

Wealth Inequality after a Global Pandemic: A Study of Political Efficacy and Support for Redistributive Policies

Kassidy Leannais

Dr. Carol Miller, Sociology Department

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and perpetuated the growing wealth inequality in the United States. Recent data suggests that Americans are growing more concerned about this issue (Pew Research Center 2021), but this research seeks to understand which individuals support redistributive policies. By comparing results from analysis of data from the 2020 American National Election Time Series Study Survey with data collected from surveying a probability sample of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse undergraduate students, this study compared levels of political efficacy and support for government intervention of wealth inequality. These findings provide information about how to battle wealth inequality, motivate the American electorate, and re-instill trust in the government.

INTRODUCTION

As the world approaches the two-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, politicians grapple with rebooting the economy and current college students are anxious about entering the workforce during these unprecedented times. College students face entering a job market with less field experience due to state and country-wide quarantines while being weighed down by student loans and a high unemployment rate. Worries about finding success during a pandemic are relevant, but truthfully, income and wealth inequality has threatened future generations' financial success for decades. The pandemic has only highlighted the inequality that exists. While Americans have struggled during this pandemic, billionaires in the United States increased their total net worth by \$637 billion (Woods 2020).

To understand the prevalence of economic inequality in the United States, it is important to understand how Americans view this issue. There is a common idea of "The American Dream" among United States citizens. The American Dream means that each individual's success is in their own hands, and therefore, each individual's failure is in their own hands. American citizens often justify the success of the elite crediting them as superior, natural leaders who earned their success (Hofacker 2005). Such beliefs coincide with stereotypes of poor people as lazy and irresponsible living on government handouts rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to work (Neubeck and Roach 1981; Hamilton 1984). This perceived link between free will and success makes Americans wary to give too much assistance to the poor because "anything more than meager aid would be seen as rewarding indolence, encouraging dependency on the dole, and increasing the tax burden of those who work for a living" (Neubeck and Roach 1981:315). However, influential sociological theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) highlights that the possession of resources and "social capital" influence one's class position. Basically, a person's environment, family, and social standing at birth determine their future more than any individual will or hard work does. Although Americans favor the belief in individualism and earned success through hard work, the reality is that research suggests that approximately "two-thirds of the growth in household wealth in the United States is accounted for by intergenerational transfers" (Wolff 1999 cited in Munnell and Sundén 2003: 72), suggesting that many affluent people are not self-made, but earned their status because they were born to a certain family.

Again, the hard work leads to success narrative is popular among American liberal democracy ideology, but recent data suggests more Americans are starting to see the severity of wealth inequality. According to a Pew Research Center (2021) survey, 43% of respondents said economic inequality is a very big problem and 31% said it was a moderately big problem. Yet, little social action and political activism towards government intervention in this inequality has occurred. Although voter turnout reached a record high in the 2020 general election with 66% of eligible voters showing up to the polls (Pew Research 2021a), only 45% of US citizens are satisfied with American democracy (Pew Research 2021b). This data suggests that faith in the democratic process and political efficacy is not at its strongest among the American citizens. Political efficacy is a citizen's trust in their ability to influence government and public policy. Research suggests that those with high levels of political efficacy are more likely to vote and be politically active (C-SPAN Classroom 2018). My research investigated whether there is a link between

political efficacy and attitudes toward government interference in wealth inequality. I hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between political efficacy and support for redistributive policies. That is, those who have a high political efficacy will be more likely to oppose redistributive policies. Determining if this relationship exists will be important in analyzing how to battle wealth inequality, motivate the American electorate, and re-instill trust in the government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Attributed to Increased Economic Inequality

The growth in economic inequality arguably started about five decades ago in the 1970s. With the world becoming an increasingly globalized economy, there was an increase in foreign competition which caused inflation and low profits. As a result, the corporate elite started to attack government interference in the economy (Mizruchi and Hyman 2014). Corporations needed the help of politicians to decrease regulation, weaken the bargaining power of the labor force, and slash social welfare (Jacobs and Myers 2014; Jacobs and Dirlam 2016). During this time, neoliberal politicians—such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom—gained power and started to push policy toward such corporate economic interests. Reagan specifically endorsed the theory of trickle-down economics which entails giving corporate tax cuts by slashing welfare policies, and these tax cuts will stimulate the economy and help working people by doing so. However, Jacobs and Myers (2014) found that neoliberal policies expanded inequality by 11.2% in the 12 years after the presidency of Reagan as compared to 4.53% the 12 years prior. This trend in inequality proves that trickle-down economics never worked its way down the socioeconomic ladder to benefit the working class; the economic policy made wealth inequality worse.

