

Responsiveness and Representation

A Preliminary Analysis of Wave 4 CSES Data¹

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This paper provides an introduction to and some initial analyses of responses to questions about government spending in the CSES 4 module. Thus far, we have data for just 11 countries – the possibilities where analysis is concerned are rather limited. Even so, we aim here to describe the initial justification for the questions, and then to review the data gathered thus far. Our analyses will then focus on (a) basic country-level descriptives, (b) evidence of (cross-sectional) thermostatic responsiveness to government spending, and (c) differences in spending preferences across income cohorts.

Background

Questions about change in government spending have played a large role in our work on the relationship between public opinion and policy the US, the UK and Canada (Soroka and Wlezien N.d., 2010, 2008, 2005, 2004; Soroka, Wlezien and MacLean 2006; Wlezien 1995; 1996; 2004; Wlezien and Soroka 2003; 2007; Soroka 2003; Soroka and Lim 2003). They have also been important in a range of other studies on the connection between opinion and policy (e.g., Eichenberg and Stoll 2003; Erikson et al. 2002; Jennings 2009; Jennings and John 2009; Page and Shapiro 1992; Stimson et al. 1995), as well as in much broader literatures on public opinion, and political behavior.

The argument for including the same questions in the CSES was they would allow us to extend our research on “thermostatic” public responsiveness to spending from (a) a focus on changes in opinion over time in a handful of countries to (b) levels of opinion at a particular point in time across many countries. This has several advantages – not just in terms of testing our ideas on a larger sample size, but in being able to examine the impact of institutions using a sample with much more institutional variance. For instance, our past work has focused in part on how decentralization of government responsibility influences the public’s reaction to policy at different levels of government. Our conjecture

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has been that vertical division of powers, or decentralization, makes it more difficult for the public to gauge and react to government policy change. Put differently, the government policy signal may be confused—or, rather, there may be different signals from multiple sources—at least in policy domains for which different governments have responsibility. Previous analyses of the US, Canada and the UK suggest that this might be true, though confidence in the finding—and its generalizability—is limited given the small number of cases.

The problem is that even modest time series of the necessary public opinion data are not available in any other countries. That said, the CSES offers an opportunity to make a (very broad) cross-sectional comparison. Note that although the thermostatic model typically characterizes responsiveness over time, an identical expectation applies across space. Consider, for example, the fifty states in the United States. We have reason to suppose that the (underlying) preferred level of policy in a particular area, say, welfare, differs across states. We also have reason to suppose—indeed, we know—that the level of policy differs across states. If the thermostatic model holds, the public’s relative preference would reflect the difference between the two across states j :

$$R_j = P^*_j - P_j, \tag{1}$$

where R represents the public’s preference for “more” or “less” policy, P^* designates the public’s preferred level of policy and P is policy. In theory, then, the preference for more policy in each state will depend on whether and the extent to which the public’s preferred level is greater than policy itself in the different states. In practice, because it is difficult to measure the preferred level of policy, things are a little more complicated, as discussed below. (For one empirical application, to abortion opinion and policy in the different U.S. states, see Goggin and Wlezien 1993.)

Of course, questions of government spending can be used for more than just tests of thermostatic responsiveness. Within countries, spending questions can be used to help understand, for instance, the policy preferences of partisans, or differences in preferences across education levels and income cohorts. And while examining the impact of decentralization on responsiveness requires a large sample of countries (alongside good data on decentralized expenditures), exploring some within-country differences is rather less demanding data-wise. Our long-term goal is still an analysis focused on federalism and opinion-policy relationships, then; but we for the time being focus on other things. One analysis below thus focuses on differences in preferences across income groups, with an eye on the relationship between those with low incomes, those with high incomes, and the median voter. To begin with, however, we introduce the data.

Data

The spending questions were developed based on existing questions in the GSS, the ISSP, and a range of other academic and commercial surveys in the US, Canada, the UK and elsewhere. The CSES questions are unique, however, both in terms of question wording and spending domains. A basic description is as follows:

For the next questions, please say whether you would like to see more or less government expenditure in each of the following areas. Remember if you say ‘more’ it could require a tax increase, or ‘less’, it could require a reduction in those government services.

(Response categories: Much more than now, Somewhat more than now, The same as now, Somewhat less than now, Much less than now)

- ...Health
- ...Education
- ...Unemployment Benefits
- ...Defense
- ...Old-Age Pensions
- ...Business and Industry
- ...Policy and Law Enforcement
- ...Welfare Benefits

The CSES codebook includes descriptions of each domain, used for translation as well as in interviews. We include the full question wording along with “help” descriptions in the Appendix.

