The (Organised) People's Voice?

Organised Interests and Public Opinion in Policymaking

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Rather than following their own conscience, politicians are often portrayed as responding to public opinion and organised interests in their quest to obtain broad public appeal, information and/or financial resources. Frequently, these different types of forces are expected to represent different interests, and the influence of one is understood as coming at the expense of the other. Instead, we argue that these two types of actors may complement rather than substitute each other when it comes to affecting public policy as a result of the differences in the resources they offer policymakers. Our comparative study of a new, original dataset of 50 policy issues debated in five different countries provides some support for this expectation: While there is only weak evidence of an individual impact of public opinion and organised interests on policy change, their joint support increases the likelihood of change compared to when they both oppose it. However, the results also underline that the influence of these two communities might be more constrained than frequently expected, as having their support is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for policy change.

According to the trustee model of representation, politicians are supposed to follow their own conscience once elected (Burke 1774). Nevertheless, they are frequently accused of simply governing according to popular sentiment or the views of special interests. A recent article in the German der Spiegel explains how Chancellor Angela Merkel has relied on opinion polls when making decisions despite her initial intention to not form judgments based on opinion polls.[i] Her office has commissioned numerous opinion polls and often defended a position in line with the opinion majority, as in the case of military service where she went from supporting universal conscription to defending a professional army. In other cases, politicians are blamed for ignoring public sentiment on an issue and being overly sensitive to the views of organised interests, whose views might not be representative of those of the general public. A recent example includes a case where the Danish Minister for Environment and Food, Esben Lunde Larsen, was accused of being in the pocket of so-called 'fish quota barons' when putting forward new proposals to the Danish Parliament for how to deal with fishing rights.[ii]

Ultimately, the impact of organised interests and public opinion on public policy is important to understand the responsiveness of democratic governance. In decisions as to whether to make changes to existing policy, politicians are often faced with a difficult dilemma regarding whose voice to represent: on the one hand, serving the interests of the general public can be crucial for maintaining 'input legitimacy' and ensuring that government reflects 'the will of the people' (Scharpf 1999, : 6), who ultimately decide whether politicians get re-elected (Mayhew 1974); on the other hand, paying attention to the views of organised interests might provide politicians with financial resources and/or expertise that help them produce policy outputs and run campaigns (see e.g. Burstein 2014; Bouwen 2004; Austen-Smith 1995). To date, there has been little systematic

research considering the impact of both organised interests and the public on policymaking and our knowledge is inadequate of whose interests prevail in cases where the public opinion majority and the community of organised interests are opposed to one another.

While there are large separate bodies of literature on policy responsiveness to public opinion and how organised interests affect public policy, few studies pay attention to both (for reviews, see Burstein 2014; Burstein and Linton 2002). This creates the risk of omitted variable bias; that is, that one type of factor picks up variance that should have been attributed to the other (Schneider and Jacoby 2006; Burstein 2003; Gilens and Page 2014). There is a particular need for research that considers both public opinion and the activities of organised interests in a wide variety of arenas on a high number of specific policy issues. In order to do so, we have compiled a data set including information about public opinion, policy developments and the activity of advocates in the news media, parliament and administrative arena on 50 specific policy issues.

This dataset allows us to examine the extent to which public policy is in line with the preferences of organised interests and public opinion and to scrutinise whether either organised interests or the public are likely to attain their preference in cases of conflict between them. We argue that the public and organised interests complement each other when it comes to influencing public policy, as they often provide different types of resources to policymakers. Policymakers frequently depend on expertise from organised interests while at the same time needing to ensure that adopted policies enjoy high legitimacy in the public eye. Moreover, given that both types of resources are important, we do not expect a general pattern for policy to be more strongly aligned with either organised interests or the public on cases where they disagree. Because of differences in the nature of resource

exchanges between different group types and decision-makers, however, we expect variation in whether different types of organised interests 'win' the policy battles when they disagree with public opinion. We predict that public interest groups are particularly disadvantaged when they advocate a position that is at odds with that of the public majority. In such cases, that which might be their most important resource, the ability to guarantee broad public appeal, becomes less credible.

Our findings show that having the support of organised interests and the public is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for policy change. Change does not necessarily come about when they both support it, whereas it sometimes does occur when they both oppose it. At the same time, policy change becomes considerably more likely when they both support it than when they both oppose it. In contrast, support from only one of them has only a weak influence on the likelihood of policy change at best. In line with our expectations, there is no tendency for either the public or the community of organised interests on an issue to prevail when they disagree; instead, there is some descriptive evidence that, when distinguishing between specific types of organised interests on an issue, public interest groups are more likely than business groups to lose in cases where they disagree with public opinion. Nonetheless, these differences in the abilities of these group types to prevail in conflicts with the public majority are not significantly different.

