

The Many Faces of Elite Power in the “System of 1896”

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We formalize and test arguments originating with Schattschneider and Burnham about elite control of the governing process in the “system of 1896.” To do so, we draw upon classic elite theory and contemporary public policy theory to specify the particular ways elite power might have operated and to deduce a series of hypotheses about such power at various stages in the policy process. Our empirical tests of the resultant propositions—for the controversy over direct democracy reform adoptions in individual American states—offer notable evidence for elite influence over the active agenda status of direct democracy proposals, as well as over the adoption, scope of adoption, and speediness of adoption of such reforms.

The era in American politics labeled the “system of 1896,” generally defined as the party system between the re-aligning elections of 1896 and 1932, is widely recognized as having shaped American politics in fundamental and remarkable ways. Most notably, mass participation in elections and party competition declined dramatically in this period. In addition, numerous party and election-system reforms were widely adopted, some of which appear to have expanded and some to have restricted, the power of the mass electorate. Many of the party and election system attributes that developed in this period endured through the twentieth century.

The causes and consequences of these changes have been intensely debated. One of the most provocative explanations for them is that economic elites—especially business and industrial ones in the North and agrarian ones in the South, as appropriate to the economies of the two regions—reacted to the Populist and Progressive movements to ensure their own control of public policy. According to this argument, initially articulated by Schattschneider (1960) and elaborated and extended by Burnham (1965, 1974a, 1982) and Piven and Cloward (1988, 2000), these economic elites pursued various political “reforms”

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that led to demobilization of the lower classes, the virtual elimination of party competition at the state level, and oligarchic control of political affairs.

Yet advocates of the economic oligarchy thesis have not been able to advance systematic evidence for it. Such diverse observers as Burnham (1974b) and Rusk (1974) agree that the absence of such evidence is explainable because of an inability to operationalize the key concept of elite power and test its hypothesized effects (see also Converse 1972). There is, however, a large body of case-study and descriptive scholarship in history and political science that is generally supportive of this thesis. Among the most notable examples from this large literature, Key (1949), Kousser (1974), and Woodward (1955) offer considerable such evidence for the South, while Argersinger (1980), Hays (1964), Kolko (1963), Weinstein (1968), and Wiebe (1962) offer similar evidence for other regions. Piven and Cloward (1988, 70–78, 85–95) summarize a number of additional case studies that provide complementary evidence for particular areas of the North and Midwest. Because of the absence of compelling systematic evidence, however, the accuracy of the elite power thesis remains in doubt.

This article offers objective, systematic tests of whether political outcomes predictable by this elite power view were, indeed, realized in the system of 1896. We draw upon traditional elite theory and contemporary, mainstream public policy research to deduce a series of propositions about how elite power might have been exercised at different stages of the policy process, and we test those propositions for a notable policy controversy in this period. Thus we provide especially thorough tests of the possible scope, or “faces,” of elite power in the system of 1896. Our findings offer considerable support, too, for the realization of elite power at several key stages of the policy process.

Elite Theory and Contemporary Policy Theory Perspectives on the “Many Faces of Power”

The vast bulk of the research on public policy making has only addressed the policy *adoption* process—where policy proposals before lawmaking institutions are adopted or rejected and where power over the process is only assessed with regard to this activity. Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1963), however, introduced a controversial, additional perspective on the policy process in their discussion of the “two faces” of power. They proposed that the power to control the agenda of concerns that government would even debate (the second face of power) was just as important as the power to influence actual policy adoptions (the first face of power). Bachrach and Baratz also argued that economic elites could exercise both kinds of power and that a failure to recognize this fact misrepresented the scope of elite control of political life.

These ideas about power have been hailed by some observers as significant insights. But numerous critics have also attacked the underlying concept of nondecisions, Bachrach and Baratz’s term for keeping items off the policy agenda

(e.g., Wolfinger 1971). Of particular concern is whether one can validly identify instances of nondecisions or, for that matter, any instances of similar agenda control. Bachrach and Baratz's elite-theory assumptions and many of their criticisms of pluralist scholarship are equally controversial (see, e.g., Polsby 1980, 189–218).

Some criticisms of the two faces of power thesis may be warranted, but we argue that subsequent research on the public policy process has evolved in ways that vitiate others of them. Indeed, much contemporary scholarship explores concerns quite similar to those raised by Bachrach and Baratz. For initial evidence on the latter point, we observe that such scholars as Anderson (1994) and Jones (1984) have explicated the policy process in terms of the logical, sequential stages of problem recognition, agenda setting, adoption, implementation, and evaluation and policy revision. Explicit in such schemes, and in the considerable bodies of research that now exist on most of these separate stages, is the idea that control over the policy process can be exercised at each of the stages.

Of special note for our concerns, research on the agenda-setting stage has proliferated in recent years. Key concepts from Schattschneider (1960) and seminal conceptual work by Cobb and Elder (1972) and Kingdon (1984) were the major stimuli for these developments. Some recent work on agenda setting even deals explicitly with agenda control, much as conceived by Bachrach and Baratz. Perhaps the clearest example of the latter research is the effort by Cobb and Ross (1997) to develop a theoretical framework for the process of "agenda denial" that draws explicitly on Bachrach and Baratz. Accompanying Cobb and Ross's theoretical effort are several case studies of agenda denial, some of which concern the power of specific economic elite groups—such as the medical and business community's power to prevent the adoption of national health insurance and related policies (Hackey 1997) and the accounting profession's ability to avoid certain kinds of federal regulation (Mahon and McGowan 1997). Crenson (1971) and Gaventa (1980) offer earlier case studies of what might also be labeled agenda denial by economic elites in particular communities.

