

**The Effects of Income Inequality on Political Participation:  
A Contextual Analysis**

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I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this paper.

In America today, the gap between those at the top and the bottom of the socio-economic ladder has been dramatically widening as income inequality is drastically increasing. The rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer (Piketty and Saez 2006). In fact, from 1972 to 2009 those in the 10th percentile of wage earners have seen their wages decrease 1.1% while those in the 90th percentile have had a 32.3% wage increase and those in the 95th percentile have had a 39.0% wage increase (Schlozman et al. 2012, 75). The growing gap between the rich and the poor has been grabbing headlines and there is much speculation and research about the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. Much of this discussion of inequality centers on America's political system, because income inequality has political consequences and it is also a consequence of politics. In the words of Larry Bartels, "economic inequality is, in substantial part, a *political* phenomenon" (2008, 3). Specifically, this rising level of income inequality is negatively affecting the equality of political voice. One cross-national study of income inequality's effects on political participation found that high levels of inequality significantly depress electoral participation and political discussion among those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum (Solt 2008). That being said, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done in order to explain the puzzle of how income inequality and political participation are related. Brady (2003) suggests that to understand how income inequality and political participation interact we must hone in on the different pathways through which this relationship may function. With that goal in mind, this paper seeks to shed light on how income inequality affects political participation by focusing on community context as a particular mechanism through which this relationship operates.

There is a vast literature that demonstrates that community context plays a role in determining vote choice and political preferences (Burbank 1997; Carsey 1995; Huckfeldt 1984;

Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague 1993; Putnam 1966; Wright 1977), and there are volumes that call for a renewed focus on how social networks and contexts affect political behavior.<sup>1</sup> That being said, aside from a few studies (Huckfeldt 1979; Giles et al. 1981; Giles and Dantico 1982; Gimpel and Lay 2005; Oliver 1999), there is a dearth of research on how local community context affects participation. Further, this existing research does not look specifically at the relationship between income inequality at the community level and political participation. Thus, in this paper I tie together two different strands of political behavior research, contextual effects on behavior and the effect of income inequality on participation, to elucidate the relationship between income inequality at the community level and political participation.

In particular, this paper compares social forms of participation to individual forms of participation. I identify persuading someone to vote for a candidate, being persuaded to vote for a candidate, discussing politics with friends or family, and signing a petition in person as social forms of participation, and contacting a member of Congress, sending a message about politics online, and signing a petition online as individual forms of participation. I also look at efficacy, voting, contributing to a campaign, and recruitment to participate in politics to uncover further the effects of inequality at the community level on participation. The central finding of this thesis is that as inequality at the community level increases there is an increase in the social participation among high status individuals but this type of participation slightly decreases among low status individuals. On the other hand, in this paper I demonstrate that voting increases among low status individuals and decreases among high status individuals as community level inequality increases. In the analyses that follow I develop a theory to explain these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *The Social Logic of Politics* ed. Alan D. Zuckerman. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

### **Income Inequality, Political Participation, and Community Context**

Soss and Jacobs (2009, 109) identify research “that focuses on the interaction of contexts and individuals” as “structured political behavior.” It is not only individual traits such as race and socio-economic status that affect political behavior but behavior is also conditioned by the context in which an individual lives. My study takes this approach to understand political participation and especially how it functions in relation to income inequality at the community level. There is, indeed, evidence that economic conditions at the local level do influence behavior. For example, although the literature shows that individuals often focus on national economic conditions when determining how to vote (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981), there is research that demonstrates that perceptions of the national economy are heavily influenced by the economic conditions that an individual experiences at the local level (Ansolabehere et al. 2014; Books and Prysby 1999; Reeves and Gimpel 2012). These findings illustrate that individuals are not only aware of the economic conditions surrounding them but also that these perceptions influence their choices in the political sphere. Further, there is, as mentioned, evidence that local community context affects participation. These studies suggest that low status individuals in high status contexts tend to participate less (Giles et al. 1981; Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979). However, these studies do not explicitly include income inequality as an independent variable and there is little empirical evidence in general for how income inequality affects political participation, especially at the community level (Solt 2008, 48). Thus, this paper expands on previous work and fills gaps in the existing literature by looking at income inequality at the community level as an explanatory variable for participation.

The relationship between inequality and participation may manifest itself in a number of competing ways. For example, income inequality could be a motivating factor that leads to

increased participation in politics. This relationship could operate through various mechanisms. First, class-based conflicts could result in an increase in participation, which Solt (2008) terms “conflict theory.” When there is a high level of inequality, the gap between the rich and the poor is relatively large and, consequently, the difference in resources between the two groups is conspicuous. This could lead poor people to be very aware of their economic status relative to the rich individuals around them and result in individuals with a low socio-economic status vocally supporting redistributive policies. On the other hand, we would expect more wealthy people to oppose these types of policies because their implementation would come at a very high cost to the rich. If this theory were to hold, it would increase participation across all levels of socio-economic status in contexts of high inequality. Second, people may tend to embrace the behaviors of those around them causing low-income individuals to participate at higher levels in contexts of inequality. A long tradition of political science literature provides evidence suggesting that individuals with a high socio-economic status participate in politics more often and more consistency than individuals with a low socio-economic status (Verba et al. 1995; Schlozman et al. 2012). Thus, the “social contagion” model, as Giles et al. (1981) call it, maintains that the participatory behaviors that are more common among high status individuals will be adopted by low status individuals in contexts of high inequality. This would result in higher levels of participation among both low and high status individuals in contexts of high inequality as compared to low inequality contexts. Studies have, indeed, found that economically diverse communities foster civic participation (Oliver 1999).

A competing explanation is that economic inequality negatively affects political voice. Contrary to Oliver (1999) findings, studies have demonstrated that heterogeneity at the community level may diminish political participation among some groups (Giles et al. 1981;

Giles and Dantico 1982; Gimpel and Lay 2005; Huckfeldt 1979). This effect may manifest itself differently for different types of individuals and be the result of several different mechanisms. First, high levels of income inequality may lead to a decrease in social trust. Social trust is the broad feeling of shared community and agreement on the values of society, and scholars have successfully demonstrated that decreases in social trust are highly correlated with diminished political participation (Hetherington 2005). Moreover, Ulsaner and Brown (2005) find that inequality at the state level results in lower levels of social trust. I argue that inequality at a more localized context would lead to an even more rapid decline in social trust and, consequently, participation. This decrease in social trust at the community level could also be the result of the fact that living in a racially or economically heterogeneous community decreases membership in social and community groups (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000), and participating in these types of groups often leads to higher levels of trust (Verba et al. 1995). Further, research has found that inequality in general (Benabou 2000; Luttig 2013) and lower levels of social trust (Hetherington 2005) lead to more conservative policy preferences, which would further decrease support for redistributive policies making it unlikely for the “conflict theory” to hold.

Next, high levels of inequality may lead to a decrease in political efficacy, which in turn will decrease participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995). In a community with high inequality, an individual with a low socio-economic status can visibly see that others are doing economically better than him in their day-to-day lives. Thus, a low status individual may become discouraged with government and the possibility that redistributive policies can actually be effective, leading him to believe that his participation in politics is futile. If an individual does not believe that participation matters or can effect change, he will not regularly participate in politics. Thus, I expect to find that income inequality at the community

level has negative effects on external efficacy in particular, which “refers to one's belief that the political system and political officials are responsive to one's attempts to influence it and that citizens' demands do affect governance” (Cohen et al. 2001, 734). In their analysis of the effects on participation of being a partisan minority in one's community, Gimpel and Lay posit, “Being a part of a perpetual minority is demoralizing, and accompanying despair and feelings of inferiority undermine the sense of efficacy that promotes participation” (Gimpel and Lay 2005, 225). I would extend this argument to the effects of income inequality on efficacy, and thus I expect that inequality at the community level will more negatively impact low status individuals. Because external efficacy and political participation mutually reinforce each other (Finkel 1985) and the literature suggests that inequality may specifically decrease efficacy I include external efficacy as one of my dependent variables in my analyses, leading me to my first hypothesis.

*H1: As income inequality increases at the community level, external efficacy will decrease. This effect will be larger among low status individuals as compared to high status individuals.*

Further, I theorize that income inequality will affect social and individual forms of participation differently. Omoto and Snyder (2002) posit that community takes on a psychological dimension in which membership, influence, integration, need fulfillment, and shared emotional connection are all essential elements of a community (856). A tool through which income inequality in a local context could translate into decreased participation is through this violation of the psychological community. That is, in contexts of high inequality low status individuals may feel that they do not truly belong, are unable to integrate themselves into the community, or that they have little influence in that community. This violation of the psychological community negatively affects the levels of volunteering (Omoto and Snyder

2002), and I argue that this will have also have a negative affect on political participation. This effect should be greater for more social types of participation, because a low status individual who is shut out from his community, even if he has the propensity to participate in politics, will not want to express his political voice in ways that require interaction with that community. Previous work, indeed, supports the argument that community context has a larger and more significant effect on social versus individual participation (Huckfeldt 1979; Giles et al. 1981; Giles and Dantico 1982).

