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From Opinions to Policies: Examining Links Between Citizens, Representatives, and Policy Change

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ABSTRACT:

In a number of recent studies researchers have argued that politicians appear to be more responsive towards citizens with high socioeconomic status. However, the mechanisms explaining this trend remain largely unexplored. In this paper we look closer at the role of political representatives as the key factor connecting citizens' opinions and policy changes. While the link between public opinion and elite opinion, as well as the link between public opinion and policy output is fairly well studied, few studies have looked at the entire relationship between public opinion, elite opinion and policy output. We combine data from Swedish election studies, surveys with members of parliament, and a database of policy change. We show that representatives' opinions reflect socioeconomically advantaged groups better than disadvantaged groups. We also find similar biases in policy responsiveness; policy changes correspond more closely to opinions of the advantaged groups.

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According to a populist conception of democracy, elected representatives should translate public opinion into policy outputs (Mackie, 2003; Manin, 1997). In a number of U.S. studies, researchers have argued that policy appears to be more responsive towards citizens with high socioeconomic status (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005, 2012; Gilens and Page, 2014). More recent studies have found a similar pattern in European countries as well (Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer, 2018; Schakel, Forthcoming; Elkjær, Forthcoming). However, the mechanisms explaining this trend remain largely unexplored. In this paper we look closer at the role of political representatives as a key factor connecting public opinion and policy change.

Do we see biased responsiveness because the political representatives are better at representing some groups than others? Or alternatively, if public opinion is well represented by representatives, is the bias to be found elsewhere? Perhaps even though representatives represent citizens well, the political system and the bureaucracy might not deliver the kind of policy change that the citizens wishes for.

Because of the critical role of representatives, scholars have extensively studied the relationship between opinions of elected representatives and their constituencies. For example, some scholars have focused on matching elected representatives' votes or positions to constituency opinions (e.g., Peress, 2013). There is also evidence that elites can and do represent their constituents' opinions on policy votes (Butler and Nickerson, 2011). Equally interesting but less studied is the degree to which policy outputs reflect representatives' opinions. Survey data on representatives issue positions is not available in most countries, limiting what we can learn about their opinions and how they are related to policy outcomes. Scholars therefore usually rely on broader measures of representatives' opinions, such as ideology (Deschouwer and Depauw, 2014; Bafumi and Herron, 2010).[1]

In this paper, we examine the relationship between public opinion, representatives' opinions, and policy outputs. Using data from Sweden, we are able to match opinions of parliamentarians and the public on specific policy proposals. Crucially, we can also observe

[1] See (Broockman, 2016) for a critique.

whether these proposed policies were actually implemented or not. As far as we know this is the first study to connect opinions of citizens, political representatives and policy implementation on the same issues. We use the concept 'responsiveness' to capture the relationship between actual policy change and policy support, i.e. the system is responsive if it produces the policy changes that citizens support. We use the concept 'congruence' to capture the correspondence between public opinion and representatives' opinions, i.e. congruence occur if representatives' opinions correspond to public opinion. This paper has the rare advantage of being able to study, in the first stage, both congruence (to what extent the representatives' opinion are congruent with public opinion) and, in the second stage, responsiveness (to what extent policy changes on the very same issues correspond to public opinion). We present results confirming that biases in responsiveness regarding policy changes occur in Sweden, and this kind of bias also exists when it comes to congruence. Political representatives appear to be better at representing opinions of socioeconomically advantaged groups rather than disadvantaged groups.

We are not the first to try to disentangle the representative chain to see where the link between citizens and representatives hold well and where it might be broken. The classic study by Miller and Stokes (1963) is one of few examples which tried to do just that. They measured constituencies opinions, the representatives' perceptions of these opinions, as well as the representatives own opinions and their roll call voting. Miller and Stokes (1963) showed that members' of congress voting patterns were affected by both their own opinions as well as their perceptions of their constituencies' opinions. However, representatives' opinions are weakly related to their constituencies' opinions. Hence, while representatives appear to want to represent the voices of the citizens, there is a disconnection between what the citizens want and what the representatives think that they want.

How Opinion Affect policy

The classic approach to study responsiveness examines the congruence between citizens' opinions and their elected representatives' opinions. Indeed, the conventional wisdom is that, at least in the US, there is a relatively strong relationship between the voters and their representatives' opinions and behavior (Mayhew, 1974; Clausen, 1973; Kingdon, 1989).[2] This is sometimes refereed to as dyadic representation (Weissberg, 1978), as opposed to collective representation which focuses on the connection between the public as a whole and representatives as a collective. This strand of research has looked beyond representatives' opinions and votes as dependent variables to study implementation of policies. In an influential study Monroe (1998) showed that implemented policies in the U.S. were in accordance with the majority's opinion in only slightly more than the majority of cases. This is echoed in a more recent study by Lax and Phillips (2012) that also shows that policy is "congruent with majority will only half the time". However, responsiveness was found to be higher for issues that citizens regarded as salient in both studies.[3]

In a study which tries to look into the timing of opinion and policy change, Page and Shapiro (1983, p. 543) conclude that "public opinion is often a proximate cause of policy" and that "when Americans' policy opinions shift, it is likely that congruent changes in policy will follow" (Page and Shapiro, 1983, p. 185). A more sophisticated approach to study to what extent and through which mechanisms opinion affects policy is developed by Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson (1995) who find support for dynamic representation, which means that policy respond to policy change via mechanisms such as government change and rational anticipation.

More recently Soroka and Wlezien have developed what they label "thermostatic representation" (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). They argue that not only does policy respond

[2] See (Achen, 1977) for a critique.

