Alike think Alike?
The Effect of Shared Class Background on Policy Preference Congruence Between Citizens and Legislators*

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown that policymakers and policy outcomes in advanced democracies are biased against the preferences of less affluent and working-class citizens. One reason for this inequality in substantive representation might be that most policymakers are well off themselves. In this paper, we explore the effect of shared class background on the congruence between legislators' and citizens' policy preferences. To do so, we rely on original data from surveys conducted among citizens and active legislators in Switzerland. We focus on six economic and welfare policy proposals where we find differences in opinion between social classes. When we match legislators' and citizens' opinion in a one-to-many relationship, we find that social class matters more for lower social classes than for the more affluent, at least for some policy proposals.

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1. Introduction

A growing literature documents that policymaking in advanced democracies is biased in favor of the preferences of affluent citizens (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Persson and Gilljam 2017; Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer 2018). Why do democratically elected politicians not produce policies that are more in line with the preferences of the mass public? To answer this question, it is useful to distinguish between the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations politicians may have to make policies that correspond to the preferences of the affluent rather than the preferences of the less affluent. Politicians are extrinsically motivated when they have an incentive to be more *responsive* to the preferences of the affluent rather than those of the less affluent.[1] 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 not only more "visible" to politicians than the preferences of less affluent citizens, but politicians also have electoral, and perhaps revolving-door, incentives to respond to the former rather than the latter.

Politicians can also be intrinsically motivated to produce policies that are more consistent with the preferences of affluent citizens than the preferences of less affluent citizens. This happens when their personal policy preferences are more congruent with the former than with the latter. 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.

[1] Following Powell (2004, 91), we define responsiveness as "what occurs when the democratic process induces the government to form and implement policies that the citizens want."

While a number of studies have demonstrated that legislative behavior and policy outcomes are biased in favor of the preferences of affluent citizens, few studies have dealt with the reasons that lead to this bias (but see, e.g., Carnes 2016). 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 likelihood that politicians and citizens have congruent attitudes. To answer these questions, we rely on original data from surveys conducted among politicians and citizens in Switzerland. The data contain politicians' and citizens' opinions on 18 policy proposals across nine policy domains. Our empirical strategy proceeds in two steps. First, we identify the policy proposals on which citizens' opinions differ by social class. Second, based on this subset of proposals, we examine the degree of congruence in the attitudes of politicians and social classes and how belonging to the same class affects attitude congruence between politicians and citizens. The results of our analysis indicate that descriptive representation matters for congruence, particularly for lower social classes. We find evidence that in some areas, politicians' opinions are more in line with higher social classes and that representation by politicians from lower social classes does affect congruence positively for the less affluent.

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

2. Previous Literature and Hypotheses

Many studies have demonstrated that legislative behavior and policy outcomes in advanced democracies are more in line with the preferences of affluent citizens than those of less affluent citizens. For the US, Bartels (2008) shows that the roll call votes of senators are more strongly related to the political views of high-income constituents than the views of middle-income constituents and that they are completely unrelated to the views of low-income constituents. Building on Bartels' study, Hayes (2012) also finds US senators' voting behavior to be positively related to high-income constituents' opinions and unrelated to low-income constituents' opinions. Ellis (2012) demonstrates for the US House of Representatives that legislators' voting behavior corresponds more closely to the preferences of more affluent constituents than those of less affluent constituents. Focusing on income biases in US state policymaking, Flavin (2012) shows that state public policy is positively correlated with the opinions of high-income and middle-income citizens but not

with the opinions of low-income citizens. Similarly, Gilens (2005, 2012) finds that the probability of change in US federal government policy 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.

Analyses of representational inequality 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 also biased towards the preferences of well-off citizens in Sweden and Germany, even though economic inequality in these countries is less pronounced than in the US (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 positions of respondents to the position of the executive as well as the position of the ideologically closest party in their respective country. The results indicate that in most countries low-income citizens are less ideologically congruent with the executive and the closest party present in the party system than are middle-income and high-income citizens. The pervasiveness of the representational bias towards the affluent is also observed by Lupu and Warner (2018), who analyze ideological congruence between legislators and citizens in 52 democracies over 31 years. Their results show that elected representatives are consistently more congruent with the affluent than the poor.

