The Determinants of Policy Representation: Evaluating the Role of Policy Type in the U.S. States*

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent to which state-level policy in the United States reflects citizen preferences, focusing on how policy type and political salience shape representation. Specifically, it asks: *To what extent does policy type determine the degree of policy representation for state-level public policies in the United States?* While previous research emphasizes the role of political salience in shaping responsiveness, few studies examine how the inherent characteristics of policies—such as their moral or technical nature—influence alignment between opinion and outcomes. Using eight state-level policies across four categories—high salient moral, low salient moral, high salient technical, and low salient technical—this paper employs multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) to estimate public opinion, and compares these estimates to enacted policies between 2018 and 2022. Two measures of representation are analyzed: responsiveness (the strength and direction of policy change in relation to support) and congruence (a binary match between majority opinion and policy). Results show that high-salience moral policies like abortion and gun control were most responsive, but several low-salience technical policies, including Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates, exhibited greater congruence. These findings challenge the assumption that salience necessarily enhances representation and demonstrate that even technical, low-visibility issues can reflect public preferences. Ultimately, the study contributes to the literature on democratic accountability by identifying the issue-specific conditions under which public opinion meaningfully translates into policy.

Keywords: policy representation, morality policy, political salience

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Contents

1 Introduction

The study of policy representation is central to understanding how democratic governance functions, as it reflects the degree to which government actions align with the will of the people. As such, policy outcomes that mirror public opinion suggest that democratic institutions are functioning effectively, reinforcing accountability and public trust. Conversely, a lack of alignment may indicate gaps in representation that can weaken public trust in governance. If certain types of policies are systematically more or less likely to reflect public preferences, this challenges foundational assumptions about democratic equality. Uneven representation not only skews whose voices are heard, but also risks undermining trust in institutions and the perceived legitimacy of state policymaking.

In American politics, research on policy representation has highlighted two critical concepts: *responsiveness*, or the extent to which policy changes in response to public opinion, and *congruence*, which measures direct alignment between majority preferences and policy outcomes. Both measures serve as benchmarks for evaluating the quality of democracy.

Prior research on policy representation has consistently found three major outcomes: (1) state-level policies are often responsive to public opinion; (2) the degree of policy responsiveness is significantly enhanced for policies with high political salience; and (3) state-level policies are frequently not congruent with public opinion. However, this existing literature has largely failed to consider one crucial variable in determining levels of policy representation: policy *type*. A strong emphasis on salience has overshadowed the possibility that different categories of policy, particularly *moral* versus *technical* policies, vary systematically in their alignment with public opinion.

This paper seeks to fill that gap. Drawing on Mooney's (1999) typology, I argue that morality policies—defined by their simplicity, public visibility, and clear value-laden stakes—are more likely to be responsive to public opinion than technical policies, which are complex, expert-driven, and often less visible to the general public. While salience certainly plays a role in facilitating responsiveness (Lax & Phillips, 2012), I contend that policy type exerts

an independent and possibly stronger influence on representation. Because morality policies tend to be inherently more salient to voters, prior studies may have underestimated the structural role of policy type in driving representational outcomes.

To test this argument, I use state-level estimates of public opinion on 8 issues, derived via multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP), and match these estimates with corresponding state-level policy outcomes. By modeling the probability of policy responsiveness as a function of policy type using logistic regression, and identifying level of congruence for each policy, I evaluate whether morality policies are significantly more aligned with majority preferences than their technical counterparts. This paper does not attempt to evaluate the normative desirability of either policy type, nor does it aim to construct a comprehensive typology of policy categories. Rather, it focuses on how one particular distinction, morality vs. technical, can help explain systematic patterns of responsiveness in the U.S. states.

This study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it re-centers policy type as a theoretically and empirically important variable in the study of democratic representation. Second, it clarifies the relationship between salience and policy type, arguing that while the two are often correlated, policy type exerts an independent effect on representation—beyond what salience alone would predict. Third, it offers new empirical evidence across policy areas on the mechanisms driving variation in state-level policy representation.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on responsiveness, congruence, and political salience. Section 3 develops the framework and expectations regarding policy type as a factor in policy representation. Section 4 presents the four hypotheses for the study. Section 5 outlines the research design, case selection, and data sources. Sections 6 and 7 present the empirical results and discuss their implications. Section 8 concludes with a summary of findings and directions for future research.

2 Literature Review

Understanding how and when public preferences influence government policy has long been a central question in the study of democratic representation. This literature review evaluates key research on policy responsiveness, policy congruence, and political salience, before identifying a critical gap regarding the role of policy type.

2.1 Policy Responsiveness

Policy responsiveness refers to the extent that government policy shifts in response to changes in public opinion over time. This concept captures the dynamic, directional relationship between constituent preferences and subsequent policy outcomes, suggesting that, ideally, shifts in public opinion are mirrored by corresponding changes in policy. In a responsive system, as the public grows more liberal or conservative on an issue, government policy follows suit—even if not perfectly matching the majority's specific stance.

One of the earliest and most influential contributions comes from Page and Shapiro (1983), who found that shifts in aggregate public opinion were followed by policy change in the same direction about two-thirds of the time. At the state level, Erikson et al. (1993) extended this logic by demonstrating that state policy is systematically associated with the ideological profile of their citizens, where more liberal states adopt liberal policies and more conservative states adopt conservative policies. Such alignment underscores responsiveness as a vital indicator of a functioning democracy, where elected officials adapt policies in accordance with evolving public sentiments. Subsequent studies have supported the general claim that policy tends to be responsive to constituent preferences. For instance, Gerber (1996, 1999) show that ballot initiatives can bring policy closer to voter preferences, particularly in states with more accessible initiative processes. Caughey and Warshaw (2018) find that public opinion significantly predicts the ideological direction of state policies across a wide range of domains. Lupia et al. (2010) argue that democratic institutions can effectively ag-

gregate and respond to public opinion, especially when voters are well-informed. Norrander and Wilcox (2001) shows that policy positions of elected officials tend to track state-level opinion on social issues like abortion.

However, while responsiveness indicates that policy outcomes can reflect constituent preferences, it does not necessarily imply direct alignment with majority opinion. Responsiveness primarily captures the direction of policy change, not the extent to which policy reflects the majority's specific preference. In other words, responsiveness simply means that policy moves in the same direction as public opinion, not that it reflects the majority's exact preference at any point in time. For instance, Lax and Phillips (2012) find that while many states were responsive to changing public opinion on same-sex marriage, few enacted policies that matched the majority's preferred position at the time. This illustrates that even consistent responsiveness can mask what they call a "democratic deficit"—a gap between public opinion and actual policy outcomes.

This limitation highlights a key challenge in understanding policy representation. While responsiveness suggests that policies are somewhat attuned to public preferences, it does not ensure they meet the full standard of democratic accountability if they fail to directly reflect majority opinion. Moreover, responsiveness can vary across institutions, policy domains, and political contexts: partisan polarization, institutional gridlock, and lobbying pressure can all mediate the translation of public preferences into policy (Lax & Phillips, 2012).

Ultimately, these limitations underscore the need for an additional measure, policy congruence, that evaluates whether policy outcomes accurately align with what the majority wants. By examining both responsiveness and congruence, scholars can assess not only whether policy shifts in response to public opinion, but also whether it fully captures the public's preferred outcome.

2.2 Policy Congruence

Policy congruence builds on responsiveness by evaluating whether policy outcomes directly reflect the preferences of the majority, not only whether they shift in the same direction as public opinion. While responsiveness captures a general alignment in movement, congruence offers a stricter test of democratic representation by asking: does the policy match what most people actually want?

Lax and Phillips (2012) introduced this concept to highlight a persistent gap between public preferences and actual policy outcomes. Their findings reveal a "democratic deficit" in the U.S. states: state policy is congruent with majority opinion only about 50% of the time, and the rate of congruence is even lower when a large supermajority supports a particular position. This gap suggests that even when policymakers respond to public opinion trends, they often fail to enact policies that truly reflect the will of the majority.

Caughey and Warshaw (2018) extend this work by systematically measuring state-level congruence across a wide range of issues using dynamic opinion estimates. They find that while states with more liberal publics tend to adopt more liberal policies, large gaps remain between public preferences and policy outcomes, especially in states with polarized legislatures or institutional veto points. Their work reinforces the idea that formal responsiveness can coexist with substantive incongruence.

The consequences of non-congruence are significant. Persistent misalignment between public preferences and policy can generate perceptions that elected officials are unresponsive, undermining trust in democratic institutions, especially when the issues at stake are morally charged or deeply salient. From a normative perspective, chronic incongruence challenges foundational principles of democratic legitimacy, which rest on the idea that governments should reflect the will of the governed. Lax and Phillips (2012) also emphasize that state policies are often more ideologically extreme than the public's preferences, driven in part by elite polarization and institutional constraints.

Other studies help explain why congruence is difficult to achieve. Matsusaka (2010), for

example, finds that only 59% of policies across the states align with majority opinion, and argues that institutional factors, such as the availability of direct democracy, can improve congruence. Additionally, scholars such as Broockman and Skovron (2018) show that elected officials often misperceive constituent preferences, which may lead them to adopt positions more extreme than the public's. These perception gaps are especially harmful when coupled with institutional barriers to change, such as partisan gerrymandering or legislative gridlock.

Unlike responsiveness, which can register modest directional shifts, congruence requires policymakers to meet a higher threshold: enacting the policy that a majority explicitly supports. Taken together, responsiveness and congruence offer a fuller picture of representation: while responsiveness shows whether policy is moving in the right direction, congruence asks whether it has arrived at the destination the public prefers. Examining both concepts in tandem helps identify not only whether the government is listening, but whether it is delivering. To understand when delivery is most likely to occur, researchers have increasingly turned to political salience—the visibility and urgency of an issue—as a key explanatory factor.

2.3 Political Salience

Political salience has long been considered a critical factor influencing policy representation, with numerous studies demonstrating that issues attracting public and media attention are more likely to elicit a response from policymakers. This emphasis on salience stems from the idea that elected officials face greater electoral risk when ignoring public opinion on highly visible issues (Burstein, 1981). Lax and Phillips (2009) established that highly salient issues are more likely to be responsive to public opinion than those with low salience, as governments are more inclined to act in line with constituent preferences when the public is engaged, aware, and attentive.

High-salience issues like abortion exemplify this dynamic. These topics are regularly debated in media and public discourse and tend to evoke strong, value-driven reactions. When public awareness is high, constituents are more likely to vote based on these issues or directly

contact elected officials, increasing the political cost of inaction. In contrast, low-salience issues, such as administrative regulations or technical fiscal adjustments, receive far less attention, allowing policymakers greater discretion to act without public scrutiny, backlash, or fear of electoral repercussions. This filtering of public and governmental attention to only a few key issues at a time is well-documented, as both the public and policymakers have limited attention spans (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Research by Lupia and McCubbins (1998) further supports this relationship, arguing that visibility and comprehensibility shape public accountability. When an issue is both salient and accessible, people are more likely to monitor government behavior, participate in the political process, and hold officials accountable. Thus, salience acts as a mechanism that enhances the link between opinion and policy by amplifying public pressure.

This dynamic has important implications for understanding variation in policy representation. While high-salience issues are more likely to elicit responsiveness and congruence, salience alone does not guarantee alignment. Many policies that attract public attention still fail to reflect majority preferences, particularly when institutional barriers or elite incentives are at odds with public opinion. For example, even on salient issues, policies that favor low-income or non-elite preferences are far less likely to be adopted, suggesting that salience can be outweighed by entrenched power dynamics (Gilens, 2012). Thus, salience amplifies public pressure, but it does not ensure that the government will deliver—therefore highlighting the need to consider other factors, such as the type of policy itself, that may shape representational outcomes.

2.4 Gap in Existing Literature: Policy Type

Despite extensive research on the effects of salience on representation, the literature has largely overlooked the independent role of policy type. Many studies implicitly conflate salience with moral content, since morality policies (those dealing with foundational questions of right and wrong) are often highly visible and emotionally resonant. This overlap has led to

a tendency to treat moral issues as simply "high-salience," without disentangling the unique representational dynamics that may stem from their moral framing, technical simplicity, and public accessibility. For instance, Lax and Phillips (2009) find that public opinion is more predictive of policy on high-salience issues such as gay rights and abortion—but these are also textbook morality policies. Their technical simplicity and alignment with deeply held values make them distinct from low-salience but morally neutral issues like insurance regulations or telecommunications policy, which are more complex and insulated from public engagement. Yet, rather than exploring this distinction, much of the literature attributes representational alignment in such cases to salience alone.

This paper addresses that gap by proposing that policy type, particularly the distinction between morality and technical policies, may be a critical determinant of representation. While salience certainly amplifies public pressure, the intrinsic characteristics of morality policies, specifically clear stakes, low complexity, and value-based narratives, may drive representation even when salience is low. By examining policy type as an independent variable, this study tests whether morality policies are more likely to be responsive to and congruent with public opinion not because they are more salient, but because of their inherent structure and normative content.

In doing so, this paper contributes a more nuanced account of policy representation, offering an alternative explanation for observed variation in responsiveness and congruence. It seeks to clarify the relative influence of salience and policy type, ultimately challenging the assumption that public engagement alone is sufficient to explain when and why public preferences shape policy outcomes. The following section develops a theoretical framework explaining how the structural features of morality and technical policies shape their likelihood of reflecting public opinion, independent of their salience.

3 Beyond Salience: How Policy Type Shapes Representation

This section argues that the degree of policy representation in the contemporary United States is shaped by an interaction between policy type and political salience, rather than by salience alone. Specifically, I propose that morality policies are more representative than technical policies, not merely because of their visibility, but because of their moral resonance, simplicity, and accessibility. By defining the key concepts of morality, technicality, and salience, I outline why morality policies should generate higher levels of engagement and accountability, ultimately resulting in stronger alignment between public opinion and policy outcomes.

