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Ana Maria Belchior and André Freire

Abstract

Most research on policy congruence has failed to provide an explanation for it. Party characteristics are acknowledged to be relevant, but the literature has not achieved a consensus as to their effective importance. Nor has there thus far been an analysis of the implications for results of using different methods to assess congruence. The present article seeks to test the importance of party type (catchall versus ideological) for an explanation of levels of intra-party congruence, with a control using the main congruence-assessment methods. The article focuses on the Portuguese party system and makes use of a set of 19 policy issues across two dimensions: socioeconomic left–right and libertarian–authoritarian (plus left–right self-placement), which introduces additional controls of the assessment of party-type relevance. As far as we know, such an in-depth analysis of party-type congruence has not been done before. Findings support the notion that Portuguese catchall parties tend to display higher levels of MP–voter congruence than ideological parties, but the type of policy issue is also relevant: levels of congruence diverge across parties depending on the issue at stake. These results were supported by the different methods used.

Keywords

party type, issue congruence, policy preferences, Portugal

Introduction

In Western European parliamentary democracies, parties are not only fundamental actors in the democratic process, but also the key official channels that connect the will of the people to its representation in parliament, and the link provided by elections serves as a basis by which to assess MP–voter congruence (Dalton, 1985: 278; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Powell, 2000: 5). Political parties are thus central to a study of representation. Additionally, representation studied through MP–voter¹ congruence should be seen as an indicator (among others) of how parties are performing that task, and consequently of their performance in terms of democratic representation. However,

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research has rarely focused on political parties' specificities as independent variables in an explanation of policy congruence.

Although a number of studies on political congruence have looked at its causality (for example, Dalton, 1985; Holmberg, 2000; Huber and Powell, 1994), and even the importance of the characteristics of political parties, there is an aspect that has not been widely explored: the relevance of the type of party to this explanation. In particular, the investigation of the congruence produced by different types of parties has not yet generated a very clear picture and has led to contradictory results: some research has stated that catchall parties are more congruent than ideological ones (Holmberg, 1989, 2000; Iversen, 1994; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986), while other authors have argued that the opposite is true (Dalton, 1985: 288–92; Klingemann, 1995; Pierce, 1999: 27–30). Our aim is therefore to assess which (if either) of these two conflicting perspectives is more adequate, using the Portuguese party system as our case study.

Furthermore, studies of Portuguese MP–voter linkages have pointed to greater congruence in catchall parties compared with the most ideological parties (Belchior, 2008), but no clear pattern has emerged – only a few significant research projects have thus far addressed the policy congruence of Portuguese parties, for example Belchior (2008, 2010). These mixed results underlie a fundamental question: Are results conditioned by the measures that are used? So, if one were to use different measures, would different results be found? Golder and Stramski (2010: 90–96) consider that the choice of a certain conceptualization of congruence strongly conditions results. In order to test this assumption, we propose to study the level of MP–voter congruence within political parties, using a set of measures that covers the most important methodological perspectives of the measurement of congruence. Besides aiming to contribute to a better understanding of the importance of party type to an explanation of levels of MP–voter congruence, the findings of this research are also expected to contribute to an improved understanding of the importance of using different measures in the study of policy congruence.

Such an in-depth analysis is better served by synchronically exploring a single case study, although this option has implications for the reach of causal inferences. Indeed, studying a single case at a single point in time precludes a generalization of the findings. However, the goals of this research were better achieved by using a more parsimonious research design, given the number of variables at stake and the relationships among them that we intended to test.

Moreover, in studying the Portuguese case we were able to rely on high-quality and seldom-available data (a survey of MPs and a representative mass survey of citizens) which used extensive batteries of questions regarding socioeconomic left–right issues and libertarian–authoritarian issues, as well as left–right self-placement. Based on the relevant literature about socioeconomic left–right and authoritarian–libertarian divides (see, for example, Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Knutsen, 1997), in the analysis the policy preferences are organized into two major dimensions: socioeconomic left–right issues and libertarian–authoritarian issues. We used 19 items that measure policy preferences: 9 to measure the traditional economic (left–right) dimension and 10 to measure the libertarian–authoritarian dimension, plus left–right self-placement. This option allowed us to introduce a degree of control for the kind of issues at stake: traditional socioeconomic issues versus 'new politics' issues. Using different measures and different policy issues, we wanted to assess whether the type of party is indeed a variable that is relevant to levels of MP–voter congruence – something which, as far as we know, has never been tested before.

The Portuguese electoral system is generally seen as generating few incentives for strong ties between MPs and voters; Portugal has a proportional system with closed lists and multimember districts, and uses the d'Hondt formula to allocate seats. Citizens vote for parties and cannot select preferred candidates because lists are closed. After elections, seats are allocated to party candidates

in the order in which they appear on the lists and depending on the number of votes received by each list. So, citizens' votes may determine the number of elected candidates per party, but not which candidates are elected. As a result, despite the prevailing idea that proportional systems are more likely than majoritarian systems to generate high levels of political representation (Dalton, 1985: 287–8, 294; Huber and Powell, 1994; Powell, 2000), the control that Portuguese parties have over the elective process and the low degree of incentive to establish any direct linkage between voters and elected representatives at the constituency level are supportive of weak ties between the elected and electors. In addition, parliamentary systems are usually highly disciplined: MPs follow the party line almost without exception (and this reinforces that trend).

