

Party representation across multiple issue dimensions

Party Politics

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Abstract

Issue congruence between citizens and policy makers should be one of the central aspects of a democratic process. This study uses the 2009 European Election Study to compare the views of citizens and party elites on a diverse set of domestic policy issues and overall Left-Right identities. We find very high levels of congruence for Left-Right positions and socio-economic issues. Parties are less representative of their supporters on the newer cultural issues of immigration and authority, as well as gender issues. National political contexts have limited influence on congruence levels, although some party characteristics such as political extremism or party family are linked to citizen-voter agreement. On the whole, citizens and like-minded parties do connect through the electoral process to a high degree. However, the results also argue for a multidimensional approach to assessing representation to recognize where parties agree and deviate from their supporters.

Keywords

elections, European parliament, party elites, representation, voters

A strong linkage between the political views of the public and political elites is one of the essential features of democratic political systems, but there remains wide debate on the functioning of the representation process in contemporary democracies. Some scholars point to the strong congruence of voters and parties on broad Left-Right positions, and consequently argue that the representation process works successfully (Adams, 2012; Dalton et al., 2011; Powell, 2000; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999). Yet, the structure of political competition is becoming more complex, new issues are entering the political agenda, and new parties are engaging the voters. This research asks whether expanding representation beyond a single unidimensional Left-Right framework provides a fuller understanding of the workings of this process.

This article builds on prior cross-national research on issue representation between European publics and the elites of their chosen party (Costello et al., 2012; Dalton, 1985; Mattila and Raunio, 2006; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999; Wessels, 1999). We focus on political parties as the agents of representation in contemporary democracies. Researchers have long recognized the importance of political parties in democratic linkage. However, voter-party issue agreement is difficult to systematically analyze in a

single nation, because of a degrees of freedom problem. There are normally many issues and fewer parties in any single nation, and thus the confluence of policy positions limits analyses. Only a large cross-national study can provide a sufficient number of parties to systematically examine the representation process.

This study uses a matched pair of surveys collected during the 2009 European Parliament (EP) election. The PRIEDEU project (Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union) organized integrated data collections as the European Election Study (EES). One component is a post-election public opinion survey in each member state of the European Union (EU). A second component is a survey of EP candidates in the election. Both surveys asked an identical battery of issue questions, a measure of Left-Right position, and other relevant mass and elite variables. We pair both data sources to examine voter-party congruence.

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Researchers typically analyze the European Election Studies in the specific context of EU politics: who voted in the election, public support for the EU, the role of EU opinions in voting choice, and so forth. In contrast, we treat the EP elections as an event when a large number of nations simultaneously hold elections in which voters think about their policy priorities and then make a party choice. As other research has shown, these choices are primarily based on national conditions for a specific national party, rather than pan-European parties running primarily on EU issues (Thomassen, 2009; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). We are not concerned with how voter choice affects EU governance and accountability, but focus on the general level of voter-party agreement across nations.

This article proceeds in five steps. First, we briefly discuss the political representation literature that provides the theoretical foundation for our research. Second, we introduce the empirical resources used in this study. Third, we examine the correspondence between citizens and elites using party dyads constructed from the 2009 EES. Fourth, we determine the factors that might facilitate or impede voter-party issue congruence and test existing theories with this new empirical evidence. Understanding the mechanism of representation is perhaps even more theoretically important than assessing the overall level of congruence. The final section discusses the implications of our findings for European party systems and the functioning of democracy.

Studying representation

The structure of parliamentary systems gives political parties a special position in the representation process. In most European democracies, parties are the dominant actors in elections; selecting candidates, securing campaign funding, organizing the campaign, and attracting votes for the party “team”. In many nations with proportional representation electoral systems, the public casts their ballot directly for a party rather than an individual candidate. This system generally produces a responsible party government model in which parties are the key representatives of the public’s policy preferences (Budge et al., 2012; Dalton et al., 2011; Thomassen, 1994).

The policy agreement between voters and their preferred party thus is a central measure of the functioning of representative democracy. Most of the cross-national literature on representation has studied congruence based on a unidimensional Left-Right scale, measuring party positions by elite attitudes, expert surveys, party manifestos, or citizen perceptions of the parties (e.g. Budge et al., 2012; Dalton et al., 2011; Huber and Powell, 1994; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012).¹ Despite frequent popular and academic criticisms of contemporary representative democracy (e.g. Farrell and Scully, 2007), these studies consistently demonstrate high levels of congruence between the aggregate Left-Right positions of party voters and the positions of

their respective parties. The results seem consistent across methodologies and electoral settings, producing optimistic evaluations of the functioning of representative democracy.

We go beyond prior research in two major ways. First, this research utilizes data on citizen and elite *policy preferences* to examine the extent of agreement—shifting from a unidimensional Left-Right scale to comparing multiple policy areas. The Left-Right framework is a reasonable way to begin studying representation by simplifying the complications for party strategy and voter decision making. However, scholars also recognize that political competition involves multiple policy controversies that are only partially overlapping (Thomassen, 2012; Valen and Narud, 2007). Various studies emphasize a post-material dimension, a traditional values/authoritarian value cleavage, European integration, new immigration issues, or other cross-cutting cleavages as reshaping party alignments (Hooghe et al., 2004; Inglehart, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2012). Furthermore, while data on party Left-Right positions are now plentiful, there are few interconnected sources of issue positions for citizens and political parties. The unusual collection of issue positions for voters and parties in the 2009 European Election Study allows us to extend the study of representation to multiple policy issues.

Second, we examine the factors affecting voter-party congruence. The comparison of voter and party issue positions is typically limited to a single nation, drawing upon a national election survey or a series of election surveys that include comparable issue questions. These analyses are valuable additions to the literature, but they are limited by the national context. Any nation has a relatively small number of parties, so studying variation across parties is constrained. In addition, a single national context prevents analyses of how electoral systems and other institutional factors influence congruence.

In the past decade there has been explosion of research on the representation process because of the advances in the depth and breadth of the empirical evidence available to researchers. Our research aims to add to this literature by extending past research to examine the nature of issue representation in contemporary European party systems.

