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## **The falcon still hears the falconer: Europeanization and national policy congruence**

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**Abstract:** The persistent strength of populist parties across European democracies invites a simple question: Are populist narratives that national political elites are more aligned with Brussels than their own citizens accurate? Using an advanced technique to measure congruence (Andeweg 2011), we find that moderate levels of congruence across European countries in the 2010s on two ‘Europeanized’ issues, immigration and environmental protection, with elected representatives slowly and unevenly moving toward the more polarized positions of their citizens. Our initial analysis of the cross-national, cross-issue, and over-time variation in levels of congruence finds that two factors appear to be strongly and positively associated with higher congruence: proportional representation electoral systems and low levels of perceived corruption.

**Keywords:** congruence, European integration, immigration, environment

European integration has ambiguous implications for national democracy. On the one hand, the European Union (EU) acts, increasingly forcefully, to counteract democratic backsliding in its member states. On the other, on issues ranging from the abstruse (fiscal policy) to the explosive (immigration), national legislatures must respond to the will of the EU as well as their own constituents. This tension has fed the politicization of European integration and a populist narrative that mainstream political parties' views are more aligned with Brussels than their own citizens (Arnold & Franklin 2012; de Vries et al. 2021; Börzel & Zürn 2021; Zürn et al. 2012; Hooghe & Marks 2009). Is this narrative accurate?

The answer to this question matters, because the relative alignment, or *congruence*, between the preferences of citizens and their elected representatives is a core component of the quality of representative democracy (Fishman 2016; Sabl 2015; Real-Dato 2017; Powell 2004, 2014; Diamond & Morlino 2005). Legislatures with persistently low levels of congruence may affirm populist narratives of an alien and faithless political elite, and may lose popular legitimacy as citizens do not see their views reflected in the composition of their representative bodies.

This paper uses an approach developed by Andeweg (2011) to capture levels of substantive, policy-oriented congruence across all EU member states with a high degree of precision. It juxtaposes attitudes of members of parliament (MPs) and the public on two issues, immigration and environment, describing levels of and cross-national variation in congruence. What we see is a mixed picture. By this measure, a majority of European citizens' positions on these issues are not directly represented in their national legislatures. However, paraphrasing WB Yeats, the falcon still can hear the falconer: on immigration if not the environment, European MPs positions are becoming better aligned with those of their constituents. On this issue at least, the rise of populist parties—a potential threat to democratic institutions and discourse—may improve congruence, as citizens who have long had more closed views (Sides & Citrin 2007) find themselves with better representation in their legislatures.

Do populist parties estrange the falcon and the falconer—cueing more extreme views among the public and thus reducing congruence? While our data do suggest a correlation between the rise of populist parties and more extreme public attitudes, the relationship between populist cues and congruence is less clear—not least because many Europeans are taking more extreme pro-environment positions, something not associated with rightwing populist parties. Rather, our initial analysis finds that two factors appear to be correlated with higher levels of congruence: more proportional electoral systems and lower levels of perceived corruption. Further analysis of the complex relationship among these variables is required, so at this stage it is too soon to draw firm conclusions from these observed patterns.

The paper begins with a discussion of developments in the measurement of congruence, and then addresses in some detail our descriptive findings regarding levels of congruence in European countries on the issues of immigration and environment during the 2010s. Thereafter, the paper briefly reviews the literature to identify hypotheses to explain variation in congruence and discusses our empirical strategies and initial findings.

## **Capturing congruence**

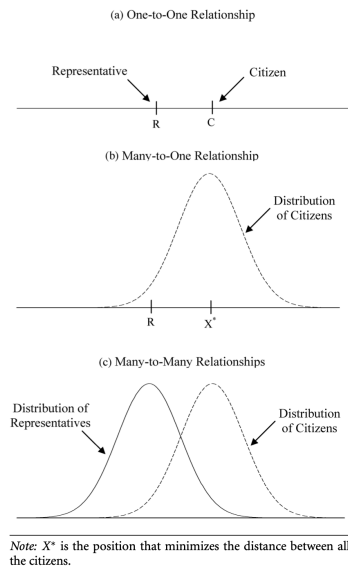
This paper aims to describe and explain levels of issue- or policy-oriented congruence in Europe—the “fit between the preferences of the citizens and the committed policy positions of their representatives” (Powell 2012; see also Arnold & Franklin 2012). The research on the quality of democratic representation is vast, so it is useful to locate our focus in this literature.

Congruence is closely linked to, but ultimately distinct from, policy responsiveness. Whereas congruence is the fit or alignment between citizens and their representatives, responsiveness is the extent to which governments adopt specific policies demanded by the public. While some scholars treat the two as essentially synonymous (Powell 2012; Sabl 2015; Fishman 2016), congruence ultimately involves the composition of legislatures and responsiveness involves legislatures’ (and more specifically, governments’) policy output.

Congruence has been studied in terms of both descriptive and substantive representation. Studies of descriptive representation address the extent to which the composition of legislatures matches that of the electorate in terms of race and ethnicity, sex and gender, or other demographic characteristics (e.g., Dingler et al. 2019; Kroeber 2018). Studies of substantive congruence tend to focus on ideological fit, whether on general left–right placements (e.g., Bernauer et al. 2015; Blais & Bodet 2006; Golder & Stramski 2010; Powell 2000, 2009) or in policy areas that clearly delineate left versus right positions, such as multiculturalism or redistribution policies (see, e.g., Stecker & Tausendpfund 2016; Morales et al. 2015). Our study emphasizes substantive, policy-oriented congruence on two issues, immigration and environment, that also are associated with clear left-right positions.

A key advance in measuring congruence came with Golder & Stramski (2010). They clarified different units of congruence, distinguishing between one-to-one congruence (between an individual constituent and her individual representative), many-to-one (between the population of constituents and their individual representative), and many-to-many (between the full population of citizens and the full population of representatives—i.e., the entire legislature). The many-to-many, or sociotropic, model of congruence offered a particularly useful approach to capturing overall national congruence, whether in general ideological terms or regarding a particular substantive issue. Visually, this sociotropic model was depicted as the relative overlap between the distribution of citizen preferences and that of representatives’ preferences.

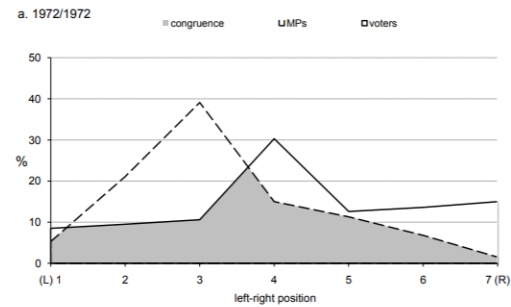
**FIGURE 1 Conceptualizing Ideological Congruence**



Golder & Stramski 2010, p. 91

These measurement strategies focus their measures of congruence on the central tendency of overall distributions of citizen and representative attitudes that were assumed to be normal. Andeweg (2011) departed from Golder & Stramski's approach by using noncumulative distribution functions, which measured the percentage of citizens and representatives at each point along a given scale (depicting, say, left-right ideology). This approach, shown below, mirrors Golder & Stramski's area-under-the-curve measure of citizen-representative congruence, but does so in a less stylized way. In practice this means that *at each point* on the 7-point scales on which preferences are measured, we compare the percentage of voters positioning themselves at that point with the percentage of MPs positioning themselves *at that same point*, and we take the lower of these two percentages. If we sum the resulting seven percentages, we have a measure for the overlap between the two distributions ('the common area under the curve').

