

## Conscientiousness of representatives and agreement with their party positions

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### ABSTRACT

Party unity is an important feature in contemporary democracies. Ideological loyalty, disciplinary measures implemented by party leaders and homogeneity of preferences among elected representatives lead them to act in unison. This study focuses on the last mechanism and assesses under which conditions party representatives agree on policy positions. It argues that the personality trait of conscientiousness is linked to how a representative agrees with her party's position and that this relationship is moderated by her knowledge of dissent between party voters and representatives. This study use data from a comparative survey conducted among 866 representatives in Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland, and among the party constituencies in the four countries. Results show that conscientious representatives are more likely to differ significantly from the position of their party peers if they spend more time on constituency work and if their voters' preferences are not congruent with those of their fellow representatives.


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### Introduction

Party unity is an important feature in contemporary democracies (Lax & Phillips, 2012). It can be sustained through shared policy preferences among elected representatives and their party, beyond pure party loyalty or disciplinary measures implemented by party leaders (Bowler et al., 1999; Kam, 2009; Sieberer, 2006). This study focuses on the extent to which individual representatives agree with the policy positions advocated by their fellow party members. Investigating policy preferences homogeneity at the party level and the policy

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distance between an individual representative and her party peers (i.e. party-representative distance) is relevant for party politics, policy-making and political representation. Cohesion among representatives is a precondition for the policy effectiveness and stability of party governments (Fiorina, 2017). Indeed, government officials need continuous support from their parliamentary allies to pass legislation. This support is best achieved when government parties are made up of representatives who are homogenous in their policy positions (Bowler et al., 1999).<sup>1</sup> In addition, and according to the standard view on pluralist representation (Pitkin, 1967), elected politicians should be responsive to their voters (Stimson et al., 1995) and thus represent their (changing) policy preferences.<sup>2</sup> Cohesive representatives' preferences about specific policy issues are thus crucial for fostering party unity, political representation and, eventually, democratic accountability.

Research on legislative behaviour has recently shown a strong interest in the reasons behind party dissent, i.e. breaking party unity, or the more general phenomena of representatives holding different preferences than their party's position on specific policy issues. A central finding in this work is that representatives' dissent may be motivated by electoral reward (Bøggild, 2020; Bøggild & Pedersen, 2020; Carey, 2007; Carson et al., 2010; Duell et al., 2020; Kam, 2009; Slapin et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2020). Voters positively perceive politicians who follow their own convictions or follow their voters' opinion rather than hewing entirely to the party line. In particular, voters prefer rebel politicians who justify their dissenting voting behaviour by arguing that voters share their own policy positions, i.e. when 'rebels portray themselves as defenders of the delegate principle of responsiveness' (Duell et al., 2020, p. 88). Previous literature has mainly focused on personal and institutional variables as drivers of preferences' homogeneity between representatives and their party, largely ignoring the impact of politicians' personalities. Despite this lack of focus on the importance of individual differences in personality, a growing number of studies show that personality traits matter for politicians and politics. Personality traits influence political positions (Joly et al. 2018; Best, 2011; Desrochers et al., 2019; Dynes et al., 2019; Krouwel et al., 2017; Schoonvelde et al., 2019). They also help structure voter-representative congruence (Bøggild et al., 2019; Nørgaard & Klemmensen, 2019). We extend these two strands of literature by examining whether the level of conscientiousness – i.e. one of the Big Five personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 2008) – of elected representatives is associated with their level of agreement with the policy positions supported by their party fellows.

## Theoretical framework

In the last fifty years, many scholars developed meaningful typologies in order to understand how representatives exercise their legislative mandate

(Eulau et al., 1959; Scully & Farrell, 2003; Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997). Even though these theories differ in the impact they give to political parties, they all agree that representatives serve different and potentially competing principals (Carey, 2007; Kam, 2009). While their party is responsible for their nomination, the voters are the ones who elected them into office. Therefore, representatives have to please both of these groups, which often amounts to a high-wire dance. To determine a representative linkage between representatives and their two principals, the measurement of preferences' homogeneity has emerged as one of the main concepts to study substantive representation.

