Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness in the United States

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the extent to which the link between public preferences and government policy is biased toward the preferences of high-income Americans. Using an original data set of almost 2,000 survey questions on proposed policy changes between 1981 and 2002, I find a moderately strong relationship between what the public wants and what the government does, albeit with a strong bias toward the status quo. But I also find that when Americans with different income levels differ in their policy preferences, actual policy outcomes strongly reflect the preferences of the most affluent but bear little relationship to the preferences of poor or middle income Americans.

In the second half of the paper, I assess a variety of alternative explanations for the observed relationship between public policy and the preferences of high-income Americans. I argue that this relationship largely reflects the economic influence of affluent Americans over the political process rather than the influence of political elites on public preferences or the confluence of preferences between affluent Americans and either interest groups or policy makers themselves.

"…a key characteristic of democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals."

Robert Dahl, Polyarchy, p.1

The ability of citizens to influence public policy is the "bottom line" of democratic government. While few would expect or even desire a perfect correspondence between majority preference and government policy, the nature of the connection between what citizens want and what government does is a central consideration in evaluating the quality of democratic governance.

Considerable prior research has examined the relationship between government policy and the preferences of the public taken as a whole. The project I report on here asks *whose* preferences are most influential in shaping policy decisions. While democracy requires that government policy reflect the preferences of the governed--at least in broad outlines over the long run--true democracy also requires that all citizens, not just the powerful or well-off, have an influence over government policies.

In the pages that follow, I report findings from a project that seeks to understand inequalities in government responsiveness to the preferences of the governed. To assess citizen influence over government policy, I combine survey measures of an extensive array of public preferences collected over the past two decades with evaluations of actual government policymaking. The broader project will examine changes over time in the relationship between public preferences and government policy, differences across population subgroups and policy domains, and variations associated with changing partisan control of national political institutions. In this paper, I focus on the strength of the preference/policy link for respondents

with different levels of income in order to assess the differential responsiveness of government to the preferences of poor, middle-income, and well-off Americans.

Previous research

Quantitative analyses of the link between public preferences and government decision making have taken three main forms (see Glynn et al. 2004, chapter 9; Manza and Cook 2002; Monroe and Gardner 1987, for reviews of this literature). The most prevalent approach, often labeled "dyadic representation," examines the relationship between constituency opinion and the behavior of representatives or candidates across political units (typically US House districts or Senate seats; e.g., Achen 1978; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Bartels 1991; Miller and Stokes 1963; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995). This work typically finds strong correlations between constituents' preferences and legislators' voting behavior.

A second approach examines changes over time in public preferences and the corresponding changes (or lack of changes) in public policies. For example, if support for spending on space exploration declines over some period of time, does actual spending on the space program also decline? Using this technique, Page and Shapiro (1983) found fairly high levels of congruency between the direction of change in opinion and the direction of change in government policy, especially for salient issues or cases with large changes in public preferences.

Finally, using a third approach, Monroe (1998; 1979) compared public preferences for policy change expressed at a given point in time with subsequent changes (or lack of changes) in government policy. For example, if the public expresses a preference for cutting spending on space exploration at a given point in time, does actual spending on the space program decline in

the following years. Monroe found only modest consistency between public preferences and subsequent policy change during the 1960s and 1970s and even less consistency during 1980s and 1990s. Mirroring Page and Shapiro's results, however, Monroe found a better match between public preferences and government policy for issues that the public deemed more important (Monroe 1998). Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002) also related public preferences for policy change (or stability) to subsequent government policy. Rather than individual policy issues, however, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson used a broad measure of "public mood" for more or less government spending or activity and a similarly broad measure of actual government policy. Taking into account the reciprocal relationship between public preferences and government policy, they report an extremely strong influence of public mood on policy outputs, concluding that there exists "nearly a one-to-one translation of preferences into policy" (p.316).

Previous research, then, suggests a fairly high level of correspondence between constituency preferences and legislators' behavior, a more modest match between Americans' specific policy preferences and specific government policies (with stronger correspondence on more salient issues), and a strong aggregate relationship between broadly defined "public mood" and broad measures of government activity.

In contrast to the substantial body of research examining the preference/policy relationship for the public taken as a whole, only a small number of studies use quantitative data to assess the variation in this relationship across social groups. Jacobs and Page (2005) assess the impact on U.S. foreign policy of various elite groups as well as the public as a whole. Using parallel survey measures of policy preferences administered to the general public and a variety of

"foreign policy leaders" over almost 30 years, they find that business leaders and experts have the greatest ability to sway foreign policy but that the public as a whole has little or no influence.

Taking a very different approach, a few studies have used samples of U.S. cities to assess the correspondence between public policy and the preferences of different citizen groups, with mixed results. For example, Schumaker and Getter (1977) report a bias toward the spending preferences of upper-SES and white residents within the cities they studied, while Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) find little evidence of economic or racial bias in representation in their sample of American cities.

Finally, the study that most closely relates to my concerns with economically-based representational biases at the national level, Bartels (2002) related U.S. senators' roll call votes and NOMINATE scores to the preferences of their high, middle, and low income constituents. Examining civil rights, the minimum wage, government spending, abortion, and ideological self-placement, Bartels found senators to be consistently and substantially more responsive to the opinions of high-income constituents (this bias being somewhat greater for Republican than Democratic senators).

My project, then, aims to expand our understanding of differential responsiveness of government policy to the preferences of different social groups. Like previous work, I use public opinion surveys to measure citizens' preferences on a range of policy issues. Surveys provide a useful, but far from perfect, indication of what the public wants from government. Survey questions themselves are sometimes vague, policy issues are often unfamiliar to respondents, and the preferences respondents express range from deeply considered opinions to meaningless "non-attitudes." A large literature explores the value and limitations of survey data for assessing the policy preferences of the American public (e.g., Althaus 2003; Bartels 2003; e.g., Berinsky 2004;

Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Fishkin 1995; Page and Shapiro 1992; Saris and Sniderman 2004; Zaller 2003). Even a brief assessment of these various perspectives would require more space than this paper allows; my view, in brief, is that the biases and noise inherent in survey data are in the aggregate not sufficiently large or systematic enough to seriously compromise the analyses that follow (or those of the hundreds of other survey-based studies of public opinion).

Finally, the associations that I and others find between public preferences and government policy may reflect a variety of difficult-to-disentangle causal relationships. To some degree these associations likely reflect the responsiveness of government to the desires of the public, but these associations could also arise from the common response of both the public and policy makers to changing conditions, from the ability of policy makers to sway public preferences, or from the confluence of preferences between (some subgroups of) the public and organized interest groups. After presenting the methodology and basic findings from the project, I bring my data to bear on these alternative causal explanations.

Data

My data set consists of 1,935 survey questions asked of national samples of the U.S. population between 1981 and 2002. 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. The survey question is the unit of analysis in the data set, with variables indicating the proportion of respondents answering favor, oppose, or don't know within each

category of income, education, race, sex, age, partisan identification, ideological self-placement,

and region, as well as a code indicating whether the proposed policy change occurred or not.

The data for this project were collected from the iPOLL data base maintained by the

Roper Center at the University of Connecticut, from the Public Opinion Poll Question data base

maintained by the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina, and for time periods where

these data bases lacked sufficient numbers of appropriate questions with demographic

breakdowns, from raw survey data supplied by a variety of sources.[1] In all cases, questions were

identified using keyword searches for "oppose" in the question text or response categories and

then hand-sifting through the results to find appropriate questions. The original survey data were

collected by dozens of different survey organizations with the largest number of questions

coming from Harris, Gallup, CBS, and Los Angeles Times surveys. 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 of time from the date the survey question was asked.[2] Additional codes were developed

indicating the policy area addressed by the question (e.g. tax policy, abortion, etc.), and the

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[1] 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.

[2] Monroe (1998) looked for policy changes over a long time period and reports that 88% 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 widow 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 (e.g., raise the minimum wage to six dollars an hour), coders considered a change to have occurred if it represented at least 80% of the change proposed in the survey question. If the actual policy change represented less than 80% of that proposed in the survey question, but more than 20%, the outcome was given a "partial change" code. Relatively few outcomes were coded as partial changes, and in the analysis below, only "full changes" occurring within the four-year window are coded as policy change. Inter-coder agreement for policy outcome (whether the proposed change occurred within four years of the survey question) was 91%; inter-coder agreement on the year the change occurred for those occasions where both coders agreed change had occurred was 93%.

government body or bodies which could plausibly act to bring the proposed policy change about (president alone, president with congress, Supreme Court, constitutional amendment, etc.). After eliminating proposed policy changes that would require a constitutional amendment or 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.

Imputing preferences by income, education, or age level

Because the surveys employed were conducted by different organizations at different points in time the demographic categories are frequently inconsistent. In particular income, education, and age are divided into different numbers of categories and use different break points in different surveys (only income and education are examined in this paper). To create consistent measures of preferences that can be compared across surveys and across years, I used the following procedure. For ease of exposition, I describe the procedure for imputing preferences by income; the identical procedure was applied to education.

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% of the respondents fell into the bottom income category and 30% into the second category, those in the bottom group would be assigned a score of .05 and the second group a score of .25 (the midpoint between .10 and .40, the bottom and top percentiles for the second group).

