Representation in the European Union: Congruence between Citizens and Elites in a Multilevel Setting

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Abstract

Liberal democracy is a system of representative government claiming to establish connections between citizens and elites. In this respect, ideological or policy congruence between parties and voters constitutes one of its primary goals (Huber and Powell 1994). Most empirical studies of policy representation explore the relationship between congruence and electoral institutions. Less work has been devoted to other factors that affect party-voter congruence. Importantly, for EU member states, representation is pursued via a multilevel institutional and party organisational structure. Yet, the study of policy representation across EU member states focuses on either the national or the European level. In this paper, we argue that the exclusion of either level from the analysis may provide an inaccurate picture of representation. We empirically explore this argument by studying the European Parliament, where policy representation is effected through an intricate web of national and supranational parties. More specifically, we ask whether party-voter congruence changes across levels of interest aggregation and if so, in which direction. We put forward hypotheses to investigate determinants of congruence change at the system (timing of membership), party (party size, government/opposition, mainstream/niche) and ideological level (left-right/EU integration). We employ two measures of congruence, namely absolute mean congruence and relative congruence (Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2009) and test our hypotheses using EES, expert and manifesto data for Austrian and Germany in 2004.

Keywords

Representation, party-voter congruence, multilevel setting, European Union
Introduction

An important tool to evaluate the performance of representative democracy is the concept of congruence (Wlezien and Soroka 2007). Policy or ideological congruence between political party and its voter, the dependent variable of our study, focuses our attention upon substantive representation (Pitkin 1967), while at the same time links to a number of desirable properties of representative systems, such as accountability and legitimacy (Przeworski et al. 1999). Input legitimacy via party competition in elections is granted assuming that what is on offer by political parties reflects the popular will (Scharpf 1999). It follows that party positions on offer should correspond to those of the voters they seek to represent. If liberal democracy claims to establish connections between voters and parties, then congruence is a “major claim and goal of liberal democracy” (Huber and Powell 1994: 292). Crucially, a recent empirical enquiry reveals that as the congruence between voters' ideological tendencies and the policymaking positions taken by parties rises, satisfaction with democracy also increases (Kim 2009).

The European Union (EU) is composed of liberal democracies. In the face of an increasingly demobilised, volatile and electorally radicalised citizenry, we are led to question whether and to what extent congruence between voters and parties is achieved in the EU’s multilevel setting. The process of European integration split “basic democratic legitimising mechanisms” between supranational and national levels (Schmidt 2006: 21-9), thus posing significant challenges to classical accounts of representative democracy (Marsh and Norris 1997; Pollak et al. 2009; but see: Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). There are two channels available to Europeans for voicing their views in this setting. One path is indirect: citizens’ choice of representatives results in the formation of national executives participating in the European Council and Council of Ministers and appointing one Commissioner per member state. The other channel is direct: citizens’ choices result in the selection of their representatives in the European Parliament (EP). Despite exercising minimal control of the Commission’s nomination, lacking the right of initiative as well as decision-making power in a number of policy areas, the EP is the

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only institution that claims to represent individual citizens at the EU level, rather than citizens nested in states (e.g. European Council, Council of Ministers).

By recruiting candidates and competing in national and EP elections, national party organisations embody the linkage between European publics and ruling elites; they are the only sources of input legitimacy in national and European Parliament elections (Wessels 1999). At the same time, however, the direct channel of representation (EP) operates at two levels, the nationally organised election (choice among offered alternatives) and the European legislature (deliberation, decision and law-making). EU's “split-level” democracy affords parties strategic incentives to “double-talk”, which may, in turn, affect voter-party congruence levels: while input legitimacy rests on voters’ choices among national parties, party competition in the European parliament is often organised among political groups that are imperfect aggregations of these national parties (McElroy and Benoit 2007). We know very little about the process by which different national parties join together to promote or prevent policy outcomes in the European Parliament (McElroy 2009) and how this disjoint between national and European level competition affects citizen representation and congruence levels.

The issue is important in the context of the EU’s democratic deficit, which has by and large concentrated on the necessity to empower the EP in an effort to strengthen the direct linkage between EU citizens and their elected elites, but has not reflected upon the changes this constant EP empowerment has had on party behaviour within the multilevel EU setting. In other words, little has been said about how the quality of citizen representation, embodied in the concept of policy congruence here, changes as we move from one level to another during a single EP election.

The present paper studies congruence between voters and parties in an effort to better understand how representation works in a multilevel setting like the EU. We focus on the EP, the most studied channel in political representation studies, for it is the most democratic and real (Schmitt 2005). Most studies of congruence focus on the relationship between ideological congruence and electoral institutions (e.g., Huber and Powell 1994; Powell 2000, 2006; McDonald et al. 2004; McDonald and Budge 2005; Blais and Bodet 2006). Less work has been devoted to other hypotheses exploring why some parties are more congruent than others beyond systemic, institutional variables. Little is also known
about the EP and transnational political groups (McElroy and Benoit 2007: 6), and even less has been researched with regards to the study of congruence. These are the gaps this paper intends to explore. To this aim, it contributes to the debate regarding political party performance in representing citizens within the EU. Hence, we ask: *to what extent is representation affected by the multilevel character of the European Union?* This research question brings us back to Pitkin's understanding of elected representatives as acting on behalf, and in the interest of the citizenry (1967). To answer this question, we explore the determinants of policy congruence between supply and demand sides of representation at national and EU levels through the cases of Austria and Germany for the 2004 EP elections. This year was the first time that all member states had to adopt some form of proportional representation as electoral rule, thus allowing us to hold this contentious variable constant (for a review of its impact on congruence, see Farrell and Scully 2007 or Powell 2009).

Parties’ behaviour is influenced by the institutional environment in which they operate (Strom 1990; Meguid 2008); so the involvement of national parties in the EP is likely to have an impact on their policy positions and, in turn, on party-voter congruence. For instance, voters across Europe have different ideological positions, as well as varied preferences with regard to European integration. Yet, the extent to which these demands are likely to be served depends upon what elected representatives are willing and/or able to supply; the latters’ performance will be strongly shaped by the multi-tiered structures in place, namely the institutional set up and the party organisational web that developed along with it. Therefore, we structure our analysis as follows: in the first section, we set the stage by elaborating on how the EU’s split-level democracy deforms the traditional landscape of political representation that citizens (and academics) are comfortable with. The EU stretches the link that unifies voters and parties domestically (Moravcsik 2002) by superimposing an alternative, obscure system of checks and balances, direct and indirect channels of representation. Then, we formulate our expectations on how the multilevel structure of the EP affects congruence between voters and parties. In the second section we explicate how we measure congruence as well as the methodology, data and case selection used to test our hypotheses. The final section concludes with a discussion of our empirical results and some suggestions for promising future research.
Representative democracy in the EU system

The recent characterisation of the EU as a ‘political system’ (Hix 2002) has generated a heated debate about its democratic deficit—a salient topic given the gradual concession of political power and policy competences to the supranational level. For this reason, some even speak of a “split-level democracy” where policy and ideological communities overlap across levels (Schmidt 2009). The following sub-section reviews the implications of this institutional design on representation and congruence.