Morality policies, as defined by Mooney (1999, 2001), are those that (1) center on conflicts over fundamental moral values, (2) work to regulate interpersonal relationships rather than economic behavior, and (3) are technically simple. These characteristics make morality policies both accessible and resonant with public values, fostering strong public opinion and increased levels of engagement. In contrast, technical policies, as defined by Senninger (2023), are characterized by (1) high textual complexity, (2) interconnectedness with other policies, and (3) the need for specialized, discipline-specific knowledge. Technical policies often require expertise to fully comprehend, creating a barrier to public opinion formation and limiting broad engagement. Finally, political salience, following Lax and Phillips (2009), refers to a policy's visibility and prominence in public discourse, which heightens public attention and pressure on policymakers.

The greater representativeness of morality policies can be attributed to the role of moral values in shaping political participation and opinion formation. Morality policies often address issues tied to core values, which are deeply connected to individuals' identities. When such policies are seen as challenging or upholding these values, they evoke strong emotional responses, such as fear, anger, or pride, that are likely to drive active political engagement.

This response aligns with social identity theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to engage with issues that resonate with their social or personal identities, especially those connected to their core values or group affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When morality policies are framed as threats to deeply held beliefs, they activate identity-based motivations to defend those values, further increasing political attentiveness and action. In the political realm, this connection compels individuals to take action on policies that feel intimately tied to their sense of self and group belonging (Huddy, 2001).

Additionally, the technical simplicity of morality policies makes them more accessible to the general public, enhancing their potential for representation. Because morality policies are often straightforward and easy to understand, citizens are better equipped to form opinions on them and take action, from contacting representatives to participating in protests or public discussions. This combination of strong moral resonance and accessibility allows citizens not only to care deeply about these issues, but also to act on them without needing specialized knowledge. The clear and direct nature of morality policies thus removes barriers to engagement, empowering individuals to express their views and hold representatives accountable more readily than they could with complex, technical policies. Together, these factors help explain the reasoning behind expecting consistently higher levels of representation for morality policies compared to their technical counterparts.

In contrast, technical policies, by nature, are not defined by moral values and often lack the accessible language and structure that facilitate public opinion formation. The complexity of technical policies—evidenced by lengthy texts, intricate policy contexts, and specialized jargon—requires expert knowledge that the general public may not possess. This barrier limits public opinion formation and engagement, reducing opportunities for citizens to express views or hold representatives accountable on technical matters. Even when technical policies become more visible due to media coverage or elite conflict, their complexity continues to hinder public understanding, making it difficult to form clear stances or mobilize collective action. Without moral significance or straightforward accessibility, technical policies do

not evoke the same identity-based responses, resulting in lower levels of public engagement and reduced representativeness. Consequently, the complexity of technical policies creates an additional layer of distance between policymakers and the public—not only by limiting understanding, but by suppressing opinion formation altogether. Without clear, accessible stakes, few citizens form strong preferences on these issues, resulting in little public pressure or accountability. In the absence of an engaged public, policymakers face fewer electoral consequences for deviating from constituent preferences. Taken together, these contrasts underscore the need to treat policy type as analytically distinct from salience.

Ultimately, while political salience undoubtedly shapes representation, many highly salient issues—such as abortion—are also deeply moral in nature. This overlap complicates the assumption that salience alone drives responsiveness, as it becomes difficult to isolate visibility from the value-laden content of the policy itself. Rather than treating salience as the primary driver of representation, this study contends that the moral or technical nature of a policy plays a distinct and powerful role. Morality policies tend to evoke stronger public engagement and clearer opinion signals due to their alignment with deeply held values and identities. As a result, policy type—particularly moral content—may exert an independent influence on representation, beyond what salience alone can explain.

4 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

To test the relationship between policy type and representation, I categorize policies into four distinct groups based on two dimensions: their type (morality vs. technical) and their level of political salience (high vs. low). This yields a simple 2×2 typology of policy categories:

1. High-salience morality policies
2. Low-salience morality policies
3. High-salience technical policies
4. Low-salience technical policies

Table 1 displays this typology with examples of the policies assigned to each category.

Table 1: **Policy Typology by Type and Political Salience**

	Moral Policies	Technical Policies
High Salience	Abortion, Gun Control	Minimum Wage, Renewable Energy
Low Salience	Capital Punishment, Drug Sentencing	Medicaid Expansion, Paid Family Leave

Note. This typology categorizes the eight policies analyzed in this study based on whether they involve moral conflict or technical complexity, and whether they were likely to receive broad political attention (high salience) or remain less visible (low salience).

This categorization enables a structured comparison across both dimensions, allowing the study to disentangle the effects of policy type from those of salience. By examining each category independently, this study addresses a key gap in the literature: disentangling the effects of moral content and salience to determine which more strongly drives representational outcomes. By comparing how different combinations of moral content and visibility affect public engagement and government responsiveness, this study helps clarify the distinct roles each plays in shaping representation.

For instance, high-salience morality policies, such as abortion, are expected to exhibit the highest levels of representation due to their clear moral stakes and consistent presence in public discourse. In contrast, low-salience technical policies, such as niche regulatory adjustments, are expected to demonstrate the lowest levels of representation, as they lack both visibility and accessibility to the general public. Policies that are both non-moral and non-technical are excluded from the analysis, in order to maintain conceptual clarity and focus the analysis on the key theoretical contrast between morality policies and technical policies. Based on these distinctions, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1: *High-salience morality policies will show the highest level of representation, as they combine public visibility with deeply held values that drive citizen engagement.*

H2: *Low-salience morality policies will exhibit greater representation than technical policies, as the value-driven nature of these policies fosters engagement even in the*

absence of salience.

H3: *High-salience technical policies will have lower representation than morality policies, as their complexity limits accessibility and citizen involvement, even with increased visibility.*

H4: *Low-salience technical policies will exhibit the lowest representation due to their complexity and minimal public attention.*

5 Methodology

This section details the research design used to test whether policy type—particularly the distinction between morality and technical policies—shapes levels of policy representation in the United States. It outlines the procedures used to define and operationalize key variables, select and categorize policy cases, estimate state-level public opinion, and assess the relationship between opinion and policy outcomes through measures of responsiveness and congruence.

The analysis is conducted at the state level, following the approach of prior studies on democratic representation in the American states (e.g., Caughey & Warshaw, 2018; Erikson et al., 1993; Lax & Phillips, 2012). States are well-suited for this analysis because they retain substantial autonomy over policy in areas ranging from health care and labor to education and civil rights. As a decentralized federal system, the United States offers a unique opportunity to study representation not as a single national phenomenon, but as a set of dynamic relationships between citizens and governments across 50 distinct political units. This study excludes Washington, D.C. and U.S. territories, as they are not fully autonomous policy jurisdictions and are inconsistently included in national survey or legislative data.

The temporal scope of this study is limited to the years 2018 through 2022, a period selected to ensure that all public opinion and policy data reflect contemporary political contexts. Restricting the timeframe to this five-year window allows for consistency across

opinion estimates and policy adoption dates while minimizing temporal mismatches that could arise from shifting issue salience or evolving party platforms.

The section proceeds in five parts. First, I define and operationalize the central variables: policy type, political salience, and policy representation. Second, I explain how public opinion estimates are derived using multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP). Third, I describe the policy selection process, including how cases are categorized across four policy types. Fourth, I detail how representation is measured through logistic regression models of responsiveness and a binary classification of policy congruence. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the research design, including measurement challenges, assumptions in the data, and sources of potential bias.

5.1 Defining and Measuring Key Variables

This study evaluates policy representation through two primary lenses: policy responsiveness and policy congruence. To explore how these vary by issue characteristics, I categorize policies by type (morality vs. technical) and by level of political salience (high vs. low). This section defines each key variable and describes how they are operationalized for analysis.

5.1.1 Policy Type

The classification of policies as either "morality" or "technical" presents definitional challenges, particularly given the inherent subjectivity of moral values. To ensure conceptual clarity and consistency, I rely on existing scholarly frameworks to guide categorization. Specifically, morality policies are identified using the list of 14 issue areas developed by Studlar (2001), which reflects broad scholarly consensus on the types of policies that are most likely to engage deeply held moral convictions. The issues are: abortion, alcohol, animal rights/hunting, capital punishment, divorce, drugs, ethnic/racial minorities, euthanasia, gambling, gun control, homosexuality/gay rights/same-sex marriage, pornography/obscenity/censorship, religion in education/Sunday observance, and women's rights.

These topics also align with Mooney's (1999) theoretical framework, which defines morality policies as those that are symbolically charged, technically simple, and easily understood by the general public. By relying on Studlar's substantive categorization and Mooney's definitional criteria, I ensure that selected morality policies meet both empirical and theoretical standards for this policy type.

Technical policies are defined in contrast to morality policies. Ideally, technical policies are characterized by a high degree of subject matter complexity, the use of specialized or bureaucratic language, and an interconnectedness with broader regulatory or institutional frameworks. These characteristics reduce accessibility to the general public and often require specialized knowledge for effective participation or understanding. Crucially, technical policies are defined not only by their complexity but by the absence of moral symbolism; they do not typically evoke fundamental value conflicts or questions of right and wrong in the way morality policies do.

While the selection of technical policies was guided by these criteria, the final set of policies was also constrained by the availability of reliable public opinion data. These practical limitations are addressed in the subsequent 'Data Limitations' section. Nonetheless, this conceptual framework provides the foundation for distinguishing between moral and technical policy domains in the analysis of policy representation. This distinction is central to the research question, as the paper argues that morality policies may elicit stronger public engagement and clearer opinion signals than their technical counterparts, thus affecting the degree of policy representation.

5.1.2 Political Salience

Political salience refers to the visibility and prominence of a policy issue within public discourse. Following Lax and Phillips (2009), I conceptualize salience as the extent to which an issue captures public attention, becomes a focus of political debate, and receives sustained media coverage. Salient issues are more likely to generate public engagement, elite

responsiveness, and political accountability.

To operationalize this concept, I rely on a qualitative assessment of media coverage, using national-level news visibility as a proxy for political salience. Rather than relying on a single publication or metric, such as front-page appearances in The New York Times, I evaluate salience based on consistent, recurring coverage in major national news outlets, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, and NPR. A policy is classified as high salience if it received sustained media attention across multiple sources during the same time frame in which public opinion and policy data were collected. While public prioritization, such as naming an issue among the most important national problems in surveys like those conducted by Gallup, can serve as a valuable indicator of salience, this study relied solely on qualitative assessments of media coverage due to data access and time constraints. This includes news articles, editorials, and reports on debates or ballot measures that placed the policy issue in the national spotlight.

This broader, more systematic approach accounts for differences in media framing and avoids the limitations of using a single media outlet as the sole indicator of salience. It allows for a more accurate classification of policy visibility while still grounding the measure in publicly accessible information environments. By focusing on the salience of an issue within its relevant policy window, this approach ensures temporal validity and avoids projecting current perceptions of importance onto past events. While the categorization of salience ultimately involves informed judgment, I adopt clear criteria to ensure consistency: policies were deemed high salience if they appeared as central topics in multiple national outlets and provoked significant political commentary or public mobilization; policies without such coverage were considered low salience. This approach maintains theoretical alignment with prior research while adapting to the empirical challenges of measuring political salience across multiple policy domains.

5.1.3 Policy Representation

To evaluate the extent to which public preferences shape government action, this study uses two standard measures of policy representation: responsiveness and congruence. Responsiveness refers to the extent to which increases in public support for a policy are associated with an increased likelihood of that policy being adopted, thus capturing whether governments tend to follow shifts in opinion. In contrast, congruence assesses whether the policies adopted in a given state directly align with the majority preference. This measure focuses on binary agreement between public opinion and policy outcomes, specifically whether or not a state enacted the policy position supported by most of its constituents.

Together, these two measures provide complementary insights into the relationship between public opinion and policymaking, allowing for systematic comparisons across policy types and salience levels to assess which kinds of policies are more likely to reflect public preferences. Responsiveness reflects the dynamic influence of public support on policy adoption, while congruence captures whether governments are substantively aligned with majority will. The specific methods used to calculate these measures are described in the Measuring Policy Representation section that follows.

5.2 Public Opinion Data Collection

To evaluate whether state policies reflect public preferences, this study requires accurate, state-specific estimates of public opinion for each selected policy issue. Because policy representation hinges on the alignment between citizen attitudes and government action, public opinion serves as the foundational benchmark for assessing both responsiveness and congruence. However, given that national surveys do not typically provide direct state-level estimates, I use Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) to generate opinion estimates for each of the fifty states. MRP is a well-established method in political science (Lax & Phillips, 2009, 2012) for estimating subnational opinion from national survey data, combining multilevel modeling with demographic poststratification to produce reliable geo-

graphic estimates even when state-level sample sizes are small.

Public opinion data were drawn from the American National Election Studies (ANES) from 2020 and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CES) from 2018, 2020, and 2021. These surveys were selected based on their national scope, large sample sizes, and inclusion of policy-relevant questions on the topics under study. Each survey item was selected to best approximate public attitudes toward the corresponding policy issue under analysis and aligned as closely as possible with the time frame of corresponding policy adoption, ensuring conceptual alignment between survey questions and policy measures. A complete list of policy questions, response codings, and survey sources is provided in Appendix A.

To estimate public opinion at the state level, I implemented the following MRP procedure in R. This process was repeated for each policy issue.

Multilevel Regression: I first cleaned and recoded each survey dataset to standardize key demographic variables, including state (50 U.S. states), age group (18–29, 30–44, 45–64, 65+), gender (Male, Female), race (White, Black, Native American, Asian, Other/Multiracial), Hispanic origin (Hispanic, Not Hispanic), and education (No High School, High School, Some College/Associates, Bachelors or Higher). I then fit a hierarchical logistic regression model for each policy, with a logit link and a binary outcome indicating support for the policy. The model included individual-level predictors from the public opinion survey, with gender and Hispanic origin specified as fixed effects, and education, race, age group, and state specified as random intercepts. This structure allowed the model to capture subgroup variation while accounting for unobserved heterogeneity across states. Gender and Hispanic origin were modeled as fixed effects due to their binary or limited categorical nature, which are well-estimated without pooling. In contrast, education, race, age group, and state were modeled as random intercepts to allow for partial pooling across groups with more levels, improving estimation for smaller subgroups and stabilizing predictions in sparse cells—a standard approach in MRP (e.g., Gelman & Hill, 2006; Park et al., 2017). All outcomes were coded

such that 0 indicated support for the conservative policy position, and 1 indicated support for the liberal policy position, ensuring consistent directionality across models.