According to Louwse and Andeweg (2020, pp. 276–277), 'policy congruence' is defined as the 'similarity of policy preferences of voters, on the one hand, and the preferences and actions of representatives on the other hand'. In doing so, policy congruence differs from policy responsiveness in their static measures, as the former focus on the extent of variety between voters and representatives at a given point of time, while the latter focus on how representatives react to policy shifts within some constituency (Soroka & Wleziën, 2010). However, we cannot only measure the policy distance between party voters and their representatives, but also between the latter and their party. These two policy positions might not be the same, which actually might be positive for political representation (Önnudóttir, 2014). Even though parties have established the instrument of party discipline in order to guarantee ideological purity and unity amongst their party members, representatives might still differ in their policy preferences from their party. One reason for this deviation could be that they want to be close to what they feel their party constituency stands for, which several recent studies suggest (Bøggild, 2020; Bøggild & Pedersen, 2020; Duell et al., 2020; Klingler et al., 2019; Slapin et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2020).

This study advances that an important explanation for the policy distance between the policy preferences of an individual representative and the policy position advocated by her fellow party representatives are her personality traits, and, in particular, the level of her conscientiousness. Works in political psychology claim that there is a relationship between personality traits, party ideology and political behaviour (Carney et al., 2008; Fatke, 2017; Jost et al., 2003; Mondak, 2010; Sibley et al., 2012). Previous empirical studies of the impact of personality traits on policy preferences have yielded robust results for two personality traits captured by the Big Five model. On the one hand, 'Openness to Experience' is strongly predictive of liberal policy preferences of both citizens and elected politicians. This finding is consistent across policy domains (e.g. socioeconomic and cultural issues), and political systems (see Gerber et al., 2011 for evidence on citizens; and Amsalem & Sheffer, 2023 for evidence on elected representatives). On the other hand, 'Conscientiousness' is directly associated with conservative attitudes and preferences among citizens (Bakker et al., 2021; Carney et al., 2008; Gerber

et al., 2010; Mondak, 2010; Xu et al., 2021). In contrast, this personality trait does not predict the policy positions adopted by elected officials (Amsalem & Sheffer, 2023, p. 1290). The differentiated impact of conscientiousness on citizens' and representatives' preferences suggests that we should not expect a systematic policy congruence (toward conservatism on socioeconomic and cultural policy issues) between voters and elites with similar levels of conscientiousness. It is therefore interesting to investigate whether this particular personality trait influences how representatives position themselves between constituency and party. When having to choose between their party colleagues and their voters, representatives may decide to follow either their voters or their party, but this may well depend on their personality traits, and their conscientiousness in particular.

The personality trait of *conscientiousness* captures a socially prescribed impulse that facilitates goal-directed behaviour (Gerber et al., 2011, p. 693). Representatives with high level of conscientiousness are self-disciplined and reliable politicians with a high sense of duty: 'They display strong will-power and responsibility, and their actions result from careful consideration of outcomes' (Amsalem & Sheffer, 2023, p. 121). In order to be consistent, conscientious representatives probably avoid adopting policy positions that are diverging from the party line, even if this could be rewarding electorally at the individual level. They will rather stay loyal to the party leadership and conform to the policy positions of their fellow party representatives. They see it at their duty to remain faithful to the policy positions advocated by their party and avoid the negative outcomes of party division on policymaking and politics. This is highly plausible since we learned from previous studies that a high level of conscientiousness is also related to risk-avoidance behaviour (Mondak & Halperin, 2008, p. 347). Consequently, we expect that the more conscientious representatives are, the less they will dissent from the party line (Hypothesis 1).

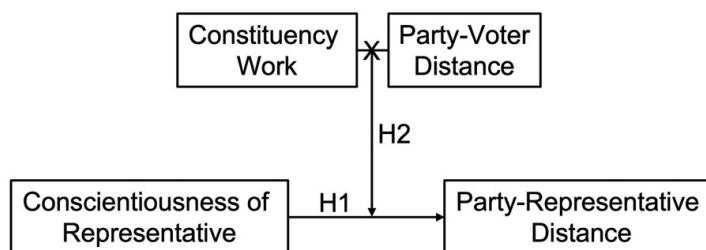
However, the situation that conscientious representatives are facing is quite different if they know that their party voters hold policy preferences that are at odds with those of the party's representatives, e.g. through increased constituency work (see Kingdon, 1968, 1984; Walgrave et al., 2022a). We expect constituency work to provide information about the extent to which voters agree with the party's position. Therefore, we argue that this sensitive information about a low voter-party congruence will strongly moderate their loyalty to the party (Hypothesis 2). This expectation needs some clarification since the literature on the perceptual accuracy of elected politicians shows that representatives are not very good at estimating the policy preferences of the general population and of their own party voters (Walgrave et al., 2022a). However, one can reasonably assume that politicians investing more time in constituency work (Fenno, 1977) will be more frequently in contact with their constituency and, thus, more able to

