

DECEMBER 18, 2015

Inequality For All

Media Landscape Report

Introduction

Income inequality has recently been gaining recognition as one of the most pressing issues in America. However, it is a complex social problem that stems from a wide swath of interconnected economic, social, and historical factors and can be difficult for the average person to engage with meaningfully. *Inequality for All* is a documentary and social change campaign that seeks to change this. Drawing on the expertise of former US Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, the 2013 film draws on a combination of relatable stories, accessible statistics, and a charismatic main character to advance the audience's knowledge of what income inequality really means for current and future American citizens.

The Harmony Institute (HI) is a nonprofit research organization that uses quantitative and qualitative forms of measurement to understand how stories drive social change. In 2013, we collaborated with the creators of *Inequality for All* to design an impact evaluation plan that would measure social change around the issue of income inequality during the lifetime of the film and campaign, because film stakeholders were interested in capturing the state of public discourse around income inequality prior to the film's release, we looked to four key data sources: public opinion polls, social media conversation, press coverage, and political discussion. In each area, we selected data points that could serve as baselines for comparison.

In this report, we provide new analysis to illustrate shifts in conversation. While it is very difficult to make specific causal claims about the direct impact of any one piece of media on a large social issue, we found substantial evidence of a changing tide around income inequality in America during the lifetime of *Inequality for All*.

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Background

Inequality for All was directed by Jacob Kornbluth and produced by Jen Chaiken and Sebastian Dungan. Guided by Robert Reich, the film takes the viewer on a journey through the past century of American economic history to learn what income inequality is and the impact it has on the wellbeing of everyday people. *Inequality for All*, and its associated campaign, aims to increase awareness of the cost and causes of income inequality in America. It also strives to change perceptions of solutions to inequality and inspire ordinary citizens to work towards economic justice. The film's campaign targets students and educators, labor unions, faith leaders, and elected officials with special screenings and events.

In this report, we provide a landscape analysis of public discourse around income inequality in the United States both before and after the release of *Inequality for All*. When possible, we have noted changes that can be directly attributed to the film and campaign. However, this report does not seek to evaluate whether *Inequality for All* was successful in reaching its goals. Instead, we take a broader view, looking for changes in the national understanding of income inequality. In section one, we examine public opinion polls to assess comprehension and level of concern around the issue. In section two, we look at social media trends around key terms from the film since 2010. In section three, we analyze the quantity and content of news reporting on inequality. In the final section, we discuss political conversation using data from the Congressional Record.

Timeline of Period Under Study

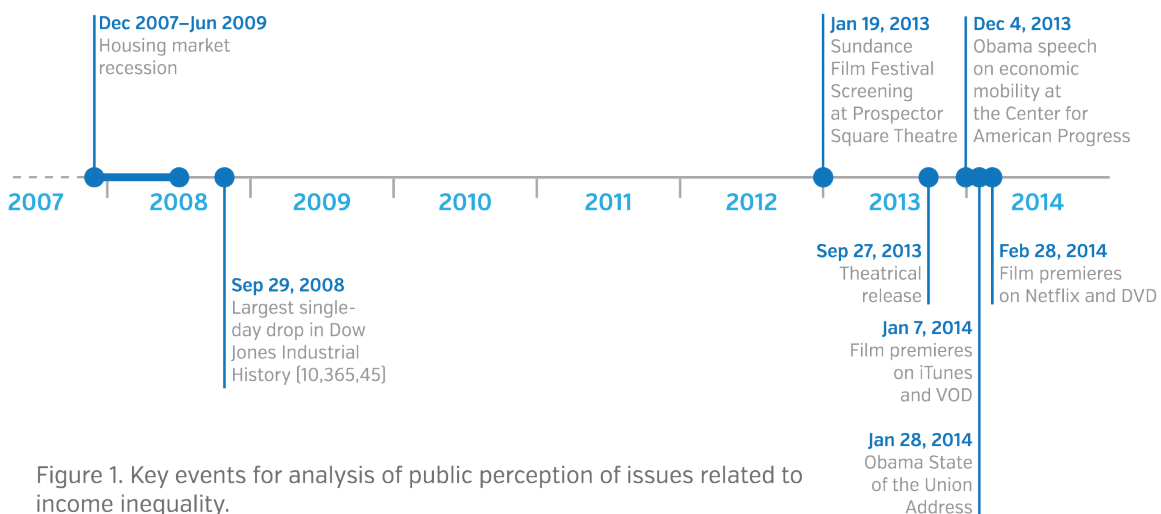


Figure 1. Key events for analysis of public perception of issues related to income inequality.

1. Public Opinion

The film *Inequality for All* was released in 2013 with very clear impact goals in mind. Critical to its campaign was the goal of increasing national public awareness of income inequality and “middle-out” economics, or the idea that the middle class is the engine behind economic growth. To ascertain whether public opinion has shifted in the desired direction, we compare public opinion data gathered prior to the film’s 2013 release, to public opinion data gathered following the release. Building on our 2013 report,¹ we parsed public opinion data collected by the Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey (GSS) into five key areas related to income inequality, including: (1) public perception of the existence of an income gap; (2) sources of inequality; (3) government responsibility in fixing economic inequality; (4) the belief that hard work can lead to success; and (5) the middle class. In this section, we examine how popular opinion within these key areas has changed over time, comparing poll answers from the time period prior to the release of *Inequality for All* to those gathered after its release.

Public perception of an income gap

In order to improve inequality in the US, Americans must first believe that an income gap exists. Second, they must believe that this income gap is growing, rather than disappearing. Even in 2008, five years before *Inequality for All* was released, a majority of Americans believed that income differentials were too big.

This data, gathered by GSS and shown in Figure 2 (next page), illustrates that 62% of Americans surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “differences in income in America are too large.” Moreover, the differences in income were perceived to be growing. According to a 2012 Pew survey, 65% of respondents felt the income gap between the rich and the poor had gotten larger in the past 10 years. The majority among them (57%) stated that this was a bad thing for society (Figure 3).

¹ Data collection was informed by the baselines established in Harmony Institute's 2013 report, [2013]. *Inequality for All: Impact measurement baselines*. New York, NY: Alex Campolo.

Q: Differences in income in America are too large.

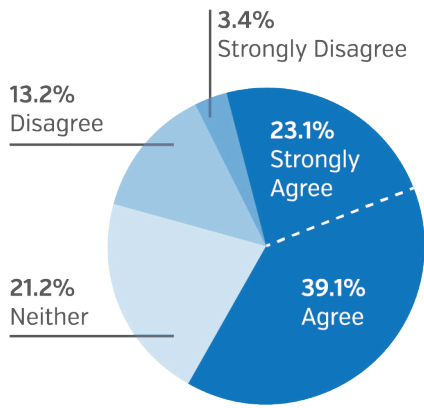
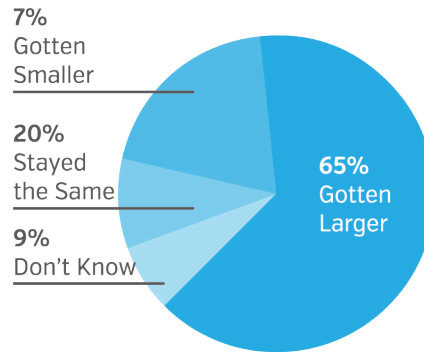


Figure 2. Percentages are based on weighted sample of 1,016 respondents. Based on weighted sample of 1,015.8 respondents. **GSS | 2008**

Q: The income gap between the rich and the poor has... in the past 10 years.



Q: If larger: Is this a good thing or a bad thing for society?



