

# Nation Dreaming: A Consideration of the American Dream in Poland, the U.S., and among Polish Americans

Sandra L. Hanson<sup>1</sup> & John K. White<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064, USA

<sup>2</sup> Department of Politics, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064, USA

Correspondence: Sandra L. Hanson, Department of Sociology, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20064, USA.

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## Abstract

This paper examines the cooperation and influences between Poland and the U.S on their respective dreams, including the influence of the American Dream on Polish Americans and their potential distinctness from those who remain in Poland. Attitudes involving the American Dream that are examined include beliefs about freedom, liberty, democracy, getting ahead, status/mobility, and inequality. Although scholars have compared these belief systems across countries, there has been no distinct focus on Poland and the U.S., and those who immigrate between these countries. A conceptual framework that combines the American Dream, American exceptionalism, and beliefs about inequality guides the research. Data from the General Social Survey and the World Values Survey are used to answer the research questions. Findings show that Polish Americans agree with other Americans on a majority of items measuring elements of the American Dream. However, Americans and Poles have significantly different opinions on each of the American Dream items. Usually, (but not always) it is Americans who are more supportive of the American Dream. When considering the three groups, Polish Americans, Americans, and Poles, our conclusions suggest a trend where Polish Americans are a hybrid of other Americans and Poles when it comes to their views on the Dream. However, the differences often run in the direction that Polish Americans' views are more like other Americans and distinct from Poles. Conclusions and implications are provided within the historical context of the long history of cooperation between the U.S. and Poland in fights for freedom and democracy.

**Keywords:** American Dream, Poland, U.S., Polish Americans, immigrants

## 1. Introduction

The American Dream is an essential part of American culture and history. The underlying meaning behind the Dream is complex and has experienced both stability and change over time. For Americans, the Dream originally evolved from the cherished values of freedom, democracy, equality of opportunity, and individual rights. It still involves these issues, but over time it has also come to represent notions of hard work, getting ahead, equality of opportunity, financial success, health and happiness, opportunities for one's family, and access to good healthcare and quality schools (Hanson & White, 2011). Americans are not the only ones with a set of dreams. Hopes and dreams are present in all cultures. In a globalized world, it is interesting to think about the ways in which dreams cross borders and affect people who cross borders. This paper will examine the cooperation and influences between Poland and the U.S on their respective Dreams, including the impact of the American Dream on Polish Americans and their potential distinctiveness from those who remain in Poland. Attitudes involving the Dream examined here include beliefs about freedom, liberty, democracy, getting ahead, status/mobility, and inequality. Although scholars have compared these belief systems across countries, there has been no distinct focus on Poland and the U.S., and those who immigrate between these countries. A conceptual framework that combines the American Dream, American exceptionalism and beliefs about inequality guides the research. Data from the General Social Survey and the World Values Survey will be used to answer the research questions.

The focus on these two countries is interesting for several reasons, including Thaddeus Kosciuszko's critical military role in the American Revolution and his resistance to the U.S. slave system (Nash & Hodges, 2008). Additionally, the contrast is thought-provoking given that the American Dream is the model Kosciuszko used when he returned to Poland

to fight for democratic reforms. In the late twentieth century, the American Dream also served as a model when Poland transitioned from Russian-imposed communism to democracy (Stoklosa, 2006; Puddington, 2005). Mikolnj Jasiak, a Warsaw lawyer, notes that the transition from Russian communism to a market-driven economy caused Poles to be “more individualistic, like Americans, and not collectivist, like the rest of Europe” (Lyman 2014).

An important part of our approach involves the perspectives of Polish Americans as a source of insight into the ways in which the Dream both overlaps and diverges in Poland and the U.S. In 2016, the American Community Survey estimated the number of Americans claiming Polish ancestry at 9,258,128—thereby making them one of the leading ethnic groups in the U.S. behind the Germans (44,754,050), Irish (32,304,175), English (23,835,787), and Italians (17,235,854) (American Community Survey, 2016). Additionally, our comparison of Americans, Polish Americans, and Poles illuminates the extent to which the American experience has shifted the Dreams of Poles, and the extent to which Polish Americans retain attitudes about a Dream that are similar to Poles residing in their homeland.

## **2. Conceptual Framework: The American Dream, American Exceptionalism, and Inequality Beliefs**

We use two frameworks -- American exceptionalism and inequality beliefs -- to guide us as we examine questions about the American Dream in Poland, the U.S., and among Polish Americans.

### *2.1 American Exceptionalism*

The American Dream has been a critical aspect of American culture from the very beginning with the American Revolution and its individualistic, egalitarian values and the resulting Declaration of Independence which promised inalienable rights. It is a resilient Dream that has persisted through times of depressions, recessions, and battles over racial and gender rights (Hanson & White, 2011). Following one of his visits, French writer Alexis de Tocqueville was among the first to write of the exceptional nature of America (Tocqueville, 1899). Others have described America's uniqueness and have speculated on its religious, political, and social sources. One of the most important sociological works on American exceptionalism is provided by Seymour Martin Lipset (1996). He notes that the concept of American exceptionalism involves a culture with a strong emphasis on values of liberty, democratic egalitarianism, and individualism. The downside of this individualist approach, however, is a lack of support for poverty programs or government assistance and attitudes that blame the poor with little understanding of larger structures or forces that might affect opportunity systems. This ideology of “Americanism” doesn't involve a nationality based on community as in other countries where it would be impossible to be, for example, un-English. “Americanism” is not a matter of birth but of ideological commitment. Thus, Lipset argues that it is indeed possible to be un-American. This conceptual framework helps us understand the history and resilience of an American Dream involving the belief in an equal chance for any individual to work hard and get ahead in a rags-to-riches system of opportunity, and helps set the stage for comparison of two cultures (American and Polish) with different histories but overlapping dreams.

The American exceptionalism that began with the founding of America is a story of immigrants (Hanson & White, 2011). For example, research examining the most recent set of immigrants -- Latinos -- shows the distinctness of the journey to the Dream with a blending of Latino culture and values with American ones. Despite this blending, Latinos are some of the strongest supporters of the American Dream across race/ethnic groups (Hanson & White, 2016). This current examination of Americans with Polish roots will ask similar questions. Our review of the literature will show the dynamics of the American Dream for Polish Americans as well as their continued interest and belief in all things Polish. Our analysis examines the nature and level of these cultural combinations of beliefs involving the American Dream for Polish Americans.