[3] It should, however, be noted that Monroe's results are correlational and he is not able to establish causality between opinion policy. Hence, the key question whether opinion affect policy or if politicians drive policy change remain unsettled in correlational studies (Kuklinski and Segura, 1995).

to opinion change; citizens also adjust their opinions as a reaction to implemented policies (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). In a number of empirical studies they find support for the thermostatic model of representation in the U.S. and in comparative data (Soroka and Wlezien, 2004; Wlezien, 1995).

Most studies mentioned so far look at the effects of public opinion as a whole or opinions among different constituencies. However, some studies go further in order to try to estimate which groups of citizens has the most influence on policy. In a classic study Verba and Nie (1972) found that leaders' opinions concurred more strongly with politically engaged citizens' opinions. Moreover, in a number of recent studies researchers have argued that policy appear to be more responsive towards citizens with high socioeconomic status (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005, 2012; Gilens and Page, 2014). However, the magnitude of this bias is contested (Soroka and Wlezien, 2008; Enns, 2015; Branham, Soroka and Wlezien, 2017; Bashir, 2015).

Previous Swedish studies in this area have looked primarily at the relationship between public opinion and political representatives opinions (Holmberg, 1997). While the relationship is found to be relatively strong, opinion polarization is larger among political representatives than among voters (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996). Sören Holmberg has shown that voters' and citizens' opinions co-vary over time and that trends in opinion change are very similar among voters and representatives. However, when opinion change, Holmberg suggests the shifts tend to be elite driven rather than driven by public demands. It is the elite that changes, and the public the follows, rather than the other way around. However, whether these elite opinion translate into policies is an open question in Holmberg and Esaiasson's studies.

Most importantly, as far as we are aware there are no studies — either in Sweden or elsewhere — looking at the relationship between public opinion, representatives' opinions, and implementation of policies concerning issues in a wide set of different policy areas.

Data

In order to asses the impact of elite opinion on policy, we turn to the surveys conducted with all of the members of the Swedish Riksdag.[4] The survey is fielded after each election starting in 1985.[5] This gives us eight waves of the survey. The response rate varies between 89 percent (2010) and 97 percent (1985 and 1994).

For public opinion, we use data from two sources. First, data from the Swedish "Society, Opinion and Media" (SOM) surveys which started in 1986 and has been conducted annually since then. It draws on a representative sample of about 6000 Swedish adults (15–85 years old residing in Sweden) and is carried out mainly as a mail survey.[6] And second, data from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES). The SNES were carried out after all national elections since 1956 and draw on net samples of about 3000 to 4000 Swedish adults.[7] The interviews are mainly conducted as face-to-face interviews. Both the surveys of the members of the Swedish Riksdag, the SOM surveys and the SNES surveys are carried out by researches at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (the latter one in collaboration with the Swedish official statistics bureau "Statistics Sweden"). Since the bulk of studies with both representatives and the public were designed by the same of researchers there is substantial overlap between the questions asked in the different surveys, which allows us to match opinions of the public and parliamentarians.

The different surveys also ask about several socioeconomic, demographic, and behavioral characteristics. This makes it possible to estimate the level of support for the proposals among different income groups[8] (only for citizens, not politicians), different age groups,

[4] "Riksdagsundersökningarna" in Swedish.

[5] Although the survey was fielded in 2014, we only include years 1985–2010 because our measure of whether policy changed or not depends on the next election. Additionally, a survey was fielded in 1996 even though there was not an election. Substantive results reported here do not change if we rerun the analysis excluding the observations from 1996.

[6] The response rate in the SOM surveys have declined somewhat over time, from the peak of 71 percent in 1992 to 58 percent in 2008.

[7] The response rate has declined from 95 percent in 1956 to 69 percent in 2010.

[8] The surveys include information on income at the household level. Previous studies of income and political opinions and behavior in Sweden show only marginal differences when using household income versus personal income Healy, Persson and Snowberg (2017). Note that the income measure comes from

education groups, and for people with different levels of news consumption and for party members and nonmembers (the latter two also only for citizens.)[9]

To asses how opinions are related to policy change, we also need information on implementation of policies. Following the work of Gilens (2012), we use survey questions that ask about policy support on specific policy proposals. We collected all such questions asked in any of the three series of surveys. For each such survey item we calculated the proportion supporting the policies among the public as a whole as well as in subgroups such as the supporters or representatives of different parties. Examples include introducing a six-hour workday, eliminating nuclear power, joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and prohibiting pornography.[10] We counted a policy as having changed if it changed in the direction of the question wording any time before the next election.[11] We coded the data so that the implementation variable is coded 1 when policies change. The opinion variables indicate amount of support for policy change. Some variables asking about support for status quo policies were switched to the opposite direction. It should be noted that policy changes are quite rare in this dataset. They only occur for 18 percent of the issue-years.

In order to assess whether a specific policy proposal was implemented we turned to different sources depending on the nature of the policy. Some survey questions specifically ask about political decisions and for those we have looked at transcripts from the national

official register data and not self evaluations in surveys.

[9]Since income is measured with inconsistent categories in the different surveys we follow the methodology employed by Gilens (2005, 2012). The original income variables were re-scored and replaced with the percentile midpoint of their income category. These scores were used as independent variables in logit models with policy preferences as dependent variable. Post-estimation commands were used to calculate the predicted levels of support at the 10th, 50th and 90th percentile. These predicted levels serve as the levels of imputed policy support among the different income groups. An alternative would be to compare the policy support among the lowest and highest income category, irrespective of the categorization made in the specific survey. When using that approach, the results are nearly identical. The correlation between the level of support in the top and bottom categories in the raw income variables and the imputed variables for the 10th and 90th percentile is above .9.

[10]Unlike Gilens, we also include relative preference questions such as whether taxes should be lowered of the size of the public sector should be reduced.

