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# Do They Get Close? Party Shifts and Changes in Parliamentary Congruence on Multiple Issue Dimensions in the Wake of the Crises

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores congruence in the wake of the crises. It analyses (1) shifts in parties' positions on multiple issue dimensions and (2) examines congruence between citizens and parliament in times of crisis. The article refers to three issue dimensions: left-right, migration and European integration. First, I hypothesise that shifts in party positions are more pronounced on newly contested issue dimensions, such as migration or European integration, than on the left-right dimension. Second, I argue that systemic congruence will increase over the course of time. Third, I posit that systemic congruence will increase particularly on newly contested issue dimensions, like migration and European integration. The study brings together a set of Western European countries: France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain and Sweden. The analysis is based on CHES- and ESS-data (2006–2018/2019) and explores congruence as a many-to-many relationship. In large part, the results confirm the hypotheses. First, party positions changed, and shifted particularly on the issue dimensions of European integration and migration. Second, systemic congruence increased in several cases. Third, the most profound changes are to be found on the issue dimension of European integration.

## KEYWORDS

representation; congruence; parties; citizens/voters; parliament

## Introduction

To what degree are citizens' preferences represented in times of crises and how does substantive representation change? The economic and political crisis that Europe has recently faced have prompted a discussion about the functioning of representative democracy. Many European citizens seem to be dissatisfied with democracy and there are crucial changes in the representational link between citizens and parties. The crises are 'external shocks' and catalysers of societal and political changes leading to changes in both the public and the political agenda (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). In Europe, issues such as European (dis-)integration and migration became increasingly politicised

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(Hutter and Kriesi, 2019a, 2021). In this context, analysing the dynamics of party competition and the evolution of parliamentary congruence is a crucial question for scholars of democratic representation.

In order to evaluate representation, the analysis of congruence, defined as the degree of agreement between citizens and political actors, is key. Scholars measure the proximity of positions, such as general ideological orientations or more specific policy preferences (e.g., Miller & Stokes, 1963). In the existing literature the main topic has been the impact of electoral systems on congruence (Blais & Bodet, 2006; Huber & Powell, 1994; McDonald & Budge, 2005; Powell, 2000). Recently, the relevance of analysing congruence on multiple issue dimensions has been emphasised (e.g., Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Bakker et al., 2018; Dalton, 2017; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016).

This article identifies several gaps in research on congruence: first, these studies do not address how congruence changes over time, and particularly in times of crisis, when party competition and party systems change significantly; second, only a few studies account for multiple issues and go beyond the analysis of abstract ideological orientations, or compare dynamics of congruence across issues; third, earlier studies did not contrast shifts of individual parties with changes in systemic congruence (here: with reference to the parliament) over time; fourth, studies did not compare the dynamics of congruence on recently politicised issue dimensions to dimensions on which parties had competed for some time. I emphasise that in order to understand the functioning of the representational link between citizens and parties at the systemic level in times of crisis, research on political parties and research on congruence need to be in dialogue. Hence, this article accounts for party competition over multiple issue dimensions and the evolution of parliamentary congruence using a comparative approach.

First, in line with literature on party competition, I depart from the assumption that the positions represented by parliamentary parties change over the course of time. I argue that these shifts vary across issue dimensions and I explore this empirically with reference to the general left-right scale, European integration and migration: changes will be particularly pronounced over issue dimensions that became politicised in the wake of the crises, namely European integration and migration. Second, I argue that the quality of representation at the systemic level (here: parliamentary congruence) will increase over time, as the positions that are represented in parliament will reflect citizens' interests better over time. Third, I argue that these mechanisms lead in particular to changes in parliamentary congruence around issue dimensions that were politicised in times of crisis. Hence, congruence will increase especially on the two issue dimensions, European integration and migration.

The analysis covers the period between 2006 and 2018/2019, which allows me to analyse representation before the crises began and in the wake of the crises. To test my arguments empirically, I draw on data from four waves of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and of the European Social Survey. Unlike many studies in the research field which conduct analyses on the basis of large-N designs, this article goes beyond existing research: a case study design allows an extremely in-depth analysis of the unit. It is possible to identify whether there are certain positions that are over- or underrepresented and how patterns of congruence change over the course of time, across issues and countries. The analysis focuses on a set of West European countries that differ regarding the impact of the economic crisis (changes in GDP) and migration (migration stock as a % of the

population): Spain, which was heavily affected by the economic crisis but faced a decrease in migration stock between 2010 and 2015 which then increased; Germany and Sweden, which faced a strong increase of immigration but did not suffer as other countries from the economic crisis; France, which was affected by the immigration and faced an economic crisis; and Great Britain, which suffered less from the economic crisis and faced a lower increase in immigration but which is ultimately facing Brexit.

In large part, the results confirm the hypotheses. They show that parties' positions go through more pronounced changes on the issue dimensions of European integration and migration – issues that became politicized in the wake of the crises – than on the left-right scale. Concurrently, parliamentary congruence has increased in some cases. But the patterns differ: on the issue dimension of European integration congruence is lowest, particularly in the year 2006, but the quality of representation increased over the course of time in most of the cases. Regarding migration, the results are mixed. Gaps were constantly small on the left-right scale on which congruence increased. The article shows that individual party shifts affect parliamentary congruence but may not immediately lead to a better quality of representation. Instead, some representation gaps increase once parties start to compete, but congruence reaches higher levels over the course of time, as particularly shown for European integration.

These results have important implications for research on political parties, public opinion, representation, and on congruence. For instance, they imply that analyses which only explore the left-right scale produce insufficient results and a potentially biased conclusion, because the patterns of representation differ across dimensions. My results show that these crises might in fact have acted as a 'catalyzing moment' and had positive effects on the quality of democratic representation, at least regarding the issue dimension European integration.

### **The Quality of Representation in Times of Crisis: Shifts, Issue Dimensions and Implications for Parliamentary Congruence**

Congruence plays a key role in the assessment of representation. Whereas in democratic theory, congruence is only one 'democratic virtue' (Huber & Powell, 1994, p. 292) among others, in research on representation it is the 'normal standard for judging the representativeness of a democratic system' (Dalton 2002, p. 217). In general, it refers to the agreement between citizens and political actors or institutions. The initial measure of congruence was established by Miller and Stokes (1963), who compared policy preferences of constituents with (1) attitudes of representatives, (2) MPs' perceptions of the interests of the constituency and (3) voting behaviour of representatives. This study inspired a long tradition of research; for decades scholars analysed congruence between citizens and representatives or government (e.g., Barnes & Farah, 1972; Converse & Pierce, 1986; Powell, 2000). Substantive agreement between political parties and citizens, or citizens and parliament, has, however, increasingly been analysed only recently (e.g., Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Dalton, 2017; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012).

Most studies on congruence assess representation with reference to the left-right dimension (e.g., Achen, 1978; Budge & McDonald, 2007; Golder & Stramski, 2010; Huber & Powell, 1994). Unlike many studies on congruence, research on responsiveness

usually refers to multiple issues and policies (e.g., Spoon and Klüver, 2014; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008; Eulau & Karps, 1977; Wlezien & Soroka, 2012). While the literature on political parties makes a thorough investigation of competition in multiple dimensions (e.g., de Vries & Marks, 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002; Rovny, 2012; Rovny & Whitefield, 2019), studies that explore congruence on multiple issue dimensions are less prominent in research on representation. These studies usually integrate only one point in time (e.g., Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Costello et al., 2012; Dalton, 2017; Dolný & Baboš, 2015; Thomassen & Schmitt, 1997).

In times of crisis, the consideration of (a) multiple issue dimensions and (b) time becomes increasingly important when evaluating representation as the structure of conflict changes. In the scope of this article, the economic crisis, the political crisis as well as the increase in migration is relevant. The economic crisis, starting in the late 2000s, prompted a more critical discussion about integration and the power dynamics within the EU. The Brexit constituted another element of Europe's political crisis that affected the debate on European integration within the UK and among the EU member states.

Finally, Europe faced an increase in migration, but the migration stock differed between countries. 'External shocks' – the multiple crises – affected the relation between citizens and the state and put new topics on the agenda (Carmines & Stimson, 1989, p. 4). This has implications for citizens' preferences, party competition and ultimately for the quality of representation. These developments led to new conflicts and the politicization of issues, defined as an 'expansion of the conflict within the political system' (Hutter et al., 2016, p. 7). Accordingly, an issue is politicised if issue salience (visibility), actor expansion (range) and actor politicization (intensity and direction) is given.

