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Representing the rich

Economic and political inequality in established democracies

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CHAPTER 4

Unequal Representation in Party Platforms

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the role of political parties in creating the unequal policy representation which the previous chapters have demonstrated. Political parties have long been a fundamental institution in democratic theory and practice, and for that reason they are central to the study of general representation. Given the role of parties as the vehicle that translates citizen demands into policies, it is equally sensible and pertinent to incorporate parties into the analysis of unequal representation. The question that guides this chapter is whether unequal responsiveness to rich and poor citizens is already present at an early stage in the policy process, namely in the election manifestos of parties. Furthermore, I consider differences in biased representation between left and right parties.

Such an analysis of income inequality in party responsiveness makes two contributions to the literature on unequal representation. First, it clarifies a major link in the chain of representation and therefore adds to our knowledge of the relevant causal mechanisms. Second, the existence of large-scale data on party platforms allows for an investigation of representation in a broader array of countries, years and policy areas than would be possible by looking at policy outcomes. We may say, hence, that this analysis adds both *depth* and

breadth to the existing literature.

Focused on links between party positioning and public attitudes, the chapter develops several hypotheses. The first hypothesis centers on political responsiveness averaged across party platforms to the demands of rich and poor citizens. I hypothesize that the structural and instrumental privileges that wealthier voters command in a polity should lead to a pattern where parties on average respond more to the wants of wealthier than of poorer voters. A further set of hypotheses moves beyond the pooling of all parties and focuses instead on responsiveness of particular party types. I hypothesize that left and right party families can be expected to mirror the expressed wants of some voters more than others, in line with the respective constituencies of these party families. Hence, left-oriented parties can be expected to more strongly take up the wants of poorer than of richer voters, whereas right-oriented parties can be expected to more strongly champion the wants of richer than poorer voters. Even if differences in party families do not manifest themselves in such strong contrasts, I in any event expect that any privileged representation of richer voters (poorer voters) should be more modest (stronger) among left than among right parties.

These expectations are tested by matching data on individual-level public opinion to party-year data on party platforms. Drawing on a range of multi-country survey instruments – including multiple waves of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and Asiabarometer Survey (ABS) – I gauge support, across various points on a country-year's income distribution, for a range of policy issues ranging from education to environmental regulation. These measures of individual-level support in a given country-issue-year can then be matched to measures of political parties' electoral platforms in that country-issue-year. To do so, I draw on the Manifesto Project Database (MPD), gauging a party platform's attention to a given issue and direction of proposed policy development. Given the reach of these two datasets, the analysis can cover a substantial period of time, 1985 through 2015, in a substantial swath of thirty-eight countries – a larger empirical sample than previous studies of unequal representation.

This investigation provides substantial empirical support for both sets of expectations about responsiveness in party platforms. I find in general that the average weight of public opinion tends to get taken-up or at least mirrored in party positions, averaged across parties and issues. I also find, however, that parties mirror or take-up the preferences of wealthier respondents more than those of poorer respondents. Focusing on the patterns across party families, I find clear differences in the responsiveness of left-wing parties compared to more right-wing parties. Against my expectations, both left-wing and right-wing parties appear

to respond or mirror more closely the preferences of wealthier than poorer respondents. But this pattern is substantially less skewed than applies to right-wing parties. As expected, hence, left-wing parties take positions that more closely mirror or respond to the preferences of poorer respondents, and less closely mirror preferences of richer respondents, than do right-wing parties. And right-wing parties display more unequal responsiveness compared to the general average or to left-wing parties, and there is even some evidence that they not only ignore but go against the wants of poorer respondents. Altogether, the study provides substantial evidence that the party road to substantive representation is a meaningful one, but it is a winding one, with faster and easier routes for wealthier than poorer citizens.

4.2 FRAMEWORK

As noted in earlier chapters, previous studies of unequal representation have uncovered strong evidence that American politics is biased in favor of the demands of the rich. However, there are still questions regarding the generalizability of the dominant finding based on patterns in the United States to other polities, and regarding the causal mechanisms that underlie unequal representation. In other words, the current literature is limited in *breadth* and *depth*.

In terms of depth, the focus on correlational links between political outcomes and policy preferences across the income spectrum leaves ambiguous what the basis of unequal substantive representation might actually be. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, the studies that have explored possible mechanisms have been contained to clarification of U.S. experience, with the cross-national studies of unequal representation articulated with very little attention to mechanisms. The result of this lack of depth with respect to identifying and empirically exploring mechanisms is that it is unclear what the basis of a given responsiveness problem actually is. This in turn makes it hard to know where to focus one's energies to reform democratic processes towards improved representation.

Existing studies tend also to have an important shortcoming in terms of *breadth*. In this regard, the ongoing problem remains that the research designs linking survey-data to data on policy outcomes have limited degrees-of-freedom in terms of cross-national, cross-issue and over-time variation, which hampers causal inferences about representation. While chapters 2 and 3 represent clear advances in this regard, they do illustrate a common trade-off: some studies analyze many policy areas within one country (Gilens and Page, 2014; Elsässer, Hense and Schäfer, 2017; Persson and Gilljam, 2017), while others analyze one policy area in many

countries (Bartels, 2015; Peters and Ensink, 2015). To truly gauge the empirical reach and robustness of apparent unequal representation, both in geographical terms and in terms of policy issues, an analysis of many policy areas in many countries would be preferable.

An important place to begin such broadening and deepening of unequal representation is to explore the extent to which political preferences of rich and poor voters are actually reflected in subsequent party platforms on various policy areas. This argues in favor of combining the literature on unequal representation with the substantial literature on party responsiveness. The latter has explored many important questions, key among which is whether parties in the aggregate respond to citizens' policy preferences and priorities. Here, many studies have presented supporting evidence for such responsiveness (e.g. Dalton, 1985; Miller *et al.*, 1999; Adams *et al.*, 2004). Subsequent studies have expanded on this by asking whether responsiveness differs by party type (Iversen, 1994a, 1994b; Adams, Haupt and Stoll, 2009; Klüver and Spoon, 2016), by election type (Spoon and Klüver, 2014), by dimension of political competition (Mattila and Raunio, 2012; Dalton, 2017) and – to a limited extent – by citizens' characteristics (Adams and Ezrow, 2009; McEvoy, 2012; Dolný and Baboš, 2015).