In more recent decades, the wealth gap widened due to the increase in financialization. Financialization increases reliance on profit for the business through interest, dividends, and capital gains rather than from the sales of goods and services (Roberts and Kwon 2017). Financialization benefits corporate executives at a disproportionate rate causing large wage disparities between workers and executives, a greater share of income in the richest households, and overall growth in income inequality (Roberts and Kwon 2017; Lin and Tomaskovic-Devey 2013; Jacobs and Dirlam 2016). The power of executives grew in proportion to their wealth, further reducing the value of the worker. Since neoliberal policies weakened labor unions, the blue-collar worker no longer has the power to bargain wages, work hours, and benefits even though these companies are growing richer because of financialization. Roberts and Kwon (2017:511) found that liberal market economies, like the United States, that have “weak collective bargaining, few labor productions, and shareholder corporate governance” see the most growth in wealth inequality.

American Attitudes Toward Wealth Inequality

As discussed, most Americans believe in extreme individualism and meritocracy. Those who are successful earned it because they are inherently superior or worked harder, and those who are poor brought it upon themselves. Therefore, social welfare is rewarding people for not working hard. Now, this is not to say that all Americans negatively view social welfare. Many times, people support certain redistributive policies because of individual values and societal status. If an individual has a strong sense of social responsibility, they are more likely to support redistributive policies (Bobo 1991). However, if a person places a higher priority on individualism rather than social responsibility, they are more likely to oppose redistributive processes. Believing in social responsibility implies the valuation of equality of opportunity, while belief in individualism perpetuates the American notion of control over economic success. Along with individual values, social and work status affects people’s stance on redistributive income. The larger amount of job authority and income that white persons possess translates to lower support for redistributive policy outside of the workplace; while those of low authority and socioeconomic status are more likely to support such policies (Wilson and Maume 2016). This trend changes based on race because African Americans are more likely to support redistribution of income policy—no matter their authority in the workplace or socioeconomic status—and more likely to have a strong sense of social responsibility (Wilson and Maume 2016; Bobo 1991). These patterns show an important sociological trend that links status and ideology. Those who see themselves as more successful may view themselves as self-made. People of greater work and economic status may not understand the country’s structural barriers to success and opportunity such as systemic racism, the glass ceiling, or the cycle of poverty. Those who do understand (people of color, women, people in poverty) such barriers are more likely to support increasing social welfare. Based on these trends, there is a dissonance between American mentality about inequality in the United States and the reality of this inequality.

Racial Disparities in Wealth Inequality

Wealth inequality has a disproportionately negative impact based on race. The wealth gap grew in response to “decreases in manufacturing and expansions in minority populations” (Jacobs and Dirlam 2016:469). The presence of an increasing minority population makes some in the white majority feel that their political and societal power is in jeopardy. To cling to power, systemically racist policy in the criminal justice system, welfare, and education, prevents people of color from equality of opportunity and upward social mobility. As a result, black people are more likely to be lower income compared to white people (Pew Research Center 2015).

An example of a way that public policy disadvantages people of color is the disparate benefits from public income transfer (PIT) programs. Means-tested PIT programs, such as housing assistance, require participants to meet certain qualifications to enroll and potentially earn benefits. Non-means-tested PIT programs, such as Social Security, are available to all and based on prior earned income. Means-tested programs are more effective among black people, while non-means-tested programs mostly benefit white people (Ozawa and Yeong-Tsyur 1994). Non-means-tested public income transfer policies are generally more effective in pulling people out of poverty than means-tested policies but are of greater effect for people in white households than black households. African Americans are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to have lower-paying jobs, more likely to be incarcerated, and have a lower life expectancy; all factors that contribute to the amount of non-means-tested benefits received.

