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## The Political Representation of Salient Issues

*Abstract:* This paper deals with research into the quality of democracy and political representation and intends to make two contributions to the debate on the representation of citizens' preferences in Eastern Europe. First, attention is focused on the level of congruence in a period of transition (1998–2001) in two countries: Hungary and Poland. The intent is to demonstrate that political representation, understood as a congruence of preferences on issues, is present in transitional democracies and improves in Poland from 1997 to 2001. Second, differences in congruence are accounted for. The first hypothesis is that citizens' and parliamentarians' rankings of the importance of issues will differ due to the different reasons these groups become involved in politics. Secondly, the variation of congruence is explained by the importance (saliency) citizens attribute to an issue. Furthermore, saliency makes political parties crowd to represent the majority preference. On less salient issues political party representatives hold to their ideological preferences. For comparison purposes congruence is operationalized as a 'one to many linkage' and is measured in accord with the measurements of Kitschelt et al. (1999) of absolute and relative representation. The hypotheses are tested using data from 1997 and 2001 for Poland and 1998 for Hungary. The data allows for measuring policy preference on a range of issues in economic, social, cultural, and foreign policy domains. The measures of congruence are unique in recording the preferences of a sample of citizens and a sample of representatives in both countries. For citizens, the analysis was conducted at the level of individuals and party-supporter groups, while for the MPs, it was conducted at the level of political party groups. The findings have implications for the study of how saliency affects political representation and contribute to the understanding of the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe.

*Keywords:* political representation, congruence, saliency, left-right, Eastern Europe

### Introduction

Issue saliency is present in many prominent studies on political representation. Researchers now know that citizens evaluate politicians in regard to the issues that worry them (Fenno 1978; Epstein and Knight 1998). Saliency is important in studying political representation. Research on members of Congress in the United States (Miller and Stokes 1963) or the French or Swedish parliaments (Converse and Pierce 1986; Holmberg 1989) show that representatives display more concern for issues that are salient to citizens. Most research has focused on consolidated democracies. Comparative research has measured congruence of opinions by comparing party positions to citizens' preferences on the left-right scale (see Bernauer, Giger and Rosset 2010 and Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2013). Party positions have been assessed through the analysis of party manifestos or expert surveys. The studies have shown that saliency improves the congruence of opinions in established democracies. How strong are

mass-elite linkages on salient issues in transitional democracies? This paper offers an alternative assessment of salience. First, the levels of non-response on issues are checked to test citizens' capacity to express opinions on issues. This is important because congruence studies are based on the assumption that citizens are able to express preferences on issues. This is followed by a comparison of rankings of issues by political parties and citizens. Finally, partially in line with previous research, I show that on salient issues congruence does not improve, but the relations of representation change. As indicated in other studies, parties are unanimous on important issues and congruent with citizens' opinions. On less important issues I show that there is relative representation because parties can afford to offer ideologically pure alternatives. In making my case I use three face-to-face mass-elite surveys: one performed in Hungary in 1998, and the others in Poland in 1997 and 2001. There are two reasons for these empirical reference points. First, both countries were considered successes in transitioning to democracy by the end of the 90s. Second, in both countries, socio-cultural issues are considered important predictors of party choice. The Polish data allows the effects of salience on political representation to be tested at two moments. I hypothesize that, compared to Poland in 1997 and Hungary in 1998, in 2001 the effects of issue importance on representation relations are more likely to be present, possibly due to the reshuffling of party alternatives or a greater acquaintance with democracy. These findings have the following implications: Important issues improve the chances for political representation to occur. Parties express different opinions than the average voter on non-salient issues, but manage to represent their own supporters. The second implication is that it is not sufficient to conceptualize political representation as simply as congruence. A measure of relative representation can show that parties still represent their supporters even when holding more radical positions.

The objective of this paper is to show that salience has a positive effect on representation. The first part discusses the role of issue importance in congruence studies, and is followed by an assessment of the implications of measuring representation as congruence. Then I present the findings of other studies that link congruence and salience in Eastern Europe and present the hypotheses of this study. This is followed by a description of my methodology and a comparison of issue rankings between representatives and political parties and congruence levels according to salience.

Lastly, I discuss the implication of the results, scope, and limitations of the study and the importance of the findings for the study of political representation and salience in new democracies.

### **Previous Analyses of Issue Salience**

Salience is a concept that is rarely defined (Wlezien 2005). Social psychologists use ego-involvement, centrality, and salience to explain importance (Krosnick 1988) and link it to manifestations of their values. For this approach, importance rankings are viewed as stable and less amenable to change. Downs (1972) claimed that citizens' attention to issues develops in cycles, making preferences on issues amenable to

change. Following the Gallup surveys, some researchers use ‘the most important problem facing the nation’ phrasing (McDonald, Budge and Pennings 2004; Pennings 2005) to identify salient issues. This operationalization, however, encounters problems of measurement validity (Wlezien 2005). Repass (1971) used open-ended questions to solve these problems and showed that citizens do not think of a single issue when they evaluate candidates.

Therefore, use of the ‘most important problem’ phrase was avoided. For reasons of comparability the applied surveys included a fixed selection of issues. This choice is not without risks. Surveys can skip issues that are important for citizens. On the other hand (Repass 1971), the variety of citizens’ choice of issues that are used for the evaluation of candidates is rather limited. In this study, a salient issue is one that interests and concerns citizens (Krosnick 1988) and is ranked accordingly by citizens.

Important issues are powerful guides for citizens to choose between candidates and political parties (Krosnick 1988). The study of political representation has not ignored issue salience as a predictor of increasing congruence of opinions between representatives and citizens. Salience is important for political representation (Wlezien 2005). Miller and Stokes (1963) affirm that, if salient issues are removed from their analysis of representation, the congruence of opinions between the elites and the masses is significantly affected. This approach assumes that citizens have opinions on issues and rank them according to preference (Downs 1957). A salient issue should make representatives more inclined to represent citizens (Pitkin 1967). McCrone and Kuklinski (1979) consider that for saliency to have an effect there should be a will to be a delegate on the side of the representative and citizens should send clear messages. In a later study they discover that it is the Member of Parliament’s perception of citizens’ perceptions of what issue is important that influences roll-call behaviour (Kuklinski and McCrone 1980). Page and Shapiro (1983) see that, on salient issues, a constituency’s change of opinion is closely followed by a change in public policy. Hawes (2009: 3) claims that representatives like to be attentive to issues that are salient to constituents, engaging in what Hawes (2009) calls ‘selective responsiveness’. Giger (2009) considered salience of an issue to be an individual characteristic and discovered that ‘personal salience’ has a positive effect on representation.

This approach entails an emphasis on an issue-based framework (Giger 2009) for explaining political representation.

