

Wage Erosion, Economic Assessments, and Social Welfare Opinions*

by

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Abstract

Severe wage erosion and rising income inequality during the 1980s and 1990s should have accentuated feelings of self-interest, retrospection, and personal economic hardship among certain socioeconomic subgroups. This study uses data from National Election Study surveys between 1984 and 1994 to show the extent to which spending preferences for Food Stamps and Social Security as well as feelings toward poor people and people on welfare are a function of national, personal, retrospective, and prospective economic assessments. The results indicate that even while controlling for other demographic factors, subjective changes in economic assessments affect social welfare preferences. Negative economic assessments, particularly national and retrospective assessments, increase support for Food Stamps spending and warm feelings toward people on welfare. However, the model does not explain progressively more variance over time, and the coefficients do not increase in magnitude as initially expected due to a likely disconnection between economic unrest and responsibility for those circumstances.

The relationship between economic conditions and political behavior poses a challenging research question. On the one hand, extensive empirical evidence links economic conditions to political behavior at the national level. Voters tend to reelect incumbents when economic conditions are good, punish them when conditions are bad (Kramer 1971; Tufte 1978; Erikson 1989; Hibbs 1987; Kuklinski and West 1981), and base their presidential approval ratings on macrolevel economic conditions (Brody 1991; Hibbs 1979; Ostrom and Simon 1985). On the other hand, the relationship dissipates at the individual level of analysis; numerous studies cast doubt upon the role of economic self-interest in politics: people without medical coverage are no more likely to favor government health insurance (Sears et al., 1980), whites do not oppose busing due to self-interest (Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979), personal considerations matter little in support for affirmative action (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kluegel and Smith 1986), and the unemployed are no more likely to favor policies to alleviate economic distress (Schlozman and Verba 1979; for a review see Sears and Funk 1990).

This apparent paradox – between the simultaneously strong national and weak personal influence of economic experience – caused Kinder (1998) to remark that, “...self-interest is *surprisingly* unimportant when it comes to predicting American public opinion” (emphasis added, 801). Particularly surprising for Kinder and other students of public opinion is the disconnection between economic experience and social welfare preferences. It seems plausible to think that financial status ought to influence support for redistributive policies. An early proponent of this view was Karl Marx ([1848] 1956) who linked worker alienation, class consciousness, and support for anti-capitalistic redistributive policies. One contemporary scholar, James Kluegel, attempted to test Marx’s general idea in an exhaustive examination of social welfare preferences amid the stagflation and economic turmoil of the mid-1970s and early-1980s. To his amazement, Kluegel (1987) found little evidence that economic assessments influenced anti-poor sentiments or opposition to social welfare. Even though social welfare opinions were *relatively* unencumbered by party loyalties or personal appeals from candidates, he could find no strong evidence linking them to economic conditions. The challenge handed down from Marx to Kluegel and Kluegel to future researchers is to explain why individual economic circumstances mean so little in terms of social welfare preferences?

This paper uses evidence of increasing income and wage inequality during the 1980s and 1990s as a backdrop in an investigation of the surprising disconnection between individual economic assessments and social welfare preferences. Survey data reveal that socioeconomic subgroups in the United States reporting financial distress do alter their social welfare preferences, but not as much as expected. Possible reasons for the lack of an overwhelming relationship are discussed in light of two traditional sources of opposition and two factors which mediate self-interested political behavior, discussed in more detail in the next section.

Economic Considerations, Politics, and Social Welfare Preferences

Four factors typically influence the connection between economic assessments and support for social welfare: 1) the degree to which individuals embrace the “American Creed” of individualistic principles and values, 2) whether people hold racially hostile views, 3) whether proper attention is given to the specific level of analysis, or 4) individual differences in levels of political awareness and information heterogeneity. Each of these factors has the potential to obscure the relationship between economic experience and social welfare views, and each of these may operate alone or conjunction.

Principles and Values

Americans may not be overly ideological in a liberal-conservative sense (Converse 1964), but they do hold many cherished cultural principles and values. Scholars studying the American political culture typically concentrate upon three that are directly relevant for the study of political attitudes about social welfare: economic individualism, the belief in equality of opportunity, and support for the free enterprise system. These three principles structure the way citizens think about American politics (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Feldman 1988; Jencks 1992; Skocpol 1991). Economic individualism often manifests in the belief that people should get ahead on their own through hard work, a core element of the American ideology. Sniderman and Brody characterize this personal ambition to solve one’s own fiscal problems as the ethic of self-reliance (1977). Self-reliance is often associated with well known Horatio Alger-like tales of the common man, who despite all the odds, prospers through individual initiative and stamina. Faith in this principle leads Americans to rank economic inequality far lower than political or social inequity in overall importance (Schlozman and Verba 1979; Phillips 1990; 1993).

Two important values related to individualism are equality of opportunity and skepticism toward the role of government. Liberals often support governmental social welfare programs because they value equality and want to maximize the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Many conservatives, however, feel that although outcomes may not necessarily be equal, all people, regardless of social status, should have an equal opportunity to compete against each other in the economic marketplace. Proponents of the free enterprise system reject governmental intrusion into the lives of those they see as hard working individuals who compete on roughly equal terms.

Feldman's (1988) empirical research testing these principles against support for social welfare finds that the first two – individualism and equality of opportunity – vary widely in both the degree to which they are held and the extent to which they are important determinants of domestic policy views. Other researchers show that the third principle, support for free market capitalism, structures beliefs for a variety of programs like Food Stamps, welfare benefits, school segregation, open housing, fair employment, aid to the homeless, assistance to the poor, Medicare, Social Security, federal support for child care, and education. In each of these studies, Americans who indicate skepticism or open hostility toward government intervention in general are inclined to oppose specific governmental programs (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Markus 1988; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976).

Importantly, these studies implicate core principles in the political support for social welfare. This line of research shows why political conservatives in America typically find it easier to oppose social welfare because their views are consistent with the political culture; in contrast, political liberals often find their views difficult to reconcile with the deeply imbedded “American” values. Feldman and Zaller (1992) note this situation and remark, “That the U.S. political tradition is inhospitable to the welfare state is scarcely news at this point,” but the shocking result from their research is, “...the extent to which the elements of this inhospitality are internalized even in the minds of people who most strongly support welfare state policies” (293). It seems even liberals are predisposed to dislike the welfare state, yet many ultimately bypass these considerations. In-depth research from Hochschild (1981) and Lane (1973) reaches similar conclusions.

