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Miriam Sorace

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The European Union democratic deficit: Substantive representation in the European Parliament at the input stage

Miriam Sorace

European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

Abstract

The analysis compares voters' preferences in economic policy to political parties' economic written parliamentary questions during the 2009–2014 term of the European Parliament. The corpus of over 55,000 written questions was ideologically scaled via crowdsourcing. The analysis shows that parties are unresponsive to second-order and to disengaged voters. The results also suggest that there is no upper class bias in European Parliament political representation. The data highlight a strong tendency of EP7 political parties to cluster around the position of the average European voter, at the expense of their average supporter. The democratic deficit is therefore at most a pluralism deficit in the European Parliament, since substantive representation in the European Parliament is successful as far as the majoritarian norm is concerned.

Corresponding author:

Miriam Sorace, European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.

Email: m.sorace@lse.ac.uk

Introduction

Forty-seven per cent of Europeans surveyed in the 2014 European Election Study believed the European Parliament (EP) did not represent their preferences, and 44% claimed not to trust the institutions of the European Union (Schmitt et al., 2015). Popular support for the European Union has decreased since the 1990s, when the age of 'permissive consensus' ended, following the establishment of the internal market (Hix 2008). On top of this, on 23 June 2016 British voters decided that the UK should exit the EU, amid, among other things, perceptions of not being represented by EU policymakers. UK voters are determined to 'take back control' from a distant and unrepresentative European polity, as maintained by the Leave campaigners.

Far from being confined to Euro-sceptic rhetoric, concerns about the EU demo-cratic deficit first appeared in academic circles (Leconte, 2010). The academic cri-tiques levelled at the EU fall into six general categories: (1) the EU has an opaque institutional design and ends up being dominated by technocrats, (2) the EU has led to 'deparliamentarisation', (3) the EP does not have sufficient influence, (4) there is no European 'demos' and hence no European democracy is possible, (5) EU elections are 'second-order': they do not convey sufficient information to European voters or make it possible to hold legislators to account and (6) the EU does not represent its citizens because of its pro-capital bias. The aim of this article is to investigate the latter academic democratic deficit hypotheses by using legislative activities of the EP as a case.

Assessing political acts against voters' political preferences is the essential test of democracy (Gilens, 2005; May, 1978; Pitkin, 1967), and yet – though the notion that the EU is not democratic is voiced by Euro-sceptics and academics alike – not many studies examine the adherence to the 'responsive rule' by representatives serving in EU institutions. The existing scholarship on the health of EU political representation overly relies on 'formalistic representation' (Pitkin, 1967), since it tests the quality of the 'authorisation' process by examining the match between voters' attitudes and representatives attitudes or promises at election time (Belchior, 2013; Costello et al., 2012; Dalton, 2015; Vasilopoulou and Gattermann, 2013; Walczak and Van der Brug, 2013). Existing research that looks at 'substantive' representation (the match between voter attitudes and representative behaviours) does not place EU legislation on the left–right spectrum. This literature tests sub-stantive representation of Euro-scepticism, not of voters' left–right preferences (Arnold et al., 2013; Hagemann et al., 2016; Toshkov, 2011).

No studies to date examine the left–right behaviours of EU representatives against the left–right preferences of citizens. Behavioural congruence is different from ideological or attitudinal congruence, and it is closer to Pitkin's conceptual-isation of political representation as 'substantive' or 'acting for' representation (Eulau and Karps, 1977). Substantive representation is a synonym of responsiveness (Eulau and Karps, 1977; May, 1978), even though more recent empirical scholarship restricts the concept of responsiveness to time series designs. Behavioural congruence indicates the congruence between voters' left–right atti-tudes with parties' left–right statements during their decision-making activities and is here a synonym for substantive representation.

This article investigates the role of voters' characteristics for political represen-tation in the EP. In particular, the analysis focuses on the role of second-order voting and social class, testing the 'political contestation' and the 'social-demo-cratic' critiques to the EU democratic deficit. These two hypotheses are significant not only because they address key academic concerns over the EU democratic deficit, but also because they reflect the wider theoretical debate on representative democracy. The broader literature on political representation examines represen-tative performances either through participatory models of democracy or through political agency models. Both can be linked to the political contestation and the social democratic critiques of the EU democratic deficit.

Participatory models of democracy are connected to Marx's view on democracy, as they emphasise the detrimental role of socio-economic structures, which lead to the 'bourgeois bias' of representative institutions (Held, 2006). Participatory models support a conceptualisation of political representation as 'presentation' (Pitkin, 1967) and reforms introducing deliberative, participatory and descriptive representation elements to representative institutions (Held, 2006). The social-democratic hypothesis on the EU democratic deficit is connected to this model of democracy. It argues that a democratic deficit exists in the Union because EU group politics is dominated by business lobbies, and because EU competences are confined to 'market creation' policies, which lead to the interests of the lower classes to be suppressed in the process. A participatory understanding of democracy would imply that political representation would fail whenever a particular demographic group is under-represented in political institutions. Therefore, since in most representative democracies the elite is composed of middle and upper class individuals – and the EP is no exception (Corbett et al., 2011) – the interests of the lower classes are expected to receive inferior representation.

Political agency models are associated with rational choice theory and emphasise the crucial role of political information instead (Downs, 1957). Representative democracies are understood, in this framework, as delegation regimes (Besley, 2006). The agency problems entailed by delegation relationships are, however, not inexorable, in this view. Representation can work when proper information is available to allow for both correct selection and attribution of rewards/sanctions. The political contestation critique can be linked to this model of democracy since it argues that a democratic deficit exists in the Union because voters in European elections are poorly informed on EU policies and agenda and cannot properly select or monitor EU representatives. A political agency understanding of democracy, therefore, anticipates that political representation fails voters that are unwilling or unable to gather the relevant information on European party platforms and/ or to monitor parties while in office.