Our analysis focuses on the five parties that currently hold seats in the Portuguese parliament. The configuration of the Portuguese party system was established soon after the revolution of 25 April 1974. The center-left Socialist Party (PS or *Partido Socialista*), which was founded in 1973, and the center-right Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD or *Partido Social Democrata*), which was founded in 1974, immediately became the country's largest parties. They are commonly considered catchall parties (for example, Lopes, 2004: 122) and have alternated in government (either alone or in coalition) since 1976. With a few one-off exceptions, the tendency has been for voting to be concentrated on these two centrist parties, especially after 1987, since when they have together consistently received around 70 percent of votes (Freire, 2005; Lobo, 2001).

To the right of the PPD/PSD is the Democratic Social Center/Popular Party (CDS/PP or *Partido do Centro Democrático e Social/Partido Popular*). Closest to the cadre party type (for example, Lopes, 2004: 33, 36–8), it represents mainly Christian-democratic values and conservative voters. Despite its small size in electoral terms (usually polling less than 10 percent of the vote), the CDS/PP has managed to present itself as a party with the potential to form part of government coalitions and has been included in government as such on a number of occasions.

The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP or *Partido Comunista Português*) is a Marxist-Leninist party. Founded in 1921, it is the only political group that resisted the major adversities of the dictatorship period and a concomitantly clandestine existence. It is therefore the oldest active Portuguese party, and the only one that can properly be considered a mass party (for example, Lopes, 2004: 79). Since 1987, the PCP has always stood for election in coalition (CDU or *Coligação Democrática Unitária*) with the Greens (PEV or *Partido Ecologista Os Verdes*). Its electoral results have experienced a continuous fall, to slightly below 8 percent in the most recent elections (which were held in 2011).

Finally, the Left Bloc (BE or *Bloco de Esquerda*), the most recent party to emerge in the Portuguese parliament (in 1999), is a left-libertarian party. Its electoral representativity was initially very low, with percentages of around 2 percent, but has grown, albeit never attaining 10 percent. In the recent elections in 2011, it fell back to around 5 percent.

In a wide diversity of parties and party typologies (see Gunther and Diamond, 2003), the dichotomy between catchall and ideological parties is a simple classification supported mainly by these parties' electoral strategies and ideological profiles. As an ideal type, catchall parties are more electorally oriented, pluralistic, and distinguished by a shallow organization and a vague ideology (center-oriented). Ideological parties have more consistent and coherent programmatic or ideological agendas, and their issue appeals are less diffuse and eclectic than those of catchall parties. Unlike the catchall type, their electoral strategy is not to maximize votes in the short term, win elections, and govern, but rather to mobilize their core constituency, and mold opinions and expand votes in the long term (Gunther and Diamond, 2003: 185–7). In our research, the PS and PPD/PSD are considered catchall parties, while the CDS/PP (on the right) and the CDU and BE (on the left) are taken to be ideological parties.

We begin with a presentation of the most relevant literature on the current topic and then discuss the different approaches to the measurement of congruence and present our analytical methods and data sources. Finally, we analyze and discuss our empirical findings.

On policy congruence and party type

To many democratic theorists, congruence is an important characteristic that ought to be encouraged – democratic governments are supposed to reflect the interests of their citizens (for example, Dahl, 2006; Pitkin, 1967). However, it is broadly recognized that the empirical implementation of straightforward MP–voter congruence is impracticable (Pierce, 1999: 25; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999: 186) and that it should not be understood as the legitimate vision of democratic representation (for example, Thomassen, 1994: 238, 257–8). Moreover, congruence should not be seen as directly connected to the quality of democracy or as a better representation of voters' interests. Instead, it should be seen as an indicator (one among others) that contributes to the understanding of the representation process.

The main conclusion to be drawn from research on MP–voter congruence is that it is extremely difficult to identify a clear tendency or pattern. Some authors argue that congruence generally tends to be low (Miller et al., 1999; Pierce, 1999; Thomassen, 1994), while others say there is evidence that policymakers follow public preferences more often than not (Erikson et al., 2002: Ch. 8; Kang and Powell, 2010; Manza and Lomax, 2002). Above all, it seems that congruence varies a lot, especially depending on the issue at stake (Dalton, 1985: 282–85; Manza and Lomax, 2002; Thomassen, 1994: 255; 1999: 45–52; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999: 199). It has been demonstrated to be greater for ideological or highly politicized issues (Dalton, 1985: 283; Holmberg, 2000: 163–5; Mattila and Raunio, 2006: 437–9; Thomassen, 1994: 254–6; 1999: 53), especially with regard to a given 'ideological super-issue', such as the left–right dimension in the case of most European countries (Pierce, 1999: 30).

