

PERSONAL ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

by

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ABSTRACT

While plenty of evidence suggests prospective and retrospective sociotropic economic voting happens in the electorate, it is hard to find evidence that supports prospective economic voting based on personal economic forecasts. Furthermore, it has been argued that the Republican Party is able to attract poor and working class individuals because of their conservative position on social issues. This research looks at the relationship between pocketbook prospective economic beliefs and ideological sentiments. I find that individuals who are optimistic about their personal economic future are more likely to be conservative, and that this personal optimism has a greater impact on ideology than current income. This finding suggests that personal economic perspectives influence an individual's ideological position, and that poor and working class individuals may support the Republican Party for economic reasons.

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INTRODUCTION

It has long been thought that the Democratic Party is the labor party of the United States (Gelman, Kenworthy, & Su 2010). However, recent work that examines the responsiveness of elected officials demonstrates that both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party neglect the needs of the poor, in favor of responding to wealthy constituents (Gilens 2012). While the Democratic Party becomes more responsive to the wealthy, the Republican Party actually broadens their responsiveness to the middle class (Rigby and Wright 2013). Nevertheless, when economic classes show divergent policy preferences, both parties tend to side with the wealthy. The reason for this phenomenon is usually attributed to the increasing cost of campaigns and the fact that both parties rely on the wealthy for campaign contributions.

The current level of income inequality in the United States is at a level not seen since before the Great Depression (Bartels 2008). The Great Recession of 2008 did very little to correct this trend and some think that the only way to correct the excesses at the top is another economic collapse like that seen during the 1930s (Hartmann 2013), otherwise politicians will have little reason to restrain the individuals that are most essential to their capture of power. It is often true that if a candidate outspends their opponent in an election they will win. Another reality that leads to unequal representation is that poor people are less likely to vote than the wealthy. Those from lower economic classes may vote at lower rates than the wealthy because they are not able to take time off of work as easily, because they are less interested in politics, or, perhaps most

importantly, because they feel like voting is a waste of time because they cannot discern real differences between the competing parties. Rigby and Wright (2013) argue that campaign platforms leave out issues that are of most concern to the poor. If both party's candidates exclude the concerns of the poor and the working class from their campaign promises, there is little reason for those groups to vote.

However, vast numbers of Americans, both poor and wealthy, do vote in elections, and identify with parties and political ideologies. It is vital to understand what drives these voting decisions, as well as an individual's ideological development. A common theme in American politics is that the poor and working class are largely ignored by both major parties. One of the possible reasons for this is that the poor tend to show larger ideological and partisan variation than the wealthy. In this study, I examine the extent to which individuals, especially the poor and working class, use their own prospective economic evaluations to inform their ideological and partisan attachments. Specifically, I examine the extent to which voter ideology is predicted by prospective personal economic concerns, compared to other considerations, such as their current economic status.

The reason that poor or working class voters may be more optimistic about their economic future is that, instead of seeing a systemic hindrance to their economic success, they look inward and perceive their economic future as being mostly within their own control. On the other hand, poor and working class individuals may be pessimistic about their economic futures based on economic disadvantages that they perceive as systemic. What is suggested here is that poor and working class individuals who are optimistic about their own future are more likely to profess a conservative ideology, and support

conservative political candidates. Given the Republican Party's platform supporting lower taxes and a reduced or eliminated social safety net, it would seem necessary for lower income individuals to be optimistic about their economic future when voting for Republican candidates, provided their decisions are based at least in part on economics. This prediction presupposes that the idea of the Democrats being the party of the poor and working class is ubiquitous in the population, an assumption that, while generally supported, cannot be tested in the current study.

