

PaReSoGo: Dataset on party representation of social groups for 25 countries, 2002–2016

Party Politics

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq**Olga Zelinska and Joshua K Dubrow** 

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Abstract

Whereas social scientists have devised various ways to measure representation gaps between the political elite and the masses across nations and time, few datasets can be used to measure this gap for particular social groups. Minding the gap between what parties social groups vote for and what parties actually attain seats in parliament can reveal the position of social groups in the political power structure. We help to fill this gap with a new publicly available dataset, Party Representation of Social Groups (PaReSoGo), consisting of 25 countries and 150 country-years, and a method for its construction. We used the European Social Survey 2002–2016 and ParlGov data for this time span to create a Dissimilarity Index. To demonstrate the utility and flexibility in the combination of cross-national surveys and administrative data, we chose social groups of gender, age, and education, as well as intersectional groups based on gender and age, and attitudinal groups. We conclude this research note with empirical illustrations of PaReSoGo's use.

Keywords

political inequality, political representation, social groups

Introduction

Parties and parliamentarians are charged with the responsibility to express and translate the interests of “the people” in the legislature. A classic concern is an extent to which political parties who attained seats in parliament represent the voters (Budge et al., 2012; Dalton, 2017; Enroth, 2017; Romeijn, 2018); a smaller current in the literature is about the party representation of particular social groups (Erzeel and Celis, 2016; Gilens, 2012; Togeby, 2008). Minding the gap between the parties that social groups vote for and the parties that actually attain seats in parliament is essential. Parliament is a core institution of the political power structure. Social groups with limited party representation in parliament are politically unequal to groups with greater representation. Indeed, empirical studies of this gap conclude that, across nations, issue position is more aligned with the top of the stratification ladder rather than its whole (Bartels, 2002; Elsässer et al., 2020; Giger et al., 2012; Gilens, 2012; Lupu and Warner, 2021; Rosset et al., 2013; Schakel, 2019). The upshot is that inequalities intersect: groups disadvantaged in the social and economic spheres tend to be politically unequal too.

Social scientists have devised various ways to measure representation gaps across nations and time (Lehmann and Schultze, 2013), but rarely do they account for particular social groups. When scholars examine the underrepresentation of disadvantaged social groups, they usually turn to descriptive representation, e.g. the percentage of women in parliament, but descriptive representation of parliamentarians does not directly convey the will of the people. As a result, scholars struggle to address research questions such as (a) what is the level of party representation of social groups?; (b) how does party representation of social groups change across nations and time?; and (c) how large is the representation gap between social groups?

To help scholars address these research questions, we created a dataset and a method to produce a replicable and relatively low-cost measure of the party representation of social groups per country and year that combines high-

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quality publicly available survey and administrative data. For survey data, we use the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002–2016 that contains items on socio-demographics, social attitudes, and retrospective vote choice, i.e. the party that the respondents said they voted for in the last parliamentary election. We aggregate the ESS items to the country and year level and match that distribution with ParlGov’s data on the percentage of parliamentarians in each party per country and year. Our country-year measure is based on the idea of issue congruence measures that match distributions. In our data, we made this match via the Dissimilarity Index (DI). Here, the DI is a measure of distance in party representation between gender, age, education, intersectional, and attitudinal groups’ retrospective party vote choices and the distribution of parliamentarians in parties.

We designed our data and method to complement the growing research field that monitors and explains social group representation. Whereas many such studies are about policy responsiveness (Elsässer et al., 2020; Giger et al., 2012; Lupu and Warner, 2021; Rosset et al., 2013; Schakel, 2019), our emphasis on the capacity of large, cross-national surveys to broaden the kind of social groups researchers can analyze is inspired by, and adds to, extant and similar survey-based work.

In this research note, we present the rationale and construction of our dataset, Party Representation of Social Groups (PaReSoGo), which contains 25 countries and 150 country-years, and provide some empirical illustrations of its use.

Overview of the dataset

Existing measures of party representation

A common way to measure mass-elite congruence (or “proximity”) is to account for the party composition of parliament, and in this genre, there are two often used measures. One is an institutionalist approach called “vote-seat share,” calculated with two official sources of data: the percent of votes each party received (i.e., a measure of the will of the people) and the number of seats that the party won in parliament (i.e., a measure of how the will of the people formed into a parliament, given a specific configuration of electoral rules). The advantage of vote-seat share is that it uses official publicly available administrative data and is relatively easy to calculate. There are innovations that have improved on this measure (Kedar et al., 2016). The other popular measure is issue congruence, which is the association between mass political preferences and elite issue positions, often taken from left-right scales from surveys of masses or the elite (Caughey et al., 2019; Lupu and Warner, 2021), or information from party manifestos such as the Manifesto Project or Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). Close congruence is

considered to be high quality, or “good,” representation, i.e. a short ideological distance between voter and party (Achen, 1978; Dalton, 2017; Geering and Häusermann, 2012; Golder and Stramski, 2010; Holmberg, 2002; Lupu et al., 2017; Miller and Stokes, 1963; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2007).

