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The Presidency and Political Equality

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The Presidency and Political Equality

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Abstract

When black and white Americans want the president to do different things, who wins? When low income earners prefer different government action than do middle and high income earners, whose preferences are reflected in presidential behavior? Recent studies show that congressional behavior often most closely follows the preferences of the white and the wealthy, but we know relatively little about presidential behavior. Since the president and Congress make policy together, it is important to understand the extent of political equality in presidential behavior. We examine the degree to which presidents have provided equal representation to these groups over the past four decades. We compare the preferences of these groups for federal spending in various budget domains to presidents' subsequent budget proposals in those domains from 1974 to 2010. Over this period, presidents' proposals aligned more with the preferences of whites and high income earners. However, Republican presidents are driving this overall

pattern. Democratic presidents represent racial and income groups equally, but Republicans' proposals are much more consistent with the spending preferences of whites and high income earners. This pattern of representation reflects the composition of the president's party coalition and the spending preferences of groups within the party coalition.

Who gets what they want from government? That is, whose preferences for government policy are best reflected in the policies government creates? Sidney Verba (2003, 663) argued “the equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens” is “one of the bedrock principles in a democracy.” Yet, several recent studies of U.S. politics find that the wealthy and whites are more likely than the poor and racial/ethnic minorities to see their preferences reflected in government behavior and policy (e.g., Jacobs and Page 2005; Bartels 2008; Griffin and Newman 2008; Ellis 2012; Flavin 2012; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014). Additional works qualify, critique, and complicate these studies (e.g., Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Bhatti and Erikson 2011), finding that the degree of inequality in political outcomes varies across political contexts (e.g., Rigby and Wright 2011, 2013; Ellis 2013; Brunner, Ross, and Washington 2013; Flavin 2015), though few have argued that the American political system reflects the preferences of various income and racial groups equally. The vast majority of this literature examines the content of public policy or congressional behavior. We know much less about presidential representation of income and racial/ethnic groups. Although presidency scholars have made major strides in understanding when and how much presidential behavior mirrors public preferences (e.g., Cohen 1997; Erikson et al. 2002, Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Rottinghaus 2006; Druckman and Jacobs 2011), according to Druckman and Jacobs (2009), we have just begun to appreciate which groups’ preferences presidents represent best.

In this study, we seek a more complete understanding of whose preferences are best represented in presidential behavior. In doing so, we build on and contribute to a growing literature that examines inequality in political representation more broadly (e.g., Enns and Wlezien 2011). It is not a foregone conclusion that the patterns of inequality seen elsewhere in the American political system would also characterize the presidency. The president serves as a

national leader, rather a representative of a smaller, sometimes more homogeneous, constituency like members of Congress (Baker 2008), which can generate different incentives to represent specific groups. Moreover, presidential and congressional representation may differ given institutional differences in method of election, term length, term limits, and citizens' different expectations of these elected officials. For example, legislators who are retiring, thus free from electoral pressures to represent their constituents' preferences, behave differently than legislators running for reelection (e.g. Rothenberg and Sanders 2007). Since second-term presidents spend half their tenure in office without the possibility of reelection, unlike the vast majority of members of Congress, presidential behavior may differ from congressional behavior. If so, minority representation may vary significantly across the branches of government.

In the particular policy arena we study here, presidents' proposals for federal government spending, the president and members of Congress may often have different incentives for representation. Presumably, the public holds the President more accountable than members of Congress for the composition of the budget simply because the president proposes an entire budget. Members of Congress can request additional spending on areas of particular ideological or economic interest to their constituents, but members do not propose entire budgets, meaning they can often make requests without the hard choices the president must make: a dollar increase in one program means a dollar decrease in another or the president must bear the political cost of a bloated budget.

Moreover, it is important to examine equality of representation in the context of the presidency because the president plays the strongest and most direct role in representing citizens' preferences of any single actor in the American political system. A Member of Congress may represent her constituents well or poorly, but in the end, she is but one of 435 or 100 members in

a single chamber of a bicameral institution that comprises one of three branches of government. A constituent may be especially well represented by her member of the House, but that member has limited influence on the outputs of the House, much less the ultimate output of the policymaking process involving the House, Senate, and president. Thus, a connection between public preferences and policy outputs is important (Gilens 2012), but does not tell us much about the behavior of any specific individuals. In contrast, the president is a single actor who can often take direct action (Howell 2003). Of course, the president often relies heavily on others in the administration, but within the executive branch, the president's opinion is decisive, unlike individual lawmakers'. Thus, within the American system, the president has the most power to expand, shrink, or even reverse the patterns of unequal congressional representation. Consequently, the presidency should be of great significance to representation scholars.

We examine the degree to which presidents have provided equal representation to racial groups (blacks and whites—unfortunately our data source did not identify Latinos for most of our period of study) and to income groups (low, middle, and high income earners) over the past four decades. We observe whether these groups prefer government spending to increase, decrease, or remain about the same. We then compare group preferences to presidents' subsequent budget proposals to see whether presidential behavior matches group preferences. Doing so enables us to see, for example, how often presidents propose a spending increase in a domain when a group prefers more spending in that policy area. Analyzing data from 1974 to 2010, we find that presidents' proposals match whites' and high income earners' preferences significantly more often than the preferences of African-Americans and low income earners. In particular, Republican presidents' proposals are more often congruent with the spending preferences of whites and the wealthy. Democrats, on the other hand, tend to match the groups'

preferences equally. This pattern of presidential representation reflects the composition of current party coalitions. That is, presidents act most consistently with the preferences of the largest groups in their party coalitions, leading to different patterns of representation for Democrats and Republicans.

