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From opinions to policies: Examining the links between citizens, representatives, and policy change☆

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies show that policy changes appear to correspond primarily to the preferences of citizens with high socio-economic status. However, the mechanisms explaining this trend remain largely unexplored. In this paper, I look closer at the role of political representatives as the critical 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 relatively well studied, few studies have looked at the entire relationship between public opinion, elite opinion, and policy output concerning social groups. This paper combines data from Swedish election studies, surveys with members of parliament, and a database of policy change. It shows that representatives' opinions reflect advantaged groups better than disadvantaged groups. Similar biases are found in policy responsiveness; policy changes correspond more closely to the opinions of the advantaged groups.

In a number of U.S. studies, researchers have argued that policy changes appear to correspond primarily to the preferences of citizens with high socio-economic status (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Gilens and Page, 2014; Gilens, 2012).[1] More recent studies have found a similar pattern in European countries as well (Elsässer et al., 2018; Schakel, 2021; Elkjær, 2020). However, the mechanisms explaining this trend remain largely unexplored. This paper looks 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? Alternatively, is the public well represented by politicians, and can the source of bias in responsiveness 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 demand?

Because of the critical role of representatives, scholars have extensively studied the relationship between the opinions of elected representatives and their constituencies. For example, some scholars have focused on matching elected representatives' votes or positions to constituencies' 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; Guntermann and Persson, 2021). Equally interesting but less studied is the degree to which policy outputs reflect representatives' opinions. Survey data on representatives' issue positions are not available in most countries, limiting what we can learn about their opinions and policy outcomes. Scholars therefore usually rely on broader measures of representatives' opinions, such as ideology (Deschouwer and Depauw, 2014; Bafumi and Herron, 2010).[2]

I examine the relationship between A) public opinion, B) representatives' opinions, and C) policy change. Using data from Sweden, opinions of parliamentarians and the public on specific policy proposals are matched together. This is combined with data on whether these proposed policies were implemented or not. As far as I know, this is the first study to connect citizens' opinions, political representatives' opinions, and policy implementation on the same issues.

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[1] Replication materials are available at: https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/98kjjsj753/1. The full data from the Swedish National Election Study are available from the Swedish National Data Service (SND) (www.snd.gu.se) with permission. The data sources used in this paper are (Holmberg and Gilljam, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994; Holmberg, 1998; Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2020). Restrictions apply to the availability of the full datasets.

[2] See Broockman (2016) for a critique.

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Looking at the relationship between public opinion, elite opinion, and policy outputs simultaneously is very rare. By including measurements of actual policy outputs, I try to disentangle the representative chain to see where the link between citizens and representatives holds well and where it might be broken. The contribution of this paper is to test the triangular relationship by opinions on the same issues for both citizens and parliamentarians and to include measures of actual policy outputs.

I present results confirming that political representatives appear to be better at representing opinions of socioeconomically advantaged groups rather than disadvantaged groups. Moreover, representatives with high socio-economic status represent their respective citizens better than representatives with lower socio-economic status. Thus, it implies that even if we had perfect descriptive representation, we would still see biases in responsiveness.

1. How opinion affect policy

One common approach to study responsiveness examines the congruence between citizens' opinions and 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) and the implementation of policies (Monroe, 1998; Lax and Phillips, 2012; Page and Shapiro, 1983). Moreover, citizens also appear to adjust their opinions as a reaction to implemented policies (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010, 2004; Wlezien, 1995).

In a number of studies researchers have argued that policy appear to be more responsive towards citizens with high socioeconomic status (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Gilens and Page, 2014; Gilens, 2012). However, the magnitude of this bias is contested (Soroka and Wlezien, 2008; Peter, 2015; Branham et al., 2017). Recent comparative studies find income biased responsiveness regarding government spending (Peters and Ensink, 2015) and ideological congruence (Giger et al., 2012; Rosset et al., 2013; Bernauer et al., 2015). In addition, studies from Denmark (Elkjær, 2020), the Netherlands (Schakel, 2021) and Germany (Elsässer et al., 2018) show that there is biased responsiveness towards the preferences of the high-income citizens also in Europe.

Recently, research has tried to move beyond income and wealth to explore other aspects of the relationship. For example, Adams et al. (2009) show that people follow 'opinion leaders' rather than party platforms, Boonen et al. (2017) show that people that are highly politically sophisticated and partisans hold beliefs that are more congruent with politicians' beliefs, Ezrow et al. (2011) show that established parties respond to the median voter while anti-establishment parties respond primarily to their voters. Moreover, Homola (2019) shows that parties are more responsive to men than women and Reher (2018) shows that this is the case also for implemented policies.

