Disadvantage and Self-interest: Social Class and Policy Preferences

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Disadvantage and Self-interest: 
Social Class and Policy Preferences

Andrew M. Engelhardt

Abstract:

This thesis examines what circumstances compel individuals to take policy preferences in line with their objective self-interest. In particular, I argue that social class plays an important role in shaping individuals’ policy preferences. Whereas recent work in political science has examined social class from the perspective of socioeconomic status, I contend that conceptualizing social class as a group identity plays an important complementary role. I show that social class identification has a statistically and substantively significant effect—comparable to changes in partisanship, ideology, and income—on individuals’ preferences for a policy related to their economic situation. Ignoring social class identification when evaluating class effects prevents us from fully understanding individuals’ preferences, a weakness especially consequential amidst concerns about politicians’ responsiveness to low-income people.
Acknowledgments

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With chants of “We are the 99%!” and “Banks got bailed out! We got sold out!” filling the unseasonably warm autumnal air, New York City’s Zucotti Park quickly drew the attention of individuals both domestically and abroad. Beginning September 25, 2011, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) soon had offshoots nationwide. These often multi-day protests involved protestors coming together in public spaces, often establishing semi-permanent camps and creating working groups that handled tasks as diverse as food distribution and public outreach (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013). While some considered the “occupying” of Zucotti Park a spontaneous act, it had been organized to an extent by the anti-consumerist Canadian magazine Adbusters (Sommer 2012). To a degree Occupy mimicked that year’s large-scale public protests collectively known as the Arab Spring; many Occupy activists participated in these protests before coming to New York (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013). Other participants were influenced by the protests in Madison, Wisconsin, that resulted from Republican attempts to eliminate collective bargaining rights for the state’s public employees. Occupy concluded a rather eventful year of public protest activity.

In addition to the uniqueness of its methods, OWS was distinct in that it lacked any unifying demands or clear goals. Some “Occupiers” decried government policies they saw as improving the lot of corporations and high-income individuals (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013). Others highlighted the burdens of student debt, which were compounded by limited employment opportunities. Soon, many credited Occupy with elevating economic inequality as a topic of political discussion (Deprez and Dodge 2011, Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013).

While Occupy Wall Street was a recent political event, the economic phenomena the movement highlighted had been occurring for years. The key point brought forth by Occupy centered on the ever-increasing disparity in incomes and wealth between different sections of

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society. Not only was the top income quintile pulling away from the bottom quintiles, the top 10% gained even more. Most astonishingly, even within the top 10% — the group’s lowest income was $98,955 in 2007 — the top 1% performed the best. Between 1979 and 2007, the share of market income going to this group rose from 10 percent to 20 percent. Its after-tax share similarly doubled, from 8 percent to 17 percent (Congressional Budget Office 2011). In contrast, the middle three income quintiles each saw their share of after-tax income drop 2 to 3 percentage points.

That same fall, in a speech in Osawatomie, Kansas, President Barack Obama echoed the themes articulated by Occupy:

“[F]or most Americans, the basic bargain that made this country great has eroded. Long before the recession hit, hard work stopped paying off for too many people. Fewer and fewer of the folks who contributed to the success of our economy actually benefited from that success. Those at the very top grew wealthier from their incomes and their investments — wealthier than ever before. But everybody else struggled with costs that were growing and paychecks that weren’t — and too many families found themselves racking up more and more debt just to keep up” (The White House 2011).

The Great Recession that began in December 2007 placed economic performance at or near the top of many individuals’ concerns. A 2010 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that a majority of all adults in the labor force had experienced some work-related hardship (Taylor et al. 2010). Thirty-two percent of respondents were either currently unemployed or had experienced a period without a job since the recession began. Among the employed, over 20% either had their work hours decreased or experienced a pay cut. Occurring alongside broader trends including long-term wage stagnation and increasing disparities in compensation between employees and CEOs (Mishel et al. 2012, Ch. 4), the climate surrounding
the Great Recession suggested that economic considerations offered a significant point of concern for individuals.

Intriguingly, Occupy lacked the diversity one might expect given the consequences of these economic phenomena. Some 80% of the Occupy activists in New York City had a bachelor’s degree and about 36% had incomes over $100,000 (Milkman, Luce, and Lewis 2013). Moreover, about two-thirds of those involved were white. The movement could not speak, therefore, to any universal class or racial inclusion. With arguments explicating the stark increase in inequality over the last few decades, why would these relatively better off individuals be concerned with their economic situation? Some identify the typical Occupy activist as a member of the “precariate”—educated individuals with limited job prospects (Moynihan 2013). What remains puzzling is the limited participation by those enduring more long-term disadvantage (Koch 1994, 689). Occupy was not the mass proletarian uprising some on the right considered it to be (Boxer 2011).

This puzzle—why relatively advantaged individuals participated in greater numbers in a movement addressing economic inequality and a lack of economic opportunity—motivates my thesis. Understanding why lower-income individuals didn’t participate en masse is important if one wants to fully grasp the nature of a movement concerned with broad distributional questions. Most immediately, understanding the factors potentially influencing an individual’s policy preferences would provide some initial idea as to what may differentiate participants and nonparticipants in a movement like Occupy. If one individual’s preferred policy goals are advanced by Occupy and another person’s are not, then one may reasonably expect the former actor to participate and the latter to not.
Given the prevalence of economic issues in the United States, exploring the role social class plays in shaping individuals’ policy preferences should shed light on why individuals support certain policies over others. Social class, as with other group identifications, influences identifiers’ perceptions and attitudes toward social and political events (Conover 1984). The process through which class-based perceptions affect the attitudes that class identifiers hold remains understudied. Understanding policy differences between different social classes might explain class-based behavior and add nuance to the substantial literature on social cleavages.

Determining which factors affect the policy preferences held by identifiers of different social classes can improve our comprehension of how social class influences public policy. This understanding becomes more important in an environment of increasing inequality and decreasing social mobility (Congressional Budget Office 2011). These factors disadvantage certain groups in society and advantage others; however, it is not self-evident that classes would deviate from one another on important issues. The possibility also exists that in an environment of inequality members of disadvantaged social strata may develop policy preferences that would help not only themselves but also those in other objectively disadvantaged groups. A better understanding of what policy attitudes class identifiers hold, and what other factors may mitigate the relationship between identification and preferences, may provide a clearer picture of policy outcomes.

In this thesis I argue that social class matters in American politics, particularly because of its role in shaping individuals’ attitudes. I start by discussing the role of social class in American politics. I highlight arguments about whether class matters and, if it does, how significant its effects are. After demonstrating that objective class does matter, I then propose an alternative conception of social class that contains the key difference between my approach and the other
literature in political science. Instead of considering class as socioeconomic status alone, I draw from the literature on group identification to show how social class can function as a group identity. I argue that identifying with a social class group produces policy preferences in line with individuals’ “objective” self-interest; these preferences may be mitigated by other factors at the individual or system level. Since group identification suggests feelings of interdependence and a collective orientation (Miller et al. 1981), something implied by a movement like Occupy, a group identification perspective seems important for more completely explaining individuals’ preferences.

To test the relationship between class identification and attitudes I use data from the 2000 General Social Survey. While I would prefer a fielding closer to the Great Recession, I use the 2000 data set because of year-specific question modules. In the analysis section I establish relationships between class identification and policies tied to self-interest. Next, I discuss factors differentiating the working class from the middle class and highlight how these differences vary by level of income. I then test a full model for the influence of social class on policy preferences, accounting for typically strong explanatory factors like partisanship and ideology. I find a statistically significant and substantively meaningful difference between middle and working class identifiers in the probability that they agree with a relevant policy proposal: government should reduce income differences between low- and high-income individuals. The effect of class identification was comparable to reasonable changes in ideology, partisanship, and objective class membership. I conclude with a discussion of the implications from the approach and offer suggestions for further research.

Class in American Politics
Class has been an analytical point of investigation since Marx. Exploring the role of social class in the United States is especially important in the current environment of increasing economic inequality. For instance, class may influence individuals’ attitudes. To the degree that class matters in this regard, those in different classes should think differently about social and political issues. According to Michael Hout (2010), social class helps Americans orient themselves within society and constrains their behavior, interests, and attitudes. These constraints may increase the probability individuals hold attitudes that benefit their objective self-interest. Moreover, this class influence may matter in both the short- and long-term. In fact, studies of socially mobile individuals have shown that preferences tied to their class of origin persist over time (De Graaf et al. 1995). The persistence of class influence suggests that understanding how social class shapes individuals’ attitudes has both an immediate and lasting importance.

Some contend that class has a negligible role in American politics (see generally McCall and Manza 2010; Roemer 1998). Thomas Frank’s What’s the Matter with Kansas? offers perhaps the best-known treatment of this topic. According to Frank and others, “the class basis New Deal voting patterns had given way to a new cleavage structure in which conservative ideology and cultural issues brought large numbers of working-class whites into the Republican camp” (Bartels 2006, 203). Working class individuals have abandoned the Democratic Party for the Republican Party as they change their focus from personal financial concerns to social and moral issues. Broadly, this argument concludes that ideological polarization on social and cultural issues better defines the contemporary political landscape than differences on economic policy (McCall and Manza 2010).

