

The Representation of Social Classes in European Parliaments*

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Abstract

Studies have shown that in advanced democracies legislative behavior and policy outcomes are more congruent with the preferences of affluent citizens than with those of less affluent citizens. This raises the question of why the behavior of democratically elected politicians is not more in line with the preferences of the mass public. Our goal in this paper is to explore one potential explanation: politicians might produce policies that are consistent with the preferences of the affluent because politicians, who tend to be well-off themselves, have similar preferences as the affluent. Based on data from the Comparative Candidates Survey and the European Social Survey for nine European countries, we show that citizens of the lower middle class and citizens of the working class tend to have attitudes that are less congruent with the attitudes of candidates to parliament than are the attitudes of citizens of the top social class. Our results also show that belonging to the same class often does little to improve the congruence between candidates and citizens.

1 Introduction

A growing literature documents that policy in the United States (US) and other advanced democracies is more congruent with the preferences of affluent citizens than with those of middle-income and poor citizens (Bartels 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Gilens 2012; Persson and Gilljam 2017; Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer 2018). Why do democratically elected policymakers not produce policies that are more in line with the policy preferences of the mass public? To answer this question, it is useful to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of policymakers. On the one hand, policymakers can have a number of extrinsic motivations to be more *responsive* to the preferences of the affluent than the preferences of the less affluent, independent of their personal policy preferences. Numerous studies have shown that individuals with a high socio-economic status are more likely to vote, contact public officials, make campaign contributions, be knowledgeable about politics, and have their interests represented by powerful lobbying organizations (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Grönlund and Milner 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012; Bonica et al. 2013). As a consequence, affluent citizens' preferences are more "visible" than the preferences of less affluent citizens and policymakers have electoral, and perhaps also revolving-door, incentives to respond to the former rather than the latter.

On the other hand, it might also be that policymakers have policy preferences that are more *congruent* with the preferences of affluent citizens than with those of less affluent citizens, so they are intrinsically motivated to produce policies that are more consistent with the preferences of the affluent. Elected politicians in advanced democracies tend to be better educated, have higher-status occupations, and come from more privileged backgrounds than most citizens (Matthews 1984; Best and Cotta 2000; Best 2007; Carnes and Lupu 2015; Bovens and Wille 2017). These inequalities in descriptive representation can lead to inequalities in substantive representation since similar socialization and life experiences among elected politicians and affluent citizens might lead them to have similar values and perceptions of material self-interest (Phillips 1995; Burden 2007). If politicians' behavior in office is influenced by their personal preferences (Kingdon 1989; Levitt 1996), then there is a good chance that the policies they pursue will also reflect the preferences of affluent citizens.

Studies dealing with the reasons for the substantive underrepresentation of middle-income and poor citizens are scarce. Our goal in this paper is to contribute to this literature by exploring how congruent the political attitudes of politicians are with those of different social classes and whether descriptive representation increases the congruence between politicians and citizens belonging to the same class. To answer these questions, we focus on three political attitudes: ideological position on the left-right scale, support for income and wealth redistribution, and view about the value of immigrants for the domestic economy. Our results indicate that ...

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we provide an overview of the existing literature and motivate our research question. In Section 3, we describe the data and methods that we use to answer our research question. Section 4 presents the results and, finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2 Previous Literature

Many studies have demonstrated that in advanced democracies legislative behavior and policy outcomes are more congruent with the preferences of affluent citizens than with those of less affluent citizens. For the US, Bartels (2008) shows that senators' roll-call votes are more highly correlated with the views of high-income constituents than the views of middle-income constituents, and completely uncorrelated with the views of low-income constituents. In a similar study of the US Senate, Hayes (2012) also finds senators' votes to be positively related to high-income constituency opinion and unrelated to low-income constituency opinion. Ellis (2012) demonstrates for the US House of Representatives that the preferences of more affluent constituents are more closely associated with the voting decisions of their representatives than are the preferences of poorer constituents. Based on a large sample of existing and proposed federal government policies, Gilens (2005, 2012) shows that the probability of policy change is strongly related to support for change among affluent citizens, but not to support for change among middle-income and poor citizens when their policy preferences diverge from those of affluent citizens (see also Gilens and Page 2014). Flavin's (2012) analysis of US state policies also uncovers a bias against the less well-off: state public policy is positively correlated with the opinions of high- and

middle-income citizens, but not with those of low-income citizens.

