

**As elected officials make
policy, do they pay attention
(only) to the preferences of
wealthier citizens?**

- Is America a land of economic opportunity but limited political opportunity?
- Or neither?
- Representation by “coincidence” is not power.
- Recurring argument: there is “class bias”
 - Policy outcomes
 - Responsiveness
 - Procedural inequality

The term American Dream can mean different things to different people. However you define it, do you believe your family has achieved the American Dream, you're on your way to achieving it, or is it out of reach for your family? (Source: Fox News Poll, Feb, 2019)

38% Achieved it

40% On the way

18% Out of reach

4% Don't know



Do you think (Hillary) Clinton/(Donald) Trump will win fair and square or will [he/she] win mainly because the system is rigged? (Source: Monmouth University Polling Institute Poll: November 2016, Nov, 2016)

87% Fair and square

9% Because the system is rigged

4% Don't know (Vol.)



Elections today don't matter; things stay the same no matter who we vote in

	Total	5 point Party ID				
		Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Republican
Strongly agree	9.6%	12.4%	5.7%	19.2%	3.0%	3.6%
Agree	29.7%	29.6%	23.2%	39.7%	31.1%	25.7%
Disagree	43.2%	36.8%	56.2%	33.9%	49.5%	50.7%
Strongly disagree	17.5%	21.2%	14.9%	7.2%	16.3%	20.1%
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
(Unweighted N)	(7,916)	(2,847)	(683)	(1,161)	(716)	(2,322)

People like me don't have any say in what the government does

	Total	Democrat	Lean Democrat	Independent	Lean Republican	Republican
Strongly agree	18.1%	21.4%	20.1%	23.2%	16.9%	10.2%
Agree	42.1%	41.7%	45.9%	46.9%	36.9%	41.4%
Disagree	32.8%	30.8%	31.3%	24.0%	42.8%	37.5%
Strongly disagree	7.0%	6.1%	2.7%	5.9%	3.4%	10.8%
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
(Unweighted N)	(7,888)	(2,840)	(680)	(1,159)	(716)	(2,304)

Bartels, 2017

- Relationship between public opinion and social spending
- Data: International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), WVS, EVS
- Time period: 1985 — 2012
- ~30 affluent democracies

Motivation

“If governments only seem to be responsive to the views of ordinary citizens because those views happen to coincide with the preferences of privileged elites, affluent citizens, or powerful interest groups, then the appearance of popular political influence is illusory.”

Notion of (in)equality

- Equal influence, regardless of income
- Focus: income only
 - Unlike gender or race, income is neither exogenous nor a protected characteristic
- Viewpoint: Responsiveness matters more than proximity (congruence)

Main results/claims

- Wealthier citizens are support welfare less
- Policy is more responsive to the preferences of the rich
- “democracies spend much less on social programs than they would if policy-makers were fully responsive to citizens’ preferences in this domain”
- Sub-analyses by political culture, democratic consolidation, electoral and policy-making institutions, national wealth, and economic inequality

Data

- Prompt: *Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say “much more,” it might require a tax increase to pay for it.*
- Paper focuses on
 - pensions
 - health
 - education
 - unemployment benefits

Averaging the four separate measures of demand for spending on pensions, health, education, and unemployment benefits provides an overall measure of social spending preferences

Total N=1,518. (Other, don't know, and missing responses for individual items omitted.)

	<i>Old age pensions</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Unemploy ment benefits</i>	<i>Social spending (average)</i>
Spend much more (100)	24.2%	36.1%	41.2%	10.5%	28.0%
Spend more (75)	41.0%	44.4%	42.4%	25.1%	38.2%
Spend the same as now (50)	27.6%	13.6%	12.6%	49.6%	25.8%
Spend less (25)	5.6%	4.6%	3.0%	12.8%	6.5%
Spend much less (0)	1.7%	1.3%	0.8%	2.1%	1.5%
Net unmet demand (-50 to +50)	+20.1	+27.4	+30.0	+7.3	+21.2

In four countries—Australia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States—the ISSP spending questions have been asked four times over a period of two decades

