State Campaign Finance Laws and the Equality of Political Representation

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Abstract

Laws that regulate the financing of campaigns are one attempt to attenuate the role of money in politics in hopes that citizens' opinions will receive more equal consideration when elected officials make policy decisions. Do states with stricter campaign finance laws actually display more egalitarian patterns of representation? Using public opinion measures from the National Annenberg Election Surveys and data on state policies, I first demonstrate that state policy decisions are consistently more proximate to the opinions of citizens with higher incomes. I then evaluate the relationship between the strictness of state campaign finance laws and political equality and find evidence that states with more stringent campaign finance disclosure requirements weigh citizens' opinions more equally in the policymaking process. However, I find no statistical relationship between the strictness of contribution limits or the presence of a public financing system and the equality of political representation.

Keywords: political inequality, political representation, campaign finance laws, public policy

There is growing concern among scholars and the general public about unequal political influence and its consequences for economic inequality in the United States (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Bartels 2008; Kelly 2009; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Flavin 2012; Gilens 2012; Kelly and Witko 2012; Ellis 2013). One frequent explanation for why citizens with low incomes exert little influence over the policy decisions made by elected officials is that this group provides relatively few contributions (both in number and amount) to political campaigns compared to more affluent citizens (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Laws that regulate the financing of campaigns have been enacted, in part, based on the belief that they can help to lessen the role of fundraising and contributions in political campaigns, attenuate the link between money and political influence, and ultimately level out the playing field for disadvantaged citizens.

Have campaign finance regulations actually been successful at enhancing political equality?[1] Unfortunately, this question is difficult to answer at the federal level because one uniform set of policies governs races for federal office and changes in laws that occur over time are contemporaneously correlated with many other changes in the political system. By comparison, the fifty states vary dramatically in terms of how much, or little, they regulate the financing of campaigns for state elected office (Witko 2005; Primo and Milyo 2006). For example, some states set no limit on the amount of money an individual can contribute to a candidate while other states have instituted a public financing system that allocates money to candidates who agree to abide by strict spending limits. Taking advantage of this variation

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[1] As Robert Dahl (2006, ix) states, "The existence of political equality is a fundamental premise of democracy." In the context of political representation, "political equality refers to the extent to which citizens have an equal voice in governmental decisions. One of the bedrock principles in a democracy is the equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens" (Verba 2003, 663).

allows researchers to identify what effects, if any, campaign finance laws have on the public policy decisions made by elected officials.

In this paper, I use the variation across the fifty American states to evaluate the relationship between campaign finance laws and the equality of political representation. Laws that regulate the financing of campaigns are one attempt to attenuate the role of money in politics in hopes that citizens' opinions will receive more equal consideration when legislators make policy decisions (Witko 2005). It is surprising, then, that no study to date has evaluated whether campaign finance laws actually achieve this goal. I investigate the relationship between campaign finance laws and the equality of political representation and uncover evidence that states with more stringent disclosure requirements for campaign contributions tend to weigh citizens' opinions more equally in the policymaking process. However, I find no statistical relationship between the strictness of contribution limits or the presence of a public financing system and the equality of political representation. These findings contribute to our understanding about the effects of campaign finance regulations and ultimately underscore the important role that election laws can potentially play in promoting greater political equality in the United States.

Background

One important reason for regulating the financing of campaigns is to prevent wealthy interests from exerting undue influence over public policy decisions.[2] Toward this end, the

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[2] In *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court did not endorse political equality concerns as a constitutionally valid justification for campaign regulations, writing that "the concept that government may restrict the speech of some elements of our society in order to enhance the relative voice of others is

Supreme Court has cautioned that even perceptions of unseemly influence by moneyed interests could harm the health of American democracy by decreasing citizens' trust and confidence in government and the electoral system. Although political scientists have uncovered little tangible evidence that campaign contributions can outright "buy" the roll call votes of legislators (for a review see Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003), there is ample evidence suggesting contributions can exert sway behind the scenes by influencing who legislators agree to meet with, what issues they focus on, and how they allocate their scarce time while in office (Langbein 1986; Hall and Wayman 1990; Schram 1995; Makinson 2003; Witko 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Powell 2012). Given widespread concerns about unequal influence in American politics, campaign finance regulations may play an important role in helping to promote greater political equality.

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wholly foreign to the First Amendment." However, in *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce* (1990), the Court subsequently ruled that a Michigan law prohibiting corporations from using their general treasury money to make independent expenditures to support or oppose candidates in elections was constitutional, arguing that "corporate wealth can unfairly influence elections." This decision was ultimately reversed in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), which struck down restrictions on independent expenditures from corporations and labor unions that attempt to influence the outcome of elections. However, the dissenting opinion in that case draws attention to the implications of the ruling for political equality, writing that "a democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold." Although a detailed discussion of the legal arguments for and against campaign finance regulations on political equality grounds is outside the scope of this paper, this brief review of previous court decisions reveals that significant disagreement remains about if and how political campaigns should be regulated in an attempt to make political influence more equal.

To regulate the financing of campaigns, state governments typically use a combination of three tools: (1) requirements that campaigns disclose the identity of contributors and the amount given, (2) limits on the amount individuals and organizations can donate to a campaign, and (3) public financing for campaigns on the condition that a candidate abides by spending limits (Witko 2005).[3] As Witko (2005, 296) explains, "While each of the three is intended to have specific effects on the behavior of various political actors, reformers believe they will work collectively to make elections and representation less subject to the manipulations of wealth, while being more competitive and democratic." Interestingly (and fortunately from a researcher's perceptive), there is dramatic variation in the stringency of campaign finance laws across states.