Democracy and Economic Inequality

As determined prior, individual values shape attitudes towards redistributive policies. As political parties align people of the same beliefs and values, welfare support differs across party lines. American conservatives tend to be less supportive of wealth redistribution than moderates and liberals (Miles 2014). Wealth inequality has become a partisan issue, just like many other problems that should not divide along party lines including the coronavirus pandemic and climate change. Some conservatives even believe “that welfare is the creation of ‘liberals’ rather than the product of hard answers to social realities” (Hamilton 1984:155). The polarization in the ideology of the two major parties has made compromise and political action difficult the past few decades. In fact, the “inactivity in Congress actively exacerbated the income gap between elite and nonelite earners in the US during the precise time in which the general public needed its political leaders the most” (Kwon 2015:61). This phenomenon is prevalent during the economic and health consequences of the pandemic. American families are struggling to pay bills, keep food on the table, and keep their families healthy while billionaires are increasing their profits by more billions of dollars.

As discussed, support for social welfare is split along partisan lines, but there is also conflict in economic ideology between capitalism and socialism between politicians. The term “socialism” or “socialist” has become a dirty word in American politics used to delegitimize political opponents (Neubeck and Roach 1981), omitting the fact that the American government has socialist policies like food assistance, Social Security, and Medicare. Many Americans view socialism as a negative term due to its loose connection to communism and the lingering fear from “The Red Scare” era. However, many Americans do not know the meaning or history of the ideology (Neubeck and Roach 1981; Cain 2019). Socialism is a broad ideology but has a core concern with human cooperation and equality which requires a just distribution of resources (Hoffman and Graham 2009). On the other hand, capitalism thrives on inequality and even requires it for economic growth (Burkhart 2007). The tension between these two forms of economy translates to the tension felt along partisan lines. Perhaps, just like a compromise of the two political parties can increase government efficiency and effectiveness, so can compromise between these economic forms. In fact, Burkhart (2007:486) found democracy is “enhanced by a mixed model of capitalism and socialism.” Instead of seeing these ideologies as conflicting, utilizing them together to create the best scenario for the economy and social well-being would be more beneficial.

METHODS

To address my first research question regarding the relationship between political efficacy and support for income redistribution in 2020, I used the American National Election Time Series Study Survey. The independent variable was *political efficacy*. To properly measure political efficacy, I created an index of four variables that all aimed at measuring the respondent’s political efficacy. The survey question I used to measure political efficacy asked to what degree the respondent agreed with the following statements:

POLEFF1: “Public officials don’t care much what people like me think.”

POLEFF2: “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.”

POLEFF3: “How often do politics and government seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what’s going on?”

POLEFF4: “How well do you understand the important political issues facing our country?”

If respondents answered “yes” to a question, SPSS assigned a value of 1. Since there are four questions, the index is between 0 and 4. The higher the index score, the more political efficacy the respondent had.

The dependent variable was *support for income redistribution*. I used two slightly different questions that measured support for redistributive policies. These questions read:

REDIST1: “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?”

REDIST2: “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose increasing income taxes on people making over one million dollars per year?”

The first question asked a more general question about redistributive policies while the second question asked about a specific policy. I was curious to see how the data would change between the two.

To identify confounding variables, I also analyzed the relationship between responses to the question pertaining to the dependent variable and respondents’ sex, race, age, education, income, and political party affiliation. I also analyzed two more variables that were not demographic information to see if responses were correlated with either the independent or dependent variable. The first variable measured if the respondent had anti-elitist values. The survey question asked to what degree the respondent agreed with the following statement:

ATTELITE: “Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.”

And the second variable is another index, but this variable measures political action. This index contains ten questions. These questions ask about the respondent’s political involvement such as signing petitions, contacting representatives, and protesting. The higher the score, the more politically active respondent.

