

Chapter 5

The Political Impact of Economic Change ¹

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The stunning election of President Donald Trump in 2016 spurred a flurry of interest in the political consequences of long-term economic change. During the presidential campaign, many observers surmised that “Trump is rising because the US middle class has crashed” and because “Trump’s white working class supporters ... have suffered a stunning loss of relative status over the past 40 years.” After the election, they inferred that Trump “tapped into the anger of a declining middle class” and “won because many millions of Americans, having endured decades of working more while getting deeper in debt, said ‘enough.’” Even those who acknowledged that Trump voters “had, on average, higher incomes” than Clinton voters argued that “the trajectory of their communities felt far worse,” making Trump’s election “more about stagnation, failure, and the dissolution of the American dream than it was about the headline economic numbers.”²

¹ *For an earlier, stand-alone version of this chapter including information on the Jennings surveys, statistical details, and references, see <https://faculty.polisci.wisc.edu/kwalsh2/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/bartels.cramer.mpsaFINAL-1.pdf>. We are grateful to M. Kent Jennings and Laura Stoker for graciously facilitating our extension of the Political Socialization Panel Study and to Monica Busch for research assistance. Original interviews were conducted under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Institutional Review Board and the Vanderbilt University Human Research Protection Program. The names attached to our interviewees are pseudonyms.*

² Matt Phillips, “Donald Trump is rising because the US middle class has crashed.” *Quartz*, March 9, 2016 (<https://qz.com/634340/donald-trump-is-what-you-get-when-you-spend-three->

One of Trump's big fans is Ron Sutton, a retiree living in an economically "stagnant" part of the white rural South.³ Sutton owned a tire store that went out of business when the big manufacturing plant in town closed down. He says that "uncontrolled immigration drives the wages down. I believe that. ... I wish they would put out what it costs for one illegal immigrant that comes into this country with a child, what it costs the American taxpayer." According to Sutton, Trump is "the first politician of either race, of either party, that ran on a platform and has tried every way in the world to carry exactly what he said out. In other words, 'I'm gonna do this,' and he has tried to do this. Every way he could. He says, 'I'm gonna change the economy. I'm gonna reduce the taxes. I'm gonna bring industrial jobs back to this country,' which he's done a great job on that." But the president's political opponents make it hard for him to deliver on his promises: "if Trump said, 'I'm gonna pay off the national debt tomorrow with gold outta my own vault,' the Democrats would vote against it."

On the surface, Sutton's enthusiasm for President Trump neatly fits the conventional story of economic distress fostering right-wing populist views. However, tracing his economic fortunes and political attitudes over the course of his lifetime tells a very different story. Sutton was an ardent conservative—and a strong Republican—decades before Trump emerged as a presidential candidate. Moreover, his

[decades-destroying-the-us-middle-class/](#)). Thomas B. Edsall, "How Falling Behind the Joneses Fueled the Rise of Trump." *New York Times*, July 7, 2016. Bernie Sanders, "Sanders Statement on Trump." Press release, November 9, 2016 (<https://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/sanders-statement-on-trump>). David Cay Johnston, "Why Voters Elected President Donald J. Trump—and Why They'll Regret It." *Daily Beast*, November 9, 2016 (<https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-voters-elected-president-donald-j-trump-and-why-theyll-regret-it>). Annie Lowrey, "2016: A Year Defined by America's Diverging Economies." *The Atlantic*, December 30, 2016 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/12/2016-diverging-economies/511838/>).

³ According to the Census Bureau, Sutton's county is 95% white. Only 12% of adults have college degrees, per capita income is 25% below the national average, and the median home value is 45% below the national average.

political views are not the result of economic distress; they were forged in the course of his rise from a relatively modest small-town background to a position of substantial affluence. (His reported income in the 1973 and 1982 surveys ranked in the top one or two percent of the national distribution of Jennings respondents. Even after suffering significant business reverses, his income in 1997 was well above average.) Sutton's support for Trump is attributable not to "the anger of a declining middle class," but to a long-familiar brand of prosperous Republican conservatism.

Our aim in this chapter is not to explain the election of Donald Trump, but to shed light on the broader question of how long-term economic change has shaped Americans' economic, social, and political views. In economic terms, the Jennings study spans the end of the long economic boom following World War II, the era of "stagflation" in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the early stages of the contemporary "New Gilded Age" of slow income growth and escalating economic inequality.⁴ Thus, it provides unique leverage for understanding how individual and collective economic change has affected social and political attitudes, policy preferences, and partisanship.

A significant advantage of the Jennings data for our purposes is that they provide a contemporaneous record of respondents' changing economic circumstances, freeing us from reliance on imperfect recall. Even more importantly, they allow us to focus on *changes* in income—a direct measure of economic mobility—rather than *levels* of income as in conventional cross-sectional analyses. Moreover, because the Jennings team measured a variety of important economic, social, and political attitudes repeatedly and in consistent ways over the years, we can focus primarily on *changes* in attitudes that are plausibly attributable to concomitant changes in economic circumstances, providing a more precise and more persuasive account of the political impact of economic mobility.

⁴ Bartels (2016); Noah (2012); Smith (2012).

Our analysis reveals a strong association between economic mobility and the changing political views of the class of '65 over the course of their lifetimes; but it is *not* the sort of association implied by the conventional wisdom regarding the bases of support for Donald Trump. Overall, this cohort became distinctly more conservative on a variety of economic and social issues, especially during the period of “stagflation” from 1973 through 1982. However, these conservative shifts were concentrated among the *upwardly* mobile members of the cohort, not those whose economic fortunes stagnated or declined. While Ron Sutton’s story is by no means typical—whose is?—it is very much consistent with this general pattern. Just as one might expect based on seminal scholarly studies of class politics, conservatism has appealed primarily to economic winners, not to those left behind.⁵

The Era of Stagflation (1973-1982)

When the Class of '65 graduated from high school, America was still in the midst of its long post-war economic boom. The boom mostly continued as the young graduates began to settle into their adult lives. In the eight years between the first and second waves of the Jennings study (1965-1973), real GDP per capita increased by 26% and real disposable income per capita increased by 33%. But the long era of prosperity came to a jarring end just six months after the completion of the second wave of Jennings’ interviews. The OPEC oil embargo in the fall of 1973 triggered a sharp recession that persisted for more than a year. Unlike most previous recessions, this one was accompanied by substantial price inflation which continued unabated for most of the next decade; economists dubbed this unfamiliar, toxic combination *stagflation*. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 sparked another major energy crisis and a “double-dip” recession exacerbated by the efforts of the Federal Reserve under Paul

⁵ Classic scholarly treatments of class politics include, for example, Lipset (1960: chap. 7) and Butler and Stokes (1974).

Volcker to bring rampant inflation under control through aggressive interest rate hikes.

When Jennings' respondents were reinterviewed in the summer of 1982 the economy was (again) in a recession, real GDP per capita was only 10% higher than it had been nine years earlier, prices were still going up by 7% per year, and the unemployment rate was 9.6% and rising. Being better-educated than the population as a whole and having just entering their prime earning years, the respondents fared better than most Americans in the era of stagflation. *On average*, their real family income increased by almost 25% between 1973 and 1982. Nonetheless, there was substantial variation in their economic fortunes, with one-third experiencing *declines* in real income and 30% experiencing gains of \$30,000 or more (in 2017 dollars)—more than twice the sample average.

