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Are the Politically Active Better Represented?

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Abstract

Political participation is considered an important path for people to influence politics. However, whether those who participate actually see more of their preferred policies implemented remains an open question. We address this question by analyzing cross-national data connecting opinions to subsequent policy implementation on multiple policy issues. Based on an analysis of data on more than 270,000 survey respondents in 40 countries from 1996 to 2016, we show that voters are at most only slightly, but not substantially better represented than nonvoters. In contrast to the negligible effect sizes for voting, citizens who are active in multiple types of nonelectoral political activity are better represented than those who are inactive. We subsequently examine whether the observed relationships can be explained by socio-economic status, as well as attitudinal engagement such as political trust and political efficacy. Our findings show that the cross-national positive association between nonelectoral participation and opinion-policy congruence remains even when controlling for these factors. Our concluding discussion highlights directions for future research that pinpoint the causal mechanisms that link nonelectoral participation with subsequent opinion-policy congruence.

Keywords Political participation · Opinion-policy congruence · Voting ·
Demonstrating · Nonelectoral participation · Representation

Introduction

A primary purpose of political participation is to influence the political process with the aim of pushing political outcomes in a specific direction (Lijphart 1997; Schlozman et al. 2018). Previous research has documented instances when political participation leads to political responsiveness (e.g., Madestam et al. 2013; Wasow 2020), but whether this means that those who participate in politics are better represented

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overall (compared to those who do not) remains largely unknown. This question has long been considered important because of its normative implications. On the one hand, it is seen as a central part of democratic life that citizens can participate in and influence politics (Verba and Nie 1972, 3–4). On the other hand, unequal political participation may lead to inequalities regarding which groups' voices are heard by decision-makers (Verba and Nie 1972, 5). This could violate the principle of political equality; i.e. that the interests of all citizens should be considered equally (Dahl 1989, 86).

We use inspiration from the opinion-policy literature to provide answers to this question. Research in this field connects public opinion on concrete policy proposals with the implementation of these policies, and has found that some groups are better represented than others. A main focus of this line of research has been on income, with some studies finding that opinion-policy congruence is stronger for high-income earners (Bartels 2016; Elkjær and Klitgaard 2021; Elsässer et al. 2021; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014; Lupu and Tirado Castro 2023; Persson 2024; Persson and Sundell 2024), while other studies have found that income groups generally agree on most issues, which leaves little room for unequal representation (Branham et al. 2017; Enns 2015). In addition to this main focus on income-based differences, research has shown opinion-policy congruence advantages for additional socio-economic characteristics, such as education (Elsässer et al. 2021; Schakel and Van der Pas 2021), and gender (Kopkin and Roberts 2023; Mathisen 2024; Persson et al. 2024; Reher 2018).

We draw on the approach used in these studies for analyzing opinion-policy congruence between socio-economic groups and apply it to those who are politically active in multiple ways compared to those who are not. In addition, we investigate potential alternate explanations that may account for associations between participation and opinion-policy congruence. This is, to our knowledge, the first study that analyzes cross-national data connecting opinions to subsequent policy implementation on multiple policy issues to assess whether those who are politically active have higher opinion-policy congruence compared to non-participators.

Based on our analysis of data from more than 270,000 respondents in 40 countries covered in surveys from 1996 to 2016 we find that, in general, voters are *not* substantially better represented than nonvoters. However, we find that people active in different types of nonelectoral political behavior, such as demonstrating, are better represented than the non-active. Specifically, our results show that policies preferred by demonstrators and those who engage in other types of nonelectoral political participation have a higher chance of being reflected in policy implementation within five years, and that the representation gap is larger than that between income groups.

A limitation of this observational methodology (and common to all studies in the field) is that we cannot ascertain whether the observed association is due to a causal influence of participation on policy. In the theoretical section we therefore take stock of competing explanations, which we probe empirically to assess their consistency with the evidence. Given that we use individual-level data, we are able to control for individuals' socio-economic status and attitudinal engagement, moving beyond previous research in the opinion-policy congruence literature that has used group-level

(and not individual-level) analyses.[1] The results show that demonstrating and other forms of nonelectoral political behavior are associated with opinion-policy congruence even when controlling for socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics, and that this association is robust to multiple specifications.

Previous Research

While some research has focused on the expressive nature of political participation (Hamlin and Jennings 2011), a main focus in the literature is on its instrumental capacity to influence political outcomes. The often-expressed concern in the literature that unequal participation can be thought of as "democracy's unresolved dilemma" (Lijphart 1997) is based on the expectation that participation affects policy, and therefore, that unequal participation will necessarily yield unequal influence. As expressed by Schlozman et al. (2018, 6) from the perspective of representatives and public decision-makers, "[p]ublic officials cannot consider voices they do not hear, and it is more difficult to pay attention to voices that speak softly." Expressed alternatively from the perspective of citizens' participation, Verba (2003, 663) noted that "[e]qual activity is crucial for equal consideration since political activity is the means by which citizens make their needs and preferences known to governing elites and induce them to be responsive. Citizen participation is, thus, at the heart of political equality."

Citizens can participate in a wide variety of different ways, and political scientists tend to view the most prevalent act of participation – voting – as particularly important for explaining policy outcomes. In Powell's (2004) classic discussion of the "chain of responsiveness," electoral results determine the composition of lawmaking bodies and which parties control government, which in turn affects public policy. Yet empirical evidence thus far on the question of whether voting yields enhanced representation of the preferences of voters compared to nonvoters has produced mixed findings. Early evidence on this topic from the United States indicates that voters' general ideology predicts politicians' roll-call votes, whereas nonvoters' liberal-conservative ideology does not (Griffin and Newman 2005). Related research showed that counties in the United States with higher voter turnout also receive higher per capita federal expenditures (Martin 2003). These findings, suggesting that politicians respond specifically to voters, are even more consequential when preference gaps between voters and nonvoters are large and the policy area is salient – such as for redistributive issues in the United States (Leighley and Nagler 2014). Moving beyond the United States, more recent research shows that issue-voting in Sweden can lead to government responsiveness (Guntermann and Persson 2023), and that turnout in European countries can partly account for unequal opinion-policy congru-

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[1] As noted by Elsässer and Schäfer (2023), previous research on opinion-policy congruence has generally investigated only one factor at a time in separate studies – e.g., Persson and Sundell's (2024) study of income, Schakel and van der Pas' (2021) research on education, and Reher's (2018) investigation of gender.

ence between high- and low-income groups (Peters and Ensink 2015),[2] and between other groups (see Peters 2018, for an overview).

In contrast, other evidence on this topic from the United States indicates that legislators are not more responsive to those who vote (Ellis et al. 2006). Achen and Bartels (2017) questioned what they described as the "folk theory" of democracy which proposes that ordinary citizens vote and thereby choose leaders who enact voters' preferences. Their empirical evidence, focused on the United States, finds little support for this theory. While more recent cross-national and longitudinal evidence indicates that social policy is more responsive to voters than nonvoters, no evidence was found of voting as the causal mechanism that induces responsiveness (Dassonneville et al. 2021).[3] Related cross-national and longitudinal research measuring policy responsiveness via spending preferences finds limited support for electoral factors enhancing policymakers' responsiveness to public opinion (Bernardi 2020). Overall then, the best available evidence to date reaches mixed conclusions regarding whether voters are better represented in general, and – if they are – whether turnout is the causal mechanism that yields better representation.

