

# Relative Policy Support and Coincidental Representation

Peter K. Enns  
Cornell University  
peterenns@cornell.edu

## Abstract

The finding that the preferences of middle-income Americans are ignored when they diverge from the preferences of the rich is one of the most widely accepted and influential conclusions in political science research today (Gilens 2005, 2011, 2012, Gilens and Page 2014). This article offers a cautionary note regarding these conclusions. I demonstrate that even on those issues for which the preferences of the wealthy and those in the middle diverge, policy ends up about where we would expect if policymakers *only* represented the middle class. This result emerges because even when middle- and high-income groups express different levels of support for a policy (i.e., a preference gap exists), the policies that receive the most (least) support among the middle typically receive the most (least) support among the affluent (i.e., relative policy support is often equivalent). As a result, the opportunity of unequal representation of the “average citizen” is much less than previously thought. The analysis also shows, however, that substantial opportunity exists for unequal representation of strong partisan preferences. Together, these results reinforce the importance of party identification for understanding policy outcomes and who gets represented.

Summarizing the work of Gilens and Page (2014), Larry Bartels recently exclaimed, “Rich People Rule!”<sup>1</sup> The emerging scholarly consensus offers a startling picture of unequal representation in the United States (e.g., Bartels 2008, Jacobs and Page 2005, Jacobs and Skocpol 2005, Gilens 2012). Much of this research can trace its roots to the 2004 American Political Science Association Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, which brought a renewed focus in political science to issues of inequality and representation. In the subsequent decade, academic attention to these issues has exploded and the resulting scholarship has had an impressive influence on the scholarly community.<sup>2</sup>

This research has also influenced politicians, policymakers, and pundits. Barack Obama referenced Bartels’ *Unequal Democracy* during the 2008 presidential campaign.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Jared Bernstein, who was a member of President Obama’s economic team and Chief Economist and Economic Adviser to Vice President Biden wrote, “Both [Bartels and Gilens] rigorously document the disproportionate influence that the wealthy have on politicians and the political process” (Bernstein 2014, 205). On the media side, Ezra Klein’s *Vox* highlighted the attention Gilens and Page’s work has received by referring to their article as “The new study about oligarchy that’s blowing up the Internet.”<sup>4</sup> This work on unequal representation is among the most accepted and influential research by political scientists today.

Perhaps the most striking finding from this research is that when the preferences of wealthy and middle-income Americans diverge, policy only reflects the preferences of the most affluent (Gilens 2005, Gilens 2011, Gilens 2012, Gilens and Page 2014). Based on this result, Gilens (2012, 83) concludes, “actual government policy does not respond to

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/08/rich-people-rule/>

<sup>2</sup>According to Google Scholar, Gilens’ work on the subject has already amassed over 600 citations and Bartels’s (2008) *Unequal Democracy* has been cited more than 1,000 times.

<sup>3</sup><http://blog.press.princeton.edu/2008/09/16/obama-cites-larry-bartels-unequal-democracy/>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.vox.com/2014/4/18/5624310/martin-gilens-testing-theories-of-american-politics-explained>

the preferences of the median voter.”<sup>5</sup> This is a shocking result because the median has the electoral power to change election outcomes. When those in the middle do not receive their preferred policy, they can presumably swing the next election outcome by voting for the opposing party (e.g., Downs 1957). Yet, Gilens (2012, 84) finds that even when the preferences of low- and middle-income individuals align with each other and diverge from the preferences of the wealthy—i.e., when we would expect middle- and low-income voters to form an electoral majority (Lupu and Pontusson 2011)—policy still only reflects the preferences of the highest income group.

These results raise a crucial question. Given their potential electoral influence, why don't those in the economic middle elect politicians who might better represent their interests? Scholars have long been interested in the relative silence of groups that do not appear to get their political way (Bhatti and Erikson 2011, Gaventa 1982, Hochschild 1979, Hochschild 1981, Sombart 1976 [1906]). Yet, the apparent acquiescence of the median is particularly perplexing (Bonica, McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2013). Even the theory of “economic-elite domination” predicts that the average citizen holds “some independent influence” (Gilens and Page 2014, 570).<sup>6</sup> According to Gilens and Page (2014, 570), Biased Pluralism, which emphasizes the disproportionate influence of organized interest groups, is the one theory that assigns “little or no independent influence” to the average citizen. Yet, even Schattschneider (1960, 34-35), who drew attention to the “strong upper-class accent” of interest group politics, acknowledged that the public holds some political influence. In response to Charles Erwin Wilson’s (the former president and chief executive of General Motors) famous remark, “what is good for General Motors is good for the country,” Schattschneider (1960, 27) ex-

---

<sup>5</sup>Gilens’ evidence of a lack of policy responsiveness to low-income individuals is also a crucial result. Given space constraints and the importance of the median for most theories of representation, the following analysis focuses on middle- and high-income groups.

<sup>6</sup>Indeed, Winters and Page’s (2009, see also Winters 2011) account of oligarchy in the United States contends that “Oligarchy can exist with respect to certain limited but crucial policy issues at the same time that many other important issues are governed through pluralistic competition or even populist democracy” (731). See also Domhoff (2002, 124-125) and Ferguson (1995, 43).

plained, “it follows that Mr. Wilson’s comment, far from demonstrating that the public interest is a fraud, proves that he thinks that the public interest is so important that even a great private corporation must make obeisance to it.”<sup>7</sup>

In sum, existing theories of representation range from predicting hyper-responsiveness to the median voter to some responsiveness to the median on some issues. Why then, do policymakers ignore those in the economic middle—who Gilens and Page (2014, 568) consider a proxy for the average citizen—and why do those in the middle ignore the fact that they are being ignored?<sup>8</sup> One possible explanation is that the political system is so tilted in favor of the affluent that those in the middle simply accept this political fate. I propose, however, that we do not observe a political backlash from those in the economic middle because policy typically corresponds with the median’s preferences. Gilens, of course, acknowledges that when the preferences of the median and the affluent align, even if politicians only follow the affluent, policy will reflect the median’s interests. I take this argument one step further. I show theoretically and empirically that even on those issues where the preferences of the wealthy and the median diverge (i.e., where Gilens finds that the middle receives no representation), policy can (and does) end up about where we would expect if policymakers *only* followed the economic median. This result occurs because those in the middle still receive what I call coincidental representation.

I develop this theoretical argument in the following section and then examine the resulting predictions with Gilens’ data. Gilens’ research represents the best practice in studying representation and his data are the most comprehensive data *ever* collected on different groups’ policy preferences and whether these policies became law. For these reasons, I build

---

<sup>7</sup>This quote came from Wilson’s Senate confirmation hearing for secretary of defense. After being asked whether he could make a decision that would hurt GM, Wilson actually replied, “Yes, sir, I could. I cannot conceive of one because for years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa.” (O’Brien, McGuire, McPherson and Gerstle 1991, 446)

<sup>8</sup>Bhatti and Erikson (2011) propose these questions in their replication and extension of Bartels’s (2008) analysis of the U.S. Senate.

on Gilens' analytic approach throughout this article. After examining income groups, I then consider the preferences of strong partisans. In contrast to high- and middle-income groups, where coincidental representation is the norm, for strong Democrats and Republicans the opportunities for unequal representation are large. Although future research should consider the implications of relative policy support and coincidental representation for other groups, these results reinforce the importance of party identification for understanding policy outcomes and who gets represented (e.g., Bartels 2008). The conclusion of this essay further considers the implications of the current findings for how we understand representation in the United States.

## Preference Gaps, Relative Policy Support, and Representation

If two groups share the same preferences, even if policymakers only pay attention to one of these groups, both groups receive their preferred policy (Enns and Wlezien 2011, Gilens 2009, Soroka and Wlezien 2008). I call this *coincidental representation*. Because we are most interested in who gets represented when coincidental representation does *not* occur, scholars typically focus on issues where a *preference gap* exists. This preference gap represents the percent of one group who support a particular policy minus the percent of another group who support that policy. If the gap is zero, both groups express equal levels of support. Larger gaps have been interpreted as evidence of more distinct policy preferences and thus more opportunity for unequal representation.