[11]So even if the policy subsequently changes back to the status quo, it still counts as having passed. Reported results do not substantively change if we rerun the analysis coding policy passage in several different ways. For example, we try coding change as having occurred within one, two, and four years with no difference. We also look at change between governments or party coalitions instead of between elections, with little difference.

parliament. Other questions focus on implementation of proposals; for those, we look at the appropriate sources for that specific issue. This could for example be budgets, administrative records, or documentation of the closing of nuclear plants or the construction of a controversial infrastructure project. Moreover, for many proposals that were never implemented there is simply no source or documentation (since these policy changes were non-events).

Thus, the unit of observation is a proposed policy (i.e. a survey question) asked in a specific year to the public and representatives. In total, we have 108 complete issue-year observations where we were able to match one of the public opinion surveys to the parliamentarian data and also find information about policy implementation. These observations are stacked in 42 issues. As far as we are aware, no other dataset exists for any country which successfully matches public opinion, legislator opinion, and policy outputs on specific policies at the national level. The issues, and the years for which they were asked are presented in table 3 and table 4. The mean levels and standard deviations of policy support are presented for citizens in table 1 and representatives in table 2. Among citizens, we find that highly educated and high-income citizens want to see more policy changes than lower educated and low-income citizens. When we compare citizens and representatives, it is striking that citizens are much more supportive of policy change than representatives. On average the mean difference in support is about nine percentage points. For an in depth study of unequal responsiveness to different socio-economic groups see (Persson, 2013).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, policy support among groups in the general public

Variable	Means	Standard deviations
General public	51.7	18.0
10th inc. p.	54.0	20.2
50th inc. p.	51.8	18.1
90th inc. p.	49.6	17.9
Men	50.0	17.0
women	53.3	21.4
Age 18–30	50.8	18.8
Age 31–60	51.5	18.7
Age 61+	52.8	19.5
Low education	54.1	20.9
Middle education	51.9	18.8
High education	48.4	17.7
Party member	50.1	16.6
Follow news	50.0	16.8

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, policy support among groups in the parliament

Variable	Means	Standard deviations
All representatives	42.8	20.1
Men	41.2	20.0
women	45.1	24.4
Age 18–30	46.1	27.8
Age 31–60	42.5	21.0
Age 61+	43.1	23.5
Low education	40.8	30.8
Middle education	39.8	23.0
High education	44.1	20.9

Table 3: Issues and years

Issue	Years
Accept fewer refugees in Sweden	1994, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Allow active euthanasia	2006
Allow gay couples to adopt children	2006
Cancel the carer's allowance' for parents	2010
Cancel wage-earner funds	1985
Decriminalize all file sharing on the Internet	2010
Dispose of nuclear waste so that it cannot be accessed	1988
Immigrants in Sweden should be able to freely practice their religion	2010
Introduce personal voting	1998
Introduce a language test to become a Swedish citizen	2002
Introduce gender quotas for public boards and committees	1994, 1996, 2010
Introduce six-hour working day	1985, 1988, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Keep nuclear power in the long run	1985, 1988, 1994, 1996
Lower taxes	2002, 2006, 2010
Lower the four percent threshold to parliament	1998, 2006
Lowering the voting age to 16 years	1998, 2002, 2006
Municipal veto in the nuclear waste placement issue	1998
Campaign contributions should be public	1998, 2006
Perform more national referendums	1998, 2006
Prohibit all forms of pornography	1985, 1988, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Prohibit research using fertilized eggs	2006
Prohibit opinion polls before the election	1998

Table 4: Issues and years, continued

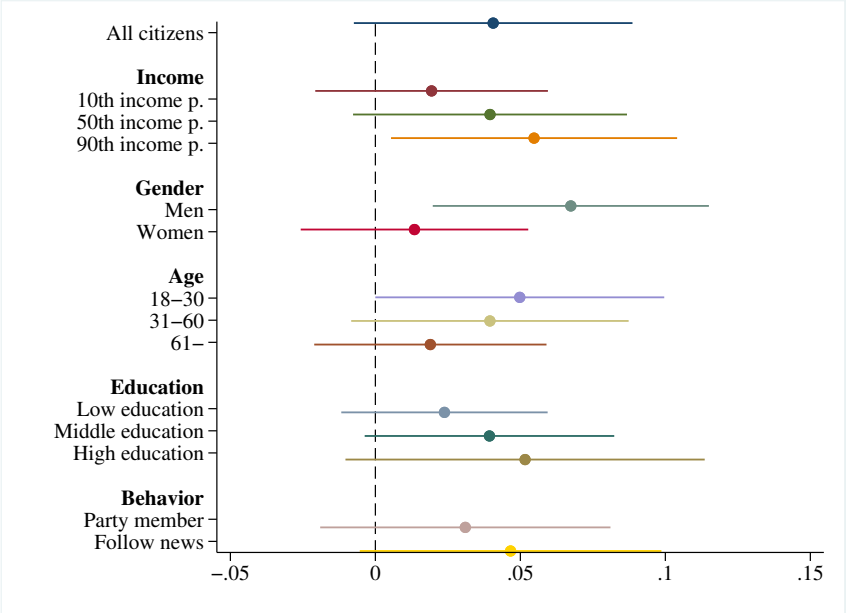
Issue	Years
Put municipal and national election at different times	1998, 2002, 2006
Raise taxes on high incomes	1994
Raise the carbon tax on gasoline	1988, 2010
Reduce defense spending	1996, 2010
Reduce foreign aid	1996, 2010
Reduce the number of MPs	1998
Reduce the size of the public sector	1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Reduce the term length from 4 to 3 years	2006
Remove nuclear power in a long term perspective	1988, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Remove tax deduction for household services	2010
Research on genetic engineering and genetic factors should be permitted	1994
Seek membership in NATO	1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Soften labor laws	2002
Stop private driving in cities	1988, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006
Support of Swedish membership in the EU	1988
Support of TV advertising	1985, 1988
Support of a Swedish EMU membership	1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Sweden should in peacetime pursue a nonaligned policy of neutrality in war	1996
Sweden should not join EMU from the start	1996
Sweden should withdraw from the EU	1998, 2002, 2006, 2010

Responsiveness: How well do policy changes reflect citizens' opinions?

