

**Differences in Policy Preferences and Priorities  
Across Income Groups in American Public Opinion\***

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## Abstract

Recent empirical studies have demonstrated what political scientists have long warned; that the political opinions of the wealthy are better reflected in the decisions of elected officials and in government policies compared to the opinions of the poor. But for unequal political representation to occur, there must be variation in political preferences across income groups. Two recent articles in *PS: Political Science & Politics* cast doubt on the proposition that political preferences vary much depending on one's income (Soroka and Wleziem 2008; Ura and Ellis 2008). In contrast, using multiple sources of survey data, I find citizens with lower incomes are more likely to support increased spending on redistributive policies such as aid to the poor and food stamps compared to citizens with higher incomes and that these differences are larger than those based on education or gender. I also find that citizens with low incomes are more socially conservative than the affluent. Finally, I find some evidence that differences in political preferences extend to within the states as well, which has important consequences for the understudied concern of political inequality at the state level. Together, the opinion data presented here generally shows important differences in political preferences and priorities based on citizens' incomes.

Government responsiveness to public opinion is a cornerstone of American democracy. As V.O. Key (1961, 7) famously stated, “Unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense.” For decades, political scientists have examined the crucial link between citizens’ opinions and subsequent action by their elected officials in government. These studies of political representation have generally documented that elected officials’ behavior in office and government policies correspond to the aggregate will of the people across an array of political institutions and policy domains. (Miller and Stokes 1963; Page and Shapiro 1983; Bartels 1991; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Hill and Hinton-Andersson 1995; Monroe 1998; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002).

This opinion-policy link is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. In addition to popular sovereignty, political equality is an essential component. As Robert Dahl (1971, 1) put it, “A key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals.” In other words, citizens’ preferences ought to receive (roughly) equal consideration when the government is formulating policy. However, while there is compelling evidence that government policies do tend to correspond to the aggregate will of the people, there is also good reason to believe that some citizens’ preferences are better represented than others. One major concern along these lines is that the wealthiest Americans are much more likely to get what they want from government compared to citizens with low incomes. A growing number of studies have confirmed this concern that has been present for some time but, until recently, was subjected to little empirical scrutiny (Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005; Bartels 2008).

But for government policies to be more responsive to some citizens over others, there must be variation in political preferences across income groups. If there is little difference

between the opinions of the wealthy and the poor, then it is impossible to distinguish which group's opinions are actually being represented in the public policy decisions elected officials make. Two recent articles in *PS: Political Science & Politics* cast doubt on the proposition that political preferences vary much depending on one's income (Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Ura and Ellis 2008). This debate over the relationship between citizens' incomes and their political opinions is the lynchpin of the growing literature on unequal political representation – without differences in opinions, the rest of the endeavor means very little.

In this paper, I examine whether political preferences vary according to income. Using multiple sources of survey data, I find citizens with lower incomes are more likely to support increased spending on redistributive policies such as aid to the poor and food stamps compared to citizens with higher incomes and that these differences are larger than those based on education or gender. I also find that citizens with low incomes are more socially conservative than the affluent, especially on the issue of abortion. Finally, I find some evidence that differences in political preferences extend to within states as well, which has important consequences for the understudied concern of political inequality at the state level. Together, the public opinion survey data presented here generally shows important differences in political preferences and priorities based on citizens' incomes.

## **Literature Review**

Political scientists have long speculated that political representation is tainted by an upper class bias. But, as the American Political Science Association Taskforce on Inequality and American Democracy (2005, 124) reports: “Unfortunately, political scientists have done surprisingly little to investigate the extent of actual inequalities of government responsiveness to

public opinion – that is, whether distinct segments of the country exert more influence than others.” Instead, considerable attention has been devoted to documenting unequal political participation, or “inputs” into the political system (Piven and Cloward 1988; Hill and Leighley 1994; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Verba 2003). But, as Larry Bartels (2008, 253) points out, “For the most part, scholars of political participation have treated actual patterns of government responsiveness as someone else’s problem.” In other words, almost all of the existing work on political inequality falls short of assessing whether unequal participation activity *actually produces* unequal policy outcomes.

Recent studies have sought to correct this problem. Jacobs and Page (2005) show that business leaders leverage far more influence over changes in American foreign policy decisions than public opinion. Gilens (2005) collects data from nearly 2,000 policy-specific public opinion poll questions and finds that subsequent government action disproportionately reflects the views of the affluent and that this bias in representation is heightened when the preferences of the rich and poor diverge. Bartels (2008) examines the larger link between political inequality and growing economic inequality, finding that the opinions of the affluent strongly predict the voting behavior of their Senators while the opinions of those in the lower class bear little or no relationship. In short, this emerging literature points to “unequal democracy.”

