

**Asymmetrical Representation?**  
**Policy Congruence Gaps in the 2009 European Parliament Election**

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Wordcount: Text = 8358 , Included: Three Figures and One table

**Abstract**

In this study, we argue and empirically demonstrate that the EP's architecture leads to asymmetrical representation. As national parties fight EP elections and EU-level political groups legislate, ideological congruence between citizens and their representatives should be assessed at both national and EU levels. We operationalize congruence as an "one-to-one" and a "many-to-one" relationship and measure these at both levels by combining novel data sources. Based on the resulting congruence estimates, we construct an indicator measuring the gap between the levels. Our study manifests that congruence gaps exist and that they vary across EU parties and issue dimensions.

## Introduction

How does the European Union (EU)'s multilevel structure impact the relationship between European citizens and those making policy on their behalf? The present study pursues this question and scrutinizes policy congruence in the European Parliament (EP)<sup>1</sup>, the single directly elected EU institution. The role of policy congruence in the representational relationship is pivotal: if the citizens' and their elected representatives' positions *a priori* diverge, it is doubtful that the latter will "make" the former "present" in policy making (Pitkin 1967). Also, congruence is normatively desirable because it associates with citizens' satisfaction with democracy (e.g. Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011). Studying policy congruence is, thus, an important avenue towards evaluating the relationship between representatives and represented in the EU polity (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). Although research has provided us with valuable insights regarding the effects of electoral systems on policy congruence (e.g. Golder and Stramski 2010; Blais and Bodet 2006), it has not looked at other types of institutional effects. The present analysis of policy congruence in the 2009 election to the EU's transnational multilevel assembly seeks to provide us with a refined understanding of EU citizens' representation and to contribute to the literature in theoretical, methodological and empirical terms.

Drawing on Mansbridge's 'Selection Model of Representation' (2009), we pay close attention to the *selection* and *sorting* mechanisms in place to produce a good ideological "match" between citizens and their representatives. In the EP environment, where all member states use some form of proportional electoral rules, electoral choice takes place in a national setting but policy is made at the European level: what are the implications for policy congruence? We argue that the debate on congruence should take seriously the particularities of the EP representational process: as the EP representation channel operates with national- *and* EU-level parties,

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<sup>1</sup>At the outset, neither the European Union (EU) in general, nor the EP in particular fit extant models of democratic representation (see Marsh and Norris 1997). Also, the EP election has been termed "second order" national election: compared to the national ones, in the EP election turnout is lower, while government parties lose and small and extreme parties win (Schmitt 2004; Reif and Schmitt 1980). Yet, this does not mean that we should not apply normative models to the EP, as such models provide valuable guidelines and criteria based on which the quality of political representation in democratically elected parliaments may be assessed (Thomassen 1994).

congruence between voters and parties should be achieved at both levels. Given that, when MEPs vote, they tend to follow the line of their EP Party Group (Hix *et al.* 2009), if divergence exists regarding the degrees of congruence achieved in different levels, voters may “lose out” at the stage of incorporation of the preferred national party into an EP Party Group. As a result, these voters would be unequally represented compared to others. What happens, however, in the real world?

So far, inquiries of party-voter congruence in the EP have studied either national- or EU-level parties (e.g. Mattila and Raunio 2006; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997). On the one hand, if we focus solely on party-voter congruence at the national level, we ignore the interdependence of individual national parties within EP Party Groups. On the other hand, if we concentrate on party-voter congruence at the EU level, we disregard the national character of EP elections and the potential differences across EU constituencies. Hence, evaluations of citizen representation via political parties in the EP cannot but take into account this potential discrepancy between levels. The existence of congruence gaps--or lack thereof--would be telling for the European election as a mechanism and for party organizations as vehicles of transnational democracy and, consequently, for the EP as an institutional channel for citizens' political representation.

A recent study of congruence in the 2004 EP that considers both national and European parties reveals that the degree of congruence between voters and the national parties they supported is not equal to that observed between voters and the EU-level parties, which their preferred parties joined (Casado and Lefkofridi 2011). However, as this project was limited to the cases of Austria and Germany, the extent of this phenomenon across the EU and its variation are yet unknown. Our study revisits this finding and extends relevant knowledge by conducting a comparative analysis of congruence differences (hereafter also termed “gaps”) between national and EU levels across the entire EU27 based on different measures of congruence.

We ask: do congruence gaps exist across levels of representation? To answer this question, we operationalize congruence from the perspectives of both citizens and the representatives. In other words, we conceive congruence as a “one-to-one” and as a “many-to-one” relationship and utilize the respective measures developed by Golder and Stramski (2010). Based on these congruence estimates, we construct an original indicator measuring absolute difference between national and EU levels of representation. We utilize new data covering the EP election in 27 member states, collected by the 2009 European Election Study (EES), the 2009 EU Profiler, and the 2010 expert survey on EP Political Groups (McElroy and Benoit 2011). Our analysis reveals congruence gaps between national and EU levels as well as variation in how this phenomenon manifests itself across EP Party Groups. Hence, this study throws new light on the quality of electoral democracy and representation in the EU. Congruence gaps present us with a novel puzzle that has important repercussions for the broader debate on the EU’s “democratic deficit” (e.g. Follesdal and Hix 2006).

In the remainder of this paper, we firstly present our thesis on the congruence gap between representational levels and elaborate on the variation of this difference across countries, parties and voters, as well as dimensions of contestation. Secondly, we deploy our methodological strategy. Thirdly, we report our results and in our fourth and concluding section we briefly discuss their implications for (the study of) representation in the EP.

## **Theorizing Policy Congruence Gaps in EP Multilevel Representation**

Approaching the representational relationship from a principal-agent perspective, voters are the principals choosing their agents among various candidates. In the Selection Model of Representation, alignment between principals and agents is primarily determined by the *selecting* and *sorting* mechanisms in place (Mansbridge 2009). Agents sort themselves in organizations

(political parties) promoting specific policy proposals. Important for the principals (voters) is to know what these proposals are. The organizational label (party name) provides such cues.