**Figure 3.1** Collective policy congruence between voters and MPs on Left-Right scale, 1972-2006



Note: Common area under the curve = 60% (Voters N = 1136; MPs N = 133).  
Sources: Dutch Parliament Study (DPS) and Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES)

Andeweg 2011

Golder & Stramski urged scholars to “better justify why they use the conceptualization of congruence that they do.” Andeweg’s approach is best for our study because it lends itself to straightforward visual presentation and it is intuitively more appealing to have a measure ranging from zero (no overlap between the two distributions, no policy congruence) to one hundred (identical distributions, complete policy congruence). Andeweg’s approach also precisely depicts *actual* citizen and representative preferences on a given subject, and thus actual levels of correspondence between these attitudes. Thus to the extent that congruence is a normatively significant quality of democracy, our strategies for measuring this phenomenon need to be as precise as possible. Moreover, as Western democracies’ societies have become more polarized in terms of partisan preferences, a congruence model that assumes a central tendency in public and elite attitudes is not only empirically suspect but also underestimates the very real difficulties of representation when the actual distributions of citizen and representative preferences may be nonnormal.

#### *Measuring congruence across issues*

Using Andeweg’s area-under-the-curve (AUC) method, we collected data on both citizens’ and their representatives’ preferences on two issues, immigration and environment. These issues were selected for a simple reason: two important sources of public and legislative preferences across a range of issues—the European Election Study (EES), which tracks public attitudes, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), which develops measures of national political parties’ positions on given issues based on expert assessments—asked nearly identical questions of their respondents regarding these issues, facilitating a direct comparison for the sake of evaluating congruence.<sup>1</sup>

The survey questions on immigration policy were as follows:

- CHES: position on immigration policy (0=fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration, 10=fully in favor of a restrictive policy on immigration)
- EES: Immigration (0=You are fully in favor of a restrictive policy on immigration, 10=You are fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration)

The survey questions on environment policy were as follows:

- CHES: position toward the environment (0=strongly supports environmental protection even at the cost of economic growth, 10=strongly supports economic growth even at the cost of environmental protection)
- EES: Environment (0=Environmental protection should always take priority even at the cost of economic growth, 10=Economic growth should always take priority even at the cost of environmental protection)

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<sup>1</sup> There are a variety of approaches to capturing elite attitudes on this and other policy questions. Some, such as Best et al. (2012), have directly surveyed political elites, which captures their attitudes more directly than the CHES surveys, which collect expert assessments of political parties’ policy positions. However, the direct elite surveys have been limited to a few countries and thus cannot inform a study of all EU members.

These policy areas and survey questions also allow us to draw inferences across European countries regarding their citizens' and MPs' preferences on issues on which the European Union possesses significant authority—and thus on which national legislatures must be sensitive to EU legislation as well as the views of their own citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Our measurement strategy also allows us to capture, at least to some extent, diversity within political parties on these issues. CHES codings of party positions on any given issue fall on an ordinal scale, and are usually not whole numbers—which offers the opportunity to redistribute party members across the two proximate whole numbers on our scale. (For example, if CHES codes a party as having a 4.6 score on immigration, we allocate 40% of that party's MPs to a score of 4 and 60% to a score of 5.) While this approach may not capture the full range of a party's internal diversity, it expresses such diversity better than a single party score would.

### **Descriptive results**

Using the method described, we investigated the level of congruence in 2014 and 2019 between the public and legislators for 28 EU countries on the issues of immigration and environment. (See appendix for a description of the process used to transform and rescale the data.) We first present the overall averages across countries, and then discuss results on each issue.

#### *Overall*

Western Europe's total area-under-the-curve (AUC) congruence—averaging observations for all EU member states across three<sup>3</sup> issues and two years—was 45.2. While identifying an 'ideal' or 'acceptable' level of congruence is more of a normative question than an empirical one, it is notable that this overall congruence score—as well as the overall congruence scores for 20 of the 28 EU member states—was below 50, meaning that a majority of all citizens' preferred positions fell outside of the area represented by MPs' positions.

As shown in Table 1, there was a good deal of variation across EU member states, with the Netherlands exhibiting more than twice as much congruence as Malta. The Netherlands and Finland respectively had the top congruence scores in both 2014 and 2019.

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<sup>2</sup> Environmental protection has been a competence of the European Union since the Maastricht Treaty (1992). On immigration, while EU member states retain formal control over extra-European immigration, they must comply with the EU's Common European Asylum System—and have essentially no power to restrict intra-EU immigration.

<sup>3</sup> We collected data on a third issue, EU integration, which had the same data available in the EES and CHES surveys. However, because relevant data was missing on this issue for a key independent variable, issue salience, we left it out of the regression analysis. The averages shown in Table 1 include the congruence scores on European integration—43.8 in 2014 and 52.0 in 2019—as well as immigration and environment.

**TABLE 1: OVERALL CITIZEN-LEGISLATOR CONGRUENCE**

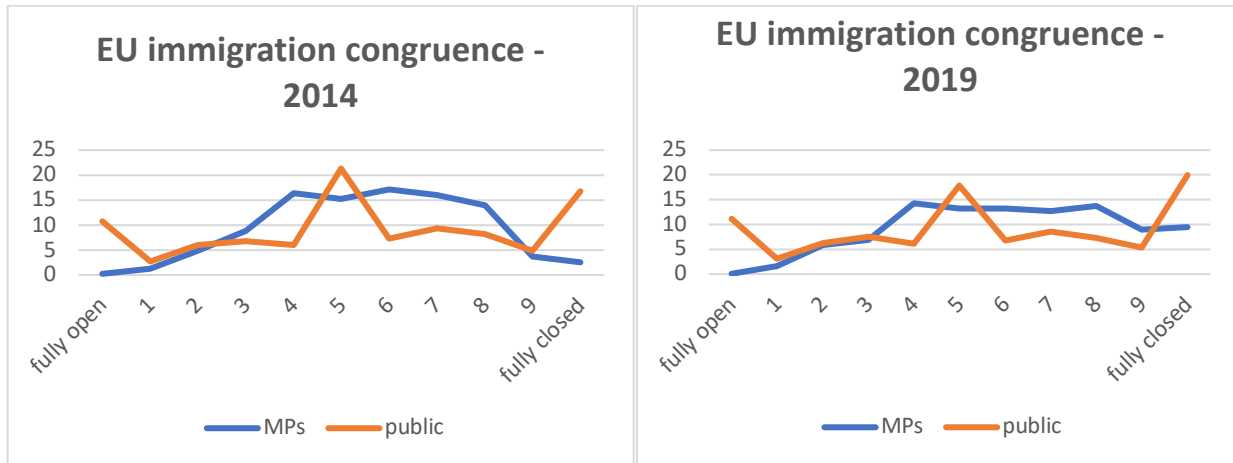
<b>Country</b>	<b>AUC</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>AUC</b>
Netherlands	64.73	Spain	45.16
Finland	59.54	Poland	44.33
Belgium	54.35	France	44.27
Italy	54.18	Greece	43.64
Austria	53.98	Latvia	42.74
Denmark	52.99	UK	42.46
Sweden	50.68	Estonia	41.96
Germany	50.54	Hungary	40.62
Portugal	48.65	Croatia	40.10
Czechia	47.80	Cyprus	39.28
Slovenia	47.24	Slovakia	38.38
Lithuania	46.95	Bulgaria	37.30
<i>EU average</i>	<i>45.20</i>	Ireland	35.77
		Romania	35.75
		Luxembourg	34.10
		Malta	30.08

There was also considerable variation in congruence across issues and years. Overall EU congruence rose on immigration, from 45.2 in 2014 to 49.9 in 2019. By contrast, congruence fell on environment from 40.6 to 38.8 over the same period.

