

# Income inequality and support for redistributive policies in Ontario: Who gets what, where, how, and who cares?

**Tara Sutton**

Department of Political Science, College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON Canada. Faculty supervisor: Dr. Edward Koning.

For correspondence, please email: [suttont@uoguelph.ca](mailto:suttont@uoguelph.ca).

## Abstract

Income inequality has risen steadily in Canada over the last three decades, and particularly in Ontario, where it has grown at a faster rate. While the public response to this growth remains unclear, policy responses to address the issue have largely failed. To date, the literature remains divided as to the nature of the relationship between income inequality and support for redistributive policies such as welfare spending. This article argues, however, that where a relationship exists between income inequality and public support for welfare spending, it is a negative one. This negative relationship is in part due to perceptions of deservingness and factors explained by institutionalism. Even if support for governmental action to address income inequality is considerable both in Ontario and in the rest of Canada, support for governmental welfare spending is low. These findings point toward a public that is largely unresponsive to the problem of growing income inequality in Ontario. The results have implications for the development of policies to address inequality effectively, both in Ontario and in the rest of Canada.

**Keywords:** Income inequality; Redistributive policy; Welfare; Programs of last resort; Public opinion; Social policy.

## Introduction

Although equal distribution of income is not a goal of liberal democracies, many political theorists hold that states ought at the very least to protect equality of opportunity in order to ensure that individuals' "life-prospects" are not diminished by circumstances outside of their control, such as being born into poverty (Rawls 1971). Extreme levels of income inequality are therefore concerning, as they can impede individuals' ability to improve upon their "starting point" in life (Rawls 1971). Income inequality, here, is defined as the extent to which income is distributed unevenly across a population (Inequality.org 2016). High levels of income inequality also have the potential to inhibit economic growth, undermine political equality, and create social unrest (The Broadbent Institute 2012; Doyle and Stiglitz 2014). While Canada does not have an official definition of poverty, the low-income cut-off (LICO) is commonly used by Statistics Canada as a relative measure of poverty (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 2014). In this article, the terms "poverty" and "poverty line" refer to the LICO, unless otherwise stated. Costs related to poverty are both economic and social in nature, and are well-documented (Laurie 2008; The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2009; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 2014). For

example, in Canada, health care costs alone for those living near or under the poverty line are estimated to exceed \$7 billion per year (Canada Without Poverty, n.d.). In Canada, and particularly in the province of Ontario, most measures point toward an increase in levels of income inequality and poverty (Osberg 2008; The Broadbent Institute 2012; Banting and Myles 2013; Report of the Standing Committee 2013).

There have been significant changes to social welfare policy in Canada, particularly in Ontario (see Maxwell 2009 for a full account of changes at both the federal and provincial levels); however, the policy response to growing income inequality and poverty has been largely unsuccessful (Maxwell 2009; Mehra 2012; Banting and Myles 2013). Programs of last resort, namely welfare, designed to offer a solution to the economic and social harms of unemployment (McBride 1999), have been criticized for keeping people in poverty (The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2009; Tweddle et al. 2014). Some evidence points toward a less generous and more punitive welfare system (Tweddle et al. 2014; Rice and Prince 2013; Maxwell 2009). There are, for example, over 800 rules and regulations that determine eligibility for social assistance programs. Even when an individual is deemed eligible to

receive benefits, they can spend up to a third of their week satisfying conditions set by programs such as Ontario Works (Maxwell 2009).

Lasswell (1950) argued that politics is “who gets what, when, and how.” Of equal significance is “who cares?” Although the extent to which policy makers respond to public attitudes is contested (Petry and Mendelsohn 2004), public opinion does to some degree influence policy choices (Brooks and Manza 2006; Burstein 2003), particularly in the case of welfare policy (Soroka and Wlezien 2004). If investment in social welfare policy in Ontario has declined as income inequality and poverty levels have increased, a change might be expected in public perceptions of poverty and attitudes toward government welfare spending.

This project begins with three research questions. First, whether there is a relationship between income inequality and public support for redistributive policies (such as welfare) in Ontario. Second, if there is an observable relationship, whether this relationship changed over the last three decades. Third, if there is an observable relationship in Ontario, how this relationship compares to any relationship between income inequality and public support for redistributive policies in Canada as a whole. This article argues that where there is a relationship between income inequality and public support for governmental spending on redistributive policies, the relationship is a negative one. This negative relationship is in part due to perceptions of poverty and deservingness, as well as factors explained by institutional theory, including previous policy decisions and regional differences. Univariate and bivariate analyses reveal a negative relationship between the independent variable (income inequality) and the dependent variable (public attitudes toward governmental spending on redistributive policies) across Canada. The relationship in Ontario, for the most part, is not statistically significant, and where a weak relationship is observed, it is a negative one. This research points toward a public that is largely unresponsive to the problem of growing levels of income inequality, particularly in Ontario, where income inequality has grown at a faster rate than the rest of Canada.

The article proceeds as follows: first, it examines the literature on the relationship between income inequality and public attitudes toward redistributive policies, and explores how public attitudes toward these policies might be shaped by perceptions of poverty and of deservingness. Second, it details methodological considerations. Third, using the Gini Index (a common measure of income inequality), it conducts univariate analyses, and then uses data from the Canada Election Study (which since 1965 has examined Canadians’ attitudes toward elections, policies, and campaign issues) to conduct bivariate analyses. Finally, the article concludes by discussing these results, and their potential implications for policymakers.

### Literature review

This literature review first examines the relationship between income inequality and public support for redistributive policies (such as welfare). Second, it examines

how, if at all, public opinion is shaped by the perceived deservingness of the recipients of redistribution.

There is considerable disagreement in the literature as to what the relationship between income inequality and support for redistribution look likes. On one hand, some scholars theorize that the association is positive. On this view, as income inequality goes up, so too does public support for redistributive policies. Others expect a negative association, such that support for redistributive policies goes down as income inequality increases. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Rational choice theory provides insight into why a positive association might exist between income inequality and public support for redistributive policies. According to rational choice theorists, “[a]ctors behave in a rational way by forming preferences for outcomes based on their perceived individual interests and use strategic action in the pursuit of these goals” (O’Connor 2004). As inequality grows, fewer individuals are concentrated at the top of the income distribution, leaving the majority of the population with a smaller share of total income. This majority chooses redistributive policies by weighing costs and benefits: the cost of redistribution sits largely with those who have the largest share of the income distribution, and the benefits of redistribution are reaped largely by those in the majority (who have a smaller amount of the total income).

