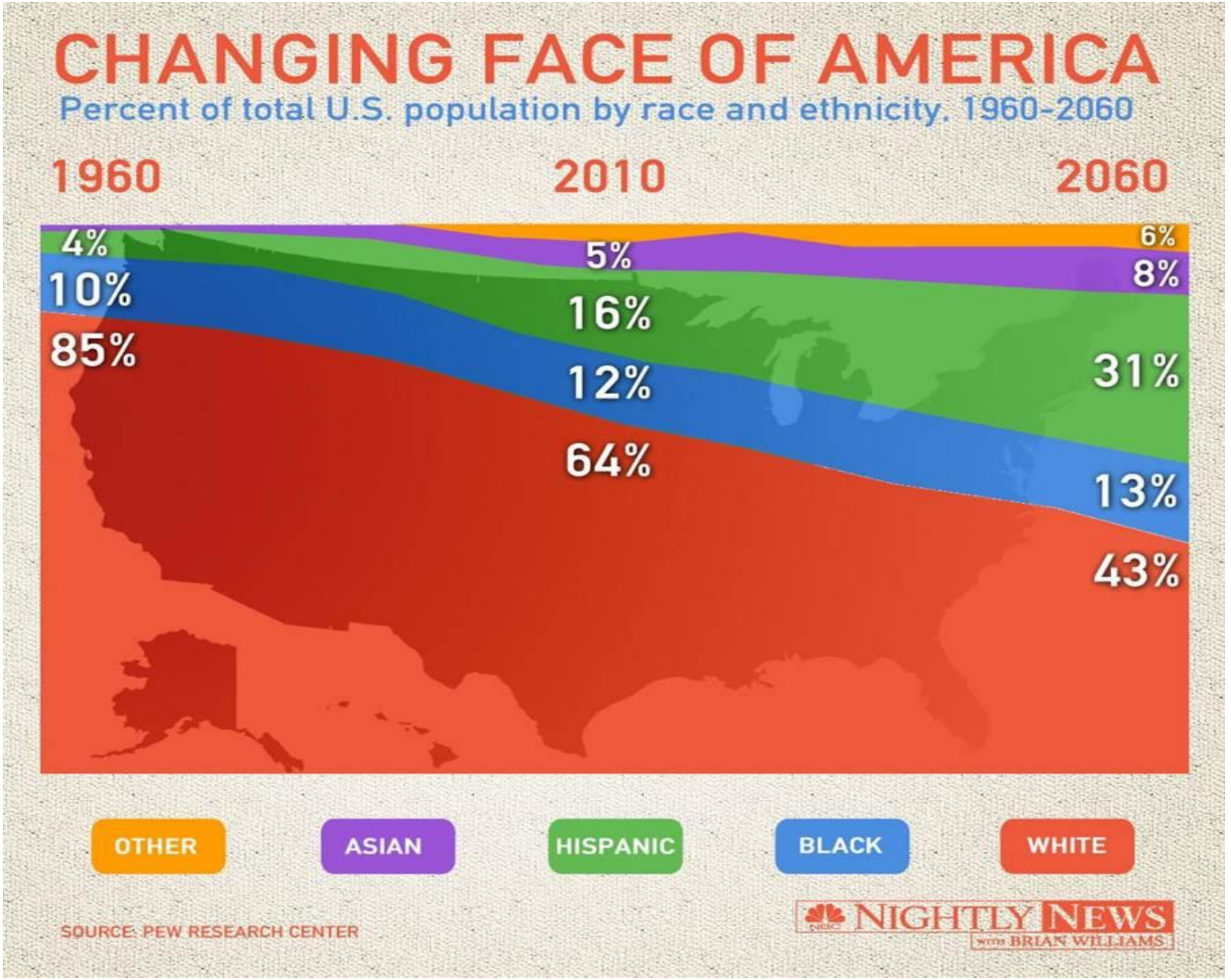
Can American Democracy Survive in a Diverse but Unequal Society?

Michael Reisch, Ph.D.

Dan & Carole Burack President's Distinguished Lecture

University of Vermont

March 25, 2015


CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA
Percent of total U.S. population by race and ethnicity, 1960-2060
1960
2010
2060
4%
10%
85%
5%
16%
12%
64%
6%
8%
31%
13%
43%
OTHER
ASIAN
HISPANIC
BLACK
WHITE
SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER
NIGHTLY NEWS
with BRIAN WILLIAMS

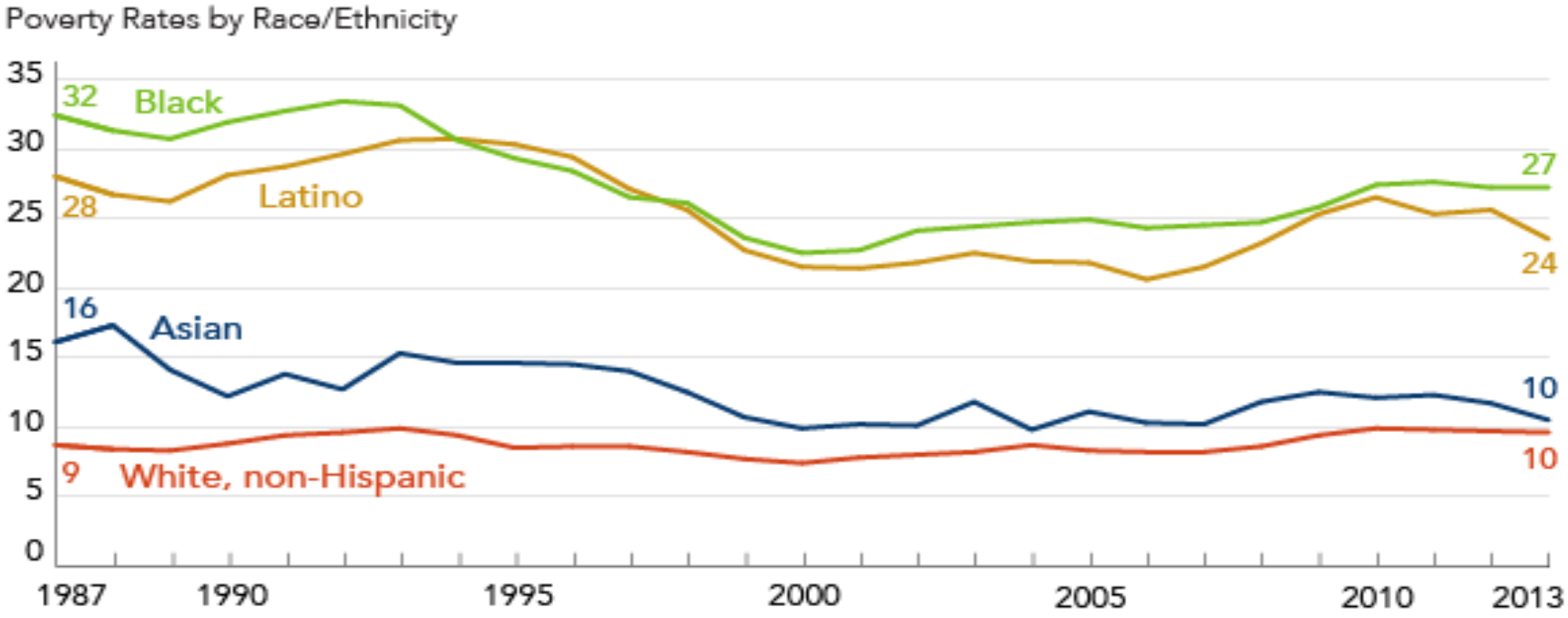
But it is Increasingly Unequal

And Poverty Has Gotten Worse

Especially for People of Color

FIGURE 6

There Is a Persistent Racial/Ethnic Gap in U.S. Poverty Rates.

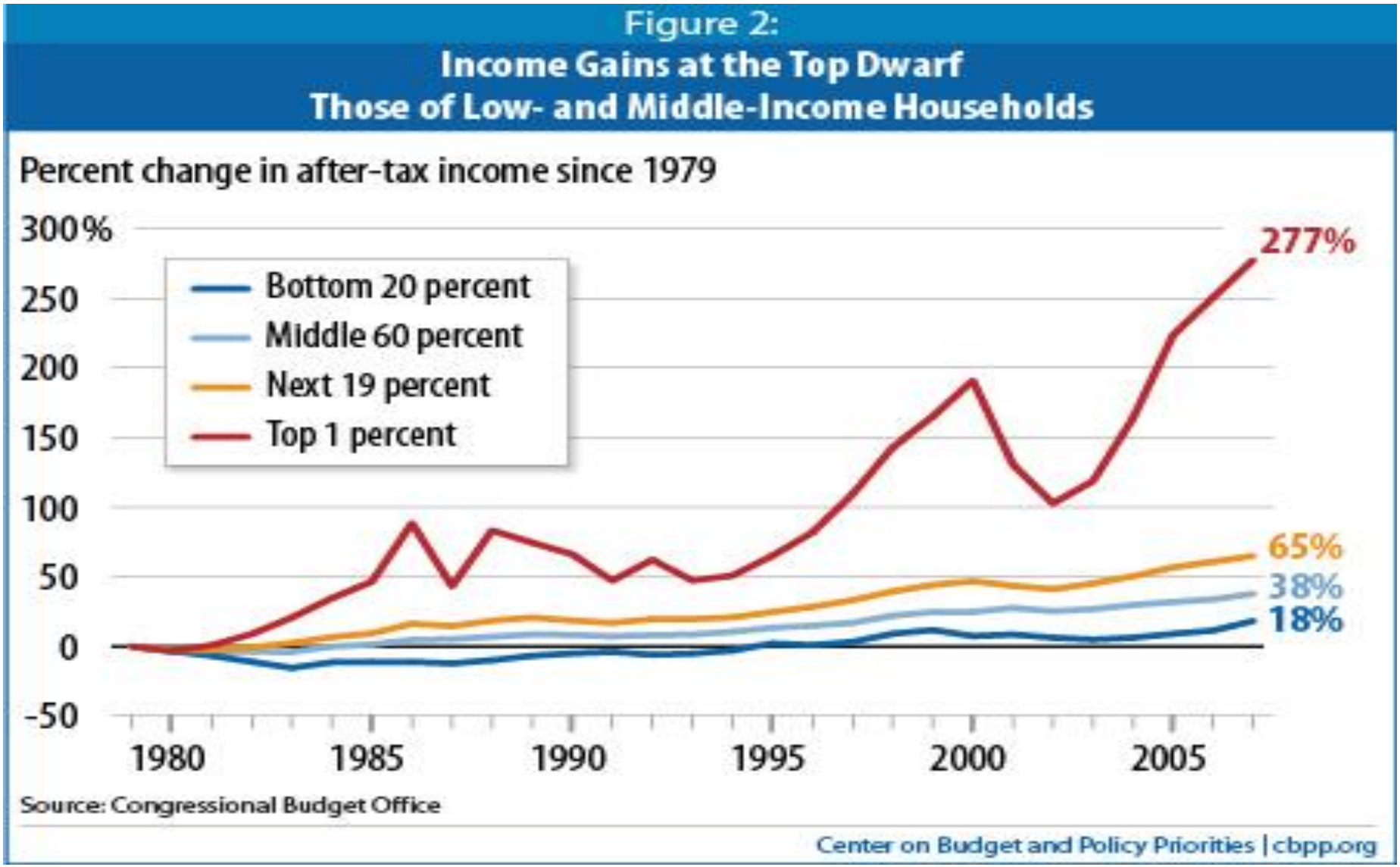


Note: Data for American Indians are not shown because of sampling error, but the poverty rate for American Indians/Alaska Natives was estimated to be 27 percent in 2013.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. Starting in 2000, racial categories reflect those who selected only one race.

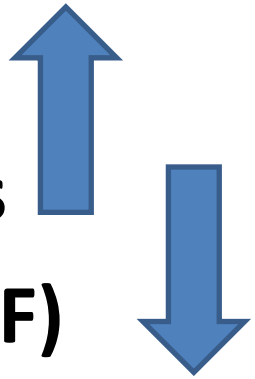
The Extent of Economic Inequality

Inequality Hits Middle Class & the Poor



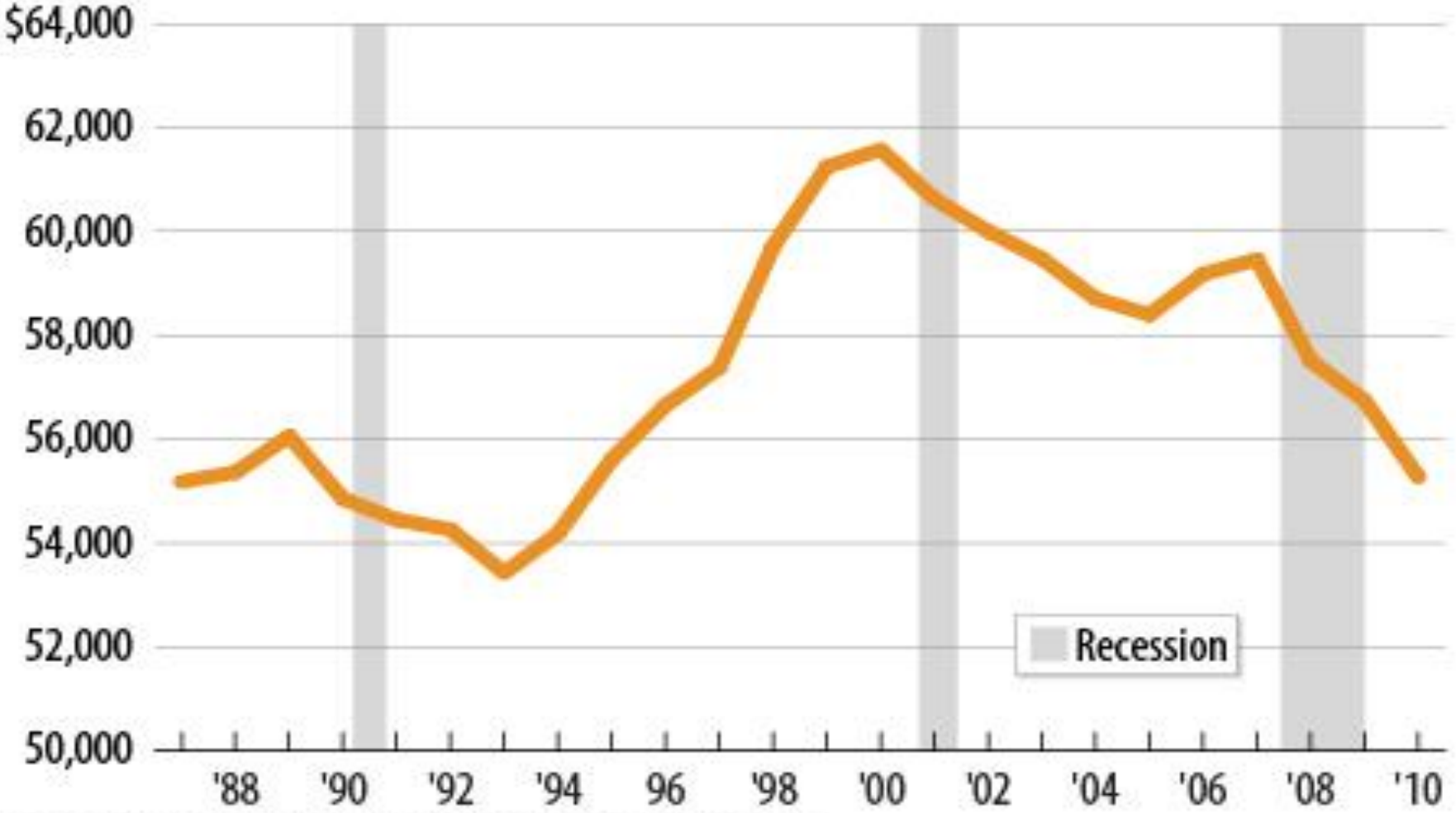
How Did This Happen?

- More regressive tax policy
- Wage stagnation while corporate profits
- Value of social welfare benefits (UI, TANF)
- Cuts in private benefits (especially pensions)
- Decline of unions
- Outsourcing– Higher structural unemployment
- Increased cost of basic goods since late 1970s:
  - -- Health care + 600%
  - -- College + 1200%



Real Income for Working-Age Households Reaches Lowest Level Since 1994

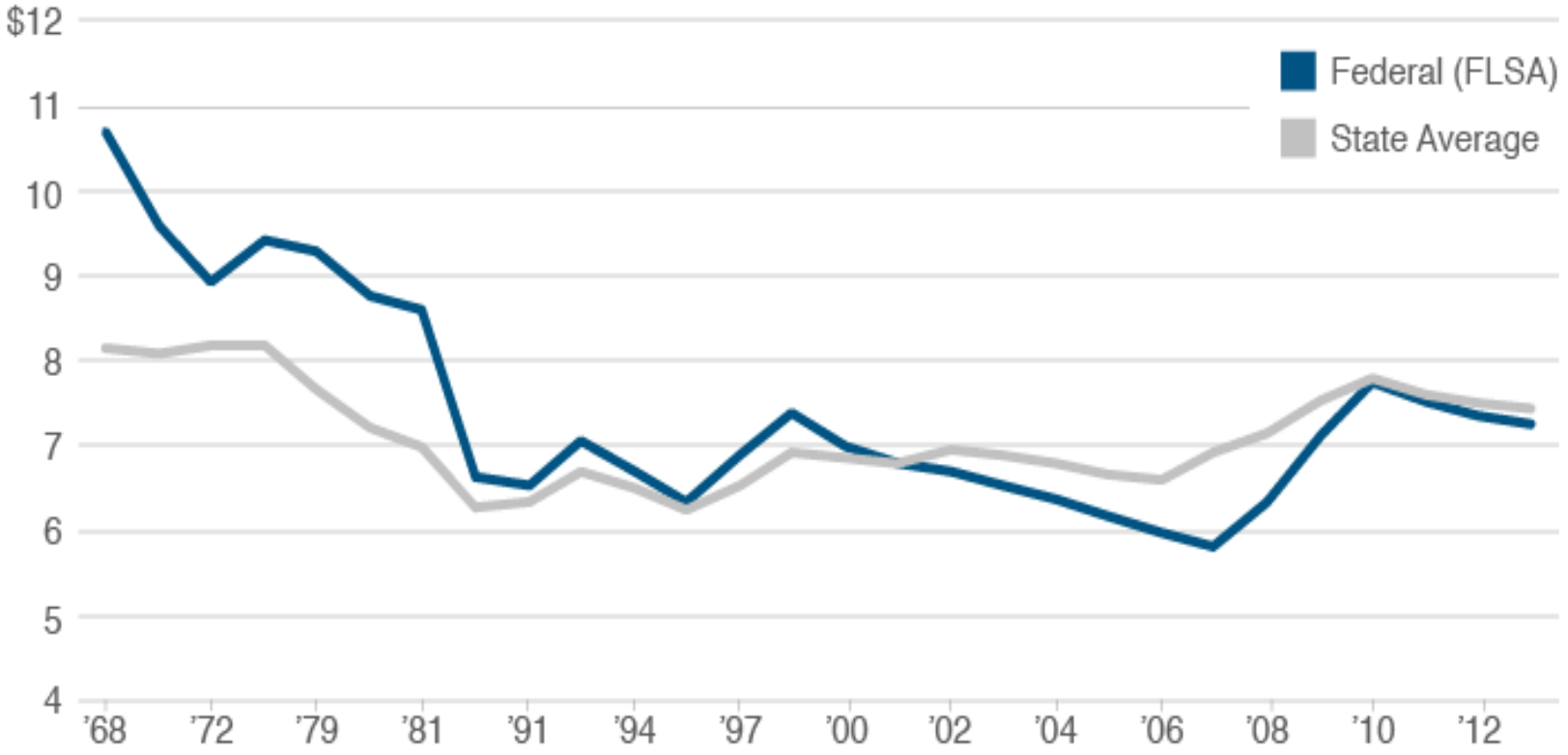
Non-elderly median household income (2010 dollars)



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, National Bureau of Economic Research

Wages Have Stagnated

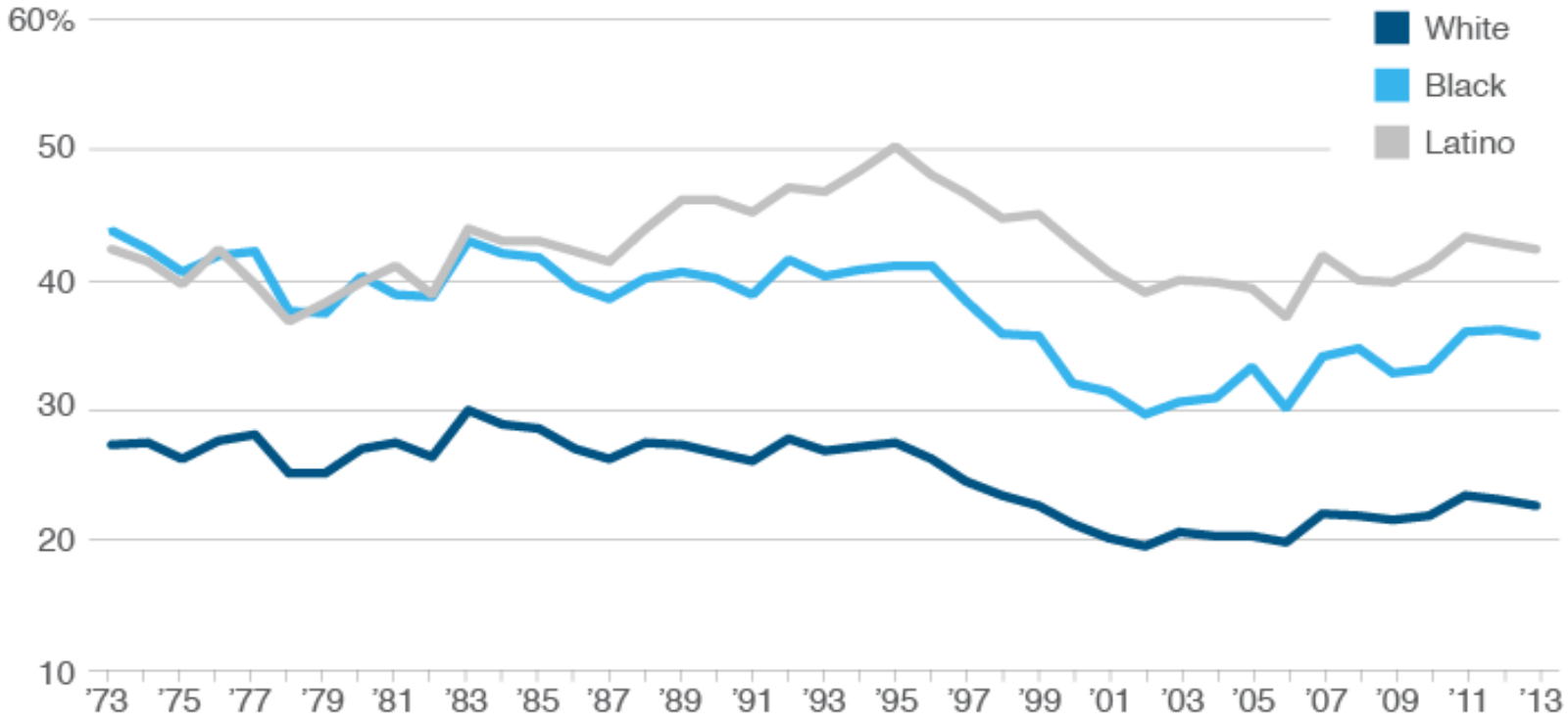
Figure 18. Federal and state average real minimum wage



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division

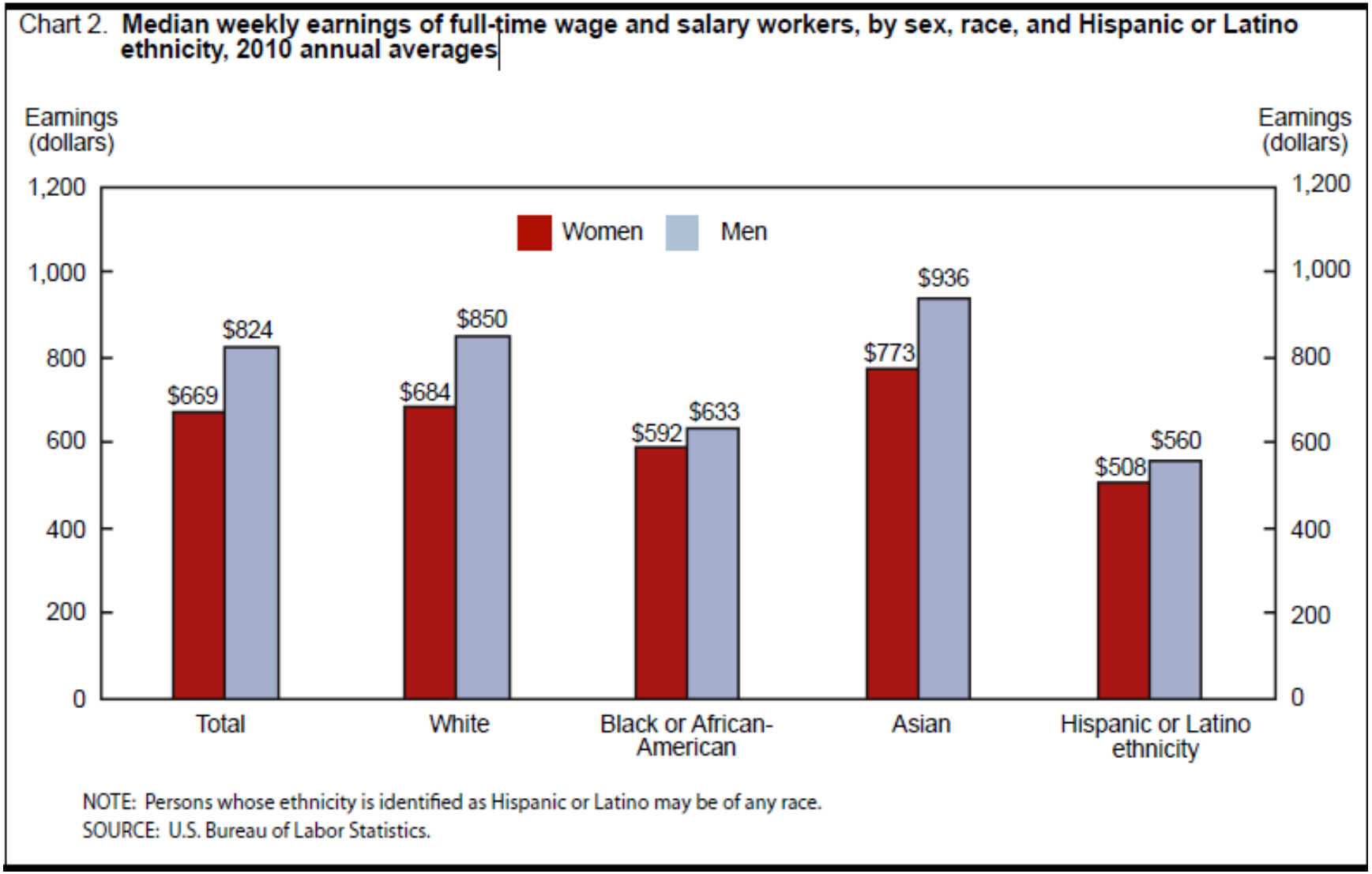
Race & Wage Inequality

Figure 19. Share of workers earning poverty-level wages, by race and ethnicity (1973-2013)

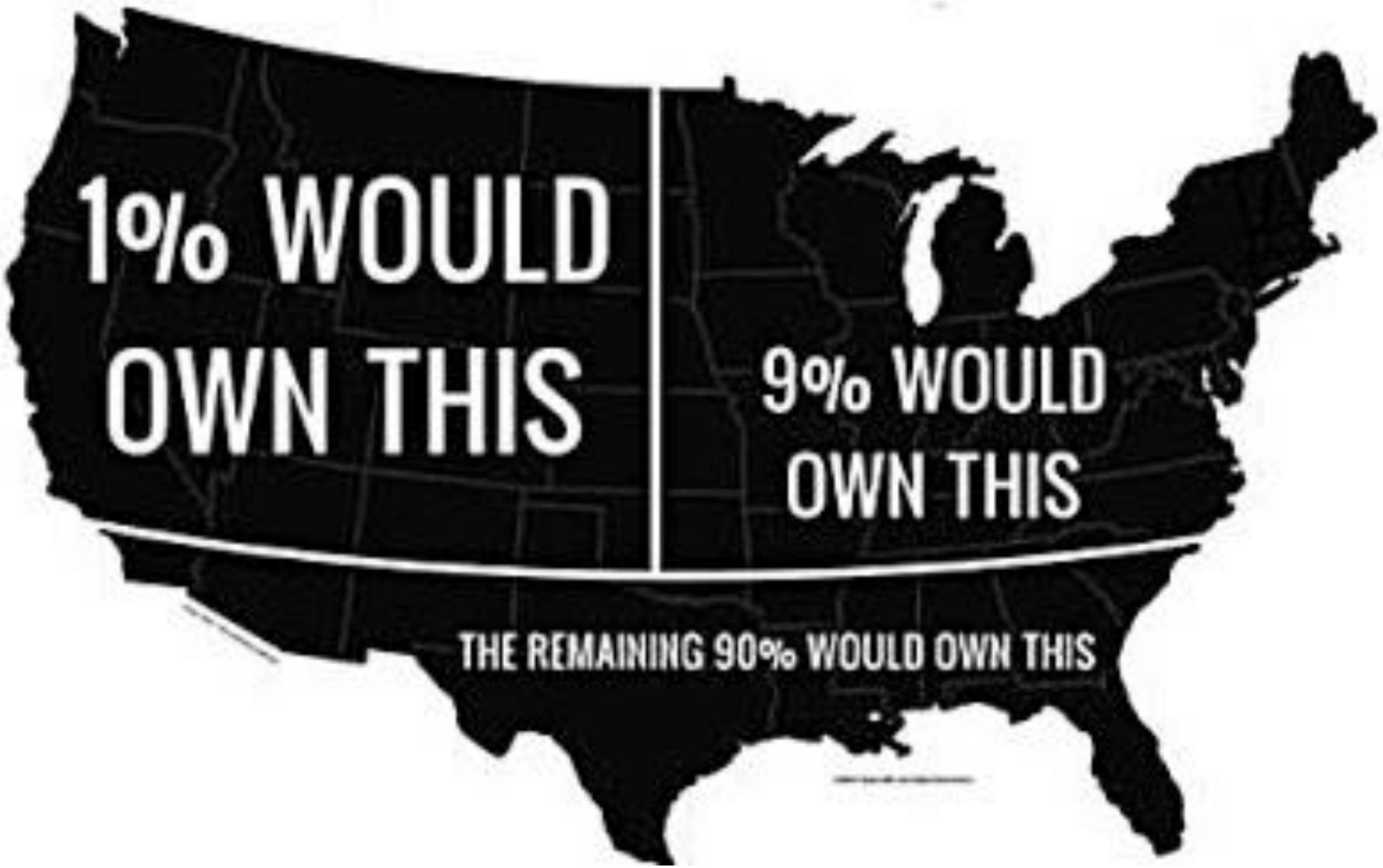


Source: EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata

Racial & Gender Income Inequality



Wealth Inequality is Even Worse

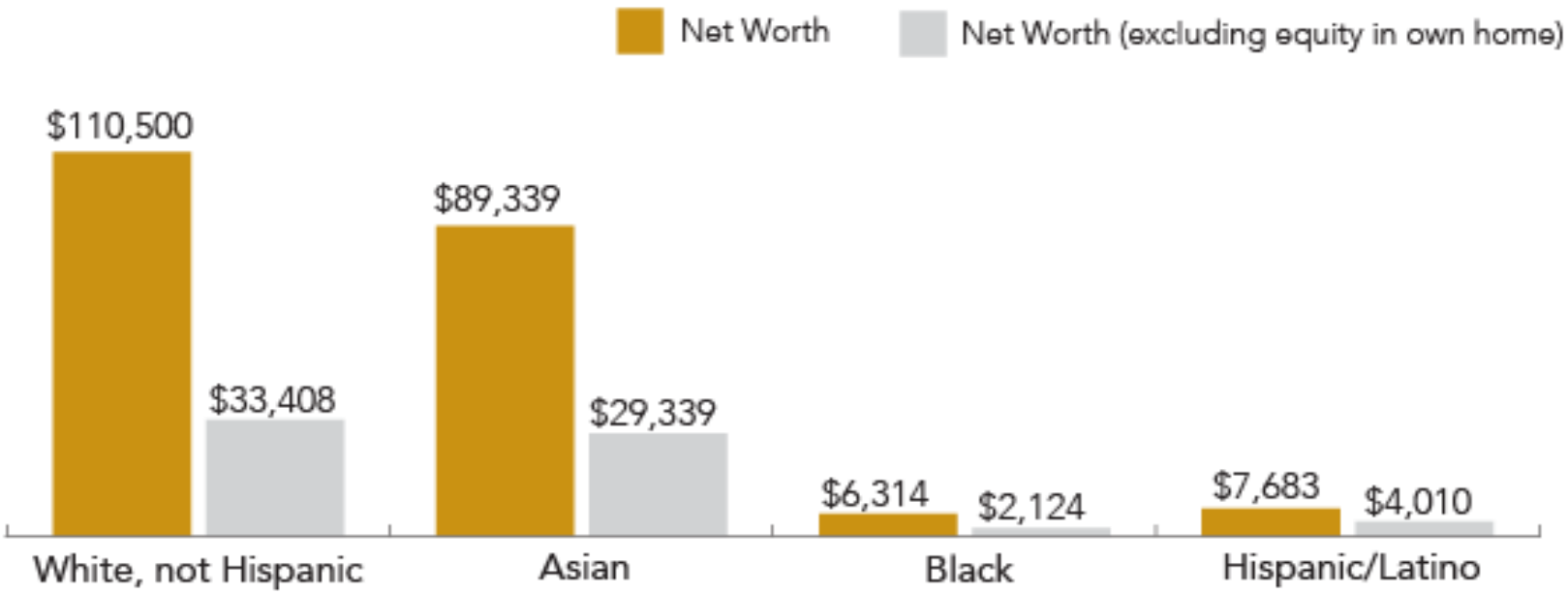


Racial Inequalities in Wealth

FIGURE 7

Wealth Is Nearly 18 Times Higher Among White Households Compared With Black Households.

