

New Study Shows Government Accommodates Rich and Poor Alike

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The election year is in full swing, complete with allegations of class warfare and claims about which candidates cater to the rich and which candidates will best serve the interests of the poor and the middle class. But a new study, co-authored by North Carolina State University researcher Dr. Chris Ellis, explores the idea that Congress and the White House act on behalf of the wealthy – and shows that it would be impossible to cater solely to any socioeconomic group, because people's preferences tend to be overwhelmingly similar when it comes to how the federal government should spend its money.

The study shows that "Even if government wanted to respond only to the interests of the rich, it couldn't," Ellis says, "because the rich and the poor tend to share similar political viewpoints – at least on economic issues."

In the study, researchers used data from the long-running General Social Survey to measure public opinion on government spending from 1973 to 2006 – and found that political sentiment was very similar between the various socioeconomic groups. Basically, trends among rich, poor and middle-class voters toward becoming more liberal or more conservative tended to take place at the same time. Ellis explains that the trends happened at the same time because both rich and poor responded to changes in the nation's economic health, or the actions of the federal government, in broadly similar ways. Ellis, an assistant professor of political science at NC State, co-authored the study with Dr. Joseph Ura, an assistant professor of political science at Texas A&M University.

The study concludes that the federal government acts on the preferences of all income groups either because it can't tell the difference between the preferences of the rich versus the poor, or because officeholders wish to represent the desires of the public as a whole. The study, "Income, Preferences, and the Dynamics of Policy Responsiveness," was published in the Oct. 3 issue of the journal *Political Science and Politics*.

"This does not mean that the government is actually acting in the best interests of the poor," Ellis says, "only that what the poor want is similar to what the rich want in terms of how the government appropriates its funds." For example, the public's views of what the federal government should do with respect to education, health care and the environment are similar regardless of socioeconomic level. Ellis notes, however, that social issues – such as abortion – were not considered in the study.

Citation: "Income, Preferences, and the Dynamics of Policy Responsiveness", Authors: Dr. Christopher R. Ellis, North Carolina State University, and Dr. Joseph Daniel Ura, Texas A&M University, Published: Oct. 2, 2008, in *Political Science and Politics*

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