Persistence of Net Demand for Social Spending in Four Countries, 1985-2007

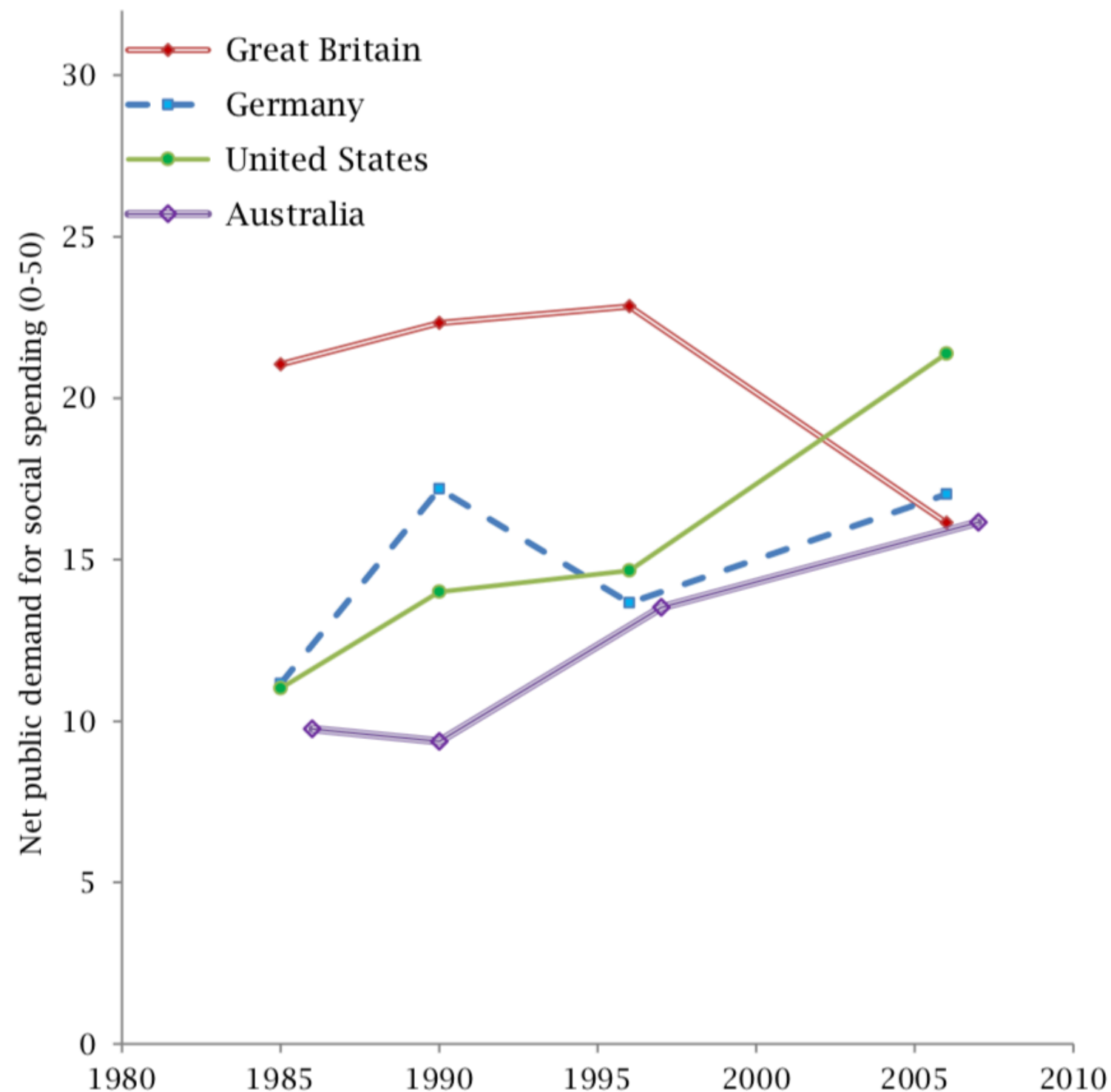
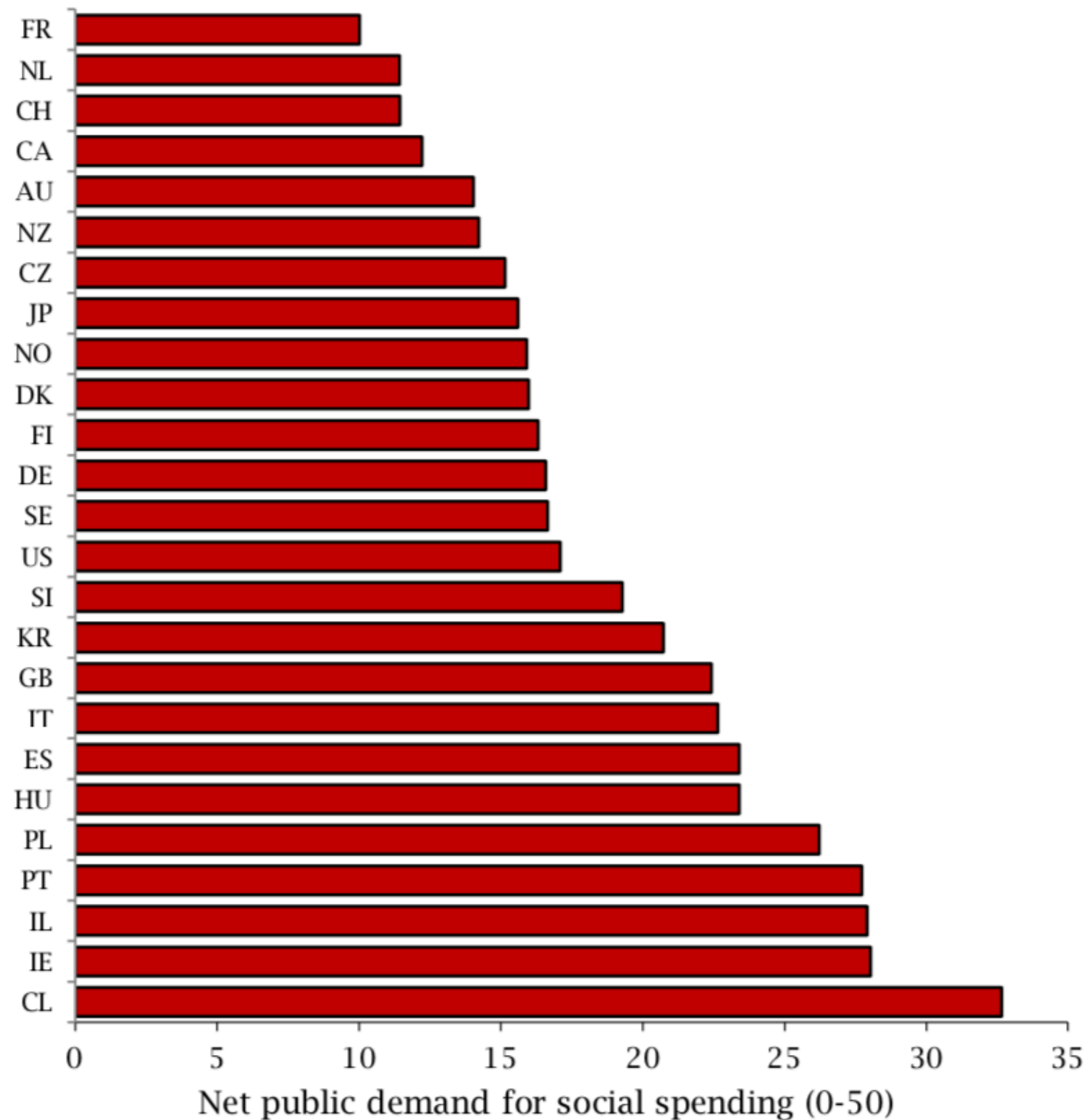


