

**ARE LEFT AND RIGHT CONVERGING OR BECOMING
MEANINGLESS?: A DISCUSSION ON CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGICAL
POSITIONS**

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Abstract

Although the history of ideologies is traced back to the ancient times of human history, it is actually a phenomenon of modern times. The concept was first systematically studied by philosophers in the Age of Enlightenment. With the development of political parties in the 19th century, the concept of ideology was intertwined with political parties. In the modern era, political parties try to get the votes of their voters by aligning their identities on the right and left spectrum. This study aims to evaluate whether or not the expressions “left” and “right” are meaningless today. If they are still meaningful, what are their meanings? The study examines ideological convergence in Western countries using the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data. The research results show that although the concepts of left and right still make sense, they have eroded over time. The results also demonstrate that right and left do not have the same meaning in every country.

Keywords: Ideology, End of Ideology, Left, Right, Politics

Jel Codes: D70, D72, D79

SAĞ VE SOL BİRLEŞİYOR MU YOKSA ANLAMSIZLAŞIYOR MU?: ÇAĞDAŞ İDEOLOJİK POZİSYONLAR ÜZERİNE BİR TARTIŞMA

Öz

İdeolojilerin tarihi insanlık tarihinin çok eski dönemlerine kadar götürülse de aslında modern zamanların bir olgusudur. Kavram ilk olarak Aydınlanma Çağı'nda filozoflar tarafından sistematik olarak incelenmiştir. 19. yüzyılda siyasi partilerin gelişmesiyle birlikte ideoloji kavramı siyasi partilerle iç içe geçmiştir. Modern çağda siyasi partiler kimliklerini sağ ve sol spektrum üzerinde hizalayarak seçmenlerinin oyunu almaya çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma, günümüzde “sol” ve “sağ” ifadelerinin anlamsız olup olmadığını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Hâlâ anlamlıysa, anlamları nelerdir? Çalışma, Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) verilerini kullanarak Batı ülkelerindeki ideolojik yaklaşmayı incelemektedir. Araştırma sonuçları, sol ve sağ kavramlarının hala anlam ifade etmesine rağmen zaman içinde aşındığını göstermektedir. Sonuçlar ayrıca sağ ve solun her ülkede aynı anlama gelmediğini de işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İdeoloji, İdeolojinin Sonu, Sol, Sağ, Siyaset

Jel Kodları: D70, D72, D7

1. Introduction

The concept of “ideology” is one of the most commonly used concepts in daily political, social and academic life. There are its many definitions. The definition of ideology varies according to world views, cultures and beliefs. Thus, there is no agreed definition of ideology. As McLellan put it, “Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences.” (McLellan, 1995 cited in Heywood, 2003, p. 5). Nevertheless, political scientist Andrew Heywood has attempted to define the concept in his book “Political Ideologies: An Introduction” (2003, pp. 10–11) as the following:

“An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies, therefore, (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a ‘world-view’, (b) advance a model of the desired future, a vision of the ‘good society’, and (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b).”

According to surveys across the world, ideology is still a frequently used concept by many people. It has been used in many different meanings in historical development. It has many types which identify themselves by their positions on the political spectrum, such as left, centre, right, and extreme left or extreme right, even though this is very often controversial. However, the distance between political positions has begun to close over time. This study aims to evaluate this convergence process between the ideologies. The study also examines whether the expressions “left” and “right” are meaningless today. If they are still meaningful, what is their meaning?

This study consists of three main sections. The first section reviews the emergence of the ideologies and political parties and their historical evolution. This section also examines the emergence of the terms “left” and “right” and looks into their definitions according to classic partisan theory. The second section analyses how political parties’ ideological positions have converged since the 1950s through the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data. This section evaluates various effects such

as globalisation, internalisation, modernisation and contagion processes hollowing out the scientific properties and assesses historical content of the left and right divisions. Moreover, the section investigates whether the importance of left and right still exists. The third section examines the terms of left and right from the perspective of different cultures of countries and continents. In this section, meanings of these terms in Europe, in the United States, and in Turkey are compared to explore the different perception of the terms of left and right from place to place.

2. Ideology: The Story of a Concept

According to French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1971, p. 159), "Ideology has no history". In other words, wherever people live, there is an ideology. Thereby, ideology extends to the beginning of humankind, according to him. However, according to general acceptance, the expression of "ideology" was coined by French Enlightenment aristocrat and philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796, and it was used as a new "science of ideas" by de Tracy (Heywood, 2003, p. 6). However, this original meaning of the term has not significantly impacted later usage, and it has been used in many different meanings in its historical development. French military and political leader Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) has a different place in developing the concept of ideology. While he was an important ideologue, he became an enemy of it. According to him, ideologists did not do anything except try to impose a good model of society on people, and they pursued speculations. He also accused them of being "dreamers". For Napoleon, the concept of ideology was a philosophical theory that was a challenge against political power, and he believed that to believe, only political power should be essential. These criticisms led to gaining a negative meaning of the concept of ideology (Toprakkaya, 2007, p. 166).

