Campaign Funding, Political Rhetoric, 
and the Public (Non)Response to Rising Inequality

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Since the early 1970s, stagnant wages for those at the bottom of the income distribution and massive income increases for those at the top have spurred levels of inequality in the United States not seen since the Gilded Age. Over this same period there have been only minor expansions of the welfare state and some notable retrenchments. Despite these developments no broad-based shift toward support for redistribution or other policies that would likely counteract rising levels of inequality has emerged. Indeed, although existing theory predicts that the general response to increasing inequality will be greater demand for redistribution, the public has arguably embraced policies that exacerbate inequality. As we show below, even among the least financially well off, support for redistributive policies has remained constant or declined. These facts lead to an important puzzle. Why has four decades of rising income concentration among the wealthiest individuals failed to increase support for redistributive policies?

Our goal is to answer this important question. The basic argument is as follows. First, as inequality has risen, wealthy individuals and corporations have become increasingly important providers of resources needed by politicians in their campaigns. Second, the growing need to please these groups has led to a shift in political rhetoric among politicians (of both parties) that increasingly emphasizes economic efficiency and small government while deemphasizing redistribution and the role of the state in securing the collective good. Third, this shifting rhetoric has influenced public opinion by suppressing support for redistribution and other policies that would slow or reverse increasing inequality.

This theory carries important implications for the study of politics and inequality in the United States. First, this model offers an explanation for why forty years of rising income inequality has not led to increased support for redistribution – even among the least well off. This argument offers an important complement to existing studies examining the rise of inequality in the United States, which show that policy makers largely ignore those at the bottom and middle of the income distribution (Bartels 2008, Gilens 2011, Gilens 2012, Hacker & Pierson 2010, Soss, Hacker, & Mettler 2007, Jacobs & Skocpol 2005, Winters & Page 2009). We contend that the political voices of the middle and bottom of the income distribution have actually failed to demand greater redistribution by government because elite political rhetoric, which influences public opinion (Chong & Druckman 2010, Witko 2003, Zaller 1992), has become increasingly sensitive to the interests of the wealthy. This hypothesis offers an important

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1 It is important to note that our claim that over time support for redistribution has not increased substantially does not conflict with cross-sectional research, which shows fairly broad levels of support for redistribution (Gilens 2012, Page & Jacobs 2009).
addition to the dominant perspective in the literature. Hacker & Pierson (2010, 301), for example, argue, "Making government more responsive to the middle class would not be just a political achievement; it would reshape the economy." But we hypothesize that even with greater government responsiveness policy might not change very much, because as inequality has expanded, middle and even lower class voters have not demanded greater redistribution or egalitarian interventions into the economy. We argue that this lack of escalating demand for redistribution stems from the public response to elite rhetoric, which (like policy) has become increasingly designed to cater to the interests of the rich.

Second, while recent studies have argued that public opinion and/or the role of money in politics are important factors in the rise of income inequality in the United States (Bartels 2008, Hacker & Pierson 2010, Kelly 2009, Page & Jacobs 2009), our theory predicts a new avenue for organized interest influence. Existing studies of organized interests focus on the role of campaign contributions in the policy process (Austen-Smith 1995, Esterling 2007, Hall & Wayman 1990, Snyder 1990, Witko 2006, Witko 2011). Our study proposes a new mechanism through which campaign finance and interest groups more generally may shape American politics – by changing how politicians discuss contentious issues and frame policy debates. Thus, the influence of organized interests is not reflected only in their ability to directly influence policy-making, but may also rest in their capacity to shift the scope of political rhetoric and thus the public's preferences.

Support from the Russell Sage Foundation will enable the collection of data to establish the link between money in politics, political rhetoric and redistributional attitudes. Our research design begins with a time-series cross-sectional analysis of patterns in campaign contributions and political rhetoric in Congress. We will aggregate existing campaign finance data into useful categories and, using automated content analysis, we will create a dataset of Congressional rhetoric at the member level. We expect that as politicians receive more support from business interests and individual donors (who are disproportionately wealthy) and less from organized labor their rhetoric becomes less supportive of redistribution or egalitarian market interventions. We will then examine the effect of political rhetoric on public opinion using existing micro and macro-level survey data. In order to further probe the causal links between rhetoric and public opinion, we plan to supplement these data and analyses with national-sample survey experiments that will be funded through non-NSF sources.

