# Representation Gaps in Europe: Causes and Consequences

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#### **Research Questions:**

- 1. To what extent do parliaments in Europe represent the policy attitudes of their voters? (substantive representation)
- 2. What are the causes for a lack of representation?
- 3. What are the consequences of a lack of representation?

#### **Relevance:**

- Key idea of representative democracies that the parliament represents the interests of the voters (Pitkin 1967)
- People might react to low representation: loose trust in democracy, protest voting, vote abstention, attacks on politicians, revolution...

I develop a framework for substantive representation

- 1. Attitude Congruence (AC): How similar are personal policy *attitudes* of MPs and voters?
- 2. **Representation Intention (RI):** Do MPs implement their own or voter's attitudes if they differ?
- 3. Decision Congruence (DC): How similar are policy decisions of MPs and voters?

 $DRG = (1 - RI) \cdot ARG =$  Low AC and low RI are sufficient and necessary for low DC

Remarks

- AC and DC are unconditional concepts
- Analysis is descriptive, not normative

### Data

Survey data: European Election Study and Comparative Candidate Survey

- Attitudes of 31.461 citizens from 28 European countries in 2009
- Attitudes of 169 MEPs in 28 countries in 2009
- Attitudes of 1.905 MPs in 15 countries in 2005-2013

Representativeness of MEPs Validation with CHES data

#### **Original Referendum data:**

- Switzerland (n=126; 1890-2021)
- Only referendums with a clear political direction on a narrow topic
- Votes and initiation decisions of citizens and MPs

# **Representation Intention**

MEPs were asked the following question:

How should, in your opinion, a member of European Parliament vote if his/her own opinion does not correspond with the opinion of her/his voters?

- Own opinion
- Voters Opinion
- $\rightarrow~72\%$  answer the question
- $\rightarrow~84\%$  respond with "Own opinion"

MPs were asked the following question:

An MP in a conflict between own opinion and the constituency voters should follow

- own opinion
- voters Opinion
- $\rightarrow~77\%$  answer the question
- $\rightarrow~69\%$  respond with "own opinion"

Heterogeneity by demographic group

# Attitude Congruence

Question format:

- Statement E.g. "Immigration to [Country] should be reduced significantly"
- MEPs or voters agree/disagree to various degrees

Estimation

 $Y_i = \alpha + \beta \cdot I(MEP)_i + \varepsilon_i$ 

- *Y<sub>i</sub>* is standardised (sd of citizens)
- Higher values of  $\beta$  mean position of MEPs is more right-wing (e.g. restrictive immigration, anti redistribution)
- Weighted s.t. I compare representative subsets of the European Parliament and voters of the 2009 EP election

#### Attitude Congruence ( $\beta$ 's) by Topic and Policy Dimension





#### Attitude Congruence by Country and Policy Dimension



RI is very low

On economic issues the AC is relatively small and varies by country

On EU-integration and cultural issues most MPs are more left-wing than most voters in most countries

- => Framework predicts that
  - decisions of MPs are more left-wing on cultural and EU-topics than most voters prefer
  - no clear prediction for economic issues

**Decision Congruence** 

For each referendum I know

- whether the initiative was right-wing or left-wing
- share of yes and no votes of MPs and voters
- $\rightarrow\,$  share of right-wing voters and MPs

DRG = share of right-wing MPs - share of right-wing voters

#### **Decision Representation Gaps by Policy Issue**



#### Validation of the Framework

Prediction of the framework:  $DRG = (1 - RI) \cdot ARG$ . From survey data: RI=0.8 Estimate  $DRG_i = \alpha + \beta \cdot ARG_i + \varepsilon_i$ 



 $eta{=}0.7985~(ppprox 0.028),~lphapprox 0.02~(ppprox 0.67).$  Smaller time window

- AC between MEPs and citizens here
- AC between voters, citizens, MEPs and national MPs [here]
- AC between voters, citizens: Cross-party heterogeneity here
- AC by demographic group here
- Perceived importance of issues (here)
- AC 2D-densities here
- Medians or share of right-wing stance instead of mean
- DC using party positions instead of MP positions here