The ambivalence toward the welfare state found in these studies is particularly important to my argument. The political culture may be oriented toward social welfare hostility due incompatibility with core principles, but if those who take consistently anti-welfare positions can still recite the merits of the social welfare state then opinions depend upon the selective activation and resulting balance of considerations in the mind. Conversion to more favorable social welfare views, even for ardent welfare foes, may be possible. Later I present detailed evidence showing that wage erosion and increasing inequality in the 1980s and 1990s may have contributed to precisely such a value conflict for members of certain socioeconomic subgroups. Those who witnessed the collision of self-reliant economic philosophy and macro-level economic reality have good reasons to alter their views if economic experience really matters. Support for social welfare must be reconsidered against the backdrop of these recent economic phenomena, but first we must examine racism, another reason many oppose social welfare.

Race and Opposition to Welfare

Despite widely held stereotypical views to the contrary, whites, not blacks, account for most social welfare expenditures in America (Blank 1997). Nevertheless, many researchers argue whites look beyond these facts and base their opposition to social welfare on racial hostility. One of those finding evidence of racism is Gilens (1995; 1996) who shows that race is an important determinant of white opposition to welfare even when controlling for economic self-interest, individualism, and egalitarianism. Of particular relevance to this study, Gilens shows that whites’ “...beliefs concern[ing] blacks’ commitment to the work ethic are *the* most important dimension of racial attitudes with regard to whites’ welfare views” (emphasis added; 1995, 995). Kinder and Sanders (1996) echo Gilens by arguing that the racial divide remains strong and that yes, whites do oppose welfare due to their racial animosity, a somewhat hidden and more socially accepted form of racism. However, Sniderman and Piazza (1993) dispute the notion of “new racism,” or politically correct versions of racial hostility. According to these scholars, if they do dislike blacks, readily say so (cf. Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). Rather than racism, opposition to social welfare programs in the Sniderman and Piazza analysis stems from core values like economic individualism.

While the definitive answer to the question of whether whites oppose welfare because of racism remains elusive, there is still strong reason to believe that race matters. The purpose of this study is not to

assess racism, but it would be unwise to ignore it, especially in light of Gilens' findings. Therefore, the challenge is to control for the effects of racism while still concentrating upon the main issue: economic considerations and their relationship to social welfare opinions.

Levels of Analysis

Aside from values and racism, often the disconnection between economic conditions and political preferences results from changing the level of analysis. For example, as Kramer's (1971) argument linking the economic climate to incumbent electoral success gained adherents (Tufte 1978; Erikson 1989), the question soon became what form of economic information was politicized the most: personal or national? Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) thought the evidence supported the politicization of national economic experience. Their study found that personal economic assessments did not significantly influence voting in congressional and presidential elections. Instead, collective or "sociotropic" assessments of the overall state of the economy explain far more variation in vote choice. However, just as consensus started to develop around their use of national level considerations in determining political preferences, a subsequent study from Kramer (1983) argued that methodological considerations prohibit using cross-sectional data to assess individual level effects when the influence of government cannot be completely ruled out. Kramer caused a great controversy, if only for a few years, until his findings were overturned by research reaffirming sociotropism. Marcus (1988) showed that a pooled cross-sectional time series analysis can help get around the infamous "Kramer problem." His study demonstrated that national economic conditions influenced individual voting decisions, even when holding perceived personal economic circumstances constant.

Beyond the national versus personal economic considerations debate, otherwise known as sociotropism versus "egocentrism," another important analytical dimension concerns the relative influence of retrospective or prospective economic judgments. Retrospective questions ask respondents whether the economy developed well or poorly in the past, whereas prospective survey items gauge citizens' expectations regarding future economic performance or well-being. Downs (1957) was an early advocate of prospection who argued that citizens rationally looked forward to prospective party differences. Downs later relaxed this assumption and allowed retrospective considerations of well-being amid costly information, but Key (1966) and Fiorina (1981) moved one step further by arguing that voters are strictly retrospective. Their conclusions were generally accepted until recent evidence, like the personal versus national controversy, pointed once again to the importance of prospective economic judgments. MacKuen et al. (1992) argue that voters are much like foresighted "bankers" who base voting decisions upon information about future economic conditions. Their study uses economic "rational expectations" models in which decision-makers incorporate all available information and respond to anticipated conditions rather than waiting until they occur. Applied in the political realm, voters respond to messages about the future economy rather than extrapolating from the current climate. The pendulum continued to swing toward prospection until Clarke and Stewart (1994) pulled it back by arguing that prospection is nothing more than a methodological artifact, eerily reminiscent of the Kinder/Kiewiet-Kramer-Marcus exchange.

The important thing to remember from the levels of analysis discussion is that consensus still eludes us. Whether national or personal and retrospective or prospective economic considerations matter more for political behavior will remain the subject of intense debate for years to come (Conover, Feldman, and Knight 1987; Funk and Garcia-Monet 1997). Although many authors consider national level retrospective considerations the variable of choice in their studies (Hetherington 1996; Anderson and O'Connor 1997), concentrating on that single combination for the present analysis does not make sense since wage erosion is such an intensely personal phenomena. There is good reason to believe that even though Kluegel (1987) did not encounter a relationship between personal subjective experience and support for social welfare, it may have been due to the fact that the economic misery of his time was more uniform in national orientation. In fact, prior to Kluegel, research from Campbell and fellow authors of *The American Voter* showed that "primitive self-interest" best explained Americans' social welfare views (1960, 205), and more recent survey evidence also affirmed the importance of self-interest (Cook and Barrett 1992; Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989).¹ Therefore, all levels of analysis remain worthy of consideration, particularly if part of the traditional disconnection between economic considerations and political opinions stems from core values and racism.

¹ This research covers only individual years without attention to wage or income inequality.

Heterogeneous Possession and Politicization of Economic Information

Recent research focuses upon the interplay of retrospective, prospective, egocentric, and sociotropic considerations in light of informational differences. For example, Krause (1997) studies different segments of the electorate who possess varying information capabilities and who subsequently form idiosyncratic economic evaluations; the least informed (those with less than a high school diploma) base their prospective judgments on retrospective and egocentric considerations. Krause concludes that "...as electoral sophistication declines (rises), voters will rely more (less) heavily on past/retrospective perceptual information when forming economic evaluations regarding future conditions" (1997, 1195). These findings reinforce earlier analyses by Kinder, Adams, and Gronke (1989) demonstrating that different people use different criteria to assess the economy, and Weatherford's (1983) pioneering research on economic evaluations which suggests that models including media effects must also control for personal experience among the less informed who rely upon that source of information.