Organised interests, public opinion and policy change

Whereas there are large, separate bodies of literature on how organised interests and public opinion affect public policy, few existing studies have a research design including both organised interests and public opinion (for reviews, see Burstein 2014; Burstein and Linton 2002; Rasmussen, Mäder,

and Reher 2017). Important exceptions include studies examining whether the size of the population of organised interests affects the relationship between public opinion and aggregate measures, such as policy liberalism (Gray et al. 2004) or spending on general policy areas such as education, welfare or healthcare (Jacoby and Schneider 2001; Schneider and Jacoby 2006). Rather than relating aggregate measures of public opinion, organised interests and policy, however, we focus on specific policy issues. According to Burstein (2014, 26),

> "..aggregate measures are often useful descriptions of existing policies, but they're *not* [emphasis added] politically meaningful during the policy process for the public, advocates, or policymakers. Legislators don't vote on welfare state effort, state policy liberalism, or state economic development policy; they vote on specific bills".

The advantage of examining specific issues is, thus, that we can directly link data on public opinion, organised interests and policy rather than having to assume that aggregate preference measures translate into broader policy dimensions (Lax and Phillips 2009; Burstein 2014). The few existing studies that take a similar approach either consider a limited set of policy issues or group types (e.g. Agnone 2007; Burstein and Freudenburg 1978; McAdam and Su 2002; Olzak and Soule 2009; Soule and King 2006; Soule and Olzak 2004) or only focus on the most powerful organised interests (Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014; Lax and Phillips 2012). A notable exception is Burstein (2014), even if he considers the influence of interest groups and public opinion separately rather than assessing whether the two complement or substitute each other when it comes to influencing public policy.

Theoretical expectations

Seen from a resource exchange perspective (see e.g. Pfeffer and Salancik 2003 (1978); Bouwen 2004), one of the reasons decision-makers should pay attention to public opinion and organised interests when deciding on the contents of specific policies might be that these two types of actors have something to offer decision-makers in exchange for possible influence. The public might possess the most crucial resource demanded by policymakers: the vote that can help politicians and/or governments get (re)elected. Not surprisingly, the re-election incentive (Mayhew 1974) has therefore been argued to give the public 'the ultimate authority over policy' (Burstein 2014, : 107), and it is the dominant explanation for why politicians should adopt policy in line with the views of their constituents (see e.g. Lax and Phillips 2012; Manza and Cook 2002). In line with such a perspective, evidence has been found in empirical research that public policy is related to public opinion (see e.g. Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Page and Shapiro 1983; Wlezien 1995). From a normative perspective, it is also widely accepted that having the support of the public is an important resource for judging whether a polity is regarded as democratically legitimate. According to an input-oriented perspective, government should reflect the will of the people and be derived from the preferences of the citizens (Dahl 1956; Scharpf 1999).

From the outset, this should put organised interests at a disadvantage when it comes to seeking political influence, as they typically only represent a subset of the public. However, the general public does not care equally about all policy issues. Moreover, even when it does, many organised interests may be able to offer resources that are as valuable to the policymakers as ensuring broad public support. Financial resources from organised interests (e.g. in the form of campaign

contributions) might affect whether politicians run in the first place. Organised interests may also be able to offer the support of their members and supporters to ensure successful policy implementation (see e.g. Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015; Berkhout 2013). Finally, many organised interests offer expertise (e.g. technical and legal information) that may be important for politicians to adopt policies that solve the problems they are meant to address (see e.g. Burstein 2014; Bouwen 2004; Eising 2007; Broscheid and Coen 2007; Dür and De Bièvre 2007). Such advice may not be 'neutral', and paying attention to it might sometimes hurt 'input legitimacy'. At the same time, gaining expertise may enable decision-makers with limited cognitive capabilities and time to adopt complex policy decisions. Should the adopted decision solve the problem it was meant to address, it is even possible that involving organised interests in policymaking could increase the problem-solving capacity of the political system as a whole and boost its 'output legitimacy' (Scharpf 1999, : 10-13). The public and organised interests therefore frequently offer politicians *different* types of resources. In many cases, these resources are complementary rather than substitutes, since politicians are typically interested both in remaining in office and obtaining input for making informed decisions on specific policies.

