

Chapter 9

Policy Consequences of Representational Inequality

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OBSERVERS OF AMERICAN government have long disagreed over how much influence citizens have over public policy. Some view American democracy as little more than a sham in which elections provide legitimacy for a government ruled by a small elite. Others see elected officials as acutely responsive to the changing preferences of their constituents. But even the most sanguine observers acknowledge that not all citizens have equal sway over government policy.

Recently, empirical studies have sought to appraise the extent of inequality in the link between public preferences and government policy. Not surprisingly, these studies find that affluent Americans are considerably more likely to find their policy preferences reflected in government policy than those who are less well-off (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005, n.d.; Jacobs and Page 2005). In this chapter, I establish the extent of the inequality in the preference-policy link across income levels and explore how this inequality varies across substantive issue domains. My goals are to shed light on the specific policies that contribute to inequalities in representation; to identify the ways in which government policy would differ if representation across income levels were more equal; and to use variation across (and within) issue domains to understand the bases of unequal responsiveness to public preferences.

My central findings can be summarized as follows. First, I show that government policy reflects the preferences of the most affluent Americans but appears to be virtually unaffected by the preferences of either the poor or the middle class. Second, I find that this representational inequality is spread broadly across issue domains and is just as great on

moral and religious values issues as it is on economic and tax policy, or foreign policy and national security. This pattern is inconsistent with accounts of U.S. politics that view conservative policies on moral issues, like abortion and gay rights, as the payoff that working-class "values voters" receive in return for ceding economic policy to business interests and the affluent (see Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter With Kansas?* [2004] and subsequent critiques by Bartels [2006, 2008] and Gelman et al. [2008]). The consistent inequality across multiple issue domains also means that income-based representational inequality sometimes pushes policies in a conservative direction (for example, on economic, tax, and trade policy), and sometimes in a liberal direction (for example, on abortion and civil rights). This representational inequality, in other words, seems genuinely rooted in economic inequality and cannot be reduced to a partisan or ideological bias.

Finally, I do find somewhat greater representational equality in the domain of social welfare policy. I argue that those cases in the social welfare domain, for which government policy adheres more closely to the preferences of the less advantaged, typically reflect a correspondence between the preferences of the less well-off and those of organized interest groups active in Washington. Within the social welfare domain, for example, interest groups, such as the National Education Association, the AARP, the pharmaceutical industry, and the National Governors' Association, align with less well-off Americans in opposition to school vouchers and in support of Social Security, Medicare, and public works spending. I conclude that though interest groups do push government policy on these issues in a direction favored by the less advantaged, this process does not primarily reflect the influence of these citizens but the "happy coincidence" (from their point of view) that powerful groups happen to share their preferences on this subset of social welfare policies.

In these pages, I follow a long tradition of research in democratic representation by analyzing the association between public preferences and government policy. The absence of a link between preferences and policies implies that constituents lack influence over what the government does. But the presence of a link is not, in itself, proof that the public shapes policymaking. Government policy and the preferences of the public (or of a subgroup of the public, such as the affluent) might align because they are both shaped by powerful interest groups, or because citizens are persuaded by government policymakers to support their preferred course of action. In this chapter, I interpret the link between public preferences and government policy as representing, at least to some substantial degree, the influence of preferences on policy. In other work, I bring a variety of evidence to bear on this question (Gilens 2005,

n.d.; see also Bartels 2008; Page and Shapiro 1983; Page 2002; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Burstein 2003).

Data

My dataset consists of 1,935 survey questions asked of national samples of the U.S. population between 1981 and 2002 (for more details on the data, analysis, and findings from this project, see Gilens 2005, 2009, n.d.). Each survey question asks whether respondents support or oppose some proposed change in U.S. government policy: raising the minimum wage, sending U.S. troops to Haiti, requiring employers to provide health insurance, allowing gays to serve in the military, and so on.¹ The survey question is the unit of analysis in the dataset, with variables indicating the proportion of respondents answering "favor," "oppose," or "don't know" within each income category and a code indicating whether the proposed policy change occurred.

The data for this project were collected from the iPOLL database (maintained by the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut), from the Public Opinion Poll Question database (maintained by the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina), and, for periods where these databases lacked enough appropriate questions with demographic breakdowns, raw survey data supplied by a variety of sources.² In all cases, questions were identified using keyword searches for *oppose* in the question text or response categories and then manually sifting through the results to find appropriate questions. After identifying appropriate questions, research assistants used historical information sources to identify whether the proposed policy change occurred, and if so, whether fully or only partially and within what period from the date that the survey question was asked.³ After eliminating proposed policy changes that would require a constitutional amendment or a Supreme Court ruling, proposed changes that were partially but not fully adopted, and questions that lack income breakdowns, 1,781 questions remain for the analyses reported below.

Because the surveys were conducted by different organizations at different times, the income categories use different break points in different surveys. To create consistent measures of preferences comparable across surveys and across years, I used the following procedure.

For each survey, respondents in each income category were assigned an income score equal to the percentile midpoint for their income group based on the income distribution from their survey. For example, if on a given survey 10 percent of the respondents fell into the bottom income category and 30 percent into the second category, those in the bottom group would be assigned a score of .05 and those in the second group a

score of .25 (the midpoint between .10 and .40, which are the bottom and top percentiles for the second group).

After rescaling income for each survey, predicted preferences for specific income percentiles were estimated using a quadratic function. That is, for each survey question, income and income-squared (measured in percentiles) were used as predictors of policy preference for that question (resulting in 1,781 separate logistic regressions, each with two predictors). The coefficients from these analyses were then used to impute policy preferences for respondents at the desired percentiles.

In the final stage of the analysis, the imputed preferences for respondents at a given income percentile were used as predictors of the policy outcomes across the available survey questions (that is, separate regressions for each desired income percentile each with one predictor and an N of 1,781). This approach has the double advantage of allowing comparisons across survey questions with different raw income categories and smoothing out some of the noise inherent in estimating preferences for population subgroups with limited numbers of respondents (for robustness analyses of the imputation procedure described, see Gilens 2005, 2009).

The Link Between Preferences and Policy Outcomes

Many of the policies in my dataset generate similar levels of support across the income distribution and others shows substantial differences between more and less well-off Americans (for details, see Gilens 2009). For policy questions that generate comparable levels of support across different income groups, the preference-policy link is necessarily the same irrespective of income. But what does the link between preferences and policy outcomes look like as the preference gap across income levels increases? Table 9.1 shows the relationship between government policy and the imputed preferences of respondents at the 10th, 50th, and 90th income percentiles for questions that generated different size preference gaps between income levels. To the extent that government policy reflects the preferences of all income levels equally, the preference-policy link should decline for all groups as the preference gap increases. This is clearly not the case. The first two columns of table 9.1 show that the association of preferences and policy outcomes for the poor declines dramatically as the preference gap between rich and poor grows from less than 5 to more than 10 percentage points (declining from .56 to .09) but does not change at all for the affluent (declining from .55 to .54; full results in the appendix table 9.A1). The top panel of figure 9.1 shows the preference-policy link when preferences between the 10th and 90th income percentiles diverge by more than 10 percentage points (row 3 of

Table 9.1 Strength of the Preference-Policy Link by Size of Preference Gap Across Income Percentiles

Size of Preference Gap between income percentiles	10th vs. 90th Income Percentiles		50th vs. 90th Income Percentiles	
	10th	90th	50th	90th
Less than 5 points	.56 (.09) ***	.55 (.09) ***	.49 (.07) ***	.52 (.07) ***
Between 5 and 10 points	.42 (.11) ***	.53 (.11) ***	.36 (.10) ***	.54 (.12) ***
Greater than 10 points	.09 (.09)	.54 (.10) ***	.13 (.14)	.58 (.19) ***
All policy questions	.34 (.05) ***	.53 (.06) ***	.41 (.05) ***	.53 (.06) ***

Source: Author's calculations.

