Whose Democracy is it?

Christophe Lesschaeve

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A study of inequality in policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters in Belgium

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van doctor
in de sociale wetenschappen aan de Universiteit Antwerpen te verdedigen door

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Promotor
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Antwerpen 2017

Universiteit Antwerpen

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Voorwoord

Aan dit doctoraat is vijf jaar lang gewerkt en ik ben trots het voor te stellen. Ik ben me echter zeer bewust van het feit dat ik dit proefschrift aan veel mensen te danken heb. Een doctoraat schrijf je nooit alleen, en dit proefschrift is zeker geen uitzondering.

Eerst en vooral wil ik *Stefaan* bedanken. Je nam me in 2012 aan, en gaf me de kans om te doctoreren. Vrijheid en vertrouwen zijn de twee woorden waarmee je als promotor het best te omschrijven bent. Je gaf me de vrijheid om mijn eigen ding te doen, met mijn nadruk op *inequality in representation* en *collective congruence*. Ook maakte het je niet uit hoe ik het afkreeg, zolang het uiteindelijk maar af was. Ideaal. De constructieve feedback op papers en ideeën waren van onschatbare waarde, het enthousiasme waarmee je aan wetenschap doet is aanstekelijk en je onverzettelijk geloof dat het wel goed zou komen was meermaals een rots in de branding.

Ook gaat mijn dank uit naar *Michiel*. Dit doctoraat steunde heel sterk, bijna compleet, op de ontwikkeling van De Stemtest in 2014. Wie Stemtest zegt, zegt Michiel Nuytemans. Het is moeilijk te overschatten hoe belangrijk je rol hierin was. In het verkiezingsproject was, voor zowel Vlaanderen als Franstalig België, een stemtest voorzien voor het regionale, federale én Europese niveau. Maar desondanks werd er doorgegaan tot de stemtesten naar tevredenheid konden worden afgeleverd, nachtwerk in Mortsel inbegrepen.

Daarnaast wil ik mijn commissieleden bedanken. *Lieven, Peter* en *Rudy*: jullie waren een heel geduldige en vooral een heel flexibele commissie, zeker toen jullie op het einde van dit doctoraat veel te lezen kregen met zeer weinig tijd. Desondanks waren jullie bij ieder van onze bijeenkomsten scherp maar constructief, streng maar rechtvaardig. Dankzij jullie is dit doctoraat naar een hoger niveau getild. Ik wil eveneens mijn twee juryleden *Bea* en *Jean-Benoît* bedanken. Juryleden krijgen normaal gesproken tot zes weken om de thesis te lezen; jullie deden het in drie. Hierdoor werd het mogelijk om op 20 april het doctoraat te verdedigen. Bedankt hiervoor.

Cruciaal tijdens de afgelopen jaren waren ook de toffe collega's in M²P: *Julie, Patrick, Pauline, Ione, Ruud, Kirsten, Edwin, Ine, Anne, Andrea*,…, en nog vele anderen. Voor het nu voor statistiek of papers

was, voor koffie of voor één of andere werkontwijkende babbel, jullie waren er altijd. Julie maken M²P mee tot het succesverhaal dat het vandaag is. Tijdens de M²P-weekend volgden serieuze en ludieke momenten elkaar moeiteloos op, en dit maakt M²P zo'n leuke plek om te werken. De combinatie van het luchtige en het inhoudelijke creëerde een werksfeer waarbij telkens naar meer en beter werd streeft, maar waar ruimte om een bij nader inzien onzinnig idee voor te stellen. Ik heb vandaag ook aan jullie te danken.

In dit bedanklijstje kunnen ook mijn vrienden en familie niet ontbreken. Mama, papa, jullie weten dat ik al langer goesting had om in de onderzoekswereld te gaan. Jullie hebben me voortdurend gesteund, aangemoedigd en alle kansen gegeven om dit ook effectief te kunnen doen. Ik heb enorm veel aan jullie te danken. Dankzij jullie ben ik de persoon die ik vandaag ben, en heb ik mijn ambitie om een doctoraat te schrijven kunnen waarmaken. Ik kan het op geen andere manier zeggen: dank jullie.

De boog kan echter niet altijd gespannen staan, en af en toe was er nood aan ontspanning. Gelukkig waren er dan mijn vrienden waarmee ik kon doorzakken of een goed feestje bouwen: Stefan (alle twee), Dimitri, Jan, Ennio, Sunisa, Eline en vele anderen. Ook Anne-Sophie, je bent behalve mijn zus ook gewoon een heel goeie vriendin. Bedankt voor de afleiding en ontspanning, bedankt om me tot hier te krijgen.

Ten slotte wil ik ook jou bedanken, Julie. Je luisterend oor, je aanmoedigingen bij successen en tegenslagen, en vooral om er gewoon te zijn voor mij, zeker wanneer het druk werd de afgelopen maanden. Je bent de vrouw van wie ik hou en iedere dag is het een geschenk om bij jou te zijn.

Introduction

This dissertation studies inequality in terms of the degree to which voters' policy positions are congruent with those of political elites. The central concept is *policy opinion congruence*, which refers to the agreement between voters' and political elites' policy preferences. Pitkin (1967) famously distinguished four dimensions of representation: formal ("is the representative legitimately selected and can he or she be sanctioned?"), symbolic ("do the represented feel represented?"), descriptive ("does the representative resemble the represented?"), and substantial representation ("does the representative have the same policy preferences as the represented?"). With policy opinion congruence, this dissertation focuses on substantial representation.

Studying policy-opinion congruence is important, and the underlying idea is simple: The more that voters and their representatives want the same policies, the higher the chance that elected politicians will effectively represent those voters in their actual political decision-making (Dalton, 2014; Thomassen, 1994). However, this dissertation examines a specific aspect of policy-opinion congruence: differences or inequalities in policy-opinion congruence between groups of voters. If the policy preferences of one group of voters are better represented among political elites than are the preferences of another group, then there is an unequal level of policy-opinion congruence. The impetus to study inequality in congruence was born out of the concern that some voter groups'

greater access to, and control over, certain resources translates into increased levels of policy-opinion congruence.

The existing literature on inequality in policy-opinion congruence has differentiated between privileged and underprivileged groups on the basis of their access to, and control over, two of the four types of capital that Bourdieu distinguished (1986): economic capital and cultural capital. The first refers to access to, and power over, economic resources, such as money, stocks, and assets. Cultural capital signifies one's education, intellect, academic degrees, and etc. These two forms of capital are closely related. Economic capital is important for gaining access to cultural capital (e.g., being able to pay tuition fees or afford student housing), and cultural capital can often be exchanged for economic capital (e.g., prestigious academic degrees allow an individual to access high-paying jobs and positions). Therefore, in its study of inequality in policy-opinion congruence, this dissertation focuses on the following voter groups: lower-educated voters versus higher-educated voters (indicative of cultural capital), and lower-income voters versus higher-income voters (indicative of economic capital). For reasons of brevity, lower-educated and lower-income voters are both labeled as "underprivileged voters," while higher-educated and higher-income voters are referred to as "privileged voters."

Inequality in policy-opinion congruence can lead to the implementation of policies that are more closely aligned with the policy preferences of privileged voters (Bartels 2008a; Gilens 2009, 2012). Opinion congruence focuses on the level of agreement between voters' and political elites' regarding policy pledges and promises: policy decisions that political elites can or will make in the future. However, pledges and promises do not always translate into policies. For this reason, Manin (1997) argued that congruence should only be assessed "retrospectively," examining whether the actual policies implemented by political elites are in line with that voters want(ed). "Prospective policy-opinion congruence", actions that political elites can or will undertake in the future, does not matter in his view as elites can rescind on their policy promises after being elected. Yet, studies on pledge fulfillment have demonstrated that contrary to popular belief, political parties, on average, follow through on almost 70% of their promises (Pétry and Collette 2009)[1]. While there are factors that can prevent actual policies from more closely matching the preferences of privileged voters—and while the conclusion of this dissertation elaborates on those factors—inequality in policy-opinion

[1] The problem with political elites rescinding on policy promises is similar to the problem in game theory of one player being cheated by the other. However, this problem is primarily situated in "one-shot games", with only one interaction between the two players. However, elections resemble repeated games, in which players have to take into account punishing behavior from the other player in response to cheating. Political elites can indeed cheat voters and rescind on their promises, but have to face voters' punishment in the next election. This gives elites a clear incentive to keep their promises.

congruence is essential to study, as it plays a crucial role in explaining inequality in policy congruence. Knowing when and where inequality in policy-opinion congruence arises can help us understand when and where there will be inequality in policy congruence.

A lengthy normative debate has explored the topic of policy-opinion congruence. That discussion, however, has primarily focused on policy opinion congruence in general, and less on inequalities between groups of voters. Therefore, this paper begins by examining the normative debate on policy opinion congruence in general. Then, I employ the arguments used in that debate to assess normative considerations of inequalities in policy opinion congruence.

Regarding policy opinion congruence in general, a debate has questioned whether political elites should share voters' policy wishes—and therefore focus on voters' policy preferences—or voters' policy interests. Both sides agree that the goal of all policy should be pursuing the common good or society's common interests[2]. The concern is that voters can have policy preferences that oppose these common interests, and in such cases, political elites should arguably not share those preferences. The question of whether political elites should have policy preferences that are congruent or incongruent with those of their voters to pursue the common good lies at the heart of what is often referred to as the delegate-trustee debate of policy opinion congruence.

Proponents of the delegate side of that debate, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, and James Mill, emphasize public sovereignty. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau (1762) initially rejects the notion of representation and argues that only voters themselves can represent society's common interests. In his view, voters as a collective body enslave themselves when they transfer their legislative rights to another body—a body of representatives: "Any act whereby the people transferred its will to representatives would involve the alienation of the freedom to determine its future will; this would be to consent to obeying and being dependent upon the will of another individual or bode thereafter" (Rousseau in Douglass 2013, 741). In short, Rousseau advocated for direct democracy on principle. Later, however, after appreciating the practical difficulties direct democracy entails in a large country, he accepted representatives and deputies—political elites— to represent voters' policy preferences (Fralin 1978). Jeremy Bentham and James Mill both also supported a delegate model of preference representation (Krouse 1982; Peonidis 2011). They saw it as the best way to arrive at the "greatest level of happiness," thus promoting the common good of all voters. When representatives or political elites share voters' policy preferences, they are prevented from pursuing their own "sinister" preferences.

[2] This concept is sometimes also referred to the "general will" (*volonté général*), and is usually defined as the that which is shared by and beneficial to all or most members of a given community (Dupré 1993).

Proponents of the trustee side of the debate, such as Edmund Burke, emphasize elite competence. Burke (2015) argued that voters can sometimes have policy preferences that conflict with society's common interests. Voters might not be aware of these common interests, and their particular interests can potentially diverge from society's common interests. Particular interests are those interests specific to voters belonging to a certain group. For instance, a preference for a small welfare state might be in the particular interests of wealthy voters but not in the interests of society as a whole. For this reason, Burke argued that political elites' preferences could—and sometimes should—deviate from the preferences of their voters.

However, Burke did not entirely dismiss voters' policy preferences. He emphasized the need for political elites to listen carefully to voters' wishes. When developing their own policy positions, the duty of political elites is to both consider their voters' policy positions and check whether those positions pursue the common interests of society. Importantly, political elites should deliberate amongst themselves when performing that check to arrive at the best representation of society's common interests. The delegate side of the opinion congruence debate also stresses the criticality of elite deliberation in the pursuit of the common good. Deliberation poses an important critique of this thesis' approach to policy opinion congruence. Deliberation can cause political elites to alter their policy positions, being convinced by the positions of other elites. Policy opinion congruence should therefore compare voters' policy positions with those of political elites *after* these elites have deliberated amongst themselves in parliament. In this dissertation, political elites' policy positions are assumed to be fixed, prior to any deliberation. While I do acknowledge that the positions of elites can change, I believe their initial positions, with which they enter parliament, are fairly robust against it[3]. To an important degree, deliberations in parliament are more part of the political game between political elites and less part of a process in which the positions of elites are genuinely discussed and subject to the change in the face of superior counter arguments.

In conclusion, for all of the above authors (except perhaps Rousseau), political elites should take into account not only voters' preferences but also their own expertise. Therefore, to a considerable extent, the distinction between the delegate and the trustee normative model of policy opinion congruence is more of a matter of emphasis than of principle. The delegate model stresses the preferences of voters relative to the competences of political elites. The trustee model emphasizes the competences of political elites relative to the preferences of voters. In sum, both models argue

[3] In the Belgium case (in which this dissertation will study policy opinion congruence), this assumption is made stronger by the strict level of adherence to the party line. In countries with weaker adherence to party positions such as the U.S., it is more important to take into account the deliberations in the legislatures and their effect on the policy preferences of political elites.

that policy opinion congruence is important and that some degree of policy opinion incongruence is not problematic per se. The models disagree on how much opinion incongruence is tolerable.

Regarding inequality in policy opinion congruence, there is debate on whether it is acceptable for political elites' policy preferences to be more congruent with those of certain voter groups and less congruent with those of other voter groups. Again, the pursuit of society's common interests is the ultimate goal of both sides of the debate. The question is whether political elites should have policy preferences that are equally congruent (or incongruent) with those of both privileged and underprivileged voter groups if those common interests are to be pursued. Authors who argue that unequal preference representation is not problematic stress the fact that political knowledge is not equally distributed among voters. Lippmann (1955), for instance, considered large portions of the public, and predominantly underprivileged groups, to be ill-informed. Indeed, research has indicated that underprivileged voters are less informed and less interested in politics than are privileged voters (Campbell 1980; Hillygus 2005). This view assumes that because privileged voters are better informed, their policy preferences are more in line with society's common interests.

The view that inequality in policy opinion congruence is acceptable was the dominant perspective for a long time, and the fact that privileged voters are generally better informed was used as an argument to limit voting rights. At their conception, many democracies limited voting rights to privileged groups, often through so-called "tax suffrage" policies. Even when voting rights were initially expanded to include underprivileged groups, privileged voters often retained an advantage through the system of general plural voting, under which voters received additional votes depending on their wealth or possession of a university degree. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, for instance, several universities had their own representatives in parliament.[4] All university graduates could vote for the university representative(s), in addition to being able to vote for their geographical representative.

However, the justification for policy opinion inequalities favoring privileged voters' policy preferences rests on the assumption that those policy preferences pursue society's common interests to a greater extent than do the policy preferences of underprivileged voters. Yet, empirical evidence seems to contradict this notion. Opinion research in the U.S. (Page and Shapiro 1992), as well as in Belgium (Wauters 2010), has demonstrated that the preferences of both privileged and underprivileged voter groups behave in a "rational" way. For instance, Wauters (2010) found that underprivileged voters were more likely to believe that trade unions should be involved in forming

[4] While university representatives were abolished in the United Kingdom in 1948, a few universities in Ireland have retained this privilege until this day.

economic policy and were less likely to support the privatization of public companies. These are rational positions for lower-educated or lower-income individuals. Trade unions defend the interests of persons in underprivileged positions by negotiating wage increases or making it more difficult to lay off employees.

Although there are some exceptions, the preferences of both privileged and underprivileged voters predominantly reflect their own policy interests, which can be in line with society's common interests. Therefore, there is little evidence suggesting that privileged voters' policy preferences pursue society's common interests of all voters to a greater extent than do underprivileged voters' preferences, or vice versa. As a result, inequality in policy opinion congruence often indicates that representatives or political elites are pursuing particular interests, and not society's common interests. In conclusion, from a normative perspective, political elites should adopt policy positions that are equally congruent or incongruent with those of both privileged and underprivileged voters. Systematic differences or inequalities in policy- opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters should therefore not exist.

This dissertation has three research goals. The first is to describe the extent to which the policy preferences of privileged and underprivileged voters are unequally represented by political elites. Is there a policy opinion congruence gap between the two voter groups and, if so, how large is this "democratic deficit?" The second goal is to explain this inequality in policy opinion congruence. Why are policy opinion congruence inequality levels greater for certain issues? To what extent is inequality in policy opinion congruence the result of voters' own voting behavior or the result of a systemic bias towards the preferences of privileged groups? Finally, this dissertation examines how policy opinion congruence changes over time, and specifically throughout an electoral campaign. Do campaigns manage to close the representational gap between privileged and underprivileged groups? Or, do campaigns increase policy opinion congruence inequality levels?

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I first discuss how policy opinion congruence—and by extension, inequality in policy opinion congruence—has been conceptualized in the literature. Then, I elaborate on the mechanisms that can result in inequalities in policy opinion congruence. Finally, I discuss this dissertation's contributions to the literature and conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters.

Conceptualizing policy opinion congruence

Policy opinion congruence revolves around a comparison of voters and political elites' policy positions. Golder and Stramski (2010) and Ruedin (2012) have developed a typology of conceptualizations of policy opinion congruence. This typology is based on the aggregation level of voters' policy positions and political elites' policy positions when both are compared. The aggregation level of policy positions pertains to whether the analysis takes into account the entire distribution of voters and political elites' policy positions or whether these positions are aggregated into a single policy position. This typology is shown in Table 0.1.

Table 0.1: A typology of conceptualizations of policy opinion congruence

		Aggregation of voters' policy positions	
		Entire distribution	Single position
Aggregation of political elites' policy positions	Entire distribution	Many-to-many policy opinion congruence	Many-to-one policy opinion congruence
	Single position	One-to-many policy opinion congruence	One-to-one policy opinion congruence

Yet, a closer examination of these "conceptualizations" reveals that they do not necessarily present different perspectives on how policy opinion congruence can be viewed. Rather, the typology only suggests different approaches to measuring it. The differences among the four conceptualizations pertain to whether the entire range of political elites and voters' policy preferences is taken into account or instead reduced to a single preference. For instance, do we reduce a political party's policy positions to one position, or do we consider the various policy preferences of that party's members of parliament (MPs)? Do we compare the position(s) with the mean position of the party's voters, or do we take into account the range of policy positions held by those voters? The answers to both questions result in the choice of a specific conceptualization, according to Golder, Stramski, and Ruedin. It is obvious, however, that there is only one concept, one idea being studied here: the policy opinion congruence between a party and its voters. The four conceptualizations should therefore be considered, more modestly, as operationalizations of policy opinion congruence. An overview of the

literature on policy opinion congruence reveals two major conceptualizations of that concept: dyadic and collective policy opinion congruence.

Dyadic policy opinion congruence is the most prevalent model. It examines the congruence between the policy positions of voters and the policy positions of political parties (e.g., Belchior 2012; Louwerse 2012) or individual representatives (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963), similar to the above example. Whether voters' policy positions should be compared to those of parties or those of individual representatives depends on the political system and whether political parties or individual MPs are the central actors within that system. In short, dyadic policy opinion congruence examines a vote- or constituency-based policy opinion linkage, studying the extent to which a specific political actor's policy positions are congruent with those of "his or her" voters.

Many scholars, however, have argued that policy opinion congruence should be viewed not only in terms of individual political actors (parties or individual MPs), but also in terms of institutions, such as parliaments (Pitkin 1967). This "institution-based" policy opinion congruence is often referred to as "collective policy opinion congruence" (Weissberg 1978). Analyses employing that lens have examined the extent to which institutions (e.g., parliaments) as a whole reflect the various policy preferences of all voters over which that institution has legal authority.

All studies on policy opinion congruence can be classified into either the dyadic congruence or collective congruence category. These two conceptualizations can then be approached via one of the four operationalizations suggested by Golder and Stramski (2010) and Ruedin (2012), with the choice depending on the political context. For instance, when studying dyadic policy opinion congruence in a party-centered political system, it makes more sense to examine a single policy position per party instead of focusing on the distribution of policy positions held by the party's MPs. Possible operationalizations of dyadic policy opinion congruence in such systems can therefore be limited to one-to-many and one-to-one policy opinion congruence.

Mechanisms of inequality in policy opinion congruence

Due to various mechanisms, political elites are likely to have policy preferences that are more congruent with those of privileged voters. The existing literature has identified four mechanisms promoting that outcome: lobbying, financial contributions, voter turnout, and descriptive biases among political elites. I discuss each mechanism in turn.

Lobbying

Many scholars in the field of inequality in policy opinion congruence and representation have pointed to lobbying as an important mechanism for political influence (Domhoff 2002; Jacobs and Page 2005; Lindblom 1982; Winters and Page 2009). Lobbyists, representing a certain interest group, seek to establish shared perspectives with politicians through socializing, friendship networks, revolving-door employment, the use of think tanks to formulate complex policy positions, and even by the act of drafting legislation for politicians (Winters and Page 2009, 740). While the impact of lobbying is difficult to study, in part due to its secretive nature, several studies have tacitly demonstrated that organized interest groups can exert considerable influence on policy outcomes (e.g., Johnston 2005).

However, lobbying is not problematic per se. There are two broad systems for how political systems deal with lobbying and interest groups: a pluralist interest group system and a corporate interest group system (Siaroff 1999). The former is often characterized by many small interest groups, non-existent or weak peak organizations[5], and little or no consultation or agreement between representatives of interest groups. From a pluralist perspective, this leads to a balance of competing interest groups (Moe 1981). If opposing interest groups are equals in their ability to attract political elites to their preferred position, they cancel out each other's influence (Robert A. Dahl 1961). In addition, new interest groups automatically form when certain interests are unorganized. In other words, the equal treatment of societal interests is assumed to occur when interests are allowed to freely compete with each other. The pluralist perspective assumes that opposing interest groups have equal resources for influencing political elites. Reality, however, has proven to be vastly different. Often, the interest groups that represent privileged voters have the largest presence in politics and possess the most resources for accessing political elites (Overton 2004). As a result, a pluralist interest group system is more likely to lead to inequality in policy opinion congruence favoring the policy preferences of privileged voters.

Corporatism involves greater coordination and compromise among the various interest groups, which are usually organized in peak organizations (Schmitter and Grote 1997; Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979). Here, the equal treatment of interest groups is not assumed to be the result of an "invisible hand" and is instead formally guaranteed. Therefore, under a corporatist system, the imbalance among interest groups in terms of presence and resources is neutralized. As a result, in a

[5] In Belgium, for instance, the large number of sector-specific trade unions is organized in three national trade unions.

corporatist interest group system that equalizes the treatment of interest groups representing privileged and underprivileged voters, inequality in policy opinion congruence is less likely to occur.

Financial contributions

Financial contributions—political donations and spending on behalf of political elites—primarily serve a selection purpose, according to what has been labeled the "ideological sorting hypothesis" (Bronars and Lott 1997; Ferguson 1995). While financial contributions are usually considered a particular means of lobbying political elites (see Winters and Page 2009), lobbyism and financial contributions differ in how they result in policy opinion congruence. Financial contributions do not try to change the preferences of political elites. Instead, they serve as a means of helping politicians with congruent policy preferences gain (re)election. Lobbying involves changing policy views, while financial contributions involve selecting them.

Through financial contributions, some political elites are given an advantage, as they possess more resources for conducting an election campaign (Abramowitz 1988). Arguably, privileged voters are far more capable of making financial contributions to political elites than are underprivileged voters. Therefore, to a certain degree, financial contributions "rig" an election. Whoever wins the election is likely to have policy preferences that are congruent with those of privileged voters.

Turnout

Studies have consistently pointed towards a social bias in who votes in elections: Underprivileged voters are less likely to vote in elections than privileged voters are (Gallego 2010; Steinbrecher and Seeber 2011). The causal mechanisms are difficult to disentangle, but they are usually connected to voters' level of formal education. Hillygus (2005) found that formal education often gives voters skills and information that make voting easier. In order to vote, people need a minimum understanding of how political institutions work, and they need to "realize the relation between political action and the preservation of the political system" (p. 27). These skills and that knowledge make voting less costly. Formal education also instills a sense of civic duty in voters. Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) argued that more formal education leads to a "stronger interest in politics, a greater concern with elections, greater confidence in playing one's role as a citizen, and a deeper commitment to the norm of being a good citizen" (p. 102).

Citizens who do not vote in elections are unable to cast a vote for political elites with congruent policy preferences. As it is often underprivileged individuals who do not vote, political elites holding positions similar to those of underprivileged voters are less likely to get elected. This can lead to inequality in policy opinion congruence.

Descriptive biases among political elites

Political elites predominantly come from privileged groups. For instance, in Belgium, the vast majority of MPs has a university degree (Bovens and Wille 2011) or comes from upper social classes (Wauters 2011). Due to this privileged background, political elites are more likely to view policy issues from the same perspective as privileged voters, resulting in similar preferences. Previous research has suggested that this is indeed the case. For instance, Wauters (2011) found that political elites with a privileged background had more rightist views on socio-economic issues and more leftist views on immigration and law-and-order issues than political elites with an underprivileged background. These links between descriptive and substantive representation can therefore result in an overrepresentation of privileged voters' policy positions among political elites.

Gaps in the literature and this dissertation's contributions

This dissertation identifies four gaps in the literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence. The first is a focus on system-level explanatory factors, such as the extent to which political systems allow political elites to accept financial contributions. In this dissertation, I instead focus on voter-level factors and their effect on policy opinion congruence inequality levels. The second gap is a lack of studies examining inequality in policy opinion congruence during an election campaign. Elections and the campaigns that precede them are one of the most important moments in a representative democracy, allowing voters to select the political elite. Yet, despite this importance, no studies have explored how campaigns affect policy opinion congruence inequality levels. In this dissertation, I therefore examine whether election campaigns mitigate or increase the congruence gap between privileged and underprivileged voters.

The third gap is a reliance on the left-right scale to measure inequality in policy opinion congruence. Policy opinion congruence based on the left-right positions of voters and political elites serves as a proxy for the congruence on concrete policy positions. In this dissertation, I measure policy opinion congruence and related inequalities on the basis of concrete policy positions instead of utilizing the left-right scale. In addition, I assess the extent to which "concrete policy opinion congruence" differs from "left-right policy opinion congruence." The fourth gap is a lack of studies on inequality in policy opinion congruence from outside of the U.S. This dissertation therefore studies inequality in policy opinion congruence in Belgium. Belgium represents a critical case for inequality in policy opinion congruence, as it is a country in which inequality in policy opinion congruence is least likely to be present.

1. Voter-level explanations of inequality in policy opinion congruence

The existing literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence has primarily relied on system-level factors to explain such inequalities: the interest group system, financial contributions, turnout,[6] and the descriptive bias among political elites. However, policy opinion congruence is also determined by the choices that voters make on election day. Normative democratic theory argues that voters must make congruent choices in elections; to inform themselves and to make informed decisions. Yet, the existing literature on voters' party choices has concluded that reality often deviates from this normative ideal. Voters often have inaccurate perceptions of the policy positions of political elites (Dancey and Sheagley 2013), and they therefore often vote for political elites with policy preferences that are incongruent with their own (Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk 2008; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). Furthermore, congruent voting is less likely among underprivileged voters than among privileged voters. As a result, inequality in policy opinion congruence can be "self-inflicted" to a certain extent. In this dissertation, I thus examine how congruent voting can help explain inequality in policy opinion congruence.

2. The role of election campaigns in inequality in policy opinion congruence

Elections are important moments in the representational process, as they often allow voters to replace all political elites in a legislature. If there is policy opinion incongruence between voters and political elites, elections give voters the opportunity to resolve that incongruence. Elections can therefore be highly consequential for policy opinion congruence. In addition, the campaigns the precede elections make policy opinion congruence possible. They are often accompanied by large amounts of information on the policy positions of political elites, and they prime these positions as an appropriate criterion for voters' election preferences (Alvarez 1998a).

While ample cross-sectional and between elections research on policy opinion congruence has been conducted (for exceptions, see Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995), we know surprisingly little about how campaigns affect policy opinion congruence and associated inequalities between privileged and underprivileged voters. We do know that underprivileged voters are generally less informed about, and less interested in, politics than are privileged voters. The informational aspect and priming function of electoral campaigns, however, could enable underprivileged voters to learn about political elites' stances, encouraging them to vote for candidates with policy preferences congruent with their own.

[6] Although opting to vote is a voter-level decision, the social bias in turnout is largely determined by system-level factors, such as the presence (or absence) of a compulsory voting law or voter registration laws.

This dissertation aims to answer the question of whether electoral campaigns allow underprivileged voters to catch up in terms of opinion congruence with privileged voters. Do campaigns close, or at least minimize, the inequality gap in policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters? Or, is there a Mathew effect at work in electoral campaigns, thus increasing policy opinion congruence inequality levels? To tackle these questions, this dissertation studies inequality in policy opinion congruence during the campaign running up to the regional, federal, and European elections that took place in Belgium on May 25, 2014.

3. Studying inequality in policy opinion congruence with concrete policy positions

The literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence, and especially the European literature, is heavy reliant on the left-right scale. Voters and political elites' positions on that scale are assumed to constitute a proxy for their policy positions on concrete issues (Downs 1957). However, this assumption has not been tested. We do not know the strength of the relation between left-right positions and concrete policy positions and, by extension, the strength of the relation between left-right policy opinion congruence and concrete policy opinion congruence.

In addition, the predictive power of the left-right scale for voters' concrete policy positions must be equal for both privileged and underprivileged voters, or else any measure of inequality in policy opinion congruence based on that scale runs the risk of meaning very little. Therefore, this dissertation compares voters and political elites' left-right positions and concrete policy positions, as well as the policy opinion congruence measures based on them.

4. Studying inequality in policy opinion congruence in the least-likely case of Belgium

The current literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence has a strong focus on the U.S. (e.g., Flavin 2012; Gilens 2005, 2009, 2012; Jacobs and Page 2005; Soroka and Wlezien 2008a). While these studies have made important contributions to the literature, their scope is limited to a single country. This is problematic, because in terms of lobbying, financial contributions, and turnout, the U.S. is a most-likely case of inequality in policy opinion congruence. Therefore, this dissertation examines Belgium, which is, in contrast to the U.S., a least-likely case for finding inequality in policy opinion congruence.

First, with regards to lobbying, the U.S. has a pluralist interest group system (Siaroff 1999). As mentioned above, a pluralist interest group system can lead to inequality in policy opinion congruence if opposing interest groups have unequal resources for lobbying political elites. Resource inequality is very much the case in the U.S. A study by Schlozman and Burch (2009) found that interest groups representing privileged voters—often financial and business interest groups

—accounted for 55% of all interest groups in Washington, D.C. in 2001, while only 10% of interest groups, many of which were trade unions, represented underprivileged voters. Belgium, however, has a corporatist interest group system in which the so-called "Group of 10," a joint committee composed of key representative of the most important trade unions and business organizations, makes large and binding agreements regarding pensions, wages, and labor standards (van Gerven and Beckers 2009). Trade unions and business organizations therefore have an equal footing.

Second, an enormous amount of money is poured into U.S. elections, and the majority of these donations come from privileged voters, the so-called "donor class" (Overton 2004; Winters and Page 2009). Furthermore, there are almost no restrictions stipulating how candidates must spend their money. Belgium, in contrast, has strict party finance laws, which, for instance, prohibit donations from both corporations and trade unions (Weekers, Maddens, and Noppe 2009). Instead, parties are almost entirely dependent on state subsidies. In addition, in Belgium, spending options are very restricted for all political parties and candidates (*ibid.*).

Third, regarding voter turnout, studies have demonstrated a consistent bias towards privileged groups in the U.S. (Leighley and Nagler 1992, 2013; Rosenstone and Hansen 2002; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). This bias is exacerbated by many state laws that require citizens to register and/or obtain voter identification before being able to vote (Alvarez, Bailey, and Katz 2008; Hershey 2009; Vercellotti and Anderson 2006). Belgium, however, has compulsory voting. For that reason, turnout in Belgium has been 90% or more since WWII (Lijphart 1997). In addition, turnout has been far more equal, with studies finding no difference in turnout between privileged and underprivileged voters in Belgium (De Winter and Ackaert 1993; De Winter and Johan Ackaert 1994).

In sum, Belgium can be considered a critical, least-likely case for finding inequality in policy opinion congruence. If inequality is present in Belgium, then it is likely found elsewhere, and to a larger degree.

Overview of the chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. Each chapter, except for the first one, constitutes a self-contained study comprised of an introduction, theory, a data and methods section, results, and a conclusion. An overview of all chapters is given in Table 0.2. The first chapter solely focuses on this dissertation's methodologies and data collection techniques. Inevitably, there is some overlap between the chapters and this introduction, as well as between the

chapters themselves in terms of theory and methodology. However, the preferred reading order is the order in which they are presented.

The first chapter gives an overview of the data used and the manner in which it was collected. While each of the subsequent chapters also has a methodological section, this first chapter is more detailed and comprehensive. This dissertation's methodology was largely predetermined by the project in which in which it is embedded: the 2014 Belgian Election Study. Nevertheless, this chapter provides a comparison between this methodology and other approaches seen in the literature. Chapter two studies the relation between voters and political elites' left-right positions and concrete policy positions. It assess researchers' ability to predict concrete policy positions on the basis of left-right positions and examines whether this predictive ability differs between voters and political elites, as well as between privileged and underprivileged voters. Chapter three builds on chapter two and explores the relation between left-right policy opinion congruence and concrete policy opinion congruence. It tests whether the former can predict the latter and whether its predictive power is the same for privileged and underprivileged voters.

Chapters four and five both study inequality in collective policy opinion congruence, examining the extent to which political elites in the parliaments in Belgium have policy preferences that are more congruent with those of privileged voters than with those of underprivileged voters. In addition, both chapters seek to develop an explanatory model of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. The two chapters differ, however, in the data used and the operationalization of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. These dissimilarities allowed me to test the robustness of each chapter's findings. Considering the fact that inequality in policy opinion congruence is the primary focus of this dissertation, this was not an unnecessary luxury.

Chapters six and seven focus on inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence—the extent to which privileged voters are more likely than underprivileged voters to vote for parties with congruent policy positions. Chapter six seeks to disentangle rival explanations for this inequality. The first explanation is that political elites offer policy positions that are more attuned to the policy positions of privileged voters than of underprivileged voters. The second explanation is that underprivileged voters are more likely to vote "incorrectly" (i.e., to vote for political elites with less congruent positions while more congruent alternatives exist). Finally, chapter seven further explores this second explanation of inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence: incorrect voting. It examines whether the likelihood of correct voting increases during an electoral campaign and whether correct voting differences between privileged and underprivileged decrease or increase.

Table 0.2: Overview of the chapters

Nr.	Chapter	Main Independent variables	Main dependent variable	Section
0	Introduction			
1	Data and methods			Methodological chapters
2	The predictive power of the left-right self-placement scale for the policy positions of voters and parties	• Left-right position • Voters' level of education • Voters' income	Concrete policy positions	
3	Does left-right policy opinion congruence equal concrete policy opinion congruence?	• Policy opinion congruence based on the left-right scale • Voters' level of education • Voters' income	Policy opinion congruence based on concrete policy positions	
4	Towards a contingent model of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence	• Voters' level of education • Policy domain	Collective policy opinion congruence	Collective policy opinion congruence
5	Finding inequality in an unlikely place: differences in collective policy opinion congruence between social groups in Belgium	• Dyadic policy opinion congruence	Collective policy opinion congruence	
6	Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence: a matter of choices made or choices given	• Correct voting • Maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence	Dyadic policy opinion congruence	Dyadic policy opinion congruence
7	The Matthew Effect in Electoral Campaigns	• Voters' level of education • Voters' income	Change in dyadic policy opinion congruence	
8	Conclusion			

Chapter I: Data and methods

The challenge of any empirical study of policy opinion congruence and the associated inequalities between privileged and underprivileged groups is the collection of comparable data on the policy positions of both voters and political elites. This chapter is divided into four parts: (1) the formulation and selection of policy position statements, (2) the collection of political elites' policy positions, (3) the collection of voters' policy positions, and (4) an assessment of the representativeness of the policy statements for the policy space.

In the first part, I describe how the policy position statements were formulated, including the criteria for "good policy statements," and I also detail how the topics of the statements were chosen. The goal was to create a policy statement list that was, on the whole, representative of the policy space in Belgium in 2014.

In the second and third parts of this chapter, I describe how voters and parties' policy positions on these policy statements were gathered. This doctoral project was embedded in a much larger project, the 2014 Belgian Election Study. I was therefore part of a larger team, and as a result, much of the methodology used to collect the policy positions was predetermined. Specifically, it was already decided that political elites' policy positions would be collected by surveying the leaderships

of Belgium's major political parties through a voting advice application (VAA).[1] A VAA is an online

system that helps voters make their vote choices by comparing their policy positions with those of political elites (Garzia and Marschall 2014). Furthermore, it was clear that voters' policy positions would be collected through voter surveys. Notwithstanding its predetermined nature, this methodology resulted in data that was highly suitable for studying inequality in policy opinion congruence. In this chapter, I therefore describe the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used,[2] and contrast them with other methods in the existing literature.

The data collection process led to a dataset containing voters and political parties' positions on a large list of policy statements. However, the size of that list did not necessarily mean that it was representative of the policy space. Therefore, in the fourth and final part of this chapter, I assess its representativeness by testing the extent to which voters and parties' positions on the policy statements led to reliable and consistent estimates of policy opinion congruence.

The formulation and selection of policy statements

What constitutes a "good" policy statement?

In the context of policy opinion congruence research, a good policy statement adequately captures voters and political elites' attitudes on a specific policy issue. Furthermore, the list of policy statements as a whole should be representative of the relevant policy space. To achieve this, I relied on the guidelines established by Van Camp et al. (2014). They listed seven guidelines for the formulation of policy statements and the entire policy statement list.

The first guideline argues that good policy statements should concern concrete policy choices rather than broader policy attitudes. An example of a statement that captures a policy attitude rather than a policy position is, "More policy competences should be transferred to the regional level in Belgium." The problem with examining congruence on the basis of policy attitudes is that such an analysis does not capture the agreement between voters and parties on concrete policies. For instance, a voter might agree with the above statement, wanting transfer responsibility for setting railway policies to the regional government. At the same time, a party might also agree with the statement but want to regionalize social security rather than railway policies. Based on their policy

[1] As is explained later this chapter, political elites' policy positions were collected on the level of political parties. Therefore, the terms "political elites" and "parties" are used synonymously in this chapter and throughout this dissertation.

[2] In this chapter, I focus solely on the data collected in the framework of the 2014 Belgium Election Study. In chapter five, I use data from a 2009 VAA and voter study. However, the manner in which the 2009 data was collected is similar to the methodology used for data collection in 2014. The collection of the 2009 data is fully explained in chapter five of this dissertation.

attitudes towards the transfer of policy competences to the regional level, we would conclude that there is a perfect congruence between the voter and the party. On the concrete level, however, they have completely different policy positions. Therefore, policy opinion congruence measured on the basis concrete policy positions arguably better captures the congruence between voters and parties on actual policy decisions. To strengthen the link between policy opinion congruence and policy congruence, statements should thus capture positions instead of attitudes.

The second guideline argues that a good policy statement should not be double-barreled. A double-barreled statement measures the preferences of voters and political elites on multiple polices at the same time (Krosnick and Presser 2010). An example of such a statement is, "The possession of soft and hard drugs should be legalized." While voters and political elites are only allowed to give one answer to the statement, they might have different policy positions on the two types of drugs. A double-barreled statement makes it is impossible to identify the part of a statement to which a position refers.

The third guideline states that policy statements should avoid qualifications. Qualifications take the form of additional but inessential information in a statement. The following statement provides an example: "Gay marriages should have the same rights as heterosexual marriages (e.g., the right to adopt children)." The inclusion of qualifications should be avoided, because they might contaminate respondents' policy positions by referencing attitudes that would not otherwise play a role. In the example, voters and political elites' positions on the statement as a whole—their attitudes on whether same-sex couples should enjoy equal rights—are colored by their positions on one specific aspect of equal rights (i.e., the right to adopt children).

The fourth guideline contends that statements should concern position issues instead of valence issues (Green 2007). Valence issues are those for which a large consensus exists, either among voters or among political elites, while position issues are those for which disagreement exists. An example of a policy statement on a valence issue is, "Crime should be reduced." Everyone is in favor of reducing crime. Because there is almost no disagreement on a valence issue, voters and political elites' answers are more indicative of salience than position (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000). Therefore, valence issues do not provide any relevant information on the positional agreement between voters and political elites.

The fifth guideline claims that policy statements should not contain loaded language or difficult terms. An example of loaded language is the term "millionaire's tax" ('miljonairstaks'). Left-wing parties are the primary users of this term, which they employ to refer to a tax on large sums of capital. Loaded language should be avoided, because it can again lead to the involvement of

attitudes that would not otherwise play a role. An example of a difficult term is "confederalism," which the Flemish regionalist party *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA) often uses in reference to its call for greater Flemish autonomy. However, the term is complex, and it is often unclear what a "confederal Belgium" would look like. Difficult terms can confuse voters and political elites, thus resulting in invalid measurements of policy positions.

The sixth guideline pertains to the list of policy statements in its entirety, and it asserts that included statements should be spread across a large number of policy domains. A wide dispersion increases the likelihood of arriving at a list of policy statements that is representative of the policy space. To achieve that goal, I examined the ministries belonging to regional governments, the federal government, and the European government. Ministries develop and implement policies, and therefore, if a policy statement does not fit clearly within the policy domain of a specific ministry, it is less likely to be implemented.[3] Consequently, following an analysis of the various government ministries, the policy statements were formulated so as to pertain to issues on which policies could be made. Table 1.1 provides the list of policy domains.

The seventh and final guideline argues that the list should include more policy statements for important policy domains than for less important domains. To determine the significance of the policy domains, I examined the budgets of the various ministries: the higher a ministry's budget, the more important its policy domains. Policies cost money, and therefore, governments can enact more policies in domains with larger budgets than in those with smaller budgets. Together with a panel of political experts (political journalists and political scientists), I assigned a weight to each policy domain. Each policy statement was assigned to up to two policy domains in order to capture the complexities of many policy issues. The distribution of the policy statements to policy domains should reflect the distribution of the weights across those domains as much as possible. The weights are indicated in the second column of Table 1.1. The actual number of policy statements per policy domain is provided in the third column of that table.

[3] Exceptions, such as institutional reform, were also taken into account.

Table 1.1: The list of competences and their importance at the regional, federal, and European level

Regional level (Flanders)		
Competence	**Policy domain weight**	**Policy statements assigned to policy domain**
Education	***	13 (13%)
Labor and economy/consumer protection	***	8 (8%)
Social welfare	**	16 (16%)
Environment and energy	**	8 (8%)
Mobility and public transportation	**	11 (11%)
Immigration and integration	**	9 (9%)
Finance and budget	**	9 (9%)
State reform and political institutions	**	13 (13%)
Media and culture	*	4 (4%)
Spatial planning	*	5 (5%)
Foreign affairs and development aid	*	4 (4%)
Total		100 (100%)
Regional level (Wallonia)		
Competence	**Policy domain weight**	**Policy statements assigned to policy domain**
Education	***	18 (16%)
Labor and economy/consumer protection	***	10 (9%)
Social welfare	**	19 (17%)
Environment and energy	**	11 (10%)
Mobility and public transportation	**	8 (7%)
Immigration and integration	**	9 (8%)
Finance and budget	**	17 (15%)
State reform and political institutions	**	9 (8%)
Media and culture	*	5 (4%)
Spatial planning	*	6 (5%)
Foreign affairs and development aid	*	2 (2%)
Total		114 (100%)

The process of formulating the policy statements

A team of political scientists and a team of political journalist formulated initial policy statements. The former team consisted of several political scientists from the University of Antwerp and the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and myself. The latter team consisted of political journalists from the Flemish and Francophone public broadcaster (VRT and RTBF), the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*, and the Francophone newspapers *La Dernière Heure* and *La Libre Belgique*. Political journalists were involved in order to increase the relevance and topicality of the policy statements. In addition to the two teams, experts in specific areas (e.g., environmental policy and social security) were contacted to gather more input for the policy statements in specific policy domains[4].

[4] I acknowledge that this is a very top-down or elite-driven approach to policy issues. The issues chosen are often those that are discussed in the media and by political parties. Another, bottom-up approach would have been to survey voters and to ask them which issues should be included. However, given that voters are heavily

Table 1.1: The list of competences and their importance at the regional, federal, and European level (*continued*)

Federal level		
Competence	**Policy domain weight**	**Policy statements assigned to policy domain**
Finance and budget	***	16 (14%)
Social security	***	13 (12%)
Labor and economy/consumer protection	***	20 (18%)
Justice and law enforcement	**	9 (8%)
Healthcare, social welfare, and family	**	11 (10%)
State reform and political institutions	**	16 (14%)
Ethical themes	*	4 (4%)
Mobility and public transportation	*	7 (6%)
Environment and energy	*	3 (3%)
Immigration and integration	*	7 (6%)
Foreign affairs and development aid	*	6 (5%)
Total		112 (100%)
European level		
Competence	**Policy domain weight**	**Policy statements assigned to policy domain**
Internal market and competition rules	***	5 (9%)
Economic affairs and monetary policy	***	11 (20%)
EU expansion	**	4 (7%)
Environment and energy	**	4 (7%)
Consumer protection	**	4 (7%)
Fisheries and agriculture	*	4 (7%)
International trade and customs	*	3 (5%)
Immigration	*	5 (9%)
Internal affairs and law enforcement	*	5 (9%)
Social affairs	*	5 (9%)
Institutional issues	*	4 (7%)
Foreign policy and development aid	*	2 (4%)
Total		58 (100%)

The final statements were formulated during several meetings between the team of political scientists and the team of political journalists between October 2013 and January 2014. Before the meetings began, a document was distributed that described the above-mentioned guidelines. Thus, we arrived at policy statements that were concrete and not double-barreled and that did not possess qualifications (see Appendix Table A1.1 for the full list of policy statements). We also avoided the use of loaded language and difficult terms, although the latter was not always possible. Sometimes, the use of a specific term in a policy statement made the statement clearer for some voters but less clear for others. As a compromise, we explained the difficult terms in those statements. An example of this

dependent on the media and by extension political parties for their information on policy issues (see McCombs and Shaw 1972), both approaches would have arguably led to very similar results.

is the policy statement, "There should be Eurobonds, in which all euro countries can act as guarantor together when one of them takes out a loan." In this policy statement, "Eurobonds" refers to a common term used in the public debate. However, to inform voters unfamiliar with the term, the second part of the policy statement explains what Eurobonds are. In addition, during the meetings, the distribution of the policy statements across the various policy domains was constantly monitored. By keeping an eye on the number of policy statements per policy domain, we attempted to make the actual distribution of statements across domains resemble the domain weights as much as possible.

Before using the statements to collect the policy positions of voters and parties, they were tested in small focus groups composed of voters who had less of an interest in politics. The purpose of these focus groups was to examine whether the policy statements were clear and whether voters interpreted them as intended. The final list of policy statements consisted of a total of 209 unique statements. Of these 209 policy statements, 57 touched upon Flemish regional policies, 57 upon Francophone regional policies, 63 upon federal policies, and 32 upon European policies. However, because each party only had to position itself on the regional policy statements for its own region, there were 152 unique policy statements per party.

The policy positions of political elites were gathered first (see below). This allowed us to check whether each statement, at least for political parties, referred to a policy issue (i.e., a topic on which parties disagreed) and not a valence issue (i.e., a topic on which the parties were in consensus) before collecting voters' policy positions (also see below). A statement was considered to refer to a valence issue if all parties had the same position. The party landscape in Belgium, however, is split into a Flemish party system and Francophone party system. Therefore, agreement among the parties' policy positions was assessed separately for the Flemish and Francophone party systems. This led to the elimination to several policy statements.