Those who favor the interplay argument can trace their roots to theories of public opinion based upon information heterogeneity. Among the competing models, John Zaller's (1992; 1995) theory of opinion formation is particularly noteworthy. Zaller shows how varying levels of political awareness lead to differing levels of opinion change: moderately aware people are most likely to accept political messages consistent with their views while the highly aware fend off opposing messages and the unaware accept new information uncritically if they encounter it (see also Luskin 1987; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Althaus 1998). These findings are particularly relevant to declining support for social welfare based upon values, racism, or different levels of economic experience. Refinements to Zaller's model from Chong (1996) and Iyengar (1991) further demonstrate how different contexts or issue framing elicit different considerations. In the end, how information is conveyed matters almost as much as what is conveyed in terms of opinions and allocation of responsibility for negative events.

Information provision is especially important when economic reports are separated from economic reality. For example, Hetherington (1996) demonstrates that political decisions can be quite independent from objective economic conditions when the media fail to convey information accurately. In his study, the 1990-1991 recession had been over for a full 20 months prior to the November 1992 presidential election. Nevertheless, media coverage during the 1992 campaign was still relentlessly negative and contributed in large part to voters' overly dire assessments of the national economy and displeasure with George Bush, ultimately contributing to his defeat. The media, however, are not the only culprits; citizens also bear some of the responsibility when using distorted economic information. Looking at the same 1992 presidential election, Holbrook and Garand (1996) found that personal characteristics such as socioeconomic status along with political interest and exposure determined the accuracy of citizens' economic perceptions. Their research follows Mutz's (1992) study showing that the media help translate personal experience and interests into political attitudes, but Mutz later argued that it is the well-informed in particular who are more likely to politicize personal experience in an accurate manner (1993).

In light of these findings on informational heterogeneity, this study avoids treating the electorate as a singular entity. Not only do values, racism, and the levels of analysis matter when searching for linkages between economics and social welfare opinions, one must also be sensitive to heterogeneous media awareness, content, and usage.

U.S. Economic Conditions in the Late 20th Century

The meager relationship between economic conditions and support for social welfare in past studies may be due to one last heterogeneity problem: heterogeneous economic experience. Few differences between the "haves" and "have nots" may have emerged in studies of public opinion prior to the mid-1980s (Kluegel 1987; Page and Shapiro 1992) because the trends of divergent economic experience are rather recent.

Table 1 (see attachments) presents the monetary income distribution in the United States since World War II. From the table, we see that the share of monetary income the bottom quintile has received, while never an overwhelming amount, remained fairly stagnant until recently. In 1947, those in the lowest income quintile received five percent of income in the United States. By 1980, they were still at this level. Only when looking at the 1980s and 1990s do the figures begin to change, eroding from five to four percent of income

received for the lowest quintile (a 20 percent drop). This occurred at the same time the economic fortunes of the top two income quintiles improved; in particular, the share of income going to the top five percent of all income earners jumped from fifteen percent in 1980 to over twenty percent by 1994.²

[insert Table 1 here]

These developments influence a statistic, known as the Gini ratio, which tracks income inequality (the last column of Table 1). From 1947 to 1979, the Gini ratio actually dropped three percent, meaning that the gap between rich and poor actually shrank by this amount. The important thing to notice is that this trend reversed in 1980. Since that time income inequality has increased by 17%.³ The statistic indicates that after hovering in the mid-30s throughout much of the post-war period, the index of income concentration increased to roughly .43 by 1994. The data plainly illustrate that the rich got richer and the poor got poorer in the United States during the mid-1980s and 1990s.

Some may wonder, why has this situation not generated more national concern and press coverage? As alarming as these figures may seem, the lack of notoriety may be because many Americans tolerate economic inequality far more than social and political inequality. Many commentators attribute tolerance of economic inequality to our faith in class mobility where work plays a central role (K. Phillips 1990; Hochschild 1981; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lane 1962; Page 1983). People reason that if most citizens in the U.S. retain the opportunity to move ahead despite their relative income inequality, a shot at the “American Dream” still exists (Schlozman and Verba 1979). Accordingly, many view income inequality as an indication of the failure to work hard enough. Unfortunately, this is the point where economic individualism and economic reality collide.

One of the most prominent economic developments in the U.S. concerns wages in the 1980s and 1990s. Figure 1 powerfully depicts the erosion or stagnation of wages in the U.S. for all but the most highly educated (see especially Blank 1997; also see Teixeira and Rogers 1995; Mishel 1995; Office of Management and Budget 1996). The figure shows how the American Dream may be beyond the grasp of all but a few; unless one can marshal the resources necessary to attend college, hard work no longer affords the opportunity for many to get ahead financially.⁴ For those who already do not earn much it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy since they know the value of a college education but are priced out of it. This development has attracted the attention of even traditionally business-oriented newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* which recently acknowledged the growing inequality of lifetime earnings (M. Phillips 1996).⁵ Since only a quarter of the population holds a college degree or better (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996), wage erosion or stagnation for the remaining 75% over the last fifteen years should have considerable political consequences. Based upon these data, good reasons exist to reexamine tolerance of income inequality by searching for a connection between economic conditions and social welfare preferences which has eluded so many researchers in the past.

[insert Figure 1 here]

This study is not the first to reassess public opinion in light of the recent earnings erosion in the United States. Waldman (1996) and Teixeira and Rogers (1995) predicted economic deterioration would reduce support for social welfare among members of the subgroups that fared the worst (males with a high school degree or less). Unfortunately, these studies may have inverted the theoretical relationship. If

² This figure includes only monetary income. Other benefits such as travel awards, 401(k) plans, and health benefits, for example, are not counted in these figures which suggest, if anything, the gap between the rich and the poor is understated by these figures.

³ To compute these figures, I subtracted the Gini ratio in 1979 (.365) from the Gini ratio in 1947 (.376) and computed the result (.011) as a percent. This three percent improvement, or lower Gini ratio, I contrast with the difference between the 1980 Gini ratio (.365) and the one in 1994 (.426), which is a seventeen percent difference, or an increase in monetary income inequality.

⁴ Domestic wage erosion is made much more complicated by downward global pressure on wages. Even if government officials wanted to offset wage loss, they might believe they cannot do so without damaging the U.S. business climate (Page 1996). Although the wage situation appears bleak, there has been a small but perceptible reversal of the trend toward wage erosion (Myerson 1997). The Clinton administration wasted little time claiming their policies lead to this reduction in the rich-poor gap (Hershey 1997).

