

STATE OF MINNESOTA
COUNTY OF ITASCA

DISTRICT COURT
NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

STATE OF MINNESOTA,

Plaintiff,

Case FILE NOS. 31-CR-19-393
 31-CR-19-394
 31-CR-19-395
 31-CR-19-396

vs.

DECLARATION OF MARTIN GILENS

DANIEL TANER YILDIRIM,
BRENNNA CUSSEN ANGLADA,
MICHELE ANNE NAAR, and
ALLYSON ELYSE POLMAN,

Defendants.

MARTIN GILENS hereby declares the following:

1. I make and offer this declaration in support of the defendants in *State of Minnesota vs. Daniel Taner Yildirim, Brenna Cussen Anglada, Michele Anne Naar, and Allyson Elyse Polman*, Case Nos: 31-CR-19-393, 31-CR-19-394, 31-CR-395, 31-CR-19-396.
2. I am currently Professor of Politics at Princeton University. I received a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and previously taught at Yale University and the University of California at Los Angeles. I have received fellowships from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavior Sciences at Stanford University, and the Russel Sage Foundation, and I am a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. I am the author most recently of *Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (2012) and have authored or co-authored over thirty academic articles, book reviews, and reviews.

My research focuses on public policy and inequality and their relationship to representation, public opinion, and mass media. In particular, I examine the ability of citizens to influence government policy and the heavy influence that money plays in shaping government policy.

3. My opinions are based on the information I have considered, as well as my education and work as a public policy academic and my research into representation, policy, and citizen influence over government.
4. If so permitted, I intend to offer the following opinions at trial:
5. Majorities of the American public have little influence over the policies our government adopts. Economic elites and organized groups, especially those representing business interests, have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens have little or no independent influence.
6. These conclusions are based on analysis of a unique data set I compiled over many years. With a small army of research assistants, I gathered data on a large, diverse set of policy cases: 1,779 instances between 1981 and 2002 in which a national survey of the general public asked a favor/oppose question about a proposed policy change and provided income breakdowns for respondents. The included policies are not restricted to the narrow Washington “policy agenda.” At the same time—since they were seen as worth asking poll questions about—they tend to concern matters of relatively high salience, about which it is plausible that average citizens may have real opinions and may exert some political influence.
7. I used the original survey data to assess responses by income level. In order to cope with varying income categories across surveys, I employed a logistic regression technique to

estimate the opinions of respondents at the tenth income percentile (quite poor), the fiftieth percentile (median), and the ninetieth percentile (fairly affluent). Policy preferences at the fiftieth income percentile— that is, the preferences of the *median-income* survey respondent—work quite well as measures of the preferences of the average citizen.

8. To measure the presence or absence of policy change for each of 1,779 different cases, I and my research assistants spent many hours poring over news accounts, government data, *Congressional Quarterly* publications, academic papers and the like.
9. My results show that the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy. In other words, it makes very little difference what the general public thinks. The average citizen or the “median voter” has little or no independent influence on public policy.
10. Once we take into account the preferences of the affluent and of organized interest groups, the probability of policy change is nearly the same (around 30%) whether a tiny minority or a large majority of average citizens favor a proposed policy change. Not only do ordinary citizens not have *uniquely* substantial power over policy decisions; they have little or no independent influence on policy at all.
11. By contrast, a proposed policy change with low support among affluent Americans (one out of five in favor) is adopted only about 18 percent of the time, while a proposed change with high support (four out of five in favor) is adopted about 45 percent of the time. Thus, affluent Americans are estimated to have a quite substantial, highly significant, independent impact on policy.

12. My evidence also indicates that the responsiveness of the U.S. political system is severely limited even when influential actors want government *action*. Because of the impediments to policy change that were deliberately built into the U.S. political system—federalism, separation of powers, bicameralism—together with further impediments due to anti-majoritarian congressional rules and procedures, the system has a substantial status quo bias.
13. Further, the issues about which economic elites and ordinary citizens disagree reflect important matters, including many aspects of trade restrictions, tax policy, corporate regulation, abortion, and school prayer, so that the resulting political losses by ordinary citizens are not trivial.
14. Interest groups also have strong influence over public policy, and usually oppose change. This is important because interest-group alignments are almost totally unrelated to the preferences of average citizens. It is simply not the case that a host of diverse, broadly-based interest groups take policy stands—and bring about actual policies—that reflect what the general public wants. Interest groups as a whole do not seek the same policies as average citizens do. Relatively few mass-based interest groups are active, they do not represent the public very well, and they have less collective impact on policy than do business-oriented groups—whose stands tend to be *negatively* related to the preferences of average citizens. These business groups are far more numerous and active; they spend much more money; and they tend to get their way.
15. In sum, my findings indicate that in the United States the majority does *not* rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually influencing policy outcomes. Moreover, because of the

strong status quo bias built into the political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.

16. I conclude that because policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, ordinary citizens have little prospect of influencing government policy through the usual channels of political advocacy and electoral participation.

Under Minn. Stat. § 358.116, I declare under penalty of perjury that everything I have stated in this document is true and correct.

March 19, 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Gilens", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Martin Gilens
Los Angeles, CA