



**Segmented Representation:
The Reagan White House and Disproportionate Responsiveness**

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Abstract

Are the decisions of American policy makers influenced by the attitudes of the general public or by the views of distinct sub-groups of voters? This paper seeks to identify disproportionate influence of economic and political subgroups on government policies of particular interest to them. Using a unique data set of private polls from the White House of Ronald Reagan, we find variations in presidential issue positions across policy domains, and note different types of public attitudes that reflect the views of high income earners, political independents, Baptists and born again protestants, and conservative Republicans. These findings have implications for both understanding the strategic calculations in how public opinion is collected and used, as well as identifying economic and political pathways for biasing government policy from serving the overall interests of the country.

The relationship between the government and the mass public is commonly used to characterize the nature of a political system. Populist theories of democracy define this relationship as the close association between the wishes and wants of the country's citizens and the substantive policy decisions of elected government officials. Political representation also can be viewed in symbolic terms; kings, for instance, "stand for" the country (Pitkin, 1967). American presidents are often said to "speak for the people."

Although political representation has been defined in quite different ways, nearly all portrayals share a focus on the government's relationship with its citizenry. For instance, kings or presidents represent the country as a whole; a member of Congress represents all residents within his or her legislative district; and so on.

Empirical research on political representation tends to focus on the nation or other aggregate populations (like the congressional district or state). A large body of work has studied the degree of consistency or congruence between political elites and the mass public's opinion. For example, one body of research studies the dyadic relationship between a member of Congress and the mass public's attitudes in the member's district or state (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Bartels, 1991; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). Other work examines collective or systematic political representation – namely, the relationship between aggregate national public opinion, and the decisions of government, through collective efforts or separate institutions such as Congress (Weissberg 1978; Page and Shapiro 1983; see for review Manza, Cook, and Page, 2002).

Despite significant differences in research design, the dyadic and collective approaches to studying political representation share two similarities. First, they both focus on the government's relationship with largely undifferentiated populations – the

attitudes of the mass public in a congressional district, state, or nation. Second, past research typically treats the relationship between the mass public and government officials as one dimensional – studying aggregated policy rather than variations across distinctive policy domains and focusing either on specific policy preferences or on global liberal or conservative “mood.”

The result is that political representation research has become oddly apolitical, and neglects inequalities in influence and the calibration of strategy by political elites. Ample evidence shows that distinct subgroups of citizens, particularly the wealthy and educated, participate in elections and a range of other political activities at far higher rates than others (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Yet, few have studied the extent and nature of affluent influence on actual public policy. Even less attention has been dedicated towards better understanding the impact that social and political sub-groups not defined by economic advantage—such as religious groups—have upon government decision makers.

A comprehensive political analysis of representation needs to address not only possible disparities in influence, but the distinct strategies of elites to cultivate and mobilize segments of the electorate through differentiated appeals based on policy domains. Past research on political representation fails to take into account the changing motivations of government officials, who target specific subgroups, and specifically craft public messages to satisfy their interest.

We explore segmented representation across policy domains by studying how President Ronald Reagan responded to a unique data set – the private public opinion polling conducted by his White House. Studying segmented representation in presidential

behavior cuts across the grain of a long tradition, from the Federalist Papers to contemporary presidents, which emphasizes the chief executive's political and constitutional responsibilities to serve the collective national interest (Jacobs, 2005). Yet, presidents also often have strategic reasons to attend to the preferences of specific groups so as to build electoral coalitions.

New archival research demonstrates that the Reagan White House conducted extensive private polling, which focused particularly on the interests of specific demographic and political subgroups (Jacobs and Burns, 2004). Reagan sought to capitalize on the demise of the Democrat's New Deal coalition by building a new conservative Republican coalition, which appealed to political independents and extended the Party's traditional conservative base. The movement targeted those likely to support smaller government, "supply side" economics (which accepted higher budget deficits in exchange for lower taxes), social conservative values, and hawkish military policies. This paper seeks to systematically determine if and how Reagan calibrated his public policy statements to respond to interests of these particular subgroups.

I. Studying Segmented Representation

An enduring question in the study of political representation concerns the disproportional influence of economically advantaged citizens. The conclusion that the most advantaged influence government is as old as the United States itself. In 1913, Charles Beard argued that the U.S. Constitution was designed by and for the wealthy. C. Wright Mills (1959) argued that a coherent "power elite" directed America's major economic and governmental institutions to serve its interests. Critics of the pluralist account of government point to the influence exerted by economically powerful semi-

autonomous elites on the political agenda and on decentralized decision making within Congress and the bureaucracy (Schattschneider 1960; McConnell 1966; Bacharatz and Baratz 1962). However, these conclusions have been criticized on the claim that they are based on limited cases rather than systematic evidence.

