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Not just money: unequal responsiveness in egalitarian democracies

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of research has documented political inequality along class lines at different stages of the representation process. This article contributes to our understanding of unequal responsiveness and its causes with an in-depth study of Germany that investigates the link between preferences and policymakers' decisions. Using an original dataset covering 746 survey questions on specific reform proposals from 1980 to 2013, we provide the first study of a European democracy that investigates whether responsiveness patterns vary between economic and cultural policies or different governing coalitions. We show that decisions are skewed towards upper occupational and educational groups, irrespective of policy type or government composition. These results advance the discussion of potential mechanisms for unequal responsiveness. As privileged groups are overrepresented in parliament, our findings support the argument that the social bias in the make-up of parliaments matters for substantive representation.

KEYWORDS Class; descriptive representation; Europe; inequality; responsiveness

1. Introduction

In European democracies, inequality has increased throughout the representation process. Political participation has become skewed in favor of affluent citizens, and parliaments have become less descriptively representative than in the past. Paralleling these developments, political outcomes are more in line with the preferences of social groups with higher status. Nevertheless, few studies have investigated the direct link between *citizens' preferences* and *policymakers' decisions*, even though this policy responsiveness is crucial for political representation (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209). Recent studies have analyzed patterns of unequal responsiveness but have predominantly focused on differences between income groups and not distinguished between policy dimensions. In addition, discussions about potential mechanisms that bring about unequal responsiveness are still in their infancy.

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This article aims to advance our understanding about unequal responsiveness in Europe and its underlying potential mechanisms through an in-depth study of Germany. Based on over three decades of policy-making, it analyzes whether decisions made in the German parliament (*Bundestag*) are unequally responsive to different social groups. To quantify and investigate potential bias in political representation, we analyze an original dataset covering 746 survey questions on specific reform proposals in the *Bundestag* from 1980 to 2013. In addition, the dataset allows us to explore whether responsiveness patterns vary across the 'economic' and 'cultural' dimensions of the policy space (Hooghe *et al*., 2004; Kriesi *et al*., 2008) or by the party composition of the government. The results show that political decisions are systematically skewed in favor of citizens that have achieved higher education and incomes and belong to higher social classes. This pattern of representational inequality holds across different government coalitions and for both (re-)distributional and cultural policies. Combining these findings with those from other national studies, this article discusses which mechanisms plausibly explain unequal responsiveness.

This article makes three unique contributions. First, it introduces a new comprehensive dataset of policy responsiveness in a major European democracy. Apart from a few exceptions, most European studies consider opinion congruence rather than political responsiveness.[1] While establishing opinion congruence is an important analytical step, we think that examining the link between subgroup preferences and political decisions is a necessary complement to establishing unequal representation. Second, this study is the first to investigate responsiveness towards social classes in addition to income and educational groups. Focusing on class is important since numerous studies have shown that the relative position in the labor market is crucial for political preference formation, both for voters (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014) and legislators (Carnes, 2013; Mansbridge, 2015). Third, we go beyond existing studies by analyzing responsiveness patterns in two distinct dimensions of politics – the economic and the cultural – and across government coalitions. Based on our findings, we are able to advance the discussion on the plausibility of potential mechanisms that lead to unequal responsiveness. We conclude that it is necessary to complement monetary explanations with those that focus on other forms of political inequality, in particular the descriptive (mis-)representation of disadvantaged social groups in parliament.

This article is structured as follows: The next section briefly reviews the existing literature on unequal representation and positions the study within the current discussion about unequal responsiveness. Section 3 discusses the case selection and describes the dataset and research strategy. Section 4 reports the empirical results. The final section summarizes the study's findings, discusses different explanations and explores future research questions.

2. Unequal representation in European democracies

A growing number of empirical studies shows that political decisions are biased in favor of wealthier citizens. While representational inequality is well documented for the United States (US) (Bartels, 2008; Flavin, 2012; Gilens, 2005, 2012)[2], similar bias has recently been shown for European democracies such as Sweden (Persson & Gilljam, 2017) and the Netherlands (Schakel, 2019; Schakel & van der Pas, 2020). Consequently, policy outcomes, such as social spending, correspond more strongly to the preferences of the rich than to those of the poor (Donnelly & Lefkofridi, 2014; Peters & Ensink, 2015).