### Political Representation

Democratic political systems include political representation as a legitimate decision-making tool. There are three most frequently used conceptualizations of political representation: as the translation of votes into seats in the representative assembly; the mirroring of the socio-demographic composition of society; and the congruence of opinions between citizens and representatives or political parties (Kitschelt et al. 1999). The first claims that voters’ preferences are expressed through voting. Many of

of the independent variables in the vote-seat approach can be found within the constitutive elements of the electoral system (e.g., district magnitude, electoral formula or threshold). There is an abundant body of research covering the effects of these institutional rules on political representation (Golder and Stramski 2008; Grofman and Lijphart 1986; Huber and Powell 1994; Lijphart 1990; Rae 1971; Shugart and Wattenberg 2001; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). The second focuses on the social structure of society, which should be mirrored by the social composition of the parliament. Research using this approach relies on studies of the representation of minorities and of groups in society with a disproportionately small influence on politics. (Bird 2003; Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Phillips 1993; Spirova and Stefanova 2009; Tremblay 2005). The third approach, used here, emphasizes a view of representation that considers that the opinions, values and attitudes of citizens should be reflected by their representatives' preferences and roll-call votes. The question in this approach is to what extent citizens' opinions influence the preferences of representatives and how this affects decisions in parliament. Studies (for instance, Converse 1986; Holmberg 1989; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Miller and Stokes 1963; Thomassen 1994) have targeted the congruence of opinions between representatives and elites and political parties on several issues of importance in national politics, as well as on the left-right scale. Congruence is influenced by the type of issues and the level of citizens' political knowledge, the representative's opinion of citizens' sentiments, and the importance of the issue (Huber and Powell 1994; Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2013; Kitschelt et al. 1999).

There are several methods of surveying the congruence of opinions between citizens and representatives. Two are most often used. First there are the constituency-based models (Achen 1978; Bartels 1991; Clinton 2006; Cnudde and McCrone 1966; Erikson 1978; Eulau and Wahlke 1978; Miller and Stokes 1963; Page et al. 1984; Weissberg 1978). These link the preferences and roll-call behaviour of the representative to the opinions expressed by the constituency. However, this method is considered too individualistic and inadequate in political systems where collective political representation with the help of political parties is prevalent (Holmberg 1989: 2; Eulau 1987: 212). The party-voter linkage approach considers that parties' opinions are more important than individual representatives' preferences (Converse and Pierce 1986; Mair and Thomassen 2011; Schattschneider 1942; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). This approach draws on the responsible party government model (Schattschneider 1942; Pierce 1999). European democracies have the political party as the agent of political representation (Thomassen 1994). Political parties provide a tool by which congruence between representatives and citizens is measured (Belchior and Freire 2012: 273; Dalton 1985: 278; Powell 2000: 5). The party-voter approach to congruence is suitable for Eastern European democracies. Kitschelt et al. (1999) compared party leaders and party activists' opinions to discover that political parties in four Eastern European countries were not very responsive to party supporters' preferences. Markowski and Tucker (2010) used the party-voter linkage to describe the Euro-sceptic preferences of Polish political parties and voters. In their modern political history, parties have played an important role in Hungary and Poland. After

the regime change, political parties captured the competition for parliamentary seats. Although despised by a majority of the electorate in both countries, political parties play a major role in deciding who governs. It is no surprise then that the voter-party-linkage approach is suited for the study of political representation in Hungary and Poland.

The study of political representation as congruence has several limitations (Eulau 1978). Miller and Stokes and Eulau (1978) warned researchers not to consider congruence as equivalent to political representation in any context. These are related to sophistication, political interest, and accountability. First, individuals should be able to choose between different alternatives offered to them. Frequently there are two alternatives and voters will choose either of the two candidates according to their interests, because of habit or because of emotional attachments. Moreover, individuals have to possess sufficient information to make meaningful choices. Second, citizens should be interested in everyday politics and know the political programs of the candidates. Third, once elected, representatives should craft public policies tailored to the citizens' preferences. Citizens should be able to hold political parties accountable. These are the assumptions of the responsible-party model (Pierce 1999) used by consolidated democracies to tap into indicators of issue voting.

Miller and Stokes (1963) were aware of the American public's limited knowledge about 'legislative issues'. Converse (1963) was concerned to find out whether the American public had attitudes that were structured into ideologies. Do people have a system of beliefs that coordinates their opinions? The answer was no. The American public of the 1950s was considered ignorant and uninterested. Some claim that it is important not to indulge in assumptions about citizens' capabilities to use issues as a guiding tool for choosing among the alternatives offered by political parties or representatives (Miller and Stokes 1963; Eulau 1978).

Since the 1950s, however, the public in the United States and consolidated democracies have changed. Education, mass media, and rising interest in politics have changed the profile of the citizenry (Dalton 2008). Thus many studies of congruence (Casado-Asensio and Lefkofridi 2011; Giger 2009; Huber and Powell 1994; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Todosiević 2005) work on the assumption that citizens are able to express opinions on political, economic, or national-symbolic issues. They can use these positions to evaluate parties' performance in terms of policies. Researchers (Thomassen 1994; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999) who focus on political representation in consolidated democracies praise citizens' capacity to express opinions on issues or the ability of citizens to know and use issues as a means of choosing among and distinguishing between parties. This is because they have lived for a long time in democracies where party positions are very well known to both the political elite and to citizens in general. Compared to democratizing states, in consolidated democracies people will know more about party stances on issues because the parties have been stable and changes in the party system have been minimal.

The next section will focus on the challenges of addressing political representation in transitional democracies.

### Substantive Representation in New Democracies

Several expressed worries about the citizens' capacity to have opinions that are meaningful in new democracies (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Todorovic 2005; Markowski and Tucker 2010). On the supply side, parties are unable to send clear messages to the electorate. The party systems of Eastern Europe have been characterized by fragmentation, creating confusion in terms of the parties' ideological profiles and policy preferences. For example, in Poland in 1997, six parties entered parliament, and in 2001 their number increased to seven—six parties gaining representation in the Sejm for the first time. On the demand side, citizens in new democracies seem uninterested in politics. After 1989, citizens enjoyed experiencing the freedom to express their opinions, to participate in demonstrations, or to watch the political news on television with interest. With the exception of Poland, the founding elections of Eastern Europe showed record high levels of turnout. This was followed by disillusionment as democracy did not turn out to be what many had hoped for. Turnout levels decreased, with people being less interested in politics and displaying distrust in institutions (Klingemann, Fuchs and Zielonka 2006).

Research on the congruence between representatives and citizens in Eastern European polities is scarce. A study by Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski and Gabor Toka, published in 1999, includes a section on political representation in which they find a congruence of opinions, and relative and absolute representation. They surveyed the opinions of mid-level party officials in 1993 and compared them to interviews with politicians who were members of parliament and party officials. The pilot study was followed by a survey in 1994 focused on middle-ranked politicians in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. They find that the preferences of representatives are similar to the preferences of party members but the linkage is weak. Saliency has positive effects on congruence—with the exception of Bulgaria, where representatives and party members view all issues as important.

