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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Giancarlo Andrew Gonzalez entitled "Indebted: American Private Debt and Its Political Consequences." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Political Science.

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Indebted: American Private Debt and Its Political Consequences

**A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Giancarlo Andrew Gonzalez
May 2021**

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ABSTRACT

Private debt, also known as consumer debt, has been increasing exponentially over the past eighty years. Largely spurred by private and governmental action, the growth in consumer debt has allowed Americans to purchase services and commodities that they may not otherwise have been able to afford. However, research has also shown that debt has strong adverse effects on human social behavior. This is especially troublesome given how indebted Americans, particularly poor and minority Americans, have become in recent years. Thus, I ask if the effects of debt extend to political activity as well as social behavior. In this dissertation, I examine three dimensions of political activity across three papers. First, I look at the relationship between debt burden and political trust. Second, I analyze if a connection between debt burden and political and civic engagement also exists. Finally, I seek if a relationship exists between debt and support for various socioeconomic policies. I theorize that debt burden is a form of economic adversity that political scientists have thus far ignored. Thus, I also utilize additional economic adversity variables to see if the effect of debt burden on political behavior disappears with their inclusion. In a world of rising income inequality and economic adversity, I believe it is essential to highlight if growing debt is a concern that may also exacerbate political inequalities.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, many events have transpired to shift the nature of the American political landscape. These include growing economic inequality, rising economic adversity, skyrocketing levels of political polarization and animus, reduced trust in the federal government, declining voting and civic engagement rates, and growing hostility toward government action. These trends have created a volatile societal and political environment for the average citizen that many perceive as alien or even unfriendly. However, for the political scientist, this offers a plethora of information to analyze to further our knowledge of the political world. Our knowledge of these trends is largely thanks to scholars' efforts in improving our understanding of the political realm. This growth of knowledge has resulted in the creation of many political science subfields, including political behavior, political economy, and political psychology. With their help, the public has also become aware of major sociopolitical issues that might have otherwise gone unnoticed or misunderstood. It is hard to discuss politics with other individuals without bringing up some salient topic, whether it be the growth of political polarization or rising income inequality. Such issues have become talking points for both parties and many political pundits and political experts. Given how complex political society has become, it seems likely that some issues have gained prominence while others continue to operate in the background.

Indeed, one trend that has largely escaped political scientists' purview is the explosive growth of private debt. Private debt, also known as consumer debt, has exploded over the past several decades. As I will demonstrate here, private debt has increased fifteenfold over the past eighty years, even when accounting for population growth and inflation. This growth in private debt only compounds the reality that many Americans now face economic adversity at rates not observed in decades. As I will demonstrate, the growth of consumer debt has been propagated by

both private entities and the federal government's actions. This was largely due to the capacity of debt to spur economic activity in providing the mass citizenry access to commodities it could not otherwise afford. Given this, it is evident that the origins of debt are political in origin. Debt has had the additional effect of spurring political movements, notably the *We Are the 99% Movement* that gained traction in the early 2010s. Similar movements have also popped up elsewhere, most notably in Latin America. Throughout and following the 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign, many Democrats, including Joe Biden, have made the alleviation, or outright cancellation of debt, a major issue for the campaign. However, not all forms of debt are the same. Mortgage debt, for example, can be used as a means of building wealth. Upon accumulating mortgage debt, one can use it to purchase a house, building equity over time. However, other forms of debt, such as credit card or student loan debt, do not build wealth over time. They are considered investments, with much less clear outcomes, used to purchase a commodity at a specific time. Thus, different forms of debt can differentially affect political behavior, given their different purposes. There are reasons to suspect that debt has political effects. There is already strong evidence that debt affects social behavior. Most of these effects are harmful, notably on mental health and social relationships.

We know that the origins of consumer debt are political in origin. Though private in origin, federal entities have played a major role in influencing the growth of debt. Furthermore, debt has inspired movements whose goals include the elimination and forgiveness of debt. Nor are such movements restricted to the United States. As such, I believe it is likely that debt affects political behavior. Nonetheless, no in-depth study, to my knowledge, has been conducted that looks at what these effects might be. This omission is troubling. I believe that analyzing the

relationship between personal debt and political behavior is a potentially fruitful avenue of research.

Here, I look at the connection between debt and three dimensions of political behavior. First, I examine the relationship between trust and debt. With the massive decline in trust in government over the past few decades, I will show that growing economic inequality and adversity play a role in increasing distrust toward the government. Does debt have the same effect on trust as economic adversity does? Do different forms of debt have different effects on trust? How do debt, and its various types, differentially affect individual components of a greater index of trust in government? Answering these questions is the goal of the first paper.

Second, I examine the relationship between debt and political participation. An ongoing debate in political science asks if political and civic engagement have declined since the mid-20th century. Some scholars have argued that engagement has declined, while others have claimed otherwise, and still others argue that engagement simply takes on different forms today relative to the past. Irrespective of the side one takes in this debate, economic adversity appears to play some role in influencing how active one is in political and social affairs outside of the household. Does debt have similar effects on engagement? Are the effects on social and political participation different? Do the various forms of debt have different effects on participation? Are certain forms of participation hurt by increased debt, while others become more common? In the second paper, I address these questions.

Third, I examine the relationship between debt and support for policies meant to address socioeconomic concerns. As economic inequality and adversity have risen, policy has become largely ineffective at combatting them. The sources of policy decline are myriad, though there is evidence that adversity and economic inequality have played a self-reinforcing role in its

weakening. What about debt? Do those who have debt become more or less supportive of policy designed to fight economic adversity? What about those who have a particular form of debt? Do such indebted individuals become more supportive of policy in general? Or do these individuals become more supportive only of policies that directly address said form of debt? These questions are the focus of the third and final paper.

A matter I have not addressed thus far is the mechanism through which I believe debt may influence political behavior. In my project, I theorize the debt acts as a form of economic adversity that affects how people behave politically. As a form of economic adversity, it should draw attention to income-related concerns, increasing their salience. At the same time, debt should transcend the effects of income. This is because the impact of debt occurs *ex post facto*. Debt acts as a stressor on one's income, reducing the total amount (net) income that one has. It is an additional bill that one must regularly pay that takes money that could otherwise be used for a different purpose. To illustrate an example, take two individuals who have the same income (\$50,000), who are alike in all other ways. Superficially, we would expect them to behave the same way politically, averaged among all individuals of the same demographic traits. However, the effects of these similarities may be overridden if both individuals have a different level of debt. Individual A owes \$10,000 on a given debt borrowed to help cover the cost of some service. By comparison, Individual B owes \$100,000 on another debt. If both individuals have to pay the same percentage of the debt off in a given month, then Individual B would pay off a higher share of their monthly income to cover off such expenses. As such, we would expect these individuals to live in different economic realities despite having the same income. To analyze the effect of income alone ignores an important dimension of economic well-being.

Given that I conceptualize debt as a dimension of economic adversity, I believe that the effects of debt may be overridden by other economic adversity concerns. In this project, I analyze the effects of general health and concerns about income change on all three dimensions of political behavior. I use both of these variables to create a summed variable that analyzes the joint effects of health and financial stress on these forms of political behavior. This variable is then included as a second potential form of economic adversity in my analysis. I add a third variable that uses responses to a “most important problem facing the United States” question to analyze whether or not people view economic adversity as a societal issue. Thus, I have two additional variables that analyze the impact of economic adversity on political behavior. The former of these focuses on the role of personal economic adversity. The latter looks at the role of generalized economic adversity. Upon inclusion of these two variables, I expect the effect of debt on political behavior to disappear. This would suggest that debt is highly collinear with these variables and that the impact of debt occurs indirectly through concerns toward economic adversity. Whether the effect of debt is direct or indirect, both would suggest that debt affects political behavior.

One other thing I should make clear before I begin is that I analyze solely private debt in this project. Private debt refers to allowances taken on by a specific individual that said person is responsible for paying alone. Such dues are taken on only to pay for services or goods that this individual wants, not anyone else. Lastly, when one fails to pay their debts, only they are penalized for it. Consumer debt is an individual affair. Public debt, by comparison, refers to debt that a government, national or local, has taken on. Though such debt requires taxpayer money to pay off, it is unlikely to have the same effects on political behavior. Public debt is much more remote and harder to quantify than is personal debt. Additionally, public debt does not include

dues that a person must pay directly, nor are individuals held directly accountable for their payment. Furthermore, the amount owed by public debts is beyond what any individuals could reasonably be expected to pay. As compared with private or consumer debt, public debt is a collective responsibility. It is more reasonable to view public debt as an issue of government excess rather than as a matter of individual economic adversity. For this project, I focus only on private debt.

Through this research, I hope to gain an understanding of several things. First, I seek to establish if consumer debt is a heretofore understudied dimension of economic adversity. In making this determination, we can learn if the growth of debt has exacerbated the effects of rising economic inequality and adversity. Second, I seek to understand if debt transcends the impact of income on political behavior. As prior research has established, socioeconomic status and income play a major role in how people behave in the political realm. As mentioned earlier, the effects of debt occur after income is taken into consideration. However, since this happens before political behavior occurs, might people of varying debt levels then behave differently once their income has been affected? Third, I seek to establish if debt affects political behavior more generally. Irrespective of whether or not debt has a direct or indirect effect on behavior, knowing its impact will contribute more generally to our understanding of its impact on social behavior.

The dissertation is organized as follows. I begin with a paper on consumer debt and political trust. Then I present a paper on the relationship between debt and political and civic participation. Finally, I present the paper on the relationship between debt and support for socioeconomic policies. Within each paper, I have a sub-introduction. After the introduction, I present the issue at hand within each article. In doing this, I inform the reader as to why the issue

is important. Afterward, I present a brief literature review that looks at how economic adversity influences political behavior toward the issue in question. Following the literature review, I present a brief introduction to the issue of consumer debt. In these sections, I discuss the background behind debt's origins, its social consequences, and its potential political effects. This is followed by the methodology section, which is almost identical for all three papers, apart from differences in the specific statistical approach. I then present the variables used, which are largely the same for all three articles. This section also provides the general model I use. I then delve into the analysis within each section and discuss the implications of debt on the given form of political behavior. This is followed by the conclusion, where I summarize the findings of the analysis. After I have discussed each of the three papers, I will then present an overall conclusion that summarizes my statistical and theoretical results for the project as a whole. In my appendix that follows afterward, I include information on the survey I used for this project, a set of the tables and figures I cite throughout this dissertation, and finally, a section on supplemental statistics.

CHAPTER I
TRUST AND DEBT

Abstract

Trust in government has been on the decline for the past several decades in the United States. This has important policy implications. First, it reduces the government's capacity to act on significant issues facing the country as it makes government actors more cautious in the face of policy change. Second, it inherently makes government policy more conservative. As government becomes more cautious about adopting new policy, existing policies become unable to handle a changing society's needs. Third, the policy that does come out tends to be biased against racial minorities and the poor. Fourth, both conservatives and liberals are hurt by declining government capacity to deal with issues. Issues related to foreign affairs and domestic policy are both affected by reduced capacity. The causes for the decline in trust in government are myriad. These include historical events, reduced interpersonal interaction, economic declines, and most importantly, rising economic adversity and inequality. As I argued in my introduction, I theorize that increasing debt is a dimension of economic adversity that may affect trust in the government. Borrowing from Hetherington's (1998) work, I look at five dimensions of political trust. First, I look at individual levels of trust, specifically in the government in Washington. Second, I look at perceptions of elite control or the extent to which people in government represent the well-off's interests. Third, I look at individual perceptions of government wastefulness. Fourth, I study perceptions of government crookedness or how corrupt officials are perceived. Lastly, I look at an index of political trust that looks at peoples' collective trust toward the government. Ultimately, I find little to no support that debt burden affects trust in government. However, contrary to prior research, I also find no support for the idea that economic adversity affects trust in government. I suggest that the lack of findings may be due to a lack of variation in trust among the respondents in my survey.

Introduction

Throughout the past several decades, several trends have been observed in American politics with profound implications for the status of its democracy. Among such trends are the rise of income inequality, the rise of political polarization, and the rise of economic adversity. One trend that has garnered a lot of attention, in particular, is the decline in political trust. People are consistently less trusting of the government today than at any point since the late 1950s when data on trust in government was first collected. This decline has important implications for politics in the U.S. From a normative standpoint, a low level of trust in the government indicates a disconnect between the citizenry and those in control. This disconnect hurts democracy, as it causes people to feel less attached to the system, weakens governmental accountability, and engenders a sense of animosity toward government. On a more practical note, lower trust leads to reduced capacity of government in tackling common issues (Hetherington 2005), increased tendency to vote for third parties (Hetherington 1999), and lower support for social welfare policies (Hetherington and Globetti 2002). In short, political trust is an important feature of politics with profound implications for the functioning of democracy.

Before proceeding, it is important to note two forms of trust of interest to social scientists—social trust and political trust. Here, I look solely at the latter. Newton (2001) provides a good definition of political trust:

It is not an expression of a basic feature of “trusting personalities,” but an evaluation of the political world. This makes trust scores a litmus test of how well the political system is performing in the eyes of its citizens. Low trust suggests that something in the political system—politicians or institutions, or both—is thought to be functioning poorly. It may

be that performance is poor, or that expectations are too high, but either way low trust tells us that something is wrong (pp. 205).

Thus, political trust is understood as a person's views toward the political world. In essence, it is one's feelings about how well politics and politicians function. When one's trust in politics is low, a person believes that the government is not working well. When one's trust is high, the individual believes that the government is doing its job well. However, defining political trust is subjective. Thus, I look to Hetherington's definition of political trust. He defines political trust as "the degree to which people perceive that government is producing outcomes consistent with their expectations (2005, pg. 9)." In essence, people have expectations that government should meet. If it fails to do so, faith in government falters.

Another trend that has received little attention from political scientists is the rise of consumer debt in the United States. The increase in consumer debt over the past seventy years is an important trend that political science has overlooked. Consumer debt, also referred to as personal or private debt, has exploded over the past several decades, growing from \$100 billion in 1943 to more than \$4 trillion today (both in 2019 dollars). This marks a more than fifteen-fold increase even when one accounts for inflation and population growth. That political scientists have ignored the growth in consumer debt is concerning. Fortunately, some political scientists have noted the explosive growth in consumer debt (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, pg. 223).

This paper looks at the relationship between political trust and consumer debt. As I will show, there are differences between those who have more debt and less. Similarly, economic adversity, of which I argue debt is a dimension, has strong effects on political behavior and attitudes, including trust.

Political Trust: Decline, Causes, and Consequences

One of the better-documented trends in American politics over the last fifty years is the decline in Americans' trust in government (Hetherington 1998; Hetherington 2005; Keele 2007; Wroe 2016). By the end of the 20th century, government, previously seen as the way through the U.S.'s tribulations during the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the Cold War, no longer appeared to have the support it enjoyed previously. Indeed, the decline of trust in the federal government in the past sixty years is nothing short of staggering.

According to the Pew Research Center, which has measured trust in the government since 1958, trust in government reached a high in October 1964 when 77% of Americans reported that the government could be trusted most of the time or almost always. Trust bottomed out at 17% in March of 2019. [Figure 1a](#) (Appendix C) highlights this trend over time:

As evidenced by this figure, there has been a clear downward trend in trust in government since the 1960s. Since the second half of the Johnson Administration, trust in government has fallen and never truly recovered. A few obvious events may explain the initial decline in trust. Before the 1960s, the federal government was the tool that provided Americans both economic and physical security. From 1945–1965, incomes steadily rose, and economic and wealth inequality reached their historical nadirs. More people than ever could benefit from the economic and income security programs spawned by the Great Depression. Furthermore, neither Republicans nor Democrats were willing to take apart the solid safety net that had allowed so many to prosper. This was not seen as politically viable. Most Republicans at this point, despite their inability to build a congressional majority, were willing to go along with the New Deal social safety net, as it was highly popular and allowed the party to remain competitive in presidential elections.

Government also served to provide physical security to its citizens during this period. Following the Second (and arguably the First) World War, the United States developed the most advanced military in the world. With the rise of global fascist and communist ideologies, only the American military was strong enough to handle them. During this period, American forces oversaw the reconstruction of Europe, provided resources to developing nations, and fought extremist ideologies. Domestically, too, the government sought to purge radical ideas by expanding agencies such as the CIA and FBI to preserve the concept of an American culture and democracy. Indeed, with so many external threats (whether actual or perceived), it was no surprise that Americans depended on their government for survival. It is for these reasons that Americans developed such a strong belief in their government.

However, conditions began to change in the 1960s. By 1960, the Civil Rights Movement was in full force. Strong majorities of both Democrats and Republicans helped usher in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 24th Amendment banning poll taxes. But the years that followed featured the urban riots of the late 1960s, declining faith in the war in Vietnam, the Watergate Scandal and Nixon's subsequent pardon, stagflation, and America's failed attempt at placating religious upstarts in the Middle East. These trends took a collective toll on peoples' confidence in the federal government.

Two brief spikes in government trust followed the early 1980s and 2001, presumably in response to the Reagan Revolution and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, neither of these peaks restored trust to its pre-1965 level. Also, events transpired to restore trust to its prior low levels (e.g., the Iran-Contra scandal, the Great Recession of 2008, and intractable Middle Eastern wars). Barring a strong change in governmental fortunes, these trends seem unlikely to reverse.

Political Sources of the Decline in Trust

As suggested by the preceding discussion, historical events have influenced the decline in trust. However, other factors have contributed to the decline in trust as well. For example, Putnam (1995; 2000) has noted a precipitous decline in traditional forms of social and civic engagement. By the end of the 20th century, people attended organizational meetings, joined clubs, hosted dinner parties, and participated in casual sporting leagues at much lower levels than they did at midcentury. Putnam attributes this to the rise of television, not a loss of free time. Thus, social “face time” was replaced with time on the couch. This alone may seem to drive declines in interpersonal trust more than political trust, and Newton (2001) cautions that scholars should not conflate the two. But despite their differences, Andriani and Christoforou (2016) note that both interpersonal and political trust trend together, and as one declines the other does as well. For example, as Brehm and Rahn (1997) show, civic engagement is crucial in developing both interpersonal trust and confidence in governmental institutions. In fact, it is the connection flowing from engagement to trust, they note, that is more important than the inverse. Keele (2007) agrees, noting that the decline in national social capital since the 1950s has led to reduced trust in government. Since social capital has not rebounded, any upticks in government trust since the 1950s were quickly followed by even worse declines. As such, it appears as though the decline in social capital has contributed in part to declining political trust.

Government competence is also seen as a major driver in the decline of political trust. As Mishler and Rose (2001) note, this is primarily driven by personal perceptions. Subjective experiences and views about government corruption play a much larger role in determining political trust than objective governmental performance. Similarly, Rahn and Rudolph (2005) note the importance of political perceptions. They show that when cities were seen as running

inefficiently, people were less trusting of the local government. Michener (2018) looks at competence through the lens of social welfare programs. She notes that those who received Medicaid benefits were thankful for the receipts they received but believed they were due more. Consistently, people on Medicaid viewed the government through an uncaring lens. They believed that though government could help them more, it showed little interest in doing so. Thus, many such individuals distrusted the government not in its goals but rather in its capacity. When people perceive the government to be inept or indifferent, trust necessarily declines.

Yet trust in government is not monolithic. Rahn and Rudolph (2005) show that trust in government is partly a function of who is in power. Anderson and LoTempio (2002) and Keele (2005) also make a note of this. In short, people trust the government more when their party runs it. This effect is strongest when a president of one's party is in power, though congressional control also plays a role. There also appear to be differences in partisan trust during all periods, irrespective of who is in control, whereby Democrats are less trusting overall than Republicans (Miller 1974). Additionally, the federal structure of the United States' political system may help to dilute perceptions of government competence (Miller and Listhaug 1990; Michener 2018).

Beyond competence and social capital, economics has also played a large part in deteriorating trust. Lockerbie (1993) notes that economic conditions have contributed to reduced trust and increased political alienation. As macroeconomic conditions decline, so does trust in the government. Chanley et al. (2000) also note that macroeconomic conditions from 1980 through 1997 played an important role in trust in the national government. More recently, DiPietro (2013) notes the importance of national economic growth and high living standards in promoting strong trust in government. In a more localized context, Owens and Cook (2013) note, county-level economic conditions also affected trust in the federal government. However, this

was mediated by how much government assistance these locales received during difficult times. Notably, the relationship between economics and political trust is quite lopsided. As Soroka (2006) notes, a poor economy and media attention to a poor economy had a much greater impact on people than a good economy. Indeed, the effects of the national economy on political trust have their limits. Hetherington and Rudolph (2008) show that even when the economy is strong, trust remains low. They attribute this to the fact that the national economy's salience declines when economic conditions are good. However, declining trust may also be partly due to rising globalization, which, as Hellwig and Samuels (2007) note, dilutes perceptions of the role that the government plays in the national economy.

But microlevel economic factors may play a role in political trust that the national economy does not. In particular, economic adversity appears to have helped bring political trust down to its current nadir. Rising inequality and economic insecurity, for example, seemed to play a major role in Uslander and Brown's (2005) study. Subsequently, lower trust fed into reduced political participation. Wroe (2014; 2016) also found strong evidence for the importance of economic adversity in affecting trust in government. Both in an American and European context, adversity, whether defined as job insecurity or changes in economic standing from year to year, influenced political trust. When adversity rose, trust in government fell.

Looking at a sample of European youth, Reeskens and Vandecasteele (2017) also find evidence that high levels of economic adversity led many individuals to be less trusting of government and less supportive of democratic ideals. Again, as with competence, these concerns were not driven by objective factors (unemployment) but rather by self-assessed economic well-being. Similarly, Schraff (2017) does not find evidence that unemployment and short-term employment affect political trust directly. However, he does find support for the idea that they do

so, again, through economic adversity. Arceneaux (2003) notes that the relationship between trust and adversity may be in part based on how salient the government's role is in easing economic concerns. When people were able to tie their economic situations to the government, adversity had a greater effect on trust in government than when they were not. Mettler (2018) notes this much later on in her study on support for government welfare policies. In cases in which the government played a clear role in reducing peoples' economic concerns, people became more trusting of the role that the government played in their lives. However, when no apparent link between government policy and economic adversity alleviation existed, people were less trusting of government capacity. Michener (2018) found similar evidence in the more specific case of Medicaid. Though perhaps context may influence the capacity of economic adversity to influence trust in government, it is apparent that there is a connection between the two.

Political Consequences of the Decline in Trust

I assume here that falling political trust is bad for society. It need not be. Indeed, Newton (2001) notes that a degree of distrust is necessary to prevent the ascension of autocrats. However, rising authoritarianism (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; 2018) alongside declining political trust may render this point moot. Furthermore, the literature has shown that falling political trust has far more adverse consequences for politics in the United States than benefits. Among the effects of declining trust are reduced confidence in the government's ability to handle common problems, increasingly conservative economic policy, and reduced support for mainstream parties. Indeed, the negative consequences of falling political trust are so numerous that they may help explain many of society's adverse trends overall.

On the first note, I return to Brehm and Rahn (1997). One of the points they reiterate is the importance of high trust in government in spurring peoples' confidence in the government. As trust declines, their confidence in institutions and their capacity fall. This was a point made earlier by Eismeier (1982), who noted the importance of trust in influencing support for government programs. Indeed, this relationship was so pronounced that he found trust's effects on support to be even greater than partisanship or socioeconomic status. Later, Chanley et al. (2000) reiterated this point. They note the unidirectional nature of the relationship between trust and government support. While trust had a significant impact on how people evaluated Congress and the President, the reverse was not true. This hearkens to an earlier point from Hetherington (1998), who also noted that political trust affected government support more than the reverse. Indeed, trust in government has fallen so low that many Americans have turned to political alienation and radical views (Citrin et al. 1975; Cramer 2016).

Rather than serving as a vehicle to improve their lives, Cramer notes that people view the government as a tool for the "other side." In this case, the two sides of which she speaks are urban areas and rural areas. Rural residents perceive the cities as undeserving of the government benefits they receive while rural citizens believe that they have not received their fair share. The same view, in reverse, is held by those who lived in cities. To an extent, as Hacker and Pierson (2010) show, these views toward the government benefitting only a few at the expense of the many are not unfounded. However, such perceptions also bring up an interesting point. Often, it is held in the literature (see Gelman 2008; Hetherington and Weiler 2018) that urbanites and urban states tend to lean liberal (Democratic) while rural areas lean conservative (Republican), and as a result, we should expect the effects of trust to affect one side more than the other (depending on who is in power). However, the reality is that falling trust and belief in

government competence hurts both political sides. As stated by Hetherington and Husser (2012, pg. 323), “Trust is not only a resource for domestic policy liberals. It can provide a reservoir of public support for foreign policy conservatives as well.” Thus, both the left and right are hurt politically when trust in government fades.

On a similar note, falling trust has also led to increasingly conservative, and relatedly, racially-biased policy outcomes. Hetherington (2005) notes the importance of political trust in providing government the capacity to initiate policy change. However, as trust in government has fallen, so has its ability to deal with problems of policy drift and decay. For example, many social welfare policies, having aged past their peak effectiveness, are no longer regularly updated to include and help those who are otherwise struggling. The result is unintentionally more conservative government policy as the capacity of the American welfare state continues to shrink. More directly, Hetherington and Globetti (2002) noted that as trust in the government has fallen, so has support for social welfare policy. This is largely due to a common misperception that such programs disproportionately benefit minorities. Though perhaps true in part, Cramer (2016) notes that many white Americans also benefit from such programs. Nor need such policy be only social welfare. As trust has fallen, so has the government’s capacity to deal with foreign threats. As Hetherington and Husser (2012) note, media can play a role in spurring government activity on this and the social welfare front. In periods where media diverts a lot of attention to a specific issue, trust and support for policy related to the matter were correlated. The media can thus play a role in spurring policy support. However, with falling trust, this link is both tenuous and asymmetric. On foreign policy, media attention boosts support for government spending on defense. However, as Hetherington and Rudolph (2008) show, this is not borne out in social welfare support. Thus, welfare support and spending appear to be intimately linked to macro-

level political trust trends. As Rudolph and Evans (2005) note, these links between policy support and trust are especially pronounced among conservatives.

Lastly, declining trust has generated feelings of alienation and support for nontraditional parties and candidates. For example, Miller (1974) found that voters most distrustful of politics were self-identified political independents. He and Listhaug (1990) attributed much of the decline in trust to the structure of the political system, which strongly disfavors third parties. Many people whose views were not represented by the two major parties increasingly feel politically ostracized (Also see Keele 2005). On a similar note, Citrin et al. (1975) found that those who were most distrustful of politics were also the most alienated by the political system.

One area where people increasingly feel alienated by the national government is on the issue of taxes. As Ladd et al. (1978) noted, though Americans have never been fond of taxes, they once valued their importance and understood the need to pay them to better society. Since the 1970s, however, there has been a decline in support for taxes. This happened among both liberals and conservatives, despite taxes' importance in paying for basic services. Conversely, distrust also appears to hurt support for mainstream parties. As Hetherington (1998) notes, those who were less trusting of politics were less trustful of incumbent parties and democratic ideals. Hetherington later (1999) indicated that while trust decreased support for mainstream parties, it increased support for third-party presidential candidates. And feelings of alienation are not restricted to politics. Reduced political trust also decreases interpersonal trust (Putnam 1995; 2000; Brehm and Rahn 1997). Despite their substantive differences, the two appear so intimately connected that the same factors that influence one also generally affect the other (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Owens and Cook 2013). As these are but a few of the adverse effects falling political

trust has on society, this discussion highlights the importance of political trust in determining the effective operation of a democratic society.

The Simultaneous Rise of Consumer Debt

As trust has declined, so has civic engagement (Putnam 1995; 2000). Meanwhile, income inequality (Kelly 2009; 2019), political polarization (Fiorina 2006; Hetherington and Weiler 2009), and economic adversity (Rehm et al. 2012; Hacker et al. 2013) have all risen. One other thing has also increased substantially since World War II: consumer debt. As I noted in the introduction, the rise in consumer debt has received very little research attention. [Figure 2a](#) highlights this growth.

As this figure shows, consumer debt has exploded in the last seventy years, most notably in the previous thirty. In January of 1943, the Federal Reserve estimated that Americans held about \$100 billion (in 2019 dollars) in outstanding balances once one accounts for inflation. In January 2019, by comparison, Americans had more than \$4 trillion in debt also after accounting for inflation. This indicates a more than fifteenfold increase in consumer debt once one controls for population growth as well.² This growth has held steady even when one accounts for decline in debt accumulation caused by recessions (Garriga et al., 2017). As such, Americans are far more indebted today than their parents and grandparents ever were.

Yet, why has consumer debt grown as much as it has? A simple answer involves the role of the government. As Hyman (2011; 2012) has noted, government, jointly with the discretion of private business, has attempted to increase Americans' access to credit for roughly the past 100 years. Furthermore, the federal government has, in many instances, taken the initiative in encouraging Americans to take on more debt. There are, at least, it seems, many benefits in

encouraging such behavior. Debt, as Hyman notes, has allowed many Americans to live a better lifestyle than they may have otherwise been able to afford. By dividing payments for goods over a longer period, people no longer need to save large amounts of money to pay for commodities. As a result, products such as houses, cars, appliances, and the like were no longer restricted to the upper and middle classes (also see Frank 2007). This provided private business and the economy access to a market it did not previously have. At the same time, the national and lower-level governments could profit from the added taxes that the sale of such goods provided. The growth of debt is not restricted to the United States. As Patel et al. (2012) and Rona-Tas et al. (2018) have shown, consumer debt has grown significantly in both developed and developing nations in recent decades. While Garriga et al. (2017) show that the Great Recession (and recessions more generally) slow down the growth of consumer debt briefly, debt has seen a resurgence in the years since 2011, especially college loan debt. In short, government has played a significant role in ensuring the growth of consumer debt.

This growth has managed to permeate all sectors of the economy. The ability to pay for college, access to mortgages, medical bill payment, legal assistance, and the capacity to buy appliances are all things that debt has granted many poorer Americans (see Whalen 2010). Nowhere is the growth of debt more salient than in the rise of college loan debt. As Mettler (2014) has shown, government has encouraged people to incur more debt to afford a university education. Historically, this has provided many poorer Americans with the ability to afford higher education to improve their long-term economic standing. Similarly, as Oliver and Shapiro (2006) have noted, one of the ways black Americans have been able to move forward is through borrowing money. Through the accumulation of debt, many such individuals have managed to build and accumulate wealth, an essential development in the face of persistent wealth inequality

between white and black Americans. In many ways, the accumulation of debt has been a means by which many less-well-off individuals have succeeded economically.

As Frank (2007) notes, one problem that has occurred is that with rising income inequality, people are no longer able to afford the same goods that they might have a few decades earlier. Indeed, as Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, pg. 223) state, it is in the societies which happen to be the most unequal that debt has risen the most. With debt rising as fast as it has over the past seventy, and especially last forty years, concerns about unsustainable debt have risen. Indeed, as Athreya (2004) shows, following the growth of debt and its spread to riskier populations has resulted in skyrocketing bankruptcy rates. Debt, especially college loan debt, has grown so large that it has spawned protest movements across the U.S. and even the world (see Graeber 2012; Caffentzis 2013; Vidal 2018), most notably the *We Are the 99 Percent* movement. Furthermore, debt, and especially unsustainable debt, may not be evenly distributed. Results from the Pew Charitable Trusts (2015) found that education-related debts were much more common among Gen-Xers and Millennials than among Baby Boomers or members of the Silent Generation. These debts were highest among Hispanic and Black Americans. Conversely, debt seen as helpful in building wealth, such as mortgage debt, was less common among nonwhite and younger Americans than others. Similar trends can also be observed in the distribution of medical bill debt (Wiltshire et al., 2016). Simultaneously, while debt has reached potentially unsustainable levels, laws regarding bankruptcy have become stricter. This potentially creates a trap in which younger and nonwhite Americans may be disproportionately burdened by such outstanding balanced (Himmelstein et al. 2007). This is exacerbated by the fact that those debts which have risen the most are non-collateralized ones (Dunn and Mirzaie 2015).

As debt has risen, social science research has shown that rising consumer debt has many, largely adverse, effects on human behavior. For example, Gathergood (2012), Hojman et al. (2016), and Sweet (2018) note that debt has a consistent and negative impact on peoples' mental health and increases their likelihood of becoming depressed. These patterns held in both American and foreign contexts. The effects of credit card debt and college loan debt on health were greater than other forms of debt, especially among those with less than a college degree (Zhang and Kim 2019). Crime (McIntyre 2017) and other social and familial problems (Patel et al. 2012) also appear to be strongly influenced by consumer debt. Higher debt also seems to impact life and workplace satisfaction (Kim and Garman 2004). Beyond direct effects, knowledge of proper debt management is also unequally distributed. As Lusardi (2012) notes, the elderly are more likely to have incomplete or incorrect information about the management and use of debt than are the young. Additionally, women and nonwhites are also the most likely to be impacted by the stress of heavy debt than other groups were (Dunn and Mirzaie 2015).

