

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

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Agenda

- 1 Basic Claims by Critics
- 2 Revisiting Olson & Small Group Bias
- 3 Group Conflict & Hyperpluralism

Fundamental Critiques of Pluralism

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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)

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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
- ▶ *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)

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- ▶ 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.”*
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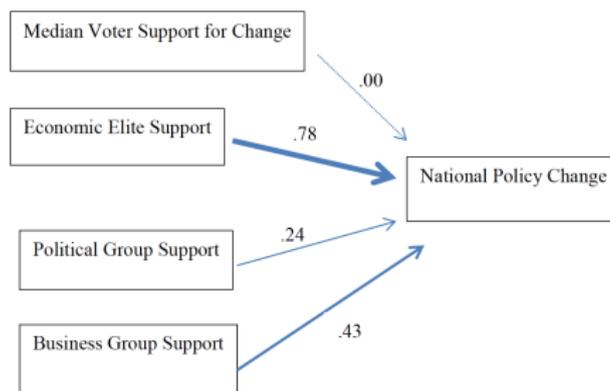
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What does this look like empirically?

Interest Groups & National Policy Change

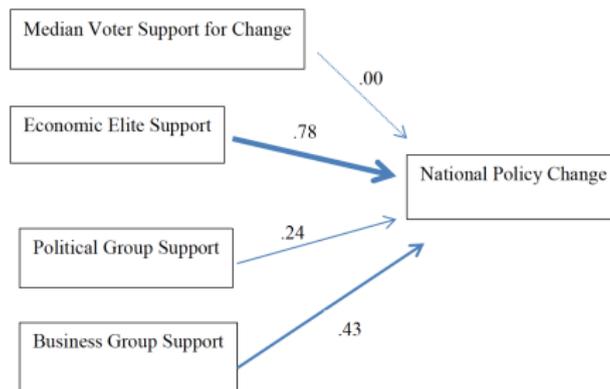
Causal Map for National Policy Change



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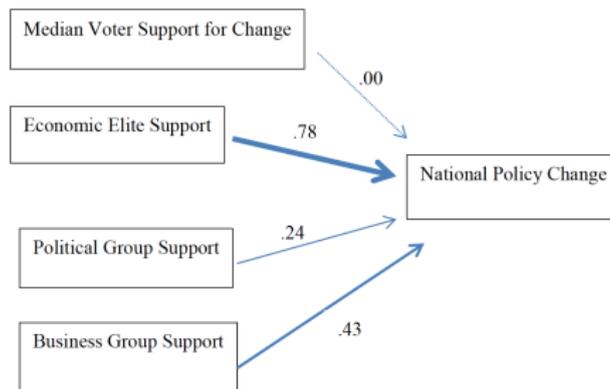
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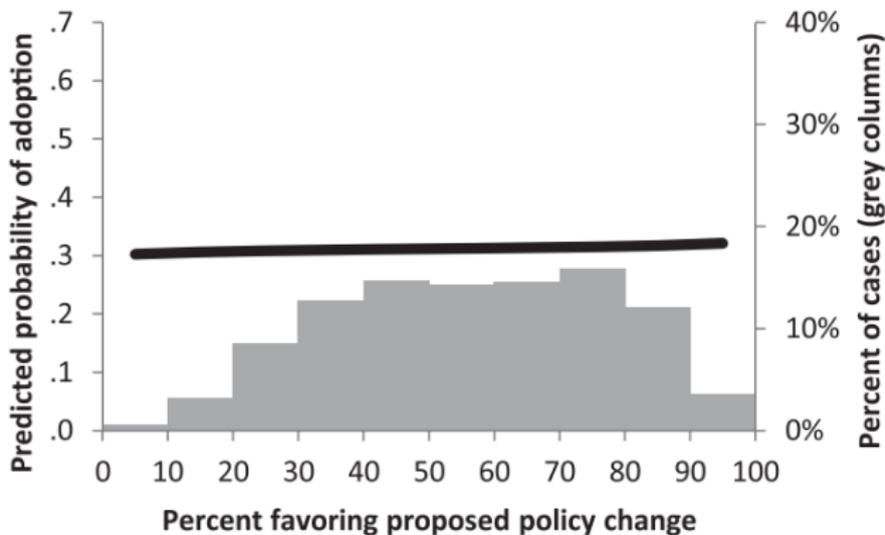
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- ▶ Business groups more influential than non-political groups
- ▶ Median voter not really represented (**caveat**: high agreement between economic elite & median voter)

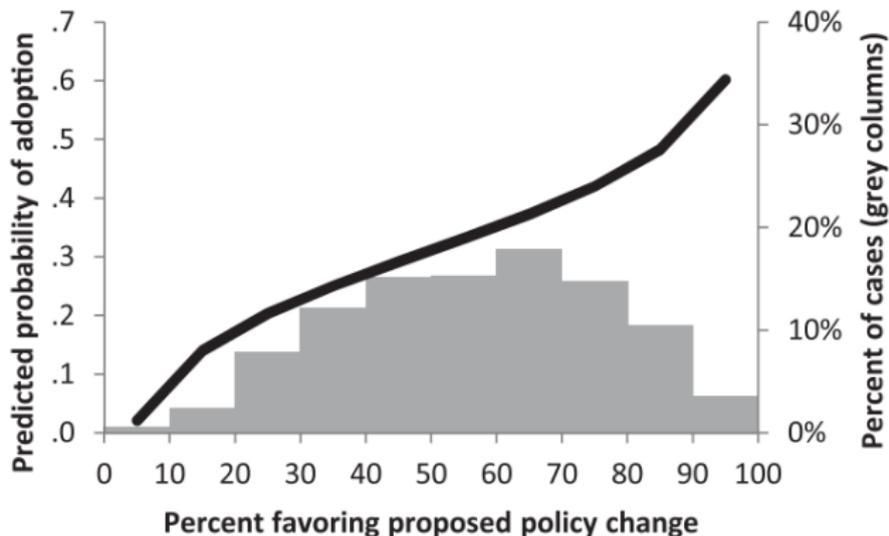
Median Voter Represented by Government Action?

Average Citizens' Preferences



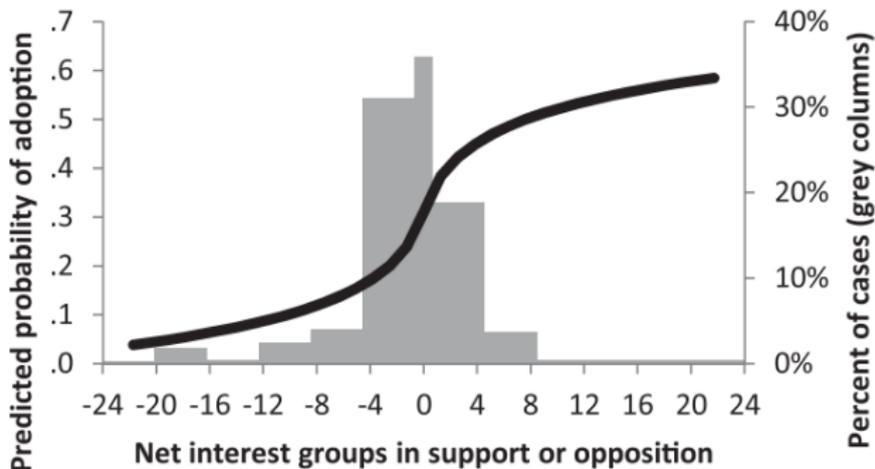
Economic Elites Represented by Government Action?

Economic Elites' Preferences



Interest Groups Represented by Government Action?

Interest Group Alignments



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