Given the belief that campaign finance regulations can alter the behavior of candidates, a growing literature has utilized this variation across the states to examine their impact, if any, on political campaigns. For instance, stricter contribution limits have been shown to lead to fewer uncontested state legislative races and more competitive elections (Stratmann and Aparicio-Castillo 2006; Hamm and Hogan 2008; Stratmann 2010). There is also evidence that public

[3] Twenty-six states set limits on the amount candidates could spend in a campaign up until those limits were declared unconstitutional in *Buckley v. Valeo* (and recently upheld in *Randall v. Sorrell* (2006)). Instead, states with public financing systems now require candidates to abide by spending limits as a condition for receiving public funds. It is also important to note that the campaign finance regulations under consideration in this paper pertain only to contributions given directly to a candidate for use in his/her campaign. Individuals and organizations still have wide latitude to use their own resources to influence the outcome of elections through independent expenditures (as affirmed in the *Citizens United* ruling). In fact, there is evidence that interest groups and wealthy individuals tend to engage in more independent expenditures in states with stricter regulations on campaign contributions (Hogan 2005).

financing systems with spending limits lead to the emergence of more challengers and can help to lower the total costs of campaigns (Hogan 2000; Gross and Goidel 2001; Bardwell 2003; Eom and Gross 2006). Taking stock of this literature as a whole, there is wide ranging evidence that campaign finance laws can have important effects on the behavior of political campaigns.

Beyond these campaign-specific effects, might campaign finance laws have effects on politics more generally? A series of recent studies examine if campaign finance laws affect election outcomes, the in-office behavior of politicians, and the content of public policies. For example, Cordis and Milyo (2013) find no evidence that stricter campaign finance laws lower instances of government corruption while Werner and Coleman (2013) find null results for the effect of campaign finance laws on liberal party power and minimum wage laws in the states.[4] Similarly, La Raja and Schaffner (2014) find no relationship between campaign finance laws and partisan control of government or incumbent reelection rates. As an appraisal of the (lack of) empirical findings in the current literature, Bowler and Donovan (2013) aptly entitled a chapter on campaign finance laws in a recent book on electoral reforms “Campaign Finance Reform: A Collection of Null Results.”

To date, however, no study has assessed whether campaign finance laws might help to promote a more equal consideration of citizens’ political preferences in the policymaking process. As a result, we have little knowledge about the extent to which disclosure requirements and restrictions on campaign contributions are successful in attenuating the relationship between money and political influence. This omission is surprising given that “the ability of citizens to influence public policy is the ‘bottom line’ of democratic government” (Gilens 2005, 778) and

[4] They do, however, find some evidence indicating states that more strictly regulate corporate expenditures in campaigns allow for more popular control of corporate governance.

that "democracy implies a certain degree of political equality – if not full equality of political representation among citizens, at least some limit to political inequality" (Verba and Orren 1985, 8). To advance our understanding of one possible mechanism that may lead to greater political equality, I investigate whether states with stricter campaign finance regulations tend to weigh citizens' political opinions more equally in the policymaking process.

Evaluating the Equality of Political Representation in the States

Although political representation is central for American democracy, there is little consensus on how best to measure the concept. For years, political scientists have experimented with different ways of evaluating the link between the people and their government (Achen 1978). One crucial distinction has been whether public opinion is compared to the behavior of individual elected officials (Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978; Erikson 1978; Powell 1982; Bartels 1991; Clinton 2006) or to the content of public policies (Page and Shapiro 1983; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Wlezien 2004). This paper focuses on the latter, policy representation, because government policy is the final link of the chain that begins with citizens' inputs (their political opinions and behaviors) into the political system. More importantly, regardless of how a citizen's particular state house member or senator votes on any given bill in the state legislature, citizens are ultimately affected by the decisions of the legislature as a whole and the actual policies that are implemented.

Policy representation is measured using a proximity technique that places public opinion and policy on the same linear scale and compares the distance between the two (Achen 1978).[5]

[5] Policy representation, the focus of this paper, is not the only way in which elected officials can "represent" their constituents (Griffin and Flavin 2011). For example, Eulau and Karps (1977) identify

Using this method, as the ideological distance between a citizen's opinion and policy grows (i.e. policy is ideologically "further" from a citizen's preferences), that citizen is not well represented. A similar measurement technique has been used in several recent studies to evaluate the ideological distance between citizens and Member of Congress (Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2007, 2008; Ellis 2012, 2013), Senators (Gershtenson and Plane 2007), and presidential candidates (Burden 2004; Jessee 2009) in the United States as well as the ideological distance between citizens and political parties in Europe (Blais and Bodet 2006; Powell 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012). To illustrate, Figure 1 compares two hypothetical citizens, Citizen A and Citizen B, who both live in the same state. When the two citizens' political ideologies are placed on the same metric as state policy, there is less ideological distance between Citizen A and state policy as compared to Citizen B and state policy. Under the proximity conceptualization of policy representation, Citizen A is better represented than Citizen B.[6]

[Figure 1 about here]

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three other types of representation: allocation, service, and symbolic representation. Allocation representation is reflected in legislator success in distributive politics, service representation is reflected in legislator effectiveness aiding constituents in their personal interactions with government, and symbolic representation is reflected in publicized gestures intended to strengthen constituency support and trust.

