

The Great Divide

Rich People Just Care Less

By DANIEL GOLEMAN

Turning a blind eye. Giving someone the cold shoulder. Looking down on people. Seeing right through them.

These metaphors for condescending or dismissive behavior are more than just descriptive. They suggest, to a surprisingly accurate extent, the social distance between those with greater power and those with less – a distance that goes beyond the realm of interpersonal interactions and may exacerbate the soaring inequality in the United States.

A growing body of recent research shows that people with the most social power pay scant attention to those with little such power. This tuning out has been observed, for instance, with strangers in a mere five-minute get-acquainted session, where the more powerful person shows fewer signals of paying attention, like nodding or laughing. Higher-status people are also more likely to express disregard, through facial expressions, and are more likely to take over the conversation and interrupt or look past the other speaker.

Bringing the micropolitics of interpersonal attention to the understanding of social power, researchers are suggesting, has implications for public policy.

Of course, in any society, social power is relative; any of us may be higher or lower in a given interaction, and the research shows the effect still prevails. Though the more powerful pay less attention to us than we do to them, in other situations we are relatively higher on the totem pole of status – and we, too, tend to pay less attention to those a rung or two down.

A prerequisite to empathy is simply paying attention to the person in pain. In 2008, social psychologists from the University of Amsterdam and the University of California, Berkeley, studied pairs of strangers telling one another about difficulties they had been through, like a divorce or death of a loved one. The researchers found that the differential expressed itself in the playing down of suffering. The more powerful were less compassionate toward the hardships described by the less powerful. Dacher Keltner, a professor of psychology at Berkeley, and Michael W. Kraus, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, have done much of the research on social power and the attention deficit.

Mr. Keltner suggests that, in general, we focus the most on those we value most. While the wealthy can hire help, those with few material assets are more likely to value their social assets: like the neighbor who will keep an eye on your child from the time she gets home from school until the time you get home from work. The financial difference ends up creating a behavioral difference. Poor people are better attuned to

interpersonal relations – with those of the same strata, and the more powerful – than the rich are, because they have to be.

While Mr. Keltner's research finds that the poor, compared with the wealthy, have keenly attuned interpersonal attention in all directions, in general, those with the most power in society seem to pay particularly little attention to those with the least power. To be sure, high-status people do attend to those of equal rank – but not as well as those low of status do.

This has profound implications for societal behavior and government policy. Tuning in to the needs and feelings of another person is a prerequisite to empathy, which in turn can lead to understanding, concern and, if the circumstances are right, compassionate action.

In politics, readily dismissing inconvenient people can easily extend to dismissing inconvenient truths about them. The insistence by some House Republicans in Congress on cutting financing for food stamps and impeding the implementation of Obamacare, which would allow patients, including those with pre-existing health conditions, to obtain and pay for insurance coverage, may stem in part from the empathy gap. As political scientists have noted, redistricting and gerrymandering have led to the creation of more and more safe districts, in which elected officials don't even have to encounter many voters from the rival party, much less empathize with them.

Social distance makes it all the easier to focus on small differences between groups and to put a negative spin on the ways of others and a positive spin on our own.

Freud called this “the narcissism of minor differences,” a theme repeated by Vamik D. Volkan, an emeritus professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia, who was born in Cyprus to Turkish parents. Dr. Volkan remembers hearing as a small boy awful things about the hated Greek Cypriots – who, he points out, actually share many similarities with Turkish Cypriots. Yet for decades their modest-size island has been politically divided, which exacerbates the problem by letting prejudicial myths flourish.

In contrast, extensive interpersonal contact counteracts biases by letting people from hostile groups get to know one another as individuals and even friends. Thomas F. Pettigrew, a research professor of social psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, analyzed more than 500 studies on intergroup contact. Mr. Pettigrew, who was born in Virginia in 1931 and lived there until going to Harvard for graduate school, told me in an e-mail that it was the “the rampant racism in the Virginia of my childhood” that led him to study prejudice.

In his research, he found that even in areas where ethnic groups were in conflict and viewed one another through lenses of negative stereotypes, individuals who had close friends within the other group exhibited little or no such prejudice. They seemed to realize the many ways those demonized “others” were “just like me.” Whether such friendly social contact would overcome the divide between those with more and less social and economic power was not studied, but I suspect it would help.

Since the 1970s, the gap between the rich and everyone else has skyrocketed. Income inequality is at its highest level in a century. This widening gulf between the haves and have-less troubles me, but not for the obvious reasons. Apart from the financial inequities, I fear the expansion of an entirely different gap, caused by the inability to see oneself in a less advantaged person's shoes. Reducing the economic gap may be impossible without also addressing the gap in empathy.

Daniel Goleman, a psychologist, is the author of "Emotional Intelligence" and, most recently, "Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence."

