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The Representational Sources of Political Inequality

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Thomas Joseph Hayes

June 2012

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Benjamin G. Bishin, Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Thomas Joseph Hayes is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Representational Sources of Political Inequality

by

Thomas Joseph Hayes

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science

University of California, Riverside, June 2012

Dr. Benjamin G. Bishin, Chairperson

This dissertation investigates the sources of political inequality by examining different aspects of the American governmental system, specifically individuals (e.g. voters), institutions (e.g. Congress), and the interaction between the two (e.g. responsiveness). As the American government was set up to be a representative democracy, the main focus is on the role of representation in the U.S. political system and the degree to which certain groups receive higher levels of responsiveness and other groups do not. Moreover, this dissertation answers three important questions related to inequality: How pervasive is political inequality? Does the public view inequality as a problem? What accounts for legislator bias toward different groups?

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

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Democracy arose from men thinking that if they are equal in any respect they are equal in all respects.

-Aristotle

The Declaration of Independence promised that all American citizens would enjoy equal political rights. Nearly every generation has returned to this promise and struggled to elevate the performance of American democracy to its high ideals. But in our time, the promise of American democracy is threatened again...the risk is that rising economic inequality will solidify longstanding disparities in political voice and influence, and perhaps exacerbate such disparities.

-Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, American Political Science Association 2004

In the early 1960's the United States government developed a measure of poverty that has long served as a social indicator that affects views of the well-being of the country. This measure informed many public policies and programs meant to help the least well-off. The measure has long been criticized for its many flaws. This poverty measure did not take into account the differing needs of workers and non-workers, the costs associated with a lack of health coverage, geographic variation, rising costs of living, or governmental programs such as food stamps or social security. In 2011, the Census developed the 'Supplemental Poverty Measure,' a new measure of poverty that took many of these factors into account.

The picture of American poverty portrayed by this new measure is striking. The biggest difference between the new measure and the old showed that 51 million people were living with incomes less than 50 percent above the poverty line (76 percent higher than the official measure). Individuals across America were struggling in places traditionally thought immune from poverty—such as in the suburbs and among home owners. In response, the Census developed a new term, called the ‘near poor,’ which labeled over 100 million Americans (nearly 1 in 3) either in poverty or just above the threshold (DeParle et al. 2011). After the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, many more Americans were struggling than previously thought.

During this same time period, however, the wealthy in America prospered at an astonishing rate. In 2010, for example, 93 percent of the income created in the country went to the top 1 percent of tax payers (those earning more than \$352,000). Focusing on the top 1 percent does not tell the whole story of the degree to which the wealthy prospered. In that same year, 37 percent of the income created in the country went to the top .01 percent, or about 15,000 households earning more than \$23.8 million (Piketty and Saez 2012). In the wake of a recession and time in which many struggled, the wealthiest of the wealthy were doing exceptionally well.

The American creed has often highlighted the fact that the system is fair because of high economic mobility, or the ability of individuals to move up the social ladder. It might be true that many struggle, the story goes, but in America anyone has the ability to pull themselves out of poverty and rise from the lower rungs. This claim, however, has come under intense criticism, as multiple studies show that Americans have less economic mobility than other advanced democracies in Canada or Western Europe (DeParle 2012).

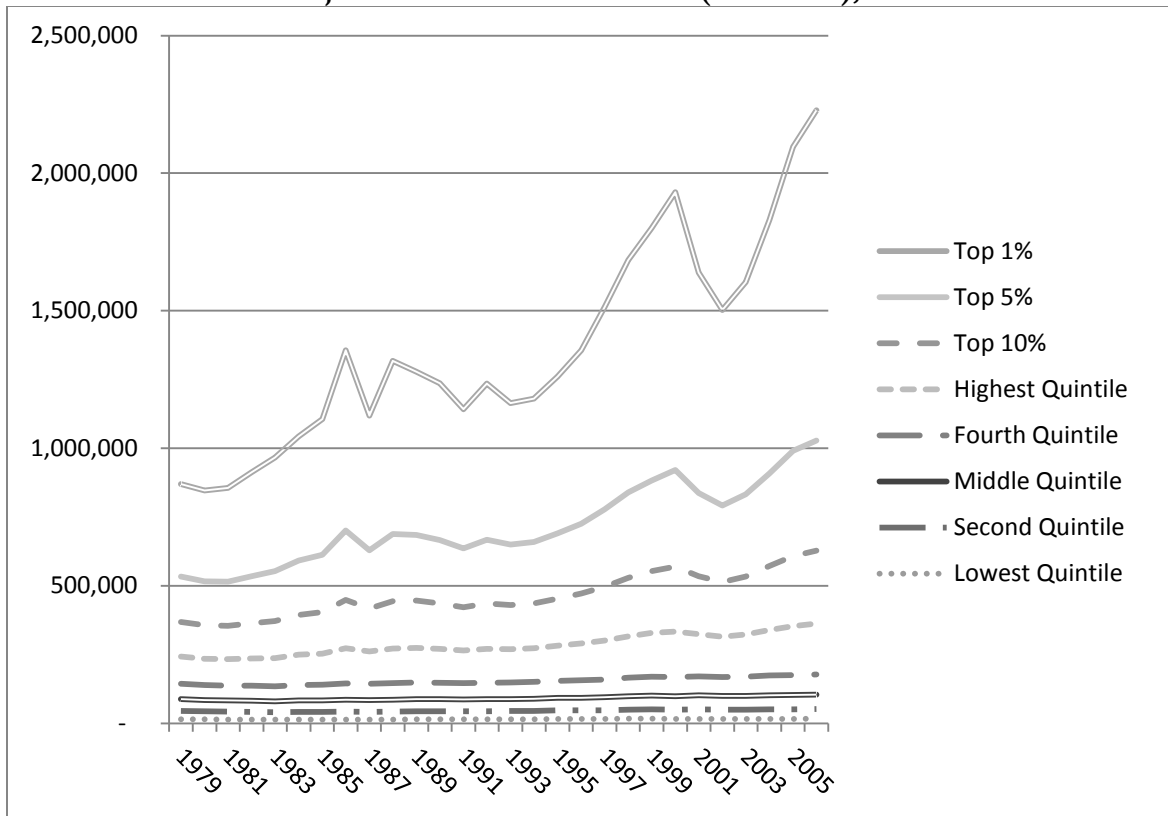
Much of the reason for the substantial amount of people in or near poverty, the extreme wealth of a few individuals, and a country that is less economically mobile than previously thought has to do with the growth in wealth and income inequality in recent times (DeParle 2012). This phenomenon is similar to the ‘Gilded Age,’ a period characterized by ‘robber barons’ and captains of industry who amassed great amounts of wealth, and used it to influence political affairs for their own benefit (Phillips 2002). The Gilded Age was followed by a Progressive and Populist response that enacted a number of reforms aimed at preventing the rich and powerful from controlling political affairs.

Despite these reforms, the United States is again returning to levels of inequality of the Gilded Age. In fact, the recent growth in disparities in wealth and income inequality may be the defining feature of the contemporary era. Comparatively, the U.S. stands out as one of the most unequal nations with the highest level of economic inequality of any rich OECD<sup>1</sup> country at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Smeeding 2005). Since the 1980s, while the growth in income and wealth among the top five percent has increased substantially, the other ninety-five percent have seen little or no increase. Furthermore, the most dramatic gains over the past 30 years are concentrated among the top one percent. Because of this, some refer to the recent era as the “New Gilded Age” (Bartels 2008). The extent of wealth inequality can be seen in Figure 1 below. This figure shows average family incomes (divided into percentiles) since 1979. The top one percent have benefited substantially with constant growth, while lower income quintiles experience much lower growth over time.

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<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was established in 1961 and includes 34 members, many of which are the most economically wealthy countries in the world.

**Figure 1**  
**Inflation Adjusted Household Incomes (After-Tax), 1979-2006**



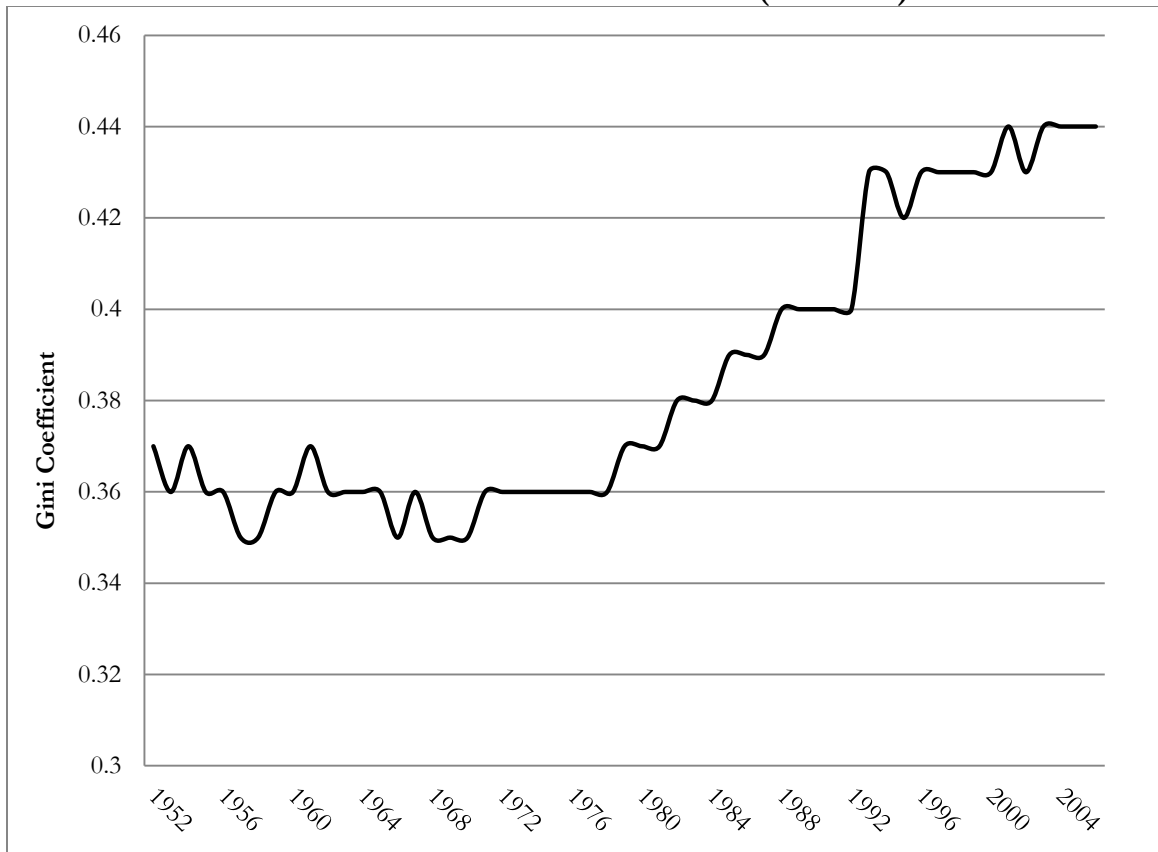
Source: Congressional Budget Office

Like the first ‘Gilded Age,’ wealth is highly concentrated. This is highlighted by the fact that since 1928 “the top 300,000 Americans collectively received almost as much income as the bottom 150 million” (Winters and Page 2009). Add to this the decreasing power of labor unions, increased spending on political campaigns (of which the wealthy are the largest donors), the increased gap in earnings among workers, rising CEO pay, decreased taxes for the wealthiest tax payers, rising costs of health care (and other basic necessities), and the extent of inequality in America is substantial.

The degree to which things are unequal in the United States can also be seen in Figure 2, which displays the Gini coefficient in the United States since 1952. This is a

commonly used statistic that measures income inequality in a society. The Gini scale ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality).<sup>2</sup> As the figure indicates, inequality has grown substantially since the end of World War II.

**Figure 2**  
**Gini Coefficient for the United States (1952-2004)**



Source: Kelly (2008)

This dissertation examines how this recent rise in wealth and income inequality affects political behavior in American politics. I join a small, but growing field in doing so. This growing focus in political science has its roots in a 2004 Task Force Report published

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<sup>2</sup> A score of perfect inequality would indicate that one person has all the income while all others have none.

by the American Political Science Association, which revealed that the discipline knows very little about the impact growing inequality has on political affairs (Task Force 2004).

These recent developments and the lack of knowledge about this topic fuel this dissertation project which addresses one of the most pressing questions facing current scholars: where does political inequality come from? The argument that I make throughout this dissertation is that economic inequality greatly affects political inequality. Moreover, I argue that the system of representation in the United States often generates political inequality, largely by favoring upper-class citizens over those in the bottom rungs.

I choose to focus on representation, as it is (save for elections) often the most direct and constant link between citizens and their government. If political processes and outcomes are leading to inequality in society, political scientists must work to explain this phenomenon. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of such processes and outcomes.

The concept of representation has become central to contemporary democratic theory. While an essentially modern concept, representation has come to mean *popular* representation and is now linked with self-government (Pitkin 1967). In the literature on representation there has been a considerable focus on responsiveness—the level of correspondence between constituency preferences and a legislator’s behavior (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978). Despite a vast amount of research in this area, relatively little has been done to compare the responsiveness of legislators across social or economic groups.

### *Why Is Inequality a Concern?*

It seems to be a given that people should care about inequality, as this concept is key to so many aspects of people's lives. From the power of their voice in government to their ability to make a living, issues of inequality are always present. In terms of political equality, or the idea that all citizens have equal power in the political system (e.g. voting rights, freedom of expression, right to run for office, etc.), most Americans and democratic theorists assert this as a valued goal. The past century witnessed a significant expansion in political equality with the extension of voting and political rights to racial and ethnic minority groups and women (Keyssar 2000). In fact, mass opinion is clearly in support of political equality in terms of everyone having a chance to influence government in an equal manner (McClosky and Zaller 1984).

The American ethos of extending economic equality, or the degree to which members of society have relatively equal outcomes, contrasts sharply with that of political inequality. Many theorists and policy leaders have questioned whether inequality in the economic arena should be a concern. In fact, it has been argued that large gaps between the rich and poor are necessary to fuel economic growth and that public policy should be aimed at improving the economy from the top down, rather than the bottom up (see Barro 2000 for a review). Moreover, Americans demonstrate greater acceptance of economic inequality than do citizens in other advanced democracies (Hochschild 1981; Jacobs and Skocpol 2005). Despite more tolerance for inequality, Americans are concerned about the extent and rise of economic inequality (Page and Jacobs 2009) and many Americans see reason to combat economic inequality, often through a variety of social welfare policies (McClosky and Zaller 1984).



I offer three main reasons why political inequality and the linkage with economic inequality are important for those interested in democracy and democratic values, as well as why political scientists should be concerned about the growth in wealth inequality in recent decades. Mainly, I argue that modern democratic theory assumes both *equal consideration* of citizen interests as well as continued *responsiveness* to those interests. Moreover, as fair treatment of individuals underlies modern conceptions of *justice*, the manner in which economic inequality threatens this aspect of democracy leads to an important area of study.

The first reason why political inequality is important is that modern democratic theory assumes citizens should have equal voice in their government. The *equal worth* of each citizen is considered a standard of any democracy, and therefore the manner in which this level of equity is met is central to assessing the extent to which a society is democratic (Dahl 1971; Beitz 1980). Moreover, it is assumed that unequal voice can lead to unequal outcomes as Jacobs and Skocpol (2005) write:

The government hears more from those on some programs than on others, and the ones it hears more from are systematically among the more advantaged citizens; for example, Medicare recipients are more likely than Medicaid recipients to get in touch with a public official about their medical benefits...Compared with those who are more advantaged, those who have limited income and education are considerably more likely to discuss issues of basic human need—that is, matters like poverty, jobs, health, and housing—in association with their participation (2005, p. 43)

Despite its importance, decades of research of political participation have produced consistent results showing higher levels of political involvement by those with more wealth

(Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Bartels 2008). Equal voice among citizens in American democracy does not seem to be a standard, as the wealthy are increasingly better organized and have more resources than the less well off (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005).

The second reason I argue political inequality is important is that modern democratic theory assumes the continued *responsiveness* of the government to all citizens, who are to be considered as political equals (Dahl 1971). Recent studies of responsiveness call the idea that the government is responding equally to all citizens into question as it has been shown that the government continuously responds to wealthy citizens and often ignores the wishes of poor constituents (e.g. Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008). These unequal outcomes could be a distinct problem for American democracy given the recent growth in income and wealth disparities, the growing expense of campaigns, the decrease in power among labor unions, and the acceleration of lobbying activities by corporations and businesses. In other words, many Americans without resources are not represented, which could be due in large part to a growth in wealth inequality.

The third reason political inequality is important is that the principle of equal treatment underlies the modern principle of *justice* (e.g. Rawls 1972; Brown 1988). Generally, people hold it as unfair to treat two people differently if they are in like cases. The movements against discrimination by race, religion, ethnicity, and gender have all used this principle as a bedrock of their argument to receive political rights within the political system. While guaranteeing equal outcomes to all citizens would be both controversial and impossible, equality of opportunity is generally viewed as a more realistic and just goal. Large disparities in wealth threaten equality of opportunity, as wealth is often passed down

among generations, thus creating a wall in the path of social mobility. Moreover, social mobility has not risen in tandem with wealth inequality, meaning that most are unable to improve their class standing (Gottschalk 1997). In other words, wealth inequality prevents the social mobility that might lead to more political power for individuals in the lower classes. For these reasons, economic inequality threatens modern conceptions of justice and threatens political inequality.

### *Conflicting Values of the American Creed*

The study of inequality and representation brings to light many normative questions for the study of American politics. Most importantly, this area of study examines the conflict between two major traditions of belief in American politics—democracy and capitalism.

The values inherent in republican democracy usually consist of the idea that all people (citizens and political leaders) are treated as equal before the law, contain equal rights, and have equal opportunities (McClosky and Zaller 1984). Moreover, the treatment of citizens by their elected officials is also thought to be subject to egalitarianism as Robert Dahl writes, “a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals” (Dahl, 1971). In this sense, despite elected officials having some privileges beyond those of ordinary citizens, those in power of the government should respond to all citizens they are representing equally and not consistently favor any group over another.

The other major tradition of belief in America, capitalism, has many values that directly conflict with those of democracy. A greater emphasis on individualism, especially in

terms of competition in the marketplace and among self-interested entrepreneurs, is often seen as a key characteristic of capitalism. Moreover, private ownership of the means of production and the right to pursue unlimited economic profit presents a focus on the individual, rather than the collective. Capitalism and democracy do share values as well, as these two traditions of belief have been said to constitute a “liberal tradition” that is paramount to American history and culture (Hartz 1955). Despite these two traditions developing alongside one another and sharing similar values, capitalism often promotes economic inequalities, and the growth in economic inequality in America has been steadily increasing, especially since the early 1980s (Bartels 2008). Therefore, the conflict between these major traditions presents an interesting and informative view of how the American political system operates.

#### *Plan of the Dissertation*

This dissertation is laid out in such a manner to contribute to the limited, but growing understanding of the way in which unprecedented wealth inequality affects political behavior. The central question driving the focus of the dissertation is: to what extent is the American political system responsive to citizens in different economic circumstances? As the evidence from many different angles will demonstrate, the answer is that the wealthy tend to receive disproportionate responsiveness from government, while those in the lower classes are often left behind. This is a phenomenon that occurs both in contemporary America, through unequal representation and social policy that often redistributes wealth upwards, as well as over the course of American history.

In the chapter that follows, I examine inequality in the United States from a historical view. I look at broad trends in political and economic inequality to understand the degree to which current inequalities differ from those of the past. This chapter details the ‘founding nature of representation’ which helps explain why elected officials tend to represent certain groups over others. This ‘founding nature of representation’ can be characterized by a hierarchical view of society as well as opposition to democratic expansion and large-scale change. Moreover, this form of representation continues to influence the nature of political equality in the contemporary political landscape.

A key aspect of republican democracy is the idea that political representatives do what their constituents want. Popular sovereignty, or the idea that majority will should prevail, is therefore a cornerstone to American democracy. In this light, it is important to understand what the American public thinks about political and economic inequality. In the third chapter, I examine the affect that wealth inequality has on individual citizens.

This chapter examines the public’s view of inequality, the extent to which they view inequality as problematic, and the ability of citizens to link views on inequality with specific policy preferences. I examine public opinion on the issue of wealth inequality using a wide range of survey evidence. I find that Americans are not only concerned about wealth inequality, but that they are highly supportive of the government taking action to reduce disparities. Moreover, this high level of support is present among many different groups of people, even those that would traditionally be viewed as unsupportive of government intervention in the economy.

The findings of the third chapter lead to a puzzle: if citizens are in favor of the government taking action to combat wealth inequality, why does inequality persist? Recent

scholarship has pointed to clear favoritism by elected officials and governmental policy toward well-off citizens and a lack of responsiveness toward those with less (e.g. Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005, 2012; Hacker and Pierson 2010). Therefore, in the fourth chapter I examine the extent to which members of Congress respond unequally to different classes of citizens. I find that representatives in Congress are much more likely to respond to the preferences of the wealthy than those in the lower or middle-income brackets. I find this phenomenon to be present in five consecutive Congresses, under both Democratic and Republican majorities.

In the final chapter, I conclude the dissertation by focusing on how the representational system in the United States often produces political inequality. Moreover, I examine possible solutions to ending the widespread disparities that are present in the modern political economy. As the concluding chapter of the dissertation makes clear, the rise in wealth and income inequality present many challenges to American democracy. It is my hope that the evidence presented in this dissertation not only paints a picture of the nature of inequality in America, but also helps us begin to understand and overcome some of these challenges.

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## Chapter 2

### The Pervasiveness of Political Inequality in America

---

History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.

-Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 1963

Politics generally comes down, over the long run, to a conflict between those who have and those who have less.

-V.O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 1949

The growth of income and wealth inequality in the recent era has led to concerns that political equality is under siege. In fact, this is one of the major assumptions of the 2004 American Political Science Association Task Force report, which argued that growing wealth inequality directly leads to disparities in the political system (APSA 2004). However, it is worth considering if this phenomenon is anything new in American history. In addition to wealth inequality affecting political inequality, it is important to consider the other ways in which political equality has changed over time. Therefore, this chapter explores the two part question: how has political equality changed over time and what can this tell us about the pervasiveness of political inequality in American society? The argument I make throughout this chapter is that the 'founding nature of representation' substantially influenced the degree to which political inequality has changed over time. At the founding, the American nation was a society separated by class, and those at the top made many of the political decisions

about its future. This was a defining feature of the creation of the American nation and had lasting effects on the way in which political inequality remained pervasive throughout history.

To understand the omnipresence of political inequality in the modern American era, it is necessary to examine historical circumstances and events that created modern inequalities as well as those that eliminated past ones. To this end, this chapter highlights major events throughout American history during which political inequality was either expanded or curbed.

As will be seen throughout this chapter, the political decisions underlying many of these major events that changed the relative political equality of Americans were often the result of long and protracted struggles, both by elites and average citizens. However, the final political decisions made to expand equality were almost always made by those with power and in positions of privilege, as those groups being treated unequally had to wrest power from them. While V.O. Key's statement that political conflict often revolves around those who have and those who have less, this chapter highlights the fact that the final decision to cede power is almost always made by those representing and holding positions of political power. It is through this idea that we can begin to understand the representational sources of political inequality, or the way in which representation in the American system often prevents political equality from being fully realized for all Americans. More specifically, by examining the structure of American government as well as the institutions that have grown from it, a more clear understanding of the sources of inequality can come to light.

### The Sources of Political Inequality

In many ways, the measurement of political equality is a difficult task for the study of democracy, as it encompasses many ideas. In its most basic form, political equality is the idea that all citizens have equal power in the political system. While political equality differs from economic equality, or the degree to which members of society have relatively equal outcomes, each clearly affects the other. Generally, Americans are more accepting of the former than the latter (McClosky and Zaller 1984). In order to measure and examine political equality in America, it is necessary to expand the broad definition and explore the many facets of this concept.

While many philosophers and scholars define political equality in different ways, one that will provide the basis for this chapter comes from Robert Dahl, who writes of measurement of both political equality and democracy in his work *On Political Equality*. Dahl's examination of political equality differs from other theoretical treatments of the concept in some ways. For instance, Dahl's definition does not place emphasis on other democratic characteristics such as deliberation (e.g. Gutmann and Thompson 1996) or contestation (e.g. Mouffe 2009). However, Dahl's defining characteristics of political equality do cover a broad range of activities that are important to modern conceptions of democracy.

Dahl writes that, at a minimum, people living in a democracy should be able to achieve the following: effective participation, equality in voting, the ability to achieve enlightened understanding, final control of the agenda, inclusion, and fundamental rights. Additionally, Dahl points out that modern representative democracy has come to entail the idea that important governmental decisions are adopted by officials chosen in popular

elections. In these elections, citizens must be able to participate freely in a fair environment, run and serve in elective office, express themselves publicly, and seek out independent sources of information. Moreover, Dahl cites the “continuing harms of market capitalism” as another way in which political equality can be threatened (Dahl 2006, p. 98). By this, Dahl is likely referring to phenomena that are common to capitalism such as large disparities in income and wealth, a lack of a social safety net, and cyclical unemployment. This brief description of the idea of political equality makes clear that the concept is elusive in both definition and in practice. However, we can take the ideals of the concept and examine the extent to which they are present or absent in American society.

This chapter builds on previous scholarship that examines political equality in America (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Smith 1993, 1997; Valelly 2004; Verba et. al 1995) and has the goal of highlighting the major events and trends that contributed to the expansion and contraction of political equality over time. A complete and in-depth treatment of this issue would require more attention than this chapter can offer; however, a brief historical analysis is necessary to understand present inequalities. Moreover, this chapter sets the stage for subsequent chapters, which examine political equality in the modern era through a different and more quantitative manner. To this end, this chapter begins with an analysis of the extent of political equality at the beginning of the Republic.

### The Mixed Egalitarianism of the Founding

The beginning of the Republic was characterized by distinctive patterns of political and economic inequality. The new nation was one separated by class, with only a select few making the decisions that would affect its future. Most of the population at the time of the

founding did not have voting rights and was not included in debates about how to structure the new nation. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence came from America's most wealthy families, owned significant portions of land, and had much to gain from the formation of a new nation (e.g. Beard 1913; Phillips 2002). While the founding documents called for greater political equality for individuals, there was no mention of economic inequality as problematic to individual liberty. Moreover, as Kevin Phillips writes in reference to the founding fathers:

Theirs was a *revolutionary* document with respect to Britain, but not in matters domestic. King George III might be charged with repeated injuries, usurpations, and tyrannies and with sending a swarm of officers to harass Americans and 'eat out their substance,' but not even Jefferson thought to condemn him for setting the rich above the poor. Hierarchy was a fact of life in the eighteenth-century American colonies (Phillips 2002, p. 5).

This is not to say that all Americans accepted every aspect a hierarchical society. Clearly great changes were underfoot, and the seeds of individual liberty, equality, and distrust of concentrated authority were present in both the structure of the government and mindset of many. In fact, opposition to aristocracy was a continued legacy of the new American nation. This represented a change not just in the political system, but in society as well (Wood 1991). However, a clear hierarchy was present as most were not free in the colonial society. While slavery was the most obvious form of people being without freedom, those who did not own land had little freedoms as well. Patronage was used by the elite to gain ever more political and economic power in colonial society, and those who were not in

positions of power had a difficult time breaking into the elite spheres of influence (Wood 1991). At the founding, the American nation was a society separated by class, and those at the top made many of the political decisions about its future.

To be sure, one of the reasons for which the American government was designed as a representative democracy was to prevent the masses from taking land (a major source of status and wealth) from those who owned property. James Madison, in Federalist 10 explicitly states such a defense of the structure of the proposed government and why factions must be controlled:

But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government (Madison, Federalist 10).

To Madison, factions needed to be controlled so they did not act adversely to the interests of other citizens. Moreover, while Madison does call for frequent elections as a way in which the people could be directly connected with their representatives (e.g. Federalist 52) the total number of elected offices for which the people had direct control was limited.

Senators and the president were not directly elected at the founding, as senators were selected by state legislators and the president by the Electoral College. This structure, while expanding political equality to new levels, still limited the influence of those eligible to be full citizens in many ways.

In some ways, the new American nation was somewhat egalitarian. For instance, wealth distribution in some colonies such as Massachusetts and Pennsylvania was relatively egalitarian, as the top 1 percent had about 10 to 20 percent of all assets. While colonies with larger population centers and more focused commercialism such as Boston and New York were much less equal in terms of wealth distribution, the founding of the nation was a relatively equal time in American history in monetary distributional terms (Phillips 2002). Moreover, the new ideas of democracy and Republicanism were radical in many ways, and citizens in the new American nation enjoyed more equality than many who lived under the rule of monarchy or in places where aristocracy dominated political, economic, and social life (Wood 1991). In fact, the Declaration of Independence asserting, “all men were created equal” was a divergent view from much of the history of the world. However, to state that the nation was equal in any other sense of the word would be an overstatement. The new American government and the founding nature of representation thus began not only with a hierarchical structure in which elites ruled, but with a sense that political inequality was necessary.

#### *On the Foundation of Inequality*

The foundational structure of the government also left a situation of extreme political inequality for the vast majority of Americans. In many senses, the ground floor of this



structure was in place well before the founding fathers began drafting a new Constitution. Colonial precedent and British suffrage regulations restricted the right to vote to adult white men who owned property. Moreover, at the beginning of the Revolution, many colonies required specific acreage or monetary values in order to participate in elections. The justification for such policies was the idea that men who possessed property had a stake in government unique from others and that these men possessed enough independence to have a voice in government. Underlying many of these arguments that restricted the franchise was the idea that voting was a privilege, not a right, and the government could take this right away as it saw fit (Keyssar 2000).

Similar concerns led to the creation of residency requirements, which became a prerequisite to qualifying to vote. These new rules were developed as a way to exclude transients who lacked a stake in local affairs. Women were excluded from voting as well, largely due to the view that they depended upon men and their fragility left them unfit for the affairs of government as Dahl writes:

The authors of the American Declaration of Independence and the fifty-five delegates to the Second Continental Congress who voted to adopt it in July 1776, were, of course, all men, none of whom had the slightest intention of extending the suffrage or many other basic political rights to women, who, in legal contemplation, were essentially the property of their fathers and husbands” (Dahl 2006, p. 19).

Other groups such as African-Americans, whether freemen or slaves, were also excluded from voting or having much say in the government. Moreover, Native Americans and many religious groups were largely denied the right to vote as well. However, in a legacy

that would present years of battles in terms of voting rights, the new Constitution largely left the decisions of who had the right to vote to individual states, as the document did not grant the right to vote to anyone (Keyssar 2000). It would not be until much later in American history that the federal government would enter the voting rights debate, which allowed for discrimination to persist in most states and localities.

