

Who gets represented? Patterns of MP-voter congruence on European Solidarity in the core and periphery¹

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Paper presented at the European Union Studies Association Conference, Denver, 8th - 12th May 2019

Panel “Mass-Elite Linkages in the European Union”

Preliminary draft. Please do not quote without the authors' permission

¹ This essay is part of the research project titled ‘Reconciling Economic and Social Europe: The Role of Values, Ideas and Politics’, funded by an Advanced Grant of the European Research Council (Grant no 340534, P.I. Maurizio Ferrera).

Abstract

In the aftermath of the Eurozone and the refugee crises the EU witnessed a growing tension between the social and economic dimensions of integration. Against this background, this article investigates the congruence between voters and incumbent members of national parliaments on the highly contentious aspects of EU solidarity. First, we map the extent to which national political elites share similar views with their voters by looking at cross-country differences in MPs-voters congruence. Secondly, we assess which factors contribute to explain levels of MPs-voters congruence testing individual, party, and country level factors. Employing original data from elite and mass surveys conducted in six EU countries by the REScEU project, we find that both voters and MPs express high level of support for policies strengthening European solidarity in the Eurozone periphery. Instead, citizens of core member states share more positive preferences than their national representatives. Furthermore, this gap is higher between radical-right Eurosceptic MPs and their voters than between voters and MPs of other parties.

Keywords: European Union, European solidarity; issue congruence; substantive representation.

Introduction

In the last decade Europe experienced a number of intertwined challenges that might be disruptive not only for the European Union (EU) economic stability, but also for its social cohesion. The global economic downturn, the sovereign debt crisis, the increasing migration flows of asylum seekers coming from extra-EU countries and the Brexit contributed to polarise European citizens, political parties as well as national governments over the EU and the integration process (Hutter et al. 2016). Since its detrimental effects were unevenly distributed among different EU member states, the current multifaceted crisis of the EU can be understood as a conflict over the potential initiatives that EU institutions and national governments propose as solutions to the abovementioned challenges. In particular, the issue of European solidarity, narrowly defined as the willingness to share (economic) risks across the EU (Ciornei and Recchi 2017:470), that was almost absent from the political agenda before the outbreak of the crisis, has now become increasingly contentious. Few recent studies address this topic investigating public attitudes towards European solidarity and individual support for providing help to EU member states in severe economic and financial difficulties as well as for fighting poverty and exclusion across the EU (e.g. Baute et al. 2019; Ciornei and Recchi 2017; Ferrera and Pellegata 2018; Gerhards et al. forthcoming; Lahusen and Grasso 2018). However, little is known about political elites' opinions on European solidarity apart from what is derived from discourses and electoral manifestos of Eurosceptic parties (e.g. Pirro and van Kessel 2017).

The present paper focuses on MPs' preferences on European solidarity. More precisely, the purpose of the paper is to investigate the level of congruence between voters and MPs on support for policies fostering European solidarity. Existing literature on mass-elite congruence on the EU dimension is quite broad, but to the best of our knowledge there are no studies that focus precisely on the issue of European solidarity. Some relevant studies, moving from the argument that political elites have commonly been considered more EU-enthusiastic than European citizens, analyse MP-voter gap in diffuse support for the EU and the integration process (Dolny and Babos 2015; Mattila and Raunio 2006; 2012; McEvoy 2012; Thomassen and Schmitt 1999). Other studies approach the debate over the EU democratic deficit investigating the degree of congruence between MEPs and European voters on specific policy issues with relevance at the national rather than supranational level (Sorace 2018; Vasilopolou and Gattermann 2013; Walczak and van der Brug 2013). Among other issues, Mueller et al. (2012) and Sanders and Toka (2012) focus their analyses of party-voter policy congruence on aspects referring to the social dimension of the EU, but do not consider the specific issue of solidarity. More recently, Teney and Elbling (2017) address the topic at stake here in comparing voters and MPs policy preferences in Germany but they conceptualize solidarity in national terms. Finally, Conti (2018) focuses on a number of policy issues that refer precisely to the concept of European solidarity we have in mind, such as the introduction of a common EU social security system, the Eurobonds and

redistribution mechanisms among different European regions. However, differently from us the author conducts his analysis only at the elite level without analysing whether and how much MPs' preferences differ from those of their electorate.

Is there a gap between voters' and MPs' support for European solidarity? Are political elites more likely to support European solidarity than voters or vice versa? Are there cross-national and/or cross-partisan differences in mass-elite congruence? And finally, which factors help to explain congruence on the issue at stake? We answer to these research questions by conducting quantitative analyses on data taken from two surveys conducted in the framework of the "Reconciling Economic and Social Europe" (REScEU) project.² The REScEU Mass Survey conducted in autumn 2016 and the REScEU Elite Survey conducted between April 2017 and April 2018 gauge voters' and MPs' preferences on a number of policies strengthening European solidarity in six EU member states: France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, and Sweden.³

In the following sections we conduct two types of analyses. First, to determine the direction of the mass-elite disagreement on European solidarity we compare the average differences between voters' and their national representatives' preferences. This descriptive analysis allows us to detect cross-national as well as cross-partisan differences in representation distortion on this issue. Then, to investigate the variation in MPs-voters opinion congruence we conduct a series of statistical models that regress representation gap on European solidarity on factors at the systemic, partisan and individual MPs level.

We advance three main arguments. First, we expect to find cross-country differences in MPs-voters gap on European solidarity and that these differences align with the divide that juxtapose core countries of Northern Europe, which strongly supported fiscal austerity measures, to countries of the Euro periphery, which were hardly hit by the sovereign debt crisis (Mathijs and McNamara 2015). More precisely, we postulate that average representation distortion is lower in peripheral member states than in core countries. Second, apart from systemic-level factors as the characteristics of the electoral system, we hypothesize that also individual characteristics of the MPs are associated with the level of congruence on European solidarity. Among them we expect that not only political orientations, but also MPs' sector of expertise and their style of representation play a significant role. Finally, the core-periphery divide moderates the link between MPs' orientations, on both the traditional left-right dimension and the integration-demarcation cleavage, and how much they share similar views with their electorates on European solidarity.

² See www.resceu.eu and www.euvisions.eu.

³ United Kingdom was also included in both the REScEU Mass and Elite Survey. However, since the surveys were conducted after the outcome of the referendum on UK withdrawal from the EU held in 2016, the British questionnaire does not include most of the items administered in the other six sample countries.

We believe that this paper provides interesting findings that contribute to the existing literature on both political representation and European solidarity. Contrary to what emerge from the studies on diffuse support for the EU, while in Italy and Spain both voters and MPs express high level of support for policies strengthening European solidarity, in Germany, Poland and Sweden voters have more positive preferences than their national representatives. Furthermore, this gap is higher between radical-right Eurosceptic MPs and their voters than between voters and MPs of other parties.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section briefly illustrates the concept of European solidarity and estimate the average MP-voter differences in support for European solidarity across parties and across countries. The following section advances a number of research hypotheses grounded in the theory of representation and the recent theoretical approaches that study European solidarity. The fourth section describes data and methods used in the empirical analyses which results are discussed in the fifth section. The last section concludes.