German philosophers Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) played a significant role in gaining popularity of the concept of ideology thanks to their book "The German Ideology" (1846/1970). In particular, according to the common opinion of the social scientists, this concept gained a modern sense thanks to

Marx. However, he sometimes used it differently, and there was a shift in the meaning between different usages (Toprakkaya, 2007, p. 167). Marx used the concept in two different senses in the book, both of which are still common:

“(a) a relatively neutral sense in which ideology refers to any abstract or symbolic meaning system used to explain (or justify) social, economic, or political realities; and (b) a pejorative sense in which ideology denotes a web of ideas that are distorted, contrary to reality, and subject to ‘false consciousness’” (Jost, 2006, p. 652).

The following words clearly describe Marx’s view of ideology:

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 64).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the “end of ideology” thesis became popular, and it reached the top with American Sociologist Daniel Bell’s thesis in 1960. Not only for Bell but also for some scholars, such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Karl Popper, Edward Shils and Seymour Martin Lipset, “The age of ideology was over.” (Lipset 1990, p. 81; Kaya, 2004, p. 6). Bell was impressed that Western politics was characterised by broad agreements amongst major political parties and the absence of ideological division or debate after World War II (Heywood, 2003, p. 256). Fascism and Communism had lost their appeal, while the other parties disagreed on which one could best be relied upon to deliver economic growth and material prosperity. In fact, economics had triumphed over politics, and politics had been reduced to technical questions. Therefore, ideology had become irrelevant for all intents and purposes.

However, according to Heywood (2003, p. 257), the process to which Bell drew attention was not actually the “end of ideology”. Indeed, he wanted to draw attention to the emergence of a broad ideological consensus amongst major parties and, thus, the suspension of ideological debate. In the immediate post-war period, representatives of the three major Western ideologies, which are Liberalism, Socialism

and Conservatism, came to accept the common goal of “managed Capitalism”. However, this purpose was ideological for Heywood (2003, p. 257). In fact, an ideology of “welfare Capitalism” had triumphed over its rivals, but this situation was temporary. In the 1960s, more radical new left ideas emerged, interest in Marxist and anarchist thought rose again, and modern ideologies such as Feminism and Ecologism began to rise. In the 1970s, the economic recession provoked renewed interests such as free-market doctrines and caused the rise of new right theories. Additionally, Bell’s thesis focused attention only on developments in the industrialized West, ignoring that during the 1950s and 1960s, Communism was still firmly entrenched in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, and that revolutionary political movements were operating in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Heywood, 2003, p. 257). Therefore, the “end of ideology” thesis was not widely accepted and criticised by many scholars. Bobbio (2005, p. 3) stated that ideologies are still very much a part of our lives, and the old ones have merely been replaced by new ones or claim to be new; therefore, “the ideological tree is always green”. Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre also interpreted the thesis as an ideological intervention in the essay “The End of Ideology and the End of the End of Ideology” published in his book “Against the Self-images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy” (1971). The thesis was also seen as a new beginning of ideologies (Kaya, 2004, p. 6).

American political scientist and political economist Francis Fukuyama put forward a broader argument of Bell’s “end of ideology” in his best-known essay “The End of History” (1989) and book “The End of History and the Last Man” (1992). Unlike Bell, Fukuyama did not argue that political ideas had become irrelevant but that one particular ideology, Western Liberalism, had triumphed over all its rivals (Heywood, 2003, p. 257). In other words, for Fukuyama, Liberal Democracy is the ultimate and best form of government for all nations, and there can be no progression from this system to another system (Kaya, 2004, p. 7). Thus, the history of ideas and fundamental ideological debate had ended. However, Fukuyama’s thesis was also heavily criticised.

Political parties in the modern sense and the expression of “ideology” emerged almost at the same time. Throughout their histories, there has been a significant relationship and interaction between ideology and politics. In particular, political parties arise with a political programme in the context of ideologies which are adopted by them. They attempt to influence government policies directly or indirectly, typically by nominating their candidates and trying to seat them in political office. Indeed, defining political parties is not easy, and there are lots of different definitions, but political scientist Robert J. Huckshorn (1984, p. 10) provided a pragmatic definition as follows: “A political party is an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in the hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organisation of the government”.

