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Political Action in the Age of High-Economic Inequality: A Multilevel Approach

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Economic inequality in the United States has reached historic levels—the highest since the Great Depression. Though people may argue over whether inequality is morally wrong or practically undesirable, the consensus seems to be clear: economic inequality is one of the greatest challenges facing the U.S. today. Yet, concern for economic inequality has not seemed to translate into solution-oriented political participation. While acknowledging the complex and multifaceted nature of this issue, the current article explores one particular factor that may help to illuminate the relationship between economic inequality and political behavior, namely socioeconomic status (SES). We propose that both the context of economic inequality and one's position within the socioeconomic hierarchy shape political attitudes and behavior. That is, economic inequality influences political action, but the strength and direction of this influence may depend on the individual's SES. Throughout this article, we highlight the importance of understanding both the objective *situation of inequality and an individual's SES, as well as that individual's* subjective *perceptions of inequality and personal SES. We also underscore the importance of applying a multidisciplinary approach, and in particular a social psychological perspective, to the current research.*

Economic inequality in the United States has reached historic levels—the highest since the Great Depression. The wealthiest 1% of Americans owns nearly

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50% of the country's wealth, whereas the bottom 80% of Americans owns only 5% of the country's wealth (Saez & Zucman, 2014; Wolff, 2002). Though reasonable people may argue over whether inequality is morally wrong or practically undesirable, the consensus seems to be clear: Economic inequality is one of the greatest challenges facing the U.S. today (Pew, 2014a,b,c). Politicians on both sides of the aisle have argued that inequality is a pressing concern, with President Barack Obama calling it "the defining challenge of our time" (Jackson, 2013). And, the American public seems to be in agreement, with approximately 78% calling the gap between the rich and the poor "a big problem" (Pew, 2014c).

Yet, concern has not seemed to translate into solution-oriented political participation. Take, for example, public opinion on redistributive policies including taxation and welfare programs, which represent one means of reducing inequality. A rational voter theory would predict that support for such policies should be on the rise because, as inequality increases, more people would benefit from redistribution and therefore should be expected to vote in favor of it (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). And yet, the data do not unequivocally bear this out: The relationship between the degree of economic inequality in the United States and citizens' average level of support for redistribution appears to be almost negligible (Ashok, Kuziemko, & Washington, 2015; see also Kerr, 2014); moreover, individuals in more unequal places may be even less likely to vote than individuals in more equal places (Solt, 2008, 2010). Why are citizens not taking political action to correct an issue that the vast majority agrees is problematic? And, more generally, why does inequality continue to grow and to elicit stark divisions over what to do about it?

While acknowledging the complex and multifaceted nature of this issue, the current article explores one particular factor that may help to illuminate the relationship between economic inequality and political behavior, namely socioeconomic status (SES). We propose that both the context of economic inequality and one's position within the socioeconomic hierarchy shape political attitudes and behavior. That is, economic inequality influences political action, but the strength and direction of this influence depend on the individual's SES. We examine the support for this claim within the following framework: First, we provide a brief overview of economic inequality, considering both theoretical and empirical evidence to suggest why individuals and societies may be motivated to reduce economic inequality. Second, we explore the relationship between economic inequality and political actions that constitute potential routes for addressing economic inequality, such as support for redistributive policies and voter turnout. Third, we examine SES, as well as how it may influence both support for redistributive policies and political participation. In a fourth section, we argue that, though economic inequality does influence political action, the strength and direction of that influence depends on the individual's status. Fifth, we consider potential psychological mechanisms that may underpin the relationship between economic inequality, SES, and political attitudes and behaviors. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion of the policy implications suggested by this analysis.

Throughout, we argue that social psychology can provide a useful perspective through which to understand the joint impact of economic inequality and SES on political attitudes and behaviors. In support of our argument, we note the importance of understanding both the *objective* situation of inequality and an individual's SES, as well as that individual's *subjective* perceptions of inequality and her SES. We also highlight innovative social psychological research that contributes to our understanding of the mechanisms through which the economic climate can influence political action. That said, we also review and rely on theoretical and empirical evidence from a wide-ranging set of academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, economics) and using a variety of methodologies (e.g., survey data, experimental studies). Underscoring the value we place on applying a multidisciplinary approach, we also encourage expanding collaborations between several social science disciplines to better understand political action in the age of high economic inequality.

What Is Economic Inequality, and Why Is It Important?

Economic inequality is a broad term used to describe the breadth of differences in economic well-being among individuals in a society. Colloquially, it is thought of as the wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Importantly, inequality is distinct from (although can be related to) poverty. Poverty may be thought of as a level of deprivation: individuals below the "poverty line," are considerably worse-off than the majority of the population (UNESCO, 2016). Inequality, by contrast, is a relative term referring to the degree of difference in wealth between those at the top and at the bottom of a society. The actual income and difference in wealth that define poverty or inequality will, of course, vary from country to country.

Economic inequality is typically broken down into three categories: wealth, income, and pay.[1] Wealth inequality tends to be the broadest category and refers to the distribution of all financial assets (i.e., property, investments, income, etc.) across individuals or households. Income inequality is the extent to which income (i.e., salaries, bonuses, investments, etc.) is distributed unevenly across individuals. Pay inequality is a narrower definition of inequality in that it only refers to money

[1] We wish to acknowledge that, though we focus on economic inequality, it is not possible to completely disentangle economic inequality from related concepts such as inequalities in access to education, healthcare, etc. and associated factors such as gender and race. Throughout the paper, we attempt to recognize these related concepts—particularly race—as appropriate.

earned through employment (for additional nontechnical information on different types of inequality, see http://www.pewresearch.org/).

There are several different ways to measure inequality, each of which attempts to quantify the dispersion of financial resources across individuals (or households) rather than the overall level of resources. The most common measure of inequality is the Gini index (Gini, 1912 [reprinted in 1955]; 1921), an indicator of the degree of inequality between different values of a frequency distribution of income (or wealth). Although other measures of inequality are limited to a single comparison of the difference in income from one level to another (such as the income of the richest 20% compared to the poorest 20% in a population), the benefit of the Gini index is that every point in the distribution is taken into account. That said, the many different measures of inequality tend to be related to one another (De Maio, 2007; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997).

Quantifying the degree of economic inequality is important because it is often a reliable indicator of the health of the economy (Berg & Ostry, 2011), the stability of the government (Berg & Sachs, 1988; Rodrik, 1999), and the well-being of individuals within the society (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Interestingly, much of the evidence suggests that both extreme *equality* and extreme *inequality* are harmful. To consider the former end of the spectrum, perfect equality of financial resources would mean that every individual has the same level of wealth. Theoretically, this could happen under a communist system of government, although such conditions are unlikely to arise in the real world, which presents a challenge to researchers. Nevertheless, much of the work that has been done on this issue suggests that perfect equality may stifle economic growth and in turn hurt individuals within such a society (for a review see Mookherjee & Ray, 2002).

In contrast, it seems that a moderate amount of economic inequality—in which rich individuals have somewhat more wealth than do poor individuals—is good for the economy and for many individuals within society (e.g., Simpson, 2009; for a nontechnical review see Keeley, 2014), presumably because economic inequality can generate incentives to produce. For example, imagine two workers at a company that produces widgets. If absolute economic equality was enforced, then Worker A would make the same amount of money as Worker B even if Worker A produced 100 more widgets a day than Worker B produced, thus de-incentivizing Worker A's productivity. Alternatively, if economic inequality was allowed, even slightly, then the company may give incentives for producing more widgets. As a result, Worker A may now make more money than Worker B, thus potentially spurring both workers' productivity (see also Hazlitt, 1986; Reisman, 1996). Of course, this overly simplistic example assumes that everyone has an equal opportunity to seek and receive economic incentives. In reality, people may receive incentives due to luck (e.g., fortuitous circumstances, born to a specific family) and/or talent (e.g., hard work, skill). However, some economists argue that a moderate amount of economic inequality may represent a situation in which the talent-to-luck ratio is reduced (Alesina & Angeletos, 2004). Put simply, moderate inequality may reflect a system where talent is more likely to be rewarded than luck.

On the other end of the spectrum, researchers have found that high inequality also may be bad for the economy and individuals within the society. It is associated with reduced economic growth (e.g., Simpson, 2009), and may be associated with a number of negative health and social outcomes. Compared to more equal countries, unequal countries tend to experience reduced interpersonal trust, shorter life expectancy, and increased infant mortality (e.g., Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; World Bank, 2012). For example, in the United States, a country with high inequality, life expectancy is 78.9 years, but in Sweden, a country with moderate inequality, life expectancy is 82.0 years (data from World Bank, 2014). Although a 3-year difference in life expectancy may not seem substantial, this difference is quite shocking when one considers that the United States is one of the richest countries in the world (World Bank, 2014) and spends more money on healthcare (17.1% of its GDP) than any other country (contrast with Sweden's 11.5%; OECD Health Data, 2014).