As mentioned, in this paper I identify persuading someone to vote for a candidate, being persuaded by a friend or acquaintance, discussing politics with friends or family, and signing a petition in person as social forms of participation. Further, the individual forms of participation included in my analyses are contacting a member of Congress, sending a message about politics online, and signing a petition online. I choose these specific forms of participation, because all of the social forms of participation require the respondent to have talked with someone in person about politics while the individual forms of participation do not imply in person interactions. This provides a precise comparison of how income inequality at the community level may be affecting social versus individual forms of political participation. Moreover, the social forms of participation encourage the expression of political preferences amongst individuals within a community, and if there is political diversity in high inequality communities these types of participation should decrease (Huckfeld and Sprague 1987). This discussion leads me to my second hypothesis.

*H2: Among both high and low status individuals, social forms of participation will be diminished while individual forms of participation will remain consistent as income inequality at*

*the community level increases. Further, social participation will be diminished at a higher rate among low status individuals.*

Other studies have identified giving to a political organization and voting as social and individual forms of participation, respectively. (Huckfeldt 1979; Giles and Dantico 1982). I, on the other hand, will evaluate these two forms of participation separately in this paper in order to create a more nuanced understanding of how the relationship between income inequality and political participation is operating. Voting and giving are both political acts that have social aspects. For example, one's community and social network can heavily influence an individual's decision about whether or not he decides to cast a ballot. There are experimental studies that indicate that people turnout to vote a higher rate if they believe that their neighbors will know that they voted (Gerber et al. 2008; Sinclair 2012). Similarly, individuals are more likely to contribute to a political organization if someone in their network contributes as well (Sinclair 2012). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that both voting and giving will be affected by community context.

That being said, unlike the social forms of participation that I have already identified, giving and vote choice are ultimately private acts. Individuals go into the voting booth alone and choose a candidate to vote for in secrecy, allowing them to express their preference without fear of others finding out. Further, an individual can give to campaign without anyone knowing that he did it. Thus, if the mechanism through which inequality is leading to decreased social participation among low status individuals is the desire to hide political preferences, giving and voting could provide a private outlet in which they can participate in politics. Thus, although I expect that voting and giving will still diminish as inequality increases at the community level

this effect should be smaller than that for social forms of participation, leading me to my third hypothesis.

*H3: As income inequality at the community level increases, voting and contributing to a candidate or campaign will decrease among low status individuals at a lower rate than social forms of participation.*

As discussed, the literature points to individual level social status as a mediator of the relationship between inequality at the community level and political participation. I theorize that education and income are both important indicators of status and, thus, both are used in my measure of social status. In particular, income is a measure of the number of resources that an individual has, but status takes into account not only resource and power but also esteem, which is captured through the education measure. Others have theorized that this is important in relation to inequality (Ridgeway 2014), and similar studies have also used education as a proxy for status (Giles et al. 1981; Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979). Further, education may also affect whether or not an individual believes that he has the opportunity to eventually rise to a higher status, because of the increased opportunities that result from education. This, perhaps, encourages highly educated individuals to identify with high-income individuals even if they are not a part of this high-income group.

### **Income Inequality and Recruitment to Participate**

Another mechanism through which the relationship between income inequality at the community level and political participation may operate is recruitment to participate in politics. Brady et al. (1999) argue that political recruiters are “rational prospectors.” That is, individuals and institutions that recruit others to participate in politics intentionally seek out those who are already more likely to participate, which are often people of a high socio-economic status. In

fact, the probability that a political party contacts a potential voter increases dramatically as socio-economic status increases (Schlozman et al. 2012, 475). Further, it seems that socio-economic status serves as a shortcut when recruiting strangers to participate in politics because when recruiters are contacting individuals that they do not know, other factors such as civic skills are more significant predictors of recruitment (Brady et al. 1999). That being said, there is an incentive for political parties to contact individuals with a low social status, and Brady et al. (1999) also note that it may not be sensible for recruiters to mobilize those who are already going to vote. Further, there is evidence that low-income individuals who are contacted by parties or other groups participate in politics at a higher rate. Studies have found that living in a battleground state during presidential elections, which implies more intense campaign exposure and contact from political parties, does little to increase the participation of those who are affluent but it does substantially increase participation among low-income individuals (Gimpel et al. 2007). The intense contact from political parties and campaigns in battleground states results in this increase in participation.

I argue that, perhaps, much of this direct contact and door-to-door mobilization from political parties and other groups take place in communities that are homogeneously low-income, because it is more efficient. It is easier to organize a get out the vote effort targeting low-income individuals who are unlikely to vote if they live in a largely concentrated area. A consequence of this would be that low-income individuals in communities that have high levels of income inequality are less likely to be contacted by a political party. In sum, perhaps recruiters are influenced by where they think they most effective places to recruit are, and there is reason to suspect that high inequality communities are not those places. Further, studies have found that contextual factors, which Brady et al. (1999) and Schlozman et al. (2012) do not include in their

analyses, do affect political recruitment (Stromblad and Myrberg 2013). Particularly, Stromblad and Myrberg (2013) find that in areas of what they call “social exclusion,” there are lower levels of recruitment. As I have argued, contexts of high inequality are communities in which I expect to find decreased social participation, which could be a characteristic of this “social exclusion.” Thus, in an effort to add a contextual dimension to models of political recruitment and to better understand how the relationship between income inequality at the community level and political participation may operate, I will look at the effects of inequality on recruitment to participate in politics. Because when analyzing this relationship I am looking at contact from political parties, I will use larger geographical units as the definition of community in these analyses. Much political action takes place at the county and Congressional district level through local and Congressional elections, so it is logical to assume that institutional contact may be more affected by these geographic boundaries than other types of participation where it is more suitable, as I will discuss in the next section of this paper, to define community at the zip code level. This discussion leads me to my next hypothesis.

*H4: As income inequality at the community level increases, recruitment of low status individuals to participate in politics by political parties or campaigns will decrease.*

### **Measuring Community Context**

Huckfeldt and Sprague (1993) reason that “a contextual effect exists when factors intrinsic to the individual cannot account for systematic variations in behavior across environments” (286). That being said, how should we define the context being studied? The unit being used to measure community could easily be the county, municipality, zip code, or any other number of geographical areas. The choice of geographical unit of analysis does indeed have an effect on the outcomes of statistical tests and should have theoretical backing, so it must

be chosen carefully (Guo and Bhat 2004). Although there is concern that government-designated boundaries are artificial and do not properly capture the effects of context (Guo and Bhat 2004; Wong et al. 2012), many studies have measured community context using these types of boundaries (Alex-Assenso and Assenso 2001; Books and Prysby 1999; Carsey 1995; Huckfeldt 1979; 1980; 1984; Leighley and Nagler 1981; Putnam 1966; Wright 1977) For this study, I use zip code boundaries to operationalize community context.

This choice of geographical unit is most appropriate for a number of reasons. First, zip codes are designated by the postal service for mail delivery, and they are intentionally geographically compact spaces (Sinclair 2012). Thus, zip code boundaries are a more accurate representation of a given community than other artificial government units. Most zip codes have a post office, which implies that everyone living in a given zip code at minimum shares one communal space that they are likely to use and be able to identify with. Second, Weinberg (2011) finds a fairly high level of income homogeneity at the census-tract level especially among high-income people, meaning that many census tracts have a high concentration of wealth or poverty. Thus, the census tract may be too small of a geographical unit to capture the reality that income inequality exists at the community level. For example, an individual who is low-income may have to drive through a relatively high-income census tract to get to the grocery store and thus indirectly interacts, though perhaps not on a personal level, with those people. These interactions may indeed have political consequences. In the words of Huckfeldt (1984), “less intimate interactions...discussions over backyard fences, casual encounters while taking walks or standing in line at the grocery, and so on may be politically influential even though they do not occur between close and intimate associates” (414). Further, there have been studies that allow respondents to self-define their communities (Wong et al. 2012), but this would not be

appropriate for the effect that I am trying to measure. An individual may choose to purposefully exclude pockets of a community that look economically different from his neighborhood even though living close to it may be affecting his political behavior.

There is also the possibility of a self-selection issue when studying community context. That is, individuals presumably choose where they want to live, and perhaps this choice is heavily influenced by political preferences or desire to live near economically similar people. However, although it is likely that many wealthy people want to live around other wealthy people (Hardman and Ioannides 2004) and poor people have fewer choices about where they live due to resource constraints, it is probably not likely that people pay special attention to politics when buying a home or choosing where to live. Thus, it may be the case that an individual chooses to live near people who have similar incomes or vice-versa. However, it is extremely unlikely that this decision has any correlation with past political participation, and once an individual lives in a specific community he is indeed influenced by the context of that community.