Although it is evident that parties' characteristics influence the connection they establish with their electorates, the nature of the relationship has not been entirely clarified. There is some (more or less deductive) theory on the importance of the type of party to the levels of congruence that are produced, but the empirical support for this assumption is limited. The existing literature allows us to advance two main (albeit antagonistic) perspectives, although there is also other research which admits that it may actually be impossible to reach any conclusion on the nature of the relationship between party type (catchall versus ideological) and the level of party–voter congruence (Dalton, 1985: 288–91). On the one hand, it is suggested that larger, centrist parties (such as catchall parties) produce less congruence with their electorate than smaller, ideologically more polarized ones. This view is justified by the fact that the former seek to diffusely reach the median voter while, because they do not share the same strategy for gaining power, the latter tend to position themselves in a way that better matches the desires of the segments of the electorate they represent (see Dalton, 1985: 290–2; Klingemann, 1995: 197–8). On the other hand, a competing explanation postulates that parties situated in the center are more congruent than more ideological parties. The justification for this view rests on this type of party's strategy in relation to the position taken by public opinion: if the idea is to change public opinion while accepting that the vote will not be maximized in the short term (said to be the tendency among more ideological parties), then the congruence such parties produce will necessarily be smaller. However, if the strategy is to captivate public opinion and maximize social mobilization in the short term, then a party must move toward that opinion – something that proponents of this view suggest is especially the case with parties that are oriented toward the ideological center. To the extent that they aspire to power, such parties promote

concordance with the ‘median voter’ (see Holmberg, 1989, 2000; Iversen, 1994; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986). In this case, catchall parties would tend to display higher levels of correspondence than ideological parties because, unlike the latter, they would not try to change the views of the electorate (see Holmberg, 1989: 12; Iversen, 1994: 160, 173–7, 181–3).

Indeed, in proportional electoral systems such as the Portuguese one, opposing demands seem to be simultaneously at play in each of these types of party. If catchall parties aim strategically to maximize votes in the short term, directing their efforts at the median voter, the attempt to converge with voters in order to get more votes might produce higher congruence; but it could also produce lower levels of congruence, given the desire to reach a politically widespread and heterogeneous electorate. The opposite is expected to happen with ideological parties: they also aim to garner as many votes as they can, but the fact that their agenda is more focused on specific issues with which they want strategically to reach some segments of the electorate suggests that a higher level of congruence might be generated. However, at the same time they tend to adopt more radical views, and this might be related to lower congruence inasmuch as voters tend to be more moderate in their ideological positions than parties (Belchior, 2010).

Given that, as we have already said, the levels of party congruence vary especially according to the issue at stake, the importance of party type to an explanation of congruence must be controlled for the kind of policy issue. To assess this, we compare old socioeconomic left–right issues (more ideological and politicized) with new authoritarian–libertarian issues (less ideological and politicized).² Catchall parties are expected to exploit especially those issues that are most politically salient and provide greatest mobilization in order to pursue their vote-maximization strategy. We would therefore expect catchall parties to be more congruent compared with ideological parties, specifically with regard to traditional left–right issues.

It is also our intent to control both party type and policy issue for the various measures of congruence: Does the level of congruence vary across parties and issues as we use different measures of congruence? Our expectation was that given that they control for voter variance, relative measures of congruence would lower the level of congruence for catchall parties (since these want to reach the median voters found across the ideological center), whereas this was not expected to happen for ideological parties because in the latter case voter variance tends to be comparatively lower.

Methods and data

Since Achen (1978) and until Golder and Stramski (2010), the biggest issue regarding how collective congruence ought to be measured seems to have been whether to use relative or absolute measures. There are several plausible ways to conceptualize and measure congruence, each of which could potentially lead to quite different results. For example, conceptualizing congruence simply in terms of the distance between citizens and their representatives (absolute congruence) can rank citizen–representative congruence very differently from ways that also take account of the dispersion in citizens’ preferences (relative congruence). This suggests that empirical results with regard to citizen–representative congruence may well depend on the particular forms of conceptualization and measurement adopted. Empirical analysis has consequently ranged between these two ways of measuring congruence. Absolute congruence has the advantages that calculations are simple and the interpretation of results is intuitive. Relative congruence is generally better in terms of the validity of the measurements, since it takes voter dispersion into account; this way it is possible both to control for voter distributions within parties and to compare congruence across parties better. The goal of the present research is to use both measures in order to consolidate results.³

Congruence occurs if the elected MPs share the ideological positioning of the citizens who voted for them. We use measures of collective representation to measure this within parties, comparing MPs' party groups with their respective voter groups (as per, for example, Belchior, 2008, 2010; Dalton, 1985; Holmberg, 1989). In terms of its measurement, the different ways of operationalizing congruence can conceivably lead to quite different rankings of the same set of representatives. Indeed, one controversial aspect of the study of congruence has been the information that can be extracted from different ways of operationalizing congruence. As such, the kind of operationalization used can be relevant to (if not determinant for) the results obtained. In order to summarize the measures used in the analysis, Table 1 shows the four we employ for each of the two approaches (absolute and relative) to the measurement of congruence – from the measure that is simplest and has lower validity to the more complex with higher validity.

We first explore the *percentages of agreement* and *differences* between MPs and voters within the five Portuguese political parties, which is the most straightforward measure of absolute congruence. It offers us a general picture of intra-party consonance with regard to policy issues.

To measure absolute congruence, we also use Holmberg's *means difference measure* (1989: 13–23; 2000), which represents the average divergence between MPs' and voters' positions regarding policy issues in parties (MPs minus voters). Because variables are measured on a five-point scale, the *means difference measure* can vary between 0 (perfect congruence) and 4 (maximum incongruence). Since it has support in the mean calculus, it provides a more synthetic picture of congruence, although it suffers from the major difficulty that it introduces bias if the distribution has outliers.

