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No Way Out:
Dual Channels of Manipulation in Agenda Institutions

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Abstract

A large body of literature in Political Science emphasizes the importance of limiting opportunities for manipulation of legislative institutions by self-interested actors. This note shows that that the very conditions that shield institutions from agenda manipulation are precisely those that expose them to capture by special interests. This result holds in a highly general dynamic framework that encompasses a broad range of empirically relevant agenda institutions and policy-making environments, including those with policy uncertainty and experimentation.

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1 Introduction

This paper revisits a foundational question in formal political theory: Under what conditions can legislative policymaking institutions and their outcomes be insulated from manipulation by self-interested political actors? A classical strand of the literature has examined how policy choices within legislatures, and more generally committees, can be vulnerable to the influence of those individuals who control the agenda-setting process. The central lessons are now familiar. First, strategic agenda-setting can generally steer group decisions toward preferred alternatives,[1] undermining the idea of a coherent "will of the people" (Riker, 1982). Second, under conditions that arise rather naturally in political contexts, a unique policy outcome, the Condorcet winner, emerges and prevails regardless of the agenda procedure.[2] Yet agenda-setters are not the only actors capable of influencing the outcomes of agenda institutions. An equally influential literature shows that special-interest groups play a central role in shaping legislative outcomes.[3] This body of literature has evolved largely independently from that on agenda manipulation. The aim of this paper is to uncover a relationship between these two forms of manipulability: specifically, that the very conditions that shield institutions from agenda manipulation are precisely those that expose them to capture by special interests.

To establish the generality of this result, we analyze a broad class of policy-making environments that capture many situations of interest. In particular, this class captures the following empirically relevant features:

(i) Agenda institutions: As is standard in the literature on legislative agenda manipulation, committee members in our framework select policies by voting over sequential binary agendas. Common examples of such procedures — widely used in legislative bodies as well as in various other contexts (e.g., academic committees, international negotiations, boardrooms) — include amendment agendas, successive-elimination agendas, and issue-by-issue voting (Austen-Smith and Banks, 2005). Our framework encompasses the entire family of

[1] E.g., Farquharson (1969), Plott and Levine (1978), Shepsle and Weingast (1984), Ordeshook and Schwartz (1987), Miller (1995), and Barberà and Gerber (2017).

[2] E.g., Black (19580, Ferejohn and Grether (1974), Grandmont (1978), and Gans and Smart (1996).

[3] E.g., Denzau and Munger (1986), Snyder (1991), Groseclose and Snyder (1996), Grossman and Helpman (2001).

these binary agendas.

(ii) Policy uncertainty and experimentation: Uncertainty over the consequences of policy choices is a pervasive feature of real-world decision-making. In legislative settings, such uncertainty typically arises from incomplete information about policy outcomes and the future political environment. Its empirical relevance is well established, and it has been a central focus in the formal analysis of legislative institutions for decades.[4] In the presence of such uncertainty, policy decisions often serve as experiments: by observing the outcomes of their choices, policymakers learn about the impacts and desirability of the policies they implement.

Our framework captures this dynamic dimension of learning. Committee members may be uncertain about the effects of different policies, form initial assessments of their potential benefits, and update these assessments over time by experimenting with policies and observing the resulting outcomes. The model imposes virtually no restriction on committee members' learning processes, thus accommodating a wide range of rationality levels — from fully Bayesian updating to complete naiveté. Moreover, it places only minimal restrictions on how revised assessments translate into new policy preferences. These preferences may reflect short- or long-term incentives, strategic considerations, behavioral traits, and more.

Our framework thus complements a broad and growing literature on policy experimentation, which has so far focused on institutional settings other than agenda voting — such as electoral competition (e.g., Callander, 2011; Hwang, 2023; Izzo, 2023), accountability (Bils and Izzo, 2024), federalism (Volden et al., 2008; Callander and Harstad, 2015), agency relationships (e.g., Hirsch, 2016), multilateral bargaining (Anesi and Bowen, 2021), voting in two-armed bandit settings (Strulovici, 2010; Freer et al., 2020), and organizations with endogenous memberships (Gieczewski and Kosterina, 2024), to name a few.

Although the notion of agenda independence is typically applied to static contexts in the existing literature (e.g., Ferejohn et al., 1987), it extends naturally to our dynamic environments: A policy-making environment is *agenda-independent* if no change in the

[4] For a recent example and a detailed discussion of this literature, see Callander and McCarty (2024).

agenda can alter the path of policy choices; otherwise, it is *agenda-manipulable.*

Existing work has identified conditions under which environments can be agenda-independent. Our manipulation theorem shows however that under those very conditions the environment becomes *prone to special-interest capture* in the following strong sense: for *any* feasible policy, a special-interest group advocating for it can increase the number of times it is implemented up to *any* given period by influencing the committee's decision in only *some* arbitrary period(s), even just one. Thus, agenda-independence implies that for any given policy, if a group has sufficient financial resources, information, and access to committee members to induce the committee to implement its preferred policy with a higher probability in any period, it is always in the group's long-term interest to do so. Even if such an influence activity is costly at the time, it guarantees the group that, without any further intervention, the policy it advocates will be implemented with greater probability in *all* future periods. As we show, this is not always the case when the environment is instead agenda-manipulable: under policy uncertainty, pushing a policy today can change the committee's learning process in ways that make the policy significantly *less* likely to be selected again in the future.

Special interests can exert influence in many ways, and the literature reflects this diversity with a range of formal models (e.g., Schnakenberg and Turner, 2024). Our theorem establishes that agenda-independent policy-making environments are highly conducive to capture by special interests, making influence activities extremely beneficial, regardless of their nature or extent. We conclude that it is impossible for the outcome of any policy-making environment to be entirely immune to manipulation by self-interested political actors.

This finding resonates with a large body of political science research that emphasizes the importance of limiting opportunities for manipulation in order to protect democratic values (e.g., Riker, 1986), ensure policy quality and equity (e.g., Stigler, 1971; Ferejohn et al., 1987), and sustain effective, credible governance (e.g., Shepsle and Weingast, 1987). Given the broad generality of the environments to which our framework applies, our result suggests that existing institutions are unlikely to fully achieve these goals.

2 The Logic of Dual Manipulation: Preliminary Intuitions

While the generality of our manipulation theorem requires formal machinery and delicate arguments, its core logic may be illustrated by a simple thought experiment. Consider a committee that, in each of three periods $t = 1, 2, 3$, must select one of $L > 2$ policies, $x_1, \ldots, x_L$. As is common in policy-making environments, members are uncertain about the potential impacts of these policies. At the beginning of each period, they hold individual *assessments* of the associated benefits and costs. These assessments determine their "experimentation preferences," i.e., an ordering of the policies with respect to which they wish to experiment in the current period: implementing a policy yields additional information about its consequences, enabling members to revise their assessments of that policy (and only that policy), and hence to update their ordering in subsequent periods.

At this stage, we impose no restrictions on how individual members' assessments translate into their orderings of policies, except for a natural independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives condition: if a member ranks policy x_k above policy x_ℓ under current assessments, then she will continue to do so as long as the assessments of these two policies remain unchanged, regardless of how her assessments of other policies evolve through experimentation. In each of the three periods, individual experimentation preferences are aggregated into a collective policy choice via a sequential majoritarian voting procedure (e.g., a standard amendment agenda).

Consider now the position of a special-interest group that seeks to maximize the implementation frequency of its preferred policy, x_1, is implemented, and that has the ability to capture the policy-making process in the first period. The group anticipates the following sequence of experimentation outcomes: (i) before any policy is tried, committee members' assessments are such that agenda voting would yield policy x_2; (ii) after one trial of x_2, individual assessments would be revised in a manner that leads to the selection of x_1; and (iii) after one trial of both x_1 and x_2, further updates in assessments would again result in the implementation of x_1. Accordingly, the group expects the policy sequence over the three periods to be (x_2, x_1, x_1).

Can the group be confident that enforcing its preferred policy x_1 in period 1 will not backfire in later periods? In general, the answer is no. Changing the period-1 policy from x_2 to x_1 means that it is then x_1, rather than x_2, whose assessment is revised at the beginning of period 2, as illustrated in Figure 1. Consequently, committee members enter period 2 with assessments different from those they would have held in the absence of capture. This, in turn, may alter their preferences in such a way that agenda voting yields a policy other than x_1. The resulting assessments at the start of period 3 would likewise differ, possibly leading again to a policy choice other than x_1. Special-interest capture can therefore have adverse consequences, reducing the frequency with which policy x_1 is implemented from two periods to only one.