However, controversies remain in interpreting the empirical evidence surrounding the effect of economic inequality on health and social outcomes (for a review see Subramanian & Kawachi, 2004). In particular, there is disagreement regarding whether economic inequality is a true cause of these negative health and social outcomes (e.g., Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006, 2009) or rather a concomitant condition of having many socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals residing in the same place, with individual disadvantage being the primary determinant of negative outcomes (e.g., Lynch et al., 2004). Additionally, inequality may exert "lagged effects" such that inequality may slowly impact health and behavior over time, rather than instantaneously (e.g., Subramanian & Kawachi, 2004; Truesdale & Jencks, 2016). These controversies surrounding the effects of inequality highlight the importance of disentangling inequality and socioeconomic status—a topic that we return to later in this article.

Given that inequality may be associated with negative economic, social, and health outcomes, one might expect citizens in highly unequal countries to desire a greater level of economic equality (or at least a lesser level of economic *in*equality). Moreover, one might expect that this desire for greater equality would motivate citizens to desire redistributive policies that seek to reduce the current level of inequality and to engage politically in order to pressure the government to create such policies. However, the data linking states' or countries' objective levels of inequality to individuals' political attitudes and action are much more complex than the overly simplistic picture we just presented. In the next section, we explore in more detail how economic inequality is related to political beliefs and actions.

How Is Economic Inequality Related to Political Beliefs and Actions?

On average, Americans tend to tolerate, or even prefer, a higher level of inequality than their European counterparts (Hochschild, 1981; Jacobs & Skocpol, 2007). This tolerance is in part due to the fact that Americans often presume that financial inequality reflects differences in work ethic and talent (Drake, 2013; Hochschild, 1981). Therefore, it stands to reason that Americans simply do not think that the current level of economic inequality is “bad” or “needs to be fixed,” because these differences in wealth are deserved. But, this is not clearly the case. Recent research investigating the attitudes of American citizens toward the gap between the rich and the poor found that the majority sees it as a big problem (Pew, 2014a), and many Americans would prefer a more equitable distribution of financial resources, one that is more similar to Sweden’s (Norton & Ariely, 2011; see also Eriksson & Simpson, 2012).

Overall, these beliefs about the challenges of inequality are paired with beliefs that government intervention is needed to address them. A majority of Americans (69%) endorse the idea that the government should do at least something to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor (Pew, 2014b). And, this desire for government intervention under circumstances of high inequality is not unique to the United States. In most countries around the world, greater economic inequality—measured objectively using the Gini coefficient—is associated with a greater desire for the government to take responsibility for its citizens (Andersen & Curtis, 2015). Somewhat surprisingly, these broad levels of support for government policies designed to reduce economic inequality seem to be present for both rich and poor citizens and across political parties (Page & Jacobs, 2009). And yet, despite this consensus to reduce economic inequality both at home and abroad, the relationship between inequality and policy attitudes is not straightforward.

One common way governments can reduce economic inequality is via redistributive policies. Broadly speaking, these are policies that tax the rich to provide benefits to the poor. Theoretically, higher levels of inequality should be associated with an increase in support for redistributive policies because a greater percent of the population would fall below the mean income and would benefit from said policies (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). But, some research suggests that in the United States there may be no or only a minimal relationship between inequality and support for redistributive policies: As national-level indicators have indicated growing inequality in the United States, individuals’ average level of support for redistribution has remained relatively unchanged over time (Ashok et al., 2015; Soss & Jacobs, 2009; see also McCall & Kenworthy, 2009; Shaw & Gaffey, 2012).

Given these findings regarding inequality and political attitudes, it is perhaps not surprising then that economic inequality does not have a clear relationship with political actions. Some studies find that high inequality is associated with *inaction*. Specifically, higher inequality is associated with reduced voter turnout, both internationally and within the United States. More unequal countries (Solt, 2008) and states (Solt, 2010)—again measured objectively using the Gini index—have reduced voter turnout relative to more equal countries and states, controlling for the median income (see also Galbraith & Hale, 2008). However, other studies complicate this understanding of the relationship between inequality and political action. For example, using aggregated state-level data across multiple time points, Uslaner and Brown (2005) found higher state-level inequality (Gini index coefficient) was unrelated to various measures of political participation, including voter turnout. And, Brady (2004), across a variety of analyses (i.e., cross-level, time-series, etc.), finds mixed evidence for whether differences in the rich-poor gap in income are positively, negatively, or even not related to differences in the rich-poor gap in political participation. Put differently, depending on which data are used and how they are analyzed, higher levels of inequality may exacerbate, attenuate, or have no effect on differences in political participation between those higher and lower in SES. These inconsistent findings across published research make it difficult to understand the impact of economic inequality on political attitudes *and* action.

One reason for these inconsistent findings may be, in part, due to aggregating across between- and within-country effects (or in failing to consider this distinction when interpreting researchers' findings). In other words, there are (at least) two questions that may be asked regarding the relationship between economic inequality and political action: One, are citizens in more unequal locales less likely to engage politically? And, two, as a locale itself becomes more unequal, are its citizens less likely to engage politically? Aggregating across these effects may obscure the true nature of the relationship between economic inequality and political action (see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). To understand why aggregating data in this way may be problematic, consider the example of brain size and animal size. Larger animals tend to have larger brains (e.g., whales have larger brains than do mice). Based on the aggregated data across different animals, one may conclude that the larger the animal, the larger the brain. But, within a species, brain size is unrelated to animal size (e.g., larger mice do not necessarily have larger brains than smaller mice). Therefore, the aggregated data may mislead or obscure the relationship between body size and brain size. Though there is a positive *between-species* relationship between body and brain size, there is no *within-species* relationship. The same type of disaggregation may be necessary for the between- and within-country effects of economic inequality. For example, Kerr (2014) found that across countries, inequality was associated with less support for redistribution (a *negative* between-country relationship), but within a country, increases in inequality were associated with increased support for redistribution (a *positive* within-country relationship). Overall, this underscores the importance of taking a multilevel approach (both conceptually and statistically) to the relationship between economic inequality and political action.

Though noted above, it is also important to underscore that all of the research reviewed thus far investigates the impact of *objective* levels of inequality on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the lack of consistency in the findings may be, in part, due to the *ecological fallacy*, which is the assumption that macro-level relationships pertain to all individuals in the group (e.g., Durkheim, 1951; Robinson, 1950). In this case, the concern is, for example, that the relationship between a country's inequality and the political response of an individual within that country cannot be assumed to apply consistently and equally to all individuals. The context of inequality may affect different individuals differently, though the net effect of inequality remains unchanged. As a result, relying on macro-level measures of inequality—particularly if done so in conjunction with the ecological fallacy—may lead to inaccurate conclusions about the relationship between inequality and individuals' policy attitudes. Together, this suggests that it is important to consider both the individual and the macro-level context of inequality (e.g., Mendoza-Denton & Mischel, 2007).

Relatedly, macro-level data investigating economic inequality does not tell us how economic inequality is understood by the individual. Put simply, before we can understand how economic inequality affects political beliefs and actions, we must understand how economic inequality is understood by the individual. In the next section, we will consider the impact of *perceived* economic inequality on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Considering perceived inequality is important for three reasons. First, the perception of inequality may or may not reflect the economic reality. If perceptions of inequality do not match the economic reality, then these skewed perceptions may be the reason why citizens are not motivated to engage politically. Second, foundational research in social psychology suggests that people's perceptions of a situation, rather than the objective reality of the situation, likely have greater effects on behavior (e.g., Lewin, 1939). Therefore, understanding the psychological experience of economic inequality may be particularly important for understanding whether and how economic inequality influences political attitudes and behaviors. Finally, understanding people's perceptions of inequality leaves room for experimental manipulations of said perceptions. These manipulations can help to determine the causal relationship between perceived inequality and political attitudes and behaviors, whereas correlational data alone cannot.

Importantly, the next section examines not only perceptions of inequality, but also related psychological factors. We consider the *psychological impact of inequality* on individual's thoughts, feelings, and motivations, which may in turn influence political attitudes and action. We also begin to examine other individual-level psychological factors that may shape perceptions of inequality and modulate people's political responses to it. However, research investigating perceived economic inequality is in its infancy, and so several questions regarding inequality and political attitudes and actions remain. We highlight some of these remaining questions as they arise.

The Importance of Perceived Economic Inequality

The effects of economic inequality may filter through imperfect knowledge. In one example, Norton and Ariely (2011) asked Americans to indicate what percentage of wealth they thought was owned by each quintile in the United States. To help guide respondents in interpreting distributions, the researchers provided two hypothetical (extreme) examples of how wealth may be distributed. In the absolute equality example, respondents were told that every quintile had the same level of private wealth: the richest 20% of people owned 20% of private wealth, the second richest 20% of people owned 20% of private wealth, the third richest 20% of people owned 20% of private wealth, and so on. In the absolute inequality example, respondents were told that the richest 20% of people owned 100% of private wealth, while the rest of the population owned 0% of private wealth. After learning about these two extreme examples, respondents were asked to estimate the distribution of private wealth (as a percentage of wealth owned) across the five quintiles in the United States. The results revealed that, compared to the actual level of inequality in the United States, respondents *underestimated* how much wealth was owned by the richest 20% of the population and *overestimated* how much was owned by the poorest 40% of the population, suggesting a large divergence between perceived and actual economic inequality in the United States.