Debt and Politics

Despite our knowledge of the impact of rising debt on social behavior, its effects on political behavior remain largely unknown. This, along with the fact that debt and trust have moved together (in opposite directions) for decades, are the primary motivators for this work. We already know that government policy has played a role in spurring debt growth (Hyman 2011; 2012). We also know that consumer debt has spawned social movements inherently political in nature (Graeber 2012; Caffentzis 2013; Vidal 2018). High levels of debt can cause people to take action on the issue (Deville 2016). It thus seems reasonable to expect that debt might affect political behavior.

I thus theorize that consumer debt may be a form of economic adversity that drives political behavior and attitudes. Furthermore, as with other forms of economic adversity, I hypothesize that debt acts as a stressor in that it reduces one's maximum net income periodically. It is unique in that, unlike other forms of economic adversity (job loss, change in income, or loss of work hours), it does not directly affect one's gross income. Instead, its effects are *ex post facto*. It is after we control for income that we should see the impact of debt. To provide an example, take two individuals, both of whom make \$50,000 a year. The first individual managed to graduate from college with only \$10,000 in student loan debt, while the second graduated with over \$100,000 in debt. The economic realities faced by an individual only paying off \$10,000 in college loans are likely much different than those faced by a person whose debt is much more than that. As such, we should expect it to affect one's behavior even after income has been controlled for.

To build on the theory that debt acts as a stressor, it is important to first define what we mean by stress. Here, I borrow from Seaton (2003), who defines stress as follows:

... [It is] a situation in which a person perceives that his or her resources are exceeded resulting in psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. Anger, anxiety, and frustration can result when an individual perceives that he or she is unable to cope with the situation or unable to modify his or her response to the situation (pp. 292 – 293).

Thus, we can understand stress as a state of being. It is unnatural and likely to elicit strong emotion and likely to have a physical impact on the body. From this definition, we can also see that factors beyond one's control elicit it. Stress detracts from one's resources, both

material and mental, and forces one into an uncomfortable situation. It likewise has the potential to overwhelm a person and force them to take potentially extreme actions to ease its effects.

Thus, as debt decreases one's gross income, it may put a person in a potentially stressful situation. I thus hypothesize that debt will work to influence a person's political trust indirectly. Specifically, debt acts as a stressor that will color an individual's life experiences and then affect their confidence in government. Additionally, debt, as a potentially chronic (or long-term) source of stress, is likely to have more of an effect on peoples' behavior than is an acute (or short-term) stressor such as being furloughed (Avison and Turner 1988).

Extant work shows that economic adversity is a form of stress that can influence political behavior. One work worthy of mention here is Levine (2015). In building an index of economic insecurity based on four factors (involuntary job loss, health care costs, retirement, and higher education costs), Levine finds two things. First, people suffering from high levels of economic adversity are acutely concerned about meeting their own needs. This leads to less donating to political causes. However, this added stress causes them to express more interest in and give more time to causes they believed might alleviate their situation. Second, stress is not evenly distributed among groups of people. As Ojeda (2016) shows, the poorer tend to face more economic stress than the rich do, though when the rich experience economic stress, it impacts their behavior more than it does the poor. Miller and Krosnick (2004) note that stress need not come from economic threats. For example, political stress in the form of claims to reduced access to abortions spurred people to act on the issue. Peterson and Gabbidon (2007) also found evidence among black Americans that stress spurred higher levels of political activity.

There is some evidence that stress can affect trust. Lindström and Mohseni (2009) find strong evidence that stress, particularly stress from economic duress, leads to reduced trust in the

national legislature. Though the authors look only at Sweden, there is little reason to believe that their results are restricted to that country. Lindström and Rosvall (2016) also find evidence that early-life economic stress is a predictor of trust in adulthood. Specifically, those who experienced more stress in childhood maintained high distrust irrespective of their adult economic situation. Finally, Mattila and Rapeli (2018) argue that poor individual health and high stress are important factors in determining trust in institutions. This is the case because these individuals tend to be most reliant on social services and see firsthand partisan conflict related to such programs. When this occurs, they become less trusting of a government that may choose to take such benefits away. Thus, it appears as though stress may have a direct impact on political trust. And stress likewise can be conditioned by one's levels of consumer debt.

A few things are worth noting about the potential impact of debt-based stress on political trust. We know that high indebtedness affects peoples' levels of stress, motivates anger in people, and may lead them to political action (see Graeber [2012] and Caffentzis [2013]). However, it appears that at some levels, debt does not influence peoples' behavior (see Hojman 2016). When one reaches very high levels of debt (which Hojman et al. measure using type of debt and the amount spent to repay it monthly relative to income), we should expect it to have effects on political behavior. Before this, however, we should expect little to no effect. Additionally, not all forms of debt have an equal impact on debt. As Oliver and Shapiro (2006) and Frank (2007) note, mortgage debt is crucial in allowing people to build wealth through the acquisition of equity. But some forms of debt, such as college loans and credit card debt (Zhang and Kim 2019), are often unsecured, do not help in the accumulation of wealth, and thus are often viewed negatively (also see Prasad et al. 2016). These appear to especially contribute to

peoples' stress (also see Dunn and Mirzaie 2015; Wiltshire et al. 2016). Thus, stress may impact political trust as caused by debt, but these effects may be partly conditional.

Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

Based on the preceding discussion, I have developed the following hypotheses:

H1: Personal debt is negatively associated with level of political trust. In other words, as debt rises, political trust drops.

H2: However, the relationship between consumer debt and political trust is strongest when it is mediated by one's health. In essence, the indirect effect of debt through stress on political trust is stronger than the direct relationship between debt and trust.

H3: Various types of debts will have differential effects on political trust.

H3a: Mortgage debt will have a positive effect on political trust.

H3b: All other forms of debt will have negative effects on political trust.

Data

No good data exist on debt and political behavior, which led me to generate my own. I began by creating my own novel survey on consumer debt and political behavior. The survey queried respondents about their levels of debt, personal characteristics, and three dimensions of political behavior. These dimensions are (1) policy support; (2) political and civic participation; and (3) political trust. Many of my survey questions came from existing reliable surveys that are tried and tested, among them the General Social Survey (GSS), the American National Elections

Survey (ANES), the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health) of 1994 – 2008, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) conducted by the University of Michigan. The ANES is an especially important source of questions given its emphasis on electoral trends in the U.S from 1948 to 2018. The GSS has also proven important for political scientists due to its questions on social tolerance and civil liberties. Though used infrequently in political science, ADD Health is still crucial in understanding longitudinal social and health changes in the same set of individuals across a 15-year timespan. Lastly, the PSID is a panel dataset that queries households about various economic and social behaviors that has been in circulation since 1968. Questions borrowed from all four surveys played a crucial role in mine.

From the ANES, I pulled questions on ideology, political interest, general financial insecurity, and presidential approval. From the GSS, I primarily pulled questions on demographic control variables (religiosity, marital status, employment status, hours worked, and health). From ADD Health, I pulled a few more demographic questions (education, household income, and personal income). I got my debt questions exclusively from the PSID, though some have been slightly altered to look solely at an individual's debt instead of household debt. Additionally, using the general structure of the PSID questions, I also created my own debt questions on student loan and medical bill debt. The complete list of survey questions (which also includes questions on political/civic participation and public policy support) is included in the appendix. In all, I have amassed a total of forty-four questions. For this paper, I have borrowed Hetherington's (1998) questions on political trust, which I shall discuss in further detail momentarily.

One issue that may arise when asking people about their debt is that people may not precisely know their debt level. Unfortunately, there is no objective available source for data on

levels of debt among ordinary Americans. This is a problem, of course, because if people overestimate the amount of debt they have, my models' estimates are overinflated (thus running the risk of committing Type I errors of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is, in fact, true). The reverse is also possible, as people may underreport how much debt they owe (thus running the risk of Type II errors where I fail to reject the null when it is, in fact, false). However, Keese (2012) notes that both objective and subjective reports on debt influence peoples' behavior. More importantly, he notes that subjective reports of debt are generally even more useful than objective ones. Only when a researcher fails to account for typical demographic factors (uncommon in microlevel studies) are objective measures of debt amounts superior. Thus, I do not believe that any biased self-reports of debt will be problematic, especially when such errors should cancel each other out among hundreds of respondents.

In total, 800 respondents were contacted through the survey hosting service, Survey Monkey, in May 2020. I chose this platform due to its ease of use and ability to contact hundreds of individuals in a short period. Beyond these benefits, Survey Monkey also provides its users with maximum digital protection, ensuring that data are not compromised and are destroyed once the analysis period has ended. This added security ensures that only the person conducting the investigation has access to the data. Upon releasing the survey, Survey Monkey randomly sampled the respondents over the age of eighteen and living in the United States. No determination for selection was made based on gender, race, age, income, or any other potential demographic identifiers. Out of the 800 individuals contacted, 720 individuals consented to take the survey. Another seventy-nine individuals engaged in attrition, and nine more refused to provide responses for either the dependent or some important independent variables. In total, 634

respondents completed the survey in its entirety, providing a sufficiently large sample with which to conduct statistical analysis.

Key Independent Variables

I measure debt directly through self-reporting. Data on five different types of debt are measured using dummy variables called *Mortgage*, *Credcard*, *Studloan*, *Hospbill*, and *Otherbill*. These take on values of 1 or 0, where 1 indicates that a given individual has that type of debt. From here, I build several additional variables on debt. The first, *Totdebt*, is the numerical amount of debt one owes on all types of debts. The next variable is *Debtmort*, which measures total amount of mortgage debt. Third, I create *Colldebt*, which measures total amount of college loan debt. Fourth, I create the variable *Debtcred* looking at how much credit card debt one has. Fifth, I have *Hospdebt* which measures total amount of medical bill debt. Sixth, I have *Otherdebt* which looks at how much miscellaneous debt one owes. The last debt variable, *Nomodebt*, measures the total debt one owes minus any debt owed on a mortgage. In addition to these variables, I make ratios of peoples' debts and their household incomes, one for each measure of debt, for a total of seven separate ratios of debt-to-household-income. These variables are named *Totdebtr*, *Nomodebtr*, *Debtmortr*, *Debtcredr*, *Colldebtr*, *Hospdebtr*, and *Otherdebtr*. The choice to use debt-to-income ratios is prompted by Hojman (2016), who used a similar approach to analyze the impact of debt on mental health.

I measure each respondent's stress level using a measure based on one variable based on two sub-variables. The first is *Health*, which takes on values of 0 – 3, with 0 equaling poor health, 1 equaling fair, 2 equaling good, and 3 equaling excellent health. The second is *Finworry*, which measures the amount of financial stress one currently faces. It takes on values from 0 – 4,

with 0 meaning a respondent is “not at all worried,” 1 meaning a “little worried,” 2 meaning “moderately worried,” 3 meaning “very worried,” and 4 meaning “extremely worried.” From here, I build a measure of takes the sum of both variables together, ranging between 0 – 7. This variable is called *Finhealth* and looks at the additive effect of health and financial worry.

Other Independent Variables

As for control variables, I employ *Gender* (1 = female), *Age* (continuous), *Hispanic* (yes = 1),² *Nonwhite* (yes = 1), *Religio* (1 – 4, with 4 being most religious), *Educ* (1 = no high school, 5 = completed graduate education), *Educ2* (1 = college degree), *Married* (yes = 1), *Workft* (1 = working fulltime), *Houseinc* (household income with integer values), *Persinc*³ (personal income with integer values), and *Polinter* (how much someone pays attention to politics scaled from 0 - 3, where 0 = Hardly at all and 3 = Most of the time). Additionally, I use several variables to gauge political views. These include *Ideology* (Likert scale, with 1 = very liberal, and 7 = very conservative), *Pid* (party identification, Likert scale, with 1 = strong Democrat and 7 = strong Republican), *Piddem* (= 1 if someone leaned Democratic or identified as Democratic) *Pidrep* (= 1 if someone leaned Republican or identified as Republican), *Trumpapp* (Likert scale, with 1 = disapprove strongly and 7 = approve strongly), and *Trumpappd* (= 1 if someone approved slightly of the president or greater).

Dependent Variables

Because I borrow from Hetherington’s (2005) definition of trust, I use his survey questions (1998) to measure political trust (with his permission). The questions are as follows:

1. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right-just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?
2. Do you think that people in government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?
3. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
4. Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?

Using his same schemata, the responses for each, respectively are: (1) “Just about always” [1], “Most of the time” [0], and “some of the time” [-1]; (2) “Not very much” [1], “Some” [0], and “A lot” [-1]; (3) “For the benefit of all” [1] and “Few big interests” [-1]; (4) “Hardly any” [1], “Not many” [0], and “Quite a few” [-1].

Again, following Hetherington, I combine the responses to these four questions to create trust index. The index is called *Trustind* and has a range of -4 to +4, with lower values indicating less trust and higher values indicating more trust. *Trustind* is the primary dependent variable in this chapter. The variable names for each trust index component are, respectively, *Trustwash*, *Govwaste*, *Govrun*, and *Crooked*. I use these as dependent variables in analyses following the models of the trust index. However, due to an issue with the Brant test,⁵ I create five additional variables based on the five trust variables named *Trustindb*, *Trustwashb*, *Govwasteb*, *Govrunb*, and *Crookedb*, all of which are binary equivalents of these variables. In this case, a value of 1 indicates a less trusting value, while 0 refers to neutral or positive feelings toward government.

Modeling

I will start with *Trustindb*. Since *Trustindb* is a non-continuous binary variable for the models in which it is the dependent variable, I utilize a logit regression approach. I will also perform follow-up analyses using the individual debt dependent variables designed to determine the relationship between the individual components of trust and consumer debt, all of which are also estimated via logit regression. In total, there are twenty models ($5 * 2 * 2 = 20$), each covering the five measures of trust, two models with mortgage debt (one of which has the health/financial worry variable), and two models with the nonmortgage debts (one of which has the health/financial worry variable).

There is thus the trust index as well as the four separate components which are analyzed. Within the index and each of the components, there are five different debt measures (mortgage debt alone, and college debt, credit card debt, medical bill debt, and other debts together). Additionally, only the variable measuring identification with the Republican Party is kept as a measure of political ideology due to heavy multicollinearity between party ID, approval for Trump, and self-reported ideology.⁵ Thus, they are also dropped from the final model. The variables for debt, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, age, religiosity, marital status, college degree, if employed full time, health, identification with the Republican Party, household income, personal income, political interest, and debt remain in the final estimated models. Thus, for the trust index, the general model takes the form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Trust in government} = & \beta_1(\text{Gender}) + \beta_2(\text{Age}) + \beta_3(\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_4(\text{Nonwhite}) + \beta_5(\text{religio}) \\ & + \beta_6(\text{Educ2}) + \beta_7(\text{Married}) + \beta_8(\text{Workft}) + \beta_9(\text{Finhealth}) + \beta_{10}(\text{Pidrep}) + \beta_{11}(\text{Houseinc}) + \\ & \beta_{12}(\text{Persinc}) + \beta_{13}(\text{Polinter}) + \beta_{14}(\text{Debt}) \end{aligned}$$

As I will show shortly, there is little change in the models across the analyses. The only notable change beyond varying the dimension of trust analyzed and the type of debt studied is *Finhealth*'s inclusion in some models. To analyze the impact of health and financial stress on debt, I estimate two kinds of models: one with and one without the direct impact of health. The other change of interest is varying the level of debt respondents have in a given regression. For some models, I estimate the model with mortgage debt alone, while for the other models, I look at the other forms of debt. Since the nonmortgage debt variables have little multicollinearity⁷, I include all forms of debt (besides mortgage debt) into a pair of models when estimating their trust effects. Given this low multicollinearity, I do not expect the effects of one form of debt to confound with other types.

Analysis

Before I conduct my analyses, I will provide detailed basic statistics on the debt variables. The number of and percentage of people who owe debt, the forms of debt they owe, and the median amount owed in each category are summarized in [Table 1a](#) (Appendix B):

In total, across the 654 total respondents, a strong majority (74.76%) reported having some form of debt. Of those, 378 (61.04% of the total) reported having non-mortgage debt. Some attrition occurred in responses among the individual categories of debt, but overall we can see that more than two-fifths (42.09% of 627) of respondents owed money on a mortgage, roughly a fifth (22.03% out of 631) reported having college debt, nearly half (44.59% of 628) reported having credit card debt, about one-sixth (17.77% of 619) claimed to owe on medical bills, and about one-eighth (12.14% of 626) owed miscellaneous debts. In sum, most respondents

owed money, with credit card and mortgage debts being the most common. These descriptive statistics are hardly surprising.

Additional descriptive statistics will be provided on the index of government trust and its components. I have listed these in [Table 2a](#).

There is a constant pattern among all four measures of trust and the index: People do not trust the government. On the index of trust, only fifty-eight respondents (9.15%) did not express negative feelings toward the government. An even smaller proportion of respondents (34, or 5.36%) expressed positive feelings. Similar numbers appear across the board. The one area where people were slightly more agnostic was in their perceptions of government wastefulness. Here, almost a third of respondents (207, or 32.7%) had a neutral opinion toward how wasteful the government is, though a similar percentage of respondents (27, or 4.27%) as compared with the other categories expressed positive feelings toward wastefulness. In all, none of this should come as a surprise since the Pew data showed that only about 20% of all respondents were trusting of the government. Compared with the population, however, my sample is even less trusting.

Now, I will provide a general overview of the relationship between debt and the five dimensions of political trust analyzed here. To do this, I run basic bivariate correlations between each measure of debt and each measure of trust. This is to analyze the basic relationship between debt and trust prior to the inclusion of any control variables. Utilizing the *pwcorr* command in STATA, I look at the Pearson's correlation coefficient values between trust and debt. Though not ideal as one variable is binary, this may be preferable to Spearman's correlation coefficient, as the latter assumes that at least one variable is ordinal. For my analysis, however, no dependent variables are ordinal. I post the results of these bivariate analyses in [Table 3a](#).

Based on this table, only one correlation (between trust in Washington and mortgage debt) has a value over 0.1000. This value is -0.1059, suggesting that as one mortgage-to-income ratio increases, their trust in Washington decreases. How statistically significant will this relationship be when other variables are included, however? Will other variables retain their relative unimportance in determining the effect of debt on trust? I will delve into further detail in the next five sections as I individually analyze the effect of debt on each dimension of trust.

Overall Trust in Government

This section will look at the relationship between the various dimensions of debt and the trust index. In total, I will analyze four separate models of trust using the trust index (*Trustindb*). The first model examines the mortgage-debt-to-income ratio and its impact on trust along with the aforementioned control variables. The second is the same as the first minus the combined effects of health and financial worries. The third model is identical to the first but looks at the debt-to-income ratios for college, credit card, medical, and miscellaneous debts combined into a single regression equation. The fourth model is the same as the third but again excludes the effects of health and financial worry on trust.

I excluded three cases from the final regression analyses due to their tendency to bias the results in favor of debt affecting trust. I say about the reasons for this a little more in the footnotes.⁸ The omission of these observations leads me to be more confident in my final results than I would have been otherwise. Additionally, I continue to omit these cases in the later chapters, so I will not mention them again. Since I am only excluding three cases, I do not expect

this to substantially impact my ability to use a regression model on the results, as my N is greater than 500 in all cases. The results of the trust index models are presented in [Table 4a](#).

In general, I do not find much evidence that the amount of debt one owes relative to their income affects trust in government. There is some weak evidence that more credit card debt affects trust, but the effect is the opposite of what one might expect. The negative coefficient on *Debtcredr* suggests that a higher debt-to-income ratio makes one *more* likely to trust government. This is contrary to expectations. However, the coefficients for all the other debt ratio variables are positive, indicating that their impact makes one less likely to trust the government. However, none of these relationships are statistically significant. Thus, I do not find support for either H1 or H3b.

I do not find any support for the hypotheses that the combined effects of health and financial stress (see the coefficients on *Finhealth*) have a negative impact on trust. If anything, the negative coefficients for health suggest that more stress yields higher trust, and this relationship barely fails to attain significance at the .10 level in Models 1 and 3. Additionally, there appears to be no evidence that adding or removing the health/stress variable affects the significance of debt, except potentially in the case of credit card debt (although this variable still approached significance at 10% even with the inclusion of the health/stress variable). Thus, I can conclude that there appears to be no relationship between stress and trust and debt on trust indirectly through stress, thus providing no support for H2. However, in the cases of debt and stress, breaking the index into its components may reveal different results. I will talk more about this shortly.

Beyond this, few factors appear to have much of an impact on trust. In general, Republican (see the coefficients on *Pidrep*) respondents were more trusting of the government

than non-Republicans were. This relationship is somewhat weaker in models excluding the health/stress variable. This finding may be partly because the survey was conducted at the time the survey was conducted, a Republican (Donald Trump) was the sitting president. Also, age seems to influence trust. Older voters are less trusting than are younger voters. This relationship becomes more significant when the variable for health/stress is removed, suggesting that the latter captures some of the effects of age. This is unsurprising since older individuals generally report being in poorer health.

In all, the variables do little to explain levels of overall trust. The highest pseudo R^2 value for any of the regressions is 0.1023. This may be due in part to a lack of variation on the dependent variable (only 58 out of 576 respondents reported neutral or positive feelings toward government). Since some people may indicate trusting responses on some individual measures of trust, but not others, however, this index may be hiding some nuance in levels of trust in government. Some (notably, Republicans) may trust the government in Washington, for example, but may perceive the government, in general, to be wasteful. The reverse may be true in that people may believe that the government may not be wasteful but may not trust the current officeholders. As such, I will now move onto a discussion of the individual components of the trust index.

Trust in Washington

This next section looks at the relationship between debt and trust in the government in Washington (dependent variable = *Trustwashb*). This is different from overall trust, as it encompasses a level of trust in those currently in office, as opposed to trust in the government in general or trust in what the government does. As I hinted previously, one may trust current

leadership without necessarily believing the government to be trustworthy. In this section, I utilize the basic models as in the previous section, varying only the measure of trust being studied. The results for all four models are presented in [Table 5a](#).

From these results, the general findings are not much different. However, contrary to our expectations for mortgage debt (see the coefficients on *Debtmortr*), a higher mortgage-to-income ratio results in people becoming more likely to express neutral or positive feelings toward the government in Washington (negative sign). Compared with the rest of the population, those whose mortgage debt-to-income ratio took on the mean value had between a 0.816 (Model 2) and a 0.818 (Model 1) probability of expressing an untrusting view toward the government versus a 0.883 [both models] probability for those with no debt, when all other values were held at their means. This effect has a p-value of 0.041 in Model 1 and a p-value of 0.035 in Model 2, both of which are significant at the 95% confidence level. There is some weak evidence that other debts affect trust (see the coefficients on *Otherdebt*), leading people to be more likely to express an untrusting opinion of Washington (positive sign). Compared with the rest of the sample, those whose miscellaneous debt-to-income ratio took on the mean value had a between 0.881 (Model 3) and 0.888 (Model 4) probability of expressing an untrusting view toward the government, when all other values were held at their means. This compares to a probability of 0.858 (both models) of expressing such views among those with no debt. These effects have p-values of 0.100 (Model 3) and 0.092 (Model 4), which are significant at the 90% confidence level. The other forms of debt are all negatively signed, indicating respondents are more likely to report neutral or positive feelings toward the government. However, these results are not significant at the 90% confidence level or greater. Thus, we cannot be certain if these forms of

debt have an effect on peoples' trust in the government in Washington. I find contrary support for H1 and no support for H3 (and the latter's sub-hypotheses).

Again, however, I find no evidence that stress and health impact trust (*Finhealth*). In this case, it does not even approach significance at 90% confidence. The coefficient is again signed negative, but this means little as it fails to reach significance at any commonly-used level of confidence. In addition, its inclusion or exclusion from the model does not affect the significance of the debt variables. As with the prior model, I can conclude that stress and health do not affect trust directly. In any event, I do not find any evidence H2.

Additionally, I find that *Hispanic* respondents were less likely to report an untrusting response than other individuals. Thus, they were more likely to have either neutral or positive feelings toward the government in Washington. The same is true (albeit only at 90% confidence in three cases) for Republicans (*Pidrep*). They were more likely to express neutral or positive feelings toward government than non-Republicans were, again likely because, at the time of the survey, a Republican held the White House. Other than that, educated (*Educ2*) individuals were more likely to express untrusting views toward Washington. This was significant at the 95% confidence level, but only in Models 3 and 4. However, none of the other variables are significant at the 90% confidence level or greater for any models. Again, this may be in part because a vast majority of the sample (85%) expressed untrusting views toward the government in Washington. As such, I am attempting to explain differences in a variable that has little variation.

Perceptions of Elite Control of Government

This next section looks at the relationship between debt and perceptions of government being run by elites (*Govrunb*). In particular, this question asks if government is run for a few special or elite interests, or for the well-being of all Americans. Again, I utilize the same models looking at the impact of stress/health and debt on perceptions of government control. The results for Models 1 – 4 are presented in [Table 6a](#).

Unlike with trust in Washington, I do not find evidence that debt affects (positive or negative) the belief that elites run the government. The result for the miscellaneous debts (*Otherdebtr*) variable in Model 4 approaches significance at the .10 level but just fails to attain it. Both of this variable's coefficients are positively signed, though a lack of significant results here leads me to wonder if said debt does make one more likely to report an untrusting response. In addition, there is weak evidence that health and stress (*Finhealth*) are important in determining beliefs in perceptions of elite control. In both models where it is used, the variable reaches significance at the .10 level and barely fails to attain 95% confidence in these models, achieving a p-value of 0.051. However, the sign is negative (contrary to expectations), indicating that worse health led people to be less likely to believe that the control was governed by elites. At the worst level of joint health/stress (*Finhealth* = 7), people had between a .797 (Model 3) and a 0.804 (Model 1) probability of holding a belief that government was run by elites, versus between a 0.956 (Model 1) and a .959 (Model 3) probability among those in the best state of health (*Finhealth* = 0), when all other variables were held at their means. Thus, I find no evidence for H1, H2, and H3 (and its sub-hypotheses). H2 lacks support as even though financial health affected trust, its presence (or lack thereof) did not influence the effect of debt.

Beyond this, the only variable with a consistent effect on trust is identification with the Republican Party (*Pidrep*). For all four models, this variable was significant at the .01 level and negatively signed. In sum, Republicans were less likely to believe that the government was run by elites than other respondents. This, again, is unsurprising since a Republican held the White House at the time of the survey. *Age* had something of an effect on reducing the likelihood that one expressed untrusting views, varying in significance from 90% to 95% confidence depending on the model. When health/stress (*Finhealth*) was included, *age* attained significance at the .10 level and reached significance at the .05 level when the health/stress variable is removed, suggesting that part of the effect of age is contained in this variable. In addition, the full-time worker (*Workft*) variable had a slightly positive impact on the likelihood of distrust. However, it is only significant at the .10 level and only when the health/stress variable is excluded. As such, its effect is likely also contained in part in this latter variable. As before, since there was little variation in the dependent variable, this might explain in part why so few variables attained significance.

In all, there is no evidence that the weight of one's debt has an impact on one's perceptions of elite control. There is somewhat stronger evidence that health and stress may impact these feelings. Republican Party identification was the only variable that managed to influence this attitude consistently. Again, the lack of variation in the dependent variable, it may explain my lack of results.

Perceptions of Government Wastefulness

This fourth section looks at the relationship between peoples' debt and their perceptions of government wastefulness (*Govwasteb*). Specifically, this question looks at if people believe

the government efficiently (or inefficiently) utilizes citizens' taxes through the implementation of its programs. The same four models from the three prior sections are utilized here, with the measure of trust being the only change. I present the results for these four models in [Table 7a](#).

As with the previous section, I do not find much evidence that either health/stress or debt affects perceptions of government wastefulness. Only in the case of other debts (see the coefficients on *Otherdebt*) do any of these variables approach significance at the .10 level. However, it is signed negatively, suggesting that a higher miscellaneous-debt-to-income ratio makes respondents more likely to report positive perceptions of government wastefulness (government viewed as less wasteful), which is contrary to expectation. By comparison, the health/stress variable coefficient (*Finhealth*) is signed positively, suggesting that worse health/stress leads people to become more likely to report a less trusting response. Since both estimates are not significant, however, it is unlikely that they impact one's likelihood of reporting a belief that government is wasteful. Thus, I find no support for H1, H2, and H3 (and its sub-hypotheses).

The coefficient on the variable for Republican Party identification (*Pidrep*) is significant in all models, varying in significance from the .05 level or better in Models 3 and 4 to the .10 level in Models 1 and 2. The positive sign indicates that Republican respondents were more likely to believe that government was wasteful than were non-Republican respondents. This is in tune with political expectations. However, it is surprising that the variable remained significant despite the fact that a Republican president occupied the White House at the time of the survey. As such, it appears this effect persists irrespective of who controls the presidency. The change in the level of significance from .10 to .05 in the latter two models may indicate that the other debt-to-income ratios capture part of the effect of partisanship, though I am not certain of this. It is

also possible that this may be due to the slightly different set of respondents present in each sample ($n = 518/517$ versus $n = 503/504$). In either event, the results are unsurprising from an ideological standpoint, even if somewhat so from a contextual one.

Beyond this, only the coefficient on *Age* was significant at the .05 level or greater in all models. A positive sign on the coefficient in all four models indicates that older respondents were more likely to believe that the government was wasteful relative to younger respondents. As in the case with the Republican identification, the coefficient on this variable attained significance at the .01 level in the first two models, falling to the .05 level in the latter two models. Again, this may be because the different debt-to-income ratios capture some of the effects of this variable in the latter two models that the mortgage-debt-to-income ratio does not. Or, again, it may be due to the slightly different set of respondents present within each subsample. As before, the fact that the elderly are more likely to perceive the government as wasteful than the young is in line with common perceptions that older generations are less trusting of (and less willing to rely on) the government to solve societal problems than younger generations are.

Lastly, household income (see the coefficient on *Houseinc*) attained significance at the .10 level in Model 2, though not in any other models. This is positively signed. This may indicate that wealthier households might be more likely to perceive the government as wasteful than poorer households are. Though this is not necessarily surprising finding, I suspect this finding may be spurious, seeing how income has not played a significant role in influencing other forms of trust. Its inability to attain significance in the other models only reiterates this belief. With this said, I now move onto the last measure of trust, perceptions of government crookedness.

Perceptions of Government Crookedness

This fourth section looks at the relationship between peoples' debt and their perceptions of government crookedness (*Crookedb*). In particular, I asked if people believe that those in government were crooked. I present the results for this measure of trust in [Table 8a](#).

Among all variables, only two are significant, and consistently so, across all four models, those being gender and religiosity. Neither the health/stress nor any of the debt-to-income ratio variables are significant at the .10 level, leading to no support for the hypotheses presented earlier on. The coefficients on gender and religion, however, are significant. Women are more likely than men to report perceptions of crookedness among members of the government. These findings are significant at the .05 level. This may be because more men than women are Republicans. Given that a Republican held the presidency at the time of the survey, men (and Republican men in particular) may have been less likely to perceive those in government as crooked. Also, more religious people are less likely to report perceptions of crookedness among members of the government than are less religious people. These results are significant at the .10 level for all models except Model 1. These perceptions may stem from the fact that religious individuals are more likely to defer to a higher authority (in this case, the government) and are more likely to take said authority's words as a given.

In sum, I do not find support for the notion that debt or health/stress are significant in predicting one's perceptions of government crookedness. In fact, there are no factors other than religiosity and gender that appear to influence such perceptions. No other variables attain significance at the .10 level. With a pseudo R^2 value of 0.0429 or less for all models (the lowest values for all five measures of trust), the findings suggest that a very large amount of variation is left unexplained by my models. Since only 20% of the sample expressed a neutral or contrary

opinion to the idea that government was crooked, much of these perceptions may have been due to factors not accounted for in the model or idiosyncratic matters. In any event, it does not appear that the model as it stands currently explains much of the variation in perceptions of government crookedness.

Conclusion

In recent decades, many trends have played out in American politics, which may threaten the future of democracy. For example, we have seen a precipitous decline in trust in government. This development threatens the capacity of the government to solve societal problems. Simultaneously, scholars have observed a rise in economic inequality and economic adversity, which further threaten the mass citizenry's ability to influence their government. Exacerbating this further is the resurgence of partisan polarization to levels not seen since the beginning of the 20th century. Beyond this, there has been an explosive rise in consumer debt. Americans owe more in outstanding balances now than at any point in U.S. history, even when accounting for population growth and inflation.

