UNEQUAL DEMOCRACIES

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Do poor and rich vote differently?

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ABSTRACT:

There is extant literature documenting the unequal representation of the interests of economically defined groups in democracies. One of the potential explanations for this phenomenon resides in the electoral behavior of different groups of voters. If more affluent citizens base their vote decision more strongly on policy considerations while the less affluent rely on more unconditional forms of electoral support, this pattern could influence the ability of political elites to represent the poor as well as their willingness to do. We make use of the integrated CSES to study how income affects the way in which voters rely on different voting heuristics like proximity voting, valence considerations and economic voting in their electoral choice across a diverse set of countries. Our findings suggest that these different considerations are used to similar extents by all income groups and no major differences exist in which cues poor and rich use when called to the voting booth. These findings have important implications for the literature on unequal responsiveness as they rule out one common narrative.

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Introduction

Extant research testifies that the process of representation has a bias and more affluent segments of the society often get better heard than the less affluent. This holds true when looking at public policy (Bartels 2008, Gilens 2012, Elsässer et al. 2018, Peters and Ennsink 2015, Schakel 2020) but also already when looking at the positions of elected political actors (Rosset et al. 2013, Bernauer et al. 2015, Lupu and Warner 2020) or even when looking at priorities (Traber et al. 2021) of different economic groups within society.

Despite recent advances, the literature has not settled on the causes of this phenomenon. Context factors such as the degree of macro-economic inequality (e.g. Rosset et al. 2013, but see Gunterman 2020), the descriptive underrepresentation of low-income citizens (e.g Carnes and Lupu 2015) or the role of interest groups in policy making (Gilens and Page 2014) have been highlighted to play a role. Other explanations focus more on the behavior of the disadvantaged group itself, e.g. their lower turnout (Peters and Ennsick 2015), their lower level of information (Elkjaer 2020) or the fact that their preferences are not well covered by the party system and disadvantaged voters end up choosing parties whose policy stances are far away from theirs (Rosset and Kurella 2020).

In this study, we side with this second group of work and tackle a so far neglected aspect in focusing on the signals sent by different economic groups when called to the voting booth. We study the extent to which more and less affluent citizens differ in how they reach their electoral choice, i.e. which factors are decisive for their party choice. This perspective contributes to the literature on voters' heterogeneity in terms of electoral decision-making (see e.g. Bartle 2005, Stubager et al 2018), which however has only rarely focused on economically defined groups of voters (except for some work on economic voting). It also

contributes to the political economy literature which despite focusing more and more on the key role of elections for economic policy making (Beramendi et al. 2015) hardly takes into account that economically defined groups might take electoral decisions based on different considerations.

We posit that potential differences in the way various groups take electoral decisions can have important implications for both who gets elected and receives a political mandate but also the clarity of the signal sent to political elites and thus the relationship between political elites and voters. If poor and rich differ for example in how much they rely on policy considerations when deciding whom to vote for, this has direct consequences for the selection of elected representatives. For instance, if rich voters vote according to their policy preferences whereas the poor vote more according to non-policy considerations, the elections are likely to produce an outcome that favours relatively rich voters on policy grounds, given that their policy preferences been directly channeled into the system. Second, we argue, heterogeneity in voting decisions potentially affects the links between politicians and represented. If policy factors and thus spatial considerations prevail, this creates a clear mandate for the representatives on which policies to pursue. If on the other hand, more long-term and unconditional factors such as party identification or valence are decisive, the mandate is based much more on symbolic ties and favors a looser connection, known as trustee model of representational linkages (Thomassen 1994).

Put differently, heterogeneity in electoral decision-making has potential consequences both for the *ability* of elites to represent these groups on policy grounds as well as for their *willingness* to do so. First, these differences in how voters reach their decision have potential consequences for the clarity of the signal sent. It might simply be easier for politicians to fulfil the expectations of one group if they are clearer in what they want in terms of policy. If

another group relies more on unconditional factors such as party identification or valence impressions of the candidates or if their electoral behavior is in general less predictable, it might be more difficult for political elites to cater to the demands of this groups as no clear policy mandate was given. As Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) note in relation to American presidential elections: "we believe that it is necessary to determine the evaluative standards that voters employ in order to accurately interpret any "messages" or mandates that might be conveyed by a given electoral result. For example, George W. Bush has interpreted his victories in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections as a mandate for sweeping conservative policy initiatives. But such an interpretation would be questionable, at best, if the American electorate acted on the basis of other, nonideological, considerations" (p. 256). Considering that different groups of voters base their vote choice on different criteria as the literature on voter heterogeneity suggests (e.g Bartle 2005, Stubager et al 2018), elected politicians might have a hard time figuring out what they have been elected for, especially if some groups put less emphasis on policy considerations in their vote choice.

Second, heterogeneity in electoral decision-making could impact the willingness of political elites to cater to the demands of certain groups of citizens. If policy considerations are less important to them, they are also less likely to hold politicians accountable for delivering on these policies and consequently punishing them if they are not satisfied with political outcomes. In other words, if more unconditional forms of support prevail for certain segments, the need to deliver policy solutions tailored to their demands is less an issue than it is for groups expressing more clear-cut policy demands as potential punishment does not loom large for the former group. As a consequence, the differences in electoral decision making potentially affect the willingness of elites to represent different societal groups.