Surprisingly, however, these studies on various aspects of party responsiveness have said very little about the possibility of economic-based inequality. The conceptualization of opinion has not, for instance, considered how the role of economic inequality might bring about party responsiveness. A partial, important exception is the study of Giger, Rosset and Bernauer (2012) into variation in ideological congruence by income tercile, but this study provides a very limited reach in time and number of countries. More importantly, its focus on left-right placements for parties and citizens has many shortcomings. Among other things, the left-right scale may confuse consistency with extremity (Broockman, 2016), it can mean different things to different groups in society (Bauer *et al.*, 2017) or change in meaning over time (De Vries, Hakhverdian and Lancee, 2013), and it can lead to overly rosy conclusions about the quality of representation (Schakel and Hakhverdian, 2018).⁵⁹

I argue that an important part of political representation involves party responsiveness to wealthy and poor citizen preferences. Two reasons, in particular, make it important to study unequal representation at the level of political parties. The first is one that is shared with all studies of party representation, namely that parties are the primary vehicle by which popular demands are aggregated and translated into policy. As a result, they potentially form a major avenue for reform to remedy any defects in representation.

⁵⁹ The introductory chapter contains a more extensive discussion of ideological indices like the left-right scale. To be clear, I am not arguing that the left-right scale is useless; in fact, it plays a large role in this chapter. Instead, I question the value of the left-right scale *as a measure of representation*.

Secondly, election manifestos signify political parties entering the electoral arena, and here they have a clear incentive to appeal to as many potential voters as possible. Once parties enter the parliamentary arena and, in some cases, the governmental arena, their actions become much less public. This is the stage in which possible backdoor lobbying takes place, where politicians may be aided or frustrated by rich individuals or interest groups in the process of designing, passing and implementing policy. Of course, these lobbying practices may not be equally present in all times and places, and one can also imagine this offering access to groups that represent the demands of the poor. Still, it is likely that, if we find evidence of unequal representation in party platforms, this will be amplified further in the policy process.⁶⁰

This, of course, begs the question whether election promises can be expected to be biased towards the preferences of the rich. I argue that, despite different parties having different electorates and potentially different motives, the positions advanced by all parties in the aggregate can be expected to cater more strongly to the wealthy than to the poor. Simply put, the rich possess more resources that can be expected to help parties win a favorable election outcome. This is most obvious in settings where citizens with high incomes can donate money to political campaigns (Rigby and Wright, 2013). Even in more encompassing, inclusive democratic systems, however, high-income citizens can command more political resources than low- and middle-income citizens in the form of political participation, political information, ties to powerful interest groups and structural power as employers and investors (Block, 1977; Gallego, 2007; Carroll, Fennema and Heemskerk, 2010; Marien, Hooghe and Quintelier, 2010).

Furthermore, it is perfect possible – indeed, very plausible – that biased responsiveness takes place within specific sections of the electorate. For example, a socialist party may listen more to high-income socialist voters than to low-income socialist voters. Both may be below the median income in a given country-year. However, if this same bias applies to most parties, the result is that party platforms in the aggregate reflect the views of the rich more than the views of the poor. These considerations underlie the first hypothesis, a general expectation of income inequality of representation in party position-taking of all parties on average:

Hypothesis 1: Party platforms generally mirror the policy wants of wealthier voters more strongly than the policy wants of poorer voters.

This first hypothesis is relevant to a general sense of how a party system can be expected

⁶⁰ One suggestive piece of evidence in support of this comes from an analysis of coalition agreements in the Netherlands by Wiemer Bolhuis (2018). Bolhuis shows that these coalition agreements have, in the past three decades, led to a lower tax burden on corporations than what was planned in the programs of the coalition parties. The opposite applies to the tax burden on labor.

to react to the wants of rich and poor citizens. But of course, such a net or bottom-line portrait paints over differences between particular parties that surely color the substantive representation in the position-taking of parties. The second set of hypotheses, hence, focuses on the substantive responsiveness of particular party families. I expect, in particular, that left and right party families take up the expressed demands of some voters more than others, reflecting the respective constituencies of these party families. The difference between party families, and indeed between any given party in a given election cycle, is a complex matter, which belies attempts to pigeon-hole party families. Broad and basic cleavages can be identified, however. And these matter for understanding the basic party-political road to substantive representation.

Left parties and right parties can be expected to have quite different constituencies with respect to positions along the polity's income spectrum. The character and potential multidimensionality of left and right positioning of voters and parties in advanced democracies continues to fascinate comparativists (Kriesi *et al.*, 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009; Hooghe *et al.*, 2010; Bakker *et al.*, 2015). Surviving across waves of changes in the ideological landscape, a number of differences should still cleave left and right parties and their representation across the socioeconomic spectrum. On the economic dimension, egalitarianism and pro-state interventionism to promote economic equality remains a central dividing line between left and right (Korpi, 1983; Castles and Mair, 1984; Boix, 1998). Left-wing voters and parties embrace interventionist government policies, both macro- and micro-economic, to regulate and humanize market economies and promote egalitarianism and wellbeing of the poor (Bobbio, 1996; Fehr, Naef and Schmidt, 2006). Right-wing voters and parties, meanwhile, tend not just to reject the importance of such egalitarianism or the needs of the less-well-off, but in any event to be skeptical about the efficacy and equity of statist economic intervention. And on the more cultural and nationalist-cosmopolitan dimension, left-wing and right-wing parties can be expected to differ substantially on immigration, integration, cultural nationalism and status roles with respect to gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality (Hooghe *et al.*, 2010; Burgoon, 2013; Van Elsas and Van der Brug, 2015; Rooduijn *et al.*, 2017).