After re-scoring 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.[3]

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.[4]

FINDINGS

Consistency versus influence

Raw correspondence between majority preferences and policy outcomes is one way to

assess the relationship between preferences and policies. But consistency is a fairly crude

measure which does not take into account the *degree* to which policy outcomes are influenced by

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[3] These coefficients and predicted values were estimated using the Clarify program. To perform these calculations, the aggregate data reflecting the number of respondents at each income level favoring or opposing each policy proposal were used to "reconstitute" the individual-level data. (The actual procedure used was to treat each combination of income category by preference as a single observation weighted by the number of respondents in that cell.) Clarify was then used to estimate the logistic coefficients and the Simqi subroutine was used to generate predicted values and standard errors at the percentilezed income levels of interest.

[4] One consequence of using a regression-based imputation procedure to estimate the preferences of respondents at different income levels is that the uncertainty of the predicted values will be smallest at the mean of the income distribution and largest at the tails (Gujarati 1995, p.137). This will result in slightly noisier measures of preferences for low and high income respondents than for those with middle incomes and therefore slightly attenuated coefficients for the relationship between preference and outcome for the extreme income categories. The mean standard errors for the 10th, 50th, 90th, and 99th income percentiles are .06, .04, .06, and .09, respectively.

the public's preferences. For example, a policy change opposed by 51% of the public and one opposed by 99% of the public would both be inconsistent with public preferences, but the latter clearly represents a greater failure of policy to reflect public preferences.

More importantly for my purposes, raw consistency is an inappropriate measure to use in comparing democratic responsiveness across population groups. Although 59% of the policy changes proposed in these survey questions received majority support,[5] only 32% of the proposed changes actually took place (within the four-year coding window, at least). Consequently, if the majority of population group X prefers policy change less often than population group Y, X will *ceteris paribus* have higher consistency scores. But influence over policy outcomes is reflected in the degree to which policy change is more or less likely to occur depending on whether or not members of that group support it. A group that favors only 10% of proposed policy changes will inevitably have a high consistency score, but if the probability of a change being implemented bears no relationship to the group's preferences, the group cannot be said to have influence over policy outcomes. The weakness of raw consistency as a measure of policy influence is illustrated with a hypothetical example in the appendix A.

To assess the strength of the relationship between policy preferences and policy outcomes across groups, I use measures of association (logistic regression coefficients) rather than raw consistency scores. Regression coefficients (and the associated probabilities of policy change which I report) overcome both of these shortcomings with consistency scores--they incorporate the degree of support (or opposition) to a specific policy proposal, and they reflect the extent to

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[5] Among respondents expressing a preference. Level of support for policy change does not vary by income for my 1,781 policy questions. On average, 55% of those at the 10th income percentile favor policy change compared with 56.2% of those at the 50th and 56.5% of those at the 90th percentile.

which different levels of policy support are associated with different probabilities of policy implementation within each group.

Relationship between preference and policy

The relationship between policy preferences and policy outcomes are shown in table 1. These results are based on logistic regressions in which policy outcome (coded 1 for change and 0 for status quo) is regressed on the percentage of respondents favoring the proposed policy change (or on the imputed percentage of respondents at a specific income percentile favoring the proposed policy change). The first column of results in table 1 shows the preference/policy link for the survey respondents as a whole. Row 4 shows the predicted probability of a policy change occurring if 10% of respondents favor the proposed change, row 5 shows the predicted probability if 90% favor the proposed change, and row 6 shows the ratio of row 5 to row 4--that is, the factor by which the predicted probability of policy change increases as opinion shifts from strong opposition to strong support.

table 1 about here

The first column of table 1 reveals the strong status-quo bias across these 1,781 proposed policy changes. Overwhelmingly unpopular proposals are unlikely to be adopted: the predicted probability of policy change occurring among policies favored by 10% of Americans is only .17.[6] But even policy proposals which receive overwhelming support among the public have a less-than-even change of being enacted. Among proposed changes with 90% support, the

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[6] These unpopular policies which were nevertheless adopted include various tax increases over the years, loan guarantees or other economic assistance to foreign countries, and sending U.S. troops to Haiti and Bosnia.

predicted probability of adoption is only .46. This status quo bias should not be surprising;

indeed, it is what we would expect from a government structure with separation of powers,

multiple veto points within congress, supermajority requirements in the Senate, and so on--a

structure designed by its framers as much to combat factionalism and inhibit the "tyranny of the

majority" as to facilitate federal lawmaking.

Turning next to the differences in the preference-policy link for respondents at different

income levels, we find, as expected, that higher income respondents' views are more strongly

related to government policy. The logit coefficients relating preference and policy rise from 1.22

for those at the 10th income percentile, to 1.63 for median income respondents, to 2.25 for those

at the 90th percentile. These coefficients are translated into probabilities in rows 4 and 5 of table

1 and displayed more fully in figure 1. For respondents at the 10th income percentile, the

probability of policy change rises from .21 with 10% favoring to .42 with 90% support. Thus a

policy which is overwhelmingly favored by those at the 10th income percentile has twice the

probability of being adopted as one which is overwhelmingly opposed. [7]

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[7] As explained above, the inconsistency in income categories from survey to survey requires the use of
imputed rather than observed preferences for respondents at various income levels. To assess whether the
results in table 1 are a function of the preference imputation process, I identified a subset of the survey
questions that used identical income categories. The largest such subset is from 1981-1987 and contains
451 questions each using the same six income categories (under $7,500; $7,500 to 15,000; $15,000 to
$25,000; $25,000 to $35,000; $35,000 to $50,000; over $50,000). For this subset of questions I compared
the results obtained using the observed percentage of respondents in each category favoring each
proposed policy change with those obtained using the imputed percentage based on the same quadratic
imputation procedure described above.
    The average size of the difference in the percent favoring policy change between the imputed and
observed preferences is only .022 (standard deviation= .017) and the difference between imputed and
observed preferences is nearly identical across the six income groups (all fall between .02 and .03). Given
the similarity of the observed and imputed preferences, it is not surprising that the patterns of association
between preference and policy outcome are similar when using the two sets of preference measures. The
logit coefficients for the six income groups (from lowest to highest income) based on the observed and
imputed preferences respectively are -.06 and 06, .68 and .53, .92 and .97, 1.36 and 1.34, 1.50 and 1.61,
1.78 and 1.76. Even the largest of these differences (.68 versus .53 for the second lowest income
category) is less than one-third of the standard error of the estimates. In short, the preference imputation
procedure does not appear to be driving the results of these analyses.

figure 1 about here

For those at the top of the income distribution, the probability of policy change rises somewhat more dramatically, from .14 to .49 (a factor of 3.6). Looking across the columns in row 6 of table 1, we see that the strength of the relationship between preferences and policy outcomes not only increases with each step up the income ladder, but does so at an increasing rate: the difference in the 90/10 ratio in row 6 of table 1 is about half as great between the 10th and 50th income percentiles as it is between the 50th and 90th percentiles. [8]

The preference-policy link when preferences across income groups diverge

It is hardly surprising that the preferences of the well-off are more clearly reflected in government policy than those of poor or middle-income citizens. But the results in table 1 understate the true differences in the ability of different economic groups to influence policy. On many of the policy issues in the data set, low- and high-income Americans do not differ substantially in their policy preferences. If the well-to-do are better able to exert influence over government policy, the association we do find between policy outcomes and the preferences of poor or middle-income respondents may simple reflect those proposed changes on which Americans of all income levels agree.

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[8] An alternative approach to assessing the independent influence of different income groups would be to include the preferences of multiple groups as predictors in the same model of policy outcomes. Using this approach, I also found strong effects for the preferences of high income Americans but not for those with middle or low income. However, measurement errors (which result from question wording effects, imperfect fit between the preference being tapped and the outcome coded, and simple errors in outcome coding) produce correlated prediction errors across income groups. If predictors with strong true correlations and also correlated errors are included in the same equation, the coefficients for the predictors with the weakest relationship to the outcome being measured (in this case, for those with the lowest income) may be unreliable and even incorrectly signed (Achen 1985). This problem, which has emerged in other analyses that compare the influence of policy preferences across multiple social groups (e.g., Bartels 2002, Jacobs and Page 2005), makes the separate analyses of the preference/policy link for the various income levels a more appealing alternative.

About one-third of the proposed policy changes in my data set generate levels of support within eight percentage points across all income groups. For these questions, preferences across different income groups are statistically indistinguishable. For the next set of analyses, I selected those questions for which the preferences of respondents at the 10th and 90th income percentiles differ by at least eight percentage points (n=887 survey questions), and those for which preferences of respondents at the 50th and 90th percentiles differ by at least eight percentage points (n=498 survey questions). The logistic regression coefficients for the relationship between preferences and policy outcomes for these questions are shown in table 2, with predicted probabilities shown in figure 2. For the 887 policy questions on which well-off and poor Americans disagree by eight percentage points or more (top panel of figure 2), outcomes are fairly strongly related to the preferences of the well-to-do (b=1.92, p=.000), but wholly unrelated to the preferences of the poor (b=0.04, p=.92).

table 2 and figure 2 about here

The complete lack of government responsiveness to the preferences of the poor is disturbing, if not entirely surprising. But poor people might hold attitudes that consistently differ from those held by middle-income and wealthy Americans, and if so the lack of responsiveness to their preferences might actually reflect a well-functioning democracy. Middle-income respondents might better reflect the preferences of the median voter on most issues and the responsiveness of government policymakers to the preferences of these Americans might therefore serve as a more appropriate test of biases in representation.