Studies of legislative behavior and policy outcomes in countries other than the US yield similar results. Replicating Gilens' (2005; 2012) research design, Persson and Gilljam (2017) and Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer (2018) show that policy change is biased towards the preferences of well-off citizens not only in the US but also in Sweden and Germany, where economic inequality is less pronounced (Smeeding 2005) and parties and election campaigns are, to a large extent, funded by the state and membership dues (Koss 2010). Using survey data from 21 democracies, Giger, Rosset and Bernauer (2012) compare the ideological position of each survey respondent to the position of the executive and the position of the ideologically closest party in her country. The results indicate that in most countries low-income citizens are less ideologically congruent with the executive and the closest party in the party system than are middle- and high-income citizens. In a comparative analysis covering 52 democracies and 31 years, Lupu and Warner (2018) consistently find that elected representatives are more congruent with the affluent than the poor.

As mentioned above, policymakers might perceive extrinsic incentives to respond to the preferences of affluent citizens rather than the preferences of less affluent citizens because the former are more likely than the latter to turn out to vote, contact public officials, make campaign contributions, be politically knowledgeable, and have their interests represented by powerful lobbying organizations (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Grönlund and Milner 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2012; Bonica et al. 2013). However, there is little empirical evidence showing that economic biases in policymaking are driven by these reasons. Bartels' (2008) results indicate that the bias in US senators' voting behavior towards the preferences of affluent citizens is not primarily due to differences between affluent and less affluent citizens in turnout, political knowledge, or contacting of officials. Similarly, Ellis' (2012) study of the US House of Representatives shows that the greater congruence between legislators and affluent constituents cannot be explained by the higher levels of education, political knowledge, and political engagement among affluent than among less affluent constituents. Scholars of US politics have also suggested that the affluence bias in policymaking might be attributed to the outsize influence of money in US politics (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Flavin 2015).

However, as the studies of Persson and Gilljam (2017) and Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer (2018) have shown, affluence bias in policymaking is not a unique feature of US politics but also present in European democracies, where parties and election campaigns are, to a large extent, publicly funded.

Another line of reasoning is that policymakers have similar policy preferences as affluent citizens and, therefore, an intrinsic incentive to produce policies that are consistent with the preferences of the latter. Elected politicians in advanced democracies tend to be drawn from the upper strata of society and similar socialization and life experiences among members of these strata might lead them to have similar values and perceptions of material self-interest (Phillips 1995; Burden 2007). For the US, Carnes (2012) shows that legislators from white-collar backgrounds vote more conservatively on economic issues than legislators from working-class backgrounds. In a comparative study of 18 Latin American countries, Carnes and Lupu (2015) find white-collar legislators to have more conservative attitudes on economic issues than working-class legislators. Based on data for Argentina, Carnes and Lupu also find white-collar legislators to be more likely to co-sponsor bills that are economically conservative. These results are generally taken as evidence that parliaments, which tend to be dominated by legislators with a high socio-economic status, produce policies that are in line with the preferences of affluent, economically conservative citizens.¹ The flip side of this interpretation of results is that the less well-off would get more of what they want if they were only descriptively better represented in parliaments. This leads us to the following research questions. First, we would like to explore how congruent the political attitudes of politicians are with those of different social classes. Second, we would like to examine whether descriptive representation increases the congruence between politicians and citizens belonging to the same class. If low socio-economic status politicians are more congruent with less-well off citizens than are high socio-economic status politicians, then an increase in the descriptive representation of the less well-off would likely lead to an improvement in their substantive representation.

¹Studies comparing the opinions of more and less affluent citizens typically show that the affluent have more conservative preferences on economic issues than the less affluent. On the other hand, the former are usually found to be more liberal than the latter with regard to socio-cultural issues such as abortion and stem cell research (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006; Gilens 2009; Flavin 2012; Rigby and Wright 2011, 2013).

3 Data and Methods

To answer our research questions, we combine data from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS 2016) and the European Social Survey (ESS 2016). The ESS is a nationally representative population survey that is conducted every two years in European countries. The CCS (wave I) data set combines data from 23 country-specific surveys that were conducted among all candidates running for the national parliament. Our goal is to explore the congruence between the political attitudes of politicians and citizens of different classes and to examine whether congruence increases when politicians and citizens are of the same class. The CCS and the ESS provide us with three indicators of political attitudes. The first indicator measures politicians' and citizens' ideological position on the left-right scale.² The second indicator is a measure of politicians' and citizens' support for income and wealth redistribution.³ Finally, the third indicator measures the beliefs of politicians and citizens about how good or bad immigration is for their country's economy.⁴ To obtain measures of congruence, which are our dependent variables, we compute for each pair of candidate and citizen in a country sample the absolute difference between their values on each indicator. We therefore focus on collective representation, i.e., the extent to which parliamentary candidates collectively represent the preferences of the electorate (see also Weissberg 1978; Lupu and Warner 2018).