Analyses

Basic Descriptives

Our analysis of these data relies on a re-coding version of each variable, from -2 to +2, where low values indicate support for less spending and high values indicate support for more spending. Support for spending that is the “same as now” is 0. We focus for the time being on the three large social domains, health, education and welfare, as well as defense. Country-level means are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Net Support for Spending, by Social Domain

	Mean preference for spending (-2 to +2)			
	Welfare	Health	Education	Defense
Austria	0.33	0.56	0.98	-0.57
Taiwan	0.97	0.77	0.95	-0.09
France	0.21	0.81	0.91	-0.63
Ireland	n/a	0.98	0.94	-0.46
Mexico	0.85	1.14	1.18	0.27
Montenegro	0.75	0.87	0.68	0.13
New Zealand	-0.50	0.85	0.84	-0.13
Serbia	1.25	1.18	1.25	0.61
Switzerland	0.09	0.16	0.66	-0.96
Thailand	0.62	0.75	0.88	0.47

Based on unweighted CSES data, as of August 2014.

Table 1 offers a first glimpse of the list of countries for which data are currently available. Clearly, this is a small but diverse sample – diverse not just regionally and culturally, but in spending preferences as well. That said, mean net support for spending in all social domains is almost always positive. Except for New Zealand, all citizens in all the

countries surveyed here say they want more social spending. This is particularly true in Serbia, where increases in social spending are most strongly supported. Switzerland shows low levels of support for spending increases – indeed, only education produces a net support measure that clearly is different from zero.

The situation is quite different for defense spending. Here, four countries show positive net preferences for spending increases; the mean for remaining countries is below zero.

Thermostatic Responsiveness

What drives differences in preferences for spending? A certain portion of cross-country variation is due to cultural and regional difference, certainly, but some of it will be related to current levels of policy as well. These are measures of relative preferences of spending, after all – preferences for change in spending is based on what governments are currently spending. The fact that Switzerland shows low levels of support for spending change does not indicate the Swiss are less supportive of social welfare spending than Serbians – it reflects, at least in part, the fact that the Swiss already have a much more developed welfare state.

We can of course examine this possibility more directly. Equation 1, above, sets out the basic theoretical relationship; the standard thermostatic model of opinion and policy is estimated as follows:

$$R_t = a + \beta_1 P_t + \beta_2 U_t + e_t, \quad (2)$$

where R is the public's relative preference for policy, P is current levels of policy, and U is a set of additional exogenous variables affecting R , such as current macroeconomic conditions. Note that Equation 2 differs from Equation 1 only slightly – R is a function of P , but because we cannot directly capture P^* we rely on proxies (U). Because of this and the fact that measured R and P (and U) are on different scales, the equation also includes regression parameters.

The thermostatic model was initially conceived as a model that applies longitudinally – relative preferences respond dynamically to policy, and other factors, over time (t). The model can be adapted to apply across space as well, i.e., we can introduce subscript j to indicate units:

$$R_{jt} = a_j + \beta_1 P_{jt} + \beta_2 U_{jt} + e_{jt}. \quad (3)$$

The thermostatic model can be easily adapted to fit individual-level analyses as well, of course, as follows,

$$R_{it} = a_i + \beta_1 P_{it} + \beta_2 U_{it} + e_{it}, \quad (4)$$

where i denotes survey respondents. Just as we can look at variations in R across space (j), we can look at variations in R across individuals (i), based on varying levels of policy (P) and other factors (U), at time t . There is to our knowledge little work exploring the thermostatic model at the individual level (though see Wlezien and Soroka 2014), and this variant of the standard thermostatic model is the basis for the analysis that follows.

Table 2 provides results from a simple panel estimation of thermostatic responsiveness to government spending. It is based on a GLS random-effects panel estimation, in which we regress spending preferences on (a) gender (1=female), (b) birth year, (c) education (binary, 1=more than high school), and (d) income quintiles. We use the middle income quintile as the residual category, so income coefficients reflect the difference between each quintile and the middle. We also include a measure of current spending (as a percent of GDP) in each country – this is the critical test of thermostatic responsiveness. Data for welfare are drawn from the OECD, and are available for the six OECD countries only.² Data for health, education and defense are drawn from the World Bank, and are available for all countries with the exception of education spending in Montenegro.³