We assume that a concept of relative congruence is more appropriate than a concept of absolute congruence if one is interested in how well representatives are performing in terms of producing congruence. Absolute congruence is not the most appropriate if we are interested in comparing the relative performance of representatives across different parties, as is the case here. In this approach, which is inspired by Converse and Pierce (1986: 963–4), the *standardized mean differences* between MPs' and their voters' policy-issue positions is computed by dividing the differences (MPs minus voters) by the standard deviation of voter distributions within parties. The measure is computed at the party level; that is, for each party and policy issue. This measure disregards the signs of mean differences, since it is the distance between means and not the direction that is relevant to the analysis. Moreover, retaining the signs of the values would lead to situations in which different signs would cancel each other out, thereby erasing the true distance between the two positions. The lower the values of the *standardized mean differences*, the higher the congruence.

Table 1. Measures of Collective Congruence: A Synthesis.

	Measures	Validity
Absolute congruence	Percentage of agreement (and differences)	Low (rough measure; little information)
	Means and means difference measure	Low (biased in distributions with outliers)
Relative congruence	Standardized mean differences	High (controls for variance at the party level; bias can still occur since the basis is the mean)
	Centrism	High (controls for voter variance; more accurate if the median is used)

When considering congruence-measurement problems, Achen (1978: 483–4, 487–8) devised forms of statistical measurement that cover different dimensions of the concept. Of these, centrism is the strongest measure for assessing how closely the opinions of party elites mirror the views of their average (or median) supporters (see, for example, Dalton, 1985: 286). Noting the exceptionalism of Achen's centrism with regard to the conceptualization of congruence, Golder and Stramski (2010: 94) also asserted that 'by normalizing congruence relative to the dispersion of citizen preferences, relative citizen congruence avoids the use of an abstract left–right scale and provides a metric-free concept of congruence'. Centrism is thus considered the strongest measure for overcoming the potential problems of comparability between MPs and voters.

Centrism measures how representatives actually represent the political preferences of their mean or median voter in the party. It is measured by the difference between the *proximity* and the variance with regard to the position of the electorate. *Proximity* refers to the similarity of the party's position to that of its voters. That is:

$$\hat{S}_j = \sum(a_{ij} - r_j)^2/n_j$$

where a_{ij} is the position of voter a_i in party j , r_j is the mean position of the elite in that party, and n_j is the size of the sample. The variance for the electorate is measured by

$$\hat{Y}_j^2 = \sum(a_{ij} - \bar{a}_j)^2/(n_j - 1)$$

where \bar{a}_j is the median position of the voters.

$$\hat{C}_j = \hat{S}_j - \hat{Y}_j^2$$

is the measure of the *centrism* in party j . As in the previous measure and for the same reasons, for centrism we also disregard the signs, and all values therefore become positive. High *centrism* values indicate a mismatch between the voters and the elite; low values indicate the reverse.⁴

Besides assessing the levels of congruence of catchall versus ideological parties across a set of 19 items, it is also our aim to assess whether the traditional or old political issues characterizing the left–right divide produce more or less congruence than the 'new politics' issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian divide and whether the kind of issue is more relevant than party type to an explanation of congruence.⁵ For this purpose, we have two sets of variables, based on a question on policy agreement (measured using a five-point scale):⁶ one dimension includes traditional socioeconomic (left–right) issues; the other includes issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. The first particularly concerns state intervention in the economy and society, fighting inequalities, and defending public education and health.⁷ The libertarian–authoritarian dimension concerns, for example, lifestyle issues (abortion, same-sex marriage, and so on) and attitudes toward authority, immigration, and environmental protection (see, for example, Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2004).⁸ Due to their importance in structuring the political debate in most European countries, it is expected that the socioeconomic issues anchored in the left–right dimension will produce higher levels of MP–voter congruence than libertarian–authoritarian issues (Holmberg, 2000: 163–5; Pierce, 1999: 27–9).

As we briefly mentioned above, the data analysis is supported by two surveys conducted in Portugal in 2008 as part of the project entitled 'Portuguese MPs in Comparative Perspective: Elections, Leadership, and Representation'.⁹ One is based on a multistage probability sample of Portuguese citizens aged 18 or more and living on the mainland ($N = 1350$). The other survey was

aimed at the universe of those Members of Parliament (*Assembleia da República*) in office in the 10th legislature (during 2005–09), and also used face-to-face interviews. Out of a universe of 230 MPs, 141 responses were validated, giving a quite remarkable rate of response among such surveys of representatives (61 percent). An equivalent questionnaire covering basically the same topics was used for both citizens and MPs.

The sample size (especially for MPs) is not always as big as we would have liked it to be, especially concerning the smaller parties.¹⁰ This is, however, a recurrent problem in these kinds of studies since it requires equivalent questions for both groups: MPs and voters. Even acknowledging this, we consider that the effective sample sizes are good enough to reliably support our analysis.

Findings

Looking at the percentage and average differences of agreement between parties regarding the set of left–right issues, it is the Socialist Party that displays the smallest distance to its voters as a whole – a finding that matches expectations for catchall parties (and similar to the findings for MP–voter left–right self-placement (see Freire and Belchior, 2013)). The other catchall party (the PPD/PSD) does not share this privileged position of correspondence to its voters: its performance is bettered by that of an ideological party (the CDU), but only slightly. As expected, the CDS (also ideological) appears in the position that is least privileged with regard to congruence with voters: on average there is a distance of more than 30 percent from the voters' position (data not shown¹¹).