The stable cooperation of political representatives occurred shortly after the formation of the first modern assemblies: in the United States during the 1780s, in France in the first year of the French Revolution (1789), and in Britain through the opposition of Tories and Whigs. Therefore, political parties in the modern sense started to emerge in the beginning of the 19th century. While the Democratic Party and the Republican Party were founded in the United States around 1828 and 1854 respectively, Britain’s Conservative Party and Labour Party were founded in 1834 and 1900 respectively. Moreover, in Belgium and Switzerland, unified liberal (or radical) parties were founded in the 1840s. In the last third of the 19th century, Catholics and Social Democrats founded highly centralised mass parties in the European continent (Boix, 2007, p. 500).

The terms “left” and “right” emerged during the French Revolution of 1789 when members of the French National Assembly were divided into supporters of the king to the president’s right and supporters of the revolution to his left. Deputy Baron de Gauville explained this with the following words:

“We began to recognise each other: those who were loyal to religion and the king took up positions to the right of the chair so as to avoid the shouts, oaths, and indecencies that enjoyed free reign in the opposing camp. However, the Right opposed the seating arrangement because they believed that deputies should support private or general interests but should not form factions or political parties” (Gauchet, 1994, p. 243).

The terms left and right were used to some different forms but only to seating in the legislature.

With the establishment of the French Third Republic in 1871, the terms left and right were adopted by political parties. While the Republican Left and the Centre-Right emerged in 1871 and 1876 respectively, the Extreme Left and Radical Left appeared in 1876 and 1881 respectively (Gauchet, 1994, p. 257). According to the classic partisan theory of policy outcomes, while the Left favours greater government control of the economy, the Right advocates reliance on the market. In other words, leftist parties are expected to increase government spending, and rightist parties are expected to decrease it (Tavits and Letki, 2009, p. 555). Furthermore, leftist governments are generally expected to produce bigger governments and increased welfare spending, particularly in the areas of education and health (Tavits and Letki, 2009, p. 555). Due to the existence of many ideologies of political parties, ideologies have been categorised differently. Klaus von Beyme categorised European political parties into nine families in 1985, and he was able to arrange seven of them from left to the right: “Communist, Socialist, Green, Liberal, Christian Democratic, Conservative and Right-wing Extremist”. The position of agrarian and regional/ethnic parties varied (Ware, 1996, p. 22).

3. The Transformation of the Population Between Political Parties and Ideologies

In the 1950s, ideological positions started to converge, and political parties converged toward the centre on the traditional left-right scale. As Figure 1 shows that in majoritarian electoral systems (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom), ideological convergence was remarkable between the 1950s to the 1980s. It

was also visible in proportional representation systems, including Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, there were some Western countries where ideological polarisation increased more, such as Denmark, France and Sweden.

Figure 1: Ideological Distance between Major Left and Right Party, 1950–1980s

	Per annum change	Sig.	N	1950s avg.	1980s avg.	Change
Australia	-0.31	0.19	16	20.1	11.2	-8.9
Austria	-1.36	0.37	11	78.7	12.9	-65.8
Belgium	-0.45**	0.33	13	25.2	2.6	-22.6
Canada	-0.55	0.30	13	43.2	7.8	-35.4
Denmark	1.27	0.18	16	42.8	91.5	+48.7
France	0.47	0.54	11	15.7	61.0	+59.3
Germany	-1.02	0.30	10	65.4	15.2	-50.2
Ireland	0.34	0.88	11	14.6	17.1	+2.5
Italy	-0.15	0.28	9	6.6	4.7	-1.9
Netherlands	-0.56*	0.06	10	12.4	1.5	-10.9
New Zealand	-0.59*	0.07	13	32.6	15.4	-17.2
Norway	-0.35***	0.00	9	11.8	1.7	-10.1
Sweden	0.59	0.38	13	27.0	70.7	+43.7
United Kingdom	0.24	0.20	11	18.3	5.9	-12.4
United States	0.39	0.52	10	51.5	26.5	-25.0

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Per annum change table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Source: Caul and Gray, 2009, p. 213.

Figures 2 and 3 also demonstrate that although ideological polarisation increased sometimes, ideological convergence occurred in some Western countries between the 1940s to the 1990s.

Figure 2: Range Between the Most Extreme Left or Right Parties

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	Average
Austria	46	50	35	31	40	44	41
Belgium	63	43	40	48	46	20	43
Denmark	38	55	79	71	81	75	67
Finland	76	81	80	98	90	47	79
France	63	61	67	56	58	66	62
Germany	53	49	14	38	43	50	41
Greece	-	-	-	47	48	52	49
Ireland	71	75	45	44	44	39	53
Italy	71	36	33	46	65	74	54
Luxembourg	47	47	31	45	51	37	43
Netherlands	39	50	38	54	32	26	40
Portugal	-	-	-	49	59	19	42
Spain	-	-	-	39	50	48	46
Sweden	100	93	97	56	78	76	83
United Kingdom	47	34	26	39	56	45	41
Average	60	56	49	51	56	48	53

Source: Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 156.

