Political Representation Gaps and Populism

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Abstract

Populists are often defined as those who claim that they fill "political representation gaps" —differences between the policymaking by established parties and the "popular will." Research has largely neglected to what extent this claim is correct. I study descriptively whether representation gaps exist and their relationship with populism. To this end, I analyze the responses of citizens and parliamentarians from 27 European countries to identical survey policy questions, which I compile and verify to be indicative of voting in referendums. I find that policymaking represents the economic attitudes of citizens well. However, I document that the average parliamentarian is about 1SD more culturally liberal than the national mean voter. This cultural representation gap is systematic in four ways: i) it arises on nearly all cultural issues, ii) in nearly all countries, iii) nearly all established parties are more culturally liberal than the national mean voter, and iv) all major demographic groups tend to be more conservative than their parliamentarians. Moreover, I find that demographic differences between voters and parliamentarians or lack of political knowledge cannot fully account for representation gaps. Finally, I show that right-wing populists fill the cultural representation gap.

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JEL Classification: D72, D78, N44, P16

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1 Introduction

Across the globe, populist parties have recently increased their vote shares to unprecedented levels (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022; Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2023). Once in government, populists strongly impact economic policymaking and sometimes undermine democratic institutions (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2023; Bellodi, Morelli, and Vannoni, 2024). These observations have sparked a large and rapidly growing literature. However, there is still no consensus on 1) what the main explanation for the rise of populist parties is and 2) how non-populist "mainstream" parties can win back voters (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).

The paper at hand approaches these questions by studying the extent to which non-populist "mainstream" parties (do not) represent the political attitudes of citizens. I refer to such a lack of representation as a "political representation gap." Studying representation gaps is motivated by the fact that populists are often defined as politicians who claim that mainstream parties do not represent the policy attitudes of ordinary people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). At the same time, however, the economic literature on populism has paid little attention to political representation. For instance, a recent and comprehensive survey (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022) does not even include the term "representation."

This paper examines 1) whether representation gaps indeed exist and 2) whether populist parties fill them. While these investigations are purely descriptive, they improve our understanding of whether representation gaps could potentially drive the rise of populist parties. If representation gaps do not exist or populists do not fill them, they are unlikely to cause the rise of populist parties. In addition, empirical facts about the extent of representation can potentially help us to better understand other phenomena, like political distrust, and test theories of electoral competition.

Figure 1 visualizes one instance of my main result that, as I show, applies generally. The gray bars measure the opinion frequency of German adults on whether immigration opportunities should be facilitated or restricted. The same question was also posed to German parliamentarians at the same point in time, and I display the opinion of the mean parliamentarian of each major party via dots. In 2013, the majority of Germans demanded a restriction of immigration opportunities, while the average parliamentarian of each major party preferred to facilitate them. Under the assumption that the personal opinions of parliamentarians reflect the policy position offered by their parties, this hints at the existence of a large representation gap. Two years later, the refugee crisis took place, during which, as I show below, immigration became by far the most important issue in the eyes of voters. Moreover, the AfD became Germany's only right-wing populist party during that time, focusing, like many other populists, on immigration policy (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). After the refugee crisis in 2017, the AfD had established itself as another major party, closing the representation gap by offering anti-immigration policies. Hence, in this specific case, a representation gap indeed existed, and a right-wing populist party filled it. However, there are many policy issues, many countries, and many populist
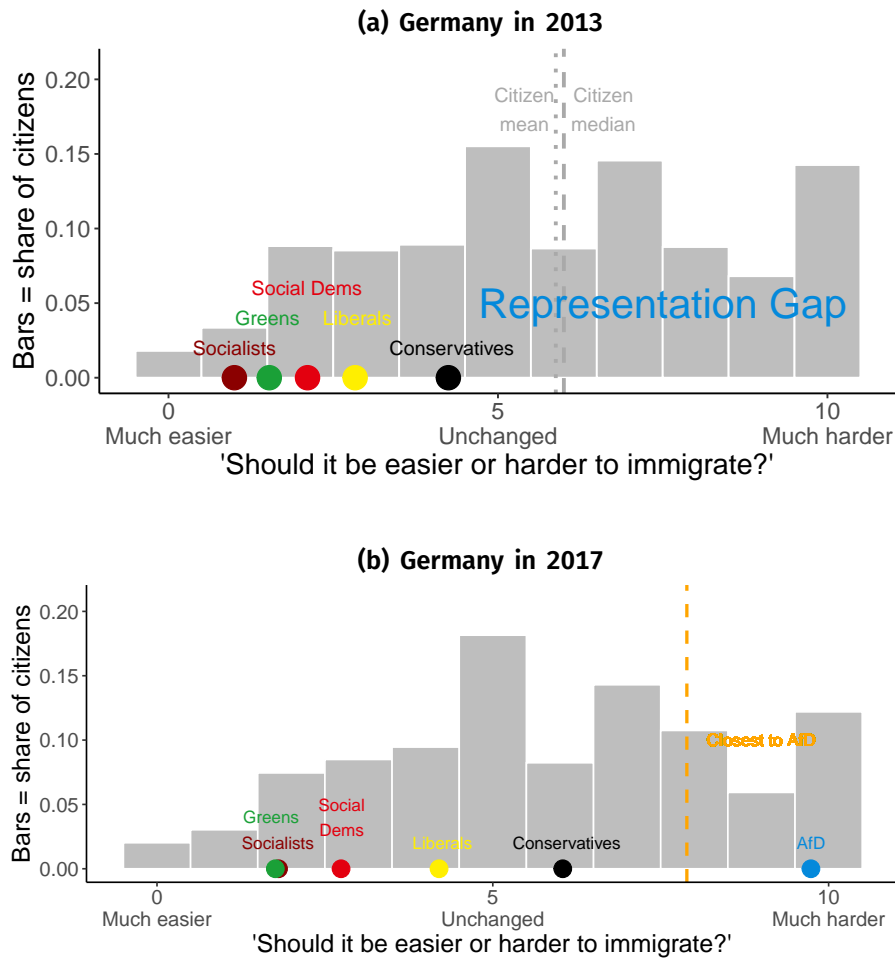
Figure 1. Immigration attitudes of citizens and the mean parliamentarian of major parties

Note: The figure shows attitudes regarding the question "Should immigration opportunities be facilitated or restricted?" Gray bars show the share of citizens (voting-age Germans, broadly representative of the adult population) who agree with the corresponding answer option. Answer options range from "0–Much easier to "10–Much harder." The dots show the mean response of elected parliamentarians of the corresponding party to the same question.

parties. The paper at hand shows that the existence of representation gaps generalizes across many dimensions and that representation gaps are systematic.

Methodologically, the key challenge to estimating representation gaps is to measure the positions of voters and politicians on the same scale. Most existing studies estimate positions from different types of data, like mass surveys for voters and manifestos for parties (Evans and Hall, 2019), such that the positions are measured on different scales (Andeweg, 2012; Laver, 2014; Louwerse and Andeweg, 2020). In contrast, I build on the most rigorous approach developed by political scientists and, as done above, compare the responses of voters and parliamentarians to *identical* policy items in anonymous surveys (Saiegh, 2009; Andeweg, 2012; Fisher and Herrick, 2013; Louwerse and Andeweg, 2020). Moreover, I perform several exercises to test the assumption that the responses of parliamentarians in such surveys are predictive of their behavior in parliament. By compiling

various surveys, I obtain two datasets. First, I compile an "EU-wide dataset" that contains responses regarding a wide range of political issues of 27,069 citizens and 994 parliamentarians (MPs) around 2009. The samples are representative of the underlying universes of citizens and voters of 27 European countries as well as 15 national European parliaments and the European parliament, respectively. I use this data to estimate representation gaps just before the rise of populist parties across Europe intensified (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022). Second, I compile a "temporal dataset" for Germany from 2009 to 2021, including the responses of 792 MPs and 61,907 citizens, to study representation gaps throughout the period when the populist AfD rose in Germany.

I estimate large, significant, and systematic representation gaps on cultural topics like immigration or gender issues. I illustrate the systematic nature of this cultural representation gap through five stylized facts.

(1) Voters are more culturally conservative than their MPs on nearly all cultural issues.

Representation gaps are larger on issues that voters and MPs find more important. Regarding an average of cultural issues, weighted with their perceived importance, the difference between the mean voter and the mean parliamentarian amounts to 1SD of EU-wide citizen attitudes. This is as large as the difference between the average conservative and communist MP. Regarding the cultural issues considered most important —punishment for criminals and immigration— voters and MPs disagree directionally.

(2) The cultural representation gap exists in nearly all of the countries analyzed.

(3) All demographic sub-groups analyzed tend to be more culturally conservative than their national parliament.

For instance, the average citizen, voter, party member, man, woman, educated, uneducated, rich, poor, old, and young person is more culturally conservative than the average MP of their country. In particular, immigrants are more conservative regarding immigration and assimilation than their MPs. The only analyzed group similarly liberal as elected MPs are *un*elected candidates for parliament.

(4) Demographic differences between MPs and citizens account for a third of the cultural representation gap.

Educational differences are the most relevant demographic characteristic for explaining representation gaps. However, MPs are still much more culturally liberal than citizens who have similar demographics, including education, and achieve a full score on a political knowledge quiz.

(5) Nearly all established European parties, including conservatives, are more culturally liberal than the overall national mean voter.

Economic representation gaps are much smaller, even though they are large in some countries. Moreover, they are much less systematic. Whether parliamentarians are more

left-wing or right-wing than voters strongly depends on the policy issue and the country. In most countries, there also exist established parties to the left and the right of the mean voter, and some demographic groups, for instance, the rich, are represented well.

I perform three main exercises to test the validity of inferring political representation gaps from survey data. First, I show that the largest representation gaps, arising on the issues perceived as most important, reflect disagreement about the *direction* in which policymaking should be changed. For instance, the average MP wants to facilitate immigration opportunities, while the average voter demands them to be more restrictive. This directional disagreement is hard to explain through survey biases such as differential item interpretations. Second, I also find representation gaps when *one* individual places voters *and* politicians on the same scale —such that differential interpretation cannot arise. I show that voters and politicians perceive the same representation gaps, which coincide with my estimates. Third, I use a hand-collected dataset on politicians' and ordinary citizens' voting and initiation decisions in Swiss referendums. Differences between (i) the voting behavior of "ordinary" citizens and (ii) the voting behavior of MPs and the vote options advocated for by parties and the government closely resemble representation gaps as estimated from survey data. Similarly, politicians and voters initiate referendums that seek to push policymaking in opposite directions in a way that is consistent with the survey-based estimates. Moreover, I conduct numerous robustness checks and validation exercises to address potential concerns about the representation gap measures. For example, my estimates are not driven by a few extreme voters, and they are larger when comparing medians instead of means.

I relate representation gaps to populism by studying the political supply and demand side. On the demand side, I show that citizens whose policy attitudes are less well-represented by their national parliaments are less likely to believe that their parliament considers their concerns and are less satisfied with the way democracy works, even after controlling for many demographic characteristics and policy attitudes. Regarding the supply side, I find that right-wing populists, who drive the rise of populism (Guriev, 2024), fill cultural representation gaps, even though they are economically more market-oriented than the electorate. In contrast, other groups of populists do not fill any representation gap. Citizens whose attitudes are less well-represented by established parties are more likely to vote for right-wing populists, but not other populists, also after controlling for demographics and policy attitudes.

Finally, an analysis of the "temporal dataset" reveals that, given the policy issue, representation gaps stayed constant during the last 14 years because neither the attitudes of citizens nor the policy positions of parties changed notably. However, the immigration issue, where the representation gap is particularly large, became more important in the eyes of voters, while topics with small representation gaps became perceived as less important. Hence, the large pre-existing immigration representation gap was "activated," notably during the 2015 refugee crisis. This evidence does not establish whether representation gaps played a role in causing the rise of populist parties. However, it suggests

that *if* they played a role, they did so not because of movement in the policy space but because issue-priorities changed.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses the related literature, Section 3 provides an overview of the data and Section 4 explains how I measure representation gaps. Section 5 documents the stylized facts of representation gaps and offers a speculative discussion on potential origins and welfare effects. Section 6 relates representation gaps to populism and Section 7 concludes.

2   Related Literature and Value Added

The paper at hand adds stylized facts to the literatures on representation and populism that have important implications for theory and welfare considerations. The paper contributes to the economic literature on representation by analyzing the representation of political attitudes instead of the numerical over- or under-representation of demographic groups in positions of power (Pande, 2003; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Banerjee and Pande, 2007; Beaman et al., 2009; Duflo, 2012; Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2015; Besley et al., 2017; Bó et al., 2017, 2023). Moreover, I study the association of numerical representation and the representation of policy attitudes. I find that the groups who are numerically over-represented in parliament have their attitudes well-represented only regarding economic topics. On cultural topics, numerically over-represented groups are not notably better represented regarding attitudes than numerically under-represented groups. This finding cautions against the idea that numerical representation is always strongly linked to the representation of policy attitudes. From a welfare perspective, it indicates that improving the representation of numerically underrepresented groups regarding attitudes might not always improve overall welfare since their attitudes might not be underrepresented.

The paper at hand contributes to the political science literature on representation by providing novel stylized facts and a particularly rigorous and extensive analysis. The current paper is especially extensive, partly due to much larger samples. Most similar papers focus on one particular country and rely on small samples of parliamentarians (Bühlmann, Widmer, and Schädel, 2010; Andeweg, 2012; Holmberg, 2012; Thomassen, 2012; Andreadis and Stavrakakis, 2017; Schakel and Hakhverdian, 2018; Bale et al., 2020; Costello et al., 2021; Hakhverdian and Schakel, 2022; Jaime-Castillo and Coller, 2022; Kübler and Schäfer, 2022; Lesschaeve, 2022). Many of these papers also concentrate on the same countries, such that we know very little about representation gaps in some parts of Europe. In contrast, I harmonize many surveys to obtain a large sample of elected national and European parliamentarians from many countries and add data on official party and government positions. Such a broad coverage is necessary to investigate whether representation gaps are a robust and general phenomenon. My data reveals that economic representation gaps differ more by country than previous analyses suggest. In particular, MPs are more right-wing than their voters in many Eastern European countries,

which have received little coverage so far. Regarding the cultural dimension, I find that representation gaps are much more general and systematic than earlier studies indicate.

The most similar studies in political science are those that use subsets of the data employed here (Costello, Thomassen, and Rosema, 2012; Vasilopoulou and Gattermann, 2013; Walczak and van der Brug, 2013b; Dalton, 2017). These studies compare voters to the parties they voted for and provide suggestive evidence that most parties are culturally more liberal than their *own* voters. I replicate these results but in the main analysis, I either consider the positions of all political parties from the perspective of voters or compare voters to their parliaments. The former exercise is important to understand vote choices, particularly voting for populists. The second exercise is relevant from a welfare perspective because the parliament as a whole enacts laws and serves as the main representative institution (Pitkin, 1967). In particular, voters might be well-represented by a minor party but if this party has a limited influence in the parliament actual policymaking might still differ strongly from their attitudes. Moreover, the descriptive statistics on representation gaps these papers present fall short of contemporary standards in economics. For instance, none of these papers examines whether representation gaps are statistically significant. They also make only a minimal effort to interpret their magnitudes and do not validate their survey-based data. A main reason for this is likely that these papers are not primarily interested in representation gaps per se but use them as a measure to examine other hypotheses. As a result, however, there is little clean evidence on the stylized facts of representation gaps.

Moreover, several stylized facts presented here are new, for instance, that nearly *all* established parties in Europe are more culturally liberal than the overall mean voter, that *all* main demographic groups are more culturally conservative than their parliaments, and that representation gaps are not just the result of superior education or a particular background of MPs, as often assumed (Kane and Patapan, 2012; Guriev, 2024). These new facts matter for theory and welfare considerations. Take as an example the fact that the cultural representation gap is not confined to a particular demographic group. Recent papers focus on unequal representation and study groups that are assumed to be particularly badly represented like economic and social outsiders (Bó et al., 2023), the losers of globalization (Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Kriesi et al., 2006; Berger, 2017), or those with left-authoritarian values (Van Der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009; Thomassen, 2012; Schakel and Hakhverdian, 2018). Consistent with these papers, I find that such groups are relatively badly represented. However, I also show that other major demographic groups are represented only slightly better. Moreover, attitude differences between the various demographic groups are dwarfed by the general representation gap between the average voter and parliamentarian. Hence, the key division is not between a particular demographic voter group and the rest of society but between voters and politicians in general. From a theoretical perspective, this insight informs us about the likely origins of representation gaps. If the attitudes of one particular voter group differ strongly from the attitudes of the majority and politicians alike, it makes sense to explain this lack of representation through special features of this group. In contrast, if all major demographic groups demand simi-

lar cultural policies that are much more conservative than politicians are ready to deliver, it appears more reasonable to think about how politicians are special. For instance, my result that party members are representative of voters while parliamentary candidates are already strongly biased suggests that it might be worth investigating selection within parties based on political attitudes.

The paper at hand also makes at least two major contributions to our understanding of populism. First, it helps to rationalize *why* some factors lead to voting for parties that are populist. While the recent literature has focused on empirically establishing that factors like trade exposure (Colantone and Stanig, 2018a, 2018b; Autor et al., 2020), economic insecurity (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2016; Algan et al., 2017; Fetzer, 2019; Gabriel, Klein, and Pessoa, 2023) and immigration (Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller, 2017; Harmon, 2018; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm, 2019; Hangartner et al., 2019; Tabellini, 2020) do increase the vote shares of populist parties, it is less well understood *why* they do so (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).

Representation gaps offer a potential explanation. Suppose that voters vote for parties close to them in policy space on issues that are relevant at the moment. The fact that mainstream parties produce representation gaps opens up policy space that challenger parties can fill. The rise of these challenger parties might then be due to the fact that, recently, issues became more relevant where representation gaps are relatively large, particularly cultural issues. This is consistent with recent evidence that increased relevance of cultural topics makes cultural attitudes stronger drivers of policy views (Bonomi, Gennaioli, and Tabellini, 2021) and changes in voters' issue priorities are the main drivers behind the rise of the populist right (Danieli et al., 2022). Moreover, my results might explain why these challenger parties are populist, i.e., why they see the "pure people" in a struggle with the "corrupt elite" and are usually culturally conservative (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). The claim that the "corrupt elite" does not represent the "pure people" can be interpreted as a pointed description of representation gaps. Since they are aware of their existence, it seems reasonable for challenger parties to fill representation gaps in order to attract voters. Because it is culturally conservative attitudes that are not represented, challenger parties also have to be culturally conservative to fill representation gaps. Hence, the comprehensive approach taken by the paper at hand —jointly analyzing the demand and supply— helps to understand how various features of populists hang together. In doing so, it complements theoretical insights from Bellodi et al. (2023).

Second, my results suggest a simple but rarely investigated explanation for why many voters choose right-wing populists. Many models explain populist voting with biases or frictions in the electoral process like lobbyism (Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin, 2013), betrayal aversion (Tella and Rotemberg, 2018), short-shortsightedness (Guiso et al., 2017; Bernhardt, Krasa, and Shadmehr, 2022) or simplistic thinking (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990; Levy, Razin, and Young, 2022). In many of these models, voting for populists does not maximize the voters' utility but constitutes some form of error. While my findings do not imply that such factors are irrelevant, they suggest that much simpler spatial voting models without biases or frictions can already account for populist voting. From the

perspective of culturally conservative voters who consider cultural topics important, right-wing populists offer by far the most attractive policy bundle. This advantage over other parties might outweigh their lower competence of populists (Bó et al., 2023; Bellodi, Morelli, and Vannoni, 2024) and their worse output in terms of economic growth (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2023).

3   Data

The main analysis builds on comparable surveys among parliamentarians (MPs) and voters that contain identical policy statements. Such surveys are seen as a valid but underutilized measure of policy positions by political scientists (Laver, 2014).

3.1   Where Do the Surveys Come From?

Parliamentarian survey data come from i) the European Candidate Study 2009 (Weßels, 2013) and wave one of the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS, 2016) and ii) the German Longitudinal Election Study candidate studies (GLES, Candidate Study 2009; Candidate Study 2013; Candidate Study 2017; Candidate Study 2021). These datasets contain many sub-surveys that were conducted by experienced local institutions. The European Candidate Study 2009 was fielded to nearly all candidates for the 2009 *European* Parliament, while the Comparative Candidate Survey was fielded to nearly all candidates to *national* parliaments for all elections between 2005 and 2013 in 19 European countries. This data enables comparable cross-country analyses around 2009. The German Longitudinal Election Study candidate studies were fielded to nearly all candidates to the German federal parliament in 2009, 2013, 2017 and 2021 which enables temporal analyses. All responses were elicited anonymously several months after the election and the data include information on whether candidates were elected.

Data on voter attitudes come from i) the European Voter Study 2009 (Egmond et al., 2017) which was conducted alongside the European Candidate Study 2009 and designed to match it as closely as possible and ii) the German Longitudinal Election Study voter studies (GLES, Post-election Voter Study 2009; Post-election Voter Study 2013; Post-election Voter Study 2017; Cumulation 2009-2023; Post-election Voter Study 2021). The authors of the European Voter Study 2009 sampled from the general adult population of each EU member state in 2009 using random dialing techniques. This resulted in a sample of roughly 1,000 citizens for each of the 27 EU countries. I match this data to the European Candidate Study 2009 and the Comparative Candidate Survey to generate a "cross-country" dataset of parliamentarians and voters that covers 26 European countries around 2009.

The German Longitudinal Election Study voter studies (2009-2021) were conducted alongside the corresponding candidate studies and include responses of between 1,900 and 3,400 citizens, representative of the adult German population. In addition, GLES

([Cumulation 2009-2023](#)) contains responses from 52,341 German citizens from 48 surveys based on representative samples between 2009 and 2023. I match these German voter and candidate studies to generate a second "temporal" dataset that contains comparable responses of voters and MPs from 2009 to 2021.

3.2   How Comparable Are the Items across Surveys?

Regarding the cross-country dataset, the European Candidate Study 2009 and the European Voter Study 2009 have 14 policy attitude items in common. Subjects were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with statements like "Immigration to [Country] should be reduced significantly." Items refer to a diverse set of policy issues such as redistribution, state-intervention or gender relations. Table I.1 provides details. Of these 14 items, seven overlap precisely with items given to national MPs, six of the 14 items are not included in the national MP survey and there is one borderline case: voters and members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days.

National MPs responded to a slightly different assertion:

People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.

In the analysis, I include both items and treat them as identical, because, as I show, the difference in formulation creates a bias that works against my finding. Hence, the responses of citizens and MEPs can be compared using 14 items while comparisons with national MPs are limited to eight items.

Regarding the temporal dataset, all survey items I use to compare voters and MPs are identical. I use three items that were asked in more than one candidate and voter survey. As for the cross-country dataset, policy items refer to specific issues —social services, immigration, and climate change. Table I.2 provides details.

3.3   Exclusion Criteria

I exclude observations from my analyses because of missing responses and failed quality checks. As recommended by the authors of the European Candidate Study, I exclude respondents who fail a reliability criterion (Weßels, 2013). Regarding missing observations, the two most important cases are a lack of information on which candidates were elected and a lack of data on some variables when calculating indexes. I exclude data on all sub-surveys where information on which parliamentary candidates were elected is missing. When calculating indexes based on individual policy items, I exclude all observations that do not include responses to each item contained in the corresponding index.

3.4 The Final Datasets

The final cross-country dataset includes information on 24,827 voters and 994 elected parliamentarians. The comparison between these two groups is at the center of this paper. Moreover, the dataset includes information on over 2,000 non-voting citizens and nearly 7,000 non-elected candidates for parliament, which I use in some exercises.

As Table I.3 in the appendix shows, the data includes responses of MEPs and voters for 26 countries but the numbers of elected MEPs are often low. In addition, the dataset includes data on national MPs for eight countries. While MEP and voter responses were elicited at the same time, some MP responses were elicited earlier or later. However, most temporal differences are small and not systematic. Hence, the cross-country dataset provides a snapshot of European policy spaces around 2009 before the rise of populism intensified (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).

The final temporal dataset includes responses from 198 (2009), 232 (2013), 186 (2017), and 176 (2021) national MPs and 2,115 (2009), 1,908 (2013), 2,112 (2017), and 3,431 (2021) citizens, elicited after the corresponding national election. In addition, it includes responses from 52,341 citizens in between these points in time and up to 2023. Hence, it provides information on the temporal evolution of representation gaps during the rise of right-wing populism in Germany.

3.5 Survey Data Validity

Surveys are a valid source of information only if they are well-designed (Stantcheva, 2023). This subsection addresses corresponding concerns.

3.5.1 Representativeness of the Parliamentarian Sample. The response rates of the parliamentarian surveys vary between 16% and 48%, which raises justified doubts about the samples' representativeness. In contrast to this fear, numerous studies find no representational bias, for instance regarding political ideology, in surveys with often even lower response rates (Smith, Herrera, and Herrera, 1990; Saiegh, 2009; Fisher and Herrick, 2013; Byrne and Theakston, 2016; Lupu and Warner, 2022). In addition, Section B.1 checks the representativeness of the MEP sample, where the response rate is relatively low (about 18%), and finds that the sample is representative regarding many dimensions, in particular, party-group affiliation. Moreover, Section B.3 shows that inferred behavior based on survey samples is highly predictive of real-world behavior of the corresponding universe.

3.5.2 Survey-specific Concerns. Three other reasonable concerns are that parliamentarians strategically misreport their attitudes, that they report their party's position and that their responses are not related to their decisions. First, parliamentarians have no incentive to misreport because responses are anonymous. Second, they were asked explicitly

for their personal attitudes, which was sometimes contrasted in the surveys with questions about their party's positions. Third, previous research has found that responses in parliamentarian surveys are strongly related to roll-call-voting (Saiegh, 2009).

In addition, I perform two corresponding validation exercises. First, I validate the parliamentarian data with the two most established datasources for party positions, the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Polk et al., 2017; Jolly et al., 2022) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al., Manifesto Project Dataset). Neither of these datasources estimates party positions on the same scale as citizen surveys, making it difficult to measure representation gaps. However, it is possible to compare party-level estimates based on these datsources to party-level estimates based on MP survey data. Section B.2 shows that measures for party positions based on MP survey data correlate highly and significantly with both other measures. This indicates that survey responses of MPs are related to the *behavior* of their parties.

Second, I add a dataset on the initiation- and voting decisions in referendums by parliamentarians, parties, the government, the media, and voters. Because Switzerland is the only European country with a sufficiently large number of referendums, I build the dataset based on Swissvotes (Swissvotes, 2024). Swissvotes is the primary data source for referendums in Switzerland and contains information on all referendums since 1884, including the vote shares by the general population and parliamentarians as well as official recommendations by parties and the government and a measure for media tone.

Referendums are ideal for estimating representation gaps because i) voters and MPs are confronted with the same well-defined issue, which enables comparability, and ii) decisions in referendums have real consequences. However, to estimate representation gaps in a way that mirrors the survey-based estimates, referendums have to be matched to the issues contained in the surveys and it must be clear whether a yes vote indicates a right-wing or left-wing decision. Because Swissvotes does not provide this information I classify referendums by hand and add a left-right indicator.

The resulting referendum dataset contains information on 82 referendums between 1970 and 2024. Section B.3 compares estimates of representation gaps based on this dataset to survey-based estimates using data on Swiss national MPs from the Comparative Candidate Study and a representative sample of 4,392 Swiss voters from the Swiss Electoral Studies 2007 (Selects, 2009). Reassuringly, Section B.3 finds that survey-based estimates of representation gaps are very similar to those based on referendums. Moreover, voters are more likely to initiate referendums on a right-wing policy change than MPs on exactly the topics where they are more likely to hold right-wing attitudes, according to the survey data.

Furthermore, Section B.3 shows that gaps between voters and parliamentarians closely resemble gaps between voters and parties while representation gaps between voters and the government are larger. This suggests that the survey-based estimates in the main part of the paper are indicative of representation gaps between voters and the political elite in general.

3.6 Auxiliary Data

I use two other data sources. First, I rely on the frequently used PopuList (Rooduijn et al., 2023a) to classify parties as populist or mainstream. Second, I use the 2014 version of the European Parliament Election Voter Study (Schmitt et al., 2016) to estimate the EU-wide growth of representation gaps.

