

Dimensions of Political Positions: A Spatial Model of Parties' Electoral Platforms

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1. Background

Relevance of political/ideological positions of parties

- Political/ideological positions of parties are a central ingredient for research on
 - Coalition governments
 - Public policy
 - Party competition
 - Electoral behavior

Why using electoral platforms?

- Scarcity of Data on parties' political/ideological positions
- Limits of expert surveys:
 - rest on pre-determined rating scales
 - possibility of bias in perception and expert selection
 - deliver only one-time snapshots
- Advantages on coded electoral platforms:
 - objective measurement
 - large data base already available in form of MRG/CMP data

Structure of MRG/CMP data

- 1991 electoral platforms covered in the 2001 edition
- Emphases of 56 policy objectives
 - recorded in terms of number of (quasi-)sentences that mention these objectives
 - (quasi-)sentences are (1) each coded into one of the 57 categories, counts are transformed into percentages.

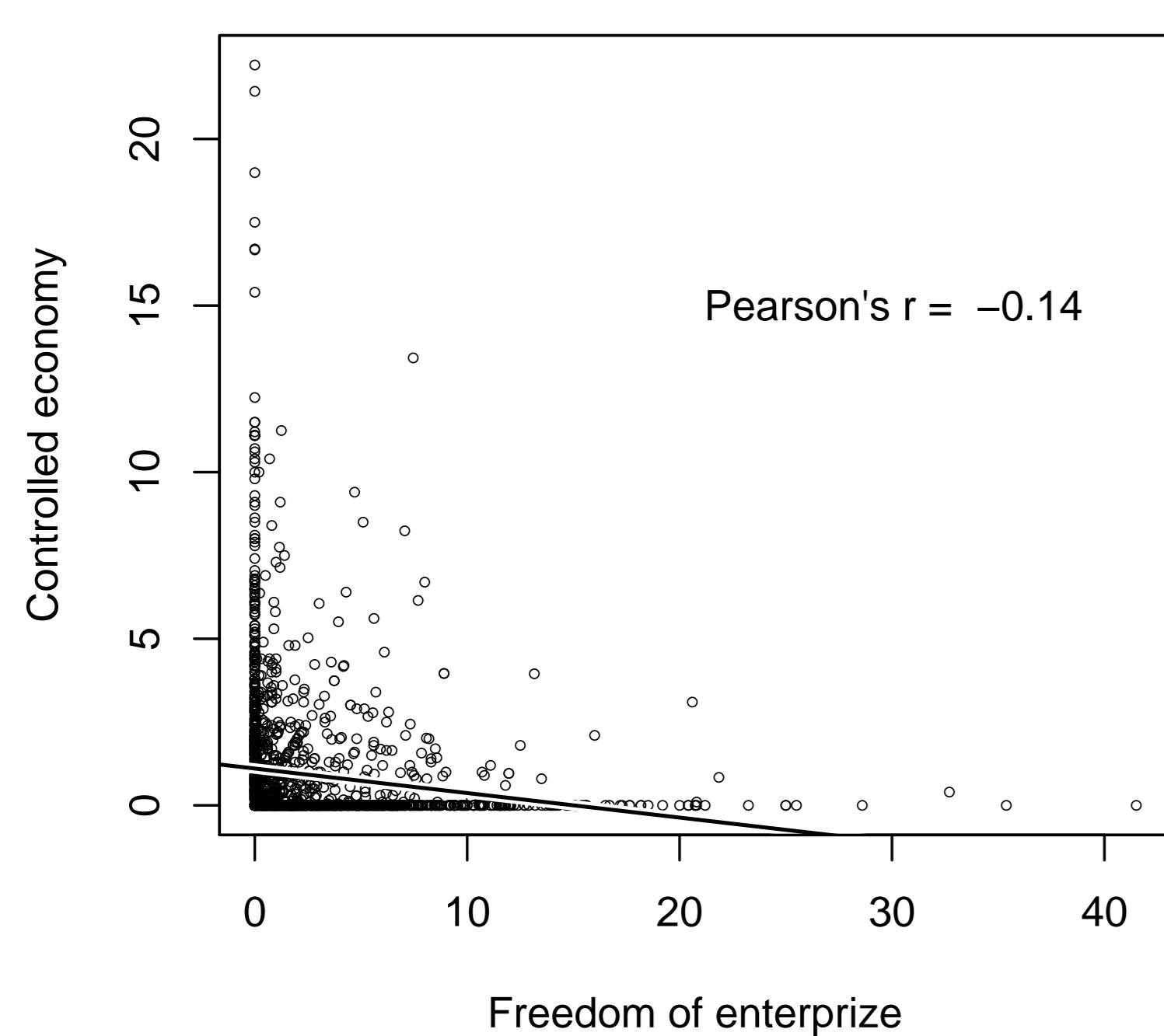
Use of MRG/CMP data in extant literature