The bottom panel of figure 2 shows that median income Americans fare little better than the poor when their policy preferences diverge from those of the well-off. The probability of a proposed policy change being implemented rises almost 30 percentage points as support among

high-income respondents increases (b=1.80, p=.003), but rises only six percentage points as attitudes among median income respondents shift from strong opposition to strong support (b=0.33, p=.51).

The lack of responsiveness to the preferences of the 10th and 50th income percentiles illustrated in figure 2 does not mean that those groups never get what they want from government nor that high income Americans always see their preferences enacted in government policy. On the policy questions on which low and middle income respondents share the same preferences as those with high incomes they are, of course, just as likely as high income Americans to get what they want. But when their views differ 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. (Appendix B presents a brief overview of the most salient areas of policy disagreement between low-, middle-, and high-income Americans.)

Issue Salience

The policy preferences in my data set include many familiar issues like abortion or gun control, about which most Americans have given at least some consideration and many Americans hold strong and stable opinions. But my data set also contains measures of preferences on issues which are either obscure, like the investment tax credit or the Bosnian arms embargo, or which are familiar but complex like the Clinton health care plan or the debate about whether "homeland security" activities should be located in their own cabinet level department. On these sort of obscure or complex issues, citizens views are understandably less well formed

and less strongly held.[9]

Both common sense and normative theory suggest that government policy should be more tightly linked to public preferences on issues where those preferences are clear and strong.[10] Consistent with this expectation, both Monroe (1998) and Page and Shapiro (1983) found a stronger relationship between public opinion and government policy on more salient than on less salient issues. Thus, even if middle-class Americans lack influence over the broad range of policy decisions, we might expect them to exert influence over the most salient (and arguably the most important) policy matters.

To assess the role of issue salience as a moderator of inequality in government responsiveness to public preferences, I follow previous research in using the percentage of respondents saying "don't know" as a proxy for the salience of the issue to the public (Monroe 1998; Page and Shapiro 1983). My expectation is that the preferences which are expressed on questions that elicit larger proportions of "don't know's" are likely to be more tentative because these questions are either more obscure, more complex, or both. I'll refer to questions with high proportions of "don't know's" as low salience questions although I recognize that salience in the sense of political significance is only one source of the varying level of "don't know" responses across these survey questions.

Table 3 and figure 3 show the strength of the preference/policy link for the 50th income percentile based on separate regressions for questions with low, medium and high proportions of "don't know" responses. As expected, this association is strongest for questions with the lowest

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[9] This division of issue types parallels the distinction between "easy" and "hard" issues first elaborated by Carmines and Stimson (1980). Carmines and Stimson identified "easy issues" as symbolic rather than technical, long on the agenda, and more likely to deal with policy ends than means.

[10] In normative theory, attention to strength of preferences is often found in discussion of the differing level of intensity of preferences across subgroups of the public, reflecting a concern over situations in which a majority with weak preferences prevails over a minority with strong preferences (e.g., Dahl 1956). From a descriptive perspective, this situation is a specific case of the more general condition in which weakly held views of a majority of citizens are overridden by either a passionate minority or other sources of political influence.

proportion of "don't know's" and weakest for questions with the highest proportion.   Figure 3 also reveals that the stronger association between preferences and policy for high-salience issues manifests itself in a lower probability of adoption among strongly opposed policies rather than a higher probability of adoption among strongly supported policies. This pattern is consistent with the status quo bias observed above, and underscores once again that it is easier for political actors to derail disliked policies than to get favored policies adopted.

Across the range of questions in my data set, the association between government policy and the preferences of the middle-class is stronger on more salient issues. But does this hold even when policy preferences of middle- and high-income Americans diverge? To address this question, table 4 and figures 4a and 4b show the three-way interaction between policy preference, issue salience, and preference divergence between the 50th and 90th income percentiles.[11]

Figure 4a shows the preference/policy link for the 50th income percentile. The back row of figure 4a shows same pattern as figure 3: preferences and policies are most closely linked for the most salient issues. But the figure also shows that as the divergence in preferences from high-income Americans grows (as we move toward the front row of the figure) this pattern declines. Indeed, for high-divergence issues, the association between middle-income Americans' preferences and government policy is uniformly low, regardless of level of salience. It appears that the greater responsiveness to the preferences of the middle-class is confined largely to those issues on which middle- and upper-income Americans agree.

Figure 4b shows the three-way interaction of preference, salience, and preference divergence for the 90th income percentile. The back row of figure 4b shows that when the

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[11] The issues that elicit large numbers of "don't knows" from the middle-class also elicit large numbers of "don't knows" from the affluent and vice versa. There is no evidence that the salience of individual issues varies systematically across income levels. See figure 5 for the aggregate percent "don't know" across income levels.

preferences of middle- and high-income Americans coincide, the preference/policy link declines with declining issue salience. For issues where preferences diverge, on the other hand, this pattern reverses. On high-divergence issues, the association between government policies and the preferences of the well-off actually declines as salience increases. On these high-salience high-divergence issues (the front left column in figure 4b), the divergent preferences of other groups appears to act as a break on the influence of high-income Americans.

Considering the patterns in figures 4a and 4b together, we see that government policy is most closely aligned with public preferences on high-salience issues where middle- and upper-income Americans agree (the back-left corner of the figures). For low-salience issues, divergent preferences lead to a strong decline in the preference/policy link for the 50th income percentile but none at all for the 90th percentile. For high salience issues, the preference/policy link declines for both groups as the extent of preference divergence grows, although this decline is stronger for middle-income than high-income respondents. The bottom line is that middle-income Americans' preferences are strongly associated with policy outcomes only when they share the preferences of the well-off. When preferences across income groups diverge, high-income Americans are always more likely than middle-income to get what they want from government, and this difference is considerably greater on low-salience than high-salience issues.

The greatest difference in responsiveness to the views of middle- and upper-income citizens occurs on low-salience high-divergence issues (the front right column in figures 4a and 4b). These include many policies that tend to get little public attention like medical savings accounts and investment tax credits (both viewed more positively by higher income Americans) and a few high-profile but complex issues like the North American Free Trade Agreement (also

viewed more favorably by the affluent).

On high-divergence high-salience issues (the front left column), affluent Americans are still more likely to see their preferences reflected in government policy, but the difference across income groups is smaller. These issues tend to be strongly redistributive and are more likely to be recurring issues that are sometimes decided in the direction more favored by the affluent and sometimes not. This set of issues includes raising the minimum wage, extending unemployment benefits during periods of high unemployment, and raising taxes on high-income workers (all of which are, not surprisingly, viewed more positively by middle- than upper-income respondents). The preference/policy link is more equal on these issues than on less salient issues where middle-income and high-income preferences also diverge. Nevertheless, the association even on these issues is twice as strong for the 90th income percentile as it is for the 50th percentile.

The patterns displayed in figures 4a and 4b generally confirm the dramatic inequality in government responsiveness revealed above and qualify previous findings concerning the role of salience in enhancing government responsiveness. When middle-class and well-off respondents agree, government responsiveness is greatest on the most salient issues. But this pattern changes when preferences across income groups diverge. Under these conditions, issue salience does nothing to boost the preference-policy link for the middle class (which is uniformly low) and actually works to undermine responsiveness for the affluent.

When policy preferences between the middle-class and the affluent diverge, high levels of issue salience leads to somewhat greater equality of responsiveness across income levels. Even so, the greater equality of responsiveness under this condition emerges not because middle-class preferences show a stronger link with policy outcomes (compared with less salient issues) but because the preference-policy link for the well-off is attenuated.

Explaining the Preference-Policy Link

Demonstrating an association between the public's preferences and government policy is only the first step in understanding the role of public opinion in shaping policy outcomes. The more difficult task is to explain the causal forces which produce this association. In this section, I assess four hypotheses consistent with the notion that the association between policy and the preferences of Americans at the 90th income percentile is spurious and not a result of the influence of this group over policy outcomes, and two hypotheses which identify alternative mechanisms through which the preferences of well-off Americans do exert influence over government policy. My evidence suggests that some of these accounts are more plausible than others, but complex social phenomena can rarely be reduced to a single cause and there is no reason to think that the patterns of association documented above are an exception.

The "non-causal" explanations I address below attribute the observed relationship between government policy and the preferences of high-income Americans to (1) the influence of elite actors on the preferences of the well-off, (2) the correspondence of attitudes between the well-off and powerful interest groups, (3) the correspondence of attitudes between the well-off and even more affluent Americans, and (4) the correspondence of attitudes between well-off members of the public and similarly well-off policymakers who, by virtue of their shared economic status, might hold similar outlooks and interests. Concluding that the preference-policy link for the 90th income percentile is likely to reflect, at least in large measure, the actual influence of this group over government policy, I then address two alternative mechanisms that might account for this causal influence and it's inequality across income groups: (5) affluent Americans are more likely to know what policy outcomes they prefer or to care more about

getting what they want, and (6) affluent Americans are more likely to engage in political behaviors that influence elections and policymaking such as voting, volunteering, and donating to campaigns and interest organizations.