Others have argued instead that class remains an important influence on both vote choice and party identification (Bartels 2008; Brewer and Stonecash 2007; Manza and Brooks 2008;
Beyond the vote and partisanship, if we examine policy preferences between class groups we should see class differences in policy areas related to feelings of self-interest. Even so, some contend that the magnitude of income-based differences is actually small; therefore, class differences may exist but be insubstantial. Joseph Ura and Christopher Ellis (2008) argue that, over time, “policy mood” differs across income quartiles with wealthier individuals usually more conservative than poorer individuals. They also find, however, that the relationship lacks consistency, as differences in mood between the rich and poor are statistically indistinguishable in roughly half of the years they consider.

A potentially significant shortcoming in these current treatments of class follows from how these scholars operationalize this subject. Most of the analyses arguing that class still matters use measures of socioeconomic status—usually income—as indicators of class. While education and income levels do matter, they mainly indicate an individual’s position in society in terms of resources. They do not take into account the possibility that individuals of a certain socioeconomic status feel similar to others in comparable positions. Consequently, I aim to modify and extend these “class matters” stories by proposing a definition of class as a social group. Outside of the race and ethnic politics literature there has been an incomplete discussion on the effects groups have on the attitudes and policy preferences for individuals identifying with them. I hope to fill in this gap by examining social class as a group identity.

The importance of differences in preferences between classes is especially significant when considering the representation of various groups in Congress. On the one hand, Ura and Ellis (2008) contend that the preferences of wealthier citizens are not more predictive of Congressional policymaking. On the other hand, Martin Gilens (2012) and Larry Bartels (2008) argue that the poor are in fact poorly represented in Congress. If this is the case, and if, as some
contend, large preference gaps exist between the rich and poor in policy areas as diverse as social welfare, taxes, and national security (Gilens 2009), then policies enacted will be unfairly skewed to benefit the wealthy and others in privileged positions. Understanding the process through which social class influences policy preferences therefore becomes important for evaluating the democratic responsiveness of political institutions. Moreover, if class identification promotes the assumption of self-interested policy preferences, then understanding when this effect exists or changes in degrees would further improve these evaluations. Extensions could also help us understand why, for example, Occupy Wall Street was not a more broadly inclusive movement between class groups. To begin untangling the class influence process, the following section draws together lessons from the literature on group identification to understand the consequences for analyzing class as a social group.

**Class and Group Identity**

Broadly speaking, people can identify with any number of groups. These groups could form around shared characteristics like gender, race, age, or occupation. Identifying with a group follows from an awareness of the group as a social entity (Brewer 2001; Lau 1989). In the case of social class, individuals would see the working class or middle class as collections of individuals sharing similar objective characteristics; perhaps they work in a similar job or earn comparable amounts of money. Identifying with a group signifies a psychological attachment to the group as a social entity; individuals may perceive themselves as members of a common social category even without sharing objective traits (Conover 1984, 1988; Koch 1993; Lau 1989). This psychological, or affective, attachment compels individuals to feel more positively about those also identifying with the group since they share similar traits and are part of the same “team.”
How individuals select the groups they identify with follows from a variety of factors. Lau (1989) argues that similarity to others identifying with a group, the group’s political salience, and the proportion of group identifiers in a local environment all contribute to the likelihood individuals will subsequently identify with the group. A group’s place in society also plays an important role as the political and social contexts influence group identification by affecting the group’s political salience (Conover 1984, Koch 1994, Lau 1989). A more highly salient group identity will increase the likelihood someone identifies with the group. Individuals may also show a greater willingness to identify with higher-status groups than lower-status groups (Koch 1994). Regardless of their objective circumstances, individuals would then rather identify as middle class than working class or lower class given the connotations associated with each group. This would especially be the case if opinion leaders referred to middle class concerns, perhaps generically referring to improving the situation of America’s middle class families, thereby increasing the salience of middle class identification.

Group identification is often defined as comprising two components: objective group membership and a psychological attachment to the group, or subjective identification (Conover 1984, 1988). In the context of social class, similar levels of education or income would place individuals objectively in one class group over another given their access to resources. From this objective position the individual could then identify with a relevant class group. An individual with a bachelor’s degree who earns $65,000 a year as a chemist would probably be considered middle class. She would then use these objective factors, her income and degree, to identify the class group with which to identify. Conover (1984) notes that while objective group membership may not have a substantial impact on political perceptions and attitudes, subjective group identification does.
Identifying with a group has consequences for an individual’s political behavior and attitudes. For instance, Lau (1989) argues, “Merely the perception that one is part of a group (and that other people are not part of the group) is sufficient for people to act differentially toward in-group and out-group members” (220). Those identifying with a group pay attention to things explicitly linked to the group’s economic and social interests, providing various interpretations of the political environment. Some argue, then, that identification fosters a sense of solidarity with the group and its interests (Conover 1984). For example, individuals identifying as working class may take policy positions that protect collective bargaining rights and others that promote employment while middle class individuals may show more support for policies controlling inflation.

Others contend that group identification does not directly translate into group influence without the development of a group consciousness; identifiers develop a sense that their group and another group hold opposite issue positions (Miller et al. 1981, Conover 1988). A group consciousness, then, combines group identification with a “political awareness or ideology regarding the group’s relative position in society along with a commitment to collective action aimed at realizing the group’s interests” (Miller et al. 1981, 495). In other words, some external factors make identification with a group politically salient for objective members (see also Converse and Campbell 1968). It may be that political elites frame a certain policy option as benefiting a specific class group. Consequently, those identifying with this group may look more favorably upon the policy proposal because their class identification has become more salient.

Amidst a sense of interdependence and a developing group consciousness, group identification promotes the formation of self-interested attitudes targeted at enhancing the group’s position. For example, lower class individuals might perceive an inability to remedy
their disadvantaged position by themselves. They may believe the existing social order to be illegitimate due to perceptions of its distributional unfairness. This perceived unfairness may encourage concerns that those in deprived groups have less control of their own fate than do their counterparts in privileged groups. The interests of lower or working class individuals may run opposite those of middle or higher class individuals, with implications for policy and democratic responsiveness.

The degree to which group identification influences individuals’ attitudes and behaviors follows from the legitimacy of an existing state of affairs. Individuals assign legitimacy according to who or what they blame for the status quo arrangements—either individual failings or inequities in the social system (Miller et al. 1981). Working class individuals who face diminishing retirement benefits through employers restructuring pensions may become more supportive of increased spending on Social Security as a way to balance this effect. Lower class individuals without a college degree may support public provision of job training programs to improve their chances at securing employment. Blaming outside factors rather than faulting individuals for existing inequalities may increase the degree to which group identification affects attitudes by encouraging the formation of a group consciousness. In contrast, locating solutions to problems at the personal rather than collective level may decrease the influence of group identification. Individual blame has been shown to inhibit voter turnout and affect evaluations of presidential candidates, indicating that the placement of blame has significant consequences (Brody and Sniderman 1977, Abramowitz et al. 1988, cf. Arceneaux 2003).

When considering those identifying with an advantaged group, this group identity would promote the benefits that accrue to them. Gurin and colleagues (1980) argue that group consciousness for those high in status, power, or resources justifies advantage and has the aim of
maintaining beneficial arrangements. They suggest that group consciousness justifying the status quo would likely occur if disadvantaged groups attacked this “natural state of affairs” (Gurin et al. 1980, 34). Upper class identifiers benefiting from the carried interest treatment of investment income may ardently oppose proposals to increase the tax rate on long-term capital gains. More broadly, they may oppose any increase in taxes as this would potentially threaten the well-being of themselves and their peers. Those identifying with advantaged groups realize that their preferences are opposed to other, potentially disadvantaged, groups, and want to ensure that the can continue to enjoy their current benefits.

In contrast, identifying with a group on the opposite end of the distributional arrangements encourages policies that would ameliorate this disadvantage. Disadvantaged groups question the rules governing the distribution of status, power, and resources in society because these rules are opposed to identifiers’ interests (Gurin et al. 1980, see also Miller et al. 1981). This questioning, combined with a salient group identity, compels group identifiers to think collectively. The focus on a collective orientation is important because it emphasizes the perception that the issues facing the group exist beyond the capacity for any single member of the group to solve. Thus, politics becomes the locus of engagement for the group as identifiers view government action as the best, perhaps only, method for mediating perceived distributional illegitimacies (see generally Page and Jacobs 2009). Only the government has the tools to redistribute incomes from upper-income, upper class individuals to lower-income, lower class individuals, thereby smoothing market outcomes.

Group identification, via a group consciousness, makes outcomes relevant to the group personally significant for the individual. Conover’s (1988) characterization of group consciousness in particular focuses on a configuration of affective and cognitive elements that
lead individuals to feel sympathetic towards their in-group, contributing to the development of pro-group issue positions (see also Kinder and Kam 2010). The realization of a group consciousness among deprived individuals could result from a shift in accepting the status quo to instead questioning why an out-group possesses greater, or unfair amounts of, resources, status, or power. This questioning attributes the group’s relatively deprived status to forces external to it and produces a sense of anger regarding those forces (Conover 1988). Concurrently, an assault on the status quo could mobilize dominant groups to participate in politics out of a desire to maintain the existing relationships (Miller et al. 1981). The development of a group consciousness, again, entails a specific group identity becoming politically salient for an identifier through a realization that the group’s interests may be opposed to those of another group.