The theoretical basis for analysing representation on multiple issue dimensions goes back to Lipset and Rokkan (1967) who identified different societal cleavages that form societal conflict which is then translated into political conflict: church-state, working class-bourgeoisie, centre-periphery, urban-rural. With the emergence of post-industrial society, additional cleavages emerged, emphasising cultural aspects, environmentalism and post-materialist values. New parties entered politics and other parties were urged to react and to make changes (e.g., Adams et al., 2006; Enyedi, 2008; Kitschelt, 1994, 1995; Kriesi et al., 2006; Marks et al., 2006). In the last decade, issues such as migration and European integration became politicised. The process of politicization refers to a more publicly visible contestation of issue dimensions (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2002; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019b) and dimensional changes occurred (e.g., de Vries, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Marks et al., 2006; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2016; Wheatley & Mendez, 2019).

These developments evoked a renewed debate about the integration of core state powers. This debate included (i) the need for a common fiscal backstop to prevent a liquidity crisis, (ii) proposals for a common unemployment insurance across the EU as a response to the high levels of unemployment and (iii) suggestions concerning a common refugee relocation scheme (Bremer et al., 2019). Monetary and fiscal policy as well as border policies affect the 'core state powers' of member states and are 'highly politicised integration politics' (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2018). In the wake of the economic crisis, the salience of European integration increased constantly between 2008 and 2014; then, it remained on that rather high level. It became remarkably more

politicised after 2010. With regard to the migration issue, salience increased continuously after 2011 (Debomy, 2016; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019a).

While salience increased, the preferences of voters concerning European integration and migration remained rather stable. Tables A1–A3 in the Appendix show that citizens' preferences towards migration and European integration as well as their left-right orientations did not change strongly. Similar results are shown in the empirical analysis of many-to-many congruence below. Hence, the impact of shifts made by parliamentary parties are the focus of the subsequent analysis.

The literature engaged extensively with the implications of dimensional changes for party competition, suggesting that, at the beginning of the crises, the positions political parties represented on not yet politicized issues such as European integration or migration were constrained and citizens' choices were limited. But due to politicisation, the positions parties represented became more diverse over the course of time. This development is caused by two mechanisms: (1) challenger parties enter the political landscape, which are 'new, or reinvigorated' (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016, p. 971). These parties compete on particular issues directly related to the crises that become politicised: European integration and migration. Challenger parties do not enter the political sphere as part of government; on the whole they do not have this responsibility and take issue positions at 'niches' or at the extreme (Adams et al., 2006; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016) – as for instance Euroskeptical positions or illiberal positions on the migration issue. (2) The rise of new parties is explained by the incapacity of mainstream parties to make profound shifts in positions: 'For mainstream opposition parties that routinely alternate between government and opposition, wedge-issue competition could risk imperiling relationships with past and prospective coalition partners' (van de Wardt et al., 2014, p. 987). Regarding the migration issue, political conflict was mainly attributed to party competition and less to 'objective pressures' (Grande et al., 2018). Research suggests that there was a convergence of mainstream left parties and parties on the centre/right. Liberal positions were represented to a high degree and as a consequence, a representation gap concerning anti-immigration positions was created, which then opened the space for parties representing positions that are against migration (Kitschelt, 1995; Kriesi et al., 2008; Pardos-Prado, 2015). New parties enter the political sphere to account for citizens' hitherto unrepresented preferences. Finally, citizens could react by turning their backs on traditional parties and voting instead for parties representing other positions on the newly politicised issue dimensions (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Hobolt & de Vries, 2015; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2016) – and these parties enter parliaments or are becoming stronger within the parliament.

Positional shifts of parties may vary across dimensions: changes differ between specific issues that became politicised and the left-right scale. Unlike the issue dimensions of European integration or migration, the left-right scale is a 'super issue' (Downs, 1957) on which parties compete over time. It might be interpreted as an overarching dimension that bundles issue positions and policy preferences and would be a reasonable and useful approximation of party competition (see e.g., Cox, 1990; Dalton, 2008; Downs, 1957). In recent decades, research on congruence has referred mainly to the left-right scale, which is in the field interpreted as an indicator for ideology (Golder & Stramski, 2010; Huber & Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000). Preferences and positions towards overarching principles are contested over a greater period of time and the strategic incentives for parties to make

positional shifts differ from recently politicised issues. Consequently, there is more room for shifts in party positions on issue dimensions that became contested recently. As competition is changing particularly on issue dimensions that became politicized in the wake of the crises, such as European integration and migration, strong shifts of positions represented by parliamentary parties are more likely to occur on these dimensions than on the left-right dimension.

Hypothesis 1: Shifts of positions represented in parliament are stronger on newly politicized issue dimensions (such as the issue dimensions of European integration and migration) than shifts on the left-right dimension.

What are the implications of these shifts for the quality of representation in times of crisis and – more precisely – the implications for congruence at the systemic level over time? How and to what degree parliamentary congruence evolves across diverse issue dimensions and across countries has not yet been acknowledged by the literature. In times of crisis, the consideration of time becomes important: the politicization of issues affects party competition at the electoral stage and parliamentary representation, referring to the positions represented by parliamentary parties and parties' seatshare.

Changes in congruence are caused by two different mechanisms. (1) The representation of more extreme positions in the wake of the crises is likely to be realised by new parties or challenger parties (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2016). These new parties enter parliaments or become stronger over the course of time, representing positions that were rather neglected before issue politicization started. This has an impact on congruence between citizens and parliamentary parties at the extreme: challenger parties enter parliament, the seatshare of parties at the extremes increases on newly politicized issues. Consequently, parliaments represent these extreme positions to a larger degree and congruence increases.

(2) These developments put pressure on mainstream parties that usually have a large seat share. Traditional parties have an incentive to adapt positions according to citizens' preferences on issue dimensions that are politicised recently. However, they are constrained and will not shift significantly because of the incentive to form coalitions with other parties to be part of government. Hence, traditional parties pass slight shifts in order to represent the interests of citizens with similar positions more accurately, particularly on issues such as European integration and migration. These shifts are not at the extremes, but at moderate positions, where most citizens are placed. Due to these rather small shifts the positions of a large part of the electorate are represented more adequately. Hence, small shifts of traditional parties occur and result in higher degrees of congruence at the corresponding positions.

Here, the aspect of time becomes crucial: closing the representation gap needs time. This concerns the formal organisation of parties (if the parties are new), establishing positions on newly politicised issues in the public and the political discourse and gaining votes in the national elections to have seats in parliament. Finally, challenger parties represent citizens' preferences (stronger) in parliament. Similarly, the reaction of traditional parties needs time – they make slight shifts in their positions, integrate these positions into the political and public discourse and the election results might change. The (strength of) positions represented in parliament change. As a result, the degree of parliamentary congruence increases. As these corresponding dynamics occur particularly

regarding newly politicised issues, congruence will increase more on these issue dimensions, but less on the left-right scale.

Hypothesis 2a: Parliamentary congruence on the issue dimension of European integration increased after the economic crisis.

Hypothesis 2b: Parliamentary congruence on the issue dimension of migration increased after the increase of immigration into Europe.

Hypothesis 3: Parliamentary congruence increases more on newly politicized issue dimensions (such as European integration and migration) than on the left-right dimension.