The data

This PIREDEU 2009 European Election Study collected representative public opinion surveys of the 27 EU member states (Banducci, 2012; Schmitt, 2010).² The project interviewed at least 1000 people in each nation following the election, which generated 27,302 respondents. The second component surveyed 1576 candidates in the EP election.³

There may be questions on the use of EP candidates as party representatives. The EP lacks the status of national parliaments, and the criteria for candidate selection can vary from national parliamentary candidates. These are legitimate concerns, especially on topics directly related

to the EU. However, prior research demonstrates a strong relationship between the Left-Right position of MEPs and members of the national parliament from the same party (Dalton et al., 2011: 122). In addition, the EP's political importance has created a significant career track for party elites. About half of the EP candidates in the EES had previously held local elected office, and one fifth had held national parliamentary office. Among those candidates actually elected as MEPs in 2009, almost two fifths previously served in national parliaments and more than half had served in the European Parliament. In short, EP candidates are top-level party elites and thus provide a valid basis for assessing party positions.

For each party we constructed a mass-elite party dyad as our unit of analysis. To determine the citizen half of the dyad we combined actual voters in the 2009 election and non-voters who preferred a specific party; this maximizes the voter side of the dyad. To ensure reliable estimates of each party's voters, we only include parties with 20 or more supporters in the mass sample. For the candidate half of the dyad, we only examine parties with two or more candidate respondents, which excludes about a quarter of the parties from the full survey.⁴

These decisions yield 130 party dyads from 24 of the 27 EU nations, and all of the major EP party groups.⁵ The range of parties also allows us to examine the interaction of national context with the representation process. For example, we might expect significant differences in the representation process between the post-communist democracies of Eastern Europe and the established democracies of Western Europe, or across parties of different ideologies or structures.

The EES asked citizens and candidates to express their views on twelve issues, as well as locating themselves on a standard Left-Right scale. This is the first European Election Study since 1979 to ask both a mass sample and candidate sample for their opinions on a range of domestic policy issues, and one of the few cross-national surveys to include both mass and elite policy positions. The issue questions are phrased so they are understandable by both citizens and candidates, as well as applicable across the diverse range of economic and political conditions in the EU member states.

To introduce these issues and identify the broad policy dimensions that underlie the issues, Table 1 presents principal components analyses (PCA) of these items. The leftmost panel presents the results for the European public.⁶ The first dimension taps the *cultural conflicts* that are currently dividing European publics: immigration, harsher penalties for criminals, and a stress on authority in education. This component appears similar to Hooghe et al.'s (2004) description of the traditional, authoritarian, nationalism (TAN) orientation, or Inglehart's (1990) contrast between liberal postmaterialists and more traditional materialists. The second component includes the three

gender items of women's rights and same sex marriages. Somewhat surprisingly, the least constrained component includes the three *socio-economic issues* that have long structured European party systems: the extent of state economic ownership, income redistribution, and the role of private enterprise.

The patterns for citizens' Left-Right self-placements illustrate the strengths and limits of this summary measure of political positions. Left-Right is most strongly related to the socio-economic issues, indicating that these issues still strongly affect citizens' political identities. In contrast, culture and gender issues have a weaker link to Left-Right positions. Thus, if one measured representation based only on Left-Right positions, this would minimize the importance of other issue concerns.

The next panel in the table repeats this PCA for the full sample of EP candidates. In overall terms, the components are quite similar to the mass public results. Cultural issues are the first component, without the one economic item that now loads of the second component. Socio-economic issues are the second component. Gender issues are less central to elite belief systems, producing the third component. Left-Right self-placement for elites is also primarily related to socio-economic issues, while cultural and gender issues are a more oblique set of values.

The rightmost panel presents the issue structure for our aggregated party units based on the mean position of the candidates for each party (N = 130). The structure of party positions is similar to the candidate results, albeit with greater consistency since these are aggregated measures rather than individual opinions. The eigenvalues and explained variance are the highest in this solution.

The key finding is that European citizens, EP candidates, and political parties see the same basic structure and thus political meaning to the issues included in the 2009 EES.⁷ The Left-Right scale is more closely related to socio-economic issues for both citizens and elites, with a much weaker relationship with cultural and gender issues. Indeed, these latter issues contributed to the rise of Green parties in the 1980s and extreme right parties more recently because the established parties were unresponsive to these issue demands. In short, the results speak to a need for considering multiple dimensions of political competition and representation.

Measuring representation

To estimate the congruence between citizens and elites on a specific issue, we utilize two measures. One meaning of representation is *centrism*, which is the policy agreement between party supporters and party elites (Achen, 1978; Costello et al., 2012; Dalton, 1985; Wessels, 1999). Centrism is the absolute value of the difference between the mean of party supporters' policy positions and the mean of candidates' positions on each question.⁸ Centrism is

Table 1. Issue dimensions for citizens, elites and political parties.

	European Public			EP Candidates			Political Parties		
	CULTURE	GENDER	ECON	CULTURE	ECON	GENDER	CULTURE	ECON	GENDER
Left-right self-placement	-0.237	-0.163	0.621	-0.326	0.634	-0.292	-0.405	0.741	0.216
People who break law should get much harsher sentences than now	0.667	0.068	0.028	0.803	-0.151	0.042	0.809	-0.162	-0.019
Immigrants required to adapt to customs of [country]	0.624	0.078	-0.156	0.759	-0.222	0.137	0.782	-0.286	0.026
Schools must teach children to obey authority	0.560	0.200	0.024	0.705	-0.095	0.199	0.746	-0.104	-0.115
Immigration to [country] should be decreased significantly	0.555	0.373	-0.041	0.760	-0.077	0.299	0.783	-0.093	-0.177
Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy	0.485	-0.067	0.115	0.275	-0.615	-0.074	0.394	-0.610	0.300
Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion	0.324	-0.738	0.145	-0.116	0.150	-0.873	-0.256	0.258	0.829
A woman should cut down on paid work for her family	0.226	0.652	0.069	0.500	-0.020	0.586	0.685	-0.069	-0.475
Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law	0.342	0.569	0.096	0.563	-0.105	0.570	0.723	-0.148	-0.419
Public services and industries should be in state ownership	0.284	0.160	0.590	0.139	0.775	-0.070	0.085	0.803	0.122
Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people	0.273	0.177	0.550	-0.026	0.811	-0.099	-0.043	0.835	0.210
Private enterprise best to solve [country's] economic problems	0.317	0.117	-0.498	0.312	-0.766	0.087	0.365	-0.804	-0.066
Eigenvalue	2.27	1.58	1.36	3.17	2.74	1.69	3.95	3.13	1.33
Percent Variance	18.9%	13.2%	11.3%	26.5%	22.9%	14.1%	32.9%	26.1%	11.1%

Source: 2009 European Election Study.