Orienting the Argument
Following the previous discussion, I argue that individuals who identify with a specific social class will broadly share policy preferences, especially in comparison to those identifying with other classes. Moreover, given the personal economic situation class identification entails, I hypothesize that policy areas most clearly linked to identifiers’ self-interest should exhibit class effects. For instance, class identification should matter for attitudes about taxes, spending on aid to the poor, or wanting the government to reduce income differences between high- and low-income people, but not for gun control, capital punishment, or marijuana legalization.

The typical model for the effect of social class on policy preferences or vote choice reduces to the following:
In contrast, I include factors in between what would be a measure of socioeconomic status and the outcome of interest. As described earlier, I propose a conception of class as a social group. Identification with a class group therefore comes between objective group membership—indicated by socioeconomic status—and attitudes. Consequently, I model the process through which class helps identifiers take preferences in their objective self-interest in the following way:
Whereas most of the political science literature has focused solely on class as an individual’s objective position, class according to my proposed relationship above contains additional modifiers. Developing class as a social group implies a collective orientation, one where an individual’s economic position may affect the class group she identifies with. The class an individual identifies with, and the subsequent effect on her policy preferences, could in part depend on her economic circumstances; therefore, I expect the inclusion of class identification to decrease the magnitude of influence from objective membership as identification captures some of class membership’s effect.

The discussion of group identity suggests that additional factors may influence the effect class identification has, especially if these factors relate to the salience of the group identity or the legitimacy of the social order. These factors may also differentiate identifiers both within and between groups. For example, in studying class politics in Chile, Langton and Rapoport (1975) found that to the degree that class differences existed, interacting with other individuals who linked their objective position with their subjective identification increased the effect of identification on vote choice. Moreover, they found that identifying with a class and having a conflict image of politics significantly increased support for Left parties. To understand whether similar features affect class identification’s contribution I include the mitigating factors stage.

I specifically use the term mitigating rather than moderating or mediating for these factors. The terms mediating and moderating have related implications about the nature of the relationship between variables they are attached to and other variables being considered. Therefore, I adopt the term mitigating because I remain agnostic about the exact relationship between these factors and social class identification. Whether, for example, a conflict image mediates—class identification influences the perception of conflict which in turn determines the
effect on the dependent variable—or moderates—class identification’s effect depends on the degree of conflict perceived—does not enter into the expectations for my results.

Class identification effects on attitudes should be especially strong on policies that specifically target the individuals’ class: policies related to an individual’s self-interest as determined by their objective economic situation. Beyond identifying with a group, an identifier must see a relationship between the group and politics (Converse and Campbell 1968). For group identification to matter, identifiers may believe that the distributional order is illegitimate and that government action is therefore necessary, and able, to correct these imbalances, which makes salient the identification with the group during attitude formation. As connections between a group’s position and policy outcomes become clearer in identifiers’ minds, the differences between identifiers of different classes should become more apparent. The degree that differences between class identifiers are found in this way would suggest that individuals find class relevant to the political context and feel their identification salient.

While a substantial literature exists concerning the role class plays in voting behavior, relatively little investigation has focused on the effect class may have regarding policy preferences, let alone the process through which this effect emerges. Additionally, the measurement of class most often used in these analyses only takes into account objective conditions. An approach to social class that utilizes the understandings of behavior developed within the literature on group identification should enhance the current understanding of social class politics. Through an examination of factors contributing to differences between classes in various policy areas we can address the mechanism(s) that promote the development of these cleavages, sharpening our knowledge of social class in the process.

Data and Methods
The 2000 General Social Survey (GSS) allows us to test the hypothesized relationship between objective class membership, class identification, and policy preferences. It allows us to examine these factors and evaluate what elements contribute to low-income individuals assuming policy positions that come in line with their objective self-interest. My indicator for objective class membership is the respondent’s total family income in order to capture the effect of multi-earner households. A more detailed discussion of why I operationalize objective class with income follows this section.

To measure the subjective component of class, what I have also referred to as class identification, the GSS asks respondents to select which class category they identify with: lower class, working class, middle class, upper class. While my analysis sees subjective identification with a class as a central component in the formation of attitudes, a note of caution is in order. Due to social norms within the United States, individuals have a tendency to declare themselves either working class or middle class regardless of their objective circumstances. As Table 1 indicates, 91% of respondents were rather evenly divided between the two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Identification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>5.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>45.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>1273</td>
<td>45.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2803</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Subjective Class Identification in the 2000 General Social Survey

Bearing this limitation in mind, disaggregating class identifiers according to income and location in the Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema helps draw a sharper distinction between class groups. The Erikson-Goldthorpe schema categorizes individuals according to their employment situation, accounting for how they are paid and what sort of work they perform. As Figure 1 shows, increasing levels of income correspond to decreasing levels of identification with the
lower and working classes. Working class identification dominates until the $50,000 mark when middle class identification then becomes predominant. Likewise, rising income increases identification with the upper class, a shift most evident in the final category.

FIGURE 1

The picture painted by Figure 2 is more complex, but a pattern does emerge. Skilled and non-skilled laborers, those in working class occupational relationships, are those most likely to identify with the working class. Some two-thirds of these individuals identify as either working or lower class. In contrast, majorities of individuals in service class or self-employed entrepreneurs (i.e. petty bourgeoisie) positions identify as middle or upper class.

FIGURE 2

Both Figures 1 and 2 to some degree exhibit intracategory variation. For instance, in Figure 1 we see that more than 80% of the top quintile, those high-income individuals making more than $75,000, identify as either middle or upper class. Even so, over 20% of the top quintile identifies as working class. While not as apparent, of low-income individuals, those in the bottom two quintiles, more than 60% identify as either lower or working class. According to Michael Hout (2008), the intracategory variation we see comes as a consequence of what he calls status inconsistency. When forced to identify with a class group, he argues that these individuals face a difficult choice because they objectively exist in more than one category. Hout offers the following as a reason for the split between working and middle class identifiers:

“[T]he nearly even split of Americans into the middle and working classes reflects the balance of consistently high and consistently low status class locations, ambivalence stemming from status inconsistency, and ambiguity about the borderline that separates the working class from the middle class among people like high school graduates with average incomes and routine jobs who might fall on either side of the line” (2008, 40).
Americans emphasize additional criteria when determining their class locations as well, including: homeownership, union membership, marriage, and leisure pursuits. According to Hout (2008), if someone uses a longer list of requirements to determine a social class with which to identify, then the likelihood that she suffers from status inconsistency will increase, although this need not necessarily be realized. Different understandings about what objectively makes someone working or middle class would therefore complicate how an individual comes to identify with a specific class group. Even so, if significant differences in policy preferences do exist between working and middle class identifiers, then we might expect even stronger differences if individuals held clearer understandings of the criteria differentiating class groups.

The General Social Survey has additional variables useful for exploring what factors help individuals take policy positions in line with their self-interest. The GSS asks respondents a series of questions that fall within my classification of mitigating variables—those factors that when included alongside class identification in some way influence the relationship between class and policy preferences. For example, in 2000 the GSS asked a subsample of respondents a battery of questions about their perceptions of social conflict as well as a battery of questions asking respondents about their attitudes regarding inequality—who it benefits, why it exists—that are useful for examining the connection between system-oriented perceptions and group identification. Similarly, several questions tap individuals’ feelings about their relative position in society, providing the opportunity to evaluate whether perceptions of relative disadvantage clarify differences between class identifiers. Below I describe more fully how these mitigating variables differentiate class identifiers.

Finally, the GSS offers plenty of variation for dependent variables. Following my assumption of self-interested preference orientations I expect class identification to have the
most relevance to policies concerning the distribution of resources. I compare the differences between identifiers on these policy issues to attitudes supporting the legalization of marijuana, capital punishment in the event of murder, and background checks for the purchase of guns. I do not expect significant class differences in these areas because they lack a direct relationship with individuals’ material circumstances. While I contrast the relationships between identification for self-interest and non self-interest related policies, my primary dependent variable of interest asks respondents whether or not they agree that the government should reduce income differences between low- and high-income individuals.

The analysis proceeds in four steps. First, following the lead of the group identity literature I establish a definition for objective class membership, specifically what makes someone objectively working class. This definition is important because, as the group identification literature notes, individuals with certain objective characteristics will be more likely to identify with groups these characteristics relate to. Next, I describe the results from various cross-tabulations to show that preferences do vary by class identification for policies related to an individual’s objective circumstances. Then, in the same way I show how class identification varies given various mitigating factors, such as job security, change in financial status, and attitudes about one’s relative economic standing. Finally, I combine these two exercises to evaluate the effect of class identification on policy preferences while controlling for demographic factors, partisanship, and ideology. I contrast the results from my model of class identification with the model typically used to show class effects, and show that merely using objective class ignores an important contribution made by class identification. Likewise, I show that including factors explaining intergroup variation in class identification may help show when class identification’s effect should be most apparent.
What is Objective Class?
As the discussion on group identity noted, identification involves feeling psychologically attached to a group and sharing similar objective circumstances with other identifiers. While we have an existing measure of subjective identification, we do not yet have a measure of objective class. Consequently, before we can examine how social class identification influences individuals’ policy preferences we must establish criteria for objective class membership to evaluate whether class identification has different effects for those objectively in a specific class group.

Objective definitions of class concern how much money people have, what they do with their money, or how they earn their money (Hout 2010). What people do with their money falls into aspects of lifestyle. Some consider this conception important as it indicates individuals’ orientations to social life and how these predispose some classes to one lifestyle and other classes to other modes of living (Hout 2010). While class may structure social interactions, the inability to fully capture these effects from a measurement standpoint limits the possibility of applying the lifestyle perspective to evaluations of individuals’ participation or attitudes.

