Abstract
This paper deals with the concept of salience in models of representation. It develops the argument that salience should be conceptualized and measured at the citizen level. Only then can we ensure a functioning micro link of how salience influences the process of representation.

The paper discusses first how issue salience has been seen in the literature before turning to its own argument. Some testable hypotheses are derived from the empirical reasoning about how personal salience could enrich our understanding of representation. These hypotheses are then tested with Swiss election data (2007). The results indicate that personal salience plays a role at the individual and party level and that we indeed get different results when relying on a congruence indicator based on salient issues or on one based on an average of issues or on the left-right dimension. Finally, normative considerations of a salience based model of representation are raised.
“as efforts to develop an empirical theory of representation continue, we recommend that issue salience be given its proper place in that theory” (Kuklinski and McCrone, 1980: 159)

Introduction

As the quote above shows, issue salience is not unknown to representation research neither in theory nor in empirical work. Pitkin (1967) makes references to a general public interest that is required for politicians to be responsive and Miller and Stokes (1963) explain differences in the responsiveness of Congressmen with respect to the salience of the specific topics they examined. These examples show that the representation literature has early recognized the need to integrate salience into models of representation.

What is missing, however, is the specification of the micro foundation. Why should salient topics face more responsiveness than others? We can only satisfactorily explain this when conceptualizing issue salience as something individual citizens attach to certain issues. Such a perspective implies that salience has to be seen as personal salience and thus be measured on the individual level.

This paper makes the argument that only by integrating personal salience into models of representation we are able to specify adequately how salience influences the representation process. This change of perspective allows us to get the causal chain right and to advance hypotheses about how salience and representation interact on a sound theoretical basis. More specifically, it puts forward the argument that people are best represented on the topic they rate important. Second, at the party level, we postulate that parties are judged differently once personal salience is taken into account and especially small and niche parties perform better. For national level comparisons, representation models incorporating salience are a better mean to compare political systems and effects of political institutions.

In this paper, first the relevant literature is critically discussed before the new model based on political representation is introduced theoretically and with reference to the socio psychological literature. Then, hypotheses on different levels are derived from the theoretical reasoning and tested afterwards with Swiss data. The results indicate that personal salience plays a role at the individual and party level and that we indeed get different results when relying on a congruence indicator based on salient issues rather than on one based on an average of issues or on the left-right dimension. Finally, normative considerations of a salience based model of representation are raised.
Salience as a concept in representation theory

Issue salience is not unknown in representation theory. However, and as I will show below, the topic has only been looked at from a specific perspective and from a too high level of abstraction.

Already in the seminal work by Hanna Pitkin (1967) we find certain reference that the salience of a topic plays a role: “The representative system must look after the public opinion and be responsive to public opinion, except insofar as non-responsiveness can be justified in terms of the public interest” (Pitkin 1967: 224). Pitkin sees political representation as a public institutionalized arrangement and hence her referring to a general public interest must be seen under this light. However, it remains unclear in her work how the “public interest” is defined. In essence, however, we can state that Pitkin already includes a notion of political salience of topics into her work and makes the strength of the relationship between political elites and citizens to be dependent on the existence of public interest.

The same notion, namely that the strength of political linkage varies according to issue areas can be found elsewhere and at different places in the political representation literature. Actually, we find reference to this idea already in Miller and Stokes (1963) study of constituency influence in Congress. They analyzed the correlation of constituency opinion and roll call voting in several areas of politics and found considerable variation according to issues. Miller and Stokes speculate that these differences might reflect the relative salience of the policy areas. Further analyses strengthened their conclusion because when southern districts, for which civil rights issues were particularly salient in the late 1950s, were removed from the analysis, correspondence between district opinion and roll call behaviour dropped visibly (Erikson, 1978).

Others summarized the general hypothesis about the effects of salience in the following way: “When a policy domain is salient to constituents, representatives apparently make sustained efforts to identify district opinion and vote in accordance with their perception of that opinion” (Kuklinski and McCrone, 1980: 140). Thus, we expect high levels of policy congruence on salient issues. The driving force is the re-election calculus of representatives: Representatives assume that topics which a lot of voters care about have a special relevance for their re-election. This makes politicians collecting more information on the constituency opinion and being more responsive on these topics. Also, the greater visibility of policy choice should decrease the ability to get away with shirking public will (Burgstein, 2003, Lax and Phillips, 2009, Page and Shapiro, 1983).

