Group opinion and differential responsiveness across Western democracies

An initial analysis of Great Britain and France

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Abstract

The relationship between economic inequality and political representation has received considerable scholarly attention. And yet our prior models of policy responsiveness in Europe have mostly relied on a single measure of public opinion when evaluating the extent to which policy is influenced by the public's preferences. This limitation of prior work has been due to scarcity of data. Here we develop a measure that accounts for different income group preferences regarding social spending and redistributive policies. This bifurcated measure of policy mood allows us to empirically investigate the influence of income groups on government decisions and provides some initial insights into whether we can speak of 'parallel publics' amongst low- and high income Europeans. Recent evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between political decisions and the opinions of the rich, but no association or even a negative one for the opinions of the poor. In order to study whether this is the case across Western democracies, this study estimates public opinion measures for two initial countries, namely the UK and France. Using data from the Global Public Opinions Project, this study examines to what extent policy outcomes respond to public opinion and whether we can find any difference in this responsive relationship between low- and high-income strata. Whose preferences prevail? And, most importantly, what are the implications of our findings for representative democracy?

Introduction

Some of the guiding principles of representative democracy relate to the dynamics and effectiveness of representation (Dahl 1971). In particular, classic empirical studies of the macro polity almost systematically highlight the importance of policy responsiveness, and the high levels of representation in numerous Western-style democracies (Page & Shapiro 1992; Erikson et al. 2002; Soroka & Wlezien 2010). That is, most studies – whether theoretical or empirical – agree that governments respond to citizens across representative democracies.

In theory, and if all opinions count equally, this means that governments represent the median voter through a homogenous mechanism (Downs 1957). In practice, however, we wonder whether policy responsiveness is truly such a homogenous process. After all, at the heart of most representative democracies where we observe such intentional policy responsiveness, are liberal democratic principles. This means that in systems where sovereignty is in the hands of representatives, the recognition of heterogeneity within a population (e.g. minority rights) becomes a fundamental component of democracy. Following these liberal democratic principles, we would expect that policy not only (or always) represents the median voter, but that different social groups (and thus different median voters) are taken into account. That is, rather than representing across populations, policy-makers represent different social groups within populations, all of which might have different priorities and interest. The question then becomes, *who* gets represented (Enns & Wlezien 2011)? Or, differently put, to what extent does policy responsiveness operate (similarly) within different strata of the population, or does it only hold on the most aggregate level?

Following the growing income inequality across Western democracies and the apparent salience of this macro-societal divergence, we pay particular attention to the representation of different income-groups and their redistributive preferences. First and foremost, we are interested in examining to what extent we can speak of parallel publics. That is, if we can distinguish the redistributive preferences of low- and high-income groups, do they move in tandem or do they evolve autonomously through time? This, in turn, provides us with necessary insights into whose redistributive preferences, if any, get reflected in policy behaviour. The literature opposes two schools of thought in this regard, or what scholars refer to as the dynamic vs. unequal democracy perspectives. The former argues that policies respond equally to the redistributive preferences of different macro-societal groups. In other words, responsiveness is

homogeneous in nature. The latter argues that responsiveness is a more heterogeneous process and that the polity can (and does) react differently to the opinions of different social strata.

We simultaneously examine these debates empirically, and do so across Western democracies. We first design a number of unique public opinion measures that allow us to track and compare redistributive preferences of low- and high-income strata, both between and within countries. We then connect these group-specific redistributive preferences to redistributive policy itself, and examine to what extent policy responsiveness actually differs depending on income strata. Our preliminary findings indicate that policy does not respond to the redistributive preferences of neither high- nor low- income groups. However, in one of our two first cases of analysis, policy seems to actually be negatively linked to the preferences of the poor. That is, while preferences do not seem to shape redistributive policies in general, they tend to go in the opposite direction of the demands of lower strata.

Mass preferences and policy responsiveness

While empirical and normative scholarship do not always see eye to eye, they both attribute an important role to citizens and their relationship with governments. From a normative perspective, this policy-opinion nexus presupposes that governments make policies that reflect public preferences. The ultimate purpose of elections is to provide policy congruence (Powell 2000) and therefore, responsiveness is a crucial feature of liberal democracy. In turn, empirical scholars argue that governments do, in fact, need to follow citizens' preferences in order to gain elections and avoid electoral punishment. In that regard, a broad scholarship finds that policy output closely tracks public opinion (Erikson et al., 2002; Stimson, 2004; Wlezien, 2004). This relationship is typically positive, indicating policy-makers tend to give citizens what they want (Page & Shapiro, 1983).[1]

It makes sense for governments to follow public opinion in some of the most salient domains, thereby increasing the chances that citizens approve of the chosen policy direction (Wlezien 2004). After all, citizens are more likely to approve when governments provide policies citizens strongly demand (e.g. immigration policies), rather than policies citizens hardly care about (e.g.

[1] While this positive relationship is not always true, it is prevalent in empirical studies. For conditional results, Pacheco (2013) finds that policy representation is dependent on legislative professionalism (higher representation in states that are highly professionalized) and on issue salience (higher responsiveness for salient issues).

environmental policies). While recent research efforts have found such domain-specific policy responsiveness in 'new' issue arenas such as European integration (Bølstad 2014) and immigration (Jennings, 2009), this does not mean older, economic issues have become less important for citizens. In effect, spending on social and welfare programs seem to track mass preferences in the corresponding domains in the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom (Soroka & Wlezien 2004, 2005, 2010).

