



# Government responsiveness

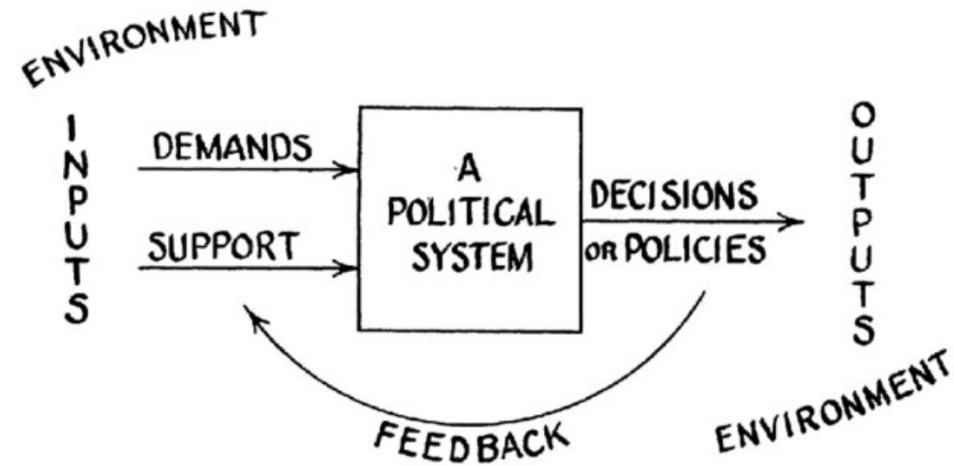
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PMCb1013

21 October 2024

# Public opinion and government

- Legitimacy (consent of the governed)
- Government constraint
- Core of the political system (Easton)
- Retrospective voting
  - Informed decisions
  - Policy based evaluation



# Theories of democracy (Robert Dahl)

- Democracy ideal type
- Polyarchy = the rule of the many
  - Free and fair elections
    - Universal suffrage
  - Freedom of expression
  - Alternative sources of information
  - Associational autonomy
    - Inclusive citizenship
- Continuing responsiveness of government essential outcome

# The public as a thermostat (Wlezien)

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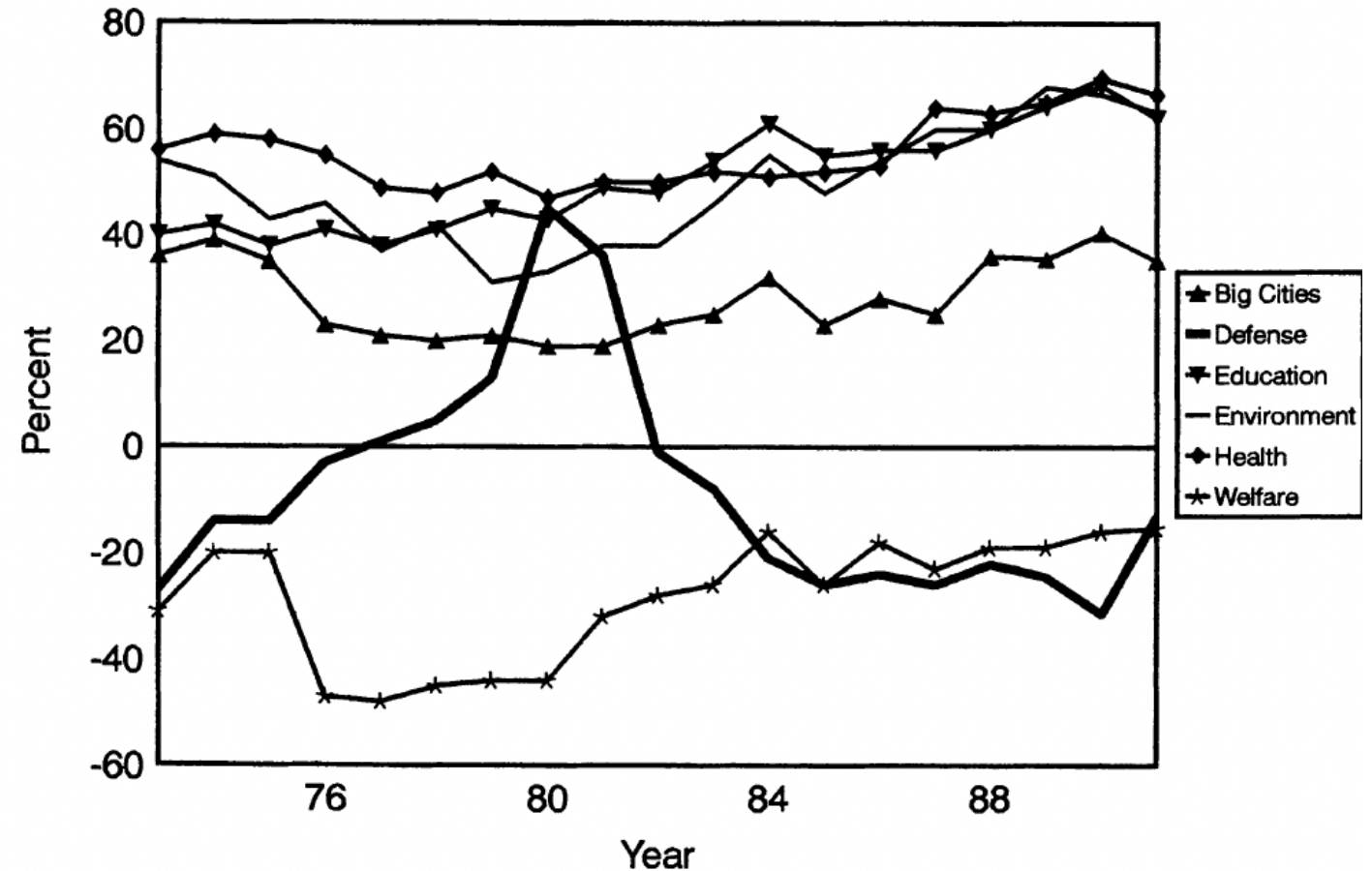
- Public responds to actual policy
- Signals when policy needs adjustment
- Stops signaling when adjusted adequately
- E.g. preferences over government spending