Burean (2002) compared preferences of a sample of representatives to opinions expressed in a national survey in Hungary. He found that party discipline and large parties are more congruent with citizens' views. In a similar vein to Kitschelt et al. (1999), he finds a similarity of opinions between parties and citizens but low levels of responsiveness. Markowski and Tucker (2010) make a longitudinal analysis of representation focused on Euro-scepticism issues and find that Polish political parties represent citizens' preferences in regard to attitudes toward the European Union.

Based on three data sets, which compare the opinions of a sample of representatives to a nationally representative sample of citizens, this work accords with other co-variation models (Weissberg 1976) by inspecting the relationship between the preferences of citizens and political parties. First, there will be a comparison of rankings of issues between representatives and citizens. The ordinary citizens and the elite might be expected to have different sets of priorities due to their different motivations to influence politics. On the contrary, Kitschelt et al. (1999) showed that in 1993–1994 there was a similarity in ranking issues between party supporters and political party

leaders in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. On the basis of these findings, I test such expectations with better quality data. The expectation is thus that in Poland and Hungary the ordering of representatives' and citizens' stances on issues is the same (H1). Previous researchers (Hawes 2009; Page and Shapiro 1983) have argued that political parties are more eager to represent preferences on salient issues. This indicates that there will be a positive relationship between the unity of citizens' opinions and salience (H2). Secondly issues viewed by citizens and representatives as salient will have improved congruence scores compared to issues that are less important (H3). Toka (2002) argued that congruence improves on issues on which political parties offer clear alternatives. In this paper this argument is extended and modified. On issues that are salient, political parties cannot afford to offer alternatives and thus represent citizens' preferences. On less important issues, political parties will offer clear alternatives and political parties will engage in relative representation of citizens' preferences (H4). Complementary to Toka (2002) and Klingemann's (1995) findings, on important issues there is an absolute congruence of opinions and on less important issues there is relative representation. Finally, research (Toka 2002) shows that the 'age of democracy' has a positive effect on issue voting and representation. Thus in Poland in 2001 the congruence between citizens' and political parties' preferences could be expected to be greater than in 1997 or in Hungary in 1998 (H5).

The measurement of relative and absolute representation makes controlling for alternative explanations of congruence very difficult. Political knowledge, interest in politics, party discipline and the mass-media framing of issues all impact congruence (Lefkofridi 2010; Toka 2002). Among the institutional factors, the electoral system influences politicians' behaviour as representatives, although comparative studies show limited effects (Curtice and Shively 2009).

Several of such studies looked at the congruence between parties and citizens on the left-right axis. This paper's contribution is to go beyond the left-right congruence by including an inspection of congruence on issues that tap various areas. Thus, although the paper will omit to take into account and control for alternative explanations of congruence, it will offer a richer account of congruence on a large variety of issues considered important by citizens and political parties. Another important limitation is the uncertainty related to the causal direction of representation (Page and Shapiro 1983). In this work representation is viewed as an outcome of constituencies' influence on political parties (Miller and Stokes 1963; Pitkin 1967). However, it is worth mentioning that political parties can bring several issues to the agenda and gather support for those topics (Schumpeter 1942). The view supported in this paper is that any indicator of constituency influence on parties' issue preferences could be a sign of the presence of political representation in that political setting.

### Case Selection

I survey the effect of issue salience on political representation in Hungary and Poland at the end of the 1990s, when both countries had been through ten years of transi-

tion. The countries share a similar recent history, being former satellites of the Soviet Union. Both countries experienced an accommodative type of transition from communism (Linz and Stepan 1996; Kitschelt et al. 1999). Poland and Hungary, together with the Czech Republic, were viewed as champions of the transition to a liberal economy (Roberts 2010). For Hungary, mass-elite surveys were conducted in 1998. In that year, Hungary experienced the rise of right-wing parties. Among them FIDESZ, a right-wing conservative party, proved to be the most influential, outliving the two right-wing extremist parties, FKgP and MIEP, which also entered the 1998 parliament (exiting it four years later).

In Poland, the 1997–2001 period witnessed the comeback of right-wing political parties and their fall and transformation by 2001, when socialists regained control of the government. In 1997, electoral volatility and the number of parties that entered parliament had decreased (Szczerbiak 1998), showing that institutionalization of the party system was underway as theory predicted. Yet, four years later the dimensions of the competition had changed and a fresh set of political parties competed for votes. The instability of political parties is considered detrimental to the consolidation of democracy (Toka 1998; Cwiek-Karpowicz and Kaczynski 2006). Poland provides a unique case for tracking how citizens' preferences are taken into account in times of party system change. When a party system changes, party identities weaken and realignment occurs. This makes voters more likely to choose parties according to party programs (Carmines and Wagner 2006). The expectation was that in this period the quality of democratic performance would decrease (Szczerbiak 2002). Some expressed worries that Poland's democratization was ambivalent (Jones 2002).

Thus this study will add valuable knowledge to a literature focused on the formal features of democracies and on the left and right. This work is in line with other research (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Roberts 2010; Markowski 2000) that evaluates the development of substantive democracy in countries that are in transition.

There are obvious limits in comparing the processes of political representation in two countries. The small number of cases and the focus on the idiosyncrasies of the two countries makes generalization problematic.

### Data and Methods

Representation is not congruence (Miller and Stokes 1963; Eulau 1978). Plain similarity of opinions between citizens and representatives does not imply that representation is taking place. However, several studies (Converse and Pierce 1986; Huber and Powell 1994; Casado-Asensio and Lefkofridi 2011) have regarded it as such. The data gathered in Hungary and Poland is more suitable for inquiries into political representation than data used in other studies (for example, Huber and Powell 1994; Kitschelt 1994). First, there are double MP-mass surveys. Some studies only use mass surveys and compare the opinions of citizens to proxies such as a survey of experts or party program data (for example Huber and Powell 1994). Kitschelt et al. (1999) compared the opinions of party activists with party leaders. Secondly, the surveys

were conducted in election years. Mass surveys were conducted prior to elections, while representatives were surveyed after the elections. Representatives will be more inclined to be responsive immediately after the elections and citizens tend to be more attentive to issues during an electoral campaign.