4 Measuring Political Representation Gaps

4.1 Measuring Policy Positions of Parliamentarians and Voters

By representation gaps, I refer to the congruence between the *decisions* of parliamentarians and the policy attitudes of voters. In contrast, similar studies compare *attitudes* of parliamentarians to attitudes of voters. A key concern is that MPs decide not based on their own attitudes but on voters' attitudes. If this was the case, representation gaps could be small despite large attitude differences. Hence, credible survey-based measures of representation gaps need to integrate information on whether parliamentarians decide based on their own or their voters' attitudes. To this end, I use an item that asks parliamentarians generally how an MP should decide if his own attitudes would conflict with those of their voters. Appendix C provides a detailed analysis of the responses. To summarize, about 84% of MEPs and 81% of national MPs state that the parliamentarian should decide based on his own attitudes. More experienced and more senior MPs are particularly likely to hold this view.

To estimate the behavior of parliamentarians, I assume that those who prioritize their own attitude, decide based on it while those who prioritize their voters' attitudes, decide based on their voters' mean attitude. Formally, let $\overline{a}_{d,p}$ be the mean attitude of the voters of party p on topic t and $r_i \in \{\text{Policy motivated}, \text{Representation motivated}\}$ indicate whether MP i bases his behavior on his own attitudes or on the attitudes of his voters. Because parliamentarians are only asked generally whether an MP should follow his voters, they are either representation motivated on all topics or on no topic. I define i's behavior $b_{i,t}$ as

$$b_{i,t} = \begin{cases} a_{i,t} & \text{if } r_i = \text{Policy motivated} \\ \overline{a}_{t,p|i \in p} & \text{if } r_i = \text{Representation motivated}. \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

To measure the corresponding attitudes of voters, I directly use their survey responses. In this paper, all estimates of representation gaps are comparisons between the behaviors ($b_{i,t}$) of parliamentarians and the attitudes ($a_{i,t}$) of citizens/voters. When I use the term "policy position," it refers to the attitudes of voters and the behaviors of politicians. By construction, differences between the estimated behavior of MPs and attitudes of citizens (representation gaps) are smaller than attitude differences between the two groups.

One might wonder whether parliamentarians prioritize the party line over their own attitude and those of their voters. Parliamentarians were also asked what a parliamentarian should do when his attitudes differed from the position of his party. About 81%

of MEPs and 69% of national MPs state that the parliamentarian should vote according to his own attitude. Integrating this information into the estimates of MP positions does not change results notably, but I favor the estimate from Equation 1. The aggregation of MPs, which the analysis will rely on, is likely close to the party position anyway. In fact, party positions are often estimated as the average attitude of MPs (Thomassen, 2012; Walczak and Brug, 2013a). Thus, explicitly incorporating this information is likely to be redundant. Moreover, Section B.2 shows that party positions calculated as the average $b_{i,t}$ of parliamentarians from a party are strongly correlated with established party-level measures. Hence, including information on the party vs. self trade-off would unnecessarily complicate Equation 1, and it might not be applicable for other datasets that lack this additional piece of information.

4.2 Measures of Representation Gaps

Representation gaps refer to *differences* between the policy positions of parliamentarians and voters. Depending on the specific purpose, I use three measures of representation gaps, building on the attitudes of voters and the behaviors of MPs ($b_{i,t}$).

First, to estimate representation gaps between parliaments and voters overall, I calculate variables labeled $Y_{i,t}$, where i indexes individuals and t indexes political topics. $Y_{i,t}$ equals the attitude of i if i is a voter and his estimated behavior ($b_{i,t}$) if he is an MP. Then, I estimate the following equations by OLS:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha_t + \beta_t \cdot \mathbb{1}[\text{Parl.}]_i + \varepsilon_{i,t}. \tag{2}$$

My estimate for the representation gap on topic t is β_t. Using regressions has the advantage that I can control for additional variables, like demographic characteristics, as I do in Section 5.4. Moreover, Equation 2 enables me to estimate representation gaps for subgroups of voters, by restricting the underlying dataset to the voter group of interest and parliamentarians. Unless noted otherwise, regressions are unconditional or only include country indicators. In this case, representation gaps estimate descriptively how the behavior of actual parliamentarians differs from the attitudes of their voters, reflecting the degree of representation actually occurring.

To analyze differences between political parties, I calculate a party-level measure of representation gaps that compares the position of parties to those of the overall national mean voter. Let c indicate countries, p parties and v voters. I calculate the representation gap of p on topic t as

$$RG_{p,t}^P = \overline{b}_{p,t} - \overline{a}_{v \in c,t}, \tag{3}$$

where $\overline{b}_{p,t}$ is the average of all MPs belonging to p.[1]

To compare voters whose attitudes are more or less well represented, I also calculate a representation gap measure at the voter level. Since voting for populist parties is the

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1. I also show versions using data on all candidates and comparing parties to their own voters only.

main outcome of interest, I calculate the absolute difference to the closest non-populist party in voter v's country:

$$RG_{v,t}^{V} = \min_{p \in c \text{ and } p \notin \text{populist}} \left\{ \left| a_{v,t} - \bar{b}_{p,t} \right| \right\}. \tag{4}$$

Strictly speaking, I always measure the distance between voters' attitudes and the policy position of the average parliamentarian of either their country or a specific party. However, the idea is that these differences are indicative of the distance between voters' attitudes and policy decisions. It is reasonable to question whether this is the case. Concerns include that MPs lie despite anonymity and that they neglect party discipline in personal survey items. To test these concerns, Section B.3 validates survey-based estimates with differences in real-world referendum voting and initiation decisions between voters, parliamentarians, and parties. Differences regarding behavior in real-world referendums do not suffer from the shortcomings of surveys, yet they yield very similar conclusions, suggesting that the survey-based measures work as intended. Moreover, Section B.3 finds that estimates of representation gaps do not depend on whether one compares voters to the parliament or to parties. Finally, Figure H.4 and Figure H.5 show that voters and MPs both *perceive* similar representation gaps as I document when comparing parties to voters.

5 Estimates of Political Representation Gaps

The following five subsections present empirical facts about representation gaps. To this end, each subsection analyzes representation gaps from a different angle. Section 5.6 investigates their robustness and Section 5.7 speculates on potential origins and welfare effects.

5.1 MPs Are More Liberal than Voters on Nearly All Cultural Issues

Figure 2 depicts policy position distributions of European voters and parliamentarians by issue. All policy positions are scaled such that higher values are more right-wing/conservative/anti-EU. Regarding the variable EU referendums, high values indicate a preference for EU referendums. Observations are weighted to adjust for population size differences between countries and I pool data on all elected parliamentarians.

Figure 2 shows that representation gaps –visualized as differences between the lines– strongly depend on the issue. For instance, voters and parliamentarians have similar positions regarding the role of private enterprise in the economy but hold opposing views on immigration, where most voters prefer a decrease while the majority of parliamentarians are not in favor of decreasing immigration. Distributions differ most regarding immigration, sentences for criminals, assimilation, teaching authority in schools, and gender relations.
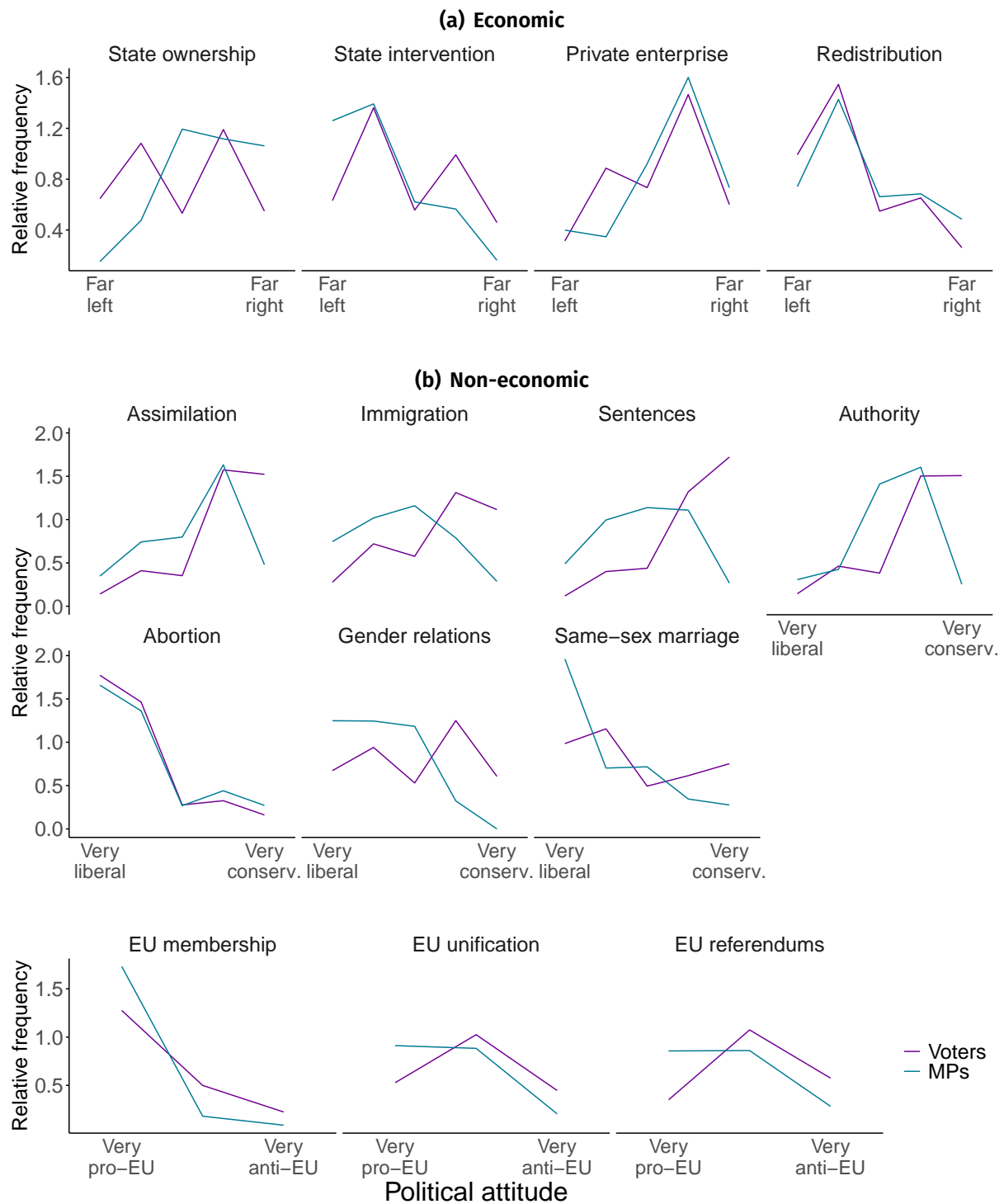
Figure 2. Policy Position Distributions of Voters and Parliamentarians

Note: Individual sub-plots show the policy position distributions of parliamentarians and citizens who either voted in the most recent national or EU parliament election before the survey. Data includes responses from 141 MEPs, 1,805 MPs, and 26,500 voters, but the number of respondents varies by issue. Respondents are weighted according to the population size of their country. Responses of national parliamentarians are not available for "private enterprise," "state ownership," "authority," "gender relations," "immigration," and "EU referendums."

Representation gaps might cancel out if they go in opposite directions on similar topics. To examine how systematic representation gaps are, I classify individual issues into broader policy dimensions. It is well established that political parties package their positions on multiple issues together and that knowing the political attitudes of citizens on a few issues enables one to predict their attitudes on most issues well (Hinich and Munger, 1994; Kitschelt, 1994; Aldrich, 1995; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2012; Enke, 2020; Enke, Rodríguez-Padilla, and Zimmermann, 2022). Hence, reducing the dimensionality of policy spaces does not reduce explanatory power strongly while simplifying the analysis (Laver, 2014). Most studies find that policy spaces in Europe are best described as either two- or three-dimensional (Kriesi et al., 2006; Henjak, 2010; Stoll, 2010; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2012; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2014; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Jackson and Jolly, 2021; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2022). The two main dimensions, also distinguished recently by economists (Bonomi, Gennaioli, and Tabellini, 2021; Danieli et al., 2022), are the classical economic left-right dimension and a cultural dimension which contrasts liberal cultural positions, like multiculturalism with conservative ones, like strict sentences for criminals (Inglehart, 2015). It is contested whether one should consider a separate pro-anti EU dimension or not (Hooghe and Marks, 1999; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999; Tsebelis and Garrett, 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk, 2012; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2019).

I experimented with several classifications and chose one for the main text that follows the literature and produces results that are robust to alternative classifications. To this end, I manually allocated all topics into an economic and non-economic "cultural" dimension, as shown via the two panels of Figure 2. In particular, I classify immigration and EU-related issues as cultural because attitudes on these topics are linked more strongly to cultural than economic concerns (Alvarez, 2002; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Appendix A examines the validity of this theory-based categorization empirically. Reassuringly, attitudes correlate higher within than across dimensions, and nearly all correlations within dimensions are positive and significant. Attitudes on purely cultural topics and EU issues correlate positively and significantly with each other, while they are less strongly and systematically related to economic attitudes.

Distinguishing between economic and non-economic issues reveals a pattern. As Figure 2 shows, representation gaps between voters and MPs are small and not systematic regarding economic issues. In contrast, voters are more conservative/anti-EU than MPs regarding all cultural or EU issues except abortion. Furthermore, the largest representation gaps (on immigration and sentences) concern cultural issues. Notably, these two gaps reveal *directional* disagreement between voters and MPs. The corresponding items ask whether immigration should be reduced and whether criminals should be punished more harshly, respectively (see Table I.1 for details). Most voters favor a reduction in immigration and harsher punishments, while a majority of MPs oppose these policies.

Figure D.1 in the appendix quantifies these representation gaps. The mean MP is significantly more liberal than the mean voter on all cultural issues but abortion, where the difference is not significant. Most differences regarding cultural topics range between

0.5–1SD of EU-wide citizen attitudes. Differences regarding economic topics are much smaller.

To examine whether this classification yields robust results, let's consider alternative classifications. I could have split up the non-economic dimension into a narrowly defined cultural dimension and an EU dimension. As discussed in Appendix D, this would not affect the results since representation gaps on these two sub-dimensions are similar to the gap on the non-economic dimension. Hence, one can think of the non-economic representation gaps discussed in the main text as applying equally to purely cultural and EU issues. Another alternative classification would be to subsume EU issues and immigration as a separate third dimension and interpret it as openness to trade. In this case, one would interpret the economic dimension as measuring the size of the state and the cultural dimension would not include immigration. This would not affect the estimates for the (left-right) economic and cultural dimension notably (many estimates discussed below do not include immigration into the cultural dimension due to data availability anyway). However, it would result in representation gaps on the trade dimension that are very similar to those on the cultural dimension —parliamentarians favor more trade than voters. Finally, Appendix A shows that the main results change little if I aggregate issues through a principal component analysis. In any case, the existence of a representation gap on non-economic issues emerges as a particularly robust finding, and differences and distinctions between non-economic sub-categories do not affect the interpretation strongly. Hence, the main text lumps non-economic topics together and compares them to the economic left-right dimension. Below, I use the labels "cultural" and "economic" dimension to distinguish them clearly. I label the non-economic dimension "cultural" because cultural issues are seen as much more important than EU issues (Appendix E).

Result 1. *Voters are much more culturally conservative than parliamentarians on nearly all cultural topics.*

5.2 MPs are More Culturally Liberal than Voters in Most Countries

Reporting representation gaps for individual countries and individual topics would yield a very large number of results, which might lead to confusion. To keep the analysis concise, I first aggregate individual issues into broader policy dimensions.

5.2.1 Aggregating Issues into Policy Dimensions.
I pool EU and cultural issues and calculate two indexes for cultural/EU, labeled "cultural" and economic (small state vs large state) issues, respectively.

Formally, let $p_{i,t}$ summarize the policy positions of parliamentarians and voters, that is

$$p_{i,t} = \begin{cases} b_{i,t} & \text{if } i \text{ is a parliamentarian} \\ a_{i,t} & \text{if } i \text{ is an "ordinary" citizen.} \end{cases} \qquad (5)$$

I calculate the policy position $p_{i,d}$ of any survey participant i on dimension $d \in \{economy, culture\}$ as

$$p_{i,d} = \sum_{t \in d} p_{i,t} \cdot importance_t. \tag{6}$$

$importance_t$ is an index that measures the perceived importance of issue/topic t by voters. Aggregating individual issues in dimensions makes it necessary to consider how they are weighted, and the perceived importance is a natural candidate (Laver, 2014). I calculate $importance_t$ from an item that asks all participants to name the three issues that are most important to them. As detailed in Appendix E, voters and MPs rank the importance of issues similarly. Moreover, representation gaps tend to be larger on issues that voters and MPs find more important. Since the surveys among national MPs did not include the items "private enterprise," "state ownership," "authority," "gender relations," "immigration," and "EU referendums," I restrict my analysis to the remaining two economic (redistribution and state intervention) and six non-economic issues, unless noted otherwise. Appendix D shows that neither i) restricting the analysis to this issue subset, nor ii) subsuming EU issues into the cultural index, nor iii) weighting topics changes representation gaps on the indexes strongly, particularly regarding the cultural dimension.
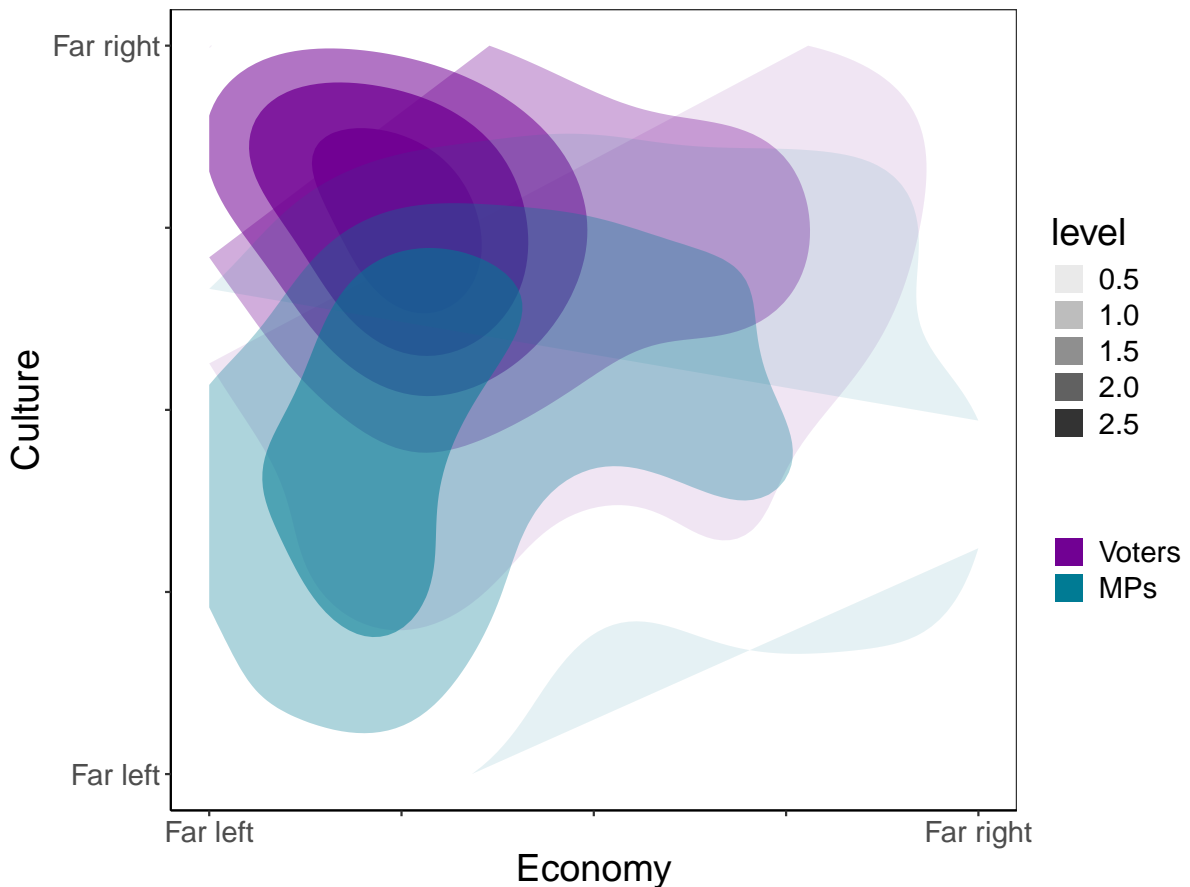

Figure 3. Two-Dimensional Policy Position Distributions of Voters and Parliamentarians
Note: The "Economy" axis measures an index for economic issues while the "Culture" axis measures an index for non-economics issues based on Equation 6. The density is higher in less transparent areas. Data is pooled across Europe and includes the attitudes of 127 MEPs, 738 national MPs, and 19,813 voters.

Figure 3 depicts policy position densities of voters and MPs in the two-dimensional economy-culture policy space. Higher values on either dimension indicate positions that are more right-wing/conservative.[2] The distribution of voter positions is unimodal, and most voters are located close to the mode. This simple structure makes it easy for parties to determine the vote-maximizing policy positions and a convergent equilibrium more likely in many models (Plott, 1967; McKelvey and Wendell, 1976; McKelvey, 1979; McKelvey and Schofield, 1987; Schofield, 2007). The distribution of MPs is also unimodal, and most positions form a cluster around this mode. Different than for voters, the two dimensions appear to be correlated for parliamentarians.

However, the key difference between the two distributions is not their shape but their location. The distribution of voter positions is located much higher than the one for MPs, illustrating that voters are more culturally conservative than parliamentarians. In contrast, their horizontal positions are similar, indicating that voters and MPs hold similar economic policy positions. These results reinforce the impression of a systematic and large representation gap on non-economic issues but not on economic topics. Figure A.2 shows that similar results are obtained when aggregating issues using a principal component analysis.

Figure D.1 in the appendix quantifies these representation gaps. The representation gap regarding the cultural index is a bit larger than 1SD, while the difference regarding the economic index is small and insignificant. With just over 1SD, the cultural representation gap is about as large as the difference between the average nationalist MEP and the average social democratic MEP, or alternatively, as large as the difference between the average Christian democratic/conservative MEP and the average communist MEP.

5.2.2 Representation Gaps by Country. Figure 4 displays representation gap estimates based on Equation 2 by country. I pool elected national MPs and MEPs to increase the sample size, and because MEPs and national MPs have similar policy attitudes compared to voters as shown in Figure H.1. In the case of "EU28" as a whole, I compare all European voters to the European parliament. Therefore, I exclude national MPs and weigh voters to adjust for population size differences between countries.

Cultural representation gaps are negative in all countries except Poland and Bulgaria, indicating that the average parliamentarian is more culturally liberal/left-wing than voters prefer in nearly all European countries and the EU as a whole. In the average country, the mean parliamentarian is about 0.87SD more liberal than the average voter.

On economic topics, MPs are about 0.21SD more right-wing than voters in the average country. However, economic representation gaps differ strongly by country. They are negative in 10 countries and positive in 13. Moreover, economic gaps tend to be smaller than cultural ones in absolute values, even though they are still sizable. They are largest

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2. Figure 3 does not measure whether voters or MPs are right-wing or left-wing in absolute values because the attitudes, measured through survey responses, depend on the formulation of the question. In contrast, the figure is used to illustrate *differences* between voters and MPs.
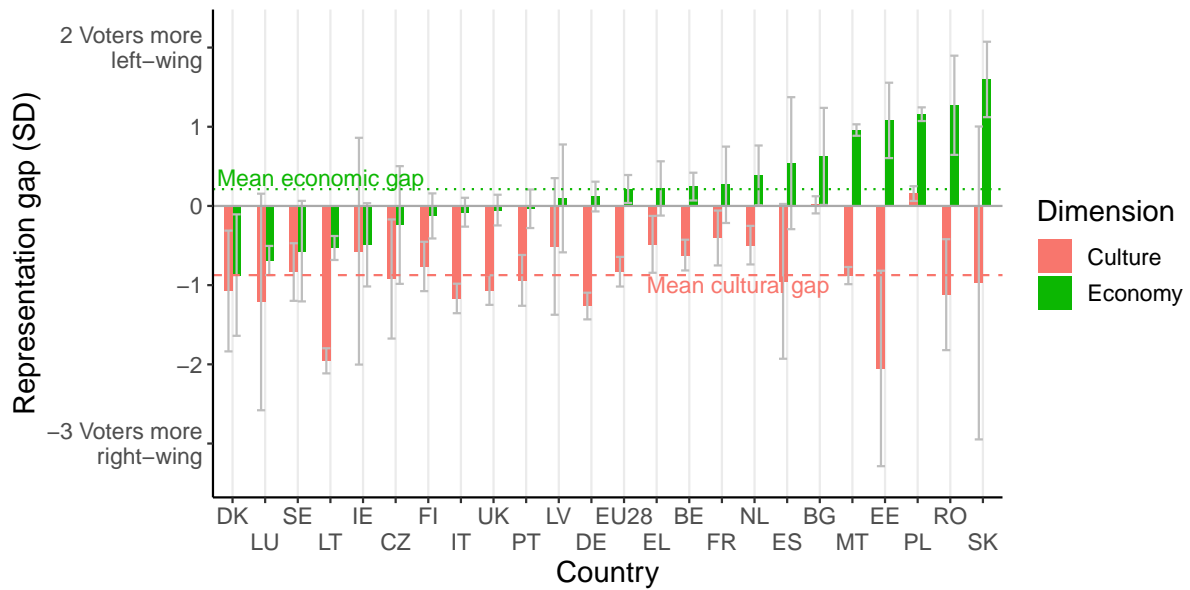
Figure 4. Representation Gaps by Country and Policy Dimension
Note: Bars show representation gaps between voters and parliamentarians (MPs and MEPs) from the same country. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals come from regressions resembling Equation 2 but for each country individually. Representation gaps are expressed in standard deviations of EU-wide citizen attitudes.

in eastern European countries, where the parliament is significantly more right-wing than voters.

Result 2. *In nearly all European countries, voters are much more culturally conservative than their national parliaments.*

The fact that parliaments are more culturally liberal than voters in nearly all countries suggests that factors common to all countries are important drivers of these gaps. In particular, institutional factors like the voting system appear to be insufficient to explain cultural representation gaps. In contrast, economic representation gaps, which differ strongly between countries, might be better explained by factors that differ between countries.

5.3 Most Demographic Groups are More Conservative than their MPs

This section examines how the degree of representation differs across demographic groups. Doing so helps to understand the origins of representation gaps. According to many accounts, the fact that the *average* citizen is not well-represented arises because a minority of citizens holds extreme attitudes, far removed from the rest of citizens, who are well-represented by policymaking (Berger, 2017; Bó et al., 2023). It follows that the main divide of interest is between this minority of extreme citizens and the rest of society, which includes most citizens and the political elite. On the other hand, populists argue that the main divide is between all citizens and the elite. According to their claim, the

attitudes of demographic subgroups are similar to each other but differ strongly from the elites' policymaking.

To study the representation of a specific demographic group, I estimate Equation 2 using only data of respondents who belong to this demographic group and elected parliamentarians. All regressions include country fixed effects and estimates are expressed in terms of EU-wide attitude standard deviations. Panel (a) of Figure 5 displays the results. Higher absolute values indicate a larger representation gap. Positive values indicate that the mean attitude of the demographic group is more liberal/left-wing than national MPs and negative values mean that it is more conservative/right-wing.

The average member of most demographic groups is fairly well represented in the economic dimension. The representation gap is significant for only two sub-groups — the poor and citizens with an immigration background. MPs are more right-wing than these groups. Natives and the wealthy are better represented regarding economic issues. However, these *differences* in representation pale in comparison to the cultural representation gap that is *common* to all demographic groups considered.

On cultural topics, all groups are much more conservative than their parliamentarians. Moreover, no difference between any two demographic subgroups is as large as the cultural representation gap between any demographic group and the average parliamentarian. For instance, the educated are better represented than the uneducated, but they are also much more conservative than their MPs and closer to the uneducated than to parliamentarians. Hence, while demographic subgroups of "ordinary" citizens have different cultural attitudes, this within-citizen heterogeneity is small compared to the difference between the average citizen and the average parliamentarian. This is more in line with the populist "elite vs. homogeneous people" model than with the "extreme voters vs. the rest" models predominant in academia.