## Assessing the Quality of Representation in Turbulent Times: Concepts, Data and Methods

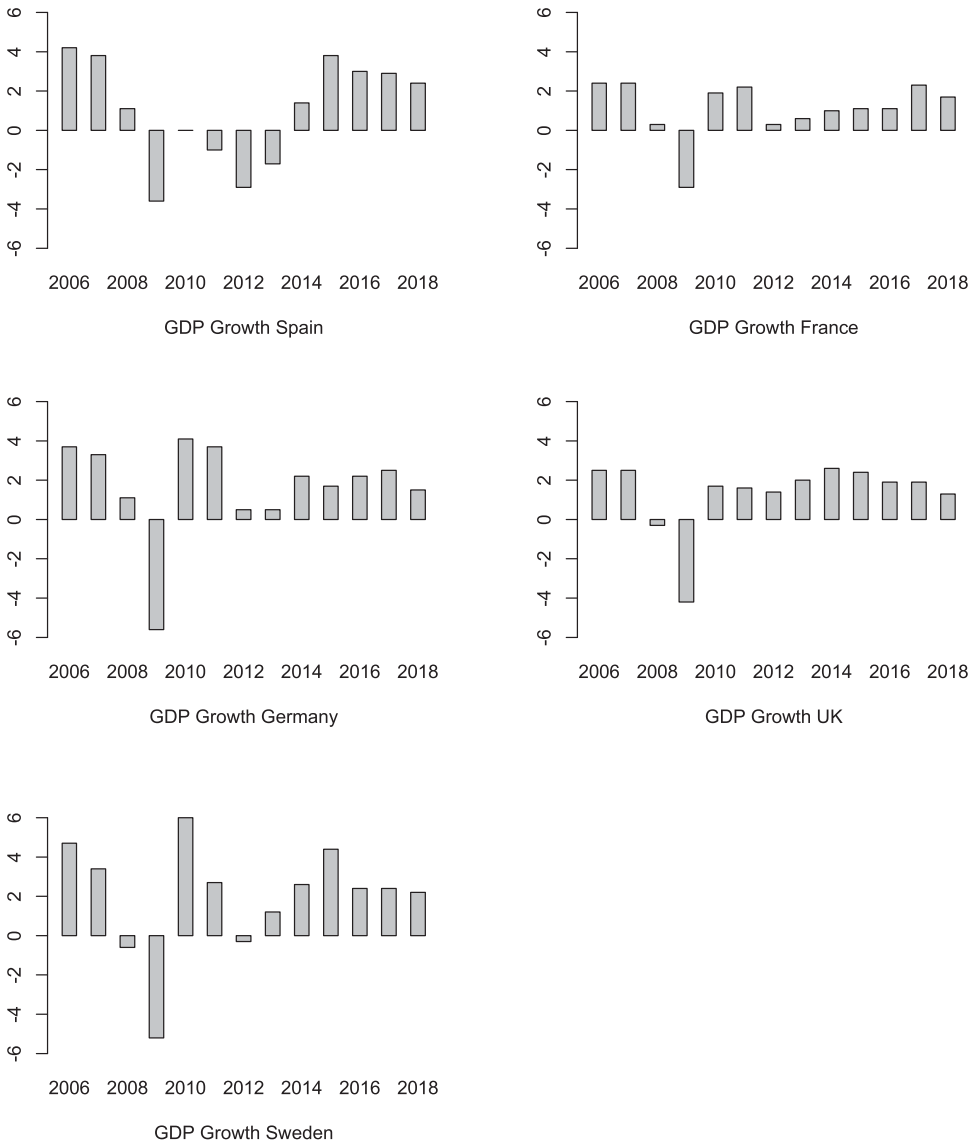
To assess the quality of representation over time, this study focuses on three dimensions: the left-right continuum, the – as yet – most important dimension for judging representation; and two different dimensions that became more and more contested in the wake of the crises, migration and European integration.

Most of the studies in the field deploy a large-N research design. Unlike these studies, which aim to identify general dynamics, this article investigates party shifts and corresponding changes in congruence in-depth by referring to case studies. Consequently, the analysis delivers results that allow very nuanced interpretations. They reveal (i) shifts of party positions with reference to particular units and (ii) detail related changes in congruence. For instance, the results show how shifts in party positions correspond to over- or underrepresentation of certain preferences of the citizenry. It is possible to identify precisely *which positions* are well represented and which are not reflected adequately. Furthermore, the results indicate *to which extent* certain positions are under- or overrepresented. The findings detail furthermore changes over the course of time and patterns across countries and issues; a nuanced and in-depth analysis is possible.

The analysis is conducted for five different European countries: Spain, France, Germany, Great Britain and Sweden. These countries differ regarding the impact of the economic crisis and the number of refugees entering the country. While European integration became more salient during the Eurocrisis, migration became more salient with the increase of immigration into Europe (Debomy, 2016; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). Policies that were attributed to the EU were mostly perceived as negative. This concerned the austerity measures on highly indebted countries that belonged to the Eurozone and migration policy (Schimmelfennig, 2018).

Simultaneously, a debate on the integration of core state powers was ignited. As described above, this concerned horizontal and vertical capacity building. Overall, citizens support horizontal transfers concerning refugees, unemployment and debt. Support for horizontal transfers with regard to refugees is highest in Spain and Germany, followed by Sweden, UK and France. With regard to unemployment and debt, net support is high in Spain. Citizens of the other countries of this sample are, however, against it. The support for vertical capacity building (financial capacity) is generally lower. Germany and Spain are rather supportive, but citizens in France, Sweden and UK are skeptical – with Sweden and UK not being part of the Eurozone (Bremer et al., 2019) (Figure 1).





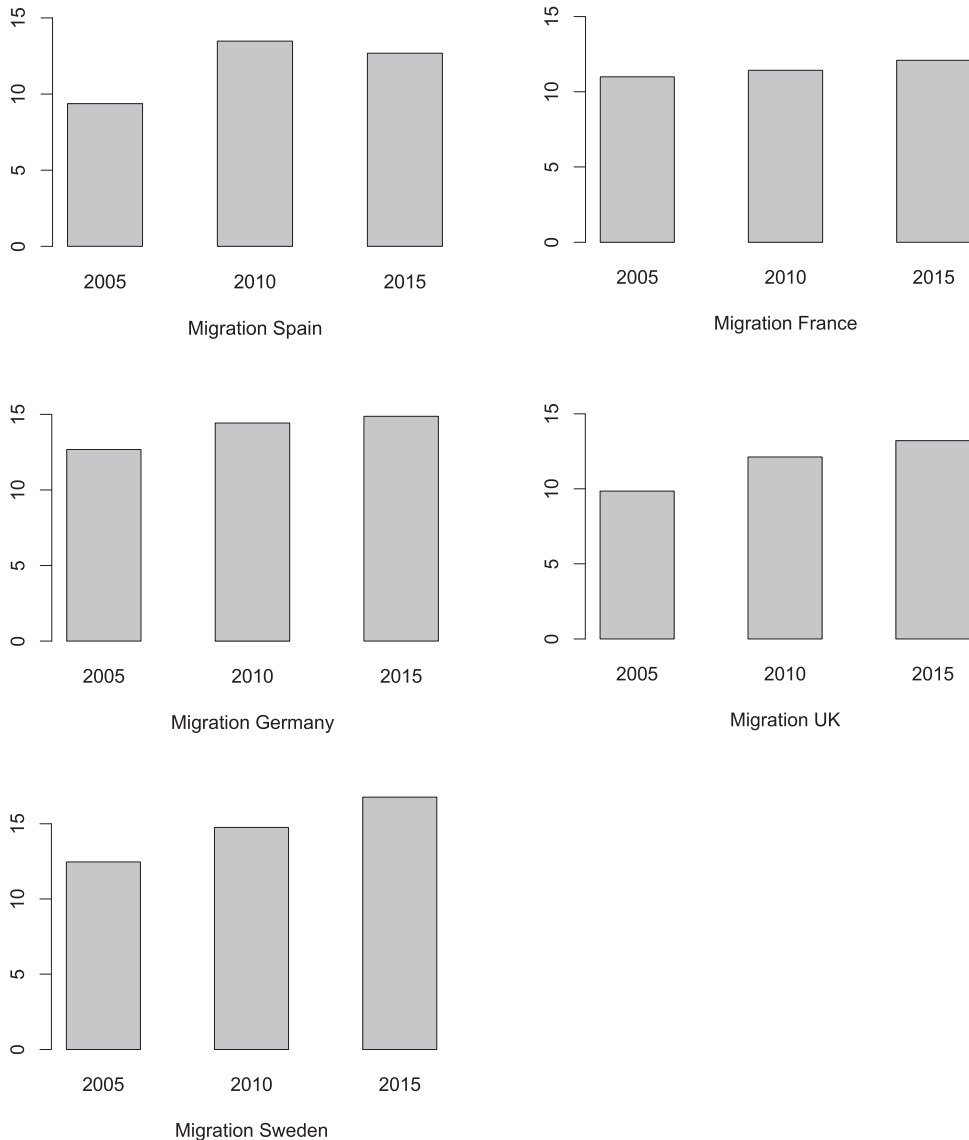
**Figure 1.** Changes in GDP (expenditure oriented), 2006–2018.  
Source: OECD 2019.

