PRISONERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM?

AMERICANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TAXES AND INEQUALITY
IN A NEW GILDED AGE*

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October 2014

*Our title is a nod to Davis (1984). We thank Leslie McCall for vigorous discussions of these issues. We welcome comments and reactions.
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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore the trends and underlying sources of attitudes towards rising income and wealth inequality. Three decades of rising inequality, combined with clear evidence of wage stagnation for the majority of American households, have produced what has been widely described as a “new gilded age” in which the benefits of economic growth and increased productivity have gone primarily to those at the top. We show that in spite of these trends, Americans have not increased their hostility to either inequality or the rich, nor have they increased support for redistributive taxes in recent decades. A classical explanation – but one largely dismissed by contemporary political sociologists – is that an abiding belief in what is known as the “American Dream,” or AD - the belief that American society provides opportunity for advancement irrespective of family background. This possibility has been almost entirely peripheral to recent scholarship on redistributive attitudes in the new Gilded Age, and we test it against other leading models of inequality attitudes. Using a scale of the six most commonly-fielded tax and equality items in the General Social Surveys, we find clear evidence for the relevance of AD beliefs to attitude formation. Greater belief in the AD is associated with significantly lower support for taxes and equality, even taking into account a variety of factors that previous analysts have advanced. Our findings pose a fundamental challenge to existing political sociological models of the subjective foundations of rising inequality.
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Americans’ Attitudes toward Taxes and Inequality in the New Gilded Age*

Three decades of rising income and wealth inequality combined with stagnating or declining real wages for most American households since the late 1970s have altered some fundamental assumptions about the future of democratic capitalism in the United States. These recent trends mark a historical reversal from an earlier pattern in the first few decades after World War II. During that time productivity gains and the benefits of rapid economic growth were shared so that income shares for all groups rose (Piketty and Saez 2003; Hout and Fischer 2006, chap. 6; Krugman 2007).

At the center of the postwar era of widely shared prosperity was the idea that America was making good on a commitment to provide all individuals with an equal opportunity to move up and achieve a higher standard of living. Indeed, the growth of a “middle class society” seemed entirely consistent with the widely cherished view of the United States as a society characterized by exceptional mobility and opportunity (see e.g. Skocpol 2000; Krugman 2007). Rising levels of educational attainment and the vast expansion of higher education through the early post-World War II decades made the U.S. a world leader in promoting upward mobility across the class structure in this period (Hout 1988). The influential data presented by Piketty and Saez (2003; Saez [2013] for a recent update) suggest that shares of income commanded by the top 1% of households, which stood at 25% in 1928, had shrunk to just 8% in 1960 and remained there until the early 1970s. And the “war on poverty” had begun to chip away at some of
the most persistent problems in urban America, aiding the poorest of households (Bailey and Danziger 2013).

The stratification regime in this period, while never attaining the levels of equality found in much of Western Europe, seemed to fit well with core propositions of the “American Dream”: that individuals, through dint of hard work, could readily improve their life chances and that each successive generation would have the opportunity to attain a higher standard of living. The belief in such possibilities has long served as a core part of American national identity and folk wisdom, perhaps even approaching that of a “dominant ideology” suggested by some scholars (Hochschild 1995; Cullen 2003; Samuel 2012). The roots of this optimistic view of the stratification system predate the decades between the end of World War II and the late 1970s, yet no other period in U.S. history has arguably provided as firm an empirical foundation for the core tenants of the American Dream (AD) (cf. Hout and Fischer 2006).

After more than three decades of rising inequality, however, it is clear that the early postwar trend has given way to a new era, one which been widely described as a “new gilded age” (e.g. Bartels 2008; Grusky and Kricheli-Katz 2011). Rising productivity and economic growth are no longer associated with improved living standards for most individuals and families (Mischel 2012; Noah 2012). The expansion of egalitarian institutions and the extension of social and civil rights, innovations critical to the middle decades of the 20th Century, have largely ceased to redistribute income and opportunity, while the emerging economic regime provides substantial income growth to those at the very top (Krugman 2007; Freeland 2012). Earlier findings that Democratic presidential administrations were able to partially reverse the drift towards rising inequality (Bartels
2008; Kelly 2009) do not appear to have continued in the Obama era. Financialization – the dramatic increase in the share of profits generated by financial activity, as compared to all other types of economic activity – underscores critical changes in the American political economy (Krippner 2010; Reich 2012). High levels of household debt, declining job and income stability, and low levels of saving for retirement leave many American families on the edge of financial calamity (Smith 2012; Packer 2013).

The institutional and political developments that made possible declining inequality in the postwar years have all begun to reverse. These include the steady expansion of redistributive welfare state programs, the strength of labor unions, growth in higher education and rising levels of educational attainment, the emergence of affirmative action policies for minorities and women, high marginal tax rates on the highest earners and outsize corporate profits, and a strong regulatory regime which limited financialization (cf. Krugman 2007; Manza 2012). In some cases these changes were the result of cumulative long-term trends (e.g. union decline). In other instances the explanation lies with specific historical events or policy changes (e.g. the tax cuts of 1981). As egalitarian institutions and policies eroded, the stage was set for a new era in income distribution, and like a hot knife through butter rising inequality has cut mercilessly through the assumptions of a middle class society.

In recent years, social scientists have thoroughly mapped the key contours of the emerging economic order. In this environment, a narrow elite (or even “oligarchy,” as Winters [2011, chap. 4] has put it) captures the vast majority of economic rewards while others scramble to stay in place. In the work of Piketty and Saez (2003, 2007; Saez 2013), the share of income going to the top 1% of earners shot up from 8% in 1970 to
almost 24% by 2007, down slightly to 20% in 2011 and 23% in 2012. At the same time, per capita incomes stagnated: incomes for the top 1% went up 31% during the 2009-12 recovery while rising just 0.4% for the bottom 99%.¹ Wages – which provide a different measure of economic performance separate from hours worked in households, have been deteriorating for several decades (Mischel et al. 2012). Also daunting for middle-income families was the loss of wealth with the collapse of housing prices after 2006; for example, the median family saw its wealth fall in the aftermath of the Great Recession, while households with a net worth above $500,000 saw a 21% increase in their net worth between 2009 and 2011 (Fry and Taylor 2013).