Our independent variables are a set of dummy variables for the social classes of citizens and a dummy variable that indicates whether or not the candidate and the citizen of a dyad belong to the same social class. We measure social class using

²Both the CCS and the ESS use an 11-point scale, where 0 means "left" and 10 means "right."

³The redistribution item had a slightly different wording in the two surveys. The CCS asked respondents how much they agree or disagree with the statement that "income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people," while the ESS asked how much respondents agree or disagree with the statement that "the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels." Both surveys used a 5-point answer scale, ranging from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree."

⁴Again, the wording of the item differed slightly between the two surveys. The CCS asked how much respondents agree or disagree with the statement that "immigrants are good for [country]'s economy," while the ESS asked whether respondents "would say [...] it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries." The CCS used a 5-point answer scale, ranging from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree." The ESS used an 11-point answer scale that ranged from 0 "bad for the economy" to 10 "good for the economy," which we recoded into a 5-point scale as follows: $\{9, 10\} \rightarrow 1$ (good for the economy), $\{7, 8\} \rightarrow 2$, $\{4, 5, 6\} \rightarrow 3$, $\{2, 3\} \rightarrow 4$, and $\{0, 1\} \rightarrow 5$ (bad for the economy).

the class schema proposed by Oesch (2006*a,b*). Specifically, we rely on Oesch’s simplified schema that collapses the original 17-class schema into five classes. This simplified schema distinguishes between (i) a “higher-grade service class,” (ii) a “lower-grade service class,” (iii) “small business owners,” (iv) “skilled workers,” and (v) “unskilled workers.”⁵ In order to assign candidates and citizens to a social class, we require information on their occupation, employment status, and, for the self-employed, the number of employees they have. While both the ESS and the Comparative Candidates Survey provide information on the occupation and employment status of citizens and candidates, respectively, only the former provide also information on the number of employees.⁶ This lack of information prevents us from distinguishing between candidates who own large businesses and candidates who own businesses with few or no employees, and we decided to treat all candidates owning a business as small business owners. Our small business owner category might therefore contain some large business owners, who, according to Oesch’s schema, are members of the higher-grade service class. As a consequence, we are likely to underestimate the “true” difference between small business owners and the higher-grade service class in our empirical analysis.

In total, our data set includes 10,265,033 candidate-citizen dyads, covering 12 elections in nine European countries. The countries (and corresponding election years) are: Belgium (2007), Germany (2005), Greece (2007, 2009, 2012), Hungary (2010), Ireland (2007), Norway (2009), Portugal (2009, 2011), Switzerland (2007), and the UK (2010).⁷ Our approach in combining CCS and ESS data was to match each candidate survey to the closest ESS survey conducted prior to the election.⁸ We fit the following regression models separately for each country and

⁵In order to integrate shifts in the employment structure that have occurred over the last decades, Oesch’s (2006*a*; 2006*b*) 17-class schema relies on “work logics” to horizontally distinguish segments within the working class and the middle class. The simplified five-class schema collapses this horizontal dimension and retains only the vertical (or “hierarchical”) dimension that differentiates between more and less advantageous employment relationships.

⁶The ESS report ISCO-88 4-digits codes and the Comparative Candidate Survey ISCO-88 2-digits codes for the occupation of citizens and candidates, respectively. Guidelines on how to create Oesch’s class schema based on ISCO codes are available online from <http://people.unil.ch/danieloesch/scripts/> (last accessed on June 15, 2018).

⁷More precisely, our data set includes the following numbers of candidate-citizen dyads per country and election: 586,272 for Belgium (2007), 1,854,490 for Germany (2005), 225,540 for Greece (2007), 196,900 for Greece (2009), 425,372 for Greece (2012), 219,480 for Hungary (2010), 234,914 for Ireland (2007), 1,284,840 for Norway (2009), 276,332 for Portugal (2009), 317,467 for Portugal (2011), 2,385,170 for Switzerland (2007), and 2,258,256 for the UK (2010).

⁸This means that CCS data from elections in 2005 are matched to ESS Round 2 (2004)

each dependent variable:

$$y_{d(i,j)} = \alpha + x_{d(i,j)}^T \beta + \gamma_i + \delta_j + \varepsilon_{d(i,j)} \quad (1)$$

and

$$y_{d(i,j)} = \alpha + x_{d(i,j)}^T \beta + c_{d(i,j)} \lambda + \gamma_i + \delta_j + \varepsilon_{d(i,j)}, \quad (2)$$

where $d(i, j)$ refers to the candidate i -citizen j dyad, $y_{d(i,j)}$ is the absolute difference between the positions of candidate i and citizen j of dyad $d(i, j)$ on the left-right scale, their support for income and wealth redistribution, or their beliefs about how good or bad immigration is for their country's economy, $x_{d(i,j)}$ is a vector of dummy variables for the social classes that take on the value of one if citizen j is a member of a class and zero otherwise (higher-grade service class is the reference category), $c_{d(i,j)}$ is a dummy variable that takes on the value of one if candidate i and citizen j belong to the same class and zero otherwise, and γ_i and δ_j are random effects for candidates and citizens.⁹