As mentioned above, politicians might have extrinsic motivation 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 factors. 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 politicians have similar policy preferences as affluent citizens and, therefore, an intrinsic motivation 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.[2] These findings lead some to speculate that the opinions of the less well-off would get more weight in policymaking if they were descriptively better represented in parliaments.

In this paper, we investigate this crucial relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. First, we hypothesize that the political attitudes of politicians are, on average, more congruent with the attitudes of members of the highest social class than with the attitudes of members of lower classes. Second, we expect that descriptive representation increases the congruence between politicians and citizens belonging to the same class. If it turns out that working-class politicians have opinions that are more congruent with the opinions of working-class citizens than are the opinions of middle-class politicians, then an increase in the descriptive representation of working-class citizens would likely lead to an improvement in their substantive representation.

[2] Studies 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 Model

We conceptualize (and analyze) the congruence between the opinions of politicians and citizens as a one-to-many relationship (Golder and Stramski 2010) with each politician representing many (all) citizens. Our data come from two different surveys: one conducted among active Swiss national and regional MPs and one from a representative sample of Swiss citizens. In both surveys, we asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed with a number of specific policy proposals. We decided to include 18 policy proposals from nine policy areas. These 18 policy proposals (two per policy domain) capture the major cleavages in current Swiss politics, are (relatively) salient to the mass public and politicians, show some disagreement between party electorates and, finally, vary in terms of whether they are within the competence of the national government or the competence of cantonal governments (see Appendix A for an overview). The survey asked MPs and citizens to indicate whether they absolutely disagree, rather disagree, rather agree, or fully agree with a policy proposal or whether they are undecided (neutral or no opinion).

The citizens' survey was conducted among Swiss citizens who are 18 years old or older and live in Switzerland (excluding the Italian-speaking part of Ticino). The survey was carried out by FORS (Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences) between June and August 2018. FORS contacted a nationally representative sample of 10,268 citizens (the probability sample was obtained from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office), of which 4,677 completed the survey (response rate of 46%). Respondents received an invitation by mail with an online access code to the survey and a voucher of 10 CHF. After a first reminder, the second reminder included a paper version of the survey with a return envelope. 1,036 respondents (22%) completed the survey on paper. For these respondents, we are currently missing information on social class, so they are excluded from the analysis.

The politicians' survey was conducted among the MPs who, at the time of data collection, served in either of the two chambers of the Swiss national parliament or in one of two cantonal parliaments (those of Geneva and Bern). Politicians took the survey on a tablet in a personal meeting with a member of the research team. All data were collected between the end of August and mid-December in 2018. A detailed description of the data collection procedure is available from the authors on request. Overall, 370 of the 495 politicians we contacted in our study participated with response rates between 61% (Senate/Council of States) and 88% (Grand Council of the canton of Bern) per parliament. MPs across parties participated with response rates between 56% and

100% for the larger parties. In total, our data include 490,796 dyads between 361 politicians and 2718 citizens.

Our goal is to explore the congruence between the political attitudes of politicians and citizens of different classes. To obtain a measure of congruence for each policy proposal, we first recoded the 4-point opinion scale into a binary one (agree/disagree) and dropped the "undecided (don't know or no opinion)" categories for both citizens and politicians. Next, we determined for each politician-citizen pair whether the politician and citizen had the same opinion or not. We will run a separate model for each policy proposal, using the respective congruence measure as the dependent variable. In this paper, we focus on the policy proposals covering economic issues and those related to welfare policy (marked bold in the list in Appendix A).

Our independent variable social class is based on a five-class scheme by Daniel Oesch and colleagues (Oesch 2006; Oesch and Rennwald 2010). It emphasizes a person's work logic and the marketable skills this person possesses and thus goes beyond using a binary distinction of social classes, for example into white-/blue-collar workers (e.g. Alford 1962) or manual/non-manual groups. Some argue such a scheme is better able to map the distinctions in societies that have seen a growth in the service sector and a rising middle class such as Switzerland. We differentiate the five social classes listed in Table 1 but collapse class 4 and 5 because of the low number of politicians in these two lowest social classes (n=10 total).

Table 1. Overview of the five social classes.