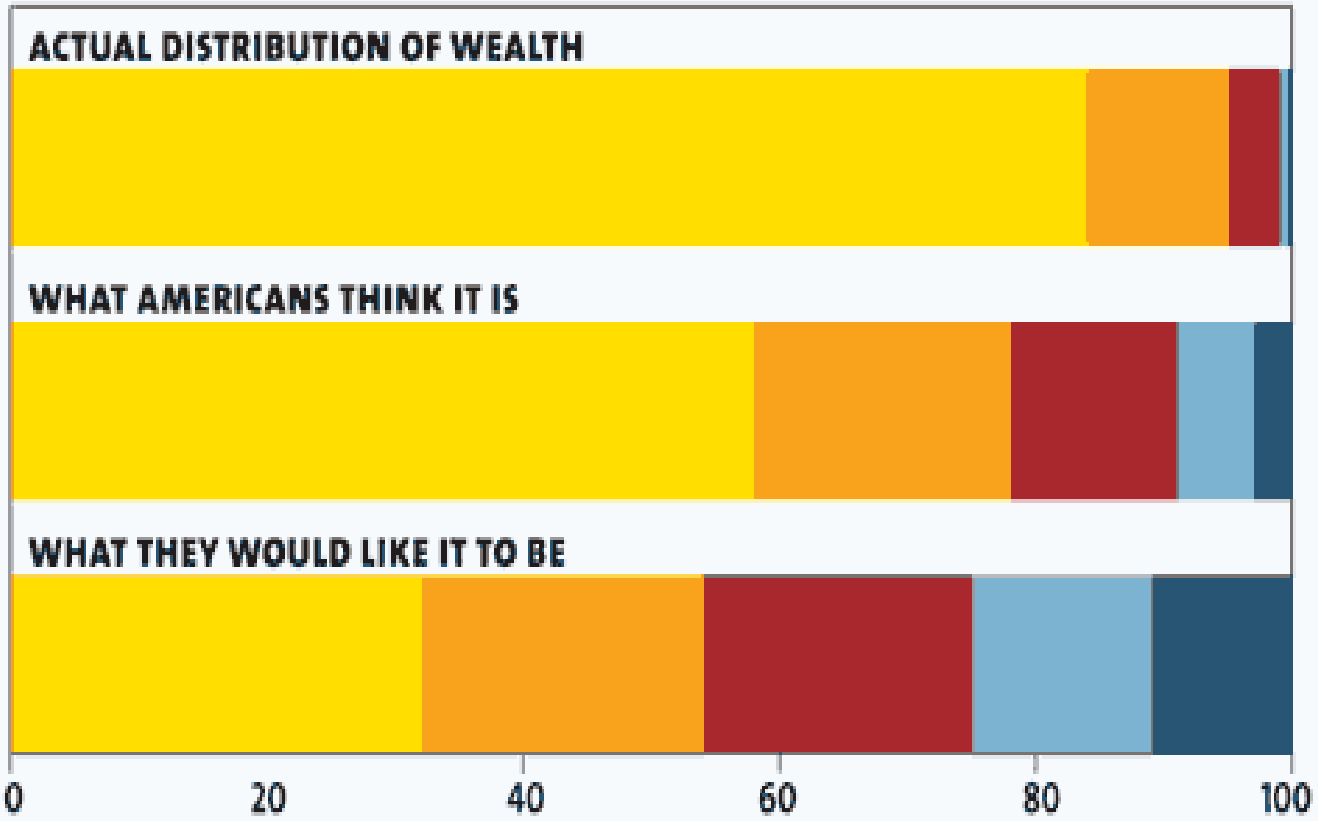
Median Net Worth, by Race/Ethnicity, 2011



Note: Households headed by Other Races had a net worth of $19,023 (or $7,113 excluding home equity).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 Panel, Wave 10.

Wealth Inequality: Perception v. Reality

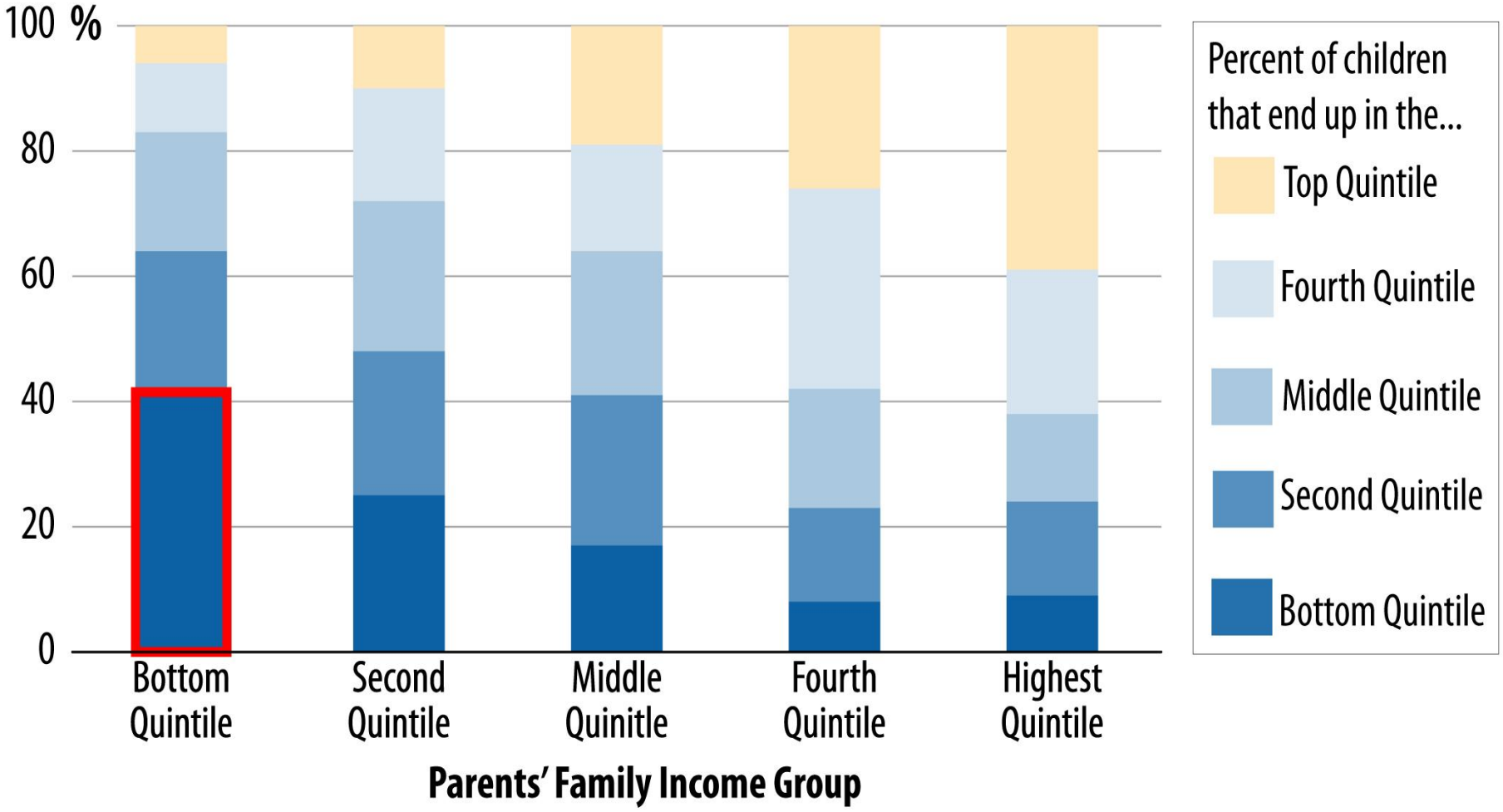


Source: Michael I. Norton, Harvard Business School; Dan Ariely, Duke University

Lack of Opportunity for Women

The Myth of Social Mobility

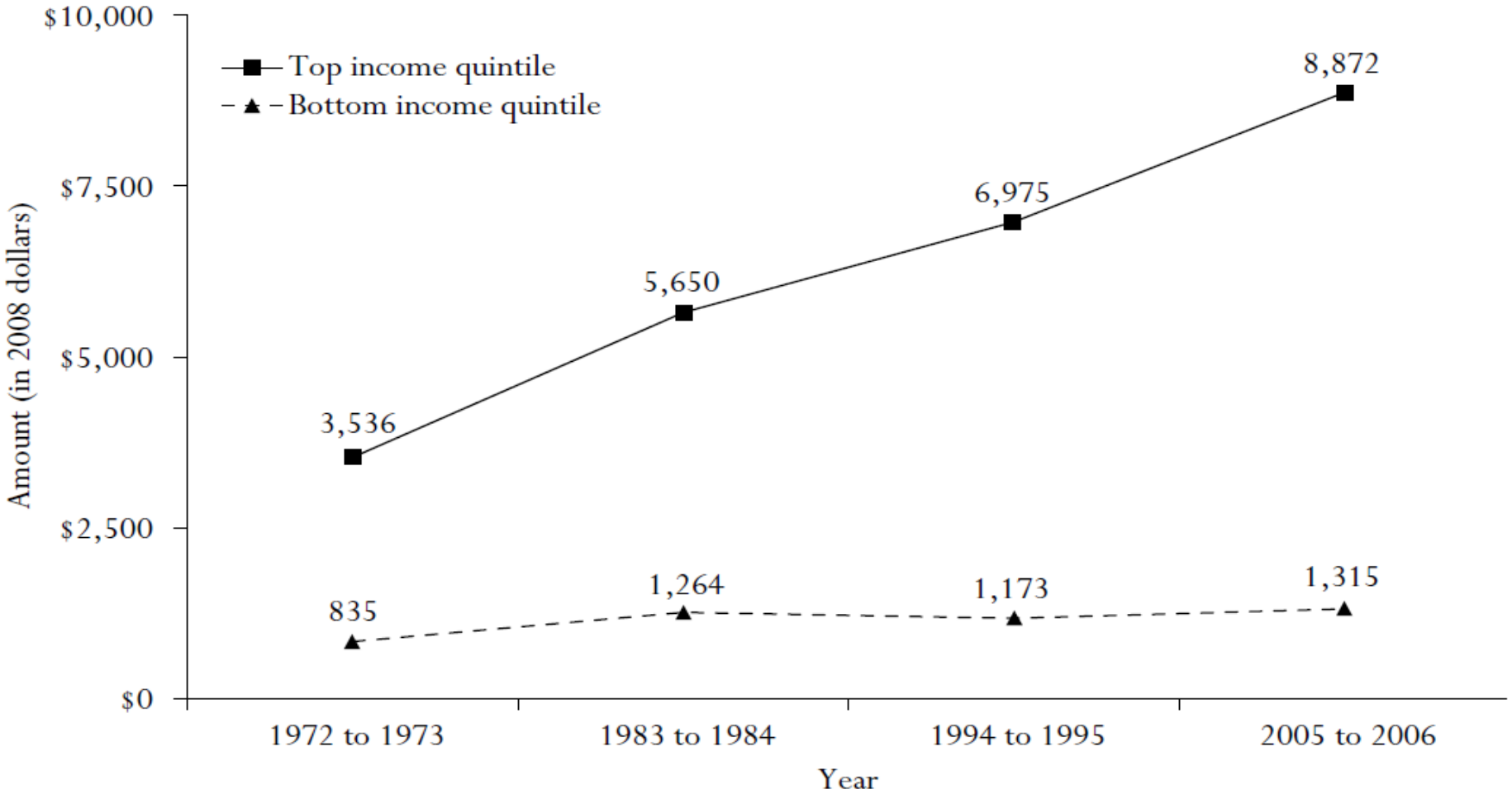
Children's Chances of Getting Ahead or Falling Behind by Parents' Family Income



Source: CBPP based on Pew Economic Mobility and the American Dream Presentation

Widening Gap in Enrichment Expenditures

FIGURE 1.6 *Enrichment Expenditures on Children, 1972 to 2006*



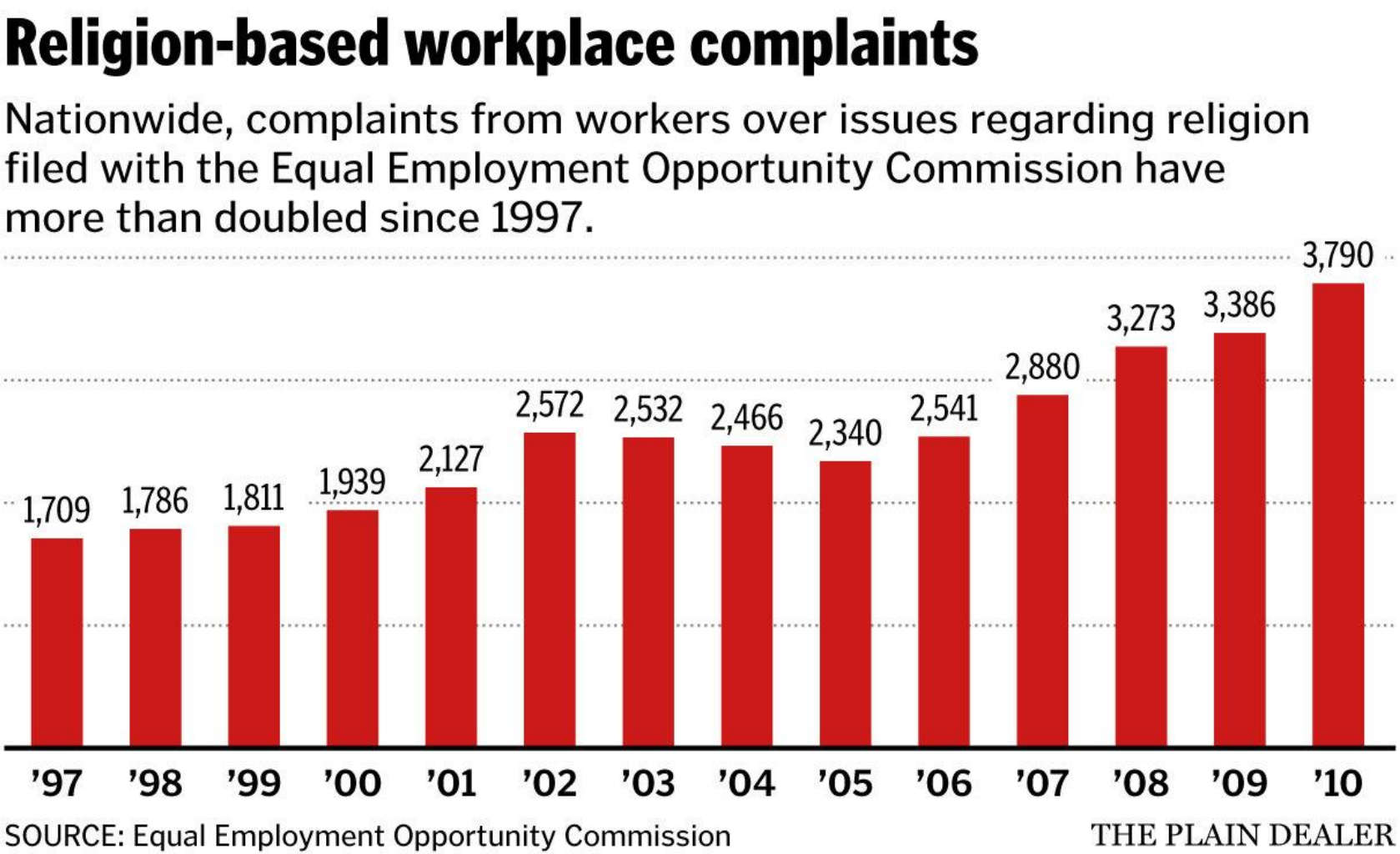
Source: Whither Opportunity? Russell Sage

Other Forms in Inequality

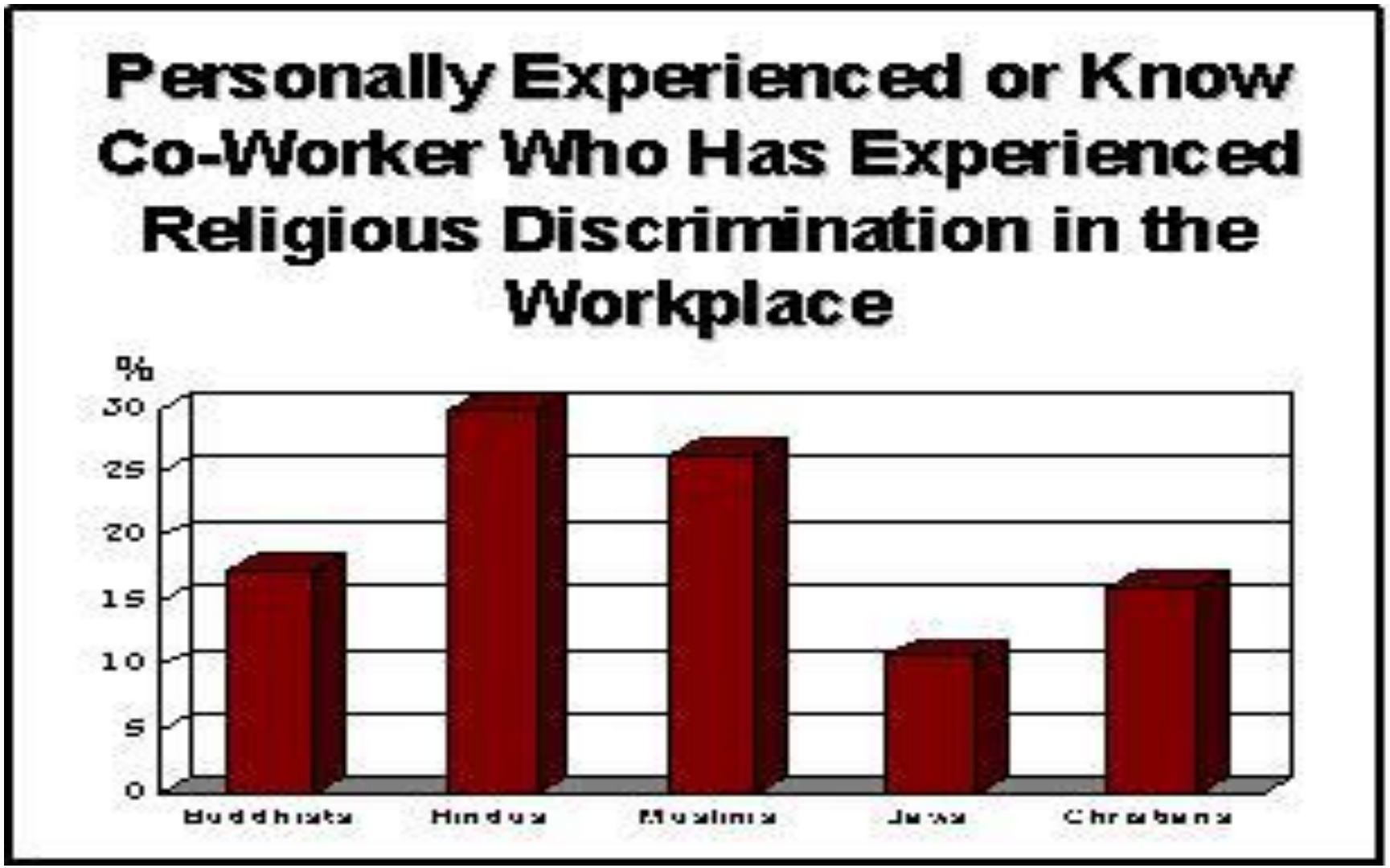
Cultural Homophobia

Anti-Gay Discrimination

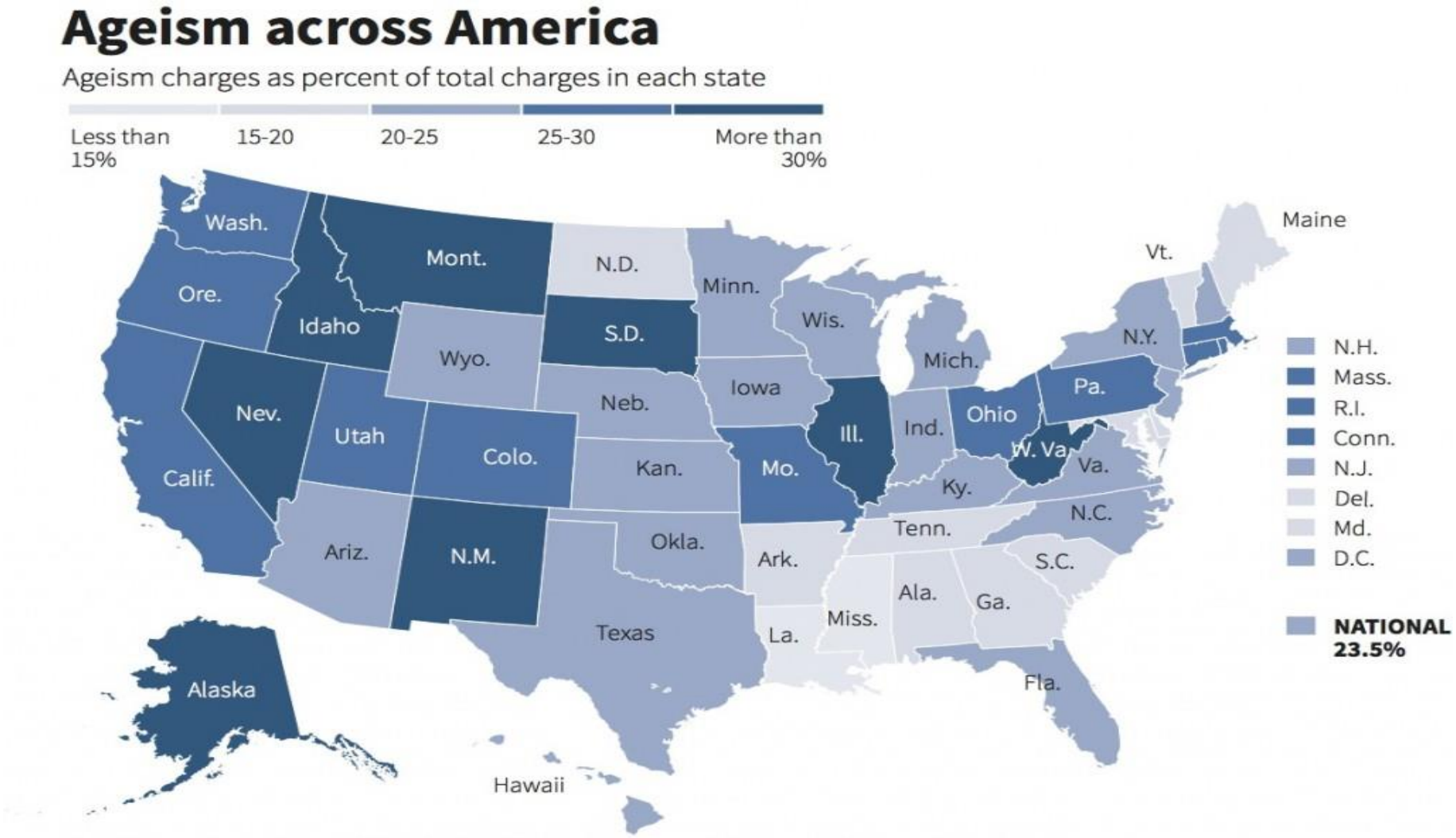
Increasing Religious Bias



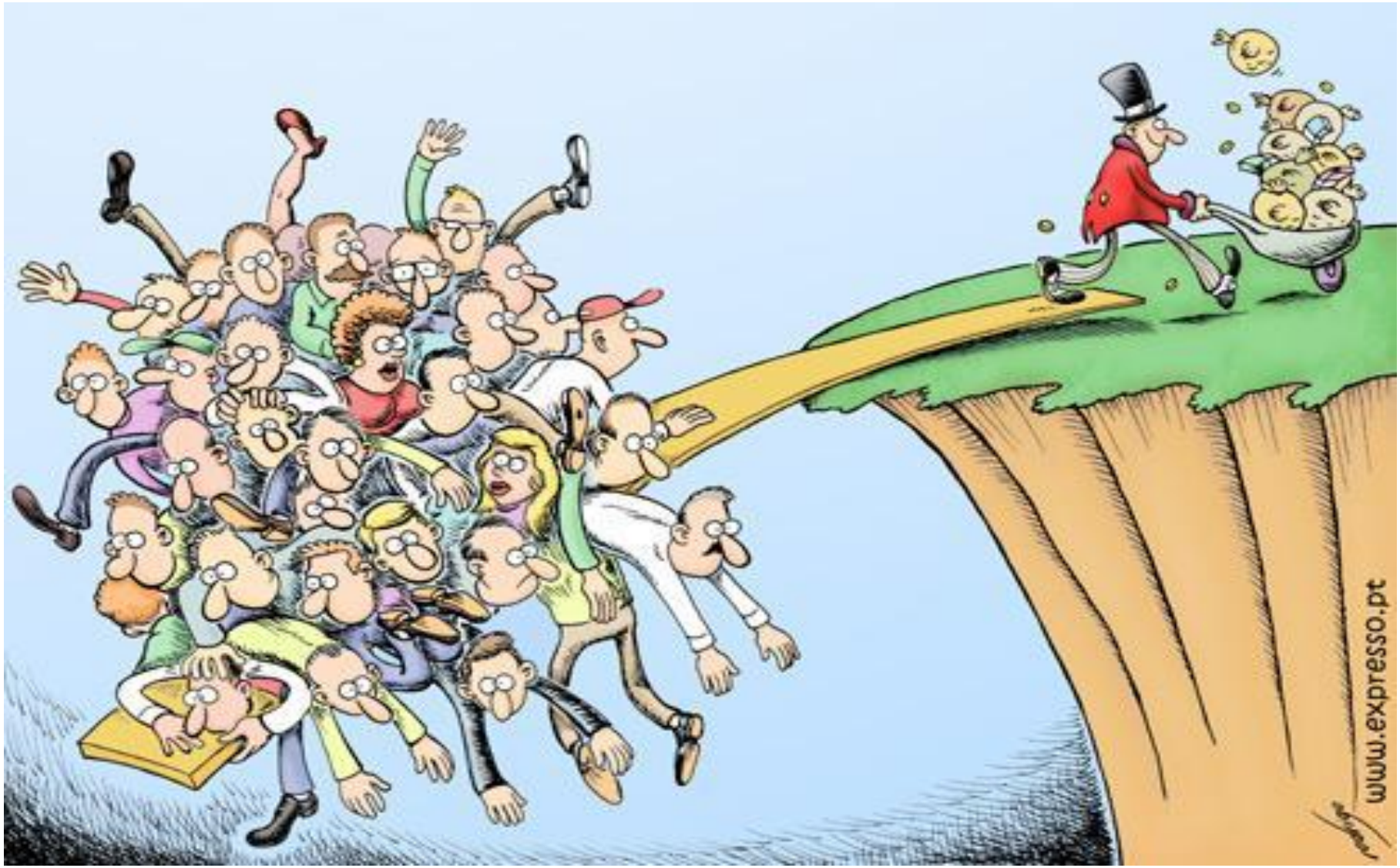
Religious Discrimination at Work



Persistent Ageism



The Impact of Social Inequality



Class Divisions Widen

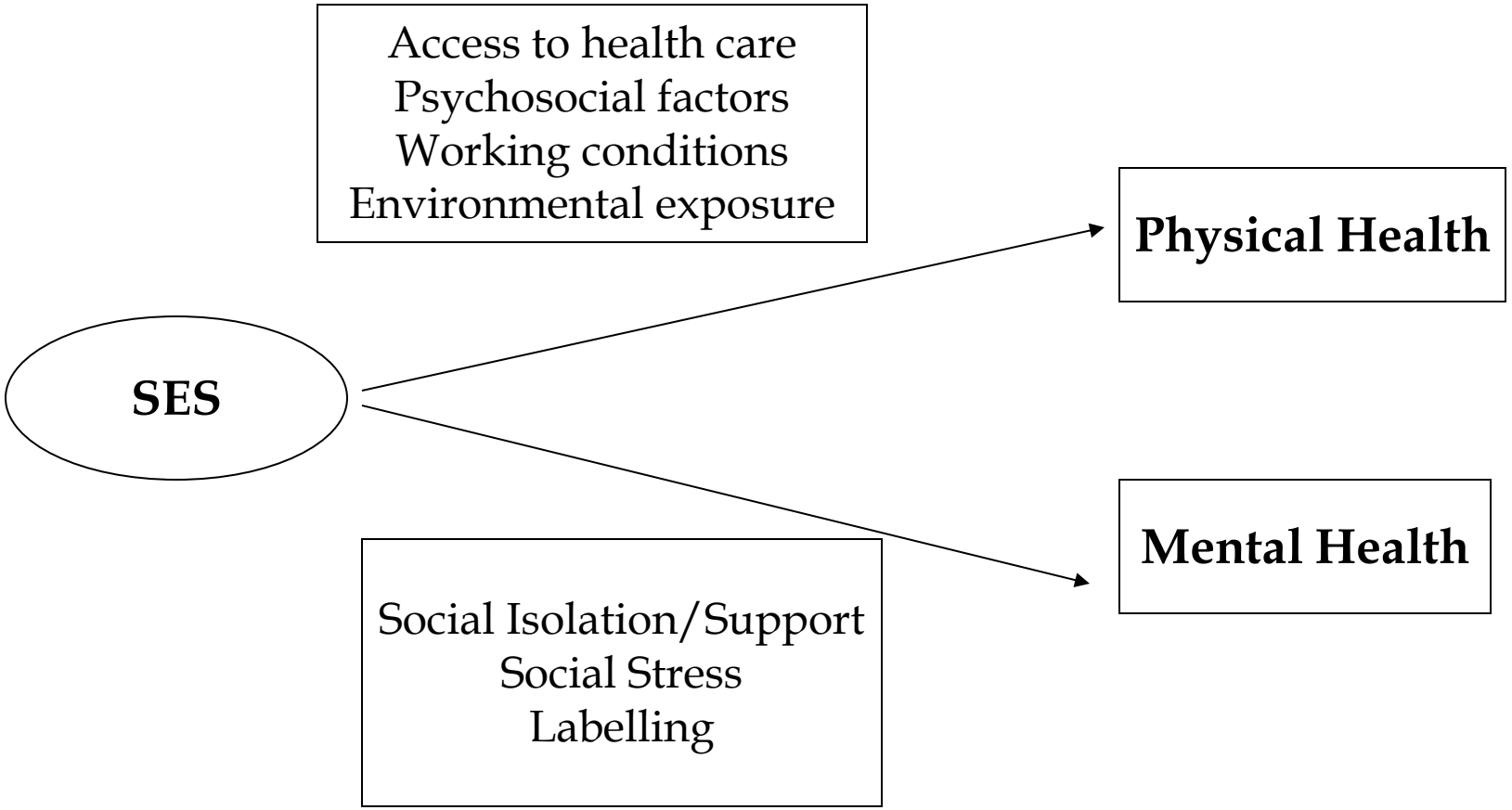
<u>Since 1980</u>:

- **Pay for college grads up 15.7%**
- **Pay for workers w/o HS diploma down 25.7%**

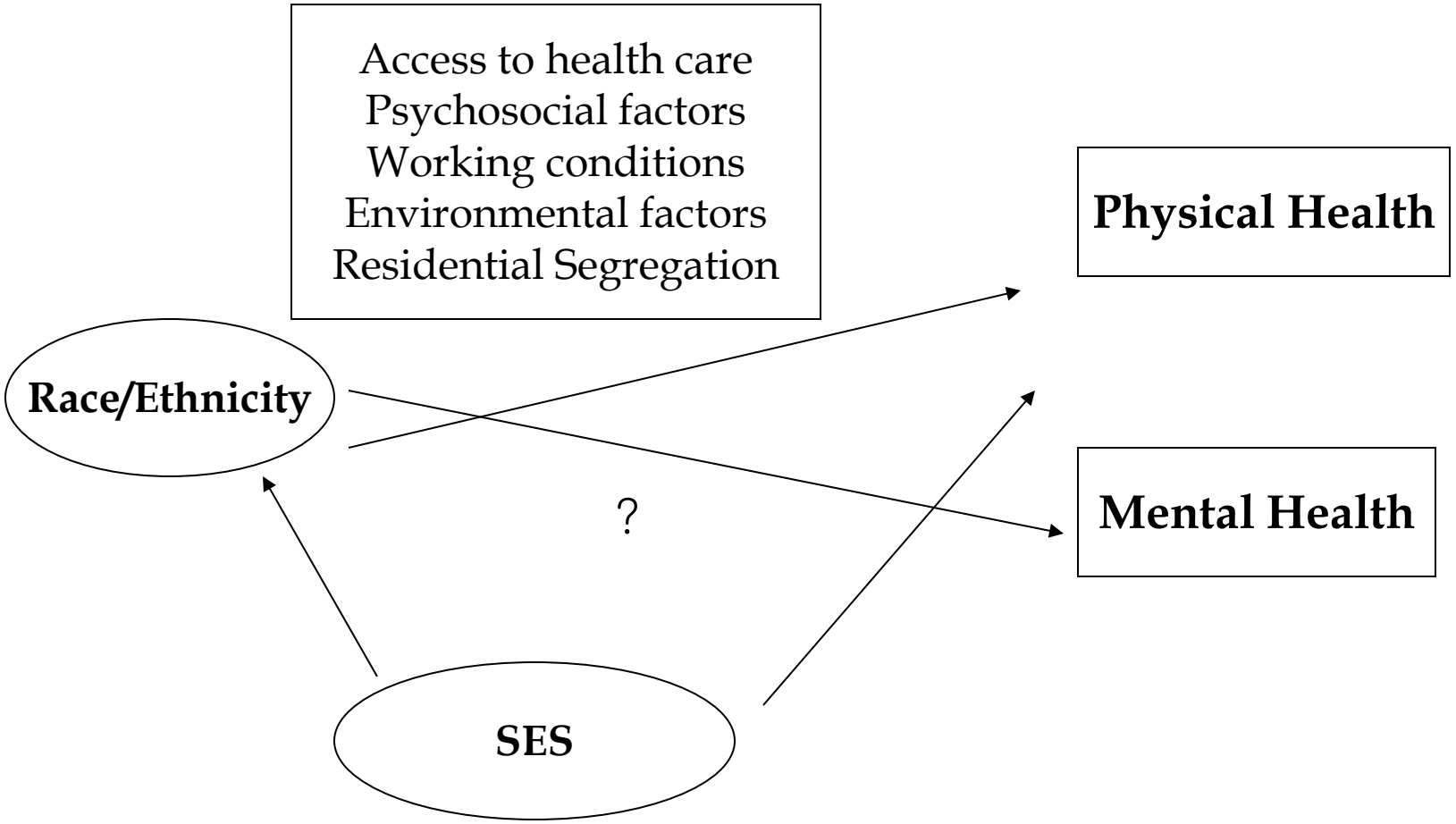
<u>Since 2008</u>:

- **% of Americans who think they are middle class fell from 53% to 44%.**
- **% of Americans who think they are lower middle class or poor rose from 25% to 40%.**

Inequalities in Health & Mental Health

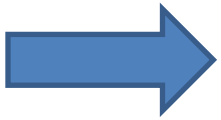


Inequalities in Health & Mental Health



Inequality & Democracy

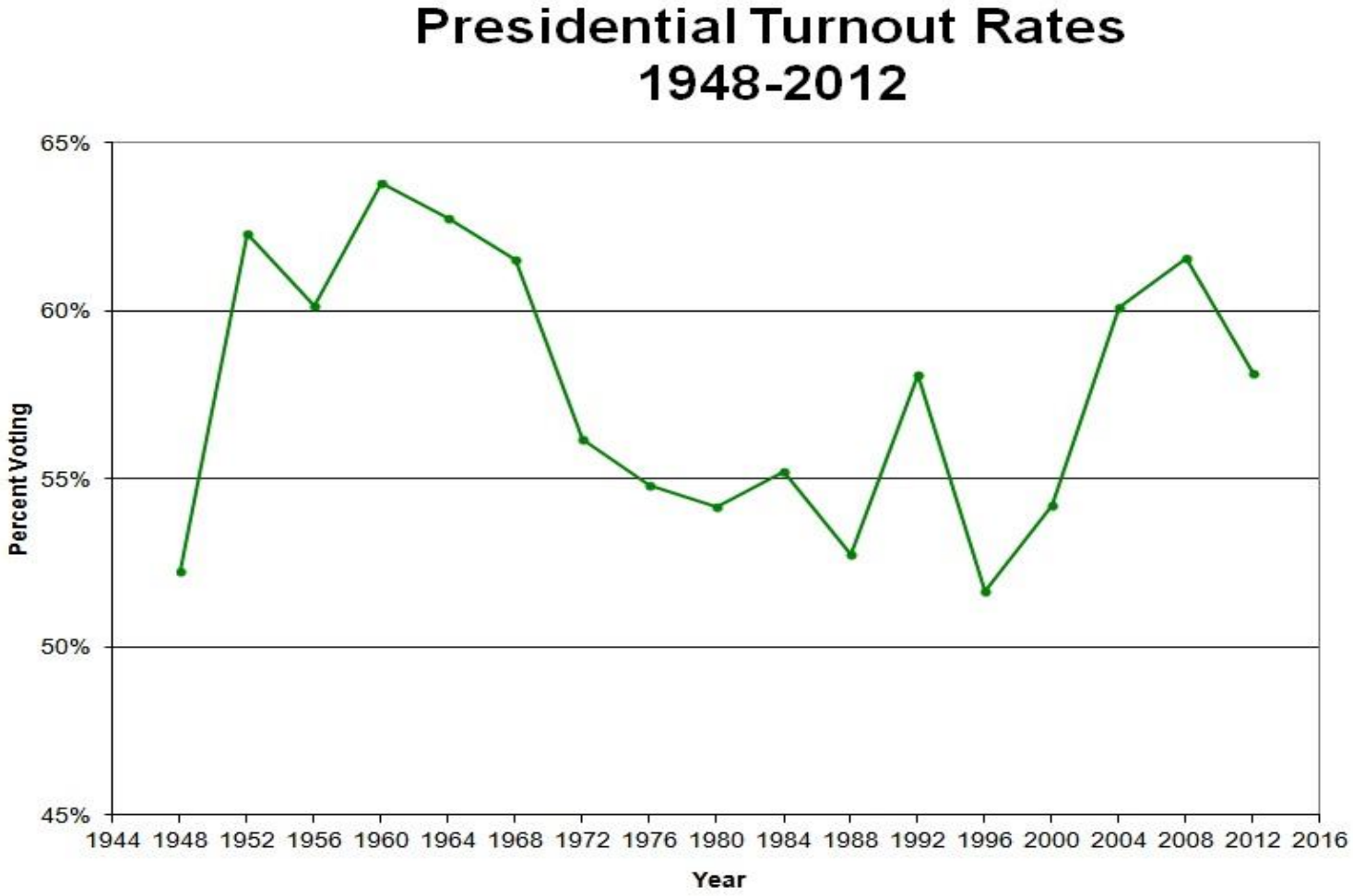
Rationalizations for Inequality

1. Equality  Tyranny of the majority
2. All human beings are not equal in capacity
3. Intolerance of different views
4. Most people lack sufficient information

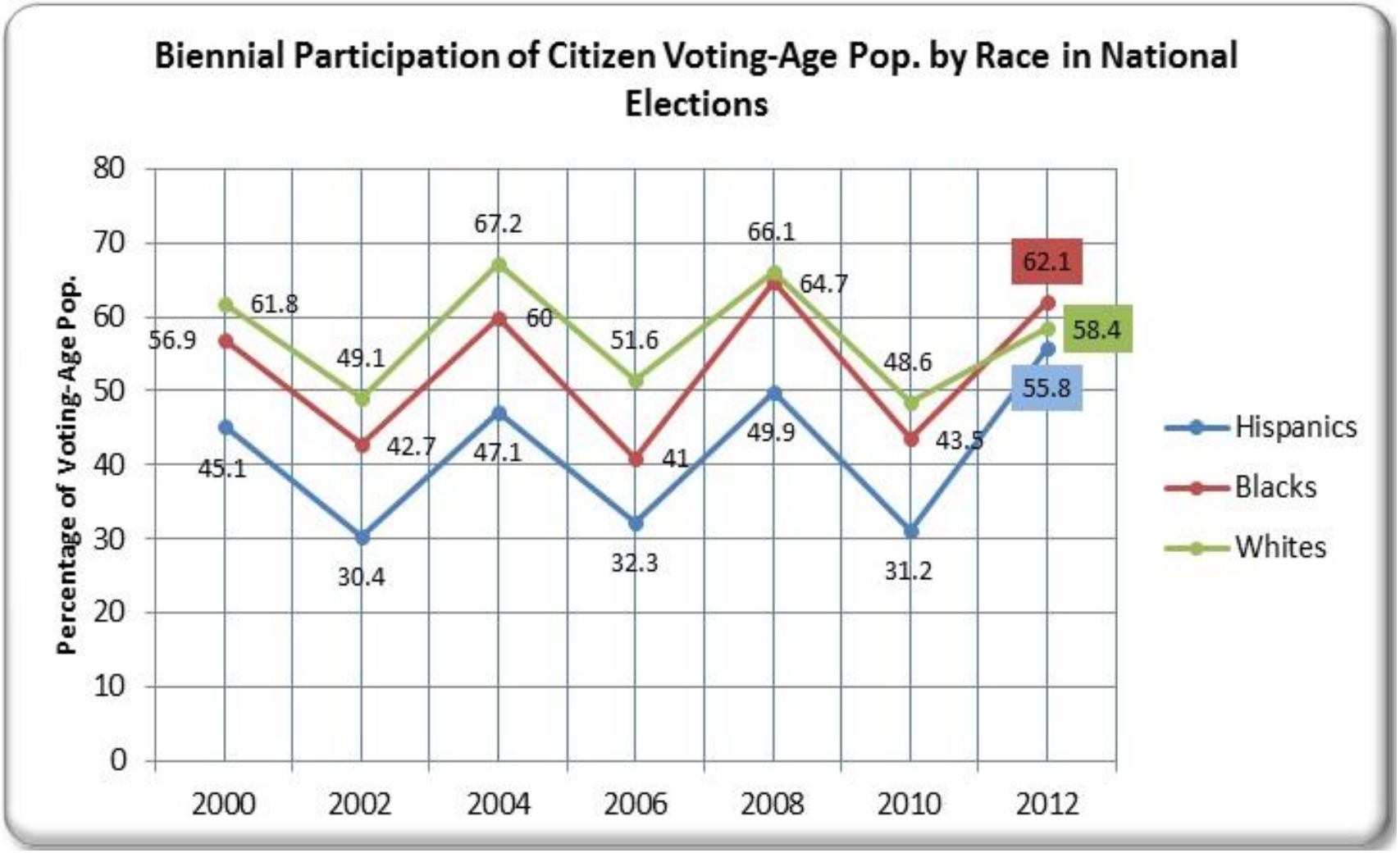
Inequality & Democracy: Who Votes?

10-23

Voter Participation: An Historic Perspective



Voter Participation

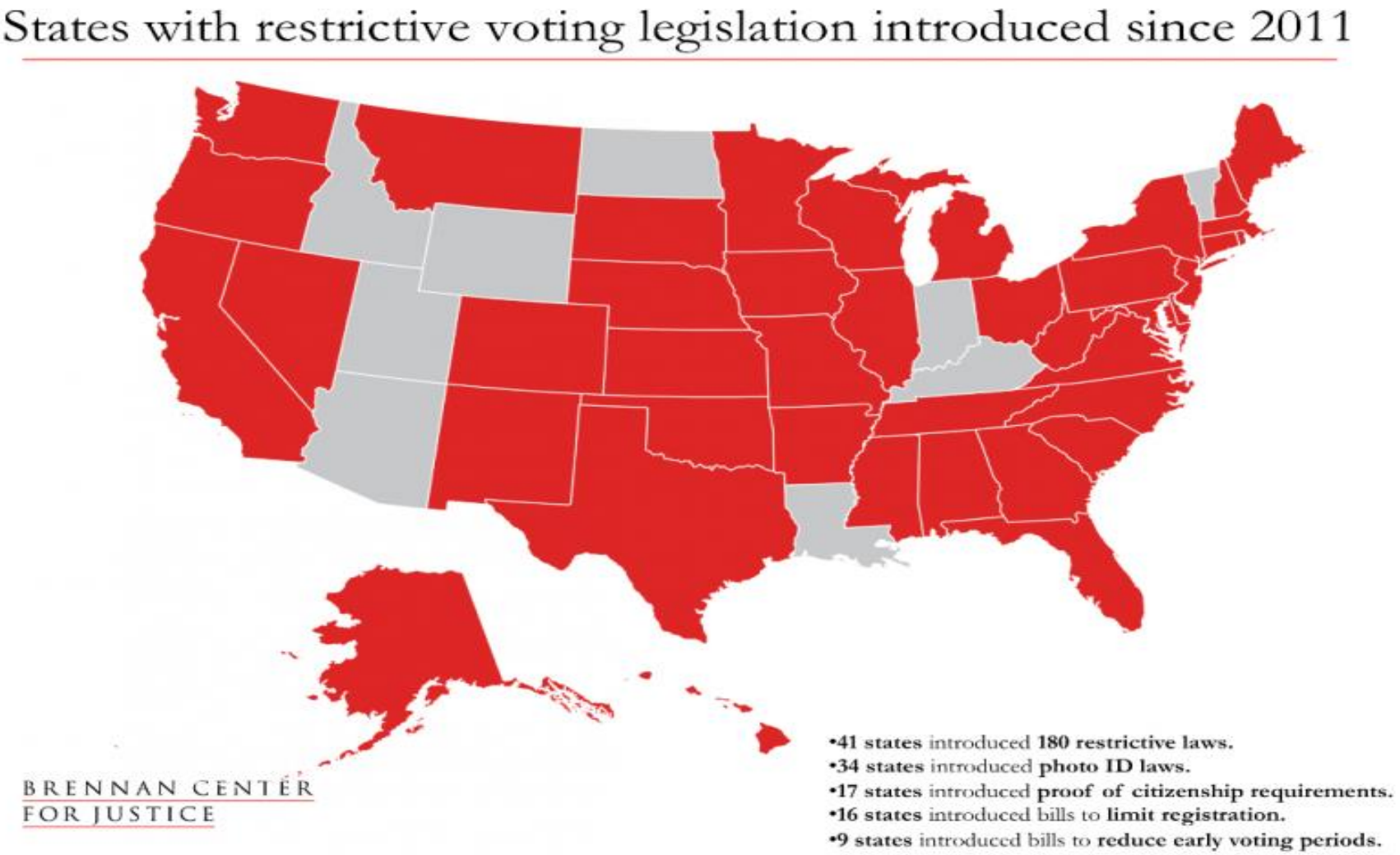


Voting Rights & Democracy

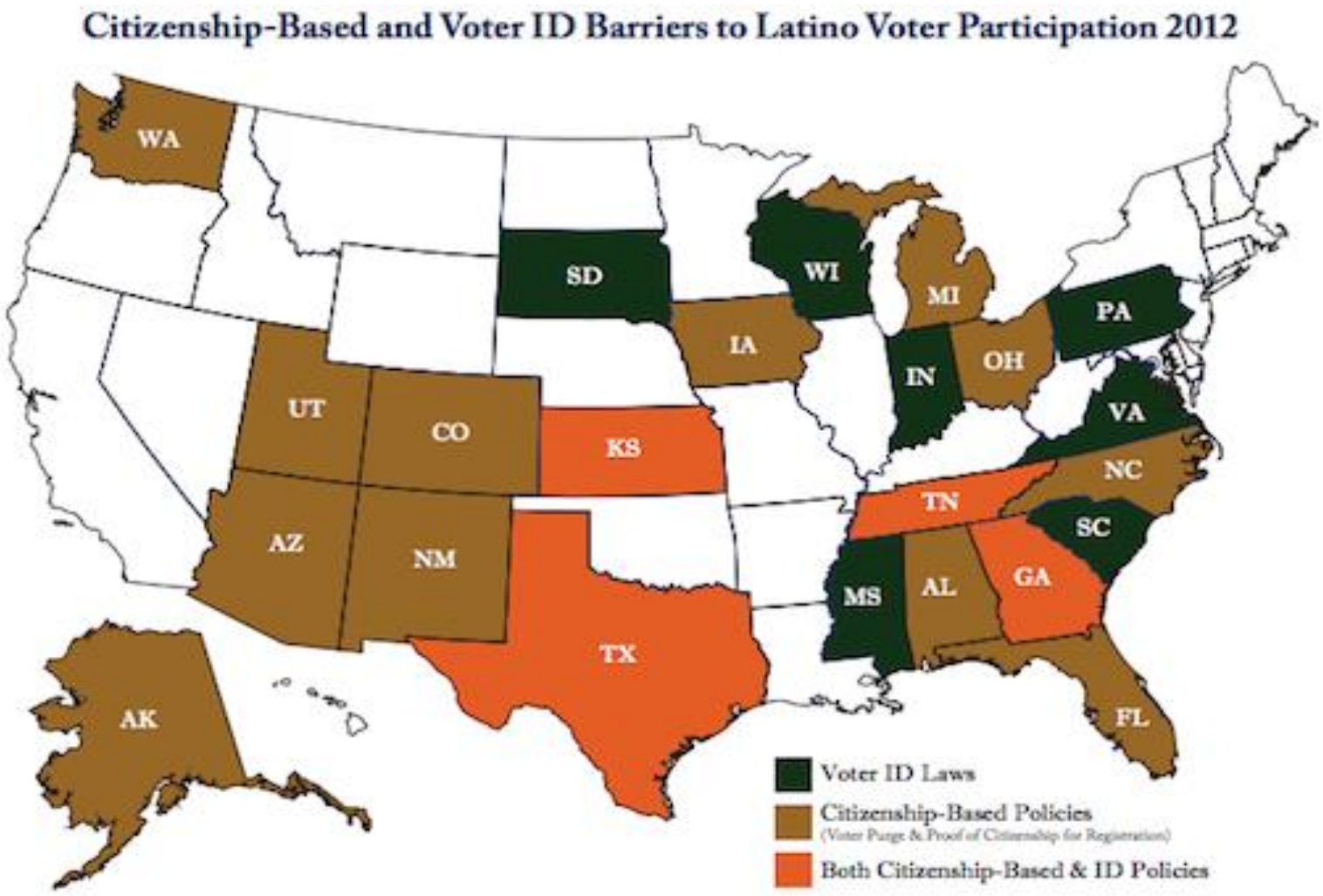
Outright Voter Suppression

Suppression of Voting Rights

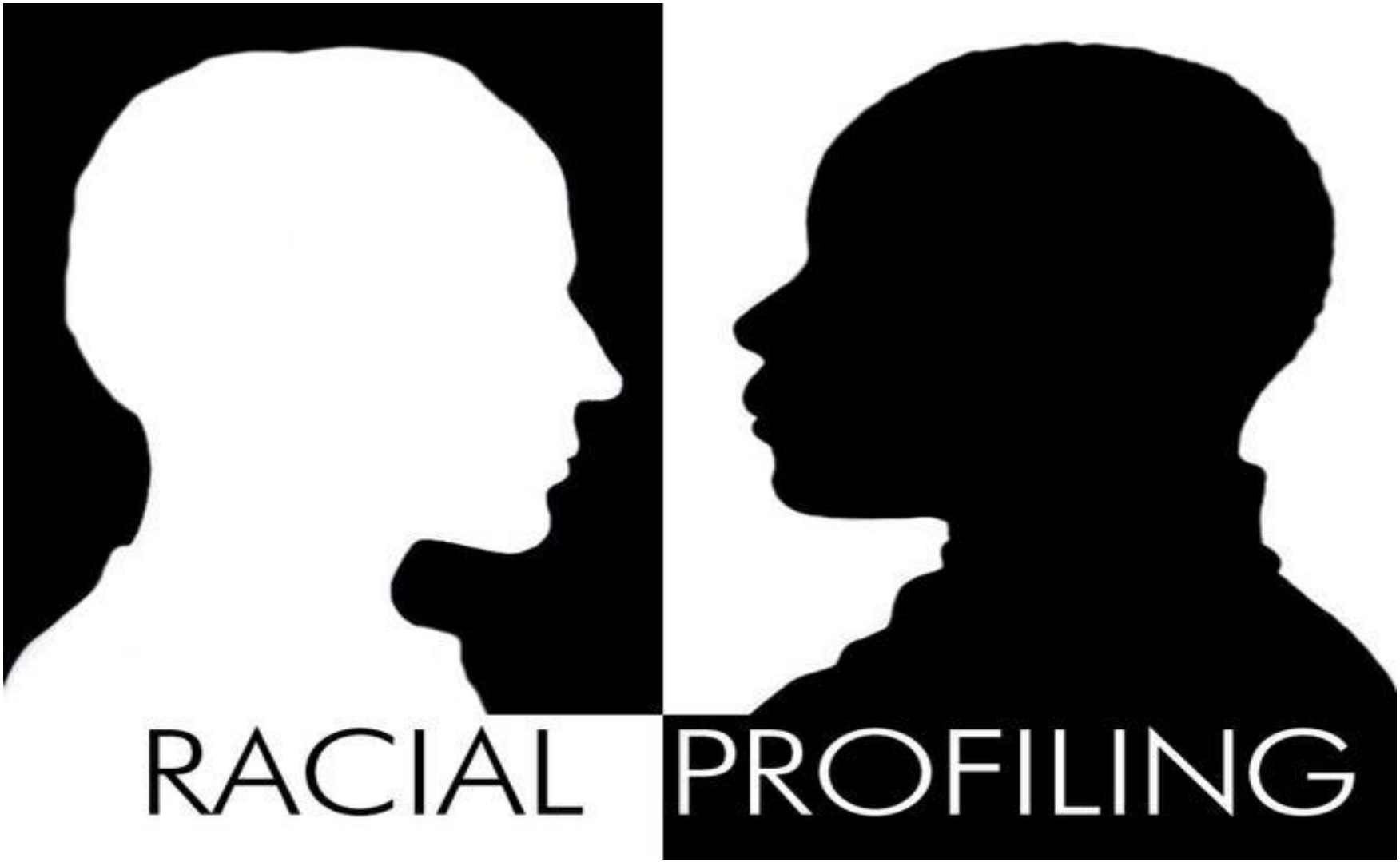
Proposed New Restrictions on Voting



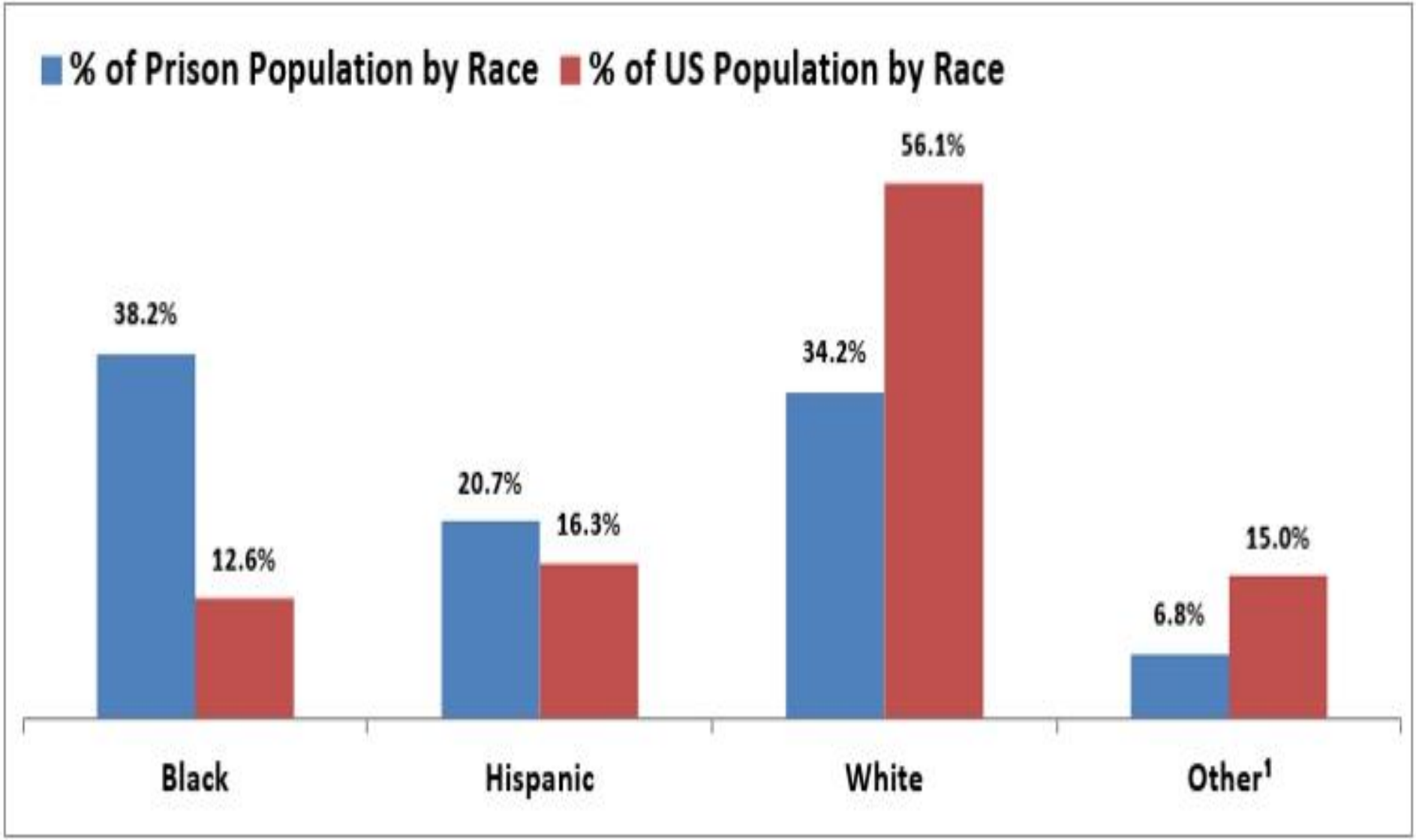
Barriers to Latino Voter Participation



Incarceration & Racial Inequality



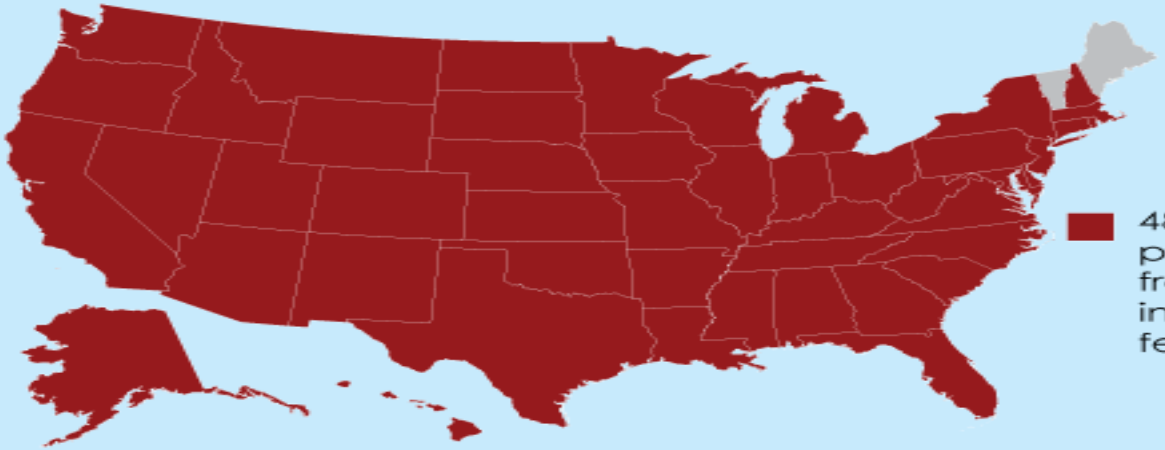
Race & Incarceration



Felon Disenfranchisement

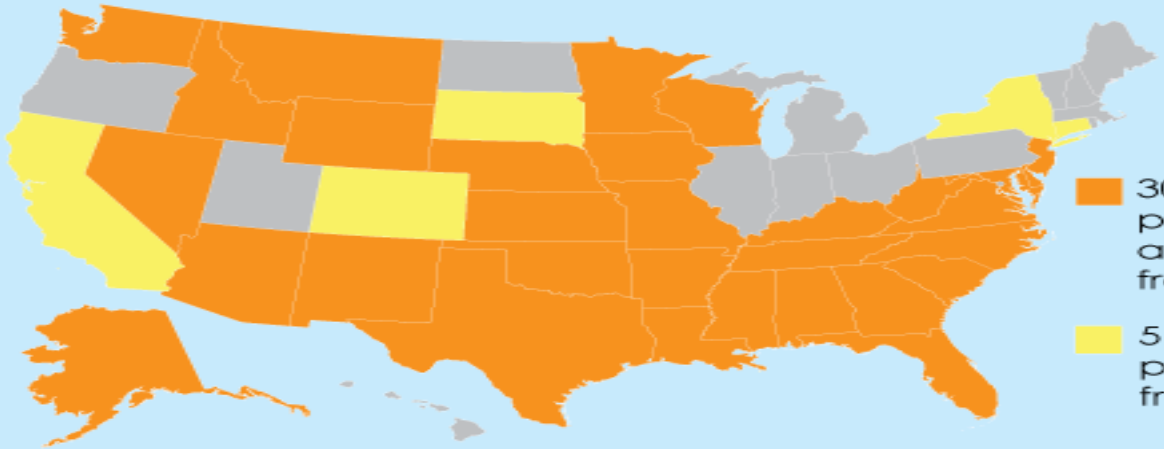
STATE DISENFRANCHISEMENT LAWS

States that prohibit inmates from voting



48 states and D.C. prohibit inmates from voting while incarcerated for a felony offense

