

**Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy
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Inequality and American Governance

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Inequality and American Governance

What government officials hear influences what they do. The processes of American governance – from the activities of interest groups and political parties to the often Byzantine operations of lawmakers – are readily penetrated by the strong, clear, and frequent political voices of privileged and highly active citizens. Differences in the abilities of individual citizens and groups to set the policy agenda, frame debates, and adapt to institutional processes prompts governing institutions to respond unevenly to the concerns and preferences of American citizens. Yet, the governing process is not simply a mechanical cash register that tabulates the unequal political voices of the advantaged and organized. Entrenched institutional norms, patterns of behavior, and collective conceptions of purposes and goals interact with the struggle for political power among rival individuals and government bodies to prevent any single group or set of ideas from consistently steering government decision making in one direction.

The most persistent impact of stratified political participation is to reinforce the enduring bias of the American political process toward “deadlock and delay” – as the framers of the U.S. Constitution and James Madison intended (Burns 1963). The recent growth in economic inequality appears to be increasing the power of individuals and groups who have a stake in doing little or nothing about substantially counteracting disparities based on income and wealth.

American government is characterized by a level of individualization and lack of authoritative lines of control that makes it particularly ill-suited to respond to a broad, aggregate phenomenon like economic inequality by consistently enacting effective remedial policies. The American political process is geared toward particularistic, piecemeal issues rather than the big picture. Politicians and government may respond to the rising income and wealth of a small proportion of citizens in a thousand little (and not so little) ways, but they are not likely to consistently do so in one big way. Even if officeholders were generally motivated to enact egalitarian tax and spending policies to stem the rising tide of economic inequality, their efforts to significantly change these policies would likely run into the kind of collective action problems that have stalled efforts on environmental protection, health care, and homeland security.

The bias in the American political process toward inaction and responding to pressure from well-organized particularistic groups has created multiple and competing centers of influence and a corresponding patchwork of contradictory and incomplete economic and social welfare policies. One of the most demonstrable developments in the United States over the past half century has been the expansion of civil and political rights and, specifically, equality of opportunity in the economic realm and procedural equality in the political realm. Historically entrenched racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination has been challenged and the presence of previously underrepresented groups in the policy-making process has modestly expanded as a result. The ostensible aims of equity have been shaped, however, by the entrenched bias in the American political process to produce social rights for concrete and discrete groups such as seniors or the poor. The broader claims for establishing universal social rights and delivering substantive political and economic equality to all citizens lacked the intense support of powerful encompassing groups and institutional allies and clashed with the trajectory of American political development toward ensuring equality of opportunity more than equality of results. The consequence is that rising economic inequality has neither expanded nor reduced political inequality nor even produced a dramatic redirection of overall government policy in the egalitarian or anti-egalitarian direction. The pitched political battles over the past several decades and partisan cycles of frustrations and mobilizations have fuelled the polarization of the Democratic and Republican parties and intimidated even the Democratic Party from energetically promoting the kind of egalitarian programs that some of its activists favor.

The Working Group on Governance has reviewed the existing research on American governing institutions, political organizations, and the making of public policy in order to identify continuity and change in who makes government policy, how, and to what effect. In particular, we examined research on whether and how political influences on government policy reflects enduring disparities in political voice and has changed as economic inequality has risen and long entrenched racial, ethnic, and gender inequalities have been challenged.

This report is divided into four principal parts. We begin by acknowledging limitations on our efforts to evaluate the potential impact of unequal power in the making of public policy. The second section describes the broad institutional context of policy making in the United States, including the complexities of the legislative process, federalism, and the nature of party politics. The third section outlines the role of interest groups and the impact of money in elections and in the policy-making process. The last section examines biases in political representation, with particular emphasis on whether patterns of unequal influence have altered in recent decades either with changing patterns of economic inequality or with expansions of civil and political rights.

Challenges in Evaluating Inequality in American Government

Our review of research that investigates the potential impacts of rising economic inequality and skewed political participation on the process of governing has faced two daunting challenges – a limited body of research and complex questions of causality.

Inequality in American Government is Understudied

Although the openness of the American governing process has attracted the critical scrutiny of political observers since the framing of the U.S. Constitution in the late 18th century, contemporary political scientists who study political institutions and the governing process have generally not focused on studying this question with notable exceptions (e.g., Mayhew 1991). There are two reasons that the current generation of American political scientists has generally failed to produce a substantial body of research motivated by a burning concern over the impact of unequal political voice and economic inequality on a democratic governing process. First, the increased theoretical and empirical sophistication of research on the governing process has coincided with a kind of hyper specialization. It is not uncommon for students of Congress, for instance, to specialize in the House of Representatives, leaving research on the Senate to specialists on this chamber. Scholars retreat into specialized communities

where self-enclosed debates are disconnected from broader research questions. One consequence of this growing specialization is that the impact on the governing process of political behavior and public opinion – separate scholarly enclaves themselves – is often neglected or understudied. A two step professional fragmentation has resulted – the carving up of research on unequal voice as one field as distinct from the study of institutions, and then the further compartmentalization of these fields into discrete sub-fields. Hyper-specialization has produced research that has expanded our understanding in particular areas but also makes efforts at synthesis – such as ours – quite difficult. In effect, we have pieces of the puzzle but are not sure if and how they fit together.

Second, the hyper-specialization of political science has generated a series of theoretical expectations and empirical generalizations that have avoided what are seen as inappropriate or distracting normative questions about the extent and nature of democratic governance. We fully appreciate that theoretically-informed and empirically rigorous studies have dramatically expanded our understanding of distinct aspects of the national governing process including the internal dynamics of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches and specific aspects of their interactions. For instance, sophisticated research has been conducted on the interaction of presidents and Congress in passing legislation and scholars have developed theories and methodologies to investigate the processes by which Speaker of the House of Representative refers bills to one or more committees as well as the significance of imperfect information for legislative organization and behavior. These and other bodies of research on the governing process have been impressive and professionally recognized but they have also generally avoided – with a few notable exceptions -- an explicit, sustained, and critical consideration of larger questions about the nature of American democracy.

The result is that the contemporary political science profession has not maintained the tradition of investigating inequality and American democracy established by earlier generations of scholarly leaders including Woodrow Wilson, Charles Merriam, Pendleton Herring, E.E. Schattschneider, V.O. Key, Robert Dahl, and others. Although the APSA Presidential Address of Charles E. Lindblom highlighted this tendency in 1981 and scholars have documented it (Seidelman 1984), the subsequent response by

scholars of American politics and policy making institutions has been meager. The lack of a large and thoughtful body of research that links unequal political voice to the governing process has inevitably restricted our efforts at synthesis.

Wrestling with Causal Ambiguity

The second challenge to studying the connections of unequal political voice and rising economic inequality to the governing process are a series of conceptual and methodological hurdles that complicate efforts to establish causality. Four interrelated problems have plagued the efforts of political scientists to analyze the relationships between economic and social conditions, political participation, and policy influence.

The Conversion Problem

Leading scholars have long warned about the error of confusing the possible bases of power (economic resources, military might, specialized knowledge, etc.) with the exercise of power (Simon 1953; Dahl 1963). While the disparity of resources available to some and not others can serve as an indicator of potential power, political scientists have to recognize that there is no self-evident conversion rate between nonpolitical resources and political power. Studying the ambiguities of skill, interest, and chance by which potential power is converted into realized power over policy outcomes requires a very fine-grained analytic reconstruction of events, something that few researchers have accomplished.

The Non-decision Problem

Even where careful accounts are constructed, there remains the vexing problem of power over important decisions that were *not* made.¹ Power in repose, so to speak, can exercise its less empirically verifiable influence over what is not on the policy agenda, what options are off the bargaining table, and so on. For example, growing economic inequality since the mid-1970s appears to have been associated temporally with lessened, not greater, attention in policy debates to the principle of progressivity in

federal income taxation (compared with the post-World War II generation when economic inequalities were narrower). Is this because concentrated economic power has translated into political power to keep progressivity off the policy agenda? The failure to enact national health insurance in the U.S. is an unusually salient illustration of entrenched interests preferring the status quo to change—a public decision on behalf of non-action (Morone and Jacobs, 2004).

The Input/Outcome Problem

The actual outcomes produced by government decisions on complicated matters of public policy—such as federal tax policy or social welfare policy—are the result of immensely long, tangled causal chains. The connection of these outcomes to any background assessments of political power is tenuous and often counterintuitive. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) shows that changing the “black box” configures and reconfigures the connections between inputs and policy outcomes in ways that are difficult to trace or to predict. It was created, institutionalized, and rapidly expanded under dramatically shifting partisan and ideological developments (from the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s to the Clinton administrations) as well as under the presumed stern hand of conditional party government that is hostile to redistributive policy (Thorndike and Ventry 2002).

The Problem of Observation

Research on some of the most important questions in American politics – such as the influence of money on the governing process -- relies on analyzing concrete, observable patterns of influence: namely, situations in which the efforts of distinct individuals and organizations (whether interest groups or congressional leaders or party caucuses) explain the behavior of others (such as individual members of Congress). Contemporary political scientists have generally neglected a second approach that relies on functional and structural analysis of the political system to explain patterns of behavior for which there may not be concrete and observable connections (e.g., Easton 1965; O'Connor 1973). This approach focuses on identifying the imperatives for the continued maintenance of the political order and then

reasons backwards to identify critical functions of government and system-wide incentives that constrain individual actors. Although there is no consistent evidence that campaign contributions are related to the votes of members of Congress (controlling for party and ideology), a structural and functional analysis may valuably highlight predispositions of members to align their views with important contributors before they run for office.

In short, any effort to search for connections between skewed political participation and policy outcomes are beset by daunting questions of causality. We proceed with humility.

The political dynamics intervening amidst complex and multi-level causal chains are far richer than can be captured by an assumed clash of egalitarian and anti-egalitarian interests over government policy on taxes and spending. The play of ideas, offsetting interests, institutional biases, and electoral calculations seem designed to scramble any neat patterns of conversion and non-decision regarding potential power and actual outcomes in tax policy.² Effects of growing economic inequality on governance are not likely to emerge as a few big, demonstrable causal statements but as a multitude of indirect influences and inferences.

Political Parties, Polarization, and Inequality

A common critique of American political institutions is that their fragmentation, decentralized structures, weak authoritative lines of control, and multiple veto points allows the organized and politically vocal to block policies that threaten their intense preferences while enabling these narrowly-based elites to push through targeted decisions that favor their particularistic interests.³ American political scientists have commonly argued that the cure for these ills of the political system would be found in stronger, more unified and “responsible” political parties. Indeed, the most influential predecessor of our own APSA Task Force argued vigorously for movement “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System” (Committee on Political Parties 1950).

In the past three decades, political parties have emerged as an increasingly coherent and significant force, both in the electorate and in the halls of government – much as the advocates of “responsible parties” hoped they would. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the increasing unity of each political party and their growing bifurcation within government has reinforced rather than counteracted existing institutional tendencies (especially within Congress) toward deadlock and disproportional influence for the well-organized and vocal. In particular, the increasing polarization of the parties in the electorate and in Congress seems to be fueling two developments in national legislative politics that reinforce political inequality – conditional party government in Congress that often stymies comprehensive policy responses to rising economic inequality and increased partisan segmentation of beneficiaries of government policy.

The Resurgence of Political Parties in the Electorate

One of the most-analyzed developments in modern American politics is the “decline of parties” in the 1960s and early 1970s (e.g., Broder 1971; Abramson 1976; Wattenberg 1998). Evidence of decline appeared in each of the three arenas monitored by scholars of party politics—parties as organizations, parties in government, and parties in the electorate. In the organizational realm, the last of the traditional party machines that dominated many American cities through the first half of the 20th century seemed to be disappearing (Mayhew 1986). Politicians seeking office relied increasingly on their own efforts (and those of professional campaign consultants, pollsters, and television ad producers) to secure a “personal vote” (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Kelley 1956). In government, party unity and party-line voting in Congress declined significantly through the 1960s, while Republican presidents (first Eisenhower, then Nixon) appeared to accept and entrench their Democratic predecessors’ ambitious domestic policy initiatives. Meanwhile, partisan loyalties in the electorate weakened markedly, with the proportion of “strong” party identifiers in National Election Study (NES) surveys declining by almost one-third between 1964 and 1972 (from more than 35% to about 25%) and the proportion of “independents” increasing correspondingly. As Fiorina summarized the thrust of scholarly interpretations, “Parties were

deteriorating, decomposing, and disappearing. The country had entered a period of electoral disaggregation, an era of dealignment” (Fiorina 2002, 94).