"Non-causal" explanations of the preference-policy link

Hypothesis 1: The preference-policy link for Americans at the 90th income percentile reflects the influence of elites on politically attentive members of the public.

Both common sense and considerable evidence suggests that citizens form their policy preferences at least in part on the basis of cues from political decision makers and other elites (e.g., Carmines and Kuklinski 1990; Gilens and Murakawa 2002; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). If higher income Americans are more attentive to such cues, their preferences may more strongly correlate with government policy than do those of Americans with lower incomes.

If the stronger preference-policy link for those at the high end of the income distribution reflects greater attentiveness to elite political discourse, we would expect to find an even stronger pattern across levels of education, since education is more closely associated with interest in and attention to politics than is income (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996, p.77; Zaller 1992). While those with high-incomes tend also to have more education, the relationship is weak enough to allow for separate analysis of income and education as moderators of the preference-policy link.[12] By using the preferences of both high income and high education respondents as predictors of policy outcomes, I partial out from the estimated influence of the affluent that

[12] Fewer than one-third of Americans in the top income decile are also in the top education decile and vice versa. Based on the 1998-2002 General Social Surveys, 250 respondents were both in the top 11.4% of the income distribution and the top 11.7% of the educational distribution (these being the closest cut-points to the top deciles). These 250 respondents constituted 30% of the top income decile and 29% of the top education decile.

portion of their preferences that represents the views of those with the highest educations.

Similarly, I partial out from the estimated influence of the highly educated, that portion of their

preferences that represents the views of those with the highest incomes.

Table 5 compares the association of policy outcomes with the preferences of high income

and high education respondents (i.e. preferences for the 90th income and education percentiles).

Including income and education in separate equations (models 1 and 2) suggests similar levels of

association with policy outcomes. But when both are included simultaneously, the preferences of

high-income respondents remain a strong predictor while the preferences of the highly educated

show no independent impact on policy outcomes. The greater attentiveness to politics that

characterizes highly educated Americans does not seem to explain the stronger association

between preferences and policy outcomes among the affluent than among less well-off

Americans. Consequently, the ability of decision makers and other elites to sway public opinion

is not a likely explanation for the differential relationships between preferences and policy

outcomes across income groups.

table 5 about here

Hypothesis 2: The preference-policy link for Americans at the 90th income percentile reflects the coincidence of their preferences with those of organized interest groups.

Most accounts of the role of organized interests in shaping federal policy emphasize the

prominence of business interests (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Berry 1994; Truman 1951). Of

course, opposing groups also exist (e.g., labor, environmental, and consumer groups), and

different industries often hold conflicting preferences in a given policy domain (Hart 2004).

Nevertheless, affluent Americans' more conservative preferences on economic policies (see

appendix B) are generally more aligned with business groups' preferences than are the more liberal economic views of middle-class citizens. Consequently, the preference-policy link for the 90th income percentile may represent the compatibility of preferences with business rather than true influence.[13]

To assess this hypothesis, I compare the preference-policy link for the 90th percentile across different issue domains. If the influence of business explains this observed association, we should find a stronger association between preferences and policies for business-related issues and a weaker relationship for issues unrelated to business. Table 6 shows the association between preferences and policy for the 50th and 90th income percentiles for all domestic issues, for economic issues broadly defined, for issues on which business could be expected to hold nearly uniform preferences, and for purely non-economic issues like abortion, gay rights, and stem cell research which lack any strong impact on the well-being of business groups (see the table for the list of issues included in each category).[14]

table 6 about here

As hypothesis 2 predicts, the preference-policy link for the 90th income percentile is strongest for business-related issues, but the difference across these issue domains is small and

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[13] While there are hundreds of organized interest groups representing a huge array of policy preferences, my focus on business as a broad group reflects my specific concern with explaining the stronger association between preferences and policy for well-off Americans. Moreover, the possibility that the power of organized interest serve as an *alternative* explanation to the influence of affluent members of the public requires that we exclude from consideration those groups which merely channel the preferences and resources of large numbers of citizens. Such membership organizations represent a mechanism by which the public exerts influence over government policy rather than an alternative source of influence. Only those organized interest groups that have independent resources and/or preferences can be considered alternative sources of policy influence. While there is some gray area between these two ideal types of interest groups, mass membership groups like the Sierra Club clearly fall on one end and corporate lobbying organizations on the other.

[14] Of course, almost any issue no matter how symbolic has some implication for some business interest (flag burning laws and flag manufactures?). But in choosing the policies to include in the "business" and "non-economic" categories I sought to include only those in the former that have clear and nearly universal pro- or anti-business implications and only those in the later that have no implications for the well-being of businesses as a group or any substantial subgroup of the business community.

statistically non-significant, ranging from 3.5 (se=0.3) for all domestic policies to 4.1(se=1.4) for

business-related policies. While it appears that the confluence of preferences between well-off

citizens and business interests might contribute a bit to the preference-policy link for the 90th

percentile, this association is nearly as strong for the wholly non-economic issues on which

business interests are unlikely to have preferences and unlikely to play a role in shaping

government policy.

Hypothesis 3: The preference-policy link for Americans at the 90th income percentile reflects the coincidence of their preferences with the even more affluent Americans who do shape policy outcomes.

While Americans at the 90th income percentile are somewhat more likely to participate

in political campaigns and especially to donate money than middle-income Americans, those

most actively engaged in the political process are typically far more affluent. One study, for

example, found that the majority of campaign donations were made by Americans in the top 9%

of the income distribution, but of these, almost two-thirds of the money came from the top 3%

(Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, p.194).[15]

To address the hypothesis that the preferences of the truly rich are driving the observed

relationship between policy outcomes and preferences of the 90th income percentile I examine

the views held by those at the 99th percentile of income.[16] This analysis is unfortunately quite

tentative because it is difficult to measure the preferences of those at the very top end of the

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[15] Individual donations to candidates provides a limited picture of the flow of money in politics but one which, thanks to Federal Election Commission reporting requirements, we have good data on. These data, however, substantially understate the degree to which political campaigns and lobbying are financed by the most affluent members of the public. Fund raising (e.g., by "bundling" many individual donations), and donations to parties, PACs, and independent expenditure groups have much higher or no donation limits and are therefore attractive alternatives for individuals wishing to contribute larger sums.
[16] The 90th percentile of family income in 1997 expressed in 2005 dollars was about $117,000, the 99th percentile was about $440,000 (Congressional Budget Office 2001, pp.86-7).

income distribution and because there are few policy proposals for which preferences differ between the 90th and 99th percentiles.

Despite the paucity of data, the pattern of imputed preferences for Americans at the 90th and 99th income percentiles differ in sensible ways with the largest divergence occurring on issues which impact business or which have clear redistributive implications. Those at the 99th percentile, for example, are more opposed to raising income or payroll taxes on high-income workers, placing price controls on oil or gas, or supporting affirmative action in hiring or college admissions, and more favorable toward free trade with Mexico (all by margins of 10 to 15 percentage points).

Table 2 showed that the association between preferences and policy outcomes all but disappeared for the 10th and 50th income percentiles among issues where their preferences diverged from those of the 90th percentile. There are too few cases for which preferences of the 90th and 99th income percentiles differ substantially to replicate these analyses. A logistic regression using as predictors the preferences of the 90th percentile, the difference in preferences between the 90th and 99th percentiles, and the interaction of these two, suggests that the impact of the 90th percentile does decline as their views diverge from those of the 99th, however the similarity of preferences across these two groups leads to large standard errors and a non-significant coefficient for the interaction term.[17] In sum, it appears likely that the Americans at the 99th income percentile have an even greater influence over government policy than do those at the 90th percentile. But the small number of cases in my data set where the preferences of these groups diverge preclude any firm conclusion about the independent influence they each bring to bear.

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[17] Applying this procedure to the contrasts between the 50th and 90th or the 10th and 90th income percentiles results in highly significant coefficients which mirror the findings reported in table 2.

Hypothesis 4: The preference-policy link for Americans at the 90th income percentile reflects the coincidence of their preferences with similarly affluent policymakers.

All federal lawmakers by dint of their government salaries alone fall within the top income decile of American families. To the extent that policymakers' own preferences shape policy, then, we might expect policy to more closely reflect the preferences of the well-off than those of middle-income Americans.

Yet within any economic stratum there exist individuals with a wide range of policy preferences and this would appear to be true among federal policymakers as well as the public at large. That is, although every Senator and Representative is well-off, the range of policy preferences represented appears to be quite wide. Affluent liberal Democrats as well as affluent conservative Republicans battle over federal policy. In terms of understanding responsiveness of government policy to public opinion, the key question is not what the preferences of elected representatives are, but why a particular set of affluent lawmakers, with a particular set of policy preferences, was elected. Given the range of policy views represented in congress, it seems unlikely that any coincidence of preferences that exists between lawmakers and well-off Americans is the result of the economic status of lawmakers themselves rather than the electoral system that produced a given set of lawmakers.[18]

Some additional evidence concerning causal influence

I addressed above the specifics of four accounts of the preference-policy link for the 90th income percentile all of which offer an alternative to the causal influence of this group of

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[18] A quick and dirty analysis of Senators' assets (based on mandatory financial disclosure forms) and their voting records (based on NOMINATE scores) shows a weak and non-significant relationship in the wrong direction (i.e., more liberal Senators reported greater assets, on average).