Despite discussions of suffrage that were often at the center of debates of legitimate government authority and the role of the governed during the Revolution, the political decisions made during the constitutional convention to largely leave issues of the franchise to the states led to many different types of laws. In effect, the lack of centralized voting laws led to divergent circumstances for many groups of voters as Alexander Keyssar writes:

...aside from property qualifications, there were no firm principles governing colonial voting rights, and suffrage laws accordingly were quite varied. Not only Catholics and Jews, but also Native Americans, free blacks, and nonnaturalized aliens could vote in some places and not in others. Women were barred expressly in several colonies, including Virginia, but statutes elsewhere made no reference to gender, and in at least a few Massachusetts towns and New York counties propertied widows did legally vote...moreover, the enforcement or application of suffrage laws was uneven and dependent on local circumstances (Keyssar 2000, p. 6).

While local laws varied, there was a gradual movement by state governments to exclude many from voting and participating in local affairs. The founding legacy was one that allowed for greater local control of government, but left a vacuum and no central enforcement apparatus to prevent the curbing of political equality, especially in terms of

suffrage procedures. Thus, the founding nature of representation was one that created many walls in the way of achieving political equality.

### *Protection from Democracy*

Beyond issues of suffrage, political decisions made at the time of the creation of the new American government also limited the role of the people's influence in government as well as their ability to directly elect representatives to serve them in government. Not only was the majority of the population prevented from participating in governmental affairs, most specifically at the ballot box, but also the rules set out in the Constitution avoided the direct election of Senators and the President. Moreover, the design of the national legislature led to the overrepresentation of rural areas that were less populous than urban centers. Each state was allotted two senators, thus over-representing the interests of smaller states. While the House of Representatives was allocated somewhat more equally according to population, the three-fifths compromise gave Southern slaveholding states the ability to count slaves to increase their representational power in Congress, yet still preventing them from having any real political rights (Klinkner and Smith 1999).

The institutional design that elected the President was also an undemocratic means of providing representation. The Electoral College was designed due to the decentralized and agrarian nature of the new nation, but it also led to the prevention of the most preferred candidate from winning and, sometimes, failed to produce a winner able to garner a plurality of votes (Donovan and Bowler 2004). In addition, state legislators, not the people, were given the ability to select Senators to the Congress. This decision was set out directly to counter against what the founders believed would be a House of Representatives that would

be wild and uncontrollable in nature. Moreover, the Bill of Rights, which contained many important freedoms for citizens in the United States, was not even present in the original Constitution. The first ten amendments were not ratified until 1791, four years after the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

As can be seen by many of the writings of the founding fathers as well as in the *Federalist*, there remained a great fear among many elites that expanding democracy and egalitarianism would lead to instability, constant revolution, or a general downgrading of society. With this in mind, the structure of the new American government was set up to allow for change, yet with the intention that this change would be slow and gradual. This is yet another key aspect to the founding nature of representation. Those who designed the Constitution did leave much to be settled in the future (e.g. slavery), left ambiguous language in the Constitution (e.g. the role of the Supreme Court later decided in *Marbury v. Madison*), and created a founding document amenable to change (e.g. ability to amend the document). However, each of these decisions, some purposeful and others not, created a government with the ability to change and adapt, but slowly.

### *Commerce in the New Republic*

Beyond the rules that governed the election of representatives and determined who had the right to participate in politics, a debate about the direction the country would take in terms of commerce raged between Jefferson and Hamilton. At the heart of the debate was concern about the relative power of large financial institutions. Alexander Hamilton, the country's first Secretary of the Treasury, argued the government should ensure sufficient credit to fund economic development. Hamilton pushed for a publicly chartered bank that

would aid the economic development of commerce in the early Republic. Thomas Jefferson on the other hand, feared the role of private commerce and the development of big banks. Jefferson thought large financial institutions could give banks too much political and economic power, especially relative to individual citizens. Instead, Jefferson pushed for a more decentralized agrarian society (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

While Jefferson lobbied with much fervor against the establishment of a national bank, legislation to create the First Bank of the United States passed Congress rather easily and President Washington signed the bill into law in 1791. Scholars have demonstrated that economic development in the early Republic depended on a well-functioning financial system (Sylla and Rousseau 2002). In many ways, the development of the financial sector as well as a central bank helped attract capital and equity. This was especially important during the Industrial Revolution, during which technological innovations and the application of technology to production required credit (Johnson and Kwak 2010). While Jefferson may have largely lost out in the early debate about the direction commerce would take in the new country, his fears of large financial institutions gaining influence over government would be realized at various times in American history. This debate would be at the heart of many political battles throughout American history, and remains salient today.

### Egalitarian Expansion (1790-1865)

As the Republic developed and the population grew, democratic expansion and political equality matured as well. Much of this development took place at the local and state level. State constitutions underwent drastic changes, often with the issue of suffrage at the center of these alterations. Every state held at least one constitutional convention between

1790 and 1855. In many localities, especially in the South, voting was not a private act. Names would often be read from a roll sheet and individuals were expected to state the candidate they intended to vote for.

The public nature of the vote led to intimidation, and therefore calls were made from both the public and elected officials to protect the secrecy of the ballot. The public nature of the vote was slowly done away with as nearly every state in the mid-nineteenth century required written ballots and the Australian (secret) ballot triumphed across the U.S. by the 1890s (Massicotte et al 2004). The institution of the Australian ballot was meant to prevent intimidation and political parties began to print ballots that allowed them to track votes and assist individuals as well (Keyssar 2000). While political equality was aided with the ability to cast a ballot in private without overt intimidation, the act of voting was still a long way from the formalized and private nature it would eventually become. Political parties were still able to heavily influence, and in a more minor way than before, intimidate many voters into supporting their candidates through patronage (Wood 1991; Keyssar 2000).

The right to vote expanded to large swaths of the population as states began to eliminate property qualifications. No states admitted to the union after 1790 instituted a property requirement and by 1860, only two property requirements remained.<sup>3</sup> As states and territories developed, political elites came to see the advantage to liberalizing voting laws and doing away with property requirements. New states saw opportunity in encouraging the expanding population to move west, as an increased population led to greater revenue in the form of taxes (Keyssar 2000). In many ways though, the political decisions of the elites in

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<sup>3</sup> The two remaining property requirements applied to foreign-born residents in Rhode Island and African-Americans in New York (Keyssar 2000).

power, and thus the property owning white males in control of the direction of the country, were far from altruistic. Those with the power to make such decisions largely expanded the franchise because their material interests could be furthered by incorporating more people into the political sphere. As the urban population grew, most couldn't meet the requirements to vote, and thus were part of the social and economic fabric of the nation, yet not the political.

In some senses, political non-decisions led to the expansion of political equality, which was not always a planned process. For example, the Framers had little to say about political parties, and many actually despised them, one reason Madison believed so strongly that "factions" should be controlled. The development of political parties in the early Republic and the electoral competition that ensued, led to a greater say in government for many citizens. Broad based political parties competed and actively pursued votes, and in many ways, helped encourage the expansion of the suffrage in many states (Keyssar 2000). Issues of the right to participate in political life, and which groups should receive the expanding definition of the suffrage, were inextricably bound in the competition of the political parties from early competition between the Federalist and Republican parties to competition between the Whigs and Democrats. Broad based political parties quickly learned the advantages of enfranchising new groups of citizens as the need to mobilize to win elections increased (Aldrich 1995; Brewer and Stonecash 2009).

As property requirements eroded, residency requirements and issues of who was eligible to vote became more salient. As states began to gain sovereign supremacy over municipalities, the suffrage laws between the two became nearly uniform in almost every state. While within state suffrage laws converged within states during the period leading up

to the Civil War, laws remained very different between states. However, both within and between states, concentrated efforts of disenfranchising many groups of voters were still underway.

### *State Efforts of Disenfranchisement*

Despite the rapid expansion of many political rights, especially in the right to participate in politics for many who had previously been excluded, there were plenty of instances in which political equality was curbed in the political landscape of early America. As the nation developed, the first seeds of decisions that curtailed political equality could be seen during this era. Large groups of citizens were targeted by state laws that took away the right to participate in politics for groups such as women, African-Americans, Native-Americans, felons, paupers and immigrants. For example, in New Jersey, the original state constitution granted suffrage to all inhabitants, which was often taken to mean that women, African-Americans, and aliens could vote. However, the state legislature soon took this right away, and along with states such as New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, the right to vote for women and other minority groups was rescinded as well (Keyssar 2000).

African-Americans were one of the main groups targeted when it came to the prevention of egalitarianism to all Americans. At the founding of the Republic, most states did not have formal laws that prevented African-Americans from voting. However, as the number of states in the union expanded and the nation developed, most states developed formal laws that specifically prevented African-Americans from voting—in the North as well as the South. This trend was so dominant that by 1855, only five states did not formally discriminate against African-Americans. Moreover, the five states that allowed African-



Americans the right to vote only contained four percent of the total free black population (Keyssar 2000).

A strike against political equality came when the Supreme Court ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) that blacks were not considered citizens of the United States. In one of the most egregious cases of political inequality to be formalized in United States history, this decision found slaves (and their decedents) to be property and prevented their use of the courts and others avenues of political decision-making. Moreover, this ruling prevented blacks (free or slave) from being citizens. As the country approached the Civil War, egalitarianism had spread in a number of ways (e.g. evaporation of property requirements to voting), yet many laws had been passed to make things more unequal for minority groups.

#### *Jefferson's Legacy Alive and Well*

President Andrew Jackson continued Jefferson's deep mistrust of large financial institutions, and this was evident in his fight against the Second Bank of the United States. Jackson believed that paper money allowed bankers to influence the economy in a way that went against the common man. Moreover, Jackson viewed the Second Bank as a threat to executive power. This was especially prevalent due to the management of the Second Bank by Nicholas Biddle, who gained leverage over many in Congress, especially those that owed him a large amount of debt. The battle between Biddle and Jackson came to be known as the "Bank War" as Congress attempted to renew the Second Bank's charter in 1832. After Congress renewed the charter, Jackson vetoed renewal. Without a central bank, the American economy suffered many recessions throughout the nineteenth century, as a lack of a central bank was one reason the financial system could not stabilize. However, the Bank

War did demonstrate how large financial institutions could yield tremendous influence over political affairs, as Biddle purposefully expanded and contracted credit for political ends (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

While it is difficult to pin down the exact effects the Bank War had on the level of egalitarianism in America at the time, it is clear that equality of the average person is likely to suffer when one organization or power source has expansive political power over the entire political system. As those at the head of the Second Bank were able to yield influence over politicians in debt and influence the credit market in a manner that was contrary to the average person, it seems clear that a large financial institution without clear checks against corruption would certainly curb egalitarianism in the country.

In many ways, while egalitarianism had expanded greatly during the period leading up to the Civil War, the country was still far from being egalitarian by any means. While many previously disenfranchised groups did gain the right to vote (e.g. white males who did not own property), suffrage exclusions grew as the nation expanded and the practice of slavery remained common in the South. Moreover, just as the Framers debated the commercial direction the nation would take at its beginning, the battle between those that favored large financial institutions over a decentralized system continued. As the nation approached Civil War, egalitarianism was a distant idea for most Americans.

#### The First Reconstruction: The Broken Promise of Political Egalitarianism (1865-1920)

The Civil War is popularly regarded as a time in which the Union was held together, with the North winning a protracted battle that cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Moreover, this war is often seen as a time in which African-Americans gained freedom and

greater equality as the South was defeated and the Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves. Passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments after the Civil War represent, symbolically at least, an expansion of equality to a group previously prevented from enjoying much liberty at all. However, a closer examination of this time period shows how glimpses of egalitarianism for many soon subsided and an unequal nation continued.

The Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery in the United States, clearly increased equality for blacks in the South, however the formal dissolution of slavery came 89 years after the Declaration of Independence declared, "...all men were created equal." To be sure, this was an act that increased equality, yet the events that followed in the Reconstruction Era proved to be difficult for African-Americans in terms of gaining equal status as citizens.

While the Fourteenth Amendment recognized everyone born or naturalized in the United States as citizens, finally extending citizenship rights to African-Americans, in practice this Amendment's additional promise of limiting the government's ability to deny citizenship privileges to minorities was quite limited. Many states, in the North and the South, instituted laws that directly discriminated against African-Americans, Native Americans, and other previously disenfranchised groups (Keyssar 2000).

After the Civil War, many in the Republican Party realized the possible gains to be made with the enfranchisement of blacks (Frymer 1999). The efforts to expand black political incorporation only intensified as Southern opposition mounted and fears of the Democrats retaking control of the government ensued. The struggle to grant greater equality to previously disenfranchised blacks was especially evident with efforts to pass the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which eventually barred voting discrimination

based “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Efforts to pass the Amendment were led by the Republican controlled Congress that saw expanding their electoral base to blacks as a major advantage. Moreover, as Keyssar writes, Republicans had additional concerns driving their action:

In addition to pragmatic considerations, many Republicans were uncomfortable with the glaring inconsistencies in the party’s posture toward black suffrage in the North and South. A constitutional amendment, then, had several perceived virtues: it would end the party’s hypocrisy, benefit its candidates, and firmly cement the political rights and power of blacks in the South. Moreover, as a federal amendment, rather than an act of Congress, it could avoid constitutional adjudication in the courts and would be easier to enact than a long series of state constitutional referenda: once it left Congress an amendment would be subject to ratification only by state legislatures, most of which were in the hands of the Republicans (p. 94).

The final version of the Fifteenth Amendment was actually a watered down version of efforts to deny *any* voting discrimination. In 1869, two versions of the amendment made their way through Congress, a more restrictive one in the House, and a measure that would provide more equal access to the vote (beyond race) in the Senate. In the House, Representative George S. Boutwell introduced the first version of the amendment, which rather than stating voting as a positive right, instead prevented states from denying suffrage for a multitude of reasons. This led to opposition from those concerned with the primacy of state rights. Moreover, some viewed the language as too broad, as the amendment would have also prevented suffrage and office-holding discrimination based on race, property, tax,

nativity, and literacy requirements. In the Senate, William M. Stewart introduced a similar version. However, an amendment to the proposal was offered by Senator Henry Wilson, which prevented suffrage discrimination based on race, nativity, property, education or creed, yet allowed qualifications based on age and residence (Keyssar 2000).

While opposition to the Wilson amendment came in many forms, many focused on the sanctioning of black office-holding and the potential to undermine the authority of state sovereignty. Moreover, the way in which the amendment was defeated is an example of how relatively popular legislation never makes its way through the legislative process. As the Senate first rejected the Wilson amendment, a revised version was sent to the House, which in turn rejected it soundly. An alternative bill was proposed offering almost identical language (yet leaving out a ban on literacy tests and education) and a conference committee was appointed, which was then filled with many who were against the broad language of the Wilson amendment. As Congress was only to remain in session a few more days, the Senate approved the bill, with many Republicans doing so reluctantly due to the narrower language (Keyssar 2000).

Once the amendment was passed and went to the ratification stage at the state legislatures, many Western states refused ratification, as many wanted to prevent the enfranchisement of Chinese, Irish, and Native Americans. Despite an intense fight in many states, the amendment was finally ratified in 1870. The passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were significant achievements and clear expansions of equality, especially since this was the first time in U.S. history that the words “right to vote” were included in the Constitution. While the passage of the Civil War amendments were a real achievement for the political equality of a previously disadvantaged group, it would be a long

time before African-Americans and other racial and ethnic groups would enjoy greater political equality. The Republican Party that had so strongly pushed for African-American rights immediately after the Civil War became divided between Radicals and conservatives. The party's efforts at keeping African-Americans as a major part of their electoral coalition were largely abandoned by party leaders as early as the 1880s, when federal enforcement of election fraud and arrests for intimidation dropped significantly (Frymer 1999).

While the end of the first reconstruction ended with large-scale disenfranchisement in the South, one of the more positive results in terms of expanding political equality of the Reconstruction Era for African-Americans was a greater ability to migrate to areas that contained better economic opportunities. This led to massive migration of blacks to northern states after the Reconstruction era. In turn, this migration led to expanding political opportunities for blacks and increased influence in terms of voting, which would later aid their cause when seeking expanded political rights (McAdam 1999).

#### *Countervailing Movements to Democratic Expansion*

Two important, yet divergent, movements of this time period affected the relative equality of groups that received constant preclusion from equal treatment in political affairs. One movement became a relatively successful political party, the Know-Nothings, and led to the restriction of rights for the growing immigrant population in the United States. The women's movement, which gained strength after the Civil War, planted the seeds for one of the largest expansions of political equality in the history of the United States.

The rise of the Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s found its roots in anti-immigrant and nativist biases of the time. Originally started as a secret organization, the group became

public in 1853 and had over a million members by 1854. While their platform included many progressive aspects, such as extension of property rights to women and an opposition to slavery, the main tenets of the party were grounded in opposition to immigrant and Catholic political rights. The party had considerable success in many states, as they took control of the governorships in nine states and control of state legislatures in six. Support for the party mainly came in states with large immigrant populations. The lasting effect of this movement for the purposes of an analysis of political equality is that, in large part due to efforts by this party, voter registration laws changed in many states to include more strict residency requirements, require lengthy time periods for naturalization, prevent immigrants from being able to vote even after naturalization, and establishing literacy tests (Keyssar 2000).

The women's rights movement had its seeds in the early nineteenth Century, as different movements to liberalize laws relating to women's equality were introduced in a number of states. The Married Women's Property Act, passed in New York in 1848, was a significant change from previous laws, which mainly prevented women from holding contracts, property, and wages once married. Modeled after English laws, the first law preventing such practices was passed in New York, which slowly spread to other states in the mid-nineteenth century (Chused 1985). Moreover, scholars have demonstrated that it became more economically beneficial for men to allow changes in these laws, as new markets were created (Geddes and Lueck 2001).

In many ways, these laws were among the first to grant relative equality in a variety of ways to women, who were still viewed as less than equal in terms of granting political rights, as the right to vote for this group eluded the movement for some time. Women,

while being viewed as intelligent and capable in many areas, were still viewed by many men in power as incapable of participating in the public and political spheres. In effect, the majority of laws treated them as part of the family, and largely viewed them as dependent upon men (Keyssar 2000).

The women's suffrage movement gained steam after the Civil War, as many saw the extension of suffrage to women as a logical extension once Constitutional amendments gave African-Americans legal rights. However, efforts to extend voting rights to women after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment were disappointing for the movement, as the Republican Party in many instances did not support the movement and at other times, was completely antagonistic to it. For example, the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment makes reference to "all persons" as being equal under the law, however in the second section it is made clear that in apportioning representatives, the document makes reference to "male citizens." Many in the women's rights movement, while agitated by this development, saw this as a clear failure and difficult barrier that had been added, as one of the leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued, "if that word 'male' is inserted, it will take us a century to get it out" (Keyssar 2000, p. 177).

Unfortunately for the women's right movement, the egalitarian expansion of the Reconstruction era had peaked with the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which did not extend to their cause. Despite defeats suffered by the women's rights movement in the 1860's, the movement carried on with a two-pronged approach—pressuring the federal government to enfranchise women as well as demanding state legislatures amend state constitutions. In most instances, referenda and efforts at the state level failed, yet many efforts succeeded in numerous localities. While there were frequent



failures at the state level, the movement grew substantially and did begin to garner the support of male voters in many areas of the nation. In 1890, the movement became more centralized, as two of the main competing organizations combined into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

At the turn of the century, NAWSA had offices in every state and continued pressure on politicians, both at the state and at the national level. Moreover, by 1917 the membership of NAWSA grew to an estimated 2 million members (Keyssar 2000, p. 212). At this time, the women's right movement began to win battles at the state level, as state legislators in multiple states granted women suffrage rights. Finally, in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified and the electorate doubled in size. The amendment barely made its way out of Congress, as it only received two votes more than the two-thirds threshold in the Senate (New York Times 1919). While the states ratified the treaty with the required three-fourths threshold, the remaining states took over sixty years to ratify, with Mississippi being the last state to do so in 1984.

While the fears of a completely changed political landscape did not come to fruition, new issues began to emerge on the political scene, giving greater voice not just to women, but children as well. The movement's success came after almost a seventy-year period that finally led to the largest extension of voting rights in American history. Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie R. Shuler, speaking of the eventual success in 1926, perhaps best sum up the struggle and achievements of this movement as they write:

To get the word 'male' in effect out of the Constitution cost the women of the country fifty-two years of pauseless campaign...During that time they were forced to conduct fifty-six campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get

Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get State constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions; 277 campaigns to get State party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms, and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses (quoted in Keyssar 2000, p. 172).

The women's rights movement remains one of the largest expansions of political equality in American history. While women continued to be treated as less than equal in many ways, the ability to participate politically was a significant step toward great egalitarianism of half the population. Moreover, this event and the many efforts of the movement itself represent a clear example of the fact that it has often been a protracted struggle to gain political equality for many groups in American history. The political decisions by men in positions of power continually frustrated and defeated efforts to expand suffrage rights to women until the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

#### *Expanding Democratic Representation to the Senate*

In 1913, the ability to directly elect members of the Senate was given to citizens in each state with the passage of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Until this time, state legislatures had the ability to choose Senators, which often led to decisions made by party insiders. Proponents of the amendment, largely led by the Progressive Party, argued it would increase accountability. The amendment was a culmination of efforts at the state level to change the way in which Senators were selected, and many states had already passed such requirements

by the time of its ratification (Gailmard and Jenkins 2009). Once again, the ability of mass-based political parties were effective in creating expansions of equality.

With the ability to directly elect Senators, citizens who could vote now enjoyed greater say in the affairs of Congress. In essence, this increased political equality among citizens in two main ways, the first being the ability to directly cast a ballot for candidates and the other the ability to participate in an increasingly competitive election environment. Scholars have also demonstrated that this amendment changed the voting patterns and behavior of politicians in the institution. Moreover, this amendment introduced incentives for senators to become more moderate as they now had to seek reelection (Bernhard and Sala 2006; Gailmard and Jenkins 2009).

As time passed, competition among candidates for the Senate became much more spirited than House races (Hinckley 1980; Kranso 1994). Moreover, Senators are more visible to voters (Squire 1992; Abramowitz 1988). Studies also show that voters are better able to recognize and recall information about Senate candidates over House candidates (Parker 1981).

### *Corporate Beginnings*

Beyond voting and citizenship rights changing during this era, the role of large financial institutions changed substantially as well. As the Industrial Revolution created advancements in commerce in the United States, the way in which businesses and corporations were viewed by law changed. In *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), corporations were ruled to have rights to contract, which were to be honored the same as contracts entered into by natural persons. However, the Court did not recognize

corporations as individuals under the law, a decision that would come many years later. The decision in the case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* (1886) recognized corporations as persons, citing the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. In effect, corporations were given equal rights both formally and in practice far before many citizens of the United States could taste the true nature of equality. The decision to identify corporations as persons was in many ways accidental, as the language was added later by the court reporter who wrote the introduction to the decision (Hartmann 2002).

The time period after the Civil War, with the budding industries of railroad expansion, resource extraction, telecommunications, and steam power led to a creation of wealth in many industries. Along with this wealth creation came the corruptive influence of money on politics, and the era came to be known as the Gilded Age. Large industries gained influence and dominated business. Standard Oil, Vanderbilt Steel, and J.P. Morgan were among the many businesses that became monopolies and not only dominated the business world, but gained substantial influence in the political world as well. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many firms began to merge, and trusts were formed. Wealth flowed to fewer and fewer sources, and large banks like J.P. Morgan benefited much more than others, controlling an estimated 40 percent of the total capital raised at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

When Theodore Roosevelt became president, he pushed for a policy of “trust-busting” and used the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 to break up large industries. In the landmark case of *Northern Securities Co. v. United States*, the Supreme Court agreed with the Roosevelt administration and dissolved Northern Securities, a railroad trust put together by J.P. Morgan and others. Future presidents would use a similar policy, albeit sparingly, and

other large trusts such as Standard Oil were broken up in 1911. As the dominant policy remained laissez-faire by political representatives of the time, these actions did little to break up the concentration of wealth, which largely remained in the hands of the few (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

The trust-busting policies were part of a broader movement of the time that aimed to counter the stains of the Gilded Era in which political and economic power were focused among the few. The Progressive Era witnessed many reforms, in which the main aim was to take power away from special interests and promote expansions of political equality to a greater number of people. Many reforms occurred at the state level in the form of “direct democracy” in the way of referendum, initiative, or the ability to recall officials (Donovan and Bowler 2004). Moreover, major changes to the Constitution took place during this era such as the direct election of Senators and institution of income tax.

The Sixteenth Amendment was a major expansion of political equality as it instituted an income tax, which allowed the government to raise revenue, largely by taxing those with the most wealth. The origin of the income tax came during the Civil War, in which the Union government needed to raise revenue to fund the war effort against the South. While there had been efforts to keep the tax since that time, Congressional policy often varied after the Civil War. In 1889, Thomas Shearman, a wealthy lawyer from New York, published an essay that was widely circulated titled “The Owners of the United States.” In this essay, Shearman detailed the vast amount of wealth that a few individuals had as well as the ability of the wealthy to evade taxation. Shearman argued that most of the tax burden since the end of the Civil War fell on working class Americans (Weisman 2002).

The effort to institute a national income tax was taken up by William Jennings Bryan, former Democratic Presidential candidate and current member of the House of Representatives. Bryan believed a national income tax was as a way to prevent the amassing of concentrated wealth (Weisman 2002). After bitter and partisan political battles between Republicans and Democrats, Congress eventually passed the institution of a nationwide income tax. However, the legislation that had passed proved to be a temporary victory, as the Supreme Court struck down the law. Therefore, the need for a constitutional amendment arose after Congress' attempt to tax incomes uniformly throughout the U.S. were held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1895 in the case of *Pollock v. Farmer's Loan & Trust Co.* A Constitutional Amendment was not ratified until 1913, with the support of Congress, Theodore Roosevelt, and the current President Woodrow Wilson as well (Weisman 2002).

A major piece of legislation that changed the course of the way the government would be involved in the economy was passed in 1913. The Federal Reserve Act prevented private banks from controlling the new banking system, yet did little to rein in the banks themselves. Efforts to create the Federal Reserve came after the Panic of 1907. This financial crisis led many to call again for a central bank, which could help stabilize the financial system. Congress created a special commission to investigate the causes of the crisis. The Pujos Committee reported that the control of the credit system was concentrated in the hands of a select group of Wall St. bankers, that used its influence to exert too much sway over the financial system. The final version of the Federal Reserve Act was a compromise between those who wanted stricter control of the banking industry, while at the same time allowing for a more central financial authority. The Federal Reserve Board would

now be appointed by the president, however the banks in the system remained private entities and were given the power to appoint two-thirds of their directors (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

Overall, this time period saw both efforts to expand and restrict political equality. While the actions of the Progressives were meant to counter-act the Gilded Age, the overall scale tipped drastically toward the wealthy. True, the Progressive Era did witness major successes with the adoption of the direct election of Senators and women gaining the right to vote. However, wealth remained concentrated, politicians corrupt, and a financial and governmental system that could not protect its citizens against the dangers of capitalism reigned. While the economy expanded greatly in the 1920s, problems with the financial system, and the government's inability and unwillingness to respond to such problems, was evident as the Roaring Twenties gave way to the Great Depression.

#### A New Deal and Civil Rights Expansion (1920-1960)

After women gained the right to vote in 1920, the period leading up to and after World War II was generally a period of stasis in terms of voting rights battles. Most issues that did come up had to do with residency requirements and registration procedures, but overall very few major changes took place. There were many battles over the use of poll taxes, as blacks as well as poor whites were kept from casting ballots under such laws. One of the reasons for this relatively stable period in terms of suffrage laws could be due to the overall lack of party competition during this era. Many states had one-party rule and the third parties that had sprouted in the previous century had mostly died out or lost any real political clout as the Republican and Democratic parties were strong. Moreover, the

grassroots social movements that had spearheaded efforts to expand the franchise had also subsided (Keyssar 2000). Major changes to the political landscape and political equality came as the economy reached unprecedented lows and millions struggled to get by.

The 1930s witnessed a period of time unlike any other in American history, as the Great Depression ravaged the country; President Roosevelt's actions were some of the first to directly extend political rights to poor Americans. In the previous century, the poor had been excluded from voting in almost a dozen states, reflecting previous beliefs that voting should be for those with independence. With so many affected by the Depression and millions left without a job, this view began to change. Moreover, the president embraced the view of broad suffrage rights, further helping to change restrictions against pauper's voting.

In addition to embracing a broader interpretation of voting that extended to the poor, the Roosevelt administration's policy of government spending and social programs was unlike any in American history. Previous approaches to a laissez-faire policy to the economy were largely abandoned, as the government took a new active role in social policy aimed at guiding the economy and helping those worst off. Roosevelt's New Deal policies created social safety nets such as Social Security (Social Security Act), improved working standards (Fair Labor Standards Act), and increased the tax burden on the wealthy and corporations (Wealth Tax Act). Moreover, with so many devoted to the war effort, Congress passed legislation that created the G.I. Bill in 1944, which helped military veterans pursue an education once their service was completed.

The Roosevelt administration also took on the power of banks, in many ways following the legacy of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, rather than Alexander Hamilton. While the administration and supporters in Congress pushed through many bills



in the 1930s to counteract the concentrated power of big banks, the Glass-Steagall Act was one of the most important. This act separated commercial and investment banking, which was an attempt to protect commercial banks from the more risk prone investment banks. This in turn forced large banks to split their operations, and J.P. Morgan created an investment firm known as Morgan Stanley. In addition to the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, banks were also subject to tighter regulation by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) which was created in the same year. Moreover, the governance of the Federal Reserve was reformed in the 1930s as well, which strengthened the authority of presidential appointees. Many of these reforms were also the result of compromise, as banks traded more strict regulation for government protection. Much of these efforts did have the effect of taking power from the banks and giving more power to the federal government, which in some ways expanded political equality, as concentrated financial power, while still present, was weakened in some ways.

Many of the governmental programs instituted during this time period had the effect of generating additional expansions of egalitarianism. For example, Campbell (2003) shows that Social Security aided the formation of the actively engaged population of senior citizens. Moreover, as Social Security gained in popularity and was confronted by weaknesses, interest groups for the elderly grew as well (e.g. AARP). Therefore, not only did the creation of Social Security help bring many elderly citizens out of poverty, but it also led to a more active citizenry among this group. Similarly, the G.I. Bill increased civic participation by more fully incorporating new citizens, even for those of less privileged backgrounds (Mettler 2002).

### *World War II and Egalitarianism*

America's entry into World War II largely put a hold on many actions to expand political equality. However, for the first time in the country's history, women entered the workforce in mass. The changing gender roles brought about by the war, in many ways, helped spur future changes as well. Soon after the war ended, women began to question their role in society, which led to a greater expansion of egalitarianism along gender lines. The war also created other opportunities of egalitarian expansion, as members of groups that had previously been disenfranchised fought alongside those that could vote. An embrace of democratic values as well as a desire to defeat Nazism helped create a situation in which many called for an end to discrimination on the domestic front. Moreover, suffrage rights began to undergo changes during the war, demonstrating the beginning of the major changes that would follow after the war ended.