In this light, a new and growing body of research has begun to supply systematic evidence of the influence of the economically advantaged on government policy. One study of income-weighted preferences and roll call votes cast by U.S. Senators in the late 1980s and early 1990s found that senators are consistently much more responsive to the views of affluent constituents than to the views of the poor (Bartels 2005). Another study found that the American political system is a great deal more responsive to the preferences of the rich than to the preferences of the poor (Gilens 2005). A third study reported that the policy stands of foreign policy decision makers were most influenced by business leaders, with the general public exerting no significant effect, and policy experts largely serving as conduits for the views of other elites (including business) (Jacobs and Page 2005).

Virtually no work, however, has explored disproportional influence of other (non-economic) decisive political forces. The early 1970s was a period of significant change in the electorate and the organization of political parties, with the goal to alter political incentives. In particular, changes in the process for selecting candidates substantially enhanced the influence of single issue and ideologically extreme party activists. Within the Republican Party, for instance, social conservatives (especially born again protestants and Baptist fundamentalists), economic conservatives (especially, “supply side” advocates favoring sharp reductions in government taxation), and philosophical

conservatives all gained new prominence in candidate selection and thereby in government circles (Aldrich, 1995; Edsall and Edsall, 1991). Even as ideologically-oriented party activists gained more sway, both political parties competed to appeal to the growing ranks of independent voters. As the Democratic Party's New Deal coalition unraveled and stalwart supporters such as Catholics drifted from the Party, the proportion of voters who described themselves as independent in surveys by the American National Election Studies rose from 23 percent in 1952 to 34 percent by 1980.¹

These significant changes in the electorate and party organization generated incentives for national political leaders to win over politically critical segments of the electorate. With leaders in both parties maneuvering for advantage, Republican government officials were motivated to construct a new conservative coalition – one that would expand Barry Goldwater's economic libertarianism to include social conservatives, “supply-siders” who favored sharply lower taxes (even at the risk of higher budget deficits), and more general philosophical conservatives.

Changes in the political incentive structure, along with shifts in the electorate, motivated government officials to devote particular attention to distinct economic and political segments of the electorate. For Republican leaders, we would expect their policy decisions to be particularly attentive to higher incomes groups, social conservatives (namely, fundamental Baptists and Catholics as they defected from the Democratic Party), and political independents. By contrast, Democratic leaders gravitated toward social liberals and economic liberals who favored greater government intervention in market distributions, though the pressure to raise campaign contributions

¹ The proportion independent includes both “independent independents” as well as respondents who indicated after declaring themselves as independent that they were “closer” to one party.

also placed a premium on higher income groups among their supporters (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

Another challenge facing research on segmented representation is accounting for variations across policy domains and the public's global and policy-specific attitudes. Previous research suggests that politicians and presidents in particular distinguish between domestic and international issues based on political considerations (Wildavsky 1994; Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier, 2004). For instance, bold and aggressive *foreign policy* initiatives (e.g., hawkish defense policy) offer an opportunity to promote a portrait of strength, while conciliatory positions on defense issues can project, or be portrayed by their opponents as revealing, a soft, timid, or passive personal character (Nincic 1990; DeRouen 2000; Foyle 1999; Ostrom and Job 1986). In general, domestic issues offer – under normal conditions – an opportunity for government officials to respond to the public's most intense concerns.

In addition, strategic political actors differentiate public attitudes along two distinct dimensions – the public's general ideology and the public's policy specific preferences (Druckman and Jacobs 2006). When the public harbors strong concerns and intense preferences, policy-makers tend to behave as “splitters” – they collect and respond to the public's preferences toward specific policies (e.g. Monroe 1979, 1998, Page and Shapiro 1983, Geer 1991, 1996, Heith 1998, 2003, Wlezien 2004, Soroka and Wlezien 2005).² When not facing intense concerns and strong preferences, government officials act like “*lumpers*” by collecting and using public opinion information to form

² Although the “splitter” scholarly tradition shares a common focus on the specific policy preferences of citizens, there are variations in the data sources and methodological approaches taken (e.g., archival based research of presidents and quantitative analyses that correlate published polls and government policy-decisions).

summary judgments of the liberal or conservative contours of public opinion (Kingdon 1984: 68-69, 153; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). Under normal circumstances, government officials are expected to focus on splitting on domestic issues, where the public often forms more intense views given its direct knowledge and experience. Conversely, lumping on foreign policy is considered more distant and less directly apparent in the public's daily lives (Druckman and Jacobs 2006).