BACKGROUND

By political representation, we mean the relationship between what citizens want government actors to do and what they actually do. This connection between the governed and their governors is fundamental to democratic theory. Studies of political representation have analyzed the connection between mass public preferences as a whole and some government action, be it a roll call vote, government spending, or a general course of policy making (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983; Erikson, et al. 2002; Wlezien 2004). Examining undifferentiated mass preferences has both strategic and normative appeal (Downs 1954). Most presidential representation studies follow suit in examining presidential responsiveness to majority opinion (e.g., Cohen 1997, 2015; Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Rottinghaus 2006).

But, in one important respect focusing on majority representation is too simplistic. While the public often exhibits a surprising level of agreement on policy matters, it is made up of identifiable, politically-relevant groups that sometimes disagree, a fact presidents must confront when crafting strategies to maintain or build the coalition needed to win elections or advance policy goals (Bishin 2009; Druckman and Jacobs 2011). Sometimes policy makers simply cannot please the whole public because the public is sharply divided. In such instances, with whom do presidents side? Scholars are just beginning to understand the conditions under which presidents respond to the policy preferences of subgroups in the public (see Druckman and

Jacobs 2009) and most of the work so far has focused on representation of the president's partisans (e.g., Wood 2009; Eshbaugh-Soha and Rottinghaus 2013). Although we have learned much about the nature and extent of minority representation in Congress (e.g., Canon 1999; Griffin and Newman 2008; Bishin 2009; Minta 2011; Grose 2011; Hero and Preuhs 2013; Butler 2014), if we are to understand minority representation in the United States, with its system of separated powers, we must examine presidents' representation of subgroups.

Based on existing research, we expect that presidents will tend to side with those who will help them advance policy and electoral goals (Fiorina 1974; Wood 2009; Griffin and Newman 2013). The president's party coalition is an obvious source of such help. It will come as no surprise to students of American politics that the major parties' composition differs in terms of race and income. The General Social Survey (GSS) data we employ show that during the period of study (1974-2010), on average 19% of all Democrats were African-American, while only 3% of Republicans were African-American.¹ Clearly, Democrats have greater incentive to pay heed to blacks' preferences. Income differences between the parties, though not quite as sharp, are significant as well. Splitting the public into three roughly equally sized groups based on income, on average, 40% of the identifiers with each of parties were middle income earners, while 32% of Democrats were low income earners and 28% were high income earners. In contrast, 23% of Republicans were low income earners, while 38% earned high incomes. The Democrats' coalition is more balanced; the difference in the percent of high and low income earners is only 4 points, compared to 15 points for Republicans. Thus, Democrats have incentives to please both high and low income earners. In contrast, Republicans have greater incentive to respond to high income earners than low income earners when their views

¹ These tabulations include partisan leaners. We first obtained the relevant percentage from each survey and then calculated the mean of these percentages.

conflict.² Consequently, we expect Democrats to represent racial and income groups fairly equally while Republican presidents will favor whites and the wealthy.

DATA AND METHODS

Assessing the degree of presidential policy representation various groups enjoy requires a measure of each group's policy preferences and corresponding presidential behavior. We follow Canes-Wrone and Shotts' (2004) approach of comparing public preferences for federal government spending in various issue domains to presidents' annual budget proposals. We drew preference measures from the GSS, which regularly asks whether "we're spending too much money," "too little money," or "about the right amount" on 11 different policy areas to the president's annual budgetary proposal in each of these domains (crime, defense, education, the environment, foreign aid, ground transportation, health care, parks and recreation, space exploration, welfare, and aid to big cities).

The GSS measured spending preferences in 26 years from 1974 to 2010 (almost every year from 1974 to 1994 and every even-numbered year since). These preference measures match up nicely with many of the "functions" defined in the federal budget, enabling us to observe whether the public's preference for increased spending on the environment, for example, was followed by a presidential proposal for more spending on the environment (Wlezien 2004; see Appendix for details about which spending items were matched with which budget functions). We compare preference measures in a given year to the president's next budgetary proposal, meaning preferences are measured prior to presidential behavior.³ The unit of analysis is a

² Druckman and Jacobs (2011) provide additional support for this expectation, showing that Ronald Reagan was especially attentive to the preferences of high income earners.

³ Until 2006 the GSS is typically in the field sometime between January and March. Since 2006 the survey was fielded typically March to August. We compared GSS items in a given year (e.g., 1974) to the president's proposal for the following fiscal year (FY1976), which the administration would have compiled in the fall of 1974 and presented to Congress in February 1975. Following Canes-Wrone and

particular domain in a particular year. Matching spending measures in the 26 years to budgetary proposals yields a total of 270 observations (the GSS did not include every spending item in every study).⁴ As is typical in studies of unequal representation based on income, we created three income groups of roughly equal size based on the distribution of respondent incomes in each survey (Bartels 2008). The GSS did not include measures allowing us to identify Latinos for much of the time period, so in analyses of racial groups we only examine respondents identifying as white or African-American.

The general approach of comparing spending preferences with presidents' budgetary proposals has several attractions (Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004). The president submits a budget proposal to Congress every year. The president's budget proposal includes spending proposals for virtually all aspects of the federal government. Examining budget proposals therefore provides a consistent and frequent measure of policy representation across a wide range of issue domains.