Figure 1
Net Public Demand for Social Spending in OECD Countries



- 1 points increase in aggregate public support for social spending was associated with an expected difference of about .349 percentage points in incremental spending over the next two years.
- Outcome: Social spending per capita (% of GDP)

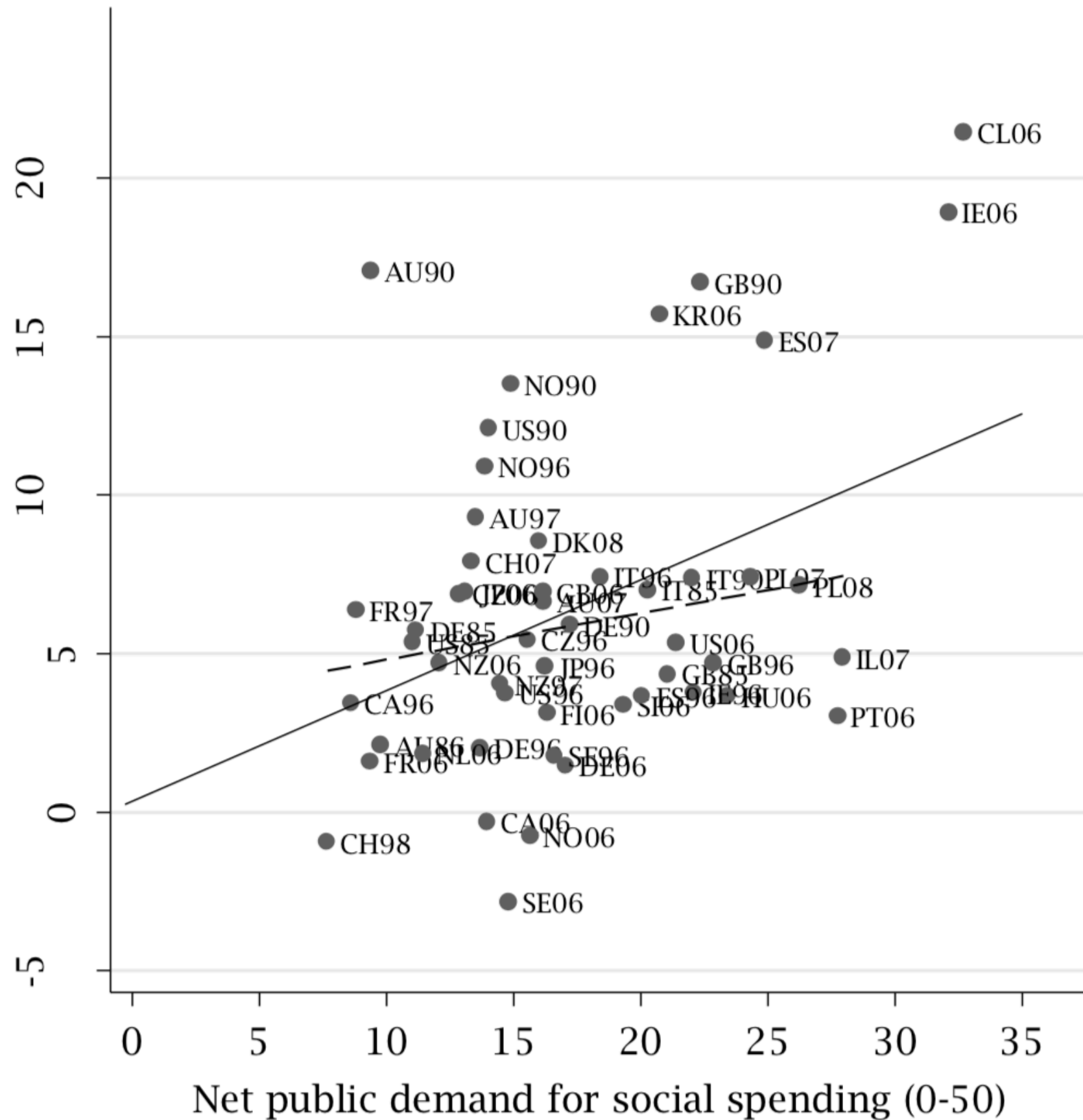
Claim: Even a “responsive” policy-making process may fail to reflect public preferences, even over long periods of time, if the extent of responsive is inadequate