COMMENTS

RWordplayNew York

The disparity in wealth is the least troubling aspect of our culture. I do not think there is a much of a correlation between wealth and a disturbing lack of empathy.

Rather I see a culture that has elevated the self and its short-term pleasure above community and sustainable pleasure. Our culture suffers from the repressed fears of the Arriviste, whose sleep is disturbed by the fear of scarcity. Therefore, the return from any endeavor—financial or social—must exceed that of any gift, i.e., millions to a business school, or a Central Park, or library.

Our notions of philanthropy have been so thoroughly corrupted that the beneficiaries have been reduced to symbols and metaphors, the easier to sweep them out of our consciousness. Conscience like shame and sin have slipped out of our lexicon.

Proximity, or the lack of it, has never opened or closed a heart, hand, eye. University studies, although conducted with the best intentions, merely demonstrate what their authors believe to be true.

We are a culture and the Times is a paper that celebrate the rich and celebrated. We have no problem living with the fact that Bed-Stuy can co-exist with Bedford, at least until the gentrification of Bed-Today is complete

PubliusCA

Like so much work in social psychology, this one ignores the dictum: correlation is not causation. What about the possibility that people who are more focused on their work get rich? Or smarter people are less sympathetic and get rich? Or that being too attuned to interpersonal relations makes you poor. ...

GaryBSiValley

Meh, I don't believe it having met many rich and many poor. Empathy is randomly distributed amongst them.

...

A more interesting article would dwell on a not-talked about secret: Markets are a winner take all game. Once you are wealthy, you get a greater than linear rise in ways to make even more money. We simply need to modestly reduce that effect with moderately more progressive taxes.

pfwolf01Bronx, New York

I think both processes are involved, to differing degrees for different people. For many, especially the rich, those below them are inconsequential, not even worthy of projections. Most Wall Street guys couldn't care less, unless the poor waiter messes up their order.

For lower and middle class right wingers, the Rush Limbaugh fans and their ilk, there are projections of weakness, helplessness, rage, etc.- understandable feelings given their/our socio-economic reality- which are projected, leaving the projecting one feeling cleansed of unacceptable traits and feeling superior.

Add to that the attempt to salvage self-esteem through identifying with the rich, and disidentifying with fellow strugglers (especially Blacks, immigrants, etc.), a kind of class disidentification. I remember a poll, many years ago, that found that nearly 20% of the population considered themselves in the 1%, and an additional nearly 20% believed that some day they would join them. (Math was never our country's strong point). America is about becoming rich, and the Horatio Alger myth still lives as it becomes even more a fantasy.

Jonathan ArielN.Y

The more we can identify with someone, the easier it is to empathize with them. The more we empathize, the more willing we are to make a sacrifice on their behalf.

The stronger the historical glue that binds a society together, the more members of that society identify and empathize with each other. Wealthy Scandinavians are the most willing to pay higher taxes to fund policies that prioritize social solidarity and relative fairness over the individual's pursuit of happiness. This is not surprising, since these are all relatively small and highly homogenous (at least until 30 years ago) societies, which had gradually evolved for over a thousand years.

America is the opposite, a large highly heterogenous society that has had an evolutionary process of less than 250 years, a society based not on a shared past and heritage, but on the belief of a shared future, a future whose core values are the individual's right to "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Fairness and solidarity were not part of the equation.

SAndersonBoston

It's very easy to "turn a blind eye" to people you never see.

Over the last 40 years, our communities have become more and more segregated by economic status. I grew up in a town where my classmates' parents included construction and factory workers, secretaries, police officers, lawyers and doctors.

That meant that In school and the PTA, in church, in the grocery store, in social settings, we were all in it together. Now, you'd be hard-pressed to find such a place, as more and more of the wealthy segregate themselves in upscale communities. Even our methods of commuting segregate us.

If we indeed want a society that works for the common good, we need to recognize that the way we live makes the challenge even more difficult. .

cesplinphx, az

Bull!

Generalizing that the rich and powerful have no empathy for the poor is bull.

Some do have empathy and some don't. Some poor have empathy and some do not.

Sympathy and empathy are different. Empathy moves one to action not just feeling sorry for someone.

Mr. Goleman has little empathy for the rich and powerful, is that good?

All should have empathy for everyone. I agree that the more we interact the more empathy we have.

As Atticus told Scout in "To Kill a Mockingbird" Scout, here is a trick that will help you get along with all kinds of people. Walk around in the other persons skin for a while and you will understand the other person better.

The rich and powerful are no better or worse than the poor, it is just easier to pass judgement on the rich, who will argue. Cheap shots are not of value.

Believing that income inequality is one thing but raising everyone up is much preferable than pulling some down.

Paul PosnerMassachusetts

"Reducing the economic gap may be impossible without also addressing the gap in empathy."