We begin by looking at how well opinions of different groups of citizens are reflected in implemented policies. In figure 1, we illustrate results of a series of bivariate ordinary least square regressions where the policy support of different groups were regressed on policy change. We use heteroscedastic-consistent standard errors clustered at the issue level and year fixed effects. We use bivariate regressions rather than multivariate models since many of the groups such as the education and income groups are overlapping and including the same individuals, thus resulting in high multicolliniearity. Since our sample size is small and the confidence intervals are generally large, the estimates are not precisely estimated. Interpretations of the estimates should therefore be made with caution. Full results from the regression analyses can be found in table A1.

In these analyses, public support variables are coded to theoretically range from 0 (no support) to 10 (100 percent support) while representatives' support variables vary from 0 (no support) to 1 (100 percent support). As in studies from the U.S. (Gilens, 2012, 2005) as well as studies from Europe (Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer, 2018; Schakel, Forthcoming), we find that responsiveness is biased toward the opinions of the rich. In particular, it appears that there is a strong relationship between policy change and opinions of men, high income citizens, and the well educated. A ten percent increase in policy support among men is associated with an eight percent increase in the probability of policy change and an increase of the same magnitude among the 90th income percentile is associated with a seven percent increase in policy change. Opinions of women, those with limited education, and low income citizens appear to be less well represented in policy change. When looking at the relationship between the opinions of the general public and policy change, we find that the relationship is positive but only moderately strong. However, estimates are largely overlapping and do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Figure 1: Responsiveness

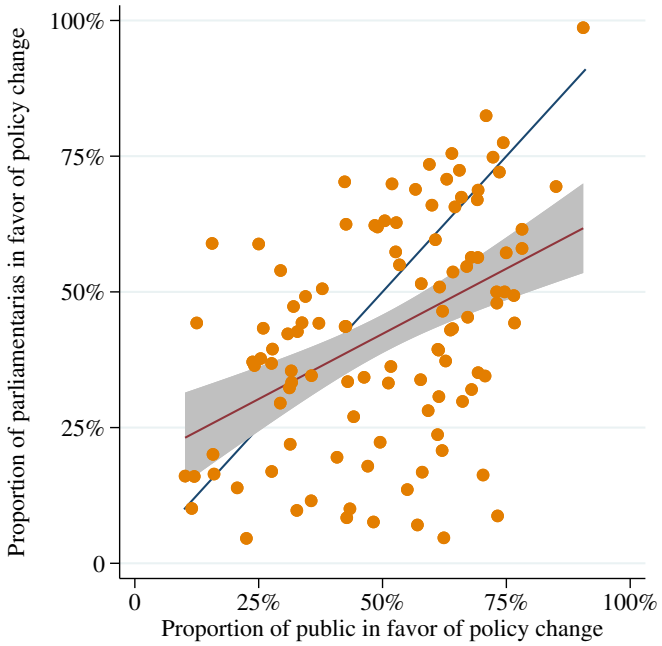


Congruence: How well do the representatives' opinions reflect the citizens' opinions?

Do we find the same bias toward the well-to-do when examining congruence between public opinion and MP opinion? If so, it is indicative that the responsiveness bias is a result of a problem in the connection between citizens and politicians. However, if opinions of the public are well represented by representatives, then the bias might be caused elsewhere. It is possible that even though representatives might represent citizens well regarding opinions, the political system and the bureaucracy might not deliver the kind of policy changes citizens want.

While we know that Swedish politicians appear to adapt to the views of the electorate when there is issue voting (Guntermann and Persson, 2020), we no less about how well related are opinions of MPs and the opinions of different groups of the public are. We expect to see a relatively strong positive relationship here. After all, members of parliament should generally reflect public opinion if a democracy functions as we think it should, normatively speaking. We plot this relationship in figure 2. The diagonal line represents what we would

Figure 2: Congruence



expect to see if public opinion and elite opinion were perfectly related. This figure has the additional advantage of distinguishing between observations with more support from the elites than from the public (above the line) from those with more support from the public than from elites (below the line). The figure also includes the best fit regression line.

As expected, the relationship between public and elite opinion by issue is positive, indicating that as more of the public support something, more of the representatives tend to support it as well. That said, there are clearly policies where support among elites is higher than support among the public, and vice-versa. This is perhaps lower than what we would expect, given that representatives are supposed to represent the will of the people, according to democratic theory.

A particularly important dimension of conflict, especially in the Riksdag, is partisanship. The party system in Sweden is constructed along roughly a left-right ideological spectrum, at least for most of the years under study (König, Marbach and Osnabrügge, 2017). The Social Democratic party is the largest center-left party and has been the dominant party for most

of postwar politics, though usually as a minority government. The Social Democrats were the governing party in postwar Sweden until 1976 and have since periodically alternated power with a coalition of center-right parties. This coalition (referred to today as "The Alliance") consists of the Moderate Party, the Center Party, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats.[12] All four are center-right parties with ideological influences from liberalism and conservatism to different degrees, and with slightly different policy positions. They vary drastically in their support in the public. The largest party in the Alliance (the Moderates today) usually draws between 20 and 30 percent of the vote while the smaller ones often struggle to meet the four percent bar.

