

CLASS, LABOR AND GOVERNMENT IN DYSTOPIAN NOVELS: DISTRICTS, FACTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

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INTRODUCTION



What is power?

- In political science, we often say that power is the ability to get someone to do something he or she would not otherwise do.
- Who has power?
 - *On campus?*
 - *In Plano?*
 - *In Collin County?*
 - *In Texas?*
 - *In the United States?*
- Why does this matter?
 - *Who makes decisions that impact the society as a whole?*
 - *What or who influences those decisions?*

Who has power?

- Power is usually concentrated in the hands of a few groups, and those with power will try to maintain that power
- These groups tend to have power:
 - *Elected officials in a democracy or government officials in other systems*
 - *The wealthy*
 - *The military*
 - *Religious leaders*
 - *Industrial leaders and/or labor unions*
- Who is missing from this list?
 - *The “average” person*
 - *“Other” groups*

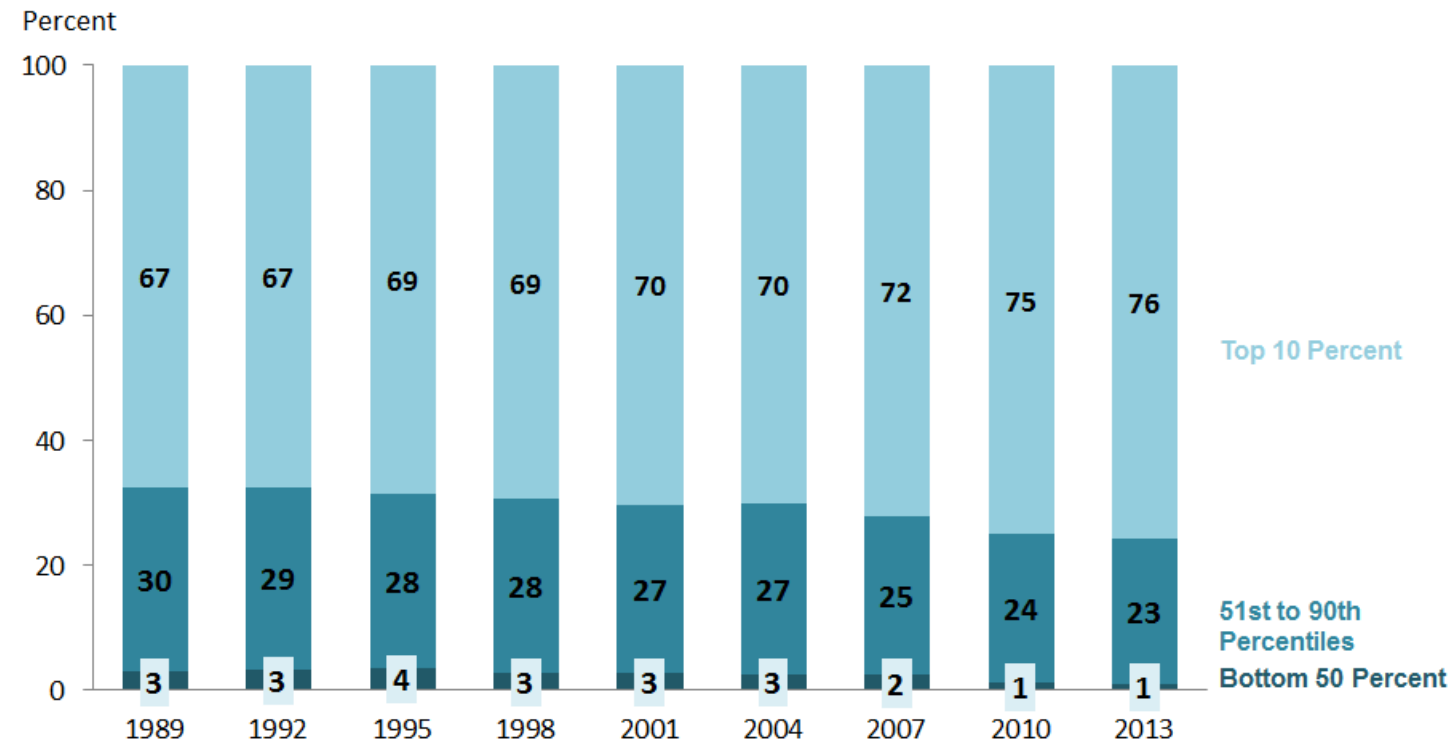
In the US today...