Interestingly, the results of Norton and Ariely's (2011) study revealed a large degree of consensus across different groups of Americans. People who voted for Republican candidate George W. Bush *and* people who voted for Democratic candidate John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election both underestimated the level of inequality in the United States. Similarly, poor individuals *and* rich individuals both underestimated the level of inequality. Men *and* women both underestimated the level of inequality in the United States. These subgroup findings are important because it suggests everyone's views of inequality, regardless of their demographic background or political orientation, may be imperfect reflections of reality.

This divergence between perceived and actual economic inequality, however, may reflect participants' lack of understanding of this topic. For example, some researchers have argued that the description and use of anchored percentages influenced participants' choices in the task described above (Eriksson & Simpson, 2012; 2013). To address the shortcomings of the original study, these researchers used questions that asked respondents to indicate the average wealth among percentiles (rather than the percentage of wealth controlled by each percentile). The findings revealed that these altered but logically equivalent questions did produce more accurate estimations of actual inequality (though see Norton & Ariely, 2013). However, it is important to note that, when asked about the ideal distribution of wealth in the United States, even the respondents using the questions intended to create more accurate responding reported a desire for lesser inequality than currently exists in the United States.

Though it is sufficient for the current article to note that perceptions of actual and ideal inequality may be distinct from objective levels of inequality and therefore an important consideration for researchers, future research should continue to investigate why and to what extent objective levels of economic inequality are imperfectly reflected in people's subjective perceptions. Regardless, extrapolating from these findings leads to the idea that macro-level data linking objective inequality to negative social outcomes may obfuscate the micro-level *experience* of inequality. Further, the micro-level experience of inequality may provide a unique tool for exploring the mechanisms linking inequality to political attitudes and behaviors.

Perceived Inequality and Support for Redistribution

Acknowledging the distinction between actual and perceived inequality suggests that economic inequality may not motivate political beliefs and behavior as expected because some people are simply not aware of the current level of economic inequality. Yet, the available evidence demonstrates that educating individuals about economic inequality does not necessarily change their policy judgments. Specifically, Kuziemko, Norton, Saez, and Stantcheva (2015) investigated whether knowledge (or lack thereof) of the level of economic inequality was associated with support for redistributive policies. The authors randomly assigned participants into a "treatment" or control condition. In the treatment condition, participants navigated through an interactive and personalized platform that informed individuals of the level of inequality in the United States. Participants in the control condition did not learn anything about the level of inequality. Then, participants were asked about their views on inequality and redistributive policies. The results revealed that participants in the treatment group were significantly more likely to think inequality was a serious problem than participants in the control condition. The associated effect size was very large; treatment was equal to approximately 35% of the political gap on this issue. In addition, the treatment led to a statistically significant increase in support for redistributive policies, but the effect size was quite small (equal to about 10% of the political gap on this issue). These findings suggest that awareness of inequality may not result in a corresponding attitudinal shift about redistributive policies.

Additionally, it may be that awareness of inequality may affect people's political attitudes differently depending on their political party affiliation. Support for redistribution, particularly when inequality is salient, may reflect partisan differences in beliefs about the role of government and the efficacy of redistribution. For example, regarding reducing inequality, 62% of Democrats believe the government should do "a lot" more to reduce the gap between the rich and everyone else, but only 23% of Republicans agree with this sentiment, with 33% of them believing that the government should do "nothing at all" (Pew, 2014b). And, Democrats and Republicans tend to have different beliefs about which policies are best designed to address inequality. In response to the question "What would do more to reduce poverty?," 75% of Democrats, compared to only 29% of Republicans, thought raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations to expand programs for the poor was the most effective method. Alternatively, 59% of Republicans, compared to only 17% of Democrats, thought that lowering taxes on the wealthy and corporations to encourage investment and economic growth was the most effective method. These stark partisan contrasts highlight one reason why economic inequality may not always translate to an increase in support for redistributive policies. Namely, though most people may agree that government *should* work to combat inequality, they cannot agree on *how* it should do so and to what extent.

Finally, beliefs about personal social mobility, which is the ability to change one's socioeconomic status, may moderate the relationship between perceived inequality and attitudes toward redistribution. Social mobility (actual or perceived) increases tolerance toward extreme economic inequality (Shariff, Wiwad, & Aknin, 2016). Extending this research further, it may be that, under conditions of high social mobility, people believe those at the bottom of the hierarchy deserve to be there because there is opportunity to move up (e.g., Kay & Jost, 2003). Additionally, people may believe that in the future they will be rich due to conditions of high mobility (Benabou & Ok, 2001). Together, this would suggest that any effect of perceiving higher levels of inequality on support for redistributive policies may be especially weakened among people who perceive higher levels of economic mobility (see Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Corneo & Gruber, 2002; Linos & West, 2003; Piketty, 1995). To our knowledge, this model has not yet been explicitly studied.

Perceived Inequality and Political Disillusionment

Although awareness of economic inequality may not have a strong influence on attitudes toward redistribution, it does affect trust in the government. Kuziemko et al. (2015) found that participants in the "treatment" condition, those who viewed inequality to be a more serious problem, distrusted the government significantly more than participants in the control condition. Put differently, perceived inequality caused distrust in the government. Moreover, these micro-level, experimental findings are consistent with macro-level trends. High inequality is associated with greater interpersonal distrust (Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Uslaner & Rothstein, 2005) and reduced support for democracy (Krieckhaus, Son, Bellinger, & Wells, 2014). Interestingly, high inequality is also associated with the desire for an authoritarian leader who disregards party politics (Krieckhaus et al., 2014). This may be because citizens believe that the government, and in particular partisan politics, helped create the extreme economic inequalities.

The fact that perceived inequality caused distrust in the government suggests that level of distrust may help explain the relationship between perceived inequality and political inaction. Previous research using macro-level data, however, investigated this mediational hypothesis but did not find evidence for it (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Importantly, the researchers measured interpersonal trust as opposed to trust in the government. Although at times interpersonal trust and trust in the government may produce similar effects, trust in the government may have unique effects on political inaction because trust in the government is more germane to political action than is interpersonal trust (e.g., Davidson & Jaccard, 1979). Future research should investigate whether perceived economic inequality causes political inaction and whether distrusting the government mediates (explains) this relationship. If this mediational pattern exists, it may provide clarity to the inconsistent macro-level data findings, namely that macro-level data investigating the relationship between objective economic inequality and political action may overlook the micro-level impact of economic inequality—how it is perceived by the individuals' experiencing it and how those perceptions affect their trust of the government.

Additionally, perceived inequality may heighten intergroup stereotypes. Foundational research in social psychology suggests that people automatically categorize others into groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These group-based categorizations not only simplify the complexities of the world, but also lead to an "us" (or ingroup) versus "them" (or outgroup) mentality. The perceived differences between the ingroup and outgroup are exacerbated when resources are scarce or distributed unequally such that people tend to negatively stereotype outgroup members because they are perceived to be in competition for these resources (Sherif, 1956; Sherif et al., 1954). Negatively stereotyping outgroup members can help justify the unequal distribution of resources, particularly for those who are on the top of the social hierarchy (e.g., Lerner, 1980; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). In addition, higher status individuals may want to maintain the inequality for the purpose of helping their ingroup (Chow, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006). This suggests that hierarchy maintenance may be a result of both outgroup derogation and ingroup love (Brewer, 1999).

Importantly, due to many countries' history of racial and ethnic exploitation and inequalities, these negative stereotypes often fall along racial and ethnic lines. Therefore, from the majority group members' perspective it may be that, when people become aware of the level of inequality, they may not be motivated to reduce it because they perceive that doing so will benefit racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Haller, Eder, & Stolz, 2015). Additionally, from the minority group members' perspective, histories of racial and ethnic exploitation suggest that those at the bottom of the hierarchy and racial minorities may be disenfranchised and therefore not adequately skilled and/or motivated to engage politically (Gaventa, 1980), a point that we return to in later sections.

Finally, it may be that perceived inequality has divergent effects on political action based on one's socioeconomic status. In particular, higher SES individuals may be motivated to maintain the status quo because they are benefitting from economic inequality, whereas lower SES individuals may be motivated to reduce inequality because they are disadvantaged by it. We discuss this possibility in a later section. Overall, (objective and subjective) inequality appears to have little relationship with attitudes toward redistribution. Additionally, an inconsistent relationship exists between objective inequality and political action. As is evident, there are several remaining questions regarding the mechanisms that link economic inequality to political attitudes and action. In the following sections, we consider the impact of SES on political attitudes and behaviors. Like economic inequality, SES represents an important factor that may inform political attitudes.

What Is Socioeconomic Status, and Why Is It Important?