		$t = 1$	$t = 2$	$t = 3$
Without capture	Assessments	Initial	After one trial of x_2 only	After one trial of each x_1 and x_2 only
	Policy choice	x_2	x_1	x_1
	Frequency of x_1 after t periods	0	1	2
Capture at $t = 1$	Assessments	Initial	After one trial of x_1 only	After one trial of each x_1 and x_k only
	Policy choice	x_1 (capture)	x_k ($\neq x_1$)	x_ℓ ($\neq x_1$)
	Frequency of x_1 after t periods	1	1	1

Figure 1: Illustration of how capture can alter the committee's learning trajectory in a way that ultimately harms the special-interest group. While the policy x_1 advocated by the group would be implemented twice after three periods in the absence of capture, it is implemented only once when the group intervenes in the first period.

Such adverse consequences of capture would however be precluded if after one trial of x_1 in period 1, the policy period 2 were necessarily either x_1 or x_2. Indeed, if x_1 were chosen again in period 2, the group would be guaranteed at least as many occurrences of x_1 as in the absence of capture, and possibly more if x_1 were also selected in period 3. If x_2 were chosen in period 2 then after two periods, each of x_1 and x_2 would have been tried once, exactly as in the absence of capture. Consequently, at the start of period 3, the assessments inherited from experimentation in the preceding periods would be identical with or without capture. This in turn would yield the same individual orderings of policies and, therefore, the same policy choice x_1.

How can the special-interest group be assured that, after one trial of x_1, the period-2 choice will be restricted to x_1 or x_2 after one trial of x_1? This is precisely where the notion of *agenda-independence* is critical. Suppose that voting is immune to agenda manipulation, in the sense that whatever the committee's policy assessments, it is impossible for an agenda-setter to change the outcome of the vote by modifying the agenda. A classical result in formal political theory establishes that such immunity obtains if and only if, for every realization of members' assessments during experimentation, their orderings are such that there exists a unique policy that defeats all others in pairwise majority comparisons. This policy, the *Condorcet winner,* is then the committee's collective choice.

Suppose that agenda-independence holds. Recall that in the absence of capture, it is policy x_2 that is chosen in period 1. Thus, before any policy is tried, the committee's initial assessments are such that x_2 is the Condorcet winner; by definition, it defeats every untried policy in a pairwise majority vote. Hence, even if the special-interest group enforces x_1 in the first period, the independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives condition ensures that x_2 would remain majority-preferred to any other untried policy at the start of period 2. As the voting outcome must coincide with the Condorcet winner under agenda-independence, the committee's choice in that period must then be either x_1 or x_2. This illustrates how the very condition preventing agenda-setters from manipulating voting outcomes ensures for the special-interest group that capturing the committee's policy choice in period 1, while immediately profitable, will also never prove disadvantageous in subsequent periods.

This simple heuristic assumes that the special-interest group can predict with certainty how committee members will learn from each policy trial, and thus the resulting policy trajectory. Of course, this is highly unrealistic, as policy experimentation typically involves substantial uncertainty about the possible outcomes of different trials. The formal analysis of our general framework below shows that the conclusions drawn from this illustrative example do not depend on this simplification or any of the other assumptions we have made.

3 Framework

3.1 Policy-Making Environments

General description. We present a general model of dynamic policymaking by a committee (such as a legislature or an academic committee) consisting of $n \geq 2$ members, denoted by $N \equiv \{1, \ldots, n\}$. In each of an infinite number of discrete periods, $t = 1, 2, \ldots$, the committee selects a policy x^t from a finite set $X \equiv \{x_1, \ldots, x_L\}$, where $L \geq 2$. The potential utility benefits that committee members expect to derive from polices depend on the value of a payoff-relevant state of the world $\omega = (\omega_1, \ldots, \omega_L)$. Each component ω_k of the state may itself be multidimensional, so as to capture for example agent-specific dimensions of policy outcomes. Although the value of the vector ω is initially unknown, it is common knowledge that each of its components ω_k belongs to some finite set Ω_k. Let $\Omega \equiv \Omega_1 \times \cdots \times \Omega_L$ denote the set of possible states.

Despite their uncertainty about the state of the world, committee members can form assessments of the potential quality of each policy, and revise those assessments over time by experimenting with different policies and observing the resulting outcomes. We begin by informally describing this process of learning and policy making, before formally detailing each of its steps below — Figure 2 provides a graphical illustration.

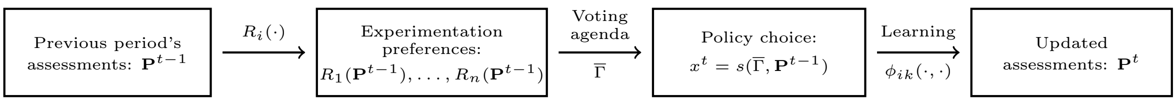

Figure 2: Policy making and learning in period t.

Each member begins every period t with her own "assessment" of each policy in X. This assessment can for example be thought of as an index of the policy's expected performance, quality, or desirability. It determines their "experimentation preferences" over X, i.e., their preferences regarding which policy should be implemented in period t. As we will see below, the model's assumptions concerning these preferences are general enough to capture a wide variety of incentives — e.g., static or dynamic, sincere or strategic, etc.

The preference profile of the n committee members is then aggregated into a collective policy choice x^t using a voting procedure, which will be modeled as a binary voting agenda. The implementation of this policy x^t is then followed by the realization of a policy outcome, the observation of which leads members to update their assessments of policy x^t. Holding these updated assessments, the committee transitions to period $t+1$, in which the same process is repeated.

Policy assessments. Formally, the assessment of any policy x_k by committee member i is represented by a real number p_{ik}. For example, it could correspond to the Gittins index, as in standard experimentation problems in the political economy literature. We assume that the set of possible assessments P that any member can hold about any policy is countable.

Given an assessment p_{ik} for each member $i \in N$ and each policy $x_k \in X$, we obtain the $(n \times L)$ *assessment matrix* $\mathbf{P} \equiv [p_{ik}]$, whose ith row $p_{i\cdot} = (p_{i1}, \ldots, p_{iL})$ describes member i's assessments of each policy in X, and whose kth column $p_{\cdot k} = (p_{1k}, \ldots, p_{nk})$ describes the assessments of all n members regarding policy x_k. The (countable) set of all possible assessment matrices is denoted by $\mathcal{P}$.

As described in Figure 2, the committee begins each period t with an assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$, inherited from policy experiments conducted in earlier periods, which is then revised into a new assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}^t$, based on the policy experiment carried out in period t. We elaborate on this updating process below. The initial assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}^0$ is exogenously chosen by Nature according to some arbitrary probability distribution with full support on $\mathcal{P}$.

Experimentation preferences. Every assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}$ gives rise to preferences, for each committee member $i \in N$, over which policy they would like to see implemented in the current period. To avoid imposing unnecessary restrictions on these preferences, we simply assume that they are represented by a function R_i which, for each $i \in N$, assigns to every $\mathbf{P}$ in $\mathcal{P}$ a binary relation $R_i(\mathbf{P})$ on X. We only make two mild assumptions about R_i. First, for every $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$, the relation $R_i(\mathbf{P})$ is complete and asymmetric. This rules out indifference over any pair of alternatives in X which, given the finiteness X, would be nongeneric. Second, R_i satisfies the following independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives condition: for any pair of alternatives x_k and x_ℓ in X, and assessment matrices $\mathbf{P}$ and $\mathbf{Q}$ such that $p_{\cdot k} = q_{\cdot k}$ and $p_{\cdot \ell} = q_{\cdot \ell}$, we have $x_k R_i(\mathbf{P}) x_\ell$ if and only if $x_k R_i(\mathbf{Q}) x_\ell$.

This general formulation allows for a wide variety of situations of interest. The policy experimentation incentives described by the function R_i may reflect short-term or long-term considerations, exploration-exploitation tradeoffs, behavioral traits, etc. In particular, note that the preference relation of member i may depend not only on her own assessments but also on the assessments of other members. This can reflect strategic anticipations by member i about the future choices of other committee members — as illustrated in Example 1 below.

We also note that the functions R_i exhibit a form of Markovian stationarity, since they are time-independent. This assumption is made purely for expositional ease; none of our results would be affected if these functions were instead of the form $R_i^t(\cdot)$.

