Policy congruence and distributive politics: matching voter preferences and party positions on labor market policy

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Abstract
Do parties still represent their voters’ preferences with regard to distributive policies? Three negative answers can be found in the literature: welfare state research sees distributive policies increasingly determined by exogenous constraints (globalization), rather than voter preferences. Recent research on party system change argues that party competition today is structured by cultural, rather than economic issues. And an even more radical party literature questions democratic representation altogether, seeing current party politics as purely elite-based and detached from voter preferences.

All three arguments underline their reasoning by showing that parties have changed their positions on distributive policies as compared to the post-war past. We argue that such approaches may underestimate party-voter congruence since they do not take shifting electoral configurations and shifting policy agendas into account. Parties may advocate different policies because they represent different voters with different interests. Hence, congruence may still be there, even though policy positions have changed. However, we expect congruence to vary across countries, party types and reform dimensions.

We test our arguments with regard to labor market policy preferences in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. We rely on a newly compiled data set on party positions in electoral campaigns (coded data from newspaper analysis) and compare them to voter preferences on the basis of micro-level survey data. Our results show that there still is a reasonable amount of congruence with regard to labor market policies. We also find evidence that left parties represent their voters more congruently than right parties that and there seems to be no trade-off between congruence on cultural and economic issues.
Introduction
The congruence between citizens’ policy preferences and the positions of their elected representatives is crucial to democratic quality. In a very fundamental sense, democracy and democratic representation are about making citizens’ opinions present in the policy process (Pitkin 1967), and the election of political parties is supposed to do exactly that: parties advocating the preferences of their voters in the political process. So, ultimately, representation and democracy are not just about elections and parties winning seats, but they are always about *policy* and policy preferences. A well-functioning democracy requires that the positions of parties and their voters are reasonably congruent.

For a long time, this condition seemed largely unproblematic, since “mass parties” precisely mobilized specific socio-structural electorates to represent their interests. As Peter Mair (1997, 99-100) put it “[Mass parties] were the first parties that explicitly claimed to represent the interests of only one segment of society. … The political party was the forum in which the political interest of the social group it represented was articulated.” In the specific area of distributive policies – social and labor market policies in particular – it has long been unquestioned that the “democratic class struggle” (Korpi 1983) must be seen as the direct translation of class-based welfare interests in the parliamentary arena through elections. The idea was that left parties as representatives of the working class would advocate generous welfare policies for their constituencies, while right-wing parties would try to limit these policies to avoid heavy taxation for their middle- and upper-class voters. This view corresponds exactly to the idea and concept of the mass party representation. And even though the comparative welfare state literature and the party/representation literature have developed (and still develop) largely separate from each other, both converge today on their skepticism if the voter-party-link is still intact.

In this paper, we address three different strands of literature, which all (though on the basis of different arguments) contend that the congruence of voter- and party positions with regard to distributive policies has become weak: 1) the “globalization”-literature:
welfare state research on political parties argues that globalization increasingly ties the hands of national parties, detaching their policies from the preferences of voters (e.g. Hellwig and Samuels 2007; Huber and Stephens 2001). 2) The “realignment”-literature: recent research on party system change argues that party competition today is structured by cultural issues such as immigration, rather than economic issues, and that the representation of these cultural issues blurs the congruence of voter-party positions with regard to social and economic policies (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008). 3) Finally, the most radical critique of voter-party congruence stems from the literature on “cartel parties”, which sees parties as purely elite-based and state-oriented, and democracy as increasingly detached from voter preferences altogether (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 2004).

We adopt an agnostic position as to whether these claims are empirically valid. However, we argue that there is still a number of problems with the theoretical and empirical bases on which they are made, which stem to a large extent from the fact that party system research is partly blind to recent changes in distributive policies and politics (analyzed extensively in the welfare state literature), and that welfare state research is mostly blind to electoral change (analyzed extensively in the party system literature). Therefore, certain studies measure congruence on distributive issues that do not reflect the current distributive policy agenda (a shortfall mostly observable in the party system literature) while other studies measure congruence by only looking at parties, but not at voters (a shortfall mostly observable in the welfare literature). We think that both need to be brought together to assess the congruence between voters and parties with regard to distributive issues. Distributive politics is not just about more vs. less state intervention anymore, because both the social structure and economic interests have changed profoundly, and this needs to be taken into account when we study party-voter congruence. Also, parties may advocate different policies because they represent different voters. Hence, congruence may still be there with regard to economic issues, even though policy positions have changed. Unless we test the level of congruence between the positions of current party constituencies and party positions with regard to the issues currently on the distributive policy agenda, we cannot judge whether parties still represent their voters or not.
Hence, our question in this paper is to what extent and under what conditions party positions on distributive policies (in particular labor market policies) reflect the policy preferences of their electoral constituencies. For our analysis, we draw on new data from an ongoing comparative research project that compares voter and party preferences with regard to different distributive policies in seven European countries. This paper is a first attempt at drawing some insights on voter-party congruence with regard to labor market policy in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. Our goal is to develop a measure of voter-party congruence. Overall, we want to analyze two things. First, whether distributive policies still structure party positions and political struggles (i.e. whether there is overall congruence and whether party positions differ on distributive policies). And second, we want to analyze a range of country-specific, party-specific and policy-specific determinants of congruence, which will allow us to test some of the claims articulated in the literature on a declining voter-party link.

The paper proceeds as follows: In a first theoretical part, we clarify our concepts and review the three strands of literature that postulate a deterioration of policy congruence, before – in a second theoretical part – presenting our own argument why there might still be congruence despite the obvious changes in party positions that have been recently observed with regard to welfare policies. In this second section, we also develop a range of hypotheses on the determinants of congruence. A third section presents our case selection, data and methods, before we present a fourth section with a mostly explorative analysis of voter-party congruence.

1. Theory: has voter-party congruence on distributive policies declined?

The literature on congruence and party responsiveness is broad and rich, so that a few terminological clarifications may be helpful to situate our endeavor in these debates. In line with Bartels (2008), we distinguish between congruence and responsiveness. Responsiveness refers to a dynamic process of interest representation, i.e. parties are

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1 We do not refer to the different definitions and debates on “representation” here, since this is a very encompassing and more general term, which mostly refers to the “mandate”-function of political parties (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999).
responsive if they follow shifts in the preferences of their voters and vice versa. Among the most important contributions in the field of responsiveness are probably the works by Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson (2002; 1995) on “dynamic representation”, and the different versions of the “thermostat model” by Wlezien (1995) and Wlezien and Soroka (2007), which analyzes the extent to which public preferences (the “policy mood”) and public policies react to each other. On the basis of mostly public opinion- and spending-data, these works tend to argue that policy responsiveness is rather good. But as Bartels (2008, 4) argues, policy-makers may be responsive at the margin, even though their policies differ strongly from what the public wants. Hence, the literature on policy congruence is interested in the correspondence between the levels of preferences of the public and policy-makers (governmental elites and parties), rather than the mere shifts. Brooks and Manza (2006) therefore correlate voter attitudes with actual spending levels. This may be problematic since spending is determined by so many other, exogenous factors (such as past liabilities). We think that we should compare the positions of voter and elites to assess congruence. This is what Powell (2000) does by focusing on the overall ideological left-right scale. As Bartels (2008), however, we focus on specific policies and policy reform directions, since they are more clearly interpretable than the left-right scale. However, we analyze the policy congruence between individual political parties and their specific electorate, rather than the congruence between an average voter and the government. This means that we are interested in “party representation”. The concept of party representation (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007; Thomassen and Schmitt. 1997) implies that parties offer policy alternatives and that these alternatives are congruent with the preferences of their voters. In sum, within the context of representation-research, we situate our analysis in the field of congruence-analysis, but with a focus on specific policy fields and individual political parties.