Figure 3: Degree of Left-Right Polarisation of Party Systems

	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	Average
Austria	46	50	35	31	35	38	39
Belgium	63	36	30	29	30	13	34
Denmark	31	43	61	56	61	56	51
Finland	50	59	60	71	62	34	56
France	41	45	57	50	47	50	48
Germany	46	40	14	38	39	41	36
Greece	-	-	-	38	48	41	42
Ireland	55	61	39	44	36	33	45
Italy	50	31	28	28	43	44	37
Luxembourg	43	40	26	38	41	28	36
Netherlands	31	37	31	38	24	23	31
Portugal	-	-	-	37	40	16	31
Spain	-	-	-	27	29	25	27
Sweden	86	77	78	43	55	54	66
United Kingdom	47	34	26	39	42	45	39
Average	49	46	40	40	42	36	42

Source: Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 156.

Highly influential social and behavioural scientists (e.g., Edward Shils, 1955/1968, Raymond Aron, 1957/1968, Daniel Bell, 1960, Seymour Lipset, 1960, and Philip Converse, 1964) also presented in their works that in the aftermath of World

War II and the Cold War, both the right and the left had been equally discredited and that “a kind of exhaustion of political ideas” had taken place in the West (Lane, 1962, p. 15 cited in Jost, 2006, p. 651).

Many analyses have argued that socio-economic constraints are reducing the importance of partisan control due to internalisation and globalisation. Changes in the international environment such as growing influence of the international economy and the Europeanisation of policy-making limit many national governments’ scope and discretion. According to Volkens and Klingemann (2002, p. 145):

“the European integration process in particular contributes to party families becoming more similar and adhering the core identities of their party families, because parties of roughly the same party family co-operate in the factions of the European Parliament”.

Thus, in national governments, the ability of policy steering of political parties has been reduced over time.

Political parties are increasingly constrained by the same policy parameters and find themselves sharing the same policy priorities (Caul and Gray, 2009, p. 221). Furthermore, since the 1970s, the globalisation of the economy has weakened the economic and political bases for support of the welfare state. National governments have lost some control over economic policy and the national economy due to internationalisation of trade, production, and finance. Therefore, the same market-conforming policies will be implemented no matter whether a Social Democratic or Conservative government is in office (Caul and Gray, 2009, p. 222).

On the other hand, Anthony Downs’s rational choice theory considers parties’ policy positions to be “free-floating”. Downs said in his book “An Economic Theory of Democracy” (1957) that parties’ primary goal is vote-seeking to win the next elections. According to his theory, most voters are located in the middle of the ideological space, and parties will converge in the middle of the political spectrum for vote-maximizing (Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 145). Moreover, parties will change their policy positions whenever voters change their interests and demands,

and “modernisation processes” provide for several forces of change (Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 146).

“Contagion process”, which may make parties move closer to the positions of their successful competitors, is also shown as the other reason behind the process of ideological convergence (Thomas, 1980 cited in Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 146). As seen in Figure 4, environmental issues were a non-issue in the 1940s and 1950s for political parties. In the 1960s, few Socialist, Christian Democratic, Conservative, and agrarian parties began to show interest in environmental issues. In the 1970s, this interest spread to all party families and environmental issues received more attention with each passing decade. Eventually, with the establishment of green parties in most parliaments, all party families’ attention to environmental issues increased in the 1980s and 1990s.

Figure 4: Policy Positions of Party Families: Environmental Protection

Party Families	1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s		1980s		1990s		Average	
	%	STD*	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD
Communist	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	4	4	6	5	2	2
Green	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	16	21	13	21	15
Socialist	0	1	0	0	1	2	3	3	4	4	6	5	2	3
Liberal	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	4	5	4	5	3	2	2
Religious	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	6	5	2	3
Conservative	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	3	4	4	2	2	3
Nationalist	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	2	3	4	1	2
Agrarian	0	0	0	0	2	2	6	6	13	6	16	6	6	3
Regional	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	5	4	6	5	3	2
Special-issue	0	0	0	0	-	-	2	3	2	2	5	6	2	2
Average	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	6	5	8	5	3	4

*STD=standard deviation.

Source: Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 163.

Moreover, as seen in Figure 5, administrative efficiency was considered a minor issue for party families until the 1960s. However, centre-right parties began to pay more attention in the 1970s, and in the 1980s, almost all parties paid much more

attention to this issue. These examples are an indication of contagion between different party families to compete with their successful competitors.

