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Political Inequality across Income Groups in the United States of America

*A thesis submitted as a partial requirement for the fulfillment of the Master degree
in literature and Civilization*

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Dedication

All the credit goes to my dear and precious mother who taught me the meaning of love and care.

My deep thanks and appreciations for my dear father. His blessings and prayers highlighted my way for success.

Also my heartfelt thanks to my dear grandmothers Yamina and Safia.

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This work is dedicated to my cousins Khadidja, Houda, Souhila, Asma, Sahar and Safia.

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Abstract

The current study tackles the issue of political inequality in the United States of America. The research intends to highlight the link between economic inequality and political inequality. Politicians and researchers in the scholarly field of American politics have warned that citizens with modest income are underrepresented in the government policies. Our study focuses on the unequal representation of the government toward the low-, middle- and high-income groups. But for unequal representation to occur there must be variations in the political preferences and priorities among the various income groups. The subject of political equality is paramount because it is fundamental for the democratic theory.

ملخص

تتناول هاته الدراسة قضية اللامساواة السياسية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. و كما تسلط الضوء على الصلة بين اللامساواة السياسية باللامساواة الاقتصادية. و قد نبه الساسة و الباحثين في مجال السياسة الأمريكية ان المواطنين ذوي الدخل المتوسط و الضعيف يمثلون تمثيلا نسبيا في السياسات الحكومية. و كذلك يركز هذا البحث على التمثيل الغير متكافئ للحكومة اتجاه جماعات الدخل المتوسط و الضعيف و العالي. و لكن اللامساواة في التمثيل تستلزم اختلافات في التوجهات و الأولويات السياسية بين فئات الدخل المختلفة. ان موضوع المساواة السياسية بالغ الاهمية لانه امر اساسي لنظرية الديمقراطية.

List of Tables

2.1. Different Spending Preferences, By Income Tercile.....	17
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List of Figures

1.1. U.S. Family Income Growth.....	09
2.1. General Political Ideology by Income Tercile.....	15
2.2. Differences in Political Priorities.....	22
3.1. Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (W-NOMINAE Score).....	26
3.2. Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (107 th -110 th Congresses).....	29
3.3. Democratic and Republican Senator's Responsiveness to Income Group....	31

Content

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgment.....	Ii
Abstract – In English.....	Iii
-In Arabic.....	Iv
List of Tables.....	V
List of Figures.....	Vi
Content.....	Vii
Introduction.....	01
1. Background.....	01
2. Research Problem.....	02
3. Significance of the Research.....	03
4. Suggested Methodology.....	03
5. Structure of the Research.....	04
Chapter one: The Link between Political and Economic Inequalities.....	05
1.1 introduction.....	05
1.2 Political Representation.....	05
1.3 Political Equality:.....	06
1.4 Economic Inequality.....	07
1.5 Linking Political Inequality to Economic Inequality.....	10
1.6 Conclusion.....	12
Chapter two: Differences in Political Preferences across Income Groups.....	13

2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Expectations about Income and Political Preferences.....	13
2.3 Differences in Political Preferences.....	14
2.4 Differences in Political Priorities.....	19
2.5 Conclusion.....	22
Chapter Three: Differences in Political Representation.....	24
3.1 Introduction.....	24
3.2 Congressional Responsiveness for Different Income Groups.....	24
3.2.1 Bartels Analysis for the Congressional Responsiveness.....	24
3.2.2 Hayes Analysis for Congressional Responsiveness.....	27
3.3 Partisan Differences in Representation.....	29
3.3.1 Partisan Differences among Republican and Democratic Senators.....	30
3.3.2 States' Party Responsiveness to Different Income Groups.....	31
3.4 Conclusion.....	33
Conclusion.....	34
Works Cited.....	37

Introduction

1. Background

The United States of America is a powerful nation due to its political system based on representative democracy. It is ranked among the full democratic nations in the world. It strongly endorses democracy at home and abroad. One of the bedrock of democracy is political equality which is a basic principle of the American government. Political equality requires that all citizens should have equal voice over governmental decisions and their preferences and needs should be equally represented in the government. This is expressed by the principles one-person/ one-vote, equality before the law, and the equal right of free speech. Additionally, citizens' preferences and interests can be translated to the government through political activities which include participating or working in a political campaign. Government responsiveness to the citizens' interests is of great importance in achieving democracy. In political studies, scientists and politicians view political representation as a central democratic premise.

Political representation is the activity of making the citizens voices, opinions, interests, and priorities present in the policy making process. Political representation appears when political actors articulate and symbolize the citizens' priorities in the political arena. Equal representation of all citizens' needs and desires is the most paramount element of political equality. Politicians and scholars are interested in studying political representation because it is one of the principles that democracy is all about.

Equal political voice and equal government responsiveness are part of American democratic values and ideals. Equal political voice involves the equal right to participate in order to transmit one's preferences, to control who will hold public office and to influence policymakers' do when they govern. And equal responsiveness

is the equal consideration and attention of the government to all of demands and interests of the citizens'. However, in an age of rising inequalities, the United States' democratic principles may be under growing threat. Political inequality is one of the different ways that citizens can be disparate. Many Americans have worked to balance citizens' voice and political representation across race, gender and income. Racial segregation and separation were no more socially and legally acceptable after the Civil Rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, gender disparities began to diminish by the 1960s, and women started to share the same political and economic chances with men. Nonetheless, there is a fear that the discrimination against African Americans and women has been replaced by disparities across income. Studies conducting the issue of political inequality have been concerned that citizens' representation and government responsiveness are based on the citizens' incomes. Income groups are divided into three categories: citizens with high income, citizens with medium income, and citizens with low income. The peril of the political inequality across income groups threatens the quality of U.S. democracy. Politicians and scholars are concerned if citizens with low or middle income are less represented than affluent citizens. Another concern is that the government policies are more responsive to affluent citizens' demands and interests than to those of the poor and the average.

2. Research Problem:

Political inequality is one of the causes that threaten the health and authenticity of the American democracy. In all democracies all citizens should have the same rights and should be equal in terms of the consideration given to their needs. Reflecting the citizens' interests and preferences in government policy is a fundamental tenet of

democracy. However, political equality is hard to be achieved with the rise of economic inequality. This latter may lead to a class bias where citizens with greater resources are better able to form government policy according to their needs and where citizens with low or medium income are underrepresented in government policy. This research aims at highlighting the new tendency of political inequality in the United States.

The current research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the differences that exist in political preferences across income groups in the US?
2. Who does the government respond to in the process of formulating public policies?

3. Significance of the Research

The proposed research is of great importance in the field of political sciences. Political equality requires that the government policy should equally reflect the preferences and requests of all citizens. In addition, all citizens should have an equal share in participating in public policies. However, with the rise of economic inequality, political equality would be difficult to attain. This study serves for the measurement of government responsiveness to the different income groups in the United States. Additionally, it attempts to highlight the extent of their representation in the government.

4. Suggested Methodology

The current research is based on content analysis with both analytical and critical methods of research. It examines different articles and papers dealing with the same topic done by scholars and researchers. In addition, this work relies on statistical data

from surveys and assessments done by scientists. Also, it explores the works conducted by politicians and scholars on the topic associated with political inequality across income groups, representation and government responsiveness to these groups in the United States.