- Sum/difference indices
- Principal components analyses

Challenges addressed

- Emphases of policy objectives may reflect both
 - the position of a party in a policy space
 - the salience of the policy area that is represented by the policy space
- Emphases are measured as percentages or counts, thus linear relations among *distances* cannot directly translate into linear relations among *emphases*.

Figure 1: Percentages of sentences emphasizing the policy objectives "controlled economy" and "freedom of enterprize" in electoral platforms of parties from 25 countries, 1945-1998.



2. The spatial model

Assumptions

- Each policy objective belongs to exactly one policy area.
- Each policy area constitutes its own policy space.
- Each party takes a position in each policy space by virtue of emphasising policy objectives.

Basic "components" of the spatial model

- Policy objectives $i = 1, \dots, I$
- Parties $j = 1, \dots, J$
- Elections at $t = t_{jk}, k = 0, \dots, K_j$
- Euclidean space with dimensions $d = 1, \dots, D$

Positions and distances

- Positions of the policy objectives: $\alpha_i = (\alpha_{1i}, \dots, \alpha_{Di})'$
- Positions taken by the parties: $\beta_{jt} = (\beta_{1jt}, \dots, \beta_{Djt})'$
- "Directional" distances $\alpha_i - \beta_{jt} = \Delta_{ijt}$
- Squared distances $\eta(\alpha_i, \beta_{jt}) = \eta_{ijt} = \Delta'_{ijt} \Delta_{ijt} = \|\alpha_i - \beta_{jt}\|^2$

Distances and emphases

- y_{ijt} : Number of (quasi-)sentences referring to objective i
- n_{jt} : Total number of (quasi-)sentences concerned with given policy area (e.g. economic policy) (NB: index for policy area suppressed throughout).
- y_{ijt} has multinomial distribution with size n_{jt} and cell probabilities

$$\pi_{ijt} = \frac{e^{-\eta_{ijt}}}{\sum_k e^{-\eta_{kjt}}}$$

Parties' positions as random-walks

- b_{djt_0} : position of party $j = 1, \dots, J$, on dimension $d = 1, \dots, D$ when observed the first time.
- $b_{djt_0} \sim \mathcal{N}(0; \sigma_{0d}^2)$
- b_{djt} : position of party j on occasion $t = 1, \dots, T_j$
- $b_{djt} = b_{djt-1} + \epsilon_{djt}$
- $b_{djt} - b_{djt-1} = \epsilon_{djt} \sim \mathcal{N}(0; \sigma_{1d}^2)$

Table 1: Positions of policy objectives and parties in the space of economic policy — fixed parameter values, maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors and model summaries

	Econ. left/right
Positions	
Government ownership	-0.604
Controlled economy	-0.519 (0.021)
Economic planning	-0.208 (0.022)
Market regulation	0.208 (0.032)
Incentives	0.600 (0.025)
Freedom of enterprize	1.073 (0.013)
Economic orthodoxy	0.778 (0.021)
Variance components	
Parties	1.064 (0.089)
Time	0.157 (0.005)
Log-likelihood	-38539
Deviance	60543
N	83675

Note: Estimates of free parameters are listed with standard errors in parentheses, fixed parameter values are listed without standard errors.

Table 2: Positions of policy objectives and parties in the space of domestic and social policy — fixed parameter values, maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors and model summaries

	Lib./Auth.	Mod./Trad.
Positions		
National way of life +	0.801	0.764 (0.007)
Traditional morals +	0.012	0.825
Traditional morals -	0.006 (0.009)	-1.277
Law and order	0.734	-0.064
Freedom and human rights	-0.011 (0.000)	-0.239 (0.006)
Democracy	-0.717	-0.156 (0.002)
Variance components		
Parties	0.700 (0.058)	0.376 (0.031)
Time	0.285 (0.010)	0.059 (0.002)
Log-likelihood	-29746	
Deviance	45886	
N	83873	

Note: Estimates of free parameters are listed with standard errors in parentheses, fixed parameter values are listed without standard errors.