**Causes of Representation Gaps** 

Idea: Voters substitute competence of a party for its spatial closeness to them

- $\rightarrow$  Parties with high valence can afford to be far away from voters
- $\rightarrow \mathsf{Predictions}$ 
  - Culturally left-wing parties are seen as relatively more competent
  - EU left-wing parties are seen as relatively more competent
  - On the economic dimension this difference is much smaller
  - RGs within each dimension are correlated with valence differences across countries

Subjects were asked what issue is most important Then asked which party is "best at dealing" with that issue

$$valence_{p} = \frac{\sum_{i \in R_{c}} \mathsf{I}[\mathsf{p} \text{ is best}]_{i,p}}{\sum_{p \in P_{c}} \sum_{i \in R_{c}} \mathsf{I}[\mathsf{p} \text{ is best}]_{i,p}}$$
$$VR_{c,d} = \left|\sum_{p \in PR_{c,d}} valence_{p,d}\right| - \left|\sum_{p \in PL_{c,d}} valence_{p,d}\right|$$

 $PR_{c.d}$  = parties to the right of the mean voter in country c on dimension d

#### Valence Advantage of the Political Right and ARG by country



#### Association between valence and ARG - Regression estimates

	Dependent variable: Right-wing ARG				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Valence Advantage Right	0.174***	0.173***	0.172***	0.174***	0.117***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.033)
Democracy Index		-0.017		0.061	0.089
		(0.046)		(0.180)	(0.168)
Control of Corruption			-0.008	-0.012	-0.017
			(0.016)	(0.069)	(0.064)
Constant	-0.055***	-0.036	-0.048**	-0.089	-0.153
	(0.014)	(0.054)	(0.021)	(0.154)	(0.144)
Other Controls				√	√
Dimension Dummies					$\checkmark$
Observations	78	78	78	78	78
R <sup>2</sup>	0.375	0.376	0.377	0.379	0.481

- Parliamentarians try to protect minorities here
- Parliamentarians represent citizens here
- Lobbyism here
- Causal effect of getting elected here

# Consequences of Representation Gaps

If representation gaps exist, citizens might

- believe that the parliament does not represent them/consider their concerns
- be dissatisfied with how democracy works
- loose trust in democratic institutions

If all major parties are biased in same direction, citizens might

• abstain from voting

$$bias_{i,d} = |$$
attitude index<sub>i,d</sub> - EP attitude index<sub>d</sub> $|$ 

d indexes policy dimensions i indexes voters

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_d \cdot bias_{i,d} + \theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

 $y_i$ : survey items for attitudes toward democracy  $\mathbf{X}_i$ : demographic control variables bias<sub>*i*,*d*</sub>  $\in$  [0, 1]  $y_i$  standardised (except voting) Association between Representation and Attitudes toward Democracy ( $\beta_d$ 's)



#### **Definition** based on the populist narrative (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017):

- Conflict between two homogeneous groups
- "The elite" and "the people"
- Populists save the people from the elite
- $\Rightarrow$  Populists could be anywhere in policy space

#### Estimation:

2014 and 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey: political experts assess salience of "anti-elite" rhetoric

I label parties who score more than 1 sd above the mean as populists => 50 populist parties, including the usual suspects

The Populist Narrative claims that populists are a reaction to representation gaps

If that's true we would expect that

- populists are more likely to perceive representation gaps than non-populists
- populists have a higher representation intention than non-populists
- ideological differences between populists and non-populists are larger on issues where representation gaps are larger
- populists hold attitudes close to that of voters

#### Assessment of Representation by Populist and Mainstream MPs



Percentage of those saying that an MP should vote according to his voters opinion:

14% of non-populist MEPs 50% of populist MEPs Fisher's exact test: p = 0.02436

28% of non-populist national MPs 69% of populist national MPs Fisher's exact test: p = 3.596e-16

# Mean Policy Attitudes of Voters, Populist MEPs and Non-Populist MEPs by Policy Dimension





#### Conclusions

Representation gaps help to understand distrust in democracy and populism

- Help to understand channels and features of populists
- Populism and distrust not only result from exceptional crises
- Only excluding populists from power might be dangerous as people might become violent to close representation gaps
- Established parties closing representation gaps might mitigate populism and generate trust in democracy (worked in Denmark)