In the face of these developments, it is perhaps not surprising that the consequences of rising inequality have become a central topic for scholars and journalists of varying perspectives (cf. Neckerman 2004; Murray 2012; Noah 2012; Stiglitz 2013). For example, the impact of rising inequality for American politics and policy has been one of the most widely debated issues. At the macro level, a number of analysts and journalists have presented evidence that political polarization is linked to rising inequality (e.g. McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Mann and Orenstein 2011). Other scholars have argued that rising income inequality favors the interests and preferences of large corporate interests and affluent individuals who can afford to “invest” in the political system (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Burris 2010; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Gilens 2012). While inputs in the form of political money donated to candidates for elected office, and rising expenditures on lobbying highlight one likely mechanism of elite influence are not new phenomena, its impact may be magnified as the amounts being donated keep rising (Domhoff 2010; Lessig 2011). Policy outputs – in
particular, reduced tax burdens on high earners (and privileged treatment of certain types of income generally received by the very rich), reduce regulatory oversight (most importantly in the financial sector), and long stagnation in the minimum wage, appear to be consistent with the view of elite influence on policy (Hacker and Pierson 2010).

But what about the mass public? How and in what ways has rising inequality over the past thirty years impacted the political and policy preferences of ordinary Americans? The question is important for several reasons. Most obviously, shifts in public policy at the federal level – in particular, changes in tax policy which might provide mechanisms for redistribution of the gains from economic growth and rising productivity downward – are far more likely if the public demands such policies. By the same token, if the mass public exhibits little appetite for higher taxes and egalitarian policies, powerful economic elites are more likely to be able to use the political system to “get their way.”

Questions about public preferences are also important to study because it would be startling – and indeed contrary to much of the classical political economy literature – to discover that rising inequality on the scale that has been observed in the U.S. over the past three decades has not had consequences for subjective perceptions of stratification issues. Rising inequality challenges many widely-held assumptions about central tenants of the American Dream (AD). Numerous journalistic and scholarly accounts have attested to the new pressures and rising levels of insecurity faced by middle and working class families (e.g. Hacker 2006; Noah 2012; Smith 2012). And longstanding and influential political economy models have posited that changes in the environment impact the preferences of ordinary citizens (or the “median voter”). Changes on the scale
of recent decades thus provide an important context to test such propositions. While not ordinarily conceptualized this way, we can think of the increase in inequality as an historical experiment in how public opinion is, or is not, impacted by ongoing exogenous shocks.

In this paper, we describe and analyze trends in Americans’ attitudes toward taxes and inequality since the 1970s. The paper is in five parts. In the first part, we present results from repeated General Social Surveys that pose the key puzzle about public attitudes towards rising inequality that is our point of departure. In part two, we contrast the expectations of recent political economy approaches with our alternative account, which highlights the role of underlying beliefs in the AD as moderating the extent to which individuals are capable of processing information about trends in inequality and other fundamental changes in the economic environment. In part three, we present our measures and analytical strategy for assessing the failure of public opinion to respond in the ways predicted by political economy models and established scholarship. Part four presents the multivariate results of the paper, noting the surprising resilience and analytical power of AD. The concluding discussion considers the bearing of results for scholarship on public attitudes toward taxes and equality, alongside implications for the trajectory of political debates and public policies regarding inequality.
THE PUZZLE OF ATTITUDES TOWARD TAXES AND EQUALITY IN THE NEW GILDED AGE

Among social scientists who have explored the political fallout of rising inequality, there has been mixed evidence that Americans either perceive inequality to be rising, or view it as a central problem requiring active policy intervention (see e.g. Bartels 2008; Page and Jacobs 2009; McCall 2013). Bartels (2008, chap. 5) argues that most Americans fail to understand the fundamentals of public policies, including their distributional impacts. He reports dramatic evidence that Americans supported the 2001 elimination of the estate tax while simultaneously failing to understand the ways in which this policy change systematically benefited the richest Americans while bringing no such rewards to ordinary individuals and households. Page and Jacobs describe the national mood (based on the results of a 2007 national survey) as dominated by “conservative egalitarians,” in which many Americans express general support for egalitarian principles yet also oppose precisely the kinds of government policies that might reduce inequality.

McCall’s (2013) work provides the most comprehensive investigation, presenting evidence that higher proportions of Americans express concern about inequality than journalistic accounts tend to suggest. Paralleling the conservative egalitarian interpretation, McCall concludes that Americans tend to support social policies that enhance human capital without simultaneously supporting more redistributive policies (e.g., enhanced spending on education is a favored response to rising inequality, but not increased social spending or redistributive taxes).
But McCall departs from earlier theorizing in arguing for a central role for media coverage of inequality. She presents a novel argument that the degree to which egalitarian beliefs (or negative views about affluent Americans) are connected to individuals’ attitudes toward specific policies are a function of the information made available in the media. When individuals perceive equal opportunity to be threatened by virtue of media coverage of rising inequality, McCall’s theoretical perspective predicts a willingness on the part of individuals to support egalitarian measures and policies. She provides support for this view with a content analysis that shows both increased media attention and public concern about rising inequality in the mid-1990s (using a battery of ISSP inequality items available in 1987, 1996, and 2008, and finding an uptick in egalitarian attitudes in 1996). McCall argues that absent the sustained public attention afforded by increased media coverage and public debate, Americans remain skeptical toward the rich yet are simultaneously ambivalent toward, or unsupportive of, specific redistributive policies.

What do the available data on mass attitudes toward taxes and equality suggest? In Figure 1 we present General Social Survey (GSS) data as a first step towards addressing these questions. The GSS has fielded attitude items that predate the rise of inequality, as well newer questions that have been added in subsequent surveys, providing the most comprehensive source of data with which to assess trends in mass opinion on these issues. The relatively broad array of suitable GSS items allow researchers to go beyond analysis of individual measures of attitudes toward taxes and equality, while also enabling a central focus on questions concerning to taxes as key
policy interventions with respect to the reduction of income inequality (Piketty and Saez 2007).