The seminal work of Meltzer and Richard (1981; 1983) is perhaps the most well-known exposition of this theoretical expectation, often referred to as the median-voter theory (Finseraas 2009; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005). Meltzer and Richard hypothesized that individuals whose incomes fall below the median are more likely to respond positively to (that is, vote for) redistributive policies. Specifically, they will support higher taxes and increased levels of redistribution. Meltzer and Richard found support for their hypothesis by creating a static model to simulate voter income and preference for redistributive policy. In their later work (1983), they used time-series income data (from the United States) to test their earlier model, yielding similar results.

Anderson and Curtis’ (2013) recent work also supports the theoretical expectation of a positive relationship between inequality and support for redistribution. They examined whether Canadians’ opinions on public spending were influenced by economic and political conditions between 1980 and 2005. They used data from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to determine the extent to which changes in the level of income inequality, among other variables, could account for changes in public opinion over time. Anderson and Curtis found that as income inequality increased, Canadians seemed to favour increased social spending on welfare. They additionally found Canadians were more likely to be aware of their own positions within the income distribution as income inequality increased, and were therefore more likely to support redistributive programs to better their positions.

Critiques of this rationalist account are well-documented in the literature. These critiques point toward a negative

relationship between income inequality and support for redistributive policies: as income inequality increases, support for redistribution goes down (Kelly and Enns 2010; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005; Sealey and Andersen 2015). Institutionalism and power resource theory (PRT) help to explain this relationship, and will each be discussed in turn.

According to Pierson (1996), “[p]atterns of governance matter”. That is, institutions determine the systems, or rules, as Pierson (1996) calls them, through which political decisions are made. These rules then influence policy preferences. There are two major arguments in support of this institutionalist claim. First, institutions establish the systems through which political activities take place, and these systems affect group identity and policy preferences, advantaging some groups while burdening others. Pierson (1996) notes that robust social policies are most easily built when states possess extensive administrative and financial resources. Federal and bicameral systems, by contrast, may hinder the development of the welfare state. Second, the programs developed by the welfare state offer a platform from which social learning occurs. Within the context of policy-making, social learning refers to the process whereby policy makers, learning from previous policy failures, incorporate the lessons learned from those failures into their policy making (King and Hansen 1999). As Pierson suggests, social learning can positively or negatively influence the likelihood of future program expansion. If there has not been a strong history of redistributive policies and programs of last resort, the state may find little support for such economic interventions, as individuals and policy makers have little previous experience with these programs and policies. This is the consequence of previous policy decisions, or what Pierson (1996) refers to as “feedback”. A lack of experience with redistributive policies may have a negative effect on the expansion of programs such as welfare.

Sealey and Anderson’s (2015) recent work offers support for this institutionalist argument. Although they found support for Meltzer and Richard’s model (in which the lower-income majority support redistributive policies) within Canadian provinces, they found a negative relationship when each province was treated as a separate context. Explaining that regional differences provide different political contexts, Sealey and Anderson (2015) suggest that “not only policy preferences but also values and beliefs differ by state in large part because different institutions augment the effects of the interests of their respective populations.” The negative relationship observed across provinces can be explained by political and cultural traits fostered by the institutional arrangements and feedback that are unique to each region (Pierson 1996; Sealey and Andersen 2015).

Power Resource Theory (PRT) provides a theoretical explanation for the variances in development of welfare states. Specifically, PRT is most interested in the relationship between social policy development and labour mobilization (Olsen and O’Connor 1998). High levels of labour union membership can cause a reallocation of power in the market (shifting some of the power away from capital and onto labour), while support for social democratic parties (coalitions

of the working class) can shift political power toward state policy that favours increased redistribution (Bradley et al. 2003; Korpi 1980; Olsen and O’Connor 1998). PRT maintains that welfare states can develop further if labour is strong, and also holds the inverse to be true: without strong labour, welfare states may experience challenges in program expansion (Olsen and O’Connor 1998). This suggests that if inequality is rising in a state with right-leaning parties and low labour mobilization, then low levels of support for redistributive policies can be expected.

In their study of distribution outcomes in postindustrial democracies, Bradley et al. (2003) used the Luxembourg Income Study’s (now the LIS Cross-National Data Center) datasets, collected from the 1970s to the 1990s, to examine the factors affecting redistribution processes in fourteen advanced industrial countries. Some key factors considered in their empirical work included leftist governments, extent of veto points within the political process, union density and level of collective bargaining. Bradley et al. found that several factors, namely a leftist government, unionization, and collective bargaining, had a positive influence on income equality, and that these factors were interrelated. As such, a negative relationship is observable between income inequality and support for government redistribution.

This literature review has thus far discussed two common contentions about the relationship between inequality and public attitudes toward redistribution within the literature: the first posits a positive relationship and the second a negative one. Having reviewed the literature concerning the relationship between income inequality and support for redistributive policies, this paper now briefly examines how public opinion might be shaped by perceived deservingness.

The perceived deservingness of recipients may influence public opinion of redistributive policies, and may specifically influence public opinion of government intervention and welfare spending (Appelbaum 2001; Rodgers 2009). Although the extent to which public policy is influenced by public opinion is contested, many argue that it does have a role to play (Brooks and Manza 2006; Burstein 2003; Soroka and Wlezien 2004). Accordingly, it is useful to examine now.