### **Data**

To test my hypotheses I use data from the 2012 American National Election Studies Survey (ANES), and I merge it with U.S. census data from the American Communities Survey. Specifically, I add the Gini coefficient for each respondent's zip code to the ANES dataset to represent to the level of inequality the respondent's community, and it serves as the first independent variable in my models.<sup>2</sup> The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of income inequality that ranges from zero to one with one representing communities where one individual

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<sup>2</sup> The zip codes in the restricted 2012 ANES are, unfortunately, not available for all respondents. Thus, in analyses using the zip code level Gini coefficient variable, the number of observations is smaller than the full dataset.

has all of the income and zero representing communities where everyone has equal shares of the income (Weinberg 2011). It accurately captures the effects of inequality that I am interested in testing, and other studies have found that it correlates with other measures of income inequality (Brady 2003, 18; Luttig 2013, 813; Weinberg 2011, 5). Other scholars have used a similar method of merging data from the U.S. census with national survey data to measure contextual effects when studying other topics (Books and Prysby 1999; Wright 1977). The census data that I am using is aggregated from census surveys taken from 2008 to 2012. Scholars have noted that accounting for time is often lacking in many contextual models (Prysby and Books 1987, 225), and that there is often a lag from when contextual variables shift to when they actually cause an effect on some dependent variable (Wright 1977). Thus, aggregating the contextual data from the five years prior to when the 2012 ANES data was taken may help to account for this lag.

The next independent variable used in my analyses is a dummy variable for individual level social status. To generate the dummy variable I created a social status index, which is coded from one to five with five representing high status individuals, using the respondent's level of education and income.<sup>3</sup> For the dummy variable, high status individuals are the top quartile of respondents, coded as one, and zero is equal to all else. Further, my models also include a variable measuring the interaction between the social status dummy variable and the Gini coefficient variable. Using the dummy variable for the interaction allows me to directly compare the effects of income inequality at the community level on high and low status individuals, which is the comparison of interest as stated in my hypotheses, and mitigates the challenges of interpreting interaction effects between two continuous variables (Brambor et al. 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> The wording for questions from the 2012 ANES used to create my variables is located in the appendix.

My models also include a number of other individual level control variables. First, I create three variables to control for the respondent's "psychological commitment to politics," as Campbell et al. (1960) put it. Specifically, these variables represent how interested the respondent is in the presidential campaign, how much he cares who wins, and if he thinks voting is a duty or a choice. These variables are coded so that higher values indicate a stronger commitment to politics. In many of my models I also control for strength of party ID, because it is a strong predictor of voting behavior (Bartels 2000). This variable is coded from one to three with one being self-identified independents and Republican or Democratic leaners, two representing moderate partisans, and three representing individuals with very strong partisan attachments. In my models similar to that of Bartels (2008) I control for political knowledge and ideology. The political knowledge index I use was created with questions about the majority party in the House of Representative and Senate, and it is coded so that individuals with higher levels of knowledge are assigned higher values. The ideology variable is scaled from -1 to 1 with -1 representing extreme liberals and 1 representing extreme conservatives. Finally, I control for individual level demographic variables known to affect participation including age, gender, and race. Gender is a dummy variable with one representing females and zero all else.

The first dependent variable that I look at is external efficacy. To measure this, I created an index based on if the respondent feels that public officials care what he thinks and if he believes that he can affect what the government does. The variable is coded from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the highest level of external efficacy. In the section of this paper on efficacy I also analyze a model with support for the government reducing income inequality as a dependent variable, because it could possibly serve as another measure of external efficacy. This variable is coded so that one signifies individuals who oppose this action, two represents those who neither

oppose nor support it, and three represents those who support the government addressing income inequality. The next group of dependent variables that I look at are the social and individual forms of participation previously mentioned. I create a social participation index and an individual participation index, which are used in my regression analyses. These indices are coded from zero to one, with zero representing a respondent who did none of the social or individual participatory acts and one representing an individual who did all of them. I, next, look at dependent variables for if a respondent voted in the 2012 elections or if he contributed to a political party, candidate, or any other type of political organization. The final dependent variable used in my analyses is whether or not an individual was recruited to participate in politics by a campaign or political party. Finally, as previous studies have done I use ordinary least squared regression to analyze the effects of both individual level and contextual level regressors across my dependent variables (Alesina and LaFerrara 2001; Boardman and Robert 2000; Oliver 1999). Robust standard errors are used where noted.

### **Efficacy and Income Inequality**

The first hypothesis I test is whether or not income inequality at the community level affects levels of external efficacy. Political efficacy is highly correlated with political participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995). Those who believe that their vote is decisive in an election or that they can influence policy outcomes are more likely to participate in politics because they think that it matters. That being said, efficacy and political participation are distinct concepts, and looking at the effect of inequality on efficacy can help in painting a more complete picture of how the relationship between income inequality at the community level and political participation operates. As discussed, there is reason to suspect that in contexts of high inequality, there will be lower levels of efficacy. In particular, I suspect

that income inequality will have a substantial effect on external efficacy, because income inequality is an outwardly visible phenomenon that is likely to influence people's perceptions of the effectiveness of government.

	Model 1.1	Model 1.2
Gini Coefficient	1.60*** (.535)	.968 (.708)
Social Status	.156*** (.029)	-.380 (.465)
Gini X Social Status		1.37 (1.08)
Political Knowledge	.256*** (.055)	.277*** (.055)
Strength of Party ID	.105*** (.030)	.096*** (.030)
Age	-.007 (.008)	-.005 (.0008)
Gender	-.276*** (.053)	-.255*** (.052)
Black	.098 (.087)	.067 (.084)
Hispanic	-.202* (.105)	-.241** (.105)
Other Race	-.137 (.112)	-.190* (.107)
Constant	2.04*** (.255)	2.72 (.312)
	<i>N</i> =935	<i>N</i> =974

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 1 displays the regression estimates for the effects of inequality at the community level and a host of control variables on external efficacy. Model 1.1 does not contain an interaction variable measuring the interaction between the Gini coefficient and individual level social status, while Model 1.2 includes this interaction variable. This second models directly tests

my hypothesis that income inequality affects the external efficacy of high and low status individuals differently. Interestingly, when the interaction effect is present, none of the variables of interest are statistically significant, indicating that individual level status does not influence the effect of contextual inequality on levels of external efficacy. However, when looking at Model 1.1, where there is no interaction effect present, the effect of income inequality when controlling for social status is quite large, positive, and statistically significant, all else constant. These findings refute both parts of my first hypothesis: that income inequality at the community level diminishes efficacy and does so at a higher rate for low status individuals. On the contrary, external efficacy increases with income inequality at the community level and this effect does not operate differently among low status individuals as compared to high status individuals. It is interesting that I find such a different effect of income inequality at the community level on efficacy than the literature would suggest. It could be the case that individuals living in contexts of high inequality have higher levels of external efficacy, because they are relying on government more in hopes of income inequality being addressed (and later in this paper I will show that as income inequality increases individuals in contexts of high inequality, regardless of social status, contact members of Congress more than those living in low inequality contexts). Or, perhaps, higher levels of efficacy in contexts of high inequality are the result of the poor conditions in communities with low inequality but high levels of poverty. That is, we may see this increase in external efficacy as income inequality increases, because conditions in areas with concentrated poverty are actually relatively worse than contexts with high levels of inequality resulting in a statistical “increase” in efficacy as income inequality increases. Indeed, individuals living in communities with widespread poverty have been found to have relatively low levels of efficacy (Boardman and Robert 2000).

Thus, to get a better idea of how efficacy changes as income inequality increases at the community level, it could be helpful to look at support for government intervention to address inequality as a proxy measure of external efficacy. I argue that this is an interesting and sufficient substitute for external efficacy, because a fundamental characteristic of an individual with high levels of external efficacy is the belief that government can help do something to address societal issues, such as income inequality. I would expect that those living in high inequality contexts are more perceptive of income inequality and consequently more likely to have their opinions on government intervention to address income inequality affected by their local economic conditions. As discussed, local economic conditions, do, in fact affect perceptions of the national economy and political preferences (Ansolabehere et al. 2014; Books and Prysby 1999; Reeves and Gimpel 2012). Thus, this question about if the government should address inequality could not only be picking up on the ideological leanings of respondents, that conservatives would be less likely to support this type of government intervention, but also on if they actually think that the government can do anything to effectively address income inequality.

Table 2 displays the regression estimates for a model with an index of support for government intervention to address income inequality as the dependent variable.<sup>4</sup> To address the issue that the support for this type of government action may just be the result of political ideology, I control for ideological leanings, and higher values for the ideology variable indicate more conservative preferences. In this model, as opposed to that for efficacy, the coefficients for individual status, the Gini coefficient, and their interaction, are all statistically significant even when controlling for ideology. The magnitude and sign of these coefficients indicates that the probability of low status individuals supporting the government trying to shrink the gap between

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<sup>4</sup> The control variables for this model as well as the model with the efficacy dependent variable are based on a similar analysis in Bartels (2008), with my contextual variables added.