But just as political scientists began to conclude that “organized political parties may be an anachronism” (Niemi and Weisberg 1976, 414), the electorate became more attentive to political parties. The proportion of “strong” party identifiers in the electorate increased substantially after 1976, while the proportion of “independents” declined; at the same time, the strength of the relationship between partisanship and voting behavior also increased markedly, reaching levels by the late 1990s well in excess of those prevailing in the 1950s (Miller 1991; Bartels 2000). And citizens increasingly saw important differences between the parties, recognized their relative ideological positions, and preferred one party to the other in both overall ratings and open-ended comments (Hetherington 2001).

If these signs of party resurgence do not bespeak a return to the status quo ante, they nevertheless reflect an important shift in the American political landscape. While many citizens remain disengaged from the parties – and, for that matter, from the political process more generally – those who are interested and attentive have increasingly been choosing up sides, producing an electoral landscape that is more partisan and more ideological than at any point in the past half-century. The precise causal connections between partisanship and ideology are a matter of some scholarly dispute at the mass level, as they are at the elite level (Fiorina 2002; Miller 2000; Bartels 2002a; and Krehbiel 1993). Nevertheless, party competition seems more vibrant, and potentially more consequential, than at any time in recent memory.

A particularly important development for our purposes is that mass partisanship has become increasingly correlated with income over the past half-century (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2003). As the parties in Congress have polarized on economic issues (Poole and Rosenthal 1984; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997), the public has followed suit, with the rich gravitating increasingly to the Republican Party and the poor aligning more reliably with the Democratic Party. Thus, for example, NES respondents in the top income quintile were only a little more likely than those in the bottom income quintile to identify as Republicans in 1956 and 1960, but more than twice as likely as those in the bottom

income quintile to identify as Republicans in 1992 and 1996 (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2003, 3-4). The result is a class cleavage in partisanship and voting behavior that is modest by European standards but considerably sharper than in the recent American past.

Political parties are bifurcating along not only class lines but also racial lines, which in some cases has complicated class alliances. The Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s sparked an exodus of white voters in the South from the Democratic to the Republican Party. After the 1960s, the Democrats became more likely than Republicans to support government action to aid minorities, and racial policy became a key distinguishing feature separating the two parties (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Race contributed to the polarization of the political parties, complicating efforts to redress entrenched inequalities between the races in terms of life opportunities and conditions.

Congressional Polarization and “Conditional Party Government”

The emergence since the 1970s of “conditional party government” – characterized by the steady increase in party unity and party-line voting in Congress – has further complicated the already treacherous arena of redistributive politics and reduced the potential for mitigating economic and political inequalities among more diffuse publics. Compared to the enfeebled legislative parties that existed during golden age of the committee process, parties reasserted themselves in the 1970s as a decisive force in congressional organization (Aldrich and Rhode 1998, 2000, 2001; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1995). The core organizational change was the reduction in the autonomy and control of standing committees regarding the content of legislation and its flow to the floor as well as the selection of its chairs based on seniority. In place of committee dominance, party caucuses and leaders assumed greater power over the composition of committees (including its chairs) and the full range of legislative business (particularly in the House where committees are more crucial than the more loosely structured Senate). Legislative parties have been found to exert particular influence on the policy-making agenda (Sinclair 1995; Taylor 1998), committee behavior (Maltzman 1998), and, especially, (as discussed below) roll call voting. The emergence of legislative parties as the primary political muscle was

reflected in significant changes in campaign contribution patterns: PACs disproportionately funneled contributions not only to members who sit on committees with jurisdiction over issues of importance to them (Hall and Wayman 1990; Romer and Snyder 1994; Grier and Munger 1991, 1993) but also to members of the majority party and its leaders (Taylor 2003; Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999).

Conditional party government arises from two significant developments. First, the Democratic and, especially, Republican parties became more ideologically homogenous. The proportion of members who had regularly crossed the aisle to work with members of the opposite party (such as conservative southern Democrats like the powerful chair of the Ways and Means Committee Wilbur Mills and the liberal northern Republican Jacob Javits) declined and were replaced in each party by more ideologically extreme politicians who offered unwavering support for their party's core philosophy (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997; Bond and Fleisher 1990; Fleisher and Bond 1996). It is telling that the Republican surge in 1994 hurt moderate Democrats more than extreme liberals who fared much better. The homogenization of intra-party preferences is evident in a number of trends. Most roll call votes on the floor of the House and Senate no longer divided each party as they did from 1945 to 1976. There was also a significant decline since the mid-1970s in the proportion of close floor votes in Congress where more than 10 percent of each party disagreed with a majority of their party. Finally, the ideological position of each party's members moved closer together. Analysis of the distance between the votes of members of the same party in the House and Senate shows that there was less division within each party by the end of the 20th century than at any time since 1947 (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 1984; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997).

Second, both political parties moved further from each other and became increasingly polarized. The distance separating the average House and Senate Democrat from the average Republican increased over time (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997). Roll call votes in Congress were more frequently divided between liberals and conservatives in the 1990s than at any time since 1947 when President Harry Truman faced a contentious Republican-dominated Congress. As Democrats and Republican became more ideologically homogeneous and polarized, political parties decisively

influenced roll call voting and, more generally, provided the organizational glue that the committee system had previously supplied (Cox and Poole 2002).

The partisan realignment in the South due to the civil rights movement contributed to the polarization. The steady increase in the identification of white Southerners with the Republican Party produced a decline in the number of conservative southern Democrats in Congress (improving the legislative unity of the Democratic Party) and an increase in the number of Republicans at a time when the rising population of the South boosted the region's representation in the House. The gradual transformation of southern politics coincided with the historic trend in Congress toward more conservative Republicans, proportionately more liberal Democrats, and fewer moderates. The result is that political parties are fiercely polarized over policies that explicitly aim to reverse racial differences in economic and political resources

The degree of party unity and party-line voting in Congress would seem to meet the requirements for “responsible party government” called for by E.E. Schattschneider and the APSA Committee on Political Parties that he chaired (Schattschneider 1942, 1960; Committee on Political Parties 1950), notwithstanding the persistent potential for gridlock in a complex, fragmented political system (Krehbiel 1998). Progressive observers of mid-century American politics hoped that a “responsible” party system would usher in policy changes favorable to broad publics and the less well off by making it possible for voters to choose between cohesive party teams offering distinct platforms and then be empowered to implement those platforms once elected. Recent American politics does not indicate, however, that party government – or at least the conditional form in the U.S. Congress – inherently favor progressive policy change. The critical question is which party is in power, whether they control both legislative chambers and the White House, and how unified they are on their policy goals.

Partisan Differences in Redistributive Policies

Research on the significance of political parties for democratic governance has tended to focus on the process or nature of party competition rather than on the *policy content* or distributional consequences of which political party controls the reins of government. More recent research on the policy effects of

party competition suggests that which party controls government matters, with Democrats (until recently) pursuing policies that redistribute economic resources from the rich to the poor and Republicans moving in the opposite direction.

The *process approach* to parties and inequality has origins in V.O. Key's famous argument in *Southern Politics in State and Nation* that well-organized party competition (defined as stable, programmatically coherent, and "factional[ly] responsible") facilitate the political participation and influence of the economically disadvantaged. For Key, "over the long run the have-nots lose in a disorganized politics (Key 1949, 307)." Key's "have not" hypothesis was inspired by his close study of the one-party politics of the South in the Jim Crow era, which suggested that the southern states with the most stable, cohesive factional structures had more genuine competition between "ins" and "outs," a greater "sense of corporate responsibility" among elected officials, less "favoritism and graft" in the conduct of government business, and more "power to discipline wild-eyed men" on the explosive issue of race—all factors contributing, in Key's view, to rational public consideration of the "crucial issues" of "taxation and expenditure." By comparison, less stable factional structures only sporadically facilitated "the old Populist battle of the poor, white farmer against the plantation regions," while the states with the most "discontinuous and kaleidoscopic" factional structures were marked by "issueless politics" lacking even "a semblance of factional responsibility," placing "a high premium on demagogic qualities of personality," and providing "great negative power to those with a few dollars to invest in legislative candidates." The implication Key drew from these observations was that stable, organized factional competition (which he thought of as approximating, under the peculiar historical conditions of the one-party South, "the role assigned elsewhere to political parties") is necessary, if not sufficient, to provide an "institutionalized mechanism for the expression of lower-bracket viewpoints" (Key 1949, 298-310).

Although Key appeared to abandon his hypothesized link of the "have nots" with organized party competition and students of parties have not generated much systematic empirical support for it,⁴ the process account evolved from studying the *structure* of party competition to examining the *closeness* of the electoral division between Democrats and Republicans as measured by vote shares or seats in the state

legislature. Early analyses of this sort found little impact of party competition on state policy outcomes (e.g., Lockard 1959; Dye 1966; Winters 1976). The results of more recent studies are also mixed, but suggest, if anything, that an even partisan division between Democrats and Republicans may produce policy outcomes generally considered harmful to the political interests of “have-nots.” For example, some research has found inconsistent but generally negative effects of party competition on the size of state governments (Rogers and Rogers 2000), while other research has found that evenly divided state legislatures produced lower taxes and lower levels of workers’ compensation benefits (although the former result disappeared when the analysis included the ideology of the state electorate as a control variable) (Besley and Case 2003).

The critical missing piece of the process account was a consistent examination of the policy consequences of *which* party controls the reins of government. The policy approach to party competition helps to explain the tilt against egalitarianism in American governance.

A particularly important study of policy effects of party competition reported that the class basis of party competition rather than the closeness of party competition affect the political fortunes of the economically disadvantaged (as measured by the generosity of state welfare benefits) (Jennings 1979). Analysis of data from eight states showed that the six with class-based party systems from the New Deal through the 1960s (Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) spent more on welfare than the two that did not (Indiana and Virginia). This study also found that the states with class-based party systems spent more on welfare when Democrats controlled state politics than when Republicans were in charge, suggesting that class-based politics is especially good for “have-nots” when their side wins. A broader analysis produced further empirical support for the latter effect, but not for the former effect: on average, states characterized by a class-based “New Deal” cleavage structure did not provide more generous welfare benefits than southern or “post-New Deal” states; but Democratic control did have a strong positive effect on welfare spending in the “New Deal” states, while partisan control had little or no impact in Southern or “post-New Deal” states (Brown 1995).

There is now a substantial body of research that establishes the political importance of *which* party controls the reins of government at any given time. Notwithstanding the popular perception that there's not a dime's worth of difference between Democrats and Republicans (as George Wallace used to say) – and notwithstanding a strong emphasis on the moderating effects of electoral competition in formal theories of majoritarian politics (Downs 1957) – political scientists have documented significant effects of partisan control on policy-making in a variety of realms.

Some of this research is based on comparisons across states and parallels the research on the effects of party competition. For example, studies have found partisan differences in state revenues and expenditures (Rogers and Rogers 2000), in taxes and spending patterns (though not in overall spending) (Besley and Case 2003), in state taxes as a share of gross state product (Knight 2000), and in Medicaid spending (Grogan 1994).⁵ Related work demonstrated that welfare benefits were more generous in states with higher turnout rates among low-income voters (whether measured in (absolute or relative terms) (Hill, Leighley and Hinton-Andersson 1995; Husted and Kenney 1997).