To test these theories, the analysis assigns left–right ideological scores to political parties serving in the seventh term of the EP via crowd-sourced content analysis of their written parliamentary questions on economic policy. Next, party voters are placed in the economic left–right scale through an index of economic policy survey items in the European Election Study 2009 (Egmond et al., 2013). The differences between parties' and voters' ideological scales are first described via regression and distribution analysis. Second, the 'behavioural congruence scores' for each individual party in the sample are calculated, and then used to test the political contestation and the socio-democratic hypotheses via a multilevel regression model.

The EP was chosen as the case study because of the importance of EP performance for popular evaluations of EU democracy (Hobolt, 2012). In addition, it is fundamental to assess the representativeness of the 'direct accountability channel' of the EU (Norris, 1997). The focus on written parliamentary questions makes this study an assessment of substantive representations in 'inputs' to the system. Some scholars have argued that it is vital to assess representative democracy during 'processes' or 'inputs'. For the majoritarian outputs of representative democracies to be accepted as legitimate, in fact, voters need to know their policy preferences managed at the very least to access the policymaking stage, and that, therefore there is pluralism during the agenda setting and deliberative stages (Bellamy, 2010; Dahl, 1989; Goodin, 2003). This study investigates the representativeness and pluralism of inputs to the EU decision-making process.

The results document that the EP has majoritarian tendencies even in 'less con-sequential' legislative activities, typical of the 'input stages' of the policy cycle, such as written parliamentary questions. Parties serving in the EP sacrifice the pluralistic representation of their average supporter to coalesce around the policy preferences of the average European voter. In addition to this, the data show that second-order voting and low engagement with the electoral campaign hurt voters. First-order voters, together with voters informed about and engaged in the 2009 EP election campaign, are in fact better represented than second-order and uninformed voters. Both the political agency model of democracy and the political contestation critique of EU democracy are vindicated by the data. In contrast, as far as the social-democratic critique is concerned, social class does not seem to matter for political representation in the EP. Curiously, it is the policy preferences of the middle and of the upper-middle classes that appear to be somewhat less represented than those of the working classes in parties' written parliamentary questions. All other social classes are, however, equally well represented. A systematic bias in favour of the working classes is therefore not supported by the data either.

The study makes several contributions. It enhances our understanding of the EU democratic deficit, it extends the literature on EP political representation and it weighs in major democratic theory debates, by establishing whether political representation fails because of information asymmetries or because of 'structural' inequalities. The findings also have practical implications for the survival of the EU political system: the quality of political representation matters for regime support and legitimacy (Newton, 2006; Rohrschneider, 2002). Low legitimacy of political institutions, in turn, leads to more anti-system political behaviour (such as fights with the police, unofficial protesting, government overthrow and refusal to pay taxes) and higher tolerance for non-compliance with the law (Marien and Hooghe, 2011; Muller et al., 1982). Inadequate representation can thus have extreme consequences for the effectiveness and survival of political systems: studies have highlighted the way in which Euro-scepticism has already transformed European institutions and practices,

which have become increasingly intergovernmental (Leconte, 2010: Chapter 1). Low representation in inputs to decision-making may further fuel popular Euro-sceptic tendencies and reinforce Euro-sceptic campaigns, leading, in the extreme, to the dis-solution of the European project.

Theory

Political agency models describe the relationship between voters and representatives as a non-contractual repeated delegation game. The representative relationship is non-contractual since legislators' independence is often enshrined in representative institutions' rules of procedure, and since no third party exists that can formally sanction representatives or political parties for not following the 'responsible party model'. The relationship is a repeated one since every legislator, and political party, has a probability d of being re-elected at time t+1 (Besley, 2006; Morrow, 1994). Voters are assumed to primarily value the voicing of their ideological interests (Dahl, 1989) while representatives mostly value vote maximisation (Downs, 1957). These contrasting goals may motivate agents to drift if anything else besides voicing voters' preferences can ensure either vote or office maximization. These contrasting goals may motivate agents to drift if anything else besides voicing voters' preferences can ensure either vote or office maximization. Therefore, in political representation, principals (voters) move first and are potentially subject to agency problems such as adverse selection and moral hazards.

According to political agency models such problems can be counteracted by either correct selection, the narrowing of representatives' discretion and/or through future rewards and punishments (Besley, 2006; Ferejohn, 1986; Morrow, 1994; Perrson et al., 1997). The existence of a future can counter the agent's temptation to defect, provided that the payoff from future rewards and punishments is higher than the payoff from shirking (Morrow, 1994).

The 'political contestation critique' of the EU democratic deficit precisely decries the scarcity and poor quality of the electoral information disseminated during elections to the EP and the weak sanctions available to European voters. Scholars argue that current EP electoral campaigns pre-empt the usage of the most traditional rewards and punishment available to voters in representative democracies. Voting behaviour in elections to the EP is second-order, mostly focused on rewarding/punishing national government performance rather than on the assessment of EU-specific platforms and actions (Hix and Marsh, 2011). EP campaigns contain low substantive information on the EU policies and agenda (Davidson-Schmich and Vladescu, 2012), and voters are unaware of party position-ing during EP campaigns (McElroy and Kritzinger, 2012). Punishing Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for shirking is, as a consequence, very costly for the European voter, plagued by insufficient information. This situation makes defections potentially less costly for politicians. Follesdal and Hix (2006) call the lack of political contestation over European issues in EU elections the major anti-democratic flaw of the EU, a flaw that even Moravcsik (2008), the staunchest abjurer of the democratic deficit, recognises as dangerous. The inadequacy of EP election campaigns is expected to make it virtually impossible for voters, and espe-cially for second-order and for uninformed voters, to accurately select and monitor EU representatives. This, in addition, calls into question whether European voters can have their policy preferences voiced in EU institutions.