The 2020 Time Series data set is a cross-sectional sample of 4,779 American eligible voters. Data was collected via the internet, phone, and video. The interviews began soon after the November 2020 election and continued through the end of December. This data was collected via the internet. Additionally, I conducted a survey using the same questions from the ANES questionnaire of a probability sample of UW-La Crosse undergraduate students using the Qualtrics platform. Prior to sending the survey, I completed the Responsible Conduct of Research training to become certified for research of human subjects from the Institutional Review Board. The survey was sent to a random sample of 3,000 student email addresses in February of 2022 in which I requested them to complete the survey. A total of 722 individuals started the survey, and 595 finished the survey for a completion rate of 82%. After obtaining the UWL data, I compared the results of frequency distributions, bivariate correlations, and logistic regression analyses to those of the ANES 2020 Time Series Study data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the basic descriptive frequencies found from the 2020 American National Election Studies dataset of the independent, dependent, and confounding variables analyzed in this study. Demographic variables were consistent with general patterns we see in the United States (United States Census Bureau 2021a). For example, gender, political party affiliation, income, and age were split about evenly (income was coded as a dichotomy with the median income as the cutoff, while people over 50 were fairly over-represented). Race and education representation of the sample also matched general demographic patterns of the United States population with about 35% being college educated and over 65% being white. There was variation in response rates for the two questions that measured support for redistributive policies. Recall that the first redistributive policy question was a more general question about the idea of redistributive political action. The data showed that less people (60%) supported redistributive policies in this question compared to almost 80% who supported a more specific redistributive policy (increasing taxes on those who make over \$1 million/year). It is important to note that a majority of respondents supported redistributive policies despite the wording of the question. The higher support for the second redistributive policy question could relate to the fact that 81% of the sample held an anti-elitist attitude and the second question specifically targets elites. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables measured in indexes. The independent variable, political efficacy, had a range of 0 to 4 and the mean was 1.26 (standard deviation 1.122). These statistics indicate that most respondents had a low political efficacy score. Lastly, the sample shows that a majority of people were not politically active in the last year. Out of a range of 10, the political action mean was 1.51 (standard deviation 1.919).

Table 1: Descriptive Frequencies from ANES Dataset

	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Redistribution1		
Oppose	2,146	40.1%
Support	3,201	59.9%
Redistribution2		
Oppose	1,244	21.3%
Support	4,594	78.7%
Sex		
Male	3,557	48.0%
Female	3,852	52.0%
Race		
White	4,853	65.7%
Person of Color	2,533	34.3%
Age		
18-50	4,022	56.0%
51+	3,157	44.0%
Education		
Not college grad	4,749	64.8%
College grad	2,580	35.2%
Income		
<\$75,000/year	3,197	46.0%
>\$75,000/year	3,755	54.0%
Political Party		
Lean Republican	3,073	48.0%
Lean Democrat	3,328	52.0%
Anti-Elite Attitude		
Disagree	1,102	19.0%
Agree	4,708	81.0%

Table 2: Index Descriptive Statistics from ANES Dataset

	Frequency	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Efficacy Index	7,402	0	4	1.26	1.122
Political Action Index	7,453	0	10	1.51	1.919

Table 3 shows the basic descriptive frequencies of the UW-La Crosse data. The demographic variables were not as consistent with the demographics of the area. All respondents of this survey were under 50 and not college graduates, although many will become college graduates. Although white people were overrepresented in this data (94% of respondents), it is fairly consistent with the demographics of La Crosse County (United States Census Bureau 2021b). Those making over \$75,000/year (66%), those who lean Democrat (~69%), and women (~65%) were also overrepresented. Unlike the ANES sample, there was little variance between the two redistributive policy questions that act as the dependent variable. There was overwhelming support (over 75%) for both redistributive policy questions. Just like the ANES sample, over 80% of respondents held anti-elitist attitudes, but UWL students differed from the national sample in political action. Table 4 shows that the political action mean was much higher (2.57). When it comes to the independent variable, the efficacy index mean was slightly higher than the ANES sample at 1.31.

Table 3: Descriptive Frequencies from UWL Dataset

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Redistribution1		
Oppose	100	24.4%
Support	309	75.6%
Redistribution2		
Oppose	114	22.9%

Support	384	77.1%
Sex		
Male	202	35.4%
Female	369	64.6%
Race		
White	545	94.1%
Person of Color	34	5.9%
Income		
<\$75,000/year	193	34.0%
>\$75,000/year	374	66.0%
Political Party		
Lean Republican	164	31.2%
Lean Democrat	361	68.8%
Anti-Elite Attitude		
Disagree	93	18.6%
Agree	407	81.4%

Table 4: Index Descriptive Statistics from UWL Dataset

	Frequency	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Efficacy Index	592	0	4	1.31	1.130
Political Action Index	592	0	10	2.57	2.066

Table 5 shows the bivariate correlation results from the ANES dataset. According to this chart, an individual with a high political efficacy was statistically significantly more likely to oppose reducing income levels between the richest and poorest households. This relationship was only significant for the first redistributive policy question. The correlation was weak but statistically significant, nonetheless. More generally, a respondent was more likely to have a high political efficacy if they were a man, over the age of 50, had a higher education, made more than \$75,000/year, and leaned Democrat. It is also important to note that political efficacy was correlated with high political action, and those respondents were less likely to have an anti-elitist attitude. Those who were more likely to have a high political efficacy have been historically more politically involved mostly because of the privilege of historic political freedom.