Our substantive interest is how elite political rhetoric connects to redistribution, the welfare state, and inequality. But this project will also create a large, updatable dataset on political rhetoric covering a
wide range of topics that will be of use to scholars in political science, history, communication, sociology and other disciplines. Given the automated methodology we will apply to analyzing rhetoric, it will be a straightforward extension to create individual-level measures of rhetoric for members of Congress in essentially any policy domain, which can then be aggregated to create measures by chamber, party, year, etc. Our initial plan is to categorize rhetoric according to the Baumgartner and Jones Policy Agendas topic codes and within those codes to generate individual-level dimensional scales. This dataset would go beyond other efforts to categorize and score Congressional rhetoric by connecting to the policy agendas topic codes, creating member-level ideological scores for multiple issue domains, and covering a longer period of time than any existing dataset on Congressional rhetoric.

The next section describes the details of the central puzzle of our project and the theory linking money in politics to political rhetoric and public opinion on redistribution and inequality. We also present some preliminary evidence in support of our general argument. Next, we discuss in more detail our work plan and data acquisition strategies. We conclude with a discussion of the synergies that will stem from the collaborative nature of our research and our strategies for publishing the results of this research.

**A Model of Money in Politics, Political Rhetoric, and Public Opinion**

Influential theories predict that as income inequality increases, the public, particularly those below the median income, will demand more redistribution (Bénaou 2000, Meltzer & Richard 1983). But in practice we observe the theoretically unexpected pattern that support for redistribution has not increased in the face of rising inequality (Campbell 2010, Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson 2002, McCall & Kenworthy 2009, Kenworthy & McCall 2008, Soroka & Wlezien 2010, Wlezien 1995). In Figure 1, we chart movement over time in the national Gini coefficient of inequality along with responses to two survey items related to inequality: support for government aid to the poor and support for reduced inequality through higher taxes on the rich. The opinion data are available for varying years from the General Social Survey and the inequality data are from the U.S. Census Current Population Survey.
Rationalist perspectives on public opinion predict increasing support for redistribution among the poor during times of rising inequality. We see that neither the relatively affluent nor the poor have become more supportive of redistribution. The short-dashed line in each chart depicts the attitudes of the bottom third of the income distribution. As inequality has increased (solid line) the attitudes of the poor either do not exhibit much of a trend or actually shift away from supporting more government action. Clearly, the poor have not embraced redistribution as inequality has risen. In previous work we make this same point even more systematically by using multivariate time series analysis to show that, contrary to expectations, the poor become increasingly conservative in the face of rising inequality (Kelly & Enns 2010).

We should also observe increased attitude divergence between the rich and the poor if the rich and poor respond to changes in inequality as predicted by standard political economy models. Our data confirm that the rich are generally more conservative than the poor on economic issues (Bénabou 2000, Ellis & Ura 2011, McCall & Manza 2011, Enns & Wlezien 2011). But for both items, the attitudes of the rich and the poor move in tandem and as inequality increases the difference between the two groups does not widen at all. Other research has demonstrated a similar pattern across numerous issues and
policy domains (Enns & Wlezien 2011, Ellis & Ura 2011, Ura & Ellis 2008). Our theory, both simple and powerful, can explain the puzzle of how low levels of support for redistribution are sustained (or even increased) in the face of rising inequality, as well as multiple subsidiary questions. We posit a causal chain in which increasingly pro-conservative patterns of campaign finance and interest group resource mobilization lead to less egalitarian rhetoric among elites of both parties, which reduces public support for government action to confront rising inequality.

The Shifting Balance of Campaign Resources

Our theory begins with the observation that, as inequality has risen, campaign contributions have come increasingly from business interests and wealthy individuals rather than labor. Some have argued that these changes in campaign finance have been a key driver of inequality (Hacker & Pierson 2010). It is also possible that such changes happened in response to rising inequality since, as economic inequality rises, the pool of potential political resources is by definition more concentrated in the hands of the rich. For the purposes of our argument, whether growing inequality preceded the dominance of campaign finance by business and the wealthy or vice versa is not critical. What is essential to understand is that once the process is started, rising inequality and changes in campaign finance patterns are correlated.