Gomez and Wilson (2001) found that people with more political knowledge were more likely to blame the federal government for changes in their personal economic welfare, even when controlling for party differences. Their study did show retrospective pocketbook voting among the more politically sophisticated. My study is likewise concerned with pocketbook voting, but instead of being concerned with retrospective evaluations I want to focus on prospective economic beliefs. While there is little evidence to suggest prospective voting overall occurs in the electorate, I argue that individual-level prospective economic voting does occur among individuals. Furthermore, Individuals who are more optimistic about their own economic future are more likely to profess a conservative ideology, and identify as a Republican.

This study addresses important concerns about the effect of economic inequality on the quality of democracy. It is important to understand what might be hindering political action to reverse the current trends of grotesque excess at the top. The main goal of this paper is to try and understand a facet of the economic inequality problem in more detail. In order to achieve this, I employed a survey that asks respondents about their beliefs towards their future economic wellbeing. It was necessary to use my own data

collection process because I believe people's prospective economic beliefs are one of the causes of poor and working class dispersion between political parties, and because current techniques (e.g. the American National Election Studies survey) do not provide the means to or are inadequate for measuring prospective personal economic beliefs. Also, the literature is scarce on personal optimism as it relates to ideology, and the research that does exist on economic assessments in the electorate focuses mainly on sociotropic evaluations rather than personal ones.

THEORY

Economic inequality has been increasing in the United States since the 1970s, and there is reason to be concerned with the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor in society. Boix (2003) suggests that democracy prevails when higher levels of economic equality are present. The link between the economic and the political spheres is undeniable, and as Downs (1957) noticed, governments dominate the economic scene. Governments determine the individuals that will receive the benefits that come from the excesses of labor and the ever-efficient means of production. It becomes important, then, to determine the governmental and societal causes, consequences, and remedies to increasing economic inequality if a relatively high level of democracy is a normative goal. I argue that economic inequality is brought about by a perceptual problem: those who perceive the ability to improve their economic situation will be more likely to identify as more conservative than those who do not perceive such ability. Assuming that conservative individuals are less likely to believe in redistributive tax policies means that poor and working class conservatives may vote against their own economic welfare. Conservative politicians are then able to avoid being held accountable by constituents when they experience economic hardships, because those constituents do not believe it is the government's responsibility to regulate markets or inequality.

A major reason that politicians are more accountable to wealthier individuals in society is because they are much more likely to participate in the political process (Erikson 2015). The poor in society are much less likely to vote or even pay attention to

relevant information beyond party identification in order to rationally choose a candidate. For this reason, Democrats and Republicans usually do not pay attention to the concerns of the poor. By looking at policy proposals, Gilens (2012) found that when the affluent in society want a policy outcome that is opposed by the less well-off, the rich tend to get the policy outcome they desire.

Not only are the wealthy in society more likely to vote, but they are also more likely to donate to campaigns. The cost of campaigns in the United States has grown faster than healthcare, income, and the nation's GDP (TIME 2016). Since Republicans more generally have and have had the support of the wealthiest in society it is easier for them to fund their campaigns. As a response, the Democrats have moved to be more fiscally conservative in order to gain the support of wealthier voters and donors (Frank 2004).

Gelman, Kenworthy, and Su (2010) looked at partisan voting in the United States and found that the income inequality trends in the nation, as a whole, are similar to the rich-poor gap in partisan voting. When looking at states individually, however, it is evident that wealthier states are voting for Democrats. Scholars argue that the rich in Democratic states vote based on social issues, just like the poor in Republican states vote based on social issues. The wealthy in both types of states agree with the poor in these states on social issues, but when the poor disagree with the economic concerns of the wealthy they are likely to be left unrepresented by government (Gelman, Kenworthy & Su 2010). This gives the appearance that class voting does not exist because wealthy individuals are voting Democrat.

Others have agreed that class voting is still prominent in western societies (Van Der Waal, Achterberg & Houtman 2007). The appearance of the decline is due to cultural capital that is brought about by education. Education helps to instill democratic values and social liberalism while also affording a higher income indicative of the middle class. Van Der Waal, Achterberg, and Houtman (2007) also found that working class individuals have increasingly been voting for rightist parties based on social issues. They attribute the increase in wealthy individuals voting Democrat to an increase in education and the poor voting Republican because of social conservatism. In sum, they find that the rich and less educated vote for rightist parties while the well-educated and poor vote for leftist parties. This produces a lack of options for those who are fiscally liberal, in that neither of the two parties offer an economic structure that benefits those who have not fared well economically.

