Political Inequality in America:
Who Loses and What Can Be Done About It?

Abstract

Rapid growth in America's economic inequality and endemic disadvantages among racial minorities have deepened fears about unequal political influence. From separate studies, it appears that government responds more to the wealthy and to whites. But critical questions remain unanswered. Is it class or race that ultimately drives inequality in government responsiveness? Also, how can disparities in responsiveness be reduced? Can the composition of political leadership, economic growth, or expanded voter turnout diminish unequal influence? To answer these questions, we assess the congruence between individual-level policy preferences and policy outcomes using the General Social Survey. We match individual spending preferences in 11 policy areas with actual federal spending to see whose preferences are realized. We find that race, more so than class, shapes government responsiveness. We also find that Democratic Party control eliminates over half of the racial bias in responsiveness. Economic growth also narrows racial inequalities.

Equality is central to democratic politics. Robert Dahl (1971, 1) contended "that a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals." Along the same lines, Sidney Verba (2003, 663) argued that "the equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens" is "one of the bedrock principles of a democracy." Yet fears of bias and unequal political influence have been a part of American democracy almost since its inception (e.g. Schattschneider 1960; Piven and Cloward 1977). The rapid growth of economic inequality in the U.S. over the last several decades has renewed and deepened these fears, sparking widespread scholarly attention (e.g., American Political Science Association 2004; Page and Jacobs 2005; Bartels 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Gilens 2012; Carnes 2013; Butler 2014; Piketty and Goldhammer 2014). Until recently, scholars have had a difficult time proving that

government responds more to some groups than others (Hajnal 2009). That has changed with a series of studies that have demonstrated in dramatic and convincing fashion that different segments of the polity have different levels of influence over the actions of government. Using an impressive array of data, scholars have shown that policy follows the wishes of the wealthy over those of the poor (e.g., Page and Jacobs 2005; Bartels, 2008; Rigby and Wright 2011; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014). Others have shown that legislative action tracks the preferences of white Americans more than those of Blacks or Hispanics (Griffin and Newman 2008).

These are important developments in our understanding of American democracy but they leave critical questions unanswered. Whites and the wealthy garner most of the government's attention, but is class or race really driving responsiveness in American politics? Existing studies tend to employ research designs that only allow them to look at one demographic characteristic in isolation. For example, Gilens (2012) and Bartels (2008) only look at the effect of income differences in responsiveness while ignoring other divisions like race or ethnicity. Similarly, Griffin and Newman (2008) focus on racial differences in responsiveness but pay little heed to class and other important divides in American politics. Consequently, we do not know which factor is really behind differential responsiveness. In fact, since race and class are correlated in the U.S. it may be that what appears to be race-based inequalities in representation are actually only income-based inequalities or vice-versa.[1] If the latter is true, for instance, efforts currently directed toward decreasing income-based disparities in political influence may be ineffectual unless they also attend to racial disparities. Moreover, it remains unclear how political inequalities based on class and race intersect. Are the views of poor Blacks even more

[1] On the persistence of the White-Black income gap see, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/07/5-facts-about-economic-inequality/.

likely to be snubbed than those of poor whites? Do wealthy Blacks make the same gains in political representation that wealthy whites enjoy? Finally, we do not know enough about how racial and class differences in responsiveness vary across issue areas and over time. These are all good reasons to examine the roots of unequal responsiveness more comprehensively.

Equally important, existing studies have offered few viable solutions to inequality in responsiveness. To help identify potential solutions, we look at variation in responsiveness across contexts. We investigate three factors that may shape responsiveness. First, given the central role political parties play in structuring policy and knowing that racial and ethnic minorities have voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party in recent years, we might expect that party control of government will critically alter racial inequality in responsiveness. Second, given (as we show below) that racial minorities and the poor tend to favor more government spending, we might expect that the federal government would be more able to accommodate those preferences when the economy is expanding and less able to heed minority wishes under poor economic conditions. Finally, given that elected representatives have an incentive to respond more to the politically active, one could predict that greater participation by minorities and the poor would reduce inequalities in representation. We test these three possibilities below.

We seek to address these questions using a novel but relatively straightforward research design. Namely, we assess the congruence between individual-level preferences for federal spending in 11 core areas and actual spending outcomes over a long period of time (1972-2010) to see who gets what they want from government. By focusing on individual-level preferences rather than on measures aggregated to the group level as existing studies have largely done (e.g., Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012), we can simultaneously control for a range of different individual characteristics that could be driving unequal responsiveness. This enables us to see whether

class, race, or some other factor like partisanship or ideology is the primary driver of political inequality.

Our evidence points to the conclusion that the severity of racial differences in responsiveness has been underappreciated. To be sure, the well-educated and higher income earners are more likely to be policy winners over the last four decades. However, the racial inequality in policy responsiveness we uncover is as large as, and often larger than, income inequality. Blacks are significantly less likely than whites to be policy winners, even after we control for income, as well as Blacks' greater propensity to identify with the Democratic Party, to hold liberal policy views, and to prefer increases in government spending. Moreover, while the impact of class is inconsistent across time and issue area, Blacks are almost always disadvantaged regardless of the year and regardless of the issue. There is, however, significant variation in the degree to which Blacks are disadvantaged on other dimensions. First, Democratic Party control greatly reduces racial inequality in responsiveness. Likewise, the racial gap in responsiveness fades significantly when the economy grows. Voting by Blacks, however, does little to reduce racial gaps in responsiveness. All of this suggests that although there are important barriers to Blacks' representation in American politics, there are also potential pathways to greater inclusion.

Class, Race, and Policy Representation

Democratic theory demands that, at least to some degree, the government's actions and policy outputs should be responsive to the public's preferences. That is, when the public wants more spending, government should typically spend more. We call this policy representation—

when government outputs coincide with public preferences.[2] Generally speaking, systematic research has found clear evidence of such representation in U.S. politics (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963; Fenno 1978; Page and Shapiro 1983; Wlezien 2004). However, concerns about inequalities in responsiveness to subgroups of the public are widely shared. The vast majority of recent attention to political inequality has focused on class-based, and specifically, income-based inequalities in influence. Concern that the political system advantages the wealthy has motivated both scholarly attention (e.g., Schattschnieder 1960; Piven and Cloward 1977; APSA Taskforce 2004) and political activism (e.g., the Occupy Wall Street movement). Systematic research has found strong evidence that the decisions of policymakers and the policy outputs that result are significantly more consonant with the policy preferences of high income earners than low income earners (Page and Jacobs 2005; Bartels 2008; Druckman and Jacobs 2011; Ellis 2012; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014). However, government can only respond unequally to two groups when the groups hold different preferences (Ura and Ellis 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). Since the poor and wealthy often hold highly correlated preferences (at least by currently available measures)[3], some argue that income-based inequalities are somewhat muted (Ura and Ellis 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Bhatti and Erikson 2011; Wlezien and Soroka 2011). Taken together, this literature presents a variety of findings demonstrating that when the poor and wealthy hold conflicting preferences, government action responds to high income earners' preferences and essentially ignores the preferences of low income earners. This is a set of findings of deep practical and theoretical significance.

[2] We recognize that representation is a complex phenomenon and that we are only examining one of many of its facets (see, e.g., Pitkin 1967). For some studies examining other forms of representation of minority constituents, see Butler and Brookman (2011) and Grose (2011).

[3] See Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013) for a new set of measures that may tell a different story.