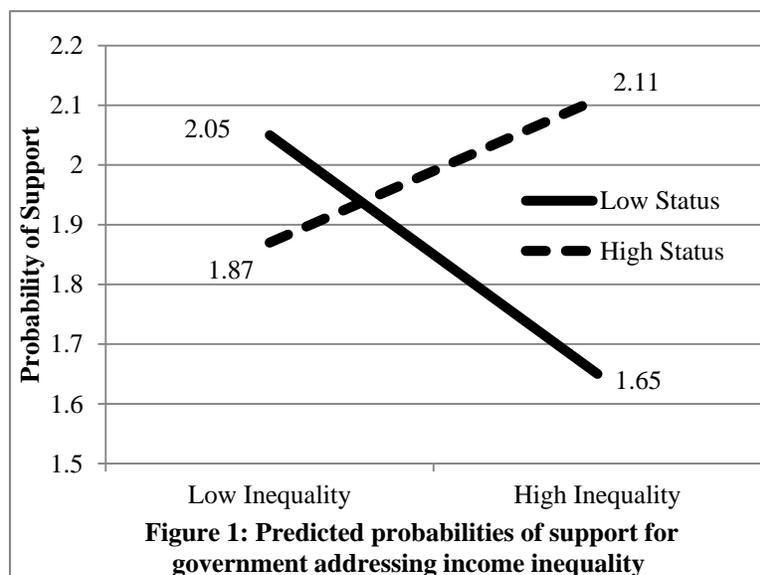
the rich and the poor decreases as income inequality increases, all else constant. Further, as inequality increases, support for government action to address inequality increases among high status individuals. This finding is quite surprising. It would seem logical that low status individuals living in contexts of high inequality would be in support of government action to address income inequality, but this is clearly not the case.

**Table 2: Linear Regression Estimates for Support of Government Intervention to Address Income Inequality**

Gini Coefficient	-1.52** (.781)
Social Status Dummy	-.989** (.488)
Gini X Status	2.43** (1.13)
Political Knowledge	.078 (.083)
Ideology	-.822*** (.054)
Age	-.025*** (.008)
Gender	.076 (.055)
Constant	2.74*** (.352)
	<i>N</i> =805

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Using the predicted probabilities for the level of support for government intervention to address income inequality, Figure 1 illustrates just how significant this effect is. I estimated the predicted level of support displayed in this figure by setting the individual status, Gini coefficient, and interaction variables at the value that I am interested in isolating and holding all other variables in the model at their means. Theoretically, the Gini coefficient can take a value from zero to one. However, to create a more realistic prediction when calculating the predicted probability for high and low contexts of inequality, I assigned the variable the highest (.5937) and lowest (.331) Gini coefficients that were found in the dataset, respectively. This figure shows that in low inequality contexts low status individuals are more likely to support government intervention than high status individuals, but the level of support for this action is relatively close between these two groups at 2.05 and 1.87 respectively. However, in contexts of high inequality the predicted level of support among high status individuals (2.11) is higher than that of low status individuals (1.65). Moreover, this gap is larger than the one that we saw in low inequality contexts. Thus, it is clear that income inequality at the community levels influences if an individual supports the government using its power to address income inequality and that this affect is different among high and low status individuals.



This could have a few explanations. First, although I control for ideology in this model, perhaps partisan preferences are influencing this finding. That is, maybe low status individuals in high inequality contexts are less likely to support government action on income inequality, because they are more Republican and consequently disagree about government intervention generally due to their partisan leaning. Table 3 shows that individuals in contexts of high inequality are much more likely to support the Democratic Party. 57.25% of individuals living in communities that have Gini coefficients that are in the top quartile of the dataset are Democrats, while in this group only 35.51% are Republicans. Thus, it is unlikely that this decrease in support for government action on inequality that we see is due to an underlying partisan or ideological makeup of high inequality communities. A second explanation could be that individuals living in these high inequality contexts do not truly feel the effects of the high levels of inequality. That is, they do not feel the inequality of their community worse than anywhere else, and as a result the context is not what is driving this decrease in support for government intervention. That being said, 57.99% of individuals living in communities that have Gini coefficients that fall among those in the top quartile of Gini coefficients in the dataset believe that income inequality is a bad thing, while only 49.29% of those in the lowest quartile believe the same. It is, thus, likely that individuals living in high status contexts are indeed negatively responding to the income inequality in their community.

	1 <sup>st</sup> Quartile	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quartile	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	4 <sup>th</sup> Quartile
Democrat	45.01%	43.28%	49.00%	57.25%
Republican	43.75%	44.68%	41.03%	35.51%

Alternatively, the findings presented in Table 2 could be telling us a story that is related to efficacy. That is, although, as demonstrated, individuals, without regard to social status, in high inequality contexts have higher levels of efficacy, perhaps low status individuals in high inequality contexts are less likely to believe that the government can do anything to make the gap between the rich and the poor smaller. Those who are living in contexts of entrenched income inequality and see the large resource gaps between them and more wealthy individuals have perhaps tried to get the government to address the issue without success or have seen a number of policies fail. Consequently, the probability of low status individuals in high status contexts supporting government action to address the issue is diminished. Meanwhile, high status individuals who have not personally felt the effects of income inequality as hard are more likely to support government action on income inequality, because they just want something to be done about the issue.

In all, these findings indicate that income inequality at the community level is affecting how individuals perceive if the government should reduce income inequality. This has a number of implications. First, although this study is not necessarily concerned with political preferences, these findings are consistent with other studies that illustrate that economic factors at the community level do indeed affect preferences and perceptions (Ansolabehere et al. 2014; Books and Prysby 1999; Reeves and Gimpel 2012). Further, efficacy and political participation are correlated (Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995), so if we assume that support for the government reducing income inequality is an accurate proxy for external efficacy when trying to understand how external efficacy relates with income inequality at the community level, we should expect that find that political participation also declines as income inequality at the community level increases.

### **Social versus Individual Forms of Participation**

This analysis of income inequality at the community level's effects on external efficacy leads me to a discussion of my second hypothesis, which states that income inequality at the community level will diminish social forms of participation particularly among low status individuals. Although most acts of political participation engender higher levels of efficacy (Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995), higher levels of socially based discursive participation in particular are correlated with high levels of efficacy (Jacobs et al. 2009). In the words of Jacobs et al. (2009), political discussion especially increases "efficacy by helping [individuals] see the relevance of government and politics to their private lives" (13). That being said, my analysis of income inequality's effects on efficacy provides some mixed signals. Perhaps, social forms of participation will actually increase with inequality like external efficacy and lead me to reject my second hypothesis. On the other hand, I also demonstrated that higher levels of income inequality at the community level cause low status individuals to have lower support for government action to address income inequality. Thus, to better understand how the relationship between income inequality and social forms of participation is operating, I examine the levels of participation for a number of social and individual forms of participation holding individual social status constant. I identify four particular variables that are socially based forms of participation: having a friend, coworker, or acquaintance who talked to you about voting for a specific candidate, trying to convince someone else to vote for a specific candidate, discussing politics with friends or family, and signing a petition. The individually based forms of participation are signing an online petition, sending a message on Facebook or Twitter about politics, and contacting a government official. The percentages of high and low status individuals who engaged in these types of political participation are shown in Table 4. For these analyses the

low inequality context is operationalized as the bottom quartile of zip code level Gini coefficients in the dataset and the high inequality context is the top quartile. The medium level of inequality is the 50% of respondents who live in a zip code with a Gini coefficient between these two groups.

**Table 4: Percentage of Individuals Who Participated in Individually and Socially Based Forms of Participation by Level of Inequality**

<b>Socially Based Participation</b>				<b>Individually Based Participation</b>			
<b>Persuaded someone to vote for a candidate</b>				<b>Contacted a member of Congress</b>			
	Low	Medium	High		Low	Medium	High
Low Status	39.14%	39.37%	32.75%	Low Status	8.51%	12.38%	14.60%
High Status	41.86%	44.79%	49.42%	High Status	18.91%	21.67%	33.33%
<i>N=1,928</i>				<i>N=1,926</i>			
<b>Persuaded by friend or acquaintance</b>				<b>Sent a message about politics online</b>			
	Low	Medium	High		Low	Medium	High
Low Status	35.89%	41.09%	32.54%	Low Status	22.21%	21.86%	21.14%
High Status	38.01%	52.25%	48.16%	High Status	23.29%	18.06%	20.77%
<i>N=1,922</i>				<i>N=1,926</i>			
<b>Discussed politics with friends or family</b>				<b>Signed a petition online</b>			
	Low	Medium	High		Low	Medium	High
Low Status	71.80%	69.87%	75.44%	Low Status	13.46%	17.43%	20.08%
High Status	79.79%	89.79%	88.24%	High Status	20.35%	22.74%	33.62%
<i>N=1,927</i>				<i>N=1,920</i>			
<b>Signed a petition in person</b>							
	Low	Medium	High				
Low Status	22.00%	19.69%	21.44%				
High Status	21.50%	28.60%	34.68%				
<i>N=1,920</i>							

The first socially based form of participation I look at is if an individual has tried to convince a friend or family member that he should vote for a specific candidate. Among low status individuals, as inequality increases from the lowest to highest level, the number of individuals who engaged in this type of activity drops from 39.14% to 32.75%. Among high status individuals, however, 41.86% of individuals tried to convince someone to vote for a specific candidate in low inequality contexts while 49.42% did so in contexts of high inequality.