Although unequal representation has increasingly gained scholars' attention in recent years, the mechanisms causing these patterns are still unclear. So far, a number of plausible explanations have been proposed (Rosset, 2016). First, wealthier citizens directly make their voices heard with money – especially through private donations and campaign financing. Scholars have stressed the role of private money as the primary cause of unequal responsiveness in the United States, as the bulk of party and campaign funding comes from a relatively small number of large donors and pro-business interest groups (Gilens, 2015a; Gilens & Page, 2014). In contrast, most European political parties and election campaigns are largely funded by state subsidies and regular membership contributions (Koß, 2010; Naßmacher, 2009). And although lobbying and interest group pressure are common features of all advanced democracies, the nexus between interest groups and politics differs widely (Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013). As existing evidence points to similar representational inequalities in the US and selected European countries, however, some authors have cast doubt on the argument that monetary influence is the most powerful explanation (e.g., Schakel, 2019). In any case, we should expect these money-based mechanisms to be most influential with regard to (re-)distributional policy decisions, since the rich and pro-business groups plausibly share similar (material) interests in these issues.[3] No study has systematically investigated differences in responsiveness across policy dimensions in European countries up until now, however.

Political inequality may also result in unequal responsiveness through indirect means. Voter turnout has become much more imbalanced in many countries over the last several decades. Turnout rates are considerably lower among the poor than among affluent citizens (Armingeon & Schädel, 2015; Gallego, 2015), and other forms of political engagement are equally if not even more skewed than electoral participation (Dalton, 2017; Schlozman *et al*., 2012). If policy makers listen more carefully to those who are more active, more knowledgeable or more consistent in their political preferences, this will create unequal responsiveness. Since both the level and differences in

voter turnout differ across democracies, the degree of unequal responsiveness should differ between countries and over time, too.

Another potential mechanism for unequal responsiveness is the growing (mis-)representation of lower social classes in legislative bodies. Across rich democracies, blue-collar workers and citizens with little formal education have all but disappeared from the ranks of parliamentarians (Best, 2007; Carnes, 2013; Evans & Tilley, 2017). Studies from different European countries show that the opinions of parliamentarians are more congruent with the preferences of the social groups from which they come (Lesschaeve, 2017; Rosset & Stecker, 2019; Schakel & Hakhverdian, 2018). If lower social classes' perspectives are systematically underrepresented in parliamentary discussions, unequal descriptive representation could lead to biased decision-making (Mansbridge, 2015). Recent evidence for this mainly comes from economic policy-making in the US, where lawmakers are vastly richer than average citizens (Carnes, 2013; Carnes & Lupu, 2015; Griffin & Anewalt-Remsburg, 2013).[4] European parliaments are less dominated by the superrich but descriptive misrepresentation mainly stems from differences in education and occupational background. A vast majority of parliamentarians are university graduates, many of whom have never worked outside politics and come from higher-status occupational groups (Bovens & Wille, 2017; O'Grady, 2019). Consequently, selective responsiveness should be observed not only towards top income groups but also towards upper educational and occupational groups. As occupational background has been shown to be crucial for preference formation in both the economic and cultural policy dimensions (e.g., Oesch, 2013), descriptive misrepresentation likely biases responsiveness across policy dimensions.

Finally, several authors argue that there is a 'supply-side gap' of political competition (Hillen & Steiner, 2020). In European democracies, there are few parties that combine culturally conservative and economically leftist positions. Because parts of the working class and poorer citizens hold such positions, the party system is misaligned to their preferences, which may translate into unequal substantial representation of those citizens' concerns (Oesch & Rennwald, 2018; Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009). If this were the case, center-left and center-right coalition governments should nevertheless produce partial correspondence with these citizens' preferences in different policy domains.

Taken together, the debate on potential explanations for representational inequality is still inconclusive. Most importantly, we lack more fine-grained empirical analyses on European democracies that go beyond showing broad patterns of (unequal) responsiveness. While we cannot test all of the aforementioned mechanisms directly, our empirical analysis of Germany provides new empirical evidence to address these questions, since we examine policy responsiveness across policy dimensions and different government

coalitions. Moreover, we investigate responsiveness towards social classes in addition to income and educational groups. In conjuncture with the findings in other countries, these findings advance our understanding of the mechanisms underlying unequal responsiveness.

3. Data and methods

When analyzing policy responsiveness, different authors often utilize different methods and measures. Many studies concerning the US assess the relationship between policy preferences and *legislative decisions*, whereas most studies on Europe focus on (opinion) *congruence*. Arguably, the assessment of legislative action – i.e., some form of political decision – is most suited to understanding the link between public will and politicians' reactions to it, and hence to investigate responsiveness.