States that prohibit persons on probation and/or parole from voting



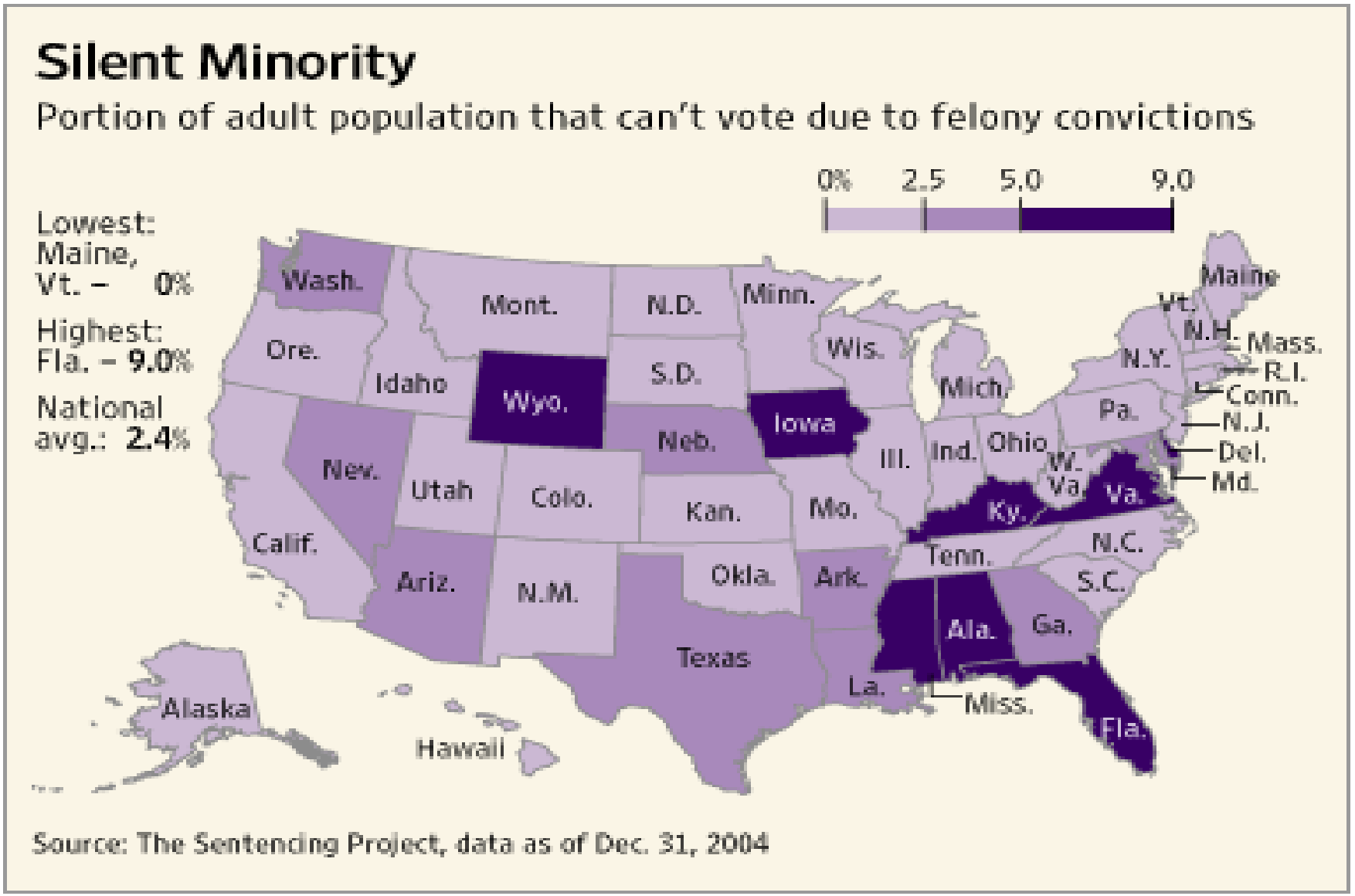
30 states prohibit persons on parole and probation from voting

5 states prohibit persons on parole from voting

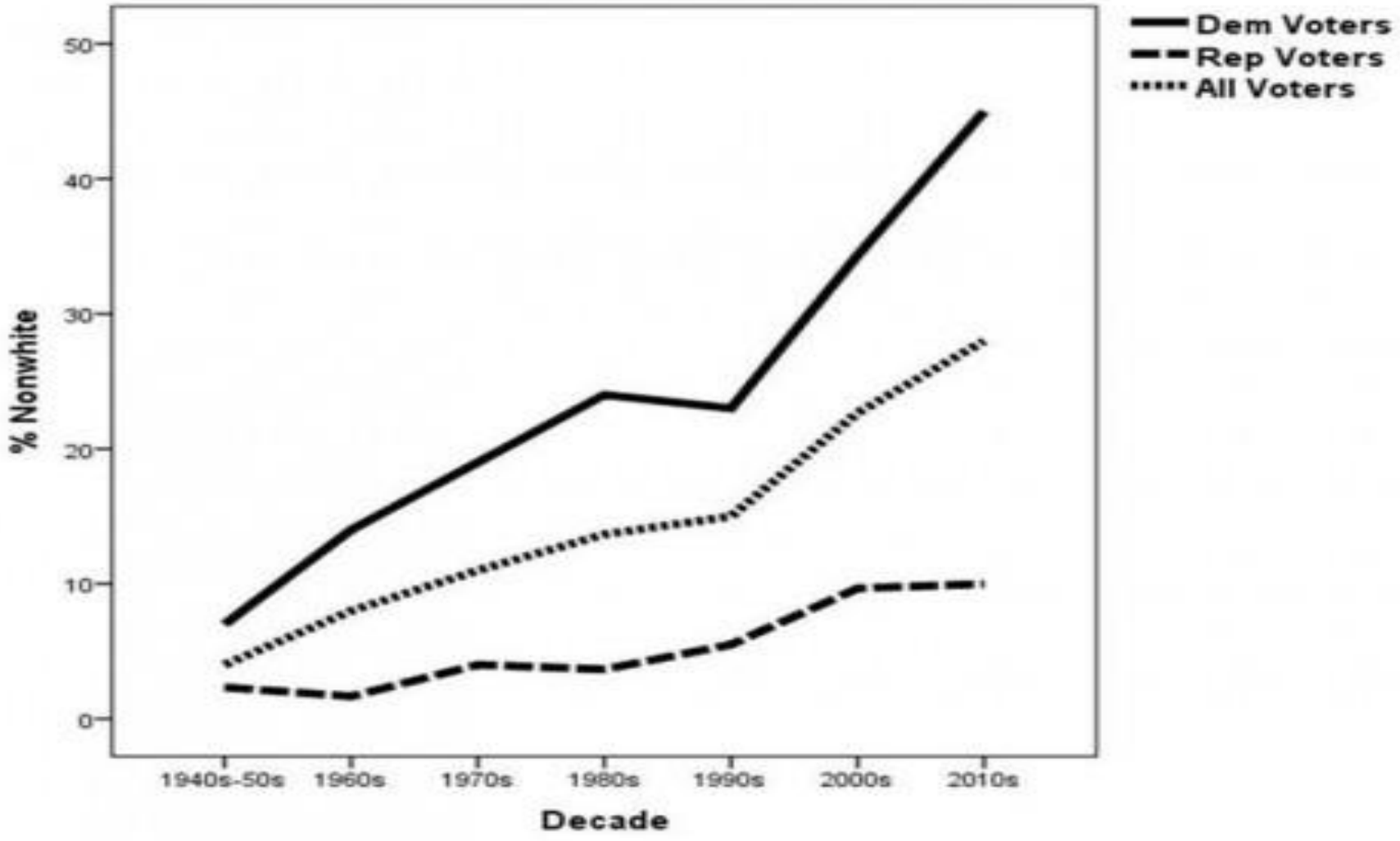
Source: Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States, The Sentencing Project

COLORLINES®

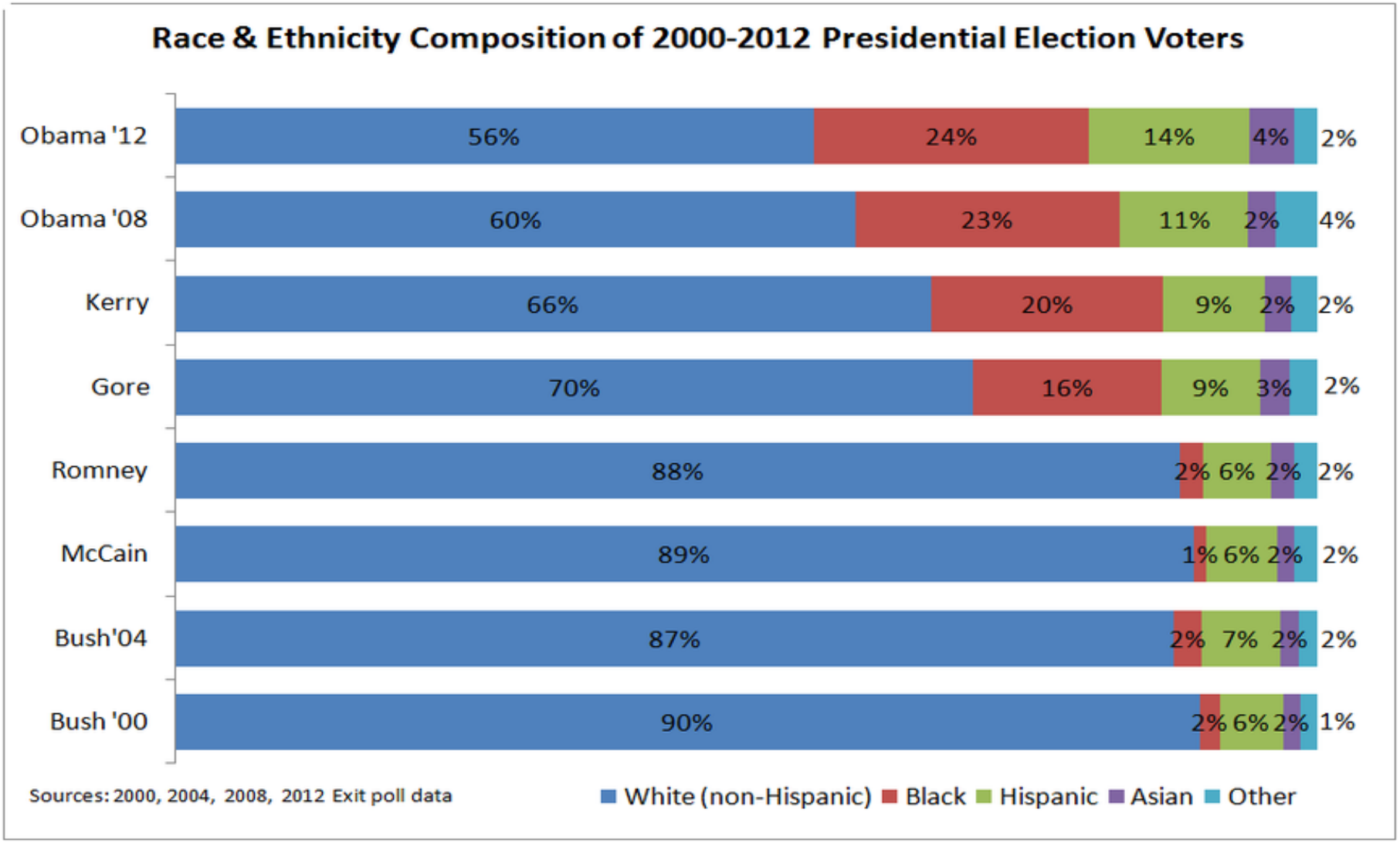
Impact on Democracy



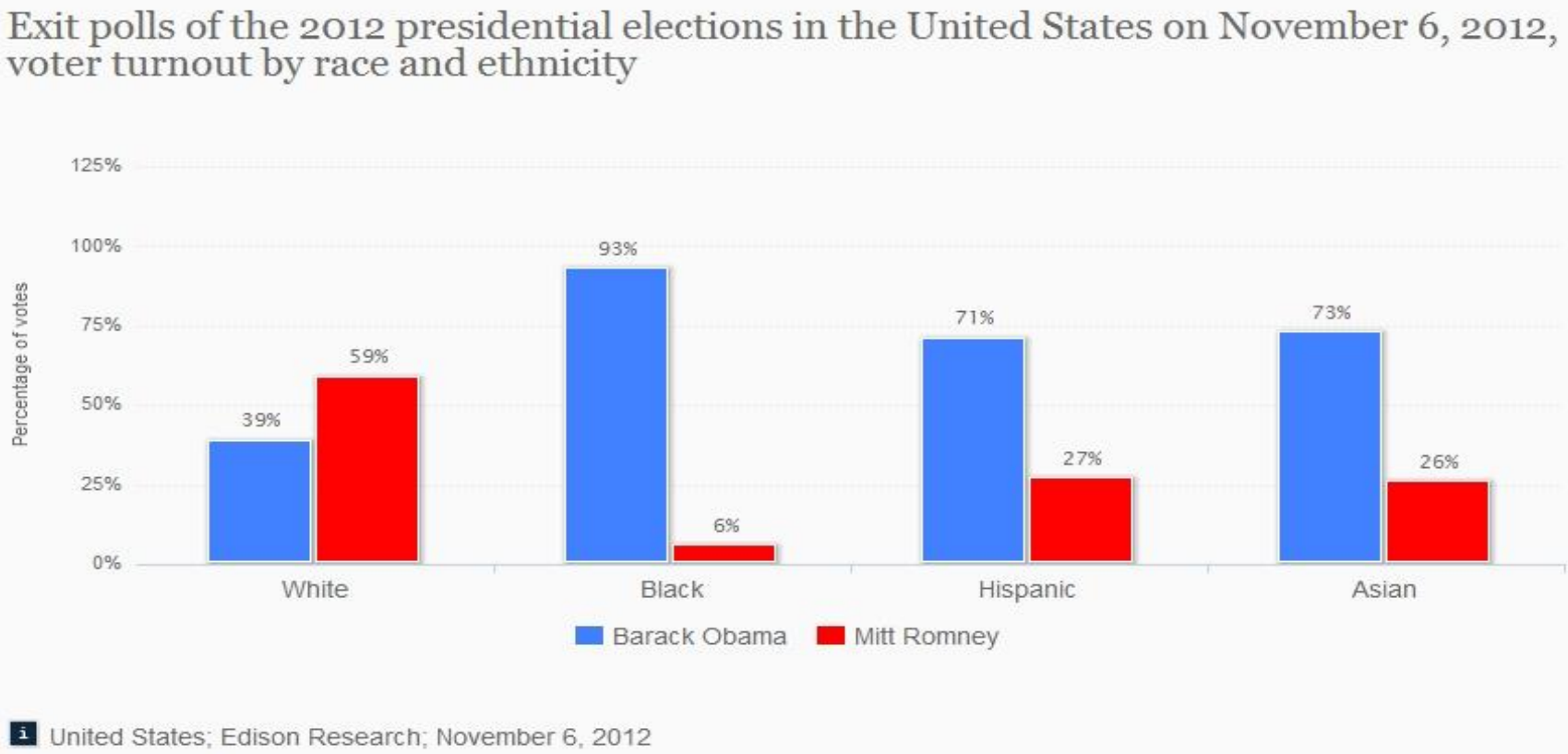
Why This Matters:
Race & Political Partisanship



Recent Historical Trends



Votes by Race & Ethnicity, 2012

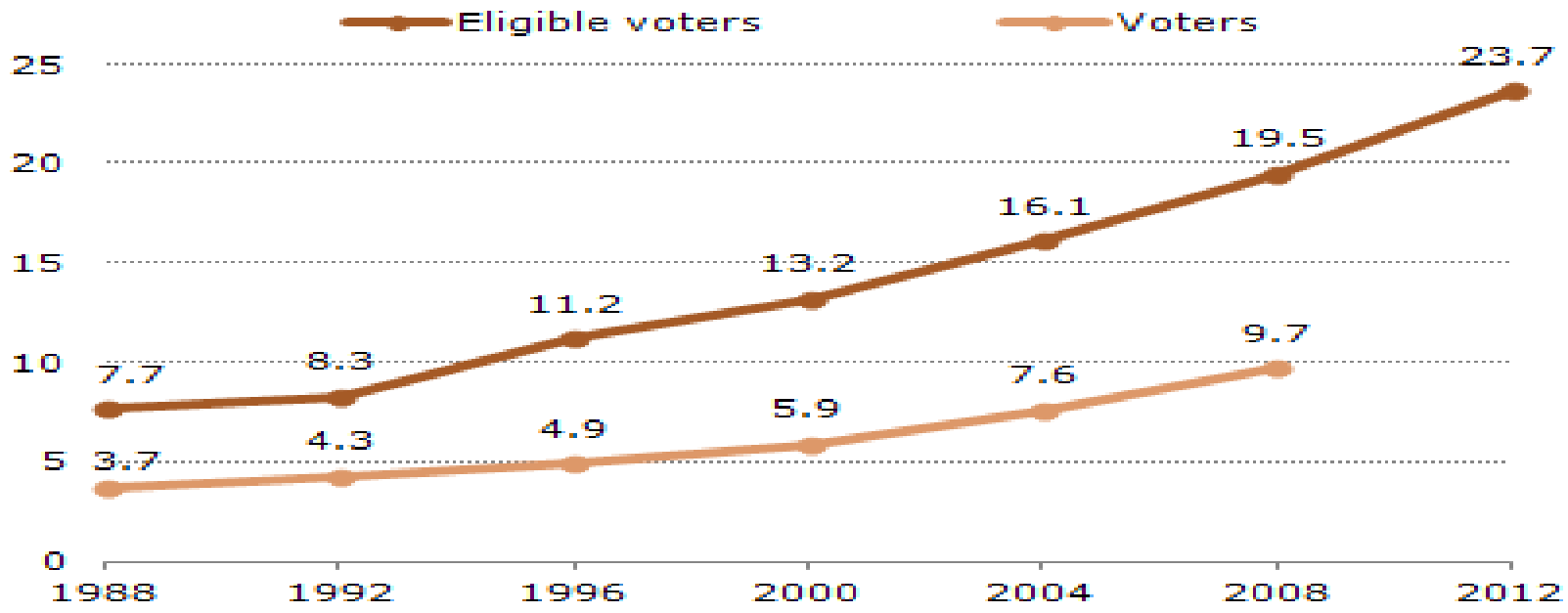


Latino/a Voter Participation

Figure 1

Latino Participation in Presidential Elections, 1988-2012

(in millions)



Note: Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older.

Source: For 1988 through 2008, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey November Supplements; for 2012, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the August Current Population Survey

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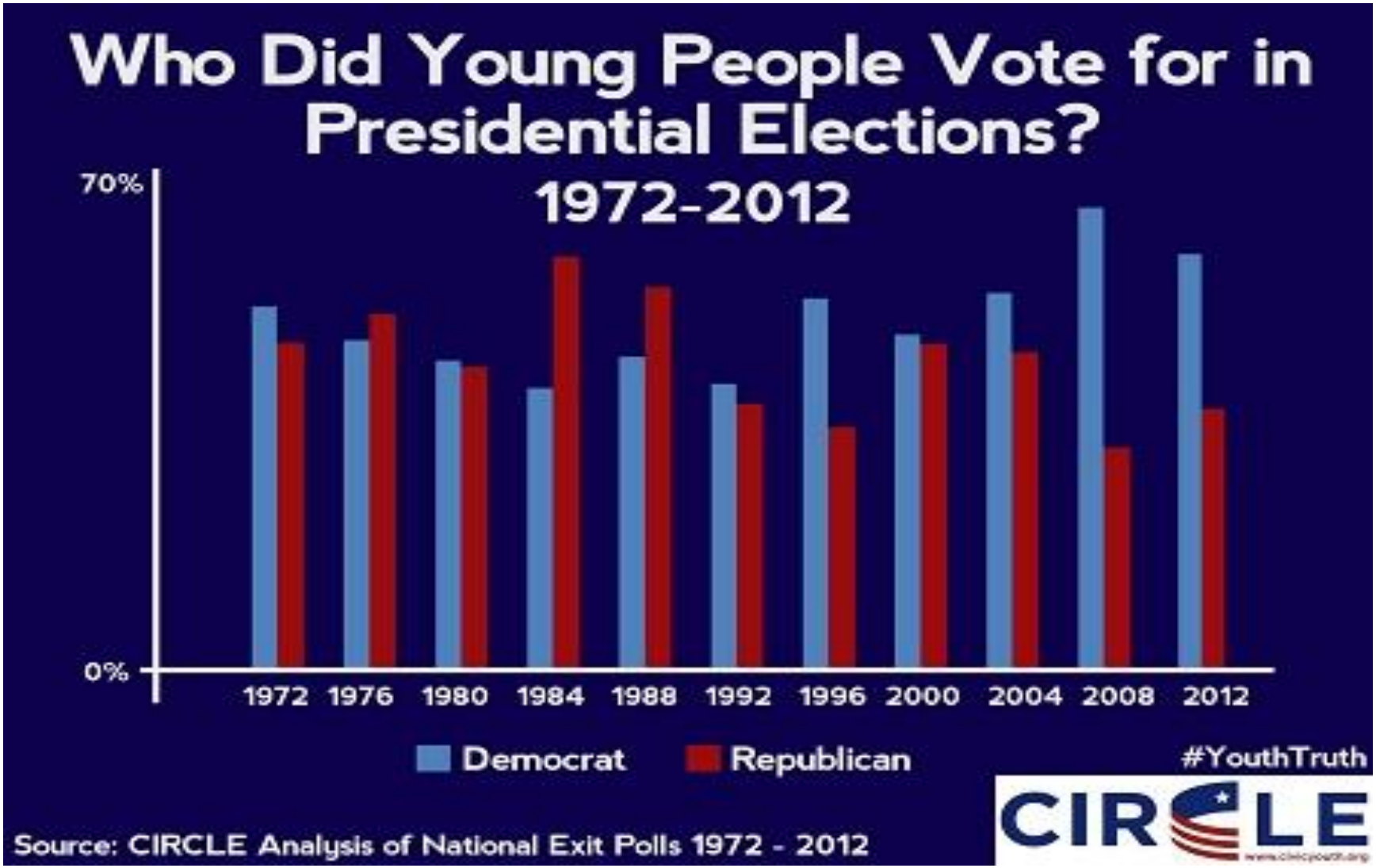
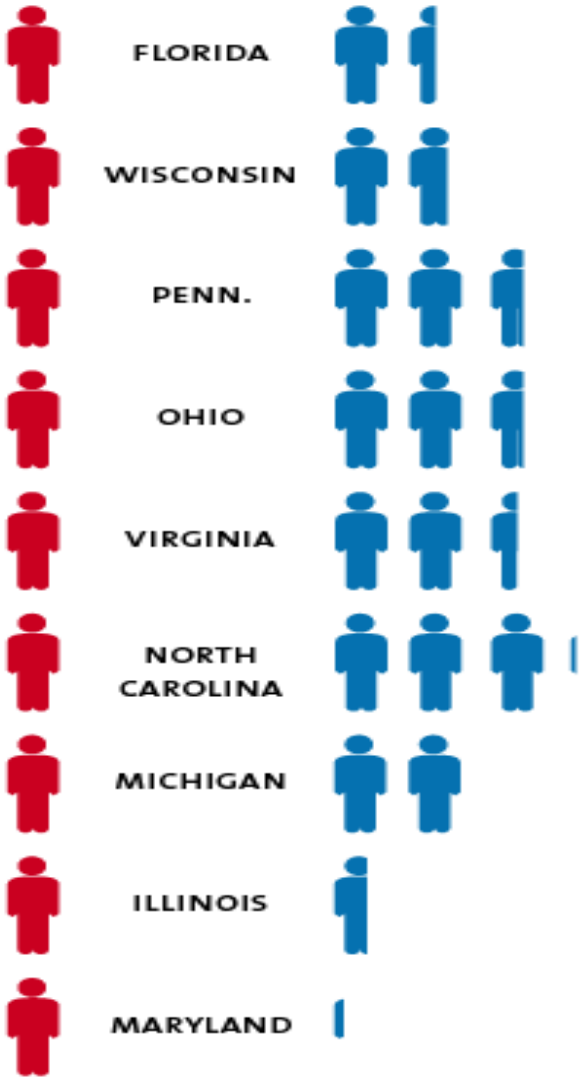
Youth Vote, 1972-2012



Gerrymandering & Democracy

Impact of Gerrymandering

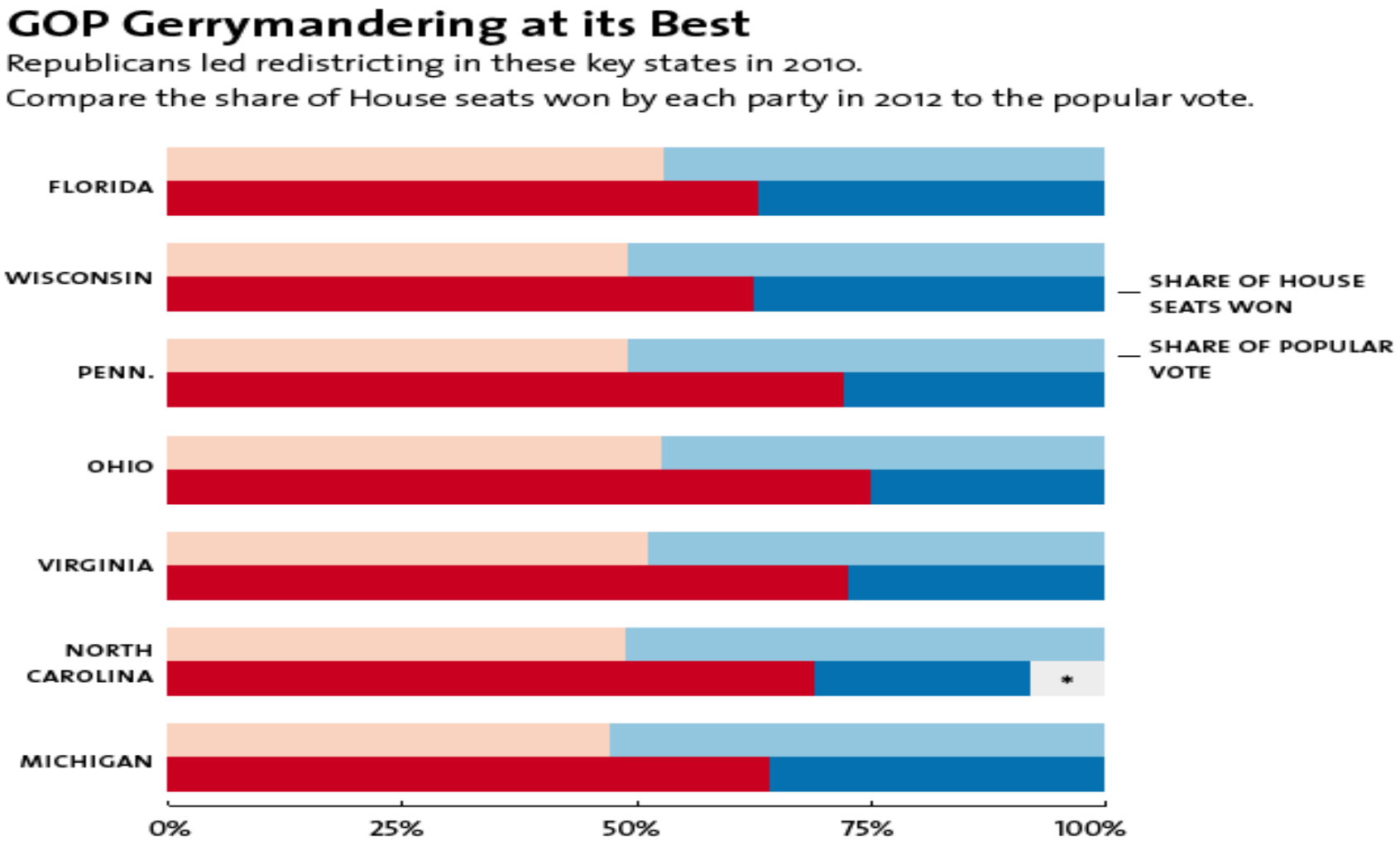
For every vote it took to elect a Republican House member in these states...



...it took this many votes to elect a Democratic House member.

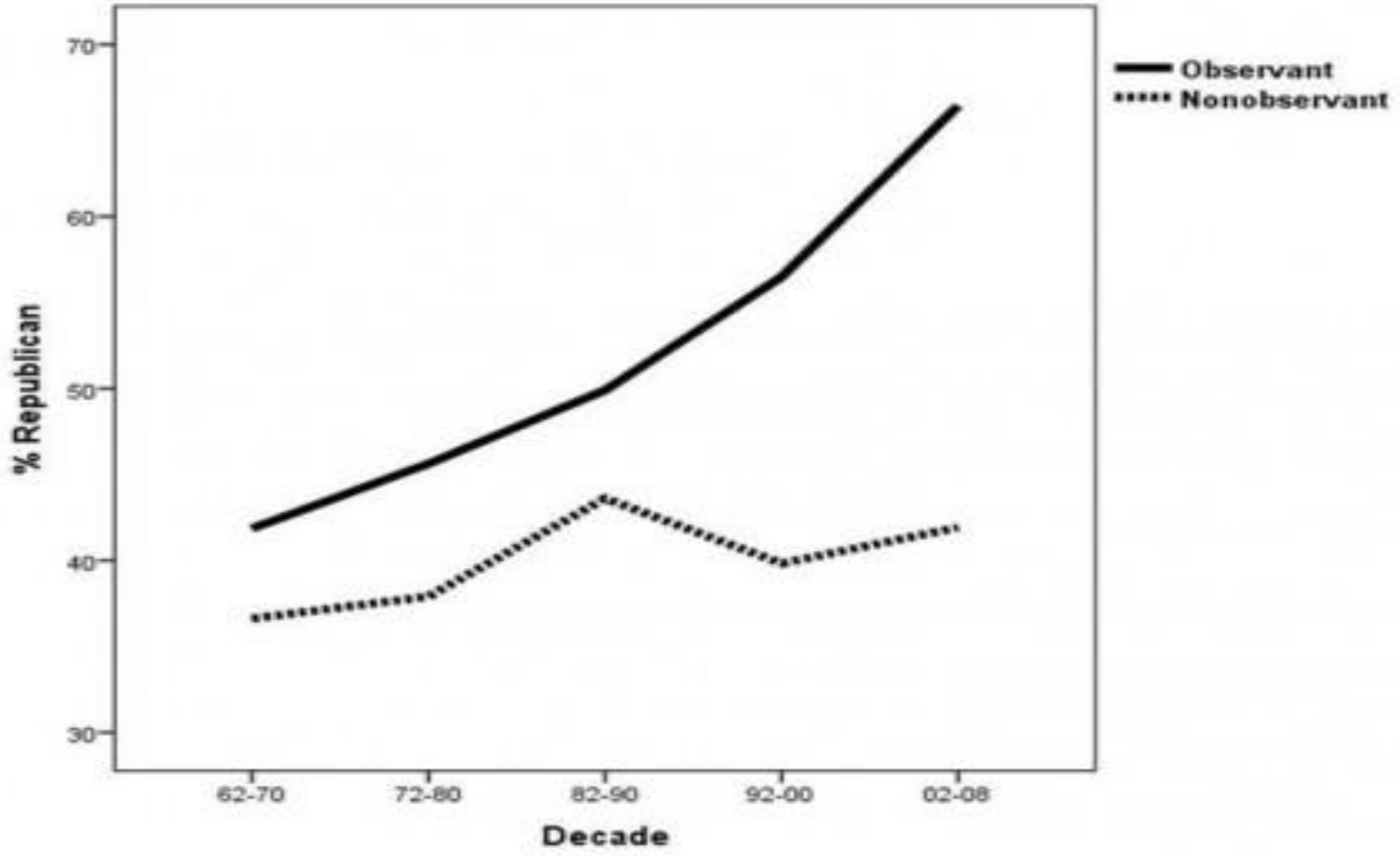
Mother Jones

Impact of Gerrymandering



Impact of Gerrymandering

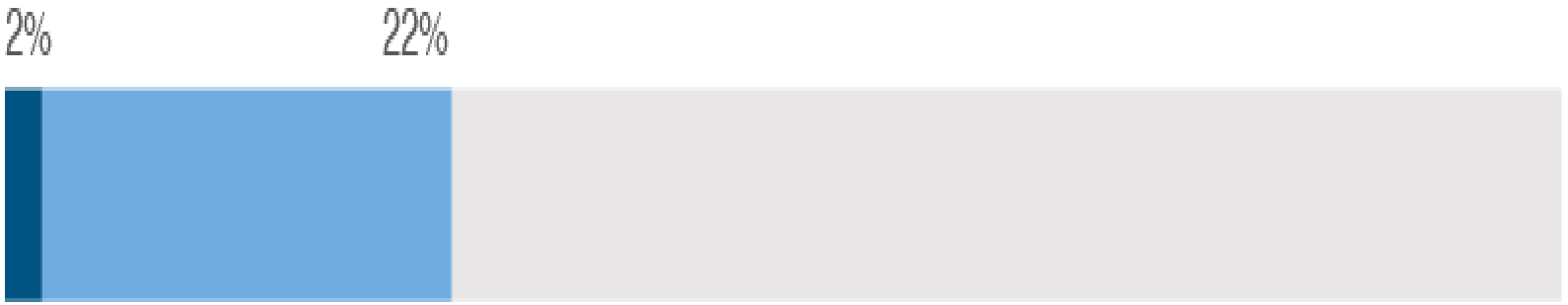
Religion & Political Partisanship



The Results: Who Holds Office? Who Represents Whom?