Our paper is in line with a recent contribution by Kitschelt and Rehm (2011), who compare the preferences of party constituencies to the positions of parties and find ample evidence for ongoing congruence. We share much of their approach and assumptions, but

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2 Our goal in the analysis is not primarily to evaluate the causal arrow: do voter preferences follow from party positions or the other way round, but simply to examine congruence. Implicitly, however, we start from a bottom-up view of voter interest representation.
we measure party positions on the basis of statements in the media (during election campaigns) rather than on the basis of expert-surveys or manifesto-data, since we want to break the analysis down to very specific policy fields and reform directions. However, our question is similar: to what extent and under what conditions do party positions on distributive policies reflect the policy preferences of their voters?

Most of the current literature argues that the congruence between voters and parties on distributive issues is bad, respectively deteriorating. These assertions are mostly made on the basis of the empirical observation that parties today advocate and implement “unexpected” policies (see e.g. Kitschelt 2001; Kriesi et al. 2008; Pierson 1995, 2001; Ross 2000). Social Democrats implementing cutbacks of welfare benefits or – on the contrary – right-wing parties defending the current welfare status quo are taken as indicators of a declining policy congruence. One may obviously distinguish between what parties advocate (i.e. the policy positions they take in the elections) and what they actually implement (i.e. actual government policies). There may be convergence in either one of them or both. In this paper, we only compare voter preferences to policy preferences parties articulate in election campaigns, without being able to trace their actual policies once the elections are over. Hence, it may well be that we somewhat overestimate actual policy congruence. In the wider context of the project from which this paper is drawn, we do trace the entire representational chain from voter preferences to policy outputs, but in this paper, we stop at the electoral campaign and do not distinguish between congruence in positions and congruence in actual policies. This needs to be kept in mind when assessing the literature that argues a decline in preference or policy congruence. In this literature, three lines of argument can be identified, which contain possible explanations of an alleged decline.

The first strand of literature stems from comparative welfare state research. The very influential power resources literature (Allan and Scruggs 2004; Esping-Andersen 1985; Korpi 1983; Korpi and Palme 2003; Stephens 1979) has always relied on the “mass party”-view of voter-party representation. Power resources theory has demonstrated that social democratic parties in the post-war era mobilized the quickly growing industrial
working class and represented their interests in the policy-making process very effectively. For the power resource theory, welfare politics is a class struggle with democratic means. The electoral basis of parties – i.e. workers voting for the left and the more privileged strata voting for the right – were and are usually neither questioned nor investigated empirically. Hence, when a range of studies in this area found declining differences between the positions of parties (such as Huber and Stephens 2001), this was interpreted as a decline in representational congruence and a decline of the importance of political parties. Globalization, increasing fiscal austerity and institutional path-dependency are supposed to be the drivers of this decline in congruence (Huber and Stephens 2001; Pierson 2001). Hence, the underlying idea is that parties would still represent the same social groups with the same interests (i.e. workers with an interest in generous welfare policy vs. upper classes with an interest in restrictive welfare policies) if only they could. However, looking at party positions and party policies only to judge interest representation is obviously problematic, because it implies that the electoral basis of the political parties participating in distributive struggles are more assumed than actually observed (Häusermann 2010). In other words, it completely neglects the demand side, because it looks at only one side of the “parties matter”-thesis - the existence of alternative policy packages. Even if parties defend policies that differ from what they advocated in the 1960 and 1970s, they can still be perfectly congruent with their electorate, since the electorate may have changed, too. We will elaborate further on this point when presenting our own argument.

The second strand of literature – completely independent from the first one –, which argues a radical decline in voter-party congruence can be traced back to the “cartel party thesis” developed by Katz and Mair (1995) and – in its consequences – further elaborated by Mair (2004, 2008) and Blyth and Katz (2005) over the following years. The key idea in this thesis – very much in contrast to the welfare literature – is that the age of “mass parties” is over. On the basis of rising abstentionism and electoral volatility, as well as declining trust in political institutions among citizens, these authors argue that political parties have become almost entirely detached from voters and voter preferences. Instead, parties are oriented towards the state for their support, legitimacy and resources and they
practically become part of the state. Elections in this view do not actually affect or change policies, because parties divide resources and power among themselves anyway. What links this literature to the welfare literature is the idea that globalization and exogenous constraints narrow down the leeway of political parties in distributive politics, but in contrast to the power-resources view, the cartel party thesis postulates that parties would not defend their voters interests anymore even if they could, because they do not depend on their voters for power and resources anymore. This view is certainly the most radical questioning of voter-party congruence (the “hollowing of democracy” in Mairs’ words, 2004). It, however, shares a weakness with the welfare state literature on parties, which is the neglect of the demand side. The fact that parties advocate other positions than in the past does not per se mean that they have abandoned their electorate. Furthermore, the lack of voter-party congruence – as a necessary implication of the cartel party thesis - has so far not been demonstrated empirically.

The final strand of literature – completely independent from the first one –, which argues a decline in voter-party congruence on distributive policies deals with a realignment of party competition and party systems over the past 30 years. In contrast to the welfare state literature, both the demand- and the supply-side are taken into account in this strand of research which was has mostly been developed in works by Kriesi (1998, 1999; Kriesi et al. 2008), Kitschelt (1994; Kitschelt and Rehm 2011) and some authors who have worked with them (Bornschier 2010; Lachat and Dolezal 2008; Oesch 2008).