Frank (2004) suggests that the reason lower income individuals vote Republican is because of their conservative stance on social issues like gay marriage. Furthermore, he puts forward the idea that the Democratic Party is leaving behind blue-collar voters in order to sway white-collar professionals by more conservative economic principles. In response to this, Bartels (2006) finds that the Democratic Party is still viewed by white working-class voters as being fiscally liberal and that cultural issues do not outweigh economic ones among white working class voters. Furthermore, he suggests that the reason that more poor and working class people are voting Republican is because of the South turning Republican after the Civil Rights Movement.

Conventional wisdom has traditionally assumed that the Democratic party is more representative of the poor and working class. However, some scholars argue (Bartels

2008; Rigby & Wright 2013) that elected officials in both parties are generally unresponsive to low income citizens. Democrats and Republicans do not represent the poor or middle class in policy decisions if the wealthy disapprove of it (Erikson 2015; Gilens 2012). Rigby and Wright (2013) note that Democrats are mostly responsive to the wealthy, while Republicans respond to the wealthy and middle class. On the other hand, Bartels (2008) finds that poor and middle class families have improved economic outcomes under Democratic presidents, but could not find the same under Republican administrations. Still, neither party seems to explicitly represent the needs of the poor over either the middle or wealthy class. Rigby and Wright (2013) suggest that the reason Democrats are responding to the wealthy more is because they have traditionally not been in their base and since they need to raise large amounts of money for campaigns they must respond to the demands of the wealthiest in society. What this paper suggests is that the dispersion of poor and working class between the two major parties weakens their political power on a class level, and one of the reason that poor working class conservatives vote Republican is because they believe they will have future economic success.

Radical right-wing parties may also be a cause and consequence of economic inequality. Using analysis from Western European countries Han (2016) suggests that people of the lower class may want to distance themselves from minorities of that same group and so they attach themselves to national identities. The idea is that the stigma of lower class status increases as economic inequality increases. Individuals of the majority race may feel that it is better to associate themselves with that national identity and not group themselves in with similar class minorities. This divides those in the lower class

and causes greater divisions in the working class than exists in the upper class. Instead of questioning the economic structure of society, those in the dominant group of the lower class try to raise their status by lowering the status of the minorities in their same class.

Research looking at attitudes toward immigration (Citrin et al. 1997) has found that personal economic experiences do not factor into an individual's position on immigration, but their views about the economy in general do. The theory is that people may be looking at what is happening around them to determine where they stand on issues. For example, individuals may hear about the increased tax burden brought about by immigration and form a restrictionist opinion regardless of whether or not they have experienced a tax increase themselves. In other words, sociotropic evaluations of the economy may lead to more conservative political attitudes. However, there should be factors outside of the sociotropic ones impacting political decision making, and I argue that personal prospective economic evaluations, when properly measured, will influence political ideology and partisanship.

A different study on immigration by Hajnal and Rivera (2014) found that, while partisan attachment is usually a deeply held aspect of an individual's identity, feelings about immigration may be able to pull individuals away from the Democratic Party. White individuals that express reservations about immigration are much more likely to vote Republican, and Latino attachment to the Democrats could be why there appears to be a white defection from the Democratic Party (Hajnal & Rivera 2014). Additionally, Republicans have used the immigration issue to try and move white voters away from Democrats (Robinson et al. 2015). In other words, an individual's ideology may be moved by racial and immigration sentiments.