accurately guess the policy positions of their party voters. Furthermore, Mondak and Halperin (2008, pp. 343–344) have also suggested that people who score high on conscientiousness are more likely to participate to political discussions and, furthermore to attend local political meetings. Thus, conscientious representatives will make more efforts to know what their voters want. Previous studies confirm that representatives do not only engage in constituency work due to electoral incentives (Ashworth & Mesquita, 2006; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Mayhew, 2004), but they also use it in order to express group norms (Broockman, 2013; Butler & Broockman, 2011; Giger et al., 2020). The more time representatives spend with their voters, the more informed they should be about those voters' policy preferences.

Furthermore, conscientious representatives will also consider more seriously the voters preferences when they have to make up their own minds. Knowing that their voters disagree with the party policy position, they have a better capacity to advocate the diverging preferences of their constituency. In addition, conscientiousness may also affect a politician's understanding or 'style' of representation. Bøggild et al. (2019) show that personality traits are related to representatives' preferences for personalised representation. Furthermore, personality traits affect the chances of a politician gaining media exposure. Representatives scoring high on conscientiousness are found to be more visible in the news (Amsalem et al. 2020). If the personality trait of conscientiousness influences the way how representatives portray themselves, then becoming aware, through constituency work, that a gap exists between voters and party preferences might be important in order to understand how they think about representation.

In addition, it has been showed that representatives strongly diverge from their party position with regard to policy issues on which they perceive their electorate to be at odds with what the party wants (Varone & Helfer, 2022). Accordingly, representatives who devote a lot of time to constituency work and, thus, who probably know better their voters' preferences, do not agree with their party when their voters do not agree with the party either. This behaviour is a priori responsive since it means representing voters instead of following party peers who are not aligned with voters.

In sum, our theoretical approach relates the personality trait of conscientiousness to expectations about representatives' positioning vis-à-vis their party and their voters (see [Figure 1](#)). It does not only focus on the direct impact of conscientiousness of representatives (Hypothesis 1), but also consider the moderating effects of their personalised interactions with party voters and of preferences' gap between party voters and representatives (Hypothesis 2).



**Figure 1.** Theoretical expectations.

## Research design, measurement and method

The research design utilises data from two cross-national surveys that solicited responses from representatives and voters in four countries in 2018. The legislative survey was carried out amongst elected members of Parliament at the national and subnational level (e.g. Canton Bern and Geneva in Switzerland; Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium; Ontario in Canada) by the respective country teams. In doing so, all teams used the same approach to contact a representative for a face-to-face meeting. The meetings usually took between 45 and 60 min, with the survey taking approximately 30 min to complete. The responses were recorded on a tablet or a laptop computer by the representatives themselves. A total of 866 elected representatives in Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland took part in the survey.

The selection of these four countries as an empirical setup is based on the following criteria: it combines an emblematic case of partitocracy in Belgium (Depauw, 2003; Dewachter, 1981; DeWinter et al., 1996), strong party systems in Canada (Westminster model) and in Germany and, a weak party system in Switzerland (Ladner, 2004; Lanfranchi & Lüthi, 1999; Sciarini, 2015). Table 1 presents an overview of the descriptive statistics of the sample. It shows that the response rates are unequal, but within typical experiences, across countries. Nevertheless, the distribution of the respondents' characteristics regarding party membership does not vary very strongly from the full population of representatives within each national or regional parliament.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1.** Overview of sample.

Country	Parliament ( <i>N</i> )	Study ( <i>N</i> )	Response rate (%)	Female (%)	Age (mean)
Belgium	421	324	77%	34%	50
Canada	462	80	17%	39%	52
Germany	709	79	11%	25%	51
Switzerland	495	368	74%	32%	51
Total	1889	866	46%	33%	51

Note: The countries' sample is based on the following representatives: Belgium (national and regional), Canada (national and regional), Germany (national), and Switzerland (national and regional).

