A global scale of economic left-right party positions: exploring the cross-national and cross-expert perceptions of party placements

Nicolás de la Cerda, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Ryan Bakker, University of Essex
Seth Jolly, Syracuse University
Patrick Leslie, Australian National University
Jonathan Polk, Lund University
Jill Sheppard, Australian National University
Roi Zur, University of Essex

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Abstract

We examine the cross-national comparability of expert placements of political parties on the economic left-right dimension using a novel data set that combines data from Europe, Latin America, Australia, Israel, and the United States. Using anchoring vignettes and Bayesian Aldrich-McKelvey Scaling (BAM), we evaluate whether there is evidence of region, country, or expert-level differential item functioning (DIF), in terms of how experts perceive party placements on an economic left-right dimension. We then explore systematic differences across experts' perceptual distortion parameters (DIF "shift" and "stretch" terms) using Bayesian Multilevel Models. The models show that there are no substantively interesting systematic biases in perceptions of party placements for either term at the region, country, or expert level. More generally, our results clearly support the claim that the economic left-right dimension travels well across the globe.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a proliferation of data collected via surveys. As these data come from an increasingly diverse set of contexts, assessing the cross-contextual comparability of them is of ever-increasing importance. The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) on political party positioning is one such source of data that is widely used by scholars of comparative party politics. The CHES has recently increased its geographic scope from an EU-based survey to include Latin America, Australia, the United States, and Israel. We leverage CHES' expanded regional breadth to explore the extent to which expert placements of political parties are comparable across regions and countries.

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) was first fielded in 1999 as an extension of a smaller, EU-specific survey. Since 1999, CHES has expanded to include a variety of policy-specific questions as well as to increase its geographic scope. In recent years, CHES has grown from an EU-based survey to now include Latin America, Australia, The United States, and Israel. While these new data are interesting and useful for studying party and electoral behaviour, it is not clear the extent to which party placements are comparable across these very wide set of cases. CHES has been criticized for its lack of cross-national comparability in the past (Budge 2000; McDonald, Mendes, and Kim 2007), the new expanded dataset can address these concerns.

How can we assess whether or not there is bias in how survey respondents, be they experts or otherwise, perceive the placements of political stimuli on some latent dimension? After all, the economic left-right position of a party is not something that can be directly observed and, as such, any attempt to measure it will yield an imperfect result. The expert survey-based approach to measuring party positions is relatively straightforward—a researcher designs a survey instrument, identifies appropriate experts, collects survey responses, and applies some form of aggregation to construct a single value for a party's position on a given scale. These placements of political parties, however, do not necessarily provide enough information to assess whether or not experts may be biased in one direction or the other.

In the context of perceptual data, this bias is often referred to as differential item functioning (DIF). DIF can come in a variety of forms, but for our purposes, we think of DIF as potentially arising from three sources: region, country, expert. At the region/country level, if there were two experts with the same set of demographic characteristics and similar self-reported left-right positions, we would expect these two experts to place the same party in similar ways. To the extent that these experts diverged in their perception of the placement of the same party, DIF caused by 'geography' would likely be at play. Perhaps one of those experts was from a country characterised by left-wing politics whereas the other lived in a more conservative leaning context, thus resulting in differing understandings of the underlying scale. At the expert-level, if there were two experts from the same country, with similar demographic characteristics, but with different self-reported ideological positions, then this DIF would be a function of individuals with different ideological positions viewing the underlying scale differently.

While this seems like a relatively simple task, in order to assess DIF on a cross-national or regional level, the experts all need to place the same political stimuli as one another. This poses a major challenge to many expert-surveys, like the CHES project, in that the types of experts that such surveys tend to employ are country-specific. This also means that the survey instruments tend to be country-specific, including the same questions, but with different stimuli (political parties). When these country-specific data sets are combined, the resulting data set is replete with missing values, as a given set of experts (rows) in the data set only has observed values for a given set of parties (columns). The most important characteristic of the combined data set is that there is no party that is placed by experts from more than one country.

The challenge, then, is to include one or more stimuli that is common to all experts, regardless of country of expertise, on the survey instrument. Following the advice of King et al. (2004), the CHES team includes 'anchoring vignettes' in its surveys, explicitly to solve this

problem. Anchoring vignettes are hypothetical stimuli that are placed by all survey respondents, regardless of context. For the CHES data, the vignettes are hypothetical parties that are described in text to the experts. Each expert gets exactly the same set of hypothetical parties to place. As such, the placement of these vignette parties is invariant and any divergence amongst the expert perceptions of these parties' placements would be a function of region/country/inter-personal level differences.

We expect the economic left-right dimension to travel well across national borders, even though there are likely some systematic differences in the way in which experts perceive party positions at the regional, country, and expert levels. At the regional level, compared with Europe, we would expect that experts in the US are likely to have a right-wing bias in their placements, placing parties further left than experts in other countries. Similarly, we expect the opposite in Latin American countries, with experts tending to place parties further right along the economic dimension. At the expert level, we expect to find similar results as previous research has shown using public opinion data (Hare et al. 2015), who show that the reported self-placement of survey respondents can bias their placements of political stimuli. Hare et al. show that respondents who place themselves as far left (right) tend to place political stimuli too far to the right (left) and we would expect to find a similar pattern amongst the experts, but likely less pronounced than in the mass public.

1 Why Should We Care?

Curini (2010) highlights the potential problem of bias introduced through the subjective political views of the respondents. His examination of Benoit and Laver (2006) expert surveys reports ideological bias in expert placements' of parties on the left-right dimension in almost 16 percent of the cases he analysed (Curini 2010). Independent of expert respondents' political views, the broader question of the cross-national meaning of central concepts, such as Left and Right, remains a pressing question, particularly as the geographical and temporal scope of expert surveys expand. In the words of Budge (2000) nearly a quarter century ago: "It may be that the same criteria underlie the locations of parties when experts are asked to place them from Left to Right. But they may not. We do not know." This latter potential source of bias relates to the object of evaluation, while the former relates to the level of expertise or political neutrality of the experts themselves (Martínez i Coma and van Ham 2015). Within this paper, we examine both of these sources of potential bias in the CHES data, yet one may still wonder why cross-nationally comparable estimates of party positions are important in the first place?

Many aspects of political party competition and policy output are nationally circumscribed. The economic left-right positions of French political parties has no immediate ramifications for the politics of the Lithuanian legislature, for example, so why should we be concerned with the comparability of their parties' economic ideologies? Here, we highlight three reasons why cross-nationally comparable estimates matter for practical politics: 1) the emergence of transnational party competition, 2) the increasingly prominent evidence that party policy diffuses across national borders, i.e., that political parties learn from and adopt what are seen as successful policy positions from parties outside their country, and 3) the potential ramifications of party policy diffusion for democratic backsliding. We briefly discuss each in turn.

One of the most prominent example of transnational party competition is the European Parliament (EP). While EP elections are still run domestically, with electoral lists created by the political parties of each Member State, the elected Members of European Parliament (MEPs) are organised according to transnational political groups, defined by shared ideology (McElroy and Benoit 2010), and the EP itself is structured by left-right ideology (Mair and Thomassen 2010). In the more intergovernmental Council of the European Union the relevance of the ideological orientations of national governments for legislative cooperation is more debated, but even here recent evidence indicates that party ideology affects the formation of cooperative ties between countries (Huhe et al. 2022). Thus, for the countries within the European Union, the relevance of cross-nationally comparable estimates of party positions for understanding transnational political competition is clear.

One of the more dynamic areas of recent party politics scholarship focuses on the ability of parties to learn from and emulate successful foreign incumbent parties, referred to as party policy diffusion (Böhmelt et al. 2016). From the analyst's perspective, if we are to understand and explain this process of party diffusion across national boundaries, we must have confidence in the underlying comparability of our estimates of party ideology. And although much of the party policy diffusion research is also based on EU members, being in the same EP political group enhances learning and emulation between national political parties (Senninger, Bischof, and Ezrow 2022), there are solid grounds for expecting it to be a wider phenomenon. Social democratic parties, for example, are particularly poised to pick up on cross-national policy diffusion from within their party family because the party family both has faced sustained and major competitive challenges and because social democrats possess exceptionally strong transnational organizations (Schleiter et al. 2021). This suggests that social democratic or affiliated parties outside of Europe could also participate in this cross-national diffusion.