We complement these with a measure that combines the desirable qualities of vote-seat share and issue congruence—i.e. relatively straightforward to collect and calculate with high-quality, publicly available data—and addresses a gap in the literature, that is, a more direct account of the party preferences of social groups.

Party representation of social groups

We built PaReSoGo from two primary sources. One is the European Social Survey (ESS). This academically driven cross-national and cross-sectional survey has been conducted across Europe every two years since 2002 via face-to-face interviews on representative samples of the adult population. The administrative data on elections across nations and time with the highest visibility and greatest reputation is ParlGov.

We use retrospective vote choice, i.e. “What party did you vote for?” In cross-national measures of party representation, few have used data on retrospective party vote choice. A prominent example is the MARPOR Party-Voter Dataset (Volkens et al., 2011) that uses retrospective vote choice from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and combines it with prospective vote choice from Eurobarometer and World Values Survey.¹ The MARPOR data is valuable but we have theoretical and practical reasons to not use prospective voting. Theoretically, one can view the measures of PaReSoGo as how well representation functions for particular social groups who choose parties within a specific institutional arrangement, country, and time. Voter choice is rooted in that institutional specificity, and thus gap movement over time would not necessarily reflect a qualitative change in the electoral institutions. Prospective vote choice has no such institutional benchmark.² Practically speaking, prospective voting, i.e. “Who would you vote for if the elections were held today,” requires data on the composition of the parliament during the fieldwork period of the survey, but no such data exist. In sum, we turn to retrospective voting because of its potential institutional meaning, and we can compare it to readily available official statistics with minimal cost.

Assumptions and interpretations of the measure

Core assumptions of the measure encompass the idea that surveys are a means to know how people think and behave within their political environment. We assume that each country’s survey administrators are knowledgeable about the political environment and, thus, what parties they

should list in their retrospective voting items. At the same time, we assume that surveys are, in part, social constructions in which an unknown number of respondents are inaccurate reporters of their past behavior. With cross-sectional surveys, we cannot identify, *a priori* or *a posteriori*, the accuracy of respondents' responses. We assume that most respondents accurately report how they think and feel at the time of the survey. As for the political environment, like MARPOR and CHES, we assume that within the political market of voters and parties, political parties have an identifiable ideology that voters know about. Survey data on retrospective vote choice directly capture party preferences and indirectly the ideological or policy preferences of social groups. From these considerations, we deduce that survey data will reasonably match the parliamentary data, e.g. few vote for fringe parties.

Considering that retrospective vote choice is often thought of in terms of accountability (Healy and Malhotra, 2013), in PaReSoGo, we view the item's interpretation in two main ways. If one takes the objective route, we can say that retrospective vote choice is as reliable and valid as any other survey item on political behavior that respondents retrospectively recalled. However, some may argue that, because retrospective vote choices are unverifiable, it measures a perception. On this subjective route, we can interpret it in terms of how social groups feel about the parties that are in parliament.

Calculating representation gaps of social groups with the dissimilarity index

A gap is a distance, and the distance measure we use is the Dissimilarity Index (DI). The DI was originally a demographic concept used to measure the extent of heterogeneity. We use it as a simple categorical variable that captures the discrepancy between people's political preferences and the parties that entered parliament. PaReSoGo's DI is about the comparison of two distributions. One is retrospective vote choice for parties. The other is the distribution of parliamentarians affiliated with parties in parliament. In our dataset, the choices of social groups are arrayed at the aggregate level as a distribution. The composition of parliament is also a distribution. The DI directly connects voters to parties as a measure of the distance between these two distributions.

To calculate the party representation using the DI logic, we used the following equation:

$$DI = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N \left| \frac{a_i}{A} - \frac{b_i}{B} \right|$$

where

a_i is the number of seats party A gained in given country elections in a given year;

A is the total number of seats in this country's parliament formed after elections in a given year;

b_i is the number of ESS respondents (or representatives of a specific social group) who named party A as a party they voted for in general elections in a given year in a given country;

B is the total number of ESS respondents (or representatives of a specific social group) who said they voted in these past elections in a given country.

