



Are the Policy Preferences of Relatively Poor Citizens Under-represented in the Swiss Parliament?

Jan Rosset

To cite this article: Jan Rosset (2013) Are the Policy Preferences of Relatively Poor Citizens Under-represented in the Swiss Parliament?, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 19:4, 490-504, DOI: [10.1080/13572334.2013.812363](https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2013.812363)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2013.812363>



Published online: 02 Aug 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 518



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 7 View citing articles [↗](#)

Are the Policy Preferences of Relatively Poor Citizens Under-represented in the Swiss Parliament?

JAN ROSSET

The principle of equal political representation can be undermined by differences in economic resources among citizens. Poor citizens are likely to hold policy preferences that differ from those of richer citizens. At the same time, their lack of resources can have as a consequence that these preferences are not taken into consideration by their representatives. Focusing on the case of the Swiss Parliament and using survey data on the opinions of citizens and MPs in the 2007–11 legislature, this study investigates whether the income of citizens systematically affects the proximity of their policy preferences with the stances of their representatives. It demonstrates that on economic issues MPs hold preferences that are generally less in favour of the state's intervention in the economy than the median citizen and that relatively poor citizens are less well represented as compared with citizens with high incomes. This remains true when taking into account only the opinions of the most knowledgeable citizens among these groups as well as when the focus is only on those who turned out to vote.

Keywords: political representation; income; National Council; policy congruence; Switzerland.

Introduction

Students of substantive representation have recently shown an increased interest in studying whether the preferences of particular social groups are channelled by political elites better than the preferences of other groups (for example, Adams & Ezrow, 2009; Bishin, 2009; Griffin & Newman, 2005). From that perspective, much research has focused on how disadvantaged groups – particularly women, ethnic minorities and lower social classes – are represented by parties or governments (for example, Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Ura & Ellis, 2008; Wauters, 2010). This interest is directly linked to the observation that despite the egalitarian ‘one citizen one vote’ principle and because of diverging levels of political influence of various social groups, legislatures are likely to reflect the policy preferences of certain groups of citizens better than others, independently of their numerical weight.

As a result of the important role of economic cleavages in both shaping the interests of citizens and giving them means to voice their preferences, much emphasis has been placed on the unequal representation of income groups (for

example, Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Ura & Ellis, 2008). Research has focused so far mostly on the American case, where inequalities in representation of various income groups have been documented in some studies (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005), whereas others did not find evidence for systematic bias in the representation of policy preferences (Ura & Ellis, 2008). Studies conducted from a comparative perspective have shown that party systems and governments generally represent the policy preferences of wealthier voters better, even though this varies importantly depending on the context (Giger, Rosset, & Bernauer, 2012; Rosset, Giger, & Bernauer, 2013). This article contributes to this ongoing debate by focusing on the representation of income groups in Switzerland. More precisely, it focuses on the congruence between policy preferences of income groups and the preferences of their representatives in parliament. This view of representation, in line with a 'selection model' of political representation (see Mansbridge, 2009), puts emphasis on the importance of having representatives who share similar preferences, in terms of broad policy options and values, with their electorate.

The overarching research question addressed in this paper is as follows: Are the policy preferences of less affluent citizens less well represented in the Swiss National Council¹ (lower house of the Federal Assembly) than the preferences of richer citizens? A three-step strategy addresses this issue. First, the differences in policy preferences of various income groups are studied. Second, the policy preferences of citizens are linked to representatives' policy preferences, which explores whether the latter support policies that are closer to the preferences of particular income groups. Third, two alternative explanations for unequal representation of citizens with varying incomes are tested: the impact of political participation and that of political information. The study shows that, on some issues, income levels are clearly associated with policy preferences; MPs on these issues hold policy preferences that more closely mirror the policy preferences of high-income citizens as compared with less affluent ones, and only part of this observed relationship can be explained by differing levels of political activity or information across income groups.

Before returning to the empirical portion detailing the research design and results, the paper presents an overview of the literature on the unequal representation of various income groups, elaborates on the theoretical perspectives that underlie the analysis, and explains the mechanisms through which unequal representation of various income groups occurs. The last section of the paper proposes a summary of the main arguments and findings as well a short discussion of their implications.

The Unequal Representation Controversy

The studies on the representation of the poor have typically studied whether the policy preferences – often measured along a single dimension – of different subgroups of constituents were linked with the behaviour of legislators during their

mandates. By taking this approach, these studies sought to operationalize the concept of responsiveness – the legislature’s reaction to the changes in the public’s policy preferences. This has been analysed differently, with a focus on parliaments and sometimes also political parties, on individual or aggregate representative positions, or on actual policy changes. Among the studies that focused specifically on the representation of poor citizens, several strategies can be distinguished.