Studies in the tradition of the Miller and Stokes diamond model of representation also heavily debated whether policy agreement for salient issues only occurs because the representative’s
attitudes are influenced by his perception of the districts opinion or whether there is also room for his own attitudes (see e.g. Cnudde and McCrone, 1966, Kuklinski and McCrone, 1980). If representatives are solely responsive to the constituencies’ wishes and make every effort to carry out what they want, the position of the representatives becomes interchangeable in the sense that it does not matter anymore who particularly occupies the post. Only by taking into account that politicians will enjoy more freedom to pursue their own opinion on other, less salient matters, we can rationally justify why somebody would want to become elected. Another open question in this strain of literature is why there is at least a certain degree of congruence also in policy areas with less relevance for the voters. One common argument is that politicians try to have a certain degree of congruence also on these topics because they might also increase in salience once and then responsiveness would become decisive again (see e.g. Burgstein, 2003, Jones, 1994).

Recently, Jane Mansbridge (2009) advanced the idea that the relationship between representative and represented can be seen differently than only based on sanction: She puts forward the idea that selection processes are also important in this respect and that by selecting the right representative citizens don’t have to invest so much in monitoring and sanctioning him or her. However, even if we adopt this theoretical perspective, we can still see personal salience to be an important criterion for the citizens to chose who they want to represent them. In fact, as the selection process becomes more important, personal salience might also increase in importance as it is crucial in exactly this selection process.

What all these accounts have in common is that they focus on single issues and distinguish between salient and non-salient topics. Hence, they are issue-centred in a way. Such a focus is not uncommon to the study of political representation, also other theories and accounts emphasize differences according to issues. Hurley and Hill (2003) for example propose a new theory of political linkage in which they separate issues based on two criteria: issue complexity and closeness to the lines of partisan cleavages. Others like Arnold (1990) postulates that certain issues in Congress are too complex to be understood by ordinary citizens. While these authors highlight different aspects of issues, they all have in common that their theory focuses on single topics of political debate. This becomes also visible when having a closer look on how these studies measured whether an issue was salient or not. Mostly, they rely on some sort of aggregated ranking of survey or other material on the most important problem facing the country (see e.g. Lax and Phillips, 2009, Monroe, 1998, Page and Shapiro, 1983). What they capture with such questions is a general “thermostat” of the popular problems/issues independent on who exactly judges these issues to be salient and not telling us much why and by whom such issues have been rated salient.
Yet, the micro foundation of the whole hypothesis about more congruence on high salient topics rests on the assumption that citizens care a lot about a topic and therefore hold an representative accountable if he or she does not act according to his or hers preferences. Only the prospect of a possible withdrawal of support makes the representatives stay close to the preferences of his or her constituency. This line of thought implies that the same person has to rate a topic salient and be a voter of that particular representative. By only looking at issues which are generally rated as salient, this micro link is not fully taken into account. It could for example also be that those people rating a topic highly salient are anyway voting for the opposition or not voting at all. Then being responsive to the general public mood does not make lot of sense for a representative because the electoral effect is minuscule. In a certain way one could speak of an ecological fallacy in this respect because this hypothesis does not consider the micro fundament but relies at aggregate measure and correlations only.

Things get even more complex if we move away from this constituency based view of representation (prevalent especially in the US context) and make parties enter the stage. Does it make sense for a party to be responsive on those topics generally rated as salient or would it serve a party better only to consider the party electorates most hotly debated topics? The decision is not easy but this is mainly due to the fact that salience is not measured on the adequate level of analysis. The next section will elaborate further on this.
A new model based on personal salience

So far, salience has been seen as something attached to an issue. I argue for a new perspective and especially for a view of salience closer connected to the individual citizens, namely personal salience. We define personal salience as the personal importance a citizen attaches to a certain topic of political life.

Only by looking at salience as something individual citizens attach to certain issues we avoid running into an ecological fallacy and hence, drawing possibly wrong conclusions. This change of perspective allows us to get the causal chain right and to put forward hypotheses about how salience and representation interact with a sound micro basis. Empirically, we are able to provide stringent tests for our hypotheses and get also a new, sound basis for comparison between countries or parties.