We include in this analysis all GSS items that refer to issues concerning tax policy or equality/inequality, while requiring that items be fielded in at least three surveys so as to enable perspective on whether policy opinions changed over the time period measured by survey items. Full question wordings and response formats are summarized in Appendix I. For all items (including the scale), higher scores indicate greater relative support for taxes or equality.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1’s data for eleven GSS items (and a scale of the six most commonly-fielded items) show a notable paradox, particularly on close inspection. At first glance, eight of the eleven individual items show opinion trends that move, over time, in the direction of greater relative support for taxes or equality. If the public responded in expected ways this is hardly surprising, yet in most cases the actual size of these trends is modest. Indeed, over the respective series covered by the eight items, the average opinion change is just 20% of a standard deviation. This can readily be seen in the first three charts for tax preferences concerning respondents’ own taxes, individuals with “low incomes,” and those with “middle incomes.” In these cases policy attitudes experienced egalitarian changes but ones that are fairly small in magnitude (.14, .16, and .23 standard unit changes respectively). And in the fourth chart, when asked whether taxes are too low for those with “high incomes,” measured opinion shows a net movement away from demanding higher taxes.
We gain further perspective on this result using Figure 1’s final chart, which displays our scale of the six most commonly-fielded items. Here we see a modest increase in support for redistribution between 1987 and 1996, one that McCall (2013) also reports. Yet between 1996 and 2008, we also see a considerably more anomalous movement away from egalitarian preferences and thus a return (by 2008) to the level of measured opinion found in 1987. This cyclical pattern and tax and equality opinion-formation represents an important paradox, for it stands out during a period in which inequality witnessed its largest increase.

Overall, then, Americans’ attitudes towards tax and equality do not approximate anything resembling a large egalitarian trend in response to the dramatic rise of a new stratification regime during the past three decades. These results and the challenges they pose to public opinion and political economy scholarship are the point of departure for the rest of the paper. We seek to explore why tax and equality attitudes show only very minor increases in support for more equality in the era of rapidly rising inequality. We do so by extending our analysis of repeated GSS surveys, to take into account established factors relating to the economy, sociodemographic characteristics, partisanship, and measures of media exposure that incorporate and extend McCall’s recent theoretical argument.

What is novel to our analysis is the attention we focus on the key concept of the American Dream. We test the proposition that the AD represents a belief whose potent symbolism is not easily dislodged in the face of individual-level changes in life chances or macroeconomic trends. If beliefs in the AD are not simple reflections of economic
transformations and stratification trends, these convictions will tend to constrain what might otherwise be stronger and more critical responses to rising inequality.

THEORIZING TAX AND REDISTRIBUTION ATTITUDES

We begin our discussion by situating our focus on the American dream with reference to past scholarship. We consider the classical approach associated with political economy, discussing challenges to those approaches posed by our evidence of tepid public responsiveness to inequality. This serve as the point of departure for our presentation of the American dream as a new factor with which to better unpack attitudes toward tax and equality in recent decades.

Neoclassical Political Economy

A large body of influential scholarship has forcefully argued that public attitudes routinely shift in response to changes in the macroeconomic environment. Economic models of political behavior assume that voters respond to the economic environment by punishing or supporting incumbents in reference to perceptions of the health of national economy or their own financial situation. Fiorina’s (1981) classic work established this thesis with respect to the phenomenon of retrospective voting, in which evaluations of candidates were based on comparisons of current to past economic performance. Other scholarship in this vein brought to light the importance of prospective and sociotropic reasoning, through which voters punish or reward incumbents based on their expectations for themselves or for the economy as a whole (Kinder and Kiewet 1981; see Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier 2000 for review).
In the political economy tradition, the widely debated Melzter-Richard model (Meltzer and Richard 1981) posits that the gap between the income of the median household/voter and mean income is a crucial determinant of preferences for redistribution. As inequality rises (and the gap between mean and median incomes grows), the median voter rationally demands more redistributive policies, and the size of government and preferences for taxes on the rich is expected to grow accordingly (see also Meltzer and Richard 1983). A vast literature testing the Meltzer-Richard hypothesis has emerged (see Kenworthy 2007; Pontusson and Rueda 2010; Lupu and Pontusson 2011; see also the collection of papers in Anderson and Beramendi [2008]).

One basic question raised by the debate over the Meltzer-Richard model is how and to what extent voters behave in the parsimonious fashion predicted by the model. For example, do non-economic considerations, or beliefs about opportunities for individual social mobility confound the inequality-policy relationship? And, from a more classically sociological position, how and in what ways do unions, political parties, race, ethnic, gender and class membership, and political institutions alter or disrupt the translation of median voter interests into concrete policy preferences (cf. Rueda 2010; Lupu and Pontusson 2011)?

While the Meltzer-Richard model left open the kinds of substantive policy demands that citizens may make, a second literature on public responsiveness to the macroeconomic environment postulates that economic downturns cause citizens to prefer more liberal (redistributive) policies, and vice-versa with respect to times of economic prosperity. The most systematic effort to incorporate macroeconomic conditions into a broader theory of opinion responsiveness is found in the work of
Erikson, MacKeun and Stimson (2002; see also Stimson, Erikson and MacKeun 1995; Stimson 2004; cf. Page and Shapiro 1992). In their work, the mass public responds to changes in the macroeconomy in meaningful and predictable ways. For example, if unemployment rises, citizens as a whole respond by demanding higher levels of liberal (and thus redistributive) laws and policies.

Evaluations of the expectations of neoclassical and recent political economy models have raised a number of challenges. Limited knowledge about the “facts,” in this case, trends in income and wealth and the potential for redistribution through taxes and transfers, can distort policy preferences (Bartels 1996, 2003; Althaus 2003). In the formulation of Bartels (2008), poorly-informed Americans may resemble the cartoon character Homer Simpson in supporting regressive tax cuts because they fail to grasp the fundamental facts at hand. More recently, McCall (2013, chap. 3) offers a different theoretical interpretation in which egalitarian public attitudes depend on the level of media coverage of inequality. In this communication model of opinion formation, the mass public responds when information about inequality trends is provided by media elites (or potentially social movements such as Occupy Wall Street).

An Alternative Hypothesis: The American Dream as Robust Symbolic Belief

Another possibility to consider – the one we pursue here – is that prior beliefs on the part of individuals may over-ride or block the formation of redistributive policy preferences. This scenario dates back to scholarship on American exceptionalism, and when it has informed survey research the results have been provocative. To this point,
however, the promise of these results has yet to be applied systematically to the area of tax and inequality attitudes.

Alexis de Tocqueville’s characterization of American political culture in *Democracy in America* provides us with an early, canonical statement. For Tocqueville, Americans (in contrast to the Europeans of his era) appeared to hold to a remarkably optimistic views about the opportunities afforded to them (Tocqueville 2003 [1835]). Traces of this view of the AD is likewise evident in Horatio Alger’s wildly popular late 19th Century novels about boys rising from impoverished circumstances to achieve success through hard work (Lhamon 1976). In his classic work on the absence of socialism in the United States, Werner Sombart (1976 [1906]) offered the complementary hypothesis that in comparison to Europeans, Americans had an unusually strong belief in the possibility of upward mobility, giving workers comparatively lower motivation to support socialism.