Table 2. Thermostatic Responsiveness to Policy, by Domain

	Welfare	Health	Education	Defense
Spending (t-1)	-.210*** (.012)	-.033*** (.004)	-.055*** (.009)	.093*** (.017)
Female	.025 (.023)	.111*** (.018)	.080*** (.017)	.003 (.021)
Birthyear	.005*** (.001)	.001 (.001)	.003*** (.000)	.001* (.001)
Education	-.466*** (.024)	-.284*** (.020)	-.120*** (.018)	-.577*** (.023)
Income: 1 st	.015 (.036)	-.046 (.027)	-.097*** (.026)	-.047 (.033)
Income: 2 nd	-.012 (.036)	-.065* (.027)	-.064* (.025)	.028 (.032)
Income: 4 th	-.123*** (.037)	.024 (.029)	.018 (.027)	-.158*** (.035)
Income: 5 th	-.111** (.038)	-.024 (.030)	.012 (.028)	-.031 (.036)
Constant	-8.676*** (1.391)	-.343 (1.063)	-3.973*** (.981)	-2.815* (1.266)
N	7596	11109	10532	10779
sigma_e	.936	.890	.835	1.000
sigma_u	.000	.000	.000	.000
rho	.000	.000	.000	.000
r2_w	.005	.002	.001	.007
r2_b	.586	.420	.589	.574
r2_o	.103	.041	.016	.073

Cells contain coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, from GLS random-effects models using unweighted data.

Individual-level demographics in Table 2 point to some relatively well-known relationships: women are more supportive of health and education spending, and those with higher incomes tend to show less support for welfare spending. Education is negatively related to spending support in these data – this is not as we would expect in the social domains in Anglo-American democracies, and is worth further investigation. For the time being, however, we focus on the first coefficient in each column – the test of

² See <http://www.oecd.org/statistics/>.

³ See <http://data.worldbank.org>.

whether public preferences for spending change are systematically related to levels of government spending.

There is evidence in Table 2 that they are. There are significant coefficients for spending in every case. In all three social domains, increased levels of spending leads to lower support for spending increases – the more your country spends on welfare, for instance, the less supportive you are of more welfare spending, *ceteris paribus*. This is exactly as the thermostat model predicts. The fact that it holds cross-sectionally, in such a small and diverse set of countries, is, we think, rather impressive.

Defense is quite a different case, however. Here, more spending appears to lead to more support. There may well be thermostat responsiveness to policy change over time within countries (see work by Eichenberg and Stoll, for instance); but across these countries, and across space, there is no evidence of that. While it may be that defense spending feeds back positively on preferences, another, seemingly more likely, possibility is that our cross-national analysis captures the impact of preferences on spending, i.e., that spending is greater where support for more spending is higher. To settle the issue, we need to incorporate a good measure of—or instrument for—the public’s preferred level of defense spending across countries, which would allow an estimate of the effect of policy on relative preferences. Such measures are available within certain countries (Wlezien 1995; 1996; Soroka and Wlezien 2010) but not most of the countries in our dataset.⁴

Differences Across Income Groups

Table 2 offers a glimpse of how preferences for spending differ across income groups. It provides only a partial picture, however – the model assumes that the differences across incomes groups are the same from one country to the next. This may not be the case, of course.

Provoked in part by recent work examining differences in both preferences and representation across income groups in the US, our interest here is in the degree to which preferences differ across income groups, differently, across countries. We have argued elsewhere that representation of the rich rather than the poor may partly be a function of how far apart the rich and poor are from the middle (Soroka and Wlezien 2007; 2010; also see Enns and Wlezien 2011). If the preferences of the rich match rather closely the preferences of the median voter, and the preferences of the poor do not, for instance, we might expect that it is the poor that are under-represented. It follows that the nature of representation – in terms of the degree to which policy better matches the preferences of the rich or the poor – may differ from one country to the next based in part on how policy preferences differ across income groups.

Do preferences differ across income groups within countries? Do income groups vary in different ways from one country to the next? Table 3 offers a very simple preliminary test – ANOVAs of spending preferences as a function of country, income quintiles (included as a categorical rather than interval-level variable), and an interaction between

⁴ It also is not clear what differences across countries would tell us.

the two. Results make clear that both country and income matter for spending preferences. This comes as no surprise – regression results in Table 2 already make these facts relatively clear. The fact that there is much more variance across countries than across income groups is more readily evident in Table 3, however. Consider results for welfare, in which countries account for roughly 21% of the individual-level variance, and income accounts for less than 1%. The situation is not very different across the other domains. Even when countries account for less variance, particularly for education, income barely matters. Even to the extent that income does matter for preferences, the effect of the interactive variable indicates that it varies substantially across countries.