Congress passed the Soldier Voting Act of 1942, which allowed soldiers to vote from overseas. While many states already had such laws in place, Congress federalized this right in 1944. Beyond expanding residency requirements for soldiers, this law was used by legislators to exempt soldiers from paying poll taxes, which were used regularly in the South. Moreover, in 1944, in the case of *Smith v. Allwright* the Supreme Court struck down white primaries. While this is a relatively little known decision, Thurgood Marshall, regarded it as his most important victory (Keyssar 2000). This ruling helped pave the way for future expansions in voting rights law in the next decade.

While the war did bring about many opportunities for change that expanded political egalitarianism, xenophobia certainly led to the curbing of equality for others as well. The internment of Japanese Americans by President Roosevelt during the war remains as one of

the clearest examples of the contraction of political rights and liberties in American history. By issue of executive order, the Roosevelt administration used the military to intern Japanese Americans for fear of espionage after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Relyea 1977). The suspension of habeas corpus at this time demonstrated the way in which governmental authority could be used to take away the rights of small groups in an unequal manner.

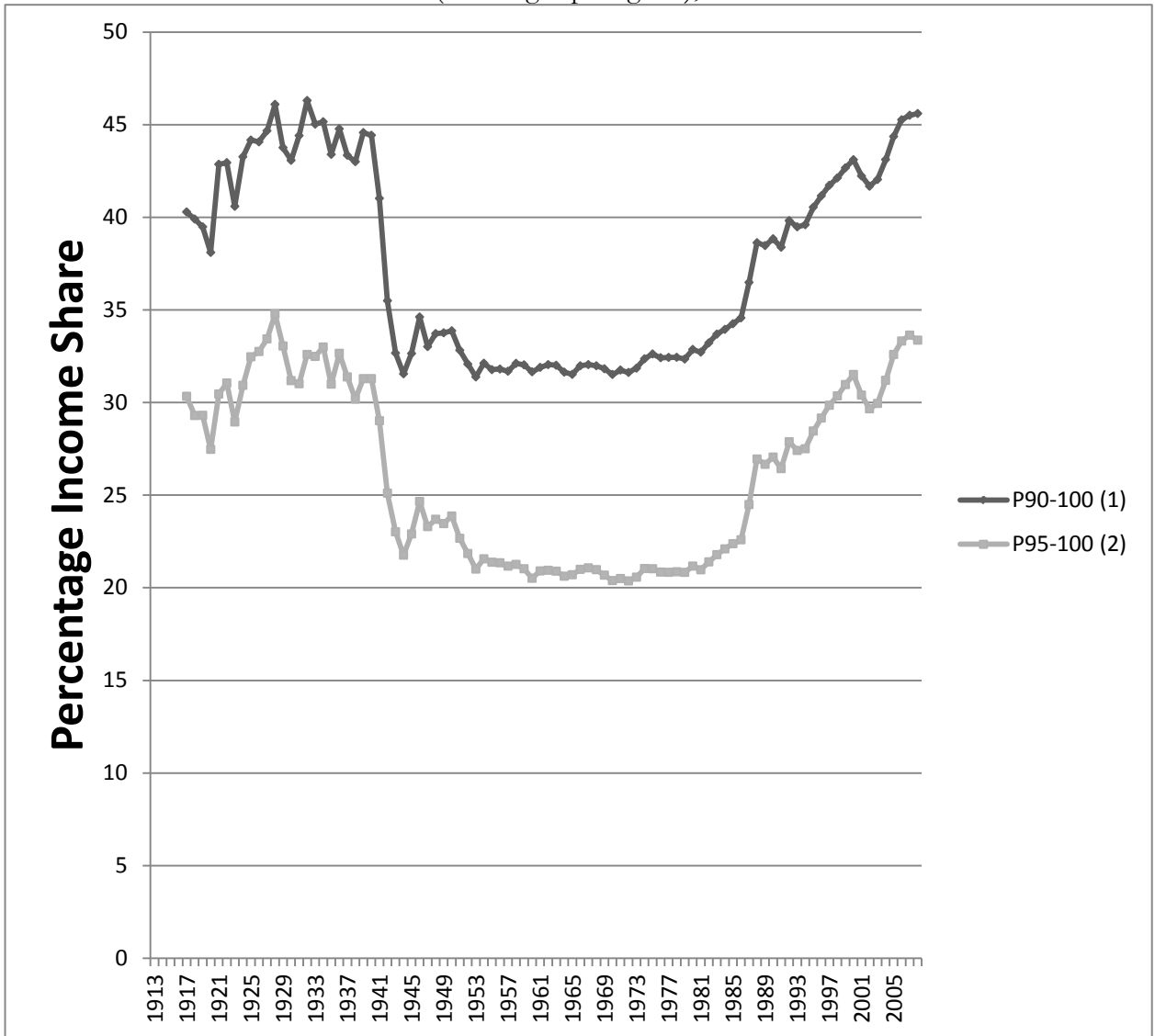
World War II, like many other periods of great change in American history, laid the groundwork for a time that would generate greater questioning of past ideals and practices. After the war ended, America's leading position in the world and economic growth created many changes to the political equality of its citizens.

#### *Post-War Egalitarian Expansions*

The 1950s were a time in which the pursuit of material happiness exceeded previous times in American history. Many Americans, perhaps in response to conditions incurred during the Great Depression and World War II, turned their attentions to the accumulation of material things. While post-war growth of the American economy led to increased living standards for many, the degree of political equality among most Americans was still uneven. African-Americans, still second-class citizens throughout America, but especially in the South, began to build a movement that would change their position in society drastically. Women, having garnered the right to vote before the war, and undergoing changing roles during the war, began to question their role in society and degree of equality as well. As the economy boomed, so too did the growth in incomes for many Americans. The middle class grew and wealth distributions stayed relatively stable in the post-war era (Piketty and Saez 2003). As can be seen from Figure 3, during the time in which America was involved in

World War II until the late 1970s, income shares going to the top five and ten percent were also relatively stagnant at this time.

**Figure 3**  
Top Tenth (P 90-100) and Fifth Percentile (P95-100)  
of Income Share (excluding capital gains), 1917-2008



Source: Piketty and Saez (2003). Income is defined as market income (and excludes government transfers).

In 1948, by executive order, President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. While such a policy had been lobbied by black organizations such as the NAACP for many years prior, this political decision was among the first to expand and aid the Civil Rights movement that would follow (McAdam 1999).

The 1950s saw a great increase in legal victories for African-Americans, highlighted by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. While these legal victories were a radical change from previous times in American history, it has been argued that they had relatively little effect in eliminating racial segregation in a variety of areas (Rosenberg 1993). Rather than change occurring after major Supreme Court decisions, it was only when the executive or legislative branches acted that substantive change occurred. Rosenberg argues that changing economic position, international pressure and migration from the South helped increase pressure for civil rights, which was reflected in Court decisions, not created by them. Despite exogenous pressures reflected in these decisions, they did provide groundwork and organizing strategy for those working for expansions of equality in the Civil Rights Movement.

While much action from the executive and legislative branches came in the 1960s, Congress did pass the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which was meant to respond to egalitarian demands of the time. The first Civil Rights Act was actually quite weak, and the result of compromises reached in Congress, as Southern senators filibustered and killed stronger bills. The 1957 Civil Rights Act created a national Civil Rights Commission, created a stronger Civil Rights division in the Justice Department, and allowed the attorney general of the U.S. to seek injunctions and file civil lawsuits in voting rights cases (Keyssar 2000). While additional action was taken with the passage of the 1960 Civil Rights Act, this legislation was

weak and African-American leaders criticized the legislation, as mass protests and civil disobedience continued throughout the South. Expansions to political egalitarianism were on the horizon, as the country entered one of its most tumultuous decades in its history.

### *The Great Society and the Second Reconstruction*

The 1960s witnessed one of the greatest expansions of political equality in American history. The Civil Rights Movement achieved multiple successes during this decade, as the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, ratified in 1964, formally prohibited literacy tests and economic barriers to voting (Keyssar 2000). The passage of this amendment came after the assassination of President Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson urged its passage as a tribute to Kennedy. Additionally, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, both much stronger pieces of legislation than were passed a decade earlier. Federal examiners were now monitoring voting practices in the South, and black registration and voting power increased substantially (Keyssar 2000). This legislation did not end racial discrimination or prevent all voting disenfranchisement, but the willingness of the federal government to back legislation and previous Supreme Court decisions led to clear expansions of political equality.

In addition to the elimination of literacy tests and poll taxes, the federal government also took steps to change lengthy residency requirements that prevented many from registering to vote. In the 1970 amendments to the Voting Rights Act, Congress prohibited states from imposing more than thirty-day residency requirements for federal elections and allowed those who moved less than thirty days before an election to have the ability to cast an absentee ballot (Keyssar 2000).

This era finally fulfilled many of the broken promises left over from the end of the Civil War. Scholars have put considerable attention to understanding the successes of the Civil Rights Movement during the second reconstruction. In one comprehensive analysis, Richard Valelly (2004) argues that institutional support for jurisprudence building and party building was stronger during the second reconstruction. The reform coalition during the first reconstruction not only had to work for reform, but also at strengthening the institutional framework that could enable the project. During the second reconstruction, the Supreme Court was cooperative and the parties were rebuilt. Moreover, during the second reconstruction both major parties gained from the incorporation of black southern voters, while this did not happen in the same manner during the first reconstruction. In terms of jurisprudence, during the second reconstruction it was heavily influenced by a favorable stance by the Court, whereas in the first reconstruction the Court was entirely hostile to voting rights legislation (Valelly 2004).

In addition to expansions of suffrage rights during this period, the efforts of the Johnson administration and the desire to use America's wealth to build a "Great Society" expanded political equality to many as well. During this time, Congress passed legislation that created Medicare and Medicaid programs, creating government programs to aid the poor and elderly. President Johnson also increased the amount of money to be distributed to cities, where many Americans now lived. The expanded distribution of money to cities helped protect many from the downsides of market capitalism, where high unemployment affected many different groups, especially ethnic minorities (Piven 1984). Another key piece of congressional legislation was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This legislation provided funding to localities to expand education to the populace, a trend that

continued with the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which aided an increase in demand for opportunities to achieve an education by providing low interest rates for student loans. These landmarks in legislation increased equality by providing a greater ability for citizens to achieve enlightened understanding.

### The End of the Great Society (1970-1990)

The Vietnam War, in many ways, ruined the chances of additional success for Johnson's Great Society. This war, and the government's handling of it, shined light on many areas in which political equality still suffered. The publishing of the Pentagon Papers and governmental efforts to suppress and limit dissent demonstrated that citizens' political equality was limited, as access to independent sources of information and the ability to participate freely and fairly suffered during this time. Moreover, young men were being sent to war, but were unable to participate fully in the political system.

Due to the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War, efforts to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 received stronger support. The voting age of 21 had been a colonial legacy and had generally been accepted as the status quo for much of American history. However, efforts to lower the voting age received the largest amount of support during major wars, as many serving overseas (and those drafted) could not participate in politics domestically. During World War II a constitutional amendment was drafted to lower the voting age, however the proposal died in committee. Youth and Veterans organizations attempted to change laws in the 1950s, yet these efforts did not often produce victories.

In the late 1960s however, new calls to lower the voting age took hold, as a movement to resist the draft and protest the war among young people grew. During this



time, many states acted to lower the voting age and members of both major political parties supported national efforts to expand suffrage to young people. Republicans often supported these efforts as a way to undermine arguments that the draft was undemocratic, and Democrats believed they could incorporate new voters. Additionally, new interest groups began to formally lobby members of Congress to reduce the voting age. These interest groups were made up of a diverse set of groups such as youth groups like Let Us Vote (LUV) and the Youth Franchise Coalition, as well as liberal activists, the NAACP, some veterans groups, and church organizations (Keyssar 2000).

In 1970, Senators Edward Kennedy, Warren Magnuson, and Majority Leader Mansfield included a proposal to lower the voting age in all federal elections to the Voting Rights Act. These Senators believed that Congress had the authority to expand the age requirement and that a constitutional amendment was unnecessary. The Senate approved the measure by a wide and bipartisan vote as an extension of the Voting Rights Act. While many members of the House believed the measure to be unconstitutional, they reluctantly supported the measure, as rejecting it would have risked delay to the Voting Rights Act. President Nixon, a known supporter of lowering the voting age, signed the bill into law although he too believed the measure to be unconstitutional. In *Oregon v. Mitchell* the Supreme Court narrowly upheld the measure. A major problem remained however, as a two-tiered age limit existed, as those older than eighteen could vote in federal elections, but not in most state elections. With the elections of 1972 approaching, Congress acted quickly to pass a constitutional amendment, thus eliminating the two-tiered system and the potential bureaucratic problems that might ensue. In March of 1971 the Senate approved an amendment without any dissenting votes, and the House followed a few weeks later with

only nineteen dissenting votes. State legislatures acted quickly to ratify, and the Twenty-sixth Amendment became law in 1971 (Keyssar 2000).

In the short time period since the early successes of the Civil Rights Movement, many of the major obstacles to suffrage had been eliminated. The culmination of these efforts was the “nationalization of the right to vote” as state control of suffrage was restricted in many ways. Barriers such as property, literacy, wealth and tax requirements had been broken. Moreover, the electorate expanded greatly, as African-Americans and young people could now vote. The requirement of bilingual ballots was included with the 1975 Voting Rights Act, and many language barriers were eliminated as well, thus expanding political equality in voting to those that struggled with the English language (Keyssar 2000).

During this time, both major political parties instituted key reforms in their organizations. First, both parties created a nationalization of their rules and procedures, which created less reliance on locally based party organizations and a stronger “national” party. Second, each party strengthened their resource base and level of professionalization of organizations at the local, state, and national level. These reforms led to primaries being the dominant way of selecting convention delegates, as opposed to the previous system which contained a more “behind the scenes” selection process by party insiders. In turn, this allowed the voters more power in selecting candidates that would run for office. The second aspect of reforms, which strengthened the national parties, in many ways took control for localities in shaping the direction of their parties (Jewell and Olson. 1988; Aldrich 1995).

### *Transformations in the Financial Sector*

Congress continued efforts to limit banking activities with the passage of the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956, the Savings and Loan Holding Company Act of 1967, and amendments to the Bank Holding Company Act in 1970 (Johnson and Kwak 2010). These pieces of legislation, on top of the other achievements of Johnson's Great Society, were representative of an effort by the federal government that had been present since the New Deal to shape society in a way that limited the power of large financial institutions and used the power of government to expand political equality to average Americans.

While banks had been limited by the Glass-Steagall Act since the 1930s, many efforts were made by the industry to get around these restrictions and expand the size and power of commercial and investment banks. While Congress had largely continued legislation aimed at limiting bank expansion after the initial New Deal legislation, the banking industry took a number of steps in the late 1970s that would increase their size and power, which would affect banking for years to come. Congress was facing a new political and economic climate, and the banking industry found loopholes that allowed large financial institutions to grow even larger (Jackson and Kwak 2010).

With the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, the New Deal coalition that had tied the Democratic Party together and led the direction to expand political equality in a number of ways had ended. Republicans would control the Presidency, and largely set the agenda, for the next thirty years. Peacetime recession and deregulatory policies led to a change of course for the degree of economic equality in America. During this time, the gap between rich and poor grew to unprecedented levels. Moreover, the gap between the top income earners and the rest of the nation expanded with each year. Inflation and a struggling economy kept

median-income for most Americans relatively stable over time, yet the percentage of income going to the top gradually increased. Moreover, differences in household income skyrocket for the top 1 percent from the 1980s until 2006.

While economists have explained this process by emphasizing such factors as changes in technology, educational gaps, and changes to the American economy, political explanations have been under-emphasized (Spilerman 2000; Neckerman and Torche 2007). However, as multiple scholars have begun to demonstrate, the increase in economic inequality in America is heavily influenced by political decisions and policy (e.g. Bartels 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010). As the government has become more involved in the modern economy, the political decisions by those in power (e.g. Congress, the president, etc.) have become more involved in decisions that directly bear on the relative economic inequality of Americans. In other words, as government officials moved away from a philosophy of *laissez faire* in the 1930s, many of the decisions they make (e.g. who to transfer money to) and the issues they take up (e.g. taxes, social welfare, etc.) directly affect the degree to which economic inequality exists.

This is also a phenomenon that occurs with divided and unified government, as well as control by either major political party. For example, Bartels (2008) finds evidence that the relative earning power of lower and middle income Americans is much better under Democratic presidents. While the major parties differ in their distributional outcomes, which is reflected in policy stances, each often bring forth major policies that affect economic equality (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Hibbs and Dennis 1988). Moreover, both parties have been subject to policy “drift,” a process in which policy makers fail to update policies in response to major changes (Hacker and Pierson 2010).

Overall, the period of Republican presidential leadership, beginning with Nixon, led to the restructuring of many factors that influenced political equality. However, the most significant changes to policies affecting political equality would come with the Reagan administration. This administration changed the way in which the government spent money, as it increased military spending, cut taxes for wealthy Americans, and deregulated many industries and cut government services. The success of a conservative administration led to a radically different way of allocating money to social programs, as programs were cut that provided money or assistance to the poor in terms of housing, food, health care, and direct cash payments (Piven and Cloward 1982). In addition to slashing social welfare programs, legislators in many ways failed to maintain the levels of funds needed to keep programs at levels that met growing needs of the population. Many of the programs that started during the Great Society experienced only modest growth, often not enough to keep up with their original intention. In fact, many policies (especially those related to social welfare) have experienced fundamental shifts (Hacker 2005).

While spending was slashed in many areas that affected social welfare programs, government spending did not decrease, as the Reagan administration oversaw the largest peacetime deficits in American history. Moreover, one of the greatest redistribution's of the tax burden occurred under Reagan, one that shifted the burden away from the wealthy (Gourevitch 1986).

Deregulation was also a key change in U.S. policy at this time. One of the first major enactments of deregulation promoted by the Reagan administration came in 1982, with the passage of the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act. This piece of legislation lifted many of the regulations that affected the savings and loan industry, creating huge profits for

large financial institutions. Moreover, the bill allowed state-chartered banks to offer mortgages with adjustable rates, as well as other constraints on mortgage lending for national banks. This legislation was one of the first pieces of policy that would lead to bigger banking and an expansion in the power of large financial institutions as well as large-scale problems in the capital market (e.g. Savings and Loan crisis of the late 1980s). Additional legislation loosened the regulation of banks with the passage of the Secondary Mortgage Market Enhancement Act of 1984 and Tax Reform Act of 1986. These new laws helped create additional markets for investment banks (Johnson and Kwak 2010).

### *A Defeat for Equal Rights*

An amendment to the U.S. Constitution that had long been in the works finally approached the ratification process in the 1970s, although its ultimate failure again demonstrated the way in which the structure of American government prevented expansions of political equality. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was drafted to prevent discrimination based on sex. The proposed amendment would give Congress the authority to enforce the following provision, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” In 1972, the ERA passed the Senate with only 8 votes against it and a majority of Americans favored the amendment. However, after 10 years, the deadline for ratification passed and there were not enough states supporting ratification. In fact, the amendment was only 3 states short of achieving ratification, but over the course of those ten years public support declined in many key states. Opponents argued the ERA would be interpreted by the courts too liberally and major changes would have to occur, such as women being sent into combat on the same

basis as men. With the recent Supreme Court decision of *Roe v Wade* in 1973, opponents turned the ERA into a referendum on that decision, arguing that feminism had gone too far (Mansbridge 1986). While it is unlikely that the ERA would have made the radical changes to society that opponents argued, the failure in the ratification process was a significant setback for equal rights, even if it was largely a symbolic one.

#### The Modern Era and Political Equality (1990s-Present)

The 1990s witnessed a continuation of previous politics in a number of ways. With the Clinton administration's failure to pass health care reform and the Republican Party taking control of Congress, efforts to renew government involvement like the years of the Great Society were frustrated. Clinton ran as a "new Democrat" and his platform was a far cry from policies pushed during the Democratic Party in the 1960s. Clinton was a former chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which was founded in the 1980s as a way to moderate the Democrats. Once in office, the Clinton administration pushed welfare reform, which passed in 1996 under the title "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act." Reforms to the welfare system were significant, as new rules prevented individuals from receiving welfare for more than 24-months, and put a 5-year cap on government assistance (Brewer and Stonecash 2009). This had the effect of decreasing political equality for many poor Americans, as they were less protected from the dangers of market capitalism.

The Clinton administration also continued the dismantling of the regulatory regime that had been built since the New Deal. The Riegle-Neal Act of 1994 and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999 were two significant pieces of legislation that weakened regulation

of the financial system. The former eliminated most restrictions on interstate banking, which allowed companies to acquire banks in any state, while the latter got rid of the barriers that separated commercial and investment banks (Jackson and Kwak 2010). While the economy boomed in the 1990s, real income growth for most Americans stayed relatively stable; however inequality grew as the top income holders continued growth (Piketty Saez 2003).

The introduction of the Internet and its growth in the 1990s and 2000s represents a way in which political equality had the opportunity to expand, largely by allowing citizens the ability to access independent sources of information. Moreover, with access to more sources of information and decreased costs of participating, it is possible that this new technology could decrease the participatory gap between rich and poor. However, recent studies have demonstrated reason for skepticism in this regard, as large gaps remain in both Internet access and participatory activity between socioeconomic groups (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010).

#### *Continued Deregulation in the Bush Era*

With the election of George W. Bush in 2000, the United States witnessed additional years of deregulation and decreased social spending. The country experienced record deficits with the funding of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which was mixed with massive tax cuts for the wealthy. Corporate taxes also continued to decrease and efforts to repeal the estate tax, which only affected the wealthiest Americans (less than 2 percent of the population), were continually pushed in Congress. Two of the largest reductions in federal



income taxes occurred in 2001 and 2003, as Congress passed key pieces of President George W. Bush's agenda to reduce taxes (Bartels 2008).

The Bush period was a time in which deregulation and concern for corporate profits led to abuses in the financial sector, often at the cost of the less well off. Corporate scandals such as the Enron bankruptcy led to responses by Congress to push back with legislation such as the Sarbanes-Oxley bill in 2002, which required more strict requirements for corporate financial statements (Jackson and Kwak 2010). While Congress instituted some legislation to try to prevent corporate abuses, the dominant trend of the deregulation era continued. Moreover, Congress also passed legislation that made changes to the bankruptcy law in 2005, as the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 made it more difficult for citizens to declare bankruptcy, and thus protect themselves from the harms of capitalism. This bill passed with bipartisan support, demonstrating the shifting political climate of the era.

The influence of money on politics was a hot topic during this time, as efforts by Congress to limit the influence of private interests were often met with resistance. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act attempted to limit the influence of private companies, organizations and individuals on campaigns. The most recent defeat of these efforts came with the Supreme Court decision in early 2010 in *Citizens United v. FEC*. In this narrow 5 to 4 decision, the Court again equated money with speech (as it had in *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976). The Court again affirmed that corporations have the same rights as individuals when it comes to political speech. In effect, the Court ruled that Corporations could not be prevented from using their profits to endorse candidates (Barnes and Eggen 2010). This is

perhaps one of the most recent examples of political equality being curbed, one that will likely have significant effects on American political life for years to come.

### American Egalitarianism Appraised

As a brief historical analysis has demonstrated, the relative political equality of many Americans has changed drastically over the course of American history. While many of these changes were due to the actions of those in positions of power and privilege, most of the instances in which political equality has expanded have been the result of various actors wresting power from them. Many Constitutional Amendments made it out of Congress with a bare majority (e.g. 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment), the ratification process take an extended period of time, and state representatives often stood in the way of expansions of equality.

While political equality has improved in many areas (e.g. voting rights, elimination of laws that formally discriminate, etc.), there are other ways in which things are far from equal for many Americans (e.g. wealth distribution, political participation, etc.). In almost every historical event highlighted in this chapter, the political decisions made to expand equality were the result of demands from the public being frustrated for long periods of time, until a bare majority of representatives (those with power and in positions of privilege) cede power themselves. This pattern is a somewhat different view from that provided by some normative democratic theory, which paints legislators as acting on behalf of constituent interests. Representatives have, in many instances, gone to great lengths to prevent their constituencies from expanding, have actively favored certain groups over others, and have often stood in the way of expansions of political equality to many Americans.

### *Institutions and Political Equality*

Those serving in positions of power in political institutions are not the only factor that affects political equality. The interplay between individuals and institutions must be taken into account when trying to understand the ways in which political equality has expanded. The American government was set up to prevent large-scale changes, which has frustrated many social movements demanding political equality for the disenfranchised. However, the prevention of large scale change is a double edged sword, as institutions will work to protect equality once established. One example of this comes from the successes of the Civil Rights movement, when each branch of government began working to protect civil rights in the late 1960s, African-Americans experienced numerous expansions in their ability to participate in the political system in a more equal manner.

Another of the ways in which an expansion of political rights took place was the advocacy and desire of political parties to expand their electoral base. Parties developed as a solution to the collective action problem and were a vehicle for both preventing and instituting expansions of political equality. In other words, the “institutionalized coalitions” of political parties are strong forces affecting political equality in America (Aldrich 1995). Individuals within the party pushed to expand coalitions and incorporate new voters in order to win elections.

Two other examples illustrate the way in which institutions (e.g. political parties) and individuals (e.g. voters, protesters) interacted to affect the relative political equality of American citizens. In a case of expansion of political equality, the Democratic Party worked to expand its coalition of voters during the Second Reconstruction, and fought for formal changes in the law and mobilized citizens to vote. An example of contracting political

equality came with the successes of the Know-Nothing party, which worked to mobilize voters to counter-act the growing power of immigrants. This party deflated the rights of many by changing state laws and adding barriers to suffrage for new citizens (Keyssar 2000; Aldrich 1995). A broad trend that emerges is that parties are often at the forefront of battles involving political equality. This is not surprising, given the fact that scholars have demonstrated that the major political parties often have different distributional goals and represent different groups of voters (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Brewer and Stonecash 2009). However, it should be noted again that parties are made up of political representatives in a hierarchical manner too, and parties only act as agents that expand political equality when their leaders see it as politically expedient.

In addition to governmental institutions that affect political equality, financial institutions can also have a great impact on individual political equality. During the periods in American history that witnessed the largest expansions in terms of wealth creation, one of the main forces acting to prevent the egalitarian nature of monetary flow has been large financial institutions. These institutions expanded greatly during the nation's founding with the creation of the Bank of the United States, the economic boom of the 1830s and 1840s, the Gilded Age, the 1920s, the 1960s, and the 1980s-1990s. During each of these times, those who owned banks, stock, and investment firms gained substantially more than others (Phillips 2002). With the expansion in economic inequality during this time came unequal political power and influence, who often funded the campaigns of political representatives or served in these positions themselves.

### *The Structure of American Government*

One theme that is often present in efforts to expand political equality in America is that the founding governmental structure that was set up to prevent quick and broad changes has, in many ways, frustrated and stalled the progress of countless social movements aimed at expanding equality. Clear examples of this process can be seen with the protracted movements to expand suffrage to women and African-Americans. Each of these groups were seen as not deserving of political rights at the founding, and this trend remained strong for much of American history in the mindset of future representatives. Moreover, the original design of the national legislature, while having undergone many changes, continues to provide slow and gradual changes in policy. This effect is often compounded in the modern era of political polarization with the constant use of the filibuster as a tool of minority obstruction (Pierson and Hacker, 2010).

Despite gaining political equality in terms of the right to vote, the lasting effects of preventing these groups from voting are visible in the turnout rates of formerly disenfranchised groups. The comparably lower rates of turnout among previously disenfranchised groups affects representation in government and the types of candidates elected to serve (Hajnal 2010). Therefore, at many levels of government, and especially at the national level, the difficulty of formerly discriminated against groups to achieve descriptive or substantive representation remains. In this way, many of Dahl's characteristics of political equality suffer, as inclusion, effective participation, and a final say in the decision making process all remain unequal.

While the American government was in many ways set up by Madison to prevent tyranny of the majority, the historical analysis presented in this chapter adds to the evidence

that a steady appeasement of small groups of citizens has been a frequent occurrence (Dahl 1956). However, this appeasement has largely excluded ethnic minorities and groups that had received formal discrimination.

Another area for which political egalitarianism has often struggled to make a strong foothold is in the economic arena. As Dahl pointed out in *On Political Equality*, the dangers of market capitalism have prevented, and still prevent, political egalitarianism from being accomplished in America. A summary of Dahl's criteria for political equality comparing the founding to the modern era can be seen in Table 1. While this table is a rough estimate of the degree to which American citizens contain each aspect of political equality highlighted by Dahl, it shows that political equality has increased in many areas, yet remains far from achieving the ideal. Moreover, this table illustrates the founding nature of representation, with political equality being at very low points for most Americans. It has taken many struggles by those without power and privilege to wrest control from those controlling it, as the table also demonstrates improvements in the modern era.

Table 1. Comparison of Political Equality at Founding and Modern Era

Dahl's Characteristics of Political Equality	Degree to which this occurred at the Founding	Degree this occurs fully in modern society	Examples of Changes since the Founding	Main Cause(s) of Change
Effective participation	Low	Medium	Majority-Minority districts, 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Supreme Court rulings, Congressional action, Social Movements
Equality in voting	Low	High	14 <sup>th</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> , 19 <sup>th</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> Amendments, Voting Rights Acts	Social Movements, Political Parties, Congressional action
Ability to achieve enlightened understanding	Medium	High	Increased access to college, G.I. Bill, Internet	Technological changes, Congressional legislation
Final control of the agenda	Low	Low/Medium	Ability to directly elect most representatives, 17 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Political Party action, Social Movements
Inclusion	Low	Medium	13 <sup>th</sup> , 14 <sup>th</sup> , 19 <sup>th</sup> Amendments	Social Movements, Congressional action
Fundamental rights	Low	Medium	Bill of Rights	Elite decision-making
Important governmental decisions are adopted by officials chosen in popular elections.	Low	Medium	Initiative process, 17 <sup>th</sup> Amendment, Party Primary Reforms	Progressive Reforms/Social Movements
Participate freely in a fair environment	Low	High	Australian ballot, election observers, 24 <sup>th</sup> Amendment, Voting Rights Acts	Social Movements, Political Party action
Run and serve in elective office	Low	Medium	State Reforms	Political Party action
Express themselves publicly	Low	Medium	Internet, Bill of Rights	Technological changes, Elite decision-making
Seek out independent sources of information.	Low	Medium	Internet, Television, Newspapers	Technological changes
Protection from continuing harms of market capitalism	Low	Medium	Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Welfare	Elite decision making, Social movements, Political Party action

Clearly, not all groups of citizens enjoy the same levels of political equality as others in the modern era. While the right to vote has expanded to near universal suffrage, children, felons in many states, and the mentally ill are prevented from voting. Immigrants still suffer from overt discrimination and bigotry in many localities. Gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals are prevented from equal political rights throughout the nation, as many cannot get married or adopt children. Moreover, with the growth in economic inequality over time, and the drastic inequality of the past thirty years, those with less often lose out to those with more wealth in the political arena (e.g. Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008). Not only has wealth inequality increased drastically in recent times, but racial inequality seems to have either remained stagnant or gotten worse since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, an era that seemed to present the opportunity for large-scale changes to the historical inequalities. While many socio-economic indicators suggest vast improvement, substantial gaps between whites and blacks exist in terms of educational attainment, access to health care, criminal punishment, and wage differentials.

