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Congruence between Citizens and Governments in Europe: A Multidimensional Approach

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ABSTRACT:

This study analyses congruence across various issues in 20 European democracies. Making use of public opinion and expert survey data, our analyses show that congruence between the policy preferences of citizens and the stances of governments is much more complex than what is revealed by studies focusing on ideology solely. Size and directions of incongruence are larger and more systematic on specific issues than on the left-right scale. On redistribution, citizens are more to the left than their governments, while popular support for European integration is systematically lower among citizens than among their representatives. Moreover, the relatively poor are particularly underrepresented on redistribution, while the preferences of the relatively lower educated are not well reflected in government preferences in relation to European integration. We interpret these results as being partly linked to a representation gap with privileged social groups enjoying higher levels of congruence with their government.

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Introduction

It is a core requirement for the quality of democracy that governments reflect the preferences of citizens[1]. To meet this requirement regular and free elections are considered a central instrument. They enable citizens to control their representatives by selecting those parties or candidates who advocate policies that correspond most closely to their wishes and by firing those who perform badly in office. This hiring and firing by the voters shall create representative bodies that closely reflect the broad policy goals of the majority of citizens. Many studies investigate the actual extent of (in)congruence between citizens and their representatives. Most come to a positive conclusion and find a considerable proximity between the policies preferred by voters and those advocated by their party or between the preferences of the median voter and the government (Dolný and Baboš 2015, Thomassen and Schmitt 1997, McDonald and Budge 2005).

However, in a context in which multi-dimensional congruence, that is, the ability to bring policies in line with citizen preferences *simultaneously on different issues* is becoming an increasingly relevant indicator for the quality of democracy (Ward and Weale 2010, Ganghof 2015, Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016), research also shows that there are differences across policy issues. Party-voter congruence on an ideological left-right is higher than on specific issues (Thomassen and Schmitt 1997, Freire and Belchior 2013). Specifically, it has been shown that parties tend to be more in favour of European integration than their voters (Thomassen and Schmitt 1997), that they tend to hold less conservative or authoritarian preferences than the public (Dalton 2017, Freire and Belchior 2013, Thomassen 2012) or that elected representatives do not reflect the pro-state intervention in the economy-stances of citizens very well (Peters and Ensink 2015, Rosset 2016, Lesschaeve 2017). In sum, there is some evidence for a pattern in which elites tend to be to the right of citizens on economic issues but hold more progressive (or left) preferences on cultural issues. However, this evidence comes mainly from studies focusing on the link between parties and their voters. We are not aware of any study that would assess whether the same findings hold for citizens-government congruence in a comparative perspective. That is regrettable as governments are key actors in policy-making and should reflect the preferences of citizens (Huber and Powell 1994, Dahl 1971). We, hence, take government preferences as our main reference point.

The aim of this paper is first to provide a long-term inquiry of government-citizen issue congruence across various dimensions in Europe. Instead of providing only a snapshot we hope to uncover more general trends by analysing 20 countries in the years 2002 to 2016[2]. By analysing congruence on several issues, we take the increasing multidimensionality of political competition into consideration (de Vries and Marks 2012).

Our second contribution is to focus on one of the potential explanations for the systematic patterns in incongruence (see also Peters and Ensink 2015). In a nutshell, we argue that incongruences might be linked to social inequalities and the fact that some groups get systematically better represented than others with generally the richer and more educated enjoying more congruent preferences with their representatives or their governments (Aaldering 2017, Bartels 2008, Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012, Hakhverdian 2015). Economic resources have been used to explain citizens' preferences with regard to redistribution. Higher income is usually associated with preferences that are less favourable to redistribution (and can be characterized as more "right"). At the same time, education is one of the main variables structuring individual preferences on European integration (Hakhverdian et al. 2013) or with regard to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension (Stubager 2006). In this case, higher education is linked to more universalistic (or more "left") preferences. Potential inequalities in issue congruence thus also have consequences for overall levels of correspondence between the preferences of the (median) citizens and their governments. Given

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[1] As Dahl puts it, "democratic government provides an orderly and peaceful process by means of which a majority of citizens can induce the government to do what they most want it to do and to avoid doing what they most want it not to do" (Dahl 1989, 95).

[2] Our focus on this specific time period is linked to data availability. We aggregate different years in order to analyse systematic differences in public opinion over several electoral cycles within the same country.

the pattern of public opinion described above, governments are likely to be "to the left" of their citizens on cultural issues but "to the right" on economic issues.

In order to explore congruence on specific political issues we analyse data on citizens' preferences from eight waves of the European Social Survey (ESS) and measures of government policy stances based on four waves of the Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) covering 20 countries. While matching these two data sources is not without problems, it allows us to shed light on the extent to which the preferences of citizens correspond to the stances of their governments on the general left-right scale and three different policy issues including redistribution, European integration, and social lifestyle (particular same-sex marriage). Our analyses confirm that the high level of ideological congruence between citizens and governments on the left-right scale cannot be reproduced with survey questions measuring specific policy orientations: when asked about their stances on redistribution, the EU or same sex-marriages citizens tend to be less congruent with their governments. In particular, citizens favour more redistribution but less EU integration than their governments. Congruence on the issue of same sex marriages seems to be particularly dependent on the country specific context with the population being significantly to the left or the right of the government. Finally, when analysing subgroups of the population separately, we show that socially disadvantaged groups of voters are further away from the government than the remainder of the population. This applies specifically to issues on which their individual characteristics are most likely to matter for their preferences. In other words, relatively poor citizens are particularly under-represented on redistribution, while the views of the less educated citizens are poorly reflected in the stances of government on EU integration.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. We first discuss the literature on the congruence between citizens and political elites with a focus on the variation in levels of congruence across political issues and across social groups and develop our hypotheses. Then data and methods used to measure citizen-government congruence in a comparative perspective are introduced. We then present the results of our empirical analysis and conclude with a more general discussion of their implications.

(In)congruence across policy dimensions

Policy congruence has been an increasingly popular subject for political scientists (Golder and Stramski 2010). The concept refers to the proximity between the policies preferred by citizens and the policies advocated or implemented by their representatives. Policy congruence has been evaluated using different points of reference and normative standards. Mayne and Hakhverdian (2016) discern egocentric and sociotropic measures. Whereas the first refers to the distance between each individual citizen to representatives, sociotropic measures cover the congruence between representatives and the population, e.g. represented by the median voter, as a whole.

Policy congruence has also been studied with regard to different representative agents. Studies have looked at the match between voters and their parties (Dalton 1985, Belchior 2013, Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011). This perspective is often linked to "responsible party" or "party government" model of representation which assumes that parties propose coherent political platforms, that voters chose parties based on their proximity to them and that, once elected, parties will implement their political programs. As a result, if parties are congruent with their voters, governments should also ultimately represent the preferences of the majority of voters well (Pierce 1999)[3].