5. Structure of the Research

The current research has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical background of political inequality in the United States of America. This chapter links political inequality to political inequality. The second chapter tackles the differences in political priorities and preferences across the different income groups. And the third chapter of this work deals with the issue of the political representation of the different income groups and the government responsiveness to their needs and preferences.

Chapter one: The Link between Political and Economic Inequalities

1.1 Introduction

One of the treasured American principles is the democratic government receptiveness to all citizens' needs and predilections and the equal political voice. The United States is a nation which endorses democracy at home and overseas. However, the American values of receptive government and equal citizenship may be under an increasing threat in the age of unrelenting and expanding inequalities (APSA 1). Political equality is a desirable ideal for Americans. However, with the increase of the economic inequality, the achievement of political equality among different classes of society has been threatened. Many political studies and analyses examined the link between the political and economic inequality. Also, several scientists have been concentrating on the issue of political representation because the fact that government decisions should parallel citizens' preferences is the feasible reality of political equality.

1.2 Political Representation

Government representation of the public views is a key characteristic of American democracy (Flavin, "Income Inequality" 1). Real representation involves responsiveness and consideration to the desires and needs of the represented. In the core of representation, there should be some link or connection between a representative and the people s/he represents. This means that his/her views or actions, or both must be consistent with the needs, the desires and the concerns of the people s/he acts for (Pitkin 113-114).

In contrast for the Greek polis and the Swiss canton in which the participation in public decisions is direct, the public in representative government choose legislators to

act for them in government deliberations. Therefore, citizens' influence over government appears through periodic competitive elections to choose the leaders. Elections must guarantee that the elites of the government are receptive to the public. By accepting the electoral process the public gives its assent to be governed by the elites elected. So the democratic procedure depends on an effective and receptive connection between the represented and the representative (Rosema, et al 21).

The connection between the public and the makers of political choices has been one of the fundamental themes in the democratic systems' analysis (Rosema, et al 21). Representation is a complicated concept with a long history in both democratic premise and political practice. Nevertheless, empirical studies on representation have appeared only in the past half century. The emergence of the empirical research on representation has been due to the starting of the public opinion surveys that make possible the process of measuring the public inclinations and linking them to the tangible choices of democratic policy making (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 117).

1.3 Political Equality

Equality is fundamental to democracy. As Verba has stated: "Democracy implies a certain degree of political equality—if not a full equality of political influence among citizens, at least some limit to inequality" (*Equality* 8). Political equality requires that all citizens should be given equal chances to sway political choices. Otherwise, it could be said that each citizen's political preferences should be equally considered in the policy making process (Beitz 4).

The ideal in politics is democracy and one person, one vote. This ideal denounces inequalities of political power among individuals or groups; therefore, it approaches egalitarianism of results. Political equality necessitates that the needs and predilections

of no individual or a segment of a society should predominate (Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman *Voice and Equality* 11). This is articulated by the principles of one-person/one-vote, equal rights of free speech, and equality before the law. Equal political activity promotes the equal consideration of citizens' desires and likings. The equal political activity includes equal voting turnout and other political activities such as direct contact with the elites, demonstration, and working in a political campaign (Verba, "Would the Dream" 663).

Political equality is important and valuable in many ways. Political equality contributes in building societies which are joined together by a collaborative activity toward shared objectives. In addition, political equality enables equal protection of interests. Democracy entails equal attentiveness of all of the citizens' desires and predilections. One of the influential features of political equality is the capability to transmit one's inclinations and needs to the government and to force it to pay heed. This feature is the key to the equal consideration that democracy implies. People who are more likely to receive government's attention are those who express political voice by voting, by declaring their interests or using other means. Thus, political voice is a means to attain many objectives. Therefore equality in political voice is an essential form of equality (Verba, "Would the Dream" 667).

1.4 Economic Inequality

There are several kinds of inequalities. Economic inequality is one of them. Income inequality is considered as one of the main indicators of economic inequality. Amongst the most significant questions that have been posed in political debate is "who gets what?" Answering this question would serve to determine equality and inequality in a society (Kelly 2).

A vast amount of trustworthy government and non-government data have been analyzed by researchers. These studies concluded that the United States' society has undergone increasing gaps of income and wealth. Several studies uncover that over the past three decades, the distribution of economic resources in American society has become progressively more concentrated among the most well heeled people. In addition, growing wealth is sharply concentrated in the topmost of the American society. Moreover, inequality of wealth and income has increased not only between the poor and the wealthy, but also between administrators, business men, advantaged professionals, and the middle stratum on the other hand. Since the mid 1970's, an increasing portion of wealth and income has been appropriated by the wealthy and the super-wealthy (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 2-3).

Although the United States has one of the most affluent economies in the world, the way its economic pie has been distributed is not equal (Kelly 4, 5). Ideal income equality necessitates that each fifth of the population get twenty percent of the country's income. In 2001, the bottom two fifths both have earned less than 10 percent of the family income, the middle class (the third and fourth fifth) have gained 15.5 percent and 22.9 percent, and the wealthiest quintile received 47.7 percent. It is crystal clear that half of the country's income has been enjoyed by the wealthiest 20 percent (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 3).

The well-off have always benefited an excessive hold over income. More than 40 percent of the country's income has been enjoyed by the top fifth since at least 1947. However, income growth across segments of the population has changed over time. For twenty years after the World War II, the top fifth hold of the country's income was slightly weakening—as the income grew less rapidly at the top than income at the

bottom and in the middle. However, after 1973, the trend toward income equalization reversed (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 3).

Figure 1.1 reports the sharply different distribution of income that prevailed in 1947 to 1973 versus 1973 to 2000. The figure shows that after the Second World War the income increase for those in the middle and at the bottom was more rapid than those at the top quintile. Nevertheless, after 1973, income growth was evidently much more rapid for those in the top fifth than for all other Americans, and growth for those at the bottom was feeble (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 3).