Analyses of partisan effects at the national level have been constrained by the obvious limitations of data imposed by studying one political system rather than fifty. Notwithstanding those limitations, partisan control generally seems to be even more important at the national level than at the state level. For example, studies of state tax policy have documented only small partisan effects, presumably due to the political constraints imposed by federal tax policies and state constitutions (Lowery 1987; Morgan 1994). By comparison, studies of federal tax policy have found strong partisan effects on the progressivity of nominal or “symbolic” tax rates, albeit more modest effects on the progressivity of effective tax rates (Page 1983; Allen and Campbell 1994).

A much more comprehensive study of the American political economy from the late 1940s through the early 1980s found significant partisan differences in a variety of important macroeconomic policies and outcomes, including monetary and fiscal policy (both more expansive under Democratic presidents), unemployment (lower under Democrats), real output (higher under Democrats), and income inequality (lower under Democrats) (Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988). The analysis of partisan differences in

income growth patterns was extended through the Clinton years, revealing substantial, statistically significant differences in the economic fortunes of lower- and middle-income families under Democratic and Republican presidents (Bartels 2003). For example, the average real pre-tax income growth rate in the second half of the 1900s for families at the 20th percentile of the income distribution was 2.6% under Democratic presidents, but only 0.6% under Republican presidents. Middle-class family incomes grew about twice as fast under Democrats (2.4% versus 0.9% at the 40th percentile; 2.5% versus 1.3% at the 60th percentile), while families at the 95th percentile of the income distribution fared equally well under both parties (with an average real income growth rate of 2.1%).

Obviously, substantial partisan differences in income growth patterns by income class have substantial implications for prevailing levels of economic inequality. Simulations suggest that steady application of Democratic income growth patterns throughout the past half-century would have entirely counteracted the dramatic increase in economic inequality experienced over this period, while steady application of Republican growth patterns would have caused inequality to increase almost 80 percent faster than it actually did (Bartels 2003).

For the post-World War II period as a whole, partisan differences in income growth rates seem to be traceable to the corresponding partisan differences in macroeconomic outcomes.⁶ For example, the average unemployment rate from 1948-2001 was 30 percent higher under Republican presidents than under Democrats, while the average rate of real GDP growth was 30 percent lower; controlling for these differences accounted exactly for the observed partisan differences in lower- and middle-class income growth patterns. However, there is also some evidence suggesting that partisan differences in macroeconomic outcomes may have diminished in recent years, while partisan differences in tax and transfer policies have become relatively more important (due, for example, to the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit under Bill Clinton or tax cuts for the wealthy under George W. Bush) (Bartels 2003).

Finally, large-scale historical analysis of “the macro polity” underscores the impact of political parties on the broad course of American public policy (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). Partisan control of government was by far the most important determinant of policy outputs in a complex analysis

relating economic conditions, liberal or conservative shifts in “public mood,” partisan loyalties in the electorate, presidential approval, election outcomes, and policy-making in the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court. For example, the estimated effect on White House policy activity of replacing a Republican president with a Democrat was more than three times larger than the estimated direct effect of moving from the most conservative public mood on record (in 1952) to the most liberal public mood on record (in 1961). The estimated effects of partisan control on congressional policy activity were even larger (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, 204, 305, 308, 310). Although this macro analysis did not stress these findings, it is hard to interpret its findings without being mightily impressed by how substantially the course of public policy alters with changes in partisan control of the reins of government.

The Limits of Conditional Party Government

The current configuration of the American party system features a highly competitive balance between Republicans and Democrats in the electorate, in Congress, and in the Electoral College. But the intense competition has not produced a convergence at the midpoint of public opinion.⁷ Rather, the parties are now more ideological, more cohesive, and more distinct in their supporting coalitions than at any time in recent memory. While a large segment of the public remains politically disengaged, attentive citizens have increasingly responded to these developments by choosing up sides, adopting more or less consistent packages of policy positions and partisan loyalties.

The implications of increasing economic and ideological polarization of the parties and their supporting coalitions for the pursuit of egalitarian policies appear to depend primarily on the outcome of the partisan struggle for political dominance. For most of the 20th century, the “have-nots” have benefited when the Democratic Party has won. Until recently, Democrats have consistently used their control over the reins of government to pursue high employment, high taxes, and other policies that generally redistributed economic resources from the rich to the poor. When Republicans have governed they have fairly consistently done the opposite.

Conditional Party Government makes it possible, at least in principle, to overcome the Madisonian system that deadlocks efforts to enact comprehensive policy and, in particular, to pursue concerted action on wide-ranging egalitarian initiatives. Indeed, the election in 1992 that brought Bill Clinton to the White House and Democratic control of both legislative chambers made it possible to formulate and introduce comprehensive health reform that would help lower income Americans, though of course the Madisonian system contributed to its demise.

But three factors have mitigated the potential of Conditional Party Government to open the way for consistent egalitarian policies. First, Republicans have enjoyed greater leverage over both lawmaking branches more often over the past several decades than Democrats as evident under both Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Missing in the progressive preoccupation with encouraging party competition and in Madison's fears that majorities would use democratic government to confiscate wealth was sufficient consideration that voters would choose a political party that did not favor egalitarian policies. Second, divided government has positioned a disciplined contemporary Republican Party to capitalize on the Madisonian tools of deadlock to stymie egalitarian policies. The Republican Congress checked Clinton's policies, obstructing the President's efforts to enact health care reform and forcing the President to accept, for instance, significantly more draconian welfare reform legislation than he had originally proposed.

Third, the contemporary Democratic Party is ideologically further from Republicans than in decades but appears to have moved in a conservative direction. Even during Clinton's first two years in office when Democrats controlled Congress, he did not pursue a consistently egalitarian policy and his partisans never even voted on his top domestic priority – health care reform. The relative timidity of the contemporary Democratic Party reflects its dependence on raising campaign funds from the more affluent as well as strategic caution as it faces nearly unified Republican attacks for wastefulness and mismanagement, as concisely summarized in the charges of “tax and spend Democrats.” The inability of the Democratic Party to regularly recruit a sizeable group of moderate or liberal Republicans has both reduced its potential to form coalitions to support the kind of egalitarian policies enacted during the New Deal and Great Society legislation and stripped away valuable political cover against sweeping attacks on

the Party's reputation. Fears of attacks from Republicans and the search for allies in a shrinking pool of cross-over Republicans have produced cautiousness among contemporary Democrats about proposing redistributive legislation.

In short, conditional party government has not ushered in redistributive government policies because they face fierce and unified Republican opposition, and strategically calibrated defensiveness by Democrats.

The Narrowcasting of Distributional Politics

The first major bias in the political process against the disadvantage is that conditional party government in Congress "delays and deadlocks" comprehensive policy responses to rising economic inequality. The second principle bias is that the well-organized and most vocal disproportionately receive piecemeal, particularistic policies.

Distributional politics and, specifically, the allocation of discretionary government expenditures to concentrated groups have a long and well-known tradition in American government. The new developments over the past several decades have produced finer targeting of benefits to increasingly narrow groups.

By the 1970s, distributional politics or, in more earthy terms, "pork barrel" politics was well-known as a process geared toward helping incumbents of both political parties in Congress. The call to "Bring home the bacon" represented an institutional commitment to aiding incumbents by delivering benefits to congressional districts that would be clearly traceable to specific members of Congress and offer tangible evidence of the members' effectiveness in fighting for their constituents. A line of research reported that members of Congress had changed their institutional routines toward the non-partisan and non-controversial process of distributing particularized benefits to woo constituents (Fiorina 1989; Mayhew 1974; Ferejohn 1974). The bipartisan commitment to winning reelection and helping incumbents gave rise to the famed "triple alliance" or "iron triangles" of American politics in which sub-units within the legislative branch (committees and sub-committees) and the executive branch (agencies) worked with

peak interest groups. Rather than interest groups and congressional committees competing and thereby counteracting each other as pluralist theory predicted, members of Congress abided by the norms of cooperation and mutual non-interference and allowed a substantial part of government decisions to fall under the control of narrow, semi-autonomous elites working within discrete policy areas (McConnell 1966; Lowi 1969). The committee system served as the focal point for the construction of logrolling coalitions.

Reforms of the Democratic and Republican Party nomination process, which enhanced the influence of party activists and campaign contributors, as well as shifts in the electorate (especially, the growing ideological homogenization of many congressional districts) generated incentives for targeting the distribution of pork in two directions after the 1970s. First, the power of political parties and their leaders increased, and the political incentives within Congress shifted toward disproportionately expanding the incumbency advantage of members of the majority party and away from a logrolling process aimed at helping members of both parties. With members increasingly convinced that pork produced votes (Alvarez and Saving 1997; Levitt and Snyder 1997), the majority party kept the lion's share of pork for their members to advantage their members. Research has found that the districts of majority party members has been disproportionately favored in the legislative distribution of defense dollars (Carsey and Rundquist 1999), transportation funding (Lee 2000), appropriation earmarks for higher education institutions (Balla, Lawrence, Maltzman, and Sigelman 2002), and federal grants generally (Levitt and Snyder 1995). The study of higher education demonstrated that the majority party made a shrewd strategic decision: even as the majority party disproportionately funneled funds to the districts of their members, it also "inoculated" itself against charges of wastefulness by legislators from the minority party by distributing some (albeit, less) resources to them (Balla, Lawrence, Maltzman, and Sigelman 2002).

Second, the favoritism toward districts of majority party members was intensified by the efforts of members themselves to differentially funnel federal discretionary spending *within* their district. Evidence since the mid-1980s suggests that members calculated that the effectiveness of pork to enhance their

prospects of reelection could be maximized by targeting federal money toward specific geographic areas within their districts that voted at higher rates (Martin 2003). Findings of politicians rewarding their supporters confirm V.O. Key's observation that "politicians and officials are under no compulsion to pay much heed to classes and groups of citizens that do not vote" (Key 1949, 527).⁸

The intensified targeting of discretionary federal funds expands inequalities in political and economic resources. Bias in political voice, which our colleagues document in a separate review, joins together with bias in political influence. Martin suggests that "unequal participation leads to unequal representation:" "If members of Congress allocate resources based on participation, then inequalities in representation are further exacerbated." Moreover, skewing resource allocation to selective participation "shifts scarce federal allocations away from those areas in society that need it most – based on concentrations of social problems – toward those areas that participate the most" (Martin 2002, 123).

In short, distributive politics that has always favored well-organized particularistic groups has become more selective, while the politics of redistributing resources for the benefit of racially and economically disadvantaged groups now faces unified Republican Party opposition and defensive Democratic Party strategizing.

Continuing Opportunities for Addressing Political Inequality in Legislative Politics

Despite the persistent biases of the political process against Americans who have unequal political voice, the legislative process is not closed to pressures from voters for addressing economic, racial, ethnic, and gender inequalities. The main check on legislators is that they are held accountable on Election Day. Research continues to find that roll call votes by members affect the decisions of voters. In particular, decisions by members to vote with the extreme (liberal or conservative) wings of their respective parties decrease their share of the vote and decrease the probability of retaining office for Members in both marginal and safe seats, controlling for the ideology of the district (Erikson and Wright 1993; Canes-Wrone et al. 2002).

Interest Groups and Money

Interest groups form and maintain themselves to exert influence and advantage their members in the competition for scarce public resources. Although they can be a vehicle for transmitting the views of a wide spectrum of American society, the purpose of interest groups is not equality; it is vehicle for differentiation. Campaign contributions are a favorite tool of interest groups and individuals. The impact of money and the contributors who wield it is significant but defies the simplistic cartoon version of corrupt government officials literally “selling” their vote. The effect of campaign contributions is to empower the best organized and most affluent with a powerful weapon for blocking egalitarian legislation and promoting particularistic policies that favor them. We begin by broadly outlining the role of interest groups in American politics and then turn to identify the ways that money influences American elections and governance.

Interest Groups and Public Policy

Interest groups are now a widely accepted part of America’s system of government. But students of politics in the 18th and 19th centuries used such unflattering terms as “factions,” “vested interests,” and “influence peddlers” to describe what they considered as aberrations and corruptions of self-government in a republic. During the 20th century, political scientists learned to see such groups as normal features of political behavior in modern government. Leading political scientists can and have strongly disagreed about their democratic value (Schattschneider 1960; Truman 1951), but interest groups have come to be regarded as fully legitimate actors in the highly complex mix of forces that combine to produce today’s policy making processes.