In this equation, b_i or B could stand both for the total population of respondents or for those respondents who belong to a specific social group (e.g., women, the young, and so on) who report what party they voted for. PaReSoGo's DI can be interpreted as the proportion of seats in the parliament that would need to be reallocated across parties to achieve the distribution of preferences in the survey. The values of the DI range from 0 to 1. The value of zero means that the two distributions (in the survey and in the parliament) are identical: The greater the value, the greater the discrepancy between the two distributions. The score's proximity to zero (no gap) and one (largest possible gap) determine what is high and what is low: The higher the value, the greater the distance between social groups and the parties in the halls of power.

Structure of the data

PaReSoGo contains 150 country-years, which cover 8 ESS rounds (2002–2016) and 95 national elections (1999–2016) across 25 countries³: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.⁴ The minimum number of country-years that cover the same election is one; the maximum is three. For each country-year, we calculated the DI for all ESS respondents and selected social groups.⁵

Whereas there are many groups one can choose, we decided on major socio-demographic contrasting groupings of gender, age, and education. Using surveys opens up the possibilities to understand social group representation. To demonstrate this flexible utility, we also chose intersectional groups based on gender and age, and attitudinal groups. Specifically,

- Gender: women and men;
- Age groups: young adults (18–29 y.o.), the middle-aged (40–65 y.o.);
- Education groups⁶: lower educated (high school diploma and below) and higher educated (above high school diploma), using EISCED item in ESS (a concise seven-category version of ISCED—the International Standard Classification of Education, see *Measuring Education in the ESS and EVS*, 2019);

- Intersectional groups: young women, young men, middle-aged women, middle-aged men⁷;
- Attitudinal groups with regard to immigration. To construct these groups, we used the ESS item on allowing immigrants of a different race or ethnic group into the country and recoded the responses

as pro-immigration (allow many/some) and anti-immigration (allow a few/none).

Each country-year contains the DI scores for all ESS respondents and for 10 to 12 social groups. Figure 1 below provides the data basics.