Some scholars have looked at: how policy changes are linked to the preferences of various income groups on these policies (Gilens, 2005); how individual senators responded in terms of actual votes in the Senate to their constituents’ preferences, depending on the economic status of these constituents (Bartels, 2008, pp. 252–282); or the association between policy preferences of various income groups measured through an index of liberalism and an aggregate measure of the degree of liberalism of the legislature, based on MPs’ votes (Ura & Ellis, 2008). These studies have all been conducted in the US context and have focused on slightly different time periods.² Although Gilens (2005) and Bartels (2008) found a substantial gap in the representation of less affluent citizens as compared with richer ones – with the latter being better represented – Ura and Ellis (2008) did not find different degrees of responsiveness across income groups.

Summing up the debate in the American case, however, it appears that when differences in representation are found, they lean towards an under-representation of the preferences of the poor. One of the possible explanations for the differences in the results of previous studies seems to be the extent to which income groups differ with regard to their policy preferences. Indeed, authors showing no differences in responsiveness across income groups tend to interpret their findings not as a sign of the fact that each group has equal weight in the representation process, but rather that the differences in policy preferences across income groups are so small that even if different groups had different influence the outcome would be virtually the same (see Soroka & Wlezien, 2008; Ura & Ellis, 2008). The argument is that if different groups hold the same policy preferences it ultimately does not matter whose preferences are followed as ‘representation of one group’s preferences effectively represents the other group’s preferences, and we also cannot know which group, if just one, is being represented’ (Griffin & Newman, 2007, p. 1037). Beyond the controversy on whether or not there are systematic differences in the representation of various groups, there are good theoretical grounds to think that this is the case.

Possible Mechanisms for Unequal Representation

The literature suggests three main broad channels through which economic inequalities result in inequalities in representation. These are related to the descriptive representation of various income groups, the direct influence of money on political actors, and also differences in terms of both political

participation as well as political information across groups of citizens with differing levels of income.

First of all, it is hardly new to say that most legislatures in liberal democracies generally comprise individuals who share socio-economic characteristics that are closer to the higher than to the lower end of the income distribution. Therefore, citizens from the higher end of the income distribution are descriptively better represented, which might in turn be linked to a better substantive representation.³ This is not to say that income determines policy preferences (either of voters or of representatives) and that the voter who earns an income equivalent to that of the median MP would be best represented. The idea is that even representatives who strive to stand for a less affluent electorate and try to be responsive to it would not necessarily have an accurate understanding of who they represent. In other words, descriptive representatives – that is, ‘individuals who in their own backgrounds mirror some of the more frequent experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the group’ (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 628) – will have on some occasions a better ability to act on behalf of the people with the same background. This might be particularly relevant for the representation of less affluent citizens whose descriptive representatives tend to be non-existent in terms of income and rather rare in terms of learned profession or education (for example, Gaxie & Godmer, 2007). This general statement must be adapted to the Swiss case as Swiss MPs tend to be paid smaller salaries than members of other parliaments in Western countries (Z’graggen, 2009, pp. 129–138); yet their educational level is similar to that of other European countries (Z’graggen, 2009, pp. 64–65) and is much higher than that of the population.⁴

Although not necessarily needy, political actors are not cut off from material preoccupations. Political parties might seek financial resources for their activities and MPs additional income. This is particularly true in Switzerland, where the rules regulating party finance are among the most liberal in Europe (Austin & Tjernström, 2003).⁵ On a personal level, because of the semi-professional status of the parliament, most MPs work outside their representative mandates. Although the ties with big business seem to have loosened over recent decades, a substantial portion of Swiss MPs still sits on private companies’ administrative boards (Pilotti, Mach, & Mazzoleni, 2010, pp. 230–232). Additionally, another specificity of Switzerland is the large share of members of the Swiss National Council who work as independents, which blurs the possible ties with interests groups. Beyond the direct ties between MPs and economic actors, there is the possibility of rewards in the form of lucrative positions after the end of the political mandate (as documented in the case of the UK, see Eggers & Hainmueller, 2009).

Another reason for unequal representation is linked to the perception that representatives have of the population. Indeed, from the MPs’ perspective, the policy preferences of their constituents are not immediately visible, and even if it were assumed that MPs try to follow their electorate’s preferences, it remains unclear how representatives could know what their constituents think.