Whether the groups correspond with *income* (Gilens 2009, Rigby and Wright 2011, Soroka and Wlezien 2008), *gender* (Box-Steffensmeier, Boef and Lin 2004, Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999, Shapiro and Young 1986), *race* (Abrajano and Poole 2011, Kinder and Sanders 1996), the *politically informed* (Althaus 2003, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), or *voters and nonvot-*

ers (Leighley and Nagler 2014, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), scholars have emphasized the representational implications of preference gaps. Highlighting the preference gap between high- and low-income groups, Gilens (2009, 340) concludes, “it is hard to escape the conclusion that public policy in the United States would look rather different if poor Americans had the influence over government policy that affluent Americans appear to enjoy.”

The key assumption of this research is that when preference gaps exist, coincidental representation is no longer possible. If policymakers ignore a particular group, policy outcomes will not align with that group’s preferences. I propose, however, that when a preference gap exists, coincidental representation can (and does) occur. Even when the level of support for a policy differs across groups *and* policymakers only consider the preferences of one of the groups, both groups can receive equal representation. This result is possible as long as two conditions holds.

First, when policymakers consider the public’s preferences, policies with greater amounts of support must be more likely, on average, to become law. Suppose, for example, that 80 percent of respondents favor more government spending on public schools and 60 percent favor increasing the minimum wage. All else equal, more spending on public schools should be more likely to pass than higher minimum wage. There are many reasons to expect this pattern to hold. Political decisions take place in a complex and resource constrained environment. Thus, even if politicians wanted to follow the public’s preferences, if a strong majority favored increasing government spending on defense, health care, education, *and* social security, fiscal constraints might limit the government’s ability to do so. Furthermore, even when fiscal constraints are not present, producing legislation takes time and effort. Not all popular policies can be enacted. If the goal was to best represent the public’s preferences, we should expect policymakers to look at which policy area (or areas) received the *most* public support. This expectation does not mean that politicians only (or always) consider

the public’s preferences. But when they do, they should consider how much support a policy receives. Because we are comparing support across policies, I refer to this as *relative policy support*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the previous example, relative policy support was higher for spending on public schools (80%) than for increasing the minimum wage (60%).

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is easy to find evidence in support of this first assumption. Figure 1, which replicates Figure 3.2 in Gilens (2012), shows that as relative policy support increases along the x-axis, the proportion of policies adopted (y-axis) also increases. The relationship is not perfectly monotonic, but the overall pattern is clear.

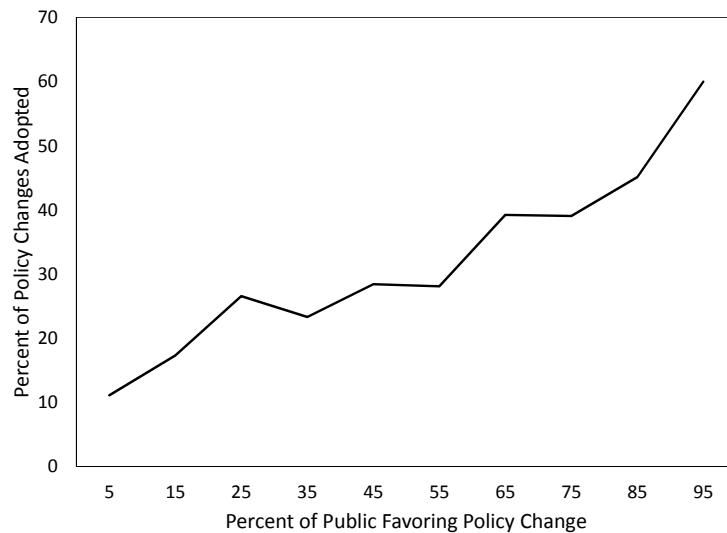


Figure 1: The Relationship between Policy Adoption and Relative Policy Support.  
*Note:* Replication of Gilens 2012, Figure 3.2

The second condition necessary for the possibility that groups with distinct preferences receive coincidental representation relates to how we define representation. I follow Gilens (and Gilens and Page) and focus on the congruence between relative policy support and whether the proposed policy becomes law.<sup>10</sup> In other words, if (as in Figure 1) the proba-

<sup>9</sup>Gilens refers to the “degree” of support (41).

<sup>10</sup>This view of representation also parallels Jacobs and Page (2005) who test whether higher support for a policy among the public, business leaders, labor, and experts (relative to other policies supported by each group) corresponds with higher relative policy support among government officials.

bility of policy adoption increases as relative policy support increases, we have evidence of representation. I suspect that these two conditions (i.e., when politicians consider the public’s preferences, more relative policy support corresponds with an increased probability of policy adoption and that such a relationship is evidence of representation) are straightforward. Perhaps even axiomatic. Yet, as I demonstrate below, these conditions hold crucial—and surprising—implications for the existence of unequal representation.

## Relative Policy Support by Group

When we examine the public as a whole, there is no need to differentiate between relative policy support and the level of public support for a policy. The higher (lower) the percentage supporting a policy, the more (less) relative support. The two concepts are interchangeable.<sup>11</sup> However, as I show below, when we consider groups, focusing on the level of policy support can yield different conclusions about representation than when focusing on relative policy support. Specifically, if two groups express different levels of policy support (i.e., a preference gap exists) relative policy support can still be equal.<sup>12</sup> To see why, consider Figure 2. This figure presents hypothetical levels of support for two policies (more school funding and higher minimum wage) among the top- and middle-income groups. Of course, the real policy making environment involves more than two policies, but this simplified example illustrates how a *preference gap* does not necessarily translate into different *relative policy support* across groups.

In Figure 2, support among high-income respondents is plotted on the x-axis and support among middle-income respondents is plotted on the y-axis. In this hypothetical ex-

---

<sup>11</sup>Indeed, for policy  $i$  ( $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$ ), call the absolute *level* of public support  $L_i$ . The average value of  $L_i$  is  $\frac{L_i}{N} = \bar{L}$ . The *relative* level of support for policy  $i$  is  $L_i - \bar{L}$ ; call this  $R_i$ . Then  $L_i$  and  $R_i$  are perfectly correlated.

<sup>12</sup>Even when considering groups, relative policy support and absolute levels of support are not completely distinct concepts. If there are no preference gaps, relative policy support will be equal and as the size of preference gaps increases, relative policy support becomes more distinct. The key point, however, is that even when large preference gaps exist, relative policy support can be equivalent.



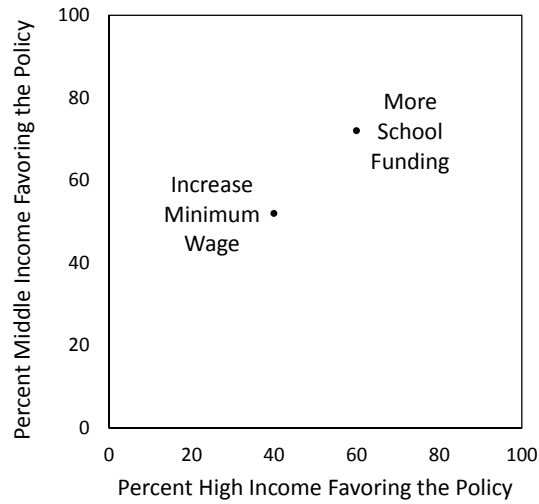


Figure 2: Hypothetical Scenario 1: High- and Middle-Income Preferences Differ by More than 10 Percentage Points, but Relative Policy Support is Equal (both groups prefer more school funding more than increasing the minimum wage)

ample, middle-income respondents are more supportive than high-income respondents of both higher minimum wage and more school funding by more than 10 percentage points (52% versus 40% support for minimum wage and 72% versus 60% for school funding). I set the preference gap to be more than 10 percentage points because this gap corresponds with Gilens’ definition of preference divergence (Gilens 2011, Gilens 2012). Standard interpretations of this preference gap would conclude that the probability of more school funding *and* increased minimum wage would be higher if politicians considered the preferences of middle-income respondents and lower if they followed wealthy respondents. This perspective, however, ignores the concept of relative policy support. Recall that Gilens (2012, 41) measures representation as “the strength of the association between policy outcomes and the *degree* of support expressed by the public (or a subgroup thereof)” (*italics in original*). Although middle-income respondents are more supportive of both policies than high-income respondents, relative policy support (what Gilens calls the “degree of support”) for more school funding is greater for both groups. Regardless of which income group politicians

turned to, we would expect the probability of legislating more school funding to be higher than increasing the minimum wage. Coincidental representation would occur.