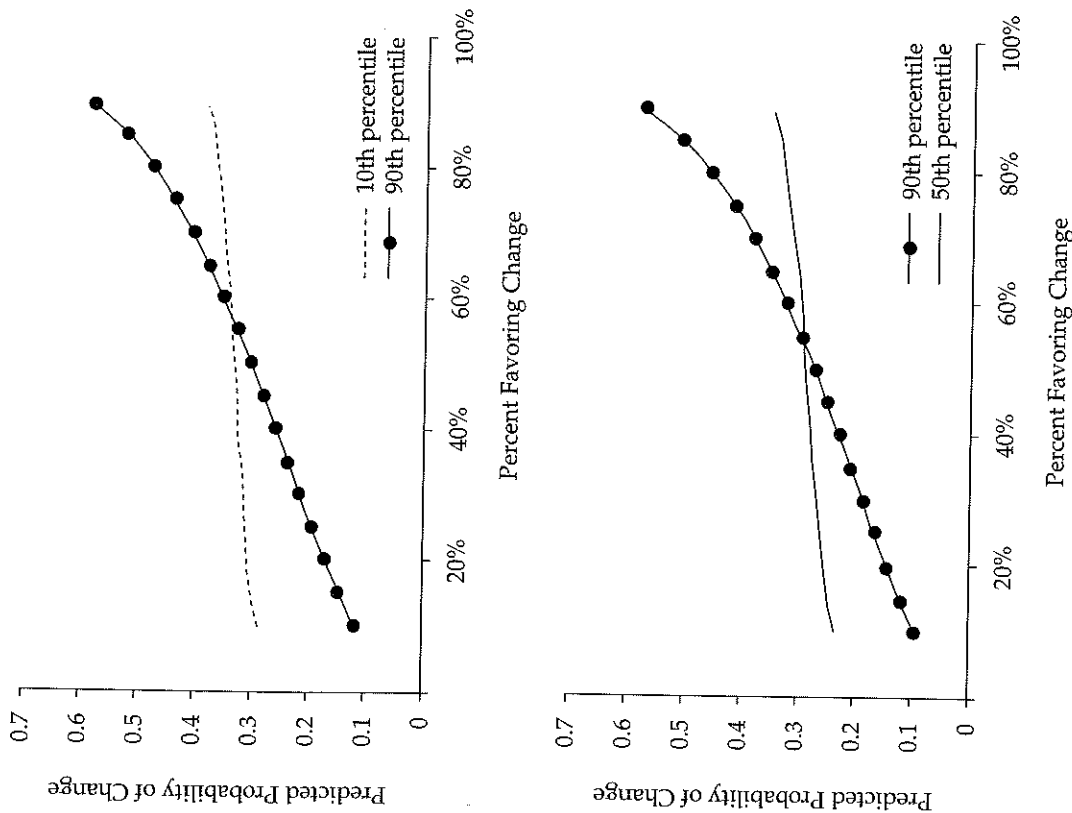
Note: Table shows regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) from 16 bivariate logistic analyses. The dependent variable is the policy outcome, coded 1 if the proposed policy change took place within four years of the survey date and coded 0 if it did not. The predictors are the logits of the imputed percentage of respondents at a given income percentile favoring the proposed policy change. $N = 1779$ for all policy questions (in the bottom row) and from 322 to 936 for analyses in the first three rows. See appendix table 9.A1 for full results. ***, $p < .001$

table 9.1), conveying the fairly steep relationship between preferences and policy outcomes for the well-off and the virtually flat relationship for the poor.

The virtual lack of government responsiveness to the preferences of the poor is disturbing and seems consistent only with the most cynical views of American politics. But these results could be compatible with an egalitarian and majoritarian polity if poor people held attitudes that consistently differ from those held not only by the affluent but by the middle class as well. If the preferences of the poor are systematically at variance with the majority of Americans, the lack of responsiveness to their preferences might actually reflect a well-functioning democracy. Middle-income respondents better reflect the preferences of the median voter on most issues, so the responsiveness of government policymakers to the preferences of the middle class might therefore serve as a more appropriate test of biases in representation.

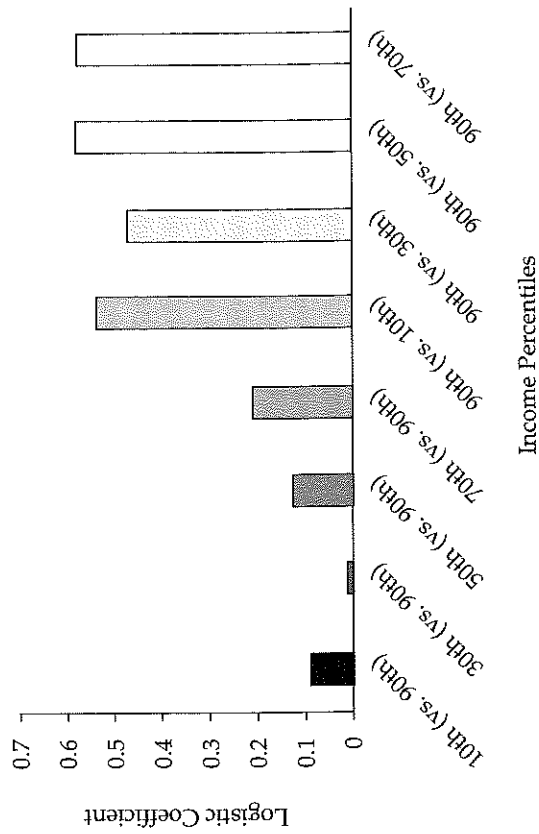
The right two columns of table 9.1 and the bottom panel of figure 9.1 show that median-income Americans fare little better than the poor when their policy preferences diverge from those of the well-off. For those proposed policy changes on which middle- and high-income respondents' preferences diverge by at least 10 percentage points, the pref-

Figure 9.1 Preference-Policy Link When Preferences Across Income Groups Diverge



Source: Author's calculations. Predicted probabilities based on the logistic regressions reported in row 3 of table 9.1.

Figure 9.2 Strength of Preference-Policy Link When Preferences Diverge from Income Percentiles



Source: Author's calculations based on the logistic regressions reported in appendix table 9.A2.

erence-policy link for the 90th income percentile remains strong but is weak (and not significantly different from zero) for the 50th percentile.

To provide a more complete picture of the relative influence of different economic groups, figure 9.2 repeats the analyses shown in row 3 of table 9.1 for the 10th, 30th, 50th, and 70th income percentiles for those proposed policy changes where the preference gap with the 90th percentile is larger than 10 percentage points (the numeric results of these analyses are in appendix table 9.A2).⁴ This figure makes clear the dramatically greater influence of the affluent when their preferences diverge from those of less well-off Americans. The four left-most columns in figure 9.2 show the modestly greater responsiveness to the preferences of the 50th and 70th income percentiles compared with the 10th and 30th (when the preferences of each are pitted against those of the 90th percentile). But none of these estimated associations are statistically distinguishable from each other or from zero.

In stark contrast, responsiveness to the preferences of the 90th percentile are equally strong whether their preferences diverge from the poor, from the middle-class, or even from respondents at the 70th income percentile. Of course, the number of proposed policy changes that elicit di-

vergent preferences is greatest between groups farthest apart on the income distribution—in this case, the 10th and 90th percentiles. Nevertheless, when preferences did diverge from the affluent, Americans at the 70th income percentile appear as powerless to shape government policy as their less well-off fellow Americans.

In short, figure 9.2 suggests that for Americans below the top of the income distribution, any association between preferences and policy outcomes is likely to reflect the extent to which their preferences coincide with those of the affluent. Although responsiveness to the preferences of the affluent is far from perfect, responsiveness to less well-off Americans is virtually nonexistent, at least based on the full set of proposed policy changes in my dataset.

The lack of responsiveness to the preferences of the 10th and 50th income percentiles illustrated in figure 9.1 does not mean that those groups never get what they want from government or that high-income Americans always see their preferences enacted in government policy. On the policy questions on which low- and middle-income respondents have the same preferences as their high-income counterparts, they are, of course, just as likely as high-income Americans to get what they want. In addition, the strong status quo bias evident in figure 9.1 means that even proposed policy changes with strong support among the affluent often fail. Finally, many policies that disproportionately benefit the poor or the middle class nevertheless receive strong support among high-income Americans. The minimum wage, the Earned Income Tax Credit, federal aid to education, child care and job training for welfare recipients, and employer health insurance mandates, for example, are all strongly favored by the affluent (even if some of these policies receive greater support still from the less well-off). Clearly some government policies do benefit the less advantaged at the expense of the more advantaged. The findings reported, however, suggest that such policies are not adopted in response to the influence of the poor or the middle class. When the preferences of the less well-off diverge from those of more affluent Americans, government policy appears to be fairly responsive to the well-off and virtually unrelated to the desires of low- and middle-income citizens.

Heterogeneity in Responsiveness Across Policy Domains

In the remainder of this chapter, I look at the specific policies that account for the differential responsiveness across income groups in order to understand what policies contribute to the observed inequality and how national policy would differ if responsiveness were more egalitarian. In addition, the variation in responsiveness, and in inequality in re-

sponsiveness, across different issue domains may provide clues to the causes of unequal responsiveness and insights into the strategies that might make public policies more reflective of the preferences of all Americans.

The policy questions in my 1981 to 2002 dataset contain proposals for changes in dozens of different policy areas, from taxes, to gun control, to abortion policy, to foreign military engagements. Three-quarters of these questions fall into four major domains of government policy: foreign policy—national security, social welfare, economic policy, and issues with strong moral or religious components (for illustrations of the major sets of policy issues contained in each domain, see tables 9.3 to 9.6).

