Article

From Preference to Policy: Wealth, Institutions of Government, and the Search for Democracy

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Abstract

What is the nature of substantive representation within American institutions of government, and to what extent do constituents' preferences turn into adopted policy? To answer these questions, I analyze data on federal policies proposed between 1964 and 2006 and constituents' support for them by running a series of linear probability models to estimate the chance of policy adoption as a function of constituent support. I find the president is more responsive to constituents than Congress, and high-income constituents' preferences – but not those of median- and low-income constituents – are significantly correlated with policies adopted by both Congress and the president.

Keywords: Democracy, Representation, Income Inequality, Linear Probability Models, USA

"I assume that a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals."
–Robert Dahl, 1971 (p. 1)

1. Introduction

What is the nature of substantive representation in the American government? The U.S. democracy seems quite simple: citizens form policy preferences and elect representatives to turn our preferences into policy, but it sometimes feels like that preference-to-policy pipeline goes unfulfilled (e.g., Carnes, 2013; Tavernise, 2016).

The question of who is represented in the U.S.' representative democracy is highly debated, with some purporting or implying that all who vote or participate politically are represented and others claiming only certain groups of the American public are represented. These contrasting ideas leave us with questions about representatives' responsiveness to their constituents: to what extent do our preferences become policy? Are the institutions of government responsible for adopting policies differentially responsive to constituents' preferences? Has this preference-policy relation changed in the context of elections or polarization-caused challenges to governing?

The standard account provides one model of the policymaking process: constituents elect legislators who turn our preferences into policy. In this thesis, I test implications from the standard account across institutions of government; I estimate policy adoption as functions of constituent support for proposed policies. My data contain information about policies proposed between 1964 and 2006, their support from constituents, the institutions responsible for enacting them, and whether the policies were adopted within two years of being proposed.

My results show the president is more responsive to constituents' policy preferences than Congress. Furthermore, my findings align with the existing literature about the American government's differential responsiveness to constituents: like other scholars, I find higher-income constituents are most likely to have their preferences significantly correlate with adopted policy while median- and lower-income constituents are rarely likely to have their preferences significantly correlate with policy. When analyzing election years, I show the presidency remains more responsive than Congress and find there remains differential responsiveness on the basis of constituent income. These results are robust to a variety of different specifications.

Overall, my results contribute uniquely to the literature about the American government by analyzing and comparing policy responsiveness for our different institutions. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: section two summarizes the existing literature surrounding the nature of democracy, focusing on the standard account model of political representation. Sections three through five outline my hypotheses then the data and empirical strategies I'll use to test them. Sections six and seven report my results and their potential confounders. Section eight concludes my research and pivots toward larger questions of American democracy. The appendix checks the robustness of my findings.

2. The Standard Account of Political Representation

Gilens & Page (2014) identify four "theoretical traditions in the study of American politics": Majoritarian Electoral Democracy, Economic-Elite Domination, Majoritarian Pluralism, and Biased Pluralism. In Majoritarian Electoral Democracies, "the collective will of average citizens, seen as empowered by democratic elections," drives policy. Thus, under this theory, the median voter has the most political power (see Downs, 1957); (s)he has "the capacity … to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (Wrong, 1995, p. 2) and meets Domhoff's "four power indicators" (2005):

> (1) *who benefits* in terms of having the things that are valued in the society? (2) *who governs* (i.e., sits in the seats that are considered to be powerful)? (3) *who wins* when there are arguments over issues? and (4) who has a *reputation for power* (i.e., who stands out in the eyes of their peers)?

In comparison, the Economic-Elite Domination Theory places policymaking power in the hands of the wealthy, potentially as a result of their ability to "finance election campaigns, bribe supporters and opponents, and purchase other political advantages such as a good education" (Ball & Peters, 2005, pp. 37–38); the theory includes "a class that rules and a class that is ruled" (Mosca, 1939, p. 50). Gilens & Page's remaining two theories of democracy are forms of interest group pluralism, giving political power to interest groups rather than constituents: Majoritarian Pluralism purports interest groups representing all citizens compete to make policy, and Biased Pluralism restricts Majoritarian Pluralism to corporate, business, and professional interest groups. Notably, none of these four theories give low-income constituents any political power, and by focusing on interest groups, the latter two diminish all constituents' power.

According to Urbinati & Warren (2008), Majoritarian Electoral Democracies – the traditional view of American democracy – see citizens form preferences and then elect representatives to turn those preferences into policy. The standard account has four central features: (1) there is a principal-agent relationship between constituents and representatives, (2) representation is determined by geography, (3) representatives are responsive to their constituents, and (4) representation is politically equal. Central to the idea of the standard account is the belief citizens can voice policy preferences, aligning with Gilens & Page (2014) claiming democratic proceedings empower citizens to voice their desires. Existing literature shows our democracy meets this condition: constituents can express preferences by voting (Franko, 2013), staging riots or protests (Enos et al., 2019; Gillion, 2013), and lobbying (Kollman, 1998). Therefore, because citizens can express our preferences to policymakers, the foundation of the standard account holds true.

Just because we can express our preferences, however, does not mean they necessarily will become policy. Starting with the account's first tenet, if representatives do not follow the wishes of their constituents, they violate the model. Notably, the trustee model of representation – where representatives are elected and trusted to enact the policies they deem best, regardless of their constituents' beliefs (Burke, 1774) – allows for such violations. Next, the nationalization of American politics (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Caughey et al., 2018; Morgenstern et al., 2009; Sievert & McKee, 2018) may violate the account's second tenet by leading legislators to widen their foci to constituents outside their districts or states, as compared to keeping legislators closest to the constituents with whom they connect geographically. Additionally, the electoral college (Edwards, 2011) and the equal – not equitable – representation of states in the Senate (Lee & Oppenheimer, 1999) violate the account's third tenet by virtue of taking away aspects of citizens' abilities to hold our representatives accountable. Finally, governmental descriptive representation – when "a representative body is distinguished by an accurate correspondence or resemblance to what it represents, by reflecting without distortion" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 60) – does not always match the breakdown of America itself: representatives are not always similar to their constituents on the bases of race (Crenshaw, 1989; Grofman et al., 1992; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2008; Hawkesworth, 2003; Lee & Oppenheimer, 1999; Lublin, 2021), gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2008; Hawkesworth, 2003; Rosenthal, 2002; Tate, 2004), religion (Sandstrom, 2019; Stone, 2010), income or class (Carnes, 2013, 2018), ethnicity (Grofman et al., 1992; Lublin, 2021; Welch & Hibbing, 1984), or sexuality (Reynolds, 2013). Furthermore, disenfranchisement (such as felony disenfranchisement (Clegg, 2001)) and other barriers to political participation (such as voter ID laws (Alvarez et al., 2008; Barreto et al., 2009; Hajnal et al., 2017; Vercellotti & Anderson, 2006)) diminish the participation and representation of minority, low-income, less-educated, older, and immigrant constituents; these things violate the account's fourth tenet. In summary, the standard account's philosophical underpinning does not hold up as well as we'd like – American democracy appears to be not so responsive to average constituents after all.

The empirical literature has proposed several tests of the standard account. My analysis draws from Bartels (2008, 2016), Gilens (2012), and Gilens & Page (2014), who also studied the relationship between constituents' preferences and adopted policies and further showed violations of the account. Bartels (2008, 2016) analyzes Senators' policy responsiveness during the late 1980s and the 1990s, finding American democracy does not treat all citizens' preferences equally. Specifically, Bartels (2008) finds Senators weighed the views of those in the upper third of the income distribution 50% more than the views of those in the middle third, with that trend of decreasing wealth correlating with decreasing policy influence continuing to the extent that constituents in the bottom third of the income distribution were "entirely *un*considered in the policymaking process" (254). These findings violate the standard account's fourth tenet.

Gilens (2012) shows even when 100% of Americans support a proposed policy, there is only approximately a 65% chance of it being adopted within four years, and high-income constituents' preferences are more strongly correlated with adopted policy than those of median- and low-income constituents. This overall policy unresponsiveness violates the third tenet of the standard account, and this differential responsiveness on the basis of income violates the fourth.

Gilens (2012) also shows citizens' preferences are more likely to become policy during presidential election years, though there remain "differential impacts on responsiveness to more- and less-well-off Americans" (170). This suggests elections' high salience increases representatives' responsiveness to their constituents' preferences. Ultimately, though, he concludes that "under most circumstances, the preferences of the vast majority of Americans appear to have essentially no impact on which policies the government does or doesn't adopt" (Gilens, 2012, p. 1); despite the relative increase in responsiveness due to elections, absolute responsiveness remains low.