Figure 3. Question from 2012 Pew Research Center survey. Percentages are based on sample of 2,508 respondents. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. **PEW RESEARCH CENTER | July 2012**

In January 2014, one year after *Inequality for All's* release, a Pew poll showed results similar to those found in 2008 and 2012, with 65% of respondents stating that in the past ten years the gap between the rich and everyone else increased, versus just 8% who said it has decreased (Table 1). When respondents were grouped by political affiliation, partisans seem to agree that inequality has grown over the previous ten years, with Democrats showing slightly more support for this statement (68%) than Republicans (61%).

Q: In past 10 years, has gap between rich and everyone else ...

	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
Increased	65	61	68	67
Decreased	8	7	8	8
Stayed the same	25	28	23	23
Don't Know	2	5	1	1
	100	100	100	100

Table 1. Survey conducted Jan 15-19, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. **PEW RESEARCH CENTER | USA TODAY**

This appears to be part of a larger trend towards income inequality becoming a bipartisan issue, as shown in the Congressional Record section of this report. Moreover, in a separate 2014 Pew survey, 57% of Americans considered economic inequality to be a very important issue (Figure 4) when thinking about elections for Congress, with 27% labelling it a somewhat important issue. This could indicate a growing concern for income inequality as a serious social and economic issue.

Q: As you think about the elections for Congress this November (2014), how important is the issue of economic inequality?

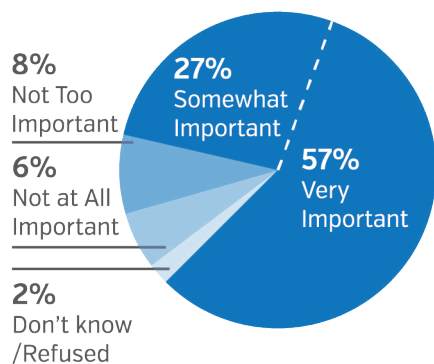


Figure 4. Percentages are based on a sample of 2675 adult registered voters. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER | 2014

Reasons for inequality

When considering the reasons why inequality exists in the first place, a majority of Americans tend to blame the very wealthy. Prior to the release of *Inequality for All*, a 2008 GSS survey showed that 54% of Americans agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “inequality continues to exist because it benefits the rich and powerful.” The idea that the inequality exists to favor the wealthy persists today. A January 2014 Pew poll asked respondents to say in their own words why the gap between the rich and everyone else had grown.² The top answer, given by 20% of respondents, blamed tax loopholes that were skewed to favor the rich. Ten percent cited Congress and government policies as the main reason, and about as many (9%) cited the lackluster job market. Six percent named corporations or business executives as the main culprits of economic inequality.

2 Desilver, Drew. [2014, April 28]. Americans agree inequality has grown, but don't agree on why. Pew Research Center FactTank. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/28/americans-agree-inequality-has-grown-but-dont-agree-on-why/>

Government responsibility

As shown in the previous sections, public opinion demonstrates that Americans continue to be aware of income inequality, see it as an important issue to consider when voting, and also consider it to be something that favors the rich. The question that remains is: whose responsibility is it to fix income inequality? Findings from public opinion polls indicate that, while support for government intervention has seen periodic declines, the overall trend shows that it is increasing.

Gallup surveys asked the question “Do you think our government should or should not redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich?” As reported by the New Yorker, 45% of respondents in 1985 chose the option “Yes, should,” and 51% chose “No, should not.”³ By 2008, during the height of the great recession, the numbers flipped, with a small majority (51%) favoring heavy taxes on the rich. This “more liberal attitude” appears to have been unaffected by the Great Recession and its aftermath, because in 2013, the last time Gallup asked the question, 52% of respondents chose the “Yes, should” option.

More recent survey data from Pew corroborates the Gallup findings that support for government intervention to reduce income inequality has grown over time (Table 2). In 2014, 69% of respondents said that the government should do “a lot/some” to reduce the income gap. Broken down by political affiliation, 45% of Republicans and 90% of Democrats agreed with that statement. Just 26% of respondents said that the government should do “not much/nothing.”

Q: How much, if anything, should the gov't do to reduce the gap between rich and everyone else

	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
A lot/Some	69	45	90	69
Not much/Nothing	26	48	10	28
Don't Know	4	7	1	4
	100	100	100	100

Table 2. Survey conducted Jan 15-19, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER | USA TODAY

3 Cassidy, John. [2015, April 17]. Is Support for Income Redistribution Really Falling? The New Yorker. Retrieved from: <http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/is-support-for-income-redistribution-really-falling>

Hard work and success

A key tenet of the American Dream is the idea that hard work leads to success. *Inequality for All* directly addresses this belief, as it persists in spite of data showing otherwise. Public opinion has shown that while many Americans still hold on to this belief, their numbers have declined over the last fifteen years. In 2000, 74% of people surveyed by Pew agreed with the statement “most people who want to get ahead can make it if they’re willing to work hard.” By 2012, not long before the release of *Inequality for All*, this percentage fell to 58%. In 2014, two years after the release of *Inequality for All*, this belief rose slightly to 60%. It is still too early to tell if this most recent figure represents the beginning of an upward trend back to a more optimistic US, as such a small rise could be due to sampling differences from previous years.

The middle class

Beyond redistributing income via taxation, the government can take other measures to reduce the income gap. One such measure is to assist the middle class. As *Inequality for All* explains, a healthy middle class leads to a healthy economy. Along this line, a 2011 Pew survey asked whether the government does enough to assist the middle class. According to this survey, nearly 60% of Americans believed that the government does not do enough for middle class people, and only 7% believed that it does too much (Figure 5). In a 2015 Pew survey, two years after the release of *Inequality for All*, there has been an increase in the number of people who say the government does not do enough for the middle class, with 72% of respondents saying that the government’s policies have done little or nothing to help middle-class people (Figure 6). When asked whether or not the policies the government put in place post-2008 to help the middle class were successful, most respondents (41%) said no (Figure 7).

Key findings

Q: Do you think the government does too much, not enough or about the right amount for middle class people?

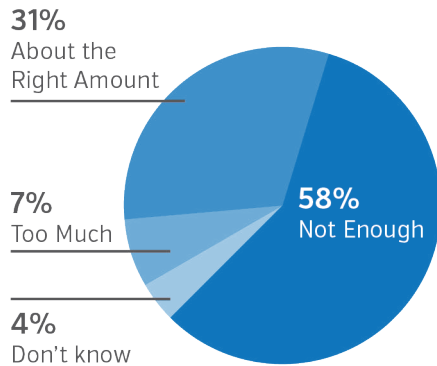


Figure 5. Based on weighted sample of 1,016 respondents.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER | September 2011

Q: How much have government economic policies since the recession helped middle class people?

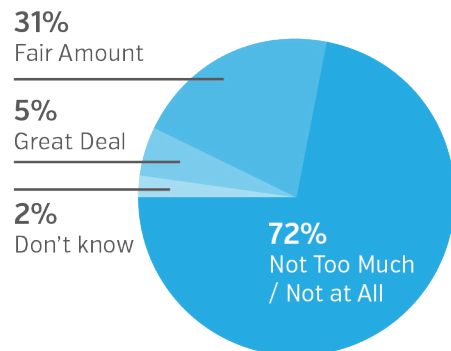


Figure 6. Question from 2015 Pew Research Center survey. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER | February 18–22, 2015

- Americans continue to be aware of the issue of income inequality and many continue to think that the income gap is growing. This percentage has remained steady since the release of *Inequality for All*.
- When examined along political lines, partisans seem to agree that inequality has grown over the last ten years, with Democrats showing slightly more support for this idea than Republicans.
- For many people today, income inequality is an important issue to consider when voting in elections.
- The majority of Americans see the very wealthy as the main reason for the existence of economic inequality. This belief has persisted following the release of *Inequality for All*.
- Support for government action in reducing income inequality appears to be increasing over time. A major factor in changing public opinion on this issue was the 2008 recession.
- Currently, there is a large divide between Republicans and Democrats on the issue of government intervention, with far greater numbers of Democrats supporting government action to reduce inequality.