The argument in this literature bears not on a decline of congruence in general, but on a specific decline of the traditional “class voting”, i.e. a decline of congruence in distributive politics. The main argument shared by these authors is that since the 1970s, a new cultural dimension of party mobilization and conflict (summarizing issues such as cultural liberalism, immigration or EU integration) has been structuring voter-party links in Western Europe. Today, they argue, voters choose parties on the basis of these cultural issues, not with regard to economic preferences, because economic issues are seen as increasingly technical questions that tend to be out of the hands of national governments. Given that voters choose parties because of their stances on cultural themes, it is assumed that voter-party congruence shifts to these “salient” issues, whereas it declines with
regard to economic and welfare policies (Lachat and Dolezal 2008). Hence, there is an underlying idea of a zero-sum game or a trade-off between congruence on cultural vs. economic themes. The two are supposed not to go together since the “cultural vote” contradicts the economic vote: workers vote on the right because they have traditional and anti-immigrant values (Bornschier 2010; De La O and Rodden 2008; Oesch 2008) whereas they “should” vote on the left when it comes to their economic interests. This is why this literature expects that a rise of cultural politics leads to a decline of congruence on distributive issues. The weak point of this literature is mainly that the “economic dimension” is conceptualized in a very rough way as attitudes on “more spending” or “welfare” rather than policy-specific indicators (an approach that also Bartels (2008) criticizes). The welfare literature, however, has shown that the agenda of salient distributive policies today has shifted to more diverse and specific preferences on retrenchment, social investment or redistribution (e.g. Bonoli 2005; Häusermann 2010; Häusermann and Kriesi 2011; Levy 1999). Hence, congruence must be assessed with regard to these actually salient issues.

2. The argument: new voters, new demands

We are basically ignorant as to whether the critics of current voter-party congruence with regard to distributive policies are right or wrong. All of them make plausible arguments as to why it might have become more difficult or less of a goal for parties to represent their voters social and economic policy interests. However, we contend that we might underestimate voter-party congruence because electorates have changed and policy issues have changed. The three criticisms discussed above tend to neglect these changes, which is why they cannot test congruence conclusively.

Our basic hypothesis is that we still find a reasonable amount of congruence between parties and their electorates if we compare voter-party positions on the basis of updated, current electorates and policy-issues. We think that economic policy still matters to democratic representation, because it is so key to people’s life chances and affects their everyday life so strongly. Also, economic and social policy are still as tremendously
important as they were during the post-war era, even though now under the auspices of retrenchment rather than expansion. But fiscal austerity and the post-industrialization of labor market have put economic policies even more strongly on the forefront of the policy agenda. Of course, many of the aforementioned authors do not deny the relevance of distributive policy as such, but they argue that it has been subtracted to the national electoral arena, since it is out of the hands of governments (Duch and Stevenson 2008). And while this may be true for some specific parts of distributive policy (such as fiscal and monetary policy, see e.g. Boix (2000)) the same cannot be said for social policy. Welfare policies – pensions, labor market regulation, health care, family policy, education and training systems, and even tax policy – are still in the hands of national governments and huge variations in the regulation of these areas and their distributive consequences persist, as an ample welfare literature has shown (e.g. Hall and Soskice 2001; Häusermann 2010; Palier 2010; Pierson 2001; Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). Also, welfare policies still matter greatly for the electoral success of parties (e.g. Armingeon and Giger 2008). And while “new”, more culturally connotated issues such as immigration or environmental protection have certainly become key to voters’ electoral choice (Kriesi et al. 2008), there is in principle no reason for there to be a trade-off between cultural and economic policies. Lachat and Dolezal (2008), for instance, show that in Western Europe, attitudes on immigration have become equally important to economic attitudes in explaining vote choice. A zero-sum view of issue-congruence would require that parties necessarily need to present coherent packages of policies, which is not the case. Hence, they may very well advocate both culturally progressive and economically restrictive positions and vice versa.

On this basis, we argue that a test of congruence needs to take two developments seriously: the change in voter alignment and the change in policy agendas.

With regard to electoral changes, we draw on the realignment literature. An ample strand of research has been showing over the past 20-30 years that the socio-structural transformation of Western societies goes together with changing patterns of voting behavior (Bornschier 2010; Kitschelt 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1997; Kriesi 1998; Kriesi et al. 2008; Oesch 2006). These authors base their argument on the transformation
of the class structure of Western societies. In the wake of post-industrialization, the middle class has become broader and more heterogeneous. Kriesi (1998) identifies a new class of “socio-cultural professionals”, i.e. (high-)skilled individuals who work in an interpersonal work-logic, oftentimes in the public sector or in private services. This “new” and typically post-industrial part of the new middle class typically votes on the left, because they share universalistic values (Oesch 2006). Managers and technical specialists, by contrast, tend to vote on the moderate right, together with the self-employed and liberal professions. This analysis of electoral change has a very materialistic, quasi-marxian undertone, in the sense that a person’s profession and everyday work experience (person- vs. organization/technics-centered work logic) forms political values and attitudes. Whether one shares this mechanism or not, it is clear that large parts of the educated middle class today vote on the left (Müller 1999).

At the same time, the working class has become similarly divided between – roughly – a service and a manual working class – or a “new and old” working class. The old manual blue-collar working class was the traditional electorate of the left, and the main reason these parties defended generous and expansive welfare policies. Today, they increasingly desert the left and cast their vote for the radical and populist right (Bornschier 2010; Oesch 2008). The “new” working class on the other hand has no party that traditionally mobilizes and represents them and their party choice is thus very much undetermined. Little research exists on these workers political preferences. We may link it to Rueda’s (2007) distinction of insiders and outsiders with blue-collar workers being the insiders and the service proletariat being the outsiders (Häusermann and Schwander 2009). Rueda assumes that the left represents the insiders while the outsiders turn to the radical right, but empirically this is still untested.

Overall, we do know that both the middle- and the working classes have become split in two different social classes with their distinct demands and needs, and thus their distinct policy and party preferences. Hence, parties may today rely on an electorate that is very much different from their traditional constituency. Left parties increasingly represent the educated middle classes, whereas the radical right represents workers. If these parties still want to be congruent with their voters’ economic interests, they need to change policy
positions as opposed to the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, a shift to more moderate social policies by Social Democrats may not be a sign of declining congruence, but rather a sign of adaptation to their new middle-class constituency. This is why we think that we need to take both the demand and the supply side of policy preferences into account when assessing congruence. Electoral change may, however, have two contrasting implications for congruence: de- and realignment may weaken congruence if electorates just become more heterogeneous. If parties today need to represent different socio-structural groups with very different preferences, their average congruence may indeed decline. Congruence may still be strong, however, if their electorate has changed, i.e. if their core voters have been replaced by a new socio-structural group.

The second change that we need to take into account when assessing congruence is the change in policy agendas. With the differentiation of the class structure, the needs and demands of different social classes have become more specific and more diverse, too. The new working class needs job opportunities in the first place, while the old working class relies on social insurance (Häusermann and Schwander 2011; Rueda 2007). High-skilled female service sector workers may demand childcare policies to combine work and family, whereas they may refuse subsidies to save jobs in declining industries. Given that the context of fiscal austerity (Pierson 2001) has made the stakes higher and distributive struggles more acute, different social groups increasingly advocate the expansion of benefits for themselves only, not in general. Hence, in contrast to the times of welfare state expansion, the question today is not just how much welfare expansion a party or a constituency advocates. Rather, the policy reform space has become truly multidimensional (Bonoli and Natali forthcoming; Häusermann 2010; Häusermann and Kriesi 2011). This means that reforms today can go in the direction of strengthening redistribution (i.e. a clear reallocation of resources between social groups), emphasizing social investment (i.e. improving the employability of people or creating jobs), or implementing retrenchment in various forms. These reforms may not align on a single dimension anymore, i.e. people who are in favor of redistribution are not necessarily in favor of social investment, too, or against retrenchment. Rather, they may advocate the cutback of social benefits to some particular group and at the same time request the
reallocated of this money to a particular goal. Hence, if we only test whether voters and parties want “more or less” welfare, we may find a very bad congruence fit, which however neglects these underlying differentiations. This is why we argue that we need to examine voter-party congruence on theoretically and politically meaningful dimensions of policy reform. We therefore work with data (survey data and our own coded newspaper data) that differentiates policy-preferences of voters and parties according to whether they advocate the status quo, retrenchment, social investment or redistribution.