The same pattern holds for the reciprocal of this type of participation; another individual trying to convince the respondent to vote for a particular candidate. In low inequality contexts 35.89% of low status and 38.01% of high status individuals were asked to vote for a specific candidate. Meanwhile, in contexts of high inequality 48.16% of high status individuals had someone try to persuade them while only 32.54% of low status individuals had the same encounter. Thus, it seems that in low inequality contexts, high and low status individuals are engaging in socially based participation at similar levels. However, as income inequality increases at the community level a participation gap forms.

The third form of socially based participation is any form of political discussion with family or friends. This type of participation behaves a bit differently than the first two social based participation variables. That is, I actually find a slight increase from 71.80% to 75.44% of low status individuals discussing politics as income inequality increases at the community level. However, high status individuals still engage in this type of participation at much higher levels and there is a bigger increase from 79.79% to 88.24% as income inequality increases. Perhaps, we see this increase for general discussion and not persuasion to vote for a particular candidate because of differences in political preferences among high and low status individuals. That is, when an individual is persuading someone to vote for a specific candidate, his political preferences must be explicitly clear. However, it is possible to just discuss politics in a manner that is more superficial and does not require revealing true political preferences. Indeed, studies find that individuals in the political minority tend to avoid revealing their partisan preferences when talking about politics if they know the person that they are talking to favors the majority party in their community (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). The final act of social participation I analyze is signing a petition in person. Among low status individuals the percentage of

respondents who signed a petition in person stays relatively consistent across levels of inequality, but the number of high status individuals who signed a petition increases by 13% when moving from low to high inequality. There is a consistent theme through all of these forms of participation: socially based participation is relatively equal between low and high status individuals in contexts of low inequality, but high status individuals engage in the socially based forms of participate at much higher levels than low status individuals in high inequality contexts.

As expected, community level income inequality affects individual forms of participation in different ways than social forms of participation. Namely, the pattern of a participation gap forming between high and low status individuals as income inequality increases for social forms of participation does not persist when looking at individually based forms of participation. The first individually based form of participation that I look at is signing a petition online. Contrary to individuals who signed a petition face-to-face, there was an increase in signing a petition online for both high and low status individuals as inequality increased. Namely, there was nearly a 7% increase for low status individuals and a 13% increase for high status individuals. It is important to note that the number of respondents overall who sign a petition in person was higher than those who signed one online, illustrating that people engage in more traditional forms of face-to-face participation at higher levels. Thus, despite this encouraging increase in participation with an increase in inequality, the lower levels of signing a petition online puts low status individuals at a further disadvantage. That being said, in high inequality contexts the number of individuals who signed an online petition (20.08%) is nearly the same as the number who signed a petition in person (21.44%). This finding suggests that low status individuals in contexts of high inequality, perhaps, could have the desire to engage in these more social forms

of participation but feel blocked from doing it by their position in the community. Thus, they engage in politics through impersonal participator acts that are not face-to-face.

This pattern continues for other forms of individually based participation. When looking at the percentage of individuals who have sent a message or posted on Facebook or Twitter about politics, we do not see an increase in the number of low status respondents engaging in this activity as inequality increases like for signing a petition online. Among both high and low status individuals this type of political engagement is consistent as inequality increases and there is not a large gap between the two groups at any level of inequality. Thus, it does not seem that income inequality at the community level is contributing to a gap in this type of participation between high and low status people. Finally, the percentage of low status individuals who has contacted a Senator or member of the House of Representatives nearly doubles from 8.51% to 14.60% as income contextual income inequality increases from the lowest to highest level. This form of participation also nearly doubles among high status individuals as income inequality increases. As mentioned, perhaps individuals in high inequality contexts are seeking support from the government. This is quite interesting given that in the section of this paper on efficacy I found that low status individuals are less supportive of government action on inequality as contextual inequality increases. In all, and more importantly for the purposes of this project, these findings allow me to at least preliminarily accept parts of my second hypothesis, which states that social forms of participation will decrease for all social groups and individual forms of participation will remain consistent as inequality increases. In a slight deviation from this hypothesis, my findings indicate that income inequality at the community level results in a decrease in most forms of social participation but only among low status individuals, and individually based forms

of participation either remain consistent or increase with income inequality among both high and low status individuals.

In order to determine if these relationships hold when controlling for other variables, I created social participation and individual participation indices using these variables and ran regression estimates on them holding a number of individual level demographic variables constant. For ease of comparison, the indices are both scaled from zero to one, with individuals who have engaged in all of the activities being assigned as one. The regression estimates for these models are located in Table 5. Models 5.1 and 5.3 are baseline models without the zip code Gini coefficient variable measuring contextual inequality. In these two models the social status variable is positive and very statistically significant, which is consistent with the large body of literature that finds that the propensity to participate increases with socio-economic status (Schlozman et al. 2012).

Models 5.1 and 5.2 have the socially based participation index as the dependent variable and Models 5.3 and 5.4 have the individually based participation index as the dependent variable. A notable feature of the regression estimates in this table is that for Model 5.4, which has individually based participation as the dependent variable, the contextual inequality, individual social status, and interaction variables are all not even marginally statistically significant, suggesting that context does not affect engagement in individually based forms of participation, all else constant. Moreover, when the Gini coefficient variable is added the adjusted R-squared decreases slightly from 0.12 in Model 5.3 to 0.11 in Model 5.4, providing further evidence that adding these variables adds no value in explaining the variation in individually based participation.

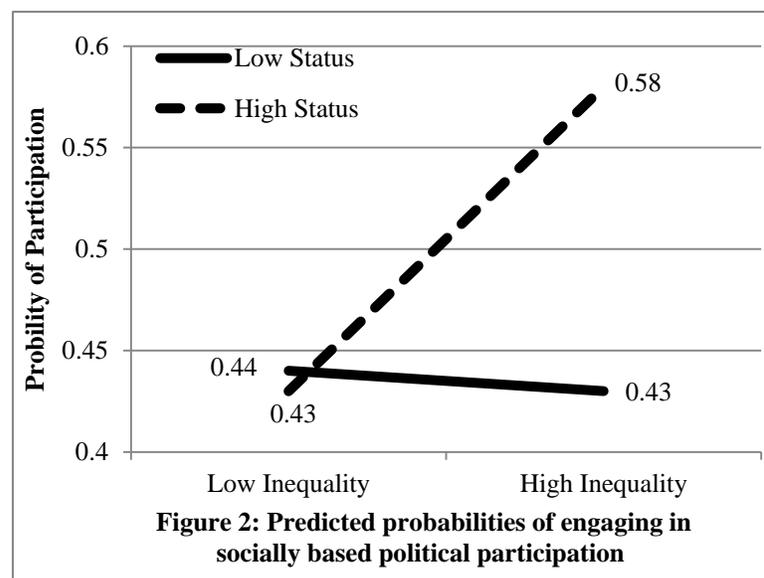
**Table 5: Linear Regression Estimates for Socially and Individually Based Participation**

	Model 5.1 Social Participation	Model 5.2 Social Participation	Model 5.3 Individual Participation	Model 5.4 Individual Participation
Gini Coefficient		-.049 (.170)		.231 (.171)
Social Status Dummy	.057*** (.008)	-.219* (.124)	.055*** (.009)	-.180 (.125)
Gini X Status		.626** (.288)		.468 (.291)
Age	-.002* (.001)	-.008*** (.002)	-.012*** (.001)	-.018*** (.002)
Gender	.001 (.007)	.006 (.013)	-.001 (.008)	.005 (.013)
Black	-.061*** (.012)	-.076*** (.020)	-.089*** (.012)	-.107*** (.020)
Hispanic	-.054*** (.012)	-.029 (.021)	-.068*** (.013)	-.068*** (.021)
Other Race	-.035** (.016)	-.001 (.026)	-.017 (.016)	.023 (.026)
Interest in Campaign	.122*** (.006)	.098*** (.010)	.101*** (.006)	.072*** (.010)
Care Who Wins	.104*** (.011)	.123*** (.019)	.069*** (.011)	.082*** (.019)
Duty or Choice?	.010*** (.002)	.014*** (.003)	.012*** (.112)	.012*** (.003)
Strength PID	.003 (.005)	.003 (.008)	-.003 (.005)	.016** (.008)
Constant	.016 (.016)	.140 (.076)	-.026 (.017)	-.085 (.076)
	<i>N</i> =5,331	<i>N</i> =1,797	<i>N</i> =5,348	<i>N</i> =1,804

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

On the other hand, in the socially based participation model (Model 5.2), both the status variable and the interaction effect between individual status and contextual inequality are at least marginally significant. These coefficients indicate that for high status individuals, as income inequality increases engagement in socially based participation increases by 0.577 units, all else constant. Meanwhile, among low status individuals these types of activities decrease slightly as the level of inequality increases. For a visual representation, Figure 2 displays the predicted

probabilities for engaging in socially based participation with respect to the individual level status and Gini coefficient variables. The values for these predicted probabilities were obtained through the same method as that for the predicted support for government intervention to address income inequality. This figure shows the large gap that forms between high and low status individuals as income inequality increases at the community level for socially based participation. In fact, in communities with the lowest levels of income inequality, low status individuals actually engage in social forms of participation at slightly higher levels than high status individuals. However, in high inequality contexts, there is a .152 unit difference in the predicted probability of participating in socially based participation. This is a significantly large gap that forms between high and low status individuals in contexts of high inequality.