New research on segmented representation across policy domains and dimensions of public attitudes poses five broad expectations in investigating political leadership and, specifically, President Reagan's position on key issues. First, we expect political leaders to differentiate their approaches by relying on general ideological data on public attitudes in crafting their foreign policy positions (i.e. lumping) and using policy specific data in fashioning their domestic positions (i.e. splitting). Second, we expect that the intense concerns of the affluent regarding specific economic issues will focus the attention of political leaders. Specifically, Republican leaders like President Reagan are expected to be acutely responsive to higher income groups when fashioning his public position on taxes, government spending, and Social Security (e.g., opposition to expanding or even maintaining social security). Third, we expect community groups with strong social networks—mainly Baptists and Catholics for Republican leaders—to exert a disproportionately strong influence on Reagan's specific public positions on family values and crime. Fourth, we expect Reagan to be attentive to the domestic issue specific policy preferences of political independents. Finally, we expect general conservatism to have a strong impact on Reagan's public positions on defense spending (where lumping and ideology play a larger role).

II. Data and Methods

We test our expectations with a unique body of evidence: President Ronald Reagan's extensive private data on public opinion during his first term in office, 1981-1989. Although focusing on a single president raises questions about generalizability (i.e., from Reagan to politicians more generally), the use of targeted empirical research to generate broader theoretical insights has a distinguished tradition (e.g., Conover and Sigelman 1982, Miller and Stokes 1963, Riker 1996). The main advantage of the Reagan White House's polling data is that it provides unparalleled access to actual political decisions about the collection and use of distinct types of public opinion information. Virtually all prior research on public opinion and political action (e.g., Cohen 1997, Wlezien 2004), as well as previous analysis of the disproportionate government responsiveness to the economically affluent (Bartels 2005; Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005) relies on publicly available polls from survey organizations or other secondary sources. This approach lacks direct evidence regarding whether or what kind of public opinion information government officials actually track or use.

Is there a consistent and systematic relationship between the public policy statements of politicians (Reagan in our case) and their (i.e. Reagan's) private polling data on distinct policy domains and electoral subgroups? Past research, using case studies of various administrations, policy areas, and pressure groups, suggests that such a relationship exists (e.g. Beard 1913; Mills 1959; Schattschneider 1960; McConnell 1966). Although this work offers valuable insights about the disproportionate influence of distinct groups on government policy making, case studies cannot detect general patterns of influence. We search for these patterns of influence by studying the relationship of

Reagan's White House polling, and his specific policy statements. In particular, we use two data sets to investigate the extent and nature of the association between a president's polling information on the core policy concerns of distinct electoral sub-groups and the president's public statements on those policy issues: Reagan's privately collected polling data and a systematic content analysis of the President's public statements on policy issues.

A. Public Opinion Data

The Reagan White House developed two distinctive sets of polling questions to track the public's opinions. First, the White House relied on an item that asked respondents to report their ideological self-identification, producing a percentage who declared themselves conservative. We label this measure "General Ideological Identification," with higher scores representing the conservative end of the scale.³ For example, this measure might report that, at a given point in time, 60% of the voters view themselves as ideologically conservative.

The White House's ideological self-identification data provide an appropriate independent variable for the lumpers account. While this measure differs from other lumping measures – such as Stimson's (1991) "public mood" that aggregates over numerous policy areas – the critical point is that archival records show that Reagan treated the data as measuring the public's ideological orientation (see Druckman and Jacobs 2005).

The second set of data from White House polling measure public opinion toward specific policies (e.g., particular positions on social security, taxes, defense spending). What we label "General Policy Opinion" serves as the relevant independent variable for

³ The Ideological Identification measure has an overall mean of .60 and variance of .03.

the splitter account. The General Policy Opinion items report the percentage of the public which holds the conservative position on the conservative position on the given policy proposal (running from 0% through 100%).⁴ For example, this measure might report that 40% of voters take a conservative position on taxes. Another of these measures might show that 70% report conservative positions on defense spending.