Note: Table presents results of Principal Component Analysis based on the mass sample, candidates for the European Parliament, and mean party scores from EP candidates. Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, pairwise deletion of missing data.

analogous to saying that party elites locate themselves near the center of the policy distribution of their supporters.

A second measure of representation is *political responsiveness* (Dalton, 1985; Powell and Powell, 1978). Responsiveness presumes that the relative positions of party supporters should be closely linked to the relative positions of the parties. In other words, leftist voters should be represented by leftist parties, and rightist voters by rightist parties. Responsiveness is normally measured by a simple regression equation:

$$\text{Party elites' mean position} = a + b \text{ (party voters' mean position)}$$

An unstandardized $b = 1.0$ means that each unit shift in voter sentiments is exactly matched by an equal shift in party elite positions. A b coefficient greater than 1.0 means that parties accentuate the opinion differences between voter groups—party elites are more polarized on the issue than are party voters. A b less than 1.0 indicates parties are under-responsive to their voters. The intercept term, a , can

measure the bias of party elites compared to party voters. For instance, at the lowest value on citizen issue positions, does the regression equation predict a lower or higher value for party elites?

To illustrate this methodology, we compare the position of party voters and party elites on the Left-Right scale (see Figure 1). Each dot in the figure represents a party dyad. The horizontal axis plots the mean score of each party's supporters on the Left-Right scale; the vertical axis plots the mean score of where each party's EP candidates *place their party* on the scale.

The figure shows a very high level of congruence between party voters and candidates in Left-Right terms ($r = 0.85$). Elites also tend to be more polarized than their own supporters.⁹ That is, leftist parties are more leftist than their own voters, and rightist party candidates are slightly more rightist than their voters. Thus, the regression line ($b = 1.16$) shows that for each 1.0 unit change on the X-axis, party elites shift 1.16 units along the Y-axis. This strong relationship is quite similar to prior voter-party Left-Right agreement in the 1979 and 1994 EP elections (Dalton, 1985; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999).

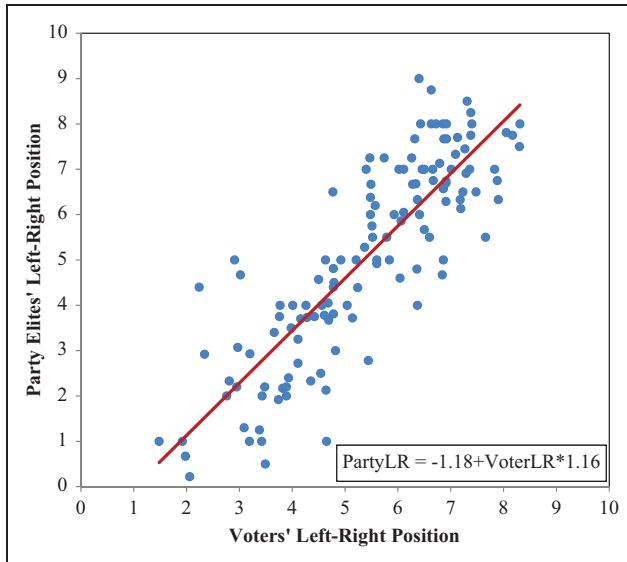


Figure 1. Party congruence on the left-right scale. *Source:* 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads. *Note:* Each dot represents a party dyad. The horizontal axis plots the mean score of each party's voters on the Left-Right scale; the vertical axis plots the mean score of the party's EP candidates. The dotted line is the estimated regression relationship ($N = 130$).

However, Jacques Thomassen (2012) cautioned that representation research may have a blind corner because many scholars “assume that representativeness on the left-right dimension automatically implies representativeness on a range of other issues as well.” Thomassen discussed how the emergence of new cultural and social issues that cut across traditional Left-Right party alignments might not be as well represented (also see Valen and Narud, 2007). Therefore, overall policy representation may be limited by cross-cutting issue demands being placed on the parties.

Table 2 thus extends our analyses to the battery of domestic policy issues in the 2009 EES; the first time this has been possible since the 1979 EP study. The centrist index shows that the majority of party supporters are within 1 point of party positions on the 11-point Left-Right scale, which is a moderate gap in nations where multiple parties compete for support (often in close proximity to one another).

The centrist scores also show modest voter-party agreement across issues. On all but one issue, the average party supporter is within one point of their party's position on the 5-point Likert scale.¹⁰ The largest overall gap is for cultural issues: decreasing immigration, harsh crime sentences, and teaching obedience in schools. There is also a large gap on the three gender issues. Socio-economic issues display a slightly better match between supporters and parties.¹¹

If we make allowances for the scaling differences between the Left-Right measure (11-point scale) and the issue questions (5-point scale), the supporter-party gap on issues is larger than for overall Left-Right position. In other

words, as Thomassen (2012) has argued, Left-Right voter-party agreement might indicate a generalized shared political identity that does not fully translate to specific issue positions.

The right half of Table 2 displays statistics for party responsiveness to their voter base. On cultural issues—which generally cut across traditional Left-Right alignments—the parties are highly responsive to their supporters. The positive slope ($b = 1.18$) indicates that party elites are more polarized than party supporters, and this pattern is strongest for the two immigration issues. The correlation between supporters and elites is also quite strong across cultural issues, and for the overall cultural index ($r = 0.66$).