In our view, this discussion elevates two important points: First, a study about the "evaluative criteria" (Lewis-Beck et al 2008) of the population as a whole and in particular of different segments of the population is relevant for the study of representation and elite behavior as it tells us something about the ability and willingness of elites to consider voters' points of view. Second, such an exploration allows shedding light on a crucial "input"-based explanation of unequal representation. If no stark differences exist between the electoral decision-making criteria of rich and poor, we can rule out that differences in the signals sent by voters is decisive in explaining the unequal outcomes that we observe.

In our comparative analyses, we explore heterogeneity in four prominent factors known to influence electoral behavior: party identification, leader evaluations, economic voting and spatial voting which represent the classical theories of electoral behavior (Fisher et al. 2018). While differences among socio-economic groups in the prevalence of these explanations for electoral choice have not attracted a lot of scholarly interest, there are still reasons to expect that the considerations of more or less affluent could be different when deciding whom to vote for given that income is associated with two important features known as relevant for the way citizens take a decision: economic and material resources and political sophistication (see e.g. Kölln 2018, Elkjaer 2020 or de Vries and Giger 2014).

We take a comparative approach to test our arguments and rely on Comparative Study of Electoral System (CSES) data. Our sample comprises of 60 elections and covers more than 52'000 respondents in 22 countries between 1996-2016. Our models aim to explain vote choice and we run interactions by income groups to get at differences in the decision-making mechanism between the economic groups.

The results show that the weight of different considerations varies only slightly between the rich and the poor when called to choose a candidate or party. While low income citizens rely slightly more on partisan identification and valence factors such as leader evaluations, for the more affluent policy or spatial considerations are more prevalent. Overall, however, the considerations used by poor and rich citizens are very similar and the share of correctly predicted votes by each of these factors almost identical and relatively high (around 70%). These findings highlight that differences in the way income groups reach electoral decisions, at least among those citizens who turn out, cannot be decisive to explain unequal representation. We thus conclude that the causes of this phenomenon are to be sought in party supply and/or elected politicians' responsiveness to the preferences of different income groups. Furthermore, we show that partisan identity as well as leader evaluations have the highest predictive power suggesting that overall, the signal sent by voters might not be very clear and the support is more unconditional of concrete policy proposal than previously assumed.

Hints from the heterogeneity in electoral choice literature

Classic explanations of voting include party identification, valence, economic voting and spatial voting. While the first theory is rooted in social identity, valence, economic voting and spatial voting relate to voters' rational decisions regarding the perceived utility of parties that are on offer. The source of this utility differs between the three types of vote. Valence corresponds to a vote that is not related to citizens' evaluations of the content of policies that are to be implemented, but rather the perceived desirable characteristics of candidates and parties such as honesty or competence (Stokes 1992). In that sense a vote based on valence will maximize the perceived nonpolicy "quality" of the party or candidate that is chosen. Economic voting corresponds to a vote choice that maximizes a voter's welfare (Kramer 1971, Fair 1978). It entails that voters will reward incumbent parties if the economy has been growing (or has been perceived as such) and, on the contrary, will turn to opposition parties if economic conditions are (or are perceived) as declining. In the spatial voting model, voters do not take into account past performance. Rather, they focus on their ideological stances and compare them with those of the competing parties. It is important to note that these criteria for making an electoral choice are not mutually exclusive in the sense that most individuals declare using several of them simultaneously, but give different priorities to them (Stubager et al 2018). Obviously, there are cases in which using one or the other criterion would lead to the same voting decision. However, when this is not the case the weight attached to each of the criteria would be decisive for the vote choice.

Each of the four explanations of voting relate to different facets of representation. Party identification relates to the affective and symbolic ties between voters and their representatives. Valence allows choosing parties and candidates that are perceived positively independent on their policy stances. In that sense, it could be seen as related to a

trustee conceptualization of political representation. Economic voting is based on past performance and, in that sense, it is related to accountability mechanisms and the possibility for voters to punish or reward incumbents based on how they performed in office. Spatial voting, on the other hand, is based on a selection model of political representation and allows translating policy preferences into representative bodies. If voters vote based on their own policy preferences and choose a party that is closest to them regarding its policy stances, the policy preferences of voters should be reflected in parliaments and ultimately public policy (Pierce 1999). Each of these models of voting behaviour has been largely studied in itself as well as in combination with one another but only a small literature exists exploring heterogeneity in the weight of these considerations (Bartle 2005, Stubager et al 2018, Blumenstiel 2016) but no with regard to socio-economic criteria