These studies are built on the fundamental premise that the “haves” and “have-nots” actually possess different opinions about what the government should do in areas like health care, education, tax policy, and assistance to the poor. However, this premise has come under increased scrutiny. In an article aptly titled “On the Limits to Inequality in Representation,” Soroka and Wlezien (2008, 319) compare opinions on government spending and find that “differences in preferences across income brackets are in fact small and insignificant,” especially

when compared to differences across education levels and partisan identification. Specifically, using General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1973 to 2004 they show that across income terciles roughly the same proportion of respondents think the government is spending “too little” (compared to “too much”) on defense, foreign aid, education, health, cities, crime, and the environment.<sup>1</sup> They do, however, find rather large differences in opinion about welfare spending (an area where one might expect income to strongly predict preferences), with citizens in the lowest tercile much less supportive of cuts to welfare compared to the middle and upper terciles. On the whole though, they conclude that concerns about unequal representation that arise from the premise that the rich and poor have different political opinions are largely overblown.

Ura and Ellis (2008) arrive at similar conclusions. Aggregating spending preferences from the GSS for ten issue areas, they compute a separate policy mood liberalism measure for each income quartile from 1974 to 2004.<sup>2</sup> In general, wealthier Americans are more conservative than poorer citizens, though this trend is inconsistent over time. More importantly, they find that the difference in opinion liberalism between each income quartile is quite modest and that over the time period they study opinions tend to shift in the same magnitude and direction regardless of income. Matching measures of public opinion to actual government spending data, they find no evidence that government policy is disproportionately responsive to

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<sup>1</sup> Soroka and Wlezien (2008) compute net spending preferences by subtracting the percentage of respondents who think the government is spending “too much” from the percentage who think the government is spending “too little” for each income tercile.

<sup>2</sup> Ura and Ellis (2008) use spending preferences for the following policy areas: defense, foreign aid, solving the problems of big cities, halting the rising crime rate, dealing with drug addiction, improving the nation’s education system, improving and protecting the environment, welfare, improving and protecting the nation’s health, and improving the conditions of blacks.

wealthier citizens. When preferences do not differ depending on income, “it may be simply impossible for elected officials to perceive and react differently to the ‘scope of government’ preferences of different income groups” (Ura and Ellis 2008, 791).

Taken together, recent empirical studies have cast doubt on the belief that people with different incomes differ in their political opinions in any meaningful way. If this is the case, then claims that the United States is an “unequal democracy” may be overblown. However, there are theoretical reasons to expect that one’s standard of living does impact how they view the political world and the role of government in providing goods and services. In what follows, I discuss these expectations.

### **Expectations About Income and Political Preferences**

Why would we expect citizens with different levels of income to have different political opinions and priorities? To begin, people with different incomes have, by definition, different material circumstances. Whereas in a wealthy household there is likely only modest concern about day-to-day survival and purchasing basic consumer goods, this can become a persisting anxiety as one moves further down the income distribution. As a consequence, people with lower incomes may be more likely to support government intervention to reduce this anxiety by providing a social safety net and protections against joblessness, food insecurity, or losing health insurance. Economic circumstances, then, lead people with low incomes to adopt policy opinions that call for an expanded role for government in ensuring a basic standard of living.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The literature on “pocketbook voting” highlights the importance of personal economic circumstances in influencing citizens’ voting behavior (Markus 1988). One possible mechanism linking economic

Put another way, different life experiences between the affluent and the poor likely lead them to adopt differing political opinions.

A second reason that political preferences likely vary by income derives from the different social networks that people are embedded in depending on their economic status. Living in an affluent neighborhood and socializing in an environment largely made up of others from affluent backgrounds will serve to crystallize one's political views. In the same way, living in a neighborhood composed largely of people with lower incomes will have the same isolating effect. In short, increasing economic segregation (Jargowsky 1996) in the United States may lead to a consolidation of opinions among citizens with similar economic situations.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the two major political parties at least partly target their policy messages and mobilization efforts based on social demographics like income. If Democrats traditionally receive greater support among citizens with low incomes compared to Republicans, then a rational agent will look to capitalize on this already existing support. The same is true among more affluent individuals and the Republican Party.<sup>5</sup> To the extent that elite signals shape the political preferences of the public (Hurley and Hill 2003), these targeted efforts by political parties may serve to reinforce and even exacerbate preference differences among income groups.

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circumstances to vote choice is that citizens adopt differing sets of policy opinions based on their personal circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> One avenue for future research would be to empirically test the impact of living in a highly gentrified area on political opinions and behaviors.

<sup>5</sup> Exit polling data from the 2008 election reveals that the tendency for citizens with higher incomes to give greater support to Republican candidates remains.