The natural comparison is with the traditional Left-Right socio-economic issues that have long structured party competition. On the one hand, parties are hyper-responsive to their supporters on the overall socio-economic policy index that combines all four issues. Small differences across voter groups correspond to large differences between their respective party elites by nearly a two-to-one ratio ($b = 1.82$). On the other hand, the individual issues themselves show widely varying patterns of responsiveness, which suggests a loose structure to these opinions.

Party supporters are relatively well representative on socio-economic issues (see online appendix, Figure A1). At the same time, the policy differences across voter groups are relatively modest, and so the centrist gap between partisans and parties is the smallest of the three policy areas. We suspect that the responsiveness for the socio-economic index reflects the traditional identity of parties that formed around these issues—for voters and elites. And over time voter positions have converged while party elites continue to articulate these earlier political identities.

Cultural issues present a contrasting pattern (Appendix Figure A2). The distribution of partisan groups is spread out on this issue, as are party elites; the variances in positions are almost double those for the socio-economic issue index. The parties are responsive to their supporters on the culture index, and there is an even stronger correlation between dyad pairs than for socio-economic issues. However, because of the large variance for supporters and party elites, the average gap in issue centristism is larger than for the socio-economic issue index.

The representation linkage is weakest for the gender issues index (Appendix Figure A3). Opinions are relatively diverse among partisan groups, but party elites are not highly responsive to their respective constituencies, and parties are dispersed around the regression line so that the correlation between the party dyads is among the weakest in Table 2. The median distance between partisans and party elites on gender issues is greater than for socio-economic issues or general Left-Right orientations.

However, the most significant finding from these issue analyses may be the virtual independence of voter-party

Table 2. Issue congruence between voters and elites.

Issue	Centrism	Responsiveness		
		A	b	Correlation (r)
Left-Right placement	0.97	-1.18	1.16	0.85
People should get harsher sentences	0.95	0.65	1.12	0.58
Immigrants required to adapt to customs	0.68	-0.10	1.30	0.62
Schools teach children to obey authority	0.87	0.95	0.92	0.55
Immigration should be decreased significantly	1.03	0.67	1.12	0.68
Culture Index	0.70	0.39	1.18	0.66
Politics should not intervene in the economy	0.72	0.66	0.93	0.54
Public services and industries should be state owned	0.79	1.38	0.59	0.35
Income and wealth should be redistributed	0.72	0.20	1.08	0.56
Private enterprise best to solve economic problems	0.63	-0.91	1.32	0.58
Socio-Economic Index	0.45	-2.66	1.82	0.64
Women should decide on matters of abortion	0.63	0.18	0.96	0.41
A woman should reduce paid work for her family	0.92	2.07	0.55	0.45
Same-sex marriages should be prohibited	0.91	0.99	0.87	0.61
Gender Index	0.60	0.82	0.88	0.57

Source: 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads.

Note: Centrism is the absolute value of the difference between mean scores for party voters and EP party candidates; responsiveness is based on OLS regressions.

congruence on these separate issue measures. Although the issue positions are significantly correlated among and between voters and party elites, this is not the same for measures of congruence. Left-Right centrism is only correlated at $r = 0.03$ with socio-economic centrism, $r = 0.14$ for cultural issues, and $r = 0.02$ for gender issues. This speaks strongly to the need to consider the multi-issue aspects of representation, and not just a summary Left-Right comparison.

Predicting congruence

Our attention now shifts to the factors that may affect the level of voter-party congruence on Left-Right orientations and issue indices.¹² The varied national context across EU member states may influence congruence. In addition, specific party characteristics can influence the representative linkage. We consider factors at both levels.

Institutional context

An institutionalist would argue that a nation's political framework creates an incentive structure that should influence the behavior of political parties (Ezrow, 2010; Huber and Powell, 1984). Although EP elections span the entire EU, each election is conducted in a national context with specific political histories, electoral rules, and a combination of political parties. When historical, economic, or political incentives exist, then citizens' and elites' partisan behavior should reflect this. Our question is whether specific frameworks encourage voter-party congruence.

The structure of a nation's electoral system is often linked to the degree of voter-party congruence. The standard hypothesis is that proportional representation (PR) systems should yield a closer fit between voters and their parties. Previous research based on the Left-Right scale seems to verify this conclusion (Huber and Powell, 1984; Klingemann et al., 2006; cf. Golder and Stramski, 2010). The EP electoral rules have been harmonized into PR systems, albeit with significant variances in Ireland and Malta (Farrell and Scully, 2007: 130). So the effects of PR versus majoritarian systems cannot be realistically examined in contemporary EP elections. However, other electoral system traits still vary significantly. For example, the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) varied widely in the 2009 election (from 2.9 in Spain to 7.7 in the Netherlands). Earlier evidence from the 1979 European Parliament study holds that more choices should mean that voters have more opportunity to find a party that is closer to their preferred mix of issue positions (Dalton, 1985; also Wessels, 1999). So instead of rules of the electoral system, we examine the effective number of parties as a possible contextual effect (see article appendix for variable description).

District magnitude is also postulated to affect the number of parties and the decision making calculus of voters. Higher district magnitude provides more opportunities for smaller parties. Thus an open system might provide voters with more party choices, small parties to reflect distinct voter groups, and encourage the larger parties to be responsive to their voters. However, the empirical evidence based on Left-Right congruence is mixed (Golder and Stramski, 2010; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012: Chapter 8).

AQ3

AQ4

Similarly, the disproportionality of an electoral system is a potential influence. Less distortion in the translation of votes into seats may encourage parties to be more responsive to voters (Ezrow, 2010; Powell and Vandenberg, 2000).

The polarization of parties across the political spectrum may be an important factor in judging the party choices available to voters. If political parties are dispersed along the Left-Right dimension or specific policy dimensions, then this provides more meaningful choices for voters. More choice should translate into a stronger voter-party linkage. And the polarization of party systems is only weakly linked to the effective number of parties competing in elections (Dalton, 2008). Prior research on the Left-Right scale and attitudes toward the EU have tended to support this hypothesis (Mattila and Raunio, 2006; Wessels, 1999).