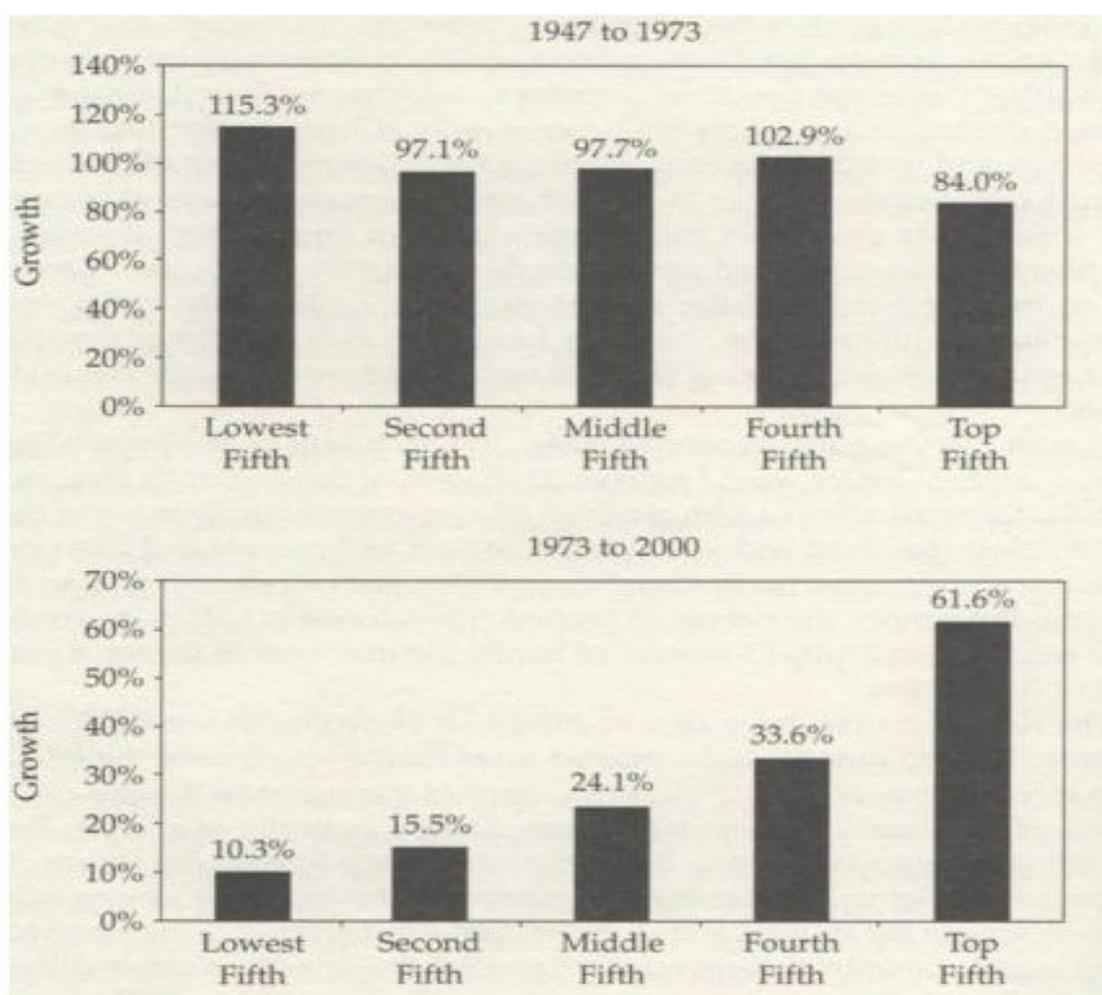


Figure 1.1.: U.S. Family Income Growth (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 3)

The Americans public opinion in the field of economy is multi-dimensional. The majority of Americans support equality of opportunity and declare that all people are

‘created equal’. Nevertheless, they tend to be tolerant concerning the results of economic inequality. Americans accept economic inequality when it is justified as giving motives to work and to advance in ways that everyone may gain profit from, or when individuals perceive big chances to climb the ladder of success and richness (Page "Inequalities" 8). However, Americans disagree with the idea that large differences in income are “necessary for America’s prosperity”, and believe that “the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer” (Page, and Lawrence R. Jacobs *Class War* 34). In addition, a large amount of Americans believe that the wealthy have much more influence and power in the political field (Page, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, et al "Inequalities" 8).

1.5 Linking Political Inequality to Economic Inequality

Several political analyses probe the relationship between political influence and economic welfare. The majority of investigated relations between politics and economics lie at the core of equality. Opposed to the Marxist prophecy, equality in one field is no assurance in the other field. It is possible that one can have influence but not money or vice versa. Nonetheless, prosperity and power go hand in hand. In both the economic and the political fields of influence, there is a struggle for gain. Power is the instrumental objective and income is the terminal objective in both of political and economic domains. The well-off use income to get power with the intention of ameliorating their economic situation (Verba, and Gary Orren *Equality* 218-219).

Income and power share similar characteristics; both are extremely desired. People want to get more not less. Income and influence are desired because they are a way to other appreciated goods. With money one can have consumer goods, leisure, and

independence. Also, income can get political influence (Verba, and Gary Orren *Equality* 218-219).

Whilst Americans tend to be supportive of equal economic results, they are very supportive of providing equal economic opportunities. Americans think that individuals should be provided with an equal opportunity to be successful. One crucial element of the belief that Americans must be given an equal chance to succeed is the expectation that the government would generate equal playground for all citizens and would not give too much power to some segment of the society over others in the policy making process. For instance, 89% of respondents in the American National Election Studies 1983 Pilot Study agree with the declaration: "All kinds of people should have an equal say in running this country not just those who are successful". Thus, Americans appear to concurrently consent big levels of economic inequality while they appreciate political equality (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 10).

Although the cornerstone of American democracy is the equal continuous responsiveness of the government to all of the citizens as political equals, there are numerous causes to believe that citizens are not considered as equals by the political elites in the political realm. Underprivileged and less educated citizens are less likely to have well-originated and well-reported preferences, less likely to get direct in touch with public elites, less likely to vote, and less likely to supply money to political campaigns. Considering these inequalities in political resources and acts leads to the question asked by Dahl in the first page of his book *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*: "In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social positions, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?" (Bartels "Economic Inequality" 2).

The significance of Dahl's question has been magnified by political and economic developments in the U.S. in later years since he has raised it. The form of the distribution of U.S. income has noticeably altered, with substantial profits in real income at the top outstripping much more modest gains for low middle-income citizens. To illustrate more, the income of the high income group has increased by more than 64 percent between 1975 and 2003, while the income of middle quintile has enhanced by 23 percent and the real income of the low quintile has increased by less than 10 percent. The progressive unequal division of income is tricky for a democratic system to the extent that economic inequality stimulates political inequality (Bartels, "Economic Inequality" 2-3).

1.6 Conclusion:

Political equality is central to the democratic principles. The fact that citizens should be treated as political equals when considering their needs and preferences is a key characteristic of the American representative government. Political representation is the link between the public opinions and the government officials. Economists and politicians in recent years have concluded that economic inequality is rising. With the rise of economic inequality, political scientists have concentrated on the issue of the government responsiveness and the representation of groups with different economic resources. Researchers in the political science have been concerned with the how the government responsiveness and representation are biased toward the wealthy while neglecting the middle and low income citizens' political preferences and views.

Chapter two: Differences in Political Preferences across Income Groups

2.1 Introduction

Reflecting the citizens' preferences in public policies is a key element in democratic representative government (Soroka, and Christopher Wlezien 319). Recent studies concerning political inequality across income groups in the USA have warned that wealthier American citizens are better represented in the government than middle and poor citizens. In a task force on Inequality and American Democracy conducted by The American Political Science Association, the studies have concluded that: "Citizens with lower or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policymakers readily hear and routinely follow" (APSA2). Differences in government responses and representation necessitate variations in political preferences and priorities (Griffin, and Brian Newman 37). The examination of the political preferences of different income groups is important in the study of income inequality and political representation because if the political priorities and preferences do not vary, unequal representation will not occur (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 17).

2. 2 Expectations about Income and Political Preferences

There are several reasons to expect variations in political preferences. To start with, citizens with different economic resources have different material situations. Buying necessary goods and everyday survival can become a continuing worry for those at the bottom of the income ladder, while in a well-off family there is a little concern about these issues. Therefore, people with lower income would support government actions for supplying a social safety net and protection against joblessness. The divergence in social networks is another reason for the political predilections' variations. Living in a

wealthy neighborhood and socializing with others with affluent backgrounds will certainly contribute in the shaping of one's political opinions. Likewise, living in a poor neighborhood made up of people with lower income will have the same isolating effect. To put it in a nutshell, the rise of economic inequalities in the United States may lead to the consolidation of views among citizens with related economic circumstances (Flavin, "Differences in Policy" 5-6).