Further, if we conceptualize representation including the personal salience dimension, the concept suddenly becomes much closer to other aspects of citizen’s life. One could for example highlight the closer connection to democratic satisfaction: If a citizen finds a party close to his own, salient preferences, this will have a larger effect on this satisfaction with the political system than if this party is only on average close to his attitudes. Others might emphasize the closer causal relation to electoral concerns: A party’s electoral success is much more likely to depend on their closeness to the citizens on their salient dimensions than on some general scales.

The socio psychological basis

But let’s start with the micro-underpinning for the general hypothesis that salient issues ought to be more important than non-salient ones. Social psychologist literature tells us more about how the connection between attitudes and (political) behaviour looks like and why salient attitudes ought to have more power for the decision-making than non-salient ones.

A large debate exists in this literature dealing with the question whether (and how strong) attitudes have relevance for behaviour (Fazio and Zanna, 1981, Zanna and Fazio, 1982, Ajzen and Fischbein, 1977, Schwartz, 1978). One general conclusion emerging from models of attitude-behaviour link is that strong attitudes are better predictors of behaviour than weak ones. Existing attitudes must first be made accessible or retrievable from long-term memory in order to exert any influence on perception or behaviour. According to Fazio’s attitude accessibility theory (Fazio, 1986, 1989), the more easily an attitude can be accessed from memory, the greater is its expected effect on subsequent perception and behaviour.

of information in citizens’ memories. Zaller and Feldman’s work on survey response and attitudes has been even more influential in the scholarly debate. The authors build their model on the basic assumptions that citizens share ambivalent views about most issues and only form their attitudes from the most accessible considerations, which are shaped by recency of use. To conclude, attitude accessibility has become the “dominant, and seemingly default” indicator of attitude strength in political science (Miller and Peterson, 2004: 854).

The idea of issue salience is expressed in the following statement: Only personally important issues are able to shape political behaviour; non-salient ones ought not to have an effect (Krosnick, 1990, 1988, 1989, Lavine et al., 1996). Regrettably, in some works, the distinction between importance and accessibility is not always made, and the two terms are conflated as measures of attitude strength (Miller and Peterson 2004). Other authors argue more precisely and refer to several social psychological theories in order to explain how salience is linked to attitude accessibility. Krosnick (1988, 1990) lists several reasons why important attitudes should have more impact on behaviour than unimportant ones. First, salient attitudes are more frequently thought about and expressed which enhances attitude accessibility. Highly salient attitudes have also been shown to be more closely linked to other psychological elements such as core values and self-interest (Boninger et al., 1995, Judd and Krosnick, 1989). A final reason is that salient attitudes are highly resistant to change, as people will have a large amount of knowledge about them, and other factors, such as social support and linkages to other attitudes, beliefs and values, also exert a stabilizing effect (Ostrom and Brock, 1969, Tedin, 1980).

Thus, there are a number of reasons to suspect that people have more accessible attitudes towards issues that are highly salient to them than towards issues that are less salient to them. A consequent debate evolved around the question of whether issue salience and accessibility are linearly related across the full range of the salience continuum, as proposed by Aldrich et al. (1989). Rabinowitz et al. (1982) and Hernstein (1981) argue instead that the electoral influence of salient issues is limited to the one or few most salient issues to a given voter. A reason could be that only high levels of importance enhance attitude accessibility, while low or moderately important issues do not shape the level of accessibility. This may particularly be the case for national salient issues in contrast to personal salient issues, as accessibility is more strongly linked to personal salience of attitudes than to national salient issues (Lavine et al. 1996, Fabrigar et al., 1995).
Developing hypotheses
The approach to the salience-representation linkage from a micro-perspective gives us also a different perspective on what we expect if this relationship holds. What (empirical) effects will we observe if personal salience ought to have an effect? First of all, we have to distinguish three levels of analysis where possible effects can be expected: the individual level, the party level and the national level. They will be addressed in turn.

At the individual level, we are closest to what the social psychologist literature tells us: Citizens are more prone to base their decision making and behaviour on attitudes important to them. For the representation and voting behaviour literature this would indicate that salient issues ought to have more power in the decision-making process whom to vote for; other issues which are of less importance for the individual will not be influential for his or her decision. Parties offer a distinct policy platform to voters which ties together policy positions on political dimension and issues. Hence, our new salience model suggests that a voter relies on the personal salient policy dimension or issue when choosing whom to vote for.