Gilens & Page (2014) share the results of a similar study regarding citizens' preferences and policy adoption, though this time also accounting for interest groups' preferences. Accounting for interest groups' preferences reveals that "[e]mpirical support for Majoritarian Pluralism looks very shaky, indeed. We also know that the composition of the U.S. interest-group universe is heavily tilted toward corporations and business and professional associations." Ultimately, their analysis provides evidence for the theory of Biased Pluralism, and when focusing more on constituents' preferences, they also find evidence for the Economic-Elite Domination theory.

In sum, Bartels, Gilens, and Page provide further evidence showing that American governance follows the Economic-Elite Domination theory of democracy. Whether from wealth (in the case of economic elites) or lobbying (in the case of interest groups), power may be a necessary condition to relate one's preferences to policy. However, both these scholars and other researchers leave open questions about how policy responsiveness varies across governmental institutions; by conducting such an analysis, my research fills a gap in the literature.

3. Hypotheses

Mayhew (1974) advances a view of representatives as single-minded seekers of re-election – i.e., individuals who maximize utility by doing whatever will maximize their vote shares in future elections – and scholars like Fenno (1978), Murray (2010), and Weingast (1997) offer similar understandings of legislators. I apply this view to the president as well, facilitating a comparison of his responsiveness to that of Congress; this view follows a line of reasoning pioneered in political economy by Buchanan and Tullock (1962) and sometimes referred to as the "Virginia School" (Amadae, 2003; Levy & Peart, 2018, 2020; Mitchell, 1988). Because re-election incentives lead to responsiveness according to Mayhew, I predict responsiveness will decrease alongside election frequency; as Congresspeople are up for re-election every 2.75 years (averaged across both houses), the president is up for re-election every 4 years, and Supreme Court (SCOTUS) justices are never up for re-election (by virtue of being appointed for life), I make the following hypothesis:

> *H1.* **Congress is more responsive than the president.**

Note that I account for existing research about SCOTUS while formulating my hypotheses, but because my dataset does not include enough observations about policies routed to the Court for adoption, my hypotheses and empirical analyses themselves do not ultimately analyze SCOTUS.

In line with Bartels (2008, 2016), Gilens (2012), and Gilens & Page (2014), however, I predict Congress and the president will have differential responsiveness on the basis of constituents' incomes, with both Congresspeople and the president preferring to maximize responsiveness to those most able to contribute to their re-election efforts: economic elites. As compared to members of those two institutions, SCOTUS justices are appointed for life and therefore never need to seek re-election, protecting the Court from Mayhew's re-election-motivated incentive. Existing research offers conflicting accounts of how SCOTUS makes its decisions, however, with some claiming the Court is responsive to outside – e.g., citizen – influences (Ball & Peters, 2005; Bentley, 1949; Flemming & Wood, 1997; Gillion, 2013; Link, 1995; Mishler & Sheehan, 1993, 1996) and others claiming it is isolated from such pressures (Hagle & Spaeth, 1993; Segal & Spaeth, 1993, 2002). My second hypothesis thus is as follows:

> **H2.** **Within Congress and the presidency, there will be differential responsiveness to constituents' preferences: the two institutions will be most responsive to the preferences of economic elites, moderately responsive to median-income constituents, and least responsive to low-income constituents. For the aforementioned reasons, I predict the ordinal rankings of responsiveness by institution will be the same as for H1.**

Testing this hypothesis will allow me to examine the first two theories of democracy with finer resolution; rather than focusing on American government at large, I will be able to determine whether our institutions follow the theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy or Economic-Elite Domination.

Furthermore, the presence of an impending election can lead legislators to enact policies they would not otherwise enact (Arnold, 1990; Fenno, 1978), temporarily increasing responsiveness (Gilens, 2012). This makes sense in the context of the retrospective voting model (Bartels, 2016; Cheibub & Przeworski, 1999; Fiorina, 1978, 1981; Fisher & Hobolt, 2010; Healy & Malhotra, 2013; Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984; Kramer, 1971; Plescia & Kritzinger, 2017): constituents decide whether to re-elect legislators based on their prior policy positions, so these prior positions are of increased saliences during election years. In fact, due to it being easier to recall more-recent policy positions, legislators' election-year positions can serve as heuristics for their earlier performances (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), further increasing the salience of positions leading up to elections. My third hypothesis thus is as follows:

> **H3.** **Cardinal measures of Congressional (resp. presidential) responsiveness will increase during Congressional (presidential) election years, with Congress being most responsive and the president being moderately responsive (similar to the ordinal rankings of responsiveness from H1).**

In the context of existing literature showing differential responsiveness on the basis of constituent income, I predict each institution will retain its ordinal ranking of responsiveness across levels of income, leading my fourth hypothesis to be similar to my second hypothesis:

> **H4.** **Though measures of responsiveness during election years will be cardinally larger than measures during non-election years, within Congress and the presidency, there still will be differential responsiveness to constituents' preferences.**

Testing these hypotheses will let me test the theories of democracy within an institution-specific context.

4. Data

To test these hypotheses, I analyze the microdata Gilens (2012) obtained from several nationally representative public opinion surveys and by tracking federally-adopted policies. The dataset's unit of analysis is one proposed policy, with the policies' topics including economic policy, social welfare policy, moral or religious policy, foreign policy, and gun control policy. My data's survey questions range from whether we should allow motorized vehicles in federal wilderness areas to how we could reform the U.S. healthcare system; each question asks for a dichotomous pro or con response, focused on a specific policy, related to federal policy decisions, and used categorical rather than conditional phrasing. For each proposal, the data contains information about support from all constituents, support from constituents of specific income percentiles, when the policy was proposed, whether the policy was adopted within two years of being proposed, and which institution of government could enact it (e.g., Congress alone, the president alone, a combination of Congress and the president). The data comes from a combination of the iPOLL database maintained by the University of Connecticut's Roper Center, the Public Opinion Poll Question database maintained by the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute, other pollsters as described in Gilens (2012), and Gilens and his team directly. Overall, the dataset contains 2,355 policies proposed between 1964 and 2006, though some years in that window do not have any observations due to Gilens' data collection methods. For more information, see Gilens (2012) and Gilens & Page (2014).

Figure 1 illustrates the percent of proposed policy changes by year, with color indicating whether the policy was adopted, opaqueness indicating the timeline of adoption, and each bar's height representing the percent of all

policies which were proposed during that year (e.g., 5.4% of all policies I analyze were proposed in 2006, the last year included in my dataset).
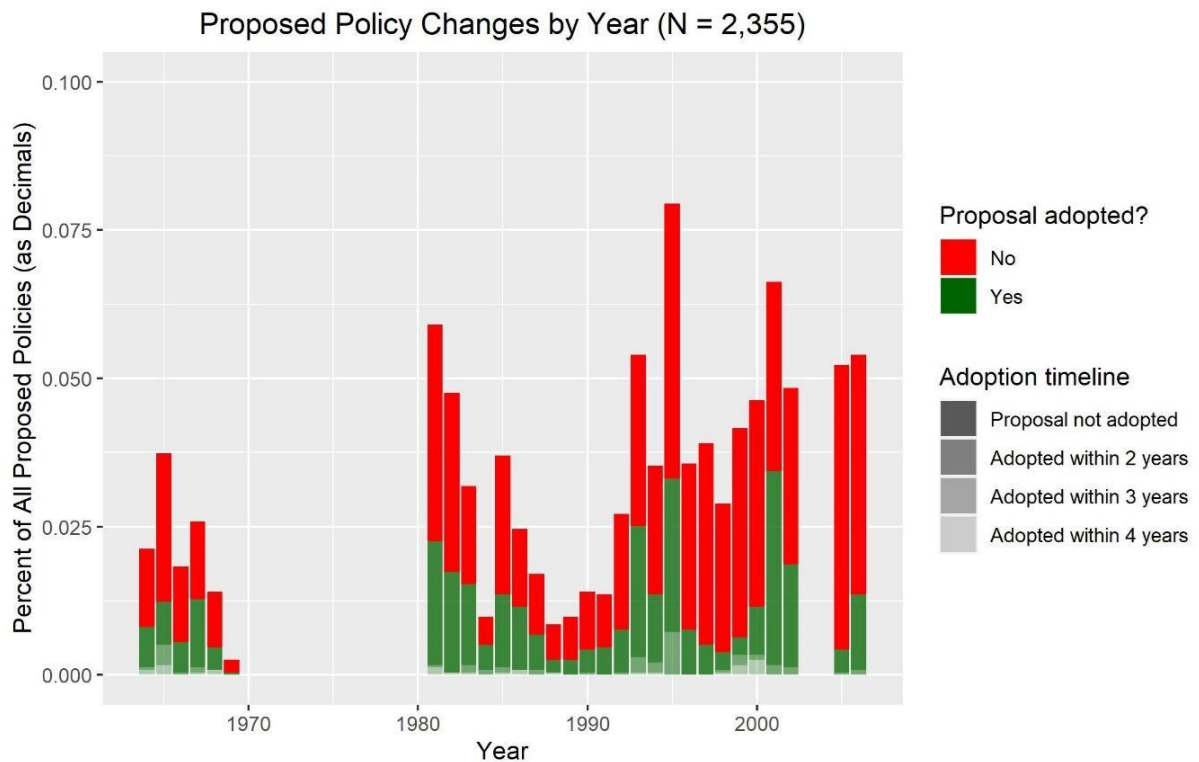

Figure 1

Most adopted policies were adopted within two years, and there appears to be an increasing trend over time for the number of policies proposed in a given year.