Table 2
Public Opinion and Social Spending: ISSP

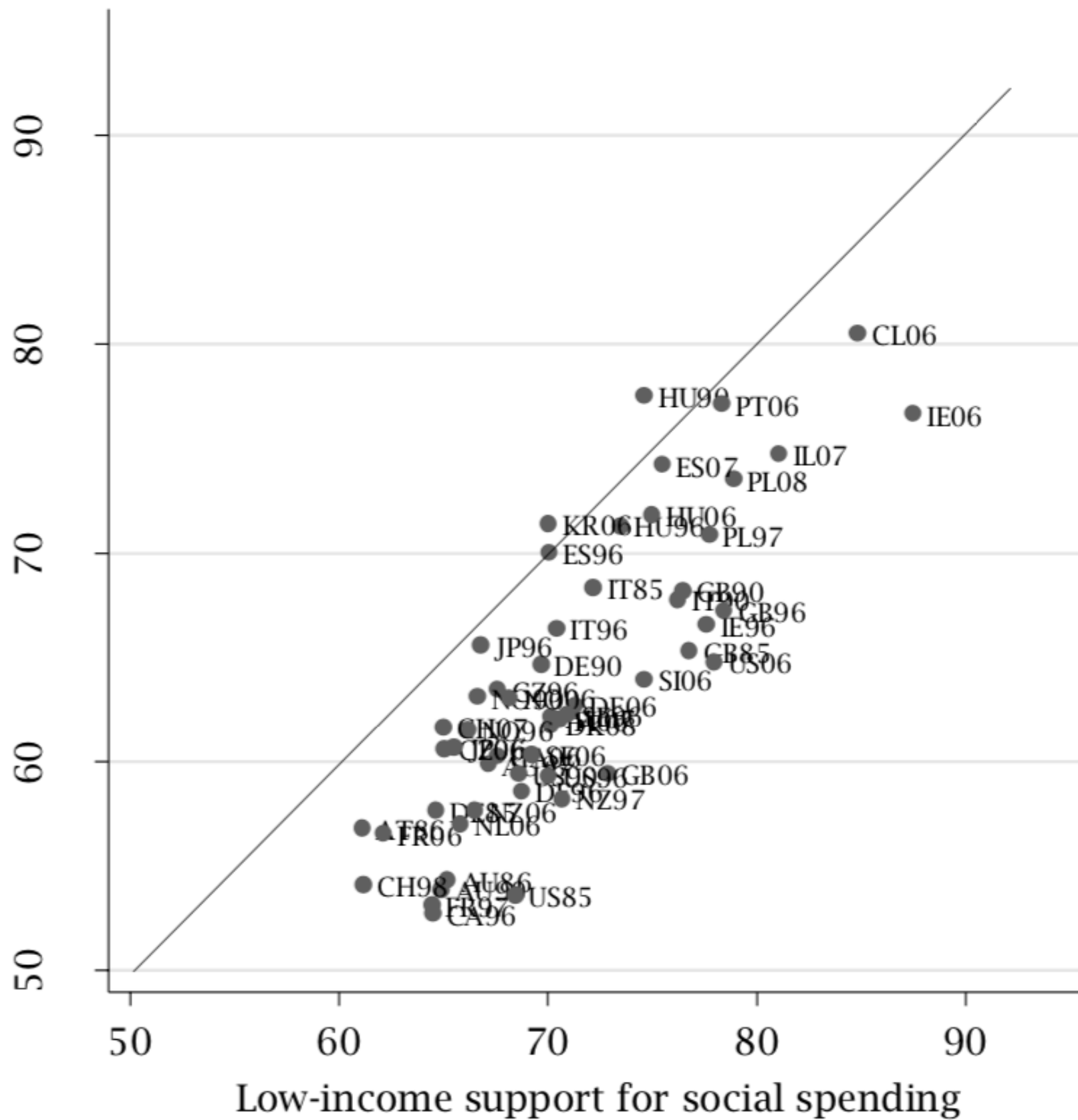
Two-year changes in real social spending per capita (%). Ordinary least squares regression parameter estimates with standard errors (clustered by country) in parentheses.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Social spending preferences	.349 (.140)	.206 (.116)	.309 (.142)	.182 (.112)
Budget-cutting preferences	---	---	-.093 (.057)	-.046 (.044)
Dependency ratio (65+/20-64)	---	5.70 (19.40)	---	4.49 (19.18)
GDP per capita (<i>ln</i>)	---	9.29 (3.41)	---	8.49 (3.43)
Spending per capita (<i>ln</i>)	---	-8.36 (2.20)	---	-8.05 (2.26)
Δ GDP per capita (%)	---	.13 (.31)	---	.14 (.31)
Δ Unemployment (%)	---	1.09 (.41)	---	1.07 (.41)
Intercept	-17.05 (9.39)	-33.13 (28.74)	-7.94 (11.34)	-22.52 (28.62)
<i>Standard error of regression</i>	4.79	3.91	4.75	3.93
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.14	.43	.16	.42
<i>N (countries)</i>	51 (25)	51 (25)	51 (25)	51 (25)

Social Spending Preferences and Policy Change



High- and Low-Income Support for Social Spending



**Everyone (rich and poor respondents)
declares they want more spending**

Differentiated Public Opinion and Social Spending: ISSP

Two-year changes in real social spending per capita (%). Ordinary least squares regression parameter estimates with standard errors (clustered by country) in parentheses.