What explains this disparity in political participation for social activities that we do not see for individually based activities? First, these findings highlight the link between efficacy and socially based forms of participation. If we accept support for government intervention to address income inequality as a proxy for external efficacy, the decrease in socially based

participation correlates with a decrease in efficacy, which is expected based on the literature on socially based discursive participation (Jacobs et al. 2009). Second, these findings provide evidence that the demographics of a social context in which an individual lives, in this case level of income inequality, greatly affects more social forms of participation. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have found neighborhood status affects the participation of low status individuals (Giles et al. 1981; Huckfeldt 1979) and that income inequality at the community level leads to decreased group membership (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000). Finally, these findings suggest that there is some sort of social process present that excludes low status individuals from social participation in contexts of high inequality. That is, low status individuals are shut out social forms of participation in contexts of high inequality but individual level status seems to have no affect on individually based participation. To shed further light on these findings and advance this theory, I turn to an analysis of voting and contributing to a political group; two forms of participation that are neither as explicitly socially nor individually discursive as the other forms of participation that I have looked at so far.

### **Voting and Giving**

Due to the fact that it is extremely unlikely for a given individual to cast the deciding ballot in an election, it may not be rational to vote purely for material benefits or because you think your vote will be decisive in the election (Levine and Palfrey 2007). Rather, many people participate in politics for the social solidary benefits, and, thus, individuals often vote if there is a social pressure to do so in their community. Thus, contrary my third hypothesis, which states that voting should decrease as income inequality at the community level increases, although at a lower rate than social forms of participation, it could, in fact, be the case that low status individuals in high inequality contexts turnout to vote at higher levels, because they still can

receive social pressure from their high status neighbors. These high status individuals are more likely to vote in the first place (Schlozman et al. 2012), and perhaps low status individuals in high inequality contexts mimic their participatory attitudes. Further, if these low status individuals tend to have different preference than the high status individuals around them, which would discourage social participation, the privacy of their vote choice absolves this fear of expressing different preferences. Indeed, my findings show that low status individuals in high inequality contexts are more likely to vote than if they lived in a low inequality context. Table 6 displays the marginal probability of voting during the 2012 elections. Model 6.1 is a baseline model without the Gini coefficient variable, and Model 6.2 contains the contextual variable measuring the Gini coefficient at the zip code level as well as an interaction variable between the contextual level of inequality and individual status. First, it is noteworthy that in Model 6.1 social status is very statistically significant and has a positive coefficient with a large magnitude, which is consistent with previous research (Schlozman et al. 2012).

Moreover, in model 6.2 the Gini coefficient, social status, and interaction variables are all statistically significant ( $p=0.066$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $p=0.002$  respectively). Further, the sign and magnitude of the coefficients indicates that income inequality at the community level has divergent effects on the probability of voting depending on individual level social status. When the socio-economic status dummy variable is equal to zero, which represents low status respondents, all else constant the probability of voting increases by .638 units as the level of inequality increases. Meanwhile, among high status individuals the probability of voting decreases as the level of inequality increases. The predicted probabilities for voting, obtained by the same method described for the support for government addressing inequality model, are displayed in Figure 3. Notably, the lines for high and low status individuals have opposite slopes and intersect. At

levels of low inequality there is a 0.281 unit gap in the probability of voting between high and low status individuals, with high status individuals being more likely to vote. However, as inequality increases voting among low status individuals increases, while it decreases among those with a high status. Further, at this highest level of inequality low status individuals, quite unexpectedly, are more likely than high status individuals to vote, with a predicted value of voting of 0.82 and 0.73 respectively.

**Table 6: Linear Regression Estimates for Marginal Probability of Voting**

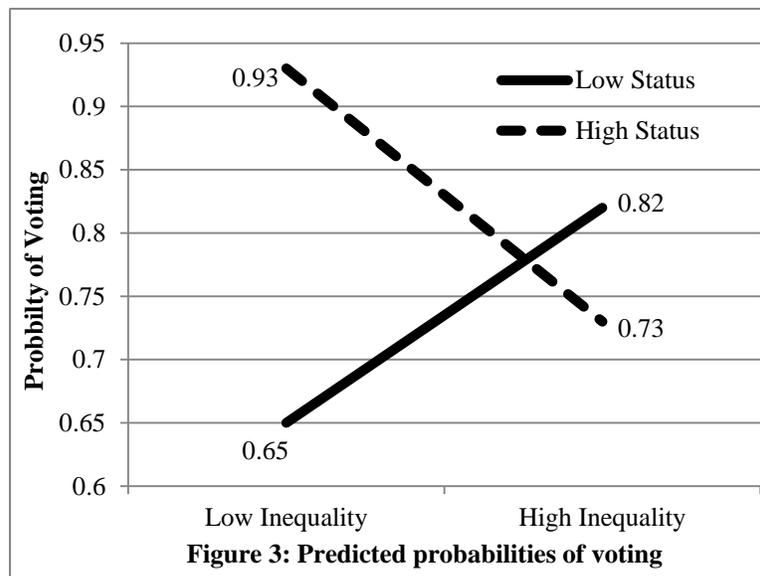
	Model 6.1	Model 6.2
Gini Coefficient		.638*
		(.346)
Social Status Dummy	.124***	.740***
	(.014)	(.189)
Gini X Status		-1.38***
		(.443)
Age	.011***	.010**
	(.002)	(.004)
Gender	.022	.024
	(.014)	(.024)
Black	.013	.031
	(.022)	(.030)
Hispanic	-.058**	-.068*
	(.026)	(.037)
Other Race	-.088***	-.089*
	(.032)	(.054)
Interest in Campaign	.077***	.095***
	(.012)	(.020)
Care Who Wins	.215***	.215***
	(.025)	(.041)
Duty or Choice?	.023***	.020***
	(.003)	(.005)
Strength PID	.052***	.058***
	(.008)	(.014)
Years in Community	.002***	.002**
	(.001)	(.001)
Constant	.078**	-.251
	(.034)	(.154)
	<i>N</i> =5,344	<i>N</i> =1,799

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses.  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Further, it is important to note that the variables in model 6.2 are significant even when controlling for the number of years that the respondent has lived in his community. This suggests that the partial effect of inequality at the community level on voting among low status individuals is not necessarily overshadowed by the partial effect of how long the individual has lived in his community. I would expect that the longer that an individual lives in his community, the more relationships he has with those who live near him. Thus, if when controlling for the number of years the respondent has lived in his community the effect of inequality at the community level was not significant we could theorize that, perhaps, the effect of inequality dependent on how long an individual had lived in his community. However, this is not the case, which provides support for my theory about the effects of inequality on social as opposed to individual forms of participation. Voting is not so social that it requires living in a community for a long time to receive the civic duty or social solidary benefit from completing the act. Rather, perhaps the social pressure to vote and the social benefits received from do not require strong relationships with others in an individual's community. A voter goes to the polls and he interacts with those waiting in line, the volunteer who checks his ID, and he may wear his "I Voted" sticker to the grocery store later that day. None of these interactions require previous relationships but a social benefit may still be received, especially if there is social pressure to participate.

On the other hand, the social forms of participation that I analyzed in the previous section of this paper are more likely to be dependent on these types of relationships, and the individual types of participation do not require an interaction with anyone in the individual's community. These findings present an interesting puzzle: as income inequality increases at the community level, social forms of participation decrease among low status individuals but voting increases

among this same group. Meanwhile, I find the opposite effects among high status individuals for these two types of political participation. It seems low status individuals are barred from the most social forms of participation when there is a high level of inequality, but they still try to emulate the behavior of the high status people around them, perhaps through a social pressure mechanism, when in contexts of high inequality by voting.



I will, next, turn to a discussion of the effects of income inequality at the community level on giving to a political organization. Contributing to a political cause is an act of participation that is distinct from other forms of participation. Namely, it is the most unequal and class-stratified form of participation, and it is the type of participation that is most expandable (Schlozman et al. 2012). That is, unlike voting, which each citizen has only one of, and volunteering for a campaign, for which is limited by time, giving can be expanded dramatically. People at the highest income brackets have an incredible amount of discretion in how much that they want to donate. This is only one distinction between voting and giving money. The latter can also be seen as a more social act (Sinclair 2012). As discussed, although an individual's

propensity to vote may be higher if those close to him also vote, he can still receive social benefits of voting from just going to the polls and seeing total strangers. On the other hand, giving, which can be done in private, is more exclusive and is social insofar as someone else sees you do it. Sinclair (2012) argues that individuals give at higher levels when others in their network notice the gift, and “that these are public acts of adherence to a social norm of giving” (76). Among high-income individuals, donating to a political organization is more of a social norm, because these individuals have more resources. Thus, in contexts of high inequality perhaps we will find that, like voting, low status and low income individuals, despite their lack of resources, give at higher levels in contexts of inequality in order to adhere to this social norm.