Even more, considering the rising tide of inequality across Western democracies and the recent economic and financial hardship, issues related to economic inequality and income redistribution remain as important as ever. We would thus expect government policy, and particularly policies related to income and wealth redistribution, to respond to citizens and reflect their redistributive preferences. As to the direction of this relationship, we find two opposing schools of thought. Meltzer and Richard (1981) argue that growing inequality increases public's desire for redistribution. If governments truly set out to give citizens what they want, and thus follow mass preferences, growing inequality will result in increasing government action to curtail it, i.e. more redistributive policies. Benabou (2000) expects the opposite, assuming that the demand for redistribution that typically follows from increasing levels of inequality actually results in less support for government intervention and redistributive policies. He argues that, as inequality increases, more citizens stand to lose from redistributive policies and aggregate welfare enhancements.

In their seminal study, Kelly and Enns (2010) find that both inequality negatively affects redistributive preferences and redistributive policy itself. The question remains, however, how much of this relates to American exceptionalism (in terms of income inequality) and to what extent can we generalise this beyond the USA? After all, a number of prominent studies find suggestive evidence of a more positive relationship in advanced industrial societies (Moene & Wallerstein 2001, 2003; Finseraas, 2008). Results might be more heterogeneous across countries considering differences in social justice norms and political culture, as well as the structure and normativity of inequality itself (Lupu & Pontusson, 2011). While the effect of inequality on redistributive preferences is contested, these models implicitly share the assumption that governments will respond to movements in public opinion. This is in line with the median-voter theorem, which describes how elites move their behaviour in line with the distribution of preferences (Downs 1957).

At the same time, recent evidence from Europe questions the general assumption of a positive link between public preferences and policy (Peters & Ensink 2015). Instead, general support for redistribution would be associated with lower levels of redistribution. In the same line, Bartels (2017) finds that the relationship between public preferences and social policy in affluent democracies is in large part spurious. Together, these studies suggest that governments overlook demands for social spending. One possible explanation for such lack of responsiveness might be that citizens demand more social spending but refuse tax increases at the same time, making it impossible to respond to all expressed preferences in different domains (Bartels, 2017). Therefore, as a first step, we examine to what extent redistributive demands become reflected in redistributive policies:

> H1) *Policy responsiveness*: a demand for redistribution is met by the redistributive policies that governments put forward

Different publics? Heterogeneity and redistributive preferences

Recent studies have claimed that publics are mostly homogeneous (Page & Jacobs 2009; Soroka & Wlezien 2008). Accordingly, research on representation typically posits that governments respond to the median voter or the average citizen (Brooks 2006). Simultaneously, however, scholars argue populations are not necessarily homogenous entities and education, ethnicity and income can all shape preferences structures differently (Enns & Wlezien 2011). In their study on group opinion, Enns & Wlezien (2011) show that income does not appear to shape preferences in policy domains like defence, crime, the environment, health care and education. However, they do find substantial differences regarding support for welfare spending. Not surprisingly, low-income citizens support welfare spending more than their high-income counterparts. Similarly, they find that African Americans are more favourable to racial integration and affirmative action than their white counterparts (Kellstedt 2000). These findings support the idea that political preferences are driven by self-interest, usually operationalized as the conjunction of egoism, materialism, and rationality (Sears & Funk 1991). Therefore, while most studies tend to aggregate preferences and characterise the population as a singular unit, it is crucial that we additionally focus on the (growing) potential for heterogeneity in public opinion.

Since the mid-1970s, levels of income and wealth inequality have almost systematically increased throughout Western democracies (Piketty & Saez, 2003, Piketty 2015, Solt 2016). Following the self-interest rationale, income group opinions might move further away from each other as well. In this study, we focus on the differences between income-groups, and for the most part their redistributive preferences. We are particularly interested in assessing to what extent different social strata have different preferences for redistributive policies in Europe, and whether they move in parallel or evolve separately.

Scholars studying political preferences across income groups have repeatedly found significant differences in the two domains where self-interest is more prominent, that is welfare and tax policies (Bartels 2017; Cusack et al. 2008). As expected, these studies show that affluent citizens are less supportive of redistributive policies, while low-income citizens support it the most. Most scholars would also argue that mass preferences are dynamic and react in an orderly manner to economic and political stimuli (Erikson et al., 2002; Stimson, 1991, 2004, Wlezien, 1995, 2004), but they have conflicting views on how sub-publics perceive and react to such events. A first perspective indicates that different sub-publics react differently to economic and political events, while a second one points to parallel reactions across sub-publics.