Alongside these mixed findings regarding voting as a path to political influence, an alternate path to influence has regained attention in recent literature, namely the potential influence of nonelectoral participation. This alternate path was addressed most comprehensively in Verba and Nie's (1972) study of *Participation in America* which included an in-depth investigation of the consequences of participation. Verba and Nie (1972, 2) viewed this question of the impact of nonelectoral participation on representation as "perhaps most important of all" – and they also described it as the "most difficult to answer." Subsequent work by Verba and colleagues on political participation focused primarily on political participation patterns and their socio-demographic correlates (Brady et al. 1995; Schlozman et al. 2012; Verba et al. 1973, 1995) with more limited empirical attention to the potential implications of these patterns for measures of representation (Schlozman et al. 2018; Verba 2003).[4] Yet subsequent work by scholars of voting and electoral behavior has reiterated the potential importance of various types of nonelectoral participation as a potential parallel pathway for citizens to exert political influence (Bartels 2009; Griffin and Newman 2005). This "communication hypothesis" (Griffin and Newman 2005, 1207) proposes that nonelectoral political participation (contacting politicians, protesting, etc.), may act as a parallel causal vector that induces responsiveness among decision makers (see also Schlozman et al. 2012, 117–146).

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[2] More recent cross-national evidence, however, shows that while high-income voters are more likely to vote, vote for ideologically proximate parties, and see their parties in government, these electoral advantages do not translate into substantially higher opinion–policy congruence (Lindqvist et al. 2025).

[3] On the related question of whether responsiveness to voters yields electoral benefits, research shows that greater responsiveness is not linked to better electoral outcomes for governments (Lindqvist et al. 2024).

[4] A clear articulation of this trend in the literature is offered by Bartels (2009, 168): "Studies of participatory inequality seem to be inspired in significant part by the presumption that participation has important consequences for representation. As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 14) put it, 'inequalities in activity are likely to be associated with inequalities in governmental responsiveness.' It is striking, though, how little political scientists have done to test that presumption. For the most part, scholars of political participation have treated actual patterns of governmental responsiveness as someone else's problem."

These two separate potential channels of influence – voting and nonelectoral participation – are illustrated schematically in Figure 1. The top half depicts the classic electoral-oriented chain of responsiveness outlined by Powell (2004) that is channeled through the act of voting. The bottom half of Figure 1 shows the alternate channel of influence discussed by Schlozman et al. (2018), through which nonelectoral forms of political participation may influence policymakers' decisions. Note that this parsimonious figure does not illustrate the well-established fact that turnout is positively related to protest behavior (Kikuta 2025) and that most nonelectoral participators also vote (Oser 2022), which we take into account in our methodological approach.

While the explanation that voting may influence the decisions of policymakers through the "chain of responsiveness" of the electoral system is well established in the literature (Powell 2004), the reasoning for why nonelectoral participation may also influence policymakers' decisions has received less sustained attention in political science literature. The theoretical reasoning for the potential effect of nonelectoral participation is that policymakers, engaging in rational anticipation of future elections (Esaiasson and Wlezien 2017; Stimson et al. 1995) will act on public opinion communicated in multiple ways (Rasmussen et al. 2017; Rasmussen and Reher 2019; Rasmussen et al. 2019). Consistent with this line of reasoning, studies have leveraged various measures of participation and representation for specific policy issues, geographical contexts, and time periods to investigate instances in which political activism communicates citizens' policy preferences and priorities, and is associated with better representation (Bernardi et al. 2021; Branton et al. 2015; Gause 2022; Gillion 2012; Htun and Weldon 2012; Leighley and Oser 2018).

Previous research has provided support for several hypothesized mechanisms that can explain the presence of an association between nonelectoral participation and policy. For instance, representatives have been shown to have biased perceptions of public opinion, which several researchers partially attribute to a mechanism of direct influence of nonelectoral participators on decision-makers through activities such as contacting legislators (Broockman and Skovron 2018, 534, 557–559; Pereira 2021, 1309-1310; Pilet et al. 2024, 1040; Sevenans et al. 2024, 4). Experimental research
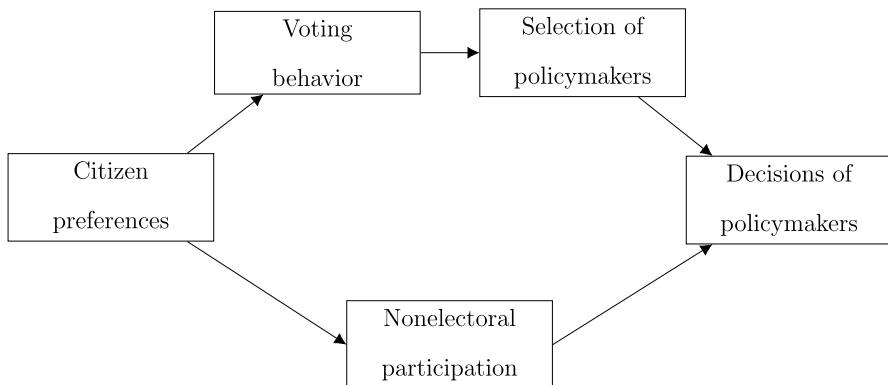
Fig. 1 Electoral and Nonelectoral Channels of Influence

on protests shows that protests can affect legislators' decisions (Wouters and Walgrave 2017). Protests also seem to influence the public agenda through the media (Jennings and Saunders 2019; Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012), but research finds that the influence on the legislative agenda is limited to only some issues (Bernardi et al. 2021).

Related research by Wasow (2020) has provided evidence of a well-identified and robust causal effect of political participation during the civil rights movement in the United States on subsequent political outcomes through the mechanism of influencing general public opinion. But the civil rights movement was extremely widespread and engaged large segments of the population on matters of crucial importance to them. While the prevalence of nonelectoral participation such as protests has steadily increased over the past several decades (Dalton 2008, 2017), it is not clear that this type of participation yields meaningful political outcomes outside of the context of a major social movement.

Despite the predominant focus of this literature on the expected positive effect of nonelectoral participation on representation through multiple mechanisms, there are also reasons to expect a negative association between nonelectoral participation and opinion-policy congruence, but with the effect running the other way, from representation to participation. Dating back to Gurr's (1968) research on civil strife, a line of work on the motivating role of grievance has observed that nonelectoral participation may be attributed primarily to political frustration and anti-system attitudes that may not translate into enhanced representational outcomes for the politically active (Borbáth 2024; Bremer et al. 2020; Klandermans 2014; Kurer et al. 2019). We also know that a recent experience with nonelectoral political participation predicts current dissatisfaction with the government (Muliavka 2021). If poor representation motivates political participation, particularly for activities beyond the electoral arena, then we should observe that those who participate more have lower levels of opinion-policy congruence.

In short, it remains an open question whether those who are politically active are better represented overall compared to the inactive. While the studies discussed here provide some evidence that those who are politically active are better represented on certain policy issues, during specific time periods, and in some geographic contexts, there is a lack of systematic, generalizable, cross-national evidence showing whether the politically active are better represented overall.

Taken together, this literature indicates that the question of whether the politically active are better represented is clearly the type of topic that is intrinsically important, regardless of causal relations (Gerring 2012; Holmes et al. 2024). Our first research question is thus: *Is opinion-policy congruence higher for political participators?* The question is descriptive, and robust investigation of it lays the groundwork for determining whether further inquiry is needed on the causal mechanisms underlying the connection between participation and representation, which we turn to in the next section.