[6] Empirical analyses of political representation typically operate from the premise that public opinion influences government policy decisions (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). However, it is also possible that the causal arrow runs in the reverse direction whereby the issue opinions of elected officials and the policy decisions they enact influence citizens' opinions (e.g., Miller and Stokes 1963; Hill and Hurley 1999).

To measure ideological proximity, I require two pieces of data: (1) a measure of citizens' opinions and (2) a measure of state policy. To measure public opinion, I combine data from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 National Annenberg Election Surveys (NAES), three random digit dialing rolling cross sectional surveys conducted in the months leading up to that year's presidential election. For years, scholars of public opinion in the states have wrestled with the problem of not having enough respondents in public opinion polls to make reliable state-level estimates and inferences. One way to address this problem is to pool surveys over a long period of time (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). Another way is to simulate state opinion by using national polls and multi-level modeling to derive estimates for the states based on demographic characteristics (Park, Gelman, and Bafumi 2006; Lax and Phillips 2009a,b). The major advantage of pooling these three NAES surveys is their sheer sample size which allows a large enough sample without having to aggregate across a long time period or simulate state opinion (Carsey and Harden 2010). This large sample size is especially important because I later assess the relationship between income and ideological proximity within individual states.[7]

Citizens' general political ideology is measured using the following item from the NAES: "Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative,

[7] A total of 177,043 NAES respondents across the three survey waves answered the ideological self-placement and income items. All states except North Dakota (N=475) and Wyoming (N=414) have a sample size of over 500 respondents. Alaska and Hawaii were not surveyed, so all analyses in this paper report results from the remaining 48 states. When responses from the 2000 NAES are aggregated to the state level to create state values for average income, percent of population with a college degree, and percent of the state's population living in urban areas, these values correlate with corresponding state measures from the 2000 U.S. Census at or above .80. These high correlation coefficients suggest that the NAES provide for representative samples of a state's population (also see Griffin and Newman 2008, 83).

moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" I code the five point measure such that it runs from -2 (very conservative) to +2 (very liberal). Data on citizens' self-reported political ideology have been commonly used to measure public opinion in previous studies of political representation (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Griffin and Flavin 2007; Bartels 2008; Flavin 2012) and there is reason to be confident that self-reported ideology is an accurate measure of citizens' aggregated policy-specific opinions.[8] For example, Table 1 displays the percentage of respondents from the 2000 and 2004 NAES who report a particular opinion categorized by their self-reported political ideology.[9] Looking across the columns, it is clear that respondents who identify themselves as liberal are more likely to report liberal policy opinions. For example, only 38% of respondents who place themselves in the "very conservative" category believe that "Government should reduce income differences between rich and poor." In contrast, fully 77% of respondents who place themselves in the "very liberal" category support that policy proposal. These differences across ideological classifications suggest that self-reported ideology in the NAES is an accurate measure of citizens' operational policy opinions.

[Table 1 about here]

Next, to measure public policy, I require a general measure of the "liberalism" (Klingman and Lammers 1984) of state policy outputs that comports with the survey item that asks citizens

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[8] However, some previous studies have questioned whether a person who identifies him/herself as a liberal (conservative) actually holds liberal (conservative) policy opinions; that is, whether citizens' self-reported or "symbolic" ideology accurately reflects their operational ideology when queried about specific issues (Knight 1985; Jennings 1992; Jacoby 1995; Ellis and Stimson 2012).

[9] The 2008 NAES did not include similar items that queried citizens' opinions on specific issues, so it is not included in Table 1.

to report their general political ideology. In their seminal book on state opinion and policy, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) developed a composite index of state policy liberalism using eight policy areas for which liberals and conservatives typically disagree. Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004) updated this policy liberalism measure for 2000 using the following five policy items: (1) state regulation of firearms as measured by state gun laws; (2) scorecard of state abortion laws in 2000; (3) an index of welfare stringency that accounts for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) rules of eligibility and work requirements for 1997-99; (4) a dummy measure of state right-to-work laws in 2001; and (5) a measure of tax progressivity calculated as a ratio of the average tax burden of the highest five percent of a state's earners to the average tax burden of the lowest forty percent of a state's earners.[10] These five components are then standardized and summed in an additive index such that more liberal state policies are coded higher. I use this index as my first measure of the general ideological tone of state policy.

Second, a recent article by Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008) provides a rich source of data on state policies in twenty different areas ranging from public assistance spending to gun control to health insurance regulations.[11] In addition to specific statutes and spending data, the authors provide a summary index of policy liberalism for each state that they derive by factor analyzing their entire range of policies. This composite score is used as a second measure of

[10] Gray et al. (2004) argue that using these policy items, as opposed to a measure of per capita expenditures for different policy areas, precludes the possibility that policy liberalism is simply a proxy for a state’s wealth. The five policies included in the index produce a Cronbach's alpha of .63.

[11] The state policy data can be accessed online at www.statepolicyindex.com.

general policy liberalism.[12] Together, the two policy liberalism measures represent the uni-dimensional liberal/conservative ideology of state policy decisions that correspond well to the measure of citizens' general political ideologies described above.