⁵ It is too early to determine exactly what is causing pronounced wage erosion though some speculations have emerged. Some point to international trade and globalization (Page 1996; Wysokci 1997; Blank 1997), while others cite the decline of unionization (Page 1996; Blank 1997), and technological improvements (Blank 1997).

anything, wage erosion should make political actors and the public more sympathetic to social welfare, not less supportive as Waldman and Teixeira and Rogers seem to suggest. Both also fail to explain why a decade-long wage decline suddenly caused support for social welfare to wane in 1994 and not in years prior. Ultimately, Waldman's lack of support for many of his hypotheses⁶ bolsters the argument here that those who suffer wage erosion become more, not less, supportive of remedial governmental programs and program recipients.⁷

Linking Economic Experience and Social Welfare Opinions

This study began with the premise that economic conditions influence support for social welfare. The increasing income inequality and wage deterioration data from the 1980s and 1990s offer new reasons to investigate whether there is a significant connection between changes in aggregate social welfare opinions and the determinants of those opinions. Specifically, an empirical test can reveal whether there is a highly responsive relationship between assessments of economic conditions and social welfare attitudes during this time period.⁸ Because the wage and income erosion of the 1980s and 1990s took place selectively, it is possible to examine whether various subgroups alter their economic assessments and social welfare views to different degrees.

Most studies of welfare preferences over time have generally not looked at explanations of support (Weaver, Shapiro, and Jacobs 1995; Shapiro, Patterson, Russell, and Young 1987; Shapiro, Patterson, Russell, and Young 1987; Shapiro and Smith 1985; Shapiro and Young 1989). Those attempting to explain support generally do not directly focus on the influence of economic experience (Cook and Barabas 1997). Since the literature lacks consensus on what level of analysis is most appropriate, all levels will be considered here. The main research hypothesis of this study is that negative economic perceptions lead to increased support for social welfare. Restated more explicitly:

- H_1 (economic experience and social welfare): Negative economic assessments – national, personal, retrospective, and prospective – should increase support for social welfare.

But what about the particular type of economic experience? The linkage between economic conditions and support for social welfare could be easily interrupted if citizens discount short-term past experience, such as a job layoff or corporate restructuring, in favor of a more long-term view; that is, some may withhold support for social welfare so as long as they remain optimistic about their *future* ability to get ahead through hard work and education, irrespective of social group or the nation's past economic experience. Because information is imperfect and uncertainty increases when trying to predict future economic experience, it is more realistic to assume respondents base their support for social welfare upon retrospective assessments. Those who are likely to be more uncertain, particularly the undereducated, should be especially willing to rely upon the relatively more concrete retrospective assessments. Stated more formally:

- H_2 (retrospective vs. prospective): Retrospective assessments should influence social welfare opinions more than prospective assessments because imperfect information leads people to discount the future in favor of more reliable past experience.

Because wage and income conditions appear to be getting worse, overall support for social welfare in the 1990s should be greater than in the 1980s. The rationale behind this prediction is that economic

⁶ Waldman's evidence for diminished support for social welfare among lower income and low education groups is quite modest. Occasionally his models achieve statistical significance, but he fails to note his findings carry little substantive meaning given the low unstandardized regression coefficients. The fact that support among these "threatened" groups declined less than their more wealthy and educated counterparts provides evidence, I interpret, as responsiveness relative economic (wage) experience. It is worth mentioning that while some might attribute this drop in political support for social welfare to negative media coverage of social welfare programs, research has shown that quite to the contrary, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were highly supportive of social welfare programs in the early 1990s (Cook and Caspary 1997).

⁷ This study pays scant attention to the emerging formal literature on the subject which may ultimately be a deadly omission. Recently, Moene and Wallerstein (1997) proved increasing wage and income inequality *reduces* support for targeted social welfare programs but *increases* support for universalistic policies.

⁸ The Data and Methods section of this paper (next) explains how the social welfare opinions and economic conditions are operationalized. Because of data limitations, also discussed later, this study focuses exclusively on *assessments* of financial conditions rather than objective income or wage changes that respondents may experience. Suitable longitudinal data sources recording both political preferences and actual economic changes do not exist.

assessments matter, and that they take on added importance as conditions continue to deteriorate. Restated, the hypothesis is as follows:

- H_3 (early years vs. later years): Economic assessments should affect social welfare views more in the 1990s than in the 1980s.

The empirical ambiguity in previous studies necessitates testing the relationship between economic assessments and social welfare opinions along multiple dimensions. The national-personal dimension is especially problematic. On the one hand, negative national economic assessments should be important determinants of positive views of social welfare among people who are in income and education classes that were not threatened in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the data presented earlier, the two upper income and education classes that both increased their share of aggregate income and wage earnings should show an altruistic pro-social welfare reaction. If they rate national economic conditions more pessimistically, their support for social welfare programs and recipients should rise and should increasingly be a function of these economic assessments.

On the other hand, personal economic assessments should be an important determinant of support for those bearing the full brunt of the negative economic conditions: the lower income and education classes. Respondents in these socioeconomic (SES) subgroups should feel a sense of class consciousness; that is, they should dislike the fact that the rich/poor gap grows as their ability to work their way out of this situation diminishes. Thus, they would be expected to increase support for social welfare programs and recipients accordingly. The predictions on the national-personal dimensions are:

- H_4 (personal for low SES subgroups): For those who are in “threatened” economic experience classes (high school dropouts, high school graduates, low income quintile respondents, etc.), personal economic assessments should have a greater impact on support for social welfare programs and recipients than the national level economic assessments.
- H_5 (national for high SES subgroups): For those who are aware of negative national economic conditions but who do not experience it themselves (the upper income and education quintiles), national assessments should have a greater impact on support for social welfare programs and recipients than do personal economic assessments.

Finally, severe wage loss should have a profoundly liberalizing effect on social welfare views, in proportion to each group’s relative loss. Lacking measures of the exact income and wage loss among each subgroup (see the Data and Methods section next) means that people who report the most negative economic assessments – low income and education subgroups – should express more support for social welfare and base their support on these economic assessments. The sixth hypothesis is as follows:

- H_6 (highest coefficients for lowest SES groups): Subgroups experiencing the greatest decline in wages or income should derive more of their support for social welfare from economic assessments than those in the upper income and education subgroups.

The rationale behind this sixth hypothesis is that subgroup sensitivity to wage deterioration should be seen in the opinions of those hit hardest: non-high school graduates who experience an average weekly wage drop of almost 16% in real constant dollars from 1979 to 1994. This group should have the most liberal social welfare views and base that support on personal and retrospective economic assessments. The next worst in terms of wage erosion were high school graduates (-4% in Figure 1). They should have the second highest level of support for social welfare programs and recipients. The regression coefficients predicting their support should also be roughly second largest. Accordingly, predictions for other groups should follow a similar pattern: for example, respondents with some post-high school training who were slightly better off (+2%) should report slightly lower support, etc.