# Government spending 1973-1991

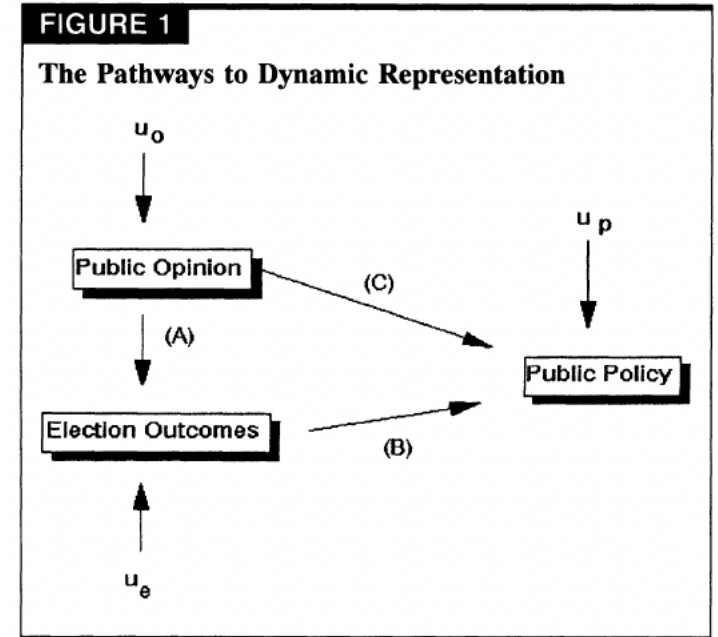
- Public preferences influenced by changes in policy
- Spending decreases = public preferences for increase
- Information gaps (eg. Defense)
- Security = more long term considerations


Figure 1. Net Support for Spending, Various Items



# Dynamic model of representation

- Stimson, McKuen, Erkison
- Also from the 90s
- Electoral change
- Rational anticipation by institutions
- Institutions differ in their responsiveness