Evaluating ideological proximity requires a method of placing citizens' opinions and state policy on a common scale for comparison (Achen 1978; Burden 2004; Blais and Bodet 2006; Gershtenson and Plane 2007; Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008; Jessee 2009; Powell 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010; Ellis 2012, 2013; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012). This paper approaches the task by standardizing all citizens' ideological self-placements and the two measures of general state policy liberalism described above (Gray et al. 2004; Sorens et al. 2008) to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. After standardizing both opinion and policy, they are now on a common (standardized) metric similar to the strategy first proposed by Wright (1978) and commonly used in recent studies of political representation that compare citizens' opinions with the voting behavior of their Member of Congress (Griffin and Flavin 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008; Ellis 2012, 2013). Proximity is measured as the absolute value of the difference between a respondent's ideology score and the policy liberalism score for his/her state. This technique creates two measures of ideological proximity for every respondent in the NAES sample, one using each measure of state policy liberalism.[13]

[12] The Gray et al. (2004) and Sorens et al. (2008) policy liberalism measures correlate at .79 across the states.

[13] To confirm that the findings in this paper are not driven by the particular technique used to measure ideological proximity, I develop two alternative measures of proximity and assess if the results are consistent across techniques. As the first alternative, the two measures of state policy are rescaled to the same scale (-2 to +2) as citizens' self-reported ideology. This technique is similar to that used in early studies of congressional representation (Miller 1964; Achen 1978) and one that has been used by scholars

One common critique of using the proximity method to evaluate political representation is that, regardless of the statistical technique used to match up the two, opinion and policy are not on the same scale. However, whatever the flaws of the technique of ideological proximity used in this paper to match up opinion and policy, it is likely equally flawed for all citizens regardless of their income. Therefore, while the measures of ideological proximity may not be accurate in measuring how well represented a citizen is in an absolute sense, the measures are appropriate for evaluating how ideologically proximate opinion and policy are for one person relative to another person (also see Griffin and Newman 2007, Ellis 2012, 2013).

I then assess whether there is a systematic relationship between citizens' incomes and the ideological distance between their opinion and state policy. Because I am interested in unequal political representation within each state and state populations can vary widely in terms of their income distribution, it would be unwise to simply compare the incomes of citizens in one state to the incomes of citizens in another state. Simply put, we might expect someone making $100,000 per year living in West Virginia to exert comparatively greater political influence than someone

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to compare the ideological positions of citizens and politicians in more recent studies as well (Burden 2004; Griffin and Newman 2008). Ideological proximity is then computed as the absolute value of the distance between a respondent's ideology score and the state policy liberalism score for his/her state. As the second alternative, policy is rescaled to a tighter range (-1 to +1) than citizens' ideologies. This procedure is used because we can expect citizens' ideological opinions to have a wider range and take on more extreme values compared to actual state policy outputs. This transformation to a tighter scale is suggested and implemented by Powell (1982, 1989) in her studies of congressional representation. Again, the absolute value of the distance between a respondent's ideology score and the state policy liberalism score for his/her state is computed. When these two alternative techniques to measure ideological proximity are used, the results are substantively identical to those reported below.

making $100,000 per year living in Connecticut. To account for differences in the income distribution across states, I generate a measure of state relative income that compares a respondent's income with the average income for a resident in his or her state. A positive score for state relative income indicates that a respondent is above the mean while a negative score indicates that a respondent is below the mean.

To evaluate the relationship between (state relative) income and ideological proximity, I regress the measure of ideological distance on income for every respondent in the sample using the two measures of ideological proximity described above.[14] The results of these two regression estimations are reported in Table 2 and reveal evidence of unequal political representation. Specifically, both of the coefficients for income are negative and bounded below zero which indicates that as respondents' incomes increase the distance between ideology and state policy decreases and they are better represented. Put another away, the lower a respondent's income, the greater the distance between opinion and policy and the worse that respondent's general political ideology is represented in the general liberalism of his or her state's public policies. Substantively, the larger opinion-policy distance for a respondent at the 10th percentile for income compared to a respondent at the 90th percentile is about the same as the difference between a respondent at the 10th percentile for (state relative) level of education compared to the 90th percentile (Gilens 2005) and larger than the difference between an African American respondent compared to a white respondent (Griffin and Newman 2008). These findings

[14] Because residents are clustered within states and experience the same state policy, I report standard errors that adjust for clustering by state in the regression estimations in Table 2. The results are substantively similar if a random intercepts hierarchical linear model (with respondents nested within states) is used instead.

comport with the small but growing set of studies (Gilens, Lax, and Phillips 2011; Rigby and Wright 2011; Flavin 2012) that have found that citizens with low incomes are systematically underrepresented in the policymaking process in the American states.

[Table 2 about here]

As discussed above, the primary reason for examining unequal political representation at the state level is to understand and explain variation in political equality across the states. To assess in which states political influence is strongly tied to income compared to those states where opinions are represented more equally, I run a separate regression for each state and compare the coefficients for income. Similar to the nationwide regression reported in Table 2, a more steeply negative slope coefficient indicates a stronger relationship between income and ideological distance and, accordingly, less political equality. To illustrate, consider the two hypothetical states presented in Figure 2. For each state, the line represents the slope of the relationship between income and ideological distance. As the figure illustrates, the relationship between income and distance is rather weak in State C, indicating that citizens' opinions are represented roughly equally regardless of their income. In contrast, the slope of the relationship between income and ideological distance is quite steeply negative for State D, indicating that citizens with higher incomes are better represented by state policy.