There are reasons, we believe, to consider that income groups differ in the considerations they use when making electoral choices. Indeed, income is associated with two features that might be important for the way citizens make a decision. First, income is proxy for the economic and material resources citizens have. These resources allow citizens to get political information or to have a mental space to get interested or engaged in politics having less to worry about their livelihood than citizens who are deprived of these resources (Manstead 2018). Second, there is an association between income and levels of political sophistication. On average, those citizens who fare well in the market economy are also more knowledgeable and interested in politics (Kölln 2018, Elkjaer 2020). This might be due to the material resources income provides but could also be linked to other factors such as education for instance which affect both citizens' income and their level of political sophistication. Since both economic resources and political sophistication might contribute to using one or the other consideration in making an electoral choice (Alvarez 1997, Krosnick

1988; Lau & Redlawsk 2001, Sniderman et al. 1991 de Vries and Giger 2014), some differences in the use of each of these factors are likely across income groups. In the following paragraphs, we focus on each of the main voting mechanism, review the literature on the use of these considerations by different social groups and formulate tentative hypotheses regarding potential differences regarding the weight each of the explanations for poor and rich citizens that the literature suggests. These hypotheses should be considered with caution as first the literature is scarce when it comes to considering heterogeneity in electoral decision making at all and thus the general notion of uniformity of considerations across the population is a very strong null hypothesis. Second, the evidence regarding the direction of the effects is mixed at best which only allows us to formulate tentative expectations regarding the direction of differences between rich and poor.

Party identification has often been portrayed as one of the main determinants of vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960). It is argued that voters base their electoral choiceon long standing party attachments linked to group identities and that these attachments are independent from any policy or self-interested consideration (Achen and Bartels 2017). Research on party identification has mainly looked at which groups identify with which party or which personal characteristic might contribute to identifying with a specific party (Box-Steffenmeister et al. 2004, Peterson 2016). However, it has not investigated the differences in the extent to which party identification explains the vote of different groups of voters. There are some reasons to believe that party identification might play a greater role for some groups of citizens. In general, party identification is stronger for citizens with more cognitive resources (Huber et al. 2005). However, it appears that more informed voters are more likely to switch parties if their preferences are at odds with those of the party they identify with (Achen and

Bartels 2017). This suggests that party identification is a stronger cue for electoral choice for relatively uninformed voters. In sum, as income is generally positively associated with political knowledge, this literature suggests that party identification plays a more important role in the vote choice of relatively poor voters.

Valence refers to the overall assessment citizens make of a party or candidate independent of policy considerations. While the term has been used quite widely in the literature, we define it here as an overall assessment of the party or the party leader respectively measured with thermometer scores. This evaluation includes an emotional attachment but also party leadership images and broad performance evaluations (see e.g. Clarke et al. 2004, 2009). While it has been criticized to be too broad (Fiorina 1981), it has recently been shown to capture exactly what is supposed to, namely emotions (empathy) and competence (leadership) (Garzia 2018). While the long-time paradigm for this type of vote consideration has been that it serves as short-cut for the low-informed, unsophisticated voters, recent research suggests that this might not be the case and highly sophisticated rely on valence considerations as well (Bittner 2011, Garzia 2014).

Economic voting represents another perspective on how voters might attribute utilities to parties and vote based on these utilities. It entails that voters make a decision to support an incumbent party or parties based on their perception of the state of the economy (for a review see e.g. Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007). The very rich literature has tackled two questions that seem relevant for us here: First, it acknowledges differences in the strength of economic considerations based on the personal economic situation (e.g. Singer 2013, Dorussen and Taylor 2002, Hellwig 2001, Palmer and Whitten 2011). This literature suggests that given their more precarious and vulnerable economic situation less affluent voters are more reliant on economic factors when casting a vote while a similar effect is not always

visible when looking at economic shocks and crises(e.g. Weatherford 1978, Duch and Sagarzazu 2014). A second strand explores heterogeneity regarding political sophistication and again mixed findings arise – dependent also on whether one looks at "egocentric" or "sociotropic" evaluations (Fiorina 1981, Kayser and Wlezien 2011, Gomez and Wilson 2001, Duch 2001, De Vries and Giger 2014). Originally, the general mechanism of economic voting was argued to be less demanding to voters than spatial voting as voters simply need to have an opinion on the state of the economy or their personal finance and know also who is in government (Fiorina 1981). In sum, no clear expectations regarding differences between rich and poor emerge from this literature even though discussions of heterogeneity in the prominence of economic voting is prevalent.

Spatial or proximity voting entails making a vote choice that minimizes the distance between the voter and the selected party in the policy space. In its simplest version one ideological dimension, usually left-right, is considered. To cast a vote based on that spatial logic a voter has to know her own position in the policy space as well as that of each of the parties that are running. This process thus requires both quite extensive knowledge about politics as well as an ability to process this information. Proximity voting has been found to be more prevalent among politically knowledgeable voters (Delli Caprini and Keeter 1996, Lau Andersen and Redlawsk 2008). As a result, one would expect that the ability of different social groups to vote spatially differs depending on their level of political sophistication. Regarding differential effects of proximity voting for poor and rich citizens, research has shown that low-income voters do not chose to vote for left parties in proportions that would be expected from self-interested theory of voting (Iversen and Soskice 2006). One explanation is that low-income citizens do not hold left economic preferences in the first place and another one is that they do not translate these preferences into a vote choice, in