Appelbaum (2001) conducted research to determine whether redistributive policies (such as welfare) are more often recommended when the recipient group is perceived to be a deserving poor group. Poor children, for example, were perceived as deserving, while able-bodied men were not. Appelbaum conducted surveys in the United States, surveying 240 individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The participants were given one of six categories of low-income people: widows with children, the physically handicapped, the physically ill, teen mothers, single mothers, and able-bodied men. Participants were then given policy choices for each group. They were asked how likely they would be to support the policy choice for a particular group. Using an analysis of variance (ANOVA), Appelbaum found that respondents’ likelihood of support differed significantly depending on which group they were assessing. She found that perceived deservingness of the recipient group predicted the

likelihood of respondents' support of redistributive policies for that group. A group perceived as undeserving (particularly, able-bodied men) was less likely to receive respondents' support for redistributive policies than a group perceived as deserving (namely, widows with children, physically handicapped, and physically ill). Growing inequality, moreover, may exacerbate the division between those perceived as deserving and undeserving (Bickford 2000; Lane 2001; Wax 2005), resulting in what may be limited support for redistributive policies.

## Methodological considerations

This paper is centrally concerned with the relationship between income inequality and public attitudes toward redistributive policies. This interest extends beyond the province of Ontario and to the rest of Canada. Comparing and contrasting the changes (if any) in Ontario and Canada will help illuminate in what ways (and why) the province is similar to, or different than, the rest of Canada. The comparison provides a longitudinal analysis within a province and across provinces. (In this study, Ontario includes only the residents of Ontario, and Canada includes residents of Canada outside of Ontario. In this way, the populations examined are mutually exclusive.) This will both increase the number of data points and also more robustly test the theories discussed above, particularly rational choice theory and institutionalism. Regional differences can influence public attitudes toward redistributive policies, and by comparing Ontario to the rest of Canada, these differences can be recognized.

For the independent variable, income inequality in Ontario and in the rest of Canada, I rely on the Gini Index as reported by Statistics Canada (2015). The Gini Index (or Gini coefficient) is a number between zero and one which measures inequality in the distribution of income. A population in which each family receives an equal income would register a Gini coefficient of zero (perfect equality), and a population in which one family received all income would register a Gini coefficient of one (perfect inequality) (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016). As Statistics Canada (2015) notes, it might be difficult to interpret a single coefficient, but the Gini Index is well-suited for longitudinal or cross-sectional comparisons: the higher the coefficient, the higher the level of inequality in income distribution.

For the dependent variable, public attitudes toward the government's role in addressing income inequality and poverty through redistributive policies, I rely on three questions from the Canadian Election Study (CES): whether *The government should do more to reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor*; *The welfare state makes people less willing to depend on themselves*; and whether *Spending on welfare should change (go up or down) or stay the same* (CES, 1988-2011). Although the CES has surveyed respondents on these questions consistently from 1988 to 2011, there are two issues that pose some difficulties for longitudinal comparison. First, both the question wording and the response options differ somewhat between waves. In

particular, in 1988, the phrasing of the question pertaining to government's role in addressing income inequality is substantially different from the phrasing in other waves of the CES (for a full breakdown of sample size in each CES wave, see **Supplementary Table 1** below). In 1988, the question posed was whether *The government should do...for the poor*. Options for respondents were *more, same, less, don't know, or refuse to answer* (CES 1988). In 1993, the wording was altered, and became *The government should do more to reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor*. Options for respondents were *strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or no opinion* (CES 1993). In 1988, the question focuses solely on the poor, whereas in 1993, the focus of the question shifts to income gap. It is therefore necessary to exercise some caution in comparing results from 1988 with those from other waves.

The question pertaining to government spending on welfare also displayed variations in phrasing. In 1993 and 1997, the wording was *Should the federal government cut welfare spending...* Respondents had the option to answer *a lot, some, not at all, don't know, or refuse to answer* (CES 1993; 1997). The policy question was phrased strictly in terms of spending cuts, and this may have affected how respondents approached the question. In contrast, from 2000 to 2008, the question was phrased as *Should the federal government spend more, less, or about the same as now on welfare?* Respondents could also answer with *don't know* or *refuse to answer* (CES 2000-2008). In 2011, the word *federal* was removed, which resulted in the question reading as *Should the government spend more, less, or about the same as now on welfare?* (CES 2011). A further complication is that in 2011, a question was added that referred to the provincial government rather than the federal government (CES 2011). However, the response patterns for these two 2011 questions do not differ from each other in any statistically significant way, and it therefore seems safe to assume that this complication is not particularly troublesome.

Second, the number of missing cases differs between waves. In 1993, there was a significant amount of missing data in the three questions this study uses to assess public attitudes toward the government's role in addressing income inequality through redistributive policies. For example, the number of respondents who were asked whether *The government should do more to reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor* was not very large. The removal of missing data from the analysis is important, as this study was concerned only with the responses of those who were offered the question, and who responded with answers relevant to the present investigation. As such, missing data were excluded from this investigation's analyses. Including missing data can skew findings, which become imprecise when too much missing data are included. In addition to affecting confidence intervals, a bias can occur if the values of the missing data are substantially different from those of the non-missing data (Pearson 2006).

Finally, the survey question of whether *The welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves* was not asked during the CES waves of 1988 and 1997 (CES 1988-

1997). For the sake of comparability, all questions concerning governmental action to reduce income inequality have been recoded so that a higher score means more support for governmental action to address income inequality.

Income inequality in Ontario and the rest of Canada was first visualized in a line graph. Descriptive statistics of the proportions of respondents in support of governmental welfare spending, with confidence intervals of 95%, were examined for each wave of the CES between 1988 and 2011. Finally, correlation techniques were used to investigate more directly whether support for governmental welfare spending is higher or lower when inequality is higher.

## Results and discussion

### Univariate analyses

The Gini Index for Ontario and Canada between 1988 and 2011 reveals that income inequality has risen both in Ontario and Canada (Statistics Canada 2015). It also suggests that income inequality has been greater inside than outside Ontario throughout that period (with the exception of 1992, when income inequality in Ontario fell below the Canada-wide rate).

The univariate analyses yielded 4 key observations. First, income inequality in Ontario has grown over the last three decades at a higher rate than in Canada overall. Second, between 1988 and 2011, Canadians outside of Ontario were more supportive of governmental intervention to address income inequality than those in Ontario. Third, although support for governmental action to address income inequality was high, specific policy action, such as public spending on welfare, did not garner very much support, especially in Ontario. Fourth, at least half the surveyed population had negative feelings about whether the welfare state increases individuals' dependency (Figures 1a and 1b). Over time, it seems that as inequality has increased, support for redistributive policies has not. Instead, it has remained relatively stable, albeit declining slightly, across Canada, and particularly in Ontario.