Critically, these studies almost completely ignore the role of race. This is, to put it plainly, a curious omission. Although income inequality is certainly growing, and there is little doubt that "class politics is alive and well" in the current competition between the two major parties (Bartels 2008, 96), there is also little doubt that racial dynamics profoundly shape American politics. Indeed, judged by the vote, the post-war era has clearly been split more by race than class. From 1944 to 2012, the difference in the percentage of Blacks and Whites voting for Democratic presidential candidates was on average 43 points. In contrast, the parallel difference in Democratic support for working class and middle class voters was only 12 points (Abramson, et al. 2014, Ch. 4). The relative centrality of race over class in the vote appears only to have grown over time and may have reached an all-time high in 2012 (Abrajano and Hajnal 2014).

Racial dynamics not only influence electoral choice and the current party system, they are also a primary factor behind policy choice. Across a range of issues Blacks and Whites hold sharply divergent policy preferences (Kinder and Winter 2001; see also Griffin and Newman 2008). Indeed, Kinder and Sanders declare that "Differences in opinion between Blacks and whites… are simply staggering" (1996, 17). On most policy questions class divides pale in comparison. Page and Jacobs (2009, 73) rely on a vast array of survey data to argue that "ordinary Americans are not engaged in . . . class war."[4] This is not to suggest that high and low income earners agree on all political questions, far from it. Our point is simply that, since Blacks and Whites disagree about policies more frequently, and to a greater degree, than do income groups, the possibility of race-based inequality in representation is greater than that of income-based inequality.

[4] Likewise, Kinder and Sanders find that "differences associated with class or gender pale by comparison" to differences by race (1996:17).

Indeed, existing evidence shows quite clearly that race matters for policy representation as well. Studies of political inequality that have focused on race have generally found that whites hold undue influence (e.g. Browing, Marshall and Tabb 1984). The most systematic of these studies has found that the decisions of members of Congress and federal government policy outputs are considerably more aligned with the policy preferences of whites than the preferences of racial minorities (Griffin and Newman 2007, 2008). In other words, race, rather than class, may be the primary driver of responsiveness.

All of this leaves us with a sense that both race and class may shape political inequality, and also deep questions about the relationship between the two. In particular, because studies of income-based inequalities in representation almost never account for race and studies of race-based inequalities almost never account for income, we do not know whether income or race is the chief driver of political inequality. This lack of cross examination is especially important in light of the fact that race and class are deeply intertwined in the U.S. For example, 66 percent of the poor in this country are non-white, while 9 percent of the wealthy is non-white (Keister 2014).[5] Given the close relationship between race and class it seems clear that one should not be studied without consideration of the other.

Reducing Inequality in Representation

Recent studies have done well in helping to identify inequalities in policy representation. These studies have, however, been less successful in offering viable solutions to the problem of uneven representation. Identifying the problem is, of course, only the first step. Is there anything we can do to diminish bias in the policy world? We attempt to answer this question by

[5] Figures for the 'poor' are for those below the official poverty, while "wealthy" refers the top 1% of income earners.

looking at variation in responsiveness across different contexts that we believe are likely to lead to different outcomes and less severe imbalances in representation.

First, we explore partisan control. There are several reasons to expect a strong relationship between the party in government and responsiveness. The most obvious reason is that minorities and to a lesser extent the lower classes disproportionately favor the Democratic Party. In 2010, for example, 89 percent of Blacks, 60 percent of Hispanics, 58 percent of Asian Americans and 57 percent of individuals with incomes below $30,000 supported Democratic candidates for Congress.[6] Members of these groups may be supporting the Democratic Party precisely because it enacts policies that they favor. The logic from the perspective of the Democratic Party is equally clear. Democrats are likely to pursue policies minorities and the working class favor because they want to appeal to their core constituency to win elections.[7] We also focus on partisan control because political parties are likely to be one of the major drivers of American public policy. There is certainly a debate as to just how much influence political parties have over the policy process but few would not expect sharp policy differences in governments dominated by Democrats and those run by Republicans. Moreover, existing studies have shown that economic outcomes for different demographic groups do vary considerably across parties (Bartels 2008; Hajnal and Horowitz 2014). We ask whether race- and income-based inequalities in policy responsiveness follow the same pattern.

Economic conditions may also affect government's ability to respond to citizen demands. During periods of robust economic growth, government generally has greater revenues to expend to try to accommodate the interests of its citizens. And if citizens want greater spending – as we

[6] By contrast, a clear majority of whites (63 percent) and the wealthy (64% of those earning $200,000 or more) favored Republicans. Data from CNN National Exit Polls.

[7] At the same time is important to recognize that *both* parties make strong claims that they serve the interests of low income earners and minority groups

will find most minorities and the poor do – it may be easier for government action to coincide with the policy preferences of racial minorities and the poor during periods of economic expansion.[8] Thus, we explore whether economic expansion increases the policy representation of minorities and the poor and diminishes representation gaps.

Finally, we examine whether voting by racial and ethnic minorities helps to narrow the racial gap in responsiveness. On the one hand, government adopts policies consonant with the preferences of voters more than nonvoters (Griffin and Newman 2005). However, prior studies have found that the rewards of voting are less for groups that are small and that are not pivotal (Griffin and Newman 2013, see also Butler 2014).

Method and Data

We answer these questions using a novel but relatively straightforward research design. Unlike most existing studies, we gauge the congruence between *individual* level policy preferences and policy outcomes rather than *group* level policy preferences. Specifically, using the General Social Survey (GSS), we have compiled the spending preferences (increase, decrease, no change) for individual Americans on 11 core policy areas for the years 1972 to 2010.

We then match those individual preferences with actual federal government spending outcomes in each area in the subsequent year. Combining individual preferences and governmental spending patterns, we can observe whose policy preferences are enacted by government and whose preferences are not. If, for example, a particular individual favored a decline in federal government welfare spending and the federal government chose to

[8] Across all of the issues and years in our data set, a clear plurality (43 percent) favors spending increases over decreases (23 percent) or no change in spending (35 percent).

significantly decrease welfare spending in the following year, that individual is a policy 'winner' on welfare policy that year.[9]

Focusing on individual rather than group preferences (which has been the typical approach) has two critical advantages. By focusing on individual preferences we can simultaneously incorporate race, class, and a range of other individual demographic and political characteristics into our regression models. Given that race and class and many other factors that could be driving unequal responsiveness are all closely correlated, this kind of analysis is critical and ultimately enables us to see whether class, race, or some other factor is the primary driver of political inequality.

Our data on individual policy preferences come from the General Social Survey (GSS), including all GSS administrations between 1972 and 2010. The GSS is a nationally representative survey administered in most years. The average sample size for our 28 surveys is 1,967. The scope and consistency of the GSS items offer significant analytical leverage. By looking over an extensive time period and by incorporating an array of issues from welfare and health care on one end of the spectrum to the military, foreign aid, and space exploration on the other, we can not only look at the overall pattern of who wins and who loses in American policy contests but just as importantly we can examine variation in responsiveness over time, across issue areas, and across potentially critical economic and political contexts (the remaining domains include education, parks and recreation, law enforcement, solving the problems of big cities, improving and protecting the environment, and highways and bridges. All of this helps us

[9] We recognize that spending is not the only dimension of policy. In criminal justice, for example, individual citizens may care as much or more about the laxness or severity of criminal sentencing policy than they do about the amount spent on criminal justice. Likewise, the amount of money spent may be less important than how that money is spent (the choice in criminal justice might, for example, be between money for prisons or money for rehabilitation). Thus, our analysis represents an incomplete picture of policy responsiveness in the American context.

to identify potential solutions to the unequal responsiveness that we and others generally find exists in American politics.

The core dependent variable in our analysis is policy congruence. Does government do what an individual wants in a given policy arena at a given point in time? Each respondent is asked whether the government should increase spending, decrease spending, or keep spending at its current level for a particular issue domain.[10] These 11 areas do not cover all issues of concern to the public, but they do address many of the most important spending decisions the government makes and collectively cover the clear majority of the federal budget.