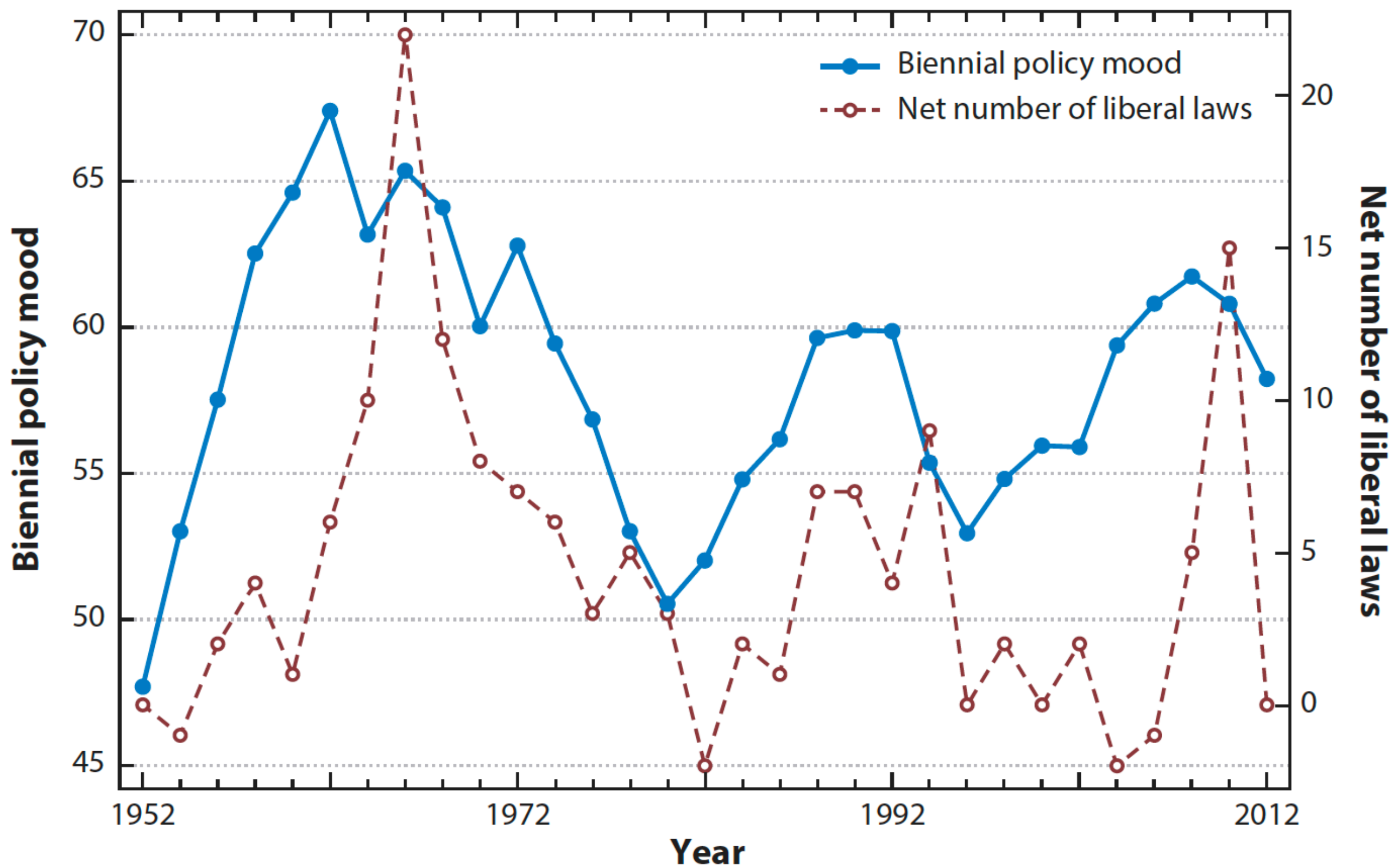
	<i>(13)</i>	<i>(14)</i>	<i>(15)</i>	<i>(16)</i>
High-income social spending preferences	.286 (.168)	.152 (.116)	.305 (.185)	.172 (.094)
Low-income social spending preferences	.044 (.160)	.048 (.162)	-.018 (.178)	.022 (.137)
High-income budget-cutting preferences	---	---	-.199 (.079)	-.164 (.059)
Low-income budget-cutting preferences	---	---	.110 (.082)	.132 (.076)
Dependency ratio (65+/20-64)	---	4.36 (18.33)	---	3.34 (16.98)
GDP per capita (<i>ln</i>)	---	9.30 (3.31)	---	9.29 (2.77)
Spending per capita (<i>ln</i>)	---	-8.25 (2.15)	---	-8.00 (2.00)
Δ GDP per capita (%)	---	.14 (.31)	---	.17 (.30)
Δ Unemployment (%)	---	1.08 (.41)	---	1.06 (.42)
Intercept	-14.86 (9.53)	-33.13 (28.26)	-5.28 (10.70)	-31.94 (22.43)
<i>Standard error of regression</i>	4.82	3.95	4.71	3.90
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.13	.42	.17	.43
<i>N (countries)</i>	51 (25)	51 (25)	51 (25)	51 (25)

A thorny issue

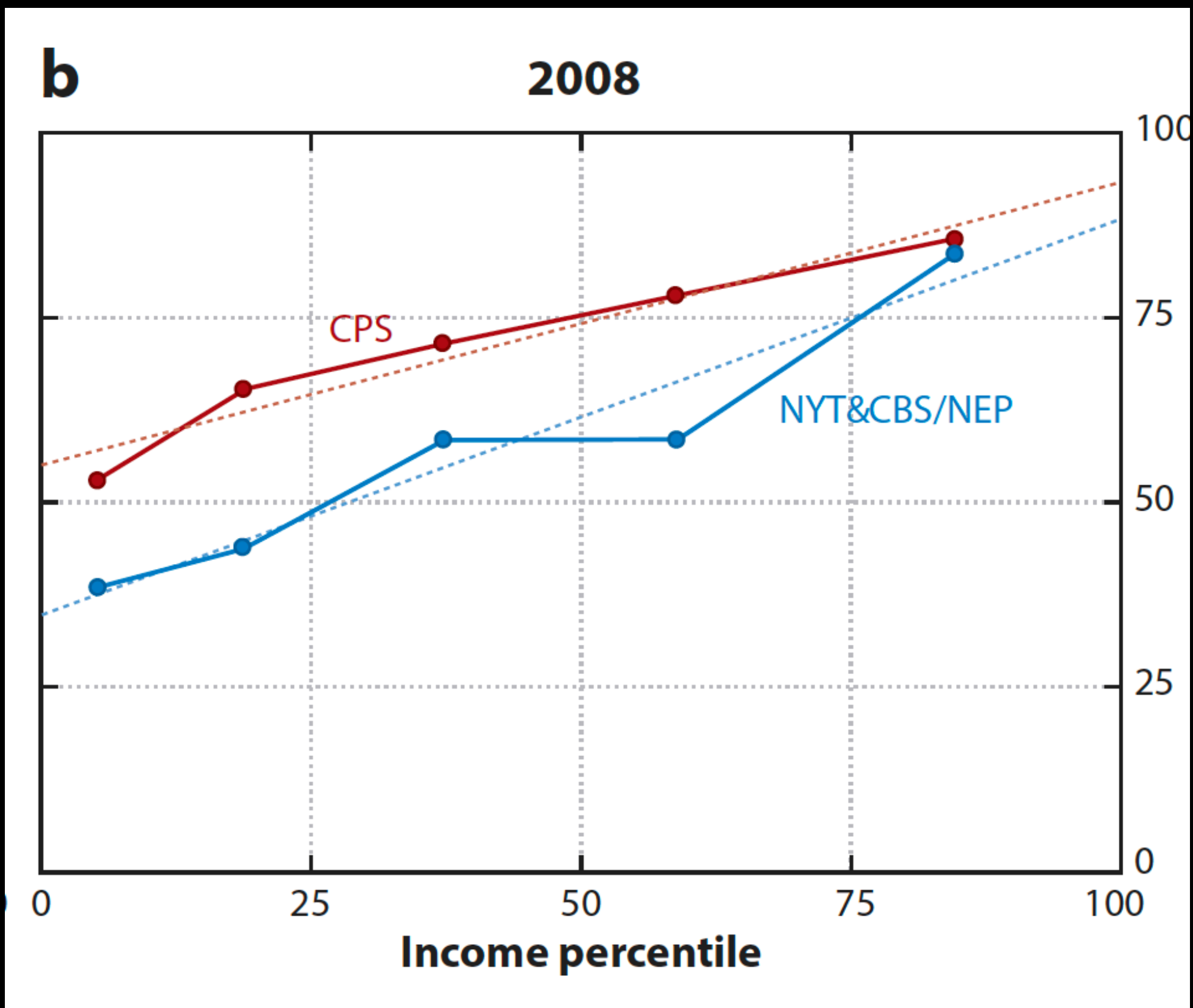
- Budget-cutting preferences: “some things the government might do for the economy” - respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed “cuts in government spending”
- Claim: “the apparent impact of spending preferences on actual spending is not much affected by including budget-cutting preferences in the analysis”