Social class	Description	Politicians per social class (%)
1. Higher-grade service class	Large employers, self-employed and employed professionals, managers	257 (71%)
2. Lower-grade service class	Semi-professionals and associate managers	33 (9%)
3. Small business owners	With or without employees	64 (18%)
4. Skilled workers	Craft workers, clerks and skilled service workers	9 (2%)
& 5. Unskilled workers		& 1 (<1%)

To code the social class of the citizens in our sample, we use information collected in the survey about their occupation (recoded into ISCO) and information about their status of employment and number of employees and then apply the syntax provided by Oesch (http://people.unil.ch/danieloesch/). For politicians, we use politicians' official occupancy as reported in their profile on the parliament website. In Switzerland, being a politician is not a full-time occupancy, not even at the national level. The Swiss are rather proud of their militia system and even politicians who derive

most of their income from other (possibly related) functions are expected to have, or at least list, a professional occupancy outside of politics. An independent coder looked through all the mentioned occupations to code the social class according to the five classes from Oesch and colleagues. For business owners we relied on the business website to code the number of employees relevant for the Oesch classification (10 or more employees). For politicians who listed themselves as pensioner or housewife, we coded their last occupation if such information was available, for example from a CV on their website.

To analyze the congruence in opinion between politicians and citizens from the same social class, we fit the following regression model for each economic or welfare policy proposal separately:

$$\Pr\left(y_{d(i,j)} = 1\right) = logit^{-1}\left(\alpha + x_{d(i,j)}^{T}\beta + \gamma_i + \delta_j\right),$$

where $d(i,j)$ refers to the dyad formed by politician i and citizen j, $y_{d(i,j)}$ is an indicator variable that takes on the value 1 if politician i and citizen j have the same opinion on a policy proposal and 0 otherwise, $x_{d(i,j)}$ is a vector of indicator variables for the social classes (1 if citizen j is a member of a class and 0 otherwise), an indicator variable for descriptive representation (1 if politician i and citizen j belong to the same class and 0 otherwise), and interactions between the social class indicators and the indicator for descriptive representation, and γ_i and δ_j are random effects for politicians and citizens.

4. Results

Congruence arguably matters most when groups in society have diverging opinions and/or consider some policies more important than others. The figures in Appendix B show the distribution of the opinion by social class for all 18 policy proposals. For some policy proposals, the support between the higher-grade service class, our highest social class, differs significantly from all other social classes. Raising the pension age in Switzerland to 67 has significantly lower support among lower social classes than higher-grade service class and small business owners. When it comes to a classical redistributive policy like raising income taxes for high incomes and lowering it for low incomes, there is significantly more support among lower social classes than the highest one. While for these two proposals we see a clear pattern, differences in opinion between social classes are not as clear cut for other policy proposals. The support for the introduction of single-payer health care at the

cantonal/state level for instance does not vary across social classes. This is the case for many of the other policy proposals we had included.

Social classes might also differ in the importance they attribute to policy proposals, for example when it comes to policies specifically aimed at redistribution. Again, we see different patters depending on the policy (Table 2). When it comes to raising the pension age in Switzerland, we see a clear relationship with social class: the higher the social class, the more importance citizens attribute to this policy change. A similar pattern, albeit reversed, can be observed for redistributive taxation. Here, those in higher social classes find the policy less important than those in lower social classes. However, again social classes do not differ when it comes to the introduction of single-payer health care.

Table 2. Mean importance among citizens for the economic policy proposals per social class.

	Mean importance from 0 (absolutely unimportant) to 10 (very important)					
Social class	Job protectionism	Elderly employees	Redistributive taxation	Taxation of wedded	Pension age	Single-payer health care
1	5.65	8.27	7.44	7.55	7.19	7.02
2	6.32	8.87	8.02	7.3	6.9	6.99
3	6.04	8.14	7.95	7.3	6.76	7.03
4	6.77	9.07	8.15	6.62	6.35	6.89
5	6.38	8.98	8.4	6.77	5.53	7.29
Difference class 5 to 1	0.73	0.71	0.96	-0.78	-1.66	0.27
Difference class 4 to 1	1.12	0.8	0.71	-0.93	-0.84	-0.13

These descriptive results show that we indeed find variation in both support and importance of policies among social classes. Do these differences matter for congruence between politicians and citizens? Does it matter more for some social classes than for others? To address our hypotheses, we run regression models on our data for each policy proposal separately (Figure 1). The upper half of each figure (coefficients Class 2 to Class 4/5) shows the effect on congruence of opinion if a politician and a citizen do *not* come from the same social class. Put differently, we estimate the likelihood that a politician and a citizen have the same opinion if no politician comes from the social class of the citizen. Values on the left side of the dotted line in each figure indicate a negative effect while those on the left point to positive effects (taking into account the confidence intervals).