The cross-national collaboration of far-right parties highlights the relevance of party policy

diffusion beyond Europe. In addition to the high profile transcontinental meetings of CPAC, which feature prominent speakers such as Donald Trump and Victor Orban, academic scholarship also indicates meaningful networks of interaction beyond continental boundaries. For example, Trump's defeat to Joe Biden in the 2020 USA presidential election had a sizeable negative effect on voting intentions for Spain's new far-right party, VOX (Turnbull-Dugarte and Rama 2022). Empirical analyses indicate that far-right transnational diffusion is facilitated by geographic and cultural proximity (Roumanias, Rori, and Georgiadou 2022), but this suggests that the extensive colonial legacies of European countries and those throughout the globe could be an important source of cultural proximity. When it comes to populist parties in government, large scale analysis finds a policy backlash by parties in other states (Adams et al. 2022). More anecdotally, the similarities between the riots in Washington, DC on January 2021 and Brasilia in January 2023 further emphasise the inter-related features of contemporary politics.

The previous point relates directly to contemporary debates about the nature and extent of democratic backsliding, or what some refer to as autocratization (Bermeo 2016; Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017; Waldner and Lust 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Skaaning 2020). Scholars of the phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe draw attention to the centrality of similar underpinning ideologies and regional affinities that facilitate cross-border learning from backsliders (Kelemen 2017; Vachudova 2021). Moreover, much as prior periods of democratization were closely grouped in time (Huntington 1993), patterns of autocratization further suggest the possibility of transnational diffusion in regime transitions (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Boese et al. 2022). Putting these ideas together, if the ideologies of governing parties is an important component of democratic backsliding, and parties learn from and emulate policies in culturally or geographically similar countries, our ability to understand the backsliding process, as driven by parties, requires cross-nationally comparably estimates of party positioning.

Finally, the nature and scope of the most pressing challenges of our era point toward the importance of transnational politics. Climate change, asylum/refugee policy, and international commerce cannot be contained within or managed by a single country. These policy areas require deep, coordinated cooperation between political actors, and the construction of new, multi-national coalitions. Yet managing international cooperation is not just about reaping the benefits of economies of scale, but also centers on navigating our innate preference for parochial altruism, to self-govern at local levels (Marks 2012). This need to reconcile the local with the global illustrates the enduring relevance of domestic politics for international cooperation and the importance of party ideology within countries for understanding cooperation patterns across countries. In order to do so, we require comparability in our estimates of party ideologies.

2 The Search for Differential Item Functioning (DIF)

In the most recent waves of the CHES data from Europe (2019), Latin America (2021), Australia (2021), United States (2020), and Israel (2022), the surveys included anchoring vignettes for three hypothetical parties' economic left-right positions. These are simple statements about a few key characteristics and are, by design, simple to place along a continuum from left to right (A-C-B). Experts were asked to place these parties on a scale from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right), matching the scale the experts use to place the real parties in their countries. The text of the three vignettes is as follows:

> **Party A** supports a strong role for government in redistributing wealth, protecting jobs, and regulating business. It favours steeply progressive taxes to fund social programs.
>
> **Party B** believes in small government. It favours minimal regulation of business, support the privatisation of many gov't operations, and opposes high taxes.
>
> **Party C** advocates welfare policies within a market economy. This party supports social investment in education and health to spread individual opportunity.

When we combine the above listed survey data, we end up with a data set that includes 428 parties from 47 countries. With just the placements of the vignettes alone, we can already assess whether or not our initial expectations about region/country DIF are supported by the data. That is, we can aggregate the vignette placements to the region/country level and look for any systematic differences. The first thing to assess with vignette placements is whether or not the respondents perceived the correct ordering of the vignette parties. If an expert were to mis-order the vignette parties, this expert would be discarded from the analysis (due to a presumed misunderstanding of the scale as well as a methodological issue discussed below). Luckily, and unsurprisingly, 100% of the experts correctly perceived the ordering of the vignette parties.

The next step is to compare the placements of the three vignette parties across regions and

countries. In Figure 1, we present the mean and 95% confidence interval (estimated using non-parametric bootstrap) of the vignette party placements across region:

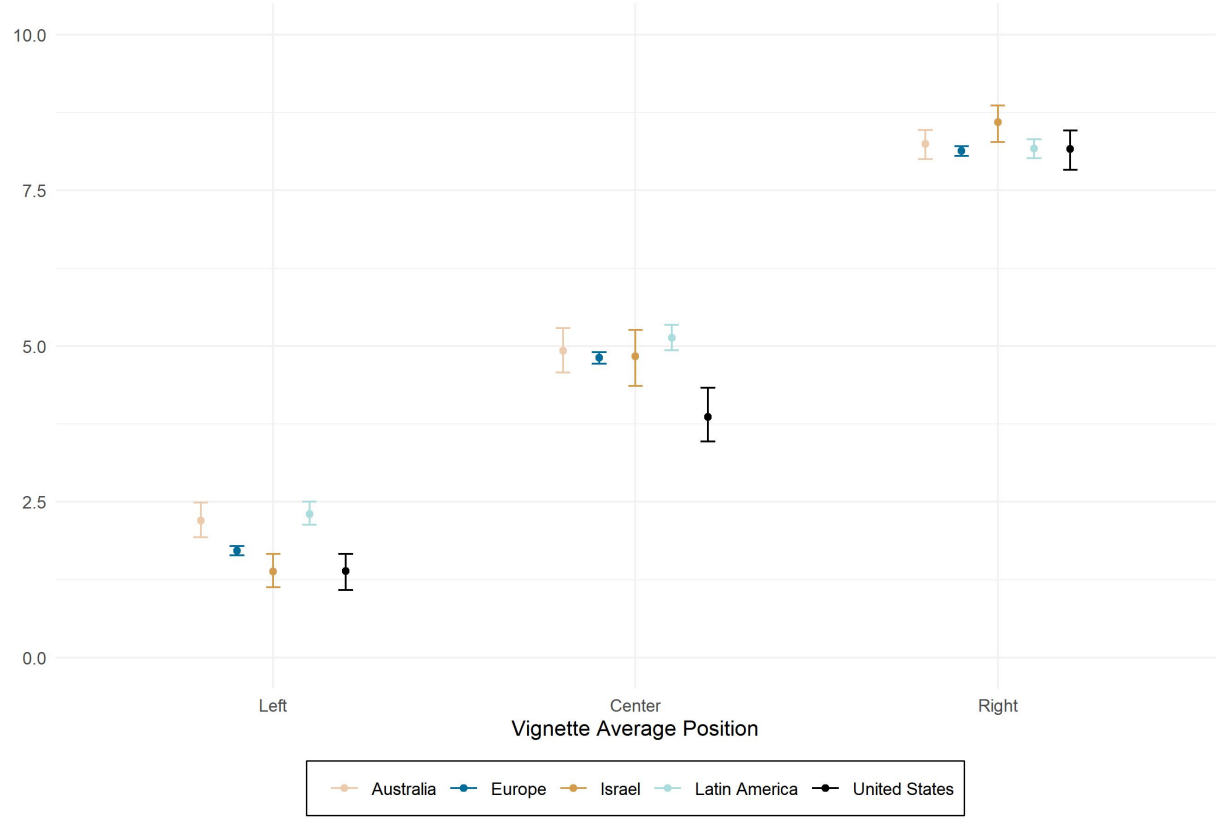

Figure 1: Average Vignette Party Position by Region

The consistent ordering of the vignette parties is evident here, but there are also some interesting differences within each vignette parties' placements across region. Most notably is the placement of the Center party by the US experts. The US experts view this party as considerably more left-wing than their counterparts from Europe, Latin America, Australia, and Israel do, supporting our initial expectation that US experts are more prone to place parties further to the left. The vignette with the most variation in terms of expert placements is the Left party. Compared to their European counterparts, Australian and Latin American experts tend to see this party as slightly more moderate, whereas experts from American and Israel see this party as been slightly more extreme. Finally, it is also clear from Figure 1 that

European experts tend to be in closer agreement with one another than experts from other regions. Even though this is, in part, a function of the fact that there are more European experts than in the other regions, sample size alone does not explain this difference.

Figure 2 displays the same information, but at the country, rather than regional, level, with a vertical line added at the overall mean placement of each party.

There are several interesting results to notice from Figure 2. For example, Scandinavian experts place the right-wing vignette party further right than experts from other countries, likely reflecting their vantage point of living in a state with a more generous set of welfare programmes. The opposite is true for US experts and the Center party. The relevant observed differences across regions and countries regarding the placement of the three hypothetical parties bring into question the cross-national comparability of experts' placements on the left-right economic dimension. In the next section we directly address this question.