Poststratification: For each policy, I constructed a poststratification frame using the U.S. Census Bureau's five-year American Community Survey (ACS) microdata that best aligned with the year of the public opinion survey used (e.g., ANES 2020 $\rightarrow$ ACS 2021). Each frame included all possible combinations of the model's predictors (e.g., 18–29-year-old Hispanic women with some college education in California). I then used the fitted regression model to predict the probability of supporting each policy for every demographic cell. These predictions were weighted by each cell's relative population size within its state, and the weighted values were aggregated to produce a single state-level estimate of policy support for each issue.

To allow direct comparisons between public preferences and policy outcomes, I recoded all public opinion and policy variables to a standardized binary scale, where conservative responses were assigned a value of 0 and liberal responses were assigned a value of 1. While this binary structure facilitates comparability across diverse policy issues, it necessarily simplifies policy nuance, potentially obscuring meaningful gradations in both public opinion and policy design. Nevertheless, it offers a consistent and interpretable metric of directional alignment for the purposes of measuring both responsiveness and congruence. This approach allows for theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous estimates of state-level opinion on a wide range of policy topics. By applying MRP to high-quality national survey data, I obtained reliable estimates of public support across all 50 states for each policy issue, which form the basis for evaluating policy responsiveness and congruence. The next section explains how these opinion estimates are paired with policy outcome data to assess the degree of alignment between public preferences and state policy decisions.

5.3 Policy Case Selection and Categorization

This study aims to evaluate policy representation across different categories of public policy, specifically comparing outcomes between moral and technical issues. To do so, I analyze eight state-level policy topics, each selected to reflect variation across these two dimensions. The policies span a range of issue areas that allow for meaningful comparisons in how public preferences are, or are not, translated into state policy.

The selection of these policy topics was driven by both conceptual relevance and the availability of appropriate data. In order to assess policy representation, I required valid and recent state-level policy outcomes and national survey data suitable for MRP. Thus, I prioritized issues for which both public opinion and policy data could be reliably matched in time, ideally from the same year, and where clear policy variation existed across states. Policies were coded using a consistent binary scale, where 0 indicates the conservative policy position and 1 indicates the liberal policy position. This directional coding allowed for a standardized comparison of congruence and responsiveness across issues.

Policies were categorized by type and salience using the conceptual definitions provided in the previous section. Morality policies were drawn from Studlar's (2001) list of 14 moral issue areas and aligned with Mooney's (1999) criteria of symbolic simplicity and accessibility. Technical policies, by contrast, were selected for their relative lack of moral symbolism and greater reliance on administrative, economic, or scientific expertise. Salience was determined using a qualitative assessment of national media coverage during the year of the public opinion data. The eight policy issues analyzed in this study, and their classifications, follow.

5.3.1 Abortion (High Salience, Moral)

Abortion was selected as a high-salience morality policy due to its central position in American political discourse and direct alignment with Studlar's (2001) list of morality issues. The issue centers on whether, and under what circumstances, a person should be allowed to legally terminate a pregnancy—raising fundamental questions about life, bodily autonomy,

and religion. It is highly symbolic and morally charged, meeting Mooney's (1999) criteria for morality policy. The abortion issue received extensive national media attention in 2020, due in large part to the confirmation of Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court and the growing number of state-level challenges to *Roe v. Wade*. News outlets including The New York Times, CNN, and NPR ran frequent stories and editorials on the legal and political implications of abortion rights, framing it as a defining issue in the 2020 presidential election. Public opinion data were drawn from ANES 2020, and policy data were collected from the Guttmacher Institute's *State Abortion Policy Landscape* report for 2020. States were coded as 0 if they had restrictive abortion laws (e.g., bans or severe limitations) and 1 if they had permissive or protective laws, in line with liberal policy preferences.

5.3.2 Gun Control (High Salience, Moral)

Gun control was classified as a high-salience morality policy due to its symbolic resonance and normative conflict over individual rights, public safety, and the Second Amendment. This policy issue involves whether private gun sales (e.g., at gun shows) should be subject to background checks, aligning with Studlar's (2001) list and meeting Mooney's (1999) criteria given its accessibility, moral framing, and emotional salience. Gun control remained a focal point in public debate throughout 2020, particularly following high-profile shootings and ongoing public concern about firearm access. National news coverage emphasized both partisan disagreement and policy proposals related to background checks, red flag laws, and Second Amendment protections. The topic consistently appeared in media discussions, candidate platforms, and legislative agendas, indicating a high degree of political salience. Public opinion data were drawn from ANES 2020, and policy data were obtained from Everytown for Gun Safety's *Universal Background Checks* tracker and Giffords Law Center's *Background Checks on All Gun Sales* report. States that did not require background checks for private sales in 2020 were coded as 0 (conservative), while those that did were coded as 1 (liberal).

5.3.3 Capital Punishment (Low Salience, Moral)

Capital punishment addresses whether states allow the execution of individuals convicted of certain crimes, typically murder. It raises moral and ethical questions about justice, deterrence, and state power over life and death and thus fits Mooney's (1999) definition of morality policy. In addition, the topic is included in Studlar's (2001) morality policy list. While capital punishment has historically generated moral debate, it did not occupy a central role in public discourse in 2020. Media coverage on the issue was limited and largely overshadowed by other criminal justice topics, such as police reform and mass incarceration. The lack of frequent or sustained national media attention, combined with its absence from major electoral platforms or public mobilization efforts, supports its classification as low salience. ANES 2020 provided the public opinion data, and the U.S. Department of Justice's *Capital Punishment, 2020 - Statistical Tables* report was used for state policy data. States with an active death penalty statute or at least one execution in 2020 were coded as 0 (conservative), and states without were coded as 1 (liberal).

5.3.4 Drug Sentencing Reform (Low Salience, Moral)

Drug sentencing reform policy concerns the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for individuals convicted of nonviolent drug offenses. It is included in Studlar's (2001) list of morality policies under the categorization of 'drugs' and engages deeply held values about justice, punishment, rehabilitation, and systemic inequality—making it symbolically charged and morally framed. Although the broader issue of criminal justice reform received some attention in 2020, specific proposals related to eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses received little focused national coverage. Major news outlets rarely discussed the policy in isolation, and it was not a prominent issue in electoral debates or public mobilization. As a result, this issue was coded as low salience. Public opinion data were sourced from CES 2020, and policy data were collected directly from state statutes as of 2020. States that retained mandatory minimums as of 2020 were coded as 0 (conservative)

and states that had eliminated them were coded as 1 (liberal). Detailed information on the statutes used for coding in each state is provided in Appendix B.

5.3.5 Minimum Wage (High Salience, Technical)

Minimum wage policy centers on whether states require employers to pay a base hourly wage of at least $10. This issue fits the definition of a technical policy due to its complexity, economic implications, and lack of symbolic moral framing. In 2018, the year the relevant public opinion and policy data were collected, minimum wage increases were at the forefront of public and political discourse. Several states held ballot initiatives to raise their minimum wages, and national political figures frequently addressed the issue in campaigns and media appearances. News coverage focused on the economic and partisan implications of wage policy, and the debate gained traction across both liberal and conservative media. These factors justify its classification as a high-salience technical policy. Public opinion data were obtained from CES 2018, and policy data came from the U.S. Department of Labor's *Minimum Wage Laws in the States* tracker. States with a minimum wage of less than $10 in 2018 were coded as 0 (conservative), while states with a minimum wage of $10 or more were coded as 1 (liberal).

5.3.6 Renewable Energy Mandates (High Salience, Technical)

Renewable energy policy involves whether states have binding mandates, often known as Renewable Portfolio Standards, requiring utilities to source a minimum percentage of electricity from renewable energy. It is technically complex, involving regulatory frameworks and environmental planning, and lacks moral framing, placing it in the technical policy category. In 2020, renewable energy policy received elevated public and media attention amid heightened concern over climate change, wildfires, and environmental regulation. National debates over the Green New Deal, the Biden campaign's climate platform, and state-level clean energy transitions brought renewable standards into the public eye. Although the

specific mechanics of Renewable Portfolio Standards may not have been widely discussed, the broader issue of clean energy mandates was salient within election coverage and national discourse. This broader framing justifies its classification as a high-salience technical issue. Public opinion data were obtained from CES 2020, and state policy data were compiled from the *Renewable Portfolio Standards* report by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency (DSIRE). States without binding renewable mandates as of 2020 were coded as 0 (conservative), and those with mandates were coded as 1 (liberal).

5.3.7 Medicaid Expansion (Low Salience, Technical)

Medicaid expansion policy addresses whether a state opted to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act to cover low-income individuals and families. It is a complex issue involving healthcare financing and intergovernmental policy design, with minimal moral framing, and is thus categorized as technical. Although health care was a broadly salient issue during the pandemic, Medicaid expansion specifically did not receive sustained media focus in 2021. Other health-related issues, such as vaccine mandates, hospital capacity, and masking directives, overshadowed state-level decisions about Medicaid eligibility. As a result, Medicaid expansion is categorized as a low-salience issue. Public opinion data came from CES 2021, and policy data from the Kaiser Family Foundation's *Status of State Medicaid Expansion Decisions: Interactive Map*. States that had not adopted Medicaid expansion by 2021 were coded as 0 (conservative), and states that had adopted expansion policies were coded as 1 (liberal).

5.3.8 Paid Family Leave (Low Salience, Technical)

Paid family leave policy involves whether states require or offer paid family leave to workers caring for newborn or newly adopted children. While touching on family and caregiving, paid family leave is best categorized as a technical policy due to its lack of moral symbolism and

its complex administrative design, including payroll taxes, benefit formulas, and eligibility criteria. These programs often require new state infrastructure and have direct implications for state budgets and employer obligations. Furthermore, despite its relevance to many working families, paid leave policy was not a major focus of national media coverage or public discourse in 2020 outside of COVID-specific emergency relief. Although the pandemic briefly brought attention to worker protections, long-term paid family leave proposals did not dominate campaign platforms or public debates to the same degree as other pandemic-related policies. The limited and episodic nature of its coverage justifies its classification as low salience during the survey year. Public opinion data were drawn from ANES 2020, and policy data were taken from the Bipartisan Policy Center's 2020 *State Paid Family Leave Laws Across the U.S.* report. States without a statewide paid family leave program in place in 2020 were coded as 0 (conservative), and states with such programs were coded as 1 (liberal).

Ultimately, while the classification of each policy into discrete categories was grounded in established theoretical criteria, some policies exhibit characteristics that blur the boundaries between types. For instance, paid family leave may intersect with moral dimensions (e.g., gender equity, caregiving norms) while also presenting technical complexities grounded in budget and funding procedures. In such cases, I prioritized the dominant framing of the issue during the time of analysis—drawing on media discourse, legislative debate, and issue framing in public discussions—to assign a primary classification. This approach ensures conceptual consistency while acknowledging that real-world policies often straddle between multiple dimensions.

To summarize the classification of policy issues used in this study, Table 2 below outlines the eight selected policies, their designation as either moral or technical issues, their salience classification, the year of the associated public opinion data, and the source of the corresponding policy outcome data. This table serves as a reference point for understanding how each policy issue fits within the study's conceptual framework and empirical design.

Table 2: **Classification of Policy Issues by Type, Salience, and Data Source**

Policy Topic	Policy Type	Salience	Year	Data Source
Abortion	Moral	High	2020	Guttmacher Institute
Gun Control	Moral	High	2020	Everytown for Gun Safety; Giffords Law Center
Capital Punishment	Moral	Low	2020	U.S. Department of Justice
Drug Sentencing Reform	Moral	Low	2020	State Statutes
Minimum Wage	Technical	High	2018	U.S. Department of Labor
Renewable Energy Requirements	Technical	High	2020	National Conference of State Legislatures; Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency
Medicaid Expansion	Technical	Low	2021	Kaiser Family Foundation
Paid Family Leave	Technical	Low	2020	Bipartisan Policy Center

Note. This table summarizes the eight policy topics included in the analysis, grouped by policy type (moral vs. technical) and salience level (high vs. low). Public opinion data were drawn from national surveys conducted in the indicated year, and policy outcomes were compiled from the listed sources.

While the selection of policies was guided by conceptual definitions, the availability of matched public opinion and policy data limited the inclusion of more substantively complex or obscure technical policies, such as tax reform or telecommunications regulation. As a result, the distinction between morality and technical policy is not always perfectly sharp. This limitation is addressed further in the Data Limitations section. Nonetheless, the selected issues provide sufficient variation to explore whether policy type and salience shape the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes.

5.4 Measuring Policy Representation

To assess how closely state policy aligns with public preferences, this study operationalizes policy representation through two complementary dimensions: responsiveness and congruence. These measures capture the probabilistic relationship between public opinion and policy adoption, and the alignment between majority support and actual policy outcomes. Once state-level public opinion estimates were generated via multilevel regression and post-

stratification (MRP), they were merged with corresponding policy outcome data for each of the eight policy topics. For each state, the policy outcome was coded as a binary variable indicating whether or not the liberal version of the policy was in place (0 = conservative policy adopted, 1 = liberal policy adopted), consistent with the public opinion coding described earlier. This unified dataset enabled systematic evaluation of responsiveness and congruence across states and issues.

5.4.1 Policy Responsiveness

Policy responsiveness captures whether higher levels of public support for a given policy are associated with a greater likelihood of its adoption. For each policy issue, I modeled the probability of policy adoption as a function of state-level public opinion using logistic regression, appropriate for the binary nature of the policy outcome variable. Formally, for each policy i, I estimated the following model:

$$\text{logit}(\Pr(\text{Policy}_i = 1)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Public Opinion}_i)$$

In this equation, Policy_i is the binary policy outcome in state i, and Public Opinion_i is the proportion of residents in state i estimated (via MRP) to support the liberal policy position. The intercept β_0 reflects the baseline log-odds of policy adoption when public support is zero, and the coefficient β_1 captures the marginal effect of increasing public support on the likelihood of policy adoption. A statistically significant and positive β_1 indicates responsiveness—that is, as public support increases, the likelihood of adopting the liberal policy also increases. Regression models were estimated in R using standard logistic regression techniques, and the results are reported in the Results section.

