Concepts of congruence and European's evaluation of representation.  
A micro-level-analysis.

Mirjam Dageförde*

Abstract

The analysis of the relation between citizens and politics is mostly done from two different perspectives and disciplines: On the one hand, legislative scholars analyse legislative behaviour or evaluate representation in terms of responsiveness or congruence. On the other hand, public opinion research focuses on political trust or satisfaction with democracy for assessing the citizens' perspective. To a minor degree, both disciplines are combined: In the last decades, legislative research neglected the perspective of citizens, and public opinion research referred only rarely to theories that concern representation. This article investigates the interrelation of the most important concepts for evaluating representation with a subjective approach through (1) how citizens assess parliamentary representation in terms of perceived responsiveness and (2) explores how different forms of congruence impact on it. The analysis is drawn in a European comparison. Effects on the micro-level are investigated through applying a regression model. The results indicate that the distinct conceptualizations of congruence are not of equal importance for explaining citizens' representational judgments.

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1 Introduction

Recently, the concept of congruence is applied continuously as a means for evaluating representation, whereas the implicit assumption is: The higher the congruence between political actors and the electorate, the better representation works. The initial design of congruence was established by Miller and Stokes (1963) who measured policy-congruence between US-Congressmen and their constituencies. The design was adapted in a plethora of studies, mostly applying the left-right-scale instead of policy-positions. In the last decade the impact of electoral systems on congruence was the most relevant topic concerning congruence (e.g. (Budge and McDonald, 2007, Huber and Powell, 1994, Blais and Bodet, 2006, Powell, 2006, Golder and Stramski, 2010, Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012a, Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012b), whereas parties become more relevant instead of MPs. Moreover, the applied methods become more sophisticated. The most recognized article was published by Golder and Stramski (2010), who differentiate between a many-to-one relationship in contrast to many-to-many-relationship: Whereas the many-to-one-relationship relates the position of voters to one political actor, the many-to-many-relationship relates position of voters to those of congressmen or parties as a whole.

Despite of testing new models to explain congruence (Belchior, 2012) and the methodological advancements (Blais and Aarts, 2006, Golder and Stramski, 2010), there is lack of exploring the effect of congruence. Thus, I will remain to the underlying assumption of measures of congruence mentioned above and test the normative statement (the higher the congruence, the better representation works) empirically. In doing so, I relate congruence to the evaluation of representation made by the ultimate principal – the citizens. In the past few decades, students of legislatures and representation have generally neglected this very perspective (Leston-Bandeira, 2012) and factors of influence; recently, studies that integrate them re-enter the field (Bengtsson and Wass, 2010, Carman, 2006, Dageförde, 2013b, Saalfeld and Dobmeier, 2012).

The purpose of this article is based on the measures applied by Golder and Stramski. After testing the effects of congruence in terms of the many-to-many relation on citizens' evaluation of representation by relating the ideological positions of all parliamentary parties to the positions of the citizens on the aggregate level (Dageförde, 2013a), this paper attempts to test the effects of congruence on the individual level and explores micro-effects.

2 Evaluating representation: Ideological congruence on the micro-level and perceived responsiveness

For assessing the quality of representation – or in Pitkin's (1967) terms: whether the representational agents act in the interest of the represented and reflect their interests –
scholars developed diversified doctrines. Above all, they refer to the substance of representation and apply the concept of congruence or investigate responsiveness. For gaining information about congruence, the accordance between policy preferences or ideological orientations of citizens and political actors is examined (Miller and Stokes, 1963, Achen, 1978, Huber and Powell, 1994, Blais and Bodet, 2006, Powell, 2009, Kim et al., 2010, Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012b). Analyses of responsiveness explore to which extent parliaments consider the interests of the represented in terms of policy-outcomes (e.g.Eulau, 1977, Powell, 2004, Wlezien and Soroka, 2012).