There are broad similarities in the distribution of public and MP attitudes across the two issues. MP attitudes on immigration and environment tend to be normally distributed around the center of the range. The public's preferences, by contrast, are spread more fully across the range and quasi-trimodal, with peaks at the center and extremes.

#### *Congruence on openness to immigration*

The two figures below depict the overall European AUC congruence on immigration, using a scale in which 0 indicates total openness to immigration and 10 indicates total closure. Table 2 below depicts the level of congruence, ranging from 0 (no congruence) to 100 (perfect congruence), across the 28 EU countries on the issue of immigration and relative support for a restrictive immigration policy.



**TABLE 2: CITIZEN-LEGISLATOR CONGRUENCE ON IMMIGRATION POLICY**

country	AUC 2014	AUC 2019	change
Denmark	76.74	48.58	-27.89
Austria	67.44	61.52	-5.92
Netherlands	63.08	71.05	7.97
Belgium	62.86	59.31	-3.55
Finland	58.02	68.07	10.05
France	56.89	47.73	-9.16
Czechia	56.36	46.59	-9.77
Portugal	50.51	60.85	10.34
Latvia	49.37	62.14	12.77
Sweden	49.34	52.50	3.16
Italy	49.18	51.94	2.76
Luxembourg	45.06	20.52	-24.54
Germany	44.26	55.04	10.78
Hungary	43.61	56.88	13.27
Slovakia	42.72	44.21	1.49
Greece	41.36	45.62	4.26
Estonia	39.52	60.99	21.47
Malta	38.66	16.45	-22.21
Spain	38.60	60.00	21.4
Ireland	38.39	31.93	-6.46
Poland	37.37	49.81	12.44
Romania	36.39	35.10	-1.29
Bulgaria	35.02	38.07	3.05
Lithuania	34.88	47.32	12.44
Slovenia	33.29	68.52	35.23
United Kingdom	31.62	37.05	5.43
Croatia	25.66	52.13	26.47
Cyprus	19.90	46.81	26.91
EU average	45.22	49.90	4.68
Standard deviation	12.90	13.40	15.19

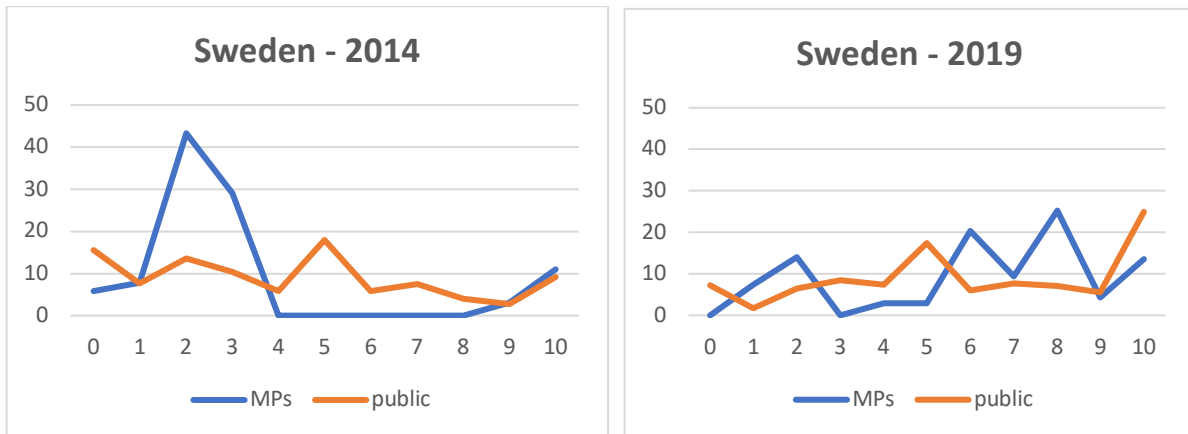
We can make some initial observations regarding immigration-related congruence. First, a rising level of overall congruence, from 45.2 in 2014 to 49.9 in 2019, occurred amid a slight shift in the distribution of both public and MP positions. The public's (weakly) modal position shifted



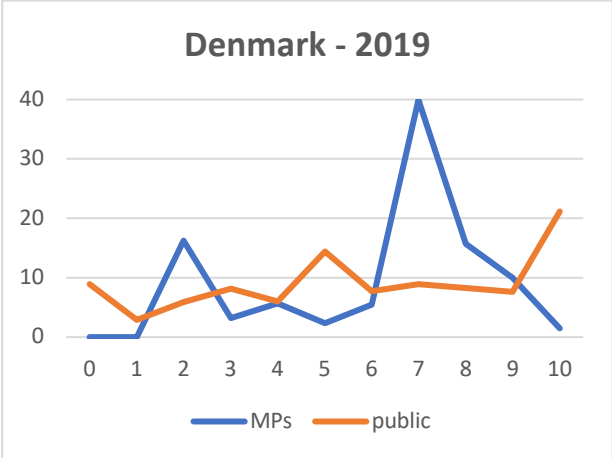
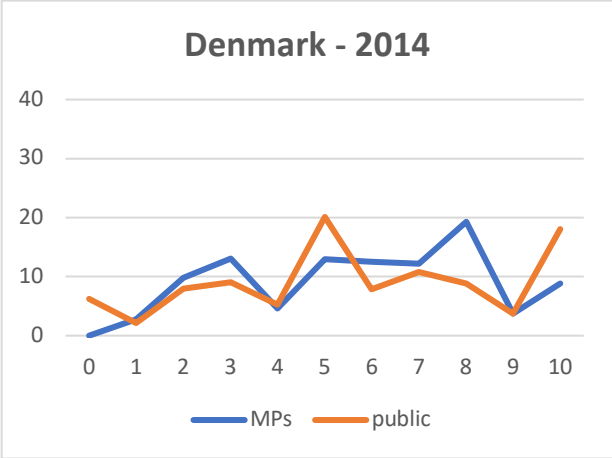
from the center in 2014 to the closed extreme in 2019. While the level of congruence at each’s modal position declined, a rise in the number of (far-right) MPs favoring full closure actually exceeded the rise in the number of citizens with this preference, producing an overall increase in congruence in 2019.

Second, political elites had a more normal distribution of preferences, though this normality declined over time as more anti-immigration parties entered legislatures. Meanwhile the public was distributed more evenly across the scale in both years, with the percentage in the moderate 4-6 range declining in 2019 as more Europeans preferred a fully open (11.1%) or fully closed (20%) policy. During a period in which western Europe experienced a surge of irregular migration, public attitudes became more polarized and legislators adopted more restrictive positions to reflect the larger percentage of citizens on the restrictive extreme—but not the open extreme.