Three Explanations for Better Representation of Participators

As the data we use are observational, our study cannot identify evidence of causal effects directly. Instead, we outline three different explanations for a potential observed relationship between political participation and opinion-policy congruence – one causal and two alternative non-causal explanations – as benchmarks for the subsequent empirical analysis. All three explanations predict that those who participate more should see higher opinion-policy congruence, but for different reasons, which gives rise to different observable implications. The goal of the empirical analysis is to determine whether the results are consistent with these explanations. Our second research question is thus: *Which theoretical explanation best accounts for a relationship between participation and opinion-policy congruence?*

Causal Interpretation: Political Participation Influences Policy

The first explanation is simply that there is a causal effect of political participation on the decisions of policymakers. When individuals make their voice heard, policymakers act. Voters can alter the composition of the policymaking bodies and nonelectoral participators can pressure policymakers or change their perceptions of public opinion and thereby their political calculus. In either case, there is a causal effect of political participation on policy leading to better congruence between the opinions of participators and implemented policy. This relationship is described in Figure 2.

In the current study, we evaluate this explanation indirectly: If the prominent alternative non-causal explanations that we investigate fail to account for an empirical relationship between participation and congruence, the causal interpretation remains a relevant topic for future research.

Alternative Explanation 1: Individuals with High Socio-Economic Status Participate more, but Affect Policy Through Other Channels

The first alternative explanation we propose is that the relationship between participation and opinion-policy congruence is spurious and caused by a third variable: socio-economic status, which is associated with channels of influence other than political participation. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 3.

The positive association between socio-economic status and political participation is firmly established in the literature (Brady et al. 1995; Frank and Martínez i Coma 2023). Those with higher incomes and higher education have a higher propensity to vote, and also to be active beyond the electoral arena (Gallego 2015; Persson 2015; Schlozman et al. 2018; Theocharis and van Deth 2018). Regarding gender, although

| Political participation | Decisions of policymakers | Opinion-policy congruence |
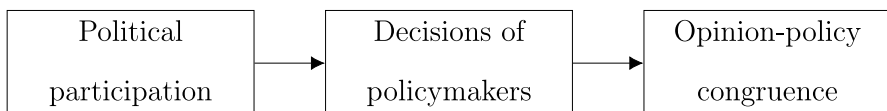
Fig. 2 Political Participation Influences Policymakers, Which Leads to Higher Opinion-Policy Congruence for Participators
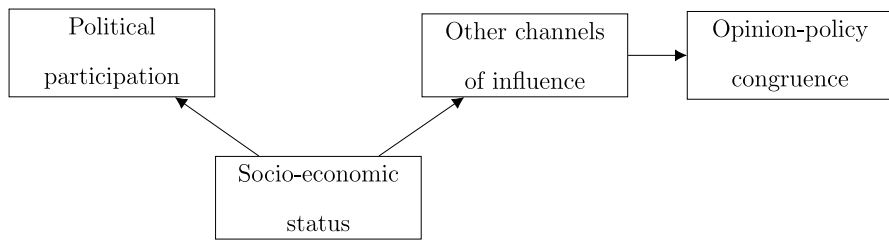
Fig. 3 Alternative Explanation 1: The Association Between Participation and Opinion-Policy Congruence is due to Socio-Economic Status

early survey-based studies on these topics indicated a participatory gender gap in favor of men (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Verba et al. 1978, 1995), more recent research shows that gender-based differences for multiple types of political behavior have decreased in recent years (Oser 2022; Shames et al. 2025). Regarding age, research indicates a difference between older participants who are particularly active in electoral-oriented avenues such as voting or joining a party organization, and younger individuals who are more prone to participate through non-institutionalized avenues such as protesting and signing petitions (Grasso 2018; Oser et al. 2013).

The mechanisms responsible for the link between these socio-economic characteristics and policy, other than participation, are a matter of debate. For example, research on the impact of the *very* wealthy, focused mainly on the United States, pays particular attention to the direct policy influence of political donors (Barber et al. 2017; Canes-Wrone and Gibson 2019; Witko et al. 2021). However, other research argues that party agendas already embrace privileged interests at an earlier stage, before the decision-making process begins (Weber 2020), which may imply other causal mechanisms. Relatedly, there are additional ways in which socio-economic status may matter for representation, even though they may be difficult to adequately measure, as discussed in research on class and descriptive representation (Carnes 2013; Carnes and Lupu 2023), racial capitalism (Thurston 2025), as well as lobbying efforts by business organizations and elites that successfully prevent certain topics from reaching the public agenda (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Schattschneider 1975; Witko et al. 2021). Another reason that income levels may matter is that representatives are more likely to mistake high-income opinion for the opinions of those with average income (Pereira 2021).

Recent work also shows that representatives themselves enjoy high socio-economic status in that they are relatively wealthy, better educated, men, middle age/old, and urban (Carnes et al. 2025; Elsässer and Schäfer 2023; Gerring et al. 2024). These factors may mean that policy preferences that are prevalent among people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to be implemented in policy (Carnes and Lupu 2023). Similarly, beyond being overrepresented in parliament, these groups tend to be overrepresented in other powerful positions in society such as in management positions in companies (e.g., Graham et al. 2017, 223). People in otherwise powerful positions may be more in contact with politicians, or politicians may listen to these voices more, leading to influence over policy.

The observable implication of this alternative explanation is that the association between participation and opinion-policy congruence should disappear or be substantially weakened when controlling for indicators of socio-economic status.
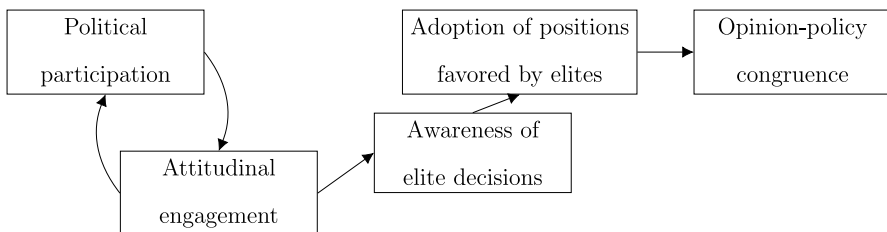
Alternative Explanation 2: Attitudinally Engaged Individuals Participate more and Adopt the Policy Positions of the Elite

Another explanation focuses on how individuals' attitudinal engagement in democratic processes – as evident in indicators such as political interest, political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy – increases the likelihood that an individual will participate, both electorally and nonelectorally. This has been found across various country contexts, temporal spans, and types of political behavior (Devine 2024; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2014; Muliavka 2021). Research that analyzes repeated wave panel data shows that when individuals participate (both electorally and nonelectorally) their political interest, efficacy and confidence are further strengthened (Finkel 1985; Gastil and Xenos 2010; Kostelka and Blais 2018; Quintelier and van Deth 2014). We thus have good reason to expect a strong and mutually reinforcing relationship between these attitudes and participation.

At the same time, these attitudinally engaged individuals are more likely to be aware of the positions favored by elites, and this awareness may lead these individuals to adopt elite positions for themselves (Broockman and Butler 2017). This would give rise to an association between participation and opinion-policy congruence, but not because participation affects policy, and instead because participators are more likely to prefer policies that were going to be implemented anyway.