For political scientists, the most commonly used measures to indicate individuals’ objective class status have been income and education, the typical measures of socioeconomic status. These measures attempt to tap one’s current economic state and future earnings potential, or, to meld it into the previous discussion, the amount of resources available to an individual1. Resource access, either current or future, becomes important when one considers the different economic decisions high- and low-income individuals make.

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1 An individual’s total wealth would provide an even clearer economic position; however, the General Social Survey does not contain a measure of wealth and therefore makes the use of wealth as an objective indicator more problematic.
One could also define objective class membership by using occupation. Sociologists often look at occupation from the perspective of employment relations (see Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, Svalfors 2006). This takes into account the human capital requirements and monetary rewards for a job, thus potentially accounting for both education and income (McCall and Manza 2010)\(^2\). Alternatively, one could use occupational prestige scores. These scores are taken from evaluations of occupational status provided by survey respondents (Hauser and Warren 1997)\(^3\).

In determining a sound theoretical conception of objective class that takes into account both the amount of money people earn and how they make it, the Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema offers a convincing formulation. Likewise, the Duncan prestige scores provide a way to tap social status as indicated by one’s occupation. However, to provide the most direct connection to the political science frameworks within which the rest of this analysis exists, I establish criteria for objective membership in the working class based on level of income. Using income allows for an easier comparison of class effects in this analysis with other extant work in the discipline.

\(^2\) Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe created perhaps the best-known class schema. This construction follows from individuals’ relationships to labor and production units. It divides people according to their status as employers, self-employed without employees, and employees. Each category relates to the amount of control an individual has over her, or others’, labor. In addition, it takes into consideration the nature of individuals’ compensation, e.g. salaried or hourly. The employment situation and form of compensation are combined to create the class schema—creating categories where individuals exhibit some homogeneity in access to resources. For example, Erikson and Goldthorpe argue that working class positions—non-skilled and skilled labor—would most likely be paid by the hour rather than by a salary (1992, Ch. 2). The schema relies on a structural perspective of class—it looks at class as a social position based on labor market relationships.

\(^3\) The Duncan Occupational Prestige scores are often used in this regard. Prestige scores have advantages in that they are highly correlated across countries and over time. Moreover, it does not matter who rates occupations and how they are asked to do so. Critics of the scores, however, argue that they lack criterion validity because they are not highly correlated with other measures of occupational social standing—average educational attainment and income of occupational incumbents (Hauser and Warren 1997, 190).
For the rest of the paper, those considered objectively working class have household incomes under $30,000 (although in regressions I will use the full range of income categories). In 2000, $30,000 is about 171% of the poverty line for a family of four. Using the 2000 General Social Survey and defining objectively working class with a $30,000 cutpoint, we have 1,048 objectively working class individuals in the data set, over 42% of the whole sample. This aligns somewhat similarly to the distribution of household income in the United States in 2000, with the mean household in the second quintile having an income of $25,331 (DeNavas-Walt et al. 2001). Similarly, when compared to the Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema, large numbers in what the schema establishes as working class positions earned under $30,000.

Unionized workers present obstacles for any income-based definition. Households with union members would typically see higher incomes, something the GSS data suggest. Likewise, someone in a heavily unionized occupation would benefit from unions’ presence even if she were not a member herself given externalities following from union bargaining for wages and benefits. However, when looking at income by class schema position and union membership we see the majority of skilled and non-skilled workers who earn more than $30,000 are also union members. In contrast, a clear majority of self-employed businesspeople, in the schema referred to as the petty bourgeoisie, earn over $30,000. A similar, if even more pronounced, difference exists for those categorized as part of the service class, with about 82% of these salaried professionals and managers earning over $30,000. While admittedly an arbitrary threshold, using $30,000 to establish an income level determining whether or not an individual is objectively working class appears to have merit with its accounting for the bottom two income quintiles in 2000 while also producing results similar to what the use of a more detailed class schema might offer.
Analysis

Class identification and policy preferences
Through this thesis I explore the impact of social class on political attitudes. Specifically, I focus on the question of “under what conditions do low-income respondents take policy positions ‘objectively’ in their self-interest.” I expect to find that income effects are largely mitigated by class identifications, alongside other factors like perceptions of fairness in the system and perceptions of conflict between classes. Examining traits that coincide with working class identification and income may serve to provide guidance on relevant factors in this relationship.

As has been noted above, individuals with lower socioeconomic status as indicated by income or education more frequently identify as working or lower class. Yet, beyond these resource indicators, what other attributes characterize working class individuals? Is working class identification associated with subjective evaluations of individual and national financial situations? What differences exist between someone objectively working class who identifies as working class and someone who identifies as middle class? In this and subsequent sections I dichotomize the GSS class identification question, combining individuals identifying as lower class and working class into one category and those identifying with the middle or upper class into another category\(^4\). For the sake of brevity I will refer to these categories as working class and middle class, respectively.

Before examining traits differentiating working and middle class identifiers, and how imposing restrictions on objective class membership affects these relationships, understanding how identification relates to policy preferences should suggest which policies to subsequently examine more in-depth. As discussed above, under a rational choice approach working class

\(^4\) The combined lower and working class category consists of 1,422 respondents, with another 1,381 respondents in the combined middle and upper class category. This relates to 51% and 49% of the sample respectively.
individuals should favor more government activity, especially when these actions influence the allocation of resources. In contrast, policies that relate to more social and moral concerns should not exhibit substantial, if any, class-based differences. Policies connected to individuals’ economic concerns should evince class differences, while those divorced from people’s financial considerations should not. Initially, we can examine differences between identifiers in their “size of government” preferences. The GSS determines individuals’ general dispositions about which actors should solve public problems through the following question: “Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country’s problems.” In response, the working class favored more government intervention by 5 points over the middle class, 27% to 22%.

First, I explore whether policies related to social issues exhibit differences between class groups. To examine this possibility, I use questions in the General Social Survey asking respondents about their support for capital punishment, gun laws, and legalizing marijuana. Considering capital punishment, over two-thirds of each class favor the death penalty for murder, with the working class 1.5 percentage points more in favor. Likewise, about 82% of respondents from both classes support gun permits. Finally, when asked whether they support or oppose marijuana legalization, roughly one-third from each class favor legalization, with working class identifiers 2 percentage points more in favor. As one can see, and in line with my expectations, no statistically distinguishable difference exists between class identifiers when evaluating issues not tied to economic considerations ($p < 0.41$; $p < 0.74$; and $p < 0.30$ respectively).

I now look at these relationships for only objectively working class individuals. I expect that class identifiers will have distinct differences. Working class identifiers who are also
objectively working class should have preferences that differ from objectively working class individuals who identify as middle class given the alignment of their objective and subjective identification. Restricting my observation to those earning under $30,000 preserves 37% of the original sample\(^5\). As discussed earlier, one might contest the exact cutoff for what counts as objectively working class, but this retains enough sample variation to permit further analysis. Importantly, and as we might expect given the relationship between income and class identification presented in Figure 1, two-thirds of this sample identifies with the working or lower class, with the other third identifying with the middle or upper class. Similarly, roughly two-thirds of each income group that comprises the objectively working class ($0-14,999 and $15-29,999) identifies as working class.

As before, working class identifiers are slightly more supportive class of the death penalty in the event of murder than those in the middle class, but over 60% of each class displays support. Similarly, nothing distinguishes class members in their support for gun permits, with 84% in favor apiece. The relationship persists for marijuana legalization as well, with roughly two-thirds of middle and working class individuals opposing legalization and the other third supporting. In this case, limiting the analysis to only those objectively working class does not change the nature of the relationships between identification and policy preference.

As expected, no meaningful differences existed between class identifiers on social issues so I now turn to investigate potential differences between groups on more economic-oriented issues. For policies related in some degree to one’s financial position we see the hypothesized self-interest relationship borne out across the whole GSS sample. When asked whether it is the responsibility of the government to reduce income differences between high-income and low-

\(^5\) N=1,048 respondents. 687 of these identify with the working/lower class (66%) and 355 identify as middle/upper class (34%).
income people, some 39% of the working class agreed with the proposition; only 29% of middle class respondents voiced support. Likewise, while both classes overwhelmingly responded that too little money was being spent on assistance to the poor, working class individuals were 7 percentage points more likely than middle class identifiers to respond in this way. Much the same, when queried about the tax burden the rich should bear, overwhelming majorities in each class favored imposing higher taxes on the rich than on the poor—69% and 61% for the working and middle class respectively. Again, however, we see the working class displaying much stronger support.

Whereas the relationships observed for social issues persisted when looking at objectively working class individuals alone, the relationships for the economic-oriented issues change. Each class had 45% of its members to some extent agree that the government should reduce income differentials. Moreover, roughly two-thirds of each class said that too little is being spent on aid to the poor; however, the difference between the two groups has narrowed from 7 percentage points to a mere 3 and become indistinguishable statistically (p < 0.48). Similarly, each class had two-thirds of its identifiers agree that the rich should pay a larger share of their income in taxes than the poor, presenting little substantive difference. These preliminary results suggests that, counter to my hypothesis, identification does not appear to make a significant difference in whether or not an objectively working class individual holds a policy preference that aligns with her objective self-interest.