Perhaps more importantly, the budgetary process *requires* the president to take a range of policy positions every year. Apart from budget proposals, presidents are rarely required to take policy positions publicly. Typically, they can choose whether and when to make a statement about their position on any issue. A President has incentives to take public stands on issues where the president's position is popular and to avoid making unpopular positions public (Groseclose and McCarty 2001). As a result, if we only examine voluntary presidential issue

Shotts (2004), we compared the "estimate" for budgetary authority in a given fiscal year to the "estimate" for budgetary authority the previous fiscal year, or the figures the administration would have used as it prepared the next year's proposal.

⁴ The budgets for FYs 1978, 1984 and 1985 only report by function, while many of our categories require more specific figures (broken down by subfunctions). Following Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004, 691, note 4), we excluded the domains where we required more specific figures.

positions it may be difficult to observe some instances in which the president is out of step with public preferences simply because presidents may not advertise their unpopular positions when this is avoidable. In addition, GSS spending items are strong measures of public preferences. The public's spending preferences react in quite sensible ways to real world events and changes in policy (Wlezien 1995) and citizens appear to have distinct preferences across domains rather than merely "global" spending preferences (Jacoby 1994; Wlezien 2004).⁵ In short, our approach focuses on substantive representation in an important arena (allocating government resources) that covers a variety of issue domains in a legal context that requires presidents to make proposals annually. This setup provides a consistent set of data over a relatively long period of time with the analytical advantage of required, rather than voluntary, proposals from the president.

Although our approach has its advantages, we recognize that it is but one way to study representation, which is a rich and complex phenomenon (e.g., Pitken 1967; Canon 1999; Tate 2003; Conley 2005). For example, our approach does not reflect all of the many symbolic elements of presidential representation (e.g., Pitken 1967; Waterman, et al. 1999). Consider the importance of Obama's statement just after Trayvon Martin's death, "if I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon" or leaving an empty chair next to Michelle Obama during his last State of the Union address to signify victims of gun violence. Our approach misses these important symbolic dimensions of representation.⁶ Nevertheless, as House Speaker, John Boehner, argued "the

⁵ As Wlezien and Soroka (2011) point out, question wording can affect respondents' stated spending preferences. As such, we may over- or under-estimate the true degree to which policy responds to preferences at large. This is an important concern. However, to affect our conclusions about group disparities, wording effects would have to differ across racial groups. We are unaware of any literature that finds differential wording effects across groups.

⁶ Moreover, the policy domains cover a number of programs so the president could propose a cut in welfare spending overall, but propose an increase in grants to minority businesses (we thank an anonymous reviewer for noting this). We also recognize that spending is not the only dimension of

budget is an opportunity to lay out your priorities,” and since much of government’s impact on people’s lives stems from the ways it spends money, the president’s budget is an important piece of government action.”⁷

In addition, it is important to note that budgetary proposals may sometimes be strategic (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1985). For example, in theory the president may prefer only modest increases in education funding, but initially ask for a large increase to stake out a bargaining position. Despite this possibility, presidents face strong incentives to propose sincere budget requests. Kiewiet and McCubbins (1988) contend that under many circumstances, presidential misrepresentation of preferences leads to a less preferred outcome than sincere representation of preferences. In addition, they argue that voters are likely to sanction presidents who are not sincere, which presidents anticipate when formulating their proposals. Moreover, a number of studies treat budget proposals as non-strategic (Kiewiet and MCCubbins 1988; Canes-Wrone 2001; Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004). Finally, we note that our measure of policy representation and research design do not enable us to make direct causal claims that citizens influenced presidential behavior. We can only measure congruence between preferences and presidential behavior and see whether the degree of congruence varies across groups.

We adopt two specific approaches within the general framework of comparing spending preferences to spending proposals. First, we classify each case as an instance of congruence or non-congruence for each group. Group preferences and presidential proposals are congruent if 1)

policy. In criminal justice, for example, individual citizens may care as much or more about the laxness or severity of sentencing policy than they do about the amount spent. Likewise, the amount spent may be less important than how that money is spent (e.g., for prisons or rehabilitation). Thus, we analyze just one dimension of policy responsiveness.

⁷ See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/15/us/politics/boehner-says-election-losses-wont-deter-push-for-smaller-government.html?_r=0.

a group prefers more spending and the president's proposal is at least 2% more than the previous year's spending, adjusting for inflation, 2) a group prefers about the same amount of spending and the president's proposal is between 2% less and 2% more than the previous year, adjusting for inflation, and 3) a group prefers less spending and the president's proposal is at least 2% less than the previous year, adjusting for inflation.⁸ When using this approach, we measure group preference as the category (prefer more, less, or about the same amount of spending) with the most respondents. Thus, if 25% prefer more spending, 35% prefer less spending, and 40% prefer about the same amount, the group's preference is for the same amount of spending.⁹ Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004) employ this approach, though we modified their method slightly.¹⁰ Replicating their approach with our data from slightly different years finds very similar results (see Appendix).

Under this first measure of policy congruence, 33% of presidential proposals were congruent with public preferences taken as whole. The relatively low percentage of congruence stems largely from the public's penchant to prefer spending increases (e.g., Jacoby 1994). The public as a whole preferred spending increases in 50% of cases, while presidents proposed spending increases in only 37% of cases. Despite limited levels of congruence under this definition, we find patterns of representation that square nicely with previous studies. For

⁸ We tested the results' sensitivity to several thresholds and found that the data support our conclusions across a variety of thresholds.

⁹ In three cases, an equal percentage preferred less/more spending and the same amount of spending. In these cases, we coded the group's preference as preferring the same amount of spending.