- Overall, the number of people who believe hard work leads to success appears to be declining. However, there was a slight increase in support for this idea following *Inequality for All*'s release.
- In the years following the release of *Inequality for All*, an increasing number of people think the government is not doing enough to help the middle class.

Q: How much do you think the federal government's economic policies following the recession that began in 2008 have helped middle-class people?

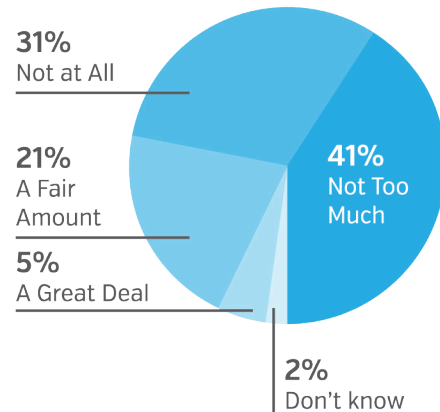


Figure 7. Percentages are based on sample of 1,504 respondents.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER | 2015

2. Social Media

In our baseline report, we analyzed how use of key terms from the film proliferated on social media. We examined the phrases, “*Inequality for All*,” “Robert Reich,” “income gap,” “middle out economics,” and “income inequality,” using the Crimson Hexagon ForsSight platform. While social media audiences are not representative of the overall population, tracking these terms and how their use on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs changed over time gives us insights into how ideas from *Inequality for All* spread. For each term, we queried for the posts containing the exact phrase and examined changes in the overall volume of conversation before and after the film’s theatrical release, changes in sentiment (positive, neutral, negative), geographical location of posts and notable authors, and any notable spikes in volume. We looked at the period from October 28, 2010 to September 26, 2013 as the prerelease period, and the period from September 27, 2013 to Nov 1, 2015 as the postrelease period.

“Inequality for All”

We started by examining the use of the film’s title, “*Inequality for All*,” to measure overall awareness of the film on social media. (see Figure 8, p.16)

Prerelease

Total number of posts: 13,535

Sentiment: 7% positive, 73% neutral, 20% negative
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon’s algorithm)

Authors: 7,197 posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 37% female and 63% male. Out of all content sources, the most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *The Guardian*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The Boston Globe*. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @NewMoviesQuotes, @InequalityFilm, and @TheAppealtoall.

Geography: 4,640 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 1,198 posts, or 26% of US posts overall, and New York with 625 posts, or 13% of US posts overall.

Postrelease

Total number of posts: 35,317 (+21,782)

Sentiment: 12% positive (+5%), 69% neutral (-4%), 19% negative (-1%)
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 20k posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 40% female (+3%) and 60% male (-3%). Out of all content sources, the most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *The Washington Post*, *Fast Company*, and Brown University. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @dancintina, @sondramorrissey, @MarcoDeanMirage, and @SusanMaylone.

Geography: 12,901 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 2694 posts, or 21% of US posts overall (-5%), and New York with 1205 posts, or 9% of US posts overall (-4%).

Notable spikes

The most notable spikes occurred around major releases of the film - its theatrical release on September 27, 2013, its DVD and digital release in early January, 2014, and its Netflix release during the beginning of March, 2014. These notable dates are marked with circles in Figure 8 (p.16).

“Robert Reich” [in conjunction with “film,” “documentary,” “movie,” or “Inequality for All”]:

Prerelease

Total number of posts: 7,644

Sentiment: 6% positive, 55% neutral, 39% negative
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 2,525 posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 36% female and 64% male. Out of all content sources, the most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were Occupy Wall St., Martina Navratilova, and BillMoyers.com. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @USRealityCheck, @lavenderblue27, and @InequalityFilm.

Geography: 1,654 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 422 posts, or 26% of US posts overall, and New York with 168 posts, or 10% of US posts overall.

Postrelease

Total number of posts: 9,558 (+1914)

Sentiment: 12% positive (+6%), 70% neutral (+15%), 18% negative (-18%)
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 4568 posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 37% female (+1%) and 63% male (-1%). Out of all content sources, the most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *FastCompany*, MMFlint, and BillMoyers.com. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @octoberus, @SusanMaylone, and @MarcoDeanMirage.

Geography: 2,622 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 677 posts, or 26% of US posts overall (+0%), and New York with 229 posts, or 9% of US posts overall (+0%).

Notable spikes

The largest spike by far occurred on September 27, 2013 during the film's theatrical release. We also saw spikes in volume in August of 2011 and on the film's two year release anniversary on September 27, 2015.

"Income gap"

Prerelease

Total number of posts: 91,080

Sentiment: 6% positive, 64% neutral, 30% negative
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 38k posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 35% female and 65% male. The most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *The New York Times*, *The Associated Press*, and *The Guardian*. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @incomegap, @FirstIncomes, and @TradeIncomes.

Geography: 19,676 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 2947 posts, or 15% of US posts overall, and New York with 2,701 posts, or 14% of US posts overall.

Postrelease

Total number of posts: 112,972 (+21,892)

Sentiment: 5% positive (-1%), 74% neutral (+10%), 21% negative (-9%)
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 48k posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 36% female (+1%) and 64% male (-1%). The most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were the World Bank, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @Conserv_Report, @northmix, and @earthscraft.

Geography: 28,716 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 4342 posts, or 15% of US posts overall (+0%), and New York with 3513 posts, or 12% of US posts overall (-2%).

Notable spikes

The largest spike during the time frame occurred in early September 2013, just before the release of the film. *The Associated Press* publicized a study which found that the income gap in America was at its largest since 1928. The AP also contributed to another spike in mentions of the income gap later that year when it published survey results that claimed that the income gap was slowing the economy.

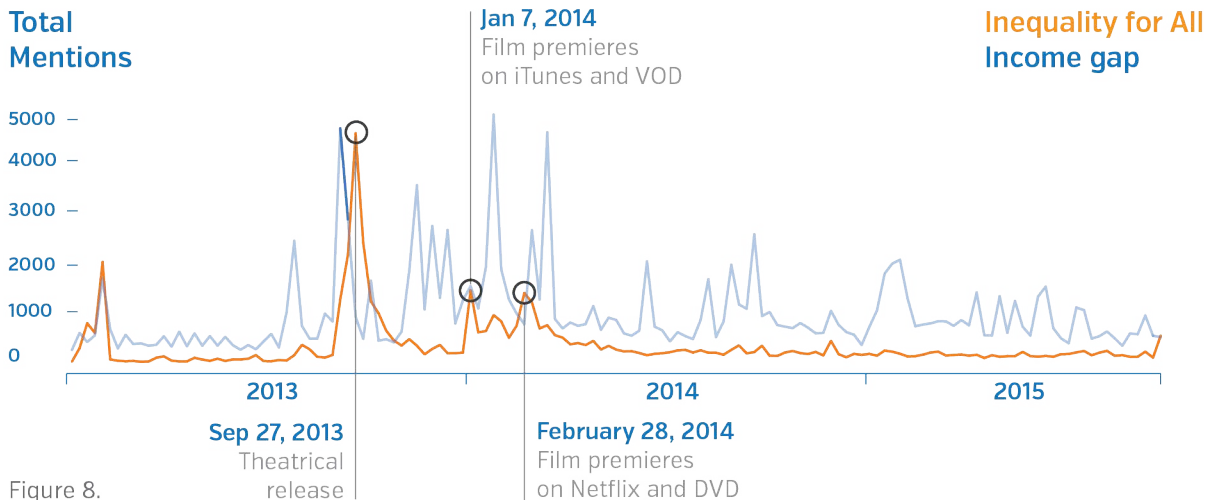
“Middle out economics”

Prerelease

Total number of posts: 1,687

Sentiment: 9% positive, 71% neutral, 20% negative
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Mentions on Twitter, Facebook, and Blogs



Authors: 923 posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 28% female and 72% male. The most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *The Atlantic*, Marketplace, and Yahoo! Finance. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @ericpliu, @NickHanauer, and @EconomicsGuide.