Of equal note is the related literature on "problem definition." Here, as one example, Stone (1988, 1989) proposes a theory of problem definition wherein rhetoric and "causal stories" are argued to be essential tools for agenda control. Rochefort and Cobb (1994) offer an alternative conceptual survey of the problem-definition process and its implications for agenda control. As a final example of contemporary scholarship on agenda setting, Baumgartner and Jones (1993, 59–82) offer a general discussion and a case study of how the fortunes of "policy monopolies" are associated with their power to control policy agendas. The preceding examples indicate that the basic conception of agenda control in Bachrach and Baratz's two faces of power perspective comports fully with mainstream public policy research today. The only distinction is that little of the latter work is imbued with an explicit elite-power perspective.

There are other, widely ignored similarities between contemporary public policy scholarship and the two faces of power perspective. In their most extended discussion of political power—and likely the least-read version thereof—Bachrach and Baratz (1970) anticipate several contemporary ideas about stages of the policy process. Most interpretations of their concept of the second face of power have understood it to mean only keeping certain policy proposals off the *institutional* agenda, the set of proposals being debated formally by lawmakers. Bachrach and Baratz (1970, 44), however, also argue that elite power can be exercised by keeping policy proposals off the *public* agenda, the list of concerns being widely debated by the general public, *and* by destroying or eviscerating them in the “decision-implementing stage of the policy process.” The possibility of controlling the public agenda anticipates Lukes’ (1974) argument that such control constitutes a third face of power, while the expectation for elite power over policy implementation anticipates much contemporary scholarship that investigates that stage of the policy process.

The preceding discussion highlights a number of common emphases in traditional elite power and contemporary public policy scholarship. We draw upon these emphases to specify and test a series of hypotheses about how elite power might have influenced the policy process in the system of 1896.

Theory-Testing Requirements, Theoretical Assumptions, and Hypotheses

Research on elite power in American politics has been controversial because of the normative assumptions upon which much of it is based and with respect to the kinds of empirical evidence that must be developed as evidence of such power. In response to the concern about normative assumptions, one cannot merely assume that an elite with significant political power exists in any one or a set of political systems (Merelman 1968, 453). Instead, one must measure or somehow offer systematic evidence of elite power. Yet prior research on elite power *and* contemporary analyses of agenda setting and agenda denial virtually all share a notable limitation with respect to providing such measures or evidence. They are typically analyses of single policy issues in single political systems or institutions. Satisfactory tests of systematic explanatory propositions, however, require generalizable evidence, derived either from qualitative, case-study research or large-sample, quantitative analyses. Such evidence must be marshaled from a number of political systems or institutions across which *both* the magnitude of elite power and the policy behavior under study (such as whether an issue achieves agenda status, is adopted, and so on) vary *and* can be assessed empirically. Only with such evidence can the conventional requirements for causal inference be addressed systematically.

Classic studies of elite power and contemporary agenda-setting research, however, agree on some fundamental theoretical assumptions, their implications for the exercise of elite power and for how such power should be analyzed. We

adopt and formally state those assumptions, along with the specific hypotheses about elite power derived from them, and the kind of evidence that must be offered to test each hypothesis. First, we *assume* that:

(1) One must choose a policy issue for analysis that is, in Bachrach and Baratz’s (1970, 47–48) language, a “key” issue that “involves a genuine challenge to the resources or power or authority of those who currently dominate the process by which policy outputs in the system are determined.” Alternatively, a key issue may pose a challenge “to the established ‘rules of the game’” (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 950; see also Dahl 1958, 466).

(2) As Bachrach and Baratz (1970, 49–50) stipulate, there must be overt or covert conflict over the proposed policy. Otherwise, there may be no disagreement with the status quo and no reason for the second face of power to be exercised (see, as well, Cobb and Ross 1997; Dahl 1958, 467; and Polsby 1980, 216–17). In contemporary public policy terminology, the issue or proposed policy must be on the systemic, or public, agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972, 10–14).

(3) In policy contests that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above, the elite-preferred position must be more likely to prevail in circumstances of higher—as opposed to lower—elite power for there to be compelling evidence of such power. This assumption is obvious, but it is also insufficient for discerning the particular way in which power might be exercised. Thus, more specific hypotheses must be advanced to take account of the different, theoretically anticipated faces or aspects of elite power.

Therefore, the specific *hypotheses* to be tested here are:

H1: For initial evidence of agenda-control power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above must be less likely to reach the institutional agenda in circumstances of higher as opposed to lower elite power.

H2: For perhaps the most critical evidence of agenda-control power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 must be less likely to attain what Cobb and Elder (1972, 86–87) refer to as “active and serious” agenda status as opposed to “pseudo-agenda” status that confers only symbolic attention.