Three hypotheses are derived from political agency models of democracy and from the political contestation critique. The political agency model of democracy implies that variation in parties' behavioural congruence should be associated with second-order voting, voter engagement with and attention to the EU campaign, or voter general knowledge about the EU.

H1: EP7 political parties' behavioural incongruence is higher for second-order voters, all else constant.

H2: EP7 political parties' behavioural incongruence is higher for voters with lower exposure to the EP election campaign, all else constant.

H3: EP7 political parties' behavioural incongruence is higher for voters with low EU knowledge, all else constant.

If these types of voters are less represented by their parties, keeping all else constant, it must mean that political information and informed, non-protest voting matters in ensuring the behavioural congruence of representatives. This would vindicate the political agency model of democracy as well as the political contestation critique.

The participatory model of democracy, and the social-democratic critique – its correlate in the democratic deficit literature – postulate that political parties, com-posed by members of the middle and upper classes and immersed in an environment tailored to elite and pro-business interests, will inevitably under-represent substantial sections of the population. This stance is tenaciously held by the members of the Italian Five Star Movement, members, together with Farage's United Kingdom Independence Party, of the Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy party group in the EP. At the Five Star Movement founding rally, the V-day, representative democracy was described as a mechanism to cheat poor people (though they put it more 'colourfully' than that).[1] Their concerns over representative democracy are influenced by participatory models of democracy, Marxist theory and by the early 20th-century works by Robert Michels, Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto on oligarchies (Held, 2006; Morel, 2012). Empirical evidence has demonstrated that the lower classes are seriously under-represented in the rank and file of representative institutions (Carnes and Lupu, 2016) and that representation inequalities favouring the upper classes are rampant in some representative democracies (Aaldering, 2016; Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Gilens and Page, 2014).

The 'social-democratic critique' of EU democracy predicts that the failure of political parties serving in EU institutions to represent voters is specifically going to be at the expense of the lower classes. The EU, according to these scholars, has a democratic deficit because it is, similarly to representative democracies in general, inherently biased towards pro-capital interests. In the words of Schmitter (2000: 9) '[t]he EU is indeed surrounded by representatives, but these are hardly representative of the citizenry as a whole. At the functional level, they are overwhelmingly skewed to favour business interests'. Schmitter (2000) and Streeck (1995) theorise that the constitutional structure of the EU necessarily leads to policies biased against the interests of wage earners, pensioners, the unemployed and the young. According to this view, national governments fought to maintain full constitutional legitimacy to pass social and welfare policies for themselves. As a result, the EU can, at most, concern itself with 'market creation' policies, i.e. deregulatory policies to allow the removal of market barriers, e.g. tariffs and/or barriers to movement of people and capital. In addition to this, Schmitter (2000) and Streeck (1995) argue, group politics in the EU is skewed towards business and professional lobbies. EU representatives, given the context they work in, are fundamentally incapacitated to channel non-upper class interests.

The social-democratic critique hypothesises that specific social groups are sys-tematically better represented than others, because EU policymaking is naturally partial to the interests of the wealthy. This hypothesis will be tested by examining the relationship between parties' behavioural incongruence and voters' social class.

H4: EP7 political parties' behavioural incongruence is higher for voters from the lower classes, all else constant.

Analysis: Scaling political parties and party voters

Crowdsourcing of EP written questions is used to retrieve political parties' positions in economic policy. The operationalisation imposed by a substantive conceptualisation of political representation requires text analysis of legislative activities. Estimating party scores via candidate or expert surveys was avoided as it corresponds more closely to the formalistic conceptualisation of political representation, in that it relies on manifestoes (electoral contracts), candidates' answers to election surveys and parties' official/public stances. In addition, datasets on expert scoring of political parties are inappropriate for the objectives of this article in that they do not concentrate on EU legislative activities specifically.

Crowdsourcing is a cheap and fully replicable text analysis technique that can be fruitfully exploited in studies of substantive representation. It is comparable to classic hand-coding procedures, such as the one adopted by the Comparative Manifesto Project. Similarly to classic content analysis, coders analyse and score a text on the basis of coding rules. The key difference between classic content analysis and crowdsourcing is that coding is not done by experts in political text analysis but by an online crowd. Another key difference is that no text is coded by the same group of coders since textual units are randomly made available to an enormous pool of coders. The final party score is then obtained via an 'average of averages' approach. Each unit of text receives an ideological score which is an average of the scores from five online coders that were assigned to each text on average.[2] The political party score is then the average score of the texts tabled by members of the relevant political party.

Over traditional hand-coding methods, crowdsourcing has the advantage of scale reliability, guaranteed by the 'average of averages' approach, as well as that of replicability (Benoit et al., 2016). Benoit et al. (2016) found that text analysis by coders on the web highly correlates with the results from experts and that this holds for both electoral manifesto and legislative text data. The method is therefore successful in approximating experts' hand coding because it relies on multiple coders per text (the 'wisdom of the crowd' effect) and because the online

platform used (Crowd Flower) allows the researcher to set a series of quality checks, such as initial quizzes and random administration of test questions throughout the job. The researcher, via these quality checks, can easily filter out 'spammers' (Benoit et al., 2016; Berinsky et al., 2012). For more details on the quality checks used to filter out rogue online coders, and on the 'average of averages' procedure to extract the final ideological score of political parties, see the Online appendix.