The research uses three double mass-elite surveys: in Hungary in 1998 and in Poland in 1997 and 2001. The Polish national survey in 1997 (2003 respondents) was conducted just after parliamentary elections on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, making the context favourable for searching indices of political representation. A sample of 176 representatives from six political parties and alliances in the lower chamber of Poland's parliament were interviewed. Representatives and citizens were asked to rate the importance, their position, and their party's position, on twelve issues: crime prevention, privatization, the role of the Church and religion in public life, the role of former nomenclatura in present-day politics, unemployment, taxes, joining the European Union, agricultural subsidies, state social responsibility, foreign capital, abortion, and public administration reform. The Polish national survey from 2001 (1794 respondents) was conducted immediately after the national elections on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. 120 sample representatives were interviewed. MPs and citizens were asked to rank the importance of, and express opinions on, ten issues. The issues listed were the same as in the 1997 survey, with the exception of abortion and public administration. The data from 1997 and 2001 was collected by the Institute of Political Studies in Warsaw, Poland.

In Hungary, the data was collected by Median Survey Institute. The mass survey was organized by Gábor Tóka and sponsored by Central European University between the two rounds of the 1998 elections. The mass survey was weighted according to social-demographic variables. The MPs survey was organized by Zsolt Enyedi and sponsored by the Hungarian Academic Science's 'Strategic Researches' Program in October 1998. First, a questionnaire was submitted to a representative sample of the voting population between the first and the second round of the election. The sample contained 1435 respondents. The survey covered the respondents' opinions on privatization, territorial inequalities, the state-Church relationship, the role of former communists, foreign capital, tuition fees, NATO and the EU, and family policy. The same questions regarding the issues mentioned in the first questionnaire were asked of the members of the new Hungarian parliament.

If, as several authors claim (McCrone and Kuklinski 1979; Kuklinski and McCrone 1980; Lavine et al. 1996; Giger 2009; Nyhan et al. 2012), the salience of an issue is associated with elites' being more inclined to follow voters' preferences and citizens' paying more attention to these issues then it is in regard to salient issues that I should expect improved representation scores. The display of political representation on salient issues will approximate the mandate style of representation.

The level of non-responses is presented as an indicator that citizens are able to answer on issues. This is followed by a comparison of rankings. If citizens and MPs are able to express preferences and rank issues according to importance (Downs 1957; Pierce 1999) it is likely that their ranking of preferences is rational. For Poland, there is a comparison of rankings of voters and non-voters. Non-voters comprise a near

majority of the electorate: Perhaps they have a different set of issues they consider important, and this is why they do not participate. The survey in Hungary included eight issues on which representatives had to express an opinion. The survey in Poland 1997 contained eleven issues. In 2001 both citizens and representatives expressed opinions on ten issues. Five topics were common to all the surveys. These were: privatization, the role of the Church in politics, the role of the former nomenclatura, and the role of foreign capital. Ten issues were common to the surveys in 1997 and 2001 in Poland. Only abortion was an issue not considered in the 2001 survey. Importance was determined by looking at the maximum and minimum value of importance. The most important issue was graded 9.8 and the least important was given a score of 3.2 on a scale from 0 to 10. Any issue that scored more than 7.6 was considered important, between 5.5 and 7.6 the issue was moderately important, and below 5.5 the issue was less important.

The unity of opinions of citizens and MPs were measured by looking at the dispersion of answers around the mean opinion on issues. The higher the dispersion, the more varied the opinions are on that particular issue. MPs' responses should bundle around citizens' preferences on salient issues (Page and Shapiro 1983).

Dispersion of voters' and MPs' preferences = b Average importance of issue + B

Representation is measured by absolute distance, slope and intercept of the regression of party supporters' opinion on the party members of parliament in Hungary and Poland. A similar set of these indicators were used by Kitschelt et al. (1999) in their study of representation in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. These indicators are useful as they capture the presence of congruence and influence of citizens' opinion on the representatives from the party they prefer, thus displaying a picture of representation from below.

Absolute distance (D) measures the absolute distance or the proximity of the mean of the opinions of the members of the parliament belonging to a party and the mean of opinions of the supporters of the party.

D =

|Average opinion of MPs from party A – Average opinion of supporters of party A|

I use regression to find indicators of congruence between citizens and representatives. The regression is on the individual opinion of members of parliament and the average of issue stances of party supporters.

Opinion of MP from party A = b (Average opinion of supporters of party A) + B

The slope and variance explained by the regression equation together with the large D and a large intercept (B) indicates the presence of relative representation. If the slope (b) and variance are insignificant and D and the intercept are large, there is no representation. If the slope is statistically significant and D and the intercept

are small, there is absolute representation. Finally, if the slope and variance are insignificant and D and the intercept are small, there is a similarity of opinions but no linkage between representatives and citizens.

### Saliency: The Ordering of Issues

Due to limitations imposed by the data, a comparison of rankings between citizens and parties is only possible in Poland. For Poland I have also included the rankings of citizens who did not intend to vote. The inclusion of the preferences of non-voters is important. In Poland, around 50% of registered voters turn out to vote. Non-voters represented 42% of the electorate in the 1997 survey and 41% in 2001. The data revealed no difference in the rankings between non-voters, voters, and representatives.

The response rate to issue stances was very high in 1997 and 2001, showing that citizens were inclined to express their opinions. In 1997 the non-response rate ranged from 1 to 14% and in 2001 from 0.8 to 9%. In Hungary the rate of non-response did not surpass 1.5%. All representatives from the Sejm expressed an opinion on the issues. In Hungary, two refused to answer on some of the issues.

The rankings of issues from 1997 and 2001 are surprisingly similar. In 2001 Polish representatives considered NATO and EU issues more important than did ordinary citizens, while for citizens the issue of the state's social responsibility seemed to be more important than for the MPs. All the other issues were ranked in the same order.

Table 1

Issue Rankings of citizens and representatives in Poland in 1997

Citizens Ranking		Representatives Rankings	
Issue	Importance	Issue	Importance
Crime	8.9 (1.7)	Crime	8.5 (1.6)
Unemployment	8.9 (1.6)	State social responsibility	8.3 (1.7)
Tax Policy	8.2 (2.0)	NATO and EU	8.1 (1.9)
State social responsibility	7.7 (2.1)	Unemployment	8.1 (1.9)
NATO and EU	7.1 (2.5)	Tax Policy	7.4 (1.7)
Subsidies for agriculture	6.9 (2.6)	Privatization	7.2 (2.0)
Foreign capital	5.9 (2.5)	Foreign capital	6.4 (2.1)
Privatization	5.9 (2.5)	Subsidies for agriculture	6.3 (2.4)
Church	5.5 (2.9)	Church	5.0 (2.8)
Abortion	5.3 (3.4)	Abortion	4.9 (3.2)
Nomenclatura	4.5 (3.1)	Nomenclatura	4.5 (3.2)

N = 2003 for citizens and 176 for representatives; rankings are means; standard deviations are in parentheses.