Table 3. Spending preferences by Country and Income Quintile

	Partial SS	df	F	% Variance
<i>Welfare</i>				
Model	2870.40	44	76.8***	23.08%
Country	2624.05	8	386.17***	21.10%
Income	79.54	4	23.41***	0.64%
Country*Income	56.03	32	2.06***	0.45%
Residual	9566.60	11263		
Total	12437.00	11307		
<i>Health</i>				
Model	1155.94	49	29.7***	10.44%
Country	1058.08	9	148.02***	9.56%
Income	13.19	4	4.15**	0.12%
Country*Income	45.12	36	1.58*	0.41%
Residual	9916.68	12486		
Total	11072.62	12535		
<i>Education</i>				
Model	419.27	49	11.59***	4.35%
Country	325.96	9	49.06***	3.39%
Income	12.89	4	4.36**	0.13%
Country*Income	57.55	36	2.17***	0.60%
Residual	9208.40	12473		
Total	9627.67	12522		
<i>Defense</i>				
Model	3324.07	49	66.85***	21.35%
Country	2793.54	9	305.86***	17.95%
Income	47.56	4	11.72***	0.31%
Country*Income	65.99	36	1.81**	0.42%
Residual	12241.90	12063		
Total	15565.97	12112		

Based on unweighted CSES data, as of August 2014.

How exactly does the effect of income differ from one country to the next? Table 3 offers a general view; Figures 1 through 4 offer more detail. The figures show estimated means for each income quintile, across all countries, and for each of the four domains. The estimates are based on simple within-country ANOVAs of preferences regressed on income quintiles.