The relevance of both approaches is uncontroversial: Whereas in democratic theory, congruence is only one “democratic virtue” (Huber and Powell 1994: 292) among others, in research on representation it is the “normal standard for judging the representativeness of a democratic system” (Dalton 2002: 217; for a critical discussion see Rohrschneider 2005: 851). Or, as Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012b: 87) assume: “ideological agreement, or lack thereof, provides a useful way to assess the quality of democratic representation-through-parties”. On the other hand, Dahl points out the importance of responsiveness by assuming that “a key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens” (Dahl 1971: 1). Although it is impossible to reach perfect responsiveness, he points out that a hypothetical system like this might serve as an ideal. The same occurs with regard to congruence (Andeweg, 2011).

The implicit assumption of both approaches is: The higher the congruence or responsiveness, the better the quality of representation.

The theoretically interrelation of these elements assumes a mechanism which proceeds as follows: Congruence in ideological terms means that the positions between citizens and political actors (in the European context: political parties) are similar. Hence, there is a general agreement between parties and voters with regard to their “ideas about how society should work” (Almond 1978). As a consequence, the parliamentary parties are supposed to act in the interest of the represented when it comes to deliberation and the process of policy-making. And if the interests of citizens’ are considered in the process of policy-making, responsiveness is given. Hence, higher congruence leads to better responsiveness (Powell, 2004, Whitefield, 2006, Lefkofridi et al., 2012). Thus, the assumption mention above has to be refined: Higher congruence leads to better responsiveness and by this to a better quality of (substantive) representation.

Especially in the European context, political parties became are more important representational agents than MPs and their links to a constituency. Considering Weissberg's (1978) notions that citizens' interests are not divided by geographical boundaries but
aggregated by interest groups or political parties, he emphasises the relevance of the latter: "The modern mechanisms to express different views on matters of national policy are political parties, not individual deputies. By focusing on the relationship between individual deputies and their districts, one tends to neglect a major element in modern representative democracy – that is, the overriding importance of political parties and interest groups." (Thomassen 1994: 242).

Yet, the most frequently discussed topic is the effect of electoral systems and party systems on congruence. The common attempt was to analyse party positions and ideological placements of the median voter in distinct electoral systems. In doing so, scholars related the positions of the electorate and political actors, be them MPs, government or political parties (Budge and McDonald, 2007, Huber and Powell, 1994, Golder and Stramski, 2010, Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012a). Above all, they investigated the effects of proportional and majoritarian electoral systems on congruence and hypothesized distinct effects (Huber and Powell, 1994, McDonald and Budge, 2005, Powell and Vanberg, 2000). However, on the contrary to earlier findings, recent studies prove that electoral systems have margin impact on congruence (Blais & Bordet 2006; Powell 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010).

Furthermore, the applied methods become more sophisticated and enable researchers to gain different information about congruence. In this context, scholars broaden the analytical perspective on congruence and differentiate between distinct measurements. As mentioned above, the common method for the analysis of congruence was to compare positions of parties or government with those of median voters. Recently scholars criticise this approach: The mere comparison of government or party positions and the position of the median citizen doesn’t consider the distribution of ideological orientations in an appropriate manner (see e.g. Blais and Bordet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010).

On the other side, subsequent research dealt with civic attitudes to parliaments, governments, parties, members of parties and politicians in general (Patterson et al., 1975, Patterson et al., 1992, Herrera et al., 1992, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002, Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995, Nye et al., 1997, Pharr and Putnam, 2000, Dalton, 2004, Dalton, 2006, Norris, 1999, Norris, 2011, Hobolt, 2012). In this context, scholars utilize political trust as an indicator for analysing nearness or distance between citizens and parliament or a political system e.g. (Saalfeld and Dobmeier, 2012) or investigate citizens’ satisfaction with democracy e.g. (Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014). But there is an ongoing discussion about the emergence of political trust (e.g. Hardin 2006). Beyond, scholars agree on the high complexity that the construct support for democracy entails; especially in new democracies (McAllister, 2008: 2; see also Norris, 1999). Hence, these indicators are not adequate for answering questions that occur when investigating topics concerning
representation and exploring citizens’ representational judgments (Rohrschneider 2005: 854). Considering that our knowledge about citizens’ representational judgments is comparably low, this article contains new conceptualizations and measures of ideological congruence between citizens and parties on the micro-level which is – until now – only done in detail for the aggregate level. In a second step, this article explores the impact of distinct conceptualizations of congruence on perceived parliamentary responsiveness. Thus, we gather in-depth knowledge on citizens’ evaluation of representation and how the main concepts for judging about the quality of representation can be applied (1) through considering the perspective of the European citizenry and (2) how they relate to each other.