Previous Swedish studies in this area have looked primarily at the relationship between public opinion and political representatives' opinions (Holmberg, 1997; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996). Voters' and citizens' opinions co-vary over time, and trends in opinion change are similar among voters and representatives. However, when opinions change, the shifts tend to be elite-driven rather than driven by public demands, according to Holmberg and Esaiasson's studies. Thus, the elite changes and the public follows, rather than the other way around. Whether these elite opinions translate into policies is an open question. However, an evaluation of the relationship between Swedish citizens and representatives, Pereira (2019) shows that political representatives misperceive the perceptions of citizens with low socio-economic status and disproportionally reflect those who are better off. However, Pereira does not study whether this bias leads to the implementation of policies that better reflect the preferences of those better off.

Looking at the relationship between public opinion, representatives' opinions, and the implementation of policies is rare. The classic study by Miller and Stokes (1963) is one of few examples that partially tried to do something similar. They measured constituencies' opinions, the representatives' perceptions of these opinions, and 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, while representatives appear to want to represent the citizens' voices, there is a disconnection between what the citizens want and what the representatives think they want. A more recent example is the study by Crisp et al. (2020) which looks at the chain of representation through preferences via institutions to policies across several Latin American countries.

Likewise, research on descriptive representation has repeatedly demonstrated that there is often a lack of certain groups in most parliaments, such as representatives with a working-class background (Carnes, 2013) or women (Wängnerud, 2009). However, few studies have followed the chain of representation from voters via their representatives to implemented policies to evaluate whether biases in responsiveness are caused by some groups representing their voters better than others or whether it is a product of descriptive misrepresentation. One exception in this regard is the study by Carnes (2012, p. 22) which shows that "underrepresentation of the working class in Congress skews roll-call voting in favor of conservative economic policies that are often characterized as beneficial to the upper class and that are more in line with affluent Americans' subjective policy preferences". This paper will contribute to this debate by studying whether descriptive representation might attenuate inequalities and transform inequalities in opinions into inequalities in policies.

Although few studies have looked at the relationship between citizens, representatives, and policies, several studies present different potential mechanisms explaining differences in responsiveness. For example, Peters and Ensink (2015) and Griffin and Newman (2005) argue that citizen's participation, and most importantly, voter turnout, is driving unequal responsiveness, i.e., voters are better represented. In a recent contribution, Rosset and Kurella (2021) show that party supply and citizens' ability to choose representatives that match their preferences are driving unequal responsiveness and that "low-income citizens tend to take policy less into consideration when making an electoral choice than richer citizens". Moreover, Gilens and Page (2014) tested whether the influence of interest groups are driving unequal responsiveness and showed that "organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy" while "mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence" (p. 564). And Flavin (2015) and Gilens (2012) suggest that campaign contributions drive unequal responsiveness while campaign finance laws facilitates more inequality.[3] Moreover, Elkjær (2020) citizens' knowledge and information about policy as a potential driver to why advantaged groups are represented better than others.

The studies just mentioned looked at different characteristics of the voters and institutional factors to explain inequalities. However, there is also research focusing on the political representatives and how they represent their voters. First, among others Mansbridge (1999) have argued that descriptive representation might increase congruence between citizens and voters since it is more likely that groups will be represented when there are representatives who share their experiences and preferences. Second, another way, highlighted by among others Sobolewska et al. (2018), in which the descriptive representation of minority groups will achieve more congruence is that the minority candidates have a higher motivation to represent their respective groups and thus make that more effectively. Third, Pereira (2019) highlights yet another reason why poor descriptive representation might distort congruence, i.e., that representatives do not have perfect knowledge of public opinion since they are unequally exposed to different sub constituencies and tend to "project their own preferences on voters".

[3] For an overview of the studies see Peters (2018) and Rosset (2016).

While this paper documents the link between voters' preferences and the elite's preferences for policies, it is not possible to document if potential inequalities might be caused by one or the other mechanisms outlined above.