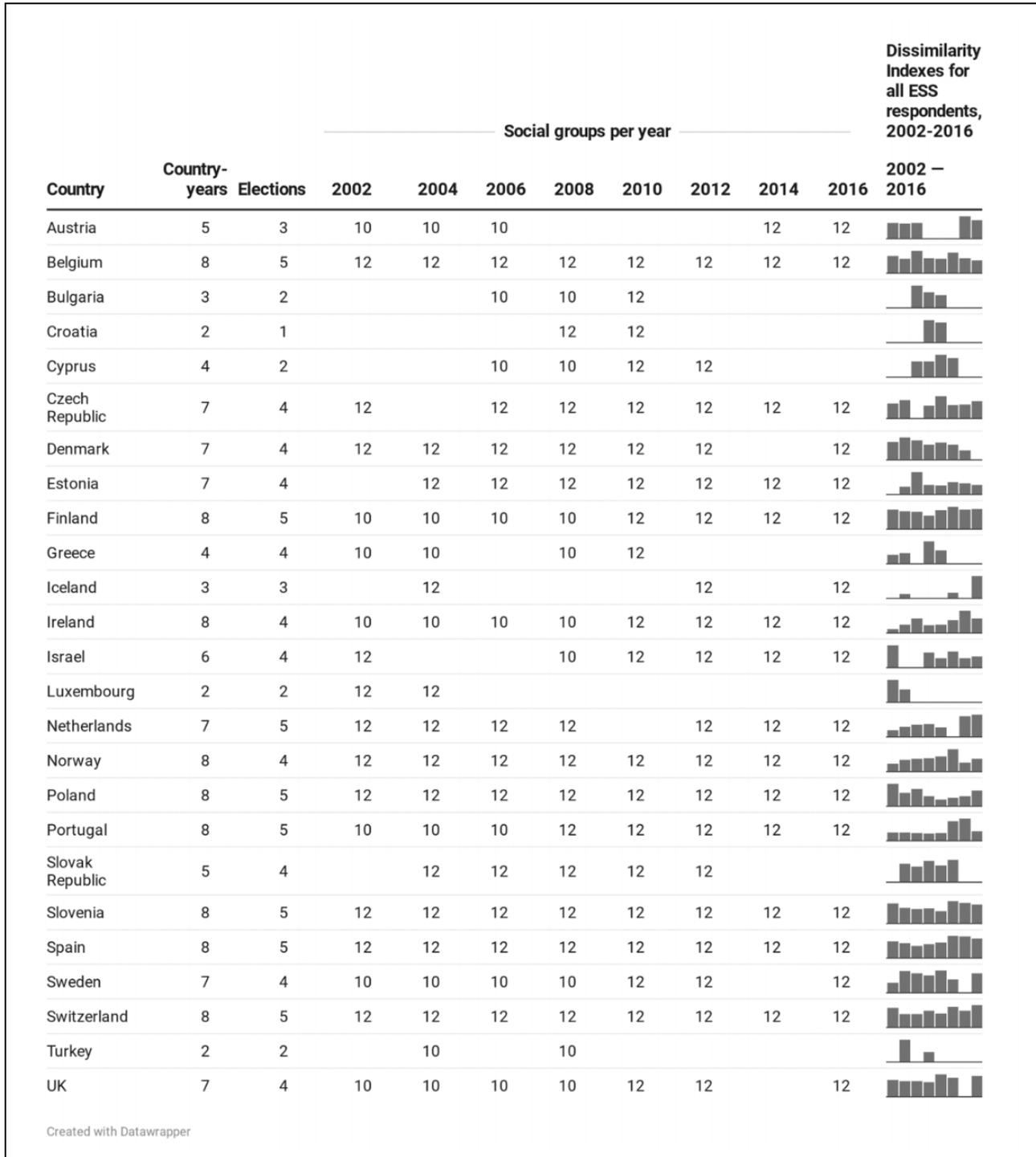


Figure 1. PaReSoGo data basics.

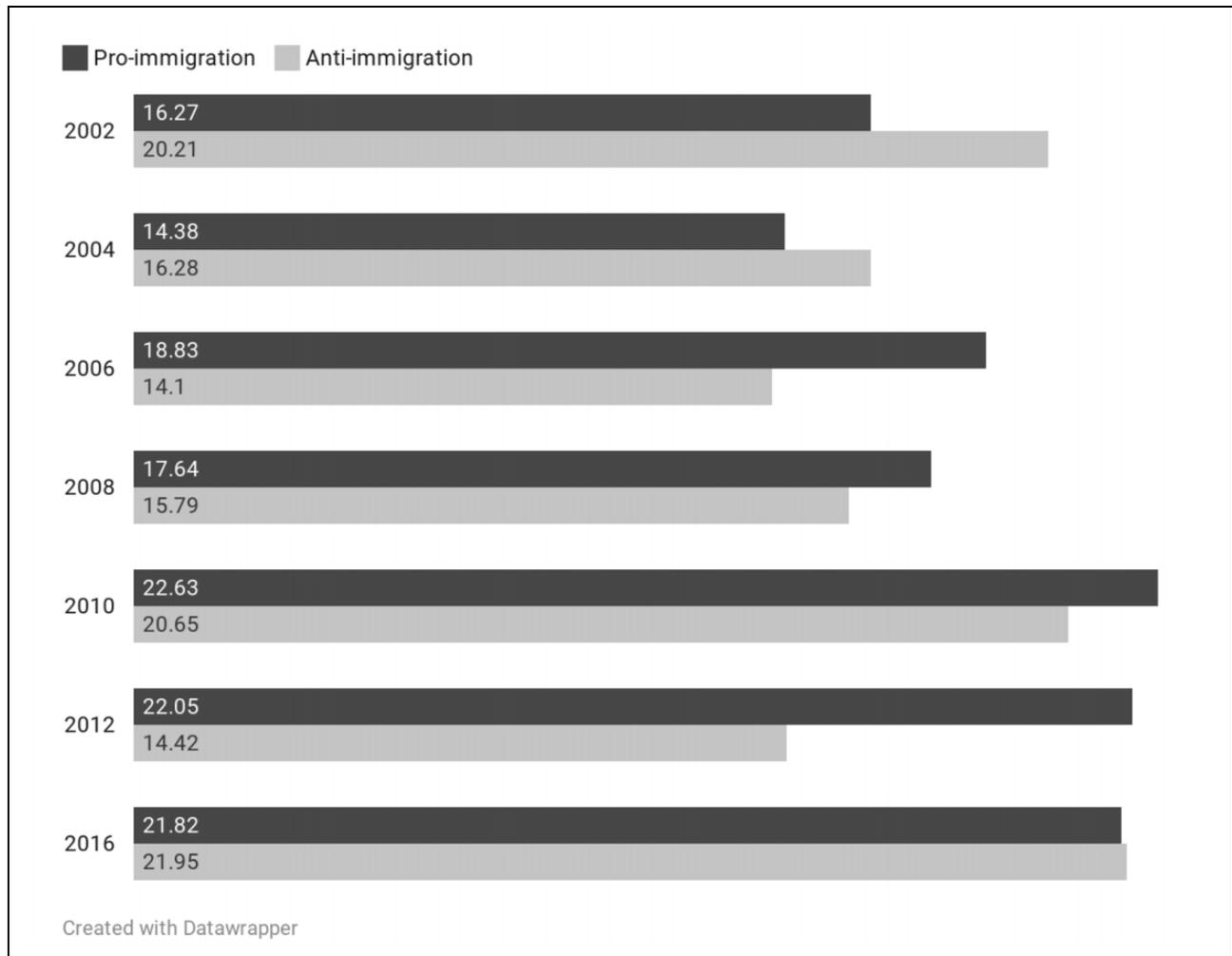


Figure 2. DIs for attitudinal groups, UK (all years).