Socioeconomic status, or social class, is constituted by both *objective* material resources or capital and *subjective* experiences of those resources and one's position in the social hierarchy. While objective SES is commonly assessed by indicators of wealth, education level, and occupational prestige, subjective SES relies instead on an individual's perception of his or her social class (see Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). It has been most often measured using the single-item MacArthur Ladder (Adler et al., 2000), in which participants are asked to place themselves on a 10-rung ladder, with those at the top being defined as among the "best off" in terms of income, education, and occupation and those at the bottom among the "worst off." In addition to this rank-based measure, other subjective measures of SES have included self-reports of social class identity (e.g., lower, middle, and upper class; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009); perceived resource availability both in childhood and currently (e.g., "My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up"; "I don't worry too much about paying my bills"; Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur, 2011); and perceived relative deprivation (e.g., "I feel privileged compared to other people like me" [reverse-scored]; Callan, Shead, & Olson, 2011).

Though objective and subjective SES are often at least modestly correlated (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi, Payne, Rini, DuHamel, & Redd, 2014; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Singh-Manoux, Marmot, & Adler, 2005), converging evidence suggests that these subjective perceptions of SES may be equally as, and in some cases more, important to consider than objective indicators in domains such as emotions (e.g., Chen & Matthews, 2001; Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012), attitudes (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2015; Kraus et al., 2009), behaviors (e.g., Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Piff et al., 2012), and mental and physical health (Cohen et al., 2008; Singh-Manoux et al., 2005). Why would that be so? Two noncompeting explanations have emerged to answer that question. First, objective SES is often indexed using an average of income and education. In most of the research described here, this measure is based on individual-level data, though at times (particularly in epidemiological studies) it may be based on census track data (e.g., information based on a neighborhood). Regardless, this crude average may not fully represent all of the different ways to measure an individual's wealth, and of course does not include any information related to the individual's access to other resources, opportunities for advancement, and so on. Relatedly, crude objective SES measures, such as education, may not be valid across different racial groups. For example, using education or income to approximate wealth, economic advancement, and prestige may not be appropriate for racial minorities due to the history of slavery and discrimination in this county, which has limited minorities', and in particular African Americans', ability to accrue wealth and economic advancement (e.g., Pager & Shepherd, 2008). In contrast, subjective SES may represent a cognitive "averaging" of a wide range of personal and economic data, simultaneously including information about various objective indicators (e.g., income, education, wealth) and information about one's current and future prospects (e.g., opportunities for advancement). As a result, this cognitive average may be a more accurate predictor than any solitary objective measure (Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Second, subjective measures may do more to convey an individual's sense of place in the hierarchy relative to others (Singh-Manoux et al., 2005), that is, how an individual *feels* about her status, wealth, prospects, and so on. Holding objective factors such as household income constant, perceiving oneself as lower on the hierarchy relative to another may be associated with powerfully different thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

In considering the relative importance of subjective status as a predictor, one more methodological issue highlights just how key a role it can be play: Unlike objective SES, subjective SES provides a means of examining the *causal* effects of SES on political and other outcomes. Though objective indicators cannot be manipulated experimentally (i.e., one cannot be randomly assigned to a different educational level), one's subjective sense of place (e.g., rank relative to others) is less static and, therefore, can be constructed with the help of experimental manipulations. Doing so allows researchers to then observe the effects of these experimentally induced states of relatively lower or higher status. Subjective status has been successfully manipulated across a variety of studies by, for example, compelling participants to compare themselves to someone either very high or very low in SES, which in turn induces a relative sense of lower versus higher position, respectively (Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011); randomly assigning participants to perform relatively better or worse than their peers in an economic game (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015); and leading participants to believe that they are relatively deprived (vs. privileged) compared to similar others (Callan et al., 2011).

Race and SES

Although SES and race are separate constructs, both constructs are complex, as well as inextricably tied to each other and to other rank-based social identities, such as ethnicity and gender (see Brannon & Markus, 2013; Conley, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Stephens & Townsend, 2013). For example, consider the differing socioeconomic experiences of White and Black individuals in the United States: In 2014, U.S. Census Bureau data indicated that, while the poverty rate for non-Hispanic White individuals was just 10.1%, the rate for Black individuals was more than twice that at 26.2% (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). These numbers reflect a similar racial gap in median household income ($60,256 for non-Hispanic White households vs. $35,398 for Black households; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). And in 2015, non-Hispanic White individuals were still more likely than Black individuals to report having attained a bachelor's degree or higher (36.2% vs. 22.5%, respectively; Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

These racial inequalities likely stem, in part, from the influence of both structural and interpersonal factors over centuries of slavery, segregation, and discrimination. For example, practices such as redlining—an institutionalized practice begun during the Great Depression of denying loans to mostly Black neighborhoods with a higher risk of default—have contributed to systematic differences in access to wealth for Black individuals (see Conley, 1999). In addition to such instances of institutionalized discrimination, research has also documented how personal stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination can exacerbate inequities in employment opportunities (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager, 2003), education (e.g., stereotype threat; Pennington, Heim, Levy, & Larkin, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995), housing (e.g., Turner et al., 2013), and the criminal justice system (e.g., Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004; Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006).

It is beyond the scope of the current article to provide an exhaustive review of the intersection between White–Black racial differences and socioeconomic differences, let alone of the intersections between various other social identities and SES. However, we recognize that SES, inequality, and political outcomes are integrally linked with other social identities (including race and gender). In short, when examining social class and inequality in the United States, the role of other social inequalities must be acknowledged.

How is Socioeconomic Status Related to Political Attitudes and Actions?

SES, attitudes toward redistribution, and political behavior have long been theoretically linked. For example, as mentioned previously, the rational voter model postulates that, as mean income increases relative to the median voter's income (i.e., as economic inequality increases), the majority of voters will press its government for increased redistribution of wealth (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). Inherent in this thesis is the idea that it is in the self-interest of those with less to want a larger government engaged in greater redistribution. However, similar to the relationship between economic inequality and political attitudes and action, the relationship between SES and political attitudes and action is not as straightforward as the rational voter model would suggest.

Socioeconomic Status and Attitudes toward Redistribution

Two competing hypotheses exist concerning the relationship between SES and attitudes toward redistribution. The first suggests that SES is not related to support for redistribution, the most notable example of this argument being advanced in the popular press book, *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (Frank, 2004). In this book, Frank suggested that lower SES voters tend to vote against their economic self-interest because they are swayed by politicians to vote based on social issues (such as abortion and immigration) as opposed to economic issues. Although this argument has received much public acclaim, the greater part of the empirical research lends evidence to the second hypothesis: Lower SES *is* associated with greater support for redistribution.

For example, a recent Pew Research Center study (2015) found that the most financially insecure individuals showed the greatest preference for Democratic candidates, who have historically been more likely to support redistributive policies, over Republican candidates. Tellingly, this pattern held even among White respondents only. The least financially secure group also had the largest percentage (60%) who agreed that "government should do more for the needy, even if it means more debt," while only 34% of the most financially secure group concurred. These results align with others that have consistently shown greater income and occupational prestige are associated with higher levels of support for Republican candidates, less support for social welfare, and less support for government intervention (Andersen & Curtis, 2015; Bartels, 2006; Brooks & Brady, 1999; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006; Stonecash, 2000; 2005).

How though can these findings be reconciled with data showing that richer states (e.g., New York, California) tend to prefer Democratic candidates? Gelman, Shor, Bafumi, and Park (2007) teased apart these state-level and individual-level relationships between income and political preferences in an elegant series of multilevel analyses. Examining presidential election data collected between 1968 and 2004, their results demonstrated that, though richer states have tended to lean Democratic, higher income levels *within* states were nevertheless associated with a higher likelihood of voting for Republican candidates. Interestingly, the positive relationship between income and Republican leanings was strongest in the poorest states and weakened considerably in the richest states, suggesting that income might be most consequential in predicting political outcomes in states with the highest concentrations of lower SES individuals. Critically, though the results were attenuated after accounting for race, race could not fully explain the observed relationship become income and voting preference. Overall, this is evidence of the ecological fallacy—assuming that the voting preference of the state is reflective of the individuals' preferences within the state.

While survey data provides a rich, representative overview of the American electorate and is highly suggestive, it cannot establish whether differences in income or SES *cause* differences in political preferences. Our own research (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; see also Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2016), however, manipulates individuals' momentary sense of their own status, and can provide such causal evidence. Using the premise of an economic game, participants were asked to decide how to invest a small amount of seed money with which they were provided. Though any return on investment was ostensibly the result of a simulation of stock market activity, in actuality participants were randomly assigned to learn that they had performed either better or worse than 89% of all other players to date. Notably, the actual amount of earnings was held constant across conditions, suggesting that only participants' subjective perceptions of rank relative to others differed. Additionally, participants were told about a system of redistribution within the game, in which the top-third of players were assessed a portion of their earnings in order to provide a credit to the bottom-third of players (mirroring a rudimentary system of taxation and welfare benefits). After learning their own outcome, participants were asked to recommend rates of assessment and credit for future versions of the game. To date, across six studies involving 1,170 participants, we have consistently found that those who are randomly assigned to learn that they are higher ranking are less supportive of redistribution (i.e., recommend lower assessment and credit rates) than those randomly assigned to learn that they are lower ranking. These results provide strong experimental evidence that subjective SES does indeed cause people to adopt different stances toward redistribution (see also Cruces, Perez-Truglia, & Tetaz, 2013; Guillaud, 2013).