5.4.2 Policy Congruence

Whereas responsiveness focuses on the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes, congruence evaluates whether the policy in place aligns with the majority opinion in

a state. Congruence is defined here as a binary measure: for each state and each issue, the policy is coded as congruent if it matches the majority preference in that state (i.e., if more than 50% of the population supports the policy in place).

Congruence was determined by comparing each state's public support estimate to the actual policy outcome. If a majority ($\geq 50\%$) supported the liberal policy and the liberal policy was adopted (coded as 1), the state was classified as congruent. Similarly, if less than 50% supported the liberal policy and the conservative policy was in place (coded as 0), the state was also coded as congruent. All other combinations were considered non-congruent. Formally, congruence is coded as:

$$\text{Congruence}_i = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if (Public Opinion}_i \geq 0.5 \text{ and Policy}_i = 1) \text{ or (Public Opinion}_i < 0.5 \text{ and Policy}_i = 0) \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

This coding structure allows for a straightforward assessment of alignment between public opinion and policy outcomes. Congruence was calculated for each state and each policy issue, and the final aggregate results—representing the proportion of states that were congruent on each issue—are presented in the Results section.

This approach provides a rigorous and transparent framework for evaluating state-level policy representation. Logistic regression captures the dynamic responsiveness of policymakers to changes in public opinion, while the congruence measure offers a binary, majority-rule perspective on whether state policies reflect the will of their constituents. Together, these metrics allow for meaningful comparison across policy types and salience levels.

5.5 Data Limitations

While this study aims to provide a rigorous analysis of state-level policy representation, several data and design limitations constrain the generalizability and interpretability of its findings. These limitations stem largely from the challenges of working with public opinion and policy data across diverse issue areas, as well as the conceptual complexity of classifying

policies by type and salience.

Firstly, the analysis is limited by the availability of public opinion data. Only eight policy topics were included, selected in part because of the availability of reliable national survey data that could be matched to corresponding state-level policies from the same year. This inevitably constrained the scope of the study, excluding some otherwise relevant issues—particularly those that are highly technical or obscure and very low in salience, such as financial regulation, telecommunications infrastructure, or utility pricing. These omitted issues may differ systematically from those analyzed, especially in terms of complexity and public visibility, which limits the generalizability of findings to the full universe of state policy domains.

Relatedly, although technical and moral policies were carefully defined using established theoretical frameworks, the final selection was shaped in part by data availability rather than purely conceptual criteria. In particular, the technical policies examined in this study tend to be relatively accessible and moderately salient compared to more specialized policy domains, as highly technical issues are less likely to appear in nationally representative surveys. As a result, the observed differences between moral and technical policies may understate the true variation in representation. This study should therefore be interpreted as a conservative test of the theory that policy type independently affects representation.

Another important limitation is the dichotomous coding of both public opinion and policy outcomes. While necessary for comparability across issues and for the operationalization of congruence, binary classifications inevitably simplify more nuanced opinion preferences and policy outcomes. For example, public support for a minimum wage of $10 per hour may not fully capture support for more or less aggressive wage policies, and the presence or absence of background checks may obscure differences in implementation or enforcement. To reduce potential distortion, I carefully selected survey items and policy measures that closely matched in scope and intent, and applied a consistent coding scheme across all issues.

Despite these limitations, this study takes several steps to ensure the integrity and va-

lidity of its findings. All public opinion estimates were generated using a transparent and theoretically grounded MRP procedure. Salience classifications were applied consistently using clearly defined criteria. Policies were coded using a standardized binary framework, and all classification decisions were documented. These strategies help to reduce measurement error and increase the reliability of the study's conclusions, even as they highlight the practical constraints of working with real-world policy and opinion data.

Taken together, the methods described above provide a rigorous and transparent approach for assessing state-level policy representation across diverse policy domains. By combining MRP-based public opinion estimates with systematically coded policy outcomes, and by measuring both responsiveness and congruence, this framework enables direct comparisons across policy types and salience levels. While no classification scheme is without trade-offs, the distinctions between morality and technical policies—and between high and low salience—remain analytically useful. They enable a systematic exploration of how structural characteristics of policy issues shape representational outcomes, even if individual cases involve overlapping features. The following section presents the results of this analysis, highlighting the patterns of alignment and misalignment between public preferences and state policy decisions.

6 Results

This section presents the empirical results of the analysis. Recall that this project investigates whether the degree of policy representation, measured through both responsiveness and congruence, systematically varies by policy type (moral vs. technical), irregardless of political salience. This section is organized into two parts: first, the results of logistic regressions measuring responsiveness; and second, state-level congruence patterns. Visualizations and summary tables are included to illustrate the variation across issue areas and categories.

6.1 Policy Responsiveness

Responsiveness measures how strongly estimated public support for a policy predicts whether the policy was adopted in a given state. Table 3 presents the logistic regression results for each policy, with coefficient estimates (β_1), standard errors, and p-values. These coefficients indicate how a one-unit increase in support for a given policy (on a 0 to 1 scale) affects the log odds of a liberal policy being in place, where higher coefficients indicate a stronger relationship between public support and policy adoption.

Table 3: **Logistic Regression Results by Policy**

Policy	Estimate (β)	Standard Error	P-Value (p)
Abortion	48.801	16.726	0.004^{**}
Gun Control	90.714	30.262	0.003^{**}
Capital Punishment	17.407	6.908	0.012^{*}
Drug Sentencing	60.318	27.802	0.030^{*}
Minimum Wage	43.414	13.309	0.001^{**}
Renewable Energy Mandates	40.974	11.325	$<0.001^{***}$
Medicaid Expansion	67.710	24.404	0.006^{**}
Paid Family Leave	6.829	11.781	0.250

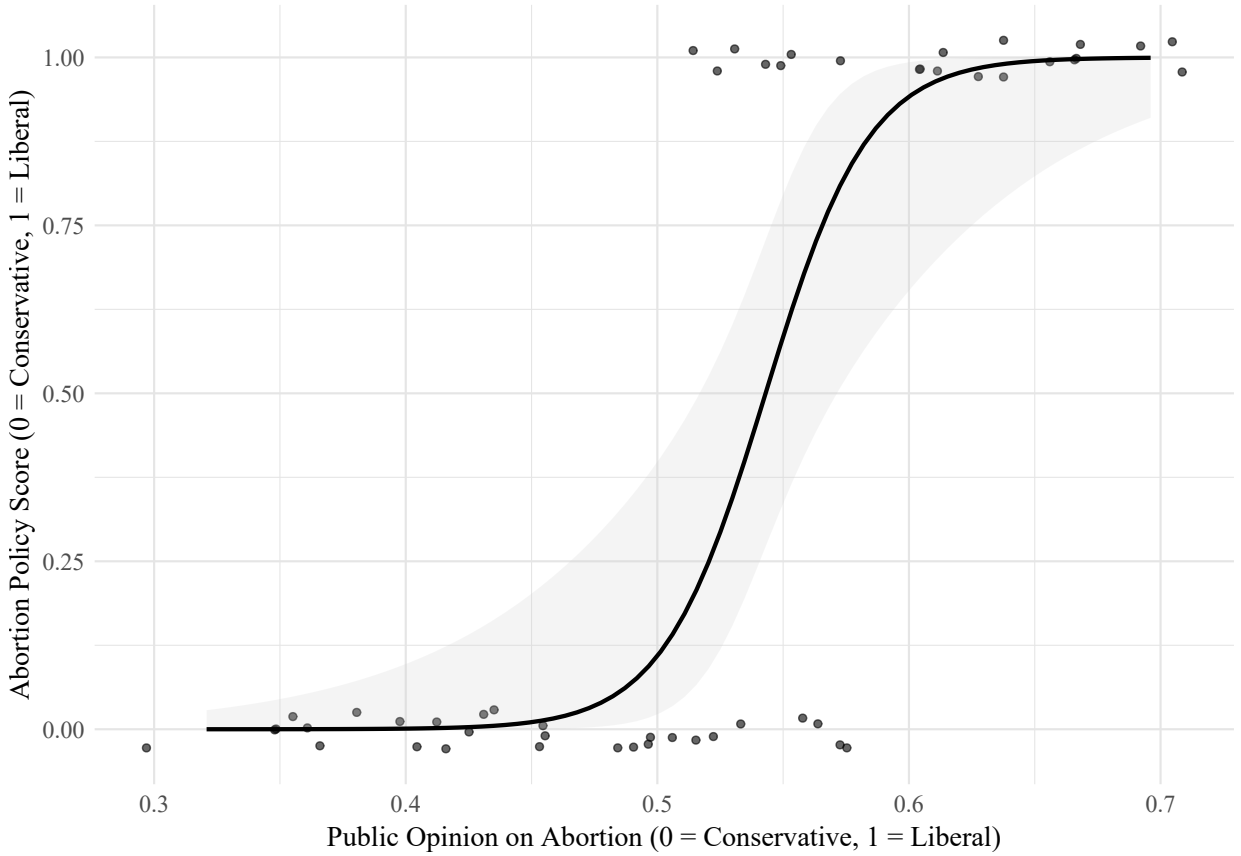
Note. This table reports coefficients from logistic regression models predicting the probability of a liberal policy being in place as a function of estimated public support in each state. The models were estimated separately for each issue using state-level MRP opinion estimates. Higher coefficients indicate a stronger relationship between public support and policy adoption. Standard errors and p-values are reported. Statistical significance levels: $p < .001$ (***), $p < .01$ (**), $p < .05$ (*).

As shown in Table 3, public opinion significantly predicted policy adoption in seven of the eight issues. The strongest responsiveness coefficients were observed for gun control (β_1=90.714, p=0.003) and abortion (β_1=48.801, p=0.004). Other policies with significant responsiveness include minimum wage, renewable energy, Medicaid expansion, drug sentencing, and capital punishment. Paid family leave was the only issue with both a substantively small and statistically insignificant slope (β_1=6.829, p=0.25), indicating weak alignment between public support and policy status. This result is likely driven by limited variation in

public opinion across states: support for paid leave is consistently high, which reduces the model's ability to detect a strong relationship between opinion and policy adoption.

To visualize these relationships, logistic regression plots were created for each policy. Figure 1 displays the model for abortion policy. The x-axis represents estimated public support, and the y-axis shows the predicted probability that a liberal policy is in place. The black curve displays the logistic regression fit, the shaded area indicates the 95% confidence interval, and each black dot represents a U.S. state. A small random 'jitter' was applied to both axes to allow for visual distinction. The steep positive slope reflects a large responsiveness coefficient. Plots for the seven remaining policy areas are included in Appendix C.

Figure 1: **Policy Responsiveness: Abortion.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal abortion policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).



Responsiveness was next summarized across the four policy categories to evaluate systematic differences by policy type and salience. Table 4 presents the average responsiveness coefficients grouped by policy category. These values reflect the mean slope coefficients from the eight policy-specific models. While all four categories exhibit some degree of responsiveness, the most responsive group is high salience moral policies (abortion and gun control). In contrast, low salience technical issues, such as paid family leave, show the weakest responsiveness on average. However, the gap between categories is smaller than anticipated, and technical policies—particularly high salience ones like renewable energy—also exhibit meaningful responsiveness.

Table 4: **Responsiveness Rates by Policy Category**

Policy Category	Average Responsiveness (β)
High Salience, Moral	69.757
Low Salience, Moral	38.863
High Salience, Technical	42.194
Low Salience, Technical	37.269

Note. Table reports the average responsiveness (β) from logistic regression models estimated by policy category. Higher coefficients indicate a stronger relationship between public support and likelihood of liberal policy adoption.

6.2 Policy Congruence

Congruence refers to whether a state's adopted policy directly matches majority opinion within that state. For each policy, I coded a state as congruent if a liberal policy (policy score = 1) was in place and estimated support for the liberal policy was above 50%, or if a conservative policy was in place (policy score = 0) and estimated support for the liberal policy was below 50%. Congruence is therefore coded as a binary indicator (0 = mismatch, 1 = match,), where the percentage of congruent states reflects the proportion of cases (out of 50) in which policy aligns with majority preferences.

Table 5 summarizes congruence results for each policy issue, reporting both the percentage of states that were congruent for that policy topic and the raw count out of 50. As shown in Table 5, congruence varied widely across the eight policy areas. The most congruent policy was abortion, with 82% of states aligned with majority opinion. This was followed by Medicaid expansion (76%) and renewable energy (72%), with a significant drop-off in congruence percentage afterwards. The least congruent policies were minimum wage and paid family leave, where only 26% and 20% of states had a policy in place that directly aligned with majority public opinion, respectively.