This might help explain why the evidence that either organised interests and public opinion have an individual impact on individual policy decisions is sometimes mixed. For example, even if Lax and Phillips (2012) found a relationship between public opinion and policy on the 39 policies they examined in the US states, they found that the actual state of policy is only in line with majority opinion 48 per cent of the time. Similarly, whereas some of the studies of specific national policy issues find higher consistency than inconsistency between (changes in) majority opinion and actual

policy (e.g. Monroe 1979; Petry 1999; Page and Shapiro 1983; 1998), others did not (Brooks 1985, 1987, 1990).[iii]

The literature on organised interests leaves even more doubt that groups are influential. Even if the conventional understanding of lobbying is regularly one in which policymakers are captured by powerful organised interests, research often fails to document such influence in practice (Leech 2010). A meta analysis of the impact of interest organisations on public policy shows that groups were influential in less than half of the cases (Burstein and Linton 2002). Referring to 'the paradox of lobbying', Lowery (2005, 7) explains how, 'beyond a threshold of an absence of lobbying, the influence of organised interests – all other things equal – seems to be negatively associated with the scope of lobbying battles…' Importantly, one of the factors that Lowery himself states is not 'equal' is the extent to which public opinion on an issue is aligned with that of the community of organised interests.

Given the complementarity of the resources that the public and organised interests offer policymakers, we predict that they can mutually benefit from each other when it comes to influencing policymakers. Finally, since we have no reason to expect that decision-makers generally prefer a specific type of resource, we therefore also do not expect to find an aggregate difference in whose preference is most likely to be reflected in the final policy outcomes on issues where organised interests and the public disagree. This leads to the following hypotheses:

> *1: Organised interests and public opinion are likely to complement each other when it comes to exerting an impact on the likelihood of policy change on an issue.*

2: There is no difference in the degree to which the community of organised interests on an issue and public opinion 'win' on issues where they disagree.

While we expect neither the public nor the advocacy community of organised interests to hold a bargaining advantage in cases of distributional conflict between them, the picture might look different when examining different subsets of organised interests on an issue. The reason is that there might be variation in the nature of the resource exchange with policymakers between different types of organised interests, which are not equally dependent on public support for obtaining access and influence. Binderkrantz et al. (2015) distinguish between so-called insider and outsider resources, the former consisting of information and expertise of relevance to the policymaking process and the ability of organised interests to control specific constituents (e.g., their members). In contrast, the possibility to ensure the broad public appeal of a given policy is considered an outsider resource (see also Dür and Mateo 2013; Binderkrantz, Fisker, and Pedersen 2016). Even if any given interest group type may hold a combination of both insider and outsider resources, the relative possession of and dependence on these types of resources is often expected to vary between different group types. Public interest groups are typically seen as among the key providers of broad public appeal (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015). Conversely, business associations are often presented as prime examples of groups 'well endowed with specialized information' (Dür and Mateo 2013, : 664) (see also Bouwen 2004). Conflict with public opinion on a given issue might therefore be more severe for public interest groups that are no longer able to exploit what is typically seen as their most important resource and credibly claim to be acting in the public interest. In contrast, business groups might not be 'hit' as hard by such a conflict given that the rationale for giving them access and influence often relates to the information, expertise and financial resources

they bring to the table rather than their ability to guarantee public legitimacy. In cases of conflict with the public majority, business interests will also remain valuable for decision-makers to help ensure compliance with policy decisions among their specific constituents, whereas public interest groups without mass-based support cannot be expected to play a positive role in securing the enthusiasm of the general public for policy implementation. We therefore hypothesise that,

> *3: Public interest groups are less likely than business interests to 'win' conflicts with the public opinion majority on issues.*

Analysis design

According to Berry et al., '...it is important to look at actual policy outcomes, to examine the winners and losers of policy conflicts and issues to see if government decisions are in line with public opinion' (1993, : 102). Consequently, we examine our hypotheses with a new original dataset of 50 specific policy issues from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK involving dichotomous choices as to whether to make particular changes to these policies and for which we can subsequently determine whether change occurred (see appendix). For example, one of our Dutch issues concerns a question about whether the retirement age should be raised to 67. Even if we do not have strong evidence that the impact of public opinion or interest groups on public policy should vary systematically in different national contexts (see e.g. Brooks 1985; Binderkrantz and Rasmussen 2015), the five countries are selected to allow us to control for such a possibility. Hence, they display variation in the structure of state–society relations by having both a pluralist system (the UK) and neo-corporatist systems in our sample (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden). Moreover, in the latter group of countries, proportional electoral systems

often lead to coalition governments with many parties, whose 'clarity of responsibility' to voters and incentive to act in line with public opinion may be weaker (Powell and Whitten 1993).