In most other respects, the issues within the different domains are quite similar. For example, the proposed policy changes were, on average, about equally popular across the four domains, with 52 percent of respondents favoring the proposed changes in foreign policy and 57 percent favoring the proposed changes in each of the other three domains. Similarly, the proportion of proposed changes that generated lopsided preferences for the public as a whole was similar across policy domains, ranging from 30 percent to 37 percent. (Lopsided issues are those for which at least two-thirds of the respondents who expressed a preference were on one side of the issue or the other.) Finally, the percentage of proposed changes with large preference gaps across income groups was similar in the four domains: the proportion of policy changes generating preference gaps of more than 10 points between the 10th and 90th income percentiles ranged from 40 percent (for foreign policy issues) to 45 percent (for economic policy issues). The one characteristic of these proposed policy changes that does clearly differ across the domains is the number of changes adopted, which is highest for foreign policy (at 54 percent), and lowest for social welfare and religious values issues (at 22 percent and 24 percent, respectively). The reasons for these differences are discussed shortly.

In short, the characteristics of proposed policy changes do not differ substantially across the four issue domains in most respects. Although one might expect the dynamics of agenda formation and policy change to be different in areas as diverse as foreign policy and religious values issues, the findings outlined suggest that there may be more commonalities than differences across these four substantive domains.

Of central interest here, however, are variations in inequalities of responsiveness to the preferences of lower- and higher-income Americans across these domains. These patterns are shown in table 9.2 and figure 9.3, which reveal the decline in responsiveness to the preferences of each income level as the preference gaps across income levels grow (with the full logistic regression results shown in appendix table 9.A4). Because the number of policy questions in each domain is limited, I don't divide

Table 9.2 Decline in Preference-Policy Link as Preferences Across Income Groups Diverge

	N	Income Percentile		
		10th	50th	90th
Foreign policy	428	-.62 ** (.22)	-.42 * (.22)	-.06 (.21)
Social welfare	399	-.26 * (.14)	-.13 (.14)	-.03 (.16)
Economic and tax policy	389	-.43 * (.24)	-.45 * (.23)	-.16 (.24)
Religious values issues	161	-.79 * (.38)	-.46 + (.33)	-.27 (.34)
Four domains combined	1,377	-.28 *** (.09)	-.19 * (.09)	-.02 (.09)

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: Shows interaction coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) from fifteen logistic analyses. The dependent variable is the policy outcome, coded 1 if the proposed policy change took place within four years of the survey date and coded 0 if it did not. Predictors are policy preferences at a given income level, preference divergence across income levels, and the interaction of the two. Policy preference is measured by the log of the odds ratio of the imputed percentage supporting the proposed policy change at each income level. Preference divergence is measured by the log of the mean absolute difference between the 10th and 50th income percentiles and the 50th and 90th income percentiles. Negative signs reflect a decline in the strength of the preference-policy link for a given income level as the preference gap across income levels grows. Full regression results in appendix table 9.A4. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests)

the proposed policy changes into categories as in table 9.1. Instead, I use the interaction between the preferences at a given income level and the size of the preference gap across income levels as an indicator of the degree to which the preference-policy link declines depending on the size of the preference gap.

For those at the 10th income percentile, this decline is significant for all four policy domains but smallest for social welfare and largest for religious values issues (table 9.2). For median-income Americans, declines in the preference-policy link is quite small and nonsignificant for social welfare and about equal for the other three domains. For those at the top of the income distribution, there are no statistically significant declines in the association of preferences and outcomes as the preference gap across income groups increase. Figure 9.3 shows these twelve relationships in graphical form.

Foreign Policy, Defense, and Terrorism

In the domain of foreign policy and national security, the drop-off in responsiveness to low- and middle-income Americans is strong as their preferences diverge from those of the affluent (table 9.2 and figure 9.3).

Source: Author's calculations. Note: Based on logistic regressions reported in table 9.2 and appendix table 9.A4. Y-axis represents the strength of the preference-policy link. X-axis represents preference divergence across income groups. See note to appendix table 9.A4 for details.

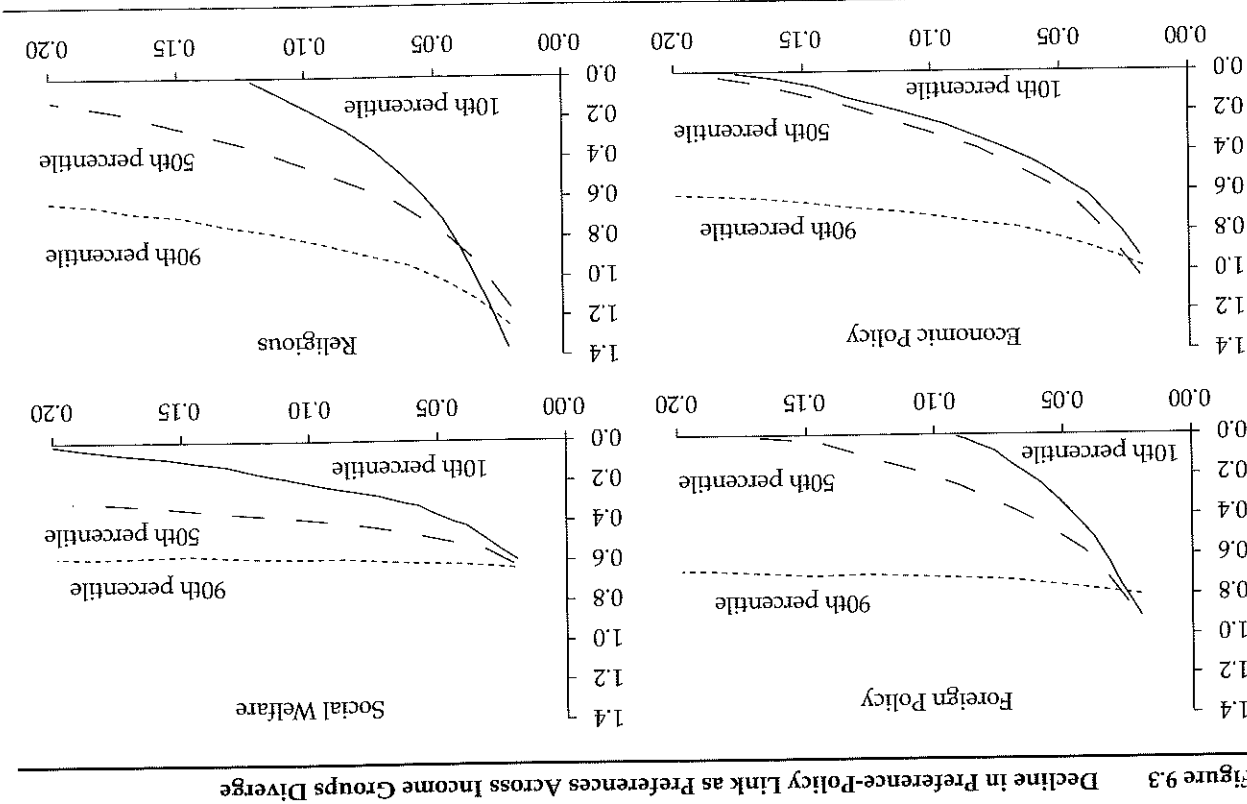


Figure 9.3 Decline in Preference-Policy Link as Preferences Across Income Groups Diverge

The substantive policy issues that underlie these patterns are clarified in table 9.3, which presents the policy preferences for the 10th, 50th, and 90th income percentiles for those proposed changes that attracted the greatest attention from pollsters or that resulted in the largest preference divergence across income levels. To make the data in table 9.3 and the subsequent tables for the other policy domains easier to absorb, I re-scored preferences from percentages to a 11-point scale in which -5 represents strong opposition, +5 strong support, and 0 an approximately equal division of support and opposition. The notes section of these tables contains the legend, which shows the relationship between percentage favorable and the 11-point scale.

The first section of table 9.3 shows U.S. involvement in foreign military engagements (either directly or indirectly), including Latin America in the 1980s, the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and Afghanistan and Iraq starting in 2001 and 2003. Public support for these various foreign interventions varied considerably, with the invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks receiving the strongest support and aid to anticommunist forces in Latin America during the 1980s the strongest opposition. With the exceptions of Afghanistan and (to a lesser degree) Iraq, the public has been ambivalent toward or opposed to the various proposed military interventions that survey organizations have asked about. When queried in advance, majorities expressed opposition to most of the direct foreign military operations that the United States did engage in (including Panama in 1989, Haiti in the early 1990s, and the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s) as well as possible operations that the United States did not engage in (taking military action against Iran, invading Libya, invading Nicaragua).

Consistent with previous research (see, for example, Kull and Destler 1999; Page and Bouton 2006), public support was strongest when risks to American lives appeared lowest, when the United States acted as part of an international force rather than unilaterally, and in response to an attack on Americans. In sum, U.S. military policy was sometimes consistent with public preferences (invading Iraq and Afghanistan but not Iran, Libya, or Nicaragua) and sometimes not (invading Panama, sending troops to Haiti and Bosnia, supporting anticommunist forces in Central America). As the last column in table 9.3 shows, preferences on issues of military engagement tended to be quite similar across income groups.

