THE INTERACTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMES AND INEQUALITY IN THE US.

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Open Forum CES Paper Series

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a content analysis of newspaper articles to show how material social inequality and social justice views that are articulated in a public media discourse interact. It shows that before the 1970s, the New York Times mostly described social inequality in egalitarian terms and advocated that social inequality should be structured by egalitarian principles. When material social inequality increased in the US after 1980, this was accompanied both by increased descriptions of social inequality as structured by individualistic social justice principles and by increased arguments that social inequality should follow individualistic justice principles. In this sense, this paper shows that social inequality and social justice views about inequality coincide, with justice views having changed from predominant egalitarianism before the 1980s to predominant individualism after the 1980s.

The Interaction of Social Justice Frames and inequality in the us.

INTRODUCTION.

What do American newspapers portray as fair social inequality? Do these social justice frames follow developments in factual social inequality, articulating as 'ought' what 'is'? This paper analyzes what the New York Times articulates as factual and fair social inequality since the 1950s, to contribute to answering this question.

The existing literature has developed two mechanisms, through which social inequality and social justice views about it might interact. First, what is articulated as fair social inequality might follow factual social inequality. The mechanism behind this, by which social justice arguments adapt to changes in social inequality, is derived from Homans (1974: 249f.), who argues that 'what people say ought to be is determined in the long run and with some lag by what they find in fact to be the case.' Melvin Lerner's (1982) 'Just World Theory' reformulates this. Lerner argues that even though social life is fundamentally unfair, people have a strong desire to see the world as just, so that 'one of the most commonly observed characteristics of social existence is that people imbue social regularities with an "ought quality' (Lerner 1982: 10; also cf. Bénabou / Tirole 2006). According to this mechanism, what newspapers articulate as fair social inequality should adapt to factual changes in social inequality.

Low social inequality should be followed by egalitarian social justice statements. High social inequality should be followed by individualistic social justice statements. Survey studies indeed show that attitudes about fair social inequality adapt to devel-

opments in factual social inequality (Kelley / Zagorski 2005) and to existing welfare arrangements (Arts / Gelissen 2001). But it remains unclear from these studies whether the public discourse about social justice, which newspapers display, also adapts to changing social inequality.

The second mechanism, by which social justice frames in newspapers could relate to changes in social inequality, is the opposite of an adaptation mechanism. It is a 'thermostat mechanism' (cf. Schelling 1978: chapter three). According to this conception, articulated social justice frames do not follow, but influence social inequality. In this conception, increased social inequality triggers egalitarian justice norms, which counter social inequality. Conversely, decreased social inequality eventually triggers individualistic social justice norms, which argue against low social inequality. Like a thermostat heating up a cold room and cooling down a hot room, moral justice views influence social inequalities towards what is widely articulated as fair. This model relies on research by Brooks and Manza (2006; 2007), who argue that social policy is responsive to moral views about it (for social policy responsiveness, also cf. Page / Shapiro 1983). Specifically, Gilens showed that depiction of African Americans in newspaper stories made Americans connect poverty with minorities, so that they were less disposed to social policy that could effectively ameliorate poverty. This mechanism further relies on research by David Brady (2009), who argues that social policy determines social inequality to a large degree. According to this conception, widespread moral views about social inequality influence social policy, which influences social inequality.

From this perspective, it is no surprise that studies show that egalitarian values go together with more perceived social inequality (Osberg / Smeeding 2006) and more egalitarian welfare states (Breznau 2010; Svallfors 1997; 2010). But these studies leave the question open what role public media discourse plays in this. It is possible, judging from these stud-

ies, that public discourse links social inequality to moral norms about it. Namely, widespread moral norms could be articulated through newspapers, by journalists who need to be in touch with their audience. These articulated social justice frames could in turn influence what politicians see as the prevailing moral climate, to which they adapt social policy, which influences social inequality. Thirdly, the possibility exists that there is no link between changes in factual social inequality and articulated social justice norms about it. This paper therefore tries to understand what link, if any, exists between social inequality and what newspapers articulate as fair social inequality. To do so, it builds on a methodology of text analysis, with which Gamson and Modigliani (1989) reconstruct how nuclear power was presented in the media since the 1950s. Using a similar analysis, Ferree et al. (2002) have reconstructed what the media presented as morally acceptable abortion policy at different times. Martin Gilens (2000) has analyzed four decades of American news coverage about poverty, showing that 'Americans hate welfare' because the media associates poverty with blacks, so that racial stereotypes prevent Americans to support measures that could reduce social inequality. This paper uses a content analysis to understand whether what newspapers describe as fair social inequality changes with – or precedes changes of – factual social inequality. I will go into a more detailed discussion of the methodology after highlighting what I mean by changes in inequality.

THE U-TURN IN INEQUALITY.

To measure social inequality, I look at changes in the Gini coefficient of household disposable income since 1960, which is as far back as comparable data on the Gini coefficient goes. Frederick Solt (2009) put together a database of disposable household incomes (after taxes and transfer), adjusted according to the standard set by the Luxembourg Income Study. The following line graph shows how social inequality, measured by this standard, has developed since 1960 in the US.

Figure 1: Gini of household incomes since 1960
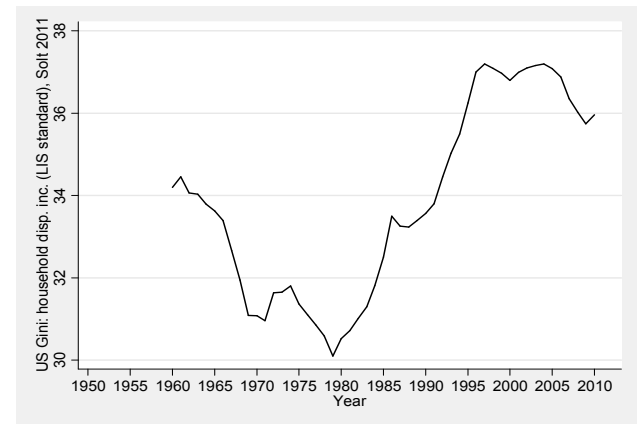
What is most striking is the U-shaped decline of social inequality until 1979, followed by an increase of inequality and its stabilization in 1995. This increase of inequality went together with income gains especially of the richest 10 and 1 percent of American society. As the following figures show, the richest 10 percent of Americans had roughly 32 percent of all income until 1980. Then their incomes started to rise to more than 45 percent of all incomes in 2010.

Figure 2: Income share of top 10 percent since 1950
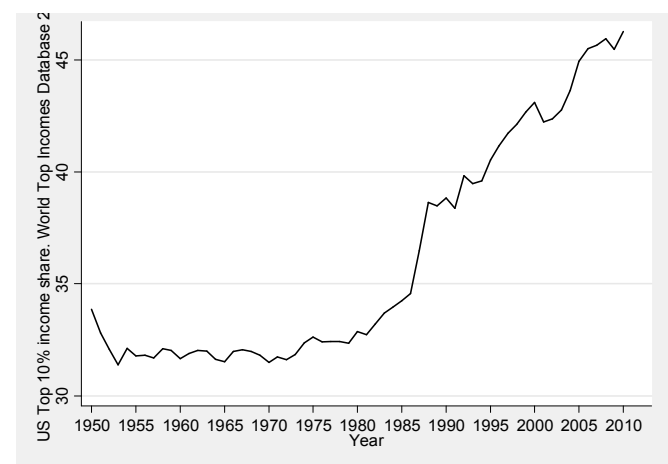
While the top 10 percent increased their share of all incomes by roughly 50 percent, most of the gains went to the top 1 percent, which doubled their income share during the same period. Not shown here, the incomes of the top 1 percent declined from 11 percent of all incomes in 1950 to 8 percent in 1980 and then started to rise to 18 percent of all incomes after 2000 (World Top Incomes Database

2012). When plotting the three different measures of social inequality into one graph (with a different scale for each indicator), one observes a great U-turn of social inequality, which decreases until around 1980 and then increases.