### *2.2 Inequality Beliefs*

A second conceptual framework that guides our research is the inequality beliefs framework proposed by Kluegel and Smith (1986). The framework examines beliefs about the availability, causes, and benefits of inequality and opportunities to get ahead. Kluegel and Smith use social psychological theories to explain and understand the differences in individual beliefs that are products of political context, larger culture, and dominant ideologies about inequality as well as the individual's own economic status. The framework borrows from Feagin's (1975) work on causal attribution and differentiates between individual and structural explanations for opportunity and inequality outcomes. It is often used in comparative analysis of mobility belief systems (Kluegel et al., 1995; Kluegel & Mateju, 1995; Mason & Kluegel, 2000). Individual attributions examine the supposed characteristics of either the wealthy or the poor to understand getting ahead. It is an optimistic belief system since outcomes are believed to be totally reliant upon the individual's own characteristics. The individual attributes associated with economic progress include motivation, ability, and hard work. The individual attributes associated with lack of mobility include factors such as lack of effort, weak attachment to work, and a poor work ethic. On the other hand, structural attributions of opportunity and inequality focus on larger factors beyond the individual including, for example, poor educational opportunity, lack of jobs, and discrimination.

Research on the U.S. and capitalist countries has consistently shown an individualist attribution system for opportunity and inequality (Nilson, 1981; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Until the ground-breaking comparative work of Mason & Kluegel (2000) and Kluegel, Mason, & Wegener (1995), we knew little about attitudes concerning opportunity and inequality in Poland and other countries in Eastern and Central Europe. Their comparative work on inequality attitudes found that those in Central and Eastern Europe tend to attribute opportunity and inequality to larger structures. Unique historical experiences (including communism) and economic upheavals have contributed to these attitudes. Some argue the attitudes persist despite the democratization process and transition to a market economy. An emphasis on equality and equality of opportunity is largely supported in this region and is associated with the view that structures sometimes limit opportunities (Mason & Kluegel, 2000; Kluegel et al., 1995). On the other hand, individuals in capitalist countries, and America in particular, are more likely to attribute opportunity and inequality to individual factors (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Nilson, 1981). The work by Mason and colleagues suggests the ideology of capitalism (and the associated belief in individual accountability for success or failure), as well as an idealistic view of democracy contribute to this system of attribution. One of the classic works on the attitudes of Americans toward getting ahead is Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). Weber argued that Americans (as well as those in European capitalist nations) were distinct in stressing individualism and an ethic of self-help. He attributed this world view to a Calvinist-based Protestant ethic.

The inequality beliefs framework contributes to our understanding of the unique histories of the U.S. and Poland and the potential consequences for the American Dream. More specifically, the framework guides our thinking on views about opportunity and inequality and the related issues of freedom, rights, status, and democracy in Poland, the U.S., and among Polish Americans. The comparative research showing a structuralist view of opportunity and inequality in Central and Eastern Europe and an individualist view in the U.S. is critical to our understanding how beliefs about the Dream might vary across countries and among individuals who have exposure to both Polish and U.S. culture.

### *2.3 Democracy, Freedom, Rights, and the American Dream*

In addition to the above frameworks, our research is guided by scholarship examining concepts involving democracy, freedom, and rights. There is disagreement on the meaning of democracy (Mansbridge 1990; Tremblay 2007). This disagreement goes beyond issues of democracies that exist together with structured gender and race inequality. Interestingly, some of America's founders considered an alternate form of government involving a "natural aristocracy," and were uncertain of democracy as a means of creating good government. The democratic ideal developed over time in the U.S. In addition, democratic governments worldwide do not guarantee rights for all minority groups (Miller, 2018). The measures of democracy used here (e.g. important aspects of, pride in, satisfaction with, importance of) reflect the complexity of the concept and go beyond simple measures involving satisfaction with democracy (Canache et al., 2001). There is also disagreement on the meaning and measurement of freedom, especially with regard to positive (rights, opportunities) and negative (lack of coercive constraint) aspects of freedom. The Cato Institute (2018) provides international measures of freedom that involve the absence of coercion in areas involving personal, civil, and economic freedom. Graeff (2012) also suggests specific concepts and measures including freedom of speech, protest, religion, and work. Our measures are guided by this scholarship and reflect both positive (e.g. gender and immigrant rights) and negative (e.g. freedom of speech and religion) aspects of freedom in multiple areas of life.

## **3. Background**

### *3.1 The American Dream Yesterday and Today*

In 2019, 38 percent of Americans said they had realized the American Dream, while another 40 percent were "on the way" to achieving it (Fox News, 2019 a). Today, Americans frequently describe their dreams using several financial yardsticks: 76 percent say having a successful career is either "extremely" or "very important" in realizing the American Dream; "owning a home," 69 percent; "being better off than the generation before you," 57 percent (Fox News, 2017). Education is also closely tied to grasping the American Dream: 65 percent believe a college degree is essential to achieving the American Dream, and 67 percent say the ability to send one's children to college is also "very much" a part of it (Fusion, 2015). Finally, 58 percent believe that having enough financial security in order to "have ample time for leisure pursuits" is yet another measure (Ibid).

In many ways, the American Dream is an expression of patriotic feelings. In 2017, 79 percent said that "the ability of people living here to get good jobs and achieve the American Dream" was either "very important" or "extremely important" to "the United States' identity as a nation" (*Associated Press/NORC*, 2017a). Closely related is the idea that the American Dream is a means to bind the nation together. In 2017, 74 percent thought "making a valuable contribution to your community" was an essential element of the American Dream (Fox News, 2017).

The American Dream is woven into the fabric of the country's culture and history. The phrase was first developed by historian James Truslow Adams. In his book, *The Epic of America*, Adams described the American Dream as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (Adams, 1941, p.404). The phrase became a shorthand for the notion that the U.S. is more than a land mass; rather, the act of becoming an American rests on a commitment to a set of ideas that allows anyone to endorse the values of freedom, equality of opportunity, individual rights, and hard work. In 2015, 63 percent believed that "freedom of choice in how to live one's life" was "very much" an apt descriptor of the American Dream (Fusion, 2015).