Figure 5: Policy Positions of Party Families: Administrative Efficiency

Party Families	1940s		1950s		1960s		1970s		1980s		1990s		Average	
	%	STD*	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD	%	STD
Communist	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	5	1	2
Green	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	3	3	3	4
Socialist	1	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	4	3	6	5	3	3
Liberal	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	3	6	5	6	6	4	4
Religious	1	1	2	2	3	4	3	3	5	4	6	5	3	3
Conservative	2	5	1	2	2	2	3	3	6	7	5	3	3	4
Nationalist	3	4	1	1	0	0	3	3	8	9	10	10	4	5
Agrarian	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Regional	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	4	5	4	6	4	3	3
Special-issue	3	2	7	8	-	-	6	8	4	2	4	4	5	5
Average	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5	3	3

*STD=standard deviation.

Source: Volkens and Klingemann, 2002, p. 164.

German jurist and Frankfurt School's political scientist Otto Kirchheimer argues that mass integration parties became the catch-all party to expand the base of votes. Kirchheimer specifically pointed to the mass integration parties of Germany, Italy, Austria, France and Great Britain as evidence of his "catch-all" thesis. As an example, he showed the convergence of the German Christian Democrats and Social Democrats according to West Germany's 1949 and 1953 election results. Kirchheimer's "catch-all" and Downs's "multi-policy" parties sacrificed their former ideological positions and the interests of their core electorate for maximum electoral appeal (Krouwel, 2003, p. 29).

Andre Krouwel criticises the "catch-all party" theory in some respects according to his comprehensive study. In 1998, Krouwel analysed 83 political parties between the period 1945 to 1990 from 12 West European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), and concluded that between the late 1960s and the 1980s there was

a decline in the “catch-all party” system. According to Krouwel, the problem of the “catch-all” thesis is Kirchheimer’s assumption of a continuing trend (Krouwel, 1998, p. 250). He is also against the thesis of only major parties being catch-all parties. Moreover, while there were more catch-all characteristics in big countries (Germany, France, and Italy), the catch-all transformation of Scandinavian countries, Ireland and the British parties was slower (Krouwel, 1998, p. 251).

Left and right are two antithetical terms that have been used for more than two centuries to indicate the contrast between the ideologies and movements that divide the world of political thought and action (Bobbio, 2005, p. 1). According to public opinion surveys and election results, however, the importance of the terms has declined over time but not all over the world. As seen in Figure 6, the core left-right issues (LR_core) declined in importance in 16 countries from 1945 to 2011. However, there was a slight increase in the importance of the core left-right issues in Japan, Canada, and the United States. Also, it increased substantially in Switzerland in the last period. Furthermore, the additional issues had more frequently mentioned over time, particularly in Austria, Luxemburg, Norway, and Sweden; but the importance of the left-right index (LR) was fairly stable.

Figure 6: The Importance of Core and Additional Left-Right Issues Over Time and Countries

	1945–1969			1970–1989			1990–2011		
	LR	LR_core	LR_plus	LR	LR_core	LR_plus	LR	LR_core	LR_plus
Australia	60.44	26.16	34.28	52.34	21.22	31.12	56.82	17.27	39.55
Austria	47.74	21.30	20.44	37.53	15.80	21.73	62.20	13.24	48.96
Belgium	63.93	15.62	48.30	54.27	12.42	41.85	55.82	10.42	45.41
Canada	48.07	11.75	36.33	44.64	13.71	30.94	58.39	13.02	45.37
Denmark	59.35	26.39	32.96	61.66	24.64	37.02	57.83	15.91	41.92
Finland	29.93	20.24	9.69	45.06	21.99	23.07	41.84	15.77	26.07
France	68.74	14.29	54.44	67.32	19.80	47.52	51.66	13.74	37.92
Germany	37.31	17.29	20.03	41.06	11.82	29.24	65.98	12.16	53.83
Iceland	41.01	17.71	23.30	38.48	14.93	23.55	40.16	12.83	27.33
Ireland	31.24	18.20	13.04	23.80	11.96	11.84	42.64	12.59	30.05
Italy	56.78	17.18	39.60	41.49	10.86	30.63	55.35	13.97	41.39
Japan	45.37	10.27	35.10	41.56	11.38	30.18	29.64	10.50	19.14
Luxembourg	30.09	15.89	14.20	34.70	12.92	21.77	54.97	10.18	44.79
Netherlands	73.67	21.50	52.17	65.89	11.77	54.13	57.28	12.76	44.52
New Zealand	70.66	23.82	46.85	57.23	12.13	45.10	48.99	17.80	31.20
Norway	56.03	17.72	38.30	69.83	15.57	54.26	69.71	13.04	56.67
Sweden	66.59	26.11	40.48	63.62	19.20	44.42	78.94	15.91	63.03
Switzerland	53.14	20.71	32.43	52.25	19.83	32.42	60.36	25.54	34.82
United Kingdom	41.68	20.29	21.39	42.55	17.69	24.86	32.27	9.43	26.84
United States	36.85	14.96	21.89	32.58	11.61	20.97	38.00	15.30	22.70
Total	52.16	19.52	32.64	51.21	16.47	34.74	54.12	14.30	39.82

Source: Jahn, 2014, p. 300.