Perhaps the most obvious contextual factor is the possible contrast between the established party systems of the West and the still developing party systems of the post-Communist states (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). Most post-Communist party systems have experienced greater volatility and fragmentations in electoral results. Voters and political elites had to learn the new procedures of democratic elections, and how to organize and sustain political parties. Thus levels of party identification are generally lower in the East, and the voting effect of partisanship is weaker.

In contrast, Western parties and party systems are relatively more stable and institutionalized, and have a long democratic history. Parties develop a political identity and history that better allows voters to determine the parties' policy positions. In addition, voters become more familiar with their party choices when the choice set is relatively stable. Therefore, we might expect greater congruence in the West than in the East. However, recent studies have yielded mixed evidence on the contrast in Left-Right congruence for old and new democracies (Dalton et al., 2011: Chapter 6; Mattila and Raunio, 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). In addition to the East/West dichotomy, we also consider the World Bank's Voice and Accountability Index as a broader measure of democratic development.

Finally, as a control we treat the socio-economic development of a nation as a possible influence on representation. More affluent and educated publics presumably are better able to understand the complex world of politics and make appropriate voting choices. To test this thesis, we use the United Nations' Human Development Index that combines national income, education levels, and longevity (see appendix).

Empirical results

Table 3 presents the bivariate correlation between each of these national traits and our measures of Left-Right and

issue centrism.¹³ While each of the contextual hypotheses seems plausible, and there is some evidence for each in the previous literature, our findings suggest that institutional influences on voter-party congruence are very limited in this EP election. Only four of the 35 correlations in the table are statistically significant, and no variable is significant for more than one dependent variable. The direction of relationships often varies across issue indices, meaning that factors producing congruence on one dimension might diminish it on another without a clear a priori reason. For example, the effective number of electoral parties has a weak negative effect of Left-Right congruence (it lessens the distance between party supporters and party elites), yet the trait increases voter-party distance on socio-economic issues—although neither correlation is statistically significant.

The most striking results in the table are for gender issues. These issues are the most distinct from general Left-Right orientations and thus form an oblique dimension of cleavage that is not represented by simple Left-Right identities.¹⁴ In this case, institutional context seems to matter more. The representation gap on gender issues is lower in more democratic nations, those with a large number of effective parties, and in more affluent democracies. In nations with these characteristics, the party systems have seemed to be more responsive to gender issues (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012).

There are substantial cross-national differences in these various measures of voter-party agreement.¹⁵ But Table 3 indicates that these nominal differences are not systematically related to distinct features of the political context or party system. This is, in a sense, a positive finding because it implies that representation is not bound to specific institutional arrangement.

Party traits

Contextual factors may have limited impact on voter-party congruence because these effects are constant across parties, and the variation in congruence primarily occurs at the party level. The challenge of representation is for like-minded voters and parties to identify each other and establish an electoral bond.

Prior studies of issue or Left-Right congruence suggest that the clarity of party positions helps voters to recognize a party that supports their political views and vote for that party (Dalton, 1985; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012; Walczak and van der Brug, 2013; Wessels, 1999). For example, a party's identity may derive from being embedded in the society's social structure. A party can be closely linked to specific voter blocs that reaffirm its identity, such as the religious base of Christian Democratic Parties, the working class base of Communist parties, or the rural base of agrarian parties, and this guides voter choices. Research often examines this theme in terms of the class

Table 3. Institutional predictors of voter-party congruence.

Predictor	Left- Right	Socio- Economic	Culture	Gender
New democracy	0.13	-0.04	0.01	0.11
Voice & accountability	-0.13	-0.03	0.06	-0.21*
Effective number of parties	-0.07	0.08	0.02	-0.25*
District magnitude	-0.14	0.07	0.08	-0.08
Disproportionality	0.22*	-0.08	0.11	0.10
Polarization	-0.03	-0.14	-0.01	0.05
UN Human Development Index	-0.08	-0.08	0.10	-0.17*

Source: 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads (N ~ 130)

Note: The table presents the correlation r between predictors and centrism; higher values of centrism indicate less voter-party agreement.

base of party supporters, but this is too narrow a definition. We broaden the approach to argue that parties with a more distinct voter base in terms of traditional socio-demographic cleavages will have a closer voter-party congruence.

Another measure of the clarity of a party's position is its political ideology because this is a source of its political identity. Parties at the ideological extremes offer distinct political programs, and thus voters more easily know where they stand—and stand with them if they agree (Dalton, 1985; Mattias and Raunio, 2006; Walczak and van der Brug, 2013; Wessels, 1999). For example, to be a communist or support the French National Front implies a clearer policy profile than supporting the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) or even the French Socialists. Similarly, Bonnie Meguid (2008) has argued that niche parties—green, radical right, and ethno territorial parties—are more closely linked to their voters because of their distinct political profiles. Thus the position of parties at the poles of an issue or Left-Right dimension, or the party family, might affect congruence.¹⁶

The simple size of a political party is another factor that might affect its responsiveness to voters, but the direction of effects is unclear. On the one hand, large parties might provide clearer signals to voters on their policy positions. But with size also comes a potential inertia to new issue demands. Conversely, smaller parties might feel compelled to be more responsive to their voters to maintain their existence, but they also might be more labile in their positions because of a small political base. Consequently, the previous empirical evidence is mixed. For example, Mattila and Raunio (2006) used the 1994 European Parliament study to show that larger parties were less responsive to their voters on EU issues. In contrast, Dalton (1985) found that party size had observable, but often varied, effects on issue congruence in the 1979 EP study (also Adams et al., 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012).

The length of time a party has competed in elections also might facilitate the clarity of party positions and thus voter-party congruence. Established parties have a track record that may enable voters to better identify the parties' positions and to commit to a party to match their positions. In

comparison, new parties often evolve their positions over successive elections as they expand their programs beyond their initial formative issues.

Finally, several studies suggest that centralized and well-organized parties are more effective in presenting a single coherent party message compared to decentralized parties or ones that speak with many voices (Dalton, 1985; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012: Chapter 6). This logic builds on a long tradition emphasizing the efficiency of oligarchy or centralized structure in managing political parties.