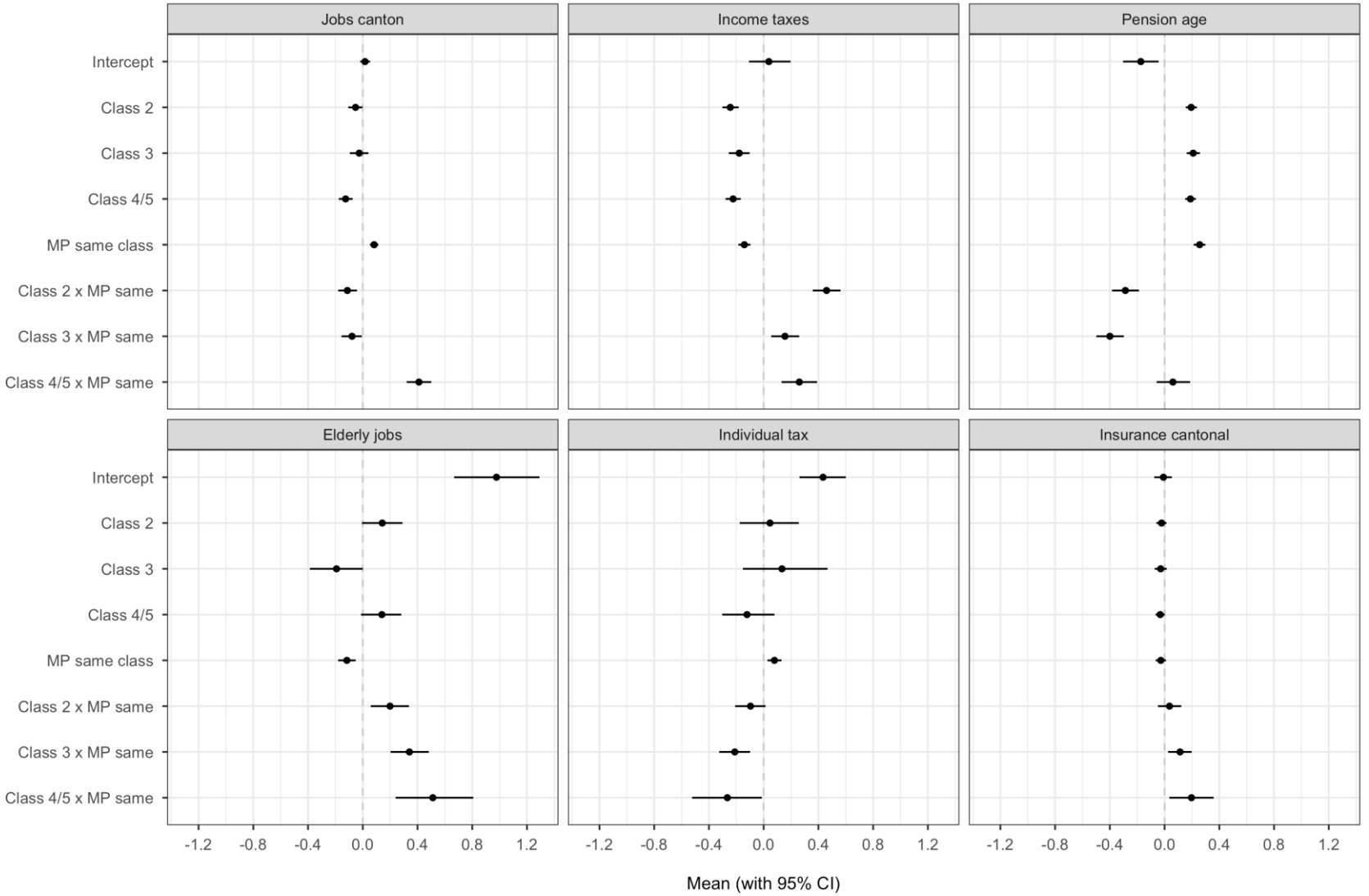
We find evidence that politicians from other social classes are less in line with the opinions of the lowest social class (class 4/5) than that of higher level social classes (see Figure 1). While for the highest social class (class 1, represented by the intercept) is mostly positive or close to zero, it seems

to depend much more on the specific issue at hand for other social classes. This points to descriptive representation playing a more important role for lower social classes than higher ones.