The results of my empirical analyses provide little support for this theory. Table 7 presents the regression estimates of two models for contributing to a campaign, candidate or other political organization. The dependent variable for the models in this table is a dummy variable in which an individual who gave to a political party, candidate, or other group is coded as one and all others are coded as zero. Model 7.1 contains an interaction variable between income and the Gini coefficient<sup>5</sup> and Model 7.2 does not contain this interaction. Model 7.1 leads me to reject my hypothesis that there is a relationship between individual level social status and income inequality at the community level on giving as the Gini coefficient, income, and interaction variables are all not statistically significant. On the other hand in Model 7.2, when there is no interaction effect, the coefficient for the inequality variable is .456 and is marginally

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<sup>5</sup> In the regression analyses with giving as the dependent variable, I use an income dummy variable as my individual level status proxy rather than the social status dummy that I created. Like the social status dummy, the income dummy is coded with one equaling the top quartile of earners and zero equal to all else. The income dummy is used to account for the fact that donating to a political cause is very dependent on the number of resources that an individual has (Schlozman et al. 2012). That being said, I ran the regression using the social status dummy and it produced similar results. Further, the correlation between the income and status dummies is 0.6403.

statistically significant. Thus, as income inequality at the community level increases there is a marginally significant, yet large, increase in giving.

**Table 7: Linear Regression Estimates for Marginal Probability of Giving**

	Model 7.1	Model 7.2
Gini Coefficient	.128 (.240)	.456* (.275)
Income Dummy	-.374 (.264)	.024 (.024)
Gini X Income	.935 (.630)	
Education	.037*** (.009)	.038*** (.009)
Age	.012*** (.003)	.012*** (.003)
Gender	-.047** (.020)	-.047** (.020)
Black	-.039 (.025)	-.043* (.025)
Hispanic	-.052*** (.018)	-.051*** (.018)
Other Race	-.002 (.032)	-.001 (.031)
Interest in Campaign	.042*** (.014)	.043*** (.014)
Care Who Wins	.005 (.016)	.003 (.015)
Duty or Choice?	.013*** (.004)	.013*** (.004)
Strength PID	.056*** (.013)	.056*** (.013)
Years in Community	.000 (.001)	.000 (.001)
Constant	-.353*** (.111)	-.500*** (.128)

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses.  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

One explanation for this finding is that the increase in giving could be the result of the way that the Gini coefficient is calculated. Given the nature of the Gini coefficient, in the high inequality contexts, the effect we are capturing of increased giving could be that of those who

have an extremely high income. The Gini coefficient is formulated so that a community would be assigned a one if a single individual has all of the income and a zero if everyone has an equal share of the income (Weinberg 2011). Thus, perhaps in contexts with the highest Gini coefficients there are a few respondents with very high incomes, which would raise the Gini, who are giving at very high levels. That being said, my dependent variable for giving does not measure the magnitude of giving. That is, it only captures if a person has given to a political cause – not how much or how often. Consequently, given the data it is hard to say for sure why there is this increase in giving as income inequality increases.

So, why do we see an increase in voting among low status individuals and a decrease in voting among high status individuals as income inequality increases at the community level among, while there is a positive relationship between giving and inequality at the community level that is not mediated by social status? I argue that it is due to the fact that like social forms of communication that I already analyzed (namely persuading or being persuaded to vote for a candidate, discussing politics, and signing a petition), low status individuals not only lack the resources to give but are also blocked out of the benefits of social pressure that increase giving. Voting is a social act, but this act can be private in that vote choice is not known unless an individual chooses to disclose it. On the other hand, if a candidate gives to a political organization for the social benefit of others knowing that he has donated money, it is conceivable that the other individuals in his network know to whom he gave the money (Sinclair 2012). Perhaps due to a desire to keep political preferences hidden from other community members, low status individuals feel more comfortable voting than donating or discussing politics. That is, a particular low status individual is not, say, going to try to convince someone to vote for a

specific candidate because he does not want to create political conflict in his discussions (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987).

Looking at a comparison of party identification by social status in contexts of high inequality provides some evidence for this argument. As before, a high inequality context is operationalized as respondents living in a zip code with a Gini coefficient that falls in the highest quartile in the dataset. The percentages of respondents who are Republicans and Democrats in communities with high levels of inequality are displayed in Table 8. More low status individuals identify as Democrats (59.71%) than Republicans (31.51%). Although high status individuals are also more likely to be Democrats, if you compare across the status groups more high status individuals (43.68%) are Republicans than are low status individuals (31.51%). Further, more low status individuals (59.71%) are Democrats than are high status individuals (52.21%). Thus, it is plausible to theorize that avoiding political conflict in discussion is what is driving the decrease in social forms of participation as income inequality increases. Further, a mechanism through which this relationship functions is, perhaps, a diminished sense of membership in their community, which Omoto and Snyder (2002) theorize is an essential element of the psychological community, among low status individuals in high inequality contexts due to their lower status and different preferences. However, there is still a social pressure for low status individuals to participate in politics in contexts of high inequality as a result of the high status individuals in the community who have a higher propensity to participate. Low status individuals feel this social pressure during their day-to-day lives and interactions in their communities. In the words of Betsy Sinclair, “voters...establish a sense of their civic responsibilities from their social interactions” (2012, 23). Thus, because in high inequality contexts low status individuals are

excluded from social forms of participation, despite social pressure to participate in politics, they use voting as their participatory outlet.

**Table 8: Party ID in High Inequality Contexts by Individual Level Social Status**

	Low Status Individuals	High Status Individuals
Democrat	59.71%	52.21%
Independent	8.78%	4.10%
Republican	31.51%	43.68%
<i>N=510</i>		

### Recruitment to Participate in Politics

There is one other possible factor that could be driving an increase in voting among low status individuals as income inequality increases: recruitment to participate in politics. Thus, I now turn to an analysis of the effects of income inequality on recruitment to participate in politics. I hypothesized that higher levels of income inequality would lead to lower levels of recruitment, but given my findings about the relationship between income inequality at the community level and voting, perhaps those living in high inequality contexts are being recruited by political parties or candidates to vote at higher levels than those living in contexts of low inequality. In Table 9, I present three regression models for predicting contact by a political party or candidate. Model 9.1 uses the contextual inequality variable for the zip code level environmental unit. With this contextual variable the model has very little predictive power. Nearly all of the coefficients are statistically insignificant. Consequently, I must conclude that my hypothesis should be rejected and that there is no relationship between contextual inequality, at least when measured at the zip code level, and recruitment to participate in politics. Thus, it seems the cause of higher levels of voting in high inequality contexts is not recruitment.

**Table 9: Regression Estimate for Recruitment by a Political Party of Campaign With Different Environmental Units**

	Model 9.1 Zip Code	Model 9.2 County	Model 9.3 Cong. District
Gini Coefficient	.332 (-.365)	-.435 (.311)	-1.14*** (.335)
Social Status	-.020 (.276)	-.373* (.225)	-.574** (.255)
Status X Gini	.262 (.635)	.971** (.494)	1.43** (.561)
Hispanic	-.060 (.038)	-.082*** (.025)	-.077*** (.024)
Black	-.024 (.037)	.043 (.027)	.052* (.027)
Other Race	-.045 (.054)	-.060* (.034)	-.052 (.035)
Married	.057* (.030)	.044** (.017)	.038** (.017)
Age	.030*** (.005)	.033*** (.003)	.033*** (.003)
Gender	.026 (.030)	.008 (.017)	.009 (.017)
Voted 2008	.137*** (.032)	.189*** (.020)	.190*** (.020)
Years in Community	.002* (.001)	.002** (.001)	.002** (.001)
Constant	-.172 (.159)	.181 (.142)	.49*** (.152)
	<i>N</i> =1842	<i>N</i> =5379	<i>N</i> =5245

*Notes:* Coefficients are from ordinary least squared regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses.  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

That being said, changing the environmental unit measuring inequality shows that there may be an interesting and significant relationship between contextual inequality and recruitment. If I replace the zip code level variable for inequality at both the county (Model 9.2) and Congressional district (Model 9.3) level, I find statistically significant results. In fact, as the environmental unit grows in size the coefficients become statistically significant and larger. How does my hypothesis about recruitment hold up at the county and Congressional district level?

The models with these two variables actually support the argument that low status individuals will be recruited to participate in politics less as income inequality increases, all else constant. As income inequality increases at the county level there is a .435 unit decrease in recruitment and at the district level there is a quite large 1.14 unit decrease in recruitment among low status individuals. Thus, at least for larger environmental units there is a negative relationship between recruitment to participate in politics and level of income inequality among low status individuals.

