

Immigration Attitudes and White Americans' Responsiveness to Rising Income Inequality

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Abstract

Despite decades of rising inequality, there has been little observed increase in American public support for redistribution. This is puzzling because majorities of Americans profess to be aware of and opposed to high inequality. I argue that this lack of responsiveness is not due to public ignorance of, nor apathy toward, inequality but rather, in part, to negative feelings toward immigrants, a growing, politically salient, and negatively stereotyped “out-group” that is widely viewed as a target of redistributive spending. To test this, I combine data on state-level income inequality with survey data from the 1992 to 2016 Cumulative ANES. I find that growing inequality *can* prompt support for redistribution but that this depends, in part, on peoples' immigration attitudes. Overall, these results suggest that immigration has important implications for economic redistribution in an era of high, and rising inequality.

Keywords

public opinion, income inequality, immigration attitudes, economic redistribution

Despite decades of rising income inequality, decreased economic mobility, and minimal wage growth among all but the most affluent Americans (Bartels, 2016; Chetty et al., 2017; Pikety et al., 2018), public support for redistribution has, even among the less affluent, remained largely unchanged (Kelly & Enns, 2010). This is theoretically puzzling (Meltzer & Richard, 1981), given that the mass public has economic incentives to support greater redistribution when inequality rises.

Income inequality is politically consequential (Stiglitz, 2012). By unequally distributing political resources (Schlozman et al., 2012), economic inequality amplifies the “voice” of the affluent and mutes the “voice” of the non-affluent (Bartels, 2016; Gilens, 2012; Hacker & Pierson, 2010). In short, economic inequality undermines political equality. Rising income inequality has also been linked to decreased participation and civic engagement (Solt, 2010; Uslander & Brown, 2005), and increased legislative polarization and gridlock (Garand, 2010; McCarty et al., 2016; but see O'Brian, 2019). These are important political outcomes. As such, a plethora of research has sought to examine if and when rising inequality prompts people to support policies that redistribute wealth and reduce income disparities. Findings, from both observational and experimental designs, are mixed (Franko, 2016). Furthermore, in the aggregate, there has been little observed shift in public support for redistribution over the past several decades, with recent work documenting a null, or even negative relationship

between inequality and support for economic redistribution (Kelly & Enns, 2010; Luttig, 2013; Wright, 2018). This is especially puzzling, given that majorities of Americans profess to be aware of and opposed to high levels of inequality (McCall, 2013; Page & Jacobs, 2009).

I argue that this lack of responsiveness is not due to ignorance of, nor apathy toward, rising inequality. Rather, it is due, in part, to attitudes toward immigrants, a negatively stereotyped “out-group” that has become increasingly salient since the 1970s and that is widely perceived to be a prominent target of redistributive spending. This has been largely overlooked as an explanation for the aforementioned puzzle, despite the strong link between immigration and redistribution in the United States (Filindra, 2013; Garand et al., 2017; Haselswerdt, 2020; Hawes & McCrea, 2018; Hero & Preuhs, 2007; Xu, 2017).¹

To test the relationship between income inequality, immigration attitudes, and support for economic redistribution, I combine objective state-level data on inequality with individual-level attitudes toward immigration and government redistribution, using data from the 1992–2016 Cumulative American National Election Study (Cumulative ANES). I

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examine this among white Americans, a group for whom immigration is particularly salient and potentially threatening (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). I find that immigration attitudes *condition* the relationship between income inequality and whites' support for redistribution. Specifically, I show that higher state-level income inequality *can* prompt greater support for redistribution, but this depends, in part, upon citizens' immigration attitudes. These findings underscore the political relevance of immigration. They also help us to better understand an important puzzle in American politics—why public opinion has failed to shift in favor of economic redistribution, despite decades of rising income inequality.

Public Attitudes Toward Income Inequality

Conventional wisdom suggests that many Americans are either tolerant of high inequality, in part because of optimism about economic mobility (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Kluegel & Smith, 1986), or that they are simply ignorant about its rise (Bartels, 2016; Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018). However, survey data in Table 1 paints a different picture. For instance, data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) shows that large majorities of Americans are aware that income inequality has risen over the past several decades, while data from the General Social Survey (GSS) shows majority opposition to large income disparities.