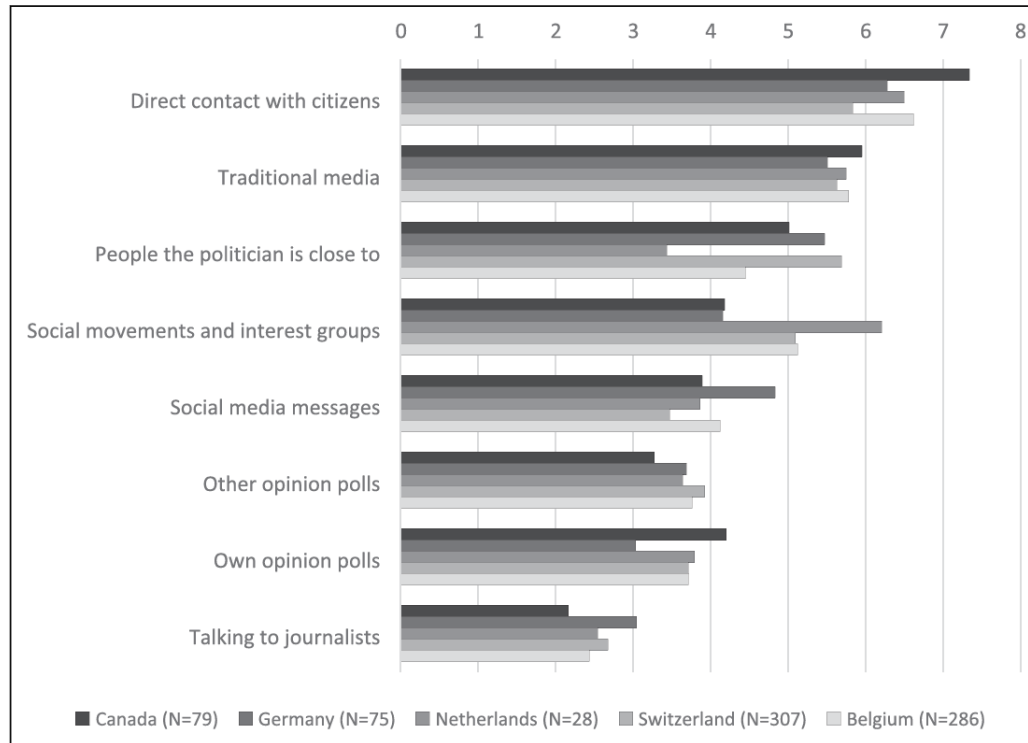


# How do politicians learn about public preferences?

- Public (public and private)
- Media
- Interest groups
- Contact with citizens
- Social media
- ??

# How politicians learn about public opinion

Stefaan Walgrave and Karolin Soontjens 



**Figure 2.** Average usefulness attributed by politicians to each of the public opinion sources, by country.





# Factors influencing responsiveness

- Electoral system
- Concentration of power, federalism
- Electoral competition
- Populism?
- Economic status of electorate
- Interest group influence

# Electoral systems

- Proportional (Powell 2000)

vs

- Majoritarian (Ferland 2000)



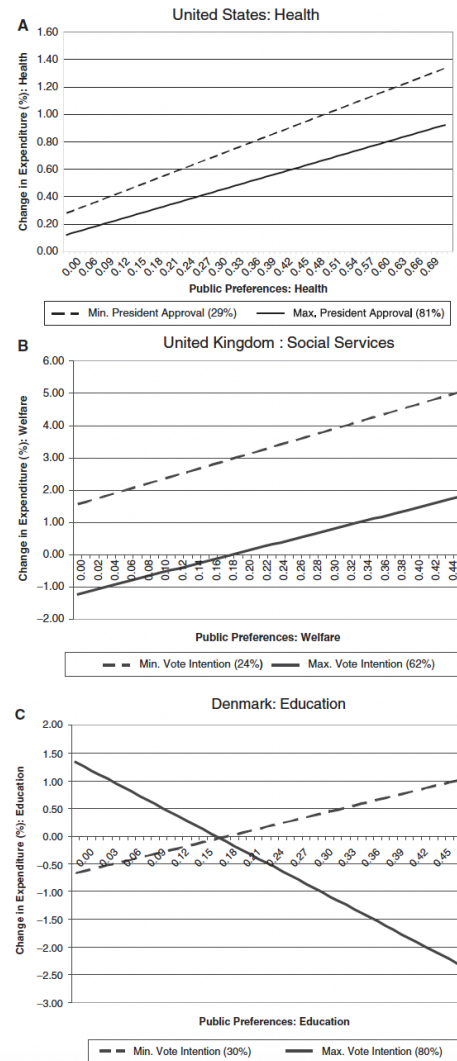
# Centralization v. federalism

- Soroka and Wlezien (2010)
- US, UK, Canada
- Testing the thermostat model
- Federal structure enhances responsiveness