To the surprise of some observers, politics in this period moved to the right, not to the left. The failure of established Keynesian economic theory to explain the simultaneous surges of inflation and unemployment “provided a political opening for those interested in disciplining the labor market” and even suggested to some that “the New Deal would have to go.” Many observers concluded that the election of staunch conservative Ronald Reagan as president in 1980 “showed that most American voters wanted limits on the growth of government.”⁶

Like the country as a whole, the Jennings respondents expressed distinctly more conservative views in 1982 than they had in 1973. Their ideological self-identification shifted substantially from liberal (by 35% to 23%) to conservative (by 37% to 24%).⁷

⁶ Schlozman and Verba (1979); Kenworthy and Owens (2011). Cowie (2010: 223). Barone (1990: 596).

⁷ The remainder described themselves as “middle of the road” (29% in 1973 and 27% in 1982) or said they “haven’t thought much about this” or didn’t know (13% in 1973 and 12% in 1982). “We

They were also less sympathetic toward labor unions (by six points on a 100-point “feeling thermometer”), slightly *more* sympathetic toward big business, less enthusiastic about government providing jobs⁸ and helping minority groups,⁹ and much more concerned about stopping crime even at some risk to the rights of the accused.¹⁰ However, analysis of the Jennings data demonstrates that this conservative reaction was *not* primarily a response to personal economic distress. Rather, it was concentrated among people who were *upwardly* mobile and among economically advantaged groups, including whites, males, and Republicans.

We begin by examining the impact of economic mobility on four key economic attitudes in the 1982 Jennings survey. Our measure of economic mobility is the real change in each respondent’s reported family income between the 1973 and 1982

hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

⁸ “Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others believe that the government should let each person get ahead on his or her own. And other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?” The proportion agreeing (to varying degrees) that the government should ensure jobs and living standards decreased from 26% to 16%, while the proportion saying that “the government should just let each person get ahead on his own” increased from 43% to 59%.

⁹ “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?” The proportion favoring government help for minority groups declined from 40% to 24%, while the proportion saying that minority groups should “help themselves” increased from 31% to 48%.

¹⁰ “Some people are primarily concerned with doing everything possible to protect the legal rights of those accused of committing crimes. Others feel that it is more important to stop criminal activity even at the risk of reducing the rights of the accused. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?” The proportion leaning toward protecting the rights of the accused declined from 50% to 24%, while the proportion more concerned about stopping crime increased from 27% to 50%.

surveys.¹¹ We gauge its impact by assessing the expected difference in economic attitudes between a typical respondent with above-average income growth and a typical respondent with *below*-average income growth, holding statistically constant previous attitudes, partisanship, and a variety of social characteristics, including race, sex, region, religiosity, and college experience.¹²

Our first analysis focuses on changing attitudes toward labor unions and big business as measured by the difference in “feeling thermometer” ratings for these two groups. The AFL-CIO’s legislative priorities were stymied in the late 1970s, even with a Democratic president and congressional majority; and President Reagan’s dramatic dismissal of striking air traffic controllers in 1981 “dealt a telling blow” to the already-declining union movement.¹³ Attitudes toward labor unions and big business were impressively stable through this tumultuous period.¹⁴ Nonetheless, our statistical results imply that a Jennings respondent who experienced above-average income growth would have increased support for business over labor by 4.4 points on the 100-

¹¹ We lack income data for 16.7% of the survey respondents in 1973, 16.4% in 1982, and 6.3% in 1997. Most of these missing data are for respondents who were surveyed by mail and not asked to report their incomes. We include these respondents in our analyses, but also include indicator variables for each group to capture any difference between their responses and those of otherwise similar people who reported their incomes. (The parameter estimates associated with these indicator variables are not reported in the tables.) Of course, we exclude observations with missing data on the *dependent* variable for each analysis (again, mostly reflecting questions omitted from the mail-back surveys); these exclusions account for the variation in sample size from column to column and table to table.

¹² More precisely, we compare a respondent whose real income growth between 1973 and 1982 was one standard deviation above average (a \$74,700 increase in 2017 dollars) with an otherwise similar respondent whose real income growth was one standard deviation below average (a \$40,000 decline in 2017 dollars).

¹³ Barone (1990: 561, 617-618).

¹⁴ The estimated stability of this attitude and others is bolstered by our statistical allowance for random measurement error in the survey responses (Achen 1983; Bartels 2006). Our errors-in-variables estimation strategy is described in the Appendix, and the estimated measurement reliabilities of our explanatory variables are reported in Table A2.

point “feeling thermometer,” relative to an otherwise similar respondent who experienced *below*-average income growth. Whites, males, and people with college education also became substantially more favorable toward business relative to labor during the era of stagflation.¹⁵

Income gains had an even larger impact on views about whether the government should “see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living.” The difference between upward mobility and downward mobility was associated with a 6.3-point decline on a 100-point scale measuring support for government involvement in providing jobs and income support. In this case, Republicans also turned sharply against government provision of jobs and social welfare, as did whites and males (though not the college educated).¹⁶

The same patterns appear in our analysis of responses to a question about cutting government spending and services.¹⁷ In this case, since the question was not asked in 1973, our analysis is of *levels* of support rather than *changes* in support. Nonetheless, it is clear that political pressure for spending cuts in the era of stagflation came, primarily, *not* from those who were themselves being most squeezed by high unemployment and inflation but from those who were doing well despite the hard times.¹⁸ As Robert Kuttner put it, the “revolution against government” discerned by

¹⁵ Table 5.1, column 1.

¹⁶ Table 5.1, column 2.

¹⁷ “Some people think the government should provide many fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending a lot. Other people feel it is important for the government to continue the services it now provides even if it means no reduction in spending. And other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

¹⁸ Table 5.1, column 3. Adding *levels* of family income and state economic inequality in 1973 as additional explanatory factors (to allow for the fact that we have no lagged dependent variable)

Jimmy Carter's pollster, Pat Caddell, was a "Revolt of the Haves."¹⁹

We also examined attitudes toward beneficiaries of government assistance—specifically, the perceived influence of "people on welfare."²⁰ It might seem odd to think that welfare recipients had much "influence in American life and politics," especially in the conservative political climate of 1982. "Legislators who had voted for or gone along with great increases in Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits between 1963 and 1973 were content to let inflation erode the value of these benefits after 1973." Nonetheless, Ronald Reagan's harangues on the campaign trail in 1976 and 1980 about a "welfare queen" collecting lavish government benefits tapped into "a long and deeply racialized history of suspicion of and resentment toward families receiving welfare."²¹ The distribution of views in the Jennings data reflects that suspicion and resentment, with 31% of respondents in 1973 and 30% in 1982 saying that welfare recipients had too much influence (and many of the rest saying they had "just about the right amount of influence"). But here, too, the statistical results make it clear that the suspicion and resentment were concentrated among economically privileged groups—whites, males, Republicans, the college educated, and the upwardly mobile—*not* among the people who were merely "Stayin' Alive" as members of the

produces an even larger estimated effect of *changes* in income on support for spending cuts, .1776 (with a standard error of .0348).

¹⁹ Kuttner (1980), quoted by Cowie (2010: 300).

²⁰ "Some people think that certain groups have too much influence in American life and politics, while other people feel that certain groups don't have as much influence as they deserve. On this page are three statements about how much influence a group might have. For each group I read to you, just tell me the number of the statement that best says how you feel." The response options were "too much influence" (100), "just about the right amount of influence" (50), and "too little influence" (0).

²¹ Barone (1990: 572). Rachel Black and Aleta Sprague, "The Rise and Reign of the Welfare Queen." *New America*, September 22, 2016 (<https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/edition-135/rise-and-reign-welfare-queen/>). Also see Gilens (1999).

struggling working class.²²

The conservative shift between 1973 and 1982 was not limited to the economic domain. One standard question included in the Jennings survey registered an 11-point drop (on a 100-point scale) in support for government assistance to blacks and other minority groups. Another showed an even larger 17-point increase in support for stopping crime even at some risk to the rights of the accused. Our statistical analyses indicate that these shifts, too, were concentrated among people with above-average income growth, even after allowing for the effects of race, sex, college experience, partisanship, and other factors.²³ The income gradient for the question about reducing crime is modest in magnitude and rather imprecisely estimated; but the difference for the question about affirmative action for minorities is larger and more precisely estimated, suggesting that the difference between upward mobility and downward mobility was associated with a 5.6-point drop in support for government help—enough to offset four and a half years of college education or to match the expected difference in views between an strong Democrat and a strong Republican.