Whereas the Codebook archived along with the data contains a step-by-step algorithm for DI calculation and detailed country-specific notes, here we highlight the major steps that would be helpful to understand the empirical illustrations below.

For all calculations, we used the ESS 8e01 cumulative file to obtain the distributions of votes by social groups. From the stable version of ParlGov, we calculated the distribution of seats in the parliament for every country by taking the number of seats won by a party and the total number of seats in parliament. Next, we took the shares of parliamentary seats for every party from ParlGov and matched them with the ESS party list. The point of this matching was to compare the ESS vote distribution to the ParlGov seat distribution. From that we calculated the DI.

Our data have a time element. As Budge and colleagues (2012: 1) suggest, examining party representation across time allows us to take elections out of their specific context and view representation—in this case of social groups—as a process. In this process, we can uncover the degree of

correspondence between social group preferences and the parties in parliament, and thus the dynamics of the representation gap between groups and parliament. Each country-year DI thus has an institutional benchmark from which to compare one to the next.

In PaReSoGo, time has a second dimension: the distance from the fieldwork period to the election. This distance might impact respondents' retrospective vote choice and, consequently, the DI for a given social group within a country-year. We constructed this election-to-fieldwork time distance variable from the fieldwork period (from ESS) and election date (from ParlGov). It ranges from 4 days to about 4.5 years. For example, for ESS 6 (2012), the minimum time between the elections and the fieldwork was 7 months (Slovak Republic), and the maximum was 49 months (Israel). The average time distance was 21 months.

Via its method, PaReSoGo presents an interesting puzzle over how to interpret such representation dynamics. The “methodological artifact” view is that DI dynamics in these situations are due to the production of the survey data; one

can search for what particular aspect of the survey throughout its data lifecycle is the cause. A substantive interpretation is that members of social groups misreport—deliberately or not—whom they voted for based on the political environment of the fieldwork period.

Ex-post matching of ESS and ParlGov presented several decision points. Overall, this process required precise matching of (a) relevant ESS waves and elections, and (b) two different party lists: from ESS (retrospective vote items mentioned by the respondents) and ParlGov lists (parties that attained seats in parliament). Thankfully, ESS questionnaires usually specified which general election they asked the respondents about. That said, there were judgment calls in a few exceptional cases when the ESS questionnaire did not specify the election that they asked about. For those we used the results for the most recent parliamentary election in ParlGov.

The task of matching the ESS and ParlGov lists required care. First, these lists are rarely the same. Besides the anticipated differences in the shares of votes and seats, there are differences in the number of parties. ParlGov also lists one-seat parties or “quota parties” of national minorities, such as that found in Italy, Poland, or Hungary.

Moreover, ESS and ParlGov may contain different versions of the name of a party that renamed itself or entered a coalition.⁸ To match these, we manually checked for the name changes in other sources, including the ParlGov website. In the end, it is the researcher who manually matches the scores from two different lists. Human tasks beget human errors, but researchers also are able to consider and decide on the best solution in any particular situation.⁹

ESS also has shares of respondents who reported voting for another party (“Other”), voted for an independent candidate, or other voting behavior (e.g., submitted an empty or a spoiled ballot). These survey categories are not present in the ParlGov seat distribution and they influenced the DI scores, sometimes substantially. For example, 0.2% of young adults in Austria (ESS8, 2016) said they voted for a party that the ESS coded as “Other.” At the same time, researchers coded responses of 17% of young adults in Portugal (ESS7, 2014) as “Other.” We kept the “Other” and the “technical” ESS categories (e.g., “Null” or “Blank”). We did not attempt to standardize the party lists in ESS and ParlGov in any way, as we believe all these nuances reflect the inherent complexity of each specific electoral system.