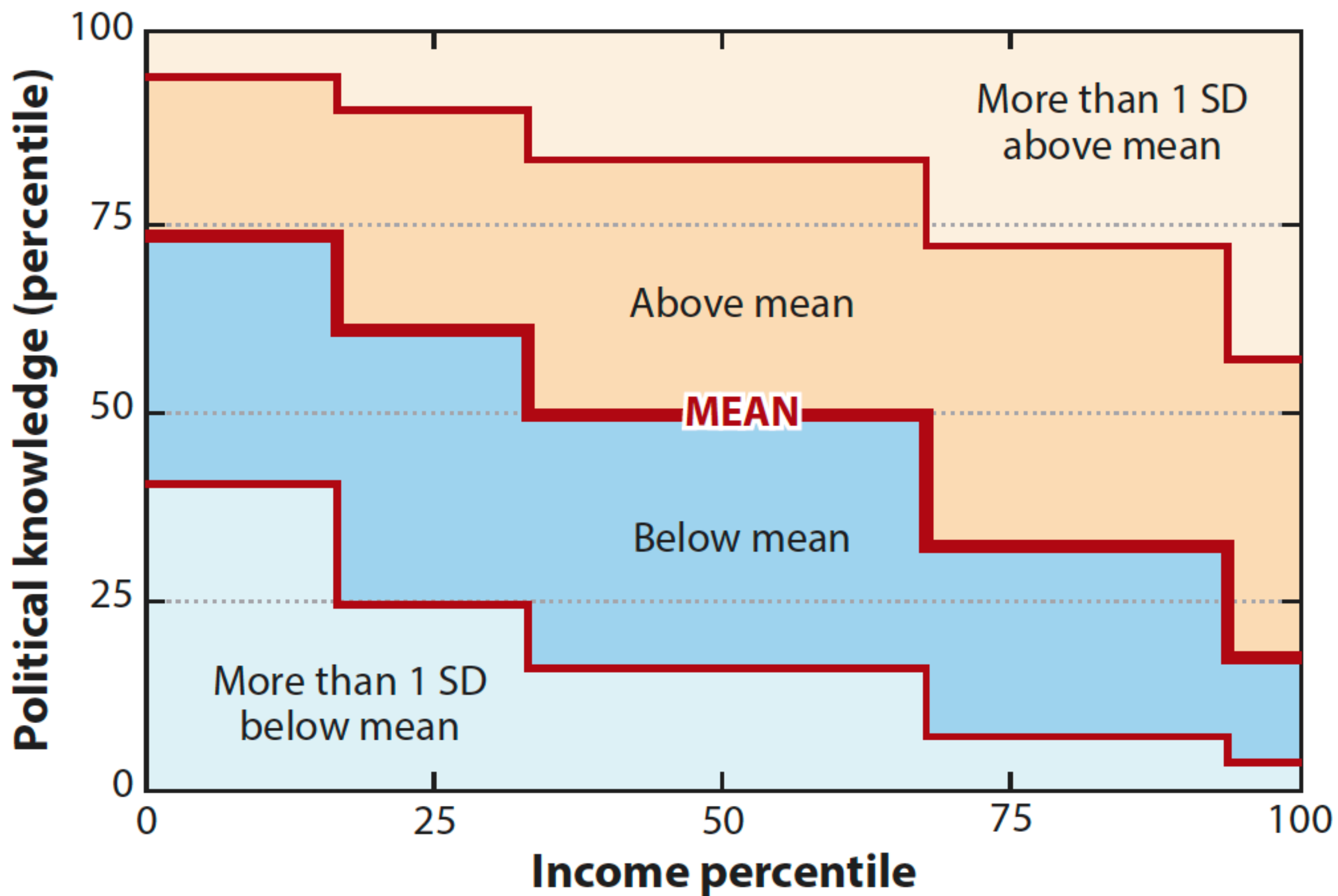
Eriskon, Review piece (ARPS, 2015)