Overall, despite widespread knowledge of and opposition to high inequality, public opinion has not responded, via increased support for redistribution. If anything, it has, counter to theoretical expectations (Meltzer & Richard, 1981), moved in a conservative direction (Kelly & Enns, 2010; Luttig, 2013; but see McCall, 2013). As such, research has sought to examine the conditions under which inequality prompts support for redistribution.

Some have found that higher inequality in one's locality (county and/or zip code) is associated with decreased belief in meritocracy among the less affluent (Newman et al., 2015; but see Solt et al., 2017). This decreased belief in meritocracy can, in turn, lead people to believe that the economic system is unfair and that action should be taken to level the economic playing field (see Mijs, 2019 for cross-national evidence). Research in this vein also demonstrates a relationship between local income inequality and support for government spending (Johnston & Newman, 2016; Newman, 2019). Additional observational work finds a relatively strong relationship between individuals' attitudes toward inequality and their economic self-interest with their support for progressive taxation (Franko et al., 2013; Newman & Teten, 2020). However, others find that many Americans do not strongly connect their opposition to inequality with support for policies meant to reduce income disparities (Hayes, 2014; Macdonald, 2020). Experimental designs have also produced mixed results. Some have found that providing information about the true extent of

inequality reduces peoples' belief in meritocracy and equality of opportunity (Kuziemko et al., 2015; McCall et al., 2017) and boosts support for progressive taxation (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2018), while others find that such information can actually backfire and depress support for redistribution (Trump, 2018).

Several studies have advanced a conditional relationship. Condon and Wichowsky (2020) argue that peoples' support for redistribution depends, in part, upon whether they make upward or downward comparisons, that is, viewing themselves in reference to the poor or the rich. When people are experimentally prompted to make comparisons to the latter, they are more supportive of economic redistribution. Franko (2016) finds that the inequality-redistribution relationship depends, in part, on two factors: state wealth (rich vs. poor) and the policy under consideration (welfare vs. education spending). Macdonald (2019) finds, using survey data, that growing inequality prompts support for redistribution among the minority of citizens who are trusting of the federal government, but fails to do so among the less politically trustful majority.

Here, I contribute to this literature by advancing a similar conditional relationship. I specifically argue that the inequality-redistribution relationship is conditioned, in part, by attitudes toward immigrants, a politically salient "out-group" that is strongly associated, in American political discourse, with redistributive spending.

How and Why Immigration Attitudes Matter

Since the 1970s, after passage of the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the U.S. immigrant population skyrocketed from 14 million, representing 6% of the U.S. population in 1980, to 40 million, representing 12% of the population in 2010, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The most recent wave (post-1965) of immigrants has been disproportionately non-white, less affluent, and less likely to speak English (Pew Research Center, 2015). Such characteristics tend to be viewed unfavorably by the American mass public (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). As the U.S. immigrant population has grown, immigration has become a salient political issue (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). Given immigration's political salience, and immigrants' association with social welfare spending (Garand et al., 2017; Haselswerdt, 2020), immigration attitudes should play a role in shaping mass opinion toward economic redistribution, and by extension, in shaping mass responsiveness to rising income inequality.

Even though there are many national and state-level restrictions on immigrants' eligibility for social welfare benefits (Filindra, 2013; Hero & Preuhs, 2007) and despite undocumented immigrants' ineligibility for nearly all social welfare benefits (Broder et al., 2015; O'Shea & Ramón, 2018), there remains a strong link, in political discourse

Table 1. American Public Opinion Toward Income Inequality.

	Income gap has increased (%)	Income gaps are too large (%)
Whites	80.8	62.3
Non-Whites	75.9	66.4
All respondents	79.3	63.3

Note. Shows the percent of respondents who agree with the statement that “the difference in incomes between rich and poor in the U.S. is larger than 20 years ago” (ANES variable VCF9227) and the statement that “differences in income in America are too large” (GSS variable INCGAP). Source is the Cumulative ANES (2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016) and the Cumulative GSS (1987, 1996, 2000, 2008, and 2018). Survey weights applied for both datasets. N ranges from 1,459 to 13,139.

Table 2. Immigration Attitudes By Race/Ethnicity.