Given our focus on government attention to discrete electoral subgroups, we also used the Reagan White House's polling data on the policy preferences of four distinct segments of voters: party identifiers (Democrats, Republicans, and independents who did not identify with either major party), high income earners⁵, and born again Protestants or fundamental Baptists, and Catholics. (Some of these subgroups – such as Republican identifiers – may reflect the general attitudes associated with conservative “mood” as described by the lumpers account.) These data report the percentage of the particular subgroup taking a conservative position on a given issue – such as 80% of Baptists taking a conservative position on crime.

Although the measurement of these sub-group categories is neither consistent nor necessarily comparable with contemporary social science research standards, the White House clearly treated information about these sub-groups as valid and politically important (see Druckman and Jacobs 2005). More specifically, we collected the White House's data on the preferences of sub-groups toward policy issues that align with their interests and values. For instance, we assembled White House data on the preferences of

⁴ Reagan's average conservative score for specific issues was .47 (.22) for all issues, .44 (.22) for domestic issues, and .52 (.20) for foreign affairs.

⁵ Reagan measured income in two ways. Sometimes he asked respondents to classify themselves as low, middle, or upper class. Other times, he asked respondents to report which of three different earning categories they fall in (e.g., under \$15,000 a year). We combined these measures by splitting the three numeric responses into three income level groups – one below \$15,000, one between \$15,000 and \$30,000, and one above \$30,000.

high income earners toward lower taxes, less government spending, and Social Security reform.

B. Politician Behavior Data

We measure behavior by analyzing Reagan's public statements – what we call, “Presidential Policy Positions.”⁶ Modern presidents carefully calibrate their public statements to signal their policy positions to congressional committees, interest groups, and voters (Riker 1996, Cohen 1997). In terms of the Reagan White House, the President and his senior advisers crafted the President's public statements to communicate specific messages to the country and to rally public support (see Druckman and Jacobs 2005, Jacobs 2005).

Our specific measure comes from a rigorous content analysis of Reagan's statements on the full range of domestic and foreign policy issues in all news conferences and addresses to the nation as well as a random selection of 50% of other oral and written statements.⁷ The President's statements were retrieved from the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* and the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. Our unit of analysis was each distinct public utterance by the President regarding a specific policy. For each document in the *Public Papers* or the weekly *Compilation* that we analyzed, we first coded whether Reagan addressed a substantive policy issue (e.g., increased defense spending, support for family values, or support for cracking down on crime). We categorized each of Reagan's substantive policy statements as referring to

⁶ Although this measure of political activity provides a direct indicator of a critical strategic form of presidential behavior, it differs from those deployed in some past work (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002).

⁷ Oral statements include bill signings; addresses to the nation; press conferences; and speeches to interest groups, administration officials, state and local government officials, Republican Party leaders, and foreign nations. Written statements include messages to congress, administration officials, foreign nations, interviews with domestic and foreign news media, proclamations, bill signings and vetoes, and press secretary releases.

one of 229 particular policy issues, which constitute the universe of distinctive issues that the President addressed throughout his term.

In addition to coding the policy issue that Reagan addressed, we coded the date of their comments and the number of lines of text devoted to it. We also coded the ideological direction of each policy statements on a 1 to 5 scale: higher scores indicate increasing conservativeness (i.e., policy statements favoring less government responsibility and activity) and lower scores represent liberalism (statements indicating greater government involvement). When necessary, to determine the conservative direction of a proposal, we consulted contemporary accounts in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* as well as memoirs and other historical analyses. We carefully assessed the content analysis and found it highly reliable (i.e., nearly 75% agreement between independent coders).⁸

We collapsed Reagan's statement data by merging the hundreds of distinct issues that each president addressed into a smaller set of aggregated (but substantively related) clusters of 98 policy areas. For some of our analyses, we further aggregated data into domestic issues and foreign policy issues.⁹

C. Analysis of Public Opinion and Politician Behavior

⁸ One coder conducted the content analysis. Accordingly, our reliability analysis focused on external comparisons of lines of text that were coded in common; there was no need to examine inter-coder reliability. A second coder who had not been involved in this project analyzed a sample of documents examined by the first coder. A third coder compared the analysis by the first two coders. Comparisons between the first coder and the second showed levels of agreement of 71% for identification of the specific policy issue addressed by Reagan. In terms of the directionality of presidential comments, the coders agreed that a policy statement was pro, neutral, or con on 85% percent of the statements for Reagan.

⁹ The average ideological direction of Reagan's domestic statements was to 3.50 (1.80) compared to 3.46 (1.80) for his foreign policy statements. (The scores are based on a 1 to 5 scale; $t_{2258} = 9.81$; $p < .01$, and $t_{1434} = 11.98$; $p < .01$, respectively.) (Note these scores exclude issues the few issues that could not be classified in an ideological direction, such as position on outer-space exploration.)