The conflict over European solidarity

The concept of European solidarity is not easy to grasp. Historically, solidarity has been conceptualized in national terms and institutionalized through the development of national welfare states. However, the deepening and widening of the integration process over the last 60 years generated tensions between the “logic of closure” typical of national welfare states and the “logic of openness”, which characterized the EU, and forced institutions and citizens to reframe the concept of solidarity in European terms (Ferrera 2005; Ferrera 2017). Solidarity refers to individuals’ agreement to share resources with others by personal contribution through taxation and redistribution organized by the state (Gelissen, 2000; Stjernø, 2009). Thus, in the EU context European solidarity can be narrowly defined as the individual willingness to share (economic) risks across the EU (Ciornei and Recchi 2017:470). More precisely, Sangiovanni (2013) distinguishes between *national* solidarity, which implies sharing risks with citizens and residents of EU member states, *member states* solidarity (also named international or cross-national solidarity), which refers to risks sharing among EU member states, and *transnational* solidarity, which entails to share social and economic risks among EU citizens (see also Ciornei and Recchi 2017; Baute et al. 2019). For the context of this study we refer to the last two dimensions of European solidarity.

In the light of the multiple crises that the EU is experiencing the saliency of the issue of European solidarity increased. The sovereign debt crisis set the stage for the implementation of new mechanisms for financial assistance to debt-ridden member states. High unemployment rates in Southern Europe increased the number of mobile EU citizens who exercise their social rights putting national welfare states of Northern European countries under stress. In addition, the migrant crises induced some national governments to ask for a redistribution of refugees and asylum seekers among

all the EU member states. As a consequence, European solidarity becomes highly polarized both within and across EU member states. On the one hand, issues as the international financial bailouts and the management of migrants now regularly enter the national electoral campaigns exacerbating the different positions of mainstream parties, that have historically driven the integration process, and Eurosceptic parties, that voice against the current EU governance or even oppose the very nature of the EU polity. On the other hand, the politicization of European solidarity gave birth to a conflict that separates creditor countries of Northern Europe and debtor countries of the Eurozone periphery (Magone et al. 2016; Mathijs and McNamara 2015). Creditor countries support a markedly “disciplinarian” approach according to which domestic fiscal imbalances reflect damaging policy decisions implemented by national political elites in the past and thus should be tackled nationally in the forms of fiscal austerity, wage and price depression. Debtor countries instead blame the excessive rigour and lack of solidarity by the EU institutions and Northern governments, and voice against austerity measures, calling for more flexibility in the application of rules, the mobilisation of EU resources for investment and growth, and, most importantly, the “mutualisation” of risks (Ferrera 2017).

Against this background, it is particularly relevant to investigate simultaneously cross-national and cross-partisan differences in the magnitude and the direction of discrepancies between voters and MPs in the degree of support for European solidarity. We expect to find a higher level of congruence of preferences over policies strengthening the European solidarity in debtor countries than in creditor countries. Indeed, in debtor countries both voters and parties are conscious of the social and economic consequences of the economic crisis and unanimously ask for more solidarity. In the creditor countries instead the debate over the willingness to bear the costs of bailing out member states in economic difficulties became much more contentious with the negotiations on the three Greek bailouts giving birth to single-issue and protest parties such as *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany.

To evaluate the extent to which MPs preferences on EU solidarity match those of their electorate means to compare the same measure of voter-MP congruence on this policy issue. To do so our study draws on the RESeEU Mass survey (Ferrera and Pellegata 2017) conducted in late 2016 to gauge citizens’ preferences on EU solidarity. This dataset includes more than 8,000 individual observations collected in six EU Member States: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. These countries present important institutional and socio-economic differences that may impinge on the level of EU solidarity and on the congruence between masses and elites. They have different electoral systems, party systems, welfare states, and economic performances. This variation at the country level allows to capture the North-South divide between creditor and debtor member states within and outside the Eurozone. Compared to other sample countries Italian and Spanish economies have been hit more severely by the crisis, and were still struggling to get out of stagnation. At the same time these six countries have experienced different migration pressures: Italy and Spain have become

destination countries in the recent decades, while being also among the major countries of origin of intra-EU migration like Poland. France, Germany and Sweden are instead traditional countries of destination.

Mass survey data are combined with the REScEU Elite Survey conducted between 2017 and 2018. This dataset includes 494 national MPs from the six countries presented above, who provided an answer to the same questions administered to the general public. To ensure a more refined match between voters and MPs and to account for the emergence of new parties the comparison between preferences of MPs and of their supporters is not based on the past vote of citizens, but instead we identify them through a question asking for which party they would vote if elections were to be held in the next day.

In both datasets we identified five items – reported in Table 1 – pertaining to European solidarity and worded in the same fashion. These items were designed to measure citizens' and MPs' support for policy programs introducing cross-national and trans-national forms of European solidarity. These variables register whether respondents are in favour of the introduction of: common European bonds to share economic risks across Eurozone countries; an EU fund compensating countries that experience a sudden rise in migration; a trans-national EU social insurance scheme covering intra-EU migrant workers; an EU budget to provide financial help to member states facing sudden rises in unemployment; and a European program that guarantees that no EU citizen would remain without means of subsistence in case of a severe economic crisis. Both citizens and MPs indicated their responses on all five questions on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree, 2 - Somewhat disagree, 3 - Somewhat agree, 4 - Strongly agree. All five items have the same direction, where lower values are associated with anti-solidarity preferences, and higher values with pro-solidarity views.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Given the ordinal nature of the five items and the limited number of answer options, to better evaluate the congruence between masses and elites we opted for the construction of an additive index of EU solidarity, rescaled to range from '0 - Anti-EU solidarity' to '10 - Pro-EU solidarity'⁴. To ensure that these items tap the same latent factor, namely preferences for EU solidarity, we ran a factor analysis with polychoric correlations given the ordinal nature of the five variables. Results reported in

⁴ Cronbach's alphas on the five items computed for each country separately are always greater than 0.6 at worst. See Table A1 in the appendix for more details.

Table A2 of the Appendix confirm that these items are captured by only one common factor, which loads positively on all five items for both masses and elites datasets⁵.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 reports the average EU solidarity index computed for citizens and MPs of the six countries considered. Two interesting patterns emerge: first, there is much more similarity among masses and more variance between elites across countries; second, as expected, in France, Italy, and Spain elites are even more pro-solidarity than masses. In France this is explained by the over-representation of MPs from *La République en Marche* who occupy the absolute majority of the National Assembly, while in the other two countries the high level of favourability of EU solidarity is shared across the political spectrum. High levels of EU solidarity in Italy and Spain can be related to different logics: first they are members of the Eurozone and they are the two countries among the six with the highest level of unemployment rate and thus favour cross-national risk-sharing through the Eurobonds, as well as other forms of cross-national financial help. At the same time, they are traditional emigration countries and therefore their citizenry supports trans-national programs fostering mobility like the creation of an EU insurance scheme for EU-workers. Finally, in the last couple of decades they have become immigration countries, and thus would favour cross-national financial transfers from Nordic countries to face the costs of managing migrants and refugees.