A common interpretation of politics in the 1970s (and before and since) is that “race and class were often at odds,” with “white working people” having “typically

²² Table 5.1, column 4. Limiting the analysis to whites produces very similar results, but with a slightly *larger* estimated effect of economic mobility, .0999 (with a standard error of .0332). Because respondents’ views regarding the influence of people on welfare were not solicited in 1997 it is impossible to calculate the measurement reliability of this variable using the Wiley-Wiley model. For purposes of the analysis presented in Table 5.1 we assume that the measurement reliability of this variable is .50, somewhat higher than for most of the other “influence” measures in the survey due to its greater observed (total) variance. Varying this assumption does not greatly alter the results. For example, assuming that the measurement reliability is .60 produces an estimated effect of income growth of .0899 (with a standard error of .0325), while assuming the reliability is .40 produces an estimate of .0798 (with a standard error of .0312).

²³ Table 5.2, columns 1 and 2.

chosen their race over their class.”²⁴ It is always hard to know what to make of the evocative but imprecise phrase “white working people”; as a literal matter, the vast majority of white people of working age, then and now, have worked for a living (or been supported by someone who worked for a living). If the phrase “white working people” is supposed to refer more specifically to people on the losing end of economic change, then our results suggest that the impression of a conflict between “race and class” in the era of stagflation should be tempered by a realization that *upwardly mobile* whites, not those whose incomes were stagnant or declining, were in the vanguard of increasingly conservative public opinion regarding the role of government, welfare, affirmative action, and crime.²⁵

However, it is also worth noting the limited domain of this “Revolt of the Haves.” While conservative shifts on the issues of affirmative action and crime were concentrated among people with larger-than average income gains, economic mobility generally seems to have had weaker and less consistent effects on other social attitudes. For example, while views of the military became significantly more positive in the decade following the end of the Vietnam War (increasing by 8 points on a 100-point feeling thermometer), our statistical analysis indicates that that shift was much more strongly related to sex, race, and college education than to economic mobility.²⁶

A question in the Jennings survey about the appropriate social role of women represents an even more striking exception to the general pattern of opinion change

²⁴ Cowie (2010: 236).

²⁵ On the other hand, if “class” is taken to refer to education rather than economic mobility, our findings are mixed. Even when the statistical analyses are limited to whites, people with little or no college education were more likely to shift toward opposing government aid to minorities; but they also became relatively *less* concerned about the influence of people on welfare, other things being equal.

²⁶ Table 5.2, column 3.

during the era of stagflation.²⁷ In the Jennings sample as a whole, support for women having an equal role with men increased by almost 14 points (from 65.6 to 79.4 on a 100-point scale) between 1973 and 1982. But this liberal shift occurred more or less across the board (with the notable exception of the biblically devout and, to a lesser extent, southerners). If anything, people who experienced greater income growth probably liberalized at a faster rate than those whose incomes were stagnant, other things being equal. But this difference is fairly small, statistically uncertain, and contrary to the general pattern of conservative shifts among the economically advantaged during this period.²⁸

Our findings regarding shifts in public attitudes during the era of stagflation raise interesting challenges for a variety of familiar perspectives on class politics and economic change. On one hand, contrary to what might be expected in response to a period of slow economic growth and high unemployment, the Jennings respondents (and Americans more generally) became significantly less supportive of government efforts to cushion economic well-being. On the other hand, contrary to what might be expected in light of recent writing on the “white working class” and the politics of economic grievances, that conservative shift was concentrated among upwardly mobile individuals and economically advantaged groups—*not* among those whose own economic experiences and social locations would seem to make them most vulnerable to economic distress.

The millions of Americans who directly suffered the consequences of recession, soaring prices, and industrial decline were, for the most part, politically inert, while

²⁷ “Recently there has been a lot of talk about women’s rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that women’s place is in the home. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

²⁸ Table 5.2, column 4.

those who prospered through this period of wrenching economic change increasingly pulled away from their fellow citizens politically as well as economically.

The Advent of the “New Gilded Age” (1982-1997)

The period between the third and fourth waves of the Jennings study ushered in another series of significant economic changes. The tight monetary policy that had exacerbated the deep recession of 1981-82 began to gain traction, bringing down inflation and long-term interest rates. The unemployment rate fell from 11 percent at the end of 1982 to 8 percent a year later. By the time President Reagan ran for reelection in 1984, double-digit inflation was a receding memory, the economy was booming, and Reagan’s campaign ads touting “morning in America” carried him to a landslide victory.²⁹

While the economic rebound of the 1980s was immediately salient and politically consequential, a more insidious trend only gradually came into focus: the fruits of economic growth were increasingly accruing to people who were already well off (Edsall 1985; Danziger and Gottschalk 1995). According to Census Bureau tabulations, the share of total income going to the most affluent five percent of households increased from 17% in 1982 to 21.7% in 1997, while the share going to the bottom *forty* percent of households fell from 14% to 12.5%. Separate tabulations based on tax data indicate that the share of income going to the top *one* percent increased even faster, from 11.3% in 1982 to 16.6% in 1997. Regional variation in levels of economic inequality also accelerated; the standard deviation of state Gini coefficients for the Jennings sample increased by about 10% between 1965 and 1982, but by 50% between

²⁹ Barone (1990: 644-647).

1982 and 1997.³⁰

If anyone expected these developments to reverse the significant conservative shifts that had occurred during the era of stagflation, they were to be disappointed. On the whole, the economic and social attitudes of the Jennings respondents were only slightly less conservative in 1997 than they had been in 1982. After declining by 8 points between 1973 and 1982, support for government ensuring jobs and living standards increased by a single point between 1982 and 1997. The 6-point decline in attitudes toward labor unions relative to big business was partially reversed by a 2-point increase. Support for government aid to minority groups, which had fallen by almost 12 points between 1973 and 1982, held steady between 1982 and 1997. Enthusiasm for fighting crime even at the risk of reducing the rights of the accused receded by one point after having jumped by 17.

Of course, stability in the aggregate may obscure important changes in the views of individuals or groups. Paralleling our earlier analyses spanning the era of stagflation, we examined changes between 1982 and 1997 in attitudes toward labor and business and the role of government in ensuring jobs and living standards. In both cases, while the associations between personal economic experience and shifts in economic attitudes were not as strong in 1997 as they had been in 1982, they were similar in kind: upward mobility, not income stagnation, seems to have produced waning support for labor unions (versus big business) and waning support for government activism, other things being equal.³¹

³⁰ Census Bureau data are from the Historical Income Tables: Households (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html>). Tax data are from the World Wealth & Income Database (<http://wid.world/data/>). State inequality data are from Frank (2009; http://www.shsu.edu/eco_mwf/inequality.html).

³¹ Table 5.3, columns 1 and 2.

Figure 5.1 provides a graphical summary of the impact of economic mobility on these economic attitudes in both 1973-1982 and 1982-1997. The comparison in each period is between the expected change in economic attitudes for an otherwise typical upwardly mobile person and the expected change for an otherwise typical downwardly mobile person.³² While the figure clearly reflects the overall conservative shift in the Jennings respondents' economic attitudes between 1973 and 1982 and the slight liberal rebound between 1982 and 1997, it also reflects the impact of economic mobility, with respondents whose own family incomes had increased at a faster-than-average rate accounting for much more than their share of the conservative shift and much less (if any) of the subsequent liberal rebound.