Voting agendas and outcomes. Once endowed with a profile of experimentation preferences $\big(R_1(\mathbf{P}), \ldots, R_n(\mathbf{P})\big)$, the committee must aggregate these preferences into a collective choice of a policy from X. Following most of the literature on the manipulation of legislative institutions in political science, we focus on a family of empirically important institutions; namely, those characterized by majoritarian committee voting over binary agendas. The most commonly encountered examples are amendment agendas, successive elimination agendas, and issue-by-issue voting, in which voting proceeds sequentially, with each decision in the sequence involving a pair of (possibly composite) alternatives (e.g., Austen-Smith and Banks, 2005). Such procedures are typically observed in legislative settings, but they are also commonly used in academic committees, international organizations, judicial panels, and corporate boards.

Although the concept of a *(binary) agenda* (or *voting tree*) is relatively simple and intuitive, the formalism required for a precise definition can be somewhat cumbersome. To avoid introducing additional notation that will not be used later, we provide here an informal definition, relegating the formal mathematical machinery to the Appendix.[5] An

[5]Formal treatments can also be found in standard textbooks (e.g., Austen-Smith and Banks, 2005) and

agenda is modeled as a binary decision tree that specifies the order in which pairwise votes are conducted. Each internal node in the tree corresponds to a decision between two alternatives (or intermediate winners of earlier votes), and each such decision leads to a new branch depending on the majority choice. The terminal nodes of the tree are labeled with the policy alternatives in X, while the internal nodes (called "decision nodes") represent the sequence of votes that take place. Every decision node has exactly two immediate successors, ensuring that each stage of voting involves a binary comparison. This tree structure captures the procedural constraints imposed by the institution: which alternatives are compared, and in what order. The family of all binary agendas is denoted by $\mathcal{A}$.

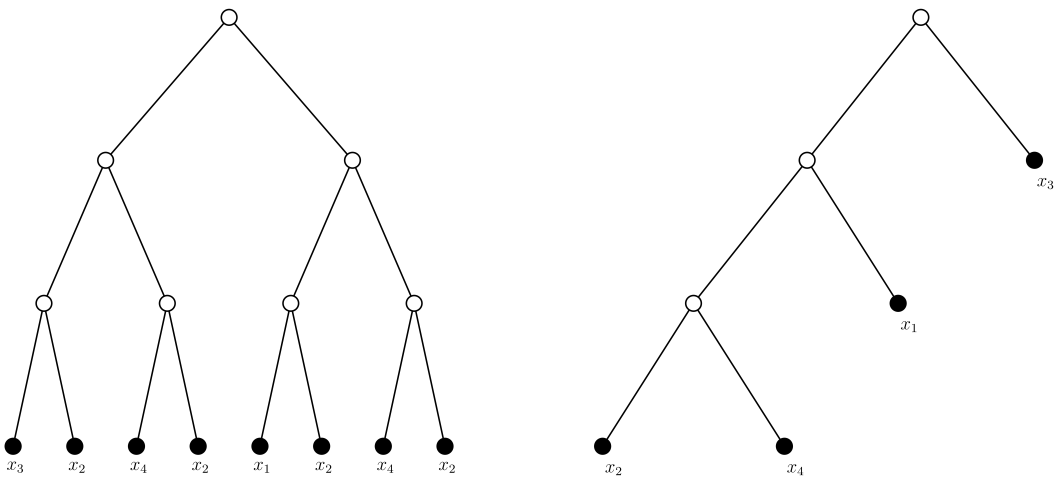

Figure 3: An amendment agenda (left) and a successive elimination agenda (right).

Figure 3 presents two standard examples of agendas in $\mathcal{A}$, both with voting sequence $(x_3, x_1,\ x_4, x_2)$: an amendment agenda and a successive-elimination agenda. The former describes a sequential decision-making process where one policy (or "proposal") can be amended step by step until a final decision is made: here, the initial proposal x_3 is first pitted against x_1; the winner of this pairwise vote is then pitted against x_4; the winner of this second pairwise vote is pitted against x_2; and the winner of this final vote is the committee's final choice. In the successive-elimination agenda shown in Figure 3, the first

surveys (e.g., Miller, 1995). The seminal reference is Farquharson (1969).

proposal x_3 is offered as the final choice in a yes-no vote; if it is accepted, it becomes the committee's final choice; if it is rejected, the second policy in the sequence, x_1, is considered; and so on.

As in most of the existing literature, we assume in the main text that n is odd and that each pairwise vote is decided by simple majority voting. This ensures that the committee's social preference relation is a tournament (i.e., it is both complete and asymmetric). This assumption greatly simplifies the exposition, guaranteeing the existence of a unique policy outcome for any agenda and any preference profile, without requiring specific assumptions about how ties between pairs of policies are broken. However, as we elaborate in Section 5, our results also apply to even-sized committees and/or non-majoritarian institutions.

The final outcome of an agenda depends on the order in which votes occur and the committee members' preferences on X. To determine the collective choice from a given agenda $\Gamma \in \mathcal{A}$ and preference profile $\big(R_1(\mathbf{P}), \ldots, R_n(\mathbf{P})\big)$ induced by an assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}$, we use the standard concept of sophisticated voting (Shepsle and Weingast, 1984) — defined formally in Section A of the Appendix. This involves backward induction through the voting tree: at each decision node, committee members anticipate the outcomes of future votes and vote so as to induce their most preferred policy as the final choice. By recursively applying majority rule at each decision node — starting from the bottom of the tree and working upwards — we can determine the unique policy that emerges from the full voting process. This policy is referred to as the *sophisticated outcome* of Γ,[6] and is denoted by $s(\Gamma, \mathbf{P})$.

Returning to the dynamic policy-experimentation framework described in Figure 2, we assume for (and only for) expositional ease that the committee uses the same agenda, denoted by $\overline{\Gamma}$ in every period. (None of our results would be affected if we instead allowed for a time-dependent sequence $\{\overline{\Gamma}^t\}$ of agendas in $\mathcal{A}$.) Coupled with the assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$ inherited from the previous period, the fixed agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$ generates a policy choice $x^t = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}^{t-1}) \in X$ in each period t. This is the policy chosen by the committee in period t.

[6]It is well known that this is the unique policy outcome obtained from the iterated elimination of dominated strategies in the corresponding noncooperative game form (Moulin, 1979).

Learning. To complete the description of the sequence of events in period t, it remains to describe how committee members' assessments evolve during that period. After implementing a policy, say x_k, members observe a policy outcome that may lead them to revise their assessment of the quality of x_k. This policy outcome may stochastically depend on the state of nature, and more specifically, on its kth component ω_k. Each member i is therefore led to revise her beliefs about ω_k, and consequently her assessment of x_k, according to an individual updating process, which may be Bayesian but could also reflect forms of bounded rationality. To allow for maximum generality, we only assume that each member i's updating process is governed by a stochastic transition function $\phi_{ik} \colon P \times \Omega_k \to \Delta(P)$. Thus, if member i holds assessment $p_{ik}^{t-1} \in P$ at the beginning of period t, then conditional on the true state regarding x_k being $\omega_k \in \Omega_k$, her updated assessment p_{ik}^t at the end of period t is drawn according to the probability distribution $\phi_{ik}(p_{ik}^{t-1}, \omega_k)$ on P. As for policies $x_\ell \neq x_k$ that have not been selected in this period, their assessments remain unchanged (i.e., $p_{\cdot\ell}^t = p_{\cdot\ell}^{t-1}$), since members acquire no new information about them.

As we have noted repeatedly, the framework described above is extremely flexible. Depending on the policy instruments, committee members' preferences and incentives, their levels of rationality, the agenda institutions, or the informational structures that one seeks to capture, the parametric configuration of the model can be adjusted to account for a broad range of situations of interest. In what follows, we refer to any such parametric configuration as a *policy-making environment.*

Example 1: Two-armed Bandit Environments. Before proceeding further, it is useful to illustrate how the general framework above can accommodate two-armed bandit models, which are commonly used in the literature on policy experimentation. Consider an environment in which there are only two feasible policies: a "safe policy" x_1 and a "risky reform" x_2. Suppose that $\Omega_1 = \{\text{Safe}\}$ and $\Omega_2 = \{\text{Good}, \text{Bad}\}$. There are fixed parameters $\bar{p}, \lambda \in (0, 1)$ such that the set of possible assessment matrices $\mathcal{P}$ consists of all

$(n \times 2)$ matrices of the form

$$\mathbf{P} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & p \\ 1 & p \\ \vdots & \vdots \\ 1 & p \end{bmatrix} ,$$

for some

$$p \in P \equiv \left\{ \frac{\bar{p}(1-\lambda)^l}{\bar{p}(1-\lambda)^l + 1 - \bar{p}} : l = 0, 1, \ldots \right\} \cup \{1\} \ .$$

Each committee member $i \in N$ has experimentation preferences over $\{x_1, x_2\}$ determined by a fixed cutoff $q_i \in (0, \bar{p}) \setminus P$, such that for any $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$, $x_1 R_i(\mathbf{P}) x_2$ if and only if $p < q_i$. Assume that $q_1 < \cdots < q_n$; so that letting $m \equiv (n+1)/2$, q_m is the median of the q_i's. Accordingly, the risky reform is majority-preferred to the safe policy if and only if $p > q_m$. As there are only two feasible policies, there is a unique agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$, whose sophisticated outcome is

$$s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) = \begin{cases} x_1 & \text{if } p < q_m \ , \\ x_2 & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

for all $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$.