In order to collect information on the public opinion of the representatives' party constituency, a survey with exactly the same policy statements as the representatives' survey (see Table A2 in the Appendix) was conducted in each country around the time of the interviews with representatives. The Belgian data were collected in Flanders and Francophone Belgium (Wallonia and Brussels) in two surveys conducted within two weeks at the end of February 2018 ( $N = 2389$  for Flanders and  $N = 2380$  for Wallonia/Brussels). The Canadian team collected the data in a nine-day data collection in June 2018 ( $N = 895$ ). The German data was collected in October 2018 ( $N = 1520$ ), while the data from Switzerland was collected between June and August 2018 using representative probability sample ( $N = 4677$ ).

Our measure of *Party-Representative Distance* is based on the individual representatives' positions on policy statements. During the survey, we asked incumbent representatives to provide their own preferences on a set of concrete policy proposals (eight in Belgium and Canada, and nine in Germany and Switzerland). We focus on policy statements to measure political congruence for two reasons. By relying on policy proposals (instead of voting behaviour on legislative acts), we are able to avoid the party discipline effect that is observable in many parliaments (Bailer, 2018; Godbout & Høyland, 2017; Traber et al., 2014), and we are also able to compare representatives with their voters directly, as we have used the exact same policy proposals in the population surveys. These policy proposals are country specific, but they were selected according to the same criteria. First, the policy proposals are on non-technical issues, which are easily understandable by representatives and by citizens as well. Second, the policy issues at stake are politically relevant at the time of the survey (e.g. topics on the political agenda). Third, the policy proposals cover a large spectrum of policy issues (e.g. economic, social, environmental, defense policy, etc.) on the socio-economic left-right axis and the cultural progressive-conservative divide. Fourth, the distribution of the public opinion (e.g. clear versus unclear majorities supporting the policy proposals) varies across policy issues.<sup>4</sup> The representatives' and party voters' responses rank on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree).

To be able to calculate Party-Representative Distance, we assume that the party position is the position that is adopted by the majority of the party's representatives (see Kam, 2001 who follows a similar logic). We compare the representative's individual response with the percentage of representatives that share this position (either disagree or agree to the policy proposal) and then estimate the mean of this share for all policy proposals. However, the validity of this measure of party position is limited if the number respondents per party is insufficient. As a consequence, we decided to put the cut-off point at a minimum of five percent of the parliament seats of each party. Empirically, we see substantial agreement among representatives within each

party. Over the full sample, on average 71 per cent of members from the same party group share a randomly drawn representative's policy position.

The *level of conscientiousness* is measured by the two relevant items of the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003): (1) Dependable, self-disciplined and (2) disorganised, careless (reversed). The TIPI scale is a short version of the Big Five personality traits and is thus well suited to elite surveys where length should be as short as possible. Originally coming from the field of psychology, the TIPI is widely used in the study of political elites (Amsalem et al., 2020; Joly et al., 2018; Dietrich et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2021; Scott & Medeiros, 2020). The TIPI scale is a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for politicians' conscientiousness across our various samples. There is little difference between the mean scores of conscientiousness across the countries.

The moderating variable *constituency work* measures the time representatives spent with their voters with the following question from the representatives' survey: 'In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on direct interaction with citizens in your constituency (having conversations with citizens, going to local events, talking with local associations)?'.

The second moderating variable is the *Party-Voter Distance*, which estimates whether the constituency's preferences differ from the representatives' position. We focus here on observed deviation and control for the objective deviation between (average) party voters' position and the (average) party representatives' position. In order to measure this difference, we compare the percentage of citizens agreeing on a policy proposal in the representatives' party electorate (i.e. population survey) with the percentage of agreeing party group colleagues from the representatives' same party (i.e. elites survey). The variable *Party-Voter Distance* ranges from 0 (constituency and party have always the same position) to 100 (constituency and party have never the same position).