Starks (2003) states that the legitimation of the economic structure is dependent on those who are successful in it. This may lead those who have done well under the current system to be apprehensive to see any real change in fear that they may be left at a disadvantage. Starks (2003) also found that workers are becoming less optimistic about their ability to achieve the American Dream, and that individual's perception of economic opportunity was based not only on how those around them were doing financially, but also on their own economic well-being. This study also argues that people are evaluating their personal economic wellbeing, but in a prospective way. What it seeks to find is whether or not conservative voters are more optimistic about their economic futures and anticipates that they will be. The logic behind this is that poor and working class individuals who are conservative would arguably need to be optimistic about their economic future in order to reconcile their opposition to redistributive tax policy and their current economic situation.

Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) discuss sociotropic voters and how they look at the economy as a whole and not their own personal economic experience. They suggest that sociotropic voters punish and reward candidates based upon their perceived handling of the nation's economic issues. Personal economic experience is turned inwards, but the performance of the economy as a whole is the responsibility of the government. Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) state that "Personal economic grievances do not appear to influence partisan identification, thereby foreclosing one indirect route by which pocketbook interests might have impinged on political preferences. Assessments of national economic conditions, on the other hand, were intertwined with partisanship, in particular strength of partisanship" (152). I predict that political ideology is influenced not only by

the nation's economic situation, but also by prospective personal economic forecasts, and that poor and working class individuals who support Republicans or conservatives believe that their personal economic future will get better. Furthermore, I argue that the inward focus of personal economic hardships is more true of poor and working class conservatives than it is of poor and working class liberals, and that lower income liberals are more likely to see their personal economic situation as being at least partly systemic.

Hypothesis: Political ideology is influenced by prospective economic wellbeing, and those that believe their economic future will get better are more likely to be more conservative.

As mentioned before, those who are of a lower income would benefit most from a strong social safety net and more redistributive tax policies in general. Considering this fact, some would argue that it is irrational for low income individuals to support conservative politicians. However, I argue that low income individuals may believe they are behaving rationally; if they are optimistic about their economic future, they can justify voting for conservative candidates for economic reasons. It might be that low income conservatives are voting for the Republican Party based on their stance towards social issues, and the optimism they have about their personal economic welfare allows them to rationalize their opposition to redistributive tax policies. On the other hand, it may be that the Republican Party is able to persuade poor individuals to be economically optimistic. While I do believe that the Republican Party is very effective at framing issues, it seems that economic optimism is more immutable than other beliefs.

Furthermore, the conservative belief is that government should stay out of the market and

this suggests that it is not systemic attributes but personal ones that enable personal economic success for conservatives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test my hypothesis, I conducted a survey of 295 American citizens over the age of 18 and asked participants a range of questions including; demographics, ideology, economic perspective, racial feelings and social attitudes. I recruited subjects through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. Mechanical Turk was used, in part, because it has been found by Clifford, Jewell and Waggoner (2015) to be a valid recruitment method for psychological research on political ideology. The survey was released and completed on January 13th 2017 and the participants were paid 50 cents for the 3 to 5 minutes it took to complete the survey. Respondents who declined to answer the ideology question were excluded from the analysis, leaving a total of 292 respondents.

The average age of the participants was approximately 36 years of age. The average household income was just over \$50,000 a year, with a modal value between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year. The sample was approximately 81 percent white. 54.8 percent of respondents considered themselves to be between very liberal and somewhat liberal, 14.4 percent were moderates and 38.8 percent of subjects considered themselves to be between very and somewhat conservative. The sample was younger and more liberal than the population of the United States, which is common when using Mechanical Turk. Nevertheless, Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz (2012) found that Mechanical Turk samples represented the U.S. population better than in-person convenience samples.

Given the debate between economic and social causes of lower income individuals, it is important to include some social control variables in this model. I use

the issue of birth control within the context of religion in order to control for social influences on ideology. This allows me to isolate the effects of economic and social issues; I am able to control for current economic status and social issue stances, which allows me to isolate the effect of prospective economic evaluations on ideology and partisanship. I hypothesize that while controlling for social issues stances and current economic status, future beliefs about personal economic welfare will be a significant determinant of ideology.