The following table illustrates the number of proposed policies by the institution of government able to enact them and what percent of these proposals were adopted:

Institution	Proposal count	Share of proposals	Adoption rate
Congress	1932	0.82	0.307
President	427	0.181	0.522
SCOTUS	10	0.004	0.5
Total	2369	–	–

Table 1

In my analysis, I classify proposed policies as routed through institutions of government – i.e., up for adoption by those institutions of government – by whether that institution needed to play a role in enacting it. For example, a policy routed through Congress could be enacted by Congress alone or a combination of Congress and the president. Because I classify policies this way, I double-count those which can be adopted by either Congress or the president, leading the row of totals to be larger than they would be without any double-counting. As a result, because they exceed 100%, I removed the two totals reported in percentages ("Share of proposals" and "Adoption rate").

The following table summarizes the key variables for my analysis:

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.
Adoption indicator	2355	0.335	0.472
Percent of constituent support: all	2349	0.546	0.206
Percent of constituent support: 10th income percentile	2349	0.539	0.209
Percent of constituent support: 50th income percentile	2349	0.548	0.214

Percent of constituent support: 90th income percentile	2349	0.550	0.207
Percent not knowing their preferences	1259	0.072	0.066

Table 2: Summary Statistics

NOTE: 'Adoption indicator' equaling 1 signifies the proposed policy was adopted. The four 'Percent of constituents supporting' variables are the percent support proposed policies received from that group of constituents (by income percentile). 'Percent not knowing their preferences' is the percent of respondents who said they didn't know what their preferences were for that specific policy.

In the appendix, I interpret the "Percent not knowing their preferences" variable – *DK_PERCENT*, which I will describe in more detail in that section – as a measure of policy salience (with a higher percent of constituents not having a preference indicating the policy is of lower salience and vice versa).

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of poll respondents saying they "don't know" their preferences for proposed policies:
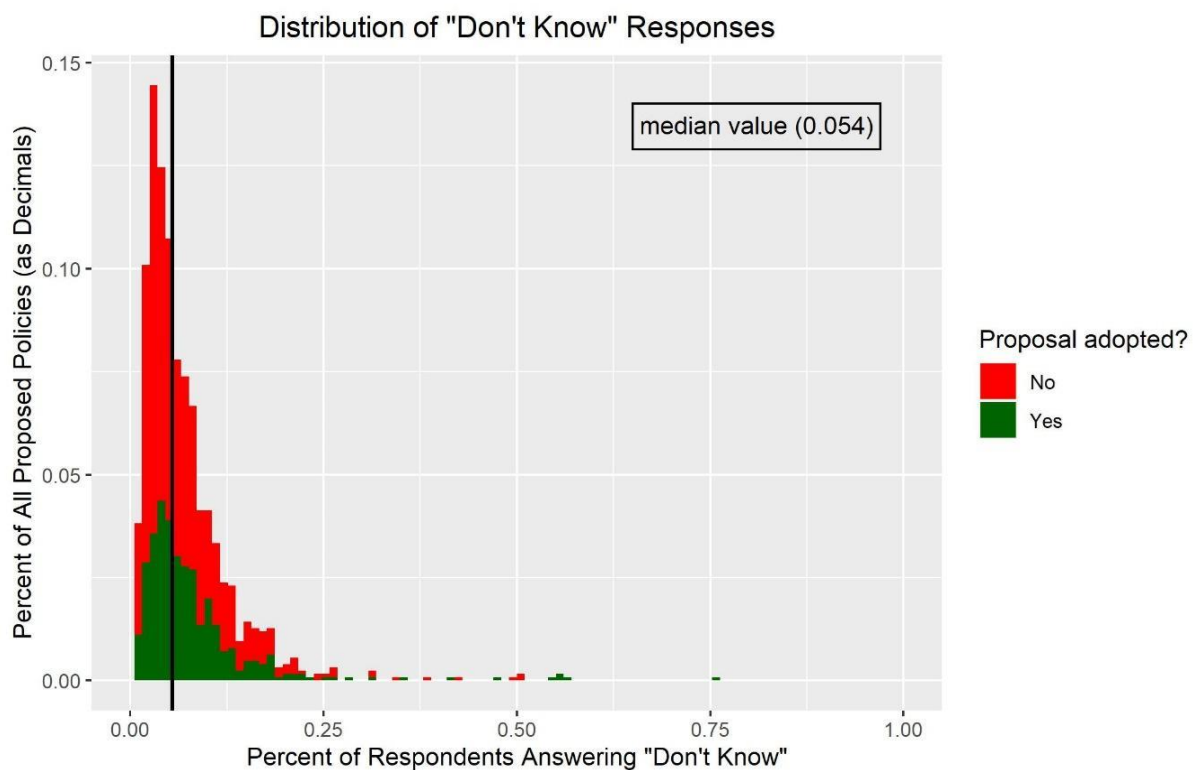
Figure 2

The vertical black line falls at the median value of *Don't know percent*, 0.054. Clearly, the data is right-skewed, suggesting constituents have preferences most of the time and cluster on the same policies when they don't know their preferences (e.g., on a lower-salience policy). This aligns with the literature: by forming their own beliefs internally or picking up positions externally through processes such as heuristics, constituents come to hold policy positions (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Krosnick, 1990; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Popkin, 1993).

5. Empirical Strategies

To test my first hypothesis (H1), I estimate the following linear probability model:

$$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where *ADOPTION* is an indicator variable measuring whether a policy was adopted within two years of being proposed (and taking the value 1 if the policy was adopted and 0 otherwise), *i* subsets the proposed policies by the institutions of government responsible for enacting them (Congress, president, SCOTUS), *PCT_SUPPORT_ALL* is the percent of all constituents in favor of each policy, and ϵ is an error term. Note that I pool data across all years of observations to examine the institutions as wholes (like Bartels (2008, 2016), Gilens (2012), and Gilens & Page (2014)); I do this for subsequent analyses as well. I use a linear probability model for its ease of interpretation, which allows me to compare the magnitudes of the calculated coefficient estimates.

To test my second hypothesis (H2), I estimate the following regression:

$$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_10_i + \beta_2 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_50_i + \beta_3 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_90_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where *ADOPTION* and *i* maintain their prior meanings. My specification is similar to that of Gilens (2012) and Gilens & Page (2014): I represent low-income constituents' preferences by the percent support a policy receives from constituents at the tenth income percentile, median-income constituents' preferences by support from the fiftieth percentile, and economic elites' preferences by support from the ninetieth percentile, with *PCT_SUPPORT_##* being a decimal of the percent of constituents at the ##th income percentile who support each policy (e.g., if 40% of constituents at the tenth income percentile supported a policy, *PCT_SUPPORT_10* would equal 0.4). Though those at the ninetieth percentile may not truly be societal economic elites, the ninetieth percentile's preferences are likely more similar to those of the economic elites than those of median-income constituents, making the ninetieth percentile a satisfactory proxy for economic elites (Gilens & Page, 2014).

To test my third hypothesis (H3), I estimate the following regression:

$$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings. I run this specification three separate times: on policies proposed during Congressional election years, presidential election years, and non-election years.

While testing my third hypothesis, it easily makes sense why I should focus on the responsiveness of Congress (resp. the president) during Congressional (resp. presidential) election years – the years when that institution faces re-election incentives – though it is also worth focusing on the intersections of institutions and election years. First, it's possible the president may increase responsiveness during Congress-only election years; given the president takes on the role of the party leader (Cotter, 1983; Klinghard, 2005; Savage, 2014; Seligman, 1956), evaluations of his party's candidates may be somewhat dependent on evaluations of the president himself (i.e., a modification of the coattail voting theory (Calvert & Ferejohn, 1983; Ferejohn & Calvert, 1984; Mondak, 1990; Zudenkova, 2011)), so increasing his responsiveness may yield benefits for Congressional candidates from his party. Second, because presidential elections are of higher salience than Congressional elections (to equate turnout with salience, e.g., Arseneau & Wolfinger, 1973; Campbell, 1960; Converse & Niemi, 1971; Milbrath & Goel, 1977), they pull focus away from Congressional elections and therefore may allow Congresspeople to decrease their responsiveness and still win re-election (with that potential decrease in responsiveness being relative to Congress-only election years). Hence, I will analyze Congress (resp. the president) during Congress-only (presidential-only) election years as well as Congress (the president) during presidential (Congress-only) election years. Furthermore, for a baseline reference, I will also analyze the institutions during non-election years.