[Figure 2 about here]

A separate regression is run for every state using both of the measures of ideological proximity described above (one using each measure of state policy liberalism).[15] Because a

[15] One potential concern with running a regression separately for each state with opinion-policy distance as the dependent variable is that every respondent has the same value for state policy, effectively making the policy term a constant. However, consider a state where income and ideological conservatism

more steeply negative slope coefficient indicates more unequal representation (i.e. a stronger relationship between income and ideological distance), a negative coefficient closer to zero indicates a more equal weighting of citizens' opinions (see Figure 2). As a means of comparing states, Table 3 lists the states in rank order from the most politically egalitarian to the least when using the Gray et al. (2004) measure of policy liberalism. In the following section, I use this variation across the states to evaluate whether states with stricter campaign finance laws tend to display more egalitarian patterns of political representation.[16]

[Table 3 about here]

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correlate perfectly (i.e. as income increases, so does ideological conservatism). If the state's policy position is more conservative than all citizens' ideology positions, the regression coefficient for income would be *negative* (indicating that as income increases, ideological distance between opinion and policy decreases). But, if the state's policy position is more liberal than all citizens' ideology positions, the coefficient for income would be *positive* (indicating that as income increases, ideological distance between opinion and policy also increases). Even though the distribution of citizens' opinions is identical under both scenarios, the regression coefficients are very different depending on where state policy is located in the ideological space (relative to citizens' opinions). Therefore, the coefficient for respondents' income for single state regressions does not simply indicate the relationship between income and ideology within a state but instead indicates (as intended) the sign and strength of the relationship between income and opinion-policy distance.

[16] It is important to note that the measure of the equality of political representation for each state is not simply an alternative to a state's policy liberalism (with the expectation that lower income citizens support more liberal policies). For example, the state rankings reported in Table 3 correlate with the Gray et al. (2004) policy liberalism measure at .52 and with the Sorens et al. (2008) policy liberalism measure at only .29.

State Campaign Finance Laws and the Equality of Political Representation

Political scientists and concerned citizens alike have long been interested in the role that money plays in politics (for a review see Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003). Much of this attention is driven by the normative concern that monetary contributions to candidates' campaigns allow certain groups unequal sway over lawmakers' policy decisions (Lessig 2011) as well as empirical evidence that indicates contributions can influence who legislators agree to meet with, what issues they focus on, and how they allocate their scarce time while in office (Langbein 1986; Hall and Wayman 1990; Schram 1995; Makinson 2003; Witko 2006; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Powell 2012). Since it is widely documented that more affluent citizens contribute to campaigns at exponentially higher rates than the poor (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012), campaign contributions are often assumed to be a prominent cause of unequal political representation in the United States.[17]

In an attempt to attenuate the influence of money in politics, states have instituted a variety of campaign finance regulations. As discussed above, to regulate the financing of campaigns, state governments typically use a combination of three tools: (1) requirements that campaigns disclose the identity of contributors and the amount given, (2) limits on the amount individuals and organizations can donate to a campaign, and (3) public financing for campaigns

[17] For example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) report that roughly 75% of the total campaign contributions reported by respondents in their 1990 Citizen Participation Survey came from the top quartile of income earners (those with annual family incomes greater than $50,000 in 1989), while only 2% of total contributions came from the bottom quartile of earners (with incomes less than $15,000). In addition, Bonica, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2013) point out that 40% of all contributions to federal candidates in the 2012 election came from the top .01 percent of income earners in the voting age population.

on the condition that a candidate abides by spending limits. In a 2005 article in *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, Christopher Witko provides the first systematic attempt to quantify these three components across the states (using data from state campaign finance statutes for 2002 collected by the Federal Election Commission) by creating an additive indicator of the presence of certain statutes and requirements in each of the three areas, with higher scores indicating more stringent campaign finance laws for that particular area.[18]

These three indicators are used as independent variables to evaluate the relationship between the strictness of campaign finance regulations and the equality of political representation across the states. Specifically, I regress (separately) the two series of state-specific regression coefficients that measure the equality of political representation on these three

[18] The eight items used in the <u>disclosure requirements</u> index are: (1) Aggregate expenditure reporting; (2) Aggregate contributions reporting; (3) Itemization of some categories of expenditures; (4) Itemization of some categories of contributions; (5) Itemization of expenditures over $50; (6) Itemization of contributions over $50; (7) Requirement of final report within one month of an election; and (8) Requirement of reports on at least a quarterly basis. The seven items used in the <u>contribution limits</u> index are: (1) Contribution limits on individuals; (2) Prohibition of direct corporate contributions; (3) Prohibition of direct labor union contributions; (4) Limits on corporate contributions (direct or PACs); (5) Limits on labor union contributions (direct or PACs); (6) Limits on candidate self-financing; and (7) Limits on candidate family contributions. The seven items used in the <u>public financing</u> index are: (1) Total expenditure limit; (2) Check-off on tax return form for contribution to public funding; (3) Independent revenue source for public financing; (4) Public financing of statewide campaigns; (5) Public financing of state legislative campaigns; (6) Public financing of political parties; and (7) Equal distribution of public funds between candidates and/or parties.

additive indicators of campaign finance regulations[19] and a set of control variables including a state's median income, a state's level of income inequality, and the racial composition of a state's population. A state's median income is measured using U.S. Census Bureau data for 1999 and is included because richer and poorer states may differ in the way economic inequality is reproduced in politics and in terms of the issue cleavages that define political conflict for both voters and elites (Gelman, Park, Shor, Bafumi, and Cortina 2008). A state's level of income inequality is measured using the Gini coefficient for 1999 (data from the U.S. Census Bureau[20]) and is included because previous research on unequal political influence at the state level suggests that political representation is the most unequal in states with higher levels of income inequality (Rigby and Wright 2013).[21] Finally, a state's racial composition is measured as the percent of a state's population that is "non-white" using U.S. Census Bureau data for 1999 and is included to account for the possibility that states with the highest levels of political inequality also tend to be the states with the largest racial minority populations (Hero 1998).