2.3 Differences in Political Preferences

Of the handful studies that examine the unequal representation based on citizens' income, there is no common technique for how to break up the survey respondents into income categories. Different scholars and researchers use different methods to divide respondents into groups. Among these scholars is Flavin who divides citizens into three dissimilar groups described as low, medium, and high. In his study, Flavin starts with differences at the level of self-reported political ideology of the different income tercile using data from the 1999-2004 American National Election Studies. In this survey respondents were asked to classify themselves as whether liberal, moderate, or conservative (Flavin "Political Inequality" 23). Conservatives believe in personal responsibility, individual liberty, and traditional American values. Also they believe the role of government should be to provide people the freedom necessary to pursue their own goals. Conservative policies generally emphasize empowerment of the individual to solve problems. In contrast to the conservatives' beliefs, liberals believe in government action to achieve equal opportunity and equality for all. Also they believe that it is the duty of the government to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights. And they believe that the role of the government should be to guarantee that no one is in need. Liberal policies generally

emphasize the need for the government to solve problems (Conservative vs. Liberals Beliefs pph.2).

Flavin splits the respondents in the survey into three groups based on their income. He defines respondents as lower, middle, and upper. Figure 2.1 demonstrates ideological breakdown of each income groups (Flavin "Political Inequality" 23).

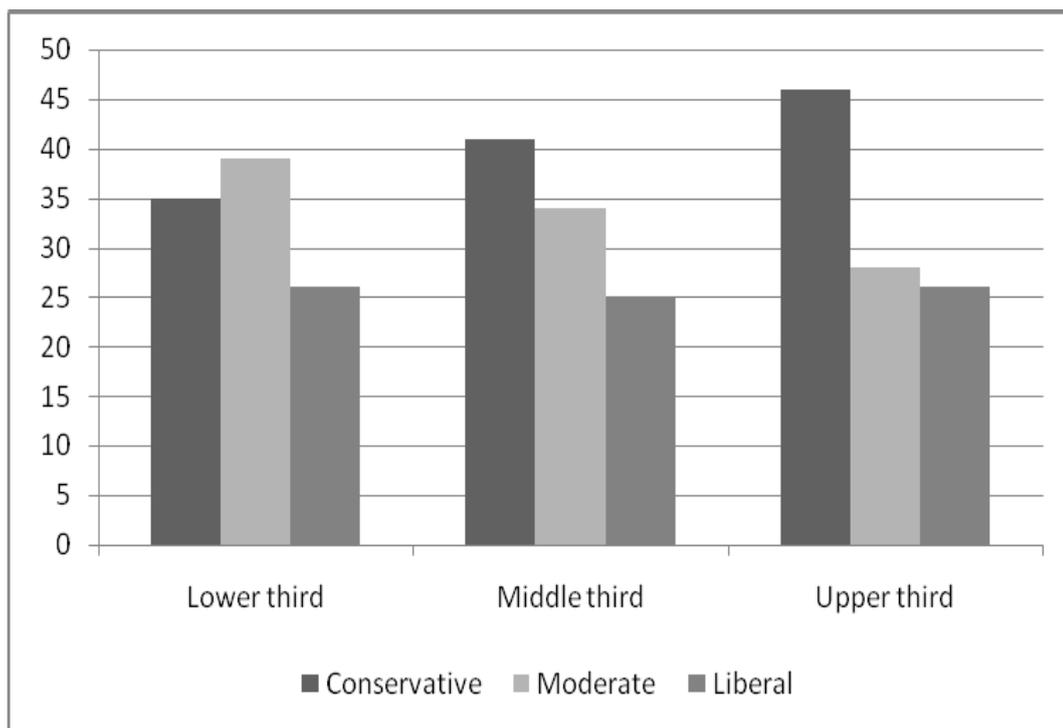


Figure 2.1. General Political Ideology, by Income Tercile. Data source:

National Election Studies, 1990-2004 (Flavin 24).

Figure 2.1 demonstrates that 46% of respondents in the upper third report themselves as conservatives. However, only 35% of citizens in the bottom third does. In other words, the well heeled citizens are more likely to see themselves as conservatives compared to the less off. Thus, significant differences are evident at the level of general political ideology. (Flavin "Political Inequality" 24)

A similar study was conducted by Rigby and Wright. They use data from the National Annenberg Election Survey during the elections of 2000 and 2004. Rigby and Wright find larger variations in both the economic and social policy liberalism that have been made from respondents' reported preferences rather than their self-identification as conservative, moderate, or liberal. Unsurprisingly, the most obvious differences across income groups are on economic policy issues for which the lower income group is more liberal than the higher income respondents ("Whose Statehouse" 10).

Another technique that is used by scholars to measure the differences among income groups is the examination of citizens' views on government expenditure on a wide range of programs and budget categories. Soroka and Wlezien have focused on the measure of public preferences on government spending on eight main spending areas where they find little differences in spending preferences across the income groups. However, significant disparities have been clear on the welfare spending ("On the Limits" 321).

Employing the same technique, Flavin finds considerable differences in the spending preferences of the three income groups. Using data gathered from 1990 to 2004, Flavin, again, divides respondents into three categories based on their income household: middle, upper, and low. Respondents have been asked whether they desire spending increased, decreased, or static. Taking the method of Soroka and Wlezien as a model, Flavin has calculated a value for net spending preferences for every policy domain by taking the percentage of the people who want spending to be "increased" minus the percentage of people who want spending to be decreased. For instance, if 55% of the respondents in the lower income group wanted spending increased, 20% desired it kept the same, and 25% wanted spending decreased, that specific policy

domain would get a value of +30. Moreover, a negative value is stated, if a larger percentage of respondents want spending decreased for a specific policy domain.

Table 2.1 below displays these calculations, 1-3 (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 25).

	(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

Table 2.1.: Different Spending Preferences, By Income Tercile 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) (Flavin "Political Inequality " 26).

Column 4 in Table 2.1. reports the result value of subtracting the upper third value from the lower third value. When a positive value is concluded, it signifies that respondents in the lower income tercile are more supportive for increased spending on that particular area compared to higher income respondents. In addition, larger numbers denote a larger disparity in spending predilections. The variation in support for increased spending between low and upper respondents on aid to the poor, welfare, childcare, aid to the blacks, social security, and food stamps, is larger than twenty percentage points. Welfare spending area is the major difference between the upper and lower income groups. Low income tercile support welfare spending increase with a thirty-three percentage points higher than the upper income group (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 26).

In parallel with this analysis, among the items from the 2000 survey, Rigby and Wright find that the largest difference by income has been observed for the item of estimating support for government efforts to decrease income disparities between the rich and poor (supported by 69% of respondents in the lower income category and only 26% in the upper income group). Correspondingly, those in the lower income group have been more likely to support the item for providing health care to the uninsured with 80% versus 61% in the highest income category. Likewise, in the 2004 survey, the most obvious income difference has been on the issue of decreasing income disparities. While 48% in the lower income class have been supporting the reduction of income differences, only 27% of the well-heeled people have shown support ("Whose Statehouse"09).

However, one way to test that differences in political preferences based on citizens' income are momentous is to compare them with differences in views among other commonly studied demographic disparities in American politics. Flavin appraises

differences in views across gender and education as a comparison to the income groups' disparities. Flavin uses education because prior studies have revealed that educated people are more engrossed and give more heed to politics gender. And he uses gender because of the 'gender gap' in voting behavior that is the result of differences in political opinions between men and women ("Political Inequality" 27).