We know that in the late 1960s and early 1970s corporations and rich individuals became heavily mobilized into politics for a variety of reasons (Hacker & Pierson 2010, Vogel 1989). At the same time, “deunionization” began and campaign finance laws may have made it more difficult for labor to compete with business and the wealthy in providing resources to politicians (Gais 1998). The net result of these changes was that by the late 1970s resources from conservative, moneyed sources were much more important to politicians than they had been a decade earlier. Hacker & Pierson (2010) do a masterful job of describing this process.

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2 Page & Jacobs (2009, 41) find a similar pattern. Despite rising inequality, they show declining support for redistribution during the 1990s and, on average, higher levels of support for redistribution during the 1980s than 2000s. The lack of public demand for more redistribution is also consistent with recent work by Campbell (2010) and Mettler (2011).
We illustrate these changes by looking at campaign finance data from 1980 to 2010. The Federal Election Commission categorizes interest group political action committees (PACs) into four relevant groups: Labor, Corporate, Trade/Membership/Health (TMH) and Non-connected (the latter are PACs not affiliated with any “parent” group and usually focus on a narrow policy area). The contributions in the TMH category come mostly from economic interests like trade and professional associations. The remainder of contributions comes from individuals, and as one might expect, political contributors are much wealthier on average than the rest of the public. In Figure 2 we present the Gini coefficient of income inequality along with two measures of the influence of wealthy interests in recent elections—the ratio of individual campaign donations to labor donations and the ratio of business donations (Corporate plus TMH) to labor donations. All variables have been standardized to have a common scale. Although there are times of divergence, overall we see a strong relationship between inequality and the balance of individual to labor and corporate—TMH to labor contributions (r=0.72 and 0.73, respectively). Evidence from lobbying data (Drutman 2010) or an exclusive focus on very large donors rather than individual contributors (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal 2006) would produce similar results.

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3 Data are from Ornstein, Mann, & Malbin (2009).
Consistent with Hacker & Pierson’s (2010) qualitative picture, income inequality and the dominance of the campaign finance system by these moneyed interests is highly correlated.

Importantly, this pattern of increased reliance on funding from corporations and individuals as opposed to labor has affected both Republican and Democratic politicians. Labor donations remain important for Democratic congressional candidates but, according to data we collected, in recent Congresses, House Democrats have received approximately 35-40 percent of their contributions from labor. In the Senate the proportions from labor are even lower. In contrast, in 1968 Democratic congressional candidates received 61 percent of their contributions from labor, 32 percent from national party committees, and only 7 percent from business/industry (Alexander 1971, Wright 2000). Since half of the money raised by Democratic Party committees also came from labor (Wright 2000), Democratic congressional candidates received about three-fourths of their funds from unions as recently as 1968. This situation changed dramatically throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Wright 2000). Obviously, not all wealthy individuals are conservative. However, Francia, Green, Herrnson, Powell, & Wilcox (2005) show that of those who donate more than $200 to the Democratic Party, over half are active members of a business lobbying organization, while less than 4 percent are union members. Wealthy individuals who donate the most money to politicians are generally more socially liberal but more economically conservative than the poor (Gelman, Park, & Shor 2008). In sum, a voice that is consistently supportive of liberal economic policies (labor unions) has been increasingly drowned out by more economically conservative corporate and individual donors, even in the Democratic Party. The next section outlines a mechanism linking these changes in the interest system to public attitudes toward inequality and redistribution.

**Campaign Funding, Elite Rhetoric, and Public Opinion**

Fenno (1973) noted long ago that the three basic goals of most members of Congress are: reelection, influence, and good policy. The ability to raise money is critically important to reelection and influence, and politicians can likely achieve policy goals more readily if they cultivate strong relationships with lobbyists and interest groups (Hall & Deardorff 2006). Several studies document that campaign contributions and lobbying result in specific policy benefits for business (Gordon & Hafer 2005, Richter, Samphantharak & Timmons 2009, Witko 2011). But we posit that politicians also shape their rhetoric to appeal to those providing resources for their campaigns. If our argument is correct, the shift of

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4 Data were collected from the Federal Election Commission detailed data page: [http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/ftpdet.shtml](http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/ftpdet.shtml).
campaign finance toward wealthy donors and business interests would cause politicians to shift their rhetoric away from support for egalitarian, redistributive policies. This does not require individual members to change their rhetoric to attract support from business and the wealthy (conversion). For example, members who previously vocalized a pro-redistribution position could begin to focus more on social issues instead of economic issues. Alternatively, it could be that as older, more rhetorically egalitarian members retire they are replaced by members with less egalitarian rhetoric who win partly due to their ability to attract the support of business and the wealthy (replacement).