Clearly, inequalities exist in present-day America. While inequalities will always exist in any society, the normative question of *how much* inequality is tolerable remains one of the most pressing questions for citizens. Public opinion polling allows us to examine what the American public thinks the answer to this question is and the degree to which public officials should address the issue. Therefore, the next chapter takes up the issue of the degree to which citizens care about inequality as well as how well citizens hold their elected officials accountable for these views.



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## Chapter 3

### American Attitudes Toward Economic Inequality

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In the early fall of 2011, protesters gathered at Zuccotti Park to ‘Occupy Wall St.’ and draw attention to a variety of economic and social problems facing the nation. Upset with corporate greed, and a lack of prosecution of individuals in the financial industry viewed as largely responsible for the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, protesters were particularly disturbed by the growth in wealth and income inequality in the United States. These protests soon grew beyond Wall St. and sprouted up across the United States to more than 100 localities (and across the globe) by mid-October (Buckley and Donadio 2011).

As the growth of this movement coincided with a Republican Party primary contest, potential presidential candidates criticized the movement for a variety of reasons. Among the most vocal critics was Herman Cain, former CEO of Godfather’s Pizza, who proclaimed in a debate:

Don’t blame Wall Street, don’t blame the big banks, if you don’t have a job and you’re not rich, blame yourself! It is not a person’s fault because they succeeded, it is a person’s fault if they failed. And so this is why I don’t understand these demonstrations and what is it that they’re looking for (Bingham 2011).

Cain's comments were roundly cheered by the debate audience and the candidate soon began to rise in the polls, becoming a frontrunner in the primary field by late October (Somashekhhar 2011). In many ways, Cain's comments represent what we might expect a significant number of Americans to believe (albeit articulated in more extreme language). The widespread belief in the idea that hard work leads to success and the 'American Dream' has long been part of the American creed (Hanson and Zogby 2010). In fact, scholarship shows that not only are Americans more accepting of economic inequality than comparable democracies (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005), but that those in the lower classes do not support wealth redistribution (Hochschild 1981).

Despite a large amount of scholarship detailing the rise in inequality over time (e.g. Piketty and Saez 2003; Smeeding 2005; Bartels 2008), relatively little is known about American public opinion on issues related to economic inequality. While previous research has examined American public opinion on social welfare policies and inequality (e.g. McClosky and Zaller 1984; Bartels 2008; Jacobs and Page 2009; McCall and Kethworthy 2009) few have studied which groups are most supportive of reducing wealth inequality or even the reasons behind this support. To the extent that public policy in a democratic polity is expected to reflect the public's will, understanding public attitudes toward inequality and the policies that relate to it is central to understanding the sources and nature of inequality in the United States.

This chapter examines the extent to which the American people support reducing large differences in incomes between the rich and poor. Moreover, this paper explores the reasons behind the differences in public opinion on this subject by examining whether group status, self-interest, or political explanations (e.g. partisanship and ideology) best explain

Americans' attitudes toward wealth inequality. This chapter is among the first to examine the reasons behind support for reducing inequality by testing four possible explanations of Americans' attitudes on inequality, thus shedding light on the way in which Americans form attitudes about wealth inequality in a time in which it has increased drastically.

### *Economic Inequality in American Society*

The growth in wealth inequality may be the defining feature of the contemporary era. Comparatively, the U.S. stands out, having the highest level of economic inequality of any rich OECD<sup>4</sup> country at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Smeeding 2005). While many have experienced only modest gains in real income since World War II, those at the top have enjoyed massive increases. Additionally, since the 1980s, the growth in income and wealth among the top five percent has increased substantially, yet the other ninety-five percent have seen little or no increase. Furthermore, the most dramatic gains over the past 30 years are concentrated among the top one percent (Piketty and Saez 2003). This extreme concentration of wealth among the wealthiest of the wealthy has led some to refer to the recent era as the “New Gilded Age” (Bartels 2008).

Despite the perceived negative impact of wealth inequality on American democracy very little is known about the degree to which Americans are supportive of redistributive efforts that might narrow the wealth gap (e.g. APSA Task Force 2004). In fact, research in the public opinion literature has tended to focus on views of political, rather than economic inequality (e.g. McClosky and Zaller 1984; Page and Shaprio 1992).

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<sup>4</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was established in 1961 and includes 34 members, many of which are the most economically wealthy countries in the world.



### *The American View of Inequality*

It seems to be a given that people should care about inequality, as this concept is key to so many aspects of people's lives. From the power of their voice in government to their ability to make a living, issues of inequality are always present. In terms of political equality, or the idea that all citizens have equal power in the political system (e.g. voting rights, freedom of expression, right to run for office, etc.), most Americans and democratic theorists assert this as a valued goal. In fact, as previous research shows, mass opinion is clearly in support of political equality in terms of everyone having a chance to influence government in an equal manner (McClosky and Zaller 1984). While Americans largely support equal opportunity, they demonstrate greater acceptance of economic inequality than do citizens in other advanced democracies (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005).

Conventional wisdom seems to hold that Americans are not in favor of wealth redistribution. Gallup polls, for example, show Americans divided in terms of redistributing wealth or taxing the wealthy (Sadd 2011). In a recent experimental study, researchers found Americans of all stripes to desire a more equal distribution of wealth, yet the authors write:

Americans exhibit a general disconnect between their attitudes toward economic inequality and their self-interest and public policy preferences, suggesting that even given increased awareness of the gap between ideal and actual wealth distributions, Americans may remain unlikely to advocate for policies that would narrow this gap (Norton and Ariely 2011).

The conventional wisdom in political science closely mirrors the belief that a majority of Americans do not favor wealth redistribution and are not divided along class

lines (e.g. Erikson and Tedin 1995). Jennifer Hochschild (1981), in her seminal work on American beliefs about redistributive policies uses survey evidence and in-depth interviews to find that, “poor Americans do not seek a downward redistribution of wealth” (p. 278). In fact, much of the author’s work is devoted to understanding why poor Americans *do not* favor redistribution.

As was pointed out in the previous section, however, wealth inequality has increased greatly in the United States since the early 1980s. Along with these changes in inequality, opinion might be changing as well. Recent studies demonstrate Americans are concerned about the extent and rise of economic inequality (Bartels 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009). Moreover, many Americans support programs for those struggling economically, often through a variety of social welfare policies (McClosky and Zaller 1984). Therefore, the American view of inequality is much more complex than might be expected.

#### *The Changing View of Wealth Redistribution in the United States*

One of the key ways in which we can examine the public’s view on equality is to monitor the view that people have on the government taking action toward reducing income differences. The 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) allows for an examination of this issue as respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed “The federal government trying to reduce the income differences between rich and poor Americans.” Over the course of the 2004 Presidential campaign, about 37,000 respondents were asked this question. In total, 61 percent of respondents indicated that they favored the government attempting to reduce the differences between rich and poor Americans. Tables 1-3 display descriptive statistics on this question, broken down by different categories.

**Table 2.** Bivariate Relationship for Percent Supporting Reducing Inequality (NAES 2004)

<i>Age</i>	Percent in agreement	<i>Education</i>	Percent in agreement
Under 30	70	Below High School	65
30-40	62	High School	65
40-50	62	Some College	62
50-65	57	College degree	57
Over 65	56	Graduate degree	60
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Race</i>	
Male	56	Latino	70
Female	65	Black	70
		Asian	70
		White	59

What is striking about these tables is that the vast majority of groups seem to favor the government taking action to reduce income differences. As seen in Table 2, large differences exist between age cohorts, as younger groups have a much higher level of support for reducing inequality than older generations. Racial and gender differences are evident as well. Whites exhibit much lower support for reducing inequality than do minorities. Females are more supportive of the government reducing inequality than men. Substantial differences are not evident for groups with different educational backgrounds, yet small differences are present, as those with more advanced degrees are the least supportive of the government reducing inequality.

**Table 3.** Bivariate Relationship for Percent Supporting Reducing Inequality (NAES 2004)

<i>Party Identification</i>	Percent in agreement
Democrat	75
Independent	63
Republican	43
<i>Ideology</i>	
Very Liberal	81
Liberal	75
Moderate	65
Conservative	49
Very Conservative	41

As seen in Table 3, some of the largest differences exist between those identifying with different political parties or self-described liberals and conservatives. A 32-point difference is present between Democrats and Republicans, while a 40-point difference exists between liberals and conservatives.

**Table 4.** Bivariate Relationship for Percent Supporting Reducing Inequality (NAES 2004)

<i>Class</i>	Percent in agreement
Lower Class	70
Middle Class	62
Upper Class	49
<i>Rate Personal Economic Situation</i>	
Poor	72
Fair	68
Good	54
Excellent	43
<i>Rate Country's Economic Situation</i>	
Poor	74
Fair	64
Good	44
Excellent	34

Turning to Table 4, the degree to which an individual rates their own economic situation and that of the country's economic situation also creates large differences in the likelihood of their support for reducing inequality. Those in the lower classes have much higher support than those in the upper class.

Taken together, these findings suggest a marked change in opinion when compared to polls taken much earlier in American history on the same subject. For example, Hochschild (1981) uses polling data from 1937-1976 to show that a majority of Americans are generally opposed to reducing income differences. Moreover, while differences exist between groups, I am interested in explaining support for reducing inequality *above and beyond*

a bivariate relationship. For this, a multivariate analysis that controls for many of the factors that influence political behavior is necessary. Before turning to this analysis, it is necessary to discuss some of the main ways in which Americans tend to divide over political affairs, as these are likely to influence views toward wealth inequality as well.

### Divisions in American Politics

Four dominant cleavages are generally used to explain the way people participate in the political system as well as view the political world. Partisanship, ideology, group position, and self-interest are four of the most dominant ways in which people are said to participate in politics.<sup>5</sup> While each of these concepts are generally seen as encompassing something unique, each is also interrelated to the other (e.g. partisanship is often viewed as a group identification). In the following section, I explain the underpinnings of each political cleavage, which might explain differences in opinion about wealth inequality.

#### *Partisanship*

Partisanship remains one of the most powerful explanations of political behavior in American politics. This concept is seen as more than just a running tally of political assessments, and is viewed as an enduring attitude and/or identity that continues to shape individual behavior toward political objects (e.g. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Niemi and Weisberg 1983; Whitefield and Evans 1999; Brader and Tucker 2001;

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<sup>5</sup> Other explanations such as socialization likely play a role in people's attitudes on inequality as well, however data limitations do not allow me to test this specification.

Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Bartels 2002; Dancygier and Saunders 2006; Gerber, Huber, and Washington 2010). Some have conceptualized partisanship as a longstanding attitude and/or affective orientation (e.g. Campbell et. al 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996); others as a product of evaluations of parties, candidates, economic conditions (e.g. Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983); and still others as a schema of political attitudes (e.g. Hamill and Lodge 1986; Rahn 1993). Despite these differences in conceptualization, most agree that partisanship is an evaluative response toward political parties as well as an instance of group identification (Greene 2002).

As Democrats and Republicans tend to see the political world differently, it is likely that party identification also drives differences in support for reducing economic inequality in the United States (e.g. Bartels 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010). I expect *party identification* to help explain the degree to which an individual supports governmental action to reduce inequality. As parties build coalitions with differing distributional goals, I expect to find partisans to have clear differences in opinion in terms of leveling (e.g. Tufte 1978; Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Brown 1995; Greenberg 2004; Bartels 2008). I expect self-identifying Republicans to be less likely to support reducing income differences between the rich and poor than Democrats. As the major parties generally push for different approaches to the economy, with Democrats generally favoring government intervention and Republicans generally opposed, the expectation of partisan differences toward wealth inequality is likely to hold as well.

## *Ideology*

As opposed to partisanship, ideology reflects an individual's core philosophical values, such as equality, tradition, liberty, and individual responsibility. An ideology can be seen as a set of beliefs about the political world, the proper order of society, and how this order is best to be achieved (e.g. Converse 1964; Erikson and Tedin 1995). Political ideology is generally conceptualized on a left-right ideological continuum, as individuals are classified according to their relative liberalism or conservatism.<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, ideology can be seen as a worldview, rather than an affective attachment to any given political party or candidate. While self-described liberals may tend to side more with the Democratic Party, this type of association is not always the case. A person might vote for the Democrats, yet their economic ideology might be conservative. Therefore, ideology could play a large role in predicting one's view of how the government should act to alleviate economic inequality.<sup>7</sup> I expect self-identifying liberals to be more likely to support the government taking an active role to reduce differences between the rich and poor, while conservatives to be much less supportive. As liberals generally favor government aid to the poor and increases in social spending, while conservatives generally oppose such efforts, the expectation that there will be ideological differences on the issue of wealth inequality is likely to be present as well.

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<sup>6</sup> While political elites are seen to have very clear ideological beliefs (e.g. Herrera 1992; Jennings 1992), there is much more debate as to the extent to which the mass public has a consistent ideological view (e.g. Converse 1964; Luttbeg and Gant 1985).

<sup>7</sup> It is possible (and entirely probable) that opinions on inequality contribute to one's ideological orientation or that they may influence each other.

### *Group Position*

A large strand of research in American politics makes the case that political behavior is best predicted by a members' association with one or more groups (e.g. Truman 1951; Schattsneider 1960; Olson 1971). Moreover, those studying racial politics in American society often find racial or ethnic group membership to be a significant predictor of voting behavior (e.g. Conover 1984, 1988; Dawson 1994; Bobo 2000). This research largely stems from social psychological research that points to differences in group behavior based on social status indicators such as race, gender, etc. (e.g. Tajfel & Turner 1986; Bobo, Kluegel, Smith 1997; Sidanius and Pratto 1999).

As an individual's group position can predict political behavior, it might also predict attitudes toward inequality as well. Thus, this explanation focuses on the role of social status as an important predictor of group behavior and stems from social psychological research that points to differences in group behavior based on social status indicators such as race, etc. (e.g. Tajfel & Turner 1986; Bobo, Kluegel, Smith 1997; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). I expect lower status groups will be more likely to support a reduction in income differences than groups with higher status. This is largely due to acceptance with the status quo, as high status individuals will be more likely to oppose efforts at change than those in lower status groups. In other words, the groups that will be most likely to support reductions in inequality will be those groups generally viewed as being on the bottom of societal hierarchies. Therefore, an individual's status in terms of *education*, *race*, and *age*, and *gender* should predict support for reducing inequalities. I expect the groups to be most supportive of reducing inequality to be the less educated, young people, and ethnic minority groups (Blacks and Latinos).



### *Economic Self-Interest*

Another school of thought that predicts how individuals behave in the political world is based on their own economic self-interest. Literature that examines economic self-interest and voting decisions during the time of an election, is that of “pocketbook” or “sociotropic” voting. An individual is said to vote with their “pocketbook” if their political choices are driven by their personal economic situation and will therefore reward the party in power when their financial situation is good and punish candidates when their finances are bad (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960). On the other hand, “sociotropic” voters behave politically based on the national economic conditions and reward or punish candidates based on the country’s economic health (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979, 1981; Feldman 1982; Weatherford 1983; Markus 1988).

While pocketbook and sociotropic political behavior are generally used to examine voting preferences, the same logic applies to an individuals’ view on the government taking action to reduce inequality. Those who perceive their *personal economic situation* as excellent or see overall *national economic conditions* as favorable to them are probably more likely to favor the status quo and thus not be in favor of the government taking action to reduce income differences. Similarly, an individual’s economic *class* might also influence their opinion toward wealth redistribution. In fact, recent studies find differences based on economic class across a number of issues (e.g. Jacobs and Page 2005; Griffin and Newman 2007; Griffin and Flavin 2007; Bartels 2008; Gilens 2009).

## Data and Methods

I test the degree to which each of the political cleavages outlined in the previous section influences the reasons some Americans are highly supportive of the government taking action to reduce income inequalities and others are not. I employ three different dependent variables to measure the *Inequality Opinion* of individuals. I do this in order to measure attitudes at different points in time and under different question wordings in order to gain increased robustness and have a clearer view American opinion about inequality. As each of the dependent variables is dichotomous, I employ a probit regression for each model.

The first measure of the dependent variable (*Inequality Opinion*) comes from the 2004 NAES question asking respondents whether they support or oppose the government taking action to reduce income differences between rich and poor. I code this dependent variable *Government Action Against Inequality* as support (1) and oppose (0).

I also examine *Inequality Opinion* at different points in time by employing the General Social Survey (GSS) in each of the years they asked questions related to inequality (1987, 1996, and 2000). The measure of *Inequality Opinion* is taken from the GSS, and is similar to the NAES question asks respondents their level of agreement with the idea that “differences in income in America are too large.” I code this dependent variable *Income Gap* as a dichotomous measure, with agreement with the statement coded as 1 and disagreement as 0.

The GSS also asks respondents their opinion on whether the rich should pay a greater share of taxes, allowing for an alternative measure of *Inequality Opinion*. For this dependent variable *Increase Rich Taxes*, I recoded responses into a dichotomous variable in which respondents either agree (coded 1) that the rich should pay a higher share of taxes, or

disagree, in that they should pay a smaller share (coded 0). The advantage of these three measures of the *Inequality Opinion* are that we can see how Americans view income inequality at different points in time as well as under different questions wordings.

In addition to the variables outlined in the previous section (e.g. party identification, ideology, etc.) that will be used to test each set of explanations, I also include a number of control variables.<sup>8</sup> Descriptions, coding schemes, question wording, and sources for all variables are available in Appendix A. Previous research has documented that political knowledge or interest can have an effect on political behavior, especially on issues relating to equality (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba et. al 1995; Bartels 2008). Therefore, I include variables for the degree of *political interest* an individual has, a measured on a five-point scale by the degree to which they follow the presidential campaign of 2004. I also include a variable that controls for political *knowledge*, which is measured on a five-point scale in response to five standard political knowledge questions on the Annenberg survey. Finally, I include a control variable for *religious attendance*, as previous research has indicated religious differences can affect support for reducing inequality (e.g. Quadagno and Rohlinger 2009).

### Testing Views on Inequality

As I employ a number of different measures of the dependent variable *Inequality Opinion* at many different points in time, this section focuses on explaining the substantive results of the probit regression models I employ, rather than simply the statistical results.

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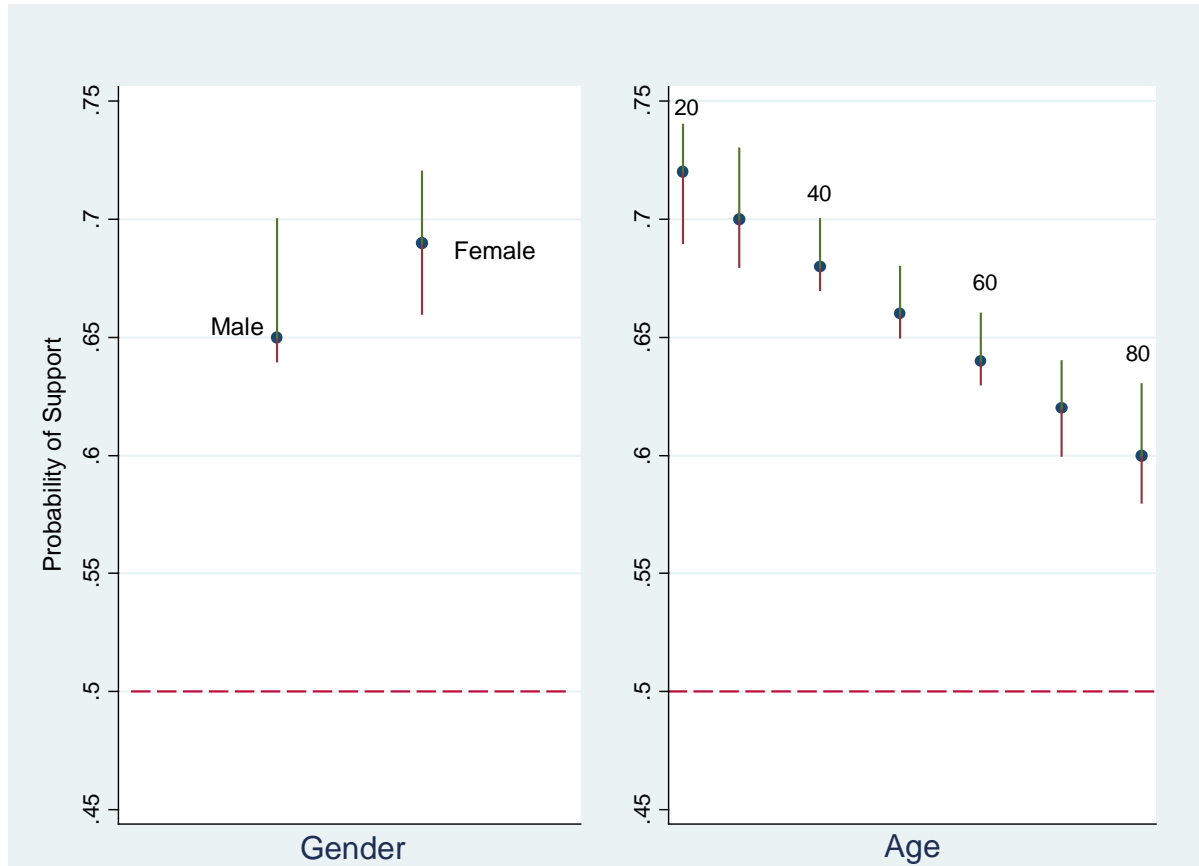
<sup>8</sup> Whenever possible, I attempted to include the same control variables in all the models. However, due to differences in survey questions between the NAES and GSS, this was not always possible, and therefore slight differences exist between models (found in Appendix B).

That is to say, rather than focusing on which variables achieve statistical significance, I focus on those that are substantively meaningful for understanding Americans' views on inequality and the factors that explain these views. Therefore, in this section, I only show figures with predicted probabilities for the statistical results I obtain under a number of model specifications. I obtain these predicted probabilities in order gauge the relative size of the influence of selected independent variables through simulations using *Clarify* (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 1999). While I discuss the statistical models employed in the analyses throughout, the full tables and results for these analyses can be found in Appendix B.

I begin with the discussion of the results from a probit regression model in which the dependent variable *Government Action Against Inequality*, is a dichotomous measure of a respondent's agreement or disagreement with the idea that income differences between the rich and poor should be reduced through government action (Table 1, Appendix B).

Each cleavage achieves some support in the model. In terms of *group position*, the coefficient for *age* is negative and statistically significant indicating that older Americans are less likely to support the government reducing income differences between the rich and poor. The variable *female* is positive and statistically significant, indicating women are more supportive of reductions in inequality than men.

**Figure 4.** Support for Reducing Income Differences between Rich and Poor by Gender and Age (NAES 2004)



In Figure 4, the probability of supporting a reduction in income differences is shown by the *gender* and *age* of a respondent. Each point indicates the predicted probability of each age or gender group supporting the government reducing inequality. Moreover, the dotted line at the .5 mark represents the ‘popular sovereignty line,’ or the point at which a majority supports or opposes a given policy. As the data show, older cohorts are less likely to support the government taking action to reduce income differences, although support remains above .6 for all ages displayed in the figure. Younger cohorts are predicted to have highest support, as almost three-quarters of young people support reductions of inequality.

Somewhat smaller differences exist between the sexes. Men and women have different levels of support for the government reducing inequality in income, although much smaller than might be anticipated. *Females* have a higher estimated support for the government reducing income differences, with a predicted value of .69. Males have a slightly lower predicted level of support at .65.

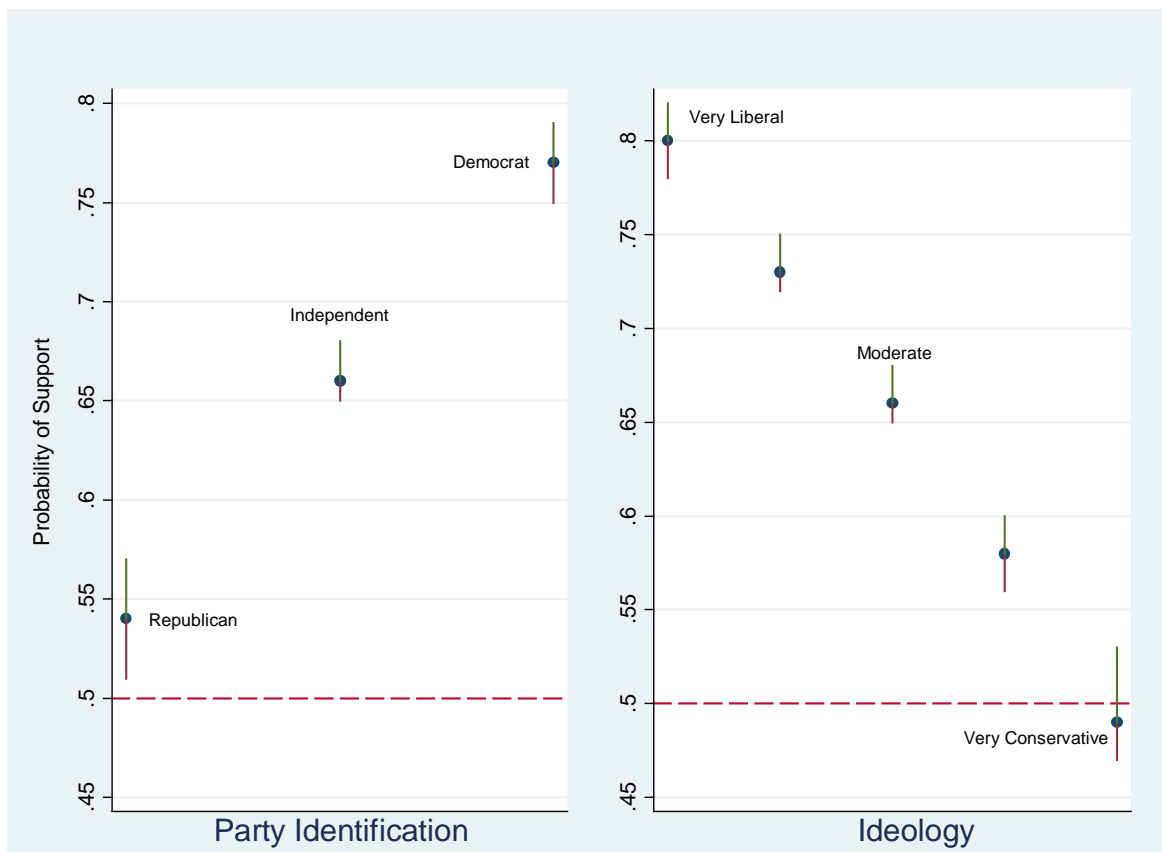
These results show that the *group positional* achieves mixed support as the variables measuring *education* and *race* do not achieve statistical significance. Moreover, while large differences in the predicted support for reducing inequality exist between *age* cohorts, much smaller differences exist between men and women. However, clear and substantively interesting differences exist between the young and the elderly as well as between economic classes.

Turning to *partisan* explanations, the variable measuring self-reported *party identification* is negative and statistically significant. As expected, self-identified Republicans were less likely to support the government reducing income differences than were Independents or Democrats. In terms of the *ideological* cleavages, the variable is negative and statistically significant, indicating that conservatives were less likely than liberals to support the government taking action to reduce income differences between the rich and poor.<sup>9</sup> In other words, as individuals become more conservative ideologically, they are less supportive of government action reducing inequality. This is an expected result, as conservatives generally oppose governmental action in the form of leveling.

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<sup>9</sup> I also tested for the equality between these coefficients in order to determine whether the differences between coefficients could be observed (results available in Appendix D), and found these variables to be significantly different from each other.

**Figure 5.** Support for Reducing Income Differences Between Rich and Poor by Party Identification & Ideology (NAES 2004)



Some of the largest differences in support for reducing inequality are *partisan* and *ideological*. Figure 5 displays the predicted probability for supporting a reduction in income differences by respondent party identification as well as self-ideological self-placement. Each data point represents the predicted probability of supporting a reduction in income differences and the lines above and below represents the 95% confidence intervals. Moreover, the dotted line across the graph represents the threshold at which a majority supports the policy.

As the figure indicates, those identifying as “very liberal” were the most likely to support reducing inequality, with their estimated support at .8. Those identifying as “liberal” and “moderate” were also highly supportive, with estimated support above .65 for each. As expected, the least supportive are self-identifying conservatives, as those identifying themselves as “conservative” or “very conservative” had estimated support of .58 and .49 respectively. What is surprising about this figure is that most groups were estimated to be highly supportive of reducing inequality, as only those identifying themselves as “very conservative” were less than .5.

Large differences in support for the government reducing inequality are evident when looking at the *partisan* identification as well. Republicans, as expected, have the lowest support for the government taking action to reduce income differences as their predicted support hovers around .54. While lower support among this group is expected given that most Republicans oppose government involvement in the form of leveling incomes (e.g. Tuftes 1978), it is interesting to note that a majority still support government action to reduce inequality. Independents are estimated to have much higher support than Republicans, but less than Democrats. Those identifying with the Democratic Party were the most likely to support reductions in inequality, as their predicted support reaches .79. Overall, Democrats and Independents were quite supportive of the government reducing income differences, especially compared with self-identified Republicans. The predicted probabilities for both partisanship and ideological orientation demonstrate additional support for both the *partisan* and *ideological* explanations, as the substantive significance of these variables is meaningful as well.



Americans seem to be differentiated by their *self-interest*. Individuals who rated their *personal economic situation* as excellent were less likely to support reductions in inequality. Moreover, those who rated the *country's economic situation* as excellent were also less likely to support the government reducing income differences.<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with previous scholarship that finds evidence for sociotropic and pocketbook voting. It seems as though self-interested considerations (in terms of personal economics) do play a role in conditioning views on inequality. Moreover *class* is negative and statistically significant, as those in higher economic classes are less likely to support the government reducing income inequalities. This finding demonstrates there are clear differences between economic classes (as measured by income) that exist in this policy domain. Those with the lowest amount of income are generally the highest supporters of such a policy.

