, that is, of whether parties stand on the Left-Right continuum independently of other parties' location. In the course of the analysis we will focus first on the Australian case where it is possible to construct, on the basis of survey data, fairly long time-series of parties perceived positions and see whether and to what extent PMD-based estimates of party positions relate to survey-based estimates of party positions. In doing so we will show that, while PMD are an extremely useful tool to estimate where parties are located in the political space relative to one another, they are somewhat less useful in estimating parties' absolute positions –that is their

position independently of all other parties' positions. We will show then that comparative analyses performed with German, Dutch and American data present a similar picture. In the light of this evidence we reach two major conclusions. First, that whether PMD represent an adequate methodology for estimating party positions depends on whether the analyst is concerned with party relative position or party absolute positions. Second, that the focus of analysis is the reason why some scholars could argue that the PMD provide reliable estimates and other scholars argue otherwise. Finally, the paper provides a tentative explanation for why party relative positions estimated PMD are validated by survey data analysis, while party absolute positions are not.

In the course of the paper, we will proceed in the following way. In the first section we will address the importance of spatial analyses and the variety of tools that can be employed to estimate party positions. In this section we will also note that correlation between party positions estimates generated with elite survey data, roll call data, and mass survey data have generally been employed in the literature to validate the PMD-based estimates of party positions. In the second section, we will show, focusing on the Australia case, that while mass survey data validate parties' relative positions, that is, where they are located relative to one another, they do not validate the absolute position of individual parties. Building on this evidence in the third section, we show that the results presented in the second part are not due to what one could regard as an instance of Australian exceptionalism, but are consistent with what we find in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA. In the light of these results we reach the conclusion that whether the PMD represent an adequate methodology to estimate party positions depends on whether one wants to estimate relative positions or absolute positions. We also note that depending on the purpose for which PMD are used, scholars may reach conflicting and equally correct assessments of the usefulness of the PMD.

Part One. Estimating Party Positions

Since the publication of Downs (1957) spatial analyses have become one of the most important frameworks for the study of several political phenomena. The spatial analytic framework can be applied to the study of voting behaviour (MacDonald, Rabinowitz and Brasher, 2003; McDonald and Budge, 2005), legislative behaviour (Krehbiel, 1998; Poole, 2005), coalition formation (Laver and Budge, 1992), portfolio allocation (Laver and Shepsle, 1996).

Given the importance of knowing party positions, scholars have developed a variety of data and methodologies to estimate party positions. Party positions have been measured *a priori* (Taylor and Herman,1971; Sartori, 1976) but also on the basis of mass survey data (Sani and Sartori,1983), elite survey data (Katz and Wessels, 1999; Miller et alii,1999), expert judgments (Castles and Mair, 1984; Huber and Inglehart,1995; Benoit and Laver; 2006), computerized word frequencies (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003), roll call voting (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997, Poole, 1998; Poole, 2000; Poole, 2006) and party manifestoes (Budge et alii, 2001; Klingemann et alii, 2006).

The great advantage of the PMD over competing methodologies is that they provide the scholar with readily available data that can be used to perform cross-national and diachronic analyses. In addition, PMD have generally provided fairly reliable estimates of party positions (Klingemann et alii, 2006). In fact, regardless of whether analyses have been performed within countries, or with large N datasets, the PMD-

based Left-Right scores have always correlated very strongly with party positions estimated with alternative methodologies. The Left-Right scores estimated with PMD correlate very highly with positions estimated on the basis of mass surveys (Ray, 2007), expert surveys (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Keman, 2007; McDonald et al., 2007), and roll calls analysis (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006). This evidence has been interpreted as indicating that PMD-based estimates are cross-validated or corroborated.

We suggest instead that these analyses cross-validate party positions relative to one another, that is how parties are ordered along the Left-Right dimension, but they provide little evidence as to whether the PMD-based Left-Right scores provide accurate assessment of individual parties absolute positions. The fact that the PMD work well for some purposes but not for others explains why scholars could argue simultaneously that party positions are and are not adequately estimated by PMD. Therefore, whether the PMD are the appropriate methodological tool or not depends on what analysts want to measure.

The Australian Case

While PMD are available for the 1948-2001 period in Australia, Australian voters were asked to locate parties on the left-Right continuum only in the 1987, 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2004 Australia election surveys.[1] The 1987 Australian election survey also asked voters to indicate where they thought parties were located on the Left-Right continuum in the 1984 elections.

One of the criticisms that is used against mass survey data is that they sometimes provide unreliable information as voters tend to place the parties they vote for closer to where they locate themselves—a phenomenon known as rationalization (Gilljam, 1999; MacDonald, Rabinowitz and Listhaug, 1999). In order to see whether that is indeed the case we correlate party positions estimated in a given elections with party positions estimated in the previous election. By doing so we find that the perception of party positions is quite stable over time. In fact the correlation yields a strong, positive and statistically significant coefficient. See Table 1. The stability of perceived party positions over time is further corroborated by the data presented in Table 2, which shows that the perception of party positions is stable not only over consecutive elections but also over long periods of time. The stability of voters' perception of party positions over long periods of time suggests that party positions estimated on the basis of Australian election surveys are reliable.

Table 1. Correlation of Perceived Party Positions

	Party Previously Perceived Positions
Party Perceived Positions	.958**
	(.000)
N	15

[1] In the 1987 and 1996 voters were asked to locate parties on a 10 point scale where 1 indicates Left ad 10 indicates Right. In the 1998, 2001 and 2004 elections surveys, voters were asked to place parties on a 11 point scale where 1 indicates Left and 11 indicates Right. Before performing any analyses the data were standardized. The PMD data for Australia were taken from Budge et alii (2001) and Klingemnan et alii (2006).

Table 2. Correlation of Perceived Party Positions in Consecutive Elections

Party perceived position in	1984	1987	1996	1998	2001
1984	1	.955	.956	.978	.983
Sig. (2-tailed)		(.192)	(.190)	(.135)	(.116)
N	3	3	3	3	3
1987		1	1.0**	.996	.993
Sig. (2-tailed)			(.002)	(.057)	(.075)
N			3	3	3
1996			1	.994	.966
Sig. (2-tailed)				(.006)	(.034)
N				4	4
1998				1	.985
Sig. (2-tailed)					(.015)
N					4
2001					1
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N					

In order to test whether and to what extent Left-Right scores estimated on the basis of PMD are validated with party positions estimated with other methodologies, we correlate PMD with perceived party positions in a given election as well as with perceived party positions in the previous elections. While the first correlation allows us to cross-validate, as it has customarily been done in the literature, the validity of the PMD-based estimates, the second correlation allows us to test a hypothesis advanced by Pelizzo (2007), that parties with strong identities and long histories adopt 'identity-based' manifestoes. If this were the case, we should find not only that PMD data should be strongly correlated with where a party is perceived to be located in a given elections but also with where the party was previously perceived to be located.

By performing correlation analyses we find that party positions estimated on the basis of PMD correlate strongly and in a statistically significant way with where parties are perceived to be located in a given election and in the previous elections (see Table 3). The evidence so generated sustains several theoretical claims. It is consistent with the notion that correlation between party positions estimated on the basis of the PMD and party positions estimated on the basis of mass survey data generally validates the PMD estimates. Indirectly it also sustains the claim that in countries where the party system has long been consolidated and parties have clearly defined identities PMD-based Left-Right scores are identity based, indicate party positions and not directions. This claim is further corroborated by the fact that when we correlate changes in party perceived position, and we correlate such changes to party manifesto data, we do not find a particularly strong relationship between these variables. In other words, the PMD in Australian should be regarded as *positional* and not as *directional* as parties do not use their manifestoes to alter their perceived positions and/or, if they try, they fail to do so—which is exactly what had been argued in the literature on the conditionality of the directional nature of the PMD. See table 4.

Table 3. Correlation between Perceived Party Positions and PMD

	Party Perceived Position	Party Previously Perceived Position
PMD	.550*	.536*
	(.018)	(.048)
N	18	14

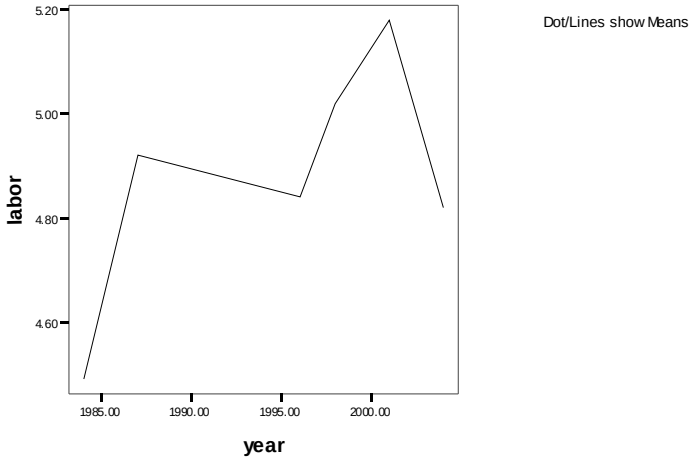
Table 4. Correlation between PMD and Change in Party Perceived Positions

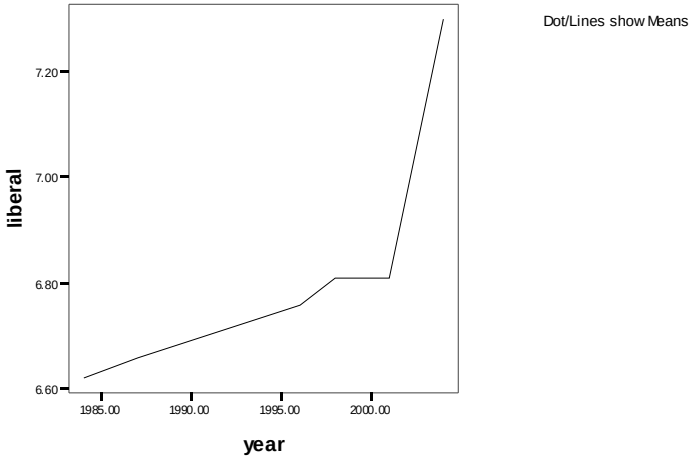
	Change in Party Perceived Position
PMD	-.402
	(.220)
N	11