Existing evidence on this shift in rhetoric is quite limited, and a major component of the proposed research would focus on amassing the data necessary to assess this claim. However, preliminary support for this argument can be found in the literature (e.g. Campbell & Morgan 2005) and in some preliminary data we have collected. Graetz & Shapiro (2005) demonstrate that Democrats' recent arguments against the repeal of the estate tax focused on the effect this would have on the deficit. This focus on the deficit contrasts with traditional arguments in support of the tax, which focused on redistribution and preventing the accumulation of large fortunes. Additionally, Smith (2007) shows campaign advertising content about incomes, standards of living, and the minimum wage actually decreased for both parties after the 1970s despite a general uptick in discussion of economic issues. We see a similar pattern in the data we collected. Figure 3 shows the combined results from searches of the Congressional Record for the number of mentions of the phrases “income inequality,” “economic inequality,” and “progressive taxation” (dashed line) plotted against a Gini index for income inequality (solid line). In the 1970s, the discussion of both economic inequality and policies that could reduce it (progressive taxation) declined dramatically.
We are not arguing that an increasing reliance on the resources of business and the wealthy are the only factors driving changes in political rhetoric. Politicians likely also craft their rhetoric in response to the successes and failures of other politicians, as well as the perceived successes and failures of particular policies.\footnote{McGovern’s defeat in 1972 probably suggested that openly redistributive rhetoric was not politically advantageous and Reagan’s victory in 1980 likely sent a similar message. In addition, the perceived shortcomings of New Deal Keynesian economics in the 1970s might have caused politicians to genuinely view these policies as questionable.} However, expanded corporate political mobilization and lobbying of the 1970s (Vogel 1989) made business interests a more common source of information about policy relative to organized labor, so this increased business mobilization may also influence perceptions of the success of various policies. And this reliance on business and the wealthy for resources can explain why inequality and related policies never became prominent in the elite discourse even as inequality increased dramatically and the economic successes predicted by conservative supply-side economics did not always emerge.

The final step in our theory is the link between redistributive rhetoric and public attitudes. Understanding the public’s policy preferences toward redistribution is particularly important because these preferences influence redistributive outcomes (Brooks & Manza 2006, Brooks & Manza 2007, Kelly 2005, Kelly 2009). In a general sense, it is not controversial to suggest that elite rhetoric influences

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**Figure 3: Inequality and Changes in Political Rhetoric**

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public opinion (Berinsky 2007, Gabel & Scheve 2007, Jacobs & Shapiro 2000, Lippmann 1922, Schneider & Jacoby 2005, Witko 2003, Zaller 1992). We know that the public responds to changing "facts" by updating its opinions and policy views (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson 2002, Page & Shapiro 1992). But because in politics basic facts are often in dispute and the causal process of translating government action into new social facts is so complex, the public also relies on elite frames when forming and updating their opinions about social reality or policies (Berinsky 2007, Chong & Druckman 2010, Jacobs & Shapiro 2000, Schneider & Jacoby 2005, Witko2003, Zaller 1992). This is especially likely in the realm of policies that might mitigate or exacerbate inequality (McCall & Kenworthy 2009). Although the public is concerned about economic inequality, it is typically not a very salient issue (Bartels 2005, Campbell 2010). Recently economic inequality has been thrust onto the agenda, but for over three decades it was largely absent and there continues to be substantial debate among political elites regarding which policies are best suited to mitigate inequality. Thus, elite rhetoric is likely to have a particularly strong influence on the public's attitudes toward redistribution. More specifically, we expect the constrained discourse described above prevents the public from viewing inequality as a very serious problem or understanding what policies would reduce it, causing rich and poor alike to embrace policies that bolster the agenda of business and the wealthy and worsen inequality (Kelly & Enns 2010).

**Work Plan**

Our theory concerning the lack of increasing public demand for a government response to rising inequality has three major aspects: 1) That as unions have declined and inequality has increased, the Washington pressure and campaign finance system has become increasingly dominated by business and the wealthy, 2) that as a result, political elite rhetoric has become less focused on economic equality and less supportive of redistributive/egalitarian policy positions, and 3) that this rhetoric influences public opinion on matters of the welfare state and redistribution. The preliminary evidence we have presented above offers initial support for these hypotheses. Our key task moving forward is to develop evidence more fully testing the empirical linkages implied by our theory. First, we develop a strategy to assess the extent to which campaign finance influences political rhetoric. Then we explore how rhetoric relating to redistributive/egalitarian policies shapes public attitudes toward inequality and these policies.