H3: For additional evidence of agenda-control power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above must generally reach the institutional agenda or the active agenda significantly later in time in circumstances of higher as opposed to lower elite power. This expectation conforms to the findings of several contemporary studies of agenda denial (e.g., Hackey 1997, Mahon and McGowan 1997) and to some of the historical circumstances of the policy episode we analyze below.

H4: For primary evidence of policy adoption power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above that achieve

institutional agenda status must be more likely to fail in the lawmaking process in circumstances of higher as opposed to lower elite power.

H5: For additional evidence of policy adoption power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above that achieve institutional agenda status must be more likely to be adopted in relatively weaker form, if they are adopted, in circumstances of higher as opposed to lower elite power.

H6: For more evidence of policy adoption power, proposals on the public agenda that meet the criteria in assumptions 1 and 2 above that achieve institutional agenda status must be more likely to be adopted significantly later in time in circumstances of higher as opposed to lower elite power.¹

Compelling evidence for the preceding hypotheses must incorporate adequate controls for spuriousness. Thus, we include in appropriate analyses below tests for the major competing explanations for direct democracy adoptions that arise from two distinct, notable, and relatively well developed bodies of theory. First, Converse (1972) and Rusk (1974) have directly challenged the elite theory under examination here and have proposed instead a “legal-institutional” theory. In effect, they argue that it was only the strength of the Populist and Progressive movements that accounts for whether and to what degree particular states adopted reforms associated with these movements (for additional, compatible arguments, see Cronin 1989 and Magleby 1984). By this thesis, then, the degree of support for reform, but not the level of elite power, should be related to success in the direct democracy reform process in our analyses.

Second, innovation diffusion theory suggests that communication processes across states may account in part for reform adoptions. An established principle of innovation diffusion theory is that these communication processes are strongest among *homophilous* individuals or groups—ones that “are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status, and the like” (Rogers 1995, 19, see also 286–88). Thus, we execute a series of tests for possible diffusion of direct democracy reforms. The first of these is for any *general* evidence for diffusion. The second set of tests considers particular hypotheses about the *specific* causes (based on particular shared attributes) of any diffusion suggested by the general tests. In the latter, specific tests we draw on the two substantive theoretical views above about direct democracy

¹In principle, one could also pose and test hypotheses about control over policy in the implementation stage—as with establishing the legal or institutional structure for implementation or with the frequency or success of the actual exercise of a newly adopted policy or power. We do not offer such hypotheses here, however, because we do not have the systematic data necessary to test them for the policy issue under examination.

reforms. Thus, we test the effects of two specific attributes shared between contiguous states: relatively comparable levels of elite power and of reform movement strength.

The Policy Issue, the Measures for the Concepts, and the Universe of Cases

The policy issue to be analyzed is the debate over the adoption of direct democracy procedures (the initiative, referendum, and recall) at the state level, stimulated by the Populist and Progressive movements. We judge that controversy to be over a "key" issue in accord with the expectations of assumption 1 above. In Bachrach and Baratz's language, this was a challenge "to the 'established rules of the game'" that could threaten elite power. Indeed, these particular reforms promoted by the Populists and many Progressives have been widely interpreted as challenges to elite and establishment power—by then-contemporary observers (e.g., DeWitt 1915, 3–25 and 213–15; Munro 1915, 1) and modern-day analysts (Cronin 1989, 38–59; Magleby 1984, 20–25). These reforms were advocated, as well, by a number of pamphleteers with national influence; an independent National Direct Legislation League that published widely on the subject; the leadership of various labor, women's rights, temperance, and prohibitionist organizations; and leading politicians of both major parties (Cronin 1989, 43–54). And the policy debate was a heated and contentious one. As DeWitt (1915, 215) observed, "These three measures have been more widely discussed, more bitterly condemned, and more loyally praised than almost any other measures connected with the whole progressive movement."

We assume, second, that overt conflict over direct democracy proposals existed—that is, that direct democracy proposals were on the *public* agenda in accord with proposition 2 above—when at least 20% of the voters in a particular state voted for a Populist or Progressive candidate for governor in a particular election. Thus, if such a level of voting support was achieved in a state in the period from 1896 (at the beginning of the system of 1896) to 1921 (when the last state adopted one of the direct democracy reforms in the system of 1896), that state is judged to have demonstrated sufficient conflict that might induce political action by the economic elite. The data for these election results are taken from Congressional Quarterly (1998).

Elite power theorists have not specified operational variables by which to measure elite power. Burnham (1965, 27), however, offers the most explicit conceptual definition of such power as being "concentrated economic power." In stating that definition and in other works, Burnham (e.g., 1974b, 1054) also explicitly recognizes state and regional variations in the levels of such power and in whether it was based primarily in agriculture or industry, depending on the character of a particular state's economy. Piven and Cloward (2000, 72–93) offer highly compatible observations about the character of and state variations in what they label "economic elites" and oligarchic power over politics.