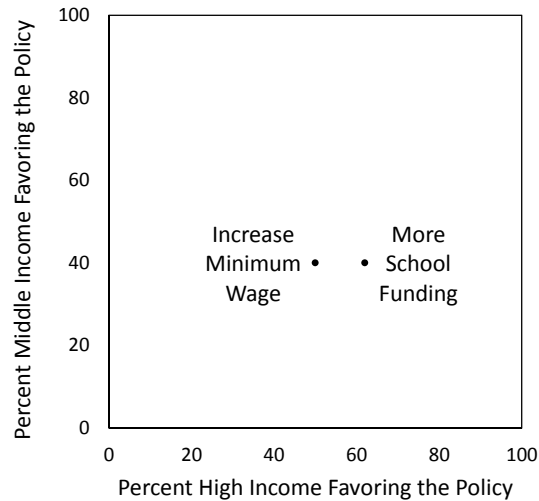


Figure 3: Hypothetical Scenario 2: The Wealthy Prefer More School Funding More than Increasing the Minimum Wage, Middle–Income Respondents are Indifferent.

Of course, a preference gap of more than ten percentage points can produce other patterns of relative policy support. Figure 3 presents an alternate scenario. Here, the wealthy prefer more school funding to increasing the minimum wage (62% versus 50%), while the middle income group favors both policies equally (40% support). If a politician aimed to reflect the preferences of the wealthy, this politician should be more likely to support increasing school funding. This scenario would be consistent with Gilens’ results, as we would expect a positive association between the relative policy support of the affluent and the probability of policy adoption and a near–zero association for those in the middle. Interestingly, even if a policymaker wanted to align his or her vote with middle–income respondents, these constituents are indifferent. Thus, the strategic vote would be for school funding. Absent a clear signal of support for one policy or the other from middle–income respondents, this politician should aim to please the group with distinct preferences over the two policies.

Figure 4 presents a third hypothetical scenario. Here, middle-income respondents prefer increasing the minimum wage and high-income respondents prefer more school funding. The preference gap is equal to the first hypothetical scenario (Figure 2),<sup>13</sup> but in this example, distinct preferences correspond with different relative policy support. As a result, the probability of policy adoption will be different depending on whether policymakers consider the preferences of high-income or middle-income constituents. If policymakers prioritize the preferences of high-income or middle-income constituents. If policymakers prioritize the preferences of the wealthy, we would expect increased school funding to be adopted against the preferences of the middle-income group. If relative policy support follows this pattern, and if policy outcomes reflect the preferences of the affluent, we would expect a negative association between the preferences of those in the middle and probability of policy adoption. This pattern would offer the strongest evidence of unequal representation.

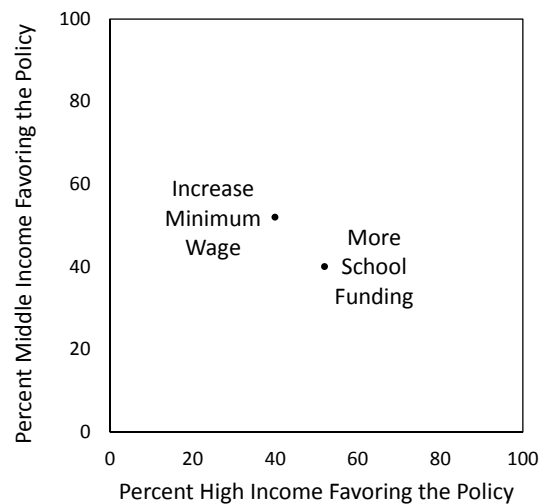


Figure 4: Hypothetical Scenario 3: High- and Middle-Income Preferences Differ by More than 10 Percentage Points and Relative Policy Support is Distinct (The wealthy prefer more school funding and middle-income respondents prefer increasing the minimum wage)

These three hypothetical scenarios illustrate that even when a substantial preference

---

<sup>13</sup>52% of middle-income respondents prefer increasing the minimum wage compared to 40% of high-income respondents and 40% of middle-income respondents prefer more school funding compared to 52% of high-income respondents.

gap exists, we do not necessarily observe different relative policy support across groups. Preference gaps can produce different relative policy support (as in Figure 3 or 4), but this outcome is not a guarantee (as in Figure 2). The question then becomes, when we analyze relative policy support, which figure do the data most closely resemble?

## **Analysis: Coincidental Representation?**

The above discussion shows that when two groups express different levels of support for a particular policy (i.e., preference gaps exist), similar patterns of relative policy support can lead to coincidental representation. Below, I use Gilens' data to analyze the implications of this argument for different income and different partisan groups.

### **The 50<sup>th</sup> and the 90<sup>th</sup> Income Percentiles**

I begin by plotting the relative policy support of the 50th income percentile and the relative policy support of the 90th income percentile for the 1,836 survey questions in Gilens' data. The more the relationship follows a flat or negative slope (like Figures 3 and 4, above) the more opportunity for unequal representation. By contrast, the more tightly the values cluster around a positive slope (like Figure 2, above) the more we would expect coincidental representation to occur. The data in Figure 5 clearly follow the latter scenario. The correlation is an impressive  $r=0.94$ .<sup>14</sup> Although the similar patterns of relative policy support are striking, these results are consistent with a large body of literature that finds a *lack* of relationship between economic self-interest and policy preferences (Citrin and Green 1990, Hochschild 1981, Lau and Heldman 2009, Sears and Funk 1990). As Gilens (1999, 40) explains, "the empirical evidence suggests that for most people, most of the

---

<sup>14</sup>Gilens and Page (2014, 571) report a correlation of 0.78. This value is lower than 0.94 because it reflects their adjustment for common measurement error across income groups. The analysis below follows Gilens' (2005, 786) preferred approach which relies on bivariate analysis without these adjustments. Appendix 1 offers additional support for the decision to not adjust for measurement error.

time, politics is not about the pursuit of individual gain, and that policy preferences reflect considerations of self-interest only weakly, if at all.”

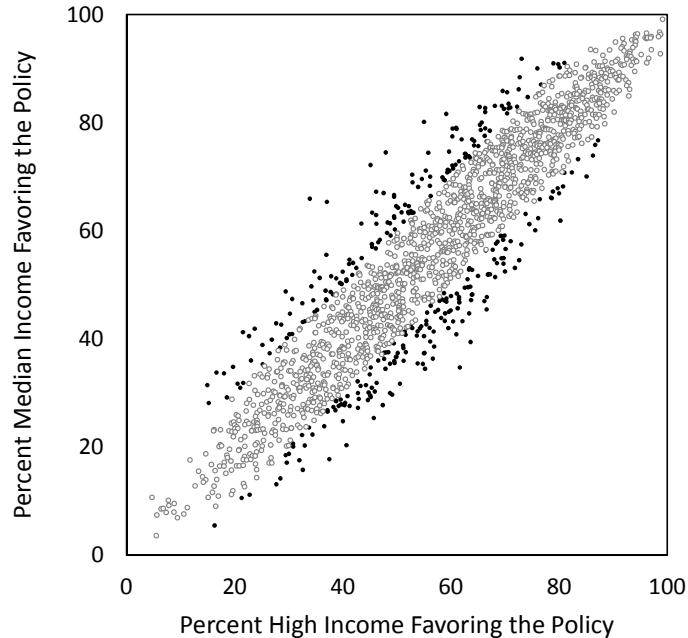


Figure 5: Relative Policy Support Among the 90th Income Percentile and the Median Income  
*Note:* Hollow dots represent policy issues where the difference between high- and middle-income groups is 10% or less.