However, it became apparent that there were significantly more valence statements in the Francophone party system than the Flemish party system. On the Francophone side, all five parties had the same position on 73 of the 152 policy statements (48%). In the Flemish party system, however, this was only the case for 28 of the 152 policy statements (18%). Therefore, it is possible that the policy space in French-speaking Belgium was not captured to the same degree as the Flemish policy space. I could not rule out the possibility that this disparity was due to the imbalance in the number of VAAs built in the two regions. In Flanders, there has been a VAA for every election

since 2003,[5] while for French-speaking Belgium, the 2014 elections constituted one of voters' first experiences with a VAA. Consequently, the Flemish members of the team of political scientists and political journalists were much more experienced than the Francophone members in formulating statements capturing position issues rather than valence issues.

Consequently, perfect agreement among the Francophone parties was not considered a criterion for excluding policy statements. The result was that prior to the collection of voters' policy positions, the list of policy statements was reduced to 191 policy statements: 50 Flemish regional policy statements (7 excluded), 57 Francophone regional policy statements (0 excluded), 56 federal policy statements (7 excluded), and 28 European policy statements (4 excluded). Like the parties, voters only had to answer the regional policy statements for their own region. Therefore, Flemish voters were asked to respond to 134 policy statements, while Walloon voters had 141 policy statements.

The differences in the policy statement formulation process between Flanders and French-speaking Belgium were also the reason that I did not split following chapters' analyses by region. In such an evaluation, it would be unclear whether regional differences were due to differences in the data collection process or due to differences in, for instance, the political culture or the party landscape. However, in the analyses, I did control for region wherever possible to control for the extent to which differences in the statement formulation process led to disparities in policy opinion congruence between the two regions.

The collection of political elites' policy positions

To collect the policy positions of political elites, the policy statements were sent to the leaderships of all major political parties in Belgium. The literature contains the following approaches to gathering political elites' policy positions: surveying party leaderships (e.g., Schmitt and Thomassen 2000; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013) and surveying candidates/MPs (Jacobs and Page 2005; e.g. Kissau, Lutz, and Rosset 2012; Miller and Stokes 1963). The choice between the two approaches depends on the political system. Surveying candidates or MPs is an appropriate technique when parties are fairly weak organizations, such as in the U.S. In Belgium, however, political parties are strong and homogenous. They are the primary organizing actors in the Belgian political process. Within parties, political power is concentrated in the party leadership. The leaderships predominantly determine the policy positions of the parties (Deschouwer 2012) and are able to ensure that MPs' roll-call votes follow party lines (Depauw 2003).

[5] Except for the election of 2010, which was an early election.

In total, 28 parties participated in all three elections. Many of these parties, however, never had a chance of getting a candidate elected. Therefore, this study's party sample was limited to 11 parties: 6 in Flanders[6] and 5 in French-speaking Belgium.[7] I opted to include only those parties that had a representative in the regional, federal, or European parliament prior to the 2014 elections. This criterion entailed the risk that a party that gains representation in one of the parliaments after the 2014 elections would not be surveyed. This happened when PvdA+/PTB-Go gained two seats in the federal parliament and two seats in the Walloon parliament. Nevertheless, this method led to the collection of the policy positions of the parties that together represented 98% of the seats in the federal parliament, 99% of the seats in the Flemish parliament, and 96% of the seats in the Walloon parliament.

To ensure their cooperation, the party leaderships were surveyed through a VAA: *Stemtest 2016/Test Électoral 2016*. This VAA was built in cooperation with several media outlets.[8] These media outlets advertised the VAA, ensuring the participation of many voters. This pressured the party leaderships to position their parties on all policy statements presented to them. Despite the fact that a VAA's results can be considered voting advice (Garzia and Marschall 2014) and can therefore give party leaderships an incentive to answer strategically, studies have demonstrated that they generally answer VAA statements truthfully (Dejaeghere and van Erkel 2017; Krouwel, Vitiello, and Wall 2012). However, one pattern that has been observed is that political elites tend to give centrist answers to VAA statements (Gemenis and Ham 2014; Wagner and Ruusuvirta 2011). To counter this, party leaderships were only given two answering options: agree and disagree. This, however, did not allow the leaderships to nuance their party's policy positions. A party might agree overall with a policy statement (e.g., "All nuclear power plants must close by 2015") but have certain conditions for agreeing with it (e.g., "that the supply of electricity must be guaranteed at all times"). There was thus an inevitable trade-off between the validity of the party positions and their preciseness. In the development of the VAA, validity was deemed more important.

In addition to responding to the policy statements, the leaderships were asked to justify[9] each party position. These justifications were used to check whether the leaderships' answers were consistent with their justifications. If contradictions were present, the leaderships were given the opportunity to revise their position or their justification. This further increased the validity of the leaderships' answers, as it avoided mistakes on the part of the party leaderships.

[6] The six Flemish parties in the sample are Groen, Sp.a, CD&V, Open VLD, N-VA, and Vlaams Belang.
[7] The five Francophone parties in the sample are Ecolo, PS, CDH, MR, and FDF.
[8] VRT (Flemish public broadcaster), RTBF (public broadcaster in French-speaking Belgium), *De Standaard* (Flemish newspaper), *La Dernière Heure,* and *La Libre Belgique* (newspapers in French-speaking Belgium)
[9] Justifications are sometimes referred to as "motivations" in the chapters below.

The existing literature has used various other methods besides party leadership surveys to gather party policy positions: scanning party manifestos, conducting expert surveys, aggregating candidate/MP positions, and aggregating voter positions. However, reviewing party manifestos is not a useful strategy for collecting party positions on a large list of policies. The reason is that parties often do not talk about the same policies. In fact, parties often have an interest in emphasizing different issues instead of addressing the same policies (Sigelman and Buell 2004). For instance, a green party will devote a substantial part of its manifesto to environmental policies and a smaller part to immigration policies. For a right-wing party, this might be the other way around. The use of expert surveys entails the risk of less accurately capturing party positions on policies on which parties have communicated less. Budge and Farlie (1983) argued that most political parties selectively emphasize the policies where they enjoy a competence advantage rather than directly confronting another parties' issues (also see Chong and Druckman 2007). Arguably, experts are more informed about the policy positions stressed by a party than on others.

Surveying a party's candidates/MPs essentially means surveying a large group of people to obtain the policy positions held by only few: the party leadership. This makes that method less practical. In addition, it entails the risk of less accurately estimating party positions in instances when the leadership's policy positions do not coincide with those of party candidates/MPs. Finally, using the policy positions of party voters as estimates of party policy positions (e.g., Powell 2006) is quite problematic. This approach assumes policy opinion congruence between voters and parties. When used to subsequently measure policy opinion congruence, it would overestimate the extent to which voters and political parties agree on policy positions. Given the deficiencies of the other methods for gathering party policy positions, I argue that a party leadership survey was—despite being a predetermined methodological choice—the optimum available approach.

The collection of voters' policy positions

The policy positions of voters were gathered through two voter surveys. The first survey had a cross-sectional design but contained all 134/141 policy statements. The second was a survey with a two-wave panel design but only 23 of the 134/141 policy statements.

The cross-sectional survey was an online voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters, conducted in March 2014. As Belgium mainly consists of two linguistic regions, Flanders and Wallonia, half of the respondents were Flemish voters (n=1,053), and the others were Walloon voters (n=1,028). Voters were asked to react to the 134 (Flanders) or 141 (Wallonia) policy statements mentioned above.

Similarly to the party leaderships, voters could either "agree" or "disagree" with a policy statement. In order to avoid respondent fatigue because of the large number of policy statements, the survey was split into two waves. Studies have proven that when online surveys take more than 20 minutes to complete, the quality of the responses begins to decrease (Galesic and Bosnjak 2009). After the first wave of the survey was completed, voters were sent an invitation to participate in the second wave. The survey thus did not have a panel design in the true sense of the word, although it did give voters the opportunity to pause instead of immediately moving into the second wave upon completion of the first. Due to the two-wave strategy, the average length of one survey wave was only 15 minutes. The response rate for the entire survey (both waves), was 17% (12,421 voters were contacted). Quota sampling was used to ensure that the sample was representative of the Flemish and Walloon populations in terms of gender, age, and education. In addition, each voter received a weight between 0 and 3 to further reduce any remaining biases in the sample. These weights are used throughout this dissertation. TNS Dimarso conducted the survey.

The two-wave panel survey was conducted in the framework of the 2014 Belgian Election Study.[10] For the first wave, a sample of 4,511 voters, drawn randomly from the national register,[11] was contacted, and 2,019 participated, resulting in a response rate of 45%. Similarly to the cross-sectional survey, half of the voters in the sample were Flemish (n= 965), and the others were Walloon (n= 1,054). Trained interviewers conducted the first wave interviews, which were done face-to-face, with trained interviewers, and started on March 20, 2014 and lasted until May 17, 2014. Each interview lasted on average 64 minutes. The second wave consisted of telephone interviews, which were conducted from May 26, 2014 - July 1, 2014. The average second wave interview lasted 23 minutes. Of the 2,019 voters who participated in the first wave, 1,532 participated in the second wave, which was a response rate of 76%. This survey was also carried out by TNS Dimarso.

In each wave, voters were asked to respond to 23 policy statements from the list of 134/141 statements. Due to the limited number of policy statements that could be included in this survey, the scope was limited to policy statements touching on federal policies. The policy statements were therefore identical for the survey's Flemish and Walloon respondents. The selection of the 23 federal

[10] The Belgian National Election Study in 2014 was carried out by the PARTIREP consortium (www.partirep.eu). PARTIREP is an Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) funded by the Belgian Science Policy. It involves universities in Antwerp (Universiteit Antwerpen), Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Université Libre de Bruxelles), Leiden (Universiteit Leiden), Leuven (KU Leuven), Louvain-La-Neuve (Université Catholique de Louvain), and Mannheim (Universität Mannheim).

[11] This was a stratified sample: Each of the 43 administrative arrondissements in Flanders and Wallonia was given a number of sampling points indicative of the number of inhabitants above the age of 18. Taking into account the anticipated non-response rate in each arrondissement, a gross sample was calculated. An overview of the net and gross samples per arrondissement for Flanders and Wallonia is given in Tables A1.2 and A1.3.

policy statements also attempted to ensure that the distribution of the policy statements across policy domains reflected the distribution of the weights across the policy domains as much as possible. The actual number of policy statements per federal policy domain is provided in Table 1.2.

Similar to the cross-sectional survey, weights were assigned to each voter in the panel survey to compensate for the possible over- and underrepresentation of certain types of voters.

In both the cross-sectional and the panel survey, voters living in Brussels were excluded. This was due to the substantially higher operating cost of surveying voters in Brussels. In addition, there was little reason to assume that the policy preferences of Brussels voters systematically differed from those of Flemish or Walloon voters. In addition, both surveys asked voters to indicate their highest obtained level of education[12] and to place themselves within an income decile (see the Appendix for the wording of the questions and all answer categories). The voter responses to the question on education levels were recoded into three categories: lower educated voters (voters without or with only an elementary school degree), middle educated voters (voters who finished their secondary education), and higher educated voters (voters who graduated from graduate school or had a university degree).

Table 1.2: Distribution of policy statements across the policy domains

Federal level		
Competence	**Policy domain weight**	**Policy statements assigned to policy domain**
Finance and budget	***	9 (16%)
Social security	***	3 (5%)
Labor and economy/consumer protection	***	5 (9%)
Justice and law enforcement	**	5 (9%)
Healthcare, social welfare, and family	**	3 (5%)
State reform and political institutions	***	6 (11%)
Ethical themes	*	2 (4%)
Mobility and public transportation	*	2 (4%)
Environment and energy	*	3 (5%)
Immigration and integration	*	3 (5%)
Foreign affairs and development aid	*	3 (5%)
Total		56 (100%)

There were two reasons behind this recoding. The first was that the three categories corresponded to the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which was designed to reliably compile statistics on the education level of individuals. As such, the three categories had been used to distinguish between voters on the basis of education level in previous research, both in political

[12] I am aware of the relation between voters' level of education and their age. Therefore, wherever possible, I controlled for age when analyzing the relation between education level and policy opinion congruence.

science (Holbrook 2002; Viswanath and JR 1996) and sociology (Dierckx et al. 2015; Vranken et al. 2009). The second reason was that similarly to the deciles used to measure income, these categories split voters into three groups that were approximately equal in size.[13] Therefore, throughout this dissertation, voters' level of education is measured via those three categories, while voters' level of income is measured by income deciles.

The theme of both voter surveys was politics. Therefore, the surveys likely attracted more politically interested voters. As a result, the survey might have overestimated the level of political interest among voters, especially among lower educated and lower income voters. Furthermore, panel attrition likely compounded this bias in the panel survey (Frankel and Hillygus 2014). In politically themed panel surveys, politically less interested voters are more likely to drop out between waves. To assess the extent to which the average level of political interest changed between the two waves for different education and income levels, I compared the level of political interest of the entire sample of voters in the first wave (n=2,019) with the level of political interest in the second wave (n=1,532).[14] The results are provided in Tables 1.3 and 1.4.

Table 1.3: Changes in voters' average level of political interest between survey waves, by education level

	Wave 1 (pre-campaign)	Wave 2 (post-campaign)	Difference
Lower education	3.84 (2.91)	4.25 (2.93)	+0.41
Middle education	4.55 (2.74)	4.67 (2.72)	+0.12
Higher education	5.57 (2.50	5.67 (2.50)	+0.10

Note: Standard deviations are between parentheses. The data was weighted to accurately reflect the eligible voting population in Flanders and Wallonia in terms of region, gender, age, and education.

[13] The statistics department of the Belgian federal government (Statbel; www.statbel.fgov.be) reported that in 2015, for the population older than 15 years old, 35% were lower educated, 35% were middle educated, and 30% were higher educated.

[14] The effects of the panel attrition on the composition of the sample in terms of education level and income decile are shown in the appendix in Tables A1.5 and A1.6.

Table 1.4: Changes in voters' average level of political interest between survey waves, by income decile

	Wave 1 (pre-campaign)	Wave 2 (post-campaign)	Difference
Income decile 1	3.74 (2.77)	4.29 (2.84)	+0.55
Income decile 2	3.60 (3.00)	3.80 (3.07)	+0.20
Income decile 3	4.26 (2.88)	4.35 (2.87)	+0.09
Income decile 4	4.41 (2.97)	4.70 (3.05)	+0.29
Income decile 5	4.63 (2.74)	4.89 (2.72)	+0.26
Income decile 6	4.92 (2.66)	5.06 (2.69)	+0.14
Income decile 7	4.88 (2.67)	5.14 (2.64)	+0.26
Income decile 8	5.33 (2.56)	5.32 (2.52)	+0.01
Income decile 9	5.30 (2.72)	5.69 (2.55)	+0.39
Income decile 10	5.52 (2.66)	5.63 (2.62)	+0.11

Note: Standard deviations are between parentheses. The data was weighted to accurately reflect the eligible voting population in Flanders and Wallonia in terms of region, gender, age, and education.

Both Tables 1.3 and 1.4 demonstrated that the overall average level of political interest increased between the two waves of the panel survey. While the change in political interest levels was small, lower educated and lower income voters more resembled higher educated and higher income voters in terms of political interest, due to panel attrition. In other words, the data from the voter surveys underestimated the difference in political interest between privileged and underprivileged voters. However, one of the main claims of this dissertation is that political elites have policy positions that are more congruent with those of privileged voters, because such voters are better equipped to select parties with similar policy positions. This improved ability to vote for congruent parties is arguably largely due to the fact that privileged voters are more politically interested than are underprivileged voters. In other words, differences in political interest lead to inequalities in policy opinion congruence levels. If, however, the difference in political interest between privileged and underprivileged voters shrinks, then policy opinion congruence inequalities should also become smaller. Therefore, in addition to the nature of the Belgian case, the nature of the data makes this dissertation a conservative assessment of inequality in policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters.

The representativeness of the policy statement list

A representative sample is a small quantity of something that accurately reflects a larger entity. Therefore, a representative list of policy statements is one that leads to a measurement of policy opinion congruence that is similar to policy opinion congruence based on all possible policy statements. Usually, representativeness is assessed by comparing the sample to the population. In

the case of the policy statements, no population existed against which the list of 134/141 policy statements could be equated. Nevertheless, spreading the policy statements across a large number of policy domains prevented the list from being biased due to the exclusion of certain policy domains.

Furthermore, questions about the representativeness of the list stemmed from the concern that measurements of policy opinion congruence are unreliable. A measurement of policy opinion congruence resulting from a list of policy statements is reliable if it is similar to the policy opinion congruence measure originating from a completely different list of policy statements. This was tested via bootstrapping for the 134 policy positions held by Flemish parties and Flemish voters that the party leadership survey and the cross-sectional voter survey gathered. From the list of 134 policy statements, samples could be drawn and compared with each other. In the first step, two random samples of policy statements were drawn from the list of 134 statements. These two samples were mutually exclusive and equal in size. Next, for each sample of policy statements, I calculated the policy opinion congruence between voters and their preferred party (i.e., the percentage of policy statements for which both had the same position). Finally, I compared the two measurements of policy opinion congruence. This was repeated 100 times for a given sample size of policy statements. This whole process was repeated for various sample sizes. For each sample size between 4 and 67 statements (since 67 policy statements was the maximum sample size for which two unique samples could be obtained from a list of 134 statements), two mutually exclusive samples were drawn and compared 100 times.[15]

This method is based on the principles underlying bootstrapping, in which multiple subsamples are drawn from an initial sample to assess the accuracy of sampling estimates—in this case, in terms of policy opinion congruence (Efron 2003; Efron and Tibshirani 1993).

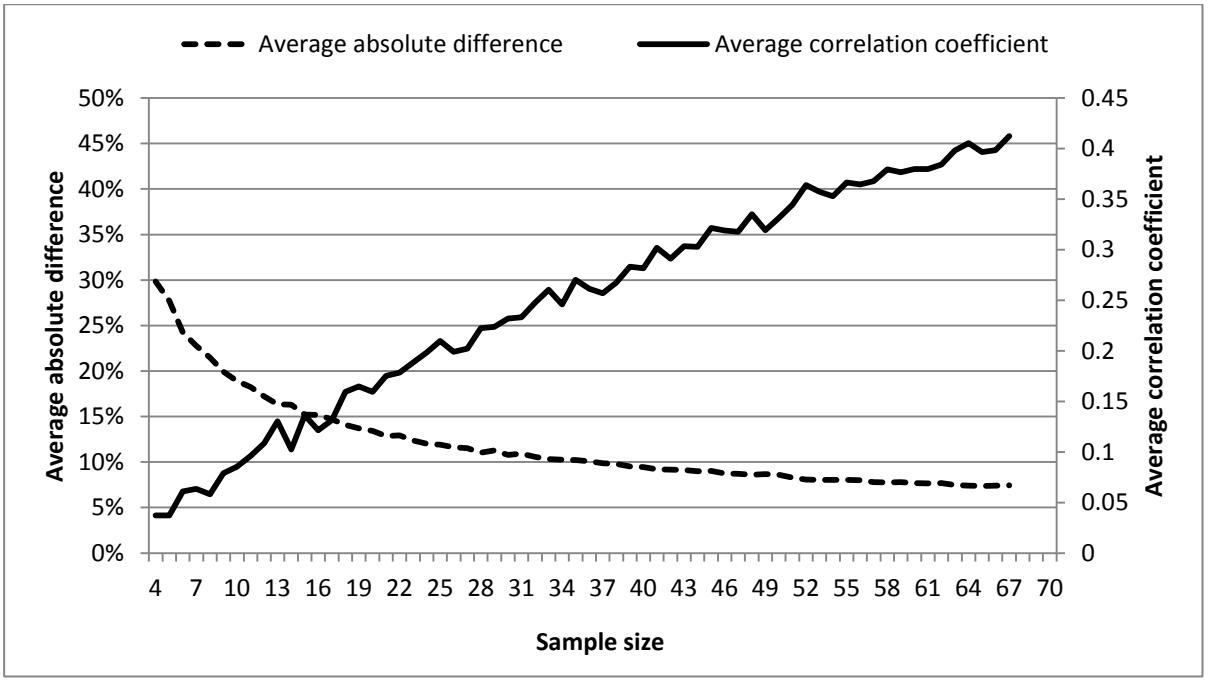
In essence, this method gave me an accurate view of how similar two measurements of policy opinion congruence, each based on completely different policy statement samples, were. In addition, it allowed me to analyze how these similarities were affected by the size of the sample. Similarity was calculated in an absolute way, as well as in a relative way. The first approach was based on the absolute distance between the two measurements of policy opinion congruence, while the second one was based on the correlation between the two measurements. Figure 1.1 contains the results for both methods. The dotted line shows the average absolute difference in policy opinion congruence between the two measurements, averaged across voters and the 100 iterations. It indicates that the

[15] I did the same for the Francophone/Walloon data, but as similar results were obtained, I only report the results for the Flemish data.

average absolute distance first sharply declined as the sample size increased but then began to flatten for sample sizes above 15-20 policy statements. After that, the average absolute distance between two measurements of policy opinion congruence stabilized around 7%. The solid line depicts the average coefficient of the correlation between the two measures of policy opinion congruence across 100 iterations. It indicates that the average correlation coefficient steadily increased with the sample size. In addition, for sample sizes larger than 25 policy statements, the correlation between two measures of policy opinion congruence became reliably significant at the $p<0.05$ level (not reported in Figure 1.1).

The results thus reveal that samples with more than 20-25 policy statements spread across a large number of policy domains led to reliable measurements of the policy opinion congruence between voters and political parties. Both absolutely and relatively, measurements of policy opinion congruence began to strongly resemble each other. This dissertation used a minimum of 23 policy statements to calculate policy opinion congruence. Thus, I can confidently claim that the measurements of policy opinion congruence are reliable and representative of the policy space.

Figure 1.1: Similarities in policy opinion congruence between two mutually exclusive lists of policy statements.



Chapter II: The predictive power of the left-right self-placement scale for the policy positions of voters and parties

Abstract

The left-right self-placement scale is often used in political science as a proxy for the policy positions of voters and parties. Yet studies have suggested that, for voters, this relation is dependent on education level. These studies were, however, hampered by data limitations and restricted statistical analyses. In addition, the extent to which the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions differs for parties and voters has not been explored. This article looks at the differential relation between left-right self-placement and policy positions for voters with different education levels on an integrated dataset containing over 50 voter and party policy positions. It is found that the left-right self-placement scale is a much better predictor for the policy positions of parties than it is for the policy preferences of voters. Robustness checks show that neither the saliency of the policy positions nor their complexity moderates these findings.

This chapter is based on an article written by myself and published in West European Politics

Introduction

The left-right self-placement scale is one of the most widely used measures in political science, predominantly as an indicator of the policy preferences of voters and parties. The reasons are substantial and pragmatical. The scale has been found to be a powerful statistical predictor of political behavior and attitudes (Coughlin and Lockhart 1998). In addition, the scale is parsimonious: it takes little space in surveys, and is widely accessible in many existing databases such as the Eurobarometer, the European Social Survey Many studies use it as a substitute for the policy positions of voters and parties, for instance in the field opinion congruence, where the distance between parties and voters on the left-right scale is often used as a proxy for the distance between the actual policy preferences of parties and voters (Belchior 2010, 2012; Mattila and Raunio 2006; McDonald and Budge 2005). However, the validity of these studies hinges on the strength of the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and the policy positions of voters and parties. The extent it which this is the case, will be the focus of this paper. Previous research has shown that the left-right self-placement scale, for voters, is related to more than just their policy positions. Partisan and social factors also play a role (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976). These other components of the left-right self-placement scale generate 'noise' from the perspective of research that uses the left-right as a proxy for policy positions. However, it is still unclear how big this 'noise' is, and to what extent it hampers the ability of the left-right scale to allow us to predict policy positions.

This paper has two goals. The first is to replicate previous research that tested the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions. Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) found proof of this relation across all voters, but found the strength to be dependent on political cognition. However, there has been little effort to go beyond the bivariate analyses of Inglehart and Klingemann or to validate their results with a larger batch of policy positions. The second goal is to analyze whether the scale is differently related to the policy positions for voters and political parties. After all, the left-right self-placement scale is often used to gauge the policy positions of both voters *and* parties. In order for the left-right self-placement to be employed as a means to compare and contrast the policy positions of voters and political parties, the scale needs to be significantly related to the policy positions of both voters and political parties. However, it also requires the scale to be *equally* related to the policy positions for both voters and parties. This paper seeks to fill these voids in the literature. Based on a large dataset containing the left-right position of 2.000 Belgian voters and 11 Belgian political parties, as well as their positions on more than 50 policy statements, we are able to see how well the left-right self-placement position of voters and political parties explains their concrete policy positions. We find that the scale is a significantly related to the policy preferences of both voters and parties. However, in accordance with previous studies, the proxy value of the left-

right self-placement scale for policy positions is stronger for higher educated than for lower educated voters. In addition, we show that the scale is related differently to policy positions for voters and political parties: the policy positions of parties are much more related to their left-right position compared to voters. Finally, our robustness checks show that neither the saliency of the policy statements nor their complexity moderates these findings. We discuss the implications of our results in our conclusion.

The Basis of the Left-Right Self-Placement Scale for Voters and Parties

The political reality is a complex reality, and as with many complexities, people try to simplify it. One of the tools they use to do so is the left-right continuum (Fuchs and Klingemann 1989; Jou 2010; Laponce 1981). Arian and Shamir (1983) argue that the terms 'left' and 'right' are labels or cues given by political parties to important object in the political realm, such as political parties themselves but also policy issues, for voters to approve or reject. In essence, it translates the multitude of parties and issues to alternatives that can be placed on a single dimension (Downs 1957). By reducing political reality to understandable terms, the left-right scale facilitates communication between voters and parties by helping the former orientate him or herself in the political and party landscape. As a result, it is thought that the "simple structure of a general Left-Right scale can summarize the political positions of voters and political parties" (also see Conover and Feldman 1981; R. J. Dalton, Farell, and McAllister 2011, 26). Previous research indeed confirms that voters can not only place themselves but also parties meaningfully on the left-right scale (Jou 2010; H. D. Klingemann 1972; Laponce 1970; Sani 1974). Many studies, for instance in the field of policy congruence, therefore use the left-right self-placement scale under this very assumption (e.g. Andeweg 2011; Belchior 2010, 2012; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Golder and Stramski 2010; Mattila and Raunio 2006).

However, in their seminal article, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) found that for voters the left-right self-placement scale consists of three major components. The first is the partisan component, which is based on party identification. The policy positions of parties define their programmatic image and thus give them a left-right reputation. If a voter feels close or affiliated with a certain party, he or she might identify with a left-right position similar to that party's left-right reputation, "without knowing or considering the implications of such concepts for their own issue positions" (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976, 244). This component is thus derived from party loyalty, independent from policy positions. The second component of the left-right self-placement scale is the social component. This view claims that the position on the left-right self-placement scale is derived from social background

factors such as social class, education or church attendance (see Freire 2006). The final component, and the focus of this study, is the value or ideological component. The position on the left-right self-placement scale is believed to be related to political values and issue or policy positions.

While Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) claimed that, through bivariate analyses, the partisan component was larger than the value component in explaining the positions of voters on the left-right self-placement scale, subsequent studies indicated that these conclusions arises from the choice of a specific causal model (Knutsen 1997). Research on voting behavior has shown that issue preferences can explain party choice or identification (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). The partisan component and the value component are thus related to each other. As a result, part of the variance of positions on the left-right self-placement scale is explained jointly by the partisan and the value component. The causal models differ in how to interpret this compounded variance. One causal model assumes that the relation between the partisan and the value component is ambiguous, and ascribes the jointly explained variance to neither the partisan nor the value component. However, if we accept that political values and policy positions determine or arise prior to party choice, then the value component not only has a direct relation with the left-right self-placement scale, but also an indirect relation through the partisan component (*idem*). Voters' policy preferences (partially) explain voters' party choice, which in turn (partially) explains their position on the left-right self-placement scale. Indeed, Knutsen (1997) found that, once the total effect of the value component was calculated instead of just the direct effect, the explanatory power of the value component was larger than that of the partisan component. Based on this previous literature, we are able to formulate a first, general hypothesis regarding the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and the policy positions of voters:

H1: The left-right self-placement scale is a significantly related to the policy positions of voters.

In their study, Inglehart and Klingemann also claimed that the strength of the value or ideological component depended on the level of political cognition. They argued that "an ideological understanding of the left-right dimension demands relatively great cognitive effort" (p. 261). Contrary to relation between party choice and left-right position, the relation between issue positions and left-right position would depend on the level of education of the voters. If the left-right self-placement scale is considered a heuristic that guides voters through the political quagmire, the 'accuracy' of this heuristic is dependent on the level of political sophistication and education (Philip E. Converse 2000, 2006a; Philip E. Converse and Pierce 1986; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009). Politically less sophisticated voters have a different understanding of the left-right continuum, an understanding less related to policy positions (Arian and Shamir 1983). Alternatively, if the left-right

position is considered as an expression of one's policy positions, it requires a good level of political cognition and intellectual capacity to 'translate' these concrete positions into a position on an abstract left-right self-placement scale. Either way, political cognition moderates the relation between left-right self-placement scale and policy positions. Previous literature has shown that political knowledge or political participation depends heavily on the level of formal education (Grönlund and Milner 2006; Hillygus 2005). Consequently, we are able to formulate a second hypothesis regarding the moderating role of education on the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions:

H2: The left-right self-placement scale is more strongly related to the policy positions of higher educated voters than to the policy positions of lower educated voters.

However, in order to compare the left-right positions of parties and voters, for instance in congruence research, not only should the left-right self-placement scale relate to the policy preferences of voters, the left-right self-placement scale should also relate to the policy preferences of political parties *and*, this relation should be equal for voters and parties. In other words, voters and parties should attach the same policy preferences to various positions on the left-right self-placement scale (Todosijević 2004). Else, congruence on the left-right self-placement scale runs the risk of hiding larger differences in congruence on policy preferences. Previous research indeed suggests that the policy preferences of political parties relate to a more abstract overarching left-right dimension, whether parties' positions on the left-right continuum and their concrete policy positions are measured through elite interviews (Philip E. Converse 2006b; Freire and Belchior 2013; Todosijević 2004), expert surveys (Benoit and Laver 2006, 2007; M. R. Steenbergen and Marks 2007) or party manifesto's (Budge 2001; H. Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; H.-D. Klingemann et al. 2006). Thus when political parties place themselves on the left-right scale, it is fair to expect policy positions to play an important factor in this regard. However, many of these studies were hampered by a limited number of policy issues. In this paper, we seek to test whether the left-right self-placement of parties allows us to predict their policy positions on a wide range of policy issues. In Belgium, as in many political systems, political parties are the pivotal actors; the instruments through which people express their demands (Sartori 2005). This applies very much to the case under study, Belgium, for which previous research has found high levels of vote cohesion in parliament (Depauw 2003a). We thus hypothesize:

H3: The left-right self-placement scale is significantly related to the policy positions of political parties.

Regarding the final requirement, however, no study to date has tested whether the left-right self-placement scale is differently related to the policy positions of voters and parties. For voters, a position on the left-right self-placement scale is induced by more than just their policy preferences, and as a result, it will arguably only be partially related to those preferences. For political parties, however, policy positions are one their most distinguishing characteristics. Parties frequently organize conventions to determine what positions they take on various issues. Policy positions are fundamental to parties and are likely to be important for their left-right self-placement position. This is not to say that the left-right position of parties is not influenced by their social basis. Similar to voters' social background factors, a party's social basis could reduce the relation between a party's left-right placement and policy positions. However, many party systems have experienced substantial levels of electoral volatility in the last decades (R. J. Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Drummond 2006). Parties are less and less able to count on a group of voters with certain social background characteristics to vote for them. Consequently, parties' self-placement on the left-right scale will arguable be less and less related to an increasingly fluid voter base. Furthermore, parties have experienced a stark decline in party membership (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012). Al this arguably results in a weaker relation between parties' social base and their left-right stance, and in a stronger relation between the left-right continuum and their policy positions. The results of a recent study by Belchior and Freire (2013), who asked voters and MPs to define what the left-right continuum meant to them, seem to confirm this. They found that MPs interpret the scale much more in terms of abstract concepts or issue preferences. It is therefore possible that voters do not interpret some policy issues as being left- or rightwing at all, and subsequently do not anchor their position on the left-right continuum. Either way, the left-right self-placement is arguably more related to their policy positions than the left-right self-placement is to the policy positions of voters. We therefore hypothesize that:

> *H4: The left-right self-placement scale is more strongly related to the policy positions of political parties than to the policy positions of voters.*

Data and Methods

To test these four hypotheses, we use three sets of data. The first is an online voter survey of 2081 eligible Belgian voters, taken in March 2014, in the run-up to elections of May 25th 2014 for the Flemish and Walloon regional parliaments, the national parliament, and the European parliament. Belgium is small consociational federation in Western-Europe and mainly consists of two linguistic

regions, Flanders and Wallonia. One half of the survey therefore comprises of Flemish voters (n=1053) and the other half of Walloon voters (n=1028). Respondents were asked to react to 134 (Flanders) to 141 (Wallonia) statements containing policy proposals. The policy statements touched upon policy issues of the regional, national and European level. The statements on national- and European-level policy proposals were identical for both Flemish and Walloon voters, but the statements on regional policy proposals were tailored to match the differences in policy problems and issues between Flanders and Wallonia, which explains the difference in the total number of policy statements between Flemish and Walloon voters. While the regional statements can thus differ between Flanders and Wallonia, both sets of statements, as a whole, accurate reflection of the relevant policy issues for the 2014 electoral campaign in their region. Thus, for both Flanders and Wallonia, we compare the relation between the left-right scale and an encompassing set of concrete policy statements. Individual statements may differ, but as a whole, the statements are comparable[1].

Voters could either 'agree' or 'disagree' with a policy statement. The survey also featured the classic 11-point left-right self-placement scale. In order to avoid respondent fatigue, the survey was split up into two waves. Studies have shown that when online surveys take more than 20 minutes to complete, the quality of the responses begins to decrease (Galesic and Bosnjak 2009). Due to the two-wave strategy, the average length of one survey wave was only 15min. The response rate of the survey, across both waves, was on average 17%. The sample was drawn on the basis of the gender, age, education, language and region. Specific types of voters with a usually lower response rate were oversampled as to ensure the overall representativeness of the net sample. The survey was conducted by TNS Dimarso.

The second data set is a party leadership survey. The same statements presented to voters in the online survey were also presented directly to all political parties in Belgium who had at least one representative sitting in either the regional, federal or European parliamentary assembly (n = 11) in the context of the development of an online voting aid application (VAA). The questionnaires with the policy statements were sent online to the leaders of parties in March 2014, who were given two weeks to confer with other members of the leadership to agree on a single position on each statement. The Belgium party landscape is split along the Flemish/Walloon linguistic divide (De Winter, Swyngedouw, and Dumont 2006). There are 6 Flemish and 5 Walloon parties in our sample. As a result, the national and European statements are identical for all parties, while the regional

[1] We did, however, test whether the results of the analyses in the next section differ between Flanders and Wallonia (results shown in the Online Appendix, table A2.4 – A2.6 and Figure A1.1). There was no regional variation regarding the difference between education groups and the difference between parties and voters. We did find that in Wallonia the relation between the left-right scale and policy positions is weaker than in Flanders, but that the difference is very small.

statements are not, similar to the voter survey. As was the case for voters, a party's leadership could only react to the statements with 'agree' or 'disagree'. The position of the party leadership on a policy statement is assumed to be the position held by that entire party.

Is it possible that parties gave strategic answers? It is possible, but unlikely. First, parties were required to motivate each answer, which arguably makes it more difficult for parties to react however they want because they need to explain themselves. Second, previous research on the validity of party responses in a VAA concluded that parties are more likely to give centrist answers (Gemenis and Ham 2014; Wagner and Ruusuvirta 2011). This way, they reduce the maximum distance between them and potential voters. In this case, parties were given only two options, 'agree' or 'disagree', and were thus forced to choose a side instead of placing themselves in the middle. The answering format of the party survey thus made it more difficult to give strategic answers. Finally, the party positions in the VAA were critically examined by both the developing team, consisting of political scientists, and the media outlets that featured the VAA. This entailed a dialogue with the parties, which resulted in some positional changes.

The party survey does not contain a left-right self-placement scale, however. To supplant this, we use the average placement of their candidates on an 11-point left-right self-placement scale. This data came from the Comparative Candidate survey taken just after the elections of May 25$^{th.}$ This is the third dataset we will be using in this paper [awaiting report on CCS data collection in 2014]. While it is an aggregation of a candidate-level variable to a party-level variable, we believe it to be a suitable proxy. First, we averaged the candidates' placement of *their own party* on the left-right self-placement scale, though the differences with their own placement are rather small[2]. Second, we find a substantial degree of consistency in the ideological placements of MPs. Across all parties, the average standard deviation of the left-right placements is only 1.21. Therefore, we believe those placements to indeed be separate measurements of latent party left-right position. Third, we compared the candidate survey with the results of an political scientists survey conducted during the 2014 campaign, and found parties' left-right positions in both survey were highly correlated (0.99).

Our dependent variable is the position of a voter or party on a policy statement. In our analyses, we will test how well the position on the left-right self-placement scale predicts these policy positions. It is expected that voters and parties with a leftwing position on the left-right self-placement scale are

[2] We did, however, test whether the results of the analyses in the next section differ between Flanders and Wallonia (results shown in the Online Appendix, table A2.4 – A2.6 and Figure A1.1). There was no regional variation regarding the difference between education groups and the difference between parties and voters. We did find that in Wallonia the relation between the left-right scale and policy positions is weaker than in Flanders, but that the difference is very small.

more likely to choose the leftwing policy position on a policy statement and vice versa for voters or parties with a rightwing position on the left-right self-placement scale. The statements to which parties and voters reacted are, however, formulated in sometimes a leftist (e.g. "The retirement age should not rise") or rightist manner (e.g. "Unemployed people must lose their unemployment benefits after a time"). A rightist statement is a statement with which a rightwing voter or party would agree and a leftist statement is a statement with which a leftwing voter or party would agree. Agreeing or disagreeing with a policy statement is thus not an indication of a leftist or rightist policy position, and can subsequently not be predicted by the position on the left-right self-placement scale. Therefore, we recoded the answers to the statements to indicate whether the voter or party reacted with a leftist (0) or a rightist (1) position on a policy statement.

Previous research has indicated that parties organize their policy positions on a single dimension, while voters distinguish multiple dimensions (Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). In addition, the left-right self-placement scale has been argued to have a more socio-economic meaning for voters (*idem.*). To make sure a difference in the relation between left-right self-placement position and policy position between parties and voters is not due to a difference in dimensionality, but due to the way it relates to policy preferences, we focus only on statements belonging to the socio-economic left-right dimension (for the definitions of the socio-economic and socio-cultural dimension, see Kriesi et al. (2006)). A list of all statements and the codings are provided in the Online Appendix (Table A1.1).

As the left-right continuum is more strongly related to socio-economic policies than other policies, working with only the former arguable will increase the relation we will find between left-right self-placement position and policy position among voters and subsequently decreases the probability of finding differences in this relation between voters and parties. In sum, dropping statements belonging to other dimensions thus constitutes a more conservative test of the hypotheses. This left us with 55 policy statements on the Flemish and 60 policy statements on the Walloon side. All codings were done by the author[3]. Previous studies used around 10 or less policy positions when studying the relation between policy positions and the left-right self-placement scale. Our larger set of statements will allow us to draw more robust conclusions about how well the left-right self-placement scale relates to policy positions.

Our independent variables are the left-right position measured on the often used and validated 11-point scale (Kroh 2007), and education level. The variable contains three categories: lower educated

[3] The statements were also coded by a second coder. For both the direction of a policy statement (left- or rightist) and the dimension (socio-economic or other), adequate levels of reliability were achieved (Kippendorf's Alpha of respectively 0.72 and 0.83).

are voters who have no or only an elementary school degree. The middle educated are those who finished their secondary education, and higher educated voters are voters who graduated from graduate school or have a university degree. In our analyses, we also control for gender, age, income (based on the income decile of a voter), region (Flanders and Wallonia) and political interest. Table 2.1 gives an overview of all the main variables used in the analyses in the section below.

Because we have 55 or 60 statements per voter or party, we stack our dataset. In the stacked dataset, there are 55 or 60 observations per party or voter, one for every policy statement. Stacking the dataset results in 119,540 voter-statement combinations and to 858 party-statement combinations. An example of a stacked dataset is given in the Online Appendix (Table A2). As a result, statements (n = 55/60) are embedded in voters/parties (n = 2080/11). While there are two levels in our data, a respondent and a statement level, our variables are all situated on the respondent level. Therefore, we use multilevel logistic regression with a random intercept for the voter/party-level.

One final note on our research design is in order. Most studies of the left-right self-placement scale try to explain the scale via its constituting components. However, our approach starts from the left-right self-placement scale. Many studies assume the self-placement of parties and voters on the left-right scale is a good proxy or statistical predictor of their policy positions. We test the validity of this assumption. Contrary to Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) or Knutsen (1995, 1997, 1998), our purpose is not to uncover what drives a voter (or a party) to place him- or herself on a left-right scale, our purpose is to find how useful the scale is for studies that want to measure the policy positions of parties and voters. We are not so much interested in what the left-right scale *is*, but in what it can *do*. It is also the reason why in the analyses in the following section (except in the analyses related to hypotheses 1), we do not include variables that account for the other determinants of the left-right scale, party preference or social factors. Our focus is on the *total* statistical predictive power of the left-right scale in estimating the policy positions of voters and parties, regardless of whether it occurs directly through the substantive meaning of the left-right scale or indirectly through the relation between latent policy preferences and party identification or social background. The primary interest of this study is on the methodological validation of the use of the left-right scale as a proxy for policy positions. In this view, all other factors generate 'noise', but the aim is not to uncover from where it originates. What we want to uncover is, starting from the information researchers often have of voters and parties, their left-right position, how well can we predict their policy positions?

Table 2.1: Descriptives of all variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Left-right self-placement position (voters)	5.31	2.40	0	10
Left-right self-placement position (parties)	5.46	2.42	2.13	9.47
(leftist (0) – rightist (10))				
Policy position (voters)	0.47	0.50	0	1
Policy position (parties)	0.48	0.50	0	1
(leftist (0) – rightist (1))				
Political actor	0.01	0.10	0	1
(voter (0) – party (1))				
Education level				
Lower education (1)	0.27	0.44	0	1
Middle education (2)	0.41	0.49	0	1
Higher education (3)	0.33	0.47	0	1
Gender	1.45	0.50	1	2
(male (1) – female (2))				
Age	50.29	15.60	18	83
Income	5.68	2.36	1	10
(lowest income decile (1) – highest income decile (10))				
Region	1.52	0.50	1	2
(Flanders (1) – Wallonia (2))				
Political interest	5.91	2.53	0	10
(no interest in politics (0) – high interest in politics (10))				

Results

In the following analyses, we try to explain the positions of voters and parties on concrete policy statements (right- or leftwing), with their position on the left-right scale. More specifically, we calculate whether the probability of a rightwing policy stance (1) instead of a leftwing policy stance (0) increases as voters or parties have a higher or more rightwing position on the left-right scale. Hypothesis 1 predicts that the left-right self-placement scale is a significantly related to the policy positions of voters. Model 1 in Table 2.2 shows the results of the multilevel regression analysis. We see that, controlling for social background factors, the left-right positions of voters are a significantly related to their policy positions. The effect is positive: voters who place themselves on the left side of the scale are more likely to have a left-wing policy position, while voters with rightwing position on the scale are more likely to have a rightwing position on concrete policy issues. This confirms hypothesis 1. A number of social background variables are also significant. Women are less likely to have a rightwing policy position, while older or higher income voters are more likely to have a rightwing position on a policy statement. Finally, politically interested voters are also more likely to have rightwing policy positions. Because there are two levels in our data – a statement and a

voter/party – level, we cannot summarize the models with a single measure of explained variance. Our models account for a different portion of the total variance on each level. However, as our primary focus is on voters and parties, we calculate the portion of explained variance on the voter/party level in our tables by comparing the remaining variance in each model with the total variance in that same model without independent variables (not reported).

Hypotheses 2 expects that the left-right self-placement scale is more strongly related to the policy positions of higher educated voters than those of lower educated voters. Model 2 in Table 2.2 shows the results of the multilevel logistic regression interaction model. While model 1 tests the direct effects of left-right position and several socio-demographics on the likelihood of a rightwing concrete policy position, model 2 contains the interaction terms between education level and left-right score. The results show that the relation between left-right placement and concrete policy positions is different for higher and middle and lower educated voters: the left-right self-placement scale is a better statistical predictor for the concrete policy positions of higher educated voters than it is for the policy positions of lower educated voters. The difference is highly significant. This clearly confirms hypothesis 2.

Figure 2.1 shows the predicted probabilities of having a rightwing concrete policy position for each left-right score, for all voters and for each level of education, while keeping all other variables at their mean value. The steepness of the lines is the indicator of the strength of the relation between left-right position and policy positions: the steeper the line, the larger the explanatory power of the left-right self-placement scale. Across all voters, the differences between an extreme leftwing position and an extreme rightwing position on the left-right self-placement scale makes a 20% difference in the likelihood of having a rightwing policy position: extreme leftwing voters on the left-right self-placement scale have a 33% chance of taking a rightwing position on concrete policies, while this is 53% for extreme rightwing voters on the left-right self-placement scale. However, for higher educated voters, the difference between an extreme leftwing position and an extreme rightwing position makes a 25% differences in the likelihood of having a rightwing policy position, and for lower educated voters only 11%. Indeed, the line is steeper for higher educated voters than for middle and lower educated voters, indicating a stronger relation between left-right self-placement scale and concrete policy positions.

Table 2.2: Explaining the position of voters on concrete policy statements

		Model 1: direct effects			Model 2: interaction terms		
		B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right position		0.08	(0.00)	***	0.05	(0.01)	***
Education	Lower	---			---		
	Middle	0.06	(0.03)	†	0.07	(0.09)	
	Higher	0.08	(0.03)	**	-0.19	(0.08)	**
Gender	Male	---			---		
	Female	-0.04	(0.02)	*	-0.04	(0.02)	**
Age		0.00	(0.00)	**	0.00	(0.00)	***
Income		0.02	(0.00)	***	0.02	(0.00)	***
Region	Flanders	---			---		
	Wallonia	-0.07	(0.02)	***	0.07	(0.02)	***
Political interest		0.01	(0.00)	*	0.01	(0.00)	*
Interaction terms:							
Left-right position*lower education					---		
Left-right position *middle education					0.00	(0.01)	
Left-right position *higher education					0.05	(0.01)	***
Constant		-0.68	(0.08)	***	-0.53	(0.09)	***
Constant SD		0.28	(0.01)		0.28	(0.01)	
N (Total)		86,915			86,915		
N (voters)		1613			1613		
AIC		117437.6			117400.1		
BIC		117531.3			117512.5		
Explained variance (voter level)		36.81%			39.84%		

Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) policy position; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001

Hypothesis 3 predicts that the average left-right position of the party parties is a significantly related to their policy positions. Model 1, the party model, in Table 2.3 shows the results: the left-right self-placement position of parties is a highly significant statistical predictor of their policy positions, similar to voters: leftwing parties are less likely to take a rightist policy position and rightwing parties are more likely to take such a stance on a policy statement. This clearly confirms hypothesis 3. So far, we have shown that the left-right self-placement scale is a significantly related to the policy position of parties and voters, notwithstanding the differences between lower and higher educated voters in the latter. However, in order to use the left-right self-placement scale as an instrument of linkage, the scale should be equally related to the policy positions for parties and voters. However, hypothesis 4 predicts that the proxy value of the left-right self-placement scale for policy positions is stronger for parties than for voters. Model 2, the voter-model, in Table 2.3 shows the relation between left-right positions and policy positions. Contrary to the analyses in Table 2.2, all social background factors are excluded. This is to make the analyses for parties and voters comparable. When we compare at the model 1 and 2 in Table 2.3 with their respective empty models (not

reported), we find a huge difference in explained variance. The left-right self-placement scale explains 80% of the variance in concrete policy positions of parties, and only 50% of the variance in concrete policy positions of voters. The size of the 'noise' thus accounts for more 70% of the variance among parties and only 20% among political parties.