Nonsense. Income inequality didn't decrease after 1929 because the very wealthy became more empathetic toward those less affluent than themselves. Rather, it decreased because we had a governing class, both Democrats and Republicans, who were willing to pass legislation benefitting the broad majority of American society in the face of opposition from moneyed interests. What's missing today is not so empathy, which has probably always been in short supply among the wealthy, but rather political courage.

Marcella Daly MroczkowskiMidlothian, Va.

Actually, empathy and political courage go hand in hand. One has to have respect for the rights of others before one can show political courage in doing what's right for the country as a whole.

There are both political and economic benefits to teaching the wealthy and privileged - and everyone else - the value of altruism and respect for the interests of others. It is absolutely essential to the preservation of the middle class democracies that are humanity's best hope for peace, freedom and prosperity.

Likewise the most effective and productive business leaders are altruists, people who care deeply about having a positive impact on other people's lives. Michael Maccoby, MD PhD, spent over forty years studying leadership. His empirically grounded observations are far more valuable than the baseless selfish garbage that too many in the business world embrace.

KCPA

I grew up in a family solidly in the bottom 25% of wage earners in the US and now through luck and hard work am solidly in the top 5% of wage earners in the US. ... Friends knew I came from a very modest/ poor background and could hold me up as a sign that meritocracy is alive and well in our country, no need for a hand up to the poor by the government, let's cut taxes and cut more programs. More recently during political discussions though I mention all the "taking" I did from government programs in my youth. I review the specific programs and how they are either gone or severely reduced and how unlikely it would be for someone like me to get a similar result today. I am always amazed at how surprised people are to hear the specifics as I wonder what people think happens when we just lower taxes over and over again and cut programs. ...

EllaWashington State

... None of us created what we have in a vacuum, as an individual act of will - there was, and always will be, an environment around us that is either conducive or not to our personal success.

There were roads already built that we traveled; there were teachers and mentors who already knew the way; there was an era that was hospitable to our efforts; there were institutions that we relied on...

but none of us built what we have, alone.

Dr JimGermany

David Graeber (Author of "Debt") has a neat article on the interpretive division of labor, how those in subservient positions have to - and do - put more effort into understanding and adapting to those in power than the reverse. As he also noted, the same dynamic works between the sexes: females still have to put more effort into interpreting and adapting to males than males do for females.

Jonathan --NYCVerified

Your complaints are ridiculous. The personality traits that high achievers have are necessary to do their jobs.

Look at a middle manager in a large company, running a department of 1000 people. Is he going to talk to each of his employees individually, and get to know them? No. He's got to run his department by the numbers. His employees are just a bunch of skills and expenses on a spreadsheet. He takes 20 guys from that group, and moves them over here if he has to, without so much as a by-your-leave.

Or look at a busy orthopedic surgeon, operating on 20 knees a week. Does he talk to his patients and listen to their problems? No, he has assistants who do that. To him, you're just a knee, and you really wouldn't want any other way. He focuses on what counts in his profession.

These people may not be pleasing personalities, but they keep the world running.

MoralMagelIndianapolis, IN

True enough. However you assume that the manager has lesser managers to delegate the responsibilities of communication and information gathering to. The busy orthopedic surgeon has to have expert assistants to gather appropriate information for risk assessment and procedural qualification. This is not the same as a business, where this level of lower level managers is often eliminated, so communication and information gathering is limited to a a metric that may or may not capture the risks and success factors of real operations. This is also not the same as moving a group of employees with needed skills to plug a gap.

If a higher managers isolate themselves from real feedback and the chosen metrics are inadequate, how does he/she know how well things could be working or not? In the real world, what usually happens is that that higher manager simply puts the risk onto the subordinate, blames failures on them, and gets a pass by discharging the subordinate. The real world is full of enterprises that do not perform to potential until crisis hits. Do not confuse the businessman with the orthopedic surgeon whose success is based on objective criteria derived from outcomes.

ChloeGermany

One of the most interesting aspects of living in a small town in Germany is that my neighbours are people completely unlike me, whereas previously I've always surrounded myself with people just like me, at work and at home. The built environment here means we all interact together on a daily basis, from meeting at the markets to meeting at the pub. The rules about housing - that new developments must have a mix of renters, pensioners and owners - means people from different demographics end up living on the same street. On one side a multimillionaire is building the house of his dreams. On the other, a shop assistant pays rent. It's impossible to look down on people. Plus it would be social death.

W.A. SpitzerFaywood, New MexicoVerified

... I think this is true of small towns everywhere. I grew up in a small town. A small town has most all of the component parts of a big city, except everybody knows everybody; because they all live in the same neighborhood.

Josh HillNew LondonVerified

Just made much the same point. I believe that there is. I've seen it often in the corporate world. Those who make it to the top are typically both personally ambitious and willing to ignore principle to gain power and wealth. Sociopaths are known to do very well in business, and studies show that they are disproportionately represented on Wall Street

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“Now I am not concerned to deny that, at various times during the history of mankind, narrow oligarchies have kept too much of the wealth of the world to themselves, or that false economical systems have occasionally diminished the total supply of wealth, and, by their indirect operation, have caused it to be irrationally distributed.