other words they do not consider their policy preferences when choosing a party. There is some evidence for both perspectives. Importantly, research has shown that poor voters are more likely than their richer counterparts to vote for parties that are distant to them on economic issues. De la O and Rodden (2008) demonstrate that on average low-income citizens hold more pro-redistributive policy preferences than richer citizens, but that they are also more conservative on moral issues and, as a result, do not support left parties in proportions that are expected political economy models. This is particularly the case among religious individuals and in countries with proportional representation electoral systems. Their models, however, do not directly test for a differential effect of policy positions on vote choice among poor and rich citizens, though the greater influence of religiosity among the poor might indicate that policy preferences play a smaller role in the vote choice of this group. Rosset and Kurella (2020) show that on average poor voters end up voting for parties that represent them less well in a multidimensional space than richer voters (see also Lesschaeve 2017). Part of the explanation highlights that party systems are biased in the first place making the vote choice particularly difficult for poor voters, but in addition, poor citizens tend to vote less in line with what proximity models would predict. Based on the results of these previous studies, we could expect spatial voting to be more prominent among the (sophisticated) rich.

Last, we consider the explanatory power of these considerations in total, or in other words the question whether poor and rich differ in how systematic they are in deciding whom to vote for. Doing so, we take up a common narrative among public commentator that low-income voters vote “impulsively” or “irrational”. In scientific terms, this translates into an argument that states that established electoral theories could work less well in explaining and thus predicting the vote decision of poorer individuals. In other words, we track

differences according to socio-economic groups in which inputs they consider or in the way the reflect on politics. This is what Bartle (2005) coined "type 2 heterogeneity", i.e. differences in how individuals think about politics and as a consequence how good established theories are able to explain their behavior. Blumenstiel (2016) testifies in his study on Germany that indeed such differences exist. It is in particular a lack of political sophistication and individual insecurity about issue positions that make it harder to predict voting decisions among certain groups of voters. In sum, this research suggests that it might simply be easier to forecast the electoral choice for higher income citizens.

Data and method

We use the Integrated Module Dataset from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems[1] for our empirical analyses. The dataset covers more than 281,000 respondents across 174 elections in 55 countries. We restrict the dataset to parliamentary elections in democracies, resulting in 60 elections in 22 unique countries[2]. This leaves us with 52,730 respondents with valid answers to our relevant survey items[3].

[1] The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (www.cses.org). CSES INTEGRATED MODULE DATASET (IMD) [dataset and documentation]. October 17, 2019 version. doi:10.7804/cses.imd.2019-10-17

[2] The list of elections and countries is presented in Table A8 in the Appendix.

[3] The leader valence question as well as the economic evaluation have not been systematically asked in Module 2 and 3, this is why we lose some entire election studies there.

Our dependent variable in the following analyses is the individual vote choice, which we aim to explain based on various vote explanations: party identification, valence, economic voting, and policy proximity. We transform the data set in the long format, such that the independent variables are case-specific variables of the form voters x party.

Party identification is measured by a dummy variable, taking the value 1 if the respondent reports to identify with the respective party. To get at *leader valence*, we rely on individually reported thermometer scores about party leaders, measured on an 11-point scale from 0 (strongly dislike the leader) to 10 (strongly like the leader). *Economic voting* is measured by two distinct dummy variables. The first takes on the value 1 for the current incumbent party or parties, if and only if the respondent reports that the state of the national economy has gotten better over the past 12 months. Thus, it captures the effect of positive evaluations of the economy on the incumbent party/parties. We label this the economic rewards voting variable, in contrast to the economic punishment voting variable, which takes on the value 1 for all opposition parties if and only if the respondent reports that the state of the economy has gotten worse over the past 12 months. In Module 2 and 3 of the CSES, the economic performance variable is not included, but instead respondents have been asked to evaluate the performance of the incumbent. For these survey waves, we use this performance variable as a proxy for the economic performance and construct the economic voting variables accordingly.

Policy proximity is measured via the absolute distance between the respondent's reported self-placement on the 11-point ideological scale, running from left to right, and the

respective party's position on the same scale, as it is perceived by the respondent.[4] We are interested in the extent to which the weight of these different concepts varies by income. The CSES survey provides a categorical income measure, based on national income quintiles. This categorization is sufficiently differentiated for our purpose. We use it as a metric variable to capture interaction effects in the vote models.

We estimate mixed conditional logit models on the pooled data set, including random party intercepts. Concretely, we apply a mixed conditional logit model that allows for variation in choice sets and random intercepts, applying the mclogit function in R as described in Elff (2009). We build the model stepwise, first testing for each voting explanation separately, and then combining them in a full model. Each model is estimated once with and once without interaction effects for income.