In the empirical sections, we use Germany as a case study to analyze policy responsiveness in a major European democracy. Germany introduced state funding for political parties as early as 1959 and extensively relies on public funds to finance them (Woll, 2016). Donations and private campaign financing are limited and comparable to most other European democracies (Koß, 2010). Regarding the social make-up of the German *Bundestag*, people who have attained low or middling levels of education are vastly underrepresented, as are blue-collar workers and lower-grade employees. In the last legislative term, for example, 85 per cent of the German parliamentarians held a university degree, compared to just 15 per cent in the general population. An overwhelming proportion of parliamentarians previously worked as civil servants, business owners or were otherwise self-employed – they constitute more than 50 per cent of MPs in the current *Bundestag*, compared to about 15 per cent in the German labor force.

We replicate Gilens (2005, 2012) research design and relate the opinions of citizens with different occupations and levels of education to actual political decisions. The analysis is based on our database 'Responsiveness and Public Opinion in Germany' (ResPOG), which includes information on public opinion and political decisions for 746 policy proposals. We selected questions about reform proposals from two German representative surveys polled for different media: *Politbarometer* and *DeutschlandTrend*. The former covers the period from 1980 to 2013 and the latter from 1998 to 2013. The dataset contains relatively few questions from the early years and more from 2000 onwards, but since the Christian Democrats governed from the early 1980s until 1998, the data include a sufficient number of questions for each government coalition since 1983 (Figure A-1 in the Appendix shows the number of questions per year and party coalition in government).

Questions in the dataset usually deal with political decisions that were high on the political agenda at the time or that are of general public interest and

ask about the respondents' agreement with a specific policy proposal. Our data include reform initiatives proposed by the government, opposition parties, or actors outside parliament, such as trade unions. Issues range from the minimum wage or cuts in social insurance benefits to proposed changes in abortion rights or same-sex marriage (Table A-1 in the Appendix reports the number of questions per policy field).

For the purpose of our analysis, we subdivided the questions into two dimensions of politics that capture the traditional economic left-right divide and a cultural policy dimension.[5] While the poles of the left-right dimension are consistently designated as state versus market, various labels have been used to describe the cultural dimension of the policy space (Beramendi *et al*., 2015; Hooghe *et al*., 2004; Merkel, 2017). All approaches have in common that the economic dimension captures policies that mainly deal with (re-)distribution and market regulation, whereas the cultural dimension focusses on the expansion of individual rights and the demarcation of political communities (Beramendi *et al*., 2015). For this study, it is instructive to distinguish policy proposals along these two dimensions because it reveals whether responsiveness differs in these areas.[6] Roughly two-thirds of the questions in the dataset relate to the dimension state vs. market (see Figure A-2, left panel, in the Appendix).

Next, the degree of support within different social groups was calculated for each of the 746 questions. Respondents were grouped according to their occupation, education or income. Building on the scheme developed by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992), this study distinguishes skilled from unskilled blue-collar workers, routine white-collar employees, higher-grade white-collar employees, civil servants, and business owners. In treating civil servants as a distinct category, we deviate from the Erikson-Goldthorpe scheme because their employment relations differ from those of other white-collar employees in terms of social security benefits and job security. Thus, they are expected to hold different political opinions. Civil servants and business owners are treated as the 'highest' social classes in the dataset. Unfortunately, the differences between occupational groups are not always as fine-grained as one would hope. For example, business owners include both large-scale entrepreneurs and individuals in a precarious labor market position, such as freelancing journalists. Despite this heterogeneity, however, the highest occupational groups are also those with the highest average income (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015), thus capturing vertical social stratification.[7]

Education is the second main variable. Here, this study distinguishes between those who have attained low, medium and high levels of education based on their secondary education. After finishing primary school, German schoolchildren attend one of three types of secondary school, depending on their grades: *Hauptschule*, which entails schooling through the ninth

grade; *Realschule,* from which they graduate after tenth grade; or *Gymnasium,* which qualifies them to attend university. These three tracks define the level of education in this study. Unfortunately, the data does not allow any further differentiation of education. Figure A-3 in the Appendix compares the educational composition of occupational groups in the first and the last years of our analyses, 1980 and 2013. It mirrors the trend of an increase in average education in Europe over the last decades. However, clear differences remain: a majority of unskilled workers still comes from the group with lowest education, whereas higher-grade employees, business owners and civil servants comprise the highest share of highly-educated both then and now.