Policy congruence has also been studied in relation to representative bodies, by matching the preferences of the voters with the position of the corresponding government or parliament (Huber and Powell 1994, Powell 2000, Blais and Bodet 2006). Within that tradition, research has focused on citizens' and

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[3] Note that although many studies focus on party-voters congruence, the normative argument for being interested in congruence usually relates to the proximity between the citizenry and policy makers in general (see e.g. Huber and Powell Jr 1994, Thomassen 1994).

policymakers' median (or mean) preferences (Huber and Powell 1994; Powell 2000), on the distribution of preferences among both citizens and political elites (see e.g. Golder and Stramski 2010) or, at the individual level, looking for determinants of congruence (see e.g. Bernauer et al. 2015). Studying the proximity between the preferences of citizens and their governments comes close to the democratic requirement that government policies match what a majority of citizens prefers. Therefore, it is the type of congruence that we chose to focus on in this research.

Existing studies mostly focus on the left-right scale referring to ideological orientations rather than policy goals. Analysing ideological congruence to some extent presupposes that policy preferences across a wide range of areas can be summarized in a single left-right dimension. Yet, this assumption seems to be increasingly violated. Although a very large proportion of survey respondents have no problem placing themselves on such a continuum, it is not exactly clear what this position entails in terms of policy stances. Political competition in Europe has indeed evolved over the last decades, with non-economic issues gaining in importance (Kriesi et al. 2006). A cultural dimension has supplemented the traditional economic divide between pro-state intervention in the economy and pro-market stances. There, individuals with universalistic and progressive values oppose those who hold more nationalistic and conservative views (Bornschier 2010). As a result, it is not obvious where someone who identifies as being moderately left (e.g. placing oneself at 4 on a 0-10 left right scale) stands on specific policy domains. It could be that this person holds indeed moderately left preferences on all issues, but this positioning could for instance reflect a resolutely « leftist » position on economic issues combined with a moderately conservative position on socio-cultural topics such as immigration or morality issues for instance. Hence, various studies call for distinguishing between preferences on different political themes in showing that indeed left-right may not be sufficient to summarize citizens' preferences across a variety of issues (Munzert and Bauer 2013, Rosset, Lutz, and Kissau 2016) and that many survey respondents fail to associate specific policies with overall left-right orientations (Dolezal et al. 2013; Freire and Belchior 2011).

Therefore, our paper looks at congruence on the left-right ideological scale as well as three specific issues which are salient in the current context: redistribution, social lifestyle, and European integration. To be frank, this choice of issues is closely linked to question of data availability. At the same time, their inclusion in the citizen and elite surveys we use attests to the fact that these are also important issues on the European continent. Two of these issues – social lifestyle and European integration - can be linked to the cultural divide in societies between nationalistic and conservative views on the one hand and universalistic and liberal views on the other. Redistribution refers clearly to economic issues. But what can we expect to find in relation to levels of policy congruence between the citizens and governments across specific issues?

The comparative research on issue congruence has mostly focused on the link between parties and their voters. Drawing on this literature, we can formulate some expectations with regard to citizen government congruence. First, it is one of the most consistent findings of the literature that congruence on general left-right attitudes tend to be relatively high (Dalton 2015; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). In contrast, studies focusing on more specific issues, tend to come to more negative conclusions regarding the match between preferences of citizens and stances of elites (Dalton 2015; Freire and Belchior 2013; Thomassen 2012). Thus, our first hypothesis:

- Levels of congruence are higher in relation to ideological (left-right) orientations than in relation to specific issues (H1).

When looking at other issues than left-right, congruence appears to be particularly low on cultural issues. Dalton (2015) for instance finds that the match between parties and their voters is lowest on the authoritarian-libertarian divide as well as gender issues. Regarding the direction of this incongruence, the majority of current research documents that party voters are more conservative than party elites on cultural issues. For instance, European voters have been consistently found to be more eurosceptical than political elites (Mattila and Raunio 2006; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). Research focusing on specific countries also reveal more conservative stances of the public as compared to the parties they vote for. Portuguese voters display more authoritarian stances than their parties (Freire and Belchior 2013). The same conclusion can

be drawn from an analysis on the Netherlands showing that voters are more in favour of law and order than the parties, especially among left party supporters (Thomassen 2012). Research is however not completely unanimous on this matter as on issues of immigration there is little gap between parties and voters and, when such a gap exists, voters tend to be more liberal than elites (Lefkofridi and Horvath 2012). Taken together, however, these results show that, when there are differences between parties and voters, parties tend to hold more liberal views on cultural issues than their voters. This is consistent with the assumption that politicians are more tolerant than the general population notably due to their socialization in party structures (Sullivan et al. 1993). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

- Governments tend to be to the left of citizens on cultural issues such as European integration, or social lifestyle (H2).

In relation to economic issues, research has generally found smaller gaps between voters and parties than for cultural issues (Dalton 2015; Freire and Belchior 2013). There is however also evidence for a systematic bias with citizens being generally more left or pro-state intervention than elites. This has been documented in the Netherlands where party voters favour more income equality than their representatives, especially among the voters of right parties (Thomassen 2012). In Switzerland a similar trend has been identified with the parliament as a whole holding views that are significantly less favourable to social security and redistribution than the median citizen (Rosset 2013). There is also an emerging literature on responsiveness showing that policy preferences of the relatively poor (and left-leaning on economic issues) citizens are less well translated into economic policy and that government decisions tend to follow the preferences of richer (and right-leaning) citizens (Donnelly and Lefkofridi 2014, Peters and Ensink 2015). In sum, based on the results of previous research, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- Governments tend to be to the right of citizens on economic issues such as redistribution (H3).

One of the potential explanations for the differences that we expect in relation to the direction of congruence for cultural and economic issues is related to representational inequalities. The current literature points to a systematic bias in the extent to which citizens' preferences are reflected in political institutions or public policy (Gilens 2012). Social inequalities, so the argument goes, might translate into political inequalities with lower levels of issue congruence among socially disadvantaged citizens. At least two mechanisms could account for such a systematic bias. First, disadvantaged social groups tend to turn out less to vote and thus have proportionally a more limited influence on election results. Studies show, for example, that on average higher educated citizens tend to participate more in elections. The same is true for lower income groups that display lower levels of participation in most European countries (Armingeon and Schädel 2015). Second, there is also an under-representation of individuals sharing those groups' characteristics among political elites. This descriptive under-representation is very high in relation to features such as education and wealth (Pontusson 2015). Regarding these two categories representative bodies tend not to include many (or oftentimes any) members of very large groups of citizens defined in these terms, and this despite of the fact that these features have been consistently found to be associated with individuals' policy preferences.

Insofar as individuals' characteristics in terms of income or education are related to specific policy preferences, these two mechanisms will have consequences on overall issue congruence with governments' positions being on average tilted in the direction of advantaged social groups. These preferences, however, are not easily summarized in a single dimension as the systematically under-represented groups tend to hold policy preferences that are to the "right" in some policy domains, but to the "left" in other policy areas.