Yet nothing is more certain, than that the mental picture which enchants the enthusiasts for benevolent democratic government is altogether false, and that, if the mass of mankind were to make an attempt at redividing the common stock of good things, they would resemble, not a number of claimants insisting on a fair division of a fund, but a mutinous crew feasting on a ship's provisions, gorging themselves on the meat and intoxicating themselves with liquors, but refusing to navigate the vessel to port.

It is among the simplest of economic truths, that far the largest part of the wealth of the world is constantly perishing by consumption and that, if it be not renewed by perpetual toil and adventure, either the human race, or the particular community making the experiment of resting without being thankful, will be extinguished or brought to the very verge of extinction. Sir Henry Sumner Maine, “Popular Government“ (1885)

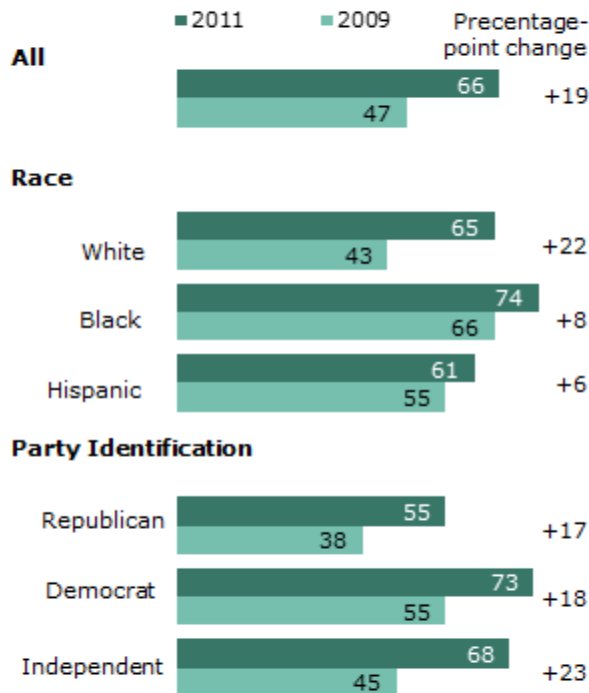
Released: January 11, 2012

Rising Share of Americans See Conflict Between Rich and Poor

by [Rich Morin](#)

Public Perceptions of Conflict Between Rich and Poor

% who say there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between the rich and the poor



Question wording: "In America, how much conflict is there between poor people and rich people: very strong conflicts, strong conflicts, not very strong conflicts, there are not conflicts?"

Notes: For results from the 2011 survey, n=2,048; for the 2009 survey, n=1,701. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

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The Occupy Wall Street movement no longer occupies Wall Street, but the issue of class conflict has captured a growing share of the national consciousness. A new Pew Research Center survey of 2,048 adults finds that about two-thirds of the public (66%) believes there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between the rich and the poor—an increase of 19 percentage points since 2009.

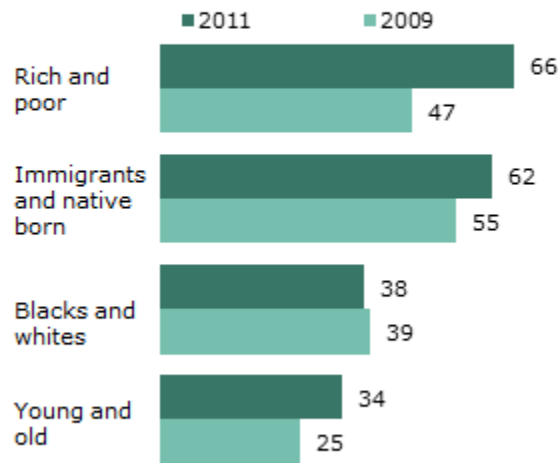
Not only have perceptions of class conflict grown more prevalent; so, too, has the belief that these disputes are intense. According to the new survey, three-in-ten Americans (30%) say there are “very strong conflicts” between poor people and rich people. That is double the proportion that offered a similar view in July 2009 and the largest share expressing this opinion since the question was first asked in 1987.

As a result, in the public’s evaluations of divisions within American society, conflicts between rich and poor now rank ahead of three other potential sources of group tension—between immigrants and the native born;

between blacks and whites; and between young and old. Back in 2009, more survey respondents said there were strong conflicts between immigrants and the native born than said the same about the rich and the poor.¹

Social Conflicts in Society

% who say there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between ...



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_____ Virtually all major demographic groups now perceive significantly more class conflict than two years ago. However, the survey found that younger adults, women, Democrats and African Americans are somewhat more likely than older people, men, Republicans, whites or Hispanics to say there are strong disagreements between rich and poor.