Our expectation is that the President's policy statements will be significantly and positively related to data on General Ideological Identification, General Policy Opinion, and subgroup policy specific preferences. To analyze the data, we create monthly aggregated measures of each of the variables. For each month where data were available, we created measures of Presidential Policy Positions, General Ideological Identification, and measures of General Policy Opinions and the policy preferences of the key subgroups for each of the merged 98 policy areas.¹⁰ As mentioned, we coded all variables so that higher values indicated congruent movements in a conservative direction. Because of the directional nature of the analyses, we exclude issues on which positions could not clearly be classified in a conservative-liberal direction.

We potentially have a substantial number of observations. Reagan could have discussed 98 issues over the course of 97 months from January 1981 to December 1988, which totals 9,506 observations. In practice, however, Reagan did not make a statement on every issue in every month; he made a total of 3,261 statements on different policies in the given months. In addition, Reagan did not collect public opinion data on every issue over time. Our analysis depends on the availability of relevant public opinion data prior to the President's statement (i.e., we can only analyze the relationship between statements and public opinion data when the public opinion data exist).¹¹

¹⁰ We created monthly aggregated scores by averaging White House polling items on similar issues across geographic areas (state and national) within the same month. Our decision to produce monthly aggregated averages was based on White House memoranda and other evidence in which the president and his aides concentrated on trends and patterns across a number of states and within the nation as a whole. We also took average monthly scores for our Presidential Policy Positions measure; results are generally robust if we instead used weighted averages (i.e., weighted by space of the statement).

¹¹ We do not impute missing values in any of our analyses. Our decision was based on an examination of archival and other evidence from that suggests that presidents and their aides did not try to impute missing data and thus any such imputed data cannot be expected to impact presidential behavior.

We deal with the timeline aspect of our data in several ways. First, in all of our analyses, we include a lagged value of our dependent variable, Presidential Policy Positions. We expect a strong positive relationship between prior and present Presidential Policy Positions given the incremental nature of policy movement (Wildavsky 1964, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002: 285). Including a lagged dependent variable provides a tough test of our models: it serves as a control for various other influences that may have impacted the prior position of presidents (e.g., interest group activities).

Second, we use lagged versions of General Ideological Identification, General Policy Opinion data, and the subgroup policy preference data so as to reflect the White House's operations and decision-making process. This lag captures the time it took for the survey organizations to enter and analyze their results, and for the White House to weigh the results and incorporate them into presidential activities. White House records and other evidence (such as memoirs and diaries) suggest that Reagan used the previous set of results – even if this meant going back in time. Accordingly, our lagged variables used the most recent data completed at least one month earlier (most of the data were quite timely).¹² For instance, we related Reagan's policy statements on increasing defense spending in April 1982 to his polling data in March 1982 or, if data were not available in March 1982, in the previous month for which data were available.¹³

III. Empirical Analyses

¹² The interval between presidential statements and prior polling data was generally brief. Details are available from the authors.

¹³ Our focus on how White House polls influenced subsequent presidential behavior follows how they in fact used the polling data. The White Houses repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of their polls was to analyze public opinion to form policy and political decisions. In short, they were responding to the polls and not using the polls to systematically measure their effect on public opinion. While we do not deny the possibility of a reciprocal process (e.g., Hurley and Hill 2003, Druckman and Holmes 2004), it is neither our focus nor how Reagan primarily viewed their polls.

Our quantitative analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we begin by examining what types of public opinion data the Reagan White House collected. Second, we test whether the White House engages in splitting or lumping, all else constant. Third, we explore whether and how political independents and conservative sub-groups impacted his public statements.

A. Strategic Investments in Information

The White House recognized that space on survey instruments was limited and that collecting and processing data imposed substantial financial and organizational costs on the time and attention of its staff, senior officials, and the President. These costs in conjunction with strategic considerations motivated the White House to calibrate its collection of General Policy Opinion data that required distinct question for each issue. (This contrasts with the much cheaper General Ideological Identification data which was simply one self-identification ideology question on the survey.) Also, given the potentially large number of demographic, political, and other sub-groups, the White House carefully pinpointed certain components of the electorate as especially important strategically and worthy of investment in terms of tracking them.