We can operationalize this hypothesis in various ways. In a regression analysis we could for example test whether salient policy issues ought to have a higher effect on the vote choice than other variables. However, to test its implication for the representation process more explicitly, we should focus on which issue the citizen is represented best. A citizen putting more weight to salient issues will chose a party which is closest to his ideas on that particular issue and hence, we should find enhanced congruence on that particular issue which will become manifest in a smaller distance between the voter and the party position than the distance for issues not rated as personal salient by the individuals.

Adopting a party level perspective we are closer again to issue-based models of representation. However, the line of argumentation is different: The connection is still personal salience and not aggregated salience of certain issues. If we span the thought further that people rate certain issue more relevant than others, therefore also base their political decisions on these criteria, and hence will be represented best on these issues, this has also consequences on how well parties represent their electorate. A party is considered as representing their citizens well if the average distance between their electorate’s position and the party position is small. This hypothesis has to be reformulated a bit to account for personal salience: A party is representing their voters well if it is close to the (average) preferences of what their voters conceive as important. While standard accounts of the performance of parties mostly only rely on the left-right dimension (see e. g. Huber
and Powell, 1994 or Blais and Bodet, 2006), a salience-based model with several issue areas included offers a much more accurate picture of how representative parties are.

An example might help clarify the argument. Let’s assume a right-wing party with a strong focus on anti-foreigner issues. If we only consider the party’s score on the left-right dimension and compare that to the position of its voters, this party might not obtain a high congruence score simply because their electorate will be rather divers with regard to their position on the left-right scale and the party might not be optimally positions towards its electorate. However, if we take personal salience into account and assume that for a majority of its voters, migration and asylum issues have top priority; this party might be much more representative because now the immigration/asylum issue is highly relevant. The high personal relevance will make a lot of voters chose this party because it is close to their own preferences but also make the party pay a lot of attention to their citizens’ preference as the re-election calculus is valid.¹

We believe that by measuring party representation in such a way, we will obtain a better picture of party performance and are able to compare parties on solid grounds. This because such a measure of party performance is based on the micro-link of personal salience which proposes a reasonable causal chain for the assumption that people will punish or reward a party for its movement on this particular issue and hence, the party will try hard to find the ideal position on issues important to their electorate. Also, comparisons of parties based on salient issue dimensions will provide a much more relevant picture of performance as it captures what people care about and what they base their decisions about. Hence, we expect also the link to the electoral success to be enhanced.

While all parties will probably have increased congruence score once personal salience is taken into account, this effect is postulated to be stronger for smaller parties. Particularly, single issue or niche parties are known to focus strongly on their own constituency and less on the general public will (Adams et al., 2006, Ezrow et al., 2008). We would now make the argument that niche parties have also a very distinct policy issue profile both from the side of their voters as of their party positions. This makes it more difficult to capture them adequately on the left-right scale and will result in biased representation scores. Hence, once we take this distinct set of issues into account and look only whether the party represents their constituency well on these important matters, congruence will be enhanced. To sum up, we expect the differences between conventional and salience based congruence scores to vary according to party families.

¹ Please note that this argument is not very far from what is commonly argued in the issue based salience hypothesis. However, here it is based on a solid micro-foundation while the other one relies only on macro connections.
Turning to the last level of analysis, namely the national level, we can also come up with some hypothesis on what we will encounter once personal salience is integrated into empirical models of representation. Basically, we can transfer the party level argument also at the national level: With a salience based model of representation, we arrive at better grounded congruence measures which are especially helpful when engaging in some kind of comparison. This is of relevance particularly if we want to compare representation among different institutional settings, electoral systems for example (see e.g. Powell, 2000, Blais and Bodet, 2006).
A preliminary test of the new salience based model

In this section we confront the theoretical reasoning with empirical data and examine the hypotheses developed in the previous section. The first subsection describes the data, the model and the method; in the second subsection, the results are presented and discussed.

Data and Method

In order to test the propositions laid out above, we need data on citizens’ preferences that go beyond what is normally provided by comparative mass surveys. In particular, citizens should be asked about their attitudes towards several issues and not only their position on the left-right scale. The salience based representation argument rests on the assumption that citizens rate one or a few topics important and these issues than have stronger weight for their political behaviour. Accordingly, we also need information about which topics people rate salient and preferable this salience measure should be asked in a personalized form (which political issue is most relevant for yourself?) rather than in the form of “what issues is most relevant for the country”.