Geography: 702 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were Washington D.C. with 126 posts, or 18% of US posts overall, and Washington with 93 posts, or 13% of US posts overall.

Postrelease

Total number of posts: 1,737 (+50)

Sentiment: 24% positive (+15%), 57% neutral (-14%), 19% negative (-1%) (categorized by Crimson Hexagon's algorithm)

Authors: 759 posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 31% female (+3%) and 69% male (-3%). The most notable authors by Klout score were TheWeek, Instapundit.com, and the Pirate Party UK. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @atomsoffice, @50th_President, and @KSDA14.

Geography: 500 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 76 posts, or 15% of US posts overall (+6%), and Washington D.C. with 71 posts, or 14% of US posts overall (-4%).

Notable spikes

The three largest volume spikes in the use of the term “middle out economics” all occurred during the year 2015. The largest spike in mentions occurred in April, when coverage of the job market in the Wall Street Journal prompted a highly retweeted response from writer/activist Stephen Miller. The second largest spike occurred in July, following an appearance by Clinton spokesperson Karen Finney in a Republican National Committee research video discussing the distinctions between middle class and working poor.

“income inequality”

Prerelease

Total number of posts: 382,929

Sentiment: 4% positive, 54% neutral, 42% negative
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon’s algorithm)

Authors: 190k posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 33% female and 67% male. The most notable Twitter authors by Klout score were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @eSocialistPAC, @TradeIncomes, and @FirstIncomes.

Geography: 101,795 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California, with 15,551 posts, or 15% of US posts overall, and New York with 13,909 posts, or 14% of US posts overall.

Postrelease

Total number of posts: 984,648 (+601,719)

Sentiment: 5% positive (+1%), 61% neutral (+7%), 35% negative (-7%)
(categorized by Crimson Hexagon’s algorithm)

Authors: 523k posts contained data on author gender. These authors were 35% female (+2%) and 65% male (-2%). The most notable authors by Klout score were Forbes, the World Bank, and *The New York Times*. The most active Twitter handles in the conversation were @GossipDetector, @AshelyR4, and @rcooley123.

Geography: 321,233 posts from within the United States contained location data. Of these, the top two states were California with 47,272 posts, or 15% of US posts overall (+0%), and New York with 38,367 posts, or 12% of US posts overall (-3%)

Notable spikes

The largest spike in volume occurred on January 29, 2014 when President Obama gave a State of the Union address that discussed the issue of rising income inequality. The second largest spike in volume was also sparked by a speech given by President Obama. The third largest spike in volume occurred more recently on September 17, 2015, when Bernie Sanders live tweeted the GOP debate, initiating a lively Twitter conversation around income inequality.

Social media queries of key terms

Prerelease → Postrelease

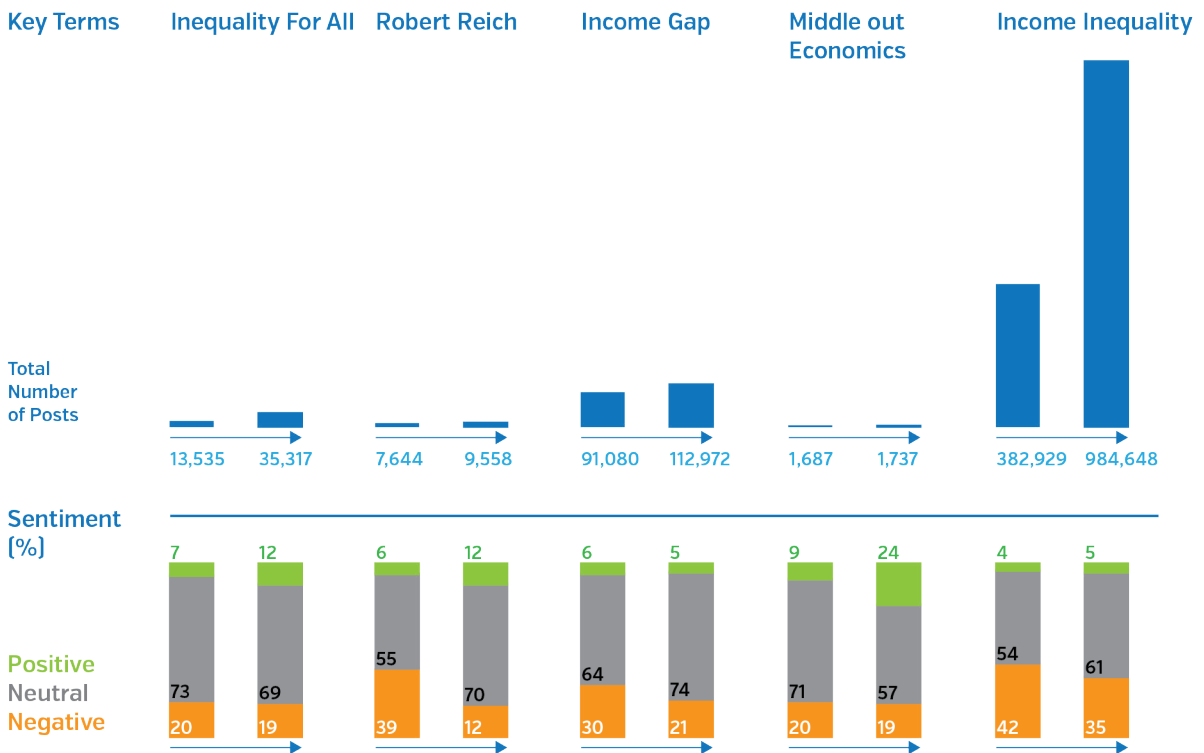


Figure 9.

Key findings

- The phrases with the highest volume are “income inequality,” “income gap,” and “*Inequality for All*.”
- California and New York are consistently among the most active states in the social media conversation around income inequality.
- Uses of the film’s title on social media are tied most closely with events in the film’s distribution, rather than issue-based events.
- Apart from several unique moments of popularity, the phrase “middle out economics” has not become part of the public conversation around inequality.
- The largest change from the period before the film’s theatrical release to after the film’s release was in use of the phrase “income inequality,” which was boosted by about 157%.

3. Press

Inequality for All's September 2013 release came at a crucial time for many Americans. With the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent Occupy Wall Street movement, the 2000s had seen inequality at its worst. In this section, we consider the ways in which income inequality was discussed in the press before and after the film's release. Most notably, issues related to income inequality addressed in the film gained prominence in media coverage, suggesting that the film was well positioned to take advantage of inequality's momentum within the zeitgeist to amplify its impact.

