

Issue Brief:

The Altering Correlation Between Class and Voting Behavior at the State Level

Key Words: Socioeconomic status (SES), class, income, education, voting behavior, state income

Description: This issue brief introduces a modern finding in a change in correlation between voting behavior of upper and lower class voters within richer and poorer states. With earlier trends relating upper class voters with the Republican Party, and lower class voters with the Democratic Party, a recent state-level shift has been revealed, differentiating voting behavior in richer and poorer areas of red and blue states.

Key Points:

- Studying voting behavior is crucial not only to understand election outcomes, but also electoral tendencies.
- Access of resources is a major factor in the variation of political participation between low and high SES.
- Individual income is a positive predictor of voting Republican, while average state income is a negative predictor of voting Republican.
- Higher income voters in richer states support the Democratic Party, even though richer voters lean toward the Republican Party on the national level.

Issue Brief

Analyzing voting behavior has become a useful tool for politicians to obtain relevant information regarding election outcomes as well as electoral tendencies.

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been a characteristic closely related to voting, as its measurement includes the evidently vital factors of income, education, and occupation.

Findings on the higher ends of these factors – the wealthier, more educated, and those

with higher occupation prestige – indicate correlations with more active voting behavior. Conversely, individuals with overall lower socioeconomic status tend to participate less, as well as possessing lower levels of political efficacy (Nevitte, 6).

Voting behavior possesses two fundamental questions of *why* and *how* people vote, which tend to vary among groups of higher and lower socioeconomic statuses. The former question is commonly associated with political participation and having the *ability* to participate. People of higher SES are more likely to be active in politics because of the greater access they have to particular resources – such as time, money, and civic skills – which facilitates participation (Miller). In contrast, individuals of lower SES, who do not possess access to such resources, are less likely to participate in politics.

Patterns dealing with *how* people vote based on SES can be further broken down using the Democratic and Republican parties within America’s two-party system. An evident divide has been present in modern politics generalizing the Democrats as the party of the lower classes and the Republicans for the upper classes. However, a more recent and opposing perspective has presented itself at the state level, claiming that the Democratic Party represents the elites of the upper class, rather than the Republican Party. The research reveals that individual income and partisan preferences vary between richer and poorer states (Gelman).

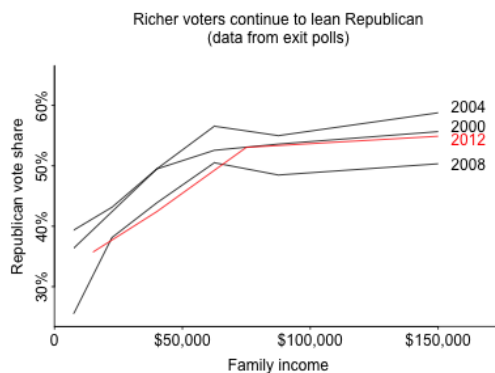


Image 2: Rich voters continue to vote Republican at the national level (washingtonmonthly.com)

In presidential elections since 1952, census and poll data show that higher-income voters continue to support Republicans (Gelman, 347). However, when analyzing average state income, a study conducted by Andrew Gelman has shown a shift demonstrating that richer voters in higher-income states have favored the Democrats. The Republicans have indeed collected the support of the richer voters within any given state, but have statistically higher levels of support of richer voters in poorer states. In other words, people in the upper class of poorer states are more likely to vote for the Republican candidate than people within the upper class of the richer states. Thus – especially within national level elections – voting behavior has been greatly associated with state income, particularly when dealing with higher-SES voters.

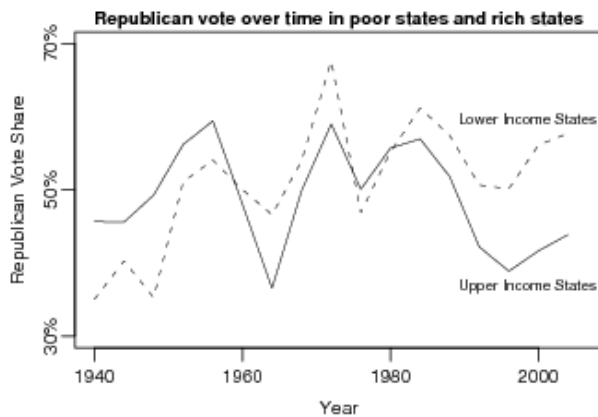


Image 3: Republican vote share in poor and rich states 1940-2000 (washingtonmonthly.com)

The two contemporary findings of this research indicate that if the “typical Republican voter” was to be labeled, the voter would be an upper-income resident of a poor state. In contrast, the “typical Democratic voter” would be a lower-income resident of a rich state (Gelman, 362). Therefore, on average, upper-income Americans do tend to vote Republican; however, this analysis becomes more nuanced when considering average

state income. A red-blue paradox becomes evident, where individual income is a positive predictor, and average state income is a negative predictor, of voting for the Republican presidential candidate (Gelman, 355).

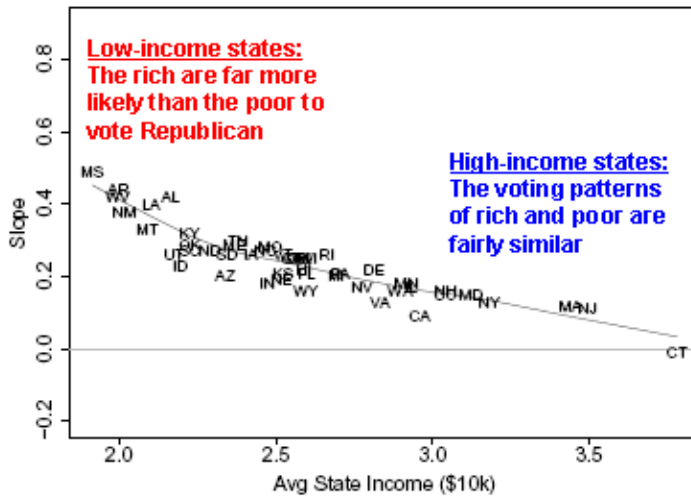


Image 1: Voting Behavior: Low-Income States vs. High-Income States (andrewgelman.com)

Analyzing voting behavior is not solely based on class and income, however they do prove to be vital factors in furthering our knowledge on the matter. Through this pioneering research, the interconnectivity between SES, political participation, and geography collectively verify to be fundamental factors in analyzing voting behavior.

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