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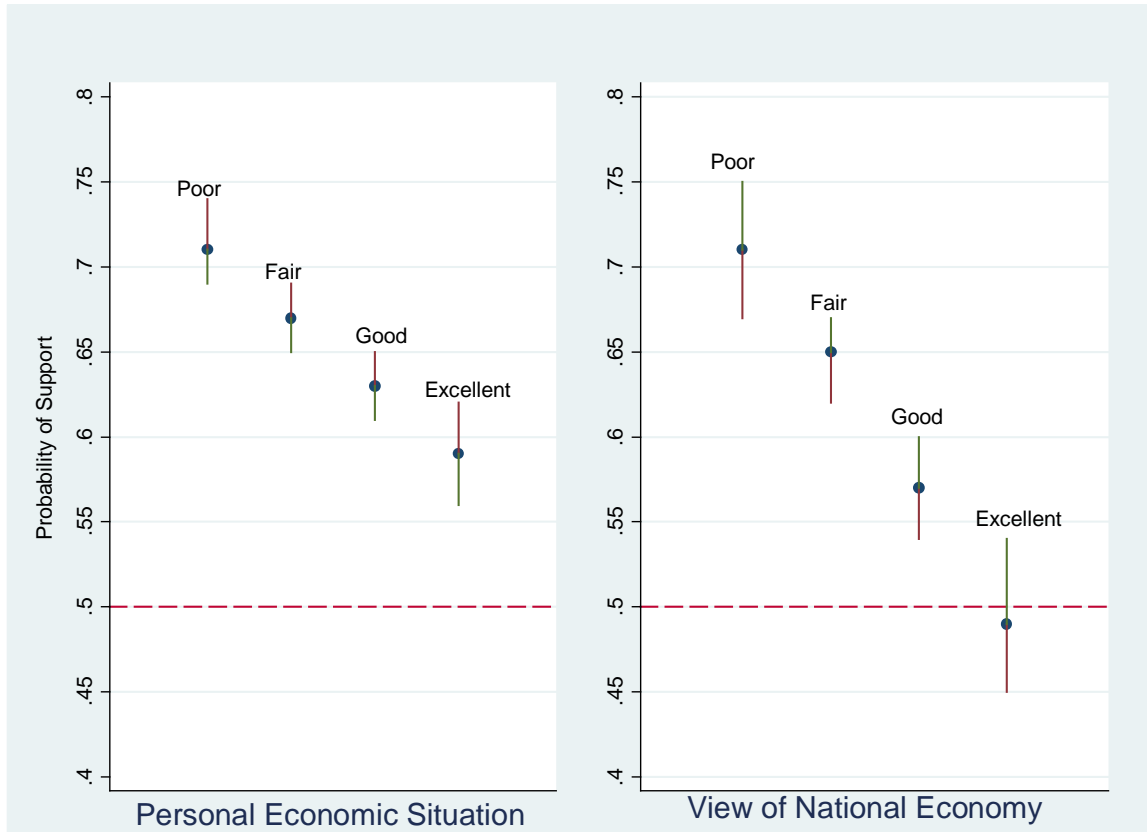
<sup>10</sup> Tests of equality between these coefficients show them to be significantly different from one another. Full results for tests of equality between coefficients for all variables used in these (and other) analyses can be found in Appendix D.

**Figure 6.** Support for Reducing Income Differences between Rich and Poor by Class (NAES 2004)



The predicted probability for supporting a reduction in income differences between rich and poor by class is displayed in Figure 6. As the data indicate, those in the lower class are the highest supporters of reducing income differences, while the middle class is somewhat less so. Those in the upper class are the least supportive of reducing inequality, although their support remains above .5. This figure demonstrates that *class* differences do exist in terms of support for reducing inequality, a finding that is both statistically and substantively significant, thus lending evidence to *self-interest* cleavages.

**Figure 7.** Support for Reducing Income Differences between Rich and Poor by Personal Economic Situation & Rating of the Nation’s Economy (NAES 2004)



In Figure 7, the predicted probability of support for the government reducing income differences is shown by both a respondent’s *personal economic situation* as well as their rating of the *country’s economy*. Those who rated their *personal economic situation* as “good” or “excellent” were much less likely than those less well off to support the government reducing income differences between the rich and poor. Similarly, those who rated the country’s economy as “excellent” were one of the few groups to fall below the .5 popular sovereignty line, although just barely. A similar pattern emerges when comparing respondent ratings of their personal economic situation as well as the overall state of the

nation's economy. Substantively, figure 7 shows those who are doing better off tend to be less supportive of the government taking action to reduce income differences between the rich and poor.

#### Additional Testing of Support for Reducing Inequality

The results presented in the previous section show the American public to be highly supportive of reducing inequality. As these results are not in line with conventional wisdom, some might question whether the findings presented so far are an aberration. Perhaps there was something special about 2004 that shaped public opinion in this manner. This is certainly possible, as the Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry consistently argued against the extension of the Bush tax cuts as an issue of fairness. Moreover, this was an election that achieved high partisan polarization, thus these results could be an aberration. Moreover, some might argue that Americans have long been opposed to redistribution and therefore the survey results from the 2004 NAES do not reflect broad based support for reducing inequality, but rather a momentary change in opinion. To investigate this claim and test the robustness of my results, I examine inequality related public opinion at different points in time by employing the General Social Survey (GSS) for the years of 1987, 1996, and 2000. I choose these years from the GSS as multiple questions (similar to the 2004 NAES) related to inequality were asked during these times, but not during others.

As in previous analyses, I take individual *Inequality Opinion* as the dependent variable for each model.<sup>11</sup> Because the GSS asks additional questions in terms of what respondents think about inequality, I am able to use different dependent variables in order to measure *Inequality Opinion*. Once again, I am not only interested in *what* American public opinion is on inequality related issues, but also on *how* these attitudes can be explained. Therefore, I test the four explanations outlined in the previous section here as well.

An alternative measure of *Income Gap* comes from a question that asks respondents their level of agreement with the statement, “Differences in income in America are too large.” As with the NAES survey, I recoded this variable into a dichotomous measure, with those who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” coded as 1 and those who “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree” or “just right” as 0.<sup>12</sup> The results of the probit regression analysis are available in Table 2 of Appendix B.

In two of the three models (for years 1987 & 2000), *age* is a positive and statistically significant predictor of agreement that income differentials are too big. This is an interesting finding, as older Americans are more likely to support the idea that income differentials are too big, yet less likely to support the government taking action to reduce these large differences. This could perhaps reflect recognition of the vast growth in income inequality in the modern era, yet a resistance from earlier generations toward leveling. However, this

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<sup>11</sup> Due to differences between GSS and NAES survey questions, the coding of the variables in this analysis differ somewhat from the previous analysis. All efforts were made to code in a similar manner, although some differences remain. All question wordings and coding schemes for all variables are available in Appendix A.

<sup>12</sup> I also ran these results without collapsing the question into a dichotomous variable. The ordered logit results can be found in Appendix C and are largely similar to those presented here.

variable is the only consistent predictor of agreement with the idea that income differentials are too big in the United States that would support *group position* explanations.

Once again, there is strong support for both the *partisan*, *ideological*, and *self-interest* explanations. In each of the three years, both *ideology* and *party identification* are negative and statistically significant predictors of support for reducing inequality. This means that self-identifying conservatives and Republicans are less likely to support the idea that income differentials are too big, reflecting a consistent acceptance for inequality. Similarly, respondents who indicated greater confidence and happiness with their *personal economic situation* were less likely to agree that income differentials are too big. The variable measuring economic *class* is significant in 2000, but not the other years.

The GSS also asks respondents their opinion on whether the rich should pay a greater share of taxes, allowing for an alternative measure of American views on inequality. Full results of the probit regression for the dependent variable *inequality opinion III*, as measured by a respondents support for the idea that the rich should pay a bigger share of taxes<sup>13</sup> are displayed are reported in Table 3 of Appendix B.

Once again, the dependent variable *Rich Taxes* is dichotomous, with those who “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” coded as 1 and those who “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree” or “just right” as 0. The only variable that lends evidence to *group position* that achieves statistical significance is *age*, which is positive, meaning older respondents were more likely to support the idea that the rich should pay more taxes. Once again, both *ideology* and *party identification* are statistically significant and in the expected

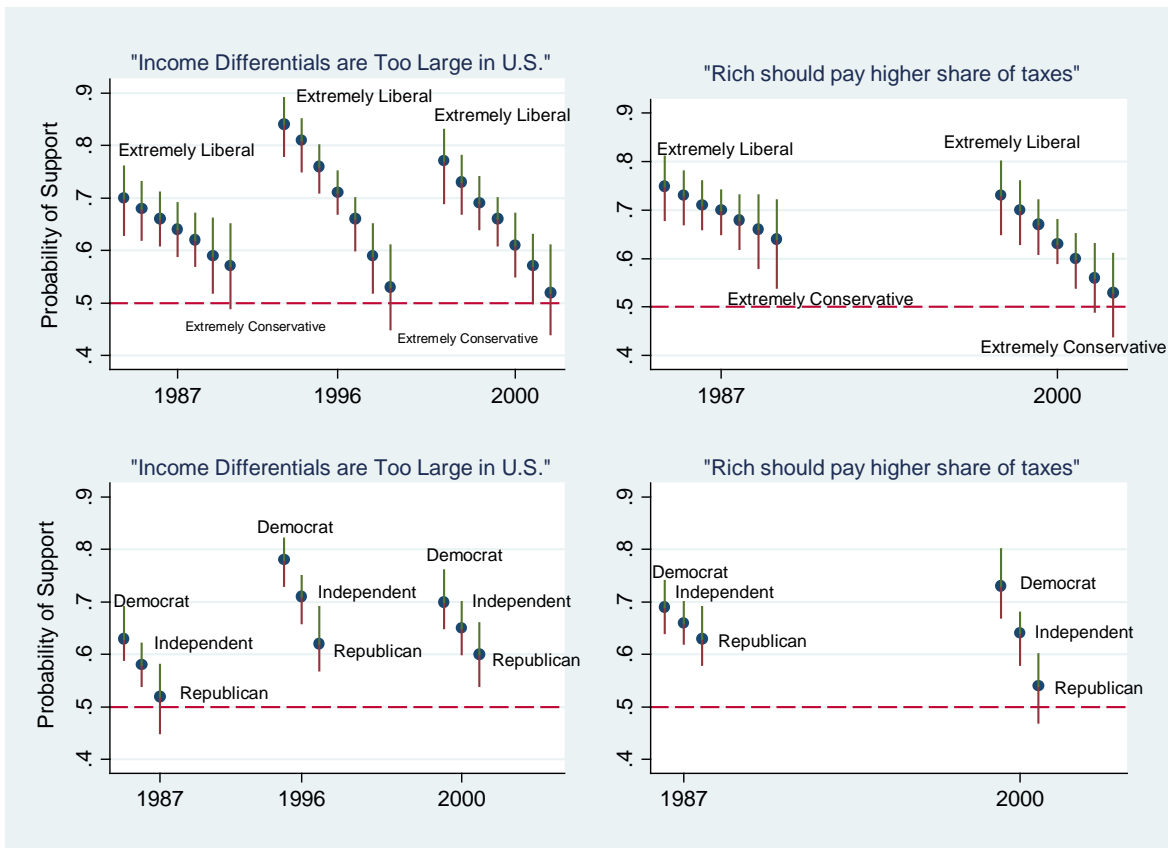
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<sup>13</sup> This question was not asked by the GSS in 1996.

direction, lending support to the *ideological* and *partisan* cleavages. A respondent's *personal economic situation* is statistically significant and negative in the 2000 survey, as those who rated their own situation as better were less likely to support the idea of the rich paying more in taxes, which again supports explanations of *self-interest*. However, *class* is not significant for any year.

The predicted probabilities for a respondent's likelihood of agreement with the idea that income differentials are too large or that the rich should pay a greater share of taxes can be seen in Figure 8. As with previous figures presenting predicted probabilities, each point represents the predicted value for each group using *Clarify*, while each line stemming from the point represents the 95% confidence interval.

**Figure 8.** Predicted Probabilities for Various Inequality Related GSS Questions

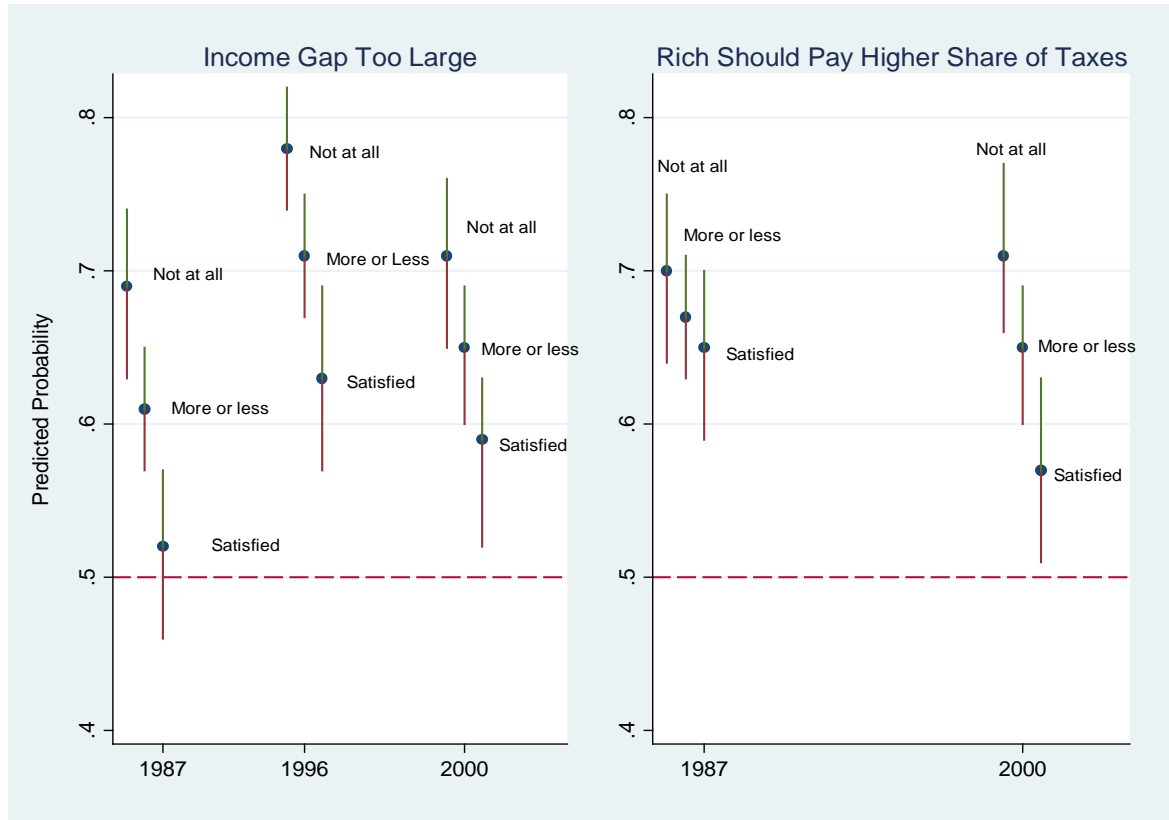


The top two graphs in Figure 8 show the predicted probability of agreement by *ideology* for each year of the GSS survey. As expected, as respondent's become more conservative, their predicted level of agreement with reducing inequality drops. While extreme conservatives are less likely to agree than are extreme liberals, even the most conservative respondents tend to agree with the idea that income differentials are too large in the U.S. Moreover, this is a finding that is consistent over time.

The bottom graphs of Figure 8 display the predicted probability of support by *party identification* for the years 1987, 1996, and 2000. As expected, Democrats have the highest predicted level of agreement that income differences are too large, while Independents remain supportive of the idea, yet in between Democrats and Republicans. Even though Republicans have the lowest level of support compared to Democrats or Independents, a majority remains supportive of this idea. Additionally, this figure indicates that agreement has grown over time for each group, just as the level of inequality has grown since the 1980s.



**Figure 9.** Predicted Probabilities for Inequality Related GSS Questions by Satisfaction with Personal Economic Situation



In terms of the substantive significance of *self-interest*, it is clear that a respondent's evaluation of their own economic situation affects their view of inequality. The graph on the left of Figure 9 shows the predicted level of agreement that an individual has with the idea that income differentials are too large in the U.S. based on their rating of satisfaction with their personal finances. Those that are more satisfied with their personal economic situation are less likely to support the idea that income differences are too large, a finding consistent for each year the question was asked in the GSS. In the graph on the right of Figure 9, a similar pattern emerges. Respondents who are more satisfied with their personal finances are less likely to support the idea that the rich should pay more in taxes.

### *Discussion*

These data represent a significant shift in attitudes when compared to past research. Whereas Hochschild (1981) finds Americans to be largely unsupportive of reducing economic inequality, I find a clear change in American public opinion on this issue. Overall, the results from four different surveys (NAES and GSS) present similar findings, with large majorities favoring reducing the gap between rich and poor and for increasing taxes on the wealthy. While differences in support for reductions in inequality are present when looking a respondent by *age*, the substantive impact of this finding are less than for *party*, *economic self-interest*, or *ideology*. Very clear differences emerge when examining Americans' attitudes toward the government taking action to reduce inequality ideologically, by partisan identification, and by personal economic interest. Party identification, ideology, and self-interest were found to be statistically and substantively significant predictors of differences in supporting a reduction in inequality using different surveys at different points in time. This suggests that the attitudes about inequality are as much political as they are economic.

For the analysis using NAES data, both partisan and ideological extremes displayed differences in the predicted probability of supporting a reduction in inequality by about .3. In other words, the predicted difference in support for reducing inequality between those identifying themselves as “very liberal” and “very conservative” was .31 and the difference between Republicans and Democrats was .23. The largest difference between any other groups was between income groups, as the difference in predicted support for reducing inequality between lower and upper class individuals was .15. The strong support for the *partisan* and *ideological* differences is perhaps not all that surprising, given the fact that each party builds coalitions by offering different economic benefits to partisan groups and these

differences in distributional goals of the parties affect Americans through policy-induced variations in macroeconomic policy (Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988).

While I was not always able to test for the differences between “pocketbook” and “sociotropic,” the evidence presented from both the GSS and NAES surveys demonstrate the importance of an individual’s personal economic situation in viewing the distribution of income in American society. Those doing better or who at least felt they were benefiting from the current economy were much less likely to want to change that system. While class differences were clear in the NAES survey, this finding did not occur when looking at the GSS.

While the largest differences were partisan, ideological, and based on an individual’s economic situation, differences do exist between men and women, among income groups, and between the young and elderly. While differences between groups clearly exist, these findings also demonstrate that *most* groups are very supportive of the government taking action to reduce income differences between rich and poor Americans. In fact, only those identifying themselves as “very conservative” or who rated the country’s economy as “excellent” had a clear majority against governmental action in the NAES survey (but not in the GSS). For most other groups, a clear majority favored a reduction in inequality. This is true for questions that related to inequality in the abstract (e.g. favor or oppose reducing income differences) as well as more specific (e.g. raising taxes). Interestingly, differences between groups should therefore not be looked upon as *whether* there is support for reducing inequality, but how much of a majority supports this policy. This is a far different picture painted of American public opinion than originally thought, and one that needs much more attention in future scholarship.

These findings run counter to the common line of many political observers. The idea that Americans are opposed to leveling is false. In fact, a majority of Americans favor a reduction in inequality (even when it is personally costly to do so), with the government taking the lead to accomplish this task. This is a finding supported by recent scholarship (e.g. McCall and Kentworthy 2009). Moreover, many groups, such as Republicans and conservatives that would traditionally be thought to be staunchly against the idea of the government taking action to reduce inequality are in fact quite split on the idea. While there is likely some social desirability effect in these surveys, it is still quite striking that many Americans, across a wide array of groups, are highly favorable to *reducing* inequality. This is not the picture painted during election seasons, in the media, or even by many political commentators and scholars.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter examined the extent to which Americans desire action related to the growth in income inequality in recent years. As the evidence from multiple surveys makes clear, most Americans are both supportive of a reduction of income differences and are in favor of the government taking action to do so. Additionally, this paper tested four explanations that predict the way individuals feel about economic inequality and ways to reduce it. The results from multiple different surveys, at different points in time, show that most of the support was for the partisan, ideological, and self-interest explanations.

As both party identification and ideological convictions were consistent predictors of support for reductions in inequality, further evidence that these variables are important in explaining individual behavior remains strong (e.g. Campbell 1964; Green et al. 2004; Lewis-

Beck et al. 2008). Moreover, these findings confirm recent studies that link voter attitudes toward inequality with partisan differences (e.g. Bartels 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010). This is an important finding, especially as more political scientists focus on the affects of income inequality on the political sphere, it seems that the evidence is growing that income inequality is as much a political phenomenon as it is an economic one. This idea is supported by the fact that the self-interested explanations consistently received support alongside partisan and ideological ones. This chapter is among the first to test these different explanations of attitudes about inequality and these findings suggest much broader support for reducing income differences than might be expected.

Despite differences between groups in terms of preferences for reducing inequality, the majority of Americans support governmental action to reduce differences between the rich and poor. This suggests that examining the representational process, especially by looking at the differences in the behavior of elected officials in each party remains an important way in which we can understand how inequality occurs and whether responsiveness happens. The findings in this paper indicate that most Americans would like something to be done to reduce inequality, and therefore the question now turns to why elected officials do not carry out the wishes of the people, and instead spurn majority will. This is one of the most important questions for any democracy as the will of the people and the idea of popular sovereignty are among its main tenets.

## Appendix A.

Variable Name	Question Wording	Coding
<b>2004 NAES</b>		
Inequality Opinion “Government Action Against Inequality” (ccc41)	The federal government trying to reduce the income differences between rich and poor Americans—do you favor or oppose the federal government doing this?	Agree/Somewhat Agree=1 Disagree/Somewhat Disagree=0
Inequality Opinion (alternative scaling in Appendix C)	The federal government trying to reduce the income differences between rich and poor Americans—do you favor or oppose the federal government doing this?	0 Strongly Oppose 1 Somewhat Oppose 2 Neither Support or Oppose 3 Somewhat Favor 4 Strongly Favor
Female (cwa01)	The interviewer observed the respondent’s sex from his or her voice. If the voice was ambiguous, the interviewer asked for clarification.	Male=0 Female=1
Age (cwa02)	What is your age?	Respondent age in years
Education (cwa03)	What is the last grade or class you completed in school?	1 "less than high school" 2 "high school" 3 "some college" 4 "college degree" 5 "graduate/professional"
Race (cwc01, cwc03)	What is your race?	1 "white" 2 "black" 3 "Asian" 4 "other" 5 "Hispanic"
Religious Attendance (c wd01)	How often do you attend religious services, apart from special events like weddings and funerals—more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?	1 More than once a week 2 Once a week 3 Once or twice a month 4 Few times a year 5 Never
Republican (cma01)	Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?	0 "republican" 1 "independent" 2 "democrat"
Political Interest (cmk01)	Some people seem to follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there is an election or not. Others are not that interested, or are interested in other things. Would you say you follow what is going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?	4 Most times 3 Sometime 2 Now and then 1 Hardly at all
Ideology (cma06)	Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?	1 "very conservative" 2 "conservative" 3 "moderate" 4 "liberal" 5 "very liberal"
Class (cwa04)	Last year, what was the total income before taxes of all the people living in your house or apartment?	0=lower (less than \$25k) 1=middle (\$25-100k) 2=upper (more than \$100k)

Personal Economic Situation (ccb04)	How would you rate your own personal economic situation today— is it excellent, good, only fair, or poor?	3 Excellent 2 Good 1 Fair 0 Poor
Country Economy (ccb01)	How would you rate economic conditions in this country today— would you say they are excellent, good, fair, or poor?	3 Excellent 2 Good 1 Fair 0 Poor
<b>General Social Survey (GSS) 1987, 1996, 2000</b>		
Differences in income in America are too large “Income Gap” (incgap)	Differences in income in America are too large.	Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree=1 Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Just right=0
Differences in income in America are too large (alternative coding Appendix C)	Differences in income in America are too large.	0 Strongly Disagree 1 Somewhat Disagree 2 Neither 3 Somewhat Agree 4 Strongly Agree
Rich pay higher taxes “Rich Taxes” (Taxshare)	Do you think that people with high incomes should pay a larger share of their income in taxes than those with low incomes, the same share, or a smaller share?	Somewhat larger share, much larger share=1 Smaller share, much smaller share, Just right=0
Rich pay higher taxes (alternative coding Appendix C)	Do you think that people with high incomes should pay a larger share of their income in taxes than those with low incomes, the same share, or a smaller share?	0 Much Smaller share 1 Smaller share 2 Just right 3 Somewhat larger 4 Much larger
Ideology (polviews)	We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal--point 1--to extremely conservative--point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?	Extremely liberal (1) to Extremely conservative (7)
Party Identification (partyid)		0-Dem 1-Ind 2-GOP
Education (degree)	Highest degree attained?	1 Little high school, 2 High School, 3 Jr. College, 4 Bachelor, 5 Graduate
Class	In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year--before taxes, that is.	0-lower (less than \$25k) 1-middle (\$25-100k) 2-upper (more than \$100k)
Personal Economic Situation (satfin)	We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?	0- Not satisfied at all 1- More or less 2- Satisfied

Religious Attendance (attend)	How often do you attend religious services?	0 Never 1 Less Than once a year 2 Once a year 3 Several Times a year 4 Once a Month 5 3x a month 6 Nearly Every Week 7 More than once a week
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**Appendix B.** Results for Models used in the Analyses.

**Table 1.** Probit of Influences on Supporting the Government Reducing Income Differences (NAES 2004).

Dependent Variable: *Government Action Against Inequality* (1 agree, 0 disagree)

	(1)	(2)
Constant	2.148*** (0.0563)	2.406*** (0.119)
Age	-.686*** (.0580)	-.537*** (.105)
Education	-0.0318*** (0.00846)	0.0126 (0.0158)
Class	-0.188*** (0.0176)	-0.237*** (0.0311)
Latino	0.0874** (0.0379)	-0.00507 (0.0665)
Black	-0.0651 (0.0420)	-0.0780 (0.0709)
Female	0.163*** (0.0183)	0.0767** (0.0326)
Ideology	-0.209*** (0.0109)	-0.200*** (0.0196)
Republican	-0.254*** (0.0128)	-0.265*** (0.0224)
Country Economy	-0.237*** (0.0185)	-0.194*** (0.0331)
Personal Economy	-0.0806*** (0.0139)	-0.0558** (0.0241)
Political Interest		-0.0962*** (0.0211)
Religious Attendance		-0.0269** (0.0127)
Knowledge		-0.0568*** (0.0138)
Observations	21122	7033
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.102	0.109

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

**Table 2.** Probit for Inequality Opinion as measured by “Income Differentials are Too Large” (GSS)

Dependent Variable: *Income Gap* (1 agree, 0 disagree)

	1987	1996	2000
Education	-0.0236 (0.0332)	-0.0247 (0.0333)	0.0269 (0.0373)
Age (x100)	0.803*** (.221)	0.183 (.234)	1.05*** (.255)
Female	0.0929 (0.0704)	0.0593 (0.0769)	0.0753 (0.0816)
Black	0.0849 (0.0897)	-0.343*** (0.119)	0.201 (0.132)
Class	-0.0149 (0.0626)	-0.0312 (0.0613)	-0.117* (0.0652)
Ideology	-0.0633** (0.0274)	-0.145*** (0.0308)	-0.100*** (0.0311)
Republican	-0.0546*** (0.0186)	-0.0991*** (0.0210)	-0.0622*** (0.0218)
Personal economic Situation	-0.228*** (0.0522)	-0.227*** (0.0542)	-0.168*** (0.0583)
Religiosity	-0.000928 (0.0143)	0.00764 (0.0148)	-0.00615 (0.0155)
Constant	0.399** (0.202)	1.504*** (0.222)	0.665*** (0.228)
Observations	1391	1277	1081
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.037	0.063	0.050

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

**Table 3.** Probit of Inequality Opinion as measured by “The Rich Should Pay a Greater Share of Taxes” (GSS).Dependent Variable: *Rich Taxes* (1 agree, 0 disagree)

	1987	2000
Education	0.0225 (0.0348)	0.0184 (0.0380)
Age (x100)	1.04*** (.233)	.889*** (.255)
Female	0.0328 (0.0733)	0.0451 (0.0821)
Black	0.118 (0.0945)	-0.0231 (0.131)
Class	-0.0473 (0.0652)	-0.0693 (0.0661)
Ideology	-0.0637** (0.0286)	-0.0802** (0.0312)
Republican	-0.0371* (0.0194)	-0.108*** (0.0221)
Personal economic Situation	-0.0689 (0.0542)	-0.185*** (0.0589)
Religiosity	0.0384*** (0.0149)	-0.00561 (0.0157)
Constant	0.242 (0.210)	0.814*** (0.228)
Observations	1357	1064
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.030	0.054

Standard errors in parentheses \* p&lt;.10, \*\* p&lt;.05, \*\*\* p&lt;.01

**Appendix C.** Alternative Coding for Dependent Variable (Inequality Opinion) for various models.  
 Ordered Logit of Influences on Supporting the Government Reducing Income Differences (NAES 2004).

	(1)	(2)
Age	-0.00857*** (0.000791)	-0.00604*** (0.00143)
Education	-0.0655*** (0.0117)	0.00956 (0.0216)
Class	-0.271*** (0.0242)	-0.343*** (0.0425)
Latino	0.179*** (0.0535)	0.0578 (0.0935)
Black	0.0363 (0.0597)	-0.0556 (0.0993)
Female	0.231*** (0.0251)	0.0985** (0.0446)
Ideology	-0.322*** (0.0152)	-0.334*** (0.0271)
Republican	-0.381*** (0.0176)	-0.378*** (0.0307)
Country Economy	-0.393*** (0.0257)	-0.321*** (0.0453)
Personal Economy	-0.160*** (0.0192)	-0.156*** (0.0332)
Political Interest		-0.0971*** (0.0286)
Religious Attendance		-0.0403** (0.0174)
Knowledge		-0.112*** (0.0189)
Cut 1 Constant	-4.219*** (0.0810)	-4.678*** (0.169)
Cut 2 Constant	-3.432*** (0.0793)	-3.883*** (0.166)
Cut 3 Constant	-3.248*** (0.0789)	-3.681*** (0.166)
Cut 4 Constant	-2.326*** (0.0775)	-2.729*** (0.163)
Observations	21999	7351
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.057	0.061

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

Ordered Logit of Influences on Inequality Opinion as measured by “The Rich Should Pay a Greater Share of Taxes” (GSS).