On economic issues research has shown that individuals tend to hold less pro-state intervention preferences when their income increases, possibly reflecting self-interested attitudes (Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm 2006). Education also gives individuals more confidence in their own capacity of faring well on the job market or coping with difficulty. Holding income constant, education is consequently found to be negatively associated with demand for redistribution (Rehm 2009). It thus seems that if politicians are affected by their social background they should tend to hold preferences more to the right than the citizens on economic issues,

which has been documented in a number of studies (Carnes and Lupu 2014, Rosset 2016). In relation to cultural issues of internationalisation and universalistic values, however, the descriptive representation gap is likely to have the opposite effect with politicians having on average more libertarian or more "left" preferences than the citizens. Indeed, the new social cleavage revolving around cultural issues linked in particular to globalization, has been characterized as one that particularly divides along educational lines with higher levels of education displaying on average much more liberal values (Stubager 2006) and much more pro-European preferences (Hakhverdian et al. 2013). To some extent, the more pro-EU stances of political elites as compared to voters (Mattila and Raunio 2006), could be read in light of the fact that the social background between citizens and their representatives differs considerably. If politicians' social background plays a role in the way parties perceive political problems, we would expect the party system to be tilted to the right on economic issues and tilted to the left on sociocultural issues and that there would be a similar tendency for governments. Interestingly, the existence of such a pattern would likely be associated with a close congruence between governments and citizens if solely measured on a left-right scale, but low levels of congruence on specific policy domains.

If these patterns are indeed associated to inequalities in how governments reflect preferences of citizens from different societal groups, preferences of individuals with high income and educational status should also be better reflected than the preferences of citizens belonging to complementary groups. Given that income is associated with specific preferences on economic issues and education on cultural issues, we can expect poor citizens to be particularly incongruent with the preferences of their government on economic issues and those with relatively low education not to have their preferences taken into account on cultural issues. As both education and income tend to be associated with the better educated usually earning higher salaries, the poor are also likely to be under-represented on cultural issues and the relatively lower educated on economic issues, too. However, the magnitude of these gaps should be smaller than for the policies most closely associated with the individual characteristic considered. Thus, our two hypotheses regarding representational inequalities are the following:

- Holding education constant, low income citizens tend to be less congruent with their governments on economic issues (H4).
- Holding income constant, low educated citizens tend to be less congruent with their governments on cultural issues (H5).

Data and methods

Congruence has different conceptual dimensions. One dimension refers to the choice of representative agents as reference point. Congruence has been studied with reference to parties or party systems (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011, Lefkofridi and Horvath 2012), legislatures, governments (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016) or combinations of these (Golder and Stramski 2010). Another dimension refers to the question of whether agents are modelled as unitary or collective references points; or, to put it in the words of Golder and Stramski (2010), whether we study one or many citizens and representatives respectively. This one-to-many dichotomy can be further refined, when the focus lies on specific groups of voters (e.g. Belchior and Freire 2013). A related question is whether absolute or relative distances between citizens and representatives are used. Whereas the first is a rather blunt but straightforward measure, the latter takes information on the distribution of preferences into account. Moreover, temporal dynamics in congruence over a government's term may be considered (Ferland 2016).

These different options to conceptualize congruence lead to quite different results and conclusions. It is therefore important to make the choices that are appropriate for the research question at hand. With regard to the representative agent we take the government as our reference point. This brings us as close as possible to an answer to the question of whether different groups (e.g. rich vs. poor) are equally well served by the outputs of a political system. With regard to the citizenry, we take on different perspectives, which we

explain in detail below. Most importantly, we move beyond absolute values of distances as we are also interested in the direction of (in)congruence.

There are also different approaches when it comes to choosing the actual data with which congruence is measured. In most studies, congruence between citizens and parties or governments is measured based on how citizens' place themselves on a scale and how they perceive parties to be positioned on that same scale. This can be easily done, for example, with data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) (e.g. Blais and Bodet 2006). Unfortunately, such data is only available for the left-right axis while information on issue specific preferences for citizens and parties are only available in separate sources. In analysing congruence between citizens and governments on multiple issues we, hence, face an unfortunate data limitation. We dealt with this problem by combining citizen preferences from the ESS with party positions from the CHES. To our knowledge, the combination of both surveys provides for an optimal database to analyse our research question. On the one hand, both surveys present an interesting selection of position items that can be meaningfully matched onto each other. On the other hand, four (CHES) and seven (ESS) available survey waves allow us to provide a long-term perspective on the multidimensional congruence between citizens and governments.[4]

Matching citizens' self-placement with expert placements of parties is of course not without methodological problems. Adams et al. (2011), for example, show, that voters are sensitive to their *perceived* ideological distance to parties while voters' perceptions are not necessarily in line with 'objective' measures such as scores generated from manifestos or expert surveys. Yet, this problem affects our research only marginally. First, we are not interested in congruence between citizens and parties but between citizens and governments. On government policy, voters are likely to be better informed than about mere manifesto rhetoric (Adams et al. 2011: 380). Second, as shown by Powell (2009: 1481-1482) the results of congruence studies do not change much when measures of party positions are derived from manifestos, expert surveys or citizen placements. Beyond that, there are also some solvable technical difficulties in merging the two surveys. For some items, CHES and ESS use different polarity and scales, which requires transformation.

We generate congruence measures in the following way: Citizen preferences are taken from different items of the ESS while measures of party preferences are taken from the CHES (Bakker et al. 2012). From the CHES we calculated government policy positions. To single-party majority governments we attribute the positions of the governing party. When it comes to coalition governments we take the standard approach of using the seat-weighted average of the positions of all cabinet parties (Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012, 249-250, Warwick 2001, Martin and Vanberg 2011). Coalitions do not exclusively compromise but also engage in logrolls (Laver and Shepsle 1996) or invoke intra-coalitional vetoes (Tsebelis 2002, Stecker 2015). Nevertheless, the seat-weighted average seems to be a reasonable approximation of the actual policy output of a coalition (Martin and Vanberg 2014, McGann 2006, Warwick 2001).

We calculate the policy proximity between citizens and governments on four items: general left/right, redistribution, European integration, social lifestyle. Congruence scores on the issue of redistribution, for example, were generated by using the question of whether the "government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels" in the ESS and from the expert rating of parties according to their "position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor" in the CHES. We recoded all items into the same polarity and standardized all response categories on a 0-1 scale. Accordingly, individual congruence scores vary between 0 (perfect congruence) and -1/1 (perfect incongruence). Table 1 gives a detailed overview of the question wording and the scale of the different items we combined from ESS and CHES.

Given the different timelines of CHES, ESS and cabinets, we took various steps to provide for an optimal combination of our measures of government policy positions and citizen preferences (see Figure A1 in the appendix). In a first step, we assigned each cabinet party the position from the closest CHES wave (2002, 2006, 2010, or 2014). From these positions, we calculated government policy positions in the

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[4] For that reason, we preferred the ESS over the European Election (EES) study, which provides for only three usable waves.

aforementioned way. In merging government positions with citizen preferences, we determined for each respondent in the ESS which cabinet she or he faced at the exact day of the interview. This day-exact matching is important as the actual ESS field periods vary considerably and are sometimes carried out astonishingly distant from the official year of an ESS round. The ParlGov infrastructure (Döring and Manow 2016) has been very helpful for the task of merging the two surveys. We use the 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 ESS round for our analysis.[5] We kept all countries that were part of at least four of these eight ESS waves.[6] Overall, we analyse 259,667citizens from 20 countries.