Figure 1. Welfare spending preferences across income quintiles

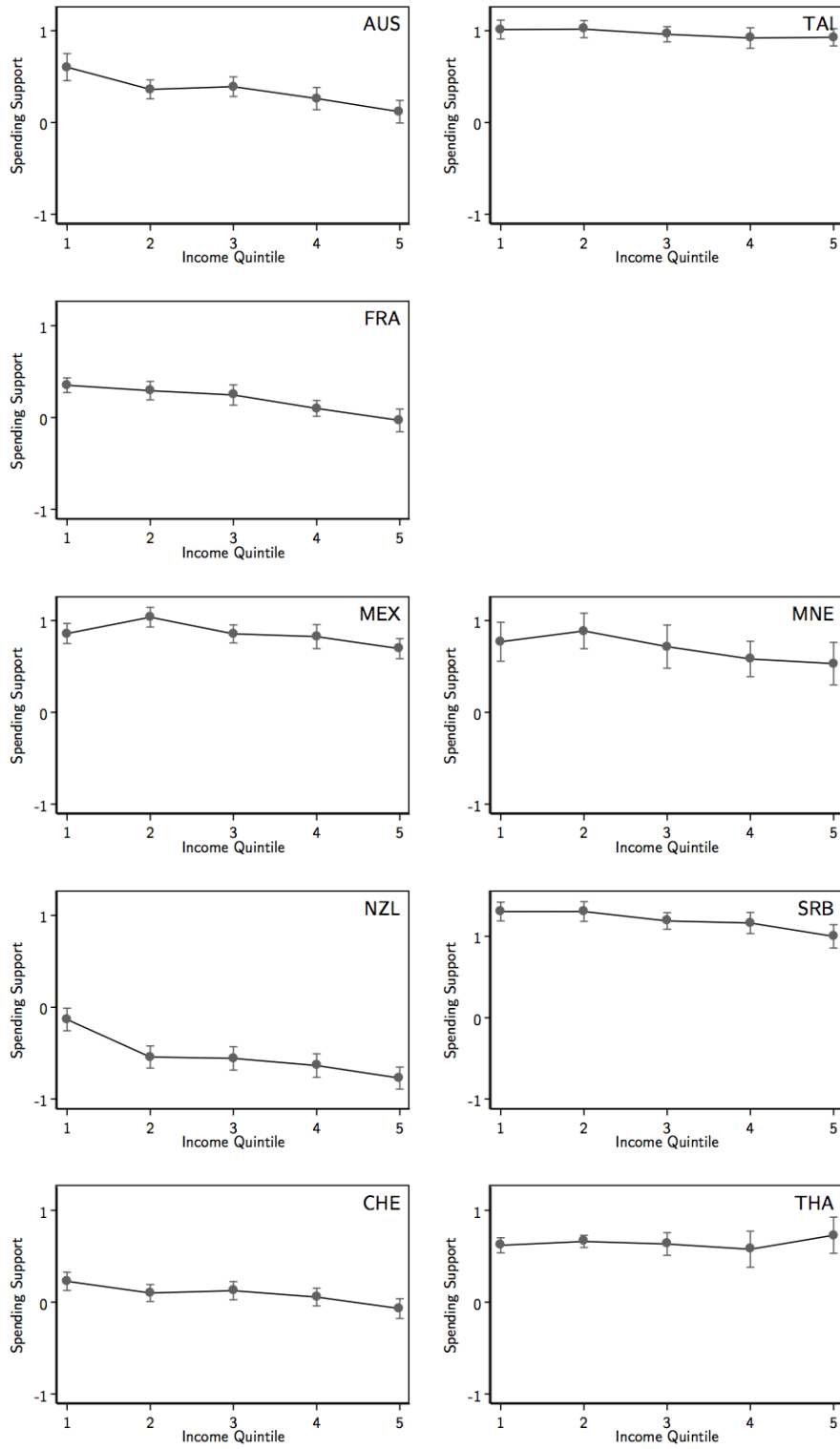