The graphs show that Spain was particularly heavily affected by the economic crisis, as well as Sweden that faced twice a decrease in the GDP but had a strong GDP growth already in 2010. France did not have stable growth after 2009. In the UK, GDP growth became more stable after 2010 but had not yet reached its pre-crisis level. Germany did not face any drop in GDP growth after 2009 but could no longer reach the before-crisis threshold. In addition to the changes in GDP growth, the austerity measures differed between the nation states. Neither Sweden nor the UK are part of the Eurozone. With regard to the other countries of this sample, Spain was affected most by the crisis in terms of drop in GDP *and* the austerity

measures imposed. It can hence be assumed that Spain has the most profound changes regarding European integration (Figure 2).

Concurrently, an increasing number of migrants entered Europe and became a matter of public and political discourse around the mid-2010s.

In most of the countries the number of migrants increased constantly and distinctively. Germany and Sweden were the countries with the highest migration stock (as a percentage of the population) when the significant increase of immigration began. Changes regarding the migration issue can be expected particularly in these countries. In contrast, Spain was heavily affected by the economic crisis, but the number of migrants



**Figure 2.** Migration Stock as a % of the population, 2005–2015.

Source: Worldbank 2020. The numbers include asylum seekers.

was proportionally lower than in Germany and Sweden. France faced both a strong increase of immigration and an economic crisis, but the GDP grew constantly since 2009. Lastly, Great Britain suffered from the economic crisis, the migration stock as a percentage of the population increased strongly and the country is ultimately facing the Brexit. Hence, the choice of countries offers a necessary variation to test the hypotheses above in diverging contexts and to explore whether the findings are robust in diverging contexts.

The data is derived from two sources. The European Social Survey serves as the basis for the analysis of citizens' positions (NSD, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018). The Chapel Hill Expert Survey provides information about party positions and about the seat share of parties in national parliaments (Bakker et al., 2022; Bakker, Edwards, et al., 2015). As the analysis aims to explore shifts in, and the quality of, representation, congruence is compared at four different points in time: 2006 (before the economic crisis began), 2010, 2014 and 2018/2019.<sup>1</sup> The measure of congruence is based on the expert approach (Powell, 2009): experts ascertain the positions of political parties. The strength of this approach is the ability of experts to identify the 'true' position of political actors. It is argued that these expert placements are more reliable than citizen placements, particularly as many experts are surveyed in each country. The main criticism of this measure is differential item functioning: citizens and experts might have a different understanding of what 'left' and 'right' actually means, and this puts into question the reliability of this method (see also: Budge 2000). But recent analyses prove that there is no great variance, either between citizen and party positioning (Bakker, Edwards, et al., 2015), or between country experts (Jolly et al., 2022). The data used in the analysis was collected at the same points in time (2006, 2010, 2014, 2018) and thus allows inferring positions of parties and citizens simultaneously. This strategy minimises the biasing effects of external events on analysing party positions and citizens' preferences.

The empirical analysis takes up the current methodological debate for assessing representation. For long, the method of choice for inferring congruence was the comparison of mean or median scores of citizens and government. With the aim to assess representation in greater detail, Golder and Stramski (2010) introduced congruence as a many-to-many relationship. This concept considers to what extent positions are distributed among the citizenry and to what extent these positions are represented in parliament. For illustrative reasons, the calculation is explained with reference to the left-right dimension.

### **(1) Positions of Political Parties**

Party positions are placed on the left-right scale, ranging from 0 to 10. In a next step, the seat share of each party is considered. Based on these two pieces of information about parliamentary parties, it is possible to infer a distribution function on the left-right scale. Based on this distribution, Golder and Stramski suggest calculating a cumulative distribution function (F1).

### **(2) Positions of Citizens**

Citizens' left-right positions are identified, ranging from 0 to 10 on the left-right scale. In a next step, the distribution of citizens' positions is calculated; we know about the

percentage of voters that place themselves on the integer point 3, 4, 6, etc. on this scale. Based on this distribution, a cumulative distribution function is calculated (F2).

### (3) Congruence as a Many-to-Many Relation

For calculating congruence as a many-to-many relationship, the differences between both distributions (F1 and F2) are computed for each integer point on the left-right scale (0–10).<sup>2</sup> The aggregation of these differences is the indicator for congruence as a many-to-many relationship. Here, larger differences indicate lower degrees of congruence.<sup>3</sup> The formula reads as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{congruence}(\text{many} - \text{to} - \text{many}) \\ &= \sum |F_1(x) - F_2(x)| \end{aligned}$$

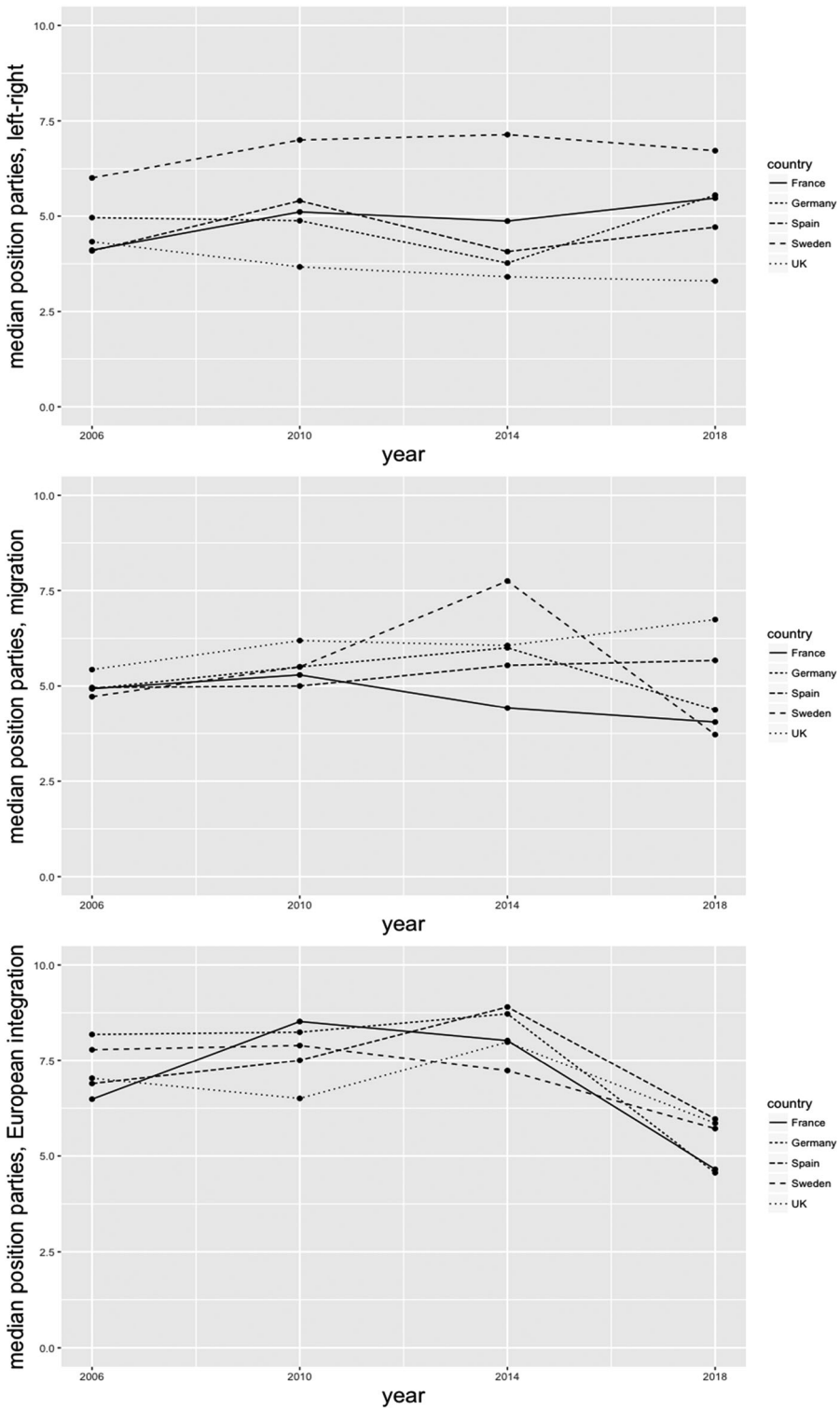
The subsequent analysis makes use of this concept, amplifying studies that explored congruence as a many-to-many relation. This approach is particularly suitable for the case study design, the descriptive analysis of changes and the graphical illustration of gaps (e.g., Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017; Dolný & Baboš, 2015; Kedar et al., 2015). Another measure of many-to-many congruence was developed by Lupu et al. (2017). The *earth mover distance* captures similarities between distributions and calculates the amount that has to be moved to transform one mass distribution into the other mass distribution.