The preferences of high- and low-income Americans also coincided on most aspects of nuclear weapons policy. In the mid-1980s, for example, support was strong across the board for a nuclear-freeze agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite the popularity of the nuclear freeze among the public, the policy ran strongly counter to

Table 9.3 Policy Preferences on Foreign Policy and National Security, by Income Percentile

	Income Percentiles				Difference (90th-10th)
	10th	50th	90th		
Foreign military engagements					
Invade Afghanistan	+4	+4	+5	+1	+1
Invade Iraq	+2	+2	+1	-1	-1
Use air power against Serbia	0	0	0	0	0
Send U.S. ground troops to Serbia	-3	-2	-2	+1	+1
U.S. troops in international peace-keeping force in Bosnia	-1	0	0	+1	+1
Send U.S. troops to Haiti	-1	-2	-2	-1	-1
Give military aid to El Salvador or Sandinistas	-3	-2	-2	+1	+1
Nuclear weapons					
Negotiate a nuclear freeze with U.S.S.R.	+4	+4	+4	0	0
Build the MX missile	-3	-1	+1	+4	+4
Build a missile defense system	+3	+4	+4	+1	+1
War on terrorism					
Restrict Americans' freedom of speech	-1	-2	-4	-3	-3
Relax legal protections (e.g., habeas corpus)	+3	+4	+5	+2	+2
Monitor Americans' phone calls, etc.	+1	0	0	-1	-1
Torture known terrorists	0	0	-1	-1	-1
Attack nations that harbor terrorists	+3	+4	+5	+2	+2
Foreign economic policy					
Development aid generally	0	+1	+2	+2	+2
Development aid to former Soviet Union	-2	0	+2	+4	+4
GATT, NAFTA, free trade	-1	0	+1	+2	+2
Mexico loan guarantees	-4	-4	-3	+1	+1

Source: Author's calculations.

Legend:

between 45% and 55%	0
over 55% or under 45%	+/-1
over 60% or under 40%	+/-2
over 65% or under 35%	+/-3
over 75% or under 25%	+/-4
over 85% or under 15%	+/-5

the hard line the Reagan administration had adopted against the Soviet Union.⁵

Americans at all income levels also expressed strong support for anti-missile defense. Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative vastly increased the resources devoted to developing a defense against nuclear attack. Despite continued doubts about the technical feasibility of such a system, funding remained relatively steady throughout the 1980s and 1990s and increased dramatically under George W. Bush (U.S. Department of Defense 2006).

Preferences of high- and low-income Americans did diverge on one aspect of nuclear weapons policy. The development of the MX missile in the 1980s was strongly opposed by those with low incomes but weakly favored by the affluent. Intended to enhance the ability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal to survive a Soviet attack, the MX became mired in controversy over how it was to be based. Alternative strategies were proposed and rejected, but development of the missile itself proceeded. The drawn-out compromise and the funding that the missile received over the years despite the continuing uncertainty about its basing was more consistent with the mild support of the well-off than the strong opposition of poor Americans.

Larger differences of opinion across income groups sometimes emerged concerning the war on terrorism, though it would be hard to characterize either the poor or the affluent as consistently more hard-line in the policies they support. For example, well-off respondents were more likely to oppose restrictions on Americans' freedom of speech, but more supportive of proposals to relax legal protections, such as habeas corpus, and more willing to attack nations that harbor terrorists. For most aspects of antiterrorism policy, however, differences in preferences across income groups were minor.

In general, war-on-terror policies have been fairly consistent with public preferences. Policies with strong public support have been adopted (for example, attacking nations that harbor terrorists, relaxing detainees' legal protections, assassinating terrorists in foreign countries) and policies with strong opposition have not (for example, restricting speech that might incite terrorism).

The most consistent divergence in preferences across income groups in the realm of foreign policy and national security concerns trade policy and foreign aid. Affluent Americans tended to be at least somewhat supportive of free-trade policies, such as NAFTA and GATT, and somewhat supportive of nonmilitary aid to developing countries, including the former Soviet Union. Low-income Americans tend to be somewhat opposed to all these aspects of foreign policy. U.S. policy on tariffs and trade during the past few decades has clearly been more consistent with the preferences of the affluent and has become more so over time as

trade barriers have fallen (U.S. International Trade Commission 2006). On the other hand, U.S. foreign aid in general and development aid in particular declined somewhat during the 1980s and 1990s (a trend more congenial to lower-income than higher-income Americans) before increasing sharply beginning in 2002 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).

In sum, table 9.3 reveals that the weak overall preference-policy link in the domain of foreign affairs and national security reflects both a large number of issues on which public opinion is split and the many aspects of military engagement and weapons policy on which public preferences and government policy diverged. In contrast, the drop-off in responsiveness to middle- and low-income Americans as their preferences diverge from the affluent is accounted for primarily by policies concerning the war on terror and (especially) aid and trade. Affluent Americans' greater opposition to restricting freedom of speech and greater support for relaxing the legal rights of detainees, as well as their greater support for both free trade and aid to the states of the former Soviet Union, all contributed to inequality across economic groups in responsiveness to preferences in this domain.

The politics of policymaking in the foreign policy domain are somewhat distinct in that the president is more frequently able to set the agenda and make policy decisions independently of Congress than is the case in other domains. This independence may account, at least in part, for the higher proportion of proposed policy changes adopted in the foreign policy domain. If the president is more likely to set the agenda in foreign policy and less constrained by Congress in foreign-policy decision making, policies that are opposed by the administration are less likely to make it onto the national agenda and those that do are more likely to have the support of the political actors needed to implement the proposed changes.

Previous research has documented large gaps between the general public's preferences in foreign policy and the preferences of elites (Page and Barabas 2000; Page and Bouton 2006; Jacobs and Page 2005; Kull and Destler 1999). The findings presented show that preference gaps also exist between less and more affluent Americans. If foreign policy had more equally reflected the preferences of all Americans over the past decades, we would have seen even lower levels of foreign aid than we did, especially for Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union, and a more protectionist trade policy.

Religious Values Issues

A wide range of policy issues—from taxes to health care to terrorism—may involve moral or religiously based considerations, but such considerations typically play a more direct or more dominant role in most peo-

Table 9.4 Policy Preferences on Religious-Moral Values Issues, by Income Percentile

	Income Percentiles			Difference (90th-10th)
	10th	50th	90th	
Abortion and birth control				
Approve RU-486	-1	0	+2	+3
Constitutional ban on abortion	-2	-3	-4	-2
Federal funding for abortions	-2	-2	0	+2
Ban partial-birth abortion procedure	+2	+2	+1	-1
Require biological father's consent or notification for abortion	+3	+3	0	-3
Require parental consent for birth control assistance for teens	0	0	-2	-2
Gay rights				
Gays, extend legal protection	+1	+3	+3	+2
Gay marriage	-2	-2	-1	+1
Gay civil unions	-1	0	0	+1
Gays in the military	0	0	+1	+1
Recreational drugs and teen smoking				
Strengthen fight against drugs and teenage smoking	+4	+4	+4	0
Legalize marijuana for medical use with doctor's prescription	+4	+4	+4	0
Legalize marijuana for personal use	-3	-3	-3	0
Encourage mandatory drug testing in workplace	+4	+3	+3	-1
Misc. moral-religion issues				
Constitutional amendment to permit school prayer	+4	+3	+1	-3
Stem cell research: source unspecified	+1	+1	+3	+2
From discarded embryos	0	+1	+3	+3
From newly created embryos	-2	-1	+1	+3
Mandatory AIDS testing of all citizens (mid-1980s)	+3	+2	0	-3
G.W. Bush's faith-based initiative	+3	+3	+2	-1
Strengthen TV rating system or time restrictions; require V-chip	+4	+5	+4	0

Source: Author's calculations.

Legend:
 between 45% and 55% 0
 over 55% or under 45% +/-1
 over 60% or under 40% +/-2
 over 65% or under 35% +/-3
 over 75% or under 25% +/-4
 over 85% or under 15% +/-5

ple's preferences on issues like abortion, school prayer, and gay rights. As figure 9.3 shows, the preference-policy link for religious values issues is strong on policies where agreement across income groups is high. But when preferences across income groups diverge, responsiveness to lower- and middle-income Americans falls sharply. Responsiveness to high-income Americans also appears somewhat lower on issues with divergent preferences, though this decline is not statistically significant (table 9.2). When preferences across income levels diverge, affluent Americans consistently express more liberal views than those with low or middle incomes.

Table 9.4 shows that affluent Americans were significantly more liberal on abortion policy, school prayer, stem cell research, and mandatory AIDS testing (a highly moralized policy debate when these questions about AIDS were asked in the mid-1980s). The affluent were also slightly more liberal on gay rights than low- and middle-income Americans, though on this set of issues the differences across income groups tended to be smaller.⁶

On other religious values issues, preferences were shared across income groups. Majorities at all income levels opposed gay marriage, supported George W. Bush's faith-based social services initiative, favored strengthening laws restricting sex and violence on television, and favored intensifying the fight against illegal drug use and teenage smoking. On most of these issues, federal policy was consistent with majority opinion. Consequently, as figure 9.3 shows, when income groups agreed on religious values issues, the association of preferences and government policy was strong.