Race & Political Representation

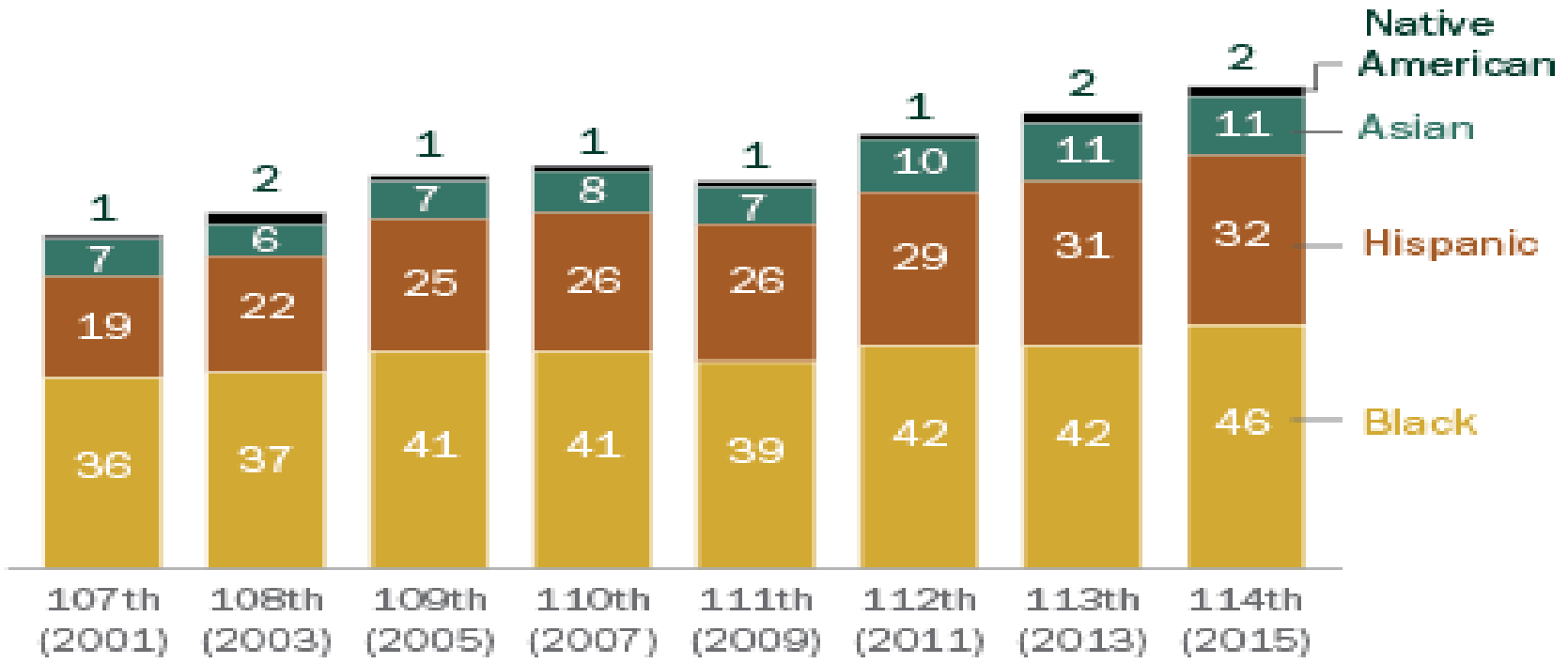
Figure 12. Latinos & Asians are 22% of population, but hold 2% of elected offices



Source: The New American Leaders Project

Growing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Congress

Number of House and Senate members by race and ethnicity



Note: The data do not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Figures represent the makeup of Congress on the first day of the session. Asian includes Pacific Islanders.

Source: CQ Roll Call, Congressional Research Service, Brookings Institution

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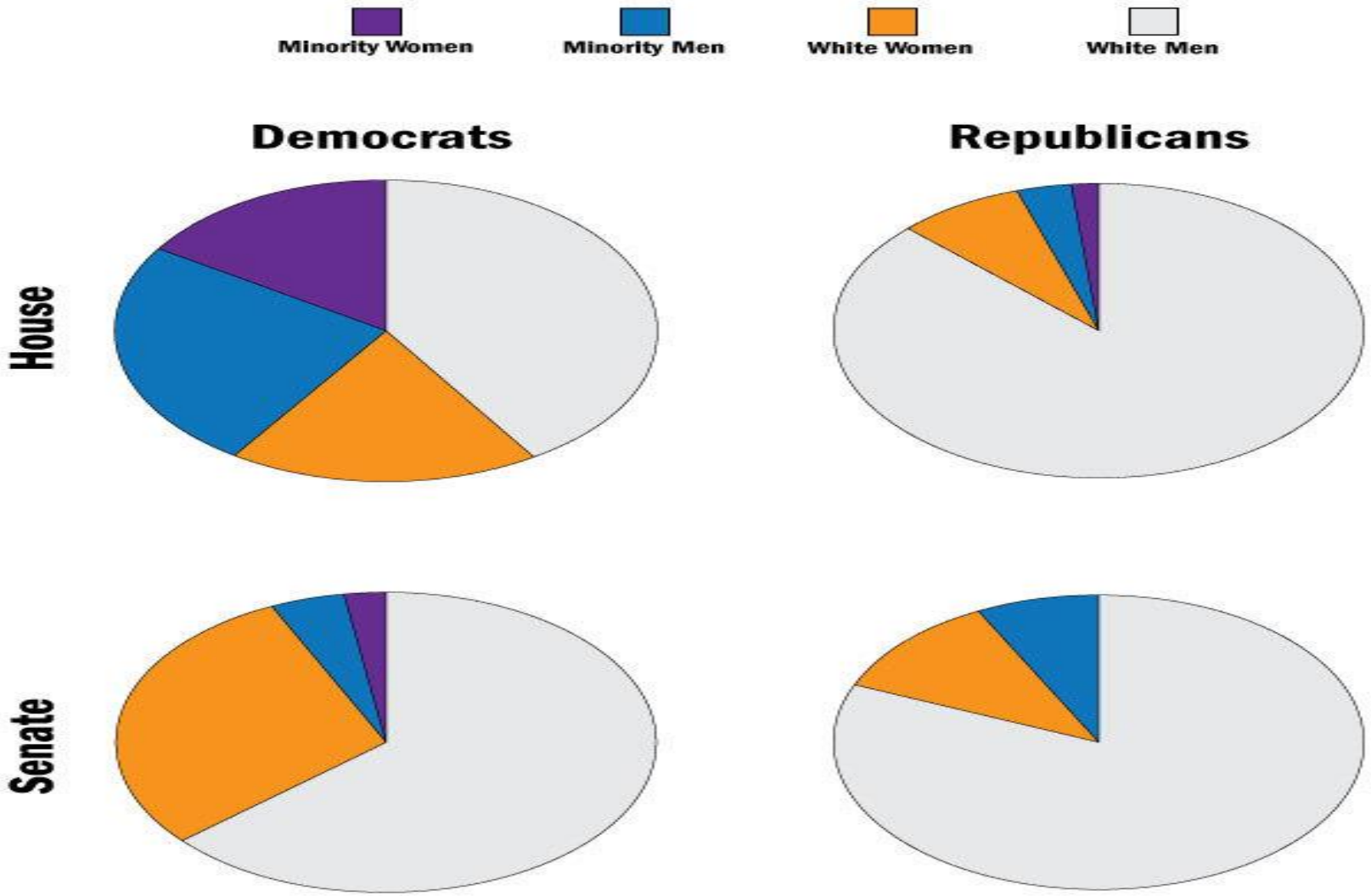
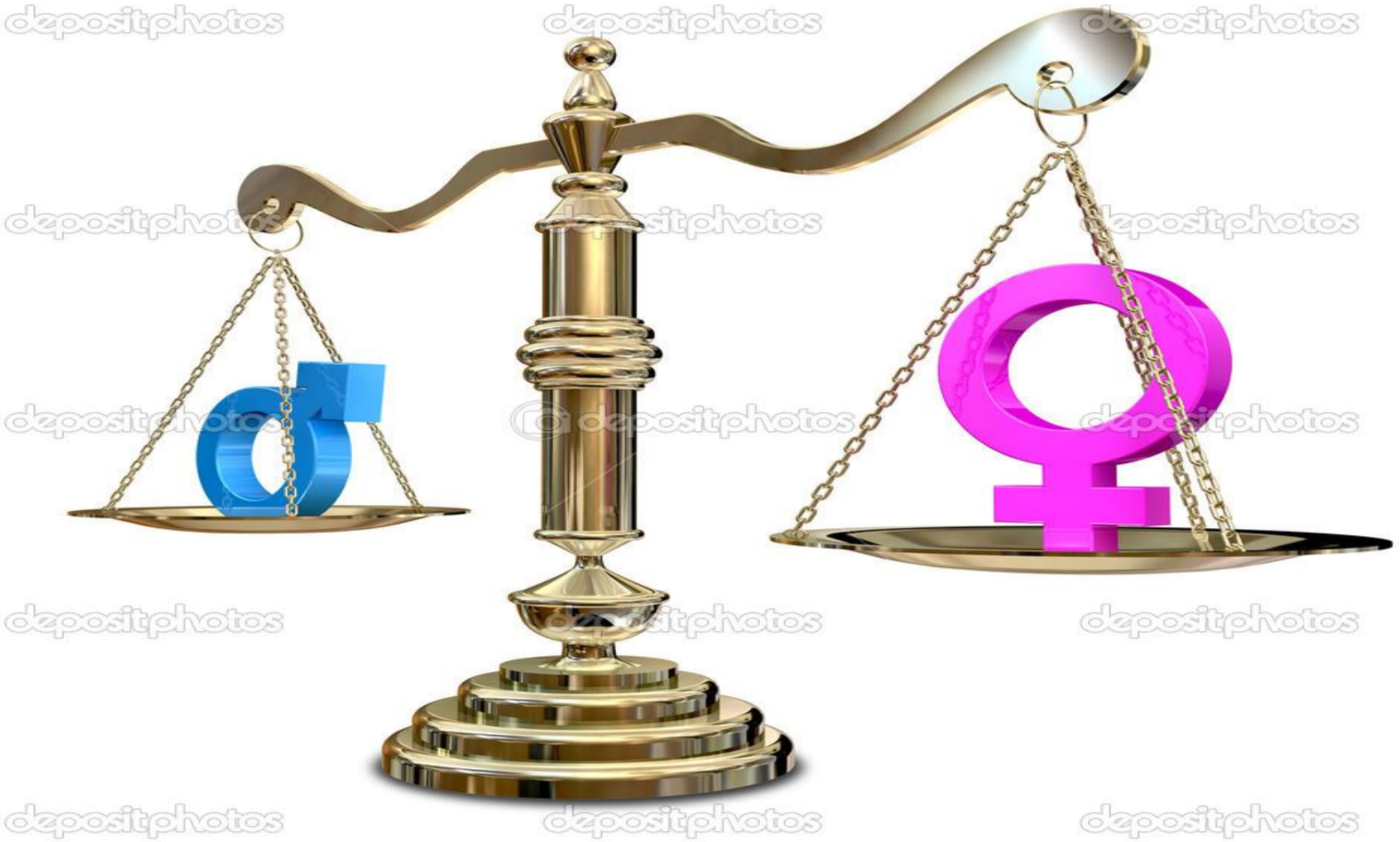
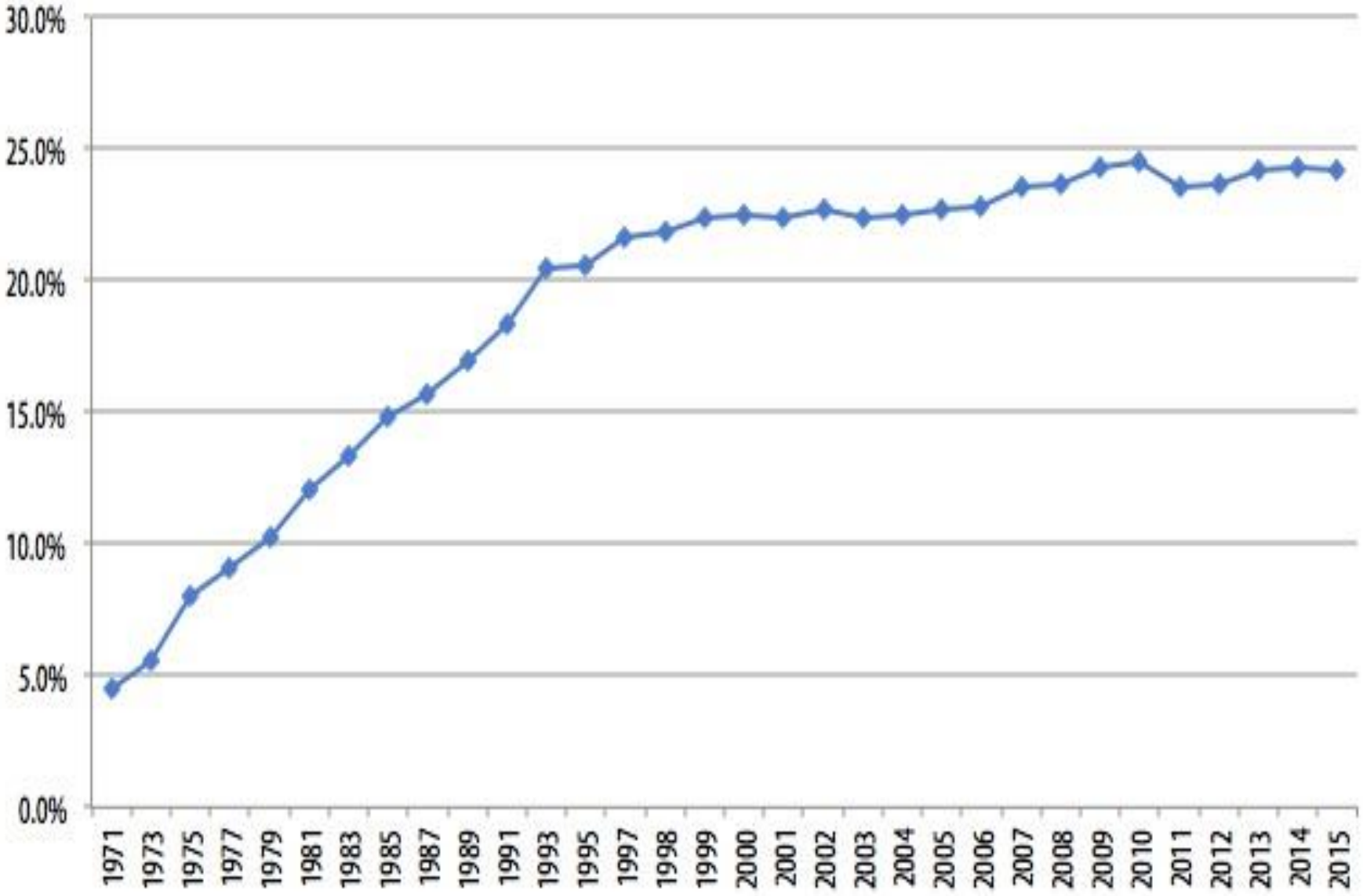
The Real Diversity In The 114th Congress Comes From Dems



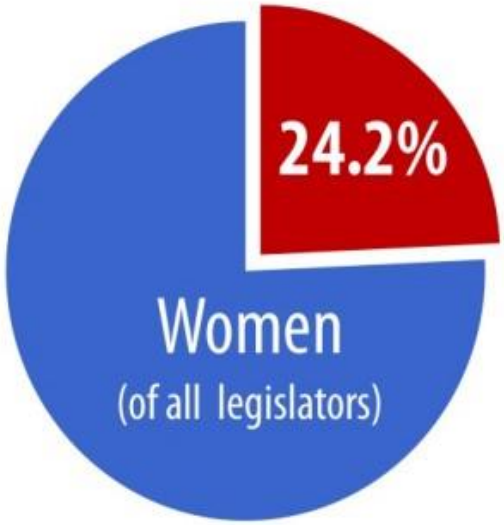
Gender Inequality & Democracy

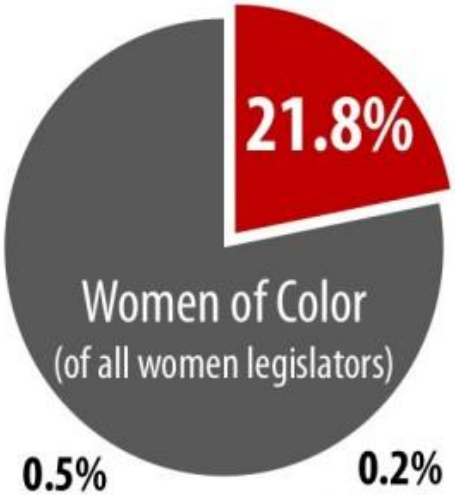


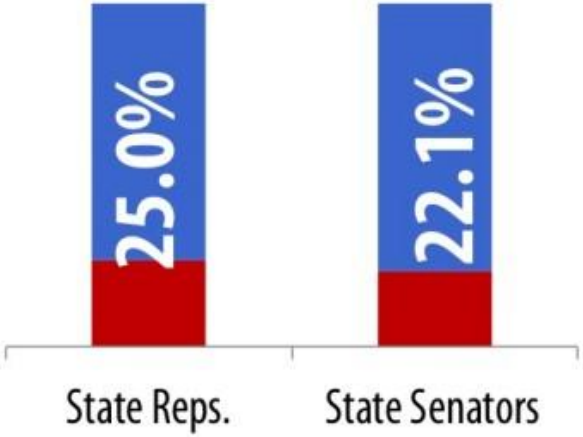
Women in State Legislatures, 1971-Present

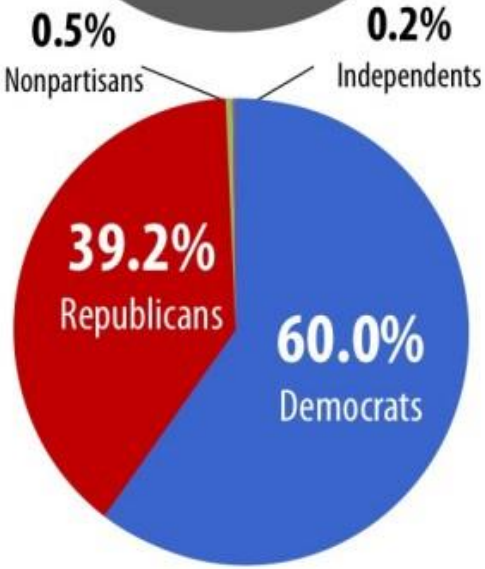


Women in State Legislatures 2015









State Rankings

1. Colorado
2. Vermont
3. Arizona
4. Minnesota
5. Washington
6. Nevada
7. Maryland
8. Montana
9. Illinois
9. Oregon
11. New Jersey
12. Maine
13. Connecticut
13. Hawaii
15. New Hampshire
16. Alaska
17. Idaho
18. Rhode Island
19. New Mexico
20. California
21. Massachusetts
21. Ohio
21. Wisconsin
24. Kansas
25. Florida
25. Missouri
27. Delaware
28. New York
29. Georgia
29. North Carolina
31. Iowa
32. Michigan
33. South Dakota
34. Arkansas
34. Indiana
34. Texas
37. North Dakota
38. Nebraska
39. Pennsylvania
40. Tennessee
41. Mississippi
42. Virginia
43. Kentucky
44. Utah
45. West Virginia
46. Alabama
47. South Carolina
48. Wyoming
49. Oklahoma
50. Louisiana

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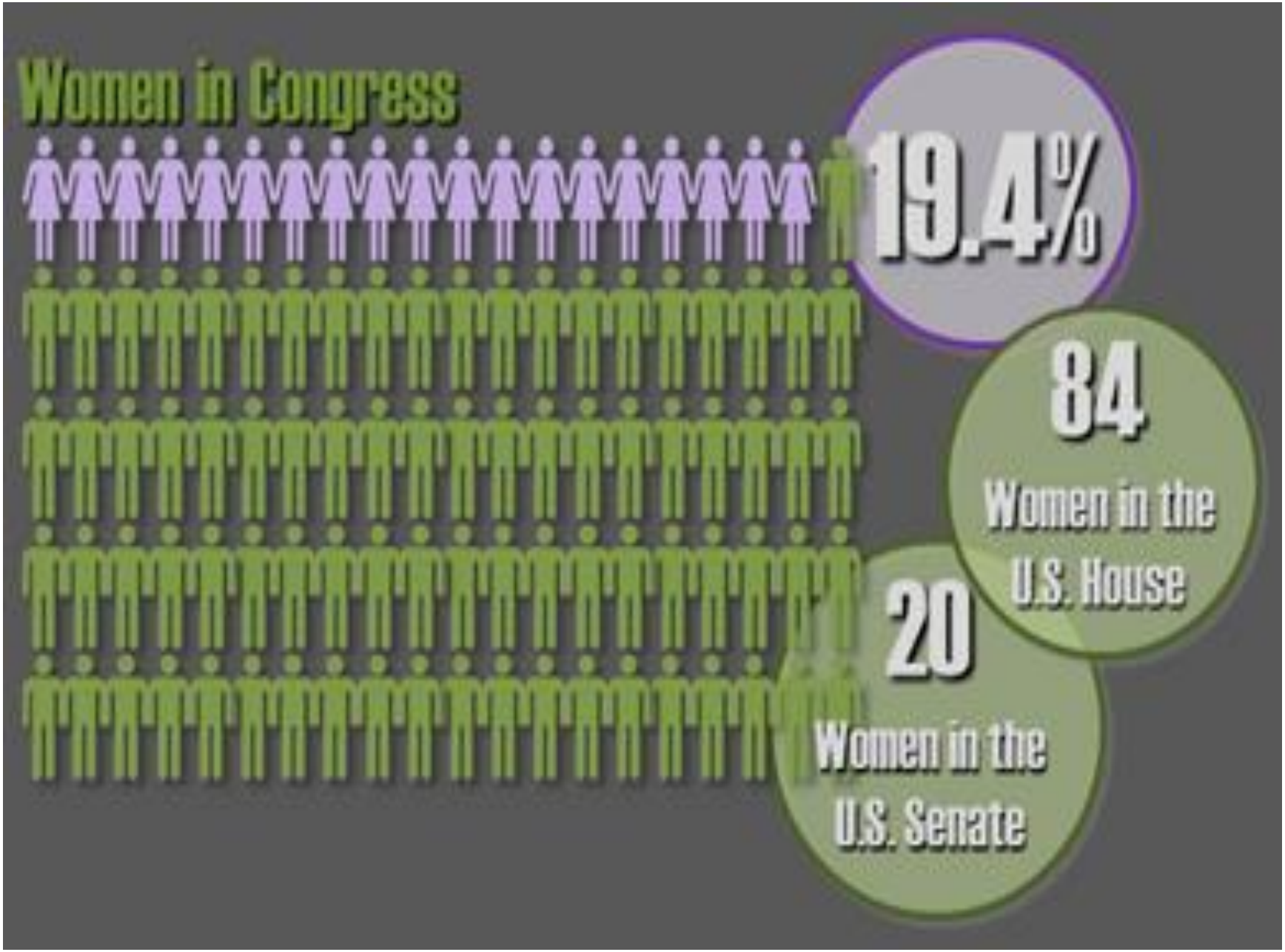
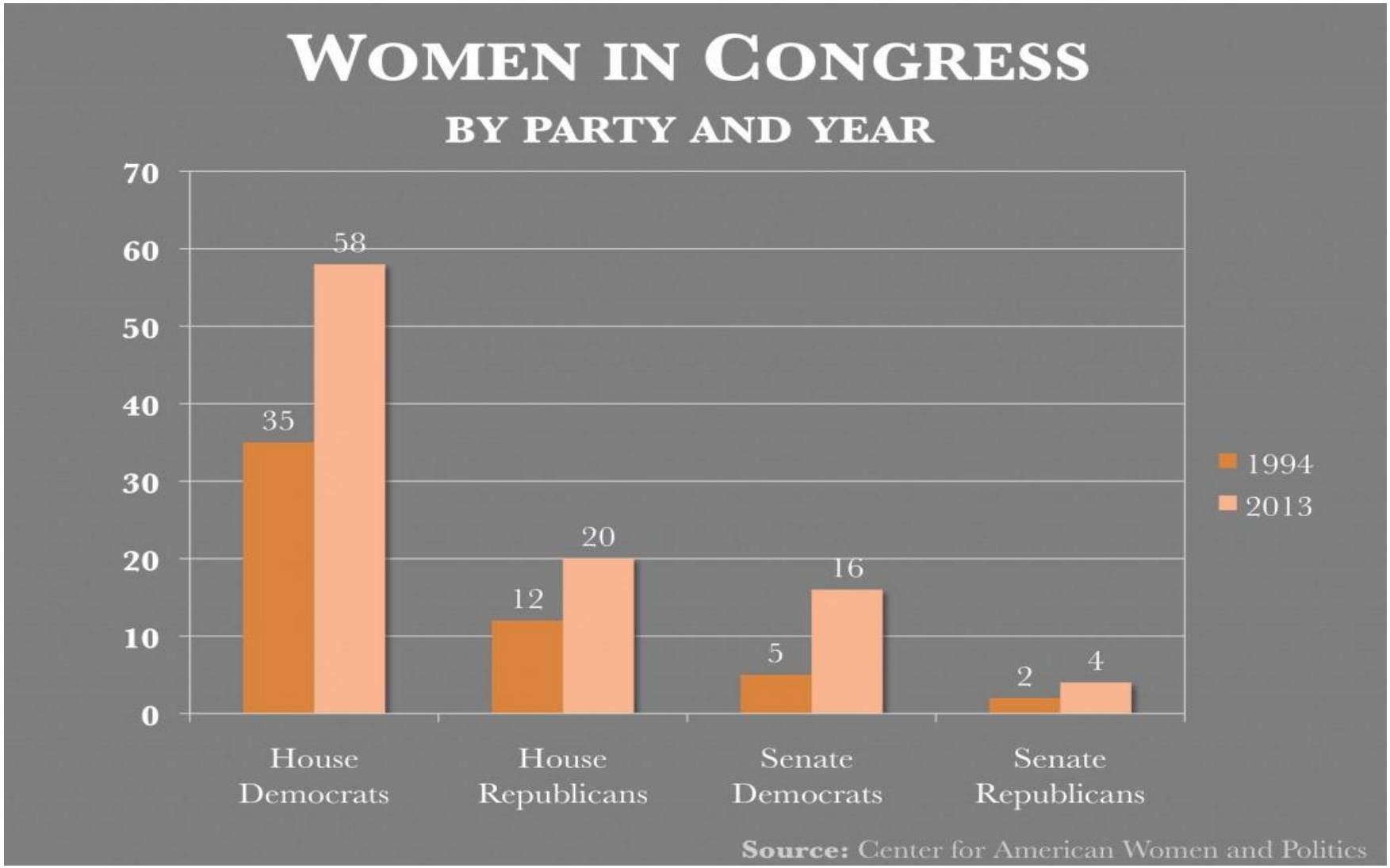
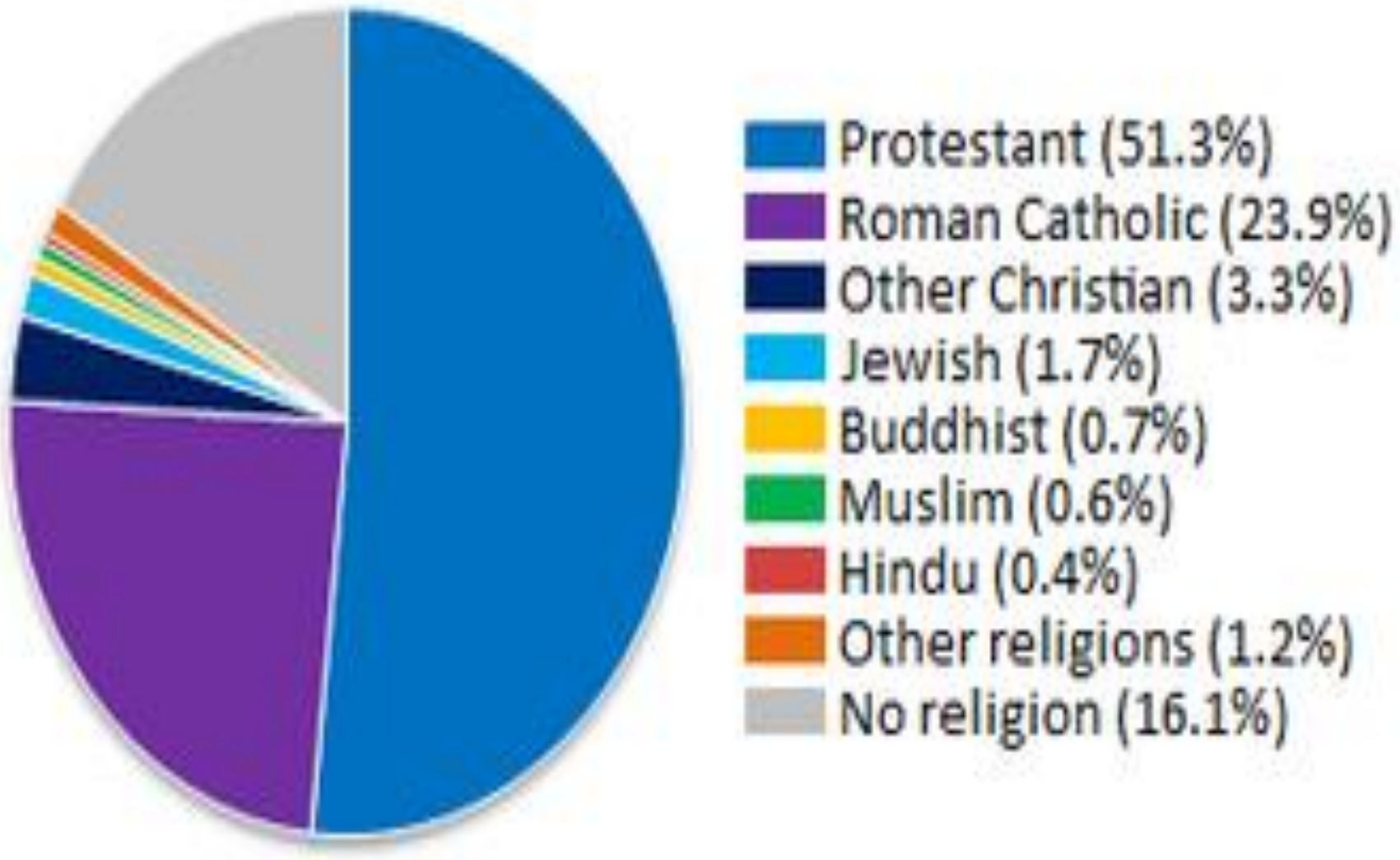
www.cawp.rutgers.edu