To test my fourth hypothesis (H4), I estimate the following regression:

$$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_10_i + \beta_2 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_50_i + \beta_3 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_90_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings. I run this specification the same three times as for my test of H3.

Similar to the aforementioned literature, these specifications include as explanatory variables only terms capturing percent support of policies. Though my analysis omits potential controls or a causal specification, it still reveals correlations in governmental responsiveness to constituents of various incomes and aligns with the established literature. Possible control variables for future analysis include measures of political participation regarding proposed

policies (e.g., the number of protesters at a rally, the number of emails a legislator receives about a proposed policy) or support among interest groups; future researchers may need to collect additional data to measure these things. In section seven, I discuss questions similar to these in greater depth.

6. Results and Discussion

The following table contains the results of my test of H1, that the order of institutional responsiveness is Congress, the president, then SCOTUS:

Institution	ADOPTION	
	Congress	**President**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.378***	0.838***
	(0.050)	(0.117)
Constant	0.098***	0.102
	(0.030)	(0.062)
N	1932	421
R-squared	0.029	0.109
Predicted probability	0.307	0.567

Table 3: Policy Adoption by Institution (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

My dataset lacks a large number of policy observations routed to SCOTUS for enactment; as a result, I cannot analyze SCOTUS' responsiveness. Future research could expand the timeframe of observations in the hopes of tracking enough proposed policies to facilitate an analysis of the Court.

Notably, the preferences of all constituents are significantly correlated with policy adoption at the 1% level for both Congress and the president, and as *PCT_SUPPORT_ALL* is the percent of all constituents supporting a proposed policy and my models are linear probability models, the coefficients indicate the percent change in the likelihood a policy is adopted given a one hundred percentage point (one-unit) increase in support for the policy by all constituents (e.g., for Congress, a one-unit increase in support for a policy is correlated with a thirty-eight percentage point increase in its chance of adoption).

These results provide evidence against my first hypothesis: the president appears more responsive to constituents than Congress. This may be due to the president serving a larger constituency, therefore making him accountable to the preferences of all Americans and emphasizing incentives to pursue policies aligned with a majority of constituents' interests. Some have argued that the president has more autonomy over his agenda (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010; Cohen, 1995, 1999; Downs, 1972; Kingdon & Stano, 1984; Light, 1999) than Congresspeople have over theirs (Edwards III & Barrett, 2000; Krehbiel, 1988, 2010; Rutledge & Larsen Price, 2014), with one reason for Congresspeople not having ultimate authority over their agendas being the president's ability to affect the Congressional agenda. As a result, it's possible the president would enact policies strongly aligned with constituents' preferences and add to the Congressional agenda policies he supports but that contradict constituents' preferences. This would increase my measure of presidential responsiveness relative to Congressional responsiveness; future research could examine this in greater depth.

Additionally, I include a row at the bottom of the table to report the predicted probabilities of *ADOPTION* given the estimated model coefficients and the average value of *PCT_SUPPORT_ALL*. I will include similar rows in all my regression tables (though using the means of those tables' respective independent variables) as a robustness check to ensure all predicted probabilities fall between 0 and 1, the only reasonable range for *ADOPTION* given it is an indicator variable. Ultimately, all my specifications' predicted probabilities fall inside that interval, marking my models as robust in this respect.

The following table contains the results of my test of H2, that (1) there exists differential responsiveness on the basis of income within our institutions and (2) institutions retain the same ordinal levels of responsiveness I predicted in H1:

Institution	ADOPTION	
	Congress	**President**
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.246[*]	-0.131
	(0.136)	(0.294)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	-0.120	-0.030
	(0.202)	(0.455)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.785[***]	0.985[***]
	(0.143)	(0.329)
Constant	0.068[**]	0.105[*]
	(0.031)	(0.064)
N	1932	421
R-squared	0.047	0.126
Predicted probability	0.307	0.518

Table 4: Policy Adoption by Institution and Income (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Again, there is not enough data to analyze SCOTUS.

For neither Congress nor the president is the median-income voter's preference significantly correlated with policy adoption, aligning with the findings of existing research that provide evidence against the median voter theorem and show the U.S. is not a Majoritarian Electoral Democracy (e.g., Bartels, 2008, 2016; Drezner, 2015; Fraenkel, 2016; Gilens & Page, 2014; Gilens, 2012; Romer & Rosenthal, 1978; Rowley, 1984). In fact, for both institutions, the preferences of median- and low-income voters are insignificant at the 5% level and beyond, aligning with the findings of existing literature referenced earlier and aligning with the part of my hypothesis purporting there will exist differential responsiveness within the institutions. The last part of my hypothesis is incorrect, however, as Congress remains less responsive to constituents than the president (or, more precisely, less responsive to high-income constituents, those at the ninetieth percentile who I use to understand responsiveness to economic elites).

A quick search of my dataset reveals one example of this pattern: in 1966, respondents were asked whether they "favor or oppose a plan such as medicare for older people which would cover all members of [their] famil[ies]," with 74.7% of low-income constituents (three-fourths of them) favoring the proposal and 53.7% of median-income constituents (just over half) favoring it. In comparison, only 37.5% of economic elites (well under half) favored it, and despite the support of so many low- and median-income constituents, the proposal ultimately was not adopted by Congress.

The following table contains the results of my test of H3, that (1) elections increase policy responsiveness and (2) the ordinal rankings of responsiveness from H1 will remain constant:

Institution	ADOPTION					
	Congress	**Congress**	**Congress**	**President**	**President**	**President**
Election year?	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.405[***]	0.405[***]	0.374[***]	1.653[***]	0.871[***]	0.738[***]
	(0.125)	(0.095)	(0.067)	(0.328)	(0.246)	(0.144)
Constant	0.023	0.087	0.116[***]	-0.289[*]	-0.028	0.198[**]
	(0.077)	(0.056)	(0.039)	(0.161)	(0.139)	(0.077)
N	319	521	1092	65	99	257
R-squared	0.032	0.034	0.028	0.288	0.114	0.093
Predicted probability	0.26	0.311	0.32	0.477	0.434	0.56

Table 5: Policy adoption by institution and income, by election year type (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

For each specification, the preferences of all constituents are significantly and positively correlated with policy, but because of the overlap between the confidence intervals of the coefficients within institutions (e.g., Congress during presidential election years, Congressional election years, and non-election years), I cannot definitively confirm the first part of H3 despite the coefficients' point estimates being larger during election years than non-election years (which would support my hypothesis if not for the overlapping confidence intervals).

As for the second part of my hypothesis, similar to the first part, comparing the confidence intervals of the coefficients across institutions (e.g., Congress during presidential election years and the president during presidential election years) reveals an overlap for the responsiveness estimates during Congressional and non-election years, making it so I cannot definitively confirm the second part of H3 despite the coefficients' point estimates being larger for the presidency than Congress (which would support my hypothesis, similar to what I observe for my test of the first part of H3). For presidential election years, however, the confidence intervals do not overlap, and because the coefficient for the president is larger than the coefficient for Congress, my results provide strong supportive evidence for the second part of H3. Since the sample size for presidential adoption is so small, future research with an expanded dataset may shed more light on our understanding of the president's responsiveness.

The following table contains the results of my test of H4, that (1) election years increase policy responsiveness yet (2) still contain differential responsiveness by constituents' income:

	ADOPTION					
Institution	**Congress**	**Congress**	**Congress**	**President**	**President**	**President**
Election year?	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.087	-0.568[**]	-0.179	-0.748	-0.051	-0.118
	(0.346)	(0.282)	(0.175)	(0.799)	(0.707)	(0.358)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	0.459	0.151	-0.374	1.092	1.576	-0.585
	(0.538)	(0.411)	(0.259)	(1.304)	(1.014)	(0.547)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.018	0.829[***]	0.986[***]	1.318[*]	-0.708	1.465[***]
	(0.360)	(0.279)	(0.191)	(0.770)	(0.739)	(0.413)
Constant	0.031	0.084	0.069[*]	-0.310[*]	0.006	0.183[**]
	(0.082)	(0.057)	(0.040)	(0.157)	(0.163)	(0.076)
N	319	521	1092	65	99	257
R-squared	0.033	0.063	0.052	0.358	0.129	0.131
Predicted probability	0.26	0.311	0.32	0.477	0.434	0.56

Table 6: Policy adoption by institution and income, by election year type (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

As can be seen, there exists differential responsiveness, with economic elites' preferences being more likely to correlate significantly with adopted policy and median- and low-income constituents' preferences rarely significantly correlating with adopted policy (thus aligning with the second part of H4). Furthermore, during Congressional (resp. presidential) election years, economic elites' preferences are – with varying levels – significant to Congresspeople (the president) as expected due to re-election incentives. The coefficients for responsiveness to economic elites during each institution's respective election years are not significantly different from the corresponding coefficients during non-election years, however, so I cannot definitively accept or reject the first part of H4, consistent with the result of my test of H3.