Fortunately, these 11 policy areas match up nicely with 'functions' defined in the federal budget enabling us to observe whether the public's preferences for spending on a given issue match up with actual government behavior. In each case we match individual spending preferences on a given issue in a given year with changes in government spending on that same issue in the following fiscal year. All spending data are from the government budget historical tables and are converted to real dollars.[11]

Our main dependent variable – policy winning – is coded as 1 if subsequent government spending matched the respondent's preference and 0 otherwise. In particular, if the respondent favored a spending increase and government increased spending in the next year, they are viewed as a policy winner. Those who wanted no change when government spending did not

[10] In each case, the exact prompt is: We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount.

[11] The official budget categories and their codes are: income security (604,605, 609), national defense (050), education (501-503), international affairs (151 +152), recreational resources (303), administration of justice (750), health (550) community development (451+452), conservation and land management (302), space flight, research and supporting activities (252), ground transportation (401).

change and those who sought a decrease when spending decreased were likewise coded as winners. All others were coded as policy losers.[12]

One other issue that we had to consider is how to define what constitutes a change in government spending. There is no simple empirical cut-off that is theoretically satisfying so we use a range of different cut-offs to ensure the robustness of our findings. In most of our analyses we measure change as any spending increase/decrease that is greater than a one standard deviation shift in annual spending change in that policy area. This measure highlights spending changes that are larger than normal and might be what citizens are actually thinking about when they indicate a preference for spending increases/decreases. To ensure that our results are not dependent on this particular cut-off, in alternate analysis we use cut-offs of spending increases/decreases that are a) greater than 2 percent of the budget for that policy area, and b) greater than 5 percent of the budget for that policy area.

The main independent variables are fairly straightforward. Respondents self-identify their race. For most years, the GSS only coded for three racial groups- respondents are asked if they are white, Black, or "Other" race. After 2000, we are able to identify each respondent as white, Black, Hispanic, or Asian. Income is measured as family income (in constant dollars). Education reflects the number of years of schooling completed. Other demographic measures include age (in years), gender, unemployment, marriage status (married or not), and religion (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Athiest, or non-religious). All independent variables are standardized from 0 to 1 to more easily allow for comparison. Since we incorporate each

[12] 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.

respondent's preferences on each of the 11 spending areas, we cluster errors by respondent. We also include fixed effects for each policy area.[13]

Results

We begin simply, by presenting the percentage of cases in which individuals in various demographic categories were policy winners (see Table 1). This is the most basic indicator of responsiveness—did government do what the individual wanted. Looking across the entire table, we see that for no group does policy responsiveness exceed 50 percent.[14] This may at first be somewhat surprising. But it is more understandable when one considers that there are three different possible spending preferences (increase, decrease, no change) and three different spending outcomes (increase, decrease, no change) so it is unlikely that the two will be perfectly aligned. Also, the fact that governments have limited funds while citizens in our surveys favor spending increases twice as often as spending decreases suggests that there will often be mismatches between preferences and spending.

At first blush demographic differences in policy representation do not appear all that large. There is some variation in who gets what they want from government, but government responds to all groups to some degree. Women "win" about as often as men (37.1% compared to 36.7%), and those over 65 win only slightly more often than those under 30 (37.8% compared to 37.2%). Differences across religious groups are slight as well. The biggest gap for religious

[13] The results without fixed effects are nearly identical. Alternate analysis with fixed effects for policy/year also led to similar results.
[14] For similar findings, see Griffin and Newman (2008) and Lax and Phillips (2011).

groups, between the non-religious and Catholics, is just 1.6 points (37.6% for Catholics and 36.0% for non-religious).[15]

TABLE 1: DESCRIBING UNEQUAL RESPONSIVENESS

	Percent winning
Race	
White	37.6
Black	31.9
Hispanic[1]	37.0
Asian American[1]	40.9
Class	
Income – high	37.6
Income - middle	36.7
Income – low	36.1
Education – high	38.9
Education – low	35.8
Gender	
Male	36.7
Female	37.1
Religion	
Protestant	36.8
Catholic	37.6
Jewish	37.3
Non-Religious	36.0
Age	
Age – Over 65	37.2
Age – Under 30	37.8

[1]Data on Hispanics and Asian Americans are limited to 2000 - 2010 and are thus not strictly comparable to other figures in the table.

Even for class, the differences are statistically significant, but not all that large, a finding in keeping with some work on income and responsiveness (e.g., Ura and Ellis 2008; Bhatti and Erikson 2011; Wlezien and Soroka 2011). Income, the measure of class typically employed in these studies, shows only a small relationship to responsiveness. High income earners (those in the top third of the income distribution) won 37.6% of the time, compared to 36.1% for those in the lowest third. Moreover, if we look at more extreme categories like the top 10 percent of earners (37.9% winners) or even the top 1 percent (36.8% winners) and compare them to the

[15] We recognize that these measures of religion are unrefined and that more nuanced measures may generate larger differences. Unfortunately, such measures are not available in the GSS.

bottom 10 percent (35.8% winners) or the bottom 1 percent (33.4% winners), slightly larger class differences do emerge but they are far from dramatic. Alternate analysis of other potential markers of class like being unemployed (35.4% winners) also don't reveal major differences in responsiveness. If, however, we think of class in terms of education, we observe slightly larger gaps in responsiveness. Those with a college education win more often than those with less than a high school degree (38.9% and 35.8%, respectively). But overall, class, religion, and most other demographic characteristics do not appear to greatly shape government responsiveness.

The one exception is race. By far the largest differences between groups are in the race category. Blacks are the least advantaged, by a considerable margin, in the whole table. Blacks are only winners in 31.9% of cases, compared to 37.6% for whites. This 5.7 point difference is roughly four times larger than the 1.5 point difference between high and low income earners. Although the data are far more limited because the GSS only began to inquire about Hispanic ethnicity and Asian heritage in 2000, we can offer some preliminary conclusions about these two groups. Over this ten year period, Hispanics won in 37.0% of cases, just slightly below the figure for whites for the same period (38.1%). By contrast, Asian Americans won at higher rates than whites (40.9%) and might therefore be viewed as privileged in the political system.

We can also compare the importance of race and class by looking at how responsiveness varies by class within each racial group. Upon doing so we find that income makes essentially no difference among Blacks. Blacks in the top income quartile win about as often (32.0%) as Blacks in the bottom income quartile (32.1%). In other words, Blacks lose more regularly than whites regardless of their class status. Among whites the income gap is in the expected direction but still small (38.8% winners for wealthier whites vs 36.9% for poorer whites). Whites win

more often than Blacks at all class levels, such that poor whites are still much more likely to be policy winners than are wealthy Blacks. Race again trumps class.[16]

These preliminary results are intriguing, but the principal advantage of our research design is that we can examine several different demographic characteristics simultaneously to determine what most drives policy representation. We do this by modeling the probability of being a policy winner on a set of demographic and political measures. Model 1 of Table 2 provides the basic results. Consistent with the findings Bartels and Gilens have published using different data, we see evidence of class bias. Higher levels of educational attainment and higher income both increase the odds of winning. This is true holding race constant. This is more general evidence than we have seen in the past that class shapes policy representation even after accounting for race. The results also demonstrate that Blacks are significantly less likely to win than the comparison category of whites. This is true even when we control for income and education. Race shapes political inequality over and above the well-documented inequalities based on income.[17] We also note that the indicator variable for "other races" is modestly positive, though not statistically significant. This category is likely comprised of mostly Hispanics and some Asian Americans, but represents a tiny fraction of respondents for most years. We look more specifically at Hispanics and Asian Americans below.