Why is SES related to attitudes toward redistribution?. A number of explanatory mechanisms for the relationship between SES and attitudes toward redistribution have been proposed. Among those, two of the most frequently studied have been economic self-interest and ideology. The *self-interest hypothesis* assumes that individuals are motivated by the desire to retain as much money as possible, and therefore proposes that those with more money prefer less redistribution because it presumably has a net negative impact in the form of paying taxes, while those with less money prefer more redistribution because it has a net positive impact in the form of receiving benefits. The *ideology hypothesis* explains individuals' preferences for redistribution as rooted in a coherent set of beliefs and values about work ethic, social equality, and fairness. While egalitarian values reflect beliefs that a society has an obligation to provide basic rights to all its citizens, meritocratic values assume that economic outcomes are determined by hard work and skill (or lack thereof). Though many individuals may hold both sets of values simultaneously (see Kay & Eibach, 2012), they may come into conflict with one another when considering redistributive policy: Though an individual might want to provide for everyone in society, especially the most vulnerable, she simultaneously may resent that some may take advantage of the system, gaining a "free ride" with minimal effort.

Notably, ingroup interest may also inform attitudes toward redistribution. For example, White individuals who believe the United States represents a meritocratic system are more likely to deny White privilege and discrimination against racial minorities, as well as more likely to oppose redistributive policies (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Lowery et al., 2011). These effects are mediated by positive group-esteem, suggesting that White individuals favor policies that help the ingroup. Overall, these findings suggest that, not only self-interest, but group interest may drive attitudes toward redistributive policies.

Support for the self-interest hypothesis has most often been claimed when empirical evidence has simply demonstrated that those with less earnings potential and/or wealth also hold the most positive attitudes toward redistribution (e.g., Doherty, Gerber, & Green, 2006; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989) or when declines in economic opportunity are associated with increased support for the welfare state (e.g., Blekesaune, 2007). In other words, demonstration of the phenomenon has often been sufficient evidence for concluding that self-interest is the causal mechanism. However, the ideology hypothesis has also received its fair share of empirical support, often in research that finds simultaneous support for the self-interest hypothesis (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Jæger, 2006; Linos & West, 2003).

Interestingly, some have suggested that differences in economic status may cause differences in ideological beliefs, which in turn shape redistributive preferences. For example, Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989), drawing on a 1983 probability sample of adults in the Detroit, Michigan area and using a path analysis model, found that those who were most economically and socially vulnerable (e.g., non-Whites, lower income brackets) reported the highest levels of support for "social democratic values" (i.e., beliefs in the government's obligation to provide for its citizens, that personal wealth and work ethic are not strongly connected, etc.) and in turn the highest levels of support for government welfare programs (see also

Huber & Form, 1973; Robinson & Bell, 1978). In other words, the adoption of ideological beliefs may itself be motivated by economic circumstances. Our own research has taken this idea a step further, proposing that, though ideology may shape redistributive preferences, redistributive preferences—informed by subjective status—may also shape ideology (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). Recall the studies described in the previous section involving an economic investment game with its own system of redistribution. We found that those who were randomly assigned to learn that they performed better in the game relative to their peers also indicated the lowest levels of support for redistribution. Critically, that same group—after voicing their lack of support for redistribution—was also the most likely to rate inequality within the game as fair (Study 3), to rate redistribution within the game as unfair (Studies 3–4), and to rate the game itself as just (Studies 3–4). And, these views extended beyond the game to the U.S. system more broadly. Participants who were randomly assigned to learn they performed better (vs. worse) in the game also reported greater system justifying beliefs about the United States (e.g., "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness"; Study 3). Our conclusion was that subjective status may cause differences not only in attitudes toward redistribution, but also in the ideologically-based beliefs that justify those attitudes (for in-depth perspectives on motivated political cognition, see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008).

Related to both self-interest and ideology, there is an additional important variable that should be considered when examining the relationship between SES and attitudes toward redistribution, namely actual or perceived *personal social mobility*, which is the likelihood that an individual will rise or fall on the socioeconomic ladder. Social mobility, actual or perceived, may be predictive of attitudes toward redistribution. When people believe their status will increase in the future (a belief in *upward* mobility), as many Americans believe (Davidai & Gilovich, 2015b; Kraus & Tan, 2015), everyone—regardless of current SES—may hold more negative attitudes toward taxation and welfare policies than when people do not believe their status will change in the future. This opposition toward the "social safety net" may result from the belief that they will be rich in the future, at which point such policies would harm them economically. Alternatively, if people believe there will be downward social mobility, everyone, regardless of current SES, may hold more positive attitudes toward taxation and welfare policies than when people do not believe their status will change in the future. In other words, individuals may express redistributive preferences consistent with their anticipated rather than their current SES. Existing theoretical and empirical evidence supports such a premise. For example, Alesina and La Ferrara (2005) found that both subjective perceptions of one's future mobility and objectively constructed measures of one's expected future income (based on the probability of moving from one income decile to another) were significantly negatively associated with support for redistribution. This suggests that (perceived or actual) future higher earnings leads to current opposition toward redistribution.

However, beliefs about social mobility may not be equally dispersed along the socioeconomic spectrum. In fact, at least one set of published studies found that, though there was a general tendency to overestimate upward mobility, those participants who were higher in both measured and manipulated social class were even more likely to provide overestimates of social mobility, particularly when asked to provide estimates for individuals similar to themselves (Kraus & Tan, 2015). These findings suggest that higher SES individuals may be more likely to endorse a belief in upward social mobility and, therefore, less likely to voice support for redistributive policies.

It is also important to consider internal and external attributions for SES. When people believe their SES is self-determined (e.g., hard work, natural ability), they tend to be less supportive of redistributive policies. Alternatively, when people believe their SES is due to exogenous factors (e.g., wealthy parents, political connections), they tend to be more supportive of redistributive policies (Lino & West, 2003; see also Benabou & Ok, 2001; Corneo & Gruner, 2002; Piketty, 1995). However, again, these attributions may not be completely orthogonal to SES. For example, research has found that when people feel higher status, they tend to make internal attributions for that status, while lower status individuals tend to make external attributions for status (Piff et al., 2010). Thus, it is feasible that internal and external attributions may mediate the relationship between SES and support for redistribution. Importantly, though, when considering both beliefs about social mobility and attributions, it is also possible that these factors serve not only as mediators, but also as justifications for the relationship between SES and support for redistribution. For example, an individual who has achieved higher status and desires less redistribution may be more motivated to believe that such success is achievable for those with strong talent and work ethic, thereby legitimizing the lack of a social safety net for those who do not achieve higher status.

Finally, it is important to examine how race and racial attitudes may factor into the relationship between SES and support for redistribution. Relating to race, consideration must be given to the diversity present at all levels of the social hierarchy. Specifically, research on *tokenism*—the presence of at least one racial minority at the top of the social hierarchy—has important implications for attitudes and behaviors of racial minorities at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Wright, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1998; but see also Barreto, Ellemers, & Palacios, 2004). Diversity at the top of the social hierarchy signals to racial minorities that there is an "open" system—that one's ability to attain upward mobility is possible regardless of one's race. This signal, in turn, tends to lead to reduced collective action and political engagement among racial minorities in an effort to alleviate the inequality because the system is viewed as fair. Critically, diversity at the top need not represent the diversity of the system. That is, regardless of whether or not the token presence of a racial minority at the top of the social hierarchy reflects the overall level of diversity of the system, it leads to reduced collective action and political engagement. In contrast, if there is little racial diversity at the top of the social hierarchy, this signals to racial minorities that there is a "closed" system—meaning that one's ability to attain upward mobility is only possible if the individual is of a particular race. This lack of diversity can increase motivation within disadvantaged groups to change the system as they view this system to be unjust. In such cases, we might expect lower status racial minorities to potentially voice increased support for redistributive policies as a means of social change.

Relating to racial bias, we theorize there are two possible ways that racial bias may factor into the relationship between SES and support for redistribution. First, at higher levels of racial bias, one may expect to find a significantly weakened relationship between SES and attitudes toward redistribution, such that (particularly) White individuals, regardless of SES, may voice negative attitudes toward specific redistributive policies due to racial prejudice and the racial connotations of the redistributive policy. In the United States, "welfare" is a term with decidedly racial undertones. For example, in new research, when asked to imagine a welfare recipient (or a poor person), on average, Americans generated images consistent with their mental representations that looked, to naïve observers, representative of African Americans (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, Cooley, & Payne, 2016; Lei & Bodenhausen, in preparation). Similarly, participants have been found to be more likely to categorize ambiguously raced faces as Black when they are dressed in low-status attire (Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, & Ambady, 2011). And, simply using terms such as "welfare" or priming race in the context of welfare is sufficient to create an association between one's racial stereotypes and attitudes and one's policy preferences (Gilens, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001; for a review see Hutchings & Jardina, 2009). Thus, even though racially prejudiced, lower SES White individuals may benefit from welfare policies, they, along with their higher SES counterparts, may oppose these policies because they believe them to benefit racial minorities.