In sum, there are theoretical reasons to believe that political preferences will vary according to citizens' incomes. In light of recent work that calls this expectation into question (Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Ura and Ellis 2008), I now turn to various sources of public opinion data to examine this claim.

### **Demonstrating Different Political Preferences and Priorities**

Fortunately, most surveys of public opinion on political issues also include an indicator for a respondent's income (either personal or household), which allows researchers to derive an average opinion for a specified income group. Unfortunately, self-reported incomes are usually lumped into categories determined prior to the survey, which places some limitations on how the data can be analyzed. Specifically, it is difficult for a researcher wanting to know, say, the mean opinion for those above and those below the national median for household income if the income categories bridge the median value. In the following analysis, I make every effort to examine equally sized income groups.

To begin, I follow Soroka and Wlezien (2008) and Ura and Ellis (2008) and examine citizens' opinions on government spending. Recall, both studies found little difference in spending preferences across income cohorts. Using data from 1990-2004 from the National Election Studies (NES) Cumulative File, I first separate respondents into terciles based on reported household income and label these lower, middle, and upper.<sup>6</sup> For each spending item, respondents are asked whether they want federal government spending increased, decreased, or

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<sup>6</sup> Pooling data over eight studies ensures that the sample size for each income tercile produces reliable estimates of opinion. Each tercile has between 2,500 and 3,000 respondents for each spending item included in the analysis and reflects the national income distribution for the year of the study.

kept about the same. Following Soroka and Wlezien (2008), I compute a value for net spending preferences for each item by taking the percentage of respondents in each income tercile who want spending “increased” and subtract the percentage of respondents who want spending “decreased.” For example, if 55% of people in the lower income tercile wanted spending increased, 20% wanted it kept about the same, and 25% wanted spending decreased, it would receive a value of  $55-25=30$ . If a larger percentage of respondents wanted spending decreased for a particular area, a negative value is reported. These computations are reported in Table 1, Columns 1-3.

[Table 1: Different Spending Preferences Across Income Terciles]

In Table 1, Column 4, I take the value for the low tercile and subtract the value for the upper tercile. A positive value indicates that lower income respondents are more supportive of increased spending in that particular area compared to higher income respondents and larger numbers indicate a larger difference in spending preferences. Notice for aid to the poor, childcare, welfare, food stamps, Social Security, and aid to blacks, the difference in support for increased spending between low and high income respondents is larger than twenty percentage points ( $p<.01$ ). The largest difference is for welfare spending, with low income respondents preferring increased spending at a rate thirty-three percentage points higher than high income respondents.<sup>7</sup> Though differences in welfare spending opinions are consistent with Soroka and

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<sup>7</sup> Since more respondents report the government should decrease (as opposed to increase) spending on welfare and food stamps, a more accurate description of the lower income group’s preferences is that they are much less supportive of *cuts* to these programs than the higher income group.

Wlezien's (2008) study, the large differences in other social welfare policy areas are at odds with their findings. In part, this is likely due to their use of survey items that asked broader questions on "health" and "education" as compared to the NES's more policy-specific items. From the findings in Table 1, it appears that differences in political opinions across income groups are larger when specific programs that relate to the government's redistributive role are probed.

What constitutes significant differences in opinion? That is, how do we know if different preferences based on citizens' incomes are meaningful? Regrettably, there is no accepted metric for what constitutes a meaningful difference. However, one way to interpret the magnitude of the differences is to compare them with differences of opinion across other commonly studied demographic cleavages. As a comparison, I examine preferences differences based on education and gender. I use education because previous work has shown that more educated citizens are more interested in and pay more attention to politics (Zaller 1992; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Berry 1996), which may lead elected officials to pay greater attention to their opinions. I use gender because of the well-documented "gender gap" in voting behavior that presumably stems from different political opinions between women and men (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999).

[Table 2: Different Spending Preferences, by Education and Gender]

In Table 2, I display differences in opinions on the same spending areas (using the same computation method) based on education and gender. Specifically, I compare respondents with a college degree to those without and men to women. Positive values in Column 3 and 6 indicate that respondents with no college and females are more likely to support increased spending than respondents with a college degree and males, respectively. Looking down the columns, the

differences are generally larger for education than for gender, though the average gap of ten to fifteen percentage points between women and men should not be understated. However, even the differences between respondents with a college degree and those without are still smaller than the differences between the lower and upper income terciles and this is especially true for policy areas that pertain to assistance to disadvantaged individuals. For example, the differences between the lower and upper income group on aid to the poor, welfare, and food stamps are, respectively, 27, 33, and 29, while the same differences for education are 21, 4, and 8, and for gender 14, 19, and 12. In sum, for policy areas one would expect the largest differences in opinions between the rich and the poor, the differences are larger in magnitude than differences based on education or gender.