Also, it seems quite realistic that the voices that are heard by legislators are those that are used; in other words, citizens who are more active are more visible to their representative, who may infer the policy position of their entire constituency on the basis of those of a minority (Miler, 2007).

From that perspective, the main influence of citizens on their representation is of course voting: it is through elections that citizens choose their representatives from among individuals or parties. As noted by Verba (1996), 'citizen activity is perhaps the major way the public's needs and preferences are communicated to governing elites' (p. 1). Therefore, political participation might be an important way of enforcing a closer congruence between those who participate and their representatives. For instance, Griffin and Newman (2005) found that the American Senate is more responsive to voters than to non-voters and that this can be explained by a closer ideological congruence between voters and representatives, but also by the fact that voters participate more in other types of political activity and are more likely to communicate their preferences to representatives. Similarly, Adams and Ezrow (2009) showed that European parties are more responsive to opinion leaders – that is, people who frequently discuss politics with friends or family and report persuading other individuals – than they are to the preferences of other voters. The authors explain this notably by the fact that opinion leaders are more likely to turn out to vote (Adams & Ezrow, 2009, p. 208).

Considering political activity to be an important factor for political representation is particularly relevant in our case – the representation of preferences of poor citizens as compared with richer ones – because generally speaking, citizens with higher economic resources participate more in politics than others (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Schäfer, 2010). In Switzerland, where for instance in 2007 turnout was only 48.9 per cent, there is a large proportion of citizens who do not voice their preferences.

Also contributing to the distinctive representation of richer and poorer citizens is political information. This factor is important to consider as it might play a role at different levels. The first is a potentially important weakness of our conceptualization of electoral representation as selecting representatives who have similar political aims as citizens. Political information might have a systematic influence on policy preferences and values (see Gilens, 2001). In this case, representatives who through their activity might have gained some knowledge would be likely to have policy preferences closer to those of the most knowledgeable citizens. Similarly, information might be associated with political activity. More knowledgeable citizens have a higher propensity to vote (Lassen, 2005); but they are also more likely to vote for parties or candidates that share their policy preferences (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997), which can result in a better representation of their policy preferences.

In sum, there are several reasons to expect that if income groups differ with regard to their policy preferences, the position of richer citizens will be better reflected in parliament, which is the main thesis of this article paper. While the

causes for an unequal representation of income groups can be attributed to representatives' and citizens' characteristics and actions, systematic differences in the representation of income groups can be observed at the aggregate level. Some of the mechanisms outlined above do not relate directly to the economic status of citizens, but rather suggest that unequal representation results from the fact that income is a covariate of other characteristics of citizens that are important in the representation process and in particular political participation and political information. Therefore, it is of interest to know whether differences in policy congruence between different income groups and representatives also exist if the influence of political participation and political information is taken into consideration.

Empirical Analysis

The analysis is based on the **Swiss Electoral Study 2007** (Lutz, 2008), which was carried out straight after the 2007 parliamentary elections. **In addition to a citizen survey, candidates were studied.** Although the design of the two surveys is different, they both contain a set of 13 identical questions in relation to policy propositions or political aims. These questions were asked to citizens in the supplementary survey carried out by mail, which 2291 people answered either by mail or online. In this study, the subsample of the citizen survey that contains answers to the supplementary questionnaire was used as well as a subsample of the candidate survey that includes only candidates who have been elected to the Swiss National Council.⁶

The first step of the analysis is to identify whether the preferences of Swiss citizens vary systematically across income groups. For this, the answers to general questions about policy preferences on issues related to the role of the state in the economy, its attitude towards minority groups, its foreign policy and other broad political topics are analysed (for a detailed list of statements, see Table 1). Respondents were asked to take a position on a series of statements by answering to what extent they agreed with the statement. The five answer categories were 'fully agree', 'rather agree', 'neither nor', 'rather disagree' and 'fully disagree', and these were coded as ordinal variables from one (fully agree) to five (fully disagree). Respondents also answered a question on the gross monthly income of their household. This question provided 11 possible answer categories, ranging from 'below 2000 CHF' to 'more than 12,000 CHF'.⁷ To assess whether there are significant differences in terms of policy preferences across these income groups, an analysis of variance is performed. This simple statistical model allows testing on whether there are significant differences in means across groups. In this particular case, the analysis reveals whether the means of the answers of respondents belonging to different income groups vary significantly. Table 1 provides the level of significance of differences across groups and a measure of effect size (eta square). The eta square is, in this case, the measure of the proportion of variance in the policy