### Bivariate analyses

The univariate analyses above pointed to less change in the dependent variable than in the independent variable (that is, the level of income inequality changed more than public attitudes, as garnered from respondents' answers). Bivariate analyses were then employed to more explicitly investigate the relationship between these variables.

Data were first visualized in a scatterplot. Each relationship was then examined for Ontario and the rest of Canada separately. Figures 2a (Ontario) and 2b (Canada without Ontario) display the relationship between the Gini Index and support for governmental action to reduce income inequality. It was hypothesized that there is a relationship between these two variables, with the null hypothesis being

that no relationship exists. In both Figures 2a and 2b, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

These figures suggest that there is not a significant relationship between income inequality and support for governmental action to reduce income inequality. In Ontario,  $r = 0.348$ , which means that 12% of the variance in support for governmental action can be explained by the level of income inequality. Outside of Ontario, this relationship is even weaker, with  $r = 0.229$ . Here, 5.23% of the variance in support for governmental action can be explained by inequality. With a weak relationship in both Figures 2a and 2b, it seems that it is difficult to predict support for state intervention even if the level of inequality is known.

Figures 3a (Ontario) and 3b (Canada without Ontario) display the relationship between the Gini Index and support for welfare spending. It was hypothesized that a relationship between these two variables exists, with the null hypothesis being that no relationship exists. In Figure 3a the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, but in 3b, it can be successfully rejected, as  $p$  is significant ( $<0.05$ ).

These figures suggest a negative relationship between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and support for welfare spending: as income inequality increases, support for welfare spending decreases. In both figures a negative relationship is observed, with the relationship in 3b being stronger. However, in Ontario and the rest of Canada, the data point for 1988 (when the question pertaining to the government's role in addressing income inequality was posed differently) stands as an outlier. While excluding this outlier decreases the strength of the relationship considerably for Ontario (from  $-0.715$  to  $-0.154$ ), such exclusion results in a much smaller decrease in the rest of Canada (from  $-0.818$  to  $-0.723$ ). During the 1990s and 2000s, public support (in Ontario) for welfare spending was not significantly influenced by growing inequality. During this time, only 2.37% the variance in support for welfare spending can be explained by inequality. In the rest of Canada, however, there is a strong negative relationship that has endured since the 1980s. For this time period, 66.84% of the variance in support for welfare spending can be explained by inequality.

Figures 4a (Ontario) and 4b (Canada without Ontario) display the relationship between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and support for the belief that the welfare state does not make people more dependent. It was hypothesized that a relationship exists between these two variables, with the null hypothesis being that no relationship exists. In both 4a and 4b we can reject the null hypothesis because  $p$  is significant ( $<0.05$  and  $<0.01$ , respectively).

The results from 1993 are difficult to interpret, however, as the CES waves preceding and following this year are missing. If the relationship is evaluated outside the year 1993, the findings change considerably: in Ontario, the relationship is no longer positive and becomes fairly weak, with  $r = -0.359$ . In the rest of Canada, the relationship remains strong and positive, with  $r = 0.597$ . In the case of Ontario, it is difficult to predict the extent of the belief that the welfare state makes

people more dependent, even if inequality is known ( $R^2 = 0.13$ ).

Despite the decades-long decline in social policy investment in Ontario (Banting and Myles 2013; Maxwell 2009; Mehra 2012), and the growth of inequality during the same period, public perceptions of poverty and of government welfare spending have remained largely unchanged.

In Ontario, the independent variable, income inequality, has had little to no effect on public attitudes toward welfare spending, governmental action to reduce income inequality, and the belief that the welfare state makes people more dependent. Where a weak relationship existed, it was a negative one: with increasing inequality people were less likely to support welfare spending and were less likely to agree that the welfare state does not create dependency. In the rest of Canada, a strong negative relationship existed between inequality and public attitude toward welfare spending.

Taken together, this research points toward a public that is largely unresponsive to the problem of growing inequality. If anything, as inequality has increased, respondents' support for spending on welfare—a system designed to provide a safety net against the economic and social harms of unemployment—has decreased. This finding is most troubling in Ontario, where inequality has grown at a faster rate than in the rest of Canada. In Ontario, growing inequality has had little to no effect on public support for redistributive policies such as welfare spending.

The literature is divided as to what the relationship between inequality and support for redistribution might look like. Some scholars suppose that a positive relationship exists (Meltzer and Richard 1981; 1983; Anderson and Curtis 2013), while others argue that the relationship is negative (Kelly and Enns 2010; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005; Sealey and Andersen 2015). These longitudinal analyses provided an opportunity to test the theories examined in this paper, specifically institutionalism and rational choice theory. The evidence presented in this study stands contrary to those scholars who theorized that a positive relationship exists between inequality and support for redistributive policies and welfare spending.

The evidence instead suggests that where there is a relationship between income inequality and support for governmental spending on redistributive policies, the relationship is a negative one. This negative relationship has weaker strength in Ontario than the rest of Canada, and institutionalist theory provides support for this conclusion. Particularly, Sealey and Anderson's (2015) findings demonstrated that political context differs between provinces, differently influencing values and beliefs, and thereby attitudes toward policies and spending priorities.

Further, Pierson (1996) argued that robust social policies are most easily built when states possess extensive administrative and financial resources. By contrast, such policies and programs can be constrained in federal and bicameral systems. In addition, if the programs developed by welfare states offer a platform upon which social learning occurs (Pierson 1996), then it is reasonable to assume that

social learning has not occurred to the same degree in Canada that is has in other welfare states.

Ontario shows little evidence of any strong relationship between inequality and support for redistribution. In general, support for redistribution was relatively low in Ontario, and remained so even as income inequality rose. Once again, this supports Sealey and Anderson's (2015) findings that differences exist across provinces, as there are regionally unique institutional arrangements and feedback.

Generally, in Ontario and the rest of Canada, support for state intervention to combat inequality was high, yet support for welfare spending was very low. This apparent discrepancy may be explained by how deservingness is perceived. As inequality increases and more income is concentrated at the top, individuals may be more inclined to believe those at the bottom of the income distribution are undeserving. This seems a reasonable—albeit distressing—conclusion, given that the public generally supports action to minimize inequality, but does not support redistribution for those most in need. The most vulnerable segments of the population are deemed undeserving of a safety net, and this should serve as a rallying cry, not only for Ontarians, but for all Canadians.