While blacks are still more likely than whites see serious class conflicts, the share of whites who hold this view has increased by 22 percentage points, to 65%, since 2009. At the same time, the proportion of blacks (74%) and Hispanics (61%) sharing this judgment has grown by single digits (8 and 6 points, respectively).

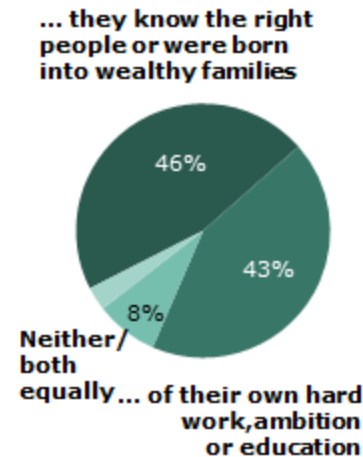
The biggest increases in perceptions of class conflicts occurred among political liberals and Americans who say they are not affiliated with either major party. In each group the proportion who say there are major disagreements between rich and poor Americans increased by more than 20 percentage points since 2009.

These changes in attitudes over a relatively short period of time may reflect the income and wealth inequality message conveyed by Occupy Wall Street protesters across the country in late 2011 that led to a spike in media attention to the topic. But the changes also may also reflect a growing public awareness of underlying shifts in the distribution of wealth in American society.² According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data, the proportion of overall wealth—a measure that includes home equity, stocks and bonds and the value of jewelry, furniture and other possessions—held by the top 10% of the population increased from 49% in 2005 to 56% in 2009.

Perceptions of the Wealthy

Why the Rich Are Rich

Most rich people are wealthy because ...



Note: Share of "Don't know/refused" and other responses shown but not labeled

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While the survey results show a significant shift in public perceptions of class conflict in American life, they do not necessarily signal an increase in grievances toward the wealthy. It is possible that individuals who see more conflict between the classes think that anger toward the rich is misdirected. Nor do these data suggest growing support for government measures to reduce income inequality.

In fact, other questions in the survey show that some key attitudes toward the wealthy have remained largely unchanged. For example, there has been no change in views about whether the rich became wealthy through personal effort or because they were fortunate enough to be from wealthy families or have the right connections.

A 46% plurality believes that most rich people “are wealthy mainly because they know the right people or were born into wealthy families.” But nearly as many have a more favorable view of the rich: 43% say wealthy people became rich “mainly because of their own hard work, ambition or education,” largely unchanged from a Pew survey in 2008.

About the Survey

This report is based on findings from a Pew Research Center telephone survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of 2,048 adults ages 18 and older living in the continental United States, including an oversample of 808 adults ages 18 to 34. A total of 769 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline telephone and 1,279 with those contacted on their cellular phone. The data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the continental United

States. Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International, in English and Spanish.

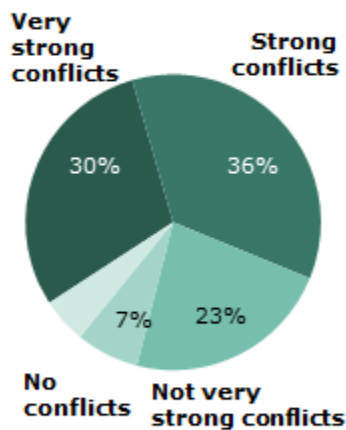
- Interviews conducted December 6-19, 2011
- 2,048 interviews
- Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points for results based on the total sample and 4.4 percentage points for adults ages 18 to 34 at the 95% confidence level.

Moreover, a recent Gallup survey found that a smaller share of the public believes that income inequality is a problem “that needs to be fixed” today than held that view in 1998 (45% vs. 52%). And when asked to rate the importance of various alternative federal policies, fewer than half (46%) say “reduc[ing] the income and wealth gap between the rich and the poor” is “extremely” or “very” important. In contrast, more than eight-in-ten (82%) say policies that encourage economic growth should be high priorities.

Social Conflict in American Life

Rich vs. Poor

Q. In America how much conflict is there between poor people and rich people?



Note: Share of "Don't know/refused" and "Can't choose" responses shown but not labeled

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About two-thirds of the public say there are strong conflicts between the rich and the poor, and nearly half of these (30%) say these conflicts are “very strong.” An additional 36% say these differences are “strong,” while 23% view them as “not very strong.” Only 7% say there are no conflicts between rich and poor Americans, while the remainder does not offer an opinion. . *[what is meant by conflict when change is not emphasized by as many – not after the rich, just want selves and others like them to do better?]*

Three other historic social divisions are viewed as less pervasive or contentious. About six-in-ten (62%) say there are strong conflicts between immigrants and the native born, including 24% who characterize these disagreements as “very strong.”