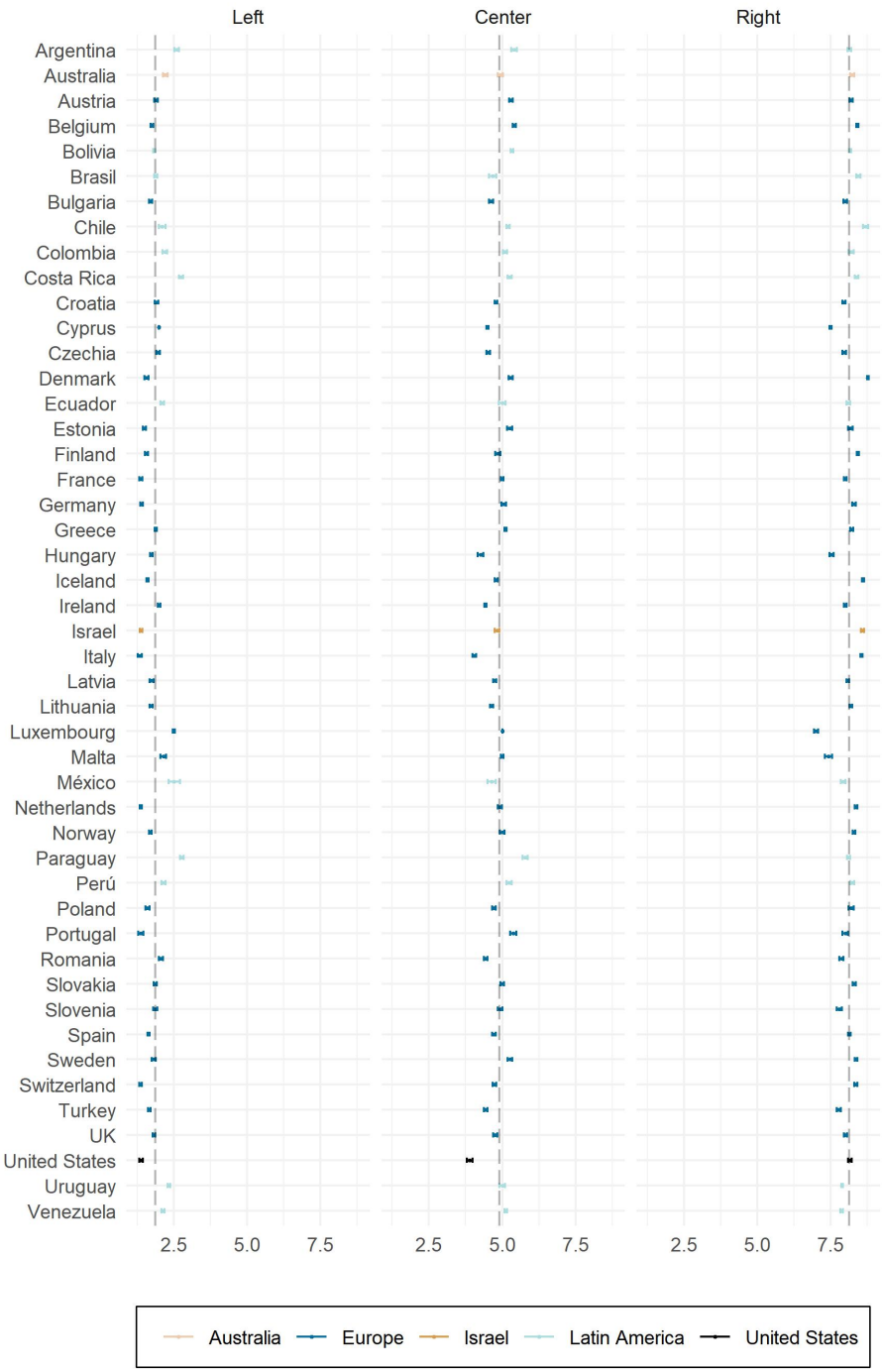

Figure 2: Average Vignette Party Position by Country

3 BAM and the Global Scatterplot

Simple descriptive data are interesting and informative, but in order to more carefully examine potential sources of DIF, a more sophisticated approach is necessary. Although there are many different methodologies one could employ here, such as nonparametric approaches (King and Wand 2007) or black-box scaling (Bakker et al. 2014), we choose to use the Bayesian implementation of the Aldrich-McKelvey (A-M) scaling routine introduced by Hare et al. (2015) and previously used on CHES' European data (**?**). Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) introduced a scaling routine designed to place respondents and stimuli on a common scale, while controlling for DIF. Their application used US public opinion data in which respondents placed themselves as well as political candidates on an ideological scale. The chief concern regarding DIF was that people of differing ideological positions may perceive the underlying scale differently, with those on the far-left (right) placing stimuli further to the right (left). The A-M routine model assumes that the respondent placements of the stimuli are imperfect perceptions of the true stimuli position and corrects for this by allowing respondent-level parameters that map their perceptions of stimuli positions to the true stimuli positions.

The basic model is:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha_i + \beta_i X_j$$

Where Y_{ij} is expert i's placement of party j, α_i and β_i are individual distortion parameters, and X_j is a true stimuli position. α_i represents the shift parameter, while the β_i represents the stretch parameter.

This is a challenging model to estimate in that everything on the right-hand side of the equation is unobserved. The Bayesian implementation is relatively straightforward and has two advantages over the more computationally challenging classic A-M solution. First, A-M cannot handle missing data, so listwise deletion is the default. As described above, the CHES

data have huge amounts of missingness and, as such, classic A-M would simply not work with these data. A second issue is that classic A-M does not yield measures of uncertainty. As the output of these models are estimates of party positions, such estimates should be accompanied by measures of uncertainty.

The Bayesian approach solves both of these issues in that it seamlessly handles missing data and automatically generates measures of uncertainty for all estimated quantities. In order to estimate the above model in a Bayesian context, we needed to choose prior distributions for the αs, βs, and Xs (the unknown quantities). We follow Hare et al. (2015) and use uninformative conjugate priors on all parameters. We do impose sign constraints on betas in order to keep these positive in order to aid in model identification. This also reflects something we mentioned above—that the experts all accurately perceived the ordering of the vignette parties (a negative Beta would indicate that an expert misperceived the direction of the underlying scale). We estimated the model using **Stan** in **R**. The model ran for $45,000$ iterations, discarding the first $20,000$ as a burn-in. All parameters showed strong evidence of convergence according to the Rhat value and graphical inspection of posterior density plots.

The Bayesian Aldrich-McKelevy (BAM) model yields estimates of the αs, βs, and Xs (the latent variable of interest). Recall from above that the alphas and betas are expert-specific, whereas the Xs are party-specific. The expert-level parameters can be used to examine DIF at the region/country level via aggregation or can be examined at the individual level. If, however, all one were interested in was a DIF-free scale of party placements, then X would be the only quantity of interest. We will return to an analysis of the individual parameters below, but first will examine the resulting scale (X) and compare this to the 'raw' data (the unscaled party means). The BAM corrected scale (X) is a scale of economic left-right party positions that is free from DIF and, thus, cross-nationally comparable. This allows researchers to ask and answer a variety of questions regarding economic policy positions in a broadly comparable fashion. It also allows us to compare how much change there is in the

BAM scale relative to the raw scale, which gives us a sense for the degree of DIF in the data.

In Figure 3, we plot the BAM corrected scale against the raw scale from CHES and color the markers according to region.