Americans over government policy. The evidence presented suggests that this association cannot be accounted for by the stronger influence of elites on the preferences of high-income citizens, by the confluence of preferences of affluent Americans and business groups, or by the confluence of preferences with lawmakers themselves. The confluence of interests between this group and even more affluent Americans remains a possible explanation for the observed association which my data cannot satisfactorily address.

In addition to the specific evidence relevant to each of these alternative accounts, two additional kinds of evidence from other research bolsters the general notion that public preferences have a causal impact on government policy. First, the strong associations between constituency preferences and representatives' votes found in the "dyadic representation" literature are unlikely to arise from the influence of representatives on their constituents. Only 29% of Americans can name their U.S. Representative, much less describe his or her position on any particular issue, and only 25% can name both their U.S. Senators (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Far more plausible is that representatives' votes are shaped by their constituents' preferences (or at least by the preferences of their most affluent constituents; Bartels 2002), operating through incumbents' desire to avoid providing potential challengers with campaign issues and through the election of like-minded office holders to begin with.

The second kind of evidence that the preference/policy link reflects the influence of the public on government decision makers is found in studies of public policy and the electoral cycle. For example, Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004) show that the association between public preferences and presidential budget proposals is strongest not when the president is most popular (and presumably most able to influence public preferences) but when the president is most in

need of public support (i.e., when facing re-election with a moderate level of popularity).[19]

Similarly, research on congressional voting shows that legislators' positions tend to be more

moderate (and consequently more consistent with constituency preferences) when an election is

near (Elling 1982; Kuklinski 1978; Thomas 1985).

"Causal" explanations of the preference-policy link

If the observed association between government policy and the preferences of the 90th

income percentile reflects, at least to a large degree, the influence of this group and/or the

influence of still more affluent Americans, there are two sets of characteristics that might explain

the influence of the affluent in contrast with the apparent lack of influence of lower- and middle-

class Americans.

Hypothesis 5: The preference-policy link for well-off Americans reflects the fact that they are more likely to know what policy outcomes they prefer or to care more about getting what they want.

We saw above that the observed preference-policy link for the 90th income percentile

was not explained by the preferences they share with the highly educated. This fact alone makes

it unlikely that economic differences in influence are explained by differences the extent to

which middle- and upper-income Americans hold issue preferences to begin with or care about

policy outcomes (both of which should be at least as strongly related to education as income).

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[19] The argument is that this is exactly the condition under which a president has the greatest incentive to cater to public preferences. If a president's popularity is very high, he can safely disregard the public's wishes on most issues and still be confident of re-election, and if his popularity is very low, he will be unlikely to win re-election regardless of the policies he adopts. But if re-election is uncertain, a president's incentive to respond to the public's preferences is greatest.

For a more direct test of this account, I show in figure 5 the mean percentage of respondents saying "Don't Know" in response to the policy questions in my data set for the 10th through 90th income percentiles. As the figure shows, poor respondents are about twice as likely, on average, to say "Don't Know" than those at the median income, but there is no discernable difference between the propensity of middle- and upper-income Americans to respond in this way. Since the apparent influence over policy as indicated in table 2 is extremely weak for both low- and middle-income Americans, but fairly strong for the well-off, the pattern of responsiveness does not fit well with the propensity of different income groups to hold (or at least to express) policy preferences.

figure 5 about here

Figure 5 also shows essentially no difference across income level in the propensity of respondents to say they "strongly" as opposed to "somewhat" favor or oppose a given policy.[20] These measures of opinion holding and opinion strength from my data are imperfect measures at best. Social pressures may lead respondents to avoid saying "Don't Know" (especially, perhaps, on policy questions about which they may feel they ought to have opinions), and this pressure may be felt more strongly by middle-income than low-income respondents.[21] Nevertheless, the existing evidence does suggest that any greater influence over policy by Americans at the top of the income distribution is unlikely to be explained by a greater tendency to hold opinions on policy questions or to care more about policy outcomes.

Hypothesis 6: The preference-policy link for well-off Americans reflects the fact that they are more likely to engage in political behaviors that influence elections and policymaking such as voting, volunteering, and donating to campaigns and interest organizations.

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[20] This analysis is based on a subset of 160 survey questions that asked respondents to qualify their favor or support in this way.

[21] In future work, I plan to use panel data to examine preference stability across income levels.

A different sort of mechanism that might account for the greater influence of the affluent over policy outcomes concerns their greater involvement in politics and political campaigns. The well-off are more likely to vote, more likely to volunteer in campaigns, and more likely to make political donations (and to make larger donations), than are middle-class or poor Americans. But as figure 6 shows, the patterns of these three types of political involvement across the income distribution vary substantially. While all three are monotonically related to income, the increase in voting and volunteering is greatest between low- and middle-income citizens, with smaller differences apparent between the middle and high end of the income spectrum. Donations, on the other hand, show the opposite pattern, with only a small difference in reported donations between low and middle income Americans and a much larger difference at the highest incomes.[22]

Campaign donations are only one form of political contribution. Individuals hoping to influence policymaking can also give money to parties, PACs, independent expenditure groups, and lobbying organizations. Some of these forms of political donations also have individual limits and reporting requirements (e.g., donations to political parties and PACs), but these limits are higher than those for individual candidate donations. Do to higher or non-existent donation limits, the source of funds flowing through these other channels is even more biased toward upper income Americans than are direct campaign donations.[23]

figure 6 about here

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[22] These self-reported donations (from the 1988 American Citizen Participation Survey) are roughly compatible with surveys of actual political donors based on Federal Election Commission reports. For example, a study of donations to congressional candidates in 1996 found that four-fifths of donors who gave $200 or more had incomes in the top 10% of all Americans (Green et al. 1998). Since not only the propensity to donate but the size of donations increases with income level, this figure understates--probably to a very large degree--the extent to which political donations come from the most affluent Americans.

[23] Of course specific PACs or lobbying organizations may draw relatively more of their resources from less affluent Americans (e.g., those associated with labor). But funding for these organizations as a whole comes disproportionately from those with the highest incomes.

There is considerable debate about the role of money in shaping federal policy (cites here). The findings above show that influence over policy is strongly concentrated, if not entirely reserved for, the most affluent segment of the public. The fact that this same segment provides the majority of money which flows from individuals to politicians and lobbying organizations, and the very different pattern evident in other forms of political participation, suggests that money may well be the primary explanation for the patterns of influence over policy exhibited in my data.

Of course, money is not the only valued commodity in politics. Groups that can mobilize large numbers of volunteers (like labor and religious organizations) may exert a policy influence that competes with that of the affluent, at least on particular issues at particular points in time. Nevertheless, electoral campaigns require money, and more and more of it over time. While the evidence here is circumstantial, the associated patterns of policy influence and political contributions offer at least one highly plausible explanation for the inequality of democratic responsiveness to different economic strata documented above.

Conclusion

Recognizing the multifaceted relationship between public preferences and government policy, a variety of evidence nevertheless suggests that the relationship between what the public wants and what the government does reflects, at least in large measure, the influence of the former on the latter. But the findings presented above also suggest that this influence is reserved for those at the top of the income distribution. The fairly modest relationship between preferences and policy among lower and middle-income Americans is accounted for almost entirely by the extent to which they share preferences with more affluent citizens.

There has never been a democratic society in which citizens' influence over government policy was unrelated to their financial resources. In this sense, the difference between democracy and plutocracy is one of degree. But by this same token, a government that is democratic in form but is in practice only responsive to its most affluent citizens is a democracy in name only.

Most middle-income Americans think that public officials don't care much about the preferences of "people like me."[24] Sadly, the results presented above suggest they may be right. Whether or not elected officials and other decision makers "care" about middle-class Americans, influence over actual policy outcomes appears to be reserved overwhelmingly for those at the top of the income distribution.

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[24] Sixty-two percent of middle income ($35,000 to $65,000 in household income) respondents to the 2000 National Election Study agreed that "Public officials don't care much what people like me think" compared with 36% of respondents in the top 10% income (over $100,000 in household income).

Appendix A: Consistency versus Influence

The table below illustrates the problem with using raw consistency between policy preference and policy outcome as a measure of influence in the presence of a status quo bias. The preferences of groups A and B are each consistent with policy outcomes 10 out of 16 times (63%). But for group A, policies are three times as likely to be adopted if they are favored as if they are opposed (3/8 versus 1/8) while for group B policies are equally likely to be adopted whether they are favored or opposed (1/4 versus 3/12). The consistency scores are .63 for both groups, but the measure of association (in this case, correlation) reveals the stronger relationship between preference and policy for group A (.29 versus .00).

