

# How Democratic is the U.S.? Policy Responsiveness

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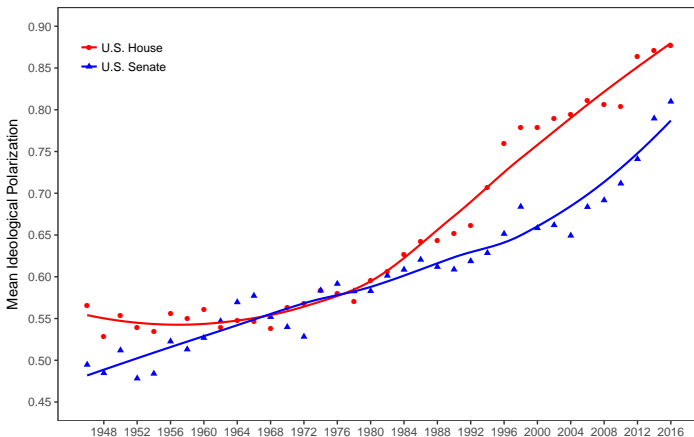


# Agenda

- 1 Polarization & Policy Making
- 2 Policy Responsiveness in the U.S.

# Congressional Polarization

## Partisan Polarization in Congress since WWII



*Polarization measured as absolute difference between first dimension DW-NOMINATE party means.*

# Polarization & Policymaking

- ▶ How do you expect polarization to influence American policymaking under the *Pivotal Politics & Partisan Model*?
- ▶ Under the *Partisan Model*, party polarization & internal unity facilitates delegation to party leaders
- ▶ Would this lead to a reduction of agency loss for members & congressional party caucuses?
- ▶ What are the implications of polarization for the Madisonian vision of the *district-centered* Congress?
- ▶ When conditions of polarization and elements of the Partisan theory of Congress are weakened, you get more of a district-centered Congress (ex: 1950's - 1970's)

# Does Partisan Polarization Help Voters?

- ▶ Does Jones present a positive argument for political polarization?
- ▶ Jones argues that partisan polarization should help voters assess who to punish or reward for how Congress functions as an institution: “the subordination of individual officeholders to the party lessens their ability to separate themselves from party action.”
- ▶ Why would a lack of polarization foster the notion that “party disunity leads to diffused accountability?”
- ▶ What is Jones’ main finding?
- ▶ If congressional approval is high, majority party members see an increase in their vote percentages & minority party members see a decrease in their vote-shares
- ▶ How is this collective accountability? Implications for the partisan model?

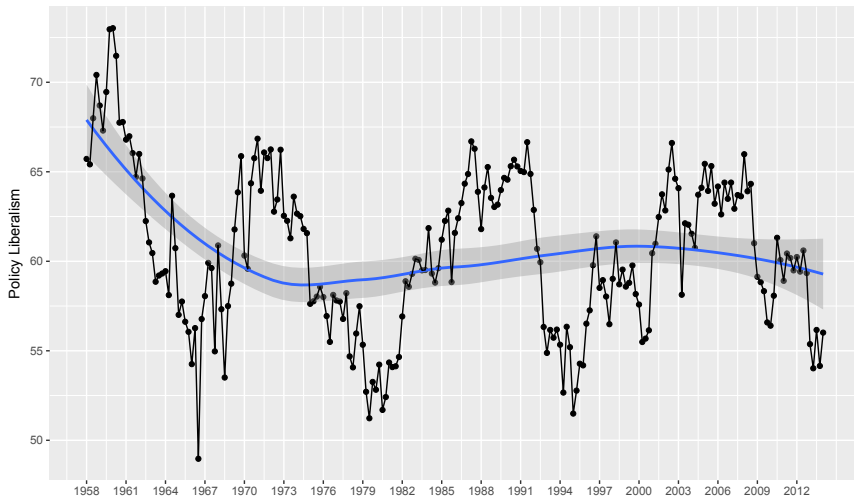
# Responsiveness of Institutions

- ▶ Should we expect policy responsiveness from our political institutions, if so, which ones?
- ▶ Representatives & even the Supreme Court have an incentive to be responsive to the mass public
- ▶ Stimson, MacKuen & Eriskon argue two mechanisms of policy responsiveness:
  - ① New elections can elect new politicians/representatives
  - ② Policy makers are *antelopes*, they calculate future (mainly electoral) implications of current public views & act accordingly
- ▶ Stimson et al. assume that representation is *dynamic*, with policymakers being responsive to the ideological preferences of the mass public
- ▶ Assumption is that politicians are *well informed* by movements in public opinion

# Dynamic Theory of Policy Responsiveness

- 1 *Rationality*: Politicians are *rational* actors & make decisions in the *present* that have consequences in the future given the *uncertainty* in which they operate
- 2 *Information*: Politicians receive *global information*, in that they look at aggregate public opinion to inform what they are going to do in the future
- 3 *Consensus*: “Community of politics” talks about where public opinion is *going* and there is agreement about the direction in which public opinion moves. Example: *Iraq War*, *Economic collapse*, etc.