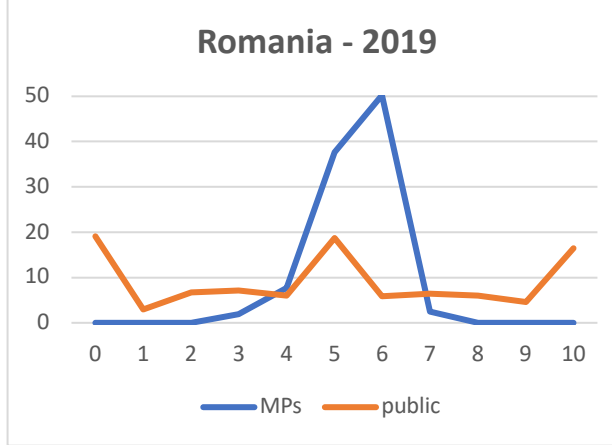
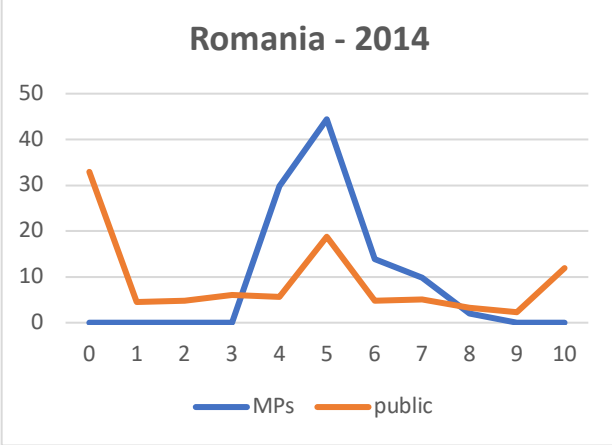
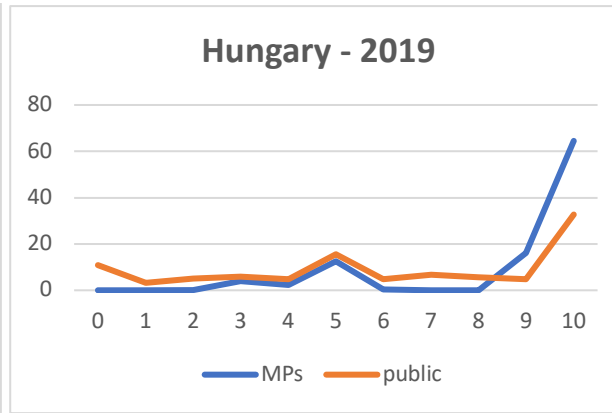
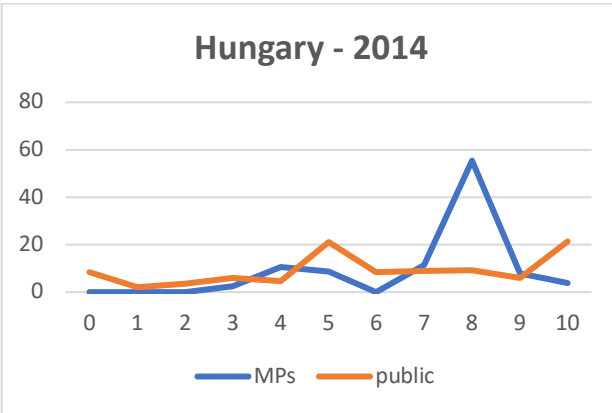
Sweden is an example of a country in which an increase in public hostility to immigration was largely matched in the legislature. In 2014, a public that was comparatively open to immigration was represented by parties that were among the most pro-immigrant in Europe. All congruence was at the pro- and anti-immigration extremes (see left-hand figure). By 2019 everything had changed: extreme closure became the most common public preference, and the legislature prominently featured the rightwing Sweden Democrats and an increasingly immigration-skeptical Moderate Party—thus bringing an uptick in congruence in positions ranging from moderate to closed (see right-hand figure).<sup>4</sup> Neighboring Denmark, by contrast, saw an over-hardening among party positions relative to the public and thus a large decline in congruence on this issue.



<sup>4</sup> According to CHES, the Moderate Party’s score on immigration policy in 2014 was 2.6—and thus very open to immigration. By 2019, that score had risen to 8, near the restrictive end of the spectrum.



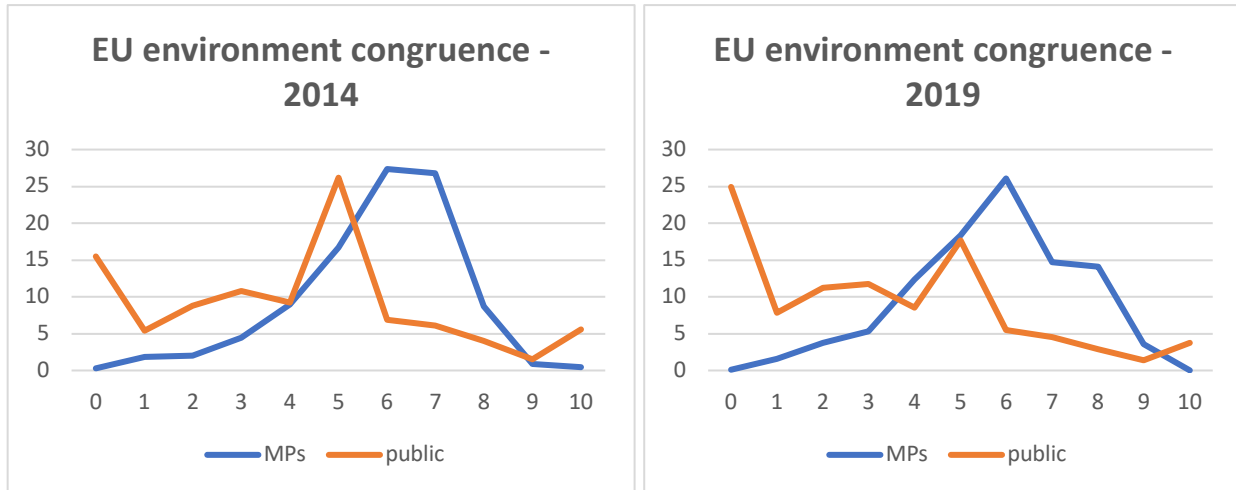
Meanwhile, Hungary and Romania stood out for how their citizens took more cosmopolitan positions than their elected representatives. Hungarian citizens' positions on immigration were similar to European norms, but their representatives' positions were far more restrictive.<sup>5</sup> A strikingly large (if declining) percentage of Romanian citizens, but none of their MPs, favored completely open immigration.



<sup>5</sup> The fact that Hungarian citizens' views were near European norms despite years of anti-immigrant messaging by the Fidesz-controlled government and press suggests a limit to the power of populist cues, at least in this case.

### Congruence regarding environmental protection

The two figures below depict overall European AUC congruence on environmental policy, using a scale ranging from 0 (strongly favoring environmental protection over economic growth) to 10 (strongly favoring economic growth over environmental protection). Table 3 depicts the level of congruence across the 28 EU countries regarding environmental policy, with values potentially ranging from 0 (no congruence) to 100 (perfect congruence).