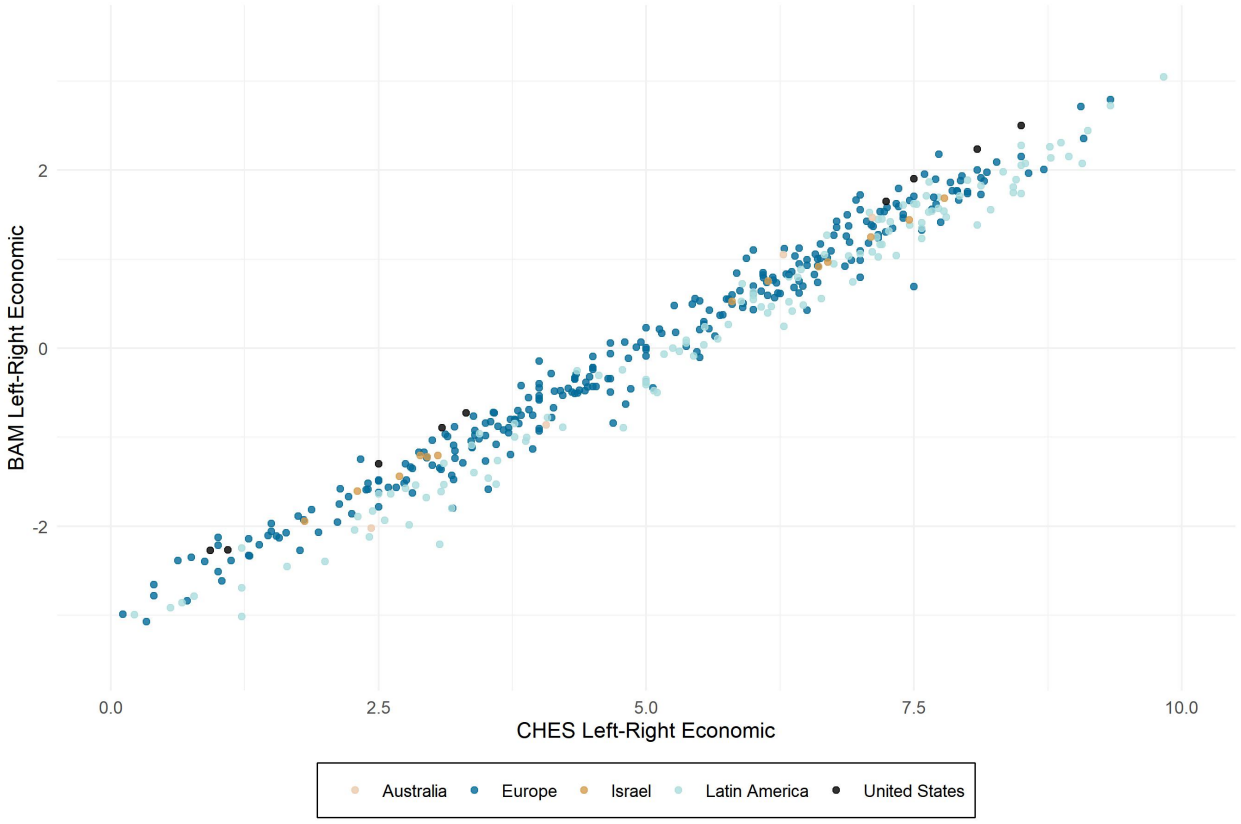

Figure 3: BAM vs CHES Left-Right Economic Positions

What immediately jumps out is that there is a remarkably small amount of DIF in the data. That is, the two scales are closely related, with a correlation of .98, illustrating that the BAM scale has very few differences relative to the raw CHES data. However, within the small differences across the two scales, there are some interesting systematic patterns. The BAM estimates for the Unites States consistently push parties to the right, which is evidence of experts' bias. The opposite is true for Latin America, where, compared to the left-right economic position, the BAM estimates are further to the left.

One of the advantages of BAM is that we can use these estimates to identify the most extreme left and right-wing parties on the economic dimension once experts' bias is taken into consideration. Figure 4 shows the placements of all the parties in CHES while highlighting the ones that are more extreme according to the BAM estimates. Of all the parties available in CHES, the Peruvian party Renovación Popular, is the most right winged. It is worth highlighting that at both ends of the spectrum we can only see European and Latin American countries.

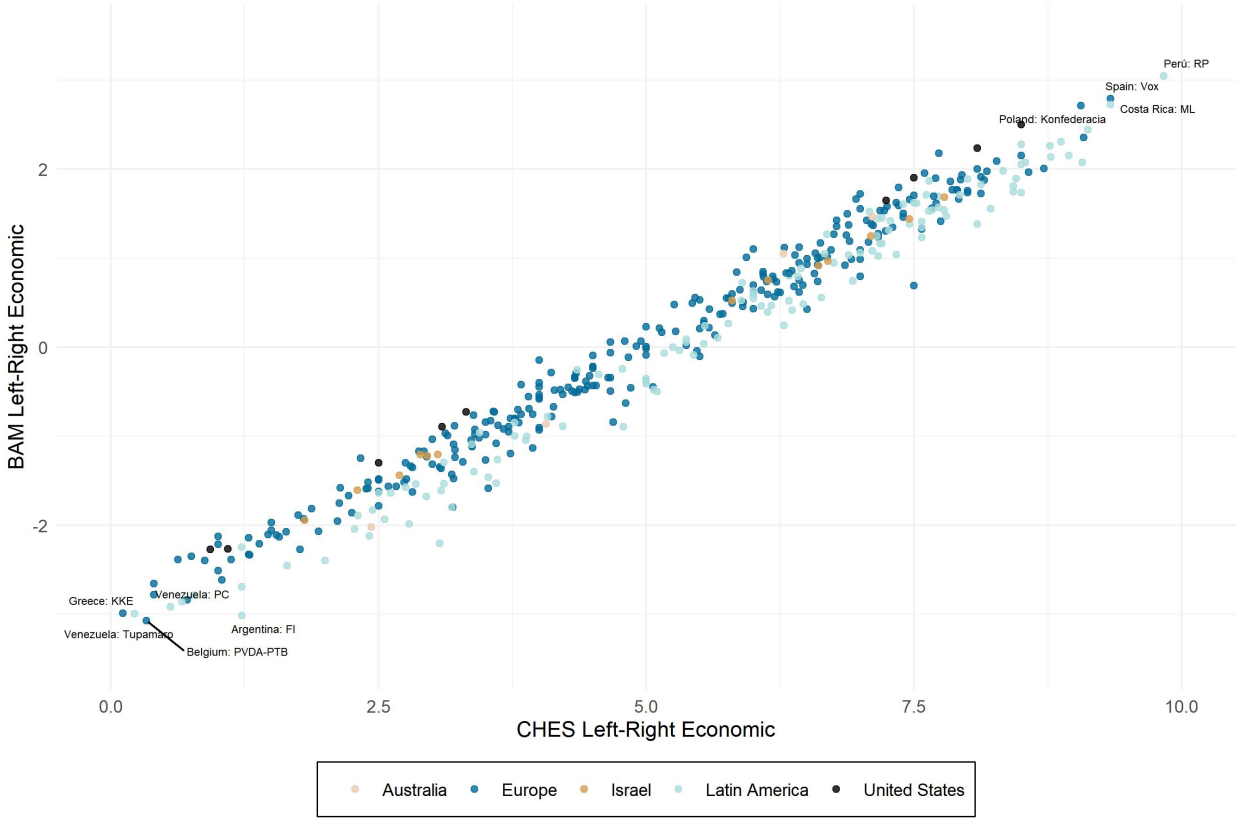

Figure 4: Extreme Left-Right Economic Parties

Figure 5 places the US parties in a global context, where we see the mainstream Democrats being much more moderately placed, in a global comparison, than their Republican counterparts.

