Affluence and congruence: unequal representation around the world*

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Abstract

Do elected representatives reflect the preferences of the citizens they represent? Recent studies from the U.S. and a number of other democracies have found that legislators tend to represent better the preferences of affluent citizens. But we still know little about how widespread this bias is. To answer this question, we gathered every publicly available survey of national legislators in the world and matched it with mass survey data. Our dataset consists of 92,000 elite observations and 3.9 million citizen observations spread across 565 country-years, 52 individual countries, and 33 years. Using a variety of methods, we find that around the world, legislators' preferences are consistently more congruent with those of affluent citizens. However, we also find that this inequality varies substantially by issue domain: while the affluent are better represented on economic issues, the poor seem to be over-represented on cultural issues.

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Do elected representatives reflect the preferences of citizens? This question is central to understanding how representative democracy works—and under what circumstances it works better. It also informs much broader theories about inequality and democracy. If some citizens' preferences are disproportionately better represented, then basic assumptions about the median voter, for instance, may need to be rethought. Unequal representation may also worryingly erode citizens' satisfaction with and commitment to democratic institutions (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Wlezien 2017; Arnesen and Peters 2018; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017).

And yet, the answer to this question remains elusive. Inspired by seminal work on unequal representation in the U.S. (e.g., Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Butler 2014), an emerging body of studies has uncovered remarkable inequalities in representation: across a number of democracies, policymakers appear to better represent the preferences of the rich than they do those of the poor or the middle class (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Lupu and Warner 2017; Rosset 2013; Schakel and Hakhverdian 2018; Rosset, Giger, and Bernauer 2013). But these studies analyze single countries or small samples of cases, typically in Europe. Moreover, they use a wide variety of data and measure representation in very different ways, making it difficult to aggregate their findings. As a result, we still lack an encompassing sense of the extent to which modern electoral democracies around the world achieve the ideal of equal representation.

There are good reasons to think that the unequal representation scholars first documented in the U.S. may not travel. Most of these studies attribute it to the uniquely outsize influence of money in American politics (Flavin 2014; Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012). After all, U.S. election campaigns are the most expensive in the world. If money biases the policymaking process in favor of the rich, then we could well find far less inequality in other countries, where the role of money in politics is more circumscribed.

In this paper, we take these questions to the broadest possible dataset of comparative, high-quality mass-elite data. We gathered every publicly available academic survey of elected national representatives and matched each one to a nationally representative mass survey. Our sample consists of 92,000 elite observations and 3.9 million citizen observations spread across 565 country-years, 52 individual countries, and 33 years.

This represents more than a tenfold increase in country-years over prior comparative studies, and much wider geographic and temporal coverage.

We also improve on previous studies by using multiple approaches to calculate the distances between mass respondents and elected representatives—all of which use the full distribution of preferences to measure unequal representation. Finally, ours is the first paper in this field to move beyond left-right placement, a metric with serious limitations. We draw on coordinated mass and elite surveys in Latin America to examine congruence on finer-grained economic and cultural issues.

We consistently find that mass-elite congruence is significantly and substantially higher for the affluent than it is for the poor. Affluence bias is not limited to the U.S. and a handful of advanced democracies; it is widespread among modern electoral democracies. Yet we also find that this inequality varies substantially by issue domain. While the affluent are better represented on economic issues, the poor seem to be over-represented on cultural issues. Around the world, representation appears to be much more unequal than previously thought.

Democracy or plutocracy?

Conventional theories of representative democracy view their guiding ideal as a system of "continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Dahl 1971, 1; see also Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999; Pitkin 1967). Ordinary people have policy preferences, they choose leaders who will act upon those preferences, and the policy preferred by the majority becomes law. Canonical theories thus divide the representative process into two stages: first, congruence —the process of generating a body of representatives that reflects the preferences of the electorate —and then, responsiveness —the process by which these representatives generate policies that reflect citizens' preferences (Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978).[1]

1 . For instance, a recent special issue on "Advances in the Study of Democratic Responsiveness" includes studies of both responsiveness and congruence (see Esaiasson and Wlezien 2017). Lax and Phillips (2012) define both responsiveness and congruence in terms of policy outcomes. We follow the convention in comparative work to define responsiveness in terms of policy outcomes and congruence

Empirical scholars have been debating just how representative democratic governments really are (see, e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983; Shapiro 2011; Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2007; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Burstein 2003, 2014; Miller et al. 1996), but it seems clear that democracies sometimes—and perhaps quite regularly—fail to achieve this ideal. The particular failure that has concerned recent scholars—and which concerns us in this paper—focuses on inequalities in the representative process (Erikson 2015; Canes-Wrone 2015; Enns and Wlezien 2011). In the U.S. (Rigby and Wright 2013; Flavin 2014; Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012, 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005; Gilens and Page 2014; Ellis 2013; Rhodes and Schaffner 2017) and a number of other democracies (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Lupu and Warner 2017; Rosset 2013; Schakel and Hakhverdian 2018; Rosset, Giger, and Bernauer 2013), elected representatives appear to better represent the preferences of affluent citizens than those of less privileged citizens.[2]

Although much of the U.S. research has been concerned with responsiveness, broader empirical research on representation typically encompasses both congruence and responsiveness. A large body of research, focusing mostly on advanced democracies, has developed around the question of how congruent representatives are with mass preferences overall (e.g., Converse and Pierce 1986; Miller et al. 1996). These studies have focused primarily on the overall congruence between citizens and their representatives (e.g., Miller et al. 1996; Converse and Pierce 1986; Esaiasson and Wlezien 2017; Soroka and Wlezien 2010), and how differences across countries —especially electoral institutions —condition that congruence (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Huber and Powell 1994; Powell 2006, 2009, 2013; Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010; Ferland 2016; Lupu, Selios, and Warner 2017; Rasmussen, Reher, and Toshkov, Forthcoming). However, they have largely elided the question of whether certain groups within countries enjoy disproportionately more congruence with their elected representatives.