Setting the first set of expectations, the classic models of political economy previously discussed (Benabou, 2000; Meltzer & Richard, 1981) assume heterogeneity in how certain groups perceive economic events. Thus, rational and self-interest driven responses to economic events produce divergent changes in mass preferences. Following their characterization, each income-group could adjust their demands for redistribution to their potential gain from it. Low-income groups would increase their demand for redistribution while high-income group preferences would remain unaltered or in the opposite direction, demanding less redistribution. Since policy preferences might be defined by material interests and in particular support for social spending and redistribution is a product of material interests such as income or exposure to economic risk (Cusack et al. 2008), we would expect group opinions to accordingly react in a self-interested manner. That is, when responding to increasing income inequality, lower-income groups would favour more redistribution, while higher-income groups would not change or do it in the opposite direction, favouring more market freedom. While empirical evidence of such divergent sub-opinion trends is limited, some authors have found periods of elevated income inequality to trigger mass ideological polarization (Garand, 2010).

A second approach points to homogenous, or parallel, movements across sub-publics' preferences. Low-income citizens, who usually are less politically sophisticated, have more difficulties to articulate their political preferences in consonance with their economic self-interest. Evidence suggesting that poor citizens favour less progressive tax policies would support this hypothesis (Bartels, 2008). Moreover, the poor seem to be less likely to take their own personal finances into account when deciding their vote (Duch & Zagarzazu 2014). Therefore, self-interest would not shape political preferences in general (Sears & Funk, 1991) or support for welfare policies in particular (Gilens 1999). Additionally, Enns & Kellstedt (2008) provide evidence that least sophisticated individuals receive the same economic messages as the most sophisticated, and therefore change their opinions similarly. Following this rationale, even if certain strata differ in terms of their policy preferences levels, they would still update them in similar ways, reacting to representations of macroeconomic events through mass media (Duch & Zagarzazu 2014).

After Page & Shapiro's (1992) study on "parallel publics", public opinion scholars have repeatedly found evidence of parallel evolution of group preferences over time in the US. Group opinions by income, education or party identification track each other closely through time (Soroka & Wlezien 2008, 2010, Enns & Wlezien 2011). Furthermore, both the poor and the rich move in tandem in a conservative direction in response to income inequality (Kelly & Enns 2010). It is important to note, however, that despite the overall parallel movement, each group opinion exhibits unique variance related to social class (Ura & Ellis 2008).

The study of parallel publics remains less studied in the European context. Nevertheless, previous research on European sub-publics similarly find that, even when they remain divided on policy issues, they move in tandem over time. In the UK and Germany, the rich and poor assessed similarly macroeconomic performance and responded quite homogenously to them through their economic vote (Duch & Sagarzazu 2014). Regarding opinion towards the income gap in Great Britain, different strata similarly moved in tandem over time (Soroka & Wlezien 2014), while they do not completely move in perfect sync. In the last two decades, the rich became less inclined to see income gaps as a problem, while middle- and low-income citizens continue to see it as much as a problem as before (Soroka & Wlezien 2014). Recent evidence from a large set of European countries show that the self-positioning a classical left-right scale

evolved in parallel across income groups during the Great Recession, finding little support for the idea of mass polarization (Gonthier 2017).

Considering these different interpretations of how publics may intrinsically behave, we can formulate three separate expectations.

> H2a) *Homogenous publics*: There is no difference in redistributive preferences between the rich and the poor.
>
> H2b) *Parallel publics*: There is heterogeneity in the redistributive preferences of the rich and the poor (different levels), but they move in tandem.
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> H2c) *Non-parallel publics*: There is heterogeneity in the redistributive preferences of the rich and the poor (different levels), and they do not respond in parallel to stimuli.

Unequal responsiveness?

Regardless of whether these sub-publics move in parallel or not, we know from the public opinion literature they each have measurable, deliberative and meaningful opinions. That means, each of them move in an orderly manner and thus their movement can provide some insights about each group's reactions to the same policies. Specifically related to redistribution, this would allow for insights into whether lower-income citizens are truly more favourable of government intervention. At the same time, we can use these observations and relate them to actual policy-making to further examine the influence of each income group on policy-makers.

Since large levels of economic inequality might affect the political representation of different income groups, the notion that every citizen should have equal voice gains salience as the income gap gets wider. However, if we cannot distinguish between sub-publics, then we cannot measure their differentiated influence over policy. On the other hand, if publics are heterogeneous in nature, we then need to revisit our assessment of policy-makers responsiveness. Is there heterogeneity in representation? By disentangling the preferences of the rich and the poor, we can measure to what extent policy responds to low- and high-income strata preferences across Western democracies. Scholars have vividly debated about the existence of differentiated responsiveness to the poor and to the rich. Some studies encounter unequal representation, namely differences in representation between the two groups, while other studies find little

support for this hypothesis. Examining whether responsiveness is homogenous across different groups has not only theoretical, but also practical implications for the day-to-day functioning of democracy. For instance, lack of congruence with the electoral options reduces extremists turnout (Lefkofridi et al. 2014). In turn, different levels of turnout across groups could partially account for differential responsiveness (Peters & Ensink 2015), with more equal representation when turnout is higher.