My analyses suggest that only two forms of debt appear to affect trust, though only in the case of trust toward government in Washington (*Trustwashb*). There is a negative relationship between level of mortgage debt relative to income (*Debtmortr*) and trust in government in Washington as measured by my trust index. In contrast, there is a positive relationship between level of other debts relative to income (*Otherdebtr*) and trust in government in Washington. The former finding is significant at the .05 level in Models 1 and 2, while the latter is significant at the .10 level in Models 3 and 4. In the case of overall debt (*Trustindb*) and credit card debt-to-income (*Debtcredr*), the coefficient for Model 4 was significant at the .10 level in one instance,

though the sign was negative. This is contrary to expectations, though since it was not significant in Model 3, it may be a spurious result. Nor were these findings particularly surprising since only mortgage debt had a correlation higher than 0.1 with any form of debt in the bivariate analyses. In any event, I find little to no support for H1 or H3 and its sub-hypotheses.

Health/stress (*Finhealth*) appeared to have even less of an effect on trust than did debt. Only in the case of perceptions of elite control (*Govrunb*) did the joint effects of health and stress have any effect. However, this result was only significant at the .10 level (though it did approach 95% confidence) and was negatively signed. This indicated that to the extent that stress affected, people who were in a worse financial/health situation were more likely to report a neutral or more trusting (elites did not control government) response. In all cases other than perceptions of government wastefulness, all signs for the coefficients of stress and health were also negative (though no other results attained significance). These results were contrary to expectations.

I found no evidence that the effects of debt operate through health/stress. Whenever health/stress and debt exerted effects on trust, they were independent of one another. Thus, there is no evidence that debt indirectly affects political trust through one's health. This may be because, as Ojeda (2016) states, the poor (and by association, the more indebted [see Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009]) are more accustomed to economic stress than the rich, which then impact their political behavior less. Thus, health and debt exert separate effects on political trust since the indebted have come to accept stress as a way of life (or a long-term chronic stressor, see Avison and Turner 1988). Given these results, I also find no support for H2.

The lack of findings here may be due to the lack of variation in many of the primary dependent variables. For all trust measures other than beliefs about government wastefulness, more than three-quarters of all respondents indicated an untrusting response. Thus, very few of

my respondents gave trusting responses. An even smaller number of respondents had trusting (positive) responses on the trust index (less than 10% of all respondents), indicating that while some respondents marked individual components of trust positively, they indicated other measures of trust negatively. This suggests there is a degree of nuance among the measures of trust. In any event, I find only limited evidence that debt affects trust and even less support for the idea that health and stress have an effect among this particular sample.

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Footnotes

1. The population of the U.S. in 1940 was 132 million, compared to 308 million in 2010.
2. *Hispanic* and *Nonwhite* are treated separately in this analysis because most (64%) Hispanic respondents identified solely as white, even when the other race option was included.
3. I keep both personal income and household is because I am analyzing individual debt instead of household debt. A relatively low multicollinearity value between both variables (0.3007) appears to justify this choice.
4. I moved from ordered logit to standard logit because the Brant test refused to perform properly in STATA. Instead of retrieving results, the error “- invalid name; 1 invalid name” was returned upon attempting the Brant test. To avoid issues of parallel regression, logit models were utilized instead. Additionally, the results of the ordered logit models were not significantly different from the results presented here.
5. The multicollinearity values between *Pid*, *Trumpapp*, *Trumpappd*, *Piddemd*, *Pidrep*, and *Ideology* ranged from a low of -0.6091 (*Piddem* and *Trumpappd*) to a high of 0.9353 (*Trumpapp* and *Trumpappd*).
6. The multicollinearity values for the individual forms of debt ranged from a low of -0.0046 between hospital and mortgage debt to a high of 0.3224 for hospital and other debt.
7. I have excluded debt cases in which debt was greater than \$1,000,000 due to influential observations. This only amounted to a loss of three observations, in one of which a respondent claimed to have owed more than \$100,000,000 in debt, compared to a median of \$25,000. I exclude these three cases for all subsequent regressions as well.

CHAPTER II
PARTICIPATION AND DEBT

Abstract

Political and civic engagement are the centerpieces of a functioning democratic society. Alexis De Tocqueville noted in the mid-1800s that American society based its culture around civic and political interaction. Compared to Europe at the time, he found that people in the U.S. were more willing to share ideas and debate with one another. However, the American civic and political culture has come under attack. Some scholars, notably Putnam (1995; 2000), have claimed that American society is not as engaged as it has been. Evidence does point to a decline in civic engagement and voter turnout as compared with the mid-20th century. However, evidence for a decline in general political participation is more mixed. Among the factors that influence political and civic engagement, economic adversity is one of the more important factors.

However, the effects of adversity on participation are varied. In some cases, adversity increases activity, while it lowers it in other cases. I argue here (again) that debt is a form of economic adversity and will have similar effects on participation as other forms of adversity do. There are several forms of participation analyzed in this paper. These include political forms taken from Rosenstone and Hansen (1993; 2002) and civic forms from Putnam (1995; 2000). I argue that most forms of debt (excluding mortgage debt) have a negative impact on political and civic participation. Time spent saving up for debt is more important than time spent engaging with one's community. One exception is voting, whereby its simplicity and briefness keep it from being overly affected by debt. In my analysis, I find that economic adversity generally has less of an effect than expected. With debt, additionally, only college debt had a reliable effect. Across generalized activity, higher college debt burden made people engage in fewer political activities. However, this effect did not carry over to individual activities. Additionally, college debt negatively affected the likelihood of donating to social causes but did not affect other civic activities. Again, the effect of debt on participation is independent of the effect of economic adversity on engagement. A few other findings here are worth noting. First, contrary to the literature, I do not find that women are less active in the political and civic realms than men are. If anything, they are more active than men in some instances, notably meeting/rally attendance and going to protests. I likewise find no evidence that women donate less money to politics than men do, while women donate more than men to social issues. Second, there is very little connection between race and ethnicity and engagement once socioeconomic factors are considered. Only in the case of voting is there a noticeable gap in participation. Third, income plays little role in engagement, except in donating to both political and social causes. Lastly, Republicans were generally less active in politics than Democrats and independents were. The only exceptions were discussing politics online, displaying political propaganda, and voting.

Introduction

Participation in civic and political society is essential for the well-being of American democracy. Participation has played a role since the nation's founding in ensuring that people retain their connection with government and elected officials. So ingrained is this idea of a civic culture in American society that in 1831, Alexis De Tocqueville (1900) noted:

The cares of political life engross a most prominent place in the occupation of a citizen in the United States, and almost the only pleasure of which an American has any idea is to take a part in the Government, and to discuss the part he has taken. This feeling pervades the most trifling habits of life; even the women frequently attend public meetings and listen to political harangues as a recreation after their household labors. Debating clubs are to a certain extent a substitute for theatrical entertainments: an American cannot converse, but he can discuss; and when he attempts to talk he falls into a dissertation (pg. 254).

Americans are generally perceived as highly engaged. This is seen as a good thing, as high engagement links citizens to their government. Likewise, high levels of participation keep the government accountable to citizens. Lastly, civic engagement keeps people connected with and allows for the discussion of relevant policy issues. Scholars since De Tocqueville have also found that Americans are more politically active than their European and other democratic counterparts, attributable in part to our federal system (Powell 1986; Michener 2018). But how active are Americans really?

Approximately half of all Americans are fully disengaged from politics, while only about 16% are considered “fully-active” in the political realm. These figures come from Zukin et al.

(2006, pp. 63 – 65), who note that political engagement is the exception among American citizens, not the norm. They note that civic behavior has both social and political dimensions. The former refers to direct political activity, while the latter looks at how people affect society through community activity. Zukin et al. note that roughly 16% of Americans are active on both social and political issues. Similar percentages of Americans are either civically engaged or politically engaged. However, about 50% of all Americans are completely inactive in civil society. These are people who rarely vote, donate time or money to politics or causes, volunteer for their communities, join clubs and associations, or display political propaganda. If only half of the American citizenry is active, concerns arise that the interests of a large segment of society are excluded from social and political discussion.

Low levels of civic and political participation in the United States are nothing new. Have they declined even further in recent decades, however? Many scholars have found solid evidence that voter turnout in the U.S. has declined since the mid-20th century (Powell 1986; Gray and Caul 2000; Blais et al. 2004). Evidence for other forms of participation is mixed. Rising income inequality appears to have played some role in decreasing some forms of political participation (Bartels 2008; Kelly 2009), while growing political polarization may be having the opposite effect (Alvarez et al. 2010). Regarding civic engagement, Putnam (1995; 2000) has argued that participation has declined significantly since the mid-20th century. Various factors are responsible for this, including the rise of television and generational replacement. However, some scholars have argued that civic participation has not declined but has changed from a physical to a digital format (Zukin et al. 2006; Gainous and Wagner 2011).

Political participation, its trends, and the implications of these trends have received a fair amount of attention from political scientists. However, one trend that has received little attention

in the literature is the immense growth of consumer debt, largely propagated by government and private corporations (Hyman 2011; 2012). Consumer debt sometimes referred to as personal or private debt, has exploded over the past several decades, growing from \$100 billion in 1943 to more than \$4 trillion today (both in 2019 dollars). That political scientists have ignored the growth in consumer debt is concerning. Some political scientists have noted the explosive growth in consumer debt (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, pg. 223), but none, to my knowledge, has studied these implications.

Borrowing from Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), I look at several forms of political participation in this chapter. These include voting, political campaign volunteering, political campaign donating, attending political meetings, displaying political propaganda, protesting, and discussing politics online. Also, I look at several forms of civic engagement, including belonging to a labor union, civic organization, PTO, military organization, or hobby group, and donating to social causes. After describing levels of participation, I analyze if participation is related to rising consumer debt, either directly or through the effects of health and financial stress.

Americans and Participation

Some scholars have argued that political and civic participation have declined in recent decades. Others, however, have argued that this is not the case. Putnam (1995; 2000) belongs to the former school of thought. He has argued that political and civic participation, responsible for the accumulation of social capital, declined in the last half of the 20th century. One of his primary arguments is that television has spurred the decline. The arrival of television and other technological distractions resulted in people spending more time at home in solitude and less with other people in public settings.

Why Has Participation Declined?

Explanations for declines in participation are not just technological. The resource model, proposed by Brady et al. (1995), highlights the importance of political resources such as time, money, and civic skills in fostering political participation. This model holds that these resources are not evenly distributed. Further, certain groups have fewer of these resources today than they did decades ago. The rise of income inequality (Kelly 2008; Bartels 2008, 2016) suggests that there is less money in the hands of the many and more in the hands of a wealthy few. This provides more resources for the rich to become politically active. As an example, there is strong evidence that the wealthy donate more than the average American to political matters (Verba et al. 1995; Page et al. 2015). However, the effects of income are not limited to monetary donations. As demonstrated by many scholars, one political activity that has been particularly affected is voting (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Gray and Caul 2000; Blais et al. 2004). Solt et al. (2008) show that increasing income inequality has reduced voter turnout among the poor. Since Snipp and Cheung (2016) have shown that minorities and especially minority women are hurt most by rising inequality, the decline in participation is greatest among certain groups of people (though see Pacheco and Plutzer [2008] for a note on the effect of economic inequality on white voter turnout). Additionally, these patterns of lessened participation may continue. Ojeda (2018) shows that even when people of disadvantaged backgrounds experience upward financial mobility later in life, early-life income deficiencies still affect their lifetime participation. If such participatory patterns are not developed early on, as Plutzer (2002) shows, it is unlikely that individuals will overcome the “inertia” keeping them from engaging (also see Prior 2010). Further, such deficiencies tend to cross generations (Verba et al. 2003), indicating that the effects of such disadvantage may carry over time. Other causes of declines in participation include

falling political trust (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Uslaner and Brown 2005), reduced mobilization of voters (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Gray and Caul 2000), the decline of unions (Bucci 2019), and increasingly restrictive voting laws (Hajnal et al. 2016; though also see Burch 2012).

But Has Participation Declined?

Some scholars argue that participation has not actually declined. In general, they say that new forms have replaced traditional forms of participation. Some of these scholars begin by noting that education levels have been increasing for decades now. As Brady et al. (1995) note, higher education is an important requirement for civic skills and is a major political resource. At higher levels of education, people are more likely to vote, be interested in politics, and engage in political and civic activities (though see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). In addition, the rise of the internet and other technologies provides people an opportunity to engage in civic and political activities with more flexibility than ever before. Though there is a generational divide in who has access to the internet (Schlozman et al. 2010), Jennings and Zeitner (2003) demonstrate the importance of the internet in spurring political activity as well as acting as a source of political information. Furthermore, the growth of the internet has also, at minimum, prevented civic and political engagement decay (Kittilson and Dalton 2011), which otherwise might have occurred as a result of the changing social landscape. In this sense, per Gainous and Wagner (2011), the internet has resulted in a “revolution,” providing people with nearly instant access to political information and the ability to communicate to and between groups immediately.

There is some evidence that political and civic activity on the internet have become more popular and allowed people to discuss issues they may not have otherwise been able to (Deville 2016). This is especially true of respondents interested in learning about a particular political or

social issue (Shah et al. 2001; Lupia and Philpot 2005; Flanagan and Levine 2010). It is not only technological change that appears to have influenced rates of participation. Per the work of Antunes and Gaitz (1975) and Harris et al. (2005), when one accounts for socioeconomic status, there are no racial differences in participation. As such, given rising descriptive and substantive representation, the effects of socioeconomic status on participation have been largely (though not entirely) mitigated (Walker 1983; Harris et al. 2005). There is also evidence that even if many traditional forms of participation have declined, community involvement has risen among younger Americans (Flanagan and Levine 2010). In addition, some work suggests that increasing political polarization has been important for spurring voting and other political activity (Bartels 2000; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Alvarez et al. 2010).

Economic Adversity and Participation

Regardless of the side one takes in this ongoing debate, one factor that appears to play a role in influencing political and civic participation is economic adversity. Some earlier work suggested that microeconomic factors did not play a role in voting behavior (Kinder and Kiewit 1979; Kuklinski and West 1981). But other research showed that economic concerns influenced both if one voted and how one voted (Bloom and Price 1975; Rosenstone 1982; Conover and Feldman 1986). Others still have argued that the relationship between the two is conditional, depending on whether they are politically sophisticated (Gomez and Wilson 2001).

The effect of adversity on non-voting forms of participation is clear. Burn and Konrad (1987) found strong evidence that outside of voting, concerns about money or job loss led people to become more politically active. Levine (2015) shows that irrespective of the measure of economic adversity used (job loss, cost of bills, and lack of retirement savings), those who faced

income concerns were less likely than those who did not to donate money even to political causes that might help their situation, but more likely to engage in other forms of activity, notably donating time and interest to political causes. In comparison, Levin et al. (2016) found that people facing adversity were more likely than those not facing adversity to both donate to politics and express political interest on economic issues in other ways. In the end, it appeared as though adversity spurred activity in some ways (though see Uslander and Brown [2005] for an alternative indirect and negative relationship). Campbell (2002) also found strong evidence that when Medicare recipients thought their benefits were threatened, they were more willing to take political action on Social Security. More recently, Michener (2018) has shown that people who were concerned about losing access to Medicaid benefits were more likely to take political action to protect them than those who were unconcerned.

There are two major caveats of the relationship between economic adversity and participation. First, people must view economic adversity as a societal issue, not a personal one. Second, for adversity to spur political action, people must attribute the problem to inaction from the government. On the first note, Brody and Sniderman (1977) noted that while viewing an issue as a personal one was a necessary condition for participation, it was not a sufficient one. Only when an issue was viewed as both a personal and societal one did the issue spur activity. More recently, Page and Jacobs (2009) demonstrate that most Americans are “conservative egalitarians.” This means they prefer to avoid what is perceived as excessive government but are supportive of political action and will act on issues that are seen as critical to society. In short, for people to demand government action on an issue, they must also think the issue is important to all of society. On the second note, attribution of blame plays a major role. Arceneaux (2003) shows that when people can attribute their own and society’s economic woes to the government,

they are both more likely to vote and more likely to vote against the incumbent party.

Additionally, Levin et al. (2016) argue that beyond voting, people who blamed economic adversity on government action were more politically active than people who did not.

The State of Participation in the United States

Why do we care if political and civic participation levels have declined? The answers are manifold. First, lower levels of participation among large numbers of Americans allow the elevation of more advantaged voices in the political realm. Since the rich and powerful are much more active in politics already (by virtue of their socioeconomic position), politics becomes even more stratified as their voices are increasingly the only ones heard (Verba et al. 1995; Gilens 2014; Drutman 2015). The views of the rich are far more likely to be represented in government than those of the poor, especially on socio-economic and welfare policy (Hall and Wayman 1990; Gilens 2014; Brookman et al. 2017; Mettler 2018). When more people are politically active, the views of a wider set of citizens are expressed, which improves the likelihood that officials will address the concerns of the mass citizenry.

Second, there is political acceptance. When people are active in the civic and political realms, they accept political results, even when their party loses an election (Nadeau and Blais 1993). It appears that this relationship is reciprocal and self-reinforcing (Birch 2010). Third, with low levels of participation, inactive people are likely to stay so, which helps reinforce the dominance of the affluent. As Zaller (1992) shows, people inactive in politics generally have low political knowledge levels and are unlikely to listen to elite requests for participation. All of this is exacerbated by the fact that uninformed and inactive people are less likely to be contacted to participate than are informed and active people (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al.

1993). In short, there are many reasons as to why we should be concerned if political and civic participation are declining.

So what is the state of political participation in America today? One of the most notable trends in participation is a decline in voter turnout during the latter half of the 20th century.

[Figure 1b](#) (Appendix C) shows data on voter turnout among the eligible population over time in U.S. national elections.

Several things are evident from this figure. First, among the voting-eligible population, turnout steadily increased from the founding to the late 19th century. Following this, there was a decline in voter turnout until the mid-20th century. There was a steady increase in voter turnout from the end of the Second World War until the early 1970s. Though in no way comparable to the turnout of the 19th century, this roughly 25-year period marked the peak of voter participation in the 20th century. Since then, a steady decay has occurred in presidential and especially midterm election turnout. We may be experiencing a resurgence in voter turnout, however. After roughly thirty years of falling turnout, there was an uptick in the 2004 and 2008 elections. Additionally, the 2018 midterm is notable for being the highest turnout for a midterm election since 1914, followed by a similar surge in the 2020 presidential election (not pictured here). To summarize, voter participation has fluctuated over time. This includes peaks in the 1800s, mid-20th century, and 21st century, and nadirs in the early 1800s, the first half of the 20th century, and the last three decades of the 20th century. Though voter participation today is not as great as in the 19th century, this does not mean that this trend will continue.

How have other forms of political participation fared in the decades since the mid-20th century? The evidence here is a bit more mixed. Data from the ANES were assembled, showing political participation in various activities since 1948. I present this data in [Figure 2b](#).

This figure shows that there has been no consistent decay or surge pattern among most forms of participation since the early 1950s. The only form of participation that appears to have experienced either a decline or surge is working on a political campaign. Peaking at about 7% of respondents in 1970, only about 4% of ANES respondents reported working for a political campaign in 2016. Among the other three forms of participation for which there are data, we can see that while a decay took place in the last three decades of the 20th century, there appears to have been a revival since. In all, it is difficult to say if other forms of political participation have declined as voting has since the midcentury.

What about civic engagement? If Putnam (1995; 2000) is correct, we should see a steady decline in social and civic engagement after 1950. Using data from the General Social Survey from 1974 – 2004 (the years for which data are available)¹, I have created [Figure 3b](#), which shows levels of civic participation since 1974.

According to this figure, there is support for Putnam’s claim that participation in the civic realm has declined since the mid-20th century. Across all six measures of engagement analyzed, we can see a clear and steady decline between 1974 and 2004. From activities as obscure as belonging to a veteran group or participating in sports and hobby clubs, most forms of civic engagement have experienced a drop of more than half over three decades.

I have not included in any of the graphs online or other digital forms of political and civic participation. This is the case because such forms of participation are fairly new and have not been widely studied. However, I include a question on digital political engagement on the survey used in this analysis (I will discuss this shortly). Additionally, questions on political and social donations are likely to have some respondents who give money through online websites. However, the questions do not parse out the nature of the donations themselves. We know that

while digital participation has increased (Gainous and Wagner 2011; Kittilson and Dalton 2011), inequalities in participation persist on the internet (Schlozman et al. 2010). Future surveys on participation need to include questions on internet participation and observe such inequalities if they exist.

Debt and Political Behavior

As I note in the previous chapter, consumer debt has grown substantially in the last seventy years, especially in the last thirty. It has increased partly due to government policy and has permeated all sectors of the economy. This growth has been especially pronounced among young people and people of color. Debt may affect political behavior. Specifically, Burn and Konrad (1987) found that stress, irrespective of its source, led to reduced levels of political activity. Similarly, Ojeda (2016) noted that poor people faced more barriers to engagement than the rich, mainly stemming from financial stress. This was a major factor in explaining higher participation rates among the wealthy than the poor. Even on the most common form of political participation, voting, Hassel and Settle (2017) find evidence that higher stress made already infrequent voters less likely to vote. However, it is also possible that stress can increase political participation. In addition to Peterson and Gabbidon (2007), French et al. (2014) also found strong evidence that individuals with higher cortisol levels were more likely to vote than others. If debt does indeed increase stress, we should expect it to have notable political and civic participation effects. Finally, as I note in the previous chapter, not all forms of debt are equal. Mortgage debt may affect political activity differently than other forms of debt.

Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

The literature on stress, debt, and political participation led me to formulate several hypotheses.

They are:

H1: Level of personal debt is negatively associated with non-voting forms of political and civic participation.

In short, the stress from debt makes the indebted less likely to engage politically and civically.

However, mortgage debt does not affect stress levels, so I hypothesize that it does not affect levels of participation:

H1a: Level of mortgage debt is not associated with non-voting forms of political and civic participation.

Voting is different from other forms of participation. It requires a lesser time commitment and reduced dependence on other political resources as compared with other activities. As prior research suggests that stress increases the likelihood of voting, I offer the following hypothesis:

H2: Level of personal debt positively affects the propensity to vote.

The only instance where debt should not affect the likelihood of voting is in the case of mortgage debt, as it does not induce stress. Thus, mortgage debt should be unrelated to the likelihood of voting.

H2a: Level of mortgage debt does not affect the propensity to vote.

Unfortunately, no good data exist on debt and political behavior. Thus, I generated my data to test my hypotheses. I describe my data and how I collected it in the previous chapter.

Key Independent Variables

In this chapter, like the last, I rely on several debt-related independent variables to test my hypotheses. These variables are described in the previous chapter. I also utilize several stress-related variables and control variables. They too are described in detail in the previous chapter.

Dependent Variables

For political activities, I analyze various activities that respondents are asked about in the ANES and ADD Health surveys, leaving the wording intact. To create participation variables, I use these three questions:

1. In the election held on November 6, 2018, did you definitely vote in person on election day, vote in person before Nov 6, vote by mail, did you definitely not vote, or are you not completely sure whether you voted in that election?
2. Please tell me whether you are a member of any of the following. Parent/teacher organization, military veterans' organization, labor union, hobby or sports group, such as a bowling team or a ham radio club, or civic or social organization, such as Junior League, Rotary, or Knights of Columbus (check all that apply).
3. Please tell me if you have engaged in any of the following political activities over the past 12 months. Attended a political meeting, donated money to a political issue, joined in a protest/march/rally/demonstration, discussed politics online, displayed political propaganda like a sticker or tag, volunteered for a political cause or campaign, or donated money to a political party or candidate (check all that apply).

The first question on voting is turned into a basic binary variable called *Vote2018*, coded as 1 if someone voted, and 0 otherwise. I use the other two questions to create independent dummy variables called *Ptomem*, *Milorgmem*, *Labormem*, *Hobbymem*, *Civorgmem*, *Othermem*, *Donsocial*, *Polmeet*, *Protest*, *Polonline*, *Display*, *Volunteer*, *Donpolit*, *Otherpol*. The two participation indices are called *Allindex* and *Polindex*. Each of the dummy variables takes a value of 1 if the respondent reports engaging in that activity and 0 otherwise. The first index takes on values between 0 and 7, and the second index takes values between 0 and 8.

Other Variables

I also create several control variables. They are *Gender* (1 = female), *Age* (continuous), *Hispanic* (yes = 1)², *Nonwhite* (yes = 1), *Religio* (1 – 4, with 4 being most religious), *Educ* (1 = no high school, 5 = completed graduate education), *Educ2* (1 = college degree), *Married* (yes = 1), and *Workft* (1 = working fulltime), *Houseinc* (household income with integer values), *Persinc*³ (personal income with integer values), and *Polinter* (how much someone pays attention to politics scaled from 0 - 3, where 0 = Hardly at all and 3 = Most of the time). I also include several variables gauging political views. These are *Ideology* (Likert scale, with 1 = very liberal and 7 = very conservative), *Pid* (party identification, also Likert scale, with 1 = strong Democrat and 7 = strong Republican), *Piddem* (= 1 if someone was at least closer to the Democrats than Republicans), *Pidrep* (= 1 if someone was at least closer to the Republicans than the Democrats), *Trumpapp* (Likert scale, with 1 = disapprove strongly and 7 = approve strongly), and *Trumpappd* (= 1 if someone at least approved slightly of the president).

Modelling

Since most of my dependent variables are binary, I utilize standard logit models to analyze the relationship between if one participated in an activity and consumer debt. For the indices, since these only take on positive or zero values, I estimate models using negative binomial regression. The negative binomial regression approach is superior to standard Poisson regression because the latter assumes that the independent variables' effects will be constant at all values of the dependent variable. As a result, the Poisson model assumes that the events are independently and identically distributed. In practice, this would mean that the likelihood of one engaging in one additional form of civic or political participation is the same no matter how many forms of engagement they are currently active in. Since the literature has established that people involved in politics and in the community are likely to be involved in multiple forms of participation at once (Verba et al. 1995; Zukin et al. 2006; Schlozman et al. 2010), I have good reason to believe this assumption would be violated. Thus, Poisson regression is inferior to negative binomial regression. Since I am looking at seventeen forms of participation, along with two debt variables (mortgage and nonmortgage debts), and the inclusion or exclusion of a health/stress variable, I estimate a total of one-hundred and two models ($17 * 2 * 2 = 68$).⁴

In my models, I use the *Pidrep* variable as a measure of political ideology but dump the ideology and Trump-approval variables due to heavy multicollinearity.⁵ The final general model takes the form:

$$\text{Participation} = \beta_1(\text{Gender}) + \beta_2(\text{Age}) + \beta_3(\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_4(\text{Nonwhite}) + \beta_5(\text{religio}) + \beta_6(\text{Educ2}) + \beta_7(\text{Married}) + \beta_8(\text{Workft}) + \beta_9(\text{Finhealth}) + \beta_{10}(\text{Pidrep}) + \beta_{11}(\text{Houseinc}) + \beta_{12}(\text{Persinc}) + \beta_{13}(\text{Polinter}) + \beta_{14}(\text{Debt})$$

In general, there is little change in results across analyses. Beyond the dimension of participation analyzed, half the models will exclude a health/worry interaction variable. A third of the models will be dedicated to each of the three major measures of debt.

Analysis

Before I conduct my analyses, I will provide detailed summary statistics on debt and respondents. These summary statistics can again be found in [Table 1a](#) (Appendix B).

In total, across the 634 respondents, a strong majority (74.76%) reported having some form of debt, with the mean amount owed among those who had debt was \$260,588. Of those with debt, 387 (61.04% of the total) reported having debt that did not include a mortgage. Some attrition occurred in terms of responses among the individual categories of debt, but overall we can see that more than two-fifths (42.09% of 627) of respondents stated they owed money on a mortgage, roughly a fifth (22.03% out of 631) reported having some level of college debt, nearly half (44.59% of 628) reported having credit card debt, about one-sixth (17.77% of 619) claimed to owe on medical bills, and about one-eighth (12.14% of 626) owed miscellaneous debts. Unfortunately, the data collected does not allow me to differentiate between various forms of miscellaneous debt. However, this may not be a significant issue given the relatively small amount of people who report owing such debt. Overall, we see that most people in the survey owed money. Given our knowledge of the rise of debt in the U.S., this is hardly surprising. If anything, it is more surprising that more than a quarter of respondents (25.24%) reported owing no debt at all. Moving onto political and civic engagement, I present summary statistics on these in [Table 1b](#).

From this table, we can see that voting is the most common political activity. More than 500 respondents (82.91% of the sample) claimed to have voted in the 2018 midterm elections. This is likely an overreporting of actual activity for two reasons. First, the 2018 midterm elections had a nationwide average turnout of 49%, which is far lower than the percentage of respondents who claimed to have voted in my sample. Second, it is well-established in political science that people are likely to overreport if they voted due to social desirability bias. However, despite these overestimates, it is still likely that voting is indeed the most common political activity (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995). Interestingly, the second most common activity is donating to social causes. Nearly half (45.11%) of the sample claimed to have given money to such causes. Beyond this, membership in social organizations varied from a low of 40 (6.31% of respondents) for military organizations to a high of 122 (19.24% of respondents) for hobby-based organizations. For political activities, protesting was the least common of the standard activities (11.83% of respondents), followed by displaying political signs (12.15% of respondents). The most common non-voting activity is discussing politics online (38.17% of respondents). This online finding is not surprising due to the online nature of the survey and the simplicity of discussing politics on an online forum. However, the low number of people who claimed to have displayed political signage is interesting given the simplicity of this form of activity and its minimal draw on political resources.

Lastly, I will provide a general overview of the relationship between debt and all of the dimensions of political and civic participation. As in Chapter I, I run basic bivariate correlations between each measure of debt and each measure of participation. Again, utilizing STATA's *pwcorr* command, I analyze the Pearson's correlation coefficient values between participation and debt. Though my dependent variables are binary, this may be preferable to Spearman's

correlation coefficient, as the latter assumes that at least one variable is ordinal. For my analysis, however, no dependent variables are ordinal. I have posted the results of these correlations in [Table 2b](#).

Based on this table, there are a few relationships with correlations whose absolute values are over 0.1000. These are mortgage debt with protesting, credit card debt with labor union membership, and mortgage debt with miscellaneous group membership (all positive). Mortgage debt and political meeting attendance as well as hospital debt and volunteering for politics also approach correlation values of 0.1000 (also both positive). These relationships are by and large contrary to the hypotheses presented thus far. This is because the predicted relationships in these cases are expected to be either null or negative. To see if these patterns persist in multivariate analyses, I now move onto individual analyses of each form of participation with the various forms of debt along with control variables.

Political Participation

In this section, I examine the relationship between debt and political participation. In [Table 3b](#), the dependent variable is the index of overall political participation (*Polindex*). For the next six tables⁶, the dependent variable is an individual component of the index⁷.

The tables suggest several general conclusions. First, there is no evidence that mortgage debt (*Debtmortr*) affects political participation. This supports H1a. Second, there is no evidence that either debt burden or stress influences political participation. The one notable exception is college loan debt (*Colldebtr*). For overall participation ([Table 3b](#)), we see that college debt has a significant and negative relationship with general political participation. This relationship is significant at the 95% confidence level in Models 3 and 4, and just fails to attain significance in

both at 99% confidence. To put things in perspective, the data indicate that people with no college debt burden participate in roughly 1.6 activities when all other variables are held at their mean values. At the median level of debt burden among recipients with debt, respondents engaged in roughly 1.4 activities. At the 90th percentile of debt burden, respondents engaged in only a single activity. However, in no other cases does college loan debt have a relationship with participation, though it does maintain a negative coefficient in all models after that. However, the coefficients on the college debt variable approach significance at the 90% confidence level in the cases of protesting and discussing politics online for Models 3 and 4. This is rather interesting. This suggests that although college debt burden does not influence the likelihood of engaging in any particular activity, it negatively impacts a person's overall participation. No other forms of debt burden seem to affect participation.

Third, stress (*Finworry*) appears to play little role in political participation. The impact of stress is only weakly apparent in the cases of protesting ([Table 6b](#); positive) and displaying political propaganda ([Table 7b](#); negative). However, the coefficients on said variables are only significant at the 90% confidence level, and there is no relationship between stress and overall participation. In sum, I do not find much evidence here that adversity influences political participation. As such, I find only weak evidence for H1 and no evidence for H2. Furthermore, there appears to be no relationship between stress and debt burden. The significance of debt is unaffected by the significance of stress. These effects of both variables on political participation are independent of one another.