Our operational definition of elite power follows the preceding conceptual distinctions explicitly. It is, first, a measure of the concentration of economic power in individual states based on control of labor by the owners of capital (the only measurable dimension of economic concentration by states for this period—because neither income distribution nor firm-specific data are available). Second, we distinguish and measure separately for each state economic concentration in both agriculture and manufacturing. Third, we weight the final measure by the relative importance of these two sectors in a given state's economy. Specifically, we first created for each state separate measures of the concentration of agricultural employment and of manufacturing employment. The measure of the concentration of agricultural employment is the total number of persons employed in agriculture in 1899 divided by the number of independent farms (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1902a, cxxxi; 1914, 123).² The measure of the concentration of manufacturing employment is the total number of persons employed in manufacturing in 1899 divided by the number of manufacturing establishments (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1902b, 60 and 58). Then we created a single, summary measure of elite economic power in each state by Z-scoring the separate measures of employment concentration in agriculture and manufacturing, weighting both Z-scored measures by the proportion of the state's employment in the relevant sector and then summing the two weighted measures. This summary measure allows us to test whether relatively more concentrated economic power is associated with realized political outcomes compatible with elite theory expectations.

To test our various hypotheses, we also collected data for the following policy process events *and* the years when they occurred:

(1) When any one of the three direct democracy proposals (the initiative, the referendum, or the recall) got on the institutional agenda in a state, if it ever did—defined as being introduced as a bill in the state legislature, proposed formally for legislative consideration by the governor, or being on the agenda considered by a constitutional convention.

(2) Whether the preceding agenda status implied “active and serious” consideration by appropriate policy makers or was only a symbolic achievement (Cobb and Elder 1972, 86–87). We discriminate active from symbolic agenda status based on observations in the intensive case-study literature for individual states: specifically, whether the authors of those studies offered explicit conclusions that getting on the agenda as we have defined it was only a sym-

²The standard Census Bureau count of the number of independent farms was corrected for the ex-Confederacy states to take account of the fact that a large number of tenant farms associated with the plantation system there were not independent entities as were tenant farms in the remainder of the nation. Instead, these Southern tenant farmers were “subjected to quite as complete supervision by the owner, general lessee, or manager as that to which the hired laborers were subjected on large farms in the North and West” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1914, 877). For more details of the rationale for this correction and the base data upon which it was calculated see “Plantations in the South” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1914, 877–89).

bolic achievement.³ Typically this occurred in a particular state when minority-party state legislators introduced a bill calling for one or more direct democracy reforms that was essentially ignored by the remainder of the legislature and the governor.

(3) When any of the three separate proposals was adopted into law on a statewide basis (and, hence, the scope of adoption of the three possible reforms).

The preceding data come from an intensive search of documentary and case-study historical materials, beginning with the information on direct democracy adoptions in Cronin (1989, 126) and Magleby (1984, 38–40). Additional data on the agenda status and adoption of these reforms come from Beard and Schutz (1914), Phelps (1914), "Notes on Current Legislation" from various issues of the *American Political Science Review* during the system of 1896, a host of unpublished Ph.D. dissertations on the politics of this era in individual states, and numerous books and articles on the history of individual states in this period. In the vast majority of cases this extensive data search uncovered multiple sources to confirm the dates of the relevant events.⁴

To test the rival hypothesis that reform movement strength accounts for direct democracy policies, we employ a measure for the vote percentage achieved in a state by the most successful Populist or Progressive gubernatorial candidate in the elections from 1890 to 1920 (along with the vote shares of any fused parties) (Congressional Quarterly 1998).

Our first test for the importance of diffusion of these policy innovations is for any *general* evidence of diffusion. For this test, and following common usage in state politics research (e.g., Berry and Berry 1990), we employ as an independent variable the earliest date at which any contiguous neighbor state adopted any one of the initiative, referendum, or recall.⁵ A significant finding on the latter variable, however, only provides unspecific evidence for diffusion based on homophily and must be investigated more intensively for evidence of the particular cause (which might be any of a number of attributes shared by contiguous states). To provide theoretically interpretable evidence on the causes of any significant relationship with this general diffusion measure, we draw upon the two substantive theories that have been proposed for direct democ-

³The case studies concluded that direct democracy reform proposals got onto the institutional agenda but did not achieve active and serious agenda status in Connecticut, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Rhode Island.

⁴An annotated data archive with the dates of these policy events in individual states and documentation of the sources from which those dates were derived is available from the authors.

⁵We use adoption by a contiguous state instead of achieving agenda status there because of the higher visibility of the former kind of policy action. We operationally define all the diffusion variables as the number of years before 1921 (when the last state adopted any direct democracy reform in the system of 1896) when the appropriate first contiguous state adopted any one of the three possible reforms.

racy reforms and test the importance of four other measures based on homophilous attributes of states: (1) the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *comparable* level of elite power, (2) the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *dissimilar* level of elite power,⁶ (3) the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *comparable* level of reform movement strength, and (4) the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *dissimilar* level of reform movement strength. The first and third measures, then, estimate diffusion effects based on shared levels of elite power and reform strength, and the second and fourth measures estimate general diffusion effects based on all other causes.

As can be inferred from the preceding explanations of our measures, American states are our units of analysis, and we test our hypotheses with the universe of 45 states admitted to the Union by 1896 and selected subsets of that universe.

Evidence for the Validity of the Elite Power Measure

Our measure of elite power explicitly follows the conceptional definition in the relevant elite theory about the system of 1896, and thus we conclude it has face validity. Yet, because this is an abstract and controversial concept, we provide systematic evidence for the *construct* validity of the measure. Construct validity is the strongest form of validation and is based on whether associations of a given measure with measures of other attributes conform with theoretical expectations.