Furthermore, the standard requirements for data to measure congruence apply also in this case: Identical or at least similar questions should be asked both to voters and elites and there should be a variable identifying which party the respondent voted for.

While it is difficult to find the type of data described above in comparative mass surveys, which would of course be most desirable, the Swiss election study 2007 offers a credible source for a preliminary test of the hypotheses formulated above. First of all, this study does not only offer data for individuals including salience ratings but includes also a candidate survey which asked the identical policy questions. A further advantage of using Swiss data is that we have extended knowledge about candidates’ preferences due to the smartvote project\(^2\). Smartvote is an online election aid platform which provides detailed political profiles of the candidates by asking over 30 specific policy questions. For this paper, the two sources of elite information have been merged in order to obtain an optimal source of information on the elite level.

From the relatively large number of issues, seven have been chosen for the purpose of this study. For these seven areas, we have identical questions both on the citizens’ as well as on the elite level and enough citizens rating each issue salient. For the elite level, six are drawn from the candidate survey while one is taken from the smartvote dataset. These seven issues are also covering a good range of the issues central to nowadays political debates with topics such as the immigration, social policy, economic liberalisation and environmental-questions. They also cover the dimensions of

\(^2\) [www.smartvote.ch](http://www.smartvote.ch)
political contestation in Switzerland as described by Hermann and Leuthold, 2003). An average distance score for all issues have been calculated giving all issue areas equal weight. More information on the seven issue areas can be found in Appendix A.

To compute the party positions, we calculated the mean of all candidate positions\(^3\). The values have been calculated as party averages but also as party averages in cantons. This because Switzerland has a very federal system which also becomes manifest in rather distinct cantonal party systems (Linder, 2005). While the results do not differ heavily according to what operationalization has been taken into account, the results presented in this paper are all based on the cantonal party measures due to this characteristic of the Swiss system. This choice determines also that no other option to estimate a party’s position as for example to take information from an expert survey or to derive the position from party manifestos has been considered as none of them offers data on the cantonal level.

In the Swiss context major parties are defined as the four parties present in the government: Social democrats (SP), free democrats (FDP), Christian democrats (CVP) and Swiss people’s party (SVP). All other parties have a vote share of less than 10% and are considered as small or niche parties.

Citizens were asked about the two most important political topics for them personally. We coded an issue as salient if it was mentioned as first or second most important topic\(^4\). The exact questions for citizens and candidates plus the attached salience area can be found in Appendix A.

Congruence has been operationalized as the individual distance between a citizen and the party this particular citizen voted for. The question on the individual level are all asked with a five item scale, the elite scales are the same except for the smartvote question where we rescaled in order to have the same range\(^5\).

To test our hypothesis on the individual level, namely that the distance between the party and the citizen is smaller for the personal salient issue, we estimated for each citizen the distance to his party on his favourite issue and on all other issues. Due to the theoretical focus of this paper it is important to measure congruence at this level as precisely we differentiate between individual salience ratings. As the results might differ according to issue areas, the results are displayed

\(^3\) Two operationalizations have been carried out: the mean of all elected candidates and the mean of all candidates. The results do not differ substantially; therefore the mean of all candidates is reported in this paper because this measure is more robust (larger N).

\(^4\) Only a small minority of respondents mentioned a second important topic (N=324 out of 5756).

\(^5\) The elite scale ranges from 0 to 100 for the smartvote data.
separately for the seven issue areas (Table 1). The mean differences are tested for significance with the help of a t-test.

For the hypotheses at the party level, two empirical tests have been carried out. First, we conducted a test similar to the individual level by comparing the congruence on all issues (average) versus the congruence on the personal salient issue, both aggregated per party (mean). Here, we should see whether parties get higher congruence ratings when taking the personal salience into account. A second test goes more in the direction of comparing salience based measures to congruence measures known from the literature, namely congruence measures based on the left-right distance. Precisely, we compare how representative parties are of their electorates on the left-right dimension and based on the issue their voters rate as most important. For both party level analyses, we highlight especially how niche and small parties are doing in comparison to the major parties. The mean differences are tested for significance with the help of a t-test.

As we consider only data for one country (Switzerland), a national comparison is difficult. However, we provide a national average congruence value based on the left-right scale and a salience based indicator to exemplify the different results one might obtain when taking salience into account at the national level.