4 Results

Figure 1 shows the results for each country-specific regression of the distance between the positions of candidates and citizens on the left-right scale on indicator variables for citizens' social class. For most countries in our sample, citizens of the lower middle class (lower-grade service class and small business owners) and citizens of the working class (skilled and unskilled workers) tend to be less congruent with candidates than citizens of the top class (higher-grade service class). In Norway, Switzerland, and the UK, unskilled workers are about 0.5 points less congruent with candidates than citizens of the top class, whose value on the left-right congruence measure is about 2.5 (on a scale from 0 to 10). In other words, unskilled workers in these countries are about 20% less congruent with candidates than citizens of the top class. In Ireland, unskilled workers are about 1 point, or more than 40%, less congruent with candidates than citizens from

data, CCS data from elections in 2007 to ESS Round 3 (2006) data, CCS data from elections in 2009 to ESS Round 4 (2008) data, CCS data from elections in 2010 and 2011 to ESS Round 5 (2010) data, and CCS data from elections in 2012 to ESS Round 6 (2012) data.

⁹For all of our analyses, we have used the post-stratification weights provided by ESS to weight our data.

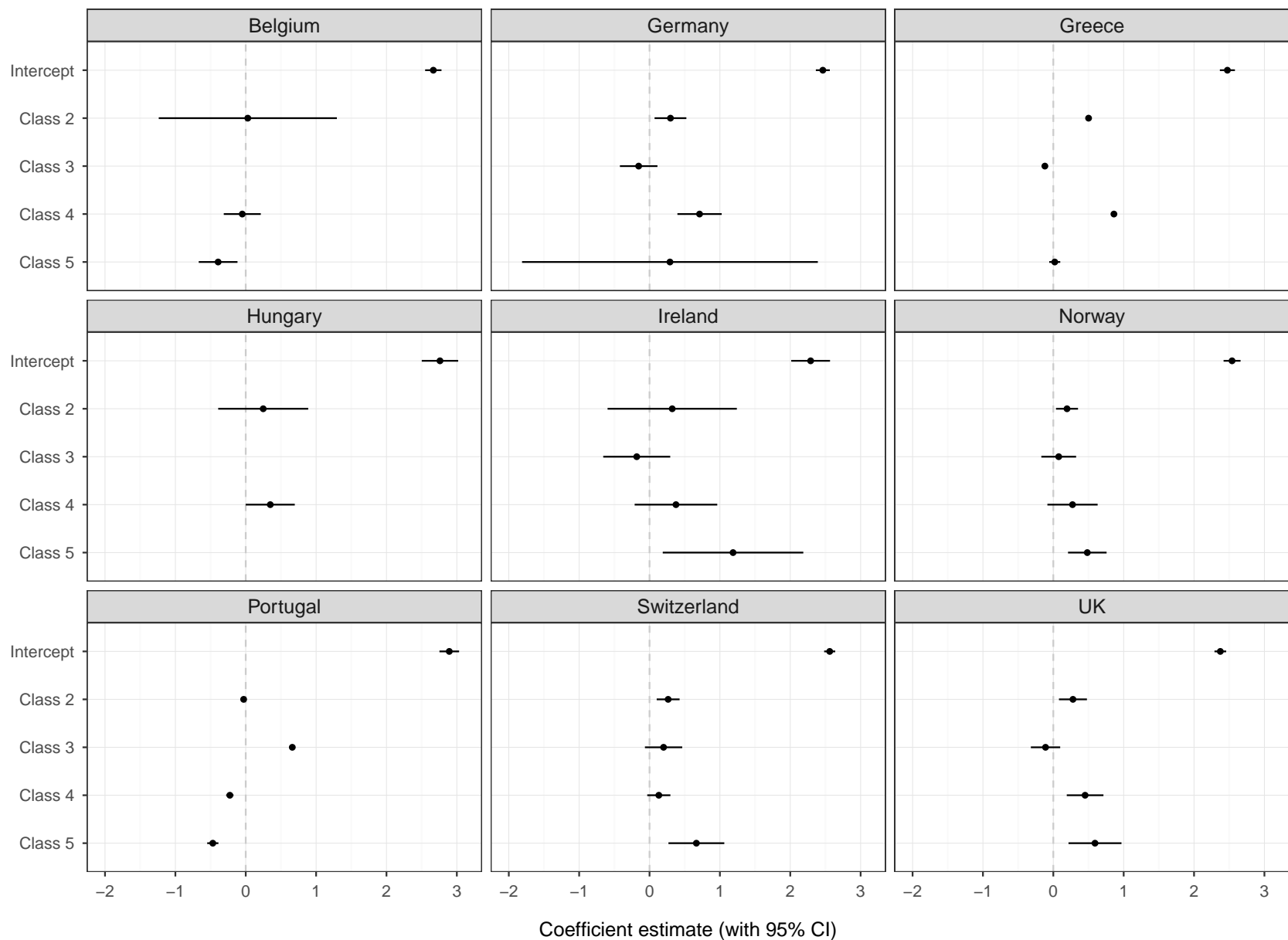
the top class, whose value on the congruence measure is about 2.3. Exceptions to this general pattern are Belgium and Portugal. In these two countries, it is the working class whose left-right positions are most congruent with those of candidates.