Model 3 in Table 2.3 combines the first two models and tests the relation between left-right self-placement scale and policy positions across parties and voters. The coefficient of the left-right position in model 3 is similar to the coefficient in the voter model, but this is due to small portion of parties in the overall sample of parties and voters. The interaction effect hypothesis 4 predicts is tested in model 4. We see that the left-right self-placement scale is a significantly better statistical predictor of the policy positions of political parties. Leftwing parties are much more likely to take a leftwing position on policies than leftwing voters, and the same goes for rightwing voters and parties. This clearly confirms hypothesis 4.

Figure 2.1: The relation between left-right position and concrete policy position for lower, middle and higher educated voters

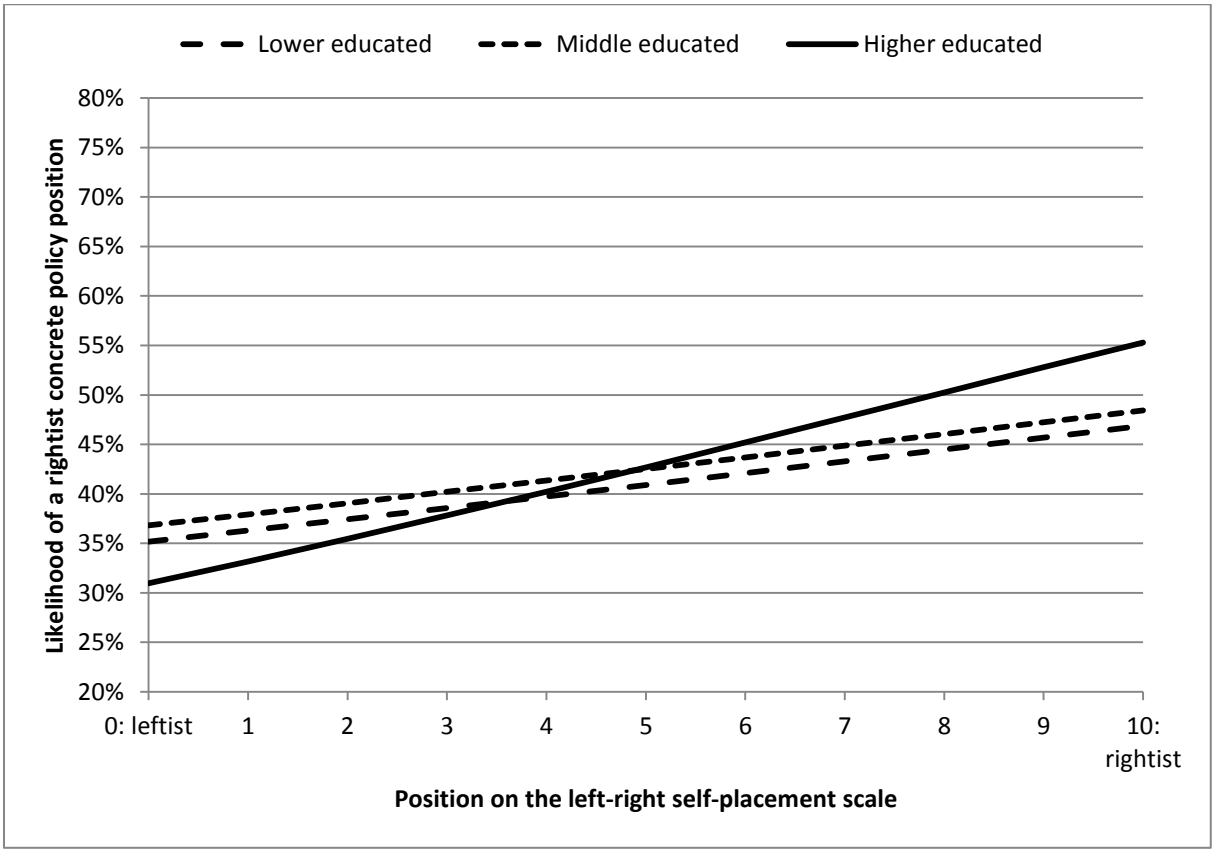


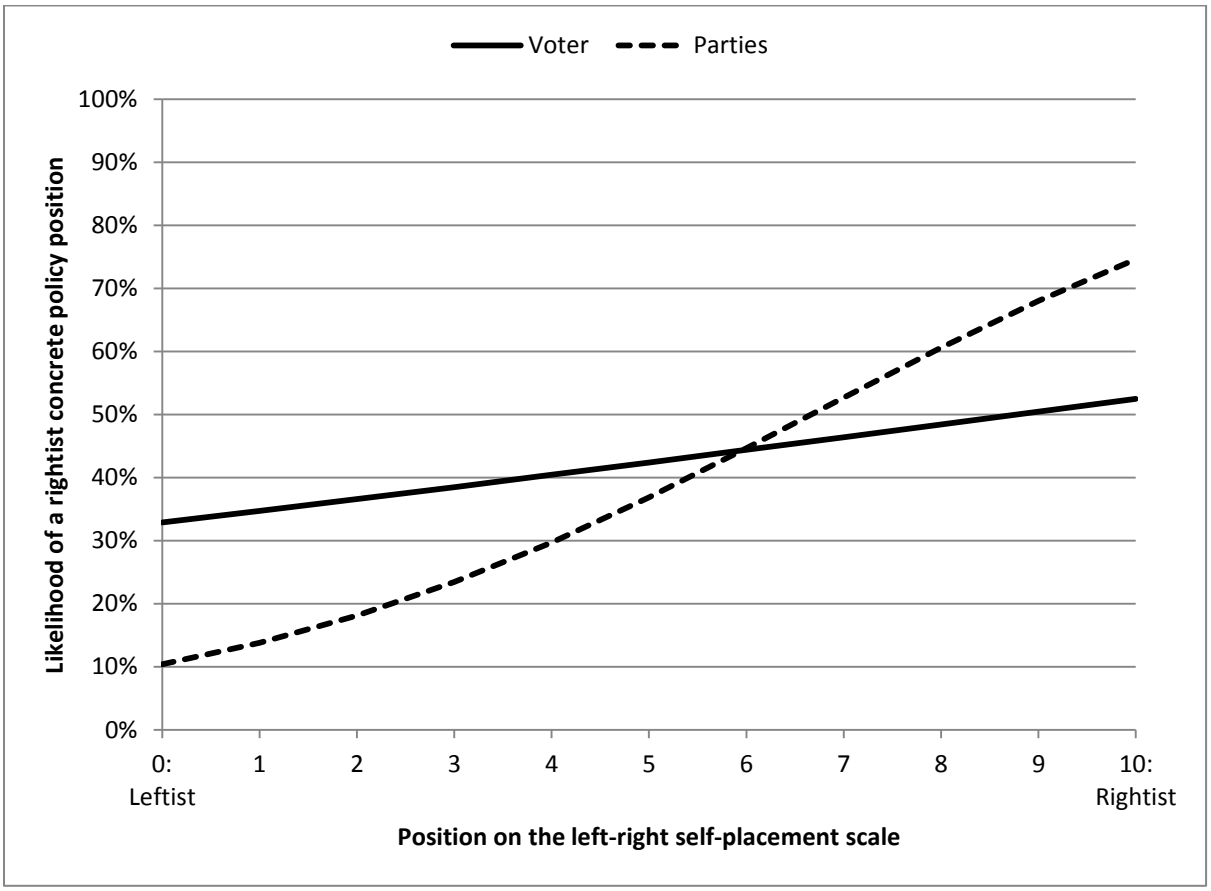
Table 2.3: Explaining the policy positions of parties and voters on concrete policy statements

	Model 1: parties			Model 2: voters			Model 3: direct effects (parties + voters)			Model 4: interaction effects (parties + voters)		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right position	0.33	(0.06)	***	0.08	(0.00)	***	0.08	(0.00)	***	0.08	(0.00)	***
Voter (ref. cat.)							---			---		
Party							-0.09	(0.12)		-1.44	(0.32)	***
Left-right position *voter (ref. cat.)										---		
Left-right position *party										0.24	(0.05)	***
Constant	-2.17	(0.38)	***	-0.71	(0.02)	***	-0.72	(0.02)	***	-0.71	(0.03)	***
Constant SD	0.40	(0.13)		0.37	(0.01)		0.31	(0.01)		0.30	(0.01)	
N (Total)	676			86,915			87,591			87,591		
N (voters/parties)	0/11			1613/0			1613/11			1613/11		
AIC	826.36			117512.2			118356.6			118337.3		
BIC	839.91			117540.3			118394.1			118384.2		
Explained variance (voter/party level)	79.59%			29.63%			29.89%			31.60%		

Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) concrete policy position; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001;

To get an idea of the size of the differences in the relation between left-right position and concrete policy position, we show the predicted probabilities of having a rightwing position on a concrete policy statement for each value of the 11-point left-right self-placement scale, both for voters and parties in Figure 2.2. It is immediately clear that the slopes differ greatly for parties and voters. The slope for parties is much steeper, further indicating that the left-right position is a much stronger related to their policy positions. An extreme leftwing party, with a left-right score of 0, has a 10% chance of having a rightwing concrete policy position. For an extreme left-wing voter, this is 33%. On both ends of the left-right spectrum, there exist large differences between what voters and parties consider to be a left- or rightwing position in terms of concrete policy positions. Only in the center-right of the left-right continuum do we find that parties and voters are almost as likely to agree with a rightist concrete policy proposal (44%-45%). This clearly indicates that the labels left and right are differently connected to policy positions for voters and parties.

Figure 2.2: The relation between left-right self-placement position and concrete policy positions for voters and parties



Robustness Checks

It could very well be that the policy positions of voters contain non-attitudes (Philip E. Converse 2000), policy issues on which voters simply do not have a 'real' or at least a well-developed opinion; issue positions voters have simply because we asked them. Yet, some voters might have never considered that policy issue before. As a result, their responses might therefore just be random, and this randomness inevitably decreases the predictive power of the left-right self-placement scale. Therefore, in our robust check, we attempt to remove non-attitudes from our analyses. To do so, we use two measures. The first is saliency. In the voter survey, voters were asked how important they found each policy domain on an 11-point scale. Every statement is attributed to a maximum of two policy domains, to better capture the complexities of the policy statement and to avoid arbitrary decisions. The saliency of a statement to a voter is the average importance of the two policy domains

to which the statement belongs[4]. The second variable is how well a policy statement was understood or how clear an issue was. Unfortunately, we do not have a measure for each respondent on every policy statement on how well they understood it. However, we can measure how many voters did not answer a statement, or answered with 'don't know'. A poorly understood issue likely results in an increased number of voters that do not answer or answered with 'don't know' on a policy statement. If many voters indicate they do not know what to answer to a policy statement, than this could indicate that the issue was not well known to the public and that the answers of respondents who did answer the policy statement might not all reflect well-developed policy positions. For both variables, we check whether they moderate the relation between the positions of voters on the left-right self-placement scale and their positions on concrete policies. The results are can be found in the online appendix (table A2.3). They indicate that our measures of the salience and complexity of a statement do not moderate the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions[5], and demonstrates to the robustness of our previous findings.

While these analyses confirm the voter analyses, we have not yet tested the robustness of the party analyses. Given the relatively small party sample (n = 11), the analyses could be sensitive to in- or exclusion of a single party in the sample. Taking all observation of one party could have a strong impact on the strength of the relation between parties' left-right positions and their policy positions. To test this, we use the jackknife method: we repeat the analysis of model 1, Table 2.3 11 times, each time leaving out one party. The analyses all showed a similar relation between the left-right scale and policy positions for parties as the one reported in Table 2.3[6].

Conclusion

The first goal of this paper was to replicate previous research that tested the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions. Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) found this relation to be dependent on political cognition. However, there has been little effort to validate their results and research that did only had a handful of policy statements at their disposal. Testing their hypothesis on a large batch of more than 50 policy position, we were able to confirm that the left-

[4] For instance 'Belgium should allow migrant workers from outside the EU to solve labor shortages' is a policy statement belongs to both the economic policy domain and the immigration and integration policy domain.
[5] We also tested whether the moderating effect of education, in which the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions is strong for higher educated than for lower educated voters, itself is moderated by issue saliency and complexity. Yet this did not prove to be the case (results not reported).
[6] The average coefficient size of the left-right self-placement scale across the 11 analyses is 0.32, with a standard deviation of 0.03. The results are not reported, but can be requested from the author.

right self-placement scale is indeed more related to the policy position of higher educated voters. Second, the literature has often neglected the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions on the party side. Using the party positions on the same policy issues, we were able to compare the differences in the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions between parties and voters. We found that the left-right self-placement scale is much more related to the policy positions of parties than it is to the policy positions of voters. Finally, our robustness checks confirmed our results, by showing no moderating effects of issue saliency or statement complexity.

Our findings do have consequences for research that uses the left-right self-placement scale. Studies on policy or opinion congruence might find that voters and parties are very close on the left-right self-placement scale, while in fact, there is a substantial gap if one were to look at their actual policy positions. For instance, our results showed that an extreme leftwing party (position 0 on the left-right self-placement scale) has an 11% probability to take a rightist position on a policy issue, while an extreme leftwing voter only has a 33% chance of taking a rightist position on a policy issue. On the left-right self-placement scale, one might think there is perfect agreement between party and voter, but on actual policy positions, there is at least a gap in congruence of over 20%. In turn, the differences we found between education levels also suggest that the use of the left-right self-placement scale in research on inequality in opinion congruence could also affect the outcome.

Though we think the evidence in this paper is compelling, this study is not without its limitation. Our study only looks at one country, and thus only to one party system. Would the same difference between parties and voters be found in other party systems? We are not sure. First, due to our single case design, our party sample was limited to 11 parties. Can we generalize our findings to other parties? Even though the robustness checks showed that our results were not driven by a single party in our sample, it could be that the relation between the left-right self-placement scale and policy positions is weaker in countries with less fragmented party systems. The reason is that parties in those systems have broader voter audiences. As a result, parties need to take into account policy preferences of various subgroups of party supporters (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012), which could to a weaker left-right anchoring of their policy positions. Second, in addition to the classic left-right cleavage, Belgian politics are structured by a strong linguistics divide(Deschouwer 2012; also see: Freire 2015). While no policy statements touching upon this divide where included in our analyses, we cannot be sure whether it has not reduced the overall strength of the left-right scale, even for socio-economic statements (Knutsen 1998). This should be explored by future research. However, evidence from the 1999 European Values Survey showed that the strength of the value component of the left-right scale in Belgium was around the average strength in sample of 13

European countries (Freire 2008). This indicates that Belgium is to an important degree representative for other countries when it comes to the proxy value of the left-right scale for policy positions, or at the very least not an extreme case. Either way, it presents an additional challenge to the use the left-right scale as a statistical predictor for policy positions, especially in comparative research. Not only does the scale mean something different for voters and parties *within* countries, but its relation to concrete policy stances varies *between* countries.

In sum, we do not claim that our results are just transposable to other political and party systems. However, our study does indicate that future research should asses to what extent our conclusions are born from the measures we choose to use. Refining our instruments is an essential part of scientific inquiry. We have shown in this paper that the left-right self-placement scale does not equally relate to policy positions for all groups of voters nor does it equally relate to the policy positions of parties and voters. The next step is to investigate what the consequences of these findings are in fields that use the left-right self-placement scale as a proxy for policy positions.

Chapter III: Does left-right policy opinion congruence equal concrete policy opinion congruence?

Abstract

Policy opinion based on the left-right scale is often used as a proxy for policy opinion congruence based on concrete policy positions. However, the extent to which left-right policy opinion congruence can indeed predict concrete policy opinion congruence has received little attention in the literature. This paper aims to assess the predictive value of left-right congruence based on a large dataset containing the left-right positions of Belgian voters and parties, as well as their positions on more than 130 concrete policy positions. We found that left-right policy opinion congruence was a poor proxy for concrete policy opinion congruence. Its overall predictive power was weak and was also contingent on issue dimension, voters' level of education, and a combination of the two.

This chapter is based on an article written by Rudy Andeweg and myself.

Introduction

Despite manifold debates about the style, focus, and direction of political representation, there is widespread agreement that, "Unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all talk about democracy is nonsense" (Key 1961, 7). Elected politicians are expected to act in accordance with their voters' preferences. Studies have inquired as to whether the level of such congruence depends on the electoral system (e.g., Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010; Powell 2009) or the mode of candidate selection (Spies and Kaiser 2012). They have also questioned whether congruence is the result of representatives adapting to their voters' views or the other way around (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996) and whether descriptive representation results in higher congruence (e.g., Ruedin 2013). Moreover, research has explored whether some representative institutions are more responsive to shifts in public preferences (Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995). Especially in light of the normative significance of congruence in representative democracies, its proper operationalization and measurement in empirical studies are important.

In this paper, we draw attention to the level of abstraction at which policy opinion congruence is measured. The most common measure uses the left-right scale and compares voters' self-placement on that scale with political parties or MPs' position on that same scale (Rudy Andeweg 2011; Belchior 2012; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). One advantage of measuring policy opinion congruence on the basis of the left-right scale (hereafter referred to as "left-right policy opinion congruence") is that it involves asking a single question, thus reducing complexity levels and presumably providing a summary of preferences on a range of individual issues. Measuring policy opinion congruence on the basis of concrete policy positions (hereafter referred to as "concrete policy opinion congruence") is more precise, but the cost rises considerably for each additional issue included in the study. Selecting only a limited set of issues is the only way to reduce costs somewhat, but that involves difficult decisions on which issues to include. It is not surprising that only a few studies have relied on concrete policy opinion congruence (e.g., Kissau, Lutz, and Rosset 2012; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). In addition, a limited set of issue statements entails the risk of leaving out important policy issues. The left-right scale, however, is assumed to capture all—or at least the vast majority of—policy issues.

Because it is economical, left-right policy opinion congruence is thus the preferred option. However, this is only true if left-right policy opinion congruence is a good predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence. The extent to which this is the case is the central question of this paper. The higher the correlation between these two measures, the more valid are comparisons of positions on the left-right scale. On the other hand, the lower the correlation, the less predictive left-right policy opinion

congruence is of actual agreement between voters and parties or MPs. In the most extreme case, left-right policy opinion congruence has little more than symbolic importance.

This paper has two goals. The first is to validate existing studies on the relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence. Dalton (2015) and Freire and Belchior (2013) found evidence that left-right policy opinion congruence was systematically higher than concrete policy opinion congruence and that left-right policy opinion congruence is a stronger predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence regarding socio-economic issues than other issues. However, their analyses were hampered by the limited availability of issue statements. The second goal is to move beyond differences between issue dimensions and to study differences between voters. Given that a position on the left-right scale is more related to the concrete policy positions of higher educated voters than those of lower educated voters (see chapter II), the concern arises that left-right policy opinion congruence is a better predictor of the concrete policy opinion congruence of higher educated voters than of lower educated voters.

This paper seeks to fill these voids in the literature. Using a large dataset containing the concrete policy preferences of 2,000 Belgian voters and 11 Belgian parties on more than 130 issue statements, as well their positions on the left-right scale, we are able to test how well left-right policy opinion congruence can predict concrete policy opinion congruence. In accordance with previous studies, we find that left-right policy opinion congruence systematically overestimates the concrete policy opinion congruence between voters and parties.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that left-right policy opinion congruence is a weak yet significant predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence, although its predictive power was higher for higher educated voter than for lower educated voters. In addition, we find differences between issue dimensions: The proxy value of left-right policy opinion congruence is smaller for the concrete policy opinion congruence on neutral issues than on socio-economic or socio-cultural issues.

Finally, for lower educated voters, left-right policy opinion congruence is primarily an indicator of socio-cultural concrete policy opinion congruence, and it was less of an indicator for socio-economic or concrete policy opinion congruence on neutral issues. For middle and higher educated voters, left-right policy opinion congruence is only a less valuable predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence on neutral issues.

Left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence

While political reality is complex, it has long been assumed that it can be simplified, and concrete policy opinion congruence is no exception. The theoretical justification for the use of the left-right scale as a proxy for the concrete policy positions of both voters and parties primarily stems from Downs' spatial theory (1957). It argues that all policy alternatives can be placed on a single left-right continuum. This supposition relies on the idea that the "simple structure of a general left-right scale can summarize the political positions of voters and political parties" (also see Conover and Feldman 1981; R. J. Dalton, Farell, and McAllister 2011, 26). In other words, voters or parties' position on the left-right scale can be considered to be a good indicator or predictor of their positions on concrete policy issues. If this is indeed the case, then it follows that agreement between voters and parties on the left-right scale points towards their agreement on concrete policy positions. In sum, left-right policy opinion congruence equals concrete policy opinion congruence.

There is, however, reason to be concerned about the predictive power of left-right policy opinion congruence for concrete policy opinion congruence. First, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) have influentially argued that there are three components to an individual's self-placement on a left-right scale: social position (religion, class), values, and partisan loyalty. Values, and to a lesser extent social position (i.e., interests) are closely linked to policy views, but if partisan loyalty determines one's left-right position, left-right policy opinion congruence does not contain much information with regard to concrete policy opinion congruence. Yet, Inglehart and Klingemann saw the partisan component as the strongest of these three factors. Assuming that the value component is causally prior to the partisan component, however, Knutsen (1997) claimed that values may still outweigh partisan loyalties. In a recent study, partisan loyalty again explained most of the variance in left-right positions in most countries (Freire and Belchior 2013, 149), but the question remains as to the extent to which left-right self-placements indeed reflect policy preferences.

Second, the meaning attributed to the labels "left" and "right" varies over time and across individuals. For a long time, the class cleavage dominated political competition, and "left" and "right" were generally interpreted in socio-economic terms. Before that, the two poles of the left-right scale were, in some countries at least, rather related to the secular-religious divide. More recently, they have been linked to cultural issues. Such shifts in meaning are unlikely to have occurred at the same time for all citizens, and Freire and Belchior (2013) found considerable differences among individuals with different levels of education. In an extreme case, lower educated voters might interpret "left" and "right" in one way (socio-economically) and higher educated voters in another way (culturally). Similarly, as detailed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, I found that left-right self-placement

is more predictive of issue positions among the highly educated and parties themselves than among less educated individuals. This may have important implications for the relationship between left-right policy opinion congruence and concrete policy opinion congruence: "On the left-right self-placement scale, one might think that there is perfect agreement between party and voter, but on actual policy positions, there is a gap in congruence of over 20%" (chapter two, p. 54).

So far, few studies have focused on the relationship between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence, and none have been able to use such a large number of issue statements. A first and most obvious question is whether left-right policy opinion congruence overestimates or underestimates concrete policy opinion congruence. On the one hand, it could be argued that we should expect left-right policy opinion congruence to be lower than concrete policy opinion congruence. Whereas concrete issues are clearly defined, attributing meaning to the terms "left" and "right" is left to the respondents and party leaders, and they may define the poles of the scale differently. On the other hand, concrete policy opinion congruence may be lower, as it is a more demanding measure than the simple left-right heuristic. Moreover, to the extent that left-right self-placement is influenced by non-left-right factors, such as partisan loyalty, its results contain more noise. On the balance, the latter expectation seems more in line with the pre-existing literature:

H1: Left-right policy opinion congruence overestimates concrete policy opinion congruence.

However, in itself, such an overestimation is only problematic if the absolute level of left-right policy opinion congruence is used as a proxy for the absolute level of concrete policy opinion congruence. Usually, however, variation in left-right policy opinion congruence is used as a proxy for variation in concrete policy opinion congruence. If concrete policy opinion congruence co-varies with left-right policy opinion congruence, we can still use the much more economical measure to study whether congruence is higher in one particular electoral system or for one particular voter group. Even if Hypothesis 1 is supported, left-right policy opinion congruence could therefore still constitute a useful proxy for concrete policy opinion congruence.

H2: Left-right policy opinion congruence is significantly correlated with concrete policy opinion congruence.

These two hypotheses make no distinction between categories of voters or between types of issues. Ever since Converse's seminal 1964 paper (2006b), the literature has recognized that the level of abstract left-right thinking might vary across individuals and that one's level of education is an important determinant of the "constraints" of one's belief system (Converse and Pierce 1986; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009). This does not mean that lower educated voters do not use the left-right

schema. For them, however, it is more of a heuristic that may be less accurate in terms of concrete policy positions. In contrast, higher educated voters are likely to be better informed about various issues and policy positions, and they use such concrete positions to place both themselves and political parties on the more abstract left-right scale. To oversimplify, left-right self-placement is the result of issue positions among higher educated voters, but it is the origin of issue positions among lower educated voters. If this is correct, the level of education moderates the correlation between left-right policy opinion congruence and concrete policy opinion congruence:

> *H3: Left-right policy opinion congruence is more strongly correlated with concrete policy opinion congruence among higher educated voters than among lower educated voters.*

So far, we have assumed that left-right self-placement is indicative of one's general left-right position: that it is a "superissue" (Arian and Shamir 1983). In addition, we have also already referred to the fact that the meanings of "left" and "right" may be related to the structure of political competition at a given point in time. To the extent that the latter is indeed the case, left-right placements may be more strongly related to whatever issues are central to the current political competition—and thus less of a "superissue" encompassing all issues. This is not the place for a discussion of the dimensionality of political competition over time, but it is safe to say that, until recently at least, left-right positions has been associated primarily with social class and socio-economic policy positions. New cultural issues may cut across such a socio-economically defined left-right dimension. Thomassen (2012) has called this the "blind corner" of representation. Dalton (2015) indeed found stronger congruence between candidates and party voters on both the left-right dimension and socio-economic issues than on cultural issues. Freire and Belchior (2013) even found that congruence in Portugal was higher on socio-economic issue positions than on left-right self-placement, and it was considerably lower on cultural issues. However, neither Dalton nor Freire and Belchior directly correlated these different forms of congruence. Nevertheless, based on the existing literature, we can hypothesize that:

> *H4: Left-right policy opinion congruence is more strongly correlated with concrete policy opinion congruence on economic issues than with congruence on cultural or neutral issues.*

Even this interaction between types of issues and the correlation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence might be further moderated by one's level of education. With regard to Hypothesis 3, we argued that the left-right schema might serve as a heuristic for lower educated voters. To the extent that their left-right self-placements are informed by concrete issue positions at all, these are more likely to be socio-economic issue positions, given the long-term relationship between left-right positions and competition on such issues. For higher educated voters, we

suggested that their perceptions of "left" and "right" are less of a heuristic and more the result of their knowledge of concrete issue positions. This would imply that the difference in the correlations between left-right policy opinion congruence and, on the one hand, socio-economic concrete policy opinion congruence and, on the other hand, cultural concrete policy opinion congruence is more pronounced for lower educated voters than for higher educated voters:

H5: The extent to which left-right policy opinion congruence is more strongly correlated with concrete policy opinion congruence on economic issues than with concrete policy opinion congruence on cultural or neutral issues is dependent on the voter's level of education.

Data and methods

To test our hypotheses, we use two sets of data. The first is an online voter survey of 2,081 eligible Belgian voters, conducted in March 2014 in the run-up to May 25, 2014 elections for the Flemish and Walloon regional parliaments, the national parliament, and the European parliament. Belgium is small consociational federation in Western Europe, and it largely consists of two linguistic regions, Flanders and Wallonia. Half of the survey respondents were therefore Flemish voters (n=1,053), while the others were Walloon voters (n=1,028). The survey asked voters to place themselves on a standard 11-point left-right scale, as well as to react to a large set of concrete policy statements: 134 for Flemish voters and 141 for Walloon voters. The policy statements touched upon regional, national, and European policy issues. The statements regarding national and European issues were identical for all voters, but the regional policy statements were different, as they were tailored to adequately capture the regional policy debates in their respective regions. While the regional statements thus differed between Flanders and Wallonia, both sets of statements were, as a whole, accurate reflections of all policy issues with relevance for the 2014 electoral campaign in their region.

Voters could either agree or disagree with each statement. Due to the large number of statements, presenting voters with all statements at once would have stretched the survey duration beyond an acceptable length. Indeed, studies have demonstrated that when online surveys take more than 20 minutes to complete, the quality of the responses begins to decrease (Galesic and Bosnjak 2009). To prevent survey fatigue, the survey was split into two waves. As a result of this strategy, the average time that respondents took to complete one survey wave was 17 minutes.

The second dataset originated from a party survey. The same statements that the online survey presented to voters were also directly presented to all political parties in Belgium with at least one

representative sitting in the regional, federal, or European parliamentary assembly (n = 11) in the context of the development of an online voting aid application (VAA). The questionnaires with the policy statements were sent online to the leaders of the parties in March 2014. The Belgian party landscape is split along the Flemish/Walloon linguistic divide (De Winter, Swyngedouw, and Dumont 2006). Our sample contained six Flemish parties and five Walloon parties. Consequently, the national and European statements were identical for all parties, while the regional statements were not, as with the voter survey. As was the case for voters, a party's leadership could only react to the statements by opting to "agree" or "disagree."

Using the responses of the party leadership raises the question of whether the positions of the party leaderships always matched those of their rank and file MPs. Arguably, one might expect a high level of opinion congruence between party leaderships and party MPs: Candidates are unlikely to join a party with which they starkly disagree, and parties are unlikely to allow a candidate to represent them who does not endorse the party leadership's positions. In addition, even in the case of disagreements, there are still important reasons to assume that MPs will vote in line with the party leadership. These include anticipated sanctions and adherence to the norm dictating that MPs should express loyalty to the party leadership (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011, Van Vonno et al, 2013). In sum, MPs and the party leadership are highly likely to agree on the vast majority of issues, but even when they do not, the latter's position is the one that matters. The near-total party cohesion during votes in parliament has exemplified this in the Belgian case (Depauw 2003).

A second question raised by the use of a party leadership's responses to determine the party's issue positions pertains to the risk of parties giving strategic answers. Such an outcome was possible but unlikely. First, parties were required to provide a justification for each answer, which arguably made it more difficult for them to react however they wanted, because they needed to explain themselves. Second, previous research on the validity of party responses to a VAA concluded that parties are more likely to give centrist answers (Gemenis and Ham 2014; Wagner and Ruusuvirta 2011). In that way, they reduce the maximum distance between themselves and potential voters. In this case, parties were given only two options, "agree" (1) or "disagree" (0). This forced them to choose a side instead of placing themselves in the middle. The survey's answer format thus made it more difficult for them to give strategic answers.

The party survey did not contain a left-right self-placement scale. To obtain those measures, we use a party's candidates' average placement of that party on an 11-point left-right self-placement scale.

That data came from the Belgian Candidate Survey,[1] which was conducted immediately following the May 25, 2014 elections. That survey data constitutes the third dataset employed in this paper. While it is an aggregation of a candidate-level variable to a party-level variable, we believe that is constitutes a suitable proxy. First, we averaged the candidates' placements of their own party, rather than the candidates' self-placements, on the left-right scale, even though the differences were small. Second, we found a substantial degree of similarity in a party's candidates' left-right placements of that party. Across all parties, the average standard deviation of the left-right placements was only 1.21. Therefore, in our opinion, those placements indeed constitute separate measurements of latent party left-right positions. Third, we compared the candidate survey results with the results of a survey of Belgian political scientists conducted during the 2014 campaign. We found that parties' left-right positions in both surveys were highly correlated (0.99).

The high number of policy statements for which we measured the positions of both voters and parties made the dataset ideally suited for studying the relationship between left-right policy opinion congruence and concrete policy opinion congruence. Many studies have assumed that party-voter agreement on the left-right scale is a good proxy, or statistical predictor, of agreement on concrete policy positions. We examine the validity of this assumption. To that end, we assess the degree to which left-right policy opinion congruence can predict concrete policy opinion congruence. The latter is thus the dependent variable in our analyses, and is measured on the basis of the 134/ 141 policy statements. For each statement, we first determine whether a party and a voter had the same position (yes=1 and no=0). Then, we calculate the average agreement across all statements to which the voter responded. Finally, we multiplied the results by 100, in order to avoid small coefficients in the analyses. The result is an indicator of concrete policy opinion congruence. Specifically, results range from 100 (perfect agreement) to 0 (no agreement; see Formula 1). This process is repeated for each party in the voter's region.

$$Issue - opinion\ congruence = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k} 1 - \left|policy\ position_{party} - policy\ position_{voter}\right|}{k} * 100 \qquad (1)^2$$

Hypothesis 4 anticipated that the predictive power of left-right opinion congruence for policy opinion congruence would be stronger if the latter only considered socio-economic policies. Therefore, we calculate three additional "versions" of concrete policy opinion congruence. Each is solely based only

[1] The data/tabulations utilized in this publication were made available by the CESPOL (UCLouvain), sponsored by the Belgian National Scientific Research Fund FNRS (CDR J.0141.14). The data was originally collected by Lieven De Winter, Audrey Vandeleene, and Pierre Baudewyns. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Centre bears any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here.

[2] 'k' stands for the number of statements for which a voter offered a valid response.

one of the following issue types: 1) economic, 2) cultural, or 3) neutral. To do so, we coded the dimension to which the issue in each policy statement belongs on the basis of Kriesi et al.'s (2006) issue dimensions. The authors are responsible for all coding.[3]

The first main independent variable is left-right policy opinion congruence. This is calculated by taking the absolute distance between a party's left-right position and a voter's left-right position.[4] The result is subtracted from 10, so that high values would reflect high levels of congruence and vice versa. Finally, we multiplied the results by 10, so that the variable values ranged from 0 to 100, as with the concrete policy opinion congruence variable. This similarity allows us to compare the two variables (see Formula 2). As with the dependent variable(s), the process is repeated for each party in the voter's region.

$$Left-right\ opinion\ congruence = \frac{10 - \left|left-right\ position_{party} - left-right\ position_{voter}\right|}{10} \quad (2)$$

The second main independent variable is education. The variable contains three categories. Lower educated voters are voters without or with only an elementary school degree. Middle educated voters are those who have finished their secondary education, and higher educated voters are voters who graduated from graduate school or have a university degree. In our analyses, we also control for a voter's gender, age, income (based on the voter's income decile), region (Flanders or Wallonia), political interest, and the percentage of statements left unanswered. This last variable controls for the fact that the concrete policy opinion congruence scores for voters who had left many statements unanswered are based on less information. Table 3.1 offers an overview of all variables used in the analyses described in the next section.

Because we have 5 or 6 (depending on the region) left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence scores per voter, we stack our dataset. In the stacked dataset, there are 5 or 6 observations per voter: one for each political party in his or her region. Stacking the dataset results in 8,919 voter-party combinations. As a result, parties (n = 5/6) are embedded in voters (n = 1,623). While there are two levels in our data, a voter level and a party level, our variables are all situated on the voter level. Therefore, we use multilevel logistic regression with a random intercept for the voter-level and add party dummies to all analyses. The latter estimate separate intercepts for each party and these absorb all inter-party variation (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008).

[3] A second, external coder also coded the statements, and adequate levels of reliability were achieved (Kippendorf's Alpha = 0.83).

[4] Technically, by focusing on the congruence between voters and both measures of policy opinion congruence measure

Table 3.1: Descriptive statistics for all variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Concrete policy opinion congruence	52.38	8.67	0	100
Economic concrete policy opinion congruence	52.01	9.70	0	100
Cultural concrete policy opinion congruence	54.06	10.96	0	100
Neutral concrete policy opinion congruence	51.40	12.64	0	100
Left-right policy opinion congruence	72.58	19.07	5.30	100
Education level:				
Lower education (1)	0.27	0.44	0	1
Middle education (2)	0.40	0.49	0	1
Higher education (3)	0.32	0.47	0	1
Income (lowest income decile [1] – highest income decile [10])	5.64	2.36	1	10
Gender (male [1] – female [2])	1.46	0.50	1	2
Age	49.8	15.70	18	83
Region (Flanders [1] – Wallonia [2])	1.46	0.50	1	2
Political interest (no interest in politics [0] – high interest in politics [10])	5.78	2.59	0	10
% unanswered statements	0.10	0.14	0	1

Note: n (voters) = 1,623

Results

The first hypothesis states that left-right policy opinion congruence results in higher levels of agreement between voters and parties than does concrete policy opinion congruence. If measured using the left-right scale, left-right policy opinion congruence scores should thus be closer to the maximum congruence score of 1 than concrete policy opinion congruence scores. To test this, we first look at the histograms of left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). As both figures make clear, in the case of left-right policy opinion congruence, most observations are situated in the highest categories of congruence, in contrast with concrete policy opinion congruence. This finding corroborates the difference in average levels of left-right policy opinion congruence (72) and concrete policy opinion congruence (53) observable in Table 3.1.

However, these are overall averages. A full test of Hypothesis 1 requires us to assess the differences between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence for each voter-party combination. Therefore, for each combination, we subtract concrete policy opinion congruence from left-right policy opinion congruence. The results are presented in Figure 3.3. It is clear that the great majority of the observations are positive, meaning that the policy opinion congruence measure based on the left-right scale is higher than the measure based on policy statements. In more than 80% of the voter-party combinations (n=8,919), left-right policy opinion congruence is higher than concrete

policy opinion congruence The mean difference is significantly higher than 0 (μ = 0.20; t= 93.43; n= 8,919; df= 8,918; p< 0.001). This clearly supports Hypothesis 1.

Figure 3.1: Histogram of left-right opinion congruence

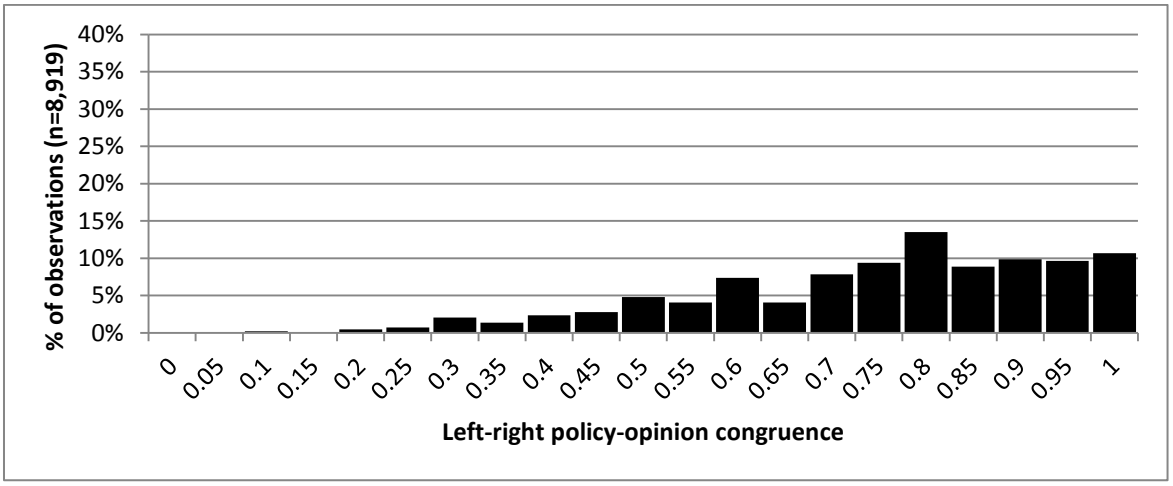


Figure 3.2: Histogram of concrete policy opinion congruence

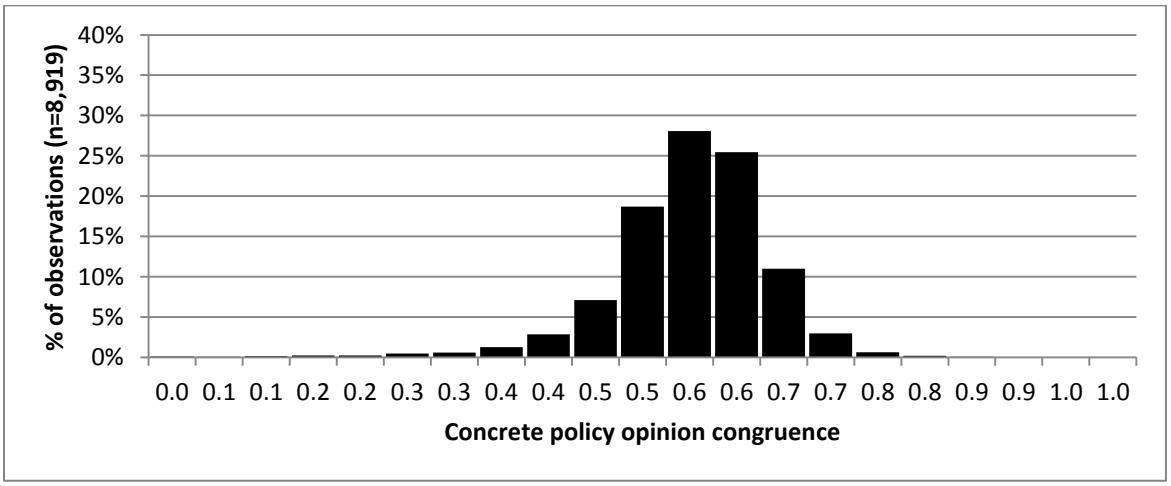
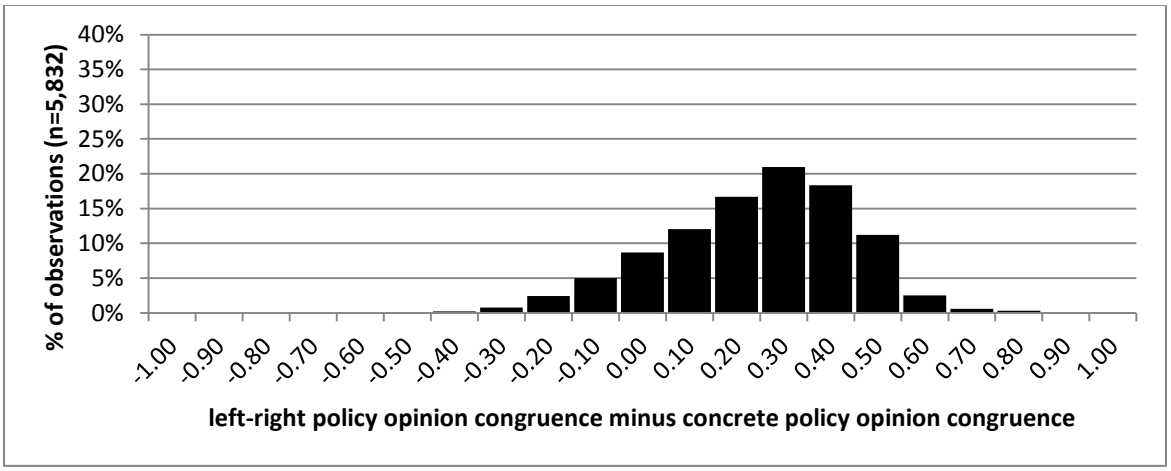


Figure 3.3: Histogram of the difference between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence



While left-right policy opinion congruence often overestimates concrete policy opinion congruence, most research on congruence uses the left-right scale to assess differences in policy opinion congruence between voters or countries. For those purposes, it is not problematic for left-right policy opinion congruence to result in higher levels of congruence than concrete policy opinion congruence, as long as the patterns of congruence are the same. Hypothesis 2 predicts that left-right policy opinion congruence is significantly correlated with concrete policy opinion congruence. We calculated the correlation between left-right and policy opinion congruence and found that the two were significantly correlated (Pearson's r= 0.17; p<0.000). While this confirms Hypothesis 2, the finding must be nuanced. When we calculate the percentage of variance in concrete policy opinion congruence explained by left-right policy opinion congruence by taking the square of the Pearson's r, we find that it only explains 3%. In sum, while the two measures are related, the measures of policy opinion congruence based on the left-right scale are a weak predictor of policy opinion congruence based on concrete policy positions

The third hypothesis predicts that the predictive power of left-right policy opinion congruence is different for higher and lower educated voters. More specifically, left-right policy opinion congruence is a stronger predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters. To test this, we conduct a multilevel regression analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 3.2. The first model shows the direct effects and confirms the significant (albeit weak) relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence. The marginal effects of this relation are depicted in Figure 3.4. Across all voters, the difference between a left-right policy opinion congruence score of 0 (no congruence) and 100 (perfect congruence) translates in a 10% difference in concrete policy-opinion congruence. The second model estimates the moderating effect of education on the relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence, and the results demonstrate that education indeed has a significant moderating effect. Left-right opinion congruence is indeed a stronger predictor of concrete policy opinion congruence for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters. The marginal effects of this moderating effect are provided in Figure 3.5. For lower educated voters, the difference between no left-right policy opinion congruence and perfect left-right policy opinion congruence translates in a 7% difference in concrete policy opinion congruence. For higher educated voters, this is a 13% difference. These results clearly support Hypothesis 3.

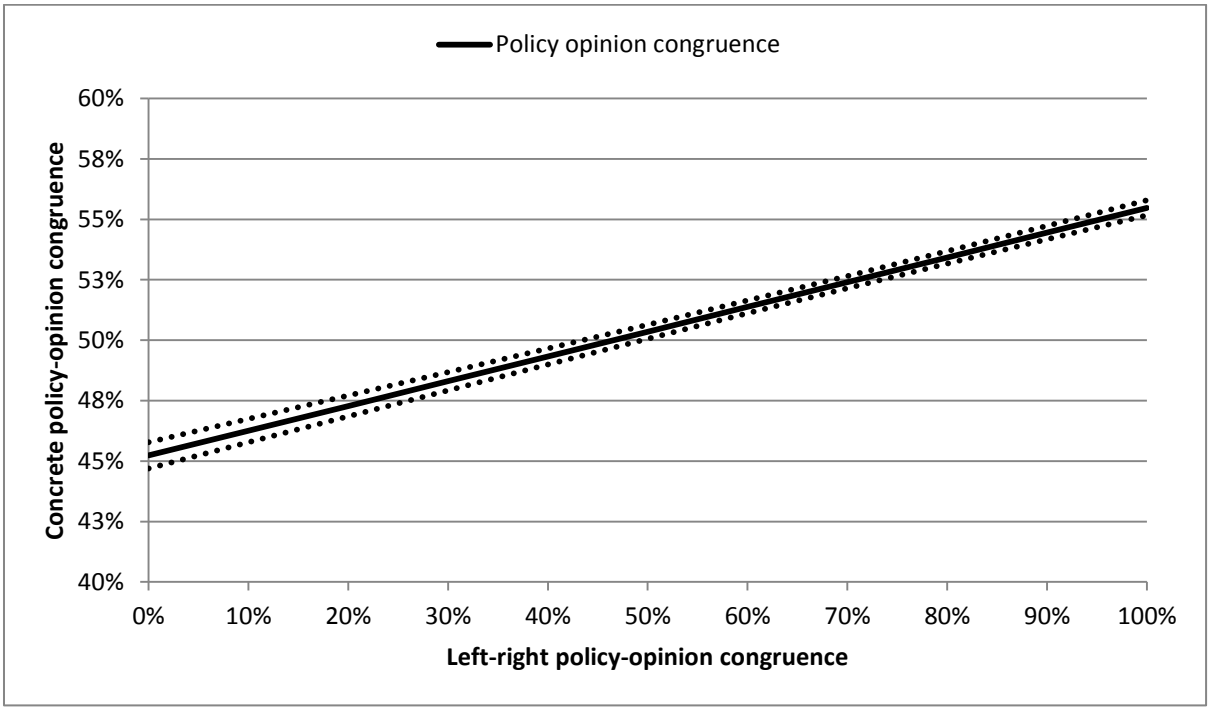
Table 3.2: An analysis of concrete policy opinion congruence and the moderating effect of education

	Model 1: direct effect			Model 2: interaction effects		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right policy opinion congruence	0.10	(0.00)	***	0.07	(0.01)	***
Lower education (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Middle education	0.27	(0.41)		-0.16	(0.84)	
Higher education	0.34	(0.41)		-4.17	(0.80)	***
Income	0.15	(0.06)	*	0.15	(0.06)	**
Man (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Women	0.63	(0.27)	*	0.63	(0.27)	*
Age	0.04	(0.01)	***	0.04	(0.01)	***
Region	-4.13	(0.35)	***	-4.16	(0.35)	***
Political interest	-0.05	(0.05)		-4.16	(0.05)	
Missing statements	-27.60	(0.98)	***	-27.60	(0.98)	***
Interaction terms:						
Lower education*left-right policy opinion congruence (ref. cat.)				---		
Middle education*left-right policy opinion congruence				0.01	(0.01)	
Higher education*left-right policy opinion congruence				0.06	(0.01)	***
Constant	50.57	(1.03)	***	53.20	(1.19)	***
N (Total)	8,919			8,919		
N (Voters)	1,623			1,623		
Explained variance (voter level)	44.15%			44.11%		

Note: Multilevel regression analysis; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001. Party dummies are omitted from the model.