Instead, in Germany, Poland, and Sweden masses are more pro-EU solidarity than their MPs. Sweden and Poland are not members of the Eurozone, and thus do not favour programs of cross-national risk sharing; Germany is part of the Eurozone but being the most-developed economy and a ‘creditor’ country would not want to share its risks with Southern ‘debtor’ countries. Sweden represents the opposite extreme compared to Italy and Spain. Being an immigration country not member of the Eurozone with a good economic performance and a traditionally generous welfare state, its elites are particularly against programs for an increased integration on solidarity.

Comparing means of aggregate data at the country level may hinder more interesting insights and differences. Therefore, to better assess the extent to which preferences of voters and MPs on European solidarity match we investigate the ‘many-to-one’ congruence of preferences (Golder and Stramski 2010). In particular we compare simple mean differences, which is useful to visualise the direction of policy preference disagreement (Vasilopoulou and Gatterman 2013). Figure 2 presents the average distances between voters and MPs on the EU solidarity index by party in the six sample

⁵ The correlation between the additive index of EU solidarity and the factor extracted from the factor analysis is of 0.995 for MPs and 0.993 for citizens. In both cases the association between the two variables has a 99% statistical significance.

countries⁶. The distance is computed by subtracting the preferences of the median voter of a party from the preferences of each MP of the same party, and then by averaging MPs' distances by party affiliation. A positive distance means that MPs are more pro-EU solidarity than their supporters, and a negative one that the opposite is true.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The first thing we notice is that in Italy and Spain distances between citizens and MPs cluster around the 0, meaning that there are very small differences in the views on EU solidarity once we aggregate them by party. This is mostly due to the fact that both countries share a high degree of consensus on the introduction of cross-national and trans-national EU solidarity programs as we saw in the first figure. More cross-party differences emerge in France, Germany, Poland, and Sweden.

In France we can distinguish three parties that show a higher level of solidarity compared to their supporters, *Les Verts*, *MoDem*, and *La République en Marche*; and other three parties that closely match the preferences of their electorate: *PCF*, *La France Insoumise*, and *Les Républicains*. The *Parti Socialiste* falls somewhere in between these two groups. In general, it seems that the rationale for the ranking of parties seems to be related by levels of Euroscepticism, with more pro-EU parties that share higher support for European solidarity than their voters compared to all other parties.

In Germany there is a clear clustering of parties according to the left-right ideological axis, regardless of Euroscepticism. Left and centre-left parties share a greater level of favourability toward EU solidarity than their voters, while centre-right and radical-right parties are much more opposed to the institutionalisation of cross- and trans-national forms of a social Europe.

In Poland, apart from *Platforma Obywatelska*, whose MPs closely match the preferences of their supporters, all other parties share on average a higher level of scepticism toward EU solidarity compared to their voters. At the extreme we find *Pravo i Sprawiedliwość*, and *Kukiz'15*, two hard Eurosceptic parties, that campaigned against further forms of EU integration.

Eventually, in Sweden all party representatives on average share a more negative opinion toward European solidarity. Here the left-right logic does not seem to work in explaining the ranking of parties' distances from their voters. While at the two extremes we find a centre-left pro-EU party, *Miljöpartiet*, that pursues green ideology and solidarity, and the *Sverigedemokraterna*, an anti-immigration populist Eurosceptic party, close to the first we find a centre-right party (*Centerpartiet*) and to the second a left-wing party (*Vänsterpartiet*).

⁶ We excluded parties for which less than three MPs are included in our sample, and parties for whom we had less than 10 voters in the mass survey.

To sum up, differences in congruence across parties are captured by a combination of cross-country logics, North-South conflict mainly, together with national logics: an interaction between the left-right divide with Euroscepticism. In particular leftists and pro-EU parties tend to be more in favour of their electorate of EU solidarity, while centre-right parties are not necessarily pro-European solidarity even if they do not support Eurosceptic stances.

Matching mass-elite preferences over European Solidarity: Research hypotheses

The analytical framework adopted in this study is grounded in the broad theory on substantive representation and the empirical works on mass-elite opinion congruence (Dalton 1985; Huber and Powell 1994; Powell 2004; 2009; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). However, to derive specific research hypotheses we take into consideration both the research on the political elites' opinions on Europe (Best et al. 2012; Cotta and Best 2007) and to recent empirical studies on public attitudes towards European solidarity (Baute et al. 2019; Ciornei and Recchi 2017; Gerhards 2018).

All these streams of literature suggest relying on system-level, party-level and individual-level factors to explain variation in MP-voter opinion congruence on the issue at stake. Most of the empirical studies on substantive representation postulate that characteristics of the electoral systems, such as the electoral rule, the district magnitude and the ballot structure, play a pivotal role in affecting MPs-voters ideological or policy congruence (Blais and Bodet 2006; Powell 2009; Powell and Vanberg 2000). According to Carey and Shugart (1995) different combinations of these features contribute to explain how much closer the link between single candidates and their voters is. In candidate-oriented electoral systems – those that allow citizens to vote for individual candidates, express a preferential vote or cast an ordinal vote – voters' choices play a crucial role in influencing candidates' electoral success and thus provide more incentives for candidates to cultivate their personal reputation, as opposed to party-centred systems, such as closed proportional representation systems, where the fate of the candidate is determined largely by their party support (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Wallack *et al.*, 2003; Farrell and McAllister, 2006). It can thus be derived that in candidate-oriented electoral system MPs, who seek their re-election, take more seriously into consideration preferences of their constituents over the most important issues debated during the electoral campaigns and have incentives to share similar views.

H1a: the higher the incentives to cultivate personal vote provided by the electoral system, the higher the level of MP-voter congruence

However, the linkage between the nature of representation and its outcome in terms of MP-voter congruence can be analysed at the individual level considering how MPs perceive their role as representatives. This argument can be traced back to the distinction of MPs between delegates, trustees

and partisans according to their style of representation (Eulau et al. 1959). For the purpose of this study the main line of distinction separates MPs who feel themselves as representatives of their voters – be them their constituents or the national electorate – from those who feel themselves mainly as representatives of their party (Onnudottir 2014). We expect that MPs who consider themselves as delegates of their voters are more prone to take instructions from what their voters prefer in terms of European solidarity. On the contrary, partisans are more concerned with party discipline and less interested in their voters' preferences.

H1b: MPs who feel themselves as representatives of their electorate are closer to their voters

We also expect that partisan affiliation and, more in general, political orientations of MPs are associated with congruence. Historically the issue of solidarity, even if conceived in national terms, has always been salient for voters with left-wing ideological leanings and central to the political agenda of left-wing parties. It can thus be expected that both left-wing voters and MPs are more likely to share economic risks with citizens of other EU member states and support international redistribution and cross-border social rights. This should favour higher congruence.