Women in Congress
19.4%
84
Women in the U.S. House
20
Women in the U.S. Senate

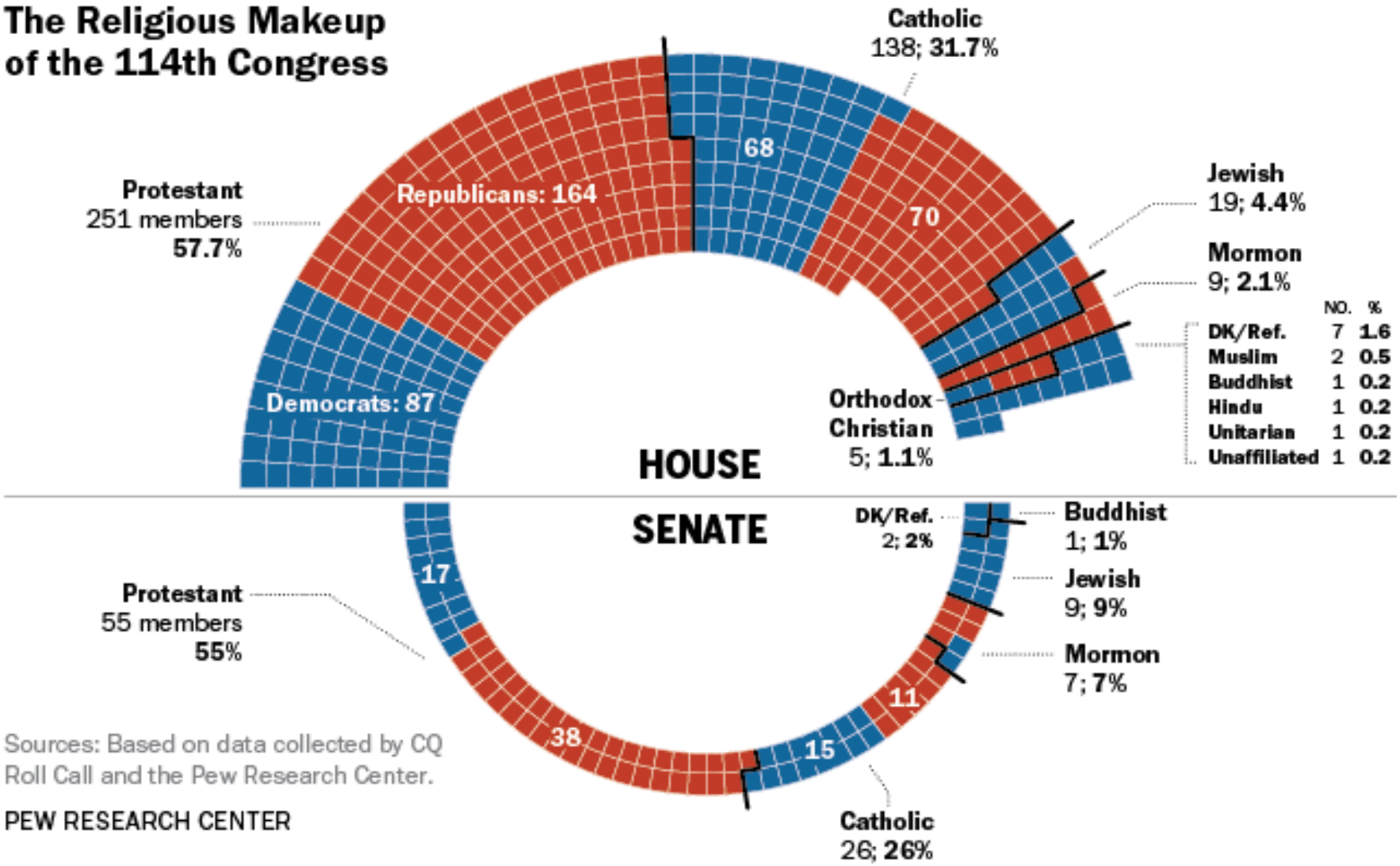
Gender Inequality is Bi-Partisan



Religious Makeup of U.S. (2007)



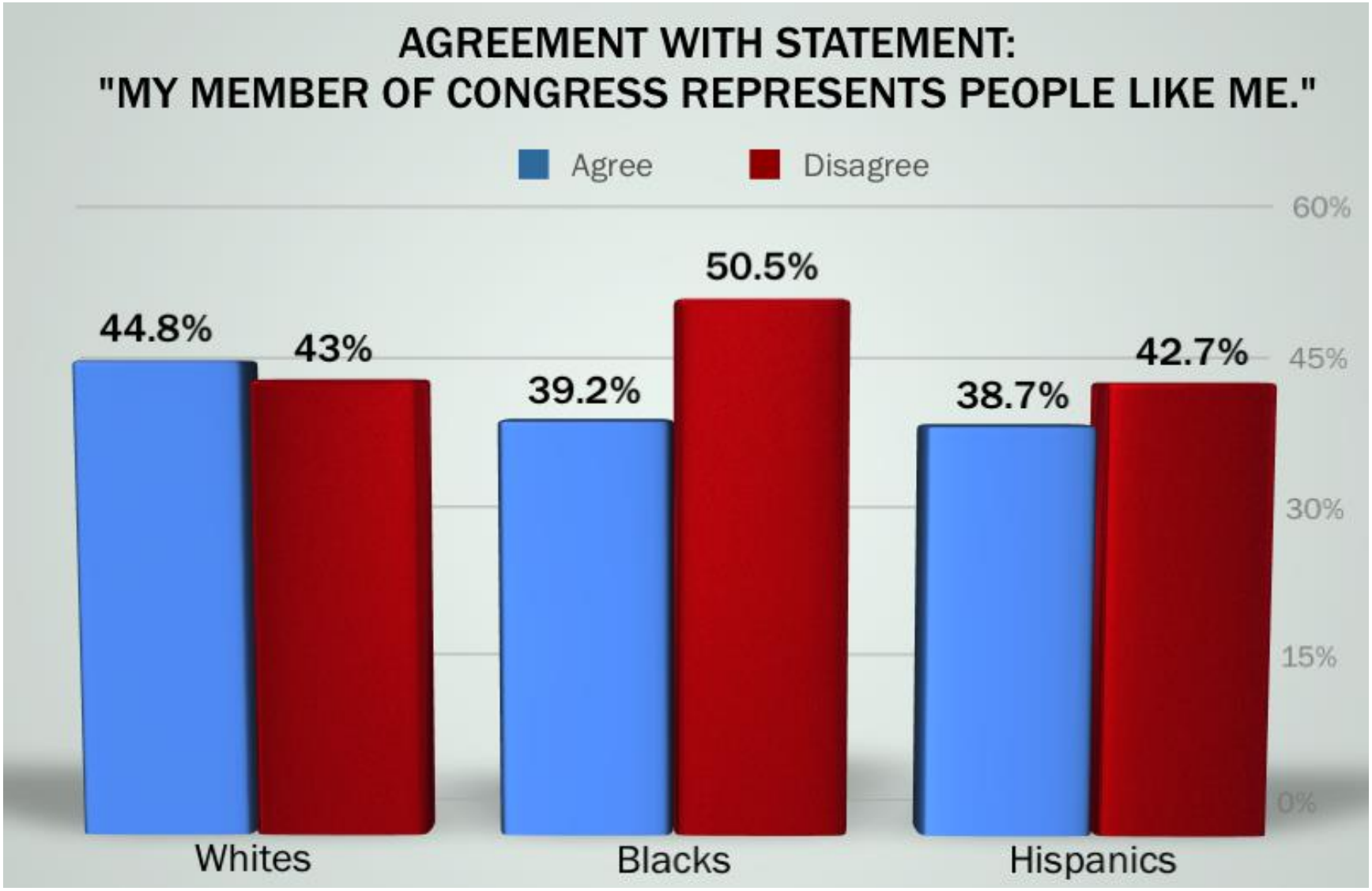
The Religious Makeup of the 114th Congress



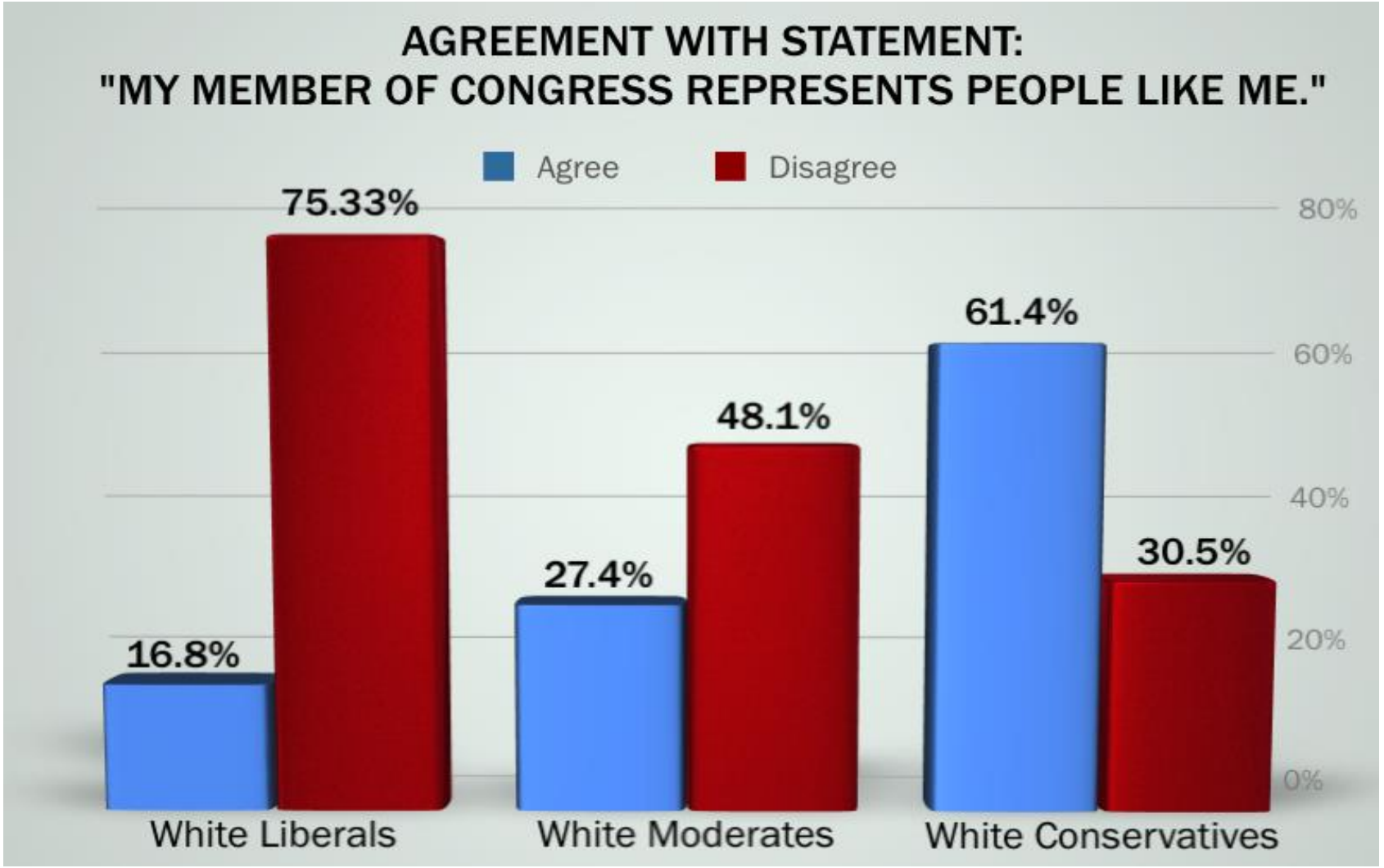
Sources: Based on data collected by CQ Roll Call and the Pew Research Center.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

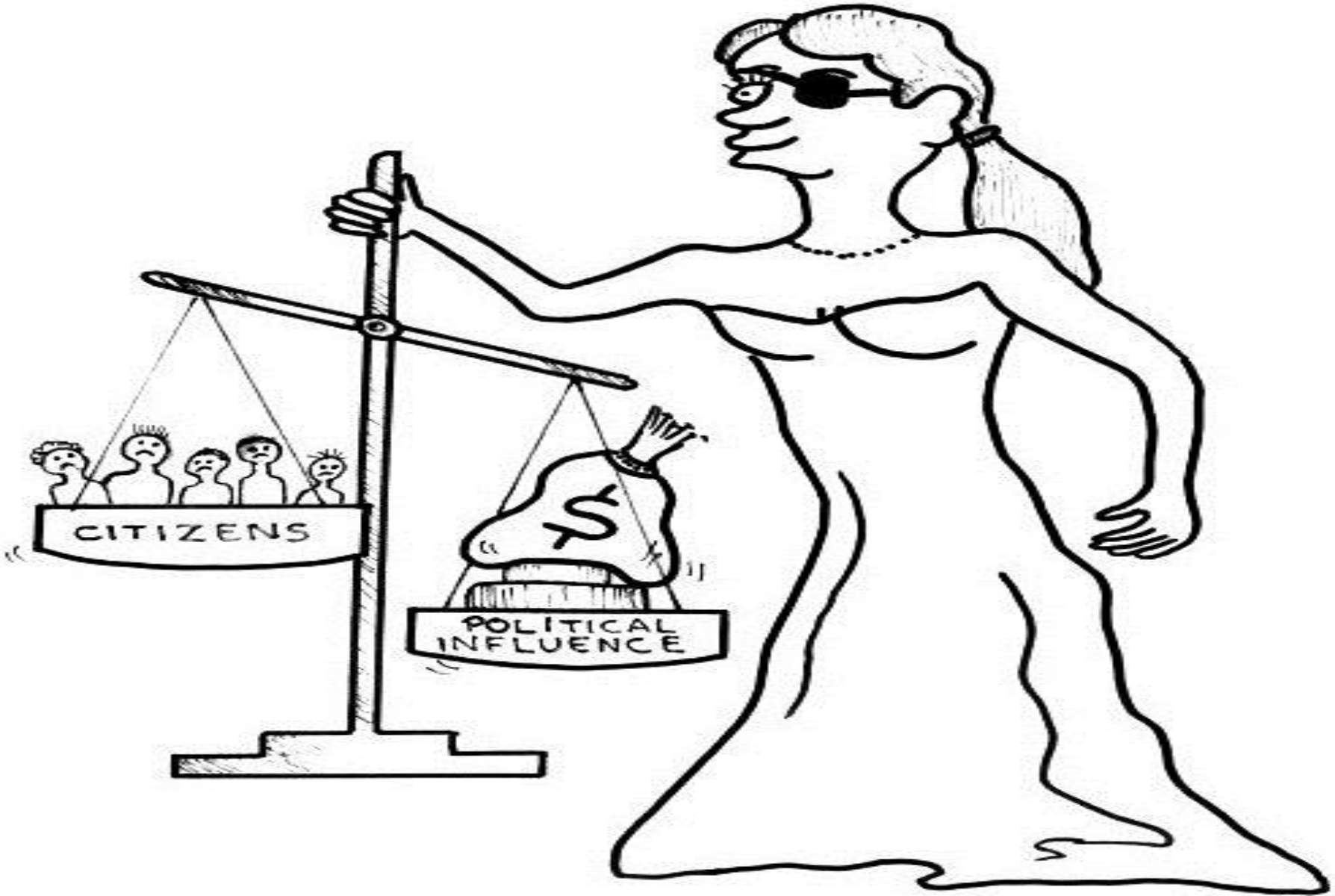
So: Who Represents Whom?



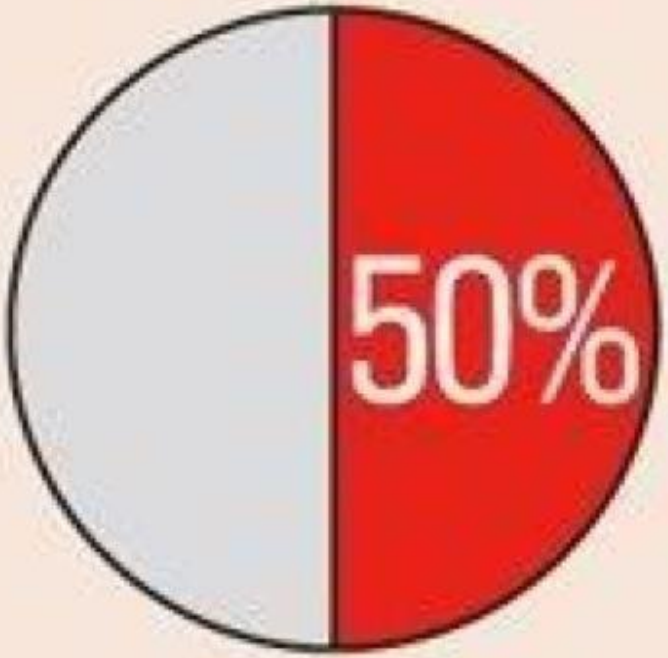
Who Represents Whom?



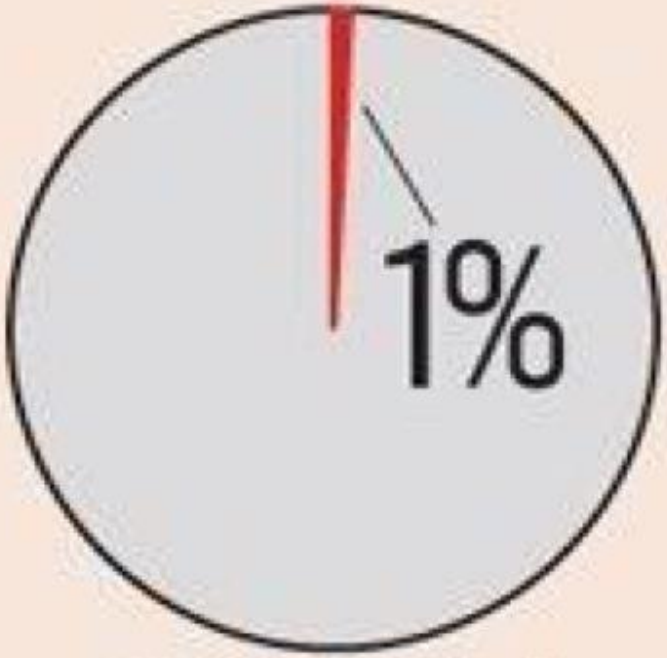
Money & Political Democracy



Percentage of Millionaires



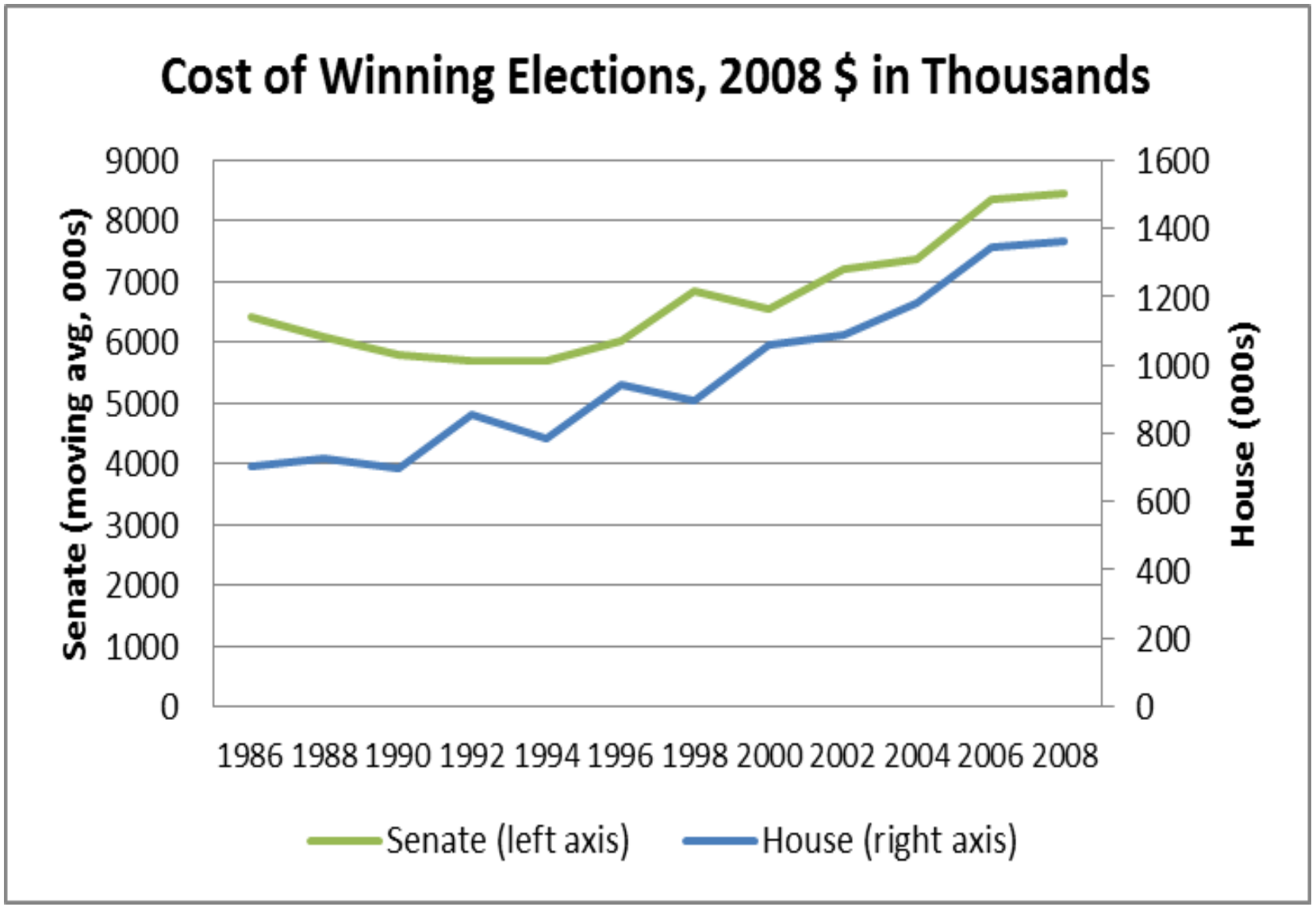
Congress



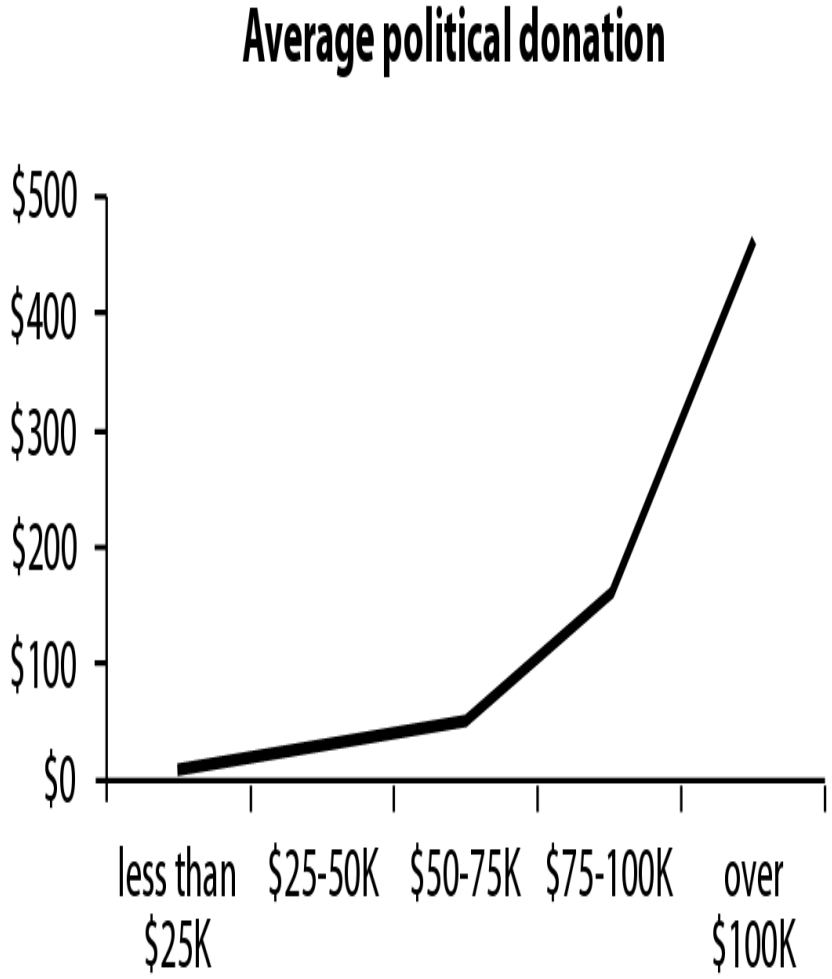
United States

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

Campaigns are More Expensive



Wealth = Greater Voice



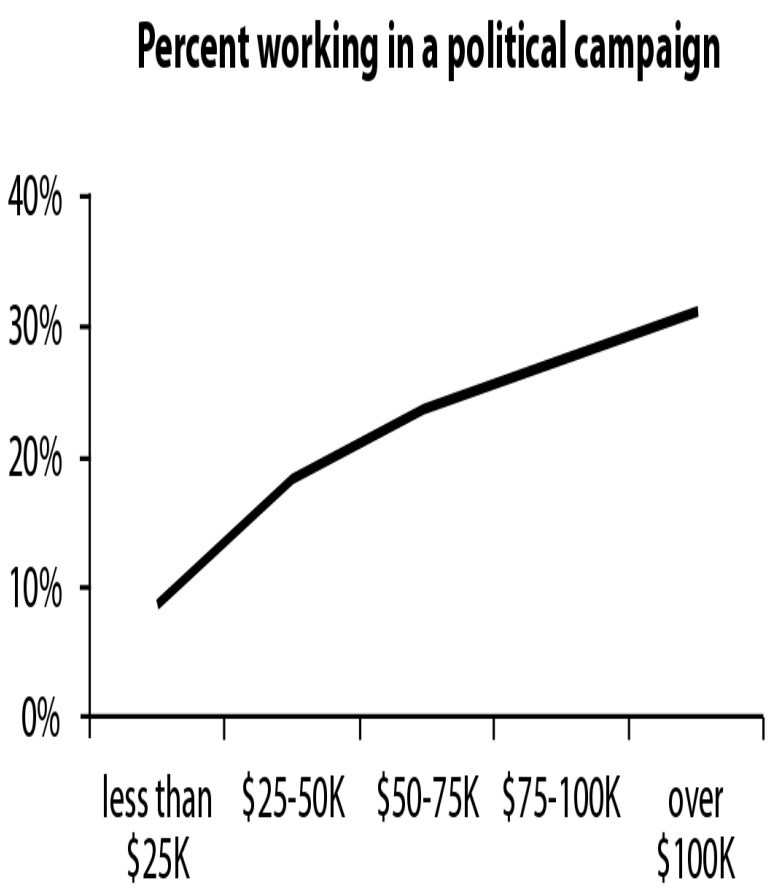
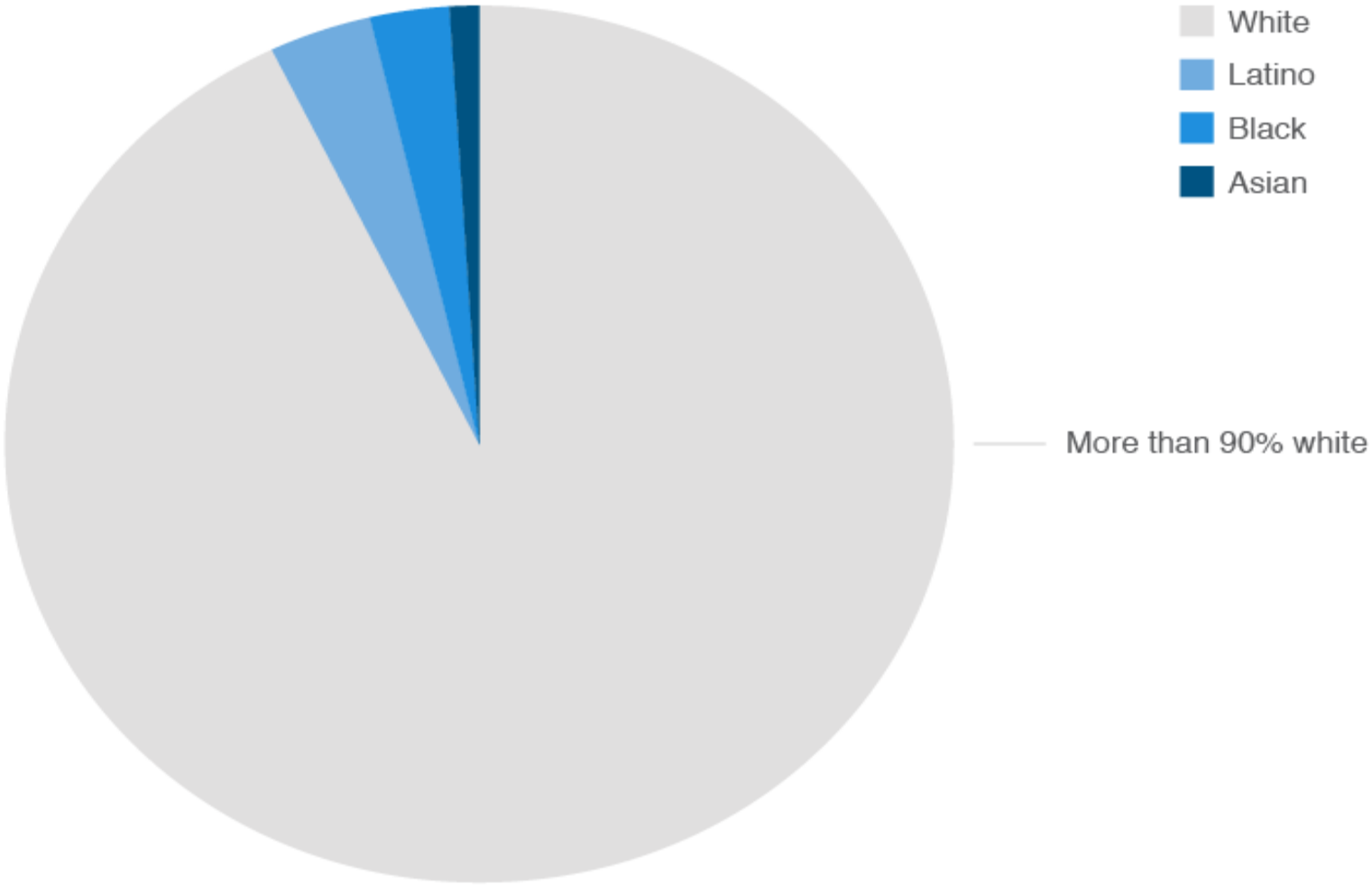