Applying the same computation technique, Flavin estimates differences in opinions based on education and gender on the same spending areas. Explicitly, Flavin compares women to men and respondents with a college degree to those without a college degree. Flavin finds that males and respondents with a college degree are less likely to espouse increased expenditure than females and those with no college degree. He also finds that variations generally are larger for education than for gender. Nevertheless, even the differences across education are still lesser compared to the variations between the upper and lower income groups. For instance, the dissimilarities between upper and lower terciles on aid to the poor, welfare, and food stamps are, correspondingly, 27, 33, and 29 percentage points, while the same differences for education are 21, 4, and 8, and for gender 14, 19, and 12. All in all, variations in views between the well off and poor are larger in magnitude than differences based on education or gender (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 28-29).

2.4 Differences in Political Priorities

Besides examining the differences in political preferences, it is important to see whether the wealthy and the poor have distinct political priorities. That is to say, do the rich and the poor believe that different fields are more or less worthy for the government notice and resources? This question is paramount because it is another means the government uses while representing citizens by deciding which

matters/problems will grasp the policymakers' attention. For appraising differences in priorities, Flavin uses a survey in the Pew Research Poll of January 2008. Respondents have been asked a question about a range of matters and policy areas: "I'd like to ask you some questions about priorities for President Bush and Congress this year. As I read from the list, tell me if you think the item that I read should be a (1) top priority, (2) important but lower priority, (3) not important, (4) should it not be done?" Since the sample of the survey was small, Flavin breaks the respondent in halves. Those with a household income of less than \$50,000 per year and those with more than that sum. (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 34).

The low income group believed that the issue should be a higher priority than the upper income group for every policy area. There are evident differences between the low and high-income priorities. Low income group put the highest priority on improving the job situation, taking steps to make the Medicare system financially sound, dealing with moral breakdown in the country, reducing crime, and taking steps to make the Social Security system financially sound. In addition, there are slight differences between low and high-income respondents on dealing with the nation's energy problem, reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interest groups in Washington, and strengthening the U.S. military, and strengthening the nation's economy (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 34-35).

Next, using the 2000 NAES, Flavin has assessed the respondents' answers on the question of whether the "amount of poverty" and "the number of people who cannot afford health insurance" are troubles in the United States today. The technique used has been for each task respondents can locate themselves in one of the four sorts: the problem is "extremely serious, serious, not too serious, not a problem at all." To appraise the political priorities differences among income groups, Flavin breaks up the

respondents into three income groups: those who earn less than \$35,000, those whose annual household income is between \$35,000-75,000; and those with an income more than \$75,000. The division of the responses is displayed in figure 2.3. It is apparent that the low income group citizens report “extremely serious” problem for both the issue of poverty and unaffordable health care. Especially for the issue of poverty 35% citizens with low income state “extremely serious” while 28% and 23% of citizens with middle and high-income groups report it “extremely serious” for poverty. Also, for the health care 45% of low income citizens report it as “extremely serious” while merely 37% and 29% of middle and high income groups categorize it that way. To conclude, from the above findings in addition to differences in political opinions and preferences, citizens with different incomes hold distinct political priorities (Flavin, "Political Inequality" 35-36)

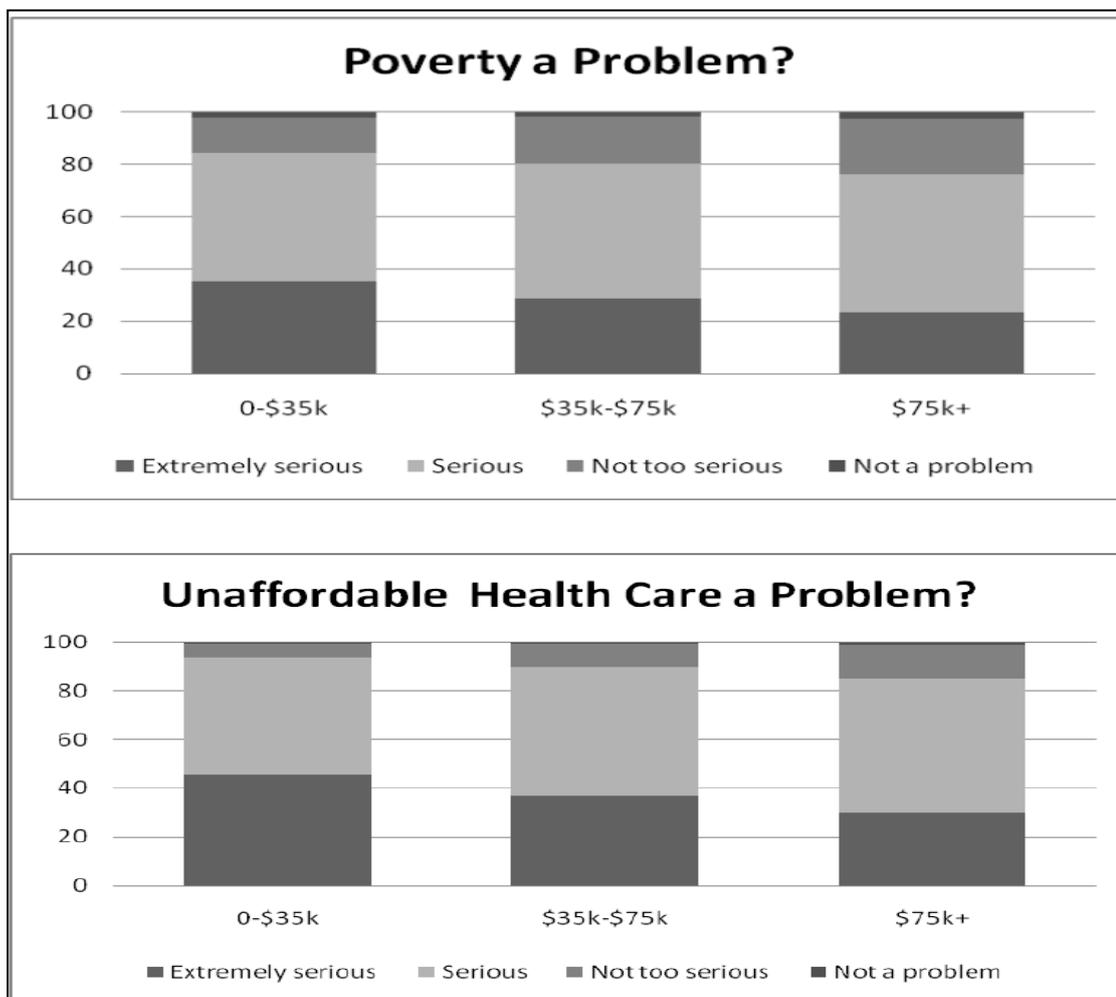


Figure 2.2: Differences in Political Priorities (Flavin, "Political Inequality"³⁷)

2.5 Conclusion

The equal weighting of citizens' inclinations in the process of making policies is a fundamental feature of American democracy. Recent studies on the field of political representation revealed that wealthier citizens are better represented in the government than poor or middle class. But for unequal representation to appear there must be differences in the political likings and priorities of the different income groups. If the preferences do not differ across groups, then it would be difficult to distinguish whose opinions are better represented. Several analyses find that citizens with different resources hold different political predilections and priorities. Considerable differences

have been found at the level of political opinions and general ideology. Also, differences between the wealthy and the poor go over differences along gender and education.

Chapter Three: Differences in Political Representation

3.1 Introduction

As Robert Dahl states: "A key characteristic of democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Polyarchy 1).