H2a: left-wing MPs are closer to their voters on views on European solidarity

MPs' general orientation on the new integration-demarcation cleavage are also expected to be associated with MP-voter congruence on European solidarity. Scholars argue that this new political conflict is grounded in a broader cultural issue that crosscut the traditional economic left-right dimension (Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012). MPs with a 'hard' Eurosceptic agenda tend to primarily focus on the issue of Europe in their discourse, as it is constitutive of their political identity. This is especially true for those MPs who belong to single-issue or protest-based parties. Euroscepticism may thus be positively associated with voter–MP opinion congruence on an EU-related issue as European solidarity.

H3a: Eurosceptic MPs are closer to their voters on views on European solidarity

However, taking into consideration that the consequences of the recent European crises are unevenly distributed across European countries we should expect a more nuanced situation. Differently from creditor countries, debtor countries of the Eurozone periphery coped with severe economic and social consequences of both the economic downturn and the fiscal austerity measures implemented to put the Euro area under stability. Post-crisis scenario fostered a mounting opposition to austerity

measures by voters and large sectors of the media and political elites coupled with a request of a mutualization of risks and debt pooling initiatives. This was inspired by a few challenger parties that coupled the opposition to the austerity measures with a request of political renewal (Hutter et al. 2017). Most of these parties – SYRYZA in Greece, the Five Stars Movement in Italy and Podemos in Spain – experienced a huge rise of electoral consent that brought them to the government of their countries. The pattern followed by debtor countries is different from what emerged in core creditor countries where the reshape of the political space was mostly driven by radical-right populist parties that compete with mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties assuming harsh Eurosceptic stances and strongly opposing international financial bailouts.

Therefore, we could expect that the core-periphery divide moderates the association between MPs' political orientations and MP-voter congruence on European solidarity. More precisely, we postulate that, given the shared concern for the consequences of the austerity measures and the awareness of the necessity of cross-national redistributive mechanisms, in debtor countries of the Eurozone periphery MPs' left-right orientations are less relevant in explaining congruence with voters' opinion on European solidarity. Furthermore, considering the shared importance that large part of the voters and elites attribute to European solidarity in the Eurozone periphery we expect that in Italy and Spain MPs with Eurosceptic stances are closer to their voters in supporting policies strengthening European solidarity.

H2b: the association between MPs' ideological leanings and congruence is more relevant in creditor countries than in debtor countries

H3b: in debtor countries Eurosceptic MPs are closer to their voters than EU-enthusiastic MPs

Apart from their political orientations there are other characteristics of the MPs that could contribute to explain the level of MP-voter congruence on the specific issue of European solidarity. These characteristics refer to the MPs' political role and their background. For instance, there are representatives that deal with social issues in their daily activities because this is their sector of expertise and for instance are members of a specific committee working on these issues. Others are particularly devoted to social issues because of their (past or current) affiliation with trade unions. It is presumable that MPs more interested in social issues are more conscious of the positions of their voters on European solidarity than MPs dealing with other issues.

H4: MPs' who are more interested in social issues are associated with higher levels of congruence

Method and model

To investigate more in depth the congruence between MPs and their voters, we follow the strategy employed by Vasilopoulou and Gatterman (2013) and base our analysis on Golder and Stramski's (2010: 96) measure of congruence for the 'many-to-one' relationship, to which they refer as relative citizen congruence (RCC). This is a measure that corrects the absolute distance between MPs and their supporters for the dispersion of preferences among voters of a given party to which individual MPs belong. The RCC is computed according to the following formula:

$$RCC = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |C_i - MC|}{\sum_{i=1}^n |C_i - MP_j|} \quad (1)$$

where n is the number of citizens in the mass survey that would vote for the party of MP_j , and C_i is the ideal point of the i th citizen on the EU solidarity index. MC is the position of the median supporter of the party of MP_j . The RCC is the distance between the preferred level of EU solidarity of MP_j and C_i , in relation to the dispersion of the preferences of all citizens willing to support the same party in the next elections. We computed the RCC on the EU solidarity additive index for a total number of 376 national MPs, distributed as in Table A3.

The RCC is a continuous variable that ranges between 0, perfect policy match, and 1, perfect mismatch between the preferences of an MP and its (potential) voters⁷. Given the nature of our dependent variable we perform Tobit regression technique (Tobin 1958). We estimated our models with standard errors clustered by country to account for variation between member states.

To test our hypotheses, we recur to the following operationalizations of the explanatory factors. Hypothesis H1a on the incentives created by personal vote is tested through a continuous variable ('personal vote') measuring how much the electoral system favours votes directed toward the MP rather than the party. This variable is taken from Wallack et al. (2003) and ranges from 0, indicating the most party-oriented electoral systems, to 2 which refers to most candidate-oriented systems. Hypothesis H1b is tested instead through a categorical variable, 'representation', based on answers to the question 'Do you think of yourself primarily as a representative of...?' with four answer options: constituency, party, a specific social group, or the citizens of the country as a whole. The response category 'party' is taken as reference category. Hypothesis 2a on ideological leanings is tested using the traditional Left-Right self-placement variable ranging from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right). Hypothesis H3a on Eurosceptic affiliation or attitudes is tested with two distinct variables: 'Eurosceptic' and 'EU benefit'. Eurosceptic is a party

⁷ Figure A1 in the Appendix reports distribution by country of RCC.

level binary variable coded as 1 for soft and hard Eurosceptic parties (Taggart and Szcerbiak 2004).⁸ EU benefit is instead an individual level binary variable of Euroscepticism coded 1 if the MP thinks that her country has benefited from EU membership, and 0 otherwise. Hypotheses H2b and H3b are tested by interacting left-right self-placement and Euroscepticism, respectively, with a dummy variable named ‘periphery’, coded 1 if the MP is Italian or Spanish, and 0 otherwise. Hypothesis H4 is scrutinised through two binary variables: ‘social expertise’, coded as 1 if an MP has expertise on employment and social affairs, or migration and international cooperation, and 0 otherwise, and ‘trade union member’, a binary variable registering whether the MP is a member of a trade union or a professional association. As control variables our models consider seniority, a continuous measure of the number of years an MP spent in parliament, a binary variable for gender (1 corresponds to female), and a continuous one for age.