The “American Dream” metaphor was first introduced in the popular history writings of James Truslow Adams, who in a survey of American history in 1931 defined it as “a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the circumstances of their birth” (Adams 1931, pp. 404-05). The AD metaphor grew in popularity during the 20th century as a kind of “national motto” in Cullen’s (2003, p. 5) formulation (see Samuel 2012 for documentation of its cultural significance in American popular culture). The AD has also figured centrally in politicians’ communication. For example, here it is invoked in a 1993 speech by former President Bill Clinton:
The American Dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one—if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability can take you. (Clinton, quoted in Jillson 2004, p. 7).5

Historians who have traced the evolution of the Dream metaphor find it in public discourse in innumerable places, over-time and across multiple political contexts (Cullen 2003; Samuel 2012).

The idea that a distinctive American creed built around the Dream metaphor can be found in the public’s attitudes informed many famous works of 20th Century American social science. In postwar sociology and political science, individual responsibility and liberty were identified as key source of American political culture (e.g. Hartz 1955; McClosky and Zaller 1984). Seymour Martin Lipset’s many works on American exceptionalism (see e.g. Lipset 1963, 1996) go further by highlighting the power of the individual “bootstraps” metaphor as central to the American creed, while simultaneously acknowledging its less positive aspects.

Even critics of the AD as an animating discourse in American political culture have acknowledged its power. Some of the best-selling works by social scientists have highlighted the ways in which the AD is connected to individual responsibility and leads to a devaluation of public life and shared fate. The best-selling mid-1980s work of Bellah and his colleagues in Habits of the Heart, for example, goes even further than Lipset in identifying individualism as at the heart of many key contemporary dilemmas in American society (Bellah et al. 1985, 1991). In similar fashion, Putnam (2000) traces a variety of social problems as originating in excesses of individualism and a growing inability on the part of communities to sustain social capital. Systematic comparative survey research has, with some caveats and nuance, generally supported parts of the
individualism claim, in particular with respect to the idea that Americans more readily embrace the idea that their society provides greater opportunity for merit and hard work than survey respondents in other countries (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Alesina and Glaser 2004; Benabou and Tirole 2006). Americans are less likely, for example, to believe that either “luck” or a helping hand from someone else is critical to achieving success (Alesina and Glaser 2004, chap. 7).

To get further perspective on the American dream as a source of influence it is useful in passing to juxtapose it with theories of “symbolic racism” or “racial resentment” (e.g. Kinder and Sanders 1997; Sears, Sidanius and Bobo 2000). In this literature, many white Americans are viewed as accommodating to, or signaling, the idea of racial equality while simultaneously harboring an underlying racial resentment. These sentiments can readily be mobilized by political or policy conflicts, and, in turn, by scholars’ deployment of experiments or survey research in which questions about “welfare” or even “big government” are powerful triggers (Gilens 1999). In this literature, racial resentment has been linked to a variety of specific policy preference.

We think underlying AD sentiments can operate in a similar way. Americans may know how to express hostility to the “1%” or doubts about the “fairness” of the economy, while at the same time harboring beliefs about individual opportunity that inoculate them from greater support for specific policy interventions, even in the face of rapidly rising inequality. The question of this paper is whether AD beliefs about social mobility and individual success help to explain policy reasoning surrounding questions of tax and equality, or whether the routine dismissal of AD by sociologists is warranted.
DATA AND MEASURES

Our analyses investigate factors behind tax and inequality preferences, particularly as regards influences that have muted or otherwise limited egalitarian responses to rising inequality. Our primary focus is on AD, but we consider a range of other sources of policy attitudes as well. These established factors are important not only for their bearing on trends in tax and equality attitudes, but also because their operation may confound or negate the influence of the AD. In the analyses presented below, we draw from the same repeated GSS items used above. Because our multivariate analyses focus on the six-item scale of tax and equality attitudes, our estimation sample is for the years 1987, 1996, and 2008.

Belief in the American Dream

Building from past scholarship, our central focus is on the concept of the American Dream and its potential to shed light on novel factors behind tax and equality attitudes. As summarized in Table 1 below, we measure this concept using a long-running GSS item asking respondents, “The way things are in America, people like me and my family have a good chance of improving our standard of living-do you agree or disagree? (strongly disagree=1; slightly disagree=2; neither=3; slightly agree=4; strongly agree=5).”

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

This item nicely captures the American Dream concept without simultaneously invoking taxes or inequality, the educational system, the current state of the economy, or other confounding considerations. Ideally, of course, it would be informative to have available
a larger battery of items with which to measure the American dream as symbolic belief (akin to the battery of racial resentment scholars have proposed and implemented in a number of National Election Studies surveys). But we would note that the larger risk of having a limited measure is the possibility of underestimating the true relationship between AD beliefs and policy attitudes towards redistribution. That is not an unreasonable risk in the current study, as it will tend to generate null results.

Other Covariates

Central to much past scholarship on tax and equality attitudes are factors relating to the economy and to social group memberships that influence perceptions of economic interests (e.g., Erikson et al., 2002; Bartels 2005, 2006; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2011). As summarized in Table 2, we measure economic evaluations using an item asking respondents whether “During the last few years, has your financial situation been getting quote better, worse, or has it stayed the same?” The next four covariates in our analysis consider additional economic attributes that we expect to be associated with redistributive attitudes: unemployment, unions, class identification, and household income. The first two are dichotomous, coded respectively “1” for unemployed and union member. Household income level is a continuous covariate (measured in real 2010 dollars), and class identification is coded “1” for upper-class/middle-class identification and “0” otherwise.

Table 1’s next two independent variables are for respondents’ degree of confidence in government and their political partisanship. Government confidence is relevant because if respondents lack confidence in government they may be reluctant to
support redistributive policies (Hetherington 2006; Hetherington and Husser 2011). Our measure of government confidence is a three-category response item asking respondents about their level of confidence in “the people running...the executive branch of the federal government.” Political partisanship also potentially confounds estimates of the sources of policy attitudes (see e.g. Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). We measure partisanship using the GSS’ seven-category scale in which categories range from “strong Democrat” (1) to “strong Republican” (7).