### Parliamentary Parties and Shifts in Positions

The first section of the empirical analysis explores how the positions that are represented by parliamentary parties shifted in the wake of the crises by focusing on median scores of party positions on the dimensions of interest: left-right, European integration, and migration (Figure 3). The median scores refer to the median position of parliamentary parties, given the seat share of each party. On the left-right dimension, the median positions of parliamentary parties are generally centrist, with a tendency to the left, with the exception of Sweden. The score for Sweden is the highest, indicating that the median position of Swedish parties tends towards the right, caused by some small parliamentary parties on the right.

The median position of parliamentary parties on the issue dimension of migration was quite centrist in 2006. As Figure 3 illustrates, there were no significant shifts between 2006 and 2010 but several changes between 2010 and 2018. The most remarkable shift occurred in Sweden, where the median party position was strongly in favour of migration in 2014. In 2018, however, parties supported more restrictive immigration policies. Unlike, the median party position of Spanish and British parties shifted towards more support towards immigration. For the case of Great Britain, this is partially caused by the positions of small parliamentary parties. In France and Germany, the median positions shifted towards more restrictive policies between 2014 and 2018.

Parties' positions on European integration shifted to a greater extent. Generally, the results show that parties represent above all pro-European positions. But the median position on parliamentary parties shifted towards the centre in all of the countries analysed.



**Figure 3.** Median position of parliamentary parties and party shifts 2006–2018. Left-right: 0 = left, 10 = right; migration: 0 = against migration, 10 = in favour of migration; European integration: 0 = against integration, 10 = in favour of integration. Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Party entries: Spain: 2010, 2014, 2018; France: 2010, 2014, 2018; GB: 2010, 2018; Germany: 2018; Sweden: 2010

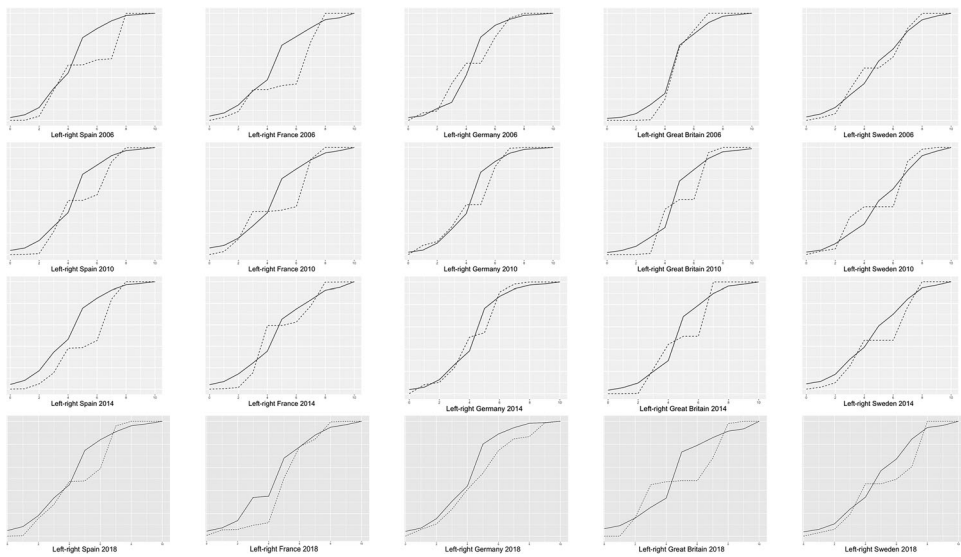
Differently to the literature on party competition, the analysis shows that in the aftermath of the economic crisis which started in 2009, the positions represented in the British and in the German parliament became even more pro-European between 2010 and 2014, but then shifted towards the centre.

In sum, there are few changes on the left-right scale. Regarding European integration and migration, there were fewer shifts between 2006 and 2010, but more shifts between 2010 and 2018, which confirms the hypotheses in large part. The results show, however, that median positions seem to shift more strongly when parties start to compete on an issue. With regard to European integration, positions started to shift between 2010 and 2014, but most of them were strongly pro-European. Between 2014 and 2018, median positions moved to the middle of the scale, after parties competed on this issue for several years, indicating that parties' positions increasingly included Euroskeptic positions and most of the parliaments included new parties. As assumed above, Spain and France made the most profound shifts in positions. Similarly, with regard to the migration issue, median positions shifted when the issue became increasingly contested (2014–2018). Yet, these median shifts don't follow a clear pattern, but further research might explore how the positions evolve after parties competed on the issue for some time. Particularly Sweden made strong shifts, as assumed above; the shifts in Germany, however, were not that pronounced.

### Many-to-Many Congruence on Multiple Issue Dimensions in Times of Crisis

The subsequent section investigates congruence as a many-to-many relation on the left-right scale and on the recently politicised issue dimensions of European integration and migration over time. The graphs illustrate citizens' orientations (CDFs solid lines) and compare them with the positions of parliamentary parties (CDFs dashed lines). Gaps between the CDFs indicate incongruence: the larger the gaps, the lower the congruence. The concrete numbers are listed in the Appendix ([Figure 4](#)).

The graphs show that parties went through more profound shifts than citizens on the left-right scale. In Spain, citizens' orientations did not go through a profound shift; the solid lines indicate quite similar patterns, albeit there are some changes which concern the extremes. Over the course of time, a part of the citizenry went from the centre to the left and to the right. When comparing the extremes, the results show that the Spanish citizenry holds to a greater extent positions on the extreme left. Unlike citizens, the political parties showed more significant shifts. In 2006, party positions were concentrated at the centre of the left-right dimension. While citizen positions drifted continuously to the left, it was only in 2014 that political parties made a remarkable shift to the left and the centre-right positions became less strongly represented. In 2011, new parties representing positions that challenged traditional parties entered parliament: the most important change was caused by Amaiur, a very leftist party (expert placement = 1.88), but as the party won only seven seats, this shift is not strongly pronounced. However, extreme leftist positions were better represented than before and became part of the parliamentary discourse. What are the consequences for the quality of representation? In 2010 the CDFs became more similar, while the gap increased again in 2014, as citizens shifted more towards the left than the political parties. In 2018, the positions of parties and citizens were again closer.



**Figure 4.** Changes in congruence as a many-to-many relation, left-right (2006–2018).

Left-right: 0 = left 10 = right; sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset; CDF citizens = solid lines, CDF parties = dashed lines. Larger gaps indicate a worse quality of representation.

In France, left-right congruence improved between 2006 and 2014. There were large gaps at the centre/centre-right in 2006, but these gaps were much diminished in 2014. Citizens' orientations shifted slightly towards the centre, but to a significantly lower degree than the parties. Unlike citizens' preferences, positions which were represented in the parliament became more dispersed. As a result, congruence increased. In 2018, a gap on the left arose as the parliament was less leftist than citizens.

The left-right positions of German citizens remained quite stable over the course of time and the majority of voters had attitudes located at the middle of the left-right scale. But over time, citizens' attitudes became more leftist. Concurrently, attitudes on the far right became slightly more pronounced in 2014. The political parties made minor shifts, too. Most German parties are located at the middle of the left-right scale, but there is a tendency to lean to the left, which is in accordance with citizens' orientations. The patterns remained quite stable even if there was a change within the party system in 2014, when the FDP, the liberals, lost their seats in parliament. These stable patterns result in almost consistent degrees of congruence and remained in 2018. However, the CDFs indicate that parties' seat share on the far right was larger than the share of citizens holding similar positions.

Especially in 2006, the positions of British parliamentary parties matched the left-right orientations of citizens almost perfectly. The British parties held positions mainly at the middle of the left-right continuum, and most of the citizens had similar orientations. However, in 2010 the political parties went through more shifts than the British citizenry. The gaps in the years 2010 and 2014 indicate that the quality of representation decreased over time, but the gaps are not yet large. In 2018, the two major parties became more dispersed and the representation gap increased.