Recalling Table 1, one plausible interpretation is that citizens with low incomes simply want the government to spend more in every budget area (with the exception of foreign aid). Without asking directly about budget constraints, respondents are free to tell surveyors that they want spending increased in all areas the government funds. But what happens when they are forced to make difficult choices about budget allocation? Are their spending preferences still different from those with higher incomes? To test this question, I use data from the March wave of the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), an online survey conducted by Polimetrix.<sup>8</sup> Respondents were presented with nine budget areas that the federal government

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<sup>8</sup> The CCAP approximates a nationally representative sample using a sample matching technique.

Specifically, Polimetrix first built a large online panel of potential respondents who “opted in” to receive survey requests. Using a randomly selected sample of 20,000 individuals from the American Community Survey (conducted by the U.S. Census where participation is mandatory, producing a response rate of

typically assigns funding to (defense, education, Medicare, public assistance, transportation, housing, homeland security, energy, and a catch-all “other” category) and asked to construct their “ideal” budget by assigning percentages for each spending area. The percentages had to sum to 100%. Essentially, this survey item presents respondents with a finite pot of money and they can choose which areas will receive more and which will receive less. In Table 3, I report the mean percentage allocated to each budget area by income tercile.<sup>9</sup>

[Table 3: Different “Ideal Budgets” Across Income Terciles]

Table 3, Column 4 shows the difference in the mean percentage allocated by the lower income tercile (respondents with a family income less than \$40,000 per year) compared to the upper income tercile (respondents with a family income greater than \$80,000 per year). Citizens with lower incomes allocate more funding to Medicare, public assistance, and housing, and less to defense and transportation than their more affluent counterparts ( $p < .01$ ). While these differences are not enormous, they nonetheless show that the rich and poor allocate funding differently when faced with finite budget constraints.

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over 90%), the closest matching active PollingPoint panelist was selected using the following measure of distance:  $d(x,y)$ . For more information on sample matching, see Rivers (2006).

<sup>9</sup> The income categories used in the CCAP break respondents roughly (but not perfectly) into income terciles. The terciles are composed as follows: lower income is a reported family income of less than \$40,000 (31.8% of the sample), middle income is \$40,000 - \$80,000 (37.1%), and upper income is greater than \$80,000 (31.1%).

Aside from government spending, do political preferences differ based on income for other issues as well? For example, do the rich and poor hold similar positions on “social issues?” I next turn to data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) to probe this question.<sup>10</sup> The survey asks about a variety of policy items dealing with both economic and social issues. Having already examined differences on spending, the three economic issues I assess from the NAES are whether the federal government should raise the minimum wage, whether the federal government should reduce income differences, and respondents’ self-placement on a 1-5 conservative to liberal economic ideology scale.<sup>11</sup> For social issues, I assess opinions on abortion, gay marriage, gun control, and respondents’ self-placement on a 1-5 conservative to liberal social ideology scale.<sup>12</sup> For each, I take the percentage of respondents in each income tercile who support a liberal policy and subtract the percentage of respondents who support a conservative policy.<sup>13</sup> These computations are reported in Table 4.

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<sup>10</sup> The same issue for income terciles arises for the NAES. The terciles are composed as follows: lower income is a reported household income of less than \$35,000 (33.2% of the sample), middle income is \$35,000 - \$75,000 (37.1%), and upper income is greater than \$75,000 (29.7%).

<sup>11</sup> The economic ideology question is: “Generally speaking, when it comes to economic issues, such as taxes, the federal budget, and government spending, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

<sup>12</sup> The social ideology question is: “Generally speaking, when it comes to social issues, such as education, health care, abortion, guns, and crime, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

<sup>13</sup> Specifically, support for raising the minimum wage, support for reducing income differences, opposition to abortion restrictions, opposition to an amendment banning gay marriage, and support for

[Table 4: Different Political Opinions Across Income Terciles]

Table 4, Column 4 reports the difference in opinion between respondents in the lower income tercile and those in the upper tercile. Citizens with low incomes are much more likely to think the federal government should raise the minimum wage and work to reduce income differences, which is consistent with the economic liberalism displayed in earlier tables. On social issues, however, the differences in preferences are reversed. Poorer citizens are more likely to favor the government banning abortions or placing further restrictions on them. They are also more conservative on gay marriage and general social ideology, though the differences are smaller in magnitude. From this analysis, it seems that *citizens with low incomes are more economically liberal and more socially conservative than their more affluent counterparts*. This is a far different conclusion than the view that preferences do not vary in any meaningful way across income groups.