That represents a major change from the Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2009. At that time, a larger share of Americans believed that there were more strong conflicts between immigrants and the native born than between rich and poor people (55% vs. 47%). Today, even though perceptions of disagreements between immigrants and the native born have increased by 7 percentage points in the past two years, this social divide now ranks behind rich-poor conflicts in the public's hierarchy of social flashpoints.

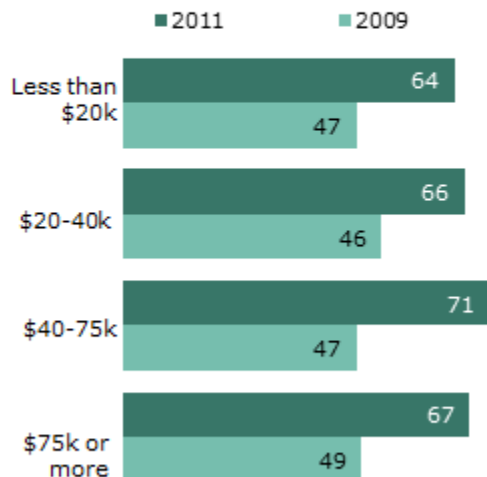
Two other social divides are viewed as less pervasive or intense. Fewer than four-in-ten (38%) say there are serious conflicts between blacks and whites, including 10% who see these conflicts as being “very strong.” About a third say there are similar disagreements between the young and old (34%, a 9-point increase since 2009).

Income and Perceptions of Class Conflict

The perception that strong and growing conflicts exist between the economic classes is broadly held. Not only do those at the bottom rungs of the income scale agree that there are serious disagreements between the economic classes, but even those who are relatively well-off hold that belief.

Perception of Class Conflict Rises In All Income Levels

% in each group who say there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between rich and poor



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Nearly two-thirds (64%) of all adults with family incomes of less than \$20,000 a year report serious conflicts between the rich and poor—a view shared by 67% of those earning \$75,000 a year or more. *[Need to subdivide this group more]*

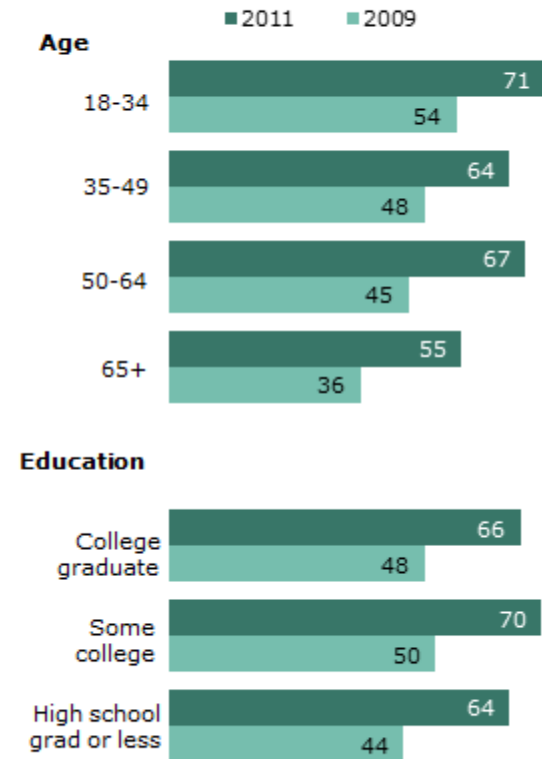
Moreover, the perceptions of class conflicts have grown in virtual lock step across all income groups since 2009, rising by 17 percentage points among those earning less than \$20,000 and by 18 points among those making \$75,000 or more.

The increase is slightly larger among middle-income Americans earning between \$40,000 and \$75,000. Among this group, the share who say there are strong class conflicts increased by 24 points, from 47% in 2009 to 71% in the latest survey.

Other Demographic Differences

The Demographics of Class Conflict

% in each group who say there are “very strong” or “strong” conflicts between rich and poor



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Young people ages 18 to 34—the demographic group most closely associated with the Occupy movement—is more likely than those 35 or older to see “strong” conflicts between the rich and poor. According to the survey, more than seven-in-ten (71%) of these young adults say there are major disagreements between the most and least affluent, a 17 percentage point increase since 2009. [*? Relation to job prospects vs hopes*]

Baby Boomers ages 50 to 64—the mothers and fathers of the Occupy generation—are nearly as likely to say there are serious conflicts between the upper and lower classes; fully two-thirds (67%) say this, a 22-point increase in the past two years. Among those ages 35 to 49, more than six-in-ten (64%) see serious class conflicts.

While older adults are the least likely to see serious disagreements between the classes, the proportion who express this view increased from 36% two years ago to 55% in the current survey.

Women are more likely than men to say there are serious disagreements between the rich and poor (71% vs. 60%). In 2009, about half of all women (51%) and 43% of men said there was strong conflict between the classes.