The next block of independent variables in Table 1 are controls for major socio-demographic groups. These include continuous covariates for education and age (both measured in years), and indicator-coded variables for gender, race, and region of residence. The last two socio-demographic controls are for religious participation (a continuous covariate with scores ranging from “never attend” to “attend several times in a week”), and labor force participation (a binary variable contrasting participants versus non-participants).

Measures of Media Exposure
The final pair of independent variables in our analysis is for media exposure. Media processes are important in light of McCall’s (2013) recent argument concerning the central relevance of trends in media coverage to patterns of change in tax and equality opinions. Two GSS items provide our measures of media exposure: print media (five response categories “never reads” the newspaper to reads “every day”); and television viewing (number of hours that respondent watches television daily).
RESULTS

What Matters for Attitudes towards Taxes and Equality?

How do beliefs about the AD shape attitudes toward taxes and inequality in the new Gilded Age? And how does this source of influence line up when we compare with estimates for better-established economic and social group factors behind policy attitudes? We begin to answer these questions using the results summarized in Table 2 below. Entries in this table are coefficients and standard errors for our statistical model of attitudes toward taxes and inequality. The dependent variable is our six-item scale, for which higher scores indicate greater support for taxes and equality.

Consider first the coefficient for AD beliefs. This coefficient easily reaches statistical significance, and a 1-unit increase in belief in the AD is associated with a -.107 decline in support for taxes and equality. Providing further perspective, a broader shift across the full range of the range of the AD item yields a corresponding .43 drop in support for egalitarian policy. That is a sizable effect. It translates into well over half a standard unit change in the tax and equality scale.

A pair of diverging scenarios now commands our attention. Did AD beliefs exert a stable influence over how individuals’ reasoned about tax and equality issues? Instead, could this influence have grown (or declined) during the time period under investigation? We consider the relevant evidence by investigating whether AD beliefs interact with survey year. These results do not point to any such interactions: the adjusted Wald test for an interaction between AD beliefs × year(continuous) is F( 1, 252) = 3.00, p > F = .08; the parallel Wald test for AD beliefs × year(indicator coding) is F( 2,
This buttresses Table 2’s statistical model, where there is evidence that (only) the effects of government confidence are conditional on survey year. 

Together, these results suggest that AD beliefs have been both influential and stably so with respect to the operation of attitudes towards taxes and equality. We now consider how the respective influences of AD beliefs and better-established factors compare, using Figure 2’s results to get at this issue. These are predicted tax and equality opinion scores for assessing the comparative magnitude of AD beliefs and two key coefficients for household income and government confidence. To facilitate comparisons we vary independent variables across a +/- 2 standard unit range when predicting attitudes.

The effects of AD beliefs and household income are comparably large and both point in the same direction: increases in AD and income are associated with declining support for taxes and equality. Confidence in government, in contrast, shows a more complicated pattern of association. This is to be expected in light of the interactions between government confidence and time (see again Table 2). In 1987 and 2008, confidence in government had fairly similar and negative associations with attitudes towards tax and equality. But in 1996, the pattern reversed sharply: in that year, higher levels of confidence in the executive branch were associated with greater support for taxes and equality. This suggests that effects of government confidence were conditional on which party controls the presidency. For the relevant two years in our estimation
sample, greater confidence in the executive branch was associated with lower support for taxes and equality under Republican presidential administrations.¹¹

*Simulating Aggregate Change in Tax and Equality Attitudes*

We turn now to the puzzle of over-time change in attitudes towards tax and equality. Recall that our scale shows a pattern in which aggregate opinion moved in an egalitarian direction by 1996, while shifting back by 2008 to almost precisely the initial level of tax and equality attitudes observed in 1987 (see again Figure 1). How might factors considered in the preceding section bear on patterns of over-time change in tax and equality opinion? Do AD beliefs have the potential to shift aggregate attitudes in new directions?

To address these questions, we present simulations that extend our statistical model of tax and equality attitudes. We already have coefficient estimates for our model. What we now want to know is the effect on aggregate opinion of a trend in a specific independent variable of interest, holding all other covariates constant at their observed means.

As displayed in Figure 3 below, the baseline prediction should by now be familiar. This is the prediction that we get from our statistical model when we keep covariates at their observed levels for all years in the analysis. What we again see is over-time fluctuation in tax and equality opinions that departs from anything resembling a monotonic and egalitarian trend in response to rising inequality.

*[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]*
Moving to results for AD beliefs, we present predictions derived by simulating two key trends. The first of these is a decline in the AD in which predictions are recalculated by assuming a 1 standard unit drop in the level of the covariate between 1987 and 2008. As summarized by the estimates in Figure 3’s second panel, this yields a different picture of aggregate trends in tax and equality attitudes. What we now see are attitudes towards tax and equality moving to much higher support for taxes and equality in 1996, and declining less by 2008. This is an over-time pattern that is still far from perfect monotonicity. But it represents a much larger and considerably more egalitarian shift in aggregate opinion between 1987 and 2008.

Staying with the AD results in Figure 3, we consider a second simulation in which rather than declining the relevant beliefs increase (by 1 standard unit) between 1987 and 2008. With this simulation we see that between 1987 and 1996 tax and equality attitudes move towards the left, though less so than in the baseline prediction. And between 1996 and 2008, the shift away from egalitarianism is much sharper, yielding a substantial, net decline in support for redistribution.

The preceding simulations suggest the power of AD beliefs to have placed tax and equality attitudes on a quite different trajectory. The same is true with respect to household income. Indeed, as suggested by Figure 3’s third panel, these simulations show a somewhat more extensive pattern of over-time change. As before, a standard unit drop in household income level anticipates a sizable increase in tax and equality support between 1987 and 2008, whereas a parallel increase in affluence predicts a net decline in egalitarian support.
Figures 3’s final results are for changes relating to the level of confidence in the executive branch of the federal government. A one standard unit increase in government confidence yields a net increase in tax and equality support, though predicted opinions are nearly unchanging between 1996 and 2008. In the second simulation, a standard unit decline in government confidence predicts a much larger drop and tax and equality support between 1996 and 2008. Together, these results suggest the relevance of government confidence to aggregate tax and equality opinion-formation. But the heterogeneous pattern of association over time yields diverging divergent trends for the simulations.