Among the research on the influence of income groups on policy, we distinguish here three perspectives. First, we find a stream of literature providing both theoretical and empirical reasons to expect that some groups will have fewer chances to be effectively represented. Evidence shows that older citizens are more likely to be informed than younger ones, whites more informed thank blacks, men more informed than women and those with higher income more informed than those with lower income (Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Less informed individuals are less likely to follow and discuss politics and to hold stable opinions over time, and therefore politicians may not trust the preferences of the poor to be accurate or even meaningful see (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996). In the same way, public opinion scholars have raised concerns about the reliability of less informed opinions. Since more affluent citizens tend to be better informed and more interested in politics, their measure of group preferences would be the most valid ones, and therefore more likely to provide positive findings of responsiveness when they are included in the same statistical model (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010, p.161).

Since more educated and wealthier citizens are typically better informed, they are also more likely to participate in politics by working for a political party, attending local community meetings or contributing to political candidates (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Verba et al, 1995). They are also more likely to form and articulate an opinion and to vote (Gilens 2005, Gallego 2007, Soroka & Wlezien 2008). Politicians prioritize the opinions of voters, because those are the people that hold them accountable, policy outputs might also be geared more towards voters, among which the rich are better represented (Griffin & Newman 2005). Moreover, politicians themselves tend to come from higher strata (Graxie & Godmer 2007, Morales & Saalfeld 2018), and following the preferences of the poor would – in theory – go against their self-interest. Considering this structure of incentive, governments would respond to the preferences of one or few strata with economic and political influence and directly ignore the preference of others.

According to this perspective, governments mostly respond to the preferences of one or few strata and directly overlook the preference of others. Most researchers focus on the USA and Great Britain, and find that governments generally respond to the preferences of the rich, while they do not account for those of the poor (Bartels 2008, 2017; Gilens 2012). In line with this expectation, recent research has started to examine its generalisability to other Western democracies. A recent study on Germany has shown a positive association between political decisions and the opinions of the rich, but no association or even a negative one for the opinions of the poor (Elsässer et al. 2017), suggesting that there is a systematic lack of responsiveness to low-income preferences. Similarly, Swiss MPs decisions on economic issues seem to be more responsive to the preferences of rich citizens than those of the poor (Rosset 2013). More significantly, in his cross-national study on thirty affluent democracies, Bartels (2017) focus on support for social spending and finds a "social welfare deficit". His results show a bias in responsiveness in favour of the rich, leading to systematic incongruence between public demands for social spending and actual social spending. Interestingly, he finds that European continental social democracies like France are less successful in representing the preferences of the poor than liberal ones like the UK.

A second perspective argues that unequal influences on policy makers do not necessarily lead to unequal responsiveness. Even when differential influence of income group preferences on government decisions exist, all group opinions might end up being represented if they are similar. In most policy domains, preferences are similar across income groups and policy typically corresponds with the median voter preferences (Enns 2015). However, whenever preferences are different across income groups, policy tends to respond to the preference of the economical elites (Gilens & Page 2014). Interestingly, most differences between income groups appear in two salient domains: redistribution and market regulation. (Gilens 2015). In these contested arenas, economic elites get their way shaping the set of issues and alternatives policy-makers consider through interest groups and, eventually get their desired policy outcome (Gilens & Page 2014). Additionally, economic elites would be able to shape public's preferences, reinforcing homogeneity across groups. Overall, this perspective would characterise a "democracy by coincidence" (Gilens & Page 2014), and, as such, whenever a majority of less-wealthy citizens disagrees with organized interests or with economic elites, governments ignore the preferences of the majority.

Finally, some scholars in the field of dynamic representation argue that, overall, there is no evidence of, and also no reason to argue, systematic differentiated responsiveness. If all votes count equally and policy-makers seek electoral rewards, they will tend to place policy to the median voter (Downs 1957). However, even when every opinion has an equal-weight, not each person's policy position can win. From that perspective, the distance of a given voter from the median one is the cause of differentiated responsiveness (Enns & Wlezien 2011). Not coincidentally, scholars working from this perspective find parallel movements of group opinions (Enns & Wlezien 2011, Kelly & Enns, 2010, Soroka & Wlezien 2008, Ura & Ellis, 2008).

Additionally, over-time similarity between income groups could be increasing (Page and Jacobs 2009), thereby reducing the possibility for unequal representation. If preferences are driven by self-interest but do not differ across income groups, it could be that self-interest does not differ very much, or, as previously argued, those with less resources are less able to connect their interests with their policy preferences. Either way, insofar as observable preferences move in parallel across groups, policy-makers would not be able to be more responsive to one group or another.[2] Studies that find or assume parallelism do not find differentiated responsiveness, which subsequently moderates their concerns for heterogeneous representation. After all, even where representation differs across groups, the median voter would be effectively represented (Soroka and Wlezien 2010)[3].

In line with these opposing schools of thought, we thus formulate two expectations regarding policy responsiveness across Western democracies:

H3a: *Dynamic democracy*: Policies respond similarly to both the rich and the poor.

H3b: *Unequal democracy*: Policies respond differently to different income groups

[2] Furthermore, a high degree of parallelism would impede a precise assessment of responsiveness. When trying to measure responsiveness, multicollinearity among variables would end up with one of them explaining almost all the systematic variance, distorting the other coefficients (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010, p.161). Since more affluent citizens tend to be better informed and more interested in politics, their measure of group preferences would be the most valid one, therefore offering better statistical results (Zaller 1992). Thus, measurement error and multicollinearity could indicate differential responsiveness even when true representation is exactly equal (Stimson 2011).