When examining overall congruence, the most straightforward way is to relate, i.e. correlate, the positions of parties with the positions of party constituencies (Bornschier 2010; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007); but there is always the problem of cut-off points: what is strong congruence, what is weak congruence? There is no obvious answer, of course, and all we can do is discuss the strength of correlations and whether parties offer distinct policy alternatives. Beyond that, we will adopt a comparative approach that allows us to test some of the aforementioned theories as well as our own argument empirically. In the following, we develop a series of hypotheses that we derive from the theoretical discussion and that will structure our empirical analysis.

We will start (H0) with a general comparison of the voter-party match to address the claim that there is no linkage between voter- and party-positions in Western Democracies anymore, and that parties have converged on the same policies anyway (Mair 2004). Our goal here is to assess whether we see some (positive) relation between voter and party positions and whether parties offer distinct alternatives to the electorate, as two necessary conditions for congruence and democratic quality. This argument is made intertemporally, i.e. it is argued that parties have become detached from their voters. A true assessment of this thesis would require a comparison of voter-party linkages between the 1960s or 70s and today. This data is, of course, unavailable, which is why we have to limit ourselves to a general assessment of congruence for this first step.

The other theories can be traced back to “explanatory factors”, i.e. determinants of congruence, and can therefore be tested through comparisons across countries, parties
and policy issues. This is how we structure the hypotheses (see overview table 1 below).

At the country-level, we contrast two hypotheses. The “cultural” realignment theory (Kriesi et al. 2008) argues that cultural party competition distracts parties from the representation of economic preferences. If this is true, we should see voter-party congruence on distributive policies to be lower in those countries where the cultural dimension of voter mobilization has become very important (H1). The idea here is that in countries with strong cultural voter mobilization, workers vote more on the right and middle-class voters vote more on the left, which should blur congruence on the economic dimension. Hence, we can compare countries with strong cultural mobilization (articulated in the rise of a strong right-wing populist party) to those countries where the economic dimension has remained the predominant one.

The second hypothesis refers to the institutional argument that PR democracies, characterized by multiparty systems (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2010; Lijphart 1999) have a better representative performance than majoritarian party systems (H2), the mechanism being that parties in majoritarian systems need to form ample majorities within the parties whereas parties in PR systems can “specialize” in the representation of a particular constituency. We may note that H1 and H2 are largely contrasting since the cultural conflict dimension has emerged more “easily” in PR systems than in majoritarian systems where the rise of new parties is much more difficult.

A second set of hypotheses focuses on characteristics of parties as determinants of voter-party congruence. In line with the realignment-literture, our own argument developed above takes changing electoral constituencies seriously. We argue that changing patterns of party preferences have made party electorates and constituencies more heterogeneous, which makes representation of economic interests very difficult. Hence, we argue that the more heterogeneous a party’s electorate, the worse its voter-party congruence on distributive policies (H3). This hypothesis is also similar to Kitschelt and Rehm’s (2011) idea that some parties resemble “department stores”, offering different supplies to different groups of voters, whereas others are “boutique parties”, which represent a very limited (socially and thematically) group of voters.
Second, on the basis of issue ownership theory (van der Brug 2004) one would expect that left parties have a better voter-party congruence on distributive policies than right-wing parties (H4). With the rise of new topics such as immigration, security and multiculturalism over the past years, the right has increasingly focused on a law-and-order approach, whereas the left has more strongly tried to uphold its traditional areas of competence, which are in economic and social policy. Hence, one would expect that since the left is more clearly elected precisely for these topics, congruence should be higher.

Finally, radical parties are supposed to have a better voter-party congruence than moderate parties (H5) for the very similar and straightforward reason that radical parties probably have a more homogeneous constituency than moderate parties. Also, radical parties can offer more “pure” and ideological policies that need not take external constraints and governability into account.

One may also expect congruence to differ depending on the issue at stake. In line with Piersons’ (1995, 2001) very influential work on austerity and retrenchment, it must be hypothesized that congruence is lower with regard to social policy retrenchment than with regard to expansive policies (H6). Indeed, Pierson has convincingly argued that voters do not want retrenchment, even though parties have to deal with the financial constraints of austerity. Hence, retrenchment is supposed to happen in the “background”, in a more hidden and technocratic fashion. Expansive policies, by contrast, are electorally more attractive credit-claiming policies, which are attractive to both voters and parties. Finally, one would expect moderate parties to have better congruence with regard to social investment than radical parties (H7). Social investment is a “new” policy paradigm that can be read through both right- and left-wing lenses (as a duty and a right to work). Therefore, in a general formulation it is somehow beyond the traditional left-right scheme (Bonoli and Natali forthcoming). Thus, parties with a moderate profile or a heterogeneous electorate can use these policies without fearing electoral backlash.

The following table 1 summarizes the hypotheses, which will be analyzed empirically in the remainder of this paper.
### Table 1: Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Theoretical basis</th>
<th>Unit of analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H0</strong>: Parties today are detached from their voters and converge on distributive policies</td>
<td>Cartel party thesis (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 2004)</td>
<td>Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1</strong>: The more relevant cultural party mobilization, the worse voter-party congruence w/r to distributive policies</td>
<td>“Cultural” realignment theory (Kriesi et al. 2008)</td>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H2</strong>: The higher party fractionalization, the better the voter-party congruence</td>
<td>Institutional theory: PR vs. Majoritarian (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2010; Lijphart 1999)</td>
<td>Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3</strong>: The more heterogeneous a party’s electorate, the worse its voter-party congruence</td>
<td>Realignment theory (Kitschelt and Rehm 2011)</td>
<td>Political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H4</strong>: Left parties have a better voter-party congruence w/r to distributive policies than right-wing parties.</td>
<td>Issue-competence (van der Brug 2004)</td>
<td>Party families (left vs. right)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H5</strong>: Radical parties have a better voter-party congruence than moderate parties</td>
<td>Realignment theory (Kitschelt and Rehm 2011)</td>
<td>Party types (radical vs. moderate)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H6</strong>: Voter-party congruence is lower with regard to retrenchment reform preferences than with regard to expansive reform preferences</td>
<td>New Politics of the Welfare State (Pierson 2001)</td>
<td>Policy reform direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H7</strong>: Moderate parties have a better voter-party congruence than radical parties with regard to social investment reforms</td>
<td>Social investment welfare policies (Bonoli and Natali forthcoming)</td>
<td>Policy reform direction</td>
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</table>

### 3. Case selection, data and methods

In order to analyze the voter-party congruence across different party systems and parties we study four Western European countries: Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and the UK. This selection of parties enables us to compare two-party systems (UK) to multi-party systems (A, D, CH), multi-party systems with strong center parties (A, D) to party systems with a fragmented center (CH), as well as party systems with important parties on the radical left (D: Die Linke; A: KPÖ) and on the radical right (CH: SVP; A: FPÖ).