**Shifting Elite Rhetoric in Response to the Rise of the Rich**
The first major phase of our analysis will examine elite political rhetoric as the dependent variable. Our key expectation is that as the importance of the rich and business within the Washington pressure system increases, elite rhetoric emphasizing redistribution, social welfare, and the government’s role in maintaining or promoting equality declines. Our theory has observable implications for both aggregate change over time and cross-sectional variation in elite rhetoric. At the aggregate, we expect levels of redistributive/egalitarian policy rhetoric to decline as the power of the wealthy/business increases. We also expect this rhetoric to vary within and across parties based on the relative importance of wealthy and business donors. Thus, on average, Democrats should produce more egalitarian rhetoric, but both Democrats and Republicans should decrease such rhetoric over time as the power of the rich and business increases. At the level of individual politicians, we expect redistributive rhetoric to decrease as support from these interests increases. This could take place either via a process of "conversion" where individual politicians change their rhetoric throughout their careers, or by "replacement" where retiring or losing politicians are increasingly replaced by less rhetorically egalitarian candidates who have greater support from moneyed interests. We also anticipate that, all else equal, progressively ambitious politicians and party leaders will demonstrate less egalitarian rhetoric since they require more resources from the wealthy and business to hold higher office/leadership positions.

In this portion of the analysis, we will utilize a time series cross sectional dataset where the politician-year is the unit of analysis. The theoretically relevant explanatory variables measure patterns of campaign donations at the individual level – the proportion of contributions coming from business-related interests, the proportion of contributions from labor unions, the ratio of labor union to business-related contributions and the proportion of contributions at the maximum and lower donation levels. The dependent variable will measure the degree to which each politician's rhetoric is anti-poverty, pro-redistributive, or pro-egalitarian. Given the structure of the data where politicians are nested within parties (and potentially other groupings like states and years) we will estimate multi-level models. In these models we will control for macro-level variables that change over time and which may influence rhetoric such as the partisan control of government and economic conditions. We will also control for individual-level variables that likely shape rhetoric such as party, ideology, constituency characteristics and committee/party leadership positions. We expect that even after controlling for these factors, the financial reliance on business and the wealthy will produce more conservative rhetoric at the individual-level. Of course, these individual-level variables can be easily aggregated to generate time-series data, as well.
The campaign funding variables for this analysis will be constructed using existing individual-level campaign finance data that is available beginning in the late 1970s, which is at the beginning of the shift toward business dominance of the PAC system and when labor's contributions began to decline. The FEC data has itemized contributions categorized by source (corporate, TMH, labor, non-connected, party committees and individual contributions). It will be time consuming but conceptually straightforward to create a database of campaign contributions for each candidate with donations aggregated into these categories. We can also create measures of reliance on large and small donations since all contributions over $200 are itemized. Though all of these data are already freely available, we will be the first to aggregate the data in this manner. By making this aggregated information available to other scholars, we will provide a valuable resource that enables testing of not only our theory but also many others concerning the role of money in politics. Furthermore, we will use the ICPSR unique member of Congress identifier in this campaign funding dataset so that our data can be linked with many other congressional datasets that utilize the same ID numbers. In this data organization effort, RSF funds will be used to hire undergraduate research assistants who will help to construct the campaign finance database. This data collection effort will take place primarily during the first two years of the project and will be implemented primarily at Saint Louis University.

Creating the rhetoric measure, which is the dependent variable in this portion of the analysis, will comprise the lion's share of the work associated with this proposal. The substantive focus of our research is rhetoric on issues of redistribution and inequality but, as we describe below, our dataset will have applications far beyond this substantive area. To develop measures of redistributive rhetoric at the politician level, we will employ recent advancements in automated content analysis and its application to political texts (Diermeier, Godbout, Yu & Kaufmann 2011, Grimmer 2010, Hopkins & King 2010, Laver, Benoit & Garry 2003, Lowe, Benoit, Mikhailov & Laver 2011). Our content analysis will examine all speeches and content inserted into the record by members of Congress. We will acquire requisite searchable, electronic, optical character recognition versions of the Congressional Record that can be converted to text files for use with automated content analysis software from Hein Online. Our analysis will initially focus on the years 1970-2011. Of course, the public does not read the Congressional Record. However, existing research shows that the Congressional Record offers an important indication of available political rhetoric. Lawrence & Birkland (2004, 1198), for example, find that “congressional floor debates are an important indicator of public discourse” and Maltzman & Sigelman (1996) note that