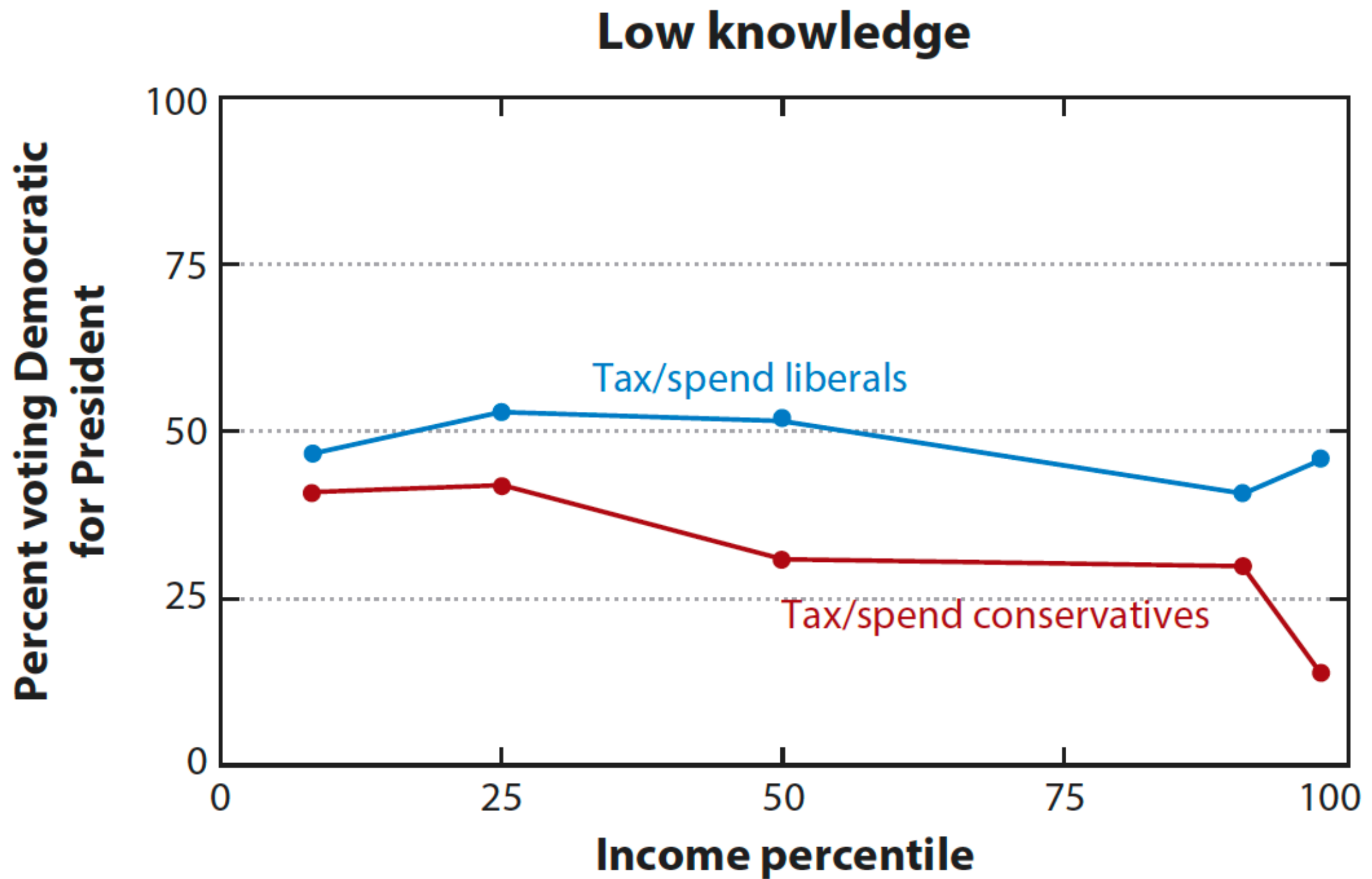
- Low-income Americans vote at lower rates
- Political knowledge is lower among voters in the bottom of the income distribution
- Opinions of low-income voters “count less”
- Claim: Knowledge conditions issue-based voting
- Major legislation usually moves policy in the liberal direction (i.e. the direction favored by low-income voters)