This alternate explanation is illustrated in Figure 4. In this model, because there is an arrow from political participation to attitudinal engagement, political participation can be said to increase opinion-policy congruence, but only indirectly.

The observable implication of this alternative explanation is that the relationship between participation and opinion-policy congruence will disappear or be substantially weakened when controlling for indicators of attitudinal engagement, such as political interest, political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy. This holds true regardless of whether people participate because they are, for example, politically interested, or whether they are interested because they participate. In the former case the original relationship is spurious, and in the latter it is mediated through attitudinal engagement.

Fig. 4 Alternative Explanation 2: The Association Between Participation and Opinion-Policy Congruence is due to Attitudinally Engaged Individuals

Data and Methods

To measure policy implementation, we analyze data collated by Persson and Sundell (2024), which includes information on policy opinion from multiple international surveys, as well as originally coded information on the country-level implementation of the same policies within five years. This time window provides lawmakers with the opportunity to act on public opinion, with a low likelihood that public opinion has changed substantially. Coders examined policy preference questions that had already been asked to respondents in international survey programs, which could be determined as either implemented or not within five years. This includes policies that were already implemented in the country, and proposals that would require a policy change. Some of the policies are of a definitive character (such as whether to implement a specific law), while other policy proposals concern changes to policy levels (such as increases in unemployment spending). Regardless, the outcome is always coded as either implemented (1) or not (0). More information on the coding procedure that is relevant for our study is documented in Appendix A, and additional documentation is available in the supplementary materials of Persson and Sundell (2024).

The policies in our dataset cover three main topics: civil liberties, economic issues, as well as immigration and ethnic minority policy (see Appendix A for a full list of questions and information on policy implementation). Ideally, the surveyed issues would include a completely random sample of the entire universe of potential policy issues, which would allow drawing definitive conclusions about representation in general. However, only a selection of issues is included in surveys – and this selection is determined by survey teams' assessments of how important or salient a specific policy issue is in a particular context. On average, this leads to oversampling of more salient issues (Gilens 2012, 54–56). Such selection effects introduce an important caveat for interpreting the robustness of our findings, though this holds for all research in this area. To address this limitation we also conduct issue-specific analyses to assess how the availability of data across issue areas affects the inferences that can be made based on our findings (see Figure 7 and Appendix E).

As we are interested in political participation, our analyses are limited to the surveys in the opinion-policy congruence dataset that include information on multiple ways that people participate in politics. Previous research does not provide any specific expectation regarding whether those engaging in electoral or nonelectoral participation will be better represented in terms of policy outcomes, and we therefore investigate both. Specifically, we analyze voting behavior due to its theoretical relevance in the classic "chain of responsiveness" literature, as well as "demonstrating" which is the classic nonelectoral political action in the study of political behavior, and is considered one form of protest among many (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2023). In addition to these two key political acts of voting and demonstrating, we conduct additional tests that include all nonelectoral political behavior that is available in the relevant surveys (including signing petitions, boycotting, and contacting a politician).

For analyses that include voting and demonstrating, we analyze the European Social Survey rounds 1–5, 7, and 8 (ESS 2023a, 2018a, b, 2023b, c, d, e), and three waves of the International Social Survey Programme, namely, Role of Government

III 1996 (ISSP 1999), Citizen I 2004 (ISSP 2012), and Citizen II 2014 (ISSP 2016). These surveys measure demonstrating by asking whether the respondent had joined any demonstration (or protest march in ISSP 1996) in the last year, except for the ISSP 1996 which asked respondents about the last five years. Due to this deviation in question wording for ISSP 1996 compared to the other surveys in our dataset, we conduct robustness tests that exclude the observations from this survey (see Appendix D, Table D.2).

The collected survey material that includes these indicators of political behavior allows us to include several different types of survey items on political issues, which are documented in Table A.6. Our dataset includes 36 different policy issues, and approximately 750 country-year-policy combinations. To measure individual-level support for policy issues[5] we remove "don't know" answers and score support for the policy as 1, ambivalence (neither in favor or against, e.g., a 5 on a scale from 0 to 10) as 0.5, and opposition as 0.[6] For country-level policy implementation, we use the variable in the dataset that denotes whether the policy was implemented within a five-year period (see Table A.7).

We then combine information on respondents' individual-level policy positions and the country-level implementation of these positions to construct an individual-level measure of congruence that is either 0, 0.5 or 1. Thus, an individual will receive a congruence score for each policy issue. A congruence score of 1 means that the respondent either favored the policy and it was implemented five years later (e.g., they approved of increased defense spending and it was subsequently implemented), or that they did not want the policy and that it was not implemented (e.g., they did not want a law controlling wages, and no such law was implemented). In the case of a mismatch between the respondent's policy preference and actual policy implementation (e.g., the respondent disliked a policy but it was implemented), we assign a zero. For respondents who were ambivalent we assign a congruence score of 0.5, since it does not matter whether the policy was implemented or not. Finally, for each respondent we average congruence across all policy questions fielded to them to calculate their average congruence score.

Our measure of policy preference, like most of the literature on opinion-policy congruence, does not take level of support into account, nor how much salience respondents attribute to the policy, because consistent relevant survey items are unavailable in our data. Such variables may better gauge when opinion-policy incongruence matters substantively for representation, and should be investigated further in future research.

We have information on more than 270,000 respondents, and the distribution of the dependent variable is shown in the histogram in Figure 5. A score of 1 in the figure means that a respondent's preferred policy was realized on all surveyed issues,

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[5] There are other less common ways of measuring policy support, such as retrospective evaluations or prospective approval of policy implementation, which researchers can use when data are available as alternatives to the common approach in the literature that we use.

[6] As a robustness check, we conduct the same analysis where we code "don't know" answers, as well as those who did not answer, as incongruent (0). Additionally, we conduct another robustness check where we exclude indifferent respondents from the analysis. The results are reported in Appendix G, and our conclusions remain the same.
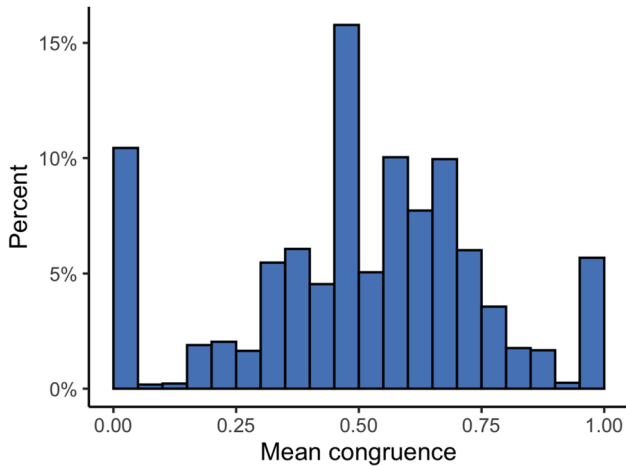
Fig. 5 Histogram of Individual-Level Congruence, Weighted by Number of Policy Questions the Individual Answered

and 0 means that none of the preferred policies were realized. The spikes at 0 and 1 in the histogram are the result of the fact that many respondents only answered one or two policy questions, and thus can easily have zero or complete opinion-policy congruence. In the analyses we weighted observations according to the number of policy questions answered by the respondent, meaning that respondents for whom we have more data to inform their congruence measure are given greater weight.