We focus in this paper on congruence. In the theoretical framework developed by

in terms of preferences or positions.

2 . There is some debate among scholars of U.S. politics about the extent of this bias (e.g., Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Wlezien and Soroka 2011; Enns 2015; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Branham, Soroka, and Wlezien 2017), although it is widely acknowledged to exist.

Miller and Stokes (1963), congruence is a necessary step in the process of representation (see also Powell 2004). While we cannot infer every behavior from representatives' stated policy preferences, we know that they regularly act upon those preferences, particularly in the important agenda-setting phase of the legislative process (e.g., Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Carnes and Lupu 2015). Moreover, mass-elite congruence means that elected representatives are "not found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented" (Pitkin 1967, 210), an important element of representation. Theorists have also highlighted the normative value of congruence with regard to descriptive representation (e.g., Mansbridge 1999). Mass-elite congruence is thus an important element of representation, both on its own and as part of the broader process. Empirically, congruence also seems to affect important democratic indicators like the public's satisfaction with democratic institutions (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Wlezien 2017; Arnesen and Peters 2018; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017). Finally, in practice, studying congruence also allows us make broad comparisons over space and time, something that is critical to understanding how modern electoral democracy works for citizens around the world.

We also focus in this paper on what some scholars call *collective representation*. We ask whether representative bodies collectively reflect the preferences of the electorate. A long tradition in political theory going back to Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill emphasizes collective representation (see Pitkin 1967; Weissberg 1978). Scholars of representation in the U.S. sometimes focus instead on *dyadic representation*, the extent to which politicians represent their districts. In Western Europe, studies often measure the congruence between voter preferences and the policy positions of their preferred party (e.g., Miller et al. 1996; Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015). Since we are interested in broad cross-country comparisons, it makes practical sense to study collective representation because some political systems (e.g., closed-list PR) produce little connection between representatives and their district constituents, and in other systems (e.g., open-list PR and many presidential systems) political parties are all but irrelevant. For this reason, we follow other comparative empirical work on congruence and focus our analysis on collective representation (e.g., Golder and Stramski 2010; Powell 2009).

Why might elected representatives disproportionately represent the preferences of the more affluent? Scholars of U.S. politics tend to blame the outsize influence of campaign contributions (Flavin 2014; Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012). Affluent voters are the source of most of the money involved in political campaigns (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Gilens 2012), so it seems highly plausible that they use their wealth to influence the selection of policymakers. Although we know far less about the role of money in politics outside the U.S. (Scarrow 2007), campaign contributions may similarly bias representation in other democracies.

Other explanations are also plausible (Erikson 2015). Most obviously, poor people may be less likely to vote than the rich, allowing reelection-motivated incumbents to discount their preferences (e.g., Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012; Lijphart 1997). Alternatively, elected representatives may discount the preferences of the poor if their views are less strongly held or less coherent. Representatives may be catering to the preferences of the most informed citizens, which also happen to be the most affluent. Regardless of the mechanism —something we leave for future research —there are plausible reasons to think that representation in many electoral democracies may be biased in favor of the affluent.

Measuring representation around the world

In an ideal world, we would study representation by comparing the preferences of citizens on every possible policy proposal with actual policy outcomes. The study that comes closest to this ideal is Gilens (2012), who compares the preferences of citizens on every policy proposal that publicly available surveys asked them to consider and whether or not the policy was approved (see Barabas 2016). Others compare the left-right placement of mass survey respondents with the positions of their elected representatives as revealed by their legislative votes (Bartels 2008; Ellis 2013; Flavin 2014). Outside the U.S., however, public opinion polls are far less frequent or detailed, and far more difficult for researchers to obtain. Legislative roll-call votes are also frequently unreported, and in parliamentary systems most of the legislative process has taken place by the time a bill comes up for a vote. In order to study representation across

a broad set of country contexts, we have to instead focus on opinion representation.

In order to compare mass and elite preferences, we first gathered information on the left-right self-placements of elected representatives. We collected all the publicly available surveys of national representatives or candidates from cross-national and national data repositories, as well as a general literature search.[3] We included an elite survey in our dataset if the respondents were elected national legislators —or, in the case of candidate surveys, the survey allows us to establish whether the respondent was elected —and where the full population of national legislators were sampled.[4] Finally, our dataset only includes surveys that asked representatives to place themselves on a scale with "left" and "right" anchors (or close variants thereof, such as "liberal" and "conservative").

In some country-years, we have access to more than one elite survey, and given the relatively small population of legislators, there is a nontrivial chance that these samples overlap, potentially exacerbating nonresponse bias. To avoid this bias, we selected only one elite sample per country-year. Where multiple elite surveys were available for the same country-year, we used the one for which fieldwork was more proximate. For instance, a survey from 2007 would be dropped in favor of a survey from 2004 for an observation in 2005. When multiple surveys were fielded at approximately the same time, we prioritized larger surveys with greater cross-national comparability (e.g., as part of the Comparative Candidates Survey).[5] Our final elite sample includes 92,000 unique legislator-year observations.

One common concern with elite survey data is the extent to which elite samples are representative of the population of national legislators. If a legislator's decision to respond to the survey is correlated with her left-right position, then we are unlikely to recover a sample that accurately characterizes the distribution of representatives'

3 . Further information about sources, variables, and coding decisions are available in the online appendix.

4 . Although our dataset includes Members of the European Parliament (who are national representatives), we do not include them in our analysis because they may not be directly comparable to other legislators. However, in the online appendix, we show that our results are robust to including MEPs in the analysis.