The EU, however, is a “split-level democracy”, where legitimizing mechanisms are split between levels of government (Schmidt 2009; 2006). Hence, the desired “alignment” (Mansbridge 2009) via the EP election is ‘business as usual’ neither for citizens nor for their representatives. The related difficulties are inherent in the architecture of the representation channel that seeks to balance territorial and partisan competition and the resulting “split-level” party system (Lord 2004: 116). Candidates for EP elections are recruited by national parties structuring vote choice. The voice of the people thus gets articulated via party competition at the national level: each people within the EU selects a (fixed) number of representatives (according to member states’ population size) competing along the lines of their national party system. Yet, the EP is organized along European party (as opposed to national) lines. The elected candidates (national parties) re-sort themselves in EU-level parties (EP Party Groups) to decide on common legislation for the EU citizenry as a whole. Therefore, in the case of the EP, both national political parties competing in elections and EP Party Groups legislating are (constitutionally) entrusted with the task of embodying the “channelment”<sup>2</sup> between citizens and elites in the EU. In sum: every five years citizens of national constituencies go to the polls to *select* among candidates *sorted* in national parties, who after the election *re-sort* themselves into EP Party Groups.

Assuming that citizens choose their EP representatives based on ideological congruence (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999), the quality of the match between electors and representatives depends upon party-voter congruence at two levels: (a) between voter X and national party x (voted for by voter X) and (b) between voter X and the EP Party Group  $\chi$  of which national

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<sup>2</sup> Sartori (1976: xxi) views parties as „the central intermediate and intermediary structure“ enabling „channelment,, „expression“ and „communication“ between society and government. Hence, the present examination of ideological congruence between parties at multiple levels and their electors contributes to our knowledge regarding how well party organizations in the EU perform in this regard.

party x becomes member. Ideally, congruence at the moment of selection (national ballot) should be preserved when the selected party joins an EU-level Party Group. No difference between party-voter congruence achieved at different levels would be expected if the positions of EP Party Groups and those of their constituent members were identical. This scenario, however, is far from reality and there are reasons to doubt that the party-voter alignment would remain intact as we move up the levels of aggregation. Political integration is lagging behind economic unification and, compared to other federations, the EU polity is distinguished by incongruence between party systems at the national and EU levels (Thorlakson 2005). In addition, EP Party Groups are not fully integrated parties; instead, they constitute a patchwork of -sometimes very-different fabrics (Mc Elroy and Benoit 2007; see also Schmitt and Pütz 2009). Eastern enlargement enhanced their heterogeneity, and especially that of the European People's Party (EPP) (Hix *et al.* 2009).

EP Party Groups are conglomerations of national-level parties competing in separate party systems and are selected by different electorates based on heterogeneous campaigns (e.g. Thorlakson 2005; Kreppel 2004). Furthermore, national parties join EP Party Groups only after the election and EP Party Group membership is not stable (see: party switching, McElroy 2009); so, the resulting position of an EP Party Group cannot be known in advance by any supporter of a national party that is likely to join this Group, nor by any national party that aspires membership of this Group. That said, it is possible that differences between the distinct levels would be too small to be worrisome. Generally, the way voters and EU-level parties structure their positions suggests that their policy spaces coincide (Gabel and Hix 2002; Gabel and Anderson 2002). At the same time, national parties tend to affiliate with EP Party Groups based on policy congruence (McElroy and Benoit 2010). This suggests that the discrepancy between the national and EU levels may not be large. A recent analysis (McElroy and Benoit 2011) shows that, in most (Greens, Liberals, ALDE, ECR, EFD) -but not all- cases, there is a lack of correspondence between EP Groups' location and the central tendency of their member-parties

on the left-right dimension. Based on a synthesis of these insights, the alignment achieved between voter X and party x at the national level may or may not “get lost in translation” when national party x becomes a member of an EU-level party  $\chi$ . Due to the normative implications that congruence gaps have on the quality of citizens’ representation, it becomes necessary to inquire about the extent and variation of this phenomenon.

Our major hypothesis postulates that there will be differences between party-voter congruence at the national and EU levels (Hypothesis 1). Given that the main elements of the Selection Model adopted here, namely *selecting* and *sorting mechanisms*, concern differences across parties in EU member states, we expect variation in congruence differences among various EP Party Groups (Hypothesis 1a). In what follows, we elaborate on how country and party-level factors examined in previous works (e.g. Mattila and Raunio 2006) may structure variation in congruence difference between levels; additionally, we explore whether EU Party-level as well as individual-level variables play a role regarding congruence gaps between the national and the EU levels.

Country-level factors that may cause variation in congruence differences are: the timing of EP election, the length of EU membership and the electoral system. First, why would timing (e.g. Oppenhuis *et al.* 1996) matter for congruence gaps? Concurrence of EP elections with important domestic electoral events suggests maximum prevalence of domestic lines of party competition. This situation may exaggerate the divergence between congruence achieved at national and EP levels. We thus hypothesize that congruence gaps between national and EP levels experienced by voters in countries, where domestic electoral events and EP election coincide, will differ compared to voters in countries where the EP election occurs as an independent event (Hypothesis 2). Second, we speculate that the length of EU membership may play a role (e.g. Goetz 2006; Mattila and Raunio 2006). Newer member states are less familiar with the EU system in general and the EP in particular. We thus hypothesize that the congruence gap between levels of representation will differ in new and old member states (Hypothesis 3).