Racial sentiment is not examined thoroughly in this study, but relevant research suggests that it is necessary to control for it. In order to do so, I ask respondents whether they believe a white person will lose out on an employment opportunity because a minority will get the job instead. While a negative stance on immigration is not the same as discrimination against minorities, I suggest that the question asked will control for both. Asking about jobs being taken away by minorities will get at both the immigration sentiment and the level of discrimination an individual has through an economic lens.

The initial ordinary least squares model is calculated with all 292 respondents surveyed, however in order to get a sample that was working-class or poor I removed any household making \$50,000 or more a year. This second model contained 170 respondents. The sample was 81 percent white, had an average household salary of approximately \$35,000 a year, and the average age was around 35 years. 55.3 percent of subjects' responses were between very and somewhat liberal. 15.3 percent were neutral, and 19.5 percent were between very conservative to somewhat conservative.

The primary dependent variable studied here is a measure of an individual's ideology, and is measured on a seven-point scale ranging from the lowest value of very

liberal to highest value of very conservative. The independent variable of most interest in this study is labeled optimism and is a measure of a respondent's optimism about their future economic situation. The variable is on three-point scale and was measured by asking: In general, do you believe your economic situation will be better, stay about the same, or get worse over the next four years. The higher values were given to more optimistic beliefs. Respondents were also asked a series of policy attitudes and demographic questions that serve as the remaining independent variables in this study.

In order to control for the relationship between party identification and ideological perspectives of the sample I added a party identification variable that used a three-point scale and coded those who considered themselves Republican with highest value, independents with the middle value, and Democrats with the lowest value. The birth control variable asked participants whether or not they think employers should have to provide birth control through their insurance if they object for religious reasons. For this social issue control variable, the lower value is associated with an individual's support for religious exemption, and means that they believe that employers should be able to object to insurance coverage of birth control. The hypothesized direction of the coefficient is negative. The discrimination variable is measured on a five-point scale using the responses to a question that asked subjects how likely it would be that a white person would be unable to receive a job because a minority would be hired instead. Higher values are given to answers that suggest a discriminatory attitude. The expected direction of the coefficient is positive. The used survey text and coding for all variables in this study are included in the Appendix.

Finally, because this study is trying to understand the dispersion of lower income individuals between political parties in the United States, a third model is calculated with party identification as the dependent variable. This model was not used as the primary model in order to avoid endogeneity concerns from the 2016 election. Using ideology instead of party identification as the dependent variable in the primary models was necessary since partisan individuals are likely to prefer their respective party being in power and the results of the 2016 election could have arguably explained most, if not all, of the optimism in those who identify as Republican. Again, party identification was measured on a three-point scale.

FINDINGS

The hypothesis is supported by the findings in the primary ordinary least squares models. The optimism variable is significant in both models that use ideology as the dependent variable, and in the model that uses party identification as the dependent variable. These results suggest that there are differences in the personal economic optimism between conservatives and liberals and between those who identify as Republican or Democrat. Political ideology is influenced by beliefs about prospective economic wellbeing and those who are optimistic about their personal prospective economic situation are more likely to be conservative.

In both models, conservatives were more likely to be Republican than other respondents. In the model that looks at the entire income group, age was significant with older individuals being more conservative. When looking at the lower income group, age did not meet any level of significance. Neither race nor income was significant in either of the models that used ideology as the dependent variable. The income variable's lack of importance speaks to the diffusion of class in each party and to the notion that current personal economic performance is not influencing ideology or party support. Optimism was significant at the .05 level (.024) for the entire sample and the .10 level (.087) for the lower income group. The birth control and discrimination variables were significant in both models where ideology was the dependent variable.