At the same time, one constant in political science research is that interest groups tend to reinforce rather than challenge pre-existing inequalities in American society and government. The bias toward maintaining the status quo emerges as a theme in a number of ways. Many political scientists have focused on the disparity in resources (finances, human capital, organizational capacity, etc.) that transform economic inequalities into unequal political clout for discrete groups.⁹ Others have focused on

the advantages entailed in holding certain strategic socio-economic positions, such as the leverage of granting or withholding business confidence for investment (Lindblom 1977). Still others have focused on the cooperative alliances of interest groups with members of Congress and subunits in the bureaucracy to form “iron triangles” that control narrow slices of government policy, quietly locking out other organized or unorganized interests (Lowi 1969; McConnell 1966).

Whatever the angle of vision, the general picture portrays the power of moneyed interests and the well-organized to thwart any major distributive policies (e.g., see Page and Simmons 2000; Ferguson, 1995). Of course, there are exceptions such as the organizations on behalf of African Americans, the poor, or consumers that challenged existing structures of inequality (Berry, 1999). Political scientists have found such cases interesting to study, however, precisely because they are so exceptional.

The overarching fact is that by its very nature, the interest group system exists for the purpose of achieving influence, not equality. The legal norm of equal justice under law and the electoral norm of one person/one vote have no counterpart in the realm of interest groups. The regime of organized groups espouses no standard for “equal protection of interests”, or “one person/one lobbyist.” This inherent difference from legal and political norms of equality means that the legitimacy of interest groups *per se* co-exists with an inescapable public distrust of the unlevel playing field represented by interest group politics. Not surprisingly, many Americans suspect that not much will be done to redress economic grievances if those who dominate the economic marketplace also dominate the political marketplace.

While economic inequality grew in the last quarter of the 20th century, there were also important changes occurring simultaneously in the world of American interest groups. The separate research review of Political Voice summarized important changes in what might be thought of as interest group demographics. First, the sheer size of the interest group community grew considerably after the 1960s. Second, and more importantly, the types of interests represented in the total advocacy and lobbyist population broadened to include many of those formerly outside or only marginally represented by politically active groups. Examples since the 1960s include minorities, consumers, the disabled, women, gays, environmentalists, and “public interest” groups more generally. Third, while the organized power

of labor unions declined in this period, many professional associations, corporations and other business organizations became politically active in their own right. Rather than relying solely on traditional trade associations or hiring part-time lobbyists, many more business interests found it worthwhile to establish a permanent and active presence in Washington to deal with the new policy challenges posed by environmental, consumer and other groups.

Demographic changes in the American interest group community have generally left the overall distribution of political influence in the halls of government less equal. (The previous research review of *Political Voice* provides a fuller discussion of changes in the interest group community.) The impact of interest groups on American government is illustrated by health policy, a longstanding focus of interest group scholars (Eckstein 1958, 1960; Morone and Jacobs, 2004). American government decisions on health policy have remained under the dominant influence of groups with the greatest economic and organizational muscle (Marmor 1983; Gordon 2003). The same calculus of privilege holds within the subset of interest groups supposedly speaking for the vulnerable, such as workers and the aged. Research shows that organized labor has mainly used its influence to expand private sector solutions favorable to its control over companies' employee benefit funds rather than fully investing in the fight for national health insurance (Gottschalk 2000). Likewise, it was the vocal organization of more wealthy seniors that forced repeal of the one-year old Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act in 1989, even though 60 percent of beneficiaries would have received benefits in excess of costs (Himmelfarb 1995). On the larger political stage, an aroused public opinion and Democratic political victory in 1992 generated President Clinton's plan for comprehensive health reform, but the fragmentation of its supporters and coalescence of better-funded corporate interest groups and political action committees along with steadfast Republican leadership in Congress did much to ensure its defeat (Skocpol 1996).

On the other hand, the common perceptions of moneyed interests directly pressuring officials or dictating policy over the objections of voters are too simplistic. They may not be entirely untrue, but they are so incomplete as to falsify the deeper reality. Research on health policy shows, for instance, that interest group influence has varied with conditions in the larger political system, waxing in periods of

deadlocked party politics and public apathy about health policy and waning in the face of critical elections and an aroused public opinion (Jacobs 1993). Although the American Medical Association was successful in defeating federal health policy initiatives for many decades, it and other groups could not prevent passage of Medicare in 1965 (Starr 1982; Oberlander 2003).

The simple stereotype of interest groups is also misleading because it misses significant changes in how interest groups have learned to function under modern political circumstances. Effective pressure groups have turned from strong arm tactics to the distribution of information, the formulation of credible explanations to offer constituents, and the development of sophisticated public communication strategies. In the post-Sixties world of proliferating lobbying organizations, watchdog groups, and non-stop political reporting, savvy interest groups have learned the value of injecting their influence into the deep tissue of policy making. This does not mean civic engagement by ordinary citizens in large membership associations. Rather, it means a growing emphasis in recent decades on mobilizing professional resources for expertly managed advocacy. Even interest groups that focus on redistributive issues or broader “public interest” claims have found it useful to shift from mobilizing large memberships to public relations strategies run by professional advocates who target appeals to more affluent and educated supporters (Skocpol 1999 and 2003). With so many voices saying so many things in so many media venues, the premium for exerting influence lies in an ability to cut through the noise.

Research shows that contemporary interest groups use their economic advantages not to buy officials, but to buy means to orchestrate the public and private conversations that constitute policy making. The growing presence in Washington of advocacy think tanks and “educational” initiatives on behalf of specific interest groups are only the most obvious expressions of this trend.

In the early 1960s, for example, one of the most thorough research studies of interest groups ever conducted found a relatively straightforward picture of business group lobbying on trade policy. A limited number of competing groups provided valuable information and expertise to government officials (Bauer, Pool and Dexter 1963). More recent case studies present a rather different picture that extends beyond direct lobbying. Now financially powerful interest groups work to use the communications process to

focus political attention on persuasive narratives that define problems and solutions in ways that advance their stakes (West and Loomis 1998). At the same time, professional advocacy groups have developed sophisticated new abilities to tightly target points of political leverage and orchestrate the appearance of “grassroots” pressure. For example, consulting companies such as Legislative Demographic Services are hired to match data provided by clients (mainly Fortune 500 companies, major associations and industries) with individual legislator’s voting records and committee positions on issues, information which can then be used to mobilize employees, suppliers and others to influence politicians in their districts. For instance, the repeal of the estate tax—a tax paid by at most only two percent of the wealthiest taxpayers—was scripted as a populist cause. Its repeal in 2001 occurred with broad popular and bipartisan support after a decade-long campaign by a coalition of interest groups and political entrepreneurs (Birney and Shapiro 2003).

Of course, well-financed, professionally managed interest coalitions are not always as successful as they were in the 1993-94 defeat of the Clinton Health Plan or the 2001 repeal of the “death tax” (a term carefully chosen after test-marketing). However, even if mere “access” to policy makers is the goal, obtaining a hearing is not some sort of neutral achievement. It is a huge contour line marking out the uneven political playing field. Continued access can build the relationships that allow scarcely noticed, pinpoint policy favors (a change in statutory language here, a line in a regulatory provision there) that are immensely important to a given group. Moreover, given limitations of time and attention, access for some also generally entails a crowding out of others. The mirror image of access is the silences that are created as those with *entrée* press in to obtain a hearing.

The deeper involvement of interest groups in the public policy conversation of government offers particular advantage to pressure groups with the deep pockets necessary to sustain sophisticated efforts at professional advocacy. This development in the political marketplace harmonizes well with the growing economic inequality in the economic marketplace. Under contemporary political circumstances, it may be easier to achieve an upward redistribution from the “have-nots” to the “haves” than the reverse.

Money in the American Political System

In an era when the financing of ever more expensive election campaigns breaks a new record with nearly every election cycle, money clearly plays an important role in American politics. In the 1999-2000 election cycle, for example, candidate and party committees raised approximately \$3 billion; congressional candidates raised and spent more than \$1 billion; presidential candidates spent approximately \$500 million; the hard and soft money accounts of political parties totaled more than \$1 billion; and PACs raised about \$600 million (Ansolabehere, de Figueredo, and Snyder 2003).

The influx of vast sums of money into American politics has sparked dire warnings about corruption and a steady stream of journalistic accounts with sky-is-falling titles like “Selling Out: How Big Corporate Money Buys Elections, Rams through Legislation and Betrays our Democracy” or “The Best Congress Money Can Buy” (Green 2002; Stern 1988; Drew 1983; but see Mann 2003). These accounts of corruption tell a simple story of money literally buying votes in Congress and the President’s signature or veto. In this telling, political equality is pure fiction, sold to the highest bidder.

Research regarding the impact of money on elections and governing refutes the crudest popular impressions of rampant corruption, though they do point to subtle but quite significant influences. Indeed, some scholars have tried to temper the shrill alarms about the growing amount of money in the electoral process by showing that the costs have remained relatively constant over time when adjusted for inflation, the size of the economy, the growth in national income, or the costs of media buys. Others describe the money flowing into American politics as a “good deal” given the stakes (Overacker 1932; Ansolabehere, Gerber, and Snyder 2001; Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Mann and Corrado 2002; Tullock 1972).¹⁰ Nonetheless, the absolute and relative amount of money devoted to campaigns can be quite significant in high-stake elections, targeted races, and elections to particular offices (Mann 2003; Magleby 2002). Moreover, the average cost of a successful challenge to a House incumbent increased between 1976 and 2000 at a rate far higher than the growth of the national income (Mann 2003). Sorauf argues that campaign funding has become something akin to a destabilizing

international arms race, characterized by “overkill” that has both parties constantly “scrambling for more weapons” and unable to realistically evaluate their needs (Sorauf 1988, 1992, and 1999).

Money has two basic impacts – it can influence elections and it can affect the behavior of elected representatives.¹¹

The Impact of Money on Election Outcomes

The most powerful effect of money on elections is on the selection and competitiveness of challengers. The costs of running a modern campaign erect a steep hurdle for challengers, creating a substantial advantage for the incumbent. The incumbent advantage in raising campaign funds and dependence on contributors who do support them reinforces the predisposition of the political process to favor deadlock on broad egalitarian policy directions and narrow-gauge responsiveness to particularistic groups.

Research shows that challengers are increasingly unable to keep up with incumbents or with spiraling campaign costs. Weak competitiveness in election to the U.S. House results from the “increasing costs of campaigns and the decreasing ability of House challengers to raise campaign funds” (Abramowitz 1991, 53). The average incumbent in 1988 spent more than 300% more than the average incumbent in 1974, while average challenger spending increased only 25% over that same period. The effects of these differences are further magnified by increases in the costs of advertising, consultants, and other campaign services.

The “financial handicap” that challengers face starts out quite high and then grows with each day of the campaign. Incumbents raise far more money than their opponents at every point in the campaign and are much better able to counter well-financed challengers. As one set of researchers noted, “challengers start out behind and incumbents are able to mobilize the resources to make sure they stay there” (Krasno, Green, and Cowden 1994, 472, 473). Although scholars have engaged in a lively debate over how to measure and analyze the decisions of incumbents to spend campaign funds, there is agreement that they generally enjoy a substantial advantage over challengers.¹² A major part of the

incumbency advantage in fund raising stems from the dramatic increases in campaign contributions by PACs (Abramowitz 1991). For instance, analysis of AFL-CIO spending in the 1996 elections on “voter education” campaigns was found to be “highly effective against the freshmen [Republicans] they targeted, but not against more senior Republicans” (Jacobson 1999, 193).

Faced with the large campaign war chest that incumbents can amass, potential challengers may not even enter the race (Goidel and Gross 1994; Hersch and McDougall 1994). Even challengers with a distinguished record to run on may be discouraged by the “daunting expense of a serious campaign and a belief that incumbents can raise much more money if they need to do so” (Mann 2003, 76). Research has shown that House incumbents with large war chests do deter quality challengers (Goldenberg, Traugott, and Baumgartner 1986; Box-Steffensmeier 1996), though some studies have not found this deterrent effect for House races (Krasno and Green 1988) or Senate contests (Squire 1991; Goodliffe 2001; Epstein and Zemsky 1995).