The notion that the government decisions should parallel the citizens' preferences is a central tenet of democracy. Examining the nature of relationship between mass opinion and government actions has been the focus of policy representation studies. Though earlier analyses imply that government policies reflect public opinions, latest studies reveal that government has been characterized by a bias towards the more advantaged citizens (Jacobs, and Theda Skocpol 117).

3.2 Congressional Responsiveness for Different Income Groups

Several studies have been examining the degree of responsiveness in the Congress, among them Bartels and Hayes analyses of the senators voting behavior toward the different income groups.

3.2.1 Bartels Analysis for the Congressional Responsiveness

Empirical studies of representation are based on a simple statistical model which link policy decisions of the elite to citizens' preferences. Disparities in citizens' preferences and policy outcomes may be noticed across geographical units, issues, districts, or over time (Bartels, "Economic Inequality" 4).

One of the influential studies of political representation in the scholarly field of American politics is Bartels' analysis of representation. The analysis utilizes estimates of constituency views in each of the 50 states from the Senate Election Study organized by the National Election Studies (NES) research team. The Senate Election

Study has been a national survey carried out in the weeks after November 1988, 1990, and 1992 general elections. The collected sample for all the three years contains 9,253 U.S citizens of voting age (*Unequal Democracy* 254).

Bartels splits the respondents in the Senate Elections Study Survey into three income groups: a low-income group with family incomes below \$20,000, a middle-income group with family incomes ranging from \$20,000 to \$40,000, and a high-income group with family incomes above \$40,000 (*Unequal Democracy* 257).

This method of linking the senators' voting behavior to the likings of their high-, middle-, and low-income constituents separately offers a more adaptable description of political responsiveness than the standard model (Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* 258).

The results found by Bartels indicate that senators' voting behavior has been to a certain extent responsive to the ideological opinions of the middle- and high-income citizens. On the other hand, the low-income constituents' opinions have had no noticeable influence over the senators' roll call votes (*Unequal Democracy* 260).

Bartels summarizes the models of differential responsiveness found in his analysis graphically in figure 3.1. The figure displays the probable weights attached to the ideological opinions of low, middle-, and high-income citizens. These clear disparities in responsiveness across the three income groups, where those in the middle and top thirds get considerable power and those at the bottom third get no weight, imply that the modern senate represents income rather than citizens (*Unequal Democracy* 260,262).

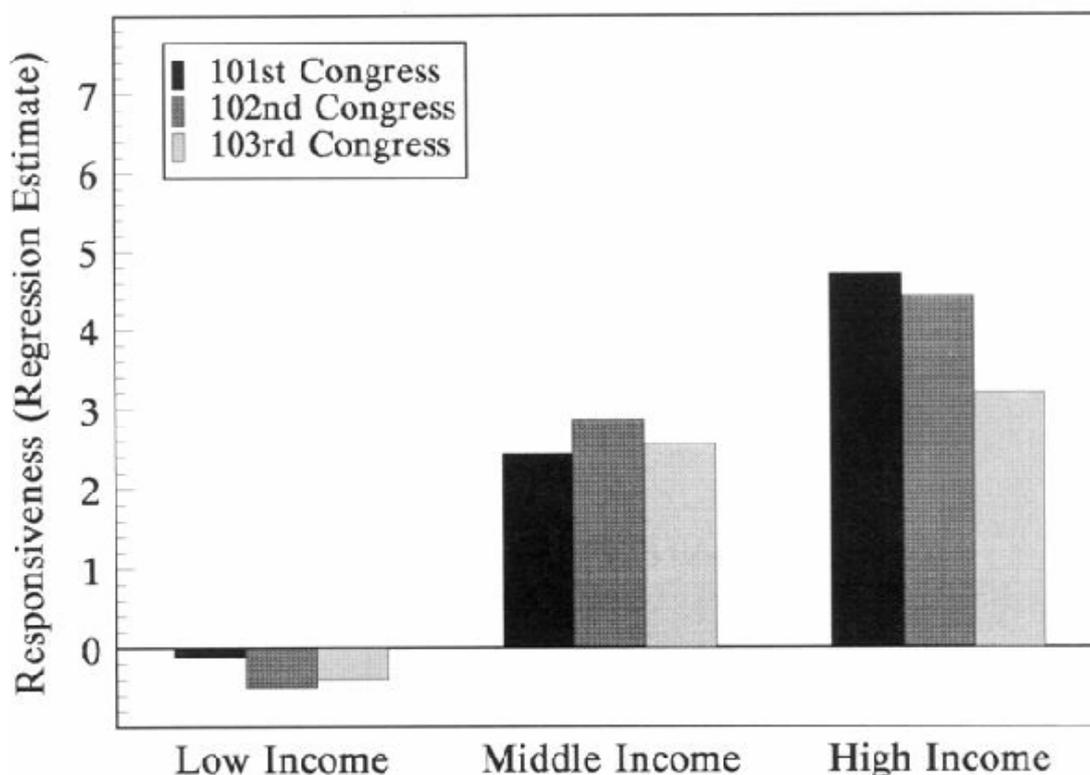


Figure 3.1.: Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (W-NOMINAE Score)

(Bartels *Unequal Democracy* 261)

Moreover, other discrepancies emerge in specific significant roll call votes on particular salient issues. Bartels examines roll call votes of senators' ideological views on the issues that arrived at the Senate in the , 102nd, and 103rd Congresses. He has investigated the senator's votes on four particular roll calls on prominent issues. These four issues are : a 1989 vote to increase the federal minimum wage, a 1990 cloture vote on an amendment strengthening the Civil Rights Act, a 1991 vote on a Budget Act waiver to shift \$3.15 billion in budget authority from the Defense Department to domestic programs, and a 1992 cloture vote on removing the "firewall" between defense and domestic appropriations (Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* 262).

The senators' voting behavior on the four issues has shown differences in responsiveness to the opinions of the wealthy, middle-class, and poor citizens more

than other issues represented by senators' salient roll call (Bartels *Unequal Democracy* 262).

The results concluded by Bartels shows evident sensitivity of senators to the high income constituents' ideological opinions in the budget cloture vote. Nonetheless, senators seem to have been more sensitive to the views of the well off citizens concerning each of the three other issues than to the usual matters summarized in the roll call scores. The political plight of the poor is reflected in the outcomes for the vote on increasing the minimum wage. Those outcomes indicate that although the poor constituents have voted to raise the minimum wage, their views have had no influence on senators. Middle income citizens' views appear to have been only a little more influential where senators' voting decisions on the same issue seem to be affected by the ideological preferences of the affluent citizens and their partisan tendencies (*Unequal Democracy* 263-265).

3.2.2 Hayes Analysis for Congressional Responsiveness

Following the same focus of Bartels, Hayes has appraised the Senators responsiveness to dissimilar economic groups on a variety of important topics. In his analysis, Hayes has used data from the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). Actually, Hayes' study is an enlargement of Bartels work on the uneven responsiveness in the Senate. As Hayes follows Bartels' method, he selects a different time, and different concerns. Choosing a different time period and selecting other issues to study is paramount because it has the advantage of appraising the degree of uneven responsiveness and how it has changed over time in addition to examining further issues that put up with inequality. In addition, scholars have found that wealth inequality has risen since Bartels' examination, which is another motivation to

appraise the extent to which this inequality is influencing the responsiveness of government (3, 9).