The Left Party is a left-wing party with historical ties to the Communists. The Green Party is a center-left party concerned with environmental politics. Following the 2014 elections, the Greens are a part of the government of Sweden. The Swedish Democrats are a populist party on the right with an anti-immigration message. Although they were officially founded in 1988, they won seats in the Riksdag for the first time in 2010. Although they are an important force in current-day Swedish politics (they are currently the third-largest party in the Riksdag, although the other parties maintain a staunch no-cooperation policy), they play a relatively minor role in our analysis since they only appear in the 2010 election data.

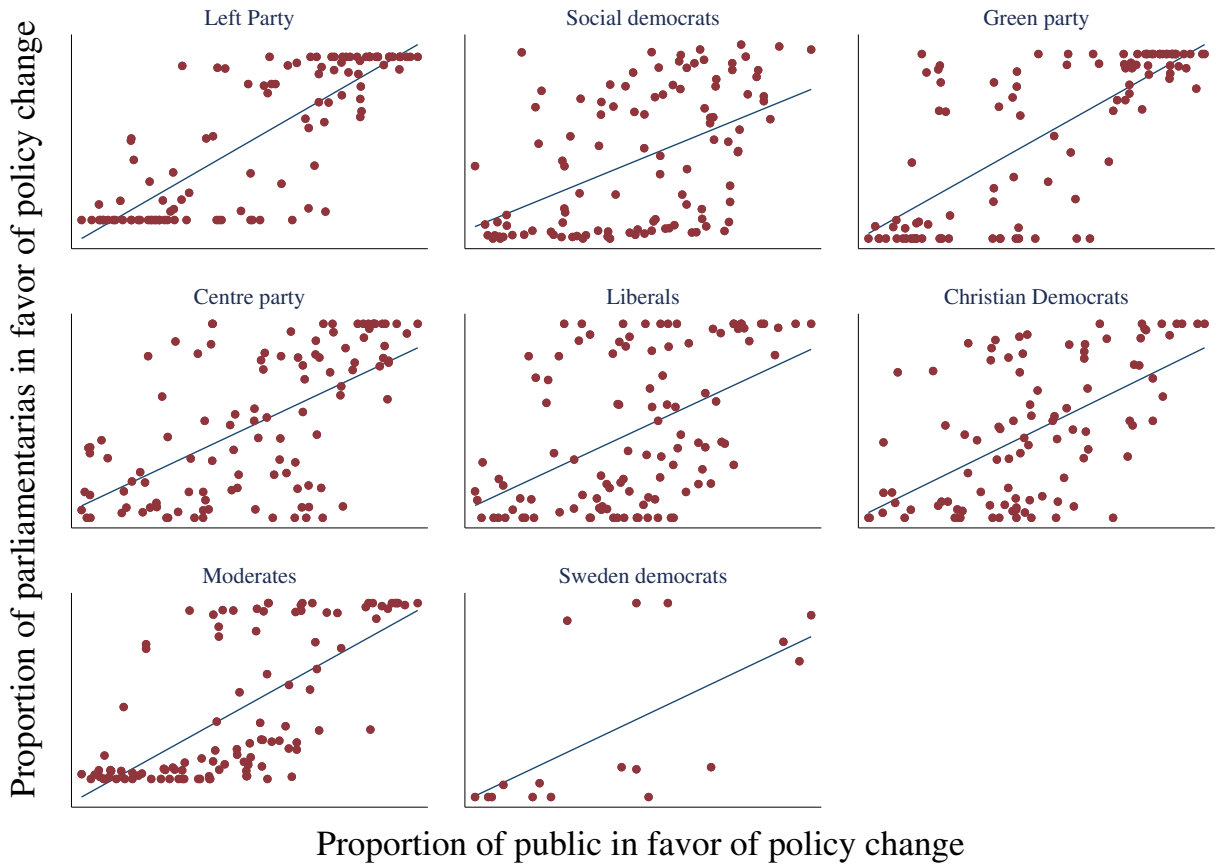
Given the wide range of party choice in Sweden, we might expect the relationship between public opinion and the political representatives' opinions to look quite different when we examine it by party. After all, members of parliament are some of the most dedicated partisans. For this reason, we plot the relationship between supporters of a party in the public and their elected representatives in figure 3.[13]

The relationship between the public opinion and their representatives' opinions here is much stronger than the relationship shown in figure 2. Opinions of partisans and members

[12]The Liberals were known as the Liberal People's Party until 2015.

[13]Partisanship for the public is a self-reported measure of which party they voted for (in election years) or would vote for (in non-election years)

Figure 3: Relationship between opinions of the public and their representatives by party