5 . Our results are robust to using all elite surveys simultaneously—that is, not dropping any potentially duplicate samples (see the online appendix).

preferences, and our measure of congruence will be biased. Despite scholars' "understandable suspicion" about biases in representativeness (Laver 2014, 214), various studies have failed to find any notable patterns suggesting strategic selection into legislator surveys (Smith, Herrera, and Herrera 1990; Fisher and Herrick 2013; Byrne and Theakston 2016; Saiegh 2009).

Even so, we address representativeness in two ways. In our main analysis, we post-stratify our elite samples by gender and party affiliation (Maestas, Neeley, and Richardson 2003; Bailer 2014), recovering a distribution of legislators that more closely resembles the population as a whole.[6] As an alternative to weighting, in analysis reported in the online appendix, we also examine congruence with a limited sample of elite surveys that achieved a response rate of at least 80 percent.[7] Because legislator surveys are sampled from the entire universe of legislators, a 100 percent response rate corresponds to a perfectly representative sample, and higher response rates impose upper bounds on a sample's unrepresentativeness. Across both of these approaches, we find no evidence to suggest that our results are affected by nonresponse bias.

For each elite sample meeting our criteria, we also gathered data on contemporaneous mass preferences. We began by identifying the legislative term that each elite survey sampled, information that was either available in the data or could be coded from other sources.[8] We then matched these elite surveys with mass surveys that included both left-right self-placement and some measure of affluence from any of the years during the elite respondents' term. For instance, an MP surveyed in 2004 for a 2003-2005 term would be matched to mass survey respondents from 2003, 2004, or 2005.

Since mass data are more widely available, we chose mass surveys more selectively. We privileged mass surveys that were conducted as part of the same study as matching

6 . Weights are constructed using raking. Where one of these variables (party affiliation and gender) is unavailable, we use only the available variable. Where neither is available, we weight each respondent equally. Our main results are robust both to including only elite respondents for whom we have information about both partisanship and gender, and to not post-stratifying the samples at all (see the online appendix).

7 . We also tested other thresholds of response rates, with no effect on our results.

8 . In two cases, information about the legislative term was not available so we coded the year the legislator was surveyed and matched the response to mass samples only in that year.

elite surveys. We also sought mass surveys in which question wording was coordinated with an elite survey, as the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) Americas-Barometer and the PELA surveys have done since 2010. When neither of these types of mass data were available, we used mass surveys in which the response scale was most similar to that of elites' responses. Finally, when arbitrating between the remaining options, we deferred to those embedded in large, cross-national projects to increase comparability across country-years. Despite this minimal approach to adding mass samples, many country-years contain multiple citizen surveys. Yet unlike with elite data, the probability of overlapping samples is minimal, and so we use all available citizen responses. The resulting dataset includes nearly 3.9 million unique citizen-year observations.

To measure affluence, we develop a rank-ordering of indicators, which privileges measuring wealth over household income and occupational status.[9] Where we have data on ownership of durable goods (e.g., a car or refrigerator), we use multiple correspondence analysis to generate a factored index of affluence (see Filmer and Pritchett 2001). Where these data are not available, we use household income or occupation, in that order. We then generate quintiles from the material wealth and income variables, and we recode occupational data into general categories (e.g., "white-collar professional").[10] Because these affluence quintiles are computed separately for each country-year, our measures of class-based disparities in congruence are inherently relative to the national distribution of wealth. Thus, although "rich" and "poor" are likely to reflect very different levels of wealth across countries, we use these terms only in refererence to the most- and least-affluent quintiles within each country-year.

Our final sample includes 565 country-years, covering 52 countries and 33 years.[11] Although our dataset represents all of the publicly available data on elite preferences,

9 . We prefer measures of wealth because (1) nonresponse to questions about household income is typically high (in some country-years nearly 40%), and (2) occupational structures are difficult to compare across countries.

10 . Of the 565 observations in our data, 379 use asset wealth as a measure of affluence, 172 use household income, and 14 use occupation. Our main results are consistent if we focus only on the cases where we can measure affluence using wealth (see online appendix).

11 . The countries are listed in Figure 2. The years are 1967-2015, although most of the data begin in the 1990s.

most of the data come from Europe and Latin America. As a result, we cannot claim to have a representative sample of the world's democracies. But only additional data gathering will allow us to extend the analysis beyond these regions.[12]

Across such a large number of surveys, of course, the question about left-right self-placement varies. Most importantly, different studies offer respondents different response scales, typically ranging from 5 to 11 points. To make these responses comparable, we rescale them to range from -1 to 1. Since the scales themselves may affect responses, our analyses control for the scale used in each mass and elite survey and for the differences between the scales provided to elite and mass respondents in each country-year.[13]

Measuring congruence

We analyze congruence in two ways. Our preferred method is to generate dyads between each mass respondent and each elite respondent in a particular country-year (see Boas and Smith, Forthcoming). We measure congruence as the left-right distance between each citizen-legislator pair and then regress that distance on the citizen's level of affluence.[14] Our models also include citizen and legislator random effects to account for dyadic dependence (Aronow, Samii, and Assenova 2015). Since our dependent variable is a measure of distance, larger values indicate less congruence.

This method is attractive for a few reasons. Most importantly, it allows us to characterize the complete set of relationships between citizen preferences and legislator

12 . The U.S. is not in our dataset because no publicly available survey of Members of Congress has been conducted since Miller and Stokes (1963)—and their study did not ask a left-right item. We draw on a recent survey of parliamentarians in several African countries below, but neither these data nor the mass surveys conducted by Afrobarometer include a left-right item.