We also limit our analysis to labor market policy, i.e. all distributive policies that deal with employment performance, unemployment benefits and employability of individuals. We choose labor market policy because it is one of the key problems of Western
democracies and because it has clear distributive implications.

Data and coding

For our analysis of party positions, we code information from national legislative elections\(^3\), because elections are crucial in the voter-party-link (Mair 2008) and thus for voter-party-congruence. Following the work by Kriesi et al. (2006, 930), we consider “political debates during election campaigns, as reflected by the mass media” as an appropriate way to catch a party’s position. Rather than relying on party manifestos (as used in Kim and Fording 1998, 2002, 2003) or expert surveys (as used in Huber and Powell 1994; Kitschelt and Rehm 2011; Powell Jr. 2000) this focus enables us to simultaneously (1) include the most hotly debated issues during the election campaign, (2) grasp the positions of a party as it is seen in the public and not as it likes to present itself and (3) measure the saliency and the position of a party regarding specific issues. We believe that this gives us a more ‘realistic’ (read: as seen in the wider public) party position than alternative approaches. The disadvantage of our approach is that we cannot use existing data and thus have to rely on newly collected data. We applied newspaper content analysis to identify the positions of political parties in the media. For the selection of the time periods, newspapers and newspaper articles we followed the work by Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008)\(^4\), i.e. we chose for each country a quality newspaper and a tabloid\(^5\) and analyzed their articles two month prior to the national elections.\(^6\) Each article was coded in a two-step-procedure. In the first step, articles were analyzed sentence by sentence. If a sentence contained information on the relationship between a political party

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\(^3\) The national elections are: Austria 2006, Germany 2005, Switzerland 2007 and the UK 2005.

\(^4\) The methodological approach used by Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008) is very close to ours. But these authors analyzed all issues in the political debates during election campaigns. To be able to do so, the authors used a much less differentiated coding scheme (“welfare” was a single category) which prevents the use of their data for our focus on labor market politics.

\(^5\) The newspapers are: Austria: Die Presse, Kronenzeitung; Germany: Süddeutsche Zeitung, Bild; Switzerland: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Blick; UK: The Times, The Sun.

\(^6\) Because this coding is a time-consuming endeavour depending on the country and newspaper we restricted ourselves to certain days within this two month-period. For the ‘Kronenzeitung’, ‘Bild’, ‘Neue Zürcher Zeitung’, ‘Blick’ and ‘The Sun’, we coded all days. For ‘Die Presse’, ‘The Times’, and ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung’ we coded three days a week, (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday).
and some issue on labor market policy⁷, the sentence was copied into a data file together with additional information such as the date and the newspaper name⁸. In a second step these statements were coded regarding policy direction they implicated. We distinguished between redistribution (more resources form the state to certain groups), retrenchment (less state involvement), social investment (state involvement that enhances employability and job opportunities) and status quo (to defend the present situation).

For the micro-level position of voters (i.e. their preferences) we relied on the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data from the Role of Government 2006 survey and on the Sozialer Survey Österreich (SSÖ) 2003, since Austria is not included in the ISSP 2006. These surveys contain information both on people’s party preference and on specific labor market policy preferences. The precise operationalization of voter preferences is explained in appendix 1.

Methods

While these two datasets (survey-data and coded party positions) offer us rather detailed and sophisticated measures of parties’ and voters’ positions on labor market policies, the bigger challenge is to combine them in a meaningful way since they are not and cannot be measured on the same scale.⁹ In the literature on the congruence of parties and voters and party responsiveness several approaches have been used depending on the available measurement of party positions. Bartels (2008), for example, uses frequency distribution to track down the degree of voter preferences and their perceived fulfillment. Soroka and Wlezien (2010) focus on shifts in voter preferences and shifts in actual policies (mostly spending levels) to test their thermostat-theory. Kitschelt and Rehm (2011) regress voter preferences measured by ISSP-data on party positions measured by expert surveys to analyze the congruence. Finally, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2007) correlate average party constituency preferences with expert survey data on party positions. While we differ

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⁷ Labor Market relevant subjects range from social insurance contribution to labor market rigidities/flexibility. Information related to industrial relations (e.g. the duty to be part of the Arbeitskammer in Austria) has not been included.
⁸ Following this procedure we gathered 106 observations for Austria, 405 for Germany, 527 for Switzerland and 204 for the UK.
⁹ A possibility would be to have the same questionnaire for voters and party politicians as in the work by Page and Barabas (2000), Jacobs and Page (2005), Page and Bouton (2006). But this again would leave aside the media-based communication between parties and voters,
in how to measure the party position, we use an approach similar to the one by Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2007) and Kitschelt and Rehm (2011), i.e. we use correlations to measure the congruence of voters and parties. Our methodological strategy is to correlate mean frequencies. We arrive at these mean values by calculating (1) the number of a party’s statements in favor of – e.g. – redistribution in relation to all statements by this party. And (2) the number of a party’s voters who are in favor of redistribution. We repeat this step for each policy direction (redistribution, retrenchment, social investment and status quo) and then correlate these measures to analyze voter-party congruence. By doing so, we follow Bornschier (2010, 81) who argues that “[i]t is possible to measure the congruence of representation … by calculating correlations. The differing scales are not a problem in correlations, because the latter tap only the covariance between positions”.

4. Empirical analysis: matching voter and party positions on labor market policy

We start our empirical overview with a general assessment of voter-party congruence across all countries. Figure 1 correlates the mean position of party electorates (x-axis) with the mean position of parties (y-axis) on all observed issues on each of the four possible policy directions\(^{10}\). Values can be between 0 and 1, 0 meaning that a party has not advocated a policy reform direction in any of its statements and that none of a party’s voter advocates this policy reform, whereas 1 means that a party has claimed a certain policy reform in all of its statements and that all of a party’s voters support this policy reform direction. We have a total of 72 observations (18 parties total and four policy reform directions). The precise country and reform direction in question is not key to figure 1, which is only supposed to give an overview of the general trend. Two observations are important with regard to figure 1. First, there is a positive correlation

\(^{10}\) Party mean position denotes the percentage of party statements that advocated a particular policy reform direction. Voter mean position denotes the percentage of party voters who favor that particular policy reform direction (operationalized as described in appendix 1).
between voter and party mean positions, meaning that the more a party electorate is favorable to retrenchment, redistribution, social investment or status quo, the more the corresponding party is favorable to that issue, too. Overall, we estimate that the correlation of 0.37 - which is significant at the 0.01 level – indicates that voter-party congruence in labor market policy has not entirely disappeared, at all (as H0 argued).