After the start of the economic crisis in 2008, LR reached a record high of roughly 60% (Jahn, 2014). However, as seen in Figure 7, even in this period, the core left-right issues increased only slightly to 14.55%.

Figure 7: The Importance of Core and Additional Left-Right Issues Over Time and Countries

	1945–1969			1970–1989			1990–2011		
	LR	LR_core	LR_plus	LR	LR_core	LR_plus	LR	LR_core	LR_plus
Australia	60.44	26.16	34.28	52.34	21.22	31.12	56.82	17.27	39.55
Austria	41.74	21.30	20.44	37.53	15.80	21.73	62.20	13.24	48.96
Belgium	63.93	15.62	48.30	54.27	12.42	41.85	55.82	10.42	45.41
Canada	48.07	11.75	36.33	44.64	13.71	30.94	58.39	13.02	45.37
Denmark	59.35	26.39	32.96	61.66	24.64	37.02	57.83	15.91	41.92
Finland	29.93	20.24	9.69	45.06	21.99	23.07	41.84	15.77	26.07
France	68.74	14.29	54.44	67.32	19.80	47.52	51.66	13.74	37.92
Germany	37.31	17.29	20.03	41.06	11.82	29.24	65.98	12.16	53.83
Iceland	41.01	17.71	23.30	38.48	14.93	23.55	40.16	12.83	27.33
Ireland	31.24	18.20	13.04	23.80	11.96	11.84	42.64	12.59	30.05
Italy	56.78	17.18	39.60	41.49	10.86	30.63	55.35	13.97	41.39
Japan	45.37	10.27	35.10	41.56	11.38	30.18	29.64	10.50	19.14
Luxembourg	30.09	15.89	14.20	34.70	12.92	21.77	54.97	10.18	44.79
Netherlands	73.67	21.50	52.17	65.89	11.77	54.13	57.28	12.76	44.52
New Zealand	70.66	23.82	46.85	57.23	12.13	45.10	48.99	17.80	31.20
Norway	56.03	17.72	38.30	69.83	15.57	54.26	69.71	13.04	56.67
Sweden	66.59	26.11	40.48	63.62	19.20	44.42	78.94	15.91	63.03
Switzerland	53.14	20.71	32.43	52.25	19.83	32.42	60.36	25.54	34.82
United Kingdom	41.68	20.29	21.39	42.55	17.69	24.86	36.27	9.43	26.84
United States	36.85	14.96	21.89	32.58	11.61	20.97	38.00	15.30	22.70
Total	52.16	19.52	32.64	51.21	16.47	34.74	54.12	14.30	39.82

Source: Jahn, 2014.

4. The Changing and Unchanging Meanings of Left and Right?

Although the terms of left and right are frequently used, there has yet to be a consensus about their global meaning. The meanings of the expressions also have yet to be discovered by many people. The American polling company Harris Interactive did a survey in 2005 in the United States, and its results demonstrated that roughly one-quarter of participants do not know what the phrases mean (Hebert, 2009). Furthermore, according to a 2002 Compass survey done in Canada, just 47% of participants could accurately place the right-wing Canadian Alliance, which is the predecessor of the Conservative Party of Canada, to the right of the New Democratic Party, which is the centre-left party of Canada. While 32% admitted not knowing, 18% said the Canadian Alliance was to the left of the New Democratic Party (Hebert, 2009).

The terms “left-wing” and “right-wing” are frequently used in the United States. These terms are generally associated with Liberal and Conservative respectively, although their meanings do not entirely coincide. These terms can have different meanings depending on the political affiliation of the person using them. A survey conducted in 2005 with 2,209 American adults demonstrated that “respondents generally viewed the paired concepts Liberals and left-wingers and Conservatives and right-wingers as possessing, respectively, generally similar political beliefs” but also indicated that “respondents were roughly 10% more clueless about left-wingers and right-wingers than they were about Liberals and Conservatives” (Taibbi, 2005).