Implications of the EU’s Institutional Design for Representation

The structure of the EU is peculiar not least because representation is diluted in an intricate web of institutions that obscure government by, of, for and with the people. The EU governs for the people through effective rule-making reinforced by transparency and accountability, what Fritz Scharpf termed “output democracy” (1999). It also governs with the people through internal consultation processes (e.g. with European Social and Economic Committee, Committee of the Regions) known as the Community Method. However, where the EU fails is in government by and of the people, or “input democracy” (Schmidt 2009), where political representation and congruence—mainly anchored at the national level—are at stake.

Legislative power in the EU is shared between Council of Ministers and European Parliament, while executive power is delegated to the Commission. Although the Council and the Commission act as the ‘government’ of the EU, the public cannot vote this government in or out of office for failing to respond to its demands. What is more, EU level decisions are impossible to ‘undo’ at the national level (EU law supremacy) and extremely hard to change at the EU level (unanimity required for treaty revision). Tensions between both levels are likely as decision-making shifts policy upwards, while politics and identities, along with the mechanisms of electoral sanctions, remain largely at the national level (Ibid. p. 19). Due to its peculiarity, the EU system does not fit existing models of representation (Marsh and Norris 1997; for a typology see Andeweg and
Thomassen 2005) that tacitly assume that citizens have preferences when they vote and elites adapt to these, and that citizens know where representatives and parties stand on those issues. The EU system puts pressure on national polities by making “policy without politics” at the EU level (Schmidt 2006, 30-3), thus depoliticising EU-level policy debates that do not resonate well with citizens. Publics are inculcated with the classical left-right dichotomy by national contests. Research on European elections shows that “parties are playing hide-and-seek with issues (and voters) across arenas: although their discussions are located in the European context, they actually debate national policy and EU polity issues, while neglecting EU policy issues” (Lefkofridi and Kritzinger 2008: 867). At the same time, national politics get emptied of substance in policy area after policy area (Mair 2005, 2006). From the citizen perspective the EU institutional set up requires painstaking effort to comprehend and seems unusually “citizen proof”.

All puzzles pertaining to ‘representative democracy’ begin by the term’s idiosyncratic semantics. This widely used term, which constitutes the dominant form of government in the Western world, embraces two distinct and conflicting concepts (see Pitkin 2004). Importantly, what “makes a system representative\(^2\) is not the fact that a few govern in the place of the people, but that they are selected by election only” (Manin 1997: 41). Election is egalitarian as long as all citizens have the right to vote and are all legally eligible for office (Ibid. p. 149) and it is democratic, in the sense that it gives voice and empowers the \textit{demos}. Thus, normatively, European elections should empower a European demos. However, European elections are “second-order” (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2008) and are not as politicised as domestic elections: they neither engender homogeneous political campaigns across Europe, nor are they based on EU-wide primaries to select candidates.

Electoral results at the national level typically represent citizens’ preferences on nationally relevant issues, often structured along the left-right dimension (Barbier 2008: 231-5). While parties have no incentives to go against this programmatic tradition in EU-wide elections (Andeweg 1995; Gabel 2000), it is unclear whether elected representatives ultimately reflect their voters’ preferences when acting on their behalf in another arena.

\(^2\) The difference between democracy in its original conception (often termed ‘direct democracy’) and representative government consists in the \textit{method} used to assign political power: election versus lot.
(EP). And though in national elections parties tend to adopt the policy positions that their citizens favour, this tendency gets disrupted in nationally organised EP elections. Even if national parties in EU-wide elections stick to their programmatic traditions, by voting for an MEP, voters are choosing for a national party, which enlarges and consequently empowers a specific Group and a specific Federation. And though EP Party Groups and Europarty federations do not deny their left-right ideological heritage, they do have to accommodate many ideologies within a single, cohesive party grouping (EP Group and federation). Most crucially, in the absence of a European demos, to whom do European elections give voice? Farrell and Scully (2007) argue that the electoral system used in the EP elections only promotes the interests of political parties and other organised interests over those of individual voters. To understand the problem at hand, we need to first comprehend the party organisational setup via which voter representation is pursued.

**Implications of the EU’s Party Organisational Setup for Representation**

The allocation of political power via election can also be conceived as an act of delegation by a principal (demos) to an agent (representative). And as delegation is “beset with potential agency problems”, political parties constitute devices aiming at ensuring, _inter alia_, politicians’ accountability and representativeness (Strøm and Müller 2009: 45). Political parties’ systemic role is central to the process of representation: they provide for the vital linkage between rulers and ruled, they integrate, aggregate and articulate interests (Webb 2002), they transfer citizens’ concerns and preferences into politics (“interest intermediation”, see Scarrow 1996) and through their competition they provide democratic legitimacy to the system (Plinka 2000). In the EU case, the Treaty of Maastricht entrusts European parties with the task of expressing the political will of the European citizens. To clarify, the organisational web through which representation of European voters is structured can be conceived using Katz and Mair’s (1994) typology: party on the ground, party in public office and party in public office (national party, EP Party Group and European party federation, respectively).

Importantly, party ‘on the ground’ represents cleavages within a single demos, whereas parties in ‘central’ and ‘public office’ do not. Hence, some national parties (and the citizens nested in them) may be losing out relative to others in terms of representation.
and congruence, thus introducing a “representation deficit” (Farrell and Scully 2007: 9). Essentially, ‘the ground’ of Europarties is a conglomerate of ideologically compatible parties from various member states. Europarties are weak organisations, usually not standing on solid ideological platforms. The range of ideological beliefs embraced by the parties in ‘central’ and ‘public’ (Federation and Europarty Group) offices is often quite wide, which presents difficulties in reaching consensus. Some Groups are larger and more diverse than others. For example, the Party of European Socialists (PES) or the European People’s Party (EPP) had over 200 representatives during the 2004-2009 term, and around 40 national parties. Conversely, the Union of European Nations (UEN) or the European Greens are smaller and more homogeneous parties.