	Decrease immigration levels (%)	FT: illegal immigrants
Whites	52.1	33.8
Blacks	42.2	48.2
Hispanics	36.3	56.2

Note. Shows mean support for reducing immigration levels (VCF0879) and mean feeling thermometer rating of ‘illegal immigrants’ (VCF0233) among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Source is the Cumulative ANES, various years from 1988 to 2016, survey weights applied. N ranges from 2,264 to 12,721.

and by extension, in the public mind, between immigrants and redistributive spending (Hero, 2010). As such, when people are thinking about economic redistribution and government spending, immigrants are a likely target group that comes to mind (Fox, 2004; Garand et al., 2017; Haselswerdt, 2020; Hussey & Person-Merkowitz, 2013). Furthermore, certain political elites and media outlets often portray the immigrant population in a negative light, with news stories about immigrants often focusing on crime, poverty, welfare usage, and illegal entry into the country (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Chavez, 2013; Farris & Mohamad, 2018; Flores, 2018; Flores & Schachter, 2018; Haselswerdt, 2020; Haynes et al., 2016; Valentino et al., 2013). As such, when Americans are thinking about immigrants, a prominent target for redistributive spending, it is likely that a generally negative picture is painted in their heads. If immigrants are associated with negative characteristics such as crime, illegality, and safety net burdens, then the citizen population should be less willing to confer taxpayer-funded benefits upon them.

Indeed, a working paper by Alesina et al. (2018) provides cross-national experimental evidence (examining France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the U.K., and the U.S) in support of this. They show that simply prompting people to think about immigration causes them to be less supportive of redistribution and makes them less likely to view inequality as a problem. Avdagic and Savage (2019) show, through a series of survey experiments in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, that negative framing of immigration reduces public support for welfare spending. This experimental work is consistent with scholarship in the United States showing that people are less supportive of government spending when it is perceived to benefit negatively stereotyped groups (e.g., Gilens, 1999;

Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Winter, 2006). The contemporary (post-1965) U.S. immigrant population is not only negatively stereotyped but also tends not to “look like” the white majority. As Crepaz (2008, p. 23) aptly notes, “it is easier for people to part with a fraction of their income in the form of taxes if the recipients of public assistance look and behave like you.” In short, I argue that the political salience of the contemporary U.S. immigrant population, stereotypes associated with this group, and a strong link between immigrants and social welfare spending shapes white Americans’ support for redistribution, and by extension *conditions* their responsiveness to rising income inequality. Formally, I hypothesize that *white Americans with more positive (negative) immigration attitudes will be more (less) likely to support economic redistribution when income inequality rises.*

I examine this relationship (between objective income inequality, immigration attitudes, and support for government spending) among the white citizen population. I do this because immigration has typically been viewed as a threat to the cultural, political, and economic power of the white majority (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Jardina, 2019). Indeed, data from the Cumulative ANES, displayed in Table 2, shows that whites are significantly more likely to oppose immigration and to view “illegal immigrants” negatively. This focus on the white majority also keeps with a prominent body of work that has identified negative views toward racial/ethnic minorities as an important determinant of whites’ support (or lack thereof) for social welfare spending and economic redistribution (Fox, 2004; Gilens, 1999; Kam & Kinder, 2009; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Wetts & Willer, 2018).

To summarize, I argue that whites (the dominant “in group”) who view the contemporary immigrant population

(a salient “out-group”) negatively will be less likely to turn in favor of economic redistribution when income inequality rises.

Data and Methods

I test this hypothesis with pooled cross-sectional data from the 1992–2016 Cumulative American National Election Studies (ANES). I combine this individual-level survey data, which includes measures of redistributive support and immigration attitudes, with a state-level measure of objective income inequality over this same time period.