As in the case of Germany and Great Britain, the left-right orientations of Swedish citizens are stable, and the majority has centrist orientations. The positions represented in

parliament, however, made some shifts. In 2006, citizens' orientations matched almost perfectly with the positions represented by parliamentary parties. In 2010, however, party positions shifted from the middle slightly to the left and to the right, which caused larger gaps in representation. As the CDFs indicate, the gaps on the left disappeared in 2014 and 2018, but disagreement became more pronounced on the right. In sum, the results indicate that there were slight shifts of parties and voters on the left-right scale. Apparently, representation is functioning well with exception of France and Spain in 2006.

In Spain, many-to-many congruence changed more significantly regarding migration. Here, citizens' attitudes altered less between 2006 and 2014 than the positions which were represented by parliamentary parties. Until 2014, citizens' attitudes towards migration remained quite stable. Parties' changes concern in particular positions that oppose migration. In 2006, there was no parliamentary party that strongly opposed migration. This changed slightly in 2010, but profoundly in 2014 and 2018. In 2014, the PP had a seat share of more than 50 percent and was in favour of restrictive policies. In contrast to 2014, the party held a more moderate position in 2006 and made a shift towards more extreme orientations (e.g., Morales et al., 2015), which finally caused a representation gap. However, overall congruence increased again between 2014 and 2018 when the issue was politicised.

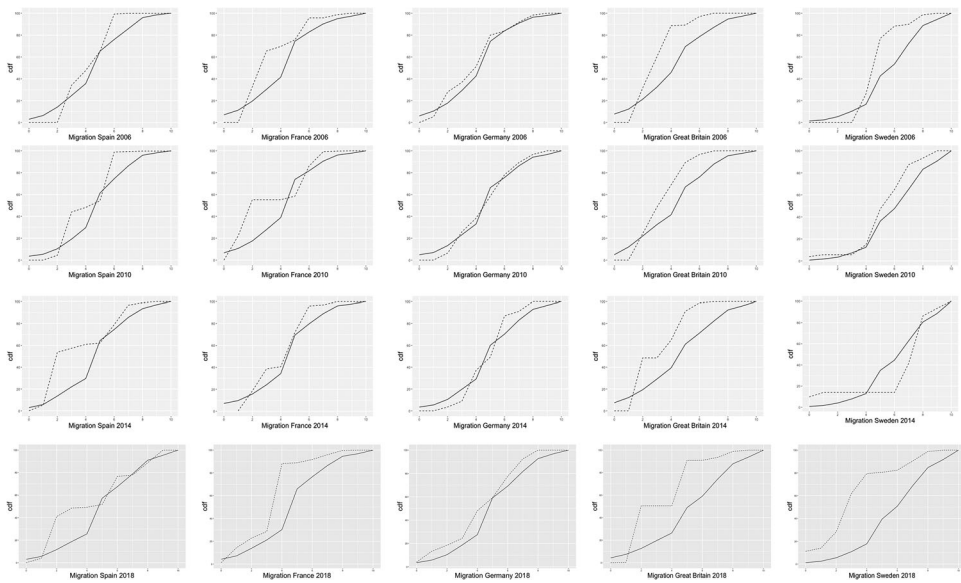
In France, citizens' attitudes towards migration did not change significantly between 2006 and 2014. Unlike citizens, the positions represented in parliament went through more profound changes. Indeed, the majority of parliamentary parties in France opposed migration, and were even more skeptical in 2010.<sup>4</sup> In 2014, the patterns changed significantly: the CDFs indicate that the gap is much smaller, but it increased at the middle of the scale in 2018 – shortly after the issue became politicised.

Germans' attitudes towards migration travelled through more changes than their left-right orientations. Overall, the representation gap was already small in 2006. Indeed, the analysis reveals a slight shift from overall supportive attitudes towards more neutral positions concerning migration. The political parties, on the other hand, shifted stronger. At first, congruence did fall but congruence increased between 2014 and 2018, after the issue became politicised (see also: Appendix). In 2014, citizens' positions on the extremes were more marked than the positions which were taken by parliamentary parties; a pattern that remained in 2018.

The attitudes of British citizens towards migration became more polarised. Furthermore, the graphs reveal representation gaps which became even more pronounced in the course of time as the parliamentary parties took more skeptical positions than citizens. The Conservatives promoted policies that opposed migration and Labour held an almost neutral position in 2014. The difference between the positions of the two major parties and citizens' balanced preferences caused representation gaps. In 2018, the gap increased and parties held more skeptical positions than the electorate. Again, parties shifted more than citizens.

In 2006, only a small part of the Swedish electorate had negative attitudes towards migration. Less than 20 percent stated that migration would have negative consequences for the country (integer points 0–4). The representation gaps varied in the course of time. In 2010 there was a change in the party system: the SD entered parliament and won even more seats in 2014. As a result, extreme positions on migration





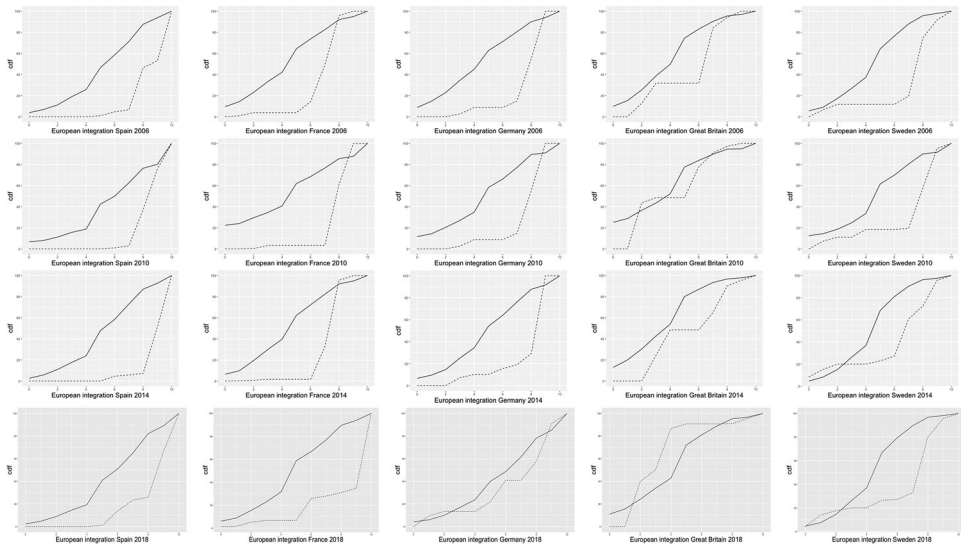
**Figure 5.** Changes in congruence as a many-to-many relation, left-right (2006–2018).

Migration; 0 = against migration, 10 = in favour of migration; sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset; CDF citizens = solid lines, CDF parties = dashed lines. Larger gaps indicate a worse quality of representation.

became more and more represented when immigration increased. Figure 5 shows that particularly parliamentary parties shifted. The CDFs reveal a large representation gap in 2018 with a parliament that was more skeptical towards migration than the electorate. While congruence does not (yet) improve overall (only slightly in Germany and Spain between 2014 and 2018), the dynamics show that issue politicisation is associated to changes in party positions. This might indicate that – while individual parties shift rapidly – an increase in parliamentary congruence on newly politicized issues needs time, as described above (Figure 6).

The dynamics of congruence concerning European integration differ: in most of the cases, congruence increased over time. Generally, the results show large representation gaps concerning European integration. In Spain, the gaps between citizens and parties increased over time: Euroskeptical positions were almost non-existent in parliament. When the economic crisis hit, party positions even shifted to pro-European positions. Concurrently, citizens' attitudes became more skeptical, but only marginally. In 2018, however, party positions shifted towards the middle of the scale and became overall less pro-European than before – the representation gap became smaller.

French parliamentary parties represented mainly pro-European positions. Again, the distribution of citizens' orientations towards European integration remained much more stable than the positions represented in parliament. On the one hand, small skeptical parties became stronger. Shortly after the economic crisis started, more moderate positions were represented in parliament, as the results for 2014 indicate. Skeptical positions in parliament became stronger in 2018, in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Concurrently, in 2017, the LREM entered the parliament and caused an increase in the representation gap as the parliament became much more pro-European than the electorate.