[3] It is important to note that, even among these scholars, differentiated responsiveness is found (to different extents) when differences in preferences exist.

Data and measurement

In this study, we create a new measure of year-country estimates allowing us to accurately track the redistributive preferences of different income groups. For the design of these opinion measures, we rely on a unique data set, collected as part of the Global Public Opinions Project. The data set includes an extensive selection of thematically grouped items from a wide range of high quality national and international opinion surveys. We particularly focus on items dealing with welfare state and social benefits, redistribution and taxes, public spending and government intervention.[4]

We divide populations in two separate income groups, namely the top and bottom quintiles.[5] Since our data usually offers income ranges instead of absolute values, the amount of citizens in each group does not always represent an exact quintile. Usually, the group with lower income represents a higher share of the sample than the top quintile. However, we expect to correct these errors using the weight measure for each survey. For each income group, we subsequently calculate the marginals of our selected items and estimate the central tendency of redistributive mass preferences. For practical reasons, our analysis currently remains limited to Great Britain, from 1983 to 2015, and France, from 1985 to 2015. For analytical purposes, we restrict our inferential analysis of France to the period 1988-2015, excluding three years for which less data was available.[6]

From our pool of marginals, we then employ a dyadic ratios algorithm that allows us to estimate a single over-time measure for each group's redistributive preferences. The dyadic ratios algorithm presupposes that, to the extent a particular iteration of a single item can be considered a valid indicator of redistributive sentiment, the change between any two values within that iteration (a dyad-ratio) is a relative indicator of our broader concept, redistributive opinions. Repeated across each point in time, for each individual iteration, the algorithm then estimates the covariance between the dyadic-ratios of each item. From this covariance, it then calculates validity estimates for the different dyad-ratio series and uses these to estimate the best possible latent measure of redistributive opinions. The algorithm then uses these estimates (the dyad-

[4] This corresponds to categories 120, 140, 160 and 180 of the project (see codebook).
[5] For reference purposes, we also calculate a measure for the middle quintile in each country.
[6] In time, our intention is to include all countries from the GPOP data set that allow us to estimate a (valid and reliable) redistributive opinions measure.

ratio series combined and adjusted according to their covariance) to estimate redistributive opinion values for each year. Further exponential smoothing increases the estimation's accuracy by accounting for potential sampling error and bias. This estimation procedure is repeated for each income group in each country.[7]

The result is a single redistributive measure for each income group in each country. For British income groups, we rely on 21 series, covering 33 time points and 344 dyads. For France, we rely on 28 series, covering 31 time points and 209 dyads. Tables 1 and 2 provide some more descriptive information about the longest series used in each country and their loading when estimating redistributive preferences for the whole population. We find one systematically unique dimension in both countries, which we theorise as public opinion towards redistribution. This dimension accounts for exactly half of the variance across our measurement models.

Table 1: Summary of longest input series from Great Britain

Item	Survey House	Coverage	Time Points	Loading
Taxes vs. Social benefits	BSA	1983 - 2015	31	0.912
Agreement Welfare help	BSA	1983 - 2015	28	0.761
Support for redistribution	BSA	1987 -2015	27	0.584
Big business vs. Workers	BSA	1986 -2008	27	-0.122
Welfare benefits are too generous	BSA	1987 -2015	25	0.939
Support for redistribution	BSA	1986 - 2015	25	0.183
Social spending	BSA	1987 -2015	25	0.946
NHS spending	BSA	1983 - 2015	20	0.537
Welfare cuts	BSA	2000 - 2015	16	0.928
Unemployment benefits spending	BSA	1985 -2015	14	0.891

[7] For a more detailed account of the methodological foundations of the dyadic ratios algorithm, we refer to Stimson (1991), Bartle et al. (2011) and McGann (2014).

Table 2: Summary of longest input series from France

Item	Survey House	Coverage	Time Points	Loading
State interventions in economic and social matters	DREES	2000-2015	15	0.823
Social inequalities intervention	DREES	2000-2014	13	0.873
Unemployment benefits limited in time	DREES	2000-2013	13	0.839
Unemployment benefits subject to counterparties	DREES	2000-2013	13	0.810
Public authorities can reduce poverty and exclusion	DREES	2000-2013	13	0.180
Public authorities can finance social protection	DREES	2000-2013	13	0.329
Health insurance solidarity	DREES	2004 - 2013	10	-0.166
Social inequalities elimination	DREES	2004 - 2012	9	0.614
Society should guarantee the basic needs of all	DREES	2004 - 2012	9	-0.299
Competition is a good thing	DREES / EVS / WVS	1990 -2013	8	0.782

We aim to link these group-specific redistributive opinions to policy outcomes, so as to explain patterns of policy responsiveness. As our main dependent variable, we use public social expenditure, a social spending measure that summarises a government's combined public and private expenditure as a percentage of GDP. This data is available from the OECD for a period between 1980 and 2015. The variable ranges from zero, indicating less spending, to 100, indicating more spending. The former typically corresponds to a more progressive or left-wing positions, whereas the latter reflects more conservative or right-wing positions. We rely on social and welfare spending as indicators of specific policy closely related to our redistributive preferences series. In addition to our redistributive preferences, our models also account for the GDP, unemployment rates and government ideology according to its composition.[8]