Policy	Group A's Preference	Group B's Preference	Outcome
1	1	1	1
2	1	0	1
3	1	0	1
4	1	0	0
5	1	0	0
6	1	0	0
7	1	0	0
8	1	0	0
9	0	0	1
10	0	1	0
11	0	1	0
12	0	1	0
13	0	0	0
14	0	0	0
15	0	0	0
16	0	0	0

consistency:	0.63	0.63
correlation:	0.29	0.00

Group A: Favors 8 policies of which 3 are adopted
Opposes 8 policies of which 1 is adopted

Group B: Favors 4 policies of which 1 is adopted
Opposes 12 policies of which 3 are adopted

Appendix B

In this appendix, I briefly summarize the most salient areas of policy disagreement for low-, middle- and high-income Americans. Tables B1 through B4 show the level of support for various proposed policy changes for respondents at the 10th, 50th, and 90th income percentiles. To make the data easier to absorb, preferences are rescored 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 top left cell of each table contains the "legend" which relates percentage point measure of favorability to the 11-point scale.)

One place we might expect, and do consistently find, differences in preferences are in economic and redistributive policies. As table B1 shows, affluent Americans express more conservative preferences on taxes, business regulation, economic policies like unemployment and the minimum wage and national health care. High-income Americans are also more favorably inclined toward market oriented reforms of Social Security (table B2) and more supportive of cutting welfare spending and of the punitive aspects of welfare reform (like time limits and child benefit caps).

On social issues, especially those associated with religion or "traditional morality," the affluent express consistently more liberal views (table B3). Abortion, school prayer, stem cell research and gay rights all elicit more liberal preferences from higher income Americans. The well-off are less supportive of affirmative action for women and minorities, whether in individual hiring and school admissions or in government contracting. Most of the affirmative action questions in my data set ask about "women and minorities" but the few questions that ask only about one group or the other generate similar levels of disagreement across income groups.

In part, the greater support for affirmative action among the poor is explained by the larger

proportion of African Americans among this group. Among Americans in the bottom ten percent of the income distribution in the 1980s and 1990s, almost 25% were black, but only 4% of those in the top income decile were African American. Separate analysis of an affirmative action question on the 1996 National Election Study suggests that about half of the 10th/90th percentile difference in support for race-based affirmative action for individuals remains when looking at white respondents only. The tendency for poor whites to express greater support for affirmative for minorities and women appears to rest on perceptions of discrimination or values toward equality rather than considerations of self-interest.

Table B3 also shows that affluent Americans tend to be at least as supportive of campaign finance reform as the less well-off. Although they seem to be benefiting far more from the current system, high-income Americans are somewhat more favorable toward limiting the amount and source of campaign donations from both groups and individuals, and considerably more supportive of public financing of election campaigns. The appeal of campaign finance reform for those at the 90th income percentile might rest in part on the perception that groups or individuals with far greater resources than they currently dominate the political system, while the lack of appeal of public finance to those at the bottom of the economic distribution might stem from the perception that social programs from which they benefit might suffer if government resources were shifted to paying for election campaigns.

Finally, table B4 shows that attitudes toward foreign policy and the war on terrorism tend not to vary systematically across income groups with the exception of the economic aspects of foreign policy. The only consistent preference differences in these domains are the greater support among the affluent for free trade and foreign aid. Since free trade, at least in the short run, is more likely to benefit well-off Americans who are less vulnerable to competition from

low-wage foreign labor, their greater support is not surprising.

To summarize the findings in tables B1 through B4, affluent Americans are more conservative on economic and redistributive policies, more market oriented on Social Security reform, more liberal on moral/religious issues and on foreign aid, and more favorable toward free trade. On some of these issues, the majority preference of low- and high-income Americans run in opposite directions, but on many policies the differences are in the degree of support or opposition across income groups, not in the direction. To some extent, if majorities of all income groups prefer the same policy option, responsiveness to one group will entail responsiveness to them all. But policy change clearly relates not only to the direction of majority support but to the degree of such support (as the probability graphs in figures 1-3 illustrate). Thus the difference between weak and strong support for a policy may have as much (or more) political importance as the difference between weak support and weak opposition.

Table B1.

Economic and Redistributive Issues

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	Income Percentiles			Difference
	10th	**50th**	**90th**	**(90th - 10th)**
Taxes -- affluent more conservative				
Cut capital gains tax	0	+ 2	+ 3	+ 3
Cut/eliminate inheritance tax	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3	+ 2
Flat tax	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2
Raise taxes on highest-income workers	+ 4	+ 4	+ 2	- 2
Raise taxes on energy, gasoline	- 2	- 1	0	+ 2
Other Economic Issues -- affluent more conservative				
Raise minimum wage	+ 5	+ 4	+ 4	- 1
Extend/increase unemployment benefits	+ 2	+ 1	- 1	- 3
Increase gov't regulation of oil/gas	+ 1	+ 1	- 2	- 3
Increase corporate regulation	+ 3	+ 2	0	- 3
Health Care -- affluent more conservative				
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

Table B2

Social Security & Welfare Reform

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	Income Percentiles			Difference
	10th	**50th**	**90th**	**(90th - 10th)**
Social Security Reform -- affluent favor markets				
Gov't invest Soc. Sec. money in stocks	- 3	- 2	0	+ 3
Individuals control own stock accounts	0	+ 2	+ 3	+ 3
Welfare Reform -- affluent sometimes conservative **(but equal support for most features)**				
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

Table B3

Social Issues

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	Income Percentiles			Difference
	10th	**50th**	**90th**	**(90th-10th)**
Abortion -- affluent are more liberal				
RU-486	**- 1**	**0**	**+ 2**	**+ 3**
Constitutional ban on abortion	**- 2**	**- 3**	**- 4**	**- 2**
Foreign family planning, birth control	**+ 2**	**+ 3**	**+ 4**	**+ 2**
Ban partial-birth abortion	**+ 3**	**+ 2**	**0**	**- 3**
Other moral/religion issues -- affluent are more liberal				
Constitutional amendment to permit school prayer	**+ 4**	**+ 3**	**+ 1**	**- 3**
GW Bush's Faith-based initiative	**+ 4**	**+ 3**	**+ 2**	**- 2**
Stem cell research	**0**	**0**	**+ 3**	**+ 3**
Gays in the military	**0**	**0**	**+ 1**	**+ 1**
Gays, extend legal protection	**+ 1**	**+ 3**	**+ 3**	**+ 2**
Gay marriage/civil unions	**- 2**	**- 2**	**0**	**+ 2**
Affirmative Action -- affluent are more conservative				
Individuals hiring/admissions (women and minorities)	**+ 3**	**+ 1**	**0**	**- 3**
Government contracts (women and minorities)	**+ 2**	**0**	**- 3**	**- 5**
Campaign Finance Reform -- affluent more liberal				
Contribution limits (amount; source; etc.)	**+ 3**	**+ 4**	**+ 4**	**+ 1**
Public financing	**- 3**	**- 1**	**0**	**+ 3**

Table B4

Foreign Policy & Terrorism

Between 45% and 55% 0	Income Percentiles			Difference
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	**10th**	**50th**	**90th**	**(90th - 10th)**
Foreign Economic Policy – affluent are more liberal, free trade				
Increase foreign aid	**- 1**	**0**	**+ 1**	**+ 2**
Aid to FSU, developing countries	**- 1**	**0**	**+ 1**	**+ 2**
GATT, NAFTA, free trade	**- 1**	**0**	**+ 1**	**+ 2**
Mexico loan guarantees	**- 4**	**- 4**	**- 3**	**+ 1**
Foreign Military Policy -- little difference				
Invade Afghanistan	**+ 4**	**+ 4**	**+ 5**	**+1**
Invade Iraq	**+ 2**	**+ 2**	**+ 1**	**- 1**
Air power against Serbia	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Ground troops against Serbia	**- 3**	**- 2**	**- 2**	**+ 1**
Military action in Haiti	**- 1**	**- 2**	**- 2**	**- 1**
Military aid to El Salvador or Sandinistas	**- 3**	**- 2**	**- 2**	**+ 1**
War on Terrorism -- mixed				
Restrict Americans' freedom of speech	**- 2**	**- 2**	**- 4**	**- 2**
Relax legal protections (e.g., Habeas Corpus)	**+ 3**	**+ 4**	**+ 5**	**+ 2**
Monitor Americans' phone calls, etc.	**+ 1**	**0**	**0**	**- 1**
Torture known terrorists	**0**	**0**	**- 1**	**- 1**
Attack nations that harbor terrorists	**+ 3**	**+ 4**	**+ 5**	**+ 2**

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Table 1. Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome, by Income Percentile

	All Respondents	By Income Percentile				
		10th	30th	50th	70th	90th
Logit Coefficient (Standard Error)	1.77 (.26)	1.22 (.25)	1.43 (.25)	1.63 (.25)	1.91 (.26)	2.25 (.27)
Intercept	-1.76	-1.44	-1.57	-1.69	-1.86	-2.06
Predicted Probability if 10% favor	.17	.21	.19	.18	.16	.14
Predicted Probability if 90% favor	.46	.42	.43	.44	.46	.49
Relative change in predicted probability (row 5/row 4)	2.7	2.0	2.2	2.5	2.9	3.6
N	1781	1781	1781	1781	1781	1781
Log Likelihood Likelihood ratio	2186 $\chi^2(1)=47$ p=.000	2209 $\chi^2(1)=24$ p=.000	2200 $\chi^2(1)=33$ p=.000	2189 $\chi^2(1)=44$ p=.000	2175 $\chi^2(1)=58$ p=.000	2158 $\chi^2(1)=75$ p=.000

Notes: 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 took place within four years of the survey date and 0 if it did not. The predictors are the percentage of respondents favoring the proposed policy change (column 1) or the imputed percentage of respondents at a given income percentile favoring the proposed policy change.