This research would benefit from three future considerations. First, a multi-variate cross-provincial analysis would further test institutional factors—including those emphasized within PRT—between provinces. Second, this research would benefit from an examination of the data by income group. Finally, to address the issue of deservingness raised in this research, a qualitative research project would be valuable. Here, open-ended interviews might examine the impacts of policy language on policy preference. The very structure and punitive nature of many programs of last resort, and the language used within them, may very well contribute to public perceptions of recipients' deservingness (Maxwell 2009; Rice and Prince 2013; Tweddle et al. 2014).

The findings in this project are not immediately encouraging for policy makers or for those who may be seeking change in redistributive policies. In general, the growth of inequality has done little to change public attitudes toward welfare spending, particularly in Ontario. There is, moreover, evidence that points to the ineffectiveness of policies designed to address and combat poverty and income inequality over the last three decades (Banting and Myles 2013; Maxwell 2009; Mehra 2012), but there remains hope for policy makers. As Pierson (1996) claimed, "social policy change is a process that unfolds over time." While public attitudes suggest a lack of support for spending on redistributive policies and programs of last resort, it is unlikely that severe or drastic program cutbacks will take place (Pierson 1996). This is little consolation, however, for those at the bottom of the income distribution. The lack of public support for a system that has done little to slow the growth of income inequality presents an opportunity for policy makers to reimagine the mechanisms through which a safety net can be provided. Viewed this way, policy innovation is possible. The public seems to acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the current welfare system. Policy makers should see this not only

as an opportunity, but as an obligation to transform our current policies of redistribution and programs of last resort.

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Tables and Figures

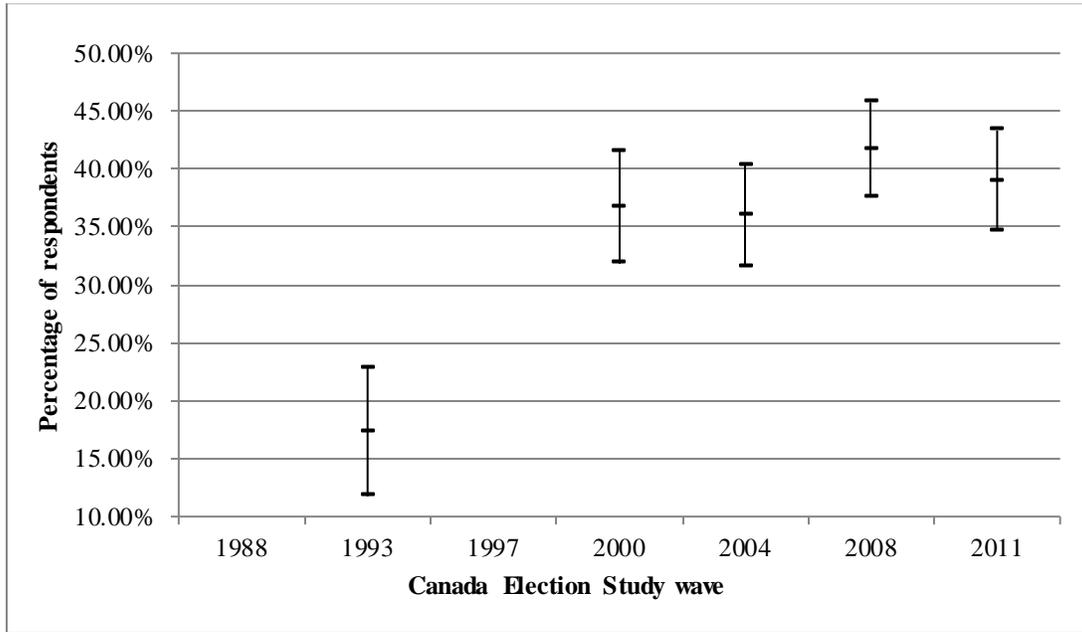


Figure 1a. Percentage of CES respondents in Ontario who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves, 1988-2011 (point estimates and 95 % confidence intervals).

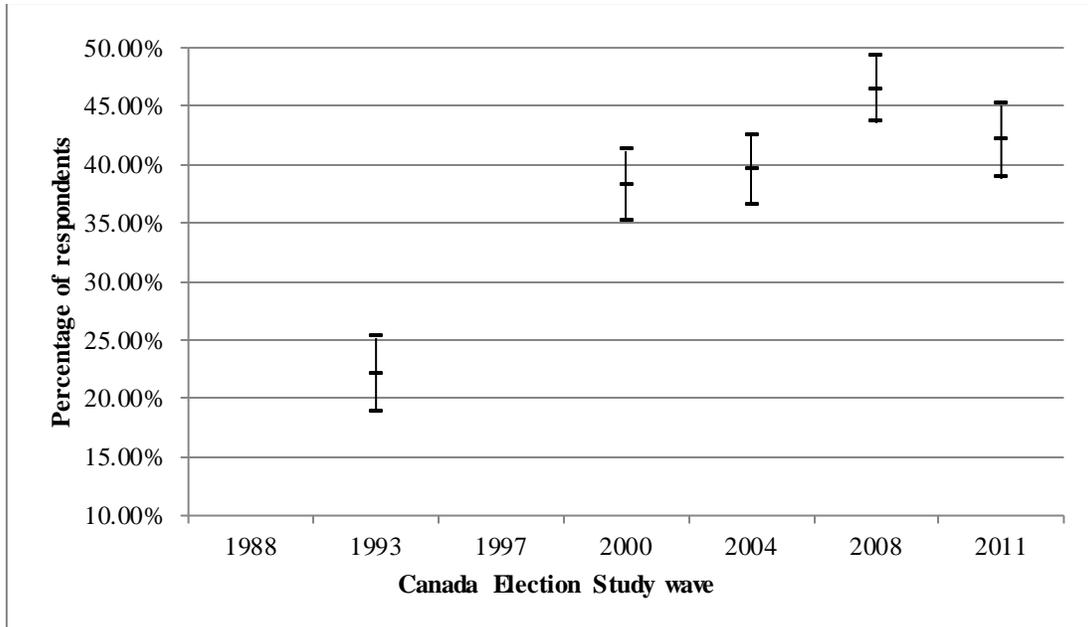


Figure 1b. Percentage of CES respondents in Canada, outside of Ontario, who disagreed or strongly disagreed that the welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves, 1988-2011 (point estimates and 95% confidence intervals).