6 We cannot rely on opensecrets.org because this website does not include all relevant years and we need the original data to generate our specific categories of interest.
politicians primarily use floor speech to seek to influence policy debates. Furthermore, a substantial literature shows floor speech focuses the media on particular issues and provides many of the frames and arguments that media chooses from when providing coverage of policy debates (Althaus, Edy, Entman & Patricia 1996, Bennet 1990, Grimmer 2010, Jerit 2006).

Our first goal in the automated content analysis is to categorize the text of the Congressional Record using the Policy Agendas topic codes (www.policyagendas.org), which is an important existing resource for social scientists. We will utilize a combination of automated text processing and student employees to pre-process the text for analysis with automated content analysis software (e.g., tag all content to identify the politician associated with the text, remove all punctuation, stem words to retain only their root, and make all letters lowercase). This marked up text will be categorized with semi-supervised machine learning categorization implemented using the freely available and open source RTextTools package (Jurka, Collingwood, Boydstun, Grossman & van Atteveldt 2012). This package contains several procedures that can be used to categorize large amounts of text into policy topics using information derived from the manual coding of a small subset of the relevant text (known as the training set). This coding according to policy domains is our first goal in this stage of the project. Using the Policy Agendas codes both makes the output more broadly useful by connecting with an existing dataset and simplifies the task of categorizing Congressional rhetoric. The categorization task is simplified because we can start by identifying speeches that were delivered in connection with public laws that have already been manually categorized by experts as part of Policy Agendas Project. These speeches can be utilized as the training set, which is the basis on which Congressional speech not associated with previously categorized public laws will be coded using the Support Vector Machines algorithm.  

After this first pass we will have a large amount of political text categorized by policy domain. We will then conduct additional content analysis within the topic areas in order to scale the ideological content of the Congressional rhetoric. Within each topic, we will scale rhetoric for its left-right content, producing an ideological score for each speech or entry in the Congressional Record. The scaling will be conducted using the WordScores program, which utilizes anchoring documents to generate ideological scores. A key decision in the application of the WordScores procedure is selecting anchoring

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7 We will also make use of ReadMe (King, Knowles & Melendez 2010) to calculate the relative proportion of Congressional Record content in each Policy Agendas category. ReadMe utilizes a more accurate method for estimating aggregate proportions of documents in categories (Hopkins & King 2010).

8 As a reliability check, we will replicate this portion of the analysis using WORDFISH, which places political text on a single-dimension scale using word frequencies and without the need for anchoring documents (Proksch & Slapin
documents. The anchoring documents need to be exemplars of extremely liberal and extremely conservative speech within each topic area. We will identify the anchoring documents based on existing knowledge of ideological positioning from roll-call voting behavior and our own expert judgment. Before analyzing the text, we will remove as much stylistic language as possible from the anchoring documents and the text to be analyzed. This is essential because stylistic elements could vary both over time and across parties. Since our goal is to capture only differences in ideological content, it is important to remove stylistic or technical variation in the texts.\footnote{Another potential concern is that Republicans and Democrats may use similar words to communicate different meanings. Where this is the case, such overlapping words would not effectively differentiate between the two parties. For this to create a fundamental problem for our analysis, the overlap would need to be so substantial that very few words effectively differentiate between ideological positions. Given what we know about language and the application of automated text analysis, this is highly unlikely. While our procedure will eliminate over-time variation in style, there may be real change in how ideology is communicated over time. If this is identified as a problem, we plan to rectify it by using multiple anchoring documents across time. For a similar application of text analysis to score ideological speech over time, see Slapin & Proksch (2008).}

For both the topic coding and the ideological coding, we will validate the automated results by having trained individuals follow established guidelines to code a random subset of the texts for policy topic and ideology and then comparing these manual scores to the automated ones. The primary expenses associated with this portion of the project are funds for student employees to pre-process the text, for faculty time to prepare the text analysis and validate results.