¹⁰ They ignored the possibility of preferring the same amount of spending, classifying each budget proposal as either an increase or decrease in spending. We opted to take advantage of all the information the spending items provide, including instances where the most preferred option was the same amount of spending (26% of cases). In addition, 13% of proposals involved changes of less than 2% over the previous year. We thought it best to consider these cases as congruent with a preference for the same amount of spending. Including this additional type of congruence allows us to take into account the status quo bias in the system (Gilens 2012).

instance, Gilens (2012) found considerably less government responsiveness in social welfare and economic policy domains (the domains we examine) compared to religious or moral issues. Moreover, various studies have found greater representation in domains with greater salience (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983; Wlezien 2004; Lax and Phillips 2009). We find higher levels of congruence on issues generally considered more salient than on less salient issues (e.g., we found 58% congruence on health care, 54% on welfare, and 46% on education, but just 6% congruence for parks and recreation and 0% for ground transportation).

It is important to appreciate that when groups prefer the same action, presidents will inevitably represent those groups equally. Presidents can only represent groups unequally when the groups want different things (Ura and Ellis 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2008). We first examine the overall degree of presidential representation of each group. Then, to assess whether presidential proposals represents some groups more than others, we examine instances in which the groups prefer different action (e.g., one group prefers a spending increase while another prefers a decrease).

Note that this first measure of preferences treats as equivalent a case where a group is almost equally split and one in which a large majority prefers one category to another. For example, if 34% of a group prefers a spending increase, 33% a decrease, and 33% the same amount of spending, the measure codes the group as wanting more spending. The measure codes identically a case where 60% of a group prefers a spending increase, 25% prefers the same spending, and only 15% prefers less spending even though the distribution of preferences differ dramatically. Therefore, our second measure of group preferences calculates the difference between the percentage of the group that prefers more spending and the percentage preferring less spending (see Wlezien 2004; Soroka and Wlezien 2011). By this measure, the first

hypothetical case described above would be coded as 1 (a narrow preference for an increase), while the second would be coded 45 (a broad preference for an increase). The two complementary preference measures we employ point to the same conclusions, providing for a more robust set of findings.

RESULTS

We begin with our first measure and describe the frequency of presidential congruence across groups. Table 1 shows significant differences in policy congruence for both racial and income groups despite a considerable amount of preference overlap between groups. Looking first at the entire period, presidents acted in accordance with whites' preferences 34% of the time, but blacks' preferences only 28% of the time, a difference significant at the .01 level (all tests two-tailed; recall that by this measure presidents can propose more, less, or the same amount of spending, so it is possible that presidential action ran counter to both groups' preferences). Over the past four decades, presidents' budget proposals have more often aligned with whites' preferences. Recall that we are examining all cases, including those in which whites and blacks preferred the same action. In such cases, groups will be represented equally, so including these cases attenuates the differences between groups. As we will see below, there are conditions under which the racial gap is much larger. Table 1 also shows an income gap in policy congruence of about the same size as the racial gap. Low income earners saw their preferences mirrored in presidential proposals in 27% of cases, compared to 32% and 34% for the middle and high income earners ($p < .01$).

The second column of Table 1 focuses on the cases in which groups preferred different government action. Spending preferences are often similar across groups (Canon 1999; Soroka

and Wlezien 2008). blacks and whites preferred different spending levels in 60 cases (22%).¹¹ Low and middle income earners held different preferences in 39 instances (14%)¹², while low and high income earners preferred different proposals 49 times (18%).¹³ Since groups share the same preferences most of the time, the extent of inequality of presidential representation, at least in terms of budgetary proposals, will be somewhat limited.

Table 1 about here

However, when groups differ, meaning the president can act congruently with only one group, budget proposals rarely reflect the preferences of African-Americans and the poor. When blacks and whites preferred different action, presidential action aligned with whites' preferences 47% of the time and blacks' preferences only 18% of the time. Of the 39 cases where either blacks or whites saw the president take their preferred action, whites got what they wanted 72% of the time and blacks got what they wanted 28% of the time. When low and middle income earners preferred different action, presidents' proposals matched middle income earners' preferences 20 times (51%), but just 5 times (13%) for low income earners. In the 49 instances of conflict between low and high income earners, presidential behavior was congruent with high income preferences 26 times (53%) compared to just 7 times (14%) for low income earners.

Looking over the whole period masks significant representation differences between the parties. Columns 3 and 4 examine cases when a Democrat is in office and columns 5 and 6 focus on Republican presidents. Democrats' proposals reflected the preferences of blacks and whites

¹¹ The 60 cases occur in the following domains: welfare (19), space exploration (18), defense (10), parks and recreation (7), roads (3), and big cities (3).

¹² These 39 cases occur in the following domains: welfare (16), space exploration (16), defense (3), roads (3), and big cities (1).

¹³ The 49 cases occur in the following domains: space exploration (21), welfare (16), defense (7), roads (4), and big cities (1).

virtually identically. Across all 93 cases, Democrats' proposals were congruent with blacks' preferences 35% of the time and whites' preferences 36% of the time, a statistically insignificant difference. Even when whites and blacks preferred different action, Democrats' proposals reflected both groups' preferences at about the same frequency. In fact, Democrats proposed spending levels that matched African-American preferences somewhat *more* often (47%, compared to 41% for whites), although the difference is not statistically significant.