Table 2. Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome, by Income Percentile
When Preferences Across Income Groups Differ

	When 10th and 90th Income Percentiles Disagree		When 50th and 90th Income Percentiles Disagree	
	10th	90th	50th	90th
Logit Coefficient	.04	1.92***	.33	1.80**
(Standard Error)	(.37)	(.40)	(.51)	(.61)
Intercept	-.75	-1.80	-1.06	-1.85
N	887	887	498	498
Log Likelihood	1120	1095	602	594
Likelihood ratio	$\chi^2(1)=.01$	$\chi^2(1)=24.6$	$\chi^2(1)=.43$	$\chi^2(1)=8.8$
	p=.92	p=.000	p=.51	p=.003

** p<.01, *** p<.001

Notes: 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 took place within four years of the survey date and 0 if it did not. The predictors are the imputed percentage of respondents at a given income percentile favoring the proposed policy change. The first two columns are based on the 887 survey questions on which respondents at the 10th and 90th income percentiles differed by at least eight percentage points; the second two columns are based on the 498 questions on which respondents at the 50th and 90th percentiles differed by at least eight percentage points.

Table 3. Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome by Issue Salience
for the 50th Income Percentile

	Low Salience	Medium Salience	High Salience
Logit Coefficient	1.19 *	1.75 ***	2.67
(Standard Error)	(.50)	(.44)	(.47)
Intercept	-1.13	-1.75	-2.68
N	586	616	573
Log Likelihood	771	749	639
Likelihood ratio	$\chi^2(1)=5.7$, p<.02	$\chi^2(1)=16.7$, p=.000	$\chi^2(1)=37.5$, p=.000

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Table 4.

Policy Preference as a Predictor of Policy Outcome,
by Issue Salience and Opinion Divergence

	50th Percentile	90th Percentile
Policy preference	4.1 ***	4.0 ***
	(0.7)	(0.7)
Preference divergence	17.2 **	13.5 *
	(6.0)	(6.0)
Salience	22.2 **	24.7 ***
	(7.5)	(7.3)
Preference x divergence	-27.8 **	-21.3 *
	(9.6)	(10.4)
Preference x salience	-20.9	-25.7 *
	(12.1)	(11.8)
Preference x divergence x salience	156.0	344.3*
	(181.8)	(166.9)
Intercept	-3.6 ***	-3.6 ***
	(.5)	(0.5)
N	1760	1760
Log Likelihood	2112	-1045
Likelihood ratio	$\chi^2(1)$=94, p=.000	$\chi^2(1)$=115, p=.000

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Notes: Logistic regression with robust standard errors in parentheses. 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 took place within four years of the survey date and 0 if it did not. Policy preference is the imputed percentage of respondents at the 50th or 90th income percentile favoring the proposed policy change, preference divergence is the absolute value of the percentage point difference in preferences between the 50th and 90th income percentiles, salience is the overall percent of respondents answering "Don't Know" to each survey question.

Table 5. The Preference-Policy Link for High-Income and High-Education Respondents

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Income	2.25 (.27) ***	--	2.51 (.84) **
Education	--	2.03 (.26) ***	-.26 (.82)
Intercept	-2.06 (.17) ***	-1.93 (.16) ***	-2.06 (.17)***
N	1781	1811	1781
Log Likelihood	2158	2200	2158
Likelihood ratio	$\chi^2(1)=75.1$; p=.000	$\chi^2(1)=64.5$; p=.000	$\chi^2(2)=75.2$; p=.000

** p < .01; *** p < .001

Notes: Logistic regression analyses, standard errors in parentheses. 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 took place within four years of the survey date and 0 if it did not. The predictors are the imputed percentage of respondents at the 90th income or education percentile favoring the proposed policy change.

Table 6. The Preference-Policy Link Across Issue Domains

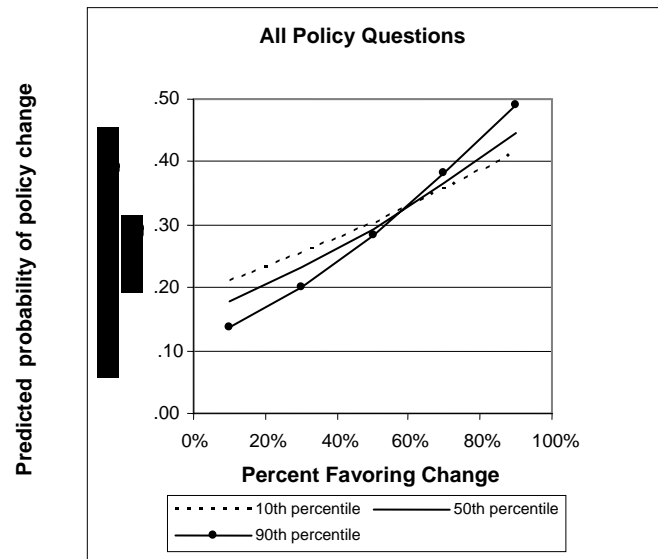|	N	50th Percentile	90th Percentile
All domestic policies	1421	2.9 (.3)	3.5 (.3)
All economic policies	398	2.6 (.6)	3.8 (.6)
Business-related policies	89	2.3 (1.2)	4.1 (1.4)
Non-economic policies	109	1.8 (1.3)	3.6 (1.5)

Notes: Table shows logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses from 8 equations. 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 took place within four years of the survey date and 0 if it did not. The predictors are the imputed percentage of respondents at the 50th or 90th income percentile favoring the proposed policy change.

Economic policies include all questions concerning taxation, economic and labor policy, and budgetary policy.

Business-related policies are a subset of economic policies and include mandated unpaid leave of employment, minimum wage, tightening corporate financial regulations, right to strike, small business subsidies, mandated employer-supplied health care, greater enforcement of equal pay for women, corporate expense accounts, and increasing/decreasing corporate tax rates, depreciation, or the investment tax credit.
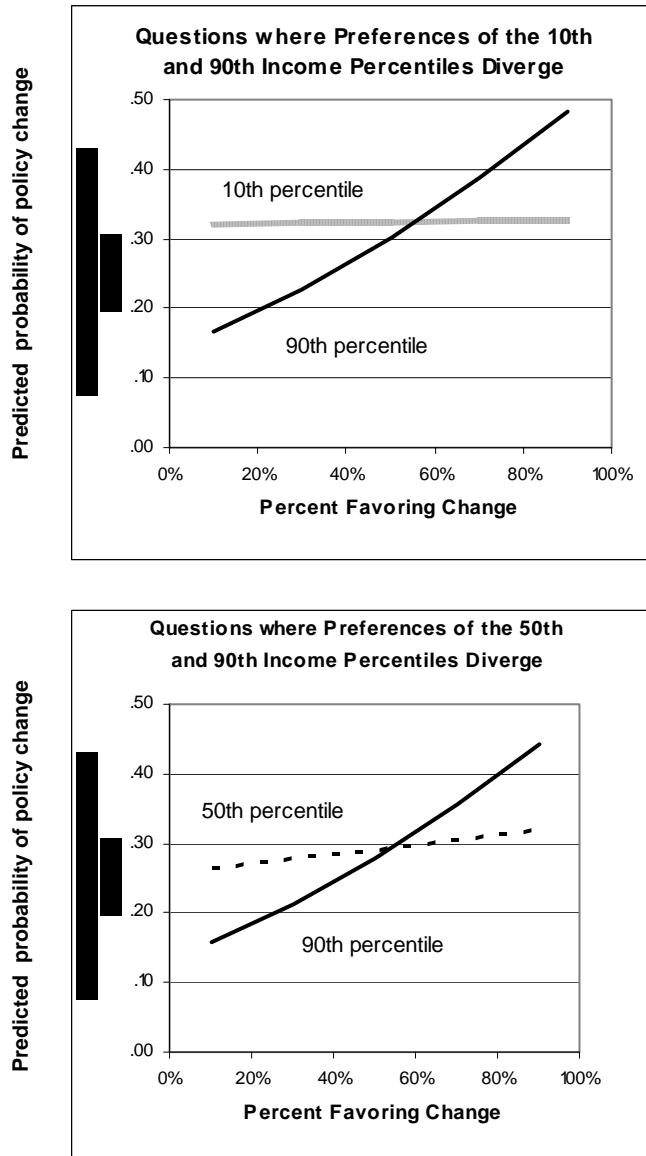
Non-economic policies include school prayer, abortion law, gays in the military, gay anti-discrimination laws, gay marriage/civil unions, stem cell research, marijuana legalization, voting by mail/internet, gun registration requirements or waiting periods, human cloning, DUI programs, anti-drug programs for children, child support penalties, restrictions on sex offenders, changing the name of National Airport, DNA testing for the unknown soldier, giving Elian Gonzalez residency, and MLK national holiday.

Figure 1. Preference/Policy Link for the 10th, 50th, and 90th Income Percentiles

Predicted probabilities are based on the logistic regressions reported in Table 1.