To test, whether there is more congruence between citizens and politicians from the same social classes, we have a look at the interaction effects in the lower half of each figure in Figure 1. Positive effects mean here that people from that class are more congruent with politicians from the same social class compared with politicians from other social classes. We see here that the interaction effect is often positive for class 4/5. To also interpret the size of effects and address our hypotheses in more detail, we calculated predicted probabilities. Those are based on the posterior distribution of the coefficients of each of the models from Figure 1. We estimate the probability that a person's opinion would be matched by a politician when we move from no descriptive representation (i.e. all politicians are from other social classes) to descriptive representation (i.e. the politician is from the same social class). Figure 2 shows again that our interpretation of results depends on the policy at hand. When it comes to protective measures in the job market (figure in the top left, upper half) or rising the pension age (figure in the top right, upper half) then descriptive representation matters a lot for the lower social classes while it seems to have less of an effect for class 2 and 3. Across policies, it seems that congruence in opinion in the lowest (and highest) social classes is most affected by descriptive representation.

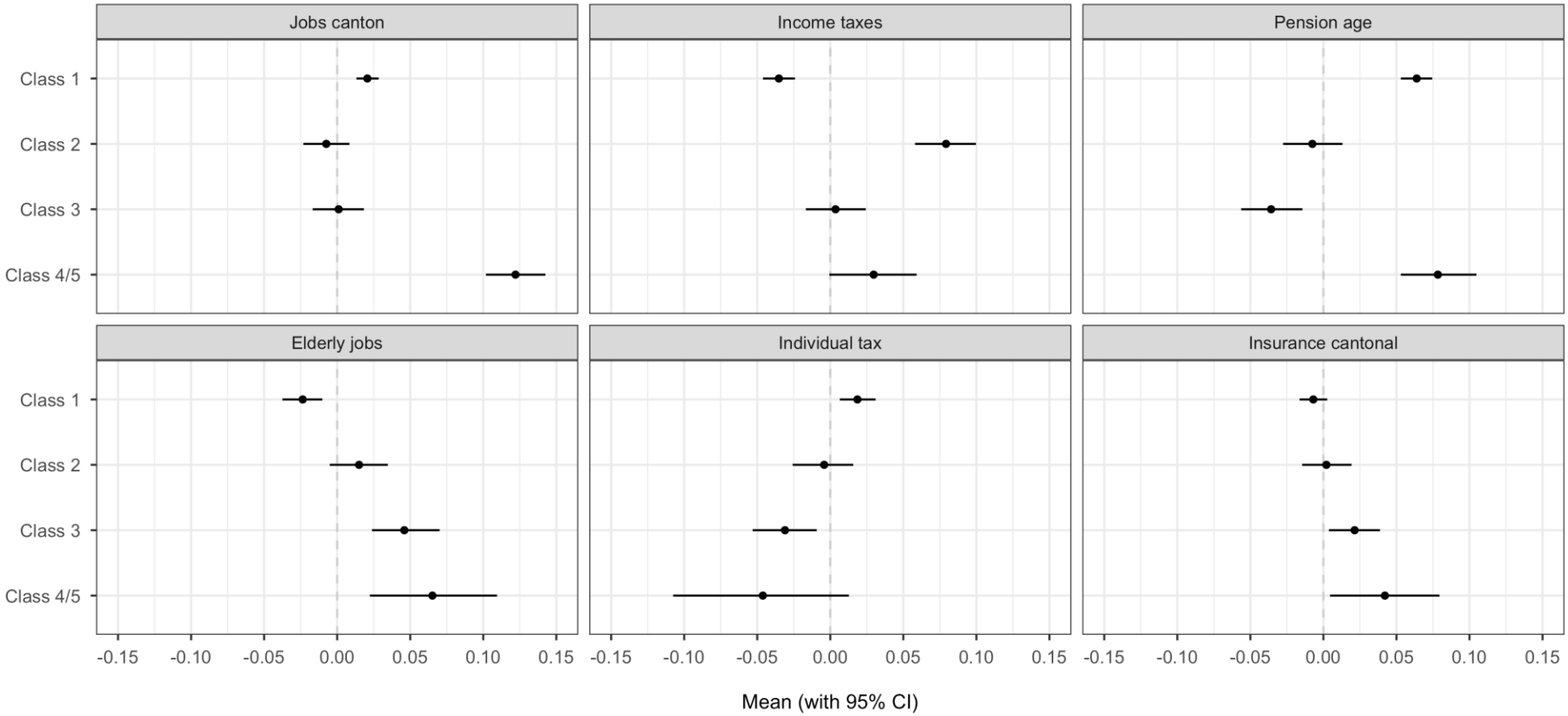
In sum, these first empirical findings partially support our two research hypotheses according to which MPs policy positions are, on average, more congruent with the preferences of members of the highest social class than with the preferences of citizens of lower classes; and descriptive representation increases the congruence between politicians and citizens belonging to the same social class. Indeed, our mixed findings indicate that descriptive representation matters most for the lower social classes, and for labor market protection of the less affluent.

