



# Quintiles of income

cannot know from this data. At best, this data set is only able to provide clues as to what general demographic, and more specifically labor market variables may be positively correlated with civic participation and which in fact may predispose people to be more engaged.

My general hypothesis is that the higher one's socioeconomic status is as measured by income levels, the more one is likely to be engaged as measured by these variables. To the extent that it is true, it would support the proposition that a wage policy that broadly boosts incomes might similarly have the effect of increasing public participation, which in turn would enhance democracy. But my other hypothesis is that where inequality is greater, there are bound to be higher levels of civic engagement among those at the top of the income distribution relative to others. In part, this will be a function of those at the lower end of the distribution becoming even less civically engaged.

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To place the issues in context, the New York City metro area had the most extreme income inequality in the country in 2008. Measured by the ratio between the mean household incomes of the top and bottom quintiles of income recipients, the magnitude of the differences between national and local inequality levels can be seen in Table 1. The mean income of the bottom fifth (\$24,395) was only 0.3 % more in New York than in the U.S. as a whole (\$24,332), while the mean income of the top fifth in New York (\$242,395) was 20.7 % more than the U.S. as a whole (\$200,854). (This is no trivial



statistically significant in the New York City metro area. What is interesting, however, is the effect of union coverage for low-level participation, which appears to be incredibly strong in New York. Union coverage, however, is not statistically significant for medium- or high-level participation in either the U.S. or New York. Still, the main difference between the New York City metro area and the nation as a whole is that coming from high income households appears to have stronger effects for all levels of participation, especially medium and high levels. This would only appear to strengthen the observation in Table 3 that there is substantially greater civic engagement among those with incomes over \$100,000 in New York City than in the rest of the country.

years when minimum wages increased, the median wages in 10

What, then, are we to make of all this? On one level, the data only bears out what we already know from the literature on socioeconomic status and participation. But on another level, it is suggestive that a wage policy that has the effect of raising families from below the poverty level to even the level of the near-poor could increase civic engagement dramatically, and that this will have an impact on democracy. A wage policy, even if nothing more than raising the minimum wage, will benefit the middle class. New research covering more than forty years of data has shown that, in