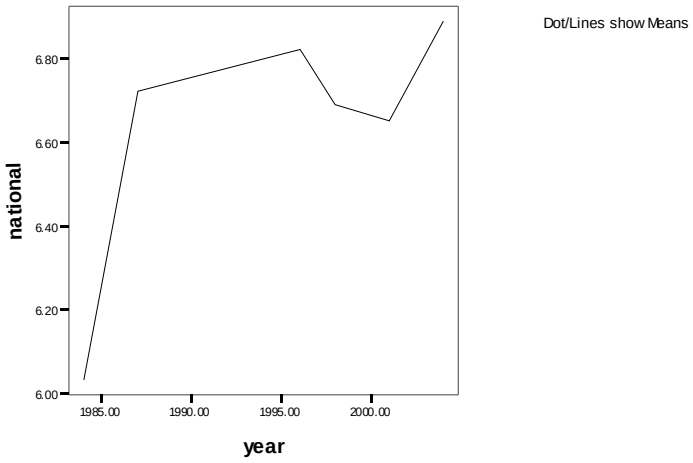
Yet, this is by no means the end of the story. What the results of the analyses conducted so far illustrates is that PMD provide an accurate depiction of party relative positions, that is of where parties are located relative to one another and of how they are ordered along the Left-Right continuum. But this finding has little to say as to whether PMD provide accurate estimates of parties' absolute positions.

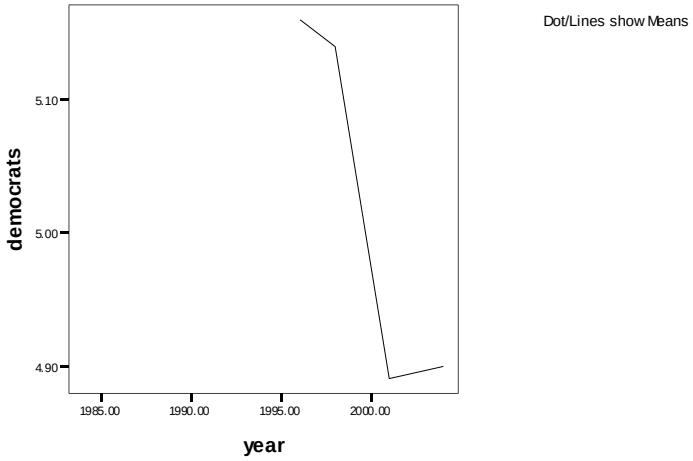
The data presented in Table 2 showed that voters' perception of party positions are fairly stable over time. Building on our distinction between relative party positions and absolute party positions, we can now say that what the correlations presented in Table 2 indicated is that voters' perception of party relative positions are fairly stable over time. Is voters' perception of party absolute positions stable? Yes, it is. From 1994 to 2004 voters' perception of the position of the Democrats changed by 5.03%, while from 1984 to 2004 the perception of the position of the Labour party, the Liberal party and the National party changed respectively by 7.34%, 10.27% and 14.2%. Visual inspection of the graphs presented in Figure 1.a-d shows also that all parties, with the exception of the Democrats, were perceived to have shifted to the right in the 1984-2004 period. Furthermore, the graphs also make clear that parties absolute positions were fairly stable over consecutive elections. The perceived position of the Democrats in the 1998 was virtually the same as the perceived position in the 1996 elections (the Democrats received a score of respectively 5.16 and 5.14), and their position in the 2004 elections was extremely close to their perceived position in the 2001 elections (their perceived position was respectively 4.89 and 4.90). A similar point can be made with regard to the Liberal party which received a score of 6.62 in 1984, 6.66 in 1987, 6.76 in 1996, 6.81 in both the 1998 and 2001 elections. So with the exception of the 2004 elections, (when the Liberal party was perceived to have made a significant turn to the right) from 1984 to 2001, the perceived position of the Liberal party had changed by 2.87%.

Figure 1. Voters' perception of party positions









Given the remarkable stability of voters' perception of party position, party positions estimated on the basis of mass survey data provide the analyst with an appropriate benchmark to test whether and to what extent PMD provide accurate indication of party absolute positions. Figure 2.a-d present party positions in the 1984-2004 period that were estimated with PMD and mass survey data. Visual inspection reveals that while party positions estimated on the basis of survey data were very stable, party positions estimated on the basis of PMD were highly volatile. Moreover, visual inspection of the graphs further suggests that there is little if any relationship between where a party is perceived to be and where it appears to be located on the basis of the party manifestoes. See Figure 2.