Third, electoral systems have been theorized as important determinants of democratic representation and a major debate concerns the impact of majoritarian versus proportional electoral institutions on policy congruence (Golder and Stramski 2010; Blais and Bodet 2006; McDonald and Budge 2005; Powell 2009, 2000). However, aspects other than proportionality have not been examined. In the EP case, the typical dichotomy between majoritarian and proportional selection rules is absent: all countries use some form of proportional representation. Nonetheless, the specific selection rules are not harmonized and variation among them matters in EP representation (Farrell and Scully 2007; Hix and Hagemann 2009). The main difference among countries concerns candidate-centric versus party-centric selection mechanisms known to affect legislative behavior of representatives (e.g. Jun and Hix 2010). Farrell and Scully (2007) show that open, candidate-based systems are associated with greater concern about constituency representation among elected politicians. Although EP Party Groups generally display high degrees of cohesion when legislating (e.g. Hix *et al.* 2007), party-centered systems (e.g. closed-list PR systems) and centralized candidate-selection rules result in MEPs beholden to national parties (Hix 2004). How can varied selection rules matter for the congruence gap between national and EU levels at the very moment of selection? Candidate-centered systems give voters the chance to choose among specific candidates. This generates the incentive for individual candidates to deviate from the national party line during campaigns so as to remain as close as possible to their supporters. Assuming that candidate-national party congruence in party-centered systems is higher than in candidate-centered systems, we expect congruence gaps to differ for voters in the two groups (Hypothesis 4).

Moreover, we consider the potential effect of party-level variables, namely party ideology and party size. Ideological centrism/extremism matters for policy representation (Mattila and Raunio 2006; Dalton 1985). Hence, we hypothesize that the congruence gap between representation levels for voters supporting national parties having extreme, and thus clear ideological profiles, will differ from voters of centrist parties (Hypothesis 5). Then, we explore

party size at the EP level, to see whether it affects congruence gaps across levels. Given important differences across EU member states in terms of preferences about the aims and outcomes of common policies (e.g. Hix and Goetz 2000), the more parties included in an EP Party Group, the higher the potential for intra-EP Party Group ideological heterogeneity. We expect that the congruence gap between the levels of representation will differ for supporters of parties joining large EP Party Groups compared to voters supporting parties that join small ones (Hypothesis 6).

On the individual level, we know that voters' political knowledge matters for electoral processes (e.g. Bartels 1996; Bennett 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and for achievement of alignment in the selection model (Mansbridge 2009). Assuming that knowledge is dependent upon degrees of citizens' interest and information availability, we speculate that high political information about the EP election may lead to a more sophisticated political behavior. In this vein, voters that are highly informed about the upcoming EP election may be more likely to consider sorting mechanisms at both levels of representation when making a choice. In other words, when selecting among national parties informed voters may take into account information on the EP Party Groups each national party is likely to join. We thus expect informed voters to differ from non-informed voters regarding congruence gaps achieved at national and EU levels (Hypothesis 7).

Finally, there are plenty of reasons to anticipate variation of congruence gaps across issue dimensions. Due to its "second-order" nature (Schmitt 2005; Reif and Schmitt 1980), the EP election is not necessarily fought over Europe or issues pertaining to EP competences (see also Mair 2007b; Lefkofridi and Kritzinger 2008). Research on political conflict, cleavages and national party competition vis-à-vis European integration (e.g. Marks *et al.* 2006; Marks and Steenbergen 2004; Hooghe *et al.* 2002) suggests that national parties have incentives to underestimate European issues and structure competition "along the more familiar and safer socio-economic cleavage" (Mattila and Raunio 2006: 428). So at the selection moment, more

information is likely to be available to voters on the left-right issues than on EU issues. Previous comparative analyses have shown that parties and voters achieve higher congruence in the classic left-right dimension of contestation than in the EU dimension, with national parties being more EU-supportive than voters (e.g. Mattila and Raunio 2006). On the basis of the European Election Study 2009, Rosema and de Vries (2010) study the extent to which voters “vote correctly”, i.e. according to their left-right positions and their attitude towards further European unification and find that voters are less likely to do so in EU than in left-right terms. Furthermore, research on MEPs and EP Party Group behaviour shows that “ideological variance from the EP party on left-right issues is a stronger predictor of MEP defection than ideological variance on European integration issues” (Hix 2002: 694). EP Party Groups are by and large EU –supportive, as they share a long-term “preference of increasing the power of the EP and the legitimacy of the EU system as a whole” (Kreppel and Hix 2003: 93). So we expect the congruence gap to vary across dimensions of contestation (Hypothesis 8).

In sum, studying citizen’s multilevel representation in the EP is obviously a complex phenomenon that requires the exploration of variation operating at different levels of analysis and in different dimensions of contestation. In the next section, we elaborate on our methodological strategy for such an enterprise.

## **Methodology & Data Sources**

Our first concern is to measure congruence. In line with previous works, we conceive the representational bond as a “dyadic” relationship (Miller and Stokes 1963). As the representation chain between citizens and policy outcomes is mediated by political parties (Powell 2000) we focus solely on the relationship between parties (instead of individual representatives) and their

electors. When studying ideological congruence in the direct EP elections<sup>3</sup>, the dyads of interest change across levels: they concern voters and national parties as well as voters and EP Party Groups, which are composed by national parties from different EU member states. To translate congruence into something both measurable and meaningful in the multinational EU setting, we start by considering two types of relationships discussed in the seminal article by Golder and Stramski (2010), namely: (a) “one-to-one” (a single citizen and her preferred party) and (b) “many-to-one” (a group of citizens and their preferred party). In detail: (a) refers to each “individual voter X that supports party x-to-party x” and (b) refers to voters X, Y, Z that support party x-to-party x”. As the investigation of our hypotheses concerns various levels of analysis, we take into account both conceptualizations of congruence and the resulting measures. In this way, we can see whether congruence gaps perform differently, when we base our estimates on different concepts of the representational relationship.

The “one-to-one” concept allows viewing the representational relationship from the perspective of the individual citizen and serves as a building block for the latter concept (Golder and Stramski 2010: 92). Essentially, this relationship concerns “individual citizen congruence”, i.e. the ideological proximity/distance between an individual and the party she supports ---a widely used variable in voting behaviour research. This measure is fit for an individual-level evaluation of democratic representation because it reflects the diverging ideological preferences of individuals voting for the same party.

$$ICC = |C_i - P_j|$$

Where  $C_i$  is the ideal point of the  $i^{th}$  citizen and  $P_j$  is the position of the party she supported. Individual Citizen Congruence (ICC) is measured as citizen’s ( $C_i$ ) distance from the position of the party (P) she voted for.