	2000	1987
Education	-0.00388 (0.0536)	0.00151 (0.0486)
Age	-0.0163*** (0.00357)	-0.0157*** (0.00320)
Female	0.000949 (0.118)	-0.0224 (0.103)
Black	-0.0302 (0.186)	-0.407*** (0.133)
Class	0.165* (0.0944)	0.0657 (0.0905)
Ideology	0.122*** (0.0456)	0.0885** (0.0406)
Republican	0.160*** (0.0319)	0.0557** (0.0275)
Personal Economic Situation	0.319*** (0.0845)	0.103 (0.0760)
Religiosity	0.0282 (0.0224)	-0.0303 (0.0210)
Cut 1 Constant	-0.531 (0.331)	-1.499*** (0.303)
Cut 2 Constant	1.459*** (0.333)	0.527* (0.301)
Cut 3 Constant	4.745*** (0.393)	3.607*** (0.349)
Cut 4 Constant	5.742*** (0.474)	5.201*** (0.504)
Observations	1064	1357
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.039	0.021

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

Ordered Logit for Inequality Opinion as measured by “Income Differentials are Too Large” (GSS).

	1996	2000	1987
Education	0.0505 (0.0454)	-0.0828 (0.0529)	0.0748 (0.0475)
Age	-0.00536* (0.00324)	-0.0168*** (0.00353)	-0.0115*** (0.00309)
Female	-0.125 (0.106)	-0.105 (0.114)	-0.196* (0.100)
Black	0.444*** (0.168)	-0.368** (0.181)	-0.290** (0.129)
Class	0.142* (0.0838)	0.257*** (0.0920)	-0.0458 (0.0894)
Ideology	0.192*** (0.0433)	0.244*** (0.0450)	0.128*** (0.0394)
Republican	0.154*** (0.0289)	0.106*** (0.0309)	0.0891*** (0.0271)
Personal Economic Situation	0.337*** (0.0753)	0.250*** (0.0827)	0.306*** (0.0752)
Religiosity	-0.00217 (0.0205)	0.00525 (0.0218)	0.00308 (0.0201)
Cut 1 Constant	0.694** (0.302)	-0.452 (0.319)	-1.460*** (0.292)
Cut 2 Constant	2.187*** (0.308)	1.443*** (0.321)	0.648** (0.289)
Cut 3 Constant	2.894*** (0.313)	2.831*** (0.331)	1.794*** (0.293)
Cut 4 Constant	3.961*** (0.324)	4.288*** (0.363)	3.776*** (0.325)
Observations	1277	1081	1391
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.032	0.039	0.024

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01

**Appendix D.** Tests of Equality between Coefficients for various models

<b>Test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Reduce Inequality (DV)</b>	<b>NAES 2004</b>	<b>GSS 2000</b>	<b>GSS 1996</b>	<b>GSS 1987</b>
Age=Class	.00	.00	.09	.00
Age=Female	.01	.00	.00	.20
Age=Ideology	.00	.00	.00	.00
Age=Republican	.00	.00	.00	.00
Age=Country Econ	.00	-	-	-
Age=Personal Econ	.03	.00	.00	.02
Class=Female	.00	.00	.00	.00
Class=Ideology	.30	.77	.96	.13
Class=Republican	.47	.83	.80	.05
Class=Country Econ	.32	-	-	-
Class=Personal Econ	.00	.32	.68	.23
Female=Ideology	.00	.00	.00	.00
Female=Republican	.00	.00	.00	.00
Female=Country Econ	.00	-	-	-
Female=Personal Econ	.01	.00	.00	.01
Ideology=Republican	.05	.42	.66	.53
Ideology=Country Econ	.87	-	-	-
Ideology=Personal Econ	.00	.27	.73	.93
Republican=Country Econ	.09	-	-	-
Republican=Personal Econ	.00	.08	.53	.74
Country Econ=Personal Econ	.00	-	-	-
<b>Income Differentials are Too Large (DV)</b>	<b>GSS 2000</b>	<b>GSS 1996</b>	<b>GSS 1987</b>	
Age=Class	.05	.59	.71	
Age=Female	.42	.45	.22	
Age=Ideology	.00	.00	.00	
Age=Republican	.00	.00	.00	
Age=Personal Econ	.00	.00	.00	
Class=Female	.06	.33	.23	
Class=Ideology	.82	.09	.47	
Class=Republican	.42	.30	.54	
Class=Personal Econ	.59	.02	.01	
Female=Ideology	.03	.01	.03	
Female=Republican	.10	.04	.04	
Female=Personal Econ	.01	.02	.00	
Ideology=Republican	.37	.27	.81	
Ideology=Personal Econ	.31	.18	.05	
Republican=Personal Econ	.08	.03	.00	
<b>Rich Should Pay Larger Share of Taxes (DV)</b>	<b>GSS 2000</b>	<b>GSS 1987</b>		
Age=Class	.23	.37		

Age=Female	.65	.75		
Age=Ideology	.00	.01		
Age=Republican	.00	.01		
Age=Personal Econ	.00	.14		
Class=Female	.27	.39		
Class=Ideology	.88	.81		
Class=Republican	.58	.88		
Class=Personal Econ	.23	.81		
Female=Ideology	.14	.21		
Female=Republican	.07	.35		
Female=Personal Econ	.01	.26		
Ideology=Republican	.52	.49		
Ideology=Personal Econ	.12	.93		
Republican=Personal Econ	.21	.58		



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## Chapter 4

### Responsiveness in an Era of Inequality: The Case of the U.S. Senate

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A key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals

Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* 1971.

The growth in wealth and income inequality is one of the most pressing problems currently facing American society. While wealth and income inequality have grown in the post-WWII era, the process has accelerated in recent decades. Since the 1980s, the growth in income and wealth among the top five percent has increased substantially, yet the other ninety-five percent have seen little or no increase (Piketty and Saez 2003). Researchers that have studied growing inequality have even labeled the recent era a “New Gilded Age” (Bartels 2008). With the growth in income and wealth inequality in America since World War II, scholars, policy makers, and advocates for disadvantaged persons are increasingly concerned that inequality among citizens could be a mounting threat, as disparities in economic inequality often contribute to unequal political outcomes (Task Force 2004). While some research has been done investigating the causes and consequences of wealth inequality (e.g. Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008; also see Keister and Moller 2000 for a review), very little has been done to investigate how the most recent increase in inequality affects representation in the American political system. The fact that little has been done is surprising, given that the

idea that all citizens are to be treated equally is central to most standard theories of democracy. While liberty and popular sovereignty also constitute essential aspects of republican democracy, equality among citizens remains a chief concern for democratic theorists (e.g. Dahl 1971).

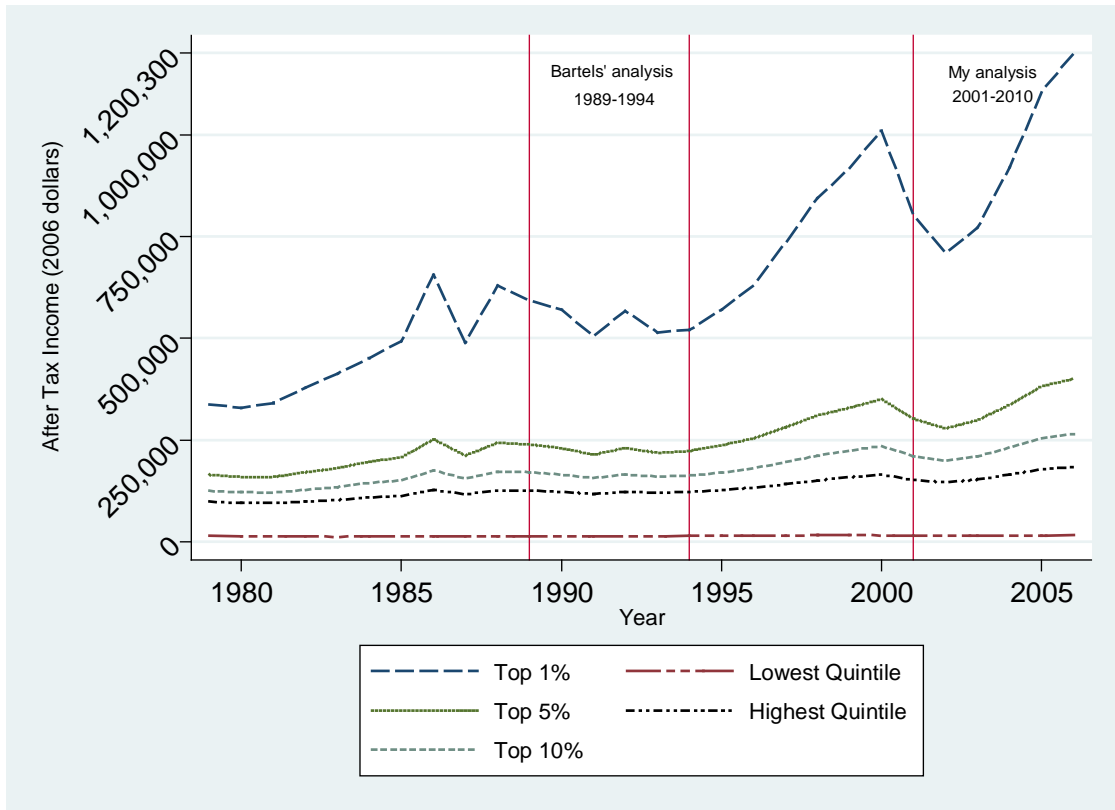
One way to evaluate how wealth inequality affects American democracy is to examine the degree to which the government responds equally (or unequally) to citizens of different economic situations. The concept of representation has become central to contemporary democratic theory. While an essentially modern concept, representation has come to mean *popular* representation and is now linked with self-government (Pitkin 1967). In the representation literature there is a considerable focus on responsiveness—the level of correspondence between constituency preferences and a legislator’s behavior (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978).

This chapter contributes to recent work of scholars investigating the causes and consequences of unequal representation (e.g. Bartels 2008). Using data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES), I examine the responsiveness of Senators to different economic groups across a range of issues for the 107<sup>th</sup> through 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses. This time period allows me to examine responsiveness under a broad variety of institutional circumstances. These circumstances matter because they might affect the inequality that occurs through mechanisms like differences in party control of Congress, the nature of different agendas, as well differences in behavior across chambers. Additionally, I use the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress as a most-similar (within) case study and examine how a change in partisan control of the agenda might change the way in which different groups receive representation.

In the analysis that follows, I expand upon the work of scholars who have examined unequal governmental responsiveness (Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008). My analysis covers a broad period in which inequality has been especially pronounced and partisan control of the Senate has changed often. This allows for an examination of the way in which institutions are responsive to the poor. Researchers have learned that wealth inequality has increased substantially since the time of previous analyses, which is even more reason to examine the extent to which this inequality is affecting governmental responsiveness (Piketty and Saez 2003). This phenomenon can be seen in Figure 10 displayed below. This figure shows the degree to which incomes are unequal for different quintiles of Americans. As the figure shows, those in the three lowest quintiles (the bottom 80 percent) have seen little change over time. However, most of the dramatic gains in income have gone to the highest quintile. Moreover, among the top quintile, incomes have increased dramatically for the top one and five percentiles.



**Figure 10.** Inflation Adjusted Household Incomes (After-Tax), 1979-2006



Source: Congressional Budget Office

Bartels' analysis covered the Senate from 1989-1994, and are in effect, over 20 years old. While income distributions were unequal during that time period, the figure demonstrates how inequality was much greater during the period of my analyses (2001-2010). In fact, one of the largest increases in income transfers to the top one percent occurs after 2002. Therefore, the time period for which I examine Senate responsiveness is a period of extreme inequality in America, a period in which we might expect greater responsiveness toward those with the most resources.

My analysis also examines partisan control of the agenda which has been shown to affect the types of issues considered in Congress (Cox and McCubbins 2005). While the congresses studied by Bartels cover both a period of divided government (101<sup>st</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup>)

and of unified control (103<sup>rd</sup>), the Senate was controlled by the Democratic Party throughout. The period for which I examine Senate responsiveness (107<sup>th</sup> through 111<sup>th</sup>) is during a time in which the Republican Party controlled the Senate and had unified control of the government for almost the entire period for the 107<sup>th</sup>, 108<sup>th</sup>, and 109<sup>th</sup> Congresses. By including the 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses, it is possible to examine a period for which the Democratic Party controlled the Senate. Also, the inclusion of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress allows for a view of the Senate when the Democratic Party had unified control of the government, as the 2008 election produced large gains in both chambers of Congress as well as Barack Obama winning the presidency.

Overall, this time period of my analysis provides an interesting window to examine the degree to which changes in partisan control of the Senate might lead to different types of responsiveness to different economic groups. Because the Democratic Party has historically sought to represent disadvantaged groups and favor policies that incorporate leveling (while Republicans have largely opposed such measures), it is necessary to examine the extent to which partisan control can affect representation of different income groups, especially the extent to which partisan control of the legislature can affect agenda setting (e.g. Bartels 2008; Cox and McCubbins 2005).

### Legislator Responsiveness

The most common way in which representation has been studied is dyadically, examining the relationship between an individual member of Congress and his or her constituency. A significant number of studies find legislators to be responsive to median constituent preferences (e.g. Mayhew 1974; Erikson 1978; Fenno 1978; Bianco, Spence, and

Wilkerson 1996). However, numerous studies find contradictory results arguing legislators are not especially responsive (Bernstein and Anthony 1974; Bernstein 1989; Fiorina 1973; Page et al. 1984; Kau and Rubin 1993; Dennis, Medoff and Gagnier 1998, Dennis 1998). Still other studies find mixed results (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Achen 1978; Elling 1982; Hutchings 1998; Theriault 2005).

A growing perspective examines legislator responsiveness to smaller groups within a constituency. This perspective argues that rather than simply responding to the majority preferred view of an entire district, Members of Congress (MCs) respond to smaller groups or subconstituencies (Claussen 1973; Bishin 2000, Clinton 2006, Bishin 2009). In many ways, this perspective closely aligns with Fenno's (1978) famous distinction between geographic, electoral, primary, and personal constituencies. This perspective offers a useful way to examine the extent of legislator responsiveness, especially if we want to know how well the government responds to groups equally (or unequally). Therefore, instead of examining responsiveness to an entire state constituency, this paper divides a state constituency by economic class. I do this largely because it is an important focus for the study of representation to examine the extent to which legislators respond to various groups that comprise their constituencies in an equal manner, especially because this is one of the primary aims of democratic governance (e.g. Dahl 1971).

### *Biases in Representation*

For decades, scholars have questioned the extent to which the government responds equally to citizen concerns. For example, Schumaker and Getter (1977) discover a bias toward spending preferences of upper class whites in a survey of cities. Hill and Leighley

(1992) find a class bias toward spending preferences of upper class citizens in terms of state welfare spending. Martin Gilens (2005) investigates which group preferences are most influential in shaping policy decisions and finds that when high and low income groups disagree on policy, the poor are consistently ignored in favor of high income Americans' preferences.

The most expansive study of unequal representation was conducted by Larry Bartels (2008), who tests the degree to which there are biases in Senate representation. Bartels finds that Senators, while quite responsive to middle and high-income groups, are largely unresponsive to low-income groups. Bartels also finds partisan differences in representation towards the various income groups, as Republicans are about twice as responsive as Democrats to the views of high-income constituents. The author also finds that for either party, there is no evidence of responsiveness to the views of constituents in the bottom income group. Bartels tested Senator responsiveness from 1989 to 1994, a period in which the Democrats retained majority control during each Congress and when wealth inequality was not as pronounced as in more recent times.

One of the most common explanations for why the poor are not well represented in American politics is that those in the lower classes often participate in politics at much lower rates than do middle and upper income citizens (e.g., Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Wealthier citizens generally have a higher propensity to vote, contact public officials, volunteer for campaigns, write letters, attend protests and donate money to candidates (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Moreover, some have found that voters are better represented in the political system than nonvoters (e.g. Griffin and Newman 2005) and that federal spending is higher in areas where

voter turnout is higher (e.g. Martin 2003). Similarly, studies show that there are gaps in the political knowledge and interest between rich and poor Americans (Converse 1990; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). The vast array of research examining the participatory differences therefore suggests there are a number of reasons why wealthier citizens could be better represented than the poor. Despite these findings, there is little evidence that these differences contribute to responsiveness disparities. The little research on this subject that exists finds that differences between the rich and poor in voting, contact and knowledge are uncorrelated with disproportionate responsiveness toward the wealthy (Bartels 2008).

Additional explanations exist that might suggest biases in representation. Research suggests that partisan differences in the control over the economy lead to vastly different outcomes for different groups (e.g. Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Bartels 2008). Clearly, economic philosophies and priorities of Democratic and Republican administrations often diverge. This can often be seen in party platforms and different political ideologies set forth by the two parties (Tufte 1978). As the class composition of the major parties' supporting coalitions differ in the United States (as in many other nations), differences in macroeconomic policies often follow as well (e.g. Hibbs 1987). Moreover, Hibbs and Dennis (1988) present evidence that differences in distributional goals of the major parties affect economic distributions of Americans through policy-induced variations in macroeconomic policy. As each party has different goals when controlling the government, the partisan control of the agenda might be an important factor in determining who gets represented and who does not (e.g. Cox and McCubbins 2005). The idea of differing distributional goals is supported by Bartels' (2008) analysis that demonstrates individual income growth diverges dramatically depending on the party that controls the presidency.

Under Republican administrations, Bartels finds richer families' incomes to increase at a much higher rate than poor families, while the opposite is true under Democratic administrations.<sup>14</sup>

In a related manner, popular accounts of recent voting behavior suggest that the Republican Party has convinced the poor to vote contrary to their self-interest by casting votes for conservative candidates based on social issues (e.g. Frank 2004). However, empirical evidence in the political science literature calls this assertion into question (Stonecash 2000; Bartels 2006, 2008; Gelman et al. 2008). Bartels (2008) for example, finds no evidence that contemporary American politics is driven primarily by cultural issues, that working class whites have abandoned the Democratic Party or become more conservative, and that religious voters are distracted from economic issues.

In sum, this literature review provides some reasons to believe the poor might not be represented as well as other groups. While I am not able to test for all of these causes due to data limitations, this brief summary of the literature shows that there is good reason to believe that the rich would receive better representation than the poor. First, previous research demonstrates that the wealthy are more likely to receive better responsiveness than the poor (e.g. Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008). Second, previous research finds that Republicans are more likely to respond to the upper class than Democrats, thus demonstrating the likelihood that there are partisan differences in responsiveness across income groups (e.g. Tufte 1978; Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Bartels 2008). Finally, there seems to be evidence that partisan control of the agenda might affect the degree to which different

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<sup>14</sup> For a critique of this analysis see Campbell (2011).

groups of voters receive benefits and/or responsiveness from government officials (e.g. Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Cox and McCubbins 2005). However, little is known about the degree to which unequal responsiveness occurs in the contemporary era. Therefore, in the next section, I detail hypotheses that come from these key expectations in the literature and then explain how I set out to test them.

### Expectations

I test three main hypotheses in this paper. First, I test whether Senators are more likely to respond to the preferences of upper-income constituents. The *Unequal Responsiveness Hypothesis* predicts that, all things being equal, Senators will be more likely to respond to the preferences of upper-income constituents. This expectation largely stems from previous findings (Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008), as well as from the participation literature, which generally finds the wealthy to have vastly higher rates of participation in politics than low-income citizens (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

My second expectation is a test of partisan biases in representation. The *Partisan Bias Hypothesis* anticipates Republicans will be more responsive than Democrats to the preferences of higher-income groups. This hypothesis stems from research that finds differences in the coalitions and distributional goals of each party (Tufte 1978; Hibbs 1987; Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Bartels 2008). Therefore, due to the traditional manner in which the parties have represented different groups of voters, I expect Democrats to be more responsive to lower-class individuals than Republicans.

My third expectation is a corollary of the *Partisan Bias Hypothesis*. This expectation focuses on partisan control of the Senate and therefore the legislative agenda (Cox and McCubbins 2005). Research in representation has often assumed that members of Congress look outward for cues (e.g. Kingdon 1977). Thus, agenda control is likely to matter for dyadic representation as Senators' responsiveness to their constituency (or constituencies) might be influenced by the issues that reach the floor. Therefore, the *Agenda Control Hypothesis* predicts that, all else equal, when Democrats have majority control in the Senate, those in the lower classes will receive better representation. In contrast, when Republicans control a majority of seats in the Senate, this hypothesis predicts a greater level of responsiveness to upper income constituencies. Specifically, I expect higher responsiveness toward the wealthy when the Senate is controlled by the Republicans (108<sup>th</sup> and 109<sup>th</sup>) and more responsiveness toward the lower-class during sessions controlled by the Democrats (110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup>).<sup>15</sup> In the next section, I detail the data and methods I use to estimate Senator responsiveness.

### Data and Methods

The data I employ have a number of advantages over other sources. In order to measure constituency opinion, I use the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey

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<sup>15</sup> Republicans began control of the 107<sup>th</sup> Senate only to lose majority control after Senator Jim Jeffords (D-VT) switched to an Independent, but caucused with the Democrats in June of 2001. The Republicans then retook control of the Senate after the 2002 midterm elections.



(NAES).<sup>16</sup> For most issues, measures of constituency opinion needed to assess the influence of opinion on responsiveness across districts and states do not exist. When surveys do ask citizens for their preferences on specific legislation, there are seldom enough respondents to obtain accurate measures of constituency opinion. Luckily, the 2004 NAES helps overcome this problem with over 90,000 respondents interviewed during the course of the election campaign. In addition to data from the 2004 NAES, I use NOMINATE data to estimate Senator ideological orientation and *The Almanac of American Politics* to identify Senator party membership. Detailed descriptions of each variable used in the analysis are presented in Appendix A.

In order to gauge constituency opinion and evaluate the degree to which Senators respond to different income groups, I separated respondents in the Annenberg Survey into terciles: a low-income group with household income below \$35,000, a middle-income group with income between \$35,000 and \$75,000, and a high-income group with incomes above \$75,000.<sup>17</sup> These groups constitute 33%, 37% and 29% of respondents, respectively. Next,

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<sup>16</sup> The 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey significantly underrepresented many groups of citizens such as young people, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with little formal education. This is especially problematic as the underrepresentation of these opinions on matters relating to economic inequality could lead to biased estimates. In order to account for this, as well as to better estimate state opinion, I post-stratified the sample within each state on the basis of education, sex, race, and age.

<sup>17</sup> I tried to both create groups that were relatively even in number in terms of respondents as well as matching a concept of class that was appropriate for this study. My classification differs somewhat from the previous literature (Bartels 2008). Much of this difference is due to the categories of *income* made available by the NAES as well as the fact that I wanted to have relatively equal numbers of respondents in each grouping. I also tried

I estimated the average opinion of survey respondents within each state (by income group). I estimated constituency opinion using a proxy measure, using respondent ideology on a traditional liberal/conservative scale as a measure of income group opinion. This scale ranges from -2 to 2, with lower values coded as liberal and higher values coded as conservative.

Estimating opinion by income groups using survey data is somewhat problematic due to the possibility of measurement error. Because most surveys do not include enough respondents to accurately measure state or district opinion, this often creates a large degree of measurement error (see Achen 1978). However, for this analysis the 2004 NAES interviews a large number of respondents in each state, ranging from a low of 184 in Wyoming to a high of 7,807 in California. On average there are 1,693 respondents per state, thus decreasing the likelihood of measurement error in the independent variable.<sup>18</sup> My data allow for an accurate assessment of state opinion, especially when broken into terciles.

The summary statistics for the estimated constituency opinion are available in Table 5. While the mean of state opinion for each group tends to be conservative, *Lower-Income Constituency Opinion* is, on average, the most liberal of each of the three groups with a mean of .129. Both *Middle* and *Upper Income Constituency Opinion* have higher values, indicating they are

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other income groupings of respondents, however the results of these analyses were largely similar to those reported in this paper.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, this is a key instance in which the data that I use are superior to those used by Bartels (2008). In order to estimate state opinion, Bartels used the Senate Election Study which had an average of approximately 185 respondents per state (Bartels 2002).

(on average) more conservative than groups on the lower-income strata. Interestingly, *Middle Income Opinion* is, on average, the most conservative of the three groups.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 5.** Summary statistics for state Constituency Opinion

<i>State Constituency Opinion by Class</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Lower	.129	.16	-.27	.56
Middle	.239	.22	-.26	.67
Upper	.222	.22	-.19	.79
State Mean	.199	.16	-.06	.51

As this table demonstrates, senators are faced with choices in terms of who they will be responsive to, as different class subconstituencies often have competing ideological orientations. While the average constituent in each income group leans conservative, the summary statistics show there is a wide variation in state ideology. This presents legislators with a dilemma in many cases, as there are instances in which they must choose whether to respond to one group over another.

#### Testing Unequal Responsiveness

In this study, as in other dyadic studies of representation, I measure responsiveness as the correspondence between legislator behavior and constituency opinion. In order to

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<sup>19</sup> Difference in means tests among groups (t-tests) show the Lower and Upper Opinion groups are statistically different from one another (as is the difference between Lower and Middle). The difference between Middle and Upper is not statistically different, largely because the average ideological opinion of each group is conservative. Nonetheless, Senators often face a choice within their states, as Middle and Upper Income Constituency Opinion often differ as well.

test the hypotheses I developed in the previous section I utilize measures of legislator ideology, party membership, and constituency ideology. I estimate a standard OLS regression analysis to examine the degree to which legislators respond to different income groups.<sup>20</sup>

Legislator ideology is measured by employing DW-NOMINATE scores, which are a measure developed to summarize a legislator's ideological position based on all the votes they cast (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).<sup>21</sup> The scale for these scores range from -1 for the

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<sup>20</sup> The basic notation is similar to Bartels' (2008) analysis, which takes the following form:

$Y_k = \alpha + (\sum_{i \in k} \beta X_i) * P_k + e_k$  Where  $Y_k$  is an observed roll call vote (or summary of votes) cast by senator  $k$ ,  $P_k$  is the percentage of poor, middle, or upper income constituents from senator  $k$ 's state,  $X$  is the opinion of a specific survey respondent  $i$ ,  $(\beta X_i)$  is the weight attached to a respondent's opinion, and  $e$  is a stochastic term representing other influences on a senator  $k$ 's behavior and  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  are parameters to be estimated. The key parameter to be estimated is  $\beta$ , which measures the statistical relationship between Senator behavior (e.g. roll call voting) and constituency opinion. As this method of estimation produces three distinct income groups, no baseline category is needed and all three may be included in the model. Moreover, my model differs from Bartels in that I multiply respondent opinion by the percentage of poor, middle, or upper-income constituents in each state. In effect, this controls for the size of the income group population (poor, middle, upper) in each state. While this model is relatively simple, it has many advantages by only including a few explanatory variables, as "garbage can" models can often lead to inaccurate results (see Achen 2002; 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Bartels (2008) uses W-NOMINATE scores to test responsiveness of Senators to constituency preferences. As W-NOMINATE scores are static and not directly comparable between Congresses (see <http://www.voteview.com/page2a.htm>), I employ DW-NOMINATE scores for my dependent variable. I also estimated W-NOMINATE scores using the W-NOMINATE Roll Call Analysis Software for R. The results (available in Appendix B) are similar to those presented here. In reality, W-NOMINATE and DW-

most liberal Senators to 1 for the most conservative.<sup>22</sup> Summary statistics for this variable (available in Appendix B) show four of the five Congresses were more likely to be conservative, but only by a slight margin. Most of the Congresses obtain a mean right in the middle of the -1 to 1 scale. However, each Congress differs in terms of the standard deviation and degree to which extreme liberals or conservatives are present. This allows for a unique opportunity to observe responsiveness to constituency opinion during a period of five consecutive Congresses.

I examine responsiveness by looking at the relationship between legislator behavior and ideology by income group (within each state). The results for the OLS regression analysis is displayed in Table 2. Each column of the table displays a standard OLS regression analysis (for each separate Congress) where the dependent variable is *Legislator Ideology* measured using first dimension DW-NOMATE scores. The independent variables reflect *Constituency Conservatism* measured using data from the 2004 NAES, which asked respondents to place themselves on a traditional ideological scale.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, each column shows the degree to which Senators are responsive to the opinion of different income groups.<sup>24</sup> The results are quite striking in that Senators are found to be positively and significantly responsive to ideology of Upper-Income Constituents in each of the five

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NOMINATE scores correlate at an extremely high rate and therefore they are comparable measures of legislator ideology (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Summary statistics for the dependent and independent variables can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>23</sup> All question wording and variable coding can be found in appendix A.

<sup>24</sup> In order to control for the size of each group by state, I employ Census (2000) data, and multiply the average of each income group constituency opinion by the size of the population in each state.

Congresses.<sup>25</sup> I am unable to detect responsiveness to either Middle or Lower-Income Constituency Opinion.

**Table 6.** Differential Responsiveness of Senators to Constituency Opinion (107<sup>th</sup>-111<sup>th</sup> Congresses). Ordinary least squares regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) for Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores.

	107 <sup>th</sup> Congress	108 <sup>th</sup> Congress	109 <sup>th</sup> Congress	110 <sup>th</sup> Congress	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Constant	-0.228** (0.112)	-0.174 (0.105)	-0.226** (0.100)	-0.249** (0.101)	-0.309*** (0.105)
Low-Income Constituency Opinion	0.625 (1.899)	-0.376 (1.771)	0.227 (1.708)	-0.157 (1.675)	0.259 (1.792)
Middle-Income Constituency Opinion	-0.118 (0.679)	-0.260 (0.634)	-0.259 (0.611)	0.472 (0.616)	0.386 (0.627)
Upper-Income Constituency Opinion	3.785*** (1.111)	4.573*** (1.036)	5.438*** (0.984)	4.347*** (1.040)	4.353*** (0.998)
Observations	96	96	98	98	102
R <sup>2</sup>	0.225	0.284	0.387	0.377	0.349

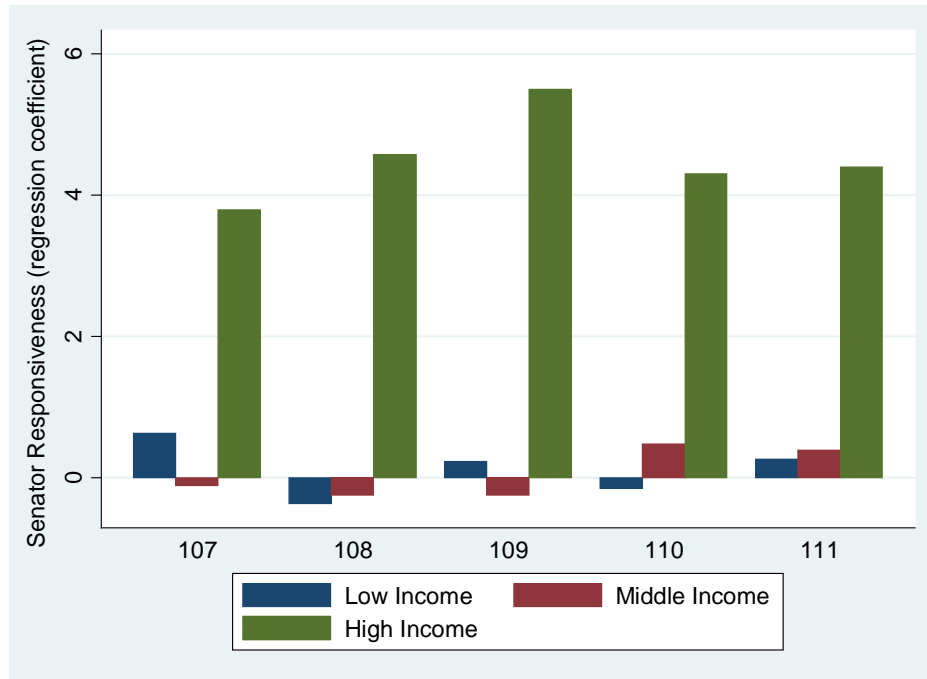
Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01 Two-tailed tests.