Challengers who can clear the financial hurdle pose a threat to incumbents. One of the most consistent research findings is that increased spending by challengers produces a greater share of the vote and more competitive races because it enables them to increase their name recognition and get their message out.¹³ This puts enormous power in the hands of contributors to determine the pool of potential officeholders. To win a seat in national office, the incumbent and the challenger usually have to win the support of funders before they go before voters. The effect can be to discourage certain kinds of challengers that, for instance, promote egalitarian policies that would redistribute resources from affluent campaign contributors.

Although campaign finance winnows down the field of challengers to a set amenable to contributors, the caricatures of big money buying elections are crude and inaccurate. If challengers can raise the funds to meet the entry fee, campaign spending appears to contribute to expanding voters’ knowledge of candidates and their affective connections with candidates (especially challengers in House races), though it has no notable effect on voters’ trust, efficacy, involvement, or attention (Coleman and Manna 2000). Spending by the challenger improves the ability of advantaged and disadvantaged groups

to accurately recall the challenger's name and identify their ideology and policy positions on services and spending (Coleman 2001). These findings help to explain why increased spending by challengers is associated with a greater share of the vote. While spending helps challengers, expenditures by incumbents (who already enjoy name recognition and visibility) do not produce similar improvements in name recall or ideological placement, though it does increase the ability of all voters to identify the policy positions of office-holders. When the spending of challengers matches incumbent spending, however, these effects dissipate.

The Influence of Money on Elected Representatives

The most vivid pictures of money in American politics are fictional or videotaped recordings (as in the Abscam sting of members of Congress) of government officials stuffing their pockets with money in exchange for their votes. Indeed, a large body of research has equated the influence of money with the “buying” of congressional votes. Case studies have shown large, statistically significant associations between contributions and roll call votes on diverse issues: labor contributions have been associated with support for minimum wage legislation in 1972 (Silberman and Durden 1976), and contributions from the American Trucking Association have been related to support for trucking deregulation (Frendreis and Waterman 1985). In addition, statistically significant relationships between contributions and representatives' votes have been found in the discrete issue areas of labor legislation (Wilhite and Theilmann 1987), a cargo preference bill (Chappell 1981), dairy price supports (Welch 1982), auto emissions standards, defense appropriations, and truck weight limits (Chappell 1982); and the debt limit, windfall profits tax, and price controls (Kau and Rubin 1982).

Despite these results, the balance of research does not reveal consistent and persuasive evidence that campaign contributions and PAC money cause floor votes. As one comprehensive review of research concludes, “overall, PAC contributions show relatively few effects on voting behavior [in Congress]” (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003, 114). Past research that claimed to find a connection between campaign contributions and congressional voting has been extensively critiqued on three

grounds: its findings were not generalizable beyond one case (Grenzke 1989); it failed to distinguish the tendency of contributors to back already supportive legislators rather than to fund “swing” members (Bailey 2003; Hall and Wayman 1990; Kau and Rubin 1982; Chappell 1982; Jacobson 1980; Welch 1982); and it did not control for competing influences on legislators’ roll call votes including their party affiliation, their own beliefs and ideology, and the preferences of their constituents (Ansolobehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Grenzke 1989).

Although money may not consistently “buy” the votes of members of Congress, campaign contributions by interest groups, PACs, and individuals are a kind of “entrance fee” to gain access or a hearing with lawmakers (Heard 1956; Alexander 1972; Hearndon 1982; Gopoian 1984; Kroszner and Stratmann 1998; Austen-Smith 1995). Some research demonstrates that contributions “buy” an interest group time with congressional staff: a contribution of \$6,400 “buys,” on average, 25 minutes of access to the office of a member of Congress and \$72,300 is rewarded with an hour long meeting (Langbein 1986).

Committee deliberations are one place where members of Congress reward contributors (Hall and Wayman 1990; Evans 1996). PACs use contributions to motivate members to increase their commitment of time, staff, and political capital to promoting their concerns in the committee process, where they face less public scrutiny and can afford to be more sympathetic. A critical purpose, then, of contributing to a member’s reelection is to influence “not simply the *direction* of legislators’ preferences but the *vigor* with which those preferences are promoted in the decision-making process” (Hall and Wayman 1990, 802).

Moneyed interests do exert, then, a substantial influence on the policy making by using their contributions to mobilize legislators already predisposed to support them to increase their levels of participation at the committee level. The ability to make contributions, which is largely restricted to the affluent or well organized, creates an unequal playing field in the halls of Congress. Money does “buy” something -- privileged access for contributors and the special attention of members who reward them with vigorous help in minding their business in the committee process.

In short, interest groups and money are tools wielded disproportionately by a small segment of American citizens to enact policies that concentrate benefits on them and to block egalitarian policies that would impose onerous costs on them.

Political Representation

One of the most basic principles of democracy is popular sovereignty and the expectation that the decisions of government should, as a general rule, parallel the preferences of citizens. There are, of course, longstanding and vibrant debates regarding the importance of government leaders possessing the discretion to act and, on occasion, to exert independence from public opinion in solving urgent problems or crises (Burke 1949; Dahl 1989). Nonetheless, the normative underpinning of democratic government and the practical reality of political equality is that the decisions of government should normally reflect the preferences of its citizens (Pitkin 1967). In some respects, this is the most basic standard for evaluating American democracy.

An enduring body of research has investigated the extent and nature of popular sovereignty by studying the relationship of mass opinion and elite action in the American political system. Although past research suggests that policy responds to public opinion, more recent analysis indicates that the government has become less responsive than it was several decades ago and that it is particularly attentive to the views of the affluent. Evidence that politicians are disconnected from citizens is consistent with the broad findings previously reported that the American governing process tends to cater to the organized and vocal and to block egalitarian policies that are supported by the public.

Popular Sovereignty

Empirical Studies of Political Representation

Representation is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon with a very long history in both democratic theory and political practice (Pitkin 1967). However, systematic empirical research on representation only emerged in the past half-century or so, with the advent of public opinion surveys

making it possible to quantify popular preferences and relate them to the observed behavior of public officials or to the actual outcomes of democratic policy-making. Work along these lines has tended to ignore many of the complexities of the relationship between democratic masses and elites; for example, symbolic representation, trust, leadership, misperception, political manipulation, and inequalities within the mass public all figure much less prominently in systematic statistical analyses than in qualitative studies of representation (Fenno 1978; Bianco 1994; Page and Shapiro 1992, chap. 9; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Notwithstanding these limitations, political scientists have generated a good deal of evidence regarding the extent of consistency and congruence between mass opinion and elite action in the American political system—a simple but important measure of popular sovereignty in the liberal populist interpretation of democracy.

The most influential study of political representation in the scholarly field of American politics is undoubtedly Miller and Stokes's (1963) path-breaking article on "Constituency Influence in Congress." Miller and Stokes studied political representation in terms of the dyadic relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. In particular, Miller and Stokes married a survey of constituents' political opinions in 116 congressional districts with a parallel survey of incumbent members of Congress and challengers in the 1958 congressional elections in those districts, and with information about the roll call votes cast by the incumbent representatives on the floor of Congress. They assessed the accuracy of representatives' perceptions of constituency opinion, the strength of the relationship between constituents' opinions and incumbent representatives' own policy views, and the impact of both perceived constituency opinion and representatives' own views on roll call votes. They found that roll call votes on civil rights issues were strongly correlated both with fairly accurate perceptions of constituency attitudes (as would be expected under the instructed-delegate model of representation) and with representatives' own racial attitudes. In the domain of social welfare issues, roll call votes were correlated with constituency opinions primarily because representatives *shared* the views of their constituents, not because they accurately *recognized* and *responded to* those views. In the domain of foreign policy, there was virtually no correlation between constituency opinions and representatives' roll call votes.

Subsequent analyses have found positive relationships between constituency opinion and representatives' behavior, even though they improved upon Miller and Stokes's original work and used quite different bodies of evidence, statistical methods, and policy areas. Some studies reanalyzed Miller and Stokes's data, making allowances for measurement error in constituency opinion (due to the very small samples of constituents in each congressional district in Miller and Stokes's survey) (Achen 1978; Erikson 1978) and attending to the potential pitfalls of comparing correlation coefficients across policy domains (Achen 1977). Additional work applied structural equation models to Miller and Stokes's data in order to probe the interrelationship of constituency opinion and House members' own policy views (Hill and Hurley 1999). Some analysis relied on National Election Study (NES) surveys from 1956 through 1972 to examine the temporal consistency of the relationship between constituents' opinions and their representatives' roll call votes (Stone 1982). Other scholars used subsequent NES surveys that were specifically designed to provide larger and more representative samples of opinion in congressional districts or entire states (Powell 1982; Page et al. 1984; Shapiro et al. 1990; Bartels, 1991a). Part of this re-analysis broke into the black box of political decision making (Jacobs 1993; Sobel 2001). For instance, one study found that policy attitudes reported in polls commissioned by John Kennedy were correlated with his public policy statements (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Jacobs 1993, Conclusion).

Aggregate Public Opinion and Public Policy

Part of the reanalysis of the Miller and Stokes's classic study shifted the focus of analysis from dyadic representation between individual members of Congress and their constituents to systemic or collective representation – the relationship between aggregate public opinion and the collective decisions of government or one of its separate institutions such as Congress (Weissberg 1978; see for discussion of this tradition Manza, Cook, and Page, 2002). It was argued that a strong correlation across districts between constituents' views and their own representatives' roll call votes was neither necessary nor sufficient to produce responsiveness by the government as a whole to the will of the people.

Unfortunately, the cross-sectional research design employed by Miller and Stokes and the many other

scholars who have followed in their footsteps is ill-suited to shed light on issues of systemic representation. Effective analyses of aggregate responsiveness require variation in actual policy outcomes in a collection of comparable political units, across a considerable variety of issues, or in a single political system over a substantial period of time.

One research strategy for improving the analysis of systemic representation was to expand the variation in policy outcomes by shifting the analysis from the national level to the state level.¹⁴ One pioneering approach compared public opinion in American states to a broad measure of “state policy liberalism.” (The measure of “state policy liberalism” was based on the presence of laws regarding consumer protection, criminal justice, and legalized gambling; state spending for education, Medicaid, and welfare; ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment; and state tax progressivity (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1989; 1993).) This approach found a very strong (.82) correlation between the ideological views of each state’s citizens (as captured in public opinion polls) and the ideological flavor of its public policies. This correlation is partly, though by no means entirely, attributable to the fact that more liberal states elected more liberal legislators. (It may also be partly attributable to long-term feedback effects of state policy on public opinion; the authors reported but did not remark on the fact that state policies in 1990 were even more strongly correlated with state policies in 1940 than with contemporary public opinion, whereas public opinion itself was much more unstable.)

While research has exploited cross-sectional variation in opinion and policy across the American states, another approach exploited temporal variation in national public opinion and policy across a wide range of political issues (Page and Shapiro 1983). This approach gathered data on the American public’s policy preferences from hundreds of publicly available opinion polls conducted between 1935 and 1979, isolating 357 instances of significant aggregate opinion change in successive polls employing identical policy questions over periods ranging from one month to several years. In each case, this research looked for evidence of congruent or incongruent shifts in corresponding policies over a period beginning at the time of the first poll and ending one year after the second poll. It found evidence of congruent policy changes in 153 cases (43%), evidence of incongruent policy change in only 78 cases (22%), and no

evidence (or uncertain evidence) of policy change in 126 cases (35%). Moreover, many of the instances of no change reflected situations in which policy already corresponded with opinion (e.g., abolition of the draft), and many of the instances of incongruent change reflected small or unstable shifts in opinion, imperfect measures of policy change, or misspecification of appropriate time lags. This work concluded that “(especially when opinion changes are large and sustained, and issues are salient) . . . opinion changes are important causes of policy change” (Page and Shapiro 1983, 188-189).