Table 1: Question wording of policy congruence-variables

Issue dimensions	European Social Survey (ESS)	Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)
left-right	In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?	Please tick the box that best describes each party's overall ideology on a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right).
redistribution	The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. Answer categories range from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly).	Position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor ranging from 0 (strongly favors redistribution) to 10 (strongly opposes redistribution).
social lifestyle	Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish. Answer categories range from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly).	Position on social lifestyle (e.g. homosexuality) ranging from 0 (strongly supports liberal policies) to 10 (strongly opposes liberal policies).
European integration	Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position? Answer categories range from 0 (Unification has already gone too far) to 10 (Unification should go further).	How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took ranging from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favor).

Empirical Results

Our first analysis concerns the level of overall congruence between survey respondents and their government on the four issues considered. We present the results graphically as this allows us to see several important things: the distribution of citizen preferences, the gap between the policy preferred by the majority of citizens and the stances of the government (the absolute distance between the median citizen and the position of the government), and the direction of this gap (whether citizens are to the left or the right of the government). Regarding the preference distribution, the boxplots in figure 1 grasp the location of the median citizen (middle line of the box) as well as the 25th and the 75th percentiles (limits of the box). The mean position of citizens is indicated with a cross. The line running through the zero of the x-axis corresponds to the position of the government. Accordingly, when the median takes a negative value a majority of citizens is to the left of the government and when it takes a positive value, the majority of citizens is to the right of the government. Figure 1 presents results country-wise in alphabetical order.

The first conclusion we can draw from this country-specific perspective is that there are some substantial variations in the level of congruence across policy dimensions. As expected, the highest level of congruence exists on the left-right scale. In a majority of countries left-right is the dimension on which the match between citizen and government preferences is the closest. In contrast, the more specific policy domains

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[5] Note that the 2010 ESS misses an item on European integration and that the 2016 ESS to date only released data on 10 countries

[6] In this step Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania were dropped from the analysis.

show a considerably higher degree of incongruence. This impression is corroborated when we look at the relative citizen congruence (see Figure A2), which gives the absolute distance between the citizens and the government relative to the overall distribution of citizen preferences (Golder and Stramski 2010, 93). On this measure congruence is highest for left/right, followed by the issues of social lifestyle and European integration with similar levels of congruence. Incongruence is markedly higher on the issue of redistribution.

As to the exact direction of incongruence, we also find interesting issue-specific patterns. With regard to left/right there are both countries where the government is to the left of citizens and where it is to the right. For the specific issues, however, incongruences exhibit a clear directional pattern. There is no country, for example, where the majority of citizens prefers less redistribution than the government, although the width of the gap between the median citizen and the government varies substantially. In twelve of the countries considered, the government wants to redistribute less than three quarters of its citizens. The pattern is also very clear with regard to citizens' policy stances on European integration. Citizens are on average less in favour of European integration than are their governments – a finding that fits with existing studies on policy congruence between parties and their voters on that dimension (Mattila and Raunio 2006). The public support of same-sex marriages is on average higher than among governments with only very few governments being more liberal than the majority of their citizens. This result matches research done in the United States showing that the public is less conservative than public policy in relation to same sex marriages (Lax and Phillips 2012).

This first overview already highlights that measuring policy congruence only on the left-right scale over-estimates the level of agreement between citizens and elites. Further, it suggests that moving beyond absolute congruence values provides interesting insights that would otherwise be blurred. Most importantly, it reveals that on issues like redistribution, and European integration the congruence gap and its direction is large and systematic. Citizens are clearly more to the left on redistribution and much less pro-EU integration. With regard to redistribution and the EU, the direction of the representation gap corresponds to what we had expected based on a representation bias argument with wealthy and educated individuals being systematically better represented. But can these gaps really be related to the under-representation of some groups as we have postulated?

Figure 1: Multi-dimensional citizen-government congruence across countries and issues
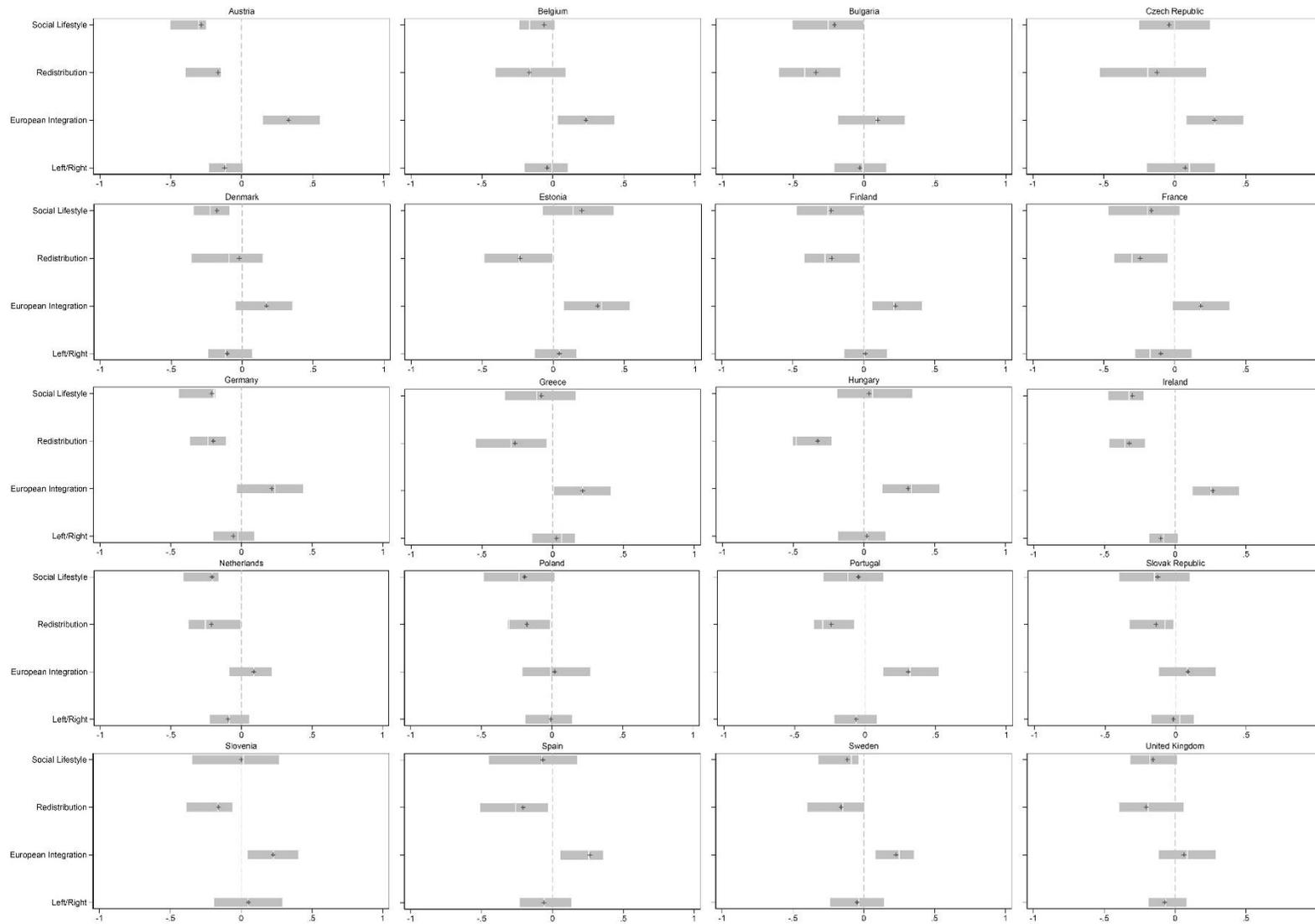
Notes: the boxes in the figures show the 25th and the 75th percentiles (limits of the box) of the preference distribution on four issues and the location of the median citizen (middle white line) as well as. The mean position of citizens is indicated with a black cross. The line running through the zero of the x-axis corresponds to the position of the government.