Figure2.a Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data. Labor Party

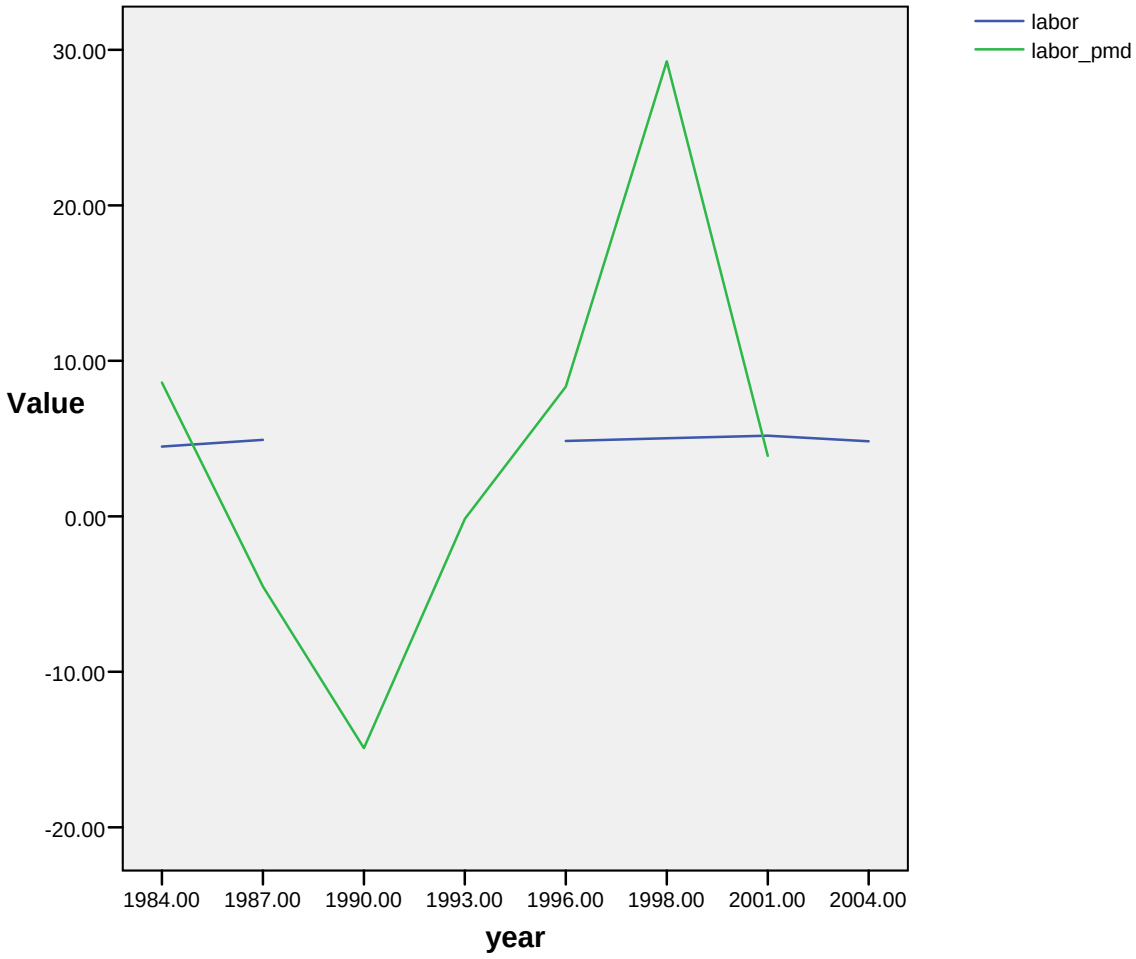


Figure2.b Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data. Labor Party

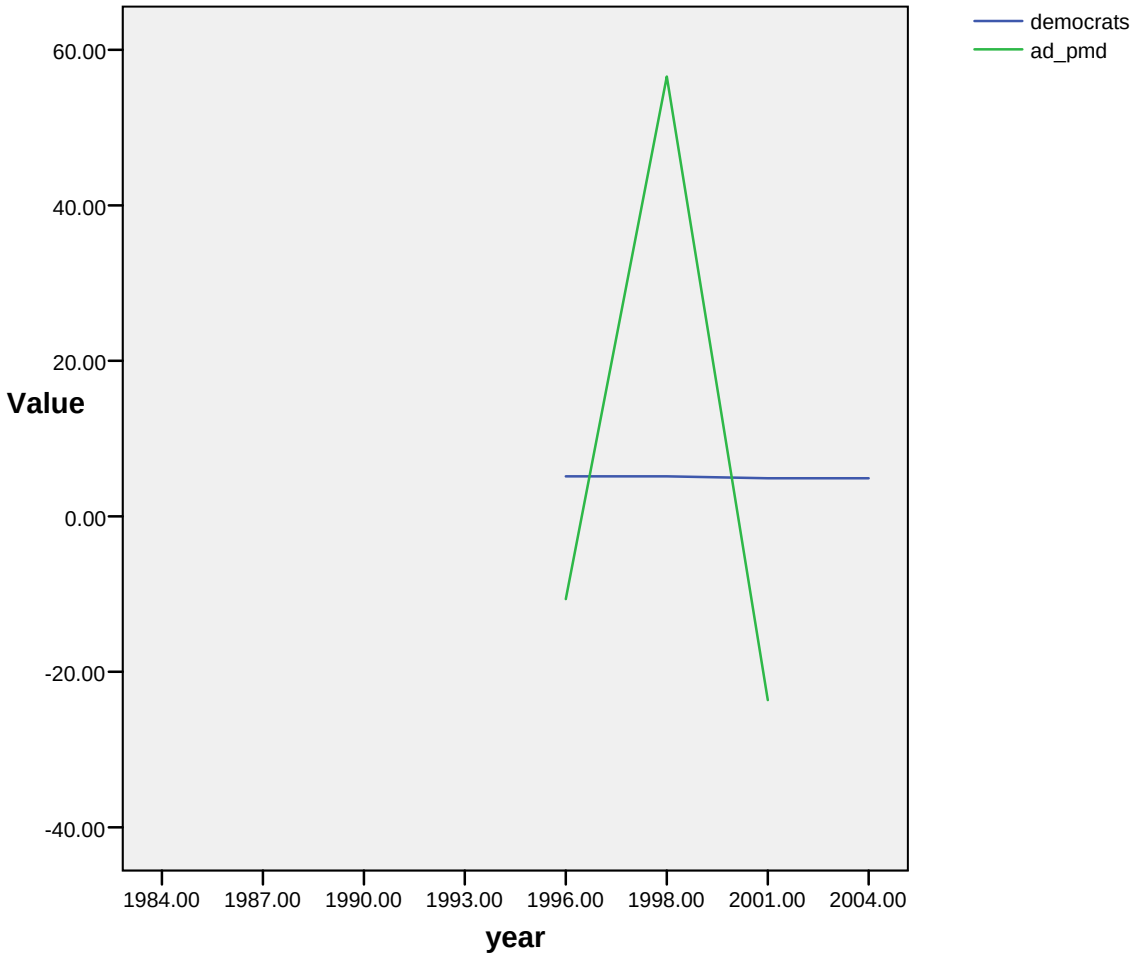


Figure2.c Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data. Liberal Party

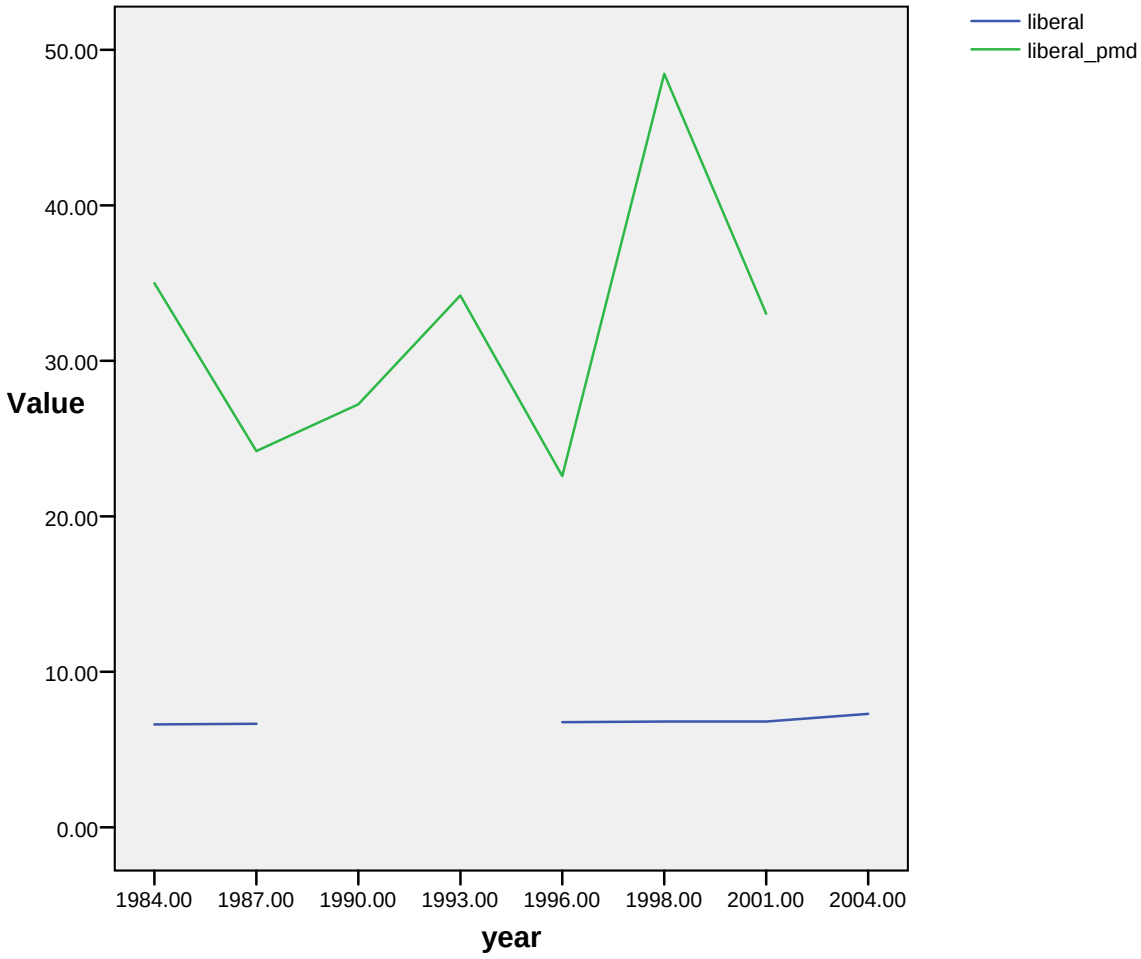
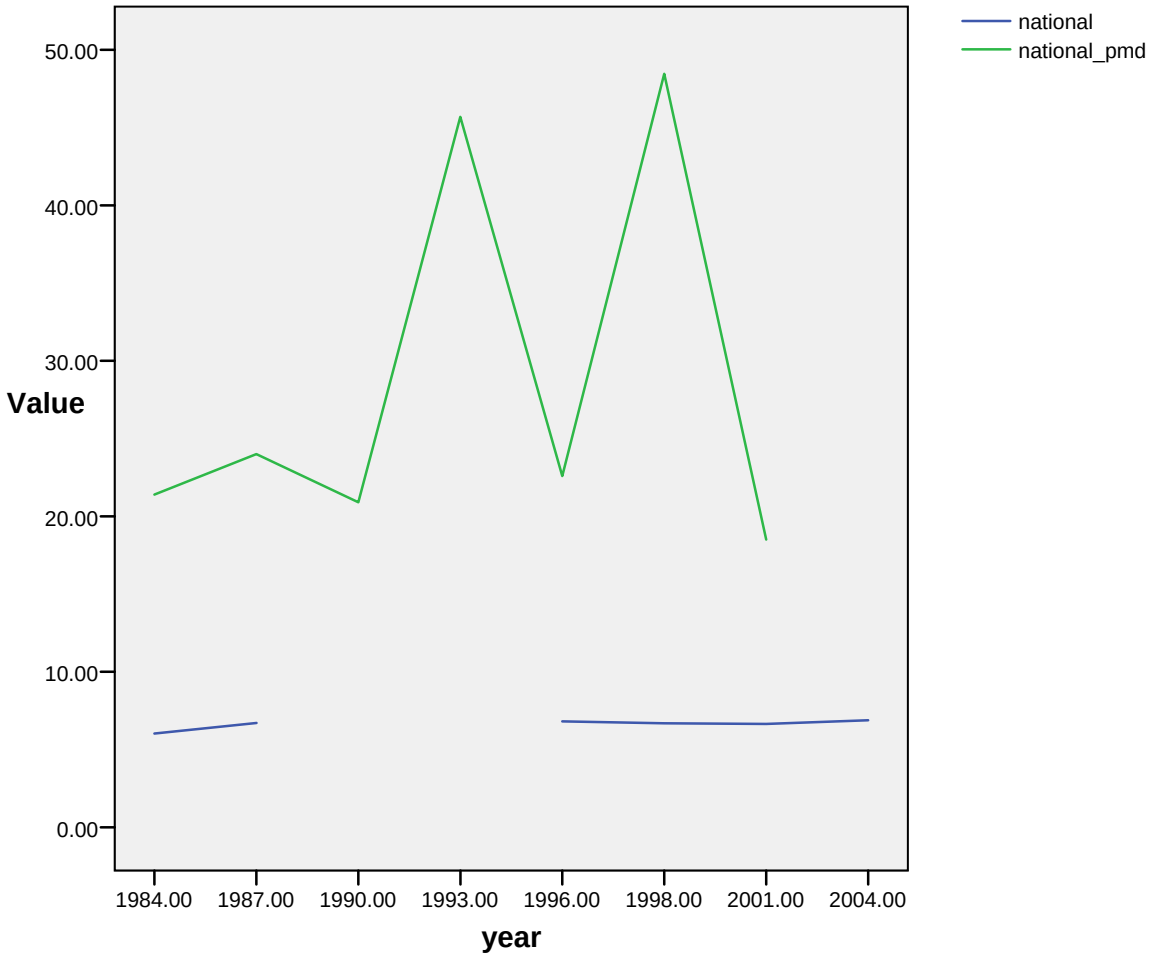


Figure2.d Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data. National Party



To corroborate the impression that there is little relationship between PMD-based estimates of party positions and perceived party positions, we correlate for each party the perceived position with the PMD position.[2] The results of the correlation analysis, presented in Table 5, show that correlations coefficients are weak and statistically insignificant. In other words, there is no relationship between perceived party positions and PMD-based party positions. This evidence illustrates that while PMD estimates of how parties are ordered along the Left-Right continuum are validated by survey data, PMD estimates of parties' absolute positions are not validated by survey data.

[2] As party perceived positions were expressed on a ten point scale and as PMD-based Left-Right scores are expressed on a scale that ranges from -100 to +100, we converted both sets of party positions into Z-scores. The correlation performed with the Z-scores yields exactly the same coefficients that we obtained by analysing the original data.