**Figure 3: Changes in Gini and in the income share of top 1 and top 10 percent**
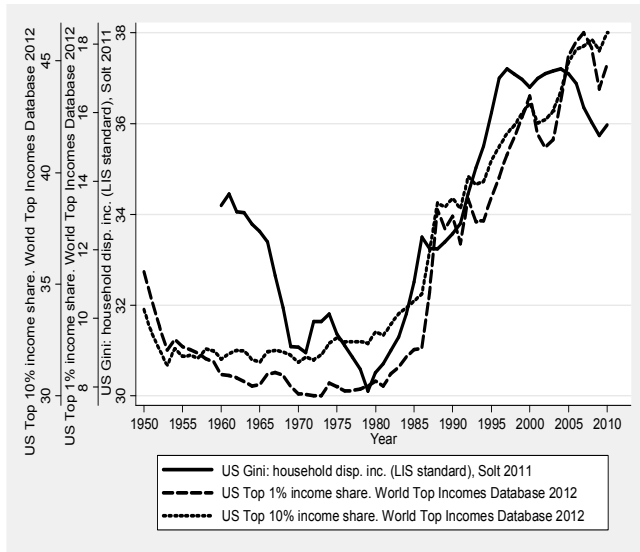
Given this fundamental change in social inequality, one can wonder how social justice views in the media changed. Did media discourse favor a decline in social inequality, while social inequality was actually declining – until about 1980? And did media statements about social justice favor an increase in social inequality, when social inequality did in fact increase? What happened during the period when social inequality was relatively low, in the 1970s and beginning 1980s, which was also the time when social inequality stopped to decrease and started to increase? Were egalitarian justice norms widespread in media statements then? Did they decline, compared to justice statements that advocated higher social inequality? The following section shows how changes in social inequality coincided with social justice statements about it.

HOW MUCH DO NEWSPAPERS TALK ABOUT SOCIAL INEQUALITY?

I first measured how much newspapers talk about social inequality in terms of social justice. I checked how many articles in the New York

Times and the Wall Street Journal contain the search term 'social justice' per year. I chose these two newspapers because they align well on a left-right political spectrum and because their archives go back to 1950, accessible through the Proquest Historical newspapers database. I searched for how often the term 'social justice' occurred, because it indicates how much social inequality is talked about in terms of justice. The following graph shows how often 'social justice' as a search term can be found in the two newspapers as a percentage of all articles that appeared in each newspaper, compared to the above-mentioned Gini of household incomes.
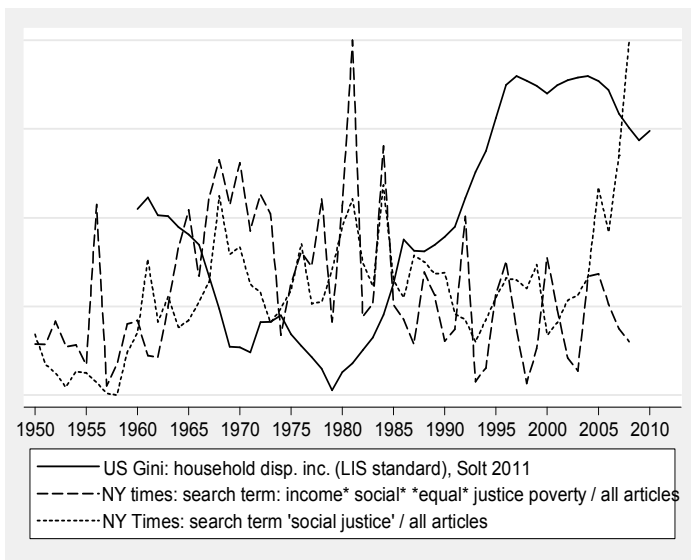
Figure 4: Search term 'social justice' in the NY Times and the Wall Street Journal
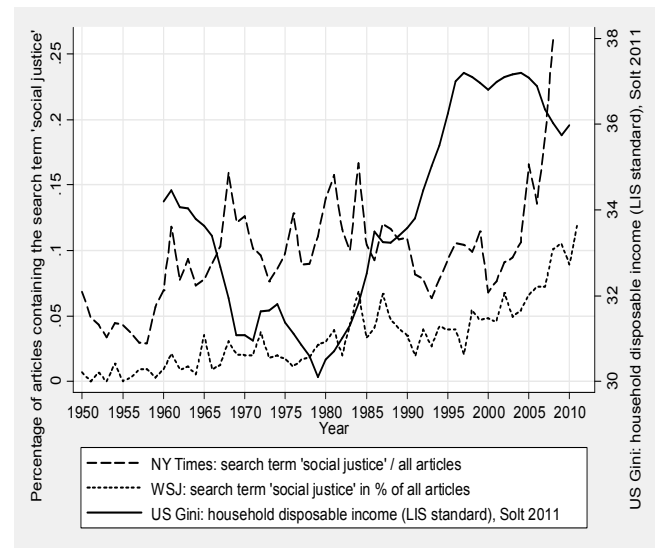
The continuous line (values on the right axis) shows the Gini coefficient for social inequality (it is the same as in Figure 1). The two dashed lines show what percentage of articles in the NY Times and the Wall Street Journal contain the phrase 'social justice' (values on left y axis). What is interesting is that while social inequality was fairly low, from the end of the 1960s to the early 1980s, a large share of the articles in the NY Times nonetheless talks about social justice. Attention to social justice then decreased, when social inequality increased starting around 1985. Attention again surged only after 2005. Compared to the NY Times, a lesser percentage of articles in the Wall Street Journal talks about

a lot about it. Then attention dies down somewhat in the 1990s and again surges after 2000. This is an interesting puzzle. While social inequality was low, the New York Times and (less so) the Wall Street Journal talked about social justice. When social inequality then initially increased from 1980 to 1985, they also still talked about it a lot. But when social inequality kept on increasing in the 1990s, they lost interest in the topic. Therefore, the overall picture is that a small percentage of all articles treats the topic before 1965 and in the 1990s. One possibility is that there is no link between social inequality and talk about social justice because talk about the latter is concerned with other topics than material social inequality. Therefore, I have also looked at how many articles in the NY Times contain the more focused keywords: 'income* social* equal* justice poverty.' As the following Figure shows, the distribution of the share of these articles follows a similar pattern as the 'social justice' articles.

Figure 5: Articles that contain the search terms 'income* social* equal* justice poverty'

US Gini: household disp. inc. (LIS standard), Solt 2011
NY times: search term: income* social* *equal* justice poverty / all articles
NY Times: search term 'social justice' / all articles

Regardless of whether one looks at the broader term 'social justice' or more specific search terms, the puzzle remains: Many articles talk about social justice or contain more narrow keywords to this regard when social inequality was not very high. There was a spike of articles devoted to social-inequality-related topics at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1980s. This is the exact same time when Martin Gilens (2000: 113) found most stories about poverty, so that one can be fairly confident that it is indeed at these times that social inequality – in one form another – was most talked about. But what justice views did the articles articulate? To answer this question, I read all articles in the New York Times that contained the second set of search terms (income* social* equal* justice poverty). This was a manageable amount of articles to read and to code (503 articles, as opposed to 5248 articles that contain the search term 'social justice'). In the following section, I elaborate how I coded the different justice views that these articles articulate.

SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMES IN
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

About half of the 503 analyzed articles contained statements how social inequality is or how it should be. I coded these articles with two codes: I used what I call 'IS'-codes for statements about how social inequality is, while 'SHOULD'-codes capture statements how social inequality should be. I had to subdivide these descriptions of and justice views about social inequality into a manageable number of social justice frames. Frames are "schemata of interpretation" that make it possible for individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" the world around them (Goffman 1974: 21). Thus, the viewpoint that social inequality is structured by the principle of egalitarianism is a frame; so is the opposed viewpoint that social inequality is substantial and thus structured by individualism. While these are frames how social inequality is, the second type of frame articulates

how social inequality should be. E.g. someone might argue that inequality should be structured by egalitarian principles or that it should be structured by individualistic principles, so that everyone can keep what he has and nothing is redistributed. Of course there are valid arguments in favor of more or less social inequality. Framing thus means 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman 1993: 52). The question thus is what view, and thereby frame, about social inequality actors are able to promote in the mass media. If the frame that social inequality is beneficial is much more prevalent in the media, it is possible that this both signifies and / or causes changes in widespread public believes about social inequality (cf. Zaller 1992).

Using a grounded theory approach, I switched back and forth between coding the articles and by doing so, conceptualizing how to code them (Glaser / Strauss 1967; Strauss / Corbin 1990). At first, I used social justice codes from the International Social Justice Project (Wegener / Liebig 1993; also cf. Douglas 1982). Then the coding showed that these had to be refined. As mentioned, an early and fundamental distinction ran between arguments on how social inequality is structured (IS-codes) and how it should be structured (SHOULD-codes). The two most important social justice frames that emerged in each regard were: 1) 'egalitarianism', a code I used for statements that social inequality is structured according to egalitarian principles (IS-code) or that it should be structured according to egalitarian principles (SHOULD-code). Opposed to this were statements that I labeled 2) 'individualism'. These either describe that social inequality is high (IS-code) or that it should be high (SHOULD-code). Coding the articles showed that some statements are not about equal or unequal outcomes, but about equal opportunities. This gave rise to the IS-code 3a) 'ascriptivism', for statements that social inequality is based on unequal opportunity and to the SHOULD-code 3b) 'equal opportunity', arguing that social inequality should be based on equal opportunity. I elaborated a system

that stipulated when to use what code until I could fit more and more articles into the coding scheme, without having to change it further (cf. theoretical saturation in Glaser / Strauss 1967: 61). Once I had such a system of codes in place, I went back and recoded the articles, to be sure that the coding system for justice frames indeed worked for all articles.

In the course of developing and using the codes, I wrote a codebook that gives instructions what type of statement has to be coded with what justice frame; at first this helped to systematize my own coding practice, later it made the coding intersubjectively reproducible. By using the codebook, the author and a student assistant reached an intercoder reliability of 80 percent. Thus, we coded the same articles with the same codes in about 80 percent of the cases, so that the most widely accepted quality criterion for content analysis was reached (Neuendorf 2002: 143). After having coded the justice views with MAXQDA, I exported the frequency of codings into Stata and converted them to yearly occurrences of each justice frame, divided by the overall number of articles. In the following, I analyze each justice code according to how often it occurred as a percentage of articles that the newspapers published.

I start with the IS-codes, which mirror how social inequality was described in newspapers. Then I continue with how the SHOULD-codes developed, showing what was said how social inequality should be. I first describe each code, then I show how often it occurred over the years.

IS-FRAMES
IS-INDIVIDUALISM

This code captures statements that argue that, broadly speaking, social inequality is high or increasing. Therefore, this code gives a measure of how often it was mentioned that social inequality is high. Seven sub codes, each a variant of this general frame, constitute this code. Concretely, statements about current social inequality that fit one of these seven frames were assigned the code IS-individualism:

1)Individuals are responsible for their own fate. They can keep most of what they earn and the state does not redistribute to or from them.
2)Poverty is high or widespread.
3)Social benefits or rights are cut, which increases social inequality.

Each of these statements indicates high or increasing social inequality. A typical individualist IS frame is: 'ten million Americans went to bed hungry last night and urgent human needs continue to go unmet …' (New York Times 22.02.1970 'Letters to the Editor'). I have coded how often such statements occur as a percentage of all articles published in a given year. The following Figure shows this since 1950 and together with changes in social inequality.

Figure 6: Inequality and descriptions of inequality as individualistic

bandwidth = .2
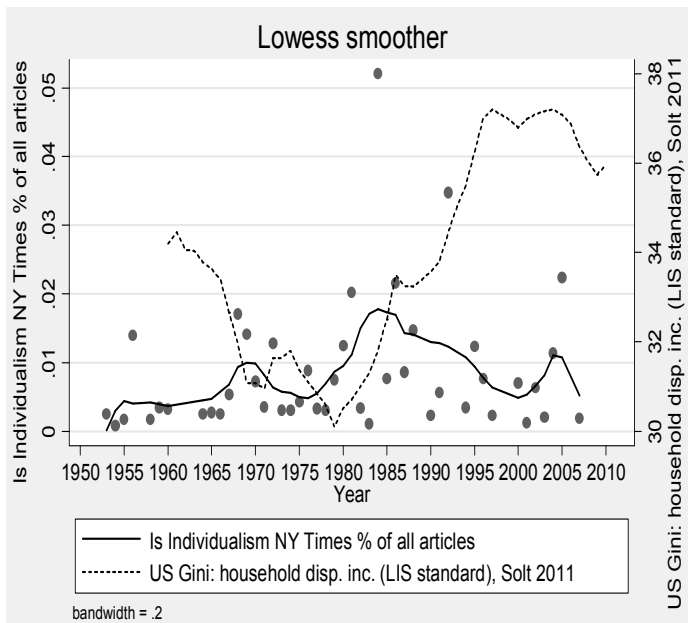
Each point represents how often an individualistic justice view was coded in that year, divided by all articles that the NY Times published in the same year. For example, the data point with the highest y-values indicates that in 1984, individualistic justice views represent 0.052 percent of all articles that the NY Times published in that year. Because individualistic descriptions of social inequality fluctuate much from year to year, I used locally weighted scatterplot smoothing, which uses 20 percent of the available data around each point, to estimate a curve that fits the long-run trend in how often this frame was used. Judging by the curve that this yields, social inequality until the end of the 1960s was rarely described in individualistic terms. This means it was rarely argued that social inequality is high or increasing. After social inequality rose in the 1980s, commentators initially increasingly mentioned that it follows individualistic principles. But interestingly, after the initial rise in social inequality in the early 1980s, less and less articles remark on this, indicating a possible 'adaptation effect' of newspaper attention to social inequality, whereby high social inequality is, after it endures for a while, seen as less newsworthy. This could also indicate an adaptation effect of articulated social justice norms towards factual inequality. But before we jump to such a conclusion, we should look at how the opposed code developed, which describes social inequality as egalitarian.
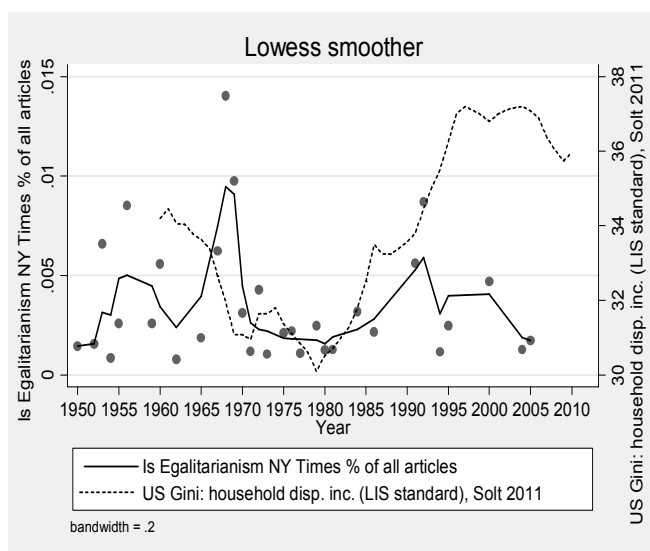
IS-EGALITARIANISM

Codes of 'IS-egalitarianism' were used for statements that indicate that social inequality is low or decreasing. More specifically, a code for IS-egalitarianism was assigned to statements that fall into one of the four categories of arguments:

1) The overwhelming part of society is doing well.
2) Poverty is decreasing or surmountable.
3) Individuals receive much public assistance.
4) The rich pay a lot for those that are less well off.