Table 1: Differences in Policy Preferences across Income Groups

Policy Statement	Sig.	Eta Square
Income and wealth should be redistributed to poorer people	***	0.076
Providing a stable network of social security should be the prime goal of government	***	0.063
Switzerland should be more involved in the 'war' on terror	***	0.047
Our democracy needs serious reform	***	0.026
People who break the law should receive stiffer sentences	***	0.025
Immigrants are good for the Swiss economy	**	0.022
Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy	***	0.021
Same sex marriages should be approved by law	*	0.017
Immigrants should be required to adjust to the customs of Switzerland		0.011
Torturing a prisoner is never justified, even if it might prevent a terrorist attack		0.009
The ongoing opening of the economies is for the good of all		0.008
Stronger measures should be taken to protect the environment		0.007
Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion		0.006

*Significant at the 0.05 level; **significant at the 0.01 level; ***significant at the 0.001 level.

position that can be explained by belonging to a certain income group. Although eight out of the 13 issues are significantly related with household income, the magnitude of the effect is rather limited for most of them. Unsurprisingly, household income is most strongly associated with policy positions on issues that are related to the economy, while it has a much weaker impact on opinions that are related to social or cultural themes (for example, abortion, environment, and integration requirements for migrants). The two statements that most clearly divide citizens on an income basis are directly related to redistribution on the one hand and social security on the other. In both cases, citizens with lower incomes are more supportive of these policies, and the effects of household income for these questions can be regarded as substantial.

To study the link between the policy preferences of citizens and those of their representatives, we focus precisely on these two questions. For these questions, a measure of the median policy position of the National Council is computed. This measure is calculated on the basis of the answers of National Council candidates who gained a seat in the assembly. Although not all of the future members of parliament answered the questionnaire, the sample we have at hand includes 124 respondents out of the 200 candidates elected to the National Council. This sample has been weighted by the parties according to the respective share of each party in the lower chamber of the parliament.⁸ The measure used is an interpolated median.⁹ The advantage of using the interpolated median is that it provides a more fine-grained measure of the position of groups of citizens and the parliament than that obtained by simply taking the integer value corresponding to the median category, while simultaneously retaining the benefits of using the median rather than a mean (that is, the fact that it is not affected by extreme values and that it more closely relates to the concept of the median voter central to

political theory).¹⁰ In this context, it is used for the position of the median parliamentarian as well as subsequently for the median citizen and the median position of each income group. The formula used for this measure is:

$$M = L + \{(50 - C)/F\}$$

where: M is the measured median position of the National Council (or the median citizen); L is the lower bound of the interval containing the median; C is the cumulative frequency of the MPs (or citizens) that position themselves up to L ; and F is the frequency of MPs (or citizens) placed in the interval containing the median. The median positions of the National Council obtained are 2.22 for the question on social security and 3.50 for the question on income redistribution. The same measures are calculated for all citizens who answered the survey (see Table 2) as well for three income groups separately. These three income groups were determined on the basis of the gross monthly income variable and correspond to respondents belonging to households that have an average monthly income up to 5000 CHF (bottom third, 32.8 per cent of the sample), between 5000 and 8000 CHF (middle, 33.9 per cent of the sample), and above 8000 CHF (top third, 33.2 per cent of the sample).¹¹ Dividing the sample into income thirtiles has several advantages: it makes the results comparable to other studies in the field (see Bartels, 2008) and it allows for comparing groups that are of the same numerical size, which is an important factor given the importance of the majority rule principle in democracy. Such a categorization enables us to control if the under-representation of the poor is also mirrored by a worse representation of the rich. In such a case, one could not speak of the systematic effect of income, but rather that parliament is congruent with the preferences of the median income earner.

Table 2 shows that the median parliamentarian is less in favour of redistribution and of social security than is the median citizen. Even citizens belonging to the top third of the income distribution are more in favour of redistribution than is

Table 2: Median Positions of MPs and Citizens belonging to Three Income Groups on Two Policy Statements

	Income and Wealth should be Redistributed to Poorer People	Providing a Stable Network of Social Security should be the Prime Goal of the Government
Bottom third	1.92	1.78
Middle	2.28	1.98
Top third	2.78	2.21
All citizens	2.12	2.03
National Council	3.50	2.22

Notes: Lower values correspond to greater agreement with the statement. The Kruksal-Wallis, respectively Mann Whitney U, tests indicate that the differences in the median between income groups as well as between all citizens and MPs are significant at a $p < 0.001$ level for both statements.

the median MP, although there are already substantial differences across the three income groups. These go in the expected direction, with the least affluent citizens being most favourable to redistribution and social security, while those from the middle of the income distribution hold policy positions that are closest to those of the median voter. From this analysis it appears that there is a certain distance in terms of policy preferences between MPs and citizens. In addition, more affluent citizens tend to be closer to the policy positions of MPs.