## Income inequality and support for redistributive policies in Ontario (Sutton)

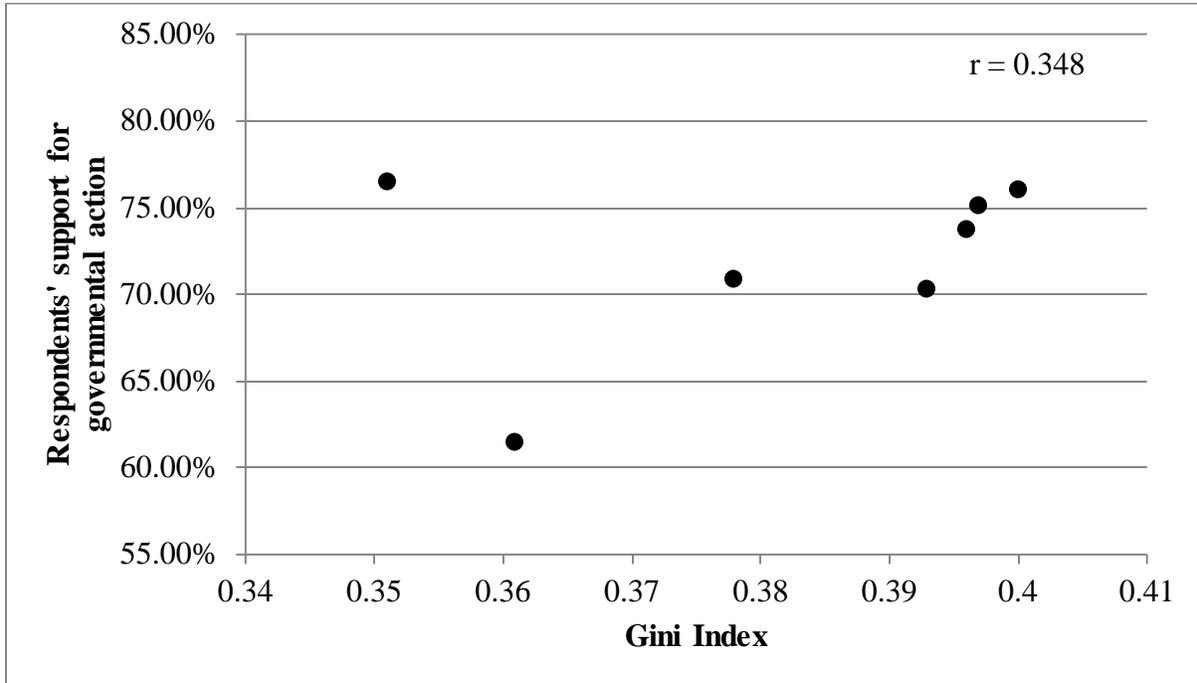


Figure 2a. Relationship in Ontario between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and respondents' support for governmental action to reduce income inequality, 1988-2011.

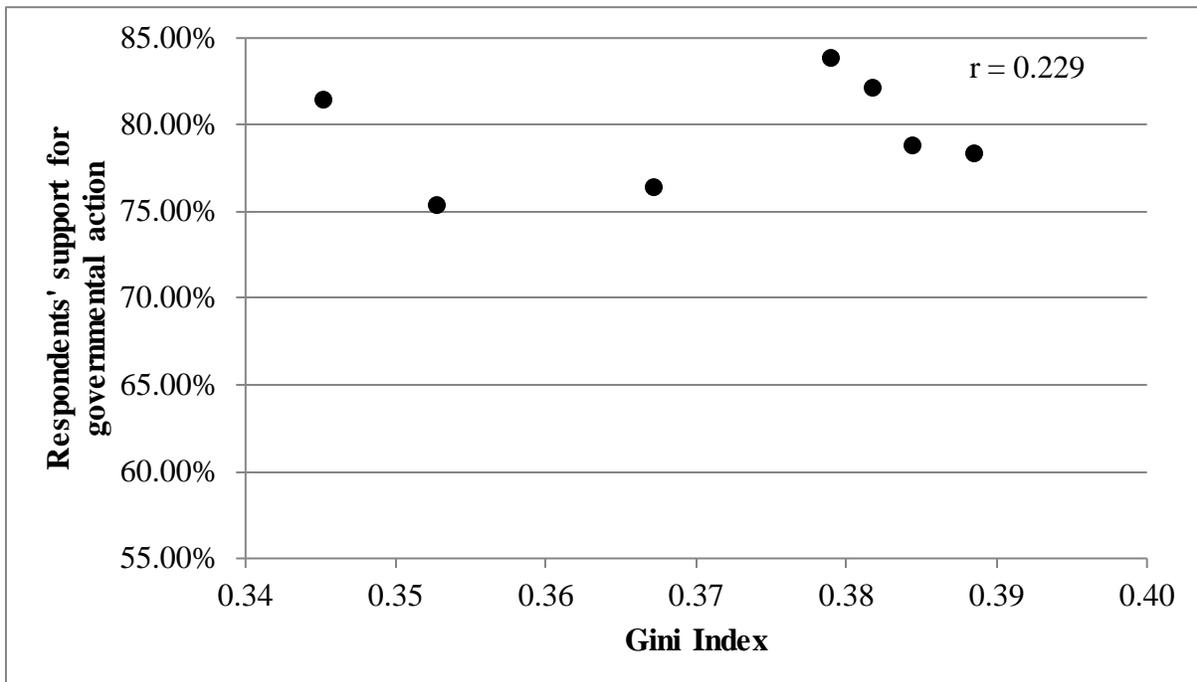


Figure 2b. Relationship in Canada, outside of Ontario, between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and CES respondents' support for governmental action to reduce income inequality, 1988-2011.