Results
This section describes the preliminary results obtained with the Swiss election study 2007. We start by describing the individual level results before moving to the party based findings and finally spend some words on national level comparison.

Table 1 displays the findings for the hypothesis that the distance between the party voted for and the own position is smallest for the issue the citizens rates personally important. The underlying reasoning highlights the fact that people will base their decision most heavily on issues they rate important and therefore also the party choice should be influenced by salience.

In the first row, the overall picture is described: it becomes visible that our hypothesis receives support from the data in the sense that the average distance on salient issues is smaller than on non-salient issues. Graph 1 shows that very clearly: The distribution for the salient issues has its peak much closer to zero then the line for the nonsalient issues. The rest of table 1 shows the findings

6 Please note that the personal salient issue can be one of all seven issue areas.
separated per issue areas as we might also expect differences according to political topics. Indeed, there is some variation but we also find support for our hypothesis for most of the issue categories. While the distance is smaller for the question about immigration, social policy, crime, and environmental protection, on the three remaining issues we do not see a significant difference (social values) or the distance is even larger for salient issues (economic liberalization and EU membership). Especially the latter finding is puzzling at first sight but can be explained with indifferent party position taking. When examining the individuals and their party choice a bit more into detail it becomes clear that the difference between the own position and the party position is especially large for the two centre-right parties in Switzerland (CVP and FDP). These two parties are very reluctant in taking a clear position towards European integration and therefore it might be difficult for their voters (even if they are interested in the topic and hence reasonably well informed about the topic) to detect their parties position on that specific issue. This becomes also manifest when looking at the internal variance in position taking: the variance is especially large for the two middle parties (1.19/1.32 compared to 1.0 for both the Social democrats and the SVP). For the economic liberalization issue the questions themselves might be problematic as they are rather technical and it can well be that voters and elites don’t understand them in the same way. This becomes manifest in the generally very large distances between voters and parties on this issue.

In general, we can state that the degree of congruence is among the same for all issue areas covered by this study and we also have enough people interested in each topic to assure robust results.

Turning to the party level, we pursued two sets of analyses: First, an analogous procedure as on the individual level has been carried out also for the party level: We looked at differences between salient and non-salient congruence measures – this time aggregated per party (Table 2). The expectation is that parties receive better congruence scores when we only base our measure on the issues people rate personally important.

This is not always the case, however. For all social democratic voters, the average distance on their salient topic (1.07) is smaller than for the average of all non-salient issues (0.97) and this holds also true for voters of the free democrats (FDP). However, our hypothesis receives support for all smaller parties. For these cases, the average distance between votes and party is always smaller when measuring for the salient issues compared to a measure taking all issues into account. This findings fits nicely to the recent literature emphasizing that niche parties act differently in the party competition and their electorates are rather distinct (Adams et al. 2006, Meguid, 2005).
As mentioned above, for the four major parties the findings are mixed. While the Christian Democrats perform better when only taking the salient issues of their voters into account, the Social Democrats and liberals perform worse. Indifferent results are found for the most right wing major party the Swiss People’s party.

We can think of several possible reasons why (some) major parties are performing badly in this test of congruence to their electorate. One is obviously that their electorate is much more diverse than the one of a small, single-issue party. Hence, it becomes more complex for a party to be congruent on several dimensions. However, this reasoning can only partly explain why explicitly find the SPS and the FDP to have lower congruence ratings. While the FDP has the most diverse electorate with regard to which issue they rate important, also the Christian democrats face similarly diverse voters.

A second reason could be unclear position taking on the side of the parties due to a non-uniform opinion within the party. Of course, parties try to downplay the importance of inner-party conflict about certain issues and certainly also try to lower the general salience of such questions. However, in my setting, this does not help if citizen rate the topic as salient, it is what counts for them and the distance on this particular issue is relevant. A more detailed reveals for example that the number two priority of social democrat voters is asylum and immigration. However, it might be difficult for the social democrats to have a clear cut position on this particular issue. The data support this speculation at least to the fact that the standard deviation of the Social democrats is among the largest of all parties.

A third reason is obviously that these major parties have chosen a suboptimal position regarding some issue areas and hence represent their people not optimally on what counts most for them. In the long run we would expect the parties to correct their position to be closer to their electorate again, but unfortunately we are not able to observe that with the present data.