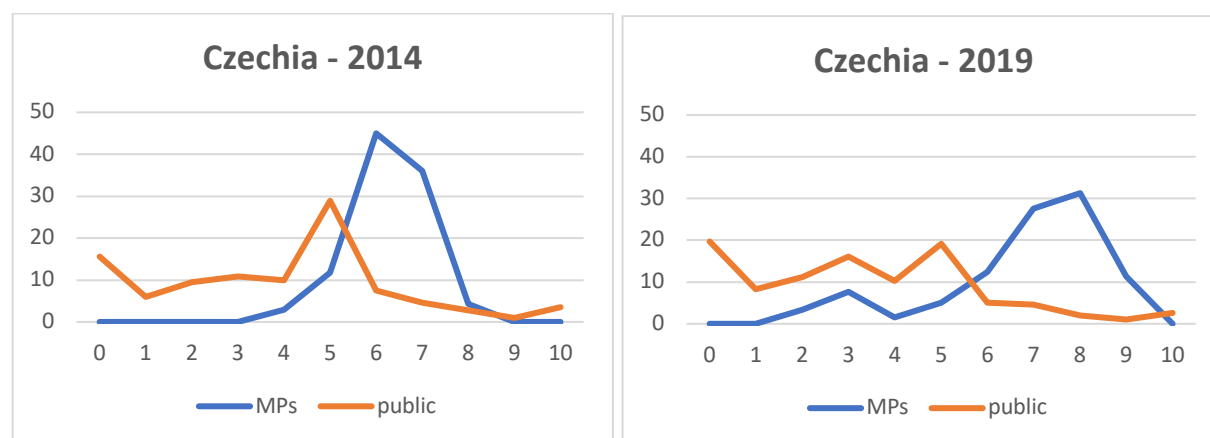


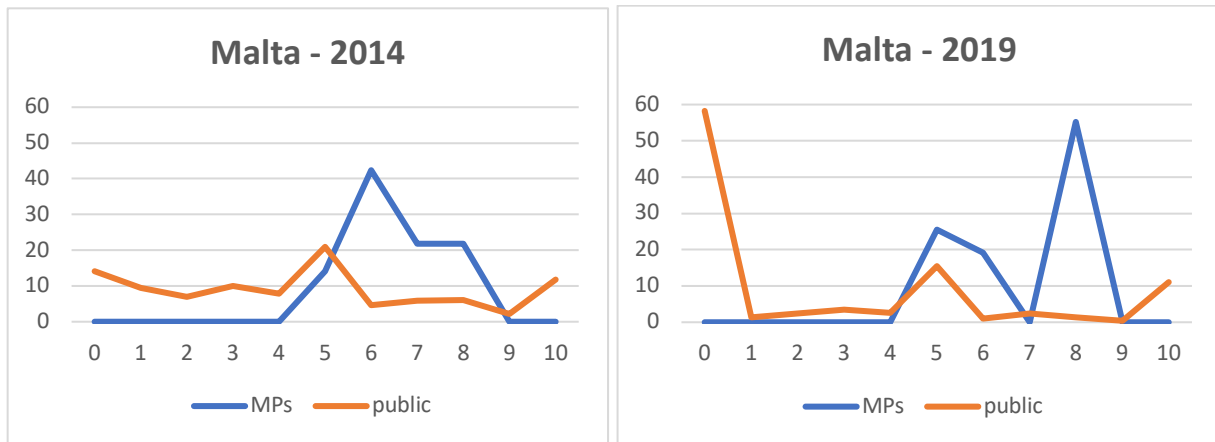
This period exhibited a trend of greater public concern about environmental protection that was not well represented in their national legislatures. The public's modal position shifted from balancing environmental protection and economic growth in 2014 to strongly favoring environmental protection. Their MPs did not shift accordingly: 64% in 2014 and 58% in 2019 fell on the pro-growth side of the spectrum. As a result, environmental congruence fell over this period, both overall and in most EU countries.

**TABLE 3: CITIZEN-LEGISLATOR CONGRUECE ON ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

country	AUC 2014	AUC 2019	change
Finland	64.81	55.46	-9.35
Netherlands	63.56	59.66	-3.90
Portugal	60.31	45.79	-14.52
Belgium	58.21	56.62	-1.59
Germany	57.00	52.40	-4.60
Denmark	52.58	54.66	2.08
France	52.04	45.35	-6.69
UK	50.61	35.68	-14.93
Austria	45.26	40.25	-5.01
Slovenia	43.15	49.63	6.48
Poland	42.86	23.41	-19.45
Italy	41.57	44.50	2.93
Luxembourg	41.07	40.12	-0.95
Sweden	39.68	65.60	25.92
Ireland	38.56	36.47	-0.09
Cyprus	38.32	49.95	11.63
Greece	38.21	25.67	-12.54
Croatia	37.95	33.07	-4.88
Lithuania	35.63	29.50	-6.13
Spain	35.22	41.93	6.71
Estonia	31.63	42.55	10.92
Malta	30.73	17.92	-12.81
Czechia	29.55	30.38	0.83
Romania	28.24	16.91	-11.33
Hungary	27.90	28.88	0.92
Latvia	22.40	35.05	12.65
Bulgaria	15.79	9.27	-6.52
Slovakia	15.10	20.14	5.04
EU average	40.64	38.82	-1.82
Std dev	13.30	14.20	9.70

Cross-national differences in environmental congruence appear to have geographic dimension. Congruence was markedly lower in central Europe and, to a lesser extent, southern Europe. Czechia and Malta—countries where there is little parliamentary representation of the majority of citizens on the pro-environment side of the scale—are striking examples of this pattern.





### Explaining variation in congruence

Explaining this variation in immigration and environment-related congruence requires us to consider longer-term political dynamics in Europe. Since the 1990s, the accretion of EU authority has induced politicization and ‘active dissensus’ among citizens and national political parties (Hooghe & Marks 2009; Zürn et al. 2012; de Vries et al. 2021), as seen in contentious referendums and the rise of populist actors emphasizing resistance to further erosion of national sovereignty and policy space. Yet while EU authority has continued to grow on both environmental and immigration policy—and thus national legislatures have experienced EU-level constraints across the union—the degree of (mis)alignment on preferred policies between the public and their elected officials varies across countries and across issues. Therefore, we need to consider explanations that can account for this variation.

A leading approach emphasizes electoral institutions, and whether proportional representation (PR) or majoritarian systems better represent the positions of the public. Elections are the mechanism through which the public can, in principle, select a congruent legislature, and some research has indicated that PR systems have higher levels of congruence than majoritarian ones (see Powell 2006; McDonald et al. 2004; c.f. Blais & Bodet 2006; Golder & Stramski 2010; Kang & Powell 2010; Powell 2009; Golder & Ferland 2017). PR systems tend to produce more fragmented legislatures with more parties to represent the full range of public attitudes—as opposed to majoritarian systems, which have fewer parties that tend to fixate on median voter positions. By this logic, PR systems with low thresholds for parties entering the legislature should produce particularly high levels of congruence.

An alternative approach stresses how different partisan majorities in the legislature are associated with different levels of congruence, particularly across issue areas (Hooghe et al. 2002; Prosser 2016). Parties on the left or right may “own” certain issues—be consistently more representative of public attitudes than other political parties. For example, parties on the left may be closer to longstanding public preferences on environmental policy than parties on the right, while the opposite might be true on immigration policy. Therefore, when a given party or

set of ideologically close parties have a majority in the legislature, levels of congruence between the legislature and the voters should be higher on the issues they own.

Because public attitudes on given issues are not necessarily fixed, cues from political parties may also shape the relative correspondence between these public attitudes and those of their elected officials (see, among others, Steenbergen et al. 2007; Anderson 1998; Azrout & de Vreese 2018). Members of the public may lack information or express ambivalence on given issues, which offers parties an opportunity to shape their views—and to generate a policy-oriented connection that improves their own electoral prospects (Stoeckel & Kuhn 2015; Stoeckel 2012; de Vries et al. 2021). While mainstream parties have long cued their members, populist parties have in recent years been particularly successful in connecting with citizens through an emphasis on nationalism and grievance against the establishment, particularly on issues such as immigration and European integration (de Vries & Edwards 2009; Mudde 2013; Arnold et al. 2012). The effect of populist cues on congruence depends in part on populist parties' electoral performance: if they polarize public attitudes and are electorally successful they may increase congruence, but if they polarize attitudes but remain unrepresented in legislatures then congruence should decrease.<sup>6</sup>

Corruption—the misuse of public office for private ends—is often associated with poor democratic performance, just as democratic decay is often associated with rises in corruption (see among others Warren 2004; Transparency International 2019; Milanovic 2019; Müller 2016). In more corrupt contexts, MPs may be able to ignore public preferences if other, less democratic connections allow them to retain their seats. Alternatively, citizens may adopt views at odds with mainstream elected officials—and be more open to populist cues—if they already believe those officials to be corrupt.