In contrast, Republican proposals demonstrate significant racial inequality. Republican proposals were consistent with whites' preferences 33% of the time, but only 24% of the time for blacks, ($p < .01$, see column 5). When forced to choose between matching blacks' or whites' preferences, Republicans' proposed budgets matched whites' preferences 47% of the time, compared to just 9% of the time for blacks (see column 6).

We also see party differences in the representation of income groups. Democrats' proposals treat all three income groups fairly equally. Across all cases, 31%, 34%, and 37% of budget proposals are congruent with low, middle, and high income earners' preferences, respectively (see column 3). None of these differences are statistically significant ($p = .13$ for the difference between low and high income earners, the comparison closest to significance). There were few instances when Democrats had to choose between income groups (see column 4). When they did, their proposals were more often congruent with middle and high income earners, but given the small case count, the differences are not statistically significant ($p = .14$ for the low-high comparison).

In contrast, clear differences emerge in the representation of income groups during Republican administrations. Across all cases, proposals were congruent with low, middle, and high income preferences 24%, 31%, and 32% of the time, respectively (see column 5). The

differences between the low income and the two other groups were significant at the .01 level. Low income earners enjoyed even less congruence when their preferences conflicted with those of the other groups (see column 6). In these cases, proposals were consistent with middle income preferences 50% of the time and with low income preferences only 10% of the time. When high and low income earners conflicted, the story was similar, with congruence in 49% of cases for high income earners, but only in 11% of cases for low income earners. To sum up, Republican presidents clearly advantage middle and high income earners across a broad set of issues.¹⁴ We see a smaller advantage under Democrats, and there the differences are not statistically significant. Finding significant income differences during Republican, but not Democratic, presidencies parallels recent studies finding greater inequality in representation of income groups by Republican members of Congress compared to Democrats in Congress (Brunner, et al. 2013; Ellis 2013).

Robustness

Another approach is to take as the dependent variable a presidential proposal for decreased spending (coded -1), about the same amount of spending (coded 0), and increased spending (coded 1) and assess the extent to which preferences predict presidential proposals.¹⁵

This approach enables us to use either preference measure we discussed above, though we only

¹⁴ We did conduct some additional analyses of each policy domain independently, but this type of analysis slices the data too thinly to generate reliable conclusions.

¹⁵ The -1, 0, 1 coding is theoretically preferable to using the percentage change as the dependent variable. It may seem initially that when a group scores high on the preference measure the president might propose a big increase. However, a high score only indicates that many people want a spending increase, not necessarily that the group prefers a large increase.

report results using the second measure (% of a group preferring more spending minus % preferring less spending).¹⁶

Table 2 about here

Table 2 presents the ordered probit estimates. The model in column 1 estimates the relationship between blacks' spending preferences and the budget proposals of Democrats, controlling for year and domain specific effects. The estimate is positive and statistically significant at the .05 level. Column 2 shows that whites' preferences are significantly related to proposals as well. Figure 1(a) shows the predicted probability that the president will propose an increase in spending across levels of group support for an increase. As more blacks prefer a spending increase, the president is more likely to propose an increase. As support for a spending boost increases among whites, the probability of a proposed increase rises at about the same rate. When we include both preference measures in the same model (see Column 3), both the coefficients are positive, but fall short of statistical significance, presumably due to collinearity between the preference measures (recall that there are relatively few instances of preference conflict under Democratic presidents).

The story is different during Republican presidencies. Column 4 shows that Republican proposals are not related to blacks' preferences, but Column 5 shows they are significantly related to whites' preferences. Figure 1(b) shows the substantive significance of these

¹⁶ Results using either type of measure generate similar results. An advantage of this approach is that we can control for unique patterns of presidential proposals for specific years and particular domains by including indicator variables for each domain and each year. Although the year variables are jointly statistically significant, models estimated without the year indicator variables generate similar results to those reported below. For presentation purposes we omit the estimates for these indicator variables. Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004) show that for the mass public, policy congruence increases as elections approach and when presidents are moderately popular. It is unclear how their model applies to subgroup representation, so we do not incorporate these variables in the estimates we report (including them does not significantly change the results).

differences. Even when blacks as a group overwhelmingly opposed spending increases, there was about a .25 chance that a Republican president would propose an increase. At very high levels of African-American support for a spending increase, the probability that the Republican president will propose an increase only rises to around .40. In sharp contrast, Republicans are far more likely to propose increased spending as support for higher spending increases among whites. Including both blacks' and whites' preferences in the same model allows us to see that whites tend to win the day when the two are in competition. As column 6 shows, controlling for whites' preferences, African-American preferences are unrelated to presidential proposals. In contrast, controlling for blacks' preferences, whites' preferences remain strongly related to Republican presidents' proposals.

Figure 1 about here

Tables 3a and b presents parallel analyses for income. Columns 1-3 show that spending preferences for all three income groups are significantly related to Democrats' spending proposals (see Table 3a). In fact, Figure 2 shows that presidents are essentially equally responsive to the preferences of the three groups. The probability of a proposed spending increase rises at the same rate across groups as support for an increase rises. Thus, we see no evidence that Democrats treat any particular income group any differently than another. Results are similar when we include two groups' preferences in the same model (see columns 4-6). In each case, the parameter estimates are positive, but not statistically significant, again due to a relatively high degree of shared preferences.