13 . Our data do not contain the anchoring questions required for joint rescaling methods, so we cannot rule out measurement problems from variation in how individuals interpret left-right scales. However, below we show that our results are consistent among respondents with high levels of political knowledge. Our similar findings using finer-grained issue positions in Latin America also give us further confidence that our left-right results are not artifacts of measurement problems.

14 . Put formally, our ideal model is $y_{d(c,\ell)} \sim \mathcal{N}(\alpha + \mathbf{x}^{\intercal}_{d(c,\ell)}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \gamma_c + \delta_\ell, \sigma^2)$, where $\gamma_c \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2_c)$ and $\delta_\ell \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2_\ell)$. Here y is distance on the left-right dimension; $\mathbf{x}$ is a vector of indicator variables for each affluence quintile; $d(c, \ell)$ refers to the citizen-c, legislator-ℓ dyad; and the γ_c and δ_ℓ are random effects for citizens $c \in \mathcal{C}$ and legislators $\ell \in \mathcal{L}$. The coefficients of interest are $\boldsymbol{\beta}$.

positions. In the language of Golder and Stramski (2010), this dyadic approach measures many-to-many congruence, or collective representation. Differences in the mean positions of voters and legislators affect the measure of distance, but so do differences in the variances of the distributions, which this approach captures.[15] In addition, it allows us to control for individual-level covariates. Unlike other measures of congruence that collapse distributions into aggregate summary statistics, dyads allow us to model voter and legislator characteristics directly, and so ensure that our results are capturing only class-based differences in representation.

Using this dyadic approach increases our sample to 99 million observations. The size of this dataset and the effort to estimate 4 million legislator and citizen random effects run up against computational constraints.[16] Instead, we compute two simplified models. First, we drop the legislator and citizen random effects and estimate the model using iterative weighted least squares (IWLS), which reads in "chunks" of data and updates a running coefficient estimate until all the data are used. Although dropping random effects underestimates uncertainty, our point estimates are unaffected. As an alternative, we bootstrap estimates by taking 250 random samples of 50,000 observations, fitting our preferred model with random effects and computing quantiles from the 250 sets of coefficient estimates. Bootstrapping allows us to recover more accurate measures of uncertainty, but could introduce bias since our observations are dyads and, therefore, not independent across resamples. Both methods have disadvantages, but to the extent that they yield similar estimates, we should be confident that we have closely approximated what computing the full model would have returned.

Our second method for measuring congruence characterizes the distance between citizens' and legislators' preference distributions in each country-year. We compute the Earth Mover's Distance (EMD), a flexible measure that calculates the amount we would have to move probability mass from one distribution to transform it into the

15 . The alternative most widely used in prior studies measures only differences in mean positions. Comparing the distances between poor/rich citizen mean positions and mean legislator positions, our results are very similar (see online appendix). Still, we prefer our measurement approaches because they also account for differences in the variances of the mass and elite distributions.

16 . We attempted to estimate these models on our university's high-performance computers, but they failed to converge within the maximum runtime of two weeks.

other distribution. The EMD has recently been shown to better capture similarity between distributions than alternative measures of congruence (Lupu, Selios, and Warner 2017). Higher values of the EMD indicate more distance between the two distributions, and so less similarity and lower congruence. The aggregate analysis using EMD collapses some of the information in our data, but has the advantage of being much more tractable computationally.

To estimate the effect of affluence on congruence, we separately compute the EMD between legislators and each affluence quintile. We then simply regress these congruence measures on indicators for each affluence group, using the rich as the baseline.[17] We include fixed effects for country, year, and the original scale of the left-right item. We drop country-years for which the elite sample included fewer than 30 legislator to ensure that our results are not driven by small samples.[18]

Is there an affluence bias?

Do these data reveal an affluence bias in representation around the world? Figure 1 shows the results of all three of our estimation methods. For each quintile of mass respondents, the leftmost estimates come from the dyadic model estimated using IWLS (hence the very tight confidence intervals), the middle estimates are 250 bootstrap replicates from the dyadic data, and the rightmost estimates come from models using the EMD.

These results imply that the distribution of less affluent citizens' left-right preferences are consistently further away from elected representatives' than those of the most affluent. Regardless of how we estimate these relationships, the evidence of an affluence bias is consistent. Moreover, at about 0.03, this difference is substantively meaningful. Since the mean EMD among the rich is 0.18, this effect size suggests that on average, less affluent voters can expect elected representatives' positions to be about 16 percent

17 . Put formally, we estimate $y_{i,t} \sim \mathcal{N}(\alpha + \mathbf{x}_{i,t}^{\intercal}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{u}_{i,t}^{\intercal}\boldsymbol{\theta}, \sigma^2)$, where y is the EMD, $\mathbf{x}$ is a vector of indicator variables for each affluence quintile, $\mathbf{u}$ are indicators for the fixed effects $\boldsymbol{\theta}$, countries are indexed by $i \in \mathcal{I}$, years are indexed by $t \in \mathcal{T}$, α is the intercept and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ are the estimates of interest.

18 . Our results are consistent if we set this threshold either lower or higher, or if we interact the affluence indicators with the indicator for question scale (see online appendix).