Because the preferences of middle- and high-income groups often overlap, Gilens suggests that those in the middle will often automatically get the policies they want when their preferences differ by 10 percentage points or less. The hollow dots in Figure 5 represent these policies, which constitute 82 percent of the observations in Gilens data. Thus, we are most interested in the policies where the preferences of middle- and high-income respondents differ by more than 10 percentage points (solid black dots). Interestingly, when we focus on just these policies, we continue to see some evidence of common relative policy support. The correlation is an impressive  $r=0.68$ . These similarities suggest that coincidental representation could still exist. *Even if policy only responds to the wealthy*, because those in

the middle tend to be more (less) supportive of the same policies the wealthy are more (less) supportive, we should expect that policy ends up about where those in the middle would expect if they received the same representation as affluent individuals. If so, it would be reasonable for those in the middle to “feel” like their preferences are represented—at least to the same extent that the preferences of the wealthy are represented.

To test this possibility, we need an estimate of the probability of policy adoption *if* the rich received *no* representation and those in the middle received the *same* representation as the rich are thought to receive. To estimate this counterfactual scenario, I build on Gilens’ (2012) analysis. For each of the 1,836 survey questions in the data, Gilens determines whether the proposed policy or policy change was adopted within the subsequent four years. Thus, it is possible to identify the relationship between policy support and whether the policy (or policy change) was adopted. Gilens estimates the relationship between the preferences of the 90th income percentile and the probability of policy adoption to be 0.47 with a standard error of 0.18. For the current analysis, we want to know what would be the expected probability of policy adoption if the wealthy received no representation and the relationship between the preferences of those in the middle and the probability of policy adoption equalled 0.47 (i.e., the estimated representation received by the wealthy). Since we know the proportion of middle-income respondents who support each policy, we can easily estimate the predicted probability of policy adoption under this counterfactual scenario.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 6 reports the results of this exercise. The x-axis corresponds with the proportion of the 90th income percentile that supports each policy. The y-axis indicates the predicted probability of policy adoption. The grey dots and grey vertical lines indicate the predicted probability and 95 percent confidence interval of policy adoption based on the preferences of

---

<sup>15</sup>Specifically, I calculate,  $\frac{\exp(-.86 + (.47 * Policy\ Support_{Middle\ Income}))}{1 + \exp(-.86 + (.47 * Policy\ Support_{Middle\ Income}))}$ , where  $-.86$  and  $.47$  come from Gilens (2012, 254) and  $Policy\ Support_{Middle\ Income}$  represents the log odds ratio of the proportion of middle-income respondents favoring the particular policy (Gilens 2012, 74).

the 90th income percentile. These estimates are based on a replication of Gilens' (2012) Table 3.2 and, not surprisingly, match Gilens' (2012) Figure 3.5, which shows that the probability of policy change increases as support for the policy among the wealthy increases.

The black dots indicate the expected probability of policy adoption if the affluent received no representation and those in the middle of the income distribution received the same representation (based on Gilens' estimates) as those at the top. Several patterns stand out. First, notice that a vertical gap separates these predicted values based on middle-income preferences. This gap results because the figure only includes policies for which those in the middle expressed more than 10 percentage points more or less support than high-income respondents. Thus, when we multiply .47 (the estimated representation of high income respondents) times the policy preferences of those in the middle, the resulting predicted values will always fall above or below the estimates for the 90th income percentile. Nevertheless, there is substantial overlap in the two sets of predicted values. In fact, approximately 66 percent of the predicted values based on middle-income preferences fall within the 95 percent confidence intervals of the predicted values for the affluent. This is an impressive overlap because these data represent the 18 percent of policies where the preferences of high- and middle-income respondents differ the most. Furthermore, none of the predicted values for the middle-income are statistically different from the affluent.

The thin black line in Figure 6 represents the quadratic fit between the predicted values based on the preferences of the median income and the preferences of the 90th income percentile. This line offers a direct indication of the association between expected outcomes and relative policy support. The near identical correspondence between this line and the predicted values from the 90th income percentile (grey dots) means that even if policy *only* reflected the preferences of those in the middle, we would still expect the probability of policy change to increase as the support for the policy among the wealthy increased. Of course,

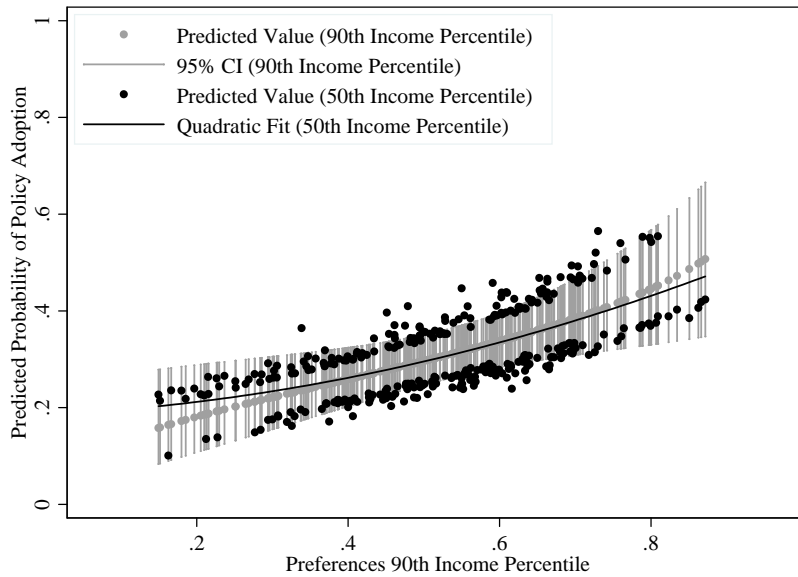


Figure 6: The Expected Probability of Policy Adoption Based on the Preferences of the 90th Income Percentile *and* the Expected Probability of Policy Adoption if the 50th Income Percentile Received the *Same* Amount of Representation as the 90th Income Percentile (and the 90th Income Percentile Received No Representation)

the converse is also true. Figure A-1 in Appendix 2 plots the probability of policy adoption as a function of the preferences of the 50th income percentile (instead of the 90th income percentile). When the predicted values are plotted in this way, we see that the probability of policy adoption also increases as support among those in the middle increases. This is exactly what we would expect if those in the middle receive coincidental representation when their preferences differ from the wealthy.

Gilens' results have been interpreted to mean that when wealthy and middle-income Americans disagree, policy ends up where the wealthy want—*at the expense of those in the middle*. But this is typically not the case. Even when policy preferences differ across groups, when relative policy support is similar—as we see here—policy ends up about where it would have been if those in the middle received the exact same representation as the wealthy. These conclusions hold when we only consider economic and social welfare policies (see Figure A-2



in Appendix 3) and when we include the preferences of organized interest groups in the statistical model (see Figure A-3 in Appendix 4).

The results do, however, affirm another of Gilens' important findings—status quo bias. Even at the highest levels of public support, the expected probability of policy change almost never exceeds 0.5. This is an important result because status quo bias means that rising economic inequality is more likely to continue (Enns, Kelly, Morgan, Volscho and Witko 2014, Hacker and Pierson 2005).