The fact that our policy issues are deliberately selected to ensure that they contain information about both organised interests and public opinion means that they do not constitute a random sample of all possible topics debated by government. In order to select the issues, we systematically screened high numbers of available polls on nationally representative samples in all countries. Apart from asking respondents whether they agreed with dichotomous choices of future policy change, eligible questions referred to areas of national (as opposed to local, regional and/or EU) policy competence. Relying on specific policy issues for which public opinion data is available has the advantage that we examine issues '…about which it is plausible that average citizens may have real opinions and may exert some political influence' (Gilens and Page 2014, : 568). However, such an approach may be biased towards salient policy issues on which decision-makers might be more responsive to public opinion (Burstein 2014). On such issues, the public might hold stronger views that are more easily transmitted to the decision-makers and on which politicians are more likely to be held accountable (see e.g. Lax and Phillips 2012; Page and Shapiro 1983; Monroe 1998). To be able to control for saliency, we have therefore specifically selected issues in such a manner that they represent low and high degrees of media saliency. Media saliency was measured in terms of the volume of coverage an issue received one month prior until one month after the question was asked in the opinion poll in a major national newspaper.[iv]

We compare the positions of organised interests and the general public towards the specific policy options in the opinion polls, which allows us to use a common metric for measuring both opinion

and policy variables (see also Lax and Phillips 2012). Following Gilens (2012), we determined whether the policy change on an issue proposed in the survey question was implemented within a four-year observation period after the question was asked (for a similar approach, see also Monroe 1979, 1998). This involved gathering information from a number of different sources, including government and interest group websites as well as electronic news and legislative databases. Interest group support was measured by systematically mapping the positions of organised interests active from one month prior to the survey question until either policy change was adopted or – when this did not happen – until the end of the four-year observation period. In line with a behavioural definition of interest groups (Baroni et al. 2014), our focus is on all of the organised actors who actively lobbied on our issues. These include associations representing economic interests (e.g., business organisations, trade unions) as well as citizen groups, regardless of whether they represent the interests of the general public or specific identity groups. We also include firms and expert organisations (e.g., think tanks). To identify these actors, we relied on a number of different sources of interest group activity in the media, administrative and parliamentary arenas gathered in a three-stage process. First, we coded the positions of all organised interests appearing in two broadsheet newspapers in each county (one left- and one right-leaning) during our observation period.[v] Second, we used interviews with a policy official per issue (response rate 82 per cent) to identify the organised interests that had not been mentioned in the selected newspapers. We targeted officials who had worked on the issue during our observation period. Finally, we searched online sources and physical archives for information about government interaction with organised interests of relevance to the issues (e.g., formal advisory bodies, public consultations, parliamentary committee hearings). The positions of the actors mentioned here were recorded, either by relying on evidence in the written sources themselves (e.g., consultation submissions) or,

when this was not possible, by searching for the policy documents and position papers of the actors regarding the issues. The paper includes all of the organised interests that held a policy position in favour of or against the policy change suggested in the survey item.[vi]

Our study consists of two types of analysis. First, we examine the impact of the opinions of organised interests and the general public on the likelihood of policy change on our 50 issues. We use different specifications with either dichotomous and continuous measures of public opinion and the positions of organised interests. This enables us to examine whether policy change is linked to a) whether *a majority* of these actors supports it[vii] or to b) how large *a share* of the public/organised interests supports such a change. The approach used to assess the impact of organised interests and public opinion on the likelihood of policy change resembles that which has been referred to as the 'preference attainment approach' in the study of interest group success (Dür 2008; Helboe Pedersen 2013). Rather than setting ourselves the goal of being able to ultimately 'prove' that policy was 'causally influenced' by a specific set of actors, the focus is on whether actors attain their preferences (see also Monroe 1998). An actor is regarded as being successful when policy is in line with its policy preference controlling for other relevant factors that might affect this relationship.

Second, we consider 'who wins' in cases of preference disagreement between public opinion and organised interests on an issue. Again, this question is answered based on a judgment as to whether an actor attains its preference in the final outcome. Given that our policy issues refer to dichotomous policy choices, the actor 'who wins' is therefore the actor whose policy preference is aligned with the final policy outcome. Needless to say, policy negotiations regularly go beyond

dichotomous choices. Yet the advantage of examining issues of a dichotomous nature is that, in cases of disagreement, we can examine who prevails in a straightforward and transparent manner without having to make a value judgement about whether a given policy outcome is ultimately closer to the preferences of one of the two. We explore both whether the advocacy community as a whole on an issue wins as well as whether the community of organised interest representing a specific type of interest wins in cases it disagrees with the public majority.

Expanding the INTERARENA coding scheme (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2015), we differentiate between six categories of actors. 'Public interest groups' is our first category of organised interests, defined as those promoting diffuse interests of the general public as a whole rather than just their members (e.g., associations promoting civil liberties and international humanitarian work, consumer and environmental groups). We also include 'business and occupational associations', 'firms', 'trade unions', and 'hobby and identity groups'. They all promote narrower, more concentrated constituencies that can be either economic in nature or identity-based. Finally, our last category, 'expert organisations, think tanks and institutional associations', may represent a mix of public and concentrated interests. For this part of the analysis, we build a stacked data set where the unit of analysis is a given type of organised interests on an issue but where we cluster observations by issue in the subsequent regression to control for interdependence between them.