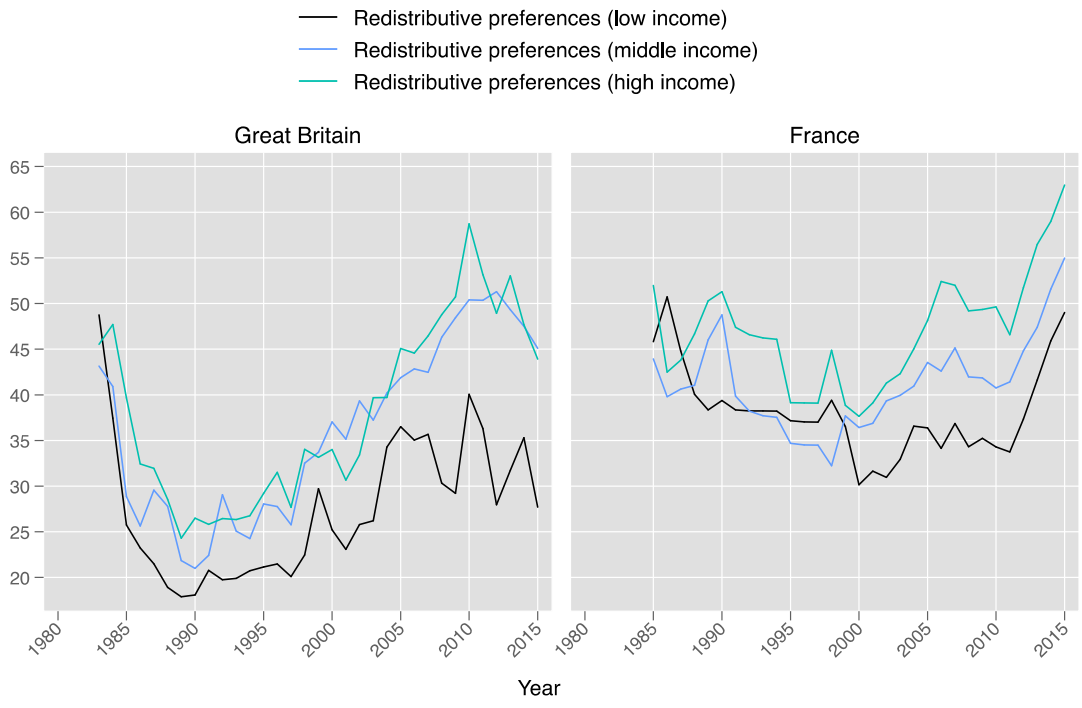
[8] We use GDP per capita (at market prices and in total USD) from the OECD. The data can be accessed here, https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm. Unemployment data comes from the World Bank and is expressed as a percentage of the total labour force. The data can be found here, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.uem.totl.zs. Government ideology corresponds to the "party control"

Descriptive results: Examining parallelism amongst publics and policy

Before we examine the diverging perspectives of policy responsiveness, we first model redistributive preferences and explore their intrinsic characteristics, both within and between countries. After all, we are interested to see to what extent redistributive preferences differ by income levels and, if so, whether these preferences diverge through time or move in parallel.

Figure 1 displays the redistributive preference series for low- and high-income categories, as well as a baseline. Higher scores indicate more market freedom and thus less redistribution (right-wing positions). Lower scores represent more government intervention and thus more redistribution (left-wing positions).

Figure 1: Redistributive preferences, income categories



variable, expressed from left hegemony to right hegemony, in the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al. 2017).

Three observations are immediately evident. First, we notice a trend towards more redistribution in the 1980s and 1990s and a near systematic trend towards free market preferences since the early 2000s.[9] Additionally, there is a persistent gap between the redistributive preferences of low- and high-income populations. Not surprisingly, those with higher incomes are systematically more opposed to redistribution and government intervention than their low-income counterparts. This is the case for both countries under analysis, so we do not find support for H2a, expecting homogeneity in preferences.

Second, despite their different absolute levels of redistributive preferences, the low- and high-income series closely track one another, as expected by H2b. We can quantify this in Table 1, where we include mean and average values of our separate series.[10] The low- and high-income series also share considerable variance through time, which suggests their redistributive preferences move in parallel. However, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows that income shapes redistributive preferences to different extents in each country. While income groups account for 41 percent of the total variance of the three series in France, it only accounts for 21 percent of the variance in Great Britain. These are relatively similar to those found by Enns & Wlezien (2011) in Great Britain, where income accounted for 12.3 percent of the variance of the more general Stimson's policy mood.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Std. dev	Min.	Max.
Britain low	33	27.51376	7.579845	17.873	48.748
Britain high	33	38.06191	9.860321	24.315	58.712
France low	28	37.97271	4.456563	32.725	48.76
France high	28	47.62621	5.61392	41.014	60.532

At first sight, however, this might appear to contradict with some of the existing literature that describes the growing income and wealth inequality since the 1960s, not only between countries but equally so within countries (Solt 2009, Piketty 2015). Yet, here it is important to remember our findings reflect the public, not the polity. Earlier scholarship has found similar income-based parallelism amongst publics, albeit mostly in the USA (Stimson 1991, Erikson et al. 2002, Enns

[9] Keeping in mind the European data traditions, we should be careful with our interpretation of absolute values here, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.
[10] The two series correlate at 0.85 for France and 0.83 for Great Britain.