Lest these differences between left-wing and right-parties seem self-evident or perhaps even true by definition, it is worth pointing out that this is actually not the case. Some authors posit that different party families have converged to a common position, with pressures emanating from economic globalization often invoked as the source of this convergence (Cusack, 1997, p. 379). And as we have seen in the introductory chapter, there are several studies of unequal representation in the United States which conclude that the right-wing

Republican party does a better job of representing the poor than does the relatively more left-wing Democratic party (Gilens, 2012, pp. 178–192; Hayes, 2013), even in campaign platforms (Rigby and Wright, 2013).

Nevertheless, I expect that the traditional differences between left-wing and right-wing parties matter to substantive responsiveness in the party systems of industrialized democracies. Left-oriented parties can be expected to more strongly mirror the wants of poorer voters, indeed championing economically egalitarian goals through the policy spectrum with respect to economic and social policy areas. Conversely, right-oriented parties can be expected to focus more on the needs of wealthier constituents, and to champion wants of these voters again throughout the range of policy realms on which parties take stances. Even if differences in party families do not manifest themselves in strong contrasts, however, I expect that any privileged representation of richer voters (poorer voters) should be more modest (stronger) among left than among right parties. Such reasoning supports three hypotheses about left- and right-wing party families. The first is the most general:

Hypothesis 2a: Left-wing parties have platforms that express less privileged responsiveness to richer voters (and less under-responsiveness of poorer voters) than do right-wing parties.

One can also deduce stronger versions of this hypothesis focused on starker differences in the responsiveness of left-oriented versus right-oriented parties. One might expect, in particular, that the left favors the poor *over* the rich, while the right favors the rich *over* the poor, *ceteris paribus*. If so, there are two stronger variants of the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b: Left-oriented parties can be expected to more strongly take up or mirror the wants of poorer rather than of richer voters.

Hypothesis 2c: Right-oriented parties can be expected to more strongly champion the wants of richer than of poorer voters.

Note that hypothesis 2a describes a necessary condition for hypotheses 2b and 2c to apply. If 2b and 2c are supported, the same automatically goes for 2a, but the reverse is not necessarily true.

Many other more fine-grained hypotheses are conceivable, for instance hypotheses about particular party families or sub-families, about particular issue areas, and about possible conditions that plausibly (*ex ante*) moderate links between opinions and party positioning.

But I take the above hypotheses as the major, if broad, starting points to better understand substantive representation via parties. The four hypotheses, as stated, can be operationalized in many ways, varying by conceptualizations of particular party families, of issue areas, and of positions on the income spectrum and of public opinion. I consider such nuances as (important) matters for the empirical enterprise of this study.

4.3 DATA AND METHODS

To analyze the hypotheses above, I match multiple datasets on citizen attitudes towards specific policies to high-quality data on party positions towards such policies. The combination allows me to explore a number of politicized policy issues in a substantial cross-section of countries over a substantial time period. The resulting dataset involves a large sample of country-year-issues that provide leverage to judge both the hypotheses on party-system responsiveness and on left and right party families.

Independent variables

Citizen attitudes are gathered from several sources, the most prominent of which is the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), in particular the ISSP's repeated Role of Government modules, included in four waves so far (in 1985, 1990, 1996 and 2006).⁶¹ These modules contain questions on various policy preferences. The most useful, repeated questions ask respondents whether they want to see more or less government spending in different areas.⁶² I have already used this module in chapter 2, and since I treat the data in much the same way here, I will be briefer on some points relating to the operationalization. In contrast to chapter 2, I use a wider range of questions, regarding culture and the arts, defense, education, the environment, law and order, and the welfare state. Furthermore, the same question battery was included in the fourth wave of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), conducted between 2011 and 2016, and the 2003 wave of the Asiabarometer. These were also added to the dataset whenever they could be matched to the dependent variable. Table A4.1 in the appendix lists the countries and years used in the analysis.

Two points about the policy issues in the survey questions should be noted. Firstly, the CSES does not contain items on culture and the environment, so I only match the remaining four items to the dependent variable. Secondly, there is not one overarching question on spending preferences with regard to the welfare state. Instead, there are three questions that cover three core parts of the welfare state: pensions, unemployment and healthcare. Since

61 The module was also included in the 2016 survey, but this is too recent to match to the dependent variable.

62 The specific wording is: "Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say 'much more', it might require a tax increase to pay for it."

the Manifesto Project Database (the basis of the outcome variables to be discussed below) only has one category covering the welfare state, and since these three parts tie in well with the content of this category, I use the unweighted mean of the three items as measures of welfare state preferences.

The interpretation of these survey questions is much the same as in chapter 2. While the nominal focus of the questions is on spending, and this is not problematic per se for my purposes, it is likely that responses to the question are not purely based on spending preferences. That is, the most likely interpretation by lay-citizens confronted with such a survey question does not involve complicated fiscal calculations but rather a simple judgment of whether there should be more or less policy in a certain area.⁶³

When it comes to measuring preferences for more or less policy at different levels of the income distribution, I use the same procedure as in chapter 2. Throughout the analysis, I focus on two different conceptions of low versus high income positioning: the first versus fifth quintiles, and the tenth versus ninetieth percentiles.⁶⁴ Like in chapter 2, the preferences can theoretically vary between -100, denoting unanimous support for much less spending among a given income group, and 100, denoting unanimous support for much more spending.