Our analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we investigate our first research question – whether opinion-policy congruence is higher for political participators – by assessing the mean congruence of individuals based on whether they voted or demonstrated recently. We then investigate our second research question – which theoretical explanation best accounts for a relationship between participation and opinion-policy congruence. We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with country-survey-year fixed effects. We regress individual-level congruence on the participation variable, and introduce control variables to examine whether any relationship between participation and congruence remains when holding these variables constant.

To test the first alternate explanation of socio-economic status, we include controls for characteristics that are considered to be the most theoretically relevant in the literature and can be harmonized across datasets used in our analysis. Specifically, we include controls for income (measured as respondent's position in the country-survey income distribution, 0–1), education (university or not), age, gender, and rural/non-rural residence. In the appendix we also control for ethnic minority status for a subset of the data (see Appendix D, Table D.2). To test the second alternative explanation of attitudinal engagement, we include controls for political interest, political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy. We specify the different operationalizations of all of the individual-level survey-based variables in Appendix A.[7]

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[7] We choose not to include a control for left-right self-placement since policy preferences can both cause and be caused by ideological orientation, which would lead to an underestimation of the association

Results

Is Opinion-policy Congruence Higher for Political Participators?

We begin by answering the first research question: are those who participate more in politics better represented, meaning, do they see their preferred policies realized to a higher degree? Table 1 shows the pooled means across all individuals in all countries and years in our data. The table documents both unweighted and weighted measures according to the number of policy questions answered by each respondent. The weighted measure is the more informative one for substantive interpretation, and the results also show that respondents who participate in politics have answered more policy questions on average. Weighted mean congruence for the 203,998 individuals who are voters is 0.512. For the 71,437 nonvoters the figure is slightly higher, 0.527. Based on this basic measure of mean congruence levels, voters are not better represented than nonvoters, though the gap between these groups in favor of nonvoters is small: 0.015 on a congruence measure that ranges from 0 to 1. In contrast, the 21,027 people who demonstrate are better represented than the 266,008 non-demonstrators: 0.542 compared to 0.515, for a gap of 0.027 in favor of demonstrators. Demonstrating is thus associated with better opinion-policy congruence.[8] However, consistent with prior research, the proportion of the population that reports having demonstrated (7.33 percent) is much lower than the proportion that reports having voted (74.06 percent).

The difference in congruence between demonstrators and non-demonstrators might appear small, but is in fact larger than the difference between respondents with high and low incomes, calculated on the same data and displayed in Table 1 to provide a relevant point of comparison. Respondents with incomes in the bottom quin-

Table 1 Demonstrators Have Higher Opinion-Policy Congruence Than Non-Demonstrators, but Voters do not Have Higher Congruence Than Nonvoters

	Unweighted mean congruence	Weighted mean congruence	Mean number of questions	n
Voters	0.468 (0.467, 0.470)	0.512 (0.511, 0.513)	3.90	203,998
Nonvoters	0.491 (0.489, 0.494)	0.527 (0.524, 0.529)	3.57	71,437
Demonstrators	0.509 (0.504, 0.513)	0.542 (0.539, 0.545)	5.33	21,027
Non-demonstrators	0.471 (0.470, 0.473)	0.515 (0.514, 0.516)	3.91	266,008
High-income	0.482 (0.478, 0.485)	0.523 (0.521, 0.526)	4.03	32,268
Low-income	0.448 (0.445, 0.451)	0.503 (0.501, 0.506)	3.92	54,568

Note: Mean value in second column weighted by number of policy questions answered by each respondent. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. The difference between groups within each category (e.g., voters vs. nonvoters) is statistically significant in all cases. See Appendix B for more information

between political participation and opinion-policy congruence. Nevertheless, including left-right self-placement as a control variable does not change our results (see Table D.3).

[8] Given that previous literature has examined opinion-policy congruence differences between groups mainly using data at the group-policy-level, we also run an analysis using this approach. The results, found in Table E.7, support the same conclusion.

tile have a weighted congruence of 0.503 compared to 0.523 for respondents in the top quintile, for a difference of 0.020. This can be compared to the 0.027 difference between demonstrators and non-demonstrators. Given the attention devoted to the difference in opinion-policy congruence between rich and poor in previous research (Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014), the difference associated with political participation observed here certainly warrants further scrutiny.

Based on the comparison of pooled means in Table 1, the answer to the first question of whether opinion-policy congruence is higher for political participators is thus negative for voting but affirmative for demonstrating based on this straightforward measure of mean congruence. To test the robustness of these results we next regress individual-level congruence on the same variables (voting and demonstrating), together with fixed effects for, respectively, countries, years, and all unique country-survey-year combinations. The analysis, presented in Table 2, assesses whether any associations are a product of variation between contexts. The strictest comparison is found in Model 4 where we include dummy variables for each unique combination of country, survey and year. In essence, here we compare voters and nonvoters as well as demonstrators and non-demonstrators who were included in the same survey. The findings in Model 4 show that the difference between voters and nonvoters with these controls is positive and statistically significant at the $p<.05$ threshold, but substantively negligible. The coefficient 0.002 means that those who vote see their preferred policies implemented 0.2 percentage points more than those who do not vote.

Demonstrators, in contrast, have much higher opinion-policy congruence, about 2.4 percentage points, compared to non-demonstrators.[9] These results thus confirm the findings from the mean weighted congruence measures that demonstrators are better represented than non-demonstrators, but that there is little difference between voters and nonvoters.

Table 2 The Positive Association Between Demonstrating and Opinion-Policy Congruence Remains When Controlling for Country-Survey-Year Fixed Effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Voted	−0.015**	−0.005**	−0.012**	0.002*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Demonstrated	0.031**	0.027**	0.013**	0.024**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Intercept	0.524**			
	(0.001)			
Country FE		✓		
Year FE			✓	
Country-Survey-Year FE				✓
N	273,191	273,191	273,191	273,191
R²	0.002	0.109	0.125	0.391

Note: *p <.05; **p <.01. Dependent variable is opinion-policy congruence. Observations weighted by the number of policy questions answered by each respondent

[9] The coefficients for voting and demonstrating are the same even when we only include one independent variable at a time, with the same observations and fixed effects as in Model 4.

Which theoretical mechanism best accounts for the better representation of participators?

Having established that those who demonstrate indeed see more of their preferred policies realized, we now turn to the more difficult question of *why* that is the case.

Testing alternative explanation 1: Socio-economic status

Previous research has consistently shown that individuals with high socio-economic status are more active in politics. As noted in Figure 3, individuals who participate may also be able to affect policy in other ways than the forms of participation measured here. To account for this alternative explanation, we conduct an analysis (see Table 3) that controls for income, education, gender, age, and rural residence. If the coefficient for demonstrators is no longer statistically significant and substantive in magnitude, then this would suggest that the relationship between demonstrating and opinion-policy congruence is explained by the high socio-economic status of those who tend to participate.