These results imply that the cultural representation gap does not result from parliamentarians balancing different group interests. In particular, they are not simply representing the educated or trying to protect groups perceived as vulnerable, like immigrants. For instance, more than 50% of immigrants agree or strongly agree with the statement that immigration should be decreased significantly, while only 24% of MEPs think so. Similarly, about 72% of immigrants agree or strongly agree that immigrants should be required to adopt national traditions, while only 48% of parliamentarians think so. In sum, parliamentarians could improve the representation of *all* considered demographic groups simultaneously through more conservative cultural policies.

Result 3. *All major demographic sub-groups of "ordinary" citizens are more culturally conservative than the parliamentarians of their countries.*

One can think of citizens having to complete several stages until they become parliamentarians. First, they have to join a political party. Second, they have to rise in the ranks of this party to be nominated as a candidate for parliament. Finally, they have to get elected. Where in this selection process do representation gaps emerge? To answer this question, Panel (b) of Figure 5 depicts representation gaps that citizens overall, voters,
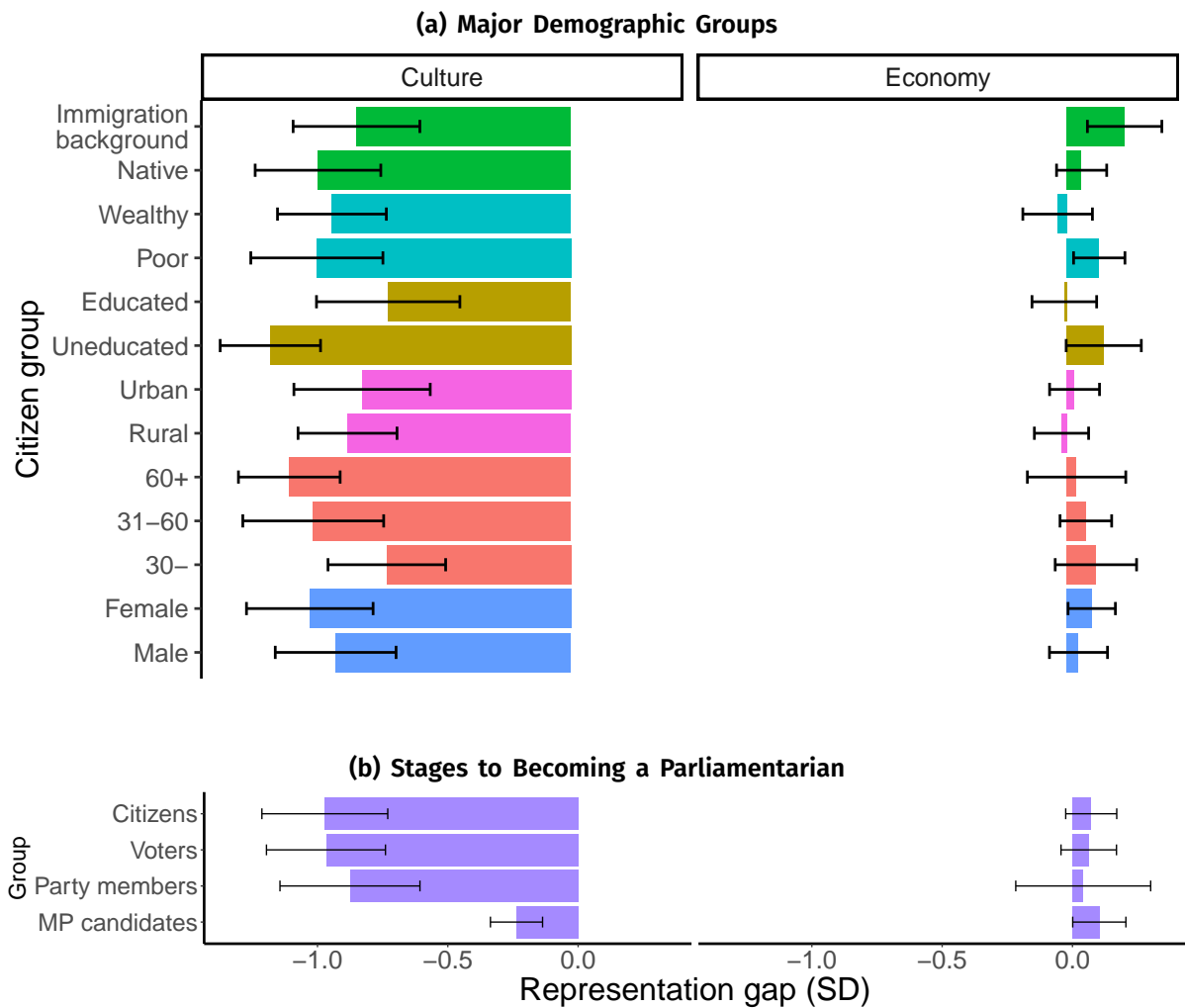
Figure 5. Representation Gaps by Demographic Group and Policy Dimension

Note: Bars show representation gaps between a group and national MPs, expressed in standard deviations of EU-wide citizen attitudes. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals come from Equation 2, including country fixed effects. Party members are those who state that they feel "very close" to a party. I classify voters as having "Immigration background" if at least one of their parents was not born in their country of residence and as "Native" otherwise. "Wealthy" and "Poor" refer to subjects above and below the median self-assessed living standard, respectively. "Educated" and "Uneducated" refer to whether they stopped their full-time education when they were older than 19 or not. I classify subjects as "Urban" if they live in the "suburbs of a large town or city" or a "large town or city" and as "Rural" if they live in a "rural area or village" or "small or middle-sized town."

party members, and unelected candidates face. It shows that citizens, voters, and party members face similar representation gaps. Unelected candidates are the only group that faces a small cultural representation gap. This suggests that parties turn a representative input of members into an unrepresentative output of candidates. Moreover, the fact that candidates are already strongly biased means that it is difficult for voters to undo this bias via voting. Instead, this result fosters the idea of a political elite, including elected and unelected parliamentarians, most of which are much more culturally liberal than any broad demographic subgroup.

5.4 The Demographics of MPs Cannot Fully Account for Representation Gaps

According to the "paradox of the democratic leader" (Kane and Patapan, 2012), politicians are confronted with the difficulty of being highly educated and, at the same time, representative of "ordinary people." This idea raises the question of whether differences regarding demographic characteristics and political knowledge can account for representation gaps. This question is relevant from a normative perspective because it sheds light on whether representation gaps are problematic or desirable. On the one hand, representation gaps might reflect that politicians enforce their personal preferences at the expense of the larger population. For instance, politicians are more risk-loving than ordinary citizens (Heß et al., 2018). At the same time, there is no optimal risk preference, and more risky policymaking is not necessarily welfare-improving. Hence, representation gaps resulting from differences in risk preferences mean that policymaking does not maximize the utility of voters. On the other hand, representation gaps might result from politicians possessing superior political knowledge. Following this line of reasoning, one might argue that representation gaps indicate policymaking that is in the interest of ordinary citizens, who just don't understand this (Levy, Razin, and Young, 2022).

To make the first steps in distinguishing between these alternatives, I estimate representation gaps between parliamentarians and voters who have similar demographic characteristics and possess high political knowledge. In particular, I estimate OLS regressions which, in contrast to Equation 2, include demographic controls:

$$index_{i,d} = \alpha_d + \beta_d \cdot \mathbb{1}[\text{Parl.}]_i + \boldsymbol{\theta} \cdot \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_{i,d}, \tag{7}$$

where $index_{i,d}$ is the standardized index of dimension d, $\mathbb{1}[\text{Parl.}]_i$ indicates parliamentarians and $\mathbf{X}_i$ includes demographic control variables. Consequently, β_d measures the representation gap on dimension d conditionally on $\mathbf{X}_i$.

Of all demographic differences between parliamentarians and voters education seems most important since higher education is strongly associated with culturally liberal attitudes and parliamentarians are much more educated than their voters (Kane and Patapan, 2012; Bovens et al., 2017). I measure the education of subjects through identical education categories used by the European Candidate and Voter Study. Categories differ between countries. For instance, there are 15 categories for subjects from the UK, ranging from "No qualifications, and left school before the age of 11" to "Doctorate: PhD or DPhil." Since education categories for the national MP survey are broader and difficult to harmonize, I focus on the comparison between voters and MEPs.

To investigate the role of political knowledge I use the fact that the European Voter Study 2009 asked seven political knowledge questions, listed in Table I.4. Since parliamentarians were not asked comparable questions, I compare parliamentarians to the voters who achieved a full score in the knowledge quiz, which turned out to be about 7% of all voters.

Table 1 shows the results. For reference, columns (1) and (6) do not control for demographic differences other than country indicators and pool MEPs and national MPs.

Table 1. Representation Gaps after Accounting for Demographic Differences and Political Knowledge

	Dependent variable:									
	Cultural index (SD)					Economic index (SD)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
$\mathbb{1}$[Parl.]	−0.940***	−0.847***	−0.600***	−0.576***	−0.401**	0.076	0.162	−0.036	−0.171**	−0.299*
	(0.110)	(0.117)	(0.117)	(0.125)	(0.195)	(0.050)	(0.099)	(0.083)	(0.086)	(0.155)
Constant	2.794***	2.793***	3.153***	3.075***	2.340***	1.725***	1.725***	1.885***	1.356**	1.688***
	(0.0002)	(0.0003)	(0.176)	(0.300)	(0.238)	(0.0001)	(0.0002)	(0.571)	(0.613)	(0.222)
Parl. sample	All	MEPs	MEPs	MEPs	MEPs	All	MEPs	MEPs	MEPs	MEPs
Voter sample knowledge	All	All	All	All	Full score in quiz	All	All	All	All	Full score in quiz
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Other demo.				✓	✓				✓	✓
Observations	21,700	21,034	21,034	19,265	1,636	23,483	22,796	22,796	20,732	1,695
R^2	0.120	0.096	0.163	0.188	0.397	0.099	0.099	0.139	0.159	0.358

Note: This table shows results from OLS regressions based on Equation 7. Higher values of the dependent variable indicate that the respondent is more culturally conservative or economically right-wing, respectively. $\mathbb{1}$[Parl.] equals one if the subject is a parliamentarian in the parliamentarian sample and 0 if he voted in either the most recent European or national election. Regressions are weighted to obtain representative samples within each country. Education indicates controls for education categories. Other demographics indicate controls for age, gender, categories for marital status, occupation, size of the town of residence, immigration background, religiosity, and perceived living standard. Voter sample knowledge refers to the results of a political knowledge quiz. Standard errors (in parenthesis) are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Consistent with my other results, the average parliamentarian is nearly 1SD of citizen attitudes more culturally liberal than the mean voter of his country but holds a similar economic position. Columns (2) and (7) reveal that these results change little if one excludes national MPs. In columns (3) and (8), I control for education categories but no other demographic variables. As expected, both β_d drop, indicating that different education levels can account for part of the representation gaps. However, $\beta_{culture}$ drops by only about 29% and the remaining gap is highly significant, which shows that educational differences cannot explain the lion's share of the cultural representation gap. Finally, columns (4) and (9) control for all other demographics on top of education. This further decreases $\beta_{culture}$ but not by much. Notably, column (8) shows that voters with similar demographic characteristics as MEPs are economically more right-wing than MEPs.

Finally, columns (5) and (10) compare parliamentarians with voters who have similar demographic characteristics and achieved a full score in the knowledge quiz. $\beta_{culture}$ decreases further, revealing that political knowledge matters above and beyond educational attainment. Still, $\beta_{culture}$ stays significant and about 47% of the unconditional cultural gap remains.

Overall, my results support the "paradox of the democratic leader" only when focusing on the cultural dimension. Moreover, a large share of the representation gaps documented here seems to have different causes. In particular, education alone explains a rather small share of representation gaps, suggesting that we can learn a lot by examining other characteristics regarding which politicians differ from ordinary citizens.

Result 4. *Parliamentarians are more culturally liberal than the most politically knowledge-able voters with similar demographic characteristics as the parliamentarians.*

5.5 Most Mainstream Parties are More Culturally Liberal than Voters

In order to understand voting decisions, it is important to view the positions of all parties from the perspective of voters. To this end, Figure 6 compares the policy positions of European parties relative to the overall national mean voter (Equation 3). A position below the horizontal zero line indicates that the party is more culturally liberal than the mean voter of its country, and a position to the right of the vertical zero line reveals that the party is economically more right-wing than the national mean voter.
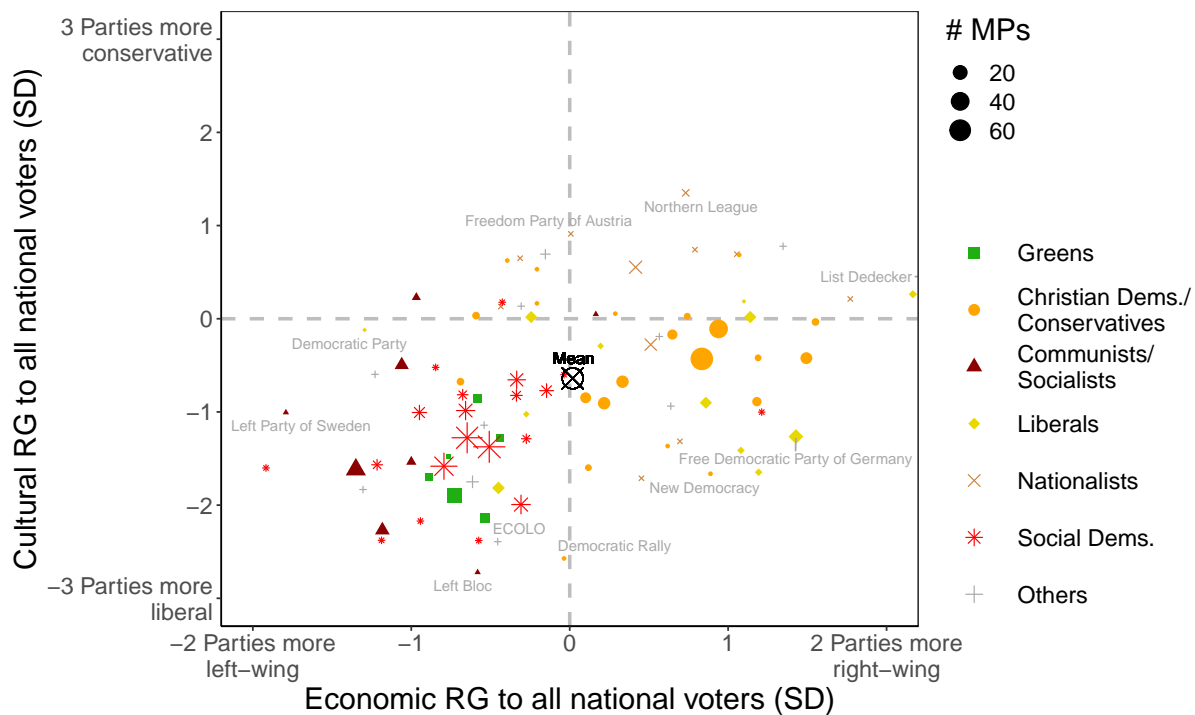

Figure 6. Party Positions Relative to the National Mean Voter by Party Group
Note: This plot compares the position of European parties relative to the position of the national mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. Different symbols refer to different party families. The size of the symbol measures the number of MPs used to calculate the policy position. For clarity, I omit a few parties whose cultural index is smaller than -3. All of them rely on few observations and are therefore measured imprecisely.

Looking at the classical economic left-right dimension reveals that most commu-nists/socialists, green, and social democratic parties are positioned to the left of the mean voter. Opposed to them are Christian democratic/conservative and liberal parties who are more economically right-wing than the national mean voter. Overall, a similar number of parties is located to the economic left and the economic right of the mean voter, and parties are spread out similarly wide to the left and the right. Consequently, the average economic position of all European parties is located very closely to the mean voter.

In contrast, the vast majority of parties are culturally more liberal than the overall mean voter in their country. Even most Christian democratic and conservative parties, which are seen as the main traditional center-right parties in Europe, are center-left when focusing on the cultural dimension. The only party family that tends to be more culturally conservative than national voters are nationalists, who, however, tend to be closer to the national mean voter in this dimension than social democratic, green, or socialist parties. Consequently, the mean party is much more culturally liberal than the overall mean voter of its country.

Result 5. *Nearly all established parties are much more culturally liberal than the overall mean voter of their country.*

These results show that most uncovered policy space is located in culturally conservative positions. While about half of the electorate demands such policies, only very few parties supply them. In many countries, about half of the electorate might vote for nationalists if voters voted mainly based on their cultural congruence with party positions. Hence, one might have predicted back in 2009 that nationalist parties have a particularly high potential to attract new voters.

5.6 Robustness of the Representation Gap Pattern

The stylized facts presented here are robust to many specifications. First, they are not an artifact of how I calculate representation gaps. As Figure 2 shows, MPs are more culturally liberal than voters regarding all issues except abortion, which few voters and few MPs consider important (Figure E.1). Consequently, aggregating issues differently, for instance, through a principal component analysis, yields similar results (Figure A.2). Moreover, I consider representation gaps regarding means to keep cross-country and cross-party results concise. The symmetric shape of voter and MP distributions apparent from Figure 3 (which also obtains for most countries individually) suggests that a measure of central location is suitable to compare the two distributions. I use the mean to follow the political science literature, not because representation gaps are particularly large if one uses this metric. In fact, Figure H.2 shows that, if anything, representation gaps are larger if one considers the median.

Second, I estimate representation gaps by comparing only elected parliamentarians to voters, which allows me to compare the parliament —the main representative organ in parliamentary democracies— to voters (Pitkin, 1967). Including unelected candidates does not change the results notably since elected and unelected MP candidates take similar policy positions (Figure H.6 and Figure 5). Moreover, Section B.3.1 shows that the government and parties are just as biased relative to voters as the parliament in the case of Switzerland, where I have real-world decision data for all these groups.

Third, I compare parliamentarians to voters instead of all citizens because I reasoned that the representation of voters is more likely to occur and more relevant from a normative perspective. If anything, including non-voting citizens, leads to slightly larger representation gaps as indicated by Figure H.1 and Figure 5. Furthermore, most (mainstream)

parties are not only more left-wing than the mean voter of their country but also the mean voter of their party (Figure H.7).

Fourth, representation gaps do not arise because voters find some issues unimportant. Representation gaps are, if anything, *larger* on issues that voters and parliamentarians find more important (Figure E.1).

Fifth, the documented pattern is hard to explain by voters and MPs interpreting the same survey items differently. The data reveals the same very specific pattern regarding many countries and demographic groups. If representation gaps would not exist, MPs would have to interpret only all cultural questions differently than voters, even differently than voters with very similar demographic characteristics. Furthermore, differential interpretation cannot explain that MPs and voters disagree about the direction policymaking should take regarding two issues that are considered particularly important by both groups —immigration and punishment of criminals (Section 5.1 and Figure 8). However, a more rigorous way to test the relevance of differential interpretation is to let the *same* subject place voters and politicians. Voters and MPs in the German "temporal dataset" were not only asked about their own attitudes but also about their *perceptions* about the policy positions of other political actors. In particular, parliamentarians placed the policy positions of their own voters and their parties on the same scale regarding the same policy items on which they stated their own attitudes. Similarly, voters placed all major political parties on the same scale they used to state their own attitudes. Figure H.3, Figure H.4, and Figure H.5 display the resulting *perceived* representation gaps. Figure H.3 shows that the average MP thinks that his policy position is 0.37SD–0.6SD (SD of citizen attitudes) more liberal on immigration than his *own* voters. This perceived representation gap is much more even regarding the economic issue of taxes vs. social benefits. Figure H.4 reveals that the mean MP of each party in each year, except for the right-wing populist AfD, also perceives their party to be more left-wing on immigration than their own voters. Similarly, Figure H.5 displays that voters have similar perceptions as MPs. Regarding immigration, the German mean voter in 2009, 2013, 2017, and 2021 perceived all established parties to be either close to his position or much more liberal than him. These perceived representation gaps cannot be explained by a differential interpretation of survey items. In general, the fact that voters and MPs perceive the same representation gap pattern is hard to explain by survey biases.

Finally, Section B.3.1 validates survey-based estimates of representation gaps with real-world decisions. It shows that voting differences in referendums between MPs and voters are very similar to the representation gaps estimated from survey data. While the votes of MPs in referendums might be inconsequential, Section B.3.1 also analyzes the official voting recommendations parties and the government make before referendums. These recommendations are consequential since they directly communicate policy positions and likely influence the voting decisions of partisans. Figure B.5 shows that the recommendations of parties are very similar to the voting behavior of their MPs while the recommendations of the government are even more biased relative to voters. Moreover, Section B.3.2 shows that all referendums initiated by politicians aim at making cultural

policymaking more liberal, while nearly all referendums initiated by peoples' initiatives seek to push policymaking in a culturally conservative direction. Such initiations are also consequential and reveal a large cultural representation gap that cannot be explained by survey biases.

5.7 Speculations on the Origins and Welfare Effects of Representation Gaps

While purely descriptive, the previously documented stylized facts shed light on how representation gaps emerge. In particular, they render several potential explanations unlikely. First, while institutional differences between countries might influence the degree of representation (Walczak and van der Brug, 2013b), such differences cannot fully account for cultural representation gaps. The fact that policymaking is more liberal than voters prefer in nearly all European countries (Figure 4) suggests that factors common to all of these countries deserve further study.

Second, one might think that voters' policy attitudes are so heterogeneous and polarized that it is difficult for a parliament to represent their attitudes. The evidence presented here contradicts this idea. Voter attitudes are neither particularly heterogeneous nor polarized (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Moreover, voters of every demographic group considered here demand more culturally conservative policies (Figure 5). In particular, this suggests that representation gaps do not emerge because parliamentarians try to protect groups like immigrants, women, or the poor because these groups also demand more culturally conservative policies.

Third, one might reason that established parties do not fill representation gaps because it would be too costly for them to move to these positions. However, this idea runs counter to the available evidence. Most major parties were culturally much more conservative a few decades ago (Inglehart, 1971, 2015). Since then, they *did* toward culturally liberal positions and ended up far to the cultural left of the mean voter. Hence, these parties could have retained their old positions, or moved less sharply, thereby reducing movement costs and improving representation.

In contrast to these ideas, my results point to a large role of other factors. To understand why voters do not adjust their voting behavior to close representation gaps, it might be helpful to consider that the representation gap is a general phenomenon. Nearly all mainstream parties are more culturally liberal than most voters and this representation gap is already present at the level of candidates. In most countries, the only parties that could meaningfully contribute to closing the cultural representation gap are nationalists (Figure 6). It is conceivable that many voters refrain from voting for nationalists for reasons that are not policy-related i.e. because they think that nationalists have low valence. Such a belief would not be surprising since recent evidence suggests that nationalist politicians are in fact less competent than other politicians (Bó et al., 2017). Under the assumption that voters perceive nationalist parties to have a relatively low valence, models like Groseclose (2001) can explain the representation gaps documented here. According to their mechanism, nationalist parties receive fewer votes than under pure spatial voting

because some voters are scared away from nationalists due to their low valence. The resulting parliament includes fewer nationalists than it would under pure spatial voting which makes it more culturally liberal than voters prefer. Hence, the cultural representation gap emerges even though voters maximize their utility.

Another contributing factor might be media bias. Figure B.5 in the appendix shows that, in Switzerland, the media is even more culturally liberal than the parliament, parties, and the government. Similar results have been found elsewhere (Puglisi and Snyder, 2015). To the extent that such a media bias influences voting, it could also help to explain the representation gap. Still, these are only two examples of factors that seem plausible in view of the results presented here. The descriptive evidence provided by this paper cannot assess their causal effect nor rule out other causes.

Is the cultural representation gap problematic from a welfare perspective? Most normative research on representation argues that representation gaps are problematic (Andeweg, 2012; Costello, Thomassen, and Rosema, 2012). Still, critics might point to several justifications for pursuing policies that systematically go against the public's will. They might argue that representation gaps are welfare-improving if they reflect i) particularly stable policymaking, ii) the protection of vulnerable groups, or iii) an information advantage of parliamentarians. The evidence presented here is not consistent with either of these potential justifications. i) the policy positions of the average voter are not more volatile than those of the average parliamentarian (Figure 8, to be discussed below). ii) representation gaps do not advantage the representation of minorities. On the contrary, vulnerable groups like immigrants or the poor would be better represented if policymaking would follow the will of the average citizen (Figure 5). iii) while differences regarding education and political knowledge can account for part of the cultural representation gap, they cannot explain the lion's share. Even the most politically knowledgeable citizens are markedly more culturally conservative than their representatives (Table 1). For instance, even among immigrants with more than 21 years of full-time education, about 66% agree or strongly agree that immigrants should be required to adopt national traditions, while only 48% of parliamentarians think so. It seems implausible to attribute this gap to the superior knowledge of the parliamentarians vis-a-vis immigrants themselves. In conclusion, a notable part of the cultural representation gap is likely not welfare-optimal.

6 The Relationship between Representation Gaps and Populism

Since 2009, the year the previous analysis refers to, a new group of challenger parties has had increasing electoral success. These parties are often referred to as populists, and the most successful of them are usually much more culturally conservative than other parties in their country (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022). This raises the question of whether the cultural representation gap caused the rise of populist parties. Two empirical exercises are key to answering this question. First, one must test whether increases in (the salience of) the cultural representation gap lead to more demand/voting for populist parties. Second,

one must examine whether populist parties supply policy positions that fill the cultural representation gap. The data used here does not allow to test the former (causal) question, but it is uniquely well suited to analyze whether populist parties fill representation gaps. Hence, the remainder of the paper provides a descriptive comparison between representation gaps and the policy positions of populists. Furthermore, under the assumption of a causal effect of representation gaps on populism, one would expect several associations that I can test with the data at hand, and I do so below. These tests should not be seen as evidence in favor of a causal effect but as a falsification exercise.

The analysis proceeds in four steps. First, I test whether representation gaps predict political dissatisfaction above and beyond political attitudes. If representation gaps caused the rise of populist parties, one would expect that citizens whose attitudes are less well-represented are less satisfied with established policymaking and, therefore, more open to voting for new challenger parties. Second, I test whether populists fill representation gaps, thereby representing the attitudes of these voters. Third, I test whether representation gaps have increased or have become more salient during the rise of populist parties. If they caused the rise of populism, one would expect that they did so. Finally, I test whether representation gaps predict voting for populists above and beyond political attitudes. Again, if representation gaps caused voting for populists, one would expect this correlation to exist.

6.1 Representation Gaps Predict Political Dissatisfaction

Does the cultural representation gap reflect an unsatisfied demand for parties with culturally conservative policy positions? If this was the case, one would expect that i) voters are aware of representation gaps and ii) conservative voters feel unrepresented and dissatisfied. I examine these two conditions empirically. First, many citizens perceive representation gaps. The voter surveys asked to extent the respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement "the [National] parliament takes into consideration the concerns of [National] citizens." Only about 11% agree strongly, and about 39% agree, while nearly 22% disagree, and about 13% even disagree strongly.[3] Hence, over a third of Europeans think that their national parliament does not even *consider* their concerns.

Second, to examine how the perceptions of representation gaps are related to the actual extent of being represented, I estimate the following equations by OLS:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_{culture} \cdot \text{cultural index}_i + \beta_{economy} \cdot \text{economic index}_i + \theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i, \qquad (8)$$

where y_i either measures the perception of representation gaps based on the item just presented or subject i's stated dissatisfaction with how democracy works in their country and $\mathbf{X}_i$ includes the same set of demographic control variables used above. Because I study the demand for representation gaps here, I do not exclude non-voters.

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3. The remaining respondents chose "Neither nor." I pool all citizen responses across Europe and weigh them by population size.