- Unequal distribution of [wealth](#)
 - 2013: 76% of wealth concentrated in the hands of 10% of the population
 - Gap between the wealthy and the rest of us is greater today than in 1989
- Unequal [representation](#) in government
 - Most elected officials are white, male, and Protestant
 - There is not much diversity of gender, race, or religion in public office
- Unequal rates of [voting](#) and political participation
 - Most Americans do not vote regularly
 - Those who do vote tend to be older than the population as a whole and whites tend to vote more than other groups
- Unequal rates of [food](#) and [health](#) security
 - 2015: 9.1% of the population was without insurance for the whole year (29.0 million people)
 - 2015: 12.7% of US households were food insecure at some point that year



Distribution of Wealth

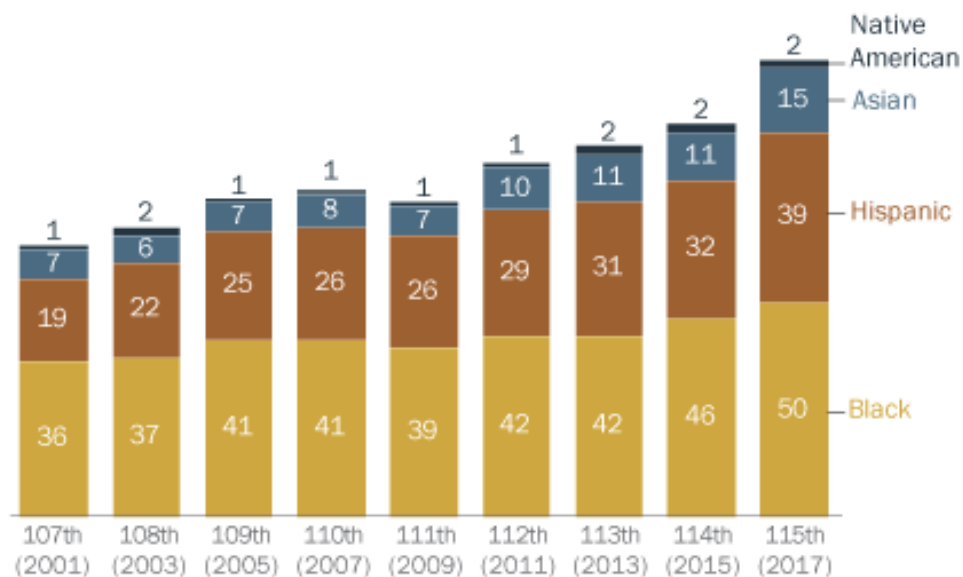
Shares of Family Wealth, by Wealth Group



Congressional Demographics

Growing racial and ethnic diversity in Congress

Number of nonwhite House and Senate members by race/ethnicity



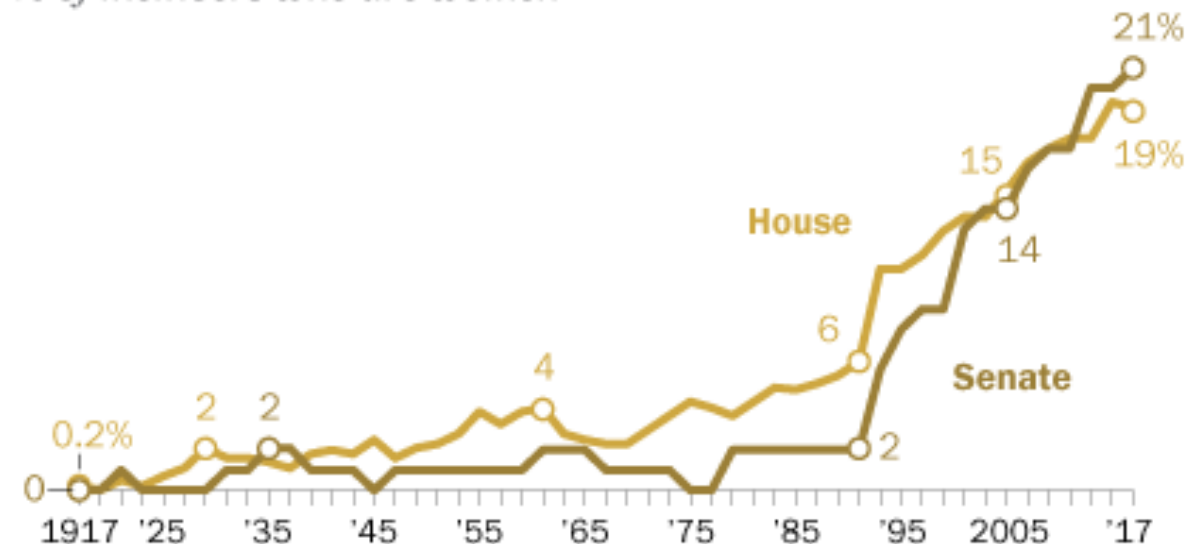
Note: The data do not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Figures represent the makeup of Congress on the first day of the session. Asian includes Pacific Islanders. For the 115th Congress, Sen. Kamala Harris is included in both Asian and black categories and Rep. Adriano Espaillat is included in both Hispanic and black categories.