This interpretation of the median position of various groups is corroborated when the distribution of preferences among each group is also taken into account. Figures 1 and 2 provide the density function for the answers to the two statements across income groups as well as for MPs. Whereas there are clear differences in the distribution of policy preferences across income groups on redistribution, the picture is less clear, albeit generally telling the same story, for the question on social security.

It is as yet impossible, however, to explain this observed relation between income and congruence with parliament. More precisely, it remains unclear whether this relationship is due to the fact that income is a covariate of other individual-level characteristics that are important in the representation process (that is, political participation and political information) or whether such differences persist when variations in these characteristics across income groups are taken into account. In order to disentangle these differences, an analysis of subgroups

Figure 1: Distribution of Preferences among Income Groups and Members of the National Council on the Following Statement: 'Income and Wealth should be Redistributed to Poorer People'

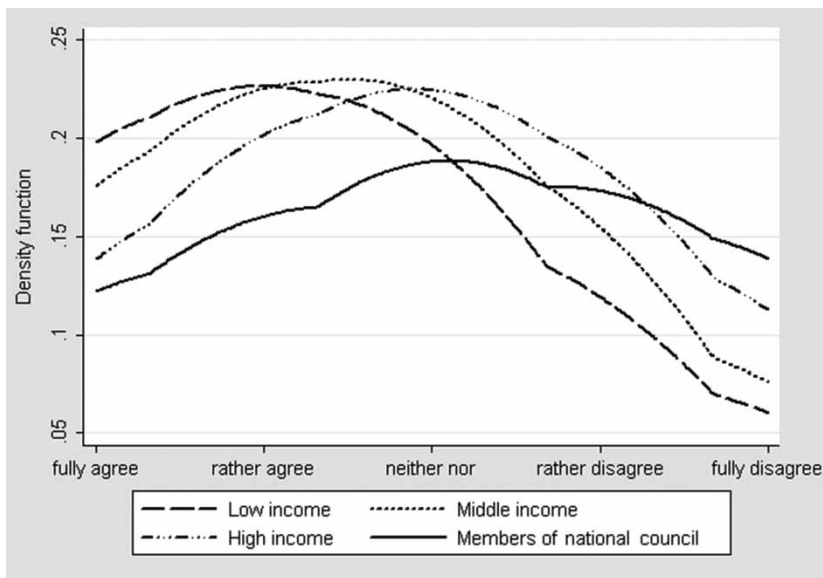
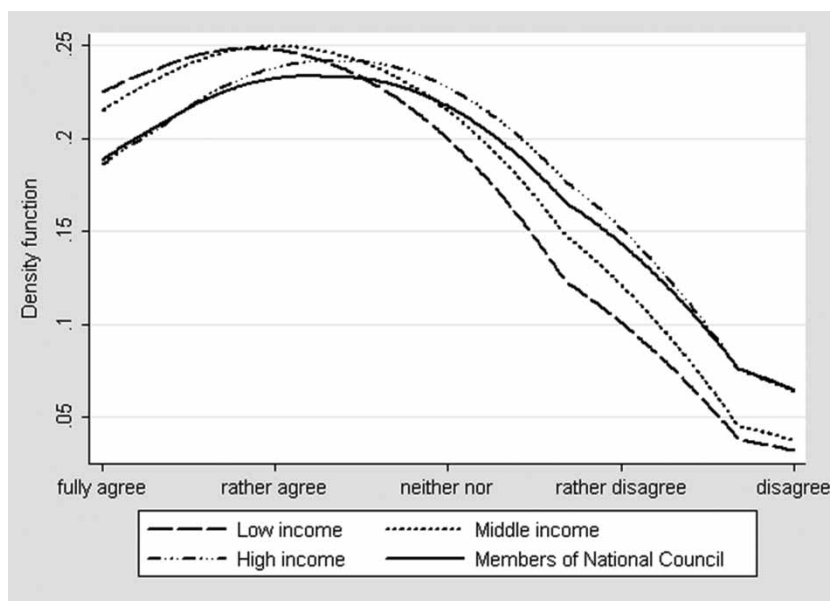


Figure 2: Distribution of Preferences among Income Groups and Members of the National Council on the Following Statement: 'Providing a Stable Network of Social Security should be the Prime Goal of Government'



of the income categories is performed. The idea is to test whether the observed bias in the representation of policy preferences of income groups persists even if we focus only on those citizens who have a high level of political knowledge and those who participate in politics.