***** Figure 5.1 *****

The impression of consistency in the apparent effects of economic mobility in the two periods is bolstered by analyses of two additional economic attitudes tapped in the 1997 Jennings survey—support for the “free market” vis-à-vis “strong government”³³ and perceptions of the influence of rich people.³⁴ In these cases, too, even after allowing for differences in education, partisanship, and other factors, people

³² The comparisons of expected shifts in attitudes hold other characteristics in the tables constant at their sample average values.

³³ Respondents were invited to say which of two statements was closer to their opinion: “We need a strong government to handle today’s complex economic problems” or “The free market can handle these problems without government being involved.” 54% chose “strong government” and 44% chose “the free market.”

³⁴ 82% of respondents said that rich people had “too much influence in American life and politics” while 16% said that rich people had about the right amount of influence and 2% said they had too *little* influence. This distribution of opinion was almost identical to the distribution in 1982, when 83% said rich people had too much, 16% said they had about the right amount of influence, and 1% said they had too little influence. Because there was no parallel question in the 1973 survey it is impossible to estimate the measurement reliability of this item. The statistical results presented in Table 5.3 are based on an assumed reliability of .50.

whose incomes flourished in the 1980s and '90s expressed more conservative economic views than those whose incomes stagnated.³⁵ Insofar as the escalating inequality of the Reagan era generated concerns about big business, the rich, and the “free market,” those concerns were concentrated among people with direct experience of being on the losing side of economic change.

Our analyses also produced some suggestive, though less consistent, evidence that escalating economic inequality itself may have affected the economic views of the Jennings survey respondents. Increases in local inequality (as measured by changes in state-level Gini coefficients between 1982 and 1997) were strongly associated with increases in support for labor unions vis-à-vis big business and with increases in support for government ensuring jobs and living standards.³⁶ The statistical results imply that the increase in state-level inequality experienced by a typical Jennings respondent over this 15-year period increased her relative enthusiasm for labor unions over big business by 11 points and increased her support for government ensuring

³⁵ Table 5.3, columns 3 and 4. Since the “free market” item was not included in previous waves of the Jennings survey, our analysis does not include a lagged value among the explanatory variables. Allowing for that fact by adding *levels* of family income and state economic inequality in 1982 as additional explanatory factors produces a slightly larger estimated effect of *changes* in income on support for the free market, .0584 (with a standard error of .0291).

³⁶ Since changing Gini coefficients are measured at the level of states their distribution is quite lumpy, with the eight most common values accounting for almost 40% of the weighted observations. Thus, it is particularly difficult to rule out the possibility that our parameter estimates reflect the impact of other relevant characteristics of states which happen to be correlated with changes in economic inequality. We return to this inferential problem in our subsequent discussion of partisan change. In a subsequent iteration of this analysis we hope to shed additional light on the impact of local economic conditions by drawing on more detailed data on inequality and economic mobility in 741 commuting zones, albeit for a cohort corresponding more closely to the *children* of our respondents than to the respondents themselves (Chetty et al. 2014).

jobs and living standards by almost 8 points—both substantial effects.³⁷

The association between increases in local inequality in the 1980s and '90s and more liberal opinions also appears in statistical analyses of social attitudes. People in states experiencing escalating economic inequality became more enthusiastic about government aid to minority groups, less warm toward the military, and (probably) stronger in support of an equal role for women.³⁸ However, *personal* economic experiences seem not to have been consequential one way or the other—except perhaps on the issue of women's appropriate social role, where upwardly mobile people seem (as in 1982) to have been liberalizing somewhat more rapidly than those whose family incomes were stagnant or declining.³⁹

Our analyses of changes in economic and social views between 1982 and 1997 show much less consistent shifts among economically privileged groups, including whites, males, the college-educated, and Republicans, than in the earlier era of stagflation. Between 1973 and 1982, most of these groups became significantly more

³⁷ Table 5.3, columns 1 and 2. Some of the estimated effects of changing state-level inequality on economic attitudes in Table 5.1 are also very large; but they are much less precisely estimated (due to the scant variation across states in the growth of inequality between 1973 and 1982) and of less substantive importance (due to the modest increase in overall inequality during this period). The standard deviation of the change-in-Gini measure doubled between the third and fourth waves of the Jennings survey (from .014 in 1982 to .029 in 1997), while the average increase in inequality more than tripled (from .025 in 1982 to .083 in 1997).

³⁸ Table 5.4, columns 1, 3, and 4.

³⁹ In both cases, the statistical estimates probably reflect a reciprocal relationship between attitudes about women's social roles and family incomes. The national female labor force participation rate increased from about 44% at the time of the 1973 survey to 53% at the time of the 1982 survey and about 60% at the time of the 1997 survey. It seems likely that women were more likely to go to work, increasing family income, in families with relatively liberal attitudes about women's social roles—and also that female labor force participation reduced support (among both women and men) for the notion that “women's place is in the home.”

conservative on most of the issues included in our analysis.⁴⁰ However, the pattern after 1982 is more varied, with some further shifts to the right (for example, by whites on the issue of government aid to minorities and men on the issue of government jobs) but also some significant reversals of the shifts observed in the previous decade (for example, in whites' relative enthusiasm for business vis-à-vis labor and men's willingness to curb the rights of the accused to reduce crime).

If the era of stagflation produced a "Revolt of the Haves" among upwardly mobile people, the subsequent 15 years of escalating economic inequality seem to have had a different and, in some ways, more subtle effect. On the whole, economic "winners" continued to pull away from economic "losers," at least with respect to core economic attitudes regarding the relationships between government and the "free market" and labor and business. However, the effect of these shifts was to halt, and in some cases at least partially reverse, the overall conservative trend of the preceding decade. Moreover, we have provided some suggestive evidence that the escalation of economic inequality itself contributed to stemming the conservative tide, as the Americans most directly exposed to the widening gap between rich and poor responded with increased support for labor unions and an active government role in addressing economic problems and ensuring living standards.

Economic Mobility and Partisan Change

While economic mobility over the course of their working lives had significant

⁴⁰ Whites moved to the right (relative to non-whites) on attitudes toward business vis-à-vis labor, government ensuring jobs and living standards, the influence of people on welfare, and government aid to minorities between 1973 and 1982. Men moved in the same direction (relative to women) on each of these items, although the magnitudes of the shifts were somewhat weaker for the items focusing squarely on government assistance. College education was associated with shifts to the right on all except government ensuring jobs and living standards. Republicans moved to the right (relative to Democrats) on all except attitudes toward business and labor.

effects on the Jennings respondents' economic and social attitudes, the impact of economic mobility on their partisan loyalties was even more dramatic. Paralleling our analyses of economic and social attitudes, we related *changes* in partisanship between survey waves to *changes* in income and (state-level) inequality, social characteristics, and previous partisanship. While our primary focus is on the impact of economic mobility and escalating inequality on shifts in partisanship, it is worth noting that these analyses demonstrate an impressive degree of *stability* in partisanship even over a tumultuous quarter-century, with 55 to 60% of people's partisanship at age 26 persisting to age 50. They also reflect substantial increases over this period in the political significance of three key social characteristics—race, sex, and biblical fundamentalism.⁴¹

Independent of these strong partisan cross-currents, the results of our analyses indicate that economic mobility and escalating inequality both produced substantial changes in the American political landscape over the last quarter of the 20th century. Just as conservative shifts in economic and social attitudes during the era of stagflation were concentrated among upwardly mobile people, our statistical analysis of shifts in partisanship provides strong evidence that Republican gains were concentrated among the economic “winners” of this era. Other things being equal, the expected difference in partisanship between a typical person with above-average income gains and a typical person with *below*-average income gains amounted to about 9 points on our 100-point partisanship scale. *Average* income growth (about \$17,300 in 2017 dollars) was associated with a 1.4-point increase in Republican partisanship, accounting for about one-third of the 3.8-point overall increase in Republican