By and large, it can be said that MPs and voters are coherent with and match the choice of policies connected with their parties' left–right placement, especially in the case of those on the left. However, the Portuguese electorate clearly tends toward the socioeconomic left, even among those who identify with right-wing parties; and this explains most of the MP–voter incongruence that we can find on the right¹² (for both types of party).

In the case of the libertarian–authoritarian divide, the smaller distance between MPs from catchall parties and their voters is more evident in relative terms. The PS and the PPD/PSD both return lower average percentages for distance than the other parties, with the differences between the two of them essentially derived from the PS MPs' more libertarian position compared with that of the PPD/PSD MPs. However, there are greater differences in policy preferences (between MPs and voters for both types of party) in this dimension than in the preceding one (left–right), and this supports the theoretical expectations that ideological or highly politicized issues will generate higher congruence.

Voters are in general significantly more authoritarian than MPs (except for the conservative party). This is the main reason for incongruence in this dimension across the left-wing parties, whose MPs are more libertarian than those of right-wing parties, especially within the ideological parties (the BE and CDU).

In general, the analysis of percentages of agreement and the average differences in the latter reveals that MPs tend to be more to the left and more libertarian than their voters. From this analysis, it seems that the Portuguese catchall parties globally tend to be closer to their voters than the ideological parties, particularly in the cases of the Socialist Party for left–right-dimension issues and of both catchall parties regarding libertarian–authoritarian policy issues. However, this question varies greatly depending on the issue at stake, indicating that the policy issue greatly contributes to an explanation of party congruence. For various issues, it is the ideological parties that are the most congruent.

Figure 2 gives a summary of the absolute measures of congruence analyzed above, with the values of the average differences for each party represented for each of the two dimensions.¹³ The catchall parties clearly occupy the position of the parties with the best performance, considering the two dimensions as a whole (which is also supported by Figure 1 regarding self-positioning on the left–right scale in the case of the CDS/PP). While incongruence at the level of the libertarian–authoritarian dimension is greater on the left, on the right incongruence is greater concerning the left–right dimension. This is a pertinent finding if we bear in mind that on the left the political struggle is essentially supported by economic and social issues linked to the left–right dimension, while on the right moral and lifestyle issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension are more significant than they are among the parties on the left.

In conclusion, the catchall parties tend to present better results for absolute congruence with their electorates compared with the ideological parties, but it seems that it is policy issue that best explains party congruence: voters tend to be more conservative than MPs regarding lifestyle and morally charged issues and more left oriented regarding traditional economic and social issues. As a consequence, congruence is higher for left-wing parties concerning left–right issues and for right-wing parties concerning libertarian–authoritarian issues. Additionally, the expectation that catchall parties respond better to left–right than to libertarian–authoritarian issues is, so far, fulfilled.

Another conclusion from the data is that MPs tend to be to the left of their voters, especially in the case of left-wing parties. That elites position themselves further to the left than their voters (or

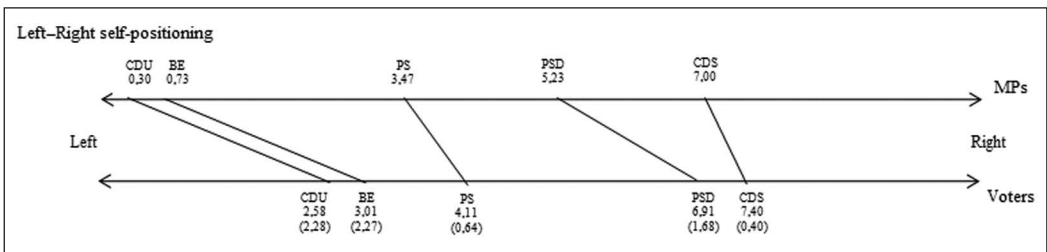


Figure 1. Mean Distances Between MPs and Voters Referring to Left–Right Self-positioning. Notes: The scale is eleven point: 0 (left) to 10 (right). Figures in brackets are mean differences within party.

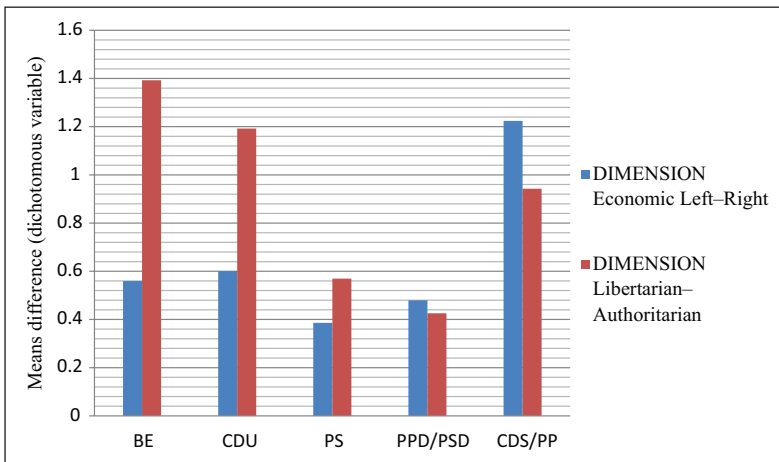


Figure 2. Means Difference (Dichotomous Variable) Across Policy Dimensions (the Mean of Means). Notes: The mean difference by party and dimension disregards the signs of the real differences, and all values are therefore entered as having positive signs.