What differentiates working class identifiers? We now see that variation exists between class identifiers in various degrees for policies that follow from self-interested positions. In contrast, issues that do not directly relate to a self-interest perspective do not display class-based variation. Additionally, the above results indicate
that the impact of class identification on attitudes changes given the level of income, providing some evidence that an individual’s objective position may influence how their class identity works. We also see that social class may not be a primary influencer of objectively working class individuals’ policy preferences. These results suggest that features beyond class identification may mitigate the effect of income on policy attitudes. The analysis now turns to examining these other factors, some objective and others subjective in nature, and how they may influence income’s role in attitude formation and the realization of self-interest more generally. It begins by looking at relationships within the entire sample and then determines how these relationships change for individuals who are objectively working class.

Employment situation seems the obvious place to begin with an examination of other factors differentiating working and middle class individuals. Intuitively, if someone has a job they may associate the working in “working class” as being employed. For those identifying as working class, some 69% work full or part-time, about 8.5 percentage points more than middle class identifiers. Working class individuals are nearly 16 percentage points more likely to have been unemployed in the last decade than their middle class counterparts, with over one-third of identifiers reporting in the affirmative. It’s also possible that working class identifiers may perceive their employment situation as more insecure compared to middle class individuals; they face some likelihood of losing their job and some difficulty finding an equally good job elsewhere. Hinting that this possibility exists, respondents in the working class were 10 percentage points less likely to say that losing their job was unlikely and 4 percentage points more likely to say it would not be easy to find a new job. And when considering the remuneration they receive for the skill and effort required for their jobs, two-thirds of working class individuals believed their employers compensated them with a less than just amount—a
difference of almost 16 percentage points. Intriguingly, while some might speculate that working class identification would come more heavily from union members, this group was only slightly more likely to have a union member in the household than those in the middle class. Some 55% of respondents with at least one union member in the household identified as working class. However, with union membership in the United States at 13.5% in 2000, the GSS sample is actually 3 percentage points more unionized than the population it represents.

Class identification should influence individuals’ interpretations of political and social events. We can explore this possibility by seeing if classes differ in their interpretation of relevant phenomena. When asked where they would place their family on a scale representing society—with 1 being the social top and 7 being the social bottom—some 20% of working class identifiers located themselves in the bottom two categories, 16 percentage points more than those in the middle class. Moreover, when comparing their financial situation to others, 38% of working class individuals responded that they had financial prospects either “below average” or “far below average,” a difference of 21 percentage points. In contrast, middle class identifiers were almost 29 percentage points more likely to see themselves in relatively above average financial situations. Not only do working class individuals locate themselves in a relatively inferior financial situation, they are significantly less satisfied with this position than those identifying with the middle class. For the working class, 35% were not at all satisfied with their financial situation, a difference of 20 percentage points over middle class identifiers. In contrast, 43% of middle class identifiers were satisfied with their financial situation, a 25 percentage point difference over the working class. Taken together, these measures suggest that working class individuals will place themselves lower in society with a greater likelihood than those identifying with the middle class. In addition, they appear willing to voice dissatisfaction with this position.
While these measures contain no information about the force(s) respondents may hold responsible for their social position, they do hint at a possibility that these individuals might desire that some actor ameliorate their position.

We can also see if identifiers differ in their attitudes concerning the broader distribution of resources in society. In particular, the General Social Survey presented a subset of respondents with a series of five diagrams indicating different types of societies, each with different distributions of people at the top, in the middle, and at the bottom. They then asked individuals to determine which diagram they thought best represented the United States (see Figure 3). This question allows us to tap subjective perceptions about the distribution of advantage in society, albeit in a rather crude manner. Working class individuals were 9 percentage points more likely to say that types A and B in Figure 3, 22% and 37% respectively, most closely approximated society in the United States. As Figure 3 indicates, these society types place large numbers of people at the bottom and varying degrees of people in middle and top of society, suggesting differing degrees of inequality. In contrast, type D offers the modal response for middle class identifiers with 36% of responses. These results suggest that working class individuals perceive society as more unequal than middle class identifiers. In contrast, when interviewers followed this by inquiring about respondents’ preferred type, both classes overwhelmingly preferred D or E, with D edging E by two to one. That substantial difference exists between classes when asked about what the United States does look like, but not about what the United States should look like, suggests that class identification may influence how individuals perceive their social position. Threading this together with responses regarding their subjective location in society, we begin to see that working class identifiers may see themselves on the wrong side of a rather unequal society.
But how do working class individuals understand the inequality they perceive? More specifically, do they see inequality as privileging some groups over others? In fact, the GSS asked a subset of respondents if they agreed or disagreed with the proposition that inequality exists for the benefit of the rich and powerful. Fifty-six percent of working class identifiers agreed with this statement, 12 percentage points more than middle class identifiers. In contrast, the two groups don’t differ significantly when asked whether pay differences are necessary for American prosperity. About 27% of each class agreed with this interpretation. Moreover, beyond merely perceiving social features as privileging some individuals or groups over others, 63% of working class identifiers affirmed the existence of strong or very strong conflict between the rich and poor in the United States, 11 percentage points more than the middle class. Middle class identifiers were over 10 percentage points more likely to say that individual effort is rewarded in America, with about 70% answering to some degree in the affirmative. Likewise, roughly 79% of them agreed that intelligence and skill are rewarded in America, while 69% of working class individuals agreed. While majorities of those identifying as working class agreed that skill and effort are rewarded, they offer less enthusiastic responses than those in the middle class. Overall, while not too large, these differences suggest that working class identification is associated with a perception of a less advantageous social position that is a consequence of more than just individual activity.

Yet this discussion has focused on everyone who identifies as working class, not just those who are objectively working class and identify as such. I now turn to exploring variation within the objectively working class. Briefly reexamining work status for these individuals, we see that the working class identifiers are 25 percentage points more likely to be in the labor force,
with 60% employed either full- or part-time. Considering working class individuals’ perceptions of job security, while respondents in this subsample view themselves as somewhat more likely to lose their job, the difference between working and middle class identifiers is statistically indistinguishable. Likewise, the subsample overall views the possibility of finding a new job as more difficult, with roughly 33% of working class identifiers replying that it would be easy versus 26% for the middle class. Finally, almost two-thirds of working and middle class identifiers responded that they received less than just compensation for their work.

Even when examining our objectively working class respondents, class identification seems associated with perceptions of one’s location in society and evaluations of one’s financial situation. When compared to the middle class, working class identifiers were nearly 14 percentage points more likely to locate their families at or near the bottom of society (i.e. in the bottom two categories), 28% to 14%. Moreover, taking into account their relative financial situation, over half of working class people, some 55%, placed themselves below average, a difference of nearly 13 percentage points. Reinforcing this relative evaluation, roughly 45% of those identifying as working class voiced dissatisfaction with their financial situation, compared with only 32% of lower income middle class identifiers. While one could potentially think that after restricting income to the bottom 40% of the whole sample the evaluations of one’s financial situation and position in society would not differ substantially between working and middle class identifiers, the above suggest that this is not the case. More than income appears to matter for determining one’s position in society.

Returning to Figure 3, and evaluations of which diagram best represents society in the United States, we don’t see much change when looking solely at the objectively working class. Some 23% of the working class respond that type A best characterizes society, while 35%
answer type B. In contrast, the middle class responded with 18% and 25% respectively. Furthermore, little difference now exists when examining how the respondents in the subsample view inequality. Some 45% of each group views inequality as existing to benefit the rich and powerful. But as before, both classes don’t differ in their responses when asked if American prosperity necessitates inequality. Almost two-thirds of the working class still say posit the existence of conflict between the rich and poor in the United States, but the difference between them and middle class identifiers decreased to 7 percentage points. In contrast, working and middle class individuals still exhibit overwhelming agreement that America rewards effort alongside intelligence and skill, with intergroup differences akin to those in the full sample. Overall, these results suggest that income alone does not have a significant influence on evaluations of society, with substantive differences between class identifiers among the bottom two-fifths of the distribution.

Conflict as a Mitigating Factor
Consider again the myriad factors explaining some inter- and intra-group variation for class identifiers: job security, economic reward, personal financial situation, and social conflict. By their nature, jobs, the remuneration they offer, and their relation to individuals’ financial situation at least intuitively suggest some bearing on individuals’ policy preferences under assumptions of self-interest. Conflict, on the other hand, might not. As mentioned earlier, in 1970s Chile an individual identifying with a class and possessing a conflict image displayed greater support for Leftist groups (Langton and Rapoport 1975). In an increasingly unequal society, the possibility for perceptions of conflict to mitigate the effect of class identification seems at least intuitively plausible. This section expands on this idea, providing a further explanation of why conflict should matter both to better ground the analysis theoretically and to
offer an examination into how certain contextual factors may influence the relationship between class identification and policy preferences.

As detailed more fully above, group identification entails the assumption of group interests where group members perceive themselves as interdependent (Miller et al. 1981, see also Kinder and Kam 2010). Moreover, these feelings of interdependence stem from affective and cognitive components stimulating a perspective in support of the group’s interests (Conover 1988). The group interest’s content follows from the group’s position in society, whether it’s in an advantaged or disadvantaged position (Gurin et al. 1980, Miller et al. 1981). But where does conflict fit in this tale? A conflict image could compel a group’s identifiers to assume issue positions that benefit them while also disadvantaging an opposing out-group. The presence of a conflict image might therefore increase the differences in issue preferences between members of different groups. As well, a conflict image held by some identifiers in a group and not others might increase variation in preferences within the group.