Analysis

17 of the 50 policy issues experience change to the policy status, supporting the general picture that political systems often inhibit a bias against change (e.g., as a result of government coalition

conflict or high thresholds for introducing and adopting legislation) (Tsebelis 2002; Monroe 1998). Table 1 presents a descriptive overview of how the frequency of change in our dataset varies for different preference scenarios based on dichotomous preference measures for the public and organised interests. Importantly, having the support of a majority of the organised interests and a majority of the public is not a sufficient condition for policy change: In one-third of the nine cases where both types of actors supported change, the status quo was left unchanged. It is also not a necessary condition: Change occurred in four of the 21 cases where both actors opposed change.

Table 1. Preference configurations and policy change on a policy issue (observed frequencies)

		No Policy Change	Policy Change	Total
Public pro, organised interests con	Number	5	2	7
	Per cent	71.43	28.57	100.00
Public con, organised interests pro	Number	8	5	13
	Per cent	61.54	38.46	100.00
Public and organised interests con	Number	17	4	21
	Per cent	80.95	19.05	100.00
Public and organised interests pro	Number	3	6	9
	Per cent	33.33	66.67	100.00
Total	Number	33	17	50
	Per cent	66.00	34.00	100.00

At the same time, having the support of both organised interests and the public resulted in a much higher frequency of policy change (67 per cent) than when they both opposed it (19 per cent). When change was only supported by one of them, the share of cases marked by change was in between these extremes (29 and 38 per cent, respectively). Finally, organised interests and the public were even more successful in attaining their preferences when they both wanted to preserve rather than change the status quo; again underlining the status quo bias in policymaking (see also Monroe

1979, 1998). Hence, whereas policy change occurred in 67 per cent of the cases where they supported it, it did not occur in 81 per cent of the cases where they opposed it.

Table 2. Likelihood of policy change on a policy issue with dichotomous position measures (logistic regressions with SEs in parentheses)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Public pro change	1.02		0.88	1.06
	(0.63)		(0.66)	(0.74)
Organised interests pro change		1.30*	1.20+	0.98
		(0.63)	(0.64)	(0.69)
Media saliency				0.56
				(0.39)
Country (baseline: Germany)				
UK				1.72
				(1.15)
Denmark				1.44
				(1.11)
Sweden				0.71
				(1.19)
Netherlands				0.62
				(1.17)
Constant	-1.02**	-1.30**	-1.56**	-2.19*
	(0.39)	(0.46)	(0.52)	(0.98)
Number of cases	50	50	50	50
Pseudo R2	0.04	0.07	0.10	0.16

+p < 0.10, *p < 0.05

Next, we examine the impact of group and public support for change in a multivariate framework in Tables 2 and 3 using dichotomous and continuous measures, respectively. In both tables, the models are built stepwise with the first three models focusing on the preference measures before the final model adds an issue control for saliency and country-fixed effects. We only have weak evidence of an individual impact of organised interests and public opinion on policy change. In both tables, the sign of their effects is positive, but the effects are never significant for the continuous measures in Table 3. Moreover, for the dichotomous measures in Table 2, there is only a significant effect for organised interests that is not significant in all specifications. Interestingly, we see that even if the size of the coefficients for either organised interests or public opinion drop somewhat when

controlling for the position of the other, the changes are modest. This reflects how there is actually a lack of overall association between these measures regardless of whether we consider the dichotomous or continuous ones.

Table 3. Likelihood of policy change on a policy issue with continuous position measures (logistic regressions with SEs in parentheses)

	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Share of public pro change	1.98		1.63	1.74
	(1.45)		(1.49)	(1.68)
Share of organised interests pro change		1.94	1.74	1.19
		(1.19)	(1.22)	(1.31)
Media saliency				0.59
				(0.38)
Country (baseline: Germany)				
UK				1.47
				(1.12)
Denmark				1.26
				(1.09)
Sweden				0.39
				(1.15)
Netherlands				0.52
				(1.15)
Constant	-1.52*	-1.76*	-2.35*	-2.59*
	(0.71)	(0.76)	(0.96)	(1.29)
Number of cases	50	50	50	50
Pseudo R2	0.03	0.04	0.06	0.13

+p < 0.10, *p < 0.05

While the individual effects of organised interests and public opinion are weak, there is some evidence that the two types of actors can be successful when they both support change. Table 4 presents the predicted probability of change for different preference configurations depending on whether there is (high/low) support for change in the two communities. We see that there is only a smaller, non-significant increase in the predicted probability of change when we move from a scenario where both oppose change to one where one of them supports it. Instead, this difference becomes much larger and is significant ($p < 0.05$) when we move from this baseline to one where

they both support change: In Model 3, the predicted probability of change is 17 when both actor communities support it, whereas it is 63 when they are both opposed.[viii] The significance of this effect is robust to including controlling for saliency and including country-fixed effects.[ix]

Table 4. The impact of organised interests and public opinion (predicted margins with 95 per cent confidence intervals)

		Dichotomous measures		Continuous measures	
		Public		Public	
		Pro	Con	Pro	Con
Organised interests	Pro	0.63 (±0.27)	0.41 (±0.24)	0.68 (±0.34)	0.38 (±0.39)
	Con	0.34 (±0.28)	0.17 (±0.15)	0.30 (±0.39)	0.11 (±0.16)

Note: Calculated based on Models 3 and 7. For the continuous measures, 'pro' and 'con' refer to the margins at the minimum and maximum observed values.