The substantive significance of the results in Table 6 can be seen by looking at the graphical display of the regression estimates for each of the five Congresses under examination. As Figure 11 demonstrates, Senators are found to be positively responsive to Upper-Income Constituents, and either only slightly or negatively responsive to Lower or Middle-Income Constituents.

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<sup>25</sup> The correlation between the income variables is actually quite high, which can be seen in Appendix B. Despite this high correlation, I generally find responsiveness toward Upper-Income Constituents, demonstrating that the impact of Upper Opinion is quite substantial.

**Figure 11.** Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (107th-111th Congresses)

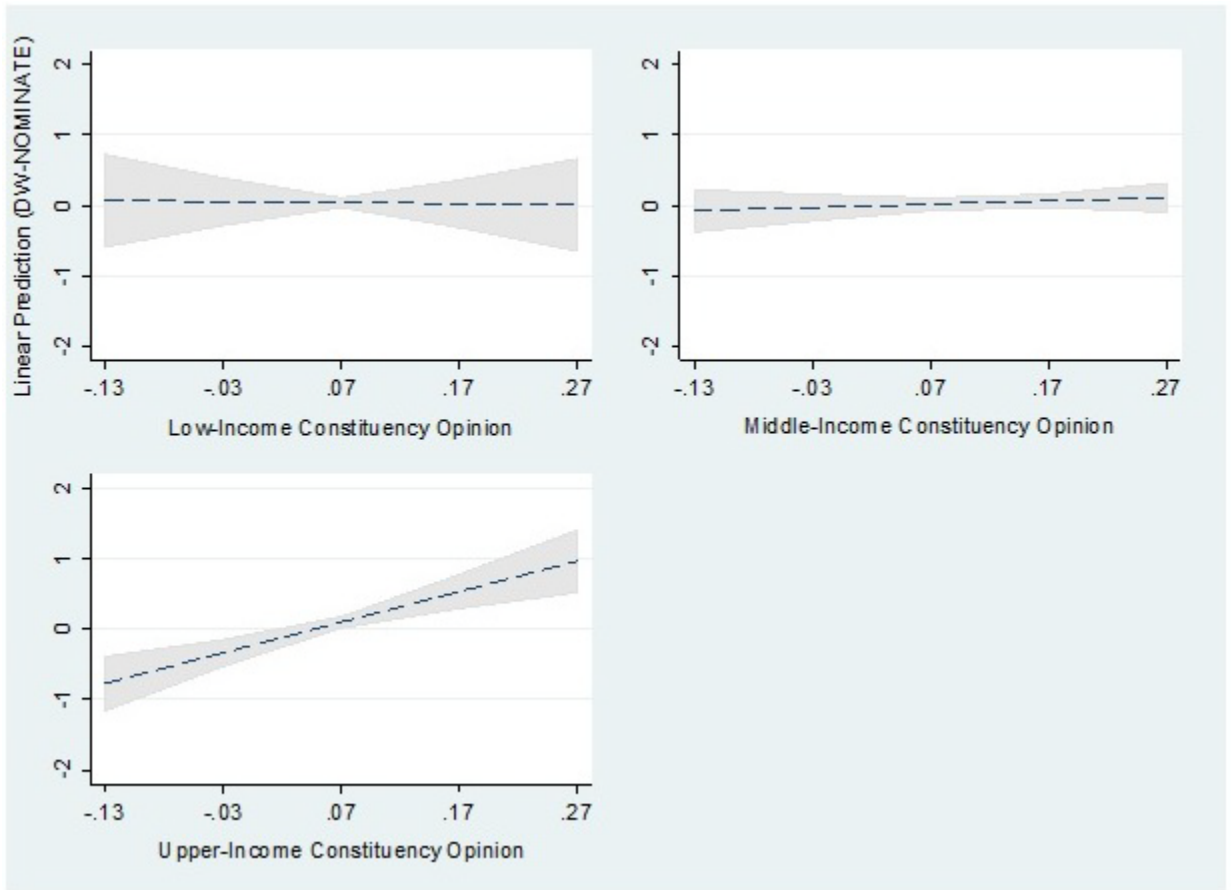


The nature of unequal responsiveness can be seen in Figure 12, which displays the predicted responsiveness for Senators in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress to each income tercile. In the figure, the dotted line represents the predicted values, while the shaded area shows the 95 percent confidence interval.<sup>26</sup> As the figure quite clearly shows, the predicted responsiveness for both Lower and Middle-Constituency Opinion is flat, while the responsiveness toward Upper-Income constituency opinion is positive.

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<sup>26</sup> To estimate predicted values I used the margins program in STATA, which estimates predicted values while holding all other variables at their means.

**Figure 12.** Predicted Senator Responsiveness by Economic Class for 110<sup>th</sup> Congress



Note: Shaded areas represent 95% confidence interval

In addition to examining a basic model of responsiveness, I control for two important variables. An additional control variable measures the percentage of African-Americans in a state. This control is included due to the fact that the proportion of African-Americans in a district likely has little impact on Republican legislator voting behavior since this group votes cohesively for the Democratic Party. In effect, including the percent of African-Americans in a state is a way to distinguish minority poor from non-minority poor. Moreover, I control for the effects of party as well. The results from the OLS regression



controlling for party are displayed in Table 7. This table shows responsiveness of Senators of the 107<sup>th</sup> through 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses toward constituent ideology (separated by income group). Each column of the table displays a standard OLS regression analysis (for each separate Congress) where the dependent variable is *Legislator Ideology* measured using first dimension DW-NOMATE scores. Each column shows the regression estimate for the independent variables of constituency opinion with a control variable for each state percentage of African Americans (*Percent Black*) and whether a Senator is a member of the *Republican Party*.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 7.** Differential Responsiveness of Senators to Constituency Opinion with additional controls (107<sup>th</sup>-111<sup>th</sup> Congresses). Ordinary least squares regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) for Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores.

	107 <sup>th</sup> Congress	108 <sup>th</sup> Congress	109 <sup>th</sup> Congress	110 <sup>th</sup> Congress	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Constant	-0.433*** (0.0459)	-0.427*** (0.0417)	-0.442*** (0.0433)	-0.423*** (0.0407)	-0.429*** (0.0392)
Low-Income Constituency Opinion	-0.103 (0.775)	-0.152 (0.690)	-0.0915 (0.723)	-0.377 (0.689)	-0.384 (0.669)
Middle-Income Constituency Opinion	0.238 (0.272)	0.287 (0.244)	0.385 (0.257)	0.691*** (0.245)	0.721*** (0.232)
Upper-Income Constituency Opinion	0.890* (0.472)	1.134** (0.432)	0.996** (0.468)	0.639 (0.450)	0.682* (0.403)
Percent Black	0.128 (0.174)	.0543 (.154)	.0670 (0.161)	.0175 (.155)	-.0220 (.148)
GOP	0.731*** (0.0334)	0.696*** (0.0303)	0.726*** (0.0342)	0.735*** (0.0326)	0.762*** (0.0303)
Observations	96	96	98	98	102
R <sup>2</sup>	0.880	0.899	0.897	0.905	0.914

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01 Two-tailed tests.

<sup>27</sup> I coded all Senators identifying themselves as Independents as either Republicans or Democrats according to the party they caucused with. The number of cases varies between Congresses due to Senator retirement or illness.

The results displayed in Table 3 are quite striking when examining the degree to which Senators respond unequally to different economic subconstituencies, even after controls are included. Most noticeably, this table demonstrates that Senators are consistently responsive to upper-income constituents as the *Upper-Income Income Opinion* variable is both positive and statistically significant in four of the five Congresses.<sup>28</sup>

Turning to the other constituency opinion variables, I am able to detect responsiveness by Senators to *Middle-Income Income Opinion* in two of the five Congresses, as this variable is both positive and statistically significant in the 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses. As each of these Congresses are controlled by the Democrats, I find partial support for the *Agenda Control Hypothesis*, at least to the extent that groups besides the wealthy receive representation when Democrats have majority control of the chamber. However, the independent variable measuring *Low Income Opinion* does not reach statistical significance in any Congress, demonstrating that I am unable to detect responsiveness to this income group. Moreover, *Low-Income Income Opinion* is negative in each of the five Congresses, demonstrating that Senators seem to act in the opposite direction of the interests of this group.<sup>29</sup> As expected, the variable *Republican* retains a positive and statistically significant

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<sup>28</sup> While many of the estimated coefficients of Low and Middle Income Constituency Opinion are negative, the estimated impact is too small in both absolute terms and in comparison to the standard error. This means that I am unable to rule out zero as a plausible value and can therefore not say with certainty that Senators are negatively responsive, only that I am unable to detect responsiveness by Senators to these groups.

<sup>29</sup> Tests of equality (Appendix B) show that the difference in coefficients between *Lower* and *Upper Income Opinion* are significantly different from each other in each model. Moreover, the difference in coefficients between *Lower* and *Middle Income Opinion* are significantly different in three of the five models (109<sup>th</sup>, 110<sup>th</sup>, and

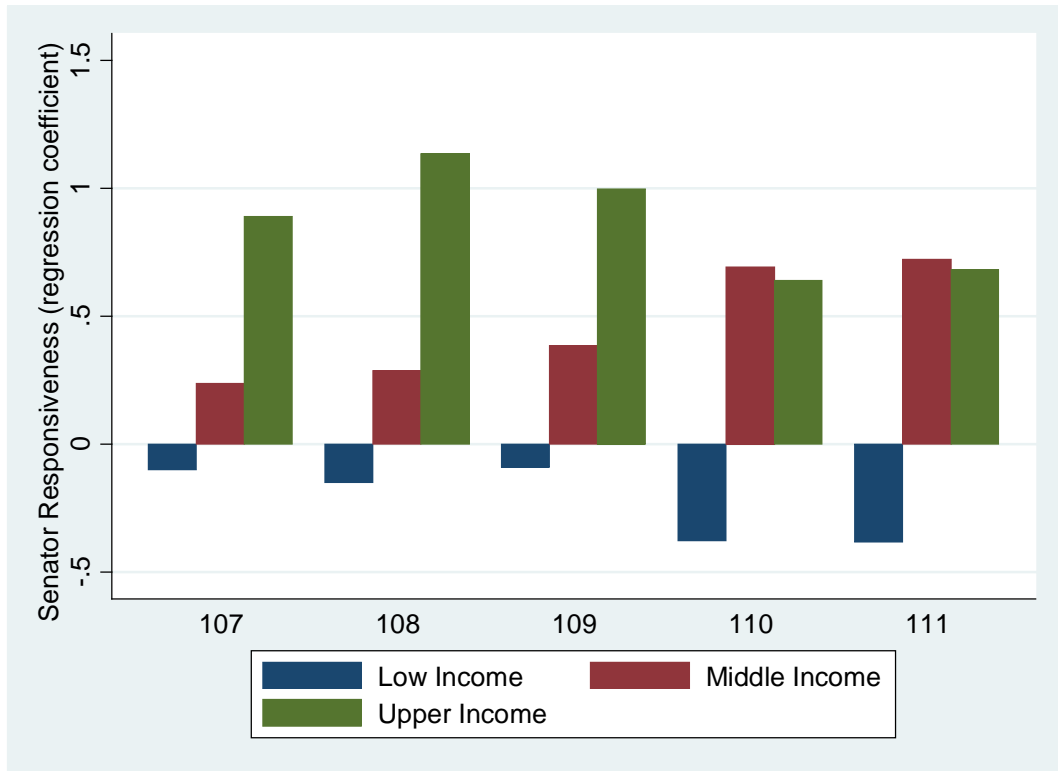
coefficient in all five Congresses, indicating Senators' party affiliations are strongly related to their voting patterns.

The substantive results of all of the findings in Table 7 are displayed in Figure 13 below. This figure shows the effect of differential responsiveness across Congresses, as the regression estimate is detailed for each income group as a bar on the graph. Clearly, the responsiveness estimate of *Upper-Income Opinion* is much larger than either *Low* or *Middle-Income Opinion* in most Congresses, but especially when examining the 107<sup>th</sup>, 108<sup>th</sup>, and 109<sup>th</sup>. Only in the 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is the estimate for *Middle-Income* higher than that for *Upper-Income Opinion*.

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111<sup>th</sup>). These tests, along with an examination of the size and magnitude of each coefficient allows for a sense of the degree to which each group receives responsiveness that is more or less than other groups (at least for those that are significantly different from one another). For example, the coefficient for *Upper-Income Opinion* is larger than the *Low Income Opinion* coefficients in all Congresses, indicating that not only are Senators responsive to the wealthy in each Congress, but significantly more so than to the poor.

**Figure 13.** Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups (with controls, 107th-111th Congresses)



Again, some support for the *Agenda Control Hypothesis* is present, as the Democratic Party having a majority of seats in the Senate does appear to allow for the responsiveness of groups besides the wealthy. However, in no case is there positive responsiveness toward the poor, and thus this hypothesis receives only minimal support. These results add support to my initial expectation that Senators are more likely to respond to the preferences of *Upper-Income Constituents*. Therefore, the *Unequal Responsiveness Hypothesis* receives strong support from the results.

### Partisan Differences in Responsiveness

While the preceding results show that responsiveness most clearly occurs for upper income constituents, it is an open question whether members of one of the two major political parties are more responsive to certain economic groups than others. I test this possibility by creating an interaction by multiplying the *Republican* variable (0-Democrat, 1-Republican) by income group opinion and adding that variable to the model used in the previous section.<sup>30</sup> This allows me to examine the independent effect that party has on responsiveness toward each income group. The results to the interactive models for each Congress are shown in Table 8.

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<sup>30</sup> Bartels (2008) estimated different equations by separately by party. In order to get a more precise estimate of the differences in each party's level of responsiveness to various constituencies, I chose to interact party with the various constituency variables.

**Table 8.** Partisan Differences in Responsiveness to Constituency Opinion (107<sup>th</sup>-111<sup>th</sup> Congresses). Ordinary least squares regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) for Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores.

	107 <sup>th</sup> Congress	108 <sup>th</sup> Congress	109 <sup>th</sup> Congress	110 <sup>th</sup> Congress	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Constant	-0.507*** (0.0754)	-0.482*** (0.0678)	-0.479*** (0.0708)	-0.459*** (0.0710)	-0.452*** (0.0614)
Low Constituency Opinion	1.303 (1.385)	0.989 (1.244)	1.026 (1.299)	0.113 (1.261)	-0.0679 (1.095)
Middle Constituency Opinion	-0.159 (0.415)	-0.162 (0.367)	-0.152 (0.391)	0.400 (0.373)	0.508 (0.337)
Upper Constituency Opinion	1.133** (0.568)	1.483*** (0.526)	1.269** (0.604)	1.120** (0.548)	1.126** (0.476)
Percent Black	.200 (.186)	.113 (.167)	.0740 (.193)	.155 (.197)	.0552 (.173)
GOP*Low Constituency Opinion	-2.055 (1.717)	-1.487 (1.530)	-1.219 (1.629)	-0.759 (1.616)	-0.0973 (1.505)
GOP*Mid Constituency Opinion	0.689 (0.598)	0.956* (0.540)	1.178** (0.568)	0.851 (0.575)	0.919 (0.559)
GOP*Upper Constituency Opinion	-0.748 (1.007)	-1.183 (0.919)	-1.092 (1.034)	-1.762 (1.077)	-1.993** (0.994)
GOP	0.844*** (0.105)	0.765*** (0.0930)	0.745*** (0.102)	0.797*** (0.105)	0.780*** (0.0966)
Observations	96	96	98	98	102
R <sup>2</sup>	0.883	0.902	0.902	0.908	0.918

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01 Two-tailed tests.

The key variables of interest are the interaction terms for each income group at the bottom of each column. In the 108<sup>th</sup> and 109<sup>th</sup> Congresses, the interaction variable *GOP\*Middle Income Opinion* is positive and significant. This means that Republicans are more responsive than Democrats to the middle class in these Congresses. Moreover, the interaction term is negative and significant in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress for *Upper Income Constituents*, signifying that Democrats are more responsive to the wealthy. This is an interesting finding, especially given the fact that the Democrats took unified control of the government in the

111<sup>th</sup> Congress as the election of Barack Obama helped the party win majorities in both the House and Senate. The fact that Democrats are more responsive than Republicans to the wealthy during this time might reflect a need to reward contributors (who tend to be wealthy).

These results run counter to my initial expectation that Democrats would be more responsive to lower-income groups and that Republicans would be more responsive to upper-income groups. Instead, the most consistent finding of partisan biases in responsiveness across Congress comes in the form of Republicans responding to the desires of the middle-class more than Democrats. Therefore, the *Partisan Bias Hypothesis* (as previously outlined) does not receive support from these results.

As responsiveness toward the *Upper Income Opinion* is strong in each of the Congresses under examination, I am unable to detect much support for the *Agenda Control Hypothesis*. In fact, responsiveness toward the wealthy under Democratically controlled Congresses seems to be greater than or equal to that of Republican controlled Congresses. Moreover, as the variable measuring lower income opinion does not achieve statistical significance under any Congress, it does not seem that a greater amount of responsiveness toward these groups is present when the Senate is controlled by either party.

#### Testing Agenda Control: The 107<sup>th</sup> Senate

The 107<sup>th</sup> Senate presents an interesting and rare opportunity to test the degree to which agenda control effects the way in which a change in the nature of issues on the agenda (and which party control the agenda) can influence the way in which legislators respond to different income groups. At the beginning of the 107<sup>th</sup> Senate session, the Republican Party

had unified control of the government, as George W. Bush's victory in the 2000 presidential election handed the party control of the presidency, and both chambers of the Congress. While the Senate was effectively split evenly between the parties with fifty members from each party elected, Republican control of the Presidency gave Vice President Dick Cheney the tie-breaking vote in the Senate, and thus majority control of the chamber.

The Bush administration wasted little time in pushing for permanent tax cuts. Passed first in 2001 (and later in 2003), the Bush tax cuts were some of the largest tax cuts in history and largely benefited the wealthy (Bartels 2008). Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT) was a key moderate in the negotiations and was a vote for which both parties courted in the many efforts to reach a compromise on the size of the tax cuts. While Jeffords voted for the final version of the tax cut in 2001, his patience with the president and the lack of moderates in the Republican Party had grown thin. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001 citing disagreements over abortion, education, and taxes, Jeffords announced he was changing his party affiliation to an Independent and would caucus with the Democrats, thus handing them control of the chamber.<sup>31</sup> In his speech announcing his decision, Jeffords said that in dealing with party leaders and the President it was difficult, "to deal with me and for me to deal with them...Looking ahead, I can see more and more instances in which I will disagree with the president on fundamental issues" (Margasak 2001).

Jeffords' switch presents an interesting most similar (within) case study to test the effects of a change in partisan control on legislator responsiveness toward different income

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<sup>31</sup> Despite announcing in late May, Jeffords promised to delay his switch until negotiations for the tax cuts had finalized, and thus began to caucus with the Democrats on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2001.



groups.<sup>32</sup> This is an opportunity in which we can examine the same group of legislators during a similar time period in which partisan control of the agenda changes. This presents an excellent opportunity for a most similar case study analysis (e.g. Gerring 2007).

In order to test the *Agenda Control Hypothesis*, I estimated W-NOMINATE scores using the WNOMINATE program in R for Senators both before and after Jeffords switched parties. Table 9 shows that Jeffords’ switch does have an effect on the agenda, as the W-NOMINATE scores for the period before the switch are on average more conservative than in the period after the switch. In fact, there is a total change in the average W-NOMINATE score of -.186, which is a statistically significant difference.

**Table 9.** W-NOMINATE estimates for the 107<sup>th</sup> Senate (before and after Jeffords party switch)

107 <sup>th</sup> Congress	W-NOMINATE mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Before Jeffords Switch	.148	.61	-.946	.973
After Jeffords Switch	-.038	.68	-.998	.952
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-.186</b> t=16.6 (p < .001)			

Table 5 shows not that the ideology of members changed in the 107<sup>th</sup> Senate after Jeffords switched parties, but that the issues on the agenda changed. As Keith Poole writes, “Members of Congress die in their ideological boots. That is, based upon the roll call voting record, once elected to Congress, members adopt an ideological position and maintain that position throughout their careers” (2003). As it is highly unlikely that Senators collectively decided to become more liberal, the change in W-NOMINATE scores are likely the result of

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<sup>32</sup> The switch by Jeffords falls short of meeting the requirements for a natural experiment, in that the change is not due to an exogenous treatment effect as Jeffords himself causes the change in agenda control (see Sekhon and Titiunik forthcoming).

issues on the agenda changing, which would likely be more liberal with Democrats controlling the chamber. Because there is an observed shift in the agenda, I run similar analyses (both before and after Jeffords switched) as in previous sections to determine which groups receive responsiveness from Senators and whether there are partisan differences in this responsiveness.

The results to multiple OLS regression analyses are reported in Table 10. In the first three columns, we can see the results for Senator responsiveness before Jeffords' party switch without controls (column 1), controlling for party and percent African American (column 2), and with interactions to test differences in partisan responsiveness (column 3). The first two models show similar results as before, Senators are responsive to upper-income constituents whether controlling for party or not. In the third model, none of the interaction variables achieve statistical significance, meaning that we are unable to see partisan differences in responsiveness before Jeffords switched parties.

**Table 10.** Senator Responsiveness to Constituency Opinion (107<sup>th</sup> Congress). Ordinary least squares regression coefficients (with standard errors in parentheses) for Poole-Rosenthal W-Nominate scores (before and after Jeffords' party switch).

	Before Jeffords Switch			After Jeffords Switch		
Constant	-0.224 (0.162)	-0.455*** (0.0644)	-0.603*** (0.102)	-0.479*** (0.180)	-0.742*** (0.0659)	-0.919*** (0.102)
Low Constituency Opinion	1.719 (2.737)	-0.689 (1.082)	1.873 (2.054)	2.105 (3.042)	0.249 (1.103)	3.979** (1.971)
Middle Constituency Opinion	-0.440 (0.979)	0.293 (0.387)	-0.210 (0.638)	-0.379 (1.088)	-0.0674 (0.394)	-1.093* (0.590)
Upper Constituency Opinion	5.694*** (1.602)	1.899*** (0.652)	2.675*** (0.792)	6.344*** (1.780)	2.177*** (0.666)	2.850*** (0.807)
GOP		1.043*** (0.0465)	1.324*** (0.137)		1.186*** (0.0479)	1.459*** (0.139)
GOP* Low Constituency Opinion			-3.788 (2.418)			-5.203** (2.368)
GOP* Middle Constituency Opinion			0.824 (0.841)			1.716** (0.829)
GOP*Upper Constituency Opinion			-1.937 (1.353)			-1.735 (1.382)
Observations	96	96	96	96	96	96
R <sup>2</sup>	0.231	0.882	0.891	0.244	0.902	0.909

Standard errors in parentheses \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01 Two-tailed tests.

The second half of Table 10 reports the results after Jeffords switches to an Independent and the Democrats took control of the Senate. Once again, three different models are presented: one without controlling for party (column 4), another controlling for party (column 5), and a third model with interactions to test differences in partisan responsiveness (column 6). Once again, Senators are responsive to their upper-income constituents, yet I am not able to detect responsiveness to either low or middle-income opinion. In the final column of the table, the interaction between GOP and lower-income

constituency opinion is negative and statistically significant, indicating that Democrats are more responsive to this group than Republicans. This is an interesting finding in that the poor do seem to receive greater responsiveness under Democratic control of the agenda. However, I find that Republicans are more responsive than Democrats to the middle class, as the interaction between GOP and middle-income constituency opinion is positive and significant. Neither party appears to be more responsive toward the wealthy after Jeffords' switch.

### Discussion

I find evidence of responsiveness to the wealthiest constituents in each of the Congresses I examine, some responsiveness to middle-income constituents in two Congresses, and no detectable responsiveness to lower-income groups in any Congress. Of all the hypotheses I tested, the strongest and most consistent support was with the *Unequal Representation Hypothesis*, as those in the upper-class received responsiveness by Senators in each Congress I examined. As my results differ from Bartels (2008), it seems to be the case that unequal responsiveness is now more pronounced than in previous decades. This change in responsiveness could reflect the growing inequality in America (e.g., Piketty and Saez 2003) or perhaps increasing polarization in Congress (e.g. McCarthy, Poole, Rosenthal 2006).

As for the *Partisan Bias Hypothesis*, the evidence is quite mixed. I do find greater responsiveness by Democrats to the wealthy in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. Additionally, I find evidence that the Republican Party is more responsive than Democrats to middle-income constituents in two of the Congresses analyzed (108<sup>th</sup> and 109<sup>th</sup>). The case study of the 107<sup>th</sup>

Congress details greater responsiveness of the Democratic Party to the poor once they control the agenda, but also responsiveness by Republicans to middle-income earners as well. However, in most Congresses, the Democrats were no more responsive to the poor than Republicans. The fact that the Democratic Party does not seem to respond better to lower-income groups could reflect a change in distributional goals of a party once set on helping the disadvantaged in American society. The fact that lower-income groups seem to be ignored by elected officials, while not a new finding (e.g. Gilens 2005; Bartels 2008), remains a troubling observation in American politics.

One possible explanation for the differences in responsiveness we see over time lies with differences in partisan control of Congress. However, the results presented in this analysis do not suggest this is always the case. While low-income constituents were better represented once Jeffords switched parties and handed control of the agenda to the Democrats in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, I was unable to detect responsiveness to this group when the Democrats controlled the Senate during the 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> sessions. The results show about the same level of (and in some cases more) responsiveness to upper-class opinion under Democratically controlled Senates. Part of the explanation for this finding might be due to the fact that agenda control matters much more in the House than in the Senate (Davidson et al. 2010).

My findings suggest that Senators do not respond to the views of all their constituents in an equal manner. My model of responsiveness assumed that Senators are equally adept at discerning the views of each income group constituency, which is not likely to occur in the real world, especially given the fact that different groups are more intense about some issues than others (e.g. Bishin 2009). Senators could be responding to what they

*think* the views of each constituency are, which is likely to lead to erroneous judgments or biased responsiveness toward upper-income groups, especially when the average Senator is not likely to come from the same socioeconomic class as those citizens at the bottom of the economic rung (e.g. Carnes 2012).

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the nature of unequal responsiveness in the United States Senate in an era for which wealth and income inequality has grown exponentially. I find strong support for unequal responsiveness in the Senate during the period of the 107<sup>th</sup> through 111<sup>th</sup> Congresses. For multiple issues, and across a number of recent Congresses, the results differ from previous findings regarding biased responsiveness, most specifically the findings of Larry Bartels (2008), who found responsiveness to middle and upper-income groups. My analysis, which examines Senator behavior on a large number of votes, shows evidence of responsiveness to only the wealthy, a distinct problem for any democracy. In some ways, this suggests oligarchic tendencies in the American system, a finding echoed in other research (e.g. Winters and Page 2009). While some might argue the size of the effects I observe in the results were small, the results consistently show that those with more means have, at the very least, a thumb on the scale when it comes to responsiveness. The results do not show the same for those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

My findings are a call for more research in the area of wealth inequality and representation. There has been a tradition in the study of American politics of treating economic class (e.g. income) as a control variable, rather than as something more. This largely stems from the idea that Americans do not identify along class lines, at least not to

the extent as citizens in European democracies. My results caution against this traditional approach, as I consistently find a clear bias in responsiveness toward the wealthy. While Americans might not easily identify along class lines, this does not mean that politicians representing these citizens do not respond to them in this manner. If equal responsiveness is a fundamental practice in a democratic society (e.g. Dahl 1971), my findings question the degree to which this occurs.

Additionally, the matter of issue intensity, especially among differing income groups, may play a large role in my findings. However, I was not able to measure issue intensity and therefore my findings are a call for more research into subconstituency politics, as it matters which types of groups parties are responsive to as different groups care about some issues more than others (e.g. Bishin 2009). Moreover, while it is clear that Americans often have conflicting views on such matters relating to inequality (e.g. McClosky and Zaller 1984), more needs to be done to examine the circumstances under which people care about reducing inequality, especially when different groups benefit and care about issues related to inequality related in different ways.

While I do find consistent responsiveness of Senators to the upper-class, it is worth considering if the Senate is functioning just as the Founders intended. It was the House of Representatives that was designed to be the “people’s branch” and to represent the interests of the majority. The Senate, in contrast, was set up to control popular excesses. Originally elected by the state legislatures, Senators were meant to be insulated from the masses (Davidson et al. 2010). Because of this, future research must examine the extent to which different income groups receive different types of representation in the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, unequal responsiveness should be an area that receives great

scrutiny from political scientists in the future, as our era is likely to be defined by the great wealth inequality not seen since the first Gilded Age.