As we aim to understand the relationship between the personality trait of conscientiousness and Party-Representative Distance, we also adjust for other factors that potentially could explain variation in the dependent

**Table 2.** Overview of personality traits distribution.

Country	Conscientiousness
Belgium	5.36 (1.00)
Canada	5.84 (0.91)
Germany	5.83 (0.84)
Switzerland	5.85 (0.92)
Total	5.65 (0.97)

Note: Sample descriptive statistics (cont.). Values are means for politicians' conscientiousness trait on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Standard deviations reported in parentheses.



variable. First, we assume that the *legislative role* of representatives has a potential impact on Party-Representative congruence. We have thus asked the representatives whether they exactly follow the preferences of citizens (i.e. act as ‘delegates’) or follow their own convictions while pursuing the interests of citizens (i.e. act as ‘trustees’) (scale points from 0: follow their own convictions while pursuing the interest of citizens to 10: follow citizens’ preferences exactly). Note that this control variable is not strongly correlated with the main independent variable (i.e. level of conscientiousness), nor with the first component of the moderating variable (i.e. constituency work). Second, we assume that *female* representatives are ideologically more distant from their party, since they in general hold different policy positions than their colleagues and there are usually underrepresented (Ferland, 2020). Third, we expect that more *experienced politicians* who have been in politics for a longer time profit from this longer time span to develop a more independent position towards their party compared to their less experienced counterparts (Kam, 2009, p. 201). Fourth, we assume that the *ideological position* of the party might influence the party congruence. Based on a previous study by Walgrave et al. (2022b), which used the same empirical data to investigate ideological agreement of parties, we expect that representatives from left-wing parties<sup>5</sup> diverge less from the party line on several policy proposals than right-wing parties. The authors argue that left-wing parties are generally organised in a more centralised and hierarchical way and based on a more unifying ideology than right-wing parties, and that their candidates are probably more screened on ideological proximity than the potential candidates of right-wing parties are. Fifth, we include both the *party size* as well as the *state level*, since we assume that bigger parties as well as those on the national level are more professionalised and have thus more resources to control the party line (Bailer, 2018; Squire, 2007). As a consequence, we integrate both personal and political traits in our analyses.<sup>6</sup>

Our observations are nested in two ways: representatives’ responses to policy statements are nested within representatives, who are in turn nested within parliaments. Hence, our observations are not fully independent from each other, which might affect estimates of the effects of personality on political congruence. To account for this structure in the data, we use multilevel mixed regression models with random intercepts at the representative and parliament level.

## Findings

This section summarises the results of our multilevel analyses. As a first step, we estimate the basic models that illustrate the relationship between a representative’s conscientiousness and the distance between her own policy preferences and the positions advocated by her party (see Table 3). In the

**Table 3.** Party-voter distance, conscientiousness, constituency work, and party-representative distance.

	Basic model (1)	Personal model (2)	Political model (3)	Interaction model (4)
Party-voter distance	-0.44*** (0.01)	-0.42*** (0.01)	-0.38*** (0.01)	-1.18*** (0.19)
Conscientiousness	-0.85*** (0.19)	-0.85*** (0.18)	-0.84*** (0.17)	-3.35*** (0.98)
Constituency work	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.14 (0.12)
Female		2.91*** (0.37)	1.10** (0.36)	1.26*** (0.35)
Age		-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.04** (0.02)
CMP left-right score			-0.16*** (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.01)
Delegate vs. trustee			0.37*** (0.09)	0.42*** (0.09)
Party size			-0.07** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)
National MP vs. regional MP			3.58*** (0.38)	3.26*** (0.37)
Party-voter distance*conscientiousness				0.02*** (0.03)
Party-voter distance*constituency work				0.02*** (0.00)
Conscientiousness* constituency work				0.06** (0.02)
Party-voter distance*conscientiousness*constituency work				-0.00*** (0.00)
Constant	87.82*** (1.87)	90.06*** (1.96)	83.92*** (1.94)	89.22*** (6.02)
N	5742	5694	5475	5475
Log. likelihood	-23099.58	-22688.50	-21415.48	-21309.41
AIC	46213.15	45395.00	42856.95	42652.81
BIC	46259.740	45454.825	42942.854	42765.146

Note: Results are from a multi-level mixed regression model. Standardised regression coefficients shown with robust standard errors in parentheses.