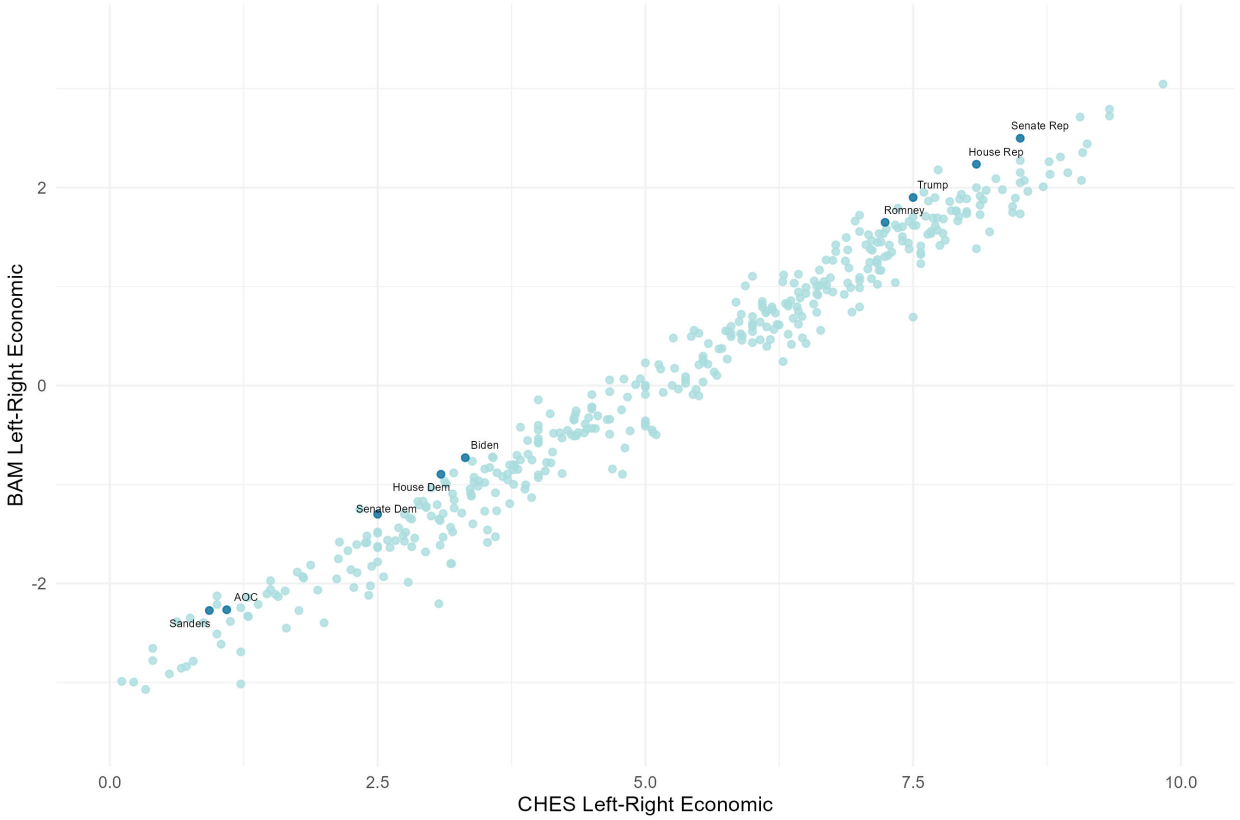

Figure 5: US Parties and Leaders in Global Context

While these and a great many other substantive questions are interesting to explore, our interest revolves around what, if any, sources of DIF could lead to problems with the cross-national comparability. We can easily identify the parties that shifted the most in their position between the BAM and CHES scales. In Figure 6, we label the parties that were most affected by DIF with parties above the 45 degree line shifting further to the right after the BAM correction and parties below shifting further to the left.

These results are consistent with previous work that finds the CHES measures to be cross-nationally comparable in the European context (Bakker et al. 2014; **?**).

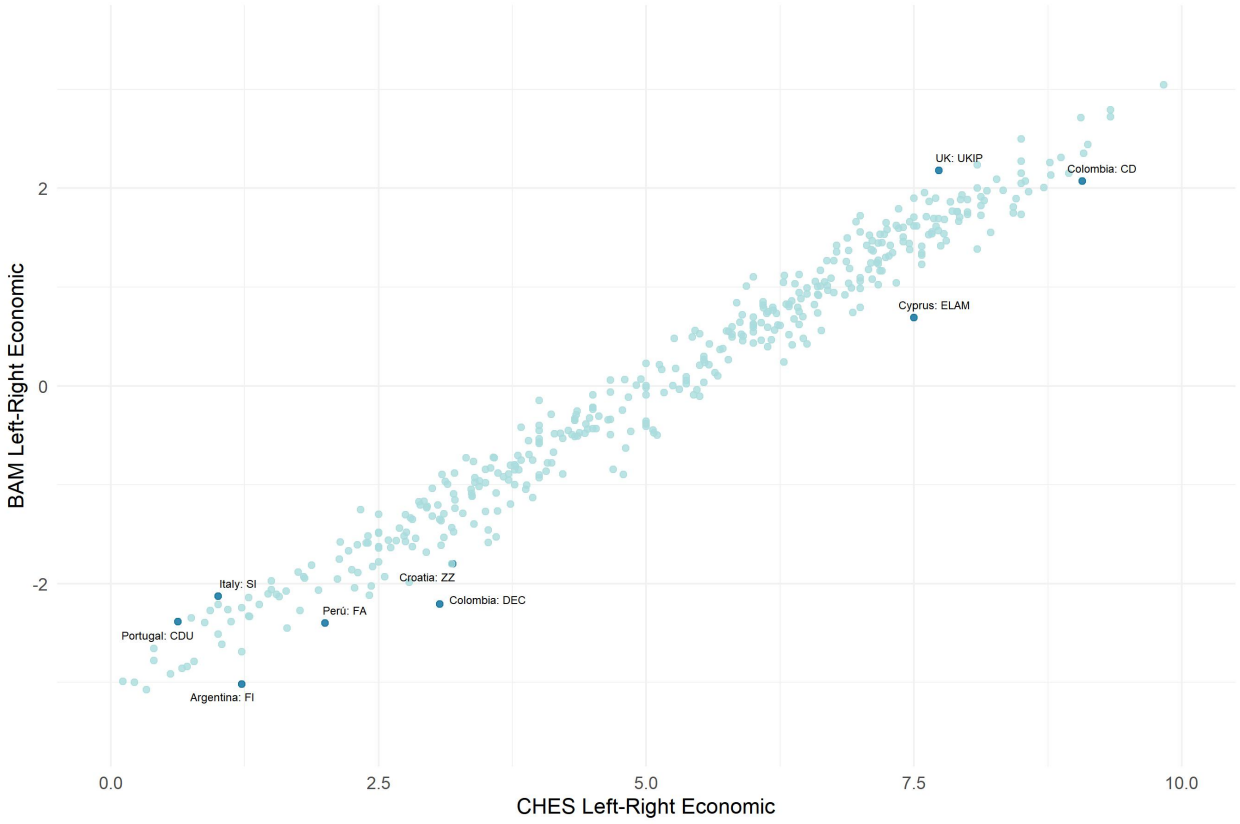

Figure 6: Most DIF Infected Parties

4 Examining the parameters: shift and stretch

We now move our attention away from X and back to the shift (α) and stretch (β) terms from the model. These parameters are expert-specific and are useful to determining, as well as absorbing, sources of DIF. The alpha term is an individual-level intercept in the model. As such, it shifts the scale to the left or the right, depending on its sign. If an alpha is positive, that means the the expert places the parties further right than they should (positive alpha = right bias). If it is negative, then the experts place the parties further to the left (negative alpha = left bias). The alpha, then, allows for an expert to shift the scale to the left or to the right, with an alpha of 0 indicating that the expert perfectly placed the party. The beta, on other hand, is a stretch paramater. Some experts use more of the scale than others, widening or narrowing the distance between parties.

In Figure 7, we illustrate the range of alpha and beta parameters. The stimuli represent the true placements and the perception represents an expert's placement of a party. Alpha and beta are functions of the (mis-)perceptions. Starting in the center, with α equal to 0 and β set to 1, the stimuli placements equal the perceptions. In the left-hand column, with α less than 0, the experts place the parties further to the right (i.e., negative α equals a right-wing placement bias). In the right-hand column, with α greater than 0, the experts place the parties further to the left (i.e., positive alpha equals a left-wing placement bias).

Along the rows, the β parameter examples demonstrate that with β greater than one (top row), the experts place parties too close together. In contrast, in the bottom row, if β is less than one, the experts place the stimuli too far apart.

These shift parameters can be used to diagnose DIF at the region/country level by aggregating the expert-level alphas. Additionally, we can use expert-level data to predict to DIF at the expert level (demographics, ideological placements, etc.). The model also yields the Beta,