Figure 1: Estimated Coefficients of Congruence Models



Note: The figure shows the mean and 95% credible interval (CI) of the posterior distribution for each coefficient.

Figure 2: Change in the Predicted Probability of Having the Same Opinion When Politicians Are of the Same Class Rather Than a Different Class



Note: The figure shows the mean and 95% credible interval (CI) of the posterior distribution for each change in predicted probability.

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

In this study, we investigated what role descriptive representation plays when it comes to substantive representation. Or, put differently, whether it matters more for some social classes than for others, whether they are represented in parliamentary politics. Making use of a unique data set collected among Swiss MPs and citizens, we matched the opinion of citizens and their elected representatives from different social classes in a one-to-many relationship. Our findings show that descriptive representation matters, particularly for the lower social classes. However, we also find differences across policy proposals even if they all focus on economic and welfare policy. For the two policy proposals the lowest social classes consider most important, the protection of elderly employees from dismissal and redistributive taxation, the effects go in two directions. While descriptive representation has a large positive effect for labor market protection, the effect is not significant for redistributive taxation. Particularly the lack of findings concerning the "classical" question of redistributive taxation is puzzling.

One explanation for these mixed results might simply be that we included too many different policy areas. Because we did not want to risk comparing apples with oranges, we tried to formulate very specific policy proposals. This however means, they cover a number of different issues, which might not be as comparable as we think. At the same time, this is one of the strengths of this study. We were able to ask politicians and a representative sample of the Swiss population the exact same question to gauge their opinion on a specific policy proposal. For the moment, we have only included a sub-set of these proposals in the analyses. We could potentially expand our analyses to other issues such as more cultural cleavages (e.g. on the "Babyklappe" or adoption rights of same-sex couples). However, on most of those, social classes do not hold diverging opinions (see Appendix B for an overview). A more fruitful avenue might thus be to investigate how other descriptive factors such as age, gender or partisanship affect congruence between politicians and citizens individually or even in combination with each other.

Another next step might be to have a closer look at the composition of the social classes among politicians. Specifically, we could separate professional politicians from others (i.e. part-time MPs) because they might be more responsive and thus more congruent with citizens' opinion (O'Grady 2019). Or, we could take a separate look at the business owners (also

from the higher social classes) which might have a very different interests, especially when it comes to economic policy making. In sum, the uniquely detailed data allow us to further investigate how congruence between politicians and citizens comes about.

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Appendix A

We tested 18 policy proposals. For this paper, we focused on the economic and welfare issues (marked in bold). Each respondent only rated nine policy proposals, either all with prefix A or those with prefix B, in randomized order.