One advantage of the enormous sample size of the NAES is that it allows researchers to make reliable state-level estimates of public opinion. The large state samples even allow for splicing state populations into income groups and deriving an estimate of each sub-group's opinion. By doing so, political scientists could build on past studies of the opinion-policy link using aggregate opinion (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Gray et al. 2004) and probe differential responsiveness within the states based on income. As an initial step in this process, I compute differences in general political ideologies among respondents with a household income

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more gun control were coded as LIBERAL. For items where respondents have the opportunity to express an intensity of preference (i.e. strongly favor vs. somewhat favor), I combine those responses together.

of less than \$50,000 to those making more than this amount *within states* by pooling the 2000 and 2004 NAES together.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, using respondent's self-placements on a 1-5 conservative to liberal scale, I take the mean for each income group for each state. I then take the mean for the low income group and subtract the mean for the high income group such that a positive number indicates the low income group reports a more liberal political ideology. In Figure 1, I display this difference for each state. Noticeably, citizens with lower incomes tend to be more ideologically liberal than wealthier citizens. Ideally, this information could be used to determine whether state policies are more responsive to some groups compared to others. More importantly for this paper, Figure 1 shows that differences in political preferences across income groups exist within states as well.

[Figure 1: Different Political Ideologies Across the States, by Income Halves]

Finally, do the rich and poor have different political priorities? That is, do they think different areas are more or less deserving of the government's attention and resources? This is an important question because another way in which the government represents citizens is by deciding which issues/problems will receive the most attention from policymakers. In January,

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<sup>14</sup> Doing so yields a total of 147,723 respondents. All states except North Dakota (N=396) and Wyoming (N=344) have a sample size of over 400 respondents (Alaska and Hawaii were not surveyed). General political ideology is asked in the same way in both waves of the survey: "Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal or very liberal?" I split citizens into two income groups (instead of three) to ensure that samples within groups are large enough to yield reliable estimates. The lower income group accounts for 54.5% of the sample and the higher income group 45.5%.



2008, a Pew Research Poll asked respondents the following question about a variety of issues and policy areas: “I’d like to ask you some questions about priorities for President Bush and Congress this year. As I read from a list, tell me if you think the item that I read should be a (1) top priority, (2) important but lower priority, (3) not too important or (4) should it not be done?” I split the sample in halves by those with a reported household income of less than \$50,000 per year and those with more and took the mean response for each group on the 1-4 scale (top priority is coded lower). The results are displayed in Table 5.

[Table 5: Differences in Issue Priorities, by Income Halves]

For nearly every policy area, the low income group thought the issue should be a higher priority than the high income group. On its face, these results seem not very useful. However, if we grant that low income respondents are simply more likely to report any issue as deserving a higher priority, then looking at variation in the size of the difference does provide some useful information. Looking at the table, respondents in the low income group place the highest (relative) priority on dealing with moral breakdown in the country, improving the job situation, reducing crime, taking steps to make the Social Security system financially sound, and taking steps to make the Medicare system financially sound. And, noticeably, there is little difference between the priorities of low and high income respondents on strengthening the U.S. military, dealing with the nation’s energy problem, strengthening the nation’s economy, and reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interest groups in Washington. Taken together, these data suggest that political priorities also vary across income groups.

## **Conclusion**

The equal weighting of citizens' preferences in government decisions is an essential characteristic of a democratic society (Dahl 1971). Recent empirical studies have demonstrated what political scientists have long warned; that the opinions of the wealthy are better reflected in the decisions of elected officials and in government policies compared to the opinions of the poor (Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005; Bartels 2008). However, for unequal political representation to occur, political preferences must differ according to citizens' incomes. If they do not, then it is impossible to discern whose opinions are being listened to. Two recent studies have called this fundamental assumption into question, arguing that the political opinions of the rich and poor differ only slightly and not enough for differential representation to be a concern (Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Ura and Ellis 2008).

In contrast, I show that real differences do exist in political opinions between high and low income earners. Across multiple sources of data, citizens with lower incomes are more likely to support government assistance programs designed to provide a social safety net to disadvantaged Americans. The differences in opinions between the rich and poor exceed differences along education and gender lines, two other important electoral cleavages. These differences extend within the American states as well.

One explanation for the disparity between my findings and those reported by Soroka and Wlezien (2008) and Ura and Ellis (2008) is that they primarily focus on the tendency for public opinion to change in a similar direction and magnitude across income groups. In their studies, opinions on government spending move nearly together; when support for increased spending among the poor goes up, support tends to increase among the rich as well. In this sense, elected officials trying to represent their constituents by reacting to changes in public opinion would be

receiving very similar signals from all income groups, making differential representation nearly impossible.