Other approaches treat public attitudes as more autonomous from party cues, emphasizing other characteristics of political attitudes that affect levels of congruence. Some studies have shown that, when citizens have higher levels of political knowledge—overall or on given issues—their views are more likely to be congruent with those of political elites (Inglehart 1970; Oldendick & Bardes 1982; Holsti 1992; Hobolt 2012).<sup>7</sup> A different vein of research focuses on issue salience, or the extent to which citizens give priority to some issues over others (see Traber et al. 2017; Arregui & Creighton 2018; Wleizen 2005; Beyers et al. 2017; Traber et al. 2017; Williams 2016; Bevan et al. 2016; Morales et al. 2015; Steenbergen et al. 2007). This research suggests that the cueing relationship between political parties and the public goes both ways, with parties being more likely to adopt positions reflecting public preferences on the issues voters consider to be most important.

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<sup>6</sup> A future iteration of our analysis will evaluate an independent variable interacting cues and electoral systems. The theory here is that strong populist cues in majoritarian systems will produce lower congruence, because majoritarian systems with single-member districts reduce the probability of populist candidates winning seats.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, well-informed citizens are more likely to be elites themselves, and thus may share interests and worldviews with elected officials. See Best et al. 2012; Risse 2003; Inglehart 1971, 1977; Checkel 2005; Hebling & Teney 2015.

### **Causal variables—data and measurement**

Our initial analysis operationalizes variables associated with the aforementioned hypotheses, with data collected at the country level of analysis for the years 2014 and 2019. For now, it does not treat European integration as a variable—that is, it assumes that EU-level influences on the positions of parties and MPs in national legislatures does not vary over time, across countries, or across issues.

*Electoral institutions* (ENPP). We emulate existing studies to capture relevant features of electoral systems. Wlezien & Soroka (2012) measured the proportionality of an electoral system by using the ‘effective number of parliamentary parties’ (ENPP), developed by Golder (2010) and extended by Bormann & Golder (2013). We use the value from the last national election that took place prior to the observation year (2014 or 2019).

*Partisanship* (Gov\_party, LR\_hegemony). Drawing on the Comparative Political Data Set, we use two measures for somewhat different elements of partisan influence. The first, Gov\_party, indicates the composition of government cabinets, ranging from hegemony of left (5) to hegemony of right (1).<sup>8</sup> The second, LR\_hegemony, is a dummy variable indicating whether either the left or the right commands all positions the government cabinet.

*Populist cues* (pop\_cue). Research on cueing has tended to focus on the strength of rightwing populist parties, in particular the number of seats they hold in the legislature, as a measure of the strength of cues (see de Vries & Edwards 2009; Steenbergen et al. 2007). We depart from this convention due to concerns about endogeneity, as parties’ percentage of seats in the legislature is part of our dependent variable. So, following Azrout & de Vreese (2017), we measure the strength of cues in terms of the percentage of the population indicating they are close to parties with highly populist orientations (left or right). The data on citizen closeness to parties comes from EES,<sup>9</sup> and on “anti-elite salience” comes from CHES.

*Corruption* (CPI\_score). To capture (perceived) corruption in European countries, we logged each country’s score on Transparency International’s definitive Corruption Perceptions Index.

*Political knowledge* (pol\_knowl, educatt\_tertiary). We used two distinct measures to capture political knowledge. The first draws on the Eurobarometer surveys, which track the percentage of people in each member state that correctly answered questions on whether members of the European Parliament are directly elected, and whether Switzerland is a member of the EU. We took the average correct responses across these two questions. The second measure, drawing on EES surveys, was the percentage of a country’s population with at least some university education, based on an assumption of a direct relationship between the level of educational attainment and political knowledge.

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<sup>8</sup> This measure introduces a possible concern with endogeneity, as both it and our dependent variable include the percentage of legislative seats held by political parties.

<sup>9</sup> On this and other measures based on EES data, we generate a national-level observation by taking the average scores of the individual-level observations. (The sample size for each country is roughly 1000 individuals.)

*Issue salience* (MIP). Drawing on the Eurobarometer survey, we follow the lead of previous work (Traber et al. 2018; Lavine et al. 2016; c.f. Wleizen 2005) by capturing issue salience via a question asking respondents to identify the most important problem or issue facing the country. Our specific measure is the percentage of people identifying “immigration” or “environment” as one of the top two most important problems.<sup>10</sup>

We also collected data on a number of control variables that might be expected to exercise some influence over the national level of congruence, in some cases due to their role in the literature on policy responsiveness.

*Election timing* (months\_since\_election, months\_until\_election). Wratil (2015) and Schneider (2019) found that European governments were particularly attentive to their constituents’ views on issues touched by Europeanization in the period prior to elections. We collected data on the number of months between our observations (June 2014 and June 2019, when data for the EES surveys were collected) and national elections.

*Economic inequality* (GINI, Wealth\_top1percent). Some authors have drawn a connection between socioeconomic inequality on the one hand and the decline of institutional trust and rise of populism on the other (Flaherty & Rogowski 2021; Piketty 2014; Milanovic 2019; Judis 2016). Thus we collected data on two measures: income inequality (GINI), using World Bank data on national GINI coefficients; and wealth inequality (wealth\_top1percent), using World Inequality Database data on the share of national wealth in the hands of the top 1 percent.

*New member state* (NMS). Based on the uneven democratic performance of postcommunist countries in central Europe and the observed gaps in environmental congruence in central and southern Europe, we included a dummy variable indicating whether a country joined the European Union after 2000.

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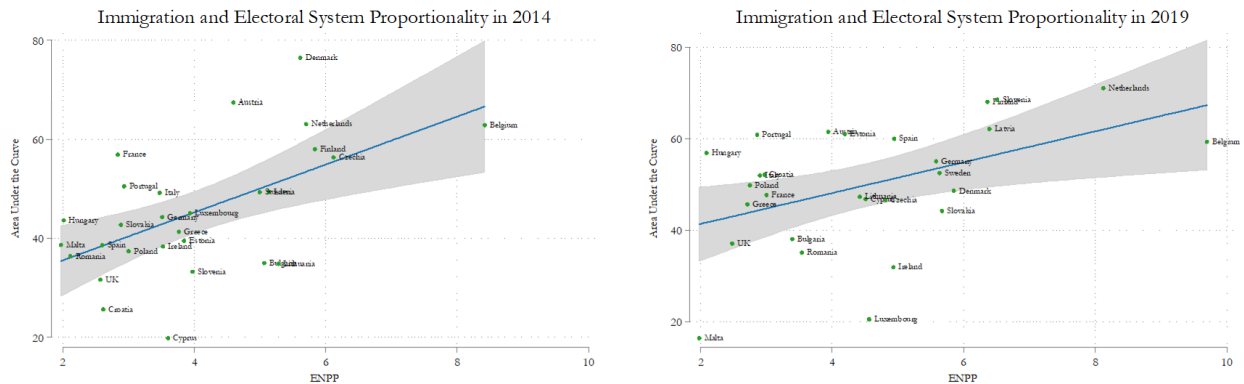
<sup>10</sup> We initially sought to use the EES survey’s “most important issue” responses for our measures, for two reasons. First, some scholars have questioned the validity of the Eurobarometer surveys, which they believe is too oriented toward creating support for European integration. Second, EES has most important issue responses for all three issues on which we collected data—immigration, environment, and European integration. However, the most important issue responses for EES 2019 have not yet been coded, and so we were unable to use that data source for our analysis.