Table 5: **Congruence Results by Policy**

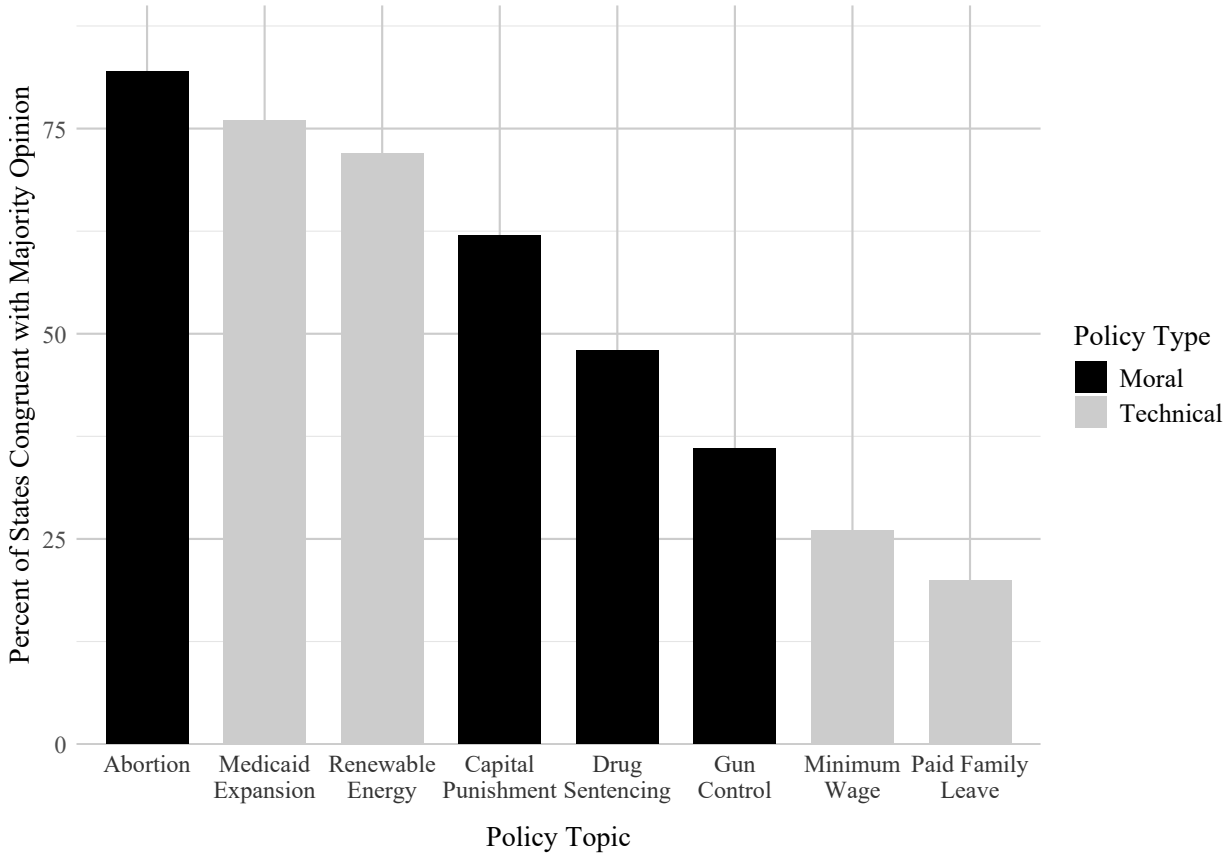
Policy Topic	Congruence (%)	Raw Count
Abortion	82%	41/50
Gun Control	36%	18/50
Capital Punishment	62%	31/50
Drug Sentencing	48%	24/50
Minimum Wage	26%	13/50
Renewable Energy Mandates	72%	36/50
Medicaid Expansion	76%	38/50
Paid Family Leave	20%	10/50

Note. Congruence is defined as a binary match between the majority public opinion (coded as conservative = 0, liberal = 1) and the actual state policy in place for each issue. Values reflect the percentage and number of U.S. states (out of 50) where policy outcomes aligned with the prevailing public preference.

Figure 2 visually displays these results, showing the percent of states where the implemented policy was congruent with majority opinion at the time of the public opinion survey, with each bar representing a policy topics. Bars are color-coded by policy type, with moral policies in black and technical policies in gray, and ordered from highest to lowest congruence percentage. This ordering highlights the wide variation in representation across issues. Some technical policies—such as Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates—showed relatively high congruence, while others like paid family leave and minimum wage were among

the least representative. Similarly, some morality policies—such as gun control and drug sentencing reform—showed relatively low congruence, especially compared to the most congruent policy topics of abortion, Medicaid expansion, and renewable energy mandates.

Figure 2: **State-Level Congruence by Policy Topic.** This figure displays the percentage of U.S. states (N = 50) where public opinion and policy align for each issue. Bars are color-coded by policy type (moral vs. technical). Higher values reflect greater congruence between majority opinion and policy adoption.



To assess whether congruence varied systematically by policy type or salience, Table 6 reports the average congruence percentage within each of the four policy categories. These values reflect the average share of states where policy matched majority opinion in each category. Overall, congruence levels varied modestly across policy types, with the highest levels observed among high-salience moral policies (59%) and the lowest among low-salience technical policies (48%). However, the differences between categories were relatively small,

and high salience did not uniformly correspond to greater congruence. Notably, several technical issues—including Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates—ranked among the most congruent individual policies, while gun control, despite its salience and moral nature, exhibited comparatively low alignment with public opinion. These results suggest that neither salience nor morality alone reliably predicts congruence, reinforcing the need to analyze policy representation at the issue level and across multiple dimensions.

Table 6: **Congruence Results by Policy Category**

Policy Category	Average Congruence (%)
High Salience, Moral	59%
Low Salience, Moral	55%
High Salience, Technical	49%
Low Salience, Technical	48%

Note. Values represent the average percentage of U.S. states in which majority public opinion aligned with state policy, grouped by policy salience and type. Higher percentages indicate stronger congruence between public preferences and enacted laws.

Together, the responsiveness and congruence results provide a comprehensive picture of how public opinion relates to state-level policy outcomes. Most issues exhibited statistically significant responsiveness, indicating that increases in public support were associated with a greater likelihood of liberal policy adoption. However, the strength of this relationship varied by issue. Congruence patterns were even more uneven: while moral and high-salience issues ranked highly in some cases, technical issues like Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates also demonstrated strong alignment with public preferences. In contrast, paid family leave and minimum wage consistently showed the weakest representation across both dimensions. These findings challenge the assumption that salience uniformly enhances representation and suggest that issue-specific features—such as administrative complexity, implementation feasibility, or elite polarization—may shape how closely policy aligns with public opinion. The next section explores these dynamics in greater depth.

7 Discussion

This study aimed to assess whether policy representation in the U.S. states varies based on policy type—namely, moral versus technical policies—using both responsiveness and congruence as measures of representation. While prior literature has emphasized the role of salience, I hypothesized that moral content—regardless of visibility—would be the primary driver of representational quality. The results, however, challenge both my own hypothesis and the broader literature suggesting that salience reliably enhances alignment between opinion and policy: neither high-salience nor moral policies were consistently more representative across both dimensions. This discussion explores potential explanations for these patterns and connects the findings back to theories of democratic responsiveness, public engagement, and policy inertia.

7.1 Interpreting the Findings in Context

First, consistent with Lax and Phillips (2012), this study reaffirms that responsiveness and congruence are distinct empirical phenomena that can yield different conclusions about the quality of representation. Responsiveness captures how changes in public opinion predict changes in policy—effectively measuring whether governments are sensitive to shifts in citizen preferences. Congruence, by contrast, offers a snapshot of whether current policy aligns with majority opinion at a given moment. As Lax and Phillips (2012) note, a state can be responsive without being congruent if it is slowly moving in the direction of public opinion but has not yet caught up—what they characterize as a form of "democratic deficit."

My findings reflect this dynamic clearly. For example, both drug sentencing reform and capital punishment displayed statistically significant responsiveness coefficients, suggesting that public support is influencing ongoing policy movement. Yet both issues demonstrated only moderate levels of congruence, meaning many state policies still diverge from majority opinion despite these shifts. This indicates that while some states are moving in a more

representative direction, their policies have yet to fully catch up with public preferences. Conversely, Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates showed high levels of congruence but relatively weaker responsiveness. These results underscore the need to evaluate representation through both lenses, as examining only one dimension can obscure meaningful gaps or progress in the alignment between public preferences and policy.

While the distinction between responsiveness and congruence aligns with existing frameworks, the findings of this study complicate the expected relationship between salience, policy type, and representation. In several respects, the results supported findings of previous research and my own hypothesis. For example, abortion and gun control, both high-salience moral issues, were the most responsive policy areas, such as what was found by Lax and Phillips (2012). Additionally, the overall ranking of policy categories in terms of congruence generally aligned with expectations, with high-salience moral policies performing best, followed by low-salience moral, high-salience technical, and finally low-salience technical. However, the differences between categories were extremely modest. For example, while high-salience moral issues had an average congruence of 59%, low-salience technical issues were not far behind at 48%. Similarly, the ordering of average responsiveness across categories did not reflect the initial hypothesis: while high-salience moral policies still ranked first, high-salience technical policies came in second, followed by low-salience moral and low-salience technical—and all category-level coefficients (outside of high salient moral policies) fell within a narrow range. The narrow margins between categories suggest that while salience and policy type help structure patterns of representation, they do not fully account for variation. This underscores that salience or policy type alone may be insufficient as a driver of representation, and that its effects are likely conditional, depending on policy content, institutional context, and political dynamics.

Furthermore, these patterns did not hold across the board. Gun control, for instance, showed a strong responsiveness coefficient but ranked among the least congruent issues, with only 36% of states enacting policies aligned with public opinion. This disconnect complicates

the assumption of previous literature that salience on its own guarantees more representative outcomes. Moreover, some of the most congruent policies in the dataset were low salience technical issues, such as Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates—both of which had over 70% of states aligned with majority opinion. Medicaid expansion, in particular, also showed significant responsiveness despite being coded as a low-salience technical issue. In addition, paid family leave and minimum wage emerged as consistent outliers, showing weak responsiveness and low congruence, despite their differing salience levels.

These findings directly contradict the expectation that technical policies are too complex or obscure to elicit meaningful public influence and suggest that issue-specific factors—such as the political environment, implementation costs, or elite consensus—may enable representation even in low-salience contexts. Rather than treating salience or policy type as singular predictors of representation, this study underscores the importance of considering how they interact with the substantive content and political dynamics of specific policy areas. Ultimately, representation is not solely a function of how visible or moral a policy is, but of how the structure of the issue shapes public engagement, elite incentives, and the policymaking process itself.

7.2 Explaining Variation in Policy Representation

While the preceding results section identified several clear empirical patterns, the underlying causes of these patterns remain more difficult to isolate. Why do some policies like Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates achieve high levels of representation despite being technical in nature and low in salience, while others like gun control struggle to align with majority opinion even amid intense public attention? To interpret these results, this section explores several theoretical explanations—some supported by past research, others more speculative in nature. These include the effects of elite polarization and political gridlock on salient moral issues (Layman et al., 2006; Mooney, 1999), the possibility of symbolic or shallow public opinion that fails to translate into specific policy demands (Druckman

& Jacobs, 2015; Zaller, 1992), and the concept of "quiet representation" in low-salience policy domains where technocratic decisions may better reflect public consensus (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). Additional considerations such as issue-specific constraints and potential measurement effects may also help explain the mixed performance of certain policy areas. While speculative, each theoretical explanation draws from existing literature and offers a framework for interpreting how and why representation occurs unevenly across different policy domains—helping make sense of the complex relationship between public preferences and policy outcomes.

7.2.1 Elite Polarization and Inaction on Salient Issues

One possible explanation for the relatively low congruence on high-salience issues, particularly gun control, is elite polarization and legislative gridlock. While highly salient issues are often assumed to increase responsiveness (Caughey & Warshaw, 2018; Lax & Phillips, 2012), they can also create political incentives for inaction. Policies like gun control and abortion operate as symbolic battlegrounds (Layman et al., 2006; Mooney, 1999), where taking a position may carry high political costs. Elected officials may respond to increased public attention by avoiding policy action altogether, fearing backlash from core constituencies or organized interest groups. This could explain why gun control showed high responsiveness but low congruence: legislators in many states may be responsive to rising support in theory, but remain constrained in practice due to the polarized and identity-laden nature of the issue. In such contexts, salience may increase conflict more than it enhances representation (Hacker & Pierson, 2005).

7.2.2 Symbolic vs. Substantive Public Opinion

Another contributing factor may be the symbolic nature of public opinion on moral or high-salience issues. Public support for policies like gun reform or abortion rights may be strong in the abstract, but often lacks specificity or depth when it comes to implementation. This type

of opinion is sometimes referred to as "expressive" rather than "instrumental" (Druckman & Jacobs, 2015; Zaller, 1992), which are difficult to translate into concrete legislation. For example, many Americans may support the idea of 'common-sense gun reform,' but diverge in their views on background checks, magazine limits, or assault weapons bans. When public opinion is diffuse in substance but strong in principle, it may still produce high responsiveness across states (as public support increases, policy is more likely to be liberal), while resulting in low congruence, since enacted policies may not match what a majority of people actually want. This dynamic helps explain why moral issues like gun control may appear responsive in aggregate models but remain misaligned with specific majority preferences.

7.2.3 Quiet Representation in Low-Salience Domains

In contrast, some of the most congruent policies in this study, such as Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates, were classified as technical and low salience. This finding runs counter to the dominant narrative that low-salience issues receive less public input and thus produce weaker representation (Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Page & Shapiro, 1983), as well as my own hypothesis that the complex, non-moral nature of these policies will produce weaker representation. One explanation is that these policy areas benefit from what Hacker and Pierson (2014) describe as "quiet representation," where elite actors or policy entrepreneurs implement broadly popular policies in the absence of organized opposition. When policies are technical, procedurally complex, or bureaucratic in nature, they may be shielded from partisan conflict and subject to less public scrutiny. In these contexts, policymaking is driven more by feasibility, expert consensus, or institutional incentives than by overt public pressure—yet still results in alignment with public opinion. Medicaid expansion is a prime example: although it was classified as a low-salience technical issue, the availability of federal funding under the Affordable Care Act and relatively low political cost in some states may have enabled broad adoption in line with public support. Renewable energy mandates similarly benefited from a combination of expert support and low-profile legisla-

tive action in many states. These findings suggest that in some cases, low-salience technical issues may actually be more insulated from backlash and thus more quietly representative.

7.2.4 Measurement Effects and Ceiling Dynamics

Some variation may also stem from how responsiveness and congruence were measured. Responsiveness was captured through logistic regression slopes, which are sensitive to variation in opinion and policy status. When most states have already adopted a policy, as with Medicaid expansion or renewable mandates, there may be limited room for further responsiveness to occur. This "ceiling effect" flattens the slope, reducing measured responsiveness even if congruence is high. Conversely, congruence is a binary measure that may understate partial or near-majority alignment, especially in cases where support hovers just below 50%. These limitations suggest that while the metrics used are appropriate and widely employed in the literature, they also carry interpretive caveats that may contribute to unexpected findings.