In Figure 4, we extend the analysis to consider the impact of political partisanship. If we assume a standard unit movement in the direction of Democratic Party identification, we see a parallel trend toward greater overall support for taxes and equality. A trend of identical magnitude toward Republican Party identification anticipates an equally large net movement away from support for taxes and equality. These results provide clear (if perhaps unsurprising) confirmation for the ongoing relevance of partisanship to understanding pressures influencing over-time patterns of aggregate change in tax and equality opinion.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

A Limited Influence of Economic Factors?
So far, the results we have considered apply to factors exerting a substantial influence over the formation of tax and equality attitudes. It is now informative to consider results other factors, and we do so here with respect to our measures of unemployment,
economic evaluations, and union membership. The simulation approach is the same as
the before, but with one important difference. For the new analyses we drop three key
covariates from the model: American Dream beliefs; government confidence; and
partisanship. This yields a model that is almost certainly underspecified. What we are
doing is permitting and even encouraging the largest possible estimates unemployment,

In Figure 5, results for both rising and declining trends in unemployment are
similar to the baseline predictions. The same is true with respect to union membership.
Neither a standard unit decline in union membership between 1987 and 2008 nor a
standard unit rebound appear to have had the capacity to substantially shift aggregate
patterns of tax and equality opinion from their actual historical trajectory.

Figure 5’s simulations for economic evaluations show somewhat larger effects. A
negative and more extensive trend in economic evaluations anticipates a net increase in
support for taxes and inequality. In similar fashion a parallel and positive shift in
economic perceptions predicts a corresponding, net drop in support for taxes and

But when we contrast the results summarized in Figures 5 versus 4, the thematic
difference is the generally small magnitude of effects for the trends in economic and
sociodemographic factors. This finding is buttressed by the use of an overly-permissive
model; recall that Figure 5’s calculations seek to deliberately exaggerate the underlying
influence of unemployment, union membership, and economic evaluations. Together,
these results shed interesting light on debates concerning limits to economic and group interest factors as triggers behind egalitarian policy support.

The Role of the Media

How do the media influence the formation of attitudes toward tax and equality? This provocative hypothesis has been forcefully raised by McCall (2013), who argues that the pattern of media coverage, particularly as involving news topics concerning inequality and opportunity, have shaped the formation of aggregate opinions about inequality. We explore this scenario by adding to our model covariates for print media exposure and also television viewing.

This yields a second estimation sample that combines the print media and television items (alongside our earlier covariates) with our new dependent variable, an item asking respondents about support for reducing income differences between the rich and the poor. This estimation sample spans the 10 surveys from 1994 through 2012 in which the GSS was fielded. As before, the over-time dimension of these data compel us to investigate the possibility that media effects on attitude-formation were heterogeneous across time periods. We do so using the test for interactions summarized in Table 3.

The first two tests are for the (unconstrained) interaction between year × print media and television viewing. In both cases there is insufficient evidence for these interactions at a conventional, $p = .05$ threshold. The next pair of tests incorporate McCall’s focus on the 1990s, where interactions contrast that decade versus the period
since. This yields evidence of a significant interaction between print media exposure ($p=.01$) though not television viewing ($p=.40$). Moving to the fifth interaction test, we find evidence that the effects of government confidence on policy attitude formation vary across year (as was the case in our analysis of the tax and equality scale). In contrast, there is no such evidence for interactions involving time and either economic evaluations or AD beliefs.

Our resultant model of attitudes toward reducing income differences is summarized in Table 4 below. As before, AD beliefs are negatively associated with egalitarian policies support, as also is household income (parallel estimates for economic evaluations and class identification are significant, in contrast to results for our first estimation sample). The more important result concerns the print media estimates. Taking into account the $-0.026$ main effect coefficient and the $-0.100$ interaction effect, we see the predicted effect of news print media was much higher in the decade of the 1990s ($-0.126$) than in the years since ($-0.026$).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Graphical displays are again useful in comparing print media estimates with other coefficients of interest. We use Figure 6’s calculations to get further perspective on the relationship between the level of print media exposure and attitudes toward reducing income differences. In the 2000s this relationship is minimal, but in the 1990s this relationship was stronger and distinctly negative. In that decade, higher exposure to print media was associated with lower support for reducing income differences. Looking across Figure 6’s panels, the 1990s print media effect compares favorably with estimates for AD beliefs and household income. Using a constant $\pm 2$ standard unit covariate
range, the print media and AD effects are very comparable, and they suggest a slightly larger pattern of influence in comparison to household income.

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Together, these results provide new, critical perspective on the question of media influence raised by McCall (2013). The interrelationship between print media exposure and attitudes toward reducing income differences has been at times important, but also in a very different direction that we might expect. During the 1990s, the period for which McCall finds a high density of news stories concerning inequality, we find higher levels of print media exposure actually correspond to reduced support for redistribution. If media exposure indeed influences policy attitude-formation, this indicates that avid readers of newspapers during the 1990s were subsequently propelled away from support for the reduction of income inequality.

DISCUSSION

In 2005, an American Political Science Task Force on Inequality asserted in a collectively-authored volume that “studying changes in political behavior and public opinion over time is essential to evaluate the impact of rising economic inequality” (Skocpol and Jacobs 2005, p. 215). This is an important recommendation, and one that should also apply to those cases where attitudes and political behaviors have changed little or less than expected. If we are to understand the subjective foundations of citizens’ responses to economic change, the possibility that rising inequality has largely failed to shift aggregate public opinion in the direction that much existing social science theory expects is both surprising and in demand of explanation.
In this paper, we have explored sources of attitudes towards tax and equality, alongside their contributions to patterns of over-time change in aggregate opinion. Our thematic focus is on individual's beliefs in AD. Using a scale of the six most commonly-fielded tax and equality items in the General Social Surveys, we find clear evidence for the relevance of AD beliefs to attitude formation. Greater belief in AD is associated with significantly lower support for taxes and equality, taking into account a variety of better-established factors behind policy attitudes. This resonates well with the focus of classical opinion scholarship on symbolic beliefs and values that present an idealized vision of life and opportunity in the United States (e.g. Hartz 1955; McClosky and Zaller 1984; Lipset 1963, 1996).