Figure 2 shows the results for the country-specific regressions of the distance between candidates' and citizens' attitudes towards redistribution (in black color) and immigration (in gray color) on indicator variables for citizens' social class. Compared to the results for left-right positions, the results for these specific issues are more mixed. In most countries, the congruence of lower middle-class and working-class citizens with candidates is not significantly different from the congruence of the top class. Exceptions are Belgium and Switzerland, where the immigration attitudes of unskilled workers are less congruent with those of candidates compared to citizens of the top class. On the other hand, in Greece and, for immigration attitudes, in Portugal, citizens of the lower middle class and citizens of the working class are consistently more congruent with candidates than citizens of the top class.

Figure 3 presents the results from the regressions of candidates' and citizens' congruence on the left-right scale on indicator variables for citizens' social class and an indicator variable that shows whether the candidate and the citizen of a dyad are of the same class. With regard to the main effects, the results are very similar to those presented in Figure 1: with the exception of Belgium and Portugal, citizens of the lower middle class and citizens of the working class tend to be less congruent with candidates than citizens of the top class. For most countries, being of the same class as a candidate has little effect on the congruence with that candidate. In Portugal and, for unskilled workers, also in Ireland, citizens are somewhat better represented by candidates of the same class than by candidates of other classes. In Greece, Switzerland, and the UK, however, the reverse seems to be true.

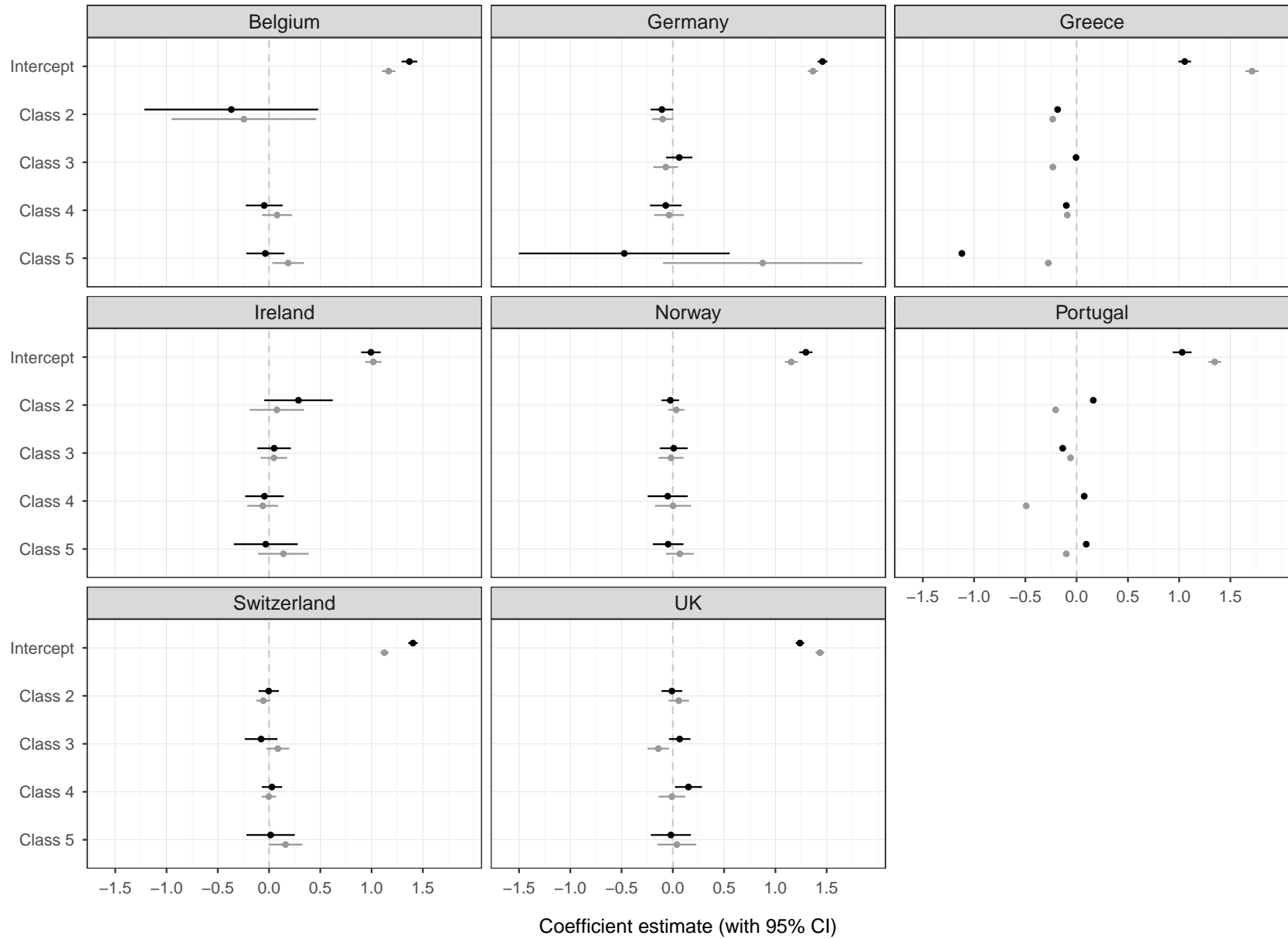
Finally, Figure 4 shows the results from the regressions of the distances between candidates' and citizens' attitudes towards redistribution (in black) and immigration (in gray) on indicator variables for citizens' social class and an indicator variable for same-class membership. Again, the results for these specific issues are rather mixed. With regard to attitudes towards redistribution, belonging to the same class hardly has any effect on the congruence between candidates