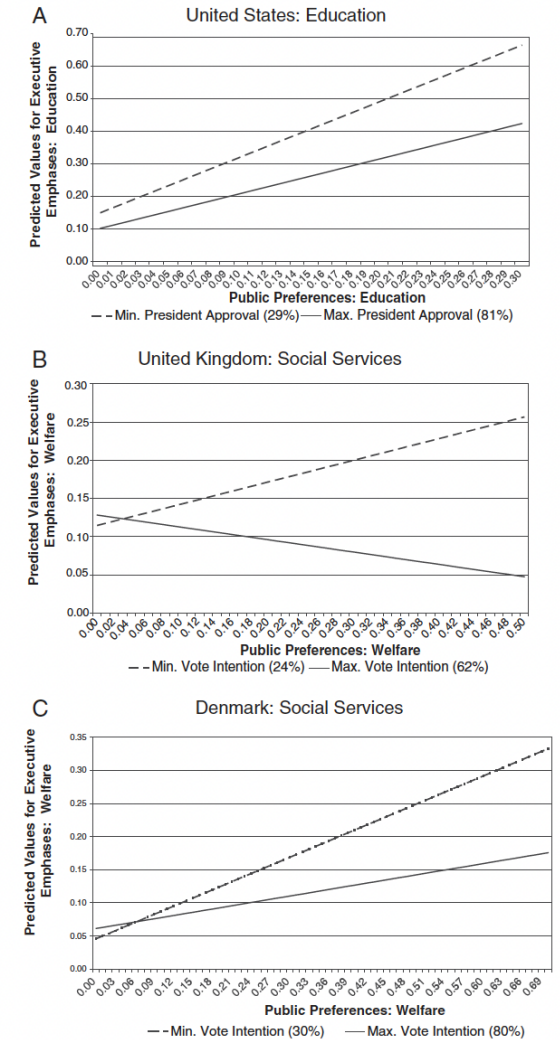
# Electoral competition

- Parties compete over voters
- Parties in government want to deliver
- More competition = more responsiveness
- (Hobolt, Klemmensen 2008)

**Figure 2**  
Conditioning Effect of Electoral Uncertainty on Changes in Public Expenditure



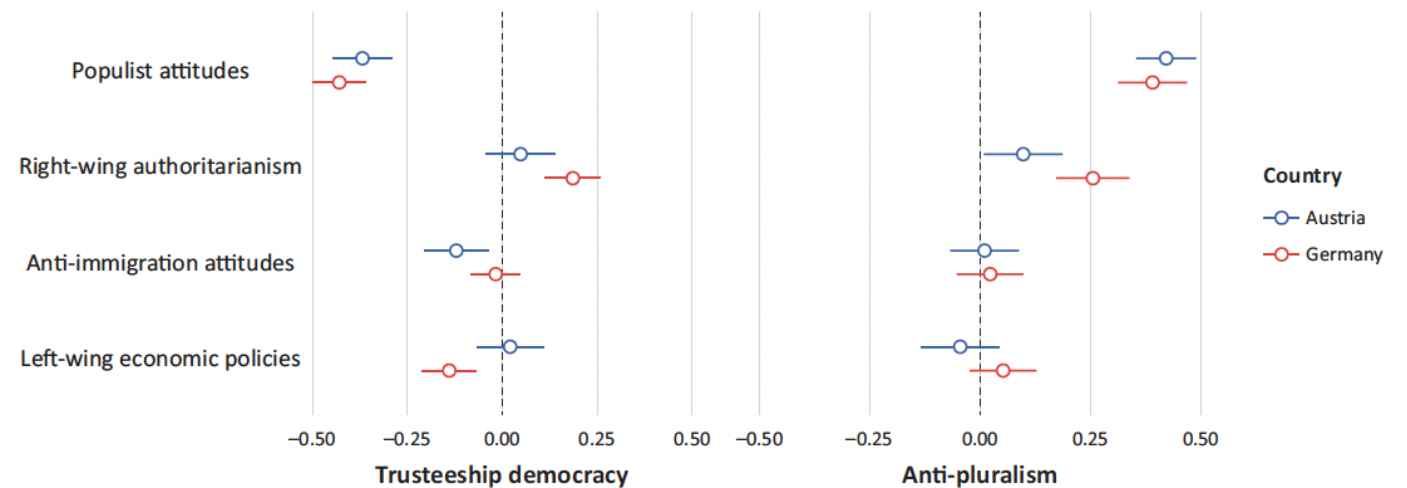
**Figure 1**  
Conditioning Effect of Electoral Uncertainty on Executive Rhetorical Responsiveness



predicted values are calculated on the basis of the full models presented in Tables 3 to 5