All these statements describe existing social inequality within an egalitarian frame. A typical egalitarian statement is: 'the war on poverty that began in 1964 has been won' (NY Times Article, October 18, 1980). How have such egalitarian frames of American society changed since the 1950s and relative to changes in factual social inequality? The following Figure shows how many IS-egalitarianism codes have been assigned on a yearly basis as a percentage of all articles.

Figure 7: Inequality and descriptions of society as egalitarian

American society was often described as egalitarian in the 1950s and 1960s. Then there was a rapid drop of such descriptions in the 1970s, when social inequality stopped to decline rapid-

ly. When social inequality rose in the 1980s however, there are at first – and paradoxically – more descriptions of social inequality as egalitarian. A glance over the relevant coded text passages shows that this was because Republicans disputed a rise in social inequality, to defend Reagan's reforms of the early 1980s. But then in the 1990s – consonant with long-run changes in factual social inequality, fewer and fewer statements contain the frame that social inequality follows egalitarian principles. Thus, in the long run and with increasing social inequality, American society is less and less often described as egalitarian.

IS-ASCRIPTIVISM

Another social justice frame is centered on equal opportunities. This frame is about statements that neither argue that social inequality is high (individualism), nor that it is low (egalitarianism). Instead, statements that fall into this category argue that social inequality is structured by unequal opportunities. During the coding process, it turned out that this code can best be subdivided into the groups which are framed as not having equal opportunities. These are:

1) Women
2) People from a low social status
3) African Americans

Independent of frames that society is egalitarian or individualistic concerning outcomes, this code thus argues that certain social groups in society do not enjoy equal starting chances, so that social inequality is structured by ascriptivism – those that are advantaged retain their advantage, all others lack equal opportunities. This code therefore focuses on the precondition, instead of the outcome of social inequality, which differentiates it from the two other codes. The following Figure shows how prevalent this frame was in the analyzed articles and thus how often social inequality was described as resulting from unequal opportunities, e.g. ascriptivism.

**Figure 8: Inequality and descriptions of society as ascriptivistic**
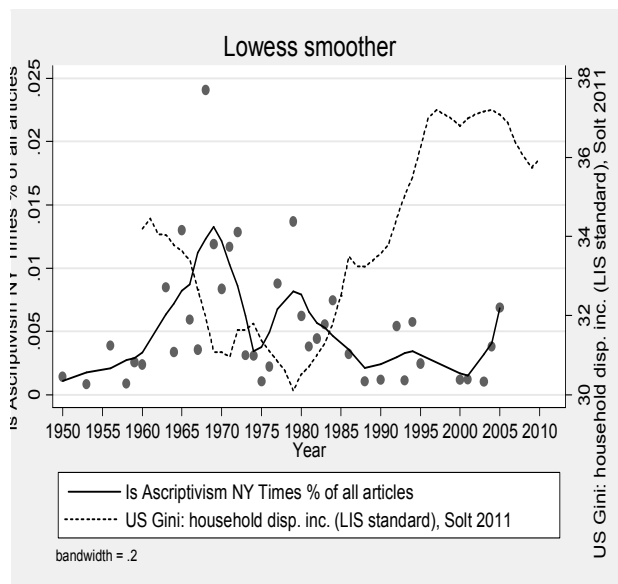
The argument that unequal opportunities structure social inequality was made very often around 1968. The prevalence of this frame levels off towards the beginning of the 1960s and the late 1980s. The time when this frame is widespread, at the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s is exactly the time when Martin Gilens (2000: 114) found a high percentage of African Americans depicted in articles that deal with poverty. Thus, it is probable that this variable indeed captures when social inequality arguments were often made regarding equal opportunities of African Americans. But interestingly, such statements that equal opportunities are lacking were prevalent at a time when material inequality, measured by the Gini, was low or declining. It is further interesting to note that this IS-code usually appeared close to SHOULD-egalitarianism codes, about which I will talk further below. Thus, text segments that are coded with this frame were often also coded with egalitarian SHOULD-codes, especially with the argument that basic needs should be met for everyone. A typical argument was that blacks do not enjoy equal opportunities (IS), but that care has to be taken that this group does not suffer from poverty (SHOULD).

INDIVIDUALISTIC, EGALITARIAN AND AS-CRIPTIVISTIC DESCRIPTIONS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY COMPARED

While the preceding Figures compared the incidence of descriptions of social inequality relative to factual inequality, the following Figure shows how the prevalence of different frames changed relative to others. This cancels out that in some years all three views of society were more pronounced, simply because there were more articles about social inequality. It thus gives an impression of how descriptions of social inequality in America have shifted relative to others.

Figure 9: Descriptions of inequality as individualistic, egalitarian and ascriptivistic
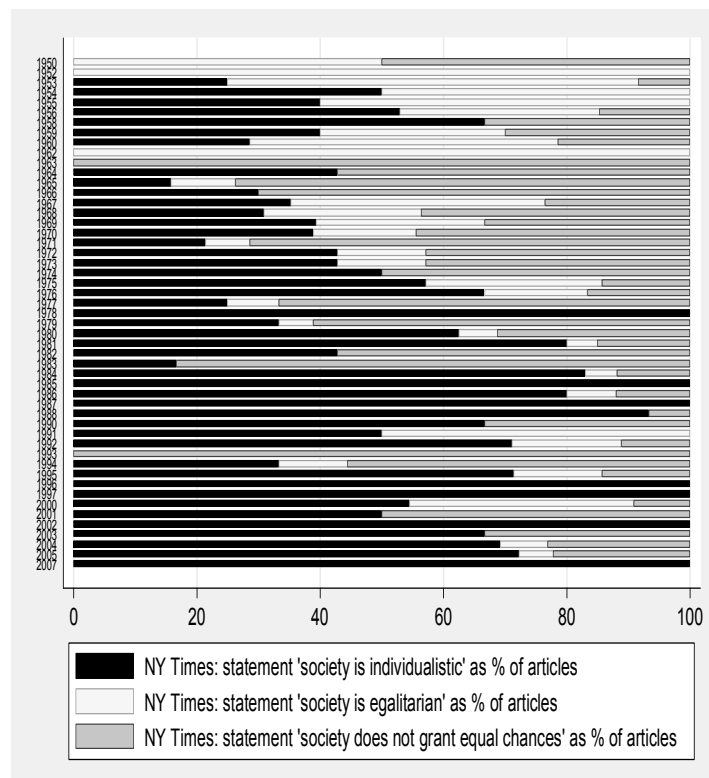
Overall and relative to other descriptions, American social inequality is most often described within an individualistic frame. But while social inequality was not described within such a frame in 1962 and 1963 – and rarely described as such around that date, individualism is clearly the dominant frame since the mid-1970s. In many years after the 1970s, American social inequality is exclusively described within an individual-

istic frame, mainly to the detriment of an egalitarian one. The same result applies when one looks not at how often individualistic frames are used relative to the overall number of articles in the NY Times or relative to other justice frames, as done above, but relative to all the articles I have coded. The following graph maps how often individualistic and egalitarian frames on existing social inequality appear over time as a percentage of all analyzed articles.