Our analyses have also sought to unpack a central puzzle in the study of public opinion toward redistribution in recent decades. In the face of massively growing income and wealth disparities, the General Social Survey data show no evidence of net change opinion change in an egalitarian direction between the 1980s and 2000s. Here, our results provide new evidence that AD beliefs, alongside over-time trends in household income, contributed to the relative stability of attitudes toward tax and equality. We also find that social group and economic interest-related factors have mattered in very limited ways to the formation of tax and equality attitudes. Even under generous methodological assumptions, we find little evidence that more extensive patterns of change in these factors could have placed tax and equality opinions on a different historical trajectory.

The final part of our analyses considered the non-monotonic uptick in support for tax and equality during the 1990s unearthed by McCall (2013) and reproduced here.
Our analysis of the GSS print and media consumption items finds little support for this argument, albeit with a puzzling sidenote. Print media consumption (but not television viewing) does appear to be associated with tax and equality attitudes, but not in the expected way. Instead, during the 1990s, it was avid consumers of newspapers who were more likely to embrace non-redistributive attitudes in comparison to their less literate counterparts. There is clearly further room for unpacking media effects and coverage of inequality issues. But our results provide little support for viewing changing patterns of media discourse as the key to understanding a return to lower levels of tax and equality opinions in the new millennium.

In view of these findings, it is appropriate to note in conclusion an irony in the growing scholarly and journalistic literature focusing on the failures of the U.S. economy to produce results matching the ideals of the American Dream (see e.g. Bartlett and Steele 2012; Reich 2012; Smith 2012). These commentaries stress how the emerging economic order is at odds with the premises of the American Dream, yet they appear to simultaneously miss its underlying power of as symbolic filter in how Americans reason and think about inequality and redistribution. It is, of course, possible that the power of the Dream, and its tensions with respect to Gilded Age realities, will erode if, as many now predict, the era of high inequality persists over an extended historical period (its power. But at the present time, scholars and political commentators alike would be well-served by taking seriously the power of the American Dream metaphor for how the public reasons about these issues.
NOTES

* Our title is a nod to Davis (1986).

1 It should be noted that incomes for the top group fell more during the 2007-09 recession, but those groups have recovered more of their losses than any other income group. Looking at the longer range picture, the trends from the 1970s to the early 2000s understate the true economic restructuring in one sense: hours worked per family over the entire 1979-2012 period, but in particular up to around 2000, have helped families offset stagnating or declining wages to produce higher total household incomes; see Blank 2011. But because the increase in average hours worked per household stopped rising around 2000, the full impact of stagnating wages for the vast majority of workers is now showing up in the household income data.

2 Note that many tax and equality items were not fielded each year of the GSS; Figure 1’s charts display all years for which each item is available.

3 Indeed, the .05 change in tax and equality preferences between 1987 and 2008 is not statistically significant ($p = .24$).

4 We note that the 1990s rise in egalitarian opinion (and its subsequent reversal in the 2000s) remains when individual items are each deleted from the scale.

5 Suggesting the potentially bipartisan nature of its appeal, a version of the American Dream metaphor was employed in pithier fashion by former President Ronald Reagan: “What I want to see above all is that this country remains a country where someone can always get rich” (Reagan 1983).

6 Critics of the individualism thesis have noted its empirical and theoretical limitations (for a review, see Kloppenberg 2001). Smith (1997) argues that republican and racialist traditions were every bit as central as liberalism (and its individualist presuppositions) to American political culture and history. Fischer (2008, 2011) challenges the view that Americans are more individualist than citizens in other countries, drawing on international survey data to show that the;

7 There are two additional GSS items that we considered in relationship to the American Dream item. These two items ask about the relevance of luck versus hard work to success, and differences between respondents’ and their parents’ standard of living. Both these items scale poorly with the American Dream item. But if we proceed and estimate factor scores based upon responses to all three items, the resulting estimates are comparable to those obtained in the current analysis (using solely the American Dream item).

8 The GSS has made extensive use of sub-samples with respect to many repeated survey items. As a result there are no years in which the two media items can be combined to also analyze all items comprising the tax and equality scale. To address this limitation, we restrict analysis of the media items to just one of the items comprising our tax and equality scale. When conjoined with the other covariates in our model, this item enables analysis that span the largest number of

9 As suggested in Table 2 by the ratio of coefficient to standard error for the interaction of government confidence × 1996, there is clear evidence for a (non-linear) interaction of this sort, and the relevant Wald test result is F(1, 252) = 9.52, Prob > F = .00). We find no such evidence for interactions involving time with respect to economic evaluations, unemployment status, household income, or partisanship (where survey year is coded as a continuous covariate or as two indicator variables). We note that the latter test results are estimated prior to testing for the (significant) interactions involving government confidence and time.

10 We retain a continuous coding of the government confidence covariate; the adjusted Wald test result for evaluating the alternative indicator-coding of covariate is F(1, 252) = .00, Prob > F = .99.

11 For the record, dropping the interactions between government confidence and time from the model yields a comparable coefficient estimate for American dream beliefs (-.110). If the main effect of government confidence is also deleted the American dream coefficient is larger (-.130).

12 See Appendix II for coefficients and standard errors for this model.

13 McCall’s (2013) investigates media influence through an analysis of trends in content-coded media stories. This approach yields estimates of trends in the frequency of media coverage of inequality, while leaving implicit the possible connection between individuals and the degree of exposure to such coverage. Our analysis seeks to directly investigate this relationship.
REFERENCES


Figure 1: Opinion trends on tax and equality

- Federal income tax which you have to pay, too low?
- For those with low incomes, are taxes too low?
- For those with middle incomes, are taxes too low?
- For those with high incomes, are taxes too low?
- People with high incomes should pay a larger share?

- Inequality...benefits the rich?
- [disagree] differences in income are necessary for...prosperity?
- Government...reduce differences in income?
- Responsibility of government to reduce income?
- Disagree differences in income are necessary for...prosperity?