Table 5. Correlation between PMD and Perceived Party Positions in Australia

	Labor_PMD	Democrats_PMD	Liberal_PMD	National_PMD
Labor	.073 (.907) 5			
Democrats		.572 (.613) 3		
Liberal			.366 (.545) 5	
National				.220 (.723) 5

Comparative evidence

While the evidence presented so far sustains the claim that PMD provide accurate estimates of parties' relative positions (of how parties are ordered along the Left-Right continuum) but not of parties' absolute position, it does not allow the analyst to make any generalization as to whether this is also the case outside Australia. After all, one may argue that, for whatever reasons, Australian parties are not really trying to affect voters' perception with their electoral manifestoes, that Australian manifestoes are intended to represent the point of agreement between the various groups inside a party, or that Australian voters do not base their judgement of where parties stand on issues on the basis of what parties say in the platforms. In other words, if any (or all) of these lines of reasoning were correct, one could simply conclude that the reason we did not detect any relationship between perceived party positions and PMD is because the Australian case is exceptional. Hence, in order to conclude that PMD represent an effective methodology to estimate parties' relative position, but not parties' absolute position, we need to perform additional analyses.

Figure 3.a German Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: SPD

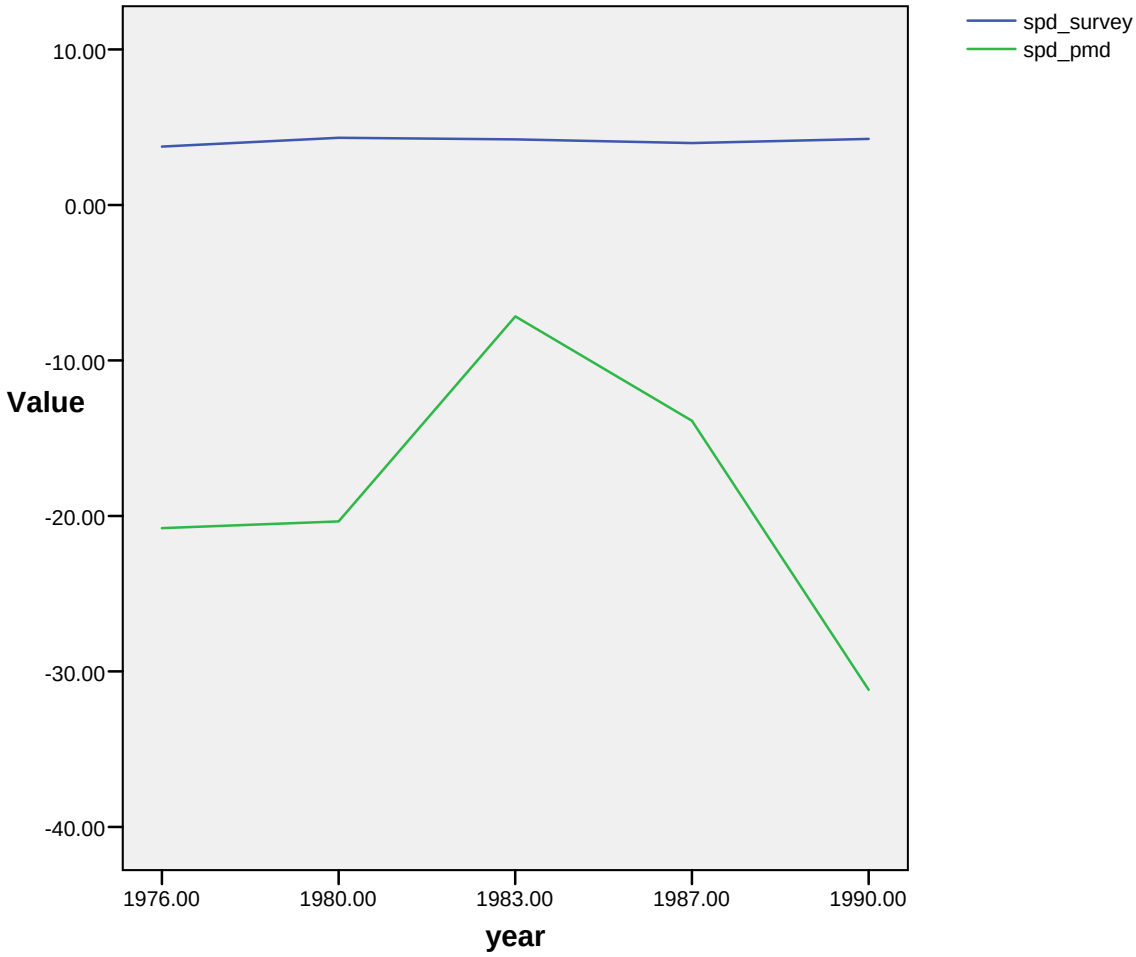


Figure 3.b German Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: CDU

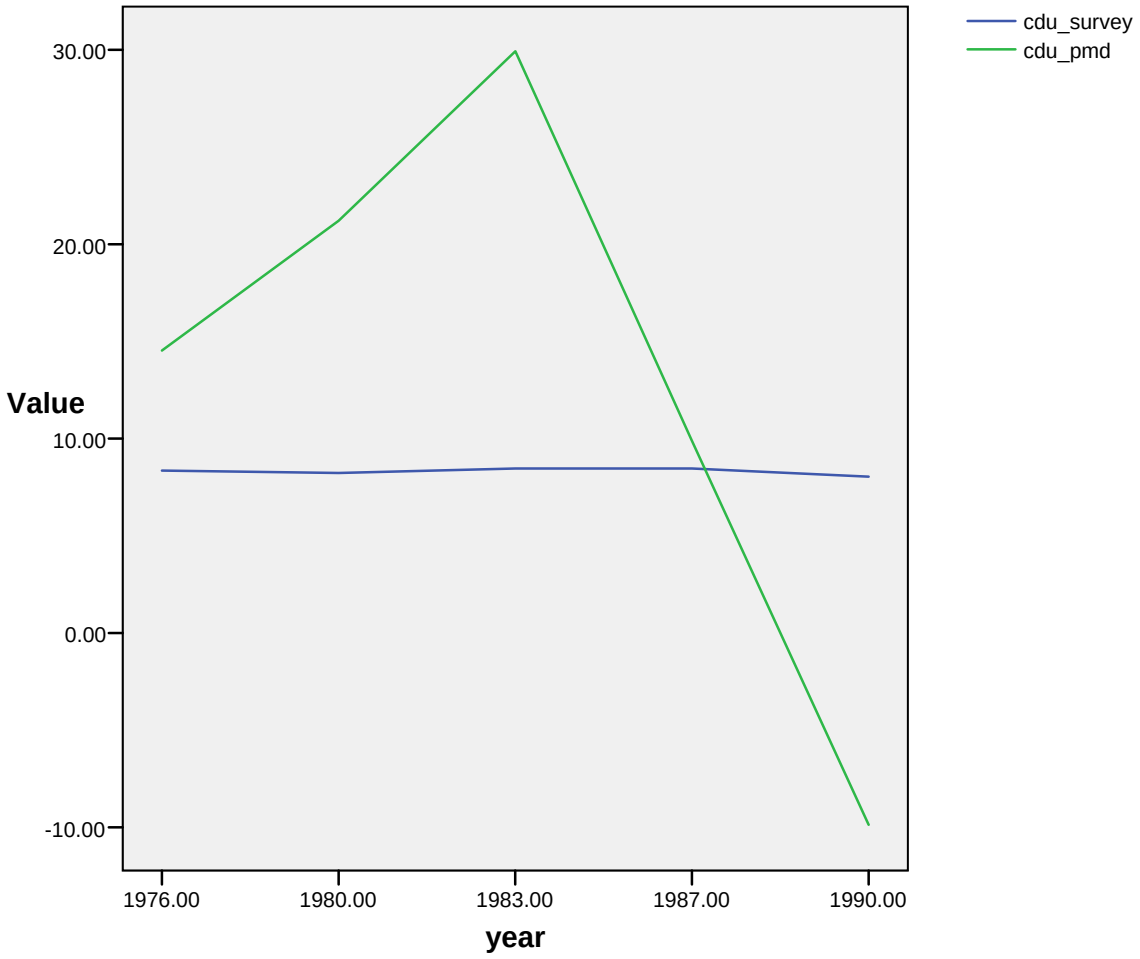


Figure 3.c German Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: FDP

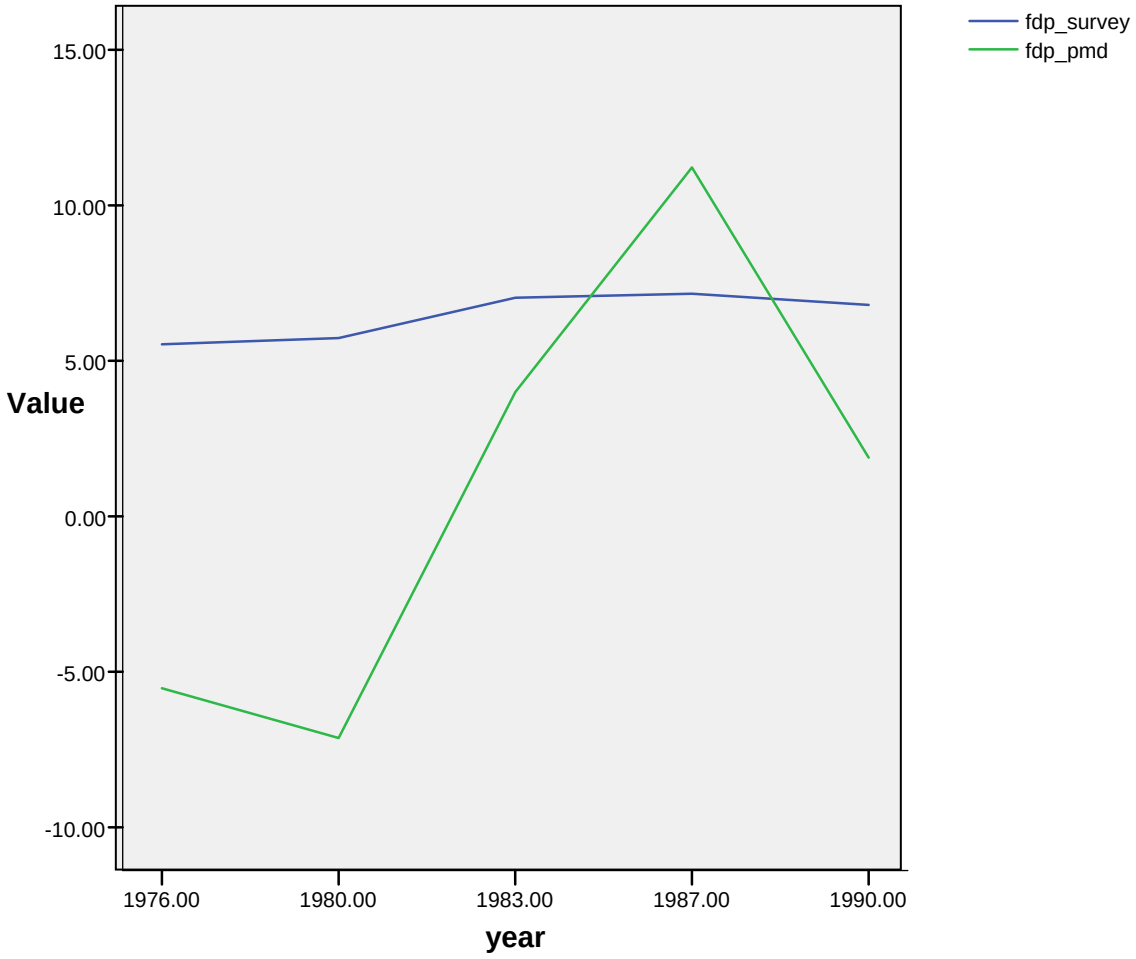
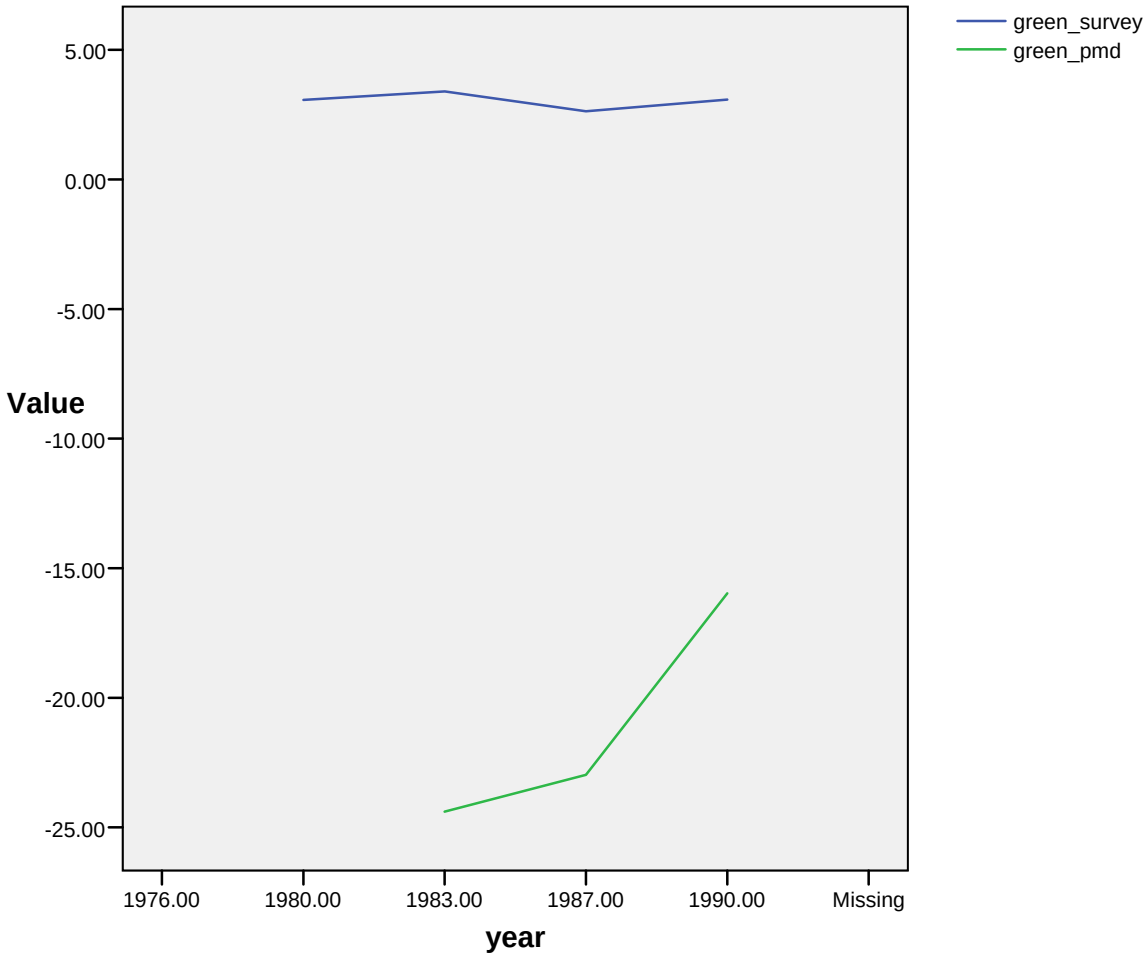


Figure 3.d German Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: Greens



We know form Pelizzo (2007) that the ordering of party positions in Germany, the Netherland and the USA generated by the PMD is fairly consistent with the ordering of parties which is estimated with survey data. Do the PMD also provide, in contrast to what we have found in the Australian case, a precise indication of parties' individual location in the political space?