In general, we can state that for the majority of the parties considered here it makes a difference which measure of congruence to take and hence according to which underlying model of representation to judge them. This gives rise for the statement that personal salience plays a role in the representation process and that we find considerable differences between the two measures of congruence.

A second test of the theoretical reasoning is to compare salience based measures of congruence to conventional measures based on the left-right dimension (Table 3). The hypothesis posits that we see a different picture once we take personal salience into account and hence might observe a different ranking of the performance of parties with respect to the representation of their
constituencies. Table 3 displays the ranking of the parties according to a congruence measure based on the most salient issue of their voters (column 1) and according to the standard left-right distance (column 2).

Table 3 reveals that the ranking of the parties changes sometimes dramatically depending on which congruence measure we use. This is especially prominent for the case of the largest liberal party in Switzerland, the Free democrats (FDP). If we base our ranking on the standard left-right dimension they feature rather well but the party is ranked last when taking the personal salient issue into account. This gives rise that for speculations that this party does not really represent their voters well or might just not be aware of what their voters really care about. On the hand we also find parties which perform considerably better once we base our judgment on more than just the left right scale. One example is the Green party which is last in line when looking at the left-right congruence but third when taking into account that most of their constituency cares most about environmental issues.

However, we also find parties which get similar ranking for both congruence measures. Examples are the Christian democrats or the Green-liberals. The fact that they score equally on both measures might indicate that their constituencies is interested in topics closely related to the left-right divide and therefore it might not make so much a difference which scale to take.

Table 4 gives us some idea how an international comparison might look like. The idea is basically the same as for the party level: We look at differences in the congruence scales and make the argument that our measure is more appropriate to compare countries, regions or parties. As our data is consists only of Switzerland, the only point we can make in this paper is that the congruence measures differ significantly again with a closer congruence when personal salience is taken into account. What we cannot tell from this study is whether the difference between the two congruence measures is the same for all nations which would not alter the ranking of congruence between political elites and their citizens or whether this difference varies and we would have to recast certain findings especially concerning the implications of the electoral system.

The results presented here are only tentative and two caveats have to be mentioned particularly. First, there might be some problems in the data. While we have identical questions for both voters and elites, they still might not understand them in the exact same way and hence, this might be a source of bias. Second, the salience question is not directly connected to the issue questions in the
sense that the most salient policy issue question was an open question. Hence, we cannot be completely sure whether the respondents did really mean the same issue area as in the policy questions. In total, we are facing two potential sources of biases and the results surely have to be confirmed with other data. Also, one might argue that Switzerland is not an ideal case for the study of representation. The extensive use of direct democratic measures makes it questionable whether issues still play the same role when deciding whom to vote for (see e.g. Linder, 2005 or Zaugg, 2009). Further, we are facing 26 subnational party systems instead of one national one. While this fact has been taken into account empirically, we are still not sure whether this special feature of the Swiss system drives the results in certain ways.

But certainly, there might also be other reasons why salience based representation does not always work. Behnke (1999) points to the fact that individuals are not always aware of their own decision rationales and might therefore cite a non-important issue as most salient to them. Another source of error could be the fact that the salience question has been asked in the “most important problem” version which has been described as problematic (Wlezien, 2005).

To sum up, however, we can state that we find some support for the general hypothesis that personal salience plays a role in the representation process and that we should include it in our models but not as previously done as macro level variable but on the individual level where we have a sound micro foundation of the causal link. Furthermore, there is evidence that a salience based representation model might lead to different empirical conclusions than what we know from previous studies. Niche parties for example might be performing rather well with respect to representing their voters while larger parties might not be as successful. In a broader perspective, we can also speculate whether the comparative findings concerning good or bad representation might be questioned when taking these new measures of congruence into account and hence the effects of the electoral system on political representation might look different.
Conclusion
This paper argues for the inclusion of personal salience into models of political representation. It demonstrates that this variable is of theoretical and empirical relevance and personal salience should receive more scientific attention in representation research. But, what are the normative implications of such a step? As representation research is always connected to the normative ideals of how political representation should work, this is a crucial question which will be discussed now.

