

## Race, Class, and Social Welfare

What makes it so difficult to enact and sustain comprehensive social welfare policy that would aid the disadvantaged in the United States? Addressing the relationship between populism and social welfare, this book argues that two competing camps of populists divide American politics. Regressive populists motivated by racial resentment frequently clash with progressive populists, who embrace an expansion of social welfare benefits for the less affluent, regardless of race or ethnicity. Engstrom and Huckfeldt uncover the political forces driving this divided populism, its roots in the aftermath of the civil rights revolution of the mid-twentieth century, and its implications for modern American politics and social welfare policy. Relying on a detailed analysis of party coalitions in the US Congress and the electorate since the New Deal, the authors focus on the intersection between race, class, and oligarchy.

Erik J. Engstrom is Professor of Political Science, University of California, Davis. He is the author of *Partisan Gerrymandering and the Construction of American Democracy* (2013) and co-author of *Party Ballots, Reform, and the Transformation of America's Electoral System* (2014). The latter was the co-winner of the 2015 J. David Greenstone Prize for best book in Politics and History from the American Political Science Association.

Robert Huckfeldt is Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science, University of California, Davis. He is the author or co-author of a series of journal articles and books, including most recently *Experts, Activists, and Interdependent Citizens* with T. K. Ahn and John Barry Ryan. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2014.

# Race, Class, and Social Welfare

## *American Populism Since the New Deal*

ERIK J. ENGSTROM

*University of California, Davis*

ROBERT HUCKFELDT

*University of California, Davis*



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One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
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*To Mary Engstrom and Sharon Huckfeldt*

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page ix</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 American Politics and Social Welfare	1
2 Politics at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Oligarchy	16
3 Civil Rights, Social Welfare, and Populism	31
4 Civil Rights and Populism: The 1957 Civil Rights Act in the US Senate	46
5 Race, Class, and the End of the New Deal in the US Senate	76
6 Transforming the Twentieth-Century House	107
7 Race, Class, and a Transformed Political Economy: Turning Populism Upside Down	129
8 Dueling Populists and the Political Ecology of 2016	157
9 Conclusion: The Dangers of Upside-Down Populism	182
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>188</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>197</i>

# Figures

4.1	Ties based on votes regarding final passage, Jury Amendment, and Hells Canyon Dam	59
4.2	Ties based on counterfactual votes regarding final passage and Jury Amendment	63
5.1	Senators' mean ADA quintiles by region, 1948–2008. (a) Southern senators' mean ADA quintiles, 1948–2008; (b) Border state senators' mean ADA quintiles, 1948–2008; (c) Western senators' mean ADA quintiles, 1948–2008; (d) Midwest senators' mean ADA quintiles, 1948–2008; and (e) Northeast senators' mean ADA quintiles, 1948–2008	81
5.2	Estimated ideological trends for southern senators. (a) Senator Fulbright (D-AR), (b) Senator Sparkman (D-AL), (c) Senator Russell (D-GA), (d) Senator McClellan (D-AR), (e) Senator Eastland (D-MS), (f) Senator Ellender (D-LA), (g) Senator Hill (D-AL), and (h) Senator Holland (D-FL)	91
5.3	Ideological rank of a Senate seat by change in racial voting, 1947–1968	97
5.4	Regional and party shifts in social welfare percentile rankings, 1946–1976	98
5.5	Examples of roll-call cutting line angles. (a) Cutting line angle less than 90 degrees – party line voting and (b) Cutting line angle greater than 90 degrees – splitting the parties, second-dimension issues	102
5.6	Mean cutting line angles on social welfare and civil rights roll-call votes, 1932–2012	103

x	<i>List of Figures</i>	
6.1	Mean percentile rank on first dimension of W-nominate for House members from southern states, by decade	119
6.2	Ideological evolution of the Alabama House delegation, 1940–1998. (a) All Alabama House members and (b) Alabama House members serving fifteen years or more	121
6.3	Ideological evolution for individual members of Alabama House delegation serving at least twenty years between 1940 and 1998	122
6.4	Regional ideological distribution in the US House, 2015–2016	125
6.5	Ideological distribution among southern House members, 2015–2016	125
7.1	Proportion of white eligible electorate voting Democratic, by presidential election year and occupational class. (a) The Nation, (b) The Northeast, and (c) The South	134
7.2	Proportion of white two-party electorate voting Democratic, by occupational class. (a) The Nation, (b) The Northeast, and (c) The South	137
7.3	Turnout among whites, blacks, and other nonwhites in presidential and congressional elections	140
7.4	Percentage of the Democratic vote for president provided by whites, blacks, and nonwhites	140
7.5	The changing occupational structure from the US Census, 1920–2010. (a) Occupational distribution for the entire US population, (b) Occupational distribution for white US population, and (c) Occupational distribution for white US population with combined working class	141
7.6	Union membership in the United States. (a) Total union membership; (b) Percent unionized, workers; (c) Percent unionized, wage and salary workers; and (d) Percent unionized, non-agricultural workers	146
7.7	Class and racial composition of the Democratic coalition. (a) Group proportions of national Democratic vote for president, (b) Group proportions of northeast Democratic presidential vote, (c) Group proportions of southern Democratic presidential vote, and (d) Group proportions of the national Republican vote	148
7.A1	Educational attainment and Democratic Party support among (white) voters, 1952–2016	155