Interestingly, low-income constituents' preferences are negatively and significantly (at the 5% level) correlated with Congressional policymaking during Congressional election years. Though the negative value may merely be a result of my using a linear probability model, the takeaway that low-income constituents' preferences are not positively and significantly correlated with adopted policy is most likely indicative of reality. Additionally, as compared to my test of H3, this test shows that during years with presidential and Congressional (resp. Congressional) elections, economic elites' preferences are insignificant to Congress (resp. the president) – i.e., economic elites' preferences are insignificant in the first and fifth columns. This may result from presidential elections pulling focus from Congressional elections during presidential election years (first column) and Congress pulling focus from the president during years when Congress is up for election and the president is not. Put another way, presidential elections' higher saliences

than Congressional elections (see section five for more information) and Congressional elections' higher saliences than non-election years for the president (see sections two and three for more information) may divert attention from each respective institution, thereby decreasing re-election incentives and explaining the results of the first and fifth columns (respectively). Future research could study these questions in greater depth.

Putting aside the overlaps of confidence intervals, the coefficients' point estimates show responsiveness to economic elites' preferences decreases during election years, contrasting with my test of H3 (and when similarly putting aside confidence interval overlaps). For Congress, one possible explanation is the fact that House members' terms are only two years, so even during non-election years, the next election is always within sight. As a result, House members could always try to maximize their responsiveness to elites during non-election years in preparation to maximize their funding for upcoming elections (which will increase their chances of re-election, once again making my results align with Mayhew's theory). In sum, holding constant the preferences of median- and low-income constituents – i.e., those least able to fund legislators' re-election campaigns and therefore those more likely to be marginalized – House members may not distinguish between election and non-election years when trying to secure campaign funds from potential donors. Furthermore, because House members constitute the majority of Congress, it's possible this lack of difference between election and non-election years' responsiveness for Congress is a result of the effects of House responsiveness "beating out" increased Senate responsiveness during election years. Future research could expand my data to examine legislators' roll call votes and whether they align with their constituents' preferences – rather than simply looking at the blunt instrument of non/adoption – to test responsiveness by chamber and non/election years.

A similar effect may explain the lack of significant difference between presidential responsiveness during election and non-election years: the president may try to remain as responsive as possible given he has fewer opportunities to adopt a policy, making every policy of higher importance. Per the summary statistics in my *Data* section above, 1,932 policies were routed through Congress for adoption, whereas only 427 policies were routed through the president. Hence, a one-policy increase in the share of non-enactments of supported policies or enactments of unsupported policies will decrease the president's responsiveness by more than such an act would decrease Congress' responsiveness. Future research could expand my dataset and test this potential explanation.

To ensure my findings are robust, I re-test them a few different ways in the appendix to this paper.

7. Discussion of Potential Confounders

7.1. Constituents' Agenda-Setting Power (or Lack Thereof)

One potential issue with my analysis is selection bias arising because some constituent-supported ideas never make it onto the agenda. If constituents were to support a policy that never goes up for adoption, that non-policy should diminish my measures of policy responsiveness, but my analysis assumes every policy with constituent support was added to the agenda, potentially biasing upward my measures of responsiveness.

One reason a policy may not make an agenda despite constituent support could be due to more-powerful constituents, interest groups, or policymakers opposing it and quietly expressing their preference not to have that policy go up for adoption (e.g., Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Crenson, 1971; Lukes, 1974). In effect, it's possible every proposed policy included in my analysis was – by some hidden mechanism – approved by elites and then added to the government's agenda. As a result, my analysis does not account for the probability of a policy being proposed in the first place. Addressing this bias would require data on constituents' preferences for ideas that never made it onto the agenda; this analysis (e.g., with an instrumental variable proxying policy proposal but not adoption) would facilitate an examination of whether and how agenda-formation itself might be biased toward the more powerful.

7.2. On Constituents Expressing Preferences

As I described earlier, constituents have tried-and-true ways to express our preferences to legislators (e.g., voting, lobbying, protesting), yet if we refrain from political participation, legislators may not learn our policy preferences.

It's possible the unresponsiveness of the American government disincentivizes constituents from expressing preferences (e.g., Tavernise, 2016) – after all, if political participation won't amount to policy changes, constituents will be less inclined to incur participation's costs (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968) – but it's also possible the American government is unresponsive because a small share of constituents incurs those participation-caused costs in the first place. Relatedly, if lower-income constituents are less likely to express their preferences in the face of political-participation-caused costs, wealthier constituents may be more likely to have their preferences significantly correlated with policy from the get-go (e.g., during a rainy election day, a wealthier car owner may be more likely to vote than a less-wealthy person without a car because the wealthier constituent will be better able to stay dry on the way to polls, thereby mitigating the cost of getting wet). Future research could examine the potential general equilibrium linking unresponsive government with the likelihood of political participation.

7.3. The State's Emergent Preferences(?)

Another potential issue with my analysis is endogeneity bias: while policy adoption may be determined by constituents' preferences, so too may constituents' preferences be determined by policy proposals. If we define "the state" as "an interrelated set of governing institutions" that serves as a neutral arbitrator between low-, median-, and high-income citizens' preferences (Cudworth et al., 2007, p. 2), we view proposed policies as manifestations of constituents' preferences (Latham, 1952). On the other hand, however, if we define "the state" as "a set of institutions which pursue certain objectives" (Cudworth et al., 2007, p. 2), the American government could be an emergent phenomenon; rather than an instrument devoted to serving its constituents by organizing our preferences, "the state" could propose policies that shape our preferences by virtue of entering political discourse. Through this lens, it's possible our government has a policy agenda of its own (Latham, 1952), in which case proposed policies may originate within the state and constituents' preferences about them may follow.

My analysis assumes all proposed policies begin with constituents' preferences, opening up my findings to this potential threat to their validity. Future research could examine whether the state passes any policies largely inconsistent with constituents' preferences; such policies could be signs there is a non-constituent-based mechanism at play within our government.

On a similar note, there exists a potential endogeneity bias resulting from the timing of the polling which forms the foundation of my data. Though none of the policies I analyzed had been adopted at the time constituents were polled about them, if the respondents were able to make predictions regarding whether the policies would pass or if respondents were able to identify large swings in public opinion and didn't want to be left out (i.e., if they want to "jump on the bandwagon" of public opinion), they may have changed their opinions of the policies (Morton et al., 2015; Rothschild & Malhotra, 2014; van der Meer et al., 2016). As a result, proposals' chances of being passed may affect constituents' support for them, constituents' support for them may affect their chances of being passed, and the cycle may repeat. This potential general equilibrium could serve as a mechanism through which "the state" having preferences for or against certain policies may impact whether constituents support policies and thereby whether the policies are ultimately adopted.

7.4. Interest Groups

Though my analysis – driven by democratic theory purporting constituents steer policy – does not control for interest groups, future research seeking a more robust model for the correlates of adopted policy could account for them (Ball & Peters, 2005; Bartels, 2008, 2016; Gilens & Page, 2014; Gilens, 2012; Grossman & Helpman, 2001). Interest groups being a potential confounder for my models merely highlights one more aspect of America's political system which manifests differently than the ideal, theoretical democracy driven by constituents; while I show the preferences of the wealthiest constituents matter most for policy adoption, future research could analyze policy adoption while also controlling for interest group support, thereby testing the theories of Majoritarian Pluralism and Biased Pluralism (the theories I did not test) in addition to Majoritarian Electoral Democracy and Economic-Elite Domination (the theories I did test).

8. Conclusion

Overall, my results suggest the president is more responsive to constituents' policy preferences than Congress – potentially due to the president having more power over his agenda than Congresspeople have over theirs (see section six) – but due to limitations in data availability, I am unable to compare SCOTUS' responsiveness with those of the other two institutions of American government. Moreover, I find differential representation on the basis of wealth within both Congress and the presidency, and my results suggest elections increase policy responsiveness. All these findings align with the existing literature. My analysis of Congressional responsiveness is slightly limited by my data, however: as my dataset's unit of observation is aggregated across individual policies (and lacks the resolution of policy support within individual legislators' constituencies), I am unable to analyze the responsiveness of individual Congresspeople, and as my data does not differentiate between policies routed primarily or first through the House or Senate, I cannot analyze the responsiveness of the chambers individually. Future research with an expanded dataset could conduct these analyses.

My analyses of Congress and the presidency join existing literature by showing there exists differential responsiveness to constituents, with economic elites having their preferences most strongly correlated with adopted policy and median- and low-income constituents having their preferences correlate less – i.e., showing American democracy follows the theory of Economic-Elite Domination and not Majoritarian Electoral Democracy. Overall, my research aligns with the literature - nuancing the simplistic, "romanticized" view that the American government exists solely to serve its constituents equally and that individual constituents can significantly impact policy (Pildes, 2014).