Figure 2. Health spending preferences across income quintiles

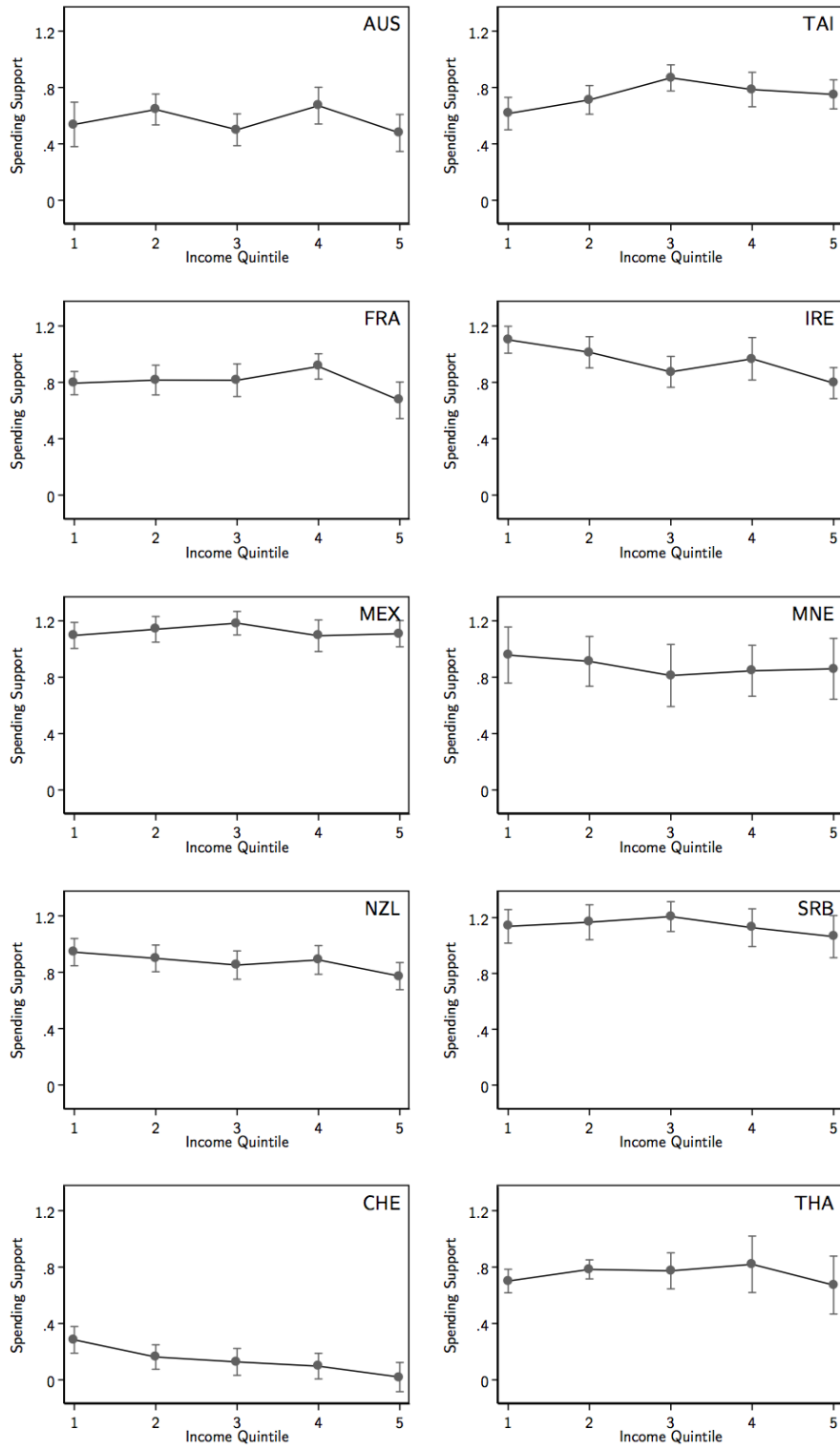


Figure 3. Education spending