⁴¹ Carmines and Stimson (1989); Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999); Layman (1997); Ammann (2014).

partisanship over this nine-year period.⁴²

A parallel analysis of shifts in partisanship between 1982 and 1997 likewise demonstrates that upward mobility in this period produced substantial increases in Republican identification. The expected difference in partisanship between a typical person with above-average income growth and an otherwise similar person with below-average income growth was 5.9 points on the 100-point partisanship scale, while the real income growth experienced by an average Jennings respondent over these 15 years (\$33,100 in 2017 dollars) was associated with a 1.3-point increase in Republican partisanship (more than half of the 2.1-point overall increase in Republican partisanship for the sample as a whole in this period).⁴³

Finally, focusing on cumulative shifts in partisanship over the whole period from 1973 to 1997 we find that long-term upward mobility was strongly associated with Republican gains, with average real income growth (about \$50,000) accounting for a bit more than half of the 5.9-point cumulative net increase in Republican partisanship over this quarter-century. The expected difference in partisanship between a typical upwardly mobile 50-year-old and an otherwise similar but *downwardly* mobile 50-year-old amounted to more than 10 points on the 100-point partisanship scale.⁴⁴

The concentration of Republican gains among economic “winners” implied by these statistical analyses is confirmed by the simple tabulations presented in Figure 5.2 of changes in partisanship among people with varying economic experiences. For each pair of surveys (1973-1982, 1982-1997, and 1973-1997) we compare people whose real incomes declined, those whose real incomes increased by less than the sample average, and those whose real incomes increased by more than the sample

⁴² Table 5.5, column 1.

⁴³ Table 5.5, column 2.

⁴⁴ Table 5.5, column 3.

average. To avoid confounding economic and racial politics in these comparisons, we exclude non-whites from the tabulations.⁴⁵

***** Figure 5.2 *****

Whites with above-average income gains during the period of stagflation from 1973 to 1982 went from being mostly Democrats or Democratic leaners (by a sizeable 49-35% margin) in 1973 to being mostly Republicans or Republican leaners (by a 47-43% margin) by 1982. In stark contrast, the Democratic pluralities among those with less favorable economic experiences barely eroded. Similarly, whites with above-average income gains from 1982 to 1997 went from a bare 45-43% Republican plurality in 1982 to a substantial 55-40% Republican plurality in 1997, after a full term of Bill Clinton's Democratic presidency. Again, there was little or no erosion in the Democratic pluralities in partisanship among whites who suffered real income losses or below-average gains during this period. Indeed, whites whose real incomes declined over the entire quarter-century from 1973 to 1997 were still mostly Democrats (by a substantial 54-40% margin) at the end of that period, while those with above-average income gains were solidly (53-42%) Republican. It is as if these two groups of former classmates lived in separate worlds—one upwardly mobile and increasingly Republican, the other downwardly mobile and steadfastly Democratic.⁴⁶

Of course, people's *subjective* sense of social mobility might be more consequential politically than actual income gains or losses. An additional question in the 1997

⁴⁵ The raw sample sizes range from 159 to 203 for whites whose real incomes declined, from 128 to 220 for those with below-average income gains, and from 291 to 302 for those with above-average income gains. The comparisons exclude people whose income was missing in either of the relevant surveys (the vast majority of whom were not asked to report their incomes because they completed the survey by mail).

⁴⁶ People who experienced below-average income gains fell midway between income losers and above-average income gainers; 46% were Democrats and 44% Republicans.

Jennings survey asked whether respondents were better or worse off than their parents had been at the same age.⁴⁷ The right-most panel of Figure 5.2 compares changes in partisanship over the entire 32-year period from high school through late middle age for three groups—white respondents who said they were worse off than their parents (16%), those who said they were about as well off (36%), and those who said they were better off than their parents (47%).⁴⁸ The results of this comparison neatly bolster those based on actual income changes. The Democratic partisan plurality among white respondents who reported being worse off than their parents declined by less than four percentage points (from 57-35% in 1965 to 56-38% in 1997), while the corresponding shift among those who reported being about as well or better off than their parents was almost 30 percentage points (from a 52-32% Democratic plurality in 1965 to a 51-42% *Republican* plurality in 1997).

While income growth contributed significantly to the erosion of the Democratic Party's partisan advantage over the last quarter of the 20th century, that erosion may have been significantly offset by the impact of increasing economic inequality. All of our statistical analyses include changes in state-level economic inequality as factors predicting shifts in partisanship over this period. The results suggest no significant relationship between inequality and shifts in partisanship during the era of stagflation, but a strong relationship in the early stages of the New Gilded Age. They imply that if economic inequality had increased only half as fast as it actually did over this 15-year

⁴⁷ “Now, thinking about your parents when they were your age, do you think that their standard of living was better, about the same, or worse than yours is now?” The responses are plausibly related to our measures of social background and economic mobility: respondents with high *Family SES* and *School SES* were much more likely to say that their parents were better off, other things being equal, while affluent people and those with college educations were much more likely to say that their own standard of living was higher than their parents’.

⁴⁸ The raw sample sizes for these tabulations are 140, 300, and 412, respectively. Again, we exclude non-whites in order to avoid confounding the effects of race with those of subjective social mobility.

period (an increase in the average state Gini coefficient of .0417 rather than .0834), Republican partisanship would have increased by an additional 3.3 points—substantially more than the 1.3 points attributable to average real income growth over this period.⁴⁹

The corresponding estimate for the whole 24-year period from 1973 to 1997 is even larger, implying an expected difference in Republican partisanship between a Jennings respondent living in a state with slow-growing inequality (a change in Gini of .081 between 1973 and 1997) and one living in a state with fast-growing inequality (a change in Gini of .136) of 9.6 points.⁵⁰ We are reluctant to put too much stock in these estimates, since changes in Gini coefficients may be correlated with a wide variety of other politically relevant characteristics of states. Nonetheless, they provide suggestive evidence that escalating economic inequality significantly slowed the national shift toward the Republican Party among the Jennings respondents.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Table 5.5, column 2.

⁵⁰ Table 5.5, column 3.

⁵¹ The states with especially large increases in income inequality between 1973 and 1997 included Connecticut, New York, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New Jersey; those with especially small increases included Iowa, Mississippi, Maine, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Kentucky. One simple way to mitigate (though probably not eliminate) the impact of potential confounding factors in these analyses is to include indicators for states of residence at the beginning of each period; then the estimated effects of changes in state-level inequality are driven entirely by people who moved from slow-growing-inequality states to fast-growing-inequality states or vice versa. An ordinary regression analysis of this sort covering the period from 1973 to 1997 produced an estimated effect of changes in state-level inequality on shifts in partisanship of -53.7 (with a standard error of 47.9). A parallel analysis covering the period from 1982 to 1997 produced an estimated effect of -68.0 (with a standard error of 54.2). These estimates are unhappily imprecise; nevertheless, they add some credibility to our tentative conclusion that the escalating inequality of the New Gilded Age reduced Republican partisanship.