In light of my findings, we're left wondering where the disconnect regarding views of American democracy is: why do we continue thinking of our government as an equally accessible conduit for societal improvement despite it being unresponsive to the majority of constituents' preferences? Ralph Miliband phrases this issue rather nicely:

> *"The act of voting is part of a much larger political process, characterised, as I have argued, by marked inequality of influence. Concentration on the act of voting itself, in which formal equality does prevail, helps to obscure that inequality, and serves a crucially important legitimating function."* (1969, p. 194)

In other words, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," (Orwell, 1946); at the voting booth – or, more broadly, when we have preferences – we're the same, but at the meetings to formulate real policy, we're far from it.

Perhaps the answer lies in the way we view democracy itself. William H. Hastie, the first Black federal judge, offered the following definition of the term: "Democracy is a process, not a static condition. It is becoming, rather than being. It can be easily lost, but is never finally won," (*Quotes*, n.d.). Academics have weighed in as well, claiming active participation in our political system can make us better citizens and better people (Adams, 1994; Tolbert & Smith, 2005). So, perhaps a better view of American democracy focuses on our perpetual effort to improve the status quo one step at a time, gradually transforming what *is* into what *could be*, not *despite* the challenges in our political system but rather *because of* them. In all, because wealth differentially correlates with access to institutions of government, the search for democracy continues.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Robustness Checks

A.1. When the President Isn't Up for Re-Election

As I hypothesized in section three, as the leader of his party, the president has an incentive to increase his responsiveness during all election years. In case he increases his responsiveness only when he is actually able to be re-elected (i.e., when the sitting president is running for a second term), however, my assumption will be unfounded. For my first robustness check, I will examine presidential responsiveness when the president is able to be re-elected and compare it with responsiveness when the president is unable to be re-elected. I estimate the following regression:

$$ADOPTION_{p,r} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL + \epsilon,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings, *p* filters the data for only policies routed to the president for adoption, and *r* subsets the proposed policies into two groups: those proposed during years when the president is eligible for re-election (i.e., the election year at the end of the president's first term) and those proposed during years when the president is not eligible for re-election (i.e., non-election years or the election year at the end of the president's second term).

My results are as follows:

Institution	ADOPTION	
	President	**President**
Able to be re-elected?	**No**	**Yes**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.758***	1.935***
	(0.122)	(0.403)
Constant	0.146**	-0.432**
	(0.066)	(0.195)
N	373	48
R-squared	0.094	0.333
Predicted probability	0.525	0.458

Table 7: Presidential policy adoption by timing, by re-election eligibility (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Clearly, the president's responsiveness when he is able to be re-elected is larger than his responsiveness when he is unable to be re-elected – the coefficient in the second model is larger than that in the first model, and the two coefficients' confidence intervals do not overlap. This provides evidence in favor of my hypothesis and aligns with my earlier findings.

Next, I test for differential responsiveness by estimating the following regression:

$$ADOPTION_{p,r} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_10 + \beta_2 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_50 + \beta_3 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_90 + \epsilon,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings. My results are as follows:

Institution	ADOPTION	
	President	President
Able to be re-elected?	No	Yes
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.069	-0.792
	(0.313)	(0.843)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	0.003	0.695
	(0.481)	(1.342)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.811[**]	2.029[**]
	(0.357)	(0.796)
Constant	0.151[**]	-0.479[**]
	(0.068)	(0.180)
N	373	48
R-squared	0.104	0.472
Predicted probability	0.525	0.458

Table 8: Presidential policy adoption by timing and income, by re-election eligibility (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Similar to my earlier analyses, only the preferences of economic elites are significantly correlated with adopted policy, and though their coefficients' confidence intervals from the two models overlap, the coefficients' point estimates suggest the president's responsiveness increases when he is up for re-election that year, aligning with my hypothesis and earlier findings despite not being a definitive, entirely-robust result. Future research could collect more data on presidential policymaking when the president is able to be re-elected and re-run this model; by increasing the sample size, the model would likely have a smaller standard error and confidence interval, potentially removing the overlap between the two coefficients' confidence intervals and yielding a robust conclusion in line with my hypothesis and the results from my first robustness check in this subsection.

A.2. Policy Salience

In a normatively desirable representative democracy, constituents' preferences would perfectly determine the fate of every policy proposal (e.g., Dahl, 1971), but the combination of three factors suggest only high-salient policies will strongly correlate with constituents' preferences. First, I will continue to consider representatives of single-minded seekers of re-election (Mayhew, 1974). Second, constituents don't care equally about all issues (Arnold, 1990; Key, 1961); only some policies will be highly salient. Finally, as described in the *Hypotheses* section above, the retrospective voting model purports constituents base electoral decisions on their representatives' prior performances. Bringing all this together, representatives want to win re-election and therefore will be more likely to follow constituents' preferences on higher-salience – and therefore more important – issues so constituents evaluate them favorably and re-elect them. As a result, to ensure my findings are robust, I need to account for differing levels of policy salience to get a better measure of policy responsiveness.

Recall my data includes a measure of the percentage of respondents saying they don't know their preferences regarding a proposed policy (*DK_PERCENT*); I interpret this as a proxy measurement of policy salience. Because constituents do not always have firm preferences (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Converse, 2006; Downs, 1957; Romer & Rosenthal, 1978), they sometimes turn to external factors and influences to inform their preferences (Berelson et al., 1986; Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Krosnick, 1990; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Popkin, 1993), so some constituents may say they know their preferences despite not actually holding the preferences themselves (i.e., despite needing to pull that preference from an external source). I thus use *DK_PERCENT* to create a conceptual spectrum of policy salience, with the most-salient policies having the smallest *DK_PERCENT* values, moderately salient policies having moderate *DK_PERCENT* values, and the lowest-salient policies having the largest *DK_PERCENT* values. Because adopting a preference from somewhere else (i.e., to have a preference despite it not being internally driven) incurs a cost (e.g., for elite cue-taking, the cost of reading the news to see what one's legislator thinks about the policy (e.g., Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000)). Therefore, I consider the median value of *DK_PERCENT*, 0.054, to be the boundary between salient and nonsalient policies. I thus create two groups of

policies: salient policies, with values of *DK_PERCENT* less than the median, and nonsalient policies, with values of *DK_PERCENT* greater than the median.

Because this cutoff is arbitrary, it's possible some policies I count as salient are not actually salient and some policies I count as nonsalient actually are salient, and it's possible legislators consider the cutoff between salient and nonsalient policies to be somewhere else. As a result, my analysis on the basis of salience will be imperfect, but as the share of actually-salient policies in my group of salient policies will be larger than the share of actually-salient policies in my group of nonsalient salient policies, any increase in the responsiveness of the coefficients from models of my salient group relative to models of my nonsalient group will indicate policymakers are more responsive when constituents' preferences are salient.

Finally, I find this salience threshold by analyzing the percent of respondents who said they don't know their preferences across all policies – i.e., rather than calculating a salience threshold unique to each institution, I use one threshold, calculated by analyzing all proposed policies. As all three institutions of government are aware of the policies before the other institutions, I consider all policies relevant to my calculation.

In sum, I use the median value of *DK_PERCENT* (0.054) as a threshold under which policies must fall for me to consider them salient, and analyzing only these salient policies allows me to examine responsiveness to "attentive publics" (Arnold, 1990), the constituents who pay attention to their legislators' actions and will more readily mobilize to re-elect them or vote them out of office. Similar to my test of H1, I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,s} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings and *s* subsets the data for non/salient policies. My results are the following:

	ADOPTION			
Institution	**Congress**	**Congress**	**President**	**President**
Policy group	**Salient**	**Nonsalient**	**Salient**	**Nonsalient**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.383***	0.295**	0.991***	0.678***
	(0.090)	(0.122)	(0.242)	(0.181)
Constant	0.088*	0.230***	-0.017	0.081
	(0.053)	(0.065)	(0.124)	(0.094)
N	541	420	64	184
R-squared	0.033	0.014	0.213	0.071
Predicted probability	0.299	0.376	0.437	0.408

Table 9: Policy adoption by institution and salience (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Constituents' preferences remain significantly correlated with Congressional and presidential policy adoption, though the confidence intervals for corresponding coefficients within institutions of government (e.g., the confidence intervals for the coefficients for Congress) do slightly overlap. As a result, I cannot conclude either institution is more responsive to salient preferences with 95% confidence, though because the overlap is so small for Congress, it seems incredibly likely Congress responds more to salient preferences than nonsalient preferences, supporting my hypothesis. As for the president, future research could expand my dataset to include more observations, likely shrinking the coefficients' confidence intervals to the point that the ordering of the coefficients' point estimates – with that for salient preferences being larger than that for nonsalient preferences – would be indicative for the presidency overall (i.e., showing the president also responds more to salient preferences).