Similar logic holds for the upper socioeconomic groups. From 1979 to 1994, college graduates gained almost 16% and those with some post college training gained almost 30%. These groups might be

expected to be the least supportive. Nevertheless, if national economic assessments turn out to be significant predictors of support and if the education control variable is positive (that is, those with more education support more social welfare spending and have warmer feelings toward the recipients), then we have evidence of an altruistic political response.⁹

Data and Methods

Data from the National Election Study (NES) surveys from 1984 through 1994 are used to analyze public opinion toward social welfare during the turbulent economic conditions of the 1980s and 1990s. Starting in 1984 and in every consecutive election year thereafter, the University of Michigan researchers asked respondents to rate their support for two well known social welfare programs, Food Stamps and Social Security.¹⁰

These two social welfare programs complement each other rather nicely in a methodological sense. The Food Stamps program is a means-tested program comprising one of the main components of the American social welfare state.¹¹ Social Security, on the other hand, is a social insurance program that provides cash-assistance to all of those who meet the eligibility requirements, typically the aged and disabled.¹² These variables are used as two of four dependent variable measures of social welfare. These questions ask whether respondents whether they would like to see spending for Food Stamps and Social Security increased, decreased or kept the same.¹³

During these years the NES researchers also regularly employed standardized feeling thermometer questions that asked respondents to rate their feelings toward poor people and people on welfare, the two other indicators of social welfare used as dependent variables.¹⁴ It is important to look beyond support for spending increases because some respondents may either know little about Food Stamps or Social Security (unlikely), or dislike these two programs or government spending in general (more plausible), yet still have sympathy toward likely or actual social welfare recipients.¹⁵

The main independent variables in this study are the standard economic assessment questions consistently asked by the NES during the same time period.¹⁶ To further distinguish between economic

⁹ The null hypotheses are that economic conditions, either personally, nationally, prospectively or retrospectively, have no effect on the explanation of support for social welfare programs and recipients. Because the analysis extends in time, the null hypotheses are also that support, early or late and among all subgroups, should be no different.

¹⁰ These are the only two social welfare programs the NES researchers consistently included in their surveys during the 1980s and 1990s. The first year of this analysis, 1984, is the earliest one can go back in time because the NES did not ask about these programs in prior consecutive studies.

¹¹ Under the Food Stamp program, single persons and those living in households meeting nationwide standards for income and assets may receive coupons redeemable for food at most retail food stores. The monthly amount of coupons a household unit receives is determined by household size and income. Households without income receive the monthly cost of a nutritionally adequate diet for their household size as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Households with income receive the difference between the amount of a nutritionally adequate diet and 30 percent of their income, after certain allowable deductions (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996).

¹² One might expect the connection between Social Security and economic conditions to be less dramatic since most recipients can expect to receive benefits only after they have met the age requirement, hardly something that changes with economic conditions. At the end of this paper I return to this possibility. Nevertheless, focusing on Social Security is important because the program has lifted millions of senior citizens out of poverty, thereby reducing economic inequality substantially. In addition, the Statistical Abstract of the United States (1996) indicates that almost forty percent of Social Security's 46 million total recipients in 1994 were officially classified as other than retired. This means that the program reduces the risks associated with uncertain economic futures, one of the goals members of the public may have as a part of their entire social welfare belief systems.

¹³ Government action comes in many varieties. Everything from progressive taxation, to guaranteed minimum incomes, to governmental jobs could potentially offset economic inequality. This study concentrates on one particular subset of governmental action, traditional social welfare programs. The question is do those who suffer or are aware of great economic suffering support social welfare programs at greater rates than those who have no similar disadvantage? In short, if the belief in the efficacy of work and education still has relevance, does its demise lead to greater support for social welfare programs? While other forms of remedial governmental action could be studied from the same perspective, future research and researchers can and should address the topic of economic conditions and policy preferences from these perspectives.

¹⁴ No predictions are made about whether programs or feelings will be stronger or weaker because they represent different aspects of social welfare opinions. Both sets were included because it is a good idea to have a variety of indicators for comparative purposes and to guard against selecting any single idiosyncratic program or feeling thermometer.

¹⁵ An index was purposely not constructed for two reasons. First, each program has a unique place in American political history so there are good reasons to explore connections between economic experience and social welfare views using both means tested and broad-based social insurance programs as well as specific and general references to the poor (Cook 1979; Smith 1987; Cook and Barrett 1992). Second, the Cronbach alpha reliability tests failed to approach generally accepted levels of confidence (.80) for an index (Carmines and Zeller 1979, 51). The variables represent different concepts.

¹⁶ As an extra precaution explained in more detail later, I include other objective indicators as control variables, such as income, age, gender, race and education. I also control for media usage, partisanship, and ideology.

experience at the national and individual levels, the study uses the NES questions asking each respondent to rate their perceptions of personal and national economic experience, both retrospectively and prospectively.¹⁷

Other survey data sets such as the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Panel Study on Income Dynamics (PSID) were considered but rejected because of the need for standardization across the years. During the 1980s and 1990s, only the NES asked questions concerning both social welfare programs and recipients as well as economic experience variables in a consistent fashion. The GSS and PSID occasionally contained relevant social welfare questions but often they were not repeated, or if pertinent questions were repeated, it was often in a substantially different format and often without the respondents' accompanying economic experience. Therefore, to test my hypotheses, a combination of consistent questions on political views toward social welfare, and multiple levels of economic well-being assessments were needed. The NES alone seemed to meet these high criteria.

Explaining Social Welfare Opinions

The bulk of empirical research here derives from an analysis of a "core" economic assessment model used to predict support for social welfare programs and recipients. The core model takes the following form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{N-PROSP}) + \beta_2(\text{N-RETRO}) + \beta_3(\text{P-PROSP}) + \beta_4(\text{P-RETRO}) + \varepsilon_i \quad [1]$$

where Y represents an indicator of social welfare spending preferences (Food Stamps or Social Security) or feelings toward likely recipients (feelings toward people on welfare or feelings toward poor people). The N-PROSP term is a measure of national prospective economic assessments. N-RETRO represents national economic assessments, but only those that are retrospective, or that extend from the present (in each year the NES survey was administered) to one year prior. Similarly, the two personal economic assessment terms are P-PROSP, which represents personal prospective economic assessments, and P-RETRO, which represents personal retrospective economic assessments. Each of the economic perception variables at the national and personal level is measured as five-point variables scaled from much better to better, same, worse, or much worse.¹⁸ The "ε" term represents all randomly distributed and unmeasured errors.