This paper will test the relationship between policy change and public opinion (in different subgroups) to see if there are any inequalities regarding policy responsiveness. I will look at the relationship between public opinion and parliamentarians' opinions to see if any inequalities exist in this case. In the last step, I will look at the link between parliamentarians' opinions and policy change. This means that each step will be evaluated separately. While it would be interesting to analyze if elite opinion is mediating the public opinion-policy link, I do not directly test for such a mediation (since the data is too limited to perform such analyses.)

2. Data

To assess the impact of elite opinion on policy, I 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, and I use ten waves of the survey (1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018). The response rate varies between 88 percent (2014) and 97 percent (1985 and 1994). Even though the response rate is high, it is still possible that systematic patterns of non-response bias the results; for example, high-educated persons might be more likely to answer, which might attenuate the upper-class bias in the results.

For public opinion, I 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.[5] And second, data from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES). The SNES was carried out after all national elections since 1956 and draw on net samples of about 3000 to 4000 Swedish adults.

The same researches carry out both the surveys of the members of the Swedish Riksdag, the SOM surveys, and the SNES surveys at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (the latter one in collaboration with the Swedish official statistics bureau "Statistics Sweden"). Since the same researchers designed the studies with both representatives and the public, there is substantial overlap between the questions asked in the different surveys, which allows us to match the opinions of the public and parliamentarians. Moreover, in most cases, the preferences among the citizens and the parliamentarians are measured in the same year.

The different surveys also ask about several socio-economic, demographic, and behavioral characteristics. Hence, it is possible to estimate the level of support for the proposals among different age groups, education groups, and for party members and nonmembers (the latter only for citizens.) As described in the theory section, previous research has shown that factors such as education and gender, and political participation might drive inequalities in responsiveness. However, as for age groups, it is less clear which are the disadvantaged groups. Young citizens are underrepresented in most parliaments in western countries. However, it is less clear to what extent this translates into differences related to policy change. Hence, since young citizens are under-represented in parliaments, it is interesting to study whether this bias in descriptive representation translates into differences in opinion and policy congruence.

To assess how opinions are related to policy change, information on the implementation of policies is also needed. Following the work of Gilens (2012), I use survey questions that ask about policy support (i.e., support for policy change) on specific policy proposals. I collected all such questions asked in any of the three series of surveys. For each such survey item, I calculated the proportion supporting the policies among the public as a whole and in subgroups with different characteristics. Examples include introducing a six-hour workday, joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and prohibiting pornography. See A1 and A2 for a full list of the issues and the years they were asked.

I counted a policy as having changed if the proposed policy change happens within the next two years. This means that the 6-hour workday proposal would be coded 1 if the workday is reduced to 6 h, otherwise 0. The NATO question would be coded 1 if Sweden would join NATO, otherwise 0. I coded the data so that the implementation variable is coded 1 when policies change and 0 when they do not. The opinion variables indicate the amount of support for policy change.

To assess whether a specific policy proposal was implemented, I turned to different sources depending on the nature of the policy. For example, some survey questions specifically ask about political decisions, and for those, I have looked at transcripts from the national parliament. Other questions focus on implementing proposals; for those, I look at the appropriate sources for that specific issue, such as budgets, administrative records, or laws passed. 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., proposed in a survey question) asked in a specific year to the public and the representatives. In total, I have 126 complete issue-year observations where I could match one of the public opinion surveys to the parliamentarian data (and for 124 it was possible to find information about policy change; the necessary budget statistics related to two if the issues was not realesed when writing this study). These observations are stacked in 47 issues. The mean levels and standard deviations of policy support are presented for citizens in Table 1 and representatives in Table 2. The issues and the years for which they were asked are presented in Table A1 and Table A2 in the Appendix.

Among citizens, I find that low educated citizens, women, and older citizens want to see more policy changes than higher educated citizens, men, and young citizens. When comparing 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 eight percentage points. Further information on the data can be found in section A in the Appendix. We can also see that advantaged groups, such as the high-educated, have more interest in keeping the status quo (Ceka and Magalhaes, 2020; Persson, Forthcoming; Healy et al., 2017).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, policy support among citizens.

Variable	Means	Standard deviations
All citizens	49.4	20.5
Men	48.1	19.5
women	50.7	23.1
Age 18–30	48.1	20.2
Age 31–60	49.2	20.9
Age 61 +	51.2	22.6
Low education	53.4	23.7
Middle education	50.0	21.9
High education	45.9	19.3
Party member	47.9	18.9

3. How well do policy changes reflect citizens' opinions?

Let us begin by looking at how well the opinions of different groups of citizens are reflected in implemented policies. In order to do this, I employ a congruence measure recently suggested by Bartels (2021): "If a policy change was adopted, the extent of congruence for any given subgroup is measured by the proportion of that subgroup that favored the policy change, regardless of whether it is more or less than half;

[4] "Riksdagsundersökningarna" in Swedish.