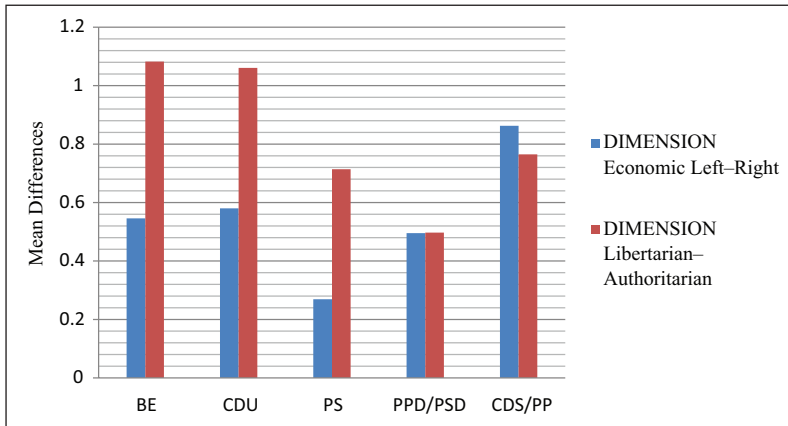


Figure 3. Standardized Mean Differences Across Policy Dimensions (the Mean of Means).

further to the right for the more extreme right-wing parties) is not a new conclusion (see Belchior, 2010; Converse and Pierce, 1986: 128; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996: 92–5; Holmberg, 1989: 19–23; Iversen, 1994: 168–75; Thomassen, 1999: 46–50). In fact, and as postulated by Rabinowitz and MacDonald’s directional model, voters generally seem to look for the party that offers the most intense alternative that matches their own preferred political views (Rabinowitz et al., 2003; Valen and Narud, 2007: 300). Another reason may simply be that, across parties, voters prefer more central positions than MPs. As previous research has demonstrated, voters’ ideologically more central positions can potentially be explained by citizens having lower levels of ideological sophistication than elites (see, for example, Converse and Pierce, 1986: Ch. 7).

We will now turn to the measures of relative congruence, which are supposed to be more accurate than absolute measures, inasmuch as they control for the variance of electorates. Figure 3 presents the standardized mean differences for policy issues in both dimensions and for left–right placement.

Although it varies depending on the issue at stake, when controlling for the variance within parties, the PS and the PPD/PSD tend to be among the most congruent parties. Figure 3 is especially illuminating when it presents the mean results for each dimension and across parties. Albeit supported by a different measure than Figure 2 above, it shows a remarkably similar representation. This suggests that the control for party–voter variance does not significantly change the MP–voter congruence results. Taken together and considering both dimensions simultaneously, the catchall parties present the best performances. In general, it is possible to confirm that the left-wing parties perform better on the left–right dimension and the right-wing parties perform better on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. Party type can be relevant, but both a party’s left–right position and the kind of issue are as important, or even more so.

Although it controls for variance, *standardized mean differences* does so at the party level, that is, it does not consider each voter’s distance to the median voter in the party individually, as centrism does, but rather voters’ standard deviation from the mean position of voters within parties. This is why centrism is considered to be a stronger measure of congruence, and the reason why it is our last and most demanding test.

Figure 4 presents the values for centrism by party and issue dimension. Inasmuch as variance is controlled at the individual level, it is not surprising that the scenario for centrism differs somewhat from previous results. Incongruence regarding the left–right dimension continues to be higher

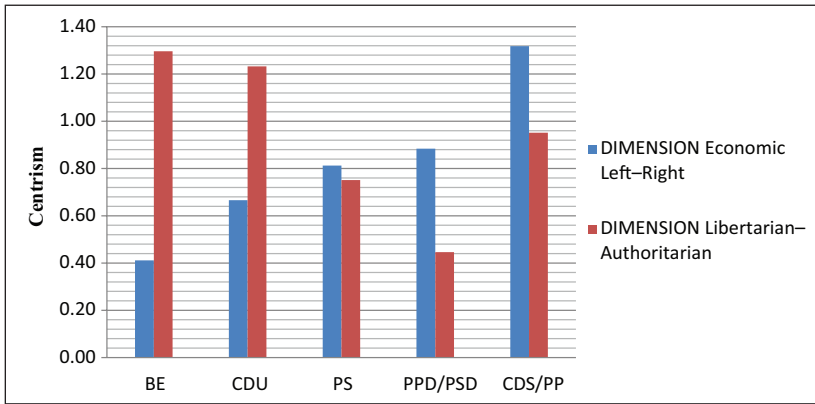


Figure 4. Centrism Across Policy Dimensions (the Mean of Centrism).

among the right-wing parties and incongruence regarding the libertarian–authoritarian dimension continues to be higher for left-wing parties.

In the case of the catchall parties, given that their MPs tend to be ideologically more moderate than voters, the reason for the increase in incongruence appears to lie at the variance level: by agglomerating a significant mass of ideologically dispersed voters, catchall parties appear to achieve a good congruence with voters in average terms. However, if we consider the discrepancies within the electorate, the degree of congruence falls somewhat, inasmuch as those discrepancies are highlighted by centrism. That means that the catchall parties have an advantage in terms of corresponding to their voters’ policy preferences if absolute measures are used. This effect is less pronounced when we use a measure that controls for voters’ variance.