Today, many Americans see cracks in the Dream. A fairly large number (27 percent) say the American Dream is dead for themselves, and an even larger group say it is dead for others (32 percent) (Point Taken/Marist, 2016). In addition, 78 percent told pollsters in 2016 that "people in other groups than yours are getting ahead while people like you are falling behind" (ABC News/*Washington Post*, 2016). Eighty-two percent cite economic inequality as a "big problem" (Pew Research Center, 2017), and 57 percent give the government either a D or an F in addressing the issue (*Associated Press/NORC*, 2018). Additionally, 56 percent agree with the statement, "Even if people work hard, the system is rigged to favor the wealthy" (Fox News, 2019 b).

Most importantly, attitudes among U.S. millennials (aged 18-29) signal both faith and future challenges. A 2017 survey found 53 percent believed that the American Dream was alive; 44 percent pronounced it dead (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2017a). Remarkably, the millennial majority's faith in the American Dream still holds despite considerable student debt, and a record 82 percent not counting on receiving Social Security checks when they retire (*Associated Press/NORC*, 2017b). They believe that any restoration of the American Dream requires a renewed faith in community: 67 percent agree with the statement: "We need a new spirit of community, a sense that we are all in this together, or the American Dream will continue to wither;" and only 7 percent disagree (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2017b).

### 3.2 *The Culture of the Dream in Poland Today*

What is the cultural context of a Dream for Poles today, and what are the prospects for young people in Poland? After 1989, new opportunities for professional careers and success became available. Factors affecting getting ahead included hard work, entrepreneurship, and the ability to learn. Over 25 years later, the situation involving young people is often discussed in the context of unemployment among university graduates, atypical employment, uncertainty about work, and migrating elsewhere to find it (CBOS, 2014). Survey data on Poland in a cross-national context show that in the post-communist transition respondents in Poland had optimistic views on the importance of education for getting ahead that were similar to respondents in the U.S. However, after 2008 this optimism declined in Poland, especially among young Poles (Wyseinska-DiCarlo & DiCarlo, 2014).

As in the U.S., surveys show Poles believe prospects for young people's success are less favorable than twenty years ago. Opinion polls show increased numbers of Poles maintain that it is social origin (i.e., high social position) that is important for getting ahead. This trend reflects enormous structural changes and increased stratification within the country (CBOS, 2014). The presence of economic and social stratification in the U.S. has not, however, affected the views of Americans as they continue to stress the importance of hard work in getting ahead. In 2018, 71 percent believed that "getting ahead by one's own hard work" is closely associated with being a "real American" (Grinnell College National Poll, 2018). Such attitudes create a kind of American exceptionalism that anyone can get ahead by working hard. The most recent International Social Survey Program data on Poland and the U.S. on this issue was collected in 2009 (ISSP, 2009). In response to the question about getting ahead and the importance of hard work, just 27 percent of Poles said it was essential as compared to 44 percent of Americans.

Findings from researchers at the Warsaw based CBOS Public Opinion Research on Polish Public Opinion organization suggest the most important value for Poles is a happy family followed by good health. Other values are less important including the well-being of the fatherland, freedom of expression, and participation in socio-political life (CBOS, 2010). Regarding satisfaction with one's status, most Poles (67 percent) are satisfied with their material standard of living, but only 34 percent were content with their income and financial situation (CBOS, 2019). On items measuring views of inequality, Poles view Polish society as more egalitarian in 2020 than they did in the 1990s. However, respondents still see Polish society as being less than their ideal with too many individuals in the bottom strata (CBOS, 2020).

In their evaluation of democratic mechanisms, Poles are pessimistic about their democratic institutions with fewer than half agreeing that voters always have a real choice, and a similar minority saying votes are always honestly counted and members of electoral commissions are trustworthy (CBOS, 12/2018). Only 48 percent of Poles are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country (CBOS, 6/2018). However, Poles' opinions about the value of democracy remain positive, with three-quarters agreeing that democracy is preferable to any other form of government. Increasingly, Poles report a lower level of political alienation, with a majority stating it really does matter whether their government is

democratic or undemocratic (CBOS, 6/2018). Pazderski's (2019) research on Polish attitudes toward democracy concluded that young Polish respondents (18-34) are unique among Polish respondents in valuing living standards over demographic values.

How are young Poles doing with regard to jobs and employment? Rorat (2014) provides evidence showing young Poles (born after 1983) have high educational attainment (even by EU standards), but also high unemployment (again by EU standards). There has been an enormous transformation as the number of university students expanded. Somewhat unique is the fact that Polish youth want a better balance between work and personal life. Salary is important, but so, too, is the stability and culture of work. Pursuit of a career at any cost is not a common attitude. While Rorat concludes that jobs are available, there is a poor fit between the educational degrees young Poles are getting, the jobs they want, and the strong competition for those jobs that are available. Many young Poles find solutions in migrating to other places to work. Rorat sees some inflexibility in young people not going into other forms of employment (e.g., job sharing, teleworking, part-time work) as an option to full-time contract employment. Even if they were interested in these alternatives, he suggests any resolution will be difficult given the lack of flexibility in the Polish labor market as compared to other places in Europe. Rorat concludes that Polish youth are neither risk-takers nor are they necessarily interested in new challenges. Many do not have a plan for career development, or even an outline of a career in mind. Some suggest this reflects the passivity of older generations who lived under communism. This may be an explanation, but Rorat suggests this is the last generation that can use the influence of communism as an excuse for their attitudes toward career opportunities.