Table 3 about here

Figure 2 about here

Columns 1-3 in Table 3b show that Republicans' proposals are more often congruent with middle and high income earners. In fact, Republican proposals show no relationship with the preferences of the lowest income group at all (see Column 1). In contrast, middle and high income earners' preferences are related to proposals ($p < .10$ for middle income earners, $p < .05$ for high income earners). Including two of the three spending preference measures in the same model (Columns 4-6) during Republican presidencies generates a negative and non-significant low income estimate (Columns 4 and 5). The estimates are positive and significant for middle income ($p < .10$) and high income earners ($p < .01$).

Figure 2(b) shows that Republicans are much more likely to call for spending increases when high income earners as a group support such a move. This is much less true for low income earners. Table 3b, column 6 even finds that when we account for shared preferences between middle and high income earners, Republicans consistently match high income earners' preferences, but are unrelated to middle income preferences. This evidence is consistent with Gilens' (2005, 2012; Gilens and Page 2014) finding that the wealthy tend to get significantly more of what they want than even the middle class (see also Bartels 2008).

Discussion

To summarize, over the four decades of study, presidential proposals are less likely to follow the preferences of blacks and the poor. This overall result is largely a consequence of the Republican dominance of the White House during this period (Republicans held office in 22 of 38 years). Democrats' budget proposals match the spending preferences of different groups equally well, while Republicans' proposals are clearly more aligned with the preferences of whites and high income earners.

This pattern of results is consistent with the notion that presidents simply do what their party coalitions prefer. Studies of political representation frequently argue that re-election minded representatives have incentives to be most responsive to their party coalition (e.g., Fiorina 1974; Wood 2009; see Clinton 2006 for evidence from Congress). Since party coalitions differed in terms of race and income over this period, the results we observe may stem from current party coalitions. Although we cannot parcel out exactly how much of the pattern of results flows from each of these potential causes, we can examine whether the results are consistent with the composition of party coalitions and the spending preferences of the groups within these coalitions.

As noted above, the Democrats' coalition includes a significant percentage of blacks and is fairly balanced in terms of income, while there are very few African-American Republicans and the Republican coalition includes many more high income earners than low income earners. Thus the party coalitions will presumably push presidents toward the pattern of behavior we observe. However, even among copartisans, Republican presidents propose policies that are more frequently consistent with high income earners. As Table 4 shows, Republicans proposed spending figures that were in line with low income earning Republicans 28% of the time, compared to 32% for their middle income earning copartisans and 34% for high income copartisans (differences between low income and other groups are significant at the .05 level). In the 30 instances in which low income Republicans preferred different action than middle income Republicans, Republican presidents were more likely to offer proposals in line with their middle income copartisans, 33% compared to 10% ($p < .05$). The results are similar for the 36 instances of preference conflict between low and high income earning Republicans (42% to 14%, $p < .05$). Democrats, on the other hand, represented their low, middle, and high income earning

copartisans roughly equally. Democrats' proposals were consistent with low income earners' preferences 32% of the time compared to 34% of the time for middle and high income earning Democrats, differences that fall short of statistical significance.

Table 4 about here

At least some of the difference between Republicans and Democrats on this count stems from partisan differences in the preferences of income groups. Conflict between income groups is fairly rare among Democrats, but more frequent among Republicans: high and low income earning Democrats held different preferences for spending just 8 times during Democratic administrations (9%), compared to 36 times for Republicans (20%). The relative similarity of preferences among Democrats limits the possibility for unequal representation when Democrats act consistent with their copartisans' preferences. Republicans, on the other hand, more frequently have to choose between acting as their low income copartisans prefer and the preferences of their middle and high income copartisans.

In terms of race, when Democrats represent their copartisans, they usually act in ways that blacks prefer. Democrats in the White House represent their African-American and white copartisans more or less equally, as presidential proposals were consistent with their African-American copartisans' preferences 34% of the time and white copartisans' preferences 35% of the time, a non-statistically significant difference. In contrast, when Republicans act in ways that correspond with their white copartisans' preferences, they often act contrary to blacks' preferences. During Republican administrations, there were 55 instances in which white Republican copartisans held different preferences than blacks. Republican proposals reflected white copartisan preferences 35% of the time and black copartisan preferences 9% of the time, a difference significant at the .01 level.

One final point deserves attention. When Republicans are in office, are blacks any worse off than white Democrats? Interestingly, the answer is yes. Republicans do what white Democrats prefer 29% of the time, largely because of some preference overlap between white Democrats and Republicans. However, Republican presidents only act in concert with blacks' preferences 24% of the time, a difference significant at the .05 level. Moreover, in the 33 cases in which white Democrats and blacks preferred different action during a Republican administration, the president's proposal aligned with white Democrats' preferences 33% of the time and blacks' preferences only 3% of the time ($p < .01$). In contrast, Democrats' proposals were equally aligned with white Democrats and blacks, matching up 35% and 34% of the time respectively in general and 33% and 39% of the time respectively in the 18 instances of preference conflict between these groups, a non-significant difference.¹⁷

In sum, the composition of party coalitions and the preference profiles of those coalitions create incentives for Republicans to act in ways that advantage whites' and high income earners' preferences, but for Democrats to represent racial and income groups more or less equally. To the extent that party coalitions shape the pattern of results we observe, we may well see changes in who gets what they want from government as those coalitions change over time (or as participation rates change across groups, effectively changing the parties' electoral coalitions). This account of presidents representing their core supporters, leading to income differences in political representation as a consequence stands at some contradistinction to the accounts of Bartels (2008) and Gilens (2012) in which the political system works in favor of the wealthy (see also Brunner, Ross, and Washington 2013; Ellis 2013).