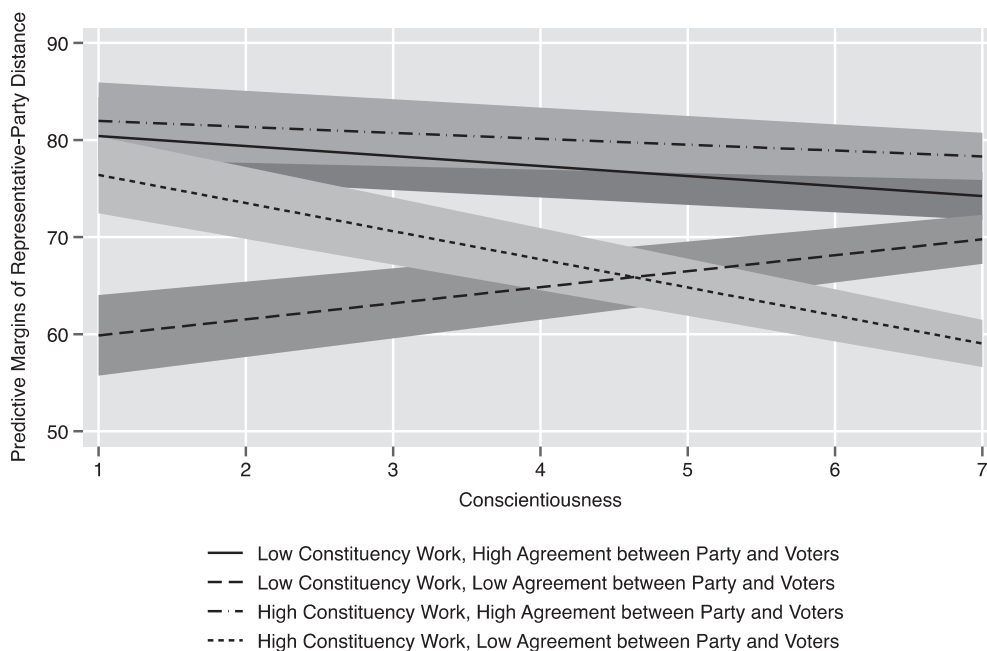
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

theory section, we argued that the difference between parties and their voters, conscientiousness, constituency work, and party-voter distance are expected to be negatively correlated. Model 1 shows that there is indeed a negative and significant relationship for both party-voter distance and conscientiousness. However, constituency work is not related to party-representative distance.

If we include personal and other political variables (Models 2 and 3), the findings remain the same. However, female, national and ‘Trustee’ representatives seem to be closer to their party, while elder representatives and those in right-wing and bigger parties tend to disagree more often with the party median.

In the following, we test our theoretical explanation. We have argued that conscientiousness is negatively related to the distance between the representative’s and party’s positions, for which our models provide some evidence. However, the difference between parties and voters is also a strong link to party-representative distance, which indicates that representatives have fewer incentives to deviate if their constituency follows the party line. However, we will test whether party-voter distance and constituency work might be moderators of this relationship (see Model 4). In order to visualise these relationships, we have plotted the predictive margins for representative-party distance in [Figure 2](#).

The figure shows that representative-party distance is correlated with constituency work and party-voter agreement. The more conscientious a



**Figure 2.** Predictive margins of representative-party distance. Note: Predictive margins of representative-party distance for lowest and highest deciles in constituency work and conscientiousness as function of party-voter difference.

representative is, the less likely she is to agree with her party when constituency work is high and party-voter agreement is low. Conversely, representatives are more likely to agree with their party when they spend less time in the constituency and when the party and voters are in disagreement. For high levels of party-voter agreement, we do not see significant changes across different levels of conscientiousness. Thus, when voters share the party's position, representatives have no incentive to deviate. We conclude that party-voter difference and constituency work act as a multidimensional moderator between the relationship of conscientiousness and representative-party distance.

## Conclusion

In this study, we demonstrate that politicians' personality traits are linked to their congruence with their party's positions. Personality traits liberate some representatives from the urge to please their party leaders and colleagues. The literature on representative-party distance tends to agree that individual characteristics of representatives are a main driver of policy dissent within a party (Bøggild, 2020; Bøggild & Pedersen, 2020; Duell et al., 2020; Slapin et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2020). Yet, the question of how personality traits explain variances in representative-party distance has received only little attention until now. Although first comparative studies have analyzed personality traits of elites and how they influence representatives' policy positions on specific issues (see Amsalem & Sheffer, 2023), they have not examined how personality traits map onto party dissent. In light of this, our study focuses on conscientiousness and combines elites and citizens' data in order to understand the impact of personality traits on representative-party distance between constituency, representatives, and parties.