In terms of non-debt-related findings, they are largely unsurprising. Political interest (see the coefficients on *Polinter*) is positively and consistently related to whether one participates in a given activity. Republicans (see the coefficients on *Pidrep*) also appear to be less engaged in

political activity than non-Republicans are, except in the cases of voting, displaying political propaganda, and discussing politics online ([Table 4b](#), [Table 7b](#), and [Table 8b](#), respectively). This may be attributable in part because, at the time of this survey, Donald Trump was the sitting president. Age also influences participation in some cases, positively in two (voting and political donations; [Table 4b](#) and [Table 5b](#) respectively), and negatively in three cases (protesting, discussing politics online, and attending rallies; [Table 6b](#), [Table 8b](#), and [Table 9b](#) respectively). The second negative finding is unsurprising as Gainous and Wagner (2011) found that the elderly are less active online than the young are. Race (*Nonwhite*) and ethnicity (*Hispanic*) also negatively affected some forms of activity (voting in the case of race [[Table 4b](#)], rally/meeting attendance [[Table 9b](#)] and potentially protesting [[Table 6b](#)] and giving money to political causes [[Table 5b](#)] in the case of Hispanic background), though these effects are neither consistent nor strong except in the case of voting. Household income (*Houseinc*), but not individual income (*Persinc*), and education (*Educ2*) mattered for political donations ([Table 5b](#)). Additionally, while full-time workers (*Workft*) were less likely to discuss politics online ([Table 8b](#)), they were more likely to vote than other respondents.

A few findings are more noteworthy. First, contrary to Verba et al. (1995), I find no evidence that women are less likely to donate money to political causes ([Table 5b](#)) than men are. For the most part, males and females were equally active in the political realm. In some cases, I find moderate evidence that women are more active than men with regard to protesting ([Table 6b](#)), more likely to display political signage ([Table 7b](#)) and more likely to attend political rallies ([Table 9b](#)). I also find evidence that the college-educated are generally less likely to display political signage ([Table 7b](#)) than those who do not have a degree. Perhaps this is due to the simplicity of the activity. It is also possible that those who are more educated are fearful of a

social backlash either in the workplace or in their neighborhood due to promoting their views. Due to their higher socioeconomic status, such overt displays of political beliefs may be regarded as unwelcome or as a social faux-pas. In any event, this is an interesting finding. To summarize, I find only evidence that college debt is related to political participation, no evidence that over forms of debt influence participation, and no evidence that financial stress and health are jointly related to participation.

Civic Participation

In this section, I examine the relationship between debt and various forms of civic participation. I begin with the index of civic participation (*ALLINDEX*) in [Table 11b](#) and then move on to the index's individual components in the next several tables⁸. I use the same set of independent variables here that I do in previous models. I now move onto a discussion of the statistical results.

In general, again, I find little evidence that debt influences civic participation. There are a few noteworthy exceptions, however. In the case of hobby group membership ([Table 16b](#)), those who have more miscellaneous debt (*Otherdebtr*) are more likely to join. This relationship is significant at the 95% confidence level. A person with no debt burden has between a 0.1761 (Model 3) and a 0.1767 (Model 4) probability of being part of a hobby group. This compares with a probability of 0.1954 (Model 3) and 0.1959 (Model 4) at the median level of debt burden and a 0.4606 (Model 4) and a 0.4639 (Model 3) probability at the 90th percentile of debt burden. Similarly, with college debt (*Colldebtr*), we see that those with higher college debt loads are less likely to donate to social causes than those without ([Table 18b](#)). This relationship is significant at the 95% confidence level for both models. A person with no debt burden has between a 0.4807

(Model 3) and a 0.4819 (Model 4) probability of donating to social causes when all other variables are held at their mean values. That compares with between a 0.4274 (Model 4) and a 0.4260 (Model 3) probability of donating to social causes at the median level of college debt burden among those who had debt. At the 90th percentile of debt, these same probabilities dropped to 0.2807 (Model 4) and 0.2793 (Model 3). College debt was more weakly related to civic group membership ([Table 16b](#)). This relationship is positive and significant only at the 90% confidence level, though it barely fails to attain significance at the 95% confidence level. These results suggest mixed support for H1. While this hypothesis predicts college debt being negatively related to donations, the results for college debt and civic group membership and miscellaneous debt and hobby group membership are contrary to H1. H1a is confirmed by these results, as the coefficient on *Debtmortr* is never statistically significant in any models. Lastly, the coefficient on *Finworry* is only significant in the case of other group membership ([Table 17b](#)). This relationship is significant and positive at the 90% confidence level in both models. In no other cases is stress significant.

I find evidence that those from wealthier households (*Houseinc*) and married individuals are generally more civically engaged than the population at large. This is particularly true in the case of overall participation ([Table 11b](#)), where coefficients on both variables are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level across all four models. In short, more affluent and married people are more likely to be involved in more activities. Moving onto labor union membership ([Table 12b](#)), we can see that women (*Gender*) are less likely to be involved in unions than men are. Additionally, there is some evidence that full-time workers (*Workft*) and the politically interested (*Polinter*) are more likely to be involved in labor unions than other people are. The former finding becomes insignificant when nonmortgage debts are considered, however.

There is also very weak evidence that Republicans (*Pidrep*) are less likely to belong to labor unions ([Table 12b](#)), though this finding disappears when nonmortgage (*Otherdebtr*) debts are considered. For PTO membership ([Table 13b](#)), the results are fairly unsurprising. Women (*Gender*), people from wealthier families (*Houseinc*), younger individuals (*Age*), and married individuals are more likely to be members of a PTO. There is weaker evidence that nonwhite respondents were more likely to be PTO members than white individuals. For military groups ([Table 14b](#)), we see that married individuals, men, Republicans, and those who did not work full time were more likely to be members. Older, politically interested, and potentially wealthier households are likewise more likely to be members of civic groups ([Table 15b](#)) than other people are. On the flip side, younger people are more likely than others to be part of hobby groups ([Table 16b](#)). For miscellaneous groups ([Table 17b](#)), women and younger individuals are more likely to be members. Lastly, beyond debt, we see that women, non-Republicans, people of wealthier households, and politically interested respondents are more likely to donate to social causes ([Table 18b](#)) than the rest of the population. In any event, there is evidence for H1a and more mixed evidence for H1.

Conclusion

In sum, I find some evidence that debt affects generalized political participation and some social activities. In the case of overall participation, college debt had a very strong and significant (just shy of attaining significance at the 99% confidence level) negative relationship with political activity. These patterns did not hold any specific forms of participation in the political realm. However, college debt did have a consistent negative sign across all forms of participation and barely failed to attain significance at the 90% confidence level in several models. This suggests

the effect of college debt is similar across all forms of political activity. As such, it acts as a general, rather than specific, depressant to political activity. Moving onto civic participation, I find that college debt made social donations less likely, but may have spurred civic organizational membership. There may have been a similar relationship between hobby group membership and miscellaneous debt, though this connection is weaker than the relationship between donations and college debt burden. In no other cases did debt burden appear to have an effect. Additionally, mortgage debt was never significant. Thus, I find mixed support for H1, strong support for H1a, and no support for H2.

There are several additional findings worth considering here. First, there is no evidence that women are less active than men in the political realm. If anything, I find moderate support for the idea that women are more active than men are in the political realm. This is especially true in the case of protesting, with some evidence that women are more likely to attend political meetings than men are. Regarding groups people join, women were more active in PTOs and miscellaneous groups, while men were more active in military groups and labor unions. In addition, there is some evidence that women were more likely than men to donate to social causes.

Second, my findings suggest that race and ethnicity are no longer important factors for determining political or civic participation. There is weak evidence that Hispanics might be less likely to protest or donate to political causes than non-Hispanics. There is limited evidence that they are less likely to attend political rallies/meetings. Only in the case of voting does race seem to play a significant role. Nonwhite Americans were noticeably less likely to vote than white Americans are ($p < .015$ in Models 1 and 2; $p < .01$ in Models 3 and 4). This supports my expectations. However, regarding other activities, political or social, I find no evidence that race

plays a role. In some cases, the coefficient is signed negative, and in others, it is signed positive. I can thus conclude that there is no distinct effect of either ethnicity or race on activity.

Third, my findings suggest that income is not important in determining political or social activity in most cases. Income does, however, seem to affect the likelihood of one donating to causes. Those with higher household incomes are more likely to donate money to both social and political concerns. Since I did not control for the size of the donation (only if someone donated), there may be individuals here who contributed smaller amounts when their income was taken into account.

Finally, I found that while partisan identification does not affect civic engagement much, Republicans are generally less politically active than their non-Republican counterparts. Republicans in my sample were much less likely to protest or donate to politics and somewhat less likely to attend political meetings/rallies and volunteer for politics. Only when it comes to voting, discussing politics online, and displaying political propaganda were Republicans on par with non-Republicans. I attribute this to the fact that Donald Trump, a Republican, was president at the time of this survey. In general, those partisans who are not currently in control of the presidency are more politically active than those who currently control the presidency (Harris et al. 2005). Additionally, these findings follow from the results of the 2018 midterm elections, which were known for their historic levels of turnout.

To conclude, I have uncovered little evidence that either health or financial stress impacts political and social participation. I find a bit more support for debt burden, but only in a few cases. It is possible that the insignificant findings with regard to these variables may be due to the way I worded my questions (I asked about general, rather than specific, activities). The results may change were I to ask respondents about which causes they supported. In any event,

political and civic participation is well and alive in the United States. Though perhaps inflated (especially in the case of voting), well over half of the sample claimed to have engaged in at least one activity. If the 2018 election is an example, furthermore, we may very well see an uptick in activity in future years. This, paired with the growth of the Internet, may indicate that while American political and civic participation has changed in ways that Putnam (1995; 2000) may not like, it is far from dead.

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Footnotes

1. Several years were missing from the GSS data, so this graph only presents a rough visual of the trend in civic participation over time. Additionally, data for 1994 were available, but the civic engagement questions were not applicable for an unusually large number of respondents. This led to a significant drop in participation for when these individuals were included (relative to other years), and thus I have dropped this year from the data.
2. *Hispanic* and *Nonwhite* are treated separately in this analysis because most (64%) Hispanic respondents identified solely as white, even when the other race option was included.
3. I keep both personal income and household is because I am analyzing individual debt instead of household debt. A relatively low multicollinearity value between both variables (0.3007) appears to justify this choice.
4. This number indicates that within each measure of participation, there are four different models. The first looks at all variables of interest, plus health/stress, plus mortgage debt. The second looks at the same variables minus the health/stress variables. The third looks like the first model but looks at the other forms of debt individually included in the model. The fourth is the same as the second, but with nonmortgage forms of debt. The choice to treat the nonmortgage debts separately is due to their extremely low multicollinearity values (max was 0.0557).
5. The multicollinearity values between *Pid*, *Trumpapp*, *Trumpappd*, *Piddem*, *Pidrep*, and *Ideology* ranged from a low of -0.6091 (*Piddem* and *Trumpappd*) to a high of 0.9353 (*Trumpapp* and *Trumpappd*).
6. The variables for these tables are *Vote2018*, *Donpolit*, *Protest*, *Display*, *Polonline*, *Polmeet*, and *Volunteer* respectively.
7. I do not present the results for miscellaneous political activities as no variables within the model were significant in explaining variation among such activities.
8. The variables for these tables are *Labormem*, *Ptomem*, *Milorgmem*, *Civorgmem*, *Hobbymem*, *Othermem*, and *Donsocial*, respectively.

CHAPTER III
POLICY SUPPORT AND DEBT

Abstract

Political policy is the foundation of government action toward addressing common issues. Socioeconomic policy, in particular, is designed to address issues related to equalizing the economic playing field in favor of people who otherwise come from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds. However, changes in the policy landscape of the United States have reduced the ability of socioeconomic policy to address current needs. As a result, economic adversity and inequality have risen over the past several decades. Scholars have argued that Americans have been largely apathetic toward growing economic adversity. However, the reality is much more complicated. Americans still largely support government action for dealing with socioeconomic issues. However, people are cautious about government policy when they believe that funding it will cost them in higher taxes. Even so, growing economic inequality and adversity appear to have counteracted this effect in part. In general, people facing greater adversity and more aware of economic inequality are more supportive of government socioeconomic policy. With the rise of consumer debt, this may further complicate this relationship. Given that I have argued that the burden of debt is a form of economic adversity thus far ignored, I expect debt to affect policy support. I look at several policies: 1) support for the 2017 tax law, 2) generalized support for government economic assistance, 3) government assistance in exchange for a tax hike, 4) a policy guaranteeing a baseline income for retirees, 5) a homeowner's protection plan, 6) support for raising the minimum wage, 7) assistance for paying medical bills, and 8) support for paying for college loans. I find that, in general, debt does not have a general effect on policy support. However, when a particular debt is tied to a specific policy, such as college loan aid and college loan debt, having a higher debt burden yields greater support for a policy. Additionally, economic adversity concerns, both generalized and personal, affect policy support in most cases. However, these effects are partly subsumed by the inclusion of partisanship. When partisanship is no longer considered, debt and economic adversity greatly impact policy support. As before, however, debt and economic adversity yield separate effects on policy support from one another. Thus, the effect of debt on policy support goes beyond concerns for economic adversity.

Introduction

One of the most interesting conundrums facing American politics is the so-called “More for Less” paradox, popularized by Susan Welch (1985). According to this paradox, people desire more action from the government to address common problems. However, they do not expect government to raise their taxes to tackle these problems. This presents a practical dilemma whereby people anticipate government activity without wanting to pay for it. However, actual evidence for this paradox is scant at best (but see Ladd et al. 1979). In general, people *do* expect to pay less in taxes while also expecting government action on issues. However, the paradox fails because people expect elected officials to spend less in some areas while spending more in others to avoid raising their taxes. Welch herself acknowledges this, and many other studies confirm it (Eismeier 1982; Page and Jacobs 2009). These studies also show there is a hesitation among the American public to rely too heavily on the government to solve societal problems.

Some have attributed this fear of government action to an inherent conservative tendency among the American citizenry. However, there is little evidence to support such claims (McCall 2013; McCall et al. 2017). If anything, evidence suggests that the American public is slightly left-of-center in its policy views. This is also reflected in popular support for governmental programs. Since public mood was first measured by Stimson et al. in 1958, American policy mood has tended to hover around 60% liberal, 40% conservative. Some of the variation in mood over the years is at least partly a function of who is in control of the presidency. However, other factors are at play as well.

For example, rising economic inequality and adversity may partly revive the “More for Less” Paradox. In general, the expectation is that higher inequality and adversity should lead people to become more supportive of government policies to address these problems. This is

generally what the literature bears out (Mughan 2007; Rehm 2009; McCall et al. 2017). This comes with several caveats, however. Alongside a rise in income inequality and adversity, there has been a notable decline in political trust over the past several decades. Trust is an important resource for government in passing a policy agenda (Hetherington 2005). Without trust, people would rather government not take action on a given issue and instead would rather be left to their own devices. Additionally, for people to demand government action, they must view economic inequality and adversity as societal problems rather than just personal ones (Brody and Sniderman 1977; Gomez and Wilson 2001; McCall et al. 2017). Thus, economic adversity and income inequality may lead people to want to address these issues. At the same time, however, they may not be willing (or aware of the need) to provide government the resources to tackle such matters.

Another potentially confounding factor is the sudden and immense growth of consumer debt over the past several decades. The rise of consumer debt over the past seventy years is an important trend that political science has largely overlooked. Consumer debt also referred to as personal or private debt, has exploded over the past several decades, growing from \$100 billion in 1943 to more than \$4 trillion today (both in 2019 dollars). That political scientists have ignored the growth in consumer debt is concerning (there are exceptions, see Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, pg. 223).

This paper examines the relationship between consumer debt and policy support. I look particularly at social welfare policy and policies intended to address economic adversity related to debt accumulation and payment. Consumer debt, which I argue is a dimension of economic adversity, has the effect of lowering one's monthly income. People spending money to pay off debts live in different economic realities than those who make the same income but lack debt.

Here, I explore whether these differences lead indebted individuals to become more supportive of policies that address economic concerns and private debt buildup.

Policy Liberalism: Trends over Time

Though the United States is often thought of as having a particular partisan lean (in the eyes of many journalists and public figures, a conservative-leaning one), this is partly misleading and vastly oversimplified. As we know from extant work (Wlezien 1997; MacKuen et al. 2002), the nation's actual partisan and policy leanings vary over time. Changes are influenced largely by changes in partisan control of government. As a party retains control of the presidency for a few consecutive terms, public mood begins shifting against the president's party's policy stances. This shift in mood produces changes in mass partisanship over many years and ultimately shifts the mass public into being more supportive of Democrats or Republicans and their associated policy stances (also see MacKuen et al. 1989).

So how has public mood shifted over time? In general, policy mood is dependent on the party in charge and how long it has been in power. Since there have been nine partisan shifts in the control of the presidency since 1958¹, there have been approximately nine periods of time during which the national policy mood has shifted toward one party or the other. The time series visual of national policy mood, created by James Stimson of the University of North Carolina (higher values indicate a more liberal policy mood), is presented in [Figure 1c](#).

In this figure, nine periods of policy mood shift are evident. Following the final years of Eisenhower's presidency, a clear and sudden swing to the left culminated in Kennedy's election in 1960. Following his and Johnson's tenure, there is a clear and sharp swing to the right that ended with Nixon's ascendancy to the White House in 1968. A swing back to the left persisted

until a few years before Ford's defeat to Carter in 1976. A gradual and similarly sharp turn to the right eventually led to Reagan's victory in 1980. A sudden and then more gradual shift back to the left culminated in George H. W. Bush's defeat in 1992. Interestingly, a sharp turn to the right took place during the Clinton administration's first years, but a swing back to the left occurred while he was still president. Nonetheless, this swing was insufficient to keep Bush Jr. from ascending to the presidency in 2000. Public mood fluctuated noticeably through his tenure, though it retained a liberal tint throughout his tenure's course. This was sufficient in electing Democrat Barack Obama in 2008. A swing back rightward took place during Obama's tenure, culminating in Trump's election in 2016, before this trend again reversed by 2020 and resulted in Biden's defeat of Trump. These swings are hardly unexpected. As Wlezien (1993) shows, when Americans perceive the government as too liberal, they will trend in a conservative policy direction. On the other hand, when the government is perceived as too conservative, we should expect a swing back to the left.

One other thing is worth noting about this chart. At no point does the collective policy mood drop below a liberal score of 50. This means that overall, there is a slight liberal tilt to the general policy mood of Americans. Though there is often the perception that Americans are less left-leaning in their political beliefs than are Europeans (Ladd et al. 1979; Page and Jacobs 2009; Luttig 2013), this graph suggests that this is not the case. Averaged out, the policy mood value for the American public is a liberal score of 60 out of 100. This corroborates recent research which questions the extent to which Americans are actually conservative (McCall 2013; McCall et al. 2017). Instead of thinking of people as either liberal or conservative, it is perhaps better to think of Americans as "ideologically conservative, operationally liberal," (Page and Jacobs 2009). Americans proclaim an ideology whereby they expect government to remain out of their

lives. However, when severe problems arise, generally those perceived as affecting society as a whole (Brody and Sniderman 1977; Hacker et al. 2013), people expect that the government should play a role in fixing them. Thus, though Americans may be more conservative than Europeans, they are still more liberal than conservative. Further, their beliefs on policy are much more nuanced than is often portrayed in the media.

However, the graph shows that there is in fact variation in the public's policy mood over time. This is at least in part a function of the party in power, but this is not the only factor at play. Beyond partisan control, several factors shift the public's policy preferences over time. I will discuss these factors (and their consequences) in the next section.

Policy Support: Sources and Consequences

Individual-level support for specific government policies in the United States is a function of many factors. Among these are partisanship (Sears et al. 1980; Lerman et al. 2017), the state of the economy (Durr 1993), personal experiences (Campbell 2002; Cramer 2016; Michener 2018), trust in government (Eismeier 1982; Hetherington 2005), perceptions of threat (Rickert 1998), covert racial bias (Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Michener 2018; Kelly 2019), personal values (Sanders 1988; Hetherington and Weiler 2018), concerns about globalization (Hicks and Zorn 2005), media attention (Zaller 1992; Dancey and Logan 2010), and perceptions of societal versus personal problems (Brody and Sniderman 1977). The myriad sources of policy support indicate that policy support is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. However, though all of these variables may have an effect, they do not have an equal effect.

Political trust is a particularly important predictor of support for certain policies. As Hetherington (2005) shows, conservative policy outcomes are not a product of people supporting

conservative social policies. Instead, perceived incompetence of government has driven down trust in government. As trust has fallen, so have citizens' demand for government to solve common problems, including addressing welfare policy drift or current policy's inability to address modern needs. As government policy has become less capable of addressing these needs, it has unintentionally become more conservative. The associated benefits and beneficiaries, as a consequence, have both declined. Nor is the effect of trust dependent on who is in charge. As Chanley et al. (2000) show, people are more supportive of government policy when trust is high, even when their preferred political party is not in charge of the presidency. The effect of trust is compounded by the fact that many policies—especially income support and welfare policies—are perceived as benefiting racial minorities (Hetherington and Globetti 2002; Cramer 2016; Kelly 2019). This may be partly because policy support among conservatives is affected more by trust than is policy support among liberals (Rudolph and Evans 2005). However, what is ironic is that both liberal and conservative policies are hurt by declining trust, as the government is viewed as incapable of handling both domestic and foreign issues (Hetherington and Husser 2012). Trust in the government has precipitously declined over the past several decades. For example, trust in the government declined from 79% of the population being trustful in 1958 to less than 20% in 2019 (Pew Research Center). Trust, then, plays a critical role in support for governmental policy. Furthermore, its decline hurts the government's capacity to adopt both conservative and liberal policies.

Another essential source of policy support is the presence of (or lack of) economic inequality and adversity. It is well demonstrated that both economic inequality and economic adversity have increased over the past several decades (Gottschalk and Moffit 2009; Kelly 2009; Hacker et al. 2013; Margalit 2013). As both have risen, scholars have found that they influence

policy support. In general, the rise of economic adversity appears to have increased support for policies meant to address concerns related to this adversity (Rehm et al. 2012; Hacker et al. 2013). These findings generally hold, irrespective of the measure of economic adversity used (Mughan 2007; Rehm 2009; Marx 2014). However, the presence of adversity may, in some instances, have the opposite effect, reducing support for action from the government. When policy is perceived as helping certain groups but not others, those facing adversity may become less supportive of it irrespective of its actual effects (Rickert 1998; Hetherington and Globetti 2002). Additionally, when adversity exists but the government's role in redressing it is obscured, people become less supportive of policies that may nonetheless handle such concerns (Mettler 2018). Lastly, rising political polarization appears to have had an effect as well (Rehm 2010). As the parties have become increasingly sorted by ideology, those whose incomes are less secure have largely become affiliated with the Democratic Party, and those least likely to face adversity have fallen mainly under the Republican Party's banner. Thus, economic adversity is no longer just a class issue; it is also a matter of partisanship. This has resulted in socioeconomic policy preferences coinciding and becoming more associated with ideology.

Similarly, rising income inequality can increase support for government policy meant to redress it (McCall et al. 2013; Piston 2018). Again, support for policies designed to address inequality appears to be influenced in part by how the issue is framed (Cavaillé and Trump 2015). When it is framed as a rich versus poor debate, there is a tendency for people to become less supportive of such policies (Shayo 2009). The same is true when people are unaware that a given policy will hurt the poor more than the rich (Franko et al. 2013). A good example is the estate tax. Bartels (2008; 2016) showed that while people think that the rich are not taxed enough, they nonetheless believe that repealing the estate tax (often portrayed as a "death tax") is

better than keeping it. However, when income inequality is framed as a public issue (Brody and Sniderman 1977; Dominitz and Manski 1997), as something that governmental policy can play a role in reducing (Mettler 2018; Michener 2018), or as a matter of the rich possessing an unfair advantage over the poor (Frank 2007), people are more supportive of policies designed to address inequality. Though conditional, economic adversity and economic inequality can increase support for governmental policy geared toward addressing them.

Regardless of its sources, policy, mainly that geared toward addressing economic insecurity, has largely become ineffective over the past several decades. Policy drift/stagnation, or the process of the policy becoming ineffective at addressing current concerns, is disquieting (Michener 2018; Mettler 2018; Kelly 2019). Due to a lack of support, the government has been unable to update many policies addressing modern needs as population growth and changes in the economy have taken hold. Thus, an unintended conservative streak has taken hold in the American welfare state. Some of those blamed for the ineffectiveness of modern welfare policy are not part of the government but are the beneficiaries themselves. As Cramer (2016) notes, urbanites and rural dwellers blame one another for having access to government benefits they think the other group does not deserve. However, the reality is that neither can receive their fair share of economic gain from such policy, as such welfare policies have become underfunded and insufficient. Not all have blamed other Americans for such policy decline, however. As Michener (2018) notes, individual beneficiaries of social welfare policy have often blamed the state governments for being the perpetrators of policy ineffectiveness. Instead of accepting assistance from the federal government, they perceive local authorities as playing political games and refusing federal assistance to fund social welfare. Though angered at this apparent injustice,

many such recipients live in such dire economic conditions that their energy is focused on financial survival rather than advocating for such policy.

We also know that a decline in governmental policy has reinforced the rise in economic inequality. As Kelly (2019) shows, rising income inequality has resulted in a vicious cycle, whereby people lash out at establishment politicians in favor of nontraditional ones who are less supportive of social welfare policy (also see Kenworthy and McCall 2007; Kelly and Enns 2010; Luttig 2013). These elected officials then reinforce inequality by ensuring that policies that can address it either do not get passed or are not updated to satisfy the current need. This is to be expected since it is known that the preferences of those in office generally reflect the preferences of the well-off (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Hacker and Pierson 2010). This is due to the overrepresentation of wealthy interests in the interest group system (Hall and Wayman 1990; Baumgartner et al. 2009) as well as structural influences that resist policy change, such as unequal representation in the Senate or resistance to unorthodox economic thought (Lindblom 1982; Griffin and Newman 2005). These differences become even more troubling when one notes that the rich's preferences are more likely to be reflected in government policy than those of the middle class and poor when the two come into conflict (Gilens 2014). Thus, a declining welfare state results in greater inequality, which in turn leads to even more resistance to passing policy to address such inequality.

We know that support for governmental policy, especially in the realm of welfare spending, has fallen in any event. Additionally, such welfare decline has resulted in an increase in income inequality and economic adversity. Furthermore, we know that this decline in the social welfare state has led to a vicious cycle whereby it has become even harder to pass such policy in the current political context. However, we know that there are instances in which

people are more supportive of corrective policy. This is especially true when both are portrayed as societal rather than personal issues and when the issue is salient. However, another policy matter has largely escaped the purview of political scientists that I believe has important implications for policy support. I will discuss this particular issue in the next section.

Debt and Policy Support

Alongside the decline in support for various government policies, there has been an explosive growth in the level of economic inequality in the United States. Similar increases have been observed in both economic adversity and political polarization. As I note in the previous two chapters, social scientists have paid very little attention to the effects of consumer debt. I also pointed out in those chapters that private debt has exploded in the past few decades, and it has permeated all sectors of the economy.

As I also mentioned previously, debt has many, largely adverse, effects on human behavior. And there is reason to suspect that those facing economic stress will support specific socioeconomic policies at different rates than those facing less stress. For example, Hacker et al. (2013) find that economic stress influenced support for economic and healthcare policy (such as guaranteeing a minimum income or a public healthcare option), though not support for other policies. The relationship between economic stress and support for such policy appears to affect people differently. Conservatives and moderates are affected by adversity more than liberals are, leading the former two groups to become more supportive of such policy when adversity is present (Margalit 2013). However, support for policy and values related to redistribution is more volatile during adversity (Reeskens and Vandecasteele 2017). This may have helped spur the rise of the populist right. While adversity generally makes people more supportive of corrective

socioeconomic policy, it also results in people voting for conservative and populist parties in both Europe and the United States. However, this appears to be motivated more by a desire for economic nationalism (pro-isolationist stances) than opposition to social welfare policies designed to help the poor (Mughan et al. 2003). Thus, even though people may vote more conservatively in the face of adversity, they do not necessarily become more conservative in policy support. This reiterates an earlier point made by Page and Jacobs (2009) whereby Americans claim to be ideologically conservative but support government policy across various issues.

There is reason to believe that those facing more debt will be more supportive of certain socioeconomic policies than those who owe less debt. This is especially true for policies that aim to address debt-related concerns. Since we know that adversity makes people more likely to support socioeconomic policy, and we have reason to believe that debt is a form of economic adversity, it logically follows that debt should affect policy support. This should be especially true in the case of policies explicitly designed to address a given form of debt, such as relief for medical bill debt or college debt. However, this relationship may be muted in part depending on how salient the issue is. As Rehm et al. (2012) and McCall et al. (2017) point out, salience is crucial in policy support. If people are aware of economic adversity and view it as a threat, they will become more supportive of combatting it. I expect that the same should happen as people become aware of debt. When people are less aware of debt as a societal issue, the relationship between debt and policy support will likely become muted. Thus, under certain circumstances, there may not be a connection between debt and policy support where we might otherwise expect one to exist.

Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

Based on the preceding discussion, I have developed the following hypotheses:

H1: Personal debt is positively associated with support for policies designed to alleviate economic insecurity and adversity. In short, as debt increases, support for these policies increases.

H2: H1 holds most true in cases where the policy in question is meant to address a specific form of debt that a respondent owes (e.g., college loan forgiveness for someone with many student loans).

H3: The relationship between debt and policy support is mediated by salience. When income inequality and economic adversity are more salient, people become more supportive of policies designed to address these issues. Here, as debt becomes a more salient issue, people are more likely to support policies designed to alleviate economic inequality and adversity.

Unfortunately, no good data exist on debt and political behavior. Thus, I generated my data to test my hypotheses. I describe my data and how I collected it in the previous chapter.

Key Independent Variables

In this chapter, like the last, I rely on several debt-related independent variables to test my hypotheses. These variables are described in the previous chapter. I also measure the salience of economic inequality and adversity in two ways. First, I directly ask respondents if they are worried about their financial situation. This variable takes on five separate values from 1 – 5,

with 1 indicating the respondent was “Not at all worried” about their financial situation, and 5 means “Extremely worried.” This variable is called *Finworry*. The second measure is derived from a question asking respondents about what they believed to be the most important problem facing the U.S. currently. Respondents who chose either unemployment, healthcare and costs, lack of money, wage issues, or income inequality as the most important issue were tagged as viewing economic adversity as a salient issue. In these cases, this variable, *Concernincadver*, takes on a value of 1. Otherwise, it takes on a value of 0. Since these two variables have a low correlation value, I incorporate them together in my regression models.³

Dependent Variables

I analyze attitudes on several forms of socioeconomic policy. First, I ask a question probing if a respondent supported Donald Trump’s 2017 tax cut. Second, I ask if the respondent agreed with the statement, “Government should play a large role in helping people feel economically secure.” Third, I ask a question about support for short-term governmental assistance for those whose incomes recently dropped in exchange for a small tax hike. Fourth, I ask about support for a policy providing a baseline income for retirees. Fifth, I ask respondents if they would also support a homeowner’s protection plan from mortgage fraud in exchange for a small tax hike. Each of these five policy questions had a Likert-scale response set with values ranging from 1 – 7, whereby 1 is the most supportive of the policy, and 7 is the least. However, to put liberal policy stances together, I flipped the values of the 2017 tax law such that lower values indicated support, and higher values indicated opposition. Thus, for all five variables, lower values indicate a liberal policy attitude. After these first five policies, I asked a sixth question about support for raising the minimum wage. The question had four possible responses:

1 = raise the minimum wage, 2 = leave the minimum wage alone, 3 = lower the minimum wage, and 4 = eliminate the minimum wage. A seventh question queried respondents about the government's role in providing aid for paying medical bills. Possible responses were: 1 = government should help, 2 = both the government and people should be responsible, 3 = the government should play no role, and 4 = don't know. Lastly, an eighth question asked if people supported college loans from the government that would not need to be paid back. The responses for this were 1 = yes, -1 = no, and 0 = don't know. Respectively, these variables' names are *Tax*, *Govsec*, *Aid4tax*, *Govretire*, *Homeprot*, *Minwage*, *Hospaid*, and *Collaid*. The survey questions for these variables are as follows:

1. Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the 2017 tax cuts?
2. Tell me whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: Government should play a large role in helping people feel economically secure.
3. How much would you approve of a new federal program providing short-term financial support to people whose incomes dropped substantially and unexpectedly, if this increased your own taxes by \$50 annually?
4. Tell me whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: Government should guarantee an adequate retirement income for all its citizens.
5. How much would you approve of a new federal program that would protect homeowners from financial practices that threatened their credit or might cause them to lose their homes, if this increased your own taxes by \$50 annually?