Once each unit of text is scored for its ideological content, we will utilize those scores to create a dataset of Congressional rhetoric at the member level within each Policy Agendas topic. We will do this by calculating an annual average ideological score of content connected to each member for every topic. Our substantive focus in this project is rhetoric related to inequality and redistribution so for our purposes we will focus the analysis on scores related to topics such as the economy, jobs, poverty, inequality, and social policy. Specifically, we will examine content categorized in selected topics within the following Policy Agendas topic codes: macroeconomics; labor, employment, and immigration; education; social welfare; community development and housing issues; and banking, finance, and domestic commerce. Based on these scores, we will be able to observe both over time change within members of Congress as well as cross-sectional variation across members. These data, when merged with campaign contribution variables and variables that can account for alternative explanations (such as legislator partisanship, electoral cycles, and economic conditions) provide for a test of the core

theoretical expectations generated above. The main expense here is student and faculty time to clean the dataset and prepare the data for public release. This aspect of the project will be implemented at Cornell University and the University of Tennessee and will be completed during the first two years of the project.\textsuperscript{10}

**The Opinion Response to Shifting Rhetoric on Redistribution**

The final aspect of our analysis examines the response of public opinion to rhetoric. In this phase of the analysis, we use existing time series and cross-sectional data from public opinion surveys. We will also conduct survey experiments funded through internal university grants. Our predictions, again, are at both the aggregate, time-series and micro, cross-sectional levels. This research will mostly take place during year three and all institutions will contribute to this part of the project.

First, our theory predicts that macro-level public opinion shifts in a conservative direction as redistributive/egalitarian rhetoric diminishes. To test this prediction we will conduct an analysis similar to that found in Kelly & Enns (2010), but now we will include independent variables measuring aggregated political rhetoric (developed in the previous phase of the analysis). In this earlier analysis, annual time series data were used to test the effect of rising inequality on general measures of public opinion, while controlling for other determinants of aggregate opinion. Our data collection effort will allow an examination of political rhetoric as a mechanism for the aggregate link between rising inequality and conservative attitudes using the same modeling approach and many of the same control variables included in the earlier analysis.

Second, our theory posits that individuals who are more exposed to political rhetoric will be less likely to support redistributive policies when rhetoric is less egalitarian. We will tap exposure to political rhetoric with levels of political information. The theory also suggests that union membership and partisanship may moderate the effect of information exposure in such cross-sectional analyses. Union members and strong Democratic partisans are more likely to receive pro-redistribution messages from party leaders than are non-union members and strong Republicans. So Democratic partisans and union members who are highly informed may be more supportive of redistribution than Democrats and union members who are less informed, while highly informed Republicans and non-union members are likely to be less

\textsuperscript{10} Specifically, the two university teams will work in tandem to organize the data by policy topic. At that point, it will be straightforward to allocate half of the topic codes to each University of ideological coding by member of Congress.
supportive of redistribution than Republicans or non-union members who are less informed. It is also important to note that this moderating effect is contingent upon meaningful distinctions between Democratic and Republican rhetoric. If such distinctions diminish over time, then this moderating effect may also decline or disappear. However, if it is only the case that the rhetoric of both parties has shifted to the right, but in roughly equal amounts, partisan differences in rhetoric will remain and the moderating effect is likely to remain similar over time. To test these expectations, we will utilize several existing cross-sectional datasets that include relevant survey items. Most notably, the American National Election Study has included questions regarding attitudes toward inequality and redistributive policy at several points in time. We can conduct cross sectional analyses of these attitudes while controlling for other relevant factors that are known to influence policy preferences to test the cross-sectional implications of our theory as it relates to public opinion as an outcome.

The structure of our database will also allow us to create state-level rhetoric measures by aggregating the scores for the representatives and senators within each state delegation. Together with data based on recent advances in estimating over time state-level public opinion (Enns & Koch 2012, Lax & Phillips 2009), we can assess the link between rhetoric and public opinion at the state level in addition to the national-level analysis outlined above. This state-level analysis also offers leverage in explaining how factors such as union density and policy liberalism may condition public responses to elite rhetoric. These analyses will be time-series cross-sectional and we will control for a variety of factors that are shown to influence state-level opinion in other studies. Again, given the structure of the cross-sectional data where voters are nested in unions, states, etc., we will utilize multi-level modeling. This part of the project will be partially implemented at each institution.