At the very least, members of a group may have a greater propensity to perceive conflict existing in some guise, either between their in-group and an out-group or between the in-group and other forces determining its position. Identifiers from one group may blame those from an out-group for their objective position. Likewise, those identifying with a disadvantaged group may blame some aspect of the social system for their circumstances. How identifiers assign blame for their situation likely influences both if they see conflict and the type of conflict that exists. For instance, the previous section showed that working class identifiers were less likely to agree that effort and skill were rewarded in the United States. They also displayed significantly less satisfaction with the compensation they received for their work and were more willing to
characterize the distribution of resources in the United States as highly unequal. These examples would suggest that working class individuals may have a systemically-oriented conflict image.

The intergroup conflict paradigm seems to align best with the literature on ethnocentrism, most thoroughly and recently expounded by Kinder and Kam (2010). According to the authors, ethnocentrism acts as a standing disposition where individuals favor their in-group and oppose out-groups. More specifically, they conceive ethnocentrism as “a readiness to reduce society to us and them. Or rather, [as] a readiness to reduce society to us versus them” (2010, 8). This disposition comes in degrees, with ethnocentric attitudes made salient through public discourse, and more potent for salient topics.

How might we evaluate class using the lens ethnocentrism offers? As defined, ethnocentrism implies conflict between groups. This suggests that those identifying with one class group may perceive other class groups as opposed to their goals. One would identify an out-group as prohibiting the realization of their preferred policy options. For example, in the case of lower or working class identifiers, their preference for increasing the share of taxes paid by the rich would be opposed by middle and upper class identifiers whom a tax increase would (potentially) affect. Conversely, middle and upper class identifiers would conceivably be averse to reducing income differentials between the rich and poor because their financial position would come under assault for the benefit of some other group of people. In the first case, the lower and working classes may be perceive their opposites as unjustly possessing the resources they have. In the latter case, middle and upper class identifiers may conceive of themselves as having earned their rewards, justifying their relatively advantaged position; any redistribution of resources to lower and working class people would take away their earned resources to subsidize the lives of lower income groups. Ethnocentrism suggests the possibility of perceptions of
conflict from both advantaged and disadvantaged groups as the underlying dynamic rests on in-
group favoritism and out-group opposition, rather than on advantage and disadvantage.

In contrast to the perception of conflict as between groups, another possibility would
have individuals see conflict as more systematic in nature. People may see some feature(s) of
society as contributing to the (dis)advantaged position in which their group exists. Consequently,
their issue preferences could align with perpetuating or ameliorating the effects of these
characteristics. For instance, dissatisfaction with one’s work compensation may compel
individuals to support an increase in the minimum wage, the right to collectively bargain, or
externally guaranteed retirement benefits. Whether or not identifiers perceive conflict, and where
they locate it, could reasonably suggest differences in policy preferences.

Modeling the Class Effect

Objective Class Influence
Following the brief discussion of what factors differentiate working and middle class identifiers,
we now examine whether class identification has an effect on policy preferences beyond the
contribution socioeconomic status makes. Given the ordinal nature of my dependent variable,
rather than using OLS regression analysis I will use ordered logistic regression models to
examine my hypothesized relationships. To ease the comprehension of the various models, I will
present example cases to display the effects of my key explanatory variables and contrast them
with other factors known to be strong predictors of policy: partisanship and ideology. Each are
measured on the standard 7-point scales, where 1 signifies strong Democrat or very liberal and 7
indicates strong Republican or very conservative. I also control for demographic variables,
including dummies for gender, where 1 indicates female, and race, where 1 indicates white, and
a continuous measure for age.
For this examination I attempt to explain variation in support for government action to equalize incomes. The dependent variable comes from the following question: “It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.” Responses were recorded on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating “strongly agree” and 5 noting “strongly disagree.” I use this over other policy options mentioned earlier for one key reason: reducing income differences between the rich and poor seems more relevant to an individual’s self-interest than either aid to the poor or the share of taxes paid by the rich. If no preference differences exist between working and middle class identifiers when using this dependent variable then I would not expect significant differences between class groups on other, less directly relevant policies.

Opposing the self-interest as dominant argument is the contention that self-interest exerts little influence on mass policy preferences. This symbolic politics argument contends, rather, that attitudes are predominately shaped by intangible concerns like racism and ideology. Examining Bostonian whites’ opposition to busing, Green and Cowden (1992) further complicate this relationship. They find that while self-interest did not affect public opinion, it did influence patterns of anti-busing behavior. The lessons from the symbolic politics literature suggest that any differences in class identifiers’ policy preferences potentially attributable to self-interest would therefore carry greater substantive meaning.

I first examine the typical model for class effects presented in political science. Again, the usual measure of this influence is socioeconomic status, what I have referred to as objective class membership. Model 1 in Table 2 shows that objective membership has a statistically

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6 The correlation between this policy and aid to the poor is 0.25, with the tax share paid by the rich is 0.36, and the government intervention to solve national problems is 0.38. In contrast, its correlation with background checks on guns is 0.14, marijuana legalization is 0.07, and the death penalty in the event of murder is -0.16.
significant effect on our dependent variable, after controlling for other factors. Increasing income decreases the likelihood one agrees with the income equalization policy.

To highlight the substantive effects, I set all explanatory variables at their means, except for the dummies that I place at their modal categories. This white female has an income of about $30-35,000, is a moderate Independent, and is 45 years old. As Figure 4.1.1 shows, this “average” person overall has a 0.29 probability of agreeing that the government should reduce income differences. However, there is a 0.42 probability she disagrees to some degree. Keeping these same factors and moving between a person with an income one standard deviation below its mean ($12,500 — 14,999) to one with a person with income one standard deviation above ($75 – 89,999) decreases the probability of agreeing by 0.18 and increases the probability of disagreeing by 0.17. Figure 4.1.2 shows this graphically. Clearly, income has a substantively meaningful effect explaining variation in support for government action to equalize incomes.

Figure 4.1.1
Probability Differences across Income

Figure 4.1.1 – All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. White, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.
How does income’s effect compare to other strong predictors of attitudes: partisanship and ideology? I use the same individual as before, and set income back at its mean. Figure 4.1.3 shows how the probabilities of agreeing and disagreeing change when varying ideology and partisanship. Between a Democrat and a Republican the change in the probability one agrees is 0.15. The same change between a liberal and a conservative, is 0.21. Figures 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 show the influence of broader changes in partisanship and ideology. When compared to the effects of partisanship and ideology, income appears to have an important influence on the likelihood an individual would want the government to reduce income differences.

Figure 4.1.3 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. White, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURES 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 HERE

The Role of Class Identity
My core hypothesis is that class identification will be a significant and substantively meaningful explainer of policy preferences beyond that of income. Moreover, income’s effect should decrease with the inclusion of class identification into the regression model. This expectation follows from class identification acting in some fashion as an intervening variable where some influence of objective membership should be captured through the inclusion of class identification. As Model 2 in Table 2 indicates, working class identification and income have statistically significant effects. Both objective membership and subjective identification are therefore significant explaners of individuals’ preferences for our dependent variable.

To evaluate the effect of class identification I again set each variable to its mean, recreating our average individual from the previous section: a white female with an income of $30-35,000, who is a moderate Independent and is 45 years old. As Figure 4.2.1 shows, a middle class individual would have a 0.26 probability of agreeing with the proposition that government should reduce income differences between the rich and poor. She would also have a 0.45 probability of disagreeing with the statement. In contrast, someone otherwise identical but identifying as working class has a probability of agreeing 0.07 greater than the middle class identifier. The difference between working and middle class identifiers is substantively as well as statistically significant.

Yet, does the effect of income change after including class identification? To determine this I repeat the procedure by offering example individuals with incomes one standard deviation below the mean and one standard deviation above the mean in Figure 4.2.1, as well as more general changes in Figure 4.2.2. This change in income decreases the probability of agreeing by 0.14. Income retains a substantively meaningful effect, but the magnitude of its influence has
decreased. Following the introduction of class identification into the model, income’s contribution diminished as expected.

Figure 4.2.1 – All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

**FIGURE 4.2.2**

I now compare the effect of objective membership and class identification to partisanship and ideology, as I did earlier when looking at income alone. Figure 4.2.3 shows these comparisons. The difference between Democrats and Republicans in the probability either support a reduction in income differences is 0.13. Between a liberal and a conservative, the probability one agrees decreases by 0.20. Figures 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 show the changes in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying partisanship and ideology across their range.
Figure 4.2.3 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURES 4.2.4 and 4.2.5 HERE

How does class identification’s effect compare? Placed into this fuller context, for Model 2 the probability difference between class identifiers is about half that for a change in party identification. Likewise, it’s about a third that realized from a substantial shift in ideology. This is a strong effect, particularly considering that income and class identification also have indirect effects through partisanship and ideology.