[Table 4 about here]

[19] The three additive indicators are included in a single regression model because multicollinearity is not a major concern. Across the states, the disclosure index correlates with the contribution limits index at .22 and with the public financing index at .12, and the contribution limits and public financing indices correlate at .19 (Witko 2005).

[20] Table S4. Gini Ratios by State: 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/state/state4.html.

[21] Similarly, in a cross-national analysis, Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer (2012) find that political parties are especially unresponsive to the opinions of poor citizens in countries with higher levels of economic inequality.

The results of these two ordinary least squares regression estimations are reported in Table 4 and reveal that only one measure of campaign finance regulations is statistically related to the equality of political representation at conventional levels of statistical significance. Specifically, states with more stringent disclosure requirements for campaign financing tend to have higher levels of representational equality. In contrast, there is no statistical relationship between the contribution limits or public financing additive indicators and the equality of political representation in the states. Looking to the other coefficients, there is also evidence (in one of the two models) that states with higher median incomes tend to weigh citizens' opinions more equally.

From a substantive standpoint, the magnitude of the statistical relationship between disclosure laws and representational equality is quite large. For example, moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean for the disclosure requirements additive index predicts an increase of .67 of a standard deviation in representational equality using the Gray et al. (2004) policy liberalism measure (Column 1) and an increase of .70 of a standard deviation in representational equality using the Sorens et al. (2008) policy liberalism measure (Column 2). Simply stated, the data indicate that states with stricter disclosure requirements for campaign financing tend to display more egalitarian patterns of political representation.

Finally, it is important to note that how much or little a state government decides to regulate the role of money in political campaigns is a policy decision in itself that citizens may have differing opinions on. We might expect, for example, that affluent citizens would be less supportive of legal limits on campaign contributions compared to poorer citizens because these limits would directly restrict their potential political influence. If there are indeed differences in opinion on campaign finance regulation, then there would be methodological concerns about the direction of the causal arrow in the models presented in Table 4. Specifically, it could be that instead of stricter campaign finance laws leading to a more equal weighting of political preferences, a more equal weighting of political preferences is leading to stricter campaign finance laws. Put differently, it may be that in states where the opinions of affluent citizens are overrepresented, one example of this unequal representation is fewer campaign contribution restrictions which is in accord with that group's preferences.

To further investigate this concern, I use data from the 2000 NAES where respondents were asked: "Limit the amount of money that can be given to political parties – should the federal government do this or not?" Comparing respondents above the mean income level in their state to those below the mean, I find remarkable agreement for opinions on campaign finance regulation. 80.7% of respondents in the high income group preferred contribution limits compared to 79.8% of respondents in the low income group. From these data it appears that campaign finance regulations are affecting political equality and not the other way around because citizens, regardless of their income level, tend to hold very similar preferences on the issue.[22]

[22] Another possible concern about the findings reported in Table 4 is that states with the least amount of ideological disagreement based on income level (and, accordingly, greater representational equality) are the same states that enact more stringent campaign finance regulations. To investigate this concern, I computed a value for each state that measures the absolute difference in average ideological self-placement for respondents above vs. below that state's mean income level. I then correlated this value of ideological disagreement with the three measures of campaign finance regulations and none of the correlation coefficients are stronger than -.30. These results suggest states with less ideological

Conclusion

The correspondence between citizens' opinions and public policy is the "bottom line" for American democracy. A large political science literature demonstrates that citizens' aggregated opinions generally predict the tone of public policy in both state (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993) and national politics (e.g., Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002), but far less attention has been paid to the question: Are citizens' opinions represented equally? Recent studies at the national level (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012) report that the opinions of the disadvantaged are especially underrepresented in the policymaking process compared to the affluent across a wide array of policy domains. This paper extends this new line of inquiry to the American states and uncovers similar findings (also see Gilens, Lax, and Phillips 2011; Rigby and Wright 2011; Flavin 2012). Assessing the relationship between citizens' general political ideology and state policy liberalism, citizens with higher incomes are better represented compared to citizens with lower incomes (see Table 2). If "a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Dahl 1971, 1), the democratic process in the American states appears to fall short of this standard.

The analysis also reveals that there is significant variation in the equality of political representation across the states. Taking advantage of this variation, I evaluate the relationship between three different measures of state campaign finance law stringency and representational equality and find that states with stricter disclosure requirements display more egalitarian patterns of political representation (see Table 4). However, I find no statistical relationship

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disagreement based on income are more likely to enact stricter campaign finance regulations, but that the relationship is statistically modest.

between the strictness of contribution limits or the presence of a public financing system and the equality of political representation.