7.2.5 Issue-Specific Political and Structural Constraints

Finally, some policy areas performed in line with theoretical expectations, but for reasons that reveal the importance of issue-specific constraints. Paid family leave and minimum wage, for example, both exhibited low responsiveness and congruence—consistent with the hypothesis that technical policies, especially when low in salience, are less likely to reflect public opinion. However, their underperformance appears to stem not only from complexity or limited visibility, but also from a combination of practical and measurement-based constraints. In the case of paid family leave, public support was consistently high across states, leaving little variation for the model to detect a meaningful relationship. This lack of variation likely contributed to the statistically insignificant result, even if public opinion may still influence policy in more subtle ways. More broadly, both policies require significant budgetary commitments and new administrative infrastructure, and often face persistent opposition from business interests and fiscally conservative lawmakers. Their limited rep-

resentation may therefore reflect institutional and political barriers more than a failure of democratic engagement. These dynamics align with the findings of Gilens and Page (2014), who argue that organized interests and economic elites exert outsized influence over policy outcomes, often at odds with majority opinion.

In contrast, Medicaid expansion defied expectations for a low-salience technical issue by showing both high congruence and statistically significant responsiveness. This may be due to the strong institutional support and clear incentives created by the Affordable Care Act, which provided cost-sharing provisions, legal clarity, and bureaucratic infrastructure that lowered the political and fiscal costs of implementation. These practical considerations helped facilitate policy adoption in ways not fully explained by salience or morality alone, illustrating how institutional context can mediate the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes.

Taken together, these findings complicate prevailing theories of democratic representation and highlight the limitations of assuming a one-size-fits-all relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes. While salience and morality help structure patterns of responsiveness and congruence, they are mediated by institutional context, elite behavior, public opinion quality, and policy-specific constraints. By incorporating both responsiveness and congruence, this study shows that representation is neither uniform nor guaranteed, even when public support is high. The next section turns to the broader implications of these findings and outlines key directions for future research.

8 Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether the degree of policy representation in the U.S. states varies systematically by a combination of policy type (moral vs. technical) and political salience (high vs. low), with the expectation that policy type—particularly moral content—would be the most important driver of representation. Drawing on MRP estimates of public

opinion and a set of eight state-level policy outcomes, the analysis assessed how closely public preferences are reflected in enacted law. The results reveal a more complex and uneven relationship between opinion and policy than prior research might suggest. While high-salience moral policies, particularly abortion and gun control, exhibited the strongest responsiveness, they were not always the most congruent. In contrast, several technical, low-salience policies such as Medicaid expansion and renewable energy mandates outperformed expectations, particularly in terms of policy congruence. Paid family leave and minimum wage emerged as consistent outliers, showing weak representation across both dimensions. Taken together, the findings reinforce that responsiveness and congruence are empirically distinct and underscore the limits of relying on salience alone as a predictor of representational quality.

8.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

These results hold important implications for both scholarly understanding and normative conceptions of democratic accountability. First, the assumption that highly salient issues automatically generate stronger representation does not hold consistently. In fact, many of the most polarizing and visible issues, like gun control, showed strong responsiveness but lagged in congruence, suggesting that political conflict and elite polarization can undermine representational outcomes even when public support is high. This complicates a central tenet of the policy responsiveness literature, which often assumes that increased attention and clarity of public opinion should translate into better alignment. Second, the findings point to policy type as a valuable, underexplored dimension of representation. Moral policies may trigger symbolic opinion signals and elite avoidance, while technical policies may allow for more routinized, expert-driven alignment with public preferences, especially in the absence of organized opposition. This supports the idea that the structure of policy domains—who pays attention, who resists, and who governs—shapes whether and how public opinion is translated into law. Importantly, these dynamics raise normative concerns: when governments are more likely to reflect citizen preferences in quiet, bureaucratic areas than in morally or

politically charged domains, it complicates prevailing assumptions about how democratic responsiveness functions.

More broadly, these findings reinforce the need to evaluate representation through multiple empirical lenses. Responsiveness and congruence are not interchangeable; rather, they capture different aspects of the policymaking process. Policies may be moving in the direction of public opinion without yet achieving alignment, or they may match majority preferences due to earlier reforms or technocratic efficiency without recent public pressure. Treating responsiveness and congruence as complementary tools helps reveal these temporal and institutional complexities. Moreover, the relatively strong performance of some low-salience technical policies suggests that democratic responsiveness can occur in less visible settings, supporting theories of "quiet representation" (Hacker & Pierson, 2014) and pushing scholars to reconsider assumptions about transparency and accountability. Rather than simply expecting better representation when the public is most engaged, we must also consider when institutional insulation, elite consensus, and low opposition may create space for public preferences to quietly shape policy.

8.2 Limitations

While the findings offer valuable theoretical insights, several limitations warrant consideration and suggest important directions for future research. First, the analysis is cross-sectional and descriptive; it captures representation at a single point in time and cannot speak to the dynamics of change. While some policies may eventually become more congruent as public support continues to rise, this temporal dimension lies outside the scope of the current research. Second, the measurement strategies used here carry inherent tradeoffs. Multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) offers powerful tools for estimating opinion across subgroups, but these estimates are modeled, not directly observed. Likewise, congruence, while intuitive, operates as a binary measure and may obscure partial or near-majority alignment, especially in cases where public support approaches, but does not exceed, 50%.

Additionally, the logistic regression models used to estimate responsiveness assume sufficient variation in both opinion and policy outcomes; when most states cluster around high support, as with paid family leave, the model may struggle to detect meaningful relationships, even if public opinion remains substantively important. Third, although each policy issue was carefully classified, coding policy type, salience, and policy outcomes necessarily involves simplifications. The boundaries between moral and technical policies, or high and low salience, are not always clear-cut, and policy outcomes often vary in scope and implementation across states.

Finally, the selection of policy issues was constrained by the availability of reliable, state-level public opinion data. Truly low-salience and highly technical policies, such as financial regulation or tax code complexity, are rarely included in large national surveys, making it difficult to fully test how representation varies under conditions of minimal public engagement or extreme complexity. As a result, the low-salience and technical policies included here may not represent the extreme ends of those categories, potentially diminishing the observed differences. These choices, while grounded in prior literature, should be interpreted as part of a broader conceptual framework rather than as fixed empirical categories.

8.3 Opportunities for Future Research

Nevertheless, these limitations point directly to fruitful avenues for future research. One important direction is to further unpack the concept of salience itself. Rather than treating salience as a binary trait, future work could examine the interplay between media attention, personal relevance, and elite agenda-setting, and how each shapes representation differently. A second direction is to analyze representation over time: does responsiveness eventually lead to congruence, or do some issues remain persistently misaligned? Longitudinal data would enable scholars to test whether democratic deficits are temporary or structural.

Expanding the scope of policy domains would also improve the generalizability of these findings. For example, one important extension would be to examine issues that fall outside

the moral/technical dichotomy or cut across categories—such as immigration—where both moral and technical dimensions are often present. Analyzing how these hybrid policies are represented could help clarify whether the patterns observed here extend to more complex or contested domains. Finally, future work should seek to overcome current data limitations by fielding custom, state-representative surveys with targeted questions on deeply technical or low-visibility policies. Doing so would offer a more rigorous test of the theory that salience and policy type shape representation, and help clarify whether the modest category-level variation observed here reflects real-world dynamics or measurement constraints.

In sum, this project offers a novel framework for analyzing policy representation across multiple issue types and salience levels, while reinforcing the need to consider both responsiveness and congruence as complementary measures. The findings suggest that representation is not solely a function of how visible or morally charged a policy is, but also of how institutions filter public demands, how opposition is mobilized, and how policy structures shape political incentives. When even low-salience technical policies outperform high-profile moral ones in aligning with public preferences, it raises important questions about where—and how—democracy is actually working. This study provides new evidence that challenges assumptions about public engagement and democratic responsiveness across policy domains, and underscores the urgent need to understand not just whether public opinion matters, but when, where, and why it does.

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Appendix

This appendix contains supplementary materials for the main analysis, including survey coding, policy statutes, and regression visualizations.

Appendix A: Public Opinion Survey Items and Coding Scheme

This appendix documents the survey questions used to measure public opinion on the eight selected policy topics. For each policy, the table lists the survey source, variable name, full question wording, and the binary coding used in analysis. Responses were coded such that 0 represents the more conservative position and 1 the more liberal one, enabling consistent cross-policy comparisons.

Table A1: **Public Opinion Survey Items and Binary Coding by Policy Topic**

Policy Topic	**Survey**	**Variable**	**Question Wording**	**Binary Coding**
Abortion	ANES 2020	V202245	There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? – By law, abortion should never be permitted – The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger – The law should permit abortion other than for rape/incest/danger to woman but only after need is clearly established – By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice	0 = Never permitted; Only in cases of rape/incest/life danger 1 = If need is established; Always allowed
Gun Control	ANES 2020	V202239	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring background checks for gun purchases at gun shows or other private sales?	0 = Oppose 1 = Favor

Policy Topic	Survey	Variable	Question Wording	Binary Coding
Capital Punishment	ANES 2020	V202248	Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?	0 = Favor 1 = Oppose
Drug Sentencing	CES 2020	CC20_327a	Do you support or oppose each of the following proposals? Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenders.	0 = Oppose 1 = Favor
Minimum Wage	CES 2018	CC18_414a	If your state put the following questions for a vote on the ballot, would you vote FOR or AGAINST? Raise the state minimum wage to $10 an hour	0 = Against 1 = For
Renewable Energy	CES 2020	CC20_334c	Do you support or oppose each of the following proposals? Require that each state use a minimum amount of renewable fuels (wind, solar, and hydroelectric) in the generation of electricity even if electricity prices increase a little	0 = Oppose 1 = Support
Medicaid Expansion	CES 2021	CC21_334a	Thinking now about your health care policy would you support or oppose each of the following proposals? Expand Medicaid to cover individuals making less than $25,000 and families making less than $40,000 a year.	0 = Oppose 1 = Support
Paid Family Leave	ANES 2020	V202241	Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to offer paid leave to parents of new children?	0 = Oppose 1 = Favor

Note. This table provides the exact question wording, survey source, and variable name for each item used to estimate state-level public opinion on the eight selected policy topics. Responses were recoded into binary form, where 0 reflects the conservative policy stance and 1 reflects the liberal stance. This enables consistent measurement of policy congruence and responsiveness across diverse issue areas.

Appendix B: Mandatory Minimum Sentencing Laws for Non-Violent Drug Offenses as of 2020

This appendix presents a summary of state-level policies on mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenses as of 2020. Each row includes the policy status (Yes/No), the relevant statute, and a condensed summary of the legal language. This classification was based on a review of official criminal codes and state legislative documents.

Table A2: **Mandatory Minimum Drug Sentencing Laws by State (2020)**

State	Status	Policy/Law	Summary of Policy/Law
Alabama	Yes	Ala. Code § 13A-12-231	Mandatory minimums for drug trafficking by type/weight.
Alaska	No	Alaska Stat. § 11.71.050	No mandatory minimums for non-violent possession.
Arizona	Yes	Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-3407	Mandatory minimums for sale/trafficking of narcotics.
Arkansas	Yes	Ark. Code Ann. § 5-64-440	Mandatory minimums for trafficking based on weight.
California	No	Cal. Health & Safety Code § 11350	No mandatory minimums; repealed by Prop 47 reforms.
Colorado	No	House Bill 19-1263	Mandatory minimums eliminated for simple possession.
Connecticut	No	Public Act No. 15-2 (2015)	Mandatory minimums repealed except in school zones.
Delaware	Yes	16 Del. C. §§ 4751C–4764	Mandatory minimums for drug trafficking by type/weight.
Florida	Yes	Fla. Stat. § 893.135	Mandatory minimums based on drug type and weight.
Georgia	Yes	O.C.G.A. § 16-13-31	Mandatory minimums for trafficking with limited discretion.
Hawaii	No	Haw. Rev. Stat. § 712-1249	No mandatory minimums for possession.
Idaho	Yes	Idaho Code § 37-2732B	Mandatory minimums for trafficking by drug weight.
Illinois	Yes	720 ILCS 570/401	Mandatory minimums for possession with intent.
Indiana	Yes	Ind. Code § 35-48-4	Mandatory minimums for high-level dealing offenses.
Iowa	Yes	Iowa Code § 124.401	Mandatory minimums based on quantity and history.
Kansas	Yes	Kan. Stat. Ann. § 21-5705	Mandatory minimums for intent/distribution by weight.
Kentucky	Yes	Ky. Rev. Stat. § 218A.1412	Mandatory minimums for drug trafficking by type/weight.
Louisiana	Yes	La. Rev. Stat. §§ 40:966–970	Mandatory minimums for distribution of Schedule I/II drugs.
Maine	No	Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 17-A, §§ 1101–1117	No mandatory minimums; treatment prioritized.
Maryland	No	Md. Code Ann., Crim. Law § 5-601	No mandatory minimums; repealed by 2016 reforms.
Massachusetts	No	Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018	No mandatory minimums; repealed by 2018 reforms.
Michigan	No	Mich. Comp. Laws § 333.7401	No mandatory minimums; eliminated by 2002 reforms.
Minnesota	No	Minn. Stat. § 152.025	No mandatory minimums; guideline-based sentencing.
Mississippi	Yes	Miss. Code Ann. § 41-29-139	Mandatory minimums for trafficking and intent.
Missouri	No	Mo. Rev. Stat. § 579.015	No mandatory minimums for simple possession.
Montana	No	Mont. Code Ann. § 45-9-102	No mandatory minimums for first-time possession.
Nebraska	Yes	Neb. Rev. Stat. § 28-416	Mandatory minimums for distribution/intent to distribute.
Nevada	No	2019 Nev. Stat., ch. 633 (A.B. 236)	No mandatory minimums; repealed by 2019 reforms.
New Hampshire	No	N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 318-B:26	No mandatory minimums for possession.
New Jersey	No	N.J. Stat. Ann. § 2C:35-10	No mandatory minimums; sentencing reform ongoing.
New Mexico	No	N.M. Stat. Ann. § 30-31-23	No mandatory minimums for personal possession.
New York	No	Rockefeller Reforms (2009)	Mandatory minimums repealed for non-violent offenses.
North Carolina	Yes	N.C. Gen. Stat. § 90-95(h)	Mandatory minimums for trafficking by weight.
North Dakota	No	N.D. Cent. Code § 12.1-32-01	No mandatory minimums for possession.
Ohio	Yes	Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 2925.11	Mandatory minimums for possession over thresholds.
Oklahoma	Yes	Okla. Stat. tit. 63, § 2-401	Mandatory minimums for trafficking/intent to distribute.
Oregon	No	Or. Rev. Stat. § 475.752	Mandatory minimums removed; treatment prioritized.
Pennsylvania	Yes	18 Pa. Cons. Stat. § 7508	Mandatory minimums for trafficking by quantity.