Table 2. Association between Representation and Political Attitudes

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | | | | | |
| | Dissatisfied with how democracy works in [country] (SD) | | | | Thinks [country]'s parliament doesn't consider citizens concerns (SD) | | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Cultural index (SD)	0.071***	0.075***		0.044**	0.099***	0.109***		0.089***
	(0.018)	(0.016)		(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.017)		(0.021)
Economic index (SD)	−0.071***	−0.061***		−0.060***	0.009	0.013		0.013
	(0.016)	(0.015)		(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)		(0.015)
$RG^{voter}_{culture}$ (SD)			0.085***	0.060***			0.077***	0.038**
			(0.015)	(0.017)			(0.011)	(0.015)
$RG^{voter}_{economy}$ (SD)			−0.0004	0.009			0.014	0.010
			(0.016)	(0.012)			(0.014)	(0.014)
Constant	1.580***	1.704***	1.577***	1.456***	0.962***	0.946***	0.934***	0.711***
	(0.035)	(0.068)	(0.109)	(0.118)	(0.038)	(0.071)	(0.118)	(0.127)
Country indicators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Observations	21,177	18,155	18,155	18,155	21,022	18,010	18,010	18,010
R^2	0.201	0.235	0.233	0.238	0.150	0.170	0.166	0.171

Note: This table shows results from OLS regressions based on Equation 8. I use data on all citizens. Demographic controls include include country indicators, age, gender, degree of religiosity, categories of marital status, city size, living standard, occupation categories, age at which their education ended, and immigration background. Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Columns (1) and (5) of Table 2 reveal that within country, citizens who are more culturally right-wing are significantly more likely to state that they are dissatisfied with how democracy works in their country and think that their national parliament does not consider the concerns of the citizens. In contrast, citizens who are more economically right-wing are significantly less likely to be dissatisfied with democracy in their country, while there is no significant association with the perception of representation gaps. These perceptions are consistent with the fact that culturally conservative voters and citizens actually are relatively less well-represented by their parliaments, as shown by this paper. Columns (2) and (6) show that these relationships are not altered notably by the inclusion of demographic controls. Hence, culturally conservative individuals are not dissatisfied because they have specific demographic characteristics.

If representation gaps were responsible for dissatisfaction with politics, one would expect representation gaps to predict dissatisfaction above and beyond political attitudes. Therefore, columns (3), (4), (7), and (8) include the voter-level representation gap, as defined in Equation 4 —the distance between the closest established party and the attitude of the voter. Indeed, even after controlling for attitudes, as revealed by columns (4)

and (8), the cultural bias is positively and significantly related to both outcome variables. For the economic dimension, the bias is never significant, while the economic index is significant in one specification.

Overall, this evidence suggests that actual representation gaps enable one to predict perceived representation gaps well. In particular, citizens with culturally conservative attitudes know that their opinions are not well-represented. Hence, parties that supply culturally right-wing policies might tap into unsatisfied demand. This analysis does not establish a causal channel between representation gaps and their perception. It merely demonstrates that representation gaps are predictive of their dissatisfaction, above and beyond many other variables.[4] But from the perspective of a new challenger party that wonders which policy positions to choose to mobilize dissatisfied voters, such predictability is all it needs.

6.2 Right-wing Populists Fill the Cultural Representation Gap

The idea of an unsatisfied demand for culturally conservative policy positions lines up well with the political development in Europe after 2009. Since then, a new group of challenger parties had unprecedented electoral successes in nearly all European countries. These parties are often referred to as populists, and most of them, particularly the most successful ones, focus on cultural issues and are culturally right-wing (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).

To classify parties as populist, I follow the frequently used PopuList database (Rooduijn et al., 2023a; Rooduijn et al., 2023b).[5] The PopuList employs the most frequently used definition of populism by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017). According to this definition, populism is not a full ideology like liberalism or conservatism, which are tied to policy objectives. Instead, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) define populists as those who make several claims about the political reality. In particular, populists are defined as those who claim that

(1) society is divided into two antagonistic groups: the "corrupt elite" and the "pure people,"
(2) these two groups are homogeneous,
(3) the populists try to save the people from the elite.

The populist claims are concerned with political representation, which reinforces the idea that representation gaps are relevant to understanding populism. The empirical facts about representation discussed, therefore, help to test to what extent the defining claims of populists are correct. Section E.0.1 provides a corresponding discussion.

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4. However, it provides evidence that culturally right-wing people are primarily dissatisfied because their attitudes are really not represented, not because they are right-wing.
5. I also classify parties as populists that are labeled "borderline" cases in the PopuList database.

The main text focuses on whether populists fill representation gaps. To examine this question, I depict the policy positions of parties in the 2D economy-culture space, like in Figure 6. In contrast to Figure 6, colors/symbols differentiate between mainstream parties and different groups of populists. I distinguish between different groups of populists because, consistent with populism being a thin ideology, the policy positions of these groups are very different. In particular, I distinguish between left-wing populists, right-wing populists, and all other populist parties as defined in the PopuList. I do not display "anti-EU populists" as an independent category because I do not use an independent EU dimension.
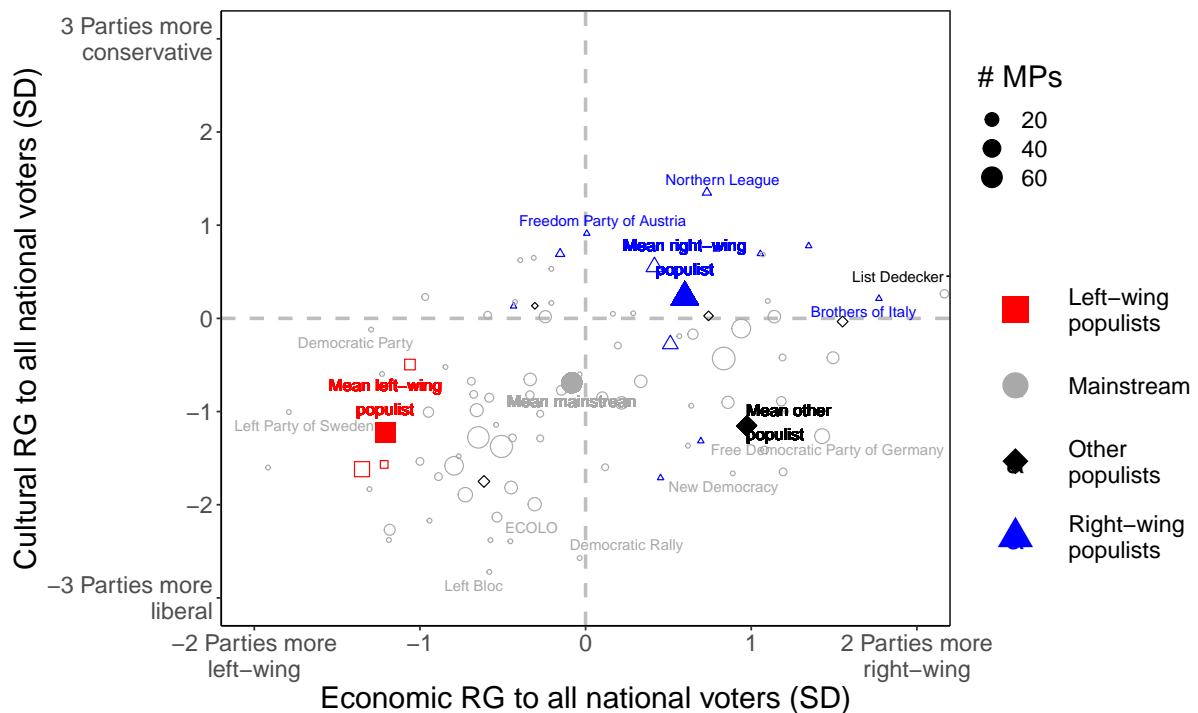

Figure 7. Party Positions Relative to the National Mean Voter by Populism Group
Note: This figure compares the policy positions of European parties relative to the position of the national mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. Estimates of policy positions are based on the mean index of elected members of parliament belonging to the corresponding party. A few parties are positioned outside the boundaries of this figure, but all of them rely on a few observations and are, therefore, measured imprecisely. I omit them for clearness.

Figure 7 reveals that most populist parties are not located close to the mean voter. However, right-wing populists fill the cultural representation gap, while left-wing populists and "other populists" do not fill any representation gap. This does not imply that right-wing populists are closer to the mean voter than any other party group or that populists, in general, are closer to the mean voter than mainstream parties. Rather, Figure 7 reveals that (only) right-wing populists fill representation gaps that other party groups have left open. In particular, right-wing populists are the only party group that represents the cultural attitudes of the more conservative half of the population.

Result 6. *Right-wing populists fill the cultural representation gap.*

Since the estimates in figure Figure 7 combine information on the attitudes of parliamentarians and their representation intention, one might wonder which of these factors enables right-wing populists to fill the cultural representation gap. The proportion of representation-motivated parliamentarians is higher among populists than among mainstream politicians. Among national MPs, about 83% of mainstream MPs are policy-motivated, while the share is 60% for populists, and this difference is highly significant according to Fisher's exact test ($p < 0.0001$). Among MEPs, the shares are 87% and 65%, respectively ($p \approx 0.022$). However, while populists are more willing to prioritize the attitudes of their voters, the majority of populists are still policy-motivated. Moreover, Figure H.9 reveals that simple attitude differences between voters and average parliamentarians from parties strongly resemble the representation gaps depicted in Figure 7. Hence, it is mostly the distinct attitudes of right-wing populists that make them fill representation gaps.

This evidence is consistent with right-wing populists behaving like rational politicians in many spatial election models (Downs, 1957; Schofield, 2007) and raises the question of whether right-wing populists are successful because they are populist or because they fill representation gaps. If filling representation gaps is the reason for their rise, this would imply that non-populist right-wing parties could be just as successful if they filled the cultural representation gap. Similarly, it would imply that populists who do not fill representation gaps do not rise. Ultimately, this paper does not aim to differentiate populism from policy positions. It aims to demonstrate that the positions of right-wing populists coincide with large representation gaps, which might help to explain their success. It does not test how populist rhetoric itself is related to their success. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the rise of populism during the last decades is nearly completely driven by the rise of right-wing populists (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022), who are the only populists to fill the cultural representation gap. Similarly, left-wing mainstream parties have suffered larger electoral losses than mainstream center parties (Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrorocco, 2020) and are simultaneously further away from the cultural attitudes of ordinary people. These observations hint at the possibility that policy positions matter more than populist rhetoric.

This raises the question of why the parties that fill the cultural representation gap use populist language. A potential explanation is that discussing representation gaps enables culturally right-wing parties to advertise themselves. Many such parties have relatively less competent politicians (Bó et al., 2023). Hence, their comparative advantage relative to other parties might be to offer popular cultural policies. As a result, they might profit from an increased salience of cultural issues and representation gaps. It thus seems natural for them to make striking claims about representation gaps to bring attention to this issue, and such rhetoric is populist according to the commonly used definition by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017).

6.3 The Co-evolution of Representation Gaps and Populism in Germany

After 2009, when right-wing populists filled the cultural representation gap, exactly these parties rose sharply in the polls. This raises the question of whether there is a causal connection between representation gaps and the rise of right-wing populist parties. While the data used here cannot establish a causal connection, it might be used to gauge *how* the relationship could work under the assumption that there is a causal effect.

I distinguish two potential relationships between representation gaps and the success of populist parties. First, policymaking and popular attitudes might have diverged, which opened up more space for populists and translated into more populist voting. Second, the differences between policymaking and attitudes might have remained constant but become "activated," for instance, by political actors who discussed particularly large representation gaps. Such coverage could have increased the importance voters attach to the cultural representation gap, which advantages populists because they fill it. These two accounts are related to the calculation of the policy dimension indexes (Equation 6). According to this formula, the cultural representation gap is an average of the representation gaps on individual cultural issues weighted with perceived importance. Hence, gaps might increase because i) policymaking and attitudes diverge on individual issues or ii) issues, where representation gaps are large, get perceived as more important. Thus, a way to distinguish between the two accounts is to check whether a potential increase in representation gaps was driven i) by a divergence between policymaking and voters' attitudes or ii) changes in what topics voters find important.

To distinguish between these possibilities, I employ the "tempotal dataset," which covers Germany from 2009 to 2023, during the rise of the right-wing populist AfD. Regarding the rise of populism, Germany follows the same trajectory as many other Western democracies. Historically, the country has been dominated by a social democratic party and a conservative party. Until 2015, the German parliament did not contain a party to the right of the conservative party. During the refugee crisis, the recently founded AfD turned into a typical right-wing populist party and has maintained a strong and growing electoral presence since then.

Figure 8 depicts the mean attitudes of citizens and the policy positions of national MPs regarding three policy items.[67] They all contrast policy changes in two opposite directions. I scale issues such that a position at 5 indicates that subjects prefer a balanced option/the status quo. As before, higher positions are more right-wing/pro-growth/anti-immigration. To visualize the perceived importance, Figure 8 depicts the share of voters who consider the issue at hand most important

As can be seen, representation gaps stayed roughly constant on all three issues during the rise of right-wing populism. Figure H.4 and Figure H.5 provide evidence that the av-

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6. I analyze citizens instead of voters for comparability because information on voting intention is not available for all citizen surveys used here. However, using voters only does not change the results notably for the surveys that do contain a voting indicator.
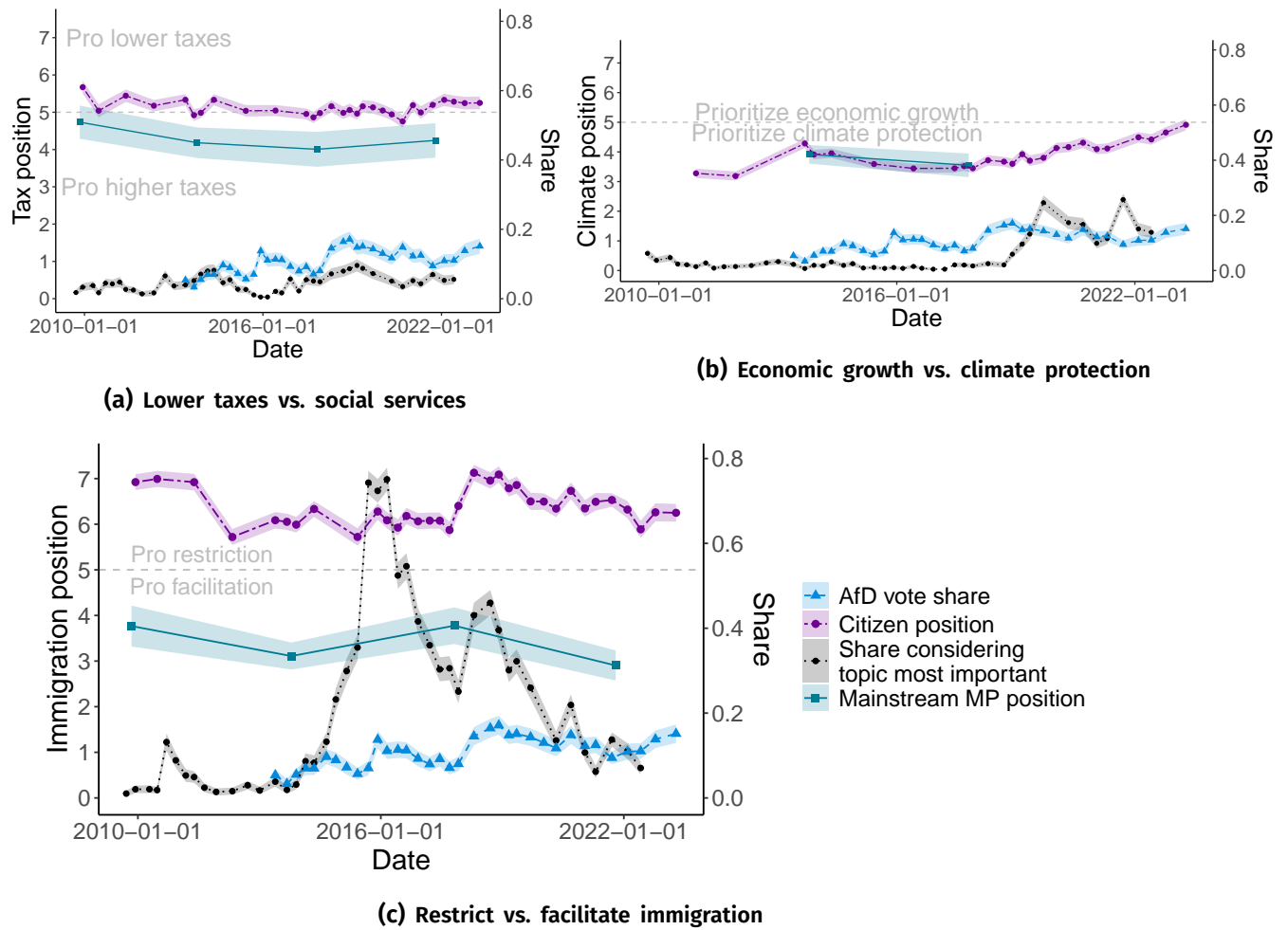
7. Table I.2 provides details about the survey items.

(a) Lower taxes vs. social services

(b) Economic growth vs. climate protection

(c) Restrict vs. facilitate immigration

Figure 8. Representation Gaps in Germany over Time by Policy Issue
Note: For all panels, the positions of citizens and mainstream MPs are measured on the left vertical axis, while the other two lines are measured on the right vertical axis. Mainstream MP position includes data on all MPs who do not belong to the AfD. MP data for climate protection is only available for two periods since the corresponding item was only included in two MP surveys. Shaded areas visualize 95% confidence bands.

erage of mainstream parties depicted in Figure 8 does not mask cross-party heterogeneity. In particular, Figure H.5 shows that the policy space *perceived* by voters did not change notably during the rise of populism. Hence, the positions of mainstream parties and voters did not diverge so that populists had more space to fill. Instead, Figure 8 shows that the perceived importance of policy issues changed strongly. Most notably, immigration, where the representation gap is particularly large, became considered much more important during the rise of the AfD. This result is not specific to Germany but also obtained for Europe in general, as shown in Appendix F.

Appendix G examines the interaction of the perceived importance of immigration and the extent to which voters are represented more formally. It finds that the interaction predicts voting for right-wing populists well and much better than immigration attitudes or the main effects of being represented/perceived importance. Hence, the perceived importance of immigration only predicts AfD voting for citizens who are not represented by mainstream parties. Equivalently, among the citizens who are not represented by mainstream parties, only those vote for the AfD who consider immigration important. Thus, representation gaps and a high degree of perceived importance are both needed to predict AfD voting.

This evidence does not establish that the cultural representation gap did cause the rise of populism. It merely suggests that if it played a role in causing the rise of populism, it did so not because policymaking became less representative of the popular will but because existing differences got activated. A key question this evidence leaves open is why voters started considering immigration more important. The trend lines up well with the actual numbers of incoming asylum seekers, which means that actual immigration might have activated the large pre-existing gap there. However, it is also possible that it was the discourse of the media or populists themselves that brought attention to this topic.

7 Conclusion

Methodologically, the paper at hand uses data rarely employed by economists —a combination of MP and voter surveys (Laver, 2014). As I show, this data type is of high quality and closely resembles real-world behavior. Moreover, in contrast to established measures, it allows researchers to estimate the representation of political attitudes. Although many economic studies explore representation, most of them focus on the numerical under-representation of certain groups in positions of power. Hence, many questions regarding the representation of attitudes remain unexplored. This paper provides evidence that numerical representation and attitude representation are not strongly related, such that examining attitude representation in greater detail seems to be a promising endeavor.

Moreover, the tendency to be culturally left-wing might not only apply to politicians. I provide evidence that the media is biased relative to voters in the same direction politicians are, but even more strongly in magnitude. Similar media biases are found by Puglisi

and Snyder ([2015](#)) for the USA while Haidt and Lukianoff ([2018](#)) summarize evidence that experts tend to be more socially left-wing than ordinary citizens. Examining the interplay between political representation gaps, media bias, and a potential "expert bias" might be another promising starting point for future research.

Regarding the rise of populist parties, my results raise the question of whether scholars have focused too much on populism itself, which is usually defined based on rhetoric, as opposed to the substantive policy positions of populist parties. The rise of populism in Europe is largely driven by right-wing populists (Guriev and Papaioannou, [2022](#)). A potential reason, consistent with the stylized facts presented here, is that they fill the cultural representation gap while other populists don't.

The paper also helps to organize the increasingly multitudinous set of reduced-form studies that examine the effects of various shocks on the strength of populists (Guriev and Papaioannou, [2022](#)). Studies have revealed a very complex pattern of shocks that can affect the populist vote share differently, partly for unknown reasons (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, [2016](#); Guriev and Papaioannou, [2022](#)). Representation gaps might help to explain these heterogeneities. Possibly, shocks only lead many voters to switch from mainstream to populist parties if they are not satisfied with the way mainstream parties are dealing with the shock. This line of reasoning suggests that the rise of populism is not entirely due to exogenous shocks and, therefore, outside of mainstream parties' control. Rather, populism could be a symptom of representation gaps, which implies that mainstream politicians can mitigate or even reverse the rise of populism by filling representation gaps themselves.

From a welfare perspective, my results raise the question of whether representation gaps are problematic and, by extension, to what extent right-wing populists improve welfare by filling them. Key to this consideration is that i) populists often damage democratic institutions (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, [2023](#); Bellodi, Morelli, and Vannoni, [2024](#)) and ii) misperceptions about political topics, particularly immigration, are widespread (Barrera et al., [2020](#); Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal, [2020](#); Alesina, Miano, and Stantcheva, [2023](#); Lutz and Bitschnau, [2023](#)). The former finding is a normative argument against populists but not against mainstream parties filling representation gaps. The latter observation suggests that representation gaps could be welfare-optimal since they might reflect a lack of information by voters. However, not all evidence is consistent with this interpretation. As shown here and also found by others Kustov, Laaker, and Reller ([2021](#)) and Danieli et al. ([2022](#)), political attitudes are very stable over time and robust to major shocks, making it unlikely that they are easily susceptible to information. Consistent with this observation, many experimental studies find that providing subjects with information about immigrants either does not strongly affect their attitudes (Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin, [2019](#); Alesina, Miano, and Stantcheva, [2023](#)) or makes them even more opposed to immigration (Barrera et al., [2020](#); Guenther, [2024](#)). This suggests that even if part of representation gaps is driven by misinformation, closing the gap through information campaigns is difficult to achieve in practice. Moreover, as shown here, even the representation gaps between well-informed citizens and parliamentarians are large, and Günther

(2023) shows that most Europeans are opposed to asylum seeker immigration if they are well informed about their characteristics. This suggests that at least part of the gaps are driven by differences in hardly mutable preferences or predispositions. Indeed, studies have shown that politicians are much more risk-loving (Heß et al., 2018) than "ordinary" citizens, place greater emphasis on efficiency compared to equality (Fisman et al., 2015) and have different Big Five personality traits (Caprara et al., 2003; Gerber et al., 2011).

In my view, this implies that much work on populism misses the forest for the trees. Scholars who work on populism often justify the relevance of their work with the idea that, once in power, populists will turn democracies into dictatorships (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2023; Bellodi, Morelli, and Vannoni, 2024). Even though this is rarely spelled out, a main argument against dictatorships is likely that dictators will not act in the interest of their subjects. Fighting populism (as some scholars do, e.g., Galasso et al. (2022)) is, therefore, a means to an end —making sure policymaking is in the peoples' interest. My results suggest that even in democracies without populist rule, policymaking might already differ systematically and strongly from what would be in the people's interest. Clearly, dictatorships would generate much larger representation gaps, and I am not arguing that the fears of scientists are unjustified. Rather, I urge scholars to consider populism also as a warming light, telling us that current policymaking on cultural issues might be far from welfare-optimal. Thus, identifying what part of representation gaps go against the interest of voters and proposing welfare-improving policies seems to be understudied and of primary importance.

In case one tries to reduce representation gaps through institutional reforms, this paper suggests that many reforms might be ineffective. For instance, giving the European Parliament more power relative to the European Commission or giving member states more power relative to the European Parliament is unlikely to reduce representation gaps because nearly all parties and parliaments are biased relative to voters in the same way. Instead, increased use of binding referendums might be more likely to have an effect.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

Appendix A   The Dimensionality of the European Policy Space

Figure A.1 depicts a correlation matrix of all 14 attitude variables, based on all citizens of 27 EU countries and weighted to adjust for population size differences. Colored boxes contain the correlation coefficients of variables belonging to the same policy dimension. Insignificant correlations are not shown. All variables are scaled such that higher values indicate attitudes that are more economically right-wing, culturally conservative or anti-EU. The only variable that is not straightforward to classify is the attitude regarding EU referendums. I classify a preference in favor of binding EU referendums as anti-EU, because referendums create an additional hurdle for EU integration.

All significant correlation coefficients between cultural variables are positive, and most are in the range of 0.2-0.4. All but one cultural variables correlate (positively) significantly with all other cultural variables. The only exception is the rejection of abortion rights for women, which is (positively) significantly related to a preference for traditional gender roles and opposition to same-sex marriage but not significantly correlated with any other cultural attitude. Correlations of cultural variables with non-cultural variables tend to be weaker in magnitude, and some are negative. Similarly, all EU attitudes are positively and significantly correlated with each other. In particular, a preference for EU referendums correlates positively with opposition to EU unification and EU membership. Anti-EU attitudes correlate positively, but less strongly, with conservative attitudes regarding all cultural variables, except for abortion. Correlations with economic attitudes are weaker in magnitude and less systematic. Out of the six correlation coefficients between the four economic variables, four are significantly positive, one is significantly positive but small in magnitude, and one is insignificant. Correlations with non-economic variables tend to be smaller and less systematic. Overall, this evidence is consistent with the previous literature and suggests that economic attitudes should be distinguished from cultural ones. The evidence speaks less clearly for a distinction between cultural and EU attitudes. While they correlate stronger with each other, most Europeans opposed to the EU are also generally culturally conservative.

Alternatively to sorting issues directly in dimensions, one could perform an empirically driven approach, using a principal component analysis. To mirror the analysis in Section 5.2.1, I focus on the eight issues that voters, members of the European parliament and national MPs were asked about. The principal component analysis reveals the first policy dimension to explain about 26% of attitude variance. As sown in table, Table A.1 this dimension correlates strongly and positively with non-economic variables. It correlates strongest with a desire for more severe sentences and a preference for assimilation of immigrants. Hence, I interpret it as cultural conservatism. The second dimension extracted by the principal component analysis explains about 15% of attitude variation and is most strongly correlated with pro EU and anti-abortion attitudes. However, it also correlates with economically right-wing attitudes. Overall, I interpret this dimension as pro-market and pro-EU.
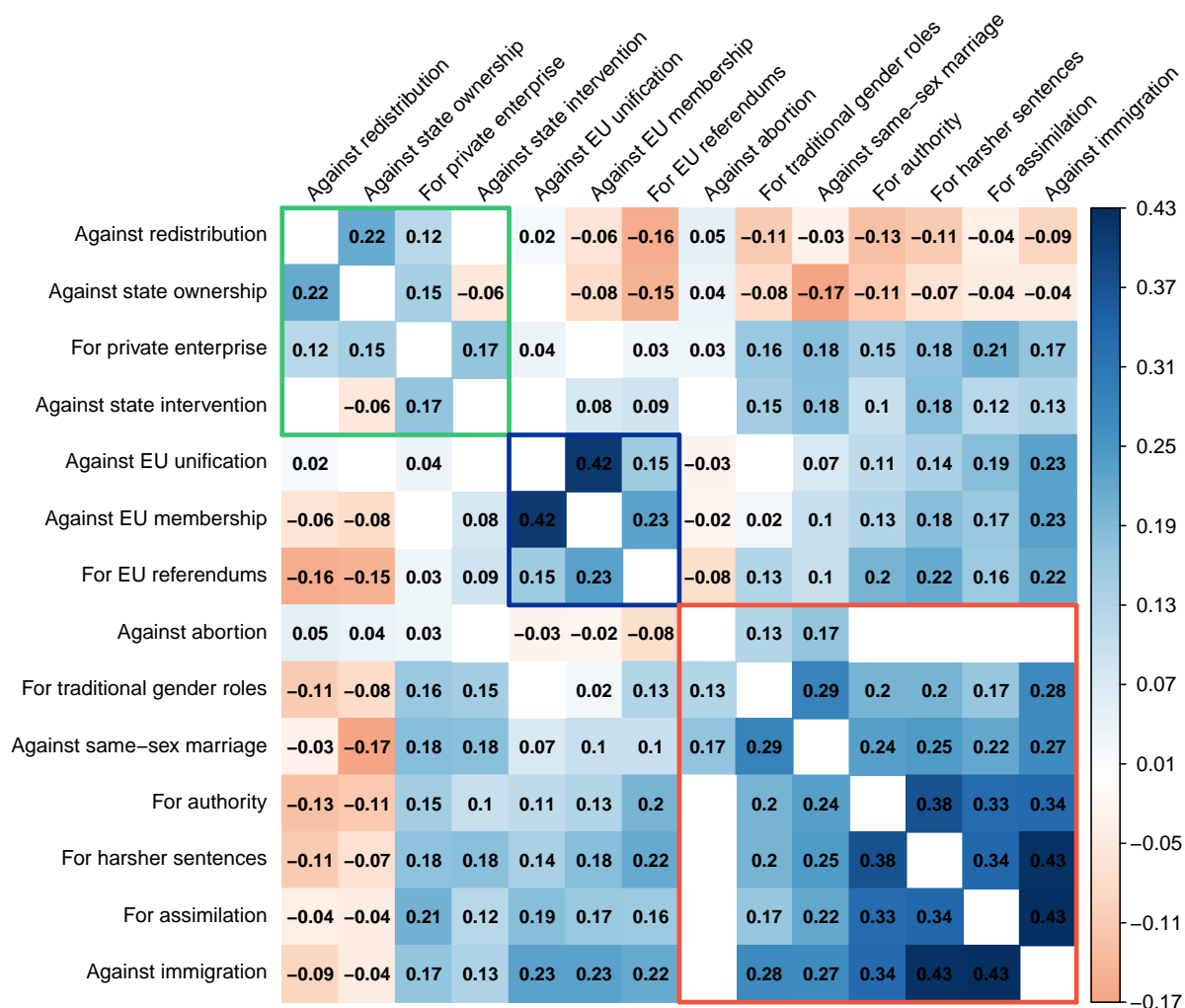
Figure A.1. Correlation Matrix of Policy Attitudes

Note: Numbers indicate correlation coefficients between the corresponding policy attitudes on the vertical and horizontal axis. Correlations of a variable with itself and correlations that are not significant at the 1% level are not shown. The sample includes citizens of 27 European countries who either voted at the 2009 Europen election or the most recent national election. Estimates are weighted to adjust for population differences between countries. Colored squares comprise variables classified as economic (green), cultural (red) and EU-related (blue).