Longitudinal trends

Press coverage tends to reflect broader public sentiment about about key issues. We can observe general changes in public sentiment surrounding social issues by comparing the amount of newspaper coverage of those issues over time. Looking at the frequencies of key phrases related to those issues allows us to investigate how the volume of conversation around critical topics has increased or decreased over time. To begin, we tracked the frequency of three key phrases in newspaper coverage over a twenty-year span. These phrases included: "middle class," "income inequality," and "economic inequality," and were identified in the previous Harmony Institute report as being important phrases to track in press coverage of the issue.⁴ Using ProQuest Newsstand, we measured the number of mentions of each phrase in six of the top US newspapers, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA TODAY*. Results are shown in Figure 10 (Exact numbers can be found in Appendix A, p.36)

4 Harmony Institute. [2013]. *Inequality for All: Impact measurement baselines*, p. 12. New York, NY: Alex Campolo.

Frequency of key terms in newspapers (1995-2015)

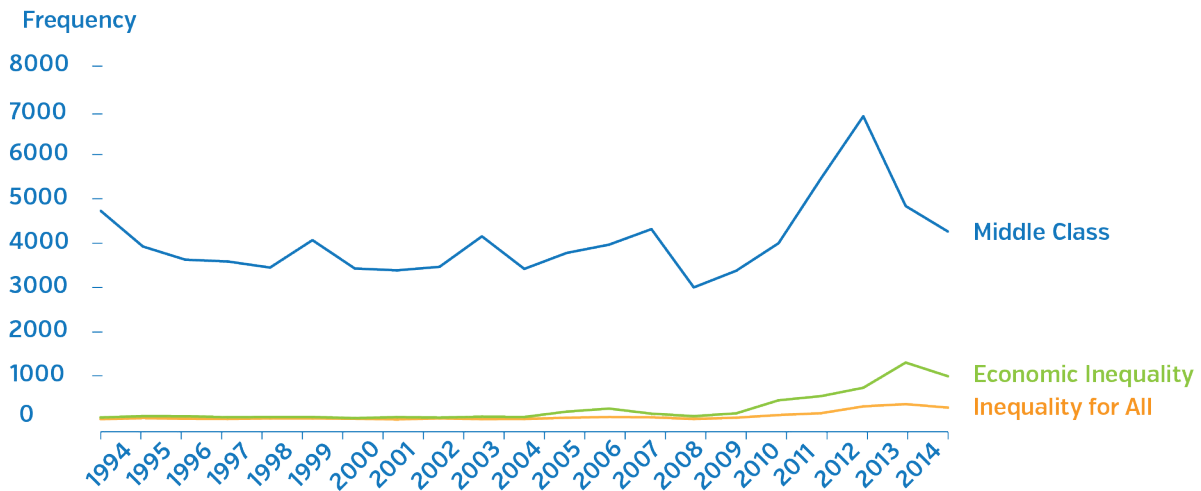


Figure 10. Volume of mentions of key phrases "middle class," "income inequality," and "economic inequality" in six of the top US newspapers, over time.

First, it is clear that press mentions of the term “middle class” greatly outnumbered mentions of “income inequality” and “economic inequality.” Mentions of “middle class” numbered in the thousands, ranging from approximately 3,000 at its lowest in 2009, to roughly 7,000 at its peak in 2013 (the year in which *Inequality for All* was released). With the exception of recent years, mentions of “income inequality” and “economic inequality” stayed below 500. As mentioned in HI’s baseline report, the popularity of the phrase “middle class” makes intuitive sense, given its reference to a broader range of social issues.⁵

In 2011, however, mentions of “income inequality” started to approach 500 per year, rising to 541 in 2012 and eventually peaking in usage at 1,300 mentions in 2014 (the year after *Inequality for All* is released). The peak usage for “economic inequality” also occurred in 2014 with 361 mentions, although this term appeared to be less popular overall than “income inequality.” Thus, the peak usage of these three phrases occurs in the year *Inequality for All* was released, and in the year following its release.

⁵ Ibid.

Although it is possible that with such a wide viewership (*Inequality for All* grossed \$1.2 million in the box office),⁶ the film’s theatrical release played a role in this inequality has grown and shifted is discussed in more detail in the following section. increase, *Inequality for All*’s extensive outreach efforts and campaign likely amplified the film’s impact by disseminating the film’s core messages among partners, stakeholders, and the public at large. The ways in which press conversation around inequality has grown and shifted is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Topics of discussion

Examining the volume of mentions of key phrases related to income inequality provides one piece of the puzzle to understanding how this issue was discussed in the popular press; to gain a better understanding of *what* was being said in the media about those topics, we used the tools available through Media Cloud’s MediaMeter Dashboard.⁷ For this report, we examined mentions of “middle class,” “income inequality,” and “economic inequality” in the US Mainstream Media Collection, which extracts text from 24 mainstream online sources (see list in appendix). Media Cloud allows us to look at online news sources going back to 2011.⁸

We can gain a better qualitative understanding of how issues are discussed in the press using Media Cloud’s word cloud feature. After inputting a keyword or phrase, this tool returns words that are frequently found alongside that search term. This frequency provides us with a better sense of how a particular word or phrase was discussed in online media. Words that are mentioned more often are shown with larger text.

6 Box office information for *Inequality for All* can be found on StoryPilot (<https://storypilot.org/films/inequality-for-all>), which retrieves this information from Box Office Mojo (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=inequalityforall.htm>).

7 Media Cloud is an open source tool created as a joint project of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and the Center for Civic Media at MIT, which enables quantitative and qualitative analysis of online media. Media Cloud’s tools are available at <http://mediacloud.org>.

8 Although there is data available from 2010, it is much more limited than in later years and is thus omitted from this analysis.

“middle class”

As mentioned previously, the phrase “middle class” can refer to range of issues. However, we can get a better sense of what these issues are through a visual analysis of words that co-occurred with the phrase “middle class” during the time period before *Inequality for All*'s release (2011–2012), those which frequently co-occurred during and after *Inequality for All*'s release (2013–2015), and words which are shared by both time periods. These word clouds are illustrated in Figure 11. Interestingly, one of the major changes seen for the term “middle class” in the years during and after the release of *Inequality for All* was the appearance of the word “inequality” co-occurring with it. What this shows is that while “middle class” can refer to a broad range of issues, there is an increase in media coverage of inequality in relation to the middle class in the year of *Inequality for All*'s release, as well as in subsequent years.

To further explore this co-occurrence, we can refer to some of the articles in which “middle class” and “inequality” are mentioned. Media Cloud returns a random sample of the sentences that match each query, along with links to any articles shown. A cursory investigation of these articles revealed that much of the discussion of the middle class and income inequality appeared to be in part due to President Obama's December 2013 speech on the economy, given at an event hosted by the Center for American Progress. Here, Obama was quoted as saying, “There's a dangerous and growing inequality and lack of upward mobility that has jeopardized middle class America's basic bargain: that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead.”⁹

9 Goldfarb, Zachary A. [2013, December 4]. Obama: 'Dangerous and growing inequality' has jeopardized middle class. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2013/12/04/obama-dangerous-and-growing-inequality-has-jeopardized-the-middle-class>.

Middle class

Prerelease

mitt ryan ohio taxpayers bush boehner unemployment
medicare lifestyle millionaires expire deductions trillion hike
detroit joe paul squeezed pledge rivals reid restore media ensure
fueling rally true mid lawmakers ordinary reagan brazil tea david
payroll russia poll britain resonate jersey paycheck baldwin

Shared

tax families americans obama
economic republicans economy
romney education democrats america
wealthy students china children college
campaign wealth corporate debt conservative
congress gop deficit child wealthiest biden barack labor
strengthen study immigration crisis hurt teachers
washington chinese shrinking war brands free affluent india
agenda indian warren john london fact british presidential
mortgage global rebuild love earners independent burgeoning

Postrelease

clinton inequality elite values gap boost suburb
mexico thaksin obamacare southern tory prosperity sanders
trump super african thriving subsidies africa bargain priorities
sector teenager investors economist poorer spokesman thailand los
stagnating celebrate yingluck pre san extremists online pits english
latin asia yorkers

A further investigation into press coverage showed that Obama is not the only politician to treat income inequality and its threat to the middle class as a central issue. In fact, as many of the 2016 presidential candidates began their campaigns, we saw a rise in discussion of the middle class and inequality, with many candidates making this issue a focal point in their campaigns.

Figure 11. Comparative word clouds for “middle class.”

“income inequality”

The word clouds for “income inequality” show that for the period of time during and after the release of *Inequality for All*, this phrase was commonly associated with (and used by) various politicians (Figure 12). These politicians include 2016 Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, as well as New York City mayor Bill De Blasio (elected in January 2014). Again, this appears to show one of the ways in which income inequality is increasingly becoming a priority for many politicians, particularly Democrats.