The White House took a dynamic approach in selecting the domestic and international issues to track in its polling. Rather than asking about the same set of policy issues, Reagan's advisers added and dropped issues in reaction to new events, public concerns, and anticipation of future administration policy and action. Consistent with our earlier expectations about the direct relevance of domestic policy, the White House committed 65% of its polling on issues to domestic policy as opposed to foreign policy.¹⁴

¹⁴ All of the data reported in this section focus on issues on which an ideological direction could be classified, and on the availability of data prior to Reagan actually making a statement (thus it does not

Moreover, the attention to individual areas of domestic and foreign policy varied over time, receiving more or less polling depending on event, public concerns, and administration policy development.

The White House devoted particular attention to tracking the reactions of critical segments of the electorate.¹⁵ On domestic issues which presumably have particular relevance to them, 71% of the White House's polling results broke out the findings for independents, the affluent, Baptists, or Catholics. Specifically, it broke out results for different income groups 46% of the time, with 34% of these devoted to core economic issues that would be most relevant to income earning – taxes, government spending, and Social Security reform. Of particular interest, the White House concentrated its polling on detecting the views of the highest income earners on these issues; 84% of polling on core economic issues that provided data by income included specific data from the affluent.

In addition, on domestic issues, the White House broke out results for Baptists or Catholics 53% of the time. Fifteen percent of these data were on the social conservative issues of family values and crime that might of particular interest to these subgroups. Finally, across both domestic and foreign policy domains, the White House collected data on the specific views of political base Republicans 65% of the time. In tracking public thinking on defense spending, it broke data down by Republicans 99% of the time.

B. Policy Domain and the Public's Ideological and Policy Attitudes

We now explore how Reagan used these different data sets in crafting his policy position statements. We begin by looking at the relative impact of Ideological

include data collected but never ostensibly used in fashioning statements). Also, consistent with the above discussion, the statistics in this section refer to any data available at least one month prior to a statement (i.e., the most recently available data at least one month old).

¹⁵ The number of separate poll results for the sub-groups discussed here may differ from the number of observations in later regression analyses; the addition of variables may reduce the number of cases.

Identification and General Policy Opinion data on domestic and foreign policy statements. Recall that we earlier suggested Reagan will rely on Ideological Identification when it comes to foreign policy (which is more distant to the public) and General Policy Opinion on domestic issues.

Table 1 reports the regression results, for domestic and foreign policy, of Presidential Policy Positions on the General Policy Opinion and General Ideological Identification data, that the White House possessed. Both variables report the percentage of respondents moving in a conservative direction, standardized on 0 to 1 scales. As mentioned, we also include Presidential Policy Positions lagged to capture the incremental nature of policy movement. (The number of cases in all of our analyses varies based on the missing lag values for the dependent variable as well as the smaller number of cases for particular policy areas.)¹⁶

Table 1 reveals the predicted domain effect. General Policy Opinion drove Reagan's statements on *domestic policy* ($p \leq .05$) and exerted no statistically significant effects on his foreign policy comments.¹⁷ In contrast, General Ideological Identification influences Reagan's *foreign policy* comments ($p \leq .05$) but not his domestic statements. These results seem to suggest that Reagan was playing to his partisan and philosophically conservative base on the Cold War and building a strong defense as the best approach to securing peace. Moreover, the significant and strong effects of the lagged dependent variables suggests that Reagan's foreign and domestic policy positions tended to "lock in" once he had staked them out publicly. Put simply, he stuck with what he said.

¹⁶ We do not include policy dummy variables because our Policy Opinion data change over time very slowly or not at all. In this situation, it is preferable not to use policy dummies so as to ensure analysis of between unit effects (see Beck 2001: 285).

¹⁷ Because the hypotheses posit directional predictions, we use one-tailed tests (see Blalock 1979: 163).

[Table 1 About Here]

In terms of substantive impact, if the public moves 10% over the average conservativeness score, Reagan becomes about 8.5% more conservative in his statements on foreign policy (as measured by *Clarify*). By comparison, when the public changes 10% over the average General Policy Opinion score, Reagan becomes about 4% more conservative in his domestic policy statements.

The findings for Reagan suggest a bifurcated approach to how he used his polling information: he turned to disaggregated information on domestic issues on which voters possess more knowledge and direct experience, while relying on aggregated, ideological data on foreign affairs. Political and strategic calculations appear to have conditioned the use of different types of polling information across policy domains: under normal circumstances, electoral risks and rewards are more intense and direct in domestic than in foreign affairs, increasing the political incentives to track and respond to the public's specific policy preference in particular.