& Wlezien 2011, Ura & Ellis 2008), but also provisionally in and across Europe (Bølstad 2015, Soroka & Wlezien 2010, Wlezien & Soroka 2012).

Third, all while moving in parallel, it appears that redistributive preferences between income groups are slowly diverging, particularly since the early 2000s. This would suggest some sort of polarisation between them and across countries. We can examine this in more detail by plotting the inter-group differences in redistributive preferences in Figure 2. Here, higher values indicate divergence, while lower values indicate convergence. The differences in absolute levels indicate a comparatively larger distance between income groups in Great Britain than in France. At the same time, we are more interested in their relative differences. The linear summary (blue line) in both countries suggests that divergence continues to increase. The cyclical pattern that underlies it is interesting and suggests that, much like mood in the USA, the polarisation of redistributive preferences moves in cycles of convergence and divergence. That is, the redistributive preferences of lower- and higher-income groups do not perfectly move in parallel, but are both trending upward and cyclical. Thus, while we find support for the notion of parallel publics, we simultaneously observe divergent trends, as expected in H2c.

Figure 2: Difference in redistributive preferences, high vs. low-income

Following Stimson (2004), we would expect the degree of parallelism we observe in Figure 1 to relate in similar ways to the political and economic environment, or the polity more generally. At the same time, in examining the origins of preferences, Ura and Ellis (2008) further suggest that the remaining unique variance in preference measures we can observe in Figure 2 is likely to reflect politically relevant differences in how income affects responsiveness. In the remainder of this study we focus on how these two observations come together.

Diverging perspectives of policy responsiveness and democracy

Before we engage in our main research question, namely to what extent lower- and high-income groups relate to actual redistributive outcomes, it is worth to examine whether government are responsive to their aggregate publics when it comes to redistribution. This can have an important impact on how we interpret our further findings. In Table 4 we provide a first basic analysis of redistributive policy.

Table 4: Social Spending Responsiveness to public's preferences

	Great Britain		France	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Social Spending $_{(t-1)}$	0.393***	0.435***	0.442*	0.442*
	(0.105)	(0.107)	(0.190)	(0.189)
Redistributive preferences $_{(t-1)}$	-0.0196	-0.0302	0.142	0.143
	(0.111)	(0.108)	(0.098)	(0.098)
GDP $_{(t-1)}$	0.368***	0.350***	0.315*	0.309*
	(0.081)	(0.079)	(0.148)	(0.149)
Unemployment $_{(t)}$	0.032***	0.034***	0.025*	0.025*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Government Ideology $_{(t-1)}$		0.005		-0.001
		(0.004)		(0.004)
Constant	-0.298***	-0.320***	-0.146	-0.137
	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.127)	(0.129)
Observations	25	25	25	25
R-squared	0.953	0.956	0.897	0.897

Models report results form Prais-Winsten regression analysis. T statistics in parentheses.
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Models 1 and 3 explore predictors of social expenditure (as a percentage of GDP) accounting for social spending in the previous year, redistributive preferences and real GDP per capita, which are all lagged one year. Additionally, we include unemployment, expecting it can have an immediate effect on social spending to a certain extent irrespective of policy-makers decisions. Models 2 and 4 directly include a control measure of government ideology. Substantive results for both models are largely the same. Our first findings do not find support for the general assumption that policy follows public's preferences in advanced industrial societies. Redistributive preferences of the overall population in each country do not seem to shape social spending, at least not at the conventional levels of statistical significance. In France, the regression coefficients for public preferences are not significant and positively signed, suggesting that increases in demand for redistribution would be associated to a decrease in social spending. In contrast, the negatively signed coefficients in Great Britain suggest that policy-makers are more likely to give their citizens what they want, at least in terms of redistributive preferences. However, we are cautious about the interpretation of these first results and conclude that we not find conclusive evidence that redistributive preferences sufficiently explain social spending, as we would have expected from our first hypothesis.

Instead, it seems that social spending is closely related to economic factors. On the one hand, it is conditional to GDP: under economic hardship, social spending would be significantly reduced, while it would increase when the economy eases. To a lesser extent, higher unemployment would also increase social spending. Interestingly, government ideology does not have a significant effect on social spending. That is, regardless of the party composition of governments, their redistributive policies would respond to economic performance rather than their ideology. Overall, these first results characterize a social spending model molded by economic factors and quite insusceptible to political preferences (in both the demand and the offer ends).

We turn now to study to what extent redistributive preferences of low- and high-income groups relate to social spending. Does this lack of responsiveness to redistributive preferences mask a differentiated responsiveness across income groups or does it echo a lack of responsiveness to both the rich and the poor? Models included in Table 5 account for both high- and low-income redistributive preferences and provide some initial insights.