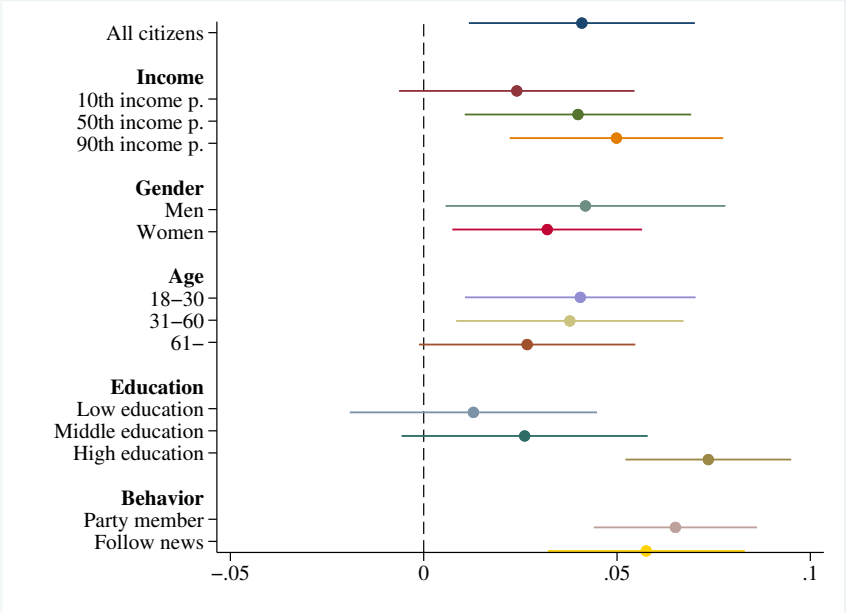


of their respective party in parliament are more strongly associated with each other than opinions between the public at large and the legislature at large. With the exception of the Liberals, the Pearson's r for every party is higher than the equivalent measure for the public at large.

One notable finding here is that MP opinion by party tends to be clustered at the extremes of the scale (that is to say, near the top and bottom of each plot), echoing the results of (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996). Either all the MPs from a party are in favor of the policy or none are. This is in contrast to taking MPs as a whole, as was shown in figure 2, where we do not observe this clustering. Additionally, we do not find that the public is as extreme as their representatives are.

Across all parties, there is a distribution of dots at many different levels of public support

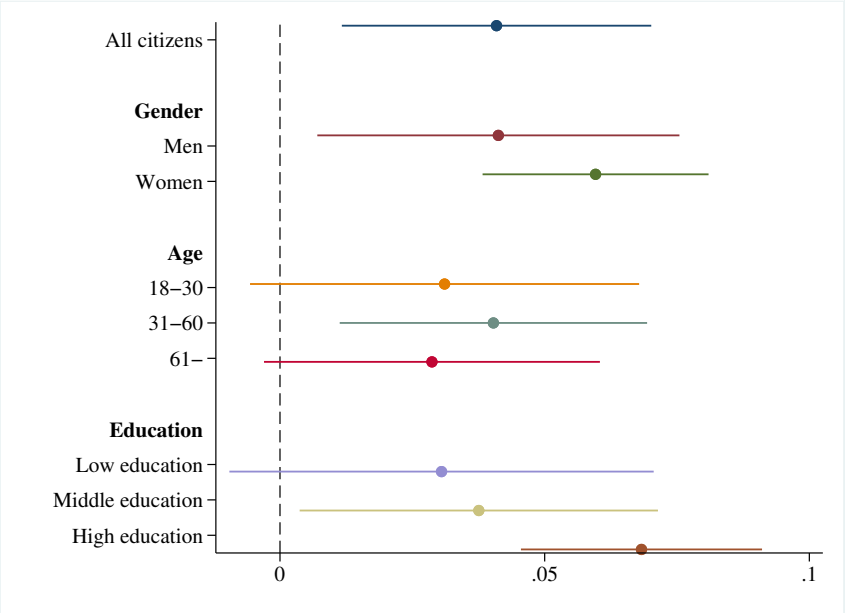
Figure 4: The relationship between parliamentarians opinions and citizen groups.



along the horizontal axis. This suggests that MPs are more polarized than their supporters are, which is in line with other work on this subject (see, for examples, Levendusky, 2010; Bafumi and Herron, 2010).

Of course, we know that there are many sub-publics, and that opinion can vary dramatically among different subpopulations (Lax and Phillips, 2012). For that reason we look at the relationship between opinions among representatives and different citizen groups in figure 4. The first thing that is striking is that we find similar patterns as we did when we looked at policy change as the dependent variable. However, these analyses are not directly comparable since policy change is a binary variable and in these analyses we can compare the entire variation in policy support among the two groups. Men appear to be better represented than women, the rich are better represented than the poor, the young are better represented than the old. In particular — the high educated are better represented than low educated. Hence, it appears as the biases occur already at stage of opinion congruence; disadvantaged groups are not only receiving less policy responsiveness — their opinions are also poorly reflected by the representatives in parliament. But again, since the estimates are fairly imprecisely estimated, interpretations should be made with caution. While many of

Figure 5: The relationship between groups of parliamentarians and the respective citizen groups.

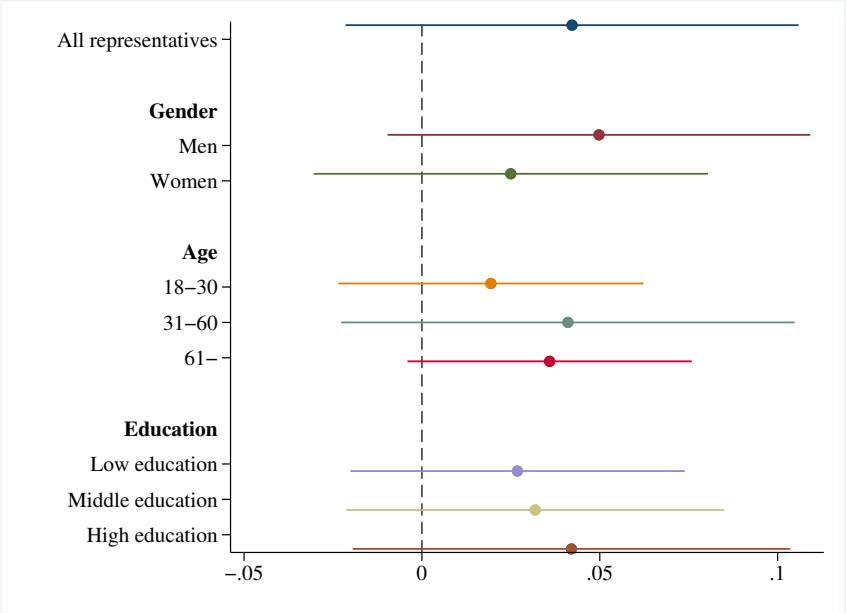


the differences are relatively small, some differences are large and significant — such as the difference between the low and highly educated.