preferences across income quintiles

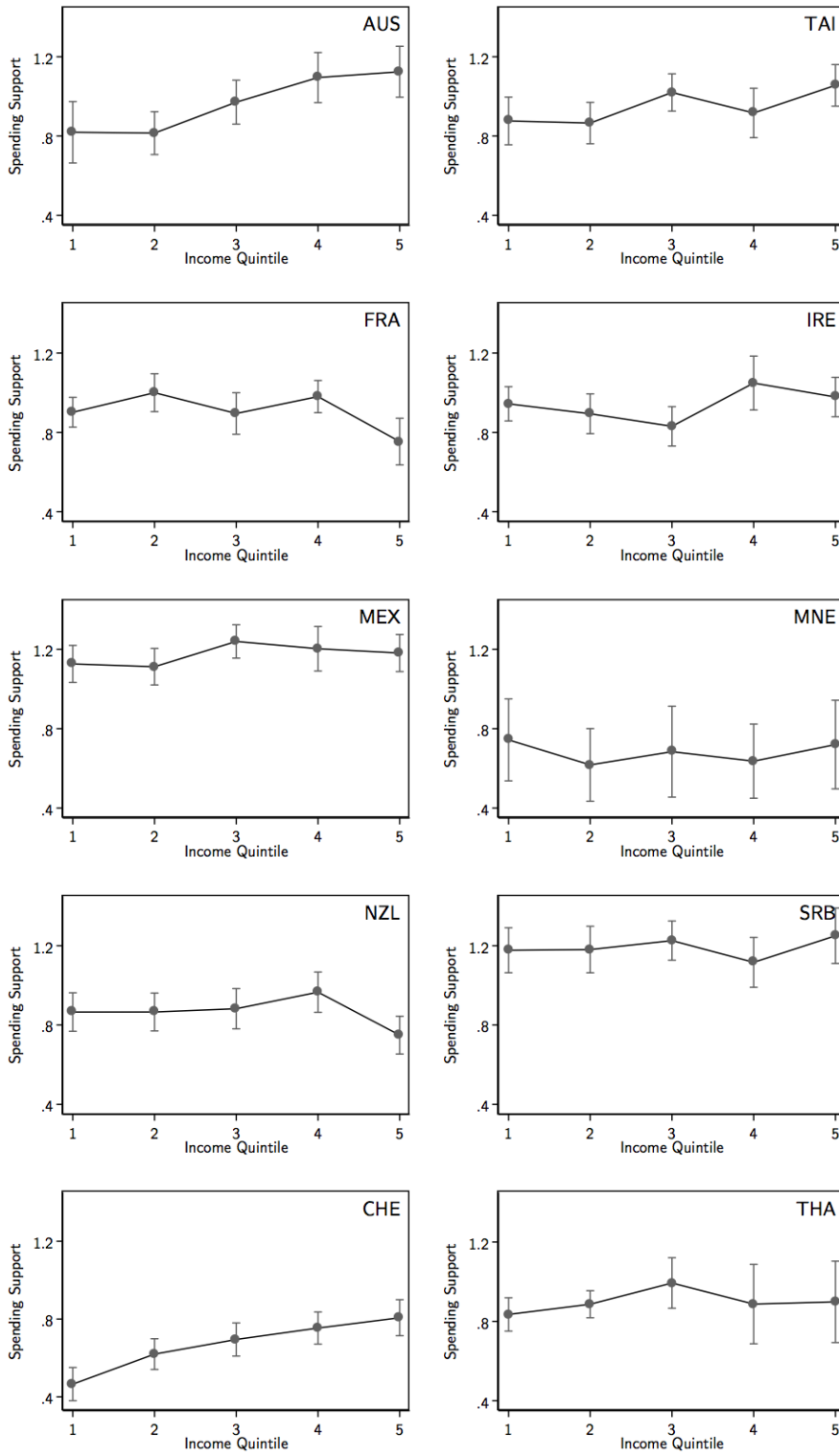
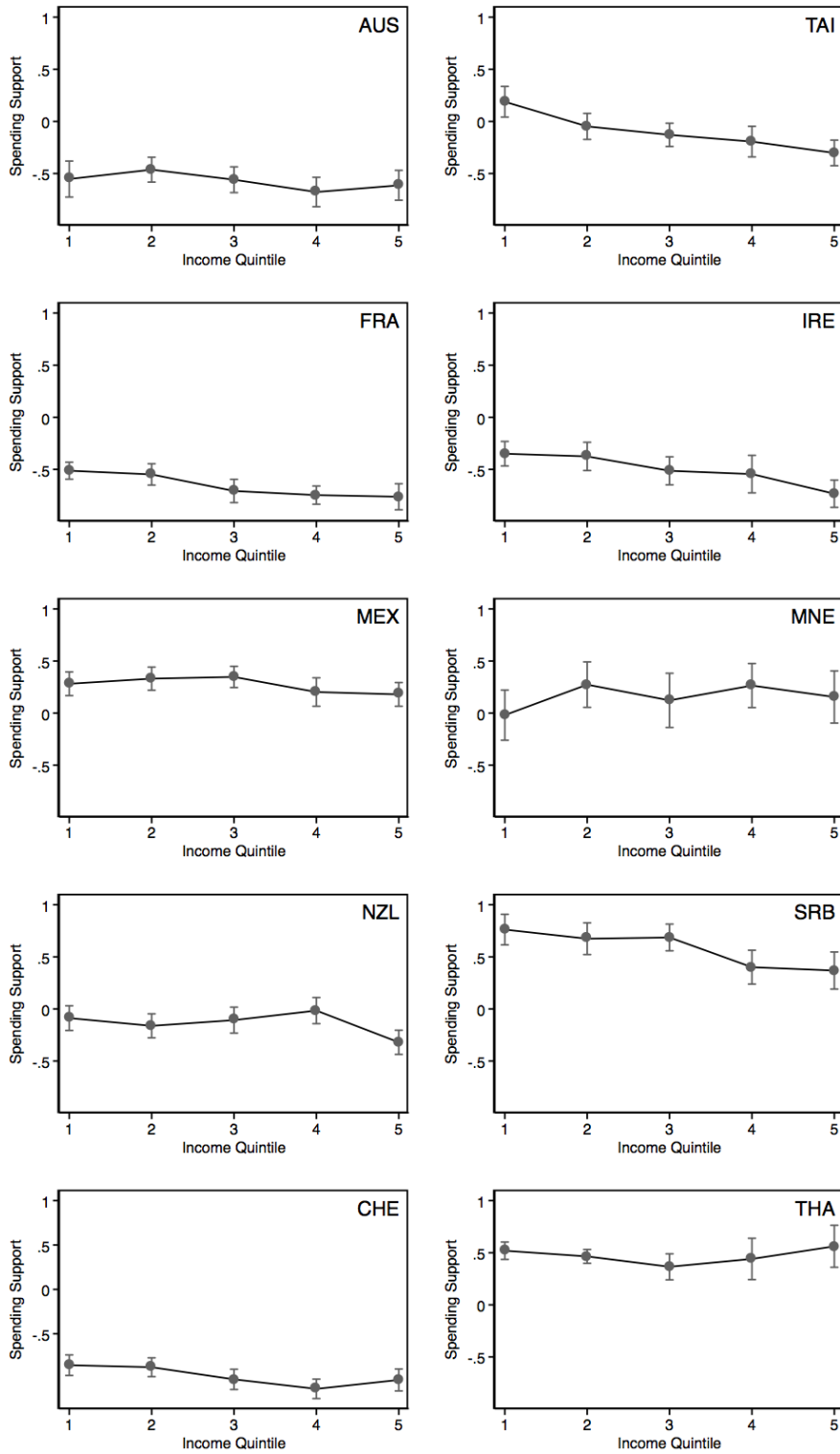


