Does Pluralism Provide Equitable Representation?
Critiques of the By-Product Model

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Recap: Pluralists claim that members do represent their members and that the “pressure system” (i.e. group system) is inclusive because we are all members of groups for various reasons (economic, social, political).
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The Semisovereign People?

“The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent.” - E.E. Schattschneider (1960)
Recall that Olson argues that smaller groups are *far more* organized & effective at lobbying relative to large latent groups.
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As a consequence, smaller groups may have more resources and narrow scope of interests to seek public goods on behalf of their members.
Revisiting Olson & Small Group Bias

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- *Logic of Group System* favors small groups who form for non-political reasons (think corporations, economic interests).

- **Multiple Points of Access** exasperates this advantage, high transaction costs → less number of choke/veto points to win.
Inclusivity of Group System?

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▶ “*Special interests can potentially have exclusionary preferences... organized special interest groups are the most self-conscious, best developed, and most intense and active groups.*” -Schattsneider (1960)
Groups Represent their Members?

- Which groups provided better representation on behalf of their members?

- Political groups provide better political representation, given membership is primarily motivated by political rather than economic or social interests.

- Non-political groups may have narrow social & economic interests.

- Implication: "Special-interest groups are much more easily formed when they deal with small numbers of individuals who are acutely aware of their exclusive interests. . . . the notion that the pressure system is automatically representative of the whole community is a myth. . . . the system is skewed, loaded, and unbalanced in favor of a faction of a minority." - Schattsneider (1960)
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What is the finding that Gilens & Page make in their piece?

Central point that emerges is that economic elites & organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence.

Evaluation of four models of representation:

1. Majoritarian democracy: Median Voter Pivotal
2. Economic-Elite domination: Economic Elites (top 10%) Pivotal
3. Majoritarian Pluralism: Political Groups Pivotal

What does this look like empirically?
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Interest Groups & National Policy Change

Causal Map for National Policy Change

- Strongest independent influence on policy change? Economic elite
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Causal Map for National Policy Change

- Strongest independent influence on policy change? Economic elite
- Business groups more influential than non-political groups
- Median voter not really represented (**caveat**: high agreement between economic elite & median voter)
Median Voter Represented by Government Action?

Average Citizens' Preferences

Predicted probability of adoption

Percent favoring proposed policy change

Percent of cases (grey columns)

Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 9
Economic Elites Represented by Government Action?

Economic Elites’ Preferences

Predicted probability of adoption

Percent favoring proposed policy change

Percent of cases (grey columns)

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70

Carlos Algara  Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 9
Interest Groups Represented by Government Action?

Interest Group Alignments

- Predicted probability of adoption
- Net interest groups in support or opposition
- Percent of cases (grey columns)
Key Points:

- Critics of pluralistics generally conceptualize their criticism of the interest group (pressure) system into two categories: 1) is the system inclusive & 2) are groups faithful agents of representation.

- Critics contend the logic of collective action favor small groups, which are non-political groups.

- This leads to distorted outcomes in government policy (public good), resulting in small groups using *multiple points of access* to gain policy change or *prevent change*.

- Under-representation of political groups; Gilens & Page find evidence of this.

- Empirical evidence that pluralism has a small-group, economic bias relative to median voter (majority of citizens) with respect to policy change.