¹⁷ The party differences reflect the preferences of these two groups. In the 49 instances when white Democrats and blacks prefer different things, white Democrats' preferences match Republicans' preferences 45 times (92%).

CONCLUSION

The evidence we present points to disparities in presidential representation based on race and income. When Republicans are in office, blacks and low income earners are at a clear disadvantage. When whites and high income earners conflict with blacks and low income earners, whites and high income earners see their preferences translated into presidential behavior about five times as often as blacks and low income earners. However, when Democrats occupy the Oval Office, these groups' views are much more equally represented in presidents' budget proposals. Over the last four decades, this pattern has generated unequal representation because Republicans held office more frequently.

As we noted above, there are many ways to conceptualize and measure presidential representation (Conley 2005). We have adopted one strategy, but future research should employ alternatives. We assess the links between preferences and outputs at a given time. A dynamic study of representation may yield a different pattern of results since different groups tend to respond to events similarly (e.g., Kelly and Enns 2010; Soroka and Wlezien 2011). Examining the links between various measures of public preferences and various types of presidential behavior will deepen our understanding of presidential responsiveness. For example, Druckman and Jacobs (2011) plumb the riches of Ronald Reagan's personal polling data to see with great detail the kinds of information the president and his advisors collected and used in making decisions. Because we know presidents and their staffs purposely collected and analyzed these kinds of data we can get much closer to identifying the causal impact of groups' preferences. In addition, Gilens (2012) found that income-based inequalities were most muted in social welfare domains, which made up many of the domains we examined. Thus, inequalities we uncovered may be greater in other domains.

For now, what should we make of our findings? First, we note that there is a fair amount of agreement between the groups' spending preferences. Recall that blacks and whites held the same preferences in 78% of cases (see also Canon 1999). Low and middle income earners shared preferences 86% of the time, while low and high income earners preferred the same spending direction 82% of the time. When groups hold the same preferences, presidents cannot represent groups unequally, so these similar preferences provide a natural limit to the extent of unequal representation (Soroka and Wlezien 2008). However, when groups prefer different action, the preferences of blacks and low income earners are typically underrepresented by Republicans.

Presidential representation may be more lopsided in domains with more race- and income-based preference conflict. For example, preferences for race related policies (e.g., affirmative action) often exhibit greater race-based differences than the spending preferences we examined (Kinder and Winter 2001). Although we might expect to see greater disparities in representation in such domains, it is important to note that in one of the main tasks of government—allocating taxpayer money—there is a high degree of agreement across groups and consequently, a somewhat limited degree of unequal representation.

In terms of racial inequalities, one's normative response to our analysis likely depends on one's notion of what political equality looks like in the context of minority groups (see Griffin and Newman 2008, ch. 2). If one expects groups to get what they want with the same frequency, the results show that Democrats are achieving political equality, but Republican presidents are not. Others might not expect blacks, who made up 10 to 15 percent of the public during the period of study, to see their preferences enacted as often as whites. From a proportionality perspective, relatively infrequent congruence for blacks during Republican administrations may

not be terribly troubling. After all, even when blacks and whites disagree, Republican presidents proposed spending policies congruent with blacks' preferences 9% of the time, a figure not too far from the percentage of the public comprised of blacks and larger than the percentage of the Republican coalition made up of blacks.

Concerns about significant income differences in presidential representation are likely to be more uniform. Since the income groups were defined to be roughly equal in size, any evidence of inequality across groups would violate notions of both strict equality and proportionality. When Republicans are in office, the income results presented above point to a real violation of political equality. Since high income earners already occupy an advantaged position, many will find it unsettling that Republican budget proposals better reflect this group's preferences than the preferences of low income earners. These results help to elucidate a pathway by which Republican presidents have presided over increases in this country's income inequality (Bartels 2008). One of the reasons that the rich get richer during Republican presidencies may be Republicans' pursuit of spending priorities that are most consistent with high income earners' preferences.

Whether or not readers find our results at odds with their vision of political equality, when viewed through the lens of party coalitions, many will find it hard to blame either Democrats or Republicans for behavior that generally matches the views of those that comprise their party coalitions. Observers may want different outcomes, but current political conditions strongly push toward the findings we present.

Finding inequality in presidential representation, even if its scope is circumscribed by some shared preferences among groups, is important for American democracy. The evidence that whites and those with greater monetary resources tend to be better represented in Congress

is mounting (e.g., Jacobs and Page 2005; Bartels 2008; Griffin and Newman 2008; Ellis 2012; Gilens and Page 2014). In the checks and balances system of American government, the president can theoretically ameliorate these inequalities. Our results suggest that Democrats in the White House may be doing this, but Republicans are not.

Appendix

In matching spending items to budget “functions”, we followed Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004) and Wlezien (2004). Table A1 details the specific matches between GSS items and budgetary figures. Table A2 compares the percentage of cases with congruence we found in each domain using Canes-Wrone and Shotts’ measure to those reported by Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004, 692). The vectors of percentages correlate at .96.