2.1 Conceptualizing and measuring ideological congruence on the individual level

For analysing the quality of parliamentary representation, ideological agreement between political parties and citizens on the micro-level can be conceptualized distinctly. Whereas only recently, scholars integrate left-right distance into their explanatory models (Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014), the following concepts model distances between citizens and parties in different ways. On the one hand, they take into account the distribution of political parties on the left-right scale and refer it to each citizen’s position. On the other hand, they refer to the strength of political parties in each national’s assembly. Due to these distinct conceptualizations, measures of congruence between citizen i and parliamentary parties will lead to distinct results. Moreover, their correlation to perceived responsiveness might differ.

Above all, the analysis of congruence refers to a median position. Mostly, the median is usually used to identify the median position of citizens and is compared to the position of an MP or party positions and party competition, considering the electoral system. However, this article focuses on congruence between a citizen and political parties whereby the angle changes. For assessing the effects of congruence between citizens and parties on the individual level, the focus is on how to compare the positions of parliamentary political parties to the position of one citizen.

With reference to the most common model for analysing congruence, one can highlight the importance of the median position of parliamentary parties. Following this model, congruence is high if the ideological position of a citizen is near to the mean position of all parliamentary political parties.

\[
(1) \text{mean party position} - \text{congruence} = |(ci - \text{mean parliamentary parties})|
\]
Recently, there are new concepts for analysing congruence on the aggregate level. Here, scholars attempt to "overcome the median" (Blais and Bodet, 2006, Golder and Stramski, 2010). Similar criticism comes up with regard to the conceptualization of ideological agreement between citizens and parties on the micro-level: The mere reference to the median party position doesn’t take into account the distribution of political parties among the ideological scale. A two-party system with parties that are near to each other might bring up the same median as a multi-party system in which the political parties are distributed broadly over the ideological scale. Taking into account this criticism, the nearest-party-congruence depicts the distance between citizen i and the parliamentary party which is nearest to the citizens’ position.

\[
(2) \text{ nearest party – congruence} \\
= \min \ |(c_i - \text{party } i)|
\]

In this case, the degree of congruence increases with the nearness of citizen i to any parliamentary party.

However, when it comes to representation, not only the mere existence of a political party in parliament is important. Beyond, the strength of a party in parliament is another important aspect to consider if one aims to explore congruence. Golder and Stramski (2010) as well as (Andeweg, 2011) highlight the necessity to integrate the strength of parliamentary parties into the calculation of congruence at the aggregate level. Their aim is to investigate whether a legislature respond to the interests of citizens through analysing whether the distribution of ideological positions in the citizenry is in accordance with the strength of distinct parliamentary parties in the assembly. If one aims to explore the effects of ideological congruence between citizens and parties, the theoretical argument – and thus the operationalization – differs slightly. In this case, one doesn’t aim to investigate the mere reflection of ideological positions on the aggregate level, but how the nearness to a strong or to a weak political party impacts on citizens’ representational judgments. This argument enriches the pure analysis of the distance between a party and citizen I with a weighting component that depicts the parliamentary strength of the referring party. In this case, congruence increases with (a) the nearness of a citizen to a political party and (b) the strength of this party. In this case, lower values indicate as well higher levels of congruence.
(3) nearest party * strength – congruence

\[ \frac{1}{\min \{|c_{i} - party_{j}|\} \times strength_{party_{j}}} \]

Even though this article focuses on the micro-effects of the distinct forms of congruence on how citizen’s perceive parliamentary responsiveness, figure 1 illustrates the distinct conceptualizations of ideological congruence between citizens and parties in a hypothetical two-party system.