Elite theory about the system of 1896 argues that higher elite power was associated with lower levels of mass participation and party competition in this period, with the declines beginning in some states in the early 1890s and generally accelerating after 1896. Thus, we should expect negative and significant construct validity correlations between our measure of elite power and turnout levels over this period. The Pearson correlations of our elite power measure with turnout as a percentage of the citizen population in 1892, 1896, and 1900 are $-.48$, $-.68$, and $-.70$, respectively. We should also expect positive correlations between elite power and the electoral success of the leading political party in each state. We measure such party success levels with the average percentage of the vote won in the three election years above by the victorious U.S. House candidates in each state. The Pearson's r 's between the level of elite power and the latter party success measures for 1892, 1896, and 1900 are $.57$,

⁶We define contiguous states with similar elite power as those whose value on that variable is within plus or minus one-third of a standard deviation of that of the "target" state. All other states are considered ones with dissimilar levels of elite power. We use the same rule for operationalizing similarity and dissimilarity in reform movement strength for the diffusion variables based on that substantive attribute employed in model four in Table 3.

TABLE 1

Elite Power and the Agenda Status of Direct Democracy Reform Proposals in States with Significant Populist or Progressive Movements^a

Agenda Status	Lowest Third of States on Elite Power	Middle Third of States on Elite Power	Highest Third of States on Elite Power	Total
Never on Agenda	20% (2)	20% (2)	30% (3)	23% (7)
Reached Agenda	80% (8)	80% (8)	70% (7)	77% (23)
Total	100% (10)	100% (10)	100% (10)	100% (30)

^aCell entries are the column percentage and, in parentheses, the column count.

Statistics for the cross-tabular table:

Chi-sq. = 0.373, n.s.

Tau-c = -0.09, n.s.

Association between agenda status ordinal variable and the interval measure of elite power:

Coefficient of multiseriate correlation = -0.23, n.s.

.45, and .64, respectively.⁷ (Comparable analyses with gubernatorial elections produce equivalent results.) Thus, there is notable support for elite theory expectations about the relations between elite power and participation and competition. But is elite power associated with policy decisions as our various hypotheses contemplate?

Tests of the Theoretical Propositions

Table 1 reports the empirical results for the test of Hypothesis 1 about elite power and whether direct democracy simply reached the *institutional* agendas of the theoretically identified, most relevant subset of states—that is, where direct democracy had reached the *public* agenda (as measured by electoral support for Populist and Progressive gubernatorial candidates). We present a cross-tabular presentation as part of our evidence here and in some of our subsequent analyses because it offers an intuitively easy-to-grasp representation of the underlying relationship. Yet, because the cross-tabular table employs a collapsed version of the elite power variable, we also report the coefficient of multiseriate correlation for the association between the agenda status ordinal variable and the full, interval-scale measure of elite power (Freeman 1965, 131–41 and 210–14).

The evidence in Table 1 indicates that there is only a very modest association between higher elite power and lower likelihood of direct democracy attaining

⁷The voter turnout data are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, 1071–72 and those on the vote totals for House candidates are from Congressional Quarterly 1975, 1060–88.

TABLE 2

Elite Power and “Active and Serious” Agenda Status of Direct Democracy Reform Proposals in States with Significant Populist or Progressive Movements^a

Agenda Status	Lowest Third of States on Elite Power	Middle Third of States on Elite Power	Highest Third of States on Elite Power	Total
Never on Agenda or only Symbolic Agenda Status	20% (2)	20% (2)	50% (5)	30% (9)
Achieved “Active” Agenda Status	80% (8)	80% (8)	50% (5)	70% (21)
Total	100% (10)	100% (10)	100% (10)	100% (30)

^aCell entries are the column percentage and, in parentheses, the column count.

Statistics for the cross-tabular table:

Chi-sq. = 2.86, $p = .12$

Tau-c = -0.27, $p = .13$

Association between agenda status ordinal variable and the interval measure of elite power:

Coefficient of multiserial correlation = -0.33, $p < .10$

agenda status. In an analysis with such a small number of cases, where such a low association could easily arise by chance, one must accept the null hypothesis of no relationship between elite power and simple agenda status of direct democracy.

Table 2 provides evidence for Hypothesis 2 that greater elite power is associated with lower likelihood of achieving *active* agenda status—as opposed to never being on the agenda or achieving only symbolic agenda status. Thus, the dependent variable here is for whether active agenda status was achieved—as portrayed in the relevant case-study and historical literature for each state. The results in Table 2 support the relevant elite power hypothesis. In the cross-tabular table there is a notably lower level of active agenda status in the subset of states with the highest elite power. Observe, too, that this association arises after controlling for the strength of the relevant reform movements—because the analysis only includes those states above the threshold of reform strength that indicates direct democracy was on the public agenda. Across the full range of values of the variables there is also a moderate, negative relationship on the coefficient of multiserial correlation as hypothesized. We recognize that here, and in all our analyses, the results may be affected by the small sample size. Yet our research design requires the testing of multiple, complementary hypotheses, which vary with respect to the sample of states analyzed. The fact that the results of most of those tests converge helps to offset the hazards of analyzing small samples.