Figure 1: Voter-Party Congruence (all countries)

The second important observation in Figure 1 is that the spread of voter positions is almost equal to the spread of party positions. Mean positions of voters vary between 0.2 and 0.9 and mean positions of parties vary between 0 and 0.8. This is important with regard to the presence of policy alternatives as a precondition for representation and democratic quality, since it shows that positions of parties are equally diverse as positions of the party constituencies. We have assessed the presence of policy alternatives in a second way, displayed in table 2 below. For this table, we have paired all parties of a country with all possible other parties. We have then calculated the differences in their positions regarding each of the four policy directions and we have (by means of a two-
sample test of proportion) tested if these differences are significant. Table 2 displays the percentage of significantly different party positions. The higher the percentage, the more clearly different policy alternatives the parties offer.

Table 2: Comparison of alternative party-positions by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>All parties: % of pairwise comparisons that are significantly different</th>
<th>Only across left-right: % of pairwise comparisons across the left-right blocks that are significantly different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, differences between countries are considerable. The UK and Austria are the two countries where only between a quarter and 40% of all pairwise comparisons of parties display significantly different positions. This is not very surprising for the first column, since it includes all party comparisons, i.e. also between e.g. social democrats and greens, which obviously do not differ that much. But in the second column, we only see the comparisons between countries of the left and the right, and the percentage of significantly different positions is not much higher. The same is the case for Germany and Switzerland, albeit at a considerably higher level. Here, almost 60% of all pairwise comparisons are significantly different, which gives evidence for the fact that these party systems indeed present voters with alternative policy positions to choose from. Overall, we find positive and quite strong congruence. In the UK and to some extent in Austria, however, party positions seem to have become rather similar. However, this may still be compatible with strong congruence if mean voter positions have become similar, too.
4.1. Country-specific determinants of policy congruence

We want to assess two theories on voter-party congruence which can be assessed at the country level. The “cultural realignment hypothesis” argues that congruence should be lower in those countries where cultural party mobilization has become very salient. They suggest a zero-sum game between economic and cultural voter congruence. When testing this hypothesis, we can take the existence of a right-wing populist party as a proxy for the saliency of the cultural conflict dimension. Indeed, these parties clearly and predominantly mobilize regarding cultural issues such as immigration and traditionalist values (Bornschier 2010). Obviously, it may still be that cultural traditionalism is strong in a country without right-wing populist party, because such a party did not emerge for structural or institutional reasons (Bornschier forthcoming). However, this is not a problem for our analysis, since the argument of H1 is that once such a party exists, it will distract parties and voters from economic and distributive politics. Consequently, we should see congruence being weaker in Switzerland and Austria, which both have strong right-wing populist parties (the SVP in Switzerland and the FPÖ/BZÖ in Austria) than in the UK and Germany. Figure 2 shows the same information as in Figure 1, but split for each country. As we can see immediately, H1 is not confirmed (see also figure A1 in the appendix). Contrary to the expectations, voter-party congruence on labor market policy is much stronger (and significant) in Austria and Switzerland than in Germany and the UK, where the positive correlation is weak and not significant. We were skeptical with regard to this hypothesis since we argued that there is no logical reason for there to be a trade-off between cultural and distributive congruence and it seems like the skepticism was justified.
Figure 2: Voter-Party Congruence per country
The second country-specific hypothesis receives equally scant support. H2 argued that the higher party fractionalization in a country, the better the voter-party congruence, based on the idea that the more parties, the more they “specialize” in the representation of their constituency. Table 3 shows two measures of party system fractionalization: The Rae-index of electoral fractionalization and the Laakso-Taagepera-index of effective number of parties (Armingeon et al. 2010). Both indices show that fractionalization is highest in Switzerland and Germany and lower in Austria and the UK. This is obviously in contrast to the finding in figure 2 showing that Austria displays overall the best voter-party congruence of all four parties. Despite having a low number of effective parties, the match between the positions of parties and voters on labor market policy reforms in Austria is closest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party System Fractionalization</th>
<th>Effective Number of Parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>66.88</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>72.22</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>77.65</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>82.27</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The disconfirmation of the cultural realignment thesis is important for the overall conclusion of this analysis, since it shows that cultural mobilization does not automatically and necessarily distract voter-party congruence on distributive policies. The underlying logic of the party-fractionalization hypothesis (i.e. the degree of constituency heterogeneity drives congruence) can also be tested in more detail at the party-level, rather than the country-level. This is what we will do next.

11 We are aware of the fact that these indices actually hold the same information. But since the values from Armingeon et al. (2010) do not show a perfect correlation, we decided to present both measures.
12 However, it is in line with Table 2: the higher the fractionalization of the party system, the bigger the distance between the parties. This means that multi-party systems present a more variable supply of policy alternatives than systems with few parties. It also shows that a focus on the supply-side only may be misleading when testing congruence.
4.2. Party-specific determinants of policy congruence

H3 follows up on H2 in arguing that the more heterogeneous a party’s electorate, the worse its voter-party congruence on labor market policy. The underlying idea is thus similar to H2. We wanted, however, to assess the realignment theory at the level of party electorates. Therefore, we have calculated the degree of socio-structural heterogeneity of party electorates on the basis of an 8-class scheme (Oesch 2006) that precisely differentiates the new and old working classes and the split within the middle class that we have discussed above. Table A2 in the appendix gives the values of constituency heterogeneity that we obtained by applying the Herfindahl-index in terms of these 8 classes to each party. Heterogeneity can vary from a minimum of 1 (only members of 1 class vote for that party) to a maximum of 8 (all classes are represented proportionally to their share of the overall population). We see that the Swiss Christian Democrats have the most heterogeneous electorate, whereas the Swiss radical left (PdA) has the most homogeneous one. We can then correlate this index of constituency fractionalization to the value of voter-party congruence for each party, which corresponds to the correlation coefficient of voter-party positions on the four policy reform directions. The higher this value, the more closely this party matches its voters’ positions on redistribution, status quo, social investment and retrenchment of labor market policy. Figure 3 shows immediately that the socio-structural fractionalization of party electorates is not closely related that party’s level of congruence.
Even though the correlation coefficient is negative (as expected), the scatter is too loose to be significant. Without the Austrian FPÖ (homogenous party constituency but bad representation of their voters), the link would, however be clearly significant. This is important to note, because the FPÖ as a right-wing populist party may not be so focused on the representation of its voters’ distributive interests.