The right side of the figures shows a similar pattern when we calculate the predicted probabilities for the minimum and maximum values on the continuous measures. This supports our expectation that organised interests and public opinion potentially complement each other when it comes to increasing the likelihood of policy change. Even if the individual effects of support for change in the public and community of organised interests are weak at best, these effects potentially add up when it comes to influencing the likelihood of policy change (see also Gilens 2012).[x] At the same time, we do not have the evidence to say that there is also a significant difference in the predictions of policy change when both actors support it (strongly) compared to when only one of them does so. Finally, turning to the control variables, there is no significant effect of media saliency on policy change (Models 4 and 8). Additional models (not shown) interacting saliency with public opinion also do not indicate that media saliency affects whether policy change responds to whether (the degree to which) the public supports it. Finally, there is also little variation in the likelihood of policy change between the countries.

Next, we explore the question of 'who wins' in Table 5; that is, whether the final policy outcome is in line with a given type of actor's preference using the dichotomous preference measures for both public opinion and organised interests on an issue. In some scenarios, these two types of actors hold the same preference. Both therefore either win or lose, depending on whether policy is in line with their preference. If we begin by examining the data for all organised interests, we see that their positions are aligned with the public on 30 of the 50 issues (60 per cent) but that the final policy went against the position defended by the two types of actors on seven of these issues. Comparing this with the information from Table 1, we see that four of these seven issues were cases where change happened against the will of organised interests and the public, whereas the remaining three were cases where their interest in change went unmet.

Table 5. Relative success of different actor types on a policy issue (observed frequencies)

Organised interests	**The public wins**	**Organised interests win**	**Both win**	**Both lose**	**Total number of issues**
All	*10*	*10*	*23*	*7*	*50*
Hobby and identity groups	3	4	9	1	17
Public interest groups	6	4	15	5	30
Business and occupational associations	8	10	12	4	34
Trade unions	10	6	7	5	28
Firms	9	9	9	5	32
Institutional associations, think tanks and experts	11	8	17	5	41

We also see that, in line with the expectation in Hypothesis 2, neither the community of organised interests as a whole nor public opinion enjoys an advantage. On the 20 issues in the second row

where their positions are not congruent (i.e., where either organised interests or the public 'won'), they each prevailed on half.[xi]

Finally, we explore the possibility that the extent to which organised interests 'win' conflicts with public opinion varies for different types of organised interests. Table 5 therefore also presents calculations at the group type level for issues on which a given type of organised interest mobilised. We see that public interest groups are more likely to agree with the public on an issue than other types of organised interests, which is reflected in the fact that the share of cases where they either both win or lose is higher for this than for the other actor types. For public interest groups, for example, it is 20 out of 30 cases (67 per cent), whereas for firms it is 14 out of 32 cases (44 per cent). This is hardly unexpected given that these advocates are supposed to represent diffuse, public interests.

In line with the theoretical expectation in Hypothesis 3, however, we find some descriptive support that, when public interest groups disagree with public opinion on an issue, they are more likely to lose than business groups. Final policy was aligned with public interest groups in 4 of the 10 cases (40 per cent) in columns two and three, where they disagree with the public. In contrast, a similar calculation for business associations and firms shows that they were successful in 56 and 50 per cent of the cases, respectively, where they had a different position than the public.

Yet in our regression in Table 6 with 'group type – public opinion' dyads, these differences are not statistically significant. Our n in this analysis is the sum of issues on which a given type of organised interest mobilised and where its opinion was not aligned with the public majority (i.e., 88

cases). The lack of significant differences between the different actor types is hardly unexpected given the low power of the test resulting from the fact that there are few cases in our analysis where the compared group types disagreed with public opinion. Given the low chance of detecting a 'true effect' with conventional statistical tests in such small sample sizes, the ability of different types of interest to prevail over the public therefore deserves more attention in future research when data for a larger number of observations become available.