TABLE 3
The Determinants of Active Agenda Status
for Direct Democracy Reforms^a

Independent Variable	Model One	Model Two	Model Three	Model Four
Elite Power	-.717** (.375)	-.091 (.467)	-.078 (.476)	-.184 (.494)
Reform Movement Strength	.029** (.018)	.005 (.025)	.013 (.024)	-.020 (.032)
Timing of Adoption by First Adjacent State	—	.255** (.082)	—	—
Timing of Adoption by First Adjacent State with Similar Elite Power	—	—	.172** (.093)	—
Timing of Adoption by First Adjacent State with Dissimilar Elite Power	—	—	.149** (.068)	—
Timing of Adoption by First Adjacent State with Similar Reform Strength	—	—	—	.016 (.089)
Timing of Adoption by First Adjacent State with Dissimilar Reform Strength	—	—	—	.357** (.118)
Log Likelihood	-25.51	-18.51	-20.59	-16.49
Dhrymes Pseudo R(2)	.16	.38	.32	.43
% Improvement in Prediction over the Mode	0%	50%	39%	55%

^aLogit models where the dependent variable is a dummy variable for whether direct democracy achieved active agenda status. Cell entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The sample size is 45.

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$.

Because an explanation for active agenda status is of particular theoretical importance, we executed additional tests of a more conventional, if less theoretically precise, kind to guard against the possibility of a spurious conclusion about the role of elite power *or* an unrepresentative one arising from a small sample. We carried out a series of logit analyses with the universe of 45 states, with a dummy dependent variable for whether direct democracy achieved active agenda status, and with various combinations of our measures of elite power, reform movement strength, and alternative measures of possible diffusion processes.

Table 3 presents the results of such tests for active agenda status. Model one in Table 3 demonstrates that there is a notable negative association between elite power and active agenda status when we control for reform movement strength, but model two indicates that this relationship vanishes when we con-

trol for a general measure of diffusion based on physical proximity alone. This general diffusion measure is quite highly associated with agenda status, but it does not indicate the particular cause that motivates states to emulate each other in this instance.⁸

To provide evidence on the causes of this diffusion association, we provide in models three and four tests for the two theoretically relevant attributes of homophily between states: shared levels of elite power and shared levels of reform movement strength. Thus, in model three the first diffusion variable is for the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *comparable* level of elite power, and the second diffusion variable is for the earliest adoption by a contiguous state with a relatively *dissimilar* level of elite power. The first measure estimates, then, a diffusion effect based on shared levels of elite power, and the second measure estimates what one might term general diffusion effects based on all other causes. For model four, we replicate this specification to estimate diffusion effects based on shared levels of reform movement strength separate from diffusion effects based on all other causes.

Both diffusion variables in model three are significant, indicating that active agenda status is influenced by shared levels of elite power and by various other homophilous attributes captured in the second diffusion variable. Further, the associations of both these diffusion variables with the likelihood of having active agenda status are essentially equivalent. If we set the other variables in model three at their means and then increase the diffusion variable for similar elite power by one standard deviation, the likelihood of active agenda status increases 17%.⁹ Replicating that calculation with a one standard deviation increase in the second diffusion variable instead increases this likelihood 15%. In contrast, the test in model four uncovers no relationship between the homophilous attribute of shared reform movement strength and active agenda status. All the diffusion effects in model four are captured by the second diffusion variable (which includes, of course, the effects of shared elite power).

In sum, the analyses in Table 3 indicate that higher levels of elite power are associated with lower likelihood of active agenda status, but that the probable cause for this association is states with similar levels of elite power emulating each other. Active agenda status, that is, was in notable part a product of states

⁸We carried out additional tests for whether changes in elite power between 1900 and 1910 would account for the policy actions analyzed in Tables 3, 6, or 7. Elite power proved to be highly stable over this interval, and change measures across it were never statistically significant predictors of any of the relevant policy dependent variables.

⁹Our base measure of elite power in individual states shares a high, curvilinear relationship with the diffusion variable for states with comparable levels of elite power—so that higher levels of indigenous elite power are associated with a progressively later date of first adoption of direct democracy by a contiguous state with similar elite power. Thus, this diffusion variable may itself capture some of the indigenous, as well as diffusion, effects of elite power.

with relatively lower levels of elite power following each other in giving serious consideration to such reforms. Conversely, active agenda status was less prevalent among states with relatively higher elite power and was less likely to stimulate diffusion to similar neighbor states.¹⁰

We next carried out tests of Hypothesis 3 about whether higher elite power is associated with direct democracy achieving agenda status—at all or for the active agenda—at a relatively *later* date. The analyses were based on duration models for the number of years before direct democracy achieved agenda status.¹¹ For the sake of space and because the findings are so straightforward, we do not present these results in detail. For both the simple and active agenda status duration models, there is no notable relationship with the level of elite power. The general diffusion variable alone is significantly related to the timing of both simple and active agenda status, with more recent adoption by a contiguous state associated with shorter duration in the condition of direct democracy not being on the agenda.