One way to approach this question is to disentangle the citizenry into different categories and analyse whether the opinions of privileged social groups are more closely reflected in the stances of governments than the preferences of other groups. To assess how congruence varies by income and education we estimated regression models for each country and issue predicting the mean policy congruence of rich and poor as well as highly and low-educated citizens.[7] Most importantly, we control for the distance of each citizen to the median voter on an issue. This reflects the notion that incongruences of certain societal groups are not problematic per se. If, for example, the views of low educated are more distant to what the median voter thinks than the views of the highly educated, a better representation of the latter's view might even be seen as normatively desirable. This becomes, however, a problem if we hold the distances to the median citizen constant and still representational biases prevail.

Furthermore, we also control for age, gender and political interest. Political interest, in particular, may have an impact on how precisely people will situate themselves on the different issue scales (Mayne and Hakhverdian 2016, de Vries and Giger 2014). In the models for different income groups we also control for education and vice versa (see Table A1). However, we do not include other explanatory variables such as government ideology or issue salience. To be sure, these variables are important, when we aim to explain the variance in congruence in an outcome-centered approach (Lax and Phillips 2012). As our factor-centered approach wants to estimate the representation gaps between different societal groups, however, we should only include as statistical controls those variables that may influence this relationship (George and Bennett 2005, 80). Of course, salience is an important variable when it comes to an overall assessment of incongruences. Normatively incongruences are the more disconcerting the more salient a specific policy area is in a particular country.

Figure 2 and 3 present the results. In figure 2 we discern the mean predicted congruence of poor people (hollow black circle), that are below the 20%-percentile of their countries' income distribution and rich people (filled dark-grey circle), that belong to the best-off 20%.[8] The lines around the circles give the 95 per cent confidence interval of the point estimate. The centre of the x-axis, marked by a dashed vertical line, gives the position of the government. Accordingly, both direction and degree of incongruence are again visually interpretable (see also Figure A3). To begin with, the differences in preferences between rich and poor are hardly surprising. Looking at left/right no pronounced difference in income groups emerges. To the contrary, on redistribution opinions differ considerably and in all but two countries the poor are more to the left of the rich.

On average, it also appears that governments reflect the preferences of the rich better. In the case of EU integration, income groups differ between each other in the opposite direction with the poor being on average to the right of the rich. In this case, it is again the opinions of richer citizens that are systematically better represented by the governments. Regarding the issue of same sex marriages, it seems to polarize to some extent across income groups with the poor being in general more conservative than the rich, but there is not clear pattern on whose preferences the governments reflect better. Totalled across all countries the difference in congruence between income groups is largest for redistribution.

In figure 3 we differentiate the mean predicted congruence of citizens based on their level of education (see also figure A4). We use an item of the ESS on the years of education of each individual as more detailed measures are not available across countries. We use again the 20% and 80%-percentile as cut-off points for

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[7] All analyses were conducted using weights provided by the ESS.
[8] Note, that the overall patterns of incongruence remain if we discern into below- and above-median income-category of the ESS.

discerning between low and high education. Totalled across all countries, differences in congruence by education-level are highest with regard to social lifestyle. Overall, the patterns of (mis)-representation due to educational differences are similar to those induced by income differences. Taken together, the results presented in figures 3 and 4 show that inequalities in the representation of income and educational groups might contribute to explaining the direction of the overall gap between the stances of the median citizen and the position of governments in a given country. However, they also make it clear, that systematic inequalities can only constitute a partial explanation for the high levels of incongruence found between governments and their citizens. Indeed, although the position of privileged groups is on average closer to the stances of governments, there is still a substantial gap: governments exhibit less redistributive and more pro-European stances than even their privileged citizens. A potential explanation for this pattern could be found in the fact that governments face a trade-off between representing their citizens acting responsibly (Mair 2009). Redistribution and European integration are precisely issues in which political elites are bound by economic factors or international agreements and might, for these reasons, take stances that are far away from the wishes of the public.

Figure 2: Multi-dimensional citizen-government separated by income
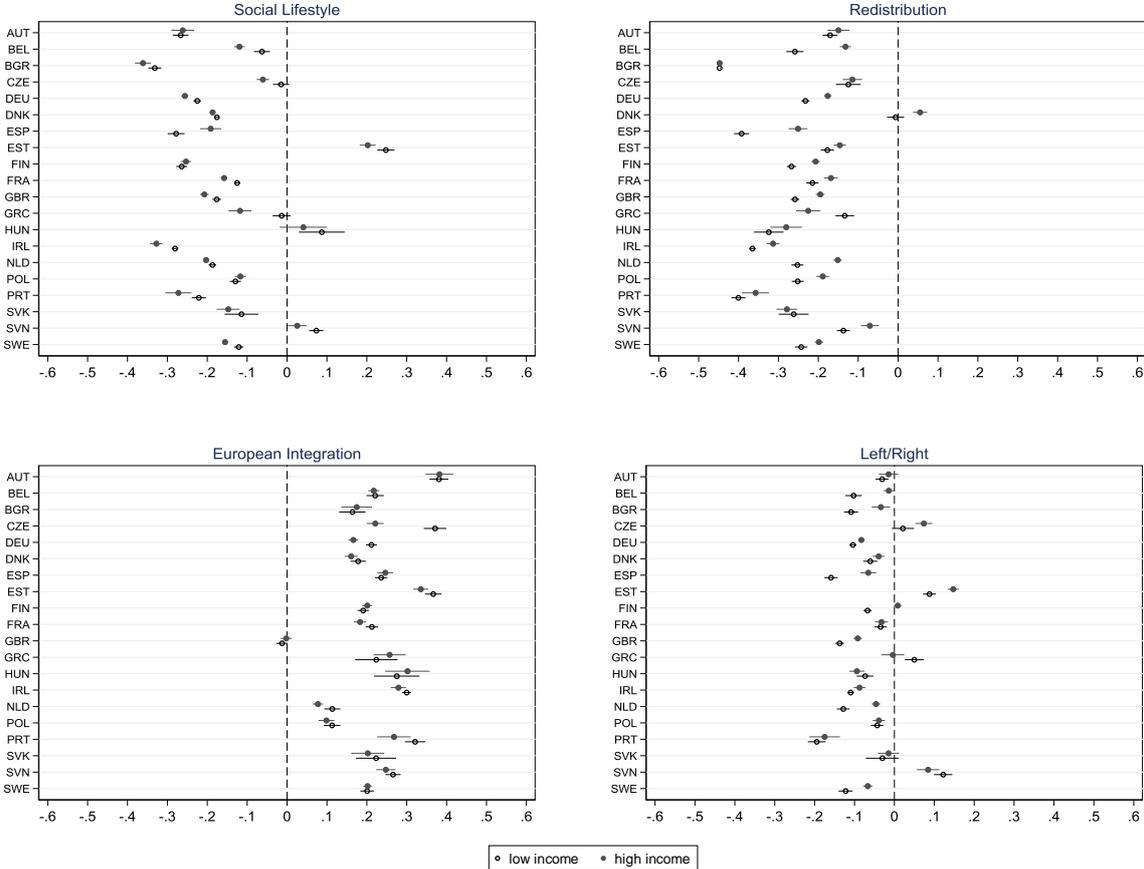
Notes: Figures show the mean predicted congruence between the government and citizens who are below the 20%-percentile of their countries' income distribution and rich people that belong to the best-off 20%. Predicted congruence values may theoretically vary between -1 and 1, we zoomed in on that scale in order to provide for a more informative perspective.