According to the rankings in the two countries we expect that representatives would be least inclined to represent in regards to the role of former communists and the influence of the Church on society. This is a surprising result. In Poland,

Table 2

**Issue Rankings of Citizens and Representatives in Poland in 2001**

Citizens Ranking		Representatives Rankings	
Issue	Importance	Issue	Importance
Unemployment	9.7 (0.8)	Unemployment	9.4 (1.2)
Crime	8.8 (1.7)	Crime	8.0 (1.8)
Tax Policy	8.1 (2.0)	NATO and EU	7.9 (2.7)
State social responsibility	7.8 (2.1)	Tax Policy	7.5 (1.8)
Subsidies for agriculture	7.5 (2.3)	Subsidies for agriculture	7.0 (1.8)
NATO and EU	5.9 (2.9)	State social responsibility	6.5 (2.3)
Foreign capital	5.3 (2.8)	Foreign capital	6.0 (2.3)
Privatization	4.8 (2.9)	Privatization	6.0 (2.2)
Church	4.4 (3.0)	Church	4.1 (2.7)
Nomenclatura	3.2 (2.7)	Nomenclatura	3.3 (2.7)

N = 1794 for citizens and 176 for representatives; rankings are means; standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 3

**Issue Rankings of Representatives in Hungary in 1998**

Representatives Rankings	
Issue	Importance
NATO and EU	8.9 (1.3)
Family policy	8.5 (1.5)
Territorial inequalities	7.8 (1.7)
Foreign capital	7.6 (1.7)
Privatization	6.6 (2.0)
Church	5.1 (2.0)
Tuition fees	4.9 (2.5)
Nomenclatura	4.7 (3.1)

N = 200; rankings are means; standard deviations are in parentheses.

the issues of abortion and the influence of the Church on society might appear to be important (Szelényi 1996: 193; Tworzecki 2003: 82). Yet it seems that in four years, probably due to economic concerns, these issues became irrelevant for both citizens and representatives in Poland. The same can be said about the role of former communists. Although in both societies the issue of communism and its legacies was debated and discussed quite often in the transition literature, it did not take precedence over the economic and security concerns of representatives and citizens.

This section revealed that citizens and representatives are capable of expressing preferences and ranking issues. The salience rankings are almost identical from 1997 to 2001 in Poland and very similar between representatives and citizens in Poland in 2001. The same can be said about the unimportant issues in Poland and Hungary. In both countries, the Church and the role of communists seem to be the least salient. The results support the first hypothesis.

Next I will test for the cohesiveness of responses of both citizens and representatives. On salient issues the expectation is that citizens as well as representatives will be more united (H2).

### Salience and Unity of Opinions

Representatives and voters perceived similar issues to be important in Poland in 1997 and in 2001.

Hungarian representatives considered integration in the EU to be the most important issue, followed closely by family policy, and seem to be less divided on both. These issues yield the lowest standard deviations out of the eight issues. The least important issues were considered to be the role former communists should play in the new democratic regime and the introduction of tuition fees for universities. These also yielded the highest standard deviation score, an indication that politicians were divided on these issues. Politicians seem to be more divided on issues they consider less important (Tables 1 and 2).

In Poland in 1997 citizens considered crime and unemployment equally important. These issues had the lowest standard deviation scores, showing a unity of opinions. For Polish citizens the least important issue was the role of nomenclatura, which, with abortion, yielded the highest standard deviation (Table 1).

In 2001 in Poland, citizens and representatives perceived the most important issue to be unemployment. This issue had the lowest standard deviation scores for both representatives and citizens. The least important issue for both citizens and representatives was the role of former communists in the new democratic regime. Citizens were most divided about the importance of the Church in politics, privatization, and attitudes toward NATO and the EU. These issues had moderate importance scores. Representatives were most divided on the role of the nomenclatura, the Church, and NATO and the EU (Table 2).

The Polish and Hungarian data reveal that less confusion among respondents is displayed in regard to issues that are perceived to be salient. This statement holds for both members of parliament in Hungary and Poland in 2001 and citizens in Poland.

In testing the relationship between unity of opinions and salience, a simple linear regression ( $n = 39$ ) between the average importance attributed to an issue by representatives and citizens and the unity of answers measured by the standard deviation revealed an inverse relationship between the importance attributed to an issue and the unity of voters' and representatives' preferences (H3).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Dispersion of voters and MPs preferences} &= \\ &= -.284^{**} \text{Average importance of issue} + 4.143 \end{aligned}$$

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .673$ , std. error .033

This section revealed that on salient issues representatives and citizens display unity of opinions. So far, the three conclusions seem to point toward a confirmation

of the linkage between importance and representation. First, citizens and politicians are able to express preferences. Second, parties and citizens produce remarkably similar rankings of issues. Third, citizens and parties seem to be more cohesive on important issues. The following section will relate salience to absolute and relative representation.

### **Political Representation and Salience**

Important issues are better represented than less salient ones (H3). In order to test this hypothesis I follow Achens' (1978, 1977) approach and cautions regarding the measurement of political representation and the methodology of Kitschelt et al. (1999) for measuring congruence. Absolute congruence is measured by the distance (D) between the average preferences of voters of a party and the average position of the party representatives in parliament. A second indicator of absolute congruence is the intercept of the regression of citizens' preferences on representatives' opinions. The intercept shows the value of the independent variable (citizens' preferences) on the dependent variable (representatives' preferences) when the independent variable is 0. The relative congruence is measured by the slope of the regression line. A second indicator of relative representation used here was the variance of the regression model.

Representatives' position on issue a = b Average position of supporters + B

A large slope (D) and a large absolute distance (D) indicate the presence of relative congruence. A large slope with small D and small intercept (B) is indicative of mandate representation. A small slope and large D indicates similarity of preferences but no linkage between parties and citizens. If the slope (b) of the regression is not statistically significant there is no congruence between parties and citizens, and a small D indicates that similarity of opinions is obtained by chance. A large variance is indicative of the presence of political representation.

Hungary displays a remarkably similar image of representation as Poland in 1997 (Tables 4 and 5). Simply put, there are extremely weak indices of congruence or relative political representation. For Hungary one of the representative relationships surpasses a 5% threshold of explained variance. Absolute distance between parties and voters indicates (min is 0 maximum is 10) the presence of congruence between voters and parties. Party representation of citizens' preferences is present but there is no support for the claim that parties took voters' preferences into account in Hungary in 1998.