TAX & EQUALITY SCALE
Figure 2: Standardized effects on attitudes towards tax and equality
Figure 3: Aggregate change in tax and equality attitudes

- Baseline prediction
- Simulated trends in American dream
- Simulated trends in income
- Simulated trends in government confidence
Figure 4: Partisanship simulations

simulated trends in partisanship

-1 sd trend

+1 sd trend

Figure 5: Upper-limit estimates of aggregate change

Figure 6: Standardized effects on attitudes towards reducing income differences
print media

American Dream

household income

b_{1990s}

b_{2000s}
Table 1: Independent variables

**American Dream**
The way things are in America, people like me and my family have a good chance of improving our standard of living -- do you agree or disagree? (strongly disagree=1; slightly disagree=2; neither=3; slightly agree=4; strongly agree=5)

**economic evaluations**
During the last few years, has your financial situation been getting better, worse, or has it stayed the same? (worse=1, same=2, better=3)

**unemployment status** (0,1)

**union membership** (0,1)

**class identification** (1=upper/middle; 0=else)

**household income** (2010 $s)

**government confidence** (1=hardly any; 2=only some; 3=a great deal)

**partisanship**
1=strong Democrat; 2=weak Democrat; 3=independent Democrat; 4=independent; 5=independent Republican; 6=weak Republican; 7=strong Republican

**education** (years)

**age** (years)

**male** (0,1)

**white** (0,1)

**South** (0=northeast)

**West** (0=northeast)

**Midwest** (0=northeast)

**religious participation**
1=never; 2=less than once a year; 3=about once or twice a year; 4=several times a year; 5=about once a month; 6=2-3 times a month; 7=nearly every week; 8=every week 9=several times a week

**labor force participation** (0,1=full-time or part-time)

**print media**
(reads the newspaper: never=1; less than once a week=2; once a week=3; a few times a week=4; every day=5)
television viewing (hours r watches television: 0-24)
Table 2: Model of attitudes towards tax and equality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>coef. (s.e.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>year_1996</td>
<td>-.334* (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year_2008</td>
<td>.006 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Dream</td>
<td>-.107* (.02)</td>
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<tr>
<td>economic evaluations</td>
<td>-.047 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployment status</td>
<td>.182 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>union membership</td>
<td>.033 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class identification</td>
<td>-.089* (.04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>household income (× 10000)</td>
<td>-.023* (&lt;.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence</td>
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<td>government confidence × year_1996</td>
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</tr>
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<td>government confidence × year_2008</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>.007 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>-.001 (&lt;.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>-.101* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>-.044 (.06)</td>
</tr>
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<td>South</td>
<td>-.018 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>-.022 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>-.001 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious participation</td>
<td>-.005 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labor force participation</td>
<td>.100* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_constant</td>
<td>1.325* (.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. N = 1,730; $R^2 = .22.$
Table 3: Tests for interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>interactions</th>
<th>Wald test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. print media × year</td>
<td>F(9, 246) = 1.16, Prob &gt; F = .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. television viewing × year</td>
<td>F(9, 246) = 1.87, Prob &gt; F = .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. print media × 1990s</td>
<td>F(1, 254) = 6.85, Prob &gt; F = .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. television viewing × 1990s</td>
<td>F(1, 254) = .71, Prob &gt; F = .40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. m3 + govt. confidence × year</td>
<td>F(9, 246) = 6.19, Prob &gt; F = .00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. economic evaluations × year</td>
<td>F(9, 246) = .57, Prob &gt; F = .82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. American Dream × year</td>
<td>F(9, 246) = .87, Prob &gt; F = .55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 5,970

a. Dependent variable is item for reducing income differences.
Table 4: Model of attitudes towards reducing income differences\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>coef. (s.e.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>print media</td>
<td>−.026 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print media × 1990s</td>
<td>−.100* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>television viewing</td>
<td>.014 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Dream</td>
<td>−.178* (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic evaluations</td>
<td>−.074* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployment status</td>
<td>−.026 (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>union membership</td>
<td>.022 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class identification</td>
<td>−.244* (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household income (× 10000)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence</td>
<td>.177 (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_1996</td>
<td>−.305 (.18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_1998</td>
<td>.086 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2000</td>
<td>.008 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2002</td>
<td>−.290 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2004</td>
<td>−.656* (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2006</td>
<td>−.468* (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2008</td>
<td>−.297 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2010</td>
<td>.067 (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2012</td>
<td>.291 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partisanship</td>
<td>−.240* (.02)</td>
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<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>−.047* (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>−.009* (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>−.234* (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>−.216* (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>−.177 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>−.195 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>−.110 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious participation</td>
<td>.001 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labor force participation</td>
<td>−.059* (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_constant</td>
<td>7.637* (.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. Estimates for main effect of year not presented; N = 5,970; $R^2 = .18$. 
Appendix I: Tax and equality items

Do you consider the amount of federal income tax which you have to pay as?
(too high=1, about right=2, too low=3)

For those with low incomes, are taxes...?
(1=much too high; 2=too high; 3=about right; 4=too low; 5=much too low)

For those with middle incomes, are taxes...?
(1=much too high; 2=too high; 3=about right; 4=too low; 5=much too low)

For those with high incomes, are taxes...?
(1=much too high; 2=too high; 3=about right; 4=too low; 5=much too low)

Do you think that people with high incomes should pay a larger share in
taxes than those with low incomes...?
(1=much smaller share; 2=smaller; 3=the same share; 4=larger; 5=much larger share=5)

Differences in income in America are too large?
(1=strongly disagree; 2=agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree)

Inequality continues to exist because it benefits the rich and powerful?
(1=strongly disagree; 2=agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree)

Large differences in income are necessary for America's prosperity?
(1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= disagree; 5=strongly disagree)

It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in
income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes?
(1=strongly disagree; 2=agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree)

On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's
responsibility to reduce income differences between the rich and poor?
(1= definitely should not be; 2=probably should not be; 3=probably should
be; 4= definitely should be)

Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the
income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the
taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others
think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this
income difference between the rich and the poor. Think of a score of 1 as
meaning that the government ought to reduce the income differences between
rich and poor, and a score of 7 meaning that the government should not
concern itself with reducing income differences. What score between 1 and 7
comes closest to the way you feel?
(1=government should not... 7=government should)
## Appendix II: Model of attitudes towards tax and equality without American dream, partisanship, and government confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>coef. (s.e.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>year_1996</td>
<td>.127* (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year_2008</td>
<td>-.017 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Dream</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economic evaluations</td>
<td>-.104* (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployment status</td>
<td>.176 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>union membership</td>
<td>.085 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class identification</td>
<td>-.155* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household income (× 10000)</td>
<td>-.024* (&lt;.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_1996</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government confidence × year_2008</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partisanship</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>.009 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>.001 (&lt;.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>-.135* (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>-.206* (.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.035 (.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>-.052 (.06)</td>
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<td>Midwest</td>
<td>.009 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious participation</td>
<td>-.018 (.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>labor force participation</td>
<td>.085 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_constant</td>
<td>.564* (.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. N = 1,730; $R^2 = .10$. 