## **Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans**

In this section I consider strong partisans. Strong partisans represent an important segment of the electorate, because we might expect politicians to be particularly responsive to their base. Furthermore, when policymakers prioritize their partisan base, coincidental representation should be *unlikely* to occur. In recent decades, Democrats and Republicans have become increasingly sorted, preferring distinct policies (Abramowitz 2010, Levendusky 2009, Hetherington 2001, Jacobson 2012, Jacoby N.d.). These distinct policy preferences imply much less overlap in relative policy support. Thus, if policy tends to follow the preferences of Republicans (Democrats), in contrast to the results in the previous section, we would *not* expect Democrats (Republicans) to “feel” like their preferences were represented.

To evaluate this expectation, I again utilize Gilens' data, and I estimate the probability of policy adoption given the preferences of Strong Republicans and Strong Democrats. I focus on strong partisans because these individuals allow us to observe patterns of relative policy support that are most likely to be distinct. The analysis is limited to survey questions that were asked between 1999 and 2002 because this is the period for which the preferences of strong partisans are available in the data (the proposed policies, if adopted, became law

between 2000 and 2004).<sup>16</sup> In these surveys, 15.5 percent of respondents identified as Strong Democrats and 19.6 percent indicated they were Strong Republicans. Given the partisan sorting in the electorate, not surprisingly, we observe much less overlap in the preferences of Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans than we observed with middle- and high-income groups. The overall correlation between the percent favoring policy change among Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans is  $r=0.43$ . When these groups' preferences differ by at least 10 percentage points, the correlation drops to  $r=0.21$ .

During the period of analysis (1999–2004), national politics strongly favored Republicans. Although Bill Clinton occupied the White House in 1999 and 2000, both the House and the Senate were majority Republican. Furthermore, President George W. Bush enjoyed a majority Republican House and a split Senate during his first two years and a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate during his second two years. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the proportion of Strong Republicans that favored a policy and the probability that the policy became law is statistically significant and substantively important ( $\beta = 0.79$ ,  $s.e.=0.25$ , see Table A-1 in Appendix 5). The corresponding relationship for Strong Democrats is small and not statistically different from zero ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $s.e.=0.17$ ).

Figure 7 illustrates the substantive implications of these relationships. The x-axis corresponds with the proportion of Strong Republicans that supports each policy and the y-axis indicates the predicted probability of policy adoption. The grey dots and grey vertical lines indicate the predicted probability and 95 percent confidence interval of policy adoption based on the preferences of Strong Republicans. Consistent with expectations, we see a strong relationship between the preferences of Strong Republicans and the probability of policy adoption between 1999 and 2004.

To evaluate whether Strong Democrats received coincidental representation, I examined

---

<sup>16</sup>Partisan preferences are available each year in Gilens' data, but strong partisanship is only available for these years.

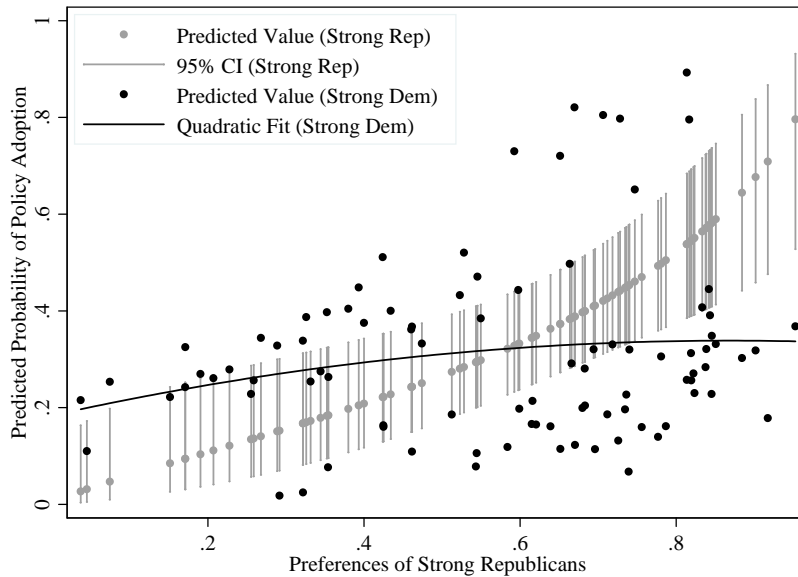


Figure 7: The Expected Probability of Policy Adoption Based on the Preferences of Strong Republicans *and* the Expected Probability of Policy Adoption if Strong Democrats Received the *Same* Amount of Representation as Strong Republicans (and Strong Republicans Received No Representation)

the counterfactual scenario where Strong Democrats received the same Representation as Strong Republicans. The black dots in Figure 7 indicate the expected probability of policy adoption based on this counterfactual scenario.<sup>17</sup> These predicted probabilities follow a much different pattern than what we observed for middle-income individuals in Figure 6. First, the predicted values for Strong Democrats are much more dispersed. In fact, 76 percent are outside the 95 percent confidence intervals based on Strong Republicans. Not only is this more than twice as many as for the middle-income respondents, but the proportion of policies where preferences differ by more than 10 percentage points is also much greater for strong partisans than for middle- and high-income groups (72 percent versus 18 percent). Thus, these values outside the confidence intervals represent 55 percent of all policies in the

<sup>17</sup>Specifically, I calculate,  $\frac{\exp(-1.01 + (.79 * Policy\ Support_{Strong\ Democrats}))}{1 + \exp(-1.01 + (.79 * Policy\ Support_{Strong\ Democrats}))}$ , where  $-1.01$  and  $.79$  come from Table A-1 in Appendix 5 and  $Policy\ Support_{Strong\ Democrats}$  represents the log odds ratio of the proportion of Strong Democrats favoring the particular policy.

strong partisan analysis while the values outside of the 95 percent confidence intervals for middle-income respondents represented just six percent of all observations. These patterns suggest that if policy during the early 2000s followed the preferences of Strong Democrats instead of Strong Republicans, policy would have looked much different. The flat trajectory of the thin black line, which reflects the quadratic fit between the predicted probability of policy adoption for Strong Democrats (if they received the same representation as Strong Republicans) reinforces this conclusion. This flat relationship means that as support for a policy among Strong Republicans increases, we have no evidence that the probability of policy adoption would also increase if policy reflected the preferences of Strong Democrats. Coincidental representation is minimal (at best) for strong partisans.

Given the polarized nature of the current political environment, strong partisans offer a most likely case for observing representational differences. Thus, even casual observers of politics may not be surprised by the patterns in Figure 7. But this is precisely the point. Although scholars have increasingly focused on the lack of responsiveness to middle-income Americans, it may be that partisan divisions matter most for policy outcomes. If we want to know who gets represented—or at least who “feels” like they get represented—we need to bring partisanship into the analysis.

## Conclusions and Implications

If “rich people rule,” it does not appear to be at the expense of those in the middle. Coincidental representation appears to be the norm. It is also possible that some of what I have interpreted as coincidental representation reflects direct representation of those in the middle. Some direct representation is consistent with most theories of representation. And although it is difficult to identify whom policymakers represent when preferences are so similar (Bhatti and Erikson 2011), recent research using population-level data has found evidence that those

in the economic middle receive substantial representation (Rhodes and Schaffner 2013). Extensive aggregate level research is also consistent with the possibility that policy reflects the preferences of those in the middle (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002, Monroe 1979, Page and Shapiro 1983, Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson 1995). Although money certainly matters in U.S. politics, it may be too early to completely dismiss standard theories of representation.