In Poland in 1997 the parties' preferences matched those of their party supporters. In nine out of ten issues we find that citizens' preferences have an influence on political parties' preferences. Yet the relationships are extremely weak. The influence is to be found on less than 10% of the representatives. As in Hungary, in Poland the match between citizens' and representatives' preferences on issues is high but I find the

Table 4

**The relationship between salience, absolute and relative representation on issues in Hungary in 1998**

Important issues		Moderately important issues		Less important issues	
Privatization		NATO and EU		Nomenclatura	
Party-voter distance	2.0	Party-voter Distance	1.5	Party-voter distance	1.0
Intercept	3.5	Intercept	1.9	Intercept	3.2
Slope	.02	Slope	.04	Slope	.02*
Variance explained	.006	Variance explained	.02	Variance explained	.02
Tuition fees		Foreign capital		Church	
Party-voter distance	1.4	Party-voter distance	2.4	Party-voter distance	0.5
Intercept	3.6	Intercept	7.3	Intercept	3.4
Slope	.03	Slope	.01	Slope	-.01
Variance explained	.006	Variance explained	.00	Variance explained	-.00
Family Policy		Territorial inequalities			
Party-voter distance	1.1	Party-voter distance	0.6		
Intercept	4.8	Intercept	3.0		
Slope	.08	Slope	.00		
Variance explained	.01	Variance explained	.00		

\* p &lt; 01      \*\* p &lt; 001

*Absolute representation:*

Party-voter Distance is the difference between the average position of voters and members of parliament on issue x.

Intercept—intercept of the regression equation.

*Relative representation:*

Slope—slope of the regression equation.

Variance explained is the R square of the regression equation.

influence to be very weak. Unlike the findings of Kitschelt et al. (1999) for the 1993 data, in 1997 and 1998 in Poland and Hungary there was no relationship between salience and the degree of congruence.

In 2001, the rankings of issues underwent only minor changes and the influence of citizens' preferences increased, offering support for H5. Compared to 1997, in 2001 on nine issues the explained variance for the degree of influence passed the 10% threshold.

The matching of preferences between parties and voters remained as high as in 1997. On important issues, however, there was no systematic difference in terms of absolute congruence. Thus we find limited support for hypothesis three.

The impact of salience on congruence is moderate. The strongest influence of citizens' preferences can be found on two important issues. On one important issue there was no relationship of representation. On less important issues I find the parties' preferences were influenced by citizens to a lesser extent. On salient issues the degree of influence of citizens' preferences on parties increased (H3).

In terms of style of representation on salient issues, the parties seemed to be closer to citizens and on less salient issues the large intercepts indicate the pres-

Table 5

**The relationship between salience, absolute and relative representation on issues in Poland 1997**

Important issues		Moderately important issues		Less important issues	
<i>Crime prevention</i>		<i>NATO and EU</i>		<i>Church</i>	
Party-voter Distance	0.8	Party-voter Distance	0.1	Party-voter distance	0.6
Intercept	4.8	Intercept	2.9	Intercept	3.3
Slope	.044**	Slope	.073***	Slope	.018
Variance explained	.017	Variance explained	.066	Variance explained	.004
<i>Unemployment</i>		<i>Agricultural policy</i>		<i>Abortion</i>	
Party-voter distance	1.4	Party-voter distance	0.7	Party-voter distance	1.7
Intercept	4.8	Intercept	4.7	Intercept	4.7
Slope	-.024*	Slope	-.032**	Slope	.099***
Variance explained	.009	Variance explained	.017	Variance explained	.067
<i>Tax policy</i>		<i>Foreign capital</i>		<i>Nomenclatura</i>	
Party-voter distance	2.0	Party-voter distance	1.5	Party-voter distance	0.5
Intercept	5.1	Intercept	2.8	Intercept	4.8
Slope	-.052***	Slope	.055***	Slope	.046**
Variance explained	.028	Variance explained	.048	Variance explained	.014
<i>State social responsibility</i>		<i>Privatization</i>			
Party-voter distance	1.8	Party-voter distance	1.2		
Intercept	4.7	Intercept	3.6		
Slope	-.031**	Slope	.021		
Variance explained	.018	Variance explained	.006		

\* p &lt; .05

\*\* p &lt; .01

\*\*\* p &lt; .001

*Absolute representation:*

Party-voter Distance is the absolute difference between the average position of voters and members of parliament on issue x.

Intercept—intercept of the regression equation.

*Relative representation:*

Slope—slope of the regression equation.

Variance explained is the R square of the regression equation.

ence of relative representation. The next section graphically displays the relations of representation in Poland in 2001.

### The Style of Representation

Since only in 2001 are there stronger programmatic linkages, my attention will be focused on the 2001 data on Poland. The figures below reveal that relative representation was important in Poland in 2001, supporting previous research (Kitschelt et al. 1999) on the style of representation in Eastern Europe. What is interesting to notice is that parties tend to be more grouped around their supporters on important issues. The less important the issue, the more parties engage in relative representation (figures 1 to 10).

Table 6

**The relationship between salience, absolute and relative representation on issues in Poland 2001**

Important issues		Moderately important issues		Less important issues	
Unemployment		Agncultural policy		Foreign capital	
Party-voter distance	0.9	Party-voter distance	.04	Party-voter distance	0.9
Intercept	-0.8	Intercept	1.4	Intercept	-3.0
Slope	1.9**	Slope	1.4**	Slope	1.3**
Variance explained	.17	Variance explained	.12	Variance explained	.12
Crime prevention		NATO and EU		Privatization	
Party-voter distance	1.3	Party-voter distance	1.4	Party-voter distance	1.3
Intercept	2.9	Intercept	-10.7	Intercept	-10.0
Slope	.26	Slope	2.8**	Slope	2.2**
Variance explained	-.001	Variance explained	.58	Variance explained	.29
Tax policy				Church	
Party-voter distance	1.2			Party-voter distance	1.3
Intercept	-7.4			Intercept	-0.15
Slope	3.8**			Slope	1.5**
Variance explained	.40			Variance explained	.33
State social responsibility				Nomenclatura	
Party-voter distance	1.2			Party-voter distance	0.1
Intercept	3.1			Intercept	-5.0
Slope	3.1**			Slope	2.0**
Variance explained	.23			Variance explained	.44

\* p &lt; .01

\*\* p &lt; .001

*Absolute representation:*

Party-Voter Distance is the absolute difference between the average position of voters and members of parliament on issues.

Intercept—intercept of the regression equation.

*Relative representation:*

Slope—slope of the regression equation.

Variance explained is the R square of the regression equation.

In order to substantiate my argument I subtracted the maximum value of the stance on issues from the minimum value for both parties and citizens.

$|\max - \min|$  issue stance of party compared with  $|\max - \min|$  issue stance of citizens

The results are presented in Table 7. Table 7 complements what we can see from the figures portraying representation patterns. Parties tend to be closer to their electorates on important issues in comparison to non-important issues, in which they engage in issues leadership and relative representation. The only issue diverging from the observed pattern is tax policy. This was due to the unusually radical position of Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] (PO). Once this party's position is eliminated, the difference between the most radical position and the least radical one drops.

Parties tend to closely mirror citizens' preferences on important issues and be more radical on issues that are less important for citizens.