Empirical analysis

To test these theories of factors affecting voter-party congruence, we collected measures of each concept (see article appendix). We measured social embeddedness as the variance in party support that can be explained by six socio-demographic variables. Party size is simply the party's vote share in the 2009 election. Two measures test whether a party's ideology affects congruence. The political extremism measure is a curvilinear relationship between party positions on each issue dimension, and centrism scores. In addition, the EES coded party family to more directly tap the niche party thesis. A party's size is measured by its vote share in the 2009 election. Party age is the year the party was formed. Finally, the party structure variable is Rohrschneider and Whitefield's index of mass party organization (2012: Chapter 6). It combines expert judgments of the locus of decision making in the party, the significance of the membership base, and the party's links to affiliate groups.

Table 4 tests these hypotheses with a multivariate model predicting voter-party absolute differences on each dimensions. For theoretical and political reasons, we included the East/West variable as the one national characteristic.¹⁷ The most striking result is for party issue positions. The bivariate graph for Left/Right position in Figure 2 is illustrative. Parties that locate themselves at the extreme Left or extreme Right are at a greater distance from their voters than centrist parties. In other words, the 'over representation' of voter positions at the political extremes yields

Table 4. Party level predictors of voter-party congruence.

Predictor	Left-Right	Socio- Economic	Culture	Gender
New democracy	0.16	0.22*	0.21*	0.14
<i>Party Level Predictors</i>				
Grouped based support	-0.11	-0.05	-0.05	-0.20*
Party issue position	-0.07	0.10	0.66*	0.21*
Party issue position squared	0.49*	0.29*	0.48*	—
Vote percent in 2009	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.18
Year party formed	-0.05	-0.18	-0.16	0.10
Mass party organization	-0.14	0.15	0.23*	-0.01
Multiple R	0.57	0.44	0.86	0.32

Source: 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads (N ~ 130)

Note: The table presents the standardized regression coefficients between predictors and issue centrism; higher values indicate less voter-party agreement.

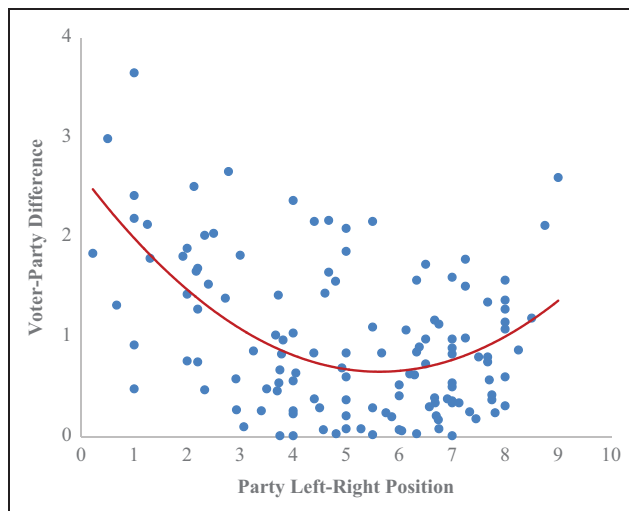


Figure 2. Voter-party difference by party left-right position. Source: 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads. Note: Each dot represents a party dyad. The horizontal axis plots the mean score of each party's candidates on the Left-Right scale; the vertical axis plots the absolute difference between the mean score of voters and party candidates on the Left-Right scale. The solid line is the estimated polynomial regression line (N = 130).

larger vote-party gaps. The pattern exists for socio-economic issues and cultural issues; we dropped non-linear term for gender because it is a linear relationship.¹⁸

The multivariate results show that, controlling for party characteristics, there is a significantly larger voter-party gap in the new post-communist democracies of Eastern Europe (cf. Costello et al., 2012; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). These effects are not large, but they indicate that when controlling for the nature of party choices being offered, the post-communist party systems are less representative of their voters.

Beyond ideological extremism effects, none of the other party characteristics have consistent, statistically significant effects across issue dimensions. Group-based party support tends to lessen the voter-party gap, but only one

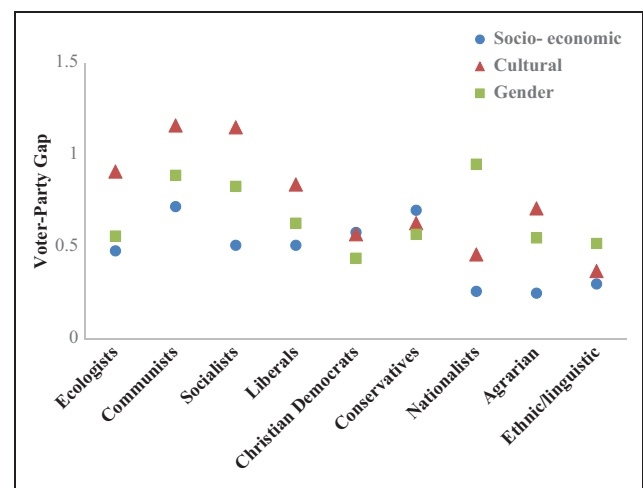


Figure 3. The issue representation gaps for party families. Source: 2009 European Election Study, party voter and candidate dyads. Note: Each marker indicates the average centrism gap for the parties belong to the party family for the respective issue dimension.

of these relationships is statistically significant.¹⁹ Traits such as the age of the party or its overall size have weak and inconsistent effects across issue dimensions. A mass party organization does decrease the voter-party gap as Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) found, but only for Left-Right positions. The effects of party organization on issue congruence are in the opposite direction although only one is statistically significant. Thus, the objective characteristics of a political party matter less for voter-party congruence than a party's political views.

A separate bivariate relationship for party family is also informative as a test for the role of a party's ideological identity and 'niche' status in the representation process. The pattern of congruence varies in an interpretable manner across issue indices (Figure 3). For example, Leftist parties tend to be representative of their voters on socio-economic issues, but there is a larger representation gap on gender and cultural issues. Because of their ideological extremism, communist parties have an above average gap for all three

issue dimensions and for the Left-Right scale. In contrast, Liberals, conservatives, and Christian Democrats are more consistent in their representation across issue dimensions. The largest voter-party gap on gender issues is among nationalist parties.