Information about respondents' income is only available in the *DeutschlandTrend* survey (i.e., for 222 of 746 questions) and as total household income. Adjusted incomes could not be calculated using the OECD equivalence scale, as the survey does not include the number of persons living in the respondent's household. However, comparing weighted and unweighted data on household income in another German representative study (*ALLBUS*) shows a high correlation ($r = 0.94$; $p < .001$, $n = 3{,}061$). This study uses Gilens (2005) approach to make the income variable comparable over time and assigns each respondent an income score equal to the percentile midpoint of their income group. The probability for each income group to support a specific policy proposal is estimated using logistic regression. In addition to the predicted midpoint, its quadratic function is also used to observe nonlinear correlations as well. Given our theoretical interest and due to these data limitations, we mainly rely on occupation and education in the next section and analyses with income groups serve as additional evidence.

To analyze whose preferences political decisions reflect, we coded whether or not the specific policy change addressed in the question was enacted within the next two or four years. To obtain this information, we researched legislative documents from the German Federal Parliament online archive,[8] newspapers, and an academic web archive on social policy legislation in Germany.[9] In 54 per cent of the cases, the proposed policy change was implemented within two years of the survey question being asked. This number increases to 59 per cent for the four-year period, which is used in this study.[10] However, our results are substantially similar for both measures.[11]

To get a better sense of the data, Figure 1 shows two scatter plots, each comparing the opinions of a 'lower' and an 'upper' group within one category of social stratification. Overall, the degree of support for policy changes correlate, but there is considerable variation at the same time. The graphs also show that the interests of the two respective groups oppose one another in only a subset of cases, i.e., a majority in one group favors change whereas the majority in the other opposes it. Table A-3 in the Appendix lists examples of the most controversial questions to provide readers with an idea of what the questions look like and which are particularly disputed.

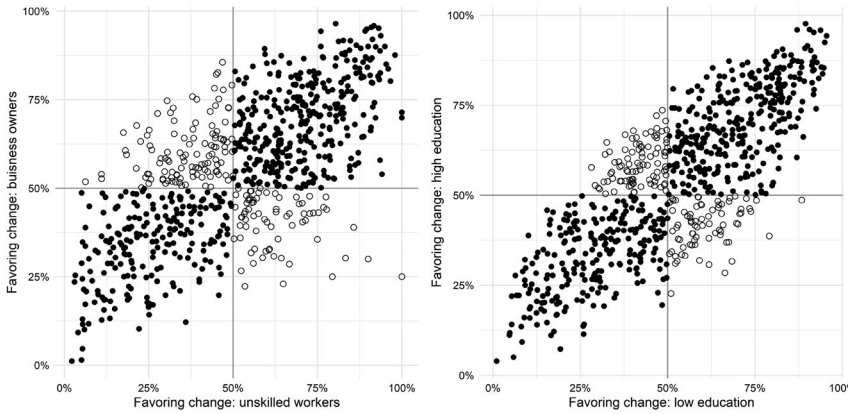

Figure 1. Opinion differences between different social groups.

Note: The filled dots indicate cases where a majority of both groups favors or opposes change, whereas the hollow dots indicate those cases where the groups hold opposing preferences. $N = 746$.

As the primary focus of this study is selective responsiveness with regard to class and education, Figure 2 compares the distribution of opinion differences between educational and occupational groups across the two policy dimensions. According to recent studies on changes in social classes (Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Stubager, 2010), one could assume that education has a stronger effect on preferences regarding cultural issues, whereas preferences on (re-)distributional issues are more strongly shaped by social class. As Figure

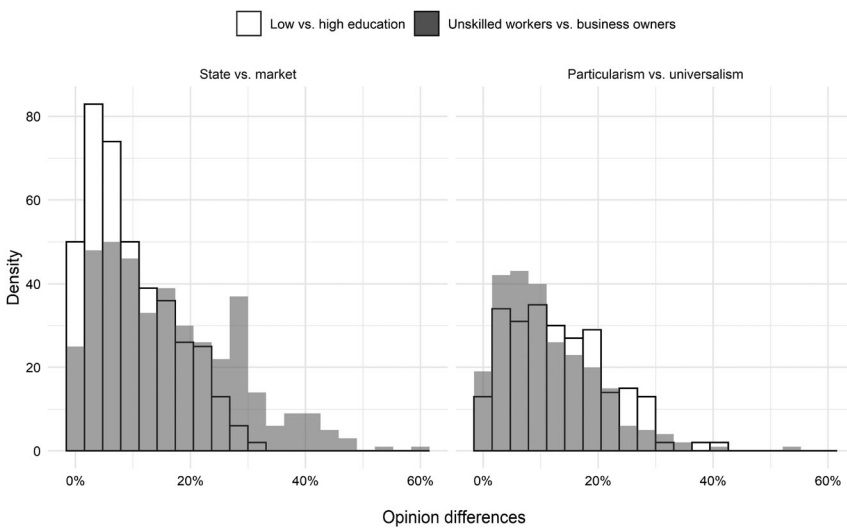

Figure 2. Opinion differences in two policy dimensions, by occupation and education. $N = 404$ (State vs. Market) and 247 (Universalism vs. Particularism), respectively.