Perceptions of Class Conflict Surge among Whites

In the past two years, the proportion of whites who say there are strong conflicts between the rich and the poor has grown by 22 percentage points to 65%. That is more than triple the increase among blacks or Hispanics. The result is that the “perceptions gap” between blacks and whites on class conflict has been cut in half, while among Hispanics the difference has disappeared and may have reversed.

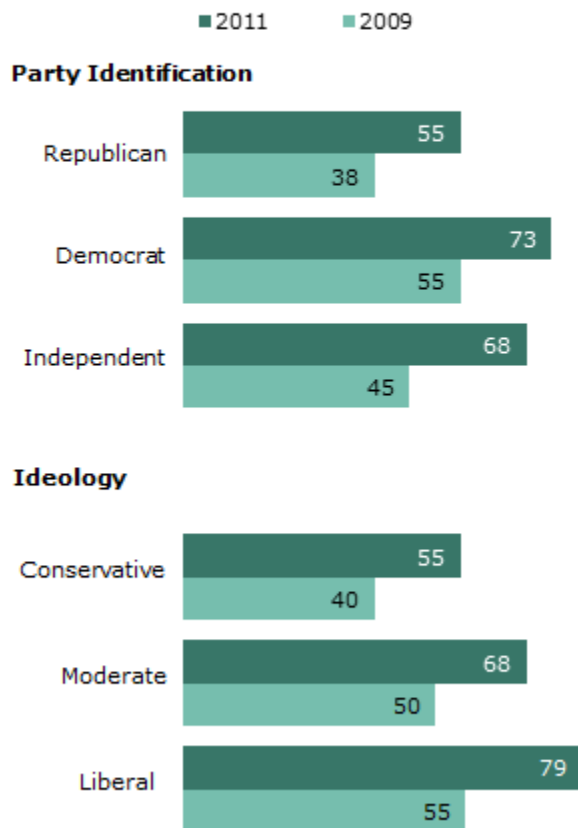
In the latest survey, the difference in the share of blacks and whites who say there are strong conflicts between rich and poor stands at 9 percentage points (74% for blacks vs. 65% for whites). In 2009 the black-white divide on this question stood at 23 percentage points (66% vs. 43%).

Among Hispanics, the gap has closed and may have reversed: In 2009, the share of Hispanics who said there were serious conflicts between the economic classes was 12 points larger than the share of whites (55% vs. 43%). Today, the proportion of whites who say there are serious disagreements is 4 percentage points greater than the share of Hispanics who hold the same view (65% for whites vs. 61% for Hispanics), though this difference is not statistically significant. [*more whites are affected than in 2009?*]

The Politics of Class Conflict

Political Orientation and Perceptions of Class Conflict

% in each group who say there are "very strong" or "strong" conflicts between rich and poor



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_____Democrats and political liberals are far more likely
than Republicans or conservatives to say there are major conflicts between rich people and poor people.

At the same time, in just two years the perceptions of class conflict have increased significantly among members of both political parties as well as among self-described independents, conservatives, liberals and moderates.

The result is that majorities of each political party and ideological point of view now agree that serious disputes exist between Americans on the top and bottom of the income ladder.

Nearly three-quarters of self-described Democrats (73%) say there are serious class conflicts, an 18 percentage point increase over those who said that in 2009. The increase among Republicans was about as large (17 percentage points); currently a majority of GOP partisans see serious conflicts between rich and poor.

Views of class conflicts increased the most among political independents, swelling by 23 percentage points to 68% in the current survey. Two years ago, fewer than half of all independents said there were major disagreements between the classes.

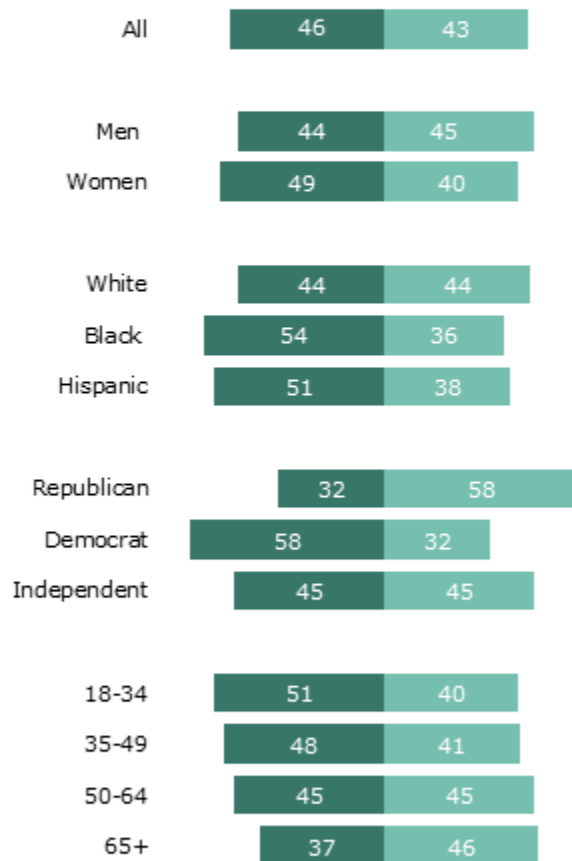
Similarly, perceptions of class conflict among ideological liberals increased by 23 percentage points to 79% in the past two years while rising less quickly among conservatives (15 points) or moderates (18 points).