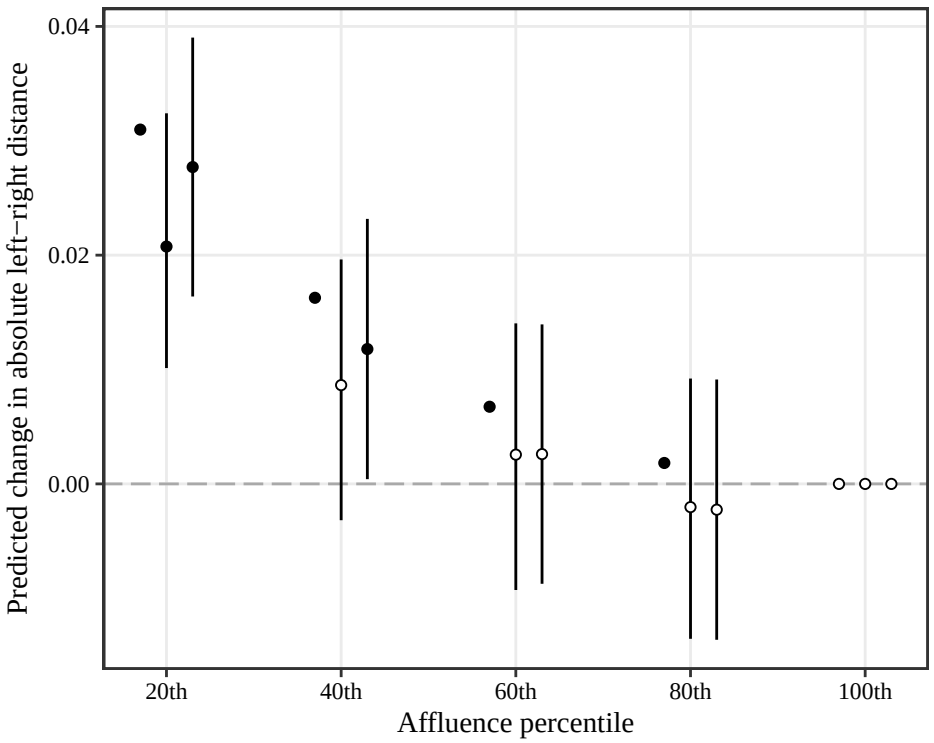

Figure 1: Affluence bias around the world. Values represent the relationship between affluence and absolute left-right distance to legislators, with the richest quintile as the baseline. Dots indicate point estimates with lines for 95% confidence intervals. For each quintile, dots on the left are from the dyadic model without random effects, estimated using IWLS, dots in the middle are mean estimates from 250 bootstrap replicates from the dyadic data, and dots on the right are from models using the EMD. See the online appendix for complete regression results.

further from theirs than can more affluent voters.[19] Our cross-national findings are not as stark as those of U.S. scholars, who find that elected officials respond *only* to the preferences of the very affluent; our findings show that the top half of the distribution is overrepresented. Still, some unequal representation appears to be the norm across democracies.

Among scholars of U.S. politics, there is some debate about whether representation should be evaluated using the full set of available issues or the subset on which rich and poor citizens disagree (see Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Gilens 2009). As in the U.S., our data similarly reveal a more pronounced affluence bias when the preferences of the rich and poor diverge. We reestimated our models on the 25 percent of country-years in which the absolute difference in mean left-right preferences between the least and most affluent citizens was greatest. The overall patterns of affluence bias are the same (see online appendix), but twice as large. When the poor and rich disagree, the poor can expect to be 31 percent further away from their representatives than are the rich.

Given the wide geographic and temporal coverage of our dataset, an obvious question is whether our finding of an on-average affluence bias is actually more circumscribed. Figure 2 shows the degree of affluence bias that we see in each country-year in our dataset (since 1995). Although there is variation over time and space, we see no obvious regional or temporal patterns. Cases of affluence bias (in shades of red) do not seem especially prevalent in more recent years nor limited to specific parts of the world, though certain countries do seem particularly biased. There is also some evidence that affluence bias may be more pronounced in newer democracies than in older ones. Figure 2 also demonstrates the substantial noise in our data, which is unsurprising for survey data. This reinforces the benefit of our large dataset over the much smaller datasets used in recent comparative work.

These results imply that there is something systematic about many contemporary electoral democracies that leads elected representatives to reflect more closely the preferences of affluent citizens, a far cry from the ideal of democratic representation.

19 . For reference, we also computed the average differences in means across our 565 country-years. The average difference between the least affluent and legislators is 0.17, compared to 0.15 for the most affluent. This difference is statistically significant and represents an effect size of 14%, in line with the results presented in Figure 1.