George W. Bush established his faith-based initiative by executive order shortly after coming into office in January 2001 and expanded its scope in subsequent years (White House 2008). Also consistent with public preferences, federal policy throughout the 1980s and 1990s moved toward greater regulation of sex and violence on television. Actual restrictions on content were struck down by the Supreme Court, but Congress did succeed in mandating a new rating system, requiring television manufacturers to install V-chips in new televisions that enable parents to block objectionable shows, and increasing fines for broadcasting indecent material (Cohen 2006; Smith 2002).

Americans at all income levels expressed similar, and typically strong, opinions on federal policy toward recreational drugs. The poor and the well-off alike strongly favored strengthening the fight against drugs and teenage smoking and encouraging mandatory drug testing in the workplace. Similarly strong majorities opposed legalizing marijuana for personal use, but, perhaps surprisingly, strong majorities at all income levels favored allowing use of marijuana for medical reasons with a doctor's prescription.

Federal policy during these decades reflected public support for fighting recreational drug use, with spending on antidrug efforts increasing six-fold (in inflation-adjusted dollars) between 1981 and 2004 (White House 2006; U.S. Department of Justice 2003). In addition, workplace drug testing expanded greatly between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s (U.S. Department of Labor 2003). The clearest exception to the consistency of federal policy and majority preferences on religious values issues concerns medical marijuana. Federal policy never reflected the strong public support for legalizing medical marijuana, and to the contrary both the Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations tried to shut down growers and distributors of medical marijuana in states that had legalized marijuana for medical use (Eddy 2005).

Although federal policy on consensual issues in the religious-values domain generally reflected public preferences, policy on nonconsensual issues fell largely in line with the preference of the affluent. The issue in this area that got the greatest attention from survey organizations (and the media) in the decades under study was reproductive policy. High-income Americans opposed laws that would have required parental consent for teenagers to receive birth control assistance from federally financed clinics (low-income Americans were split on this). Despite repeated efforts by Republican legislators to require parental notification for federally funded contraception services to minors, federal law continues to guarantee the confidentiality of such services, regardless of age (Jones and Boonstra 2004).

Opinions also differed on approving the abortion pill RU-486, which the affluent supported and the poor opposed. FDA approval of RU-486 was delayed for a few years by President G. H. W. Bush, but eventually gained approval under President Clinton (Hogan 2000). Because few survey questions concerning RU-486 were asked until the late 1990s, coded outcomes (reflecting final approval of RU-486 in 2000) were consistent with the more liberal preferences of the well-off on this issue for most of the questions in my dataset.

One aspect of abortion law that has clearly favored the stronger anti-abortion sentiments of low-income Americans is—perhaps ironically—the prohibition on federal funding of abortion services for low-income Americans. Although the specific exceptions (for example, in cases of rape or danger to the life of the woman) have changed over the years, the exclusion of abortion services from Medicaid and other federal government health programs has been in effect continuously since 1976 (Fried 2000).

The highly moralized debate about AIDS in the mid-1980s also reflected very different attitudes among less and more affluent Americans. During the early stages of the AIDS epidemic, some called for compulsory universal AIDS testing of American citizens.⁷ Affluent Americans

were split on this policy, but it was strongly favored by the poor and somewhat less strongly favored by the middle class. Public health officials unanimously rejected such large-scale compulsory testing and this policy was never adopted (Johnson and Smith 1988).

Federal policy in the religious values domain did not always reflect the preferences of the affluent. High-income Americans were strongly supportive of efforts during the Clinton years to expand the scope of civil rights laws to include sexual orientation while low-income Americans were only mildly supportive. Despite this favorable public opinion, no new federal legislation of this kind was adopted.

Finally, federal funding for stem cell research was arguably more consistent with the preferences of lower- and middle-income Americans, although the degree of support among all groups varied depending on the source of the stem cells in question. During the 1990s, federal funding of stem cell research was limited. Under G. W. Bush, funding became available for work with cells that came from embryos that had already been destroyed, but not for cells extracted from additional embryos. On the whole, the strict conditions on federal funding for stem cell research was more consistent with the split opinions of low-income Americans than the generally strong support of the well-off (Shimabukuro 2007).

Of the four major policy domains examined, moral and religious values policies stand out as being the least impacted by logistical or economic factors and the least influenced by the economic interests of organized groups or identifiable classes of citizens. In addition, the moral and religious values policies in table 9.4 do not impose significant economic costs on government. Extending legal protections, restricting abortion procedures, or permitting federal research dollars to be used on one or another source of stem cells does not require significant government expenditures the way many social and economic policies do. Consequently, politicians are freer to follow the public's preferences in this domain, a pattern reflected in the higher estimated responsiveness of policy to preferences shown in figure 9.3 and in appendix table 9.A4.

Economic Policy

Unlike foreign policy or religious values issues, economic policies tend to have clear and distinct consequences for Americans at different income levels. Yet, as reported, preferences across income groups do not differ more in the domain of economic policy than they do on religious values issues. This attests both to the important role of non-interest-based considerations in shaping Americans' policy views (Citrin and Green 1990; Sears and Funk 1991) and to the substantial number of economic issues on which low- and high-income Americans agree. As table 9.5 shows, for example, Americans of all incomes opposed proposals for

Table 9.5 Policy Preferences on Economic Issues, by Income Percentile

	Income Percentiles			Difference (90th-10th)
	10th	50th	90th	
Income taxes				
Cut personal income tax (across the board)	+3	+3	+3	0
Cut income tax rates for low and/or middle income earners	+4	+4	+3	-1
Raise income tax rates to reduce the deficit (1980s)	-3	-3	-3	0
Raise taxes on very high income earners	+4	+4	+3	-1
Cut top marginal tax rate	0	+1	+2	+2
Flat tax	-1	0	+1	+2
Other taxes				
Support a federal sales or consumption tax	-2	-2	-2	0
Cut capital gains taxes	0	+1	+3	+3
Cut/eliminate inheritance tax	+1	+2	+3	+2
Raise gas/energy taxes	-2	-1	0	+2
Other economic issues				
Unpaid family leave law	+3	+3	+3	0
Reform corporate accounting rules (post-Enron)	+3	+3	+3	0
Raise minimum wage	+5	+4	+3	-2
Extend/increase unemployment benefits	+2	+1	-1	-3
Increase gov't regulation of oil/gas industry	+1	+1	-2	-3
Increase misc. corporate regulation	+3	+2	+1	-2

Source: Author's calculations.

Legend:
 between 45% and 55% 0
 over 55% or under 45% +/- 1
 over 60% or under 40% +/- 2
 over 65% or under 35% +/- 3
 over 75% or under 25% +/- 4
 over 85% or under 15% +/- 5

a federal sales tax, opposed across-the-board increases in income tax, favored across-the-board income-tax cuts, and favored unpaid family leave laws. Americans at all income levels also strongly supported corporate accounting reform in the wake of the Enron scandal and differed only modestly on cutting taxes for low- and middle-income taxpayers and increasing taxes on extremely high earners.⁸

Federal government policy on many of these "consensual" economic issues did reflect the predominant preferences of the public. A federal sales (or consumption or value-added) tax has never been seriously con-

sidered by lawmakers and the marginal income-tax rate for the average taxpayer fell from about 31 percent in 1981 to about 24 percent in 2002 (National Bureau of Economic Research 2006). Also consistent with public preferences, a national family and medical leave law was adopted in 1993, requiring employers to grant up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave per year. The 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act strengthened corporate accounting rules in the wake of the Enron, Tyco, and other corporate scandals, again reflecting strong public support. In contrast, changes in income tax rates for very high earners did not consistently reflect the consensus for increases expressed by Americans at the 10th through 90th income percentiles. Effective (average) income taxes on the top 1 percent of earners fell during the Reagan years but rose under Clinton, ending slightly higher in 2002 than in 1981 (Congressional Budget Office 2005).

On many other economic policies, preferences across income groups did diverge, reflecting the differing interests at stake for lower- and higher-income Americans. In these cases, there was little decline in policy responsiveness to affluent Americans, but substantial decline in responsiveness to both the middle class and the poor (table 9.2 and figure 9.3). Poor people were evenly split on cutting both the top income tax rate and the capital-gains tax rate, for example, while the affluent strongly supported both ideas. During the period under study, the top tax rates for both capital gains and ordinary income fell during the Reagan administration and rose under Clinton, the net effect being a decline from 24 percent to 15 percent for the top capital gains rate and from 70 percent to 35 percent in the top income tax rate (Congressional Budget Office 1988; Burman and Kobes 2004; U.S. Department of the Treasury 2006). These shifts in capital-gains taxes and top income-tax rates clearly reflect the differing ideological orientations of the Democratic and Republican administrations, the changing revenue needs of the federal government, and a general trend toward lower and less progressive taxes consistent with the preferences of the well-off.