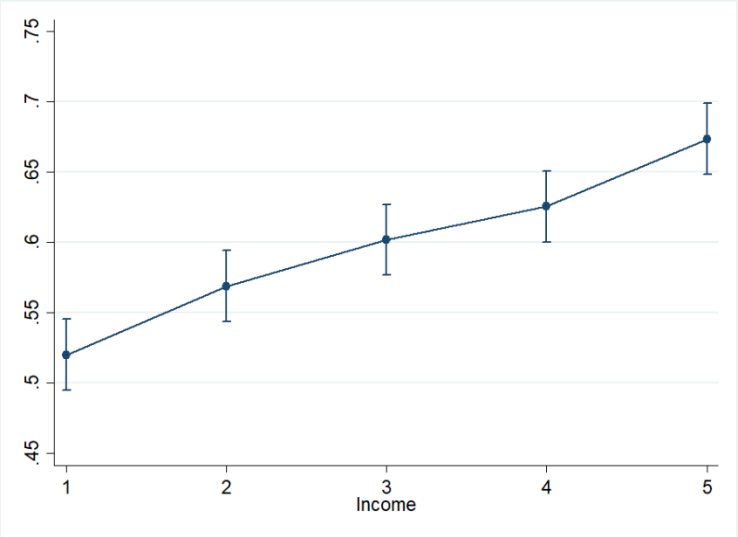
Results

Let us begin with a descriptive graph. Since we argue that political sophistication is closely associated with the income distribution, we show this correlation also for our data. We test this claim for our dataset by regressing a scale of correct answers to political knowledge

[4] Thus, we might include bias that is due to projection and persuasion effects in the placement of party positions. Yet this is adequate here, since we are interested in the vote considerations that voters rely on in their individual and subjective vote calculus. What we are interested in is not, whether lower income groups make *correct* vote choices in terms of choosing that party that really most closely represents them on the ideological dimension, but whether they *think* that the party they choose is ideologically close.

questions[5] on income quintiles, controlling for random effects on the country level. Figure 1 graphs the estimated effect of income on political sophistication. As expected, we see a clear positive effect of income on political knowledge, indicating that richer respondents are more likely to be more sophisticated than poorer segments of the population.

Figure 1: Marginal effect of income on a political knowledge scale, based on a multilevel regression model



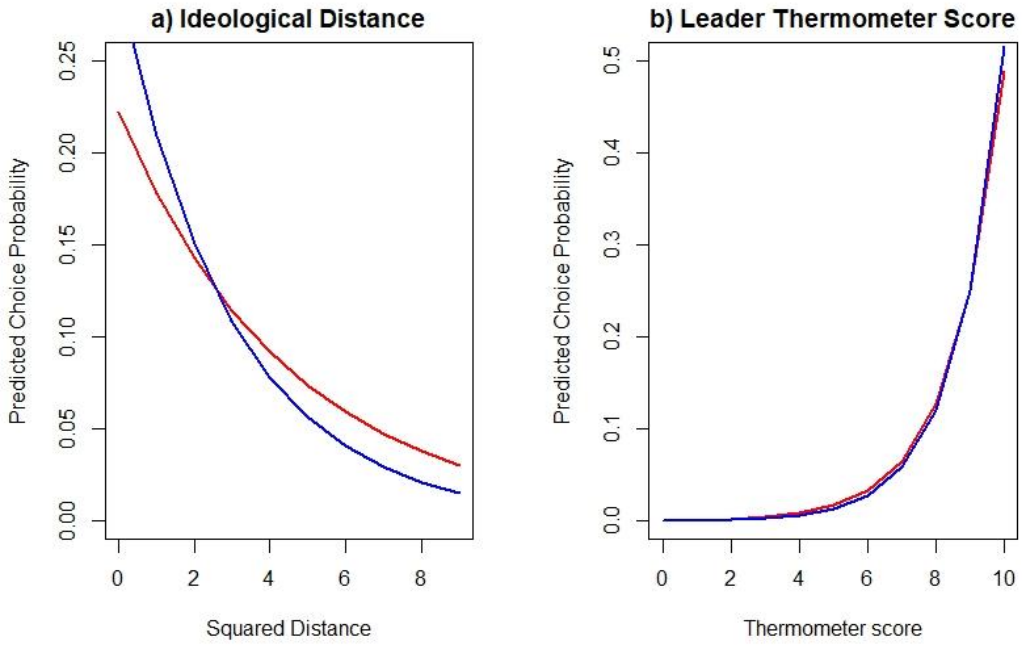
To test whether voters of different income groups weigh distinct vote criterions differently in their vote calculus, we estimate mixed conditional logit models and build the model stepwise, first testing for each voting explanation separately, and then combining them in a full model as portrayed in Table 1. The first set of models includes party identification, and while we see a large effect on the vote, as expected, we do not observe significant variation

[5] For CSES I-III, three political knowledge questions have been asked while CSES IV included 4 knowledge items. We have rescaled them to ranging from 0 to 1. Please note as well that for this descriptive graph we do not include the fifth module and thus this graph is based on fewer cases that are included in the regressions.

in the effect by income. The second set of models considers valence. Here, we see the opposite effect of income than expected: The poor put slightly less weight on leader valence in their vote choice than the rich. Models 3a and 3b demonstrate that the logic of economic voting is a useful predictor of vote choice, but only the economic punishment vote varies by income, such that its effect decreases with larger income. Ideological proximity also has a statistically significant effect on vote choice, which intensifies with increasing income, as expected. Once considering all vote explanations simultaneously, as is done in models 5a and 5b, we reveal slight deviations from that pattern. Now, controlling for all other factors influencing the vote, we see that the effect of party identification on vote choice does slightly vary by income, with the lower income voters relying more heavily on their party identification than the higher income voters. The pattern of interaction effects for ideological proximity and party and leader valence remains. Economic voting seems not to weigh heavily in the vote calculus, once all other factors and their variation by income is considered. Only the economic punishment vote still has a statistically significant main effect, but the economic rewards voting variable and their interactions with income reveal no statistically significant coefficients in Model 5b.