The EP has its own party organisation and culture (Blomgren 2002), which promotes “compromise and collaboration, both of which are imperative if one hopes to influence parliamentary and wider decisions” (Ibid.: 41). Yet, during negotiations towards coalition building, “parties in the EP face multiple pressures - their short-term policy preferences on a particular legislative issue, their medium-term preferences for particular offices and rules in the EP, and their collective long-term preference of increasing the power of the EP and the legitimacy of the EU system as a whole” (Kreppel and Hix 2003: 93).

The problem with policy representation lies in that the various national parties composing Europarties “often have different preferences over these short-, medium-, and long-term goals” (Ibid.). Europarties are thus rather consensus-building bodies pursuing consensus among constituent members (Bomberg 2002) rather fully integrated parties. Within-Group consensus is necessary for inter-Group negotiations (e.g., EPP vs. PES). The same way, within-EP consensus is essential for inter-institutional negotiations (e.g., between EP, Council of Ministers and Commission). So, while “diversity of regional, national and sectoral interests within a Group make it difficult to agree on a common group line on some issues” (Corbett et al. 2003: 88), EP Party Groups generally display internal cohesion in parliamentary votes (Hix et al. 2006). This is especially true for the three largest parties (Raunio 1997; Hix et al. 2005). Most Groups can count on well over 80 per cent of their members supporting the Group line even in a roll call vote and this, in
turn, implies that the positions taken by the Groups usually decide the Parliament’s position” (Corbett et al. 2003: 89). Summing up, voter representation is pursued by both national and transnational parties, which involves inter-party bargaining for the purpose of agreeing on a common platform (i.e. issues of common interest and common positions). In the next-sub section, we elaborate on how this multilevel institutional and organisational setup may impact on levels of policy congruence between citizens and the representatives.

**Research Hypotheses about Multilevel Congruence**

Though having tackled several questions on congruence, the literature has by and large concentrated on the impact of different electoral institutions on the degree of party/government-voter congruence. Most importantly, studies on congruence employ “the familiar language to describe and analyse behaviour of political parties”, that is, “a single-level language” (Deschouwer 2003: 213). However, what happens in systems such as the EU, where the ‘people’ are national constituencies whereas the ‘representatives’ are organised in transnational political groups? How present is the voter’s ideology across different levels of citizen interest intermediation and aggregation?

Unfortunately, the literature on multilevel governance is rather “a party-free zone” (Ibid.). Yet, due to the chain of delegation (linking citizens with Europarties via national parties) the phenomenon of multilevel representation raises primarily theoretical issues: the degree to which congruence changes across levels, its magnitude and direction should concern any assessment of representation within the EU. The exclusion of either level from the analysis would provide us with inaccurate depictions of citizen representation: by being theoretically incomplete, the empirical results of studies can be misleading. In lack of a theoretical framework to account for congruence in multi-tiered systems, multilevel congruence in the EU remains an unexplored territory.

Studies on the way EU citizens as a whole (Gabel and Anderson 2002) and Europarties (Gabel and Hix 2002) structure their positions suggest that their political spaces roughly coincide, meaning that between (the entire) European electorate and Europarties there is a “common shorthand language to communicate about policy” (Ibid. p. 953). And though the findings of the aforementioned works suggest that a European
political space already exists, it is unknown whether (and to what extent) individual national parties and Europarties (of which these national parties are constituent members) are congruent with their voters across member states. Yet, the issue is fundamental for representation in the EU and furthermore, for the development of a European party system. If Europarties were to “supplant national parties as the primary contestants in European elections” (Ibid.), we would first need to make sure that Europarties can represent citizens’ positions as good as or better than national parties. This is, however, an empirical question. Interestingly, McElroy and Benoit (2007: 18) note that the EU policy space is not a direct mapping of national patterns of party competition from the domestic to the supranational levels. While they find that the EP Party Groups' left-right positions reflect the central trend of their constituent parties, this was not always the case and parties are often out of line with the central trend of the Party Group members (for example they find that the EPP or the UEN are more centrist than some of its members, and that Verts are more leftist), suggesting divergence between EP Party Group and national party positions.

Given the diversity within these bodies and the consensual style of decision making, the achievement of a compromise implies some movement from the original positions of the constituent members. It follows that the transnational ‘common positions’ adopted by all parties within a Europarty might result in representing the voters of some parties better than others. The aforementioned findings lend support to the core argument of the paper, namely that there are two types of congruence to explore. Firstly, is the distance or proximity between citizens' positions with their national parties running for EP elections and secondly, the distance/proximity of citizens with European party federations. Thus, due to the multi-level setting of representation via parties in the EP and the consensual culture within the EP, it is theoretically possible that the degree of congruence between voters and parties varies across levels. We hypothesise that individual parties’ levels of congruence with their voters will vary across levels of representation (Hypothesis 1).

At the system level, by taking into account timing of membership we explore variation across countries. Due to the complexity of policy representation via parties in the EU, we expect parties in older member states to be more familiar with the multilevel
nature of the EU system and thus be better at representing voters’ positions at both levels. Thus, we hypothesise that *parties in older member states are less likely to experience change in degrees of congruence across levels (Hypothesis 1a)*. Following the same logic and drawing on Mattila and Raunio (2006), we put forward a corollary hypothesis, namely that *across levels, parties in older member states are more likely to display higher congruence (Hypothesis 1b)*.

If congruence indeed varies across levels, we also need to account for variation at the party level. We consider the following variables: party size in Europarty\(^3\), parties’ status in the national and European system (government/opposition) and location in the political space (mainstream/niche). The latter variables have only been tentatively studied thus far in the context of congruence (e.g., Belchior 2008; Freire and Belchior 2008).

Firstly, though in the 1990s most Europarties’ internal decision-making processes included in their studies the majority-vote principle, consensual decision-making generally prevailed. This happens because member parties retained the right to opt-out from a majority decision. We also know that Europarties’ positions do not always equate the average constituent members’ positions (McElroy and Benoit 2007). If that is so, then party size may matter and the positions of the entire Europarty will be closer to those of its largest constituent parties. Therefore, *the larger the member party in a Europarty, the more likely that its congruence with its voters will remain unchanged as we move up the levels (Hypothesis 2)*. We underline that our hypothesis refers to change in terms of degree of congruence across levels; it follows that, in case large parties are incongruent with their voters at the national level, this incongruence should be preserved.