As a descriptive overview of the opinion measures, Figure 4.1 presents the sample means for the tenth and ninetieth income percentiles pooled across all sampled country-years (ordered by the tenth percentile mean).⁶⁵ This reveals, firstly, that there are clear differences in support for spending across issues. Education in particular stands out as a policy area with strong support for increased spending, while in most country-years, respondents would like to see less defense spending. Secondly, preference gaps between rich and poor are most pronounced for defense, the environment and especially the welfare state, whereas no clear differences are discernible for education, crime and culture. In light of the estimation, it should be noted that preferences are not completely collinear for the latter issues; it is simply the case that the difference between rich and poor is positive in some country-years and negative in others. Finally, two reassuring conclusions may be drawn from the figure: respondents do not mindlessly favor increased spending across the board, as judged from the variation between issues, and the preferences of low incomes are not necessarily less ‘realistic’ than those of high incomes, as judged by the fact that the former do not systematically favor more spending than the latter.

63 For the sake of brevity, I will still refer to the independent variables as spending preferences in some places.

64 Since chapter 2 showed that the other measures – the first versus third terciles and the fifth versus ninety-fifth percentiles – led to much the same findings, I do not present these in the text here. Additional analyses show that the main findings of this chapter are reproduced with those measures (results available upon request).

65 Following my recoding, the means can theoretically vary between -100, denoting unanimous support for much less spending, and 100, denoting unanimous support for much more spending.

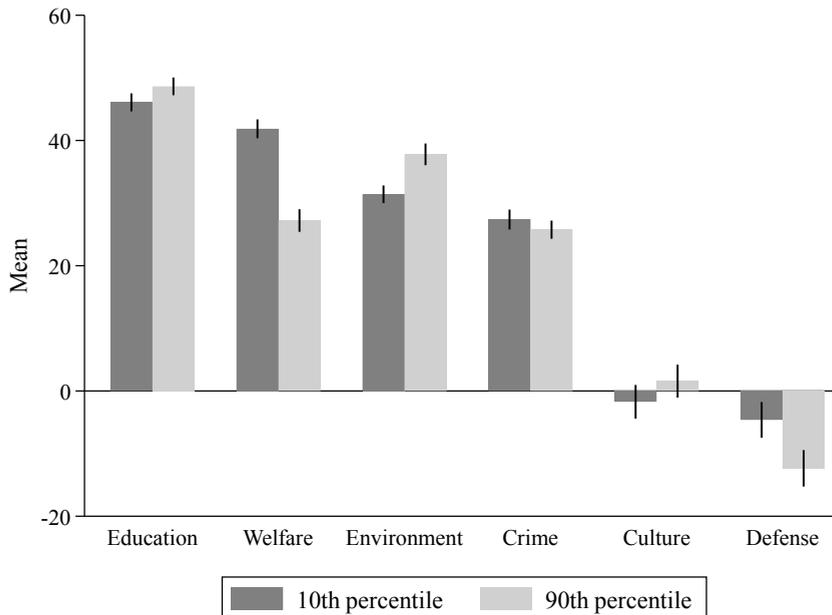


Figure 4.1: Mean spending preferences of low and high incomes by issue (error bars indicate one standard error above and below the mean)

Dependent variables

The dependent variables consist of party positions on the same issues as discussed above. For this, I turn to the data of the Manifesto Project Database (MPD) (Klingemann *et al.*, 2007). The MPD uses content analysis to code the percentage of quasi-sentences in party manifestos devoted to a range of topics. In this case, I use the percentages devoted to the issues of culture, defense, education, the environment, law and order, and the welfare state, that closely match the independent variables. Combining the survey data with the MPD produces a dataset with thirty-eight countries, ninety-one country-years and 493 country-year-issues. In comparison, the data used in chapter 2 included twenty countries, forty-four country-years and 130 country-year-issues.

Though some parts of party programs are retrospective, reflecting on past developments, they are mostly *prospective*, laying out the party's plans for the future (Dolezal *et al.*, 2018; Müller, 2018). Furthermore, the MPD not only records direct mentions of spending increases in each area, but also more general increases in policy activity, like the protection of natural resources under environmental policy. For both reasons, the MPD fits well with the measures of public opinion, such that we may expect a preference for increased spending in a certain area to lead to increased attention by parties in that same area. In other words, both the

independent and dependent variables are measured in terms of levels, but they measure demands for, and plans for, future changes.

For three of the six issues – defense, education and the welfare state – the MPD codes positive references (e.g. more spending) as well as negative references (e.g. less spending). In those cases, the dependent variable subtracts the negative references from the positive ones. For the other three areas, only positive references are recorded and the dependent variable only consists of these. Though this may seem problematic, negative references are very rare on the three issues where they are coded, so it makes little difference to the measures either way. It seems that a party which wants to cut back the welfare state, for example, does not talk a lot about cutting welfare in their program but simply does not talk about the welfare state at all (Klingemann *et al.*, 2007).

To go from the percentages in the MPD to the main dependent variable, I first calculate the average attention devoted to each issue in each country-year, weighted by the seat share of the parties. Within each party, linear interpolation is used to estimate how relative attention shifts between elections. Next, I take the natural logarithm of this average and subtract the natural logarithm of the negative attention whenever available (adding 0.5 to both to avoid zeroes) (see Lowe *et al.*, 2011). Though the logarithms are more difficult to interpret, they neatly transform the dependent variable into a normal distribution. The same dependent variable is also calculated separately for left-wing parties and right-wing parties. Left-wing parties are those grouped under the social democratic, socialist and ecologist party families in the MPD, while liberal and conservative parties are right-wing.

In the baseline models, the dependent variable is measured one year after the survey. The reasoning here is that, although it takes some time for parties to respond to public opinion, responsiveness in party platforms can occur quicker than responsiveness in policy outcomes. In studies that focus on the latter, including chapters 2 and 3, a lag of four years or more is common (e.g. Gilens, 2012; Wrátil, 2019). As control variables, I again include factors that may correlate with both the measured citizen attitudes and party positions. These include GDP per capita (measured in constant 2010 U.S. dollars), annual growth in GDP per capita, unemployment rate and dummies for both the issues and survey years. Descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent and control variables are provided in Table A4.2 of the appendix.