In order to assess the relative impact of race, class, and other factors, we now turn to Figure 1 which shows the difference in the probability of winning for various groups, holding all

[16]Looking further at different subgroups, we found one key instance of 'intersectionality.' Black women are particularly likely to be ignored in the policy arena. The gaps are relatively small in the bivariate analysis but when we add an interaction term for Black and gender to subsequent regressions, it is significant and negative indicating that Black women are doubly disadvantaged. When government chooses policy, it is the voices of Black women, perhaps more than any other group, that are likely to overlooked.

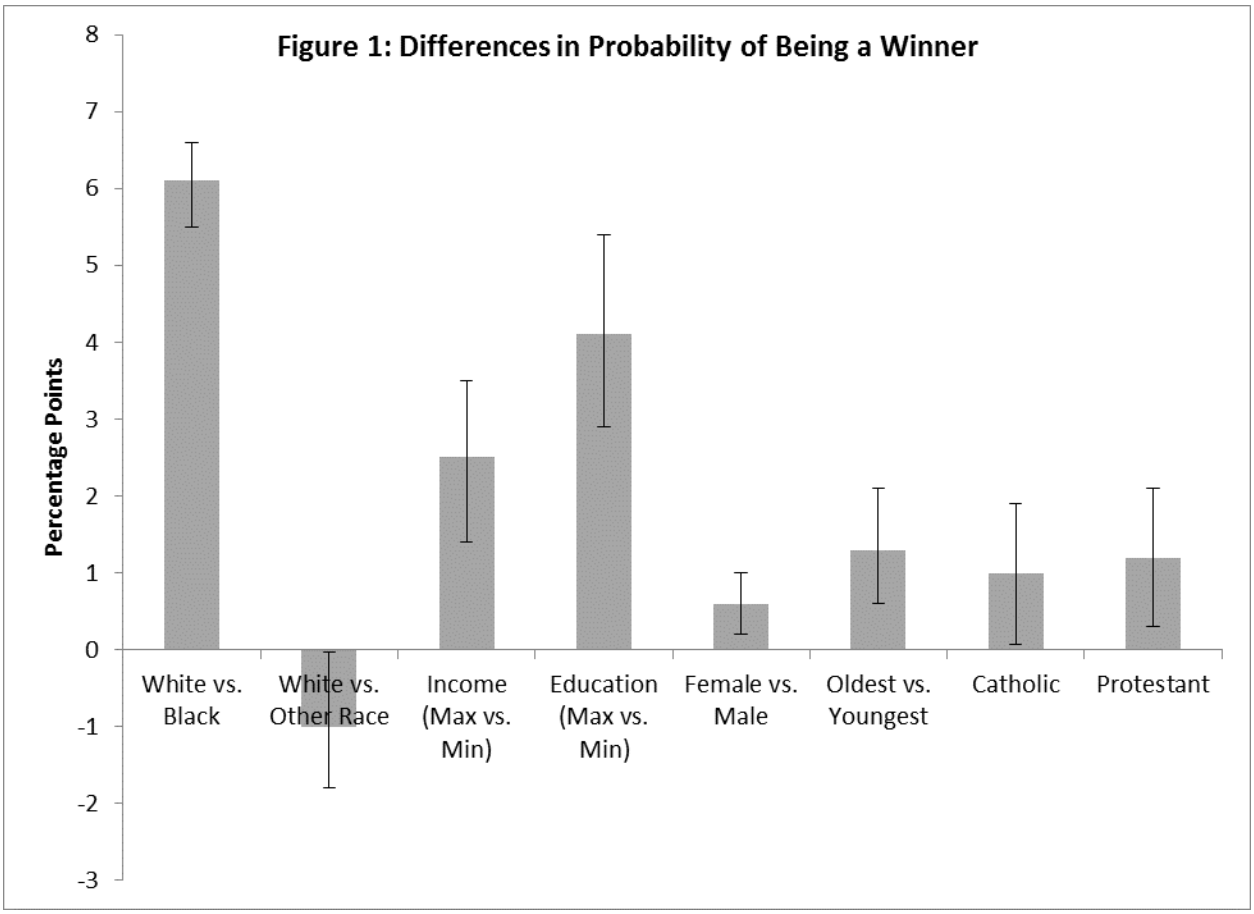
[17] We also note that, all else equal, women are more likely than men to win, while older Americans are more likely to win as well. Catholics and Protestants are also significantly more likely to win than the comparison group of Atheists.

other variables at mean or modal values.[18] Here we see the uniquely powerful role of race in shaping political responsiveness. The model estimates that all else equal the probability of a white person winning is 6.1 points higher than the probability of a Black person winning.

Class matters as well. But the gaps are somewhat smaller. The comparable difference between the highest and lowest income earners is 2.5 points, and between the most and least educated is 4.1 points. After race and class, the next largest factor in who wins is religion, with Catholics and Protestants both about one point more likely than Atheists to be winners. Finally, women were about half a percentage point more likely to win than men.

To summarize, race has the largest single impact on who government responds to. The effect of race on government responsiveness is more than twice the effect of income (Wald tests show the impact of race is significantly greater than the impact of income, $p < .01$). Only when the effects of education and income are combined does the effect of class begin to rival the impact of race. By these tests, the magnitude of race-based inequality on who wins exceeds or at a minimum rivals that of class-based inequality.

[18] Predicted probabilities calculated by CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003).



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals as estimated by CLARIFY.

Importantly, our new method also lets us examine the interaction between race and class on policy success. To do this, in alternate analysis (available from the authors on request) we simply added an interaction between Black and income to the regression model in Table 2. That interaction was significant and negative. Working through the results, we find that the effect of class works in the opposite direction for whites and Blacks. Whereas, higher income whites are 1.9 percentage points more successful than low income whites, higher income Blacks are actually marginally less likely than lower income Blacks to get the policies they want (0.9 percent). Attaining higher status does not appear to be an avenue through which Blacks can narrow the responsiveness gap.

The Politics of Responsiveness – A More Complete Model

The results to this point suggest that Black preferences are less impactful than others when it comes to policy. But are the effects that we see here really driven by race? We have so far presumed that demographics shape responsiveness, but it also possible that politics and political orientation are at the root of these inequalities. The two major political parties structure the nation's politics and as those two parties have become more internally homogeneous and polarized from each other, the basic left-right ideological divide has become increasingly important. Moreover, Blacks side with the Democratic Party and favor liberal positions on most issues more than any of the other demographic groups we examine here. If Blacks lose regularly, is it because politicians tend to ignore Blacks more than other groups or is it because Blacks tend to be Democrats and liberals in a political environment that at times favors Republicans and conservatives? We address this possibility in Model 2 of Table 2 by controlling additionally for each respondent's party identification (the standard 7 point party identification scale) and liberal-conservative ideology (self-placement on the standard liberal-conservative ideology scale).[19]

TABLE 2: RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Race				
Black	-0.25	-0.22	-0.22	-0.12
	(0.01)***	(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***
Other Race	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.00
	(0.02) **	(0.02) **	(0.02)	(0.01)

[19] Note that controlling for party identification is closely linked to controlling for copartisanship, the match between an individual's party identification and the party of an elected official. Copartisanship powerfully shapes the congruence between the roll call voting of members of Congress and the policy preferences of their individual constituents (e.g., Clinton 2006). In our context of policy outcomes, the result of bargaining and votes across both chambers of Congress and the president, it is harder to identify who is a copartisan in the frequent case of divided government. We explore the effects of party control of Congress and the presidency below. We note, however, that controlling for copartisanship with the president does not alter our main conclusion that policy responds significantly less to Black Americans and that race is significantly more tied to responsiveness than class.