### *3.3 A Polish Dream? -- Immigration*

Today, Poles are the largest group of immigrants of Slavic origin in the U.S. Many were peasants, coming for jobs and wanting to own land. In addition to the effects of the new culture on Polish immigrants, it is interesting to consider how the culture, values, hopes, and dreams of this large group of emigres supported, strengthened, and added new elements to the American Dream. Polish emigres were Catholics coming to a Protestant country carrying with them Eastern European value systems. These new Polish arrivals were very religious and formed strong communities (Stec, 1946). Many were unskilled manual laborers, but found opportunities in mining, meatpacking, construction, steelwork, and heavy industry, and they dominated most of these industries until the mid-twentieth century (McCook, 2011). Polish immigrants also built their own school systems and churches—in part because Catholics were excluded from the existing educational and religious institutions. The Catholic Church quickly became an important element in integrating and organizing these communities (Wyrwal, 1969). These Catholic immigrants helped to diversify religion in the U.S. and consequently the American Dream (D'Antonio, 2011). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki wrote that in the U.S. there had been “out of those fragments separated from Polish society and embedded in American society,” adding:

And the striking phenomenon, the central object of our investigation, is the formation of this coherent group out of originally incoherent elements, the creation of a society which in structure and prevalent attitudes is neither Polish nor American but constitutes a specific new product whose raw materials have been partly drawn from Polish traditions, partly from the new conditions in which the immigrants live, and partly from American social values as the immigrant sees and interprets them (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1996 edition, pp.107-108).

### *3.4 Polish Americans and Their Dreams*

What about Polish Americans today? Until the Modern Polonia Survey by the Piast Institute in 2009, there was no major examination of the attitudes and opinions of Polish Americans (Radzilowski & Stecula, 2010). There are approximately 10,000,000 individuals who identify as being Polish by ancestry in the U.S. (3.2 percent of the population). The survey provides evidence that this modern ethnic group retains a strong identification with its Polish roots while having a distinctive American experience. Polish Americans remain strongly affiliated with the Catholic Church (77.6 percent are Catholic as compared to 24.5 percent of all Americans). Unlike other Americans, most Polish Americans support some form of amnesty for illegal immigrants. One reason for this may be that most Polish Americans feel that they continue to be personally discriminated against in part because of negative stereotypes and historic inaccuracies. The core values of this group represent many of the essential aspects of the American Dream, with family and faith being the two most commonly espoused values. Finally, a majority of Polish Americans in the sample wanted to see less inequality in the U.S. and felt strongly that government should do all in its power to end poverty. An examination of U.S. Census data from 2000 showed continuing flows of Polish immigrants and considerable educational and occupational achievement among younger generations (Booza, 2007). One Polish immigrant who arrived in 1981 described the American Dream as a chance to get away from the “tyrannies and deceptions of the Jewish and Gentile priests and Bronze Age barbarians.... to get away from the clutches of institutionalized Christianity” (Dziamka, 1994, p. 41). Dziamka suggests that after communism Poles are economically free but spiritually enslaved and “in bondage to the Roman Catholic church” (p. 41). Kleeman (1985) notes early Polish immigrants clung to the Polish Peasant ideologies of family, honor, and the status quo—quite unlike the American Dream's priority on mobility

and its optimistic vision of brighter futures ahead. These attitudes coincided with lesser assimilation and mobility. Even small financial success was satisfactory. Peasant value systems can still be seen among some Polish Americans, although Kleeman argues that recent generations have embraced the American Dream and aim to claim it. Some (e.g., Bukowczyk, 1998) note that we should not think of Polish Americans as a single entity. In fact, there is considerable diversity and conflict among Polish ethnics in the U.S. mainly due to Polish experiences and identities that are carried into the U.S. experience. There are, for example, differences across waves of Polish immigrants, in religion (with both Polish Jews and Catholics emigrating and with divisions among Catholics as well), and in attitudes toward communism as well as the region of Poland (“partitions”) one is affiliated with. The evidence suggests that Polish Americans had an easier time assimilating and experiencing the American Dream than some other immigrant groups. Yet they have stopped short of total assimilation via their ongoing and tightly held ties to their homeland (CUNY, 2009).

In sum, the conceptual framework and literature lead us to hypothesize that Americans will be distinct and more optimistic than Poles on many of the American Dream items involving, for example, getting ahead and status/mobility. However, on some items involving rights and democracy, it may be that Poles are more supportive. The frameworks and literature lead us to hypothesize that Polish Americans have taken on many of the individualist, optimistic attitudes of Americans, but still retain some of the beliefs about the impact of structures and the extreme importance of civil liberties and democracy that typify Poles given the continued influence of peasant culture and the long history of fights for freedom.

#### **4. Methods**

##### *4.1 Data*

This paper uses the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2014) to address questions about differences between Polish Americans and other Americans and the General Social Survey (GSS, 2016) to address questions about differences between Americans and Poles on attitudes involving democracy, freedom, and rights. The World Values Survey is a global project that has been conducted by a worldwide network of social scientists since 1981 in nearly 100 countries. The World Value Survey (WVS) provides information on ideas and beliefs, changes over time, and the impact of these attitudes. It is a valuable resource for scholars, policy makers, students, journalists, international organizations, and governments around the world. Data for this research come from wave 6 of the World Values Survey collected in 2010-2015. Samples are representative of all people aged 18 and older who reside in private households regardless of their nationality, citizenship, or language. There are approximately 849 Polish respondents and 2,206 U.S. respondents in Wave 6 (with the exact N depending on the measure).

The General Social Survey has been conducted 32 times between 1972 and 2018. The General Social Survey (GSS) is one of the most influential surveys in the social sciences. The GSS has been providing survey data on probability samples of U.S. residents 18 years and older which measure public opinion on a wide range of topics. The survey is conducted via face-to-face interviews by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. We use data from 2010 through 2016 to increase the size of the Polish American sample. A good number of our American Dream variables were not included in the 2018 data; hence, we use 2010-2016. Finally, three American Dream variables were not available during the 2010-16 years. We used earlier data for these variables and note this in the measurement section. There are approximately 239 Polish Americans and 9,184 other Americans in the 2010 through 2016 samples (with the exact N depending on the measure). Given the small number of Polish Americans, we were unable to break the group down into separate generations in our analyses. It is hoped that future data sets and researchers will have larger samples of Polish Americans in order to examine differences by generation.<sup>1</sup>

##### *4.2 Measures*

Full detail on each measure and the coding (often involving recodes) is provided in Appendix A. In this research country (Poland and U.S) and Polish American status (as contrasted with other Americans) are independent variables and public opinion on aspects of the American Dream involving freedom, democracy, civil liberties, status, getting ahead, inequality, and having a good life are the dependent variables.