The transition functions governing the learning process are identical for each member i. As there is only one possible assessment of the safe policy, the probability distribution $\phi_{i1}(1, \text{Safe})$ must assign probability one to the value 1. The transition function for the risky policy is defined by the following equalities: $\phi_{i2}(p, \text{Good})(1) = \lambda$,

$$\phi_{i2}(p, \text{Good}) \left(\frac{p(1-\lambda)}{1-p\lambda} \right) = 1 - \lambda \ \text{ and } \ \phi_{i2}(p, \text{Bad}) \left(\frac{p(1-\lambda)}{1-p\lambda} \right) = 1 \ ,$$

for all $p \in P$.

The environment described above captures policy experimentation in the unique Markov perfect equilibrium of the model developed by Anesi and Bowen (2021). In a collective-choice variant on the standard two-armed bandit framework, a committee repeatedly chooses between a safe policy x_1 with known, constant payoffs and a risky reform x_2 whose payoffs depend on an unknown, fixed state, which is either "good" or "bad." Committee members hold a common prior belief about the state of the reform and update their belief p over time through Bayesian learning, based solely on the observed outcomes of the implemented policy. The risky reform yields stochastic payoffs. Specifically, when the risky reform is implemented, no payoff is received unless a signal arrives. This signal arrives according to a state-dependent Poisson process: in each period, a “good news” signal arrives with probability $\lambda > 0$ only in the good state, while no signals are ever received in the bad state. Thus, the absence of signals is itself informative, gradually leading members to revise their belief downward when no good news occurs; and the first arrival of good news reveals to all members that the reform is good, causing their belief about the state to update to one.

The reform, if good, benefits all members. This is why the set of relevant states for x_2 is simply $\Omega_2 = \{\text{Good}, \text{Bad}\}$.[7] However, they differ in how much they value a good reform relative to the safe policy. Each member seeks to maximize expected discounted payoffs over an infinite horizon. Anesi and Bowen (2021) show that the dynamic voting game, in which collective choice is determined by simple majority rule in each period, has a unique Markov perfect equilibrium. At the beginning of each period, committee members hold a common prior p^{t-1}, updated through past policy experimentation. This belief determines each member i's equilibrium continuation values for choosing the risky reform versus the safe policy. These continuation values, in turn, shape her experimentation preferences in that period: she prefers x_1 to x_2 if and only if the continuation value of implementing x_1 exceeds that of implementing x_2. In fact, the authors show that there exists an equilibrium cutoff q_i such that member i prefers to implement the risky reform if and only if $p^{t-1} > q_i$. Logically, members who place a higher value on a good reform have a lower cutoff. It then follows from majority rule that the risky reform is adopted if and only if $p^{t-1} > q_m$, as prescribed by $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}^{t-1})$ above. □

[7] This stands in contrast to Strulovici (2010), where committee members are either “winners” for whom the reform is beneficial, or “losers” for whom it is detrimental; but all winners receive the same expected payoff from the reform. This framework can also be readily accommodated within ours. In this case, the state space would be given by $\Omega_2 = \{\text{Good}, \text{Bad}\}^n$, where the ith component of $\omega_2 \in \Omega_2$ would indicate whether member i is a winner ($\omega_{2i} = \text{Good}$) or a loser ($\omega_{2i} = \text{Bad}$).

3.2 Manipulation

Having defined a broad class of policy-making environments under preference uncertainty, we now turn to the conceptualization of the two modes for manipulating policy outcomes in such environments.

Agenda manipulation. Our formalization of agenda manipulation and independence follows the seminal papers on agendas and the control of policy outcomes. As in that literature, we say that the outcome of a policy-making environment is "agenda-independent" if it is impossible for an agenda-setter to manipulate the committee's decision by appropriately selecting the agenda in any period; more specifically, if it is impossible to alter the (stochastic) sequence of policies $x^t = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}^{t-1})$ by modifying the default agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$ into another agenda from $\mathcal{A}$; and that it is "agenda-manipulable" otherwise. The following formal definition is a natural extension of that of Ferejohn et al. (1987) to dynamic settings with uncertainty.

Definition 1. *The outcome of a policy-making environment is* agenda-independent *if* $s(\Gamma, \mathbf{P}) = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P})$*, for all* $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$ *and all* $\Gamma \in \mathcal{A}$*. Otherwise, it is* agenda-manipulable.

This definition implicitly assumes that agenda-setters are unbound by any institutional constraints in their choices of agendas. They can freely choose any agenda from $\mathcal{A}$. It is common in the literature on agenda manipulation to restrict agenda choices to the empirically relevant amendment agendas — e.g., Miller (1980) and Banks (1985). As we explain in Section 5, such a restriction would have no impact on our results.

Special-interest capture. The manipulation of policy outcomes by special interests is more delicate to formalize, given the variety of influence mechanisms and, accordingly, the range of formal models found in the literature on legislative capture (e.g., Schnakenberg and Turner, 2024). As explained in the introduction, our approach does not require addressing this complexity directly. Instead, it focuses on the consequences of special-interest group's actions — i.e., an increased probability that the policies they support are adopted by the committee in some periods — regardless of the specific methods used to achieve this outcome. This approach allows us to preserve the generality of our conclusions, avoiding restricting ourselves to any particular mode of capture.

We then ask under what conditions it is beneficial for a special-interest group to influence the policy-making process. In a static environment without learning about the impact of policies, there would be no reason for a group not to increase the winning probability of its preferred policy, provided it is capable to do so. As illustrated by the example in Subsection 4.2, however, the answer is less straightforward in policy-experimentation contexts, where shifting the committee's decision in favor of a policy x_k in period t may affect the learning process in such a way that the committee becomes significantly *less* likely to select it in future periods.[8] To ensure our results are as strong as possible, we adopt a deliberately stringent criterion: we will say that the outcome of a policy-making environment is "prone to special-interest capture" if this is impossible; that is, if increasing the likelihood that the committee selects x_k in any given period increases the frequency with which it is selected in the future.

To formalize these ideas, we begin by establishing some notation. Define an *outcome function* as a mapping $\sigma\colon \mathbb{N} \times \mathcal{P} \to \Delta(X)$ that assigns to every period $t \in \mathbb{N}$ and every assessment $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$ held by committee members, a probability $\sigma(t, \mathbf{P})(x_k)$ that each policy x_k is selected in t. In a given policy-making environment with agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$, the *default outcome function* $\bar{\sigma}$ is the one characterizing the committee's decisions in the absence of special-interest capture; formally, for all $x_\ell \in X$, $\bar{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_\ell) = 1$ if and only if $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) = x_\ell$.

We conceptualize the capture of the policy-making environment by a special-interest group advocating for a given policy x_k as a change from the default outcome function $\bar{\sigma}$ to an alternative outcome function $\hat{\sigma}$ such that: (i) the committee is (weakly) more likely to choose policy x_k in every period, regardless of the committee members' assessments; while conditional on the policy choice not being x_k, the outcome is the same under both

[8] A remarkable result by Gossner et al. (2021) shows that such adverse impacts of choice manipulation are in fact impossible in *individual* decision-making settings under a mild independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives condition. However, it is easy to verify that this result does not generally extend to our collective decision-making settings: even if each voter's preferences satisfy this condition, that does *not* imply that the committee's sophisticated voting outcome, $s(\Gamma, \cdot)$, satisfies it as well.

functions; and (ii) there exists at least one period in which the committee is, in expectation, *strictly* more likely to select x_k.[9]

Formally, any outcome function σ, together with the transitions ϕ_{ik}, induces a stochastic sequence of assessment matrices $\{\mathbf{P}^t(\sigma)\}$ held by committee members over time. For each $k = 1, \ldots, L$, we then say that $\hat{\sigma} \colon \mathbb{N} \times \mathcal{P} \to \Delta(X)$ is a *k-captured outcome function* if the following holds:

(i) for all $t \in \mathbb{N}$ and $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$: (i.a) $\bar{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_k) \leq \hat{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_k)$; and (i.b) $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) \neq x_k$ implies $\hat{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_\ell)/[1 - \hat{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_k)] = \bar{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_\ell)$, for each $\ell \neq k$;

(ii) for every $\omega \in \Omega$, there exists $t \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $\mathbb{E}\big[\bar{\sigma}\big(t, \mathbf{P}^{t-1}(\bar{\sigma})\big)(x_k)\big] < \mathbb{E}\big[\hat{\sigma}\big(t, \mathbf{P}^{t-1}(\hat{\sigma})\big)(x_k)\big]$.