Figure A.2 depicts the resulting two-dimensional attitude density distributions of voters and MPs. Results resemble those of teh theory-based classification of issues into dimension presented in Section 5.2.1. The most striking result is that the density of MP attitudes is located much lower than the distribution of voter attitudes. This indicates that MPs are more culturally liberal than their voters. In contrast, attitude distributions are similar regarding the economic/EU dimension.

Table A.1. Correlations of attitude variables with the first 5 principal components of the European policy space

	Dim.1	Dim.2	Dim.3	Dim.4	Dim.5
State Intervention	0.429	0.327	-0.112	0.560	0.587
Redistribution	-0.121	0.110	0.743	0.552	-0.286
Assimilation	0.663	0.089	-0.125	0.096	-0.488
Sentences	0.680	0.134	-0.262	0.055	-0.246
Abortion	0.079	0.570	0.513	-0.488	0.134
Same-sex marriage	0.547	0.479	0.038	-0.199	0.008
EU membership	0.581	-0.497	0.243	-0.139	0.289
EU unification	0.554	-0.534	0.355	-0.083	0.038
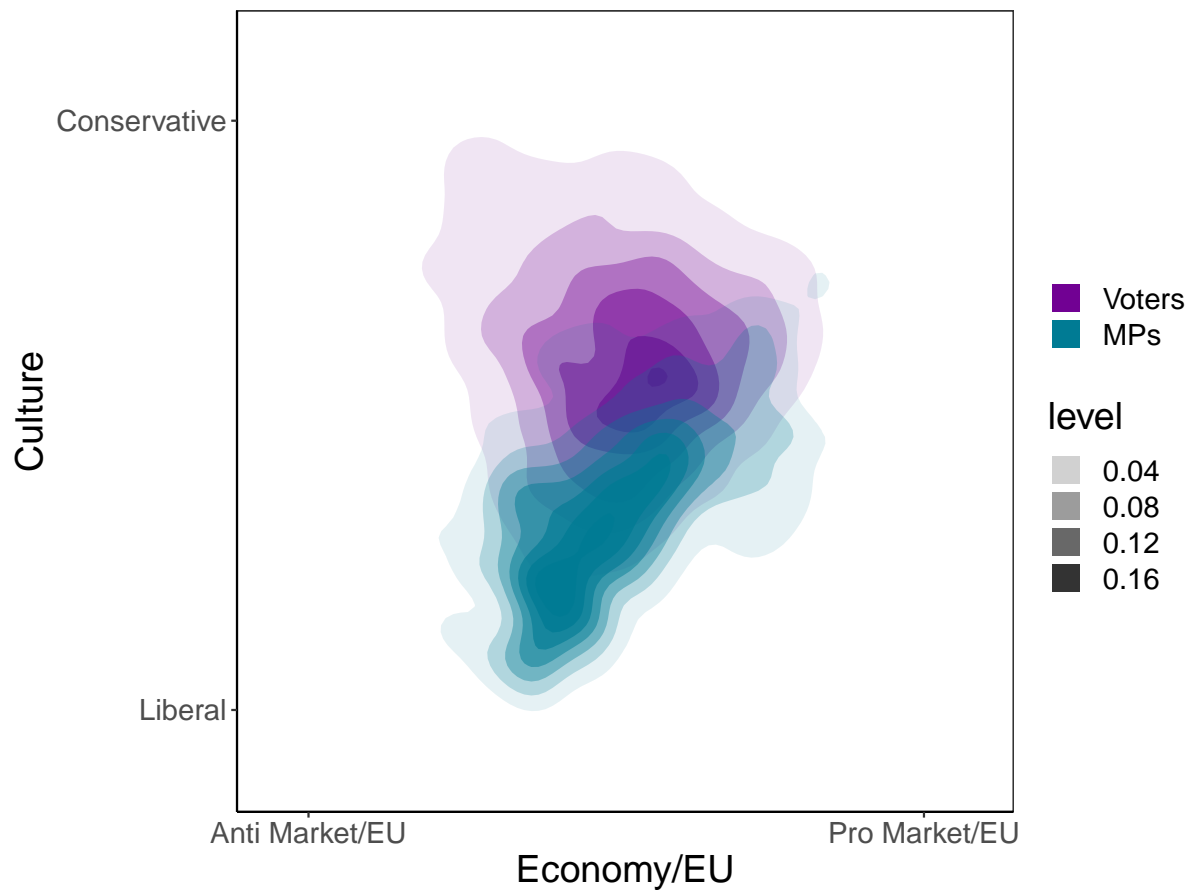
Figure A.2. Two-Dimensional Attitude Distributions of Voters and Parliamentarians Based on Principal Component Analysis
Note: The two attitude dimensions result from a principal component analysis of individual policy attitudes. The density is higher in less transparent areas. Data is pooled across Europe and includes attitudes of 127 MEPs, 738 national MPs and 19.813 voters.

Appendix B   Data Quality

B.1   Representativeness of the MEP Survey Data

Figure B.1 to Figure B.3 compare the sample MEPs to the universe of MEPs —all MEPs who were elected in 2009— regarding several demographic variables. Data is taken from Beauvallet, Lepaux, and Michon (2013) and the website of the European Parliament[8]
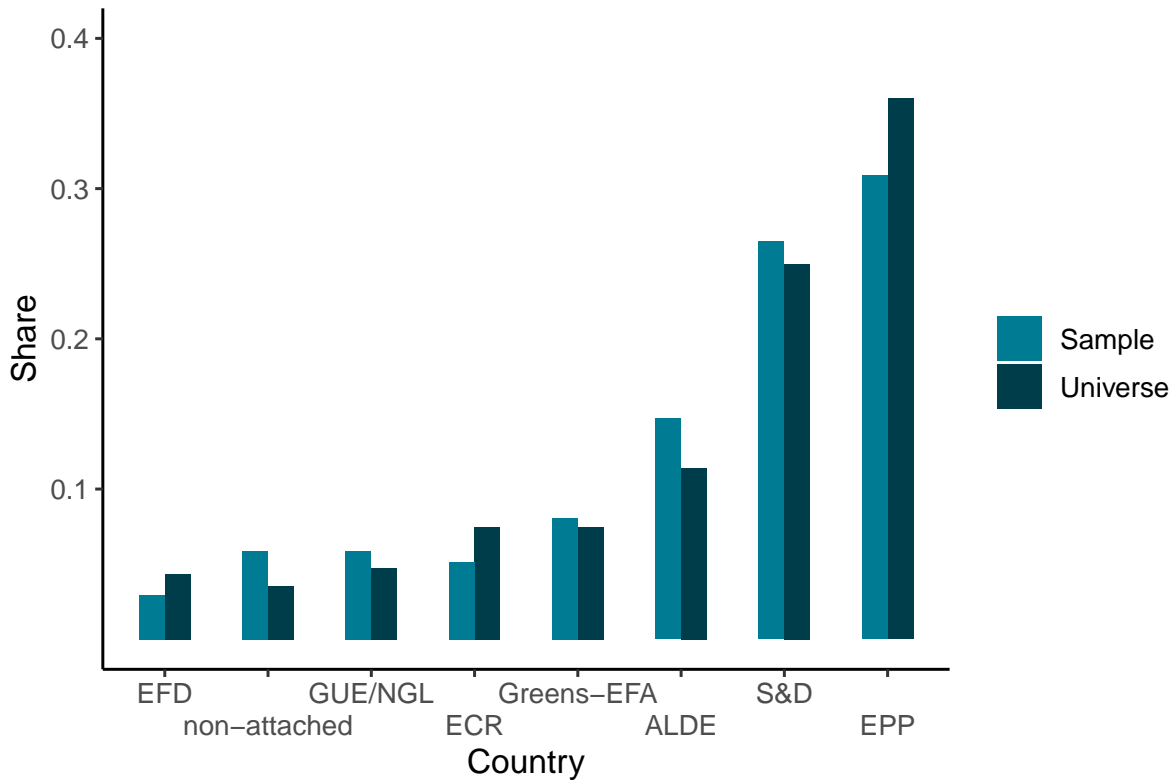
Figure B.1. MEP-Sample Representativeness Regarding Party Group

Note: This figure compares the party group distribution of the MEP universe to the party group distribution of sample MEPs used in the paper.

Perhaps most importantly, estimates of representation gaps might be biased due to the self-selection of MEPs based on their political stance in the survey. To examine this possibility Figure B.1 compares the seat shares of all European Parliament party groups based on the 136 sample MEPs to the universe seat share distribution of the 2009 European Parliament. As can be seen, the sample is representative of the full parliament, which mitigates concerns about selection into the sample based on political attitudes. Moreover, the differences between the sample and the universe are not systematic. The two largest differences concern the Christian democratic/Conservative EPP and the Liberal/Centrist ALDE who offer similar policy positions. While the EPP is underrepresented in the sample, ALDE is over-represented.

The representativeness of the sample is even higher among other demographic variables. In 2009 66% of all newly elected MEPs were male. In the sample, the corresponding share is about 66.42%. Similarly, For about 12.22% of all MEPs, a high school degree is their highest educational attainment, while for about 62.22% this is a Bachelor or Master and about 24.44% a Ph.D. In the sample, the proportions are about 12.6%, 64.57%, and 22.83% respectively.

Figure B.2 compares the distributions of occupations previously held by the sample MEPs to the distribution of occupations held to be the universe of MEPs prior to becoming MEPs. The vast majority of MEPs have worked in two out of the 12 occupation categories prior to becoming MEP: "higher administrative jobs," which include senior executive or po-

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litical aide, and "professional and technical jobs," which incorporate scientists, journalists, and teachers. Figure B.2 reveals that the sample distribution of the previous occupation is representative.

Figure B.3 assesses representativeness regarding the country of origin of MEPs. Differences between the sample and the universe are larger than for other demographic variables, which might partly be explained by the fact that the number of different demographic categories is higher regarding countries.
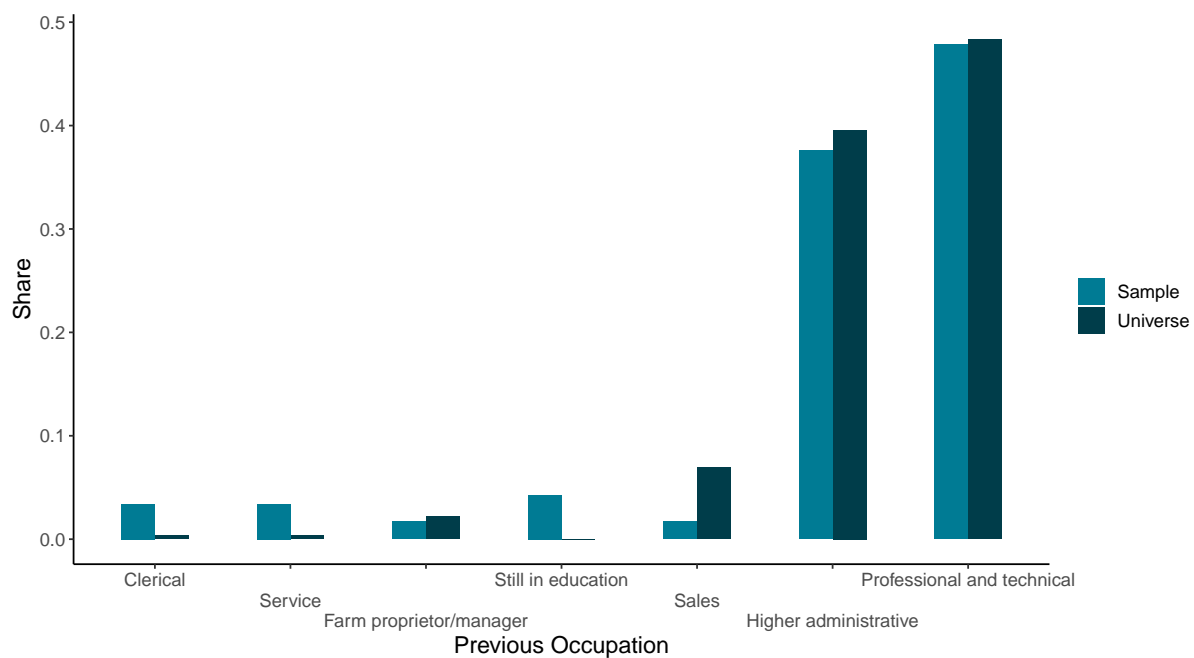

Figure B.2. MEP-Sample Representativeness Regarding Occupation
Note: This figure compares the previous occupation distribution of the MEP universe to the previous occupation distribution on of the sample MEPs used in the paper.

Overall, these results suggest that the sample is broadly representative of the MEP universe. The largest sample biases exist regarding country of origin, which means that within-country comparisons provide important robustness checks.

B.2 Association of MP Survey Data with Established Datasets

Another way to assess the validity of parliamentarian survey data is to examine its correlation with established and validated data sources. The two most commonly used datasets for party positions are the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES, Jolly et al. (2022)) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP, Lehmann et al. (Manifesto Project Dataset)).

To this end, I calculate the policy positions of parties for various issues based on the combined parliamentarian survey data by taking for each party and issue means with equal weights of the positions of all of its elected parliamentarians. CHES and CMP directly provide party-level data. For both datasets and each party, I use the values closest to 2010 (MP surveys were administered at the end of 2009 to 2010) but exclude observations from the analysis that lie outside the time window from 2006 to 2014. I then match the resulting party-level estimates of all datasets. Table B.1 shows how I match
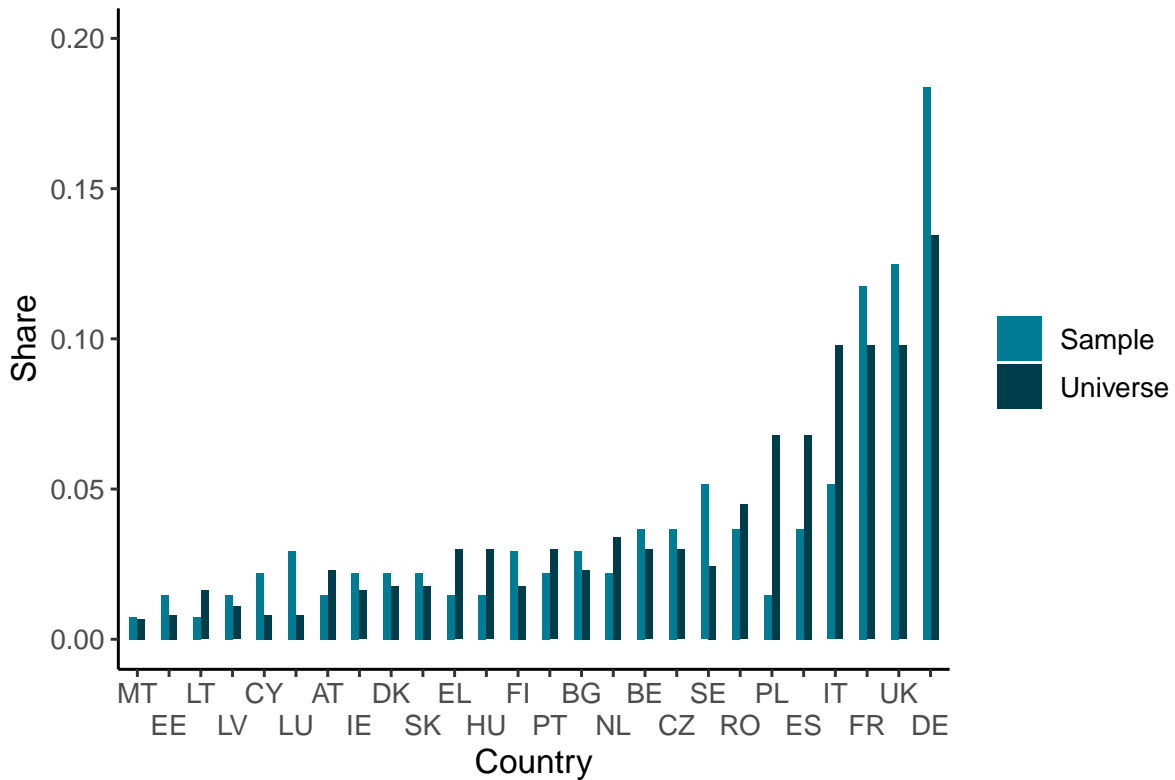
Figure B.3. MEP-Sample Representativeness Regarding Country of Election

Note: This figure compares the country of election distribution of the MEP universe to the country of election distribution of the sample MEPs used in the paper.

variables. I am able to generate 19 matches in total, including 15 matches between the MP survey data and one of the other datasets for 72 parties. Importantly, I am able to match dimension-level measures for the cultural and economic dimensions of all three datasets. I scale all variables such that higher values indicate a position that is more right-wing/conservative/anti-EU.

The quality of matches varies by variable. For some variables, the measures of different datasets refer to very similar concepts. The CHES measure for redistribution asked experts to assess the "position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor," while in the MP surveys, MPs were asked whether income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people. In contrast, the CMP measure for sentences (degree of penalty) calculates the share of quasi-sentences that contain "favourable mentions of strict law enforcement, and tougher actions against domestic crime," while the MP survey data measure asked MPs whether "people who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days." These concepts are related but less similar because, in contrast to the MP survey, the CMP measure also refers to tougher actions against domestic crime, which might include more than just harsher sentences. Similarly, the economic index based on the MP survey data includes the redistribution issue (which receives a large weight), while the corresponding CMP measure does not include the issue of redistribution. In general, none of the matches between any pair of measures is perfect, as no pair refers to identical concepts. Hence, it is unreasonable to expect correlations of 1. However, if the

Table B.1. Variables Matches between MP surveys, CHES and CMP

Variable name	MP surveys	CHES	CMP
Private enterprise	Private enterprise is the best way to solve [COUNTRY]'s economic problems. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	NA	Favourable mentions of the free market and free market capitalism as an economic model. [per401]
State ownership	Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	NA	Privatisation: Positive [per4011] - Privatisation: Negative [per4132] - Nationalisation [per413]- Publicly-Owned Industry: Positive [per4123][1]
State intervention	Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	NA	NA
Redistribution	Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	Position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. [redistribution]	NA
Assimilation	Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [COUNTRY]. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	Position on integration of immigrants and asylum seekers (multiculturalism vs. assimilation). [multiculturalism]	Multiculturalism: Negative [per608]- Multiculturalism: Positive [per608][2]
Same-sex marriage	Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	Position on social lifestyle (e.g. rights for homosexuals, gender equality). [sociallifestyle].	NA
Abortion	Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	NA	NA
Sentences	People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	NA	Favourable mentions of strict law enforcement, and tougher actions against domestic crime. [per605]
Immigration	Immigration to [COUNTRY] should be decreased significantly. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree)	Position on immigration policy. [immigrate_policy]	NA
EU unification	Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? (Pushed further – gone too far)	NA	NA
EU membership	Generally speaking, do you think that [COUNTRY]'s membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? ("Good thing," "bad thing," "Neither")	NA	NA
Deregulation	Mean of State intervention, State ownership, and Private enterprise (equal weights)	Position on deregulation of markets [deregulation]	NA
Economic index	Mean of State intervention and Redistribution (weighted with perceived importance)	Position in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues [lrecon]	Economy (State <-> Market)[3]
Cultural index	Mean of Assimilation, Abortion, Sentences, EU unification, and EU membership (weighted with perceived importance)	Position in terms of its views on social and cultural values [galtan]	Society (Progressive <-> Conservative)[3]
EU index	Mean of EU unification and EU membership (equal weights)	Overall orientation towards European integration [eu_position]	European Integration (Position)[3]

Note: MP surveys refers to the survey items MPs were given (see Table I.1 for details). CHES refers to the item descriptions of the CHES—Trend File codebook (version 1.3). CMP refers to the measure description from codebook version 2020b. Variable names in square brackets.

[1]According to the manual, Privatisation: Positive measures "Favourable references to privatisation." Privatisation: Negative measures "Negative references to the privatisation system; need to change the privatisation system." Nationalisation measures "Favourable mentions of government ownership of industries, either partial or complete" and Publicly-Owned Industry: Positive measured "Positive references to the concept of publicly-owned industries."

[2]According to the manual, Multiculturalism: Negative measures "The enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration. Appeals for cultural homogeneity in society" and Multiculturalism: Positive measures "Favourable mentions of cultural diversity and cultural plurality within domestic societies."

[3]Definitions are taken from the CMP website.

datasets provide valid estimates, it is reasonable to expect a positive correlation because all measures within variables are related.

Figure B.4 depicts correlation coefficients between measures of different datasets referring to similar variables. All correlation coefficients are positive and highly significant and the mean correlation is about 0.58. Correlations between the MP survey and CHES measures are higher than those between the MP survey and CMP measures, which might be because the MP surveys and the CHES are both surveys while the CMP codes sentences in manifestos. All but one correlation regarding the dimension indexes is above 0.6. The single exception is the correlation between the MP survey and the CMP measure for the economic index, which might be due to the fact that the CMP measure does not include redistribution while the MP survey measure does. Finally, Figure B.4 reveals that MP survey measures correlate as strongly with CHES or CMP measures as CHES and CMP measures correlate with each other. I interpret this as evidence that MP survey data provides valid estimates of policy positions.
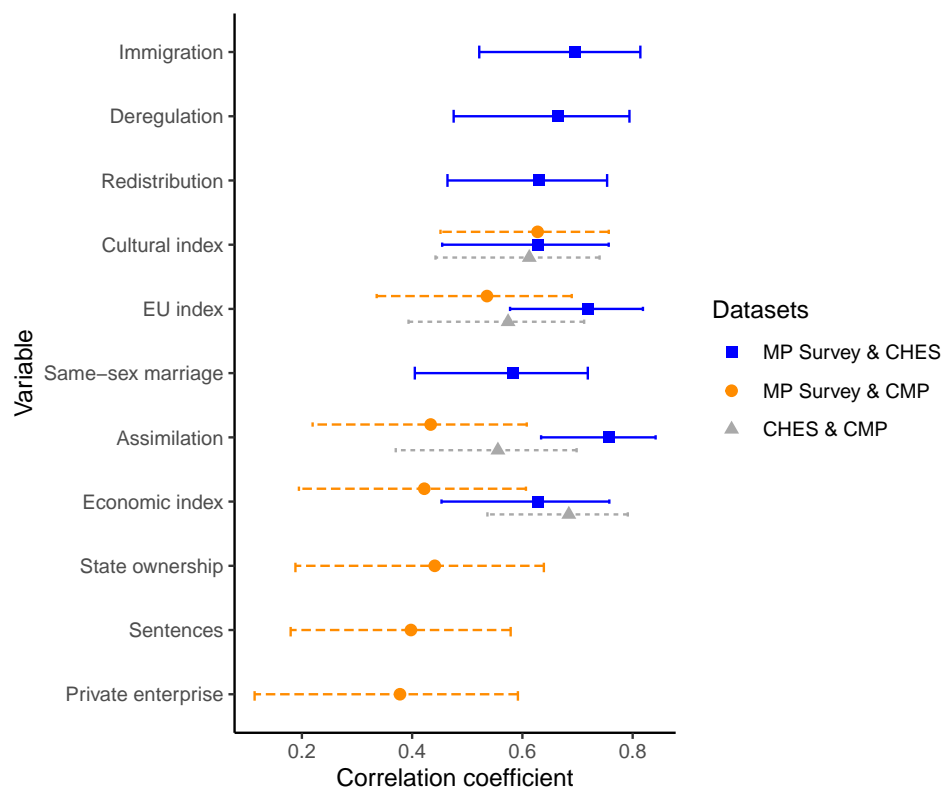

Figure B.4. Correlations between Measures of MP Surveys, the CHES and the CMP
Note: This plot shows correlation coefficients of party position measures based on different datasets. I also depict 95% confidence intervals. The MP survey estimates for Deregulation are based on MEPs only due to data availability. For all other measures I pool national MPs and MEPs. In general, I only use data on elected parliamentarians for the MP survey data.

A general concern with the MP survey data is that the MP survey data does not contain enough policy items to enable estimates of positions on broad political dimensions. Comparing indexes based on the three datasets mitigates this concern. The CHES asked experts to estimate the "overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration," the "position of the party in terms of its ideological stance on economic issues,"

and the "position in terms of their views on social and cultural values." Similarly, the CMP indexes are based on many policy issues and, therefore, provide credible measures for policy dimensions. Figure B.4 reveals that correlations between any pair of indexes are high, which suggests that the indexes used in this paper capture overall policy dimensions well.

B.3 Validation of Survey Data with Referendum Data

B.3.1 Voting on Referendums. Estimates based on survey data might lead to biased results for several reasons (Heckman, Jagelka, and Kautz, 2021). Hence, it is essential to validate survey-based data with behavioral data. Consequently, this section validates survey estimates for representation gaps by comparing survey responses of voters and politicians with their behavior in referendums. To this end, I restrict the analysis to Switzerland because it is the only European country with a sufficiently large number of referendums.

As described in Section 3, I use two datasets. First, I use a dataset containing information on the behavior of politicians and voters regarding 82 referendums between 1970 and 2024. While many more referendums hwereheld iduringthat time interval, the referendums I uusedhave two special properties. First, they were held on a specific issue, matching one of the categories I use in the paper. Second, all referendums are clearly classifiable as left-wing or right-wing in the sense that passing of the referendum would unambiguously push legislation to the left or right on the issue at hand.