## Preliminary analysis

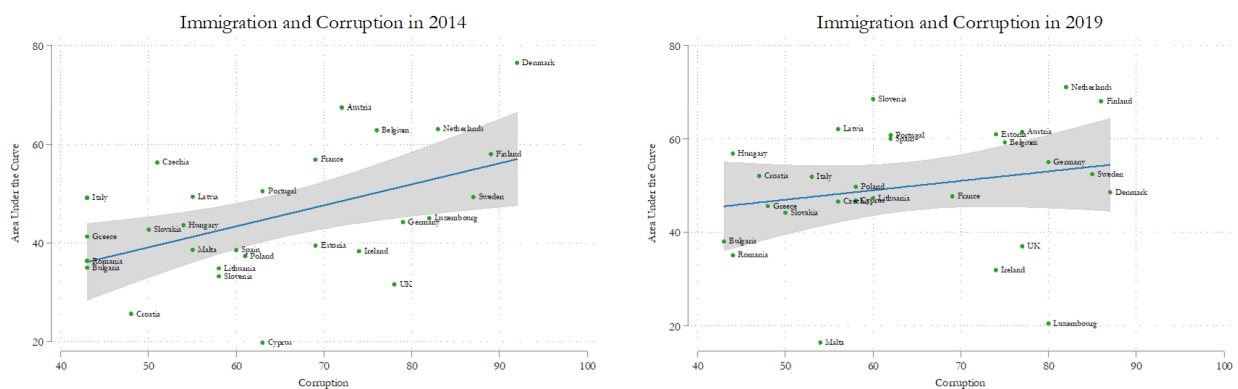
Our preliminary analysis evaluates variation in immigration and environment congruence respectively across Europe. Because analysis of a pooled data set (all countries, both years, both issues) requires a number of checks that are beyond the scope of this iteration of the paper, we present initial results based on issue- and year-specific samples (N=28).

**Figure 1 – ENPP and Immigration AUC**



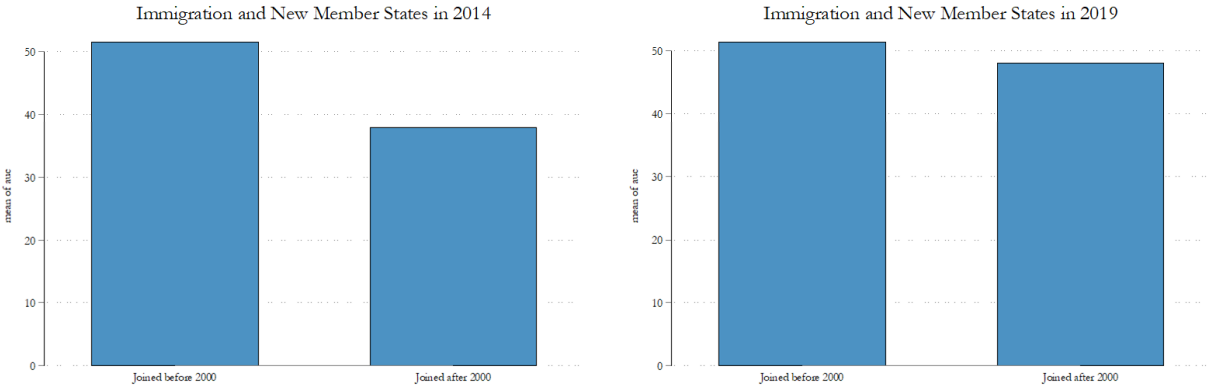
As Figure 1 shows, on the immigration issue there is a positive relationship between congruence (AUC) and electoral system proportionality (ENPP) in both 2014 ( $r=.57, p<.01$ ) and 2019 ( $r=.47, p>.05$ ). This is initial confirmation of the importance of electoral systems in producing congruence on immigration.

**Figure 2 – Perceived Corruption and Immigration AUC**



As Figure 2 demonstrates, there was a stronger relationship between corruption and immigration AUC in 2014 ( $r=.50, p<.01$ ) than in 2019 ( $r=.21, p=.28$ ).

Figure 3 – NMS and Immigration AUC



A similar pattern emerges with respect to the relationship between congruence and new member states (NMS). In 2014, NMS and immigration AUC were significantly related (mean difference = 13.6,  $p < .01$ ). They were not related, however, in 2019 (mean difference = 3.3,  $p = .52$ ).

As the above figures suggest, the dynamics in 2014 and 2019 on immigration were very different. This suggests the need to model 2014 and 2019 differently. In order to model each of these years, we use robust regression. Robust regression is an appropriate alternative to least squares regression when the data is potentially contaminated with outliers or influential observations. Robust regression assigns a weight to each observation with higher weights given to “better behaved” observations. The results of our robust regression analyses predicting cross-national variation in congruence scores on immigration are contained in Table 1.

Table 1 – Robust Regression (Immigration Congruence)

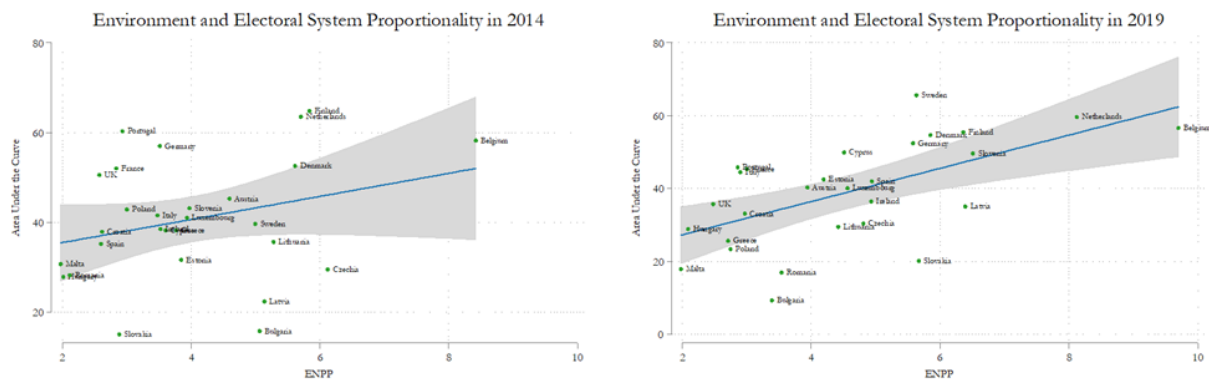
	2014	2019
ENPP	4.095*** (1.062)	3.889* (1.683)
CPI Score	0.526** (0.167)	0.0927 (0.373)
Political Knowledge	-1.220*** (0.311)	0.0239 (0.580)
NMS	-8.524* (3.725)	4.441 (7.612)
Populism Cue	0.120 (0.108)	0.614 (0.311)
Months Until Election	0.117 (0.0989)	-0.111 (0.168)
Constant	27.41* (10.70)	18.53 (21.30)
<i>N</i>	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Consistent with Figures 1 through 3, ENPP and perceived corruption scores and being a new member state exerted a significant influence on immigration congruence scores in 2014. By contrast, in 2019, only ENPP scores were associated with more congruence. On immigration, in other words, electoral system proportionality exerts a consistent (and positive) influence on congruence while other factors seem to only matter at particular moments in time.