**Important issues**

Figure 1

**Unemployment**

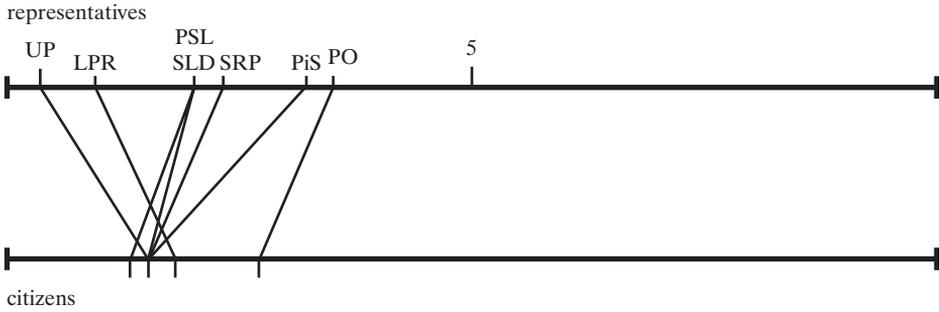


Figure 2

**Crime prevention**

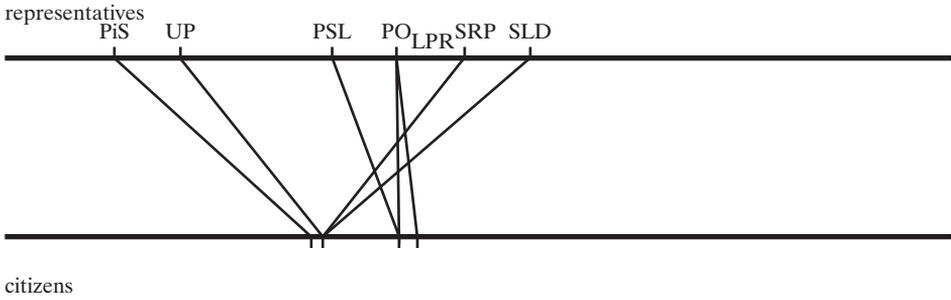


Figure 3

**Tax Policy**

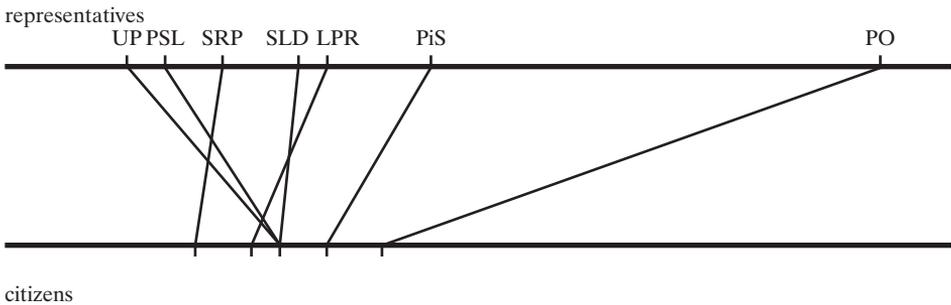
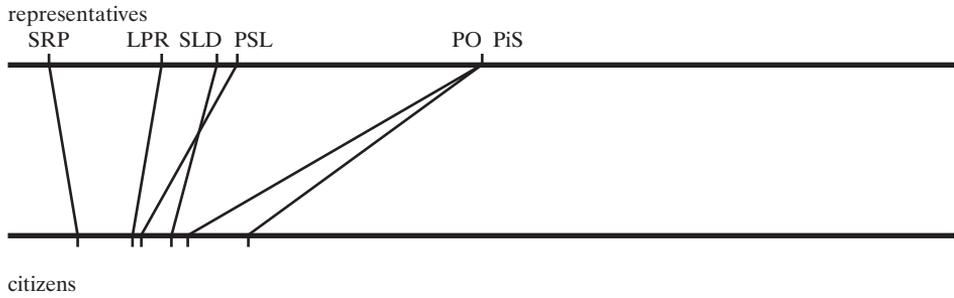