##### *4.3 Analyses*

We examine differences in means between Americans and Poles (WVS) and between Polish Americans and other Americans (GSS) on the American Dream items involving freedom, liberty, democracy, status, getting ahead, and

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<sup>1</sup> For exploratory purposes we compared first and second-generation Polish Americans to those from later generations (more detailed comparisons were not possible with the sample size). Findings show no significant differences between earlier and later generations except on one variable. Later generations were more positive about the changes in their financial situation over that past few years than were earlier generations.

inequality items. There is no single data set that contains Americans, Poles, and Polish Americans. It should be noted that there are many comparable measures of our variables in the World Value Survey and the GSS, but the exact wording and variables diverge slightly. T-tests are used to test for significance in the mean differences. Using trends from these two comparisons we draw some conclusions about the relative position of Polish Americans on the American Dream and whether their opinions are closer to other Americans or to Poles.

## 5. Findings

Table 1. Means for American Dream items comparing Polish Americans and other Americans (GSS 2010-16)+

<b>FREEDOM</b>		<u>Polish Americans</u>	<u>Other Americans</u>
	<b>1) Rights</b>		
	<b>Gender:</b>		
	Women not suited politics (1=disagree 0=other)	0.81	0.80
	Preferential hiring women (1=strongly for 0=other)	0.19	0.23
	<b>Immigrants</b>		
	Legal immigrants same rights as Americans (1= Strongly agree 0=Other) (should be 1= not 1 = )	0.00 <sup>#</sup>	0.07 <sup>#</sup>
	<b>Minorities</b>		
	Important government give rights to minorities (1-7 with 7=very important)	2.42 <sup>®</sup>	1.88 <sup>®</sup>
	<b>2) Freedom of</b>		
	<b>Religion:</b>		
	Must respect all religions (1-5 with 5=strongly agree)	4.25 <sup>#</sup>	4.00 <sup>#</sup>
	<b>Speech:</b>		
	Allow racist to speak (1=allowed 0=other)	0.65	0.60
<b>CIVIL LIBERTIES</b>			
	People participate in decisions (1-7 with 7=very important)	5.88	6.09
	Took part in demonstrations (1=yes 0=no)	0.33 <sup>®</sup>	0.21 <sup>®</sup>
<b>DEMOCRACY</b>			
	Proud of how democracy works (1-4 with 4=very proud)	2.92	3.05
	Satisfied with how democracy works** (1-4 with 4=very satisfied)	3.03	2.91
	How important to always vote (1-7 with 7=very important)	2.24	1.97
<b>GETTING AHEAD</b>			
	People get ahead-hard work (1=agree 0=other)	0.73	0.70
<b>STATUS/MOBILITY</b>			
	Ranking of position (1-10 with 10=top)	6.26	6.23
	R's standard of living compared to parents (1-5 with 5=much better)	3.65	3.67
	Kids standard of living compared to R's (1-5 with 5=much better)	2.17 <sup>#</sup>	2.42 <sup>#</sup>
	Change in financial situation (1=better 0=other)	0.29 <sup>#</sup>	0.32 <sup>#</sup>
	Satisfaction with financial situation (1=satisfied 0=other)	2.06	2.02
<b>INEQUALITY</b>			
	Difference between rich and poor too large** (1-5 with 5=strongly agree)	3.97 <sup>#</sup>	3.77 <sup>#</sup>
	Government should reduce income differences (1-7 with 7=government should reduce income differences)	4.47	4.31

+ A few items come from earlier surveys

x Year= 2008

\*\* Year = 2000

\* t-test is significant at .05 level

# t-test is significant at .20 level

### 5.1 Comparisons between Polish Americans and Other Americans on American Dream Items

Figures in Table 1 show means on the American Dream items for Polish Americans and other Americans. Where there are significant differences the means are starred. The trends are interesting as they show Polish Americans and other Americans differ on fewer than half of the American Dream items. For the items measuring freedom, Polish Americans and other Americans agree on half of the items (e.g., rights involving gender and speech). Where there are differences,

Polish Americans are less likely than others to agree that immigrants deserve rights but are more likely than other Americans to think that minorities deserve rights and to support freedom of religion. In the category of civil liberties, both groups believe people should participate in a country's decisions, but it is the Polish Americans who are more likely to say that they had taken part in a demonstration. There are no differences between the groups on items measuring democracy and getting ahead. Both express pride in and satisfaction with democracy, with opinions on importance of voting being lower. As to getting ahead, both Polish Americans and other Americans agree that people make progress with hard work. The two groups feel similarly on the status and mobility items when it comes to measuring one's standard of living as compared to their parents. They differ on three of the five items measuring status and mobility with other Americans being more positive than Polish Americans on measuring their child's standard of living, changes in their financial situations, and their satisfaction with those changes. Finally, on the item measuring attitudes about inequality, it is the Polish Americans who are more likely to argue that the gap between the rich and the poor is too large.

Table 2. Means on American Dream items comparing Poland and U.S. (WVS VI 2010-15)