Source: CQ Roll Call, Congressional Research Service, Brookings Institution.

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More women in Congress since the 1990s

% of members who are women



Note: Data do not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Figures represent the makeup of the Congress on the first day of the session. Data include only those who were sworn in as members and served more than one day.

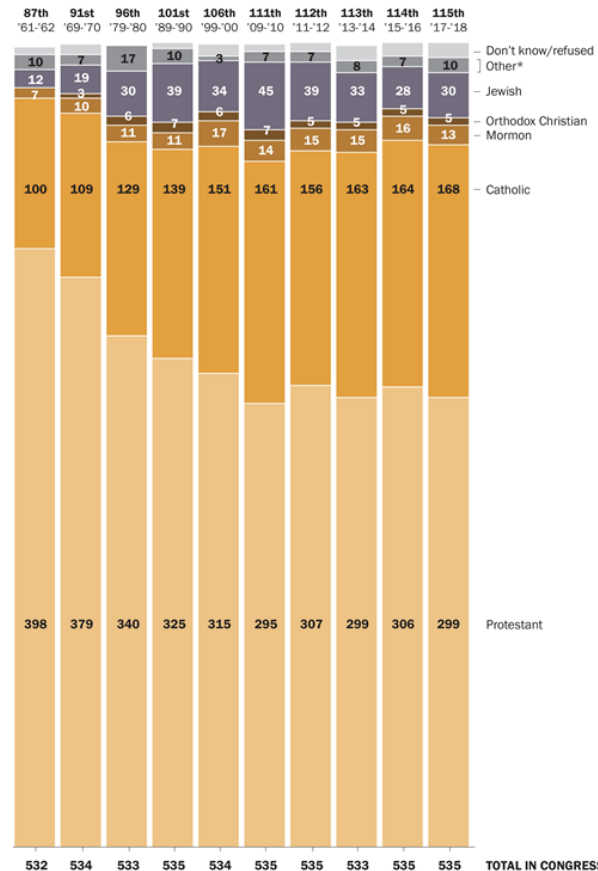
Source: Brookings Institution, CQ Roll Call.

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Congressional Demographics (2)

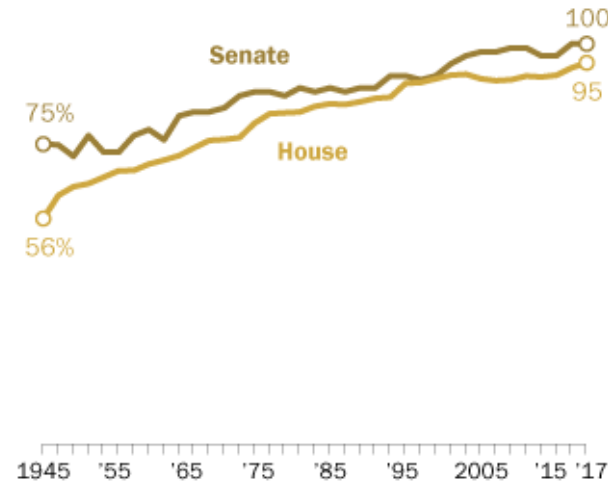
Changes in the religious makeup of Congress (1961-2017)



*Includes Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Unitarian Universalists, the unaffiliated and other faiths.
 Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: 1961 data from the Library of Congress; other data from CQ Roll Call and Pew Research Center. Figures for 115th Congress based on Pew Research Center analysis of data collected by CQ Roll Call, reflecting members of Congress to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2017.
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Almost every member of Congress now holds a college degree