In figure 5, we look at how well different groups of representatives represent their respective citizen groups. Unfortunately, we do not have information about all background characteristics, such as income for the political representatives. But what we can see is that most groups are well represented by their representatives. One of the strongest relationships is by education; highly educated political politicians represent the opinions of the highly educated citizens better than any other group represent their voters. When looking at other background characteristics we find more equal representation.

This is interesting since it implies that even if we had perfect descriptive representation we would still see biases in responsiveness if some groups of representatives are better at representing their respective groups of citizens than others. As long as high educated representatives represent high educated citizens better than low educated representatives represent low educated voters, there will be biases in congruence even if we would have a perfectly descriptive parliament. We can only speculate on why highly educated represen-

Figure 6: The relationship between parliamentarians opinions and policy change.



tatives appear to be different than the low-educated representatives in this regard. One possibility is that the low-educated representatives had made more of a "social class journey" than the high high-educated representatives and so the former might be more atypical of their own class then the latter.

How well do policy changes reflect representatives' opinions?

We end with looking at the relationship between parliamentarians opinions and policy changes. Again, the independent variable is coded between 0 and 10. The results are presented in figure 6. Overall, they do not show very strong differences between parliamentarians with different characteristics. The point estimates are however larger for men than women and larger for the older than the younger, but the standard errors are large and the coefficients are not very precisely estimated. The influence of parliamentarians with different education levels appear to be marginal. So while citizens with different educational backgrounds appear to have unequal influence over policy, that does not seem to be the case of parliamentarians of different educational backgrounds. Their influence on policy change

is approximately equal.

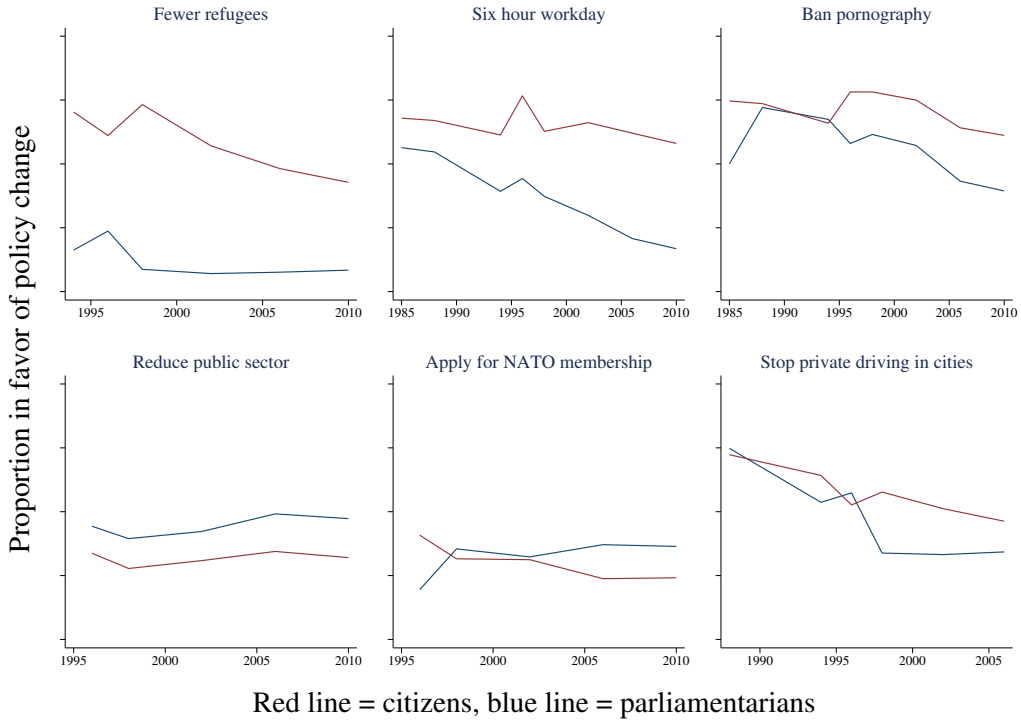
What is most striking is perhaps that the influence of all parliamentarians' level of support on policy change is not stronger than it is. There are indeed some policies that were very popular among the representatives that but were not implemented, like having municipal and parliamentary elections on different days. At the same time there were policies that were fairly unpopular among the representatives that were implemented anyway. Examples include allowing fewer refugees, which happened during the 1994–1998 and 2006–2010 terms. Changes like these are of course driven by external factors to a large extent.

Migration stands out as the issue where politicians and citizens depart most from each other; parliamentarians have been much more favorable towards welcoming refugees than citizens. Another area where politicians were more favorable than citizens was reducing defense spending. Citizens were more supportive than politicians of introducing a six hour work day, reducing the number of MPs, and introducing a language test for Swedish citizenship.

A few illustrating issues

While we have learned some about the relationship between the public, elites, and policies, there is of course much more that one would like to know. For example, it would be interesting to see how the relationship develops over time or how it might vary in different areas. However, since we have relatively few issues to work with that is not very easy to study. Comparisons over time become very biased by the specific questions asked in individual years, and measures within areas can also be influenced by specific issues being added or removed. As an illustration, Figure 7, shows the development of support among the public and the representatives for five of the issues that were asked most times in the surveys. These are "accepting fewer refugees," "introducing a six hour workday," "introducing a ban on pornography," "reducing the public sector," "applying for NATO membership," and "stopping private driving in cities." Looking at these questions it is hard to see any general trend indicating that the gap between citizens and political elites is growing larger or smaller.