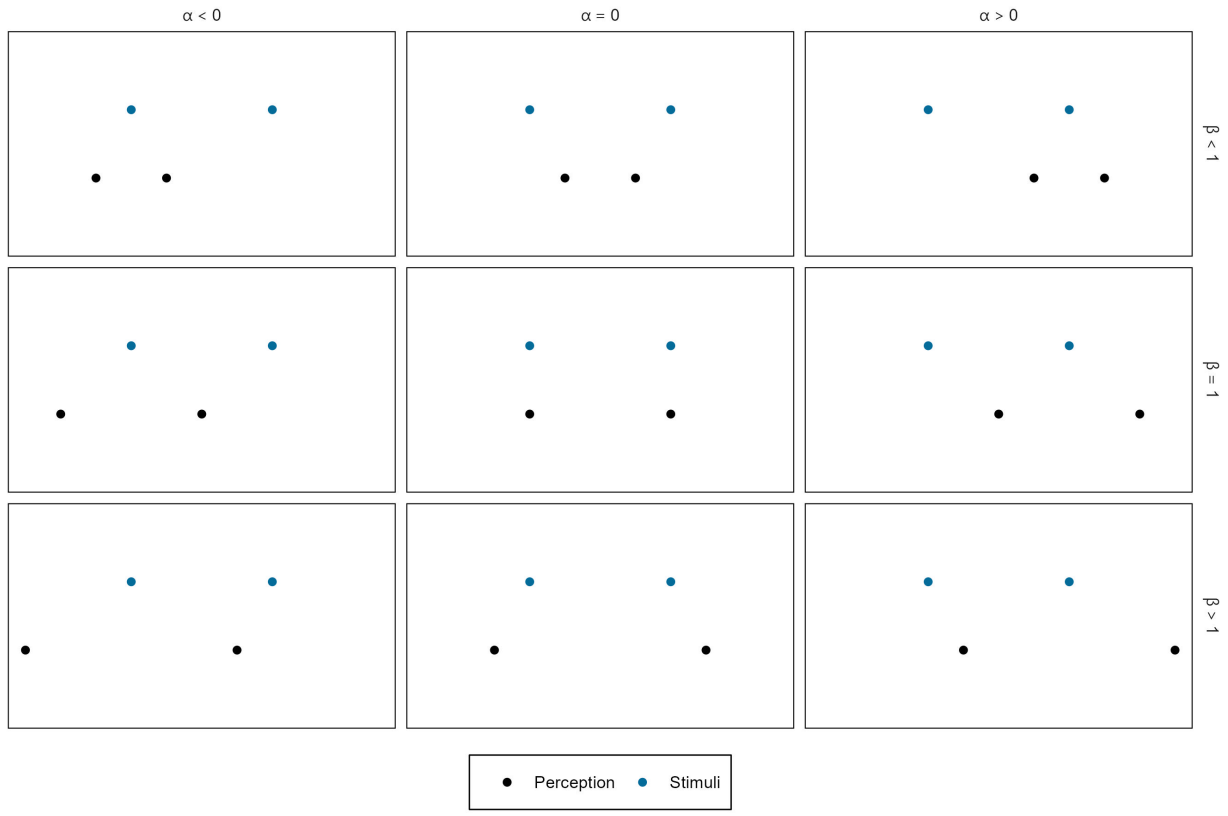

Figure 7: Hypothetical Alphas and Betas

or stretch, parameter. The betas indicate how dispersed are expert views in comparison to the bias-free scale, with larger values indicating that a respondent sees more space between scale points and smaller values indicating the opposite. As mentioned above, negative values would indicate that a respondent had reversed the order of the scale. Although the betas are arguably less interesting than the alphas in terms of understanding the direction of bias in placements, they can potentially be useful in studies concerned with polarisation/fractionalisation of party systems. If betas are particularly high in a given country, not controlling for bias can lead to overstatements of the levels of polarisation. Additionally, if there is interest in whether or not 2 or more parties are significantly different from one another in terms of their economic left-right positions, the magnitudes of the betas would be an important consideration in this determination.

In Figure 8, we highlight a few experts with the most extreme values on these two parameters (alpha in the top row, beta in the bottom). The blue dots represent the stimuli (true positions) and the perceptions (expert placements) are in black. In the top left cell, the Croatian expert displays a left bias (negative alpha). The expert placed the parties further left than they should be. In the top right cell, a Colombian expert displays a right bias (positive alpha) and parties are placed further right than they should be.

In the bottom row, Australia and Estonia provide examples of low stretch ($\beta_i < 1$) and high stretch ($\beta_i > 1$. The Australian expert uses much less of the scale than other experts whereas the Estonian expert uses much more of the scale.

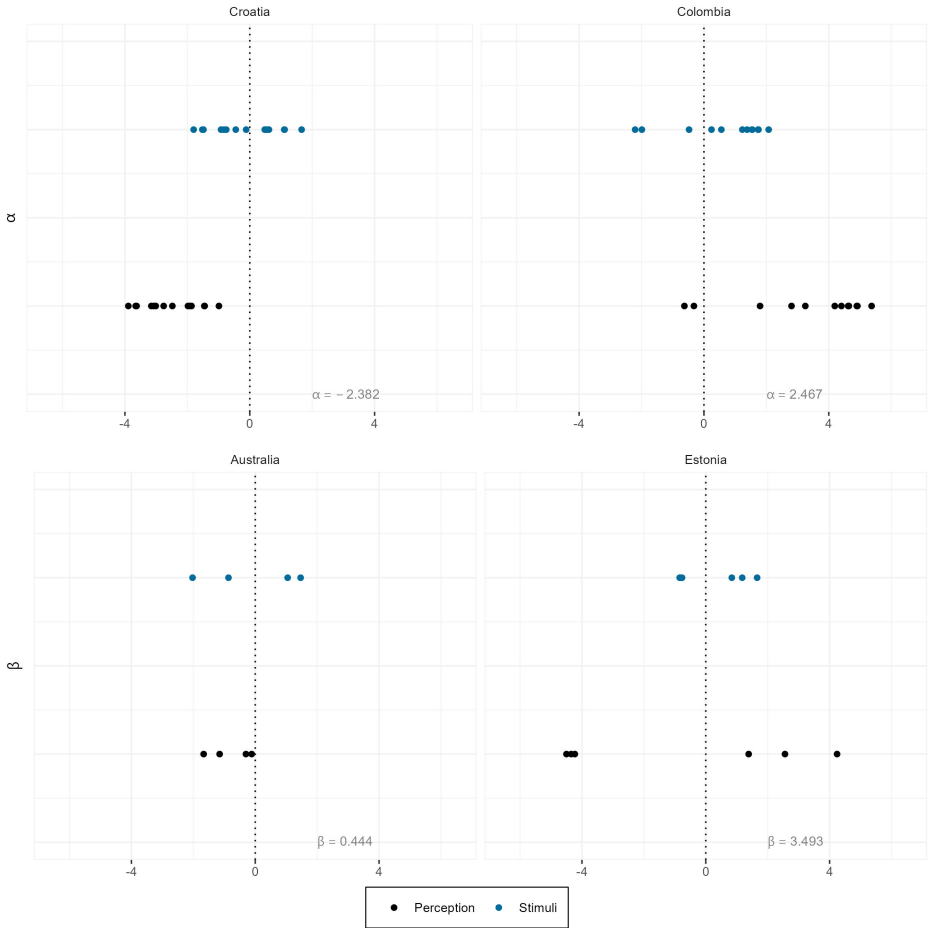

Figure 8: Experts with Extreme Shift (α) and Stretch (β)

For our current purposes, we are interested in diagnosing whether or not there is evidence of DIF, according to the parameters of the BAM model, at the region/country and expert levels. To evaluate if there is evidence of bias at the regional level, we aggregate the alphas and betas to the region/country level and plot these densities in Figure fig:alphabetaR. As these are quantities from a Bayesian model, they are posterior distributions, rather than point estimates (or histograms). The results are consistent with what we saw in Figure 1: while the United States has a left bias (negative alpha), meaning that experts place parties too far to the left, Latin America has a right bias (positive alpha).

For the betas, however, we see very little difference between the regions, with the exception of Israel having a slightly greater mean than the other regions.

In Figure 10 we show the same information, but at the country-level. Again, we see that a majority of the posterior distribution of the alpha term for the US is to the left of zero and that Latin American countries tend to have alphas distributed to the right of zero. For the betas, we see that experts in Denmark and Israel tend to see parties further apart from one another than do Hungarian experts, for example.