Besides the data taken from the 2004 NAES, Hayes uses data from the Census, *the Almanac of American Politics* and *Congressional Quarterly*. For his analysis, Hayes utilizes issues that have been present in the Senate close around the time of 2004 Annenberg Survey during 109th Congress (2005-2006). Also, by using NOMINATE scores for the 107th to 110th Congresses, he assesses responsiveness. These Congresses have been selected because they have taken place in an epoch of rising inequality. Furthermore, this study might demonstrate the degree of responsiveness change to citizens with different economic resources because these Congresses have occurred ten years later after the analysis of Bartels (11).

Hayes has divided respondents in the Annenberg Survey into three different income groups: a high-income group whose household income is beyond \$75,000, a middle-income group with income between \$35,000 and \$75,000, and a low-income group with household income beneath \$35,000. Then he has assessed the average views of the income groups that have been reported in the survey. To start with he has assessed opinions by a proxy measure using the ideology of respondents on a traditional liberal/conservative scale. Next, he has chosen additional estimates of opinion using policy pertinent questions from the 2004 NAES (12).

In the process of examining uneven responsiveness Hayes reports stunning outcomes. Hayes concludes that the voting of the Senators is linked to their party affiliation. Nevertheless, he finds that Senators are constantly responsive to upper income constituents. Moreover, Hayes has been unable to detect responsiveness for both low and middle-income groups since. The superiority of the upper income opinion mirrors its great impact on the Senators' voting behavior (14-16)

Also, the responsiveness estimate of upper-income constituency opinion is higher than both of the low and middle-income constituency opinion in each Congress, but particularly while analyzing the 108th, 109th, and 110th Congresses. These results are displayed in figure 3.2. (11-14).

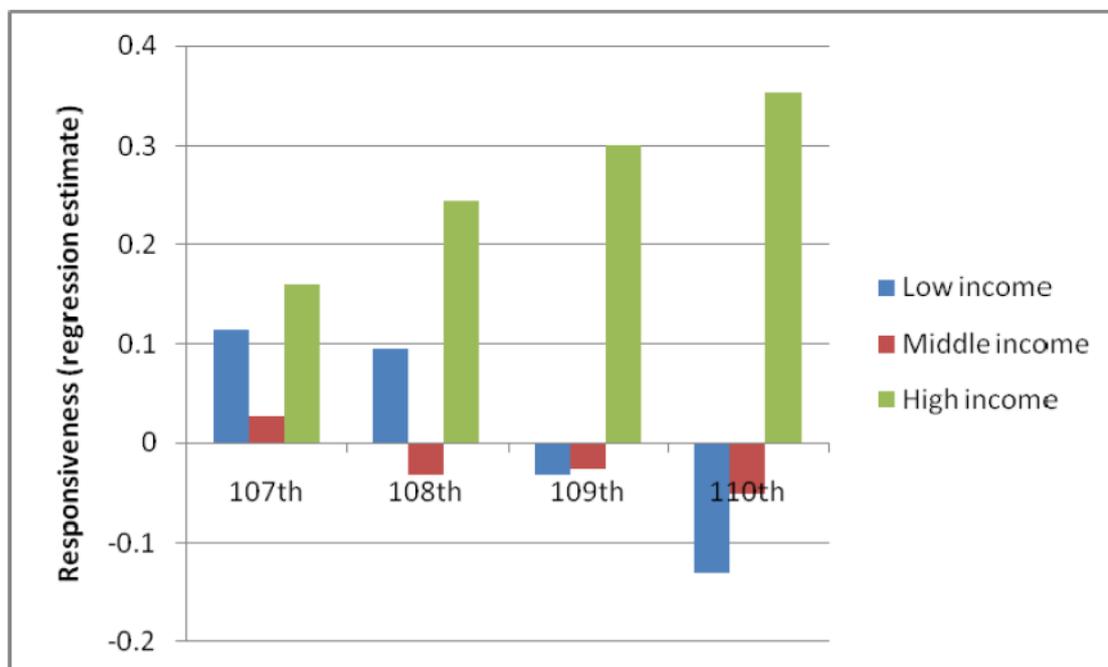


Figure 3.2.: Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (107th-110th Congresses)

(Hayes 31)

3.3 Partisan Differences in Representation

Up until now, the analysis of Bartels and Hayes present significant evidence that senators' voting behavior is biased toward the preferences and opinions of the well off constituents. However, it is important to examine the parties' responsiveness to the policy preferences of different income groups either on the level of the congress or the states' parties.

3.3.1 Partisan Differences among Republican and Democratic Senators

In his analysis of differential responsiveness of the U.S. senators to the policy views of their constituents, Bartels tests whether these patterns of differential responsiveness have been related to Democratic and Republican senators.

Looking at the different class bases of the two parties' electoral coalitions, it is expected that the Republican senators are related to the opinions of the well off citizens and Democrats are attached to the views of less wealthy constituents. Yet, campaign contributions, votes, and other political resources related to upper income are noticeably significant to politicians in both parties. Consequently, both Democrats and Republicans may be more receptive to the well being citizens opinions and preferences (*Unequal Democracy* 268).

In the study of Bartels he finds that Republican senators have been twice as responsive to the opinions of upper-income constituents' opinions as the Democrats. Also, he finds that both Republicans and Democrats have been almost evenly receptive to the middle-income citizens' opinions. In addition, he finds that there is no clear proof that the low-income group's opinions receive any responsiveness even from the Democratic senators (*Unequal Democracy* 269-270).

Bartels summarizes these findings in figure 3.3. The latter displays separate estimations of receptiveness for senators in each party. The figure shows both the different responsiveness of Republicans and Democrats' senators to high-income constituents and their parallel responsiveness to low-and middle income groups (*Unequal Democracy* 270).