Figure 3: Multi-dimensional citizen-government separated by education
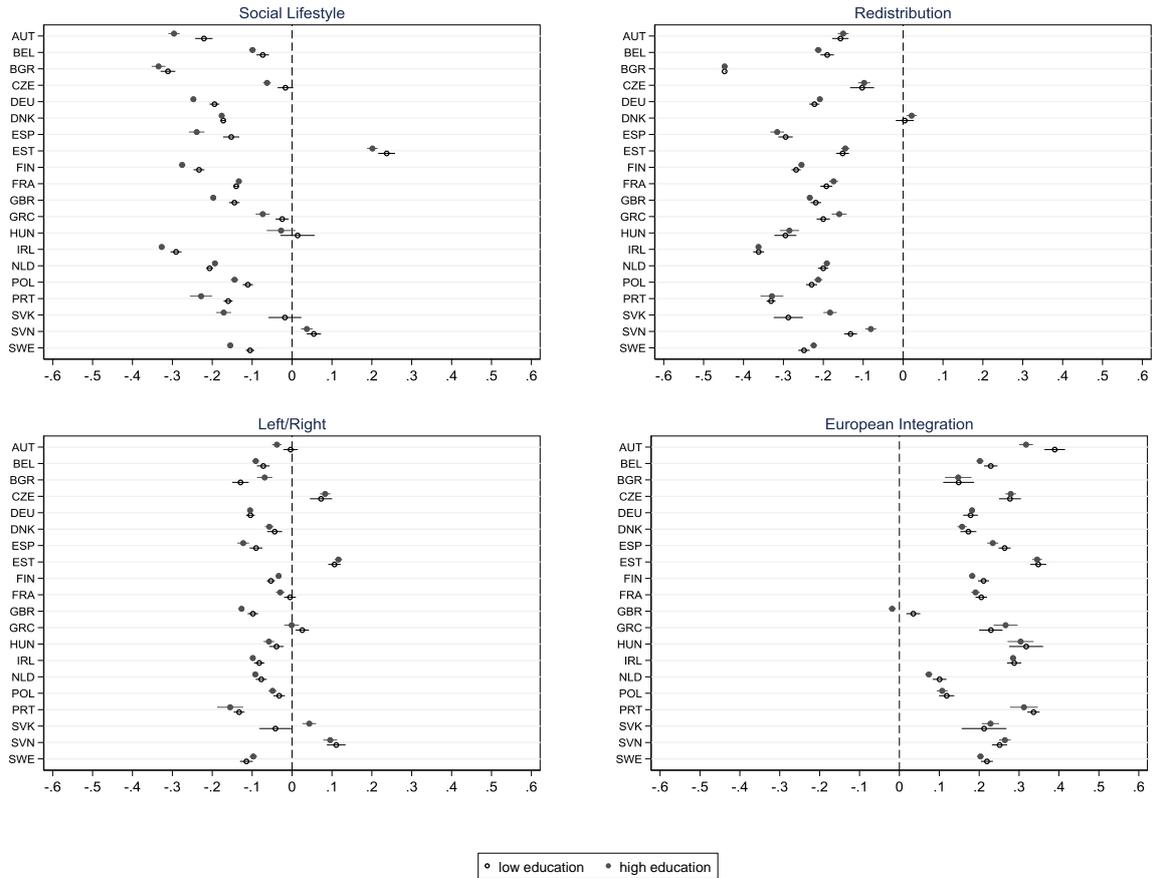
Notes: Figures show the mean predicted congruence between the government and citizens whose education is below the 20%-percentile of their countries' distribution and highly educated people that belong to the upper 20% in terms of education. Predicted congruence values may theoretically vary between -1 and 1, we zoomed in on that scale in order to provide for a more informative perspective.

Conclusion

Research on citizen-government congruence in a comparative perspective has mainly focused on the left-right ideological scale (see e.g. Powell 2000, Huber and Powell 1994, Blais and Bodet 2006, Golder and Stramski 2010). This focus, mainly due to the lack of available data on different policy domains, may be problematic in the context of a growing complexity of policy spaces in Europe where cultural issues have gained in importance in recent years (Kriesi et al. 2006). In particular, the use of an overall left-right scale might hide larger distances between citizens and government stances on specific policy domains as the public is likely to be to the left of governments on some issues and to the right of governments on some other issues. In relation to descriptive representation we would expect that governments tend to reflect the policy preferences of richer and more educated citizens better. While the economic differences would entail that governments hold more rightist stances on economic issues, the more educated political elites would be likely to hold more universalistic values on sociocultural issues.

Our analysis of European survey data clearly indicates the relevance of analysing policy congruence across various dimensions of political competition. In line with previous research, it shows that level of policy congruence tends to be overestimated when measured on a left-right scale as compared to specific issues. This might be due to the fact that, as our research demonstrates, citizens tend to be systematically to the left of governments on some issues and to the right of governments on some other issues. As a result when summarized into a single left-right scale these deviations might cancel each other out and the level of congruence on the ideological scale seems much higher than it actually is on specific issues. Drawing on the literature on representational inequalities of income and education groups and on research on the

determinants of policy preferences we were expecting that political elites displayed both economically less leftist views with regard to the state intervention in the economy and more progressive and universalistic views with regard to sociocultural issues. Our results only partially confirm these expectations. Citizens are indeed much more pro-redistribution (or "left") than are their governments and to some extent also less internationally oriented than governments as would the descriptive representation gaps in income and education suggest. However, our dichotomous view on the policy space needs to be further refined. Indeed, with regard to the policies that could broadly fall into the sociocultural umbrella, we were expecting that generally citizens will be more conservative than their governments. This is clearly the case for European integration, but less so on the topic of same sex marriages, an issue on which a majority of European publics are actually more liberal than their governments. There seem thus to be different dynamics explaining congruence on international or cosmopolitan issues and on morality issues. Our theory needs to be refined if it is to account for these differences.