% of members with a bachelor's degree or higher

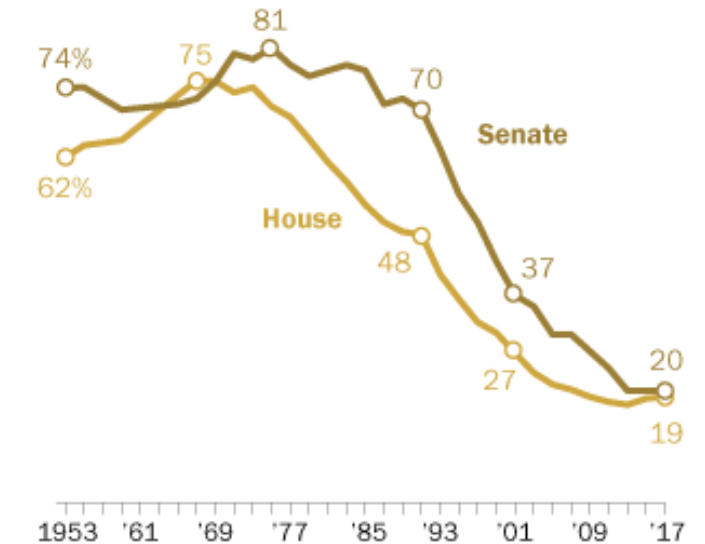


Note: Data do not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Figures represent the makeup of the Congress on the first day of the session. Senate figures for the 88th (1963) and 89th (1965) Congress are from Pew Research Center analysis of data from Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.
 Source: Congressional Research Service, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.

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Fewer veterans in Congress

% of members with previous military service



Note: Data do not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Figures represent the end of the first session of each Congress.
 Source: Brookings Institution, Congressional Research Service, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Pew Research Center calculations.

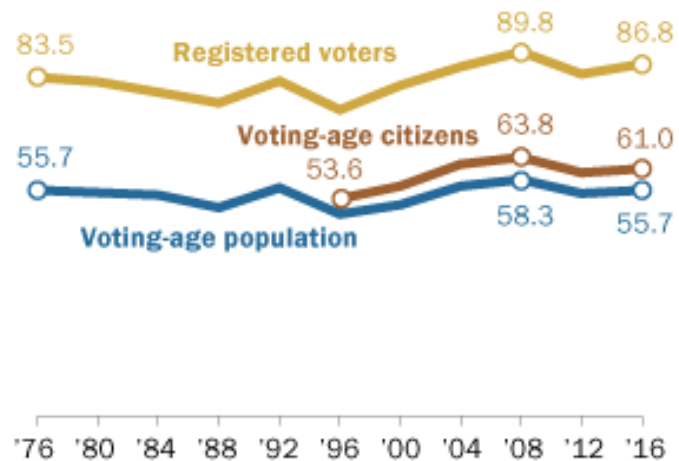
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Voter turnout

Turnout in U.S. presidential elections

Votes cast as a share of ...