Table 6. Correlation between PMD and Perceived Party Position in Germany

Party Positions estimated with PMD					
		GREEN	SPD	FDP	CDU
Party Positions estimated with Survey Data	GREEN	-.061 (.961) 3			
	SPD		-.087 (.889) 5		
	FDP			.929 (.022) 5	
	CDU				.724 (.167) 5

Table 7. Correlation between PMD and Perceived Party Position in the USA

Party Positions estimated with PMD			
		DEMOCRATIC PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
Party Positions estimated with Survey Data	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	.175 (.652) 9	.653 (.057) 9
	REPUBLICAN PARTY		

Table 7. Correlation between PMD and Perceived Party Position in the USA

Party Positions estimated with PMD			
		DEMOCRATIC PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
Party Positions estimated with Survey Data	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	.175 (.652) 9	.653 (.057) 9
	REPUBLICAN PARTY		

Visual inspection of the graphs presented in Figure 3.a-d suggests two considerations. First, that voters' perception of the absolute position of German parties is remarkably more stable than party positions estimated on the basis of the PMD.[3] Second, that there seems to be relatively little correspondence between perceived party positions and PMD-based party position estimates. The evidence provided by correlation analyses sustains the claim that there is very little relationship between the perceived position of individual parties and their PMD-based location.

[3] German voters were asked to locate parties on an 11-point scale, where value 1 means Left and value 11 means Right.

With the exception of the correlation coefficient for the FDP, the other coefficients are either insignificant (CDU), or weak and in the wrong direction (SPD and Greens). This evidence is consistent with what we had found in the Australian case: survey data validate the PMD-based ordering of parties but not PMD-based estimates of party positions.

Figure 4.a US Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: The Democratic Party