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<sup>3</sup> Consistent with our theoretical framework, we focus here on the input of the EP representation channel. It should be noted, however, that congruence could –and should– also be evaluated as correspondence between citizens’ preferences and policy output.

However, this individual-level measure is not useful when we approach the relationship from the perspective of the representative, who is expected to represent “a constituency rather than a single principal” (Pitkin 1967: 214). This is captured by the “many-to-one” concept, which is typically operationalized as the “absolute citizen congruence” (e.g. Blais and Bodet 2006; Achen 1978) or, more recently, as “relative citizen congruence” (Golder and Stramski 2010). The former measure minimizes the sum of absolute distances between voters, and takes account the dispersion of individuals. The formula for the “absolute citizen congruence” is the following:

$$ACC = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N |C_i - P_j|$$

where N is the number of citizens having supported party  $P_j$  and  $C_i$  is the ideal point of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  citizen. *Absolute Citizen Congruence (ACC)* is the distance between the ideological position of party  $P_j$  and  $C_i$ , in relation to the dispersion of the preferences of all citizens having supported the same party.

Golder and Stramski (2010: 92-5) argue that their newly developed measure of “relative citizen congruence” is superior because: not only does it consider the dispersion of citizen preferences (see Golder and Stramski 2010, Figure 2) but it can also serve as a standardized measure of distance between citizens and parties (Golder & Stramski 2010: 93). This is important when dealing with representation in a supranational assembly, as ideological positions on the left-right axis do not always mean the same thing for the whole (European) electorate (see Mair 2007a). For instance, what a British voter understands as “extreme left” might be what a Swedish voter would place around the centre left. The formula for the “relative citizen congruence” is the following:

$$RCC = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |C_i - MC|}{\sum_{i=1}^n |C_i - P_j|}$$

where  $N$  is the number of citizens having supported party  $P_j$  and  $C_i$  is the ideal point of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  citizen. *Relative Citizen Congruence (RCC)* is the distance between the ideological position of party  $P_j$  and  $C_i$ , in relation to the dispersion of the preferences of all citizens having supported the same party (whereby  $MC$  is the ideological position of the median supporter of  $P_j$ ).

In the EP electoral setting, congruence concerns less straight-forward relationship than when studying a national election. To operationalize congruence between voters and their representatives in the EP, we need to go through the national party structures. This is because, despite being ultimately represented by an EP Party Group on issues of EP jurisdiction, voters can only choose among national parties. To capture this particularity in practice, we first measure congruence between voter(s) and national parties and then move to combining national parties into their respective EP Party Groups. This research design is based on the assumption that national parties are not ideologically identical with the EP Party Groups they join. As elected deputies join an EU-level party only after the nationally organized European election, the clustering has to take place in a second stage. Even though there is some certainty for long-standing members of large EU Party groups, it is never binding before the election and thus national parties are free to regroup.

With regard to data, there are different approaches to the measurement of congruence (for a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses, see Powell 2009: 1477-80). We opt for the combination of two novel EP-specific data sources, which facilitates the study of policy congruence in the two main dimensions of contestation. In detail, we utilize the Voter Survey of 2009 PIREDEU/EES Study (Sapir and van der Eijk 2011) and the 2009 EU profiler data (Trechsel 2009) to estimate the positions of voters and national parties respectively. Although Voting Application Advice (VAA)<sup>4</sup> data are not without problems (e.g. Gemenis 2011;

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<sup>4</sup> The EU Profiler is a VAA designed to help EU citizens in making choices among national parties in the 2009 EP elections.

Ruusuvirta and Wagner 2009), there are several reasons why we consider them as appropriate for the present study: firstly, they allow an investigation of the twenty seven EU member states based on comparable measurement instruments of the items of interest (position on left-right and EU dimensions). Secondly, as they are based on parties' self-reported positions, they are able to produce more objective estimates than citizens' own (subjective) perceptions of party positions used in other studies of congruence in the EP (e.g. Mattila and Raunio 2006). Thirdly, they follow the proximity model (Ruusuvirta and Wagner 2009) and are thus compatible with our theoretical discussion of congruence. For voters' positioning we use the self-placement questions of the PIREDEU/EES Voter Survey. Both left-right and EU dimensions consist of a classic 0-10 scale<sup>5</sup>. We recode these data to an -2 to +2 scale to match the EU profiler data that provide the corresponding party positions. Based on these data, we estimate congruence scores utilizing all aforementioned measures (individual, absolute, relative), whereby perfect congruence between party and voter(s) occurs when their positions are identical. The more congruence scores approach zero, the higher the congruence between voters and parties. Yet, what happens to policy congruence when we move up the representation ladder?

To measure congruence between voters and EP Party Groups, we need the positions of the Groups that were formed after the EP election. Such data was collected in 2010 by the EP Political Group expert survey conducted by McElroy and Benoit (2011). Their survey inquired into the left-right and EU dimensions in a way that is comparable to the other two sources of data used here. We recoded the original scales to fit the EU Profiler and PIREDEU data going from -2 to +2 in the extreme positions. Based on the mean expert evaluations, we calculate congruence between the EP Party Group and the voters of its constituent member parties using the individual, absolute, and relative congruence measures.

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<sup>5</sup> The exact wording of these questions is: "In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "left" and 10 means "right". Which number best describes your position?" and "Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means unification 'has already gone too far' and 10 means it 'should be pushed further'. What number on this scale best describes your position?"

Having established how we compute national- and EU-level congruence estimates, we now proceed to the measurement congruence gaps between levels. To investigate this gap, we calculate the absolute difference of the two congruence estimates, by subtracting the voter(s)-national party congruence from the voter(s)-EP Party Group congruence for all three measures employed here. In detail, we calculate “Individual Citizen Congruence Gap”, “Absolute Citizen Congruence Gap” and “Relative Citizen Congruence Gap”. Values of congruence gap closer to zero signify minimum difference, whereas higher values signify divergence of congruence degrees between the two levels. This measure helps us establish whether the EU institutional design and the lack of integration among EU Parties facilitate differences across levels and to identify relevant patterns across parties within the EU<sup>6</sup>. To analyze congruence gaps, we rely on descriptive statistics<sup>7</sup> and on an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that shows whether there are differences between groups of congruence observations built by our explanatory variables.