Dependent Variables—Support for Economic Redistribution

To maximize the number of years and states in the analyses, I examine two 7-point scales. The first asks about cutting vs. increasing government services and spending and the second asks about support for private vs. government health insurance. Each of these center around the question of whether there should be “more” or “less” government in the economic domain (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). I re-code each scale to range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating more liberal policy preferences.²

Measuring Immigration Attitudes

I use two questions to measure immigration attitudes. These ask respondents’ their feeling thermometer rating of “illegal immigrants” (0–97; higher values = warmer feelings) and their preferred level of immigration into the United States (1 = decreased a lot, 2 = decreased a little, 3 = same as now, 4 = increased a little, 5 = increased a lot). I combine responses to these two questions into a single score using principal components factor analysis (eigenvalue = 1.42, variance explained = 71.0%), re-scaled to range between 0 and 1.³ Because “illegal immigrants” have a pejorative connotation, solely using this question to tap attitudes toward immigration is not ideal. There may be some people who are staunchly opposed to the idea of “illegal” immigration but who are more accepting of legal immigration.⁴ Thus I combined the “illegal immigrants” feeling thermometer with the question asking about preferred immigration levels in order to better capture overall attitudes toward immigration.⁵

Measuring State Income Inequality

I use an objective measure of the income share of the top one percent in each state-year. These data range from 1917 to 2015 and are made publically available by Mark Frank. In the main analyses, I use these data for the following years: 1992, 1994, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2015.⁶ This measure is based on income tax return data from the IRS. This measure is useful because unlike survey based measures from the

U.S. Census Bureau, for example, very high incomes are not top-coded, that is, included into a single category. Furthermore, the nature of U.S. income inequality over the past several decades has been considerable growth among the super-wealthy (Bartels, 2016; Piketty et al., 2018; Volscho & Kelly, 2012). As such, this measure (the top 1%) does a good job of capturing variation in inequality, both across states, and over time. The state is also an appropriate geographic area as previous research has found that peoples’ subjective perceptions of income inequality are shaped, in part, by the objective level of inequality in their states (Xu & Garand, 2010), that public perceptions of income inequality track with changes in objective state income inequality over time (Franko, 2017), and that people are responsive to state-level inequality (Macdonald, 2019). In short, extant research suggests that people are at least somewhat aware of and responsive to state-level inequality.⁷

Control Variables

I account for the following demographics: age (in years), gender (female), household income (five categories), education (college degree vs. not), home ownership (own home vs. do not), and marital status (married vs. not married). To account for additional factors that may influence both immigration attitudes and redistributive support, I also control for party identification (7-point, coded in the Republican direction) and symbolic ideological identification (7-point, coded in the Conservative direction). With the exception of age, all of these control variables are either categorical or are re-scaled to range between 0 and 1.⁸

I also control for the unemployment rate and median household income in each state-year as past research has linked state-level economic conditions with individual-level support for redistributive spending (Kam & Nam, 2008).⁹ I also control for whether the state was a part of the former Confederacy to account for the historical factors that may influence both objective income inequality and individual-level support for redistribution. I include year fixed effects to account for factors such as the state of the national economy and partisan control of the federal government.

Results

I present the main results in Table 3 and Figure 1. Overall, they support my hypothesized expectations. Across model specifications, white Americans’ responsiveness to rising state-level inequality is significantly conditioned by their immigration attitudes. To further illustrate the substantive results, I plot the marginal effects from Table 3 in Figure 1.

For illustrative purposes, consider a white American with the most “pro-immigration” attitudes (a value of 1 on the 0–1 scale). If their state context changed from the most economically equal (where the top 1% hold 10.1% of the income) to

Table 3. Immigration Attitudes Condition Mass Responsiveness to Income Inequality.

	Services & spending	Health insurance
Top 1% income share	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
Immigration attitudes	-0.067* (0.038)	-0.035 (0.044)
Top 1% × Immigration attitudes	0.008*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Demographics		
Female	0.038*** (0.005)	0.001 (0.006)
Age	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)
College	-0.031*** (0.005)	-0.017*** (0.006)
Income	-0.074*** (0.010)	-0.103*** (0.013)
Homeowner	-0.017*** (0.005)	-0.014* (0.008)
Married	0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.006)
Political predispositions		
Partisanship	-0.156*** (0.010)	-0.221*** (0.012)
Symbolic ideology	-0.330*** (0.014)	-0.394*** (0.018)
State characteristics		
Median household income	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Unemployment	0.000 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)
Southern state	0.002 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)
Constant	0.811*** (0.036)	0.942*** (0.041)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,221	9,218
R ²	0.316	0.304

Note. Dependent variables range from 0-1; higher values = more liberal attitudes. Source is the Cumulative ANES. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors clustered by state-year in parentheses.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

the most economically unequal (where the top 1% hold 34.4% of the income), their support for government services and spending would increase by approximately 0.17 (on a 0–1 scale) and their support for government health insurance would increase by approximately 0.14 (also on a 0–1 scale). Although somewhat modest (for maximum possible effect sizes), they approximate the difference between those in the lowest and highest income categories (0.07 and 0.10 for services/spending and health insurance, respectively) and the strongest Democrats and strongest Republicans (0.16 and 0.22). In contrast whites with less favorable anti-immigration attitudes (at or below the median value of 0.33), do not turn in favor of redistribution when their state context

becomes more unequal. This sends a signal that “more government” is unwelcome, increasing the likelihood that an economically unequal status quo will persist.