Most politicians are policy-motivated. Evidence against standard probabilistic voting models

Candidate surveys can be used to measure substantive representation using the framework

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
#### Economics: mostly work on descriptive representation

Pande (2003); Abhijit and Pande (2007); Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004); Duflo (2012); Besley et al. (2020); Dal Bò et al. (2017, 2021)

# Political science: much on substantive representation. Value added:

- 1. More extensive
  - Most studies focus on 1 country and/or 1 point in time:

Schakel and Hakhverdian (2018); Andeweg (2012); Holmberg (2012); Lesschaeve (2021)

- I document cross-country and time variation
- 2. Real world evidence
  - Existing studies mostly rely on survey evidence
  - Low Attitude Congruence need not imply a lack of representation (AC $\neq$ DC)
  - Different interpretation of survey questions? Heckman et al. (2019)
  - I examine AC, RI and DC and relate them

## Representation Intention of National MPs by Demographic Group



## Attitude Congruence by topic: mean MEP position vs. mean voter position



Back to ARG robustness Back to other cause

## Attitude Congruence by topic: mean MEP position vs. mean voter position



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## Attitude Congruence by Topic: mean MEP Position vs. Mean Voter Position



Citizens National MPs Party heterogeneity

## Attitude Congruence by Topic and Policy Dimension



Group 
MEPs 
Voters

## Attitude Congruence by topic: mean MEP position vs. mean voter position



Group 🔵 MEPs 🔵 Voters 🔵 Citizens 🔵 MPs

# Attitude Congruence ( $\beta$ 's) by Topic and Policy Dimension





# 2D density map: MEPs and voters



# 2D density map: voters and party families



## Attitude Congruence for the three dimensions by country



# Word clouds of topics considered to be most important for voters and MEPs

Economic structure/policies/goals/conditions in general Division of power among brunches of government Climate Change Young People (policies aimed at, treatment) Technology and Infrastructure (modernization, development of industry, methods of transport, communication, research) National Political corruption (political parties, politicians, abuse of national funds, etc., including regulations and Effects of financial crisis on domestic/ EU/ global economy. Welfare State in general Democratic role of political parties Law and Order in general Ethnic Minorities Environment Political Corruption in general Environmental Protection Other topic related to elections Education in general National Education Policy National Immigration policy Creating Jobs (specifically) Wages and Earnings Immigration Health Care Pensions European Integration Taxes Social Justice Single Market/Common market National Way of Life (reference to patriotism/nationalism, support/opposition for established national ideas and/or valu Executive and Administrative Efficiency: Efficient government and administration Bankruptcy of business, companies, banks (specifically) Any other topic National Crime prevention policy(ies) Business (companies, banks, industry, mergers, manufacturing.) Debt (public debt of a state, a community etc.) Political Authority: Strong Government, Government Stability Economic Conditions

National Way of Life (reference to patriotism/nationalism, support/opposition for established national ideas and/or value Economic Planning (of long-term economic planning, create of such a plan by authorities.) Incentives (references to tax and wage policies, financial incentives to start enterprises or stimulate investment) National Political corruption (political parties, politicians, abuse of national funds, etc., including regulations and Business (companies, banks, industry, mergers, manufacturing,) Competences of the European Court of Justice (references to the powers of the European Court of Justice) Wages and Earnings Economic structure/policies/goals/conditions in general Freedom and Human Rights in general National Immigration policy Welfare State in general Immigration Climate Change Cyprus Issue Health Care European Integration Social Justice National Crime prevention policy(les) Unemployment & Culture in general Ethnic Minorities Law and Order in general Any other topic Economic Conditions Federalism, Devolution, Regional Autonomy Debt (public debt of a state, a community etc.) Political Corruption in general Creating Jobs (specifically) National employment policies Non-economic Demographic Groups in general Effects of financial crisis on domestic/ EU/ global economy Executive and Administrative Efficiency: Efficient government and administration.