The scaling codebook built for this job covers both economic and social policy areas, e.g. economic regulation, trade, foreign policy and security, individual rights, religion and immigration. Domain-specific ideological scales were built on the basis of Bobbio's (1996) conceptualisation of the left–right domain, and of Benoit and Laver's (2006) ideological codebook. The terms 'left' and 'right' never appeared in the codebook, given their heavily loaded and context-dependent meanings (Benoit and Laver, 2006). To approximate scale equivalence, the ideological scales created for crowdsourcing closely follow the economic policy items of the European Election Survey 2009 and use a five-point Likert scale. For example, for the Economy, Environment, Business and Agriculture/Fisheries policy domain, the scale went from extreme economic freedom (unconditional privatisation, no taxation, no regulations, no public spending) to extreme economic regulation (state ownership, high taxation, high state regulation and strong welfare state provisions). The full crowdsourcing codebook is available in the Online appendix.

The complete corpus of EP7 written parliamentary questions consists of 55,623 texts, scraped from the EP official website. To reduce costs, I sampled only written questions that had a probability of over 0.59 of being on economic, environmental, social and foreign policy topics. In addition, texts with probability < 0.59 of con-taining left–right statements were filtered out. This was achieved through the Naïve Bayes text classification algorithm. The algorithm was trained on a random selection of pre-classified texts to categorise the entire corpus by policy domain and by frequency of ideologically charged language (see the Online appendix for details). This 'socio-economic-ideological' subset of the corpus totalled 31,099 texts (14,248 economic, 8782 environmental, 6845 on foreign and trade policy and 1224 on personal and civil rights), or 56% of the original corpus. Although not relying on random selection, the size of the purposive sample is very large. This purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure that 'not applicable' answers by coders be reduced to a minimum.

A maximum of 13 texts per MEP were then randomly sampled from this 'socio-economic ideological' subset. This results in bigger political parties having more units of texts than smaller parties. This mimics the voter survey, in which big parties enjoy a higher number of respondents. This sampling choice avoids the problem of over-productive MEPs biasing the final party score, since each party MEP contributes at most 13 written questions to the party sample. The textual data uploaded online for text analysis amounted to 6940 units or 12.5% of the original corpus. Each text contained information on the MEP, the EP party group and the date of submission. Information on MEPs, dates and political groups was removed before uploading the data online. These 6940 texts were uploaded to Crowd Flower as tasks for the online coders.

Party voters were scaled using the EES 2009. Four attitudinal survey items are of particular interest and specifically, the economic sub-items of the following question:

> Now I will read out some statements to you. For each of the following statements, please tell me to what degree you agree or disagree with each statement:
>
> . Private enterprise is the best way to solve [country name]'s economic problems
> . Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership
> . Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy
> . Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people

The items are all measured in a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). They were recoded to ensure that higher values were associated with right-wing attitudes. Sub-items one, two and four were all found to load positively into a principal latent factor interpretable as the economic policy domain and were thus aggregated into an additive index of economic ideology (see the Online appendix for details).

Since political representatives are scaled via text analysis and voters via survey answers, the question arises as to whether the two scales are comparable. The analysis adopts several precautions to ensure that basic metric and indicator equivalence are met. First, it scales parties and voters on the basis of a standardised codebook and questionnaire. Second, the same units of measurement of the voter survey were imposed on the text analysis codebook. Third, scores were the result of aggregation of multiple indicators of economic policy preferences.

Fourth, a relatively 'low-stakes' legislative activity was used, which could be argued approximates the choice situation faced by respondents when putting their policy preferences on record on a survey.

EP written questions were chosen as they are unobtrusive measures of political parties' ideologies. When compared to other 'input' activities[3] (speeches, written declarations, motions, questions for question time and oral questions), they were found to be authored by all MEPs and thus to be more representative of the EP chamber. They were also found to have comparatively lower procedural constraints. They can be tabled by individual MEPs who can draft as many as needed and do not require notice periods. The responsibility for their contents lies with the individual MEP; the President has the mere administrative function of delivering them to the appropriate Commission's Directorate General (DG) or Council configuration. The Commission and the Council are obliged to answer written questions (European Parliament, 2010: Rule 117), and they indeed answered over 98% of them in the 2009–2014 period. Written questions are published online but are not televised, and hence are relatively less visible. There are fewer barriers in tabling a written question and MEPs can freely put their policy preferences on record there. Text analysis of EP7 written questions and a survey to EP8 MEPs and Commission civil servants highlight that MEPs consistently put their policy preferences on record in written questions.[4] Written parliamentary questions' 'choice situation' is most similar, among other legislative activities, to putting policy preferences on record in a survey. Aiming at a similarity of choice situation between representatives and voters is key to approximate the indicator equivalence requirement (Lewis and Tausanovitch, 2015; Matsusaka, 2001). When voting in roll call votes, representatives face substantially different choice situations than voters: estimating parties' positions with roll call votes is therefore discouraged to study political representation (Lewis and Tausanovitch, 2015). In addition, roll call votes in the EP are not a random sample of the entire population of legislative votes and might lead to biased inferences (Hug, 2009). Because of their representativeness and low constraints, written parliamentary questions were chosen to measure political parties' positions during the input stages of decision-making over EU economic policies.