As well, the difference in predicted probabilities for working class and middle class identifiers amounts to half of the effect realized by a dramatic change in income. As expected, the effect of income diminished after the introduction of class identification. The results from this model alone suggest that omitting class identification from an analysis of policy preferences omits some of the nuance necessary for understanding the influence of individuals’ group identification on their attitudes.
Mitigating Variables: Intergroup Conflict

I now turn to an examination of how mitigating variables may influence this relationship. Specifically, I explore the variables discussed above that measure social conflict. For my measure of intergroup conflict I use the following question: “In all countries, there are differences or conflicts between different social groups. In your opinion, in America, how much conflict is there between poor people and rich people?” Responses ranged from 1—very strong conflict—to 4—no conflict. Regardless of their class identification, I expect that those who agree that conflict between the poor and rich exists in society will be more likely to agree that government should reduce income differences. Moreover, this effect should be greater for working class identifiers than for middle class identifiers. I expect that perceiving conflict between one’s in-group and an out-group would promote a desire for a third party authority, in this case government, to intervene to ameliorate the situation. Therefore, those perceiving conflict should be more supportive of government action to reduce income differences.

I first explore the consequences that result after adding the intergroup conflict measure. As Model 3 in Table 2 shows, both working class identification and objective membership remain significant. Given its ordinal nature, I reconstructed the 4-category conflict variable into four dummy variables. When compared to the omitted category—not strong conflict—both very strong conflict and strong conflict are highly statistically significant. Moreover, they have statistically distinguishable influences on the dependent variable.

To look at the influence of income I set each conflict dummy to 0, indicating the individual sees “not strong conflict” between rich people and poor people in the United States. As Figure 4.3.1 shows, a middle class individual has a 0.22 probability of agreeing that government should reduce income differences. The difference in probabilities between middle
class and working class identifiers is 0.07. We see that the inclusion of intergroup conflict did not affect the magnitude of the difference between class identifiers.

To evaluate the effect of income for this model I again examine the effect of a change from one standard deviation below income’s mean to one standard deviation above its mean. As Figure 4.3.1 shows, the probability difference between these two individuals is 0.10. We see that the inclusion of this mitigating variable decreases the contribution of income in the model. More importantly, class identification’s effect has increased relative to that of income given the new model specification. Figure 4.3.2 shows this effect graphically while also exhibiting the difference between working and middle class identifiers.

![Figure 4.3.1](image)

Figure 4.3.1 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, see “not very strong conflict” between rich and poor, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

**FIGURE 4.3.2**
Turning to intergroup conflict, we see substantial differences if we change the degree of conflict someone perceives for both middle and working class identifiers. As Figure 4.3.3 shows, a middle class person who sees “not very strong” conflict to one seeing “strong conflict” has a 0.07 increase in the probability she agrees that the government should reduce income differences. For those seeing “very strong” conflict, the difference in probabilities between these middle class individuals increases from 0.07 to 0.21.

Beyond comparing individuals identifying with the same class who have different conflict frames, we can also contrast individuals with the same conflict frame but who identify with different classes. As Figures 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 suggest, for two individuals seeing not strong conflict, the difference in the probability of agreeing between middle and working class identifiers is 0.08. For strong conflict, the magnitude of a change between middle and working class increases to 0.09. It appears, then, that for a given conflict frame the size of the difference between working class and middle class identifiers will increase, suggesting that intergroup conflict does influence the effect of class identification.
Figure 4.3.3 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, see “not very strong conflict” between rich and poor, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURE 4.3.4 HERE

How do the effects of income, class identification, and intergroup conflict compare to partisanship and ideology in this model? Figure 4.3.5 shows the differences between a Democrat and a Republican as well as a liberal and a conservative. For the former pair, such a change decreases the probability of agreeing by 0.11. Similarly, the difference in probabilities between the latter two amounts to 0.20. Figures 4.3.6 and 4.3.7 show these changes across all degrees of partisanship or ideology.
Figure 4.3.5 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, see “not very strong conflict” between rich and poor, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURES 4.3.6 and 4.3.7 HERE

As Figures 4.3.5, 4.3.6 and 4.3.7 indicate, substantial changes in party identification and ideology would have significant effects on our dependent variable. The difference between classes is over half that between partisans and about one-third that between ideologues, results similar to Model 2. These comparisons suggest that, as hypothesized, class identification has an important influence on policy preferences beyond that offered by objective membership alone. Moreover, the relative effect of class identification changes with the presence of mitigating factors, in this case changing according to the presence and degree of intergroup conflict. Therefore, it appears that at least in this case intergroup conflict helps explain inter-class differences in attitudes.

Mitigating Variables: Systemic Conflict
I now examine what effect systemic conflict may have in explaining intergroup preference differences. To measure systemic conflict I use the following question: “Do you agree or disagree that inequality continues to exist because it benefits the rich and powerful.” Responses ranged from 1 to 5, or strongly agree to strongly disagree. I expect that individuals who agree that inequality benefits the rich and powerful will be more likely to agree that government should reduce income differences between the rich and power. I also expect that these differences will be greater for working class individuals than for middle class individuals given their relatively disadvantaged social position. Agreeing that inequality benefits advantaged groups should prompt working class identifiers to prefer policy outcomes that address this situation.

Model 5 in Table 2 indicates that after including the measures for perceiving systemic conflict both class identification and objective membership remain significant, though identification remains so barely. This decrease in significance could come from systemic conflict resulting from class identification. As with the measure for intergroup conflict, I turn the 5-category ordinal systemic conflict variable into a collection of 5 dummies, omitting the dummy indicating “neither agree nor disagree.” As with Model 3, the variables indicating perceptions of greater degrees of systemic conflict are statistically distinguishable both from this base category and from each other.

As before, I begin with a look at how changes in objective membership and class identification influence the chance an individual agrees or disagrees that government should reduce income differences between the rich and poor. Figure 4.4.1 presents these results. To our example individual, we add that she “neither agrees nor disagrees that inequality exists to benefit the rich and powerful.” Consider the middle class example. She has a 0.28 probability of
agreeing government should reduce income differences between rich people and poor people. In contrast, a working class individual’s probability of agreeing would increase to 0.34.

Also in Figure 4.4.1 we see that moving from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above income’s mean decreases the probability of agreeing by 0.10. When compared to objective membership, it appears that class identification maintains its influence when considering systemic conflict. Yet, instead of a greater difference between classes in the presence of conflict like that realized with the intergroup conflict measure, accounting for perceptions of systemic conflict appears to reduce the absolute magnitude of interclass differences. Even so, class identification maintains its relative size advantage compared to changes in income from the mean to a standard deviation below (0.05) or above (0.04).

Furthermore, the initial probability of agreeing is greater than that observed in the intergroup conflict case. Figure 4.4.2 shows the difference between identifiers for all income categories within a standard deviation of the mean.
Figure 4.4.1 All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, “neither agree nor disagree” inequality benefits the rich and powerful, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURE 4.4.2 HERE

As with the evaluation of intergroup conflict, I consider differences within class groups for identifiers with different attitudes about inequality. Likewise, I consider differences between class groups for individuals with the same attitudes about inequality, or systemic conflict frame. Examples for both of these evaluations are presented in Figure 4.4.3. For a middle class identifier, “agreeing” that inequality benefits the rich and powerful increases the probability that she agrees government should reduce income differences by 0.08. For her working class counterpart, the increase in probability is 0.10. For those “agreeing” inequality benefits the rich and powerful, the difference in probability between class identifiers is then 0.07. These changes are also presented in Figure 4.4.4.
Figure 4.4.3 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, "neither agree nor disagree" inequality benefits the rich and powerful, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURE 4.4.4 HERE

Again, I turn to comparing the effects of objective membership, class identification, and systemic conflict with partisanship and ideology. To compare the effect of party identification we can look at the examples presented in Figure 4.4.5. The probability of agreeing decreases by 0.11 between Democratic identification and Republican identification. The probability of agreeing decreases by 0.20 between a liberal and a conservative. Figures 4.4.6 and 4.4.7 show the effects of changes along the range of partisanship and ideology.
While less substantial when compared to the intergroup conflict exploration, the effect of class identification is still comparable to reasonable changes in ideology and partisanship. These results continue to suggest that class identification, even controlling for a range of demographic and attitudinal variables, helps explain variation in policy preferences beyond the attitudes indicated by objective membership alone.

**Figure 4.4.5**

*Probability Differences between Partisans and Ideologues*

![Probability Differences between Partisans and Ideologues](image)

Figure 4.4.5 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, “neither agree nor disagree” inequality benefits the rich and powerful, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

**FIGURES 4.4.6 and 4.4.7 HERE**

**Intra-group Variation**

We’ve now seen that the difference between class groups remains the same after accounting for intergroup conflict and decreases in the systemic conflict formulation. It could also be that either type of conflict could differentiate individuals within class groups as well. It is to this possibility I now turn. Models 4 and 6 in Table 2 show the effect of interacting the intergroup and systemic conflict measures with class identification. With none of the interaction terms achieving
statistical significance we cannot say anything about the within-group influence either type of conflict may have. However, including the interaction terms does change the model specification; therefore, exploring the effect class identification and conflict frames have may still be substantively useful.