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**Appendix A:** Variables Used in analyses & NAES question wording

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Coding</b>
<i>Republican</i>	<i>The Almanac of American Politics</i>	0 Democrat 1 Republican
<i>Legislator Liberalism</i>	<i>DW-Nominate Scores</i> for Senate accessed on 4-26-11 from <a href="http://voteview.com/dwnomin.htm">http://voteview.com/dwnomin.htm</a>	First Dimension Coordinate
<i>Legislator Liberalism</i>	<i>W-Nominate Scores</i> for Senate, estimated using W-NOMINATE Roll Call Analysis Software for R	First Dimension Coordinate
<i>Class</i>	<i>2004 National Annenberg Election Study</i> . Question cwa04. Percentage of each income group calculated using Census data (2000)	Low-income: below \$35,000 Middle Income: \$35,000-\$75,000 High-Income: above \$75,000
<i>Constituency Conservatism</i>	<i>2004 National Annenberg Election Study</i> . Question Cma06.	Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal? (Recoded to match DW-NOMINATE scale and to center at 0). 2 Very conservative 1 Conservative 0 Moderate -1 Liberal -2 Very liberal
<i>Percent Black</i>	<i>US Census (2000)</i>	Percent African-American by state

## Appendix B

Summary statistics for Legislator Ideology (DW-NOMINATE)

<i>Congress</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Partisan Control</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
107 <sup>th</sup>	2001-2003	Split	.001	.42	-.768	.784
108 <sup>th</sup>	2003-2005	Republican	.01	.43	-.55	.697
109 <sup>th</sup>	2005-2007	Republican	.04	.46	-.55	.907
110 <sup>th</sup>	2007-2009	Democrat	.03	.44	-.641	.907
111 <sup>th</sup>	2009-2011	Democrat	-.04	.44	-.641	.907

Correlations between Constituency Opinion Measures

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Lower	1	-	-
Middle	.56	1	
Upper	.63	.79	1

Tests of equality between coefficients

<b>Congress</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>P-value</b>
107 <sup>th</sup>	Lower=Upper	.04	GOP*Upper= GOP*Lower	.21
	Lower=Middle	.29		
	Middle=Upper	.29		
108 <sup>th</sup>	Lower=Upper	.01	GOP*Upper= GOP*Lower	.72
	Lower=Middle	.22		
	Middle=Upper	.23		
109 <sup>th</sup>	Lower=Upper	.01	GOP*Upper= GOP*Lower	.84
	Lower=Middle	.09		
	Middle=Upper	.36		
110 <sup>th</sup>	Lower=Upper	.01	GOP*Upper= GOP*Lower	.38
	Lower=Middle	.02		
	Middle=Upper	.64		
111 <sup>th</sup>	Lower=Upper	.04	GOP*Upper= GOP*Lower	.77
	Lower=Middle	.00		
	Middle=Upper	.71		

p values less than .10 indicate coefficients significantly different from each other

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

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...no country can be well governed unless its citizens as a body keep religiously before their minds that they are the guardians of the law and that the law officers are only the machinery for its execution, nothing more.

- Mark Twain *The Gilded Age*

This dissertation began by pointing out that the current era of American politics will likely be labeled in history for the dramatic increases in disparities between the rich and poor. There are striking differences, however, between this current age of inequality and previous ones in American history. Unlike the first ‘Gilded Age’ and its aftermath, it is unlikely that the initial dissatisfaction resulting from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression will lead to substantial policy responsiveness by institutions or the elected officials who run them. Moreover, it seems unlikely that the “Occupy Wall Street” movement will be able to match the results of the Populist and Progressive movements that instituted reforms limiting the influence of the wealthy on political affairs. While the “Occupy” protests at first seemed to progress in the direction of the Progressive or Populist movements, the current political landscape remains unchanged, with elected officials responding to the interests of the wealthy over other Americans.

It is perhaps not surprising that a protest movement like Occupy Wall St. will not completely change the American political landscape. There is a long list of social movements that have failed in American history (e.g. Tilly 2004). What is surprising is that so few political representatives have embraced the movement's main concern (one that is shared by a majority of Americans) — that the drastic rise in wealth inequality is a real problem for American democracy. Instead, debts and deficits at the state and national level dominate political discussions. During these discussions, there is little effort by elected officials to aid those at the bottom of the economic ladder by raising taxes on the wealthiest Americans, the same group of individuals who have benefited most from the vast increase in wealth inequality in recent times. Instead, the programs that directly aid those struggling (e.g. social welfare and education) are cut. Rather than responding in a meaningful way to the main message of the Occupy protest (namely that growing wealth inequality threatens democracy and is inherently unfair), partisan politics continue to stifle efforts to combat inequality. The governmental responsiveness that did occur was almost entirely at the local level, in which public officials responded by sending police to almost every major 'occupation,' stifling protests and attempting to marginalize the movement's message.

The reasons why we are unlikely to see responsiveness from governmental officials is the focus of the conclusion of this dissertation. Two recent and salient examples of governmental action will provide an illustration of the factors contributing to a lack of responsiveness among elected officials. The recent passage of health care reform and the partisan battles surrounding the issue of raising the federal debt ceiling illustrate why the contemporary era is unlikely to witness a reversal of governmental action against growing wealth inequality. After discussing each example in turn, I will examine some reforms that

might offer a way out around the roadblocks standing the way to progress toward greater equality.

### Inequality and Institutional Responsiveness

#### *Health Care Reform*

The recent passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, might represent one of the most visible example of public officials acting to counter inequality. This piece of legislation was a center piece of President Obama's legislative agenda and its passage is one of the few major pieces of legislation aimed at reducing inequality since the Great Society programs of the 1960's (Leonhardt 2010). The politics behind this legislation's passage, however, demonstrate the difficulty in achieving significant reforms aimed at reducing inequality and present a picture of the way in which the American political system presents obstacles to large-scale change that might help alleviate wealth inequality.

This legislation targeted a key area of inequality in contemporary society. The number of people without health care has increased steadily since the beginning of the century, and in 2010 about 47 million Americans (1 in 6) did not have health insurance. Health care remains one of the most significant costs to uninsured Americans, 80 percent of whom earn less than \$75,000 per year (Census 2010). Moreover, family incomes have not kept pace with health care inflation, creating a situation in which many low-income families cannot afford health insurance. This led to a growing need to address the problem, and in the 2008 presidential election, both parties promised action.

As health care reform was a centerpiece of Obama's 2008 election campaign, the administration focused on passing a bill to overhaul the nation's ailing healthcare system.



The administration made an early decision to let Congress draft the majority of the legislation. As a result, the bill languished in the legislature for over a year and only then passed by a slim majority in the House of Representatives with a vote of 219-212. This came after the bill almost died in the Senate, after Scott Brown (R-MA) won the special election in Massachusetts to replace Senator Ted Kennedy, a longtime champion of healthcare reform (D-MA). Brown's election threatened the filibuster-proof Democratic majority. As a result, the Obama administration had to scale back the original health reform measure to ensure its passage. The resulting legislation was so watered down, it was deemed "kiddie care" by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) (Stolberg, Zeleny, and Hulse 2010). Despite the legislation being significantly scaled back from its original form, not a single Republican legislator voted for its passage.

While the final bill was weakened substantially, the benefits to middle and low income Americans were substantial. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires most Americans to have health insurance. The bill planned to add about 16 million Americans to Medicaid, in effect subsidizing the cost of private health coverage for low and middle income people. Large employers were now required to offer health care to employees or face a penalty. Health insurers could no longer deny coverage to children with preexisting conditions or people who suddenly become ill. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the bill would provide coverage to 32 million Americans who did not have health insurance, leaving about 23 million uninsured in 2019 (Pear and Herszenhorn 2010). While Republican lawmakers denounced the plan as ballooning the federal budget, the CBO estimated the costs of the legislation would be offset by savings in Medicare as well as tax increases on the wealthiest taxpayers. The CBO, in

fact, estimated that the bill would *reduce* the federal budget deficit by \$143 billion during the next ten years (Leonhardt 2010).

While the benefits to so many low-income Americans and those struggling at the ‘near poverty’ threshold were substantial, this piece of legislation barely became law, faces stiff resistance in its implementation in many states, and runs a high risk of being substantially changed or declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Moreover, the bill’s overall popularity has decreased substantially, despite Americans favoring the individual aspects of the bill (Sussman et al. 2012). The manner in which this bill became law, and the fact that it is on the verge of being either altered or struck down by the Court, demonstrates how the American political system and its policymaking institutions often present obstacles to decreasing inequality.

Despite the bill’s passage and projection to cut the number of uninsured Americans in half, a large swath of Americans have turned against the measure and favored its repeal (despite supporting the individual aspects of the bill), largely because many Republican legislators decried the legislation as a socialist threat to America (Sussman et al. 2012). The Supreme Court now seems likely to declare all or part of the legislation unconstitutional. At the state level, Republican governors have resisted implementing the law. The bill also fueled the growth of the ‘Tea Party’ movement, which pressured conservative members of Congress to kill the legislation and prevented any compromise from being reached. In fact, not a single Republican voted in favor of one of the most important pieces of legislation to combat wealth inequality since the legislation of the Great Society.

What counts as a significant achievement in the contemporary political landscape comes nowhere near previous ones. The most significant piece of legislation dealing with

inequality since the 1960s left a projected 22 million people without health insurance. The current institutional arrangement of governmental responsiveness, which allows minorities to tyrannize majorities (e.g. Dahl 1956, Bishin 2009) is not covering all citizens, a problem for American democracy.

This example illustrates a key finding from Chapter 2, that the U.S. system was designed to prevent quick and large-scale change. The many different choke points in American governance thus stand in the way of expansions in inequality. The battle over the passage of health care reform and the potential for it to face repeal before major aspects of the bill go into effect, for example, are illustrative of this fact. This example also demonstrates that the hyper-partisanship of the contemporary political landscape could threaten efforts to reduce inequality. Soon after this piece of legislation passed, the Republican Party took control of the House of Representatives, promised to repeal the bill and focused on the federal budget deficit.

#### *The Debt Ceiling & Budget 'Crises'*

Federal law requires Congress to give authorization to the government to borrow money to pay for programs passed by Congress. As the national debt has grown, there have been multiple times in which the Treasury has reached a debt limit, also known as a debt ceiling. In 2011, a year after Republicans re-took control of the House of Representatives, conflict over whether to raise the debt ceiling was a frequent occurrence. Negotiations between the Vice President and legislators of both parties began in May, but collapsed in June. One of the main reasons for the collapse was Democratic legislators' insistence that a

deal include revenue increases (increases in taxes) as well as spending cuts. Republicans wanted only spending cuts (New York Times 2011).

In July, President Obama came forth with a deal that included a \$4 trillion deficit reduction plan that would make cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid (Hulse and Landler 2011). These negotiations failed as well and a deal was reached (days before a government shutdown loomed) in which the debt ceiling would be raised in two stages, \$2.4 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years, and an immediate trimming of \$900 billion in cuts. Moreover, a bipartisan Congressional “super committee” was created to deal with the second round of cuts and a “trigger” was adopted, which would put in place automatic cuts if Congress failed to come to an agreement (New York Times, 2011).

This debate over raising the debt ceiling often centered around the idea the government was just spending too much. Discussion rarely focused on the fact that taxes for many, including the wealthiest Americans, were at the lowest point in almost 40 years. Cuts to social programs, which are also at a low point (as a percentage of GDP), were the main focus of the proposed deal. The fact that President Obama came forward with a deal that would have made significant cuts to social programs that disproportionately benefit low-income Americans illustrates how compromises often hit this group hardest. Increasing the amount of money the government collects or cutting spending on a bloated military budget, was not at the center of the debate. Instead, cutting programs for those struggling was often the focus, demonstrating how the current system of governmental representation is unequal in nature.

*The Contemporary Political Landscape and Lessons for Expanding Equality*

These examples, along with the findings in this dissertation, offer a number of lessons about the contemporary political landscape and show problems with current institutional responsiveness. The current institutional structure does not promote equality as a central concern. Institutions are meant to be constructed to provide citizens with services they need from government. Moreover, elected officials are meant to both respond to the people and uphold core democratic principles. Since one of the chief concerns of democracy is the idea of equality, governmental institutions need to be restructured so that equality among citizens is among the main priorities of institutional action.

One lesson from these examples is that the growth in partisan polarization threatens advancements in reducing inequality. This is especially true when one party acts in unison to stand in the way of tax increases, or any legislation aimed at helping those at the bottom of the income rungs. In terms of the health care example, the fact that not a single member of the Republican Party voted in favor of one of the most important pieces of legislation in over 40 years is another example of the hyper-partisanship that dominates the current political landscape. The rise in partisan polarization in the contemporary era has been shown to correspond with the rise in inequality (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). This rise in polarization is a clear threat to reforms aimed at reducing inequality, especially when one party stands in unison as obstructionist to any policy that might decrease inequality. This was evident with both examples; compromise was never really an option as the Republican Party stood in the way of solutions that could have decreased wealth inequality. Democrats, however, failed to connect how each of these examples could lower inequality, something a strong majority of citizens favor. Linking specific government programs with

inequality in the abstract is a necessary step for Democrats seeking to persuade a public that is skeptical of government.

These examples also demonstrate that the debate surrounding important issues is often misconstrued. When the political discussion turns to debts and deficits, public officials consistently focus on cutting spending, not on raising taxes. This has even become true for Democrats, a party that has traditionally worked to represent the downtrodden in society through progressive taxation. In the contemporary political landscape though, few Democrats have the political courage to argue for the need of tax increases. This has been especially true for President Obama, despite arguing continually during his presidential campaign to this effect. As the *New York Times* editorial board argued during the budget negotiations:

[President Obama] seems to have embraced this illegitimate process — rooted in the false and dangerous premise that the nation’s budget problems are entirely a matter of overspending on the needy and not of undertaxing the rich.<sup>33</sup>

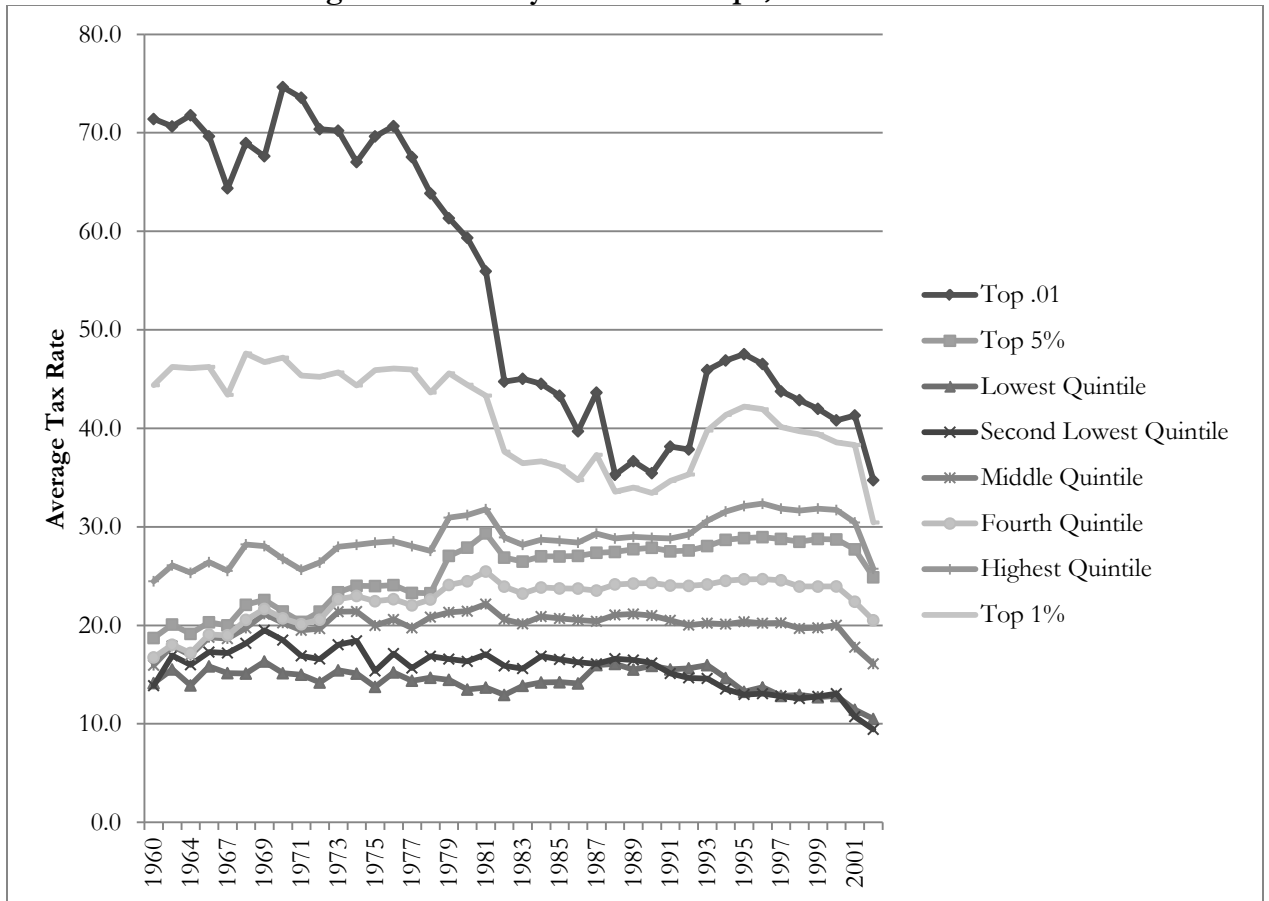
This example illustrates how the debate surrounding government spending is often misguided and focuses solely on cutting programs rather than raising taxes. Yet the change in tax policy and the move away from progressive taxation is an important concern not often considered in these debates. Figure 14 demonstrates how the average tax rate for individuals has decreased over time, especially for those at the top of the income brackets. As the figure demonstrates, the tax rate for those in the top income brackets has fallen to some of the lowest rates in 40 years. As these groups often pay the most in taxes, the overall effect on

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<sup>33</sup> “Negotiating on a Knife’s Edge,” *New York Times*, July 7 2011

the federal government's ability to raise money to spend on social programs that aid those struggling is substantially inhibited.

**Figure 14.**  
**Average Tax Rates by Income Groups, 1960-2004**



Source: Piketty and Saez (2003)

The Democratic Party's failure to effectively argue for or seriously push the possibility of increased taxes on the wealthy, along the Republican's efforts to help 'fix' the nation's budget gap, represent one of the dominant trends in contemporary American politics when states or the federal government are faced with budget shortfalls. Republican lawmakers (often with the aid of Democrats) tend to cut services that benefit the least well off in times of budget crisis. Raising taxes on the wealthy seems to be an option rarely

considered seriously. Yet, as figure 14 quite clearly demonstrates, taxes have fallen significantly on the wealthiest Americans. If the often quoted argument that decreased taxes leads to growth is true, the United States should be enjoying one of the most prosperous times economically. Clearly that is not the case.

While these examples, along with the overall findings of this dissertation, might portend an ominous future, there are many reforms that could be put in place to help alleviate growing wealth inequality.

#### Possible Reforms to the 'New Gilded Age'

The future does not necessarily hold a gloomy picture for those desiring a decrease in wealth inequality or to improve equality in responsiveness by public officials. In order to increase responsiveness from both political institutions and representatives, however, a number of reforms must be implemented.

To adequately address all of the potential reforms to the political and economic system that might redress the growth in wealth inequality in American society would take an entire dissertation. Therefore, I focus in this section on a small number of reforms that, while alone are not enough to change the course of wealth inequality, are illustrative of efforts that must be taken if wealth inequality is seen as a danger to the democratic process.

#### *Tax Reform*

One of the main ways in which wealth is redistributed is through the politics of taxation. All governments must decide how best to levy, collect, and use taxes of its citizens. In the United States, at least in recent times, the idea of raising taxes on the wealthy has been



akin to political suicide. Even efforts to curtail tax cuts already in place that disproportionately benefit the wealthy bring constant battles.

A prime example of recent governmental action contributing to wealth inequality in America is the trend toward a more regressive tax policy. The tax system must be made more progressive and taxes on the wealthy need to be increased. While this might seem like a controversial position in American politics, the evidence from Chapter 3 demonstrated that the vast majority of Americans favor increased taxes on the wealthy. Moreover, Americans that are not wealthy might be open to the idea of paying additional taxes. Research demonstrates that Americans are much more open to an increase in taxes if that money is used for education, health care, or jobs programs (Page and Jacobs 2009). Additionally, recent surveys indicate that Americans are less likely to say they pay “more than their fair share of taxes” than in previous years (Auxier 2010).

Restoring tax levels to a more progressive level, similar to pre-1980, would help increase revenue that could be spent on programs aimed at reducing inequality, such as jobs training programs, education, or social welfare. Therefore, eliminating the Bush Tax Cuts (some of the most regressive tax cuts in American history) would be a good first step. Federal tax rates, however, are not the only area in which tax progressivity has decreased. In other areas, elected officials of both parties have worked to reduce tax rates for corporations, capital gains, and inheritance taxes (Piketty and Saez 2003). Each of the tax reductions in these areas has worked to redistribute money upwards, increase inequality, and leave less government revenue for spending on programs that could help those truly struggling. Therefore, efforts to re-establish tax progressivity are an important step in moving to alleviate the threat of growing wealth inequality.

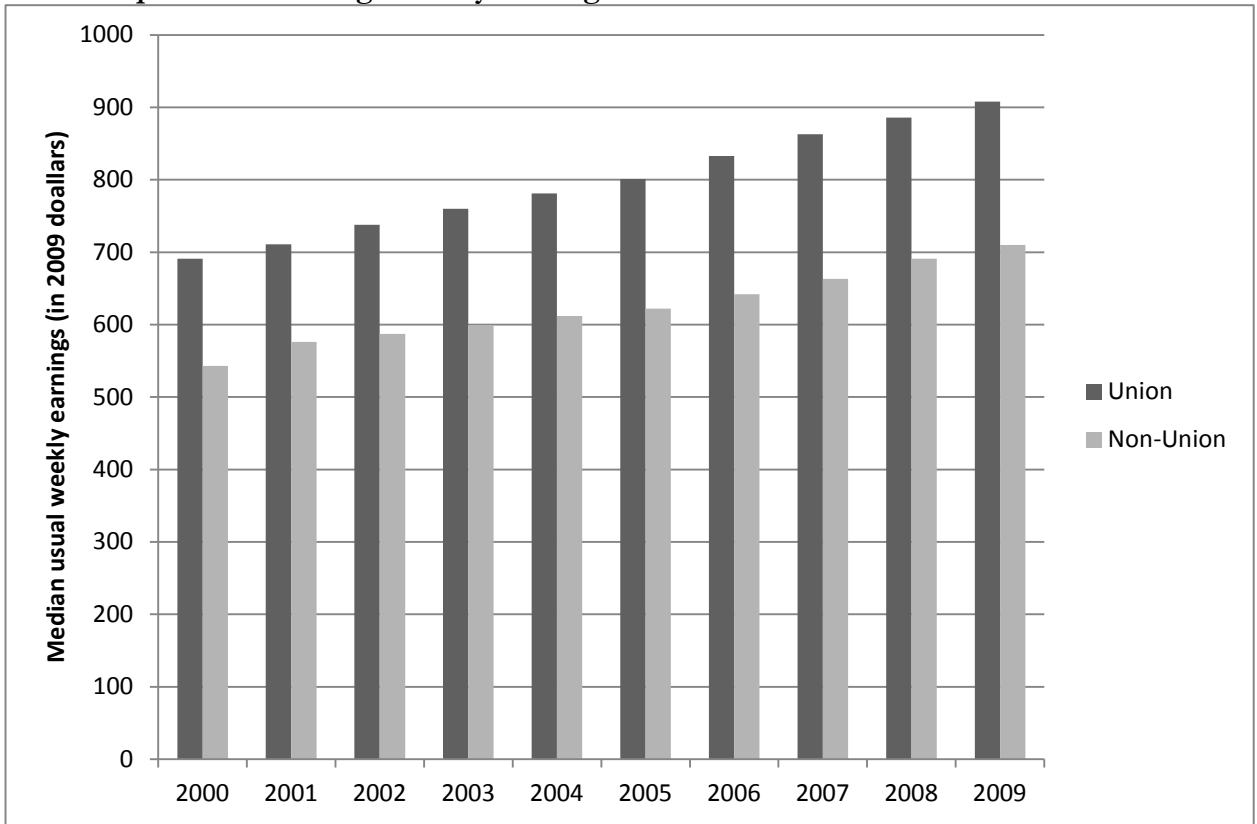
### *A Civil Right to Organize*

Unions were traditionally seen in American society as the primary vehicle to protect workers' rights. While the American economy has shifted away from manufacturing, unions have declined precipitously. Nevertheless, union representation, and the right to form a union, can still be one of the most important ways in which workers can protect their rights. This is true in both the public and private sector. Political representatives, instead of working to take away union rights, should be working to aid the right to organize. Moreover, this right must be framed as a civil right, as a recent editorial in the *New York Times* argues:

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that “everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.” The First Amendment has been read to protect freedom of association, and the 1935 National Labor Relations Act recognized the “right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations” (Kahlenberg and Marvit 2012).

From the standpoint of those who would like to decrease wealth inequality and/or provide more meaningful job creation and wealth for those in the lower-classes, the efforts to go after unions represents a way in which inequality can be exacerbated. Generally, Unions are seen as a vehicle that represent and foster worker rights. Unions and membership in unions, however, have decreased significantly over time. This is problematic because people who work in unions often make more than those who are not represented by union leadership, a phenomenon that continues to this day, which can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 15**  
**Comparison of Average weekly earnings of Union and Non-Union Workers**



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Median usual weekly earnings (second quartile), Employed full time, Wage and salary workers, Non-union, 16 & over, Wage and salary workers, excluding incorporated self employed

Political representatives need to work to strengthen union rights, which create an advocate for workers and those in the lower classes in the economic and political arena. Unions could be strengthened substantially through presidential leadership that frames the ability to organize as a civil right. One way this could be done is by strengthening the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Worker rights to collective association are frequently violated by businesses in the United States (Compa 2000). The NLRB, however, generally does not have the resources to fight for the rights of workers or does not have

strong presidential support. Democratic administrations, while generally more supportive of unions, would likely benefit from linking the strengthening of unions with decreasing wealth inequality. Beyond simply making labor friendly appointments to the NLRB, Democratic administrations must push for legislation that protects the agency from attacks by business lobbies that seek to weaken its power.

### *Job-Sharing Legislation*

After one of the worst economic downturns since the Great Depression, political representatives must look for ways to create budgets that take all citizens into account. Cutting social welfare programs or education in times of budget shortfall only hurts Americans in the long-run. One way to protect individuals during times of economic downturns is to give companies an incentive not to fire workers. In Germany, for example, a program known as *Kurzarbeit* gives incentives to employers to retain workers in times of economic downturn.

Under this system, companies retain workers by reducing their hours and wages. The government, however, steps in to provide a subsidy and pays workers about sixty percent of their lost salary. This program helps stave off large-scale unemployment and allows companies to remain productive as John Cassidy, a reporter for *The New Yorker* magazine writes, “Despite a global recession and a European debt crisis, the German unemployment rate is lower now than it was in January, 2009” (Cassidy 2012).

Attempts to introduce similar types programs in the United States have met strong resistance, even from the Obama administration. Although a trial version of this type of program was introduced in the 2012 budget, the issue has received little attention in

discussions about improving the economy during times of recession. Programs such as these should be a main priority for those who want to help alleviate growing wealth inequality because they encourage governmental responsiveness in which equality is a concern.

### *Campaign Finance*

In terms of participation, research demonstrates that those in the lower classes often participate in politics at much lower rates than do middle and upper income citizens (e.g., Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Wealthier citizens generally have a higher propensity to vote, contact public officials, volunteer for campaigns, write letters, attend protests and donate money to candidates (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

Contributing money to political campaigns has become one of the most important forms of political participation in the United States. As campaign spending rises each election cycle, races are disproportionately being funded by the wealthy. The top ten percent of income earners, for example, contribute about half of all contributions to political campaigns (e.g. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Donovan and Bowler 2002). Additionally, with the rise in Super-PACs, extremely wealthy individuals are able to be the primary donors to political campaigns, often providing the sole source of campaign cash for individual candidates. In fact, the largest single political contribution in American history occurred this year when billionaire Sheldon Adelson contributed \$5 million to Republican candidate Newt Gingrich (Eggen 2012).

Most importantly, large majorities of Americans favor stricter campaign finance laws (Donovan and Bowler 2002). Moreover, these laws increase the chance that there is a level playing field, also improving the chances that working class individuals can run in elections, a group that is historically underrepresented in political institutions (Carnes 2012). Evidence from campaign finance laws at the state level demonstrates additional benefits. In Arizona, for example, there was a 60 percent increase in the number of candidates running in state elections. Similarly, in Maine, the first publically funded elections produced a 40 percent increase in contested legislative primaries (Donovan and Bowler 2002). In addition to increasing the number of candidates in elections, putting caps on donations and providing a subsidy to candidates lessens the influence that the wealthy can have on political affairs.

Clearly, the American public cannot rely on institutions as they are currently structured or political representatives to regulate the campaign finance system so that everyone has an equal chance to influence elections. Representatives, faced with the need to constantly run for re-election, are always looking to fill their campaign coffers. Moreover, institutions like the Supreme Court have not ruled favorably on campaign finance laws. This is most evident in the recent *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010) decision. The Court ruled that the government cannot limit corporate donations in candidate elections (Liptak 2010). This decision demonstrates that not even the top court in the land will always act to uphold the principle of equality and will instead side with corporate and special interests over the people.

The view that corporations are the same as individuals, and that spending in an election equates with free speech, both allow the wealthy to have unequal influence on the political system. As was detailed in Chapter 2, the historical evidence indicates the Court's

view that corporations are to have the same rights as individuals was the result of a clerical error by the Court, not judicial precedent or policy. A constitutional amendment that prevents corporations from having the same rights as people or one that requires public financing of elections could go a long way in improving responsiveness of the government to all citizens.

### Conclusion

This dissertation began by asking a number of questions: To what extent has political inequality been prevalent throughout American history? To what degree does the American public care about wealth inequality? And, to what extent do public officials respond to the people's will? The results of the research conducted in this dissertation lend evidence to a troubling picture for American democracy: American citizens are concerned about and want the government to reduce economic inequality, yet the inequality that has been prevalent throughout American history seems likely to remain intact, largely because political representatives do not respond equally to all citizens.

As was made clear in the historical analysis in Chapter 2, political inequality has been common since the time of the Founding. In many ways, the manner in which the nature of representation was founded upon set the seeds for a future in which inequality was rampant for the vast majority of the population. Moreover, given that many accomplishments have occurred in the realm of political equality, the threat of increased and vast wealth inequality threatens these advancements.

The American public is both aware of and concerned about wealth inequality. As Chapter 3 demonstrated through the use of multiple opinion polls over different time

periods, that the vast majority of the American public both supports a reduction in wealth inequality and contains a desire to have the government do something about it.

Despite the American public's strong support to change the direction in which wealth inequality has expanded, public representatives seem to do little to counter this trend. As Chapter 4 shows, when examining the Senate, legislators consistently respond to the well-off, yet I was unable to find evidence of responsiveness toward the poor. This occurs when either major party controls the majority of the chamber, demonstrating a disturbing fact that the Democratic Party, once seen as a champion of the plight of the poor, may have now abandoned these efforts.

While I do not find evidence that political representatives respond to those in the lower classes and that the Democratic Party seems to also have abandoned the poor, a number of potential reforms were offered that might increase responsiveness to all citizens, considered as political equals. While these reforms might appear unlikely in the current political climate, it is worth noting that majorities of Americans favor their implementation. Moreover, as the modern conception of justice is largely based around equality, it is not farfetched to believe that citizens will eventually push for expansions in equality.

Citizens must be the ones to push for many of these reforms and for greater responsiveness from representatives. The way that American institutions are currently structured does not lend itself to change without citizen support. Just as Mark Twain argued in his book *The Gilded Age*, American citizens must act in a way that only allows their representatives to act as machinery for the execution of democratic values. Until they do so, many Americans, especially those at the bottom of the economic rung, will be without an advocate.



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