Next, I test for differential responsiveness for salient policies. Similar to my test of H2, I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,s} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_10_i + \beta_2 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_50_i + \beta_3 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_90_i + \epsilon_i,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings. My results are as follows:

Institution	ADOPTION			
	Congress	Congress	President	President
Policy group	**Salient**	**Nonsalient**	**Salient**	**Nonsalient**
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.407	-0.382	0.275	-0.504
	(0.262)	(0.297)	(0.677)	(0.426)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	0.152	0.346	0.479	0.289
	(0.393)	(0.464)	(1.153)	(0.734)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.644[**]	0.331	0.241	0.874
	(0.273)	(0.327)	(0.894)	(0.530)
Constant	0.080	0.225[***]	-0.019	0.088
	(0.055)	(0.067)	(0.135)	(0.095)
N	541	420	64	184
R-squared	0.052	0.023	0.213	0.101
Predicted probability	0.299	0.376	0.438	0.408

Table 10: Policy adoption by institution, income, and salience (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Interestingly, these models show economic elites' preferences are significantly correlated with adopted policy only for Congress and when the policy preferences are salient. This very slightly boosts the credence of my hypotheses – salient preferences may be more likely to correlate with policy, and there continues to be differential responsiveness (for Congressional responsiveness to salient preferences, at least). Because there is so much overlap between the coefficients' confidence intervals within their respective institutions (e.g., both sets of intervals for the models of Congressional responsiveness), I cannot definitively conclude whether a policy being salient increases responsiveness across income groups.

I now turn my attention to responsiveness during electoral cycles, starting with an examination of overall constituent responsiveness. Similar to my test of H3, I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,s,e} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL + \epsilon,$$

where terms defined earlier retain their meanings. My results are as follows:

Institution	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	President	President	President	President	President	President
					ADOPTION							
Election year?	President	President	Congress	Congress	None	None	President	President	Congress	Congress	None	None
Policy group	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.360	0.903***	0.380**	0.293	0.392***	0.138	1.191	1.317***	0.452	1.502***	1.061***	0.403*
	(0.342)	(0.295)	(0.157)	(0.209)	(0.117)	(0.172)	(0.608)	(0.459)	(0.643)	(0.365)	(0.272)	(0.238)
Constant	0.091	-0.142	0.109	0.232**	0.074	0.322***	0.226	-0.256	0.165	-0.507**	-0.071	0.274**
	(0.234)	(0.162)	(0.092)	(0.113)	(0.068)	(0.090)	(0.337)	(0.208)	(0.325)	(0.218)	(0.139)	(0.121)
N	43	62	184	127	314	231	6	36	16	40	42	108
R-squared	0.026	0.135	0.031	0.015	0.034	0.003	0.489	0.195	0.034	0.308	0.276	0.026
Predicted probability	0.326	0.323	0.315	0.378	0.287	0.39	0.833	0.306	0.375	0.35	0.405	0.463

Table 11: Policy adoption by institution, income, and election year type, by salience (standard errors in brackets)

* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Notably, there is a lot of overlap between every set of corresponding coefficients' confidence intervals (e.g., confidence intervals for Congress during presidential elections with both salient and nonsalient preferences). This is likely due to my having such small sample sizes (which also may decrease the reliability of these results). Because of this, I cannot evaluate my hypotheses that responsiveness increases during election years and that Congress is more responsive than the presidency. Similar to my earlier analyses, future research could expand my dataset and repeat this analysis; such a repetition would have smaller confidence intervals and then would be able to evaluate my hypotheses.

Finally, I will test responsiveness across Congressional, presidential, and non-election years. Similar to my test for H4, I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,s,e} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_10 + \beta_2 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_50 + \beta_3 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_90 + \epsilon,$$

My results are as follows:

	ADOPTION											
Institution	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	President	President	President	President	President	President
Election year?	President	President	Congress	Congress	None	None	President	President	Congress	Congress	None	None
Policy group	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient	Salient	Nonsalient
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.814	0.863	-0.637	-1.089*	-0.268	-0.434	3.551	-2.147**	0.845	-0.976	-0.565	0.112
	(1.383)	(0.892)	(0.470)	(0.591)	(0.330)	(0.376)	(8.838)	(0.957)	(2.504)	(0.842)	(0.820)	(0.555)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	3.039*	0.421	0.302	0.727	-0.298	0.090	-0.973	1.094	-2.733	3.106**	1.469	-1.100
	(1.718)	(1.451)	(0.665)	(0.913)	(0.510)	(0.582)	(10.736)	(1.469)	(4.269)	(1.240)	(1.230)	(1.017)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	-2.039*	-0.530	0.691	0.630	1.007***	0.485	-1.144	2.178**	2.580	-1.007	0.100	1.455*
	(1.164)	(0.907)	(0.447)	(0.613)	(0.369)	(0.433)	(3.964)	(0.914)	(3.080)	(0.937)	(0.984)	(0.745)
Constant	0.156	-0.078	0.135	0.229**	0.031	0.312***	-0.146	-0.234	0.086	-0.285	-0.041	0.248**
	(0.236)	(0.175)	(0.095)	(0.113)	(0.071)	(0.094)	(0.846)	(0.176)	(0.541)	(0.244)	(0.145)	(0.122)
N	43	62	184	127	314	231	6	36	16	40	42	108
R-squared	0.112	0.171	0.061	0.063	0.063	0.017	0.582	0.470	0.090	0.374	0.295	0.059
Predicted probability	0.326	0.323	0.315	0.378	0.287	0.39	0.833	0.306	0.375	0.35	0.405	0.463

Table 12: Policy adoption by institution, income, and election year type, by salience (standard errors in brackets)

* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Similar to my prior robustness check, I lack enough statistical power and large enough sample sizes to run these specifications with confidence intervals small enough to draw reliable conclusions, so I leave this question of responsiveness to future research.

A.3. Polarization

None of my regressions to this point have included a time trend, but I believe a time trend would have no externally meaningful correlation with policy adoption. As the structures of our institutions have not changed over time, the change in probability of policy adoption given one more year passing (i.e., the interpretation of a time trend's coefficient) would serve mainly as an approximation of another phenomenon increasing over time and affecting policymaking, the most significant of which I deem polarization (Aldrich, 1995; Cohen, 2011; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Fleisher & Bond, 2004; Hetherington, 2009; Jacobson, 2000; Layman & Carsey, 2002; McCarty et al., 2016; Poole & Rosenthal, 2000; Prior, 2013; Rohde, 2010). Poole and Rosenthal (1985) created the DW-NOMINATE scaling method to score Congresspeople's roll call votes – and therefore their ideologies – on a liberal-conservative spectrum, and there is a vast literature of researchers using the NOMINATE scores (and their first dimensions, originally constructed to capture ideology regarding economic policy yet ultimately capturing overall liberal-conservative ideology (Hare & Poole, 2014)) to analyze the U.S.' polarization (Hetherington, 2009; Hirano et al., 2010; Jacobson, 2000).

As a measure of polarization, I calculate the standard deviation of the first dimension of the NOMINATE scores (Rudkin et al., 2022) for each Congress included in the timeframe of my data, and I name this measure "POLARIZ_MEASURE*":*