The baseline models are two-level random intercept models, with country-year-issues as units and countries as clusters (as in Schakel, Burgoon and Hakhverdian, 2020). I test for

unequal representation by focusing in the baseline estimations on the roles of low- and of high-income attitudes in separate models and also combined, so as to consider their relative correlation with subsequent party positions. All models have robust-clustered standard errors (clustered by country, the level 2 variable) to address remaining country-specific correlation of errors and heteroscedasticity. The same setup will be used to explore differences between left- and right-wing parties. The last set of specifications focuses on important alternatives to these baseline models. These include alternative measures of unequal representation, such as direct measures of arithmetic differences between rich and poor attitudes. But the alternative models also include different specifications with respect to controls, embedding of the multi-level data, and alternative estimators.

4.4 FINDINGS

Before presenting the main analysis, I note that the preferences of citizens in general, captured by focusing the average attitudes of all respondents or attitudes of those with median incomes, do tend to correlate with party platforms on a given issue. In supplementary analysis of general representation,⁶⁶ I find that a one-standard-deviation increase in preferences leads to an increase in party attention of one third of a standard deviation ($p < 0.01$). This corroborates the findings of previous work on party representation, discussed above, that many party systems provide party responsiveness to median voter preferences. Such patterns increase my confidence in the validity of the current data and approach to explore inequalities in responsiveness.

Baseline models

Table 4.1 introduces the main results testing hypothesis 1 – that party positions on issues will tend to be more responsive to the issue-specific wants of rich than of poor voters. The Table summarizes the baseline models with two different measurements of low and high incomes: the tenth and ninetieth percentiles (models 1–3) and the first and fifth quintile (models 4–6). The general picture emerging from both is the same: in separate models, both low incomes and high incomes have an effect on party attention, but this effect is stronger for the latter than the former. Crucially, when both are included in the same model, the effect stays significant for high incomes but drops sharply for low incomes. This shows a clear income bias in party representation, in line with hypothesis 1.

⁶⁶ Since such general representation is not the subject of my hypotheses, the full results are relegated to online appendix 4A (Table 4A.1).

Table 4.1: Random intercept models of logged party attention, $t+1$

	Model 1 (P10)	Model 2 (P90)	Model 3 (P10/P90)	Model 4 (Q1)	Model 5 (Q5)	Model 6 (Q1/Q5)
Low income preferences	0.009*** (0.002)	-	-0.006 (0.005)	0.009*** (0.002)	-	-0.004 (0.005)
High income preferences	-	0.012*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.005)	-	0.012*** (0.002)	0.015*** (0.005)
Logged GDP (t)	0.036 (0.069)	0.092 (0.072)	0.092 (0.072)	0.036 (0.069)	0.087 (0.072)	0.087 (0.071)
Growth (t)	0.001 (0.012)	0.001 (0.012)	0.000 (0.012)	0.001 (0.012)	0.001 (0.012)	0.000 (0.012)
Unemployment (t)	-0.008 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.008 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)
Issue dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	wYes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.483 (0.711)	-0.112 (0.753)	-0.142 (0.757)	0.484 (0.714)	-0.061 (0.750)	-0.077 (0.754)
N	493	493	493	493	493	493
Countries	38	38	38	38	38	38
AIC	917.26	896.40	895.36	916.38	897.88	898.41

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Figure 4.2 displays the marginal effects of the tenth and ninetieth income percentiles, corresponding to model 3 in Table 4.51 (P10/P90). Other variables are held at their means. This underlines the finding that preferences of low-income respondents have no independent effect on the dependent variable, while the preferences of high-income respondents *do* have a strong effect.

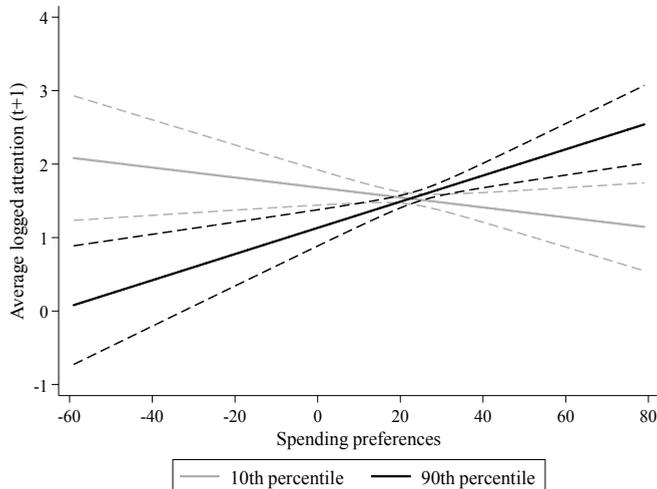


Figure 4.2: Predicted values of party attention by spending preferences of low- and high-income groups (shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals)

Left- and right-wing parties

Table 4.2 and 4.3 split out the baseline models by left-wing and right-wing parties.⁶⁷ Responsiveness among left-wing parties is similar for low and high incomes, at least in the separate models. When the two predictors are included in the same models, however, a similar pattern emerges as before: the coefficient of high incomes stays positive, on the edge of statistical significance, while the coefficient of low incomes is negligible. Nevertheless, this contrasts with Table 4.3, which shows a larger gap between the effects of low and high incomes. The most remarkable finding here is that the effect of low income preferences is significantly negative in the combined models. This suggests that, conditional on responding to high income preferences, right-wing parties actively go against the preferences of low incomes. It is doubtful whether this is a substantively meaningful result. An alternative explanation is that this is an artifact of the substantial collinearity between the preferences of low and high incomes, though this does not explain why this only occurs for right-wing parties.⁶⁸ All in all, these findings provide support for hypotheses 2a and 2c, but not 2b.