Figure 4. Defense spending preferences across income quintiles



Each panel in Figures 1 through 4 uses the same range on the y-axis, so the figure reveals both within- and across-country differences. Figure 1 thus captures some of what we have already seen Table 1, then: Swiss net preferences for welfare spending hover around 0; Serbian net preferences are comparatively high; New Zealand net preferences are comparatively low. But there some interesting within-country differences as well. We can see how income matters to welfare spending preferences: in most but not all cases, higher income produces less support for welfare spending. Comparing the low, middle and high income groups across countries also suggest some important differences. In New Zealand, preferences for more spending decline with income, and those in the third (middle) tercile are closer to those with high incomes than to those with low incomes. In Taiwan and Thailand, there is very little impact of income; and in fact in Thailand support for welfare is highest among those in the high income tercile.

Table 4. The Rich, the Poor, and the Median Voter

	Absolute Difference between Income Quintiles			
	Low vs. middle	High vs. middle	Low vs. middle	High vs. middle
	<i>Welfare</i>		<i>Health</i>	
Austria	0.21	0.27	0.04	0.02
Taiwan	0.05	0.03	0.25	0.12
France	0.11	0.28	0.02	0.14
Ireland			0.23	0.08
Mexico	0.00	0.16	0.09	0.07
Montenegro	0.05	0.19	0.15	0.05
New Zealand	0.42	0.21	0.09	0.08
Serbia	0.12	0.19	0.07	0.14
Switzerland	0.10	0.19	0.16	0.11
Thailand	0.01	0.10	0.07	0.10
<i>Average</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>0.18</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>0.09</i>
	<i>Education</i>		<i>Defense</i>	
Austria	0.15	0.15	0.01	0.57
Taiwan	0.14	0.04	0.32	0.45
France	0.01	0.14	0.19	0.90
Ireland	0.11	0.15	0.16	0.68
Mexico	0.11	0.06	0.07	0.28
Montenegro	0.06	0.04	0.14	0.02
New Zealand	0.02	0.13	0.02	0.13
Serbia	0.05	0.02	0.08	0.61
Switzerland	0.23	0.11	0.16	1.17
Thailand	0.16	0.10	0.15	0.21
<i>Average</i>	<i>0.10</i>	<i>0.09</i>	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.50</i>

Based on unweighted CSES data, as of August 2014.

We try to draw out the differences between income groups in Table 4. The table shows, for each domain, the absolute distance between the mean net preferences for the lowest versus the middle quintile, and the highest versus the middle quintile. For welfare preferences, then, we can see that the absolute gap from low to middle is .42, and the absolute gap from high to middle is .21. Here, the median voter is much closer to the rich than to the poor. As we have argued elsewhere (Soroka and Wlezien, 2007), this likely matters for the degree to which policy is more closely aligned with the rich versus the poor.

There are other instances in which there are what seem to be significant differences in the poor-middle and rich-middle gaps. French welfare preferences suggest the opposite dynamic: here, the middle is closer to the poor. The same is true for Switzerland, though to a lesser degree. Clearly, we cannot conclude that the median voter in all countries is closer to the rich than to the poor.

We can look to other policy domains, in Figures 2 through 4 and in Table 4 as well. Both make clear that not only do poor-middle and rich-middle gaps vary from one country to the next, they vary across domains within countries as well. The relative proximity of the rich to the middle in New Zealand welfare preferences is not apparent in any other domain in that country: there is no real difference in the gaps in healthcare, and it is the poor who are closer to the middle in both education and defense. Mexican welfare preferences suggest a median voter with preferences no different from the poor; and education preferences in which the poor-middle gap is nearly twice as large as the rich-middle gap. There is no simple story here. Income does matter to net preferences for social and defense spending. But it matters in quite different ways across policy domains and countries.

Variation in gaps between the poor, the middle and rich point to the possibility of quite different biases in policymaking. We do not examine these in detail here. But we see the preceding analyses as first steps in the consideration of public responsiveness, and policy representation, across what will soon be a much larger number of countries.

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Appendix

Question Wording and Domain Descriptions, Spending Questions

For the next questions, please say whether you would like to see more or less government expenditure in each of the following areas. Remember if you say 'more' it could require a tax increase, or 'less', it could require a reduction in those government services.

Q1a. Thinking about public expenditure on HEALTH, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The word "health" is intended to refer to public expenditure related to health care, i.e., public health care programs, public hospitals, clinics, etc.

Q1b. Thinking about public expenditure on EDUCATION, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The word "education" is intended to refer to public Expenditure related to all forms of education, i.e., primary and secondary education, universities and colleges, etc.

Q1c. Thinking about public expenditure on UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The phrase "unemployment benefits" is intended to refer to public expenditure related to the unemployed, mainly through employment insurance programs, but also job training directed at the unemployed, and related programs.

Q1d. Thinking about public expenditure on DEFENSE, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The word "defense" is intended to refer to public expenditure on the military, and other defense-related programs; it is NOT intended to refer to other international affairs programs, nor foreign aid.

Q1e. Thinking about public expenditure on OLD-AGE PENSIONS, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The phrase "old-age pensions" is intended to refer to public expenditure on old age pensions, NOT other spending on programs directed at the elderly.

Q1f. Thinking about public expenditure on BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The phrase "business and industry" is intended to refer to Public expenditure related to helping business and industry, Particularly through subsidies.

Q1g. Thinking about public expenditure on POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The phrase "police and law enforcement" is intended to refer to public expenditure on the justice system related to police and law enforcement.

Q1h. Thinking about public expenditure on WELFARE BENEFITS, should there be much more than now, somewhat more than now, the same as now, somewhat less than now, or much less than now?

HELP: The phrase "welfare benefits" is intended to refer to public expenditure on welfare programs or social benefit programs.