Alternatively, higher SES White individuals may be more motivated than lower SES individuals to believe that those who are poor, and thus likely beneficiaries of redistributive policies, are "undeserving" racial outgroup members. Perceiving these individuals through this negative lens may motivate or justify their opposition toward redistribution. Lower SES White individuals, in contrast, may have a more accurate perception of other lower SES individuals and those who benefit from redistributive policies because they are more frequently exposed to such individuals or are more aware of their own status as a beneficiary. In such a scenario, we might expect that, though racial bias would remain a strong predictor of opposition to redistributive policies for higher SES individuals, it may be a less potent factor among lower SES White individuals. To our knowledge, these two hypotheses—first, that racial bias may moderate and weaken the relationship between SES and redistribution, and second, that higher status may moderate and strengthen the relationship between racial bias and redistribution—have not been directly evaluated.

Overall, the reviewed data suggest that SES is significantly associated with *opposition* to redistribution. Because SES is so reliably related to attitudes toward redistribution, it is logical to surmise that SES would in turn be reliably related to political action, such as voting, campaigning, and lobbying elected officials. However, the overwhelming majority of the data does not support that conclusion. In the next section, we explore evidence for the relationship between SES and political inaction and consider potential psychological mechanisms for this effect.

Socioeconomic Status and Political Inaction

Political action can take many forms including voting, signing a petition, contacting a representative, and volunteering on a political campaign. Many forms of political action do not directly require monetary resources. And yet, SES is a strong predictor of political action. Compared to higher SES individuals, lower SES individuals tend to withdraw from political activity. Lower SES individuals are the least likely to vote in an election (e.g., Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee, 1954; McElwee, 2015; Pew Research Center study, 2015; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba & Orren, 1985). They are also less likely to volunteer for a political campaign (Verba & Nie, 1972), contact a political official (Pew Research Center study, 2015), attend a political meeting (Acock & Scott, 1980), or wear a political campaign button (Acock & Scott, 1980). Because race and SES are integrally related, it's important to consider their unique relationships with political action. Thus, importantly, when controlling for SES, there appear to be no differences between African Americans and Whites in political activities such as voting and campaigning (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Ellison & Gay, 1989). Further, a within-race analysis of a national sample of African Americans conducted during the 1984 and 1988 U.S. national elections found that the SES-political action relationship still held: Those with higher objective SES (education and income) were significantly more likely to report engaging in both traditional campaign activities such as helping with voter registration and direct actions such as signing a petition (Berman & Wittig, 2004). Together, these findings suggest that lower SES individuals are more politically inactive.

At first blush, the lack of political action on the part of lower SES individuals may seem surprising, and contradictory to the rational voter model. However, a resource model (also called a standard socioeconomic model) provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding political inaction based on SES (Gurin, Hatchett, & Jackson, 1989; Verba & Nie, 1972). This model suggests that lower SES individuals are less politically engaged than are higher SES individuals because they often do not have the financial resources, free time, civic skills, or level of engagement necessary to participate in politics. Some of the factors presented in this model have an obvious impact on political engagement. For example, the strongest predictor of donating money to a political campaign is having money. Therefore, it is no surprise that lower SES individuals donate less money to political campaigns than do higher SES individuals (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

The resource model also highlights factors impacting political engagement that are often overlooked, namely social and contextual factors. Particularly, the resource model suggests that higher SES individuals tend to live in environments where politically active behaviors, such as voting, writing to a senator, or signing a petition, are not only encouraged, but part of the social norm. However, lower SES individuals tend to live in places where such behaviors are not part of the social norm. In other words, political engagement may reflect social norms related to one's financial resources. And, empirical research lends evidence to this hypothesis. For example, highlighting how social forces may suppress political behavior, lower SES individuals are less willing than higher SES individuals to even express a political opinion (Laurison, 2015). And, a large portion of lower SES individuals (approximately 41%) did not express a political candidate preference in the last congressional election (Pew Research Center study, 2015). It is important to note however, that these findings do not take into account the possibility of a power dynamic influencing people's responses. It may be the case that lower SES individuals express fewer political opinions because those around them (e.g., bosses, coworkers, etc.) are in positions of relative power, and they do not wish to express an unpopular opinion in front of or to a superior.

Though the resource model provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding *public* displays of political actions and has accumulated a great deal of support, it does not adequately explain *private* political actions. Such actions include activities like listening to political information on the radio, watching political television programs, watching televised political debates, etc. And, in fact, SES does not seem to directly impact private political behaviors (Acock & Scott, 1980). That is, lower SES individuals tend to watch and listen to the same number of political programs as do higher SES individuals. Taken together, the research suggests that, though SES does impact political attitudes, the resulting political behaviors may depend on status-related political participation norms. The norm for higher SES individuals tends to be related to displaying visible political actions whereas the norm for lower SES individuals tends to be avoiding such overt displays (Acock & Scott, 1980). Overall, the available evidence regarding the resource model demonstrates that objective SES presents both objective and psychological barriers to political action.

Interestingly, subjective SES, controlling for objective resources, also influences political action. In a series of studies, Kraus et al. (2015) found that a momentary manipulation of subjective SES influenced intentions to participate in politics, over and above objective SES. Participants who were randomly assigned to the high subjective SES condition reported greater intention to participate in politics than did participants who were randomly assigned to the low subjective SES condition. In a separate study, Kraus et al. investigated why subjective SES influences political action. The researchers hypothesized that subjective SES conferred a sense of political efficacy such that people who felt lower status in turn would feel less politically efficacious. The results confirmed their hypothesis: High-status participants felt more politically efficacious than did low-status participants. In turn, high-status participants were more likely to vote than were low-status participants. Furthermore, affirming the self in another domain, and thereby presumably increasing a sense of self-efficacy, reduced these status-related disparities in political participation. This research provides a crucial first step in investigating one psychological mechanism (perceived political efficacy) underlying the causal relationship between SES and political action.

Subjective SES may also inform political action through several different, nonmutually exclusive, mechanisms. For example, people who feel lower status may feel a reduced personal sense of control relative to higher status individuals (e.g., Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmit, & Keltner, 2012). This feeling may lead lower status individuals to seek an external source of control, such as a strong government and a belief in the justice of the current system (e.g., Kay et al., 2008, 2010). However, turning to the government may also highlight the fact that the current political system is not working for them (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). Additionally, lower SES individuals may not trust the government to represent them or their interests in the future (e.g., Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016). Together, these findings suggest that reduced belief and trust in the system may cause lower status individuals to withdraw from political action.

Alternatively, both higher and lower status individuals may be motivated to maintain the system, though perhaps for different reasons. Higher status individuals may be motivated to maintain the current system because they are benefitting from it (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Pratto et al., 1994). Lower status individuals may be motivated to maintain the system, even though they are not benefitting from it, because the system maintains order and stability (e.g., Jost et al., 2004). But, this motivation may translate to political action only for higher status individuals because they feel empowered and entitled to voice their opinions (e.g., Gaventa, 1980; Verba & Nie, 1972). Together, these findings suggest that empowerment and entitlement (or lack thereof) may cause lower status individuals to withdraw from political action.

Finally, as researchers continue to make progress in evaluating the relationships between SES and political outcomes, it is important to note that specific facets of objective and subjective SES may uniquely predict political attitudes and behaviors. In particular, the local context, as opposed to the national or global context, may have a larger impact on attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012). Foundational research in social psychology suggests that comparisons with proximal others have a greater impact on attitudes and behaviors than do comparisons with distal others (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, local SES, or one's rank compared to neighbors or peers, may be a better predictor of political attitudes and behaviors than national SES, or one's rank compared to others in the nation.

Additionally, there are a number of factors that covary with SES that may directly influence people's political attitudes and behaviors. For example, as stated previously, lower income individuals tend to be more politically liberal than high-income individuals (Gelman et al., 2007). Additionally, parents—whose SES is a strong predictor of children's SES (Mazumder, 2012)—tend to play a major role in determining the political attitudes and affiliations of their children (e.g., Niemi & Jennings, 1991). Therefore, when evaluating the unique relationships between objective and subjective SES and an individual's political attitudes and actions, it may be important to consider the role of potential third variables such as these.

In this section we reviewed theoretical and empirical research investigating the relationship between SES and political action. Although many forms of political action do not require any direct monetary resources (e.g., voting, volunteering for a political campaign, etc.), lower SES nevertheless predicts political *in*action. This relationship is, in part, due to lower SES individuals having fewer objective resources such as money and time relative to their higher SES counterparts. Additionally, objective and subjective SES may produce psychological barriers, such as reduced perceived political efficacy, to political action. Next, we will consider the joint contribution of economic inequality and SES in predicting political attitudes and actions.

We argue that an important contextual factor to consider in conjunction with SES is the level of inequality present in the system. High inequality (vs. low inequality) produces upward social comparisons and the desire for a better financial situation (Payne, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Hannay, 2016). However, the psychological impact of inequality may depend on one's SES, and may predict differing political attitudes and behavior across the SES spectrum. A multilevel approach has the advantage of potentially illuminating whether the context of inequality and individual's SES is associated with political attitudes and action. In the next section, we will detail multilevel data that investigates the interaction between SES and level of inequality on political attitudes and behaviors.