Conclusion

The past decades have witnessed increasing debate on the vitality of democracy in Europe, and this has especially involved questions of representation. A central part of this debate concerns the question of how well parties represent their voters. Claims of an emerging “democracy deficit” are frequently heard on both sides of the Atlantic. The 2009 European Election Study provides an exceptional opportunity to study *how well political parties reflect the policy views of their supporters*.

The 2009 EES is the first since the 1979 EP election to ask European voters and party elites about their opinions on a broad range of domestic policy issues. The author of a study of the 1979 election was relatively positive about the working of party representation three decades ago: “there is a stunningly strong relationship . . . between the left/right orientations of party voters and party elites. This, we feel, is the most conclusive evidence that Western European parties generally are responsive to their constituents” (Dalton, 1985: 293–294).

In broad terms, little has changed by the 2009 EP study. Voter-party agreement on the Left-Right dimension in 2009 is almost identical to 1979 for West European parties (1979 $r = 0.91$; 2009 = 0.87). Even on specific policy domains, there are very strong correlations between voter and party positions. One might reasonably debate how precise a voter-party agreement should be expected to be, and discuss the variations in this linkage. However, the basic pattern is that like-minded voters and parties are able to connect, which is an essential aspect of democratic representation.

At the same time, voter-party congruence does vary across specific issue domains and across parties. And this raises broader questions on the measurement and content of political representation. Most previous representations use the Left-Right dimension as “the” measure of party positions. Strong congruence across many studies is interpreted as evidence of effective democratic representation. To a considerable degree this is true. However, aspects of our findings suggest that Left-Right may constitute an identity that transcends specific policy positions. Voters, and party elites, can identify as being Left or Right without holding consistent or even informed views on the issues that typically are associated with this label—much as party identifiers support “their” party while having incomplete agreement with their party’s positions. The evidence comes from the over-responsiveness of party elites to voter positions on the Left-Right scale, the limited ability of citizens’

issue positions to predict party elites’ Left-Right positions, and the lack of relationship for the representation gap on separate issue dimensions.²⁰ The evidence is not conclusive, but it suggests caution when treating Left-Right as a complete measure of democratic representation.

A corollary of the previous observation is the significance of a multi-issue view of political representation. Socio-economic issues show strong evidence of voter-party congruence, but even here party elites at the extremes tend to over-represent their supporters’ positions. These patterns suggest that party systems are still aligned with the socio-economic conflicts that initially structured party competition in the West, and this even applies to the new democracies of the East. The new culture clashes over immigration and authority patterns sharply polarize both citizens and party elites. These issues are being integrated into the European party system. However, as a new and somewhat orthogonal dimension, there is often a substantial gap between citizen and elite positions. The representation linkage is weakest for gender issues. Party supporters are relatively diverse in their opinions, but party elites are not highly responsive to their respective constituencies.²¹ We also developed and tested hypotheses that generally might affect voter-party congruence, and future research might devote more attention to whether the nature of the issue affects how voters and parties are linked. All this speaks to the need for recognizing the multiple issue dimensions of democratic representation, and realizing that congruence on Left-Right or any one policy dimension is not generalized to other issues.

Another caveat is that we are studying only aggregate positions of voters and party elites, and examining each dimension separately. An alternative approach is to consider representation from the perspective of individual citizens (Golder and Stramski, 2010; Pierce, 1999). Individual citizens do not view representation as an aggregate process; they evaluate how well their chosen party reflects their opinions in toto. Christopher Anderson (2011) has shown that nearly half of voters in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) do not feel represented by the party for which they actually voted. Similarly, Best and McDonald (2011) show that nearly half of all CSES voters do not select the party that is actually closer to them on the Left-Right scale. Further research needs to adopt a holistic view of representation from the standpoint of the citizen. Our evidence suggests that aggregate Left-Right and policy agreement can coexist with substantial individual disagreement with one’s chosen party.

With strong congruence between citizens and party elites on most issues, this leaves limited variance to explain based on the institutional context or the characteristics of individual parties.²² On the one hand, most contextual and party variables are not strongly and consistently related to representation—which is a good thing because it means that democratic representation is not

closely bound to specific institutional arrangements or types of political parties. On the other hand, there is evidence that extreme or centrist Left-Right or issue positions affect the representation process. Parties with distinct policy positions are less congruent with their supporters than centrist parties. Strong political views on the part of party leaders may make them less responsive to their actual views. They are selling an ideology, rather than selling what the political market wants.

In summary, each election provides new choices for the voters as the parties or the parties' policy positions change in reaction to events. We have taken a snapshot of this dynamic process to assess the congruence between the policies that voter blocks endorse and the policies of their chosen party. Even given the caveats we have discussed, the evidence speaks to the ability of like-minded voters and parties to connect at election time. The connection is imperfect and varies across issue dimensions, as is inevitable, but democratic representation is strongly present in European party systems.

Appendix: Data Description

National Context Variables

Established democracy. Coded 0 for new third wave democracies and 1 for established democracies.

Voice and accountability. This index combines perceptions of whether citizens can participate in the selection of government, as well as exercise freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media. The 2009 scores are from the World Bank: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>.

Effective number of electoral parties. The effective number of electoral parties was calculated by the authors from data provided in the 2009 EES contextual file. We used the standard formula:

$$ENEP = \frac{1}{\sum v_i^2}$$

where v_i is the percent of votes obtained by the i th party.

District magnitude. The formula is the number of EP seats divided by the number of EP constituencies. These data were provided by Chris Posner at the University of Manchester.

Disproportionality. Disproportionality measures the difference between the percentage of votes received and the percentage of seats a party obtains after legislature elections. The formula is:

$$DISPROP = \left[\frac{1}{2} \sum (Vote_i\% - Seat_i\%)^2 \right]^{1/2}$$

where $Vote_i\%$ is the percent of the popular vote and $Seat_i\%$ the percent of the seats the i th party obtains.