(a) Voters

(b) MEPs

# Perceived Importance and ARG by Issue



# Perceived Importance and ARG by Dimension



# RI by demographic group of MP



# Densities of DRG by policy dimension



# Densities of DRG by policy dimension







### Validation of the Framework - Smaller Time Window



## Validation of the Framework - Larger Time Window



## Valence (weighted with ARG) and ARG by country



Selection of individuals with specific attitudes into parliaments or causal impact of entering parliament?

Compare attitudes of voters, MEPs, and MEP-candidates:

 $index_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot I(candidate)_i + \beta_2 \cdot I(elected)_i + \theta \cdot X_i + \varepsilon_i$ 

- Causality hypothesis predicts that  $\beta_2$  is large and highly significant,  $\beta_2$  and  $\theta$  to a lesser degree
- Selection hypothesis predicts that  $\beta_1$  and  $\theta$  are more relevant than  $\beta_2$

	Dependent variable: Economic Index						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
I(MEP-Candidate)	-0.003	-0.003	-0.007	-0.023***	-0.019**	-0.021**	
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	
I(MEP)	0.034	0.023	0.022	0.004	-0.010	-0.009	
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.021)	
Country Indicators		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	√	
Basic Demographics			$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Economic Characteristics				$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Education					$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Cultural Characteristics						$\checkmark$	
Observations	21,685	21,685	21,460	20,262	20,262	20,032	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.0002	0.052	0.058	0.089	0.118	0.122	

Note:

## Comparing cultural attitudes of Voters, MEPs and MEP-Candidates

	Dependent variable: Culture Index							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)		
I(MEP-Candidate)	-0.155*** (0.007)	-0.119*** (0.007)	-0.111*** (0.007)	-0.089*** (0.007)	-0.074*** (0.007)	-0.078*** (0.007)		
I(MEP)	0.005 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.019)	-0.012 (0.019)	-0.009 (0.021)	-0.017 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.020)		
Country Indicators		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$		
Basic Demographics			$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$		
Economic Characteristics				$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$		
Education					$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$		
Cultural Characteristics						$\checkmark$		
Observations	21,685	21,685	21,460	20,262	20,262	20,032		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.040	0.251	0.302	0.329	0.369	0.405		

Note:

	Dependent variable: EU-Unification						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
I(MEP-Candidate)	-0.051*** (0.010)	-0.085*** (0.009)	-0.076*** (0.010)	-0.050*** (0.010)	-0.034*** (0.011)	-0.034*** (0.011)	
I(MEP)	-0.076*** (0.026)	-0.059** (0.024)	-0.062** (0.024)	-0.035 (0.026)	-0.038 (0.026)	-0.042 (0.026)	
Country Indicators		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	~	
Basic Demographics			$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Economic Characteristics				$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Education					$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	
Cultural Characteristics						✓	
Observations	26,026	26,026	25,751	24,230	24,230	23,930	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.066	0.070	0.084	0.109	0.111	

Note:

Demographic controls make a difference

Candidate indicator more relevant than MEP indicator

 $\rightarrow$  points toward selection rather than a causal effect

But selection on demographic characteristics is not the whole story, half of the gap remains



Theoretical argument: small groups of people have

- strong attitudes on particular issues
- which differ from attitudes of the public
- many resources

Groups use these resources to buy or influence politicians

Big topic in US but in Europe stricter laws

Prediction:

• Those who are encouraged to run as an MP by lobbyists are more biased

	Dependent variable:						
	bias_econ		bias_cul		bias_eu		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
I[encouraged by lobbyist]	-0.054** (0.023)	-0.030 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.018)	-0.027 (0.026)	-0.020 (0.031)	
Country Indicators	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	√	
Basic Demographics		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
Economic Characteristics		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
Education		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
Cultural Characteristics		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	
Observations	1,244	1,132	1,244	1,132	1,312	1,193	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.132	0.408	0.130	0.493	0.220	0.386	

Note:

# Do MEPs try to Protect Minorities?



## ARG by Demographic Group





# Mean Policy Attitudes of Voters, Populist MEPs and Non-Populist MEPs by Policy Issue



# Correlation of elite-survey measure with CHES



# Representativeness of survey-participants - Gender



# Representativeness of survey-participants - Highest education



# Representativeness of survey-participants- Previous Occupation


## **Representativeness of survey-participants - Country of Election**



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