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis is used to test how economic perceptions affect social welfare preferences.¹⁹ However, as a precaution the core model was retested with additional variables controlling for possible omitted factors such as media usage, partisan identification, ideology, and common demographic information such as age, gender, race, income and education. The full form of the model with the same alternating dependent variables is:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{N-PROSP}) + \beta_2(\text{N-RETRO}) + \beta_3(\text{P-PROSP}) + \beta_4(\text{P-RETRO}) + \beta_5(\text{TV NEWS}) + \beta_6(\text{PID}) + \beta_7(\text{IDEOLOGY}) + \beta_8(\text{AGE}) + \beta_9(\text{GENDER}) + \beta_{10}(\text{RACE}) + \beta_{11}(\text{INCOME}) + \beta_{12}(\text{EDUCATION}) + \varepsilon_i \quad [2]$$

The coding decisions are rather straightforward and noncontroversial. Negative values typically refer to worse or decrease, while zero values signify no change or neutral, and positive values are coded to represent better or increase. (See Appendix A for more on the variable coding.)

The analysis begins by examining social welfare opinions on programs and recipients for the four dependent variables across a ten year period spanning the mid-1980s and 1990s. Increased support for social

¹⁷ The question battery asks how respondents personally are doing or will do (worse, same or better) relative to one-year ago and one year in the future. All six NES surveys also ask respondents to rate whether the nation is worse, the same, or better off than one year ago and how it will be one year in the future. Occasionally the NES researchers asked more detailed question batteries of economic assessments (1984 in particular), but those will not be employed in this study because of the self-imposed requirement that the questions be asked repeatedly to ensure comparability across years.

¹⁸ This is true of all but national prospective (N-PROSP), which is a three-point variable scaled from better, same, and worse. The NES asked the question with only three choices in every year but 1992, when it was asked as a three- and five-point variable like the other economic assessment questions.

¹⁹ Some may object to the use of the ordinary least squares regression model with an ordinal dependent variable, and instead advocate the use of ordered probit or ordered logit models (Kennedy 1996; Long 1997). However, in studies like this with large samples and clear substantive concerns such as the stability or change in the components of support, regression analyses are robust with respect to violations of the OLS assumptions; ordinal variables can be treated as if they were on an interval scale as long as the principle of monotonicity holds when scoring the categories (Tuft 1969; Labovitz 1970; Blinder 1984). As a precaution, I rescaled the dependent variables into dichotomous measures of support and ran logistic regressions on the data. There were no changes in the general magnitude or significance of the Food Stamps coefficients, and the Social Security predictors also retained many of the same properties, but not all. It is not surprising that some of the Social Security analysis coefficients changed given that the dichotomizing procedure produced a very skewed distribution of support for Social Security, an additional reason to retain the original OLS regression model. The OLS estimates are easier to interpret and past studies of support for social welfare have also relied upon the OLS regression model with a trichotomous dependent variable (Gilens 1995; 1996).

welfare programs and recipients in a pooled cross-section analysis should be seen as a function of national and personal economic assessments, both retrospectively and prospectively. The pooled regression is then split into two roughly equal halves to test whether there is a shift in importance among particular variables. As economic changes become more apparent, the regression coefficients on economic assessments should increase, signaling that these variables have become more important factors in explaining support for social welfare. Finally, the sample is divided into high and low education groups to see whether support for social welfare changes among those with different economic experience in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁰

Results

Table 2 displays the results of the model with and without control variables for the entire 1984 through 1994 period in a pooled cross-sectional analysis. Without attention to the level of analysis for the moment, H_1 (economic experience and social welfare) predicts that the economic variables should be significantly and negatively related to support for social welfare programs and recipients. That is, pessimistic assessments of economic well-being should be associated with increasing support for social welfare. The core model shows this is true of retrospective economic assessments at both the national and personal level; the coefficients are highly significant and in the expected direction. The negative retrospective economic well-being ratings result in more support for social welfare programs and recipients.²¹ When the control variables are added, national retrospective assessments still maintain a high degree of statistical significance. However, with regard to personal retrospective assessments, this is true for Food Stamps only.

[insert Table 2 here]

The table shows that the coefficients for the retrospective variables are statistically significant in the expected direction (H_2 on retrospective vs. prospective), but it is important to remember the model accounts for a small proportion of the variance as indicated by the modest adjusted R-squared values. The sizes of the unstandardized coefficients reveal that each additional change in economic assessments results in a relatively slight change in support for social welfare or positive feelings toward likely recipients. Thus, even in the best light it appears that retrospective economic assessments alter support for social welfare only modestly. Adding the control variables to the core economic model helps convey two other points. First, even with all possible omitted variables, the overall proportion of variance explained still does not exceed thirteen percent, good by the standards of other attitudinal studies, but far from being as dramatic as expected. In this sense, the one to two percent of variance explained with the economic assessment variables looks a lot better since even a more comprehensive model cannot explain an overwhelming proportion of variance. Second, only race and partisan identification consistently and significantly influences support for social welfare. Income and ideology are important too, but less powerfully and not at all in the case of support for poor people.²²

Support Over Time

One way to judge potential support for H_3 (early years vs. later years) is to look at graphs of the marginal frequencies. This hypothesis was that over time, rising income inequality and wage deterioration of the 1980s and 1990s would increasingly result in more pessimistic economic assessments and more support for social welfare programs and recipients over time. However, as Figures 2 and 3 illustrate there was no systematic increase in pessimistic ratings as projected. In general, respondents did not rate economic conditions consistently worse in each consecutive year for any of the four different measures of economic assessments – national, personal, prospective or retrospective. Instead, we see negative assessments rise

²⁰ Later in this study the education variable is removed when the respondents are separated by educational level. During these analyses, a new variable, NESYEAR, was added to both the core and core plus control models to help assess change in support for social welfare programs and recipients over time.

²¹ A nested F-test of the core economic model and model with controls reveals a highly significant difference between the two at below alpha = .05. (The calculations are as follows: $4579.1 - 2743.4 / 8$ over $2743.4 / 6678 - 13 = 557$.) Other models in this analysis are significant in this manner.

²² The significance of several of the control variables is reassuring in terms of irrelevant and omitted variables in the control equation. Because it is difficult to tell exactly when a control variable will have a statistically significant slope coefficient, I must include all eight variables to be certain that some otherwise undetected socioeconomic or media usage factor is not influencing support for social welfare instead of one of the economic variables.

during and in anticipation of the 1990-1991 recession, and afterwards they return to their original levels. The data through 1990 show such a trend but only with personal prospective economic assessments do “same” ratings continue to rise during the ten year period. It seems that after the recession, “better” ratings were again more prevalent than worse assessments. The data in Figure 3 are similar. The social welfare indicators show no linear increase in support or warm feelings over time.

[insert Figure 2 and 3 here]

Nevertheless, it could be the case that support remained unchanged even though economic assessments became more important over time. The real test of H_3 (early years vs. later years) is the split half analysis. The original 10-year pooled regression sample was split into two halves to determine whether respondents became more or less sensitive to economic conditions in their support for social welfare programs and recipients over time. The data (not shown) reveal that there is no dramatic increase in support over time; the unstandardized regression coefficients generally became smaller, instead of larger, from the three samples in the 1980s to the three in the 1990s. Furthermore, the retrospective assessments for the two feeling thermometers are not statistically significant in the 1990s, either with or without control variables.