Table A1. Policy proposals in set A

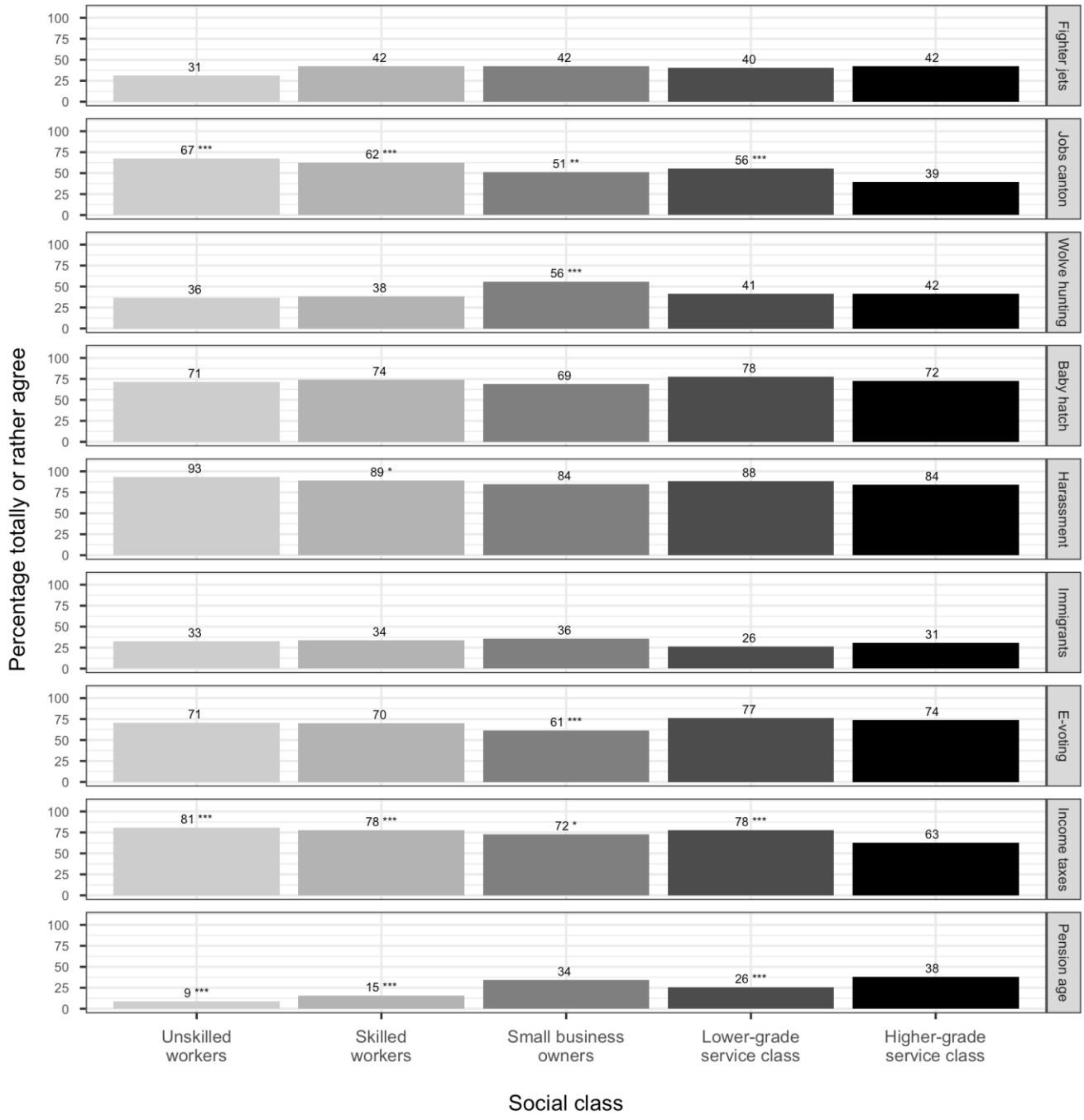
A1	Switzerland needs to buy new fighter jets.
A2	**Jobs in my Canton need to be reserved for people residing my Canton.**
A3	The concerned Cantons need to allow the hunt of wolves that attack flock.
A4	Hospitals need to have a "Babyklappe" where parents can leave their infant anonymously.
A5	Sexual harassment at work needs to be punished more severely.
A6	Switzerland should only accept well-educated immigrants.
A7	Citizens should be able to participate in federal elections via internet.
A8	**Taxes on high-income should be raised while taxes on low-income should be reduced.**
A9	**The pension age needs to be raised to 67.**

Table A2. Policy proposals in set B

B1	Civil defense facilities that are not in use need to be closed for good.
B2	**Elderly employees need to be protected better from dismissal.**
B3	Private households should be able to freely choose their electricity provider.
B4	Same-sex couples who have registered their partnership should be allowed to adopt children.
B5	The police needs to prevent unauthorized demonstrations at all costs.
B6	My Canton should spend more for the integration of asylum seekers.
B7	Foreigners who have lived in Switzerland for at least ten years should be able to participate in Cantonal elections and referenda.
B8	**Wedded people need to be assessed separately for taxation.**
B9	**My canton should create a cantonal health insurance institution for its residents.**