3. Spatial positions of parties

Party families

- Liberal parties
- Conservative parties
- Social democrat parties
- Communist parties
- Christian democrat and confessional parties
- Right wing parties
- Ethnic/linguistic/regional parties
- Agrarian/rural parties
- Left socialist and new left parties
- Green parties

Figure 2: Positions of party families in the space of economic policy — party family averages of posterior expectations

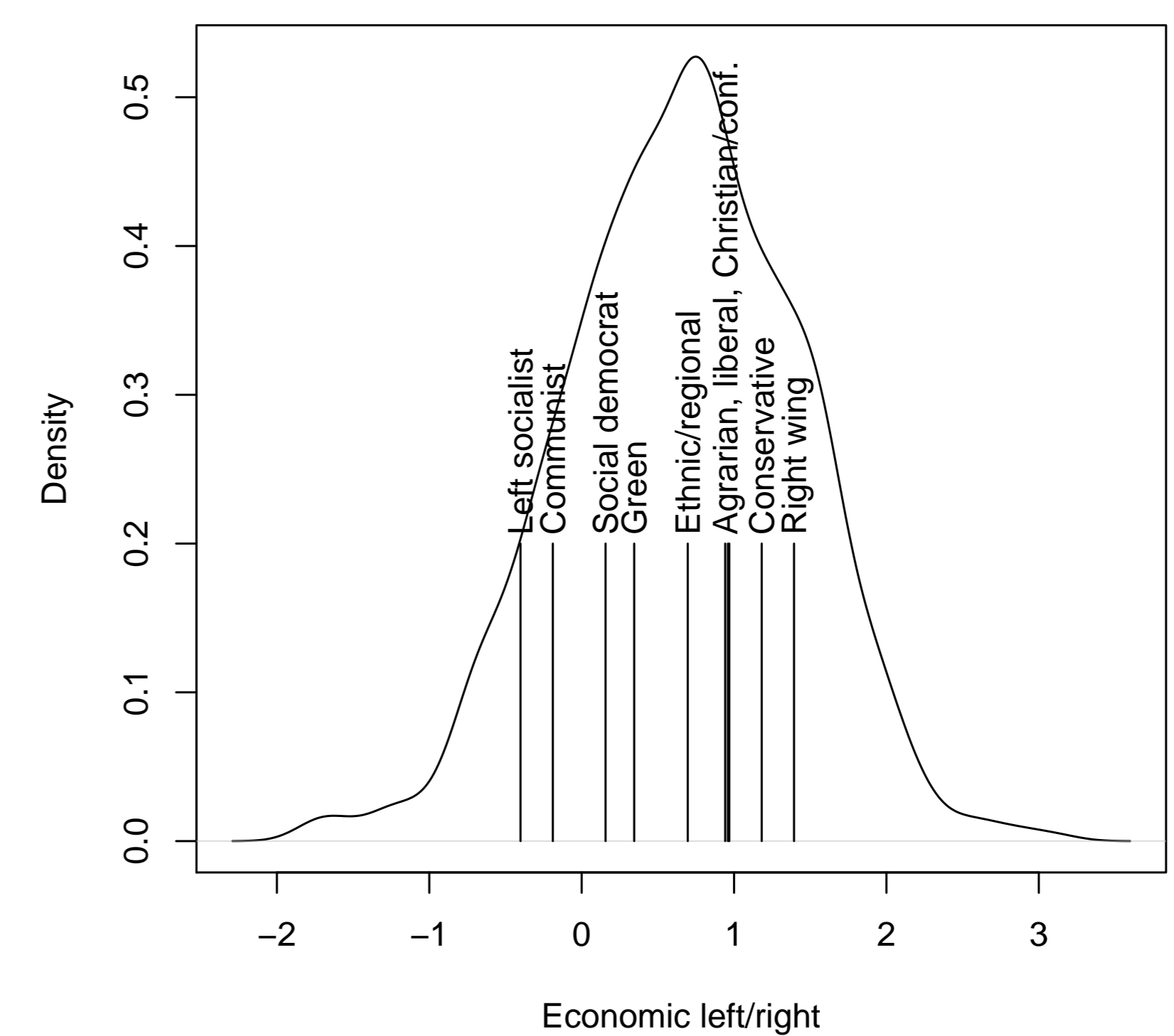


Figure 3: Positions of party families in the space of domestic and social policy — party family averages of posterior expectations