For each referendum, I have data on the shares of the voting-age Swiss population and national parliamentarians who voted yes or no, the shares of parties, weighted with their vote share, who officially positioned themselves in favor of a yes vote, and whether the government officially positioned itself in favor of a yes vote, opposed it or was neutral. From the 2010s onward I also have a measure of media tone, calculated as the share of media articles that take a favorable position on the referendum proposal Swissvotes (2024). To calculate the representation gap between voters and institution X for a referendum r I first calculate the difference in voting behavior between voters and X — $Diff_r^X$ as follows.

$$Diff_r^{MP} = \Big\{ \text{share of "yes"-voting voters} - \text{share of "yes"-voting MPs.}$$

$$Diff_r^{Me} = \Big\{ \text{share of "yes"-voting voters} - \text{Media tone measure.}$$

To calculate representation gaps between voters and parties, let r be a referendum with two options $\in \{yes, no\}$. Let the vote of voter k be denoted by $v(k)$. $v(k)=$"yes" indicates that k is in favor of the referendum initiative and $v(k)=$"no" indicates that he is opposed to it. Let V be the set of those who vote on referendum r. Let $rec(j)$ be the alternative that party j officially recommends to voters. Finally, let there be a set of parties P and let $s(p)$ be the vote share in the last national election that party p got.

$$Diff_r^{Pa} = \Big\{ \frac{\sum_{i \in V} \mathbb{1}[v(i) = yes]}{||V||} - \sum_{p \in P} \mathbb{1}[rec(p) = yes] \cdot s(p) - 0.5 \cdot \sum_{p \in P} \mathbb{1}[rec(p) = neutral]$$

For the government, I have data on whether it supported or opposed the yes-vote, or whether it took a neutral position but not on the share of members of the government who supported the initiative. Hence, I interpret support of a yes-vote as if the government supported it with unanimity and support of a no-vote as if the government opposed it with unanimity. Consequently, I calculate representation gaps between voters and the government as

$$Diff_r^{Go} = \begin{cases} \text{share of "yes"-voting voters} - 100, & \text{if government recommended "yes"} \\ \text{share of "yes"-voting voters} - 50, & \text{if government was neutral} \\ \text{share of "yes"-voting voters} - 0, & \text{if government recommended "no"}. \end{cases}$$

To calculate representation gaps from the $Diff_r$ measures I use the fact that I know whether referendum r was right-wing or left-wing:

$$RG_r^X = \begin{cases} Diff_r^X, & \text{if r is left-wing} \\ -1 \cdot Diff_r^X, & \text{if r is right-wing}. \end{cases}$$

Due to this scaling $RG_r > 0$ means that voters voted more left-wing n referendum r than the comparison group, while $RG_r < 0$ indicates that voters voted more right-wing. Finally, I calculate the average representation gaps for the cultural and economic dimensions, respectively by taking the average with equal weights of all RG_r who belong to an economic or cultural issue.

Second, I use survey data that contains the responses from a representative sample of 3.025 Swiss voters and 145 elected Swiss national parliamentarians. Both types of subjects responded in 2007 to the same items regarding State intervention, Redistribution, Assimilation, Abortion, Same-sex marriage, and Sentences, which are described in Table I.1. In addition, they were asked to what extent they agree/disagree with the statement

Immigrants are good for the the Swiss economy.

Referendum data only contains information on yes-no decisions. To make the Likert-scale data from the surveys comparable to it, I use the share of those holding a right-wing stance on an issue as a measure for the position of a group. For instance, I calculate attitude differences regarding the punishment of criminals as the share of Swiss voters who agree or strongly agree that punishment for criminals should be more severe minus the share of Swiss MPs who agree or strongly agree with that statement. Then, I calculate the average economic and cultural representation gaps, weighting for the relative perceived issue importance as in the main part of the paper.

Figure B.5 depicts average representation gaps for all decades since the 1970s. Economic RGs have undergone a major transformation. In the 1970s, political actors were more left-wing than voters, and this representation gap was similarly large as the one on cultural issues. But since the 1980s, the economic representation gap switched signs, and from then on all political actors, and later the media, continued to be more market-oriented than voters until the present. In contrast, all estimates for cultural representation

gaps are negative. This shows that the parliament, parties, and the government have all been more culturally liberal than voters for the last 54 years, while the media has been more liberal for at least the last 24 years.

Importantly, Figure B.5 is not directly comparable to Figure 8. Figure B.5 includes survey responses and referendum votes of right-wing populist MPs, while Figure 8 excludes such responses. I do not exclude populists here because the referendum data does not enable me to identify populists when analyzing the parliament. Notably, the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party rose in the polls chiefly since the 1990s when the parliamentary representation gap was relatively large. Thereafter, likely due to the strengthening of this party, representation gaps decreased.
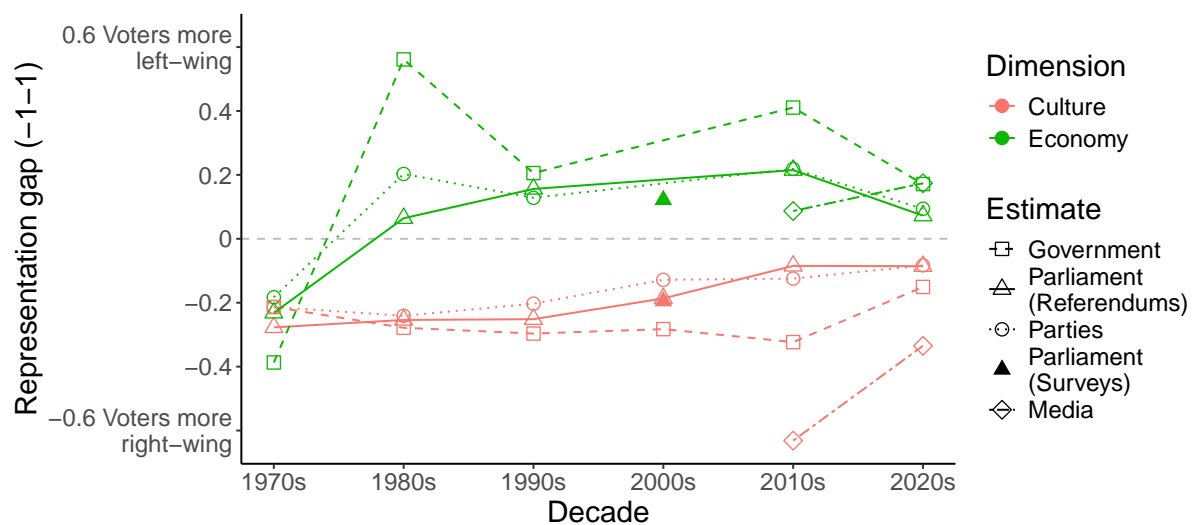

Figure B.5. Representation Gaps Over Time

Note: The horizontal axis shows the decade. Positive values indicate that the institution is more right-wing than voters. Negative values indicate that it is more left-wing. The dependent variable ranges from -1 to 1. Some estimates are missing due to missing data.

However, the point Figure B.5 is supposed to make is that estimates for representation gaps are similar, whether one compares voters to the parliament, or parties and whether one compares survey responses or real voting on referendums. Moreover, Figure B.5 shows that gaps between the government and voters tend to be even larger than those between the parliament and voters, which is consistent with the fact that right-wing populists are usually underrepresented in the government relative to their vote share and often even excluded from governments due to a cordon sanitaire. These findings have two implications. First, it does not matter much which group of politicians one compares voters to —one always finds the same pattern of representation gaps. If anything, the estimates provided in the main text, comparing voters to parliaments or parties, underestimate representation gaps because they ignore the fact that right-wing populists are often excluded from governments even if their parliamentary representation is strong.

Second, Figure B.5 provides evidence for the validity of survey-based estimates for representation gaps. Focusing on the 2000s, the time window I analyze in the main part of the paper enables me to compare real votes in referendums with survey-based estimates of the parliament representation gap. Figure B.5 shows that the two estimates are very

close regarding the cultural dimension. In the economic dimension, my dataset does not contain referendums that took place in the 2000s which prohibits me from calculating a referendum-based estimate. However, comparing the survey-based estimate for the 2000s with the referendum-based estimates for the 1990s and 2010s suggests that the survey-based estimate is close to where the behavioral one would be.

Finally, the data also enables comparable estimates for the Swiss media. While this paper is concerned with the gap between voters and politicians, I find it notable that in the cultural dimension, only the media is more biased than the government. This media bias might help to explain political representation gaps. In the economic dimension, the media is similarly biased as political actors.

B.3.2 Initiation of Referendums. A potential problem of using referendum voting as a measure for representation gaps is that the idea behind referendums is to let voters decide. Hence, MPs might vote based on their personal policy attitudes in referendums but follow voters' attitudes in other decisions. That would imply that the estimates provided by this section are estimates for the attitude differences, not for the representation gaps between voters and MPs. Under this interpretation, the results should be interpreted as a revealed preference approach to the policy attitudes of MPs. It mitigates biases specific to surveys like lying or politically correct responses and, therefore, still illustrates the robustness of representation gaps. However, it would not include the representation intention.

A measure that mitigates this concern is initiation behavior. Referendums can be initiated by different actors. In some cases, the government or the parliament can call for a referendum. Examples include changes in the constitutions or accession to supranational organizations in Switzerland, in which case a referendum is obligatory. In other cases, referendums are initiated by ordinary citizens. For instance, referendums have to be held when an initiative for a referendum has collected a certain number of signatures. There are also mix-versions. For example, citizens may call for a referendum after the parliament makes a decision with which they disagree. Similarly, the parliament may offer counter-proposals to referendum initiatives put forward by the people. If an actor initiates a referendum on an initiative that would push policymaking to the right, this is evidence of a right-wing move of this actor. Moreover, deciding on which initiatives to hold a referendum on is not purely left to voters. Hence, MPs are more likely to incorporate the representation intention when deciding whether to propose left-wing or right-wing initiatives.

Figure B.6 shows the share of initiatives with a right direction by originator of the initiative and dimension. The height of the bars indicates the share of right-wing initiatives in the group of referendums. The horizontal axis shows three types of originators; the elite (in most cases, the parliament, otherwise the government) and (ordinary) citizens.

Figure B.6 confirms the expectations. Nearly 90% of referendums initiated by Swiss citizens since 1980 aimed at pushing cultural policymaking further to the right. In contrast, no single referendum initiated by the political elite would have enabled a cultural right shift. Referendums that resulted from an interplay of these actors lie in between, at about 30%. In the economic dimension, half of the referendums initiated by the elites aimed for a right-wing shift. In contrast, none of the referendums initiated by citizens did so.
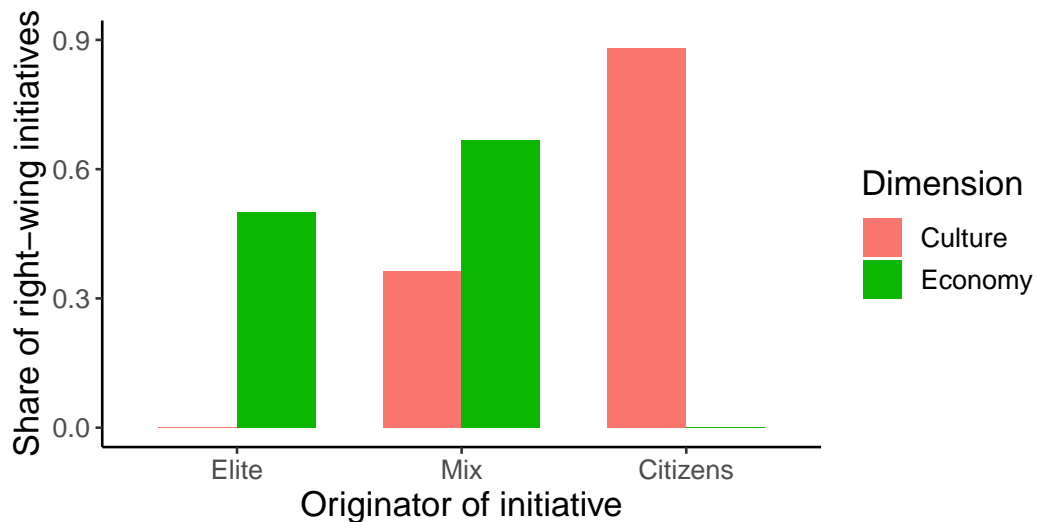
Figure B.6. Share of Right-Wing Initiatives by Originator

Note: This figure shows the share of referendums with a right direction by originator. It is based on all referendums in the dataset on a cultural or economic topic. Results pool all referendums since 1980.

However, the share is highest among those resulting from an interaction of the elite and citizens. This evidence suggests that ordinary citizens and the elite disagree on which direction their country should be heading regarding both policy dimensions.

Appendix C   Parliamentarians Decide Based on Their Own Attitudes

To examine the representation intention of parliamentarians —whether they decide based on their own policy attitudes or based on the attitudes of their voters— I exploit the fact MEPs were directly asked the following question:

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

Possible answers included "Should vote according to her/his own opinion" and "Should vote according to her/his voters' opinion." Similarly, national MPs were asked:

> *An MP in a conflict between [his/her] own opinion and the constituency voters should follow:*

Possible answers included "own opinion" and "voter opinion." I refer to parliamentarians who respond with "voter opinion" as being "representation motivated" and to those who respond with "own opinion" as being "policy motivated." Notably, the anonymity of the surveys mitigates concerns that responses are biased by, for instance, social desirability bias.

Only about 16% of the MEP respondents stated that the MEP should follow the opinions of his voters, and this share is only slightly higher among national MPs ($\approx$ 19%). Figure C.1 distinguishes between MP subgroups. Notably, MPs with a university degree have a much lower representation intention than those without. Moreover, representation intentions are higher among those who already hold positions close to the center of voters.

These MPs likely have similar attitudes as their voters, which might mitigate the cost of deciding based on the voters' attitudes. However, in all subgroups, the majority state that an MP should follow his own opinion rather than the opinion of his voters.
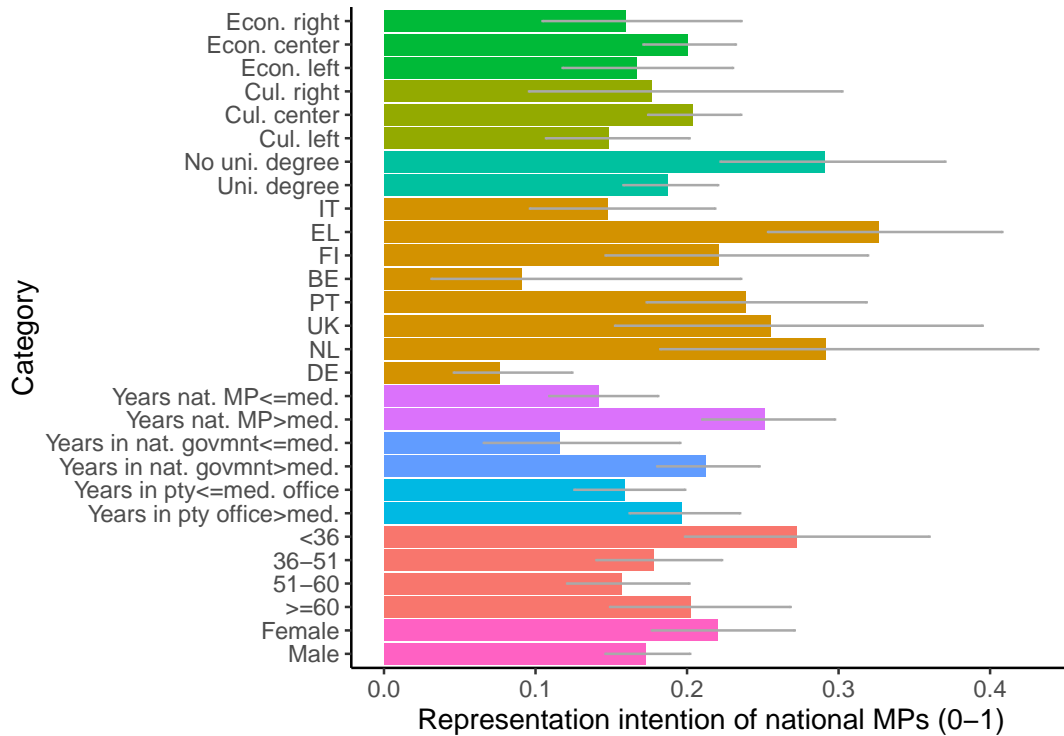

Figure C.1. Representation Intention of National MPs by Demographic Group

Note: This bar-chart illustrate the responses of an MP-sample to the following question: "An MP in a conflict between own opinion and the constituency voters should follow:" Possible answers included "own opinion" and "voter's opinion." Bars indicate the share that chose "voter's opinion." The vertical axis shows different demographic groups of MPs. I also depict 95% confidence intervals.

More experienced and more senior MPs are particularly likely to prioritize their own attitudes. Assuming that these parliamentarians have a stronger impact on policy decisions, the unweighted proportions even underestimate the extent to which parliamentarians prioritize their own attitudes. Overall, this evidence suggests that the attitudes of MPs translate into decisions, which suggests that attitude differences translate into representation gaps.

Appendix D Representation Gaps for Individual Topics and Indexes

To estimate representation gaps by policy topic I run regressions of the following form using OLS:

$$p_{i,t} = \alpha_t + \beta_t \cdot \mathbb{1}[\text{Parl.}]_{i,t} + c_i + \varepsilon_{i,t}. \tag{D.1}$$

$p_{i,t}$ is the z-score of the policy position of individual i on topic t using the standard deviation of EU-wide citizen attitudes, $\mathbb{1}[\text{Parl.}]_{i,t}$ equals one if i is an elected parliamentarian and zero if i is a voter and c_i indicates a set of country-fixed effects. Consequently, β_t

descriptively measures within-country representation gaps on topic t between voters and MPs, expressed in standard deviations of attitudes.
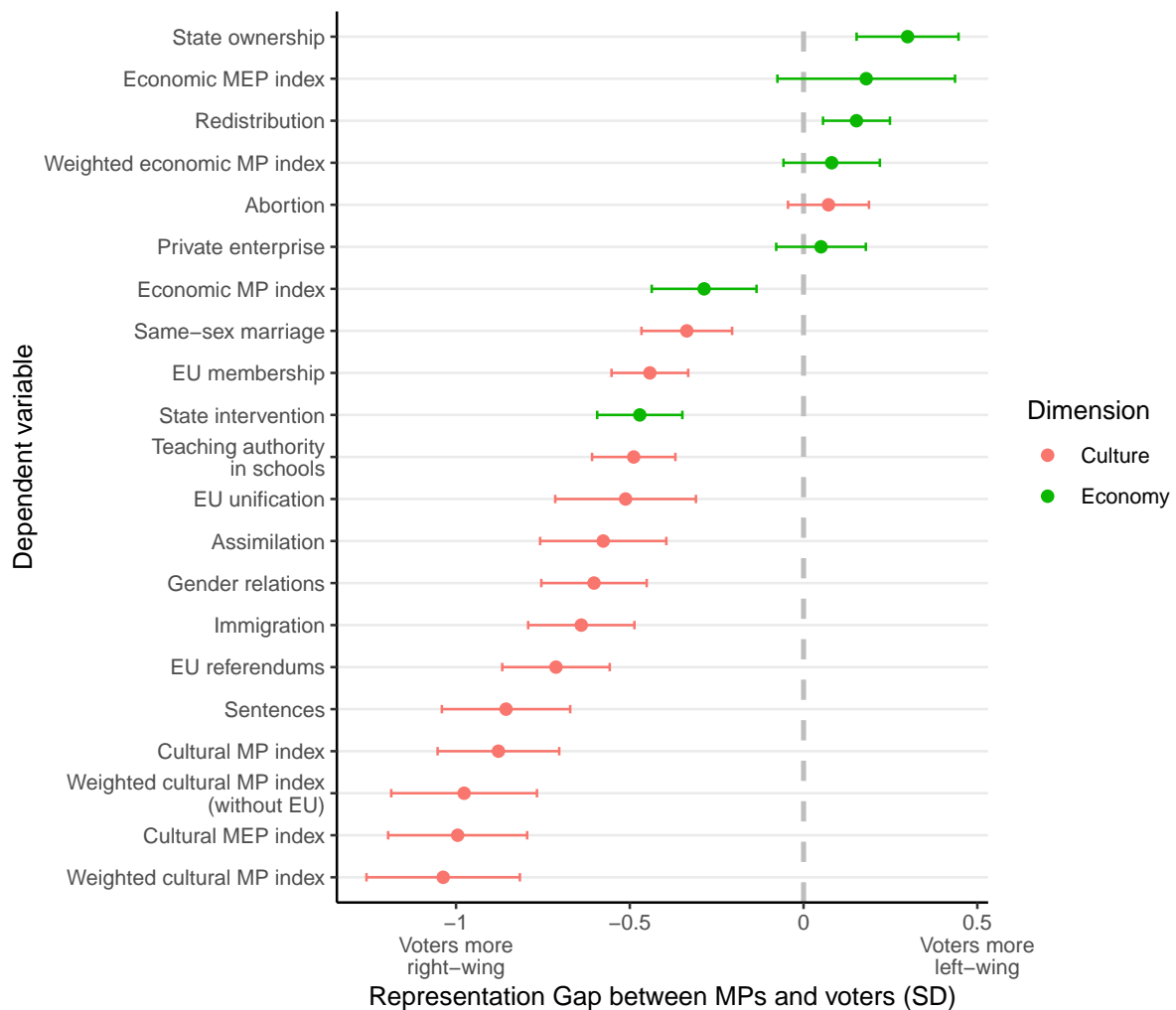

Figure D.1. Representation Gap by Issue

Note: The horizontal axis shows OLS estimates for β_t's from Equation D.1. All variables have a standard deviation (in terms of citizen attitudes) of one. 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the country level.

Figure D.1 shows β_t's and 95% confidence intervals. Higher values indicate that parliamentarians are more right-wing than voters. I also display results for various indexes. MEP indexes use attitudes on all variables but do not include responses from national MPs. The main indexes used in this paper are the weighted cultural MP index and the weighted economic MP index.

The mean MP is significantly more liberal than the mean voter on all cultural issues but abortion. Representation gaps regarding cultural indexes are even larger, partly because standard deviations of indexes are smaller than those of individual issues. Reassuringly, estimates for all cultural indexes are highly significant and quantitatively similar. Differences on weighted indexes tend to be larger than those on unweighted ones because representation gaps are larger on issues that voters consider more important (Appendix E). Representation gaps on economic issues are smaller and less systematic.

Appendix E   Perceived Importance of Political Issues

I measure perceived importance of a policy issue through the following survey item which was given to MEPs and citizens:

What do you think is the most important problem facing [COUNTRY] today?

Similar questions were also asked concerning the second and third most important problems. Answers were open-ended and recorded verbatim. They were then allocated into 146 categories. Hence, I have data on each subject's first, second, and third most important issues. This section focuses on the comparison between MEPs and voters because responses of national MPs were coded differently or are missing.

To compare issue priorities of voters and MEPs quantitatively, I construct an importance index ($II_{g,i}$) which measures how important a group g considers an issue i to be. Let "share most important$_{g,i}$" denote the weighted share of respondents who consider topic i most important and suppose similar definitions for the second and third most important topic. All three shares are weighted to adjust for differences in population between countries.

$$II_{g,i} = \frac{3 \cdot \text{share most imp.}_{g,i} + 2 \cdot \text{share 2nd most imp.}_{g,i} + \text{share 3rd most imp.}_{g,i}}{6}. \quad \text{(E.1)}$$

$II_{g,i}$ is distributed between zero and one, where one means that all subjects of group $g \in \{\text{voters}, \text{MEPs}\}$ indicate that issue i is the first, second, and third most important problem. It equals zero if no subject in group g considers issue i as belonging to the three most important problems. To make the issue importance index and representation gaps comparable, I manually match issues relating to the two variables. I am able to do this for 10 out of the 14 issues that I can calculate representation gaps for. I calculate representation gaps as in the main text by using Equation 2. However, here I focus on individual policy issues in contrast to dimension indexes. Regressions are weighted to adjust for population differences between countries.

Figure E.1 shows the important indexes (bars) and absolute values of representation gaps (points). Due to the weighting, the figure compares a representative sample of those who voted in the 2009 European Parliament election with a representative sample of MEPs. It reveals that MEPs and voters tend to find the same topics important. Both groups agree that immigration is the most important issue. However, voters prioritize immigration and sentences more than MEPs, while MEPs prioritize EU unification and state intervention more than voters. There is no strong association between the absolute size of representation gaps and the perceived importance of issues. If anything, representation gaps seem to be larger on issues that are considered more important by either group.

How important are the three political dimensions relative to each other in the eyes of voters and MEPs? To answer this question, I manually classify each of the 146 categories as either cultural, economic, or EU-related.[9] For most issues like unemployment or gender relations, this is straightforward. Some issues can be classified into several dimensions,

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9. Hence, here I divide the broader cultural dimension used in the main text.
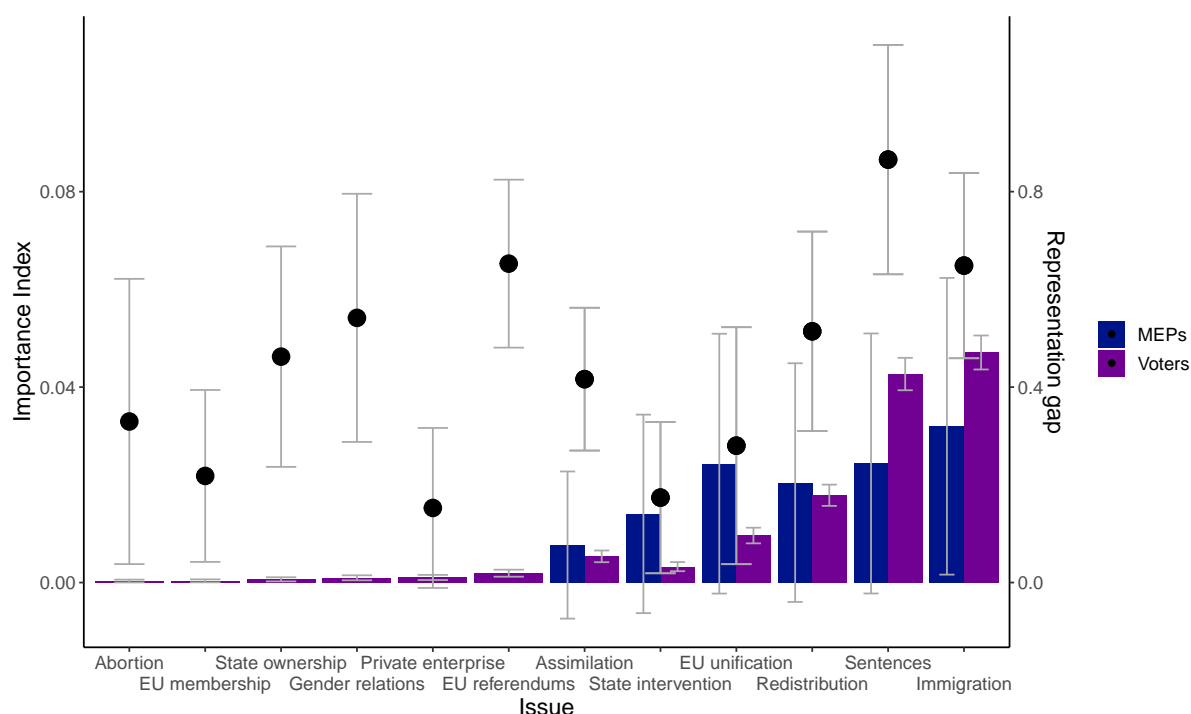
Figure E.1. Perceived Importance of Policy Issues by Voters and MEPs and Representation Gaps
Note: Bars indicate an index of perceived importance of issues ($II_{g,i}$), defined in Equation E.1. Black dots represent the absolute value of the representation gaps. I also depict 95% confidence intervals.
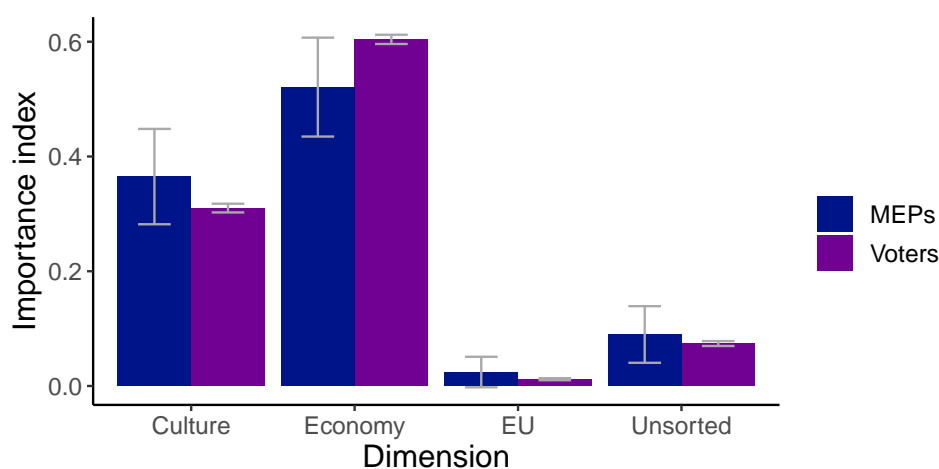

Figure E.2. Perceived Importance of Policy Dimensions by Voters and MEPs
Note: Bars indicate an index of perceived importance of political dimensions ($II_{g,i}$), defined in Equation E.1. I depict 95% confidence intervals around all values.

such as globalization. If a topic could be classified just as well in either dimension, I label it as "Unsorted."