The Interaction between Economic Inequality and Socioeconomic Status

The nature of the interaction between economic inequality and SES on political attitudes and behaviors is a contentious topic. There are three prominent views on how this interaction may influence political attitudes and behaviors.

First, the relative power theory suggests that wealth influences political outcomes (Goodin & Dryzek, 1980). If a country's wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few extremely rich citizens, then these individuals have inordinate power over the political system, and this inequity in riches can lead to the government over-representing the needs of the extremely wealthy. As a result, everyone else may conclude that their interests cannot be pursued through the political process because no one in the government is motivated to listen to their needs. Over time, citizens may internalize their position of relative powerlessness and generally disengage from all politics (Gaventa, 1980). Together, this would suggest that increasing inequality leads to increased political disengagement from everyone except the richest citizens. And, through this mechanism, to the extent that these richer individuals are advocating for policies and politicians that maintain their advantage, high inequality may perpetuate or grow (e.g., Kelly & Enns, 2010).

Alternatively, the conflict theory suggests that inequality should increase political engagement among all citizens, but that citizens desire different actions of the government depending on their SES (Brady, 2004; Oliver, 2001). On one end of the spectrum, higher SES individuals should be motivated to maintain or exacerbate the current level of inequality because it financially benefits them. On the other end of the spectrum, lower SES individuals should be motivated to reduce the current level of inequality because they are suffering from the financial consequences of it. These conflicting views should become more polarized and should lead to more group-based conflict as inequality increases. Increased conflict should stimulate greater interest in politics and greater political engagement among all citizens.

Finally, the resource theory—as described earlier—suggests that political engagement requires economic resources such as time, money, and political skills (e.g., Verba & Nie, 1972). Therefore, as SES increases, so too should political engagement. Inequality may exacerbate status-based differences because higher inequality means fewer economic resources, and in turn less ability to become politically engaged for individuals below the median income level. Consequently, higher inequality should create a stronger association between SES and political engagement than does lower inequality.

The empirical research supporting these theories, however, remains unclear, with the evidence not consistently supporting any one theory. For example, some cross-national data lends evidence to predictions made by the relative power and resource models: Higher levels of income inequality predict reductions in political interest, the frequency of political discussion, and participation in elections for all but the highest levels of SES (Solt, 2008). In contrast, other research conducted with U.S. samples finds conflicting evidence. Some research finds more unequal states have reduced voter turnout across all income levels, but particularly among lower income individuals (e.g., Soss & Jacobs, 2009); whereas other research finds no evidence of an interaction between inequality and SES in predicting the perceived importance of gubernatorial races (Solt, 2010). Instead, this research finds that inequality and SES have separate, but not interactive, effects on political attitudes. And, although higher inequality is associated with reduced support for democracy amongst all social classes, this effect is weaker among the poor (vs. rich), suggesting that poor individuals continue to believe democracy is a viable political mechanism for future redistribution as inequality increases (Krieckhaus et al., 2014). Additionally, at odds with the predictions of the conflict theory model, other cross-national data suggest that higher inequality may even increase preferences for redistribution among higher SES individuals, while lower SES individuals prefer redistribution regardless of the level of inequality (Finseraas, 2008). Overall, the data investigating the interaction between inequality and SES on political attitudes and behaviors do not clearly lend evidence to a single theory.

We argue there are three main reasons why the interaction between inequality and SES on political attitudes and behaviors is so poorly understood. First is the issue of measurement. Most often, researchers use a single item to assess SES, for brevity's sake in a survey, and this measure may assess individual, household, neighborhood, or community SES. But, using a single item to measure SES leads to unstable and unreliable estimates from one sample to the next (for a review see Gallo & Matthews, 2003). Relatedly, as stated above, due to the history of slavery and discrimination, SES measures may not be equally valid across different racial/ethnic groups. Additionally, SES can be conceptualized as resource-based (e.g., income, wealth, and educational attainment) and as prestige-based (e.g., one's rank or status in the social hierarchy). However, measures of these different aspects of SES do not necessarily converge. For example, researchers find only a modest correlation (approximately $r = .3$) between individual resource-based and prestige-based measures of SES (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2014; Singh-Manoux et al., 2005). Including multiple measures of SES at different levels can provide a more accurate assessment of SES, but this is rarely done. Due to this lack of consistency in measurement of SES, the effects of SES on political attitudes and behavior may also appear inconsistent.

Unfortunately, the issue of measurement also plagues economic inequality. Some studies use the Gini index, while others use an inequality ratio, and so on. Additionally, inequality can be measured at the level of community, county, state, and nation (for a review see Atkinson & Bourguignon, 2000). These different methods and levels to measure inequality can lead to inconsistent results. For example, many of the effects of inequality on health in the United States seem relatively robust across different measures of inequality at the state-level: High inequality is associated with worse health outcomes. However, the findings remain relatively mixed at the lower levels (e.g., metropolitan areas, counties) across different measures of inequality (Subramanian & Kawachi, 2004). Taken together, differences in measurement of both SES and inequality from one sample to the next may contribute to inconsistent findings of the interaction between SES and inequality on political attitudes and behavior. Overall, this suggests the need for a multi-method approach to investigating these multilevel analyses. That is, researchers should try to measure both individual SES and community inequality using several different metrics in order to obtain a clear understanding of the cross-level interaction between SES and inequality.

Second, the objective numbers may or may not impact behavior as strongly as one's subjective perceptions of inequality and status. Related to themes discussed earlier, subjective perceptions of economic inequality may differ from the objective situation (e.g., Eriksson & Simpson, 2012; Norton & Ariely, 2011). In addition, subjective and objective SES are only moderately correlated (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2014; Kraus et al., 2009; Singh-Manoux et al., 2005). It may be that the inconsistent results discussed above not only reflect the diversity of measures, but also reflect the fact that people are perceiving a different world than the one that objective statistics are capturing. This would result in relatively "noisy" data. Thus, it may be that perceptions of inequality and SES would lead to more consistent results across studies.

Finally, although many of these studies suggest a mechanism at play, the psychological mechanisms are not directly investigated. It is unclear why higher SES individuals in some studies would prefer greater redistribution (Finseraas, 2008), but in other studies prefer less redistribution (Hayes, 2014). In addition, it is unclear why citizens may be reacting to the level of inequality differently based on their SES in some studies (Solt, 2008) but not others (Solt, 2010). Moreover, when previous research has explored psychological mechanisms, it has often done so separately for inequality and SES. In other words, little research has investigated the psychological mechanisms that may result from the interaction between inequality and SES to explain their joint impact on political attitudes and behavior. And even less research provides evidence for causality. As a result, we believe that this research topic provides a unique and exciting opportunity for social psychological and other researchers to expand on the current state of the research. In the next section, we speculate about potential psychological mechanisms and we highlight opportunities for future research.

Potential Mechanisms Linking Economic Inequality, Socioeconomic Status, and Political Attitudes and Behaviors

Although there are many potential psychological mechanisms linking economic inequality, SES, and political attitudes and behaviors, for the sake of brevity we will only detail a few. Importantly, the mechanisms we suggest may be present when considering objective or subjective inequality and SES. However, it would be incumbent on future research to investigate whether these psychological mechanisms are only relevant when discussing objective or subjective perceptions of inequality and SES.

First, just as self-interest is a potential mechanism linking SES to political outcomes (e.g., Blekesaune, 2007; Doherty et al., 2006; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989), it should also be considered when understanding the more layered set of relationships between inequality, SES, and political outcomes. For example, Anderson and Curtis (2015) hypothesized that economic self-interest may lead to higher support for government intervention among those with lower economic standing (because they stand to gain more from the intervention). Critically, they also hypothesized that the context of inequality may moderate the relationship between SES and desire for government intervention: In more equal contexts, those with higher economic standing may be less incentivized to support government intervention (e.g., due to higher taxes) than they would be in a more unequal context (e.g., due to the negative personal consequences that they experience as a result of the inequality). And, those with lower economic standing may increase their support for government intervention when inequality is high (vs. low) because high inequality disproportionately effects individuals at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. The result would be less differentiation in views toward government intervention along the SES spectrum in more (vs. less) unequal contexts. In multilevel models examining both between- and within-country effects of objectively measured inequality, Anderson and Curtis (2015) find support for these hypotheses, suggesting the necessity of considering economic self-interest as an important mechanism underlying these relationships.

Second, and arguably the most frequently studied potential mechanism, is trust. As discussed previously, existing research has found that high inequality is associated with reduced interpersonal trust (e.g., Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009) and trust in the government (e.g., Kuziemko et al., 2015). Interestingly, trust depends on how well the country is doing economically, as opposed to how well an individual within the country is doing (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979). Additionally, lower SES individuals are less trusting of others (e.g., Brandt & Henry, 2012) and the government (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016) than are higher SES individuals. Together, these findings suggest that higher levels of inequality may reduce trust in the government generally, but particularly among lower SES individuals. This reduction in trust may, in turn, lead to reduced political engagement, including less desire for the government to intervene to reduce inequality (Kuziemko et al., 2015). That is, because lower SES individuals are suffering the most in conditions of high inequality, we believe that their trust in the government will be significantly reduced relative to conditions of low inequality. However, to our knowledge, little research demonstrates the full moderated mediational pathway, causally or correlationally.