6. Should the minimum wage be raised, kept the same, lowered but not eliminated, or eliminated altogether?
7. In general, some people think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills. Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?
8. Some people think the government should provide financial assistance to college students. Others think the government should not provide such aid. In general, do you believe the government should provide grants that would not have to be paid back?

Modeling

To avoid problems of parallel regression, I recoded all of the policy support variables into binary equivalents where 1 means support for a given policy and 0 means either neutrality or opposition (with the one exception being the 2017 tax law, whereby 1 is equivalent to opposing it). Thus, instead of estimating the relationship between the variables using ordered logit,⁴ I utilize standard logit models. These new binary variables are named *Taxb*, *Govsecb*, *Aid4taxb*, *Govretireb*, *Homeprotb*, *Minwageb*, *Hospaidb*, and *Collaidb*. Following this, I then formulate four separate models analyzing the impact of debt on policy support. Two of the models (1 and 3) examine the impact of debt alongside the salience variables, *Finworry* and *Concernincadver*. The other two look at the impact of debt when the salience variables are excluded (Models 2 and 4). Two models, additionally, will look at the impact of mortgage debt alone (Models 1 and 2),

while the other two look at the impact of college, credit card, medical bill, and other debts together (Models 3 and 4).⁵

Among the eight policies, there are five different measures of debt analyzed (mortgage debt alone, and college debt, credit card debt, medical bill debt, and other debts together). Also, only the variable *Pidrep* is kept as a measure of political ideology due to heavy multicollinearity between party ID, approval for Trump, and self-reported ideology.⁸ Thus, they are also dropped from the final model. The variables for debt, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, age, religiosity, marital status, college degree, if employed full time, health, identification with the Republican Party, household income, personal income, political interest, and debt all remain in the final estimated models. These take the general form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Policy Support} = & \beta_1(\text{Gender}) + \beta_2(\text{Age}) + \beta_3(\text{Hispanic}) + \beta_4(\text{Nonwhite}) + \beta_5(\text{religio}) + \beta_6(\text{Educ2}) \\ & + \beta_7(\text{Married}) + \beta_8(\text{Workft}) + \beta_9(\text{Finworry}) + \beta_{10}(\text{concernincadver}) + \beta_{11}(\text{Pidrep}) \\ & + \beta_{12}(\text{Houseinc}) + \beta_{13}(\text{Persinc}) + \beta_{14}(\text{Polinter}) + \beta_{15}(\text{Debt}) \end{aligned}$$

In general, there is little change in the models across the analyses. Only two are worth mentioning. First, there is variation in terms of the form of debt between mortgage debt alone and nonmortgage debts added into a single model. The second change is the inclusion of (or exclusion thereof) the financial worry and economic adversity variables. To summarize, there are four separate models analyzing the effect of debt on policy support. Model 1 examines mortgage debt with the economic adversity variables. Model 2 examines mortgage debt without the adversity variables. Model 3 examines nonmortgage debts with the adversity variables. Model 4

examines nonmortgage debts without the adversity variables. Thus, this results in 32 separate regressions, with four models for each of eight different policies.

Analysis

Before I conduct my analyses, I will provide detailed basic statistics on the debt variables. The number of and percentage of people who owe debt, the forms of debt they owe, and the median amount owed in each category are again summarized in [Table 1a](#).

In total, across the 654 total respondents, a strong majority (74.76%) reported having some form of debt. Of those, 378 (61.04% of the total) reported having non-mortgage debt. Some attrition occurred in terms of responses among the individual categories of debt. Still, overall we see that more than two-fifths (42.09% of 627) of respondents owed money on a mortgage, roughly a fifth (22.03% out of 631) reported having college debt, nearly half (44.59% of 628) reported having credit card debt, about one-sixth (17.77% of 619) claimed to owe on medical bills, and about one-eighth (12.14% of 626) owed miscellaneous debts. In sum, most respondents owed money, with credit card and mortgage debts being the most common. These descriptive statistics are hardly surprising.

Additional descriptive statistics are provided for the individual policy attitudes. These statistics include how many people answered in a supportive or oppositional manner to each policy and how many respondents answered each question. I have listed these results in [Table 1c](#).

As evidenced by this table, all of the policies have at least a bare majority level of support. Hospital bill aid had the lowest level of support, whereby about 51% of respondents supported the policy and almost 49% of respondents had either neutral or negative feelings toward it. The highest level of support existed for generic government support. Nearly 72% of

respondents supported this policy stance, with only about 28% either espousing neutral or negative feelings toward it. Most policies examined here have the support of between 62 to 72% support of respondents. Other than a hospital aid bill, support for the 2017 tax law was the only other policy that did not achieve at least 60% support, as 55.57% of respondents approved of the law, while 44.43% disapproved.

In short, as a group, my respondents were generally supportive of governmental policies designed to address inequality and economic adversity. The two most polarizing policy issues were support for the 2017 Trump tax plan and governmental aid for paying medical bills. This is unsurprising, given both the extent to which Donald Trump is viewed as a polarizing figure and the policy divide on healthcare in the U.S. In contrast, high levels of support for the other policies confirm claims that people generally support government involvement on such matters (Page and Jacobs 2009; McCall 2013; McCall et al. 2017). Though I have yet to see how divided Republicans and non-Republicans are on these issues, my data provide preliminary support for the claim that Americans are “ideologically conservative, operationally liberal.”

I lastly look at bivariate correlations between each form of debt and each of the policies studied here. As before, this is to solely look at the relationship between debt and support prior to the inclusion of control variables. Once again utilizing the STATA *pwcorr* command, I look at the Pearson’s correlation coefficient values between policy support and debt. Again, though not necessarily ideal, Pearson’s correlation may be preferable to Spearman’s correlation coefficient, as the latter assumes that at least one variable is ordinal. In this analysis, however, no dependent variables are ordinal. I present these bivariate results in [Table 2c](#).

As suggested by this table, only one policy proposal has an absolute correlation value of over 0.1000. This is credit card debt with government security, though this negative relationship

is contrary to expectations. None of the other correlations come close to an absolute value of 0.1000, though most correlations are otherwise positively-signed outside of the 2017 tax law, which conforms with expectations. I now move onto a multivariate discussion of the relationship between debt burden and each one of the individual policies, starting with a discussion of debt's relationship with support for the 2017 tax law.

Debt and Support for the 2017 Tax Law

In this section, I look at the relationship between debt/adversity and support for Donald Trump's 2017 tax law, also known as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. This tax law reduced tax rates across all income brackets and granted big tax breaks to corporations. Lesser known are the law's reductions of tax deductibles and personal exemptions, making it harder for some people to engage in write-offs to lower their taxes. The bill was very controversial while in Congress, passing without a single vote from the Democratic Party. Ultimately, it was signed by President Trump. The law was largely unpopular with the American public as a whole, with only about 29.5% of Americans approving of the law, and 51.1% disapproving of it, on December 22nd, 2017, the day it was signed into law (Real Clear Politics 2019).

Incorporating the variables discussed in the previous section, I look at how well the four models explain support for the law. Though the law became more popular over time as its effects began to take hold, later RCP surveys still found that more Americans disliked the law than liked it. For May 17th, 2019 (the most recent date for which data are available), 33.5% of Americans approved of the law, while 39.3% disapproved of it. At 44.43% support, my survey results suggest that the law may have become slightly less controversial in the year between the last RCP result and my survey. With roughly equal parts of the population favoring the law, it

remains to be seen how various factors affect support. I present the results for all four models and my variables in [Table 3c](#).

Remembering that a value of 1 here indicates opposition to the law, we can see that no forms of debt are significant in determining support for the tax law. Burden of debt relative to income does not affect support for the law. However, in all cases other than mortgage debt, debt is negatively related to opposition to the tax law. This would indicate that having a higher college loan, credit card, medical, or miscellaneous debt load would result in people becoming more likely to support the tax law. However, these relationships are not significant at the 90% confidence level or greater. Thus, in the case of the tax law, I find no support for H1, which claims that debt has a negative effect on support.

Looking at the adversity variables, we can see that personal concerns about adversity are not statistically significantly related to support for the law. However, the positive and significant coefficient on *Concernincadver* in Model 1 means that general concern for economic adversity is associated with support for the law. This holds at the 95% confidence level. Those who believed that economic adversity was a serious issue had a 0.5892 probability of opposing or feeling neutral toward the 2017 tax law, compared to a 0.4443 probability for the rest of the sample. In contrast, generalized concern for adversity is not related to support for the tax law in Model 3. In any event, that one measure of adversity was significant while the other was not, is unsurprising. This is because generalized concern for adversity and specific concern for adversity had a very weak (0.0053) correlation with one another. Thus, we would expect the effect of either variable on support to be largely independent.

Moving on to other variables, only the measures of political interest and identification with the Republican Party are statistically significant in all models. These two variables are

significant at the 99% confidence level in all models. A negative sign on the coefficient on *Pidrep* indicates that Republicans were more likely to support the 2017 law than non-Republicans were. A positive sign on the coefficient on *Polinter* suggests that interest is positively associated with feeling neutral or opposing the 2017 law. Beyond this, only household income appears to have some effect on opposition to the law. In Models 1 and 2, this relationship just fails to attain significance at the 95% confidence level, though it fails to attain significance at the 90% confidence level in both Models 3 and 4.

In sum, Republican Party identification, concern for generalized adversity, and political interest appear to be the main determinants of attitudes toward the 2017 tax law. I find no support for H1 here. Removing Republican Party identification (as I do in some of the later models) appears to have no impact on the effects of debt burdens. As none of the debt variables were significant for any of the models here, I cannot ascertain if there is support for H3. Since it is unlikely that debt burden from any particular form of debt will have a theoretical relationship with support for the tax law, this finding is not surprising. I will now move onto the second policy.

Debt and Support for Economic Security from the Government

In this section, I examine the relationship between debt, adversity, and support for the idea that government should ensure economic security for people. Unlike other sections, the question posed for this section looks at generalized support for the concept of social welfare from the government. As before, I utilize the same four models analyzing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. I have presented these results in [Table 4c](#).

Here, debt is only significant in the case of credit card debt. The coefficient on *Debtcredr* is negative and significant at the 95% confidence level, contrary to H1. This means that those with higher credit-card-to-income ratios are either more apathetic toward or less likely to support the idea of the government playing a role in ensuring economic security. Those whose ratio of credit-card-debt-to-income was at the mean value had between a 0.7597 and 0.7599 probability of holding favorable views toward the idea of government providing economic security with Models 3 and 4, respectively, as compared with a 0.7906 probability among those who had no credit card debt while all other variables were held at their mean values. This decreased to between a 0.2746 and 0.3178 probability of supporting government economic aid at the 99th percentile of credit card debt for Models 3 and 4, respectively. Beyond this, no other form of debt had an impact on support for economic assistance. Additionally, all forms of debt other than hospital debt were negatively signed, indicating a negative relationship between debt and for economic assistance from the government.

Moving onto adversity, only personal adversity is relevant in Model 3. The coefficient for *Finworry* is positive and significant at the 90% confidence level, indicating that individual adversity yields higher support for aid from the government. Though the coefficients on the other debt variables are also positively signed, none of these results are significant at the 90% confidence level or greater. Thus, we cannot be sure if personal or generalized adversity concerns have an impact on support. Additionally, the one time that personal adversity is relevant, its impact appears to be independent of the effect of credit card debt. This is contrary to H3, though it may be partly expected since credit card debt's effect is the opposite of what H1 would suggest.

Beyond this, we can see that the coefficients on both *Age* and *Pidrep* are significant in all four models. Additionally, the coefficients on both variables are negatively signed. This indicates that older and Republican respondents were less likely to support government assistance for ensuring economic security. These effects are also independent of one another, indicating that older non-Republicans are also less supportive of government assistance than younger ones. When looking at other variables, only nonwhite identification (*Nonwhite*) and full-time work (*Workft*) had something of an effect on support for government economic assistance. This was the case at 90% confidence in Models 3 and 4 for nonwhite background and only Model 4 for full-time work. The finding for race is interesting given the history of discrimination in this country. This may be a product of the variable incorporating all racial minorities together. This may lead some groups to support a role for the government in addressing such concerns and others not to do so. Since the variable is also only significant at the 90% confidence level, this relationship may be spurious. Likewise, given that full-time work was only significant in Model 4, this finding may also be spurious. Except for this, no other variables appear to affect support for the government's generalized role in addressing economic concerns.

Support for Government Aid in Exchange for a Tax Hike

This next section looks at support for a government plan that would provide brief aid from the government for those facing economic adversity in exchange for a minor tax hike of \$50 a year on those not part of this program. This program is a more specific example of the prior section's policy suggestion. In addition, it highlights the clear conflict between aid from the government and the means by which the program is funded. The results are presented in [Table 5c](#).

Here, in no case is the debt-to-income ratio statistically significant, nor do any of the coefficients on the debt variables approach significance. In addition, three forms of debt appear to have negative relationships with policy support (college debt, credit card debt, and miscellaneous debt), suggesting that a higher debt-to-income ratio reduces support for economic aid in exchange for a slight tax hike. In addition, only one form of adversity seems important. The positive and significant coefficient on *Concernincadver* means that increased general concern increases support for the policy (see Model 3). In all, I only find minimal support for the idea that adversity influences support for economic aid in exchange for a small tax hike.

Other factors, however, influence support. For example, *Gender* has a substantial impact on willingness to partake in such a social program. In all four models, women were statistically significantly (at the 99% confidence level) more likely than men to support such a policy. Political interest (*Polinter*) has a similar effect. At the 99% confidence level, we can see that politically interested people are more likely to express support for this policy than are uninterested respondents. A weaker effect exists with the variable for household income (*Houseinc*). Those who live in higher-income households were more likely to support a government plan that raised their taxes slightly in exchange for providing economic security to those who lost their incomes suddenly. These effects ranged from significant at the 90% confidence level (Models 3 and 4) to significant at the 95% confidence level (Models 1 and 2). Identification with the Republican Party (*Pidrep*) was the only significant variable to have a negative effect on support. This effect was consistently significant at the 99% confidence level or greater for all four models.

Overall, I do not find support here for the notion that either adversity or debt has an effect on support for a government program that assists those whose income vanishes in exchange for a

minor tax hike. Thus, I find no support for either H1 or H3. Other variables, notably party ID, political interest, income, and gender, influence this policy. One thing of note here is that in the more generalized government assistance policy question (prior section), Age had a statistically significant and negative impact on support for such a policy. However, there is no age effect here. This contrasts with the prior section, where age was significant at the 95% confidence level or greater for all four models. All of this may support Page and Jacobs (2009), who suggest that Americans are philosophically conservative but operationally liberal. Beyond this, no findings were particularly surprising, though one more is worth making a note of. The positive effect of political interest on support may reflect more interested non-Trump voters expressing their support for a policy over less-interested Trump respondents who do not typically identify as Republicans but may espouse a more conservative worldview. Nonetheless, all of the models with this policy yielded lower pseudo R^2 values than those of the generalized policy stance. This indicates that the models were somewhat less effective at explaining variation with the specific policy than the generalized one. In any event, I do not find much support for any of the hypotheses with this policy.

Debt and Support for a Government-Sponsored Retirement Income Program

Now I will examine the relationship between debt and adversity on support for a government-sponsored policy that guarantees a baseline income for retired individuals. Unlike the prior policy (and like the one before that), this is a generalized policy plan instead of a specific approach to tackling a socioeconomic issue. Thus, I am tapping an instance of ideology toward policy rather than a case of operational support. I list the results for this fourth policy in [Table 6c](#).

First and foremost, there again appears to be no relationship between debt and support for a retirement income program. Additionally, the coefficient on three debt variables (*Debtmortr*, *Colldebtr*, and *Hospdebtr*) is positive, while that on the other two (*Debtcredr* and *Otherdebtr*) is negative. Had these results been significant, it would have indicated mixed results on the impact of debt on support. Moving onto economic adversity, we can see that the effects for each are quite different. Personal adversity (*Finworry*) is an important determinant of support for a program providing a minimum income for retirees. This coefficient is positive and significant at greater than the 99% confidence level in Models 1 and 3. However, generalized concern for adversity has a much weaker effect. The coefficient on *Concernincadver* is positive and significant only at the 90% confidence level in Model 3 but fails to attain significance in Model 1. In analyses not reported here, I find that much of the effect of generalized adversity concerns is masked by partisanship.⁷ Upon removing Republican identification (*Pidrep*), generalized adversity attains significance at greater than the 99% confidence level in Model 3 and just fails to attain significance at this level in Model 1. Thus, though both measures of adversity influence support for a baseline retirement income, only personal concerns have a very significant effect on support for the policy when partisanship is included.

Moving on to other variables, we can see that only Republican identification (*Pidrep*) is consistently significant at the 99% confidence level in all four models. The coefficient is always negative, indicating that Republicans were less likely to support a government-sponsored minimum income for retirees than non-Republicans. Though unsurprising, the strength of this relationship is noteworthy. Compared to all other effects in the models, the coefficients on Republican identification are greater than all other coefficients. As noted before, this caused this variable to absorb much of the effect of generalized concern for adversity on support for a base

retirement income. However, removing this variable from the model also altered the significance of several other variables. For example, *Gender* is only significant at the 90% confidence level for Model 3 when Republican identification is included. When excluded, however, this variable becomes significant at the 95% confidence level for all four models and remains positively signed. The same is true of *Hispanic* upon removal of Republican identification. This variable remains significant at the 90% confidence level in Model 3, while gaining significance at the 90% confidence level in Model 1, and gaining significance at the 95% confidence level for Models 2 and 4. In the process, it also retains its positive coefficient. Lastly, religiosity (*Religio*) becomes significant at the 99% confidence level in all four models and retains its negative signs when Republican identification is removed. This is an improvement over attaining significance only for Models 1 and 2 at the 90% confidence level.

In sum, debt does not appear to help determine support for a base retirement income from the government. This applies to all forms of debt. In some cases, the signs were the opposite of those predicted by H1. I cannot test H3 here since no forms of debt were significant. I find evidence that adversity (both generalized and personal) has a positive effect on support for a government-sponsored baseline income. This is especially true for generalized concern about adversity when the Republican Party identification variable is removed. Several other variables also gain significance when this variable is removed from the model, including Hispanic identification, gender, and religiosity. Thus, at least part of the effect of many variables on support for this policy is superseded by partisanship.

Support for a Homeowner's Protection Plan for a Tax Hike

This section examines support for a homeowner's protection plan in exchange for a tax hike of \$50. The results for all four models are presented in [Table 7c](#).

As evidenced by this table, mortgage debt (*Debtmortr*) affected support for a homeowner's protection plan in Models 1 and 2. Specifically, a higher mortgage debt-to-income ratio increased the likelihood that one would support the policy. This relationship is significant at the 90% confidence level. As this form of debt is closely tied to homeownership, this support offers mild support for H2. In addition, the impact of debt, in general, offers some weaker support for H1. Since mortgage debt is significant regardless of whether the adversity variables are included or not, there is no evidence to support H3. For Model 1, respondents with no debt had a 0.6222 probability of supporting the protection plan, compared to a 0.8135 probability at the 99th percentile of debt-to-income. In additional unreported analyses, removal of partisanship (as in the prior section) does not alter the statistical significance of the impact of mortgage debt. No other forms of debt impact support for this policy and their signs again vary as in several of the prior sections. Neither generalized (*Concernincadver*) nor personal adversity (*Finworry*) had an effect in determining support for this program (though generalized adversity had a positive impact significant at the 90% confidence level on support when *Pidrep* was removed).

Moving onto other variables, several variables are consistently significant at the 90% confidence level or greater in all four models. The least significant of these variables is *Educ2*. The negative and significant coefficient on this variable in all models means that those with a college degree were less likely to support a homeowner's protection program than those without one. Republican Party identification (*Pidrep*) also negatively impacted support. This was significant at greater than the 99% confidence level for all four models, indicating its effect was

more important than college education. However, we can see that the variables for *Gender* and political interest (*Polinter*) are positively signed. This indicates that women and those who were more politically interested showed more support for a homeowner's protection plan than men, and uninterested respondents did. All eight coefficients on both variables were significant at the 95% confidence level. The only other variable that demonstrated some level of significance was *Hispanic*. Respondents who were Hispanic were more likely to support a homeowner's protection plan in Models 3 and 4 at the 90% confidence level, but not in Models 1 and 2 (though removing the Republican identification variable brought the Model 1 and 2 coefficients to significance at the 90% confidence level).

In general, I find the expected pattern between higher mortgage debt burdens and support for a homeowner's protection plan. A higher mortgage debt-to-income ratio appeared to have some effect on increasing the likelihood of support for such a policy, though this relationship is only significant at the 90% confidence level even when partisanship is ignored. This provides some weak evidence for both H1 and H2, as more debt appeared to increase support for a policy specifically connected to a given form of debt. However, I cannot ascertain if economic adversity might affect policy support, as none of these coefficients were significant in Models 1 or 3. Beyond this, political interest, college education, Republican identification, and gender had a consistent effect on support. Hispanic identification only had a negligible effect when the Republican identification variable was removed.

Debt and Support for Raising the Minimum Wage

This section looks at the relationship between debt burden, economic adversity, and support for raising the minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage has been a contentious issue

between Republicans and Democrats since at least 2009, when the federal government last raised it. The results for all four models are presented in [Table 8c](#).

From this table, we can see that debt burden does not influence support for raising the minimum wage. Though the signs for all of the debt-related coefficients (except miscellaneous debt) are positive as expected, the variables are not significant at the 90% confidence level or greater. As such, we cannot conclude that debt affects support for raising the minimum wage. Thus, I find no support here for H1. Since there is no theoretical connection between debt and support for the minimum wage, this is not necessarily surprising. Moving onto adversity, we see that personal adversity (see the coefficient on *Finworry*) is unimportant, though generalized adversity (see the coefficient on *Concernincadver*) is somewhat important. The coefficient on *Concernincadver* is significant at the 90% confidence level in Model 1 and the 95% confidence level in Model 3. However, removing the Republican ID (*Pidrep*) variable causes generalized adversity to attain significance at the 99% confidence level. Personal economic adversity does not change significance when this variable is excluded. In all cases, the signs are positive, indicating that generalized adversity increases support for raising the minimum wage.

Moving on to other variables, we see that Republican ID (*Pidrep*) has the most consistent and most significant effect on support for raising the minimum wage. The coefficient is negative and significant at greater than the 99% confidence level in all models. As for other variables, *Gender* and both forms of income have effects as well. In all four models, women are more likely than men to support an increase in the minimum wage. This holds true at the 90% confidence level for all models and increases to significance at 95% confidence for all except Model 2 when *Pidrep* is removed. Household income (*Houseinc*) and personal income (*Persinc*) have opposite effects on support. Those with higher household incomes are statistically

significantly more supportive of raising the minimum wage in Models 1 and 2 at the 90% confidence level. Removal of *Pidrep* increases this to significant at the 95% confidence level in Model 1 and raises the coefficients to be significant at the 90% confidence level in Models 3 and 4. For personal income, however, the effect is negative. This effect is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level in Models 1 and 2 and at the 95% confidence level in both Models 3 and 4. Removal of Republican ID does not notably alter these results. The only other variable that appeared to have a minimal effect on increasing support for raising the minimum wage was political interest (*Polinter*). This was only significant at the 90% confidence level in Model 1, however. However, when Republican ID was removed, this variable became significant at the 95% confidence level for Models 1, 2, and 4 and significant at the 90% confidence level for Model 3. Removing *Pidrep* from the model did not affect the significance of other variables.

To summarize, no form of debt burden had an effect on support for raising the minimum wage. However, generalized (though not personal) adversity seemed to increase support for raising the minimum wage. However, much of the actual effect of generalized concern for adversity is hidden by the impact of partisanship. Once the Republican identification variable was removed, generalized concern for economic adversity has a powerful and positive impact on support for raising the minimum wage. Removal of Republican identification had less of an effect on changing the significance of other variables. Income and gender remained significant and only gained significance at one confidence level with the party ID variable's removal.

Debt and Support for Government Aid for Medical Bills:

This section examines the relationship between debt, adversity, and support for federal assistance for paying medical bills. I present the results for these models in [Table 9c](#).

Two things, in particular, stand out here. First, hospital debt burden (*Hospdebtr*) is not significant at the 90% confidence level or greater in any model. Second, the coefficient is negatively signed, indicating that had this relationship been significant, it would suggest that a higher medical bill debt burden would *reduce* support for a medical bill assistance program. However, the coefficient on *Debtmortr* is positive and significant at the 90% confidence level in Model 1, indicating that higher mortgage debt burdens made respondents more likely to support government medical bill assistance. The coefficient on this variable in Model 2 just barely fails to attain significance at 90% confidence. Removal of the partisanship variable does not change the direction or significance of the impact of medical bill debt burden. However, this removal does cause the coefficient on *Debtmortr* to attain significance at the 90% confidence level in Model 2 and leads both to just fail at attaining significance at 95% confidence. As such, I only find weak support for H1 and no support for H2. Moving on to adversity, we see that both personal and generalized concern for adversity leads respondents to become more supportive of a program assisting people with their medical bills (see the coefficients on *Finworry* and *Concernincadver* in Models 1 and 3). These relationships are significant at greater than the 99% confidence level. Additionally, the impact of generalized and personal adversity does not appear to affect the significance of mortgage debt. Thus, I find no support for H3 here.

Moving onto other variables, the only variables that superficially appear to affect are *Pidrep* and *Polinter*. The former's coefficient has a negative sign and is significant at well over 99% confidence in all four models. As expected, this indicates that Republican identifiers were much less likely to back a government program providing financial assistance for paying medical bills than Democrats were. However, political interest has a positive effect on support for this policy. This effect is significant at the 99% confidence level in all four models as well.

Removing the Republican identification variable changes the significance of a few non-debt and non-adversity variables. These are the religiosity (*Religio*), full-time work (*Workft*), household income (*Houseinc*), and *Gender* measures. As for gender, women are more supportive of the policy at 90% confidence in Models 1 and 2, but neither of the other two. Religiosity has the opposite effect. At the 99% confidence level, those who attended a place of worship more frequently were much less likely to support a government assistance program for paying medical bills. The same effect (significant at the 90% confidence level in Models 1 and 2 and the 95% confidence level in Models 3 and 4) is observed among full-time workers. Lastly, individuals from higher-income households were more likely to support such a program (significant at the 95% confidence level in Models 2, 3, and 4; significant at the 99% confidence level in Model 1) than were individuals who came from poorer households.

These results are quite interesting. Hospital debt does not have a significant effect, with or without the Republican identification variable, and it is negatively signed, contrary to H1 and H2. Additionally, both of the economic adversity variables were significant and positively signed. Thus, both individual concerns and concerns about the economic well-being of society improved support for this policy.

Debt and Support for College Loan Forgiveness

In this last section, I look at the impact of debt burden and economic adversity on support for a college loan forgiveness program. This is a highly contentious issue and has been since at least the start of the Occupy Wall Street Movement (Graeber 2012). Unfortunately for this policy, an error was made on the survey, which I highlight in the footnotes section⁶. Nonetheless, I do not believe this will severely bias the results, which I have presented in [Table 10c](#).

At first glance, it appears that college debt (*Colldebtr*) has only a minimal effect on support for loan forgiveness. Its coefficient is significant at the 90% confidence level in Model 4, though it retains a positive sign as expected. Upon removing the Republican ID (*Pidrep*) variable, however, college debt attains significance at the 90% confidence level in Model 3 (just failing to attain significance at 95% confidence) and reaches significance at the 95% confidence level in Model 4. After removing the said variable, an individual with no college debt had between a 0.7061 and a 0.7158 probability of supporting a college loan forgiveness plan when all other variables were held at their means for Models 3 and 4. By comparison, an individual at the 99th percentile of college debt burden had between a 0.9520 and 0.9596 probability of supporting such a plan when all other variables were held at their means for Models 3 and 4, respectively. Thus, at least part of this effect is subsumed by the inclusion of the partisanship variable. Interestingly, there also appears to be a weak negative effect of hospital debt (*Hospdebtr*) burden on support for such a policy, significant only at the 90% confidence level in Model 3. However, this effect disappears entirely when the Republican partisanship variable is removed. This suggests that this effect is likely spurious. Overall, I find support for H1 and H2 here.

Moving onto adversity, we can see that only personal adversity (*Finworry*) affects support for a college loan forgiveness plan. Both coefficients are positive and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level for both Models 1 and 3, which means that personal economic adversity improves the likelihood of supporting such a program. Though the coefficient on *Concernincadver* is also positively signed, neither of its coefficients are significant at the 90% confidence level or greater. The exclusion of the partisanship variable does not alter either of these results. Additionally, the effect of debt burden on support for college loan forgiveness occurs independently of the adversity variables, providing no support for H3.

Moving onto the other variables, we can see that *Gender* and *Pidrep* have a consistently significant effect on support for a college loan forgiveness program. For the former, women are more likely to support such a policy than men are. This is significant in all four models at the 99% confidence level. Being a Republican, in contrast, has the opposite effect. Republicans were less likely to support such a policy, significant in all models at the 99% confidence level. *Age* had a much weaker, negative impact that was significant only in Models 1 (95% confidence level) and 2 (90% confidence level). Removing the partisanship variable only altered the significance of *Hispanic* (positive effect, significant at the 90% confidence level in Models 1, 3, and 4), full-time work (*Workft*; negative effect, significant at the 90% confidence level in Models 1 and 2), and religiosity (*Religio*; negative effect, significant at the 99% confidence level in all models).

To summarize, I find evidence that college debt positively impacts the likelihood of supporting a college loan forgiveness plan, though this effect is weaker than expected. A lot of this impact is subsumed by the impact of partisanship. When partisanship is removed, the impact of college loan burden becomes significant at a higher level of confidence and retains its positive sign. I find some support for H1 and H2. However, the effect of college loan debt is independent of the adversity variables' presence, in contrast to H3. Additionally, only personal adversity is an important determinant of support for a college loan forgiveness program, irrespective of if partisanship is included.

Conclusion

In recent decades, many trends have played out in American politics, which may threaten the future well-being of democracy. For example, we have seen a precipitous decline in trust in

government. This development threatens the capacity of the government to resolve societal problems. Simultaneously, scholars have observed a rise in economic inequality and economic adversity, which further threaten the mass citizenry's ability to influence their government. Exacerbating this further is the resurgence of partisan polarization to levels not seen since the beginning of the 20th century. Beyond this, another trend has taken place over the same timeframe to which political scientists have paid little attention. This is the rise in consumer debt. Americans owe more in outstanding balances now than at any point in U.S. history, even when accounting for population growth and inflation. This has taken place alongside the decline of the American welfare state.

Nonetheless, Americans remain generally supportive of government policies to alleviate economic adversity and insecurity in practice, even as they oppose them in theory. Large majorities of respondents in this survey demonstrated support for most of the government policies in this paper, except for the 2017 tax law and a hospital debt assistance program. Debt burden appears to have some effect on support for these programs. As one's debt burden (measured by the amount of debt one had relative to their income) increased, there was a general pattern supporting government policies. A few coefficients were negatively signed (indicating lessened support), though these were almost always not significant. However, debt did not affect support for all policies. Debt had the most significant impact on support for policies where it had a direct theoretical connection. For example, mortgage debt burden had a positive effect on support for a homeowner's protection program. Similarly, a higher college loan debt burden improved support for a college loan forgiveness program. These effects were partly obscured by the impact of partisanship on the models. When removed, both effects improved in terms of

significance. The one exception to this was hospital bill debt. Higher hospital bill debt was unrelated to a program assisting people in paying for medical bills.

Moving on to the adversity variables, both measures of adversity were generally related to support for the policies I study. More generalized concern for economic adversity and personal adversity improved support for most policies in this paper. In general, their effects superseded those of debt on policy support (except when said debt was tied directly to that policy). In several instances, adversity also became more significant with removing the Republican variable in the models. Thus, at least part of adversity's effect is hidden by the impact of partisanship, as was the case with debt. It is also worth noting that the effect of adversity was independent of debt. The significance of debt did not depend on whether or not the adversity variables were included. As such, whatever effects either of the sets of variables had on policy support, they exerted them independently of one another.

To summarize my findings, I find some support for H1: Higher debt tended to make it more likely for respondents to support socioeconomic policy proposals. I find stronger support for H2: When a given debt was tied to a given policy, the impact of debt was to improve support for that policy, though partisanship obscured some of this effect. The main exception to this was hospital bill debt, which was unrelated to policy support. Partisanship did not play a role in explaining this discrepancy. This may be because most of those respondents who had higher medical debt levels were older, who were generally less supportive of socioeconomic policy. Lastly, I find no support for H3. Though both debt and economic adversity concerns did impact policy support, they did so independently of one another.