Another critical contributor to the increase in conversation around income inequality was Pope Francis. Not long after becoming Pope in 2013, Francis declared that “wealth and income inequality is a moral issue” that needs to be addressed as a priority.¹⁰ This sentiment has continued throughout his tenure as Pope, and last year was echoed by President Obama in a 2014 State of the Union address¹¹. Also in the 2013-2015 period the word “tackle” co-occurred more frequently with “income inequality.” Exploring news articles that appeared online during the 2013-2015 period shows that income inequality was not simply a given in much of the popular narrative; rather it was a serious issue to be “tackled” by government at the federal and local levels.

Income inequality

Prerelease

greed romney crisis value african census meanwhile timothy deficit soaring zuccotti faster professor overall buffett britain hispanics mitt mid europe mortality chicago manhattan massachusetts richard child complaints africa resentment edward reversed rebound prosperity santorum bubble frustration surge texas unfair krueger spotlight conard chinese inflation stiglitz gatsby grievances sector bloomberg singapore unprecedented

Shared

inequality economic tax american obama america democrats economy wealth campaign corporate education republicans gap study widening global presidential economists unemployment agenda washington oecd labor wealthy immigration families fact gini recession children debt colleges stagnated conservative china poll coefficient barack stagnant worsening lowest billionaires boost populist risen media decrying richest

Postrelease

clinton sanders blasio mayor climate topic hillary tackle highlighting exacerbate congress pope bernie solution francis piketty fuel embrace california earners warren sen ceo war iowa activists yorkers biden david redistribute mcdonald rally pledged environmental wealthiest gop thomas bush john advocate priority anti hurt gender disparities nbc racism correlation rival renewed student

Figure 12. Comparative word clouds for “income inequality.”

10 Koba, Mark. [2013, August 7] Pope on world economy: Is he market-friendly or a rebel? NBC News. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/blunt-Pope-francis-targets-world-economy-again-again-6C10860679>.

11 Hammond, Andrew. [2014, January 28]. Barack Obama and Pope Francis: Unlikely comrades? CNN. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/28/world/obama-Pope-comrades>.

“economic inequality”

Although the phrase “economic inequality” has been used less frequently than “income inequality” in the press, “economic inequality” was commonly used in relation to the Occupy movements, including Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, which protested social and economic inequality worldwide. This is corroborated by the word cloud in Figure 13, in which many of the words that co-occurred with “economic inequality” prior to 2013 were words that were associated with these movements, such as “encampment,” “oakland” and “zuccotti” (the name of the Manhattan park occupied by protesters).

In the period after the release of *Inequality for All*, many of these terms disappear from press discussions, and the top stories about economic inequality again concerned presidential candidates and the Pope. Additionally, as discussions of violence against people of color increased, particularly at the hands of police, the connections between economic and racial inequality were more frequently made, as indicated by the words “violence” and “racism.”¹² Just as “income inequality” became an issue to “tackled” in 2013 and beyond, “economic inequality” also requires “tackling” particularly as presidential candidates laid out their plans to resolve this widening gap.

Economic Inequality

Prerelease

greed encampment oakland manhattan san free francisco nationwide zuccotti plaza chicago dismantling momentum london denounces romney sparked decry bailouts perceived los portland angeles sprang populist children unrest clash solidarity undue disparities mid privacy paul europe collaborative super wealthiest homeless highlighting socio sustain cathedral taiwan celebrate rage abuses media online critique austerity privileged egypt teachers millionaire

Shared

economic inequality corporate obama americans democrats america campaign global unemployment education tax economy mayor republican activists corruption wealth rallies washington reuters anti study widening families students fact wealthy labor gap african crisis war immigration colleges barack africa china topics riot brutality solution acknowledge fueling violent

Postrelease

sanders clinton pope climate blasio francis agenda racism violence discrimination presidential tackling environmental polls economist gender bernie catholic hillary yellen malley recession persistent boston martin congress piketty vermont crime brazil debt christian rampant advocating sen symptom teen abortion baltimore pregnancy embrace ferguson broader injustice unequal worldwide deepening rival pre ensure warren elites john priority bloomberg

Figure 13. Comparative word clouds for “economic inequality.”

12 See e.g., Carroll, Rory. (2014, August 21). Ferguson: a blue collar town made desperate by years on the edge. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/21/ferguson-community-suffers-clashes-jobs-equality>.

Film-specific topics

In addition to examining how and when general topics related to income inequality have been discussed in the press, there are also a number of very specific topics that are of interest for this analysis. These specific topics were highlighted by *Inequality for All* as being: (1) direct causes of increased income inequality, and (2) problems that stemmed from income inequality. We are interested in understanding the degree to which the release of *Inequality for All* coincided with an increase of discussion around these key topics, which we refer to as “rooted problems.” Rooted problems range from lack of higher education investment, to wage stagnation, to the rise/decline of unions (both at the national and local level), to the rapid expansion of the tech industry, among others. To better understand how these rooted problems were discussed in the press, we analyzed newspaper articles about income inequality that contained terms from the following groups:

- Unions: "rise of union" or "unions"
- Wage Stagnation: "stagnant wages" or “wage stagnation”
- Technology: “Apple” or “Amazon” or “Yahoo”
- Low Income Families: “low income families” or “minimum wage workers”
- Higher education: “Higher education” or “college graduation rates” or “college enrollment”
- Wall Street: “wall street” with (“reform” or “regulate”)
- Globalization: “globalization”

We did this by querying the ProQuest Newsstand database for news articles between 2005–2014 containing one of three terms synonymous with “income inequality” (“income inequality,” “economic inequality,” and “wealth inequality,”) and, of those, calculated the percentage of articles that also included a key term associated with one of the topics listed above.¹³ In other words, these percentages were normalized for the total number of articles published on income inequality in a year.

¹³ In addition to the six newspapers mentioned previously, this analysis also considered three additional top US newspapers (to gain a broader perspective): the New York Daily News, the New York Post and the Denver Post.

Frequency of film-specific terms

Percentage of articles

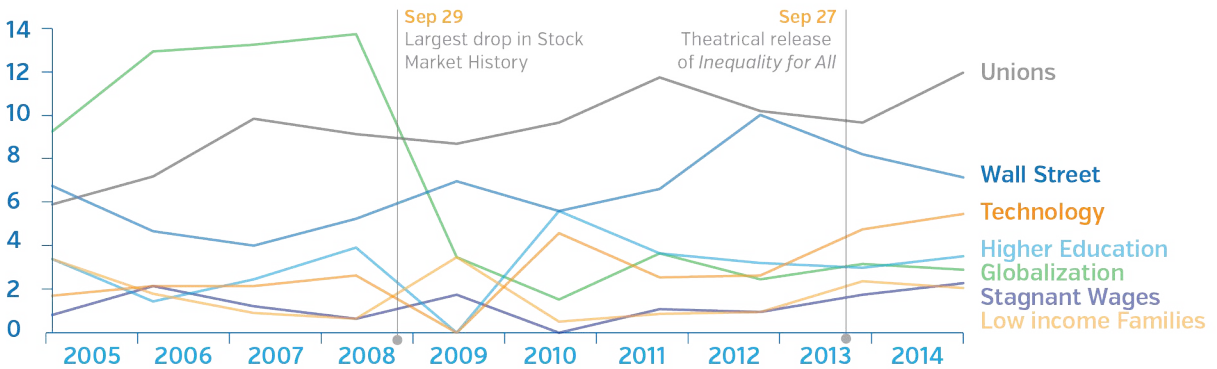


Figure 14. Percent of articles that include income inequality phrases (“income inequality”, “economic inequality” and “wealth inequality”) and specified topic phrases. Data was normalized over all articles released that include income inequality.