Findings

So far, we have provided insights on the general congruence at the country level between elites and masses, and on the extent and direction to which parties represent their (potential) voters on EU solidarity. While cross-country and cross-party differences have emerged, we can assume that there is also variation within parties due to individual and system level factors. Table 2 below shows the results of Tobit regression models, where negative (positive) coefficients of the independent variables indicate higher (lower) levels of voters–MP congruence. Model 1 and 2 test different effects of being a member of a Eurosceptic party (1) versus expressing Eurosceptic views in the elite survey (2). Models 3 and 4 test hypotheses H2b and H3b through interactions between being a country of the Eurozone periphery and, respectively, the ideological self-placement of national MPs (3) and the Eurosceptic measure at the individual level (4).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Hypothesis H1a postulated that as institutional incentives to cultivate personal vote increase, there is a greater congruence between MPs and their (potential) electorate. Contrary to this expectation, from Models 1 and 2 we found a positive and statistically significant association between personal vote and RCC on EU solidarity, meaning that as incentives to cultivate personal vote increases MPs tend to be less congruent to their (potential) voters. The association between personal vote and the dependent variable is also particularly strong, meaning that system level differences between countries play a major role in determining the level of congruence between masses and elites.

⁸ The following parties in our sample are considered as eurosceptic: *Front National*, *La France Insoumise*, *Die Linke*, *Alternative für Deutschland*, *Legia Nord*, *Movimento 5 Stelle*, *Fratelli d'Italia*, *Pravo i Spravedlivosť*, *Kukiz 15*, *Podemos*, and *Sverjdemokraterna*.

Hypothesis H1b argued that MPs who perceive themselves as representatives of their electorate are closer to their voters compared to those who interpret their role as delegates of their party. Coefficients of the variable representation support this hypothesis. Controlling for the incentives to cultivate personal vote provided by the electoral system, those MPs who perform their role as delegates of the party are indeed less congruent to the preferences of their electorate compared to those who live their role as representatives of their constituency or country. In both cases we find in all four models a negative and statistically significant coefficient. At the same time those MPs who behave as representatives of a specific social group, are not statistically different from those representing their party. Also, this result falls in line with the logic of our hypothesis.

As argued in hypothesis H2a, left-wing MPs tend to be closer to their voters when it comes to preferences for the introduction of European solidarity policy programs. In both Models 1 and 2 emerges a positive and significant association between left-right self-placement and our dependent variable, implying that on average as we move to the right-hand side of the ideological dimension, we find a greater distance between MPs and voters. This is not surprising given that left-wing parties tend to prioritise solidarity over responsibility, and as a result tend to be closer to their voters on this issue that is crucial for their electoral success also when it comes to the future of European integration.

Our models also suggest that Eurosceptic MPs, either measured at the party level or at the individual level, are not significantly closer to their voters as expected from hypothesis H3a. Parties or MPs focusing their agenda on Euroscepticism do not represent better their citizens on European solidarity. This finding corresponds to those presented in Figure 2 above, where we could not find a common pattern toward congruence looking at Eurosceptic parties across countries.

Hypothesis 4 argued that MPs with an expertise on social issues or affiliated to trade unions should better represent the views of their voters on European solidarity. Results in Models 1 and 2 partially lend support to our argument. Dealing with social issues like employment and migration returns indeed a negative and (weakly) significant coefficient, confirming our hypothesis. At the same time membership in a trade union or professional association returns a positive coefficient, implying less congruence with their voters. An alternative explanation for this result could be that MPs who held or hold office in trade unions, business, or professional associations are more responsive to their association of reference rather than to their voters on the issue of EU solidarity. Furthermore, it is likely that across Europe trade unions have different position on the willingness to share economic risks with other EU member states, with unions in core countries being less supportive of European solidarity than in peripheral countries.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

To test hypothesis H2b postulating that the impact of ideology on RCC is moderated by being an MP from a Southern-debtor country we interacted the variable periphery with left-right self-placement. Results are reported in Model 3. The coefficient of the interaction is statistically significant and negative. To provide a meaningful and straightforward interpretation of substantive empirical results we have calculated the marginal effects of being an MP from a peripheral country at changing levels of ideology. Figure 3 presents two solid lines indicating the marginal effects for MPs from core member states - France, Germany, Poland, and Sweden, (black line), and those MPs from the periphery (grey line) (Italy and Spain) at changing self-placement on the left-right ideological axis. The dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The figure tells us three relevant insights. First, there are no significant differences in terms of agreement with the electorate between an MP from a core versus periphery member state on the left side of the ideological spectrum. Second, ideology works differently in core and periphery member states. In the periphery the congruence between MPs and their voters on EU solidarity slightly increases as we move from the left to the right, albeit this difference is not substantially significant. On the contrary, in core member states congruence decreases as we move from the left to the right. Third, the correlation with the left-right axis has a greater impact in core countries where the issue of European solidarity is more contentious.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, we look at H3b that argued that Eurosceptic MPs in creditor countries tend to be more distant from their voters, while in debtor countries they tend to be more congruent on EU solidarity. This hypothesis is tested by interacting the variable periphery with the dummy 'EU benefit'. Results are reported in Model 4 of Table 2. The coefficient for the interaction term returns a positive and significant sign. Also here we present a figure to visualise the marginal effects of the interaction between the two binary variables to ease the interpretation of regression coefficients. Figure 4 shows in black the marginal effects, with 95% confidence intervals, on congruence in EU solidarity of being an MP from core countries, while in grey the marginal effects of being an MP from the periphery. According to the figure among MPs who think that their country has benefited from EU membership there is no significant difference between core and periphery member states. A clear-cut difference emerges instead between creditor and debtor countries among Eurosceptic MPs. Supporting our hypothesis, we find a greater congruence between MPs and their voters in the periphery, while in core member states there is much more distance between MPs and their supporters.

Conclusions

This article has investigated the level of congruence between voters and MPs on preferences for policies fostering European solidarity. In the first part we presented our index of European solidarity and compared averages for masses and elites across countries. Second, we evaluated descriptively mass-elite disagreement looking at party-average differences between voters' and their national representatives' preferences. At the aggregate level we find cross-country differences, with Italian and Spanish masses and elites sharing a similar high level of congruence. On the contrary, in the other countries, especially Germany, Poland, and Sweden we found elites expressing more anti-EU solidarity preferences compared to masses, and a greater gap between the two. Also looking at average distances between MPs and their voters by party, cross-country differences stand out with Italian and Spanish parties being all very close to their voters, while other countries present a higher variation according to the left-right ideological placement of MPs, e.g. in Germany, or to them holding Eurosceptic views, e.g. in France.

To investigate the variation in MP-voter opinion congruence we conducted more robust tests through a series of statistical models regressing the representation gap on European solidarity, measured as relative citizen congruence, on factors at the systemic, partisan, and individual level.

At the country level, we found that electoral incentives to cultivate personal vote are associated with less rather than more congruence, therefore disproving our hypothesis. At the same time, as argued by H1b, MPs perceiving themselves as representatives of the party rather than of their constituency or of the national electorate tend to be more distant on EU solidarity from their voters. At the individual level we found also that MPs with an expertise in social issues tend to be more responsive to their voters on European solidarity. Finally, irrespective of the core-periphery divide, left-wing MPs are significantly closer to their voters on the issue of European solidarity. However, moving to the right of the scale MPs' preferences go away from those of their voters only in core countries. It is also worth noting the moderation effect of the core-periphery divide on individual Euroscepticism. Among MPs thinking that their country has not benefited from EU membership, we find a greater congruence on EU solidarity in the periphery, while in core member states there is much more distance between MPs and their supporters.