Figure 4  
State Social Responsibility



Less Important Issues

Figure 5  
Agricultural Policy

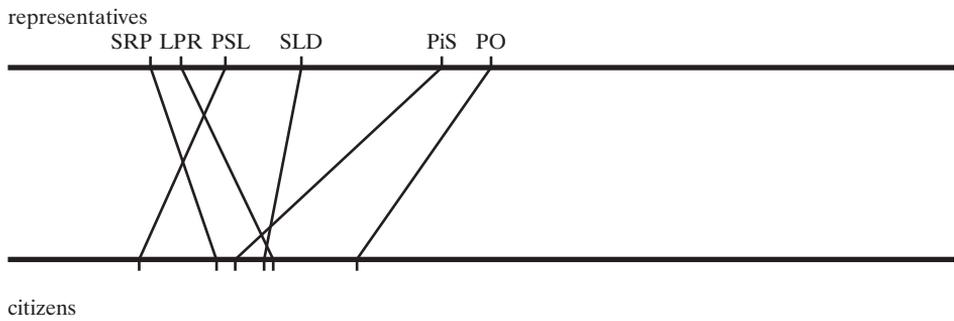


Figure 6  
Attitude towards EU

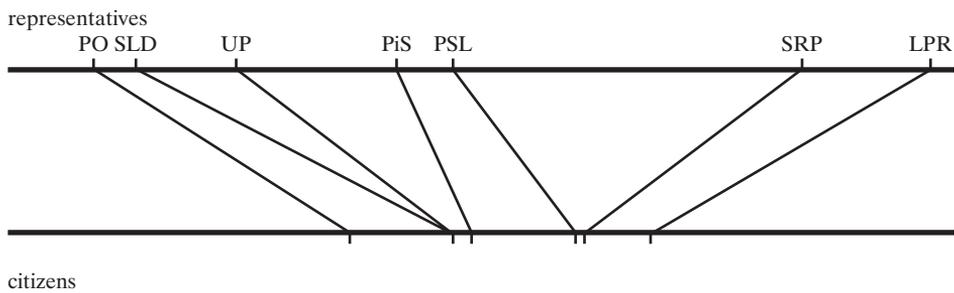


Figure 7  
**Foreign Capital**

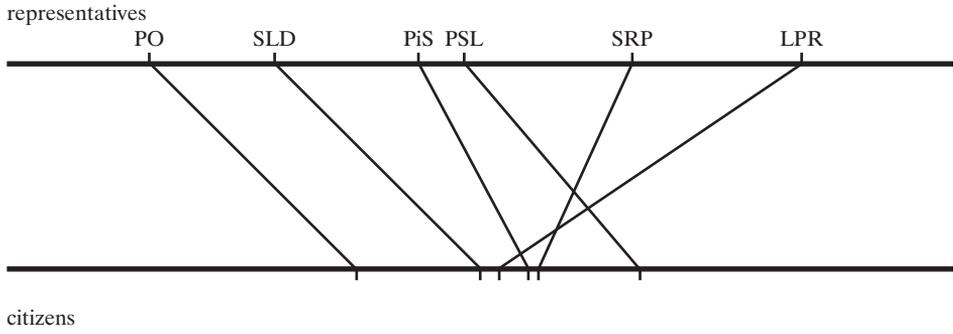


Figure 8  
**Privatisation**

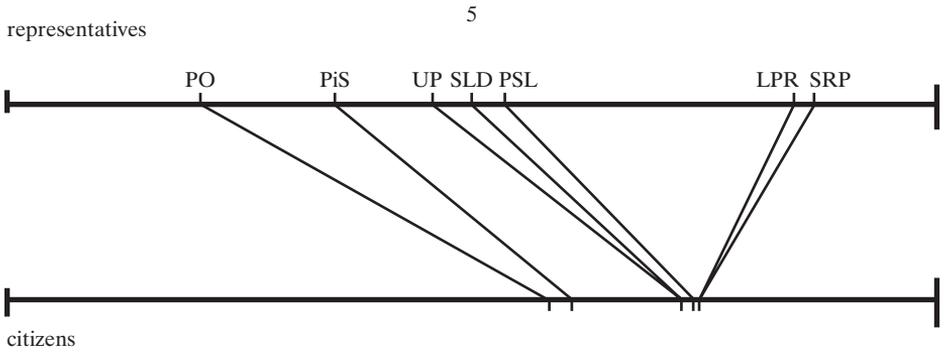


Figure 9  
**Role of Church**

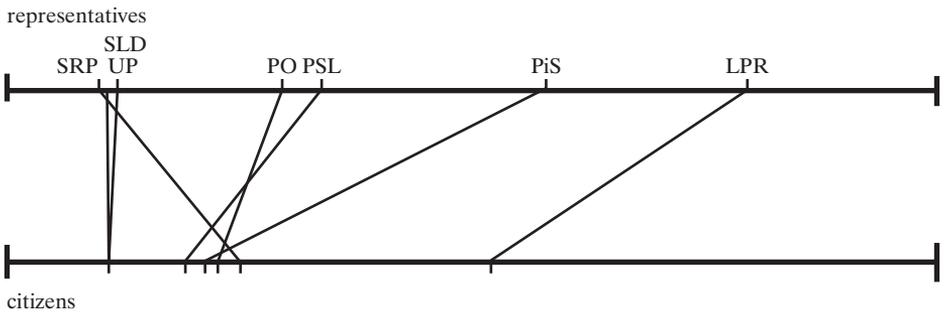


Figure 10  
Role of Nomenclatura

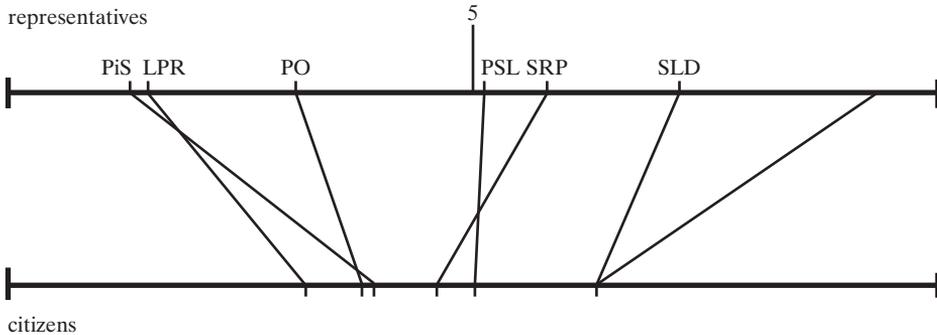


Table 7

The difference between the maximum and minimum value of the preferences of political parties and voters across the ten issues ranked according to importance in Poland in 2001

Issues	Parties	Voters
Unemployment	4.2	1.4
Crime prevention	4.2	1.1
Taxation	8.0 (4.2 without PO)	1.4
Social responsibility of the state	3.6	1.2
Agricultural policy	3.6	1.5
EU	8.9	3.2
Foreign capital	6.9	3.0
Privatisation	6.3	2.1
Role of church	7.0	4.1
Role of nomenclatura	8.0	3.1

### Discussion and Conclusions

In democracies people should be able to get what they want. This argument is especially important for issues that are salient for citizens. The first question of this study was whether the elite see different issues as salient than their supporters. The availability of data permitted a comparison of rankings of issues only in Poland in 2001. It seems that in Poland the issue rankings were remarkably similar in 1997 and 2001. The second important finding was that citizens and members of parliament seem to be more cohesive on important issues than on those that are less important. In view of these results the expectation was that the congruence of opinions would be higher on salient issues.

Data from Poland in 1997 revealed a very weak relation between salience and representation. Similarly to Hungary in 1998, where only one issue revealed a statistically significant relation, in Poland the degree of influence of party supporters over the preferences of members of parliament was limited. Four years later, the data from Poland showed a dramatic improvement in congruence indicators, permitting

testing for the relation between salience and representation. On salient issues, the correspondence between party supporters and party representatives had somewhat improved. Surprisingly, salience influenced the type of representation. On less salient issues party representatives engaged in relative representation. On salient issues parties tend to group around the preferences of their voters, engaging in a mandate style of representation.

These findings reveal that the relationship between salience and political representation is more complex than expected. Similar salient-issue rankings between citizens and party representatives and more cohesiveness does not guarantee the existence of a congruence of opinions. The data from 1997 and 1998 in Poland and Hungary revealed that there was no correspondence between citizens and members of parliament on salient issues or on topics on which citizens have a clearer stance. Salience has a limited effect on political representation when representation improves on all issues, as it did in Poland in 2001.

Although there was no clear relationship between salience and representation, the highest degree of influence by citizens was to be found on two salient issues. Furthermore, salience was associated with absolute representation, with parties grouped around citizens' preferences, while relative representation was associated with less salient issues. These results show that salience enhances citizens' influence on the policy preferences of their representatives and changes the way parties represent. The findings imply that the relations of representation in Hungary and Poland were far more moderate at the end of the 1990s, confirming research that expressed worries about the democratic future of these two countries. Moreover, unlike in other research that studies salience, I find that salience changes the type of programmatic linkages. These findings should be interpreted with a few caveats. The research focuses on three instances in two countries and this makes it more difficult to generalize from the results. Then it was very difficult to control for important alternative explanations for the increase of congruence. Perhaps in Poland congruence improved from 1997 to 2001 because of, and not in spite of, the change in the party system. Longitudinal research on political representation in Poland should answer this question. This study is one of the few comparative endeavours on the subject and sheds light on the nature of political representation in a democratizing setting.

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