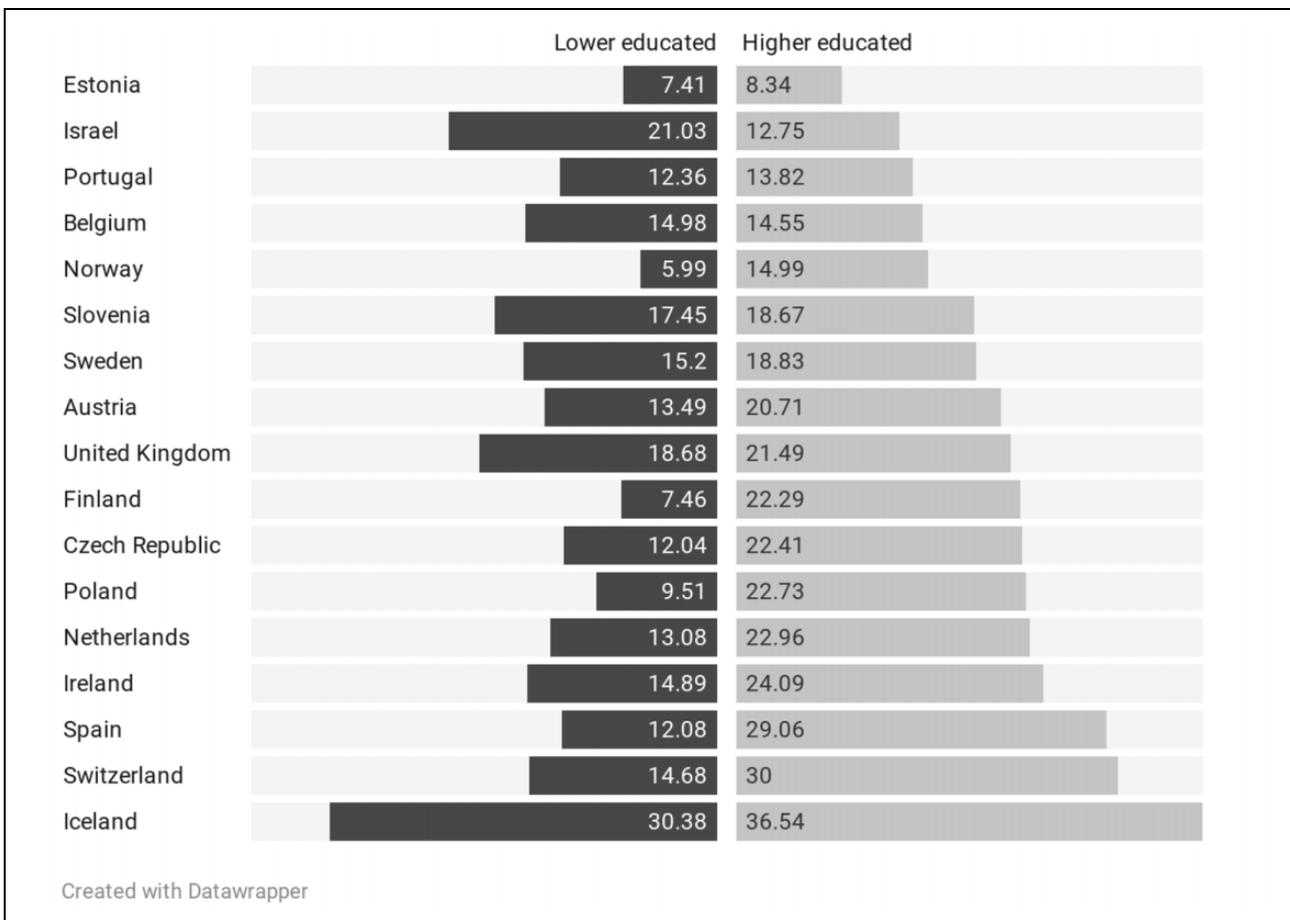


Figure 3. DIs for less- and more-educated respondents across all countries in ESS8 (2016).

Empirical illustrations

Researchers can use PaReSoGo in numerous ways: from contexts for qualitative research on party representation, to macro or multi-level regression models, to methodological research on retrospective vote choice. In this research note, we present four short empirical illustrations.

A simple hypothesis test: Representation gaps and the distribution of political power

We begin with a simple hypothesis test to show that a variable in these data correlates in an expected way with a variable from a well-known dataset.

We refer to the introduction of this research note to hypothesize that unequal representation would be negatively correlated with the equal distribution of political power in society. According to theory, participation and representation are linked in a specific way. In order to

shape policy, social groups need more than formal rules that proclaim participatory equality—they need *de facto* equal political participation, including ascension into the political elite (Gilens and Page, 2014). Thus, we test the hypothesis that the greater the *de facto* equality in access to political power, the smaller the representational gaps.

To measure the *de facto* equal distribution of power, we use the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Equal Access Index (Coppedge et al., 2021: 55). The Equal Access Index is an amalgam of three concepts. In their terms, they are: power distributed by socioeconomic position, by social group, and by gender. At the level of pooled data (all country-years), PaReSoGo DI scores for all ESS respondents correlate with V-Dem's Equal Access Index for the same country-years at -0.324 ($p < 0.001$). We thus find moderate empirical support for the hypothesis; greater political equality is negatively associated with gaps in representation.