Nevertheless, our findings are significant in several ways. First, they might point to the fact that despite high levels of ideological congruence, issue incongruence might explain citizens' dissatisfaction with representative democracy, especially at a time when citizens' preferences tend to be less and less ideological and citizens make up their mind issue by issue. In that sense, the study of issue congruence or policy congruence might be closer to citizens' sentiments than ideological congruence. Second, the fact that we find systematic differences in the way the majority of citizens are represented on redistribution echoes recent research on the link between socioeconomic and representational inequalities. Our findings confirms that some groups are systematically under-represented as some previous studies have shown, but it shows also that this under-representation is not uniform across all types of issues but particularly strong in relation to specific policy areas relevant to this group. Finally, our study might also show that political elites are not very good at explaining their stances to citizens and at least are not very successful persuading citizens on some issues and that more communication effort might be needed to raise citizens' acceptance of political decisions.

Appendix

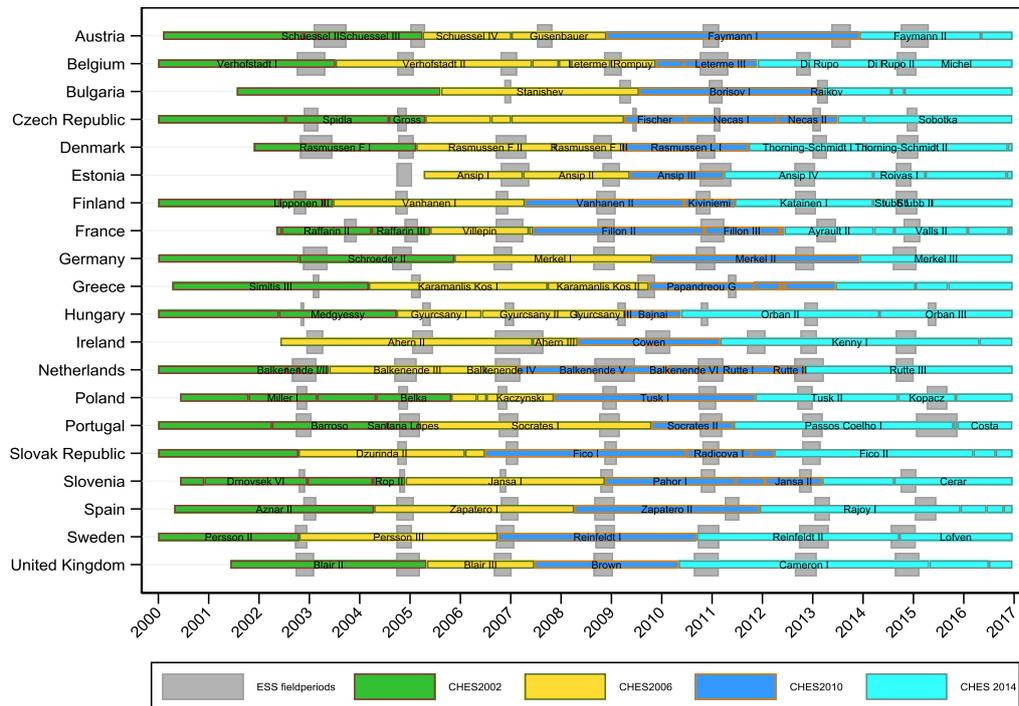## Figure A1: Matching cabinets to ESS and CHES

Figure A1 shows how we matched the information from the ESS and CHES to the different cabinets that were in place during the period of investigation. Coloured rectangles represent the duration of specific cabinets. All cabinets included in the analysis are labelled by the name of the prime minister. Different colours identify the specific CHES wave from which positions were attributed to the respective cabinet. Grey rectangles identify the duration of ESS field periods, that is, when the interviews were conducted.

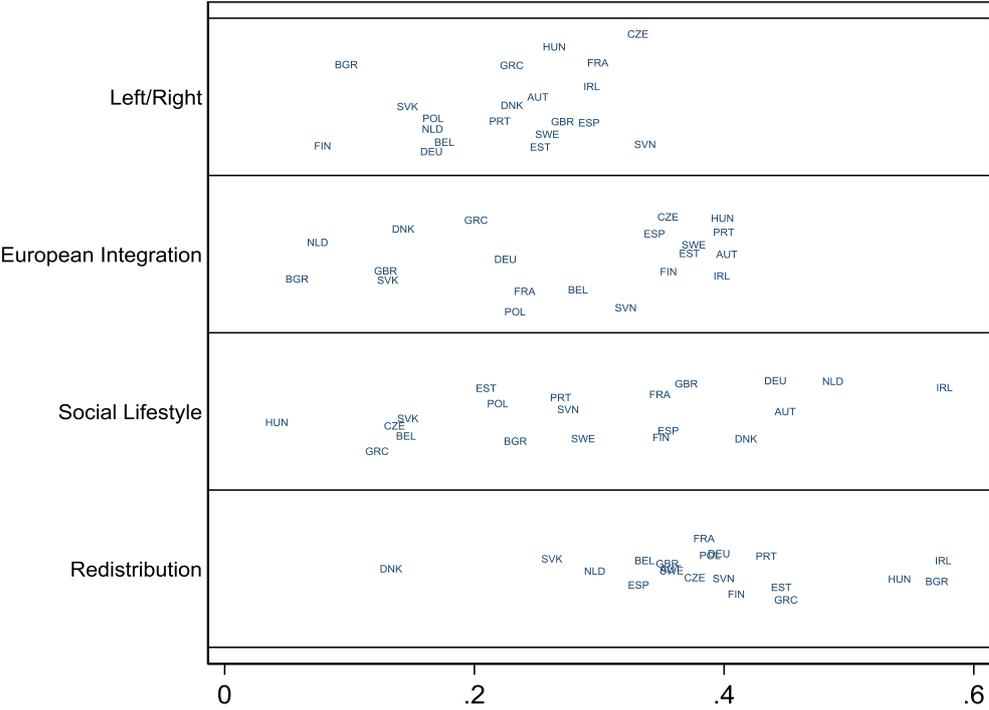**Figure A2: Relative Congruence scores by issue and country**

Figure A2 presents the average relative congruence scores for each of the 20 countries in the period of investigation. The scores have been calculated according to the formula put forward by Golder and Stramski (2010, 96). Scores may range between 0 and 1 with smaller values indicating higher congruence. Country labels indicate a country's congruence score. Vertical jittering has been introduced for presentational purpose.

Table A1: Predicting the mean level of congruence by societal group

	Model 1
Low income (lower 20%)	-0.11*** (0.011)
High income (upper 20%)	0.061*** (0.013)
Distance to Median	0.265*** (0.027)
Political Interest	0.036*** (0.005)
Gender (female)	-0.005 (0.009)
Age (standardized)	-0.005 (0.01)
Years of Education	0.004*** (0.001)
Constant	-0.33*** (0.023)
Observations	5995
Adjusted R^2	0.043

Table A1 presents an example for the regression models underlying Figure 2 and 3 in the main text. More specifically it presents the results for the issue of redistribution in relation to income in Spain. Altogether this includes 5995 Spanish respondents that participated in the ESS survey in the period of investigation. We ran these models for each country separately. The model estimates were then used to calculate the mean predicted congruence for people with low income (-0.38) and high income (-0.24) respectively. Regression tables for each country can be replicated using the replication data set.