Table 4.2: Random intercept models of logged attention by *left-wing parties*, $t+1$

	Model 1 (P10)	Model 2 (P90)	Model 3 (P10/P90)	Model 4 (Q1)	Model 5 (Q5)	Model 6 (Q1/Q5)
Low income preferences	0.009 ^{***} (0.003)	-	-0.001 (0.006)	0.009 ^{***} (0.003)	-	0.001 (0.006)
High income preferences	-	0.011 ^{***} (0.004)	0.012 [*] (0.007)	-	0.010 ^{***} (0.004)	0.010 (0.006)
Logged GDP (t)	0.214 ^{**} (0.091)	0.249 ^{**} (0.100)	0.249 ^{**} (0.099)	0.215 ^{**} (0.091)	0.246 ^{**} (0.099)	0.246 ^{**} (0.099)
Growth (t)	-0.028 [*] (0.017)	-0.027 (0.017)	-0.027 (0.017)	-0.029 [*] (0.017)	-0.027 (0.017)	-0.027 (0.017)
Unemployment (t)	0.009 (0.013)	0.010 (0.014)	0.010 (0.014)	0.009 (0.013)	0.010 (0.014)	0.010 (0.014)
Issue dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	-1.404 (0.941)	-1.794 [*] (1.041)	-1.794 [*] (1.041)	-1.408 (0.944)	-1.757 [*] (1.041)	-1.757 [*] (1.039)
N	473	473	473	473	473	473
Countries	37	37	37	37	37	37
AIC	1147.51	1141.88	1143.83	1146.96	1142.45	1144.44

^{*} $p < 0.10$, ^{**} $p < 0.05$, ^{***} $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Interestingly, and in line with the discussion in the theoretical framework, there also seems to be unequal responsiveness to parties' own voters. If I regress attention by right-wing parties

67 There are slightly fewer observations in the models for left- and right-wing parties than in the baseline models, because, for the sake of comparability, I only include country-years where the MPD coded at least one left-wing party and at least one right-wing party.

68 The correlation between the tenth and ninetieth income percentiles is around 0.8-0.9, depending on the issue. Martin Gilens, dealing with the same issue, explains that "when predictors with correlated measurement errors are included simultaneously in the same equation, the coefficients for the predictors with the weakest true relationship to the outcome being measured (in my analyses, the coefficients for the lowest income level) may be unreliable and even incorrectly signed" (Gilens, 2012, p. 253).

on the preferences of voters of right-wing parties with high incomes and the preferences of voters of right-wing parties with low incomes, the former has a stronger effect than the latter (see online appendix 4A, Table 4A.2). The same is true among left-wing parties if rich and poor left-wing voters are compared, though the gap is again smaller than on the right (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.3) and, in some specifications, quite far from statistical significance (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.4).

Table 4.3: Random intercept models of logged attention by *right-wing parties*, $t+1$

	Model 1 (P10)	Model 2 (P90)	Model 3 (P10/P90)	Model 4 (Q1)	Model 5 (Q5)	Model 6 (Q1/Q5)
Low income preferences	0.008** (0.003)	-	-0.012' (0.007)	0.008** (0.003)	-	-0.011' (0.006)
High income preferences	-	0.012*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.006)	-	0.012*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.006)
Logged GDP (t)	-0.082 (0.089)	-0.015 (0.090)	-0.022 (0.093)	-0.082 (0.089)	-0.017 (0.090)	-0.024 (0.093)
Growth (t)	-0.005 (0.018)	0.003 (0.017)	-0.004 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.018)	-0.003 (0.017)	-0.004 (0.018)
Unemployment (t)	0.002 (0.011)	0.004 (0.011)	0.004 (0.011)	0.002 (0.011)	0.004 (0.011)	0.004 (0.011)
Issue dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.450 (0.911)	0.747 (0.917)	0.781 (0.955)	1.446 (0.913)	0.773 (0.918)	0.818 (0.954)
N	473	473	473	473	473	473
Countries	37	37	37	37	37	37
AIC	1165.31	1150.74	1146.40	1164.95	1150.83	1147.90

' $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

The preceding analyses have said little about the relative influence of low and high incomes compared to the middle. Given the primacy of the median voter in conventional democratic theory, one may expect that it is actually the latter which is represented best. The easiest way to test this is to estimate a model where party attention is predicted by the preferences of the low, middle and high incomes. If we do so, we find a strong, positive effect for the highest incomes and non-significant effects for both the middle and lowest incomes. However, these estimates are quite unstable as a result of extreme collinearity.

The obvious alternative to this is to estimate separate models where party attention is regressed on the preferences of various income groups. While this substitutes collinearity for omitted variable bias, to paraphrase Lax, Phillips and Zelizer (2019, p. 922), it nevertheless provides some insight into the relative influence of different groups. Figure 4.3 summarizes the results of such analysis. It displays the slope coefficients from a number of regression models which are identical to the baseline specification presented in Table 4.1, but each time

with a different income percentile as the main predictor. Furthermore, responsiveness is again split out for left and right parties.

Figure 4.3 shows a number of things which reinforce the previous analyses. Firstly, if anything, both left and right parties display unequal responsiveness, as indicated by the positive slope of income. Secondly, this unequal responsiveness seems to be stronger for right parties, as indicated by the steeper slope of income. Thirdly, and most strikingly, the effect of income appears to be non-linear, with the effect for the middle being closer to the bottom of the income distribution than to the top.