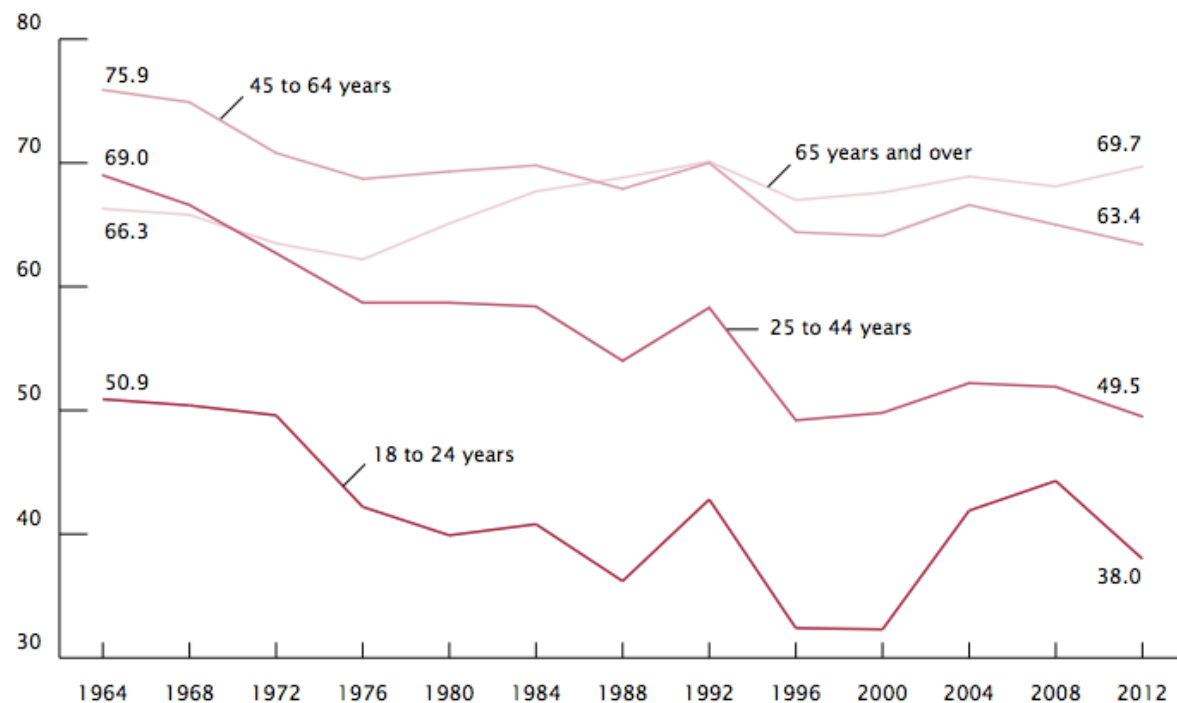


Source: Census Bureau (population estimates), House Clerk's office and Pew Research Center (vote totals).

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Figure 1.
Voting Rates Over Time for the Voting-Age Population: 1964–2012

(In percent)

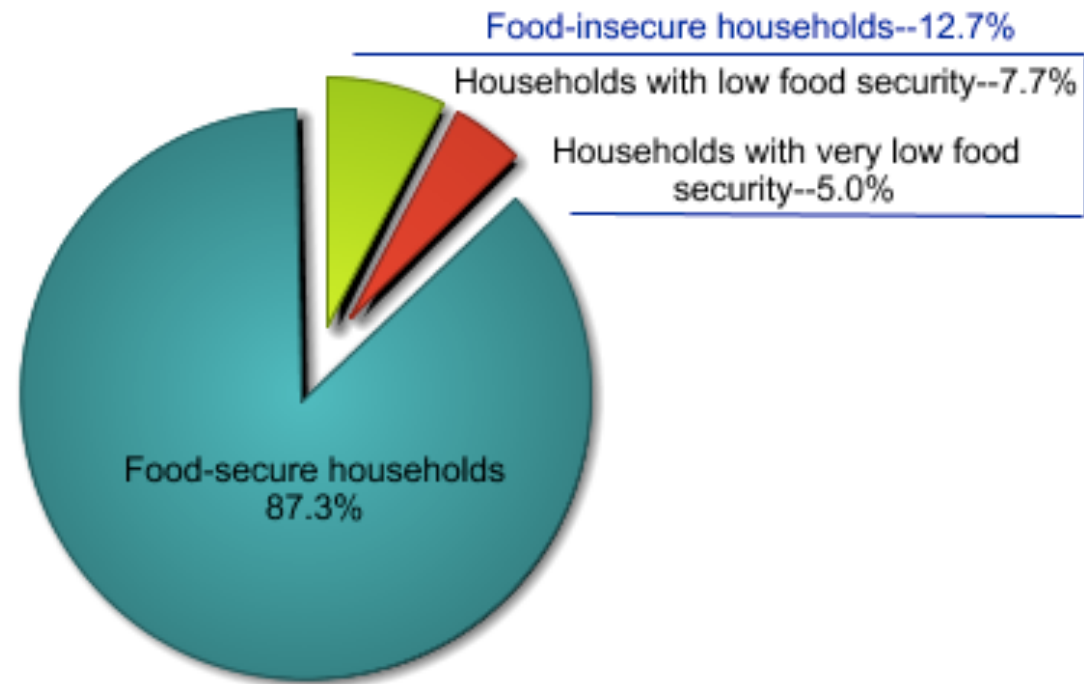


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Select Years.