In an interaction model the constituent components of the interaction term(s) are evaluated as the absence of the conditioning variable. For example, when determining the effect of class identification for Models 4 and 6 we evaluate the effect of class for an individual with a conflict frame indicated by the omitted category for each conflict variable. Take Model 4 and consider an individual seeing not strong conflict between rich people and poor people. Figure 4.5.1 shows that the difference in support for reducing income differentials of identifying as working class versus middle class is 0.09. We can also explore changes in income using both Figure 4.5.1 and 4.5.2. The difference in support for reducing income differentials between someone with an income one standard deviation below the mean and one standard deviation above is 0.09. In relation to class identification, we see that after including the interaction terms, in essence controlling for intra-group variation given the model specification, the differences between class identifiers increase both absolutely and in relation to objective membership.
Figure 4.5.1 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, see “not very strong conflict” between rich and poor, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURE 4.5.2 HERE

Because two of the three included conflict terms are also significant we can also evaluate how changes in a middle class identifier’s conflict frame affect her probability of agreeing. In Figure 4.5.3 we see that seeing strong conflict increases the probability she supports reducing income differentials by 0.07. If she sees very strong conflict, the increase in probability is 0.37. Compared to the additive formulation in Model 3, the effect of conflict for middle class individuals increases marginally in Model 5’s interaction version.
I now compare these effects to changes in partisanship and ideology. In Figure 4.5.4 we see that identifying as a Republican rather than as a Democrat decreases the probability of agreeing by 0.11. We also see that the probability difference between a liberal and a conservative is 0.19. Figures 4.5.5 and 4.5.6 show the variation in the probability of agreeing for each degree of partisanship and ideology. The examples in Figures 4.5.4-6 show that for Model 4, the effects for changes in party identification and ideology are about the same as in Model 3. But more importantly, the effect of class identification increases while that for objective membership decreases after including the interaction terms. While no statistically distinguishable effects exist within class groups for individuals with a given conflict frame, by modeling that possibility the new model specification suggests an increase in the substantive effect for class identification.
Figure 4.5.4 — All individuals have parameters set at sample averages unless otherwise specified. Middle class, see “not very strong conflict” between rich and poor, white, 45 years old, female, income $30-35,000, moderate, Independent.

FIGURES 4.5.5 AND 4.5.6 HERE

Modeling the Objectively Working Class
We can conduct the same analysis but restrict our examination to only the objectively working class. In so doing we can evaluate the effect class identification has for these individuals and see whether it helps lower income individuals take policy positions in line with their objective self-interest. Since there is variation in identification for this objective group, we might reasonably expect to find that working class identifiers again have statistically significant differences in their support for government intervention to reduce income differences between high-income and low-income individuals in the United States.

The results displayed in Table 3 offer an interesting story. Regardless of the model specification and the inclusion of the conflict measures, contrary to my hypotheses neither income nor class identification achieve statistical significance. These results are similar to the findings from the cross-tabulation results presented earlier. At least in this tale, partisanship and
ideology drive preference formation for the objectively working class. While not presented here, the estimated effects for changes in party identification and ideology are similar to those for the models in Table 2.

Conclusions
Following this investigation, we see that class identification does play an important role in explaining individuals’ preferences on a policy that is highly relevant to an individual’s self-interest. As expected, working class identifiers were more supportive of government reducing income differences between high- and low-income individuals. Objective class membership, measured by family income, remained significant throughout. More importantly, the effect of objective membership diminished after including class identification as expected. Finally, the inclusion of mitigating factors—measures of intergroup and systemic conflict—marginally changed the relative impact for class identification. Substantively, a change in identification between class groups was comparable to reasonable changes in partisanship, ideology, and objective class membership. For this case, class identification appears to have a substantively meaningful influence on individuals’ policy preferences.

The interesting counterpoint comes after restricting the analysis from the whole General Social Survey sample to only the objectively working class. Against expectations, for those earning under $30,000, neither objective membership nor class identification significantly explained variation in the dependent variable. These results suggest that these factors did not help low-income individuals take policy preferences in line with their self-interest. Instead, these individuals appear to rely on ideology and partisanship given the models used.

What explains objective membership and class identification’s non-contribution? One possibility, mentioned earlier, comes from the large literature on symbolic politics. According to
scholars working within this framework, self-interest has little impact on individuals’ attitudes (Green and Cowden 1992). Instead, the literature contends that opinions are largely shaped by concerns like racism and broad preferences for tolerance and equality (Bobo 1983, Green and Cowden 1992). The symbolism involved in a policy like busing for integration trumps the possibility that individuals susceptible to busing’s effects—i.e. those with school-aged children—have distinctly different preferences than those not affected (Green and Cowden 1992). The results presented in Table 3 suggest that symbolic concerns potentially play a greater role for objectively working class individuals than do factors that would have them hold more self-interested policy preferences. While I remain agnostic to the exact considerations—preferences for fairness, concerns for their class group—the results suggest that symbolic concerns may shape the preferences of low-income individuals.

Class identity may also not have been salient for these individuals in 2000. A salient group identity increases the influence the group has on identifiers’ behavior and attitudes (Conover 1984, Koch 1994, Lau 1989). The lack of a distinction along class lines for the objectively working class may suggest a lack of group salience for these individuals. While the objectively working class were more likely to place themselves at the bottom of society, it could be that these individuals felt they alone were not gaining ground financially. Lacking a sense of interdependence with others in similar objective positions would decrease the significance of group identification (Miller et al. 1981). With the economy growing to some degree, individuals may have felt few others shared their personal situation or that it was still up to them to make ends meet, consequently decreasing any sense of collective fate (see generally Ehrenreich 2001).

Further Research
These new questions offer interesting avenues for further research. Collecting new survey data on individuals’ class identification, as well as their attitudes towards inequality and social conflict, would allow us to test the analyzed relationships in a different context. Evidence from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2011 and 2012 suggests potentially interesting changes. One survey from July 2012 showed 31% of respondents identifying as lower class, a 7 percentage point increase from 2008 (Morin and Motel 2012). During the same time period, middle and upper class identification dropped 4 points to 49% and 17% respectively. Although not comparable to the GSS data because of question wording—e.g. the Pew question lacks a working class option—the temporal change displayed by the Pew data suggest that the time period saw some shift in individuals’ class identification. Another survey, fielded in December 2011, found that two-thirds of respondents saw “strong” or “very strong” conflict between the rich and the poor, a 19 point increase from 2009 (Morin 2012). According to Pew, this was the “largest share expressing this opinion since the question was first asked in 1987” (Morin 2012, 1). While the conflict question came quite close to that used in the General Social Survey, question wording differences prevent any comparisons between the two. What these data suggest, however, is that collecting new data using the GSS questions could be a fruitful endeavor.

Further research could attempt to test individual-level dynamics through experimental manipulations. Experimental designs could be used to explore factors contributing to the salience of class identification. Likewise, they could ascertain the degree to which elite discourse affects individuals’ perceptions of conflict (see Kinder and Kam 2010). Experiments would also offer the opportunity to provide participants with factual knowledge about the distribution of resources in the United States and test, via permutations of this provided information, how attitudes about
system legitimacy change. We could then evaluate the degree to which social class identification becomes salient either from assessments of system legitimacy or as a consequence of elite discourse. Data collected from such experiments would surely complement that provided by new survey research.

More work remains to determine which factors differentiate class identifiers both within and between groups. A clearer understanding of what contextual and individual-level factors prompt individuals to take self-interested policy preferences, if they do so at all, is important not only for academics but for policymakers and the public as well. Improving our understanding of group identifiers’ attitudes would help clarify the concerns of distinct social entities. This would allow us to more explicitly highlight the degree to which politicians respond to the concerns of their constituents, especially those facing economic hardships.
Works Cited


Figure 1 — Income divided into quintiles except for $110,000+ category which is 7% of sample.

Figure 2 — Class identification by Erikson-Goldthorpe class schema category
Figure 3 — “What type of society is America today - which diagram comes closest?”

Type A: A small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and the great mass of people at the bottom.

Type B: A society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom.
Type C: A pyramid except that just a few people are at the very bottom

Type D: A society with most people in the middle

Type E: Many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom
Figure 4.1.2 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying income from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above.

Figure 4.1.4 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing party identification. 1 = Strong Democrat; 7 = Strong Republican
Figure 4.1.5 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing ideology.  
1 = Very Liberal; 7 = Very Conservative

Figure 4.2.2 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying income by class from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.
Figure 4.2.4 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing party identification. 1 = Strong Democrat; 7 = Strong Republican

Figure 4.2.5 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing ideology. 1 = Very Liberal; 7 = Very Conservative
Figure 4.3.2 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying income by class from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.

Figure 4.3.4 — Difference in probabilities by class between seeing “not strong conflict” and “strong conflict” between the rich and the poor. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.
Figure 4.3.6 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing party identification. 1 = Strong Democrat; 7 = Strong Republican

Figure 4.3.7 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing ideology. 1 = Very Liberal; 7 = Very Conservative
Figure 4.4.2 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying income by class from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.

Figure 4.4.4 — Difference in probabilities between “agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” inequality benefits rich and powerful. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.
Figure 4.4.6 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing party identification. 1 = Strong Democrat; 7 = Strong Republican

Figure 4.4.7 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing ideology. 1 = Very Liberal; 7 = Very Conservative
Figure 4.5.2 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when varying income by class from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above. Middle class is blue and green. Working class is red and orange.

Figure 4.5.5 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing party identification. 1 = Strong Democrat; 7 = Strong Republican
Figure 4.5.6 — Change in probability of agreeing or disagreeing when changing ideology. 1 = Very Liberal; 7 = Very Conservative
Table 2 — Should the government reduce income differences between high-income and low-income people? Ordered logistic regression.

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*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Table 3 - Should the government reduce income differences between high-income and low-income people? Individuals earning under $30,000 only. Ordered logistic regression.

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