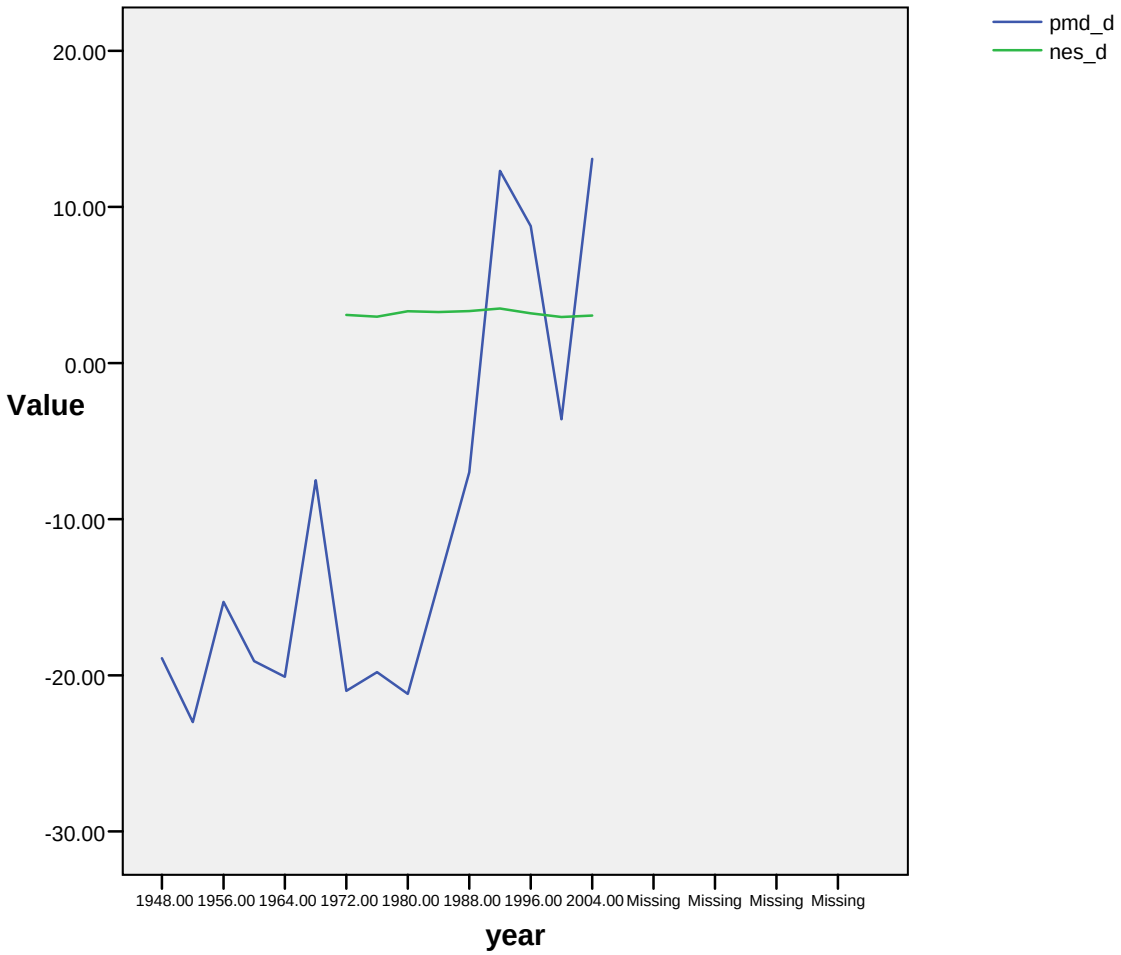
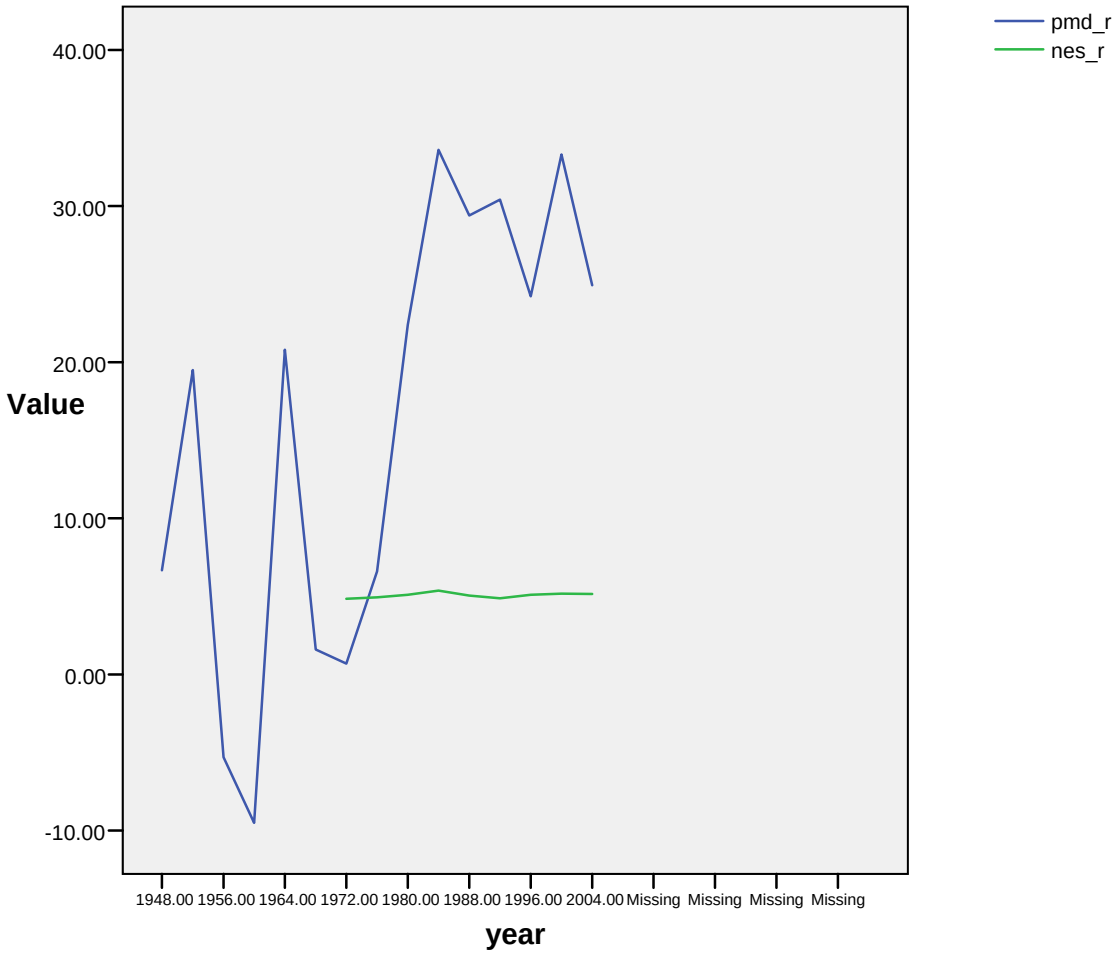


Figure 4.b US Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: The Republican Party



The data from the American case are also trend-confirming. The perception of the position of Democrats and Republican is quite stable over time, while party positions estimated with PMD are not.[4] Moreover, visual inspection of the graphs presented in Figure 4.a-b suggests that changes in party perceived positions seems to be unrelated to PMD. The results of correlation analysis present a very similar picture: the relation between the two estimates of party position is either insignificant (as in the case of the Republican Party) or both weak and insignificant (as in the case of the Democratic Party).

[4] In the US, with few exceptions, voters have not been asked to locate parties on the Left-Right scale, but they have been asked to locate parties on the Liberal-Conservative scale which is regarded as functionally similar to the Left-Right scale used in comparative analyses. The Liberal-Conservative Scale is a 7-point scale, where "Liberal is associated" with value 1 and "Conservative" is associated with position 7.