These models suggest that there is reason to believe conservative's racial and social attitudes are influencing their ideology. Both models show that conservatives are

more likely to believe in the right to deny insurance coverage for birth control to employees if the employer disagrees for religious reasons, and they are more likely to believe a minority person could take a job opportunity away from a white person. Nevertheless, minorities were underrepresented (see appendix) in this survey, and it could be that the minorities surveyed were unrepresentative of the population.

Table 1 **Optimism and Ideology**

	Ideology
Optimism	.216* (.095)
Age	.012+ (.007)
White	-.066 (.185)
Income	.028 (.026)
PartyID	1.275** (.100)
Discrimination	.288** (.069)
Birth Control	-.914** (.175)
Constant	1.371** (.494)
<i>N</i>	292
<i>R</i> ²	.589

Table entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses
+ p<.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 1 displays the results from the larger sample of 292 respondents and uses political ideology as the dependent variable. It is clear from these results that social and racial beliefs are influencing ideology. Still, prospective economic beliefs are significant

at the .05 level when controlling for these social issues. The effect size for optimism is .65, or about 2/3 of a full point on the ideology scale.

Table 2 **Optimism and Ideology among Poor and Working Class**

	Ideology
Optimism	.235+ (.136)
Age	.010 (.009)
White	.204 (.261)
Income	.124 (.082)
PartyID	1.076** (.144)
Discrimination	.320** (.094)
Birth Control	-1.099** (.236)
Constant	1.429* (.701)
<i>N</i>	170
<i>R</i> ²	.537

Table entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

+ p<.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 2 displays the results from the smaller sample of 170 participants that restricted household income levels to \$50,000 a year or less. Optimism was only significant at the .10 level in this model and the other variables, with the exception of age, behave similar to the larger sample. The smaller sample size may explain the diminished significance of the optimism and age variables. The effect size for optimism is similar to the larger sample with a value of .71.

Table 3 Party Identification as the Dependent Variable

	PartyID
Optimism	.094* (.045)
Age	-.001 (.003)
White	.204* (.087)
Income	-.004 (.012)
Ideology	.286** (.022)
Discrimination	.001 (.034)
Birth Control	.008 (.087)
Constant	.445+ (.236)
<i>N</i>	292
<i>R</i> ²	.507

Table entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < .10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 displays the larger sample of 292 respondents, but uses party identification as the dependent variable instead of ideology. What is most interesting about this model is that both the discrimination and the birth control variables lose significance while the optimism variable maintains significance at the .05 level. This suggests that, in this sample, social issues are having an influence on ideology but not on party identification, and that personal economic optimism and race are of most importance when explaining party support. The effect size of optimism in this model is .28.

Table 4 Crosstab of Future Economic Optimism and Party Identification

	Get Better (%)	Stay Same (%)	Get Worse (%)	Total
Republican	46 (68.7)	19 (28.4)	2 (3)	67
Independent/Other	44 (45.8)	28 (29.2)	24 (25)	96
Democrat	39 (30.2)	48 (37.2)	42 (32.6)	129

Table 4 illustrates the relationship between personal economic optimism and party identification. It is apparent from this crosstabulation that Republicans are more optimistic than both Democrats and Independents. The largest percent of those that believed their economic future would stay the same were Democrats. Of the independents surveyed 8.2 percent said they were closer to the Republican Party, 12 percent were closer to the Democratic, and 12.7 percent were considered true independents.

Table 5 Crosstab of Future Economic Optimism and Ideology N=292

	Get Better (%)	Stay Same (%)	Get Worse (%)	Total
Very Liberal	9 (21.4)	16 (38.1)	17 (40.5)	42
Liberal	24 (32.4)	25 (33.8)	25 (33.8)	74
Somewhat Liberal	21 (47.7)	11 (25)	12 (27.3)	44
Neutral	19 (45.2)	14 (33.3)	9 (21.4)	42
Somewhat Conservative	22 (56.4)	14 (35.9)	3 (7.7)	39
Conservative	18 (58.1)	11 (35.5)	2 (6.5)	31
Very Conservative	16 (80)	4 (20)	0	20

Both tables 5 and 6 show the ideological perspective totals cross-tabulated with optimism. There are clear trends in the level of optimism with those who are more conservative being more optimistic.