To the extent that parties' and voters' scales are used differently, these differences are expected to be spread uniformly across parties. There is no evidence that online coders used the ideological scale differently from EES 2009 respondents. The middle category was not chosen more often by crowd coders than the other categories. The centre-left value was actually the top category, being chosen 41% of the time, while the middle category only 17% of the times and the extremes roughly 12% of the time. Similarly, EES 2009 respondents chose the middle category in the redistribution, private enterprise and public services survey items roughly 17% of the time and the extremes (scores '1' and '5') roughly 14% of the time. The same 'scoring' procedure was applied uniformly to all political parties: problems of indicator equivalence can be treated as instrument error. The conclusions drawn here are thus expected to be valid and not to be biased against specific political parties.

Majoritarianism or pluralism? Political representation in policy inputs from the EP

The analysis groups 2009 voters and EP7 MEPs by national party. Over 160 national parties served in the EP7. Because of data availability (only national parties with five EES 2009 respondents or with five written questions or more

[TABLE 1 HERE]

were retained) roughly 120 political parties are part of the following analyses. All European Party Groups (EPGs) serving in the EP7 are represented in the dataset as well as 25 countries out of 27.[5]

The operationalisation of behavioural congruence relies on measures of distance between preferences of representatives and voters' policy preferences. Two main types of measures are adopted in the literature: distance measures based on central tendency and distance measures taking into account distribution spread (Achen, 1978; Golder and Stramsky, 2010). Political representation can be evaluated at three levels: (1) at the individual representative level, where the ideological score of a single political representative is compared to his/her constituency ideological scores (dyadic representation); (2) at the party level, where the ideological score of a political party is compared to its constituency ideological scores (collective representation); (3) at the legislature or institutional level, which assesses the average performance of parties or of individual representatives (legislative/institutional representation). These measures are summarised in Table 1. To describe the representation performance of the EP the latter (institutional representation) measures are appropriate here and will be adopted in the descriptive analysis below.

Parties' and voters' scores in economic policy are compared first by means of a bivariate regression (Table 2), and second by means of cumulative distribution functions (CDFs) comparison (Figure 1).

The regression slope indicates that the relationship between 2009 voters and EP7 parties is statistically significantly different than zero and positive, meaning that EP political parties do represent their average party voters when tabling written questions. However, the association is far from the ideal 1:1 relationship. For each unit move to the right of the average party voter, EP7 national parties only move 0.21 of a Likert scale unit.

Figure 1 presents the results from the distribution-based measure of congruence. The significance of the difference between voters' and parties' CDFs is tested

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

via the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (Golder and Stramsky, 2010). The evidence indicates that average party voters are roughly well represented in the EP. The two distributions are, however, statistically significantly different. The two points of the curve where there is a lack of overlap are the left-of-centre and the right-wing sections. Figure 1 indicates that there are more political parties in the section slightly left of centre than there are party voters, and that there are more voters in the right-wing section than there are parties. The average position of European voters (slightly left of centre) is therefore over-represented by political parties ser-ving in the EP7. The clustering of EP7 parties in the ideological position of the average European voter seems to be mostly at the expense of right-wingers, which is somewhat at odds with the hypotheses of the social-democratic critique, which assumes that right-wing economic preferences (pro-business and anti-regulation) are the prerogative of the upper classes.

The descriptive results – both from central-tendency and distribution-based operationalisations of political representation – show that EP7 political parties cluster around the average European voter position, and that mild congruence to average party supporters is also present. EP7 political parties seem to strongly abide by the majoritarian rule and to only mildly abide by the norm of pluralism. The latter would, however, be normatively more appropriate for the input stages of the policy cycle (Dahl, 1989). That commitment to the 'responsible party model' is weak in EP7 input legislative activities is therefore concerning. The following section will further investigate the patterns that emerged from the descriptive analysis, as well as the extent to which voter information asymmetries and/or social class membership impact the congruence of EP7 political parties.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Explanatory analysis: Causes of the variation in behavioural congruence

Behavioural incongruence is the distance between the individual party voter economic preference on the left–right scale and the economic preference of the national party she voted for in the 2009 EP elections. Key independent variables are the individual party voter's distance from the average party voter and her distance from the average EES 2009 respondents. The political agency model and the EU-specific political contestation hypothesis will be tested by the variables Second-order voting, Exposure to the EP campaign and EU knowledge. The social-democratic critique will be tested by self-reported EES 2009 item social class. Control variables include voter age, gender, education and Euro-scepticism. For descriptions and summary statistics of all covariates, see the Online appendix. The data on the covariates were collected from the Voter European Election Study 2009.

Due to the hierarchical nature of the data – voters clustered within parties and within countries – a multilevel regression model was fitted to the data to control for dependencies and possible unexplained party and country effects. The regression diagnostics reveal that residuals are approximately normal and symmetric. The heteroskedasticity of the error term is taken care of by fitting a multi-level model with national parties and member states as clusters.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The results on the two main independent variables confirm the results from the descriptive analysis. The regression analysis in Table 3 demonstrates that an individual voter that is one Likert scale unit more distant from the average party voter is only 0.13 units more distant from her national party, but that an individual voter that is one Likert scale unit more distant from the average European is 0.84 units more distant from her national party. The latter finding confirms the move of political parties towards the position of the average European voter, highlighted already by the distribution of parties' and voters' ideological scales. The effect of voter 'extremism' – or of the individual voter's distance from the average EES 2009 respondent – has a stronger effect on congruence than distance from the average party voter. Including distance from the average European substantially decreases the