How the Rich Got Wealthy

Is Wealth Mainly the Result of Personal Effort or Connections?

% in each group who say the rich are wealthy mainly because ...

- ...they know the right people or were born into wealthy families
- ...of their own hard work, ambition or education



Question wording: "Which of these statements comes closer to your own views—even if neither is exactly right: Most rich people today are wealthy mainly because of their own hard work, ambition or education ...or... Most rich people today are wealthy mainly because they know the right people or were born into wealthy families."

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_____Americans divide nearly evenly when they are asked if the rich became wealthy mostly due to their own hard work or mainly because they were born into a wealthy family or had connections.

A narrow plurality (46%) believes the rich are wealthy because they were born into money or "know the right people." But nearly as many (43%) say the rich got that way because of their own "hard work, ambition or education."

The latest result is virtually identical to the findings of a 2008 Pew survey. It found that 46% of the public believed that riches are mostly the result of having the right connections or being born into the right family, while 42% say hard work and individual characteristics are the main reason the rich are wealthy.³

These competing explanations of wealth are cited by roughly equal shares of all income groups. According to the latest Pew survey, 46% of those with family incomes of less than \$20,000 a year believe that luck and connections explain most wealth, a view shared by 47% of those with family incomes of \$100,000 or more.

In contrast, attitudes of Republicans and Democrats on this issue are mirror opposites of each other. Nearly six-in-ten Democrats (58%) say wealth is mainly due to family money or knowing the right people. An identical proportion of Republicans say wealth is mainly a consequence of hard work, ambition or having the necessary education to get ahead. Political independents fall in between: slightly less than half (45%) credit personal effort, while an equal share believe family circumstances or connections is the most likely explanation.

African Americans (54%) are more likely than non-Hispanic whites (44%) to see wealth as a consequence of family money or connections, a view shared by 51% of Hispanics. Women in the survey are slightly more likely than men to say wealth is the result of family or connections but these differences are not statistically significant.

Young people are significantly more likely than older adults to believe most wealth is due to family money or connections (51% for those ages 18-34 but 37% for adults 65 or older). However, the views of the “younger young”—those 18 to 25—differ significantly from those who are just a few years older.

Attitudes toward Wealth Correlated With Views on Class Conflict

Perceptions of class conflict among those who say the rich are wealthy ...

- Strong conflicts between rich and poor
- No strong conflicts between rich and poor

...because of own hard work, ambition or education



...because they know right people or were born into wealthy families



Note: Percentage who say "neither/other" or "both equally" not shown

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According to the survey, less than half (47%) of those 18 to 25 say the rich are wealthy because of reasons other than personal effort or drive, or about equal to the proportion of those 35 or older who share this view. In contrast, a majority (55%) of those 26 to 34 say being born into a wealthy family or personal connections are the main reasons that people are rich. [*hope vs personal experience*]

Views on Wealth, Class Conflict

Attitudes toward the wealthy—specifically, how the rich got that way—are somewhat correlated with views on class conflict.

According to the survey, **those who believe the rich acquired their fortunes mainly through their own efforts are significantly less likely than those who hold the contrary view to say there are strong conflicts between the classes (60% vs. 72%).** [*hope vs personal experience*] [*hope vs personal experience*]

[*Socialist countries of Europe cultivate a collective conscience and sense of responsibility; individualist countries like US do not*]

1. See Pew Social & Demographic Trends, "Forty Years After Woodstock, A Gentler Generation Gap," August 12, 2009 (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2009/08/12/forty-years-after-woodstockbra-gentler-generation-gap/>).
2. For a detailed look at one aspect of the wealth gap, see The Rising Age Gap in Economic Well-Being, by Richard Fry et al., Pew Research Center, Nov. 11, 2011 (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/07/the-rising-age-gap-in-economic-well-being/>).

3. See Pew Social & Demographic Trends, "Inside the Middle Class: Bad Times Hit the Good life," April 9, 2008 (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2008/04/09/inside-the-middle-class-bad-times-hit-the-good-life/>). 

This is about opinions - answers to a survey vs the way people react when not personally accountable/known to someone else.

Prefer the troubles one has to those one knows not of.

The "I've got mine mentality."

Coming off prosperity – sensitivity to loss; having expectations suddenly denied through no fault of one's own ----- psychol issues.

Socialist countries of Europe cultivate a collective conscience and sense of responsibility; individualist countries like US do not