Figure 7: Development of public opinion on six issues



As mentioned earlier, for most issues citizens and elites develop their opinions in a similar fashion and differences are most often under 20 percentage points. Again, the exception is the issue regarding accepting fewer refugees that has had a large difference between the public and the political elite. But it is important to note that this difference has decreased over time. For other issues, however, differences are growing larger (introducing six hour work day) or are relatively stable.

Conclusion

It is now a well known fact in political science literature that policy changes appear to be biased towards the wishes of advantaged citizen groups. Few studies have however looked at the mechanisms explaining this trend. Therefore we do not know if this bias is due to opinions of the less advantaged getting heard less, if political representatives misperceive them, if they chose to represent other groups, or if it is the political system or bureaucracy that for some

reason are not capable of delivering the kind of policy changes that disadvantaged groups demand.

We have looked closer at the role of political representatives in this relationship. We first confirm that biases in responsiveness regarding policy changes occur in the Swedish case. This kind of bias already exists at the stage of congruence. Political representatives appear to be better at representing opinions of socioeconomically advantaged groups than disadvantaged groups. If representatives are incapable of representing the views of all citizens, it will be hard for the political system to deliver policy changes in an unbiased way.

However, much work remains to be done. We still do not know *why* the poor are less well represented by their political representatives. Do representatives try to represent well but misperceive the views of the disadvantaged groups, do they simply care more about other groups, or are they are unable to get information about the policy opinions of the poor? Further research would benefit from looking closer into these issues.

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Online Appendix

A Extended descriptive information about the data

The opinion data comes from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) and the Society, Opinion and Media (SOM) institute. The SNES started in 1956 and has since been carried out at every parliamentary election, mainly as face-to-face surveys.

The SOM survey is an annual postal survey that started in 1986 an we use all surveys up until 2013 (28 surveys in total). The SNES is carried out by the official Swedish statistics bureau "Statistics Sweden" in collaboration with the University of Gothenburg while the SOM survey is carried out by the SOM institute at the University of Gothenburg.

For more information about the surveys see their respective websites: valforskning.pol.gu.se and som.gu.se.

We examined all the old data-files searching for questions on policy proposals at the national level. Too vague and too broad questions were excluded, since for those it was not possible to provide clear answers as to whether they were implemented. After excluding such questions remained survey questions measuring opinions on specific policy proposals. Some of these questions were only asked once while others were asked numerous times. For each of these variables we calculated the amount of support among the public as a whole and in different subgroups (i.e. the proportion who said that they supported the proposal).

An important issue is whether this collection of policy proposals represent a random sample of the total population of issues. This is hard to say since we lack a clear definition of the true population of issues. For example, should it cover proposals that are "on the agenda" in the public, in the media or among political actors? And how should these agendas be defined? These are important questions but they are out of scope for this paper. For the present study we rely on the principal investigators for the surveys judgment of which policy proposals that where relevant to ask about at different times.

When a similar question was asked in both the SOM and the SNES during the same year we used the item which had the question wording and response options most similar to those used in other years that the question was asked.

The questions cover a large array of issue areas where the largest are "Economy/Labor market/Business issues," "Energy/Environment," and "Foreign policy/Defense policy."

For each of these policy proposals it was evaluated to what extent they were implemented the same year as the question was asked or whether it was implemented at each succeeding year until 2014.

An issue when coding implementation is whether one should focus on decisions or actual implementation. We followed this guideline: If the question explicitly is about whether a decision should be made, we focused on the decision when making the coding. If the question explicitly asks about implementation, we focused on the implementation when making the coding. For most cases focusing on one or the other does not make any difference, but in some cases it does. One example is the question about whether to close down nuclear power plants. A decision to do that was taken but it is not yet implemented. In such cases we let the nature of the survey question decide whether we should focus on decision or implementation.

One research assistant was responsible for working with the opinion data and another was responsible for the implementation data. They provided raw data to us that we carefully evaluated. In order to test intra-coder reliability we asked a second research assistant to code a random subset of 25 percent of the questions. For 78 percent of the questions the answers were identical. For half of the questions with divergence answers were only partially different and for the other half the answers were completely different. Discrepancies mostly occurred because concepts were defined in different ways or that the assistants had turned to different sources. For those questions we chose the most reasonable definition and the most credible source for the final data file.

Table A1: Summary of results from table 1, 4, 5 & 6

Model:	Citizens to Policies	Citizens to Parl.	Citizen to parl (groups)	Parl. to Policies
All citizens	0.042	0.042	0.043	0.042
	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.032)
10th income p.	0.020	0.025		
	(0.020)	(0.015)		
50th income p.	0.041	0.041		
	(0.024)	(0.014)		
90th income p.	0.057	0.050		
	(0.026)	(0.013)		
Men	0.069	0.043	0.043	0.050
	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.029)
Women	0.015	0.033	0.061	0.025
	(0.020)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.027)
Age 18–30	0.049	0.042	0.034	0.019
	(0.024)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.021)
Age 31–60	0.041	0.038	0.041	0.041
	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.032)
Age 61+	0.021	0.029	0.032	0.036
	(0.021)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.020)
Low education	0.025	0.016	0.033	0.027
	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.023)
Middle education	0.040	0.027	0.040	0.032
	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.026)
High education	0.049	0.074	0.069	0.042
	(0.031)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.030)
Party member	0.033	0.064		
	(0.025)	(0.010)		
Follow news	0.047	0.058		
	(0.026)	(0.012)		
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: ***, **, * denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level, with robust standard errors at the policy proposal level in parentheses. N= 107–108.