However, if we sum up all the centrist scores per party, disregarding the issue dimension, the two catchall parties are undoubtedly the most congruent.¹⁴ Adding both dimensions is especially justified if we consider their catchall electoral strategy: these parties are programmatically more diffuse and eclectic than their ideological counterparts. Therefore, although controlling for voter variance somewhat attenuates the position of catchall parties as the most congruent, the fact is that they nonetheless continue to perform better than ideological parties if we consider the policy issues as a whole.

The control of voter variance also reveals that, as we expected and have seen in our earlier analysis (that ideological left parties perform better), catchall parties do not appear to be associated with better congruence on the traditional left–right dimension. Voter tendency to adopt a leftward position regarding traditional socioeconomic policy issues seems to be the explanation for this result.

Another way of looking at the data in order to consolidate results is to consider catchall and ideological types of parties by aggregating parties. What is the level of congruence each party type generates regarding their voters? Considering the mean congruence score for each issue and party type (catchall versus ideological), catchalls perform worse than ideological parties on only five policy issues (all belonging to the left–right dimension) of nineteen.

Figure 5 offers a picture of this aggregate-level analysis. The relationship between party type and policy issue shows that ideological parties are less congruent than catchall ones, especially regarding the libertarian–authoritarian dimension; catchall parties do worse with regard to left–right issues. These findings clarify our previous conclusions, allowing us to state that policy issues do indeed matter in the Portuguese party system, but party type is not an irrelevant

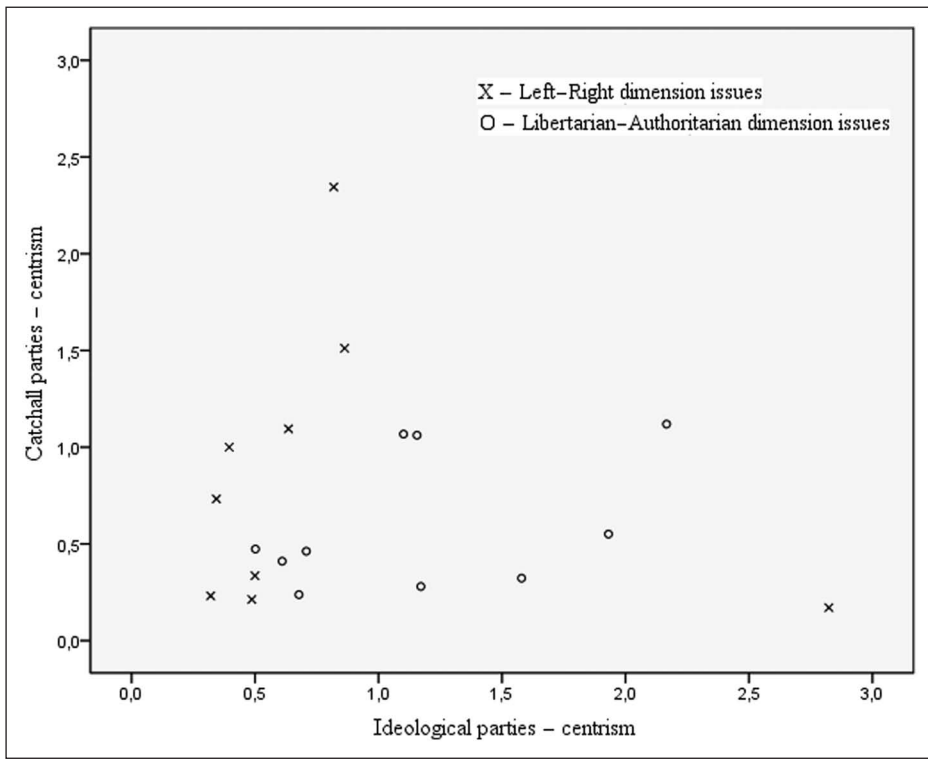


Figure 5. Catchall Versus Ideological Parties' Centrism, by Policy Issue.

variable – quite the opposite. Different types of parties seem to perform differently, with catchalls performing better than ideologicals (although not remarkably so).

Concluding remarks and discussion

The central goal of this research was to compare the relevance of party type (catchall versus ideological) to an explanation of the level of MP-voter congruence regarding Portuguese political parties. Concomitant to that first goal, it was also our intention to control this relationship by using different measures of policy congruence. Using four different kinds of measure (from absolute and rough measures to relative and more accurate ones) we compared the relevance of party type across a set of 19 policy issues (socioeconomic left-right versus libertarian-authoritarian). Similar results were obtained regardless of the measure in use.

Because the electorate traditionally tends to place itself in the center, more congruent catchall parties would be an expectable result. This was what we observed, especially when using measures of absolute congruence. However, the control of variance with regard to voters' political preferences in the measures of relative congruence (especially centrism) showed that of the two Portuguese catchall parties, only the PPD/PSD managed to perform better than the ideological parties and only in one of the dimensions of competition: libertarian-authoritarian. This means that when we control for the dispersion of voters' policy preferences, the importance that is found for catchall parties using absolute measures of congruence tends to decline. Nor is the expectation that catchall parties would do better with regard to the most ideological and politicized issues fulfilled

when we control for voter variance; more radical left-wing parties tend to perform better (because voters tend to be more left leaning in relation to socioeconomic issues).