The Texture of Class Politics in Two Lives: Ron Sutton and Don Peyton

Many of the general patterns turned up in our statistical analyses of the political impact of economic mobility are embodied in the life of Ron Sutton, the rural southern Trump fan from the beginning of this chapter. But to see how economic experiences shaped Sutton's political life, it is helpful to juxtapose his experiences and views with those of his high school classmate Don Peyton. Peyton's father was a taxi driver, and his social background was typical of their community, which ranked among the poorest 10% in the Jennings sample. Sutton's family, on the other hand, was more prosperous than most of their neighbors—his father owned the local tire store. "He was middle income," Ron told us, "high-middle income for that county."⁵²

These differences in social background were dwarfed by the divergence in the two men's economic fortunes later in life, despite the fact that both remained not far from where they grew up. Sutton acquired his own tire store, and by 1973 his reported income was in the 99th percentile of his cohort, where it remained in 1982. He suffered an economic blow when the shuttering of the local manufacturing plant forced him to close his business. "I consider myself a very honest person, and when I went out of the tire business here due to that plant closing, I owed approximately \$200,000. And I paid every penny of it back that I owed. But that took me forever, you know. And the economic impact of that, you never overcome in your entire life." Nonetheless, his economic fortunes rebounded after he went to work for a major construction company, eventually working his way up to eastern regional manager. "I put 350,000 miles on Delta Airlines in one year," he recalled, "not counting the rest of

⁵² Data on family socio-economic status (based on income, education, and other factors) from the 1965 parental survey bear out Sutton's assessment. His family SES fell near the 75th percentile of the national distribution, far above most of his classmates but well below the most privileged respondent in the school. Peyton's family SES fell in the bottom 10% of the national sample, but was not far below average among his classmates.

them.” When we met him and his wife they were retired, but owned and managed a vacation rental property just up the road from their lakeside home.

Peyton, on the other hand, built a rewarding but much less lucrative career in entertainment, parlaying a triumph in a regional talent contest into local celebrity as a singer and radio personality. He lives with his wife Brenda in a peaceful hollow surrounded by meadows, a modest property handed down through her family. His closest brush with national fame and fortune was a connection with a promoter who had hoped to book him on a major television show.

Peyton: Lawrence Welk said, ‘We’re not doing country music right now, but we sure do like his sound, stay in touch with us.’ [The promoter] was contacting various people for me to get on TV and we were getting ready to make a move and he fell dead of a heart attack on the street, just fell dead right then, and everything just ground to a halt, it just stopped. I’ve rationalized and I’ve said, ‘well, if I had made it back then and been a star and been a hit, I would never have met Brenda.’

The Peytons’ income grew steadily from 1973 to 1982 to 1997, in part due to Brenda’s work as a teacher; but they were never as well off as most of their fellow Jennings panelists. Don didn’t seem to mind that fact. His life revolved around his music, his ties to the community, and his church. “I’ve seen what happens to stars when they make a lot of money and they’re on the road I do the best I can and rest the next day. Sometimes I’ll miss church on Sunday because I just have no legs under me. I put a lot into my music, I put a lot into it.”

The views about politics and government expressed by Sutton and Peyton in response to the Jennings surveys were generally typical of those expressed by others in similar economic circumstances. Sutton, like many of his upwardly mobile peers, gravitated from calling himself a strong Democrat in 1965 to leaning Republican in 1982 and strongly identifying with the Republican Party by 1997. Peyton, on the other

hand, has remained a committed Democrat throughout his life. In responding to the Jennings surveys, he favored increasing government spending and services, while Sutton strongly favored *cuts* in spending and services and was strongly opposed to government guaranteeing jobs and living standards.

In response to a question in the 1997 survey, Peyton agreed that “We need a strong government to handle today’s complex economic problems,” while Sutton said that “The free market can handle these problems without government being involved.” Peyton also strongly agreed that “One should always find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself,” and strongly *disagreed* that “It is best not to get too involved in taking care of other people’s needs”; Sutton “somewhat agreed” with both statements.

In 1973 and again in 1982, Jennings’ respondents were asked whether people on welfare had “too much influence in American life and politics.” Sutton was among the 12% of respondents who said yes both times, while Peyton was among the 17% who said both times that people on welfare had too *little* influence.

When we talked to both men decades later, neither seemed to have changed his views significantly. For example, Sutton expressed admiration for the people he knew growing up in his rural community: “They were hard-working people, and the government didn’t subsidize them. They didn’t have a choice. They had a job. They had an opportunity to have a job, so therefore they had one, ’cause that’s the only way they were gonna survive. They didn’t know what food stamps or welfare was.”

Sutton’s disdain for government handouts went hand in hand with a disdain for government programs and personnel. “Every social program there is, is a failure. I mean, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure that out. Social security, right now you can draw it, but it’s broke. Every social ... it just don’t work. The government cannot operate anything. ... The government can’t run anything right.” Reflecting on his own

experience as a government contractor, he added, “There were always extra costs. Well, when you went in at the end of the contract to negotiate the settlement on these costs, if you could convince the guy that you were talking to, that could write the check for it, that it wasn’t his fault, that it was somebody else’s, man, he paid just like that.”

Peyton, too, was concerned about potential abuse of government programs, but committed nonetheless to making them work. “We’ve got to lift up the downtrodden,” he told us. “We’ve got to help the folks that don’t have the same opportunities we do. ... Now, I do realize that some of the programs, people do abuse them. There are a lot of people on welfare that don’t need to be. You just have to try to square that away and make sure that they need to be. I don’t mind helping people.”

The two men’s very different economic lives seemed to be reflected in their perspectives on the government shutdown roiling the country when we spoke with them. President Trump had forced the closure of government agencies in an attempt to get Congress to fund his proposed border wall. Peyton told us, “our government is not working right now and federal employees are laid off and they just went through Christmas and there’s no check there right now.” He added, referring to Trump, “He’s very cavalier about that and that makes me really angry, that he’s cavalier with other people’s paychecks. They got kids, they got school, they’ve got to buy food and they need jobs that pay.”

Sutton expressed a very different view—a businessman’s view?—of the federal workers’ plight, saying, “they’re gonna get paid. And if you are not financially stable enough to go to a bank anywhere and say, ‘Hey, I’m not laid off, but I’m not working right now because of the government shutdown. I need to borrow \$5,000 to get me by ’til I get paid,’ there’s not a banker in the world that wouldn’t loan you the money if you had any type of [credit]. ... So, hey, I’d like for you to hand me a four-week paid vacation. Think about it. That’s what they’re getting. Or six or eight or ten or

whatever.”

Near the end of our interviews, we asked both men what advice or wisdom they wished they could give to the whole country. Their responses neatly encapsulated the differences we observed in their political views and those of their respective classes. Sutton, the successful businessman, said, “Be a productive American citizen. Don’t live off somebody else, or the government. Go for it yourself.” The laid-back, sociable Peyton’s response was in a different key: “Have faith, keep your faith that things will get better and do your part. Work hard to try to help things be better, starting out in your community Just be nice to folks and do the right thing and the rest will take care of itself.”

Conclusion

Momentous changes in the national economy since the mid-20th century have surely impacted American politics, but how? The Jennings data provide an invaluable record of the views of a pivotal cohort of people as they experienced these economic changes over the course of their adult lives. Their shifting economic, social, and partisan attitudes bear clear marks of their economic experiences.

Overall, this cohort became more conservative and more Republican between 1965 and 1997, with most of this shift occurring in the era of stagflation between 1973 and 1982. Contrary to many expectations, it was not the economic “losers” in this era who turned away from government intervention, soured in their attitudes toward labor unions, and increasingly came to think of themselves as Republicans rather than Democrats. Instead, the increasing conservatism of this cohort was driven by people who experienced above-average income *gains*. There were some important exceptions to this shift toward conservatism among the upwardly mobile; for example, we find little effect of income growth on attitudes toward the military or views about the appropriate social role of women. However, those who prospered during the economic

challenges of the 1970s expressed growing skepticism about the role of government in ensuring economic security, a preference for big business over labor, and concerns about the political influence of welfare recipients.