Table 1: Congruence Between the Left-Right Positions of Candidates and Citizens of Different Classes



Note: The figure shows the estimated coefficients (and 95% confidence intervals) from the country-specific regressions of congruence between candidates and citizens on the left-right scale on indicators for citizens' class membership. Candidate and citizen random effects are not reported.

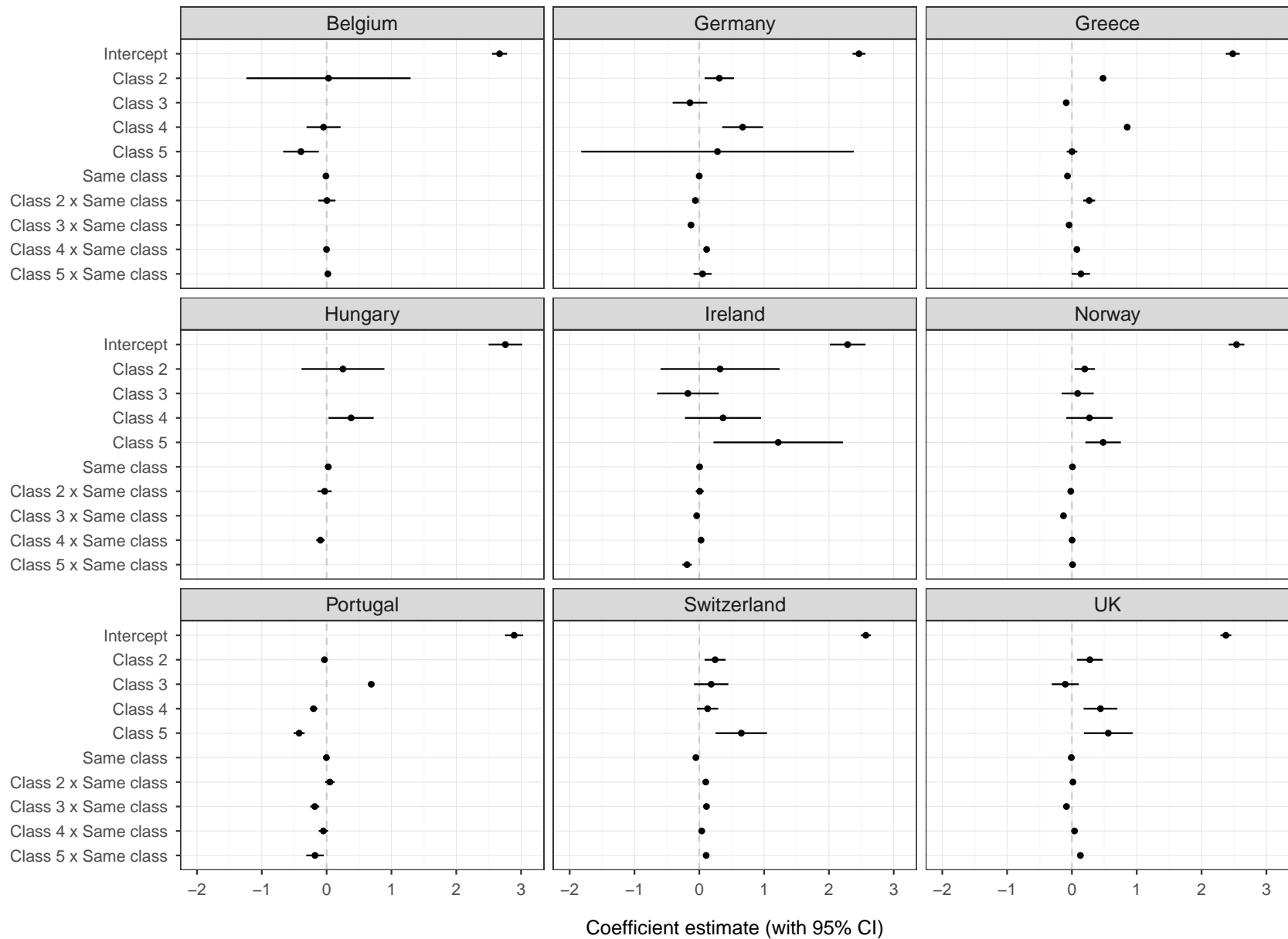
Table 2: Congruence Between the Attitudes towards Redistribution and Immigration of Candidates and Citizens