It is equally important to not paint an overly sanguine portrait of contemporary America. Inequality is real and has negative consequences. Whether we look at health, education, employment, or social mobility in the United States, opportunities and outcomes are highly varied across the income distribution. But the current results suggest that we must look beyond theories of economic–elite domination to fully understand the unequal playing field that citizens face in the United States today. An important starting point is understanding why relative policy preferences are so similar across income groups. Some might interpret these similarities as good news. In the preface to *Beyond Self-Interest*, Mansbridge (1990, ix) writes of, “individuals’ commitment to moral principles, concern for others, ‘we-feeling,’ and readiness to cooperate when cooperation does not serve self-interest narrowly conceived.” The similar relative policy support across middle– and high–income groups could certainly be viewed as consistent with “concern for others” and “readiness to cooperate.” However, the previous results are also consistent with a much more grim picture of U.S. politics. It may be that political messages are so homogenous or that power structures are so engrained that those who would benefit most from government support do not consider their economic self-interest when expressing their policy preferences (Gaventa 1982, Winters and Page 2009, 743). This view is consistent with evidence that despite rising inequality since the 1970s, support for redistribution among middle– and low–income Americans has largely paralleled the preferences of the wealthy (Enns and Wlezien 2011, Kelly and Enns 2010). When the distributional implications of policies are made clear, citizens can connect their economic self-interest to their policy preferences (Franko, Tolbert and Witko 2013), but it may be

that political debates typically do more to obfuscate, rather than clarify such implications (Winters and Page 2009).

Of course, we must also continue to study the extent to which other groups—such as racial groups, low income individuals, or organized interests—see (or do not see) their preferences reflected in policy outcomes. The focus on middle- and high-income groups was advantageous because Gilens and Page (2014, 568) view the median income respondent as a valid proxy for the average citizen. Not only does the focus on the average citizen hold important normative implications but this group relates directly to most theories of representation. The focus on partisan groups, by contrast, offered a theoretically most likely case of the absence of coincidental representation. Future research, however, should apply the current methods to identify when other important groups are more or less likely to receive coincidental representation. As this research proceeds, scholars should remember that preference gaps do not necessarily mean the absence of coincidental representation.

Future research should also keep in mind that I have focused on just one type of representation. The analysis followed recent research on unequal representation (e.g., Gilens 2012, Gilens and Page 2014) and analyzed the relationship between relative policy support (i.e., the degree of policy support) among different groups and the probability of policy adoption. There are many other ways to conceptualize representation (e.g., Disch 2012, Mansbridge 2003, Pitkin 1967). For example, in terms of *descriptive representation*, which refers to the extent to which elected officials reflect important descriptive characteristics of their constituents, such as occupation, race, or gender, the U.S. political system fares poorly. By contrast, the opportunity for unequal *dynamic representation*, which refers to whether policy responds to *changes* in the public’s preferences, is minimal. Because different groups typically update their preferences in “parallel” (Page and Shapiro 1992), if politicians respond to the shifting preferences of one group, other groups will receive coincidental repre-

sentation. How we rate the quality of representative democracy in the United States depends heavily on the definitions of representation that we apply.

## References

- Abrajano, Marisa and Keith T. Poole. 2011. Assessing the Ethnic and Racial Diversity of American Public Opinion. In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage Foundation chapter 2, pp. 32–60.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. 2010. *The Disappearing Center*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Althaus, Scott L. 2003. *Collective Preferences in Democratic Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bhatti, Yosef and Robert S. Erikson. 2011. How Poorly are the Poor Represented in the US Senate? In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bonica, Adam, Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2013. “Why Hasn’t Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27(3):103–124.
- Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M., Suzanna De Boef and Tse-Min Lin. 2004. “The Dynamics of the Partisan Gender Gap.” *American Political Science Review* 98(3):515–528.
- Citrin, Jack and Donald Philip Green. 1990. The Self-Interest Motive in American Public Opinion. In *Research in Micropolitics, Volume 3*, ed. Samuel Long. Greenwich: JAI Press chapter 1, pp. 1–28.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Disch, Lisa. 2012. “Democratic Representation and the Constituency Paradox.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3):599–616.
- Domhoff, G. William. 2002. The Power Elite, Public Policy, and Public Opinion. In *Navigating Public Opinion*, ed. Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook and Benjamin Page. New York: Oxford University Press chapter 7, pp. 124–140.



- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Druckman, James N. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2011. Segmented Representation: The Reagan White House and Disproportionate Responsiveness. In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage Foundation chapter 6, pp. 166–188.
- Enns, Peter K. and Christopher Wlezien. 2011. Group Opinion and the Study of Representation. In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Enns, Peter K., Nathan J. Kelly, Jana Morgan, Thomas Volscho and Christopher Witko. 2014. “Conditional Status Quo Bias and Top Income Shares: How U.S. Political Institutions Have Benefited the Rich.” *Journal of Politics* 76(2):289–303.
- Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. MacKuen and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, Thomas. 1995. *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Franko, William, Caroline J. Tolbert and Christopher Witko. 2013. “Inequality, Self-Interest, and Public Support for “Robin Hood” Tax Policies.” *Political Research Quarterly* 66(4):923–937.
- Gaventa, John. 1982. *Power and Powerlessness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilens, Martin. 2005. “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(5):778–796.
- Gilens, Martin. 2009. “Preference Gaps and Inequality in Representation.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42(2):335–341.
- Gilens, Martin. 2011. Policy Consequences of Representational Inequality. In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage

Foundation.

- Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and Russell Sage Foundation.
- Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives Politics* 12(3):564–581.
- Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2005. "Abandoning the Middle: The Bush Tax Cuts and the Limits of Democratic Control." *Perspectives on Politics* 3:33–53.
- Heith, Diane J. 1998. "Staffing the White House Public Opinion Apparatus 1969–1988." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62(2).
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2001. "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 95(3):619–631.
- Hochschild, Jennifer. 1979. "Why the Dog Doesn't Bark: Income, Attitudes, and the Redistribution of Wealth." *Polity* 11:478–511.
- Hochschild, Jennifer L. 1981. *What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Benjamin I. Page. 2005. "Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review* 99:107–124.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1994. "Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The Use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign." *American Political Science Review* 88(3).
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1995. "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59(2):163–195.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Theda Skocpol. 2005. American Democracy in an Era of Rising Inequality. In *Inequality and American Democracy*, ed. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Theda Skocpol. New York: Russell Sage Foundation chapter 1, pp. 1–18.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2012. "The Electoral Origins of Polarized Politics: Evidence from the 2010

- Cooperative Congressional Election Study.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(12):1612–1630.
- Jacoby, William G. N.d. “Is There a Culture War? Conflicting Value Structures in American Public Opinion.” *American Political Science Review*. Forthcoming.
- Kaufmann, Karen M. and John R. Petrocik. 1999. “The Changing Politics of American Men: Understanding the Sources of the Gender Gap.” *American Journal of Political Science* 43:864–887.
- Kelly, Nathan J. and Peter K. Enns. 2010. “Inequality and the Dynamics of Public Opinion: The Self-Reinforcing Link Between Economic Inequality and Mass Preferences.” *American Journal of Political Science* 54(4):855–870.
- Kinder, Donald R. and Lynn M. Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lau, Richard R. and Caroline Heldman. 2009. “Self-Interest, Symbolic Attitudes, and Support for Public Policy.” *Political Psychology* 30(4):513–537.
- Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler. 2014. *Who Votes Now?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. *The Partisan Sort*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lupu, Noam and Jonas Pontusson. 2011. “The Structure of Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution.” *American Political Science Review* 105(2):316–336.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. “Rethinking Representation.” *American Political Science Review* 97(4):515–528.
- Mansbridge, Jane J. 1990. Preface. In *Beyond Self-Interest*, ed. Jane J. Mansbridge. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press pp. ix–xiii.
- Monroe, Alan. 1979. “Consistency Between Constituency Preferences and National Policy Decisions.” *American Politics Quarterly* 12:3–19.