Model 2 of Table 3 includes a variable for income, and higher income is associated with better opinion-policy congruence. The coefficient for demonstrating is however largely unchanged, which means that the positive association was not caused by demonstrators having higher incomes. In Model 3 we remove income and instead include

Table 3 Socio-Economic Characteristics Explain Part of the Difference Between Demonstrators and Non-Demonstrators, but do not Fully Account for the Better Representation of Demonstrators

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Voted	0.002*	0.001	0.001	0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Demonstrated	0.024**	0.024**	0.015**	0.015**
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Income		0.034**		0.013**
		(0.002)		(0.002)
Tertiary education			0.032**	0.034**
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Woman				−0.005**
				(0.001)
Age < 30				0.005**
				(0.002)
Age >= 60				−0.012**
				(0.001)
Rural				−0.008**
				(0.001)
Country-Survey-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	273,191	200,602	200,340	147,108
R^2	0.391	0.401	0.384	0.390

Note: *p <.05; **p <.01. Dependent variable is opinion-policy congruence. Observations weighted by the number of policy questions answered by each respondent. When we re-estimate Model 1 with the same sample as in Model 4, the coefficient for Voted is 0.004** and 0.022** for Demonstrated

a dummy variable for having a university education. The results of Model 3 show that university education is also positively associated with opinion-policy congruence, with a coefficient of 0.032. Respondents with university education saw on average 3.2 percentage points higher opinion-policy congruence (when keeping demonstrating and voting experience constant). In contrast to the income variable, controlling for university education does reduce the coefficient for demonstrating from 0.024 to 0.015, though it remains statistically significant. A substantial part of the better representation of demonstrators is therefore due to their higher levels of education.

In Model 4 we proceed to include the income and education variables in the same model, along with variables for gender, age and rural residence. Women, respondents aged 60 or older, and rural respondents have lower opinion-policy congruence, while those with higher incomes, the educated, men and the young have higher congruence. The coefficient for demonstrating remains positive and significant and has the same magnitude (0.015) as in Model 3 when only education was included as a control variable, meaning that demonstrators are better represented than non-demonstrators even when controlling for these socio-economic characteristics. Regarding voting, we note that when including the socio-economic control variables in Model 4, the coefficient for voting is positive and significant at the p<.05 threshold, but approaching 0 in substantive size (0.004). This indicates that voting has a positive but small association with better opinion-policy congruence when socio-economic characteristics are taken into account.[10]

Overall, the findings in this section give some support for the alternative explanation: part of the difference between demonstrators and non-demonstrators can be attributed to the higher education of those who demonstrate. Nevertheless, most of the positive association between demonstrating and opinion-policy congruence still remains, even when controlling for all of the major socio-economic characteristics that have been studied in the rapidly growing body of research on opinion-policy congruence.

Testing Alternative Explanation 2: Attitudinal Engagement

Our second alternative explanation focuses on the attitudinal engagement of participators. Individuals who protest are almost by definition more attentive to politics and thus more aware of the policy positions of policymakers. If they also adopt these policy positions for themselves they will achieve higher opinion-policy congruence, but not because their participation directly affected policy.

We test this explanation by expanding the models with variables that could capture such attitudinal engagement: political interest, political trust, satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy. The socio-economic control variables from previous analyses remain in the model. The new variables are introduced one by one in Table 4 (See Table D.1 in the appendix for additional model information). All of these measures of attitudinal engagement have positive and statistically significant relationships with congruence, especially political interest. The coefficient for dem-

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[10] We also assess whether there is an interaction effect between voting and demonstrating, documented in Appendix B. We find no evidence of such an interaction effect, which we discuss further in the appendix.

Table 4 Attitudinal Engagement does not Explain the Difference Between Demonstrators and Non-Demonstrators

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Voted	0.004*	0.001	0.003*	0.003*	−0.002	−0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Demonstrated	0.015**	0.013**	0.015**	0.015**	0.017**	0.015**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Political interest		0.014**				0.009**
		(0.001)				(0.002)
Political trust			0.007**			−0.004
			(0.001)			(0.002)
Satisfied with democracy				0.009**		0.001
				(0.001)		(0.002)
Political efficacy					0.007**	0.006**
					(0.002)	(0.003)
Country-Survey-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socio-economic control variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	147,108	146,351	144,412	136,379	50,524	45,642
R^2	0.390	0.391	0.389	0.392	0.451	0.447

Note: *p <.05; **p <.01. Dependent variable is opinion-policy congruence. Observations weighted by the number of policy questions answered by each respondent. Socio-economic control variables include income, tertiary education, woman, age, and rural. When we re-estimate Model 2–5 with the same sample (observations) as in Model 6, the coefficients for Voted are (from Model 2 to Model 5) −0.002, −0.0004, −0.001, and −0.001. For Demonstrated, the coefficients are 0.015**, 0.016**, 0.016**, and 0.016**

onstrating however remains largely unchanged, even in the final Model 6 where all variables are included.

In Figure 4 we discussed the possibility that these attitudes, such as political interest, were both a cause of participation and an effect of it. This means that the relationship between participation and congruence can be either spurious (if interest causes both participation and congruence) or mediated (if participation causes interest which in turn causes congruence). Our analysis here cannot determine the order of causality but shows that neither appears to be an important explanation for the observed relationship, as the relationship between demonstrating and congruence remains unchanged even when including these variables in the model.

Additional Nonelectoral Participation

So far, we have investigated two forms of political participation. While the political acts of voting and demonstrating are arguably the most prominent activities in the study of political participation, our focus on only these two political acts thus far is also due to limited data availability and ease of presentation. Prior research shows that those who demonstrate are likely to also be active in additional activities, such as signing petitions or contacting a politician (Borbáth and Hutter 2022; Oser 2022). To assess whether the choice of participating in a demonstration has a different association with opinion-policy congruence compared to other forms of participation of comparable theoretical interest, we estimate models that are equivalent to the main

analysis, but focus on additional political participation indicators that are available in the data.

In Figure 6, we use political activities that are included in more than one survey program and in multiple survey waves to ensure the analysis of a relatively large and diverse sample that includes data on preferences for multiple types of policy issues. This allows us to include three additional types of nonelectoral political participation: boycotting, signing a petition, and contacting a politician. For each activity in Figure 6, we estimate two models: one including only country-survey-year fixed effects where the estimated regression coefficient is indicated by a square, and one that also includes the standard set of socio-economic control variables (income, education, gender, age, rural), where we have indicated the coefficient with a circle. Even though we use only participation variables that can be harmonized across at least two differ-
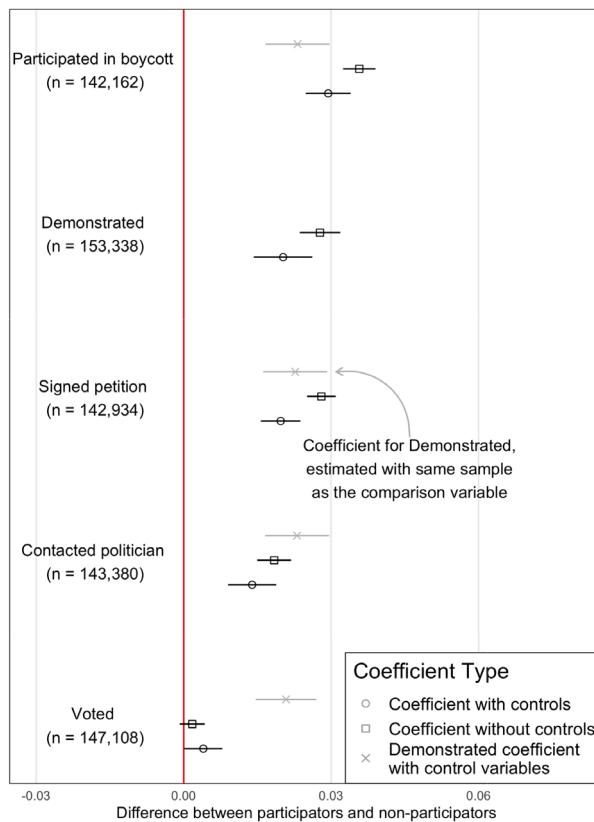
Fig. 6 Association Between Different Forms of Political Participation and Opinion-Policy Congruence. Note: Circles represent models with socio-economic control variables (income, education, gender, age, rural), while squares indicate models without control variables. An x represents a regression model with the socio-economic control variables, where demonstrated is the only included participation variable, but is estimated with the same sample used to estimate the coefficient for that participation variable. The sample sizes (n) reflect the models with control variables. All coefficient estimates are based on separate regressions. 95 percent confidence intervals. See Table C.1 for additional model specification information