**Figure 6.** Changes in congruence as a many-to-many relation, European integration (2006–2018).

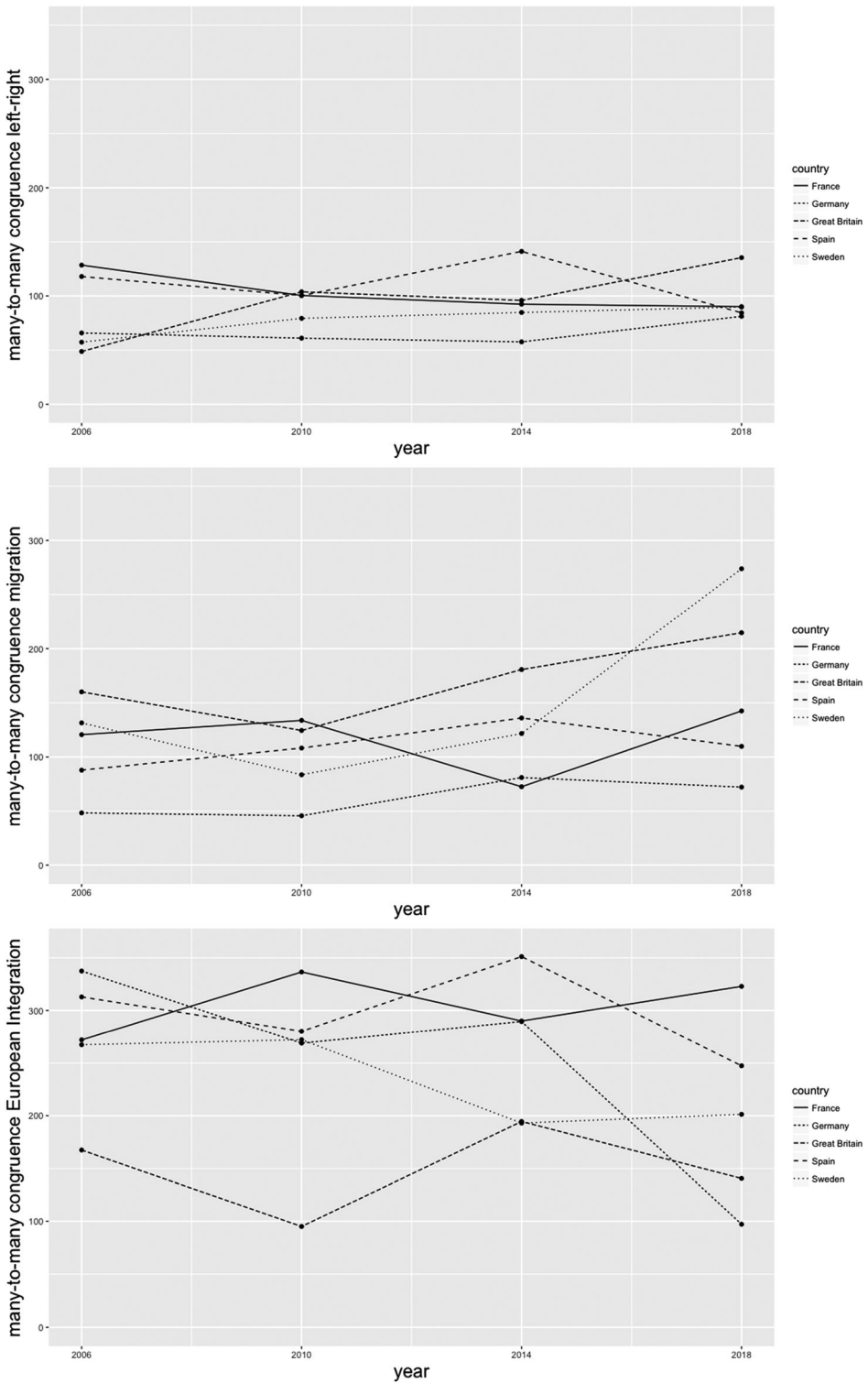
European integration: 0 = against integration, 10 = in favour of integration; Sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset; CDF citizens = solid lines, CDF parties = dashed lines. Larger gaps indicate a worse quality of representation.

In Germany there are large gaps, too. However, a comparison between 2006 and 2018 demonstrates that representation improved over time as skeptical positions were more and more represented. In 2014, the reason is not the rise of an extreme right party, but the rise of Die LINKE, a leftist party. In 2018, however, a radical right party, the AfD entered the German parliament and skeptical positions were represented to a higher degree. At this time, the GDP did not reach its before-crisis level and immigration increased. Concurrently, established parties shifted slightly and were less pro-European than in 2014. As a consequence, congruence increased in 2018.

The CDFs concerning European integration demonstrate that Euroskeptical attitudes were – already in 2006 – quite pronounced in Great Britain. In 2006, British citizens had more skeptical positions than the parliament. The representation gap decreased in 2010 but increased again in 2014. In 2018, the positions converged: the CDFs indicate that parliament was, in large part, even more anti-European than the electorate. Overall, congruence increased between 2014 and 2018.

In the case of Sweden, the analysis reveals more pronounced representation gaps: in 2006, the parliamentary parties represented mainly positions in favour of European integration and citizens' attitudes were more skeptical. However, citizens' skeptical attitudes decreased between 2006 and 2014. Concurrently, parliamentary parties went through shifts: parties holding Euroskeptical positions entered the parliament or became stronger. These two opposing changes caused an increase in congruence over time. In 2018, however, the positions represented in parliament became again more pro-European, the level of congruence remained similar.

In addition to the detailed analysis of representation gaps, [Figure 7](#) indicates how these shifts affect the quality of representation in sum and depicts degrees of congruence. Higher values indicate larger representation gaps.



**Figure 7.** The evolution of congruence as a many-to-many relation, 2006–2018.

Sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset. Higher numbers indicate a worse quality of representation. More detailed information: see Appendix.

In sum, the results largely confirm the hypotheses. The positions represented by parliamentary parties went through shifts, particularly regarding European integration. Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 3, stating that parliamentary congruence will increase in the course of time, especially with regard to newly politicised issues, is partially confirmed. Particularly regarding European integration, congruence improved as more anti-European positions came to be represented (three out of five cases), but still, the analysis reveals large representation gaps. Congruence increased in Spain, Germany and Sweden, while Spain was the country that suffered most from the economic crisis. Regarding the migration issue, parties shifted, but congruence did not increase strongly. Only in Spain and Germany congruence increased slightly between 2014 and 2018, when the issue was politicised. More changes might happen over time as the process of politicization began more recently. As the results concerning European integration showed, the positions represented by parliamentary parties shifted considerably when the issue became politicised. Over time, congruence increased in several cases. As this process takes time, future research might show how congruence on the migration issue changed after 2018, when parliamentary parties (shifting in positions and in strength) could account more accurately for voters' preferences. In addition to parties gaining momentum, parliamentary congruence also depends on electoral cycles (four to five years). Hence, some more time might have to pass for parliamentary congruence to improve. While European integration became politicised in the wake of the economic crisis, starting in 2009, and congruence on this issue improved strongly in 2018, the politicisation of the migration issue started in the mid-2010s. It has to be acknowledged that – before the process of politicization started – representation gaps with regard to European integration have been significantly larger than with regard to migration. Moreover, median position of parliamentary parties on the migration issue shifted less. Therefore, the impact of party shifts might be less pronounced. Regarding the context, this case studies showed that there is some impact on changes in party positions and in congruence. However, future research with a large N design might explore the impact on party shifts and changes in congruence more systematically than this case study design allows.

This study adds a new aspect to literature on party competition, that mainly adopts a spatial logic: individual party shifts may be reasonable and strategic to close a gap on an issue dimension from one election to the other, for instance on the issue dimension of migration or regarding European integration. The implications for parliamentary congruence are, however, not that straightforward. The results indicate that party shifts may lead to even lower degrees of parliamentary congruence once competition on an issue starts but congruence increases over the course of time as the results for European integration indicate.

These findings have important implications for the study of democratic representation: the analysis shows that mechanisms characterising the representational link in times of crisis might lead to profound changes in congruence on some issue dimensions. This article demonstrates that crises might be a catalyser of conflicts, but also lead to an increase in the quality of representation over time.