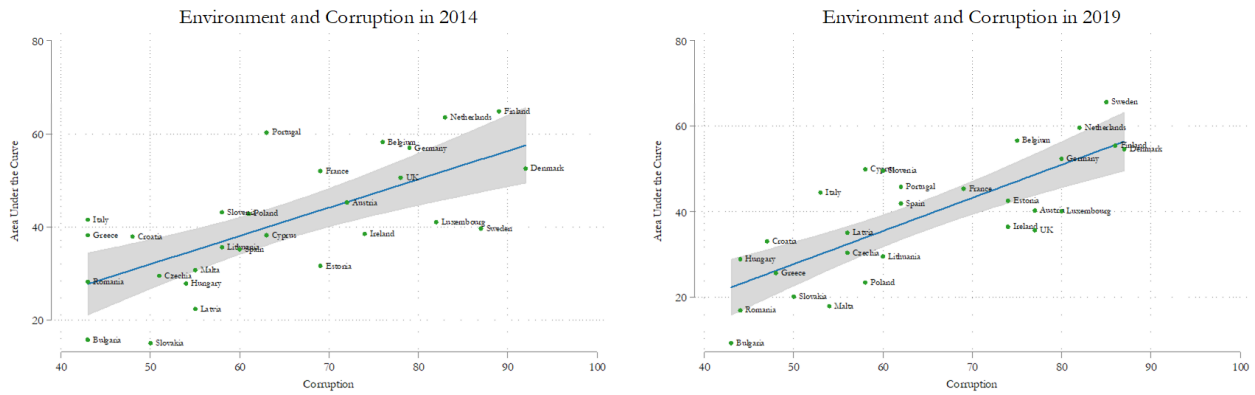
Figure 4 – ENPP and Environmental AUC



As Figure 4 shows, on the environment issue there is a strong and statistically significant, positive relationship between electoral system proportionality and congruence scores in 2019 ( $r=.59, p<.001$ ) but not in 2014 ( $r=.29, p=.13$ ).

Figure 5 shows the relationship between CPI scores and environmental AUCs.

**Figure 5 – Perceived Corruption and Environmental AUC**



As both graphs indicate, higher levels of perceived corruption were strongly and positively correlated with environmental congruence scores in 2014 ( $r=.69, p<.001$ ) and in 2019 ( $r=.77, p<.001$ ).

**Figure 6 – NMS and Immigration AUC**

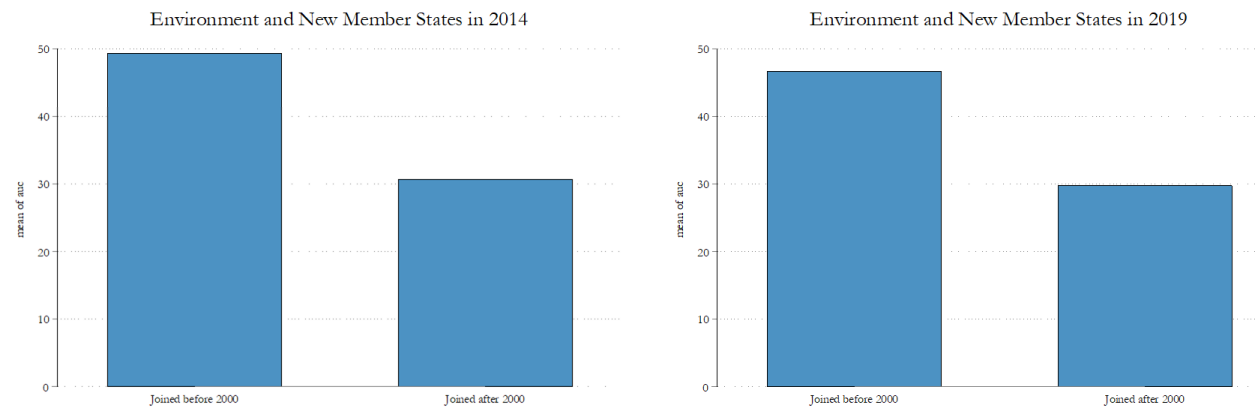


Figure 6 shows large and statistically significant differences between countries who joined the EU prior to 2000 and those who joined after.

Table 2 – Robust Regression (Environmental Congruence)

	2014	2019
ENPP	0.491 (1.367)	1.999 (1.073)
CPI Score	0.546* (0.215)	0.528* (0.238)
Political Knowledge	-0.513 (0.400)	-0.112 (0.370)
NMS	-11.52* (4.794)	-5.941 (4.852)
Populism Cue	0.0610 (0.139)	0.349 (0.198)
Months Until Election	0.0496 (0.127)	0.145 (0.107)
Constant	20.90 (13.77)	-7.246 (13.58)
<i>N</i>	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 2 presents the results of the robust regression analyses that control for these various influences together. As Table 2 shows, only perceived corruption scores were associated with more congruence in both 2014 and 2019.

### Conclusion

Given the preliminary nature of this analysis, we are reluctant to draw conclusions regarding the drivers of variation in levels of congruence across Europe in the 2010s. Electoral system proportionality, perceived corruption, and new member state status all appear to have some relationship with levels of congruence, though that relationship varies across years and issues. The next stage will involve reorienting the analysis to examine the two issues separately, aggregating the data across years and thus gaining more statistical leverage—and more robust conclusions.

Descriptively (and normatively), what we see on these two issues is both moderately good democratic performance and some worrying signs. Many European countries' legislatures broadly mirror their citizens' views while also maintaining a higher degree of moderation—a moderation that may be appropriate on complex issues and in pluralistic societies. While congruence is lower on the environment, the fit is best toward the middle of the scale—i.e., on

moderate positions. By contrast, congruence improved on immigration, with the closest citizen-MP alignment at the closed extreme. Looking at different issues, then, may lead to different conclusions regarding whether the center can hold.

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## Appendix: Application of the Andeweg method

Calculating area-under-the-curve congruence in European countries across our three issue areas required a series of steps.

We began by calculating the percentage of individuals in each country's sample (EES) and individual legislators (CHES) at each point along their original scales. In the case of public opinion, these calculations involved identifying the number of responses at each point along the scale as a percentage of the total number of valid responses in the sample. Capturing the distribution of preferences of all individual legislators in a country's legislature required more work. We combined CHES data on each political party's position on these questions and then weighted that number by the party's percentage of seats in the legislature, ultimately attaining a full distribution with all parties. In doing so, we followed the lead of Golder & Stramski, as described by Mayne & Hakhverdian (2020): "For a particular party with a left-right score of 3.5, they place half of that party's legislators in category 3 and half in category 4. A position of 3.6 would indicate that 40% of that party's representatives are located in category 3, while 60% would be located in category 4. Once all legislative parties have been parsed in this manner, a frequency distribution of legislators on the left-right scale can be obtained."

Responses fell on an 11-point (0 to 10) scale for all three issues in the EES and for immigration and the environment for the CHES, and on a 7-point (1 to 7) scale on the fiscal issue for the CHES. As such, we required different rescaling strategies for the three issues.

Environment was most straightforward, as EES and CHES used identical eleven-point scales with a strong environmental orientation at 0 and a strong economic growth orientation at 10. Both CHES and EES used an 11-point scale on immigration, but the responses were flipped—0 was maximally open in CHES, and maximally closed in EES. We chose to use the CHES scale, with 0 indicating most open (or most opposed to restrictive measures), and thus recoded the EES numbers accordingly (0 became 10, 1 became 9, etc.)

Rescaling on the fiscal issue was more complex. To bring the values of public responses into line with those of the legislators, we converted the EES's 11-point scales to match the CHES's 7-point scales using the formula  $y = .4 + .6x$ , with 1 equaling 1 and 11 equaling 7.

Additional data note: In both the 2014 and 2019 CHES data, less than 100% of MPs/parties were coded in certain countries—which led to depressed congruence scores for these countries, because there are fewer MPs to cover the different scores along the scale. (The reason for missing CHES data: independent/unaffiliated MPs that CHES experts didn't code.)

To correct for this bias, we removed the independents and reached 100% coverage of MPs by allocating the difference proportionately to the parties CHES did code.

Example: CHES coded parties in Belgium such that only 98.6% of all MPs were covered. We thus multiplied the “% of seats” score of all coded parties by 1.014 (or  $100 / 98.6$ ), and then used this “% of seats adjusted” figure to calculate the MPs preference distributions, and overall congruence, across issues.

The only countries we changed along these lines were countries whose total coded MPs fell below 99.5%: BE, HR, IE, LT, RO, and UK.