

# Introduction to the American Political Process

## Class 20: Money in Politics

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# Readings

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1. “The policy preferences of the American public as a collective whole—unlike the opinions of many individuals—tend to be stable, coherent, consistent, and reflective of the best available information. They generally reflect people’s true values and interests. **They are worth heeding.**”
2. The problem is **unrepresentativeness**.
3. As a result, policy outcomes do not reflect the preferences of average voters:
  - Average citizens have almost no independent influence over policy outcomes.
  - Wealthy citizens have significant influence over policy outcomes.
4. Wealthy Americans want different things from government than average Americans → at best, *democracy by coincidence*
5. How do the wealthiest citizens exercise influence?

# Causes of unrepresentativeness

1. The power of wealthy individuals
2. The power of corporations and organized interest groups
3. Extreme activists and polarized parties
4. Restricted choices
5. An unrepresentative electorate
6. Manipulated turnout
7. Misinformation
8. Unrepresentative institutions
9. Lobbying
10. Fragmented authority
11. Separation of powers/gridlock

# Why people don't vote

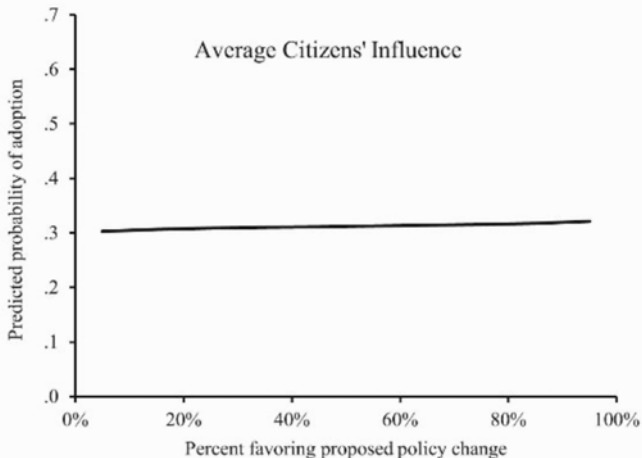
## 1. Barriers

- Personal registration
- Election Day is not a work holiday
- Voter ID laws
- Long lines and delays (particularly in urban areas)

## 2. Felon disenfranchisement

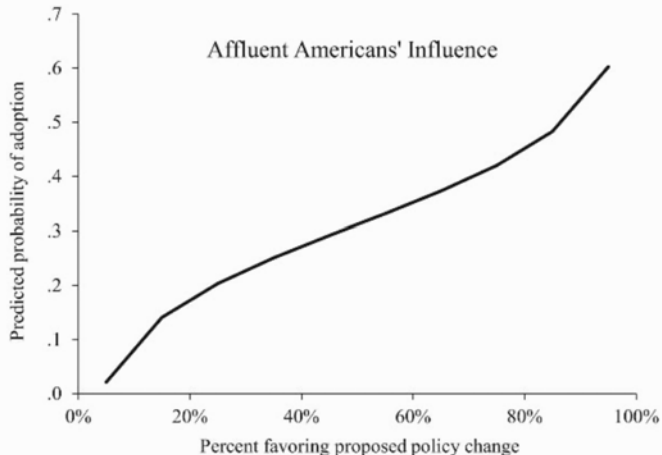
## 3. Nature of electoral choices

# Average citizens have little to no influence



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## By contrast, wealthy citizens have a great deal of influence



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# Techniques of influence by the wealthy

1. Giving money to parties and candidates
2. Access to officials
3. Shaping the climate of opinion

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# Wealthier Americans have different preferences

TABLE 4.1 Policy preferences of multimillionaires vs. average citizens

	Percent in favor		
	All citizens	Multimillionaires	Difference
<i>Jobs and incomes</i>			
Government should see to food, clothing and shelter	68	43	-25
Minimum wage should be above the poverty line	78	40	-38
Increase the earned income tax credit	49	13	-36
Government should see to it that every one can find a job	68	19	-49
Government should provide jobs for the unemployed	53	8	-45
Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	50	23	-27

## *Health care*

National health insurance financed by tax money	61	32	-29
Willing to pay more taxes for health coverage for all	59	41	-18

## *Retirement pensions*

Expand Social Security	55	3	-52
Social Security should ensure minimum standard of living	68	55	-13
Raise the cap on income subject to Sec. payroll tax	60	47	-13

## *Education*

Spend whatever is necessary for really good public schools	87	35	-52
Government should make sure everyone can go to college	78	28	-50
More government investment in worker retraining	57	30	-27

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# Detecting evidence of donor influence

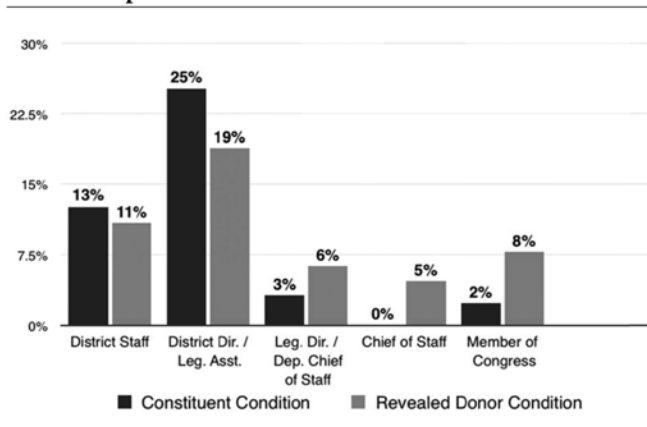
Why do observational studies fail to detect an effect of donations?

1. Legislators prefer meeting with their allies
2. Interest groups give to legislators who are already ideologically aligned
3. Or, suppose interest groups only give to legislators whose support is *not* assured

To get around these problems, we need an experiment.

Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. "Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 3 (2016): 545–58. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

**FIGURE 1 Access Gained to Congressional Staffers, by Experimental Condition**



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