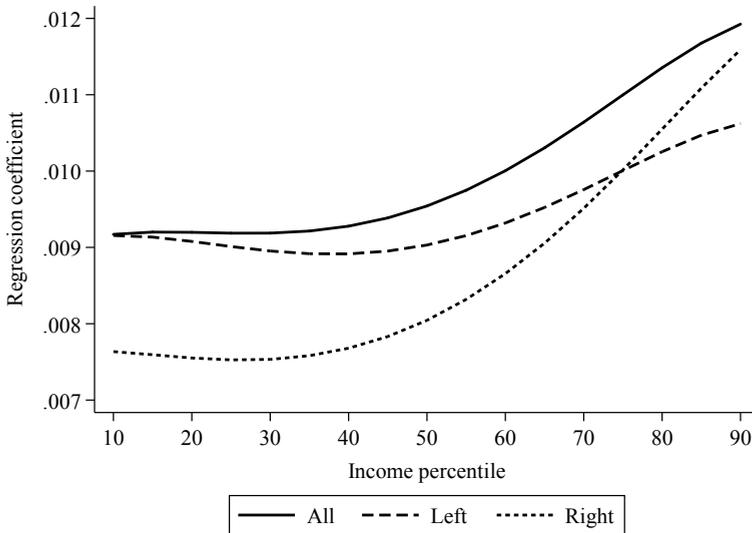


Figure 4.3: Effects of spending preferences at various income percentiles on responsiveness for all, left and right parties⁶⁹

Robustness checks

The next set of results addresses a number of important robustness and sensitivity checks. As in previous chapters, most of the full results of these additional analyses are relegated to the online appendix.

The first robustness check involves an alternative method to assess the relative influence of low and high incomes by simply taking the difference between the ninetieth and tenth percentile attitudes, *rich-minus-poor*, in a given country-topic-year. We have already seen this measure in chapter 2. Here, more positive (more negative) values capture situations where high-income voters want more (less) spending than do low-income voters. If the rich are

⁶⁹ The Figure does not include confidence intervals as they would render it unreadable. Essentially, all coefficients are significantly different from zero, but in most cases, they are not significantly different from each other.

more influential than the poor, higher values of *rich-minus-poor* should correlate positively with party attention. This specification is particularly useful for circumventing the problem of multicollinearity present in the data.

Table 4.4 summarizes results of testing this possibility for all parties (model 1), left-wing parties (model 2) and right-wing parties (model 3). All three models also control for the preferences of the median income percentile. For all parties combined, the *rich-minus-poor* variable has a strong positive effect, once again corroborating hypothesis 1b. Strikingly, models 2 and 3 indicate that the income gap in representation is mostly driven by right-wing parties, with a coefficient that is three times as large in model 3 as in model 2. The overall picture, then, is that right-wing parties are strongly biased towards the rich, while this bias is much smaller or possibly even non-existent among left-wing parties. But since they are not biased towards the poor and hence do not cancel out the bias of the right, the overall pattern is still one where the rich come out on top.

Table 4.4: Random intercept models of logged party attention with preference gaps

	Model 1 (All parties)	Model 2 (Left)	Model 3 (Right)
Rich-minus-poor preferences	0.012 ^{**} (0.005)	0.007 (0.006)	0.018 ^{***} (0.006)
Median income preferences	0.010 ^{***} (0.002)	0.009 ^{***} (0.004)	0.008 ^{***} (0.003)
Logged GDP(t)	0.075 (0.072)	0.236 ^{**} (0.096)	-0.045 (0.092)
Growth(t)	-0.003 (0.012)	-0.031 [*] (0.017)	-0.008 (0.018)
Unemployment(t)	-0.004 (0.007)	0.011 (0.014)	0.004 (0.011)
Issue dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	0.058 (0.768)	-1.637 (1.017)	1.036 (0.951)
<i>N</i>	493	473	473
Countries	38	37	37
AIC	901.27	1146.38	1150.98

^{*} $p < 0.10$, ^{**} $p < 0.05$, ^{***} $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

In line with Figure 4.3 above, calculating rich-minus-middle preferences and using this to predict party attention produces much the same findings. That is, we find a significant positive effect for all parties, a non-significant but still positive effect for left parties and a highly significant positive effect for right parties (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.5). Even compared to the middle, then, the rich are overrepresented.

Secondly, there is a clear possibility of reverse causation. Perhaps what I have termed general representation reflects the adoption of existing party positions by the public, and unequal representation reflects the fact that citizens with high incomes are more attentive to signals from parties than citizens with low incomes. This does not fully account for my findings, however, since including lagged dependent variables to the baseline models does not affect the significance of the main coefficients (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.6). Two caveats should be added to this. Firstly, I control for party attention at $t-2$ here. This is already strongly correlated with party attention at $t+1$ (0.87), and using a shorter lag would leave very little room for any other variable to have any effect.⁷⁰ Secondly, though the effects remain significant, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable does reduce the effect sizes. This is to be expected, however. In a similar vein, controlling for government spending as a percentage of GDP in each of the six policy areas, measured at t , does not affect the main results (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.7).

Thirdly, if the dependent variable is limited to the parties in the ruling coalition or current government, the effects stay much the same (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.8). This is also to be expected, as these parties normally have a majority of the seats in the legislature. Interestingly, general preferences have a somewhat weaker effect on the coalition parties, which may be due to the fact that the formation of a coalition is often not up to the public, introducing an intermediate step between public opinion and party positions. Furthermore, the gap between rich and poor is slightly bigger when the analysis is limited to the coalition. However, a full exploration of the dynamics behind this process is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Fourth, I can relax some of the assumptions I made in constructing the dependent variable. One of these assumptions is that parties change their positions in a linear way in between elections. If the analysis is limited to country-years where an election took place in the year following the survey, I find the same pattern of general but unequal responsiveness, suggesting that this particular assumption is not driving the results (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.9). This is backed up by another specification where the use of interpolation is eschewed altogether and instead the dependent variable is the average attention of parties at the next election, regardless of how many years this took place after the survey, while controlling for party attention at the time of the survey (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.10). Here it is important to note, however, that only the effect of high-income preferences continues to have a significant effect, with the effect of low income preferences falling below conventional levels of significance. Hence, this provides even stronger support for the notion that responsiveness is unequal. Lastly, choosing not to weigh parties by their seat share

⁷⁰ Using a lag at $t-1$ turns the main effects insignificant in some models, but this is especially true for the effect of low incomes. It is noteworthy that the effect of the *rich-minus-poor* variable survives even with party attention measured at t (results available upon request).

produces findings in line with the baseline models (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.11).