Moving to our analysis of the *policy adoption* hypotheses, Table 4 presents cross-tabular and associational evidence for whether elite power was related to the simplest possible relevant measure: for the adoption of *any* direct democracy reform in states where direct democracy was on both the public and institutional agendas.¹² The cross-tabular analysis suggests a vivid relationship in accordance with the research hypothesis: higher elite power is associated with a substantially lower likelihood of adopting any direct democracy reforms. The coefficient of multiserial correlation also indicates a notable relationship between elite power and lower likelihood of any reform adoption across the entire range of measured values (controlling, too, for the strength of the reform movement).

¹⁰We also carried out additional tests for spuriousness, replicating the analyses in Tables 3, 6, and 7 with controls for whether either personal income per capita, farm income per worker, or nonagricultural income per worker in 1900 (Easterlin 1960) explained the relevant policy actions or changed the findings with elite power. None of these analyses produced findings about the elite power variables notably different from those reported in the text and tables here.

¹¹To estimate these duration models and those in Table 7, we first examined the univariate hazard rates and discovered that in all the relationships to be tested the hazard rate increased with time. To ensure that this relationship held in the multivariate analyses, however, we performed log-likelihood ratio tests for various competing duration models. Weibull models as reported in Table 7 were always superior in these tests both to exponential models that assumed the hazard rate did not vary across time *and* to null Weibull models that included only the constant. We did not explore models with nonmonotonic hazard rates because of a concern that their reliability would be uncertain with our small samples.

¹²We employ in this and some of the succeeding analyses the sample of states where simple agenda status was achieved and not just active status—to increase the number of cases under consideration and to avoid biased results that might arise using the smaller sample if the authors of some of the case studies were themselves biased or simply in error in their judgments about symbolic as opposed to active agenda status.

TABLE 4

Elite Power and the Adoption of Direct Democracy Reforms in States with Significant Populist or Progressive Movements and Where Direct Democracy Reached the Institutional Agenda^a

Agenda Status	Lowest Third of States on Elite Power	Middle Third of States on Elite Power	Highest Third of States on Elite Power	Total
No Adoptions	0%	38% (3)	57% (4)	30% (7)
At Least One Reform Adopted	100% (8)	63% (5)	43% (3)	70% (16)
Total	100% (8)	100% (8)	100% (7)	100% (23)

^aCell entries are the column percentage and, in parentheses, the column count.

Statistics for the cross-tabular table:

Chi-sq. = 6.047, $p < .05$

Tau-c = -0.51, $p < .01$

Association between the adoption dummy variable and the interval measure of elite power:

Coefficient of multiseriate correlation = -0.45, $p < .05$

The evidence in Table 5 for the *scope* of adoption of the three separate direct democracy reforms (and Hypothesis 5 concerning the adoption of relatively weaker direct democracy laws) is even more striking. In general, higher elite power is associated with an especially higher likelihood of adopting *none* of these reforms, and lower elite power is associated with adopting more of the three of them. Again, the coefficient of multiseriate correlation confirms that this relationship is not an artifact of the construction of the cross-tabular table.

The analyses reported in Table 5 are for the particular subset of states where the relevant theory predicts we should most expect to find evidence of elite power. For that reason, the evidence there is especially appropriate for testing the theory. Yet the relationship portrayed in Table 5 can be analyzed in a more general fashion to offer additional evidence against a possible spurious conclusion or one that is an artifact of a small sample. Thus, in Table 6 we report ordered probit analyses for all the states where direct democracy got on the institutional agenda—with a dependent variable for the number of direct democracy reforms adopted in a given state, and predictor variables for elite power, support for the reform movements, and date of earliest adoption of at least one reform by a neighbor state. This alternative analysis also provides evidence in support of the research hypothesis.

While the coefficients from ordered probit analyses can be difficult to interpret (Greene 1993, 674), an appropriate conclusion in the present case is that higher elite power is associated with a lower probability of adopting multiple reforms, even after controlling for the influence of reform movement support

TABLE 5

Elite Power and the Scope of Direct Democracy Adoptions in States with Significant Populist or Progressive Movements and Where Direct Democracy Achieved Agenda Status^a

Scope of Adoption	Lowest Third of States on Elite Power	Middle Third of States on Elite Power	Highest Third of States on Elite Power	Total
No Reforms Adopted	0%	38% (3)	57% (4)	30% (7)
One Reform Adopted	13% (1)	0%	14% (1)	9% (2)
Two Reforms Adopted	50% (4)	25% (2)	14% (1)	30% (7)
All Three Reforms Adopted	38% (3)	38% (3)	14% (1)	30% (7)
Total	100% (8)	100% (8)	100% (7)	100% (23)

^aCell entries are the column percentage and, in parentheses, the column count.

Statistics for the cross-tabular table:

Chi-sq. = 7.833, $p = .13$

tau-c = -0.38, $p < .05$

Association between the scope of adoption ordinal variable and the interval measure of elite power:

Coefficient of multiserial correlation = -0.41, $p < .05$

and timing of adoption by neighboring states.¹³ The results also indicate that both elite power and reform movement support are related to the scope of reform adoption but that the timing of adoption by neighboring states is not. Thus, the results in this table in particular, as well as other evidence provided in Table 7 below, indicate that these hypotheses about elite power survive controls for all of the theoretically notable rival explanations for reform adoption.