Class				
Income	0.10	0.07	0.07	0.04
	(0.02) ***	(0.02) ***	(0.02) ***	(0.01) ***
Education	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.08
	(0.03) ***	(0.03) ***	(0.03) ***	(0.02) ***
Misc.				
Male	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.03
	(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***	(0.00) ***
Age	0.05	0.05	0.01	0.00
	(0.02) ***	(0.02) ***	(0.02)	(0.01)
Unemployed	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01) *
Married	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Religion				
Catholic	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.03
	(0.02) **	(0.02) ***	(0.02) ***	(0.01) ***
Jewish	-0.01	0.02	0.04	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Protestant	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.03
	(0.02) ***	(0.02) **	(0.02) ***	(0.01) ***
No Religion	-0.02	-0.00	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Political Orientation				
Ideology		-0.03	-0.00	-0.01
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Party ID		-0.13	-0.10	-0.07
		(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***	(0.01) ***
Favor Spending			-0.03	-0.13
			(0.00) ***	(0.00) ***
Member of Plurality			-0.62	-0.27
			(0.01) ***	(0.00) ***
Constant	-0.29	-0.12	0.24	
	(0.03) ***	(0.03) ***	(0.03) ***	
Cut point 1				-2.16
				(0.02) ***
Cut point 2				-0.20
				(0.02) ***
N	459,212	399,490	399,490	399,490

* denotes p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

The dependent variable in columns 1-3 is coded 1 for respondents whose preferences matched spending outcomes and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable in column 4 is coded 0 for respondents whose preferences were 2 categories from actual spending, 1 for respondents whose preferences were one category away from actual spending, and 2 for respondents whose preferences matched outcomes.

Part of the alternative explanation is confirmed. The results show that Democrats win less often than do Republicans. There is, in fact, a fairly severe partisan tilt to policy over this 40 year period that to our knowledge has not received prior attention. All else equal strong Democrats are 6.3 percentage points less likely to win than strong Republicans. Whether this is due to the frequent presence of Republican Presidents, the lower participation rates of Democrats, or some other factor is a question we address below. But the other part of the alternative explanation that Blacks lose more often simply because they are liberals and Democrats is not supported. The important point for our purposes is that the parameter estimates for race do not change much in the face of these controls. Blacks remain significantly less likely than whites to win, though the parameter estimate moves slightly toward zero. Moreover, the coefficient for race is significantly greater than that for income and education ($p < .01$).

Another possibility is that Blacks are disadvantaged because they are a relatively small group that tends to hold distinct spending preferences. Any minority group that regularly expresses preferences that clash with the majority may be likely to lose out. Thus, Blacks may be winning significantly less often simply because they hold views that are not in the majority or plurality nationwide. Although we find only marginal differences in Blacks' and whites' tendency to support the nation's plurality spending position in each issue/year, we think it is important to address this possibility.[20] To do so, we add to our model a measure of whether or not each respondent favors the most popular spending position on that issue in that year (Model 3 of Table 2).

[20] Blacks favor the most favored policy position 48 percent of the time compared to 50 percent for whites.

In addition, a group could lose more often than others simply because it favors spending that is less feasible. Given that the government has real budget constraints, it may be less able to adhere to the preferences of individuals who favor spending increases than it is those who prefer stable or declining spending. Moreover, Blacks do, in fact, favor spending increases more often than do whites (49.6% for Blacks vs 40.3% of the time for whites). To ensure that a proclivity for favoring more spending is not responsible for the racial gap in responsiveness, we add a measure of whether the respondent favors a spending increase (2), no change (1), or a spending decrease (0) for that issue/year.

The results from Model 3 suggest that neither alternative explanation accounts for the lack of responsiveness to Blacks' interests. The coefficients for income, education, and Black respondents remain unchanged. Blacks remain distinctly disadvantaged. Ultimately, it is not just some feature of Blacks' partisanship, political orientation, or spending preferences that is driving the Black-white gap in policy success. The disadvantage Blacks face in the American policy world seems much deeper.

Alternate Tests of Blacks' Disadvantage

To help ensure that our overall story is accurate, we undertook a series of additional robustness checks. First, we altered in several ways how we measure congruence between an individual's policy preference and government policy outcomes. Since we care about whether individual Americans get exactly what they want, we have been using a dependent variable that is scored 1 for a match between a respondent's preferences and subsequent government spending and 0 for all other possibilities. But we should also care about *how far* the outcome is from an

individual's first preference. Thus, we employed a more nuanced dependent variable in which respondents who get precisely what they want are scored 2, those for whom actual government spending is one category away from their preference (e.g., someone who wants government to increase spending, but spending stayed the same or someone who wanted spending to stay the same, but it increased) are scored 1, and those cases where government does the opposite of what the respondent wants (e.g., someone who wants spending to decrease, but it increased) are scored 0.

The fourth column of Table 2 presents the results. The conclusions are essentially identical. Since we have shifted to an ordered probit estimator we cannot compare the coefficients across models. But analysis of predicted probabilities shows that Blacks are still the most disadvantaged demographic group. In this model, Blacks are 4.6 percent less likely than whites to have government enact their favored policy change and Blacks are 1.6 percent more likely than whites to have government do exactly the opposite of what they want. Class still matters here but not as much. Wealthier Americans are 1.8 percent more likely than poorer Americans to get their preferred policy change and 0.2 percent less likely to get the opposite outcome.

Additional alternative approaches also support our main findings. Varying our definition of what constitutes a spending increase/decrease relative to the status quo leads to very similar results. If we use as the dependent variable each respondent's mean policy success rate across 11 policy areas, rather than the probability the respondent gets what she wants in each specific domain, results continue to show that government policy is least responsive to Black respondents. In another robustness check, we changed the dependent variable from policy congruence to actual policy outcome (more spending, the same amount of spending, less

spending). The independent variables in this model included each respondent's spending preference and an interaction between spending preferences and respondents' demographic characteristics, along with the other controls in Table 2. The results again strongly reinforce our findings. Government policy was generally responsive to Americans' spending preferences, but was significantly less responsive to Blacks' spending preferences. In fact, this alternate method indicates that when Blacks favor a spending increase, the probability of an increase actually goes down.

It is also possible that we are not measuring class as well as we could. We explored several alternate measures of class, including income logged and an alpha factor combining income and education. None revealed a larger effect for class than race and most suggested a smaller or even insignificant effect for class. Given the possibility of non-linearities in the effect of class, we also used dummy variables for each income quartile and for different levels of education (e.g. high school vs college) (Soroka and Wlezien 2008). This also did not affect the overall results with respect to race, but did suggest that the gains in responsiveness are greatest near the top of the income and education scales as Bartels (2008) and Gilens and Page (2014) found (see online appendix).

These results speak to another potential critique. Some might accept our findings, but argue that they are unsurprising or even unimportant because Blacks represent a small minority of the population and as such should have less say than the majority white population. Put simply, the median voter is white and politicians should represent the median voter, both strategically and normatively. This may be true but even among small minorities Blacks stand out. Other racial and ethnic minorities (namely Asians), the poor, the young, the unemployed, Jews, and Catholics all get roughly equal influence or in some cases more influence than their

numbers would suggest. Other minorities do not lose disproportionately. Only Black voices are differentially ignored. Moreover, the smallest minority we examine, the wealthiest one percent, do exceptionally well in shaping policy.

Other critics might raise more fundamental concerns about the lack of meaningful public opinion on these spending measures. Individual Americans may not have thought much about these spending questions, and may not know what government is doing; as such they may not be able to express coherent or meaningful views in surveys.[21] We readily admit that survey opinions often represent ill-informed, top-of-the-head responses (Converse 1964, Zaller and Feldman 1992). All survey analysis should, therefore, be done with a real dose of caution. Nevertheless, if we find significant patterns despite this 'noise', we can be particularly confident of those relationships. Moreover, it is clear that opinions on these particular spending issues are often quite reasoned (Wlezien 1995) and that elected officials treat these opinions as something worth following (Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004). As Wlezien's (1995) thermostatic model has demonstrated, shifts in public opinion on these spending questions illustrate not only that the public knows the rough contours of government spending changes but also that the public reacts to real spending shifts in a rational and coherent fashion.