It is important to note that the data continue to provide support for H_2 (retrospective vs. prospective), as only retrospective economic assessments, both individually and at the national level, seem to influence support for social welfare programs and recipients. This effect endures even with the control variables at the national level. When respondents indicate they believe the nation as a whole was worse off economically, support for social welfare increases. This is particularly true of the two social welfare programs in my study, Food Stamps and Social Security; the unstandardized regression coefficients for these two programs are still significant at the national and personal level even when controlling for media usage, political, and demographic characteristics.

Economic Assessments and Social Welfare Views by Socioeconomic Subgroup

The graphic representation of the economic experience data over time in Figure 2 describes the aggregate level only. These data do not specifically call attention to the “threatened” income and education subgroups to assess H_4 (personal for low SES subgroups), H_5 (national for high SES subgroups), and H_6 (highest coefficients for lowest SES subgroups). The subgroup trends are better seen in Figure 4, which illustrates the mean economic assessments by educational subcategory.²³ The 1990 mean national prospective economic assessments are particularly interesting. In Figure 4 for 1990 prospective national economic assessments, the lowest and second lowest education groups (less than high school and high school graduates) rated their future more optimistically than their more educated peers, even when the income and wage data suggests they should have had every reason to consistently be the most pessimistic. Nonetheless, these two groups are among the most pessimistic in the non-recession years. They remained pessimistic while the higher education quintiles bypassed them during the harshest economic times. Members of these lower education classes perceive the income disparity and wage deterioration, but less so in times of a clear national crisis.

[insert Figure 4 here]

When we turn our attention to the personal prospective and retrospective economic assessments, there is clearer evidence supporting the initial predictions. The lower two education categories are consistently less optimistic (ratings closer to worse). The assessments rise and fall in tandem with the other classes, but the means are nearly always lower at the end of the series. Unexpectedly, they do not drop steadily throughout, as we knew would probably be the case given the overall data in Figures 2 and 3. Yet, those who are in the subgroups who have lost income and wages relative to others are at least somewhat willing to express negative economic assessments, particularly at the personal level.²⁴ Knowledge of the

²³ The same figure using income categories looks almost identical so it is not shown, but the comments directed toward education classes apply to income classes too.

²⁴ Those in the low income and education subgroups may be the same respondents in many instances.

overall trends is important to remember in the upcoming analysis of the role economic assessments play in determining social welfare views.

The trends in the graphs are reflected in regression analyses shown in Tables 3 and 4 which test H_1 (personal for lower SES), H_2 (national for upper SES), and H_3 (subgroup variation).²⁵ Consistent with H_1 (and H_2), the upper SES group relied upon national (and retrospective) assessments of economic well-being in their support for social welfare. Table 3 also shows support for H_3 with regard to support for spending on Food Stamps among those with less than a high school education since they relied on personal assessments. H_3 predicted that the coefficients of the economic variables would be larger among respondents exposed to wage deterioration. In fact, they are slightly bigger for Food Stamps and Social Security, but not by much and not on two feeling thermometers. However, the proportion of variance explained does seem to increase among the more educated groups, indirect evidence of an altruistic political reaction.

[insert Tables 3 and 4 here]

Discussion

To summarize, this study finds some evidence of a connection between increasing income inequality and wage deterioration with shifting patterns of economic assessments and support for social welfare. The conclusion from the overall pooled regression analyses of six NES surveys in the 1980s and 1990s is that retrospective economic assessments, particularly at the national level but occasionally at the personal level, affect support for social welfare programs and recipients in a modest but consistent manner – partial support for H_1 and H_2 . However, this study finds little support for the prediction (H_3) that the later years of the overall regression (the 1990s only) would be more dramatic predictors of spending on social welfare programs and feelings toward likely recipients; while the direction of the coefficients were generally in line with expectations, the coefficients actually got smaller in the later years. Consistent with H_1 , the lowest education subgroup, those without a high-school degree, relied upon personal economic experience especially when it came to their Social Security views. Similarly, national economic considerations drive the support of those in the upper education subgroups, which was consistent with H_2 . The politicization of retrospective economic experience at both the personal and national levels holds up over time, but does not generally increase for the economically “threatened” subgroups of the population as expected in H_3 .

Therefore, a significant relationship connection between economic experience and social welfare opinions exists (H_1), which is often retrospective (H_2) and based upon personal level considerations for the lower education tiers (H_1) and national level considerations for the more highly educated (H_2), but the relationship does not grow stronger in the 1990s (H_3), and the most economically threatened did not politicize their experience the most as expected (H_3).

While factors other than economic assessments were not the primary focus of this analysis, it is interesting to note their effect. Like other recent studies highlighting the importance of race (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Gilens 1995; 1996), skin color had a sizable impact on social welfare opinions. Whites were much less inclined to support social welfare programs and recipients than were blacks. In fact, in almost every regression table throughout the analysis, no variable seemed to influence support for social welfare programs and recipients to the extent that race did. Some scholars believe social welfare is an issue where the so called “new” racism may manifest. This study lends support to those assertions.

Some may ask to what degree do political events during the 1980s and 1990s skew or alter the findings? It seems possible that rhetoric from candidate Clinton during 1992 to “end welfare as we know it,” or the Republicans’ success in the mid-1990s congressional elections may have had some effect on support for social welfare programs and recipients. Although it is tempting to implicate these political events in the social welfare opinions of the time period, it is important to remember the 1990s did not increase, but merely continued the anti-social welfare pressure from political elites. For the 1990s to be politically charged in a way that would substantially affect the results of this study, these years would have to be either dramatically more hostile toward social welfare or substantially more benign. Few would argue that the Reagan and Bush administrations were more supportive of social welfare than Clinton, but is Clinton *dramatically* more supportive of welfare than his predecessors? The answer appears to be no. When the GOP Congress gave

²⁵ Only the lowest and highest education groups are shown because the middle categories did not differ dramatically. Also not shown is the analysis of support in individual elections that looks very similar over time.

Clinton the chance to cut spending for social welfare programs, he vetoed the bill twice before ultimately signing it when it came to him a third time. This suggests that Clinton is somewhat less enthusiastic about welfare cuts than his two predecessors, but ultimately willing to do the same. All things considered, the influence of political events is probably overstated. Clinton's signature on the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 probably had some real effect on support for Food Stamps, but it occurred after 1994, beyond the time span of this study.