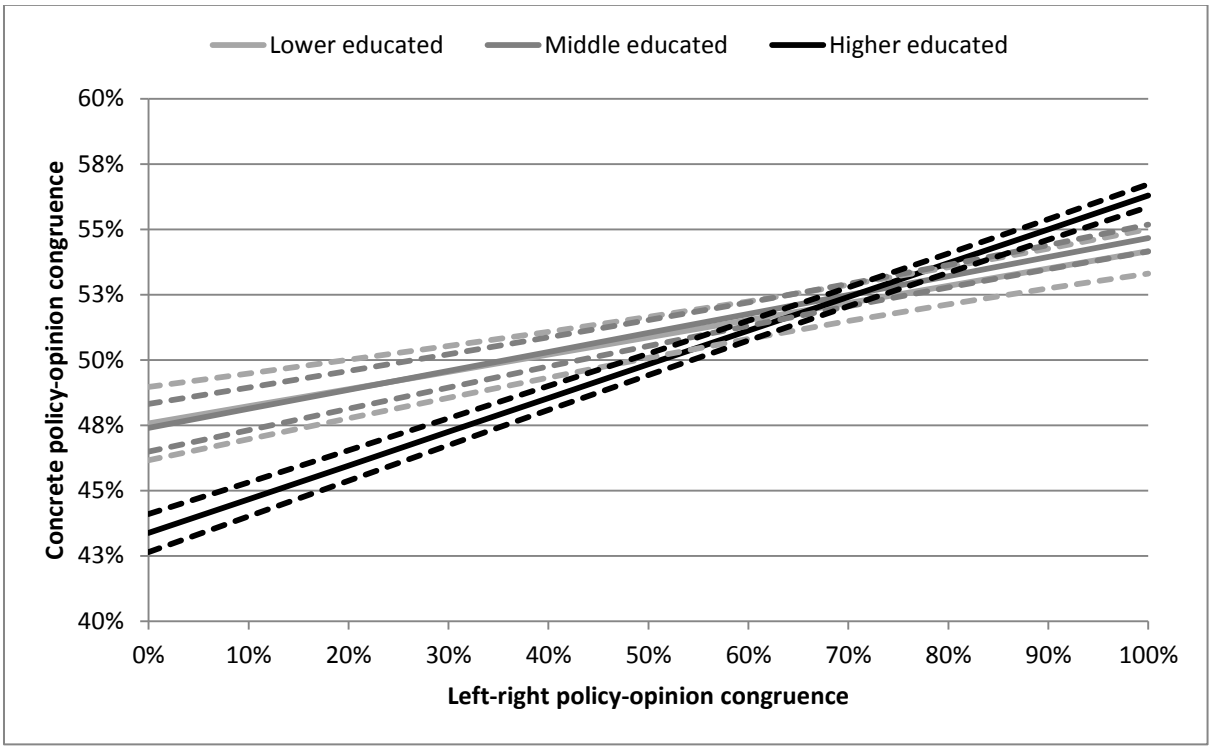
The question remains as to whether differences also exist between issue dimensions regarding the predictive power of left-right policy opinion congruence. Hypothesis 4 predicts that left-right policy opinion congruence would better predict concrete policy opinion congruence on economic issues than on cultural or neutral issues. To test this, we calculated three separate versions of concrete policy opinion congruence: one calculated only for economic issues, one only for cultural issues, and one only for neutral issues. This resulted in three dependent variables. However, to formally test the differences among the three concrete policy opinion congruence measures regarding the explanatory power of left-right policy opinion congruence, we had to stack our dataset a second time. For each voter-party combination (n= 5,832), we then had a measure of economic, cultural, and neutral concrete policy opinion congruence. This resulted in 17,496 (5,832*3) observations, allowing us to use issue dimensions as an independent variable in interaction with left-right policy opinion congruence. The results are presented in Table 3.3.

Figure 3.4: The relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence



Note: Predicted probabilities based on the results of model 1, Table 3.3; the dotted lines indicate the 95% coincidence interval.

Figure 3.5: Education and the relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence



Note: Predicted probabilities based on the results of model 2, Table 3.3; the dotted lines indicate the 95% coincidence interval.

The first model presents the direct effects, and the second model contains the interaction terms between the issue dimension and left-right policy opinion congruence. The interaction terms show

that the predictive power of left-right policy opinion congruence is the same for concrete policy opinion congruence on socio-economic issues and on socio-cultural issues. For congruence on neutral issues, however, we find a significant drop in predictive power. We thus cannot confirm Hypothesis 4, as it predicted that left-right policy opinion congruence would primarily predict economic concrete policy opinion congruence. At the same time, these analyses do reveal an additional flaw in the proxy value of left-right policy opinion congruence: It does not take into account the agreement between parties and voters on issues that are unrelated to either the economic or cultural issue dimension.

Table 3.3: The relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence and the moderating effect of issue dimensions

	Model 1: Direct effects			Model 2: Second-order interactions		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right policy opinion congruence	0.09	(0.00)	***	0.11	(0.01)	***
Economic issue dimension (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Cultural issue dimension	2.04	(0.13)	***	1.52	(0.52)	**
Neutral issue dimension	-0.62	(0.13)	***	3.70	(0.52)	***
Lower education (ref. cat.)						
Middle education	0.44	(0.42)		0.44	(0.42)	
Higher education	0.57	(0.42)		0.57	(0.42)	
Income	0.15	(0.06)	*	0.15	(0.06)	*
Male (ref. cat.)				---		
Female	0.69	(0.28)	*	0.69	(0.06)	*
Age	0.04	(0.01)	***	0.04	(0.01)	***
Region (ref. cat.: Flanders)	-4.63	(0.35)	***	-4.63	(0.35)	***
Political interest	-0.03	(0.06)	***	-0.03	(0.06)	
Missing statements	-29.73	(1.00)	***	-28.74	(1.00)	***
Second-order interaction terms:						
Left-right policy opinion congruence* Economic issue dimension (ref. cat.)				---		
Left-right policy opinion congruence* Cultural issue dimension				0.01	(0.01)	
Left-right policy opinion congruence* Neutral issue dimension				-0.06	(0.01)	***
Constant	51.40	(1.06)	***	50.13	(1.09)	***
N (total)	26,757			26,757		
N (Voters)	1,623			1,623		
Explained variance (voter level)	44.85%			44.79%		

Note: Multilevel regression analysis; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001. Party dummies are omitted from the model.

The final hypothesis predicts that the difference in the predictive power of left-right policy opinion congruence between economic issues, on the one hand, and cultural and neutral issues, on the other hand, is larger for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters. This assertion is tested through a third-order interaction term with education, the issue dimension, and left-right policy opinion congruence. The results of this test are provided in the Appendix in Table A3.1. They do not, however, confirm the hypothesis. The predictive power gap between economic concrete policy opinion congruence and cultural and neutral concrete policy opinion congruence is not larger for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters. However, we do find another significant third-order interaction effect. For higher and middle educated voters, left-right policy opinion congruence is equally effective at predicting both economic and cultural concrete policy opinion congruence. Only for neutral issues do we see a decline in its predictive power. For lower educated voters, we find that left-right policy opinion congruence is primarily a predictor of cultural concrete policy opinion congruence. Its value as a statistical proxy declines when we examine economic concrete policy opinion congruence and falls even further when we look at neutral concrete policy opinion congruence.

To make this third-order interaction clearer, we plot the marginal effects in Figures 3.6a and 3.6b.[5] Figure 3.6a indicates how the relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence differs across issue dimensions for lower educated voters. Moreover, it demonstrates that the relation between concrete and left-right policy opinion congruence is steepest for concrete policy opinion congruence on cultural issues, gradually flattening for economic and neutral issues. In contrast, in Figure 3.6b, which illustrates the interaction for higher educated voters, the relation between concrete and left-right policy opinion congruence is equally steep for economic and cultural issues. The two lines run parallel to each other; only for neutral issues does it flatten.

As this is an unexpected although interesting finding, we can only speculate regarding its origins. One possible explanation is that for lower educated voters, the left-right scale might have obtained a primarily cultural meaning in response to the increased salience of globalization and immigration issues. At the same time, its relation to lower-educated voters' positions on economic and neutral issues might have declined. Middle and higher educated voters, in contrast, might have maintained more constrained positions. As a result, their left-right policy-opinion congruence might be more reflective of both their economic and cultural policy position congruence.

[5] For reasons of clarity, Figures 3.6a and 3.6b do not report the confidence intervals. They can, however, be requested from the authors. We also do not report the interaction between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence for middle-educated voters, as it was similar to the interaction for higher educated voters.

Figure 3.6a: The relation between concrete and left-right policy opinion congruence per dimension for lower educated voters

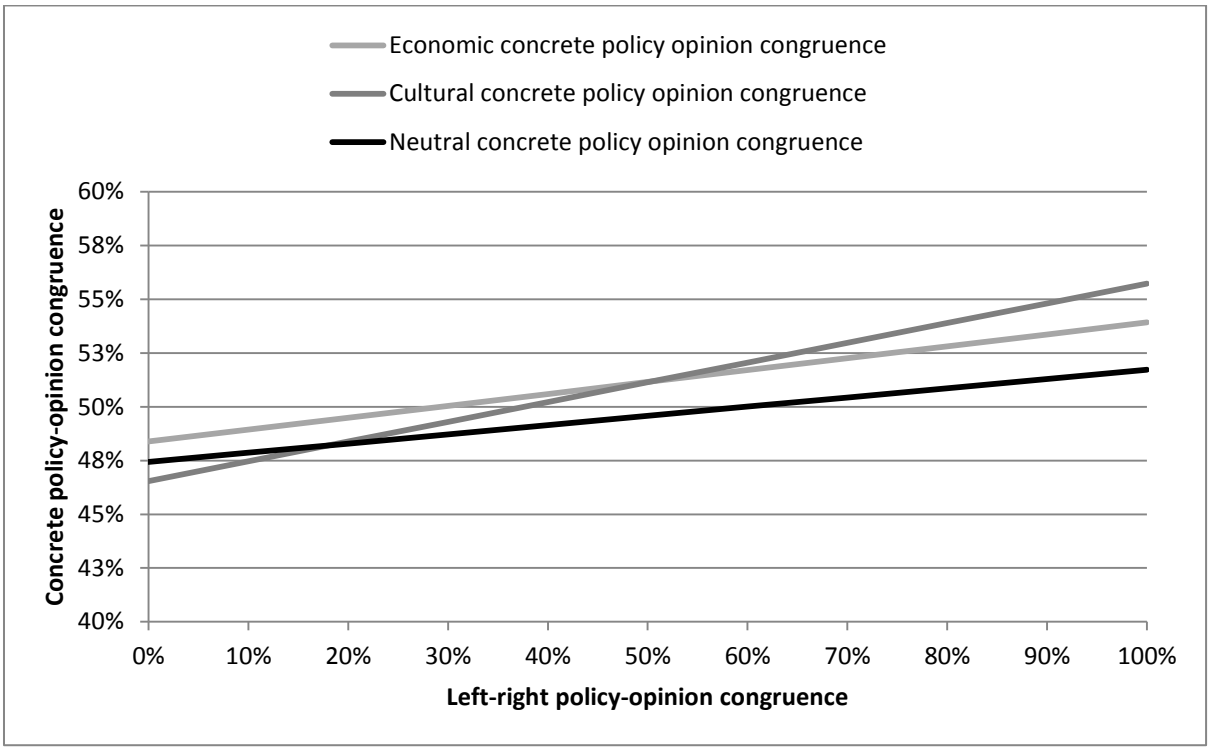
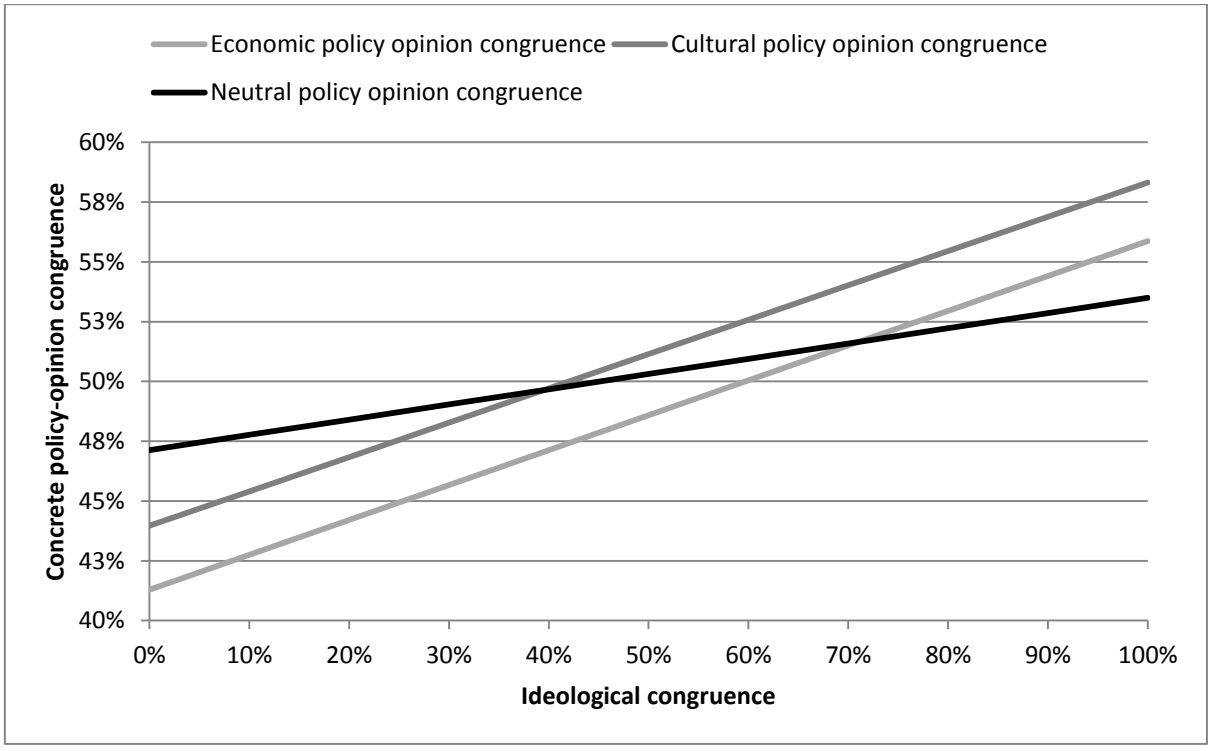


Figure 3.6b: The relation between issue and left-right opinion congruence per dimension, for higher educated voters



Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to assess to the extent to which the left-right scale can be used to measure the concrete policy opinion congruence between voters and parties. More specifically, it examined the degree to which left-right policy opinion congruence allows us to predict concrete policy opinion congruence. While left-right policy opinion congruence systematically overestimated the concrete policy opinion congruence between voters and parties, we found that left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence were—albeit weakly—related to each other. Yet, this relation was contingent on many factors: the issue dimension, voters' level of education, and a combination of the two. At best, left-right policy opinion congruence is a seriously flawed measure of concrete policy opinion congruence. At worst, left-right policy opinion congruence tells us nothing about parties and voters' agreement on concrete issues. Given that we assessed the relation between concrete and left-right policy opinion congruence on more than 130 concrete policy statements, spread across a wide range of policy domains, we are confident that our results are not biased due to the exclusion of one policy issue.

This study is, however, not without its shortcomings. We only focused one country, and thus, only on one political system. It is therefore possible that in other countries, the left-right scale is more closely linked to concrete policy positions. If that were the case, left-right policy opinion congruence might be more closely related to concrete policy opinion congruence. However, an overview of the correlation between left-right positions and concrete policy positions in 13 European countries has demonstrated that Belgium is an average case in this regard and definitely not an extreme outlier in either direction (Freire 2008). As a result, Belgium can, albeit tentatively, be considered as a representative case.

What are the implications of these findings for the research on opinion congruence? The purpose of policy opinion congruence research is to examine the extent to which voters and parties want policy to accomplish the same objectives. The impetus for using left-right policy opinion congruence is that it is economical—it requires only one survey question—and it is assumed to be related to policy opinion congruence on concrete policy positions. This study has demonstrated, however, that this supposition is unsustainable. Its main conclusion is that the left-right scale is a structurally flawed approach to measuring concrete policy opinion congruence. Approaching policy opinion congruence via the left-right scale entails the risk of arriving at erroneous conclusions about the extent to which voters and parties have similar policy preferences. Especially in the subfield pertaining to inequality in policy opinion congruence (see the following chapters), the use of the left-right scale is problematic, as its predictive power for concrete policy opinion congruence differs between higher

and lower educated voters. This study therefore adds to the increasing pile of evidence arguing against the use of the left-right scale to measure policy opinion congruence. As a means of adequately measuring concrete policy opinion congruence, the left-right "super issue" does not suffice, and more detailed measurements are necessary.

Chapter IV: Towards a contingent model of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence

Abstract

This article studies the extent to which differences or inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters are moderated by policy domains. Instead of measuring inequality across all policy areas, this study takes a policy domain-specific approach. The analyses are based on a dataset containing voters and parties' positions on 50 policy statements, with the data gathered in the run-up to the 2009 regional election in Belgium's largest region, Flanders. We find small but significant differences in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters, in favor of the former. However, we find a much larger representational bias towards higher educated voters for the following policy domains: transportation, culture and media, immigration, tax and budgetary policy, and economic policy. At the same time, differences in collective policy opinion congruence are lower for the policy domain of spatial planning. Studying inequality in collective policy opinion congruence across policy domains thus hides more complex patterns of representational bias.

This chapter is based on an article written by myself and published in Acta Politica*.*

Introduction

The political representation of policy preferences is a crucial aspect of the contemporary polity. Pitkin (1967) called it "substantial representation," and it is often seen as indicative of a democracy's health (Diamond and Morlino 2005). It therefore comes as no surprise that the agreement between voters and their representatives has received much attention in the literature, usually under the heading of policy opinion congruence (Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). An important aspect of this normative ideal is the equal representation of policy preferences on the part of the legislature (Lefkofridi, Giger, and Kissau 2012) through what is often referred to as "collective policy opinion congruence" (Weisberg 1978). That topic is the central focus of this chapter.

The literature on inequality in representation is quite divided on whether the preferences of social groups are unequally represented. On the one hand, some scholars have concluded that the policy preferences of privileged social groups in terms of education are not better represented in parliament (e.g., Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Ura and Ellis 2008; Christopher Wlezien and Soroka 2011). On the other hand, an increasing number of studies have indicated that there is a bias or inequality in policy opinion congruence towards the policy positions of the well-off (APSA Task Force 2004; Flavin 2012; Gilens 2005; Winters and Page 2009).

This article argues that the truth lies somewhere in-between. For many policy domains, there is only a limited degree of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters. For others, however, stark differences in congruence can be found. The moderating effects of policy domains are gauged by separately examining inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters for each policy domain. This domain-specific approach provides a more fine-grained picture of inequality congruence. This study claims that inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence measured on the basis of aggregated measures, such as the general "policy mood" (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002) or the left-right scale, are too broad, rendering them incapable of detecting inequalities in specific policy domains. These aggregated approaches therefore run the risk of arriving at overly optimistic conclusions regarding the equal representation of higher and lower educated voters. There might only be small differences in collective policy opinion congruence between these voter groups across all policy domains, despite the presence of larger differences in certain policy domains.

The literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence has only recently started to incorporate differences between policy domains. However, the number of policy domains that has been taken

into account, remains very limited. The present study built on that literature by considering all policy domains and presenting a complete picture of how policy domains moderate inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters.

To do so, this study employs a large dataset containing voters and parties' policy positions on 50 concrete policy statements, collected in the run-up to the 2009 regional elections in Flanders (Belgium). The results demonstrate that across all policy domains, the Flemish parliament's policy positions are more congruent with those higher educated voters than with those of lower-educated voters. However, the difference between higher-educated voters and lower-educated voters' collective policy opinion congruence is small. We do, however, find much larger inequalities in several policy domains: mobility and public transportation, immigration, fiscal policy, and economic policy. In addition, we find less inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters for policy domain of spatial planning. This reveals that an aggregated approach hides more complex patterns of inequality in opinion representation.

Inequality in collective policy opinion congruence

Policy opinion congruence is considered to be one of the cornerstones of a proper democracy (Dahl 1989)**.** There is, however, a growing body of literature suggesting that reality often strongly deviates from this normative ideal. Research conducted in the U.S. by, among others, Gilens (2005), Bartels (2008a), and Jacobs and Page (2005), has demonstrated that political elites have policy preferences that are more congruent with those of lower income voters. The choice to distinguish among voters on the basis of income is due to the fact that money plays an important role in U.S. elections (Winters and Page 2009). Parties and candidates are very dependent on private donations to run election campaigns. In Europe, this is not—for the most part, at least—the case, and researchers have thus tended to emphasize inequalities in policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters (Bovens and Wille 2010, 2011; Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015). Such studies have usually found inequalities in policy opinion congruence favoring the policy preferences of higher educated voters.

Scholars often cite three explanations for why political elites' policy preferences are more congruent with those of privileged voters. The first has to do with the educational bias in political participation (Leighley and Nagler 1992; Steinbrecher and Seeber 2011). Hillygus (2005) found that the content of formal education gives individuals skills and information that make political participation easier. In order to vote, people need a minimum understanding of how political institutions work, and they

need to "realize the relation between political action and the preservation of the political system" (p. 27). These skills and knowledge make voting less costly for voters. In addition to helping people understand how political systems work, formal education instills in individuals a sense of civic duty. Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) argued that with more formal education comes a "stronger interest in politics, a greater concern with elections, greater confidence in playing one's role as a citizen, and a deeper commitment to the norm of being a good citizen" (p. 102). As a result, higher educated voters are more likely to vote in elections. Assuming that parties want to win elections, they might consider irrelevant those citizens that cannot contribute to an electoral victory, due to the fact that such individuals do not vote.

However, some countries, including Belgium, have managed to equalize voter turnout between higher and lower educated voters by instituting compulsory voting (Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998; Winter and Ackaert 1998). Notwithstanding its potential contribution towards achieving an equal representation of voters' policy positions, compulsory voting equalizes only one type of political participation (Lijphart 1997). Research has shown that when it comes to other forms of participation (e.g., belonging to a political party or action group, participating in demonstrations, boycotting products, contacting politicians), higher educated persons continue to be disproportionally present (Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010). The educational bias in these types of participation could have consequences for collective policy opinion congruence. Voting does not convey much information to political parties in comparison to working for a party, contacting a politician, or even signing a petition. These types of participation allow an individual to express his or her policy views much more clearly. It is possible, and even very likely, that these forms of political participation are more effective in affecting parties' policy positions. To the extent that there is an educational bias in forms of political participation other than voting, we can expect higher levels of collective policy opinion congruence for higher educated voters.

Second, politicians are disproportionally higher educated individuals themselves. In their book *Diploma Democracy* (*Diplomademoratie*), Bovens and Wille (2011) noted that 90% of all MPs in the Dutch parliament were higher educated persons. This is by no means a Dutch phenomenon: In Belgium, more than 70% of MPs have a higher education. Higher educated voters are thus disproportionally descriptively represented in parliament. Here, the causal mechanism has less to do with influence, as was the case with political participation, and more to do with presence. To the extent that higher educated politicians bring the policy preferences of higher-educated voters with them into parliament, that body will demonstrate policy preferences that are more congruent with those of higher educated voters. Due to the inequalities in political participation and the descriptive overrepresentation of higher educated voters in the Flemish parliament, we expect that across all

policy domains, political elites in the Flemish parliament have policy positions that are more congruent with those of higher educated voters.

Hypothesis 1: Collective policy opinion congruence is higher for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters

The correspondence between voters and their representatives' preferences has often been examined using aggregated measures. A suitable example is the "policy mood" approach developed by Stimson et al. (1995). They define the policy mood as "the major dimension underlying expressed preferences over policy alternatives in the survey research record. It is properly interpreted as left versus right more specifically, as global preferences for a larger, more active federal government as opposed to a smaller, more passive one across the sphere of all domestic policy controversies" (P. 548). The left-right scale is another frequently used highly aggregated measure (Belchior 2012; Freire and Belchior 2013; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012). The use of aggregated measures based on the left-right continuum is inspired by the Hotelinger-Downs spatial model (Downs 1957). That model argues that all policy alternatives can be placed on a single dimension structuring political competition. Consequently, proponents of that approach believe that the "simple structure of a general left-right scale can summarize the political positions of voters and political parties" (Dalton, Farell, and McAllister 2011, 26).

However, some scholars have voiced concerns that this approach might result in what Thomassen (2012) labeled the "blind corner" in policy opinion congruence. Studies have indeed indicated that parties do organize their policy positions on a single policy dimension (Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). However, that same research has also found that voters distinguish multiple policy dimensions. The left-right scale only seems to capture economic policy positions. As a result, at best, high levels of left-right congruence only signify that voters and parties agree on socio-economic issues. In contrast, left-right policy-opinion congruence does not detect possible disagreement on socio-cultural issues. Therefore, interpreting high levels of left-right collective policy opinion congruence as proof of high levels of agreement on *both* the socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions would lead to a blind spot in collective policy opinion congruence.

However, the literature has paid less attention to how the difference between the socio-economic and the socio-cultural dimension relates to inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence. Is inequality in policy opinion congruence more likely to occur for one of these dimensions than for the other? Is it possible that another blind spot exists in this area? Studies using aggregated measures have often found little evidence of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence (Christopher Wlezien and Soroka 2011). Gilens (2012), however, found that for policy domains touching on

economic policy and tax policy, the inequality in collective policy opinion congruence in favor of high income voters was greater than for other policy domains. For these policy domains, the material interests of high and low income voters diverge (e.g., Winters and Page 2009).

However, Gilens only considered four policy domains: religious issues, economic policy, foreign policy, and social welfare. In addition, the extent to which his results can be generalized to other countries remains uncertain. Nevertheless, his findings did demonstrate the necessity of a domain-specific approach to studying inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide a broad overview of how inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence are moderated by policy domains in a European context. Based on the existing literature, it is possible to formulate two hypotheses about these moderating effects. To the extent that education level is related to income, we can say that economic policy and fiscal policy affect the basic material interests of higher educated voters. We expect potential inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters to be larger in these two policy domains.

Hypothesis 2: Inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters is larger in the economic policy domain.

Hypothesis 3: Inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters is larger in the fiscal policy domain.

Data and methods

To test these hypotheses, we use two sets of data. The first is an online voter survey of 1,000 eligible Flemish voters, collected in April of 2009 in the run-up to the regional elections in Flanders (Belgium) held on June 7, 2009. The voter survey asked respondents to react to 50 policy statements. Voters could either “agree” or “disagree” with each policy statement. The goal was for the overall statement list to be representative of the Flemish policy space (Nuytemans et al. 2010). Although we cannot be certain of having achieved that goal, the large amount of policy statements (n=50) and the fact that all major policy domains (see below) were covered arguably increased the statement list’s representativeness for the Flemish policy space in 2009.

While regional elections are usually seen as less important than national elections, the five state reforms enacted in Belgium prior to 2009 have given more and more competences to the regions. In addition, Belgium has separate Flemish and Francophone party landscapes. Flemish and

Francophone parties seldom compete for the same parliamentary seats. As a result, both regional and national elections in Belgium can be considered as first-order elections (Deschouwer 2012b). For that reason, we expect that studying a national Belgian election would yield similar results.

The response rate for the online voter survey was 22%. However, due to quota sampling, the sample accurately reflects the Flemish voting population in terms of education level, gender, and age. The use of quota sampling is important, as it solves one of the chief problems of online surveys: the overrepresentation of higher educated voters (Strabac and Aalberg 2011). In addition, while online samples are less ideal than probability samples, this distinction constituted less of a problem in Flanders, due to its high internet diffusion (Moreas 2007).

The second dataset is a party leadership survey. The 50 policy statements presented to voters were also directly presented to the leaderships of all parties that submitted a candidate list in all electoral districts (provinces). Similar to the voter survey, the party leaderships could only "agree" or "disagree" with a policy statement. A party's position in the eyes of that party's leadership is assumed to be the position of the entire party. Parties have been found to be very homogeneous in Belgium. A party's MPs almost always vote according to the party line, and that party line is predominantly determined by the party's leadership (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; Depauw, 2003).

The party leadership survey was conducted during the development of an online voting advice application (VAA). A VAA allows voters to compare their own policy positions with those of political parties. The result of a VAA can be interpreted as a voting recommendation. As such, the possibility exists that the party leaderships gave strategic answers. Parties can respond to policy statements in a manner that brings them closer to voters' positions. A Finnish VAA, in which candidates gave centrist answers to reduce the distance between themselves and participating voters, is a well-known example of this phenomenon (Gemenis 2013).

Nonetheless, the VAA discouraged strategic answers in two ways. First, party leaderships could only respond to the policy statements in one of two ways, eliminating the possibility that they might provide centrist answers. As a result, party leaderships had to choose a side on every policy statement and could not hide behind a centrist, neutral category. Second, parties' policy positions were thoroughly discussed in the media. The VAA that collected the party positions was developed in cooperation with the Flemish public broadcaster, which also invited the party leaderships in a televised program to explain their parties' positions on the policy statements. It is likely that strategic answers not reflecting a party's "true" positions would have been discovered during that process, but no such strategic responses came to light. Due to the limited number of answer choices and the

media's scrutiny of party positions, we are convinced of the validity of the party positions gathered via the party leadership survey.

Our dependent variable measures the agreement between the policy positions of voters and those of the Flemish parliament as a whole. While many studies have focused on the agreement between parties and their voters, in what is called "dyadic policy opinion congruence" (Belchior 2012; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013), we focus on the agreement between voters and the legislature as a whole. The correspondence between the policy preferences of voters and the legislature has its roots in democratic theory. Pitkin (1967) herself emphasized the ideal of a legislature accurately representing the preferences of citizens (Andeweg 2011; Weissberg 1978). In addition, inequality in congruence is often seen a property of an institution or a political system (Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Jacobs and Page 2005; Lefkofridi, Giger, and Kissau 2012). Therefore, an approach studying the agreement between a legislature and voters thus is a better fit for research on inequality in policy opinion congruence.

Golder and Stramski (2010) and Ruedin (2012) described four ways of calculating the collective policy opinion congruence between voters and parliament. First, the "one-to-one" approach compares a parliament's average policy positions and compares them to voters' average policy positions. The second method is the "one-to-many" approach, which compares the entire distribution of policy positions within a parliament with voters' average policy positions. The third is the "many-to-one" approach, which compares the entire distribution of voters' policy positions with a parliament's average positions. The fourth is the "many-to-many" approach, which compares the entire distribution of voters' policy positions with the entire distribution of a parliament's policy positions.

The approach used in this study falls in the first category: the "one-to-one" approach. Specifically, we compared the individual voters' policy positions with the parliament's average policy positions. Collective policy opinion congruence is thus measured on the level of individual voters, using Ruedin's (2012) methodology. This approach views collective policy opinion congruence as a property of individual voters. In addition, it allows for more complex data analysis by making it possible to consider multiple group memberships.

In applying this method, we start with an individual voter's policy position. For instance, say a voter agrees with policy statement A. In a first step, we would calculate the popularity of that voter's policy positions among voters (P_k). If only 5% of voters also agree with statement A, then the popularity of the voter's policy position among voters would be 5%. In the next step, we would calculate the popularity of the voter's policy position in the Flemish parliament (P_l) by computing the share of seats held by parties with the same policy position as the voter. If, for instance, two parties that

together hold 25 of the parliament's 100 seats agree with statement A, then the popularity of the voter's policy position in the Flemish parliament would be 25%. By looking at the number of seats held by each party, we were able to take into account a party's relative weight in determining the outcome of roll-call votes in parliament.

In a last step, we subtract the popularity of the voter's policy position among voters from the popularity of the voter's policy position in parliament. The result is the dependent variable, *collective policy opinion congruence*, which can be interpreted as the percentage of over- or underrepresentation of an individual voter's policy position in parliament. This variable takes a value of 0 if the popularity of a position among voters equals its popularity in parliament. This can be considered as a "proper" level of congruence. If this variable has a value smaller than 0, then a policy position is more popular among voters than in parliament, and it is thus underrepresented in parliament. A value larger than 0 indicates that a policy position is more popular in parliament than among voters, meaning that it is overrepresented in parliament.

The first independent variable is education. This variable has three categories: lower education (without or with only an elementary school education), middle education (completed secondary education), and higher educated (graduate school or university degree). The other independent variables are the policy statements' policy domains. Each policy statement was assigned to up to two policy domains in order to capture the complexities of the statements. For instance, the statement, "*Schools should require children to speak Dutch on the playground,*" touches upon both education *and* immigration policy. To increase the robustness of the results, we only consider policy domains to which at least four policy statements have been assigned. This leaves us with 10 policy domains: education policy, social welfare policy, environment and energy policy, mobility and public transport policy, spatial planning policy, political institutions, cultural policy, immigration policy, fiscal policy, and economic policy. A list of all policy statements and the policy domain(s) to which they are assigned is provided in the Appendix in Table A4.1. Policy statements can belong to multiple policy domains, and so there are 10 dichotomous variables—one for each policy domain— indicating whether a policy statement belongs to a certain policy domain (1) or not (0). In our analyses, we also control for gender and age. Table 4.1 gives an overview of all key variables used in the analyses.

Since we have 50 policy statements, we stack our data. The stacked dataset contains 50 observations per voter: one per policy statement. Stacking the data results in a dataset with 50,000 voter-statement combinations. The different independent variables are situated at two different levels: the voter level (n=1,000) and the policy statement level (n=50). Therefore, we use multilevel linear

regression with a random intercept for each of these two levels. Table 4.2 offers a (fictional) example of the stacked dataset.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for all variables

	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Collective policy opinion congruence (%)	-5.32	27.14	-58.62	58.62
Education level:	1.90	0.79	1	3
Lower education (1)	0.37	0.48	0	1
Middle education (2)	0.36	0.48	0	1
Higher education (3)	0.27	0.44	0	1
Gender (male [1] - female [2])	1.48	0.50	1	2
Age	44.54	14.59	18	81
Policy domain:				
Education policy	0.15	0.35	0	1
Social welfare policy	0.16	0.37	0	1
Environment and energy policy	0.14	0.35	0	1
Political institutions policy	0.12	0.32	0	1
Mobility and public transportation policy	0.14	0.35	0	1
Cultural policy	0.08	0.27	0	1
Spatial planning policy	0.09	0.29	0	1
Immigration policy	0.10	0.30	0	1
Fiscal policy	0.14	0.35	0	1
Economic policy	0.10	0.30	0	1

Results

This study seeks to gauge the degree to which inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters is moderated by policy domains. Model 1 (see Table 4.3) shows the direct effect of social background factors and policy domains on collective policy opinion congruence. Collective policy opinion congruence is significantly related to voters' level of education: Across all policy domains, the policy positions of higher educated voters are better represented in the Flemish parliament than are those of lower educated voters. We also find that gender and age are significantly related to collective policy opinion congruence. On average, women's policy preferences are better represented than those men, and the policy preferences of young voters are better represented than those of older voters are.

To that end, we calculate the predicted values of the dependent variable for each level of education, while keeping all other independent variables at their mean values. The predicted values are reported in Table 4.4.

Table 4.2: A (fictional) example of the stacked dataset

Voter ID	Policy statement nr.	Education policy	Social welfare policy	Age	Gender	Education level	Collective policy opinion congruence
1	1	1	0	50	Male	Middle education	45%
1	2	1	0	50	Male	Middle education	60%
1	3	0	1	50	Male	Middle education	23%
1	4	0	1	50	Male	Middle education	75%
1	5	0	0	50	Male	Middle education	35%
2	1	1	0	26	Female	Higher education	45%
2	2	1	0	26	Female	Higher education	40%
2	3	0	1	26	Female	Higher education	77%
2	4	0	1	26	Female	Higher education	75%
2	5	0	0	26	Female	Higher education	35%
3	1	1	0	34	Female	Lower education	55%
3	2	1	0	34	Female	Lower education	60%
3	3	0	1	34	Female	Lower education	23%
3	4	0	1	34	Female	Lower education	25%
3	5	0	0	34	Female	Lower education	65%

Table 4.3: Analyses of collective policy opinion congruence

		Model 1: Direct effects			**Model 2: Interaction effects**		
		B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Lower education (ref. cat.)		---			---		
Middle education		1.09	(0.31)	***	-0.03	(0.73)	
Higher education		2.62	(0.34)	***	0.38	(0.79)	
Policy domains:							
Education policy		3.35	(5.94)		3.26	(5.96)	
Social welfare policy		2.58	(5.44)		2.71	(5.46)	
Environment and energy policy		-1.86	(5.63)		-1.79	(5.65)	
Political institutions policy		-4.87	(6.50)		-5.28	(6.53)	
Mobility and public transportation policy		0.23	(5.83)		-1.07	(5.86)	
Cultural policy		0.99	(7.33)		-0.18	(7.36)	
Spatial planning policy		6.27	(5.89)		7.55	(5.91)	
Immigration policy		-5.40	(6.52)		-6.34	(6.55)	
Fiscal policy		-1.92	(5.89)		-5.88	(5.91)	
Economic policy		-2.08	(6.18)		-3.89	(6.21)	
Gender (male=ref. cat.)		-0.64	(0.27)	*	-0.09	(0.27)	
Age		-0.02	(0.01)	*	-0.03	(0.01)	
Interaction terms:							
Education policy*	Middle education				0.39	(0.95)	
	Higher education				-0.17	(1.03)	
Social welfare policy*	Middle education				0.10	(0.88)	
	Higher education				-0.60	(0.95)	
Environment and energy policy*	Middle education				-0.37	(0.91)	
	Higher education				0.16	(1.00)	
Political institutions policy*	Middle education				0.54	(1.06)	
	Higher education				0.67	(1.16)	
Mobility and public transportation policy*	Middle education				1.35	(0.95)	
	Higher education				3.01	(1.03)	**
Cultural policy*	Middle education				1.14	(1.18)	
	Higher education				2.74	(1.28)	*
Spatial planning policy*	Middle education				-1.20	(1.00)	
	Higher education				-3.27	(1.09)	**
Immigration policy*	Middle education				0.77	(1.04)	
	Higher education				2.41	(1.13)	*
Fiscal policy*	Middle education				4.23	(0.96)	***
	Higher education				9.03	(1.04)	***
Economic policy*	Middle education				1.99	(1.01)	*
	Higher education				4.08	(1.10)	***
Constant		-6.20	(4.46)		-5.20	(4.48)	
N Total / voters		43447/1000			43447/1000		
AIC / BIC		399778.8/399943.7			399706.7/400045.2		

Multilevel linear regression; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001

The results thus confirm Hypothesis 1, which predicts that higher educated voters' policy preferences are better represented. However, the question remained as to whether the differences between

lower and higher educated voters matter. In other words, we still are left with the question of whether the difference in collective policy opinion congruence is substantial in addition to significant.

As Table 4.4 makes clear, for all education levels, policy preferences are slightly underrepresented in the Flemish parliament. However, for higher educated voters, this underrepresentation only totals 3.5%, while this figure is 6.2% for lower educated voters. Nevertheless, the difference between lower and higher educated voters is only 2.7%. While statistically significant, the gap is not very large. However, as we argued, an aggregated approach to measuring inequality in collective policy opinion congruence might obscure larger inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence for specific policy domains.

Model 2 (see Table 4.3) therefore expresses how the policy domains moderate the difference in collective policy opinion congruence. For many policy domains, model 2 confirms the results of model 1, finding small yet significant differences between lower and higher educated votes. At the same time, however, the model reveals highly significant moderating effects for six policy domains: mobility and public transportation policy, cultural policy, immigration policy, fiscal policy, and economic policy. For policy statements related to these policy domains, the difference in collective policy opinion congruence is up to 9% greater. We also find evidence of a moderation effect for the policy domain spatial planning. However, the direction of the moderating effect is reversed. For statements related to spatial planning, the inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters shrinks instead of grows.

Table 4.4: Predicted values of collective policy opinion congruence per education level

	Mean collective policy opinion congruence
Lower educated voters	-6.20%
Middle educated voters	-5.11%
Higher educated voters	-3.58%

The predicted values are based on model 1's results (see Table 3). To calculate the predicted values, all other independent variables were kept at their mean values.

To get an idea of how these policy domains moderate differences in collective policy opinion congruence, we again calculate the predictive values of collective policy opinion congruence for each level of education. In this step, however, we only distinguish between the policy domains with a significant moderating effect. These values are reported in Table 4.5. They reveal that especially with regards to fiscal policy, higher-educated voters' policy positions are substantially better represented in the Flemish parliament. Compared to all policy domains in their entirety, the inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters almost triples in size for economic policy and quadrupled in size for fiscal policy. These findings clearly confirm Hypotheses 2 and 3. For the policy domains of mobility and public transportation, cultural policy, and

immigration policy, the gap between lower and higher educated voters double: from 2.3% to about 4-5%. However, when we turn to spatial planning, we see that the inequality in collective policy opinion congruence almost completely vanishes.

Table 4.5: Predicted values of collective policy opinion congruence per education level and moderating policy domain

	Lower education	Middle education	Higher education	Difference between lower and higher education
Across all policy domains	-6.09%	-5.08%	-3.76%	2.32%
Mobility and public transportation policy	-7.01%	-4.84%	-2.08%	4.92%
Cultural policy	-6.25%	-4.19%	-1.40%	4.85%
Spatial planning policy	0.79%	0.72%	0.13%	0.66%
Immigration policy	-11.77%	-10.07%	-7.30%	4.47%
Fiscal policy	-11.15%	-6.49%	-1.06%	10.09%
Economic policy	-9.60%	-6.79%	-3.59%	6.01%

The predicted values are based on the results of model 2 (see Table 3). To calculate the predicted values, all other independent variables were kept at their mean values.

Conclusion

This paper sought to explore the extent to which inequality in collective policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters is moderated by policy domains. Are inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence larger for some policy domains than for others? Oftentimes, studies have examined inequality in collective policy opinion congruence using aggregated measures. This approach, however, entails the risk of leaving undetected complex patterns of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. Our results demonstrated that across all policy domains, there was a small yet significant overrepresentation of higher-educated voters' policy preferences in the Flemish parliament. However, when we looked at each policy domain separately, we found that this overrepresentation was much larger for mobility and public transportation policy, cultural policy, immigration policy, fiscal policy, and economic policy. Especially for the last two policy domains, there seemed to be a strong bias in the Flemish parliament towards the policy preferences of higher educated voters. These results are consistent with studies that have focused on the U.S., finding a strong representational bias for policies concerning fiscal and economic matters. We also found that for spatial planning, the inequality in collective policy opinion congruence was smaller. This finding reveals that a reverse moderation effect is also possible: For some policy domains, the policy preferences of lower and higher educated voters were more equally represented.

Our results also raise important normative questions. Is the parliament's better representation of higher educated voters' policy preferences problematic? Research has indicated that these voters are more politically knowledgeable, sophisticated, and interested (Hillygus 2005). While authors who have emphasized the equal representation of all voters' policy preferences, regardless of education level, might find these results pessimistic (Rober A. Dahl 1989; Page and Shapiro 1992), others might find them encouraging (Lippmann 1955). However, if the goal is for political elites to pursue society's common interests, is their adherence to the policy preferences of higher educated voters indeed the pursuit of these common interests or the pursuit of the particular interests of higher educated voters? Previous research demonstrating that the policy preferences of both higher and lower educated voters are predominantly a reflection of their own particular interests (Bovens and Wille 2011; Wauters 2010) would argue that inequality in policy opinion congruence indeed means that the particular interests of one group of voters are being served.

While we believe that our results are convincing, this study has its limitations. First, some of the moderating effects that this study found for policy domains were small in size. This can be explained by the fact that the Belgian case is arguably a least-likely case for finding inequality in collective policy opinion congruence in any policy domain. As mentioned before, Belgium has compulsory voting, which has equalized turnout for lower and higher educated voters. In addition, however, it has strict rules regarding from whom parties can collect donations (if at all) and how they can spend those funds during elections (Weekers, Maddens, and Noppe 2009). Scholars, and primarily those in the U.S., have argued that parties and candidates' dependence on wealthy donors to fund their campaigns creates a pre-selection system, in which only those parties and candidates with donor approval can effectively run for office (Ferguson 1995). Furthermore, contrary to other industrialized countries, trade union membership and density are not on the decline in Belgium. Trade unions defend the policy positions of working class, and usually lower educated, voters. Their continued strength makes it less likely that a bias will develop towards the policy preferences of higher educated voters. In short, we can argue that while the inequalities in collective policy opinion congruence found in this paper are not always large, the fact that we even found such inequality along with moderating effects for policy domains, in the Belgian case suggests that we would find inequality in other countries as well, and arguably to a greater degree.

Second, we only focused on education. While education might be more relevant to Belgium, considering its low levels of income inequality, income might play a larger role in other settings. However, to the extent that education and income are related, our results suggest that the difference in collective policy opinion congruence that we found between lower and higher educated voters would also hold true for lower and higher income voters.

Finally, we only considered policy positions, and not the salience of the policy domains. Collective policy opinion congruence between voters and parliament arguably means more when the policy positions on which there is congruence are also considered to be more important in parliament. However, the policy domains for which we found the greatest degree of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence—fiscal and economic policy—were often high on the political agenda. Therefore, if we had taken into account the salience of policy domains, the inequalities reported in this study would most likely have been even larger.

In sum, we do not claim that our results are directly replicable in other contexts. However, the approach presented herein might be a useful way to start thinking about inequality in collective policy opinion congruence, and in representation in general. We believe such an approach could make considerable contributions to how we view and understand inequality in policy opinion congruence. Future research should inquire as to the reason why some policy domains are more prone to inequality in policy opinion congruence than others. While this does not allow us to draw simple and general conclusions, why should we be content with simple theories that do not do justice to a complex social reality?

Chapter V: Finding inequality in an unlikely place: differences in collective policy opinion congruence between social groups in Belgium

Abstract

This paper seeks to develop and test an issue-level determinants model of collective policy opinion inequality between privileged and underprivileged social groups. Current theories on congruence inequality and representation focus on country-level factors such as the interest group system or campaign finance. The literature focuses far less on variation in inequality in preference representation in a single context. To fill this void in the literature, we develop an issue-level model of collective policy opinion inequality between privileged and underprivileged groups in terms of education and income. Based on an integrated dataset containing the policy positions of parties and voters in Belgium on 229 policy statements, we find that when social groups have different policy positions, preferences in the legislature align more with the preferences of privileged social groups. In addition, collective policy opinion inequality also depends on the importance of the issues to groups: the difference in opinion congruence is larger for economic and tax policies, vital to privileged groups, but smaller on issues related to social welfare, crucial to underprivileged groups. Finally, the results show that when voters of a group disagree with their party's position on an issue, their preferences regarding that issue are less well represented in the legislature.