A counter-argument, however, points to the relationship between (national) party size and homogeneity (i.e., the larger its size, the more heterogeneous a party is). In this sense, party size may be an impediment of reaching consensus within the party before negotiating with fellow members in the gulfs of the Europarty: by lacking a coherent position, parties may have difficulties in putting it across. Thus, positions expressed in small national parties’ Euromanifestos may be found to correspond better with those adopted by the Europarty. In fact, specific research investigating party-voter congruence

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\(^{3}\) As will be seen below, party size is considered relevant for two reasons: the strength of a party (vis-à-vis other member parties) in the Europarty; and the degree of homogeneity of a party organisation (either national or Europarty).
on the EU dimension based on voters’ perceptions of party positions (Mattila and Raunio 2006: 443) finds party size to affect degree of congruence, with small parties scoring better on congruence than large parties (at the national level). However, we do not know whether this is the case when we take into account both national and European levels.

Secondly, we consider the potential differences between parties in government and in opposition. This variable is important for a study of congruence because governmental policies are pulled towards the center of the political space in both majoritarian and PR systems. Under two-party competition the two main parties “compete for the swing voters in the center of the political spectrum” and hence a priori “advocate moderate centrist policies” (Lijphart 1999: 63). Under PR, elections’ outcomes that a posteriori result in coalition governments also pull governments toward the center of the policy spectrum (Blais and Bodet 2006). Schofield et al. (1998), as well as Laver and Shepsle (1996) argue that parties in government need to respond also to preferences of other parties in the system rather than to those of their voters only. Therefore, in both PR and majoritarian systems, controlling the executive should have a moderating effect on parties’ positions, as governmental parties seek to represent the electorate in its entirety (rather than a segment of it, i.e. the party’s supporters only). Importantly, parties holding executive office in the EU need to reach agreements not just within their Europarty and the respective Group in the EP but also within the Council of Ministers. Thus participation in government at the EU level may motivate these parties to compromise within the Europarty on one issue in order to make sure that they will have EP Party Group support on another issue – provided that Council and EP legislate under co-decision, which is the most important procedure for legislating in the EU. Opposition parties are only represented in the EP, thus having less negotiation fronts. Government parties’ positions at the national level are more likely to be at odds with those at the European level. In other words, the degree of congruence of government parties with their voters is more likely to change across levels than that of opposition parties (Hypothesis 3).

In this respect we are particularly interested in the division between mainstream-niche (e.g., post-materialist like Green parties or radical right parties). Research has shown that the variable government and opposition has an impact on strategies of niche
versus mainstream parties (Meguid 2008). Given that niche parties are ‘prisoners of their ideologies’- in the sense that “they have no real choice other than to cling to the policy ground they have staked out for themselves” (Adams et al. 2006: 526), we expect niche parties to fight hard in defense of their positions and avert policy position change across levels. Perhaps this is also a reason why some niche parties (e.g., the Austrian Freedom Party or the French Front National) refrain from joining Europarties and ‘go alone’ at the EP. The limited scope of niche parties (as opposed to catch-all, mainstream parties) suggests that any changes of positions would be electorally costly. We thus hypothesise that niche parties in government are less likely to experience change across levels than mainstream parties in office (Hypothesis 3a). A different logic leading to the same expectation happens when niche parties join Europarties, which are usually smaller, more homogeneous transnational groupings than the large ones.

Moreover, we have reasons to expect variation among types of niche parties. Different party families traditionally exhibit different organisational structures (Duverger 1954; Mair and Mudde 1998), and different types of niche have different understandings of democracy (Müller-Rommel 1989; Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990: 213). To illustrate, while Green parties grew out of social movements, most radical-right parties started as a ‘one-man show’ (e.g., Lepen, Haider). As a consequence of pursuing democracy from below, Green parties developed democratic structures and participatory decision-making procedures. On the contrary, the structure of radical-right parties is top-down, built around dominant personalities. Lefkofridi (2009) argues that more democratic parties will be particularly under pressure in the EU system: the EU’s institutional properties demand high levels of ‘political elasticity’ (Michels 1911) and therefore push parties towards more centralisation of power, leadership autonomy (Raunio 2002) and decreased leadership accountability (Ladrech 2007). We thus hypothesise that the more centralised power within a niche party, the less likely it is to experience congruence change as they move from one level to the other (Hypothesis 3b).

To account for variation of congruence across different dimensions of competition, we explore two dimensions of contestation identified in the literature: the left-right and European integration dimensions (Hooghe et al. 2002; Marks and Steeenbergen 2002). In the context of congruence, the left-right dichotomy is usually the only dimension
studied because it is assumed that elites, political experts and mass publics are only able to think about political issues under this lens (Huber and Powell 1994: 294). Research now shows that several dimensions of citizen’s preferences exist and that indeed the left-right dichotomy packages myriad political issues (van der Eijk and Franklin 1991; Mattila and Raunio 2006). Indeed, an exclusive focus on the traditional cleavage does not capture the new politics or EU cleavage (Hix 1999; Hooghe and Marks 1999; Marks and Steenbergen 2002, 2004; Mattila 2004). It should be noted however, that according to some studies (e.g. Marks and Wilson 1999) the EU cleavage is absorbed in the left and right since both cleavages are correlated and citizens tend to think in one-dimension only.

In general, we expect congruence to be lower for the EU dimension than for the left-right dimension across levels (Hypothesis 4), for the following reasons. First, the literature generally portrays the second dimension as less salient (Dalton 1985; Franklin and Wlezien 1997; Soroka 2003; Agren et al. 2006). However, high levels of popular disagreement on the EU issue also increase the salience of this issue domestically. Second, previous research finds that parties are closer to their voters on the left-right than on the EU dimension (Mattila and Raunio 2006: 445) and that parties are more supportive of European integration than voters (Ibid.; see also Hooghe 2003). Relatedly, in the process of actual policy-making in the EP, MEPs are less likely to defect from their Party Group on issues of European integration. In addition, research on MEPs and EP Party Group behaviour shows that “ideological variance from the EP party on left-right issues is a stronger predictor of MEP defection than ideological variance on European integration issues” (Hix 2002: 694). Third, European parties are products of European integration; by and large, Europarties (and especially the two largest) share the preference of further EP empowerment (Kreppel and Hix 2003), which equates more integration. By nature then, Europarties are supportive of the EU system, even if they differentiate themselves on specific policies. That said, anti-EU niche parties might decide to “go alone”, as suggested earlier. By doing so, they would ensure a stable degree of congruence with their voters across levels, avoiding any compromise of their position on

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4 Not only is the left-right the single most widely available measure of preferences of citizens but it meets reasonably well the need to capture comparably the general stances of citizens and party political orientations that compete for policy-making positions. We assume that all political objects think in left-right terms and assume that all have the same concept in mind when referring to this dimension.
the EU dimension.