The research team of Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson analyzed much the same data in a rather different way to reach conclusions broadly consistent with the early analysis of congruent change in public opinion and policy (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). They constructed a summary measure of annual “policy mood” from survey data on domestic policy preferences dating back to the 1950s (Stimson 1999), then related liberal or conservative shifts in “policy mood” to election outcomes and to policy-making activities in the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court. They suggested that both direct responsiveness by incumbent officials and electoral replacement contributed to producing a strong connection between shifts in public mood and shifts in policy activity by the president and the House of Representatives. The Senate, too, responded significantly to shifts in public mood, but only through electoral replacement, while the Supreme Court responded less strongly and less quickly. They concluded that the American political system “combines both short- and long-term considerations through both rational anticipation and compositional change to produce a strong and resilient link between public and policy” (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002, 321).

Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson’s ambitious broad-brush analysis appears to be limited in three respects. First, their global measures of public opinion and public policy may lump together a wide range of specific (domestic) policy issues that tend to move in tandem. Research on public support for specific policies and on changes in these preferences over time demonstrates that the public consistently draws reasonable distinctions -- based on available information -- between different government programs (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, chap.7; Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992; Best 1999; Cook 1979). In

addition, there may be important differences in political responsiveness across specific policy domains. Research on defense policy, where aggregate public opinion has been sufficiently well-measured (and sufficiently variable) to facilitate time-series analyses of policy responsiveness, finds evidence of government responsiveness (Ostrom and Marra 1986; Hartley and Russett 1992; Wlezien 1996). Specifically, Pentagon budgets since the 1960s have been significantly influenced by public preferences for more or less defense spending. Analysis of the Reagan defense buildup of the early 1980s indicated that individual legislators' support for larger defense appropriations was strongly related to public support in their own districts for increased defense spending, and that the aggregate magnitude of the spending increase was almost entirely accounted for by the aggregate public demand for more defense spending (Bartels 1991a).

Although these findings indicate government responsiveness in individual policy areas, concerns remain. Benjamin Page recently took stock of this area of research and concludes that the use of global measures of public opinion and policy "greatly restricts the domain and range of variation in the independent and dependent variables..." to the point that the results do "not necessarily tell us much about... public opinion and policymaking" (Page 2002, 329).

A second possible limitation is that global analysis of public opinion and policy (as well as other studies of political representation in this tradition) omits critical independent variables that may influence both opinion and policy (Jacobs and Page 2004; Page 2002; Jacobs 1993, Conclusion). The danger is that strong statistical findings of association may be spurious: public opinion and policy may both be influenced by other important omitted factors -- namely, business mobilization, campaign contributors and interest groups, party activists, and other factors discussed earlier or in the research review on Political Voice.

A third potential limitation is that public opinion is not autonomous. Rather, public opinion is influenced by a host of factors including information (some of which is controlled by government officials) and the efforts of interest groups and politicians to frame arguments in self-serving ways (Zaller 1992; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Page 2002). The challenge is to establish that close statistical

associations of opinion and policy are not merely the result of political elites deceiving the public to support their desired policies.

The Tilt in Representation

Trends in Political Responsiveness

Although research on dyadic and systemic representation has generally found that decided government policy or the positions of elected officials is consistent or congruent with public opinion, two growing bodies of analysis show much less elite-public connection than previously assumed or that may have existed in the past. One line of analysis reports that policy has become less responsive to public opinion since the 1970s; another finds that government responsiveness is highly skewed toward the more affluent, with little attention to the preferences of lower income groups.

As we have seen, most studies of representation have focused on the relationship between constituents' opinions and legislators' behaviors at a single point in time or on the relationship between aggregate opinion and shifts in policy from year to year. Neither of these research designs is well-suited to monitoring changes over time in the responsiveness of the American government to the policy preferences of the public—in the former case because there is no temporal variation, and in the latter case because annual time-series are too short to be usefully subdivided. Even repeated studies of representation focusing on different periods may not facilitate confident inferences about changing responsiveness due to changes in the nature of the available data or of the methods used to analyze those data.¹⁵

In a few cases, however, political scientists have produced more systematic comparisons of responsiveness in different time periods. One body of work examined the correspondence between public opinion and changes in public policy across a wide range of issues in two periods, 1960-1979 and 1980-1993 (Monroe 1998). In the earlier period, it found that government policies were consistent with the policy preferences of a majority of the public 63% of the time; in the latter period policy was congruent with majority opinion only 55% of the time. A separate team of researchers likewise reported the results

of a “preliminary study” suggesting “a noticeable decline in correspondence” between public opinion and policy changes in the areas of welfare, crime, social security, and health care, from 67% congruence in President Reagan’s second term to 40% in the elder President Bush’s administration and 36% during President Clinton’s first term (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, 4).

Congressional responsiveness to district opinion has been measured less directly but over a much longer period of time, from 1874 to 1996 (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001). This approach related the ideological stances of incumbent members of Congress (and of challengers who were subsequently elected) as reflected in roll call votes on the floor of Congress to district opinion as reflected in presidential election outcomes in each congressional district. Over most of the period covered by their analysis, the roll call votes cast by members of Congress were virtually unrelated to presidential voting patterns in the districts those members represented. A positive relationship emerged in the middle of the 20th century and peaked in about 1970, but subsequently declined markedly, especially for Republican members of Congress.

These disparate findings of declines in congressional responsiveness after 1970 and in aggregate policy responsiveness seem plausibly consistent.¹⁶ However, another analysis of congressional responsiveness suggests a rather different temporal pattern for a period before the early 1970s (Stone 1982). This work used district-level breakdowns of data on social welfare policy preferences from NES surveys to calculate the correlation between constituency opinion and the roll call votes cast by members of Congress in various years from 1956 through 1972. It found that the correlation between roll call votes and overall district opinion was generally low throughout this period, and that it declined fairly steadily from .36 in 1956 to .09 in 1968 before rebounding to .23 in 1972. (The correlation between roll call votes and the opinions of constituents from the congressman’s own party was somewhat higher throughout this period, increasing from .43 in 1956 to .59 in 1960 and 1964 before declining gradually to .33 in 1972.)

These discrepant results –congressional responsiveness reaching a low point in 1968 in one analysis while a separate study found it reaching a historical high point at almost exactly the same time – may be attributable to unrepresentative samples of district opinion (since most of the NES surveys employed in

the analysis of congressional responsiveness used Metropolitan Statistical Areas rather than congressional districts as sampling units) or to the difficulty of comparing correlation coefficients from different populations. Further investigation of these issues is clearly warranted. In the meantime, however, we believe there is good reason to worry that the American political system has, indeed, become significantly less responsive than it once was to aggregate public opinion regarding important issues of public policy.

Inequalities in Political Responsiveness

Unfortunately, political scientists have done surprisingly little to investigate the extent of actual inequalities in government responsiveness to public opinion – that is, whether distinct segments of the country exert more influence than others. Studies of public opinion and public policy have almost invariably treated constituents in an undifferentiated way, using simple averages of opinions in a given district or at a given point in time to account for representatives' policy choices. The research we have summarized here, rich as it is, provides rather little purchase on the fundamental issue of political equality.

A few analysts have attempted to provide direct comparisons of the political influence of ordinary citizens and political elites. One found that elite opinion (as measured by the mail and phone calls reported in a survey of congressional offices) was more important than mass opinion (as measured by district-level survey data) in accounting for House members' support of President Reagan's policy agenda in the early 1980s (West 1988). Another study similarly found that elite ideology (as measured by a survey of state convention delegates and county party chairs) was more important than mass ideology (as measured by state-level survey data) in accounting for the roll call votes of U.S. Senators in the early 1980s (Wright 1989). (The views of independents in the mass public received some weight, but the views of ordinary Republicans and Democrats received little or none.)

Analysis of state policy-making that allowed for reciprocal influence between the views of political elites and ordinary citizens within each state discovered that public opinion had rather little direct impact on state policy, but strongly influenced the ideologies of political elites, especially within each political

party.¹⁷ Since the ideologies of political elites in turn strongly shaped the ideological content of state policy, public opinion had an important indirect effect on policy. However, this representative relationship is complicated by the fact that public opinion was also strongly influenced *by* the ideologies of political elites, rather than being an essentially independent driving force in the political system.

The relative influence of the general public, business leaders, and policy experts on the opinions of government officials regarding various aspects of U.S. foreign policy has also been analyzed (Jacobs and Page 2004). Using data from a series of eight parallel surveys of citizens, elites, and government officials conducted for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations between 1974 and 2002, this research found that the views of policy experts and, especially, business leaders seemed to have a significant impact on the views of government officials, but that the views of ordinary citizens had very little discernible impact. (Modest positive effects of public opinion appeared on economic issues and those that were highly salient.) These results were interpreted as supporting neoliberal theories of international politics that stress the importance of organized interest groups—and especially business interests—rather than mass publics.

While systematic comparisons of the influence of elites and ordinary citizens are unhappily rare, there is even less work to survey on disparities in political influence *within* the mass public. One unpublished study relates the roll call votes cast by U.S. Senators in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the policy views of their constituents in much the same way as in Miller and Stokes's pioneering article, but allowing for the possibility of differential responsiveness to the views of rich and poor constituents (Bartels 2002b). This analysis suggests that income-weighted preferences were much more influential than simple averages of state opinion, especially for Republican senators. Constituents at the 75th percentile of the income distribution had almost three times as much influence as those at the 25th percentile on their senators' general voting patterns, and even more disproportional influence on specific salient roll call votes on the minimum wage, civil rights, government spending, and abortion. The preferences of constituents in the bottom fifth of the income distribution had little or no effect on their senators' votes. These discrepancies in influence were partly, but by no means entirely, attributable to

differences in political participation between the rich and the poor. The study concluded that “senators are vastly more responsive to the views of affluent constituents than to constituents of modest means.” “The mechanisms by which economic inequality gets reproduced in the realm of politics . . . cry out for more sustained attention from political scientists” (Bartels 2002b, 22, 24).

An even more recent (and very preliminary) unpublished analysis extends the analysis of changes in public opinion and changes in policy by investigating the possibility of unequal responsiveness to the policy preferences of rich and poor citizens (Gilens 2003a).¹⁸ This recent study used data from 755 survey questions from 1992 through 1999 in which national samples of the public were asked about proposed changes in U.S. national policy. In a two-step procedure, it estimated the (possibly non-linear) relationship between income and policy preferences for each of these 755 questions, then related the (imputed) preferences of survey respondents at various income levels separately to actual changes (if any) in corresponding public policy. Its findings suggest that a 10 percentage point increase in support for policy change among citizens at the 90th percentile of the income distribution was associated with a 4.8 percentage point increase in the likelihood of a corresponding policy change, whereas the same public demand for policy change among citizens at the 10th percentile of the income distribution produced only a 2 percentage point increase in the likelihood of a corresponding policy shift. For the 300 policy questions on which the imputed preferences of rich and poor citizens differed by 10 percentage points or more the disparities in apparent influence were even more stark, with a 10 percentage point shift in opinion among the rich associated with a 7.6 percentage point difference in the likelihood of policy change, but a 10 percentage point shift in opinion among the poor associated with only a 0.5 percentage point difference in the likelihood of policy change. This analysis of national opinion and policy (along with the analysis of legislative representation) suggest that the American political system is a great deal more responsive to the preferences of the rich than to the preferences of the poor.

Federalism Constrains Policy Responsiveness

The latitude enjoyed by states in the American system of federalism has been lauded for creating “laboratories of experimentation” and yet the diversity across the states also reinforces and perhaps expands political and economic inequality in two related ways: it accommodates the existing disparities in political voice and influence, and it fragments the authority and administrative capacity of government that could be used to offset political and economic inequalities by establishing uniform national standards.

The federal structure of the U.S. political system – its separation of powers among the three branches of government and between the national and state governments – was in large part intended to segment policy by dividing authority horizontally and vertically. By “reserving” many of the most important powers of government to state (and local) governments, the federal structure allows and ultimately all but guarantees there will be substantial *differences* in the governing structures and domestic policies across many of the subnational governments. The effect is to accept and accommodate economic and political inequalities within the separate states rather than challenge these disparities by establishing national uniform standards.