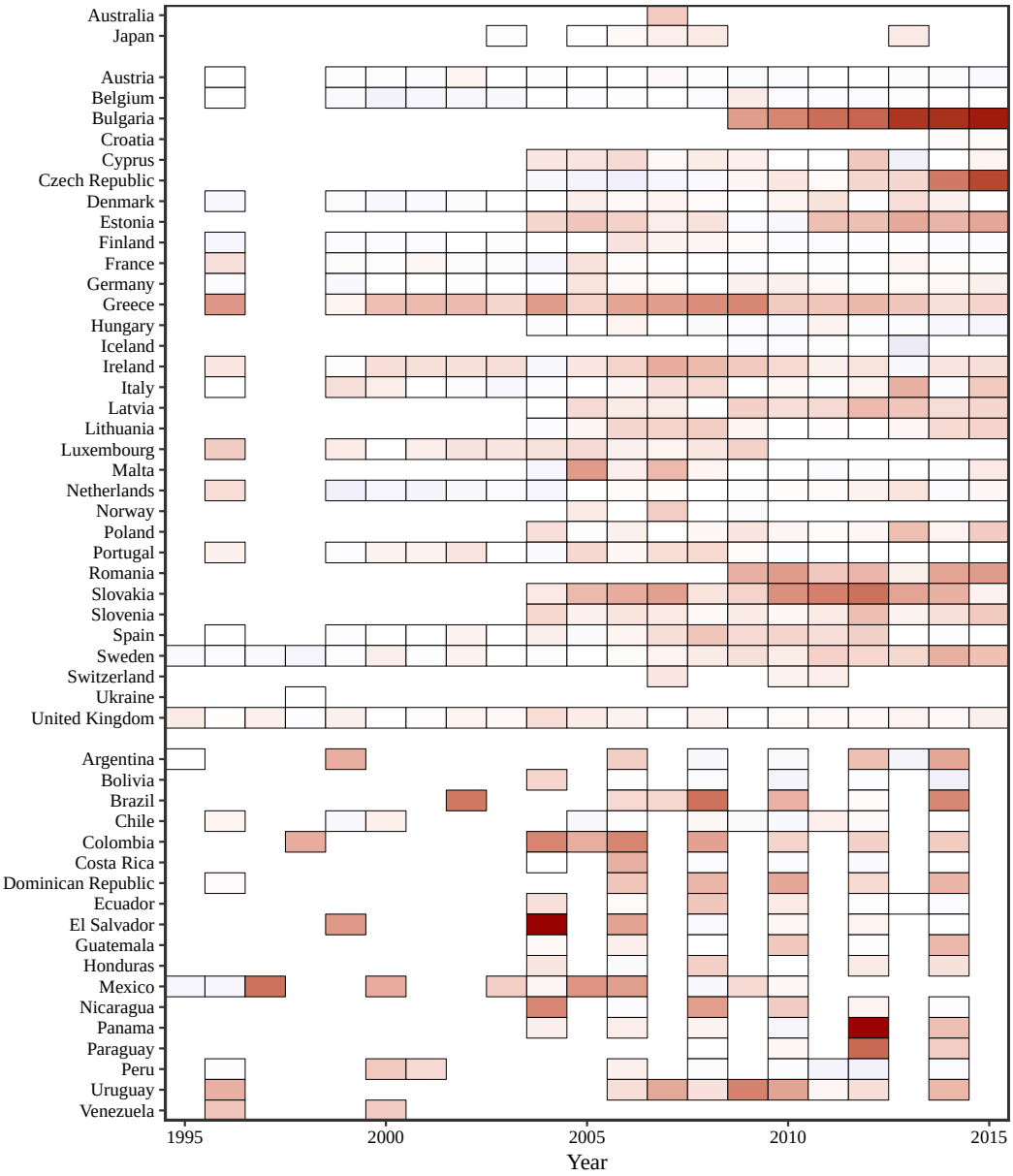

Figure 2: Affluence bias around the world. Each cell is shaded according to the size of the affluence effect. Darker red indicates greater bias in favor of the affluent, while darker blue indicates bias in favor of the less affluent. For clarity, observations before 1995 are not plotted.

At least in terms of left-right positions, the affluence bias documented in the U.S. seems to be the rule, not an exception.

Beyond left and right

Relying on left-right positions alone comes with many limitations. It is well-known that these survey-based measures rely on conceptions of left and right that can vary across contexts and individuals (Zechmeister 2006; Harbers, Vries, and Steenbergen 2012). We also know that respondents with less formal education may find it more difficult to place themselves on the left-right scale, particularly in developing contexts (Zechmeister and Corral 2013). Moreover, it is well-known that individual survey items are far noisier measures of preferences than are indexes composed of multiple measures (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). In order to construct the largest possible comparative dataset, our main analysis relies on left-right placements, but doing so forces us to use a noisy and imperfect measure.

Fortunately, in a subset of our broader sample, we have finer-grained measures of preferences. The AmericasBarometer and Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA) surveys have harmonized the wordings and scales of a series of issue questions since 2010,[20] yielding high-quality data on mass-elite congruence in greater detail than is afforded elsewhere. Although this means focusing on just one region and a more limited period of time, these additional data allow us both to verify whether we see similar patterns in finer-grained data and to dig deeper into policy domains than is possible with the single left-right item.

We focus on three issue-areas. First, to fix a baseline for comparison, we use the same 11-point left-right question we used in our main analysis. Second, we generate a factored index of economic preferences using four questions that asked respondents to rate their agreement (on a 7-point scale) with statements about the role

20 . Our dataset includes the 2010, 2012, and 2014 AmericasBarometer mass surveys and the PELA survey from the matching legislative term. We do not have information on economic preferences in Panama because the economic questions were not asked in the AmericasBarometer surveys there. We also do not have data on Venezuela because PELA has not conducted legislator surveys there during this period.

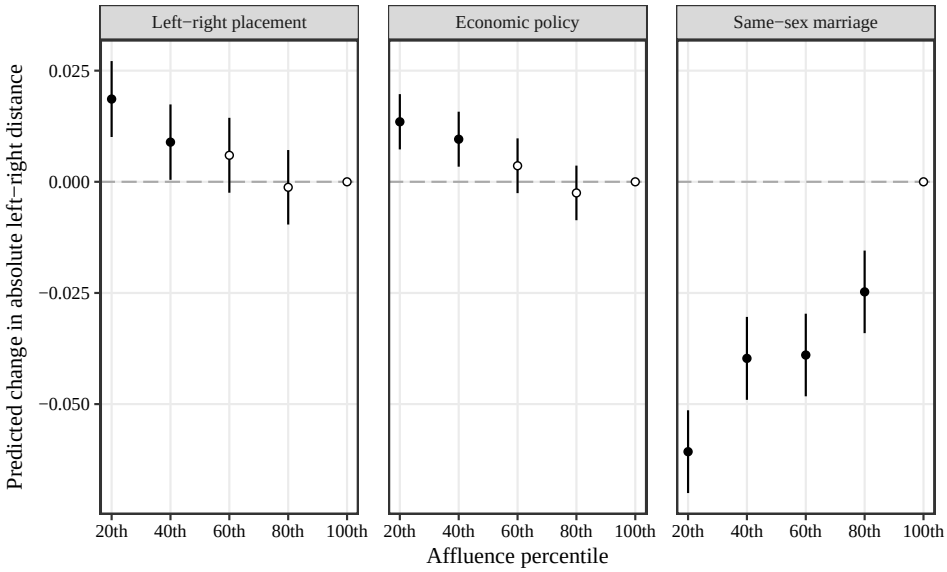

Figure 3: Affluence bias by issue-area in Latin America. Dots represent estimates of the relationship between mass affluence quintile and congruence on left-right placement, economic policy, and same-sex marriage. The baseline is the most affluent quintile. Lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. See the online appendix for complete regression results.