Table 6 **Crosstab of Future Economic Optimism and Ideology N=170**

	Get Better (%)	Stay Same (%)	Get Worse (%)	Total
Very Liberal	6 (21.4)	10 (35.7)	12 (42.9)	28
Liberal	11 (26.8)	15 (36.6)	15 (36.6)	41
Somewhat Liberal	10 (40)	8 (32)	7 (28)	35
Neutral	11 (42.3)	11 (42.3)	4 (15.4)	26
Somewhat Conservative	10 (47.6)	9 (42.9)	2 (9.5)	21
Conservative	8 (42.1)	10 (52.6)	1 (5.3)	19
Very Conservative	9 (90)	1 (10)	0	10

Though the 2016 election may be inflating these results, the evidence supports accepting the hypothesis of this study. Conservatives and Republicans are more optimistic about their personal economic future than liberals and Democrats are.

DISCUSSION

Looking at the entire sample of 292 participants, it is clear that those who consider themselves Republican are similar to those that are conservative who are more optimistic than other respondents are. It is difficult to say how much the current election played a role in these results, but regardless of any partisan effect this study lends support to the hypothesis that prospective personal economics is influencing an individual's ideology. Though party identification, for the aforementioned reason, is not the main dependent variable of this study, it is of importance because it is most likely how people are going to vote. Optimism and party identification (Table 4) in this study proved to be moderately correlated with a $r = .327$ significant at the .01 level. Ideology and optimism (Tables 5 and 6) are also correlated with a $r = .351$ significant at the .01 level for the larger sample and a $r = .358$ significant at the .01 for the poor and working class sample. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that conservative individuals are more likely to vote Republican. 77 percent of the independents in this survey who said they were conservative also said they were closer to the Republican Party.

Tables 5 and 6 both reaffirm what tables 1 and 2 suggest, which is that optimism appears to be an important factor in determining an individual's political ideology. The survey employed for this study also asked respondents what political party would be better for their personal economic wellbeing. 74.4 percent of those who considered themselves Democrat said that Democrats would be better while 62.7 percent of Republican said the Republican Party would be better. The subjects were also asked to

what extent did their personal economic future depend upon the political party in control of the government. Approximately 15 percent of self-identifying Republicans and Democrats said that their personal economic future did only slightly or did not at all depend on the party in power compared to 29.2 percent of independents. While this may suggest that partisanship is influencing the level of optimism among participants, it also suggests that poor and working class individuals who vote Republican do so not only for social reason, but for economic ones as well.

The main experiment of this study was to determine if personal economic beliefs influenced ideology. Again, what actually might be happening in this sample is that optimism about personal economics is influenced by an individual's partisanship and whether or not their party is or will be in power. The downside of not having personal economic optimism measured in other political surveys is that it is hard to determine if optimism has more to do with who is in control of government than it does with ideology.

This study further attempts to understand a psychological and economic explanation of why poor and working class individuals vote for Republicans. The notion that they are voting against their economic interests because social issues draw them to the Republican Party does not hold up here. Lower income individuals that are conservative may be so because of social reasons, but since they believe their economic future will be better they are able to vote Republican without any qualms about harming themselves economically. It is also questionable as to whether either party is economically beneficial to the poor and working class, but voting Republican does arguably come with added economic danger for the poor and working class because of Party's stance on taxes and welfare.

CONCLUSION

With economic inequality on the rise, it is important to understand how and what motivates the poor and working class vote. If lower income individuals are dispersed between Republicans and Democrats, it makes it harder for the adoption of policies that benefit them economically. If lower income individuals came together in support of one political party, they would not doubt be more effective at getting policy passed that would benefit them economically. Nevertheless, with the political reality of highly controversial social issues it seems unlikely that this will occur, leaving the wealthy to maintain influence through their campaign contributions even though they too are dispersed between parties.