Figure 10: Egalitarian and individualistic statements about social inequality as percentage of articles found
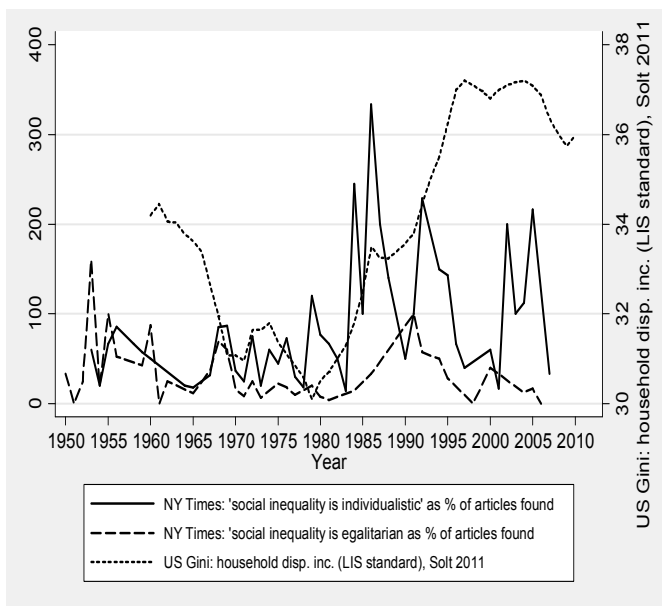
The y-axis goes above 100 percent because a justice frame can appear more than once in an article, allowing more assigned codes in a year than analyzed articles. This Figure also makes clear that existing social inequality has been increasingly described within an individualistic frame, when social inequality increased in the 1980s. Until around 1980, social inequality was about as often described within egalitarian, as within individualistic justice frames. But since then, explanations of social inequality within an individualistic social justice frame are much stronger than within an egalitarian frame. Thus, regardless of if we look at individualistic justice views as a percentage of all articles that appeared in the NY Times, as a percentage of all articles analyzed or even (not shown here) in absolute

terms, the result remains consistent that individualistic justice frames increased in descriptions of social inequality. Thus, the increase in social inequality since 1980 is mirrored by how social inequality is described. But there are not only frames that describe how social inequality is. There are also frames that describe how it should be. These statements constitute the SHOULD-frames. The next sections show how they developed over time.

SHOULD-FRAMES
SHOULD-INDIVIDUALISM

Analog to statements arguing that social inequality does follow individualistic principles, some statements argue that it should follow individualistic principles. Instead of describing that social inequality is high, statements that have been coded with this code argue that it should be high. Each of the sub codes of this code is a variant of this general argument and indicates, in one way or another, for the legitimacy of elevated social inequality. Concretely, the coding of the articles led to a division of the codes into the following sub codes, which all in one way or another argue for high social inequality. A SHOULD-individualism social justice frame was assigned to statements of the following type:

1) Social inequality results from merit and should thus not be reduced.
2) One has no right to take from individuals to redistribute to others.
3) Redistribution has to be avoided because it destroys individual responsibility and / or freedom.
4) Inequality is economically productive
5) Redistributive spending is wasteful.
6) Redistributive spending creates dependent or unemployed recipients.

All these codes legitimize social inequality by arguing against redistribution or in favor of income differences. The following statements are examples of a SHOULD-individualism frame, which argues that institutionalized redistribution that could reduce social inequality is bad: 'there are enough people to use their own resources by voluntary means to ameliorate what they view as the worst poverty in the society. And if they devoted some of their energy towards voluntary charitable activi-

ties as opposed to trying to get legislation passed, we would find a lot of the poverty ameliorated - especially if we got rid of some of the government activities which are helping create poverty, like minimum wage laws.' (Robert Nozick in the NY Times, Jan. 3, 1981) I think if you're going to have tax relief, everybody ought to get it. And therefore wealthy people are going to get it.' (George Bush in the NY Times, October 18, 2000.)

In this sense, this frame argues that no one has a right to take from one person to give to another, with the aim of decreasing social inequality. It argues that people deserve what they have, so it should not be taken away from them. In this sense, this justice frame legitimizes and asks for social inequality. So with decreasing social inequality until 1980 and increasing social inequality since then, how prevalent is this social justice frame? The following Figure shows how often it occurred as a percentage of all articles in the New York Times in that year.

Figure 11: Inequality and arguments for inequality

Lowess smoother

bandwidth = .2
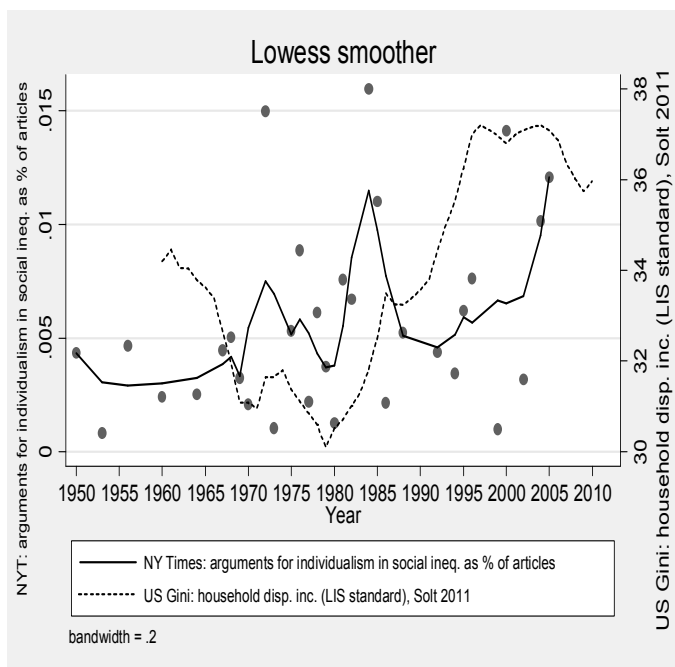
Until 1970, few SHOULD-individualism justice frames can be found. It rarely happened that high social inequality was legitimized through individualistic justice frames. This changed in the 1970s. More and more statements legitimize social inequality. These often argued that redistribution to the poor is too expensive or wasteful. Such arguments reached a peak in the mid-1980s, where they legitimized increasing social inequality, which came together with the Reagan-reforms. Individualistic justice views remained relatively strong in the 1990s and then again rose around 2005. The increase of this justice frame indicates a change in moral arguments about social inequality. While it was uncommon to argue in favor of high social inequality before 1970, individualistic SHOULD-frames increased thereafter. At the same time, social justice arguments that demanded egalitarianism declined, as the next section shows.

SHOULD-EGALITARIANISM

SHOULD-egalitarianism frames all argue for low inequality, in a variety of ways. The sub codes mirror the different ways how less inequality issued for. The following list illustrates the type of statements that have been coded with a SHOULD-egalitarianism code:

1) Basic needs must be met for everyone.
2) Public investments should create good jobs for everyone.
3) Social equality is economically productive.
4) People have human rights to social transfers and social protection.
5) Wealthy people should pay disproportionately more than poor people.
6) Everyone should own property / have wealth.

The egalitarian SHOULD-code that appeared most often by far is sub code number 1, argueing that everyone's basic needs must be met. This code often co-occurs with the IS-individualism code, which argues that poverty is high or widespread. Thus, the argument that everyone's basic needs should be met occurs especially frequently in the presence of the code that argues that poverty is widespread. This is an indicator that egalitarian justice norms become articulated when large social inequalities are talked about. Exemplary statements that received this code were:

'poverty and the human suffering and maladjustments that it entails have no place in a nation as wealthy as ours. We must attack it directly.' (NY Times Jan. 5, 1956, subcode 1)

'We must not permit poverty to continue to act as a drag on the expansion of our economy.' (same article, subcode 3).

'wealthier taxpayers will have to shoulder a greater share of the new tax burdens' (NY Times Sep 4, 1984, subcode 5).