- O'Brien, Steven, Paula McGuire, James M. McPherson and Gary Gerstle. 1991. *American Political Leaders: From Colonial Times to the Present*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *American Political Science Review* 77(1):175–190.
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rhodes, Jesse H. and Brian F. Schaffner. 2013. "Economic Inequality and Representation in the U.S. House: A New Approach Using Population–Level Data." *Unpublished Manuscript*.
- Rigby, Elizabeth and Gerald C. Wright. 2011. Whose Statehouse Democracy? Policy Responsiveness to Poor versus Rich Constituents in Poor versus Rich States. In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. Peter K. Enns and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Schattschneider, E. E. 1960. *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Sears, David O. and Carolyn L. Funk. 1990. "The limited effect of economic self-interest on the political attitudes of the mass public." *Journal of Behavioral Economics* 19:247–271.
- Shapiro, Robert Y. and John M. Young. 1986. "The Polls: Medical Care in the United States." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50:418–428.
- Sombart, Werner. 1976 [1906]. *Why There is No Socialism in the United States*. New York: Sharpe.
- Soroka, Stuart N. and Christopher Wlezien. 2008. "On the Limits to Inequality in Representation." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41:319–327.

- Stimson, James A., Michael B. MacKuen and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89(3):543–565.
- Winters, Jeffrey A. 2011. *Oligarchy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Winters, Jeffrey A. and Benjamin I. Page. 2009. "Oligarchy in the United States?" *Perspectives on Politics* 7(4):731–751.
- Wolfinger, Raymond E. and Steven J. Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Supplementary/Online Appendix for:  
Relative Policy Support and Coincidental Representation

## Contents

Appendix 1 Measurement Error or Preferences?	A-1
Appendix 2 Probability of Policy Adoption Plotted against the Preferences of the 50th Income Percentile	A-2
Appendix 3 Only Analyzing Economic Policies	A-3
Appendix 4 Replication of Gilens and Page	A-4
Appendix 5 Strong Partisan Preferences and the Probability of Policy Change	A-6

## Appendix 1 Correlated Measurement Error or Correlated Preferences?

Gilens (2012) uses two analytic approaches to deal with the fact that preferences are highly correlated across income groups. The first approach relies on bivariate analysis, so only one group's preferences are analyzed at a time. This is Gilens' preferred approach (Gilens 2005, 786) and it is the approach I follow throughout this article. Gilens' second approach involves multivariate analysis and a correction for correlated measurement error. Since I follow Gilens' first approach, the analyses reported in the main text do not require any correction for correlated measurement error. As I detail below, an additional reason to rely on Gilens' first approach is that there are numerous reasons for why we should be extremely cautious about "correcting" for correlated measurement error.

Gilens and Page (2014, Appendix 2) explain, "Errors affecting both measures in the same way within a particular survey can arise from such factors as sampling, question wording, question order, topics in the news at the time the survey was in the field, and so on." I propose that to the extent these factors influence the expressed preferences of individuals in similar ways, it is not necessarily measurement error. Consider, for example, the potential effects of question wording. It is well known that slight changes to how a survey question is worded (such as asking about "welfare" versus "assisting the poor") can lead to different responses. Yet, Gilens explains how these question wording effects can actually reflect meaningful information (as opposed to measurement error). Specifically, Gilens writes, "the lesser appeal of 'welfare' in comparison to 'assisting the poor' can be understood not as a superficial response to an emotionally laden term, but as a sophisticated differentiation between kinds of government antipoverty programs. . . much of what passes for question-wording effects are actually differences in responses resulting from differences in the policy that respondents are asked to respond to" (Gilens 2012, 33). From this perspective, if different income groups respond to specific question wording in similar ways, we should *not* view these similarities as measurement error that needs to be corrected. Rather, we should interpret the similar response patterns as evidence that the respondents are responding to the question wording in meaningful and informative ways. The same could be said of question order effects. "Topics in the news" are also likely to represent more than measurement error. If middle- and high-income groups both increased (decreased) support for a policy based on news coverage, not only does this mean both groups received the same news information, but that both groups responded to this news information in the same way. Again, the similar patterns across groups would convey meaningful information, not measurement error.

Another important consideration is that even if some correlated measurement error exists, when politicians use survey data as a measure of group preferences (e.g., Druckman and Jacobs 2011, Heith 1998, Jacobs and Shapiro 1994, Jacobs and Shapiro 1995), this error is part of the signal that politicians receive from the survey marginals. Thus, correcting for correlated measurement error would actually involve changing the input that politicians receive. Since politicians can only respond to the preferences they receive, such a change

would be problematic. In sum, “correcting” for correlated measurement error may actually distort meaningful information about respondent preferences and may misrepresent the signals politicians receive about the public’s preferences. These conclusions further support the current analytic strategy of analyzing one group’s preferences at a time.

## **Appendix 2 Predicted Probability of Policy Adoption Plotted against the Preferences of the 50th Income Percentile**

Figure 6 in the text plotted the predicted probability of policy adoption based on the preferences of the 90th income percentile and the predicted probability of policy adoption based on the counterfactual scenario of the 50th income percentile receiving the same representation as the 90th income percentile (and the 90th income percentile receiving no representation). The x-axis in Figure 6 reflected the preferences of the 90th income percentile. The fact that the predicted probabilities based on the preferences of the 90th and 50th income percentiles were similar when plotted against the preferences of the 90th income percentile offered evidence that the probability of policy adoption would be similar regardless of whether politicians followed the preferences of the affluent or those in the middle.

Figure A-1 repeats this exercise, this time plotting the predicted probabilities as a function of the preferences of the 50th income percentile. The overall conclusion is exactly the same. The black dots represent the predicted probability of policy adoption if the 50th income percentile received the same representation as the 90th income percentile (and the 90th income percentile receiving no representation). Although the expected values based on the 90th income percentile preferences (grey dots) are always above or below those of the 50th income percentile, the confidence intervals (grey lines) almost always overlap the black dots and both the black and grey dots reflect an increasing probability of policy adoption as support among the 50th income percentile increases.



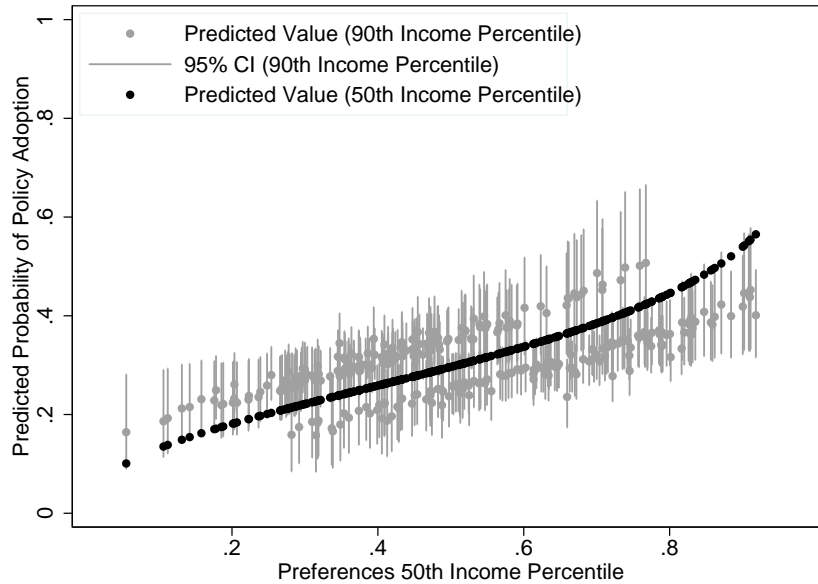


Figure A-1: The Expected Probability of Policy Adoption Based on the Preferences of the 90th Income Percentile *and* the Expected Probability if the 50th Income Percentile Received the *Same* Amount of Representation as the 90th Income Percentile (and the 90th Income Percentile Received No Representation) (The X-Axis Corresponds with the Preferences of the 50th Income Percentile.)