Food Security

U.S. households by food security status, 2015

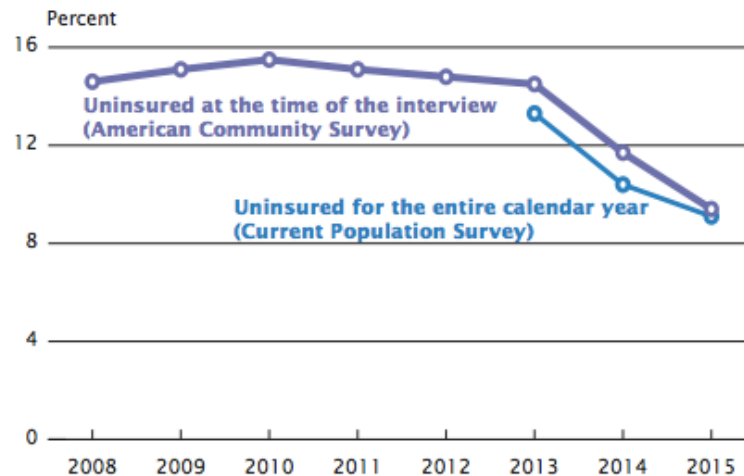


Source: Calculated by ERS, USDA, using data from the December 2015 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.



Insurance Rates

Figure 2.
Uninsured Rate: 2008 to 2015

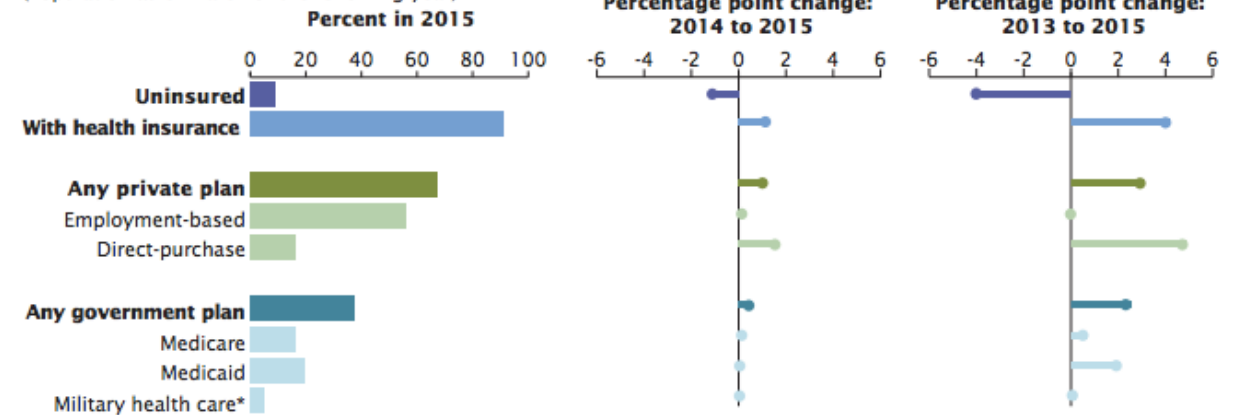


Note: For the American Community Survey, estimates are for the civilian noninstitutionalized population. For the Current Population Survey, estimates reflect the population as of March of the following year. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions in the Current Population Survey, see www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar16.pdf. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions in the American Community Survey, see www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2015.pdf.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014, 2015, and 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplements and 2008 to 2015 1-Year American Community Surveys.

Figure 1.
Percentage of People by Type of Health Insurance Coverage and Change From 2013 to 2015

(Population as of March of the following year)



* Military health care includes TRICARE and CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs), as well as care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the military.

Note: Between 2014 and 2015, there was no statistically significant change in the percentage of people covered by employment-based health insurance, Medicaid, or military health care. Between 2013 and 2015, there was not a statistically significant change in the percentage of people covered by employment-based health insurance or military health care. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions in the Current Population Survey, see www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar16.pdf.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2014 to 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.



Why does this matter?

- Who makes decisions in the United States?
- When an elected official makes a decision, whose opinions does he or she pay attention to?
- What other systems are possible?
- Why is this important?

How can speculative fiction help us?