Cutting or eliminating the inheritance tax was also quite popular among the affluent, but even poor respondents were, on balance, in favor of it. The period since the early 1980s was marked by repeated weakening of the estate tax, consistent with the preferences of higher-income Americans (Luckey 2003; Bartels 2008; Graetz and Shapiro 2005). The only proposal to raise taxes that did not generate opposition across all income groups concerns federal gasoline or energy taxes. Although poor people, who are hit hardest by gas (and most other excise or consumption) taxes, were solidly opposed, the affluent were evenly split. During the years under study, the federal gas tax increased substantially: from only 4 cents per gallon in 1981 to about 18 cents beginning in 1993, though this is, of course, still very low by international standards (Jackson 2006).

On most tax proposals that generated significant differences in preference across income groups, then, policy was more consistent with high-income preferences (cutting capital gains taxes, cutting the estate tax, cutting the top marginal income-tax rate, and increasing gasoline taxes). The exceptions are proposals for replacing the graduated income tax with a flat tax that would eliminate deductions and apply a single rate to all taxpayers. Across the decades examined, the flat tax was favored by modest majorities of well-off Americans and opposed by modest majorities of the poor, with median-income Americans evenly split. The failure of flat tax proposals to gain traction in Washington is a consequence of ideological opposition among lawmakers (primarily Democrats) who favor progressive taxes on equity grounds and powerful interests that benefit from exemptions in the current tax system that would be lost under most flat tax proposals.

Nontax policies that generate preference gaps between low- and high-income Americans often reflect the greater attraction to the free market among the affluent (who, arguably, benefit most from the relative lack of government regulation in the United States). The well-off generally opposed proposals to increase government regulation of the oil and gas industry, opposed increases in unemployment benefits, and were only modestly supportive of efforts to increase corporate regulation outside of the post-Enron period. Poor Americans were considerably more enthusiastic toward government regulation and tended to favor expansion of unemployment benefits. Americans at all income levels strongly favored raising the minimum wage, but, unlike the affluent, the poor were nearly unanimous on this question.

In sum, we would expect a more egalitarian responsiveness of economic policy to the preferences of all Americans to result in a higher minimum wage, more generous unemployment benefits, stricter corporate regulation (including the oil and gas industries in particular), and a more progressive personal-tax regime in general. Some of these policies are favored by a majority of Americans at the 90th income percentile as well, but not with sufficient enthusiasm to overcome opposition from business and other interests. (I return to the role of interest groups in shaping policy outcomes shortly.)

Social Welfare

Patterns of responsiveness in the social welfare domain are somewhat distinct from the other three policy domains examined, especially for middle- and low-income Americans. As figure 9.3 shows, the preference-policy link on issues with similar preferences across income groups is the weakest of the four domains. Moreover, social welfare policy is the only policy area in which the decline in responsiveness to middle-in-

come Americans, as their preferences diverge from those of the affluent, is negligible. As shown in table 9.2, the interaction of policy preference and preference divergence for the 50th income percentile ranges from -42 to -46 for the other three domains but is only -13 (and not significantly different from zero) for social welfare policies. A similar pattern is evident for the 10th income percentile, where the decline in responsiveness as preferences across income groups diverge is also far weaker than in the other three policy domains.

Social welfare policy during the decades under study was most consistent with public preferences on Medicare and Social Security, which were enhanced or sustained despite budgetary pressures, and the Clinton administration's welfare reforms. In contrast, substantial public support for health-care reform was not reflected in government policy. Perhaps surprisingly, preferences across income groups differed more on the "universal" policies of Medicare and Social Security (as well as health care) than on welfare *per se* (that is, the means-tested cash assistance programs TANF and its predecessor AFDC), programs strongly tied to income.

The top section of table 9.6 shows that most welfare policy preferences do not in fact differ much across income groups. Americans of all income levels strongly support work requirements for welfare recipients and favor increasing job training opportunities and child care resources for people on welfare. Americans across the income spectrum shared similar (split) opinions on the question of ending additional payments to women who have additional children while on welfare. Middle- and upper-income respondents did express more support for time limits on welfare receipt and were more inclined to want overall welfare spending cut than were low-income respondents. In sum, preferences on welfare reform display a surprising degree of consensus across income groups, a consensus that has characterized public attitudes toward welfare for many decades (Gilens 1999).

In contrast to the clearly redistributive means-tested welfare programs referenced in the top section of table 9.6, preferences on universal programs, like national health insurance, Social Security, and Medicare, show larger preference gaps across income levels. As the second section in table 9.6 shows, the poor strongly support federal government involvement in health care, whether in the form of a tax-funded national health plan, employer mandates, or the Clinton health-reform proposal, whereas the affluent support involvement only weakly. Despite the strong support from low- and middle-income Americans and the strenuous efforts of the Clinton administration in 1993 and 1994, these sorts of broad expansions of the federal government's role in health care were not adopted during the decades under study. Studies have pointed to numerous obstacles to health-care reform in the United States, including

Table 9.6 Policy Preferences on Social Welfare Issues, by Income Percentile

	Income Percentiles				Difference (90th-10th)
	10th	50th	90th		
Welfare reform					
Work requirements	+4	+4	+3	-1	
Job training for welfare recipients	+5	+5	+5	0	
Child care for welfare recipients who work	+5	+5	+5	0	
Time limits	+1	+3	+3	+2	
No extra money for extra kids	0	0	+1	+1	
Cut total spending on welfare	+1	+3	+4	+3	
Health care					
Tax funded national health care	+3	+3	+1	-2	
Employer mandates	+4	+3	+2	-2	
Clinton Plan	+3	+2	+1	-2	
Medical savings accounts	-3	-2	0	+3	
Social Security reform					
Gov't invest Soc. Sec. money in stocks	-3	-2	0	+3	
Individuals control own stock accounts	0	+2	+3	+3	
Change Soc. Sec. rules to discourage early retirement	-2	0	+1	+3	
Medicare reform					
Encourage recipients to move to HMOs	-1	+1	+1	+2	
Raise premiums/deductibles for Medicare beneficiaries	-3	-1	0	+3	
Cut overall Medicare spending	-4	-3	-2	+2	
Add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare	+5	+5	+4	-1	
Education					
Federal grants and loans to college students	+4	+4	+4	0	
School vouchers	-1	0	+1	+2	
Other social welfare issues					
Federal unpaid family-leave law	+3	+3	+3	0	
Cut public works spending (mass transit, highways, sewage)	-2	0	+1	+3	

Source: Author's calculations.

Legend:

between 45% and 55% 0
 over 55% or under 45% +/-1
 over 60% or under 40% +/-2
 over 65% or under 35% +/-3
 over 75% or under 25% +/-4
 over 85% or under 15% +/-5

doctors and hospitals, insurance companies, unions, employers, and political gridlock (Skocpol 1997; Quadagno 2005; Gottschalk 2000; Hacker 2008). To this list we can add a lack of enthusiasm among affluent Americans.

Social Security and Medicare are the two most expensive social programs in the United States, accounting for over half of all federal social spending (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). As table 9.6 shows, affluent Americans are more supportive of market-oriented reforms to both Social Security and Medicare, such as shifting Social Security toward individual stock accounts and encouraging Medicare beneficiaries to join HMOs. The affluent are also more willing to consider changes in these programs that would reduce the benefits that they provide, such as raising the age at which full Social Security benefits are available or raising premiums and deductibles for Medicare recipients.

Despite the growing costs of Social Security and Medicare, changes to both programs since the early 1980s have been fairly modest. The Social Security reform bill of 1983 increased the retirement age for full benefits from sixty-five to sixty-seven, to be phased in over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and made a portion of Social Security benefits subject to income tax for higher-income beneficiaries, about 10 percent of all Social Security beneficiaries at the time (Kollmann 2000). Cost savings in Medicare have come primarily at the expense of health-care providers, though these savings may translate into poorer service for Medicare beneficiaries, with the most substantial cuts occurring in the early 1980s and late 1990s (Chaikind et al. 2001).

In economic terms, the most significant change to the Medicare program over the past few decades was not a cutback but rather the addition of a prescription drug benefit (Medicare Part D) in 2003. Although the legislation was criticized by many as a giveaway to pharmaceutical companies and a bad deal for American taxpayers, the principle of government-provided prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients was quite popular across all income levels, though slightly less so for the most affluent Americans.