Finally, to compare the frequencies with which the committee adopts a given policy x_k under the default and captured outcome functions, we denote by $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\sigma \mid \omega)$ the (random) number of periods, up to period $t \in \mathbb{N}$, in which x_k is implemented in state ω under any outcome function σ. (The randomness of $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\sigma \mid \omega)$ arises from the possible realizations of the sequence $\{\mathbf{P}^t(\sigma)\}$ and implemented policies x^t, both of which are induced by the transition functions $\phi_{ik}(\cdot, \omega_k)$ and the outcome function σ.)

Definition 2. *The outcome of a policy-making environment is* prone to special-interest capture *if the following holds for all $\omega \in \Omega$, $x_k \in X$, and k-captured outcome function $\hat{\sigma}$: $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ first-order stochastically dominates $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ for every period $t \in \mathbb{N}$, with strict dominance in at least one period.*

In words, the outcome of a policy-making environment is prone to special-interest capture if for *any* policy x_k, a special-interest group supporting x_k can (stochastically) increase the number of times it is implemented up to *any* given period by manipulating the committee's decision in only *some* arbitrary periods — possibly just one. Moreover, the definition requires that a strict increase in the implementation frequency of policy x_k occur after finitely many periods.

[9] A more demanding definition would require that there exists a period in which the committee is strictly more likely to select x_k, irrespective of the assessments. While this would not alter our results, it would in fact preclude the existence of a captured outcome in many cases of interest, thus limiting the scope of our findings. Adopting a weaker notion of capture strengthens our result.

Definition 3. *A policy-making environment is* manipulable *if it is either agenda-manipulable or prone to special-interest capture.*

4 Inevitable Manipulation

4.1 Manipulation Theorem

Are there policy-making environments that are manipulable neither by agenda-setters nor by special interests? Despite the broad family of environments considered here, the answer is no. As noted in the Introduction, the political science literature has devoted considerable attention to the manipulation of agenda institutions, and has identified various conditions under which the outcomes of policy-making environments may be agenda-independent. Our main result, however, establishes that any environment that escapes agenda manipulation must exhibit the very strong form of proneness to special-interest capture, as specified in Definition 2.

Proposition 1. *If the outcome of a policy-making environment is agenda-independent, then it is prone to special-interest capture.*

The contrapositive of Proposition 1 is that any policy-making environment that is not prone to special-interest capture must necessarily be agenda-manipulable. We therefore conclude that, despite the wide variety of policy-making environments encompassed by our framework, none is immune to both channels of manipulation. We record this observation in the following corollary.

Corollary 1. *Every policy-making environment is manipulable.*

The proof of Proposition 1 generalizes the logic of the heuristic arguments presented in Section 2. To better understand the role of agenda-independence in fostering capture, we now illustrate why proneness to capture may fail to obtain if agenda-independence does *not* hold. We do so by presenting a simple policy-making environment whose outcome is neither agenda-independent nor prone to special-interest capture. In particular, it illustrates that without agenda-independence, attempts at capture can produce long-term adverse consequences for the special interests that seek to manipulate policy outcomes.

4.2 Agenda-Manipulability and Adverse Capture

A three-armed bandit environment. We now consider a committee of three members, $N = \{1, 2, 3\}$, who must choose a policy from the set $X = \{x_1, x_2, x_3\}$ in each period. Policy x_1 is "safe" ($\Omega_1 = \{\text{Safe}\}$) in the sense that it yields a certain positive payoff $u_{i1} > 0$ to each committee member i in every period where it is implemented. Policy x_2 constitutes a policy experiment that may turn out to be either good or bad for each member. If it is good for i, then she receives a period payoff $u_{i2} > 0$ with probability $\lambda > 0$, and zero with probability $1-\lambda$; if it is bad for her, she receives zero. Policy x_3 is also risky and, similarly, may be good or bad for each member. Unlike x_2, however, it entails the stochastic arrival of *bad* news. Specifically, whenever x_3 is selected by the committee, each i receives a certain payoff of $u_{i3} > 0$, from which a cost $c_i > 0$ is subtracted if bad news occurs. She receives bad news with probability $\mu > 0$ if x_3 is bad for her, and with probability zero otherwise.

We assume that if policy x_k, $k = 2, 3$, is good for members 1 and 2, then it is necessarily bad for member 3, and vice versa. Accordingly, we can write $\Omega_2 = \Omega_3 = \{\text{Good}, \text{Bad}\}$, with the common understanding that $\omega_k = \text{Good}$ indicates that x_k is good *only* for members 1 and 2. We further assume that members' assessments of each policy x_k, $k = 2, 3$, are represented by their beliefs that the policy is good, i.e., that $\omega_k = \text{Good}$. They hold common initial beliefs that x_2 and x_3 is good, drawn from the sets

$$P_2 \equiv \left\{ \frac{\bar{p}_2(1-\lambda)^l}{\bar{p}_2(1-\lambda)^l + 1 - \bar{p}_2} : l = 0, 1, \ldots \right\} \cup \{1\} ,$$
$$P_3 \equiv \left\{ \frac{\bar{p}_3}{\bar{p}_3 + (1-\bar{p}_3)(1-\mu)^l} : l = 0, 1, \ldots \right\} \cup \{0\} ,$$

respectively, for some $\bar{p}_2, \bar{p}_3 \in (0, 1)$. The set of assessment matrices $\mathcal{P}$ comprises all the (3×3) matrices of the form

$$\mathbf{P} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & p_2 & p_3 \\ 1 & p_2 & p_3 \\ 1 & p_2 & p_3 \end{bmatrix} ,$$

where $p_2 \in P_2$ and $p_3 \in P_3$.

Committee members' beliefs are updated according to Bayes' rule, so that the transitions ϕ_{i1} and ϕ_{i2} are as in Example 1, and ϕ_{i3} is defined by:

$$\phi_{i3}(p_3, \text{Good}) \left(\frac{p_3}{p_3 + (1-p_3)(1-\mu)} \right) = 1 \ ,$$
$$\phi_{i3}(p_3, \text{Bad}) \left(\frac{p_3}{p_3 + (1-p_3)(1-\mu)} \right) = 1 - \mu \ ,$$

and $\phi_{i3}(p, \text{Bad})\,(0) = \mu$, for all $p_3 \in P$.

Each committee member i is assumed to myopically maximize their expected payoff in each period. Thus, for any assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}$, we have

$$x_1 \, R_i(\mathbf{P}) \, x_2 \text{ if and only if } u_{i1} \geq p_2 \lambda u_{i2},$$
$$x_1 \, R_i(\mathbf{P}) \, x_3 \text{ if and only if } u_{i1} \geq u_{i3} - (1-p_3)\mu c_i,$$
$$x_2 \, R_i(\mathbf{P}) \, x_3 \text{ if and only if } p_2 \lambda u_{i2} \geq u_{i3} - (1-p_3)\mu c_i \ ,$$

for each member $i = 1, 2$. Member 3's experimentation preferences are defined in like manner, simply by replacing the probabilities p_2 and p_3 with $1-p_2$ and $1-p_3$, respectively, in each of the inequalities above.

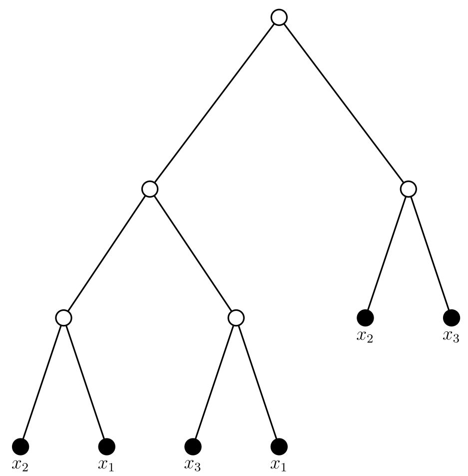

Figure 4: Agenda for the three-armed bandit environment.

In each period, collective decision-making is governed by the agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$, depicted in Figure 4. In the first round, the committee must choose between an amendment agenda and a pairwise vote between the two risky policies. If it opts for the amendment agenda, policy x_2 is first compared to x_3 in a pairwise vote, and the winner is then pitted against x_1 in a second pairwise vote.