When evaluating campaign finance laws at either the state or federal level, disclosure requirements often get overlooked. The analysis presented above suggests that they deserve greater attention because simple disclosure requirements may act as an important check on the link between affluence and influence. When the sources of contributions to candidates are well documented and can be scrutinized by the media and voting public prior to Election Day (La Raja 2007), candidates have a greater incentive to closely monitor the source of their campaign contributions and avoid the appearance that their campaign is funded only by a small group of wealthy donors. As Witko (2005, 298) observes, "Such disclosure makes public information about the interests and individuals backing each candidate, while deterring candidates from accepting contributions from questionable sources." Moreover, from a practical standpoint, disclosure requirements have far broader bipartisan political appeal than limits on contributions to candidates or the imposition of a public financing system. Therefore, the findings in this paper suggest that modest increases in the stringency of campaign finance disclosure requirements might be a viable way to promote greater political equality.

More broadly, recent studies of unequal political representation at the national level have documented wide disparities in influence between the rich and the poor (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012), but stop short of fully investigating what might be done to lessen these inequities. Fortunately, the fifty states provide rich variation to study and better understand what mechanisms might help to attenuate the link between money and influence and promote greater political equality. Therefore, future studies should consider incorporating other election laws and institutional features that vary across the states to investigate what conditions might lead to a more equal weighting of citizens' opinions in government policy decisions.

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Table 1: Political Ideology and Specific Policy Opinions

	Self-Reported Political Ideology				
	Very Conservative	**Conservative**	**Moderate**	**Liberal**	**Very Liberal**
Government should reduce income differences between rich and poor (% yes)	38	45	58	70	77
Providing health care for people who do not already have it (% spend more)	49	57	73	83	88
Providing assistance to poor mothers with young children (% spend more)	34	39	48	59	67
Financial assistance to public schools (% spend more)	49	58	73	83	87
Laws making it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion (% oppose)	28	42	66	78	81
Constitutional amendment banning gay marriage (% oppose)	29	39	61	74	80
Restricting the kinds of guns that people can buy (% government should do more)	42	52	67	76	76

Data source: 2000 and 2004 National Annenberg Election Surveys.

Table 2: As Citizens' Incomes Increase the Ideological Distance Between Opinion and Policy gets Smaller

	(1)	**(2)**
Policy Data:	GLFM	SMR
Respondent's Income (State Relative)	-0.010* [0.002]	-0.011* [0.003]
Constant	1.148* [0.115]	1.164* [0.117]
N	177,043	177,043

Dependent variable: Linear distance between a citizen's ideology and state policy (smaller distance indicates a citizen is better represented). Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors adjusted for clustering by state reported beneath in brackets. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test. GLFM = Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004), SMR = Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008).

Table 3: Ranking the States by the Equality of Political Representation

1. Montana (most equal)	25. Illinois
2. New Mexico	26. Connecticut
3. Oregon	27. Virginia
4. Minnesota	28. Massachusetts
5. South Dakota	29. Kansas
6. West Virginia	30. North Carolina
7. Missouri	31. Utah
8. California	32. Florida
9. Washington	33. Maryland
10. Michigan	34. Kentucky
11. South Carolina	35. New Hampshire
12. Rhode Island	36. Indiana
13. Iowa	37. New York
14. Wisconsin	38. Nevada
15. Ohio	39. Tennessee
16. Pennsylvania	40. Louisiana
17. Arizona	41. Oklahoma
18. New Jersey	42. Delaware
19. Nebraska	43. North Dakota
20. Colorado	44. Arkansas
21. Idaho	45. Wyoming
22. Maine	46. Georgia
23. Texas	47. Alabama
24. Vermont	48. Mississippi (most unequal)

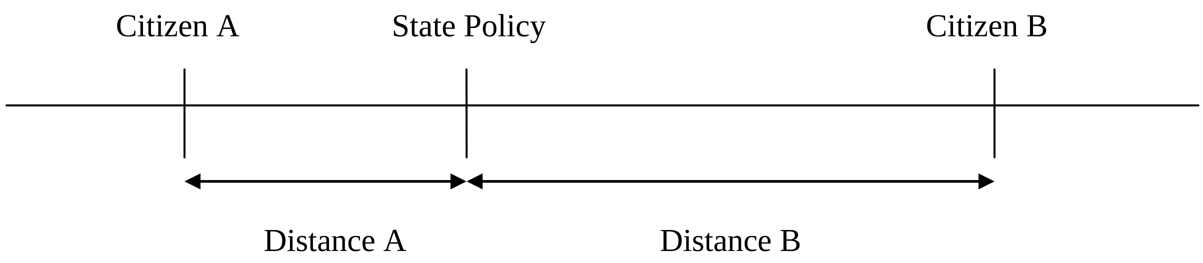
States ranked according to value for state-specific regression coefficient for income and opinion-policy proximity using the Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004) measure of state policy liberalism. Higher rank indicates a more equal weighing of citizens' political opinions (i.e. a weaker relationship between income and opinion-policy proximity).

Table 4: State Campaign Finance Laws and the Equality of Political Representation

	(1)	**(2)**
Policy Data:	GLFM	SMR
Disclosure Requirements	0.003*	0.003*
	[0.001]	[0.001]
Contribution Limits	-0.001	-0.000
	[0.001]	[0.001]
Public Financing	0.001	0.002
	[0.001]	[0.001]
State Median Income	0.000	0.001*
	[0.000]	[0.000]
State Income Inequality	-0.152	-0.120
	[0.167]	[0.138]
% of State Population Non-White	-0.000	-0.013
	[0.028]	[0.023]
Constant	0.028	-0.006
	[0.078]	[0.064]
R^2	.20	.39
N	48	48