# Do populists response more to public opinion?

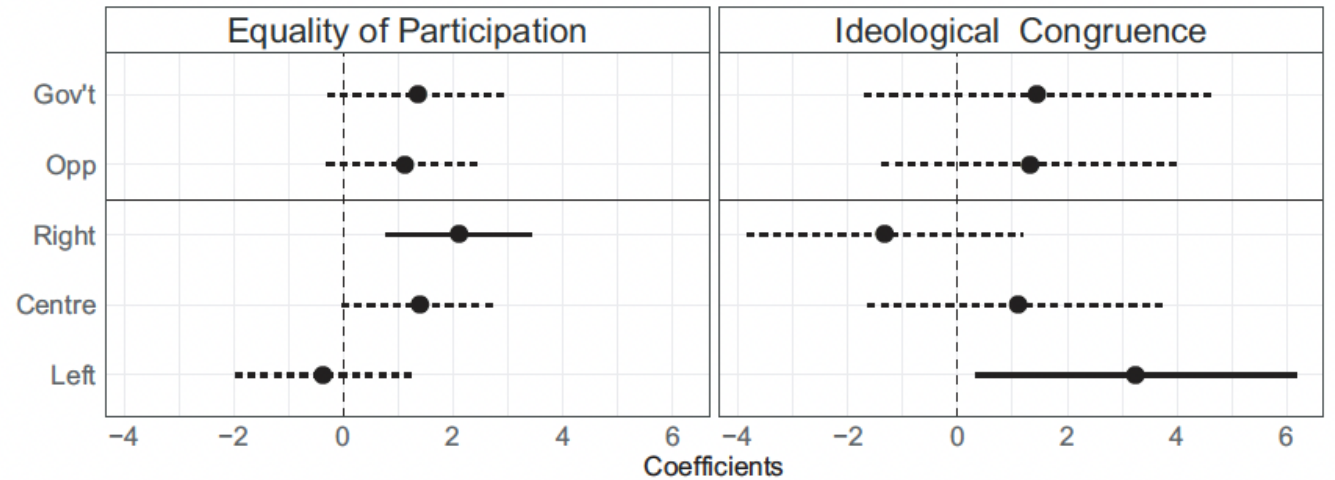
- Populism as a thin-centered ideology
- Dividing corrupt elite vs. pure people
- Representation of the pure people through direct democracy
- Populist voters:
  - low levels of satisfaction with democracy
  - Low support for representative democracy (the trusteeship model) (Heinisch and Wegschleider 2020)




## Evidence does not suggest populist responsiveness

- Host ideology matters!
- Left populist parties = ideological congruence
- Voter-party congruence
- Not the median voter responsiveness

Figure 2: Moderator Regression Coefficients for Models 2 (Equality of Participation) and 3 (Ideological Congruence)



## Mainstream party agenda-responsiveness and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in Europe

Simon D. Brause <sup>a</sup> and Lucy Kinski <sup>b</sup>

- Mainstream parties underrepresent issues of „losers of globalizaiton“
- Not effect on RRPP vote share

**Table 1.** Regression of mainstream party agenda-responsiveness towards the ‘losers of globalization’ on right-wing populist success.

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			Vote share right-wing populist parties			
Agenda-responsiveness ‘losers of globalization’	−0.097 (0.181)	−0.122 (0.184)	−0.071 (0.162)	−0.112 (0.162)	−0.121 (0.166)	−0.282 (0.205)
Inflow of immigrants/ratio population		<b>0.341*</b> (0.193)	<b>0.521***</b> (0.180)	<b>0.496**</b> (0.189)	0.438 (0.280)	0.355 (0.244)
GDP p.c.			0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Unemployment			<b>0.904*</b> (0.455)	0.704 (0.501)	0.760 (0.614)	0.375 (0.402)
Inflation			<b>1.253*</b> (0.715)	<b>1.498*</b> (0.847)	<b>1.948*</b> (1.015)	0.469 (0.486)
Electoral disproportionality				−0.353 (0.572)	−0.413 (0.449)	0.124 (0.372)
Programmatic similarity				0.178 (0.214)	0.239 (0.252)	0.127 (0.124)
ENP (votes)				0.449 (0.886)	0.480 (0.945)	0.339 (0.735)
Age of democracy				0.318 (0.340)	0.541 (0.538)	0.271 (0.484)