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Note: The figure shows the estimated coefficients (and 95% confidence intervals) from the country-specific regressions of congruence between candidates' and citizens' attitudes towards redistribution (in black color) and immigration (in gray color) on indicators for citizens' class membership. Candidate and citizen random effects are not reported. Hungary is missing because the redistribution and immigration items were not part of the survey.

Table 3: Congruence Between the Left-Right Positions of Candidates and Citizens (Including Interaction with Same Class)



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Note: The figure shows the estimated coefficients (and 95% confidence intervals) from the country-specific regressions of congruence between candidates and citizens on the left-right scale on indicators for citizens' class membership and an indicator for same-class membership of the candidate and citizen in a dyad. Candidate and citizen random effects are not reported.

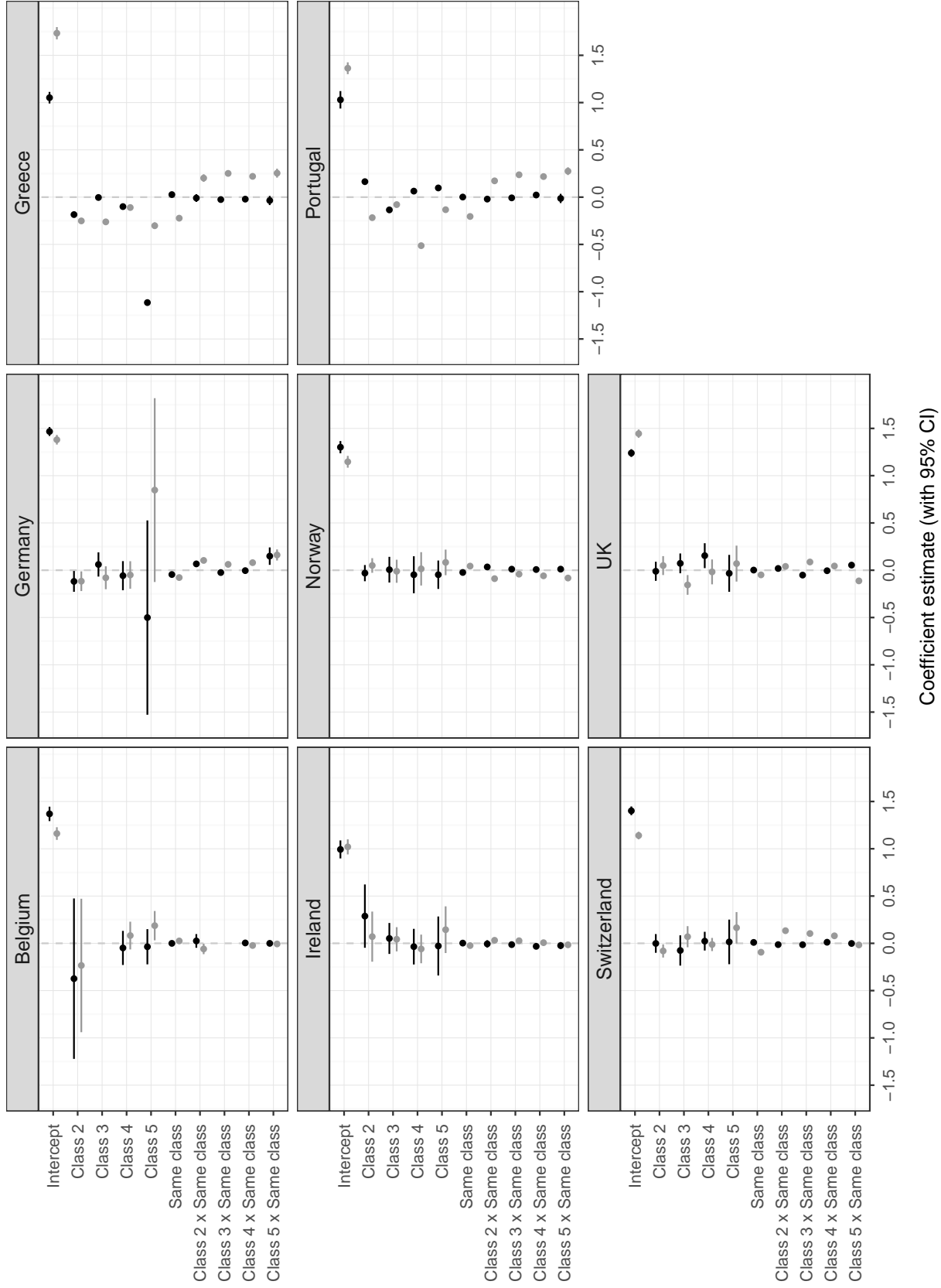
and citizens. On the other hand, for congruence in attitudes towards immigration same-class membership seems to matter, at least in some countries. In Greece and Portugal and, to a lesser degree, in Germany and Switzerland, belonging to the same class decreases the congruence in attitudes between lower middle-class and working-class candidates and citizens.