Agenda-manipulability and adverse capture. There exist parametric configurations of the policy-making environment described above under which it is agenda-manipulable, but capture activities may have adverse consequences. To see this, consider the following parametrization: $\lambda = 0.8$, $\mu = 0.5$, $(c_1, c_2, c_3) = (1, 4, 3)$, $\bar{p}_2 = 0.7$, $\bar{p}_3 = 0.6$, and

$$[u_{ik}] = \begin{bmatrix} 8 & 4 & 2 \\ 2 & 16 & 8 \\ 3 & 8 & 4 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Let $\overline{\mathbf{P}}$ denote the assessment matrix in which $p_k = \bar{p}_k$ for each $k = 1, 2$. It is readily checked that these parameter values yield experimentation preferences for which the sophisticated outcome of the agenda $\overline{\Gamma}$ is $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \overline{\mathbf{P}}) = x_2$. Moreover, an agenda setter whose ideal policy is x_1 could change $\overline{\Gamma}$ to the successive-elimination agenda Γ' with voting sequence (x_1, x_2, x_3), thus obtaining her most-preferred policy as the sophisticated outcome. If, instead, x_3 is her most-preferred policy, she could enforce it by changing $\overline{\Gamma}$ to the amendment agenda Γ'' with voting sequence (x_2, x_3, x_1), for example. Thus, $s(\Gamma, \overline{\mathbf{P}}) \neq s(\overline{\Gamma}, \overline{\mathbf{P}})$, for $\Gamma = \Gamma', \Gamma''$. We conclude that whenever $\overline{\mathbf{P}}$ is the initial assessment matrix, an agenda setter can manipulate the agenda to her advantage from the very first period.

Consider now the position of a special-interest group that has the ability to enforce its favored policy x_3 in the first period, inducing the 3-captured outcome function

$$\hat{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P}) = \begin{cases} x_3 & \text{if } t = 1, \\ \bar{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P}) & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

It turns out that *such capture behavior can significantly reduce the likelihood that the group's preferred policy is selected in the long run.* Indeed, suppose the state is $\omega = (\text{Safe}, \text{Bad}, \text{Good})$. Under the default outcome function $\bar{\sigma}$, the committee experiments with x_2 in the first period and subsequently engages in repeated experimentation with x_3 from period $t = 2$ onward. Hence, $\mathfrak{n}_3^t(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) = t - 1$ for all $t \in \mathbb{N}$. By contrast, under the captured outcome function $\hat{\sigma}$, the committee has to experiment with x_3 in the first period but then switches to the safe policy x_1 from period $t = 2$ onward, so that $\mathfrak{n}_3^t(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) = 1$ for all $t \in \mathbb{N}$. It follows immediately that $\mathfrak{n}_3^t(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ first-order stochastically dominates $\mathfrak{n}_3^t(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ for all $t \geq 2$, with strict dominance for all $t > 2$.

5 Discussion and Extensions

A central issue in formal political theory since its very beginnings has been the manipulation of policy-making institutions by those who control them. Most of the literature has focused on identifying environments in which such manipulation can be avoided. But are these environments also immune to another form of manipulation: influence by self-interested groups? This note has examined the relationship between these two forms of manipulation and reached a stark conclusion: whenever the conditions are met for a policy-making environment to be immune to institutional manipulation, it is inevitably subject to capture by special interests. The broad generality of the environments to which this conclusion applies makes it an impossibility result, with significant implications for attempts to insulate legislative policy-making from manipulation by self-interested actors.

Evidently, if the set $\mathcal{A}$ of possible voting procedures available to the committee is enlarged, then the ability of those (e.g., the committee chair) responsible for selecting these procedures to manipulate the committee's decisions increases, thus reinforcing our result. It is however natural to ask whether our result still holds when the set of collective decision-making procedures available to the committee is instead restricted. After all, not every agenda in the family $\mathcal{A}$ that we have considered is commonly used in real-world legislative bodies. In fact, the literature on agenda manipulation has often focused on a specific subset of $\mathcal{A}$, i.e., the empirically-relevant class of amendment agendas. In this case, agenda control is limited to selecting a voting sequence for amendments. It is readily checked that all the arguments in the proof of Proposition 1 still hold when $\mathcal{A}$ is restricted to amendment agendas. This also applies when $\mathcal{A}$ is restricted to successive-elimination agendas.

For expositional convenience, we have assumed an (odd-sized) majoritarian committee. However, in many situations of interest — particularly outside legislative contexts — quota rules other than majority voting are used by committees. A well-known difficulty in modeling such situations is that one must make assumptions about how ties in the agendas' pairwise votes are broken; moreover, these assumptions must be applicable across all possible agendas in $\mathcal{A}$. In the case where $\mathcal{A}$ consists of amendment agendas, two natural assumptions commonly made in the literature (e.g., Banks and Bordes, 1988; Duggan, 2006; or Barberà and Gerber, 2015) are that, in the event of a procedural tie between two policies at a decision node, the winner is either the policy appearing earlier or the one appearing later in the agenda's voting sequence. As explained in the Appendix, our manipulation result also applies to cases where voting is by quotas other than majority rule (and/or the committee is even-sized) under either of these two assumptions.

Appendix

A Binary Agendas: Formal Definitions

A *(binary) agenda* (or *voting tree*) is a tuple $\Gamma = \langle \Lambda, \succ, \theta \rangle$, whose three components are described as follows. First, Λ is a set of nodes. Second, $\succ$ is a transitive and asymmetric relation on Λ that satisfies the following two conditions: (i) there exists a unique node $\lambda_0 \in \Lambda$ such that $\lambda_0 \not\succ \lambda$ for all $\lambda \in \Lambda$; and (ii) for any pair $\lambda, \lambda' \in \Lambda$ such that $\lambda' \succ \lambda$, there exists a unique sequence of nodes $\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_m$ in Λ such that $\lambda' \succ \lambda_1 \succ \cdots \succ \lambda_m \succ \lambda$. Intuitively, the relation $\succ$ serves as a "precedence relation." Condition (i) ensures thus that there is a unique initial node that is not preceded by any other node, while condition (ii) ensures that there is exactly one path in the tree from λ to λ'. This relation partitions the set of nodes Λ into the subset of *terminal nodes* $\Lambda^T \equiv \{\lambda \in \Lambda \colon \nexists \lambda' \in \Lambda \text{ such that } \lambda' \succ \lambda\}$ — i.e., those that do not precede any other node — and the subset of *decision nodes* $\Lambda^D \equiv \Lambda \setminus \Lambda^T$. In a binary agenda, every decision node $\lambda \in \Lambda^D$ has exactly two nodes immediately following it. Finally, the third component of the agenda Γ is a surjective function $\theta \colon \Lambda^T \to X$, which assigns each terminal node of the tree to exactly one alternative in X.

The committee's final choice resulting from any agenda $\Gamma \in \mathcal{A}$ is characterized by the *sophisticated outcome* (Shepsle and Weingast, 1984) of that agenda. More specifically, each assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}$ induces a preference profile $\big(R_1(\mathbf{P}), \ldots, R_n(\mathbf{P})\big)$ on X. This profile in turn gives rise to a majority preference relation $R^m(\mathbf{P})$ on X: for all $x_k, x_\ell \in X$, $x_k R^m(\mathbf{P}) x_\ell$ if and only if $\big|\{i \in N \colon x_k R_i(\mathbf{P}) x_\ell\}\big| > n/2$. Equipped with $R^m(\mathbf{P})$, we can then apply the following *sophisticated voting* procedure to Γ. By construction, each non-terminal node λ in the tree is followed by exactly two terminal nodes, say λ' and λ''. The *sophisticated equivalent* of λ, denoted $\bar{s}(\lambda)$, is defined as the majority winner between $\theta(\lambda')$ and $\theta(\lambda'')$:

$$\bar{s}(\lambda) \equiv \begin{cases} \theta(\lambda') & \text{if } \theta(\lambda') R^m(\mathbf{P}) \theta(\lambda'') \ , \\ \theta(\lambda'') & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Applying the same reasoning to every final decision node, we can delete the set of terminal nodes of Γ by associating each final decision node λ with its sophisticated equivalent $\bar{s}(\lambda)$, i.e., by converting each final decision node into a terminal node whose associated outcome is given by $\bar{s}(\lambda)$. This yields a new binary agenda. The same logic can then be applied to the final decision nodes of this new agenda, and so on, recursively up the tree, until we are left with a unique policy $\bar{s}(\lambda_0)$, which is the sophisticated equivalent of the initial node of Γ. This policy is referred to as the *sophisticated outcome* of Γ, and is denoted by $s(\Gamma, \mathbf{P})$.