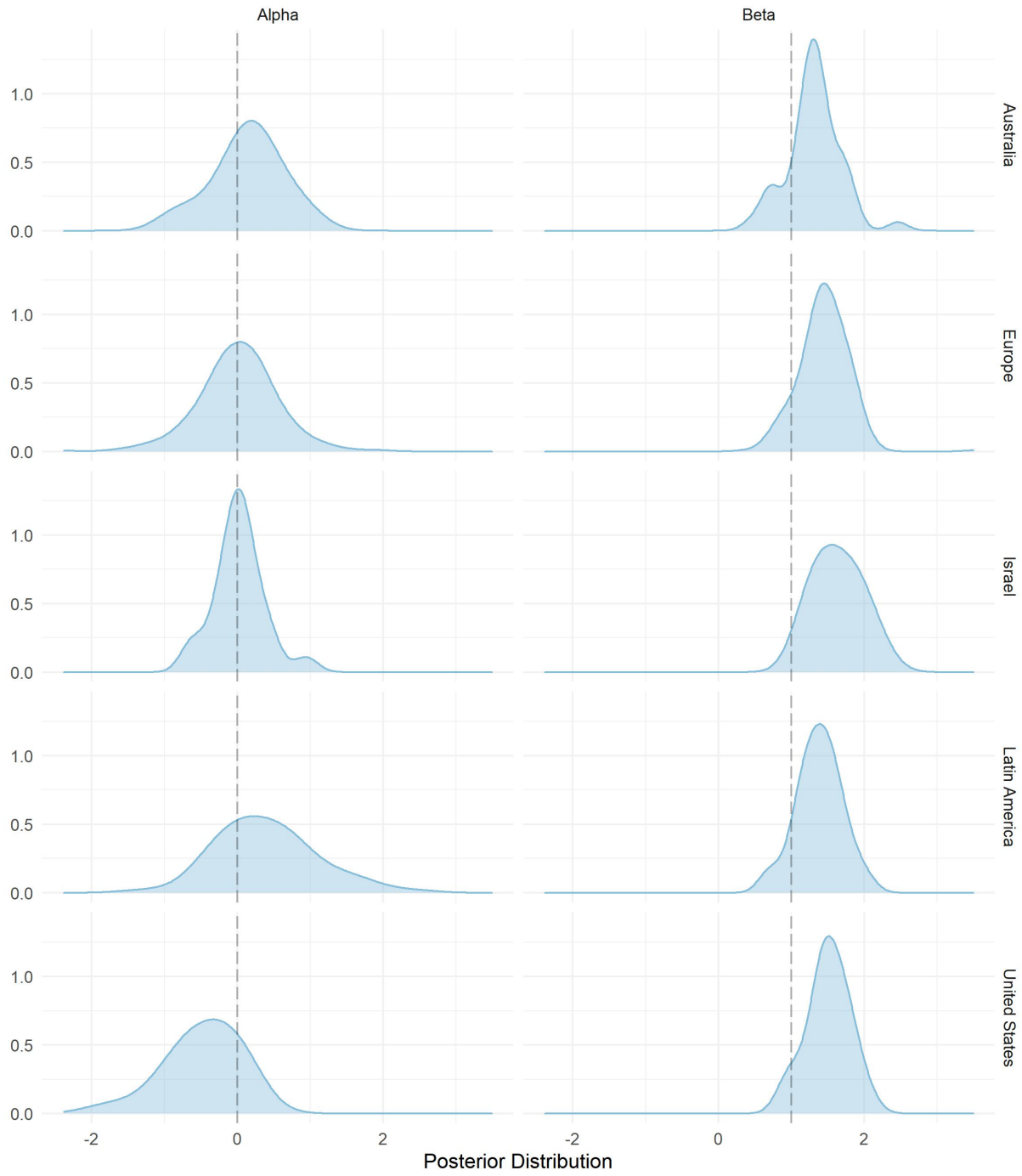

Figure 9: Shift (Alphas) and Stretch (Betas) by Region

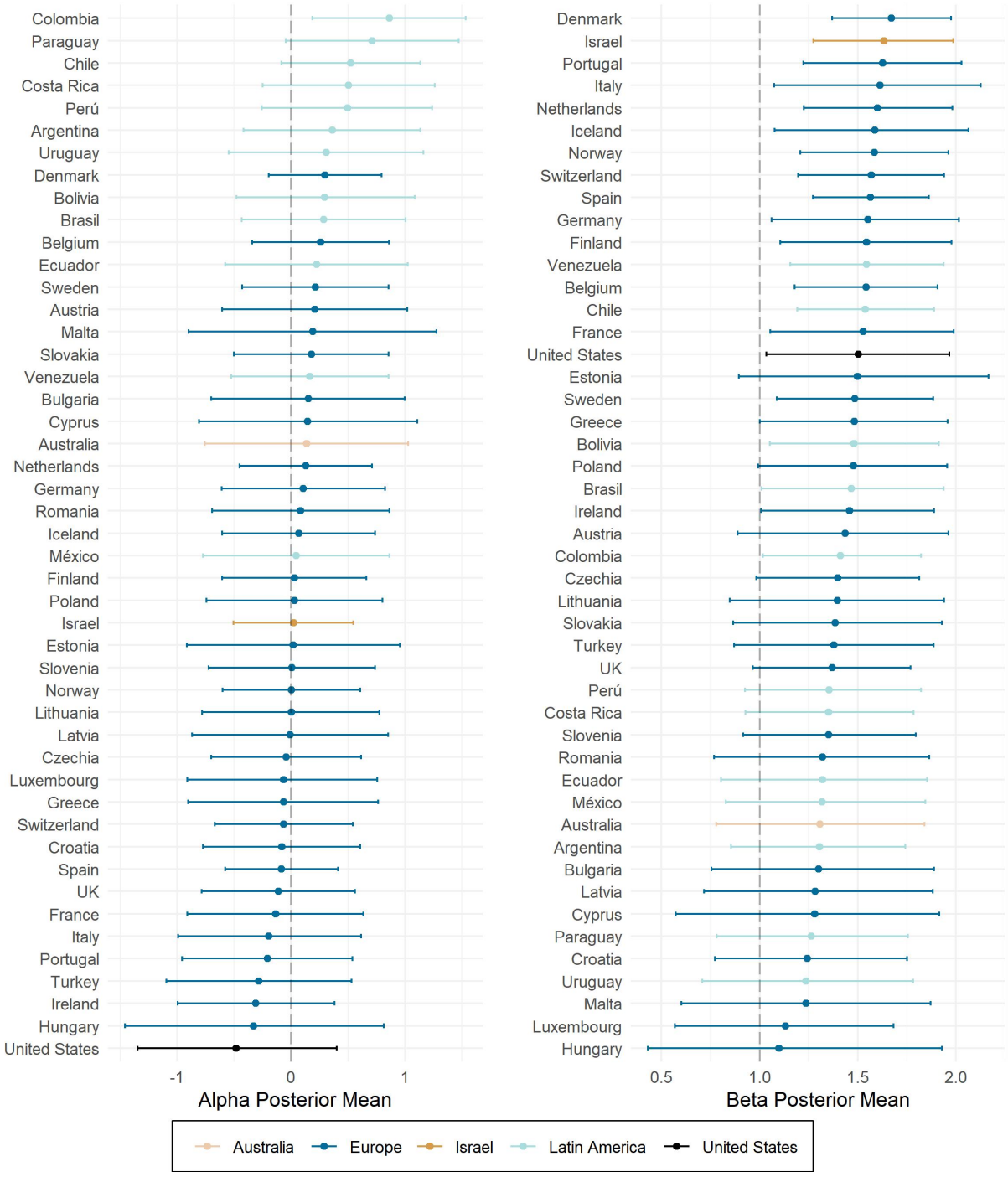

Figure 10: Shift (Alphas) and Stretch (Betas) by Country

5 The search for DIF continues: Expert level DIF

Having examined region and country level DIF, we are confident that while there are some instances of DIF (the US, for example), these are not interesting enough to question the cross-national comparability of the CHES data. Having said that, there is still the potential for expert-level DIF in the data and the BAM output offers us the opportunity to explore this further. As the alpha and beta terms from the model are individual level, we can extract these values and treat them as dependent variables in models used to determine any systematic components of expert-level DIF. To do so, we estimate Bayesian multilevel models, one for the alphas and one for the betas. We model each dependent variable in two different ways. First, we estimate a model using an expert's economic left-right self-placement, gender, and age, as well as fixed effects for region. Our primary expectation is that an expert's self-placement on the economic left-right score will have a posterior distribution that is largely to the left of zero (a negative coefficient). That is, we expect more right-leaning experts to place parties too far to the left, thus resulting in a negative alpha.

As Figure 11 displays, our expectations were largely supported. That is, in the first model, we see that the effect of self-placement is negative—the more right-wing an expert, the more negative the alpha. We see no interesting effects for gender or age, but we do get the same results for the US and Latin America as demonstrated above.