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Footnotes

1. Kennedy (1960), Nixon (1968), Carter (1976), Reagan (1980), Clinton (1992), Bush Jr. (2000), Obama (2008), Trump (2016), Biden (2020).
2. The population of the U.S. in 1940 was 132 million, compared to 308 million in 2010.
3. The correlation between *Finworry* and *Concernincadver* is 0.0053.
4. I moved from ordered logit to standard logit because the Brant test refused to perform properly in STATA. Instead of retrieving results, the error “- invalid name; 1 invalid name” was returned upon attempting the Brant test. To avoid issues of parallel regression, logit models were utilized instead. Additionally, the ordered logit results were not significantly different than the results presented here.
5. Upon removing the Republican identification variable, the coefficient for *Concernincadver* shifts from having a p-value of 0.131 to 0.011 in Model 1. In Model 3, this shift moves from a p-value of 0.072 to 0.004.
6. A mistake in the original survey led to the deletion of the “I don’t know” option for the college loan forgiveness question. Thus, respondents who answered the question were forced to take a hard support or oppose stance on the issue. Since these responses are the two primary sides of this debate in the public sphere, I do not believe that this should significantly alter the actual responses that those who answered the question would have given.

CONCLUSION

Consumer debt is an issue of growing salience in the United States. This is largely due to the amount of media attention given to the rise of college debt. However, this is hardly the only form of debt worth noting. With the Great Recession of 2007–2009 and the concurrent housing crisis, mortgage debt came to the forefront of economic discussion. Similarly, we have become aware of unfair credit practices, directed especially toward poor, minority, and other disadvantaged groups. Following decades of private and government investment in its growth, debt has now taken on levels never before seen. Americans are more indebted than ever. Though its growth was initially economic in nature, debt has taken on a strong political intonation. As debt has become increasingly difficult to pay and fallen on certain groups more than others, it seems only inevitable that debt will come to the forefront of political discussion. There is anecdotal evidence that political attention toward debt has increased. As an example, Democratic politicians, in particular, have taken on the issue of college debt. In the process, they have made calls for its alleviation or cancellation. Debt movements have sprung up across the United States and throughout the world more generally. Given how common debt has become, it is hard to imagine a segment of society that has not been affected by its growth in some way.

In my sample, in particular, almost three-quarters of all respondents stated that they held at least one type of debt. Of these, more than half (61%) owed debts that were not mortgage debts. More than 40% of the sample owed either mortgage debt or credit card debt. The least common forms of debt were hospital bill debt (approximately 1/6 respondents) and other debts (about 1/8 of respondents). Among those owing debt, the median amount owed was around \$85,000. Disregarding mortgage debt, the median amount owed on other forms of debt averaged about \$15,000. Unsurprisingly, those with more money had more debt, especially mortgage,

college loan, and credit card debt. Additionally, those with college degrees held more college debt, while Republicans owed less on credit cards, the unhealthy had more medical bills, and men owed more miscellaneous debts than women. Thus, among this random sample of Americans, most were no strangers to indebtedness. This same sample also expressed solid support for various forms of socioeconomic policy while also espousing low levels of political trust and above-average civic and political participation rates. With this, I believe it is worthwhile to learn if debt plays a role in determining their political behavior.

To summarize my findings, the effect of debt on political attitudes and behavior varied noticeably. In the policy paper, I observed the strongest impact of debt. I found that higher levels of mortgage debt increased the likelihood of support for a homeowner's protection program. This is what I expected, given that mortgage debt is tied to homeownership. Similarly, college debt influenced support for a college loan forgiveness program, as was also expected. In both cases, these effects were partly hidden by the presence of a partisanship variable. Thus, the actual impact of debt is underestimated in this paper. Economic adversity, both personal and generalized, also played a large role in determining policy support. The one unusual finding here was that medical bill debt had no impact on support for government assistance in paying medical bills. The coefficient on the medical debt variable was signed negatively, but it was not significant in this model. As such, I cannot determine if there is a relationship between medical debt and support for policy meant to redress it. Debt did not generally impact other policies, though these policies did not directly relate to any form of debt listed here.

For the second paper on participation, debt did not generally have an effect. The most notable exception came in the case of general political participation and college loan debt burden. Those who had a higher college debt burden were active in fewer political activities than

were those with a smaller college debt burden. This trend, however, did not carry over to individual activities. College loan debt did not affect any particular form of political activity. But college loan debt was always negatively signed, and in a few instances, approached significance. This suggests that although college debt did not affect any activity, it did have a cumulative effect on political participation. Additionally, college debt made one less likely to donate money to social causes. Both of these findings conformed with expectations, given that college debt is often perceived in a negative light. The one unusual finding here is that miscellaneous debt made one more likely to join hobby groups. This is likely a spurious finding, as it is hard to draw a theoretical connection between the two, though perhaps people with miscellaneous debt were more likely to join groups dedicated to handling such debt. Lastly, I find little to no evidence that economic adversity played a role in influencing political participation. This goes contrary to the literature on economic adversity, though it may be an artefact of my measure of personal economic adversity.

As for trust, I do not find much evidence that debt has an impact. The two instances where it did were in determining trust in the government in Washington. The coefficients on my mortgage and miscellaneous debt variables were significant in these cases. However, the coefficient on the mortgage debt variable was signed negatively, while that on the miscellaneous debt variable was signed positively. This suggests that owners of more expensive homes were more likely to distrust Washington, while those with higher non-standard debt burdens were more trusting. Both of these results were contrary to expectations. Additionally, I find little to no evidence that economic adversity played a role in influencing trust in the government, though it is always negatively signed as expected. In either event, this variable's insignificance leads me to conclude that financial worries do not influence political trust.

To summarize what I have found here, both debt and economic adversity played their most important roles in determining policy support. Their role in influencing political and civic participation was negligible. The role of both variables was least important in determining trust in government. Furthermore, and more importantly, I do not find evidence that debt burden acts as a form of economic adversity. Its effect on political behavior exists independently of actual measures of adversity. This suggests that where debt impacts behavior, it is operating via a different mechanism than I have proposed. When it does have an effect, most notably on policy support, it is direct. Debt may operate via another mechanism in influencing policy support and participation that I do not discuss here.

A few limitations are worth noting here. First, though I pursue a measurement format for debt that other scholars have used, it is not the best measure given the present data. I use a direct debt-to-income measure that merely compares current debt with current income. There is no information present on how much one actually pays per month on said debts or even pays their debts monthly. It is possible that the measure used in this project may have underestimated the actual effect of debt on political behavior. As such, more effective measures of debt may exist. Second, the individuals in this survey were likely different than the American public at large. For example, the sample was relatively well-off on average (median income, ~\$80,000; mean income, ~\$108,000). Additionally, this sample was overwhelmingly white (86%) and undersampled Hispanic respondents (8% of total respondents). Furthermore, a solid majority of respondents were female (61% of all respondents), and respondents were overwhelmingly well-educated (approximately 92% of respondents held a college degree or better). Thus, the respondents in this sample are not necessarily representative of the general American population. Given this, there may be differences in political behavior between the general public and those in

my sample. Third, I do not find evidence that debt represents a form of economic adversity. However, it is possible that my measure of economic adversity (the additive effect of financial stress and health along with self-reported responses to the most important issue facing the U.S. today) may not be the best measures of economic adversity. Alternative measures may be better suited for an analysis of this sort. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, there may be other forms of political behavior affected by debt, but not others. For example, in my project, debt had a clear effect on policy support but no impact on trust in government. Other forms of political behavior may also be affected by debt. To highlight a few potential examples, debt may impact feelings of political alienation, influence the types of candidates or the party for whom people vote, and affect the political issues that people perceive as most important. Further investigation on this note will be needed.

I would also like to take a moment to discuss a few implications for future research. First and foremost, I would like to recommend that further research on debt and politics be focused chiefly on college debt. This variant of debt, in particular, had the most consistent and strongest effect on political behavior. Given the salience of college debt today, as well as its apparent political effects, I believe that further investigation of the relationships between college debt and political behavior is a potentially fruitful avenue of research. In addition, I also recommend that future work utilize different measures of debt. Since using a measure of overall debt burden fails to capture the actual toll of debt on regular income, I may have underestimated the actual effects of debt in my study. Third, more attention should be given to how the government will handle debt moving forward. Though the government has historically played a role in the growth of debt, it will be interesting to see if it remains a harbinger for the cause in the years to come. This is especially true now that one of the two major political parties in the U.S. has made college

loan forgiveness a centerpiece of its platform. Fourth, I must caution that not too much attention be given to all forms of debt. As I have mentioned before, not all debts are equal. Thus, they should not be expected to have the same, if any, effect on political behavior. I have already provided some evidence in this paper that this is the case. Fifth, I have provided evidence that debt does not act as a form of economic adversity. This is not to say that it is not a form of adversity, but rather that future scientists may want to consider alternative measures of economic adversity. For example, changes in income or loss of a job may make it more difficult for one to pay off their debts. This may make the issue of paying off such bills more salient. In such a case, debt may have an indirect effect through economic adversity.

In any event, I am confident that debt affects some forms of political behavior, most notably policy support. This suggests a few things politically moving forward. If current trajectories continue and Americans become even more indebted, this may shift the policy support landscape. Rising debt may make the public more receptive toward government action on socioeconomic policy more generally. This would be especially true toward policies that are perceived as targeting such debts. Furthermore, tensions between the indebted and less indebted on policy issues may exacerbate with rising political polarization. Party identification's effect on policy support is indicative of this potential future conflict. College debt, in particular, appears to play a role in determining such behavior. This also carries into political activity, where I found that those with more debt were less active in general. As such, tackling college debt, in particular, may be a talking point in the coming years. The willingness of many politicians, notably among the Democratic Party, to discuss the growth of college debt may only be the beginning of this political debate. Drawing further awareness to college debt may, by association, draw attention to other forms of debt as well. For now, it remains to be seen how

politicians will address this issue. More importantly, it remains to be seen how political science can add to the literature on political behavior using debt as a critical variable.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Survey Instrument

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Are you of Hispanic or Spanish origin?
 - a. Yes [1]
 - b. No [2]
- 3) Irrespective of your answer to the previous question, what is your race? Check all that apply.
 - a. White [1]
 - b. Black [2]
 - c. Asian or Pacific Islander [3]
 - d. American Indian/Native American [4]
 - e. Other [5]
- 4) What is your gender?
 - a. Male [1]
 - b. Female [2]
 - c. Other [3]
- 5) How often do you visit a holy place for religious reasons such as going to a shrine, temple, church, or mosque?
 - a. Never [1]
 - b. Less than once a year [2]
 - c. About once or twice a year [3]
 - d. Several times a year [4]
 - e. About once a month or more [5]
- 6) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved to date?
 - a. Less than high school [1]
 - b. High school graduate [2]
 - c. Some college [3]
 - d. Completed college [4]
 - e. Some graduate school [5]
 - f. Completed graduate school [6]
- 7) Are you currently--married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?

- a. Married [1]
 - b. Widowed [2]
 - c. Divorced [3]
 - d. Separated [4]
 - e. Never married [5]
- 8) Last week were you working full time, part time, going to school, or neither going to school nor working?
- a. Working full-time [1]
 - b. Working part-time [2]
 - c. Going to school [3]
 - d. Working and going to school [4]
 - e. Neither going to school nor working [5]
- 9) How many hours did you work last week, at all jobs?
- 10) Would you say your own health, in general, is excellent, good, fair, or poor?
- a. Excellent [1]
 - b. Good [2]
 - c. Fair [3]
 - d. Poor [4]
- 11) Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?
- a. Most of the time [1]
 - b. Some of the time [2]
 - c. Only now and then [3]
 - d. Hardly at all [4]
- 12) When it comes to politics, would you describe yourself as liberal, conservative, or neither liberal nor conservative?
- a. Very liberal [1]
 - b. Somewhat liberal [2]
 - c. Closer to liberal [3]
 - d. Neither liberal nor conservative [4]
 - e. Close to conservative [5]
 - f. Somewhat conservative [6]
 - g. Very conservative [7]

13) Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

- a. Republican [2]
- b. Democrat [1]
- c. Independent [3]
- d. Something else [4]

14) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- a. Closer to the Republican Party [1]
- b. Closer to the Democratic Party [2]
- c. Neither [3]

15) Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

- a. Approve strongly [1]
- b. Approve moderately [2]
- c. Approve slightly [3]
- d. Neither approve nor disapprove [4]
- e. Disapprove slightly [5]
- f. Disapprove moderately [6]
- g. Disapprove strongly [7]

16) About how much total income (in thousands of dollars), before taxes did your household receive last year? If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.

17) What is your best guess of your total personal income before taxes? Include only your own income. If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.

18) So far as you and your family are concerned, how worried are you about your current financial situation?

- a. Not at all worried [1]
- b. A little worried [2]
- c. Moderately worried [3]
- d. Very worried [4]
- e. Extremely worried [5]

19) What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?

- a. Immigration/Illegal aliens [1]

- b. Dissatisfaction with government/Congress/Politicians/Poor leadership/Corruption/Abuse of power [2]
- c. Economy in general [3]
- d. Unemployment/Jobs [4]
- e. Poor healthcare/hospitals; High cost of healthcare [5]
- f. Federal budget deficit/Federal debt [6]
- g. Education/Poor education/Access to education [7]
- h. Ethics/Moral/Religious/Family decline/Dishonesty [8]
- i. Poverty/Hunger/Homelessness [9]
- j. Foreign aid/Focus overseas [10]
- k. Judicial system/Courts/Laws [11]
- l. Lack of money [12]
- m. Taxes [13]
- n. Wage issues [14]
- o. Crime/Violence [15]
- p. Race relations/Racism [16]
- q. Lack of respect for each other [17]
- r. Income inequality

TRUST

20) much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right-just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

- a. Just about always [1]
- b. Most of the time [0]
- c. Some of the time [-1]

21) Do you think that people in government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?

- a. Not very much [1]
- b. Some [0]
- c. A lot [-1]

22) Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?

- a. For the benefit of all [1]
- b. Few big interests [-1]

23) Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?

- a. Hardly any [1]
- b. Not many [0]

- c. Quite a few [-1]

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

24) In the election held on November 6, 2018, did you definitely vote in person on election day, vote in person before Nov 6, vote by mail, did you definitely not vote, or are you not completely sure whether you voted in that election?

- a. Definitely voted [1]
- b. Definitely did not vote [2]
- c. Not completely sure [3]

25) tell me whether you are a member of any of the following. Parent/teacher organization, military veterans' organization, labor union, hobby or sports group, such as a bowling team or a ham radio club, or civic or social organization, such as Junior League, Rotary, or Knights of Columbus (check all that apply).

- a. Parent/teach organization
- b. Military veterans' organization
- c. Labor union
- d. Lobby/sports group
- e. Civic organization

26) Please tell me if you have engaged in any of the following political activities over the past 12 months. Attended a political meeting, donated money to a political issue, joined in a protest/march/rally/demonstration, discussed politics online, displayed political propaganda like a sticker or tag, volunteered for a political cause or campaign, or donated money to a political party or candidate (check all that apply).

- a. Attended a political or social issue meeting
- b. Donated money to a social cause
- c. Joined a protest, rally, demonstration, or march
- d. Discussed politics online
- e. Displayed political propaganda
- f. Volunteered for a political cause or candidate
- g. Donated money to a political party or candidate

POLICY ATTITUDES

27) Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the 2017 tax cuts?

- a. Approve a great deal [1]
- b. Approve a moderate amount [2]
- c. Approve a little [3]
- d. Neither approve nor disapprove [4]
- e. Disapprove a little [5]

- f. Disapprove a moderate amount [6]
 - g. Disapprove a great deal [7]
- 28) Tell me whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: **Government should play a large role in helping people feel economically secure.**
- a. Agree a great deal [1]
 - b. Agree a moderate amount [2]
 - c. Agree a little [3]
 - d. Neither agree nor disagree [4]
 - e. Disagree a little [5]
 - f. Disagree a moderate amount [6]
 - g. Disagree a great deal [7]
- 29) How much would you approve of a new federal program providing short term financial support to people whose incomes dropped substantially and unexpectedly, if this increased your own taxes by \$50 annually?
- a. Approve a great deal [1]
 - b. Approve a moderate amount [2]
 - c. Approve a little [3]
 - d. Neither approve nor disapprove [4]
 - e. Disapprove a little [5]
 - f. Disapprove a moderate amount [6]
 - g. Disapprove a great deal [7]
- 30) Tell me whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: Government should guarantee an adequate retirement income for all its citizens.
- a. Agree a great deal [1]
 - b. Agree a moderate amount [2]
 - c. Agree a little [3]
 - d. Neither agree nor disagree [4]
 - e. Disagree a little [5]
 - f. Disagree a moderate amount [6]
 - g. Disagree a great deal [7]
- 31) How much would you approve of a new federal program that would protect homeowners from financial practices that threatened their credit or might cause them to lose their homes, if this increased your own taxes by \$50 annually?
- a. Approve a great deal [1]
 - b. Approve a moderate amount [2]
 - c. Approve a little [3]

- d. Neither approve nor disapprove [4]
- e. Disapprove a little [5]
- f. Disapprove a moderate amount [6]
- g. Disapprove a great deal [7]

32) Should the minimum wage be raised, kept the same, lowered but not eliminated, or eliminated altogether?

- a. Raised [1]
- b. Kept the same [2]
- c. Lowered [3]
- d. Eliminated [4]

33) In general, some people think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills. Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

- a. Government should help [1]
- b. Agree with both views [2]
- c. People should help themselves [3]
- d. I don't know [4]

34) Some people think the government should provide financial assistance to college students. Others think the government should not provide such aid. In general, do you believe the government should provide grants that would not have to be paid back?

- a. Yes [1]
- b. No [-1]
- c. I don't know [0]

DEBT QUESTIONS

35) Do you have a mortgage?

- a. Yes [1]
- b. No [2]
- c. I don't know [3]

36) (And) how much debt is owed on that mortgage? If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.

37) Do you currently have any credit card or store card debt? Do not count new debt that will be paid off this month.

- a. Yes [1]

- b. No [2]
 - c. I don't know/I'm not sure [3]
- 38) If you added up all credit card and store card debts, about how much would they amount to right now? Please do not count any new debt that will be paid off this month. If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.
- 39) Do you currently have any student loan debt?
- a. Yes [1]
 - b. No [2]
 - c. I don't know/I'm not sure [3]
- 40) If you added up all student loan debts, about how much would they amount to right now? Please do not count any new debt that will be paid off this month. If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.
- 41) Do you currently have any medical bill debt?
- a. Yes [1]
 - b. No [2]
 - c. I don't know/I'm not sure [3]
- 42) If you added up all medical bill debts, about how much would they amount to right now? Please do not count any new debt that will be paid off this month. If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.
- 43) Do you currently have any other debts, such legal bills or loans from relatives?
- a. Yes [1]
 - b. No [2]
 - c. I don't know/I'm not sure [3]
- 44) If you added up all other debts, about how much would they amount to right now? Please do not count any new debt that will be paid off this month. If you do not know the precise amount, please just provide us with your best estimate.

Appendix B: Tables

Table 1a: Respondent Debt

Form of Debt	Number who owed	Percent owing	Median owed	Mean owed	Number of respondents
Any debt	474	74.76%	\$85,000	\$260,588	634
Debt (minus mortgage)	387	61.04%	\$15,000	\$19,884	634
Mortgage	269	42.09%	\$160,000	\$586,947	627
College loans	139	22.03%	\$24,500	\$41,034	631
Credit cards	280	44.59%	\$6,000	\$13,488	628
Hospital bills	110	17.77%	\$2,150	\$14,107	619
Other	76	12.14%	\$11,000	\$27,174	626

Table 2a: Respondent Political Trust

Level of trust	Trust index (%)	Trust in Washington	Government run by elites	Government is wasteful	Government is crooked
-4	330 (52.05%)				
-3	135 (21.29%)				
-2	69 (10.88%)				
-1	42 (6.62%)	539 (85.02%)	548 (86.85%)	399 (63.03%)	496 (78.48%)
0	24 (3.79%)	86 (13.56%)		207 (32.70%)	123 (19.46%)
+1	21 (3.31%)	9 (1.42%)	83 (13.15%)	27 (4.27%)	13 (2.06%)
+2	7 (1.10%)				
+3	4 (0.63%)				
+4	2 (0.32%)				
N	634	634	631	633	632

Table 3a: Bivariate Correlations between Debt and Trust

	<i>Debtmortr</i>	<i>Colldebtr</i>	<i>Debtcredr</i>	<i>Hospdebtr</i>	<i>Otherdebtr</i>
<i>Trustindb</i>	0.0115	0.0135	-0.0175	0.0125	0.0237
<i>Trustwashb</i>	-0.1059	0.0135	-0.0061	-0.0890	0.0283
<i>Govrunb</i>	0.0156	0.0172	-0.0012	0.0190	0.0254
<i>Govwasteb</i>	0.0331	-0.0539	0.0269	-0.0396	-0.0620
<i>Crookedb</i>	0.0208	0.0243	0.0294	0.0214	0.0212

Table 4a: Debt and Overall Trust

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.120 (0.358)	0.134 (0.356)	0.009 (0.368)	0.010 (0.365)
<i>Age</i>	0.021 (0.011)*	0.025 (0.011)**	0.021 (0.012)*	0.026 (0.012)**
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.406 (0.691)	0.256 (0.673)	0.484 (0.722)	0.301 (0.696)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.021 (0.472)	-0.133 (0.465)	0.008 (0.478)	-0.081 (0.474)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.092 (0.112)	-0.103 (0.111)	-0.096 (0.113)	-0.110 (0.111)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.504 (0.584)	0.586 (0.572)	0.795 (0.612)	0.837 (0.602)
<i>Married</i>	0.291 (0.370)	0.306 (0.366)	0.245 (0.374)	0.272 (0.370)
<i>Workft</i>	0.102 (0.354)	0.136 (0.353)	0.096 (0.363)	0.134 (0.361)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.228 (0.142)		-0.243 (0.149)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.720 (0.368)**	-0.683 (0.366)*	-0.732 (0.369)**	-0.714 (0.367)*
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00263 (0.00302)	0.00311 (0.00302)	0.00293 (0.00313)	0.00325 (0.00312)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000329 (0.00215)	-0.000487 (0.00210)	-0.000355 (0.00206)	-0.000575 (0.00194)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.137 (0.199)	0.095 (0.196)	0.145 (0.201)	0.099 (0.198)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.000664 (0.00558)	0.000627 (0.00542)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.185 (0.379)	0.170 (0.395)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.582 (0.388)	-0.687 (0.395)*
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.030 (0.091)	0.016 (0.084)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			3.953 (3.920)	3.672 (3.526)
Pseudo R ²	0.0755	0.0668	0.1023	0.0931
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5a: Debt and Trust in Washington

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.105 (0.280)	0.097 (0.279)	0.048 (0.282)	0.037 (0.281)
<i>Age</i>	0.011 (0.009)	0.012 (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)	0.010 (0.009)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.881 (0.440)**	-0.933 (0.432)**	-0.861 (0.445)*	-0.897 (0.438)**
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.348 (0.428)	-0.047 (0.090)	0.470 (0.433)	0.446 (0.431)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.043 (0.089)	-0.047 (0.090)	-0.010 (0.089)	-0.011 (0.088)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.726 (0.485)	0.756 (0.482)	1.034 (0.498)**	1.049 (0.496)**
<i>Married</i>	-0.195 (0.291)	-0.190 (0.291)	-0.361 (0.293)	-0.360 (0.292)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.010 (0.286)	-0.004 (0.285)	-0.046 (0.285)	-0.045 (0.284)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.083 (0.115)		-0.067 (0.116)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.486 (0.296)*	-0.473 (0.295)	-0.545 (0.295)*	-0.538 (0.295)*
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00120 (0.00218)	0.00136 (0.00217)	0.00157 (0.00218)	0.00168 (0.00217)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000670 (0.00249)	0.000572 (0.00243)	0.000378 (0.00206)	0.000295 (0.00200)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.018 (0.166)	0.00379 (0.165)	0.095 (0.163)	0.087 (0.162)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.125 (0.061)**	-0.130 (0.062)**		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.115 (0.129)	-0.124 (0.128)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.329 (0.275)	-0.346 (0.272)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.075 (0.054)	-0.079 (0.055)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			1.655 (1.006)*	1.697 (1.007)*
Pseudo R ²	0.0627	0.0614	0.0667	0.0657
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6a: Debt and Perceptions of Elite Control

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.212 (0.307)	0.273 (0.303)	0.120 (0.313)	0.175 (0.308)
<i>Age</i>	0.017 (0.010)*	0.021 (0.010)**	0.018 (0.010)*	0.022 (0.010)**
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.126 (0.567)	-0.273 (0.552)	-0.056 (0.587)	-0.210 (0.571)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.007 (0.438)	-0.106 (0.431)	0.064 (0.442)	-0.018 (0.438)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.001 (0.098)	-0.020 (0.097)	-0.009 (0.099)	-0.033 (0.097)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.460 (0.541)	0.529 (0.529)	0.723 (0.565)	0.755 (0.555)
<i>Married</i>	0.199 (0.312)	0.194 (0.313)	0.162 (0.321)	0.160 (0.317)
<i>Workft</i>	0.498 (0.312)	0.572 (0.310)*	0.476 (0.316)	0.550 (0.314)*
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.237 (0.127)*		-0.255 (0.131)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.211 (0.322)***	-1.199 (0.317)***	-1.227 (0.321)***	-1.233 (0.317)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.000882 (0.00201)	-0.000532 (0.00198)	-0.000515 (0.00209)	-0.000167 (0.00206)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000358 (0.00156)	-0.000510 (0.00151)	-0.000345 (0.00154)	-0.000549 (0.00145)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.104 (0.180)	0.055 (0.178)	0.113 (0.181)	0.062 (0.178)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.00132 (0.00857)	0.00126 (0.00813)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.222 (0.381)	0.208 (0.394)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.368 (0.286)	-0.427 (0.288)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.034 (0.114)	0.016 (0.104)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			1.586 (1.131)	1.775 (1.157)
Pseudo R ²	0.0811	0.0736	0.0962	0.0876
N	515	516	501	502

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7a: Debt and Perceptions of Government Wastefulness

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.152 (0.206)	0.148 (0.206)	0.080 (0.209)	0.076 (0.209)
<i>Age</i>	0.019 (0.007)***	0.018 (0.007)***	0.017 (0.007)**	0.015 (0.007)**
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.026 (0.381)	0.034 (0.378)	-0.149 (0.385)	-0.096 (0.382)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.221 (0.287)	-0.178 (0.284)	-0.251 (0.288)	-0.214 (0.285)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.106 (0.066)	-0.100 (0.066)	-0.077 (0.066)	-0.070 (0.066)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.035 (0.439)	-0.063 (0.437)	-0.114 (0.448)	-0.123 (0.447)
<i>Married</i>	-0.024 (0.212)	-0.034 (0.211)	-0.099 (0.213)	-0.103 (0.212)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.074 (0.216)	-0.096 (0.216)	-0.146 (0.218)	-0.171 (0.218)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.100 (0.086)		0.104 (0.087)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	0.740 (0.237)***	0.735 (0.236)***	0.688 (0.238)**	0.686 (0.237)**
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.00241 (0.00149)	-0.00254 (0.00148)*	-0.00193 (0.00150)	-0.00206 (0.00150)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.00210 (0.00226)	0.00227 (0.00229)	0.00189 (0.00221)	0.00210 (0.00226)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.046 (0.122)	0.060 (0.122)	0.065 (0.122)	0.079 (0.121)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.014 (0.053)	0.017 (0.053)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.163 (0.193)	0.170 (0.189)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.189 (0.142)	0.194 (0.146)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.040 (0.042)	-0.034 (0.041)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.454 (0.303)	-0.454 (0.304)
Pseudo R ²	0.0440	0.0424	0.0444	0.0427
N	517	518	503	504

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8a: Debt and Perceptions of Government Crookedness

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.567 (0.238)**	0.582 (0.237)**	0.514 (0.240)**	0.527 (0.239)**
<i>Age</i>	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.008 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.153 (0.466)	-0.210 (0.462)	-0.075 (0.474)	0.146 (0.470)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.214 (0.362)	0.167 (0.358)	0.262 (0.363)	0.214 (0.361)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.193 (0.078)**	-0.199 (0.077)***	-0.198 (0.077)***	-0.205 (0.077)***
<i>Educ2</i>	0.182 (0.484)	0.208 (0.480)	0.194 (0.492)	0.207 (0.489)
<i>Married</i>	0.334 (0.250)	0.336 (0.249)	0.291 (0.252)	0.297 (0.250)
<i>Workft</i>	0.125 (0.248)	0.159 (0.247)	0.088 (0.251)	0.137 (0.249)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.100 (0.100)		-0.134 (0.102)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	0.055 (0.264)	0.043 (0.262)	0.050 (0.264)	0.032 (0.262)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00136 (0.00173)	0.00144 (0.00172)	0.00222 (0.00185)	0.00228 (0.00183)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000128 (0.00130)	0.0000691 (0.00128)	0.000169 (0.00129)	0.0000693 (0.00126)
<i>Polinter</i>	-0.012 (0.151)	-0.035 (0.150)	-0.025 (0.151)	-0.056 (0.150)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.00148 (0.00509)	0.00145 (0.00501)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.174 (0.253)	0.171 (0.260)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.608 (0.631)	0.510 (0.608)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.039 (0.062)	0.032 (0.061)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.080 (0.309)	0.076 (0.308)
Pseudo R ²	0.0383	0.0382	0.0429	0.0414
N	517	518	503	504

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1b: Political and Civic Participation Rates

Form of Engagement	Number who Participated	Percent Engaged	Number of respondents
Voting in 2018	524	82.91%	632
Political meeting attendance	112	17.67%	634
Protesting	75	11.83%	634
Discussing politics online	242	38.17%	634
Displaying signs	77	12.15%	634
Volunteer for politics	81	12.78%	634
Donating to politics	210	33.12%	634
Other political activities	16	2.52%	634
Donating to social causes	286	45.11%	634
PTO member	77	12.15	634
Military org. member	40	6.31	634
Labor union member	55	8.68	634
Hobby group member	122	19.24	634
Civic org. member	89	14.04	634
Other org. member	65	10.25	634

Table 2b: Bivariate Correlations between Debt and Participation

	<i>Debtmortr</i>	<i>Colldebtr</i>	<i>Debtcredr</i>	<i>Hospdebtr</i>	<i>Otherdebtr</i>
<i>Polindex</i>	0.0044	-0.0466	0.0119	-0.0126	-0.0365
<i>Vote2018</i>	0.0191	0.0164	0.0205	0.0226	0.0241
<i>Donpolit</i>	-0.0316	-0.0346	0.0404	-0.0195	-0.0244
<i>Protest</i>	0.1126	-0.0185	-0.0314	-0.0137	-0.0249
<i>Display</i>	-0.0162	-0.0171	-0.0252	-0.0092	-0.0064
<i>Polonline</i>	-0.0352	-0.0385	0.0361	-0.0360	-0.0255
<i>Polmeet</i>	0.0906	-0.0216	-0.0303	0.0093	-0.0265
<i>Volunteer</i>	-0.0170	-0.0186	-0.0141	0.0851	-0.0184
<i>Allindex</i>	0.0150	-0.0338	0.0191	0.0047	-0.0269
<i>Labormem</i>	-0.0145	-0.0133	0.1355	-0.0007	0.0025
<i>Ptomem</i>	-0.0142	-0.0108	0.0077	0.0159	-0.0192
<i>Milorgmem</i>	-0.0098	-0.0112	0.0062	-0.0199	-0.0170
<i>Civorgmem</i>	-0.0165	-0.0154	-0.0234	-0.0218	-0.0229
<i>Hobbymem</i>	-0.0199	-0.0217	-0.0253	0.0139	0.0022
<i>Othermem</i>	0.1233	-0.0166	-0.0256	0.0199	-0.0208
<i>Donsocial</i>	-0.0389	-0.0445	0.0369	-0.0384	-0.0289