The operationalization of country-level (timing of EP election, length of membership and electoral system), party-level (ideological extremism, national and EU party size) and individual-level (EU-election related information) variables that may structure variation of congruence gaps is described in Appendix C.

## **Policy Congruence Gaps: Description and Analysis**

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<sup>6</sup> That said, this indicator does not show the direction of the difference between levels, i.e. whether the congruence score is better on the national or the EU level.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the way it is constructed, the congruence gap measure is unsuitable for analytical statistics.

The dependent variable in the present analysis is the congruence gap across levels of representation. This is the absolute difference between voter-national party and voter-EU party congruence scores, which we estimated based on individual, absolute and relative citizen congruence measures. To introduce the reader to the interpretation of the policy congruence gap, we first provide two graphs (Figure 1) showing the EP Party Group positions, the mean position of their constituent members and the mean position of the latter's voters, who are grouped by EP Party Group. The upper graph of Figure 1 displays positioning on the left-right dimension. It is evident that EP Party Groups occupy a much wider proportion of the spectrum compared to Groups' member parties and their voters. Interestingly, although the EPP and the EFP-Freedom position themselves far from one another, the mean position of their constituent members occupy the exact same point in the issue space. Also, the EFD-Freedom is located further on the right of its constituent members as well as their voters. The same holds for the ECR, and less so for ALDE. The GUE/NGL-Left is on the left of both its constituent members and their voters. The Green EP Group's position corresponds to the mean of its constituent members, but not to that of their voters, who are located on the right of their representatives. The EPP is less close to its constituent members than their voters, whereas the Socialists appear slightly closer to their members' voters than to their members' mean position.

The lower graph of Figure 1 depicts positioning on the EU Dimension. Once again, the range of voters' positions in the issue space is smaller than that of national parties and much smaller compared to that of EP Party Groups. Distances between the positions of EU party Groups and the positions of constituent members and of their supporters are most evident in the cases of EFD-Freedom and ECR. ALDE, the Greens and the Socialists also show divergence, whereas of GUE/NGL-Left shows a closer correspondence among EU party groups, national parties and their voters. The largest EP Party Group, namely the EPP, is a peculiar case: at the EU level, the position of the EPP Group overlaps with that of GUE/NGL; at the national level, the mean of EPP's member parties occupies the same space as ALDE and the Greens; at the

voters' level, the position of the EPP's constituent members' mean supporter coincides with that of the Socialists. This picture shows clearly that European integration is a troubling issue for ideological congruence across levels of representation.

**Figure 1 around here**

We visualize the positional patterns within each of the seven EP Party Groups in Figure 2, which presents seven scatter plots with the actual positions of each Group's constituent parties, the mean position of their voters and the position of the EP Party Group. The overall result to keep in mind is that the EP Party Group has a distinct position that is on the extremes of its members' distribution in at least one of the two dimensions. In Figure 2 it is also clear that voters can be closer to their national party in one dimension but closer to their EP Party Group in another. Thus policy congruence between voters and their national parties on the one hand and voters and their EP Party Group on the other is not equal. These findings introduce us to the concept of congruence gap, to which we now turn.

**Figure 2 around here**

In Figure 3 we present the mean and variance of policy congruence gaps for all EP Party Groups based on the three measures employed: Individual Citizen Congruence Gap that, due to coding, varies between 0 and 2 (first row); the Absolute Citizen Congruence Gap (second row) and Relative Citizen Congruence Gap (third row) that, due to coding, vary between 0 and 1. The three graphs on the left column display gaps on the left-right and the three graphs on the right column depict gaps on the EU dimension. A gap close to zero indicates no difference in congruence between the two levels of representation. The larger the gap, the more pronounced the difference between the two levels. A glance at Figure 3 reveals that no gap approaches zero thus confirming that differences across levels do exist (H1) and that these gaps are not equal for all EP Party Groups (H1a). In detail, we see that the ranking of EP Party Groups is not similar

across the three measures, thus confirming the point made by Golder and Stramski (2011) that each of these measures captures a different aspect of congruence. These graphs provide support to our claim that congruence gaps vary across dimensions of contestation (H8) because neither the ranking of parties nor the mean or the variance of gaps are identical across dimensions.

### Figures 3 around here

#### *Analysis of variance*

Having empirically demonstrated the existence of congruence gaps and their patterns across dimensions and Party Groups, in this section we examine whether the factors discussed in the theoretical section affect the variation of this phenomenon. These factors (timing of EP election, length of membership, electoral system, ideological extremism, EP Party Group size and individual voters' information) are listed in the first row of Table 1, which indicates also the number of the corresponding hypothesis. The first column on the left lists the measures of Congruence Gap employed in the dimension of concern, e.g. the first row shows whether the mean congruence gap indeed exhibits variation in groups created by each of the independent variables based on estimates concerning "one-to-one" (i.e. *individual citizen congruence*) for the left-right dimension; the third row provides the same information for the EU dimension. The third to sixth rows report whether the predictor variables indeed affect variation of the mean congruence gap in the left-right and EU dimensions based on the conceptualization of congruence as a "many-to-one" relationship (i.e. *absolute citizen congruence* and *relative citizen congruence* respectively).