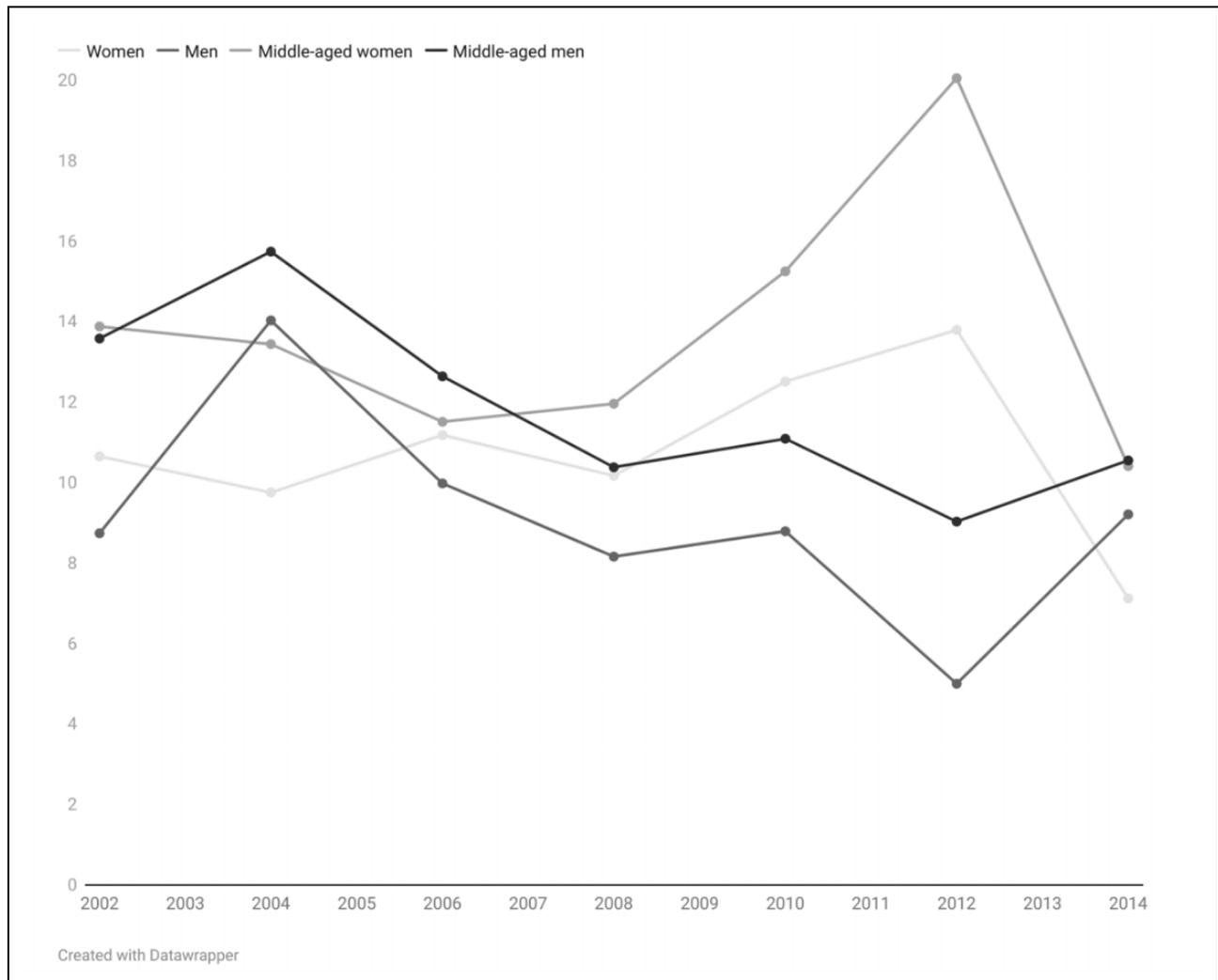


Figure 4. DIs for men and women in Denmark, all ESS rounds.

Comparisons within nation and across time

In the UK, some argued that the road to 2016's Brexit was due, in part, to the Leave campaign's focus on immigration (Gietel-Basten, 2016). How well were pro- and anti-immigration groups represented in the parliament in the run-up to Brexit? Data from PaReSoGo suggest that, over time, the gap between these groups constantly fluctuated, but was not large (Figure 2). Indeed, the largest gap was in 2012 (about the 2010 election),¹⁰ but in 2016, there was nearly no gap at all. The anti-immigration group perceived that they had a home in the UK's party system.