2 shows, differences in opinion on the economic policy dimension are indeed larger between the lower and upper occupational groups than between those with differing levels of formal education. When it comes to cultural issues, however, the distribution of opinions is rather similar across the two categories, although differences in opinion are somewhat larger between educational groups. For questions in which lower and upper groups have opposing interests, a similar pattern emerges: social classes disagree foremost when proposals concern labor market and social policies, whereas education groups most often disagree on societal issues (see Table A-2 in the Appendix).

4. Analysis: policy responsiveness in Germany

In this section, we use logistic regression analysis to see which groups' preferences lead to policy change. We mainly focus on social class and educational groups. The following analyses use the respective degree of support within different subgroups of respondents as the main explanatory variables. The dependent variable captures whether a given proposal was adopted within four years after the question was asked. Figure 3 shows the coefficients of different logit models run independently of one another. Each model includes the share of support within a single occupational or educational group.

In the left panel, the degree of support for policy change in each of the six occupational groups serves as the independent variable. For unskilled and skilled workers as well as lower-grade employees, there is no significant effect of levels of support on policy change. In contrast, there is a significant and positive effect for more privileged occupational groups. When a larger share of higher-grade employees, civil servants or business owners favors

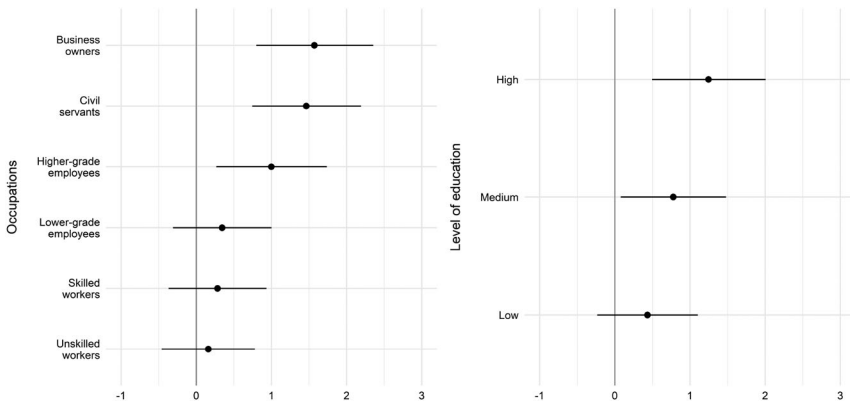

Figure 3. Regression coefficients that explain policy change.

Note: The figure shows the estimates of six (left-hand side) and three (right-hand side) separate logistic regression models with 95% confidence intervals. $N = 746$. For more details on the regression models, see Table A-4 and Table A-5 in the Appendix.

policy change, it is more likely to be enacted. For example, a shift from 10 per cent to 90 per cent of business owners in favor of a certain policy change increased the probability of that policy changing by 1.7 times, as it rises from 43 to 73 per cent. The results are very similar if we turn to respondents with different levels of education (Figure 3, right-hand panel). For citizens who finished school at a younger age the coefficient is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero. In contrast, for those that attained middling and high levels of formal education, the effect is statistically significant and positive: It is largest for respondents who completed *Gymnasium*. For these highly educated citizens, a shift from 10 per cent to 90 per cent in favor of change increases the predicted probability from 47 to 71 per cent, whereas the increase is only 8 points for those who attained low levels of education.

Although fewer questions are available for this measure, we also analyze responsiveness towards income groups to check the robustness of the previous results. Table A-6 in the Appendix shows the results for the 222 questions that include information on household income. These results resemble those from the previous analyses: Preferences held by poor and middle-income citizens do not significantly impact the likelihood of policy change. In contrast, the logit coefficient is positive and statistically significant for the two top income groups (90th and 99th percentile). Despite a relatively low number of cases, this analysis shows that parliamentary decisions are more responsive to the preferences of richer citizens. As unskilled workers are the occupational group with the lowest income and civil servants and business owners earn the highest incomes in our dataset, this confirms the previous findings.