C. The Impact of Subgroups

The next logical question is whether the White House further segmented its responsiveness, particularly on domestic issues that were important to sub-groups that were targeted as essential to building a new Republican majority. With the erosion of the Democrat's New Deal Coalition and rise of political independents, Republican leaders paid particular attention to these relatively unattached voters in the hopes of recruiting them. To investigate this, we regressed Presidential Policy Positions regarding domestic issues on the White House's polling data on General Policy Opinion, General Ideological Identification, *and* the Policy Opinion of independents (as well Presidential Policy

Positions lagged).¹⁸ The Policy Opinion of Independent variable also is measured on a 0 to 1 scale, and reflects the percentage of Independents who held a conservative position on a given issue. (In other words, it is the same as the General Policy Opinion but only includes Independents.)

Our analysis finds evidence of notable effects by political Independents on Reagan's domestic positions. Table 2 suggests that specific policy preferences are significant, while General Ideological Identification is not statistically significant. In particular, the policy preferences of Independents were substantially stronger than the policy preferences of the general public—evidence of the White House's attentiveness to this critical segment of the electorate. A key emphasis to note is that the effects of Independents emerge even after controlling for the general policy preferences and ideological attitudes of everyone else.

[Table 2 About Here]

The White House devoted particular attention to broadening the Republican Party's conservative coalition. If this effort was systematic, we would expect evidence that the policy preferences of economic, social, and military conservatives exerted a significant impact on Reagan's statements regarding issues of particular concern to each of these factions.

The affluent have been principal supporters of the modern Republican Party. Therefore, we would expect the Reagan White House to demonstrate efforts to lock down their continued support. To investigate this possibility, we regressed Presidential Policy

¹⁸ We analyzed the impact of independents on domestic issues generally on the assumption that independents, who typically are less well informed and interested in politics than partisans and other identifiable political groups, would focus on policies that were closer to their daily lives. Indeed, our findings from analyses of foreign policy reveal no significant impacts by independents.

Positions regarding issues of intense interest to high income Americans (lower taxes, less government spending, and reforming Social Security) on General Policy Opinion, General Ideological Identification, and the Policy Opinion of the affluent (as well a lagged measure of Presidential Policy Positions on core economic issues).

Table 3 presents evidence confirming the striking impact of another segment of the electorate – high income earners. General Ideological Identification is not statistically significant; the White House did not tailor Reagan’s public comments on core economic issues to an overriding conservatism among Americans. Instead, the President’s public statements on core economic policy were driven by the general public’s policy preferences on these issues but much more strongly by the views of the most affluent. In other words, the impact of the wealthy registered far above whatever impact of the general public’s policy preferences and ideological orientations.

[Table 3 About Here]

One of the most important new groups that the Reagan White House targeted for recruitment to the conservative Republican coalition were social conservatives – namely, Baptists and Catholics who harbored strong views about family values and a law and order approach to crime. Table 4, which presents regressions on these issues, and includes the Policy Opinions of Baptists and Catholics, indicates that Reagan did not systematically tailor his comments on social conservative policies to Catholics. However, the social conservative policy preferences of Baptists notably registered as an important influence on Reagan’s statements. Indeed, the social conservative views of Baptists were the only statistically significant force in shaping Reagan’s public comments on these policy issues. Of particular note, Reagan appeared to be adopting new positions in

response to the preferences of Baptists; the statistical insignificance of the lagged dependent variable suggests that his previous positions did not “lock in” his comments. This evidence demonstrates that Reagan’s White House worked hard to update Republican policy stances to target and expand its conservative base.

[Table 4 About Here]

One of the Reagan administration’s most dramatic policy changes was to substantially increase defense spending. Our earlier analysis suggests that the White House pursued a lumping approach on matters of foreign policy and national security – namely, it tended to rely on more general ideological and partisan polling results.

Table 5 shows that Reagan’s comments on defense spending were tailored to the views of Republicans, but not those of Independents and Democrats (Reagan moves in a significantly contrary direction to Independents and Democrats). The results also show, not surprisingly, that the general ideological mood of the electorate continued to influence defense spending positions. In short, Reagan honed his public statements on defense spending to respond to partisans and conservatives, while in essence, turning against other segments of the electorate.

[Table 5 About Here]

IV. Conclusion

In two significant respects, the findings of this paper offer a pointed revision of the longstanding treatment of the president as serving the overall national interest. First, the president differentiates how he handles domestic and foreign policy, rather than pursuing a consistent approach based on some objective notion of the country’s best interests. In particular, this paper and other research (Druckman and Jacobs 2006)

demonstrate that the president treats domestic and foreign policy differently, relying on discrete policy preferences to shape his domestic policy statements, while relying on aggregate public mood in crafting his foreign policy positions.