All these codes constitute variants of the argument that social inequality is undesirable and should be reduced. The question again arises how prominent the SHOULD-egalitarian code is relative to changing social inequalities. How many statements exist, relative to all articles in the New York Times, that social inequality is illegitimate and should be reduced? The following figure shows this. It depicts how often the SHOULD-egalitarianism code was assigned, as a percentage of all articles in a given year. The figure also contains the Gini.

Figure 12: Inequality and arguments for egalitarianism
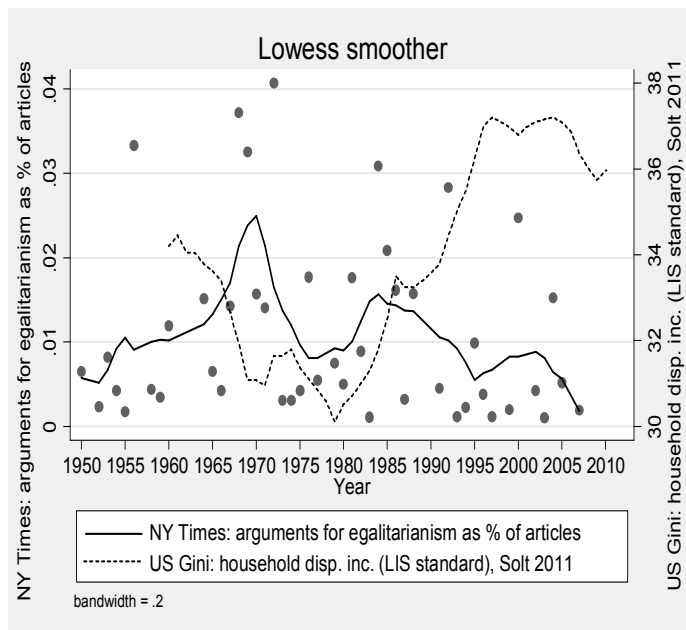
Arguments for egalitarianism peaked around 1970. When social inequality rose in the 1980s, this was at first countered by more egalitarian social justice frames. But these declined as social inequality remained high. Indeed, a qualitative reading of the articles showed that the early increase of egalitarian justice frames around 1985 occurred, because many justice arguments were made against Reagan's reforms. However, over time these arguments died down, while social inequality increased. One could infer from this that social justice norms adapted to what was, not right away but over time, seen as 'normal' social inequality, supporting the adaptation hypothesis.

SHOULD-EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The last frame how social inequality should be structured argues neither for equality, nor for more inequality. Instead of favoring on outcomes in one way or another, this frame argues that equal opportunities are important. It argues that no one should be discriminated against and that everyone must have the same life chances, for social inequality to be fair. This frame again consists of a number of sub arguments. The following statements are the different variations of this justice frame:

1) Everyone should receive a good education.
2) People should be empowered.
3) Discrimination has to be fought.
4) Discrimination on the basis of gender has to be fought.
5) Discrimination on the basis of race has to be fought.

What all these statements have in common is that each reflects a variant of the argument that equal opportunities must be granted to reach a structure of fair social inequality. The following statement therefore reflects a typical equal opportunities frame:

'A cardinal ideal in this heritage we cherish is the equality of rights of all citizens of every race and color and creed.' (NY Times, Feb 4, 1953, Speech of President Eisenhower, sub code 5)

As equal opportunity-based arguments do not talk about equal outcomes, they differ fundamentally from the two other justice views, since they focus on

preconditions, not results. Again, the question is how often this justice frame can be found in the articles over time. The following Figure shows this, again together with factual changes in social inequality.

**Figure 13: Inequality and arguments for equal opportunity**
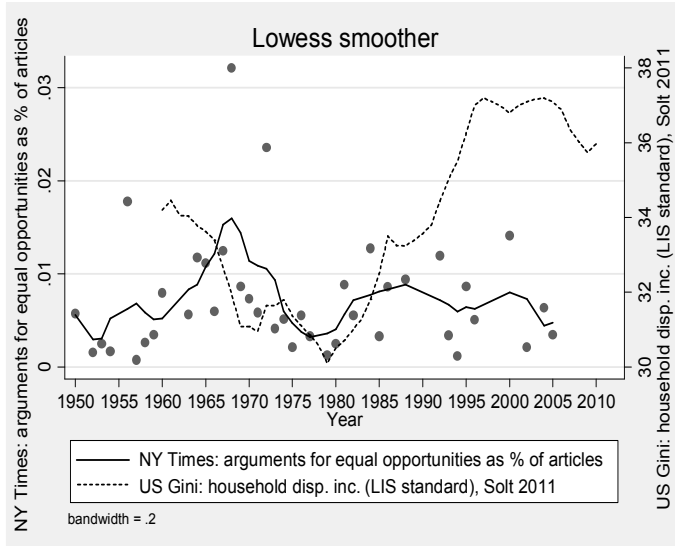
Arguments in favor of equal opportunity spiked in 1968, in the same year when it was mentioned most that equal opportunities are not given (cf. Figure 8). This is not coincidental. A qualitative reading of the articles showed that when it was argued that (mainly) blacks do not enjoy equal opportunities (IS), it was also argued that they should enjoy equal opportunities. Both the IS-ascriptivism and the SHOULD-equal opportunity code show the strength of the civil rights movement to dominate the discourse during that time. In the 1980s, articles about equal opportunity were more focused on giving everyone a good education, as an analysis of the sub codes shows (not shown here). While arguments in favor of equal opportunity remained a constant feature of arguments about social justice, they never again became as prevalent as in the 1960s.

The last three sections showed how justice views about social inequality developed relative to factual inequality. How these justice views developed relative to each other is a different question. The following section illustrates this.

INDIVIDUALISTIC, EGALITARIAN AND AS-CRIPTIVISTIC JUSTICE VIEWS COMPARED OVER TIME The section on IS-frames indicated that descriptions of social inequality tended towards more individualism and less egalitarianism frames over time, mirroring factual changes in social inequality. Can we observe a similar trend for frames that argue how social inequality should be? The following graph shows how these social justice views changed relative to each other

Figure 14: Arguments for egalitarianism, individualism and equal opportunity as percentage of justice views
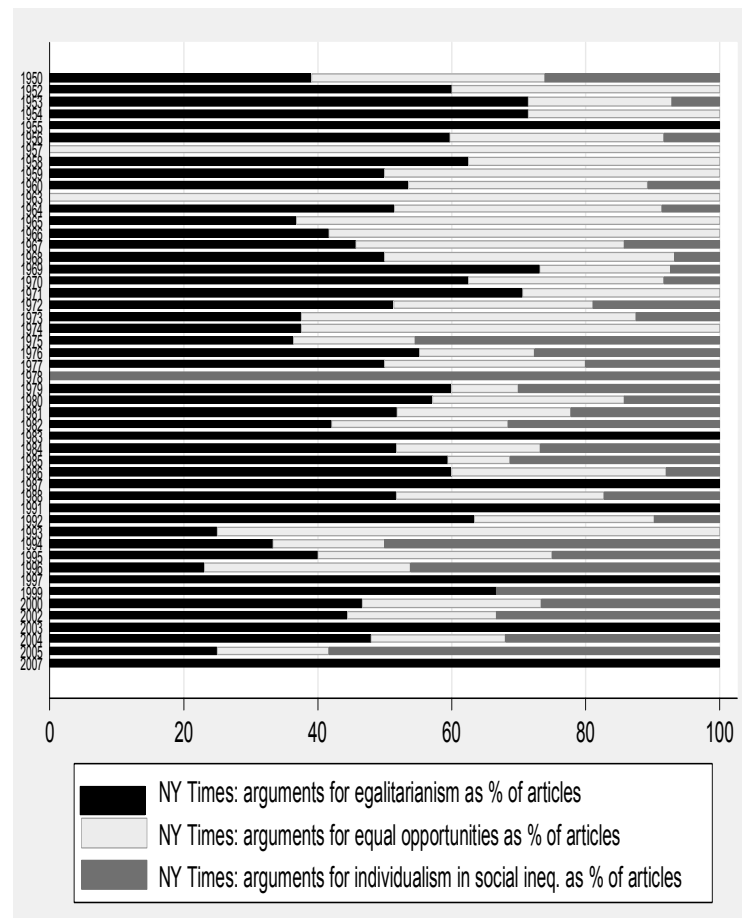
Statements for egalitarianism were and are compared and in comparison to other views. But since the 1980s, individualistic social justice frames, arguing in favor of social inequality, increased relative to egalitarian and equal opportunity-based justice frames. To show this in terms of the three justice frames, now again as a percentage of all articles in the NY Times for each justice view, the following Figure plots the three lowess-lines from figure 11 to figure 13 into one graph. Thereby the following figure indicates how each of the three social justice views developed irrespective of the others and as a percentage of all articles that appeared in the NY Times.