effect of average party voters (from 0.82 to 0.13) and substantially improves the model (Log likelihood increase: 4108.8, v^2: 7735.77, p-value: 0.000). This confirms that political parties in the EP7 are congruent with their average party voter but, similarly to political parties in traditional representative democracies, also feel the pressure to respond to the average citizen. The comparison of the nested with the full model highlights that this 'push' towards the average European is what mostly lies behind the 'pull' away from the average party voter. The consensual nature of EP decision-making might be the particular mechanism behind this finding since the proportional electoral rules adopted in EP elections as well as their second-order nature are not strong incentives to pander to the median voter. Another explanation lies in the 'double-constituency' structure of party politics in the EP: national parties are usually affiliated with bigger EPGs when working in the EP. These groups work as 'umbrella' organisations and have the power to allocate committees and speaking time, for example (Kreppel, 2002). EPG leaderships may thus have a moderating influence on the component parties, and the necessity to cater to the EPG common ideology might also be the reason behind the findings. Another reason might be the particular period studied. The analysis is, in fact, limited to the 2009–2014 period. This legislative term is peculiar, as it followed the 2008 economic and financial crisis. As recent studies have demonstrated (Blumenau and Lauderdale, forthcoming; Otjes and Van Der Veer, 2016) legislative behaviour in economic policy changed in the EP7, in response to the 2008 crisis. In particular, left–right voting patterns diminished in the economic policy domain, while the pro/anti EU dimension gained salience.

Moving to the political contestation and the social democratic critiques to EU democracy, the regression results confirm hypotheses 1 and 2, while they do not confirm hypotheses 3 and 4. Keeping constant the voter distance from both the average party voter and the average European, voters that closely follow the EP election campaign can expect to pull the political party closer to their own policy preferences. The effect is, however, small: a standard deviation increase in exposure to the EP campaign decreases incongruence by 0.006 of a Likert scale unit. The reduction in party incongruence for a completely uninvolved versus a completely involved voter is of just 0.04 of a Likert scale unit. Voters that in the 2009 election selected a different party than in the previous national election, as well as a different one than they would normally vote, are on average 0.02 Likert scale units more incongruent with their parties than first-order voters, all else constant.

There is evidence that, after controlling for their distance from the average party voter and the average European, 'first-order' voters and highly engaged voters are more successful in pulling the party towards their policy preferences. This is important and it shows that even in the hyper-consensual legislature of the EU competent voting, campaign-specific information and engagement give individuals an advantage in political representation. This confirms the political agency model and the political contestation critique of EU democracy. The analysis also reveals, however, that general knowledge of the EU does not lead to a reduction in incongruence. Assuming that political knowledge survey items indeed proxy one's deep knowledge of EU decision-making (Lupia, 2015), it appears that more knowledgeable voters are not more congruent with their parties. If anything, voters with a low-to-medium knowledge are more incongruent than voters with no knowledge at all. The rejection of hypothesis 3 is inconsistent with rational choice accounts of political representation.

Moving to hypothesis 4, there is no evidence from the data that the social-democratic critique has any validity as far as the EP is concerned. The preferences of working class respondents, controlling for their distance from the aver-age party voter and the average European, and controlling for political knowledge, engagement and second-order voting are not more likely to be ignored. Contrary to the social-democratic critique, the data even show that middle and upper middle class voters suffer, respectively, 0.01 and 0.03 Likert scale units more incongruence by their party when compared with working class voters. However, the other social classes are not different from the working classes in congruence levels, so no evidence consistent with a systematic pro-working class bias was found either.

Concerning control variables, voter age and education are not statistically sig-nificantly associated with behavioural congruence. Female voters are 0.01 Likert scale units less distant from their party than male voters. This is surprising and might be explained by gender differences in ideological leanings and voting behaviour. As far as voter Euro-scepticism is concerned, the data reveal that, keeping all else constant, voters who agree that membership in the EU is a good thing (maximum europhilia) suffer 0.02 units higher incongruence than voters who think membership is a bad thing. This result may be explained by a stronger pre-disposition of Euro-sceptic voters to hold EU politicians to account, but additional evidence is required to explain this particular finding.

All in all, the evidence points to the correct functioning of substantive represen-tation in the EP as far as majoritarian democratic norms are concerned. However, pluralism is deemed more appropriate in 'inputs' to the policy cycle (Bellamy, 2010; Dahl, 1989). Written parliamentary questions hardly represent the adoption or final

stages of decision-making. Therefore, a greater sensitivity to average party supporters as opposed to the average European voter should be expected for this type of legislative activity. The requirement of pluralism failed in EP inputs to decision-making in economic policy. This is cause for concern, since certain economic interests do not even have the chance to be presented at the input stage. It appears that when political parties breach the 'responsible party model' requirement in economic written parliamentary questions, they do so to favour the preferences of the average European and – albeit slightly – to favour 'first-order' and more campaign-aware voters. Majoritarianism and the political agency model of political representation are vindicated by the data.

Conclusion

The article's objective was to investigate the hypotheses that political parties serving in the EP are incongruent with European voters' preferences in economic policy due to failures in EU political contestation and that they are particularly insensitive towards the interests of lower class voters. To this end, it compared party voters and parties' left–right positions in economic policy. Parties' positions were retrieved from written parliamentary questions to the EU Commission and to the Council tabled between 2009 and 2014, via the state-of-the art content analytic method of crowdsourcing. Voters' positions were collected from the European Election 2009 Voter Study.

The article is innovative because of its assessment of 'substantive' legislative activities rather than the more 'formalistic' manifesto pledges or election survey responses. The investigation of representation during the policy cycle was facilitated by the introduction of crowdsourcing as a method of political text analysis. This project applies this new and flexible procedure of text analysis to a real-world political problem, establishing a procedure that can be easily replicated to assess representative democracies worldwide. The study has implications for the political contestation and the social-democratic critiques to EU democracy. It tackles the Euro-sceptic perception of EU institutions as unrepresentative, as well as scepticism concerning supranational democracy in general.