In sum, the lack of significant change in the core middle-class social welfare programs—Social Security and Medicare—is consistent with the strong support for these programs among lower- and middle-income Americans. Small changes to the Social Security retirement age and efforts to encourage Medicare beneficiaries to join HMOs were more consistent with the preferences of the well-off. But the failure of Social Security privatization, the increase in overall Medicare spending, the addition of drug benefits for Medicare recipients, and the lack of change in the portion of Medicare costs paid by the government⁹ are all consistent with the preferences of lower- and middle-income Ameri-

cans. This pattern of policy responsiveness on Medicare and Social Security, along with other policy issues discussed below, contributes to the distinctive nature of the social welfare domain illustrated in table 9.2 and figure 9.3.

The majority of questions on education policy in my dataset concern either school vouchers for K-12 education or federal financial assistance to college students.¹⁰ College assistance was uniformly popular across income levels, but school vouchers, which would help parents pay for private school education, were opposed by the poor and favored by the affluent. Although it is hard to identify the exact mix of considerations that accounts for the greater support for school vouchers among the well-off, this preference is consistent with the greater appeal of market solutions to high-income Americans across a range of policies. School vouchers, like many market-oriented social policies, are likely to be most beneficial to those with the financial and informational resources to take advantage of them. Similarly, poor Americans may be more likely to oppose vouchers because they are most concerned about the negative impact such programs might have on existing public schools. Despite numerous proposals over the years and support from affluent Americans, the only federal voucher program Congress ever passed is an extremely limited experiment available to fewer than two thousand students in Washington, D.C.

Finally, government spending on public works, like bridges, roads, water, and sewage is more popular among middle-income than high-income Americans. After a brief drop between 1981 and 1983, federal spending for such projects rose about 40 percent in constant (inflation-adjusted) dollars over the next two decades (Congressional Budget Office 2007).

Social Welfare Policy and Inequality in Responsiveness to the Public

Social welfare is the only policy domain examined in which the divergence of preferences across income groups does not lead to a substantial decline in responsiveness to the preferences of lower- and middle-income Americans (table 9.2 and figure 9.3). The account that was just given of social welfare policy identified four well-represented sets of policy questions on which lower-income Americans' preferences were most likely to prevail: Social Security, Medicare, school vouchers, and public works spending. More specifically, compared with the affluent, lower-income Americans are stronger opponents of cuts to Social Security and Medicare benefits, tax increases, and privatization proposals, stronger supporters of prescription drug benefits for Medicare recipients, stronger opponents of school vouchers (especially vouchers that

could be used to help pay for private schooling), and stronger supporters of public spending for highways, sewer systems, and so on.

What unites these different policies, and sets them apart from most policies on which lower- and higher-income preferences diverge, is that poor and middle-income Americans have powerful allies that tend to share their preferences on these issues. The AARP, widely viewed as one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington, has been a strong supporter of Social Security and Medicare (Morris 1996). In addition to support from the AARP, the Medicare prescription drug benefit, which President Bush signed into law in 2003, also had the backing of the pharmaceutical companies and their well-funded lobbyists.¹¹ The public education lobby, led by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, was allied with lower-income Americans in opposing school vouchers. Finally, government spending on public works like bridges and roads, which is more popular among lower- than higher-income Americans, is backed by developers and the construction industry. Just as important, public works can provide a highly visible form of pork barrel benefits for individual states or districts, and members of Congress frequently tout their ability to secure such funding in their re-election campaigns.¹²

Powerful interest groups happen to share the preferences of lower-income Americans on these prominent social welfare issues. But the less well-off lack allies on other issues within this domain. For example, lower-income Americans are more supportive of both taxpayer-funded national health care and mandates requiring employers to provide health insurance for their employees. Lower-income Americans also express more support for proposals to expand unemployment benefits (for example, to cover part-time workers) and to increase federal support for public schools in poor neighborhoods.

Of the 399 policy questions in the social welfare domain, about half concern the four issues on which the preferences of the less well-off are more aligned with powerful interest groups than those of the affluent: Social Security, Medicare, school vouchers, and public works spending. For these issues, there is no evidence that the middle class or the poor lose out when their views diverge from the well-off. The interactions of preferences and preference divergence (analogous to those in table 9.2) are -.08 and .08 for the 10th and 50th income percentiles, respectively ($p = .34$ and $.35$, respectively; see appendix table 9.A5 for full regression results). But for the remaining issues in the social welfare domain, where the less well-off lack strong allies, the estimated decline in the influence of the poor and the middle class is substantial and comparable to the declines in other issue domains shown in table 9.2 ($b = -.53$ and $-.39$ for the 10th and 50th income percentiles, respectively; $p = .02$ and $.05$, respectively).

Conclusion

Previous research has found a high degree of inequality in government responsiveness to the preferences of more and less affluent segments of the American public. This chapter shows that these representational inequalities extend broadly but not uniformly across policy domains. For the most part, the patterns of inequality evident in the overall analysis of the preference-policy link were replicated in each of the issue domains examined, but social welfare issues did constitute a partial exception to this pattern. In particular, the subset of social welfare issues on which the most significant interest groups were aligned with the preferences of lower- rather than upper-income Americans were immune from the inequalities evident with other issues.

Even if exceptional, the alignment of interest groups with the preferences of the less affluent raises the question of why this alignment takes place on these issues and whether such alignments can be fostered more broadly. In most cases, the confluence of preferences between interest groups and less well-off Americans results from a happy coincidence and not from any actual influence exerted by the poor or the middle class. The pharmaceutical lobby and the National Educational Association, for example, pursue policies that benefit their members and happen to coincide with the preferences of the less advantaged. The AARP, however, as a mass membership organization, might actually be considered a conduit through which the influence of less well-off Americans flows. Yet studies of interest group politics suggest that even those organizations that advocate on behalf of less advantaged citizens tend to favor their more advantaged subconstituencies (Strolovitch 2006), and the AARP has come under increasing fire for favoring the interests and preferences of its most advantaged members (Dreyfuss 2004).

This rather bleak conclusion about the ability of less well-off Americans to influence the course of government policymaking cannot help but give one pause. If democracy, in Robert Dahl's formulation, consists of "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals," then our society has far to go to before we can fully claim the designation "American democracy."

Appendix

Table 9.A1 Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome, by Income Percentile

Size of Preference Gap	10th Versus 90th Income Percentiles			50th Versus 90th Income Percentiles		
	10th	90th		50th	90th	
Less than 5 points						
Logit coefficient	.56 (.09)	.55 (.09)		.49 (.07)	.52 (.07)	
Intercept	-1.02 (.11)	-1.03 (.11)		-.94 (.08)	-.96 (.08)	
N	600	600		936	936	
Log likelihood	715	714		1,136	1,130	
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 42$	$\chi^2(1) = 43$		$\chi^2(1) = 58$	$\chi^2(1) = 64$	
	$p = .001$	$p = .001$		$p = .001$	$p = .001$	
Between 5 and 10 points						
Logit coefficient	.42 (.11)	.53 (.11)		.36 (.10)	.54 (.12)	
Intercept	-.94 (.11)	-1.00 (.12)		-.81 (.10)	-.87 (.10)	
N	456	456		521	521	
Log likelihood	549	538		648	638	
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 17$	$\chi^2(1) = 28$		$\chi^2(1) = 13$	$\chi^2(1) = 23$	
	$p = .001$	$p = .001$		$p = .001$	$p = .001$	
Greater than 10 points						
Logit coefficient	.09 (.09)	.54 (.10)		.13 (.14)	.58 (.19)	
Intercept	-.69 (.08)	-.83 (.09)		-.90 (.12)	-.98 (.13)	
N	723	723		322	322	
Log likelihood	922	892		388	379	
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 1$	$\chi^2(1) = 31$		$\chi^2(1) = 1$	$\chi^2(1) = 10$	
	$p = .15$	$p = .001$		$p = .18$	$p = .001$	
All policy questions						
Logit coefficient	.34 (.05)	.53 (.06)		.41 (.05)	.53 (.06)	
Intercept	-.83 (.05)	-.94 (.06)		-.88 (.05)	-.94 (.06)	
N	1,779	1,779		1,779	1,779	
Log likelihood	2,200	2,142		2,175	2,142	
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 45$	$\chi^2(1) = 102$		$\chi^2(1) = 70$	$\chi^2(1) = 102$	
	$p = .001$	$p = .001$		$p = .001$	$p = .001$	

Source: Author's calculation.

Note: Shows full results for table 9.1 and figure 9.1. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 9.A3 Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome, by Policy Domain

	Foreign Policy/ National Security	Social Welfare	Economic Policy	Religious Issues
Logit coefficient (standard error)	.59 (.12)	.51 (.12)	.66 (.13)	.93 (.26)
Intercept	.12	-1.50	-.84	-1.61
N	428	399	389	161
Log likelihood	562	403	482	161
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 28$ $p < .001$	$\chi^2(1) = 20$ $p < .001$	$\chi^2(1) = 27$ $p < .001$	$\chi^2(1) = 15$ $p < .001$

Source: Author's calculations.
 Note: Cases consist of survey questions about proposed policy changes asked between 1981 and 2002. The dependent variable is policy outcome, coded 1 if the proposed policy change took place within four years of the survey date and coded 0 if it did not. The predictors are the logits of the percentage of respondents favoring the proposed policy change.