(Continued)

**Table 1.** Continued.

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			Vote share right-wing populist parties			
Ratio losers of globalization/population					40.576 (199.899)	77.675 (133.777)
Mean age of populist parties					−0.194** (0.073)	−0.035 (0.076)
lagged DV						<b>0.518***</b> (0.039)
Constant	15.097 (12.054)	14.393 (12.276)	−22.140 (13.918)	−16.588 (12.387)	−28.560 (39.666)	−11.219 (30.428)
Observations	95	95	95	95	82	66
R-squared	−0.004	0.001	0.078	0.080	0.081	0.593
Number of country	25	25	25	25	23	23

Country clustered standard errors in parentheses. Significant estimates are displayed in bold.  
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

# Individual-level predictors of responsiveness?

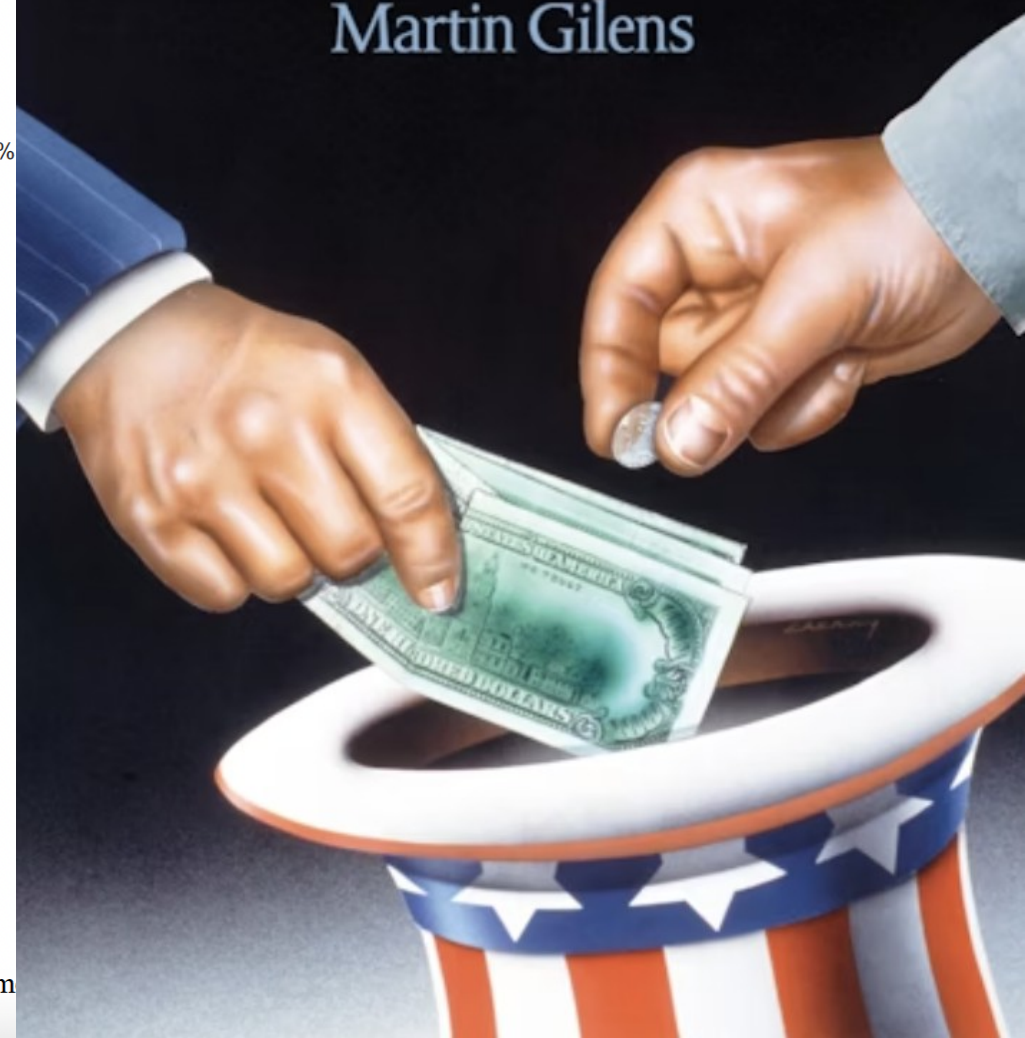
- Do all attitudes matter to the same extent?
- Is there equality in elite responsiveness?
- Concern that political elites more responsive to high-income constituents.