Indeed, hypothesis 4, which distinguishes the congruence performance of left- and right-wing parties on the basis of issue-ownership theory seems to suggest that (radical) right parties have a low degree of party-voter congruence when it comes to distributive policies. Figure 4 shows the correlation between voter and party positions for left-parties and for right-wing parties separately. It also shows three correlation coefficients: the first refers to the overall correlation, whereas the second and third refer to the congruence of moderate vs. radical right and left parties.
Two results are particularly important: first, as expected, the congruence is stronger for left- than for right-wing parties. For all left-wing parties, the correlation between voter- and party-positions is highly significant at 0.54. It is even at 0.59 for the moderate left parties only. Especially intriguing, but outside of the narrow focus of our hypothesis, is
the result that the congruence of social democratic parties in Austria and Switzerland is much better than the congruence of the German and British Social Democrats (see figure A2 in the appendix). Both the German and the British Social Democrats have undergone a process of transformation from the 1990s onwards, sharing for at least a decade a more liberal, third way approach, which was supposed to move the distributive policies of the social democrats more towards the center and middle classes. It seems like this strategy did not reflect their voters’ preferences, whereas the Austrian and Swiss Social Democrats remained closer to their constituencies with their more traditional left-wing profile. The second important result is that the lower congruence found on the right is first and foremost due to the radical right-wing parties. They even display a negative correlation (though not significant). This is strong support for the issue ownership thesis: the left parties, whose core issues include labor market policies, have a much better congruence on these issues than the radical right-wing parties which mobilize their voters based on cultural issues such as immigration. Partly, this also provides evidence for the cultural realignment theory in the sense that the radical right indeed has low distributive congruence. But overall, this does not lower the congruence with regard to distributive policies, since the left and even the moderate right continue to represent their voters’ interests in terms of labor market policy relatively well.
In the light of Figure 4, it is not surprising that radical parties have a much worse congruence fit than moderate parties (see Figure 5) which clearly disconfirms hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 5 was again based on the ideas that radical parties can specialize more
clearly in the representation of their limited electorate. But as we see in this analysis the radical parties on the right in particular are clearly discongruent with the distributive interests of their voters. The moderate parties, by contrast, display a positive and strongly significant congruence with their constituencies regarding labor market policies.

4.3. Policy-specific determinants of policy congruence

So far, all empirical analyses have merged the four policy reform directions as different but equally important aspects of labor market policy. The final two hypotheses relied on theories that argue that parties have particular difficulties or advantages in representing specific policy reform directions. Pierson’s (2001) work, for instance, suggests that parties should have great difficulties representing the voters’ preferences for, or reluctance against retrenchment (H5), whereas they should be always happy to match their enthusiasm for expansive distributive policies. Also social investment theory argues that these policies are attractive mostly to moderate center parties, because they allow to combine diverging interests and bridge traditionally left- and right-positions on distributive issues. Figure 6 provides the necessary evidence to disconfirm both hypotheses.
Figure 6: Voter-Party Congruence: different labor market policy reform directions

Redistribution

Overall: $r=0.22$
Radical: $r=0.51$
Moderate: $r=0.18$

Social investment

Overall: $r=0.40^*$
Radical: $r=0.53$
Moderate: $r=0.51^{**}$

Retrenchment

Overall: $r=0.85^{***}$
Radical: $r=0.64$
Moderate: $r=0.87^{***}$

Status quo

Overall: $r= -0.01$
Radical: $r= 0.97$
Moderate: $r= -0.12$
Figure 6 shows voter-party convergence for each of the policy reform directions and it also differentiates congruence according to radical and moderate parties. Contrary to what one would expect given the theory, congruence is best with regard to retrenchment. Pierson was right in arguing that fewer voters prefer retrenchment than redistribution, social investment or status quo, but actually the parties follow these positions and advocate congruent positions on retrenchment. With regard to social investment, the moderate parties indeed display strong and strongly significant positive congruence with their voters, but the radical parties show a positive correlation, too, even though not significant. Overall, congruence is best when it comes to retrenchment and social investment and worse for redistribution and status quo. Very few parties advocate the status quo in their statements, even though this position is rather popular with almost all party constituencies. When it comes to redistribution, the correlation is clearly positive but a few outliers (the liberal democrats in the UK are much more in favor of redistribution than their voters) blur the congruence.

**Conclusion**

Several different, unrelated strands of recent political science literature argue that the voter-party congruence on distributive policies has declined in Western Europe. Our goal in this paper was to start an empirical exploration of the arguments underlying this hypothesis. Different authors contend that parties deviate increasingly from what their voters want in terms of economic and social policies, because their hands are tied by exogenous forces (such as „globalization“), because their source of power and legitimacy has become detached from elections and voters (the „cartel party thesis“) or because parties and voters today care about cultural, rather than distributive policies (the „cultural realignment thesis“). In opposition to these three claims, we have argued that voter-party congruence may still be persistent because distributive policies are persistently salient to the public and the democratic process. We also claimed that parties might still be congruent with their voters, even though these voters – and hence their economic interests – have changed. Congruence today may actually require parties to advocate different policies than they claimed in the past.

We based our analysis on newly collected data regarding labor market policy in four
West European countries, Austria, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. Labor market policies are highly salient in the public debate. Also, they are really in the hands of national governments, so that congruence is a matter of the parties’ choices, not institutional constraints (pension policies, e.g. are much more path-dependent and thus allow for less variable party positions). To assess congruence, we mostly correlated the mean positions of party electorates (based on survey data) and average party positions (based on coded newspaper data).

In conclusion of this paper, we would like to stress three findings. First, the most clear and strongest result we found is that left-wing parties are more congruent with their voters regarding labor market policies than right-wing parties. This difference is very clear when we compare all left-wing parties to all right-wing parties. When we differentiate between moderate and radical parties on both the left and the right, it appears that both radical and moderate left parties are congruent with their voters, while on the right, the radical parties advocate policy reforms that are completely unrelated to their voters’ position. The moderate right-wing parties, by contrast, are somewhat congruent with their voters, albeit to a lesser extent than the left parties. We interpret this finding as evidence for the issue ownership thesis, which holds that parties “own” certain political topics that are key to their mobilization and to what voters expect from them and trust them to do. For the electoral success of left parties, distributive policies have always been key and they seem to remain important. Hence, the argument that parties have moved away from their voters because of exogenous constraints such as globalization does not seem to hold.

The second main finding is actually a non-finding. Contrary to what the “cultural realignment thesis” would hold, we do not find a trade-off between cultural and economic voter mobilization. Switzerland and Austria have both seen the emergence of powerful populist right-wing parties (the SVP and the FPÖ), which have massively shifted the political debates in these countries towards cultural issues such as immigration or cultural liberalism (Kriesi et al. 2008). All parties in these countries need to deal with these topics, even if only in a reactive way. One might expect that this focus on the key topics
of the new right has distracted attention from distributive policies, so that congruence between voters and parties on these economic issues would be particularly weak. This is, however, not the case. Overall congruence in Austria and Switzerland is clearly better and higher than in Germany and UK, two countries where the populist right has not managed to enter the electoral debates on an important scale. Hence, there does not seem to be a general trade-off between economic or cultural congruence. Quite the opposite, further analyses of congruence regarding specific party families has shown that the Social Democrats in those countries with a strong populist right (Austria and Switzerland) are very much in line with their voters, much more so than the Social Democrats that have not been challenged by new right-wing competitors who try to attract their working class electorate. To us, this seems a particularly important finding, since it may mean that where the electoral competition for worker’s votes is more acute (i.e. where Social democrats face right-wing rivals), the left is pushed to represent their voters economic interests more clearly so than in contexts, where the left seems unchallenged and thus seems to have the leeway to move to the center (as in the UK and Germany under the “third way” experiment). In this sense, the emergence of a culturally based workerist right (the populist right) may not weaken voter-party congruence on distributive issues overall, but even strengthen it on the left side of the political spectrum.