Figure 2. Preference/Policy Link when Preferences across Income Groups Diverge

Questions where Preferences of the 10th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge

Predicted probability of policy change

.50
.40 — 10th percentile
.30
.20 — 90th percentile
.10
.00

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Percent Favoring Change

Questions where Preferences of the 50th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge

Predicted probability of policy change

.50
.40 — 50th percentile
.30
.20 — 90th percentile
.10
.00

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Percent Favoring Change

Predicted probabilities are based on the logistic regressions reported in table 2.
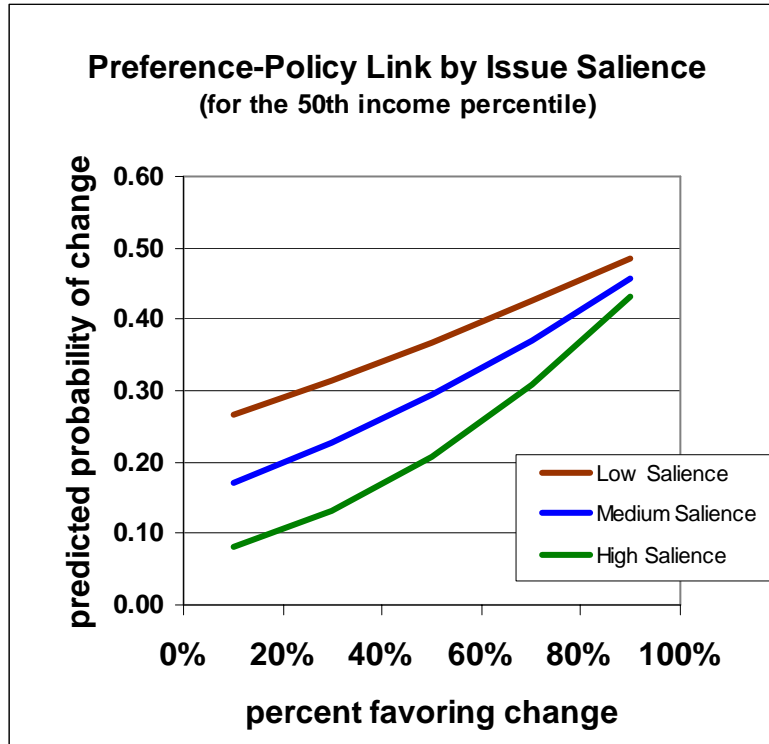
Figure 3

Figure 4a.
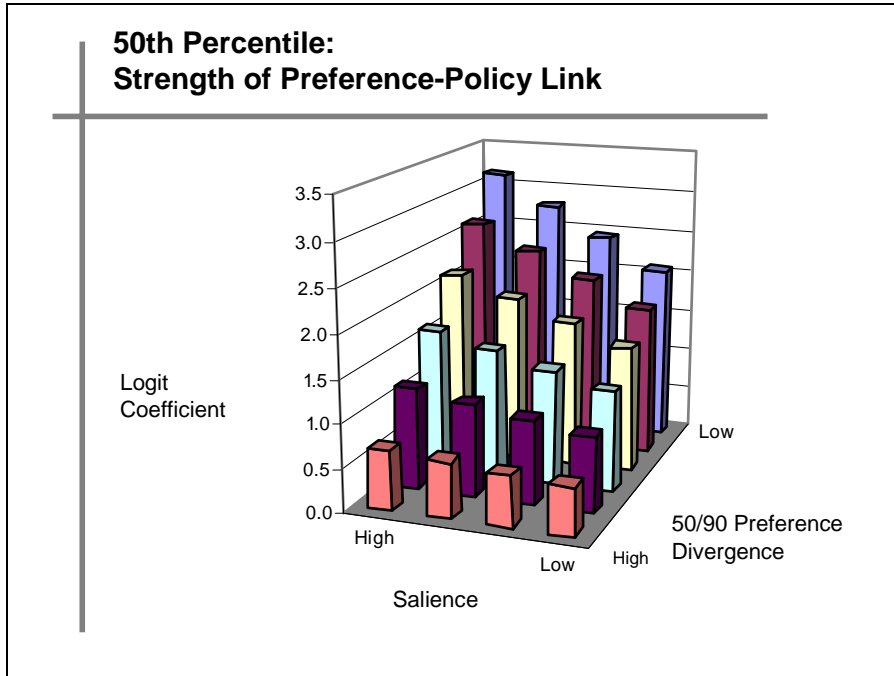Strength of the Preference/Policy Link by Salience and Preference Divergence, 50th Percentile

Figure 4b.
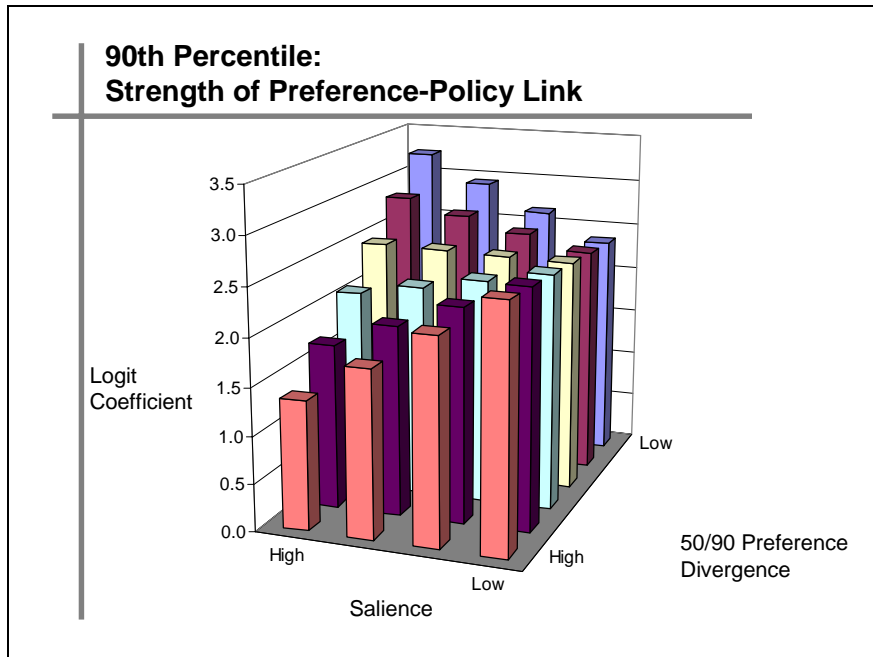Strength of the Preference/Policy Link by Salience and Preference Divergence, 90th Percentile
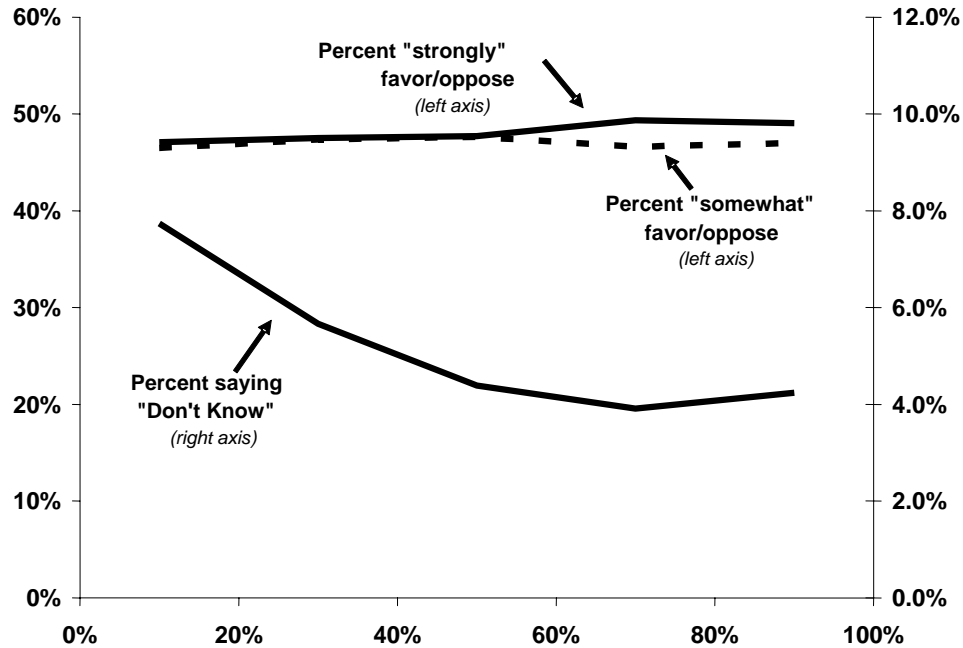
Figure 5. Opinion Holding and Opinion Strength by Income

Percent "Don't Know" is based on imputed percent of respondents saying "Don't Know" at the 10th, 30th, 50th, 70th, and 90th income levels. Percent strongly and somewhat favor/oppose is based on the 160 survey questions in the data set that ask respondents to qualify their support or opposition in this way.

Figure 6. Level of Political Involvement by Income

Self-Reported Turnout
(2000 Current Population Survey)

Percent Working in a Political Campaign
(1988 American Citizen Particiaption Survey)

Average Political Donation
(1988 American Citizen Particiaption Survey)