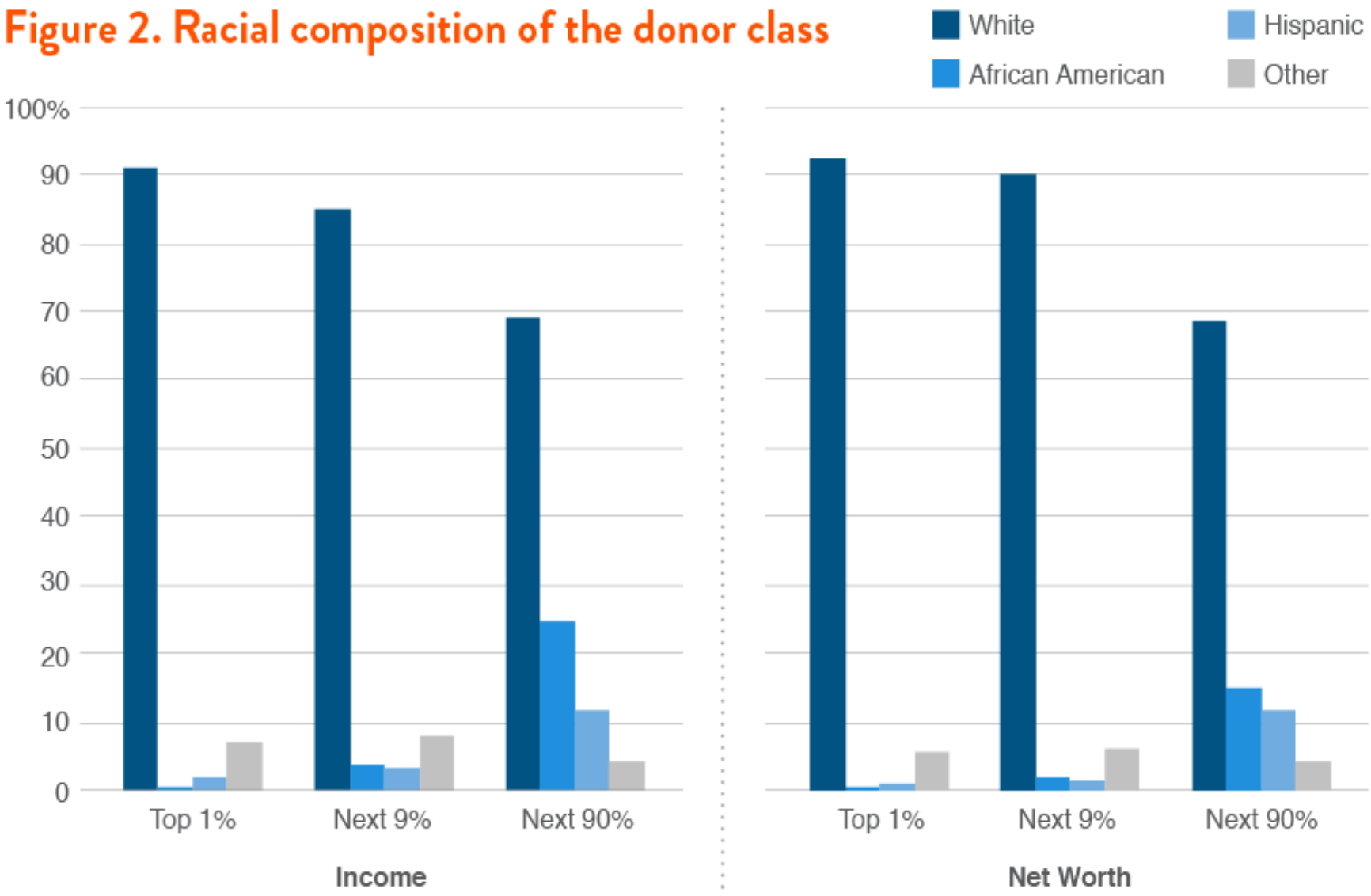
Figure 8. Contributions to 2012 presidential campaigns by race

Contributions of at least $200 by neighborhood



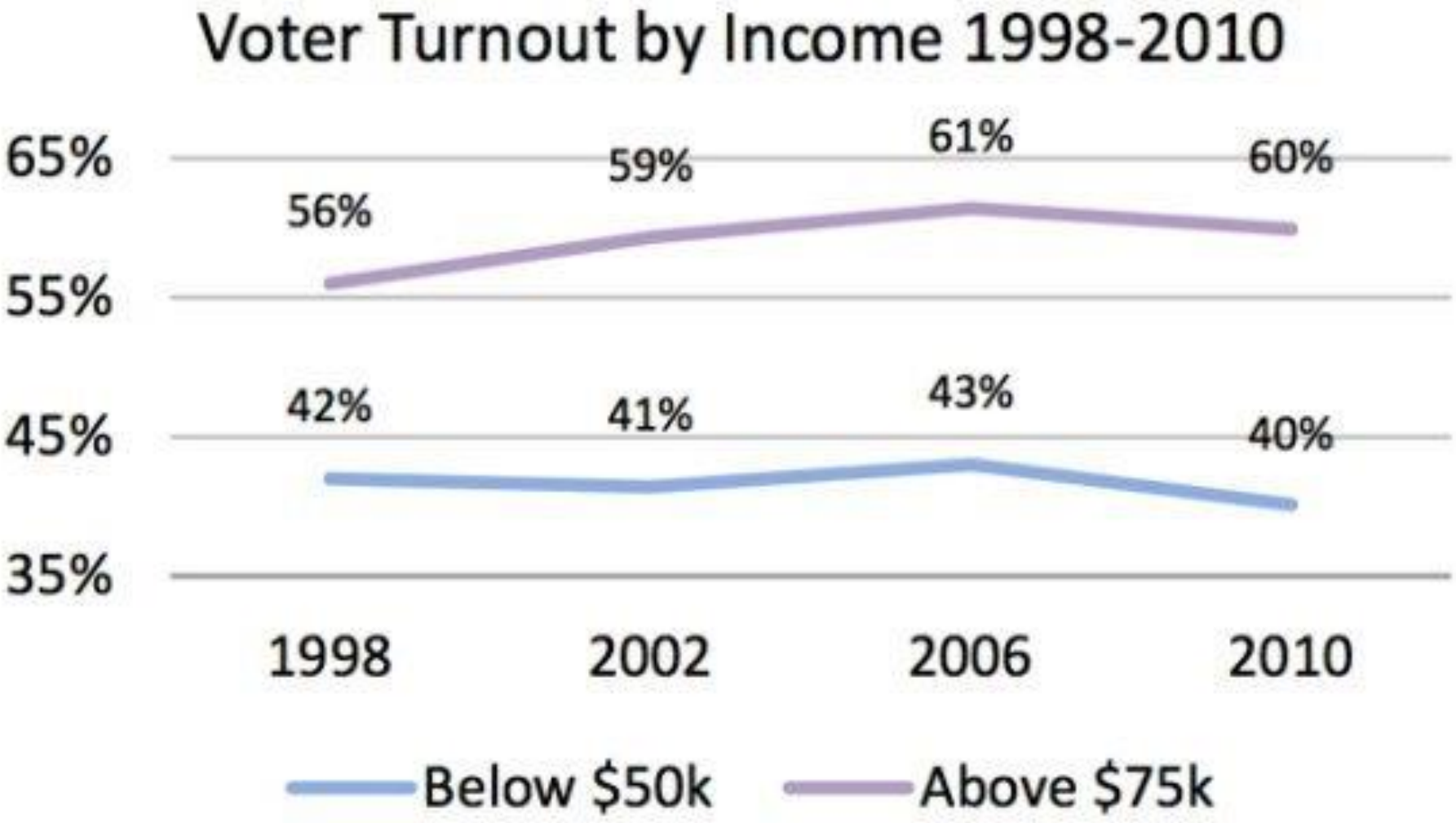
Source: Associated Press (analysis included candidate's official campaigns, their political parties, and Super PACs that support them)

Figure 2. Racial composition of the donor class



Source: Lisa Keister, The One Percent, 40 Ann. R. of Sociology 347 (2014)

Social Class & Political Participation



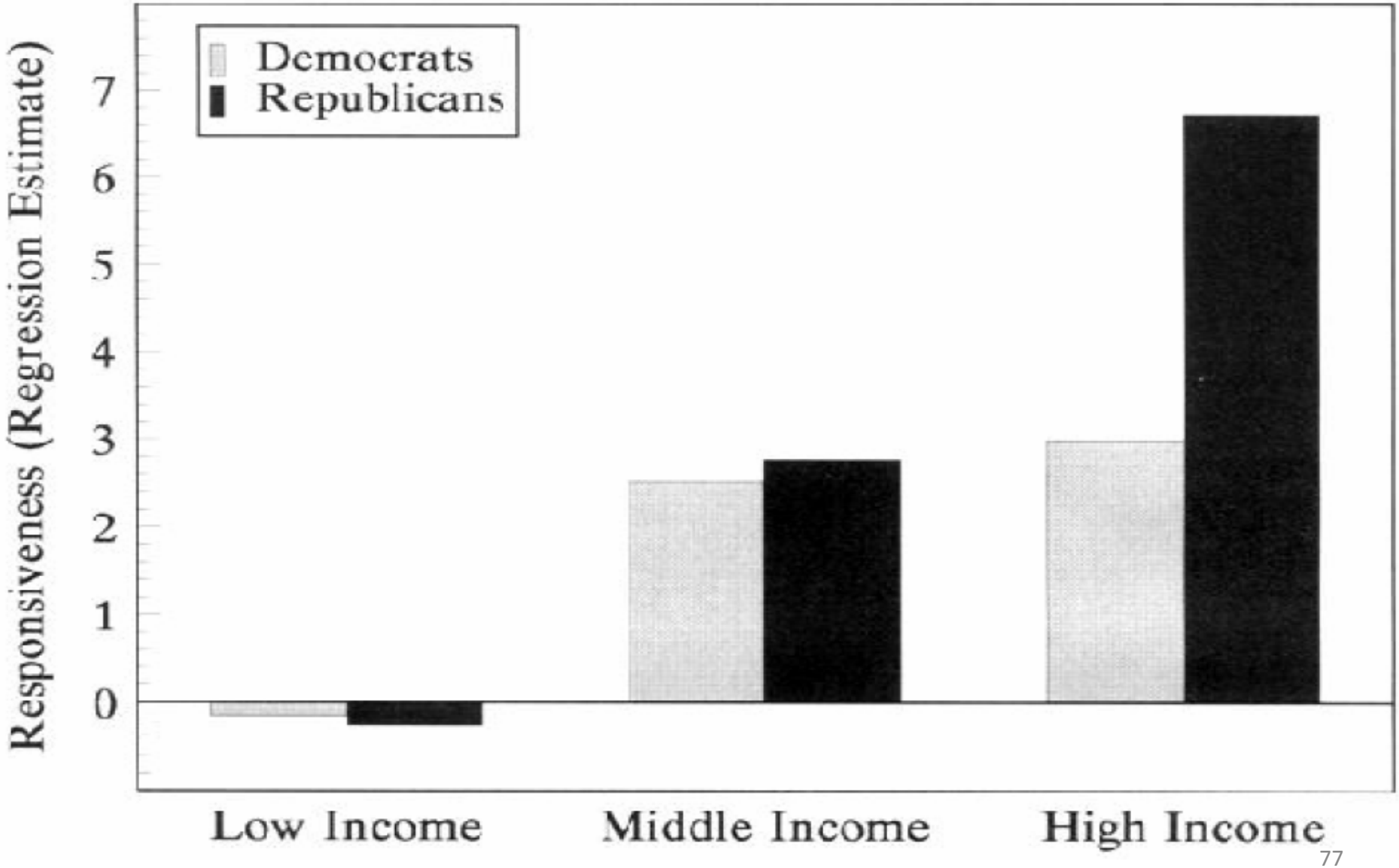
Inequality & Political Influence I

When the preferences of low and middle income Americans differ from those of the wealthy, "government policy appears to be fairly responsive to the well-off and virtually unrelated to the desires of low and middle income citizens." - Gilens, 2014

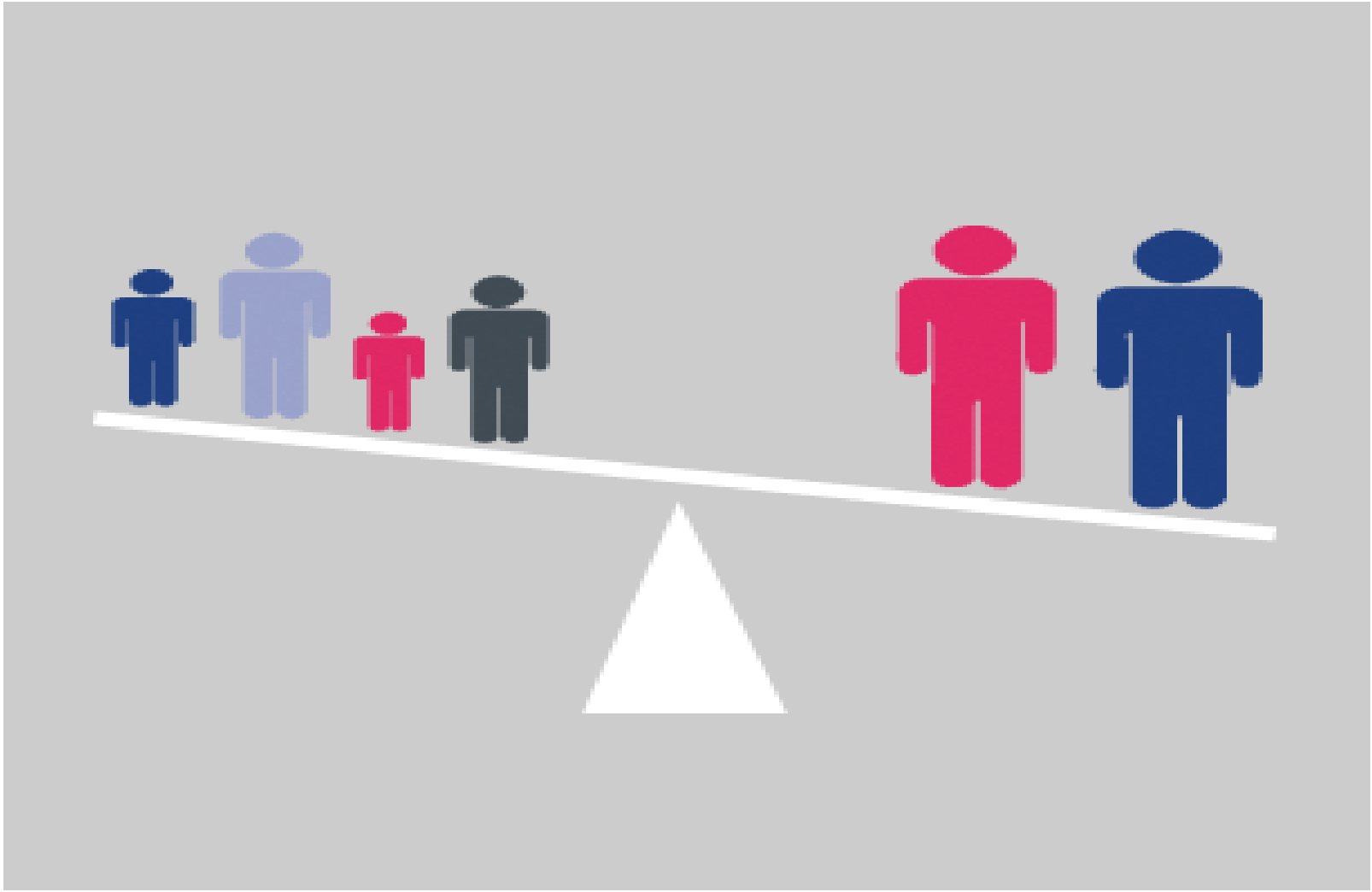
Inequality & Political Influence II

"Senators appear to be considerably more responsive to the opinions of affluent constituents than to the opinions of middle-class constituents, while the opinions of constituents in the bottom third of the income distribution have no apparent statistical effect on their senators' roll call votes." - Bartels, 2005

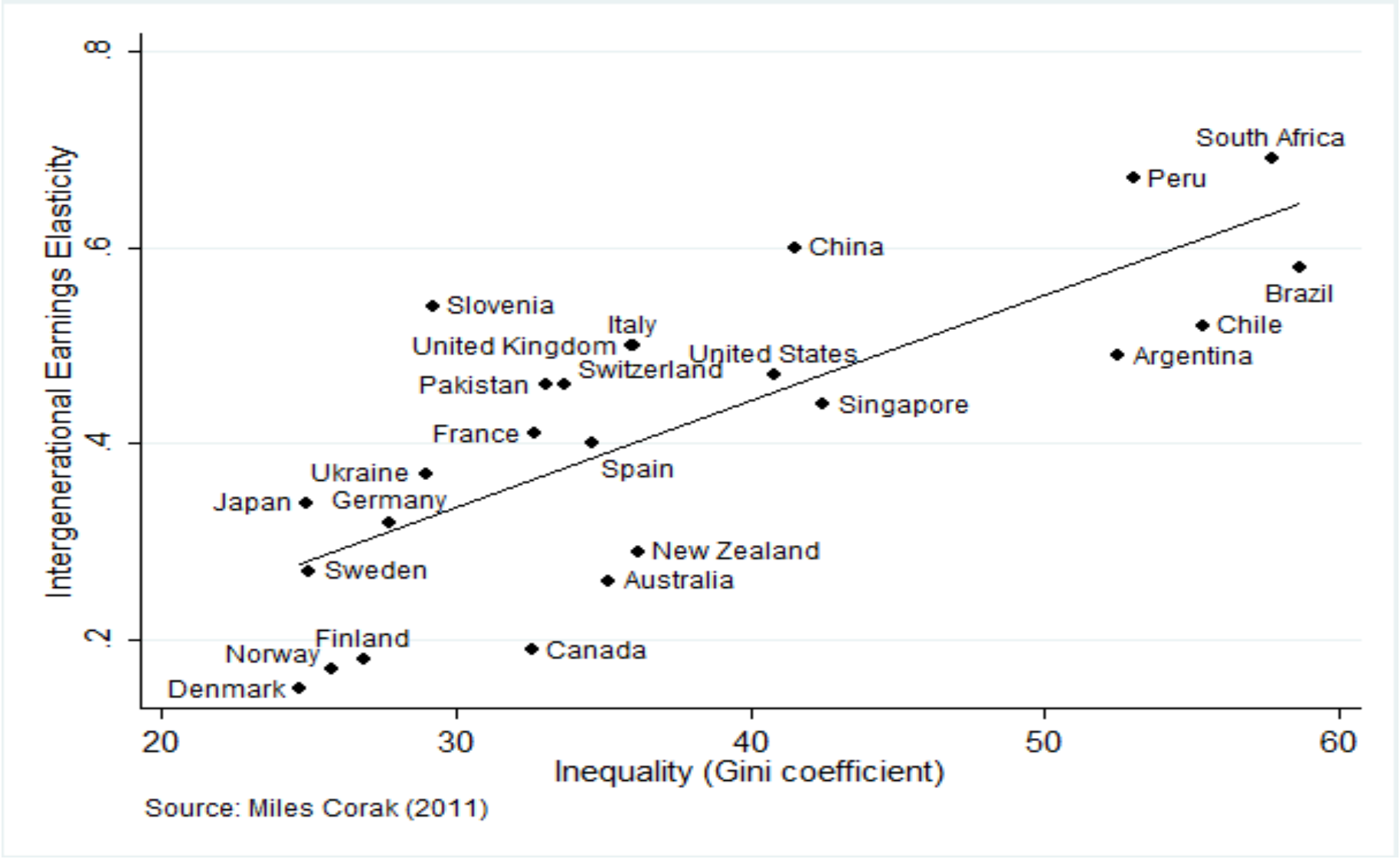
Figure 3: Democratic and Republican Senators' Responsiveness to Income Groups



The Consequences for Policy

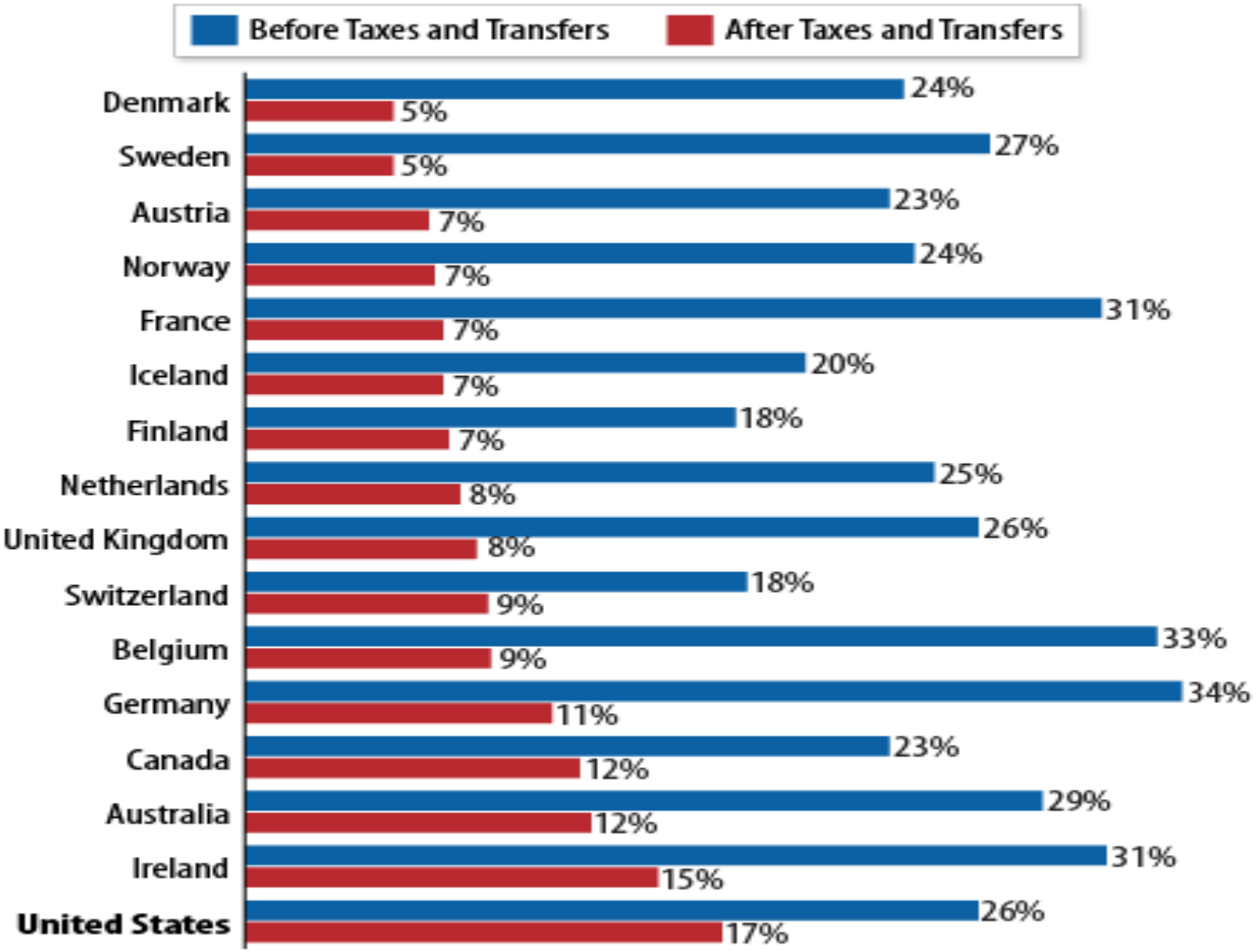


How Unequal is the U.S.?



U.S. Poverty Rate Is High After Taxes and Transfers Compared to Similarly Wealthy Countries*

Poverty rate according to common international standard, mid-2000s

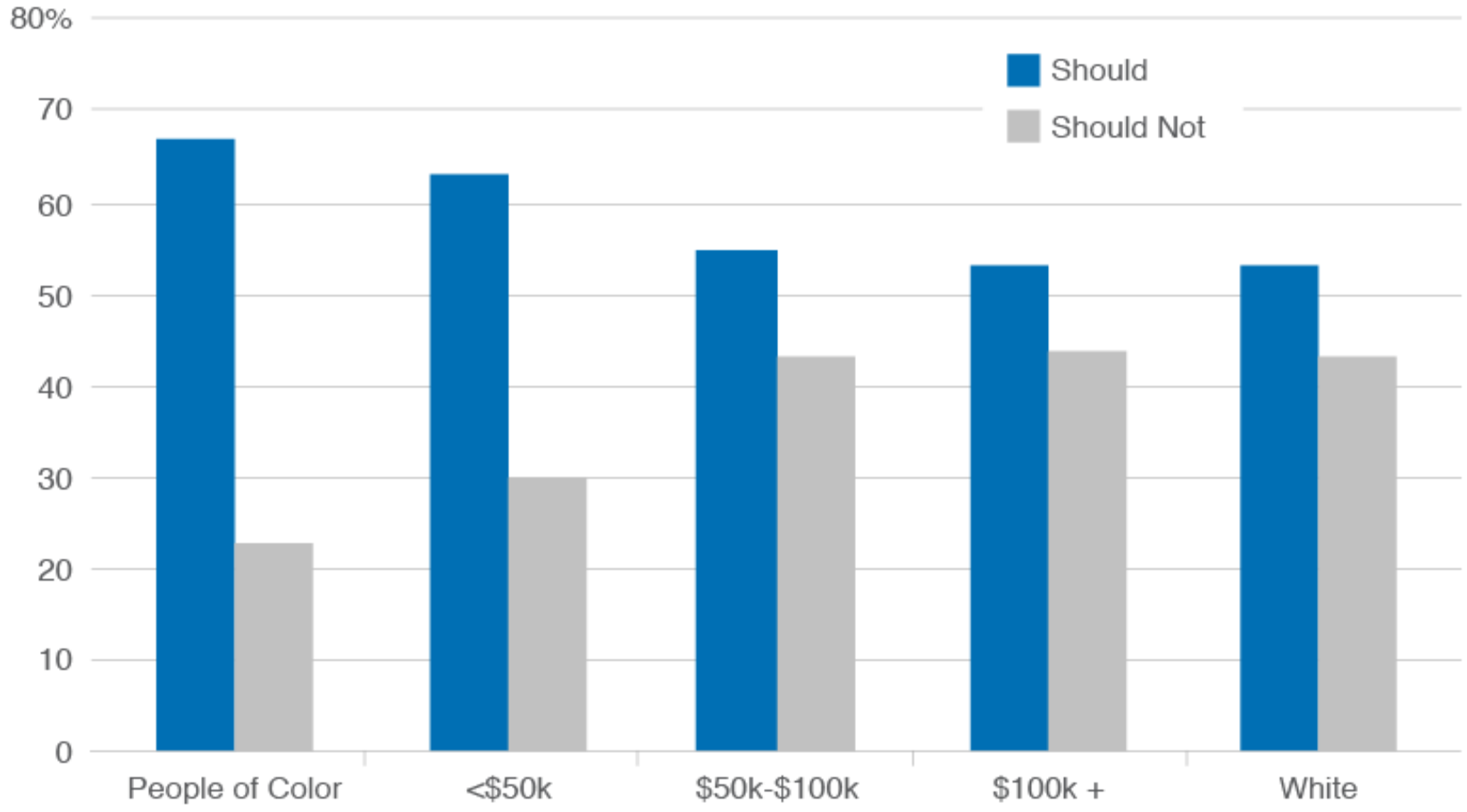


*Note: The poverty threshold is defined as 50% of national median income, a widely accepted international standard. The comparison includes countries (for which comparable data are available) with median equivalized individual disposable incomes within 25% of US median income ($26,990) in 2005 US dollars converted by purchasing-power parity. The lowest and highest were France ($20,660) and the Netherlands ($28,032).

Data reflect poverty in a year in the mid-2000s, typically 2004 or 2005.

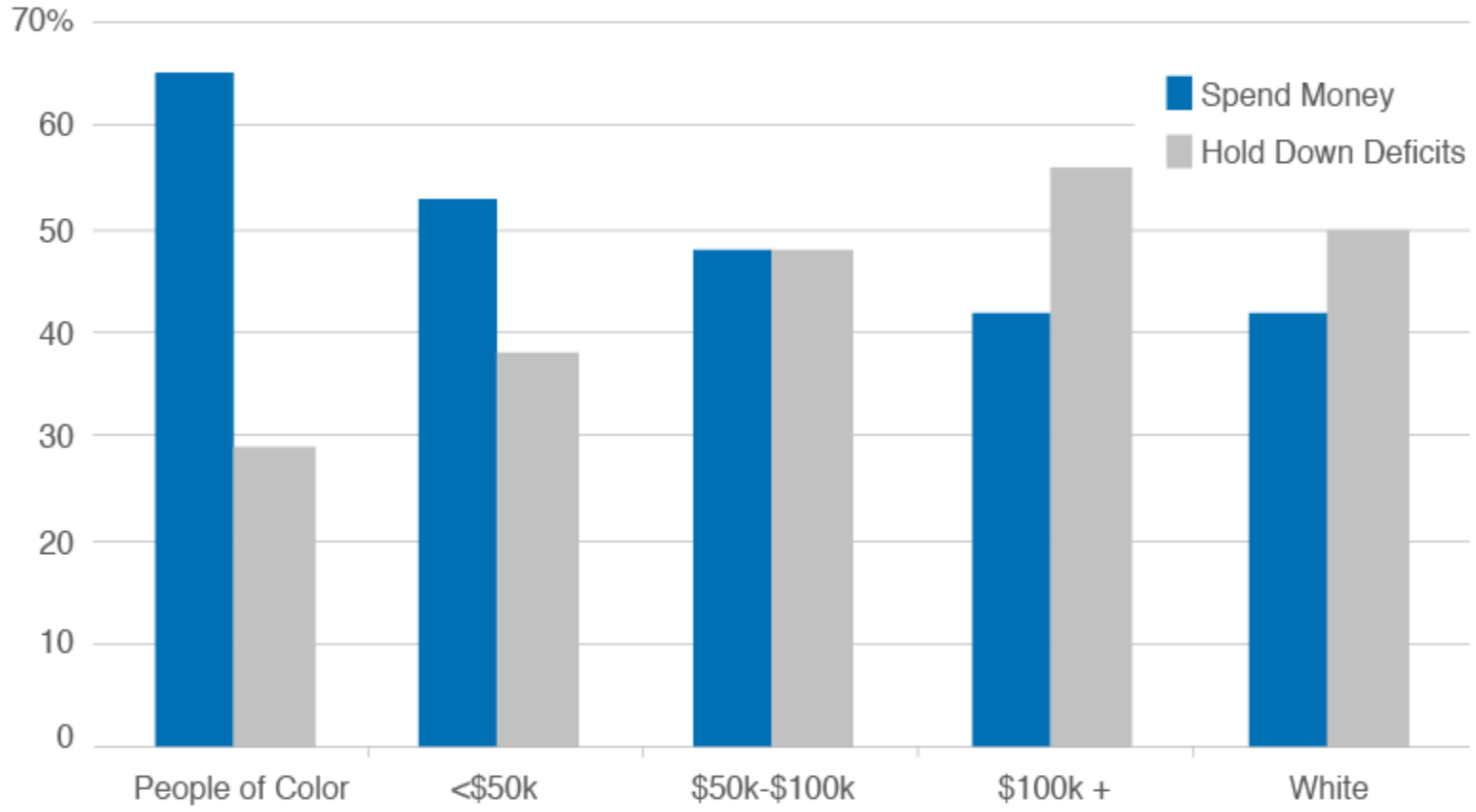
Source: OECD, Growing Unequal?: Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD Countries, 2008.