Depending upon how we view the relationship, we may reach different conclusions about whether the hypothesized factors structure variation of the phenomenon. On the one hand, when approached from the individual level, the phenomenon seems to be affected by all but two factors (length of membership and individual information in the left-right dimension; the timing of EP election and individual information in the EU dimension). This picture leads us to reject H7 for both dimensions, as well as H2 for the EU and H3 for the left-right dimension. The

results provide support to H4, 5, 6 for both dimensions. On the other hand, our analysis of variance based on the typical concept in representation studies (“many-to-one”) shows a different picture: firstly, the two measures (absolute/relative citizen congruence) produce slightly different results. There is coherence between gaps in the left-right and EU dimensions calculated based on the absolute citizen congruence measure, whereby EP Party Group size affects the congruence gap only when measured in terms of membership (supporting H6). The relative measure produces different results in each dimension. For the left-right dimension, it shows that extreme ideological positioning matters for congruence difference across levels (in support of H5), while for the EU dimension only timing of the EP election (H2) and individual information have an impact (H7). All other hypotheses are rejected.

**Table 1 around here**

## **Discussion-Conclusion**

The fact that the EU is composed of representative democracies tells us little about whether the EU is indeed a democratic and representative system. Hence, we need to study it more closely. Not surprisingly, many journalistic commentaries but also many riddles for normative and positive political theory in the last decades have been evolving around the EU’s legitimacy gap and its democratic and representation deficits. For the first time after almost half a century, the post-Lisbon institutional setting establishes the EP as a co-legislator in an important number of policy fields, while introducing citizen's policy initiative. We consider these to be important changes to the EU political system: they empower the European Parliament but at the same time, they make it possible for citizens to bypass parties and parliaments and organize an initiative requesting legislation. In a post-Lisbon world, then, those citizens that can manage to get an initiative registered and a transnational campaign started may circumvent the traditional channels of representation. This is the future. Our analysis of political representation remained in the

present and it was based on the belief that the extent to which citizens will get their act together in the immediate future (despite burdensome bureaucratic procedures) depends upon how (badly/well) they are currently served by extant institutions. The EP election is a case in point: infamously low turnouts document that most citizens in Europe refrain from seeking representation via this Europe-wide election. This motivated us to look more closely at the *selecting* and *sorting mechanisms* in place for producing an alignment between represented and their representatives in the EP. The core argument advanced here is that the architecture of the EU as a “split-level democracy” (Schmidt 2009; 2006), whereby the EP representation channel is embodied by a ‘split-level’ party system (Lord 2004) may lead to asymmetrical representation.

Our empirical inquiry about congruence gaps within the EU based on three different operationalizations of congruence extends our knowledge about representation in the EP (e.g. Casado and Lefkofridi 2011; Mattila and Raunio 2006). It demonstrates that, within the EU27, citizen representation via national and transnational parties in the EP is asymmetrical. Crucially, congruence gaps apply to most EP Groups and they vary across dimensions of contestation. So, when evaluating representation in the EP, we need to take into account these discrepancies. Also, research on policy congruence in the EP should be aware that different measures of congruence may produce different results. Having examined a snapshot of EP representation under the microscope, we conclude that the phenomenon of congruence gaps across levels of government is bewildering: factors that are typically used in congruence studies do not seem to structure variation in congruence differences. Hence, this lack of compatibility between degrees of congruence achieved at the national and EU levels poses an interesting new puzzle for EP representation scholars. Future research should investigate the conditions under which policy congruence improves/deteriorates as we move up the levels of representation.