We believe that this paper provides a relevant contribution to the limited literature on elite-mass congruence on multiple dimensions of EU integration and solidarity in times of increasing salience of the EU and decreasing support for European integration. Findings contribute also to the more general debate on the quality of political representation by investigating the determinants of mass-elite policy congruence.

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Table 1. EU solidarity items.

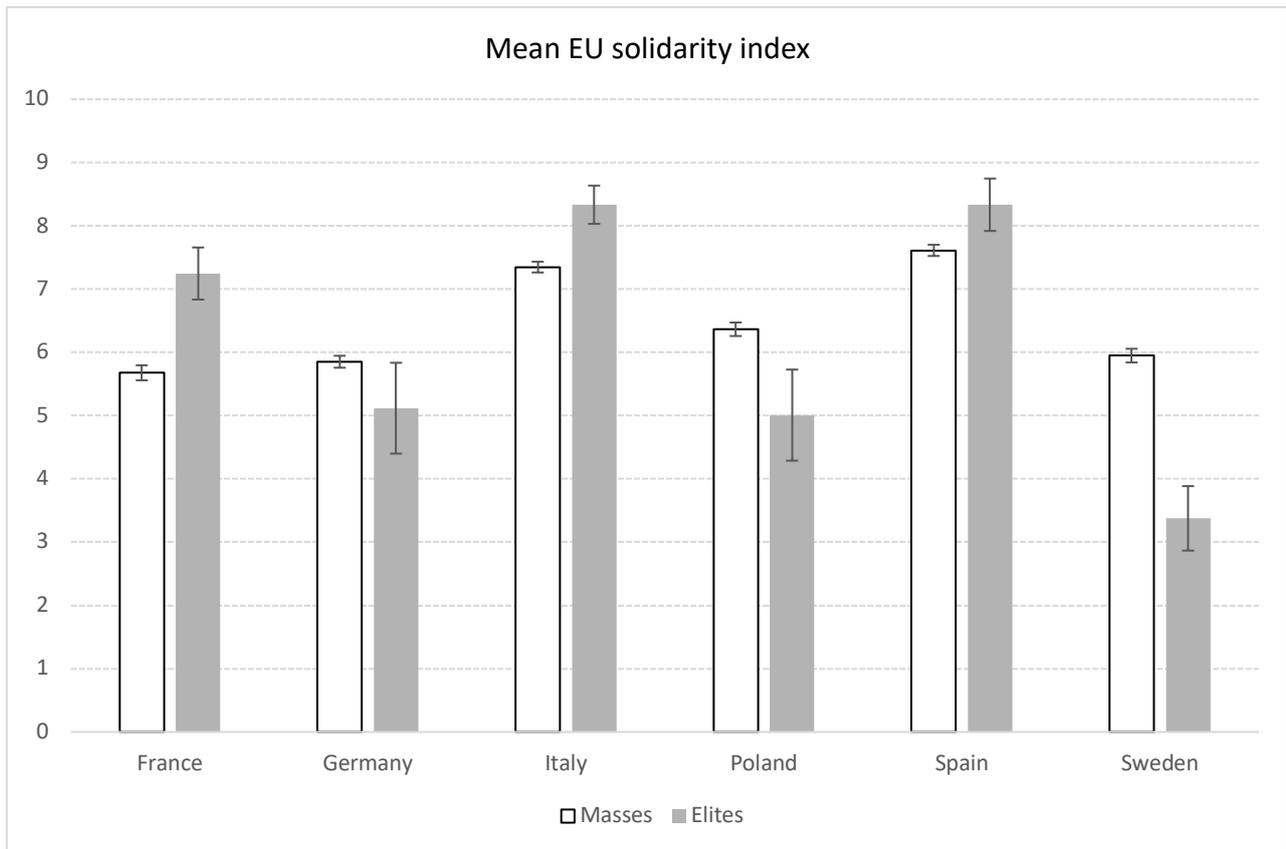
Question wording	Response categories	
Thinking about the European Union over the next 10 years, can you indicate whether you are in favour or against the following:		
Item 1	The introduction of common European bonds (a.k.a. Eurobonds).	
Item 2	The introduction of a common EU fund compensating national governments and local communities for the costs related to immigration from other EU member states.	1- Strongly disagree; 2- Somewhat disagree; 3- Somewhat agree; 4- Strongly agree
Item 3	The introduction of common EU social insurance schemes (such as healthcare, unemployment or pensions) that cover intra-EU migrant workers.	
EU Member States have decided that their economic and social policies should be brought closer together. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:		
Item 4	The EU should equip itself with a budget large enough to provide substantial financial help to Member States facing a sudden rise in unemployment rates.	1- Strongly disagree; 2- Somewhat disagree;
Item 5	In case of a very severe financial crisis in a given Member State, the EU should make sure that no citizen of that state remains without means of subsistence (food, shelter, essential medicines etc...).	3- Somewhat agree; 4- Strongly agree

Table 2. Tobit models with clustered standard errors by country predicting voter-MP congruence on EU solidarity.

DV: Relative voter congruence on EU solidarity index				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal vote	0.114*** (0.029)	0.111*** (0.031)	0.0227 (0.047)	0.004 (0.042)
<i>Representation</i>				
Constituency	-0.155*** (0.019)	-0.153*** (0.020)	-0.109*** (0.029)	-0.103*** (0.031)
Specific social group	-0.117 (0.084)	-0.104 (0.099)	-0.083 (0.111)	-0.093 (0.111)
Country	-0.131*** (0.021)	-0.124*** (0.026)	-0.097** (0.044)	-0.087* (0.044)
Left-Right self-placement	0.012** (0.006)	0.013** (0.006)	0.019** (0.007)	0.009 (0.006)
Eurosceptic party	0.031 (0.071)			
EU benefit		0.012 (0.078)	0.015 (0.064)	-0.041 (0.075)
Social expertise	-0.066* (0.035)	-0.062* (0.036)	-0.055 (0.041)	-0.055 (0.041)
Trade union member	0.046* (0.025)	0.046* (0.027)	0.035 (0.030)	0.023 (0.032)
Periphery			0.0015 (0.097)	-0.298*** (0.066)
Periphery*Left-Right Self-placement			-0.032*** (0.01)	
EU benefit*Periphery				0.177** (0.082)
Seniority	0.0001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
Female	-0.018 (0.029)	-0.021 (0.029)	-0.026 (0.028)	-0.020 (0.029)
Age	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Constant	0.338*** (0.091)	0.339*** (0.103)	0.411*** (0.118)	0.516*** (0.054)
Sigma	0.240*** (0.012)	0.240*** (0.012)	0.234*** (0.014)	0.235*** (0.014)
Pseudo-R ²	0.395	0.379	0.523	0.506
AIC	77.155	78.461	62.635	64.544
BIC	95.949	97.240	81.414	83.323
N	317	316	316	316