Quarterly Policy Mood, 1958-2014





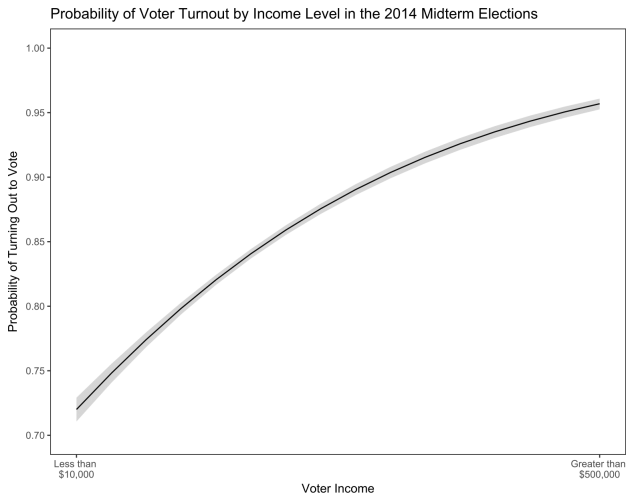
# Evidence of *System-Level* Responsiveness

- ▶ Evidence of *responsiveness* among Congressional institutions, President, & Supreme Court
- ▶ Senate achieves greater responsiveness through *electoral turnover*, same as the Presidency...why?
- ▶ House achieves greater responsiveness through *rational anticipation*, why?
- ▶ Supreme Court achieves responsiveness, even more so than constitutionally obligated, but least responsive institution. Why? Why would the Court feel the need to be responsive?
- ▶ Supreme Court concerned about *legitimacy & legacy*
- ▶ Who is really getting represented by the “government” in American politics?
- ▶ Optimistic results that the *median voter* is being represented

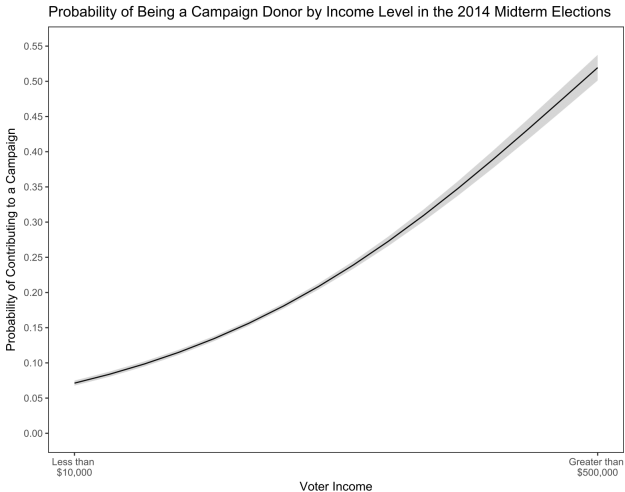
# Contrasting View & Responsiveness with a *Caveat*: Erikson

- ▶ What is Erikson's argument with respect to how politicians respond to the preferences of the mass public?
- ▶ Main criticism is that low-income voters are *less* likely to be represented by politicians, why?
- ▶ Low-income voters less knowledgeable about politics & are less likely to vote/participate than high-income voters
- ▶ How does this contrast with the view of representation brought forth by Stimson et al.?
- ▶ One constricting view is that politicians are only responsive to constituents with formed political views (i.e. wealthy), why might this be a problem?

# Recalling Resource Bias in Participation

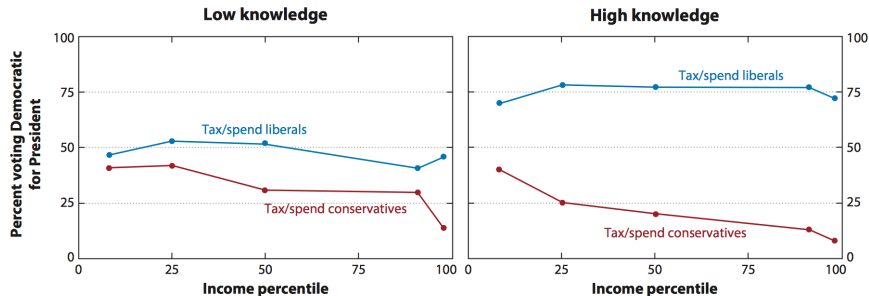


# Recalling Resource Bias in Participation



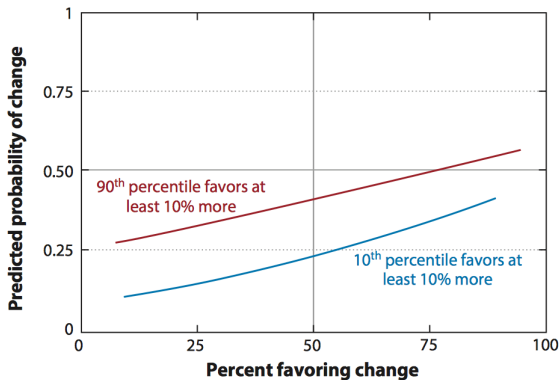
# Evidence of Divergence in Preferences by Resources

Presidential vote by social welfare opinion and income, 1980-2004



# Evidence of Variation in Responsiveness

Probability of Change by Percent Favoring Change by High/Low Income Issues



# Erikson's Findings

- ▶ Major policy change tends to move in the *liberal* direction (i.e. redistribution, government programs)
- ▶ However, upper-income voters & interest groups can slow the pace of liberal change
- ▶ Why would low & upper income voters have differing preferences?
- ▶ Public support of policies *not* a sufficient condition for policy change, why?
- ▶ Is the United States really democratic given the inherent status quo bias?

## Key Points:

- ▶ Partisan polarization strengthens value of party brand & collective accountability
- ▶ Jones finds evidence that collective accountability is possible with greater partisan polarization, majority party representatives gain votes when Congress is popular while minority party representatives lose votes
- ▶ Stimson et al. present a dynamic model of representation where political actors anticipate a cost for not being responsive
- ▶ Find evidence of responsiveness, House more like *antelopes* while Senate & Presidency require more electoral turnover for responsiveness
- ▶ Supreme Court responsive (less than president & Congress), concerned with legitimacy
- ▶ Erikson posits that median voter is not well-represented, but wealthy citizens are better represented given that they participate