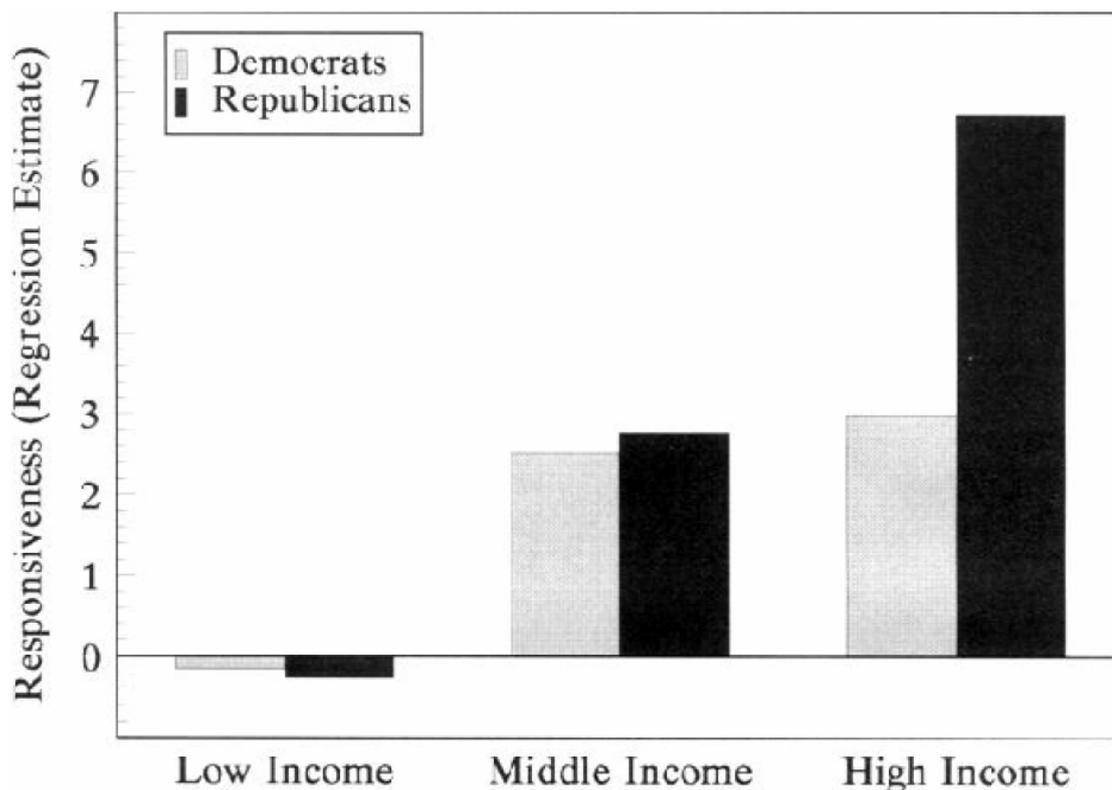


Figure 3.3.: Democratic and Republican Senator's Responsiveness to Income Groups

(Bartels "Unequal Democracy" 270)

3.3.2 States' Party Responsiveness to Different Income Groups

In an analysis conducted on representation by Rigby and Wright, they have concentrated on the political parties because of their great importance in the health of democracy. And they look particularly for the affluent citizens' involvement in the political process. Moreover, they ask whether the lower income group likings are represented in the state parties' policy program. This is a vital initial stage in the course of making policies because if a segment's concerns are not represented by one party as a minimum, the possibility to shape a policy according to its likings is little. Therefore, differential reaction at this first phase can set limits on the degree of policy responsiveness in the succeeding phases of policy making process ("Political Parties" 4).

State parties offer a productive ground for studying the policy process because they are decentralized establishments that differ in their policy stances across states with different demographic, political and socio-economic features. Rigby and Wright take advantage of this difference in comparing the level to which Republican and Democratic parties take positions in association with the interests of their low-, middle, and high-income citizens, in addition to estimating their responsiveness to each income group when its predilections vary from the other groups' preferences ("Political Parties" 4-5).

Rigby and Wright assess two different notions of responsiveness alignment and influence. Representation as influence raises the question: whose preferences are represented on issues when likings across income groups vary? To answer this question, the two researchers examine the relationships between party stances and each income group's likings. On the contrary, representation as alignment asks, how do state parties' positions on social and economic issues co-differ with the predilections of the different income groups? Rigby and Wright assess for impact with the partial relationship between each income group's view and each party's stance ("Political Parties"18).

Starting with Democratic parties, little alignment has been found between the views of low and middle-income and party stances in the state. Moreover, the economic programs of the Democratic parties are associated with the higher-income preferences. However, when the two researchers test for the independent impact of each group's view above and over the preferences of the other two groups, they find the only significant correlation to be for the upper-income group (Rigby, and Gerald C. Wright "Political Parties"19-20).

On economic issues, both parties pay attention to the interests of the high-income group. For the social issues, both parties reveal association with the likings of each group when considered alone. (Rigby, Gerald C. Wright "Political Parties"19-20).

Rigby and Wright conclude that it is the preferences of the higher-income group that form the party policy positions. In addition, these conclusions denote that the low-income preferences are only integrated when they intersect with the higher-income group likings to which the parties are paying attention to (20-21).

3.4 Conclusion

The link between the government public decisions and public opinion is a central component in the American democracy (Gilens 778). Several studies conducted on the issue of political representation and government responsiveness conclude that citizens with high income are better able to influence public policy decisions. Both of the analysis of Bartels and Hayes of congressional responsiveness find that constituents with low income receive little or no responsiveness from senators. In addition, disparities in responsiveness across citizens with different resources have been found at the level of state's parties and Republican and Democratic senators. Both Democratic and Republican parties tend to be much more responsive to the affluent citizens' inclinations. Also, the low income citizens' predilections are underrepresented by Democratic and Republican senators.

Conclusion

Among the basic principles of democracy are political equality and equal representation of the citizens' opinions in the country's process of policy making. Political equality is paramount for the reason that it is a means by which citizens guarantee the protection of other essential concerns and rights not only because of its central value of recognizing that individuals are of equal worth.

The issue of political equality has been a central subject for researchers and scholars in the political domain in which they concluded that it is a desirable and a valuable goal. Political equality entails equal responsiveness and equal representation of all citizens. The belief that every citizen's inclinations should be considered as equals in the political domain is a fundamental premise of democracy. Numerous studies in the field of politics have found out that Americans apt to be supportive for political equality among citizens. However, they are likely to be tolerant with the economic inequalities.

Several reputable studies have revealed that economic inequality in the U.S. appears to be much greater today than it was in earlier years and larger than European nations. The income distribution in the United States has been an unequal process. Because of the economic inequality, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The rise of economic inequality has led to political inequality among citizens with different incomes in which the poor is underrepresented and receive little or no government responsiveness.

Researches that gauge unequal political representation are built on the fundamental principle that rich and poor citizens have different views concerning how the government should act in policy areas like education, tax policy, health care, and help

to the poor. According to works conducted by Flavin and Rigby, they have found that different income groups hold different political preferences and priorities. These studies have concluded that there are differences in political views and general ideology between upper and low income groups. Moreover, they have found that citizens with low income are more likely to espouse government decisions on the issues related to social safety of the underprivileged people. Also, the variations between the poor and the rich political priorities have been evident.

The equal consideration of citizens' preferences is central to the democratic theory. A respectable amount of political studies have been concentrating on the link between public opinion and government actions. In the course of these studies, many researchers and politicians have found bias in the government responsiveness and representation in an era of which affluence and income inequality have been in a rapid increase. Among these scholars Bartels and Hayes who have planned their works to examine unequal responsiveness in the Senate.

Bartels analysis which relates the voting behavior of the senators in the late 1980s and early 1990s to constituents' policy opinions implies that senators are immensely more receptive to the well heeled constituents than to citizens with low incomes. Moreover, he has found similar disparities in particular salient roll call votes on the government spending, abortion, civil rights and the minimum wage.

Following Bartels analysis, Hayes has examined the senators' roll call votes of senators of the 107th through 110th. The findings of Hayes indicate that the senators are more likely to respond to the preferences of higher income constituents whereas there is no evidence of responsiveness to the middle and low income constituents.

Besides the unequal responsiveness of the senators, Bartels has also found partisan disparities in representation for the different income groups. His findings show that Republicans are nearly twice receptive as Democrats to the upper income constituents' opinions. Nevertheless, he has also found that there is no proof of receptiveness for the higher-income constituents in both parties.

Moreover, significant disparities are found at the level of states' parties. The preferences of low income citizens are underrepresented by the states' political parties and they receive attention only when they overlap with upper income group predilections. The most noticeable differential responsiveness has been for the economic concerns and for Democratic parties in the states with higher income inequality.

Lastly, the rise of economic inequality in the U.S. causes political inequality among citizens with dissimilar income. Concluding from the pre-mentioned findings, it is clear that political influence in the United States is an unequal process where citizens with better economic resources are more able to sway the government policy decisions.

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