

Abstract:

The advocates of modern western democracy promote the viewpoint that the class division of the society is becoming outdated. We attempt to disprove this statement with an example of 28 German parties who participated in the 2013 federal election. The official party positions on 38 policy issues are considered and the parties are located in this 38-dimensional political space. The statement in question, that there is no predominant political axis, would imply that the parties are scattered homogeneously, making a ball-shaped cloud of 'observations'. However, the Prime Component Analysis (PCA) shows that the parties constitute a thin ellipsoid whose two longest diameters explain 83.4% of the total variance. The following party ordering is the left–right axis rolled in a circumference, making the extreme left and extreme right ends meet. Next, it is shown that the electoral success is highly correlated with the number of party members, but not with the party's capacity to represent public opinion. For this purpose, a representativeness index is defined which measures how well the party policy profiles match with the results of 36 public opinion polls on 36 out of 38 policy issues mentioned. To reveal representativeness trends, the parties are ordered 'continuously', with neighboring parties having close policy profiles. These quasi-continuous orderings are found with four methods: PCA, traveling salesman problem, least squares for close parties, and maximum squares for distant parties. The most statistically significant trend is observed for the parties located at the circular left–right axis found with the PCA. Then the highest and lowest representativeness is inherent in left and right parties, respectively. Basing on this empirical evidence, we conclude that neither the left–right characterization of parties nor the class opposition is outdated.