To do that, the median preferences on redistribution and on social security are measured for the most knowledgeable citizens. The group with high political knowledge comprises all the respondents who gave at least four correct answers to a series of five factual questions about Swiss politics (for example, 'How many National Council members are from Respondent's canton?'). The second subgroup is that of citizens who cast a ballot in the federal election.

The results, displayed in Table 3, show some interesting trends. First, it is worth noting that for each income group the median position of highly knowledgeable citizens is less in favour of redistribution and social security than of all citizens, independent of their level of knowledge. For instance, the median position of the bottom third of the income distribution is 1.92 on the question of redistribution, while it is 2.23 for the subgroup of those low-income citizens who have a high level of political knowledge. Similar but less pronounced differences can be found for the two other income groups. An analogous pattern also exists in the case of political participation, even though here differences between voters and non-voters are less pronounced, and sometimes not statistically significant.

Table 3: Median Positions of Citizens belonging to Three Income Groups on Two Policy Statements

	Income and Wealth should be Redistributed to Poorer People		Providing a Stable Network of Social Security should be the Prime Goal of the Government	
	Knowledgeable Citizens	Voters	Knowledgeable Citizens	Voters
Bottom third	2.23	2.01	1.88	1.77
Middle	2.33	2.34	2.06	1.99
Top third	3.10	2.83	2.25	2.22
National Council	3.50		2.22	

Notes: The subsamples only comprise knowledgeable citizens and voters, respectively (lower values correspond to greater agreement with the statement). The Kruksal-Wallis test indicates that the differences in the median between income groups are significant at a $p < 0.001$ level for both statements. Differences between each subgroup and the position of the parliament are significant at a $p < 0.01$ or lower level for both statements for low-income citizens (both knowledgeable and voters) and for middle-income voters. The differences between middle-income citizens who are knowledgeable about politics and the position of parliament are significant ($p < 0.01$ level) for the statement on redistribution but not on the statement on social security. The opinions of the top-income category are never significantly different from the opinion of the National Council (Mann Whitney U test).

This general pattern, however, indicates that part of the representation bias observed previously could be due to systematic differences in political knowledge and, to a lesser extent, political participation across income groups. Nevertheless, differences in the positioning of the various income groups remain substantial. In other words, even the subgroups of poor citizens who have high political knowledge or participate in politics are farther away from the median position of the parliament than citizens of the upper third of the income distribution, while the middle income group is somewhere in between those groups, showing that congruence with the median position of parliament increases with income.

In sum, the analysis corroborates the expectation that when policy preferences of income groups differ – which is essentially the case on matters such as redistribution and social security – the median representative holds a position that is closer to the preferences of richer citizens than to poorer ones. The analysis of policy positions of subgroups of the population that have a high level of political knowledge and who participate in politics shows that differences in policy preferences across groups remain. These factors therefore cannot fully explain why higher economic status grants a better representation of policy preferences in the Swiss legislature.

Conclusions

Deriving from the normative standpoint that democracy implies ‘the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered

as political equals' (Dahl, 1971, p. 1) – this article attempted to illuminate the link between policy preferences of Swiss citizens and their representatives in parliament and the way this link might be systematically affected by the economic status of the former. Despite equal political rights – expressed notably in the 'one citizen one vote' principle – legislatures are likely to reflect the policy preferences of certain groups of citizens better than others.

The economic status of citizens being associated with their self-interest and their means to act politically, the representation of income groups has attracted scholarly attention (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Giger et al., 2012; Ura & Ellis, 2008). Adding to the current literature, which focuses mainly on the American case, this paper has studied the representation of various income groups in Switzerland. The article argues that income groups are likely to hold different preferences, in particular with regard to policies that are linked to redistribution. Furthermore, it postulates that preferences of relatively poor citizens are not well represented owing to the conjunction of three mechanisms: the low descriptive representation of this particular group; its low financial resources; and the fact that relatively poor citizens tend to participate less in politics and have lower levels of political information.

Based on survey data on the opinions of both citizens and MPs across a wide range of issues, the analysis shows that income groups differ with regard to their preferences on redistribution and social security, with lower income groups being more in favour of the state's intervention in the economy. It also documents the fact that, on these issues, the Swiss National Council is ideologically closer to citizens who belong to the most affluent households than to poorer citizens and, to a lesser extent, to the middle-income category. In other words, the analysis suggests that the proximity of citizens' policy preferences to the positions of representatives increases with income. Furthermore, the analysis also reveals that the identified representation gap can only to a limited extent be explained by diverging levels of political participation and political knowledge across income groups; even when taking into account the disparities in terms of political participation and political knowledge, higher income groups hold preferences that are systematically closer to those of representatives than citizens belonging to the low- and middle-income categories.