Finally, a third finding seems important to us, since it calls for further investigation. We have hypothesized that voter-party congruence may be weak if a party’s electorate is very heterogeneous socio-structurally. However, we have not found evidence for a link between the heterogeneity and congruence. There are relatively homogenous parties (such as the Austrian FPÖ), which represent their voters labor market policy positions very poorly, and there are parties with a very heterogeneous electorate (such as the Swiss Social Democrats) who still have a very good fit. While the first deviation from a linear correlation might be explained – see above – with the specific non-economic issue-profile of right-wing populists, the second is more difficult to understand. How does a party manage to be congruent with its electorate if the latter is composed by very different social groups, with very different economic needs and demands? It might be that these parties are particularly successful in fostering a policy program that speaks to several
groups of voters, so that they actually foster homogeneity themselves. But this requires further research. Overall, we think that our paper has shown that congruence between parties and voters on distributive policies has not disappeared, but it varies across countries and parties according to patterns that can be explained by existing theories.

Appendix

Table A1 List of variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>OPERATIONALIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution (UK, GER, SWI)</td>
<td>ISSP Role of Government 2006. Redistribution is the mean of the following three dichotomous variables: the respondent thinks 1) that the government should spend more money on unemployment benefits (V23), 2) that it is the government responsibility to provide a decent living standard for the unemployed (V30) and 3) that it is the government’s responsibility to reduce income differences (V31).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution (A)</td>
<td>Sozialer Survey Österreich 2003 Redistribution is the mean of the following two dichotomous variables: 1) that it is the government responsibility to provide a decent living standard for the unemployed (f91f03) and 2) that it is the government’s responsibility to reduce income differences (f91g03).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social investment (UK, GER, SWI)</td>
<td>ISSP Role of Government 2006. Social investment is the mean of the following four dichotomous variables: the respondent thinks 1) that the government should finance projects to create new jobs (V12), 2) that the working week should be reduced to create more jobs (V16), 3) that it is the governments’ responsibility to provide a job to everyone who wants one (V25) and 4) that it is the governments’ responsibility to provide financial help to students from low-income families (V32).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social investment (A)</td>
<td>Sozialer Survey Österreich 2003 Social investment is the mean of the following four dichotomous variables: the respondent thinks 1) that it is the governments’ responsibility to provide a job to everyone who wants one (f91a03) and 2) that it is the governments’ responsibility to provide financial help to students from low-income families (f91h03).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrenchment (UK, GER, SWI)</td>
<td>ISSP Role of Government 2006. Retrenchment is the mean of the following four dichotomous variables: the respondent thinks 1) that there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should be cuts in government spending (V11), 2) that the
government should spend less money on unemployment
benefits (V23), 3) that it is not the government’s
responsibility to provide a decent living standard for the
unemployed (V30) and 4) that it is not the governments
responsibility to reduce income differences (V31).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retrenchment (A)</th>
<th>Sozialer Survey Österreich 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Retrenchment is the mean of the following three
dichotomous variables: the respondent thinks 1) that there
should be cuts in government spending (f95b03), 2) that it
is not the government’s responsibility to provide a decent
living standard for the unemployed (f91f03) and 3) that it
is not the governments responsibility to reduce income
differences (f91g03). |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status quo (UK, GER, SWI)</th>
<th>ISSP Role of Government 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Status quo is the mean of the following five dichotomous
variables: the respondent thinks 1) that the government
should spend neither more nor less on unemployment
benefits (V23), 2) that the government should support
declining industries to protect jobs (V15), 3) that the
government should make no cuts in government spending
(V11), 4) that it rather is the government’s responsibility
to provide a decent living standard for the unemployed
(V30), and 5) that it rather is the government’s
responsibility to reduce income differences (V31). |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status quo (A)</th>
<th>Sozialer Survey Österreich 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Status quo is the mean of the following three dichotomous
variables: the respondent thinks 1) that the government
should make no cuts in government spending (f95b03), 2)
that it rather is the government’s responsibility to provide
a decent living standard for the unemployed (f91f03), and
3) that it rather is the government’s responsibility to
reduce income differences (f91g03). |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UKparty</th>
<th>ISSP Role of Government 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| GB_PRTY (“Which party do you feel close to””; if
respondent does not feel close to any party, then “Which
party would you vote for next Sunday?”) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GERparty</th>
<th>ISSP Role of Government 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| DE_PRTY (“Which party would you vote for next
Sunday?”) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHparty</th>
<th>ISSP Role of Government 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CH_PRTY (“Which party do you feel close to?”)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aparty</th>
<th>Sozialer Survey Österreich 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H13103 (“Which party do you feel close to?”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party fractionalization system</th>
<th>Index of electoral fractionalization of the party-system according to the formula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Effective number of parties

Effective number of parties on the votes level according to the formula \([N^2]\) proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Values from Armingeon et al. (2010).

Heterogeneity in party constituency

Herfindahl-Index:
Value Party A = \(1 / (\sum s_i^2)\)
where \(s\) = share of class \(i\) on party A’s constituency calculated from ISSP 2006 and SSÖ 2003 data.

Table A2: List of Political Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Label</th>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cdu</td>
<td>Christian Democratic Union</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cvp</td>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evp</td>
<td>Protestant People’s Party</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fdpCH</td>
<td>Radical Democrats</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fdpD</td>
<td>Free Democrats</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fpo</td>
<td>Freedom Party</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>greenA</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>greenCH</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>greenD</td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>Labor Party</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Liberal Democrats</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linke</td>
<td>Radical Left</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovp</td>
<td>People’s Party</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spd</td>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spo</td>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SpS</td>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svp</td>
<td>Swiss People’s Party</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure A1: Voter-Party Congruence: cultural and economic cleavages

Austria and Switzerland

$r = 0.49^{**}$

Germany and UK

$r = -0.14$
Figure A2: Voter-Party Congruence: new and old social democracy

Social Democracy: Germany and UK

$r = -0.14$

Social Democracy: Austria and Switzerland

$r = 0.90^{**}$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Heterogeneity (Herfindahl-Index)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PdA (CH)</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP (UK)</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ (Ö)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ (Ö)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Linke (D)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVP (CH)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green (A)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP (Ö)</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP (CH)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green (CH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor (UK)</td>
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<td>6.10</td>
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<td>SVP (CH)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
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<td>Liberals (UK)</td>
<td>6.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>6.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References
Bernauer, Julian, Nathalie Giger, and Jan Rosset. 2010. "Do Proportional Electoral Systems Close the Gap in Representation between Women and Men; Low and High Income Citizens?"