What these two studies downplay, I argue, is the size of the gap in support for spending at any given point in time. For example, as I have shown, there are larger than twenty point gaps between upper and lower income groups' support for increased spending for several important redistributive policies such as aid to the poor, food stamps, and welfare. When sizable gaps like these exist, one must be very careful in claiming that the rich and poor have generally similar political preferences. Instead, the differences I demonstrate point to the possibility that government can be more responsive to the wealthy than to the poor. If so, much more work needs to be done to document, understand, and explain the extent to which political inequality pervades American democracy.

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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Different Spending Preferences Across Income Terciles**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Lower	Middle	Upper	Lower-Upper
Aid to the poor	58	41	31	27
Childcare	57	45	37	20
Crime	68	66	63	5
AIDS	52	45	45	7
Public schools	69	63	60	9
Foreign aid	-41	-50	-52	11
College aid	54	46	47	7
Aid to the homeless	70	57	51	19
Welfare	-10	-36	-43	33
Food stamps	-3	-28	-32	29
Environment	48	42	41	7
Space/science	8	9	21	-13
Social Security	64	50	38	26
Aid to blacks	13	-3	-8	21

Data source: 1990-2004 National Elections Studies.

Columns 1-3: % of respondents who wanted spending increased - % of respondents who wanted spending decreased.

Column 4: Column 1 - Column 3 (positive value indicates lower income respondents more supportive of increased spending).

**Table 2: Different Spending Preferences, by Education and Gender**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	No College	College	No College - College	Female	Male	Female - Male
Aid to poor	49	29	20	50	36	14
Childcare	49	39	10	51	39	12
Crime	70	52	18	69	59	10
AIDS	47	39	8	47	43	4
Public schools	67	58	9	69	59	10
College aid	49	49	0	52	45	7
Foreign aid	-9	-9	0	-43	-49	6
Aid to homeless	62	48	14	68	49	19
Welfare	-25	-29	4	-21	-33	12
Food stamps	-18	-26	8	-16	-25	9
Environment	42	42	0	42	41	1
Space/science	9	29	-20	5	21	-16
Social Security	60	31	29	59	43	16
Aid to blacks	1	1	0	4	-2	6

Data source: 1990-2004 National Elections Studies.

Columns 1, 2, 4, and 5: % of respondents who wanted spending increased - % of respondents who wanted spending decreased.

Column 3: Column 1 – Column 2 (positive value indicates respondents with no college degree more supportive of increased spending).

Column 6: Column 4 – Column 5 (positive value indicates females more supportive of increased spending).



**Table 3: Different “Ideal Budgets” Across Income Terciles**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Lower	Middle	Upper	Lower - Upper
Defense	17	18.6	20.4	-3.4*
Education	14.5	15.2	14.6	-0.1
Medicare	15.2	13	13.1	2.1*
Public assistance	9.3	7.7	7.2	2.1*
Transportation	8	7.8	8.7	-0.7*
Housing	8.6	7.6	6.7	1.9*
Homeland security	12.5	13.1	12.7	-0.2
Energy	11.1	10.6	10.9	0.2
Other	8.5	9.9	9.8	-1.3*

Data source: 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project.

Columns 1-3: Mean percentage of budget allocated to each area.

Column 4: Mean percentage for lower tercile (Column 1) - mean percentage for upper tercile (Column 3); positive value indicates low income respondents allocated more, negative value indicates low income respondents allocated less.

\* indicates difference significant at  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4: Different Political Opinions Across Income Terciles**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Lower	Middle	Upper	Lower-Upper
Raising the minimum wage (Favor-Oppose)	78	70	55	23
Reducing income differences (Favor-Oppose)	35	26	3	32
Economic ideology (Liberal-Conservative)	-26	-29	-35	9
Abortion ban (Oppose-Favor)	27	36	48	-21
More restrictions on abortion (Oppose-Favor)	9	27	32	-23
Gay marriage amendment (Oppose-Favor)	9	7	16	-7
More gun control (More-Less)	46	36	40	6
Social ideology (Liberal-Conservative)	-16	-13	-8	-8