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

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

Variable	Means	Standard deviations
All representatives	40.6	19.9
Men	39.3	19.9
women	42.5	23.0
Age 18–30	42.8	26.5
Age 31–60	40.2	19.9
Age 61 +	42.3	23.7
Low educational	36.5	29.7
Middle education	38.2	22.0
High education	41.8	20.0

Table 3
Opinion-policy congruence.

	Mean	Standard error	n
All citizens	49.93	(1.83)	124
Men	51.86	(1.75)	124
Women	48.08	(2.05)	124
Age 18–30	51.16	(1.81)	124
Age 31–60	49.91	(1.86)	124
Age 61-	48.63	(2.02)	124
Low education	47.27	(2.12)	124
Middle education	49.59	(1.95)	124
High education	52.55	(1.75)	124
Party member	50.53	(1.69)	124

if the policy remained unchanged, the extent of congruence is simply the proportion that opposed the policy change". This measure has the advantage of directly illustrating to what extent groups of citizens are congruent with the policy changes that have been made. An alternative would be to look at the proportion of policies supported by a majority in different groups, but estimating reliable point estimates of majorities is hard to do since the levels of estimated support depend on, for example, question wordings, how to treat missing values, and do not know-answers. Instead, the measure employed here can use more information from the data and capture to what extent different groups are content with policy changes. In addition, the public support variables are coded to theoretically range from 0 (no support) to 100 (100 percent support), while the policy change variable is dichotomous. Thus, the resulting measure reflects the percent share in each group congruent with policy chance (or policy remaining unchanged). Table 3 presents the mean levels and standard errors of policy congruence in the different groups. Since the dataset is relatively small and does not draw on a random sample of issues, the interpretations of the estimates should therefore be made with caution.

It is worth noting that the congruence level is not very high; on average, only half of the citizens are congruent with policy. As shown in studies from the US (Gilens, 2005) as well as studies from Europe (Elsässer et al., 2018; Schakel, 2021), we find that congruence is biased toward the opinions of the advantaged social groups. In particular, it appears that there is a relatively strong relationship between policy change and opinions of men (52 percent congruence) and the well-educated (53 percent congruence). This can be compared to the congruence levels of women (48 percent congruence) and low educated citizens (47 percent congruence). Although the differences are not very large in general, paired t-tests show a *p*-value of .001 for the difference between the genders and a *p*-value of .001 for the difference between low- and high-educated.

We can also conclude that the congruence estimates for party members are marginally higher than for average citizens. At the same time, the differences between age groups are relatively small. Hence, we can conclude that while the level of congruence is only moderately strong, there are some systematic inequalities in policy congruence.

4. 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 representatives' opinions? If so, it is indicative that the responsiveness bias results from a problem in the connection between citizens and politicians. Of course, the politicians do not need to represent the voter's wishes perfectly; they are also free to pursue their own agenda. Nevertheless, as Pitkin (1967) famously pointed out, representatives "must not be found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason". Moreover, while they might pursue policies that are not in line with the citizens' wishes for such good reasons, I would still suggest that it is problematic if some groups of citizens are consistently more congruent with policy than others. However, if the opinions of the public and the representatives are congruent, then the bias might be caused elsewhere. Thus, it is theoretically possible that even though representatives might represent citizens' opinions well, the political system and the bureaucracy might not deliver the kind of policy changes citizens want. However, it is also essential to keep in mind that what is studied here is to what extent there is congruence in preferences. Of course, the political representatives might personally hold one preference, but still 'represent' voters holding other preferences, and thus be 'representative' in the policy making process without being congruent with the voters' preferences.