Figure 15: Arguments for egalitarianism, individualism and equal opportunity as percentage of articles
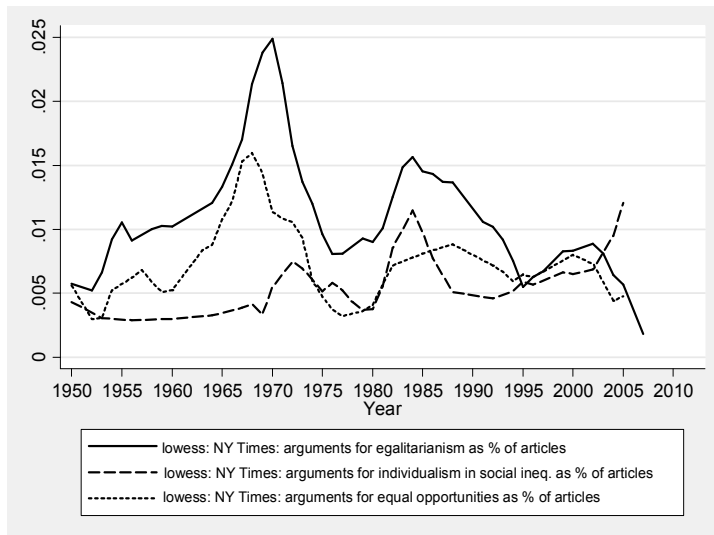
Arguments for equal opportunity- and egalitarianism peaked in the late 1960s. Individualistic justice views did not peak at that point. In the early 1980s, egalitarian and individualistic justice views were mobilized to attack or defend Reagan's reforms and the increase in social inequality of that time. What is also interesting is the long-run trend from the 1950s into the early 2000s. Egalitarian justice frames, arguing in favor of egalitarianism, were always more prevalent than individualistic ones. But this changed in the second half of the 1990s. In the late 1960s, egalitarian justice frames outnumbered individualistic ones fivefold. In 2002, more individualistic justice frames exist than egalitarian ones. Another way to show this

is to divide the times an individualistic justice view has been mentioned by the times an egalitarian justice view has been mentioned in each year. The following Figure shows the result of this graphically.

Figure 16: Individualistic justice views relative to egalitarian justice views
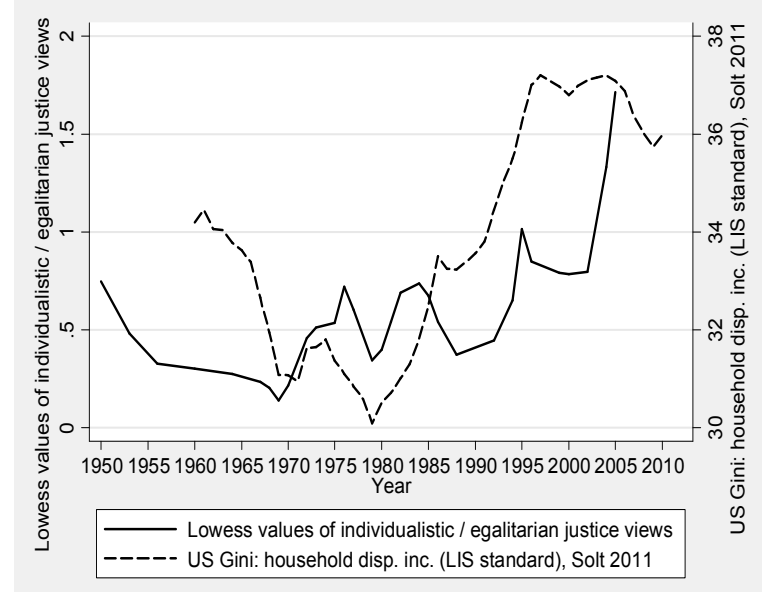
Until 1995, egalitarian justice frames are consistently more prevalent than individualistic ones. In the 1960s, we find around four claims that egalitarianism is fair for every individualistic justice frame. With increasing social inequality however, individualistic justice frames increase over egalitarian ones and finally outnumber them 1.5 to 1. In this sense, there was a profound normative change towards individualistic conceptions of social justice. The following section elaborates on the implications of this change.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS: AN INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH TO CHANGING SOCIAL JUSTICE VIEWS

This section enriches the preceding quantitative analysis by a qualitative interpretation of these trends. Notably, while reading the articles, I continuously made memos, which feed this section's analysis (cf. Glaser / Strauss 1967; Strauss / Corbin 1990). I differentiate my description of how justice views in the newspaper articles changed by decades starting with the 1950s.

In the 1950s, discussions about social justice were relatively rare. Social inequality was rarely described as individualistic, ascriptivistic and moderately often

as egalitarian. Arguments for individualism or equal opportunity were also rare, but some arguments for egalitarianism existed. Many of the articles in the 1950s were speeches of politicians. A common pattern in these articles is that office holders argued that social inequality is low because of their efforts, while incumbents argued that they would be able to lower social inequality even further. In this sense, even though the topic is not much talked about, egalitarianism was the dominant social justice frame, both in terms of how social inequality was seen and in terms of what was said how it should be. But generally, this is a time period when social justice was not yet a very big topic compared to later time periods.

The 1960s are the decade with the most intense discussions about social justice. Social inequality was described as relatively egalitarian (even though not egalitarian enough), but also as founded on unequal opportunities (ascriptivism). The articles mirror the factual decrease in inequality, in that they contain many statements that social inequality is low and should be even lower. The main specific argument in this regard is that while advances have been made, too many Americans still live in poverty (IS-frame), which has to be changed (SHOULD-frame). Such justice arguments ushered in President Johnson's war on poverty, which transformed the prevailing moral climate of the newspaper discourse into actual social policy. Beside this, there was also a combination of an IS-ascriptivism with a SHOULD-equal opportunity frame. This came from arguments from the civil rights movement, which stated that blacks do not have the same rights as whites and that this must be changed.

In the 1970s, frames that argued for individualistic social inequality appeared for the first time on a broader scale, while the dominant descriptions of existing social inequality was still that blacks do not have equal opportunities. Individualistic descriptions of social inequality were increasing, egalitarian descriptions were decreasing. Statements in favor of more individualism started to rival egalitarian justice views. For the first time, the argument came to the fore that there are financial limits as to how much the wealthy can be taxed. But such individualistic arguments were not very prevalent yet. In this sense, the 1970s were not so much a period of condemnation of egalitarianism, but rather a period of neglect. It was a period where the strong egalitarianism-frames of

the 1960s was gone, but not yet a period where an individualism-frame dominated. There were still statements that black youth or Native Americans have problems with poverty. Thus, it was special groups, not to be confounded with 'normal' Americans, who were said to suffer from poverty. While egalitarianism was still there, it was now more centered on 'special' groups. Interestingly, it was during this decade, where egalitarian justice frames receded, that social inequality at first started to increase. The evidence is too weak to sustain a causal argument, but it is without question that egalitarian frames of social justice declined, before social inequality started to rise.