B Proof of Proposition 1

Take any policy-making environment whose outcome is agenda-independent; so that we must have $s(\Gamma, \mathbf{P}) = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P})$, for all $\Gamma \in \mathcal{A}$ and all $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$. A theorem, proved by McKelvey and Niemi (1978), establishes that the sophisticated outcome of any binary agenda Γ must be an element of the top cycle set, whose unique element is the maximum of the majority preference relation when there is one. It follows that for every $\mathbf{P} \in \mathcal{P}$, the majority preference relation induced by $\big(R_1(\mathbf{P}), \ldots, R_n(\mathbf{P})\big)$ has a unique maximum. (We reach the same conclusion in the variant of our model discussed in Section 5, where voting is by any quota rule in amendment agendas, using Barberà and Gerber's (2017) Theorem 5.1 instead of McKelvey and Niemi's.)

Now take an arbitrary policy $x_k \in X$, and let $\mathbf{P}$ and $\mathbf{Q}$ be any two assessment matrices in $\mathcal{P}$ such that $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}), s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{Q}) \neq x_k$, and $p_{\cdot\ell} = q_{\cdot\ell}$, for all $\ell \neq k$. Let x_ℓ and x_m denote the maxima of the majority preference relations induced by $\mathbf{P}$ and $\mathbf{Q}$, respectively. Applying McKelvey and Niemi's theorem again, we must have $x_\ell = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) \neq x_k$ and $x_m = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{Q}) \neq x_k$. This in turn implies that $p_{\cdot\ell} = q_{\cdot\ell}$ and $p_{\cdot m} = q_{\cdot m}$. Hence, by the independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives property, we have $x_\ell R_i(\mathbf{P}) x_m$ if and only if $x_\ell R_i(\mathbf{Q}) x_m$, for each $i \in N$. It follows that the majority preference relation between x_m and x_ℓ is the same under $\mathbf{P}$ and $\mathbf{Q}$; and therefore, $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) = x_\ell = x_m = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{Q})$. (Otherwise, the sophisticated outcome of $\overline{\Gamma}$ under either $\mathbf{P}$ or $\mathbf{Q}$ would not be the maximum of the corresponding majority-preference relation; a contradiction.) As $x_k \in X$ and $\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{Q} \in \mathcal{P}$ were taken arbitrarily, we conclude that: for every policy x_k and assessment matrices $\mathbf{P}$ and

$\mathbf{Q}$ satisfying $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}), s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{Q}) \neq x_k$, and $p_{\cdot\ell} = q_{\cdot\ell}$ for all $\ell \neq k$, we have $s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{P}) = s(\overline{\Gamma}, \mathbf{Q})$. Henceforth, we refer to the latter property more succinctly as "condition (C)."

What remains to establish in order to obtain Proposition 1, therefore, is that condition (C) is sufficient for the outcome of the policy-making environment under consideration to be prone to self-interest capture. In fact, this condition is a natural extension of Gossner et al.'s (2021) condition of independence of irrelevant alternative x_k for attention strategies in their individual decision-making framework with limited attention, for each $x_k \in X$. The rest of the proof consists in verifying that condition (C) suffices to extend the coupling argument underlying their attention theorem to our agenda-voting framework with multiple individuals, and in obtaining strict first-order stochastic dominance in at least one period. To this end, we must first introduce some terminology and mathematical machinery. For every $\omega = (\omega_1, \ldots, \omega_L) \in \Omega$, define a "learning process" π as a tuple of independent n-dimensional processes $\pi_\ell = \{\pi_\ell^m\}$, $\ell = 1, \ldots, L$, where each π_ℓ is a Markov process with the initial state $p_{\cdot\ell}^0$, and whose transitions are governed by the $\phi_{i\ell}(\cdot, \omega_\ell)$'s. Thus, the mth component of π_ℓ, π_ℓ^m, is equal to the assessment profile of policy x_ℓ after it has been implemented in m periods. Observe that for any state ω and any outcome function $\tilde{\sigma}$, we can define the joint stochastic process $\{(\mathbf{P}^t, \chi^t)\}$ of assessment matrices and chosen policies, with the set of possible draws of π as its sample space, as follows: $p_{\cdot\ell}^t \equiv \pi_\ell^{\mathfrak{n}_\ell^t(\tilde{\sigma}|\omega)}$, and the probability distribution of $\chi^t(\tilde{\sigma})$ is $\tilde{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P}^{t-1})$, for every $t \in \mathbb{N}$. The law of this process is denoted by $\mathfrak{L}_{\tilde{\sigma}}^\omega$.

Next, fix some $\omega = (\omega_1, \ldots, \omega_L) \in \Omega$, $x_k \in X$, and k-captured outcome function $\hat{\sigma}$. For every assessment matrix $\mathbf{P}$, define an "implementation process" as a triple of stochastic processes $\big(A(\cdot \mid \mathbf{P}), B(\cdot \mid \mathbf{P}_{-k}), C(\cdot \mid \mathbf{P})\big)$, where $\mathbf{P}_{-k}$ denotes the $n \times (L-1)$ matrix obtained from $\mathbf{P}$ by deleting its kth column, such that for every $t \in \mathbb{N}$: (i) $A(t \mid \mathbf{P})$ is a $\{0,1\}$-valued random variable, which is equal to one with probability $\hat{\sigma}(t, \mathbf{P})(x_k)$; $B(t \mid \mathbf{P}_{-k}) \in X \setminus \{x_k\}$ is defined as policy $x_\ell \neq x_k$ if there exists $p_{\cdot k}$ such that $s(\overline{\Gamma}, p_{\cdot k}\mathbf{P}_{-k}) = x_\ell$ (where $p_{\cdot k}\mathbf{P}_{-k}$ is the assessment matrix obtained by adding the assessment profile $p_{\cdot k}$ to the matrix $\mathbf{P}_{-k}$, as its kth column), and as an arbitrary element of $X \setminus \{x_k\}$ otherwise; and $C(t \mid \mathbf{P})$ is a $\{0,1\}$-valued random variable which is equal to one with probability

$\mathbf{1}_{\{s(\Gamma,\mathbf{P})=x_k\}}/\hat{\sigma}(t,\mathbf{P})(x_k)$ if $\hat{\sigma}(t,\mathbf{P})(x_k)>0$, and with probability zero otherwise. Observe that the definition of the $B(t\mid\mathbf{P}_{-k})$'s is where the condition (C), established above, kicks in: it guarantees that each $B(t\mid\mathbf{P}_{-k})$ is well-defined, since the choice of the profile $p_{\cdot k}$ such that $s(\overline{\Gamma},p_{\cdot k}\mathbf{P}_{-k})\neq x_k$ (if there is any) is irrelevant under this condition. Observe further that the probability distribution of each $C(t\mid\mathbf{P})$ is also well-defined, since $\hat{\sigma}$ is a k-captured outcome function and, consequently, $\hat{\sigma}(t,\mathbf{P})(x_k)=1$ whenever $s(\overline{\Gamma},\mathbf{P})=x_k$.

Equipped with the implementation processes, we now turn to the construction of joint stochastic processes $\{(\mathbf{P}^t(\tilde{\sigma}),\chi^t(\tilde{\sigma}))\}$, for each $\tilde{\sigma}\in\{\bar{\sigma},\hat{\sigma}\}$. As above, the ℓth column of each $\mathbf{P}^t(\tilde{\sigma})$, $p^t_{\cdot\ell}(\tilde{\sigma})$, is defined as the assessment profile of the n committee members after policy x_ℓ has been implemented in exactly $\mathfrak{n}^t_\ell(\tilde{\sigma}\mid\omega)$ periods. Having defined the $\mathbf{P}^t(\tilde{\sigma})$'s, we can now construct the $\chi^t(\tilde{\sigma})$'s as follows. Let $\nu^t(\omega,\mathbf{P}_{-k}\mid\tilde{\sigma})\equiv\big|\{\tau<t\colon\mathbf{P}^\tau_{-k}=\mathbf{P}_{-k}\ \&\ \chi^\tau(\tilde{\sigma})\neq x_k\}\big|$. Then, let

$$\chi^t(\bar{\sigma})\equiv\begin{cases}x_k & \text{if } A\big(t\mid\mathbf{P}^{t-1}(\bar{\sigma})\big)C\big(t\mid\mathbf{P}^{t-1}(\bar{\sigma})\big)=1\\ B\big(\nu^t(\omega,\mathbf{P}^{t-1}_{-k}\mid\bar{\sigma})\mid\mathbf{P}^{t-1}_{-k}(\bar{\sigma})\big) & \text{otherwise,}\end{cases}$$

and

$$\chi^t(\hat{\sigma})\equiv\begin{cases}x_k & \text{if } A\big(t\mid\mathbf{P}^{t-1}(\hat{\sigma})\big)=1\\ B\big(\nu^t(\omega,\mathbf{P}^{t-1}_{-k}\mid\hat{\sigma})\mid\mathbf{P}^{t-1}_{-k}(\hat{\sigma})\big) & \text{otherwise,}\end{cases}$$

for all $t\in\mathbb{N}$. As desired for the coupling argument, the law of the joint stochastic process $\{(\mathbf{P}^t(\tilde{\sigma}),\chi^t(\tilde{\sigma}))\}$ is by construction $\mathfrak{L}^\omega_{\tilde{\sigma}}$, for each $\tilde{\sigma}\in\{\bar{\sigma},\hat{\sigma}\}$.