This chapter is based on an article written by myself and published in Acta Politica.

Introduction

One of the keystones of a democracy is the proper representation of voters' preferences by their representatives in parliament. Pitkin (1967) called this "substantive representation," in which representatives make present the policy positions of the public. When voters and their representatives share the same positions on public policy, it increases the chance of those policy positions to become policy realities. Agreement between voters and representatives is seen as an indicator of a healthy democracy (Diamond and Morlino, 2005) and has therefore received much attention in the field of political science, usually under the label of "opinion congruence." However, studies, which usually focus on the United States, find that legislatures often favor the policy preferences of privileged social groups, typically consisting of the higher educated or higher income strata (Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Winters and Page 2009). Amidst growing societal inequality, there is increasing concern that the preferences of affluent citizens receive more weight than those of other voters, and there is indeed growing evidence for a representational bias (see, for instance Flavin 2012; Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005).

Recently, scholars have begun to develop a theoretical model of inequality in representation (see, for instance, Winters and Page 2009). Three factors stand out: a lobbying environment dominated by business organizations, political donations that only allow those approved by the wealthy to run for office, and the (non-)compulsory nature of voting, which determines whether turnout is biased towards privileged citizens. However, all three characteristics are situated at the country level and can therefore only explain differences between countries and political systems. At the same time, studies have found differences between issues in the degree to which the preferences of different social groups are represented (Gilens 2005, 2012). Yet, a model that can explain these differences is still missing. This study seeks to fill this void in the literature by developing and testing an issue-level model of collective policy opinion inequality.

To do so, we focus on Belgium, a small consociational country in Western Europe. Using an integrated dataset containing the positions of voters and parties on 229 policy statements, our results show that, despite the favorable country context, collective policy opinion inequality between privileged and underprivileged groups (in terms of education and income) is present in Belgium. However, we find much variation between policy issues in terms of the degree to which the preferences of social groups are represented in parliament. The country-level model thus needs to be complemented by an issue-level model of collective policy opinion inequality. The issue-level model presented in this paper consists of three factors: the gap in policy preferences between social groups, policy domains of key interest to privileged and underprivileged groups, and the extent to which

voters of a social group agree with the party they vote for on an issue, dyadic policy opinion congruence.

We find that when privileged and underprivileged groups differ in policy positions, parliament is likely to side with the preferences of the former. In addition, the overrepresentation of privileged groups' policy positions is larger on issues that are important to their key interests, such as issues related to economic and tax policies, but smaller on issues of vital importance to underprivileged groups, such as social welfare. Finally, congruence inequality is to an important degree self-inflicted. When voters of a group (either privileged or underprivileged) disagree with their actual party choice on an issue, their preferences are less well represented in the legislature. We discuss the normative implications of these findings in the conclusion.

Issue-level determinants of congruence inequality

Research in the United States has identified three factors of a political system through which privileged social groups exert their influence on the decision-making process: one-sided business lobbying, financial contributions, and social bias in voter turnout. Through lobbying, representatives of specific social interests seek to establish shared perspectives with politicians on policy issues, for instance through socializing and friendship networks (Winters and Page 2009). The second factor, political donations and spending on behalf of parties or candidates, primarily serves a selection purpose in what has been labeled the "ideological sorting" hypothesis (Ferguson 1995). Campaign donations rig the game in favor of privileged groups by preventing those who are unable to garner sufficient funds from competing in an election. The third factor is compulsory voting or the lack thereof. In almost every country, lower-income or lower-educated voters are consistently less likely to vote in an election (Steinbrecher and Seeber 2011). To our knowledge, only political systems with compulsory voting have been able to completely neutralize this bias by making turnout mandatory for everyone (Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998).

However, lobbying, financial contributions, and voter turnout are all factors that are situated at the country level. While they undoubtedly play a role in congruence inequality, they are less able to explain variation in congruence inequality *within* a specific country and between issues. Some studies have indeed pointed to this variation (Gilens 2012), but an issue-level theory is missing. This paper seeks to explore which issue-level factors can explain inequality in collective opinion congruence. We focus here on three variables: differences in policy preferences, policy domains, and inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence.

One of the most important reasons why scholars argue that there is a bias in parliament towards the preferences of privileged social groups has to do with the backgrounds of political elites. Politicians and candidates often come from privileged groups. For instance, in Belgium, higher-educated individuals often make up more than 70% of the MPs in a legislature (Bovens and Wille 2011), and in the United States, the median individual net worth of members of Congress is six times larger than the median net worth of average Americans (Carnes 2012). Due to their background, politicians view the world through the eyes of privileged individuals and are thus more likely to have similar policy preferences. This link between descriptive and substantive representation is backed by a substantial literature (see, for instance Bühlmann and Schädel 2012; Carnes 2012)

While more and more studies are finding differences in preference representation between privileged and underprivileged groups that are biased in favor of the former, some studies find that there is no inequality in representation (Ura and Ellis 2008; Christopher Wlezien and Soroka 2012). However, Soroka and Wlezien (2008a) provide a possible explanation for these conflicting results. They argue that a precondition for collective policy opinion inequality is a difference in policy position. If there is a large consensus among voters regarding the future direction of public policy, then underprivileged voters are as likely as privileged voters to have their preferences represented. In fact, if policy preferences do not differ between social groups, collective policy opinion inequality between those groups is mathematically impossible. Underprivileged voters' opinion congruence might be poor or great, but it will at least be equal to that of privileged voters. There has been some debate in the literature on whether or not social groups have different views on policies (see Gilens 2009; Soroka and Wlezien 2008a). However, a more fruitful way to consider differences in policy positions would be to use it as a substantive explanatory variable of collective policy opinion inequality. Collective policy opinion inequality between groups on an issue depends on a difference in opinion between those groups. In sum, the descriptive bias in parliament towards privileged groups is expected to lead to a bias in preference representation. However, this bias can only manifest itself when there is a difference in policy preference between privileged and underprivileged groups (also see Gilens 2005). In addition, it is important to include the differences in policy positions in an issue-level model of congruence inequality. Otherwise, the results are likely to understate the difference in congruence between social groups. As collective policy opinion inequality can only occur when voters differ in opinion, a true test of this inequality would be to study how equally or unequally the preferences of privileged and underprivileged groups are represented when their preferences diverge. We expect that the tendency to side with the policy preferences of privileged groups becomes stronger as opinions diverge (H1).

The literature on inequality in substantive representation has also recently begun to study differences between policy domains. For instance, Jacobs and Page (2005) find that, in the area of foreign (economic) policy, the preferences of U.S. members of Congress are much in line with those of U.S. business elites. However, it is uncertain to what extent their findings can be generalized to other countries. The importance of U.S. foreign policy in the world and its effect on the global economy make it vital to the interests of privileged groups, unlike the foreign policy of much smaller countries, including the case studied in this paper, Belgium. In fact, given that much of the foreign economic policy is currently being conducted at the European level, there are far fewer reasons to expect congruence inequality between privileged and underprivileged in the area of foreign policy. At the Belgian level, there is simply less at stake. The material interests of the society's privileged are less likely to be threatened on the Belgian level due to the transfer of foreign (economic) policy competences to the EU level. As a result, there is less need for privileged groups to try and exert influence in this area.

Thomassen (2012) argues that scholars should distinguish between an economic and a cultural dimension. Given the economic meaning of the left-right scale (Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009), congruence measures based on it could underestimate congruence on cultural issues, in what Thomassen labeled as a "blind corner" in congruence studies. However, this blind corner affects both privileged and underprivileged groups. In addition, it is unclear, for instance, why on all issues related to the economic dimension there would be a bias in opinion congruence in favor of privileged groups. The study of Winters and Page (2009) is more instructive in this regard. They claim that inequality in preference representation is most likely to occur in a number of specific economic areas, such as tax policy, that touch upon the key (material) interests of society's "well-off'" population. Gilens (2012) put these claims to the test and found that inequality in policy responsiveness in the United States is indeed higher on issues related to economic policy. However, on issues related to social welfare, the differences between higher- and lower-income groups are smaller. This emphasizes the need to distinguish between various issues in the economic dimension. One could argue that social welfare issues are of vital importance to underprivileged groups. Indeed, studies have shown that the underprivileged are more likely to protest when they experience deprivation or when something is taken away from them (Kern, Marien, and Hooghe 2015; Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013), and this is exactly what could happen when policy goes against the preferences of the underprivileged on social welfare issues such as pensions or unemployment benefits. The same can be expected when policy goes against the preferences of privileged groups, be it more in the form of lobbying, on tax and economic issues, such as a wealth tax, that are crucial to their interests (Winters and Page 2009). When the policy preferences of

political elites go against the key material interests of a group, that group is much more likely to mobilize. This gives political parties less leeway to deviate from that group's policy preferences on those issues. We therefore hypothesize that congruence inequality between privileged and underprivileged groups is higher and more in favor of the former on the issues of tax and economic policy (H2), but lower on issues related to social welfare (H3).

Hypothesis 2: congruence inequality between privileged and underprivileged groups is higher and more in favor of the former on the issues of tax and economic policy

Hypothesis 3: congruence inequality between privileged and underprivileged groups is lower on the issues of tax and economic policy

So far, we have focused on top-down mechanisms of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. However, the literature has neglected the possibility that voters themselves can be responsible for the lack of preference representation. The responsible party model argues that proper congruence between voters and political elites can be achieved through a mechanism called dyadic policy opinion congruence, in which voters vote for a congruent party (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). Voters need to have developed policy positions, be informed about the policy positions of political parties, and compare their own positions with those offered by the parties. Finally, the voter's choice of party needs to be based on the congruence between his or her own policy positions and the policy positions of the chosen party. Conversely, a lack of collective policy opinion congruence can result from voters voting for parties with which they disagree. The third factor at the issue level relates to the extent that voters agree with the party for which they voted (Lau and Redlawsk 1997). Previous studies have found that underprivileged voters are less likely to vote for a party with which they agree on policy issues (Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015). Many studies have indeed found that lower-educated voters are less knowledgeable about politics (see, for example, Grönlund & Milner, 2006) and are less able to process political information from the media (Eveland and Scheufele 2000). As education and income are related, this also applies to lower-income voters. For instance, if lower-educated or lower-income voters want tougher immigration policies but vote for parties that opt to make those policies softer, then those groups give support to policies that contradict their own positions. In such cases, voters "self-inflict" collective policy opinion inequality on themselves by voting for a party with which they disagree[1]. On an aggregate

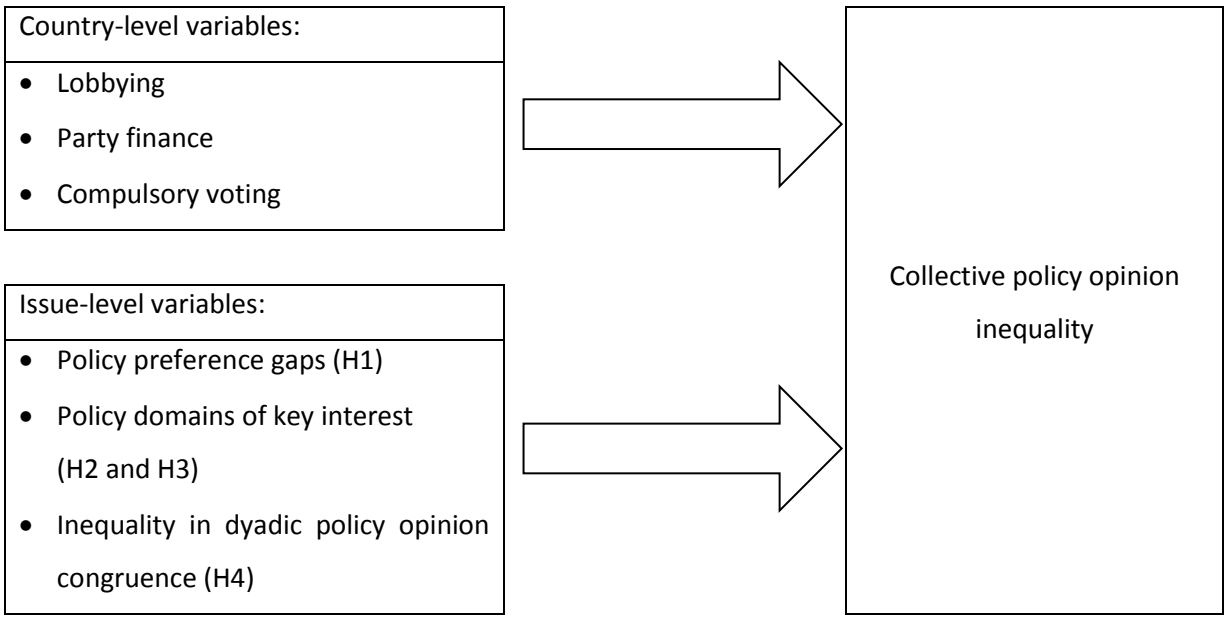
[1] Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence does not per se have to be 'self-inflicted'. It can also occur when the policy offers of political parties are more attuned to the policy positions of higher educated and higher income voters. However, Belgium has a highly fragmented party landscape and it is therefore unlikely that there is no party which caters to the policy preferences of lower educated and lower income voters. Therefore, we assume in this paper that inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence is primarily 'self-inflicted' by voters themselves.

level, this might lead to a situation in which the preferences of lower-educated voters are less well represented in parliament on immigration issues. However, even privileged groups often have substantial disagreements with their party choice, their higher levels of dyadic policy opinion congruence notwithstanding. This might be a deliberate choice: voters vote for a party that shares their position on the issues that matter most to them. Therefore, we can assume that on some issues, underprivileged groups agree more with their party of choice, while on others, privileged groups agree more. In sum, we expect that when a social group (either privileged or underprivileged) votes have higher levels of 'dyadic policy opinion congruence', its policy preferences are better represented in the legislature (H4).

Hypothesis 4: Inequality in collective policy opinion congruence is significantly related to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence

Our model is summarized in Figure 5.1, which presents the country- and the issue-level model of collective policy opinion inequality. This paper will focus on the issue-level factors only.

Figure 5.1: A country- and issue-level model of collective policy opinion inequality



Finding an appropriate case: Belgium

To study issue-level determinants of collective policy opinion inequality, it is ideal test our model in a case where congruence inequality is least affected by the country-level determinants discussed above. We believe that Belgium provides us with such a case. It is a small consociational nation in

Western Europe and possesses characteristics that arguably reduce the likelihood of collective policy opinion inequality between social groups.

First, instead of lobbying activities being dominated by business interests, large and binding agreements regarding pensions, wages, and labor standards are reached in Belgium through the so-called "Group of 10," a joint committee of key representatives from the most important labor and business organizations (van Gerven and Beckers 2009). As a result, lobbying is a less effective strategy for influencing policy outcomes. In addition, contrary to any other industrialized country (including the United States), union membership in Belgium has increased rather than declined (Liagre 2012). The increasing strength of trade unions in Belgium makes it more likely that they will continue to play a key role in socioeconomic policy making in Belgium (Naedenoen 2008), thus countervailing the lobbying activities of business interests, and producing less collective policy opinion inequality.

Second, Belgium has strict party finance laws (Weekers, Maddens, and Noppe, 2009). Donations from both corporations and trade unions have been banned, and since 1999 only individuals may donate money to political parties, and only up to a specified limit. These restrictions reduced the financial means available to parties, which were then compensated by subsidies from the state. In addition, there are strong limitations on what parties are allowed to do during a campaign (e.g. TV ads, billboards, etc.). In other words, parties and candidates need less money than in the United States because they cannot spend it on expensive ads, and the money they do need to run a campaign they get primarily from the government instead of a selective donor class.

Third, Lijphart (1997) argued that compulsory voting could help equalize representation by equalizing turnout. Due to compulsory voting in Belgium, turnout has been around 90% or more since World War II[2]. Not only is turnout larger than in other comparable countries, but it has also been far more equal as well. Studies have found no relation between education level and likelihood to vote in Belgium (De Winter and Johan Ackaert 1994). However, abolishing compulsory voting would decrease turnout to about 60% and would lead to an overrepresentation of higher-educated citizens among the voting public (Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998).

In sum, the three factors that the classic country-level theory holds as causing a representational bias in favor of the policy preferences of privileged social groups are absent in Belgium. Instead of an overrepresentation of business interests in lobbying activities, Belgium has institutionalized negotiations between labor and business; instead of party dependence on a donor class for funds,

[2] http://www.ibzdgip.fgov.be/result/nl/main.html, in Belgium, voters are required to vote. However, voters can still cast a blank vote.

Belgium has banned corporate sponsorship and strongly regulated the conduct of parties and candidates during campaigns; instead of voluntary voting, Belgium has compulsory voting, effectively eliminating the socioeconomic skew in turnout. As a result, when studying issue-level determinants of congruence inequality in Belgium, as we do in this paper, congruence inequality is less likely to be contaminated by country-level causes.

Data and method

We use two sets of data. The first is an online voter survey of 2,080 eligible Belgian voters, taken in March 2014, in the run-up to the elections for the Flemish and Walloon regional parliaments and the national parliament on May 25, 2014. The survey was conducted by TNS Dimarso. In the voter survey, respondents were asked to react to 106 (Flanders) or 113 (Wallonia) policy statements. These statements are our unit of analysis. Voters could either "agree" or "disagree" with a policy statement. Though one might argue that this leaves little room for nuance, it does represent a clearer measurement of a voter's issue position. Rabinowitz and Macdonalds (1989) argue that additional answering categories, such as "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree," are more indicative of the intensity of an issue position than its direction and reflect how important an issue is to a voter. Expanding the answering format would thus have conflated issue position with issue salience. In order to avoid respondent fatigue, the survey was split up into two waves. Studies have shown that when online surveys take more than 20 minutes to complete, the quality of the responses decreases (Galesic and Bosnjak 2009). Due to the two-wave strategy, the average length of a survey wave was only 15 minutes. The survey also contained social background factors such as education and income.

In total, 12,241 individual were contacted, resulting in an average response rate of 17% across both waves[2]. However, due to quota sampling and the use of sampling weights, the composition of the sample accurately reflects the Belgian population[43]. The most common problem of an online survey is the overrepresentation of higher-educated voters (Strabac and Aalberg 2011), which is related to inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. Consequently, an overall average policy preference would likely reflect what higher-educated voters think. However, when calculating opinion congruence, as is explained below, we compare the policy preferences of lower- and higher-educated voters separately with the policy preferences of the parliament. This approach arguably reduces the remaining bias in the survey towards privileged groups. Another common problem is the

[3] The voter survey was weighted in order accurately to reflect the Belgian population in terms of six characteristics: gender, age, occupation, education level, social class, and Nielsen region, based on the most recent population data provided by the Centre for Information on the Media. Every respondent was designated a weight between the minimum value of 0.0001 and the maximum value of 2.

overrepresentation of politically interested voters, specifically among underprivileged voters. Consequently, the underprivileged voters in the survey might be more politically interested and knowledgeable than underprivileged voters in the population. However, if hypothesis four is correct and political interest and knowledge are positively related to preference representation through dyadic policy opinion congruence, than it follows that the underprivileged voters in our sample vote more correctly and have their policy positions better represented that underprivileged voters in general. The bias in our sample of underprivileged voters leads to an overestimation of their preference representation, making the representation gap with privileged groups smaller. An increase in the political interest of underprivileged groups thus makes it less likely that differences between privileged and underprivileged voters will be found and thus constitutes a more conservative test of our hypotheses. In sum, our approach reduces sampling biases, and any bias remaining works against the confirmation of our hypotheses.

The second dataset is a party survey. The same policy statements presented to voters in the online survey were also presented to the leaders of all political parties in Belgium who had at least one representative in either the regional or national parliament before the elections of May 25, 2014 (n = 11)[54]. They were given two weeks to confer with other member of the leadership and to develop a party position. The Belgian party landscape is split along the Flemish/Francophone linguistic divide (De Winter, Swyngedouw, and Dumont, 2006). There are six Flemish and five Francophone parties in our sample. As was the case for voters, party leaders could only react to the statements with "agree" or "disagree." Does the position of the party leadership always match that of their rank and file MPs? Arguably, one can expect a high level of opinion congruence between the party leadership and party MPs: aspiring candidates are unlikely to join a party with which they have stark disagreements, and parties are unlikely to allow an aspiring candidate on their list if he or she does not endorse the party leadership's positions. In addition, even in the case of disagreement, there are still important reasons to assume that MPs will vote in line with the party leadership such as anticipated sanctions or adherence to the norm to express loyalty to the party leadership (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). In sum, MPs and the party leadership are most likely agree on the vast majority of issues, but even when they do not, the latter's position is the one that matters. This is shown in the Belgian case by the almost perfect degree of party cohesion during votes in parliament (Depauw 2003a).

The policy statements touched upon concrete regional and national policy issues. The statements on regional policies, however, were different for the Flemish (50 statements) and Francophone (56

[4] The parties included in the party survey are Groen and Ecolo (green parties), Sp.a and PS (social democrats), CD&V and CDH (Christian democrats), Open VLD and MR (liberals), N-VA and FDF (regionalist parties), and Vlaams Belang (extreme right/separatist party).

statements) voters and parties and were tailored to reflect the regional differences in relevant policy issues. The statements regarding national policy issues (61 statements) were identical for both language groups. However, Belgium has separate Flemish and Francophone parties and media systems, even at the national level. Party competition for seats in the national parliament happens in each region separately. Consequently, the national parliament is subdivided into Flemish and Francophone language groups, with a fixed seat distribution for each group. In other words, the Belgian national parliament can be considered to consist of a "Flemish national parliament" and a "Francophone national parliament." Logically, each language group in the national parliament should, collectively, represent its language community. Therefore, for national policy statements, we measure how congruent each language group is with various social groups *within* its own language community. Furthermore, the institutional arrangements that make Belgium a least likely case to find collective policy opinion inequality apply to both the national and regional government levels. Finally, elections for both the national parliament and the regional parliaments can be considered first-order elections (Deschouwer 2012). As a result, though the statements touch upon the same national policy issues, the separate party and media landscape make them independent cases in which to study collective policy opinion inequality. This brings the total number of policy statements to 229[65].

Our dependent variable is the difference in collective policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged groups on a single policy statement. The first step is to calculate opinion congruence. While many studies focus on "dyadic" opinion congruence, the congruence between voters and a specific party or representative (see, for instance Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013), Pitkin (1967) herself emphasized the normative ideal of having a legislature that reflects the will of all people. For this "collective" opinion congruence, elections are seen as the mechanisms through which voters ensure that a legislature as a whole is a proper reflection of the public in terms of policy preferences (Andeweg 2011; Weissberg 1978). Instead of measuring how congruent voters are with a party, this collective perspective focuses on how the distribution of preferences in a legislature matches the distribution of preferences within a population. In addition, as inequality is usually defined as the extent to which political elites or political institutions as a whole favor the preferences of certain groups above those of others (Lefkofridi, Giger, and Kissau 2012), a collective approach fits our research question best. Inequality in collective opinion congruence occurs when the distribution of preferences in a legislature has a better match with the distribution of preferences in one social group than the distribution of preferences in another. Some studies focus on governments, as this comes closer to actual policy (Giger *et al*, 2012). However, government formation is ruled by its own dynamics (Martin and

[5] A full list of the statements can be found in the appendix in Table A1.1.

Stevenson 2001), and a preference bias in a legislature as a whole makes it more likely that any government supported by a legislative majority will be biased towards those same preferences as well. To study collective policy opinion inequality, we thus take the collective approach and base our operationalization on Golder and Stramski (2010). Proper collective opinion congruence is achieved when the distribution of preferences in a legislature matches the distribution of preferences in specific social group:

$$collective\ congruence = 1 - \left[\sum_{i=1}^{k-1} |F_i^*(parliament) - F_i^*(social\ group)|\right]$$

where *k* stands for the number of categories in an opinion measure and *F** for the relative cumulative frequencies[6]. If, for instance, 50% of parliament agrees with a statement and 60% of a social group agree, then that social group is 1 - |50% - 60%| = 90% congruent with parliament. The result of the above formula thus indicates absolute levels of opinion congruence. Collective policy opinion inequality, however, refers to a relative difference between the opinion congruence of various social groups. Therefore, we require an additional calculation to indicate whether one social group is more congruent with the legislature than the other. To do so, we subtract the collective opinion congruence of a privileged social group from the collective opinion congruence of an underprivileged social group:

$$Inequality\ in\ c.congruence = c.congruence\ (priviliged\ group) - c.congruence\ (underpriveliged\ group)$$

The above two formulas were applied to all policy statements, and the result of this subtraction is the dependent variable in this study, collective policy opinion inequality. When comparing the collective opinion congruence of two social groups, there are three possibilities: 1) the privileged group is more congruent with the legislature than the underprivileged group, 2) the underprivileged group is more congruent with the legislature than the privileged group, and 3) the privileged and underprivileged groups are equally congruent with the legislature. By subtracting the opinion congruence of the underprivileged group from the opinion congruence of the privileged group, our measure of collective policy opinion inequality is positive when privileged groups are more congruent with the legislature than underprivileged groups, negative when underprivileged groups are more congruent with the legislature than privileged groups, and zero when collective opinion congruence is equal.

[6] In addition, we subtract the formula of Golder and Stramski (2010) from 1 so as to have high values reflect high levels of congruence and low values reflect low levels of congruence.

The distinction between privileged and underprivileged voters follows the division of society in various social strata. Social stratification refers to the distribution of resources in a society (Beeghley 2015), and the determinants of one's stratum can be largely traced back to two factors: education and income. Education has a strong impact on the occupation a person is able to attain (J. Jerit 2009) and relates strongly to voters' ability to vote for a congruent party in elections (Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015). Income is related to an individual's wealth and material well-being. In addition, income is the most-used variable in congruence inequality research (see, for instance Flavin 2012; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012) and has been found to be related to certain material interests with regard to social welfare and economic policy (Winters and Page 2009). However, instead of selecting one approach, we choose to include both. Doing so will allow us to test the robustness of our results, and it also constitutes a more thorough test of our hypotheses. Therefore, we calculate 1) the collective policy opinion inequality between lower-educated (voters who have no degree or only an elementary school degree) and higher-educated voters (voters who have a university degree or higher) and 2) the collective policy opinion inequality between the lowest two income deciles and the highest two income deciles. For instance, if lower-educated voters are 40% congruent with the legislature on an issue and higher-educated voters are 60% congruent with the legislature, we subtract the congruence of the former from the congruence of the latter: 60% - 40% = 20%. We conclude that there is a 20% collective policy opinion inequality in favor of higher-educated voters.

The distribution of policy positions of a social group is derived directly from the voter survey. Per social group and per policy statement, we calculate the collective public opinion: the percentage of voters who agree or disagree with a statement. This is important, as many studies have cast doubt on whether voters hold "true" preferences on issues (Converse 2006a; Zaller 1992), and the lack of a neutral category forced these voters to choose a side on the issue. Consequently, several of the positions of voters on the statements have to be considered random and therefore not reflective of an actual position. However, Page and Shapiro (1992) argue that the presence of such non-attitudes are not problematic if one wants to measure collective public opinion. When aggregating public opinion across all voters or a subset of voters, these random answers cancel each other out. Consequently, the measurement of collective public opinion is "largely free of the random error associated with individual attitudes" (p. 16).

The distribution in parliament is calculated using the party leaderships' positions and the seats parties received after the elections of May 25, 2014. The proportion of the legislature that "agrees" or "disagrees" with a policy statement equals the sum of the seats of all parties that agree or disagree with that policy statement. For example, in a parliament with 100 seats, if 3 parties with 10, 15 and 20 seats, respectively, agree with a policy statement, then the proportion of the parliament

that agrees with that policy statement is (10+15+20)/100 = 45%. As there are two possible answers to a policy statement, it follows that 55% of the parliament disagrees with that policy statement.

Our independent variables are the differences in policy position, the policy domains of economic and tax policy and social welfare, and dyadic policy opinion congruence. The *difference in policy position* is the absolute difference between the percentage of voters who agree with a policy statement within a privileged and an underprivileged social group. Its value is 0 when both groups have an equal percentage of voters who agree and disagree with a policy statement, and 100 when all voters of one group agree and all the voters of the other group disagree with a policy statement. For the two policy domain variables, *economic and tax policy* and *social welfare*, we create 2 dichotomous variables indicating whether a statements belongs to a certain policy domain (1) or not (0). To measure differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence, within each social group and for each policy statement we calculate how often voters are congruent with their preferred party. This gives us a percentage of dyadic policy opinion congruence for each statement for each social group. For each policy statement, we then deduct the percentage of dyadic policy opinion congruence in the underprivileged group from the percentage of dyadic policy opinion congruence in the privileged group. The result is a measure of *inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence*. This variable is positive when higher-educated or higher-income voters vote more correctly than lower-educated or lower-income voters, and it is negative when lower-educated or lower-income voters vote more correctly than higher-educated or higher-income voters. Finally, as our policy statements come from different linguistic regions and parliaments, we control for the *language group* (Flemish or Francophone) and the *legislature* (regional or national) in our analyses. Table 5.1 gives an overview of all of the variables.

Table 5.1: Descriptives of all the variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Collective policy opinion inequality (education) (%)	3.59	10.39	-27.17	31.42
Collective policy opinion inequality (income) (%)	3.22	14.4	-41.32	43.27
Difference in policy position (education) (%)	8.79	6.95	0.18	31.42
Difference in policy position (income) (%)	12.48	9.72	0	43.27
Economic and tax policy	0.24	0.43	0	1
Social welfare	0.15	0.36	0	1
Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence (education) (%)	1.16	11.07	-32.03	30.24
Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence (income) (%)	1.29	14.96	-45.41	38.56
Language group (Flemish (1) – Wallonia (2))	1.52	0.5	1	2
Legislature (Federal (1) – regional (2)	1.47	0.5	1	2

Results

Based on a large sample of 229 policy statements, we analyze how often and why privileged groups (higher-educated and/or higher-income voters) are more congruent with the legislature in Belgium than underprivileged groups (lower-educated and/or lower-income voters). When we look at the average values of congruence inequality (Table 5.1), we find them to be significantly different from each other, both for education ($t[228] = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$) and income groups ($t[228] = 3.38$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a bias towards the policy preferences of higher-educated and higher-income voters. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 visualize the collective policy opinion inequality for each individual policy statement for education and income, respectively. Every bar in the figures represents one policy statement, and the height of each bar shows the collective policy opinion inequality. The statements are placed in order of decreasing difference in collective opinion congruence, and the x-axis displays the relative rank order of a policy statement (rank order divided by the total number of policy statements [229]).

It is clear that there is a lot of variation in the degree to which privileged and underprivileged groups' preferences are represented. For instance, regarding the statement "*The ban on smoking should be relaxed in the hotel and catering industry*," higher-educated voters are 31% more congruent with parliament than lower-educated voters, and higher-income voters are 41% more congruent than lower-income voters. With respect to the statement "*The headscarf should be banned for students in formal education*," there are almost no differences between the different groups. Finally, concerning the statement "*The living wage should rise*," collective policy opinion inequality is reversed in favor of unprivileged groups: higher-educated voters are 22% less congruent with parliament than lower-educated voters, and higher-income voters are 36% less congruent than lower-income voters[77]. The aim of this paper is to explain why inequality is higher or lower on some policy statements than on others.

The Figures also shows that country-level determinants need to be complemented with issue-level factors. If country-level determinants were enough, we would arguably find low levels of inequality in congruence across all policy statements. While we do not include country-level variables in the multivariate models below, merely finding (substantial) variation in inequality in collective policy opinion congruence while keeping country-level factors constant shows that there is more going on than country-level variables can explain.

[7] As a robustness check, we examined the difference in opinion congruence between privileged groups and the middle class (middle-educated voters and voters from the two middle income deciles) and found that, while the inequality in congruence is smaller, it is also in favor of the preferences of the higher-educated or higher-incomes groups.

Figure 5.2: Collective policy opinion inequality between higher and lower educated voters

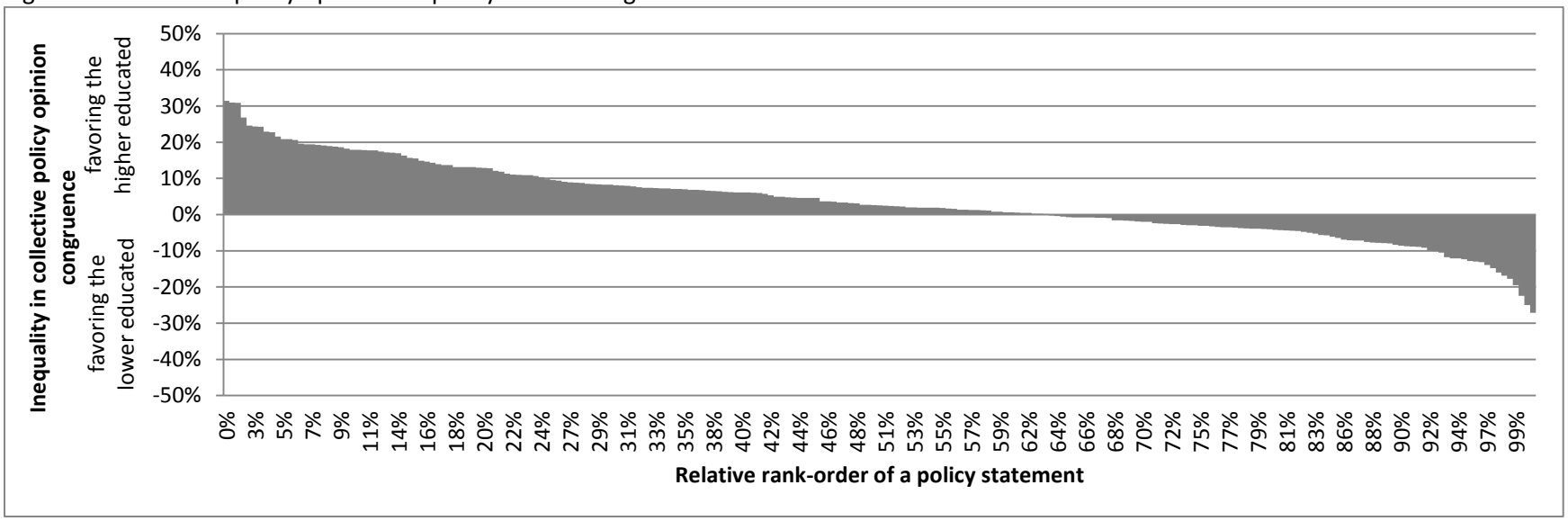


Figure 5.3: Collective policy opinion inequality between higher and lower incomes

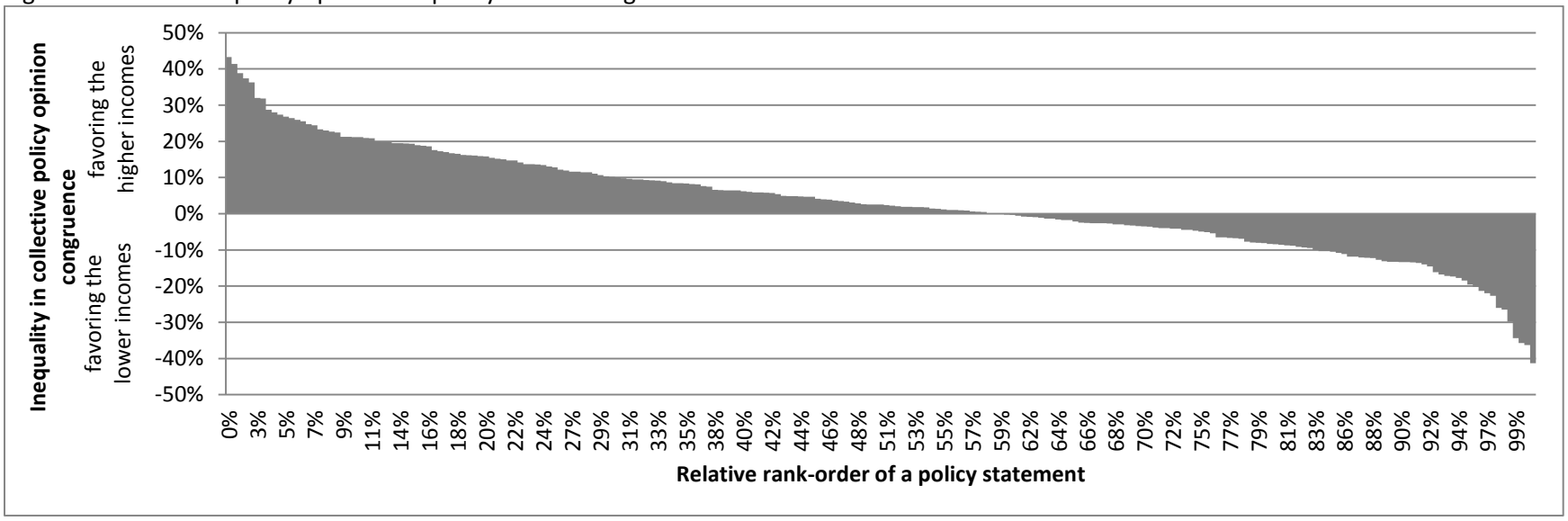


Table 5.2 shows the results of two OLS regression with collective policy opinion inequality between education and income groups as the dependent variables. The difference in opinion between social groups is the strongest predictor of the difference in collective opinion congruence, reaching statistical significance in both model 1 (education) and model 2 (income). More importantly, however, are the signs of the coefficients, which are always positive, indicating that large differences in opinions correlate with more pronounced positive differences in collective opinion congruence, which are in favor of higher-educated or higher-income voters. This supports hypothesis 1.

When we look at the policy domain variables, we find evidence for hypothesis 2 and partial evidence for hypothesis 3. In model 1, for education groups, policy statements related to economic and tax policy coincide with a higher level of collective policy opinion inequality, meaning that the legislatures in Belgium more often prefer the policy positions of higher-educated voters on these issues. On statements related to social welfare, on the other hand, collective policy opinion inequality is lower, indicating a more equal preference representation or a reverse inequality in favor of the policy positions of lower-educated voters. In model 2, for income groups, though all coefficients are in the expected direction, we only find a marginally significant effect for policy statements related to social welfare. We are thus able to confirm hypothesis 2, but for hypothesis 3 we can only confirm congruence inequality between the lower- and higher-educated groups.

We find more consistent evidence for hypothesis 4. The inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower- and higher-educated groups and lower- and higher-income groups is a highly significant predictor of collective policy opinion inequality. In addition, it is one of the strongest predictors of congruence inequality. This indicates that part of the differences in opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged groups is the result of their voting behaviors—specifically, the extent to which their party choices are related to their policy preferences. With this result, we are able to confirm hypothesis 4.

Finally, the type of legislature (regional or national) plays a role in explaining the collective policy opinion inequality between the lower- and higher-educated groups: the regional parliaments seem to be more biased towards higher-educated groups than the national parliament. This could be explained by the fact that the elections for both the regional and national parliaments were held on the same day, May 25, 2014. While they are both normally considered to be first-order elections (Deschouwer 2012), it could be that, because they coincided, the election for the national parliament became more important. This may have given parties and political elites less leeway to deviate from the policy preferences of underprivileged voters on the national level, but more so on the regional level.

The language group has an effect on the inequality between higher- and lower-income groups. In the Francophone language group, the inequality between those groups is significantly lower. This could be explained by the difference between the Flemish and Walloon social-democratic parties. The former has lost much more of its connection to its traditional underprivileged voter base, while the latter is still clearly a *travaillist* party (Coffé 2008). This would suggest that inequality in collective policy opinion congruence not only depends on the choices voters make, as hypothesis 4 predicts, but also on the choices given to privileged and underprivileged groups.

Table 5.2: Explaining collective policy opinion inequality

	Model 1: Education			Model 2: Income		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Difference in policy position	0.40	0.07	***	0.29	0.08	***
Economic and tax policy	0.03	0.01	*	0.02	0.02	
Social welfare	-0.04	0.02	*	-0.05	0.03	†
Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence	0.64	0.10	***	0.43	0.13	***
Flemish language group (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Francophone language group	-0.02	0.01		-0.05	0.02	**
Federal legislature (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Regional legislature	0.04	0.01	***	0.02	0.02	
Constant	-0.06	0.02	**	0.02	0.04	
Adj. R^2	41.13%			18.47%		
N	229			229		

OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; *** = p ≤ .001

To get a better idea of the relations between congruence inequality, differences in policy preferences, and inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence, we calculate the predicted values of collective policy opinion inequality for each value of the two independent variables based on the models in Table 5.2. Figure 5.4 represents the relation between the difference in opinion and collective policy opinion inequality for the education and income groups. It shows that when the policy preferences of the privileged and underprivileged diverge, the collective policy opinion inequality steadily increases, from no difference in collective congruence when groups have the same policy positions up to a difference of 64% and 41% for education and income groups, respectively, when there is a total opinion divergence between the social groups. Collective policy opinion inequality thus increases in favor of the positions of higher-educated and higher-income groups as the opinions diverge more. Figure 5.5 shows the relation between inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence and collective policy opinion inequality. When one social group has voted more correctly than another social group, then the preferences of the former will be better represented than those of the latter. This applies to both privileged and underprivileged groups; both are able to turn congruence inequality in their favor by voting for parties with which they agree in terms of policy.

Figure 5.4: The relation between differences in policy positions and collective policy opinion inequality

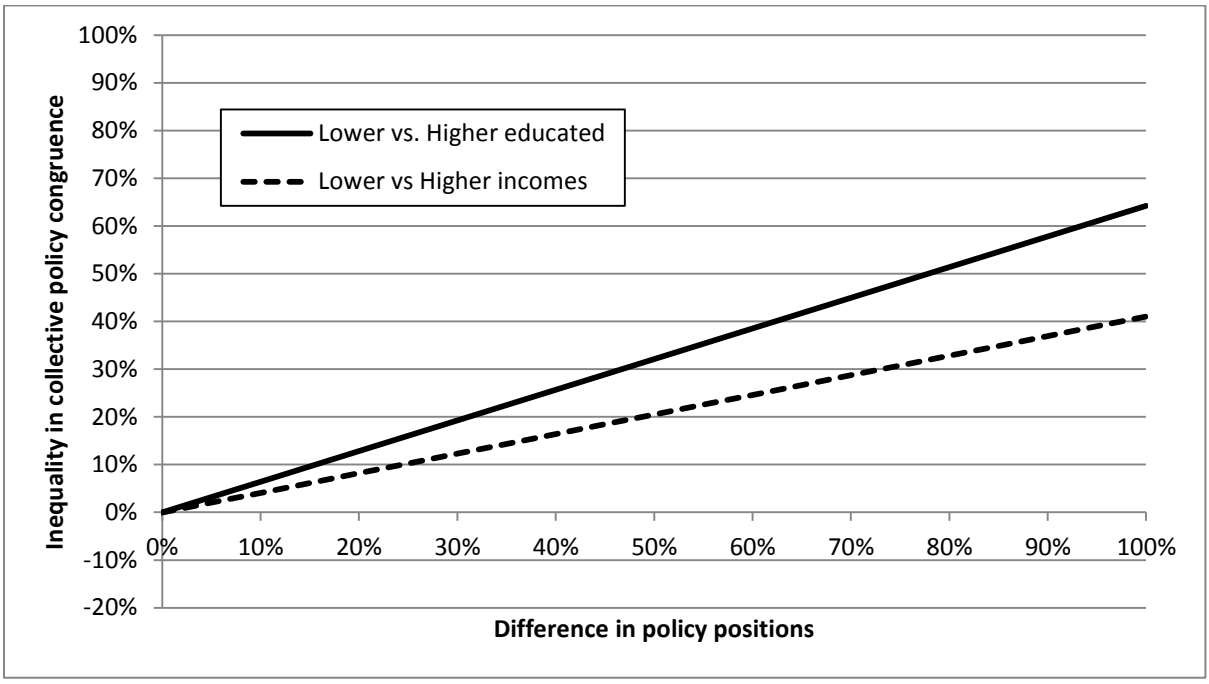
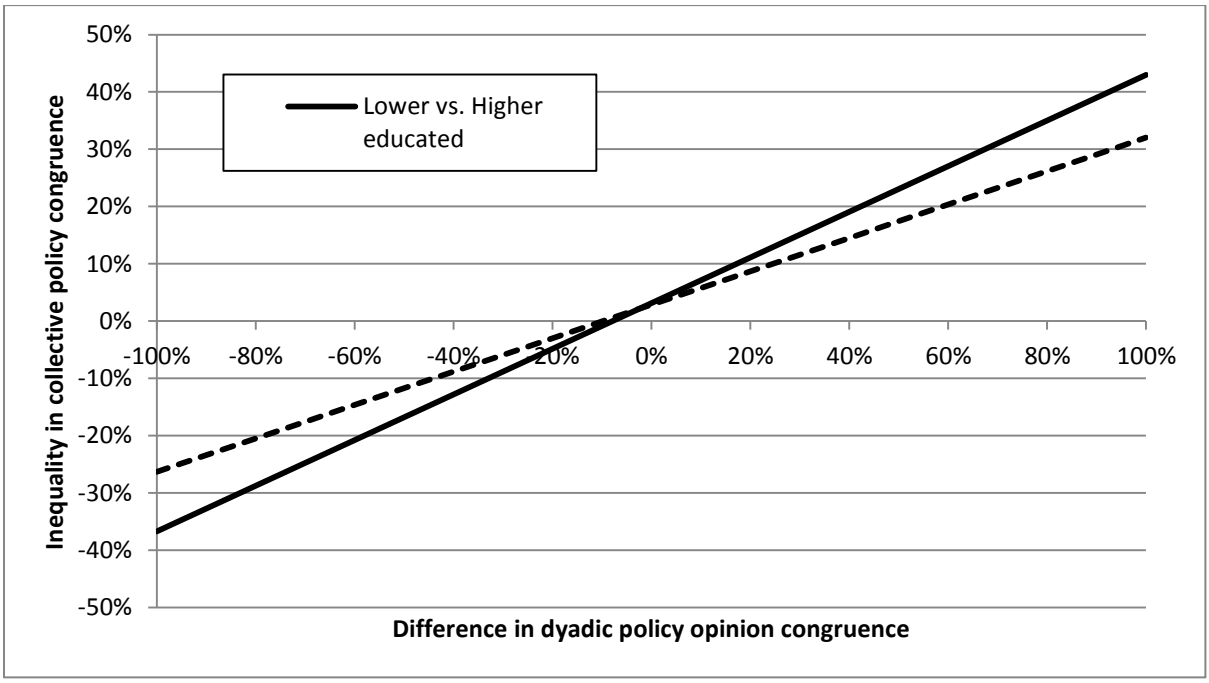


Figure 5.5: The relation between differences in party-dyadic congruence and collective policy opinion inequality



Conclusion

This paper examines to what extent and why the policy preferences of privileged groups (higher-educated and higher-income groups) are better represented in Belgium's regional parliaments and national parliament compared to those of underprivileged groups (lower-educated and lower-income groups). Previous studies identified three major causes of this inequality: one-sided business lobbying, political donations, and a social skew in electoral turnout. These factors, however, are situated at the country level and are unable to explain variation in congruence inequality between issues. The purpose of this paper was to develop a model capable of filling this gap. Our results show that when social groups differ in policy positions, legislatures are more likely to be in line with the preferences of privileged groups than with those of underprivileged groups. A representational bias thus becomes more pronounced as opinions diverge.