As the New Gilded Age set in between 1982 and 1997 it became increasingly clear that economic growth was primarily benefiting those who were already well-off. Increases in local economic inequality probably contributed to slowing and, in some cases, slightly reversing the conservative trends observed during the preceding era of stagflation. However, the shift toward the Republican Party among white Americans continued—and once again, it was the “winners” in the new economy rather than the “losers” who disproportionately swelled the Republican ranks.

We began this chapter with Donald Trump, whose unexpected election has frequently been attributed to “the anger of a declining middle class” and “a stunning loss of relative status over the past 40 years” among “Trump’s white working class supporters.” On its face, that interpretation of the 2016 election outcome presents a stark contrast to our results, which demonstrate that significant conservative shifts in opinion and Republican gains in partisanship in the last quarter of the 20th century were strongly concentrated among *upwardly* mobile people.

Perhaps the stark contrast is more apparent than real, since subsequent analysis of voting behavior in the 2016 election has indicated that “about two thirds of Trump supporters came from the better-off half” of the electorate. Nonetheless, the notion that Republicans appeal to the hard-hit (white) working class has become so familiar in popular political discourse that our results may seem puzzling rather than predictable, as they would have to previous generations of scholars of class politics.⁵³

Clearly, Republicans have succeeded in appealing to *some* downwardly mobile

⁵³ Sanders (2016); Edsall (2016). Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, “It’s time to bust the myth: Most Trump voters were not working class.” *Washington Post* Monkey Cage, June 5, 2017.

working-class people. Research on the political attitudes of working-class whites in rural communities in Wisconsin and elsewhere portrays people who are mostly not among the economic “winners” of the New Gilded Age. Indeed, social and economic resentments grounded in a sense of having been left behind seem to be central elements of their political identities. And, unlike the downwardly mobile people in the Jennings study, they have translated their grievances into increasing support for conservative policies and Republican candidates.⁵⁴

One possible explanation for this fact is simply that times have changed. Two additional decades of slow economic growth and escalating inequality may have created new strains of discontent among the people Robert Wuthnow referred to as “The Left Behind,” and thus new opportunities to mobilize that discontent for political gain. The contemporary Republican Party, especially under Donald Trump, has appealed to people who have experienced downward economic mobility, blaming their perceived lack of cultural and economic status on immigrants, Muslims, government workers, leftist urban elites, and other out-groups. Negative feelings toward these groups and related concerns about waning respect for the American flag, the English language, and hard work play a key role in defining the cultural conservatism that unites the contemporary Republican rank and file.⁵⁵

It is worth noting that these out-groups and cultural concerns are mostly only tangentially connected to concrete economic well-being. While scapegoating and ethnic nationalism may be especially appealing to people under economic pressure, they have been broadly successful in many times and places. Thus, the “resentment” and “rage” of the white “working class” may turn out, upon closer inspection, to have rather little

⁵⁴ Katherine J. Cramer, “For years, I’ve been watching anti-elite fury build in Wisconsin. Then came Trump.” *Vox*, November 16, 2016. Cramer (2016). Wuthnow (2018).

⁵⁵ Wuthnow (2018). Cramer (2016). Bartels (2018).

to do with economic grievances of the sort measured by declines in real income, even over decades, and much more to do with a social and historical context in which a significant fraction of citizens perceive significant threats to their communities and their cherished ways of life.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Cramer (2016); Wuthnow (2018). Craig and Richeson (2014).

Table 5.1: Economic Attitudes, 1982

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).
Missing data indicators for income are included but not shown.

| | (1) Labor versus big business feeling thermometers | (2) Government ensure jobs and living standards | (3) Cut government spending and services | (4) People on welfare have too much influence |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Δ Family income (\$1000s, 1973-1982) | -.0386 (.0229) | -.0548 (.0199) | .0861 (.0254) | .0860 (.0320) |
| Δ State inequality (Gini, 1973-1982) | -98.7 (119.7) | -58.2 (104.1) | 97.6 (130.6) | 210.8 (167.9) |
| College (years) | -1.917 (.465) | -.031 (.415) | .223 (.520) | 1.627 (.683) |
| Non-white | 8.85 (3.05) | 10.75 (2.78) | -11.95 (3.34) | -10.23 (4.50) |
| Female | 6.23 (1.75) | 3.02 (1.52) | -8.34 (1.94) | -9.03 (2.44) |
| South (1965) | .25 (2.33) | .47 (2.01) | 2.23 (2.54) | -8.34 (3.22) |
| Biblical faith (1973) | .67 (5.46) | 3.52 (4.79) | 7.50 (6.09) | 15.84 (7.62) |
| Republican partisanship (1973) | -.73 (3.93) | -15.93 (3.38) | 21.75 (4.13) | 12.42 (5.23) |
| Lagged dependent variable (1973) | 1.005 (.073) | .378 (.045) | --- | .612 (.072) |
| Intercept | -2.45 (5.14) | 23.32 (5.33) | 32.24 (5.61) | -1.25 (7.82) |
| Standard error of regression | 25.44 | 21.73 | 28.12 | 35.09 |
| Adjusted R ² | .36 | .23 | .12 | .25 |
| N | 908 | 871 | 892 | 890 |

Table 5.2: Social Attitudes, 1982

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).
Missing data indicators for income are included but not shown.

| | (1) Government should help minorities | (2) Risk violating rights to reduce crime | (3) Military feeling thermometer | (4) Women should have an equal role |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Δ Family income (\$1000s, 1973-1982) | -.0486 (.0205) | .0273 (.0230) | .0085 (.0161) | .0203 (.0203) |
| Δ State inequality (Gini, 1973-1982) | -49.9 (110.9) | 78.3 (119.0) | 57.9 (83.1) | 234.7 (104.2) |
| College (years) | 1.236 (.449) | -1.053 (.485) | -1.000 (.362) | -.601 (.451) |
| Non-white | 13.47 (2.83) | -2.88 (3.07) | 3.96 (2.12) | 3.83 (2.68) |
| Female | 1.54 (1.58) | .75 (1.74) | -5.10 (1.23) | 1.15 (1.55) |
| South (1965) | -.64 (2.08) | -1.61 (2.32) | 2.44 (1.64) | -4.57 (2.02) |
| Biblical fundamentalism (1973) | 1.88 (5.05) | .61 (5.50) | 1.20 (4.24) | -16.09 (5.28) |
| Republican partisanship (1973) | -5.43 (3.40) | 7.52 (3.73) | 2.83 (2.61) | .41 (3.29) |
| Lagged dependent variable (1973) | .456 (.045) | .394 (.048) | .534 (.046) | .507 (.046) |
| Intercept | 16.48 (5.68) | 37.82 (5.28) | 33.37 (3.75) | 53.76 (6.29) |
| Standard error of regression | 22.83 | 25.17 | 18.05 | 22.47 |
| Adjusted R ² | .27 | .16 | .30 | .29 |
| N | 902 | 895 | 926 | 917 |

Table 5.3: Economic Attitudes, 1997

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).
Missing data indicators for income are included but not shown.