Research Design

In the following section, we describe in detail how we will measure policy or ideological congruence. We will also explain the method and data used to test the aforementioned hypotheses. Our case selection - congruence levels for the 2004 EP election in Austria and Germany - will also be clarified.

Measurement

How do we measure voter-party links? To answer this question we need to operationalise the concept of congruence between many citizens and one party (Golder and Stramski 2009). This is typically referred to as dyadic representation: the distance or proximity between voters and their elected representatives organised around parties. There are three common measures advanced in the literature. Namely, the absolute median congruence (Weissberg 1978; Hurley 1982; Iversen 1994), absolute mean congruence (Blais and Bodet 2006; Achen 1978) and relative congruence measures (Golder and Stramski 2009).

Firstly, absolute median citizen congruence provides information on the voters most preferred ideological positions by minimising the sum of absolute distances between voters, approximated by party positions (Huber and Powell 1994: 292-3). Secondly, and similarly, the absolute average citizen congruence measure also provides information on the most preferred ideological positions of voters. Yet this measure looks at the average voter, thus accounting for the ideological position of all party voters (Achen 1978; Blais and Bodet 2006). Thirdly, the relative citizen congruence measure put forward by Golder and Stramski (2009) looks at the distance between voters and parties relative to the dispersion of voter preferences. This operationalisation captures situations where different dispersions of voter preferences impact upon the relative performance of parties, thus “normalising” congruence levels across parties (see also Achen 1978; and Ezrow 2007 for a related argument on the variance and diversity of voters' policy preferences). It represents the average distance of a voter from all party voters' most preferred position relative to the mean distance of this voter from the party voted. The relative citizen congruence measure is especially interesting when comparing congruence
across member states, as is the case here. Additionally, and unlike the two previous measures, any dimension studied with relative congruence does not have to be thought equally by voters and representatives. Finally, it provides a unit-free measure ranging from 0 to 1, where 0 stands for maximal congruence and 1 for total incongruence.

These three measures capture a different facet of policy or ideological congruence and, as such, are likely to give different empirical rankings of voter-party dyadic representation. Golder and Stramski (2009) explain how the relative congruence measure can be thought as superior to both the absolute median and absolute mean citizen measures for it eschews less information away. This is why the relative congruence measure will form the core of our empirical analysis. As will be seen below, this choice flows directly from the comparative aim of our study. However, and given the limitations of this paper (namely, that it only compares two EU member states), we will also look at absolute mean congruence levels. This measure, unlike relative congruence, provides information on the direction of change since it is based on the scalar units used to measure congruence.

The congruence measures used here investigate voter and party positions along two dimensions, the left-right and European integration dimensions, in Austria and Germany. To some extent the left-right is a proxy for other substantive issue preferences (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Knutsen 1997; but see Freire 2008; Freire and Belchior 2009). In any event, given that citizens are mostly uninformed of policy complexities and of what their representatives really do for each policy issue (Erikson et al. 2002), the use of this general ideological measure is convenient in that that legislation produced by elected representatives should resemble constituents’ ideology (Achen 1978: 481).

**Methodology**

In terms of methodology, we follow Powell (2006) in combining voter self-placement on a mass survey with estimations of national parties and Europarties’ positions derived from an expert survey. In addition, we complement the data obtained from the expert survey with the quantitative study of Euro-manifestos issued by national parties and European federations.
For the citizen side, we use data from the European Election Study 2004. In particular, we use voter self-placement on a 10 point scale for the left-right continuum (*In political matters people talk of “the left” and “the right”. What is your position?*), where 1 means “left” and 10 means “right”. We also use voter’s opinions on European integration (*Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?*), where 1 stands for unification ‘has already gone too far’ and 10 for ‘should be pushed further’. Voter positions were derived by party voted for the 2004 European Parliament election. We also used citizens’ vote recall in the EP elections (*Which party did you vote for?*) as an additional manifestation of citizen preferences (Blais and Bodet 2006).

On the parties’ side, we used Benoit and Laver’s expert survey (2006). Experts follow political parties closely and are thought to best know the “true” positions of parties (Ray 1999). They assign a position to a party on the basis of a party’s voting behaviour, political speeches, debates, expressed opinions of party leaders and so on. We used the positions given to national political parties, as well as Europarty federations, on the left-right dimension (*Please locate each party on a general left-right dimension, taking all aspects of party policy into account” with 1 Left and 20 Right*), rescaled to 1-10 to fit the EES scale. The EU dimension was also included on a 1-20 scale (the party favours *increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy* (1) or favours *reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy* (20)), where the scale was reversed and brought down to 1-10 for consistency with the voters.

Voters and experts might not have the same things in mind when placing themselves and when assigning a position on the left-right scale (Powell 2009: 3-4). Moreover, experts may be more sympathetic towards some parties than others. They may, for example, place radical right parties more to the right than they actually are, or green parties more to the left (Benoit and Laver 2006). Thus, to go beyond the potential problems arising from using two different sources of data for voters and representatives (e.g., differential item functioning problem, differences in expert-voter understanding of questions), we complemented our analysis on the party side with the quantitative content.

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5 The data utilized in this publication were originally collected by the 2004 European Election Study research group. The data are available from the homepage of the European Election Study: [www.europeanelectionstudies.net](http://www.europeanelectionstudies.net)
analysis of electoral manifestos. We believe this is a more valid approach than using citizens’ evaluations of parties, a measure that was also available to us in the EES (for a discussion see Mattila and Raunio 2006).

Electoral programs are a central feature of political parties during election time. They cover a wide range of themes, problems and political positions and although few citizens actually read them (especially the Europarty federations’ manifestos); they are usually taken as reference and spread by the mass media during the electoral campaign. As Budge et al. explain, manifestos provide a “set of key central statements” (1987: 18; see also Pennings 2002), which are “authoritative of party policy usually ratified in party conventions; representative for the whole party and not just a faction, group or individual party members; and are published ahead of the election thus allowing for diachronic study of party policy”. Positions are inferred for national Euro-manifestos, as well as for the manifestos issued by the different Europarty federations. On the Europarties’ manifestos, Gabel and Hix (2002: 937) note that national party leaders have gradually delegated the task of negotiating these documents to senior party officials. Once negotiations are complete, the manifestos are signed by the national party leaders and are issued after a congress of European party federations, where delegates from national parties and their EP Group are present.