Feelings of power and entitlement may also partially explain the relationship between economic inequality, SES, and political attitudes and behaviors. Higher power and higher SES individuals may tend to be more self-focused and agentic than are lower power and lower SES individuals (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, &

Gruenfeld, 2006; Kraus et al., 2012). Higher status individuals may also be motivated to pursue their own interests because of their sense of competence and deservingness, which in turn can lead to suppressing others' contradictory opinions (Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2016). High inequality may further exacerbate this power imbalance, such that within more unequal (vs. less unequal) contexts, higher SES individuals have an amplified sense of power. Additionally, conditions of high inequality may enhance higher status individuals' sense of entitlement, as they come to regard themselves more favorably in relation to the rest of the (lower status) population (see Côté, House, & Willer, 2015), which may in turn license them to single-mindedly pursue their self-interests (Zitek, Jordan, Monin, & Leach, 2010). Consequently, under conditions of higher (vs. lower) inequality, higher SES individuals, who are more likely to oppose redistribution, may be more motivated to remain politically engaged in order to ensure the government represents their policy desires. Lower SES individuals, in contrast, may come to feel even less entitled than higher SES individuals as inequality increases, as well as relatively powerless (Gaventa, 1980; Goodin & Dryzek, 1980). Thus, although lower SES individuals may prefer redistribution, they may be less likely to politically engage because they do not feel entitled to express their opinion (e.g., Laurison, 2015).

Relatedly, we believe it is important to investigate people's metacognitions of status and deservingness. The majority of citizens believe that the United States is a meritocratic system: If people work hard they can achieve upward economic mobility (Pew Charitable Trusts Economic Mobility Project, 2012). People at the top *or* bottom of the economic hierarchy, therefore, deserve their status (e.g., Lerner, 1980). This deservingness of status may conflate many different issues including beliefs about the work ethic, skills, and competence of those at the top and the bottom of the hierarchy. Importantly, these beliefs may overlap with racial stereotypes. For example, African Americans are stereotypically associated with concepts of laziness and incompetence (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Katz & Braly, 1933). And, recent research has shown that when people think about lower SES individuals, they tend to imagine African American individuals who are representative of negative stereotypes such as lazy and incompetent (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2016; Lei & Bodenhausen, 2016). Critically, when resources are (objectively or subjectively) scarce or one's economic status is threatened, people tend to exacerbate negative stereotypes about outgroup members (e.g., Krosch & Amodio, 2014; Sherif, 1966) and to express less support for government programs perceived to be benefiting African Americans (Wetts & Willer, in preparation). Additionally, it is likely that, as inequality increases, such economic concerns are heightened. If so, then we might expect that higher status individuals might be particularly likely to endorse beliefs about their own deservingness (as well as the undeservingness of others) in more (vs. less) unequal contexts. These beliefs, in turn, may compel them to be less supportive of redistributive policies.

Finally, fear of losing resources may motivate political attitudes and behaviors among higher SES individuals in times of high inequality. Falling from a higher economic class downwards is a much steeper fall in times of high economic inequality than low economic inequality. Therefore, under such circumstances, higher SES individuals may be particularly motivated by this fear to oppose redistributive policies and to engage politically in order to ensure their status is maintained. Simultaneously, lower SES individuals may also be fearful that they will not have enough resources to survive, thus motivating them to adopt positive attitudes toward redistribution. However, concern over making ends meet may also lead lower SES individuals to disengage politically due to the constraints and obligations of work and other activities that may directly affect one's financial standing. Thus, increased financial concern caused by higher economic inequality may have divergent effects based on one's status.

Each of these mechanisms, and many others not discussed, provides an important avenue for researchers to explore in order to create a more nuanced understanding of how economic inequality, SES, and political attitudes and behaviors are related and perhaps mutually reinforcing. As noted previously, many of these mechanisms remain untested. As social psychologists, the authors believe it is important to understand *why* people form their political attitudes and behaviors, particularly under times of high inequality. As of now, it seems that people's political attitudes and behaviors are economically irrational (e.g., Meltzer & Richard, 1981). However, understanding the psychological mechanisms that cause these divisive political attitudes and behaviors may provide some insight into these seemingly irrational behaviors.

Policy Implications

Overall, we argue that it is quite valuable to take a multilevel approach to the question of political action in a time of high economic inequality. As social psychologists, we believe it is particularly important to consider *both* the individual and the situation. Put simply, we believe the context of inequality matters, but that the effect of this context on political outcomes depends on the individuals' socioeconomic status. Therefore, we believe it is important to utilize data and statistical analyses that can model such cross-level interactions and to conduct experiments that not only investigate how socioeconomic status influences political action, but how the context of inequality may affect this relationship. Additionally, we believe it is important to understand why context may affect people differently depending on their socioeconomic status by examining psychological mechanisms such as trust, power, and self-interest. We encourage researchers to adopt this multilevel approach to better understand the mechanisms linking inequality and political inaction.

Second, we believe that reliance on measures of inequality and SES at the state or country level may not be sufficient. People are often unaware of the level of inequality at the country level (Eriksson & Simpson, 2012; Norton & Ariely, 2011), which may be due to the fact that people are better calibrated to understand inequality at the community or neighborhood level, but not at the state or country level. For example, if someone lives in a neighborhood with little variability among residents in wealth or income, then they may assume that inequality is not an issue. Therefore, the lack of a relationship between inequality and political attitudes and behaviors may be, in part, due to an issue of measurement specificity. People who live in more unequal neighborhoods may be motivated to fix inequality, but people who live in more equal neighborhoods may not believe inequality is a problem.

Relatedly, SES may also suffer from measurement specificity issues. As discussed earlier, SES is often measured by one or two items (income and education) either at the individual or census tract level. Moreover, some of these SES measures may be invalid across different racial groups due to the history of slavery and discrimination in the United States (e.g., Pager & Shepherd, 2008). As a result of the lack of specificity, these crude averages may not fully represent the concept of SES, may be unstable estimates of the construct, and may not be valid across different racial groups. We believe that both inequality and SES should be measured, to the extent possible, with both greater breadth and greater specificity (i.e., including more measures and at multiple levels). Because both of these constructs have important implications for a wide range of outcomes (political action, education, health, crime, etc.), it is critical that researchers have access to high-quality variables which assess the complexity of SES and inequality. Without quality measures, we are unable to fully understand how the context of inequality and one's SES influences not only political action, but other facets of life more broadly.

In addition, we call for an expanded focus to include subjective experiences of both SES and inequality. The objective state of the world is filtered through imperfect lenses. While these lenses are related to the objective state, they may skew the objective state just slightly in important and meaningful ways. We argue that it is equally important to understand both the objective state of the world as well as one's perception of the world. By measuring both objective and subjective SES, we may be able to garner a better predictor of political attitudes and behaviors. In addition, by understanding how individuals perceive and react to economic inequality, we may learn whether and how inequality affects political attitudes and behaviors. As stated earlier, understanding the subjective experience of inequality is in its infancy. Thus, much more research is needed to determine how people perceive and understand economic inequality.

Finally, we call for more funding in the area of research on economic inequality and SES. Understanding the psychological, physical, and social impacts of economic inequality is of the utmost importance, with both politicians and average citizens agreeing that inequality is a pressing concern. It is rare and notable that so many individuals from different political stripes and backgrounds agree on something, which suggests that such a call for increased funding might receive widespread support as well. Several private organizations have already distributed explicit calls for proposals that investigate economic inequality. Additionally, some researchers have received funding from government agencies to investigate economic inequality and SES. We would like to encourage funding agencies to continue this trend of providing researchers with the resources to better understand economic inequality and its impact on individuals and their communities.

Conclusion

A stark and growing economic inequality in the United States has drawn concern from both average citizens and political elites, and yet it remains a difficult, seemingly intractable political problem. Citizens' agreement on what to do about it is difficult to achieve, and—regardless—their concerns do not seem to uniformly translate into action. In this article, we have attempted to offer a wide-ranging overview of how the conditions of inequality *and* the socioeconomic status of individuals within that context, both independently and jointly, are associated with varying political attitudes, as well as political (in)action. We have also explored both theoretical and empirical evidence for *why* such relationships might exist. Broadly speaking, our conclusion is that, though much is known, much work remains to be done. We believe that this area of research would benefit from the continued efforts of an interdisciplinary group of scholars who (1) adopt a multilevel perspective to consider both individuals' socioeconomic status and their local conditions of inequality and (2) devote sustained attention to searching for causal explanations. We also believe that it is important to consider both objective and subjective perceptions of inequality and socioeconomic status as the effects of each may point to different causal mechanisms. Though we remain agnostic as to how to address economic inequality, we believe, as do many citizens, that it is important to understand the social and behavioral effects of inequality, both broadly and as it relates to political engagement. Collective efforts across several disciplines may play a vital role in understanding how economic inequality and socioeconomic status impact political action.

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