## Conclusion

This article has analysed how citizen and party positions changed in the wake of the crises and it has investigated the impact of these shifts on the quality of representation at the

systemic level, in parliament. The article suggested that external shocks, such as the economic crisis, the increase in migration, and the political crisis in Europe caused profound societal and political changes and correspond to the politization of issues, such as European integration and migration. In times of crisis, traditional parties had to react to dimensional changes or there was an opportunity for new (challenger) parties to enter the political system and national parliaments, with consequences for congruence.

It was hypothesised that shifts in party positions are more likely to occur around issue dimensions that become increasingly contested in times of crisis, like migration and European integration, rather than on the left-right dimension. Finally, the implications for the quality of representation at the systemic level (parliament) were problematised. It was expected that congruence would improve on the issue dimensions of European integration and migration.

The article focused on a set of Western European countries. While many studies in the field deploy a large-N research design, this article analysed party shifts and changes in congruence by referring to case studies. With reference to different units, mechanisms and patterns across countries and issues could be explored in-depth. Unlike most studies on congruence, the method chosen was to measure congruence as a many-to-many relation instead of inferring congruence based on the median positions of parties and the electorate. This method allows accounting for dynamics in representation in more detail.

The analysis confirmed most of the hypotheses, even though there are some exceptions. Indeed, the analysis revealed shifts in party positions, less on the left-right dimension, but more on the issue dimensions of migration and European integration. Challenger parties entered parliaments and represented positions that were not represented by traditional parties; but traditional parties also went through shifts, even though not to the extremes. What are the implications for the quality of representation? In the case of European integration, congruence as a many-to-many relation improved in time in most of the cases, confirming the hypotheses. However, these trends did not occur in all of the cases. Regarding the migration issue, parties shifted, but congruence did not increase overall. However, an increase in parliamentary congruence might need time, as the theoretical section and other findings showed. Furthermore, representation gaps on the issue dimension of European integration have been larger than with regard to migration before the issues became politicised. Consequently, the general possibility for increasing congruence is higher in the case of European integration. Yet, the median position of parliamentary parties shifted less on the migration issue. Future research might investigate how congruence evolves within the following years.

The analysis points to an important aspect concerning the relation of individual party shifts and parliamentary congruence. Literature suggests that, if parties start to compete, they will strategically position themselves or shift in order to gain votes. Following the spatial logic, these dynamics close representation gaps. This study reveals, however, that these changes may not immediately lead to a significantly better quality of representation at the parliamentary level.

The results emphasise the necessity to infer congruence using a comparative approach, referring to case studies. The dynamics detected show, in detail, where and to what extent representation gaps exist, increase, or decrease by accounting for the percentage of citizens holding one particular issue position and the corresponding

seatshare of parliamentary parties representing this position. When this information is included in the analysis, we achieve a more nuanced picture of the quality of representation.

The findings underline the need to evaluate representation over the course of time and on multiple issue dimensions. The results of the many-to-many analysis show that representation is functioning well on the left-right dimension, but less on issue dimensions such as migration and European integration. Further research might address how the rise of challenger parties could lead to higher degrees of congruence on some issue dimensions and how the rise of these parties might also cause larger representation gaps on other dimensions that were not integrated into this study, as for instance economic policies.

Moreover, further research might address how the institutional setting affects the reactions of parties on changes in citizen preferences, large-N studies might identify patterns of changes in congruence or analyse how other macro factors affect shifts and systemic congruence. These might offer a systematic overview on the effects of party entries on congruence in comparison to the effects of shifts in the position of traditional parties while considering parties' seat share. Country studies, on the other hand, might offer an even more detailed insight into party competition, and enable us to analyse in more depth party-voter linkages and implications for parliamentary congruence in a given state.

## Notes

1. As citizens' attitudes towards European integration were not part of the ESS in 2010, these attitudes were substituted with data from ESS 2012. Party positions on European integration were measured differently in CHES (1-7) and ESS (0-10). In order to harmonize the scale, the CHES-data was recalibrated in accordance with other studies (Adams et al., 2006) =  $((\text{position}-1)/6)*10$ .
2. See similar Andeweg (2011).
3. In order to compare citizen and party positions on each integer point, the continuous values of party positions in the expert survey are harmonized to the discrete citizen scale following the method suggested by Golder and Stramski (2010): for instance, if a political party is placed at 4.2, the seat share of the corresponding party is allocated to position 4 and to position 5 on the scale (80 percent of the seat share to integer point 4 and 20 percent of the seat share to integer point 5).
4. Nevertheless, it is worth remarking that the wording might affect these patterns: citizens were asked whether migration makes their country a better or a worse place.

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## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Median positions of citizens' preferences – left-right.

	2006	2010	2014	2018
Spain	5	6	6	6
France	5	5	5	5
Great Britain	5	5	5	5
Germany	5	5	6	6
Sweden	5	5	5	5

Sources: European Social Survey; my dataset.

**Table A2.** Median positions of citizens' preferences – migration.

	2006	2010	2014	2018
Spain	5	5	5	5
France	5	5	5	5
Great Britain	5	5	5	5
Germany	5	5	5	5
Sweden	6	6	7	6

Sources: European Social Survey; my dataset.

**Table A3.** Median positions of citizens' preferences – European integration.

	2006	2010	2014	2018
Spain	6	6	6	6
France	5	5	5	5
Great Britain	5	4	4	5
Germany	5	5	5	6
Sweden	5	5	5	5

Sources: European Social Survey; my dataset.

**Table A4.** Changes in congruence as a many-to-many relation – left-right.

	2006	2010	2014	2018
Spain	117,91	100,28	141,08	84,41
France	128,43	100,4	92,36	90,13
Great Britain	48,76	103,78	95,87	135,31
Germany	65,85	61,03	57,61	81,16
Sweden	57,35	79,31	84,74	89,74

Sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset.

Higher numbers indicate a worse quality of representation.

**Table A5.** Changes in congruence as a many-to-many relation – migration

	2006	2010	2014	2018
Spain	87,85	108,22	136,01	109,82
France	120,63	133,78	72,55	142,5
Great Britain	160,08	124,46	180,67	214,69
Germany	48,41	45,79	81,03	72,21
Sweden	131,47	83,62	121,65	273,9

Sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset.  
Higher numbers indicate a worse quality of representation.

**Table A6.** Congruence as a many-to-many relation – European Integration.

	2006	2010/2012	2014	2018
Spain	312,9	280,15	351,18	247,37
France	271,98	336,6	290	332,94
Great Britain	167,38	95,04	194,46	140,49
Germany	337,50	268,91	289,48	97,16
Sweden	267,36	272,16	192,99	201,26

Sources: European Social Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey; my dataset.  
Higher numbers indicate a worse quality of representation.

## Parties Considered

### Spain

parties 2006: PSOE, PP, IU, CiU, PNV, ERC, BNG, CC, CHA;  
parties 2010: PSOE, PP, IU, CiU, PNV, ERC, BNG, CC, UPyD;  
parties 2014: PSOE, PP, IU, CiU, PNV, EA, ERC, BNG, CC, ICV, UPyD, Amaiur;  
parties 2019: C, CC, CDC/PDeCAT, EA/EH, EAJ/PNV, ERCCatSI, IU, PP, PSOE, Podemos

### France

parties 2006: PCF, PS, VERTS, RPR/UMP, RPF/MPF, UDF/Modem;  
parties 2010: PCF, PS, VERTS, RPR/UMP, UDF/Modem, NC;  
parties 2014: PCF, PS, PRG, VERTS, RPR/UMP, FN, UDF/Modem, NC, PRV, AC, PG;  
parties 2019: DLF, EELV, FN, Insoumis, LR, LREM, MODEM, PCF, PS

### Great Britain

parties 2006: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid;  
parties 2010: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid, Green;  
parties 2014: Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid, Green;  
parties 2019: Conservatives, DUP, Greens, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Plaid, SF, SNP

### Germany

parties 2006: CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke;  
parties 2010: CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke;  
parties 2014: CDU/CSU, SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke;  
parties 2019: AfD, CDU/CSU, FDP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Die Linke, SPD

## *Sweden*

parties 2006: V, SAP, C, FP, M, KD, MP;  
parties 2010: V, SAP, C, FP, M, KD, MP, SD;  
parties 2014: V, SAP, C, FP, M, KD, MP, SD;  
parties 2019: V, SAP, C, FP, M, KD, MP, SD