Comparisons across nations

In cross-national analyses of political behavior, education is an essential factor (e.g., Verba et al., 1995). Is there a distance between groups with different educational attainment in party representation? We examined 17 countries in 2016 and compared the representation gap between respondents with lower education (high school diploma and below) to those with higher education (above high school diploma) (Figure 3). PaReSoGo data show that the gaps between the two can be substantial: they range from 17 points in Spain to just above 1 point in Portugal.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework to understand how identity and power structures combine to bestow advantage or wreak disadvantage in various social outcomes (e.g., Collins, 2015; Hughes and Dubrow, 2018; McCall, 2005), including party representation. Indeed, intersectionality researchers find that analyses that account for more than just gender reveal complexities in the relationship between identity and power. Our analysis of Denmark from 2002 to 2014 suggests that, toward the end of that time, a significant shift in representation occurred (Figure 4). Whereas women's representation gap was larger than men's (9 points), middle-aged women's gap compared to middle-aged men was even greater (12 points).

Conclusions

Inequalities intersect, such that gender, age, education, and other markers of social inequality often turn into political inequality of representation. PaReSoGo, based on survey and administrative data, allows researchers to create distributions and thus apply the Dissimilarity Index (DI) to address crucial questions about social groups' representation in modern democracies. Scholars can use and reproduce a simple measure of the party composition that social groups in the country wanted (from survey data) compared to what they received as a result of elections (from administrative data) across nations and time.

These data and the method we describe have strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of these data are that they address core questions of social groups' representation and, in their simplicity and replicability, encourage development and expansion to other countries and times. We see two main weaknesses. One is the use of the DI. The concepts we use are simple, and thus can be applied to congruence measures, as well. The type of representational congruence here is closest to what Golder and Stramski (2010: 95) called "many-to-many representation," meaning many voters to many representatives. A second weakness is that PaReSoGo DI cannot show over- or under-representation. The nature of the data we chose restricts somewhat the inequality measures we can use.

The final data package will be archived and consists of a summary table in standard file formats, a codebook, and folders with raw calculations files for each of the 25 countries included in the analysis. We also provide the summary table and the raw files with the calculations for the "complicated" cases (see endnote 3). Most importantly, we provide information for the replication and extension of PaReSoGo.

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Notes

1. MARPOR calls it "party mapping" through which they match manifesto data on issue position with a mix of retro- and prospective vote choice. Theoretically, the core problem of "mass-elite congruence" with regard to party representation is how well the party composition aligns with social groups within the voting public. We do not use data on party ideology directly. Our measure entails assumptions that all parliamentarians act as representatives (Enroth, 2017; Romeijn, 2018) and within the parties they all hold the same ideological positions (see Golder and Stramski, 2010: 96–97).
2. We thank the anonymous reviewer for this theoretical reasoning.
3. In total, the research team had calculated the DI scores for social groups for 201 country-years, for 30 countries. The list of 150 "straightforward" country-years was created by eliminating 51 cases which we consider "complicated." These

- include countries with complex electoral systems, when the survey data available and the final seat distribution in parliament cannot be directly compared, e.g. Germany, when the ESS dataset contains two variables for the first and the second vote, or France, when the retrospective vote question asks about the first round of parliamentary elections. Other reasons for considering a case “complicated” concerned survey fieldwork problems, e.g. when the elections were held after the fieldwork start. The Codebook, archived along with the dataset, contains the detailed notes on “straightforward” and “complicated” country-years.
4. This list is slightly different from the country-years available in ESS. We used the ESS cumulative file, available through the online wizard, which contains fewer country-years than individual country files. Please see the Codebook for details.
 5. We use post-stratification weights.
 6. During the early ESS waves some teams did not harmonize into EISCED. Aiming at replicability, we have chosen not to use country-specific education variables to replace standardized EISCED, which resulted in missing DI scores for education groups for some country-years. According to our calculation, the number of missing cases is around 20%.
 7. While presenting the calculations for the intersectional groups in the raw files we also include the sample size. Additionally, in the Codebook we flag the cases when the number of respondents per group (most frequently young males or young females) was less than 30.
 8. For example, in Switzerland, “Radical Democratic Party” changed its name to “FDP” in 2009, but it was mentioned under the old name in the ParlGov datafile for all elections under study (1999–2015).
 9. It is theoretically possible that the mode of the item might have influenced the survey responses and, consequently, the DI scores. In some countries, the interviewers also presented a card with party names to the respondent. We found that the card was shown for 3 out of the 150 country-years in the PaReSoGo dataset. Among the “complicated” country-years, there are more cases of a card being shown.
 10. That said, it is important to remember that, because of technical considerations, DIs using ESS7 (2014) wave for UK were archived as “complicated” cases.
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