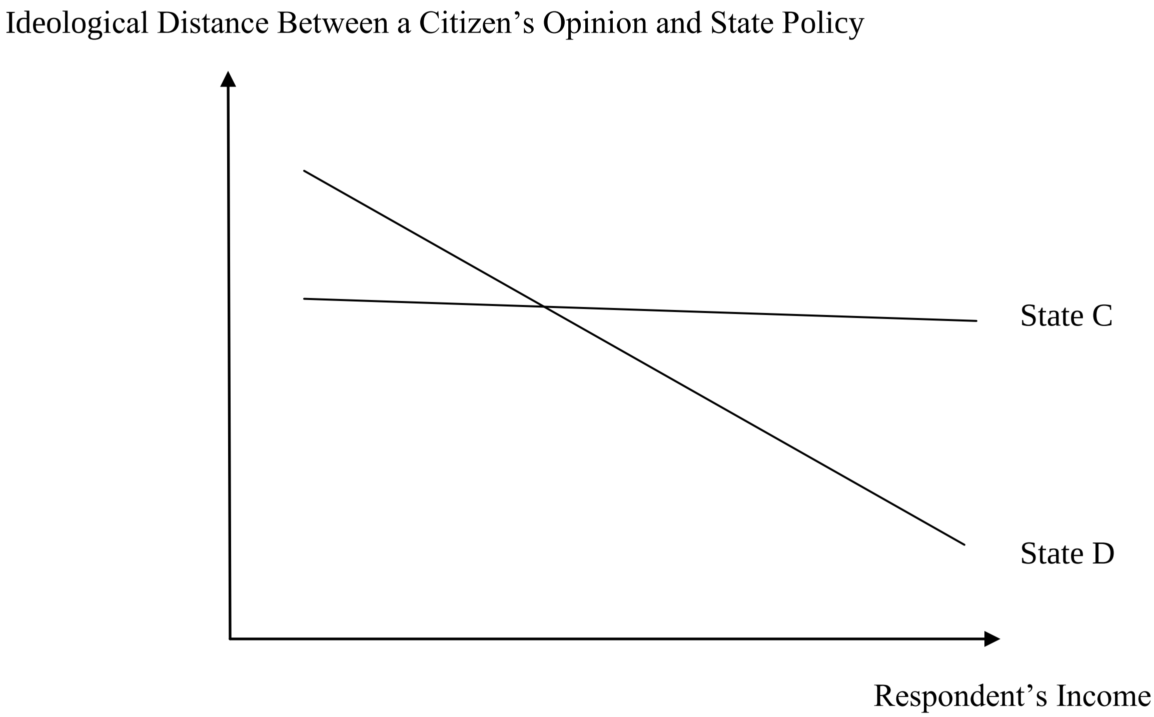
Dependent variable: State-specific regression coefficient for income and opinion-policy proximity (higher value indicates a more equal weighing of citizens' political opinions). Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors reported beneath in brackets. * denotes $p<.05$ using a two-tailed test. GLFM = Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004), SMR = Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008).

Figure 1: Computing Ideological Distance Between Opinion and Policy



Using a proximity measure of political representation, Citizen A is better represented than Citizen B because the ideological distance between her opinion and state policy is smaller.

Figure 2: Computing the Relationship Between Income and Ideological Distance, by State



State C has more equal political representation than State D because the relationship (regression slope coefficient) between income and opinion-policy proximity is weaker in State C compared to State D.

Appendix

Table A-1: As Citizens' Incomes Increase the Ideological Distance Between Opinion and Policy gets Smaller

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Proximity Measure:	Same Scale	Same Scale	Restricted Scale	Restricted Scale
Policy Data:	GLFM	SMR	GLFM	SMR
Respondent's Income (State Relative)	-0.012* [0.002]	-0.014* [0.003]	-0.008* [0.002]	-0.010* [0.002]
Constant	1.194* [0.103]	1.213* [0.074]	0.906* [0.032]	0.905* [0.025]
N	177,043	177,043	177,043	177,043

Dependent variable: Linear distance between a citizen's ideology and state policy (smaller distance indicates a citizen is better represented). Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by state reported beneath in brackets. * denotes $p<.05$ using a two-tailed test. GLFM = Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004), SMR = Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008).

Table A-2: State Campaign Finance Laws and the Equality of Political Representation

	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
Proximity Measure:	Same Scale	Same Scale	Restricted Scale	Restricted Scale
Policy Data:	GLFM	SMR	GLFM	SMR
Disclosure Requirements	0.003*	0.002*	0.003*	0.003*
	[0.002]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]
Contribution Limits	-0.001	-0.001	-0.000	-0.000
	[0.002]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]
Public Financing	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.001
	[0.002]	[0.001]	[0.001]	[0.001]
State Median Income	0.001	0.001*	-0.000	0.000
	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]	[0.000]
State Income Inequality	-0.084	-0.004	-0.184	-0.159
	[0.180]	[0.144]	[0.124]	[0.111]
% of State Population Non-White	-0.010	-0.039	0.007	-0.007
	[0.030]	[0.024]	[0.021]	[0.019]
Constant	-0.011	-0.071	0.061	0.028
	[0.084]	[0.067]	[0.058]	[0.052]
R^2	.18	.41	.25	.39
N	48	48	48	48

Dependent variable: State-specific regression coefficient for income and opinion-policy proximity (higher value indicates a more equal weighing of citizens' political opinions). Cell entries are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors reported beneath in brackets. * denotes $p<.05$ using a two-tailed test. GLFM = Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and McAtee (2004), SMR = Sorens, Muedini, and Ruger (2008).