Obviously, the first conceptualization mean-party congruence accounts the less for the distances between a citizen and particular political party. As this measure compares a citizens’ ideological position with the position of the mean party placements as made by the citizens, the differences of congruence account less for the factual distribution of political parties along the left-right scale. For example, a wide distribution of parties on this scale might lead to the same median position if parties are placed near the middle of the left-right scale.

On the contrary, the nearest party-congruence depicts the distance between citizen i and the nearest political party. As a consequence, it accounts better for the distribution of political parties on the ideological scale. Finally, the nearest party * strength – congruence builds up on this idea. However, through considering the strength of a given parliamentary in the calculation, congruence is higher if (a) the distance between citizens and parties is high and (b) mediated by the seatshare of a parliamentary party. Thus, congruence increases not only with the nearness to a party, but also with its strength.
Figure 1: Concepts of party-voter agreement on the individual level

(1) median party-congruence

\[
\text{congruence}_i = \frac{1}{\text{median party position}}
\]

Source: own illustration

(2) nearest party-congruence

\[
\text{congruence}_i = \frac{1}{|\text{party x} - \text{citizen i}|}
\]

Source: own illustration

(3) nearest party * strength-congruence

\[
\text{congruence} = \frac{1}{(|\text{party x} - \text{citizen i}|)\times \text{seatshare party x}}
\]

Source: own illustration
2.2 **Distinct conceptualizations of congruence and their interrelation to perceived responsiveness**

The main assumption of ideological congruence – the higher the congruence, the better representation – leads to the hypothesis, that higher degrees of congruence relate to more positive judgments about parliamentary responsiveness. As illustrated above, the different forms of congruence vary in their specificity. Consequently, the assumed effects of ideological congruence between citizens and parties on perceived responsiveness might differ.

Congruence, referring to a median score, is one of the most common categories of reference in the analysis of ideological congruence. However, the consideration of psychological effects in the mind of citizens leads to assumption that this construct is of minor importance for citizens’ representational judgments. As illustrated in figure 1, there might be several parties which are near to the ideological position of citizen I, but at the same time, the distance to the median score for political parties might be far away. The median is a mathematical construct and thus probably not a main category of reference in the mind of an individual.

On the contrary to the median-party congruence, nearest-party congruence accounts for the nearness of a given citizen to any parliamentary party. Given the assumed interrelation between congruence and responsiveness, it can be assumed that this conceptualisation is of greater relevance for citizens’ judgments on parliamentary responsiveness. However, the positive effects of being near to a political party might enforce if this party has a large seat share in parliament and thus, comparatively much power. As a consequence, the party has greater opportunities to represent their positions in political debates but also in concrete decision-making.

Thus, nearest party-strength congruence might have more positive effects on perceived parliamentary responsiveness than nearest-party congruence. However, referring to the notion that the strength of a political party determines their ability to make ideas, thoughts and policy proposals heard in the parliament and that these parties might have much influence on policy-making (more or less, depending on the institutional setting), then the latter conceptualization of congruence will have a larger impact on perceived responsiveness than the nearest-party congruence and median-party congruence. Table 1 illustrates the assumed strength of correlation between distinct concepts of congruence on perceived responsiveness.
Table 1: Conceptualizations of congruence and assumed correlation to perceived responsiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept of congruence on the individual level</th>
<th>Assumed correlation to perceived parliamentary responsiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) median party position – citizen – congruence</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) nearest – party congruence</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) nearest-party * strength of party – congruence</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Data and Methods

The data is drawn from the European Election Study, 2009, CSES-data and an own dataset. As this article seeks to investigate ideological agreement and its effects on the micro-level, the approach of subjective congruence is chosen. Here, citizens place themselves on the ideological scale and place the parliamentary parties as well. Despite, the EES contains data on perceived parliamentary responsiveness.

Information on the strength of parliamentary parties is drawn from the CSES and from an own dataset based on official websites, mostly from the nations’ governments.