| | (1) Labor versus big business feeling thermometers | (2) Government ensure jobs and living standards | (3) Free market can handle economic problems | (4) Rich people have too much influence |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Δ Family income (\$1000s, 1982-1997) | -.0225 (.0132) | -.0298 (.0120) | .0448 (.0273) | -.0257 (.0119) |
| Δ State inequality (Gini, 1982-1997) | 136.9 (41.8) | 93.1 (37.4) | -104.6 (86.0) | 10.4 (36.5) |
| College (years) | -.585 (.416) | -.152 (.364) | -.254 (.838) | .639 (.366) |
| Non-white | -5.69 (2.65) | -3.15 (2.44) | -18.61 (5.54) | 2.51 (2.33) |
| Female | -.15 (1.51) | 2.94 (1.36) | -17.75 (3.132) | .82 (1.35) |
| South (1965) | .80 (2.02) | -.22 (1.83) | -1.39 (4.17) | -.63 (1.77) |
| Biblical fundamentalism (1982) | -7.82 (4.71) | -10.58 (4.28) | -8.61 (9.74) | -7.36 (4.19) |
| Republican partisanship (1982) | 1.84 (3.80) | -5.01 (3.19) | 43.13 (6.35) | 2.40 (2.87) |
| Lagged dependent variable (1982) | .763 (.048) | .525 (.052) | --- | .674 (.073) |
| Intercept | -1.05 (5.60) | 20.49 (5.24) | 49.44 (11.52) | 31.32 (8.36) |
| Standard error of regression | 21.99 | 19.60 | 45.81 | 19.41 |
| Adjusted R ² | .44 | .25 | .14 | .18 |
| N | 907 | 884 | 915 | 916 |

Table 5.4: Social Attitudes, 1997

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).
Missing data indicators for income are included but not shown.

| | (1) Government should help minorities | (2) Risk violating rights to reduce crime | (3) Military feeling thermometer | (4) Women should have an equal role |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Δ Family income (\$1000s, 1982-1997) | -.0008 (.0125) | .0119 (.0141) | .0038 (.0093) | .0171 (.0103) |
| Δ State inequality (Gini, 1982-1997) | 75.8 (39.1) | -9.6 (44.6) | -87.0 (28.9) | 53.4 (32.1) |
| College (years) | .326 (.396) | -.112 (.443) | .350 (.302) | .300 (.321) |
| Non-white | 6.05 (2.64) | -3.11 (2.90) | -.36 (1.86) | 2.45 (2.07) |
| Female | 1.08 (1.43) | 3.41 (1.62) | -3.24 (1.06) | -1.62 (1.18) |
| South (1965) | .18 (1.91) | -2.67 (2.17) | -.34 (1.43) | 3.53 (1.57) |
| Biblical fundamentalism (1982) | -4.06 (4.46) | 16.48 (5.07) | 2.71 (3.47) | 3.83 (4.65) |
| Republican partisanship (1982) | -8.05 (3.12) | -8.99 (3.41) | -2.78 (2.22) | -6.65 (2.38) |
| Lagged dependent variable (1982) | .531 (.046) | .679 (.062) | .730 (.045) | .784 (.062) |
| Intercept | 18.98 (5.66) | 9.56 (6.76) | 29.66 (4.37) | 15.63 (8.31) |
| Standard error of regression | 20.87 | 23.46 | 15.43 | 17.13 |
| Adjusted R ² | .31 | .26 | .42 | .42 |
| N | 917 | 903 | 922 | 917 |

Table 5.5: Changes in Partisanship, 1973-1997

Errors-in-variables regression parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses).
Missing data indicators for income are included but not shown.

| | (1) Republican gains, 1973-1982 | (2) Republican gains, 1982-1997 | (3) Republican gains, 1973-1997 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Δ Family income (\$1000s) | .0787 (.0186) | .0403 (.0143) | .0613 (.0164) |
| Δ State inequality (Gini) | 39.4 (96.4) | -80.2 (44.9) | -172.8 (71.0) |
| College (years) | -.154 (.381) | .072 (.437) | -.063 (.507) |
| Non-white | -10.35 (2.50) | -17.68 (2.88) | -23.59 (3.20) |
| Female | -4.95 (1.42) | -5.47 (1.63) | -9.38 (1.86) |
| South (1965) | -4.13 (1.88) | 2.00 (2.18) | -2.00 (2.50) |
| Biblical fundamentalism | .25 (4.46) | 18.18 (5.08) | 19.04 (5.85) |
| Lagged partisanship | .768 (.030) | .739 (.033) | .576 (.040) |
| Intercept | 15.00 (4.13) | 9.85 (6.01) | 32.94 (9.39) |
| Standard error of regression | 20.65 | 23.89 | 27.10 |
| Adjusted R ² | .53 | .50 | .36 |
| <i>N</i> | 900 | 913 | 912 |

Figure 5.1: The Impact of Economic Mobility on Economic Attitudes

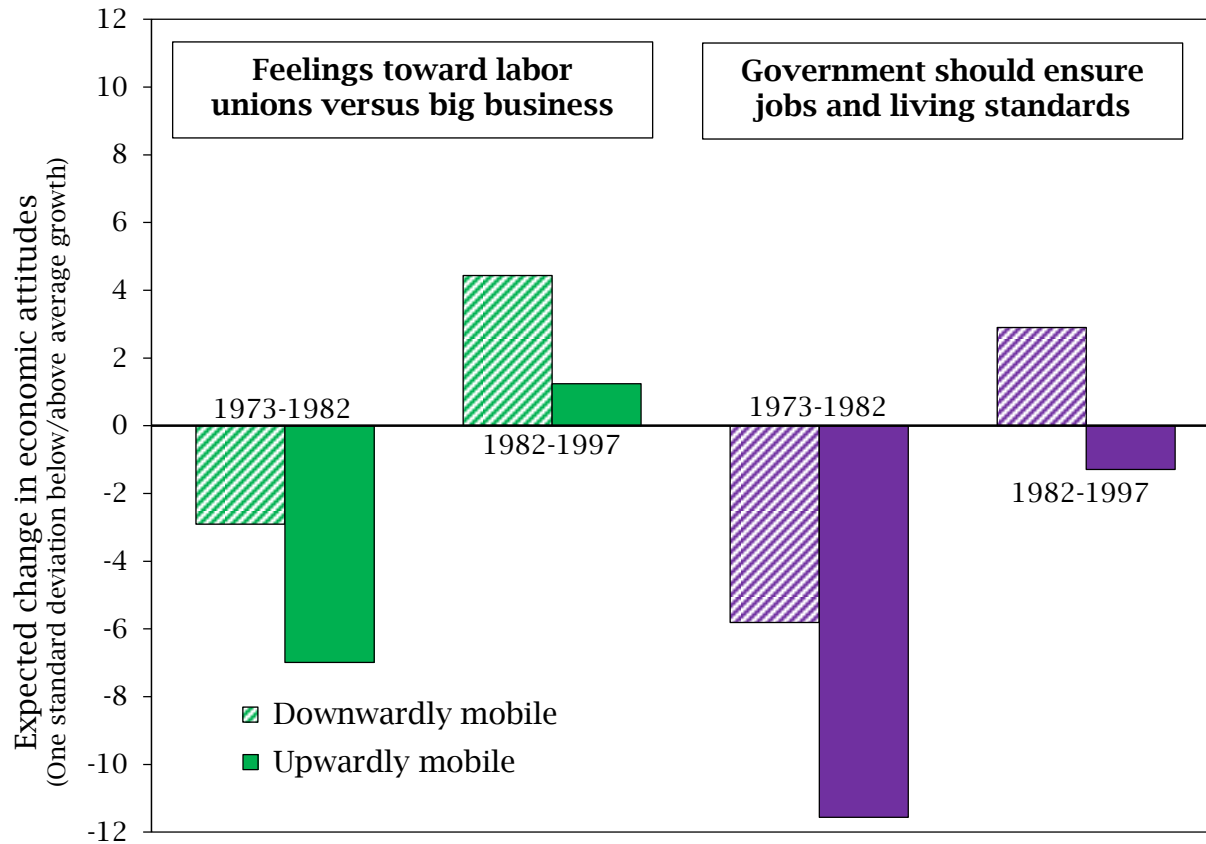


Figure 5.2: Republican Gains by Income Growth and Subjective Mobility (Whites Only)