Figure 5.a Dutch Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: PPR

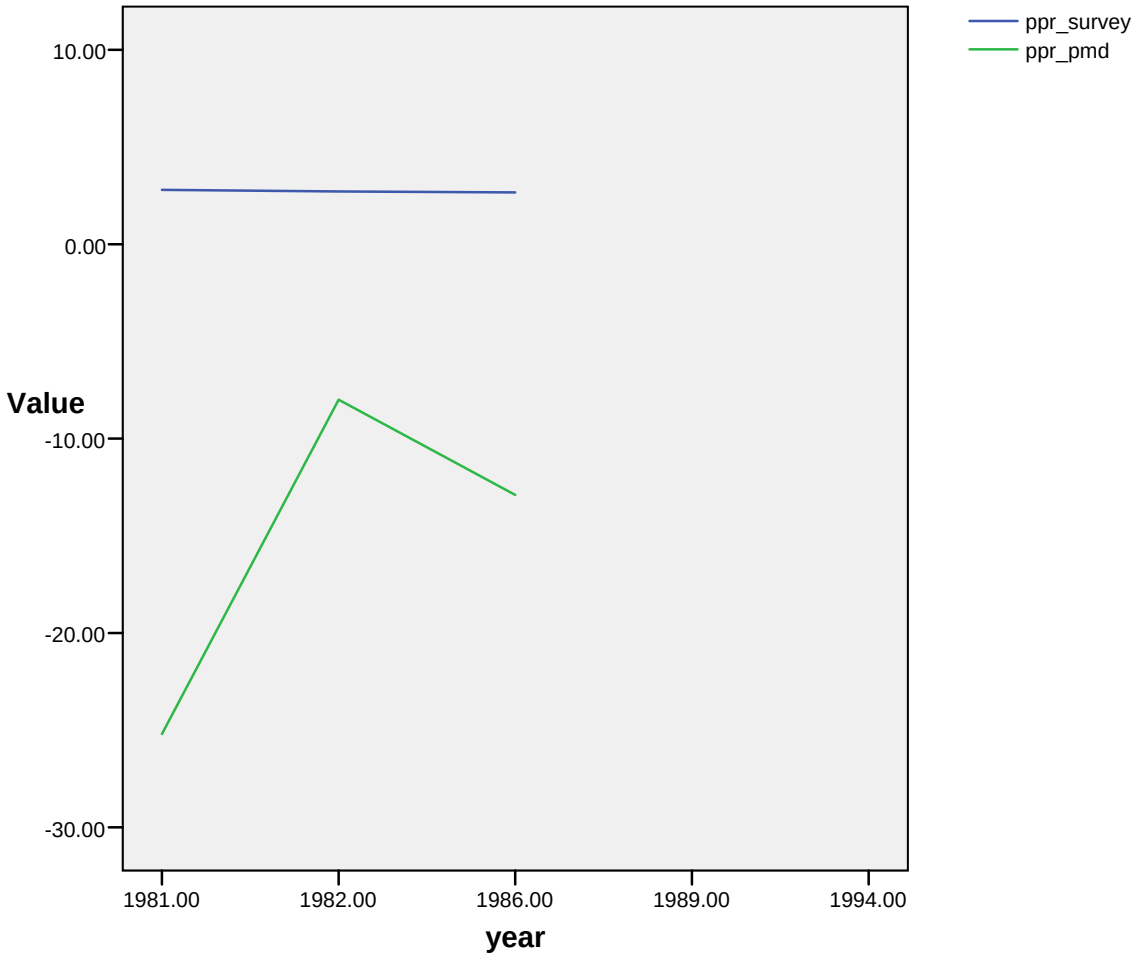


Figure 5.b Dutch Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: PvdA

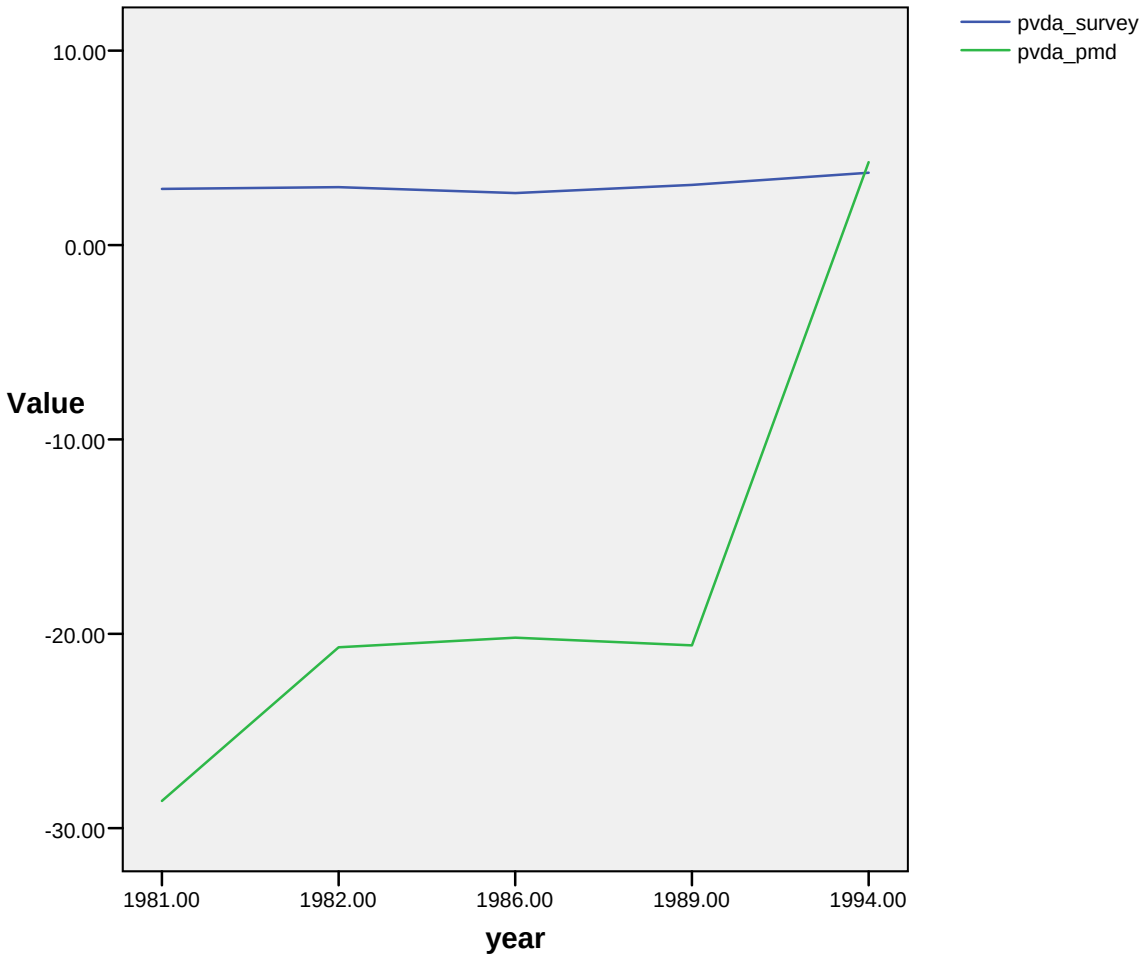


Figure 5.c Dutch Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: D66

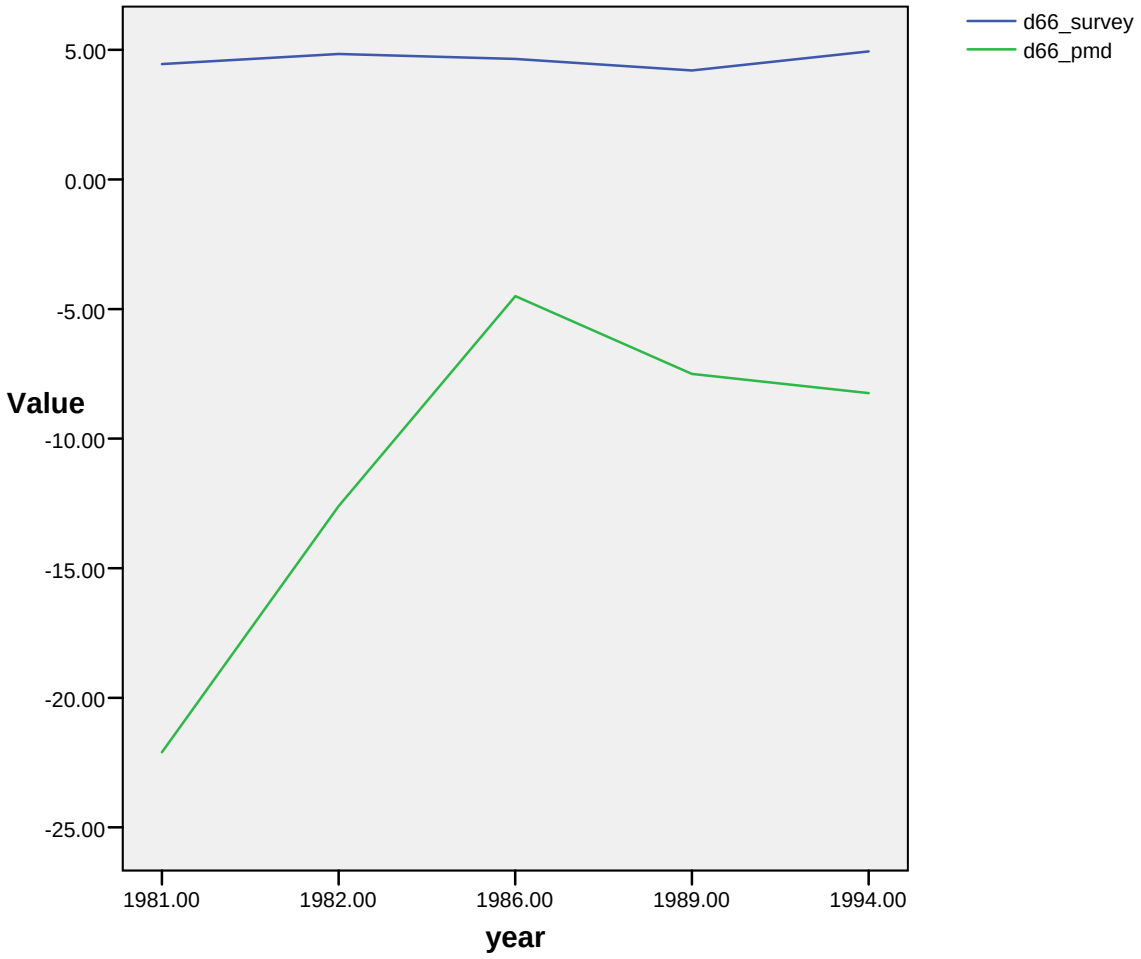


Figure 5.d Dutch Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: CDA

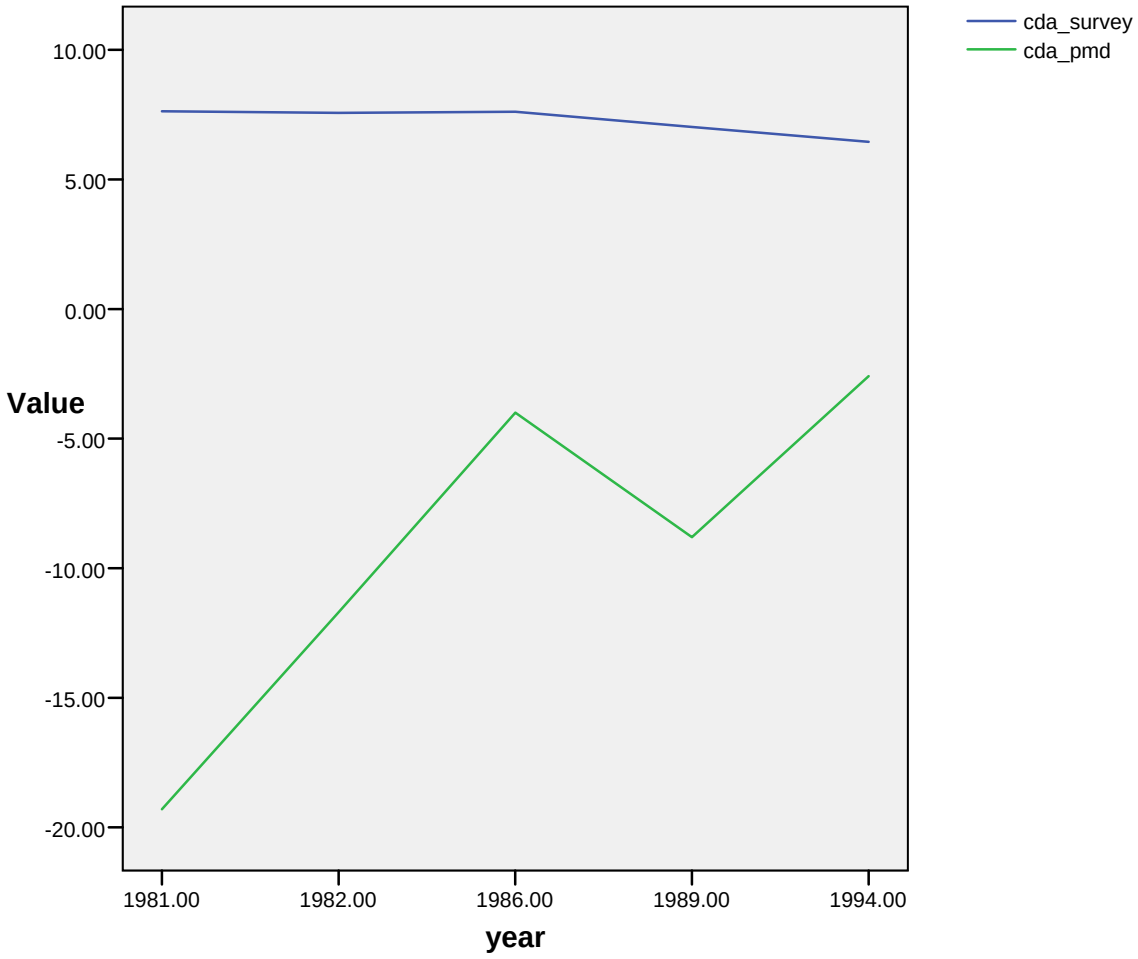
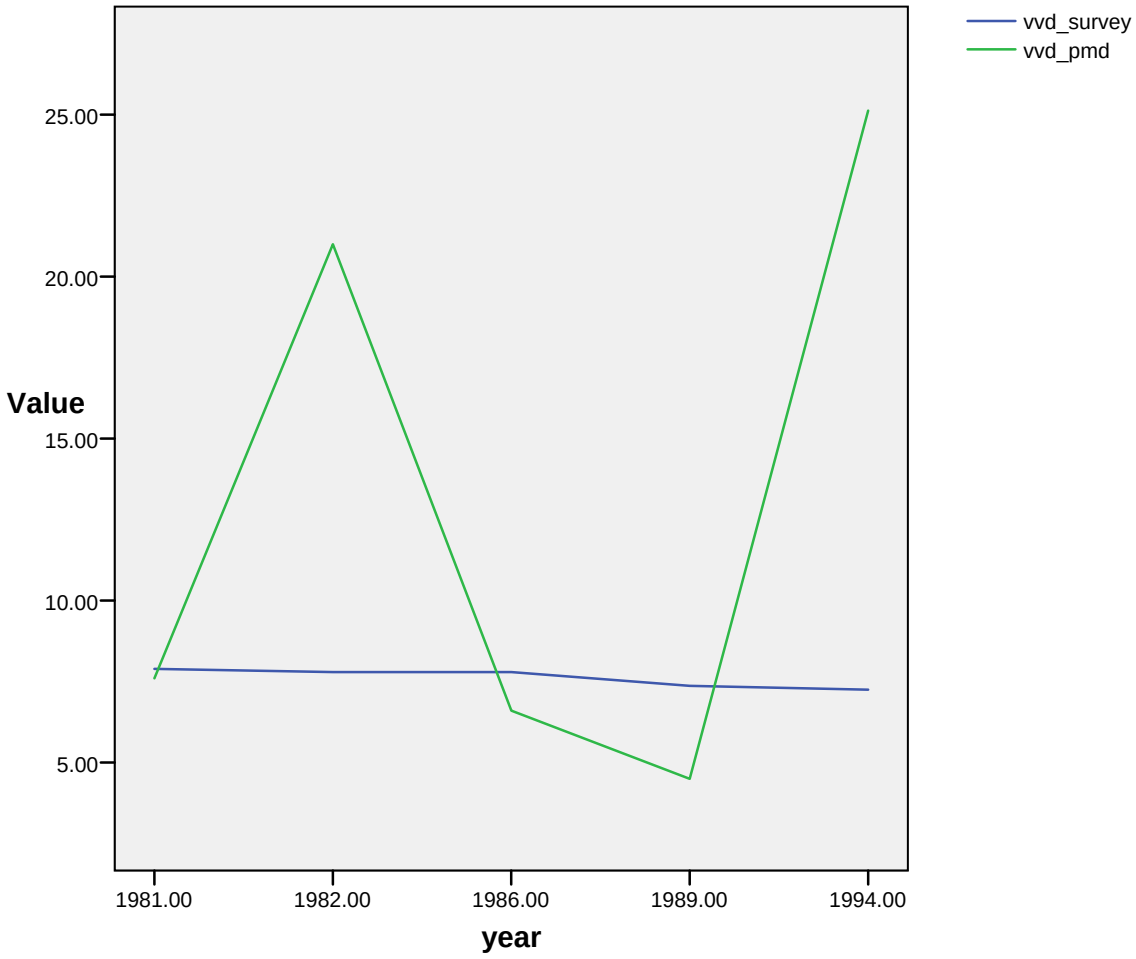


Figure 5.e Dutch Party Positions estimated with Party manifesto data and survey data: VVD



Finally in the Netherlands, party positions estimated with the PMD are more volatile and possibly unrelated to party perceived positions.[5] In fact, when we correlate mass-survey-based with PMD-based party positions, we find that in three cases out of five the correlation coefficient is negative (when a party goes right, voters perceives that it goes to the left and viceversa), it is weak and insignificant in one case (D66) and it is strong, significant and properly signed only in one instance (PvdA).

[5] Dutch voters were asked to locate parties on a 10 point scale where value 1 means “Left” and value 10 means “Right”.

Table 8. Correlation between PMD and Perceived Party Position in the Netherlands

Party Positions estimated with PMD						
		PPR	PVDA	D66	CDA	VVD
	PPR	-.802 (.408) 3				
	PVDA		.883 (.047) 5			
Party Positions estimated with Survey Data	D66			.146 (.815) 5		
	CDA				-.588 (.297) 5	
	VVD					-.328 (.590) 5

To sum up the estimates for 13 out the 15 parties that we have considered in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA, sustain the claim that PMD-based estimates of party positions are not validated by survey data. Even assuming that the correlation coefficient for the CDU in Germany and the Republican Party in the USA would have been statistically significant if the sample had been larger, 11 cases out of 15 show that PMD are not validated by analysis of survey data. This means that PMD-estimates are falsified from 73.3% to 86.6% of the time. We believe that this evidence strongly supports the notion that even where PMD accurately estimate how parties are ordered on the Left-Right continuum, they fail to provide precise estimates of parties' individual positions. These findings also shed some light on the apparent problem that was mentioned in the beginning of this paper, namely why mutually exclusive and equally correct assessments of the usefulness of the PMD have been proposed in the literature.

A Tentative Explanation

Why do the PMD provide an adequate indication of party ordering but not of parties' individual positions?

The fact that PMD are an effective tool to estimate party ordering is not surprising. The survey data that we have presented and the PMD data analysed by McDonald and Budge (2005) indicate that there is no leap-frogging — parties do not switch positions relative to another. Hence, even if the PMD-based of party positions do not provide a good indication of parties' absolute position, they do a fairly good job in portraying where parties are located relative to one another. Which is why these data can be used to estimate the dimensionality of the political space (Stoll, 2007) or to investigate policy shifts (Adams et alii, 2006). But why is there such a weak correlation between PMD and survey data when we try to estimate parties' absolute positions? The answer for this question could be found in Adams and Somer-Topku (2007b) who suggest that the effect of party policy shift on electoral returns is lagged. The logic behind their argument is quite straightforward. Though parties may change their policy stances at any point in time, voters take time before responding to these policy

changes—possibly because they want to check whether parties' proclaimed policy shifts are then corroborated by parties' actions.

If the argument developed by Adams and Somer-Topku (2007b) were applied not only to explain how parties can use their manifestoes to maximize their electoral returns but also to explain what parties can do to shape voters' perception, then we should find that the impact of PMD on perceived party positions is lagged.

This hypothesis is sustained by some empirical evidence. Though not always significant, there is a strong simultaneous relationship between perceived party positions and PMD for the CDU and the FDP in Germany, for the Republicans in the USA, for the Democrats in Australia and for the PvdA in the Netherlands. For these parties, the correlation coefficients do not improve when lags are used.[6]