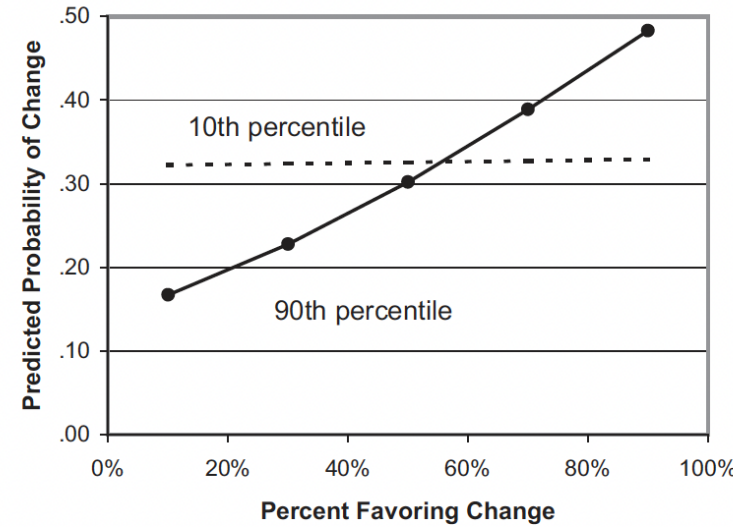
# AFFLUENCE & INFLUENCE

Economic Inequality and Political Power in America

Martin Gilens

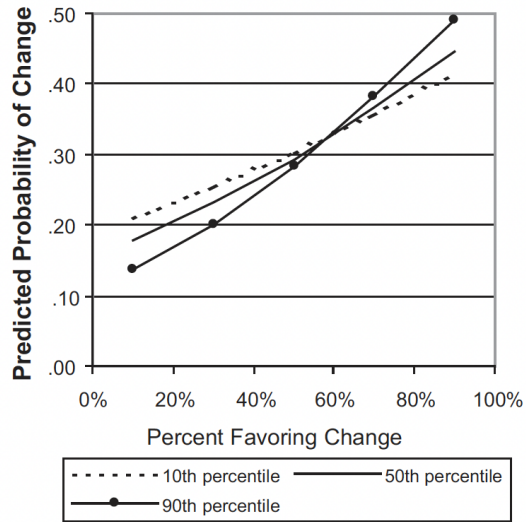


Questions where Preferences of the 10th and 90th Income Percentiles Diverge



Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness

All Policy Questions



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

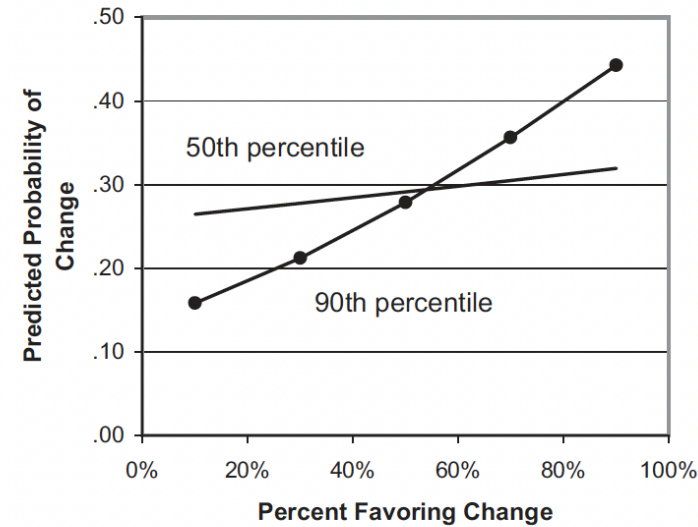


Figure 1. Preference/policy link for the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles.

Figure 2. Preference/policy link when preferences across income percentiles diverge.

# Do politicians care about public opinion at all?

- Some are very skeptical
- Bartels and Achen 2016
- Folk Theory of Democracy
  - Myth of rational voter
  - Partisanship and role of parties
  - Illusion of election mandates
  - Limits to policy responsiveness
  - Inequality
- Democracy is not just translation of public preference into policy
- What other functions?



## DEMOCRACY FOR REALISTS

*Why Elections Do Not Produce  
Responsive Government*

CHRISTOPHER H. ACHEN  
& LARRY M. BARTELS

# How citizens react to nonresponsive governments?

- External political efficacy
- Satisfaction with democracy
- Policy compliance