Table 3b: Debt and Overall Political Participation

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.126 (0.087)	0.129 (0.087)	0.138 (0.087)	0.141 (0.087)
<i>Age</i>	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.388 (0.201)*	-0.393 (0.200)**	-0.393 (0.209)*	-0.397 (0.208)*
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.150 (0.136)	-0.153 (0.135)	-0.161 (0.136)	-0.163 (0.135)
<i>Religio</i>	0.007 (0.029)	0.006 (0.029)	0.000 (0.029)	-0.001 (0.029)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.016 (0.208)	0.017 (0.208)	0.075 (0.207)	0.075 (0.207)
<i>Married</i>	0.095 (0.090)	0.095 (0.089)	0.085 (0.090)	0.085 (0.090)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.115 (0.090)	-0.111 (0.090)	-0.101 (0.091)	-0.098 (0.090)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.009 (0.037)		-0.007 (0.037)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.410 (0.106)***	-0.412 (0.106)***	-0.441 (0.107)***	-0.443 (0.107)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000398 (0.000541)	0.000406 (0.000539)	0.000154 (0.000557)	0.000159 (0.000555)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.0000222 (0.000429)	0.0000167 (0.000428)	0.0000364 (0.000422)	0.0000317 (0.000420)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.707 (0.074)***	0.705 (0.074)***	0.704 (0.074)***	0.702 (0.074)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.000233 (0.000486)	0.000231 (0.000486)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.284 (0.118)**	-0.284 (0.118)**
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.005 (0.047)	0.005 (0.047)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.010 (0.017)	-0.011 (0.017)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.018 (0.124)	0.018 (0.124)
Pseudo R ²	0.0772	0.0772	0.0842	0.0842
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4b: Debt and Voting in 2018

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.038 (0.311)	-0.043 (0.311)	0.118 (0.325)	0.114 (0.325)
<i>Age</i>	0.050 (0.010)***	0.048 (0.010)***	0.055 (0.011)***	0.054 (0.011)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.648 (0.456)	-0.594 (0.452)	-0.686 (0.472)	-0.664 (0.469)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.829 (0.360)**	-0.787 (0.355)**	-1.038 (0.374)***	-1.019 (0.370)***
<i>Religio</i>	0.169 (0.096)*	0.176 (0.095)*	0.186 (0.100)*	0.190 (0.100)*
<i>Educ2</i>	0.853 (0.495)*	0.828 (0.494)*	1.135 (0.545)**	1.126 (0.544)**
<i>Married</i>	0.133 (0.299)	0.121 (0.290)	0.150 (0.309)	0.147 (0.310)
<i>Workft</i>	0.776 (0.313)**	0.754 (0.312)**	0.939 (0.322)***	0.927 (0.321)***
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.093 (0.122)		0.051 (0.129)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.012 (0.335)	-0.020 (0.336)	0.075 (0.357)	0.074 (0.357)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000976 (0.00215)	0.000727 (0.00213)	0.000706 (0.00217)	0.000581 (0.00216)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000899 (0.00353)	0.00104 (0.00360)	0.000317 (0.00310)	0.000405 (0.00317)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.510 (0.153)***	0.522 (0.153)***	0.551 (0.160)***	0.559 (0.159)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.066 (0.086)	0.069 (0.086)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.033 (0.147)	-0.026 (0.146)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.013 (0.250)	-0.011 (0.255)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.105 (0.245)	0.109 (0.239)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.181 (0.526)	0.189 (0.521)
Pseudo R ²	0.2204	0.2196	0.2537	0.2538
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5b: Debt and Political Donations

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.155 (0.223)	-0.146 (0.223)	-0.154 (0.228)	-0.147 (0.227)
<i>Age</i>	0.021 (0.008)***	0.021 (0.007)***	0.021 (0.008)**	0.019 (0.008)**
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.888 (0.549)	-0.864 (0.548)	-1.073 (0.600)*	-1.041 (0.600)*
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.216 (0.354)	-0.183 (0.350)	-0.215 (0.358)	-0.174 (0.355)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.012 (0.075)	-0.011 (0.075)	-0.024 (0.076)	-0.023 (0.076)
<i>Educ2</i>	1.525 (0.784)*	1.516 (0.785)*	1.585 (0.785)**	1.582 (0.786)**
<i>Married</i>	-0.030 (0.231)	-0.039 (0.231)	-0.001 (0.236)	-0.013 (0.236)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.186 (0.234)	-0.182 (0.234)	-0.151 (0.242)	-0.152 (0.241)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.060 (0.094)		0.075 (0.242)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.054 (0.270)***	-1.077 (0.270)***	-1.111 (0.277)***	-1.132 (0.276)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00370 (0.00145)***	0.00360 (0.00144)**	0.00360 (0.00151)**	0.00352 (0.00150)**
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000939 (0.00104)	-0.000882 (0.00103)	-0.000932 (0.00104)	-0.000858 (0.00103)
<i>Polinter</i>	1.338 (0.223)***	1.342 (0.222)***	1.332 (0.222)***	1.339 (0.222)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.004 (0.030)	-0.003 (0.018)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.215 (0.252)	-0.213 (0.255)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.250 (0.284)	0.274 (0.327)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.036 (0.051)	-0.032 (0.051)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.113 (0.311)	-0.095 (0.311)
Pseudo R ²	0.2136	0.2123	0.2226	0.2211
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6b: Debt and Protesting

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.647 (0.312)**	0.623 (0.310)**	0.678 (0.317)**	0.658 (0.315)**
<i>Age</i>	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.017 (0.010)*	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.018 (0.010)*
<i>Hispanic</i>	-1.927 (1.066)*	-1.736 (1.049)*	-1.846 (1.087)*	-1.594 (1.062)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.622 (0.520)	-0.528 (0.516)	-0.774 (0.530)	-0.681 (0.526)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.037 (0.100)	-0.025 (0.099)	-0.055 (0.101)	-0.046 (0.100)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.139 (0.692)	-0.154 (0.693)	-0.326 (0.651)	-0.345 (0.650)
<i>Married</i>	0.504 (0.318)	0.456 (0.314)	0.524 (0.322)	0.467 (0.317)
<i>Workft</i>	0.150 (0.306)	0.121 (0.305)	0.214 (0.316)	0.162 (0.314)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.207 (0.124)*		0.237 (0.131)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.063 (0.421)**	-1.082 (0.419)***	-1.282 (0.443)***	-1.273 (0.439)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.00174 (0.00208)	-0.00201 (0.00208)	-0.00331 (0.00231)	-0.00340 (0.00230)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000100 (0.00117)	0.000243 (0.00115)	0.0000365 (0.00116)	0.000222 (0.00113)
<i>Polinter</i>	1.053 (0.295)***	1.067 (0.295)***	1.019 (0.286)***	1.029 (0.285)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.005 (0.014)	0.006 (0.029)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.822 (0.557)	-0.838 (0.552)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-1.192 (1.149)	-0.923 (1.118)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.040 (0.064)	-0.028 (0.061)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.874 (0.971)	-0.698 (0.949)
Pseudo R ²	0.1233	0.1164	0.1394	0.1312
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7b: Debt and Displaying Political Propaganda

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.389 (0.303)	0.404 (0.302)	0.526 (0.308)*	0.542 (0.308)*
<i>Age</i>	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.014 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.010)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.173 (0.653)	-0.355 (0.651)	-0.255 (0.665)	-0.386 (0.662)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.018 (0.461)	-0.117 (0.455)	-0.051 (0.462)	-0.122 (0.456)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.054 (0.098)	-0.075 (0.097)	-0.049 (0.098)	-0.065 (0.098)
<i>Educ2</i>	-1.120 (0.547)**	-1.037 (0.542)*	-1.011 (0.549)*	-0.968 (0.547)*
<i>Married</i>	-0.010 (0.301)	0.024 (0.306)	0.008 (0.304)	0.031 (0.303)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.039 (0.306)	0.013 (0.304)	0.074 (0.313)	0.151 (0.308)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.253 (0.130)*		-0.234 (0.131)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.125 (0.346)	-0.107 (0.345)	-0.123 (0.347)	-0.118 (0.346)
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.000121 (0.00194)	0.000195 (0.00194)	-0.000264 (0.00200)	-0.0000538 (0.00201)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000201 (0.00172)	-0.000455 (0.00183)	-0.000231 (0.00168)	-0.000506 (0.00183)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.994 (0.275)***	0.963 (0.272)***	0.999 (0.276)***	0.953 (0.272)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.003 (0.029)	-0.013 (0.102)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.110 (0.324)	-0.110 (0.298)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.936 (1.153)	-1.151 (1.156)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.004 (0.058)	-0.016 (0.058)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.344 (0.320)	0.310 (0.319)
Pseudo R ²	0.0721	0.0619	0.0804	0.0718
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8b: Debt and Discussing Politics Online

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.056 (0.206)	-0.039 (0.206)	-0.105 (0.211)	-0.088 (0.210)
<i>Age</i>	-0.013 (0.007)*	-0.011 (0.007)*	-0.013 (0.007)*	-0.012 (0.007)*
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.522 (0.455)	-0.602 (0.452)	-0.607 (0.482)	-0.658 (0.479)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.235 (0.315)	-0.297 (0.312)	-0.208 (0.320)	-0.244 (0.318)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.023 (0.067)	-0.034 (0.067)	-0.026 (0.069)	-0.034 (0.068)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.166 (0.485)	0.199 (0.483)	0.437 (0.495)	0.441 (0.495)
<i>Married</i>	0.067 (0.212)	0.079 (0.212)	-0.004 (0.218)	0.005 (0.217)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.506 (0.216)**	-0.475 (0.214)**	-0.523 (0.222)**	-0.493 (0.221)**
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.131 (0.087)		-0.093 (0.089)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.210 (0.233)	-0.210 (0.232)	-0.283 (0.239)	-0.292 (0.238)
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.00233 (0.00140)	-0.00218 (0.00140)	-0.00292 (0.00150)*	-0.00283 (0.00150)*
<i>Persinc</i>	0.00107 (0.00134)	0.000959 (0.00131)	0.00106 (0.00135)	0.000976 (0.00132)
<i>Polinter</i>	1.186 (0.176)***	1.160 (0.174)***	1.171 (0.178)***	1.151 (0.176)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.003 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.044)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.401 (0.265)	-0.400 (0.266)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.132 (0.171)	0.126 (0.163)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.091 (0.133)	-0.097 (0.133)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.076 (0.295)	-0.079 (0.297)
Pseudo R ²	0.1198	0.1158	0.1277	0.1254
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9b: Debt and Attending Political Meetings/Rallies

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.437 (0.259)*	0.450 (0.259)*	0.430 (0.263)	0.439 (0.263)*
<i>Age</i>	-0.018 (0.009)**	-0.017 (0.008)**	-0.014 (0.009)	-0.014 (0.009)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-2.069 (1.042)**	-2.119 (1.040)**	-2.005 (1.047)*	-2.027 (1.045)*
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.121 (0.387)	0.086 (0.383)	0.105 (0.389)	0.092 (0.385)
<i>Religio</i>	0.068 (0.084)	0.062 (0.084)	0.031 (0.085)	0.028 (0.084)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.034 (0.614)	0.041 (0.614)	0.088 (0.620)	0.088 (0.620)
<i>Married</i>	0.333 (0.269)	0.041 (0.614)	0.345 (0.269)	0.348 (0.269)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.182 (0.262)	0.345 (0.269)	-0.102 (0.270)	-0.088 (0.268)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.071 (0.109)	-0.165 (0.261)	-0.030 (0.113)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.602 (0.312)*	-0.602 (0.312)*	-0.615 (0.317)*	-0.623 (0.317)**
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000122 (0.00156)	0.000184 (0.00155)	-0.000407 (0.00165)	-0.000397 (0.00165)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000174 (0.00105)	0.000119 (0.00105)	0.000101 (0.00105)	0.0000774 (0.00105)
<i>Polinter</i>	1.046 (0.245)***	1.034 (0.243)***	1.054 (0.249)***	1.048 (0.248)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.042 (0.080)	0.037 (0.079)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.236 (0.330)	-0.236 (0.328)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.539 (0.804)	-0.564 (0.798)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.004 (0.037)	0.002 (0.036)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.167 (0.424)	-0.174 (0.424)
Pseudo R ²	0.0972	0.0964	0.0963	0.0962
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10b: Debt and Political Volunteering

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.385 (0.297)	0.372 (0.296)	0.465 (0.312)	0.450 (0.310)
<i>Age</i>	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.005 (0.010)	-0.006 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.010)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.393 (0.675)	-0.253 (0.660)	-0.645 (0.806)	-0.531 (0.793)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.397 (0.492)	-0.319 (0.488)	-0.464 (0.527)	-0.402 (0.523)
<i>Religio</i>	0.029 (0.097)	0.040 (0.096)	0.012 (0.101)	0.016 (0.101)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.846 (0.593)	-0.879 (0.594)	-0.127 (0.699)	-0.145 (0.699)
<i>Married</i>	0.429 (0.319)	0.379 (0.314)	0.405 (0.325)	0.376 (0.322)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.109 (0.304)	-0.133 (0.303)	-0.108 (0.323)	-0.144 (0.320)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.178 (0.123)		0.140 (0.131)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.757 (0.381)**	-0.771 (0.380)**	-0.711 (0.397)*	-0.717 (0.396)*
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.000628 (0.00192)	-0.000821 (0.00192)	-0.000697 (0.00201)	-0.000782 (0.00202)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.0000816 (0.00114)	0.0000611 (0.00112)	-0.0000261 (0.00114)	0.0000931 (0.00112)
<i>Polinter</i>	1.515 (0.382)***	1.540 (0.383)***	1.777 (0.455)***	1.795 (0.457)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.063 (0.111)	-0.046 (0.110)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.206 (0.380)	-0.213 (0.385)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.514 (0.942)	-0.366 (0.883)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.052 (0.052)	0.060 (0.053)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.051 (0.402)	-0.012 (0.389)
Pseudo R ²	0.1151	0.1097	0.1327	0.1297
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 11b: Debt and Overall Civic Engagement

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.028 (0.112)	-0.030 (0.112)	-0.050 (0.114)	-0.051 (0.114)
<i>Age</i>	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.085 (0.216)	0.099 (0.214)	-0.059 (0.229)	-0.055 (0.228)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.192 (0.158)	0.203 (0.157)	0.198 (0.160)	0.201 (0.158)
<i>Religio</i>	0.046 (0.037)	0.048 (0.037)	0.050 (0.037)	0.050 (0.037)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.110 (0.244)	-0.116 (0.244)	-0.149 (0.245)	-0.149 (0.245)
<i>Married</i>	0.319 (0.120)***	0.318 (0.120)***	0.293 (0.122)**	0.293 (0.122)**
<i>Workft</i>	0.017 (0.116)	0.014 (0.115)	-0.004 (0.118)	-0.005 (0.118)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.023 (0.048)		0.006 (0.049)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.059 (0.127)	-0.060 (0.127)	-0.041 (0.128)	-0.040 (0.128)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00148 (0.000633)**	0.00145 (0.000630)**	0.00159 (0.000648)**	0.00159 (0.000646)**
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000278 (0.000636)	-0.000252 (0.000627)	-0.000378 (0.000688)	-0.000370 (0.000683)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.106 (0.076)	0.109 (0.075)	0.098 (0.076)	0.099 (0.076)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.065 (0.056)	0.066 (0.055)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.029 (0.056)	0.029 (0.056)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.005 (0.019)	0.005 (0.019)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.043 (0.145)	0.042 (0.145)
Pseudo R ²	0.0223	0.0222	0.0222	0.223
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 12b: Debt and Labor Union Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.579 (0.327)*	-0.576 (0.327)*	-0.730 (0.339)**	-0.728 (0.339)**
<i>Age</i>	-0.007 (0.012)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.010 (0.012)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.315 (0.589)	0.324 (0.583)	-0.006 (0.663)	-0.008 (0.661)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.121 (0.465)	0.128 (0.461)	0.172 (0.474)	0.172 (0.471)
<i>Religio</i>	0.092 (0.110)	0.093 (0.110)	0.134 (0.113)	0.133 (0.112)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.668 (0.620)	-0.675 (0.619)	-0.762 (0.628)	-0.764 (0.628)
<i>Married</i>	0.051 (0.353)	0.046 (0.352)	-0.134 (0.357)	-0.135 (0.357)
<i>Workft</i>	0.693 (0.353)**	0.695 (0.352)**	0.498 (0.367)	0.505 (0.365)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.015 (0.138)		-0.004 (0.143)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.747 (0.419)*	-0.755 (0.419)*	-0.656 (0.421)	-0.663 (0.421)
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.00213 (0.00232)	-0.00215 (0.00233)	-0.00168 (0.00242)	-0.00169 (0.00242)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.00129 (0.00105)	0.00130 (0.00104)	0.00127 (0.00109)	0.00127 (0.00108)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.446 (0.261)*	0.448 (0.260)*	0.427 (0.261)	0.425 (0.260)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.174 (0.150)	-0.172 (0.149)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.036 (0.237)	0.036 (0.236)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.509 (0.314)	0.509 (0.313)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.356 (0.743)	-0.355 (0.741)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			--0.367 (0.785)	-0.366 (0.784)
Pseudo R ²	0.0664	0.0665	0.0824	0.0825
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 13b: Debt and PTO Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.818 (0.344)**	0.810 (0.340)**	0.669 (0.350)*	0.672 (0.349)*
<i>Age</i>	-0.033 (0.011)***	-0.035 (0.011)***	-0.031 (0.012)***	-0.033 (0.012)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.018 (0.539)	0.153 (0.523)	-0.208 (0.570)	-0.123 (0.555)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.581 (0.400)	0.645 (0.396)	0.670 (0.405)*	0.708 (0.401)*
<i>Religio</i>	0.115 (0.539)	0.125 (0.100)	0.105 (0.102)	0.112 (0.101)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.083 (0.684)	0.063 (0.687)	-0.525 (0.631)	-0.535 (0.634)
<i>Married</i>	1.671 (0.384)***	1.652 (0.381)***	1.615 (0.394)***	1.612 (0.393)***
<i>Workft</i>	0.128 (0.324)	0.119 (0.317)	0.219 (0.347)	0.203 (0.345)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.154 (0.131)		0.098 (0.137)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.059 (0.350)	-0.073 (0.349)	-0.038 (0.358)	-0.044 (0.357)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00425 (0.00181)**	0.00398 (0.00173)**	0.00526 (0.00194)***	0.00505 (0.00191)***
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.00132 (0.00297)	-0.000857 (0.00252)	-0.00317 (0.00378)	-0.00265 (0.00366)
<i>Polinter</i>	-0.074 (0.187)	-0.058 (0.186)	-0.120 (0.187)	-0.113 (0.186)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.002 (0.009)	-0.001 (0.008)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.233 (0.159)	0.249 (0.155)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.195 (0.209)	0.202 (0.212)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.031 (0.042)	0.037 (0.041)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.441 (0.711)	-0.460 (0.726)
Pseudo R ²	0.1462	0.1427	0.1505	0.1493
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 14b: Debt and Military Organization Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-1.295 (0.433)***	-1.259 (0.431)***	-1.377 (0.434)***	1.334 (0.431)***
<i>Age</i>	-0.016 (0.014)	-0.014 (0.013)	-0.019 (0.014)	-0.015 (0.014)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.347 (1.080)	-0.432 (1.077)	-0.471 (1.092)	-0.520 (1.089)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.279 (0.672)	0.184 (0.661)	0.195 (0.677)	0.104 (0.666)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.200 (0.142)	-0.207 (0.141)	-0.213 (0.142)	-0.221 (0.141)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.540 (1.082)	0.564 (1.082)	0.622 (1.101)	0.618 (1.101)
<i>Married</i>	0.913 (0.494)*	0.932 (0.495)*	0.911 (0.495)*	0.917 (0.495)*
<i>Workft</i>	1.284 (0.470)***	-1.233 (0.465)***	-1.436 (0.485)**	-1.359 (0.475)***
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.146 (0.183)		-0.158 (0.192)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	1.028 (0.451)**	1.011 (0.450)**	1.068 (0.455)**	1.032 (0.453)**
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.000374 (0.00289)	-0.000290 (0.00290)	-0.00124 (0.00308)	-0.00122 (0.00311)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000286 (0.00227)	0.000175 (0.00230)	0.000319 (0.00223)	0.000174 (0.00228)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.007 (0.279)	-0.021 (0.276)	0.075 (0.292)	0.043 (0.278)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.002 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.013)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.014 (0.292)	-0.038 (0.281)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.162 (0.617)	0.104 (0.616)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-1.726 (4.601)	-2.072 (4.862)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.301 (0.909)	-0.332 (0.917)
Pseudo R ²	0.1196	0.1151	0.1349	0.1302
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 15b: Debt and Civic Organization Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.083 (0.273)	-0.074 (0.273)	0.062 (0.283)	0.073 (0.283)
<i>Age</i>	0.024 (0.010)**	0.024 (0.010)***	0.028 (0.010)***	0.029 (0.010)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.140 (0.584)	0.141 (0.580)	-0.141 (0.656)	-0.162 (0.654)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.420 (0.398)	0.422 (0.394)	0.384 (0.417)	0.367 (0.413)
<i>Religio</i>	0.093 (0.090)	0.091 (0.090)	0.118 (0.093)	0.113 (0.093)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.531 (0.598)	-0.539 (0.597)	-0.274 (0.670)	-0.273 (0.670)
<i>Married</i>	0.167 (0.291)	0.164 (0.291)	0.168 (0.302)	0.168 (0.303)
<i>Workft</i>	0.251 (0.293)	0.262 (0.292)	0.383 (0.307)	0.401 (0.306)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.003 (0.119)		-0.042 (0.124)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	0.004 (0.308)	-0.008 (0.308)	0.099 (0.313)	0.088 (0.313)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00270 (0.00160)*	0.00268 (0.00160)*	0.00311 (0.00171)*	0.00313 (0.00171)*
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000622 (0.00155)	-0.000612 (0.00154)	-0.000924 (0.00183)	-0.000967 (0.00185)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.576 (0.238)**	0.574 (0.237)	0.687 (0.257)***	0.679 (0.256)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.268 (0.138)*	0.261 (0.137)*
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.035 (0.248)	0.029 (0.252)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.033 (0.097)	-0.036 (0.097)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.140 (0.457)	-0.132 (0.454)
Pseudo R ²	0.0713	0.0706	0.0930	0.0920
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 16b: Debt and Hobby Group Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.341 (0.242)	-0.332 (0.242)	-0.323 (0.244)	-0.312 (0.244)
<i>Age</i>	-0.024 (0.008)***	-0.022 (0.008)***	-0.025 (0.008)***	-0.023 (0.008)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.268 (0.443)	0.201 (0.439)	0.196 (0.452)	0.141 (0.449)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.038 (0.353)	-0.011 (0.349)	0.039 (0.354)	-0.005 (0.351)
<i>Religio</i>	0.079 (0.079)	0.069 (0.079)	0.062 (0.079)	0.053 (0.079)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.183 (0.504)	-0.153 (0.504)	-0.067 (0.517)	-0.059 (0.516)
<i>Married</i>	0.298 (0.259)	0.308 (0.259)	0.253 (0.257)	0.255 (0.257)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.182 (0.252)	-0.157 (0.251)	-0.253 (0.253)	-0.221 (0.251)
<i>Finhealth</i>	-0.103 (0.105)		-0.110 (0.105)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.167 (0.278)	-0.167 (0.277)	-0.151 (0.280)	-0.152 (0.279)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00202 (0.00149)	0.00214 (0.00149)	0.00217 (0.00150)	0.00228 (0.00150)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000521 (0.00177)	-0.000662 (0.00184)	-0.000291 (0.00156)	-0.000444 (0.00163)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.127 (0.157)	0.109 (0.156)	0.140 (0.157)	0.119 (0.155)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.026 (0.078)	-0.031 (0.078)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.099 (0.235)	-0.106 (0.228)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.253 (0.227)	-0.262 (0.247)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.026 (0.036)	0.021 (0.036)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.622 (0.312)**	0.614 (0.311)**
Pseudo R ²	0.0347	0.0326	0.0446	0.0422
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 17b: Debt and Miscellaneous Group Membership

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.973 (0.394)**	0.900 (0.380)**	0.913 (0.399)**	0.839 (0.385)**
<i>Age</i>	0.059 (0.013)***	0.054 (0.013)***	0.054 (0.013)***	0.050 (0.013)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.355 (0.787)	-0.205 (0.778)	-0.243 (0.799)	-0.080 (0.790)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.042 (0.495)	0.141 (0.491)	0.004 (0.497)	0.102 (0.492)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.014 (0.110)	0.001 (0.108)	0.006 (0.112)	0.019 (0.109)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.778 (1.066)	0.804 (1.069)	0.810 (1.080)	0.890 (1.079)
<i>Married</i>	-0.179 (0.352)	-0.162 (0.347)	-0.148 (0.358)	-0.138 (0.353)
<i>Workft</i>	0.480 (0.387)	0.430 (0.379)	0.469 (0.390)	0.405 (0.382)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.268 (0.142)*		0.274 (0.150)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.153 (0.386)	-0.133 (0.375)	-0.225 (0.395)	-0.182 (0.384)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00298 (0.00243)	0.00250 (0.00232)	0.00193 (0.00251)	0.00160 (0.00240)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.00272 (0.00394)	-0.00233 (0.00370)	-0.00244 (0.00388)	-0.00202 (0.00355)
<i>Polinter</i>	-0.321 (0.199)	-0.269 (0.195)	-0.352 (0.198)*	-0.301 (0.194)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.004 (0.008)	0.004 (0.008)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.211 (0.399)	-0.181 (0.407)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.972 (1.246)	-0.722 (1.117)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.001 (0.040)	0.014 (0.039)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.173 (0.748)	-0.257 (0.788)
Pseudo R ²	0.1291	0.1134	0.1124	0.0972
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 18b: Debt and Donations to Social Causes

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.336 (0.203)*	0.324 (0.203)	0.414 (0.208)**	0.399 (0.207)*
<i>Age</i>	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.007)	-0.009 (0.007)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.086 (0.400)	-0.053 (0.397)	-0.117 (0.415)	-0.080 (0.412)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.339 (0.300)	-0.314 (0.298)	-0.406 (0.306)	-0.383 (0.304)
<i>Religio</i>	0.050 (0.066)	0.055 (0.066)	0.052 (0.067)	0.058 (0.067)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.394 (0.469)	0.387 (0.468)	0.395 (0.468)	0.393 (0.467)
<i>Married</i>	0.150 (0.206)	0.149 (0.206)	0.213 (0.211)	0.210 (0.211)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.197 (0.206)	-0.215 (0.205)	-0.137 (0.212)	-0.160 (0.211)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.054 (0.084)		0.062 (0.087)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.903 (0.232)***	-0.894 (0.231)***	-0.965 (0.236)***	-0.953 (0.235)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00395 (0.00144)***	0.00389 (0.00143)***	0.00321 (0.00147)**	0.00316 (0.00146)**
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000192 (0.00101)	-0.000161 (0.00101)	-0.000115 (0.00104)	-0.0000712 (0.00105)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.668 (0.139)***	0.676 (0.138)***	0.691 (0.140)***	0.701 (0.140)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.005)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.597 (0.278)**	-0.595 (0.277)**
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.090 (0.197)	0.099 (0.207)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.584 (0.063)	-0.055 (0.062)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.194 (0.307)	0.191 (0.305)
Pseudo R ²	0.1005	0.0995	0.1136	0.1123
N	518	519	504	505

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1c: Policy Support

Variable	#Support	# Oppose/Neutral	%Support	% Oppose/Neutral	N
<i>Taxb</i>	349	279	55.57%	44.43%	628
<i>Govsec</i>	451	179	71.59%	28.41%	630
<i>Aid4taxb</i>	443	189	70.09%	29.91%	632
<i>Govretireb</i>	433	198	68.62%	31.38%	631
<i>Homeprotb</i>	397	232	63.12%	36.88%	629
<i>Minwageb</i>	423	206	67.25%	32.75%	629
<i>Hospaidb</i>	308	295	51.08%	48.92%	603
<i>Collaidb</i>	389	162	70.60%	29.40%	551

Table 2c: Bivariate Correlations between Debt and Policy Support

	<i>Debtmortr</i>	<i>Colldebtr</i>	<i>Debtcredr</i>	<i>Hospdebtr</i>	<i>Otherdebtr</i>
<i>Taxb</i>	0.0464	-0.0408	-0.0633	-0.0275	-0.0550
<i>Govsecb</i>	-0.0679	0.0255	-0.1048	0.0284	0.0126
<i>Aid4taxb</i>	0.0270	0.0259	-0.0097	0.0333	0.0163
<i>Govretireb</i>	0.0290	0.0322	0.0076	0.0437	0.0345
<i>Homeprotb</i>	0.0340	0.0307	0.0145	0.0410	0.0224
<i>Minwageb</i>	0.0295	0.0313	0.0331	0.0379	0.0208
<i>Hospaidb</i>	0.0429	0.0427	0.0155	-0.0199	0.0415
<i>Collaidb</i>	0.0294	0.0352	0.0170	-0.0478	0.0278

Table 3c: Debt and Support for the 2017 Tax Law

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	-0.236 (0.234)	-0.240 (0.233)	-0.327 (0.245)	-0.335 (0.244)
<i>Age</i>	0.008 (0.008)	0.006 (0.007)	0.007 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.690 (0.437)	-0.700 (0.435)	-0.532 (0.442)	-0.529 (0.440)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.157 (0.328)	0.137 (0.324)	0.099 (0.334)	0.101 (0.331)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.041 (0.076)	-0.056 (0.075)	-0.075 (0.077)	-0.083 (0.077)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.428 (0.536)	0.407 (0.531)	0.058 (0.537)	0.037 (0.536)
<i>Married</i>	-0.198 (0.241)	-0.202 (0.239)	-0.144 (0.248)	-0.163 (0.247)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.109 (0.238)	-0.113 (0.237)	-0.141 (0.248)	-0.150 (0.247)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.004 (0.108)		0.060 (0.117)	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.683 (0.326)**		0.550 (0.335)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-2.832 (0.331)***	-2.889 (0.329)***	-3.046 (0.351)***	-3.110 (0.349)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00298 (0.00155)*	0.00294 (0.00154)*	0.00206 (0.00162)	0.00192 (0.00162)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000353 (0.00130)	0.000337 (0.00132)	0.000456 (0.00144)	0.000443 (0.00145)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.932 (0.163)***	0.899 (0.159)***	0.929 (0.162)***	0.910 (0.159)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.044 (0.055)	0.040 (0.055)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.206 (0.189)	-0.201 (0.189)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.783 (0.583)	-0.793 (0.569)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.033 (0.039)	-0.031 (0.038)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.537 (0.384)	-0.519 (0.370)
Pseudo R ²	0.2814	0.2750	0.3038	0.2995
N	515	515	501	501

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4c: Debt and Support for Government Socioeconomic Aid

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.159 (0.229)	0.165 (0.228)	0.122 (0.238)	0.125 (0.236)
<i>Age</i>	-0.018 (0.008)**	-0.020 (0.008)***	-0.022 (0.008)***	-0.024 (0.008)***
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.822 (0.587)	0.895 (0.584)	0.819 (0.592)	0.899 (0.590)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.520 (0.331)	-0.485 (0.328)	-0.644 (0.338)*	-0.595 (0.335)*
<i>Religio</i>	0.060 (0.075)	0.061 (0.074)	0.075 (0.077)	0.078 (0.077)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.297 (0.490)	0.222 (0.486)	0.223 (0.533)	0.168 (0.528)
<i>Married</i>	-0.137 (0.238)	-0.144 (0.237)	-0.162 (0.249)	-0.173 (0.247)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.347 (0.240)	-0.360 (0.239)	-0.400 (0.253)	-0.423 (0.251)*
<i>Finworry</i>	0.155 (0.112)		0.200 (0.120)*	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.282 (0.356)		0.303 (0.385)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.637 (0.242)***	-1.694 (0.238)***	-1.684 (0.252)***	-1.744 (0.247)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000716 (0.00168)	0.000428 (0.00167)	0.000131 (0.00175)	-0.000822 (0.00176)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.000795 (0.00186)	0.000787 (0.00187)	0.000888 (0.00198)	0.000890 (0.00200)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.178 (0.140)	0.196 (0.138)	0.193 (0.143)	0.216 (0.141)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.013)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.221 (0.137)	-0.188 (0.136)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-1.380 (0.559)**	-1.246 (0.534)**
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.366 (0.348)	0.398 (0.361)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.187 (0.336)	-0.169 (0.334)
Pseudo R ²	0.1352	0.1311	0.1580	0.1524
N	518	518	504	504

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5c: Debt and Support for Government Aid in Exchange for a Tax Hike