In addition, we found that policy domains matter: the preferences of privileged groups are better represented on issues vital to their interests such as economic and tax policies, but on issues related to social welfare, which are key to the interests of underprivileged voters, preference representation is far less skewed towards society's well-off population. Finally, we find that the degree to which groups vote correctly (i.e. for parties that share their policy positions) also affects congruence inequality. When one group votes more correctly than another on an issue, the former's policy positions will be better represented than those of the latter. This relation applies to both privileged and underprivileged groups and indicates that congruence inequality is, to an important degree, self-inflicted by social groups themselves.

Our results raise normative questions. Is the opinion congruence bias towards the preferences of higher-educated or higher-income groups problematic? Research has shown these groups to be the most informed and interested in politics (Hillygus 2005). Our findings may therefore sound pessimistic to proponents of democratic theory, who emphasize an equal representation of policy preferences (Dahl, 1989; Page and Shapiro, 1992), but they could sound encouraging for those who consider large portions of the public, predominantly from the lower strata of society, to be ill-informed (Lippmann 1955). Yet authors of the latter conviction also believe that politics should advance the general interest, and it is, however, uncertain whether an adherence to the policy preferences of privileged groups will lead to the pursuit of the general interest rather than the pursuit of the interests of a specific social group.

The purpose of this study is largely exploratory, distinguishing between country- and issue-level factors of congruence inequality and developing a model for the latter. We believe that future research could build on and expand this model to develop it further. For one, the data on the policy

preferences of voters were collected before an electoral campaign, and there are two reasons to assume that the congruence gap between privileged and underprivileged groups is underestimated. First, while campaigns are known to be information-dense moments (Alvarez 1998b), research has suggested that campaigns are more likely to benefit already knowledgeable voters (usually the higher-educated or higher-income ones) instead of voters who stand to benefit most from the information disseminated in a campaign (Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter, 2015). The gap in dyadic policy opinion congruence—and, by extension, the inequality in collective congruence—between privileged and underprivileged groups that exists before the campaign may even be larger after it. Second, we cannot exclude the possibility that, on some issues, and in anticipation of the electoral campaign and the media and public scrutiny it entails, parties may take policy positions in order to be more congruent with underprivileged groups. Scholarly attention should therefore also focus on inequality in collective congruence between elections. We would expect the differences between privileged and underprivileged groups to be even higher than those found in the present study.

In addition, while we attempt to take into account the saliency of issues by identifying policy domains that touch upon the vital interests of privileged or underprivileged groups, they remain crude measures. Future studies should try to include more precise measures of salience. This could be done, for instance, by looking at the media attention given to the various policy issues, or by measuring the importance of each policy issue to the various groups. This could give more insight into why, on certain policy issues, parliamentary opinion favors the position of higher-educated or higher-income groups.

In conclusion, the focus of the literature on country-level characteristics threatens to underexpose differences in the congruence inequality between issues. By distinguishing between a country- and an issue-level model, we believe that we have presented a novel and complementary way to start thinking about congruence and representational inequality.

Chapter VI: Inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence: a matter of choices made or choices given?

Abstract

Studies on the agreement, or congruence, between voters and parties have often found more congruence between higher educated voters and the parties for which they vote than between lower educated voters and their party selections. The literature has offered two explanations for this finding. The first argues that lower educated voters select less congruent parties at the ballot box, despite the presence of a better alternative. The second posits that they lack policy offers for which to vote. However, no attempts have been made to detangle these two explanations. This paper seeks to do just that. Based on a dataset containing the positions of Belgian voters and parties on 23 policy statements, we find that voters' party choices matter most. However, given Belgium's fragmented party landscape and compulsory voting laws–which increase the likelihood of policy offers attuned to lower educated voters, the education bias in parties' policy offers is surprisingly high.

This chapter is based on an article written by myself and published in Representation.

Introduction

The mandate model of democracy emphasizes the proper representation of voters' policy preferences on the part of representatives. Voters should vote for parties that share their policy views, and in turn, elected officials should defend the platform on which they campaigned once elected. Pitkin (1967) called this "substantive representation," representatives making present the policy preferences of their voters. High levels of agreement between voters and representatives is seen as a sign of a healthy democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005). Unsurprisingly, a large body of literature has been devoted to what is often called "opinion congruence" (Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015; Agnieszka Walczak and Brug 2013; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). Opinion congruence matters for a simple reason: If voters and their representatives have similar policy positions, it increases the likelihood that these preferences will be converted into actual policies (Dalton 1988; Thomassen 1994).

While there are several ways of approaching opinion congruence, many studies have focused on "dyadic" opinion congruence, the correspondence between the policy preferences of a voter and his or her choice of a party (see Andeweg 2011; Weissberg 1978a). This concept is hereafter referred to as *dyadic policy opinion congruence*. The responsible party model argues that dyadic policy opinion congruence is achieved when two conditions are met: 1) voters select the most congruent party at the ballot box and 2) parties offer sufficient policy alternatives. However, studies in this area have often found that higher educated voters are more congruent with their selected party than lower educated voters are. This paper seeks to explain why the responsible party model is less likely to break down for higher educated voters. To what extent are differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters the result of the latter being better equipped to vote for a congruent party or the former missing parties that offer congruent sets of policy preferences? This is the question that this paper seeks to answer. It does so by looking at the case of Belgium. Belgium represents a critical context in which to study educational biases in parties' policy offers and the correctness of the voters' party choices. Its fragmented party landscape, increasing the number of (mostly left-wing) party choices for voters, and compulsory voting laws make it less likely that the parties' policy stances are more attuned to the positions of higher educated voters. At the same time, the multiplicity of political parties increases the cognitive burden of finding the most congruent party, a burden that most likely affects lower educated voters the most.

Based on an integrated dataset containing Belgian voters and parties' policy preferences on 23 policy statements, we find that higher educated voters indeed vote in a more "correct" manner. At the same time, our results demonstrate that even when both higher and lower educated voters select

the most opinion-congruent party, the former are still in closer agreement with their party choice than are the latter. Differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence are thus the result of both lower educated voters' own behavior and parties' lack of policy offers for that group. Furthermore, we find that the majority of the differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters are explained by the correctness of voters' party choices. Only a quarter of the variance is explained by an education bias in parties' offers. Given that such a bias is less likely to be found in Belgium, its magnitude is surprising. We discuss the normative implications of these findings in the conclusion.

Theory and hypotheses

Policy opinion congruence between voters and parties is founded in the mandate model of political representation. It envisions representatives as dutiful agents of their principles, carrying out—or at least defending—their constituents' policy preferences (Converse and Pierce 1986). To explain the origins of policy opinion congruence, scholars have frequently cited the responsible party model. According to that model, policy opinion congruence is based on two main requirements (Adams 2001; Pierce 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999):

1. A voter's party choice is policy based. The responsible model requires voters to have developed policy positions. In addition, voters need to be informed about political parties' policy positions, and they must compare their own positions with those offered by the parties. Finally, voters' party choices need to be based on the congruence between their own policy positions and the policy positions of the various parties. The party with the most congruent set of policy preferences should receive a voter's vote. In other words, a voter's party choice needs to be based on policy. If a voter's party choice is not based on information indicating where parties stand on issues, then there is little reason to expect policy opinion congruence between a voter and his or her party choice.

2. Parties offer distinct policy alternatives. In order to have meaningful elections, voters need to have a sufficient choice in policy alternatives (Dalton 1985; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). If there is no substantial disagreement between parties, then voters cannot make a meaningful choice. In such cases, they cannot influence policy through elections. At the very least, no subgroup of voters should be structurally more bereft of a congruent party choice than another subgroup.

A lack of dyadic policy opinion congruence can thus be the result of either 1) voters not making policy based party choices or 2) voters not being able to vote for a congruent party due to the lack of a policy alternative. However, certain voter groups are more likely to experience this collapse of the responsible party model, along with the resulting incongruence between voter and party. Previous research on dyadic policy opinion congruence has revealed that higher educated voters more closely agree with the parties for whom they vote than do lower educated voters (Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk 2008; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). Indeed, both of the responsible party model's requirements are more likely to be fulfilled for higher educated voters. Studies have suggested that the party choices of lower educated voters are less policy based than those of their higher educated counterparts. Higher educated voters know more about politics (Grönlund and Milner 2006), are more aware of parties' policy positions (e.g., Steenbergen, Edwards, and Vries 2007), and are better able to process political information provided by the media (Hillygus 2005; Scheufele 2000).

In addition, higher educated voters have more stable policy positions, suggesting more developed policy positions, and they are more likely to change their party preference during an electoral campaign (Lesschaeve and Meulewaeter 2015), indicating that the information they receive on parties' positions has an effect on their party choices. In terms of the responsible party model, higher educated voters' party choices are more likely to be policy based: They have better-developed policy positions, and they are better equipped to compare their policy positions with those offered by parties. As a result, we expect them to make a more congruent, or a more "correct," party choices in an election (also see Rosema and de Vries 2011b):

Hypothesis 1: Higher educated voters vote more "correctly" than lower educated voters.

In addition, parties' policy positions are more likely to better match to those of higher educated voters. Politicians and candidates are often higher educated themselves. Higher educated persons often make up more than 70% of the MPs in a legislature (Bovens and Wille 2011). Due to their background, they view the world through the eyes of higher educated voters and are thus more likely to have similar policy preferences. Parties can also deliberately cater to the preferences of higher educated voters. Previous research has consistently indicated that lower educated voters are less likely to vote in an election (Bovens and Wille 2010; Gallego 2010). Parties could therefore adopt the policy preferences of citizens who are more likely to vote (i.e., higher educated voters). Returning to the responsible party model, parties do not offer sufficient alternatives for lower educated voters. The second requirement of the responsible party model is thus also more likely to be met for higher educated voters. As a result, we expect that even if all voters select the most opinion congruent

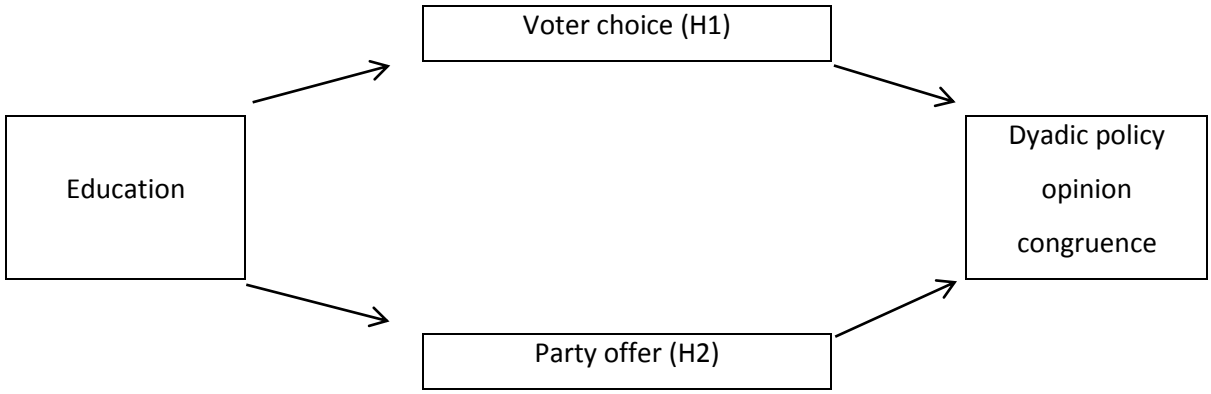
party possible—thus neutralizing differences between lower and higher educated voters in the correctness of their party choices—dyadic policy opinion congruence levels would still be higher for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters:

Hypothesis 2: The maximum possible dyadic policy opinion congruence is higher for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters.

This theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 6.1. The relation between education and dyadic policy opinion congruence is mediated by the correctness of the vote choice and the offer made by the parties. While these two explanations are not new to the literature on dyadic policy opinion congruence (see Walczak and van der Brug 2013), no efforts have been made to distinguish between the two. To our knowledge, no study has attempted to study how and to what degree differences between lower and higher educated voters concerning the correctness of voters' party choices and the limitations of parties' policy offers contribute to differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. Yet, the distinction between the two mechanisms of voter-party opinion congruence substantially affects how we understand it. We therefore seek to help fill this gap in the literature. However, due to lack of previous studies on this topic, we are unable to generate expectations regarding the size of the two mediation effects displayed in Figure 6.1. Therefore, instead of hypotheses, we formulate a research question.

RQ: To what extent are differences between lower and higher educated voters in terms of dyadic policy opinion congruence the result of differences in the correctness of their party choices or differences in the maximum level of dyadic policy opinion congruence?

Figure 6.1: Overview of the theoretical model



Data and methods

We use two sets of data to test our hypotheses and answer our research question. The first is the voter survey conducted as part of the Belgian Election Study. This data was collected in the run-up to the Belgian elections on May 25, 2014. Voters were selected on the basis of a random sample from the national register, and the interviews were conducted through computer-assisted telephonic interviewing. This data collection effort was the second wave of the election study. In total, 4,511 eligible voters were contacted for the first wave of the study; 2,019 participated, for a response rate of 45%. In total, 1,532 of those respondents took part in the second wave as well—a response rate of 75% for second wave. This study only uses data from the second wave. In the interviews, voters were asked to react to 23 concrete policy statements. Voters could either "agree" or "disagree" with a policy statement. The interviews also enquired as to the party for which the respondent had voted. In preparation for the interviews, all voters were sent a blank copy of their election ballots, which they were asked to fill in immediately after voting to reduce recall errors.

The second dataset comes from a party leadership survey. The same policy statements presented to voters were also presented to the leaderships of all political parties in Belgium with at least one representative in either the regional or national parliament before the elections on May 25, 2014. Eleven parties fit that criterion. Belgium is a small consociational democracy in Western Europe (Deschouwer 2009). As in many other countries (Dalton, 1985; Rose, 1974), citizens are represented by political parties rather than by individual candidates or MPs. Furthermore, Belgium is widely considered to be a good example of a "partitocracy" (Deschouwer, de Winter, and della Porta 1996), a system in which parties constitute the primary representative actors. The almost perfect party cohesion in Belgium exemplifies that characterization (Depauw 2003). When MPs have to vote on a piece of legislation, they do so according to the party line. As was the case for voters, party leaderships could only react to the statements with "agree" or "disagree."

The parties' positions were collected in March 2014, two months prior to the voter survey. That raised the question of whether the parties could have changed their positions during that time. It is possible, but highly unlikely. All parties organize a congress before the start of a campaign to decide on their party manifesto, which outlines their positions on a whole range of issues. The final manifesto has to be approved by party members by a majority vote. This makes it very difficult for a party's leadership to change its positions afterwards, during the campaign. The most they can do is *conceal* their position during a campaign; they cannot change it.

The next question pertained to whether the 23 policies are representative of the universe of policy issues in Belgium. There are several reasons to assume this is the case. First, we have a large number

of statements per party. Second, all the major policy domains are represented by the 23 policy statements. Third, the policy statements refer to debates that were relevant during the run-up to the 2014 election. They include many issues that have been widely discussed in the media, meaning that the encompassed the most important issues of the day. A list of all the policy statements can be found in the Appendix in Table A1.4

This study, however, involves a single country, Belgium. It is likely that answer to our research question–regarding the extent to which differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence are the result of differences in correct voting and differences in policy alternatives—, is likely to be dependent on the characteristics of that case. Thus, the question arises as to how certain characteristics of the Belgian political system affect our results. First, Belgium has a very fragmented party landscape (Deschouwer 2009). An increase in the number of relevant parties increases the number of available policy alternatives. As each party tries to carve out a niche in the political landscape, the likelihood increases of some parties offering a set of policy positions that suit the policy preferences of lower educated voters. At the same time, the higher the number of parties, the higher the burden on voters to inform themselves about the positions of all parties and compare those positions with their own. This burden is likely to be heavier for lower educated voters. As a result, in a fragmented party system, lower educated voters are expected to find it more difficult to vote "correctly," with the gap between lower and higher educated voters increasing.

Second, voting is compulsory in Belgium. One of the reasons why parties are less likely to offer policy alternatives attuned to the preferences of lower educated voters is that these voters are less likely to vote. Catering to the preferences of lower educated voters is thus not a strategy that will likely result in electoral gains if those voters do not go out to vote on election day. Belgium, however, has no educational skew in terms of electoral turnout figures (De Winter and Ackaert 1993; De Winter and Johan Ackaert 1994; Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998). Consequently, parties have a clear incentive to offer sets of policy positions congruent with those of lower educated voters, making a bias in policy alternatives less likely.

In sum, Belgium is a most-likely case for finding educational differences in correct voting but a least-likely case for finding an education bias in parties' policy offers. Our study thus focuses on a case at the extreme end at the correct voting/policy offer continuum, a case in which correct voting is most likely to be an important factor and in which the presence of sufficient policy alternatives is least likely to play a role in explaining inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. This makes Belgium a critical case for our research question. On the basis of our findings, we can develop expectations about other counties and political systems. The size of the educational bias in parties' policy

positions, along with its impact on differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters in Belgium, is a conservative estimate of what we would find elsewhere. If this study finds that the lack of policy alternatives attuned to the preferences of lower educated voters is substantial and plays a significant role in explaining inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence, then it would be even more important in other settings.

There are three dependent variables for our analyses: the correctness of a voter's party choice (H1), a voter's maximum level of dyadic policy opinion congruence (H2), and dyadic policy opinion congruence (RQ). However, we need to calculate them in the opposite order: first the third, then the second and then the first dependent variable. To measure a voter's *dyadic policy opinion congruence*, we compute, for each policy statement, whether the voter's position matches that of his or her party choice (1) or not (0). Then, we calculate the average across all 23 policy statements and multiply the outcome by 100. The result is the percentage of agreement between a voter and his or her party choice.

To calculate the second dependent variable, we repeat the above process for each of the other parties.[1] For each voter, the highest possible level of dyadic policy opinion congruence is *a voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence*. Finally, to measure the first dependent variable, *the correctness of a voter's party choice*, we divide a voter's dyadic policy opinion congruence by that voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence. If a voter agrees with his or her actual party choice on 70% of the policy statements but could have voted for a party with which he or she shared 90% of the policy positions, then that voter reached 78% of the maximum policy congruence, or voted 78% correctly.

The main dependent variable in our analysis is *education*. Voters are divided into three education categories. Lower education voters have no or only an elementary school degree. Middle education refers to those who had finished their secondary education. Higher educated voters have a graduate or university degree. We control for gender, age,[2] income (deciles), and region (Flanders or Wallonia). Table 6.1 gives an overview of the descriptive statistics for all the variables.

[1] Due to the split party landscape in Belgium, Flemish voters can only vote for Flemish parties (which constituted 6 of the 11 parties in our sample), and Francophone voters can only vote for Francophone parties (which constituted 5 of the 11 parties in our sample). Therefore, when calculating a voter's maximum party-voter opinion congruence, we only take into account the parties for which that voter actually could have voted.

[2] We control for age to consider the relation between age and education level. To further incorporate this relation, we repeated all analyses described below with age squared as an independent variable (not reported). However, this did not alter the results.

Table 6.1: Descriptive statistics for the variables

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Dyadic policy opinion congruence	0.57	0.12	0.22	0.87
The correctness of a voter's party choice	0.84	0.16	0.29	1
A voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence	0.68	0.07	0.48	0.91
Education level:	2.12	0.80	1	3
Lower education (1)	0.27	0.44	0	1
Middle education (2)	0.34	0.47	0	1
Higher education (3)	0.39	0.49	0	1
Gender (male [1] – female [2])	1.48	0.50	1	2
Age (years)	49	17	18	84
Income (lowest decile [1] – highest decile [10])	5.74	2.48	1	10
Region (Flanders [1] - Wallonia [2])	1.45	0.50	1	2

Results

Our first hypothesis predicts that higher educated voters make more opinion congruent party choices. From a policy perspective, they vote more correctly given the available party options. We test this assertion, and Table 6.2 provides the results. We indeed see that higher educated voters make more opinion congruent party choices during elections. On average, voters achieve 84% of the maximum possible policy opinion congruence. However, for lower educated voters, the figure was 82%, while for higher educated voters it stands at 88%, a 6% difference. Higher educated voters thus voted for parties that are substantially closer to the most congruent potential party choice than those selected by their lower educated counterparts. This result clearly confirms Hypothesis 1.

Table 6.2: An analysis of the correctness of a voter's party choice

	B	S.E.	Sig.
Lower education (ref. cat.)	---		
Middle education	0.31	(1.31)	
Higher education	5.84	(1.30)	***
Male			
Female	-1.72	(0.95)	†
Age	0.02	(0.03)	
Income	0.14	(0.20)	
Flanders			
Wallonia	-2.63	(0.97)	**
Constant	86.47	(2.95)	***
N	1153		
R^2	3.51%		

Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

The second hypothesis holds that the sets of policy positions offered by parties are more attuned to the policy positions of higher educated voters than those of lower educated voters. If this is true, then the maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence would be higher for higher educated voters and lower for lower educated voters. That would mean that even if both higher and lower educated voters vote for the party with which they are in the closest agreement, the former are still be more congruent with their party choices than the latter. Table 6.3 shows the results of the analysis of voters' maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence. In accordance with Hypothesis 2, the maximum level of dyadic policy opinion congruence is higher for higher educated voters than for lower educated voters. Thus, regardless of the correctness of voters' party choices, lower educated voters are at a structural disadvantage when it comes to voting for the party that best matches their stances. On average, higher educated voters agree 2% more with their most congruent party choice than lower educated voters do. While the difference is small, it does confirm Hypothesis 2.

Table 6.3: An analysis of a voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence

	B	S.E.	Sig.
Lower education (ref. cat.)	---		
Middle education	-0.06	(0.54)	
Higher education	1.55	(0.58)	**
Male			
Female	-1.08	(0.42)	*
Age	-0.03	(0.01)	*
Income	0.06	(0.09)	
Flanders			
Wallonia	2.42	(0.42)	***
Constant	66.04	(1.31)	***
N	1153		
R^2	4.70%		

Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

The question remains as to the extent to which differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters are the result of the former voting more correctly or of parties having sets of policy positions more attuned to the preferences of higher educated voters. We try to answer this question through mediation analysis. The dependent variable in the next regression analyses[3] is dyadic policy opinion congruence, the percentage of policy statements on which a voter agrees with his or her party choice. In the first model, we only include social background factors, such as education, gender, or age. This gives us an idea of the magnitude of the total difference in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. The

[3] We repeated the analyses with structural equation modeling but found identical results as those reported in Tables 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4.

next two models add the dependent variables listed in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 as independent variables. This gives us an idea of how the correctness of a voter's party choice and a voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence affect party-voter agreement.

The logic behind this approach can be explained on the basis of the example provided in Table 6.4. In the example, there are two voters with the same low level of dyadic policy opinion congruence: 43%. For the first voter, the maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence is 47%, which is hardly better the voter's current party choice. Indeed, that voter's party choice is already very close to being the most congruent, or the most correct, possible party choice. Regardless what party that voter selects on election day, the dyadic policy opinion congruence will be low. Therefore, his or her low level of dyadic policy opinion congruence is primarily the result of a lack of congruent party choices, and not of the correctness of his or her party choice.

For the second voter, however, the maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence is 83%, which is significantly higher the voter's current party choice. The second voter therefore has plenty of room to improve his or her dyadic policy opinion congruence: His or her party choice is only 53%. correct. By selecting a different party, his or her dyadic policy opinion congruence could improve greatly. Hence, his or her low level of dyadic policy opinion congruence is primarily the result of the incorrectness of his or her party choice, and not of a lack of congruent party choices.

Table 6.4: Example of a mediation analysis

Voter ID	Dyadic policy opinion congruence	Correctness of party choice	Maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence
1	43.48%	90.91%	47.83%
2	43.48%	52.63%	82.61%

It is important to note that explaining dyadic policy opinion congruence in terms of the correctness of vote choices and the maximum dyadic congruence mathematically results in a model explaining nearly 100% of the variance in dyadic policy opinion congruence. Indeed, in the example in Table 6.4, dyadic policy opinion congruence is the product of the correctness of the voter's party choice and the maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence. However, the goal is not to arrive at a model explaining the variance. Rather, it is to uncover how important each mediator is in explaining differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters.

The mediation analysis is shown in Table 6.5. For model 1, the coefficient of the higher education dummy demonstrates that higher educated voters agree, on average, 5.51% more with their party choice than lower educated voters do, which are the reference category. They share their party choice's policy position 59.9% of the time. Lower educated voters, on the other hand, agree with

their party choice on 54.4% of the policy statements. How then does this difference come about? Model 2 includes the correctness of a voter's party choice. That variable's effect on dyadic policy opinion congruence is strong, positive, and significant. More importantly, if we compare the coefficients of the higher education dummy in models 1 and 2, the difference in dyadic policy opinion congruence declines from 5.51% to 1.87%.

For model 3, we add a voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence. Unsurprisingly, this model now explains almost all of the variance. Again, the variable has a strong, positive, and significant effect on dyadic policy opinion congruence. The difference between lower and higher educated voters further decreased to 0.16%, becoming statistically insignificant. The complete mediation model is illustrated in Figure 6.2. As the total difference between the correctness of higher and lower educated voters' party choices was 5.84% (found in the model 1 in Table 6.2), and as the relation between the correctness of a voter's party choice and dyadic policy opinion congruence was 0.69 (found in model 3 in Table 6.5), the correctness of a voter's party choice explains 4.05% (5.84*0.69) of the 5.51% total difference in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters, or 74% (4.05/5.51). The total difference in maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence between higher and lower educated voters is 1.51% (found in model 1, Table 6.3), and the relation between the correctness of a voter's party choice and dyadic policy opinion congruence is 0.84 (found in model 3 in Table 6.5). Therefore, voters' maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence explains 1.27% (1.51*0.84) of the 5.51% total difference in dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters, or 24% (1.27/5.51).

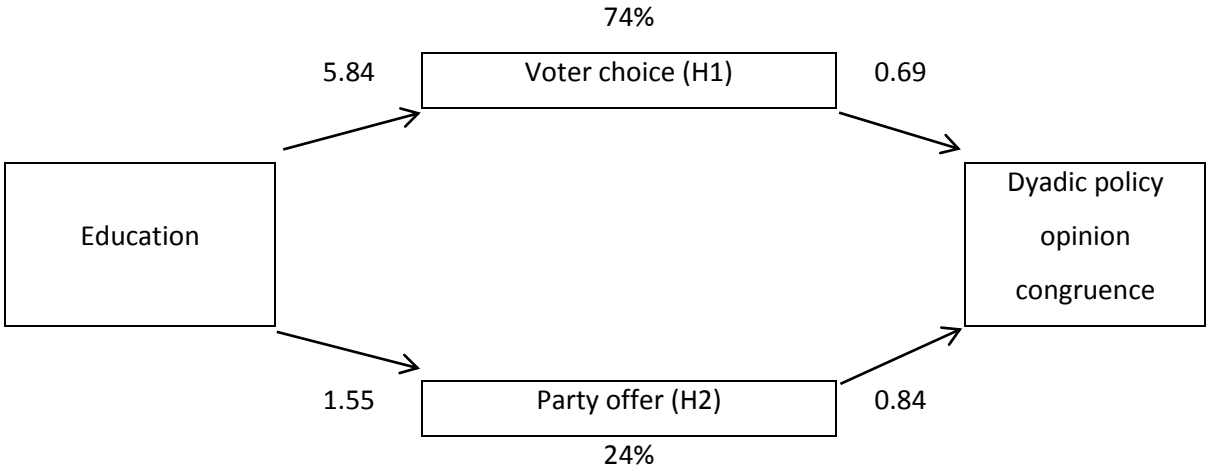
Voters' choices in the voting booth thus matter a great deal in Belgium, more so than the lack of policy alternatives. However, this was to be expected in context such as the Belgian one. First, Belgium's very fragmented party landscape increases the likelihood of voters finding a party with congruent policy preferences. Secondly, voting is compulsory, which gives parties an incentive to offer policy alternatives attuned to the lower educated voters' preferences. It is thus remarkable that even in a least-likely case, almost a quarter of the differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence are explained by a lack of policy alternatives for lower educated voters.

Table 6.5: Explaining dyadic policy opinion congruence through the correctness of a voter's party choice and the maximum level of policy opinion congruence

	Model 1: only social background factors			Model 2: including the correctness of a voter's party choice			Model 3: including a voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Correctness of a voter's party choice				0.62	(0.01)	***	0.69	(0.00)	***
Voter's maximum dyadic policy opinion congruence							0.84	(0.01)	***
Lower education (ref. cat.)	---			---			---		
Middle education	0.27	(0.92)		0.08	(0.44)		0.10	(0.10)	
Higher education	5.51	(0.95)	***	1.87	(0.49)	***	0.16	(0.10)	
Male									
Female	-2.11	(0.69)	**	-1.04	(0.36)	**	-0.01	(0.08)	
Age	-0.01	(0.02)		-0.02	(0.01)	†	0.00	(0.00)	
Income	0.16	(0.15)		0.08	(0.08)		0.01	(0.02)	
Flanders									
Wallonia	0.05	(0.70)		1.69	(0.36)	***	-0.17	(0.07)	*
Constant	57.00	(2.12)		3.10	(1.44)	*	-58.61	(0.66)	
N	1153			1153			1153		
Adjusted R^2	5.66%			74.61%			98.95%		

Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

Figure 6.2: Results of the mediation analysis of the difference in party-dyadic policy opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters



Conclusion

This chapter examined the extent to which differences between lower and higher educated voters are the result of the latter making more policy based party choices or the former lacking a policy alternative for which to vote. Based on an integrated dataset containing Belgian voters and parties' policy positions on 23 policy statements, we found that lower educated voters are less likely than higher educated vote for the party with which they most closely agree most. From the perspective of opinion congruence, lower educated voters thus vote less correctly than higher educated voters. At the same time, even if lower and higher educated voters select the most congruent party, lower educated voters are still be in less close agreement with their party choice than higher educated voters are. In other words, lower educated voters lack parties that share their policy positions. Finally, through mediation analysis, we discovered that the correctness of a voter's party choice accounts for three-quarters of the differences in party-voter opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. The lack of policy alternatives for lower educated voters explains 24% of the gap in opinion congruence between those two groups.

While our results are convincing, the main shortcoming of this study is that it is based on a single case. Belgium has a very fragmented party landscape and compulsory voting. Such a party landscape made finding an educational bias in parties' policy offers less likely. Compulsory voting contributes to this effect by incentivizing parties to develop policy alternative attuned to lower educated voters. It does so by guarantying their inclusion in the voting process. On the other hand, the multitude of party options makes it more difficult, especially for lower educated voters, to make the most congruent party choices.

Knowing this, however, we can speculate on the generalizability of our results. If Belgium is a least-likely case for finding a difference in the maximum party-voter opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters, then chances are that the gap found in this study is even more pronounced in other settings. In countries with a less fragmented party landscape or lacking a compulsory voting system, lower educated voters might be at even greater disadvantage when it comes to finding an opinion congruent party. In that respect, the educational bias in the policy alternatives offered by parties can be considered to be quite high for a country such as Belgium.

In sum, we do not claim that our results are simply transposable to other contexts. That said, the approach and mechanisms suggested by this study suggested might offer a useful way to start thinking about the opinion congruence between voters and parties and associated differences between lower and higher educated voters. The measures that we employ permit a more in-depth

analysis of how dyadic policy opinion congruence comes about. Furthermore, while much has been written on the relation between electoral institutions and voter-representative congruence (see Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010), very little work has examined the potential moderating effect of these institutions on education differences in dyadic policy opinion congruence. Future research should therefore investigate how electoral systems moderate the mediations found in this study: the availability of policy alternatives and ease or difficulty with which voters can find a party with matching policy positions.

Our findings also raise normative issues. If lower educated voters' policy preferences are less represented in politics due to the fact that they voted for parties with which they disagree, then the inequality between lower and higher educated voters can be considered to primarily be "self-inflicted." After all, parties are not biased towards the preferences of higher educated voters. If, on the other hand, there are fewer policy alternatives for lower educated voters, it points towards a rigged game. Political parties' policy offers extend an advantage to higher educated voters. In that case, parties that, according the mandate perspective on political representation should serve as a bridge between public preferences and public policy, would not be functioning as neutral transmitters but as biased filters. Our study has demonstrated that while making the most congruent choice matters, even in a fragmented party system with compulsory voting, lower educated voters can find themselves at a structural disadvantage when looking for a political party with congruent policy positions.

Chapter VII: The Matthew Effect in Electoral Campaigns

Abstract

Policy congruence refers to the degree of policy position agreement between voters and their party. Better policy congruence leads to better representation. This study deals with changes in policy congruence during an electoral campaign; more specifically it tackles the question whether differences in policy congruence between the higher and lower educated may increase during campaigns. Based on novel panel evidence with an extensive battery of policy statements included in the national election study in Belgium in 2014 combined with a survey of party leaders using the same items, we find that policy congruence is dynamic and changes through the campaign. Inequality in policy congruence does increase through the campaign. More than the lowly educated, the highly educated profit from the campaign to increase their policy congruence. The reason for the increased inequality is that the highly educated are less loyal to their initially preferred party and switch parties more often during the campaign than the lower educated. Our evidence also suggests that the higher educated are more sensitive to potential gains in policy congruence to be made by changing party; more than the lower educated, they switch parties because this may increase their policy congruence. In sum, the campaign produces a Matthew effect. Those already having a higher policy congruence increase their congruence even further, while those with a lower congruence to start with do not make any significant progress and do not profit from the campaign.

This chapter is based on an article written by prof. Stefaan Walgrave and myself, and is published in Electoral Studies.

'For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath' Matthew 25:29, King James Version

Introduction

A key feature of mass democracy is representation: the elected are expected to represent the preferences of their electors. Pitkin (1969) has coined the term 'substantive' representation to refer to this mechanism linking the popular will with policy output. One way of studying substantive representation empirically is by examining the extent to which voters and their representatives share the same policy preferences. The underlying idea is simple: the more voters and their representatives care about the same issues and fancy the same policies regarding those issues, the higher the chance that the elected will effectively represent the voters in their actual political decision-making (Dalton, 2014; Thomassen, 1994). High levels of citizen-elite agreement are considered to be good for democracy and therefore policy congruence has become a central topic in political science with an impressive body of empirical work—some even consider it to be the single most important indicator of democratic health (Diamond, Morlino, and American Political Science Association. 2005). This study deals with one form of agreement between citizens and political that has received ample attention, namely *voter-party opinion congruence*[1]; this is the extent to which voters' policy preferences correspond to that of the party they are voting for. Notwithstanding the impressive size of the opinion congruence research domain, several important questions remain.

First, there are no studies investigating opinion congruence *during an electoral campaign* in a panel design. As far as we know, all existing research has had cross-sectional designs often comparing aggregate policy congruence across several countries (e.g. Huber and Bingham-Powell 1994; Rosema and de Vries 2011a) or across parties (e.g. Belchior 2010; Karyotis, Rüdig, and Judge 2014). Note that there is some work that examines how parties, not voters, change their policy positions between elections (for an overview, see: Adams 2012) but whether and how voters update their preferences within a campaign is uncharted territory. Yet, knowing that people's policy and party preferences change more generally, it is very likely that voters' policy congruence varies during a campaign as well. A similar argument is made by Dalton and colleagues (2011) who state that substantive representation is a dynamic process and that voters and parties mutually adjust over time. But extant

[1] The term 'voter-party opinion congruence'—or simply 'opinion congruence'—refers in this chapter to the extent to which voters vote for the party they agree most with. Its meaning is therefore similar to the concept of 'correct voting' used in chapter six.

work has examined opinion congruence as being something static and not as a dynamic phenomenon, at least not from the voters' side. From a dynamic point of view, though, and from a democratic perspective as well, elections are important moments: they offer citizens the opportunity to convey their preferences to decision makers by picking out the best matching party/candidate. Yet, while campaigns are dense information moments, making us expect opinion congruence changes to happen in particular during those times, we have no real clue whether campaigns actually increase (or decrease) opinion congruence and, if so, via which mechanisms these changes occur.

Second, as most studies did not focus on individual voters but instead drew on aggregate evidence dealing with countries or with parties/candidates, we hardly know to what extent and how opinion congruence varies across voters. More precisely, while the general research domain of *inequality* and representation is huge and expanding (e.g. Soroka and Wlezien 2008b), the inequality issue seems to have been almost entirely ignored by students of opinion congruence more specifically (for two exceptions, see: Belchior 2012; A. Walczak and van der Brug 2013). This study specifically deals with education inequality. While there are other forms of inequality, for example income inequality (see for example: Bartels 2008b), we will argue that education is intrinsically linked with the mechanisms of campaign learning and priming that we expect to affect opinion congruence. Moreover, education remains one of the key sources of inequality in most advanced democracies (Esping-Andersen 2005). Do the better educated display higher levels of opinion congruence than their less educated colleagues? We hardly know the answer to that important question but the scant available work suggests that the lower-educated are in effect less well represented (A. Walczak and van der Brug 2013). As the better-off are, on average, more interested in politics and as they, as a consequence, are better informed about the positions the different parties/candidates have on offer, it is plausible that they display higher opinion congruence.

The study sets out to tackle these two questions regarding opinion congruence between voters and the party they vote for. We draw on novel data from Belgium, a small European country with a fragmented party system (Deschouwer 2009). As in many other countries (R. J. Dalton 1985; Rose 1974), it are parties and not individual candidates or MPs that represent the citizens. Belgium is widely considered to be an example of a 'partitocracy' (Deschouwer, de Winter, and della Porta 1996). Therefore, we study the congruence of policy positions between Belgian voters and their parties. The evidence comes from two sources. The Belgian National Election Study of the May 2014 elections featured two interview waves, one before and one right after the ballots. In both waves, the same 23 specific policy position questions were included making it possible to calculate policy position changes and party preference changes through the campaign. Our second source is parties' official positions regarding the exact same 23 policies acquired via a Vote Advice Application. In

combination, these data allow us to compare opinion congruence through time and to assess *whether* individuals' opinion congruence evolves during an electoral campaign, *how* individual voters change their opinion congruence, and whether *social stratification* moderates the changes in opinion congruence.

We find that opinion congruence is indeed dynamic and changes through the campaign; there is a campaign effect, although only a small one. As the elections approach, voters generally get more in line with the party they eventually vote for. It is by switching parties and not by switching positions that people bring their positions in line with their preferred party. Compared to the lower educated, the higher educated are already more congruent with their party before the campaign starts. More importantly though is that the highly educated increase their policy congruence significantly more during the campaign. In other words, campaigns may acerbate opinion congruence inequality to some extent. The reason is that the highly educated are less loyal to their initially preferred party and switch more often during the campaign period. It is not the case that the lower educated, when they too switch parties, more often pick the 'wrong' party, a party more distant from their policy preferences instead of more close; they simply switch less. Additionally, our evidence suggests that the higher educated are more sensitive to potential gains in opinion congruence to be made by changing party; more than the lower educated, they switch parties because this may increase their opinion congruence. In sum, the campaign produces a Matthew effect. Those already having a higher opinion congruence (the higher educated) increase their congruence somewhat further, while those with a lower congruence to start with (the lower educated) do not profit from the campaign to increase their opinion congruence. So, the inequality between educational groups increases instead of decreases during the campaign.

Theory and Hypotheses

Starting from the earliest studies of campaigns in the U.S. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1945), scholars have argued that campaigns may 'activate' voters' preferences. Rather than changing people's attitudes or positions, campaigns make latent predispositions salient and this leads people to vote for the party they already (latently should have) preferred before the campaign (e.g. Finkel 1993). On the one hand, campaigns offer moments of dense information that can lead to policy *learning* by voters (Alvarez 1998a). They learn about their own policy preferences, about the preferences of the parties/candidates, and about the connection between the two—is my presently preferred party the one that matches my beliefs best? On the other hand, campaigns focusing on

policies and policy positions of parties/candidates *prime* these as being important criteria to judge parties/candidates and to base one's vote upon (Claassen 2011; Mendelsohn 1996). As policies get more weight during the campaign this could lead to higher end-of-campaign congruence. In short, campaigns make voters more *able* to make a congruent vote choice, and make congruence a more *important* criterion in their vote choice.

Learning and priming can result in two types of behavior during a campaign: (1) voters deciding to change *party* preference and (2) voters adopting other policy *positions* during a campaign. Both may have an effect on opinion congruence on Election Day. We deal with both in this study but start with more general expectations. Work on intra-campaign volatility suggests that, in most countries, short-term party preference volatility has risen over the years (e.g. Blais 2004; Granberg and Holmberg 1991; Lachat 2007; McAllister 2002). If at least some of these party switches are based on voters' perception of their opinion congruence with their old and their new party, then, over the course of a campaign and all other things being equal, party switching should lead to higher opinion congruence. Although party switching during the campaign affecting end-of-campaign opinion congruence may seem straightforward and even trivial, as far as we know, no studies have examined individual-level changes in opinion congruence during electoral campaigns.

Still a good deal of work in the activation tradition of campaign studies has suggested that, at the end of the campaign, people vote more in line with their (latent) preferences compared to at the beginning of the campaign (e.g. Finkel 1993; Gelman and King 1993; Arceneaux 2005; Peterson 2009; also see R. J. Dalton, Farell, and McAllister 2011; Lavine 2001). These studies, however, did not directly empirically measure opinion congruence. Other studies as well are suggestive of positive campaign effects on opinion congruence. Dalton and his collaborators (2011), for example, examine pre-election and post-election congruence and find that, compared to the old government, the new government's left-right position is more congruent with the public's aggregate left-right position. But this work does not look at individuals nor does it look at effects of the campaign itself but rather at the slower changes during a full electoral cycle. Either way, our base-line hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 1: Voter-party opinion congruence increases through the campaign.

Voters differ. A host of research has shown that voters are not all equal and that campaigns have different effects on different voters (Arceneaux 2005; Claassen 2011). More specifically, studies found that people with less years of formal schooling, tend to vote less in line with their interests compared to those who have attended school for a longer time (A. Walczak and van der Brug 2013; Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). Hillygus (2005) argues that formal education gives individuals the cognitive and intellectual skills to help them understand political institutions and political events.

Previous work found that higher educated voters are better able to, for example, process political information from the media (Eveland and Scheufele 2000). As a consequence, we expect the highly educated to display higher levels of mean opinion congruence. Being more cognizant of their own preferences and better informed about parties' offer before the campaign (see for example: M. Steenbergen, Edwards, and de Vries 2007), the highly educated, compared to the lower educated, should prefer parties that match their preferences better (see for instance Walgrave and Lefevere 2013). So, the mere fact of having had more years of formal schooling has a direct effect on the ability of people to process information in general and political information in particular. The effect of education on people's opinion congruence thus partly is a direct effect, we believe. Of course, the education effect is probably mediated by a number of factors such as political knowledge (Grönlund and Milner 2006) or political interest (M. Lewis-Beck et al. 2008) but we are interested here in the direct effect of education; we control for political interest in all models below. In sum, our second hypothesis reads:

> *Hypothesis 2: Higher educated voters have a higher pre-campaign voter-party opinion congruence than lower educated voters.*

Accepting the previous contention implies that the lower educated enter the campaign on a lower pre-campaign opinion congruence level and thus have more opinion congruence left to gain during the campaign. Some state that campaigns are so dense in information that they should reduce the differences between high- and low-capacity groups (see for example: Van Aelst, van der Meer, and Walter 2015). There is an extensive literature on whom profits most from electoral campaigns, the high or the low politically aware (see for example: Claassen 2011). But, as far as we know, none of these studies specifically dealt with opinion congruence and examined whether, through the campaign, some voters manage to increase their congruence more than others. We, however, argue that the campaign itself may actually acerbate the differences in opinion congruence between education groups. The complexity of campaign information may actually wipe away and even reverse campaigns' potentially equalizing effect. The information provided during campaigns regarding policy positions is often blurred, complex and contradictory (van der Meer, Walter, and Aelst 2015). In fact, parties often have an interest in obfuscating their actual position (Franklin 1991) or in talking next to each other instead of addressing the same issues and making their respective positions clear to voters (Sigelman and Buell 2004).

Research has shown that when political information is complex it increases instead of decreases the knowledge gap between the highly and the lowly educated (Jennifer Jerit 2009; Nadeau et al. 2008). The crucial question, though, is whether the political information provided to voters during a typical

campaign is *more* complex than the information provided to voters outside of electoral campaigns (which has produced the hypothesized lower opinion congruence among lower educated at the start of the campaign (H2)). Also outside of electoral campaigns, the information voters get may be complex, parties may hide their actual position, talk next to each other etc. We are unaware of any work comparing information complexity in and out of campaigns. But it is not hard to argue that there is much *more* political information available during election campaigns than in non-campaign periods (and that parties may have a higher stake in talking next to each other and obfuscating their positions right before elections). Just the large amount of information available during campaigns on itself, we argue, leads to complex information, or at least to making the task to sort all this information out and make sense of it more difficult. So, as higher educated voters are more responsive to complex information and as campaign information is arguably more complex than non-campaign information, we expect them to be more 'enlightened' by the campaign than lower educated voters (Arceneaux 2005). Our second inequality hypothesis—and third hypothesis overall—therefore reads:

> *Hypothesis 3: Higher educated voters increase their party-voter opinion congruence more during the campaign than lower educated voters.*

The first three hypotheses seek to answer the question of whether campaigns affect the differences in opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. The following hypotheses are aimed at explaining *why* this is the case. In doing so, they assume hypothesis three to be confirmed (increasing opinion congruence gap across educational attainment). We explained above there are two mechanisms with which voters can increase their opinion congruence during a campaign: change party or change position. Furthermore, there are two ways in which each of those two mechanisms can lead to an increasing gap in opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. The higher educated voters can use the mechanism *more often* than the lower educated, or they can use it *better* from a congruence perspective.

In the case of party switching, the evidence regarding the effect of education on party switching appears to be mixed. On the one hand, there is the work that fares under the header 'floating voter hypothesis' and that harks back to early work in the U.S. (P. E. Converse 1962) stating that it is the least informed segment of the electorate that switches its party allegiance most easily (see for example also: Dobson and Angelo 1975). Still, most of these studies have as their main independent variable the degree of information acquisition and not education, the variable we are interested in here. On the other hand, there is recent comparative work directly investigating the role of education that seems to suggest that lower educated voters are less volatile and more loyal

compared to the higher educated (e.g. Dassonneville 2013; Dassonneville, Blais, and Dejaeghere 2015; Kuhn 2009). It could thus be the case that higher educated voters increase their congruence more during the campaign because they change or update their party preference simply more often. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Higher educated voters switch party more often during the campaign than lower educated voters

The second possibility is that higher educated voters not switch more but *better* than lower educated voters. Being on average more sensitive for party position cues and more aware of their own preferences, this is what we argued above when developing H2, they should, on average, more frequently manage to pick the better party when switching compared to the lower educated voters whom we expect to switch with less effect on their party congruence. This leads to the fifth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: When higher educated voters switch party during the campaign they increase their voter-party opinion congruence more compared to lower educated voters that switch party during the campaign

In a similar way, we expect the *reasons* for party switching to be different for higher versus lower educated voters. Due to their higher cognitive capacity to perceive the (mis)match between their own positions and those of the parties and to perceive the potential gains in congruence they can make by switching, we expect the party switching of educated voters to be more determined by opinion congruence considerations than the party switching of lower educated voters (see also: Basinger and Lavine 2005). In other words, we argue that the higher educated more easily draw the conclusion that, when gains in opinion congruence can be made, a party switch is in order. In other words, the higher educated are less tolerant for incongruence and more easily see a solution in other parties' policy offer. We thus expect that:

Hypothesis 6: Higher educated voters' party switching during the campaign is more affected by voter-party opinion congruence considerations compared to the party switching of lower educated voters

The previous three hypotheses related to party switching, the first mechanism voters can use to increase the opinion congruence with their ultimately chosen party. The second mechanism is *position switching*: voters change position during the campaign and this leads to a higher opinion congruence with the party they eventually vote for. In fact, there is a sizeable literature showing that partisan identification and partisanship can make that voters adjust their policy positions to better

match the party they feel close to (see for example: Lenz 2009). As in the case of party switching, by switching position the higher educated might increase their opinion congruence more than the lower educated because they position-switch more and/or better. However, scholars have argued that the higher educated voters are more likely to have stable policy positions and, thus, change policy preferences less rather than more (e.g. Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Lower educated voters' policy positions are more likely to change, simply because they are less likely to have a position to begin with, reflecting the randomness accompanying what Converse (1964) labelled 'nonattitudes'. Hence, we do not formulate a hypothesis about more frequent position switching among the higher educated[2].