The actual quantitative analysis of the manifestos is performed using Wordscores (Laver et al. 2003; Kritzinger et al. 2004) using Martin and Vanberg's transformation (2007). Wordscores treats texts as data in the form of words (Laver et al. 2003); differentiating between “reference” and “virgin” texts. Reference texts are selected on the basis of well-defined and known reference values for a given dimension. Usually, these texts can either be estimated with confidence from independent sources or be assumed uncontroversially. Using these reference texts, Wordscores provides the analyst with estimates of the policy positions for a set of “virgin” texts. Martin and Vanberg developed an alternative procedure to the original Benoit-Laver-Garry estimation model to rescale reference texts based on the difference between reference values (here given by Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert survey) and the reference texts when scored as virgin texts. As Benoit and Laver (2008) explain, the Martin-Vanberg transformation is to be used when
comparing a small number of virgin texts to only two reference texts. As discussed immediately below, this is the case here.

Case selection
Due to data unavailability, the empirical exploration of our research question is limited to the cases of Austria and Germany. These two cases allow holding certain parameters constant, in particular the often-researched impact of electoral systems on the quality of representation (e.g., Ezrow 2007; Golder and Stramski 2009). Indeed, both share some form of proportional electoral systems. In addition, both are parliamentary democracies with a federal structure and well-organised labour and capital organisations, common determinants of congruence (Blais and Bodet 2006; Wlezien and Soroka 2007: 800).

At the same time, both cases offer interesting levels of variance for our independent variables. Both systems include large, small, as well as mainstream and niche parties. In Austria, the large, mainstream parties are the SPÖ (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, Austrian Social Democratic Party) and the ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei, Austrian People’s Party); while in Germany these are the CDU/CSU (Christlich Demokratische Union, Christlich Soziale Union, Christian Democrat Union and Christian Social Union) and the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Social Democratic Party). Niche are the Austrian and German Green parties (Die Grünen and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen respectively), the German left-wing PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus, Party of Socialist Democracy), the radical-right FPÖ in Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich, Freedom Party), the Republicans (Republikaner) and the NPD in Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, National Democratic Party). Among the smaller parties is also the liberal FDP in Germany (Freie Demokratische Partei, Free Democratic Party), which would not classify as a niche party. What is more interesting, both Austria and Germany had a coalition formed between a mainstream and a niche party. This similar actor constellation provides variation for our interactive hypothesis connecting government and opposition with mainstream and niche

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6 Benoit and Laver consider that “the main advantage of the MV transformation is its fixing of the virgin texts to values relative to the virgin text scores of the reference texts (…) this may aid interpretation when very few virgin texts are being used. In the extreme case where only two virgin texts are scored, it often makes more sense to anchor on the reference text range rather than on a virgin text variance based on two cases” (2008: 110).
parties. Opposition parties were also either mainstream or niche.

A further element in favour of studying these two cases is that Austria is a relatively recent member of the EU while Germany is one of the founding members of the European Economic Community. This factor introduces variation in timing of EU membership (Mattila and Raunio 2006). Last but not least, Austrian citizens are known for being among the most Eurosceptic in the EU. A Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2004 found that about 29 per cent of the Austrian respondents considered the EU to be a bad thing, second highest in Europe; whereas about 30 per cent declared it to be a good thing (Eurobarometer 2004: B34). German citizens were more pro-EU, for about 45 per cent of the respondents found the EU to be a good thing, while only 14 per cent characterised it as a bad thing (Ibid.). Based on this, we allow for the salience of EU integration to vary across voters in the two states.

Notwithstanding this, our study is limited by further data restrictions and therefore can only provide a partial test on the impact of the EU’s multilevel polity on congruence. We are first limited by the number of manifestos available to us for the 2004 EP elections. For the Europarty federations we lack that of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (EUL-NGL), where the German PDS was integrated. Second, some parties had to be excluded because they were not covered by either the EES or the Benoit-Laver expert survey. This was the case of the Austrian Liste Hans-Peter Martin, and Linke, and myriad small German parties (e.g., Die Grauen, Tierschutzpartei, Familienpartei, etc.). Third, when measuring congruence at the EU level, we had to drop parties that did not make it to the EP. This led to the exclusion of the Republikaner and the NPD. In any case, voters from parties that did not make it through the threshold were unrepresented in the EP and it is only logical to exclude them from a study of congruence at this level. Finally, comparative information was not available for parties that entered the EP but did not belong to a Europarty federation. This was the case of the FPÖ. We believe that this “going alone” strategy, however, provides a reading in terms of congruence and representation. We decided to retain the FPÖ because by going alone it ensured equal representation for its voters across levels. Table 1 summarises the main electoral results of the 2004 EP elections in Austria and Germany.
Table 1. Party results of European Elections June 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>CDU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>CSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liste Hans-Peter Martin</td>
<td>SPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grünen</td>
<td>Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>FDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>PDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Parliament; in italics parties that had to be excluded from our analysis

All in all, our paper covers the SPÖ and SPD, belonging to the PES; the ÖVP and CDU/CSU, integrated in the EPP; the German and Austrian Green Parties, both members of *Verts* (European Greens); the FDP, member of the ELDR (European Liberal Democrats); and, independently, the FPÖ. It is also noteworthy that the CDU/CSU and the German Greens were the largest parties in their respective EP Party Groups, and that the SPD and FDP were among the largest parties in their Groups, thus providing variation with respect to the relative size of Austrian parties in Europe (among the smallest). The next section reports our empirical results on the two types of voter-party congruence measured empirically for the Austrian and German cases.

Findings

At the system-level, we expect congruence to vary across levels in both Austria and Germany (*H1*). However, we expect relatively smaller changes in Germany than in Austria: because of its old member status, Germany should be more familiar with the multilevel nature of the EU (*H1a*). Relatedly, we also expect Germany to be generally more congruent than Austria, and especially on EU issues (*H1b*).

At the party-level, the CDU/CSU and the German Greens should preserve congruence across levels because their size could allow them dominating their Europarties. If this hypothesis holds, then change should be moderate for the SPD and FDP, given their relatively large party sizes within the EP groupings. Conversely, Austrian parties are more likely to modify their positions across levels (*H2*). Governmental parties (SPD, German Greens, FPÖ and ÖVP) are more likely to experience change across levels than those in the opposition (*H3*). However, niche parties in government are less likely to experience change relative to mainstream parties, so that
the FPÖ and German Greens should display more cross-level congruence change than the SPD and the ÖVP \((H3a)\). Among niche parties, moreover, we expect radical-right parties to be more congruent than Green parties \((H3b)\). Finally, in terms of our ideological dimensions, we expect all parties to perform worse on the EU integration dimension than on the left-right continuum across levels \((H4)\).