Data source: 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey

**Table 5: Differences in Issue Priorities, by Income Halves**

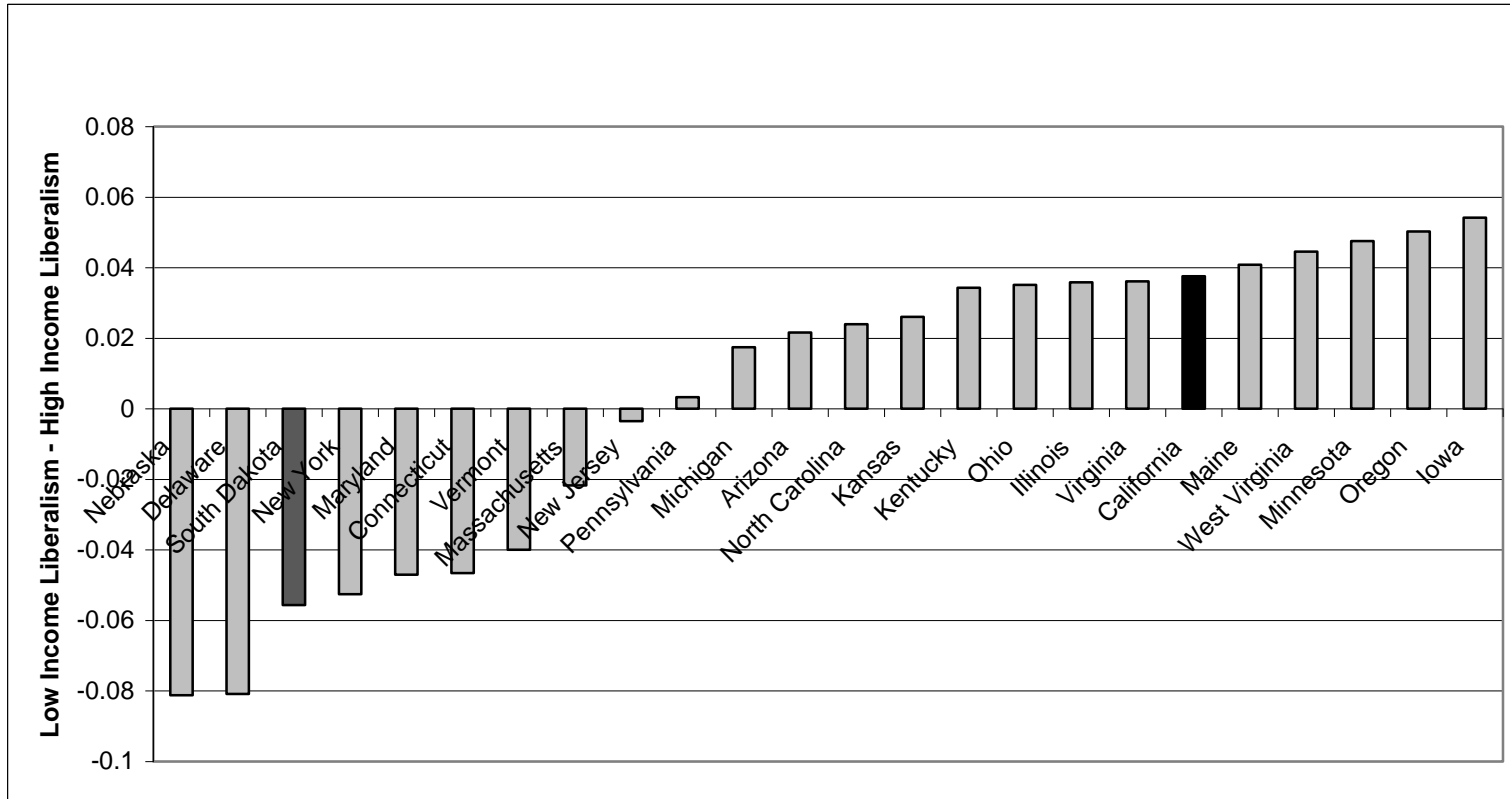
	Lower income	Higher income	Lower-Higher
Dealing with the moral breakdown in the country	1.64	2.09	-0.45*
Improving the job situation	1.39	1.61	-0.22*
Reducing crime	1.50	1.69	-0.19*
Taking steps to make the Social Security system financially sound	1.33	1.49	-0.16*
Taking steps to make the Medicare system financially sound	1.38	1.51	-0.13*
Protecting the environment	1.52	1.66	-0.15*
Reducing health care costs	1.32	1.46	-0.14*
Providing health insurance to the uninsured	1.54	1.70	-0.16*
Dealing with global warming	1.85	2.03	-0.18*
Dealing with the problems of poor and needy people	1.51	1.65	-0.14*
Reducing federal income taxes for the middle class	1.63	1.78	-0.15*
Making the recent federal income tax cuts permanent	1.97	2.10	-0.14*
Reducing the budget deficit	1.43	1.54	-0.11*
Improving the educational system	1.39	1.48	-0.09
Defending the country from future terrorist attacks	1.28	1.35	-0.06
Dealing with the issue of illegal immigration	1.62	1.67	-0.05
Dealing with global trade issues	1.76	1.79	-0.03
Strengthening the U.S. military	1.75	1.77	-0.02
Dealing with the nation's energy problem	1.45	1.46	0.00
Strengthening the nation's economy	1.26	1.25	0.02
Reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interest groups in Washington	1.81	1.71	0.10

Data source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (January, 2008).