Despite these patterns of unequal responsiveness, less affluent citizens could still benefit from what Enns (2015) calls 'coincidental representation' if they support the same policies that more affluent citizens favor. To see how the size of opinion differences affects policy responsiveness, we interact the support for policy change of one group with the size of the opinion differences towards another group. Figure 4 shows the marginal effect of the preferences for policy change for four different groups conditioned on the size of opinion differences. Unskilled workers' support for policy change positively correlates with policy change only when they agree with higher social classes. Once opinion differences increase beyond 10 per cent points, the effect becomes first insignificant and, with large differences, even negative. The more strongly workers disagree with business owners (and wealthier groups in general), the more unlikely it becomes that the *Bundestag* implements their preferences. In contrast, the coefficient for business owners is always positive, even though it is imprecisely estimated with large opinion differences and fewer cases (upper right-hand panel in Figure 4). We find a similar pattern for education. The degree of support for policy change by those who attained lower levels of education has no significant

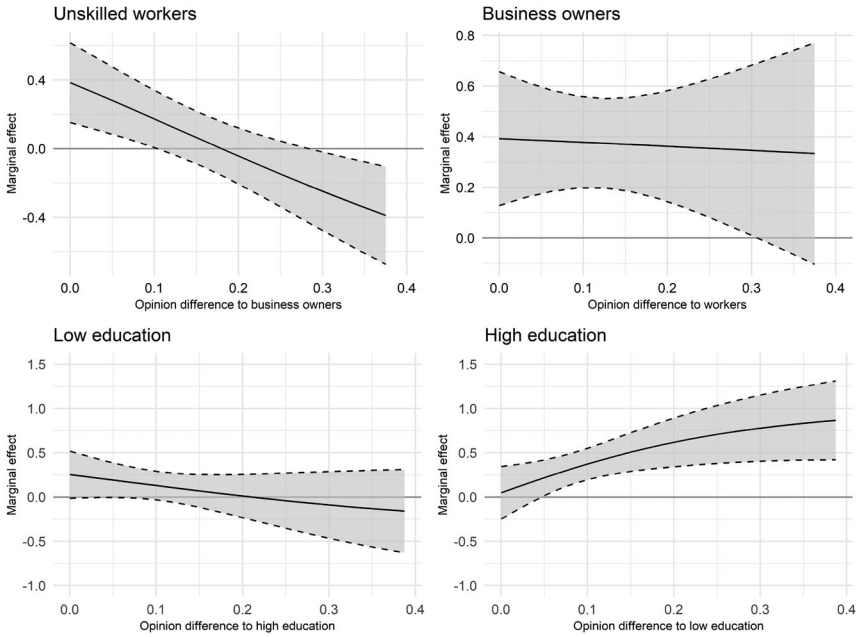

Figure 4. Marginal effect of preferences on policy change.

Note: The figures show the average marginal effect with confidence intervals of the preferences of skilled workers and respondents with low levels of education, respectively, conditioned by the size of opinion differences. $N = 746$. See Table A-7 for details.

impact on policy change – regardless of how strongly their preferences coincide or diverge from those who attained higher levels of education. In contrast, decisions by the *Bundestag* are well in line with the preferences of highly educated citizens, especially when their opinions differ from those with less formal schooling.[12]

Next, this study examines whether the degree of responsiveness depends on a particular policy dimension or on the composition of parties in government. To this end, we first split our sample and run separate regressions for proposals assigned to the state-market dimension and for those assigned to the cultural dimension. As seen in Figure 5, there is a similar pattern of representational inequality in both policy dimensions. Most importantly, and as in the previous analyses, the preferences of the lower social classes are unrelated to political decisions; this holds both for economic policy proposals (upper-left panel of Figure 5) and for proposals concerning social, cultural or environmental policies (upper-right panel of Figure 5). The reverse is true for the upper social classes, whose opinions are significantly and positively related to political decisions in both dimensions.[13] Whereas business owners see their preferences most effectively enacted with regard to economic policies, the relationship is strongest for civil servants on the cultural