How related are the opinions of MPs and the opinions of the public? In order to measure this, I first calculated the difference in support for policy change between the MP's and the different groups in the public issue by issue. I then calculated the averages of these differences. The means and standard errors are presented in Table 4. Since our dataset includes some issues measured several times while other issues are only measured at a single or a few times, the results of such calculations are skewed to the more frequent issues. Therefore, I first averaged the mean support by issue and then repeated the above calculations to circumvent this problem. The estimates for all observations are presented in the left column of Table 4, and the weighted estimates are presented in the right column. For all groups, we find negative values, which means that the level of support for change is higher in the public than among the representatives. Again we find some interesting differences, most notably related to education; as for the highly educated, the difference with the mean level among the MPs is 4.9 for all issues and 5.3 weighted by issues. This can be compared to 12.8 and 12.6 for the low educated citizens (differences are statistically significant).

The relationship between policy support in the public and among the citizens is further illustrated in Fig. 1. It shows the raw levels of policy support in the different groups. The diagonal line represents what we would expect to see if public opinion and elite opinion were perfectly related. This Figure also distinguishes 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. In the left area of the graph, the relationship between the public and the representatives is presented. The relationship is positive, indicating that as more of the public supports something, more representatives support it. Since the largest differences are related to education, the relationship between the low- and high-educated citizens is illustrated in the two following graphs in the Figure. The middle graph illustrates the relationship between low-educated citizens' preferences and the MP's preferences. The relationship between the low-educated's preferences and the MP's preferences is weaker than the relationship with the public as a whole indicated to the left. The rightmost graph illustrates the relationship between the highly educated citizens' preferences and the MP's, and here we find a more substantial relationship than in the previous two illustrations.

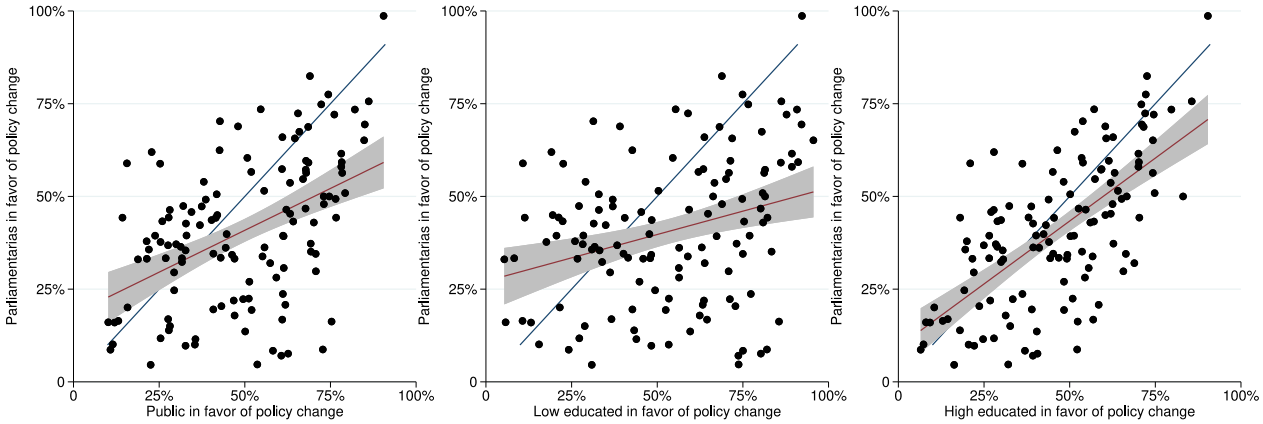

Fig. 1. Congruence. Note: Scatterplot of elite and public opinion. The regression coefficients are .45 (left), .25 (middle) and .68 (right).

Table 4
Difference in Opinion between Citizens and Elites.

	All observations	Weighted by issue
All representatives	−8.82	−8.61
	(1.86)	(2.97)
Men	−7.45	−7.93
	(1.79)	(2.88)
Women	−10.14	−9.31
	(2.09)	(3.24)
Age 18–30	−7.50	−8.05
	(1.91)	(3.05)
Age 31–60	−8.60	−8.10
	(1.90)	(2.96)
Age 61-	−10.56	10.24
	(2.03)	(3.30)
Low education	−12.84	12.61
	(2.31)	(3.78)
Middle education	−9.36	−9.51
	(2.08)	(3.40)
High education	−5.33	−4.87
	(1.44)	(2.31)
Party member	−7.35	−6.80
	(1.55)	(2.39)

Notes: Entries are means with standard errors in parentheses. n = 126 (all observations), n = 47 (weighted by issue).

Table 5
Difference in Opinion between Groups of Citizens and Respective Elite groups.