- “What speculative fiction is really good at is not the future, but the present – taking an aspect of it that troubles or is dangerous, and extending and extrapolating that aspect into something that allows the people of that time to see what they are doing from a different angle and from a different place. It’s cautionary.” – Neil Gaiman, in his introduction to Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*
- “If you like you can read ... science fiction as a thought-experiment. Let's say (says Mary Shelley) that a young doctor creates a human being in his laboratory; let's say (says Philip K. Dick) that the Allies lost the second world war; let's say this or that is such and so, and see what happens. ... The purpose of a thought-experiment, as the term was used by Schrodinger and other physicists, is not to predict the future – indeed Schrodinger's most famous thought-experiment goes to show that the ‘future,’ on the quantum level, cannot be predicted – but to describe reality, the present world.” – Ursula Le Guin, in her introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*

HUNGER GAMES



Life in the Capitol

- The Capitol is home to:
 - *The government*
 - *The wealthy*
 - *The media*
 - *The “trend setters”*
- These people make decisions that affect the lives of everyone in Panem
 - *But, those who live in the individual districts have no way to influence what happens in the Capitol*
- Forced to watch what the Capitol wants them to watch—all media is state run
- Forced to work in designated areas/fields
- Forced to send their children to the Hunger Games



Life in Districts 11 & 12

- Districts 11 and 12 are home to:
 - *The poorest people in Panem*
 - *Coal miners and agricultural laborers*
 - *Food insecurity*



Food Insecurity in Hunger Games

- Katniss says, “Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District 12. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Straggling through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or dying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body. Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one.”



The Odds are Never in Their Favor

■ District Level

- *Districts are not equal in terms of wealth*
- *Those from the poorer districts are more likely to be forced to enter the Hunger Games, instead of volunteering*

■ Inside the District

- *Miners and their families vs. mercantile class*
- *The poorer residents are forced to enter their names for the reaping more times than the wealthier ones.*

■ During the Games

- *those from poorer districts are less likely to receive helpful sponsorship gifts*
- *they are less likely to have been trained in survival skills.*

Path to Resistance

- But these districts also eventually produce the resistance
- Do they gain more power or agency by working together?
- Katniss says, “What must it have cost the people of District 11 who can’t even feed themselves? How many would’ve had to do without to scrape up a coin to put in the collection for this one loaf? It had been meant for Rue, surely. But instead of pulling the gift when she died, they’d authorized Haymitch to give it to me. As a thank-you? Or because, like me, they don’t like to let debts go unpaid? For whatever reason, this is a first. A district gift to a tribute who’s not your own.”



DIVERGENT



The Choosing Ceremony

- Who decides what you are going to do with your life?
- What traits do you think are most important to be a “good” member of society?
- What if there was a “test” you could take that would show you the “right” path for you?
- Should everyone have a defined role in society?
- Choosing ceremony: removes agency from the individual and gives it to the collective

The Factionless

- Should a single moment of failure define your life?
- Why are some jobs characterized as working class? What does working class mean?
- What value can be gained from having very little?
- Tris says, “We are in a factionless storehouse, and the factionless, who are supposed to be scattered, isolated, and without community...are together inside it. Are together, like a faction.”

The Factionless and Poverty

- What is the best way to treat those who are in poverty?
- “‘We didn’t even have guards near the fence until five years ago,’ says Will. ‘Don’t you remember when Dauntless police used to patrol the factionless sector?’

‘Yes,’ I say. I also remember that my father was one of the people who voted to get the Dauntless out of the factionless sector of the city. He said the poor didn’t need policing; they needed help, and we could give it to them. But I would rather not mention that now, or here. It’s one of the many things Erudite gives as evidence of Abnegation’s incompetence.”



The Importance of Choice

- The faction system isn't ultimately successful
 - *Tris says, "The reason the factions were evil is because there was no way out of them. They gave us the illusion of choice without actually giving us a choice."*
- But neither is the rotating job system that Evelyn tries to create later in the series
- And neither is the hierarchy in the Bureau of Genetic Welfare
 - *One of the workers says, "Support staff is more than just a job. Almost all of us are GDs – genetically damaged, leftovers from the failed city experiments. ... All of the scientists are GPs – genetically pure."*

CONCLUSIONS



Role of agency

- No system is perfect
 - *How do we find our way in a flawed system?*
 - *What is the role of the individual?*
- Should it matter how much money you have?
- Should it matter how much education you have?
- Should your race or religion matter?
 - *What is the role of organized groups?*
 - *What is the role of the society?*
 - *What is the role of the government?*

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