From a normative perspective, these results are rather discouraging, as they suggest that economic factors play a role in political representation, hindering the potential for each social group to voice its preferences. It could even be argued that on the issues on which income groups disagree the aggregated policy preferences of the parliament do not reflect those of the median voter but rather the preferences of the social groups to which the representatives belong. This finding is in line with the results of previous studies conducted in the United States (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005) and shows that the under-representation of the poor is not restricted to this case solely and that this phenomenon can be observed in a very different institutional and contextual setting.

While documenting this phenomenon contributes to the current literature, an important gap still needs to be filled in future research. It relates to the explanations for unequal representation. In particular, it would be interesting to study the impact of descriptive representation on the representation of policy preferences. One way to do so could be to analyse how the social and economic background of representatives influences their policy preferences or votes in parliament independently of their party affiliation. Additionally, closer attention should be given to the impact of lobby groups and, in the specific case of Switzerland, to the professional activities of representatives outside their political mandates. Finally, the role of political parties in aggregating both representatives and represented policy preferences and mediating these preferences still needs to be investigated. It would potentially shed more light on the role of party finance as well as of the parties' recruitment strategy in explaining the relationship between citizens' economic status and the representation of their policy preferences in parliament.

Note on Author

Jan Rosset is a PhD student at the University of Lausanne and a research associate at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Social Sciences (FORS), Switzerland, email: jan.rosset@unil.ch

Acknowledgements

This paper has been written in the context of a research project on representation and policy congruence in Europe (REPCONG) funded by the European Science Foundation. A previous version was presented at the third ECPR Graduate Conference in Dublin (September 2010). The author would like to thank the panel participants and Jakob Eberhard, Georg Lutz, Gian-Andrea Monsch, Florence Passy, Swetha Rao Dhananka, Damian Rosset and three anonymous readers for comments on earlier drafts, as well as Bryce Weaver for helping with programming issues.

Notes

1. The rationale for focusing on the lower house only is that, in the logic of the Swiss constitution, it represents the people, whereas the upper house (Council of States) represents cantons. Moreover, legislators elected in both houses seem not to differ systematically either in their ideological positioning or in their voting behaviour (see Bütikofer & Hug, 2010).
2. Gilens's study covers the period 1981–2002. Bartels focuses on the Senate in the years 1989–94, and Ura and Ellis are interested in the period 1974–96 for both the Senate and the House of Representatives.
3. In her classical work, Pitkin (1967) distinguishes four facets of political representation: formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive. These conceptualizations of representation relate to the institutions that enable representation (formal representation), the meaning the representative takes for the represented (symbolic representation), the likeness between the represented and

- the representative (descriptive representation) and the actions taken by representatives in the interest of the represented (substantive representation).
4. For instance, in 2000, 129 (63.5 per cent) of the 200 members of the National Council held a university degree (Pilotti et al., 2010). This compares to approximately 25 per cent (29.2 per cent for men and 20.6 per cent for women) in the general population in 2009 (source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, ESPA survey).
 5. In fact no rules exist at the federal level, and only in two cantons—Geneva and Ticino—are parties required to report donations to cantonal authorities.
 6. Not all the candidates elected to the National Council have actually taken a seat in the lower house of the Assembly. Of 124 respondents in our sample, eight never sat in the National Council despite their election, either because they had also been elected to the Council of States (the higher house of the Swiss Federal Assembly) or because they renounced it after the election. As they have been replaced by fellow party candidates with arguably similar policy preferences and for whom I did not have data, it was decided to keep these eight successful candidates in the sample.
 7. The interval of each category corresponds to 1000 CHF (for example, category 2: 2000–3000) up to the 10th category, for which it is 2000 (10,000–12,000 CHF). Beyond the general difficulty of using data based on reported income, the use of data about household income causes criticism because, depending on the size of the household, a certain income might be associated with very different actual means at a household's disposal. Determining the income thirtiles based on household income divided by the number of individuals in the household does not alter the results.
 8. It has to be noted, however, that using the unweighted sample in which MPs of left parties, and especially the Green Party, are over-represented as compared with their actual seat share does not substantially alter the findings. Using the unweighted sample, the median position of the parliament is slightly more in favour of social security (0.04-point difference on our scale) and also more in favour of redistribution (0.28-point difference). Even then, the median policy position of the National Council remains markedly less supportive of the welfare state than is the median voter.
 9. For other use of interpolated medians for the purpose of linking elites' and citizens' policy positions, see, for instance, Kim and Fording (1998, pp. 79–80).
 10. Given that the answers to the questions are almost normally distributed, the difference between the median and the mean is very small, and using the mean instead of the median does not affect the results.
 11. The reported household incomes are probably underestimated. Although the mean gross household income in Switzerland was about 8900 CHF in 2007 (source: Federal Statistical Office), a majority of the survey respondents reported a monthly income below 7000 CHF. Despite this important difference, I consider that this underestimation was not specific to particular income groups but randomly distributed throughout the sample. To make substantial sense of what these income levels represent, one can compare them with what is considered by Swiss households to be the minimal monthly income to make ends meet. In 2007, the average of responses to the Swiss Household Panel on this question was 5146 CHF (source: SHP 2007 survey).