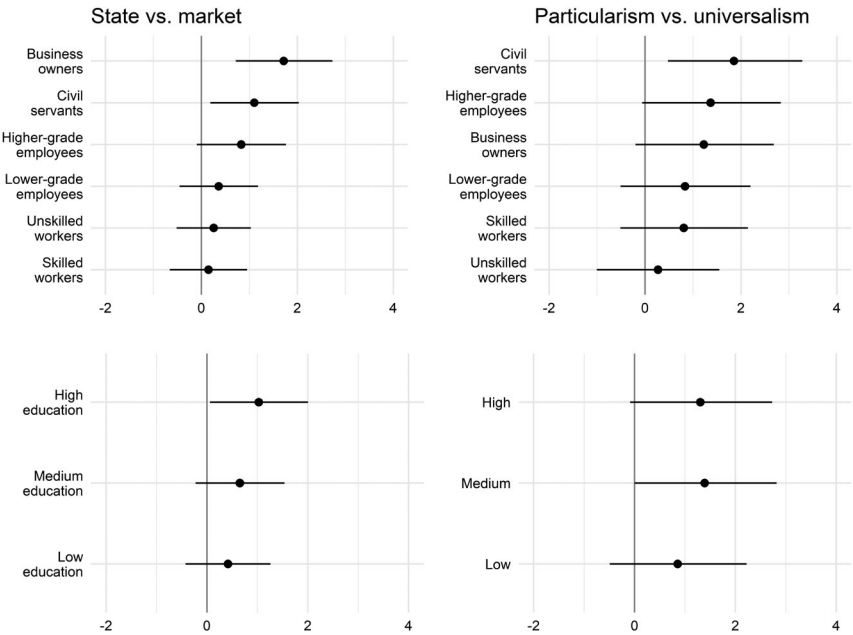

Figure 5. Responsiveness in two policy dimensions.

Note: The figure shows the estimates of six separate logistic regression models with 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The data are subdivided by policy dimension. $N = 404$ for state vs. market and 247 for universalism vs. particularism. For more details on the regression models, see Table A-8 in the Appendix.

policy dimension. The general bias in favor of the upper classes remains in both cases, however. The lower section of Figure 5 shows the pattern for education groups. The coefficients are estimated less precisely, yet the pattern of inequality remains the same. However, the cultural dimension does not drive the greater responsiveness towards higher-educated citizens. In fact, the differences are slightly larger in the state-market dimension. As fewer questions address the second dimension, however, we would not stress these findings too strongly.

In a final step, we supplement our analyses by additionally controlling for the party composition of the government. To this end, we include two interactions in our models and interact the degree of support of the respective social group with the policy dimension and with the type of government coalition. Again, the policy dimension of the proposal does not alter the general pattern of unequal responsiveness. The same is true for the parties in government (see Table A-9 for full regression results and Figure A-6 for marginal effects).[14] If anything, the preferences of workers and lower-grade employees are even less related to political decisions under the Red-Green coalition government (1998–2005) than under more conservative governments.[15] In sum, these findings show that representational inequality is a

persistent feature of German democracy and not confined to particular parties or policy areas.

The overall findings also make it implausible that the change of the groups' sizes drives the results. Of course, due to the expansion of tertiary education and deindustiralization, there are more highly educated citizens and fewer (unskilled) workers today than in the past. One could assume that these findings reflect the fact that politicians respond to the preferences of the majority. If that were the case, however, responsiveness towards citizens with less formal education should have been higher during earlier government coalitions, which it was not. In addition, business owners and civil servants have consistently represented a small proportion of society, yet the *Bundestag* has always been highly responsive towards them.

5. Discussion

While Germany has long been considered an egalitarian democracy, we have shown that the political decisions of the German *Bundestag* are biased in favor of the better off. Lower social classes see their preferences reflected in political decisions less often than higher social classes, especially when it comes to highly contested issues. The same is true for those with comparatively low levels of formal education or low incomes. These results are based on data from an original dataset that includes public opinion and policy decisions on 746 policy proposals in Germany between 1980 and 2013 and add to the growing body of evidence that unequal responsiveness is a common feature of advanced democracies.

Apart from providing new evidence of representational inequality in a major European democracy, this article advances our knowledge of representational inequality. First, it demonstrates that the pattern of unequal responsiveness holds irrespective of the party coalition in government. The findings are essentially the same for every legislative term in the study period, which included center-left and center-right governments as well as a grand coalition. As such, the lower classes consistently lacked substantive representation over the last 30 years. Moreover, policy makers respond more strongly to the preferences of the privileged both in terms of economic and cultural issues. Since data for this study are available from the early 1980s onwards, it is beyond the scope of this article to assess whether the post-war decades witnessed greater political equality along class lines.

Second, this study expands upon previous research in that it focuses on social class in addition to income and education. Studying differential responsiveness through the lens of social class is particularly important, as labor market experience shapes political preferences. As our findings show, differences in opinion regarding economic policy proposals are indeed larger between social classes than between educational groups, while disagreement

on cultural policy proposals is rather similar across these groups. Moreover, policy decisions are most strongly skewed towards business owners and civil servants, the two highest occupational groups in our data. This finding not only underscores the importance of social class for studying political responsiveness, but points to another interesting pattern, since these groups are also vastly overrepresented among German parliamentarians.