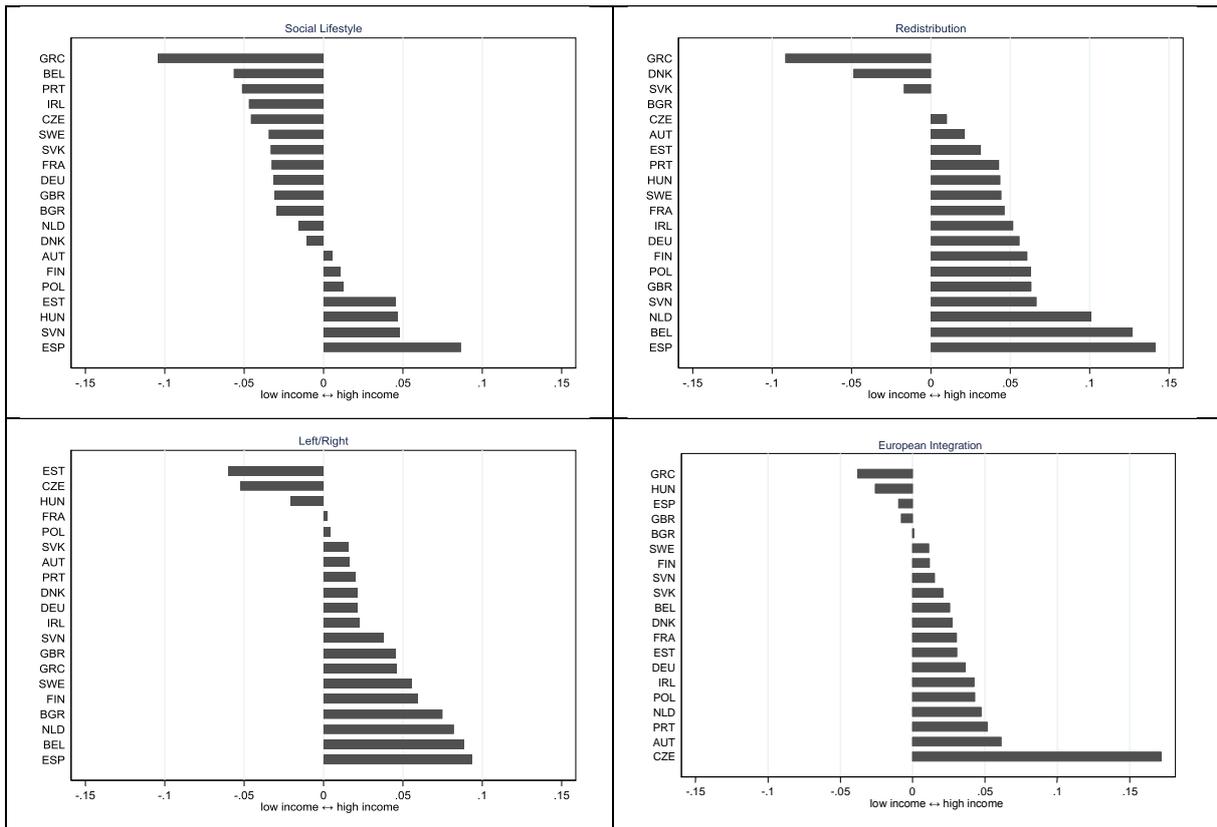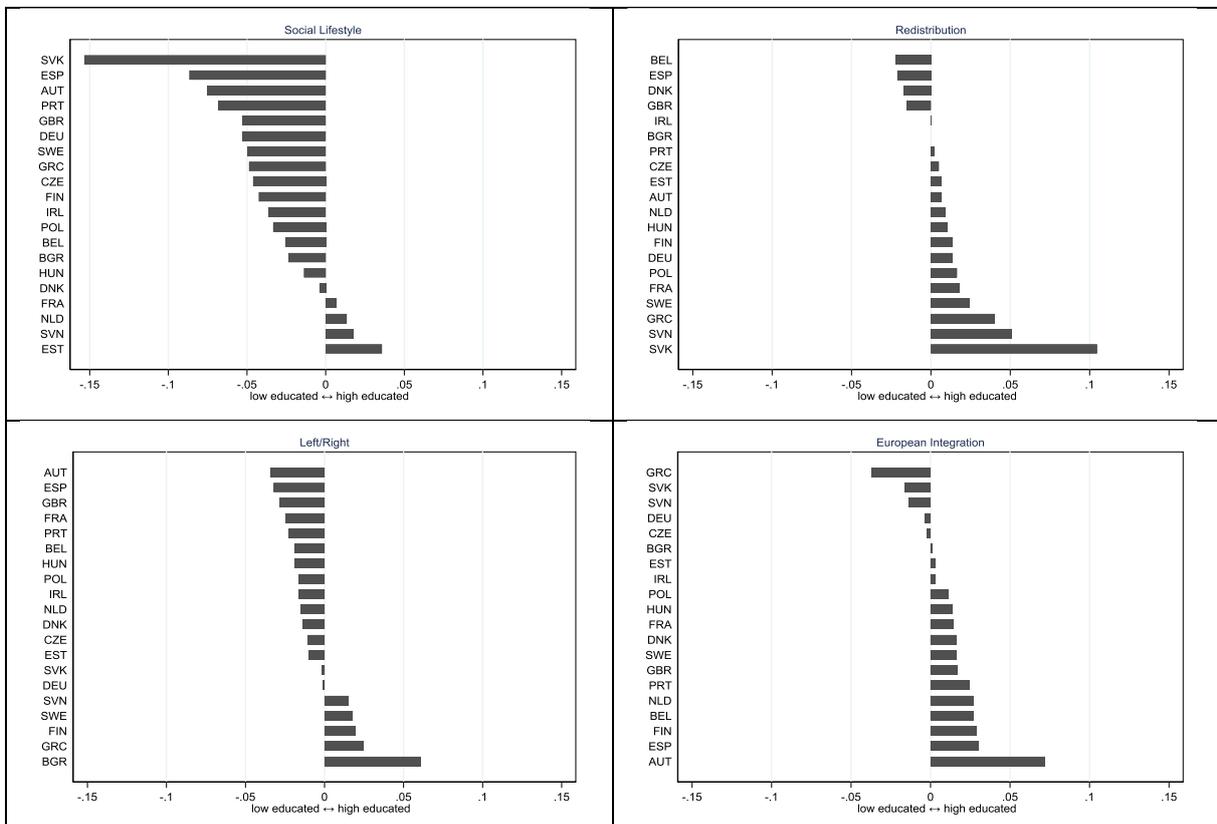**Figure A3: Rich vs. poor. Who is better represented?**

Figure A4: High education versus low education. Who is better represented?

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The Figures visualize the unequal representation of the population grouped by income and education for each country. For each issue we subtracted the absolute predicted congruence level of the group with high income/high education from the group with low income/low education and totalled these values across all issues. Accordingly, negative values indicate that the group with low income/low education is better represented than the group with high income and high education (and vice versa). As can be seen, well-off citizens are considerably better represented than poor citizens in the great majority of countries. We can observe the opposite, yet smaller effect for education.

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