Figure E.2 shows the importance index for the four categories. Again, results for voters and MEPs are similar. Unsorted issues are relatively unimportant to voters and MEPs. Although economic topics are more important to both groups, cultural topics are of great importance to both groups, too. MEPs find topics related to the EU more important than voters, but both groups find them much less important than cultural or economic topics.

This suggests that reducing the policy space in European countries to a two-dimensional economy-culture space captures most issues that are important to voters and MEPs. It also indicates that the large cultural representation gaps might matter to voters.

E.0.1 Testing the Claims of Populists. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) define populists as those who make several claims about the political reality. In particular, populists are defined as those who claim that

(1) society is divided into two antagonistic groups: the "corrupt elite" and the "pure people,"
(2) these two groups are homogeneous,
(3) the populists try to save the people from the elite.

The populist claims are concerned with political representation. Hence, my data allows me to examine to what extent they are correct. To this end, however, the claims must be made more precise and measurable. First, measures for the vague terms "elite" and "the people" are needed. I use high-ranking politicians, in particular parliamentarians, as a substitute for "the elite." Similarly, I use national citizens as a substitute for "the people." Sometimes, populists seem to exclude ethnic minorities from "the people." However, including them would not alter the considerations presented below.

Consequently, claim (1) posits "antagonism" between citizens and the parliament, while claim (2) says that the parliament and citizens are both homogeneous. Since the main purpose of a parliament is to represent the interests of its citizens, a plausible interpretation of claim (1) is that the policymaking of the parliament is opposed to the popular will. Following this line of reasoning, I interpret claim (2) as the parliament and citizens having homogeneous policy attitudes. It then follows naturally that, according to claim (3), the policy positions of populists are congruent with the popular will.

According to this interpretation, representation gaps are a central feature of the definition of populism and the claims populists make themselves. This focus on representation is consistent with populism as a thin ideology because substantive ideologies are less suitable for filling representation gaps, which can vary across countries and over time.

It is difficult to specify precise formal tests for the claims of populists since, in my view, these claims should not be taken literally. Taken literally, the homogeneity claim posits that every single citizen has the exact same attitude regarding any policy issue imaginable. This is obviously incorrect, as must be apparent to populists too who often face criticism for their positions. Rather, I see these claims as the end-point of a populism spectrum that one can place any politician on. Therefore, I do not test the literal interpretation of the claims but examine qualitatively whether they contain a kernel of truth. Such a qualitative test for claim (1) is whether policymaking is opposed to the attitude of the majority of citizens.[10] As Section 5.1 shows, most voters desire lower immigration

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10. This step implicitly equates the interest of citizens with their will. While the two concepts differ in general, part of the representation gaps reflect policymaking that goes against the people's interest, as discussed in Section 5.4. Hence, the argument still applies in a mitigated form after taking into account the difference between interest and will.

rates and much harsher sentences for criminals, while the majority of parliamentarians oppose these policies.[11] A the same time, these are two particularly important issues for voters and parliamentarians (Figure E.1). On most other issues, however, disagreements between voters and parliamentarians are rather a matter of degree. Hence, claim (1) is largely correct when focusing on important cultural topics and hence, arguably, when focusing on the cultural dimension as a whole, but not when thinking about economic policymaking.

The second claim of populists (politicians and citizens are homogeneous groups) would be completely correct if all citizens were located at the same point in policy space and all parliamentarians from non-populist (mainstream) parties were located at another point. The claim would be completely incorrect if the positions of voters and parliamentarians were distributed widely and identically in the policy space. None of the findings documented here support this claim regarding the economic dimension. However, Figure 3 shows that in the cultural dimension, there is little overlap in the distributions of parliamentarians and voters and Figure 5 reveals that cultural policy positions differ much more between voters and politicians in general than between different groups of voters. Moreover, Figure 7 shows that nearly all mainstream parties are culturally more liberal than the mean voter, while the average mainstream party is close to the mean voter on the economic dimension.[12] Hence, the claim contains much truth, but again, only when looking at the cultural dimension.

Finally, the third claim is concerned with the policies populists supply. It would be completely correct if all populists were located in the position of the mean voter. To examine that claim, Figure 7 depicts the policy positions of mainstream parties and different groups of populists. I distinguish between different groups of populists because, consistent with populism being a thin ideology, the policy positions of these groups are very different.

Figure 7 reveals that most populist parties are not located close to the mean voter. However, right-wing populists fill the cultural representation gap while left-wing populists and "other populists" do not fill any representation gap.[13]

This does not imply that right-wing populists are closer to the mean voter than any other party group or that populists, in general, are closer to the mean voter than mainstream parties. Rather, Figure 7 reveals that (only) right-wing populists fill representation gaps that other party groups have left open. In particular, right-wing populists are the only party group that represents the cultural attitudes of the more conservative half of the pop-

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11. Section 5.1 pools populists and mainstream politicians, but this creates a bias that works against the argument.

12. Figure 7 is identical to Figure 6 except for the coloring of points. As before, I calculate the bias of a party relative to the national mean voters as the mean bias of its parliamentarians based on Equation 3. Figure H.8 shows the results when party positions are estimated from the positions of all candidates and Figure H.9 depicts *attitude* differences.

13. I distinguish between left-wing populists, right-wing populists, and all other populist parties as defined in the PopuList. I do not display "anti-EU populists" as an independent category because I do not use an independent EU dimension.

ulation. Hence, strong right-wing populists are needed for parliaments to be culturally representative of all voters.

Appendix F Representation Gaps Increased Recently Throughout Europe

The vote share of populist parties *increased* sharply since 2009 (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022). If representation gaps contributed to this rise, one would expect a corresponding general increase in representation gaps. Such an increase might happen for three reasons. 1) parties might change their policy positions further away from the attitudes of voters, 2) voters might change their attitudes further away from parties and 3) policy issues where representation gaps are relatively larger might become more important to citizens, meaning that the weights on issues with larger gaps increase.

Danieli et al. (2022) find that neither the policy positions of European parties nor the policy attitudes of European citizens changed strongly between 2005 and 2020 and conclude that changes in parties' or citizens' policy positions cannot explain the rise of populism. In contrast, they find that the importance citizens put on cultural issues increased strongly, which, as they show, can account for the lion's share of the populist rise. A potential explanation is that representation gaps on cultural issues are much larger than on economic ones. Consequently, greater perceived importance of cultural issues makes the comparative advantage of right-wing populists —the fact that they are close to the electoral center on cultural issues— more relevant, thereby making them a more attractive voting option.

To test this prediction I examine how the perceived importance of policy issues changed over time. To this end, I calculate, for several policy issues, the share of European citizens who found it to be the most important issue for their country in 2009 and 2014. The data for 2009 is based on the main survey dataset, while I use the next iteration of the EU 2009 voter survey to gather comparable estimates for 2014.[14]

Figure F.1 compares the perceived importance of policy issues in 2009 and 2014. Consistent with the results of Danieli et al. (2022), cultural issues became more important in the eyes of Europeans overall, but Figure F.1 reveals that this can be nearly entirely attributed to one issue —immigration. Immigration was already considered the most important issue in 2009, but other issues followed closely. Between 2009 and 2014, the share of Europeans who consider immigration most important more than doubled to nearly 9%, which made it considered the most important issue by far.

This shift in priorities likely increased the cultural representation gap because immigration is the issue where attitude differences between voters and parliamentarians are the largest. To examine this empirically I calculate new index variables as in Section 4.2

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14. The most recent iteration provides data for 2019. However, data on the question I am analyzing has not yet been harmonized with the two earlier iterations. Including data for 2019 would likely strengthen the results obtained in this section because the perceived importance of immigration likely increased strongly due to the refugee crisis.
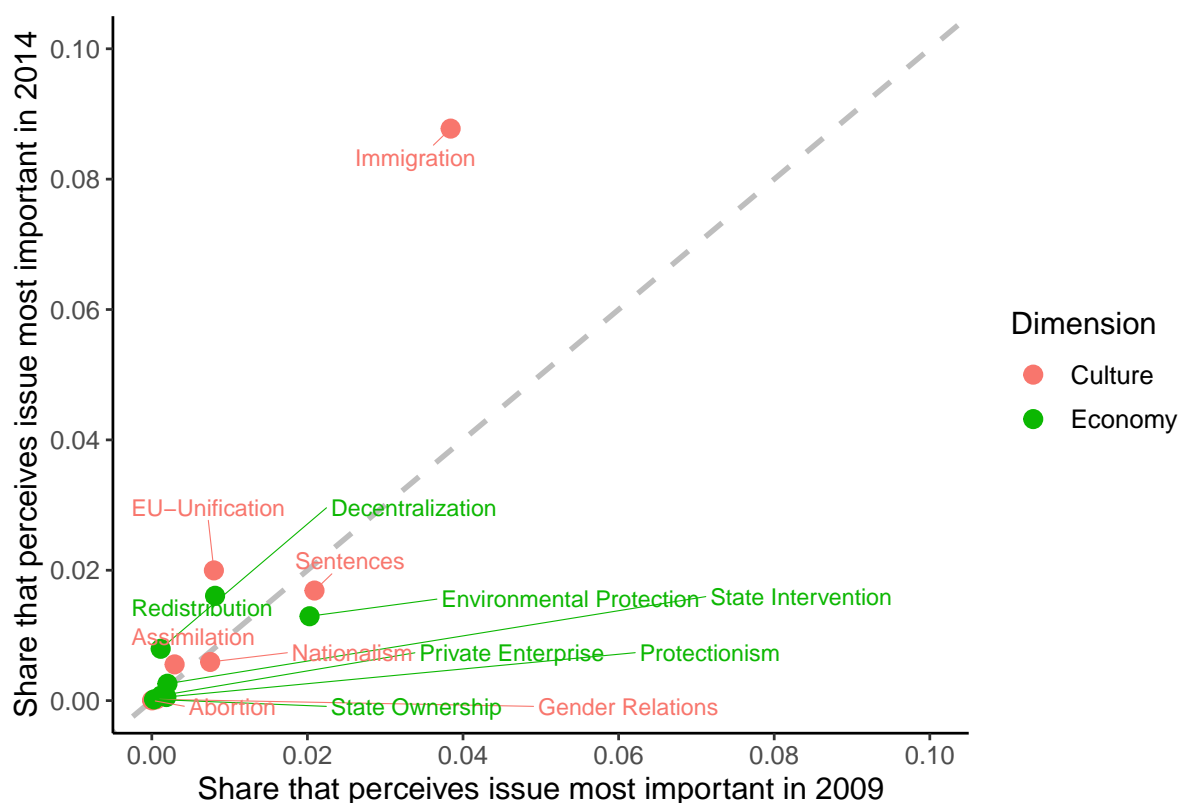
Figure F.1. Most important issues according to European citizens in 2009 and 2014

Note: Shares are calculated based on open-ended responses to the survey item "What do you think is the first most important issue or problem facing [country] at the moment?" For each issue depicted in the plot, I calculate the share of Europeans who think this issue is most important. I use data on all EU citizens and weigh them to generate a representative sample of the adult EU population. Importance shares do not sum to 1 because many responses could not be classified to one of the topics and are therefore not depicted here.

but weighting issues with the importance voters attributed to the issues in *2014*. Based on these 2014 indexes, I estimate representation gaps between voters and parliamentarians in 2009 given the issue priorities of citizens in 2014. Under the assumption that policy positions of voters and parties did not change notably, as found empirically by Danieli et al. (2022), this enables me to estimate the representation gap in 2014. Because only MEPs and citizens were asked the immigration question, I restrict my sample to these groups. Moreover, I use the MEP indexes because only the cultural MEP index includes immigration.

Columns (1) and (3) in Table F.1 show that in 2009, MEPs were 0.785 standard deviations of citizen attitudes more culturally liberal than voters, while the economic representation gap is insignificant. Columns (2) and (4) show results for the 2014 indexes. As expected, the cultural representation gap nearly doubled due to the increased perceived importance of immigration. In contrast, the economic representation gap did not change notably.

Even though most voters already desired reduced immigration rates, immigration strongly *increased* after 2014, notably during the refugee crisis in 2015/2016. This likely

Table F.1. Representation gap estimates for 2009 and 2014

	Dependent variable:			
	Cultural index		Economic index	
	2009	2014	2009	2014
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
$\mathbb{1}[\text{MEP}]$	−0.785***	−1.404***	0.122	0.278
	(0.104)	(0.181)	(0.105)	(0.195)
Constant	2.744***	5.079***	2.113***	3.523***
	(0.0003)	(0.001)	(0.0003)	(0.001)
Country indicators	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	15,250	15,250	16,500	16,500
R^2	0.163	0.155	0.102	0.106

Note: This table shows results from OLS regressions based on Equation 2. Higher values of the dependent variables indicate that the respondent is culturally more right-wing/conservative. $\mathbb{1}[\text{MEP}]$ equals one for those elected in the 2009 European Parliament election and 0 for "ordinary" EU citizens who voted in this election. Regressions are weighted to obtain representative samples within each country. Standard errors (in parenthesis) are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

made immigration even more important in the eyes of citizens. Hence, representation gaps likely continued to increase after 2014 which might help to explain the increase in the populist vote share after 2014.

Appendix G   The Interaction of Representation and Perceived Importance Predicts Populist Voting

The line of reasoning presented in Section 6.3 suggests that the interaction of the perceived relevance of immigration and the extent to which voters are represented by mainstream parties regarding immigration predicts voting for right-wing populists well. To test this idea, I run OLS regressions of the following form:

$$\mathbb{1}[\text{AfD vote}]_v = \alpha_t + \beta_{1,t} \cdot \text{RG}_{v,t} + \beta_{2,t} \cdot \text{Attitude}_{v,t} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{Importance}_{v,t} + \boldsymbol{\theta} \cdot \mathbf{X}_v + \varepsilon_v. \quad \text{(G.1)}$$

v indexes voters and t indexes/topics the three issues "taxes," "climate" and "immigration." $\mathbf{X}_v$ includes a large number of controls detailed in Table G.1. Representation gaps are defined as the absolute distance to the closest non-AfD party (Equation 4). Crucially, Equation G.1 controls for i) the perceived importance of issue t, measured as a factor variable with 5 values from "very important" to "not important at all" and ii) for the policy attitude itself (linearly). Hence, $\beta_{1,t}$ is not driven by cross-subject differences in the perceived importance or a linear association between the attitude and AfD voting. To make estimates comparable I only use data for 2017, where the AfD was right-wing populist and all three attitudes were elicited.[15]

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15. Results are similar for 2021, the only other year where the AfD was right-wing populist.

Table G.1. Association between Representation and Political Attitudes

	Taxes		Climate		Immigration	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Representation gap (SD)	0.030*	0.037	0.047*	−0.092*	0.130***	0.034
	(0.015)	(0.064)	(0.025)	(0.047)	(0.027)	(0.051)
Attitude (SD)	0.058***	0.058***	0.031	0.022	0.016	0.010
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Perceived importance (SD)	0.012	0.014	−0.008	−0.014	0.046***	0.006
	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Repr. gap x Perceived imp.		−0.002		0.039***		0.034**
		(0.016)		(0.013)		(0.015)
Constant	−2.625	−2.653	−3.367	−3.630	−4.549**	−4.611**
	(2.473)	(2.501)	(2.531)	(2.530)	(2.280)	(2.276)
Demographic controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	720	720	719	719	721	721
R^2	0.222	0.222	0.241	0.254	0.351	0.362

Note: This table shows results from weighted OLS regressions. All data is from the GLES 2017 post-election surveys. Columns (1), (3), and (5) are based on Equation G.1 while columns (2), (4), and (6) are based on Equation G.2. The dependent variable equals one if the subject stated an intention to vote for the AfD and zero else. Demographic controls include age, gender, number of years unemployed during the last 10 years, indicators for own immigration background and East/West Germany, categories of marital status, city size, perceived current economic situation, perceived future economic situation, occupation education, self-reported main information source, fear of job loss, household income, parents immigration backgrounds, religion and urbanization of the residence area. Robust standard errors (in parentheses). * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

I expect the representation gap regarding immigration to be most strongly associated with AfD voting because the representation gap is largest there and the AfD fills it, as shown in Figure H.10. Figure H.10 also reveals that, in contrast to established parties, the AfD represents the few citizens who prioritize economic growth over climate protection. Regarding taxes, the AfD is located close to the mean citizen but offers nearly the same position as the conservatives, therefore not filling a representation gap. Hence, I expect a smaller association between the climate representation gap and AfD voting but no notable association with the tax representation gap.

Columns (1), (3), and (5) in Table G.1 show the results. To ease interpretation I divide all variables by their standard deviations. For all three issues, being not represented by a mainstream party is positively and significantly associated with voting for the AfD, even after controlling for perceived importance. As expected, the point estimate is smallest regarding taxes and largest regarding immigration. Moreover, there is no linear association between AfD voting and climate or immigration attitudes even though these associations are very strong in regressions that do not include the representation gap. This suggests

that it matters more whether citizens are represented by established parties than whether they are right-wing. Similarly, these results show that representation gaps matter above and beyond the influence of perceived importance.

Following my line of reasoning, one would expect that an increase in the perceived importance amplifies a positive effect of the representation gap on AfD voting —perceived importance and representation gaps interact. To test this hypothesis I run OLS regressions of the following form:

$$\mathbb{1}[\text{AfD vote}]_s = \alpha_t + \delta_t \cdot \text{RG}_{s,t} \cdot \text{Importance}_{s,t} + \tag{G.2}$$
$$\beta_{1,t} \cdot \text{RG}_{s,t} + \beta_{2,t} \cdot \text{Attitude}_{s,t} + \beta_{3,t} \cdot \text{Importance}_{s,t} + \theta_t \cdot \mathbf{X}_s + \varepsilon_{s,t}.$$

Relative to Equation G.1 I only add the interaction between perceived importance and representation gaps. The results are depicted in columns (2), (4) and (6) of Table G.1. As expected, the interaction is significantly positive regarding immigration and climate change while it is insignificant for taxes. Moreover, the main effects for perceived importance and the representation gap regarding immigration sharply decrease in magnitude and turn insignificant after adding the interaction term. Hence, the perceived importance of immigration only predicts AfD voting for citizens who are not represented by mainstream parties. Equivalently, among the citizens who are not represented by mainstream parties, only those vote for the AfD who consider immigration important. Hence, it appears that representation gaps and a high degree of perceived importance are both needed to predict AfD voting.
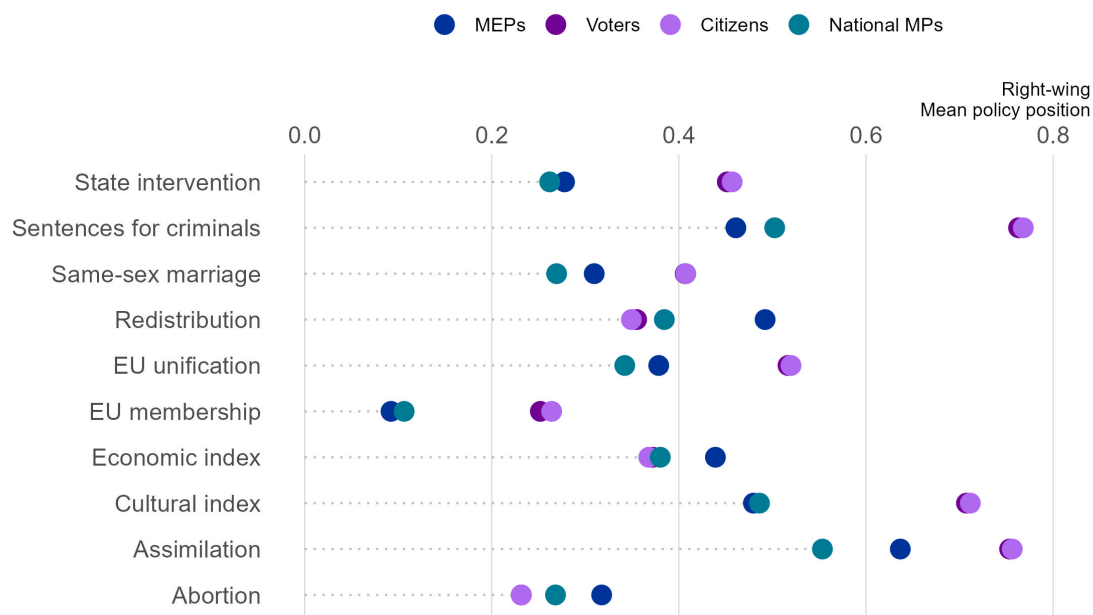
Appendix H   Additional Figures

Figure H.1. Attitudes of MEPs, MPs, Voters and Citizens by Policy Issue

Note: This dumbbell plot shows mean policy attitudes. Higher values correspond to attitudes that are more right-wing. I pool data for the following countries: Germany, Belgium, Italy, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Portugal, and Greece because data on all groups is available only for these countries. Means are weighted to adjust for population size differences. I only show results for issues where data is available for all groups. Voters are those who voted either at the 2009 European Parliament election or the last national election. The indexes refer to the "MP" indexes used in the main text.
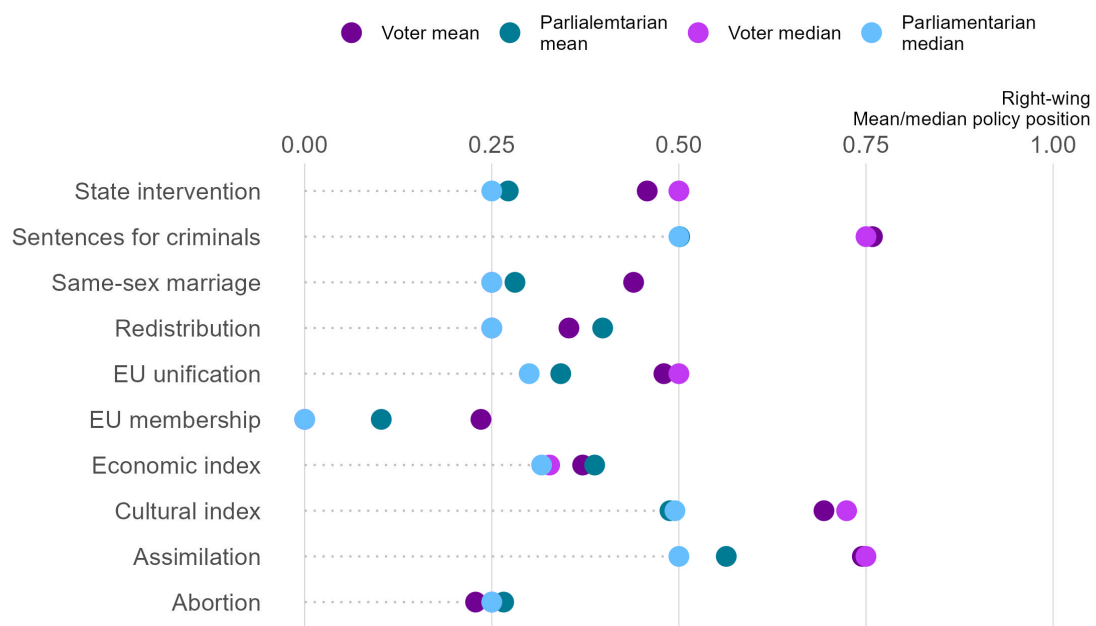
Figure H.2. Attitude Differences Regarding Means and Medians

Note: This dumbbell plot shows mean and median policy attitudes. Higher values correspond to attitudes that are more right-wing. I pool data for the following countries: Germany, Belgium, Italy, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Portugal, and Greece because data on all groups is available only for these countries. Means and medians are weighted to adjust for population size differences. I only show results for issues where data is available for all groups. Voters are those who voted either at the 2009 European Parliament election or the last national election. The indexes refer to the "MP" indexes used in the main text.
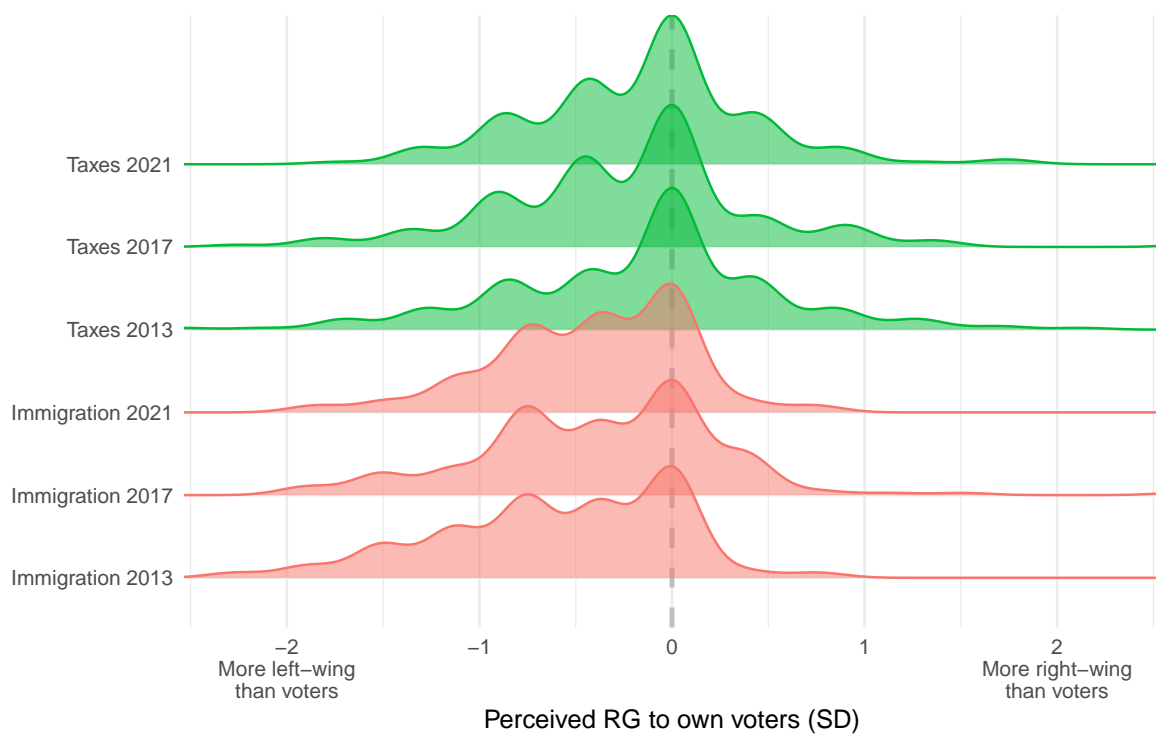
Figure H.3. Representation Gap to Own Voters as Perceived by MPs