Note: the 88th Congress met from 1963 - 1965, and the 109th Congress met from 2005 - 2007.
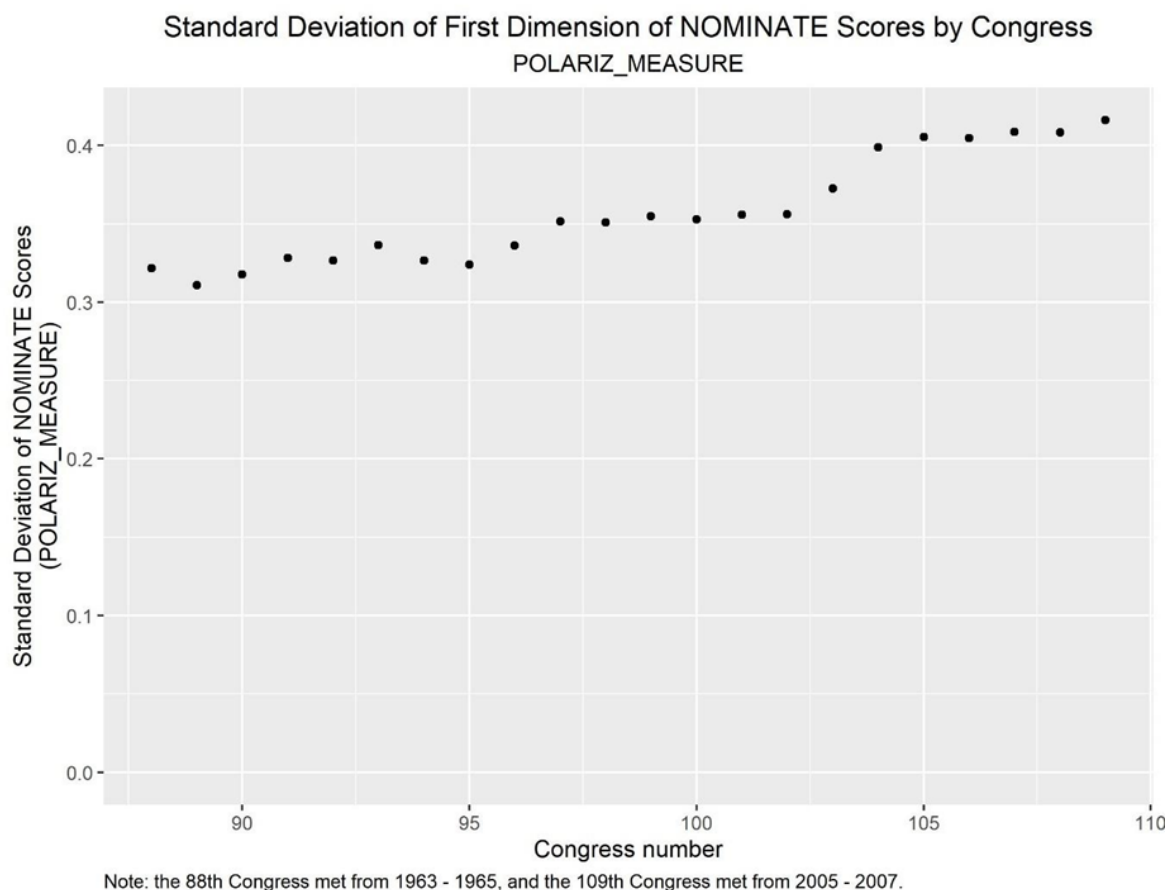
Figure 3

My primary focus is the responsiveness of American democracy to constituents' preferences and not how policy adoption varies as a function of polarization, however, so I do not focus on polarization's effect on adoption

beyond recognizing it as a control in my regressions. With this measure of polarization included in my regressions, I retest my four main hypotheses.

I first add my measure of polarization to the regression I used to test H1 and estimate the following model:

$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1*PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL + \beta_2*POLARIZ\_MEASURE + \epsilon.$

The results of my model are as follows:

Institution	ADOPTION	
	Congress	**President**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.433***	0.860***
	(0.050)	(0.123)
POLARIZ_MEASURE	-2.338***	-0.404
	(0.329)	(0.688)
Constant	0.952***	0.242
	(0.124)	(0.245)
N	1932	421
R-squared	0.053	0.110
Predicted probability	0.307	0.518

Table 13: Policy adoption by institution, controlling for polarization (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Just like in my earlier test of H1, all constituents' preferences are significantly correlated with policy adoption at the 1% level for both Congress and the president, and the coefficient of *PCT_SUPPORT_ALL* is larger in the regression for the president than in the regression for Congress (with no overlap of confidence intervals), indicating the president is more responsive to constituents' preferences than Congress. These results align with my original results from testing H1: constituents' preferences are significantly and more strongly correlated with presidential policymaking than Congressional policymaking, marking the president as more responsive than Congress and my findings as robust.

Next, I turn to H2, which purports there exists differential responsiveness on the basis of income within our institutions. I estimate the following model:

$ADOPTION_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1*PCT\_SUPPORT\_10 + \beta_2*PCT\_SUPPORT\_50 + \beta_3*PCT\_SUPPORT\_90 + \beta_4*POLARIZ\_MEASURE + \epsilon.$

The results are as follows:

	ADOPTION	
Institution	**Congress**	**President**
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.228[*]	-0.129
	(0.134)	(0.294)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	-0.208	-0.012
	(0.200)	(0.456)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.925[***]	0.986[***]
	(0.142)	(0.329)
POLARIZ_MEASURE	-2.576[***]	-0.394
	(0.327)	(0.684)
Constant	1.003[***]	0.241
	(0.122)	(0.244)
N	1932	421
R-squared	0.076	0.127
Predicted probability	0.307	0.518

Table 14: Policy adoption by institution and income, controlling for polarization (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Just like in my results from the first time I tested H2, low- and median-income constituents' preferences are not significant at the 1% level (though low-income constituents' preferences are once again significantly correlated with Congressional policymaking at the 10% level). This again bolsters the argument that American democracy follows the Economic-Elite Domination theory. Additionally, similar to some of my earlier results, due to the overlap of confidence intervals of the coefficients of responsiveness to economic elites, I cannot conclude with 95% confidence that one institution is more responsive than another. The point estimate of responsiveness to elites for the president is larger than the estimate for Congress, however, consistent with my earlier results.

I now turn to H3, that (1) elections increase policy responsiveness and (2) the ordinal rankings of responsiveness from H1 will remain constant. I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,e} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * PCT\_SUPPORT\_ALL + \beta_{24} * POLARIZ\_MEASURE + \epsilon.$$

My results are as follows:

Institution	ADOPTION					
	Congress	**Congress**	**Congress**	**President**	**President**	**President**
Election year?	**President**	**Congress**	**None**	**President**	**Congress**	**None**
PCT_SUPPORT_ALL	0.435***	1.539***	0.460***	0.838***	0.438***	0.781***
	(0.075)	(0.348)	(0.095)	(0.259)	(0.067)	(0.150)
POLARIZ_MEASURE	-2.299***	1.610	-2.483***	0.674	-2.375***	-0.889
	(0.490)	(1.644)	(0.639)	(1.542)	(0.443)	(0.889)
Constant	0.915***	-0.812	1.000***	-0.270	0.978***	0.507
	(0.186)	(0.558)	(0.241)	(0.572)	(0.166)	(0.317)
N	840	65	521	99	1092	257
R-squared	0.056	0.299	0.061	0.116	0.053	0.097
Predicted probability	0.292	0.475	0.311	0.434	0.32	0.561

Table 15: Policy adoption by institution and income, by election year type (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Likely because I have so few observations for policies proposed to Congress during Congress-only election years and policies proposed to the president during presidential election years, the confidence intervals for the corresponding coefficients are quite large, making it impossible to definitively analyze the first part of H3 (due to the coefficients' confidence intervals overlapping). Notably, however, the point estimates for Congressional responsiveness during Congressional election years and presidential responsiveness during presidential election years (i.e., responsiveness when those institutions are up for re-election) are larger than the coefficients for those institutions during non-election years, suggesting the first part of my hypothesis may be true.

Finally, I turn to H4, that (1) despite election years increasing policy responsiveness, (2) there still will exist differential responsiveness. I estimate the following model:

$$ADOPTION_{i,e} = \beta_0 + \beta_1*PCT\_SUPPORT\_10 + \beta_2*PCT\_SUPPORT\_50 + \beta_3*PCT\_SUPPORT\_90 + \beta_4*POLARIZ\_MEASURE + \epsilon.$$

My results are as follows:

	ADOPTION					
Institution	**Cong,**	**Congress**	**Congress**	**President**	**President**	**President**
Election year?	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**	**Pres.**	**Cong.**	**None**
PCT_SUPPORT_10	-0.388[*]	-1.097	-0.568[**]	-0.039	-0.135	-0.134
	(0.215)	(0.824)	(0.277)	(0.712)	(0.172)	(0.358)
PCT_SUPPORT_50	0.236	1.418	0.085	1.526	-0.476[*]	-0.536
	(0.322)	(1.309)	(0.404)	(1.034)	(0.255)	(0.549)
PCT_SUPPORT_90	0.608[***]	1.156	0.963[***]	-0.688	1.127[***]	1.477[***]
	(0.218)	(0.770)	(0.276)	(0.745)	(0.190)	(0.413)
POLARIZ_MEASURE	-2.515[***]	2.424	-2.751[***]	0.441	-2.627[***]	-0.963
	(0.490)	(1.623)	(0.632)	(1.561)	(0.439)	(0.876)
Constant	0.984[***]	-1.093[*]	1.091[***]	-0.154	1.016[***]	0.517
	(0.185)	(0.547)	(0.238)	(0.592)	(0.163)	(0.314)
N	840	65	521	99	1092	257
R-squared	0.072	0.381	0.096	0.129	0.082	0.135
Predicted probability	0.292	0.474	0.311	0.434	0.32	0.561

Table 16: Policy adoption by institution and income, by election year type (standard errors in brackets)
* significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Similar to my earlier findings, economic elites' preferences are more significantly correlated with adopted policy than anyone else's preferences, proving the second part of my hypothesis. Similar to my above analysis, however, I cannot draw a definitive conclusion about the first party of my hypothesis due to the coefficients' overlapping confidence intervals.

In all, my robustness checks controlling for polarization suggest my earlier findings hold true.