The individual data is driven from the European Election Study 2009. Here, the sample size for each country varies between 1.000 and 1.020. Citizens’ perceived responsiveness is gathered through using the following item wording:


Information on ideological positions of parties and citizens is captured by two questions:

- “In political matters people talk of “the left” and “the right”. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means “left” and 10 means “right”. Which number best describes your position?”
- “And about where would you place the following parties on this scale? How about the (Party X)? Which number from 0 to 10, where 0 means “left” and 10 means “right” best describes (Party X)?”

As this article investigates congruence as a many-to-many relation and considers the strength of political parties in each national parliament, additional data is needed.
Information on the seat-share of each parliamentary party is mostly gathered from CSES (containing seat-shares of political parties in the national parliament in 2009).¹

4 Descriptive results

The descriptive results indicate that most of the Europeans assess their national parliament as being responsive to citizens' interest.

Table 2: Perceived responsiveness of the national parliaments, European comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LU</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>992</td>
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<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CY</td>
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<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
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<td>IT</td>
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<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>966</td>
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<td>FR</td>
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<td>976</td>
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<td>PL</td>
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<td>BG</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>980</td>
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<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding: 5-point scale 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = strongly agree.

The comparison illustrates that Europeans' representational judgments about their national parliament differ a lot: On a 5-point scale “1” indicates that citizens strongly agree to the statement that the national parliament considers the concerns of citizens and “0” indicates that the respondents strongly disagree. The means vary between 0.74 and 0.25 among the European countries indicating that Europeans' representational judgments

¹ Information about seat- and vote-shares for countries that are not integrated in the CSES-data are gathered via official national websites.
differ considerably. Whereas the Luxembourgian citizenry judges mostly positive about the representational task of their national parliament, the majority of citizens of Latvia state that the parliament is not up to its task. Despite, the European citizens tend to evaluate their national parliaments more positive than negative, as the majority of mean score >0.5 indicates.

However, the results illustrate some patterns: Apparently, perceived parliamentary responsiveness is higher in West- and North-European countries than in some parts of Eastern Europe (except Greece). In most of the East-European countries, citizens tend to evaluate the task of national parliaments negatively. So, especially in Eastern Europe, the representative ideal of parliamentary representation doesn’t live up to its ideal.

5 Does congruence affect perceived responsiveness? An analysis of micro-effects.

Whether empirical investigation supports the interrelations between the distinct concepts of ideological congruence on the individual level and perceived responsiveness is depicted in table 3. Contrarily to the hypothesis, the mean party-congruence impacts most on perceived responsiveness, followed by nearest party-congruence and nearest-party*strength congruence. According to the hypotheses above, the latter should have the strongest impact on perceived responsiveness. But actually there are only two EU countries which show significant results for this category. Accordingly, the nearness to a strong political party doesn't have a strong impact on citizens’ evaluation of parliamentary representation. More important is the nearness to the mean party position. Here, the results show a large number of significant results, varying in their strength. In some cases, the effect goes into the other direction as assumed.
Table 3: OLS-Regression models of congruence on the individual level and perceived responsiveness, European comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>BUL</th>
<th>CYP</th>
<th>CZ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>b</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>β</td>
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<td>β</td>
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<td>constant</td>
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<td>0.551**</td>
<td>0.538**</td>
<td>0.565**</td>
<td>0.388**</td>
<td>0.708**</td>
<td>0.346**</td>
<td>0.574**</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.632**</td>
<td>0.400***</td>
<td>0.376***</td>
<td>0.596***</td>
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<td>mean party-congruence</td>
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<td>0.093**</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.079*</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td>0.013**</td>
<td>0.089**</td>
<td>0.012*</td>
<td>0.075*</td>
<td>0.015*</td>
<td>0.088*</td>
<td>0.020**</td>
<td>0.128***</td>
<td>0.041</td>
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<td>nearest party-congruence</td>
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<td>-0.076</td>
<td>0.034***</td>
<td>0.126***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nearest party*strength congruence</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.010**</td>
<td>0.005*</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.003*</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
<td>0.003*</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
<td>0.013**</td>
<td>0.019***</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<td>adj. R2</td>
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<td>0.003*</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
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<td>1001</td>
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<td>995</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|        | LV      | LIT      | LUX      | MAL      | NL      | PL      | PT      | RO      | SK      | SL      | ES      | SW      | UK      |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|        | b       | β       | b       | β       | b       | β       | B       | b       | β       | b       | β       | b       | β       | b       |
| constant| 0.188** | 0.205** | 0.748** | 0.575    | 0.667** | 0.332** | 0.582** | 0.404** | 0.419** | 0.480** | 0.627*** | 0.661** | 0.656*** | 0.000 |
| mean party-congruence | -0.020** | -0.129** | 0.022** | 0.093** | -0.017** | 0.063** | 0.020** | 0.164** | 0.020** | 0.126** | 0.013* | -0.087** | 0.923** | 0.121** |
| nearest party-congruence | 0.042** | 0.108** | 0.022** | 0.119** | 0.032** | 0.101** | 0.030** | 0.116** | 0.534* | 0.067* | 0.035* | 0.75* |
| nearest party*strength congruence | 0.000 | 0.017*** | 0.020*** | 0.004 | 0.026*** | 0.009** | 0.010** | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.020*** | 0.004 | 0.003 | 0.007* | 0.007* |
| adj. R2 | 0.017*** | 0.020*** | 0.004 | 0.026*** | 0.009** | 0.010** | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.020*** | 0.004 | 0.003 | 0.007* | 0.007* |
| N      | 983     | 973     | 996     | 921     | 995     | 960     | 982     | 945     | 995     | 992     | 994     | 1001    | 997     |