State	Status	Policy/Law	Summary of Policy/Law
Rhode Island	No	R.I. Gen. Laws § 21-28-4.01	No mandatory minimums since 2009 repeal.
South Carolina	Yes	S.C. Code Ann. § 44-53-370(e)	Mandatory minimums for trafficking-level offenses.
South Dakota	Yes	S.D. Codified Laws §§ 22-42-2	Mandatory minimums for repeat/serious offenses.
Tennessee	Yes	Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-17-417	Mandatory minimums for trafficking and repeat offenses.
Texas	Yes	Tex. Health & Safety Code § 481.115	Mandatory minimums for possession and trafficking.
Utah	No	Utah House Bill 348 (2015)	No mandatory minimums; possession reclassified.
Vermont	No	18 V.S.A. §§ 4230–4234	No mandatory minimums; focus on harm reduction.
Virginia	Yes	Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-248	Mandatory minimums for trafficking by quantity.
Washington	No	Wash. Rev. Code § 69.50.401	No mandatory minimums for simple possession.
West Virginia	Yes	W. Va. Code § 60A-4-401	Mandatory minimums for distribution, esp. near schools.
Wisconsin	No	Wis. Stat. § 961	No mandatory minimums for most non-violent offenses.
Wyoming	Yes	Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 35-7-1031	Mandatory minimums for certain possession/trafficking.

Note. This table summarizes whether each U.S. state maintained mandatory minimum prison sentences for non-violent drug offenses as of 2020. Policies were classified based on state criminal codes and legislative statutes. "Yes" indicates the presence of such mandatory minimums, while "No" indicates their absence or the use of judicial discretion for sentencing.

Appendix C: Logistic Regression Plots by Policy Topic

This appendix presents logistic regression plots showing the relationship between estimated public support and the predicted probability of liberal policy adoption for each of the eight issues. Each figure displays the fitted curve from a state-level logistic regression model, with public support on the x-axis (scaled 0–1) and predicted probability of liberal policy on the y-axis. Black curves represent model predictions; shaded areas show 95% confidence intervals. Black points indicate individual states, jittered slightly for readability. These plots visualize policy responsiveness and complement the coefficient estimates in Table 3. Each plot is on a separate page for clarity.

Figure A1: **Policy Responsiveness: Abortion.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal abortion policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

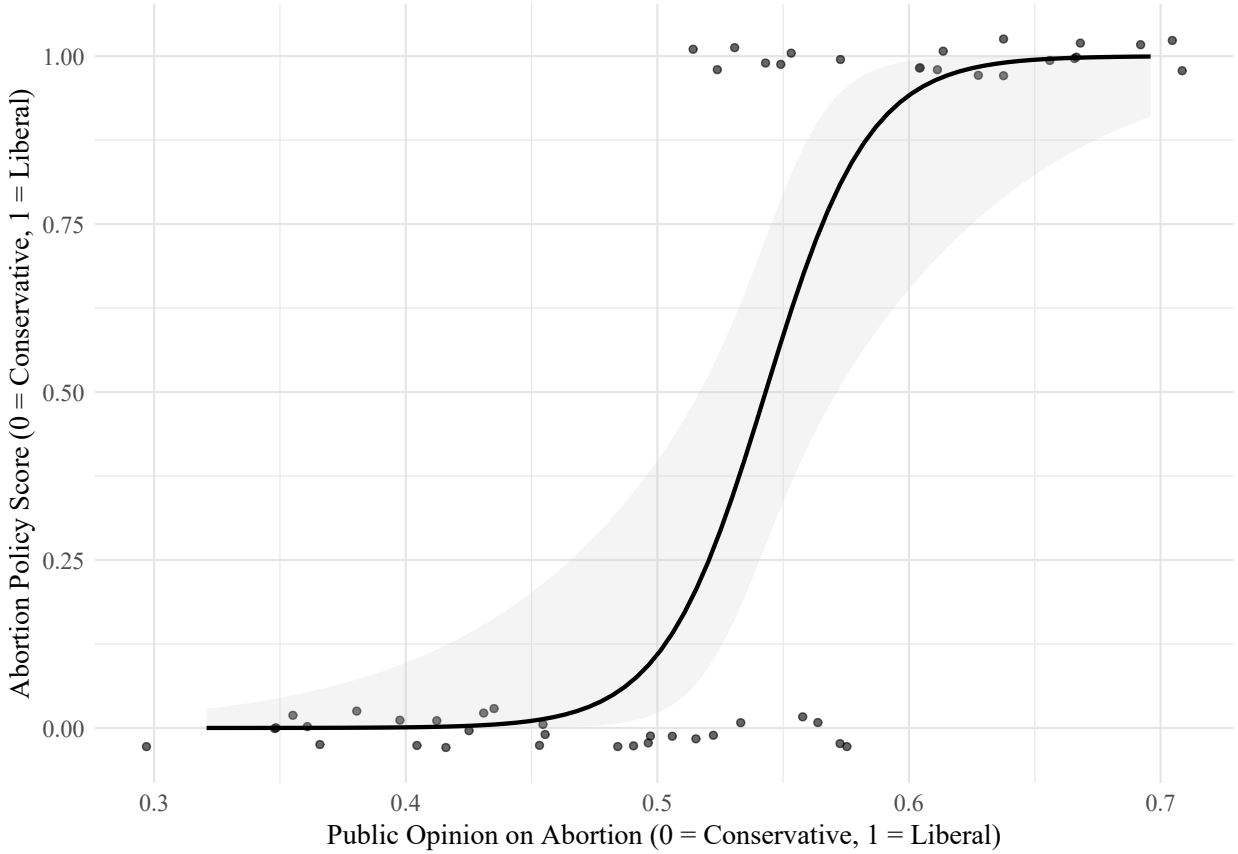

Figure A2: **Policy Responsiveness: Gun Control.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal gun control policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

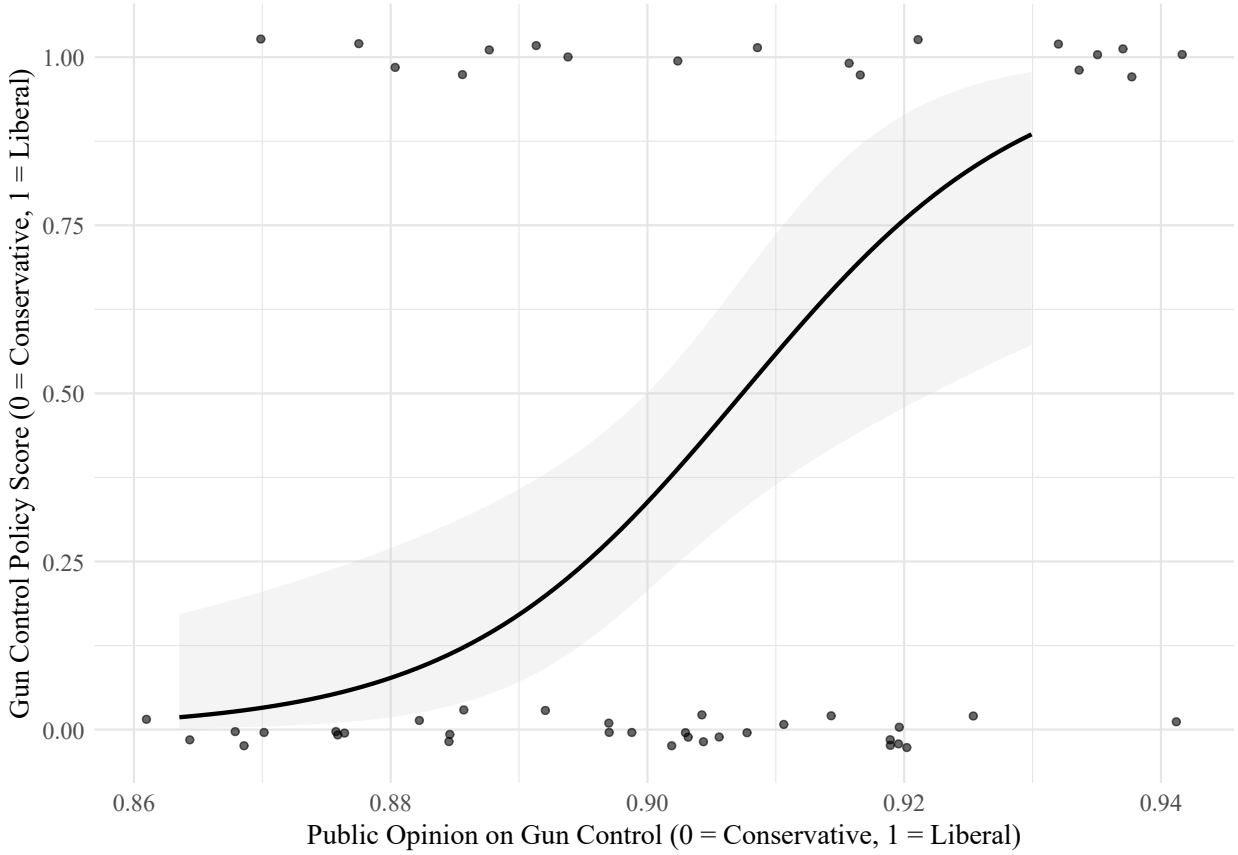

Figure A3: **Policy Responsiveness: Capital Punishment.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal capital punishment policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

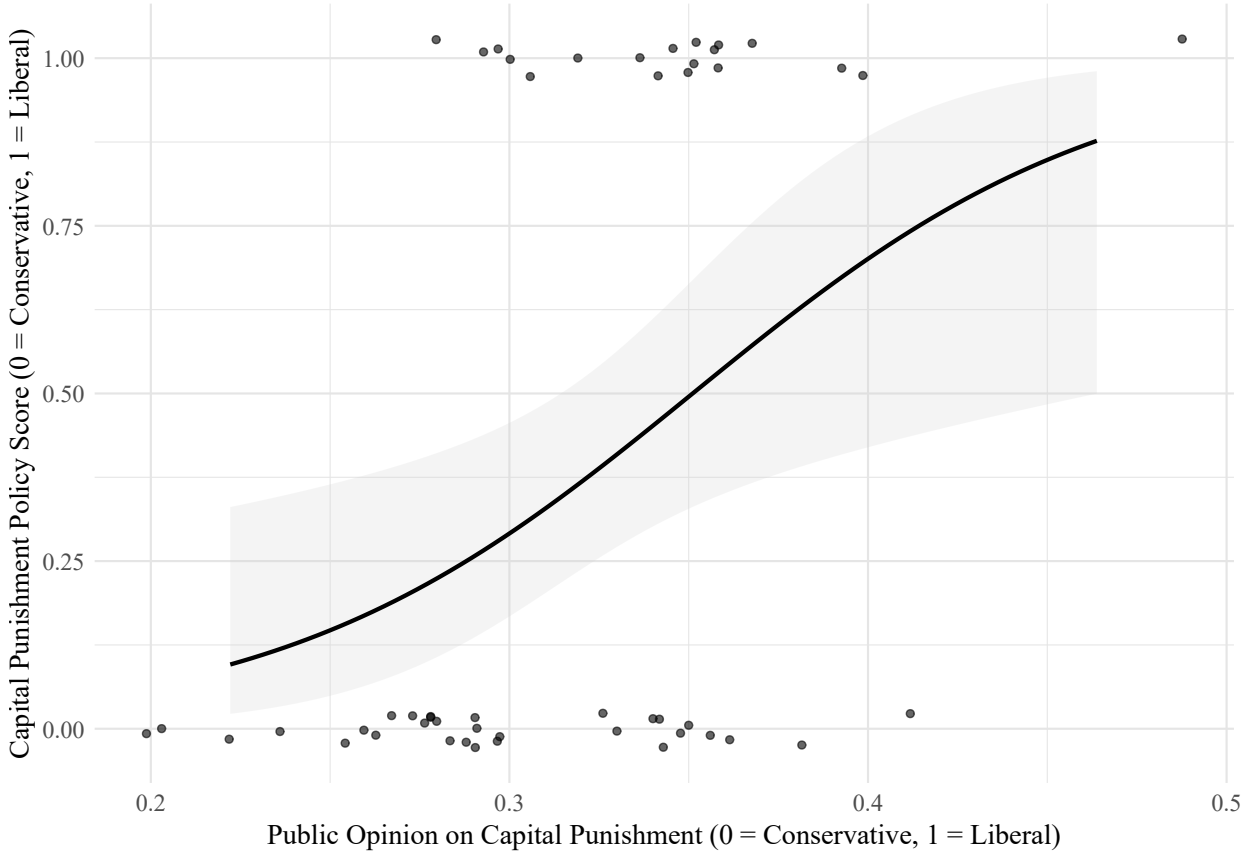

Figure A4: **Policy Responsiveness: Drug Sentencing.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal drug sentencing policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