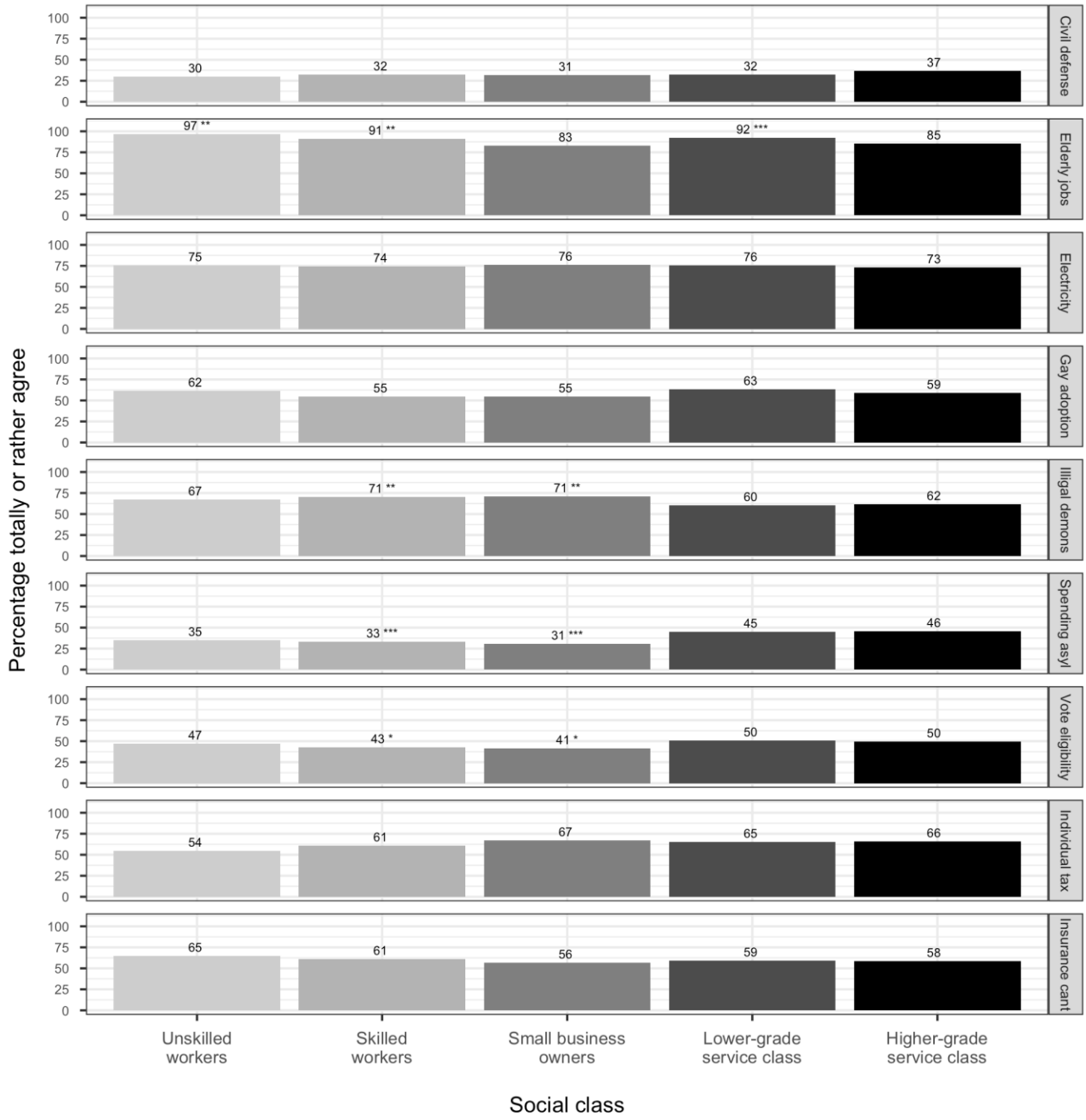
Appendix B

Figure 3: Opinion by Social Class for Statements in Group A



Note: * p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .01, two tailed test of equal proportions (relative to higher-grade service class).

Figure 4: Opinion by Social Class for Statements in Group B



Note: * p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .01, two tailed test of equal proportions (relative to higher-grade service class).