ent survey programs, the sample size and policy questions measuring opinion-policy congruence nevertheless differ between these regression analyses. To provide a valid point of comparison with demonstrating to all other types of participation, we re-estimate the regression coefficient for demonstrating using the same sample available for each of the other participation types, represented by an x and confidence interval in gray. This means that there are only two coefficients for the row for demonstrated. Information on model specification details for each regression model (such as R^2) are available in Table C.1.[11]

The findings in Figure 6 show that all forms of nonelectoral political participation are associated with better opinion-policy congruence. Each pair of coefficients denoted by an x and a circle are similar in size, meaning that demonstrating has a similar coefficient size when estimated with the same data. The same is true for almost all of the other additional participation types that are available for a more limited sample, which we examine in Figure C.1.[12] However, one should be wary of drawing the conclusion from these findings that forms of participation with more positive coefficients are more effective. For example, the coefficient for participating in a boycott is technically the largest in Figure 6, but it seems unlikely that boycotting is the most impactful type of political participation for the specific policies for which we evaluate congruence in our analysis. As noted, these analyses are associational, and there is no basis for concluding that each specific type of participation has its own causal impact. Rather, if there is a causal influence of nonelectoral participation, then it is possible that some types of nonelectoral participation have an effect on policy implementation, while simultaneously correlating with other forms of political participation (that have little to no impact on policy-making such as wearing a badge, see Figure C.1).[13]

These analyses of demonstrating compared to other nonelectoral political acts analyzed one by one indicate that there is nothing unique about the political behavior of demonstrating, as other coefficients for nonelectoral participation have similar positive associations with opinion-policy congruence. However, the question arises as to whether individuals who are simultaneously active in multiple nonelectoral political acts may be better represented compared to the less active or inactive. To assess this question we created a combined index of nonelectoral political participation (see Appendix C). Specifically, we include all participation indicators together in one index variable measuring how many of the available nonelectoral participation actions the respondent has participated in. We re-estimate the models reported in Table 3 with this variable instead of demonstrating, and find that higher values on this index are associated with higher opinion-policy congruence. The coefficient for

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[11] We document the exact policies each participation type is evaluated on in Figure 6 and Figure C.1 in Table C.2 and Table C.3.

[12] This analysis is fully documented in Appendix C, and includes additional types of political participation that cannot be harmonized across survey programs, or are included in a limited number of survey waves, rendering the results incomparable with our main findings. We report on the coefficients for these types of participation, with the caveat that these results need to be interpreted with caution.

[13] See Appendix Table C.4 for a robustness test that estimates separate regression models that include multiple participation indicators that are available for a similar sample size of respondents in the same regression models. Results are similar to those reported in this section.

this index is 0.040 compared to 0.015 for demonstrating, meaning that a person who does the maximum amount of nonelectoral participation has, on average, 4 percentage points higher congruence than a person who does nothing (see Table C.5). This finding indicates that those who are maximally active in nonelectoral participation may act as "intense policy demanders" whose nonelectoral participation has direct or indirect effects on policy outcomes. Further research is needed to assess how and why individuals who engage in multiple forms of nonelectoral participation tend to have higher opinion-policy congruence.

Participation and Congruence on Specific Policy Issues

As noted, an important caveat of our method of analysis is that the measure of opinion-policy congruence depends on the specific policy questions asked in the surveys that are included in our dataset. In order to further explore if there are specific questions that drive the results we repeat the main analysis for voting and demonstrating on each separate policy issue in the dataset. For each question we compare participators and non-participators and verify whether participation is associated with more opinion-policy congruence for that specific issue. Each analysis also includes country-survey-year fixed effects and socio-economic control variables, rendering the estimation identical in structure to Model 4 in Table 3.

Figure 7 displays the coefficients of interest from 70 separate regression analyses, controlling for the fixed effects and socio-economic variables.[14] Markers to the right of the vertical line denote a positive association between participation and congruence. Beginning with voting (left panel) we can see that the three issues for which voting has the largest positive association with congruence are to (1) allow separate schools for immigrants if they wish, (2) reduce the working week, (3) and allow refugee applicants to work.

The shapes of the markers indicate whether participation is associated with support or opposition to the policy issues. Dots denote support, and x's opposition. The interpretation is that, for example, voters are more likely than nonvoters to oppose reducing the working week. In most cases, the working week was not reduced, which means that voters will have higher opinion-policy congruence than nonvoters on that issue. However, the coefficients for the analysis of voters/nonvoters represented in the left-hand panel tend to be quite close to zero.

For demonstrating, the variation is more pronounced. The proportion of the population who are demonstrators is much smaller than the proportion of voters, allowing for greater variance, and indeed Figure 7 shows that the variance for congruence by issue is greater for demonstrating than for voting. The strongest positive associations between demonstrating and congruence are for making immigrants leave for any crime, keeping persons suspected of terrorism in prison, allowing revolutionaries

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[14] Policy issue descriptions are shortened in the figure; see Table A.6 for further detail. Observant readers may notice that there are 35 and not 36 policy issues included in this analysis. We have excluded the question of introducing a basic income scheme from this analysis, as the dataset includes only one country-survey-year observation for this policy issue.
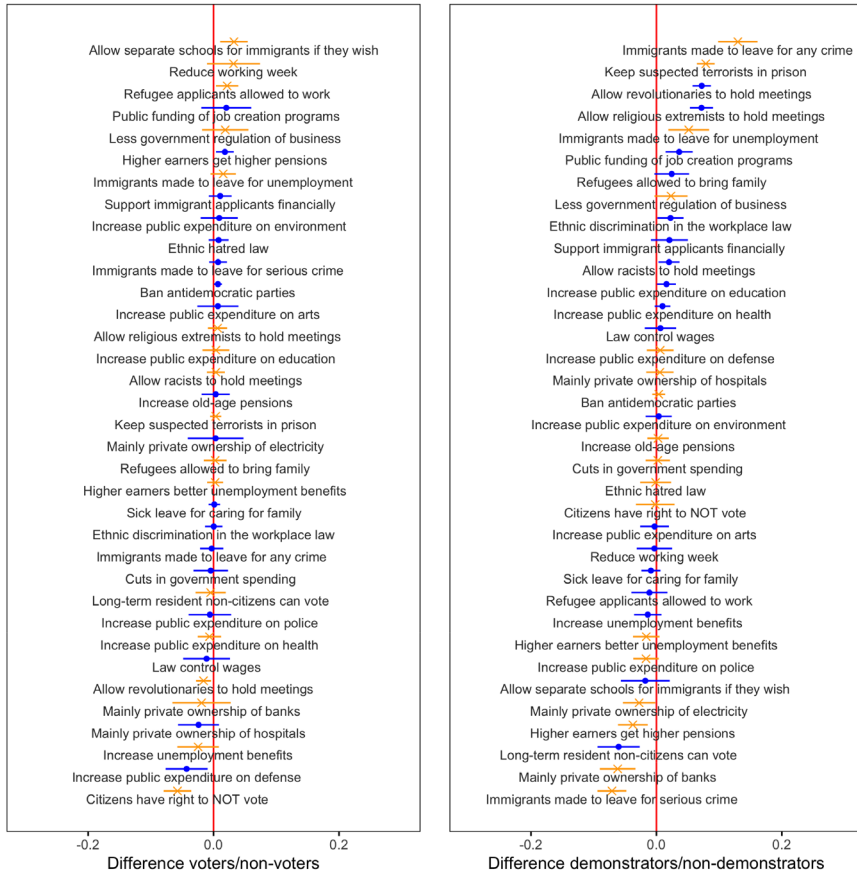
Fig. 7 Congruence Analysis Repeated for Each Individual Issue. Note: Issues marked with dots are more supported by voters/demonstrators, and issues marked with x's are more opposed by voters/demonstrators. Positive coefficients means that there is a positive association between voting/demonstrating and opinion-policy congruence