**Income inequality and support for redistributive policies in Ontario (Sutton)**

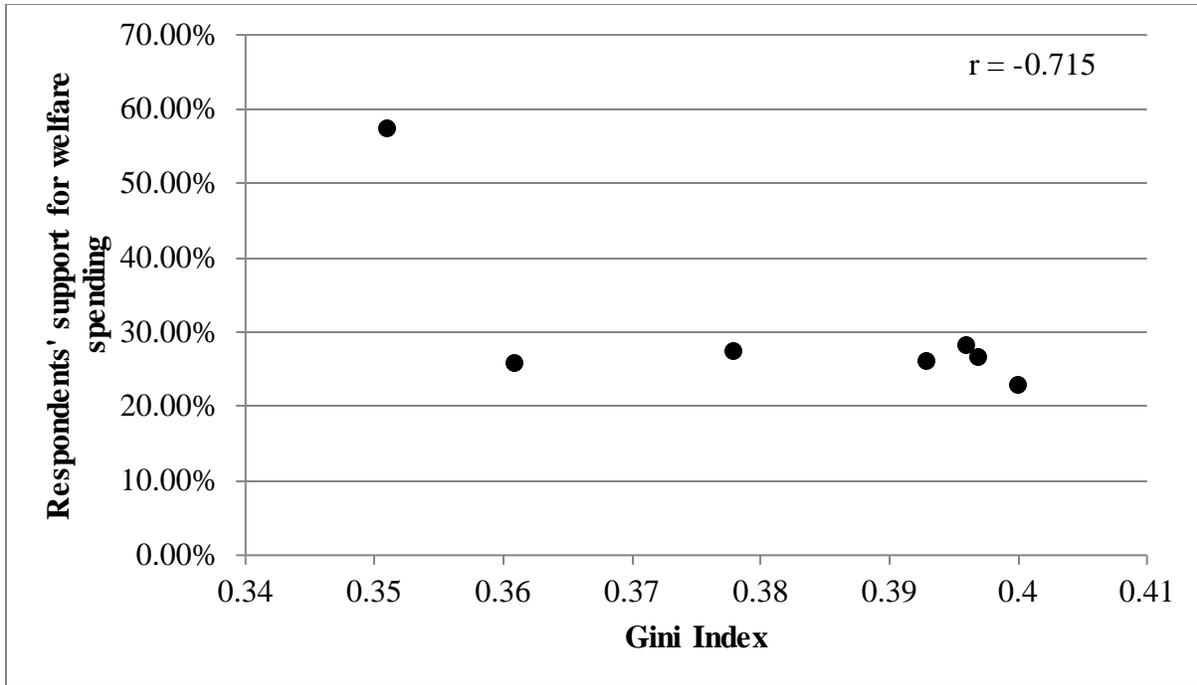


Figure 3a. Relationship in Ontario between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and CES respondents' support for welfare spending, 1988-2011.

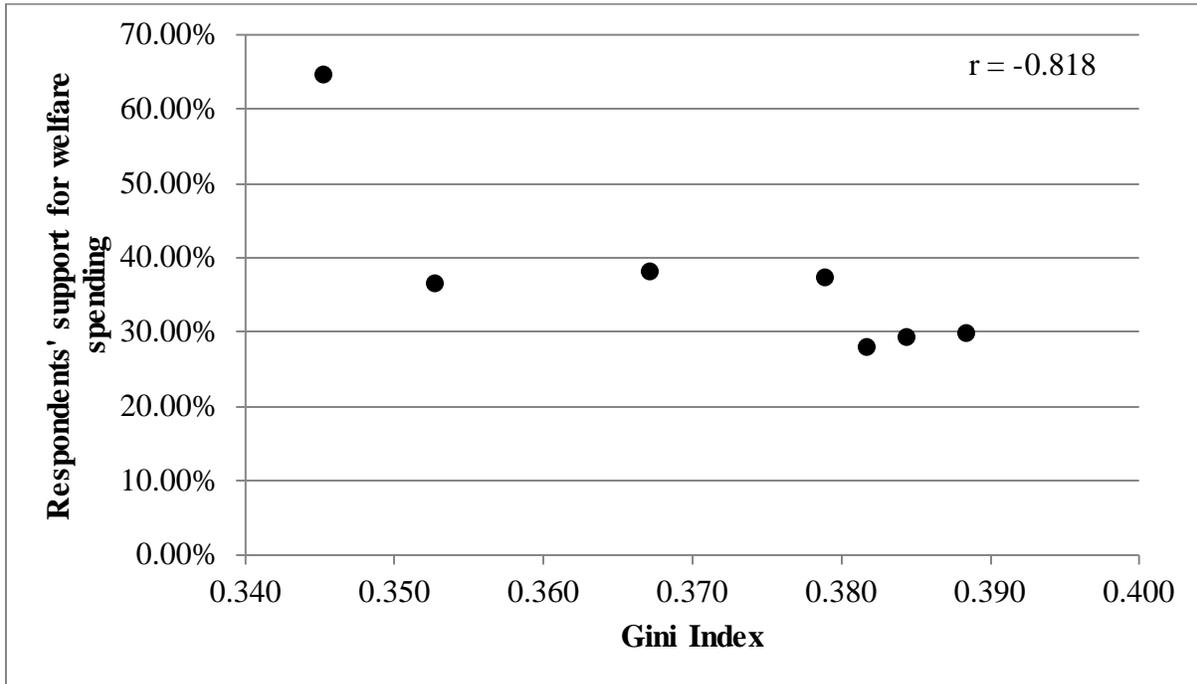


Figure 3b. Relationship in Canada, outside of Ontario, between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and CES respondents' support for welfare spending, 1988-2011.