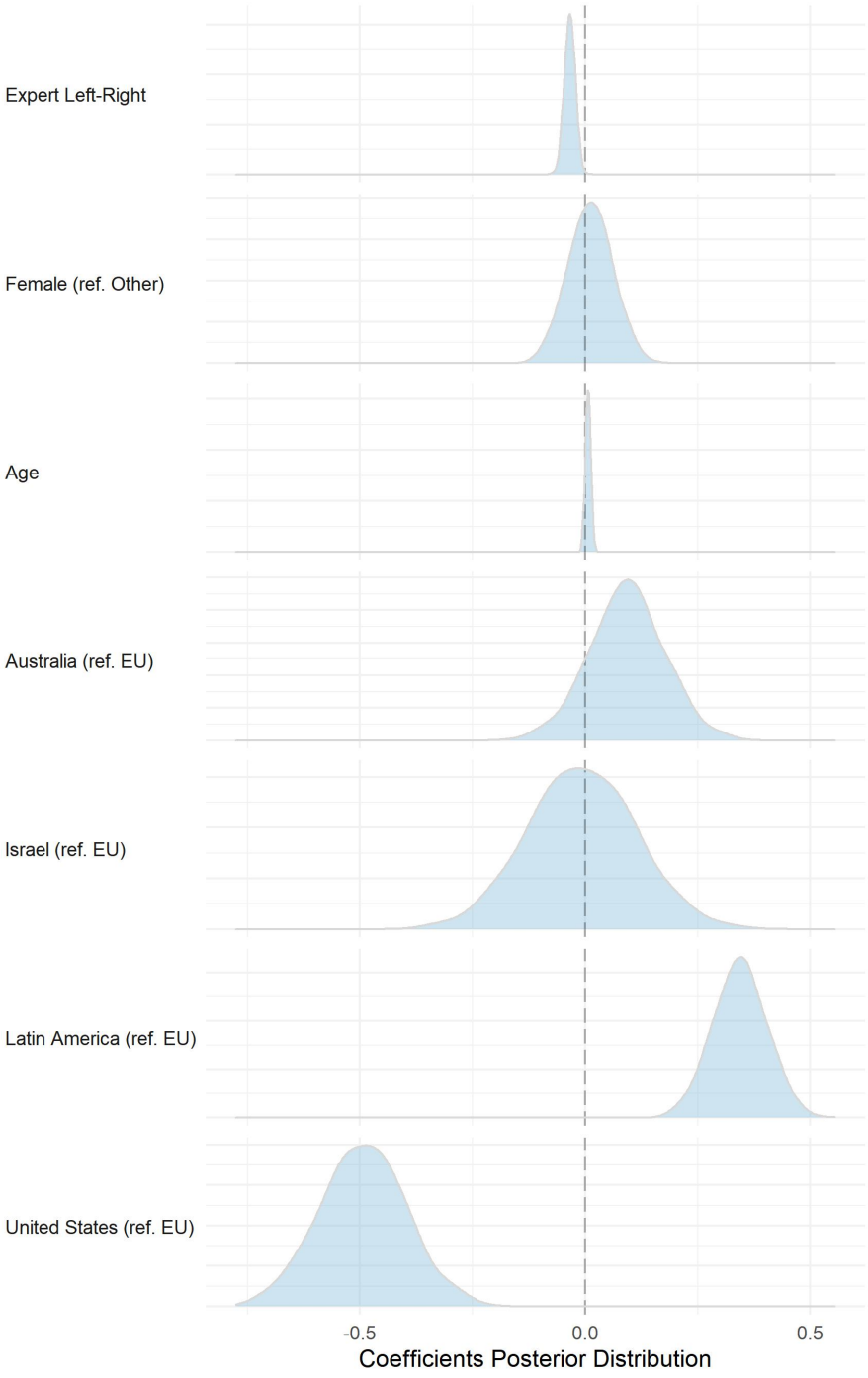

Figure 11: Predicting Expert-Level Alphas

We now repeat the exercise, but this time we estimate models with the betas as the dependent variables. The results are presented in Figure 12. Here we see no discernible effect of expert self-placement, gender, or age. We do see that the random effect for Israel is almost entirely to the right of zero, indicating the Israeli experts tend to expand the scale relative to EU experts and the opposite is true for Australian experts. Likewise, when interacting extremity with ideology, we see no discernible effect. There appear to be no expert-level sources of DIF in terms of the betas. The potential effect of the regional differences we see here deserve further exploration.

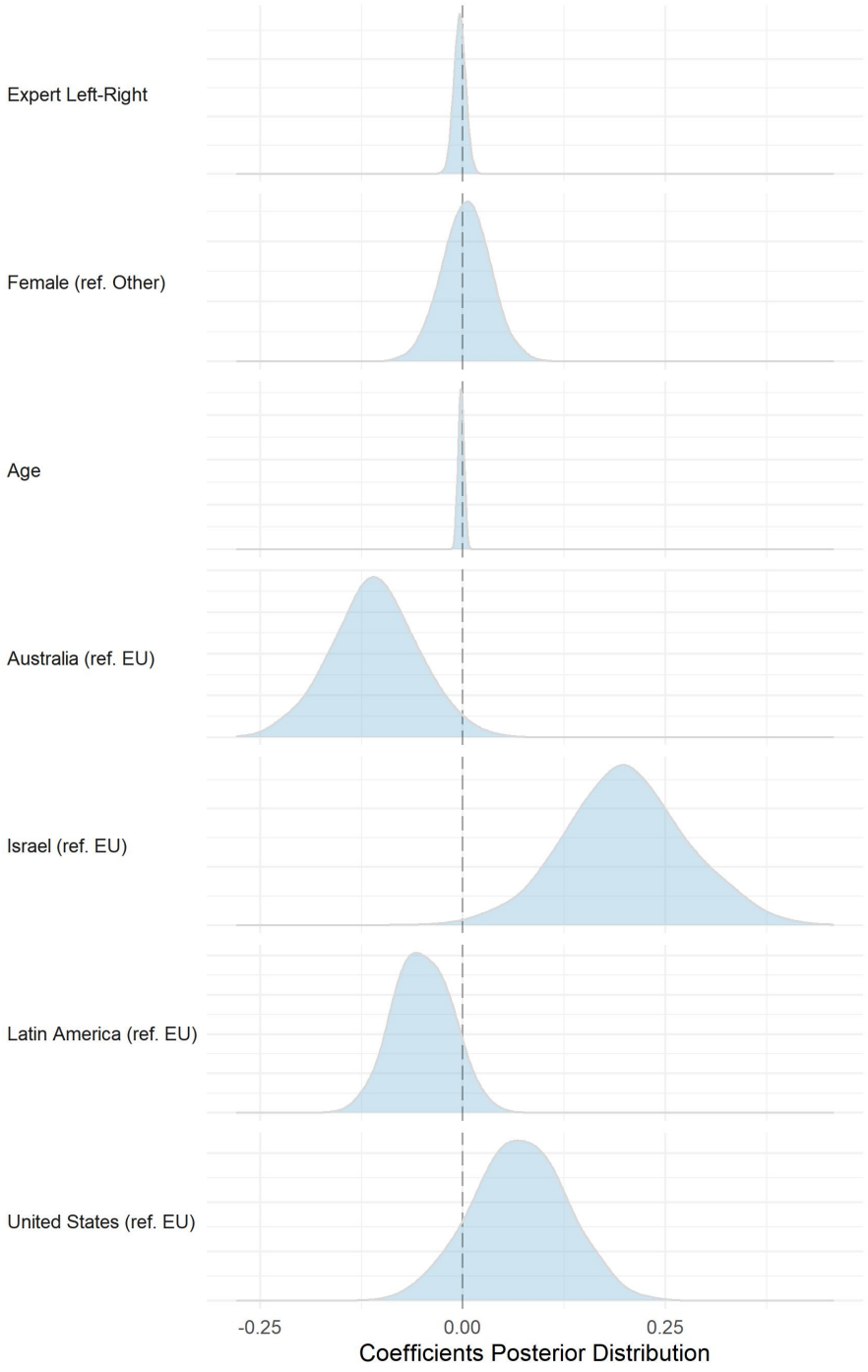

Figure 12: Predicting Expert-Level Betas

6 Conclusion: Living in a (mostly) DIF-free World

After exploring the potential sources of DIF in the CHES data, we feel confident asserting that the economic left-right dimension travels well across the borders of Europe, Latin America, Australia, Israel, and the United States. Returning to the aggregate analysis showcased in Figure 3, the DIF we find in regions and experts do not affect the party placements much at all, demonstrated by the 0.98 correlation between the raw and BAM-corrected scores. While this might not come as a surprise, the degree to which the data are free of DIF and the extremely high correlation between the BAM and raw CHES scales is impressive. This lack of DIF means that users of the data should feel comfortable making cross-national comparisons of party placement along the economic dimension. Ideally, we would like to claim that the DIF-free nature of the economic left-right dimension characterises all of the placements in the CHES data, but this analysis simply does not allow for such a sweeping statement. We are limited in our ability to test for DIF in other variables given that only the economic vignettes were included in all surveys.

Having said that, a large subset of the data do contain vignettes on the GAL-TAN dimension (socio-cultural), so an obvious next step is to perform a similar set of analyses as we did here to this subset of the global data set. In previous work (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2022), we examined the cross-national comparability of the GAL-TAN and EU dimensions, as well as the economic dimension, but this was only with the EU data. We do find that, although still minimal, there is more DIF in the GAL-TAN. Whether that finding extends to other parts of the world is an open question.

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