<b>FREEDOM</b>		<u>Poland</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
	<b>1) Rights</b>		
	<b>Gender</b>		
	Jobs scarce-men more right to job (1=disagree 0=other)	0.57*	0.70*
	Men make better political leaders (1=strongly disagree 0=other)	0.10*	0.25*
	<b>Immigrants</b>		
	Jobs scarce-people from this country more right to job than immigrants (1=disagree 0=other)	0.13*	0.24*
	<b>Human</b>		
	How much respect for human rights these days (1=a great deal 0=other)	0.04*	0.14*
	<b>2) Freedom of</b>		
	<b>Religion</b>		
	Only acceptable religion is mine (1=strongly disagree 0=other)	0.14*	0.39*
	<b>Speech</b>		
	Protecting freedom of (1=support 0=other)	0.05*	0.17*
	<b>Choice &amp; Control</b>		
	Free choice and control (1=none at all to 10=a great deal)	6.67*	7.33*
<b>CIVIL LIBERTIES</b>			
	People should have more say (1=agree 0=other)	0.36*	0.14*
	Attended peaceful demonstration (1=yes 0=other)	0.08*	0.14*
<b>DEMOCRACY</b>			
	Importance of democracy (1-10 with 10=absolutely important)	8.70*	8.41*
	How democratic is the country being run (1-10 with 10=completely democratic)	5.89*	6.46*
	Vote in national election (1=always 0=other)	0.63*	0.59*
	Democracy: Civil rights protect people's liberty (1=Not an essential characteristic of democracy 10=an essential characteristic of democracy)	8.42*	7.46*
	Democracy: Women same rights as men (1=Not an essential characteristic of democracy 10=an essential characteristic of democracy)	8.85*	8.22*
<b>GETTING AHEAD</b>			
	Success comes from hard work"??	5.33*	7.17*
<b>STATUS</b>			
	Satisfaction with household financial situation (1-10 with 10=completely satisfied)	5.71*	6.15*
<b>INEQUALITY</b>			
	Attitude about income inequality (1-10 with 10=should be made more equal)	4.68*	5.42*

\* t-test for difference in means significant at .05 level

### 5.2 Comparisons between Poland and the U.S. on American Dream Items

Figures in Table 2 show means on the American Dream items for Polish and U.S. respondents. Unlike the comparisons in Table 1 between Polish Americans and other Americans, the results in Table 2 show respondents from Poland and the U.S. hold significantly different attitudes on every American Dream item. In general, it is the Americans who are more supportive of the issues related to the Dream. But in the area of democracy, it is the Poles who are generally more supportive. Americans are more supportive than Poles on all the attitudes involving *freedom*—including items covering



human rights; rights for women, immigrants, and minorities; and freedom of religion, speech, and choice/control. Poles are more likely to agree with the item on *civil liberties* dealing with people having more say. But Americans are more likely to have attended a peaceful demonstration (the other civil liberties item). Overall, Poles are more supportive on four of the five items measuring attitudes about democracy. Americans are more likely to think their country is being run democratically, but Poles are more likely to believe democracy is important, to vote in national elections, and see democracy as protecting civil rights and women's rights. Table 2 includes three items measuring attitudes *on getting ahead, status, and inequality*. On each one, Americans score higher than Poles and have views that fit closely to established concepts about the American Dream (e.g., the importance of hard work, satisfaction with their financial situation, and attitudes about income inequality).

Table 3. Comparisons on American Dream items between Polish-Americans, Americans, and Poles. (6SS, WVS, and ISSP Social Inequality Data)

	Polish Americans v Other Americans	Poles v Americans	Conclusion
<b>FREEDOM</b>			
<b>1) Rights</b>			
<i>Gender:</i>			
*Women in politics	No Difference	Americans more supportive	Polish Americans more like other Americans-More supportive of women in politics.
*Hiring women	No Difference	Americans more supportive	Polish Americans more like other Americans-More supportive of hiring women.
<i>Immigrants:</i>			
*Rights	Other Americans more supportive	Americans more supportive	Polish Americans more like Poles-Less supportive of immigrant rights.
<b>2) Freedom of</b>			
*Religion	Polish Americans more supportive	Americans more supportive	Polish Americans more supportive than other Americans and Americans more supportive than Poles on freedom of religion.
*Speech	No Difference	Americans more supportive	Polish Americans more like other Americans-More supportive of freedom of speech.
<b>CIVIL LIBERTIES</b>			
People participate/have say	No Difference	Poles more supportive	Polish Americans more like other Americans-Less supportive of people participating and having more to say in how things are done.
Took part in demonstration	Polish Americans more likely	Americans more likely	Polish Americans more likely than other Americans and Americans more likely than Poles to have taken part in demonstration. Polish Americans are the most likely and Poles the least.
<b>DEMOCRACY</b>			
Importance/proud of democracy	No Difference	Poles more positive	Polish Americans are more like other Americans in being less positive about democracy than Poles.
Voting	No Difference	Poles more likely to vote	Polish Americans are more like other Americans in having lower voting than Poles.
<b>GETTING AHEAD</b>			
Hard work-get ahead/succeed	No Difference	Americans higher on agreement	Polish Americans more like other Americans than Poles in belief about hard work leading to success.
<b>STATUS</b>			
Satisfaction with financial situation	No Difference	Americans higher on satisfaction	Polish Americans more like other Americans than Poles in being satisfied with financial situation.
<b>INEQUALITY</b>			
Too much inequality	Polish Americans more in agreement	Americans more in agreement	Polish Americans are unlike Poles and even higher in agreement than other Americans on view that there is too much inequality.

### 5.3 Overview of Comparisons between Polish Americans, Other Americans, and Poles on American Dream Items

Table 3 provides an overview of the results from the comparisons made in Table 1 (Polish Americans contrasted to other Americans) and Table 2 (Poles compared to Americans). As noted in the methods section, there is no data set which contains these three groups in one collection. We can observe some similarities between Polish Americans and other

Americans and between Polish Americans and Poles by combining insights from the two tables when variables are similar (see the middle two columns). Conclusions from the comparisons are briefly summarized in the last column of Table 3. Regarding *freedom*, the results suggest that Polish Americans are more like other Americans than Poles on gender rights—namely, they are more supportive. However, on immigrant rights, Polish Americans are more like Poles than other Americans in being less supportive. On the freedom of religion and speech items, the results show that Polish Americans, like other Americans, are more supportive than Poles. In fact, Polish Americans are the most supportive group on religious freedom, even more so than other Americans.

Findings from the two items measuring *civil liberties* show that on the first measure, Polish Americans, along with other Americans, put less emphasis than Poles on the importance of people participating and having a say in how things are being run in their country. However, on the other civil liberties measure involving taking part in demonstrations, it is the Polish Americans who are most likely to have participated (even more so than other Americans). Respondents from Poland score lowest on this measure of civil liberties.

There are two measures of *democracy* in the data sets that allow comparison across the groups of respondents. Responses to the items on the importance of democracy and voting show Polish Americans and other Americans are similar in putting less emphasis on these issues than do Poles.