Lower numbers indicate higher priority on 1-4 scale.

\* indicates differences are significant at  $p < .05$ .

**Figure 1: Different Political Ideologies Across the States, by Income Halves**

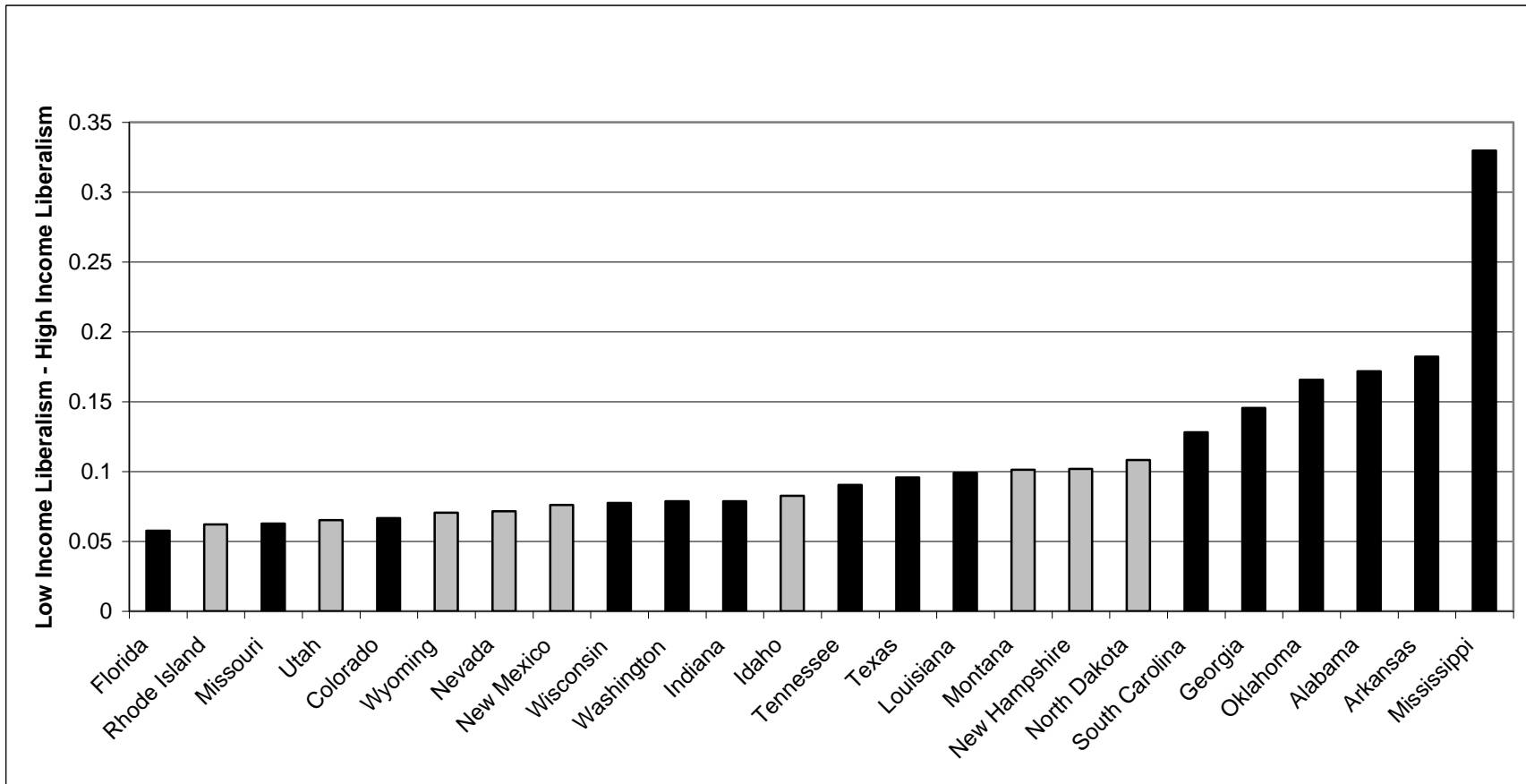


Data source: 2000 and 2004 National Annenberg Election Surveys.

Bars are mean ideology for low income group - mean ideology for high income group (1-5 ideological scale, liberal coded higher).

Darkened bars indicate difference is significant at  $p < .10$ .

**Figure 1: Different Political Ideologies Across the States, by Income Halves (continued)**



Data source: 2000 and 2004 National Annenberg Election Surveys.

Bars are mean ideology for low income group - mean ideology for high income group (1-5 ideological scale, liberal coded higher).

Darkened bars indicate difference is significant at  $p < .10$ .