To complete the proof of the proposition, therefore, it suffices to show that for every $\omega\in\Omega$: (i) for every period $t\in\mathbb{N}$, $\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\hat{\sigma}\mid\omega)\equiv\{\tau\leq t\colon\chi^\tau(\hat{\sigma})=x_k\}$ first-order stochastically dominates $\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\bar{\sigma}\mid\omega)$; and (ii) this first-order stochastic dominance is strict for at least one $t\in\mathbb{N}$.

We begin with part (i). Fix $\omega\in\Omega$. Because $\bar{\sigma}$ is deterministic, then by definition of a k-captured outcome function, we have that for every draw, policy x_k is implemented under $\hat{\sigma}$ whenever it is implemented under $\bar{\sigma}$ in period 1. Proceeding by induction, suppose that $\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\bar{\sigma}\mid\omega)\leq\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\hat{\sigma}\mid\omega)$ in all periods up to some fixed t. For every arbitrary draw where $\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\bar{\sigma}\mid\omega)<\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\hat{\sigma}\mid\omega)$, the condition trivially holds at $t+1$. Now, take a draw where $\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\bar{\sigma}\mid\omega)=\mathfrak{n}^t_k(\hat{\sigma}\mid\omega)$, so that the kth columns of $\mathbf{P}^t(\bar{\sigma})$ and $\mathbf{P}^t(\hat{\sigma})$ coincide. It follows from a variant on Gossner et al.'s (2021) Lemma 2 that the other columns coincide as well, i.e., the joint processes $\{(\mathbf{P}^t_{-k}(\bar\sigma), \chi^t(\bar\sigma))\}$ and $\{(\mathbf{P}^t_{-k}(\hat\sigma), \chi^t(\hat\sigma))\}$ are identical when restricted to periods in which policy x_k is not implemented. Formally, let $\overline{T}(m)$ denote the mth period t such that $\chi^t \neq x_k$ under the outcome function $\bar\sigma$; and let $\widehat{T}(m)$ denote the mth period t such that $\chi^t \neq x_k$ under the outcome function $\hat\sigma$. We then have $(\mathbf{P}^{\overline{T}(m)}_{-k}(\bar\sigma), \chi^{\overline{T}(m)}(\bar\sigma)) = (\mathbf{P}^{\widehat{T}(m)}_{-k}(\hat\sigma), \chi^{\widehat{T}(m)}(\hat\sigma))$, for all m. (The proof parallels their lemma, just substituting assessment (sub)matrices in our multiple-agent framework to assessment (sub)vectors in their single-agent framework.) Coupled with the observation that the kth columns of $\mathbf{P}^t(\bar\sigma)$ and $\mathbf{P}^t(\hat\sigma)$ coincide, we obtain that $\mathbf{P}^t(\bar\sigma) = \mathbf{P}^t(\hat\sigma)$ in the draw under consideration, it follows from the construction of χ^t above that $\chi^{t+1}(\bar\sigma) = x_k$ only if $\chi^{t+1}(\hat\sigma) = x_k$. Hence, $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t+1}(\bar\sigma \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n}_k^{t+1}(\hat\sigma \mid \omega)$, as desired. As this inequality holds for every draw, we obtain part (i).

We now move to part (ii). Here, we use the observation that a random variable X strictly first-order stochastically dominates another random variable Y if and only if the following two conditions hold: X first-order stochastically dominates Y, and their cumulative distribution functions are not equal (e.g., Chapter 1 in Shaked and Shanthikumar, 2007). It follows from part (i) above that, for all t, $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\hat\sigma \mid \omega)$ first-order stochastically dominates $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\bar\sigma \mid \omega)$. What remains to be established, therefore, is that there is some period t for which the cumulative distribution functions of $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\bar\sigma \mid \omega)$ and $\mathfrak{n}_k^t(\bar\sigma \mid \omega)$ are different.

To this end, we first need to establish some additional notation. Fix any $\omega \in \Omega$. For every learning draw π, let $t^*(\pi) \equiv \inf\{t \in \mathbb{N}\colon \bar\sigma(t, \mathbf{P}^{t-1})(x_k) < \hat\sigma(t, \mathbf{P}^{t-1})(x_k)\} \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$, where $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$ is the realization of the period-$(t-1)$ assessment matrix in π. By construction, therefore, $\{(\mathbf{P}^t(\bar\sigma), \chi^t(\bar\sigma))\}$ and $\{(\mathbf{P}^t(\hat\sigma), \chi^t(\hat\sigma))\}$ are identical up to period $t = t^*(\pi) - 1$. This in turn implies that $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^*(\pi)-1}(\bar\sigma \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^*(\pi)-1}(\hat\sigma \mid \omega)$. Next, for every $t \in \mathbb{N}$, let $\Pi^t \equiv \{\pi \in \Pi : t^*(\pi) = t\}$; and let $t^{**} \equiv \inf\{t \in \mathbb{N}\colon \Pi^t \text{ is not negligible}\}$. Condition (ii) in the definition of a k-captured outcome function guarantees that $t^{**} \in \mathbb{N}$, because we must have $\sum_{t=1}^{\tau} \Pr\{\pi \in \Pi^t\} = 1$ for any τ satisfying condition (ii) and the fact that $t^{**} \leq \tau$. Observe that by construction, $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\tilde\sigma \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\tilde\sigma \mid \omega) + \mathbf{1}_{\chi^{t^{**}}(\tilde\sigma) = x_k}$ for each $\tilde\sigma = \bar\sigma, \hat\sigma$. It follows that for every $\mathfrak{n} \in \{0, 1, \cdots, t^{**}-1\}$ such that $\Pr\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\tilde\sigma \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\} > 0$, we have

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n}\right\} \\
&= \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} \Pr\{\pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\} \\
&\qquad\qquad + \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} \Pr\{\pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\} \\
&= \Big[\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) < \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} + \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} \\
&\qquad \times \Pr\left\{\mathbf{1}_{\chi^{t^{**}}(\tilde{\sigma})=x_k} = 0 \mid \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}, \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\}\Big] \Pr\{\pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\} \\
&\qquad\qquad + \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\tilde{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} \Pr\{\pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\}\ .
\end{aligned}
$$

Observe first that, since $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ for every draw in $\Pi^{t^{**}}$, we have $\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) < \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} = \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) < \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\}$ and $\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} = \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\}$. Moreover, by construction, we also have that $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ for all draws outside $\Pi^{t^{**}}$; so that $\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} = \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n} \mid \pi \notin \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\}$. By the same logic as in part (i), $\mathbf{P}^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma}) = \mathbf{P}^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma})$, so that $\chi^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma}) = x_k$ only if $\chi^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma}) = x_k$, in every draw in $\Pi^{t^{**}}$. We then have that in every draw of $\Pi^{t^{**}}$, $\bar{\sigma}\big(t^{**}, \mathbf{P}^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma})\big)(x_k) < \hat{\sigma}\big(t^{**}, \mathbf{P}^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma})\big)(x_k)$. This implies that $\Pr\left\{\mathbf{1}_{\chi^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma})=x_k} = 0 \mid \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}, \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\} < \Pr\left\{\mathbf{1}_{\chi^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma})=x_k} = 0 \mid \mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}-1}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) = \mathfrak{n}, \pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\right\}$. As $\Pr\{\pi \in \Pi^{t^{**}}\} > 0$, we conclude that $\Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n}\right\} < \Pr\left\{\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega) \leq \mathfrak{n}\right\}$ and, consequently, $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\bar{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ and $\mathfrak{n}_k^{t^{**}}(\hat{\sigma} \mid \omega)$ have different cumulative distribution functions. This completes the proof of the proposition.

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