Human Development Index. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. These are 2009 scores from the United Nations website: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi-table>

New democracy. Coded by the authors 0) established democracy, 1) new post-communist democracy.

Polarization. This index measures the dispersion of parties along the Left/Right scale (Dalton, 2008). It is based on the Left/Right location of parties as determined by the publics in each nation, weighted by the vote share for each party. These values are from the 2009 election as calculated by: www.parlgov.org.

Party Characteristics

Grouped base support. The EES included questions on the probability of voting for almost all the parties in our dyads. We used these questions as the dependent variable to avoid the small N limitations with vote for some parties. The variable is Multiple R from a model including: occupation, subjective social class, union membership, religiosity, urban/rural residence, and gender.

Political position. This is the party score on each issue index.

Mass party organization. This is from Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012: Chapter 6).

Party family. This was coded in the EES dataset: 1) ecologists, 2) communists, 3) socialists, 4) liberals, 5) Christian democrats, 6) conservatives, 7) nationalist, 8) agrarian, and 9) ethno/linguistic.

Vote percent. This is drawn from the 2009 EES contextual file.

Year party formed. This was collected from the website: www.parties-and-elections.eu. In some instances parties were first established before a substantial break in democratic elections; in these cases we coded the year in which the party first competed in continuous democratic elections.

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Supplementary material

The online appendices are available at: <http://ppq.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

Notes

1. Notable cross-national exceptions are Dalton (1985) on the 1979 EP election; Thomassen and Schmitt (1999) and Mattila and Raunio (2006) on the Left-Right positions and EU opinions based on the 1994 EES; and Costello et al. (2012) on EU party groups in the 2009 election.
2. Additional information is available on the project homepage: <http://eeshomepage.net/ees-2009-study/>. We thank the investigators who collected and shared these data. The surveys are available from the GESIS archive (dbk.gesis.org).
3. Giebler and Wessels (2010) provide more information on the design and execution of the candidate study.
4. Additional analyses indicated that the strength of relationships increases as one increases the N threshold for including voters or candidates for each party, but the number of dyads inevitably decreases. There is obviously a direct tradeoff between the reliability of party estimates and the number of party dyads produced by thresholds. We settled on the current thresholds as a balance between these two goals.
5. The list of parties and the core dyad dataset are available from the author upon request.
6. For a more detailed analysis of the dimensionality of a subset of these issues see Costello et al. (2012). We excluded the EU referendums question to focus on domestic policy issues, and the single item did not tap general EU sentiments in PCA models. The unconstrained PCAs produced four dimensions for the public sample, and two dimensions for the candidate survey based on Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. This is not surprising because elite opinions tend to be more constrained and highly structured. But the fourth component in the public sample was poorly defined, and the two-dimension candidate solution seemed to compress dimensions. For comparability we constrained both analyses to three dimensions to see if similar issue structures exist.
7. These results are similar to those of Costello et al. (2012) and Walczak and van der Brug (2013) who develop a socio-economic dimension and a combined cultural/gender dimension.
8. This differs from Dalton's (1985) analysis of centrism in the 1979 EP study. He squared differences, which tends to over accentuate extreme cases, while we use absolute values as a more balanced estimate. If we replicated this methodology, the centrism score for Left-Right is slightly lower in 2009 (1.50) than in 1979 (1.97).
9. Another illustration of this point is the larger standard deviation for party Left-Right positions measured by EP candidates (standard deviation = 2.35) than for the positions of party supporters (1.76).
10. We constructed the issue indices by adding together scores of each of the specific issues (adjusted for differing polarity if needed) and then dividing by the number of items.
11. The political intervention in the economy item loads on the culture component for citizens, but on the socio-economic component for EP candidates. Because of these different loadings, we ran the analyses excluding this item from the socio-economic index. The three item index has a slightly higher centrism score (0.58), and a similar responsiveness estimation ($\text{Party_LR} = -03 + 1.32\text{VoterLR}$). Since the four item index has a strong face validity and shows a stronger relationship, we use this in our measurement of voter-party agreement. But the choice of index yields generally consistent results in the analyses that follow.
12. We also considered a summary issue index that includes all three issue indices, but this was largely equivalent to deviations on the gender dimension and thus did not add new information. Ideally weighting issue indices by salience would provide a more balanced multidimensional measure, but issue salience was not available.
13. While the set of parties is reasonably representative of the overall EP electoral results and the distribution of party families, not all electorally important parties are represented in these dyads. The absence of one or more parties in a nation may bias the national results, but we cannot test for such bias.
14. The relationship between measures can be seen in the correlation (r) of issue indices with Left-Right positions for the dyads in our study.

	Socio-economic	Culture	Gender
Party Left-Right	0.77	0.51	0.53
Voters Left-Right	0.55	0.39	0.30
15. The eta correlations between nation and centrism measures are as follows: Left-Right 0.53; socio-economic issues 0.46; cultural issues 0.40; gender issues 0.55.
16. Other research holds that voters who want policy change will select parties more extreme than themselves to ensure that the new government's policies will actually deviate from the status quo (Kedar, 2005; Merrill et al., 2002). This would be another logic producing a larger voter-party gap at the political extremes.
17. We explored other national characteristics and possible multilevel models, but with a limited number of dyads these analyses yielded limited information.
18. Including the non-linear effect produced excessive multicollinearity between the two gender indices. Visual inspection of the bivariate plot showed the lack of a quadratic relationship, so we estimated a linear model.
19. Somewhat surprisingly, the class variables generally had modest correlations with party support, and the largest effects linked religion to support for social demographic parties. Thus the highest Multiple R was for Christian Democratic parties (0.31) and the average was lower for socialists (0.21) or communist parties (0.26).

20. A multiple regression using the party supporters' mean scores on all 12 issue variables had a lower Multiple R (0.72) in predicting party Left-Right positions than just the single Left-Right mean of party supporters ($r = 0.85$).
21. This pattern may be partially due to the salience of different issues and the relative size of each issue public. However, this hypothesis is not testable with the EES data.
22. The limited impact of electoral system variables compared to other research might be due to the limited variance of the harmonized PR systems used in EP elections.

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AQ17

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