Second, this paper extends research on segmented representation by expanding upon the set of forces that disproportionately influence government policy. The findings of this paper, in conjunction with previous research (Bartels 2005; Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005), demonstrate that government officials disproportionately respond to the preferences of the highest income earners. This challenges the tendency to associate political representation with strong government responsiveness to the general public (e.g. Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, 2002). In some respects, these findings of the strong influence of the wealthy should not be surprising; they are compatible with extensive and long standing research about the asymmetrical distribution of resources among citizens, organizations, and groups, and the biasing effects it has on government policy (Beard 1913; Mills 1959; Schattschneider 1960; McConnell 1966). Moreover, this paper's finding about the particular sway of the wealthy is also consistent with a new generation of research that links rising economic inequality with political disparities (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; American Political Science Association 2004; Bartels 2005; Gilens 2005; Jacobs and Page 2005).

One of this paper's key contributions is to identify *non-economic* processes that generate disproportionate influence on government policy. In particular, Reagan's public policy positions were particularly shaped by political independents along with religious conservatives and base Republicans. The emergence of these political forces may indirectly or, in interaction with economic groups, serve as pathways by which rising

economic inequality impacts government policy. This is an important topic for future research.

The Reagan White House's strategic use of its private polling on electorally significant sub-groups played a notable role in reshaping contemporary American politics. Reagan's careful calibration of his public positions to reflect his sub-group polling contributed to the formation of a new and broader conservative coalition – one which widened its appeal from the affluent and philosophical conservatives to political independents and, most strikingly, religious conservatives. The result was a broader and more enduring coalition for future Republican presidential and congressional politicians.

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Table 1. Impact of Public Opinion Data on the Domestic or Foreign Policies Positions (Domain Effect Model)

Dependent Variable: Presidential Policy Positions

	Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy
Independent Variables		
General Ideological Identification	-.07 (1.08)	3.39** (1.55)
General Policy Opinions	1.13** (.14)	-.16 (.21)
Presidential Policy Positions, t-1	.73** (.02)	.76** (.02)
Constant	.44 (.65)	-1.13 (.93)
R ²	.68	.58
N	1,339	716

Note: The table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$, 1-tailed test.

Table 2. Impact of the Policy Preferences of Independents on Domestic Policy Positions

Dependent Variable: Presidential Policy Positions On Domestic Policy

Independent Variables	
General Ideological Identification	-.14 (1.18)
General Policy Opinions	.68** (.23)
Policy Opinions of Independents	1.60** (.22)
Presidential Policy Positions, t-1	.56** (.03)
Constant	.49 (.71)
R ²	.74
N	847

Note: The table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$, 1-tailed test.

Table 3. Impact of the Policy Preferences of High Income Americans on Economic Policy Positions

Dependent Variable: Reagan's Policy Positions On Social Security Reform and Lower Taxes and Government Spending

Independent Variables	
General Ideological Identification	-.45 (1.58)
General Policy Opinions	.70** (.38)
Policy Opinions of Higher Income Americans	4.06** (.85)
Presidential Policy Positions, t-1	.50** (.07)
Constant	-.79 (1.06)
R ²	.84
N	173

Note: The table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$, 1-tailed test.

Table 4. Impact of the Policy Preferences of Baptists and Catholics on Social Conservative Policy Positions

Dependent Variable: Reagan's Policy Positions On Family Values and Crime

Independent Variables	
General Ideological Identification	-.10 (.53)
General Policy Opinions	-.24 (.20)
Policy Opinions of Baptists	1.38* (.85)
Policy Opinions of Catholics	-.27 (.70)
Presidential Policy Positions, t-1	-.11 (.10)
Constant	4.78**
R ²	.07
N	104

Note: The table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$, 1-tailed test.

Table 5. Impact of the Policy Preferences of Republicans on Defense Spending Policy Positions

Dependent Variable: Reagan's Policy Positions On Increased Defense Spending

Independent Variables	
General Ideological Identification	3.31* (2.11)
General Policy Opinions	-.32 (.43)
Policy Opinions of Republicans	5.00** (1.74)
Policy Opinions of Independents	-3.88** (1.51)
Policy Opinions of Democrats	-2.06* (1.29)
Presidential Policy Positions, t-1	-.03 (.10)
Constant	3.15** (1.57)
R ²	.15
N	90

Note: The table reports OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .10$, 1-tailed test.