Table 9.A2 Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome, by Income Percentile When Preferences Across Income Groups Differ

	10th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge	30th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge	50th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge	70th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge
Logit coefficient (standard error)	.09 (.09)	.54*** (.10)	.01 (.11)	.13 (.14)
Intercept	-.69	-.83	-.93	-.98
N	723	481	322	322
-2 Log likelihood	922	589	577	379
Likelihood ratio χ^2	$\chi^2(1) = 1.1$ $p = .15$	$\chi^2(1) = 0.0$ $p = .47$	$\chi^2(1) = 12$ $p = .001$	$\chi^2(1) = 10$ $p = .001$
				$\chi^2(1) = 0.9$ $p = .17$
				$\chi^2(1) = 3.9$ $p = .03$

Source: Author's calculations.
 Note: Shows full results for figure 9.2. Results above are from four pairs of logistic regressions in which the sample of survey questions is restricted to those for which preferences between the specified income percentiles differ by at least 10 percentage points. To provide enough number of policy questions with divergent preferences, however, the analysis of the 70th v-ersus the 90th income percentiles includes questions on which preferences differ by at least 8 percentage points.
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 9.A4 Interaction of Preference-Policy Link and Preference Gap across Income Levels

	Income Percentile		
	10th	50th	90th
Foreign policy (N = 428)			
Income group's preference	-1.51 *	(.65)	(.66)
Preference gap across income groups	.03	(.18)	(.18)
Interaction	-.62 **	(.22)	(.21)
Constant	.18	(.54)	(.55)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	21.7, $p < .001$	30.7, $p < .001$	48.1, $p < .001$
Social welfare (N = 399)			
Income group's preference	-.41	(.45)	(.54)
Preference gap across income groups	.27	(.22)	(.22)
Interaction	-.26 *	(.14)	(.16)
Constant	-.67	(.61)	(.65)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	17.5, $p < .001$	22, $p < .001$	23.2, $p < .001$
Economic policy (N = 389)			
Income group's preference	-.74	(.69)	(.72)
Preference gap across income groups	.09	(.21)	(.21)
Interaction	-.43 *	(.24)	(.24)
Constant	-.48	(.60)	(.63)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	21.7, $p < .001$	27.2, $p < .001$	42.3, $p < .001$
Religious issues (N = 161)			
Income group's preference	-1.70 +	(1.16)	(1.09)
Preference gap across income groups	.53	(.44)	(.41)
Interaction	-.79 *	(.38)	(.34)
Constant	-.01	(1.26)	(1.19)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	16.3, $p < .001$	15.8, $p < .001$	19.7, $p < .001$
Four domains combined (N = 1,377)			
Income group's preference	-.52 *	(.28)	(.30)
Preference gap across income groups	.10	(.10)	(.10)
Interaction	-.28 ***	(.09)	(.09)
Constant	-.40	(.29)	(.30)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	46.4, $p < .001$	61.5, $p < .001$	90.8, $p < .001$

Source: Author's calculations.

Notes: Shows full logistic regression results for table 9.2 and figure 9.3. Table shows logistic regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) indicating the interaction of policy preference at each income level with preference divergence across income levels. Policy preference measured by the log of the odds ratio of the imputed percentage supporting the proposed policy change at each income level. Divergence measured by the log of the mean absolute difference between the 10th and 50th and the 50th and 90th income percentiles.

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed tests)

Table 9.A5 Interaction of Preference-Policy Link and Preference Gap across Income Levels for Social Welfare Issues

	Income Percentile		
	10th	50th	90th
Interest group allies (N = 184)			
Income group's preference	.28	(.64)	1.54 (.88)
Preference gap across income groups	.49	(.33)	.27 (.32)
Interaction	-.08	(.20)	.25 (.24)
Constant	-.11	(.91)	-.85 (.90)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	11.1, $p < .01$	12.9, $p < .005$	13.1, $p < .004$
No interest group allies (N = 215)			
Income group's preference	-1.44 *	(.77)	-.15 (.79)
Preference gap across income groups	.24	(.31)	.12 (.33)
Interaction	-.53 *	(.23)	-.22 (.23)
Constant	-.60	(.89)	-1.17 (.98)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (3)	9.8, $p < .02$	11.7, $p < .009$	12.0, $p < .008$

Source: Author's compilation.

Note: The top half of the table shows analyses of policy questions on which interest groups align more closely with the preferences of less affluent Americans (Social Security, Medicare, school vouchers, and public works); the bottom half shows all other policy questions in the social welfare domain. The table shows logistic regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) indicating the interaction of policy preference at each income level with preference divergence across income levels. Policy preference measured by the log of the odds ratio of the imputed percentage supporting the proposed policy change at each income level. Divergence measured by the log of the mean absolute difference between the 10th and 50th and the 50th and 90th income percentiles.

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed tests)

Notes

1. Most policy debates involve more than a single alternative to the status quo and cannot therefore be fully captured by dichotomous measures of public support or opposition. However, many policy debates generate more than a single measure in my dataset and therefore allow me to take some of these nuances into account. For example, although there were survey questions that simply asked whether respondents favored or opposed the Clinton administration's health-care reform proposal, many other questions asked about specific elements of health-care policy, such as employer mandates, health insurance portability, parity of coverage for mental health, and so on.
2. Survey data were obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, the Institute for Social Science Research at UCLA, the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, and the Roper Center.
3. Alan Monroe (1998) looked for policy changes over a long period and reports that 88 percent of the policy changes that occurred did so within two years of the date of the survey questions he examined. For my project, coders looked for policy change within a four-year window following each survey question. If no change consistent with the survey question occurred within that period, the outcome was coded as "no change." If change did occur within that period, the year the change took place was recorded. In coding outcomes for survey questions with specific quantified proposals (for example, raising the minimum wage to \$6 an hour), coders considered a change to have occurred if it represented at least 80 percent of the change proposed in the survey question. If the actual policy change represented less than 80 percent but more than 20 percent, the outcome was given a "partial change" code. Relatively few outcomes were coded as partial changes, and in the analysis here, only "full changes" occurring within the four-year window are coded as policy change. Intercoder agreement for policy outcome (whether the proposed change occurred within four years of the survey question) was 91 percent; intercoder agreement on the year the change occurred for those occasions where both coders agreed change had occurred was 93 percent.
4. To provide enough policy questions with divergent preferences, the analysis of the 70th versus the 90th income percentiles includes questions on which preferences differ by at least 8 percentage points rather than the 10 percentage point cutoff used for the other comparisons. We would expect this more inclusive criterion for the 70th percentile analysis in figure 9.2 to slightly increase the estimated impact of the preferences of respondents at the 70th income percentile relative to the other analyses in the figure.
5. After Mikhail Gorbachev came to office and introduced far-reaching reforms to the Soviet system in 1986, Reagan administration policy on nuclear arms began to change, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was eventually signed in 1991. The signing of the START treaty, however, cannot be considered a positive example of government response to public preferences, both because of the long delay and because of appar-

6. ently critical role of altered conditions in bringing about change in U.S. government policy. As explained, the attitudes on constitutional amendments to ban abortion or permit school prayer shown in table 9.4 are not included in the quantitative analyses.
7. William Buckley Jr., "Crucial Steps in Combating the Aids Epidemic; Identify All the Carriers," *New York Times*, March 18, 1986, p. A27.
8. The group targeted for tax increases in these proposals was considerably better off than the 90th income percentile that I use to represent high-income Americans. The relevant questions in my dataset were asked during the early 1990s and referred to families with incomes above \$180,000 or \$200,000 at a time when the 90th percentile of household income was about \$75,000.
9. The most significant cost increases to Medicare beneficiaries between 1981 and 2004 were deductibles for inpatient hospital care, which increased from \$204 to \$876 (roughly equal to the medical inflation rate and about twice the overall rate of inflation), and monthly premiums for Medicare Part B, which increased from \$11 to \$66 (about 1.5 times the rate of medical inflation). In contrast, deductibles for Part B rose only 67 percent across these decades—considerably less than inflation—and Part B coinsurance remained at 20 percent (U.S. Social Security Administration 2006).
10. The No Child Left Behind Act was passed by Congress in 2001, but the first survey question to ask explicitly about this legislation in the Roper Center's iPOLL database is from January 2003 (beyond my December 2002 cutoff for survey questions).
11. Although the AARP had initially opposed many of the bill's provisions (like forbidding Medicare to negotiate for lower drug prices), it eventually came round to supporting the legislation, creating a powerful alliance (Dreyfuss 2004).
12. District pork-barrel projects and the interest of developers and construction companies frequently come together when these projects benefit specific developers or other commercial interests within a district that then increase their support for their incumbent representative. That is, the benefit of pork barrel projects may be less in their direct appeal to voters and more in their appeal to district businesses.

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