Another way to demonstrate the utility of spending preferences is simply to show that patterns within and across groups are predictable and coherent. Indeed, a brief examination of the racial patterns suggests exactly that. A clear majority of Blacks in our surveys favor spending increases on education (79%), health care (79%), welfare (61%) and cities (58%) while the clear majority of Blacks opposes increases on space (96%), defense (81%), and foreign aid (89%). Compared to whites, Blacks are much more likely to favor spending increase on cities

[21] We can begin to get around this concern by only including the well-educated or the politically involved in our analysis. When we do this we get the same overall pattern of results and find, if anything, that the effects of race are slightly more pronounced.

(58% vs 38%) and education (79% vs 65%), and much less likely to favor cuts on welfare (16% vs 38%). All of this fits with our existing knowledge of the politics of Black and white Americans (Kinder and Sanders 1994; Kinder and Winter 2001).

Still, there may be some variation in knowledge and interest across spending areas. Respondents might know and care about welfare and defense spending but not recreation or transportation spending. To address this concern, we repeated the analysis first by analyzing only the four spending areas that tend to get the most attention and then second by focusing on the four spending areas that represent the largest share of the federal budget. Both sets of analyses led to conclusions that were essentially identical to those we present in Table 2. Blacks were once again the big losers.[22]

Variation across Issues and Time

To probe the contours of racial differences in government responsiveness, we examined variation across different policy issues as well across the different years of our data. Do Blacks lose consistently across all issues? Do they lose year after year across the almost four decades of our analysis? And how do the disadvantages of race and class compare over these two contexts?

We begin by modelling policy responsiveness by issue across the 11 domains in our data, disaggregating the data reported in Table 2, column 1. If reelection drives political leaders' behavior, then we should expect leaders to be particularly sensitive to group demands on issues that are of special significance to that group (Bishin 2009). In the context of race and representation, Griffin and Newman (2008) found that the racial gap in representation was much smaller in issue domains that Blacks or Latinos care about more than whites do, and where the groups disagree. Thus, we expect racial inequalities in political representation to be smaller in

[22] Analysis available in online appendix.

issue domains – like welfare, criminal justice, and health care – that are particularly relevant to minority and lower class interests (Griffin and Newman identified these three domains as being more salient to Blacks than whites).

Table 3 reports the parameter estimates for race (Black) and class (income and education) for the entire sample (see Table 2) and then for each issue domain. Statistically significant effects are bolded ($p<.05$). Doing so reveals that Blacks are disadvantaged in all 11 issue domains. Regardless of what policy the government focuses on, Black opinions hold significantly less sway than white opinions. By contrast, class has had a much less consistent impact on policy responsiveness. Lower income Americans were not significantly disadvantaged for more than half of the policy areas and, on one policy – education spending – lower income Americans were significantly more influential than were wealthier Americans. Likewise, the impact of a respondent's education on responsiveness was insignificant in one policy area and was actually negative in three others. Race was much more of an ever present barrier than class.

There is, however, some interesting variation across issues in the degree to which Blacks are disadvantaged. Looking across the coefficients it appears that the size of the Black disadvantage diminishes somewhat on policy areas that are particularly important to the Black community. In particular, the negative coefficients for Blacks are visibly smaller on Welfare (-.17), Health Care (-.14), and Crime (-.11). This is encouraging in that Blacks are getting a little more of the policies they want on the issues that are especially critical to their community, much as Griffin and Newman (2008) found. When we omit these three issue areas and pool the remaining eight domains, Blacks' disadvantage is magnified to -.30.

TABLE 3

EFFECT OF RACE, INCOME, AND EDUCATION BY ISSUE AREA

	Black	Income	Education
All	**-.25**	**.10**	**.17**
Foreign Aid	**-.15**	**.16**	**.66**
Aid to Cities	**-.45**	.13	**.44**
Crime	**-.11**	**.23**	**.48**
Education	**-.39**	**-.19**	**-.80**
Environment	**-.20**	.10	**-.71**
Welfare	**-.17**	-.06	**.64**
Health Care	**-.14**	-.12	.07
Transportation	**-.21**	.02	**.60**
Space	**-.62**	**.44**	**.88**
Defense	**-.21**	**.15**	**-.63**
Recreation	**-.25**	-.01	**.25**

Note: Cell entries are parameter estimates,
and where bolded denote $p<.05$.

When we look at variation over time, the pattern of results is fairly similar. Race matters more consistently than class.[23] In 20 of the 26 years Blacks fare worse than whites to a statistically significant degree. By contrast, income is positive and significantly related to responsiveness in just 3 of the 26 individual years. The effects of education are similarly uneven. In most years education is insignificant, in 6 years educational attainment positively affects responsiveness, and in 3 years (1974, 1976, 1988) it is negatively related to responsiveness.

[23] Year-by-year regression results available from the authors.

Importantly, there is one three-year period (1975-77) in which government is actually somewhat more responsive to Blacks than to whites. These results may foreshadow something we will test below – the impact of partisan control on responsiveness.

Hispanics and Asian Americans

One major omission in the analysis so far is our failure to incorporate the views of Hispanics and Asian Americans. This is simply because the GSS does not identify either group until 2000. In Table 4, we look more closely at these two groups. Given the relatively small number of years for which data are available, the results will be subject to the vagaries of time and the context of political control, so we interpret the results with caution. In the first model in the table, we use the simpler dependent variable (1=policy success and 0=failure), in the second model we employ the more nuanced measure that ranges from 2 (success) to 0 (government doing the opposite of what respondent would want), and in the third model we look at smaller changes in spending (a cut-off of +/- 2 percent in annual spending).

The three models in Table 4 tell a somewhat mixed story about race. In all three models, and consistent with what we have observed to this point, Blacks are significantly less likely than whites to win. But the results for Hispanics and Asian Americans vary from model to model. In two cases, policy is significantly less responsive to Hispanics than it is to whites but in the other model that relationship is insignificant.[24] Meanwhile for Asian Americans, there is one case where Asian Americans are significantly advantaged and two with no significant results. Perhaps all that can be said is that there are signs that Hispanics may hold a less advantaged position in the policy world and few clear inferences that can be drawn about Asian Americans. Firm conclusions about the status of these two pan-ethnic groups will likely have to await the

[24] Hispanics, in fact, lose as much as Blacks in the third model.

accumulation of more data. Also worth noting in Table 4 is that income is no longer significant while the effect of education remains robust in two of the three models.

TABLE 4: RESPONSIVENESS TO OTHER RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS[1]

	0, 1	0, 1, 2	0, 1, 2 (Different Cutoff)
Race			
Black	-0.19	-0.11	-0.06
	(0.02)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Hispanic	-0.00	-0.02	-0.07
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)***
Asian	0.14	0.05	-0.04
	(0.04)***	(0.02)**	(0.02)*
Class			
Income	0.06	0.03	-0.00
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Education	0.26	0.08	-0.08
	(0.06)***	(0.03)***	(0.02)***
N	112,047	112,047	109,597

*denotes p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01. [1] Model includes same controls as Table 2.

Improving Responsiveness to Racial and Ethnic Minorities

How might we reduce or eliminate differential responsiveness? Is there anything that leads to more representation for Blacks, the most disadvantaged group in the study? One potentially important variable affecting racial differences in responsiveness is partisan control of the levers of power. Parties, at least by some estimates, are the most important actors in American politics, and Blacks voted overwhelmingly for Democrats over the time period we analyze (Rohde 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993, but see Krehbiel 1998). We might expect Democratic presidents and Democratic Congresses to foster that support and to be at least somewhat more responsive to Blacks. In fact, it is possible that Democrats would be equally responsive to Blacks and whites (or even more responsive to Blacks than whites). We directly assess the impact of partisan control in the first model in Table 5 by adding a measure that is

coded 1 for years in which the Democrats held the White House (0 otherwise), a second measure that is coded 1 for years in which the Democrats controlled Congress (e.g. had majorities in both chambers), and interactions for each partisan control variable and race.[25] We use the main dependent variable employed in Table 2 (coded 0 or 1), though the results are robust across different versions of the dependent variable.