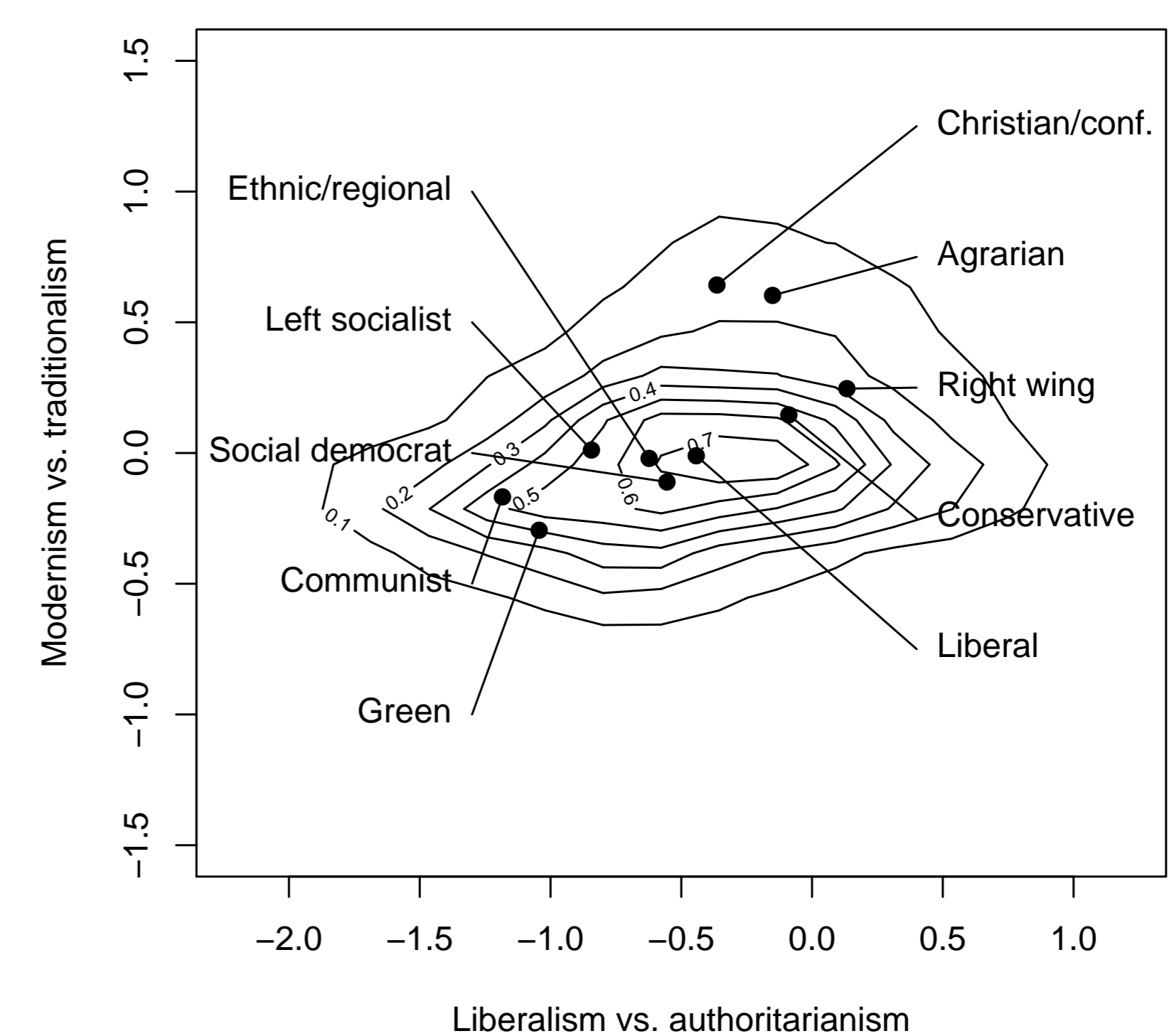


Figure 4: Positions of US Democrats and Republicans — empirical Bayes posterior expectations