When it comes to the dependent variables, I found some variables that were correlated with only one or both of the redistributive policy questions used to measure the variable. The strongest correlation for both dependent variable questions was with the political party variable. If a respondent supported redistributive policies, they were more likely to lean Democrat. This may suggest that redistributive policies are above all, a partisan issue. The respondent was more likely to support both redistributive policy questions if they were a person of color, had an anti-elitist attitude, and was highly politically active. If a respondent was under the age of 50, had a higher education, and made less than \$75,000/year, they were more likely to support reducing income levels between the richest and poorest households only. If a respondent was a woman, they were more likely to support raising taxes on those making over \$1 million/year only.

Since anti-elitist attitudes and political action were statistically significantly correlated with both the dependent and independent variable, it is important to examine what confounding variables were correlated with them as well. Respondents of color, under the age of 50, those without a higher education, those making under \$75,000/year, those who lean Democrat, and those who had low political action scores were more likely to hold anti-elitist attitudes. On the other hand, if a respondent was a woman, a white person, held a higher education, made over \$75,000/year, or leaned Democrat, they were more likely to hold a high political action score.

Table 5: Bivariate Correlations from ANES Dataset

	Efficacy Index	Redistribution1	Redistribution2	Sex	Race	Age	Education	Income	Political Party	Anti-Elite Attitude	Political Action Index
Efficacy Index	-.032* (.019) 5,345	-.003 (.821) 5,837	-.063* (<.001) 7,359	-.069* (<.001) 7,336	.103** (<.001) 7,131	.250** (<.001) 7,278	.154** (<.001) 6,905	.099** (<.001) 5,810	-.259** (<.001) 5,810	.261** (<.001) 7,402	
Redistribution1		.534** (.000) 4,501	.008 (.570) 5,317	.149** (<.001) 5,301	-.113** (<.001) 5,171	.054** (<.001) 5,171	-.053** (<.001) 5,022	.570** (.000) 4,745	.147** (<.001) 4,414	.061** (<.001) 5,347	
Redistribution2			.056** (<.001) 5,811	.030* (.020) 5,793	.020 (.131) 5,649	.016 (.227) 5,746	-.006 (.672) 5,477	.392** (<.001) 5,084	.106** (<.001) 4,815	.026* (.043) 5,839	
Sex				.019 (.094) 7,366	.028* (.019) 7,165	.001 (.934) 7,294	-.060** (<.001) 6,946	.087** (<.001) 6,365	-.008 (.541) 5,777	.032** (.006) 7,409	
Race					-.169** (<.001) 7,154	-.097** (<.001) 7,279	-.143** (<.001) 6,937	.312** (<.001) 6,365	.112** (<.001) 5,766	-.096** (<.001) 7,386	
Age						-.022 (.061) 7,074	.007 (.540) 6,835	-.108** (<.001) 6,210	-.100** (<.001) 5,713	.008 (.504) 7,178	
Education							.297** (<.001) 6,856	.087** (<.001) 6,306	-.131** (<.001) 5,713	.263** (<.001) 7,329	
Income								-.051** (<.001) 6,028	-.085** (<.001) 5,433	.160** (<.001) 6,952	
Political Party									.080** (<.001) 5,033	.095** (<.001) 6,402	
Anti-Elite Attitude										-.047** (<.001) 5,811	

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .005

To compare, Table 6 shows the bivariate correlations of the UW-La Crosse undergraduate student data. The independent and dependent variables were more strongly correlated in this data, and both questions measuring the dependent variable were statistically significant as compared to only the general redistributive policy question in Table 5. The correlations that were consistent with the correlations for political efficacy in Table 5 were sex, anti-elitist attitude, and political action. Otherwise, income was not statistically significant among UWL undergraduates while it was significantly related to political efficacy for the national sample. Lastly, political party affiliation was opposite than in Table 5; those who leaned Republican were more likely to have high political efficacy.