This finding underscores the importance of using alternative measures of policy congruence: catchall parties are more congruent in absolute terms, but their constituencies are also more heterogeneous; once we control for this heterogeneity, the higher levels of congruence in catchall parties is greatly reduced. However, it is remarkable to note that even using relative measures, the catchall parties continue to generate better levels of congruence than the ideological ones (although not to a substantial degree). This is what we find if the set of issues is considered simultaneously (consonant with the catchall parties' electoral strategy) or if we look at the catchall parties effectively as a type (by aggregating parties). To sum up, as we move from absolute to relative measures of congruence, the privileged levels of congruence with voters enjoyed by catchall parties in the Portuguese party system tend to decline. However, these parties can still be seen as the most congruent when compared with the ideological parties.

In terms of direction of policy preferences, the left-wing parties are more congruent than the right-wing ones on left–right issues: they are more in tune with an electorate that is overwhelmingly leftist in terms of its socioeconomic policy preferences. The opposite is true for the authoritarian–libertarian divide: the right-wing parties are clearly more in tune with a predominantly conservative or authoritarian electorate on issues related to authority, immigration, or alternative lifestyles. One explanation for this may be that each of the dimensions contains issues which differentiate ideological identities on the left and the right and which are politically communicated with differing degrees of efficacy: it seems that on the left it is the economic and social questions linked to the left–right dimension that are more effective, while on the right it is the moral and lifestyle-related issues tied to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension.

In addition, overall policy issues anchored in the left–right divide tend to produce higher levels of MP–voter congruence in the Portuguese political parties than policy issues anchored in the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. This is an unsurprising finding if we consider that 'left–right' is a dimension that is powerful and more politicized when it comes to organizing individuals' political thought and behavior, and that 'new politics' issues are still not all that relevant to an explanation of voting behavior in the Portuguese case (Freire, 2005).

Finally, both the type of issue at stake (socioeconomic left–right versus 'new politics') and the location of parties on the left–right spectrum proved important to an explanation of MP–voter policy congruence. What we still do not know is whether these findings with regard to the Portuguese case are valid for other cases. Further efforts should thus be made with a view to achieving a better understanding of the relationship between party type, party location on the left–right spectrum, the type of issue at stake, and MP–voter congruence.

Appendix

Table A1.

	Number of MPs in parliament (2009)	Sample of MPs	Sample of voters
BE	8	3–4	24
CDU	14	7–8	55–69
PS	121	74–76	174–326
PPD/PSD	75	43–45	193–251
CDS/PP	12	8	13

Notes

1. The expression 'MP-voter' is used to designate the relationship between Members of Parliament and their voters' political or ideological positions regarding parties.
2. For support for this assumption, see Belchior and Freire (2013), for example.
3. Although correlation and regression analysis are used by many authors (for example, Achen, 1978; Converse and Pierce, 1986; Dalton, 1985), because our study concerns the assessment of collective congruence these forms of analysis are not used here.
4. Although very close to that of Achen (1978), our measure of centrism considers the median position of citizens instead of the mean in order to overcome the bias that the latter might introduce if the distribution is removed from the normal, which is potentially the case when it comes to citizens (as, for example, Huber and Powell, 1994: 295–6). For support for this option, see also Converse and Pierce (1986: 511–6) and Powell (2000: 94).
5. In order to split the voters into parties, we used party identification instead of voting intention to increase the number of cases (the number of 'party identifiers' was larger than those willing to participate in a possible election).
6. The question asked was phrased in this way: 'People hold different views on political issues. What do you think of the following?' The answers were selected from 'completely disagree' or 'completely agree'.
7. For a review of the literature, see Knutsen (1997), for example.
8. These two scales were constructed using both theoretical guidance and reliability scaling (Chronbach's Alpha). Both procedures revealed that the scales are valid and reliable for both MPs and voters, although with some variation (less reliability for the 'new politics' issues). Space limitations mean we cannot present this information here, but it can be furnished upon request.
9. For further references regarding this, see Freire et al. (2009).
10. The effective sample sizes per political party for the 14 policy issues and left–right position are shown in Appendix Table A1.
11. The whole data analysis performed in this research is available upon request or via the following link: http://www.cies.iscte.pt/np4/?newsId=474&fileName=Is_Party_Type_Relevant_to_an_Explanation.pdf.
12. Although evidencing very similar distributions in terms of socioeconomic policy preferences, the Portuguese catchall parties display two remarkable exceptions concerning public education and health issues. Voters from both parties and PS MPs tend to agree overwhelmingly that the state should play a major role in education and health, that is, they share a leftist position on this issue. However, PPD/PSD MPs are significantly less supportive of state intervention than voters, especially with regard to education, thereby evidencing a clear right-wing stand.
13. The figures are the sum of 'completely agree' plus 'agree', on the one hand, and of 'completely disagree' plus 'disagree', on the other. The average point on the scale has been eliminated in order to emphasize actors' ideological commitment.
14. The following are the figures for the ideological parties: 1.71 for the BE; 1.90 for the CDU; and 2.27 for the CDS/PP. The following are the figures for the catchall parties: 1.56 for the PS and 1.33 for the PPD/PSD.

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