Finally, several American Dream items involving *getting ahead, status, and inequality* are compared across the data sets in Table 3. Polish Americans score high on these measures of the Dream, with their emphasis on hard work and satisfaction with their financial situation being like other Americans and higher than Poles. On the question whether there is too much inequality, Polish Americans express the highest agreement (even surpassing other Americans).

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper we consider the historical and cultural context of the American Dream in Poland and the U.S. with a special focus on those who combine Polish and American cultures – Polish Americans. We examine the history of the Dream in the U.S. and the cooperation with Poland on creating this Dream at the time of the American Revolution and beyond. We also examine Polish Americans in the U.S. and the extent to which they have been influenced by Polish culture, but also the extent to which they have been influenced by the American Dream and have taken it on as their own. We answer questions about Polish Americans, Americans, and Poles on views of the American Dream using data from the World Values Survey and the General Social Survey. The findings lead to several conclusions. First, Polish Americans agree with other Americans on most items measuring elements of the American Dream. There is no significant difference, for example, between views of Polish Americans and other Americans on variables measuring gender rights, free speech, democracy, and getting ahead. When there is a difference, sometimes it is the Polish Americans (in contrast to other Americans) whose opinions most reflect the American Dream (e.g. on rights to minorities, freedom of religion, certain civil liberties, and belief that there is too much inequality). On a few items it is other Americans who are more supportive of Dream principles (e.g., rights to immigrants, and opinions on some mobility opportunities). Although we predicted some similarity between Polish Americans and other Americans on these American Dream items, the similarities are larger than were expected. Additionally, our expectation that Polish Americans might be even more supportive than Americans on some items, e.g. democracy issues, was exhibited in the data.

In contrast to our comparisons of Polish Americans and Americans, the findings show that Americans and Poles have significantly different opinions on each of the American Dream items. Although we predicted differences between U.S. and Polish respondents, we did not expect this level of difference. With regard to the direction of the findings, usually it is Americans who are more supportive of indicators of the American Dream. However, on a few items (e.g., some civil liberty and democracy measures), it is Poles who show more support for these Dream principles.

When considering the three groups, Polish Americans, Americans, and Poles, our conclusions suggest a trend where Polish Americans are a hybrid of other Americans and Poles when it comes to their views on the Dream. However, the differences often run in the direction that Polish Americans' views are more similar to other Americans and distinct from those of Poles. On some items, Polish Americans are “more American” than other Americans in their support of the American Dream (e.g. freedom of religion, support of civil liberties, and belief that there is too much inequality). We found that there was only one case – immigrant rights-- in which Polish Americans had views that were more like Poles than other Americans (being less supportive of these rights).

## 7. Discussion

Recent research on Latinos and the American Dream (Hanson & White, 2016) provides evidence that Hispanics dream in the same way as the rest of American society. In fact, they are better dreamers than native-born Americans who are losing some faith in the Dream. Similarly, we find here that Polish Americans often dream in the same way as other

Americans, and sometimes provide more support for the Dream than their counterparts. Our research adds to the evidence that faith in the Dream as shown by those in the U.S. whose family (or selves) have a non-U.S. country of origin is a vital part of American culture and may even be acting to strengthen the Dream.

We began our paper with a discussion of shared dreams that exist across countries in a globalized society. Specifically, we noted that the comparison between Poland and the U.S. is interesting in work on democracy, freedom, rights, and the American Dream given the long history of cooperation between the U.S. and Poland in fights for freedom and democracy. The critical role that Thaddeus Kosciuszko played in the American Revolution and the model that the American Dream played in numerous fights for freedom in Poland suggest a major overlap of dreams between these two countries. Even given their distinct histories, many Poles who came to America were coming for the Dream. Current public opinion polls show that today's Polish population has lost some faith in the Dream in contrast to the ever-positive Americans who believed in the Dream even during times of slavery, limitations on voting rights, inequality, racism, sexism, and most recently during the great recession. That being said, our findings show that it is Poles who are more supportive of several critical aspects of civil liberties (e.g. people having a say in how things are run) and democracy (the importance of democracy and the importance of voting). Thus, even the Poles who often see themselves as victims (and victims don't dream) and were historically part of a fatalistic Polish peasant culture (Kleeman, 1985), as well as subject to many years of foreign domination, are more insistent on people having a say and on the importance of democracy and voting than are the American Dreamers who are said to be exceptional in the extent of their dreaming.

Our research shows Polish Americans to be both believers in the Dream and beneficiaries of it. Many came with little education and started out in unskilled manual labor in the U.S. Yet they thrived in these industries (e.g. mining, meatpacking, construction) and in many cases dominated them (Boberg & Wroblewski, 2019). Today most Polish Americans are well assimilated into U.S. education and occupations with above average education and incomes (Booza, 2007). At the same time surveys of Polish Americans show them to have a strong commitment to Poland, and to the Polish culture and language (Radzilowski & Stecula, 2010). Our research confirms this dual identity and lack of total assimilation among Polish Americans. Although Polish Americans have similar views on many issues involving democracy, freedom, rights, and the American Dream, their views do not exactly duplicate those of other Americans. While there is a large overlap, Polish Americans have experienced the Dream that every immigrant longs for, but they are still *Polish* Americans.

For decades, Americans have believed in the exceptionalism of their country and their use of language has reflected high confidence in the nation's values. Phrases such as the "American Dream," "un-American," and the "American Way of Life" became a shorthand for the meaning of citizenship and national unity. The political scientist Louis Hartz once said, "When one's ultimate values are accepted wherever one turns, the absolute language of self-evidence comes easily enough" (Hartz, 1955, p. 58). In 1922, British traveler G.K. Chesterton wrote, "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed" (Chesterton, 1922, p. 7). And Frenchman Clotaire Rapaille noted that other countries simply could not replicate the U.S. experience citing Canada as an example: "The inner life of America is not a place—Canada is a place. Maybe the best place in the world. But if you are Canadian and you have a dream, you leave. Why? Because America is not a place. It is a dream" (Quoted in White, 2003, p. 53). Certainly, the absorption of Polish immigrants into American life validates the point made by these observers that becoming an American does not mean occupying a tract of land, but an adoption of the values surrounding freedom, equality of opportunity, and individual rights into one's thinking about one's place in society. In 2018, 73 percent of Americans agreed that "individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech" were a "very important" part of being "truly American" (PPRI/Atlantic, 2018). One year later, 76 percent of those who were parents or grandparents of children under the age of eighteen believed their children would achieve the American Dream (Harvard School of Public Health/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/NPR, 2019). As Abraham Lincoln once noted, such thinking comprises the "political religion" of the U.S. (Quoted in Lipset, 1996, p.18). For all of the doubts about the future of the American Dream, Americans (Polish Americans being no exception) remain religiously devoted to it. Poland's Dream is not a carbon copy of the American Dream. Poles don't value some of the Dream components such as rights and getting ahead to the same extent as Americans. It is elements of the Dream involving democracy and civil liberties that Poles value the most. Each of these groups – Americans, Poles, and Polish Americans—have a unique history and culture. That's how Dreams are made.