Again, similar correlations were calculated in Table 6 as compared to Table 5 for the dependent variable. Only one variable was significantly correlated with only one redistributive policy question which was income. If a respondent made less than \$75,000/year, they were more likely to support reducing the difference between the richest and poorest households. Otherwise, sex, political party, anti-elitist attitude, and political action were all significantly correlated with both questions that measure the dependent variable and followed the same pattern seen

in Table 5. Women, those who lean Democrat, those with an anti-elitist attitude, and a high political action were more likely to support redistributive policies. Race was the only variable that was not statistically significantly correlated with any of the variables in this dataset.

Table 6: Bivariate Correlations from UWL Dataset

	Efficacy Index	Redistrib ution1	Redistrib ution2	Sex	Race	Income	Political Party	Anti-Elite Attitude	Political Action Index
Efficacy Index		-.203** ($<.001$) 408	-.229** ($<.001$) 497	-.176** ($<.001$) 570	-.018 (.657) 578	.031 (.462) 566	-.165** ($<.001$) 524	-.343** ($<.001$) 500	.252** ($<.001$) 592
Redistribution1			.729** ($<.001$) 375	.188** ($<.001$) 389	.048 (.339) 398	-.158** (.002) 392	.644** ($<.001$) 360	.433** ($<.001$) 359	.170** ($<.001$) 408
Redistribution2				.219** ($<.001$) 477	.059 (.191) 485	-.058 (.209) 478	.545** ($<.001$) 441	.405** ($<.001$) 430	.148** ($<.001$) 497
Sex					-.066 (.121) 565	-.041 (.335) 548	.156** ($<.001$) 512	.103* (.025) 478	.184** ($<.001$) 570
Race						-.096* (.024) 555	.115** (.009) 515	.080 (.078) 488	.057 (.168) 578
Income							-.144** (.001) 506	-.113* (.013) 479	-.032 (.450) 566
Political Party								.272** ($<.001$) 439	.225** ($<.001$) 524
Anti-Elite Attitude									.048 (.288) 500

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$

Table 7 shows the logistic regression analysis for the first question measuring the dependent variable (support reducing income between the richest and poorest households?) for the ANES national dataset. This regression model explained between 31.4% and 42.8% of the variation in the odds that someone supports reducing incomes between the richest and poorest households. Unfortunately, the efficacy index was not statistically significant in this analysis. However, there were still some important findings in this logistic regression. The table allows a researcher to calculate the odds of answering yes, that they support this specific redistributive policy question. Many of the findings supported the data from the bivariate correlation, but there were also some discrepancies. First, the findings consistent with the bivariate correlation: the odds of supporting reducing incomes between the richest and poorest households was 23.6% higher for those with a higher education, 1,600% higher for those who leaned Democrat, and 93.1% higher for those who had anti-elitist attitudes. Clearly, political party and anti-elitist attitude were the variables that most explained support for reducing income levels between the richest and poorest households. However, the logistic regression also found that the odds of answering yes to this question were 23.1% lower for women and 35% lower for people of color. Although sex was not statistically significant for this variable in the bivariate correlation, race was significant, but suggested that people of color were more likely to support.

Table 7: Logistic Regression Models from ANES Dataset – Redistribution1

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds
Political Efficacy Index	-.054	.042	.947
Sex	-.251***	.087	.778
Race	-.451***	.106	.637
Age	-.437***	.087	.646
Education	.214*	.096	1.238
Income	-.105	.092	.900
Political Party	2.829***	.098	16.926
Anti-Elite Attitude	.655***	.111	1.924
Political Action Index	.006	.023	1.006
Constant	-.911***		
Cox & Snell R ²	.313		
Nagelkerke R ²	.426		

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p<.005

Table 8 shows the logistic regression analysis for the same question, but for the UW-La Crosse student dataset. The regression model explained between 39.1% and 57.9% of the variation in the odds that someone supported reducing the incomes between the richest and poorest households. Again, political efficacy was not statistically significant in this analysis. Race and sex were not statistically significant, but the political party and anti-elitist attitude variables were consistent with both the UWL bivariate correlation and the ANES logistic regression analysis for this question. This table shows that the odds of supporting reducing incomes between the richest and poorest households were 2,889% higher for respondents who leaned Democrat, and 565% higher for those with anti-elitist attitudes. These were the only statistically significant predictors in this analysis, and again political party was the most important predictor.