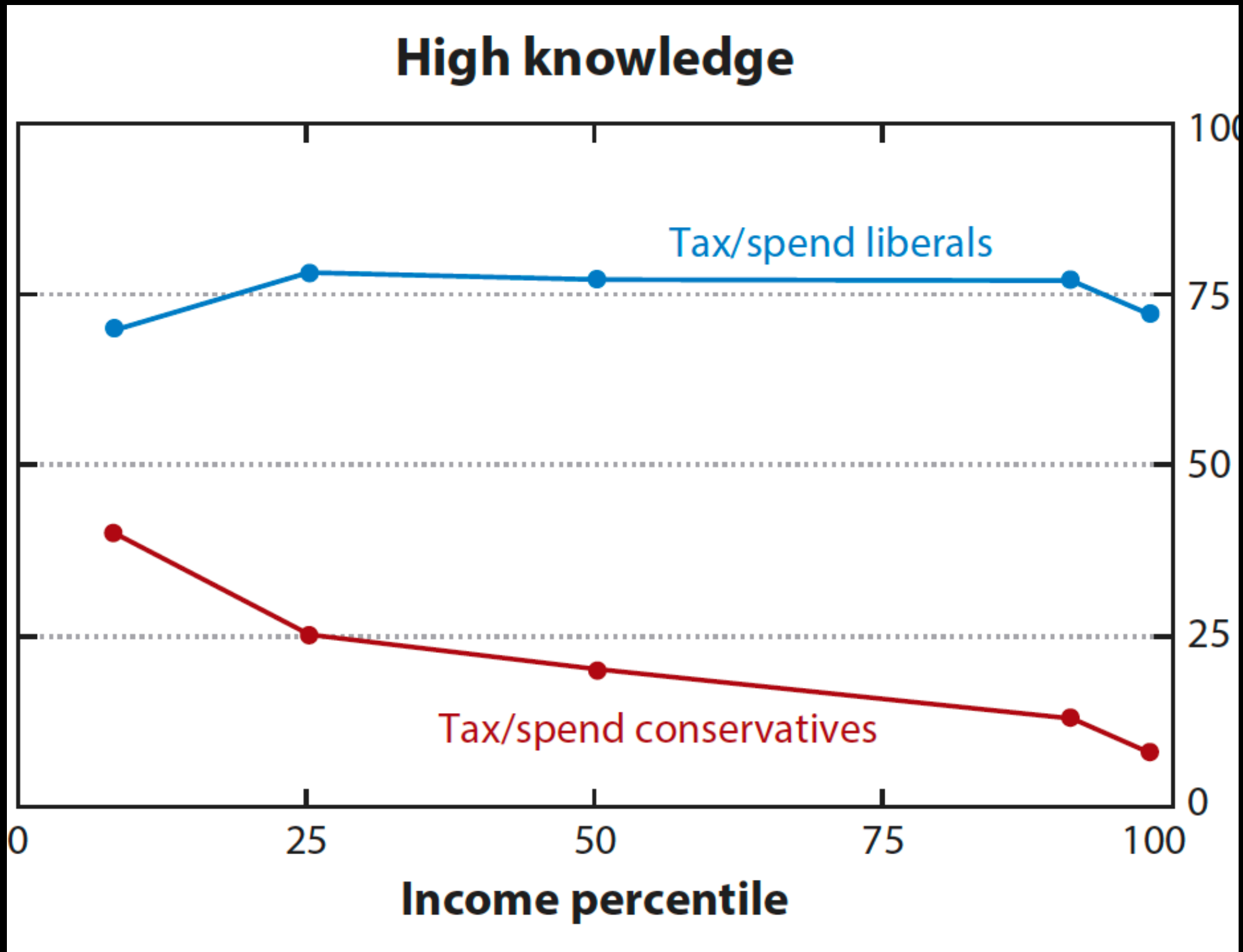
Turnout rates by income



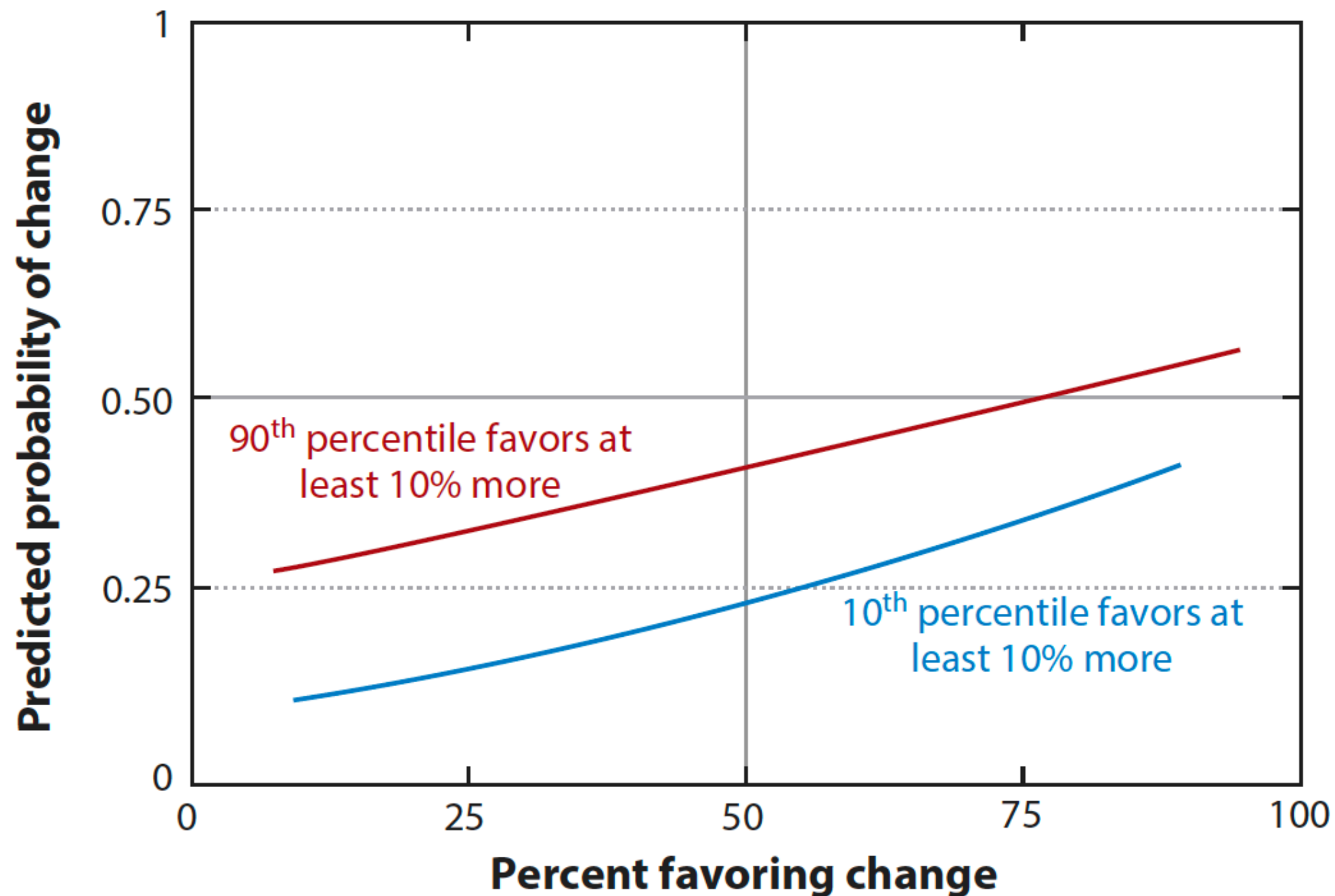




Presidential vote by social welfare opinion and income, 1980–2004.
Whites only. Data are from the American National Election Studies



Claim: Citizens are more likely to take stands that represent their “class interests” when they are more knowledgeable and to vote accordingly”



Predicted (probit) success rates (change versus status quo) as a function of general public opinion for the two types of issues.

Upper-income issues are those favored by citizens at the 90th percentile by at least 10 points more than those at the 10th percentile

- Are measures of proximity and responsiveness satisfactory?
- What do we make of the status quo bias?