Overall, these results show that immigration attitudes meaningfully condition whites’ responsiveness to rising inequality. Though these effect sizes are not especially large, they are also not trivial. Furthermore, even small shifts in public opinion are meaningful in the aggregate and if repeated over time, can eventually pressure government to enact policies consistent with mass opinion (Caughy & Warshaw, 2017; Erikson et al., 2002). Absent this public pressure, government has few incentives to address rising inequality.

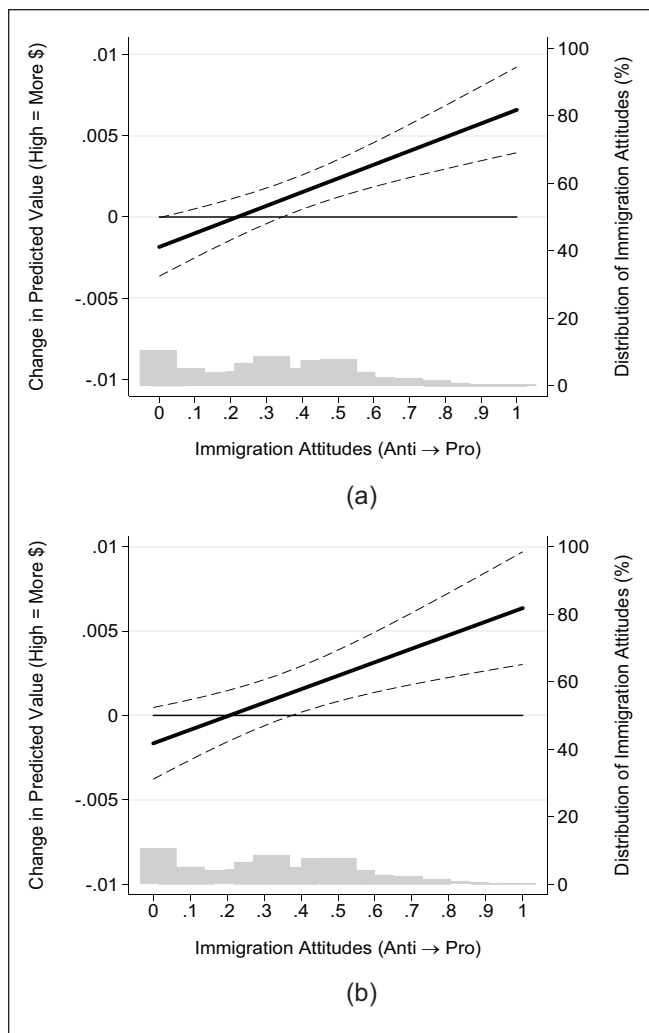


Figure 1. Immigration attitudes condition mass responsiveness to income inequality: (a) government services & spending and (b) government health insurance.

Note. Based on the OLS regression models in Table 3. Shows the marginal effect of a one percentage point increase the income share of the top 1% in a particular state-year on support for economic redistribution. The left y-axes show the conditional coefficient. The light grey histograms and the right y-axes show the percent distribution of immigration attitudes. Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Do Immigration Attitudes or Immigration Levels Matter?