Table 5: Social Spending and responsiveness to income group preferences

	Great Britain		France	
	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Social Spending $_{(t-1)}$	0.354***	0.382***	0.265	0.271
	(3.57)	(3.95)	(1.45)	(1.45)
Low-income redistributive preferences $_{(t-1)}$	-0.0521	-0.057*	0.110	0.125
	(-1.90)	(-2.11)	(1.05)	(1.16)
High-income redistributive preferences $_{(t-1)}$	0.005	0.010	-0.021	-0.023
	(0.16)	(0.34)	(-0.36)	(-0.40)
GDP $_{(t-1)}$	7.483***	7.035***	7.109**	6.749**
	(5.26)	(5.00)	(3.12)	(2.93)
Unemployment $_{(t)}$	0.580***	0.599***	0.623**	0.623**
	(5.52)	(6.06)	(3.05)	(3.01)
Government Ideology $_{(t-1)}$		0.069		-0.029
		(1.23)		(-0.39)
Constant	4.969***	4.308**	5.971*	5.692*
	(3.97)	(3.24)	(2.32)	(2.26)
Observations	25	25	25	25
R-squared	0.947	0.962	0.844	0.836

Models report results form Prais-Winsten regression analysis. T statistics in parentheses.
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Models in Table 5 replicate the specifications from Table 4, only substituting the measure of general public redistributive preferences by the two separate measures of high- and low-income citizen's preferences. The results go in line with those pointed by our previous models, but we can, nonetheless, be more specific.

Neither the preferences of the rich, nor those of the poor are decisive for social spending. In Great Britain, we find preliminary indications that government respond to the redistributive opinions of lower-income groups, although our coefficient only reaches conventional levels of significance when controlling for government ideology. That is, British policy-makers' decisions suggestively align with the preferences of the poor in the redistributive domain. The coefficients of high-income preferences are non-significant and positive, indicating the British government does not follow redistributive preferences of the high-income group. In France, we do not find clear evidence of responsiveness either. However, seeing how the coefficient for the

redistributive preferences of rich is negative, our results suggest the French government responds to high-income group. This diametrically opposes both countries in terms of which group governments seemingly respond to. For both countries, GDP and unemployment are the main drivers of social spending, while the ideology of governments continues to appear irrelevant.

Following these initial results, we do not find evidence that policies respond to the rich and the poor (equally), as expected in H3a. In fact, exempt some mere indications of responsiveness, policy-makers would equally overlook the preferences of the rich and the poor. However, while not statistically significant, our models open the possibility that redistributive policy is responsive to the low-income citizens in Great Britain. These results go in line with recent evidence suggesting that English speaking democracies are more effective at accounting for the preferences of the poor than continental European democracies, such as France (Bartels, 2017). Overall, we see some heterogeneity regarding policy responsiveness to different income groups, as we would have expected in H3b. However, our results do not suggest that policy follows the preferences of the rich in detriment of the preferences of the poor. Rather, redistributive preferences seem to have little effect on social expenditure. Moreover, our results point to a rather economically driven model in which social spending is a function of GDP and unemployment.

Conclusion and discussion

By measuring redistributive preferences across income groups, we are able to shed light on how they relate to each other and to policy. Our comparative analysis allows us to replicate some of the results we find in American scholarship, and expand them to the European arena. In particular, we dissect redistributive preferences of the rich and the poor to see to what extent they differ. We subsequently track their movement over time to assess to what extent we can talk about parallel sub-publics. By means of our unique measures, we are also able to test whether any of the main models of group responsiveness apply to the redistributive domain in Europe. Our results, far from confirming any of these assumptions, provide initial and suggestive evidence of different patterns in our two cases of study.

Regarding the nature of sub-publics, our measures add evidence pointing to stable differences in redistributive preferences across income groups. Low-income sub-publics tend to demand

more redistribution than high-income ones both in Great Britain and France, suggesting that self-interest does play a role in shaping group preferences. Since series within countries tend track each other, we find support for the notion of parallel publics also in Europe (Gonthier, 2017). Nonetheless, we detect two interesting trends in their movements. First, a cyclical pattern of convergence and divergence of income groups preferences over time. Second, an increasing polarization of redistributive preferences across groups that surpasses their internal cycles. Since preferences seem to be self-interest driven, their divergent trends might respond to an increase in economic inequality. Moreover, the polarization of preferences decreases the chances that all citizens feel (and are) actually represented regarding redistributive policy.

We do not find clear evidence, however, that redistributive policies respond to public preferences, neither general nor group specific ones. Instead, British and French social expenditure seem to be associated to GDP and unemployment. The fact that these predict redistributive policies better than preferences and government ideology picture a somewhat depoliticized arena in which economics, rather than politics, shape policy. Regarding differentiated responsiveness, we could argue that in Great Britain we find responsiveness to the poor to a certain extent but non-responsiveness to the rich. In France, we could argue we find non-responsiveness to the poor and hints of elitist responsiveness. While we were trying to assess heterogeneity in responsiveness within countries, we find a rather homogenous lack of responsiveness in France, and a heterogeneous lack of responsiveness in Great Britain.

Further research should explore the role of inequality (in terms of level and structure) on both preferences polarization and policy responsiveness. In turn, the lack of responsiveness could be studied as a predictor for economic inequality. By expanding our number of cases, we expect to add answers to this set of questions.

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