Figure 3. Views on government policy to reduce the wealth gap by race and income *Do you think the federal government should or should not pursue policies that try to reduce the gap between wealthy and less well-off Americans?*



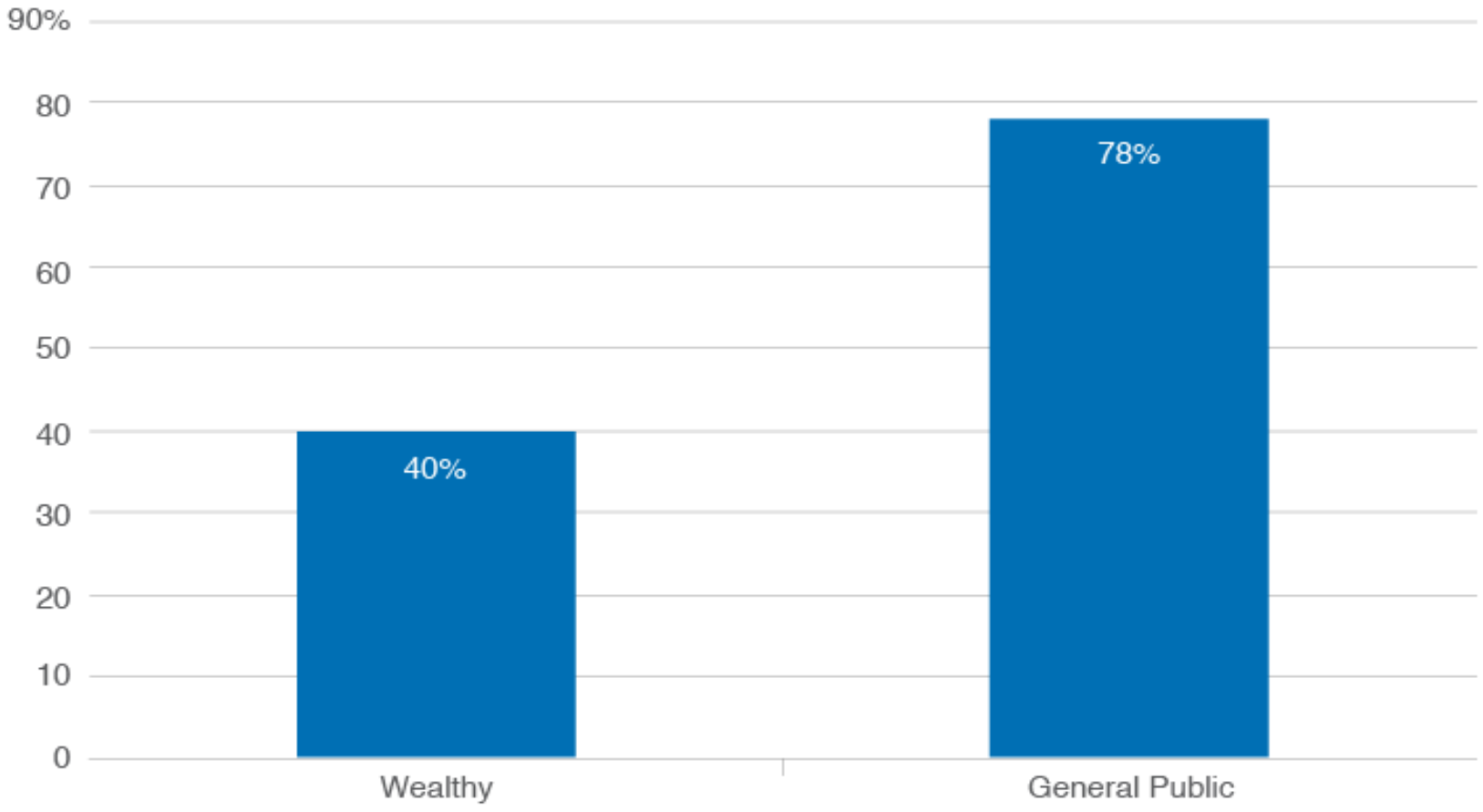
Source: Post-ABC Poll: December Monthly (2013)

Figure 4. Views on creating jobs versus holding down deficit by race and income *Which is more important, spending money to create jobs or holding down the federal budget deficit?*



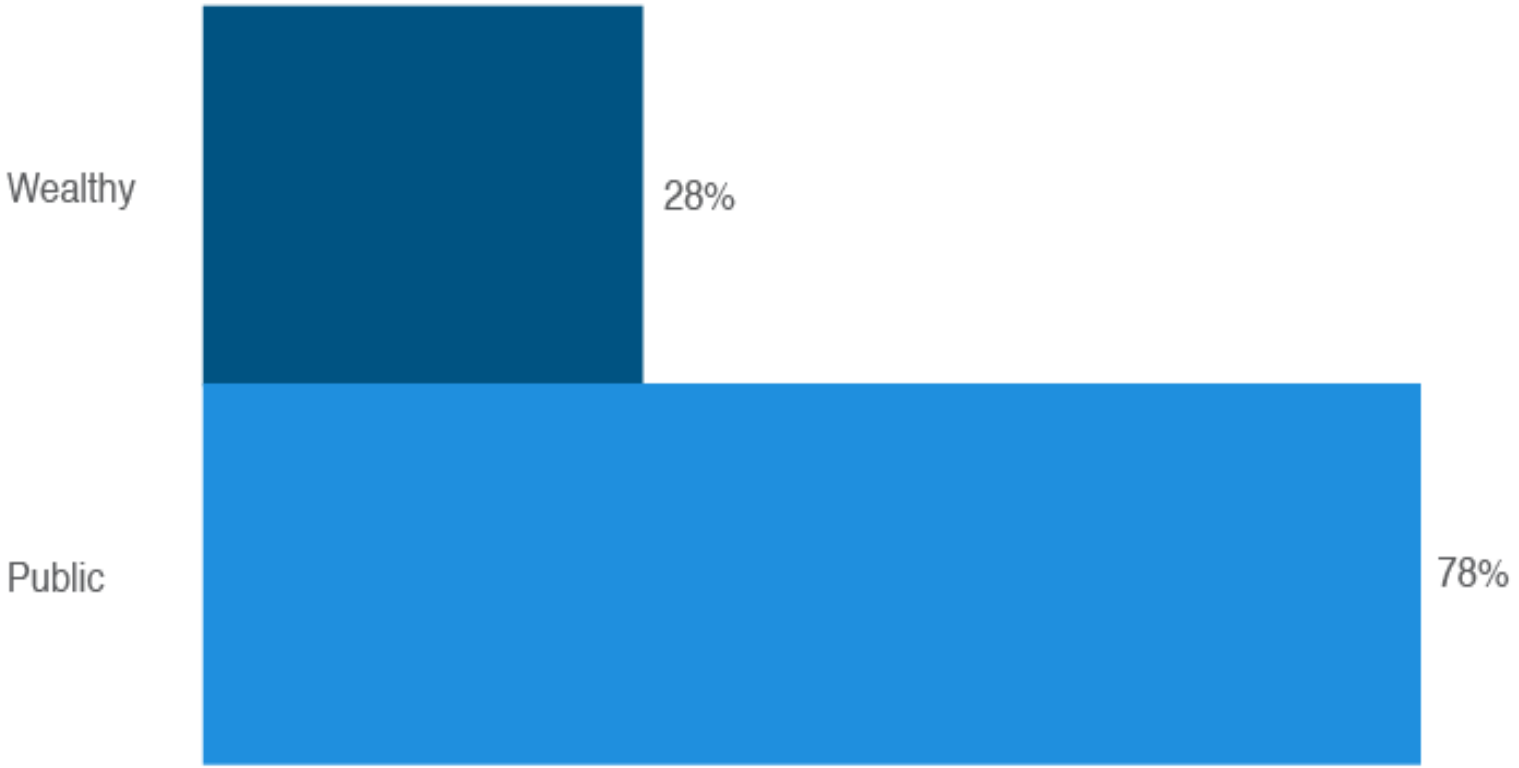
Source: Post-ABC Poll: December Monthly (2013)

Figure 21. Support for minimum wage high enough to keep family with full time worker out of poverty



Source: Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013)

Figure 6. Should the federal government make sure that everyone who wants to go to college can do so?



Source: Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013)

Americans Support Greater Equality

- **~90% believe SS & Medicare are good for the US**
- **By a 2:1 margin, Americans think maintaining Social Security and Medicare benefits are more important than cutting the deficit**
- **By a 2:1 margin, Americans think people on Medicare already pay enough for health benefits**
- **~60% of Americans think low-income persons should not lose their Medicaid benefits**

(Source: Pew Research Center, June 15-19, 2011)

Can Democracy Survive in a Diverse but Unequal Society?

Why Democracy Matters

1. Has intrinsic value

2. Builds community & enhances virtue

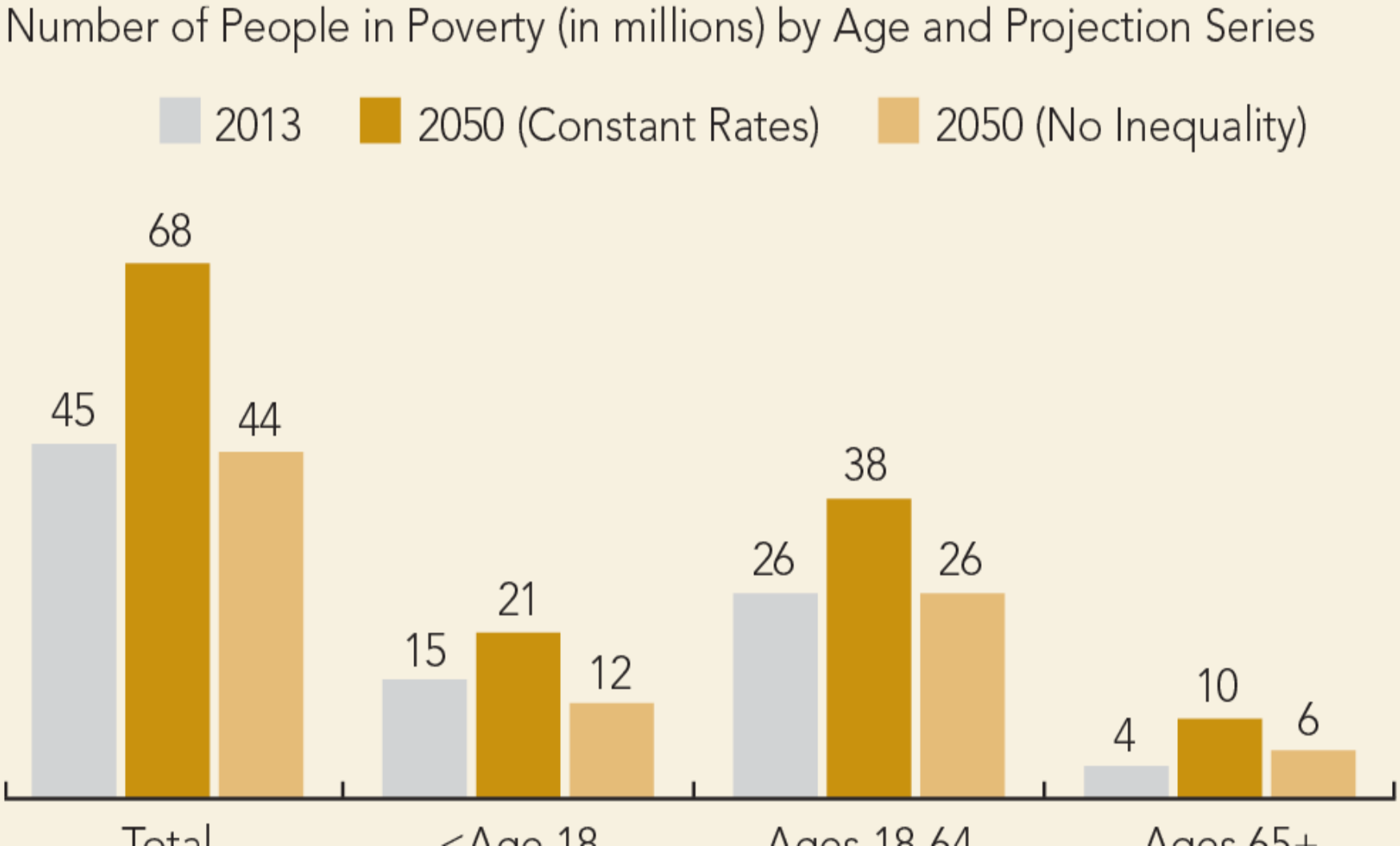
3. Creates legitimacy for institutions

4. Protects diverse interests

Saving American Democracy

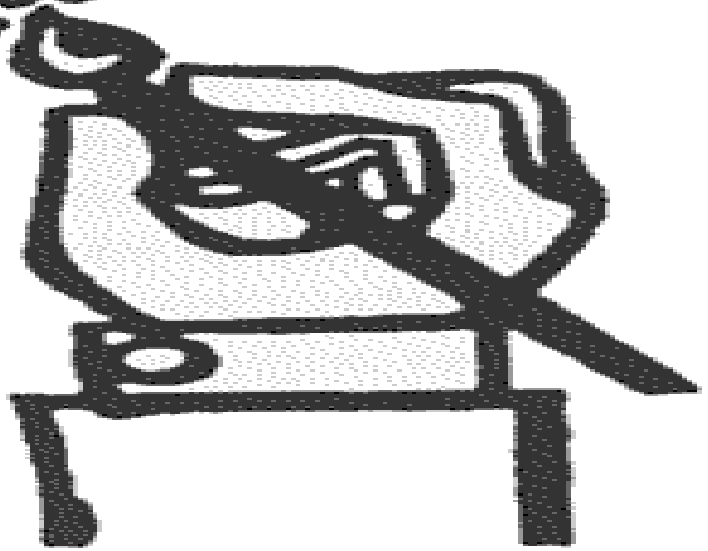
- **Reduce inequality & poverty**
- **Reduce the role of money in politics**
- **Promote civic education & participation**
- **Create more democratic policy-making**

Eliminating Poverty Gaps Would Reduce the Number of People in Poverty by 24 Million in 2050.

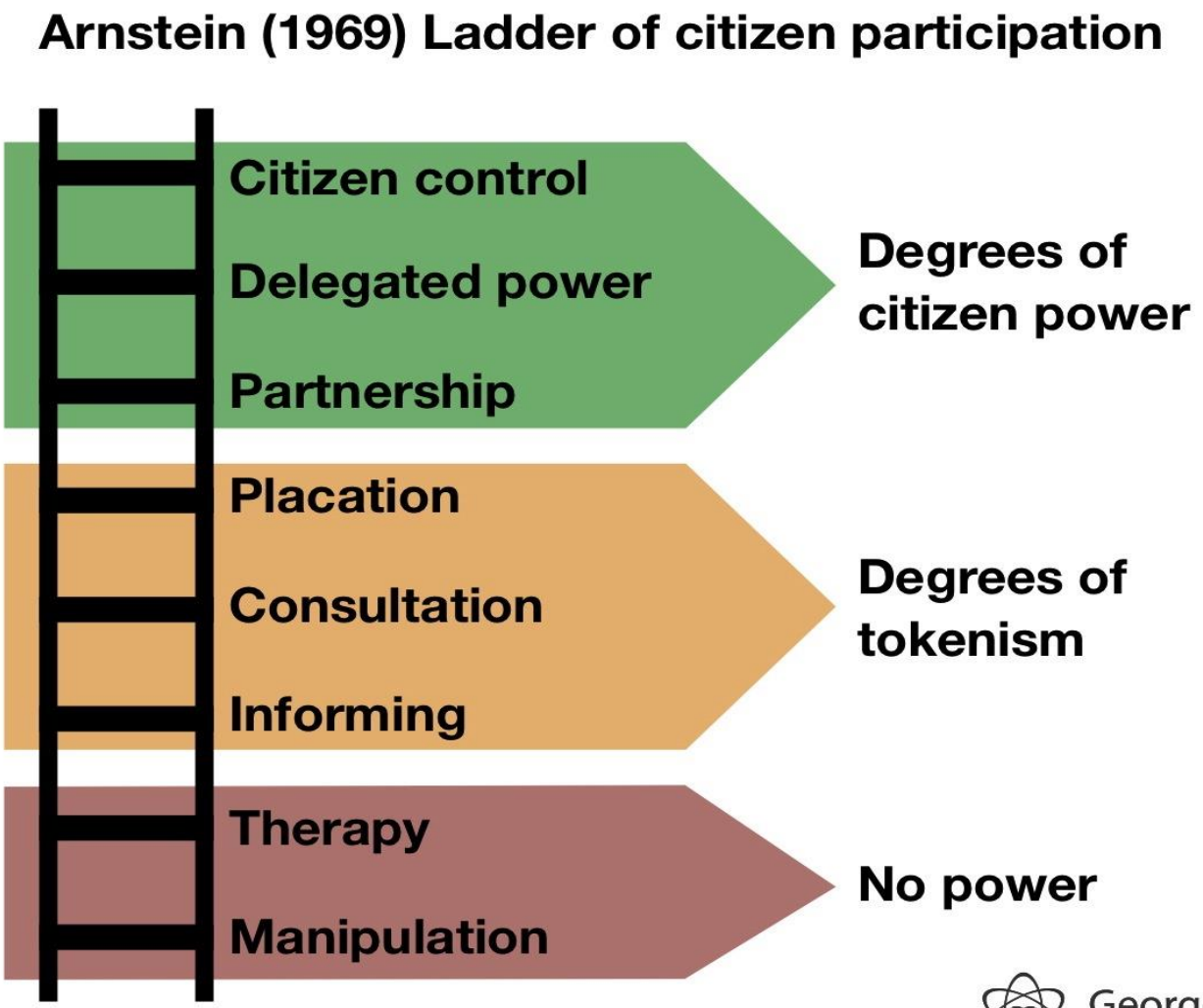


Does Participation Really Matter?

je participe
tu participes
il participe
nous participons
vous participez
ils profitent

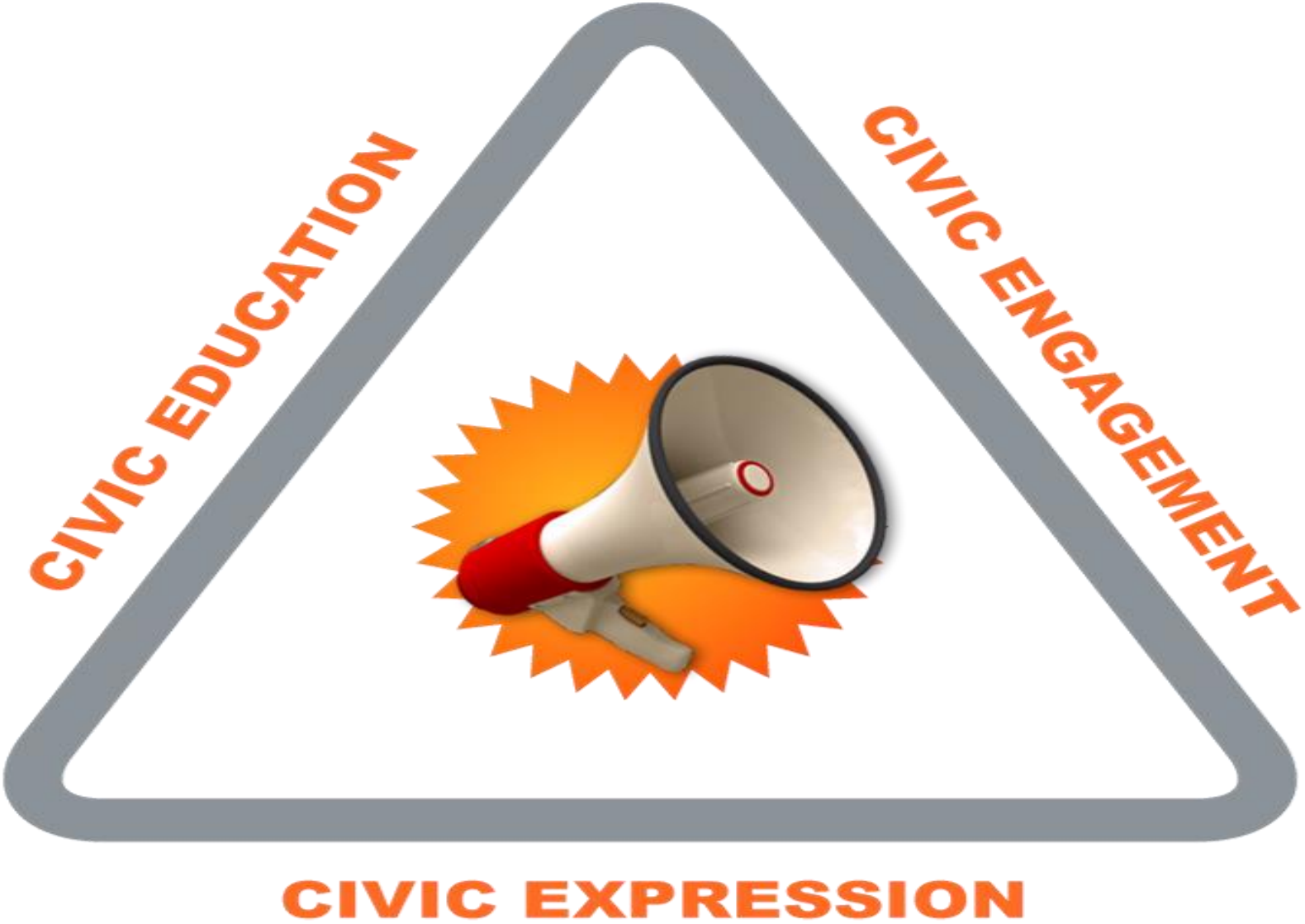


A: Only If it is Genuine Participation



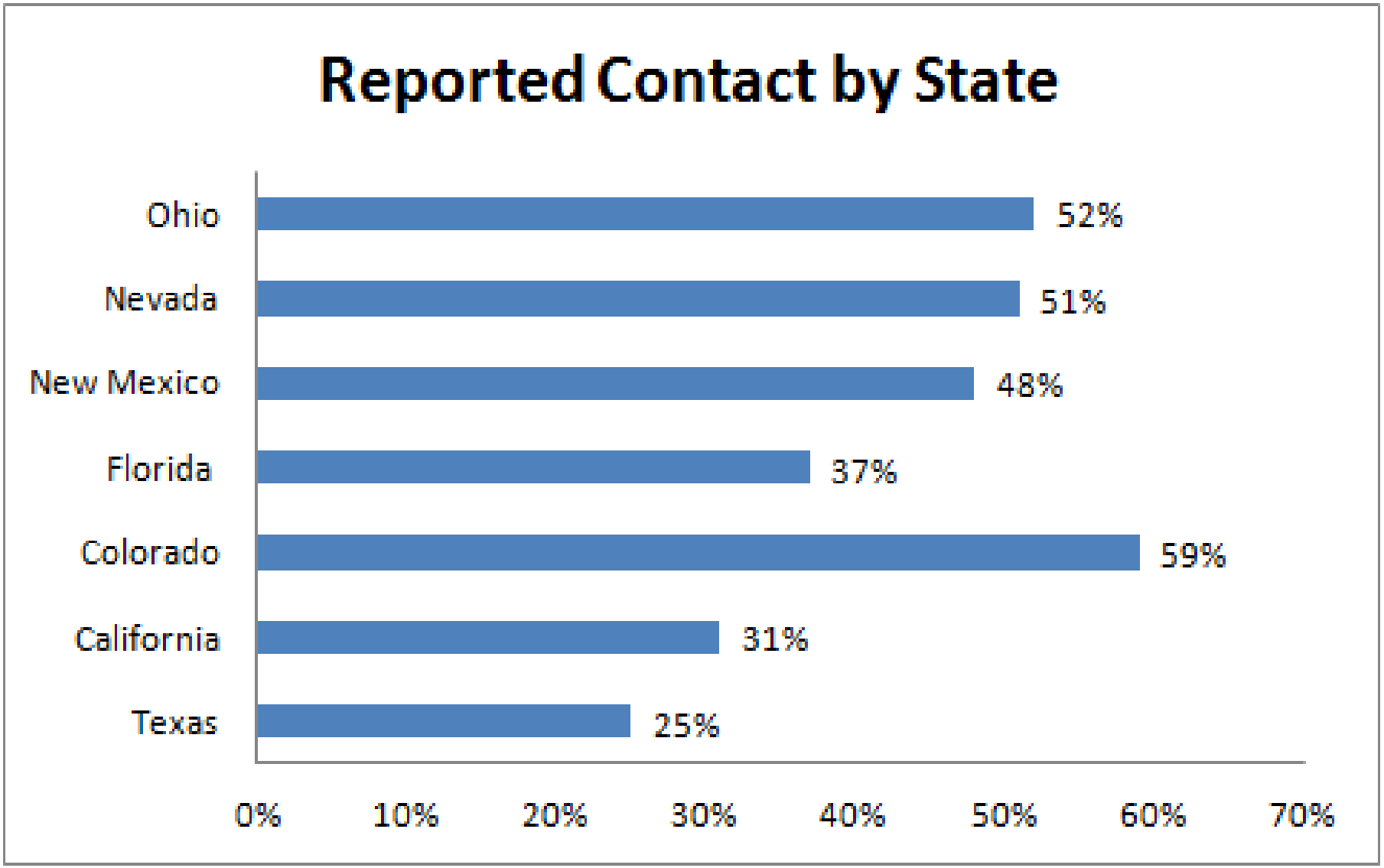
George Julian
Knowledge Transfer Consultancy

Expanding Democracy

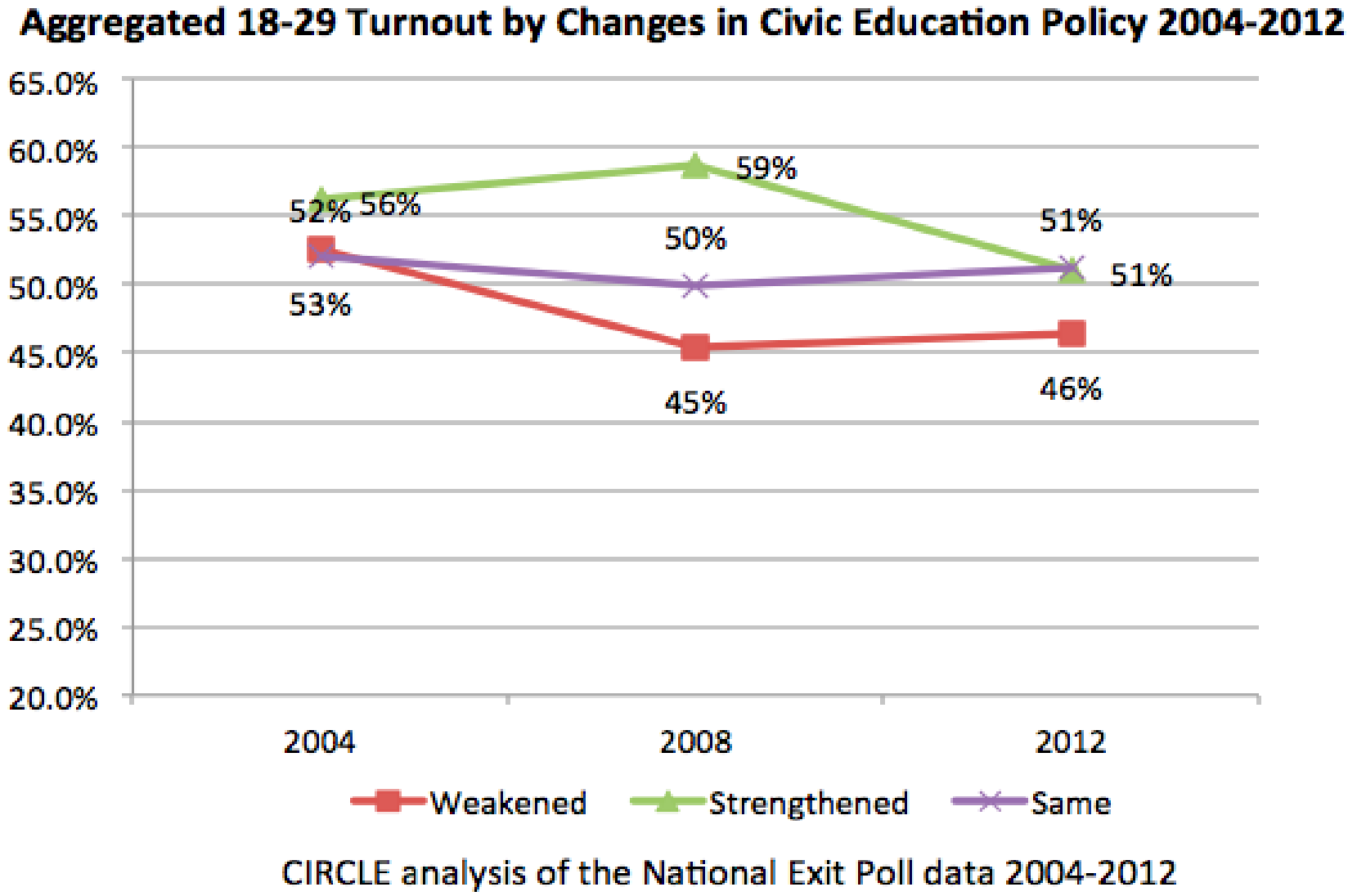


Voter Education

Latino Voter Mobilization 2012

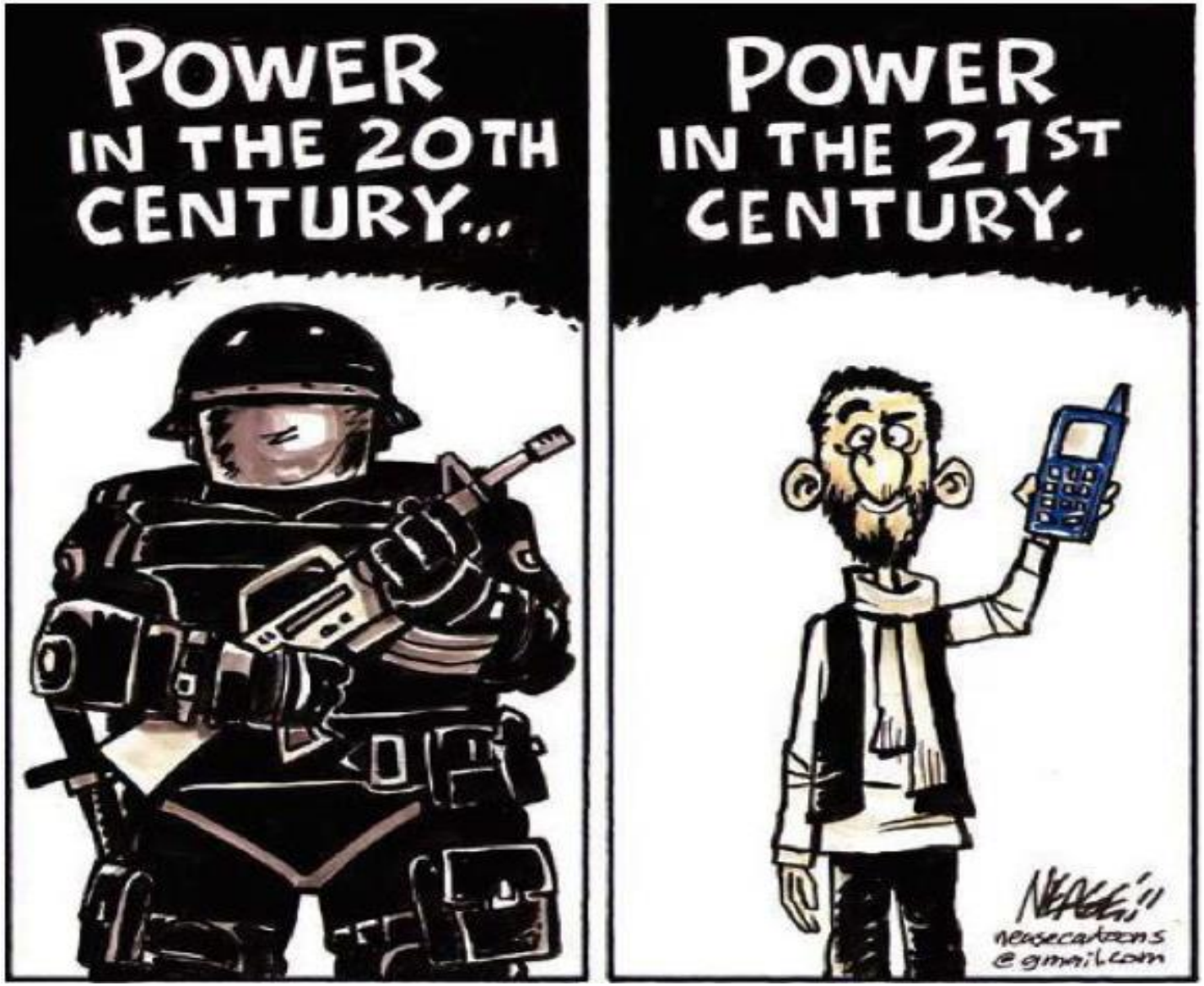


Impact of Civic Education



CIRCLE analysis of the National Exit Poll data 2004-2012

Could Social Media Help?



Should We Require Voting?

Participatory Budgeting

Democracy & Diversity Are Compatible

But Only in a More Equal Society

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

MICHAEL REISCH

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410-706-5088