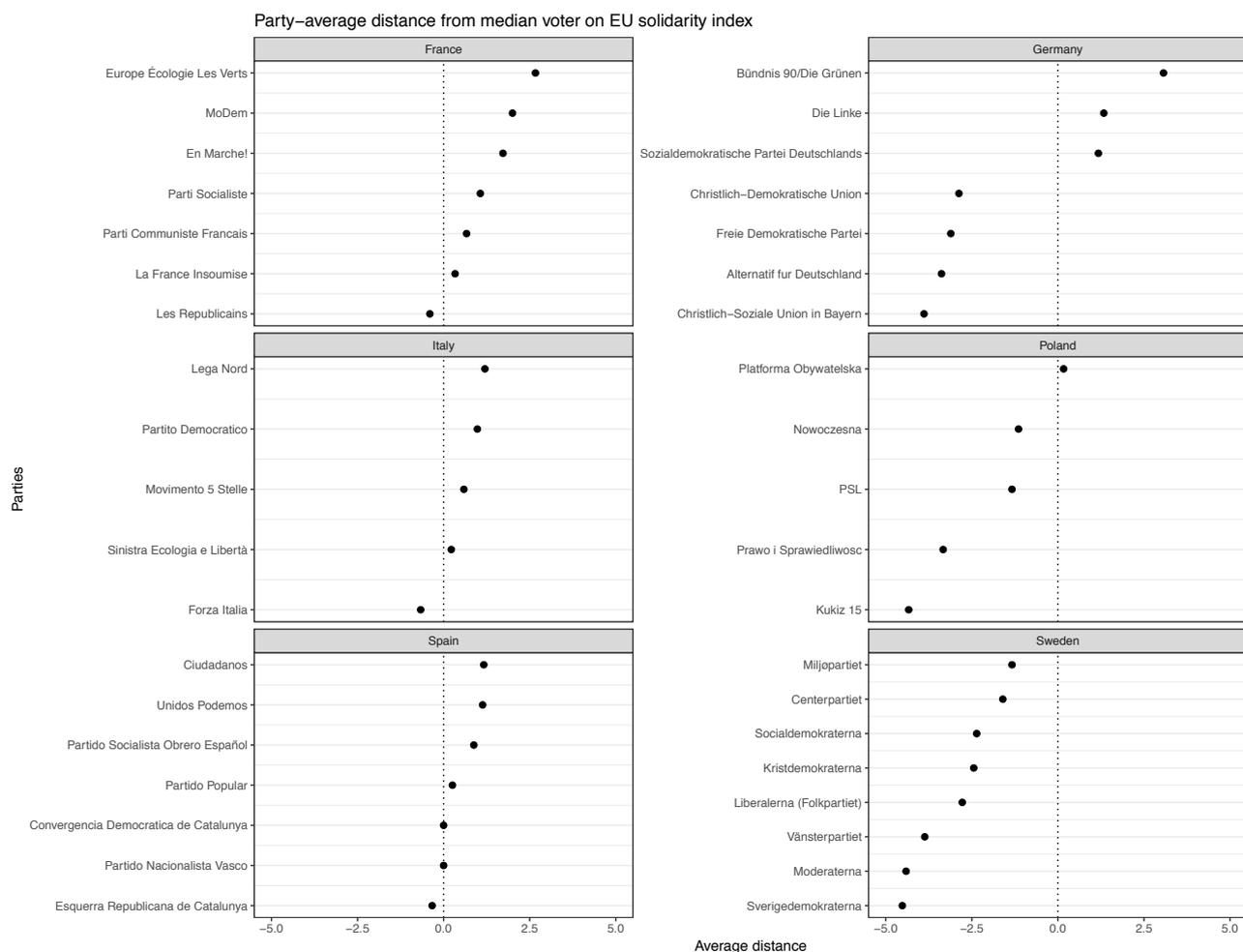
Note. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; country-clustered standard errors in brackets; Reference category for Representation is 'Party'; for EU benefit is 'Not benefited'; for Female is 'Male'; for Social expertise is 'No social expertise'; for Trade union member is 'No trade union membership'; for Periphery is 'Not periphery'; for Eurosceptic is 'Not Eurosceptic party'.

Figure 1. Mean EU solidarity index by country with 95% confidence intervals.



Source: author's calculations based on REScEU mass and elite surveys.

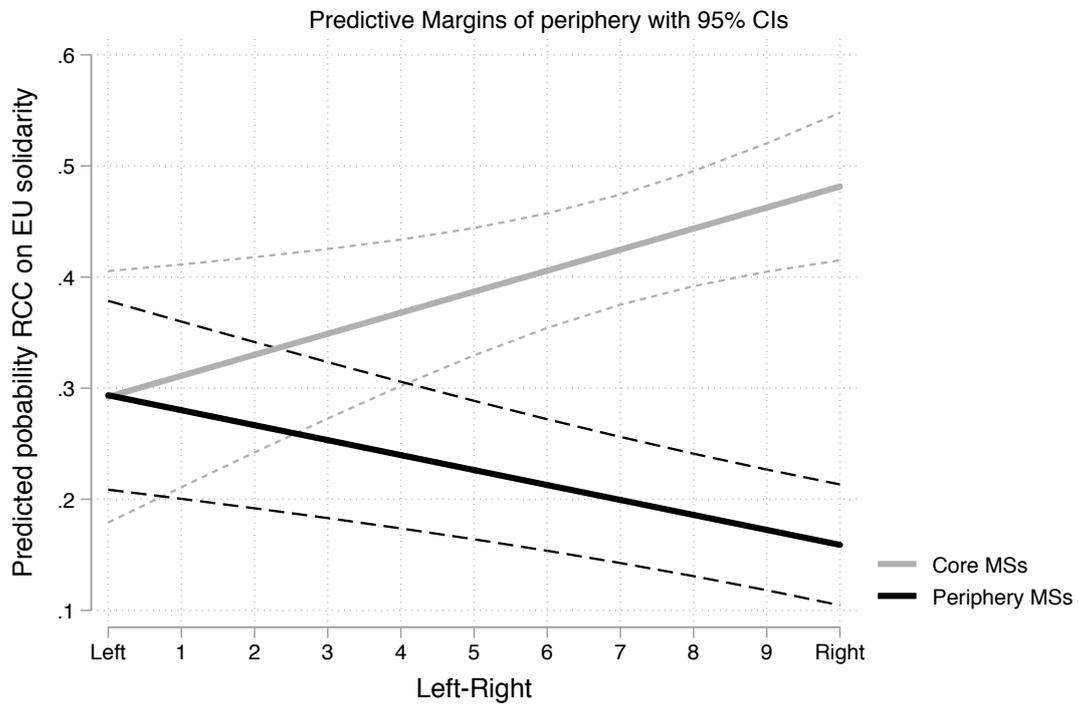
Figure 2. Party-average difference on EU solidarity index (0-10) between median voter and MPs.