Note: Based on responses of German national MPs. MPs stated their own attitudes, whether an MP should act based on his own attitudes or those of the voters, and their guess about the attitudes of their parties' voters. I calculate the position of MPs based on the first two items as described in Section 4.2. Histograms show the difference between the MP position and their guess about their voters' attitudes. These perceived representation gaps are expressed in standard deviations of citizen attitudes. I pool data of MPs from all parties.
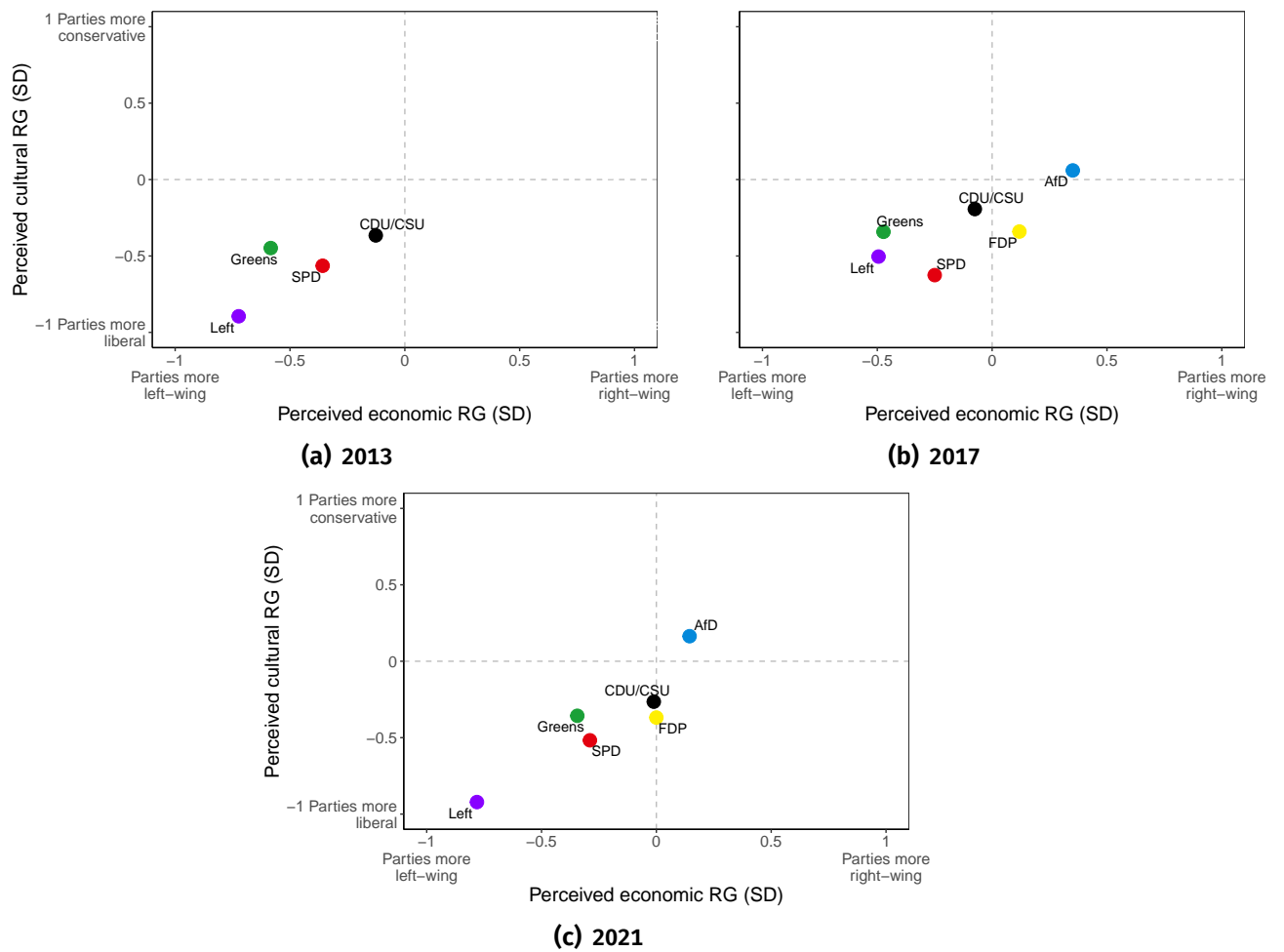
(a) 2013

(b) 2017

(c) 2021

Figure H.4. Representation Gaps Perceived by German MPs

Note: The figure compares representation gaps between parties and voters of that party as perceived by MPs of that party. The vertical axis measures cultural conservatism through the German immigration item and the horizontal axis measures economic attitudes through the German taxes vs. social benefits item as described in Section 3. Representation gaps are expressed in standard deviations of citizen attitudes.
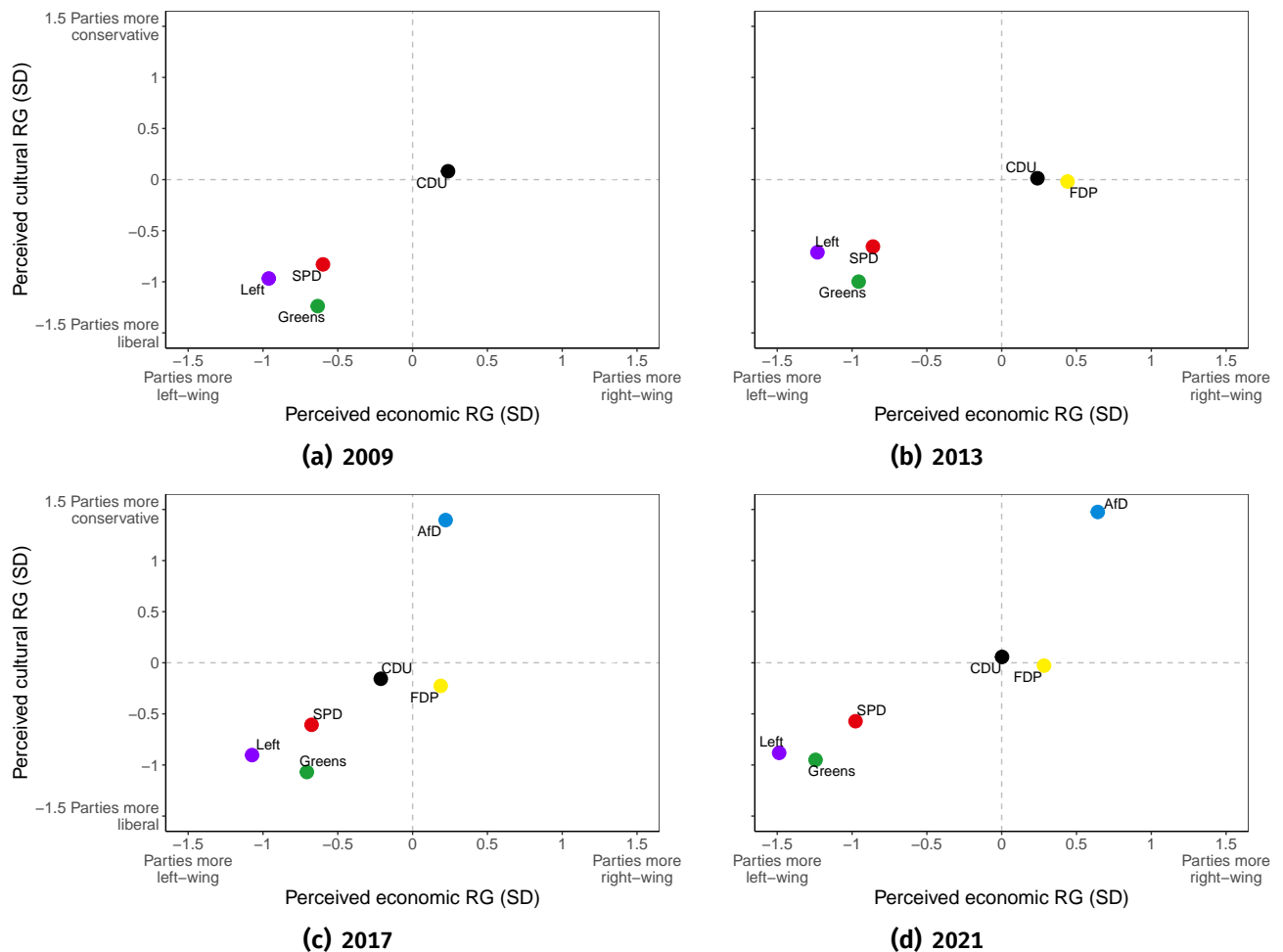
Figure H.5. Representation Gaps Perceived by German Voters

Note: The figure compares representation gaps between voters and parties as perceived by voters. The vertical axis measures cultural conservatism through the German immigration item and the horizontal axis measures economic attitudes through the German taxes vs. social benefits item as described in Section 3. Voters are weighted to obtain a representative sample of Germans regarding demographic characteristics. Representation gaps are expressed in standard deviations of citizen attitudes.
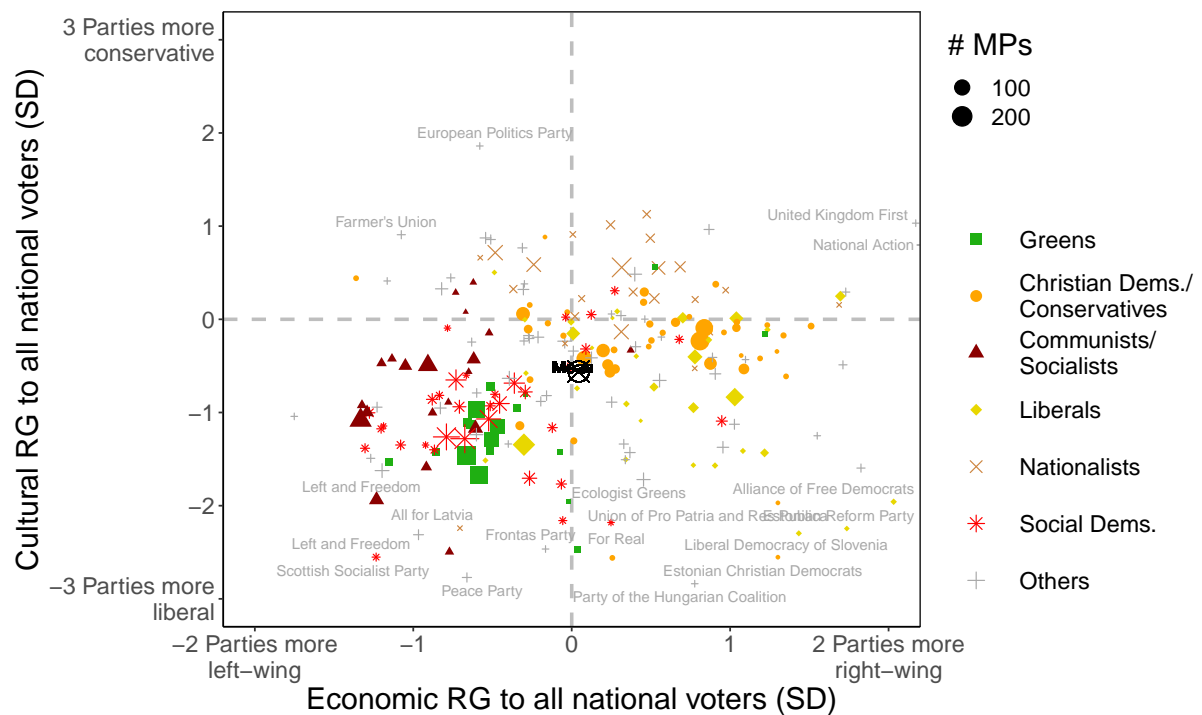
Figure H.6. Representation Gaps Relative to National Voters by Party

Note: This plot compares the position of European parties relative to the position of the national mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. I estimate party positions based on all candidates. Different symbols refer to different party families. The size of the symbol measures the number of MPs used to calculate the policy position. For clarity, I omit a few parties whose cultural index is smaller than -3. All of them rely on few observations and are therefore measured imprecisely.

Figure H.7. Party Positions Estimated Based on All MP Candidates Relative to the National Mean Voter by Party Group

Note: This plot compares the position of European parties relative to the position of their own mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. Different symbols refer to different party families. The size of the symbol measures the number of MPs used to calculate the policy position. For clarity, I omit a few parties whose cultural index is smaller than -3. All of them rely on few observations and are therefore measured imprecisely.
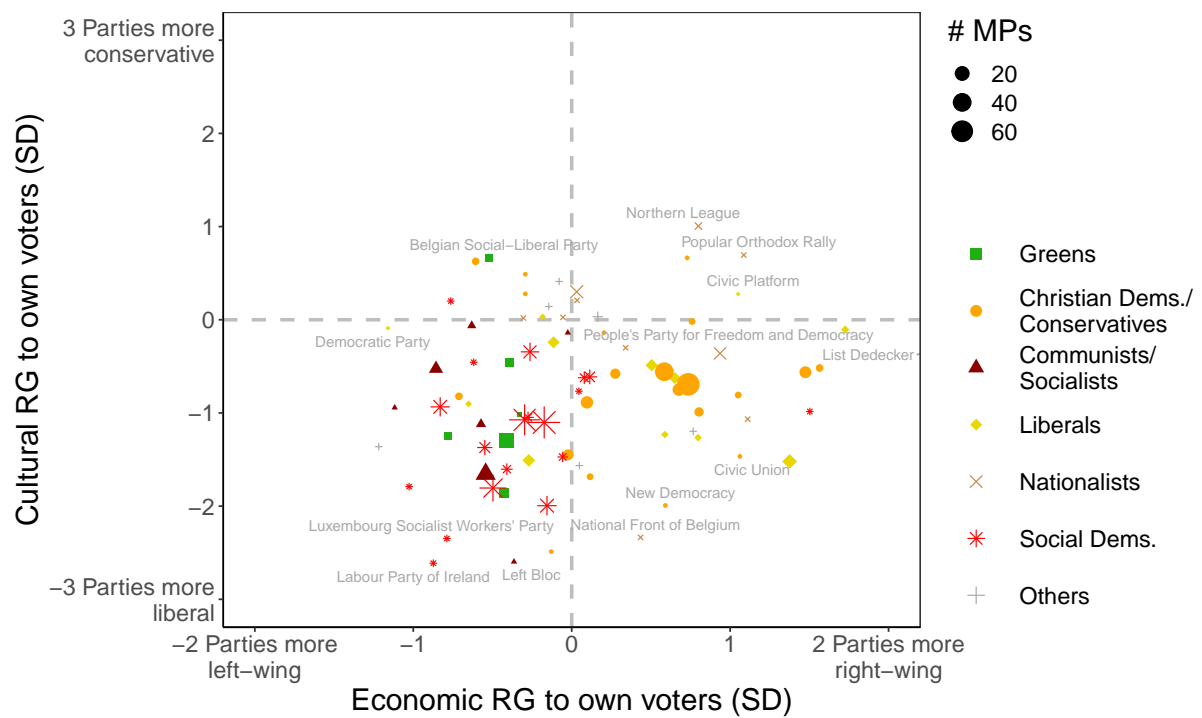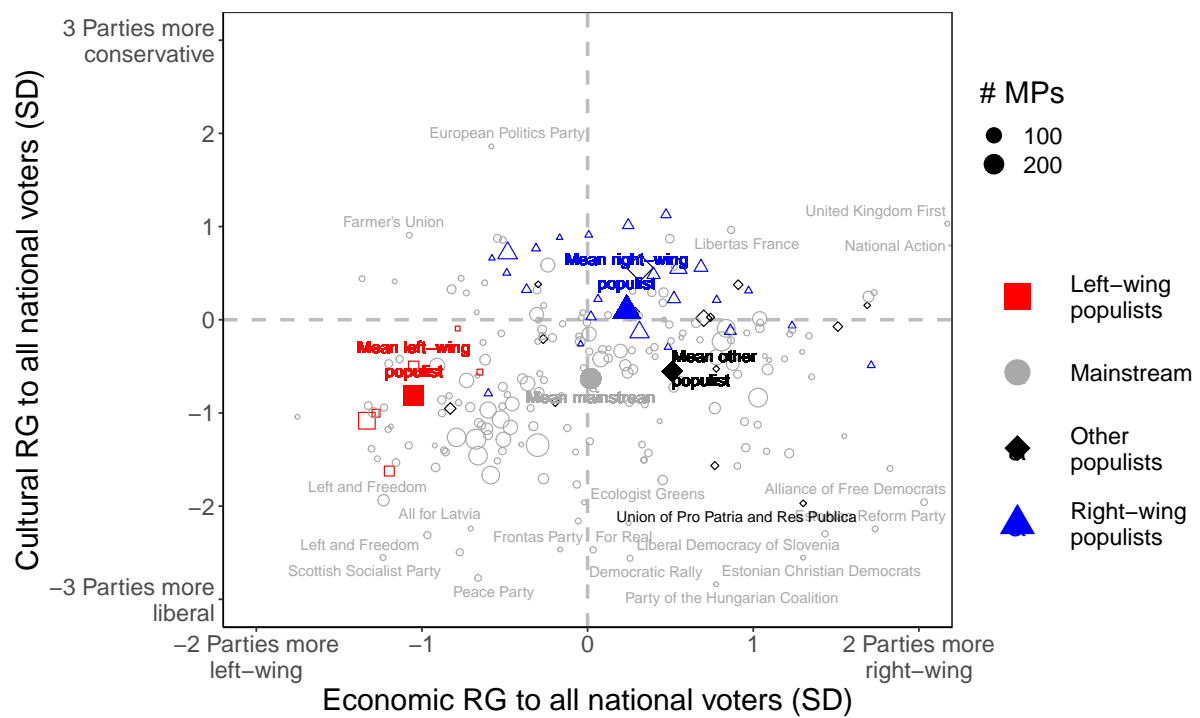
Figure H.8. Party Positions Estimated Based on All MP Candidates Relative to the National Mean Voter by Populism Group

Note: This figure compares the policy positions of European parties relative to the position of the national mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. Estimates of policy positions are based on the mean index of all candidates for national parliaments or the European Parliament. A few parties are positioned outside the boundaries of this figure, but all of them rely on a few observations and are, therefore, measured imprecisely. I omit them for clearness.

Figure H.9. Attitude Differences Between Parties and the National Mean Voter by Populism

Note: This figure compares the average attitudes of elected MPs of European parties relative to the attitude of the national mean voter in the 2D culture-economy space based on Equation 3. A few parties are positioned outside the boundaries of this figure, but all of them rely on a few observations and are, therefore, measured imprecisely. I omit them for clearness.
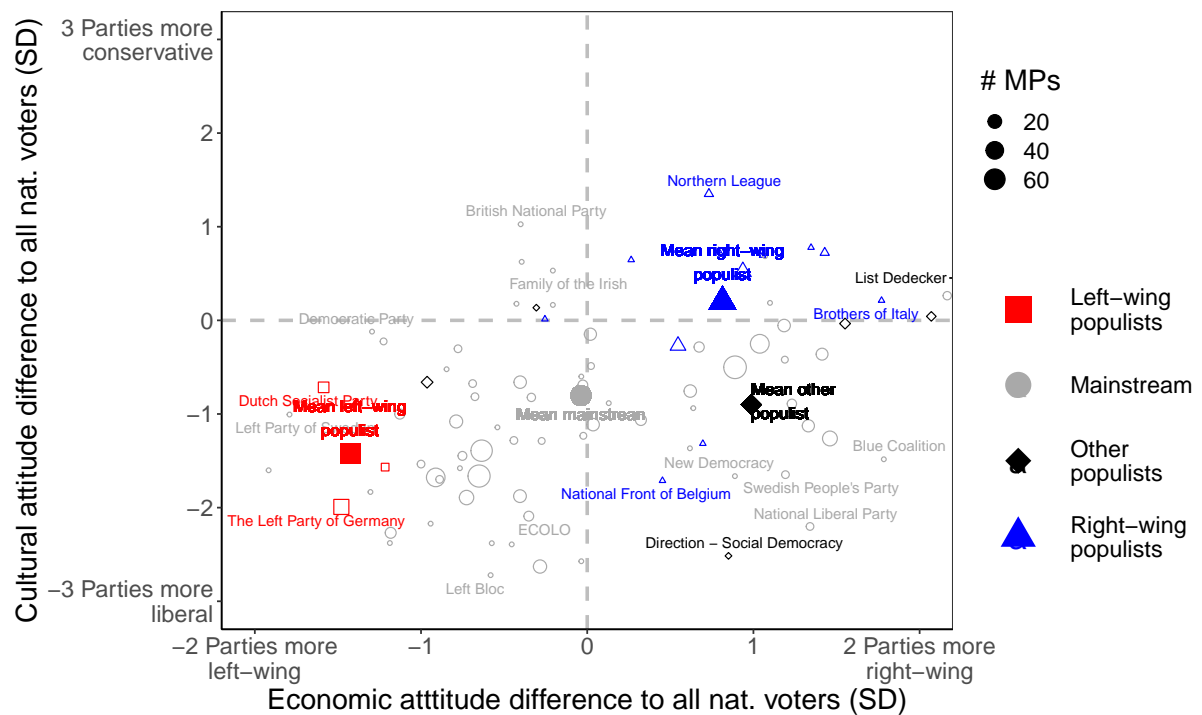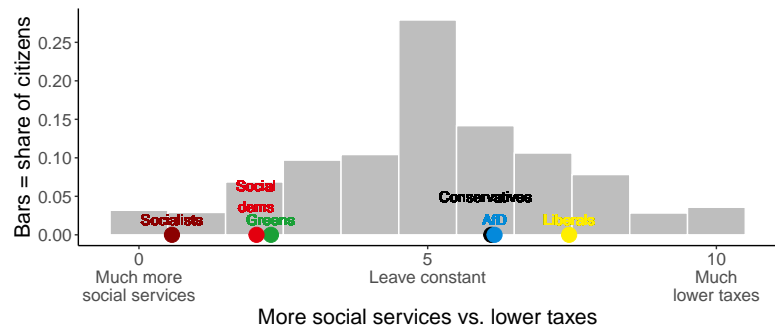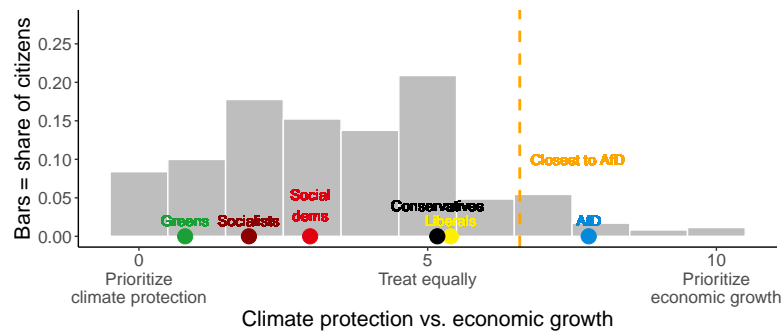
(a) Lower taxes vs. social services

(b) Economic growth vs. climate protection
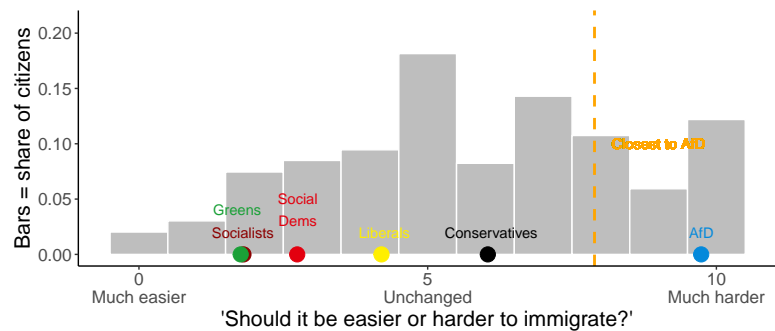
(c) Restrict vs. facilitate immigration

Figure H.10. Positions of German Citizens and Parties in 2017
Note: Histograms illustrate the attitude distributions of a broadly representative sample of German citizens. Party positions are estimated as mean positions of parliamentarians, using Equation 3. All data comes from 2017 post-election surveys.

Appendix I   Additional Tables

Table I.1. Information on Policy Attitude Variables in the Cross-country Dataset

Variable name	Question wording	Question type	Included in
Private enterprise	Private enterprise is the best way to solve [COUNTRY]'s economic problems.	5 point Likert	EES
State ownership	Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership.	5 point Likert	EES
State intervention	Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy.	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Redistribution	Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people.	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Assimilation	Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [COUNTRY].	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Same-sex marriage	Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law.	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Abortion	Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion.	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Sentences	People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days.	5 point Likert	EES/CCS
Teaching authority in schools	Schools must teach children to obey authority.	5 point Likert	EES
Gender relations	A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family.	5 point Likert	EES
Immigration	Immigration to [COUNTRY] should be decreased significantly.	5 point Likert	EES
EU referendums	EU treaty changes should be decided by referendum.	5 point Likert	EES
EU unification	Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?	11 point from "has gone too far" to "should be pushed further"	EES/CCS
EU membership	Generally speaking, do you think that [COUNTRY]'s membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?	3 Options: 1) "Good thing" 2) "Bad thing" 3) "Neither"	EES/CCS

Note: The question wording is taken from the English version of the study. Questions were translated into the national language for other versions. [COUNTRY] is an placeholder for the name of the country the version of the survey was administered in. Wording was identical in the EES and CCS surveys for all items with one exception. In the CCS the question for the "Punishment for Criminals" variable read as: "People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences." CCS refers to Wave 1 of the Comparative Candidate Study and EES refers to the European Election Study (Voter and Candidate survey).

Table I.2. Information on Policy Attitude Variables in the Temporal Dataset

Variable name	Question wording	Question type	Years
Lower taxes vs. social services	Some people prefer lower taxes, although this results in less social services. Others prefer more social services, although this results in raising taxes. … what position do you take on taxes and social services?	11 point from "Lower taxes, although this results in less social services" to "should be pushed further"	2009 2013 2017 2021
Economic growth vs. climate protection	Some say that the fight against climate change should definitely take precedence, even if it impairs economic growth. Others say that the economic growth should definitely take precedence, even if it impairs the fight against climate change. … what position do you take on the fight against climate change and economic growth?	11 point from "Fight against climate change should take precedence, even if it impairs economic growth" to "Economic growth should take precedence, even if it impairs the fight against climate change"	2013 2017
Restrict vs. facilitate immigration	And what about immigration? Should it be easier or more difficult for foreigners to immigrate? … what position do you take on immigration for foreigners?	11 point from "Immigration for foreigners should be easier" to "Immigration for foreigners should be more difficult"	2009 2013 2017 2021

Note: The question wording is taken from the English version of the study. Questions were asked in German. The "Years" column indicates years where post-election surveys among voters and parliamentarians included the item. In addition, all three items were included in many voter surveys between elections, as can be seen from Figure 8.

Table I.3. Overview of Survey Data

Country	Year	MEPs	MEP candidates	MPs	MP candidates	Citizens	Voters
AT	2009	2	39	0	0	1000	972
BE	2007	0	0	61	509	0	0
BE	2009	5	57	0	0	1002	983
BE	2010	0	0	79	558	0	0
BG	2009	4	6	0	0	1000	871
CY	2009	3	8	0	0	1000	957
CZ	2009	5	21	0	0	1020	834
DE	2009	25	143	198	789	1004	964
DK	2009	3	24	0	0	1000	989
EE	2009	2	23	0	0	1007	874
EL	2009	2	19	0	0	1000	946
EL	2012	0	0	50	337	0	0
ES	2009	5	57	0	0	1000	931
FI	2009	4	41	0	0	1000	933
FI	2011	0	0	49	911	0	0
FR	2009	16	117	0	0	1000	931
HU	2009	2	26	0	0	1005	876
IE	2009	3	8	0	0	1001	967
IT	2009	7	58	0	0	1000	967
IT	2013	0	0	141	672	0	0
LT	2009	1	30	0	0	1000	778
LU	2009	4	16	0	0	1001	938
LV	2009	2	39	0	0	1001	896
MT	2009	1	11	0	0	1000	984
NL	2006	0	0	38	170	0	0
NL	2009	3	73	0	0	1005	962
PL	2009	2	36	0	0	1002	801
PT	2009	3	17	0	0	1000	929
PT	2011	0	0	101	257	0	0
RO	2009	5	24	0	0	1003	842
SE	2009	7	162	0	0	1002	985
SI	2009	0	18	0	0	1000	939
SK	2009	3	29	0	0	1016	873
UK	2009	17	244	0	0	1000	905
UK	2010	0	0	141	1472	0	0
Sum		136	1346	858	5675	27069	24827

Table I.4. Information on the Knowledge Quiz

Indicator	Question wording	Answer options
1	Switzerland is a member of the EU.	True/False
2	The European Union has 25 member states.	True/False
3	Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament.	True/False
4	Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union.	True/False
5	[COUNTRY]'s Minister of Education is [NAME].	True/False
6	Individuals must be 25 or older to stand as candidates in [COUNTRY]'s general elections.	True/False
7	There are 105 members of the [COUNTRY] parliament.	True/False

Note: These questions were asked within the European Voter Study 2009 (Egmond et al., 2017). The wording is taken from the English version of the study. Questions were translated into the national language for other versions. [COUNTRY] is an placeholder for the name of the country the sub-survey was administered in and [NAME] is a placeholder for the name of the corresponding minister of education.