*Do our findings support these hypotheses?* Our two measures of congruence are calculated for the left-right and pro-anti-EU integration dichotomies. Looking at our congruence measures for the left-right dichotomy in Austria (Table 2) and Germany (Table 4), we first notice that degrees of voter-party congruence vary across levels of interest aggregation. This happens to all parties using any measure of congruence (in support of \(H1\)); some parties improving congruence while others widening gaps with their voters. Of course, the independent FPÖ remains constant across levels. Furthermore, most German parties improve congruence when in the EU and the rate of change from one level to the other seems smaller than in the Austrian case, saving the case of the FDP (in support of \(H1a\)). Finally, German parties tend to display higher congruence levels than Austrian parties on the left-right dimension across levels (in support of \(H1b\)).

On the EU dimension, a different picture emerges (see Tables 3 and 5). While we find that all Austrian parties, save the FPÖ, see their congruence levels vary across levels, this time the change is unidirectional: all parties distance themselves from their voters once they integrate in their respective Europarty grouping (support for \(H4\)). In Germany we also find changes across levels (in support of \(H1\)). Moreover, these changes tend to be smaller in Germany than in Austria (in support of \(H1a\)). However, despite scoring higher on the LR dimension, across levels Germany does not score higher than Austria on the EU dimension (counter to \(H1b\)).

Second, on the left-right dimension, both ÖVP and SPÖ see their congruence levels deteriorate once they integrate in their respective European groupings. However, this is not the case for the Green party. Moreover, a further exception to this is the ÖVP. If we look at the mean measure of congruence (see also Graph 1), this party improves congruence levels as it moves to the EP, suggesting that party size may not be a good predictor of congruence. In the German case, neither the CDU/CSU nor the Greens preserve the degree of congruence when moving to the EU level (counter to \(H2\)).
However, in the case of the CDU/CSU congruence with voters, regardless of which measure we use, improves dramatically (close to full congruence using the relative measure, down from a relatively high national value). The Greens also do so for the EU dimension, as will be seen later. Their relative size and prestige within the EPP and Green transnational federations did not pull the overall EP party position closer to that of their own, yet paradoxically closer to that of their voters. The SPD behaves in a similar fashion to the two previous parties, signaling again no determinant difference between these large parties and other parties. Moreover, the FDP sees its close congruence levels deteriorate dramatically once in the EP (see also graph 3). This may be due to the fact that the ELDR is one of the most diverse Europarty in terms of left-right positioning, as shown by McElroy and Benoit (2007: 19). Compared to the smaller Austrian parties, we also do not find significant differences: neither German nor Austrian parties seem to preserve national congruence levels once moving to the EU level (counter to H2). In sum, looking at CDU/CSU and the Greens, we find that all parties undergo cross-level congruence change across levels, while the Greens do so to a lesser extent. The left-wing governmental parties improve mean congruence, while both right-wing CDU/CSU and liberal FDP distance themselves from their average voters (see Graph 4).

Moreover, if we compare Tables 3 and 5, party size does not seem to matter on the EU dimension either. Large German parties seem to be far away from the position adopted by their respective Europarties. Despite being the considered as a leading Green organization in Europe, the German Greens do not seem to have put their position across within the Europarty (counter to H2). This relates to previous works on the German Greens pointing out the intra-party divisions on EU issues (e.g. Bomberg 2000). Oddly enough, this phenomenon turns out to be in the voters’ benefit, as Europarty position seems to represent better the German voter than the Green position expressed at the national level.

Third, there is no clear-cut pattern emerging for the government-opposition variable (counter to H3). In Austria, we see both office-holders (ÖVP) and opposition parties (Greens, SPÖ) experiencing cross-level change in degrees of congruence. In detail, using the mean congruence measure, the two Austrian parties in office, ÖVP and FPÖ, start off with high incongruence magnitudes that remain constant (FPÖ) or get
reduced dramatically (ÖVP) once they move to the EU level. The SPÖ and the Greens are relatively close to their citizens at the national level but only the Green party closes the congruence gap when moving to the EU level. Taking the dispersion of voters into consideration, however, provides a different reading. While some parties start off close to their citizens (SPÖ and ÖVP), others do not (Greens, FPÖ); yet, the Greens, in opposition, improve their relative voter congruence across levels. Related to this discussion, the Austrian niche party in government (FPÖ), by not joining any Europarty, retained its position for the two levels under study here, while the Austrian mainstream parties widened any congruence gap opened at the national level: integrating in the PES or EPP decreases congruence between these parties and their voters (in support of H3a).

As can be seen in Graph 1, the SPÖ widens the distance between its position and that of its mean voter, although the absolute distance opened is relatively small, compared to its national position. The SPÖ thus appears as the biggest loser in terms of multilevel representation among Austrian parties. Finally, comparing the FPÖ’s performance to that of the Green party, the Greens tend to be closer to their mean voter, a distance that gets narrower once the party moves to the EU level. However, the FPÖ does a better job once we take all the preferences of its voters into account (counter to H3b). To sum up, in terms of congruence magnitude and change no clear pattern surfaces. Governmental parties tend to perform worse than opposition parties, thus lending some support to H3. Looking at the absolute mean congruence measure (Graph 2), we see that ÖVP, Greens and SPÖ all overshoot in the opposite direction of their average vote, though the ÖVP does a relatively poorer job. Looking at relative congruence, the ÖVP and FPÖ are the furthest away from their voter both nationally and at the EU level, but surprisingly both retain or close previously opened congruence gaps.

In Germany, looking at government-opposition differences, the office-holders SPD and the Grünen display more incongruence than the CDU/CSU using any of our voter-party congruence measures, both in terms of magnitude and rate of change across levels. Moreover, all parties studied here do a better job compared to the FDP (no support for H3). The German mainstream parties, however, do better than the niche parties when moving to the EU level (counter to H3a). In the German case, we cannot test H3b since we could only look at one niche party. If we were to relax our definition of niche parties
to include the FDP, then niche parties get closer to their voters across levels (counter to $H3b$). Hence, in Germany, like in Austria, congruence changes across levels irrespective of the variable government/opposition (counter to $H3$). Yet, among governmental parties, the Green party as a niche party in government modifies congruence across levels but does so relatively less (in support of $H3a$). Compared to the FDP, again, the Greens do better (counter to $H3b$).