Using two comparative surveys for elected representatives and voters, this study explores the associations between conscientiousness and political congruence. In contrast to our assumptions, we do not find robust results for a negative relationship between conscientiousness and the congruence of representatives with their party. However, our findings show that, when party voters' preferences are not congruent with the preferences of their party representatives, conscientious representatives are more likely to differ significantly from the position of their party peers if they spend more time on constituency work.

The findings have important implications for the literature on representative-party distance as well as substantive representation in general. On the one hand, we go beyond the mere study of personality and policy positions by examining the role of dispositions for party deviation. On the other hand, we also emphasize the importance of personalities of political elites that we have witnessed in the last decade (Nai & Maier, 2021). Third, our study

underlies that representatives do not only follow party leaders in forming a policy position, but also react to their constituents. The findings display the relevance of focusing on the multiple principals (i.e. party leaders, fellows and voters) and accountability relationships that elected representatives face. Disentangling the drivers of within-party cohesion regarding specific policy issues is crucial to better grasp the factors which enhance substantive representation. Bringing conscientiousness as personality trait into this debate is a promising research avenue.

The study has several limitations. Different methodological issues may be present in elite studies. This study has used a survey to capture the policy preferences of elected representatives (see Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014 for a similar comparative survey). A central problem of such legislative survey is often self-selection of the participants, which might question the survey's representativeness. This might be the case for certain countries of our study, even if the distribution of the respondents' characteristics (e.g. party membership) does not vary significantly from the full sample. Furthermore, misreporting or social desirability might be a problem (Bundi et al., 2018), but this is why we did not use the perceived representative-party distance by the representatives, but rather used our own estimation based on policy preferences. Nevertheless, to improve the validity of the policy preferences measurement, further studies should probably combine elite survey (as conducted here) with other methods such as voting behaviour (Willumsen & Öhberg, 2017), text-based scaling methods (Lowe et al., 2011) and/or voting advice application (Binderkrantz et al., 2020; Tromborg, 2021).

Moreover, the generalisability of our findings to other parliaments may be questioned, since we only studied four parliaments. Although the study deliberately selected parliaments with different structures, there are many other parliamentary systems. This may be particularly problematic for the interaction between constituency work and conscientiousness, as the former varies across parliaments. While we cannot estimate a multilevel model due to the limited number of parliaments, as a robustness check we computed a model in which we excluded extreme cases in terms of average constituency work. Keeping only the cases between the 25th and 75th percentiles does not affect our results (see Appendix Table A4). Therefore, our results do not seem to be affected by extreme cases of constituency work.

Another important limitation of this study is that it provides only a cursory treatment of the literature on representation, and it may overlook important nuances and complexities in the concept of representation. For example, by focusing only on substantive representation according to party or constituency averages, the study may fail to consider other important dimensions of representation, such as the representation of national

voters or the differences between republican and pluralist goals as outlined by different authors (Rehfeld 2009; Wolkenstein & Wrátil, 2021). This limitation can potentially reduce the depth and comprehensiveness of the study's findings and conclusions. This is even more important, since we are not able to show robust findings across our five countries, mostly due missing statistical power. One future avenue is to explore the representation of national voters in greater depth. This could involve examining how representatives balance the interests of their local constituents with those of the broader national community, as well as how they respond to shifting national priorities and challenges. Additionally, researchers could investigate how different electoral systems and institutional arrangements influence the representation of national voters.

The findings of the present study have not only important implications for the study of representation, but also for debates surrounding the personality of political elites. They show that we still know little about the impact of these characteristics (in contrast to citizens) and that political representation is not only a matter of political calculus. Thus, we are convinced that the political transformation from party politics into a more personalized form of politics is fundamental to understand opinion formation, legislative behaviour and democratic representation.

## Notes

1. Note on terminology: Policy positions and policy preferences are used as synonyms.
2. In the conclusion, we discuss the implications of this study for broader conceptions of political representation (see Rehfeld 2009; Wolkenstein & Wrátil, 2021 in particular).
3. An overview of the sample and full population regarding party membership can be found in the Appendix in Table A1.
4. The full list of policy statements asked in all four countries can be found in the Appendix in Table A2.
5. The ideological position of a party is based on the Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker et al., 2015).
6. A detailed list of all variables (operationalization, data source, descriptive statistics) can be found in the Appendix in Table A3.

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