## Income inequality and support for redistributive policies in Ontario (Sutton)

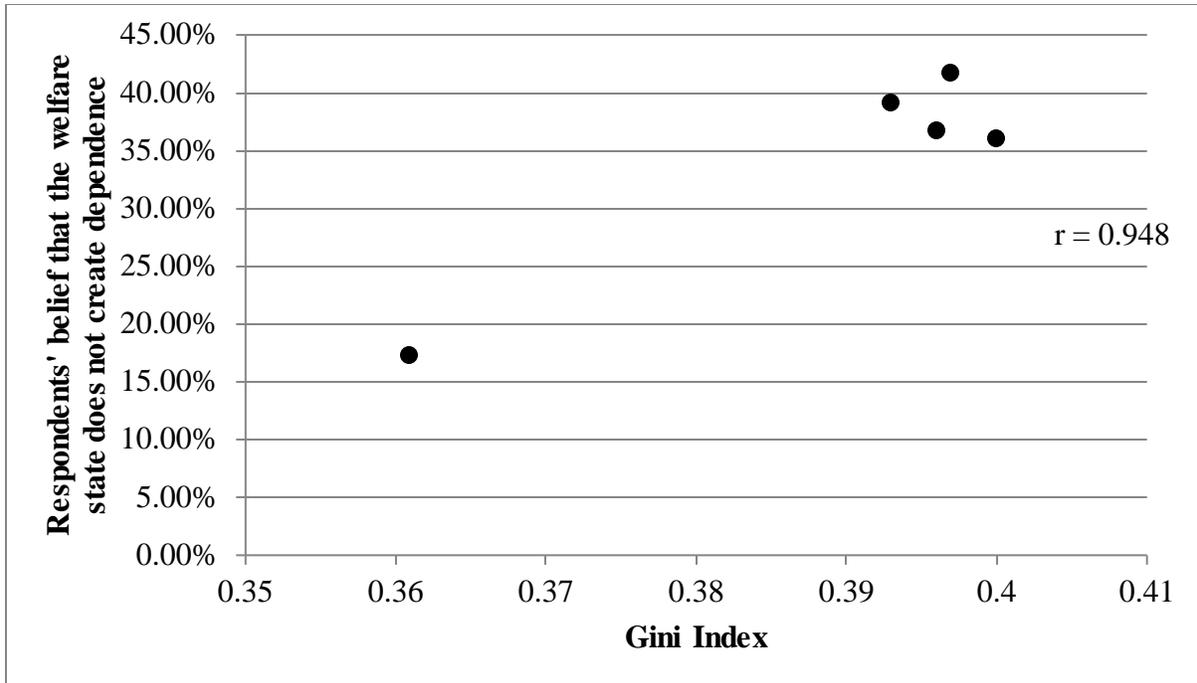


Figure 4a. Relationship in Ontario between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and CES respondents' belief that the welfare state does not create dependence, 1988-2011.

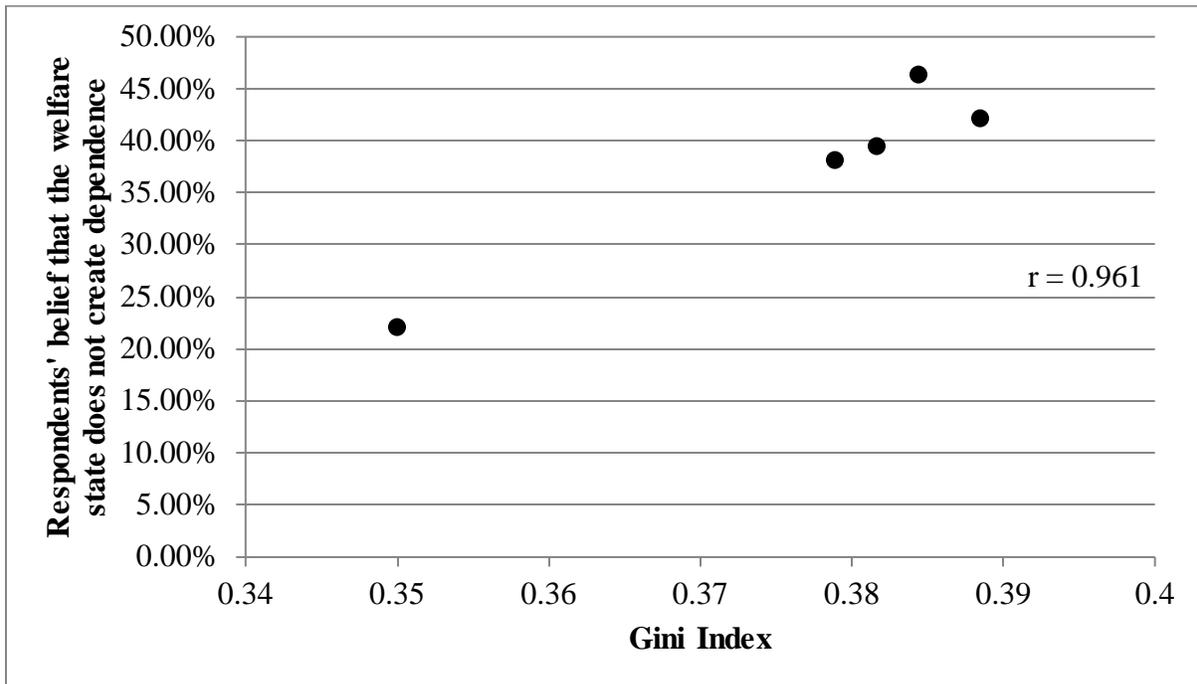


Figure 4b. Relationship in Canada, outside of Ontario, between income inequality (as indicated by the Gini Index) and CES respondents' belief that the welfare state does not create dependence, 1988-2011.

## Supplementary Information

Supplementary table 1. Question types used for the dependent variable, public attitudes toward governmental spending on redistributive policies, and number of valid or missing respondents for each question type and Canada Elections Study wave for Canada (including Ontario) between 1988 and 2011. -- indicates that data were not available.

Question type	Canada Elections Study wave	Number of valid respondents	Number of missing respondents
Governmental action to reduce income inequality	1988	771	158
	1993	184	372
	1997	669	765
	2000	909	74
	2004	1218	100
	2008	1123	283
	2011	1001	316
Whether or not the welfare state creates dependence	1988	--	--
	1993	185	375
	1997	--	--
	2000	395	570
	2004	483	835
	2008	590	816
	2011	508	809
Governmental welfare spending	1988	528	408
	1993	315	242
	1997	1126	301
	2000	741	209
	2004	977	341
	2008	1119	287
	2011	1250	67