Thus far, the results have shown that immigration attitudes condition the relationship between state income inequality and whites’ support for economic redistribution. These findings show that immigration attitudes are politically consequential. They also suggest that ethnic diversity may undermine whites’ support for redistribution (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015) and by extension, inhibit mass responsiveness to rising inequality. If immigration in and of itself depresses support for redistribution, then a possible policy solution, if the objective is to bolster support for redistribution, would be

to restrict immigration. However, if immigration attitudes are what matters, then the “policy solution” (to bolster redistributive support) would be for political elites and the mass media to portray the immigrant population in a more favorable light, or at least to demonize them less.¹⁰

It is important to adjudicate among these possibilities, that is, whether attitudes toward immigrants/immigration or residing in a state with a large immigrant population is more consequential for whites’ redistributive preferences. To do this, I regress support for redistributive spending on immigration attitudes, the percent of the state’s population that is foreign-born, and the same set of controls as in Table 3.¹¹ I do not interact immigration attitudes with state inequality (instead I simply include state income inequality as a control) as the objective here is simply to examine whether immigrant-driven diversity or immigration attitudes more strongly predict support whites’ support for redistribution.

The results in Table 4 (the full model is in Supplemental Appendix Table B9) show that immigration attitudes, rather than the size of the immigrant population appears to be what shapes public attitudes toward economic redistribution. The results here show that, if anything, white Americans residing in states with larger foreign-born populations are *more* supportive of economic redistribution.¹² These results also suggest that immigrant-fueled diversity is unlikely, absent negative portrayals of the immigrant population, to depress public support for redistributive spending.

Robustness of Findings

I also conduct a number of robustness tests. To save space, I do not present the statistical results here. Instead I describe several relevant findings in-text and present the full regression models/statistical results in the Supplemental Appendix.¹³

In Supplemental Appendix Table B1, I examine if the main results (in Table 3) are robust to additional attitudinal control variables. I specifically include additional controls for egalitarianism (Feldman, 1988), trust in the federal government (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015), feeling thermometer ratings of another prominent minority group—Blacks (Gilens, 1999), as well as feelings toward two economic class groups (Piston, 2018)—Poor People and Big Business. The results are very similar to Table 3 (the coefficients for the top 1% × immigration attitudes are similar in magnitude and are statistically significant).

In Supplemental Appendix Table B2, I examine whether the results are robust to alternative measures of immigration attitudes. Instead of combining the “illegal immigrant” thermometer rating and the five-category immigration levels questions, as in Table 3, here I separately examine how each question conditions whites’ responsiveness to rising inequality. I do this by separately regressing the two dependent variables on an interaction between state inequality (top 1%) and each immigration question (“illegal immigrant”

Table 4. Immigration Attitudes, Rather Than the Size of the Immigrant Population, Shapes Whites' Support for Economic Redistribution.

	Services & spending	Health insurance
Immigration attitudes	0.093*** (0.014)	0.116*** (0.016)
State foreign born pct	0.000 (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	9,221	9,218
R ²	0.315	0.304

Note. Dependent variables range from 0 to 1; higher values = more liberal attitudes. Source is the Cumulative ANES. Robust standard errors clustered by state-year in parentheses. The full regression models are displayed in Table B8 in the Supplemental Appendix.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

thermometer and preferred immigration levels), along with the same set of controls in Table 3. The results show that both immigration questions significantly condition (the p -values for the interaction terms range from 0.000 to 0.007) whites' responsiveness to rising income inequality.

In Supplemental Appendix Table B3, I consider whether immigration attitudes or feelings toward racial/ethnic minorities more broadly are what condition whites' responsiveness to rising inequality. I do this by regressing the two dependent variables on (1) a top 1% \times immigration attitudes interaction and (2) a top 1% \times Blacks feeling thermometer interaction. Both models include the same set of controls in Table 3. The results show that immigration attitudes significantly condition ($p = 0.000$ and $p = 0.001$ for services/spending and health insurance, respectively) whites' responsiveness to rising inequality, but that feelings toward Blacks do not significantly condition this relationship ($p = 0.641$ and $p = 0.745$, respectively). These findings are consistent with Garand et al. (2017), who found that immigration attitudes are strongly associated with support for welfare spending.