Tables

3.1	The Great Migration: Percent African American population by region and select northern cities, 1900–1960	41
4.1	ADA scores for senators serving in the first session of the eighty-fifth Congress (1957) by party and region, with predicted values	55
4.2	Senate votes on three important measures in the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act	56
4.3	Percent Democratic of the Southern delegation in the US Senate	65
4.A	Participants in voting blocs for Figure 4.1	70
4.B	Participants in voting blocs for Figure 4.2	72
5.1	Southern delegation ADA scores by Senate seat, 1947 and 1967, sorted by the 1947 score	88
5.2	Southern delegation ADA percentile scores by Senate seat, 1947 and 1967, sorted by the 1947 score	89
5.3	Estimated trends in ADA scores among southern senators serving at least twenty years beyond 1947, absent civil rights votes (standard errors in parentheses)	90
5.4	Rank ordering of Senate seats based on adjusted ADA scores for semi-independent cross sections in 1947 and 1968 by region and year	93
5.5	Change in rank order of individual Senate seats based on adjusted ADA ratings, by changing level of racial voting in the nation, weighted by the proportion of African Americans in the state, and by changes in the partisanship of the Senate seat	95



xii	<i>List of Tables</i>	
5.6	Southern delegation percentile rankings on social welfare votes (based on W-nominate scaling) by Senate seat, 1947 and 1967, sorted by the 1947 percentile ranking	99
6.1	Race, civil rights, and the evolution of American politics	111
6.2	Regional difference-in-differences estimators for percentile rankings on first-dimension ideological scores in the US House, 1940–1954 versus 1965–1979	114
6.3	Predicted percentile ranks and proximity to the median for first dimension regional estimates in the US House, 1940–1954 and 1965–1979	115
6.4	Regional difference-in-differences estimators among Democratic House members for percentile rankings on first-dimension ideological scores, 1940–1954 to 1965–1979	116
6.5	Predicted percentile ranks and proximity to the median for first-dimension regional estimates among Democrats in the US House, 1940–1954 and 1965–1979	117
6.6	Regional difference-in-differences estimators among Republican House members for percentile rankings on first-dimension ideological scores, 1940–1954 to 1965–1979	117
6.7	Predicted percentile ranks and proximity to the median for first-dimension regional estimates among Republicans in the US House, 1940–1954 and 1965–1979	118
7.1	Shared votes of the skilled and unskilled working class with professional-managerial and farm and nonfarm laborers	144
8.1	Two-party vote for Trump and Clinton by race, party, born-again identification, economic pessimism, and support for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act	167
8.2	Two-party vote for Trump and Clinton by race and gender	171
8.3	Percent supporting the repeal of the Affordable Care Act by party and racial group	172
8.4	Percent supporting the repeal of the Affordable Care Act by education and racial group	173
8.5	Vote for Trump and support for the Affordable Care Act in the 2016 election	176
8.6	Trump support among whites	177

## Preface and Acknowledgments

Many Americans experienced a rude shock on the evening of November 8, 2016, when they learned that Donald Trump would become the next president of the United States. Similarly, it had been surprising for many Americans, Republicans and Democrats alike, when Donald Trump fashioned a successful populist campaign that accumulated a string of victories in Republican primaries and ultimately secured the party's nomination at the 2016 Republican National Convention. This book argues that we should not have been caught off guard. Indeed, populist appeals are deeply embedded in the history of the Republic, and a wide variety of successful populist appeals have played influential roles in the history of its politics.

Some of these populist programs and appeals, such as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, have been progressive efforts aimed at improving the political and economic fortunes of everyday Americans. Other reactionary populist appeals, most famously in the American South but elsewhere as well, have successfully employed political messages anchored in animosity based on race and class.

Most recently, we can see the consequences of reactionary, upside-down populist appeals with respect to social welfare policy in American politics. That is, those who need social welfare legislation the most – the economically disadvantaged – are often least likely to support it. This has clearly been the case in the vitriolic debate over the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but the problem certainly predates the difficult history of the ACA. Indeed, opposition to the expansion of the social welfare state is frequently pronounced among lower-income white voters – many of whom would be ultimate beneficiaries. We argue that the solution to this

puzzle lies deeply ingrained within the conjoint dynamics of race and class in American life and hence in American politics.

We are particularly grateful to a number of colleagues who have supported us in this effort. Two former graduate students, Jack Reilly and Fan Lu, have been supportive throughout, and each has been a collaborator on one of the chapters (Chapters 4 and 5, respectively). We have also benefitted from the insights and advice gained from a series of colleagues: Ted Carmines, Carol Kohfeld, Ben Highton, Walt Stone, Chris Hare, Franz Pappi, Ron Rapoport, Matt Pietryka, and John Ryan. Carol Kohfeld, Paul Sniderman, John Sprague, and two anonymous reviewers read the complete manuscript and made particularly helpful suggestions.