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Who Cares About Inequality of Opportunity and Why?

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Introduction to Research

- Inequality of opportunity has increasingly become a problem over the lest half-century. It has resulted in income, political, and other forms of inequality which are associated with negative economic and social effects.
- Despite this problem, many laws have still been passed which have clear economic benefits for the wealthy, and redistributive policies have met with significant opposition.
- It has been theorized that voters make decisions based on their own self-interest, real or perceived. However, there are several different factors which determine as what people perceive their self-interest.
- These include but are not limited to income, political alignment, and level of education.
  - Those who earn a higher income are less likely to vote for redistributive tax policies because they place a higher burden on themselves.
  - Those of a certain political alignment may have their perceptions influenced by the opinions of the political group with which they associate.
  - Those of a higher level of education might be more aware of the political and economic ramifications or benefits of a given policy than those with a lower level of education and might therefore vote differently.
- How one feels about the inequality or lack thereof of inequality of opportunity is also indicative of whether or not one favors or opposes income redistribution.
- Unlike in earlier time periods, most Americans have nearly unlimited access to information. While many do not put this access to use learning about proposed tax policy, they have the ability to do so.
- Therefore, while some might be better able to understand information that is presented to them, no particular group can be assumed to have inferior information to any other.

Hypotheses:

1: The higher one's level of income, the less likely they are to see inequality of opportunity as a big problem.

2: The further to the right on the political scale one places oneself, the less likely they are to see inequality of opportunity as a big problem.

3: The higher is one's level of education, the more likely they are to see inequality of opportunity as a big problem.

Reasoning Behind Hypotheses:

1: If a more affluent individual were to recognize that inequality of opportunity is a big problem, then they would have fewer justifications for why redistribution of wealth is bad policy. Such redistributive policies are against their own self-interest.

2: Individuals who self-identify as being at different points on the political spectrum are likely to be influenced by the rhetoric of organizations formed by relatively like-minded individuals. Right wing political organizations tend to oppose income redistribution, therefore someone who self-identifies as conservative might therefore also oppose such policies.

3: The higher is one's level of education the more likely one is to be conscious of the ramifications of inequality of opportunity and therefore are more likely to believe that it is a big problem.

Data
(Data from the 2012 ANES Timeseries Survey)

1: Income and Inequality:
Independent Variable: Estimated Family Income of Respondent (Recoded as EstFamInc for analysis purposes)
Dependent Variable: "It's a big problem that we don't give everyone equal chance to succeed. Do you agree or disagree with that statement, and how strongly?" (Recoded as EgalBigProb for analysis)

Correlations		EgalBigProb	EstFamInc
EgalBigProb	Pearson Correlation	1	.175**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	5499	1847
EstFamInc	Pearson Correlation	.175**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1847	1975

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

2: Political Self-Alignment and Inequality
Independent Variable: "On a seven point scale from Extremely Liberal to Extremely Conservative, how would you place yourself?" (Recoded as PoliSelfPlace for analysis)
Dependent Variable: "It's a big problem that we don't give everyone equal chance to succeed. Do you agree or disagree with that statement, and how strongly?" (Recoded as EgalBigProb for analysis)

Correlations		EgalBigProb	PoliSlefPlace
EgalBigProb	Pearson Correlation	1	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	5499	5036
PoliSlefPlace	Pearson Correlation	.350**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	5036	5041

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3: Level of Education and Inequality
Independent Variable: Estimated Level of Education of Respondent (Recoded as EstEdLevel for analysis)
Dependent Variable: "It's a big problem that we don't give everyone equal chance to succeed. Do you agree or disagree with that statement, and how strongly?" (Recoded as EgalBogProb)

Correlations		EgalBigProb	EstEdLevel
EgalBigProb	Pearson Correlation	1	.103**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	5499	1892
EstEdLevel	Pearson Correlation	.103**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1892	2023

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table Interpretation
- The tables display the correlations between each of the three independent variables: income, Political Self-Alignment, and Level of education.
- Income has a correlation of .175. This means that it is on average responsible for 17.5% of a person's perception of how big is the problem if inequality of opportunity.
- Political Self-Alignment has a correlation of .350, meaning it is on average responsible for 35% of a person's perception of how big is the problem of inequality of opportunity.
- Level of Education has a correlation of .103. It therefore represents 10.3% of a person's perception of how big is the problem of inequality of opportunity on average.
- Each of these correlations had a sig. value of .000. Any sig. value below .050 is considered statistically significant. In other words, the correlations are not random results.

Findings

1: Income and Inequality:
The results showed that there is a statistically significant but weak correlation between one's income and one's perceptions of inequality of opportunity with a negative correlation. That is, the higher one's income, the less one thinks of inequality of opportunity as a big problem in 17.5% of cases.

2: Political Alignment and Inequality:
The results showed that there is a statistically significant correlation of medium strength between one's political alignment and one's perceptions of inequality of opportunity with a negative relationship. That is, the more conservative on considers oneself, the less one thinks of inequality of opportunity as a big problem in 35% of cases.

3: Level of Education and Inequality:
The results showed that there is a statistically significant but weak correlation between one's level of education and one's perceptions of inequality of opportunity with a positive relationship. That is, the more educated one is, the more one thinks of inequality of opportunity as a big problem in 10.3% of cases.

Conclusions
- Overall, most people agree that great disparity in opportunity is a problem. However, the degree to which different people believe this is influenced by a number of factors that include but are not limited to their income, political alignment, and level of education.
- People possessing a higher family income are generally less likely than their less well of fellow citizens to perceive inequality of opportunity as a big problem.
- People identifying as conservative tend to be less likely than those who identify as liberal to perceive inequality of opportunity as a big problem.
- People who are more educated tend to be more likely than those who are less educated to perceive inequality of opportunity as a big problem.

References:
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