Table 6. Likelihood that policy is in line with an actor type on a policy issue for issues on which the positions of the public and organised interests differ (logistic regressions with SEs in parentheses, clustered by policy issue)

	(9)	(10)
Actor type (baseline: public interest groups)		
Hobby and identity groups	0.69	1.26
	(0.95)	(0.90)
Business and occupational associations	0.63	1.04
	(0.72)	(0.84)
Trade unions	-0.11	0.03
	(0.78)	(0.96)
Firms	0.41	0.97
	(0.75)	(0.91)
Institutional associations, think tanks	0.09	0.56
and expert organisations	(0.70)	(0.88)
Media saliency		0.15
		(0.44)
Country (baseline: Germany)		0.00
UK		-2.22*
		(1.04)
Denmark		-3.01*
		(1.18)
Sweden		-0.29
		(1.23)
Netherlands		-2.45*
		(1.19)
Constant	-0.41	0.83
	(0.65)	(1.08)
Number of cases	88	88
Pseudo R2	0.02	0.24

+p < 0.10, *p < 0.05

Conclusion

Policymakers do not operate in closed systems, as they are involved in a series of exchanges with both citizens and organised interests who potentially influence decision-making. When policy is portrayed as being influenced by organised interests, the fear is often that such influence comes at the expense of the public. Rather than systematically considering the impact of both organised interests and the public in an encompassing research design including both types of actors, however, research has tended to focus on one of them only. Moreover, whereas there is no lack of anecdotal evidence of cases where either the public or organised interests influenced policymaking research on specific policy issues, systematic large n research does not always document a strong influence.

Our research sheds new light on this puzzle by finding that even if the evidence that these actors individually affect policy change is weak, their joint support increases the likelihood of change compared to when they both oppose it. Relying on an exchange framework, we argued that this is likely because both types of actors offer resources of importance to policymakers and that their resources frequently complement one another rather than substitute for each other. Having the support of the general public is crucial for maintaining high 'input legitimacy' and cannot be guaranteed by many organised interests, as they often represent narrow interests rather than the general public interest. But policymakers also need to ensure that the political system delivers the necessary policies and demonstrates 'output legitimacy', which organised interests have the potential to help boost. By submitting expertise and information of relevance to the policymaking process, they can assist policymakers in designing effective policies. While a risk that such information is not neutral certainly exists, it remains in high demand among many policymakers

with scarce resources who are eager to keep the ‘problem solving capacity’ of their political system high.

A lack of sufficient resources by one of the two may help why their individual effects on the likelihood of policy change were weak at best. In the aggregate, it is possible that the positive support of one type of actor cancels out the position of the other, providing policymakers the leeway to explore conflicts between the two and make their own preferred choice. We also see that even if joint support from the public and organised interests made policy change more likely than when they opposed it, their support was neither necessary nor sufficient for change to happen. Policymakers are not simple puppets manipulated by outside forces – there are also instances in which they change policy even when organised interests and the public do not support change or maintain the status quo when both of these actors support change. Moreover, we found that organised interests with a comparative advantage in claiming to represent the public are more disadvantaged than business interests in cases it is apparent that they do not. However, even if these differences were in the expected direction, they were not statistically significant in our small sample. Future research should therefore explore further how public opinion and individual group types interact when it comes to exerting an impact on public policy.

It may seem encouraging to find that neither the image of politicians legislating according to popular sentiment nor the wishes of special interests finds support. Yet we need to be aware that even if the popular debate often attaches a specific normative value to a given type of interest, the picture is more complicated in practice. At the extreme, even special interest groups may defend important minority interests, the public opinion majority may suppress important voices or it may

simply reflect popular sentiment at a very specific point of time. It must also be remembered that the policy issues considered here do not constitute a random sample of all possible policy issues but are specifically selected to include information about both public opinion and organised interests. We should therefore be wary of generalising our findings to all issues, a fair share of which do not make it into the opinion polls and may go unnoticed by the public. Similarly, whereas interest group populations may be growing in many countries and lobbying tools have become ever more sophisticated, there are issues without or with minimal interest group lobbying. On policy issues with 'asymmetric attention' – or perhaps even 'no attention' – from the public and organised interests, the decision-making patterns might look different than those detected here. In some cases, lack of attention from one of the two might give policymakers increased autonomy; in others, it could make them more dependent on specific types of inputs. We have explicitly controlled for some of the possibly most important issue level factors by including issues of varying degrees of saliency and issues that represent different policy types. Yet there is scope for future, large n research that looks closer at how issue characteristics affect the exchange relations between members of the public, (specific types of) organised interests and public policy.

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[i] http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-129095167.html (accessed 8 April 2017).

[ii] http://cphpost.dk/news/business/minister-in-hot-water-over-fish-quotas.html (accessed 8 April 2017).

[iii] Whereas the evidence of policy consistency is mixed, it is often difficult to make direct comparisons between the studies as a result of differences in their research methodology (see e.g. Petry 1999, 543; Brooks 1990, 514).

[iv] *Politiken* in Denmark, German *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *the Guardian* in the UK, *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden, and the Dutch *de Volkskrant.* We do not count articles for our entire observation period, using a similar period for all issues instead, as the issues that later experience policy change are likely to experience more coverage independent of how salient they were. The measure used in our regressions is standardised within each country.