Table 8: Logistic Regression Models from UWL Dataset – Redistribution1

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds
Political Efficacy Index	.099	.196	1.104
Sex	.788	.431	2.198
Race	-.207	.807	.813
Income	.091	.454	1.095
Political Party	3.398***	.432	29.896
Anti-Elite Attitude	1.894***	.522	6.648
Political Action Index	.059	.107	1.061
Constant	-3.341***		
Cox & Snell R ²	.391		
Nagelkerke R ²	.579		

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p<.005

Table 9 is the logistic regression analysis for the second question measuring support for redistributive policies (support increasing taxes on those that make over \$1 million/year?) for the ANES dataset. The regression model explained between 17.4% and 27.6% of the variation in the odds that someone supports increasing taxes on those that make over \$1 million/year. The only statistically significant variables in this analysis were race, political party, and anti-elitist attitude. This was consistent with Table 7, except education was also significant in Table 7. The odds of supporting increasing taxes on households making more than \$1 million/year was 42.4% lower for people of color, 1,062% higher for respondents who lean Democrat, and 65.3% higher for those with anti-elitist attitudes. This analysis was consistent with Table 7, including the discrepancy between the bivariate correlation and logistic

regression for the race variable. Again, political party was the largest predictor of the dependent variable in this analysis.

Table 9: Logistic Regression Models from ANES Dataset – Redistribution2

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds
Political Efficacy Index	-.152***	.043	.859
Sex	.106	.091	1.112
Race	-.576***	.110	.562
Age	.089	.092	1.093
Education	.102	.101	1.107
Income	-.042	.096	.959
Political Party	2.452***	.110	11.616
Anti-Elite Attitude	.503***	.111	1.653
Political Action Index	-.011	.024	.989
Constant	.241		
Cox & Snell R ²	.169		
Nagelkerke R ²	.269		

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p<.005

Lastly, Table 10 illustrates the logistic regression analysis for the dependent variable: support for increasing taxes on people making over \$1 million/year for the UWL sample. The regression model explained between 33.8% and 50.8% of the variation in the odds that the respondent supports increasing taxes on households making more than \$1 million/year. Again, political efficacy was not significant in this analysis. Political party and anti-elitist attitudes were significant and consistent with all logistic regression analyses (Tables 7-9). The odds of supporting a millionaire tax were 1,229% higher for those who leaned Democrat and 500% higher for those with anti-elitist attitudes. However, sex was statistically significant in this regression unlike Table 8 or 9. Table 7 (ANES dataset, first redistributive policy question) showed that sex was significant but had opposite results. This regression determined that the odds of supporting increasing taxes on citizens making over \$1 million/year was 197% higher for women.

Table 10: Logistic Regression Models from UWL Dataset – Redistribution2

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds
Political Efficacy Index	-.179	.164	.836
Sex	1.090***	.353	2.973
Race	.356	.850	1.427
Income	.352	.375	1.423
Political Party	2.587***	.354	13.285
Anti-Elite Attitude	1.791***	.392	5.995
Political Action Index	.123	.099	1.130
Constant	-2.669***		
Cox & Snell R ²	.338		
Nagelkerke R ²	.508		

* p < .05, **p < .01, ***p<.005

DISCUSSION

The results of this study were consistent with my hypothesis that there would be a negative relationship between political efficacy and support for redistributive policies. That is, those who had a high political efficacy were more likely to oppose redistributive policies. Although the logistic regression found that political efficacy was not a

significant predictor of whether an individual supported redistributive policies, the two factors were still related as shown in both bivariate correlations. It was found that political party affiliation and anti-elitist attitudes were the most powerful predictors of support for redistributive policies. The data from the UWL students did show the same patterns, but it is important to note that a greater percentage of respondents supported redistributive policies in the UWL data, as I predicted. However, overall, a majority of people did support redistributive policies in both datasets.

