

The Policy Implications of Americans' Concern for Increasing Economic Inequality

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to
the Faculty of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

By
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The concern of a majority of Americans for increasing inequality has not translated into increased support for the policies and candidates with the best potential for achieving this reduction. Some have argued that this is due to either a failure of the democratic process, ignorance of economic realities, or a narrow focus on explicitly redistributive programs as the mechanism for reducing inequality. I hypothesize that the lack of support for policy action on inequality stems from the ideological diversity of those Americans who are concerned about rising inequality. Even if they are united in seeing economic inequality as a problem, Americans of different ideological dispositions may have dramatically different views on what sorts of policies or candidates are best suited to deal with it. They may also differ in the importance they place on economic inequality, relative to other considerations, in their political decision making.

To test this hypothesis I will explore the relationships between concern for economic inequality, voting behavior, and two distinct dimensions of political ideology in a number of recent surveys of American public opinion. These cross-sectional analyses will be supported by longitudinal analysis which explore the electoral impact of changes in concern for inequality over time, in the aggregate. Confirming this hypothesis would recommend a focus on state-level policy reforms which could be more closely targeted to the ideological persuasions of voters in a given states. Successful state action could lead to models for more far reaching national reform. Consequently, I will calculate state-level estimates of ideology and concern for inequality to identify those states where specific policy reforms to address inequality would be most likely to succeed.

Dissertation Committee:	Michael Doonan, Ph.D. Chair Leonard Saxe, Ph.D. Grant Ritter, Ph.D. James A. Stimson, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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