References

- Adams, J., & Ezrow, L. (2009). Who do European parties represent? How Western European parties represent the policy preferences of opinion leaders. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(1), 206–223.
- Austin, R., & Tjernström, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Funding of political parties and election campaigns*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Bartels, L. M. (2008). *Unequal democracy: The political economy of the new gilded age*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bishin, B. G. (2009). *Tyranny of the minority: The subconstituency politics theory of representation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 89(2), 271–294.
- Bütikofer, S., & Hug, S. (2010). The Swiss Upper House: 'Chambre de Réflexion' or conservative renegades? *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(2), 176–194.

- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Eggers, A. C., & Hainmueller, J. (2009). MPs for sale? Returns to office in postwar British politics. *American Political Science Review*, 103(4), 513–533.
- Gaxie, D., & Godmer, L. (2007). Cultural capital and political selection: Educational backgrounds of parliamentarians. In H. Best & M. Cotta (Eds.), *Democratic representation in Europe: Diversity, change, and convergence* (pp. 106–135). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giger, N., Rosset, J., & Bernauer, J. (2012). The poor representation of the poor. *Representation*, 48(1), 47–61.
- Gilens, M. (2001). Political ignorance and collective policy preferences. *American Political Science Review*, 95(2), 379–396.
- Gilens, M. (2005). Inequality and democratic responsiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(5), 778–796.
- Gilens, M. (2009). Preference gaps and inequality in representation. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 42(2), 335–341.
- Griffin, J. D., & Newman, B. (2005). Are voters better represented? *Journal of Politics*, 67(4), 1206–1227.
- Griffin, J. D., & Newman, B. (2007). The unequal representation of Latinos and Whites. *Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 1032–1046.
- Kim, H., & Fording, R. C. (1998). Voter ideology in Western democracies, 1946–1989. *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(1), 73–97.
- Lassen, D. D. (2005). The effect of information on voter turnout: Evidence from a natural experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(1), 103–118.
- Lau, R. R., & Redlawsk, D. P. (1997). Voting correctly. *American Political Science Review*, 91(3), 585–598.
- Lutz, G. (2008). *Elections fédérales 2007. Participation et choix électoral*. Lausanne: Selects-FORS.
- Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent 'yes'. *The Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657.
- Mansbridge, J. (2009). A 'selection model' of political representation. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17(4), 369–398.
- Miler, K. C. (2007). The view from the hill: Legislative perceptions of the district. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 32(4), 597–628.
- Pilotti, A., Mach, A., & Mazzoleni, O. (2010). Les parlementaires suisses entre démocratisation et professionnalisation, 1910–2000. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 16(2), 211–245.
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rosset, J., Giger, N., & Bernauer, J. (2013). More money, fewer problems? Cross-level effects of economic deprivation on political representation. *West European Politics*, 36(4), 817–835.
- Schäfer, A. (2010). Die Folgen sozialer Ungleichheit für die Demokratie in Westeuropa. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 4(1), 131–156.
- Soroka, S. N., & Wlezien, C. (2008). On the limits to inequality in representation. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41(2), 319–327.
- Ura, J. D., & Ellis, C. R. (2008). Income, preferences, and the dynamics of policy responsiveness. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41(4), 785–794.
- Verba, S. (1996). The citizen as respondent: Sample surveys and American democracy. Presidential Address, APSA, 1995. *American Political Science Review*, 90(1), 1–7.
- Wauters, B. (2010). Bringing class (back) in: Methodological reflections on social class and representation. *Representation*, 46(2), 183–195.
- Z'graggen, H. (2009). *Die Professionalisierung von Parlamenten im historischen und internationalen Vergleich*. Bern: Haupt.