In Supplemental Appendix Table B4, I explore heterogeneity in the relationship between immigration attitudes and whites' support for economic redistribution/social welfare spending. I specifically consider how this relationship may differ by partisanship, ideology and household income. To do this, I regress the two dependent variables (services/spending and health insurance) on a *triple* interaction between state income inequality, immigration attitudes, and partisanship, symbolic ideology, and household income (in three separate models for each of the two dependent variables), along with the same set of controls as in Table 3. The results yield little evidence that the relationship between state income inequality, immigration attitudes, and support for economic redistribution is further conditioned by either partisanship, symbolic ideology, or household income. For government services/spending, the p -values for the triple interaction terms are (0.884, 0.854, and 0.624, respectively for partisanship, symbolic ideology, and household income). For government

health insurance, the p -values are (0.361, 0.581, and 0.121, respectively for partisanship, symbolic ideology, and household income). This is not to say that there is no heterogeneity in the immigration-redistribution relationship (see, e.g., Hussey & Person-Merkowitz, 2013) and while a full examination of possible heterogeneity in the immigration-redistribution relationship is beyond the scope of this paper, it remains an important pathway for future work.

Conclusion and Political Implications

The decades-long increase in U.S. income inequality shows few signs of abetting. For example, Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in December of 2017. This policy disproportionately benefited the affluent and will, along with decreased spending on welfare, education, and health care, likely contribute to increased inequality.¹⁴ Growing income disparities between the super rich and the lower/middle classes can exacerbate disparities in political influence (Gilens, 2012; Schlozman et al., 2012), ensuring that "the heavenly chorus sings with an upper-class accent" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 35).

Rising inequality is occurring alongside increasing immigrant-driven diversity, which some suggest can undermine a robust social welfare state (Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; Crepez, 2008). This can be exacerbated by elite/media framing (Abrajano et al., 2017; Chavez, 2013; Haselswerdt, 2020; Haynes et al., 2016), that is, whether the immigrant population is portrayed as a criminal threat, a drain on public services, and as undeserving beneficiaries of government benefits. Overall, the results here suggest that negative views of the immigrant population can serve to depress public support for redistribution, and by extension, responsiveness to rising income inequality.¹⁵

However, even if the mass public does respond to growing inequality by demanding increased redistribution, it is entirely possible that Congress and/or state legislatures will not listen, given the outsize influence that the wealthy have on policy outcomes (Gilens, 2012; Gilens & Page, 2014),

misperceptions that many elected officials have about their constituents' attitudes on economic issues (Broockman & Skovron, 2018; Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2019), and the stark differences in redistributive preferences between the super rich and the less affluent (Gilens, 2009; Page et al., 2013; Suhay et al., 2020; Thal, 2020; but see Broockman et al., 2019; Gilens & Thal, 2018). However, the likelihood that government will enact policies that reduce economic inequality, or at the very least policies that do not increase it, is arguably higher with public pressure, that is, mass responsiveness to rising income inequality, than without.

There are several useful areas for future research. The first is exploring how context matters. Specifically, it would be useful to examine whether the relationship between immigration attitudes and support for redistribution is stronger in areas with larger immigrant populations as living in more ethnically diverse areas may serve strengthen the relationship between peoples' racial attitudes and their policy preferences (Fox, 2004; Velez & Lavine, 2017; Weber et al., 2014). Second, it would be valuable to examine how attitudes toward different immigrant groups, for example, Hispanic versus Asian versus Middle Eastern, influence public support for redistribution. Survey experiments could randomly present respondents with different immigrant groups and then ask about attitudes toward spending programs. Future work could also examine how immigration attitudes shape support for different types of spending such as: education, progressive taxation, and/or a higher minimum wage. All of these policies can potentially influence the extent of economic inequality, but may have different perceived beneficiaries/target groups, that is, immigration attitudes may loom larger when people are considering spending on welfare rather than on education, social security, or taxes on the wealthy. It would be useful to probe exactly *which* perceptions about the immigrant population matter (see also Haselswerdt, 2020), that is, beliefs that they pose a cultural, criminal, or economic threat to the native population or whether erroneous beliefs about the proportion that is in the country illegally is what matters. Future work could leverage more tailored survey data to better adjudicate among these potential mechanisms.

Inequality and immigration are salient issues in contemporary American politics. The results presented here suggest that immigration has important implications for inequality. Negative immigration attitudes can inhibit mass responsiveness to inequality, depressing support for redistribution as a means of alleviating high, and rising income inequality. This will likely pose a challenge to politicians who wish to marshal public support for large-scale redistributive programs, for example, an expansion of Medicare and/or Medicaid. If a negatively portrayed and perceived "out-group" can undermine public support for redistribution, then it stands to reason, given the powerful influence that elites and the mass media have in shaping ordinary citizens' attitudes (Lenz, 2012; Zaller, 1992), that portraying the immigrant population in a more favorable light, or at the very least demonizing

them less, can have the opposite effect (but see Avdagic & Savage, 2019). Such framing can have important implications for American politics, potentially helping to facilitate mass responsiveness to rising economic inequality.