In the United States, the contemporary right is usually understood as a category including social Conservatives, Christian Conservatives and free-market Liberals, and is usually identified with the Republican Party. On the other hand, the contemporary left is usually identified with the Democratic Party. Left-wing parties imply a commitment to egalitarianism, support for social policies favouring the working class, and multiculturalism. Today, the left generally defines itself as promoting government regulations of business, commerce and industry; protecting fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and religion; and government intervention on behalf of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, and the working class (Kazin, 2011).

According to Knapp and Wright (2006, p. 6), class is the main factor dividing the left and right in Western European political systems. The left fights for social justice through redistributive social and economic policies, while the right defends private property and Capitalism. Left-wing values include the belief in the power of human reason to achieve progress for the benefit of humankind, secularism, sovereignty exercised through the legislature, social justice, and distrust of strong personal political leadership. On the contrary, the right doubts the capacity of radical reforms to achieve human well-being while maintaining competition in the workplace. They believe in the established Church in itself and as an instrument of social cohesion. They

also believe strong political leadership minimises social and political divisions (Knapp and Wright, 2006, pp. 7–9; Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 2).

Left-right politics in Turkey is different from the traditional understanding of left-right in the West. In most Western European countries, political parties' positions on a socio-economic dimension best explain their positions on a broad left-right scale (Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 2). However, in Turkey, political parties' positions in the religious-secular issue dimension provide the best explanation for the general left-right ideology (Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 2). In the Turkish context, the right denotes a commitment to religious, conservative and nationalist views, whereas the left is primarily associated with secularism (Hale and Ozbudun, 2010, p. 35). In order to understand that left and right have different meanings in Turkey, it will be sufficient to briefly examine the centre-right Justice and Development Party (JDP) (in Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP), which has been the governing party of Turkey since November 2002, and its main opposition, the centre-left Republican People's Party (RPP) (in Turkish: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP).

The centre-right JDP is known as a pro-Islamist party, and a large extent of its votes come from Muslim Conservatives. The centre-left RPP contrarily receives considerable support from the secular part of society (Hale and Ozbudun, 2010, p. 35). Major political parties in Turkey also differ from those in Western Europe in terms of their electorate profile. In Western Europe, leftist parties continue to receive significant support from the poorer and working-class segments of the population and fewer votes from wealthy voters (Elff, 2007 and Bartels, 2010 cited in Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 3). However, in Turkey, the richer and well-educated people mostly support the major centre-left RPP (Ciddi, 2008, p. 449).

There is also a reverse relationship between the Turkish and Western left context regarding social and economic policies. Ayata and Ayata (2007, p. 230) state that: "the centre-left political parties in Turkey are far from being perceived in public opinion as determined advocates of strong social policies and the welfare state, which in West

European countries have been the main source of legitimacy and strength of the social democracies". According to them, in recent decades, leftist parties in Western Europe have largely succeeded in developing new social and economic policies as a response to the changing circumstances, while the Turkish centre-left, in particular RPP, has failed to produce such policies (Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 4).

Aydogan and Slapin (2013, pp. 7–8) present the words associated with the election manifestoes of the rightist and leftist parties in Turkish politics. They found that rightist parties in the West emphasise some of the words in Figure 8 (e.g., morals/ethics, privatisation, nationalism and Turkish language), while many would not generally be associated with Western rightist politics. The words in boldface (abusing, climate, compensation, poverty) are typically associated with Western leftist jargon. According to Laver et al.'s (2003) examination of United Kingdom election manifestoes using Wordscores, for instance, poverty is a left-wing term more often used by the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats than by the Conservatives (Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 8). Similarly, Slapin and Proksch (2008) found that climate is the word associated with the left in Germany.

Figure 8: Words Associated with Rightist Parties in Turkish Politics

abusing	debenture bond	identity	poverty	service
actor	deficiencies	illnesses	powers	size
agreement	definition	innovations	precaution	solution
ally	degeneration	judge	presenter	space
altogether	deterrent	jurisprudence	prestige	sportsmen
analyses	development	imbalance	priorities	stability
assets	disaster	import	privatization	stock
authorization	donation	ineffective	procurement	stock market
ballot box	down	information	profit	strategy
believer	dynamics	justice	progressive	subjects
bloody	education	land	proportion	success
brotherhood	employment	language	psychologist	supreme
business administration	enterprise	limitation	public prosecutor	sustainability
cargo	essence	loss	rate	taxation
cartel	evidence	manager	reciprocity	tendency
central Asia	experience	market	recognition	terror
chain	fashion	methods	regime	test prep centres
clash	financing	MHP	rehabilitation	TIR
class	fleet	mission	repetitive	topics
classification	fluctuations	mistakes	report	trafficking
climate	freedom	modern	research	transportation
communities	genetics	modern	researcher	Turkish
compensation	geologic	morals, ethics	responsibility	Turkish Language
competence	gift	nation	revenue	unity
components	goals	nationalism	risk	urban
composition	guarantee	nationalist	rules	valuable
conditions	guilty	norm	sale	value
conscious	harmony	offices	satisfaction	veteran
contribution	head	opinion	season	virtue
corruption	historical	opportunities	security	voice
cost	housing	personnel cadre	seedling	vulnerability
council	idea	pieces	selective	wastage
cultures	ideal	planning	separatism	