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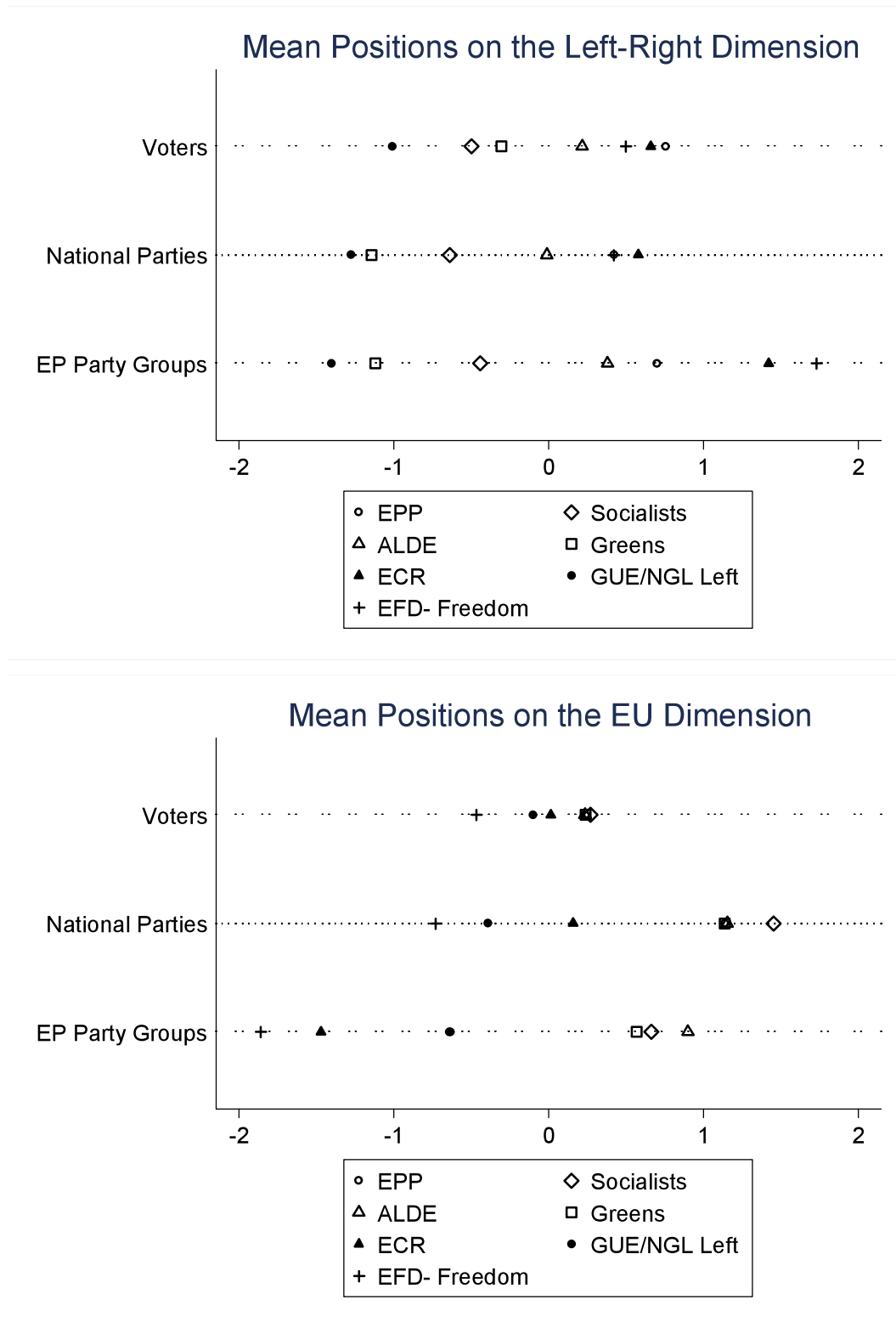
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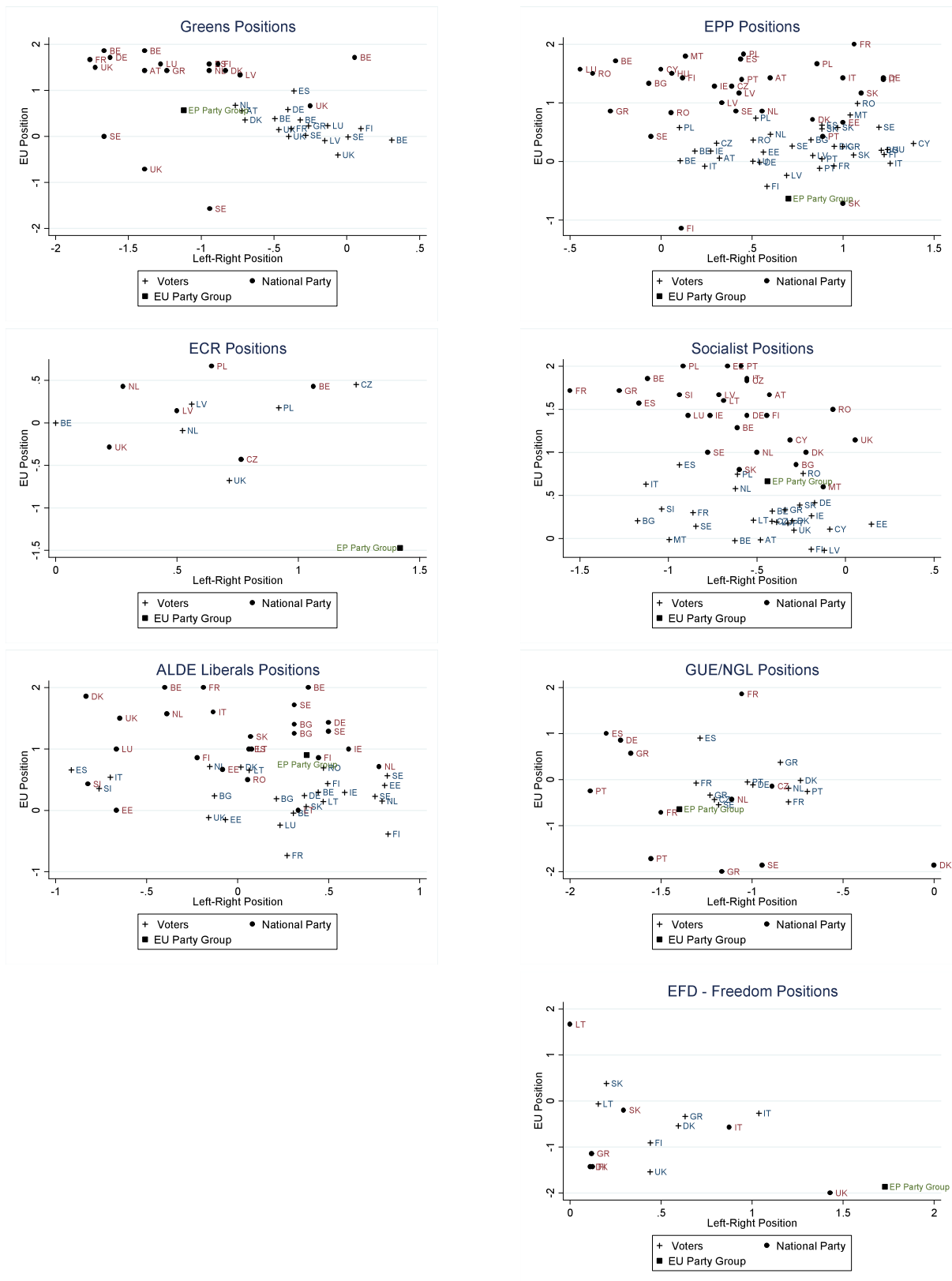
## APPENDIX A. Graphs

Figure 1: Position of EU Party Groups, their mean national party member and their mean voter in the Left-Right (-2 extreme left, +2 extreme right) and in the EU Dimension (-2 too much, +2 not enough)