Fifth, the models so far have included various macro-level control variables but no micro-level controls. However, perhaps it is not income which is the real source of influence but a related variable. Education is particularly likely to cause a spurious relationship, since this is strongly correlated with income and has previously been discussed as a source of unequal representation (Bovens and Wille, 2017; see also chapter 3). As in chapter 3, I control for education by interacting income and education when calculating the predicted preferences. This allows me to compare the preferences of respondents with low incomes and median education to the preferences of respondents with high incomes and median education. Doing so reproduces the findings of the baseline models, indicating that responsiveness increasing with income, even while education is held constant (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.12).

A sixth set of alternative specifications involves alternative estimators. These include random intercept models with alternative embedding: alternative two-level models using country-topic and country-year as clusters (online appendix 4A, Tables 4A.13–4A.14); and three-level models involving country, topic and year (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.15). I also considered ordinary least squares models with country fixed effects or with jackknifed standard errors (online appendix 4A, Tables 4A.16–4A.17). All these specifications yield results in line with the baseline models.

As a final robustness check, I limit the main analysis from the full sample of democracies to those countries that can be labeled as established democracies, since this is the focus of the other chapters. As a rough approximation, I consider established democracies to be those countries that have a high national income and have had several decades of democratic governance.⁷¹ This leaves twenty-four out of thirty-eight countries in the sample (or seventy-four percent of all country-year-topics), and excludes mostly Eastern European countries, as well as Turkey, Mexico and South Africa. Repeating the analysis for this subset of the countries does not substantially change the findings, as there is still more responsiveness to high incomes than to low incomes (online appendix 4A, Table 4A.18). Incidentally, while inequalities in responsiveness are similar in established democracies and non-established democracies, the overall level of responsiveness seems to be somewhat higher in the former than in the latter. This, too, is something I leave for future research to further explore.

Policy

Finally, I briefly turn my attention to subsequent steps on the ‘party road’ to representation.

⁷¹ The World Bank considers countries to have a high-income economy if their national income was at least \$12,376 in 2018. Data on per capita GDP is taken from the World Bank, while data on the age of democracy is taken from the Quality of Government database.

All of the previous analyses focus on the effect of public preferences on party platforms, but I acknowledge that these platforms are significant for substantive representation only to the extent that they correlate with actual party behavior and, eventually, policy change. Previous research has found evidence for such a correlation (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994; Bräuning, 2005; Thomson *et al.*, 2017). But the data afford some leverage to supplement this research with my own analysis focused on the abovementioned manifesto measures and specifications. The analysis focuses on party platforms and policy change with regard to the welfare state, first and foremost because this is the policy area with the most detailed coding of policy across time and space, in the form of the Comparative Welfare Entitlements Dataset (Scruggs, Jahn and Kuitto, 2017). Furthermore, even though the welfare state is only one of the six issue areas in the main analysis, it is the most encompassing in terms of attention devoted to it in manifestos and in terms of budget size. It is also important with regard to unequal representation as the area with the largest preference gaps between rich and poor.

The full results of this analysis are again presented in the online appendix (see Tables 4B.1–4B.2 and accompanying text), but the main finding is that the position of coalition parties in a given country-year is a statistically and substantively significant, positive predictor of changes in welfare generosity in the years following the election. A one standard deviation increase in the independent variable leads to an increase of around a quarter of a standard deviation in the dependent variable ($p < 0.01$).⁷² I infer from these patterns that responsiveness in party manifestos is likely a meaningful step in the process of substantive representation.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to clarify a major path, or road, to substantive representation: whether individual-level preferences of the rich and poor on a range of policy areas translate into party-political stances. The reason to do so is that such clarification both broadens and deepens our understanding of the politics of unequal representation: broadening with respect to the number of country-issue-years that provide a basis for judging (key aspects) of substantive responsiveness in democratic polities; and deepening with respect to clarifying among the most obvious and important political-institutional mechanisms of interest aggregation in democratic polities that can be expected to give rise to the more distant links between high incomes and policy change.

With this mandate, the chapter hypothesized, and found substantial evidence supporting, that democracies are characterized by unequal substantive representation in party

72 This overlaps with and, hence, replicates a recent finding by Horn and Jensen (2017, pp. 387–389).

platforms. Party platforms tend to take up the direction of preferred policy on a range of issues that citizens express as their wants, but this responsiveness is substantially and statistically much stronger with respect to the wants of richer than poorer citizens. Also in line with expectations, left and right party families differ in who they most or least represent. Against one of my hypotheses, I find that left parties, not just right parties, tend to respond more closely to wealthier than to poorer societal preferences as expressed in public opinion instruments. But left parties are much less skewed than their right party-family counterparts in such “overrepresentation” of the rich; and right parties are in any event likely to listen much more to wealthy respondents while ignoring, or even taking positions that contradict, the wants of poorer respondents.

In combination with the previous two chapters, this chapter shows that unequal representation is widespread across time, space and policy areas. Moreover, we now know that this inequality is already present at an early stage in the policy process, namely in the electoral platforms of political parties. This has important implications for our understanding of unequal representation, suggesting that political inequality cannot be reduced to the demand side of political competition (that is, citizen input) but is also present at the supply side (that is, party positions). At the same time, our knowledge of the causal mechanisms behind unequal representation is still limited, largely due to data limitations. To get a more encompassing view of the relevant mechanisms, the final empirical chapter will adopt a very different approach from the large-N, quantitative analyses that we have seen so far, zooming in on one particular instance of policy change.