5 Conclusion

Studies have shown that in advanced democracies legislative behavior and policy outcomes are more congruent with the preferences of affluent citizens than with those of less affluent citizens. This raises the question why the behavior of democratically elected politicians is not more in line with the preferences of the mass public. One reason might be that politicians are more responsive to the affluent than the less affluent because the former are more likely to vote, contact public officials, make campaign contributions, be knowledgeable about politics, and have their interests represented by interest groups. However, previous research has found little evidence that the affluence bias in policymaking is driven by these reasons. Another line of reasoning suggests that politicians produce policies that are consistent with the preferences of the affluent because politicians, who tend to be well-off themselves, have similar preferences as the affluent. If this is true, it implies that less affluent citizens could get more of what they want if they were descriptively better represented in governments. Focusing on this second line of reasoning, our goal in this paper was to explore two research questions. The first question was how congruent the political attitudes of politicians are with those of different social classes. The second question was whether descriptive representation increases the congruence between politicians and citizens belonging to the same class.

To answer our research questions, we combined data from the Comparative Candidates Survey and the European Social Survey. Our results showed that with regard to left-right attitudes, citizens of the lower middle class and citizens of the working class tend to be less congruent with candidates to parliament than citizens of the top social class. However, our results also showed that with regard to attitudes on two specific attitudes, namely support for redistribution and beliefs about the value of immigration for the domestic economy, the congruence of lower middle-class and working-class citizens with candidates is often

Table 4: Congruence Between the Attitudes towards Redistribution and Immigration of Candidates and Citizens (Including Interaction with Same Class)



Note: The figure shows the estimated coefficients (and 95% confidence intervals) from the country-specific regressions of congruence between candidates' and citizens' attitudes towards redistribution (in black color) and immigration (in gray color) on indicators for citizens' class membership and an indicator for same-class membership of the candidate and citizen in a dyad. Candidate and citizen random effects are not reported. Hungary is missing because the redistribution and immigration items were not part of the survey.

not significantly different from the congruence of the top class. With regard to descriptive representation, we found that being of the same class tends to have little effect on the congruence between candidates and citizens. The exception are attitudes towards immigration, for which, at least in some countries, same-class membership has a negative effect on candidate-citizen congruence.

There are a number of issues that we would like to address in the next iteration of this paper. First, we would like to repeat the analysis that includes a variable for same-class membership for candidates and citizens with similar ideologies. For example, it is possible that belonging to the same class only has an effect for left-wing citizens and candidates. Second, we would like to rerun the analysis for the subset of elected candidates. This will show us if the effects of citizen class and descriptive representation differ depending on whether we look at the full sample of candidates or only successful candidates.

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