First of all, we can state that a personal salience based model carries some (normative) advantages compared to the issue based salience model discussed in the theory section. One weakness of the issue based model is that it has no explanation why congruence should exist for non-salient issues except that they might become salient once and therefore politicians ensure a minimal amount of congruence in order to be prepared for such a situation. Yet, there are political issues for which it is hard to foresee that they ever will produce high political contestation and be of interest to a general public; one example might be technical trade restrictions. What about these issues? Will people never be well represented on such topics or does this happen automatically because representatives are anyway only gyroscopes acting referring to their own conscience (Mansbridge, 2003)?

In a model of representation based on personal salience this point is defused a bit because even though topics like technical trade restrictions will not receive high political salience, still, such topics might be relevant for a small minority of citizens and hence, it makes sense for a certain politician or party to ensure close congruence on exactly this issue because for an amount of people this topic will have large power in their decision making.

In general, though, all salience based models of representation are somehow models of partial representation only as they predict good representation only for certain issues. If we accept that representation works for certain issues and persons do we then give up the normative idea that representation should include all citizens and all topics? Or is it just being pragmatic and realistic and stating that whenever the rules of recognition are accepted (Rehfeld, 2006), we could be happy with this type of partial representation?

One positive point should not be forgotten: Even if salience based representation is only partially fulfilling the normative criteria of good representation, at least on these issues representation might be better as people tend to be better informed on issues personally important to them (Fournier et al., 2003). Hence, the equivalence condition, an important concept in Pitkin (1967), might be more realistic and hence easier to keep up for salient issues accordingly.
References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>non-salient Mean</th>
<th>St Error</th>
<th>salient Mean</th>
<th>St Error</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All issues</td>
<td>1.010</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<td>0.932</td>
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<td>Social Policy</td>
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<td>0.947</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>627</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime and terrorism</td>
<td>1.187</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>339</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU-membership</td>
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<td>0.034</td>
<td>1.270</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic liberalization</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>1.363</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social values</td>
<td>1.112</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>1.104</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Party congruence salience based vs. average issue congruence in comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Congruence based on salient issue</th>
<th>Average congruence (all issues)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAJOR PARTIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social democrats SPS</td>
<td>1.070</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free democrats FDP</td>
<td>1.371</td>
<td>1.189</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian democrats CVP</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss peoples party SVP</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SMALLER AND NICHE PARTIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green-liberals</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic peoples party EVP</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal party LPS</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.145</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table compares party congruence based on salient issues with average issue congruence across all issues. The significance level (Sig) is indicated by an asterisk (*).
Table 3 Ranking of parties according to congruence to their electorate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congruence based on salient issue:</th>
<th>Congruence based on left-right dimension:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Green-liberals</td>
<td>1. Green-liberals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Evangelic people’s party</td>
<td>2. EDU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Greens</td>
<td>3. Free Democrats FDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. EDU</td>
<td>4. Christian Democrats CVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Christian Democrats</td>
<td>5. Swiss People’s Party SVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Liberal Party LPS</td>
<td>7. Evangelic People’s Party EVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Swiss People’s Party</td>
<td>8. Social Democrats SP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 National values compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congruence based on salient issue</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>2807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average congruence (all issues)</td>
<td>1.021</td>
<td>2807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruence on left-right dimension</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>2807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All differences are statistically significant on the $p<0.05$ level.
Graph 1: Average distance salient vs. nonsalient issues
### Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question individual level (Selects) (question n14 (individuals) and C2 (candidates))</th>
<th>Most important topic category (question f12751)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigration</strong>: 1. immigrants should be required to adjust to the customs of Switzerland, 2. immigrants are good for the Swiss economy</td>
<td>Immigration, asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social policy</strong>: 1. providing a stable network of social security should be the prime goal of a government, 2. income and wealth should be redistributed towards poorer people.</td>
<td>Welfare policy and public health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crime and terrorism</strong>: people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences</td>
<td>Crime, law and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong>: stronger measures should be taken to protect the environment</td>
<td>Environmental protection, abuse of environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU membership</strong>: Switzerland should start negotiations about EU-membership in the next 5 years</td>
<td>EU membership, foreign relations of Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic liberalization</strong>: 1. the ongoing opening of the economies is for the good of all, 2. politics should abstain from intervening in the economy</td>
<td>Economy, taxes etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social values</strong>: 1. same sex marriages should be approved by law, 2. women should be free to decide on matters of abortion</td>
<td>Social values, neutrality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the salience categories have been recoded using the long list of answers to the open question. Therefore, the terms listed are only examples of what exactly has been summarized under this category.