(groups who want to overthrow democracy) to hold meetings, and allowing religious extremists to hold meetings.

We examine opinion differences between participators and non-participators in Appendix F. Coupled with the findings from Figure 7, we note two points. First, demonstrators are more likely to support the rights of immigrants. In some cases this means more congruence, and in some cases less. Second, there are larger opinion differences between demonstrators and non-demonstrators, compared to voters and nonvoters. This fact seemingly enables larger difference in congruence between the former groups.

Overall, this descriptive issue-specific analysis suggests that the better representation of demonstrators is mainly relevant for policies regarding immigration and civil liberties, and less so regarding economic issues. The same pattern is documented in Appendix E, where we examine issue areas separately. There are several possible

explanations of this pattern. For example, there may be more protests concerning certain issues, or different types of policy issues may motivate distinctive types of people to protest which may affect the degree to which protests are effective. As the current study is not designed to investigate these types of explanations, we encourage future research to delve into this further.

Conclusion

Based on our analysis of data on political behavior, policy preferences and policy implementation for more than 270,000 individuals from 40 countries covered in surveys from 1996 to 2016, we show that voters are at most only slightly, but not substantively, better represented than nonvoters.

From a normative perspective, this finding could be interpreted with concern for the mechanisms of representative democracy, as it contributes the most comprehensive cross-national evidence to date on the important ongoing debate about whether voting yields political outcomes that are more responsive to the policy preferences of voters compared to nonvoters. For the question of whether the electoral system yields responsive governance, our findings support the conclusion reached by Achen and Bartels (2017), based largely on evidence from the U.S., that the "chain of responsiveness" theory fundamental to the literature is akin to a "folk theory" of democracy when investigated with the best available data and methods. An alternate and encouraging normative interpretation of the same finding is that, consistent with Dahl's (1989) vision of an ideal democracy, policy implementation seems to represent equally the policy opinions of all citizens, whether they vote or not. Another interpretation, discussed in research on the connection between income and representation, is that there are not large enough differences in opinion between these groups (voters and nonvoters in our case) to find meaningful differences in opinion-policy congruence (Branham et al. 2017; Wlezien 2017).

In contrast to the negligible effect sizes for voting, our findings show that people who are politically active in nonelectoral types of participation, such as demonstrating, do have better opinion-policy congruence compared to those who are inactive. While the difference between demonstrators and non-demonstrators is not very large, it is bigger than the much discussed unequal opinion-policy congruence between high- and low-income citizens. Furthermore, our analysis of multiple nonelectoral indicators measured as an index shows a strong positive relationship between this index and opinion-policy congruence. There are multiple potential reasons for why nonelectoral participation may be more impactful compared to electoral participation. For example, nonelectoral participation can take place more often than electoral participation, and can also convey more specific messages regarding policy preferences. The conclusion of our study that nonelectoral participation is associated with more opinion-policy congruence compared to voting clarifies the importance of next-step research that investigates these potential explanations.

Previous literature on the connection between unequal opinion-policy congruence and other socio-economic characteristics (e.g., income, education, or gender) usually ends the analysis there, but we instead proceeded to examine possible alternate expla-

nations of the observed association between demonstrating and subsequent opinion-policy congruence. Our analysis shows that socio-economic status can explain part of the observed association, but even when controlling for these variables, demonstrating retains a positive association with opinion-policy congruence. The same is true when controlling for individuals' attitudinal engagement with democratic processes. Our findings indicate that these prominent alternate explanations in the literature for why participation may be positively associated with opinion-policy congruence do not fully account for the relationship between multiple forms of nonelectoral participation and opinion-policy congruence.

As noted, the observational data that we analyze cannot yield conclusions about a causal effect of nonelectoral participation on policymakers' decisions. Two specific patterns in the data show the need for further inquiry into the causal processes. One, we find that many different types of political participation, even those unlikely to directly affect policymaker's decisions (such as wearing a badge - shown in appendix Figure C.1), have similar positive associations with opinion-policy congruence as demonstrating. Two, we see that demonstrators obtain better opinion-policy congruence mainly on two types of policy issues in our data: pro-immigration and pro-civil liberties issues. If such attitudes are more socially acceptable among politicians as well there could be coincidental representation due to participators having similar attitudes to policymakers. Individuals with such "mainstream attitudes" may also be more likely to demonstrate and publicly express their policy views: Previous research has shown that holding stigmatized attitudes leads to less participation, with specific immigration attitudes as one example (Kokkonen and Linde 2025). But controlling for potentially related variables such as political interest or trust or even left/right ideology (see appendix Table D.3) fails to account for the relationship in full.

Moreover, if we accept this interpretation then we must also ask why some policies are seen as mainstream or politically accepted, and if political participation is a likely cause of this. The expressed goal of many demonstrators is to put issues on the agenda (Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012), to let new voices be heard, and to change minds. Successful participation can at least over the long run change public opinion, as in the case of the civil rights movement discussed earlier. If so, there would indeed be a causal effect of participation on policy, albeit less direct than we are able to test with the data analyzed in the current study. Actions that in isolation are unlikely to affect policy, such as joining a demonstration, signing a petition or wearing a badge, can perhaps be seen as bellwethers of a wider trend in opinion that may in fact sway policy. Our findings therefore indicate the importance of future research on why some policies are seen as feasible and uncontroversial, and why others are dismissed as unrealistic or controversial.

All in all, our empirical results show that the answer to the longstanding and fundamental question of whether the politically active are better represented is a clear "yes" for nonelectoral participation. This conclusion calls for a widening of the research on opinion-policy congruence. So far, much of the research has focused on differences between rich and poor, but these results highlight the importance of expanding future research to other characteristics that are associated with participation and representation, such as health, disability, ethnicity, and urban/rural resi-

dence. And finally, we need more research that pinpoints the causal mechanisms that link nonelectoral participation with subsequent representation.

Declarations

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