Yet, it may still be the case that the higher educated position-switch *better*, with which we mean that it results in an increase in opinion congruence with the party they vote for in the end. Our argument is similar to the logic spelled out above in the sense that the higher educated have more cognitive skills to make sense of whether and how their positions (not) match their existing party preference, so that their potential changes in position bring their preferences more in line with their party allegiance. This leads to our final hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 7: When higher educated voters switch policy positions during the campaign they increase their voter-party opinion congruence more compared to lower educated voters that switch positions during the campaign*

Data and methods

The study tackles voter-party opinion congruence in Belgium during the 2014 electoral campaign. This study is particularly interested in campaign learning effects and campaigns often deal with concrete policy proposals. During a campaign, parties do not advertise their general ideological left-right placement but rather their concrete policy preferences. Therefore, our choice for concrete policies to measure opinion congruence shifts is adequate. Although it is perfectly plausible that voters also move ideologically to the right or left during a campaign, maybe even as a consequence of the campaign, we argue that if voters learn anything during the campaign, it should mostly be about parties' (and their own) policy positions (van der Meer, Walter, and Aelst 2015).

We draw on two integrated datasets to calculate before- and after-campaign congruence for each individual voter in our sample. The voter data come from the 2014 National Election Study in

[2] As it turns out, we tested this assumption on our dataset and confirmed that it was correct.

Belgium[3]. The study was fielded in a panel design with a first wave of face-to-face interviews starting from March 20th and going on till May 17th, 2014[4]. Elections were held on May 25th and starting right after the ballots, a second wave of telephone interviews was implemented till July 1st. The interview mode of the wave 1 and the wave 2 survey was different—face-to-face versus telephone interviews—which may have affected the responses to some extent. Yet, in both waves interviews were done by interviewers and were not self-administered which limits possible mode effects. Additionally, it is unlikely that this small mode difference has affected the responses in the sense that it would acerbate the opinion congruence differences among the high and the low educated before and after the campaign.

Directly and randomly drawn from the National Register, 4,511 eligible voters were contacted for the first wave; 2,019 participated, which constitutes a response rate of 45%. In total, 1,532 of those took part in the second wave as well—a response in wave 2 of 76%. We only use the respondents that participated in both waves.

As the survey questions were about politics, it is likely that participation to the survey is skewed towards politically interested individuals. This pattern is probably even stronger in the second wave, after panel attrition. To compensate for this, we control for political interest (11-point scale) in all our analyses. While its inclusion in our models will reduce the predicted effect of education level on changes on voter-party opinion congruence—a part of the effect of education on congruence runs *via* political interest—it is necessary to control for the composition of our sample of voters. Furthermore, including political interest can only work against our hypotheses, making our analyses a more conservative test of our expectations.

Finally, the data in the analyses are weighted as to accurately reflect the eligible voting population in Belgium in terms of region, gender, age and education. In each wave the same 23 concrete policy statements (see Appendix Table A1.4) were presented to the respondents, and their answers could range from strongly agree to strongly disagree with two moderate options in the middle (agree and

[3] The Belgian National Election Study in 2014 was carried out by the PARTIREP consortium. PARTIREP is an Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) funded by the Belgian Science Policy. It involves the universities of Antwerp (Universiteit Antwerpen), Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Université Libre de Bruxelles), Leiden (Universiteit Leiden), Leuven (KU Leuven), Louvain-La-Neuve (Université Catholique de Louvain), and Mannheim (Universität Mannheim).

[4] Note that while the start of the surveying for wave 1 took place (March 20th) quite long before the campaign started—Belgian campaigns take about four weeks to unfold—the actual closing of wave 1 surveying occurred (May 17th) close to the real elections (May 25th) and admittedly in the middle of the campaign. This implies that some of our so-called pre-campaign interviews where actually done during the campaign. As a consequence, the party and position change during the campaign are probably under-estimated. We have no reasons to assume that this has affected our results regarding the opinion congruence gap between higher and lower educated voters.

disagree). To match parties' answers (see below) voter answers were recoded to a dichotomous agree-disagree. All 23 policy statements dealt with national competences.

While advantages of a panel design are clear—we can follow the same respondents over time and come closer to identifying causal effects—the main disadvantage is the so-called 'instrument effect'; the mere asking of a policy question in wave 1 can affect exposure to information about that policy in between the waves and thus affect the wave 2 answers to the same policy question. We cannot rule out this possibility here. One of the possible remedies is to make sure the distance between the waves is not too short (C. Wlezien and Erikson 2001). The average of 52 days, with a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 98 days, between the waves at least partially alleviates the possible instrument effect here. We are unaware of studies establishing that the instrument effect would be unequally distributed across education groups. In addition, we control for the time lag between interviews in the models below (*Time between Waves* in the models).

Our second dataset consists of party position data originating from a Vote Advice Application (VAA)—an online system that helps people make their choice by comparing their own positions with those of the parties (Garzia and Marschall 2014). The authors of this study built the Belgian VAA called *Stemtest 2014* that was online during the 2014 election campaign. All major Belgian parties (n=11) collaborated and provided their official position (agree/disagree) regarding all 23 policy statements. We only have one measure of parties' position taken before the beginning of the campaign and cannot observe parties' position changes through the campaign. Could it be that parties changed their position during that time? It is possible, but highly unlikely. All parties in Belgium organize a members' conference before the start of the campaign to decide on their party's positions on a whole range of issues. This party manifesto has to be approved by party members by a majority vote, and this in turn makes is very difficult for the party leadership to change policy positions afterwards, during the campaign. The most they can do is *conceal* their position during the campaign, they can hardly change it. Since we consider parties' positions as fixed, we focus fully on voters' movements here.

Similar to voters, party leaders could only react with 'agree' or 'disagree' to the policy statements. This was done deliberately as previous research on the validity of party responses in a VAA concluded that parties are more likely to give centrist answers (Gemenis and Ham 2014; Wagner and Ruusuvirta 2011). This way, they reduce the maximum distance between them and potential voters. Therefore, in our case, parties were given only two options, 'agree' or 'disagree', and were thus forced to choose a side instead of placing themselves in the middle. The answering format of the party survey thus made it more difficult for the parties to give strategic answers.

Can the 23 policies be regarded as a representative sample of the universe of policy issues in Belgium? In most policy congruence studies, the question of the representativeness of the policy issues sample is not even raised. First, we have a large amount of statements per party. Second, the statements have been carefully selected to map onto important policy domains ensuring that no major domain is ignored and some important domains are covered by several statements[5]. Third, the policy statements attempt to grasp actual and current debates in the run-up to the 2014 election. They include many issues that have been widely discussed in the media and should therefore be considered as issues that matter. All this increases confidence that we are dealing with real party positions.

The study focuses on a voter's opinion congruence with the party he or she planned to vote (wave 1) or actually voted for (wave 2). Calculating voter-party opinion congruence scores for each voter involved three steps. First, we calculated, for each voter, the *percentage agreement* between the positions of a voter and the positions of that voter's preferred party. This simply entailed dividing the numbers of statements on which a voter and her party agree by the number of statement questions that voter answered. Second, in order to give more *weight* to statements that matter for the voter and alleviate the effect of non-opinions on policies a voter does not care about, for each voter each statement got a specific weight. The weight is based on a series of issue salience questions in which voters were asked about the importance (0-10) of eleven issue domains. Each policy statement was then weighed according to the importance the voter attributed to the issue domains the policy statement belonged to. Third, we corrected for the fact that a fully congruent party does not exist for most voters. It is highly unlikely that, even in a fragmented party system such as Belgium's, voters achieve 100% or perfect opinion congruence with their party choice, even if voters vote for the party with which they agree most.

Differences in opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters can have two fundamental causes. The first is that the policy positions of political parties are more attuned to the policy positions of the higher educated due to the fact that politicians and candidates are often higher educated themselves. The second is that the higher educated, having more cognitive and intellectual skills, are more capable of making a congruent party choice. The focus of this paper lies on the second cause, while we want to keep the first cause constant. Therefore, when calculating the differences in opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters, we want to remove any differences between those voters that are due to the first cause.

[5] The 23 statements touch upon 11 policy domains: labor and economy, and consumer protect; finance and the budget; environment and energy; immigration and integration; mobility and public transportation; state reform & political institutions; foreign policy and development aid; social security; justice and law enforcement; healthcare, social welfare and family, and ethical themes.

For instance, consider a lower educated voter who agrees with his party choice 50% and a higher educated voter agreeing with his party choice 60% of the time. But, considering the parties from which to choose on Election Day, the former *could* achieve a maximum of 70% opinion congruence while the latter could have achieved 80% opinion congruence. While it would thus appear as if the higher educated voters made a 10% more accurate party choice than the lower educated voter, part of this difference is due to the 10% difference in the maximum opinion congruence, which represents the structural disadvantage suffered by the lower educated voter due to the fact that most parties consists of higher educated themselves.

To take the later out of the dependent variable, we divide the percentage of agreement between voter and party choice by the maximum opinion congruence score a voter could get, and thus controlling for any disadvantage suffered by voters in finding a congruent match among the possible parties to vote for. Instead of a 10% difference of party choice accuracy (50% vs 60%), there is in fact only a 4% difference (71% vs 75%). By taking the maximum opinion congruence into account, we avoid overestimating the opinion congruence gap between lower and higher educated voters. The result is a dependent variable that better fits the concept we want to measure in this paper: how congruent was the party choice made by voters?

In sum, we made our measures of opinion congruence *relative* to the maximum degree of opinion congruence a voter could achieve; this is the opinion congruence score of the party that is most in agreement with that particular voter. However, Belgium is a federal country, with separate Francophone and Dutch-speaking regions and with separate parties catering to these two main regions[6]. As a result, Flemish voters cannot vote for Francophone parties and Francophone voters cannot vote for Flemish parties. Of the eleven political parties in our sample, six are Dutch-speaking and five are Francophone. Therefore, when calculating the maximum degree of opinion congruence a voter could achieve, we only take into account the parties of that voter's region. Our final measures thus grasp how close voters come to their most congruent party: it is the weighted (on the basis of the policy statements' saliency for a voter) average agreement between voters and their party choice:

$$Opinion\ congruence = \left(\frac{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k} \frac{policy\ statement_i * saliency\ of\ policy\ statement_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{k} saliency\ of\ policy\ statement_i}}{k}}{Maximum\ opinion\ congruence} \right)$$

[6] In the analyses below, we aggregate the data from both regions. This is done in order to ensure that the analyses preserve sufficient statistical power to avoid type II errors in our conclusions. Instead, as will be explained further, we control for voters' region in all our analyses.

where 'k' stands for the number of statements validly answered by a voter. Based on this procedure, we can calculate the three dependent variables of the study: *W1 Opinion Congruence* (congruence with the party the voter was planning to vote for before the campaign); *W2 Opinion Congruence* (congruence with the party the voter actually voted for on Election Day); and *W2-W1 Opinion Congruence Change* (the difference between the two previous measures with positive scores pointing towards an increase in opinion congruence during the campaign).

The *Party Change* variable grasps whether a voter changed party choice during the campaign. We acquired policy statement responses from the eleven major parties with at least one representative in the national parliament prior to the elections (CD&V, CDH, Ecolo, FDF, Groen, MR, N-VA, Open VLD, PS, Sp.a, and Vlaams Belang). Only respondents opting for one of these parties in both waves are retained, which results in a final sample size of 1,029 voters. This also means that undecided voters are excluded from the analyses. Only 5% of the respondents who participated in both waves were undecided in the pre-electoral wave.

Education is our main independent variable. Voters were divided into three education categories. Lower educated voters have no or only an elementary school degree. Middle education comprises those who finished their secondary education. Higher educated voters are voters who graduated from school or have a university degree. Our three education categories thus indicate increasing years of formal education.

The sixth hypothesis predicts that the potential gains in congruence affect whether voters switch party preferences or not. We measure these potential gains through the *Maximum Congruence Increase*. It grasps the difference in opinion congruence, calculated as above, between the party preferred in wave 1 and the most possibly congruent party in wave 2 taking into account the (potentially changed) wave 2 policy positions of a voter. In other words, the variable grasps the leap forward in opinion congruence a voter can maximally make by switching party.

All our analyses control for voters' *age, gender, income, region, and political interest*. Finally, we include a dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent has participated in the online VAA where the party positions where shown. Table 7.1 presents descriptives of all variables.

Table 7.1: Descriptives of variables

	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
W1 Voter-party opinion congruence (%)	80.9	16	32.4	100
W2 Voter-party opinion congruence (%)	81.8	16.8	24.1	100
W2-W1 Voter-party pinion Congruence Change (%)	0.9	18.2	-54.2	61.9
Party Change (no (0) – yes (1))	0.23	0.42	0	1
Position Change (% of policy statements)	0.24	0.11	0	0.71
Education level:				
Lower education (1)	0.31	0.46	0	1
Middle education (2)	0.35	0.48	0	1
Higher education (3)	0.34	0.47	0	1
Gender (male (0) – female (1))	0.5	0.5	0	1
Age (years)	49.6	17	18	84
Income (lowest decile (1) – highest decile (10))	5.6	2.5	1	10
Region (Flanders (0) - Wallonia (1))	0.4	0.5	0	1
Political Interest (low (0) – high (10))	5.2	2.8	0	10
Maximum Congruence Increase (%)	12.9	12.3	0	60.5
Time between Waves (days)	52	17.2	9	98
VAA participation (no (0) – yes (1))	0.23	0.42	0	1

A final note about the 2014 Belgian election campaign is in order. The elections for the national, regional and European parliaments coincided and this led to a campaign with a lot of substantive policy information. Several VAAs were developed drawing ample attention to parties' policy positions. Media outlets, joining university experts, made detailed calculations as to the exact costs and benefits of the respective party manifestos. The often technical intricacies of the party programs were discussed at length in the newspapers. As this campaign was particularly focused on policies it is a good case to examine whether policy information actually affects voters' behavior and inspires them to update their opinion congruence.

Results

Our first hypothesis held that there would be changes in average opinion congruence over time; due to a general information effect of the campaign, we expected voters to have moved closer to their most preferred party during the campaign. Table 7.2 below presents the bivariate evidence and confirms our expectation. Across the board, voters have moved closer to the best fitting party. The effect is small, though; on average voters moved only 0.9% closer to the most congruent the party on offer, and the statistical significance of this change is marginal ($p \leq .10$). So all other things being equal, a campaign like the 2014 campaign in Belgium does not seem to boost policy congruence all

that much. While the evidence lends some support to H1, its confirmation can only be cautious. However, and we come back to this below, the congruence benefits of the campaign are not evenly spread across education categories. Only the highly educated seem to profit from the campaign information: they boost their policy congruence with 3.8% while the lower and middle educated do not alter their opinion congruence in a significant way. As a side note, Table 7.2 suggests that overall, both before as after the Belgian campaign of 2014, opinion congruence levels are quite high: they all hoover around 80% across the three education groups. Most voters plan to and actually vote for a party that represents them pretty well.

Table 7.2: Changes in voter-party opinion congruence, by education level

	All voters	Lower education	Middle education	Higher education
Before the campaign	80.9%	80.0%	81.2%	82.3%
On election day	81.8%	79.5%	79.7%	86.1%
Difference	0.9%	-0.5%	-1.5%	3.8%
N	1,029	272	346	411
Statistical significance	$p \leq 0.10$	n.s.	n.s.	$p \leq 0.001$

Our second hypothesis predicted that the higher educated would display a higher degree of opinion congruence to start with, even before the start of the campaign. Table 7.3 presents the results of two models predicting *W1 Opinion Congruence*. Controlling for *Political Interest* and other control variables, none of which are significant, the data confirm the existence of inequality in opinion congruence before the campaign starts. Although the initial opinion congruence difference between the lower and higher educated is small (see Table 7.2 above: 80.0% vs. 82.3%), it is a statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) difference. The difference between lower and middle educated voter and between middle and higher educated voters is not statistically significant (model not shown in the table). We conclude that H2 can be corroborated.

Note that rather small congruence gap at the start of the campaign (see Table 2) combined with the slight increase of that gap through the campaign (see Table 3), suggests that, in the long period *in between* the elections, the opinion congruence gap between the higher and lower educated is not further growing but, maybe, rather decreasing again. We would need longitudinal legislature-spanning panel data to actually test this possibility.

Table 7.3: Voter-party opinion congruence before the campaign and the effect of education

		W1 Voter-party opinion congruence (Bivariate model)			W1 Voter-party opinion congruence (Full model)		
		B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Education	Lower (ref. cat.)	—	—		—	—	
	Middle	2.63	(1.39)		2.14	(1.38)	
	Higher	4.18	(1.34)	**	3.32	(1.44)	*
Gender					-1.84	(1.09)	
Age					0.01	(0.03)	
Income					0.35	(0.22)	
Region	Flanders (ref. cat.)				—	—	
	Wallonia				-0.95	(1.10)	
Political Interest					-0.04	(0.20)	
Constant		78.53	(1.08)	***	80.98	(3.39)	***
N		1,029			1,029		
R^2		1.13%			1.80%		

Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

We now examine whether it is true that, on top of their advantageous position before the campaign, the higher educated profit more from the campaign to increase their congruence advantage further. Table 7.4 models the effect of schooling on the change in opinion congruence through the campaign. Our expectation that the low educated would see their relative position deteriorate during the campaign, is warranted by the facts. Controlling for political interest and other control variables none of which reach conventional levels of significance, the difference in opinion congruence between the higher and lower educated further increases through the campaign; the gap grew on average with 3.5% during the Belgian 2014 campaign. The effect seems small but is statistically significant. The difference in the increase in opinion congruence is even larger when we look at the middle educated. Here the difference is 5.4%, on average. This implies that the middle educated, in comparison to the higher educated, are actually doing worse than the lower educated; we have no ready explanation for that. In sum, changes in opinion congruence during an electoral campaign may thus be subject to a Matthew effect: those who already were more congruent before the campaign manage to further increase their congruence during the campaign. H3 can be maintained.

Table 7.4: Change in voter-party opinion congruence through the campaign and the effect of education

		W2-W1 voter-party opinion congruence Change		
		B	S.E.	Sig.
Education	Lower (ref. cat.)	—	—	
	Middle	-1.93	(1.63)	
	Higher	3.50	(1.69)	*
Gender		-0.39	(1.19)	
Age		-0.03	(0.04)	
Income		-0.44	(0.26)	
Region	Flanders (ref. cat.)	—	—	
	Wallonia	-2.02	(1.31)	
Political Interest		0.48	(0.25)	
Time between Waves		0.03	(0.04)	
VAA participation		-1.14	(1.43)	
Constant		3.94	(4.36)	
N			1,029	
Adj. R^2			2.32%	

Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

The next three hypotheses regard the role of education in party switching: they do it more, they do it better, and they do it more to increase their congruence. We expected that the higher educated would party-switch more often than the lower educated. Therefore, the next analysis has another dependent variable: *Party Change*. Table 7.5 reports a logistic regression predicting the switching of preferred party during the campaign. It provides proof of the fact that the higher educated, more than the lower educated, switch party during the campaign; they are less loyal to their initial party. The lower schooled, in contrast, more often stick to their initial party choice. Among the higher educated, 27% switches their party preference during the campaign, while this is only 20% among middle educated voters and 17% among lower educated. Also the high politically interested switch parties less and the opposite applies to the older voters. H4 thus receives support from the data.

Table 7.5: Party change and the effect of education

		Party Change		
		B	S.E.	Sig.
Education	Lower (ref. cat.)	—	—	
	Middle	0.21	(0.23)	
	Higher	0.59	(0.23)	*
Gender		0.12	(0.16)	
Age		-0.02	(0.00)	**
Income		0.02	(0.03)	
Region	Flanders (ref. cat.)	—	—	
	Wallonia	-0.23	(0.17)	
Political Interest		-0.12	(0.03)	***
Time between Waves		0.00	(0.00)	
VAA participation		-0.16	(0.20)	
Constant		-0.35	(0.59)	
N		1,029		
pseudo R^2		4.30%		

Note: Logistic regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

The next step is to ask whether the higher educated increase their opinion congruence more often than the lower educated when switching parties. In other words: are they 'better' party switchers? This is what H5 predicted. With H7 we formulated the same expectation for the position switch mechanism: the higher educated do switch positions better, meaning that it brings them closer to their preferred party. The evidence to test both these hypotheses is presented in Table 6; they do not receive support from the data.

The table contains three models predicting pre- vs. post-campaign opinion congruence. The first model is a direct effects model that includes *Party Change* and *Position change*. The next two models include terms for the interaction between party change or position change and education (second half of the table). A positive and significant interaction coefficient would be proof that, from an opinion congruence perspective, the higher educated employ the party (H5) or position switch (H7) mechanisms more successfully. With regards to party switching, the coefficient (B=-5.54) in the second model is not significant. When we calculate the marginal effects, we find that both lower and higher educated voters increase their opinion congruence when changing party choice (8% and 6%, respectively). As they both use it in a similar, congruence-enhancing way, it cannot explain why during the campaign the higher educated increase their opinion congruence more than the lower educated. H5 must be rejected. It is *not* the case that the higher educated switch more often to more congruent parties compared to the lower educated. It just seems to be the case that they switch *more*, not *better*. When higher educated and lower educated switch parties, they both get it right to about the same extent.

When looking in model 3 at the interaction between education and position switch in order to test H7, we see that here the coefficient (B=9.81) is positive but not significant. Therefore, we cannot conclude that the policy stance changes of the higher educated are more congruence-increasing than those of lower or middle educated voters. Consequently, H7 too must be rejected. In sum, the two mechanisms through which voters are able to increase their opinion congruence do not seem to be used in a more congruence-enhancing way by higher educated voters.

So far, we established that, first, electoral campaigns do not close the pre-campaign opinion congruence gap between lower and higher educated voters, but rather they increase it. Second, this happens because higher educated voters change their party preference more often. They do not, however, use the party change mechanism better than lower educated voters. The question remaining then is, of course, *why* the higher educated switch party more often, and how this is related to opinion congruence. Our sixth hypothesis stated that higher educated voters switch parties more often exactly *because* they realize that their positions are not in line with those of the party they preferred so far and because they think they can increase their congruence by switching party. The models presented in Table 7.7 below directly test this expectation. The dependent variable is *Party Change* and the key independent variable in the two presented models is the variable *Maximum Congruence Increase*, the leap forward in opinion congruence a voter can maximally realize by switching party during the campaign. If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect there to be a positive and significant interaction effect between the variables *Maximum Congruence Increase* and *Education* in the second model in Table 7.7.

The evidence confirms H6. The interaction coefficient (B=.06) is significant and has a significant effect on party switching. The higher educated are more sensitive to the potential improvement in opinion congruence they can make and this makes them switch parties more. An increased opinion congruence is not only the *consequence* of their more frequent party switching, the potential increase in opinion congruence also is the *cause* of their party switching. Figure 7.1 below represents the interaction effect in the form of predicted probabilities. The effect of education is strikingly clear. The higher educated (the dark grey, steeper slope) are *much* more sensitive to potential gains in opinion congruence compared to the lower educated and the middle educated (the flatter, respectively, light grey and black slopes).

Table 7.6: Change in voter-party opinion congruence through the campaign and the combined effect of education, position change and party change

	Direct effects model			Interaction model (Party Change)			Interaction model (Position Change)		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Education Lower (ref. cat.)	—	—		—	—		—	—	
Middle	-2.13	(1.61)		-0.32	(1.64)		-2.91	(3.93	
Higher	2.98	(1.67)		3.88	(1.68)	*	0.70	(3.76	
Gender (men are the ref. cat.)	-0.43	(1.19)		-0.20	(1.21)		-0.40	(1.19	
Age	-0.02	(0.04)		-0.02	(0.04)		-0.02	(0.04	
Income	-0.47	(0.27)		-0.47	(0.26)		-0.47	(0.27	
Region Flanders (ref. cat.)	—	—		—	—		—	—	
Wallonia	-1.81	(1.30)		-1.66	(1.30)		-1.82	(1.30)	
Party Change	3.81	(1.78)	*	9.28	(3.80)	*	3.76	(1.78)	
Position Change	-3.61	(6.27)		-3.81	(6.22)		-7.39	(12.39)	
Political Interest	0.56	(0.24)	*	0.56	(0.24)	*	0.55	(0.24)	*
Time between Waves	0.03	(0.04)		0.03	(0.04)		0.03	(0.04)	
VAA participation	-1.04	(1.44)		-0.87	(1.44)		-0.97	(1.45)	
Interaction terms:									
Lower education*Party Change (ref.cat.)				—	—				
Middle education*Party Change				-9.29	(4.82)				
Higher education*Party Change				-5.54	(4.64)				
Lower education*Position Change (ref.cat.)							—	—	
Middle education*Position Change							2.80	(15.30)	
Higher education*Position Change							9.81	(15.41)	
Constant	3.27	(4.74)		1.71	(4.75)		4.20	(5.41)	
N	1,029			1,029			1,029		
Adj. R^2	3.09%			3.76%			3.15%		

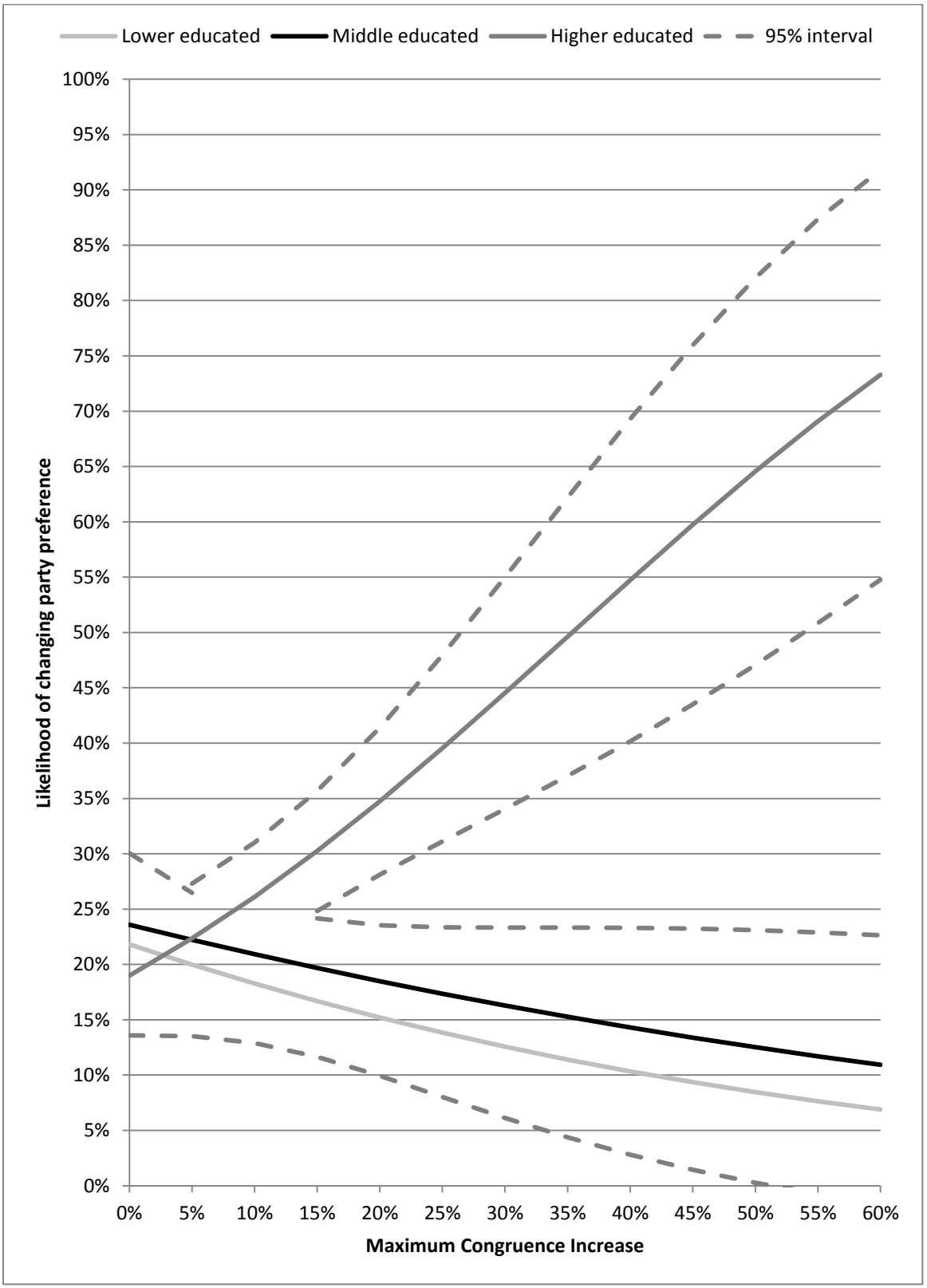
Note: OLS regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

Table 7.7: Party change and the combined effect of education and maximum voter-party opinion congruence increase

		Direct effects model			Interaction effects model		
		B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Education	Lower (ref. cat.)	—	—				
	Middle	0.21	(0.23)		0.10	(0.32)	
	Higher	0.60	(0.24)	*	-0.17	(0.31)	
Gender	(Men are the ref. cat.)	0.11	(0.16)		0.14	(0.16)	
Age		-0.02	(0.00)	**	-0.02	(0.00)	**
Income		0.02	(0.03)		0.02	(0.04)	
Region	Flanders (ref. cat.)						
	Wallonia	-0.24	(0.17)		-0.18	(0.17)	
Maximum Congruence Increase		0.00	(0.01)		-0.02	(0.01)	
Maximum Congruence Increase*Lower education (ref. cat.)							
Maximum Congruence Increase*Middle education					0.01	(0.02)	
Maximum Congruence Increase*Higher education					0.06	(0.02)	***
Political Interest		-0.12	(0.03)	***	-0.13	(0.03)	***
Time between Waves		0.00	(0.00)		0.00	(0.00)	
VAA participation		-0.16	(0.20)		-0.22	(0.20)	
Constant		-0.38	(0.60)		-0.10	(0.60)	
N			1,029			1,029	
Pseudo R^2			4.32%			6.06%	

Note: logistic regression; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; ***= p ≤ .001

Figure 7.1: Likelihood of party change and the combined effect of education and maximum congruence increase



Conclusion

Bringing together work on opinion congruence and campaign effects we showed, as far as we know for the first time, that opinion congruence actually evolves during a campaign. Drawing on novel data covering a good many policy positions from the 2014 Belgian national election campaign, we found that the average voter, by switching party in the course of the campaign, moved a little closer to the party she eventually voted for. Position switching during the campaign does not seem to matter; it does not affect opinion congruence. Through the campaign, some voters seem to learn about their own and the parties' positions and about the match between both; some draw behavioral conclusions from that knowledge and change their party preference. All in all, the found campaign effect on opinion congruence is only slight, though.

We integrated a third literature, inequality in representation, and explored potential gaps in opinion congruence between lower and higher educated voters. The lower educated already display a little less opinion congruence at the start of the campaign and the campaign widens the opinion congruence gap between lower and higher educated voters. The aggregate increase in opinion congruence resulting from the campaign can be accounted for by only looking at the higher educated; only they profit from the campaign. The reason is that the lower educated are less volatile, they stick more to the party they preferred at the start of the campaign and miss the opportunity to further their opinion congruence by shifting to another party as the higher educated do. The lower educated that *do* switch party though, manage to increase their congruence equally strong and they are equally successful in picking a more congruent party. But since they switch less, their relative average level of congruence, as a group, compared to that of the higher educated, diminishes. Additionally, we presented evidence that the higher educated are much more sensitive to opinion *in*congruence cues than the lower educated; the higher educated switch parties precisely in order to increase their congruence with the party they eventually vote for. In sum, our results suggest a dynamic model of campaign effects whereby the search to maximize one's opinion fit with the party motivates voter changes. But this congruence maximizing model of voter change only applies to the higher educated.

Our findings raise important normative questions. Is it a problem that, in contrast to the higher educated, lower educated voters hold a party preference that is less based on policy preferences and that this does not change during the campaign? Knowing that the lower educated are probably also less informed the answer may be 'no'. Yet, a possible consequence of the education gap in opinion congruence is that public policy may be skewed towards the preferences of higher educated voters. From a democratic perspective, our conclusion that an electoral campaign, albeit in our case only

slightly, may contribute to rather than reduce differences in opinion congruence is a rather pessimistic one (Rober A. Dahl 1989; Page and Shapiro 1992). Others will argue that a lesser representation of the preferences of the ill-informed—as far as we can equate the lower educated with the ill-informed—is not precarious for democracy if it means that voters' input into a political system comes primarily from the better-informed voters. Yet, there is a wide consensus that politics should advance the general interest. It is, however, uncertain whether following the policy preferences of better-informed (higher educated) groups actually leads to the pursuit of the general interest, rather than to the pursuit of the interests of these specific social groups.

Still, some of our results form a reason for democratic optimism. For example, the finding that the lower educated, *when* changing party, do switch to a similar degree to a better party than the higher educated suggests that also for the lower educated campaigns provide useful information (the only problem is that they see to use that information less to consider a party switch). Future research could investigate how campaign seem to inform both lower and higher educated voters, despite the formers' lower levels of political interest and knowledge.

Although we think our evidence to be novel and our findings compelling, the study clearly has limitations. First, and more technically, our study provided only a first take at opinion congruence inequality. We did not cluster our statements in broader dimensions, for example, nor did we examine whether our general findings were robust across dimensions. Additionally, we did not take media attention for the different policy proposals into account, as media coverage may explain possible differences across the 23 policies we studied. In other words, more refined analyses, disaggregating the evidence to the statement level, may lead to additional insights. Our aim here was to look for the general pattern across policies. Furthermore, changes in opinion congruence during a campaign could also be moderated by party characteristics, while we only looked at voter characteristics in this study. Also, while the information made available during the campaign is the most likely explanation for our findings—we spoke of a 'campaign effect'—we cannot provide definitive proof of a causal relation.

Second, our models only explain a limited portion of the variance of our dependent variables. There are undoubtedly numerous other factors that are related to changes in opinion congruence and why voters change their party preference and policy position during a campaign. However, it is not the aim of this study to develop an encompassing model of these outcome variables. Instead, we focus on the role of a specific predictor variable: a voter's education level. We showed that education matters, but effects were modest.

Third, and probably most importantly, we drew on one election in one country only. Can our results be generalized to other countries and other campaigns? We are not sure the exact same results would show up, but we are confident that the approach we proposed here is widely applicable. The 2014 campaign in Belgium was particularly information-dense and technical, and this may have caused the lagging behind of the lower educated and the Matthew effect we found. Yet, one could argue that most policy information is by definition complex—it is definitely more complex and intellectually challenging than the more intuitive information about the personalities of the candidates. As a consequence, also in other countries and campaigns, the opinion congruence gap across education groups may be growing instead of shrinking during the campaign. Whether these gap changes are larger or smaller in other countries remains to be seen and probably depends on both country and specific campaign features. For one, Belgium has a fragmented party system. This implies that parties propose sets of policies that are relatively similar. This increases the average information cost for voters to gain knowledge about the policy positions of the many parties on the ballot. This task may be more easily accomplished by lower educated voters in other, less complex and crowded party systems. Also, Belgium has compulsory voting leading to relatively high electoral participation among the low educated. In other countries, people experiencing high opinion incongruence may decide to not participate in the elections at all which is less the case in Belgium. This as well challenges the simple transposition of our results to other countries.

In conclusion, we do not claim that our exact results are simply generalizable to other contexts. But the approach and the explanations we suggested here may offer a useful way to start thinking more systematically about opinion congruence dynamics during campaigns, and the inequality this may entail. We believe to have presented an approach that can contribute to our understanding of opinion congruence dynamics, campaign effects and representational inequality.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to study inequality in policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters in Belgium. This research project had three goals. The first was to describe the extent to which political elites in Belgium—political parties—have policy preferences that are more congruent with those of privileged voters than with those of underprivileged voters. The second was to explain policy opinion inequality between the two groups of voters. Why is inequality much larger for some policy issues than for others? Why is it the case that for some issues, the situation is the reverse, with inequality favoring underprivileged voters? The third goal was to study inequality in policy opinion congruence over time, during an electoral campaign. Can campaigns—because they are moments when a significant amount of information is available on parties' policy positions—close the policy opinion congruence gap between privileged and underprivileged voters, or do they increase this gap? In other words, is there a Matthew effect in electoral campaigns?

To answer these questions, I used three sets of data. The first was a party leadership survey that asked the leaderships of Belgium's 11 main parties to give their party's positions on more than 150 concrete policy statements. The second was a voter survey that asked a sample of 2,000 Flemish and Walloon voters to react to 134 or 141 concrete policy statements. Those statements were identical to the policy statements presented to the party leaderships. The third dataset also came from a voter survey.

However, that voter survey had a two-wave panel design. A sample of 1,500 Flemish and Walloon voters was surveyed twice, once before the campaign and once after election day. Each wave asked voters to react to 23 concrete policy statements, and those same statements were also presented to the party leaderships. That data allowed me to study policy opinion congruence in both a large set of policy statements at a single point in time and a smaller set of policy statements during an electoral campaign.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by providing an overview of this dissertation's key findings. I discuss the results of each chapter, combining them to generate a more encompassing assessment. This dissertation aimed to make both theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature on inequality in policy opinion congruence, which I will discuss in turn. Next, I discuss the limitations of this thesis and try to point to avenues for future research. Finally, I elaborate on the normative implications of the findings.

Main theoretical findings of this dissertation

The starting point of this dissertation was examining inequality in collective policy opinion congruence, or the extent to which parliaments in Belgium, as a whole, have policy preferences that are more congruent with those of privileged voters than with those of underprivileged voters. This conceptualization of inequality in policy opinion congruence can be considered closest to the notion of inequality in policy congruence. From that point, I worked backwards towards identifying factors that could explain inequality in collective policy opinion congruence: inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence, correct voting, and electoral campaigns.

Therefore, in chapters four and five, I first examined inequality in collective policy opinion congruence. Each chapter used different data—one used data from 2009 and the other data from 2014—and a different operationalization of collective policy opinion congruence—one used the many-to-many operationalization and the other the one-to-one operationalization. In both chapters, however, the results revealed that political elites' policy positions were more congruent with those privileged voters. I can thus reliably conclude that there is inequality in collective policy opinion congruence in Belgium favoring the policy preferences of privileged voters. Furthermore, in chapter five, I found that one of the most important independent variables of inequality in collective policy opinion congruence is inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. In other words, the finding that parliament has policy views that are more congruent with those of privileged voters can largely be

explained by the fact that privileged voters more frequently agree with the parties they select at the ballot box.

In chapters six and seven, I then studied inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence, examining the extent to which the policy opinion congruence between voters and their party choices is higher for privileged voters than for underprivileged voters. Chapter six investigated two pathways to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. The first pathway holds that parties, through their policy positions, cater more to the policy preferences of privileged voters than of underprivileged voters. In that pathway, even if all voters—both privileged and underprivileged ones—voted for the party with the most congruent policy positions, dyadic policy opinion congruence would still be higher for privileged voters than for underprivileged voters. In short, the first explanation of inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence is that underprivileged voters face less congruent party choices on election day. The second pathway to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence asserts that privileged voters are better able to choose a party with which they are in agreement on policies than are underprivileged voters. This dissertation referred to this concept as "correct voting." In chapter six, I found that correct voting accounted for three-quarters of the inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. In other words, underprivileged voters more frequently disagreed with their selected party in terms of policy positions not because of the choices they received but because of the choices they made. Inequality in congruence was primarily self-inflicted.

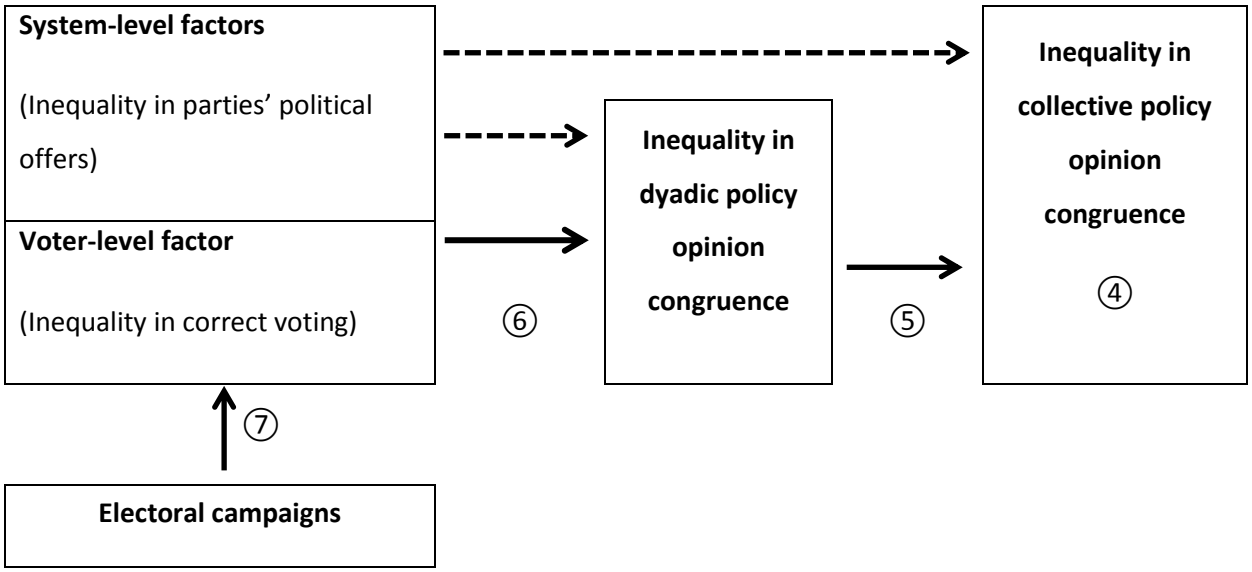
Chapter seven looked at how correct voting changed throughout the 2014 election campaign. I found that in general, campaigns had a limited effect on the "correctness" of voters' party choices. However, the results did demonstrate that the effect of the campaign on correct voting differed between privileged and underprivileged voters. Throughout the campaign, the correctness of privileged voters' party choices increased, while underprivileged voters' party choices hardly changed at all. Based on these findings, I came to the conclusion that a Matthew effect is potentially present in electoral campaigns. Instead of closing the correct voting gap between privileged and underprivileged voters, campaigns primarily enable privileged voters—who are already in closer agreement with their party choices on policy positions—to increase their dyadic policy opinion congruence even further. As a result, election campaigns do very little to decrease inequality in policy opinion congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters.

Because of the country under study—Belgium—and the nature of the data—which overestimated voters' political interest levels—this research project constitutes a conservative evaluation of inequality in policy opinion congruence. If any study were to find that political elites' policy positions were equally congruent with those of both privileged and underprivileged voters, it most likely would

have been this dissertation. In other countries with fewer safeguards against inequality in policy opinion congruence, and among other voters with lower levels of interest in politics, inequality in policy opinion congruence is also likely to be present, and to a larger degree.

Figure 8.1 summarizes the main theoretical findings of this dissertation. I conclude that (1) inequality in collective policy opinion congruence is primarily the result of inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence; (2) inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence is primarily the result of a voter-level factor (i.e., underprivileged voters voting incorrectly), and (3) electoral campaigns exacerbate the correct voting gap between privileged and underprivileged voters. The numbers in Figure 8.1 indicate the specific contribution of each chapter. The dotted lines running from system-level factors to inequality in collective and dyadic policy opinion congruence represent the unexplained variance in the models. This unexplained variance is presumed to come from system-level factors that skew parties' political offers towards privileged voters' policy positions.

Figure 8.1: Overview of the theoretical contributions



Main methodological findings of this dissertation

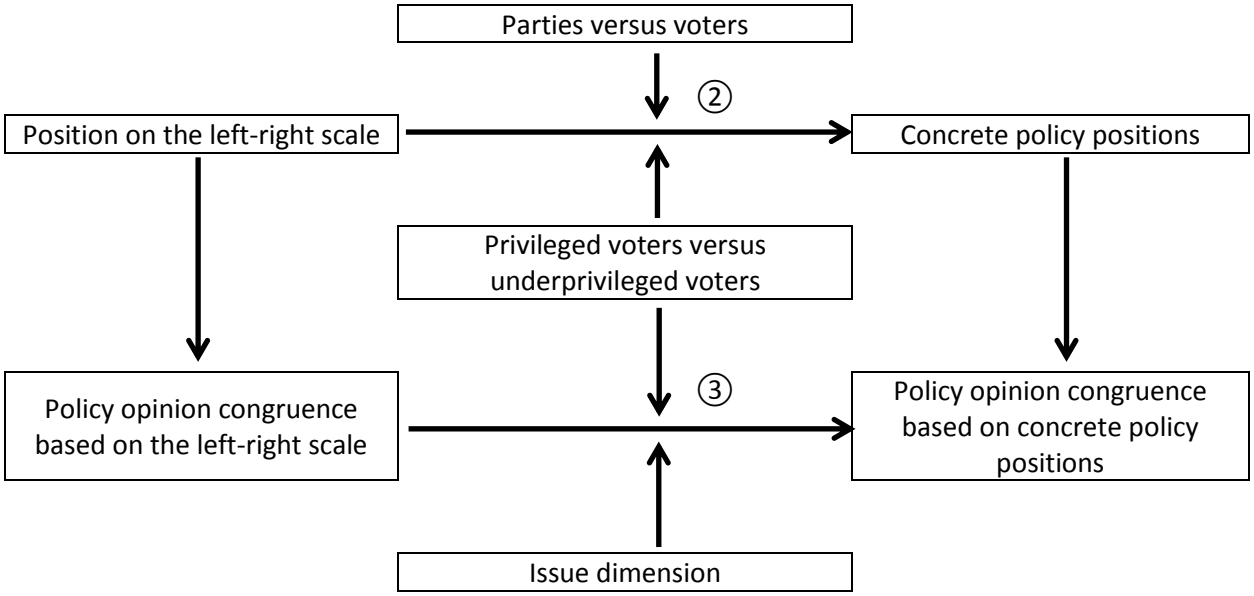
The theoretical contributions are the result of studying policy opinion congruence on the basis of concrete policy positions. It is doubtful that estimating congruence on the basis of the left-right scale would have yielded similar conclusions. That approach is the dominant one in the literature; comparing the left-right positions of voters and political elites. It assumes, however, that left-right positions are good predictors of concrete policy positions and that by extension, congruence based on the left-right scale is strongly related to congruence based on concrete policy positions. Chapters two and three tested that assumption. Chapter two examined the relation between the concrete

policy positions and left-right positions of voters and political parties. I found that left-right positions indeed predicted both voters and parties' policy positions, but that this relation was much stronger for parties than for voters. In addition, left-right positions were more effective predictors of concrete policy positions for privileged voters than for underprivileged voters.