Table 5 shows the enormous difference political party makes. The two significant positive interactions between Black and Democratic control provide clear evidence that racial inequalities in responsiveness decline under Democrats. Having a Democratic president reduces the Black-white gap in policy success by 3.8 percentage points. Likewise, having a Democratic Congress cuts the gap by another 6.7 percentage points. Under Democrats all of the exclusion of Blacks from the policy world fades away. It very much matters which party is in power for racial parity in responsiveness.[26]

TABLE 5: RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSIVENESS, INTERACTIVE MODEL

Race			
Black	-0.37	-0.34	-0.29
	(0.02)***	(0.09)***	(0.09)***
Other Race	0.04	0.03	0.04
	(0.02)*	(0.02)	(0.02)
Class			
Income	0.07	0.07	0.06
	(0.03)***	(0.03)**	(0.03)**
Education	0.20	0.13	0.13
	(0.03)***	(0.03)***	(0.03)***
Misc.			
Male	0.05	0.06	0.06
	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Age	0.01	0.03	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)

[25] Since it takes some time to enact policy, Presidential party control and Congressional party control are lagged one year.

[26] Alternate models revealed that Democratic leaders were significantly more responsive than Republican leaders to the lower class, Democratic identifiers, and liberals.

Unemployed	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Married	-0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Religion			
Catholic	0.06	0.05	0.06
	(0.02)***	(0.02)**	(0.02)**
Jewish	0.04	0.02	0.03
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Protestant	0.05	0.04	0.05
	(0.02)**	(0.02)*	(0.02)**
No Religion	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Orientation			
Ideology	-0.01	0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Party ID	-0.11	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Majority	0.06	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)***	(0.00)	(0.00)
Plurality	-0.62	-0.68	-0.68
	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Institutional Factors			
Dem President	0.04	-0.14	-0.14
	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Dem Congress	0.11	0.11	0.11
	(0.01)***	(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Black* Dem President	0.17	0.11	0.11
	(0.03)***	(0.03)***	(0.03)***
Black* Dem Congress	0.29	0.28	0.29
	(0.03)***	(0.03)***	(0.03)***
Year		-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Economic Factors			
GDP		0.02	0.02
		(0.00)***	(0.00)***
Unemployment		-0.09	-0.09
		(0.00)***	(0.00)***
Inflation		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.00)***	(0.00)***
Black*Unemployment		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Black*Inflation		0.00	0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Black*GDP		0.03	0.02
		(0.01)***	(0.01)***
Political Participation			
Turnout			0.01
			(0.01)
Black*voted			-0.06
			(0.03)**

Constant	0.20	2.87	2.64
	(0.04)***	(2.38)	(2.41)
N	381,606	336,738	333,072

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

The economy is another important variable that may affect racial differences in responsiveness. Given Blacks' preferences for greater spending noted above, racial imbalances in responsiveness might decline when the economy is growing and governments have the resources to fund greater spending. That is exactly what we find in the second model of Table 5. Here we interact race with three basic economic indicators – real per capita GDP growth, inflation, and the unemployment rate.[27] The results show that economic growth tends to boost responsiveness to everyone, but this is particularly true for Blacks. As signaled by the positive interaction between Black and GDP growth, we see that responsiveness to Blacks grows significantly when GDP is growing. If we could manufacture more growth, we might be able to eliminate some of the inequities in American politics.

One last way to rectify the racial imbalance may be expanded political participation. We know that racial and ethnic minorities tend to be less active than whites in politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Is the underrepresentation of Blacks in the policy sphere due to their lower levels of participation? Could greater turnout diminish or even erase that inequality? To test this possibility, we add a measure of voter turnout (self-reports of whether the respondent voted in the last federal election) and an interaction between Black respondents and turnout to our regression model. [28] The results are displayed in the last column of Table 6.

The results are not particularly encouraging. Accounting for turnout does not eliminate or even reduce the racial gap. In fact, we find that turnout has a differentially negative effect for

[27] All economic figures from the US Census.
[28] We would have liked to examine the relationship between other forms of participation (campaigning, protests, donations, etc) and government responsiveness but the GSS does not regularly include these measures.

Blacks (see also Griffin and Newman 2013; Butler 2014). The effect is not massive, but turnout actually expands the gap between whites and Blacks. The gap between whites and Blacks is 1.5 points higher among voters than it is among non-voters. Put another way, government typically responds to whites more than it does Blacks but when whites participate they are doubly advantaged.[29]

Discussion

On one level the results that we have presented here reaffirm existing studies of inequality in responsiveness. Using a new method that focuses on individuals and incorporates a range of demographic and political groups, we find that there are real imbalances in the policy world. Government responds much more to advantaged interests than it does to disadvantaged preferences. Both race and class shape policy responsiveness.

But on other levels we diverge. The most consistent finding in prior research and the one most echoed in the media is that income is the core determinant of policy responsiveness. The rich get what they want and the poor are generally ignored (Page and Jacobs 2005; Bartels 2008; Druckman and Jacobs 2011; Gilens 2012; Gilens and Page 2014)). But critically all of these studies ignore race. By incorporating race and class and many other demographic and political attributes in our models, we find that race, more than income, shapes who wins and who loses in the policy arena. Blacks lose by a larger margin than any demographic group, they lose more regularly over time, and they lose more consistently across issues. Moreover, this disadvantage can't be explained by Blacks' partisanship, ideological orientation, or preferences for greater

[29] Additional, unreported tests suggest that Hispanics (but not Asian Americans) are further disadvantaged by turnout.

spending. Even when Blacks make it to the middle class, they still end up with limited policy influence.

On a more positive note, there may be things we can do about the failure of American democracy to more regularly incorporate the views of African Americans. Our analysis reveals that the gap between Blacks and whites does diminish in three key contexts. First, having a Democratic President or a Democratic Congress greatly reduces racial bias. When Democrats control the levers of power, racial gaps decline by more than half. Likewise economic growth reduces inequality. When the economy is expanding and governments have more money to spend, they are better able to follow the preferences of Blacks. Also important to note is that the size of Blacks' disadvantage appears to diminish in policy areas like welfare, health care, and criminal justice that are particularly important to the Black community. American democracy is uneven and Blacks lose more than any others, but there are times and places when that imbalance begins to recede. It certainly won't be easy to generate more economic growth or greater Democratic control but it is, nevertheless, critical to know in which direction to head should we want to achieve greater racial equality in government responsiveness.

For all we have done, there is still much more to do. In particular, we have only begun to examine the list of potential solutions to the problem of unequal responsiveness. We have taken steps toward ruling out greater voter turnout as a means of alleviating political inequality. But it is unclear what role, if any, other forms of political participation play. With more money being spent on campaigns and with fewer controls on who spends it, donations are an area of special concern – especially given that whites donate more than non-whites (Verba et al 1995). Political protests might offer more hope. Protests are not only a form of participation that minorities

engage in more regularly than whites but also one that has been shown to have real influence on policy (Verba et al 1995; Gillion 2013).