In the 1980s, individualistic justice frames peaked, both in terms of how social inequality was seen and in terms of frames how it should be. This is because the Reagan administration argued in many articles that it is socially just to cut welfare services and transfers (SHOULD-individualism). Some argued against this that poverty is still high and inequalities are widespread (IS-INDIVIDUALISM). But interestingly, even the administration's prevalent line of argumentation argued that it is unjust to redistribute from the rich to the poor. Instead, it also used the argument that social aid must be limited to the 'really needy.' In this sense, even the Reagan reforms were justified by egalitarian justice principles, so that we find some egalitarian justice frames in the 1980s as well. Other egalitarian justice frames were used to attack the Reagan reforms, so that initially, when social inequality increased, egalitarian social justice frames increased as well.

In the 1990s, arguments that social inequality should be individualistic continued but were not as prevalent as in the 1980s. At the same time, arguments for egalitarianism declined. Since the 1980s, individualistic descriptions of social inequality dominated over other views. But most interesting about this is that in spite of high social inequality, not many articles treat this topic and not many justice frames are mobilized overall. What is also interesting is that, while generally there were not many articles that talk about social justice, individualistic justice frames were for the first time as prevalent as frames that argued for egalitarianism.

Starting in 2000, statements that social inequality should follow individualistic principles were more prevalent than egalitarian and equal opportunity-based arguments, as these latter two declined further. And this happened in spite of individualism having been the most often used description for factual social inequality. So even though social inequality was described as high, it was also advocated that it should be high – a combination that before never occurred in the data.

Abstracting from change of one decade to another, the most prevalent IS-argument overall is that American society has too much inequality (IS-individualism) and over almost all time periods apart from the last one, the most prevalent normative view is that the distribution of incomes should be egalitarian (SHOULD-egalitarianism).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the main result is that individualistic descriptions of social inequality increased, together with arguments that social inequality should be structured by individualistic principles. Egalitarian descriptions of inequality and normative egalitarian social justice views peaked in the late 1960s and declined thereafter. The same is true for arguments that diagnose a lack of equal opportunity and argue for equal opportunities.

In a very general sense, one can infer from this that descriptions of, and normative justice views about, social inequality moved together with factual changes in inequality. In the late 1960s, when social inequality was low and decreasing, this was not only described in the sense that many egalitarian IS-codes are found. It was also articulated as fair. At the same time, when social inequality was low, it was rarely articulated as being high and few arguments can be found that it should be. When social inequality increased in the 1980s, this was in the long run mirrored by a decrease in egalitarian descriptions of social inequality. Also, in the long run, statements declined that social inequality should be structured by egalitarianism. When social inequality increased, it was conversely also more often described through an individualistic frame and it was also more often said that social inequality should follow individualistic principles.

When social inequality increased, this was for a long time not accompanied by more discussions about social justice. Therefore, from the perspective of analyzing media discourse, this paper agrees that social inequality increased in the shadow of individualistic justice norms and declining egalitarian justice norms (cf. Hacker / Pierson 2010b; 2010a). It is important to note however that this is no direct causal claim. The notion that inequality increased when egalitarian justice norms decreased and individualistic justice frames increased does not contradict analyses that attribute rising social inequality to other causes. For example, existing studies stress that social inequality could increase because trade unions lost power to regulate wages (Western / Rosenfeld 2011: 514). Instead of making a causal claim that increased social inequality results from changing justice norms, this paper only argues that justice norms as articulated in newspapers have changed in tandem with inequality. That e.g. the declining power of trade unions might lie behind both changes is eminently possible. This study also does not contradict analyses that argue that increasing wage premiums for college graduates account for increasing social inequality (Katz / Autor 1999). But it shows that widely articulated justice norms did not militate against such an increase of incomes at the top, while they did in the 1960s.

Both the fact that egalitarian justice frames can be found less often in the 1970s than in the decades before, as well as the fact that individualistic justice frames can be found more often in the 1970s than in the prior decades hint to the argument that changing social justice views paved the way for increases in social inequality. But paradoxically, when social inequality increased, this was at first met by increased egalitarian justice views, even if increasing social inequality led to a decline in egalitarian justice views in the long run. After 1990, when social inequality was high for some years, the New York Times neither articulated this very much, nor did the newspaper argue against it with egalitarian justice views. Instead, the rise in social inequality was followed by a rise in individualistic justice frames so that individualistic conceptions of social justice became the dominant social justice frame at the end of the period studied here.

One can speculate that individualistic justice frames were linked to social inequality through a 'thermostat' mechanism, which works to increase social inequality. When social inequality declined below a Gini of 32, individualistic justice frames, arguing for more social inequality, increased and only stopped to increase momentarily when the Gini was above 32 again – even though it is too deterministic to claim that individualistic social justice frames "automatically" increase below a certain Gini.

Egalitarian justice views show more evidence of following an adaptation - rather than a thermostat-mechanism. When social inequality declined, egalitarian social justice views were high. When it increased, they were relatively low. In this sense, it seems as if egalitarian justice views on social inequality adapt to factual inequality. When social inequality declines, this might more and more be perceived as normal, so that egalitarian justice frames increase. But when social inequality grows, this might also over time be seen as more and more normal, letting egalitarian social justice frames decrease – at least in public discourse. In this sense, a public discourse about what is fair social inequality might – with some time lag – 'get used' to increasing or decreasing social inequality.

Separate from discussions about egalitarianism and individualism are justice frames about equal opportunity. Here, the big trend is that social inequality was often described as resulting from unequal opportunities at the end of the 1960s. It was argued then, that ascriptive criteria, mainly skin color, determine social inequality. This went along with normative frames describing this as unfair. But both ascriptivism-based diagnoses of social inequality, as well as equal-opportunity based normative justice frames declined from the end of the 1960s to the present.

These results could be biased by a number of problems. They come from a single newspaper. That the NY Times is on the left of the political spectrum is not a problem in itself, because we look at variation over time within the New York Times. It could be problematic however, that the newspaper has changed over time, instead of reflecting a discourse that takes place in society. Therefore, it is not pos-

sible to draw any definite conclusions on what the statements in the newspaper articles really reflect. Further research has to show whether changes in social justice views that were presented here reflect a changing social consensus on social inequality, altering political power structures that dominate discourses about inequality or if they simply reflect a change in coverage of one specific newspaper. Also, focusing on only one country and essentially on only two big trends, namely broadly decreasing social inequality until around 1980 and increasing inequality since then, one cannot rule out the possibility that the results are an artifact. One would therefore have to look at an even longer time line, other countries and other newspapers. What this study tried to illustrate is that the trends that such an analysis can unearth are well worth pursuing.

ENDNOTES

1. Further below, I talk about the frequency, with which other search terms appeared.

2. I use the Gini-index as a general measure of social inequality, as it coincides well with changes of the upper 1 or ten percent (cf. the preceding graphs).

3. I limited the search to the following types of documents: Article, Editorial, Front page article, Letter to editor, Masthead, Other, Review, Table of Contents, leaving out advertisements and other article types that are not included in the ZEIT search engine anyways.

4. Note that there are no scales for the y-axis, as each of the three indicators is on a different scale and it is not the exact values of each indicator, but its change over time, which is important.

5. While one might suppose that this is also a SHOULD statement, as one could conclude that the writer implies that it is wrong that so many live in poverty, this is not explicit in the statement, so a SHOULD-code cannot be assigned.

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