Against the backdrop of these findings, we can shed some light on the plausibility of potential mechanisms behind unequal responsiveness. If private money was the main driver behind this inequality, we would expect to observe a much smaller bias in European democracies and – presumably – stronger inequality with regard to (re-)distributional policies. Since unequal responsiveness is similar across policy dimensions and similar patterns have been found across countries with different institutional setups, we believe it unlikely that financial influence is the most important factor. Upon first glance, unequal political participation seems like a plausible explanation for unequal responsiveness. Yet, Sweden has historically had high turnout for elections, Germany and the Netherlands have changed from high to medium levels, whereas turnout rates in the United States are traditionally low but have recently risen in presidential contests. Despite changes in voter turnout rates, the pattern of unequal responsiveness remains. Accordingly, it seems unlikely that turnout rates and electoral inequality are key to unequal responsiveness. Another potential mechanism is electoral competition. If there is a 'supply-side gap' (Hillen & Steiner, 2020) in the party system, less affluent citizens may be doubly disadvantaged, as their ideological position is underrepresented and they find it harder than more affluent citizens to make up for this disadvantage (Rosset & Kurella, 2020). While no German political party combines culturally conservative with economically leftist positions, the alternation between center-left and center-right coalition governments should still produce at least a partial correspondence with these citizens' preferences. However, we find that neither the change between center-left and center-right governments affects the basic finding of unequal responsiveness, nor does the pattern of unequal responsiveness differ between the two policy dimensions.

The mechanism that seems most plausible is unequal descriptive representation – a common factor among the (relatively) egalitarian democracies of Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany. In all of these countries and, in fact, in advanced democracies in general, representatives have attained higher levels of education and come from higher-status and higher-earning occupations. In Germany, civil servants, business owners and the otherwise self-employed are overrepresented amongst members of parliament, as are university graduates. This disproportionate representation matches up quite closely with the pattern of unequal responsiveness: Despite the fact that

civil servants or business owners together comprise one-fifth of society at most, political decisions are well aligned with their preferences. In contrast, workers in the service and industrial sectors are still a fairly large group but their political preferences are entirely unrelated to policy changes. Our finding that unequal responsiveness appears in both policy dimensions alike also supports the conclusion that unequal descriptive representation, rather than party and campaign finances or interest group pressure, causes unequal responsiveness.

Although this analysis offers new insight, it is also limited. Most importantly, it presents a bird's eye view of political responsiveness that does not directly test different mechanisms. Future research could complement the aggregate analyses with in-depth case studies of policy-making to determine how patterns of inequality emerge. However, we are confident that our study provides useful first indications of where to dig deeper for an explanation of the similar patterns of unequal responsiveness found in many advanced democracies today.

Notes

1. See Beyer and Hänni (2018) for a discussion of the conceptual and empirical differences between congruence and responsiveness.
2. For a critical discussion of the findings and estimation techniques, see e.g., Bashir (2015), Enns (2015), Soroka and Wlezien (2008) and Gilens (2009, 2015b).
3. As Page *et al.* (2013) show, attitudes of the wealthy differ most pronouncedly from those of average citizens regarding spending on redistributive policies and social security programs.
4. One important exception is the study by O'Grady (2019), who examines the political positions and roll-call votes of British labor party MPs from different occupational background in major welfare reforms.
5. As not every question could be assigned to one of the dimensions, the total number of cases is less than 746.
6. We hereafter refer to the cultural dimension as particularism vs universalism.
7. Our data also corroborate this pattern. Business owners and civil servants are the occupational groups with the highest incomes in the dataset (see Figure A4 in the Appendix).
8. http://dip.bundestag.de.
9. http://www.sozialpolitik-aktuell.de.
10. The overall adoption rate in Germany is significantly higher than in similar data on the United States (Gilens, 2012) or the Netherlands (Schakel, 2019). This may be due to the timing of the polls. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to explain these cross-sectional differences. In any case, this difference is not expected to bias the results.
11. The implementation rates are roughly equal across both policy dimensions, as shown in the right panel of Figure A-2 in the Appendix.
12. Results for income groups are not reported here due to the low number of cases.
13. The somewhat lower level of statistical significance on the cultural policy dimension might be due to the lower number of cases.

14. These analyses deviate from the former because we use the two-year period of implementation here to ensure that the government coalition remains the same between the time the question was asked and implementation. However, this resulted in the exclusion of all cases from the years 1997, 2004 and 2012.
15. This result might be driven by the fact that the Red-Green government implemented a series of welfare retrenchment reforms, which the lower social classes strongly opposed. Under this government, 48 per cent of the questions that deal with public finance asked about expenditure cuts.

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