of the state in ownership of natural resources, ensuring citizens' wellbeing, creating jobs, and providing healthcare. Since the question wordings are nearly identical, we factor citizens and elites within the same country-year together. Finally, we examine preferences on cultural issues using a question that asked respondents how strongly they approve or disapprove (on an 11-point scale) of same-sex couples' right to marry. As above, we rescale the issue-areas to the range [-1,1], where lower values indicate the left, support for state intervention in the economy, and support for same-sex marriage. Since this dataset is orders of magnitude smaller than our complete cross-national dataset, we now simply use our preferred modeling strategy (mass-legislator dyads with citizen and legislator random effects).

Figure 3 reports the results from these models. As in the broader dataset, we find a similar affluence bias when we use left-right positions in Latin America. When we focus specifically on economic preferences, we again find a very similar affluence bias. As

with the left-right, there appears to be a graduated relationship between affluence and congruence: although less precisely estimated, the wealthier quintiles seem closer to the legislature. These estimates suggest that congruence increases somewhat smoothly with affluence, though the data may be too noisy to estimate this relationship precisely. The substantive effects are somewhat smaller than in our global analysis: in left-right terms, the wealthiest voters can expect to be about 9 percent closer to legislators than can the poorest, and on economic issues about 7 percent closer.

However, we find the precise opposite with respect to cultural issues: the poor appear to be substantially *over*represented relative to the affluent on the issue of same-sex marriage—37 percent closer to legislators' preferences than the richest. Unfortunately, the LAPOP-PELA data only provide us with this one item capturing the cultural dimension, so we cannot generalize too far. However, as we note below, we find similar results with two other datasets. On both economic and cultural issues, we find evidence of political inequality, but on cultural issues it appears to favor the preferences of the poor.

Our discussion so far has focused on absolute biases, but we may also want to know the direction of the bias. The lefthand panel in Figure 4 plots the mean preferences of the poorest and richest mass quintiles along with the mean preference of legislators on economic issues by country.[21] For the sake of comparability, we normalize the average poor preference to zero for each country. Quite intuitively, in nearly every country in the region, the rich on average prefer less state intervention in the economy than do the poor. The exceptions are Argentina and Honduras, where the difference between rich and poor is negligible. In most countries, legislators prefer even less state intervention in the economy than does the richest quintile, suggesting that their preferences are probably closer to the very affluent. Their rightward bias is particularly extreme in cases like Chile and Paraguay. In one case, Ecuador, legislators are in between the rich and the poor, but substantially closer to the rich. In only one case, Bolivia, do legislators on average prefer less state intervention in the economy than even the poor. But during the time-period for which we have data, Bolivia was governed by a populist leftist president who had written a new constitution that built in extraordinary electoral advantages for

21 . These means pool across the matched samples we have for each country.

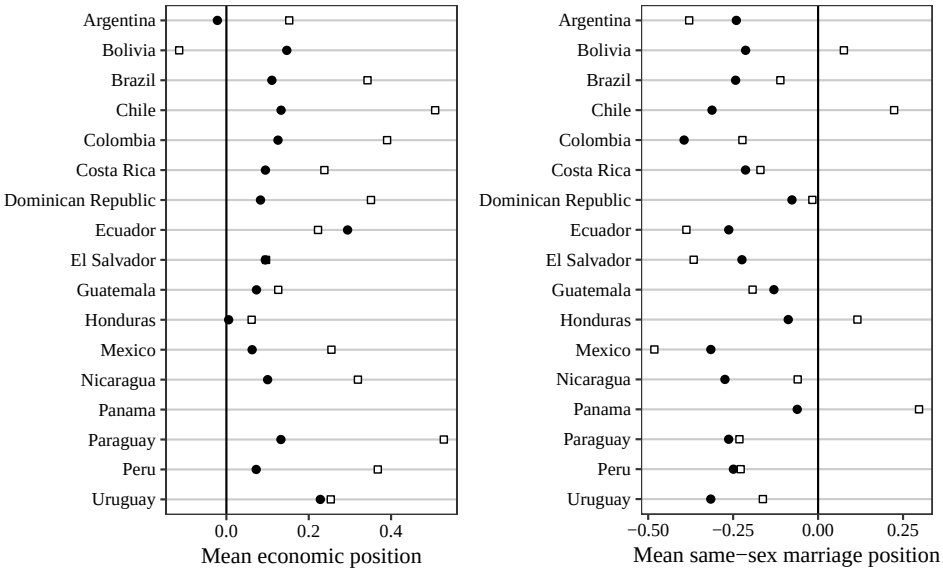

Figure 4: Mean economic and cultural preferences in Latin America. The left panel plots mean preferences on economic issues, while the right panel plots mean preferences on same-sex marriage. For each country, the mean preference of the poorest quintile of citizens is normalized to zero, with legislators' mean preference represented by squares and the richest quintile of citizens' mean preference in circles.

his leftist ruling party (Levitsky and Loxton 2013). So the unusual leftward bias in that case is unsurprising; indeed, had we had data on Venezuela for the same time period, we would have expected a similar pattern.