Even though the politics of the time period may not have posed a problem, some may still have reservations about the econometric models employed here. These critics will be pleased to learn that diagnostic tests undertaken throughout the analysis consistently ruled out problems associated with the conduct of the OLS regression models. The large number of respondents and multiple measures of both dependent and independent variables made the analysis sound, methodologically speaking, and resistant to potential violations of the OLS regression assumptions. The Durbin-Watson statistics near the bottom of each table were consistently close to a value of two, indicating no apparent problems with autoregression. The core model was also retested with eight control variables throughout the analysis to guard against possible omitted variables.²⁶ While some of the control variables may have been insignificant from time to time, to leave out variables like gender, race, or education seemed unwise. Furthermore, the large number of cases meant that the risk of heteroskedasticity was low, as was the potential for multicollinearity. In every analysis, the statistical diagnostics for regression assumption violations found little cause for alarm.²⁷

A major limitation of this study has been its exclusive concentration on subjective economic assessments. It is entirely possible that real, objective economic changes actually influence support for social welfare, but that for some reason respondents in the six NES studies failed to connect these real experiences with their subjective opinions. To minimize the risk, this study analyzed thousands of survey responses over ten years with multiple indicators of social welfare²⁸ and economic experience, making it unlikely that economic assessments failed to track objective experience. In fact, the marginal frequencies of support and economic well-being changed over time which implies sensitivity to financial conditions. Nevertheless, anyone planning to investigate this topic should search for data recording both objective economic data and attitudinal variables.

If future researchers studying the connection between economic conditions and social welfare opinions were to heed only one piece of advice it should be this: incorporate better indicators of information heterogeneity in the design. Figuratively speaking, this paper uses a magnifying glass to look at economic assessments and social welfare opinions over time when it should have used a microscope. This resulted in breadth at the expense of precision. Little attention was given to the television news usage variable because it was rarely a significant predictor of support for social welfare, but that does not mean that television content and usage made no difference in terms of economic assessments or support for social welfare. Future researchers should strongly consider a more narrow focus on selected years and subsamples of the data since wage erosion and income inequality was so targeted. Better indicators of political awareness and past economic experience, perhaps with specific tests of economic knowledge and faith in economic individualism, might reveal a stronger relationship.

High hopes for stronger findings aside, the mere discovery of significant relationships helps clarify the nebulous and notoriously absent connection between economic perceptions and social welfare opinions. Far from being the final word, these results bolster the case for further research. For the moment, political scientists must wait for the news media and political activists to increase awareness on this issue. Subsequent research can then assess whether those efforts influenced public opinion.

²⁶ In fact, in an earlier regression analysis I used newspaper readership as another media usage control variable but it was never significant or sizable in terms of the magnitude of the slope coefficient in the overall regressions from 1984 to 1994.

²⁷ With regard to multicollinearity, the tolerance was very high (and therefore low variance inflation factors) which indicates few problems. Also the bivariate correlations were never above .50. With regard to heteroskedasticity, I determined this was not a problem by running weighted least squares which did not appreciably change the slope coefficients, standard errors, or proportion of variance explained.

²⁸ Potential Food Stamps and Social Security beneficiaries come from specific segments of the population—the economically impoverished for Food Stamps and the elderly for Social Security. The unique nature of these programs warranted additional testing to see whether support for likely participants differed. Analyses not reported here indicate there was no dramatic increase in explanatory power or magnitude of the regression coefficients when selectively limiting the sample to those likely recipients (i.e., the poor and older citizens). Similarly, brief departures from the self-imposed prohibition against using data not spanning the 1984-1994 period turned up little.

Appendix A

Variable Coding

Spending on Food Stamps

-1	=	Decrease
0	=	Maintain
1	=	Increase

Spending on Social Security

-1	=	Decrease
0	=	Maintain
1	=	Increase

Feelings toward People on Welfare

-1	=	Cool Feelings (0 through 49 on thermometer)
0	=	Neutral Feelings (50 on thermometer)
1	=	Warm Feelings (51 through 100 on thermometer)

Feelings toward Poor People

-1	=	Cool Feelings (0 through 49 on thermometer)
0	=	Neutral Feelings (50 on thermometer)
1	=	Warm Feelings (51 through 100 on thermometer)

National Economic Assessments

Prospective	-2	=	Worse
	0	=	Same
	2	=	Better
Retrospective	-2	=	Much Worse
	-1	=	Somewhat Worse
	0	=	Same
	1	=	Somewhat Better
	2	=	Much Better

Personal Economic Assessments

Prospective	-2	=	Much Worse
	-1	=	Somewhat Worse
	0	=	Same
	1	=	Somewhat Better
	2	=	Much Better
Retrospective	-2	=	Much Worse
	-1	=	Somewhat Worse
	0	=	Same
	1	=	Somewhat Better
	2	=	Much Better

T.V. News

0	=	Did not watch national television news last week
1	=	Watched one day of national television news last week
2	=	Watched two days of national television news last week
3	=	Watched three days of national television news last week
4	=	Watched four days of national television news last week

5 = Watched five days of national television news last week
6 = Watched six days of national television news last week
7 = Watched seven days of national television news last week

Party Id

-3	=	Strong Republican
-2	=	Weak Republican
-1	=	Independent - Republican
0	=	Independent - Independent
1	=	Independent - Democrat
2	=	Weak Democrat
3	=	Strong Democrat

Ideology

-3	=	Strong Conservative
-2	=	Weak Conservative
-1	=	Moderate - Conservative
0	=	Moderate - Moderate
1	=	Moderate - Liberal
2	=	Weak Liberal
3	=	Strong Liberal

Age²⁹

1	=	Ages 17 to 24
2	=	Ages 25 to 34
3	=	Ages 35 to 44
4	=	Ages 45 to 54
5	=	Ages 55 to 64
6	=	Ages 65 to 74
7	=	Ages 75 and older

Gender

0	=	Male
1	=	Female

Race

0	=	Non-black
1	=	Black

Income

1	=	Bottom quintile of family income
2	=	Second quintile of family income
3	=	Third quintile of family income
4	=	Fourth quintile of family income
5	=	Top quintile of family income

Education

1	=	Less than high school degree completed
2	=	High school graduate
3	=	Some post-high school training
4	=	College graduate (4 year)
5	=	Some post-college training (MBA, MA, J.D., Ph.D., etc.)

NES Year

²⁹ Changing age to a continuous variable does not alter the results of the pooled regression analysis. I have code age by category to denote (roughly) generational differences.

- 1 = 1984 National Election Study (NES) survey
- 2 = 1986 National Election Study (NES) survey
- 3 = 1988 National Election Study (NES) survey
- 4 = 1990 National Election Study (NES) survey
- 5 = 1992 National Election Study (NES) survey
- 6 = 1994 National Election Study (NES) survey

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