### Appendix 3 Only Analyzing Economic Policies

Theories of economic–elite domination suggest that elite dominance will be particularly pronounced among policies that relate to economic issues and redistribution (Domhoff 2002, 124-125; Ferguson 1995, 43; Winters and Page 2009, 731). Thus, one potential concern with the analyses reported in the text is that stronger differences would emerge between middle– and high–income groups if the analysis was limited to these issue areas. To test this possibility, I replicated the analysis that was used to produce Figure 6, only including economic and social welfare issues.<sup>18</sup> The results appear in Figure A-2. Even when focusing only on these issue areas, the expected probability of policy adoption is roughly the same, regardless of whether policy follows the preferences of the affluent or those in the middle. In fact, if anything, the similarities are even stronger. Eighty–two percent of the predicted values based on the preferences of the 50th income percentile (black dots) fall within the 95 percent confidence intervals based on the 90th income percentile.

<sup>18</sup>Economic policy questions include issues like taxes, the minimum wage, unemployment benefits, and corporate regulation (Gilens 2012, 114). Social welfare includes questions about welfare reform, health care, social security, and education (Gilens 2012, 118).

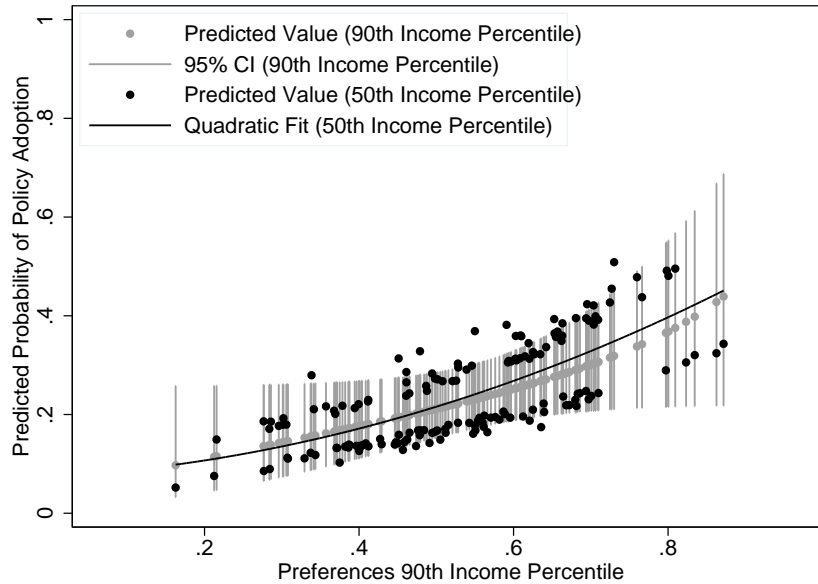


Figure A-2: The Expected Probability of Policy Adoption (*Economic and Social Welfare Policy Issues Only*) Based on the Preferences of the 90th Income Percentile *and* the Expected Probability if the 50th Income Percentile Received the *Same* Amount of Representation as the 90th Income Percentile (and the 90th Income Percentile Received No Representation)

## Appendix 4 Results Based on Gilens and Page’s (2014) Model

The analysis of income groups reported in the text is based on Gilens (2012, Ch.3). More recently, Gilens and Page (2014) have estimated models that include the preferences of organized interest groups (see also Gilens 2012, Ch.5). Below, I assess whether using Gilens and Page’s (2014) more recent approach would lead to different inferences. It turns out, this is not the case. The similar patterns in the left and right panels of Figure A-3 indicate that the conclusions from the main text hold even when we consider the influence of organized interests groups.

To generate Figure A-3, I began with the results in Model 4 of Table 3 in Gilens and Page (2014, 571), which estimates the relationship between the preferences of average citizens, the preferences of economic elites, the alignment of interest groups, and the probability of policy response. Gilens and Page estimate the influence on policy adoption to be 0.03 for the average citizen, 0.76 for economic elites, and 0.56 for interest groups. I used these values and the actual values in the data (i.e., the preferences of the average citizen, economic elites, and

interest groups) to estimate the predicted probability of policy adoption.<sup>19</sup> The left panel plots these predicted values as a function of relative policy support among the 90th income percentile. As support for a policy among the 90th income percentile increases, the expected probability of policy adoption also increases.

To generate the values in the right panel, the relationship between interest group alignment and the probability of policy adoption remained the same. The relationships between the preferences of the average citizens and economic elites, however, were reversed. Thus, these predicted values are based on the counterfactual scenario where the relationship between the preferences of those in the middle and the probability of policy adoption is 0.76 and the corresponding relationship for economic elites is 0.03. Despite this change, the expected values in the right panel closely mirror the expected values in the left panel. These similarities indicate that even when the analysis incorporates the potential influence of interest groups, we would expect the probability of policy adoption to look about the same regardless of whether politicians followed economic elites or the average citizen.

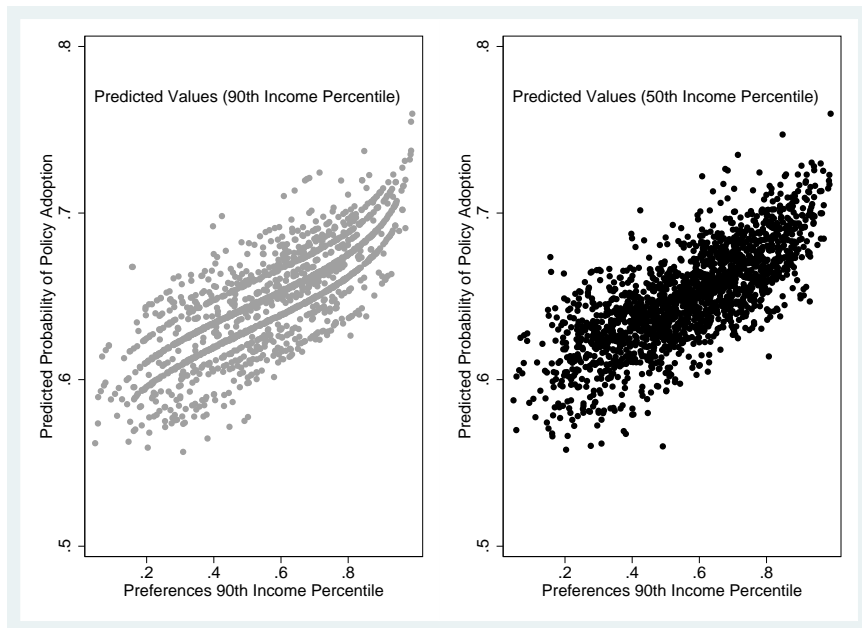


Figure A-3: The Expected Probability of Policy Adoption Based on Model 4 of Table 3 in Gilens and Page (2014, 571) [*left panel*] and the Expected Probability of Policy Adoption if the 50th Income Percentile Received the *Same* Amount of Representation as the 90th Income Percentile [*right panel*]

<sup>19</sup>Following Gilens and Page (2014) all predictors are scaled from 0 to 1, policy preferences reflect the log odds ratio of the proportion in support of the policy, and interest group alignment reflects net interest group alignment as defined in Gilens and Page (2014, 569).

## Appendix 5 The Relationship between Strong Partisan Preferences and the Probability of Policy Change

The text reported the estimated relationships between the preferences of Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans and the probability of policy response. Those estimates were used to generate the predicted probabilities reported in Figure 7. Table A-1, below, reports the full results from the strong partisan analysis.

Table A-1: Policy Responsiveness to Strong Republicans and Strong Democrats when Preferences Differ by at Least 10 Percentage Points, 2000 to 2004

	Strong Republicans	Strong Democrats
Policy Support	0.79* (0.25)	0.10 (0.17)
Intercept	-1.01* (0.28)	-0.64* (0.22)
N	92	92
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.00

*Notes:* Cell entries represent logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the policy was adopted within 4 years and 0 otherwise. Policy Support reflects the the log odds ratio of the percent favoring the policy. \* =  $p < .05$  (two-tailed tests)