Note: This list was obtained from the top 300 words that have the highest word weight. Since the verbs have no ideological meaning, they were dropped. Also some words appeared multiple times with different suffixes. We preserved only the root words in those instances. Words in boldface would reflect a right-wing ideology in Western democracies.

Source: Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 7.

The boldface in Figure 9 shows the words associated with Turkish leftist parties, not typically associated with Western leftist jargon. These include “Cypriote”, referring to the Turkish people in Cyprus, an issue of particular importance to Nationalists. This is because the invasion of Cyprus occurred under an RPP government; therefore, leftist parties have frequently used the Cyprus issue to attract votes. The Turkish left also emphasises “sovereignty”, highlighting nationalist rhetoric that is not usually associated with left-wing parties in the West. Likewise, they talk of “foreigners” rather than minorities. Slapin and Proksch (2008) find “foreign” to be a word associated with the right in Germany. German right uses rural, populist language, such as “village”, “farmer”, “agriculture” and “livestock breeding” which would be atypical for European leftist socialist workers’ parties (Slapin and Proksch, 2008: 9). In short, the left-right rhetoric in Turkey is different from the Western rhetoric.

Figure 9: Words Associated with Leftist Parties in Turkish Politics

access	need	health	work force	small-business person
activities	new	housing	year	socio-economic
administration	opportunity	improvement	youth	solidarity
adult	day	increase	packet	sovereignty
agreements	death penalty	independant	participation	street
agriculture	denomination	inequalities	people	student
annual	deprivation	injury	plan	subsidy
art	donation	institution	plurality	supply
artist	dormitories	international	pre-school	system
artistic	employee	judge	price	tea
bank	an exam (like SAT)	judiciary	protocol	theft
birth	examination	labour	quota	today
boarding school	expenditures	law	requirement	tourism
centres	expense	liberal	resources	tranquillity
chambers	facility	life	retiree	transportation
child	faith	livestock breeding	return	Turks
CHP	farmer	making	rights	unattended
citizen	father	medium	scope	vacation
condition	fellow citizen	minister	sector	veteran
councils	foreigner	ministry	shape	village
county	freedom	mobile	shelter	vital
cover	girl	money	shipyard	vocational-technical
culture	guarantee	TUBITAK	sided	war casualty
Cypriote	headman	nature	situation	women

Note: This list was obtained from the top 300 words that have the lowest word weight. Since the verbs have no ideological meaning, they were dropped. Also some words appeared multiple times with different suffixes. We preserved only the root words in those instances. Words in **boldface** would reflect a right-wing ideology in Western democracies.

Source: Aydogan and Slapin, 2013, p. 8.

5. Conclusion

Although the claims regarding “ideology has no history”, the term “ideology” was coined at the end of the 18th century. In the 1950s and 1960s, the “end of ideology” thesis became popular. Moreover, in the 1990s, a broader argument that “end of history” was put forward. However, these arguments were highly criticised and not accepted broadly. Political parties in the modern sense and the expression of ideology emerged almost at the same time. In addition, the terms left and right appeared again at the end of the 18th century but there is a big difference between the original and modern sense. Since the 1950s, ideological convergence has been shown in many countries. Thus, the left-right polarisation has decreased, and parties have started moving towards to the centre. Over time, almost all party families have started to pay more attention to some specific issues, such as environmental issues. There are various push factors in reducing differences between parties, such as internalisation, globalisation, modernisation, and not surprisingly vote-maximising. However, there is no continuous overall process of convergence everywhere.

The terms left and right continue to be part of political terminology. However, public opinion surveys and analysis of election results demonstrate that their importance has declined over time but not in all countries. On the other hand, despite left and right being frequently used terms, there has yet to be a firm consensus regarding their meaning on the global level. Public opinion surveys which were done in different countries show that their meanings are not known by many people. Rather than investigating whether left and right are meaningless, investigating their meanings may be more important. This is because these terms do not have the same meanings everywhere, and they have various meanings with the effect of countries’ or continents’ specific political characteristics, as seen in the examples of the United States, Western Europe, and Turkey. For these reasons, examining the terms left and right within each country’s or continent’s unique political spectrum would be ideal.

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