The analysis finds good institutional representation of the position of the aver-age European voter by the EP but low pluralism. Political parties are, in fact, only mildly aligned to their respective average supporter once the position of the average European voter is controlled for. Political parties in the EP7, similarly to political parties in other traditional representative democracies, are drawn towards the aver-age citizen, even in the 'input' stages of the policy cycle, whose 'lower stakes' should facilitate attention to party supporters. Given the flaws of EP elections, this finding cannot be explained by electoral incentives. It might however be explained by the strong consensual norms of EU decision-making or by the presence at EP level of partisan umbrella organisations: the EPGs. Low pluralism in the input stages of the policy cycle, however, could have important legitimacy repercussions and might be fuelling Euro-sceptic and populist rhetoric.

The data support the 'political contestation' hypothesis that second-order voting hurts political representation: the economic preferences of second-order voters are, in fact, under-represented. Also, the results highlight that campaign engagement and awareness can help in reducing behavioural incongruence. As far as the social-democratic critique to the EU, the study does not find any bias against working classes, instead it finds some incongruence with right-wing voters and wealthier voters.

The article has some limitations. First, it tests substantive representation at the level of economic policy only. The economic policy domain was chosen, however, because of its salience in EU decision-making and the priority 2009 voters gave to economic topics. To the question 'what is the top priority in your country today', 69% of EES 2009 respondents answered with an economic issue. Since EU decision-making is mostly focused on economic policy, with 61% of Commission DGs and 48% of EP committees dedicated to economic policy domains, the assessment of substantive representation in the economic policy domain is clearly fundamental. However, caution is needed in generalising the findings to other policy areas. Future research would need to consider those additional dimensions of political competition: it might be that the effect of second-order voting or campaign aware-ness was marginal in this well-known policy domain, but would be crucial in other domains where domestic heuristics are less helpful.

Second, the article tests political representation by specifically looking at written parliamentary questions. More consequential stages of the EU policy cycle, such as policy adoption or final policy outputs, are not investigated here. The analysis of 'policy inputs' is considered by some normative theorists to be fundamental in assessing democratic deficits (Bellamy, 2010; Dahl, 1989; Goodin, 2003). Future research needs to investigate final policy outputs as well.

Third, the analysis is limited to the 2009–2014 period. As argued above, due to the documented drop in salience of the traditional left–right domain in EP activities, the move towards the average European voter documented here might have been less conspicuous if other time periods were analysed. Written parliamentary questions are not

legislative votes: they are part of legislative inputs and MEPs are free to express their unconstrained individual positions in written parliamentary questions. Being less consequential and more 'personal' than legislative votes, political parties should not – in theory – be overly concerned about written questions' effects on the economy. However, the possibility that even this 'freer' legislative activity was impacted by the Eurozone crisis cannot be discounted. While future research needs to investigate additional legislative terms to test the robust-ness of these results, assessing political representation after an economic crisis is even more vital. It is especially in testing times that political inputs should guarantee good political representation. This 'crucial' test was successful in the EP (as far as majoritarianism is concerned), while the same cannot be said of other advanced representative democracies (Aaldering, 2016; Bartels, 2008; Gilens and Page, 2014).

Fourth, indicator equivalence is not fully guaranteed here, since studies of substantive representation, by their nature, have to compare two different choice situations and instruments: legislative activities against survey answers. The section on ideological scaling outlined the precautions taken to ensure the voter and party scales could be compared. In particular, political parties were carefully scaled via a standardised content analysis procedure, that the choice situations facing respondents and party members were similar, that economic policy preferences were aggregated into a core economic dimension and that a common five-point Likert metric was imposed on the two scales. It is consequently reasonable to conclude that the basic requirements of metric equivalence and choice situation equivalence were satisfactorily approximated here. Potential differential item functioning is treated here as instrumental error, uniformly distributed across political parties. It is not expected to bias the results from the analyses.

This study is valuable in that it shows that there is no democratic deficit (as far as the majoritarian norm is concerned), or pro-capital bias in EP written questions on economic policy. It indicates further that informed voters do incentivise politicians to be congruent: second-order voting and scarce exposure to EP campaigns are thus shortcomings of EP elections that need to be redressed. More broadly, it provides further evidence in support of the political agency model: to ensure that representative democracies fulfil basic democratic requirements, reforms should focus on countering information asymmetries and promoting competent voting. The evidence of low pluralism in 'input stage' activities, such as written parliamentary questions, is, however, troubling. Pluralism – or the abidingness to the 'responsible party model' in this case – is considered essential in the input stages of the policy cycle. Low pluralism could be one of the reasons for the floundering public support for the European project; as such, it is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed.

Notes

1. Massimo Fini at the V_day: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v¼mcpmzZSdDNU.
2. For the coding of EP7 written parliamentary questions, only 13 were coded by less than five coders. No text was coded by less than three coders. The wide majority of texts (3978) was coded by six or more coders. The explanation concerning the adequate number of coders per text can be found in the Online appendix.
3. Author's own study. Available upon request.
4. Author's own study. Available upon request.
5. Estonia and Latvia had to be excluded because of the insufficient number of written questions tabled by their MEPs.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Measures of Political Representation.

|	**Central-tendency Congruence**	**Distributional Congruence**
Dyadic	$r_j - \bar{v}_j$	$1 - \dfrac{\sum |\bar{v}_j - v_{ji}|}{\sum |r_j - v_{ji}|}$
Collective	$\bar{p}_j - \bar{v}_j$	$1 - \dfrac{\sum |\bar{v}_j - v_{ji}|}{\sum |\bar{p}_j - v_{ji}|}$
Institutional	$\bar{p}_J = \alpha + \beta \bar{v}_j$	$\sum |cdf_r - cdf_v|$ or $\sum |cdf_p - cdf_v|$

Note:

p = party(ies)
r = representative(s)
v = voters

Table 2. OLS Regression of parties' average economic policy score (as expressed in legislative activities of the input stage) on party voters' average economic policy scores.