Finally, Table 7 reports duration model results for the test of Hypothesis 6 and whether higher elite power is associated with adopting direct democracy reforms relatively *later* in time. The analysis predicts states' "survival" in the condition of no adoptions. The first model in the table includes only the substantive independent variables for elite power and support for reform movements; the second model adds the variable for the date at which the first neighboring state adopted one of the reforms. In both models, the measure of elite power is significantly and positively related to remaining longer in the condition of not having made any reform adoptions. Thus, it again survives tests for spuriousness against its theoretically most plausible rival hypotheses.

¹³As an example of the specific evidence that supports this general conclusion, in the model that does not control for diffusion and when the value of reform movement support is set at its mean, a one unit increase in elite power results in a reduction in the chance that a state will adopt one, two, or three direct democracy reforms. It also results in a 36% increase in the chance that a state will adopt one direct democracy device. These results are essentially the same in the model that controls for policy diffusion since the latter variable exhibits no association with reform adoptions.

TABLE 6

Ordered Probit Analysis of Elite Power and the Scope of Adoption
of Direct Democracy Devices in All States Where Direct
Democracy Achieved Agenda Status^a

Independent Variable	Model One	Model Two
Elite Power	-.49** (.29)	-.45* (.31)
Strength of Populist or Progressive Movement	.02** (.01)	.02* (.01)
Timing of Adoption by Contiguous States	—	.02 (.04)
Constant	-.30 (.49)	-.41 (.55)
First Threshold (between $y = 1$ and $y = 2$)	.41** (.21)	.40** (.21)
Second Threshold (between $y = 2$ and $y = 3$)	1.49** (.44)	1.49** (.44)
Predicted Correctly	41%	38%
Percentage Improvement in Prediction over the Mode	5%	0%
Pseudo r^2	.15	.15
Log-likelihood	-37.89	-37.80
Chi-sq.	12.93**	13.12**

^aThe dependent variable in both models is the ordinal scale for the number of the three possible reforms—initiative, referendum, and recall—that a state adopted. Cell entries are the ordered probit coefficient and, in parentheses, the standard error. The sample size is 34.

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Conclusions

We have formulated and tested a series of propositions about how economic elite power might have been exercised politically in the system of 1896. Those propositions elaborate and extend the general arguments of such scholars as Schattschneider and Burnham and take account of the multiple faces of power first proposed by Bachrach and Baratz. Thus, we offer the first systematic tests of elite power theory about the evolution of the system of 1896, and our empirical tests are distinctive for their scope and comprehensiveness. By considering a range of possible effects of elite power over the policy process, we extract more testable hypotheses from the relevant theory, subject it to a higher and more demanding level of empirical scrutiny, and uncover more evidence relevant to it than we otherwise would. Our tests also control for the most notable, rival explanations for the policy controversy under examination.

TABLE 7

Elite Power and the Timing at which Direct Democracy Proposals
Were Adopted in All States Where Direct Democracy
Reached the Institutional Agenda^a

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Elite Power	.479** (.237)	.555* (.256)
Strength of Populist or Progressive Movement	-.008* (.005)	-.010* (.007)
Timing of Adoption by Contiguous States	—	.015 (.027)
Constant	3.46**	3.33**
Scale	.538** (.009)	.533** (.094)
Log-likelihood	-31.22	-31.03

^aThe dependent variable is the logged value of the duration in years from 1896 until at least one direct democracy reform was adopted in a state or the data collection ended at 1921. Cell entries are MLE coefficients from parametric duration models based on Weibull distributions and, in parentheses, the standard errors. The N of cases is 34.

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

Our analyses also provide support for the existence of multiple faces of elite power, precisely as conceptualized by classic elite theory and contemporary policy theory. Greater economic elite power was associated with lower likelihood of direct democracy reforms attaining active agenda status, lower likelihood of adopting any of these reforms, lower likelihood of adopting multiple reforms, and later dates of adoption when it did occur. We have also shown that active agenda status was in part the product of diffusion among states with comparable levels of elite power rather than of indigenous levels of elite power but that the other policy effects above were shaped by indigenous elite power and not diffusion. Thus, diffusion processes influenced agenda setting but indigenous state traits determined policy adoptions.

Elite influence over this policy process also takes on heightened significance for additional reasons. Such policy control was especially powerful when it occurred along with a simultaneous demobilization of the lower classes and virtual elimination of party competition at the state level. Thus, even when states with high elite power did adopt one or more of these reforms, they were granted to small, select electorates often governed by one-party elites.

We have also demonstrated that traditional elite theory and contemporary public policy theory are entirely compatible at some points and that multiple,

logically related propositions about elite power and the agenda status and adoption of particular public policies can be formulated from those theories and systematically tested. Thus, this article may be a model for how subsequent research can investigate various, related propositions about the policy process. While traditional elite theory per se may appear dated to some, concern with elite power generally and economic elite power particularly remains central to political science today. As but a few examples that illustrate the range of that concern, consider the arguments of Piven and Cloward (2000) on the role of elites in the electoral process, the work of Smith (1999, 2000) and Mizruchi (1992) on business power in national politics, and of Gray and Lowery (2001) on interest-group power in state politics. Thus, our theory testing approach and methods may also be of wide applicability.

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