We visualize the two main interaction effects of Model 5b in Figure 2. While it becomes visible that indeed poor and rich do not put equal weight on ideological distance and leader evaluations in their electoral decision-making, the figure makes also clear that while mattering for these two groups, we still see significant explanatory power of both variables. This is visible in the decreasing/increasing slopes for both groups. It would therefore be overstretching the results to say that ideological distance does not matter for the low-affluent or that only the rich do care about leadership orientation.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities for ideological distance and leader evaluation by income groups



Note : red line: lowest quintile, blue line: highest quintile, based on Table 1, Model 5b.

So far, our results suggest that the extent at which voters combine ideological proximity, valence considerations, and long-standing party attachments in their vote calculus differs systematically but only very slightly for different income groups. In particular, the rich are comparatively more strongly guided by proximity voting and leader valence. Importantly, our results suggest that while there is heterogeneity in how voters reach their voting decision, it is not the case that certain criteria are completely irrelevant for certain groups, it is the weight that changes modestly.

A second test of our argument pertains to how well each model predicts the actual vote choices of the respondents by income. By this analysis, we get a better picture on the substantive magnitude of the interaction effects described so far and it allows to get at the

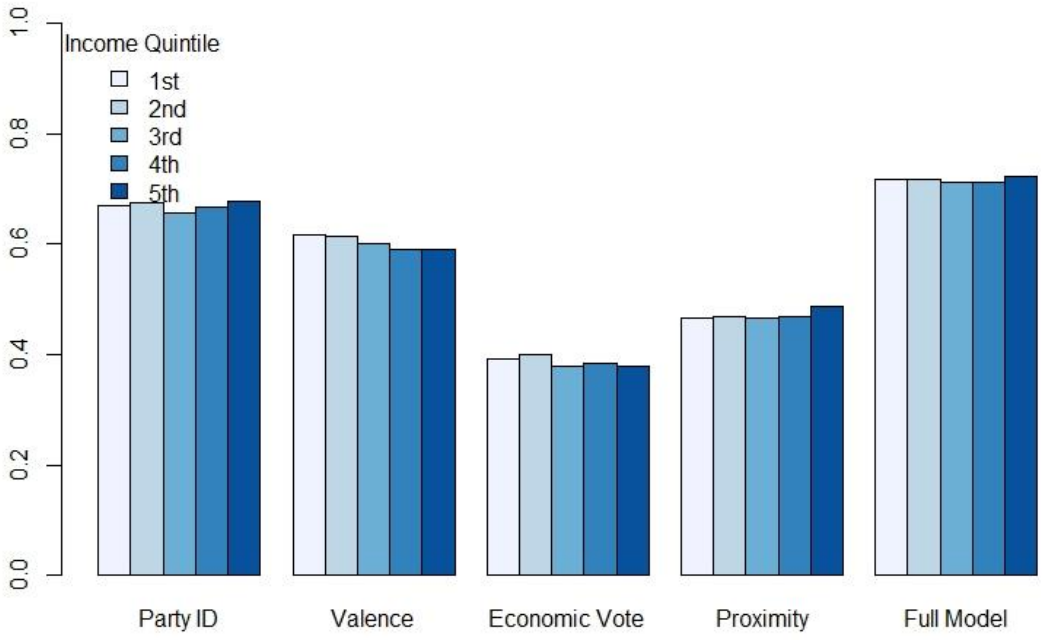
last argument which states that electoral decision making of low affluent is less predictable as such as they rely more on factors not present in standard models of electoral theory.

Table 1: Mixed Coitional Logit Model of vote choice based on individually reported valence and position scores

	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 5a	Model 5b
Party identification	3.24*** (0.02)	3.26*** (0.04)							2.25*** (0.02)	2.32*** (0.04)
Party identification x income		-0.00 (0.01)								-0.03** (0.01)
Leader valence			0.70*** (0.00)	0.66*** (0.00)					0.44*** (0.00)	0.41*** (0.01)
Leader valence x income				0.01*** (0.00)						0.01*** (0.00)
Economic reward voting					0.96*** (0.03)	0.96*** (0.05)			0.28*** (0.05)	0.25*** (0.08)
Economic reward voting x income						0.00 (0.01)				0.01 (0.02)
Economic punishment voting					1.02*** (0.03)	1.07*** (0.06)			0.21*** (0.06)	0.22** (0.10)
Economic punishment voting x income						-0.02 (0.02)				-0.00 (0.03)
Ideological distance							-0.58*** (0.00)	-0.45*** (0.01)	-0.27*** (0.01)	-0.19*** (0.01)
Ideological distance x income								-0.04*** (0.00)		-0.03*** (0.00)
Random effects										
Var(Party intercepts)	1.06 (0.10)	1.06 (0.10)	1.77 (0.34)	1.75 (0.33)	1.63 (0.29)	1.63 (0.29)	3.34 (0.65)	3.50 (0.68)	0.78 (0.04)	0.78 (0.04)
N respondents	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241	55,241
Null deviance	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400	185,400
Deviance	97,080	97,060	158,000	158,000	154,100	154,100	122,700	122,500	67,870	67,800