Looking at this data, it is important to keep in mind that the number of articles referencing income inequality rose significantly beginning in 2009 to reach an unprecedented number, as shown in Figure 14. This means that if a rooted problem phrase simply kept level with its previous year’s percentage rates from the years after 2009, the overall mentions of these phrases with income inequality increased significantly. Controlling for this, we find that as the conversation around income inequality grew and changed over the years, mentions of rooted problems increased overall. This is good news for the goals of *Inequality for All*, as it shows that this conversation now includes more of the ideas put forth by the film than ever before.

There are a few interesting findings to note here. First, there is a sharp increase in union phrases (“rise of union” or “unions”) in the period before the 2007 - 2009 economic crash. Mentions of unions decreased in the years during the crash, and began to rise again as the economy recovered. Globalization, on the other hand, decreased significantly in 2009 (-10%). This decrease in mentions of globalization may be a function of the shifting attention of the press during this difficult economic period, as newspaper articles may have focused more on domestic issues due to the economic crash and recession. Globalization mentions never rose back to their pre-2008 level. The influence of the housing market crash can also be seen with the increase of Wall Street phrases (“wall street” with “reform” or “regulate”) through

2007-2009. However, after dropping off in 2010, the use of Wall Street phrases increased again in 2014 (7%). Increases can also be seen in the technology phrases (“Apple” or “Amazon” or “Yahoo”), which more than doubled their frequency by the end of the timeline.

Key findings

- There has been a general increase in the volume of mentions of “middle class,” “income inequality” and “economic inequality” in the press, particularly since 2009.
- Use of these phrases peaked in the year of and the year following the release of *Inequality for All*.
- The use of the phrase “middle class” began to commonly co-occur with the word “inequality” in 2013 and beyond, particularly as politicians began to increasingly treat income inequality and its threat to the middle class as a central issue.
- Use of the phrase “income inequality” also indicates the extent to which it is increasingly becoming a priority for many politicians.
- In the years during and after the release of *Inequality for All*, there was an increase in discussion of “economic inequality” and “income inequality” as issues that need “tackling” or to be “tackled.”
- The phrase “economic inequality” is used much less frequently than “income inequality,” and appears to have experienced its highest usage during the active years of the Occupy protest movements.
- Mentions of rooted problems (film-specific issues that have caused or are caused by income inequality) have increased over time in articles about income inequality.
- This increase in mentions of rooted problems suggests that conversations within the press became more closely aligned with the goals of *Inequality for All*.

4. Congressional Record

To see how concepts from *Inequality for All* have rippled through the political sphere, HI tracked the use of several key frames in Congressional discourse. We followed up on three phrases from our 2013 baseline report in 2013: “income inequality,” “economic inequality,” and “middle class,” and also ran a search for the film’s title. Over the period since the film’s release, we saw a huge increase in the general conversation around inequality (Figure 15).

Frequency of key terms “income inequality” and “economic inequality” in the Congressional Record, 1996-2015

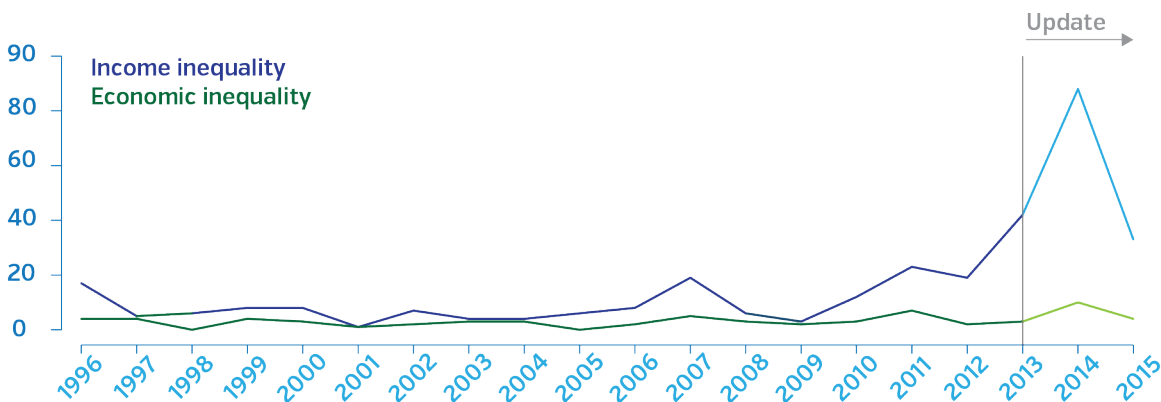


Figure 15. We queried the records of both the Senate and the House of Representatives using the Sunlight Foundation’s Capitol Words API.

As in the 2013 baselines, mentions of both “income inequality” and “economic inequality” were significantly rarer than mention of the phrase “middle class.”

Breaking down mentions by party showed results largely consistent with our earlier analysis. “Income inequality” and “economic inequality” were most frequently concerns of the Democratic party (Figure 16). Between January of 2010 and August of 2013, Democrats mentioned “income inequality” 59 times, while Independents mentioned the term eight times and Republicans only five. However, we have seen income inequality becoming an increasingly cross-party issue, even as the overall volume of conversation grew. Following the release of the film, we found 91 mentions of “income inequality” by Democrats, 37 mentions by Republicans, and 14 mentions by Independents.

We saw the opposite effect for the relatively less popular term, “economic inequality.” (Figure 17) Prior to the theatrical release of *Inequality for All*, Democrats used the term 9 times while Republicans used it only once. Following the release of the film, Democrat use of the term increased to 15 occurrences, while Republicans used the phrase once.

Yearly mentions of “income inequality” by political party

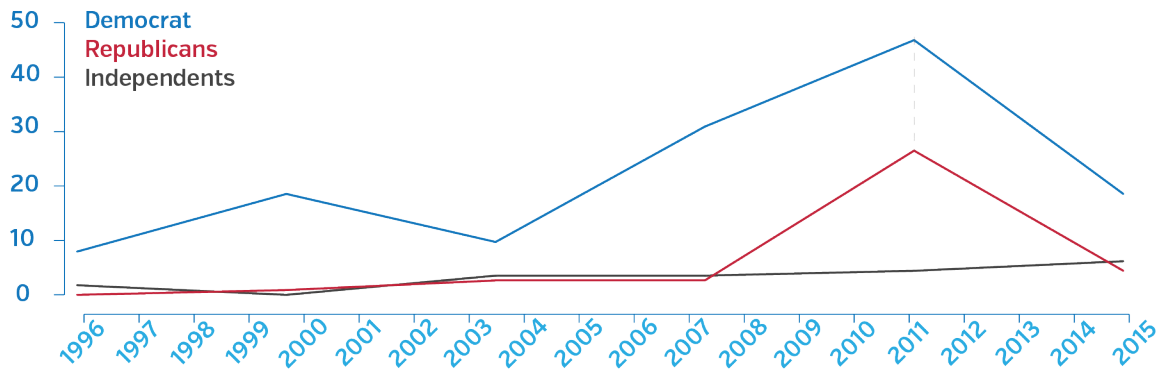


Figure 16. Data from Sunlight Foundation's Capitol Words API.