	All observations	Weighted by issue
All representatives	−8.82	−8.61
	(1.86)	(2.97)
Men	−8.73	−7.95
	(1.79)	(2.82)
Women	−8.25	−9.17
	(2.00)	(3.24)
Age 18–30	−5.33	−5.09
	(2.55)	(3.51)
Age 31–60	−9.05	−8.77
	(1.88)	(2.98)
Age 61-	−8.87	−7.23
	(2.35)	(3.57)
Low education	−16.92	−16.95
	(2.77)	(4.62)
Middle education	−11.79	−12.09
	(2.11)	(3.57)
High education	−4.11	−3.14
	(1.52)	(2.29)

Notes: Entries are means with standard errors in parentheses. n = 126 (all observations), n = 47 (weighted by issue).

So far, we have looked at how well different groups of citizens are represented by the MP's in general. Let us now turn to how well different groups of parliamentarians represent different groups of citizens; in Table 5, we look at how well different groups of representatives represent their respective citizen groups (in contrast to the previous set of analyses that analyzed the relation between citizen groups and the group of parliamentarians as a whole). Again, I first calculated the difference in support for policy change between the different MP's and the different groups in the public issue by issue. I then calculated the averages of these differences. As before, the results are presented both for all observations as well as weighted by issues. The means and standard errors are presented in Table 5. The differences between how well male and female political representatives represent women and men are small. As for age groups, the younger represent young voters somewhat better than other age groups represent their respective groups, but the differences are again small.

Moreover, once again, we see the most considerable differences related to education. It is not only that highly educated citizens are better represented in general; the high educated political representatives represent the highly educated citizens better than the low education political representatives represent the low educated citizens. The difference in policy support among the high education representatives and citizens is about 3 to 4 points on the scale. In comparison, it is about 17 points for the low educated.

Thus, even if we had perfect descriptive representation, we would still see biases in responsiveness if, ceteris paribus, some groups of representatives better represent 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 have a perfectly descriptive parliament (unless somehow the highly educated representatives also represent the less well educated citizens very well). We can only speculate on why highly educated representatives appear to be different from 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-educated representatives. So the former might be more atypical of their class than the latter.

5. How well do policy changes reflect representatives' opinions?

Finally, we look at the relationship between parliamentarians' opinions and policy change. Again, I use the congruence measure introduced previously to measure the share in each group who agrees with policy changes (or status quo). As expected, I find that most of the MP:s are congruent with policy, but the mean level of congruence is only about 57 percent. There are issues where the MP's would like to see policy change, but change is not implemented, and vice versa. One should, however, note that we use a fairly limited time frame window of two years, and it would be reasonable to assume that congruence with policy increases as more time passes (Persson,

Table 6
Elite-policy congruence.

	Mean	Standard error	n
All representatives	57.43	(1.86)	124
Men	59.06	(1.87)	124
Women	55.39	(2.12)	124
Age 18–30	56.75	(2.41)	124
Age 31–60	57.69	(1.88)	124
Age 61-	56.15	(2.19)	124
Low education	59.48	(2.79)	124
Middle education	59.37	(2.10)	124
High education	56.36	(1.86)	124

Forthcoming). Estimates are presented in Table 6, and overall they do not show very strong differences between parliamentarians with different characteristics. The point estimates are larger for men than women. However, for age groups, we see no large differences.

Interestingly, we do not see the same differences related to education; the differences are not significant ($p = .143$). So while citizens with different educational backgrounds appear to have unequal influence over policy, that does not seem to be the case of parliamentarians with different educational backgrounds. On average, highly educated citizens are more congruent with implemented policies, and politicians better represent their opinions. However, high educated politicians are not more congruent with policy than low educated politicians.

6. Conclusion

It is now a well-known fact in the political science literature that policy changes appear to be biased towards the wishes of advantaged citizen groups. However, few studies have evaluated this trend by studying the route from public opinion to elite opinion to, finally, policy change. Therefore we have not had a clear idea about whether this bias is due to opinions of the less advantaged not being represented by the parliamentarians or if it is the political system that, for some reason, cannot deliver the kind of policy changes that disadvantaged groups demand.

I 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. The findings from the paper show that representatives from different groups have a similar influence on policy. However, the representatives from some groups represent citizens from their groups better than representatives from other groups do, and as a result, representatives overall represent some groups better than others. So whereas the influence of the representatives does not appear to be divided over socio-economic differences, they bring preferences to the policy-making process that more closely resemble the preferences of the advantaged groups.

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

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102413.

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