But for the other parties, the use of lags does improve considerably the strength of the correlation between the variables of interest. In Australia, if instead of correlating perceived position of the Labour party with the PMD of that election, we correlate it with the PMD for the previous elections, we find a strong correlation coefficient (r = .933).[7] When perceived party position are correlated with PMD with 2-lags, the correlation coefficients for the National and the Liberal party increase to respectively .310 and .907.

In the Netherlands, the use of 1 period lag for the VVD increases the correlation coefficient to .684 and the use of 2 lags increases the correlation coefficient for the D66 to .366.[8] In the USA, when the impact of PMD on voter's perception is lagged, the correlation coefficient for the Democratic Party increases to .315 and .421 depending one whether the lag is of 1 electoral cycle or 2.

These results are insufficient to argue conclusively that the impact of PMD on perceived party position is always lagged, and it is even less clear why some parties are able to re-shape the way in which they are perceived right away, while others need one to two electoral cycles to produce the same results. But the evidence provided in this section indicates at least a plausible and possibly compelling explanation for why sometimes there seems to be no immediate relation between PMD and perceived party positions.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present paper was to show that while PMD provide very good estimates of where parties are located relative to one another (party relative position or party ordering), they do not do perform equally well in estimating parties' absolute position. Our statistical analyses have in fact illustrated that while there is quite a very high correlation between party ordering based on PMD and survey data, the correlation between survey based and PMD based estimates of parties' absolute positions. In this respect, with few exception, correlation coefficients are weak, statistically insignificant and sometimes improperly signed.[9]

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[6] An additional exception is represented by the SPD in Germany and the CDA in the Netherlands. In fact, PMD in these countries seemed to adjust to changes in perceived party positions with respectively the lag of 1 and 2 electoral cycles.

[7] Sig. is .021.

[8] There are too few cases for the PPR to performed any lagged analysis.

[9] By improperly signed we mean that the correlation coefficient is negative which indicates that while parties seem to be going in one direction according to the PMD, they are perceived to be going in direction by the voters. Obviously, this kind of evidence does not provide external validation of PMD estimates.

These findings are important for three different, though related, reasons. They are important, first of all, because they show that whether PMD represent an adequate methodological tool to estimate party positions depends on whether one is interested in party relative positions or party absolute positions.

Second, our findings are important because they provide an explanation for why when allegedly wrong data are removed from the PMD dataset and are used in large N-statistical analyses, there is no detectable improvement in the results. There is no such improvement because removing because PMD generally provide fairly accurate party orderings even for those countries in which the PMD seem unrelated to parties absolute positions. Hence it is not entirely surprising that by removing what some regard as possibly wrong data does not affect the coefficients of the statistical models.

Third, the paper provides a tentative explanation for why PMD provide good estimates of party relative positions but not of party absolute positions. The paper suggests in this respect that the reason why PMD-based estimates of party positions are not validated by survey data may be due to the fact that voters need time to adjust to parties' programmatic repositioning and to modify their perception of where parties are located. The evidence presented here is insufficient to prove this point once and for ever, but we believe it opens new and interesting avenues for spatial analysis inquiry.

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