The analyses described above offer a direct assessment of the overtime and cross-sectional relationships between campaign donations, political rhetoric, and the public's policy preferences. Nevertheless, as an additional robustness check, we will also conduct survey experiments to test how exposure to varying rhetoric affects reported policy attitudes. For this aspect of the analysis we will expose survey respondents to varying messages. A control group will not be given any additional message related to redistribution, one treatment group will be exposed to a pro-redistribution message taken from public statements made by a politician during the middle portion of the 20th Century, which will be selected to reflect common rhetoric at that time, while a second treatment group will be exposed to an anti-redistribution message from a recent public statement chosen to reflect statements that are more typical today. Standard techniques for analyzing data from survey experiments will be utilized to provide
a convincing demonstration of the causal mechanisms at play as well as a further test of whether changes in rhetoric, of the type that have been observed over the past 40 years, can produce substantive shifts in attitudes toward redistribution. We are not requesting RSF financial support for this experiment because we will seek internal funding support from Cornell University, the University of Tennessee, and Saint Louis University, to support this part of the project.

**Reporting Results**

While the politics of growing inequality present interesting theoretical puzzles for social scientists, this issue has also become increasingly divisive in American society in recent months. Our research will shape scholarly views of the roots of growing inequality and inform the broader public debate about inequality. This project will also improve our knowledge of the dynamics of opinion formation, sources of interest group power, the determinants of mass support for public policies, and the salience of various societal problems. Our research should also be useful to scholars in other fields such as history, sociology, economics and communications. Throughout the project period, we will present our findings at professional conferences and in journal articles. We will also disseminate our major findings in formats and places accessible to the general public, such as op-eds in national newspapers, posts in news blogs, and essays in major news magazines. Our major publication goal, however, is a book, which we hope to publish with the Russell Sage Foundation.

A second major product of this project will be a new publicly available dataset. Since we will gather data on rhetoric across a wide variety of policy domains, scholars interested in an array of other questions related to political rhetoric will be able to make use of the data we collect. Our dataset could be used in studies of the media to see how closely news coverage reflects the political rhetoric of politicians. Those interested in other domains of public opinion could use our data to test additional linkages between political rhetoric and public opinion. A database of political rhetoric as extensive as the one we propose to create would be unprecedented and would be of use across multiple disciplines. Because our project will utilize the Policy Agendas topics in coding rhetoric, it will also be straightforward to link our database to this important existing data resource. Similarly, our use of ICPSR Congress member ID numbers will facilitate merging our individual member data on rhetoric with other existing datasets used by Congressional scholars. Finally, we will create a project website that will serve as an online portal for data access and information about the project, facilitating open access to the data and documentation by scholars around the world.
Personnel


We have structured the project to make effective use of the specific expertise of the four faculty members and the strongest human capital resources available at each of our three institutions. Witko will develop the coding protocols for and manage the construction of the campaign finance database since he has the most expertise in campaign finance and Congressional politics. Undergraduates at Saint Louis University will be tasked with coding activities related to the development of this database in years 1 and 2. These undergraduates will be trained and managed on-site by. A Cornell graduate student and a University of Tennessee graduate student will work on text cleaning and markup of the Congressional Record in preparation for the automated analysis of that text. Given Morgan's expertise in content analysis, she will be the primary developer of protocols that will guide the work of these students. This work will occur in years 1 and 2 and will be managed on-site by Enns at Cornell and Kelly at Tennessee. Year three will be dedicated to finalizing data collection efforts, analyzing the data, preparing the data for public release, and preparation of the book manuscript. As the previous citations indicate, we have extensive experience collaborating together and with others. However, to facilitate collaboration and to ensure that all aspects of the project stay on schedule, we will take the following steps. First, the investigators will conduct monthly video conference calls via Skype and the research assistants will participate on these calls at least twice a semester. Second, the investigators will attend at least one common conference a year, which will provide an opportunity for direct interaction. Finally, we will use
Dropbox to allow easy file sharing across institutions. In conclusion, we are confident that our different and complementary areas of expertise and research styles will generate synergies that lead to important advancements in the study of campaign donations, political rhetoric, and the public’s surprising failure to demand more redistribution in the midst of four decades of rising inequality.

Budget Justification

References


Jacobs, Lawrence & Theda Skocpol, eds. 2005. *Inequality and American Democracy: What We Know and What We Need to Learn.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.