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Supplemental Material

The supplemental appendix and replication materials for this article are available online as well as in the Harvard Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/>).

Notes

1. See Hero (2010) for a relevant review article. See Alesina and Glaeser (2004) and Crepez (2008) for broader treatments on the relationship between immigration, diversity, and the generosity of welfare states.
2. I code respondents who said they "don't know" or "hadn't thought much about it" (approximately 10% of the sample) at the midpoint value of "4." The results here are somewhat conservative, that is, they are slightly stronger if these survey respondents are dropped instead.
3. The "illegal immigrant" feeling thermometer was asked in the following years: 1988, 1992, 1994, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016. Preferred immigration levels was asked in: 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016. As such, the factor score combining these two questions only includes years where they overlap: 1992, 1994, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016.
4. For example, data from the 2019 ANES pilot study shows that Americans give "illegal immigrants" a rating of 43 out of 100. In contrast, they give "legal immigrants" an average rating of 72. However, many Americans also drastically overestimate the percentage of the immigrant population that is in the country illegally (Alesina et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2019).
5. There may be some concern about combining a question asking about immigration levels with a question asking about feelings toward "illegal immigrants" as the two may be conceptually distinct. However, principal components factor analysis shows that they both load strongly onto a single factor, suggesting that they are tapping into the same concept. Furthermore, there is precedent for using these two variables to measure overall immigration attitudes (Garand et al., 2017).
6. These data (http://www.shsu.edu/eco_mwfi/inequality.html) are currently not available beyond 2015, so I combine the 2015 measure of state inequality with individual-level 2016 Cumulative ANES data.

7. Inequality in one's local context (county/zip code), may be more ideal as it is more proximate to individuals (Newman et al., 2015, 2018). However, this measure, and specifically a local tax-based measure of the top one percent's income share, is not available over time. Furthermore, the ANES does not make such data (county/zip-code publicly available) As such, I use a measure of state-level income inequality instead. Furthermore, because the state is a less geographically proximate unit and because there is less variation in state-level inequality (vs. local inequality), it should be more difficult to find statistically significant results.
8. See Supplemental Appendix A for descriptive statistics and greater detail regarding question wording and variable coding.
9. The state unemployment rate was obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/lau/rdscnp16.htm>), and data on state median household income (measured here in thousands of 2018 dollars) was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html>).
10. Of course, immigration attitudes would be irrelevant if there was little to no immigration to begin with, but I argue that what matters is not immigration in and of itself, but rather how the immigrant population is perceived by the citizen population.
11. To estimate the percentage of each state's population that is foreign-born, I use 1990 Census data for the 1992 and 1994 ANES, 2000 Census data for the 2004 ANES, 2010 Census data for the 2008 and 2012 ANES, and 2015 Census data for the 2016 ANES (https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/ph_stat-portraits_foreign-born-2015_trends-45b/).
12. The Cumulative ANES is somewhat limited as it does not include large samples of whites from all 50 states in each survey year. Furthermore, the state may not be the ideal context as people may be more perceptive of/responsive to the immigrant population in their local areas (Hopkins, 2010; Newman, 2013). Pending future work, the results in Table 4 should be viewed as suggestive, rather than definitive.
13. In Supplemental Appendix Table B5 I show that the results are similar when using a pre-tax Gini coefficient as an alternative measure of state income inequality (https://www.shsu.edu/eco_mwf/inequality.html). Table B6 shows that the results hold when running models that include state fixed effects. Table B7 shows that the results are robust to running ordered probit model specifications rather than OLS. Table B8 shows that the results are similar when using multiple imputation rather than dropping cases via listwise deletion.
14. <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/14/562884070/charts-hereshow-gop-s-tax-breaks-would-shift-money-to-rich-poor-americans>
15. There is mixed evidence regarding how easy it is to change public attitudes toward immigration/the immigrant population (Carnahan et al., 2020; Hopkins et al., 2019).

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