The distinction mainstream-niche does not seem determinant either for the EU dimension. While the FPÖ seems more congruent and remains constant across levels, the Green party does not (counter to $H3a$). Moreover, it is difficult to say which of the two parties is more congruent on this dimension. Looking at the absolute mean congruence measure indicates that the FPÖ does a better job once the integration of the Green party at the EU level is discounted, while looking at relative congruence suggests that despite deteriorations from one level to the other, the Green party is still closer to its voters than the FPÖ is (counter to $H3b$). Comparing these results to those of the left-right dimension, we can affirm that Austrian parties are closer to their citizens at the national level on the left-right dimension than on EU integration, though the differences are sometimes trivial. However, when moving across levels Austrian parties do a worse job in representing their voters on the EU dimension than on left-right ideology. Only the Green party, taking the dispersion of its voters into account, produces worse results on the left-right than on the EU dimension. It therefore seems that Austrian parties unambiguously sacrifice their voters when integrating into their respective Europarties, regardless whether they are mainstream or niche (in support of $H4$).

In Germany, comparing the left-right continuum with the EU dimension across levels, we also find a closer fit between voter and party for the left-right dimension than for the EU dimension (in support of $H4$). Interestingly, however, while all other German parties widen the incongruence gap on the EU dimension once at the EU level, the opposite is true for the Greens.
Table 2. Congruence measures for the left-right dichotomy in Austria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party name</th>
<th>Absolute Mean Congruence</th>
<th>Relative Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grünen</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 1. Absolute Mean Congruence on the Left-Right dimension in Austria
Table 3. Congruence measures for the EU dimension in Austria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party name</th>
<th>Absolute Mean Congruence</th>
<th>Relative Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grünen</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROC: Rate of Change in Congruence from National to EU levels

Graph 2. Absolute Mean Congruence on the EU dimension in Austria
Table 4. Congruence measures for the left-right dichotomy in Germany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party name</th>
<th>Absolute Mean Congruence</th>
<th>Relative Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROC: Rate of Change in Congruence from National to EU levels

Graph 3. Absolute Mean Congruence on the Left-Right dimension in Germany
Table 5. Congruence measures for the EU integration in Germany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party name</th>
<th>Absolute Mean Congruence</th>
<th>Relative Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 4. Absolute Mean Congruence on the EU dimension in Germany
Discussion

Given that the only direct channel of representation available to EU citizens to choose for their EP representatives operates at two levels, this paper examined whether citizen representation changes from the national level to the European level. Most voters are unaware and uninformed about the EP, which has failed to even “begin to penetrate the consciousness of so many of its electors” (Blondel et al. 1998: 242). Our results hint that this is partly the fault of political parties not being close to the citizens they ought to represent.

The empirical analysis provided a preliminary test to the hypotheses developed earlier. First, we found that congruence changes across levels in both dimensions of contestation: nationally-determined congruence levels change once national parties integrate in their respective Europarty. The only way to avoid this from happening is to “go alone”, as the Austrian FPÖ did. In its case, no compromise was necessary and whichever congruence level it had at the national level was preserved supranationally (Hypothesis 1). In addition, it seems that change may be mediated by timing of membership and/or salience of the EU dimension. In other words, we found that Germany had lower rates of congruence change than Austria (which may be due to the fact that Germany is a longer time in the EU and parties and voters are more familiar with its EU multilevel system) (Hypotheses 1a and 1b).

Second, government and opposition (Hypothesis 2) or the distinction mainstream-niche (Hypothesis 3) did not provide a definitive reading in terms of congruence change across levels. Whereas most parties close the gap with their average voters for the left-right dimension, only two (SPD and German Greens) do so for the EU dimension. However, this suggests that mainstream parties fight at the EU level to protect their core ideological left-right positions, rather than their EU positions. Moreover, mainstream governmental parties close the gap for both dimensions (except the ÖVP, maybe because it was also present in the Council). We note that niche parties behave differently depending on whether they are left- or right-wing, rather than on whether they are in government or not, suggesting that further research should consider ideological differences between political parties. Hence, the Green parties close congruence gaps
when they move to the EU level for both dimensions. However, the Austrian Greens widen gaps for the EU dimension. Similarly, the FDP widens the gap when integrating in the ELDR, and the FPÖ while remaining constant across levels, preserves relatively high levels of incongruence at both levels.

Finally, evidence was clearer on the left-right and EU dimension distinctions. Both Austria and Germany displayed lower rates of change and closer congruence across levels for the left-right dichotomy than for the EU dimension (*Hypothesis 4*). This suggests that political parties succeed in defending their general ideology once moving to the EP level better than for EU integration issues. This also echoes findings in the field of EU representation studies, that elites have agreed on a pro-integration agenda and are therefore more pro-EU than their publics forcing their citizens to vote for parties on the extremes if they want to voice their disagreement with the pace or way the EU integration project is being lead (e.g. Mair 2007).

These findings provide a new light on why public dissatisfaction, disinterest and even hostility with the European integration project has been on the rise across Europe since the 1990s. This paper has shown that looking at congruence levels between voters, on the one hand, and their national parties and the Europarties, on the other hand, may provide a hint to why this is happening. According to our analysis, low congruence magnitudes are observed across levels, while there are many cases where parties widen already existing gaps (9 out of 16 parties, 3 out of 8 parties in government, 4 out of 8 mainstream parties analysed). This comes at a time when the links between citizens and the EU need as much legitimacy as possible. Under this light, the integration of national parties in the EP confirms the characterisation of this institution as a failed representative body (Farrell and Scully 2007: 2).

Notwithstanding this, congruence provides only one tool to assess the quality of representation, legitimacy, and degree of democratic deficit in the EU. The EU constitutes a system outside the classical paradigm of representative democracy, and so affords the representative more freedom of action *vis-à-vis* the electorate. This paper confirms that parties oftentimes diverge from their national positions when integrating in their respective transnational federations. This is especially true for the EU dimension: in line with findings of previous research, elites are more pro-European than their voters,
and this distance increases once representatives seat in the EP. For the left-right continuum, parties are less inclined to widen voter-party gaps in Europe. This divergence offers a “half-full half-empty” interpretation, for the traditional balance between democracy and representation in nation-states seems preserved for the “super issue” (LR), but breaks for the EU dimension. Given that the EU is an increasingly important legislative actor, however, we believe that this break represents a serious one and one that is only likely to endanger the development of a Europarty system and the EU itself.

This paper contextualised the analysis of congruence within the fields of legitimacy, representation and the democratic deficit in the EU, and introduced the multilevel structure of the EU in the study of representation and congruence. Thus, it shed light on how voters and parties understand the EU and its institutions, in particular its central representative body, the EP. Also, it opened up new avenues for future research, such as tackling the most pressing limits in the design of the present research. Optimally, sample size ought to be greatly increased and time period of analysis extended. In a second step, models using regression analysis (e.g., using multi-level analysis) could be devised to test whether congruence affects turnout levels, trust in the EP, and satisfaction with democracy.
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