Levels of significance: *=p<0.05; **=p<0.01; ***=p<0.001; only significant results are listed.
Source: ESS, CSES, own database; 2009.
However, on the whole, empirical investigation shows that nearest-party congruence has an impact on citizens’ representational judgments, even if the effect is not exceptionally strong. For the case of nearest party congruence, the results show no strong effect neither. Moreover, the coefficients go into another direction as assumed. However, these results need to be interpreted carefully as the applied method for coping with missing values was to replace them by mean scores.

Beyond, the R squares depict that ideological congruence, considered as the most important concept for judging about representation, doesn’t correlate strongly with citizens’ representational judgments.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore citizens’ evaluation of representation and factors that influence their judgments. Thus, the concepts of congruence and responsiveness were introduced which are the main models for judging about representation. Following, the interrelation of these concepts was explained.

Arguing that we know extremely little about citizens’ evaluation of representation, the need for conceptualizing congruence between parties and citizens on the individual was highlighted. Subsequently, mean party-congruence, nearest party-congruence and nearest party*strength congruence were introduced for modelling the relation between citizens and parliamentary parties. It was hypothesised that the relevance of these models for perceived responsiveness increases with their specificity.

However, empirical investigation showed (1) that the judgment about parliamentary responsiveness differ considerably among the European citizenry and that (2) congruence doesn’t impact as much as assumed on these judgments. On the contrary to the hypotheses, the impact of distinct forms of congruence didn’t increase with the specificity of the measurement. Especially the median-congruence is more important than any other conceptualizations.

By now, the results lead to the assumption that one of the main models to test the quality of representation – ideological congruence between national parliaments and citizens – is not a relevant concept for explaining the citizens’ evaluation of representation. Each of the applied methods gave evidence for the (temporal) falsification of the hypothesis which states that higher congruence leads to better representation through the eyes of the citizenry.

However, the results might stimulate further explorations of the effects of congruence as a mix of micro- and macro-conceptualizations and to consider institutional settings. Beyond, this study
might draw attention to the fact that there is a wide research gap concerning the analysis of citizens’ evaluation of representation and factors that improve their judgement. Mostly, citizens’ attitudes are explained through considering individual and psychological factors. But there is little knowledge about citizens’ demands towards and their perceptions of political representation – be it substantive or procedural – which are important aspects for evaluating political representation in a subjective manner.
Literature


Data: EES, CSES, own dataset.