Note. Values represent the distance of the median voter to her respective MP, averaged by party group. Median voter positions are subtracted from individual MPs positions and then averaged by party affiliation. Negative values denote that preferences of the average voter are further to the right on the EU solidarity index scale than those of MPs. Positive values indicate that the median voter's opinion is less supportive of EU solidarity than her representatives.

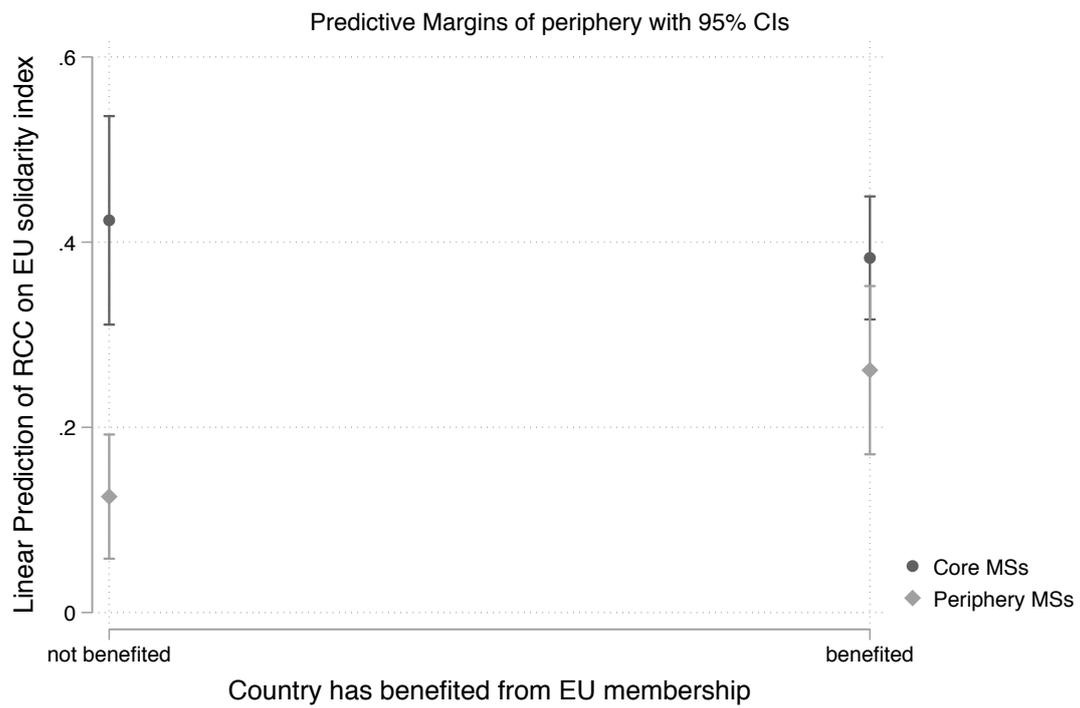
Source: author's calculations based on REScEU mass and elite surveys.

Figure 3. Marginal effect of periphery on RCC on EU solidarity at varying levels of Left-Right self-placement.



Note: the graph is estimated from Model 3 in Table 2.

Figure 4. Marginal effect of periphery on RCC on EU solidarity at varying levels EU benefit.



Note: the graph is estimated from Model 4 in Table 2.

Appendix

Table A1. Cronbach's alpha and K-M-O on the five EU solidarity items.

Country	Cronbach's Alpha		Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	
	Masses	Elites	Masses	Elites
France	0.745	0.724	0.732	0.724
Germany	0.612	0.913	0.678	0.888
Italy	0.604	0.593	0.608	0.647
Poland	0.704	0.754	0.696	0.661
Spain	0.691	0.742	0.711	0.714
Sweden	0.693	0.808	0.711	0.831

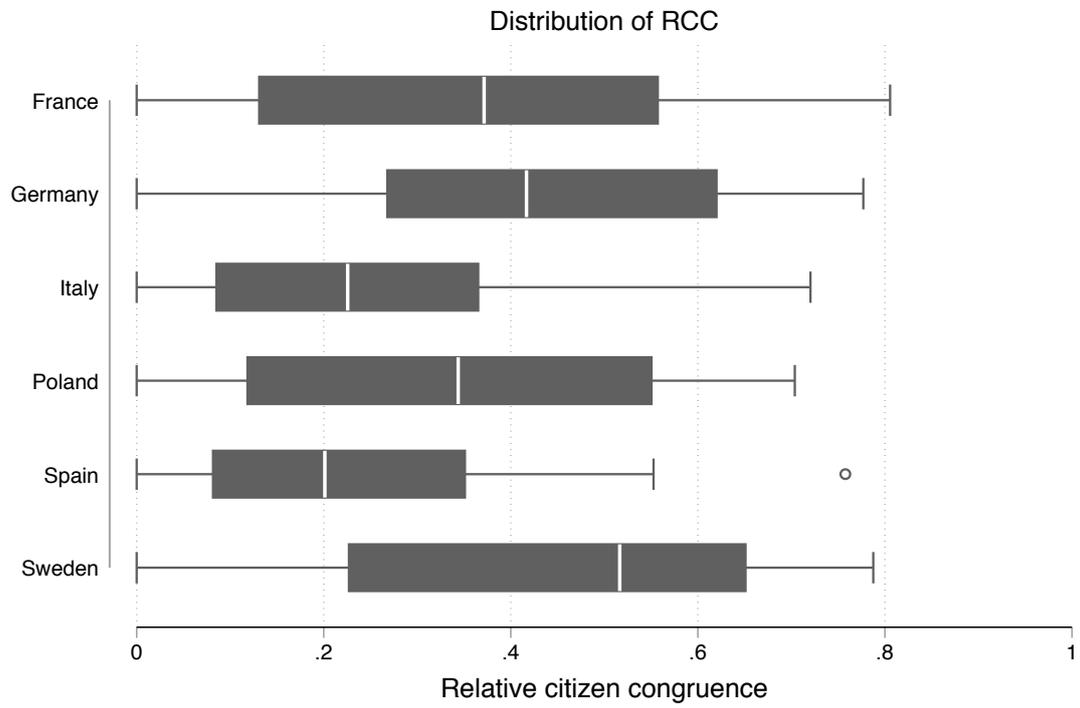
Table A2. Factor loadings after on the five items of EU solidarity for masses and elites.

Variables	Factor loadings	
	Masses	Elites
Eurobonds	0.563	0.813
Financial help	0.627	0.842
Subsistence	0.537	0.773
Immigration	0.700	0.775
Insurance	0.721	0.895
Eigenvalue	2.009	3.369

Table A3. Number of MPs for which the RCC was computed.

Country	Nr. of MPs
France	68
Germany	68
Italy	68
Poland	41
Spain	53
Sweden	78
<i>Total</i>	376

Figure A1. Distribution of relative citizen congruence by country.



Source: author's calculations based on REScEU mass and elite surveys.