It is likely that this is a consequence of recruiting techniques. Political parties and candidates are strategic when they recruit and have limited resources (Schier 2000). Low status individuals are less likely to participate (Schlozman et al. 2012), so if a candidate is looking to increase turnout it would be effective to recruit these low status individuals who are less likely to vote than individuals with a high status (Brady et al. 1999). Even though campaigns, especially those for Presidents, use sophisticated targeting techniques, it is still more simple and efficient to target areas that are homogeneous for in person canvassing, which is the most effective method of recruiting someone to participate in politics (Gerber and Green 2000), if a campaign is trying to specifically target low status voters. As a result, if a campaign is looking to target low status individuals it would be more strategic to first reach out to those in contexts with low levels of income inequality. Further, these findings illustrate that communication about politics between peers as opposed to between institutions and citizens operate differently. It seems that discussing politics with friends and family is deeply influenced by more compact measures of community. On the other hand, contact from an institution, like a political campaign, to recruit an individual to participate is related to a larger measure of community context. Regardless, and most importantly for this study, the findings presented in Table 9 give me no reason to suspect that recruitment to participate in politics by political parties and campaigns is driving the increase in

voting among low status individuals as income inequality increases. Thus, this provides further evidence for the theory that I have developed about why I find an increase in voting but decrease in the most social forms of political participation as income inequality increases at the community level.

### **Conclusion**

As other work has found, this paper demonstrates that political participation varies across community contexts (Giles et al. 1981; Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979; Oliver 1999). However, unlike these past studies, I focus specifically on income inequality at the community level and how it influences participation. Through my analyses, I find that the effects of income inequality at the community level on political participation vary for different types of participation and that these effects are often mediated by individual level social status. Specifically, this paper shows that as income inequality at the community level increases social forms of participation slightly decrease among low status individuals and increase drastically among high status individuals, causing a large social participation gap between high and low status individuals in contexts of high inequality. Meanwhile, when controlling for a number of individual level variables, the level of inequality that an individual lives in has no effect on individually based participation. Further, my findings indicate that voting increases among low status individuals and decreases among high status individuals as income inequality at the community level increases.

To explain the varying effects of inequality on participation I develop a theory that argues that there is social pressure in high inequality contexts for low status individuals to participate in politics, because of the high status individuals in their communities who are likely to already participate in politics. Despite this social pressure, low status individuals are excluded from the

most social forms of participation in these contexts. This is due to the fact that low status individuals may not feel like they belong in the community, which would diminish their participation (Omoto and Snyder 2002), and that these individuals may avoid political discussion because they may have different preferences than high status individuals. Thus, voting provides a low risk outlet for participation among low status individuals that satisfies the social pressure they feel to participate in politics while also providing these individuals with the social benefits of participating (Sinclair 2012).

This theory is supported by my analysis of external efficacy, giving, and recruitment to participate in politics. First, external efficacy, when a proxy of support for the government addressing income inequality is used to measure it, decreases among low status individuals as inequality increases. External efficacy and social forms of participation are highly correlated (Jacobs et al. 2009), so this decrease in efficacy may also be influencing the decrease in social participation. That being said, the somewhat conflicting findings when looking at other measurements of external efficacy, calls for future work on the relationship between efficacy and income inequality as it may be able to shed further light on how income inequality affects political participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen et al. 2001; Verba et al. 1995). Moreover, my findings about how inequality at the community level affects recruitment to participate in politics rules out the possibility that the increase in voting that my analyses show is the result of more intense targeting by campaigns in contexts of high inequality. Due to the scope of this project I was, unfortunately, only able to take into account how different measurements of community context influence the effects of inequality on behavior in my analysis of recruitment to participate in politics. As other studies have indicated, the environmental unit used matters when studying contextual effects (Guo and Bhat 2004; Wong et al. 2012). Thus, it could be helpful for

future studies to look at different geographic measures of community to better understand the effects of contexts of high inequality on political participation. In all, this study is the first of its kind and contributes to the literature on the effects of income inequality on political participation as well as contextual models of political behavior. As discussed, there is a lack of understanding of how inequality and participation interact (Brady 2003) and this contextual analysis adds a needed perspective as scholars begin to unravel this relationship. Thus, this paper also adds to a renewed focus on contexts and social networks in political science research, and provides support for the argument that social context matters when studying political behavior. Most importantly, the findings in this paper are significant, because they identify major political consequences of income inequality in America that are not often discussed in research or the popular media.

If we believe that equal participation among different groups of people is important for democracy, this paper has a number of important implications as America becomes a more economically unequal society (Piketty and Saez 2006). First, high status individuals have a resource advantage that encourages political participation (Schlozman et al. 2012), and my findings show that this advantage is reinforced for the most social types of participation in contexts of high inequality. Thus, if income inequality continues to increase, low status individuals could be further excluded from the socially based participation. Participation that involves discussion, including these social forms of participation that I analyzed in this study, has been found to engender efficacy, increase knowledge, and encourage other types of civic engagement (Jacobs et al. 2009). If low status individuals in contexts of high inequality do not engage in these types of participation the disadvantage that they face in the American political system will only be exacerbated.

That being said, not all of my findings are negative. Individually based participation is not affected by social status and some of these types of participation, like sending a message about politics online, can also be discursive, which could foster better citizenship just like socially based participation. Further, an encouraging finding from this paper for the equality of political voice in America is that voting increases with income inequality at the community level. As discussed, I theorize that this is due to the social pressure to vote from high status individuals in contexts of high inequality, and this study is consistent with others in indicating that voting takes on a social aspect (Gerber et al. 2008; Sinclair 2012). Thus, I suggest that in an effort to encourage more equal participation in America, citizens and the government alike should work to highlight these social incentives of voting for all citizens, including those who do not happen to live in contexts of inequality that tend to support these social benefits, so that our democracy is able to have more equal levels of participation among citizens of social statuses.

## Appendix: 2012 ANES Question Wording

### I. Dependent Variables:

#### Efficacy Index

'Public officials don't care much what people like me think.' (Do you AGREE STRONGLY, AGREE SOMEWHAT, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE SOMEWHAT, or DISAGREE STRONGLY with this statement?)

'People like me don't have any say about what the government does.' (Do you AGREE STRONGLY, AGREE SOMEWHAT, NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, DISAGREE SOMEWHAT, or DISAGREE STRONGLY with this statement?)

How much do public officials care what people like you think? [A GREAT DEAL, A LOT, A MODERATE AMOUNT, A LITTLE, or NOT AT ALL/ NOT AT ALL, A LITTLE, A MODERATE AMOUNT, A LOT, or A GREAT DEAL]?

How much can people like you affect what the government does? [A GREAT DEAL, A LOT, A MODERATE AMOUNT, A LITTLE, or NOT AT ALL / NOT AT ALL, A LITTLE, A MODERATE AMOUNT, A LOT, or A GREAT DEAL]?

#### Socially Based Participation

We would like to find out about some of the things people do to help a party or a candidate win an election. During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?

During the campaign, did a friend, family member, neighbor, work colleague or other acquaintance try to persuade you to vote for a particular party or candidate?

Do you ever discuss politics with your family or friends?

During the past 4 years, have you signed a petition on paper about a political or social issue, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?

#### Individually Based Participation

During the past 4 years, have you signed a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?

During the past 4 years, have you ever sent a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?

During the past 4 years, have you contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?

#### Political Contribution Index

During an election year people are often asked to make a contribution to support campaigns. Did you give money to an INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATE running for public office?

Did you give money to a POLITICAL PARTY during this election year?

Did you give any money to ANY OTHER GROUP that supported or opposed candidates?

## Recruitment

During the campaign, did a party or candidate contact you in person or by any other means?

## II. Independent Variables

### Psychological Commitment to Politics

Generally speaking, would you say that you personally CARE A GOOD DEAL who wins the presidential election this fall, or that you DON'T CARE VERY MUCH who wins?

Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been [VERY MUCH interested, SOMEWHAT interested or NOT MUCH interested/ NOT MUCH interested, SOMEWHAT interested or VERY MUCH interested] in the political campaigns so far this year?

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a duty - they feel they should vote in every election no matter how they feel about the candidates and parties. For others voting is a choice - they feel free to vote or not to vote, depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting mainly a duty, mainly a choice, or neither a duty nor a choice?

*Or*

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a choice - they feel free to vote or not to vote, depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For others voting is a duty - they feel they should vote in every election no matter how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting mainly a choice, mainly a duty, or neither a choice nor a duty?

*Then*

How strongly do you feel that voting is a duty? [very strongly, moderately strongly, or a little strongly / a little strongly, moderately strongly, or very strongly]?

*Or*

How strongly do you feel that voting is a choice? [very strongly, moderately strongly, or a little strongly / a little strongly, moderately strongly, or very strongly]?

Strength of Party ID

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [DEMOCRAT, a REPUBLICAN / a REPUBLICAN, a DEMOCRAT], an INDEPENDENT, or what?

*Then*

Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat / Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG Democrat / Republican]?

*Or*

Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or to the Democratic party?

Ideology

Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? [Extremely liberal, Liberal, Slightly liberal, Moderate; middle of the road, Slightly conservative, Conservative, Extremely conservative]

Political Knowledge

Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington BEFORE the election [this/last] month?

Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the U.S. Senate BEFORE the election [this/last] month?

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