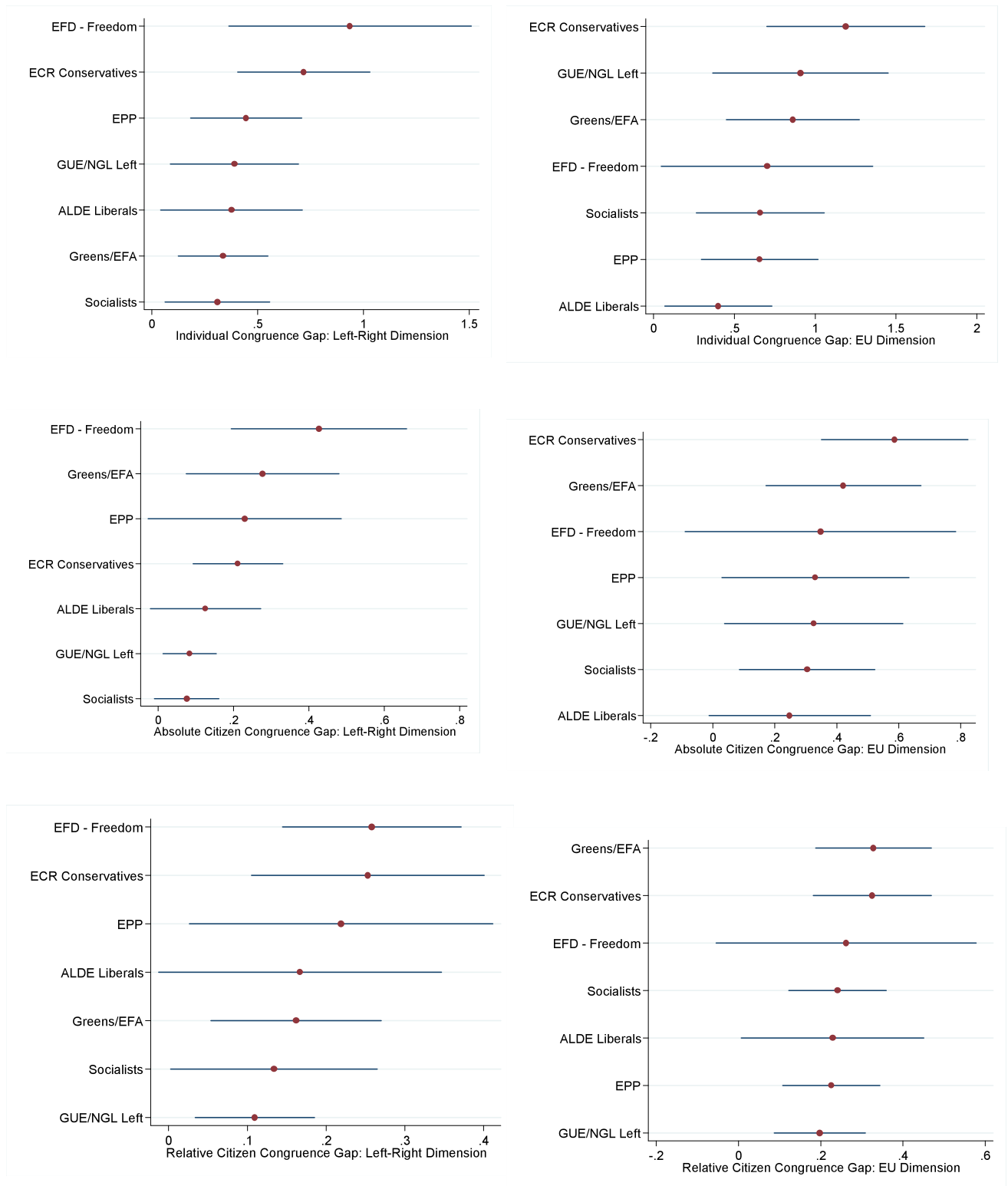
Sources: voters, PIREDEU 2009; national parties, EU Profiler 2009; EP Groups, McElroy and Benoit (2011).

Figure 2: Position of EU Party Groups, National Parties and their mean voter in the Left-Right (-2 extreme left, +2 extreme right) and in the EU Dimension (-2 too much, +2 not enough)



Sources: voters, PIREDEU 2009; national parties, EU Profiler 2009; EP Groups, McElroy and Benoit (2011).

Figure 3: Mean and Variance of the Policy Congruence Gap by EU Party Group



Sources: voters, PIREDEU 2009; national parties, EU Profiler 2009; EP Groups, McElroy and Benoit (2011).

## Appendix B: Table

Table 1: Analysis of Variance of Policy Congruence Gap among Individuals and National Parties

<i>Do we observe differences according to...?</i>	Timing of EP election	Length of Membership (New/Old)	Electoral System (Choice)	Ideological Extremism	EP Party Group Size (seats)	EP Party Group Size (membership)	Individual Information
	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H6	H7
<b>Congruence Gap based on Individual Citizen Congruence estimates for the Left-Right Dimension</b>	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
<b>Congruence Gap based on Individual Citizen Congruence estimates for the EU Dimension</b>	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
<b>Congruence Gap based on Absolute Citizen Congruence estimates for the Left-Right dimension</b>	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
<b>Congruence Gap based on Absolute Citizen Congruence estimates for the EU Dimension</b>	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
<b>Congruence Gap based on Relative Citizen Congruence estimates for the Left-Right dimension</b>	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
<b>Congruence Gap based on Relative Citizen Congruence estimates for the EU Dimension</b>	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

This table shows the results of one-way analysis of variance tests in the  $p < .05$  significance level.

Sources: voters, PIREDEU 2009; national parties, EU Profiler 2009; EP Groups, McElroy and Benoit (2011).

### *Appendix C. Methodology:*

This section explains the construction of the predictor variables, which are categorical so as to provide clearly defined groups and allow an analysis of variance for the dependent variables.

#### *Timing of EP election*

1 = simultaneous with national electoral event

0 = stand alone event

#### *Length of Membership*

1 = new member (post-2004)

0 = old member (pre-2004)

#### *Electoral System*

1 = candidate choice

0 = party choice

#### *Ideological extremism*

1 = ideological position lower than -0.5 or higher than 0.5 in the scale of -2 to +2

0 = ideological position between -0.5 and 0.5 in the scale of -2 to +2

### *EU Party Group Size*

#### *Membership*

1 = large parties with more than 29 national party members

0 = small parties with less than 28 national party members

#### *Seats*

1 = large parties with more than 184 seats (capturing the two larger parties)

0 = smaller parties with less than 184 seats (capturing parties between 27 and 84 seats)

### *Individual information*

This variable is a summation of five variables measuring: watching and reading news, and talking about the EU elections, going to meetings and visiting websites about the EU elections. All five of the variables report being informed 1 = not at all 2 = sometimes 3 = often. The construct adds up the five variables and reports:

0 = not being informed (scoring 0)

1 = being relatively informed (scoring 1 to 8)

2 = being very informed (scoring 9 to 15)