Figure 3 shows the percentage of correctly predicted vote choices, based on each of the vote models presented in Table 1, see Table A1 in the appendix for full results. These points are noteworthy: First, when considered separately, the party identification model predicts vote choices best and thus testifies the continued impact of this classical concept of electoral theory. It performs slightly better than the leader valence model. Both models yield correct vote predictions for more than half of the respondents. The proximity model also performs quite well with around 45% of correctly predicted cases. The full model 5 produces correct vote choices for more than 70% of the respondents.

Figure 3: Percentage of correctly predicted vote choices based on Conditional Logit Models as presented in Table1



However, the second important lesson we learn from Figure 3 is that overall, the models perform quite well across income groups. That means, that although we do find statistically significant interaction effects with income, the magnitude of these effects is negligible. The

finding that ideological proximity has more weight for the more affluent is visible here as well with higher shares of correctly predicted choices for the top income quintile. However, the differences are very small across income groups and, importantly, proximity voting has very similar predictive power for the first four income quintiles. A similar pattern is observed for the valence model. While there is a trend of decreasing predictive power of valence for vote choice with increasing income, the magnitude of this effect is rather small, accounting for a difference of about two percentage points in correctly predicted choices. For economic voting and party identification the pattern of correctly predicted choices does not correlate with income, as the non-significance of the interaction term in Table 1 already suggested.

Across all models, vote choices are correctly predicted for very similar shares of voters in all income groups. And while proximity is better suitable to explain vote choices of the highest quintile, and valence better suited to explain vote choices of the two lowest income quintiles, the full model performs quite well across these three income groups. This suggests that the significant interaction effects found in Model 5b of Table 1 are of very small magnitude. Thus, overall, we find similar patterns in the weight of voting considerations across income groups.

Robustness Checks

There are a series of potential limitations of the main analyses presented above that we address in a series of robustness checks. These robustness checks have as a goal to identify whether the results hold across a variety of contexts, to test whether we find similar results when using direct questions about what voters find important factors in their voting decision rather than focusing on voting behaviour and finally we analyse the extent to which item

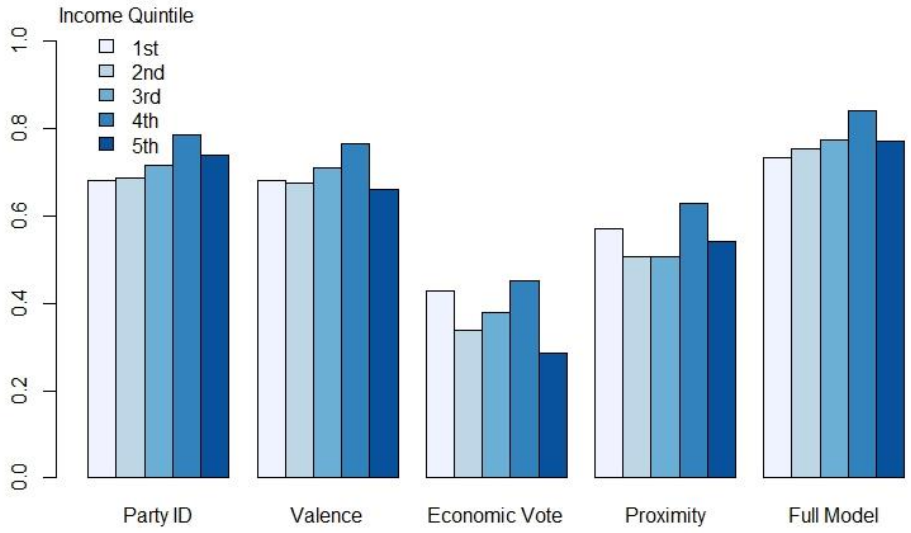
non-response varies by income group. For sake of brevity some of the analyses are presented in the appendix.

Our main analyses are based on the pooled CSES dataset. One of the limitations with this strategy is that it might hide important differences between cases. In particular, it is plausible that our relative measure of income (country-specific income quintiles) substantially affects the way individuals take voting decisions in cases where the absolute differences between income groups are large (i.e. more unequal societies). If this were the case, we might not observe substantial differences across income groups in the pooled analysis, but different ways of reaching electoral decisions might still be consequential for political representation in specific contexts. In order to test whether vote decisions vary more strongly by income in more unequal societies, we rerun our analyses on subsets of the data, grouped by their level of income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient of household disposable income using estimates from the World Bank[6]. Figure 4 shows the results for the most unequal countries in our sample (Portugal, Italy, Spain and Israel) and confirms the robustness of our initial results: Even in the most unequal countries in our sample, there is no indication that poor citizens would use the proximity heuristic much less

[6] For this analysis we focus specifically on countries with PR electoral systems to keep that context variable constant. We define three sets of countries: Group A is defined by a Gini coefficient smaller than 30; Group B has a Gini coefficient smaller than 35; and Group has a Gini coefficient larger than or equal to 35. We use only one election per country: the most recent one that is included in the integrated CSES file. Table A3 and Figures A1 and A2 report the respective findings.

than richer citizens. Overall, our results (see appendix) show that the findings of the pooled analysis can be broadly replicated in contexts of relatively low, moderate and high levels of income inequality.