EP7 Parties' Behavioural Congruence	
	National Parties' Economic Conservatism
Voters' Economic Conservatism	0.21 (0.06)***
Intercept	2.05 (0.16)***
R^2	0.11
N	120

Standard errors in parentheses
$^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Cumulative distribution functions of party voters' and EP7 parties' ideology in economic policy.

Economic Policy Preferences
EP 7 (2009-2014)
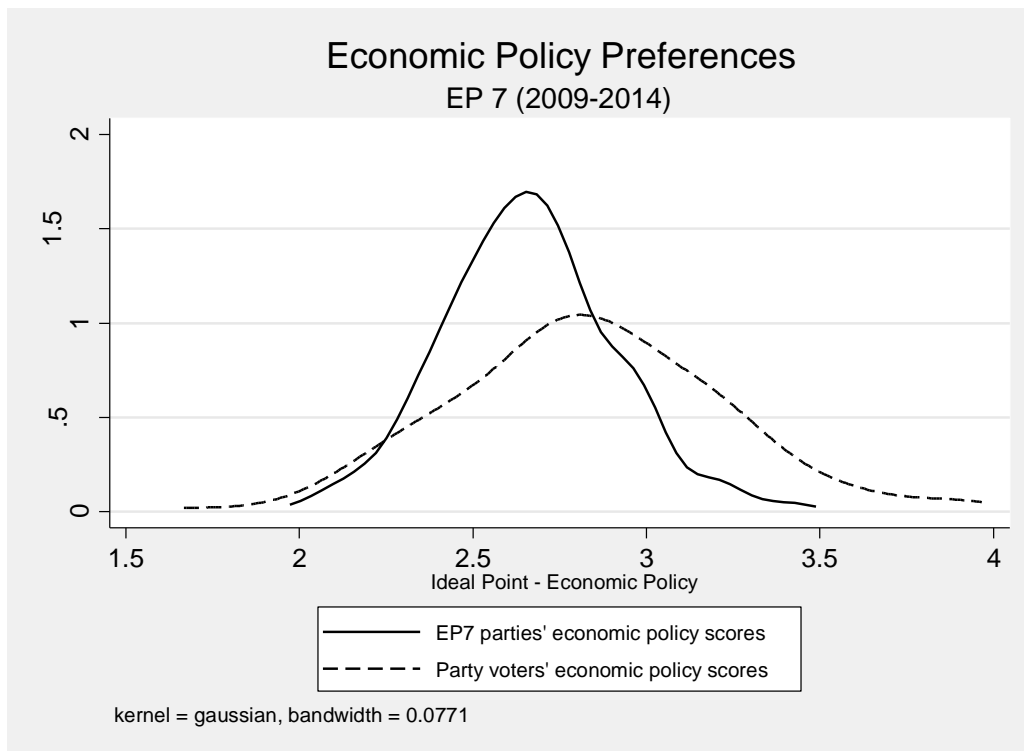
Distributional Distance	0.298***

Note:

Statistical significance of cdfs difference obtained by means of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Dashed line: party voters, solid line: EP7 parties.

Table 3. Multilevel OLS regression.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Voter Distance from Average Party Voter		0.821 (0.00846)***	0.130 (0.00795)***
Voter Extremism		--	0.842 (0.00722)***
Voter Exposure to EP election campaign		0.00559 (0.00152)***	-0.00226 (0.000958)*
Second Order Voter		0.0284 (0.0154)	0.0253 (0.00971)**
Voter Europhilia		-0.00235 (0.00678)	0.00961 (0.00426)*
EU Knowledge – 1 correct		-0.00464 (0.0167)	0.0125 (0.0104)
EU Knowledge – 2 correct		0.0276 (0.0158)	0.0227 (0.00993)*
EU Knowledge – 3 correct		0.0360 (0.0158)*	0.0155 (0.00988)
EU Knowledge – 4 correct		0.0567 (0.0168)***	0.0188 (0.0106)
Lower Middle Class Voter		-0.00351 (0.0135)	-0.00356 (0.00845)
Middle Class Voter		0.0207 (0.0103)*	0.0139 (0.00649)*
Upper Middle Class Voter		0.0711 (0.0148)***	0.0334 (0.00926)***
Upper Class Voter		0.0553 (0.0317)	0.0102 (0.0199)
Secondary Education		-0.00873 (0.0105)	-0.00269 (0.00658)
Tertiary Education		0.00778 (0.0109)	0.00755 (0.00686)
Voter Age		-0.000001 (0.000009)	0.000001 (0.000005)
Female Voter		-0.0114 (0.00768)	-0.00961 (0.00481)*
Intercept	0.674 (0.0176)***	0.0967 (0.0280)***	0.0231 (0.0187)
Intercept Member State	-2.750 (0.258)***	-3.465 (0.655)***	-4.385 (2.315)
Intercept National Party	-2.182 (0.0944)***	-2.141 (0.0894)***	-2.242 (0.0805)***
Residual Intercept	-0.694 (0.00652)***	-1.062 (0.00757)***	-1.531 (0.00757)***
N	11874	8844	8844
Log Likelihood	-8720.0	-3279.9	828.9
AIC	17448.1	6599.8	-1615.8
BIC	17477.6	6741.6	-1467.0

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$