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## APPENDIX A: MEASURES

*Freedom*. Two aspects of freedom are measured. The first involves rights: gender rights, minority rights, immigrant rights, and human rights. In the World Value Survey (WVS) two survey items measure *gender rights*. One asks: “When jobs are scarce men should have more rights to a job than women” (1=disagree; 0=other). A second measure is related to gender status: “Men make better political leaders than do women” (1=agree strongly to 4=disagree strongly). In the GSS survey, two items are used to measure gender rights. The first asks about “Women not being suited for politics” (1=disagree; 0=agree). The second question inquires whether the respondent is “For or against preferential hiring of women” (1=strongly for; 0=other). The WVS measure of rights associated with *immigrant rights* is: “When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to (Polish/American) people” (1=disagree; 0=agree). In the GSS survey immigrant rights were measured by a variable asking, “Legal immigrants should have same rights as Americans” (1=strongly agree; 0=other). The GSS also includes a question on *minority rights*, where they were asked to answer whether it is “Important government give rights to minorities” (1-7 with 7=very important). A final measure of rights measures *human rights*. The WVS uses the following question: “How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country? Do you feel there is: A great deal of respect for individual human rights” (1=A great deal of respect; 0=other). There is not a measure of support of human rights in the GSS data set.

A second aspect of freedom involves freedom of religion, speech, and choice and control. *Freedom of religion* is measured in the WVS with this survey item: “Please tell us if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: The only acceptable religion is my religion” (1=strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree).” The GSS measures freedom of religion by asking: “How much do you agree with the following statements? We must respect all religions. Would you say” (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). *Freedom of speech* is measured in the WVS with this question: “If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? Maintaining order in the nation, giving people more say in important government decisions, fighting rising prices, or protecting freedom of speech?” (1= freedom of speech; 0=other). In the GSS, respondents are questioned: “Or consider a person who believes that Blacks are genetically inferior. If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community claiming that Blacks are inferior, should he be allowed to speak, or not?” (1=allowed; 0=other).

*Freedom of choice and control* is measured in the WVS with responses to the following statement: “Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use the scale where 1 means ‘no choice at all’ and 10 means ‘a great deal of choice’ to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.” There is no item measuring freedom of choice and control in the GSS.

*Civil Liberties*. Civil Liberties is a second major concept examined here. We study two measures of these liberties. The first involves opinions as to whether people should have *more to say or more participation* in how things are done in the country. The WVS question for this measure reads: “People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority. Would you please say which one of these you, yourself, consider the most important?” Respondents chose among “a high level of economic growth, making sure this country has strong defense forces, seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities, and trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful.” The response “seeing that people have more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities” was coded 1 and all other responses were coded 0. In the GSS, respondents were asked: “There are different opinions on people’s rights in a democracy. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all and 7 is very important, how important is it that people be given more opportunities to participate in decision making?”

A second measure of civil liberties involves *demonstrations*. In the WVS, the respondent is asked: “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or would never under any circumstances do it: Attending peaceful demonstrations.” (1=have done; 0=other). The GSS asks: “Here are some

different forms of political and social action that people can take. Please indicate, for each one, whether you have done it: Took part in demonstrations.” (1=yes; 0=no).

*Democracy.* Several measures were used to operationalize the third concept examined here—*democracy*. Three questions in the WVS ask about the importance of democracy (1=not at all important to 10=absolutely important), how democratically the country is being run (1=not at all democratic to 10=completely democratic), and whether they vote in national elections (1=always; 0=other). In the WVS, respondents were also questioned: “Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means ‘not at all an essential characteristic of democracy’ and 10 means ‘it definitely is an essential characteristic of democracy.’” We chose two statements from this list of statements on characteristics of democracy: “*Civil rights protect people from state oppression*” and “*Women have the same rights as men.*” Three questions on democracy were included from the GSS. They asked whether the respondent was proud of how democracy works in America (1=not proud at all to 4=very proud), how satisfied they were with how democracy works (1=not at all satisfied to 4=very satisfied), and how important it is to always vote (1=not at all important to 7= very important).

*Getting Ahead.* Each of the surveys had an item measuring attitudes about *getting ahead*. The WVS item asks whether hard work brings success (1=hard work doesn’t generally bring success to 10=in long run, yes). The GSS item asks about different ways of getting ahead and which approach the respondent thinks is most important (1=agree that hard work is the most important; 0=think that a different way of getting ahead is most important).

*Status/Mobility.* Attitudes about *status and mobility* were also evaluated. Respondents in the WVS were asked, “How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household?” (1=completely dissatisfied to 10=completely satisfied). The GSS included items on ranking of social position (1=bottom; 10=top), respondent’s standard of living compared to parents (1=much worse; 5=much better), child’s standard of living compared to respondents (1=much worse; 5=much better), and change in financial situation over the past few years (1=better; 0=other).

*Inequality.* Finally, we included some items which measure *attitudes about inequality* in our comparative look at the American Dream. In the WVS respondents were asked “Incomes should be...” and were given options ranging from 1 (we need larger income differences as incentives for individuals) to 10 (incomes should be made more equal). The GSS included items asking whether the difference between rich and poor was too large (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), and whether government should reduce income differences (1=government should not concern itself with reducing income differences; 7=government should reduce income differences).

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