Figure 4: Percentage of correctly predicted vote choices in countries with high levels of income inequality based on Conditional Logit Models as presented in Table A3



In addition, we tested alternative empirical specifications of our argument. First, as highlighted by Blumenstiel (2016), regression analysis with interactions is only one way to get at heterogeneity in voting. Another option is to rely on what voters' state as their most important reason to vote when asked directly about the criterion they use when making an electoral decision. We replicate our analyses with this type of data, based on Stubager et al.'s (2018) data source, the Danish election study 2011, see table A3. The results presented in the appendix show a very similar pattern than what is presented here: All income groups broadly resemble each other in the criterions they declare using when making an electoral choice. As in our previous analysis, the results show the share of voters declaring using

ideological proximity as a criterion increases with income. However, overall, the differences between income groups are modest and the ranking of the different criterions is identical across income groups.

Last, we focus on a different source of heterogeneity in the models, namely on the question whether all income groups have the same likelihood of answering to the questions asked in the survey. If for example, the lowest quintile in our data would not indicate their ideological position, they would also not be able to vote based on ideological considerations according to our data. Table A7 in the appendix shows the percentage of missings by income groups and makes clear that indeed, a note of caution is warranted when interpreting our results above. For all variables except party identification, we observe more missings for the lower quintiles, for left-right positioning this effect is most pronounced with more than 6% more missings for quintile 1 than 5. However, the table makes also clear that the overall majority of voters in all quintiles have answered the crucial questions in the dataset.

Conclusion

We started this study with an interest in unequal representation and its explanations. By focusing on how affluence impacts electoral decision-making processes we tackle the topic from a new perspective. Our results suggest that the way more or less affluent citizens reach their electoral decision is broadly the same. One difference that emerged is that more affluent rely slightly more on spatial voting, i.e. on policy considerations than the poor while for the lower strata partisan identities as well as valence considerations seem to matter slightly more. However, the magnitude of this effect is rather small and differences mainly appear between the top income quintiles and the remain four.

These findings have implications for the ties between representatives and represented. On the one hand, they show that low- and high-income individuals slightly differ in the way they reach electoral decisions which might play a role in which their policy preferences are represented. Specifically, it appears that individuals belonging to the top income quintile are more likely than other income groups to rely on the proximity between their own ideological stances and those of parties when making an electoral choice. This might provide them with a slight advantage in terms of electoral outcomes that potentially reflect their preferences better. On the other hand, the magnitude of the differences we find is extremely limited and thus not likely to affect both the ability and the willingness of politicians to interact with voters of different income strata.

Two caveats should me mentioned here. First, it should be noted that we only use the left-right policy dimension to capture the effect of policy preferences on the vote. Yet, policy spaces are often better described by two dimensions of conflict, i.e. an economic and a cultural one. Other research has shown that there are differences in the way preferences on these distinct policy dimensions are weighed by voters of different income groups (Rosset and Kurella 2021). While this finding does not counter our main result of a rather modest variation of the effect of proximity voting across income groups, it suggests that there are more fine grained differences in the influence of concrete policy preferences on the vote of poor and rich voters, that we cannot capture here. Second, we are using election study data, which is subject to a number of biases which at least partially also relate to socio-economic positions (see e.g. Lathinen et al 2019). Most of this literature is concerned with turnout and it might prove difficult to translate their research designs to studying electoral choice. On the other hand, polling data is also what politicians consider when thinking about public

opinion, so it seems unlikely that these biases are particularly consequential for our study only.

Our results rather indicate a great deal of stability in the way various income groups take electoral decisions. Importantly, established explanations for electoral decision-making work for the whole population and thus also for the less affluent to a large degree, i.e. visible in the over 70% correctly predicted vote choices for example across a wide range of contexts. In addition and important for the type of linkages between elites and represented, our findings suggest that for both rich and poor more unconditional criteria such as party identification or leader valence evaluations prevail for deciding whom to vote for. This points to a more modest role of the accountability mechanism laid out before as policy considerations do not loom as large as theorized and thus political elites might be able to get away with more policy shirking than normally assumed.

The very low magnitude of differences across income groups makes it unlikely that unequal representation is produced exclusively or even mostly by the lower ability of poorer citizens to make informed choices. We conclude thus in pointing to other factors such as party supply or at the citizens' level of differential turnout rates across income groups or the communication of preferences between elections through contacting politicians that may play a larger role in representational bias.

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