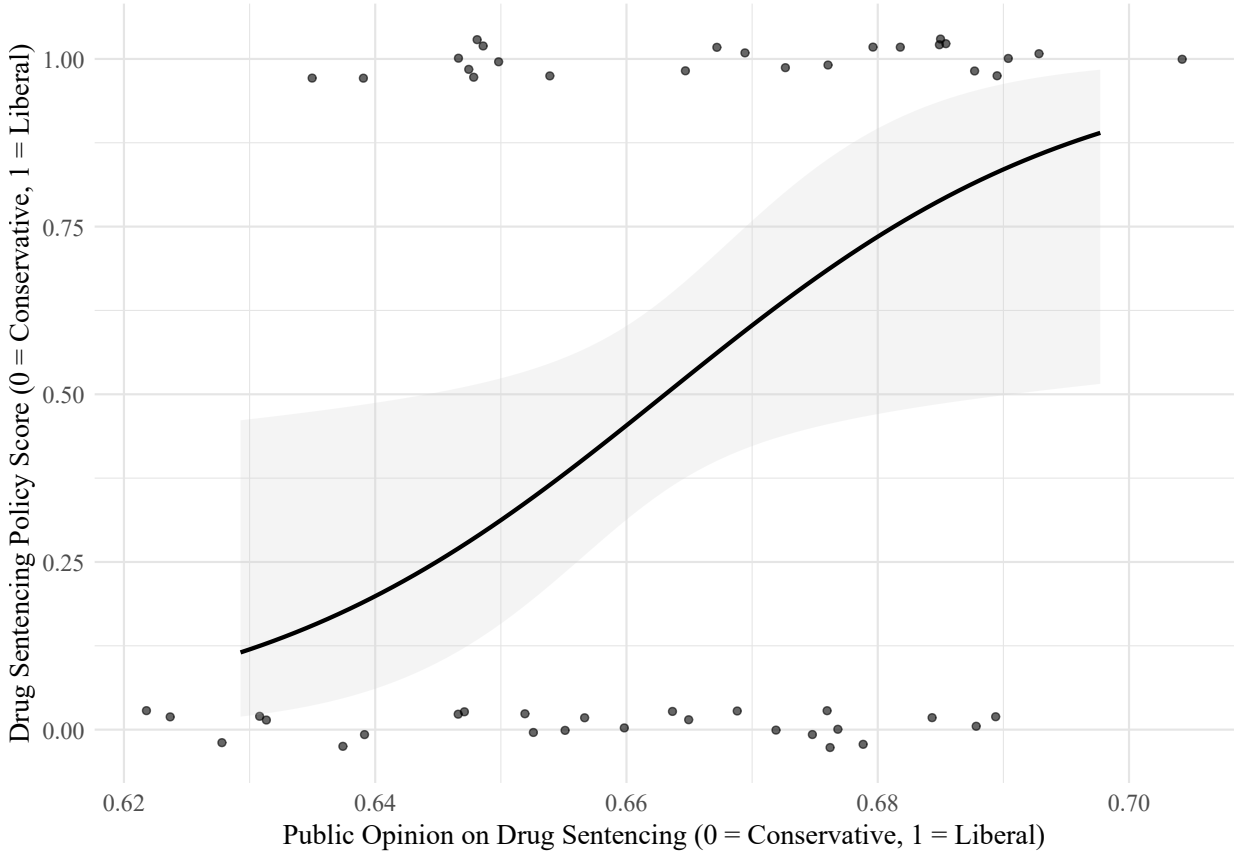

Figure A5: **Policy Responsiveness: Minimum Wage.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal minimum wage policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

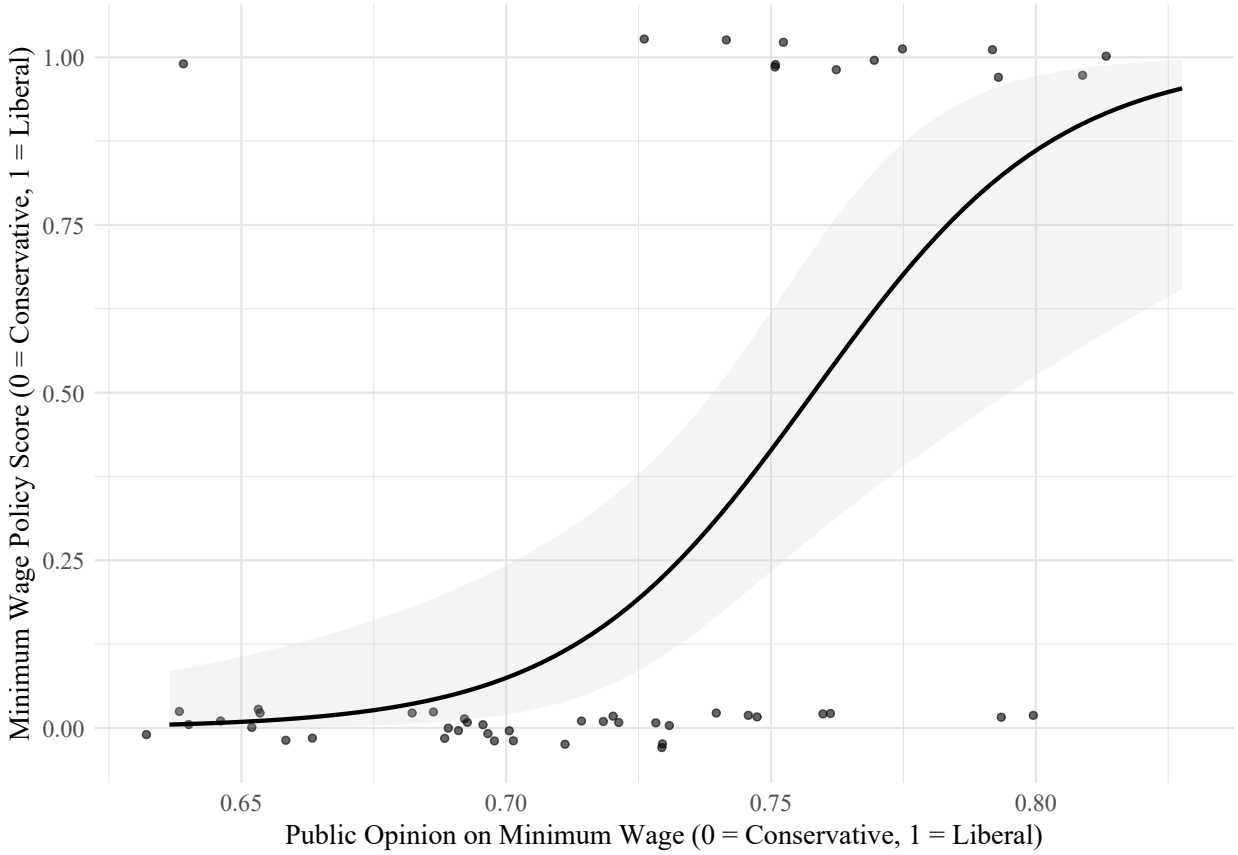

Figure A6: **Policy Responsiveness: Renewable Energy.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal renewable energy policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

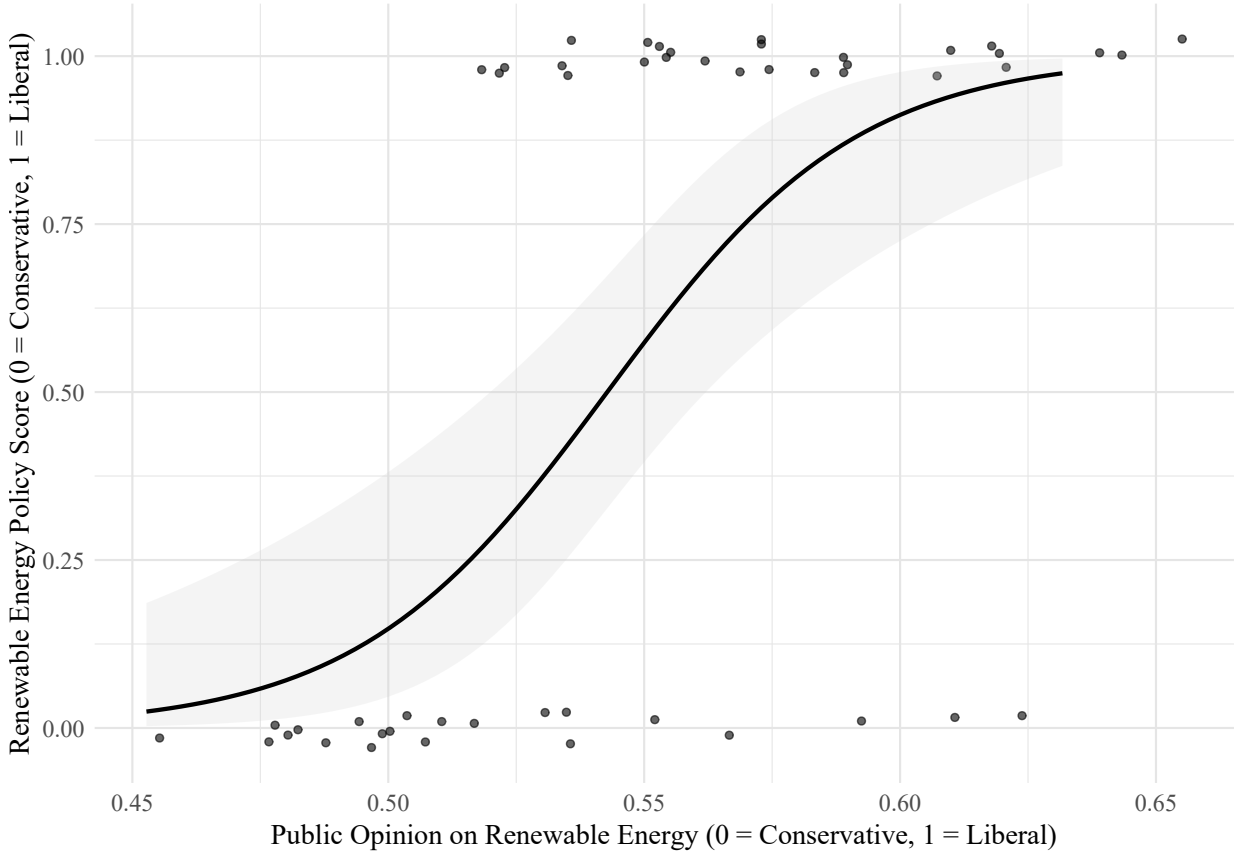

Figure A7: **Policy Responsiveness: Medicaid Expansion.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal Medicaid expansion policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).

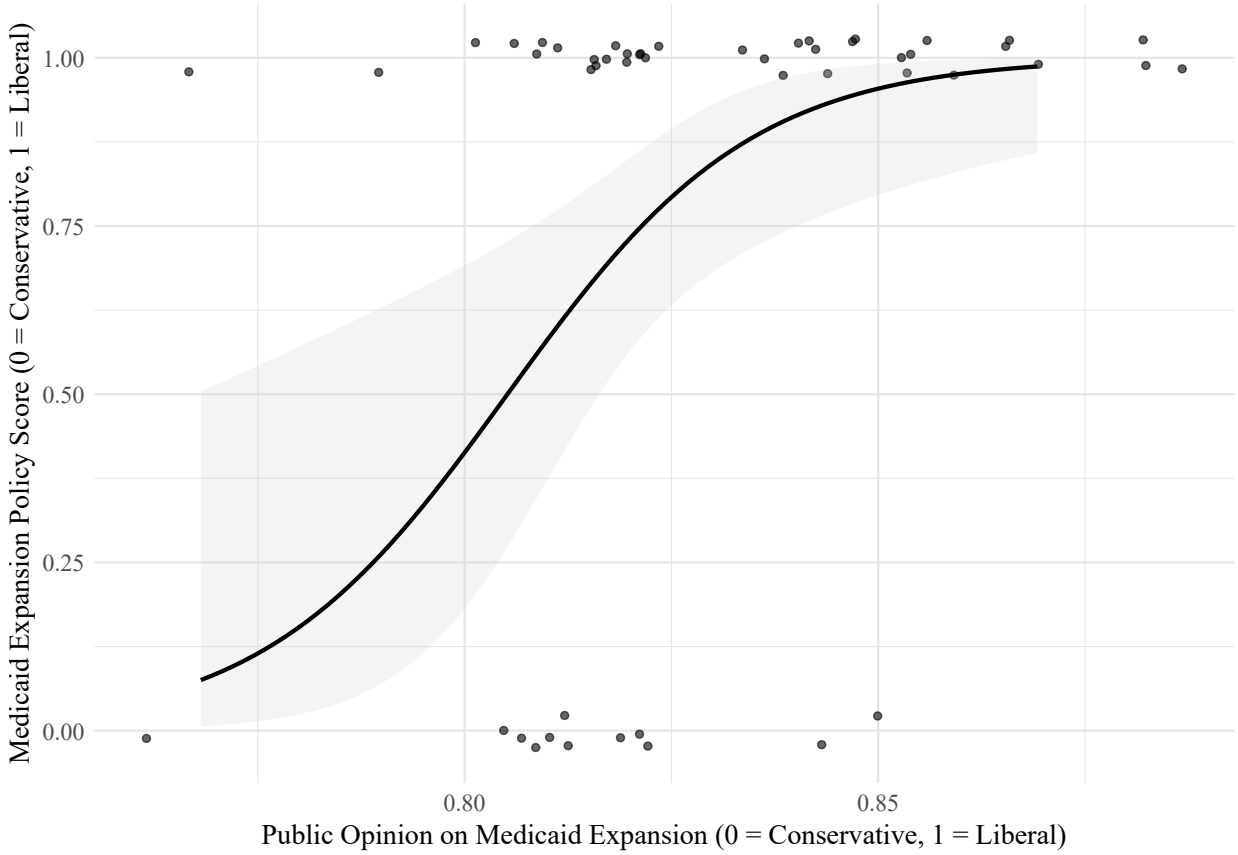

Figure A8: **Policy Responsiveness: Paid Family Leave.** This figure presents a logistic regression model predicting liberal paid family leave policy adoption based on state-level public opinion. The black curve represents the fitted model with a 95% confidence interval in gray, and each black point represents a U.S. state, with a small jitter applied (N = 50).