There were some inconsistencies between the datasets that are important to address. In Table 5 (ANES 2020), a respondent was more likely to have a high political efficacy if they leaned Democrat, but Table 6 (UWL 2022) shows a respondent was more likely to have a high political efficacy if they leaned Republican. The correlation between political efficacy and political party may change depending on the election year or political climate of the time. Since Democrats took electoral victory in 2020, people who leaned Democrat may have felt that their vote mattered more than if a Republican would have won. The results from the UWL data could be because the effect of winning the 2020 presidential election may have subsided causing the opposite correlation. Additionally, the UWL data showed that race was the only variable that was not statistically significantly correlated with any of the variables. This is most likely due to the low number of respondents that were people of color in this sample which would not allow for reliable correlation results. There were also inconsistencies between the bivariate correlation and logistic regression of the ANES dataset when it came to the race variable. The bivariate correlation suggested that people of color were more likely to support redistributive policies, but the logistic regression showed that the odds of answering supporting were 35% lower for people of color. As bivariate correlation does not control for the effects of other variables, the results seen in the bivariate correlation could be because being a person of color or a woman was confounded with party, income, or education that skewed the correlation.

The correlation between political efficacy, political action, and support for redistributive policies is important to understanding why there is a lack of progress towards redistributive policy action in the United States. Those who had a high political efficacy were more likely to have a high political action score. The individuals who were most likely to have a low political efficacy were women, people of color, young people, poor people, and those with less than a higher education. Most of these groups were also more likely to have anti-elitist attitudes as well which is a strong predictor for supporting redistributive policies. The bivariate correlations also showed that women, people of color, poor people, and young people were more likely to support redistributive policies. Basically, those who supported redistributive policies were less likely to be the ones fighting for it politically.

This study was important because it showed that a majority of Americans felt that their voices were not being heard, and this may itself be a result of the large levels of wealth and income inequality in the United States. In recent history, the government elected to protect the interests of corporations and the wealthy. Campaign finance laws and the role of lobbying in the legislature have allowed corporations to have political power, more than any one American individual has. However, the reason that wealth and income inequality exist is not because of American attitudes. Although there is a salient political and economic culture/ideology of individualism among Americans, this study finds that most Americans support redistributive policies which goes against the very core of individualism and meritocracy. Not only this, but the study of UWL students shows that Wisconsin college students, or the next generation of politicians and activists support redistributive policies at a higher rate than the national population. These students are also more politically active than the national population (although not by much), but they will be the ones who fight for redistributive policies because it is their futures that will be most affected by extreme wealth inequality.

There may be some solutions to reduce income and wealth inequality. Firstly, there needs to be a shift in economic power to balance income inequality. The stagnation in wages for the working class and the neoliberal political agenda has devastated labor unions (Jacobs and Myers 2014). Coupled with corporate reliance on financialization for profits, the bargaining power of the worker has been severely diminished (Roberts and Kwon 2017). Government institutions arguably have a responsibility to intervene to benefit the people and the economy. If not done by the government, then societal pressure must push corporations to take responsibility for curbing economic inequality by giving employees a livable wage, putting a ceiling or ratio on how much executives make compared to workers, and supporting these efforts in the legislative process (Enderle 2018). Throughout history when the United States has gone through periods of economic hardship or political disenfranchisement, there have been progressive social movements to demand change (Cain 2019; Bailey 2013). The United States may be approaching a point where progressive social movements can rise in the wake of COVID-19. The pandemic has highlighted and worsened the economic hardships and social injustices prevalent in American society, which brings economic justice to the forefront of important political issues.

Secondly, there needs to be a shift in political power because individuals who are in favor of redistributive policies “are disproportionately black, low-income, and less politically active” (Bobo 1991:71). The data within this study also supports that those with the least political power are the ones who support redistributive policies the most.

These voters lack political power because of voting laws, reduction in polling places, and the presence of money in political campaigns. Increased democracy can lessen income inequality because it expands political power which decreases the likelihood that concentration of economic power will be tolerated (Burkhart 2007). Working to get more of the marginalized electorate engaged in politics and restricting campaign contributions from Super PACs can slowly pave the way for more progressive welfare and income redistribution policies.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this research. Due to lack of resources, I could not write my own survey and conduct a national sample. Because of this, I used an existing survey so I could not phrase the survey questions to directly target the variables I was trying to measure. The lack of time that I could dedicate to this study prevented me from analyzing this issue longitudinally. Since political culture is always subject to change over time, this may bias the results toward the political climate in just 2020 (ANES) and 2022 (UWL). I also must address my own biases as a redistributive policy supporter and person with a left-leaning ideology.

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