Chapter three built on chapter two and examined the relation between policy opinion congruence based on the left-right scale and policy opinion congruence based on concrete policy positions. The results indicated that the two approaches to policy opinion congruence are only weakly related to each other. In addition, congruence based on the left-right scale was a better predictor of congruence based on concrete policy positions for privileged voters than for underprivileged voters. In addition, I found differences between issue dimensions: Opinion congruence based on the left-right scale did not capture opinion congruence based on policy positions unrelated to either the socio-economic or the socio-cultural dimension. In other words, left-right policy opinion congruence only predicted concrete policy opinion congruence for certain voters and certain policy positions.

Figure 8.2 summarizes the main methodological findings of this dissertation. I conclude that (1) the relation between left-right positions and concrete policy positions is weaker for voters than for parties, and weaker for underprivileged voters than for privileged voters. As a result, (2) left-right policy opinion congruence is only weakly related to policy opinion congruence based on concrete policy positions, especially for underprivileged voters and issues not related to the socio-economic or socio-cultural dimension. Here, too, the numbers in Figure 8.2 indicate the specific contribution of each chapter. Based on chapters two and three, I conclude that the left-right scale cannot substitute for concrete policy positions when measuring policy opinion congruence. Congruence based on the left-right scale does not reliably measure the extent to which voters and parties agree on actual policy positions. Therefore, measures of policy opinion congruence should be based on concrete policy positions.

Figure 8.2: Overview of the methodological contributions



While not directly tested in this dissertation, inequality in policy opinion congruence based on voters and parties' left-right positions would likely underestimate the congruence gap between privileged and underprivileged voters. Finding a party with a congruent position on the left-right scale is less demanding than finding a party with congruent positions on a whole range of concrete policy positions, because the former is less cognitively demanding. Consequently, the policy opinion congruence gap between privileged and underprivileged voters would likely have been smaller, or perhaps even non-existent, if it had been measured on the basis on the left-right scale. In other words, using the left-right scale to measure inequality in policy opinion congruence between would have entailed the risk of arriving at completely erroneous results.

Limitations

This section discusses the limitations of this dissertation. Conducting research involves making choices, each of which has consequences. Three issues are discussed in that context: (1) studying inequality in policy opinion congruence in Belgium, (2) studying inequality in policy opinion congruence during coinciding elections with a campaign focused on policy information, and (3) focusing on inequality in policy opinion congruence rather than on policy congruence.

Studying inequality in policy opinion congruence in Belgium

In chapter four, I argued that there are two pathways to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence: 1) parties' policy offers being more attuned to privileged voters' policy positions and 2) underprivileged voters making incorrect choices at the ballot box. The distinction essentially revolves

around the choices voters receive and the choices they make. The Belgian case arguably affects the extent to which each pathway contributes to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. Belgium has a very fragmented party landscape, both in Flanders and in French-speaking Belgium. Such a party landscape makes a bias in parties' policy offers less likely for the simple reason there are more parties. This is compounded by the fact that Belgium has compulsory voting. Parties know that underprivileged voters will participate in elections, and so they have a clear incentive to adopt policy positions attuned to the policy preferences of those underprivileged voters. However, the multitude of political parties from which voters can choose makes finding the one with the most congruent policy views more difficult.

In this sense, Belgium can be considered a most-likely case for finding that inequality in correct voting is the most important pathway to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. Likewise, it is a least-likely case for finding inequality in parties' policy offers. In countries that do not share similarities with Belgium (i.e., countries with fewer parties), the bias towards privileged voters in parties' policy offers is likely to be more important, with correct voting playing a less critical role in explaining inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence. The U.S., for instance, only has two parties, and so voters' choices are more limited. Both parties are expected to converge to the median voter's positions (Downs 1957), and so their policy positions are very similar. As a result, voters' choices are less important in determining inequality levels in dyadic policy opinion congruence. However, while the criticality of each pathway might vary across countries, the two pathways to inequality in dyadic policy opinion congruence are present in every democratic political system. As long as there are two different parties competing in an election, voters' choices matter. Future research should take into account multiple countries and assess the importance of the electoral system in determining policy opinion congruence inequality levels.

Studying inequality in policy opinion congruence during coinciding elections with a campaign focused on policy information

In this dissertation, inequality in policy opinion congruence was studied during the Belgian elections on May 25, 2014. On that day, elections for the country's federal, regional, and European parliaments all took place. The campaign preceding those elections heavily focused on substantive policy information. Several VAAs were launched—including the one developed during the course of this thesis—the media thoroughly scrutinized the parties' manifestos to calculate the costs of their policy proposals. This held true for the regional, federal, and European level. Though an information-rich campaign is a good case to study whether campaigns can help close the correct voting gap between privileged and underprivileged voters, it is possible that many voters—and particularly

underprivileged ones—were overwhelmed by a combination of the large volume of policy information and the threefold decision they had to make on election day.

The nature of the campaign and of the election itself therefore could have meant that cognitive skills and prior knowledge played an even more important role in helping voters select parties with congruent policy positions. Given that underprivileged voters were less likely to possess these skills and knowledge, policy opinion congruence inequality favoring privileged voters was likely higher during the 2014 election campaign in Belgium than during other, less information-rich electoral campaigns asking voters to make fewer decisions.

This dissertation provided evidence that campaigns do not always increase the policy opinion congruence between voters and parties. Future studies should build on this research and look at a wide variety of electoral campaigns, trying to tease out the mechanisms that determine when campaign decrease the correct voting gap between privileged and underprivileged voters and when they do not.

Focusing on inequality in policy opinion congruence rather than in policy congruence

The rationale for studying inequality in policy opinion congruence is that it can lead to inequality in policies. One of the main shortcomings of policy opinion congruence research is therefore that opinion (in)congruence does not always lead to policy (in)congruence. There are factors that intervene in the translation of political elites' policy positions into actual policies.

One example of an intervening factor is interest groups. In the case of Belgium, for instance, a substantial fraction of social and economic policies are developed in cooperation with representatives of employers and trade unions. In some instances, all that the government does is implement an agreement reached between business representatives and trade unions. This is what happened in February 2017 in Belgium, when the federal government approved an agreement reached between employers and trade unions that increased employees' wages. The government that approved the deal was composed of a coalition of center-right parties. Earlier, and in line with their policy positions, that coalition had implemented a policy of wage restraint.[1] Honoring the deal made between employers and trade unions thus meant a policy that was incongruent with the government's own position. This is an example of interest groups preventing policy positions from being translated into actual policies, and as a result, preventing policy opinion (in)congruence from being translated into policy (in)congruence.

[1] In Belgium, wages follow the level of price inflation. When prices increase, wages also increase automatically, in what is often referred to as "wage-indexing." The federal government decided to temporally suspend the indexing of wages, allowing prices to increase without increasing the wages.

Another example of a factor than intervenes in the relation between policy positions and policies is higher governments. The European Union, for instance, carefully monitors its member states' budgets deficits. Parties that want to expand the government's spending and are willing to run deficits to achieve that goal might not be able to do so, due to restrictions imposed by the European Union. A last example is the judicial branch of government. Judges can annul policies enacted by governments if it finds them to be in violation of the law. For instance, in January 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order implementing a travel ban on all citizens of seven countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The ban was temporarily halted soon afterwards, and the judiciary might end it altogether, as it potentially violates the U.S. Constitution.

In short, the realities of government can prevent political elites from enacting their policy positions. Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that political elites will translate their positions into policies as much as possible *within* the constraints imposed by these realities. This makes understanding inequality in policy opinion congruence crucial for understanding inequality in policy congruence. It is impossible to understand why government policies favor privileged voters' policy preferences without considering political elites' policy positions and the process through which their positions come to favor the policy preferences of privileged voters. This study has therefore provided an essential first step, on which future research can build, towards the development of a model of inequality in policy congruence between privileged and underprivileged voters.

The normative implications of this dissertation's findings

This dissertation found that inequality in policy opinion congruence is primarily due to inequality in correct voting. Underprivileged voters are more likely to disagree with the parties for which they vote than privileged voters are. Inequality in policy opinion congruence is therefore largely "self-inflicted" by underprivileged voters. In other words, inequality in policy opinion congruence is primarily due to a voter-level factor (i.e., correct voting) and less due to system-level factors (e.g., lobbying, financial contributions). The notion that voters are the reason why representational democracy falters is not new. In 1787, after the deliberations on the U.S. Constitution were finished, Dr. Benjamin Franklin was asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" Franklin replied with, "A republic, Madam, if you can keep it" (L. Martin 1906, 618).

Many of the Founding Fathers were distrustful of voters. In their view, democracy would always be a fragile political experiment, forever at the mercy of voters' decisions in the polling booth. Normative democratic theory argues that citizens should be given the power to directly affect politics through

voting. At the same time, it sets several requirements for voters. Voters are to inform themselves about political issues and the basic workings of political institutions, and they should act in accordance with this knowledge. In the framework of this dissertation, this means that voters need to be aware of parties' policy positions and vote for the party with which they most closely agree on those positions. This dissertation found that many voters, and primarily underprivileged ones, do not live up to this normative ideal. I find the anecdote about Benjamin Franklin fitting, because in essence he argued that institutions can only accomplish so much. Even if political institutions—the system level— are designed to equalize the policy opinion congruence of privileged and underprivileged voters, inequality in policy opinion congruence can still occur due to incorrect voting—the voter level.

Any normative discussion of inequality in policy opinion congruence entails a discussion of who is to *blame* for that inequality. On the surface, it might appear that underprivileged voters are to blame, because they vote for parties with which they disagree, despite the presence of more congruent alternatives. However, to what extent can we blame underprivileged voters for their incorrect votes? Structure and agency are the central concepts in the debate on blame and responsibility (Barker 2005). "Structure" refers to recurring patterns in social and cultural life that influence and limit individuals' choices. "Agency" refers to their capacity of to act independently and make their own choices.

While voting for a party with incongruent policy positions is a choice made by an individual voter, the root causes of incorrect voting are most likely a lack of prior political knowledge and more weakly developed cognitive skills for processing political information. In turn, those factors are predominantly the result of different levels of education. Voters with more years of formal education are more likely to have received information about democracy, political institutions, and political parties. As a result, these voters are more knowledgeable about politics and can more easily make sense of new political information. Additional years of formal education give voters at least a minimum understanding of how political institutions work (Hillygus 2005) and a stronger interest in politics and elections (Beck et al.2008). The education system can therefore be considered as a sorting mechanism (Spring 1988), creating a group of voters with the skills and knowledge required to vote for a party with congruent policy positions and a group of voters without those skills and that knowledge. Voters' ability to vote correctly is thus largely the result of the group into which the educational system places them. That system does not prepare students for their role as voters until they reach its higher rungs.

In addition, a voters' level of education is also significantly affected by the level of education achieved by his or her parents (Dubow, Boxer, and Huesmann 2009). Children of higher educated parents are more likely to attain a higher level of education themselves, and vice versa. One of the mechanisms through which this happens is parents' expectations for success (Frome and Eccles 1998). Higher educated parents are more likely to encourage so-called "achievement-oriented behavior," like obtaining higher education degrees and engaging in frequent reading. In addition, higher educated voters are more likely to provide "achievement-oriented opportunities," like library and museum trips and educational books. In sum, a voter's level of education and, consequently, his or her possession of prior political knowledge and cognitive skills for making sense of politics are not the result of his or her own choices. Rather, they are a function of his or her social position at birth and of the social position assigned by the educational system.

Therefore, it would be erroneous to interpret this dissertation's distinction between system- and voter-level explanations of inequality in policy opinion congruence as a distinction between structure and agency. The ability to vote correctly is primarily related to voters' level of formal education. Through education, voters are informed about the workings of political institutions, and they learn what to expect of parties and how to process political information more efficiently. This undermines any suggestion that incorrect voting can be blamed on voters themselves. It is structure, and not agency, that lies at the heart of incorrect voting and by extension, at the heart of inequality in policy opinion congruence.

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Appendix

Chapter one

Table A1.1: List of all 191 policy statements and their issue dimension, direction and region

Statement	Dimension	Direction	Region
There should be a ban on headscarves for teachers in community education	Socio-cultural	Right	Flanders
Schools must offer halal meals to their Muslim pupils	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
When enrolling in a school, students who live in the neighborhood should be given priority, regardless of their origin	Neutral		Flanders
There should be more technical classes in secondary education	Neutral		Flanders
Secondary schools should not organize expensive school trips	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Teachers in difficult schools should receive a financial bonus	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Only after the first two years of secondary education should pupils choose a specialization	Neutral		Flanders
Flemish public companies should be required to have a minimum number of persons with disabilities in their employment	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
The port of Antwerp should not expand further	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Even unemployed people over the age of 60 years should be guided towards a new job	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
Industrial companies should be exempt from property tax on new investments in equipment	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
Parents of children who play truant should temporarily lose their child benefits	Socio-cultural	Right	Flanders
A family should be given the same allowances for every child	Neutral		Flanders
For high earners, child benefits should go down, for low-income it should go up	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
From the moment social tenants earn enough, they have to leave their social housing	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
The rules to exploit a private crèche should be relaxed	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
Eliminating waiting lists in the disability sector calories, is more important than lowering taxes	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Rather than to build social housing, the government should help people to rent on the private market	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
Who earns more should pay more for health insurance; who earn less, should pay less	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Especially a loan for the renovation of an old house should be tax-efficient	Neutral		Flanders
In case of smog alert, restrictions on the use of cars must be strengthened	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders

Everyone who replaces a car older than 10 years by a more economical car model, should receive a premium	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Bring waste to the recycling center must be free	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Instead of a road tax, motorists should pay according to the number of kilometers they drive	Neutral		Flanders
Even bus and tram routes with few passengers should be continued	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Streets that are reconstructed, must have a cycle path	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Flanders may not subsidize regional airports	Neutral		Flanders
During rush hour on motorways, a lane should be reserved for carpooling	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
People over 65 years old should continue to travel free on buses and trams	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
The construction of the Oosterweel highway [*proposed highway in the north of the Belgian city of Antwerp*] should be stopped	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
All entrants must take part in an integration exam	Socio-cultural	Right	Flanders
Staff of the Flemish government may wear a scarf behind the counter	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
No new mosques should be built	Socio-cultural	Right	Flanders
Knowledge of Dutch know should not be a condition for eligibility for social housing	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Schools should require children to also speak Dutch on the playground	Socio-cultural	Right	Flanders
The budget of the Flemish government may go in the red in times of crisis	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
Flanders should not intervene in the debt of the Flemish municipalities	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
Mayors should be directly elected	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
The municipalities in Brussels should merge	Neutral		Flanders
The provincial level of government must disappear	Neutral		Flanders
The Flemish government must merge small municipalities	Neutral		Flanders
A member of the Flemish Parliament should not simultaneously be mayor	Neutral		Flanders
The Flemish and the federal election must always be held on the same day	Neutral		Flanders
There should be more people of foreign origin on public broadcasting programs	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Grants for culture should increase	Socio-cultural	Left	Flanders
Cultural projects aimed at a general public should receive more subsidies	Neutral		Flanders
Living in the city should be fiscally encouraged	Neutral		Flanders
Plots that are untilled for a long time, should be taxed more heavily	Socio-economic	Left	Flanders
The rules for the export of arms and military hardware should	Socio-	Left	Flanders

be stricter	economic		
Flanders should spend less money on development aid	Socio-economic	Right	Flanders
In times of crisis salaries should not be automatically adjusted to price increases	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Large capitals should be taxed more	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The federal government should sell its shares in Belgacom [*Belgian telecom company primarily owned by the state*]	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
People who invest their money instead of saving it must be fiscally rewarded	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
People should pay more taxes (VAT) on what they buy than on their income	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Company vehicles must be taxed more heavily	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The expenditure of the federal government should not increase in the coming years	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
The retirement age should not rise	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The government should fiscally encourage pension savings more	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Living wage beneficiaries should be required to perform community work	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Unemployed people must lose their unemployment benefits after a time	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
people who have never worked, should not receive unemployment benefits	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Salaries of managers of public enterprises should not be higher than the salary of the Prime Minister	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Wages should be frozen if they are rising faster than in neighboring countries	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
If the railways are on strike, there should be minimum service	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
The compulsory closing day of shops should be abolished	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
It should be easier to lay off workers	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Employers should be required to have a certain proportion of people of foreign origin in their employment	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The stations which are used by few travelers, should remain open	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The smoking ban in the hospitality industry should be relaxed	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The living wage must rise	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
There should be no alcohol in vending machines	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
All prisoners should serve their sentences in full	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The GAS fines should be abolished	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium

The minimum age for GAS fines should be higher than the current age of 14	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The use of cannabis should be banned completely	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
Clients of prostitutes should be fined	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The right to strike should not be restricted	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Illegal downloading is to be treated more harshly	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
There should be a driver's license with points	Neutral		Belgium
A parent who decided to stay home with their children should receive an allowance	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
It should be legally prohibited for parents to spank their children	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
Surrogacy for gay couples should be allowed	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
People with high incomes should receive less money from the health insurance	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
People with unhealthy lifestyles should receive less money from the health insurance	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Young people should be able to vote from age 16	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
There should be a federal electoral district, so you can vote for French-speaking candidates	Neutral		Belgium
Flanders should become fully independent	Neutral		Belgium
Social security should be completely split	Neutral		Belgium
The endowment to the royal family should be reduced	Neutral		Belgium
Europe should be able to levy taxes which replace national taxes	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The President of the European Commission should be directly elected by the Europeans	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
Europe should receive more social competences	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
Voters must be able to choose whether to vote or not	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
A member of parliament should not simultaneously mayor	Neutral		Belgium
A mother must be able to anonymously give up her child for adoption	Neutral		Belgium
There should remain nuclear power plants	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The speed limit on the Brussels ring road should be reduced to 100 km per hour	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
An asylum seeker who has come here as a minor may not be returned	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
Young people who leave for Syria to join the struggle should lose their right to benefits	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
Belgium should allow migrants from outside the EU to cope with labor shortages	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Asylum seekers who have to wait too long for a decision, should automatically obtain a residence permit	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium

Even in times of crisis, there should be more money for development aid	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The Belgian army must invest in a successor to the F-16 fighter	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
All nuclear weapons stored on Belgian territory must be removed	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The Belgian army should participate less in foreign interventions	Neutral		Belgium
The EU should oblige Member States to introduce a living wage	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Europe needs competition for domestic passenger transport as via the train	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
East Europeans may come to work in Belgium only if they pay the same social contributions as the Belgians	Neutral		Belgium
Europe must invest more in student exchange programs in higher education	Neutral		Belgium
Migrants entering the EU, should be spread across the EU countries	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
EU countries that violate freedom of the press, should be punished	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
We need stricter rules for the sale of tobacco products	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Europe must exert less control over national budgets	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
Europe needs to focus less on savings, more on economic growth	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
There should be a Europe-wide tax on the purchase and sale of shares	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The maternity leave should be at least 20 weeks across Europe	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The money from all savers, including large ones, must be fully guaranteed if a bank goes bankrupt	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
There should be eurobonds, in which all euro countries can act as guarantor together when one of them takes out a loan	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
In Europe there should be fewer transfers between rich and poor regions	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
Turkey should join the European Union	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The European Union must not expand further	Neutral		Belgium
The standards for CO2 emissions from cars should be stricter	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The exploitation of shale gas must be allowed	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
There should be less EU money for agriculture	Neutral		Belgium
The cultivation of GM crops should be allowed	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
The EU should give human rights a higher weighting when making trade deals	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
The import tax on agricultural products must be reduced for developing countries	Socio-economic	Left	Belgium
The number of languages used in the European Parliament	Neutral		Belgium

should be reduced			
The EU Member States should establish a European army	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
There should be a European identity card	Neutral		Belgium
The EU should invest more in the security of its external borders	Socio-cultural	Right	Belgium
In every European country the rules for the reception of asylum seekers should be the same	Socio-cultural	Left	Belgium
European funds for development should not go to countries with a corrupt government	Socio-economic	Right	Belgium
The organization of certain courses in another language in humanities (immersion) should be made easier	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Student's parents should be able to choose a day off according to their religion	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Parents of children who brush their courses must temporarily lose their child benefits	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
Family benefits should be related to school attendance	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
Insulation standards should be imposed for old houses	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
In case of smog alert, restrictions on the use of cars must be strengthened	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Environmental protection rules may not lead to price increases	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
Wallonia must invest less in wind turbines	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
Instead of a road tax, motorists should pay according to the number of kilometers they drive	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Cycle lanes should not be added if it complicates the situation for motorists	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
The staff of the Walloon Public Service must have the right to wear the headscarf	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
The new immigrants must be required to take an integration course	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
The construction of new mosques should be greatly limited	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
The Walloon administration should employ a minimum number of people of foreign origin	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Wallonia must impose on municipalities that they provide land to accommodate the Roma and travelers	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
The headscarf should be banned for students in community education	Socio-cultural	Right	Wallonia
The schools should provide halal meals to their Muslim students	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
There should be more people of foreign origin on public broadcasting programs	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Wallonia should encourage building in city centers more	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
Wallonia must devote more money to development aid	Socio-cultural	Left	Wallonia
The mayors should not be directly elected	Socio-	Left	Wallonia

	cultural		
Less advantaged should receive more resources	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
Graduate studies that offer fewer job opportunities should be less subsidized	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
Secondary schools should not organize expensive school trips	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
School re-entry allowances should be increased for lower incomes	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
Teachers in difficult schools must receive a financial bonus	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
Walloon public companies should be required to hire a minimum number of disabled persons	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The remuneration of intercommunal managers must be made public	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
Entrepreneurs who create jobs in Wallonia must be less taxes	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
Public authorities should invest less in major infrastructure works	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
The maximum demand by private crèches should be capped	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
From the moment social tenants earn enough, they have to leave their social housing	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
A quota of 10% social housing should be mandatory in all municipalities	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
From the moment social tenants earn enough, they have to leave their social housing	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The production of energy via solar panels should not be subsidized	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
The owners of several properties must be more taxes	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
During peak hours, a traffic lane should be reserved for carpooling	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The TEC must be privatized	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
People over the age of 65 should be able to travel free on the TEC	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The number of officials in the Walloon municipalities with limited resources must be reduced	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
Instead of disseminating advertisements, RTBF must be entirely financed by the public authorities	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
Untiled buildable land should be more taxes	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The rules related to the export of arms should be relaxed	Socio-economic	Left	Wallonia
The number of Walloon officials must be reduced	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
Farmland should be converted to industrial areas more	Socio-economic	Right	Wallonia
The decree inscriptions (which organizes the access of students to schools) must be removed	Neutral		Wallonia

An entrance examination must be set up at the university, in each Faculty	Neutral		Wallonia
Each child in a family is to receive the same amount of family allowances	Neutral		Wallonia
A parent who decided to stay home with their children should receive an allowance	Neutral		Wallonia
Only loans for the renovation of old houses are to be tax-efficient	Neutral		Wallonia
The radio-television fee tax must be eliminated	Neutral		Wallonia
The motorway sticker is to be established in Wallonia	Neutral		Wallonia
The provinces should be kept	Neutral		Wallonia
Wallonia must merge the smallest municipalities	Neutral		Wallonia
Cultural projects destined to a small audience should receive less subsidies	Neutral		Wallonia
Wallonia must create a new city to absorb the growing population	Neutral		Wallonia
Wallonia must subsidize less regional airports	Neutral		Wallonia

Table A1.2: Flemish National Register sample

	Inhabitants 18+	Sampling points	Net sample	Anticipated response rate	Gross sample
Antwerpen	808,615	19	190	50.00%	380
Mechelen	265,726	6	60	58.82%	102
Turnhout	360,600	8	80	58.82%	136
Halle-Vilvoorde	478,433	11	110	40.00%	275
Leuven	398,681	9	90	58.82%	153
Brugge	231,634	6	60	58.82%	102
Diksmuide	40,661	1	10	58.82%	17
Ieper	85,168	2	20	58.82%	34
Kortrijk	228,966	5	50	58.82%	85
Oostende	128,319	3	30	58.82%	51
Roeselare	118,893	3	30	58.82%	51
Tielt	73,345	2	20	58.82%	34
Veurne	51,990	1	10	58.82%	17
Aalst	227,235	5	50	58.82%	85
Dendermonde	157,922	4	40	58.82%	68
Eeklo	67,469	2	20	58.82%	34
Gent	433,487	10	100	50.00%	200
Oudenaarde	96,962	2	20	58.82%	34
Sint-Niklaas	192,145	5	50	58.82%	85
Hasselt	337,738	8	80	58.82%	136
Masseik	191,508	4	40	58.82%	68
Tongeren	163,572	4	40	58.82%	68
Total	5,139,069	120	1,200	54.18%	2,215

Table A1.3: Walloon National Register sample

	Inhabitants 18+	Sampling points	Net sample	Anticipated response rate	Gross sample
Nivelles	304,741	13	130	58.82%	221
Ath	67,057	3	30	58.82%	51
Charleroi	337,239	15	150	50.00%	300
Mons	202,174	9	90	58.82%	153
Mouscron	58,051	2	20	58.82%	34
Soignies	146,286	6	60	58.82%	102
Thuin	119,712	5	50	58.82%	85
Tournai	116,398	5	50	58.82%	85
Huy	86,577	4	40	58.82%	68
Liège	491,870	21	210	50.00%	420
Verviers	223,207	9	90	58.82%	153
Waremme	61,310	3	30	58.82%	51
Arlon	46,346	2	20	58.82%	34
Bastogne	35,231	1	10	58.82%	17
Marche-en-Famenne	43,335	2	20	58.82%	34
Neufchateau	47,363	2	20	58.82%	34
Virton	40,412	2	20	58.82%	34
Dinant	84,977	4	40	58.82%	68
Namur	242,758	10	100	58.82%	170
Philippeville	52,397	2	20	58.82%	34
Total	2,807,441	120	1,200	55.87%	2,148

Table A1.4: List of the 23 federal policy statements, selected from the list 191 policy statements

Statement
The federal government should sell its shares in Belgacom
Big capital should be taxed more
The President of the European Commission should be directly elected by the European voters
Flanders should become an independent state
The voting age should be lowered to 16 years old
An asylum seeker who arrived as a minor cannot be sent back
The expenditure of the federal government should not increase in the coming years
The government should more fiscally encourage retirement savings
The speed limit on the Brussels ring road should be reduced to 100 km per hour
All nuclear weapons stored on Belgian territory should be removed
We should keep using nuclear power plants
A mother must be able to anonymously give up her child for adoption
If the railways are on strike, there should be minimum service
Wages should be frozen if they are rising faster than in neighboring countries
The Belgian army must invest in a successor to the F-16 fighter
It should be legally prohibited for parents to spank their children
Illegal downloading is to be treated more harshly
All prisoners should serve their sentences in full
The minimum age for GAS fines should be higher than the current age of 14
People who invest their money instead of saving it must be fiscally rewarded
Belgium should allow migrants from outside the EU to cope with labor shortages
Company vehicles must be taxed more heavily
Living wage beneficiaries should be required to perform community work

Question wording: education level

"Wat is uw hoogst behaalde opleidingsniveau?"

1: Geen
2: Lager onderwijs
3: Algemeen secundair, niet volledig afgewerkt (Lager ASO)
4: Technisch secundair, niet volledig afgewerkt (Lager TSO)
5: Beroeps secundair, niet volledig afgewerkt (Lager BSO)
6: Algemeen secundair, volledig afgewerkt (Hoger ASO)
7: Technisch secundair, volledig afgewerkt (Hoger TSO)
8: Beroeps secundair, volledig afgewerkt (Hoger BSO)
9: Hoger niet-universitair onderwijs
10: Universitair onderwijs
99:

Question wording: income deciles

"Als u het inkomen uit alle bronnen optelt, in welke categorie bevindt zich het totale maandelijkse netto-inkomen van uw huishouden, eventuele inkomsten uit overuren inbegrepen. Indien u het precieze inkomen niet weet, geef dan een schatting. Netto-inkomen is het inkomen na aftrek van belastingen. U mag gewoon het nummer noemen van de categorie die voor u van toepassing is."

1: Lager dan €1000
2: €1000 tot minder dan €1300
3: €1300 tot minder dan €1600
4: €1600 tot minder dan €1900
5: €1900 tot minder dan €2300
6: €2300 tot minder dan €2800
7: €2800 tot minder dan €3400
8: €3400 tot minder dan €4000
9: €4000 tot minder dan €5000
10: €5000 tot minder dan €6000
11: €6000 of meer

Table A1.5: Panel attrition in the second voter survey (education)

	Wave 1 (pre-campaign)	Wave 2 (post campaign)	Difference
Lower educated	35.15%	31.95%	-3.20%
Middle educated	36.72%	36.33%	-0.39%
Higher educated	28.13%	31.73%	3.60%
Total	100%	100%	

Note: the data are weighted as to accurately reflect the eligible voting population in Flanders and Wallonia in terms of region, gender, age and education.

Table 16: Panel attrition in the second voter survey (income)

	Wave 1 (pre-campaign)	Wave 2 (post campaign)	Difference
Income decile 1	4.75%	3.37%	-1.38%
Income decile 2	10.74%	9.20%	-1.54%
Income decile 3	14.18%	14.59%	0.41%
Income decile 4	11.15%	10.69%	-0.46%
Income decile 5	12.66%	12.70%	0.04%
Income decile 6	12.12%	12.92%	0.80%
Income decile 7	12.62%	12.89%	0.27%
Income decile 8	10.27%	10.81%	0.54%
Income decile 9	6.85%	7.44%	0.59%
Income decile 10	4.66%	5.38%	0.72%
Total	100%	100%	

Note: the data are weighted as to accurately reflect the eligible voting population in Flanders and Wallonia in terms of region, gender, age and education.

Chapter two

Table A2.2: Example of the stacked dataset

Party or voter	Statement	Statement answer (dependent)	Statement dimension	Ideological position	Education level	Age
Party	1	Agree	Socio-cultural	8	.	.
Party	2	Agree	Socio-economic	8	.	.
Party	3	Agree	Socio-cultural	8	.	.
Party	1	Disagree	Socio-cultural	2	.	.
Party	2	Disagree	Socio-economic	2	.	.
Party	3	Disagree	Socio-cultural	2	.	.
Party	1	Agree	Socio-cultural	4	.	.
Party	2	Disagree	Socio-economic	4	.	.
Party	3	Agree	Socio-cultural	4	.	.
Voter	1	Agree	Socio-cultural	6	Lower education	50
Voter	2	Disagree	Socio-economic	6	Lower education	50
Voter	3	Disagree	Socio-cultural	6	Lower education	50
Voter	1	Agree	Socio-cultural	1	Middle education	22
Voter	2	Agree	Socio-economic	1	Middle education	22
Voter	3	Disagree	Socio-cultural	1	Middle education	22
Voter	1	Agree	Socio-cultural	9	Higher education	35
Voter	2	Disagree	Socio-economic	9	Higher education	35
Voter	3	Agree	Socio-cultural	9	Higher education	35

Table A2.3: Explaining the position of voters on concrete policy statements (robustness checks)

	Model 1: direct effects (issue complexity)	Model 2: direct effects (issue saliency)	Model 2: interaction effects (issue complexity)	Model 2: interaction effects (issue saliency)
	B S.E. Sig.	B S.E. Sig.	B S.E. Sig.	B S.E. Sig.
Left-right position	0.05 (0.00) ***	0.05 (0.00) ***	0.06 (0.01) ***	0.07 (0.02) ***
Issue complexity	-0.32 (1.73)		0.08 (1.76)	-0.03 (0.01) *
Issue saliency		-0.04 (0.01) ***		
Issue complexity* Left-right position			-0.08 (0.05)	
Issue saliency* Left-right position				0.00 (0.00)
Education: Lower (ref. cat.)				
Education: Middle	0.08 (0.04) *	0.08 (0.04) *	0.08 (0.04) *	0.08 (0.04) *
Education: Higher	0.13 (0.04) ***	0.13 (0.04) ***	0.13 (0.04) ***	0.13 (0.04) ***
Gender: Male (ref. cat.)	---	---	---	---
Gender: Female	-0.07 (0.02) ***	-0.06 (0.02) **	-0.07 (0.02) ***	-0.06 (0.02) **
Age	0.00 (0.00) ***	0.00 (0.00) **	0.00 (0.00) ***	0.00 (0.00) **
Income	0.03 (0.01) ***	0.03 (0.01) ***	0.03 (0.01) ***	0.03 (0.01) ***
Region: Flanders (ref. cat.)	---	---	---	---
Region: Wallonia	0.20 (0.23)	0.19 (0.23)	0.20 (0.23)	0.19 (0.23)
Political interest	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00) †	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00) †
Constant	-0.82 (0.45) †	-0.60 (0.38)	-0.87 (0.45) †	-0.69 (0.39) †
Constant SD	0.40 (0.01)	0.40 (0.01)	0.40 (0.01)	0.39 (0.01)
N (Total)	86,915	86,915	86,915	86,915
N (voters)	1613	1613	1613	1613
AIC	96294.6	96295.41	96191.54	96192.15
BIC	96407.08	96417.26	96304.01	96313.99
Explained variance (voter/party level)	31.95%	31.92%	33.02%	33.06%

Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) policy position; † = $p \leq 0.10$; * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; ***= $p \leq 0.001$

Table A2.4: Explaining the concrete policy position of voters and the differences herein between Flanders and Wallonia

	Model 1: direct effects			Model 2: second order interaction terms			Model 2: third order interaction terms		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right position	0.08	(0.00)	***	0.09	(0.01)	***	0.07	(0.02)	***
Education Lower (ref. cat.)	---			---					
Middle	0.06	(0.03)	†	0.06	(0.03)		0.10	(0.12)	
Higher	0.08	(0.03)	**	-0.09	(0.03)	**	-0.13	(0.12)	
Gender Male (ref. cat.)	---			---					
Female	-0.04	(0.02)	*	-0.04	(0.02)	†	-0.04	(0.02)	†
Age	0.00	(0.00)	**	0.00	(0.00)	***	0.00	(0.00)	**
Income	0.02	(0.00)	***	0.02	(0.00)	***	0.02	(0.00)	***
Region Flanders (ref. cat.)	---			---					
Wallonia	-0.07	(0.02)	***	0.09	(0.05)	†	0.11	(0.13)	
Political interest	0.01	(0.00)	*	0.01	(0.00)	*	0.01	(0.00)	*
Interaction terms:									
Left-right positions*Flanders (ref. cat.)				---			---		
Left-right positions*Wallonia				-0.03	(0.01)	***	-0.02	(0.02)	
Left-right positions*lower education (ref. cat.)							---		
Left-right positions*middle education							0.00	(0.02)	
Left-right positions*higher education							0.05	(0.02)	*
Lower education*Flanders (ref. cat.)							---		
Middle education*Wallonia							-0.03	(0.15)	
Higher education*Wallonia							-0.07	(0.14)	
Left-right positions*lower education*Flanders (ref. cat.)							---		
Left-right positions*middle education*Wallonia							0.00	(0.03)	
Left-right positions*higher education*Wallonia							0.00	(0.03)	
Constant	-0.68	(0.08)	***	-0.84	(0.09)	***	-0.73	(0.12)	
Constant SD	0.28	(0.01)		0.28	(0.01)		0.28	(0.01)	
N (Total)	86,915			86,915			86,915		
N (voters)	1613			1613			1613		
AIC	117437.6			117427.9			117398.6		
BIC	117531.3			117531			117557.9		
Explained variance voter level)	36.81%			37.73%			40.70%		

Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) policy position; † = $p \leq 0.10$; * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; ***= $p \leq 0.001$

Table A2.5: Explaining the policy positions of parties and the differences between Flanders and Wallonia

	Model 1: direct effects			Model 2: interaction effects		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right position	0.33	(0.06)	***	0.34	(0.06)	***
Flanders (ref. cat.)	---					
Wallonia	-0.56	(0.25)	*	0.14	(0.60)	
Left-right position *Flanders (ref. cat.)				---		
Left-right position *Wallonia				-0.13	(0.10)	
Constant	-2.17	(0.38)	***	-2.03	(0.39)	***
Constant SD	0.4	(0.13)		0.37	(0.01)	
N (Total)	676			676		
N (parties)	11			11		
AIC	824.18			824.69		
BIC	842.24			847.27		
Explained variance (party level)	89.87%			92.53%		

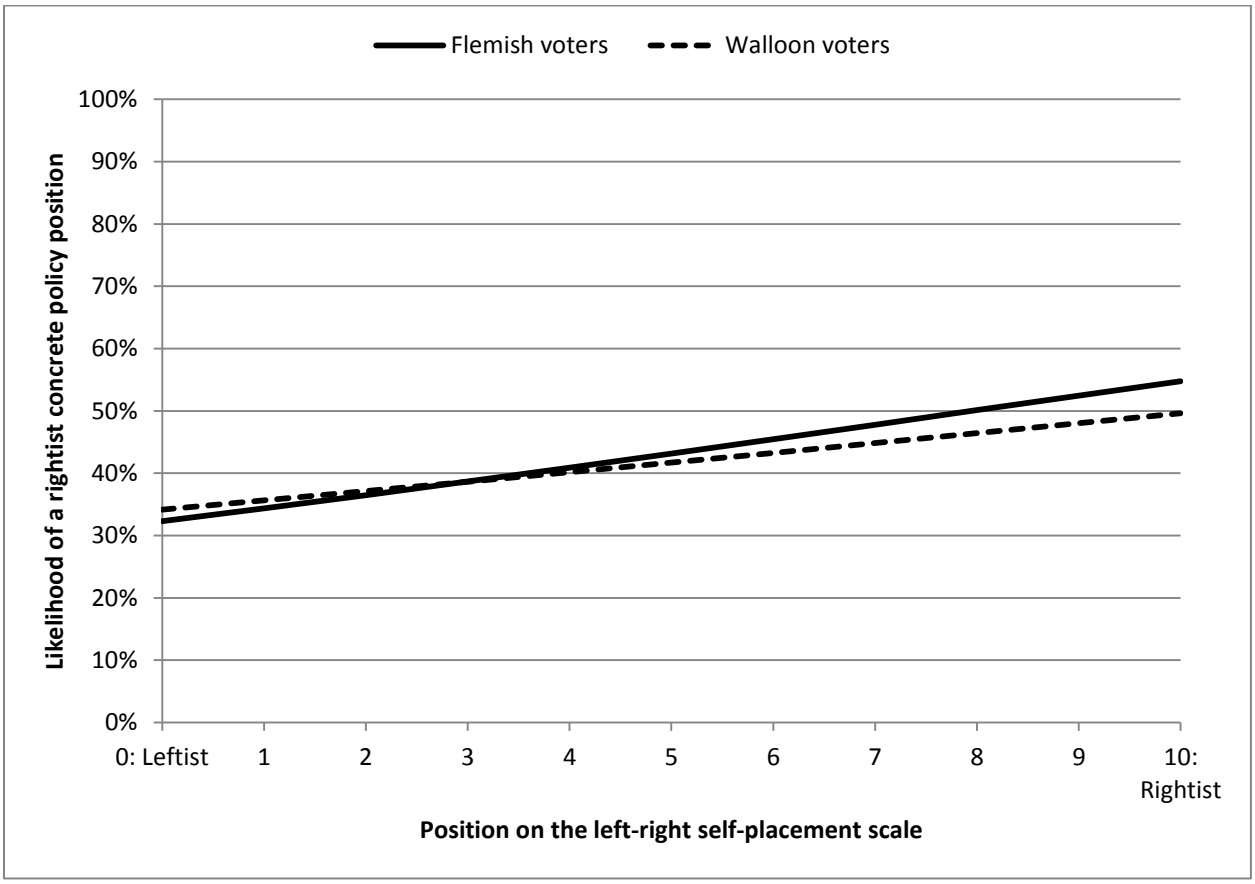
Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) concrete policy position; † = $p \leq 0.10$; * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; ***= $p \leq 0.001$;

Table A2.6: Explaining the policy positions of parties and voters on concrete policy statements and the differences between Flanders and Wallonia

	Model 3: direct effects (parties + voters)			Model 4: interaction effects (parties + voters)		
	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right position	0.08	(0.00)	***	0.10	(0.01)	***
Voter (ref. cat.)	---			---		
Party	-0.10	(0.12)		-1.27	(0.43)	**
Flanders (ref. cat.)	---					
Wallonia	-0.08	(0.02)	***	0.08	(0.05)	
Left-right position*voter (ref. cat.)				---		
Left-right position*party				0.25	(0.07)	***
Voter*Flanders (ref. cat.)				---		
Party*Wallonia				0.05	(0.66)	
Left-right position* Flanders (ref. cat.)				---		
Left-right position*Wallonia				-0.03	(0.01)	***
Left-right position*voter* Flanders (ref. cat.)				---		
Left-right position*party*Wallonia				-0.10	(0.11)	
Constant	-0.59	(0.04)	***	-0.76	(0.04)	***
Constant SD	0.31	(0.01)		0.30	(0.01)	
N (Total)	87,591			87,591		
N (voters/parties)	1613/11			1613/11		
AIC	118344.4			118312.8		
BIC	118391.3			118397.2		
Explained variance (voter/party level)	31.09%			34.15%		

Multilevel logistic regression; dv = rightwing (1) or leftwing (0) concrete policy position; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001;

Figure A2.1: The relation between left-right self-placement position and concrete policy positions for Flemish and Walloon voters



Chapter three

Table A3.1: The relation between left-right and concrete policy opinion congruence and the moderating effects of issue dimensions and education

	Third-order interaction effects		
	B	S.E.	Sig.
Left-right policy opinion congruence	0.06	(0.01)	***
Economic issue dimension (ref. cat.)	---		
Cultural issue dimension	-1.90	(1.35)	
Neutral issue dimension	-1.01	(1.35)	
Lower education (ref. cat.)	---		
Middle education	-2.11	(1.26)	†
Higher education	-7.04	(1.19)	***
Income	0.15	(0.06)	*
Male (ref. cat.)	---		
Female	0.69	(0.27)	*
Age	0.04	(0.01)	***
Region (ref. cat.: Flanders)	-4.66	(0.35)	***
Political interest	-0.03	(0.06)	
Missing statements	-29.74	(1.00)	***

Note: multilevel regression analysis; † = $p \leq 0.10$; * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; ***= $p \leq 0.001$; Party dummies are omitted from the model

Table A3.1 (*continued*)

	Third-order interaction effects		
	B	S.E.	Sig.
Second-order interaction terms:			
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Economic issue dimension (ref. cat.)	---		
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Cultural issue dimension	0.04	(0.02)	*
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Neutral issue dimension	-0.01	(0.02)	
Lower education*Left-right policy opinion congruence (ref. cat.)	---		
Middle education*Left-right policy opinion congruence	0.03	(0.02)	†
Higher education*Left-right policy opinion congruence	0.09	(0.02)	***
Lower education*Economic issue dimension (ref. cat.)	---		
Middle education*Cultural issue dimension	3.29	(1.62)	*
Higher education*Cultural issue dimension	4.48	(1.52)	**
Middle education*Neutral issue dimension	3.59	(1.62)	*
Higher education*Neutral issue dimension	6.75	(1.52)	***
Third-order interaction terms:			
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Economic issue dimension*Lower educated (ref. cat.)	---		
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Cultural issue dimension*Middle educated	-0.03	(0.02)	
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Cultural issue dimension*Higher educated	-0.04	(0.02)	†
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Neutral issue dimension*Middle educated	-0.04	(0.02)	†
Left-right policy opinion congruence*Neutral issue dimension*Higher educated	-0.07	(0.02)	***
Constant	55.06	(1.43)	***
N (total)	26,757		
N (Voters)	1,623		
Explained variance (voter level)	44.85%		

Note: multilevel regression analysis; † = p ≤ 0.10; * = p ≤ 0.05; ** = p ≤ 0.01; ***= p ≤ 0.001; Party dummies are omitted from the model

Chapter four

Table A4.1: List of policy statements

Statement	Policy domain 1	Policy domain 2
Parents of children who skip school often should be punished.	Education	Education
In grade school, it should be allowed that some courses are thought in French.	Education	Education
Teachers who work in difficult schools should get a financial bonus.	Education	Social welfare
Too much attention for weaker groups in education brings down the overall quality.	Education	Social welfare
High schools should be allowed to organize expensive field trips.	Education	Social welfare
During registration, schools should always give children from the neighborhood priority, regardless of their origin.	Education	Immigrant integration
The government should make childcare free of charge.	Social welfare	Social welfare
Getting rid of the waiting lists in the disabled sector is more important than lowering taxes.	Social welfare	Tax policy
The government should help people rent in the private sector, rather than build social housing.	Social welfare	Social welfare
There should be more detention centers for young offenders.	Other	Other
Isolation norms should become mandatory for older houses as well.	Environment & energy	Environment & energy
Slower driving because of smog alerts should be abolished.	Environment & energy	Mobility & public transportation
Anyone who replaces a car that it older than 10 years should get a bonus.	Environment & energy	Environment & energy
Bringing waste to the recycling site should be free of charge.	Environment & energy	Environment & energy
It should become easier to place a windmill in your garden.	Environment & energy	Environment & energy
The cabinets of Flemish ministers should be abolished.	Political institutions	Political institutions
The provincial government level should be abolished.	Political institutions	Political institutions
The Flemish and Federal elections should be held on the same day.	Political institutions	Political institutions
English should be recognized as an official language in Brussels.	Political institutions	Political institutions
The Flemish government should take steps towards Flemish independence.	Political institutions	Political institutions
Cultural projects with a low amount of visitors should receive less funding.	Culture & media	Culture & media
Farmers should be allowed to grow genetically modified organisms.	Other	Other
The speed limit on the Brussels highway around the city should be lowered to 65 miles an hour.	Mobility & public transportation	Mobility & public transportation
Allowing supertrucks on the road is a good idea.	Mobility & public	Mobility & public

	transportation	transportation
De Lijn (public transportation) should be made free of charge for youngsters under the age of 18.	Mobility & public transportation	Mobility & public transportation
If De Lijn (public transportation) strikes, a minimum service should be guaranteed.	Mobility & public transportation	Mobility & public transportation
An extra lane should be added to the busiest highways.	Mobility & public transportation	Mobility & public transportation
The VRT (public broadcaster) cannot broadcast any type of commercial.	Culture & media	Culture & media
Before, during and after children programming there should be no commercials.	Culture & media	Culture & media
The government must subsidize the commercial broadcasters so they can make a youth journal.	Culture & media	Culture & media
The 'Lange Wapper' bridge in Antwerp should be built as soon as possible.	Spatial planning	Mobility & public transportation
Living in the city should be subsidized financially.	Spatial planning	Spatial planning
Plots of land that have been left as is of a long time, should be taxed.	Spatial planning	Tax policy
It should be made easier to build large shopping malls.	Spatial planning	Economic policy
Schools should require children to speak Dutch on the playground.	Immigrant integration	Education
Civil servants should be allowed to wear a head scarf behind the counter.	Immigrant integration	Immigrant integration
People from Poland and Romania should have the right to work in Flanders.	Immigrant integration	Economic policy
Only those people who pass a test of integration, can stay.	Immigrant integration	Immigrant integration
The Flemish budget can go negative to fight the crisis.	Tax policy	Tax policy
Lowering taxes is a priority.	Tax policy	Tax policy
Those who earn more must pay more for health insurance. Those who earn less must pay less.	Social welfare	Social welfare
The expansion of the harbor of Antwerp must not be constricted.	Spatial planning	Environment & energy
Economic growth around airports is more important than strict noise limitations.	Economic policy	Environment & energy
The Flemish public companies should hire a minimum amount of disabled people.	Economic policy	Social welfare
Only for the lowest income groups, a tax reduction should be considered.	Tax policy	Tax policy
Flanders should increase its spending on development aid.	Tax policy	Tax policy
The rules for exporting weaponry should become stricter.	Economic policy	Economic policy
It should be possible to form a government coalition with Vlaams Belang.	Other	Other
Politicians should not be allowed to participate in television games.	Other	Other
Politicians that get elected on a list must take up their mandate.	Political institutions	Political institutions