TABLE A1: MATCHING GSS ITEMS TO BUDGET FUNCTIONS

GSS Item	Budget function	Years
Defense	Defense (total)	All GSS years (1974-1978, 1980, 1982-1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010)
Foreign Aid	International affairs (151+152) International Development and Humanitarian assistance + International Security Assistance)	All GSS years
Space	Space (253+254+255)	All GSS years
Environment	Environment (301+302+304+306)	All GSS years
National Parks	Recreational resources (303)	1984-1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010
Ground Transportation	Ground Transportation (401)	1984-1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010
Cities	Community and Regional Development (451+452)	All GSS years
Education	Education (501+502+503)	All GSS years
Health	Health (550)	All GSS years
Welfare	Income Security (604+605+609)	All GSS years
Crime	Administration of Justice (750)	All GSS years

TABLE A2: POLICY CONGRUENCE BY ISSUE, CANES-WRONE AND SHOTTS
AND OUR ANALYSES

Issue	% Congruence Canes-Wrone and Shotts	% Congruence Our Analysis
Crime	92	88
Defense	32	35
Education	57	60
Environment	41	52
Foreign Aid	32	21
Ground Transportation	33	33
Health Care	92	88
National Parks	15	33
Space	9	8
Welfare	50	50

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TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF CASES WITH CONGRUENCE, BY RACE AND INCOME

	All Presidents		Democratic Presidents		Republican Presidents	
	All Cases	Conflicting Preferences	All Cases	Conflicting Preferences	All Cases	Conflicting Preferences
Blacks	28%	18%	35%	47%	24%	9%
Whites	34	47	36	41	33	47
Difference	6**	28**	1	6	9**	37**
N	270	60	93	17	177	43
Low Income	27	13	31	22	24	10
Middle Income	32	51	34	56	31	50
Difference	6**	38**	3	33	7**	40**
N	270	39	93	9	177	30
Low Income	27	14	31	25	24	11
High Income	34	53	37	67	32	49
Difference	7**	39**	6	42	8**	38**
N	270	49	93	12	177	37

* denotes $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2: REPRESENTATION OF RACIAL GROUP PREFERENCES BY PRESIDENTIAL PARTY

	Democratic Presidents			Republican Presidents		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Blacks' Preferences	3.65** (1.40)		2.49 (1.76)	0.63 (1.16)		-1.33 (1.45)
Whites' Preferences		3.60* (1.42)	2.06 (1.82)		2.82* (1.23)	3.61* (1.50)
Cut Point 1	2.36 (1.00)	1.71 (0.82)	2.52 (1.03)	0.97 (0.87)	2.04 (0.81)	1.63 (0.93)
Cut Point 2	3.15 (3.15)	2.51 (0.83)	3.33 (1.05)	1.56 (0.88)	2.64 (0.82)	2.23 (0.93)
% Correctly predicted, modal category	38	38	38	46	46	46
% Correctly predicted by model	54	58	42	61	62	63
% Reduction of error over mode	26	33	6	27	30	31
N	93	93	93	177	177	177

Standard errors in parentheses; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. Preferences are defined as the percentage of a group preferring more spending minus the percentage of a group preferring less spending. Models estimated via ordered probit and include dummy variables for years and issue domains. Percent reduction of error calculated as % correctly predicted by the model minus the % correctly predicted by the modal category of the dependent variable, divided by 100 minus the % correctly predicted by the modal value (Hagle and Mitchell 1992).

TABLE 3(A): REPRESENTATION OF INCOME GROUP PREFERENCE, DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Low Income Preferences	3.92* (1.61)			2.51 (3.08)	1.96 (2.61)	
Middle Income Preferences		3.11* (1.29)		1.35 (2.52)		0.71 (3.01)
High Income Preferences			3.27* (1.32)		2.02 (2.13)	2.63 (3.00)
Cut Point 1	1.89 (0.89)	1.66 (0.82)	1.56 (0.78)	1.91 (0.89)	1.88 (0.90)	1.63 (0.83)
Cut Point 2	2.68 (0.90)	2.44 (0.83)	2.34 (0.79)	2.70 (0.90)	2.67 (0.91)	2.42 (0.84)
% Correctly predicted, Modal	38	38	38	38	38	38
% Correctly predicted, Model	51	57	55	54	56	57
% reduction of error over mode	21	31	28	26	29	31
N	93	93	93	93	93	93

TABLE 3(B): REPRESENTATION OF INCOME GROUP PREFERENCE, REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Low Income Preferences	1.13 (1.24)			-1.66 (1.99)	-1.82 (1.66)	
Middle Income Preferences		2.24 (1.23)+		3.51 (1.96)+		-1.53 (2.27)
High Income Preferences			2.88 (1.11)** (1.11)**		3.94 (1.48)**	4.03 (2.04)*
Cut Point 1	1.14 (0.79)	1.83 (0.85)*	2.10 (0.77)**	1.73 (0.85)*	1.77 (0.82)*	1.86 (0.85)*
Cut Point 2	1.72 (0.79)*	2.42 (0.85)**	2.70 (0.78)**	2.32 (0.86)**	2.37 (0.83)**	2.46 (0.85)**
% Correctly predicted, Modal	46	46	46	46	46	46
% Correctly predicted, Model	60	62	63	61	64	63
% reduction of error over mode	26	30	31	28	33	31
N	177	177	177	177	177	177

Standard errors in parentheses; + significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%
Models estimated via ordered probit and include dummy variables for years and issue domains.
See Table 2 for calculation of percent reduction of error.

TABLE 4: PARTY DIFFERENCES IN REPRESENTING COPARTISANS

	Democratic Presidents		Republican Presidents	
	% All cases	% of Conflicting Preferences Cases	% of All Cases	% of Conflicting Preferences Cases
Low Income	32	33	28	10
Middle Income	34	67	32	33
Difference	2	33	4*	23*
N	93	6	177	30
Low Income	32	25	28	14
High Income	34	50	34	42
Difference	2	25	6*	28*
N	93	8	177	36

*p<.05