The righthand panel in Figure 4 plots mean preferences on same-sex marriage. Unlike on economic issues, more affluent citizens in every country in the region are more liberal when it comes to this cultural issue. Legislators, on the other hand, are either less supportive of same-sex marriage than the poor or somewhere between the poor and the rich on this issue. Nearly a mirror image of the economic issues, in all but two countries, legislators' preferences are closer to those of the poor than to those of the rich. This result reinforces the limitations of focusing solely on left-right positions: the direction of the bias may depend on whether respondents have in mind the economic or cultural dimension.

No other datasets allow us to measure congruence on issues beyond the left-right

to the extent that our Latin American data do, but we provide some evidence in the online appendix that these results hold more broadly. First, we examine harmonized citizen and legislator surveys conducted as part of the Swedish National Election Study, with waves covering seven election cycles from 1985 to 2010. We focus on a range of questions on economic and cultural issues, including prompts on reducing the size of the public sector and banning pornography. These results closely mirror those from Latin America: the poor are substantially underrepresented on economic issues but overrepresented on cultural ones. Second, following Clayton et al. (2019), we match Afrobarometer data with surveys of MPs provided by the African Legislatures Project (Mattes and Mozaffar 2016). Since policy questions were not asked in either survey, we code whether respondents gave particular issues when prompted to name their country's most important problems. These results are very similar. Legislators are more likely to prioritize the economic issues that affluent citizens prioritize and the cultural issues the least affluent prioritize. Together, these data indicate a consistent trend. Around the world, the poor appear to be most underrepresented on economic issues and overrepresented on cultural issues.

Unequal representation and democracy

A basic tenet of democracy is that citizens' preferences are equally reflected by their representatives. But recent research has raised doubts about whether modern electoral democracy fulfills this promise. In the U.S. and a number of other democracies, policymakers seem to better represent the preferences of the affluent. That bias appears so large in the U.S. that Gilens and Page (2014) conclude that, "America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened" (577).

Comparative scholars may write this off as yet another peculiarity of the exceptional U.S. political system. Most researchers attribute unequal representation in the U.S. to the influential role of money in American politics, an area where the U.S. is undoubtedly an outlier. But whether similar patterns obtain broadly across modern democracies remains an open question. Until very recently, comparative scholarship on representation had largely failed to compare the representation of different groups in society.

More recent comparative work uncovers some affluence biases, but focuses on a single or a small number of cases and often relies on problematic left-right placements. Moreover, these studies use different types of data and measures of representation, making them difficult to aggregate.

This paper takes a more global approach than previous work. Studying every available survey of national legislators matched with a mass opinion survey, we have shown that affluence bias is much more the norm than the exception. To be sure, some U.S. studies find that the rich—and only the rich—influence policymaking (Gilens 2012). Our comparative results are less damning. On average, middle-class citizens can expect their preferences to be more or less equally represented in their national legislature. The poor, on the other hand, seem to be underrepresented in the average democracy. Representation may be *more* unequal in the U.S., but it is still unequal elsewhere. Around the world, less affluent citizens can expect their preferences to be less well reflected among their elected representatives than are the views of their more affluent neighbors.

In contrast to previous studies, we also find some evidence to suggest that the direction of inequality varies by issue domain. The preferences of the rich seem to be overrepresented in the area of economic policy, while the preferences of the poor appear to be overrepresented on cultural issues. In one sense, this is good news because it means that the poor are not *always* underrepresented. Indeed, there is some comparative evidence that the poor and the rich may base their voting behavior on different issue domains (e.g., Shayo 2009; De la O and Rodden 2008; Calvo and Murillo 2019). On the other hand, economic concerns are typically the most salient issues for the majority of citizens around the world, especially the poor (Singer 2011). It remains troubling that the rich seem to get better representation on the issues people care about most. Still, we need much more research to establish whether unequal representation takes different forms in different issue domains.

Our findings beg an obvious question: why are the affluent better represented on average? This is a question we hope to take up in future research. There are some obvious candidates, like campaign finance regulation, lower turnout among the poor, or poor people having less coherent or crystallized preferences – explanations some

scholars have already examined in the U.S. context. Other possibilities, especially across countries, might include electoral institutions, economic conditions (most obviously economic inequality), government ideology, and the role of civil society and organized interest groups (e.g., Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Klüver and Pickup 2019; Rasmussen, Mäder, and Reher 2018; Rasmussen and Reher, Forthcoming; Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Rosset, Giger, and Bernauer 2013).

Two explanations seem particularly plausible to us. One is that elected representatives misperceive the preferences of their constituents. Representatives' perceptions are in fact an important link in the representational chain developed by Miller and Stokes (1963). There are reasons to think that with the spread of opinion polls, representatives' information about public preferences could be more accurate (Geer 1996), but there is also growing evidence of biases in how legislators and their staffs derive impressions of public opinion (Butler 2014; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger, and Stokes, Forthcoming). Another possibility is that elected representatives reflect better the preferences of the affluent because they themselves tend to be affluent. This possibility has recently received renewed attention (Carnes and Lupu 2015; Carnes 2013).

Comparative scholars ought to take up a broader consideration of when and why representation becomes unequal. Our dataset includes all the available data, and more can be added as new elite surveys become available. We have used this large dataset to study inequalities in representation across socioeconomic groups, but the data may well reveal other inequalities. Are men better represented than women? Are the preferences or urban residents better represented than those of rural residents? Are citizens living in some regions (e.g., capitals) or those from certain ethnic groups better represented? Our dataset can be used to evaluate a whole host of empirical questions on democratic representation beyond the ones we explore. Comparative studies of representation and congruence often focus on describing entire polities or on how institutions explain variation across countries. It is time we ask deeper questions about how and why modern democracies throughout the world represent citizens' preferences unequally.

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