Race and gender relations are major exceptions to the pattern of deference to states. The Civil Rights movement led to the establishment and enforcement of national laws that forbid formal, de jure, racial and gender discrimination.

The national government continues, though, to defer, in important respects, to states on a range of policies that affect economic and social standing. The reform of welfare in 1996, for instance, expanded the discretion of states to make decisions about eligibility, work requirements, time limits and family caps. The effect of shifting responsibilities from the federal to state levels was to weaken the influence that poor people and their advocates had previously wielded at the national level under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (Winston 2002).

The kind national uniform standards that were established in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement have not been applied, for instance, on health care policy. Research shows that there are large differences in the nature, timing, and effectiveness of state regulation efforts. A comparative case study

of California and New York suggests that their distinctive political processes produced divergent approaches to controlling Medicaid costs and widening access to medical care for the poor: California officials extended the most generous Medicaid benefits of all 50 states, while New York's Medicaid program was twice the cost, dominated by interest groups, and offered less access (Sparer 1996).

The first process by which federalism reinforces political and economic inequality is by accepting rather than challenging the existing status quo within the states. The second process is that federalism dissipates and disperses the authority and administrative capacity of the national government, which could be used (as in the area of civil rights) for mitigating severe economic and political disparities.

Indeed, the watering down of the national government's authority and capacity was a deliberate strategy pursued by the framers of the U.S. Constitution. In particular, the Constitution's framers identified federalism as an institutional arrangement that would check the national government and "exten[d] the sphere" of political interactions to aid in controlling political factions and in undermining the formation of majoritarian movements that would use the national government as a cudgel against "minorities" – especially, the owners of land and wealth. E.E. Schattschneider (1960) worried that the framers' handiwork had, indeed, been quite effective in restraining the "scope of conflict" and tamping down the formation of a broad public movement that would use the national government to redistribute economic and political resources across the country.

The three decade-old effort to devolve responsibility on economic and social welfare policy from the national government to state governments has (with a few exceptions) not emphasized equality as a primary policy goal. The Johnson administration's "War on Poverty" engendered what was referred to as "creative federalism," with an emphasis on national government directives, in pursuing certain egalitarian goals. But the "New Federalism" of the Nixon administration and its later incarnations in the Reagan administration's policies and the "Welfare Reform" legislation of 1996 were part of a "devolution revolution" that delegated authority and control to the states, curtailing the national government's responsibilities and capacities. As the national government has pulled back, it is in less of a position to

set a national standard for the basic floor of economic well-being. Some fear that the new federalism invites states to “race to the bottom” for fear of becoming “welfare magnets” (Peterson 1981).

Although the general drift of intergovernmental relations is toward the states, there are notable cases of expanded national government responsibility. Fear of terrorism spawned legislation under presidents Clinton and Bush to expand the powers of national law enforcement officials at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Justice Department, and elsewhere. The “No Child Left behind Act” imposes extensive directives on state and local governments, though it has not been funded at the expected levels. Perhaps the most notable feature of these new initiatives is that they avoid the redistribution of economic resources.

Inequality and Popular Sovereignty

Political scientists have produced substantial evidence of meaningful connections between the policy preferences of the American public and the actions of their elected representatives. Those connections appear in cross-sectional analyses of individual legislators’ roll call votes, in cross-sectional analyses of state policy-making, in time-series analyses of government spending in (at least some) specific policy domains, and in broader historical analyses relating liberal or conservative shifts in government policy to shifts in the ideological mood of the public.

Despite the impressive quantity of these analyses and a fair degree of consistency in their results, they are limited in important ways. In most cases they provide no meaningful metric for comparing preferences and policies. The consequence is that they shed rather little light on complaints that the political system responds consistently but too weakly to shifts in public opinion due to institutional fragmentation and gridlock; they also shed virtually no light on claims of consistent ideological biases in policy-making. This omission is particularly troubling given the broader tendency in American politics toward deadlock -- the Madisonian system of governance offers numerous veto points to obstruct comprehensive egalitarian policy that would address rising economic inequality.

In addition, the research on public opinion and policy has seldom paid serious attention to the possibility of reciprocal influences of policy on opinion, or more generally to the possibility that public opinion is systematically misinformed or manipulated by political elites (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

Moreover, government responsiveness to public opinion is unlikely to be fixed over time but rather to vary in reactions to the dynamics of changing political coalitions, election results, and institutional conditions.¹⁹ The findings of a small but growing number of recent studies of a decline in government responsiveness since the 1970s coincides with important political developments, which were examined above and in the separate research review on Political Voice. The growing importance of campaign contributions and polarization of the political parties during this period help to explain a significant change in the incentives of national politicians toward tailoring policy to reflect the policy goals of their intense supporters even if it means compromising the views of the more diffuse general public.

Perhaps most importantly for our purposes here, studies relating public opinion and public policy have seldom dug below the level of aggregate opinion in a congressional district, a state, or the nation as a whole to examine *whose* preferences impact the course of public policy and *how much* influence they exert. The research that has been conducted has found substantial disparities in apparent influence between political activists and ordinary people, between business leaders and the public, and between well-off citizens and their less-well-off counterparts. These disparities go to the heart of any assessment of inequality and American democracy, and they raise fundamental problems for a political system grounded on the normative ideal of political equality.

Evidence that government officials are less responsive to public opinion than commonly assumed or only selectively responsive to the affluent raises a practical puzzle: how could politicians regularly win reelection if they were defying voters? The answer is that the policy decisions of government officials are (often by design) difficult for voters to monitor (Arnold 1990) and, as we suggested earlier, contributors and party activists have intense preferences that they vigorously press on government officials. In addition, voters often cast their vote based on a personal bond, creating strong incentives for officeholders

and candidates to rest their appeal to voters on non-policy considerations such as personal attributes and image.²⁰

The Continuing Struggle for Racial Equality

One of the great stories of the past century in the United States has been the reduction of overt discrimination that once excluded millions of Americans from the core of political, economic, and social life. Women gained the right to vote and the right to run for office alongside men. Popular struggles by ordinary African Americans culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations, prohibited federal funding of educational institutions if they discriminated, and forbade racial and gender discrimination by employers and unions. Another landmark was the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which cleared the way for all African Americans to vote.

Despite landmark legislation and major Supreme Court decisions in dismantling overt discrimination and expanding rights to equal treatment and fair process, the United States still has substantial de facto political inequality along racial lines. The ongoing debates on achieving racial equality in American politics and public life have interacted with rising economic inequality in ways that have intensified the existing biases in American government toward deadlock on egalitarian issues and accommodation of the organized and vocal. Rising economic inequality undermines the substantive conditions for racial minorities to capitalize on newly won procedural rights; conversely, the debate on race distracts policy efforts and public discussion from comprehensive policies to redistribute resources that would help establish the substantive conditions for the equal exercise of formal rights. The result is that inequality is often discussed in racial and often procedural terms, rather than substantive and economic terms even as racial differences in the political process and in policy outcomes remain.

The latest chapters in America's long struggle for racial equality in democratic life has been characterized by two somewhat conflicting developments. First, there has been some progress in reducing long-entrenched political inequality and increasing (in some cases) the election of racial, ethnic, or gender groups. Second, political equality has not been achieved in terms of either descriptive

representation (i.e. the racial, ethnic, and/or gender characteristics of the individuals elected to government institutions) or substantive representation (i.e. the outcomes produced by government bodies). Indeed, the sometimes separate agendas to achieve descriptive and substantive representation may work at cross purposes or, at times, collide. It is clear that race continues to be a significant factor in American politics, accentuated at times by growing economic inequality: widening economic disparities undercut, in certain respects, the procedural victories of minorities.

Much of the research in American politics and therefore our discussion focus on legislatures and, specifically, on how and whether minority interests are represented in legislatures.²¹ (Although our discussion concentrates on race, there has been some research on the representation of women in U.S. legislatures in terms of both the substantive issues that are voted upon and the structure and procedures of debate and deliberation (Kathlene 1994 and 1995; Burrell 1995; Swers 1998; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995).)

The Tension Between Descriptive and Substantive Representation

Efforts to expand the number of racial and ethnic minorities in national and state legislative bodies (that is, “descriptive representation”) may be antagonistic to the struggle for substantive representation to enact policies that would reduce economic inequality and by extension lift the economic and living conditions of the minority community (Wilson 1987). The promoters of racial redistricting expected it to protect minorities from the tyranny of the majority and to ensure that minorities had a voice in determining the policies that affect them.

A critical tool for expanding the representation of minorities in legislatures was to redraw districts to make blacks and ethnic minorities a majority of the electorate (what is known as “majority-minority districts”). “Descriptive representation” and redistricting to elect more minorities *to office* may, however, undercut “substantive representation” in two ways. First, racial redistricting may “dilute” the presence of minority voters in surrounding districts and produce a net drop in legislators who would join coalitions to

enact policies that advanced the interests of minorities. There may be more people of color in legislatures and less overall political support for legislation that advances the interests of the minority community.²²

Second, racial redistricting may prime race as the principal political identity and spark political conflict that deflects attention from economic and material interests. Research shows that African Americans more strongly favor the goal of increasing minority representation than the principle of color blindness in Congressional redistricting (Tate 2003). On the other hand, efforts to restrict and mobilize African Americans run the risk of provoking a political backlash from whites. Focusing on racialized policies ignites racial reactions including prejudice among whites (Kinder and Mendelberg 1995). One study demonstrated, for instance, that as the size of the black population increased in Louisiana parishes ("counties"), whites were more likely to join the Republican Party (Giles and Hertz 1994; Glaser 1994). In states where black voter turnout has been relatively higher, there has been *less* spending on social policies, implying a "backlash" effect.²³ Moreover, increases in the proportion of racial and ethnic minority officeholders appear to produce more powerful interest groups to counter elected officials (without a commensurate rise in interest groups that directly represented minority interests) (Hero 1998; Thomas and Hrebennar 1999).

Although racial redistricting has been controversial and may have complicated efforts to enact substantive policy to help minorities, it is important not to lose sight of the larger context of race relations in America that helps explain both the origins of efforts to promote descriptive representation and that obstruct descriptive and substantive representation. "Majority-minority" districts were not created in a vacuum; they are the historic product of persistent opposition to political equality. After the passage of the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965, southern states (especially Mississippi) implemented new electoral strategies to minimize Black electoral success during the 1960s and 1970s (Parker 1991). The concept of majority-minority districts was developed as a concrete strategy of legal defense organizations and civil rights attorneys to counter this ongoing opposition to implementing the Voting Rights Act. The tension, then, between descriptive and substantive representation that we live with today is an institutional

legacy of the enduring opposition and ambivalence to creating political equality on racial and ethnic grounds.

Moreover, the controversy over descriptive representation results from the demands and concerns of White Americans as much as Black Americans. Research shows that white constituents place more importance than black constituents on descriptive representation and are more likely to contact congressional representative who share their racial identity (Gay 2002). In addition, the battle over majority-minority districts is only one of several fronts on which race and elections are being contested (Schmidt 1989). Indeed, the tools of direct democracy -- namely, the initiative, referendum and recall -- have been wielded to strike down civil rights.²⁴

It seems particularly telling that after all the attention given to race and representation and to challenging to overt racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination, minorities continue to be underrepresented. The presence of racial and ethnic minorities in governing institutions has increased but remains below their percentages in the general population. Women also remain under-represented in Congress despite improvements – they constitute 14 percent of the House, 13 percent of the Senate, and 22 percent of state legislatures (though this varies considerably from state to state).²⁵ A series of interlocking factors converge to restrict the extent and impact of representation of minority groups:

- The institutional rules of elections and governing bodies depress advances for minority groups. The election of minorities is discouraged by their residential segregation and the residential dispersion of whites (who rarely vote for minority candidates) in at large elections. In addition, the huge majorities of white legislators make it improbable for modest increases in the number of minority officeholders alone to move the position of the median legislator toward greater responsiveness to the concerns of minorities. What minimal growth in minority representation that does occur is checked by the separation of powers and the bifurcation of legislative chambers in Congress and in most states.