Though economic optimism is not the only reason that lower income individuals vote for Republicans, it is evident from this study that optimism and Republican support are correlated. When controlling for other variables that help to explain political ideology, optimism proves to be influential on an individual's ideological perspective. In order to understand if optimism is having the influence suggested in this study, further data would need to be analyzed. It may be the fact that this survey was released just after Republicans took control of government that produce this observed relationship between optimism and ideology. However, given that this sample was one third independent, the possibility that the relationship is due entirely to partisanship is reduced.

One of the interesting findings of this study is that social issues are not driving Republican support. Economic optimism proved to be more of a factor in determining

Republican support than either the social or racial issue control variables. Still, social issues are important to conservatives, and they are more likely to vote Republican.

What is needed to assuredly conclude that conservatives and Republicans are more optimistic is a longitudinal and representative study that surveys individual's economic optimism over time. Better control variables could also be employed to try and understand the relationship between optimism and ideology better. Looking at economic conditions in the respondent's region was beyond this study, but definitely something that could be controlled for in the future. An individual's level of education is also something that needs to be taken into account. Nevertheless, this study shows that personal economic optimism is something worth considering when studying an individual's political ideology.

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APPENDIX

Data and Measurements

Data and Measurements

Questionnaire:

The variables were recorded from the following questions and the coding for the variables are in parentheses.

Age: What is your age in years?

White: What racial or ethnic group best describes you?

Asian (0)

African-American / Black (0)

Hispanic / Latino (0)

Native American (0)

White (1)

Other (specify) (0)

Income: What is your total household income, including income from all members of your family, in 2016 before taxes? This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.

Less than \$10,000 (1)

\$10,000 – 19,999 (2)

\$20,000- 29,999 (3)

\$30,000- 39,999 (4)

\$40,000 – 49,999 (5)

\$50,000 – 59,999 (6)

\$60,000 - \$74,999 (7)

\$75,000 - \$89,999 (8)

\$90,000 - \$99,999 (9)

\$100,000-\$124,999 (10)

\$125,000-\$149,999 (11)

\$150,000-\$199,999 (12)

\$200,000 and over (13)

PartyID: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Republican (3)

Democrat (1)

Independent (2)

Other (specify) (2)

Ideology: We 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?

Very liberal (1)

Liberal (2)

Somewhat liberal (3)

Neutral (4)

Somewhat conservative (5)

Conservative (6)

Very conservative (7)

I haven't thought much about this (Removed)

Optimism: In general, do you believe that your economic situation will be better, stay about the same, or get worse over the next four years?

Get better (3)

Stay about the same (2)

Get worse (1)

Discrimination: How likely is it that a white person will be unable to find a job because employers are more likely to hire a racial or ethnic minority instead?

Extremely likely (5)

Very likely (4)

Moderately likely (3)

A little likely (3)

Not likely at all (1)

Birth Control: Do you think employers who object to birth control and other contraceptives on religious grounds should or should not be exempt from the requirement that health insurance for their workers cover prescription birth control?

Should be exempt (1)

Should not be exempt (2)

Other questions included in analysis:

- To what extent does your personal economic situation depend on the political party who is in control of Congress and the Presidency?

Extremely

Quite a bit

Moderately

A little

Very slightly or not at all

- Do you believe your economic future would be better with more Democrats in office or more Republicans in office, or about the same with both?

Democrats

Republicans

The same with both

Table 7 Ethnicity of Respondents N=292

Race	Frequency	Percent
Asian	14	4.8
African-American / Black	16	5.5
Hispanic / Latino	20	6.8
Native American	1	.3
White	237	81.2
Other	4	1.4

Table 8 Ethnicity of Respondents N=170

Race	Frequency	Percent
Asian	5	2.9
African-American / Black	11	6.5
Hispanic / Latino	14	8.2
Native American	1	.6
White	136	80
Other	3	1.8