Yearly mentions of “economic inequality” by political party

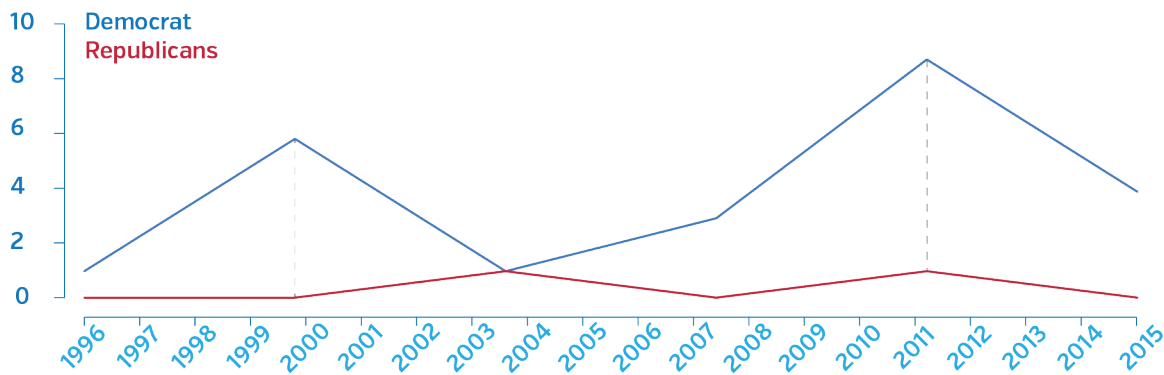


Figure 17. Data from Sunlight Foundation's Capitol Words API. There was no use of the phrase by Independents during 2010–2015.

Top users of the phrase, “income inequality” since the release of *Inequality for All*

Name	Issue Mentions	State
Barbara Lee*	11	California
Bernard Sanders*	11	Vermont
Hakeem Jeffries	10	New York
John Cornyn	7	Texas
Richard Durbin*	7	Illinois
Jim McGovern	6	Massachusetts
John Thune	6	South Dakota
Mark Pocan	5	Wisconsin
Dianne Feinstein*	4	California
Andy Barr	3	Kentucky
Eleanor Norton	3	District of Columbia

* Congresspeople who were in the top ten users of the phrase “income inequality” between 2010 and the release of *Inequality for All*

Table 3. We can see evidence of the increasing cross-party concern about inequality in the changing portions of party representation among the top users of the phrase “income inequality.”

Despite finding no direct mentions of the film’s title, we found a reference to the documentary by Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar from Minnesota. She used evidence from the documentary to support the Minimum Wage Fairness Act during discussion on April 29, 2014. She stated:

“I once saw a documentary that Robert Reich did where he talked to a major CEO with tons of money. He took [Reich] into his room, and he said: OK. I only have three pairs of jeans. How can you really have more than three pairs of jeans? Maybe you could have four, but you really don't need more than that.

His point was this: If we want to have an economy that works, we cannot have all of the profits and money sucked up by the people who run things. We want them to be rewarded for their work, but they can only buy so many jeans.

If you have that money go fairly across the spectrum, then everyone gets to buy their pair of jeans.”

The bill was put forth for consideration several times in the spring of 2014 but after numerous delays, no decisive action was ever taken.

Key findings

- The phrase “middle class” continued to dwarf conversations of the more specific terms “income inequality” and “economic inequality.”
- 2014 was the most significant year in recent history for volume of political discussion around income inequality.
- The political discussion around income inequality has grown increasingly bipartisan over the past five years, shifting away from being a purely Democratic concern. This finding is supported by public opinion data as well, with both sides agreeing that inequality has grown over the last ten years.
- *Inequality for All* played a role in the proposal of a bill, but has not yet resulted in any enacted legislation.

5. Conclusion

This report summarizes public perception around the issue of income inequality in the US before and after the 2013 release of the film *Inequality for All*. In section one, we examined public opinion polls to assess comprehension and level of concern around the issue. In section two, we looked at social media trends around key terms from the film since 2010. In section three, we analyzed the quantity and content of news reporting on inequality. In the final section, we discussed political conversation using data from the Congressional Record.

Public opinion polls indicate that Americans continue to be aware of the issue of income inequality and many continue to think that the income gap is growing. This percentage remained steady since the release of *Inequality for All*. Support for government action in reducing income inequality increased over time; in the years following the release of *Inequality for All*, an increasing number of people thought that the government was not doing enough to help the middle class.

There has been a general increase in the volume of mentions of “middle class” “income inequality” and “economic inequality” in the press, particularly since 2009 and peaking in the year of and the year following the release of *Inequality for All*. In the years during and after the release of *Inequality for All*, there was also an increase in discussion of “economic inequality” and “income inequality” as issues that need “tackling” or to be “tackled.”

Both, Congressional Record data and public opinion polls show that political discussion around income inequality has grown increasingly bipartisan over the past five years, shifting away from being a purely Democratic concern.

Additional patterns emerged in news and social media, with some notable findings throughout. In particular, mentions of “rooted problems” (film-specific issues that have caused or are caused by income inequality) have increased over time in articles about income inequality. This increase in mentions of related, existing topics, whether wage stagnation or education, suggests that the issue of inequality is being covered in greater depth, and perhaps in more concrete terms, aligning more closely with the goals of *Inequality for All*.

Inequality for All was released at a critical moment in time, during a period of growing interest in income inequality, particularly as it has affected the middle class in America. Although it is difficult to show a causal relationship between the release of this film and the changes in conversation that have occurred over time, it is clear that interest in this film, and the social issues it addresses, have persisted. Visits to *Inequality for All*'s Wikipedia page—a measure of public attention or info-seeking behavior—still numbered more than over 1000 pageviews a month for several months in 2015, two years after the film's release.

According to Robert Reich, *Inequality for All*'s charismatic narrator, “we make the rules of the economy—and we have the power to change those rules.” In this report we reviewed the moments at and degrees to which similar beliefs resonated with the American public. Media makers and advocates who seek to grow awareness, shift the conversation, and generate social change around an issue are well-served by aligning their messages with themes in public discourse. In developing a nuanced understanding of the landscape of public discourse, media makers are best positioned to identify opportunities to communicate their messages most effectively to their audiences.

Appendix A

Volume of mentions of key phrases “middle class,” “income inequality” and “economic inequality” in six of the top US newspapers, over time. Highest volume years are highlighted.

	Middle class	Income inequality	Economic inequality
1995	4,732	60	20
1996	3,923	89	45
1997	3,625	87	31
1998	3,585	66	26
1999	3,447	72	40
2000	4,067	71	40
2001	3,426	45	30
2002	3,385	68	14
2003	3,464	58	40
2004	4,153	77	21
2005	3,417	70	25
2006	3,778	191	53
2007	3,965	260	70
2008	4,316	145	62
2009	2,999	89	25
2010	3,375	152	54
2011	3,997	447	114
2012	5,459	541	155
2013	6,868	730	309
2014	4,838	1,300	361
2015	4,260	990	281

Appendix B

Media Cloud's US mainstream media collection includes 24 media sources :

<https://sources.mediameter.org/#media-tag/8875027/details>

BBC

CBS News

CNET

CNN

Daily Mail

Daily Telegraph

Examiner.com

FOX News

Forbes

Guardian

LA Times

MSNBC

New York Times

Newsweek

Reuters

San Francisco Chronicle

TIME.com

The Boston Globe

The Daily News New York

The Huffington Post

The New York Post

USA Today

Wall Street Journal

Washington Post

About HI

The Harmony Institute (HI) is an interdisciplinary research center that studies the impact of entertainment. HI's work ranges from applied media research to university partnerships on studies exploring fundamental questions around the nature of audience engagement and societal impact.

HI was founded by John S. Johnson (BuzzFeed, EYEBEAM, and Johnson Research Labs) in 2008. After years in the film industry, Johnson recognized the need to better understand entertainment's impact on audiences. HI was formed out of a desire to see entertainment meet the pressing needs of society, and to build a bridge between the worlds of mass media and science.

HI has evaluated projects ranging from social issue documentaries to fictional TV movies and multi-platform campaigns, and has conducted research on behalf of The Ford Foundation, MTV, DARPA, and Free Press, among others. Media coverage of HI's work includes profiles in Science, The New York Times, Fast Company, GOOD, and others.

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