- Rather than facilitating the political participation of all diffuse and disadvantaged groups (Schattschneider 1960), political parties tend to “capture” blacks and other minority groups and provide little in return in their rush to appeal to the median voter (Frymer 1999).
- Racial divisions may be so entrenched that they determine party cleavage and are resistant to revision. In particular, the racial composition of states generates three enduring types of party cleavages: racially-defined southern party divisions, the “New Deal” cleavages in which race was submerged by economic conflicts, and the “Post New Deal” divisions characterized by conflict over both race and class (Brown 1995).
- The mass media reinforce negative stereotypes by associating the poor with blacks more than is justified by actual demographic data (Gilens 2003b).
- The large upsurge in immigration in the 1990s has fuelled concerns about national sovereignty and cultural and economic nationalism. It has fanned underlying fears and perceptions of threat toward racial and ethnic groups and may have complicated efforts to build broad political coalitions.

In short, descriptive representation has expanded the presence of minorities in government institutions but the improvement and impact has been limited and may have deterred egalitarian policies that would help minorities. At best, minority legislators have reached a position to block or modify policies they find objectionable, a notable accomplishment though somewhat short of more lofty expectations.

The Synergy of Descriptive and Substantive Representation

Despite the constraints on what has been achieved through expanded representation of minorities in government institutions, descriptive representation and substantive representation are not mutually exclusive but may reinforce each other. Greater descriptive representation does influence policy substance in significant ways.

The mobilization and empowerment of the southern black electorate has prompted long-serving white southern Democratic member of the U.S. House to change their roll call voting and become more liberal (Whitby and Gilliam 1991; Whitby 1985). Moreover, the race and gender of state legislators influence their conduct and the issues they put on the agenda and promote (Bratton and Haynie 1999). Constituency service was taken more seriously by female and black city council members than their male and white counterparts (Thomas 1990). Analysis of state senate roll call voting in Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama in 1979-81 found that white senators are not as responsive to black constituents as are black senators (Herring 1990). (There are, however, proportionately fewer black legislators.)

Latino members of the U.S. House had distinct, more “liberal,” patterns on a set of roll-call votes that were most relevant to Latino concerns (Hero and Tolbert 1995). These votes resulted more from their constituency’s socioeconomic profile (i.e. levels of poverty and urbanization) than the ethnic traits of the constituents or ethnic background of the representatives themselves.

Similarly, electing (or appointing) representatives from historically excluded groups to city government has been found to expand substantive representation. Studies of minority political incorporation in ten San Francisco Bay Area cities and the Bradley regime in Los Angeles show that expanded political representation of African Americans and Latinos produced broad coalitions with white liberal allies that expanded the delivery of services and goods to minorities (Browning, Marshall and Tabb 1984; Sonenshein 1993).

The Civil Rights movement and passage of the Voting Rights Act produced some landmark programs that improved the living conditions of Americans who are minorities as well as those who are not. Changes in health policy illustrate how the expanded political representation of minorities influenced substantive representation. The prohibition against racial discrimination in the Voting Rights Act (especially Title VI) precipitated a transformation in medical treatment when Medicare and Medicaid were implemented following their passage in the 1965. One history of this period reported: “More than a thousand acute-care hospitals, ignoring the trepidation of board members, physicians, and patients, within a few months broke down the wall that had racially divided their staffs and patients since their founding

in order to become Medicare providers on July 1, 1966” (Smith 1999, 200-201, 316-317). The impressive result was that black and white use of physicians and hospital use converged. Although racial inequities in health policy remain, expanded political equality led to a remarkably quick change in health policy and medical practice.

Conclusion

The framers of the U.S. Constitution feared that majorities of the landless would use their equal rights as citizens to exercise government power for the purpose of redistributing economic resources. Their strategy to disrupt and discourage majoritarian movements was, in part, to disperse government power to ensure that it was not wielded by one individual or government body and to instill personal motives for the temporary occupants of government positions to check the broad and comprehensive exercise of power. The result is a political process that has operated, as designed, to deter and hinder the concerted exercise of power to pursue “big ideas” that would reshuffle social, economic, and political relations. A side result is that the dispersal of authority opened up multiple points of access into government bodies (Bentley 1908). The actual practice of political participation and American governance has both fulfilled the aspirations of America’s institution builders to obstruct the active exercise of government authority for redistributive purposes and introduced unintended dynamics – namely, the exploitation of porous and decentralized institutions by the organized and vocal.

The American constitutional system has helped to create one of the most enduring puzzles of representative government: the embrace of equality (fervently, at times) and yet a seeming complacency in accepting wide inequalities in economic and political resources. In the realm of public life, political rights are guaranteed to all citizens but political participation continues to be stratified. All adult citizens enjoy equal rights to vote, join organizations, lobby lawmakers and pursue other avenues for expressing their interests and concerns but the actual exercise of these rights is skewed toward those with higher levels of income, education, and other critical social and economic attributes.

The tendency of Americans to embrace equality of opportunity while tolerating inequality in outcomes, as de Tocqueville famously observed in the early 19th century, certainly helps to explain the puzzle of equality in principle and inequality in practice. The process of American governance has also contributed to sustaining this odd dualism by institutionalizing inclusion rather than exclusion and the dispersal rather than concentration of government authority. The American process of governance has ample points of access; it is the organized and vocal that rush through the avenues of access in order to promote policies that deliver targeted benefits and to block comprehensive policies that redistribute resources and power at their expense. Indeed, these peculiar features of the American political process account for why it does not readily avail itself to deductive analysis that reasons backwards from inequalities in influence and outcomes to identify the broad and consistent deployment of government authority that produced it. The doors to the halls of government are open but its Byzantine highways and byways amplify and reinforce the unequal voice of citizens – both the silences and the loud and consistent chorus of the few.

Economic inequality and its sharp increase over the past three decades has not remade or transformed American institutions as much as it has reinforced already existing tendencies. The dispersal of government authority and multiple points of access facilitate the continued institutional patterns of deadlocking egalitarian policies and producing selective benefits for the organized and vocal. The longstanding bias toward inert government institutions on redistributive issues and selective action on particularistic benefits stand out because the living conditions of Americans changed, not because of a makeover of government institutions. Campaign contributions is one of the few areas where the growing concentration of income and wealth appears to have expanded political inequality – increasing the advantage of the affluent to use their check books to express their views, to narrow the pool of viable candidates for elected office, and to win access to government officials.

The continuing tension of American governance is that political rights are guaranteed to all citizens and stand as a living testament to democratic equality, even as those rights are exercised disproportionately by the most advantaged to obstruct and discourage government responsiveness to

majoritarian concerns. As the next report shows, the consequences of government policies both perpetuate existing inequalities and give birth to new ones.

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Endnotes

¹ In political science, the classic case is Dahl's (1961) effort to reconstruct the exercise of power over policy decisions in New Haven. The critical reaction to this work includes McCoy and Playford (1967), Bachrach and Baratz (1962), and Gaventa (1980).

² For examples, see Davidson (1988) and Beam, Conlan, and Wrightson (1990).

³ The classic analyses include Wilson (1885), McConnell (1966), Lowi (1969), and Skowronek (1982).

⁴ Some of the factors that may have contributed to Keys' abandonment of the "have not" hypothesis may include the evolution of southern state politics in unexpected ways and the expansion of Key's own scholarly focus to one-party systems in non-southern states (Key 1956; Mayhew 1988).

⁵ See Besley and Case (2003) for a comprehensive review of these and other relevant studies.

⁶ The macroeconomic outcomes were identified by Hibbs (1987).

⁷ The prediction of convergence is most closely associated with Downs (1957).

⁸ The political consequences of unequal political participation have been dismissed on the grounds that the preferences of voters and non-voters are similar (Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Recent research has challenged this view on two grounds. First, it neglects the strategic reactions of political elites (Martin 2002). Second, it falsely assumes that survey instruments provide a neutral mechanism for providing comparable evidence regarding the policy preferences of voters and nonvoters. It turns out that current opinion survey instruments do not provide an accurate measure of the policy preferences of non-voters (Berinsky, 2002). A similar critique is offered in the separate research review on Political Voice.

⁹ A classic account is Dahl (1961).

¹⁰ See also Mann (2001, 2003) for a brief history of political science work on the cost of elections.

¹¹ Contributors may not see as mutually exclusive the strategies of influencing election outcome (Type 1 in Wright's [1985] terms) and influencing elected officials (Type II). An organized interest or political action committee (PAC) may choose to pursue one strategy rather than the other or may pursue both. There is some evidence that the choice of strategy is influenced by the goals and organizational structure of the interest group (Wright 1985).

¹² Extensive debate was sparked by Gary Jacobson's (1980) finding of a negative relationship between incumbent spending and votes and his explanation that office holders increase their campaign spending only when running against well-funded, high-quality challengers (also cf. Krasno, Green, and Cowden 1994). A number of methodological critiques have been made focusing on measuring candidate expenditures on direct communications with voters rather than total expenditures (Ansolabehere and Gerber 1994; also cf. Goldenberg and Traugott 1984) and on the difficulty of separating out the simultaneous effects of reactive spending decisions of incumbents, the propensity of quality challengers to run against weaker candidates, the ability of high quality challengers to raise money, and other factors (Green and Krasno 1988, 1990; Goidel and Gross 1994; Thomas 1989; Kenny and McBurnett 1994; Gerber 1998; also see Bartels 1991b, and Jacobson 1990). Research on state-level legislative elections suggests a complex range of influences on campaign spending and the votes it is associated with including the media market and the cost of media buys, the strength of party organization, the length of the campaign, though it also emphasizes incumbency as critical (Gierzynski and Breaux, 1996).

¹³ Candidate expenditures are associated with increased vote share in elections for congress (Jacobson 1978, 1980; Green and Krasno 1988; Abramowitz 1988, 1989; Squire 1989; Thomas 1989), state legislatures (Breaux and Gierzynski 1991; Abramowitz 1991; Caldeira and Patterson 1982; Gierzynski and Breaux 1991, 1993; Giles and Pritchard 1985; Glantz, Abramowitz, and Burkart 1976), and governorships (Jewell 1984; Morehouse 1990).

¹⁴ Other comparative state research has examined the relationship between political participation and government policy making (Hill and Leighley, 1992, 1994, and 1996).

¹⁵ For example, compare Erikson and Wright (1989) and (1997)

¹⁶ Research by Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001), Monroe (1998), and Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) use different methodologies but appear to be identifying a common underlying tendency toward declining government responsiveness over time.

¹⁷ Specifically, Hill and Hinton-Andersson (1995) extended Erikson, Wright, and McIver's (1993) state-level analysis.

¹⁸ Gilens (2003) builds on Page and Shapiro's (1983) study of policy responsiveness in much the same way that Bartels's paper extends Miller and Stokes's study of congressional representation

¹⁹ See Jacobs (1993, Conclusion) for a discussion of the "conditional relevance" of public opinion and the political and institutional barriers that prevent government policy from being an "epiphenomenon" of public opinion.

²⁰ Fenno (1978) provides a classic analysis of the non-policy appeals that members of Congress make to their constituents. Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier (2004) demonstrate "image responsiveness" – the responsiveness of President Nixon to private White House polling regarding his personality traits.

²¹ We do not discuss two additional questions. The first is the normative question, "how *should* representation be provided within a majority rule system?" The second is the legal question, "how *can* representation be provided" (Canon 2002).

²² For example, Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran (1996), but cf. Lublin (1997).

²³ Radcliff and Saiz (1995); but cf. Radcliff and Saiz (1998).

²⁴ There is a debate over whether civil rights are being challenged using the tools of direct democracy frequently (Gamble 1997) or infrequently (Hajnal, Gerber and Louch, 2002; but cf. Bowler, Donovan and Tolbert 1998).

²⁵ See Swers (1998) for a review. See also Squire (1992, 72).