Other solutions to political inequality – or at least explanations for it – might be found by focusing on electoral institutions. Redistricting is a factor often associated with minority interests in the political sphere (Cameron et al 1996). Could inequality in policy responsiveness also be explained by racial gerrymandering and ultimately alleviated by drawing districts in a more favorable manner? Likewise, what role does descriptive representation play in all of this? We know that minorities are underrepresented in office and that descriptive representation can lead to substantive representation (e.g., Grose 2011). Could the solution to unequal responsiveness lie in more Black elected officials or more Black representation on key Congressional committees? More radically, could plurality elections be in part responsible for the patterns we see here? Would minorities benefit from a system of proportional representation where there is less of incentive to ignore 'extreme' groups like Blacks (Frymer 1999)? Again, there is much work to be done.

Nevertheless, what we have found has broad implications for our understanding of how politics works, how we should study politics, and ultimately how we should appraise American democracy. In terms of how politics works, our results highlight the central role of political parties. There has been a real debate in the literature about just how much influence parties have (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Rohde 1991, Krehbiel 1998). Echoing some of the more recent empirical work, we find that parties exert powerful influences on patterns of inequality (Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Hajnal and Horowitz 2014). Control of the levers of political power by one party or the other has enormous implications for who wins and who loses in the policy arena.

There is also a broad lesson for how we study politics. We think the widespread attention to growing income inequality and its impact on politics is absolutely warranted. But as our analysis demonstrates, the conversation has to integrate race. Inequality in American politics can't be fully understood and indeed will be deeply misunderstood without thinking about and incorporating race.[30]

Finally, there are distressing implications for how we view American democracy. Inequality in policy responsiveness is very real and very disturbing. When the government makes policy, it tends to ignore the most disadvantaged segments of the population. Blacks, and to a lesser extent, Hispanics and the lower classes all lose out. Moreover, these inequities are not simply due to the smaller share of the population that is Black, to the distinctive policy preferences of disadvantaged groups, or to their allegiance to the Democratic Party. Inequality seems to be driven by a deeper factor. One very real possibility is that the inequality we see in this article is at its core driven by racial discrimination. We already know that racial discrimination plays a role in constituent services (Butler and Broockman 2011). It is not a long leap to believe that racial discrimination shapes policy responsiveness as well.

[30] Can we, for example understand the underlying causes of political inequality in America without considering the role that immigration plays in altering the racial makeup of the population and the political and economic status of different minority groups?

Works Cited

Abrajano, Marisa, and Zoltan Hajnal. 2014. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, Brad T. Gomez, and David W. Rohde. 2014. *Change and Continuity in the 2012 Elections.* Los Angeles: Sage.

APSA Taskforce on Inequality and American Democracy. 2004. *American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality*. APSA.

Bartels, Larry M. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bhatti, Yosef and Robert S. Erikson. 2011. "How Poorly are the Poor Represented in the U.S. Senate?" in *Who Gets Represented?* (Peter Enns and Christopher Wlezien,eds.) Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 223-246.

Bishin, Benjamin. 2009. *Tyranny of the Minority: the Subconstituency Politics Theory of Representation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Browning, Rufus P., Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb 1984. *Protest is not Enough: The Struggle of Blacks and Hispanics for Equality in Urban Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Butler, Daniel M. 2014. *Representing the Advantaged: How Politicians Reinforce Inequality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. 2011. "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 463-77.

Cameron, Charles, David Epstein, and Sharyn O'Halloran. 1996. "Do Majority-Minority Districts Maximize Substantive Black Representation in Congress?" *American Political Science Review* 90(4): 794-812.

Canes-Wrone, Brandice and Kenneth W. Shotts. 2004. "The Conditional Nature of Presidential Responsiveness to Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 690-706.

Carnes, Nicholas. 2013. *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Clinton, Joshua A. 2006. "Representation in the Congress: Constituents and Roll Calls in the 106th House." *Journal of Politics* 68 (2): 397–409.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In *Ideology and Discontent,* ed. D. E. Apter. New York: Free Press.

Cox, Gary W., and Matthew D. McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dahl, Robert A. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven-London: Yale University Press.

Druckman, James N., and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2011. "Segmented Representation: The Reagan White House and Disproportionate Responsiveness." In *Who Gets Represented?*, ed. P. K. Enns and C. Wleizien. New York: Russell Sage, pp. 166-188.

Ellis, Christopher. 2012. "Understanding Economic Biases in Representation Income, Resources, and Policy Representation in the 110th House." *Political Research Quarterly* 65(4): 938-51.

Fenno, Richard F. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Frymer, Paul. 1999. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gerber, Elisabeth, and Daniel Hopkins. 2011. "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2): 326-39.

Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gilens, Martin and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3): 564-81.

Gillion, Daniel. 2013. *The Political Power of Protest: Minority Activism and Shifts in Public Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2005. "Are Voters Better Represented?" *Journal of Politics* 67(4): 1206-27.

-----. 2007. "The Unequal Representation of Latinos and Whites." *Journal of Politics* 69 (4):1032-46.

-----. 2008. *Minority Report: Evaluating Political Equality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-----. 2013. "Voting Power, Policy Representation, and Disparities in Voting's Rewards." *Journal of Politics* 75(1): 52-64.

Grose, Christian. 2011. *Congress in Black and White: Race and Representation in Washington and at Home*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hacker, Jacob S., and Paul Pierson. *Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer--and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* Simon and Schuster 2011 [cited.

Hajnal, Zoltan L. 2009. "Who Loses in American Democracy? A Count of Votes Demonstrates the Limited Representation of African Americans." *American Political Science Review* 103(1): 37-57.

-----. 2010. *America's Uneven Democracy: Turnout, Race, and Representation in City Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jeremy Horowitz. 2014. "Racial Winners and Losers in American Party Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(1): 100-118.

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Benjamin I. Page. 2005. "Who Influences US Foreign Policy?." *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 107-23.

Keister, Lisa. 2014. "The One Percent." *Annual Review of Sociology* 40: 347-67.

Kinder, Donald R., and Lynn Sanders. 1996. *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kinder, Donald R., and N. Winter. 2001. "Exploring the National Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 45:439-56.

Lax, Jeffrey R. and Justin H. Phillips. 2011. "The Democratic Deficit in the States." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(1): 148-166.

Miller, and Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57: 45-57.

Page, Benjamin I., Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. "Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(1): 51-73.

Page, Benjamin I., and Lawrence Jacobs. 2009. *Class War. What Americans Really Think about Economic Inequality*.

Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *American Political Science Review* 77(1): 175-190.

Piketty, Tomas, and Arthur Goldhammer. 2014. *Capital in the 21st Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Represenation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Piven, Frances Fox, and Richard A. Cloward. 1977. *Poor People's Movements : Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Rigby, Elizabeth and Gerald C. Wright. 2011. "Whose Statehouse Democracy? Policy Responsiveness to Poor Versus Rich Constituents in Poor Versus Rich States." In *Who Gets Represented?* (Peter Enns and Christopher Wlezien,eds.) Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 189-222.

Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. University of Chicago Press.

Schattschneider, E. E. 1960. *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Soroka, Stuart N., and Christopher Wlezien. 2008. "On the Limits to Inequality in Representation." *PS: Political Science and Politics:* 41(2): 319-27.

-----. 2010. *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ura, Joseph Daniel and Christopher R. Ellis. 2008. "Income, Preferences, and the Dynamics of Policy Responsiveness." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41(4): 785-794

Verba, Sidney. "Would the Dream of Political Equality Turn Out to Be a Nightmare?" *Perspectives on Politics* 1(4): 663-79.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wlezien, Christopher. 1995. "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending." American Journal of Political Science 39(4): 981-1000.

-----. 2004. "Patterns of Representation: Dynamics of Public Preferences and Policy." *Journal of Politics* 66(1): 1-24.

Wleizen, Christopher and Stuart Soroka. 2011. "Inequality in Policy Responsiveness?" in *Who Gets Represented?* (Peter Enns and Christopher Wlezien,eds.) Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 285-310.

Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.