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.596 (0.232)***	0.591 (0.230)***	0.648 (0.239)***	0.634 (0.237)***
<i>Age</i>	-0.003 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.521 (0.485)	0.534 (0.481)	0.565 (0.489)	0.570 (0.486)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.448 (0.320)	-0.452 (0.318)	-0.514 (0.328)	-0.522 (0.325)
<i>Religio</i>	0.045 (0.074)	0.036 (0.073)	0.066 (0.075)	0.053 (0.075)
<i>Educ2</i>	0.174 (0.454)	0.134 (0.450)	0.158 (0.474)	0.150 (0.470)
<i>Married</i>	-0.336 (0.242)	-0.338 (0.241)	-0.258 (0.246)	-0.262 (0.245)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.067 (0.240)	-0.075 (0.239)	-0.009 (0.248)	-0.017 (0.246)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.038 (0.107)		0.025 (0.111)	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.556 (0.358)		0.685 (0.385)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.311 (0.241)***	-1.373 (0.238)***	-1.336 (0.247)***	-1.414 (0.243)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00482 (0.00217)**	0.00471 (0.00214)**	0.00381 (0.00219)*	0.00373 (0.00218)*
<i>Persinc</i>	0.00119 (0.00256)	0.00110 (0.00252)	0.00158 (0.00282)	0.00146 (0.00277)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.468 (0.135)***	0.458 (0.132)***	0.466 (0.136)***	0.454 (0.133)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.039 (0.055)	0.038 (0.056)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.081 (0.129)	-0.086 (0.127)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.027 (0.163)	-0.041 (0.162)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.215 (0.236)	0.231 (0.247)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.222 (0.294)	-0.232 (0.295)
Pseudo R ²	0.1246	0.1202	0.1276	0.1217
N	518	518	504	504

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6c: Debt and Support for a Government Baseline Income for Retirees

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.361 (0.226)	0.353 (0.222)	0.429 (0.229)*	0.403 (0.226)
<i>Age</i>	0.001 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.007)	0.002 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.852 (0.587)	1.010 (0.580)*	1.122 (0.654)*	1.257 (0.650)*
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.399 (0.337)	-0.279 (0.328)	-0.457 (0.341)	-0.346 (0.333)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.132 (0.073)*	-0.119 (0.072)*	-0.119 (0.074)	-0.111 (0.073)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.200 (0.520)	-0.368 (0.516)	-0.355 (0.559)	-0.445 (0.554)
<i>Married</i>	-0.306 (0.240)	-0.326 (0.237)	-0.226 (0.242)	-0.243 (0.237)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.157 (0.236)	-0.193 (0.231)	-0.118 (0.241)	-0.173 (0.236)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.411 (0.118)***		0.401 (0.123)***	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.555 (0.368)		0.721 (0.400)*	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.524 (0.237)***	-1.616 (0.231)***	-1.489 (0.242)***	-1.591 (0.236)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	-0.0000552 (0.00144)	-0.0000698 (0.00143)	-0.000396 (0.00147)	-0.000858 (0.00147)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.00124 (0.00111)	-0.00121 (0.00109)	-0.00118 (0.00106)	-0.00114 (0.00104)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.054 (0.144)	0.105 (0.141)	0.053 (0.144)	0.103 (0.141)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.091 (0.082)	0.097 (0.084)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.055 (0.246)	0.117 (0.241)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.241 (0.198)	-0.223 (0.204)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.486 (0.387)	0.504 (0.393)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.078 (0.342)	-0.038 (0.339)
Pseudo R ²	0.1715	0.1484	0.1737	0.1506
N	518	518	504	504

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7c: Debt and Support for a Homeowner's Protection Plan for Tax Hike

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.418 (0.204)**	0.413 (0.203)**	0.462 (0.208)**	0.453 (0.207)**
<i>Age</i>	0.003 (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.546 (0.441)	0.546 (0.439)	0.761 (0.463)*	0.760 (0.462)*
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.006 (0.304)	0.002 (0.302)	-0.134 (0.309)	-0.142 (0.307)
<i>Religio</i>	0.013 (0.067)	0.010 (0.067)	0.026 (0.068)	0.020 (0.068)
<i>Educ2</i>	-1.034 (0.528)**	-1.052 (0.526)**	-0.928 (0.541)*	-0.931 (0.539)*
<i>Married</i>	-0.163 (0.215)	-0.170 (0.215)	-0.019 (0.216)	-0.027 (0.216)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.142 (0.210)	-0.146 (0.209)	-0.054 (0.214)	-0.060 (0.214)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.019 (0.098)		0.017 (0.101)	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.279 (0.303)		0.382 (0.318)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-0.953 (0.226)***	-0.988 (0.222)***	-0.968 (0.230)***	-1.017 (0.226)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000521 (0.00135)	0.000479 (0.00133)	-0.000308 (0.00138)	-0.00035 (0.00137)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.000087 (0.00105)	-0.000104 (0.00105)	0.0000402 (0.00114)	0.0000015 (0.00113)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.284 (0.128)**	0.281 (0.127)**	0.279 (0.128)**	0.274 (0.126)**
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.130 (0.074)*	0.131 (0.075)*		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.134 (0.133)	-0.135 (0.131)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.071 (0.149)	0.065 (0.148)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.166 (0.209)	0.172 (0.214)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.461 (0.318)	-0.046 (0.317)
Pseudo R ²	0.0710	0.0697	0.0740	0.0717
N	515	515	501	501

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8c: Debt and Support for Raising the Minimum Wage

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.450 (0.248)*	0.443 (0.247)*	0.434 (0.252)*	0.417 (0.251)*
<i>Age</i>	0.009 (0.008)	0.008 (0.008)	0.013 (0.009)	0.012 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.064 (0.489)	0.057 (0.485)	0.122 (0.501)	0.104 (0.498)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	0.064 (0.366)	0.046 (0.363)	0.047 (0.370)	0.023 (0.367)
<i>Religio</i>	0.035 (0.081)	0.026 (0.080)	0.040 (0.082)	0.026 (0.081)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.579 (0.553)	-0.619 (0.550)	-0.506 (0.576)	-0.506 (0.571)
<i>Married</i>	0.176 (0.257)	0.157 (0.255)	0.252 (0.260)	0.231 (0.257)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.217 (0.261)	-0.216 (0.259)	-0.132 (0.266)	-0.126 (0.264)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.026 (0.115)		0.011 (0.118)	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.749 (0.399)*		0.822 (0.420)**	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-2.527 (0.263)***	-2.599 (0.259)***	2.514 (0.268)***	-2.597 (0.265)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00359 (0.00214)*	0.00361 (0.00213)*	0.00354 (0.00221)	0.00357 (0.00220)
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.00566 (0.00307)*	-0.00579 (0.00305)*	-0.00622 (0.00314)**	-0.00639 (0.00311)**
<i>Polinter</i>	0.247 (0.148)*	0.231 (0.145)	0.219 (0.148)	0.202 (0.145)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.050 (0.067)	0.050 (0.069)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.076 (0.210)	0.074 (0.210)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.361 (0.361)	0.323 (0.353)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			0.156 (0.261)	0.166 (0.269)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.355 (0.306)	-0.375 (0.306)
Pseudo R ²	0.2562	0.2501	0.2581	0.2512
N	517	517	503	503

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9c: Debt and Support for Governmental Aid for Paying Medical Bills

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	0.322 (0.238)	0.297 (0.232)	0.253 (0.245)	0.223 (0.240)
<i>Age</i>	-0.007 (0.008)	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.012 (0.008)
<i>Hispanic</i>	-0.225 (0.421)	-0.070 (0.412)	-0.220 (0.423)	-0.099 (0.418)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.332 (0.323)	-0.283 (0.316)	-0.396 (0.328)	-0.367 (0.323)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.046 (0.076)	-0.049 (0.074)	-0.074 (0.078)	-0.078 (0.076)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.059 (0.511)	-0.243 (0.497)	-0.197 (0.526)	-0.300 (0.513)
<i>Married</i>	-0.265 (0.245)	-0.318 (0.240)	-0.204 (0.251)	-0.252 (0.246)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.290 (0.252)	-0.303 (0.246)	-0.360 (0.257)	-0.379 (0.252)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.294 (0.110)***		0.252 (0.114)**	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	1.164 (0.349)***		1.053 (0.359)***	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-2.538 (0.303)***	-2.614 (0.297)***	-2.698 (0.320)***	-2.787 (0.315)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.00416 (0.00185)**	0.00343 (0.00181)	0.00403 (0.00195)**	0.00354 (0.00192)**
<i>Persinc</i>	-0.00396 (0.00275)	-0.00371 (0.00263)	-0.00394 (0.00284)	-0.00370 (0.00271)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.613 (0.149)***	0.588 (0.142)***	0.622 (0.150)***	0.598 (0.144)***
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.107 (0.062)*	0.105 (0.067)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			-0.069 (0.126)	-0.034 (0.124)
<i>Debtcredr</i>			0.023 (0.146)	0.020 (0.148)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.042 (0.037)	-0.031 (0.036)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			-0.066 (0.330)	-0.022 (0.327)
Pseudo R ²	0.2588	0.2316	0.2676	0.2468
N	498	498	484	484

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10c: Debt and Support for College Loan Forgiveness

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Gender</i>	1.040 (0.252)***	1.021 (0.250)***	1.040 (0.257)***	1.002 (0.254)***
<i>Age</i>	-0.016 (0.008)*	-0.020 (0.008)**	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.012 (0.009)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.800 (0.677)	0.935 (0.674)	0.724 (0.693)	0.841 (0.690)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.091 (0.399)	-0.001 (0.391)	-0.027 (0.404)	0.069 (0.397)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.054 (0.081)	-0.044 (0.080)	-0.078 (0.083)	-0.072 (0.082)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.318 (0.596)	-0.439 (0.594)	-0.377 (0.620)	-0.458 (0.624)
<i>Married</i>	-0.402 (0.270)	-0.439 (0.267)	-0.372 (0.272)	-0.369 (0.268)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.255 (0.270)	-0.269 (0.266)	-0.138 (0.275)	-0.177 (0.271)
<i>Finworry</i>	0.361 (0.129)***		0.375 (0.135)***	
<i>Concernincadver</i>	0.034 (0.366)		0.073 (0.382)	
<i>Pidrep</i>	-1.721 (0.265)***	-1.770 (0.259)***	-1.831 (0.272)***	-1.871 (0.264)***
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.000955 (0.00174)	0.000439 (0.00174)	0.00135 (0.00176)	0.000958 (0.00178)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.00103 (0.00211)	0.00109 (0.00218)	0.000639 (0.00183)	0.000766 (0.00196)
<i>Polinter</i>	0.044 (0.166)	0.103 (0.165)	0.029 (0.165)	0.098 (0.163)
<i>Debtmortr</i>	0.098 (0.086)	0.093 (0.086)		
<i>Colldebtr</i>			0.792 (0.493)	0.910 (0.504)*
<i>Debtcredr</i>			-0.016 (0.147)	0.004 (0.156)
<i>Hospdebtr</i>			-0.072 (0.042)*	-0.051 (0.039)
<i>Otherdebtr</i>			0.022 (0.310)	0.064 (0.303)
Pseudo R ²	0.2092	0.1939	0.2259	0.2106
N	455	455	442	442

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Appendix C: Figures

% who trust the govt in Washington always or most of the time



Figure 1a: Trust in Washington Since 1958

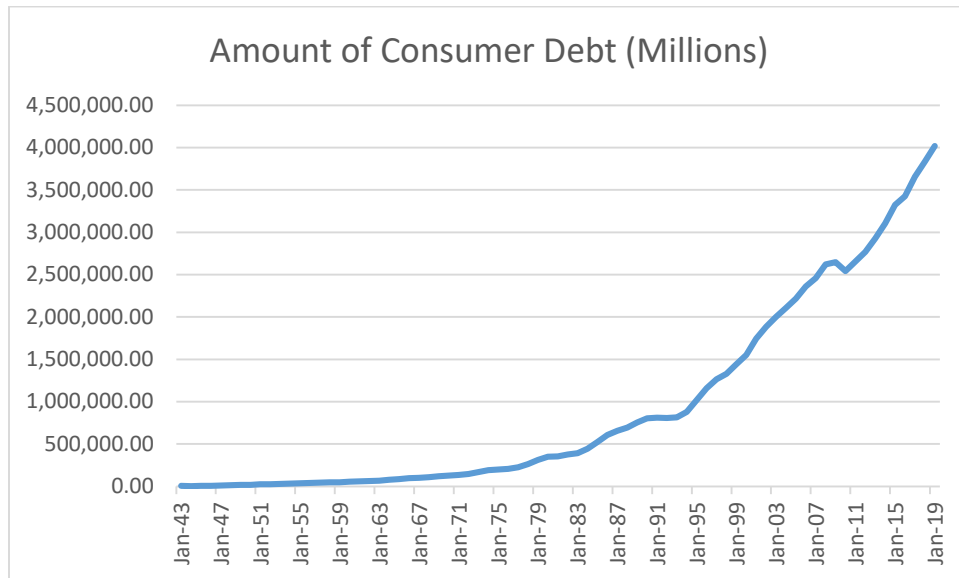


Figure 2a: Consumer Debt Growth Since 1943

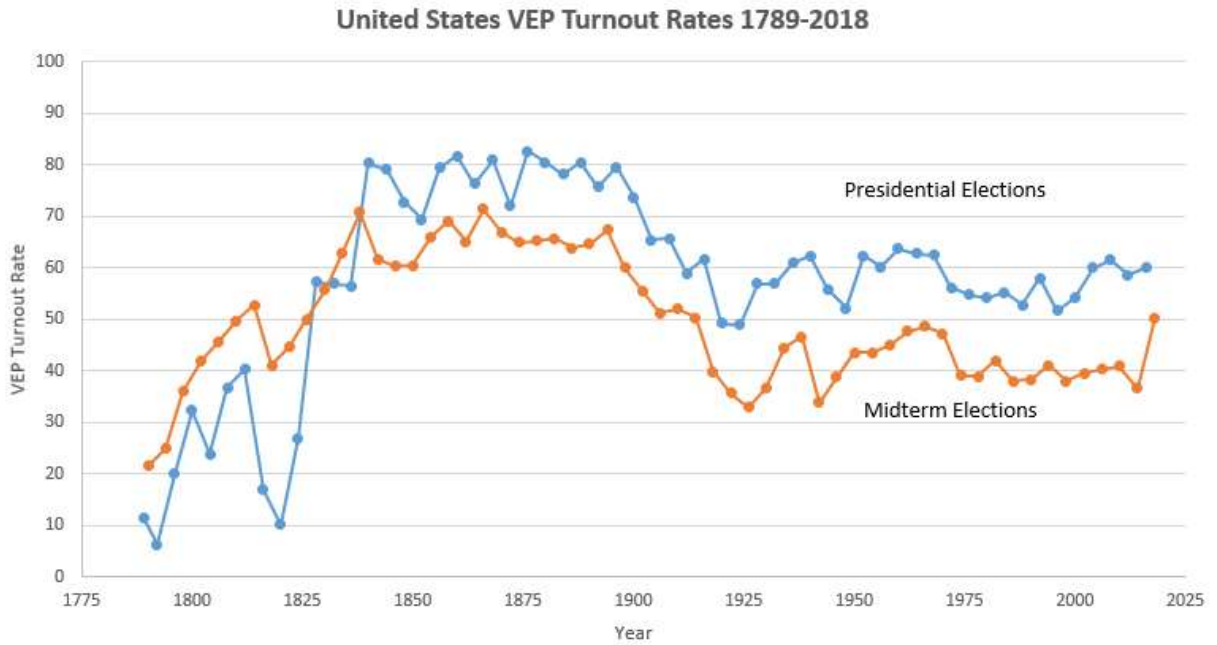


Figure 1b: Voter-Eligible Turnout in the U.S. Since 1789

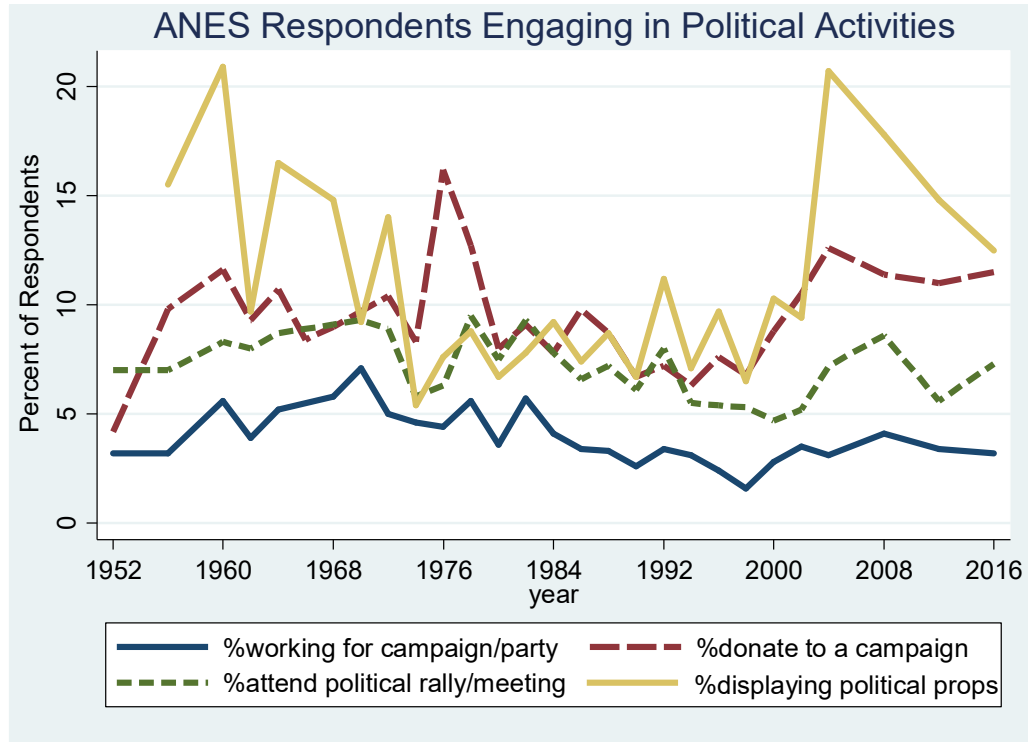


Figure 2b: Political Participation Since 1952

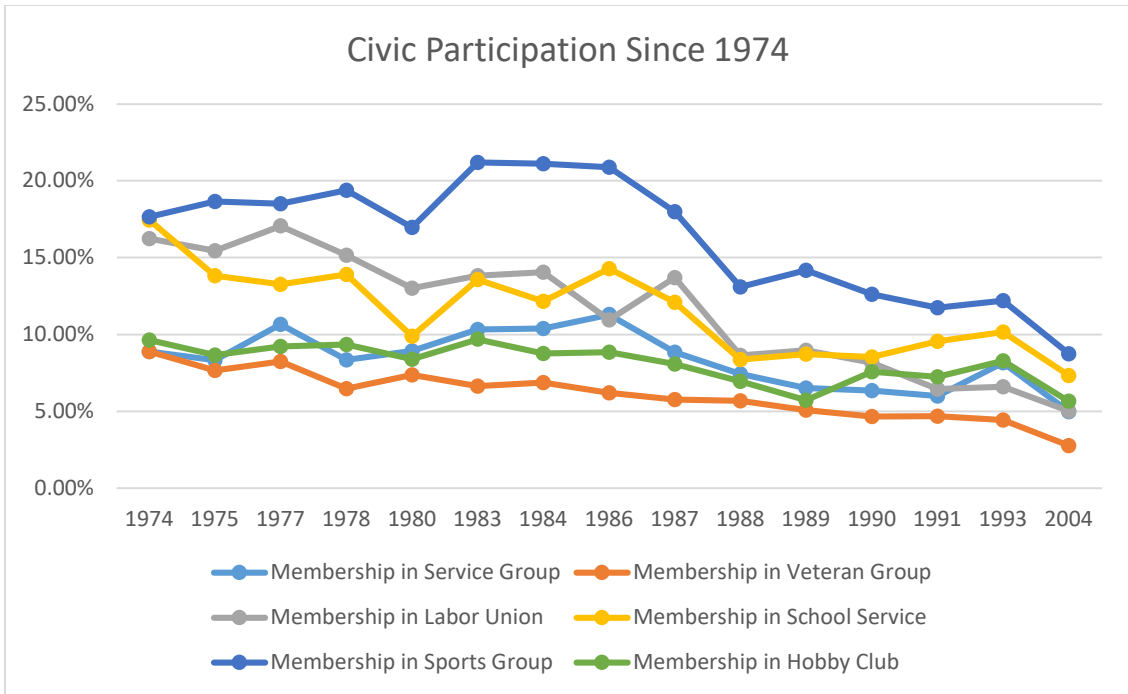


Figure 3b: Civic Participation Since 1974

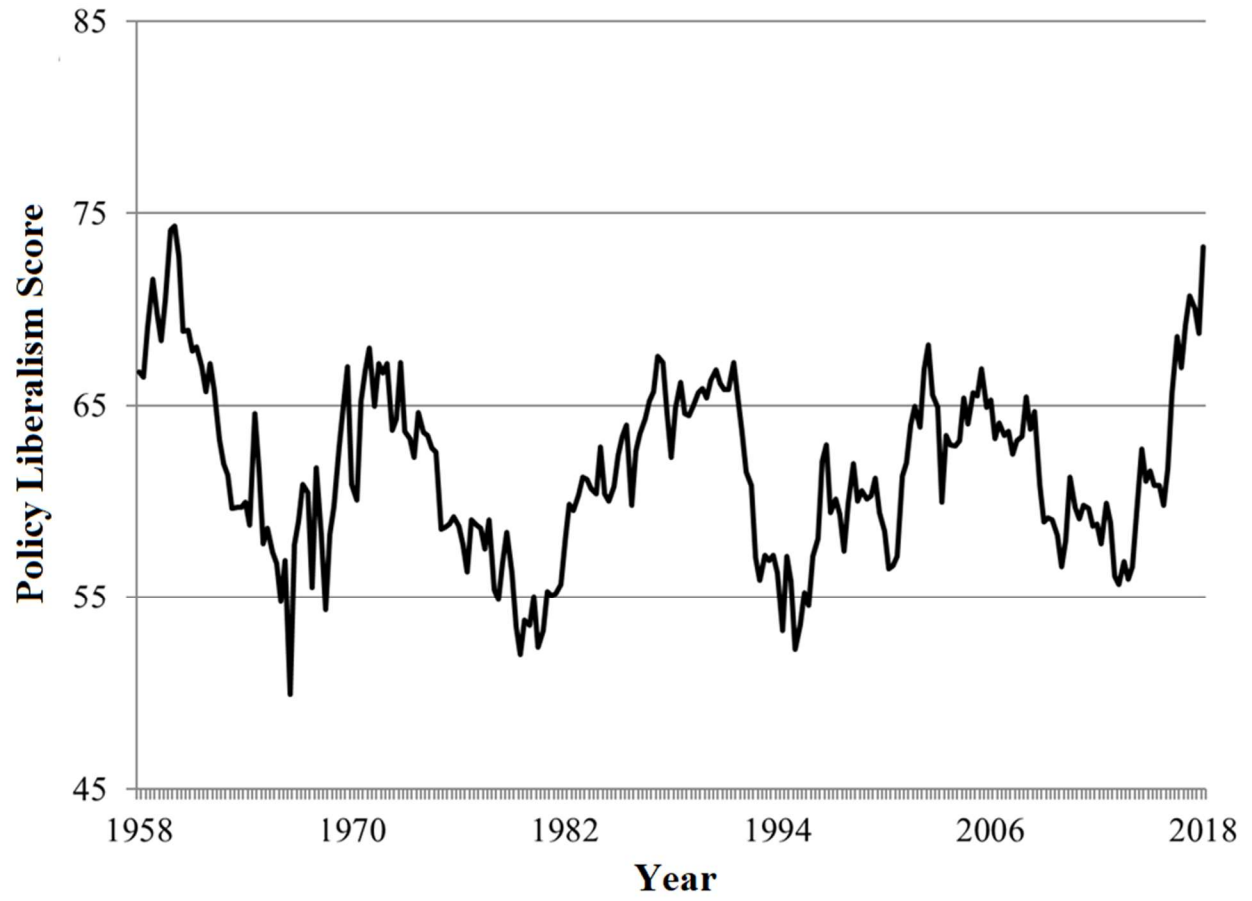


Figure 1c: Policy Mood, 1958-2019 (Stimson et al. 2019)

Appendix D: Supplemental Statistics

Summary Statistics on Independent variables:

Table 1d: Binary Variables

Variable	Yes (= 1)	No (= 0)	Percent of respondents indicating “Yes”	Number of respondents
<i>Gender</i> (1 = female)	384	244	61.15%	628
<i>Educ2</i> (1 = Has a college degree)	581	52	91.79%	633
<i>Nonwhite</i> (1 = Is nonwhite)	87	541	13.85%	628
<i>Hispanic</i> (1 = Is Hispanic)	50	583	7.90%	633
<i>Pidrep</i> (1 = Is Republican)	191	443	30.13%	634
<i>Married</i> (1 = Is Married)	353	279	55.85%	632
<i>Workft</i> (1 = employed full-time)	287	347	45.27%	634
<i>Concernincadver</i> (1 = is concerned about adversity)	85	548	13.43%	633

Table 2d: Nonbinary Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation	Number of Respondents
<i>Age</i>	49.741	49		18	90	17.370	611
<i>Religio</i>			0	0	4		633
<i>Finhealth</i>			3	0	7		630
<i>Polinter</i>			3	0	3		634
<i>Houseinc</i>	\$107,844	\$80,000		\$0	\$3,000,000	\$166,727	582
<i>Persinc</i>	\$63,203	\$45,000		\$0	\$2,000,000	\$100,088	581
<i>Finworry</i>			1	0	4		632

Who Has Debt?

In this section, I spend a brief time looking at those individuals who have debt. More specifically, I look at the individual-level factors that correlate with higher amounts of each type of debt. Given that I have mentioned that debt has risen, it is worth mentioning who has the most debt among the American population. Will I find that debt is disproportionately distributed among certain groups of people? Additionally, how are different debts distributed among the same demographic factors? Are the factors that lead one to have more credit card debt similar to those that influence the amount of miscellaneous debt said individual owes? Given that I have already briefly noted the total number of people in my survey who have specific types of debt, I will now delve into the demographic factors that influence how much of each variant of debt one owes.

Here, I exclude the dependent variables from this project (political trust, participation, and policy support) and retain the independent variables from all three studies as controls. In estimating how much debt a person has, I have estimated the models with ordinary least squares regression. To help the models better satisfy the assumptions of the Gauss-Markov theorem (in essence, to ensure that OLS is the best linear unbiased estimator), I have necessarily logged the debt variables as well as the personal and household income variables. As mentioned previously, I will exclude cases of debt where the individual owed more than \$1,000,000. Ultimately, this only excludes three total observations. Rather than looking at total debt, furthermore, I have only included the models for each of the five separate forms of debt. This will allow me to look at the individual factors influencing each form of debt. The results for these five separate regressions are presented in Table 3d below.

Table 3d: Factors Influencing Debt

Variable	Mortgage	College	Credit Card	Medical	Other
<i>Gender</i>	-0.039 (0.131)	0.069 (0.272)	-0.081 (0.227)	-0.423 (0.461)	-1.240 (0.486)**
<i>Age</i>	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.011 (0.012)	0.000 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.150)	0.005 (0.017)
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.151 (0.322)	0.709 (0.380)	-0.224 (0.402)	0.849 (0.653)	0.248 (0.703)
<i>Nonwhite</i>	-0.008 (0.211)	0.538 (0.399)	-0.293 (0.329)	-0.228 (0.595)	-0.834 (0.691)
<i>Religio</i>	-0.120 (0.043)***	0.022 (0.085)	0.147 (0.074)*	-0.016 (0.143)	0.054 (0.148)
<i>Educ2</i>	-0.536 (0.369)	4.627 (0.995)***	0.333 (0.497)	0.748 (0.626)	-1.179 (0.845)
<i>Married</i>	0.135 (0.149)	0.109 (0.266)	0.239 (0.233)	1.029 (0.459)**	0.131 (0.468)
<i>Workft</i>	-0.185 (0.156)	0.106 (0.290)	0.349 (0.243)	-0.220 (0.425)	0.686 (0.488)
<i>Finhealth</i>	0.154 (0.102)	-0.106 (0.198)	-0.107 (0.165)	-0.664 (0.313)**	0.135 (0.319)
<i>Pidrep</i>	0.064 (0.148)	-0.425 (0.290)	-0.733 (0.232)***	0.225 (0.473)	-0.308 (0.491)
<i>Houseinc</i>	0.242 (0.087)***	0.315 (0.156)**	0.414 (0.182)**	-0.472 (0.317)	-0.001 (0.443)
<i>Persinc</i>	0.379 (0.089)***	-0.159 (0.150)	-0.058 (0.178)	0.409 (0.312)	-0.113 (0.419)
<i>Polinter</i>	-0.066 (0.086)	0.231 (0.170)	-0.058 (0.141)	0.132 (0.299)	0.032 (0.301)
Constant	5.646***	3.452*	4.370**	8.986***	11.432***
R ²	0.3031	0.2907	0.1562	0.2138	0.2458
Adjusted R ²	0.2573	0.2045	0.1011	0.0656	0.0178
N	212	121	213	83	57

* Coefficient is significant at .10 level (2-tailed); ** Coefficient is significant at .05 level (2-tailed); *** Coefficient is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

From this table, we can see several things. For mortgage, three factors appear to be at play: religion, household income, and personal income. Higher incomes (along both measures) are associated with higher amounts owed on mortgages. A 1% increase in household income, and a 1% increase in personal incomes are associated, respectively, with a 0.276% and a 0.481% increase in mortgage debt. On the other hand, the effect of religiosity is the opposite. As one moves from a lower level of religiosity to the next, we see that debt drops by 11.352%. The findings for income are unsurprising. As people have more income, they are more likely to buy larger and more expensive homes, which necessarily increases their mortgage debt. The finding for religion is a bit harder to explain, though it might be due to the fact that poorer voters are, on average, more religious as well.

Moving on to college loan debt, the results for college education and household income are the only coefficients that are significant. For household income, the coefficient suggests that a 1% increase in household income results in a 0.371% increase in college debt, while for college education, having a college degree increases college loan debt by an astounding 10,118%. However, this is hardly surprising since it would make sense that those who have received a university degree would also owe money on that degree. The income finding is also somewhat surprising here, but this may be explained in part by the fact that those with college degrees also tend to have higher incomes.

For credit card debt, three factors are important: religiosity, household income, and Republican Party identification. For each of the three, respectively, we can see that on average, those who are a level more religious hold 15.855% more debt than those who are a level less religious, that a 1% increase in household income results in a 0.513% increase in credit card debt, and lastly, that Republicans hold 51.976% less debt than non-Republicans. The findings for

religiosity and Republican identification may seem initially contradictory since religious individuals tend to be Republicans. However, there is likely a racial effect going on here. Since religious individuals tend to be poorer (who also hold less debt), and since black Americans tend to be more religious and Democratic, we may be seeing a racial difference between black and white Americans, the latter of whom are more Republican than not. Additionally, the findings of Prasad et al. (2016) noted that whites, conservatives, and Republicans were less likely to take on debt due to negative perceptions among said groups toward debt.

For medical debt, we can see that only health and marriage are significant. For health, since a higher value means better health, it is unsurprising that better health is associated with lower medical debt. When one moves from one level of health to a higher one, we can see that these individuals, on average, hold 48.544% less debt than people whose health is one health level worse. Marriage has the opposite effect. Those who are married have, on average, have 179.738% more debt than those who are unmarried. The most likely reason as to why those who are married may have more medical debt is that those who are married are likely to be older (and thus go to the hospital more often). It is interesting though that this effect continues even when accounting for one's health. It is also possible that the added economic security of being married may induce people to take on more expensive medical procedures (which may also indicate why income in this case is not significant).

Lastly, for miscellaneous debts, we can see that only the variable gender is important. As compared with men, women tend to owe 71.069% less miscellaneous debt than men do. I am not sure as to the specifics for this. However, it may be possible that men are more likely to take out other loans to try and pay for investments such as businesses (a field which has historically been dominated by men). There may be a residual effect of men acting as breadwinners for families,

and in instances where they suffer from a low income, they were the ones responsible for taking out money from payday loan lenders.

To summarize, those who have higher incomes (particularly household incomes) generally have more debt than those of lower incomes. Only in the cases of hospital bill and miscellaneous debt do we see that income is not important. Beyond that, however, there are different demographic profiles of those who owe various forms of debt. Religious individuals generally owe more in credit card debt while simultaneously owing less on mortgages. Not unexpectedly, college graduates are more likely to owe debt on college loans than the general population. Republicans were less likely to owe on credit cards than were Democrats or independents. Healthier individuals owed less on medical bills, while married individuals owed more. The one interesting finding was that women owed less in other debts than men did. This may have been due to traditional gender roles in the household at work. In either event, we have a better idea of those who owe more debt than those who owe less.

VITA

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