[v] We used the same newspapers that we used to measure media saliency in our original selection of the policy issues. However, to avoid possible bias resulting from differences in political orientation, we added: *Jyllands-Posten* in Denmark, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany, *The Daily Telegraph* in the UK, *Svenska Dagbladet* in Sweden and *NRC Handelsblad* in the Netherlands.

[vi] The analysis excludes 16 actors who expressed opposing positions.

[vii] On five issues, the organised interests expressing a position are perfectly divided. We regard these cases as having a minority in favour of change. Hence, having support from half of these groups is insufficient to have a majority for change in the community of organised interests. In contrast, the single issue on which public support for change was 50 per cent is considered a case of majoritarian support for change in the population since a small share of the respondents in the poll answered 'don't know'.

[viii] Significance was tested in regressions comparing the likelihood of policy change for the relevant preference configurations. Predicted probabilities are calculated holding the remaining covariates at their observed values.

[ix] The result is also robust to excluding the cases experiencing ties in either the public and/or interest group community even if the level of statistical significance drops to $p = 0.06$ in the model run on the reduced number of cases with the controls added.

[x] We have also run the final models with interaction effects for the opinion of public interests and organised interests (not shown) to see if the *size* of the impact of one of these communities on policy change depends on the support of the other. We find a positive but non-significant interaction co-efficient, regardless of whether we use the dichotomous or continuous measures. For the latter, the average marginal effect of one predictor remained insignificant across the observed range of the other. However, it should be noted that in our smaller sample of 50 issues, there is a low likelihood of finding evidence of a multiplicative effect. Consequently, this issue deserves more attention in future work examining larger samples.

[xi] However, closer examination of Table 1 reveals a subtle difference in the 'wins' for the two types of actors. Of the 10 cases where public opinion was congruent with the final policy, there were only two where the public actively supported change, whereas it was in favour of maintaining the status quo in the remaining eight cases. In contrast, half of the cases where organised interests won conflicts with public opinion were issues on which they actually wanted change.

Appendix. List of policy issues

Country	Policy issue
Denmark	Building of a bridge for vehicles and trains across the Kattegat
	Reducing mortgage interest deduction from 33% to 25%
	Granting asylum to families with children among rejected Iraqi asylum seekers
	Reducing the unemployment benefit period by half from four to two years
	Strengthening the control of the Danish agriculture in order to take action against the misuse of antibiotics
	Controlled delivery of heroin for particularly vulnerable drug addicts at special clinics as a pilot scheme
	Introducing differentiated VAT
	Making schools' average test results public
	Cutting the allowances paid to young people between 25 and 29 years by half
	Creation of an equal pay commission
Germany	Financial support of Arcandor through public money
	Guaranteeing a pension above the poverty line for pensioners who have paid contributions for many years
	Supplying citizens with consumption vouchers to boost the economy
	Establishing a wealth tax
	State control of electricity prices
	Banning of computer games that glorify violence
	Cutting the tax exemption for night, Sunday, and holiday supplements
	Cutting coal subsidies
	Making it illegal to carry out a paternity test without the consent of the mother
	Cutting social benefits
Netherlands	Allowing all illegal immigrants who have lived in the Netherlands for a long time to stay
	Raising the retirement age to 67
	Abolishing the mortgage interest
	Spending more money on development aid
	Obligating stores to be closed on Sunday
	Ban of smoking in restaurants
	Banning embryonic stem cell research
	Allowing more asylum seekers
	Banning euthanasia
	Building new nuclear power plants

Sweden	Permanent introduction of a congestion charge in Stockholm
	Reinstating the wealth tax, which was abolished in 2007 and meant that anyone with a fortune of 1.5 million paid 1.5% in taxes
	Rescuing Saab through government funds
	Banning the construction of minarets in Sweden
	Reducing third-world aid
	Introducing a language test for Swedish citizenship
	Restricting the right to free abortion
	Making household and domestic services tax deductible
	Allowing free download of all films and music from the Internet
	Increasing the old age retirement age
UK	Giving amnesty to illegal immigrants who have spent ten years in Britain without getting into trouble with the police
	Scrapping ID cards
	Requiring food manufacturers to reduce the fat/salt content in their products
	Introducing a graduate tax, where graduates would pay an extra income tax on their inc ome after graduating
	Allowing a third runway to be built at Heathrow Airport
	Reducing corporation tax
	Increasing Air Passenger Duty, to be paid by people taking both short-haul and long-haul flights
	Subsidising the building of new nuclear power stations
	Increasing the tax on large executive-style, estate, and 4x4 vehicles
	Downgrading ‘ecstasy’ from a class-A drug to a class-B drug

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