Limitarianism in America: is there a riches line?
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What is Limitarianism?

• The intention of the survey is to gauge how people feel about extreme wealth. Drawing on the idea of economic limitarianism, the goal is to find if Americans believe that there is a moral limit to wealth, and if so, where.
• Why limit wealth?
  • Political inequality – the rich can use their wealth to enact laws and policies that benefit them in ways that the poor cannot
  • Urgent Needs – e.g. extreme poverty, climate change
  • Above argument originally posed by Robeyns, 2019

Previous Studies

• Robeyns et al. found that the Dutch population places the riches line at 2.2 million Euros.
• Davis et al. did not find support for a normative riches line in London, but found a common definition for “rich” as between the two levels below.

Methodology

• We want to know:
  • Does the respondent think this vignette is rich?
  • Does the respondent think this wealth is too much?
  • Does the respondent think that most people agree with them?
• We then ask respondents three questions
  • 1. Rank the level of richness of the family
  • 2. Is this level of wealth acceptable or not
  • 3. Out of 10 community members how many people they believe find this too rich
• Polling a representative sample of Americans, we can determine how the riches line is affected by demographic factors such as:
  • Age
  • Race
  • Sex
  • Income

How to Depict Wealth?

• Listing numerical values is too abstract for most people to accurately judge, so we use create 10 vignettes at increasing wealth levels
• Forms of wealth include:
  • Home(s)
  • Car(s)
  • Vacations
  • Savings and Investments
• Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family F – 2 parents (aka), 2 children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House: 3 Bedroom, 2 Bathroom Condominium in Manhattan – $1.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second House: 2 Bedroom 800 sq ft Beach House in East Hampton – $300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars: 1 Lexus, 1 Audi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holidays (Annual): 2 Weeks at Disney World Florida, 1 week in the United Kingdom, 1 week in France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings: $200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Worth: $1.4 million</td>
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</tbody>
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As wealth increases, each of the above categories become more luxurious.

Next Steps

• The project is currently still in progress. The original goal was to publish the survey during the month of July and then analyze the results in August.
• However, after meeting with Dr. Robeyns I decided to postpone this timeline and redesign the survey to better fit how the wealthy truly live.
• There are several ways to do this, including:
  • Working with sociologists who study demographics and wealth
  • Reaching out to wealth managers and wealthy individuals for anecdotal evidence
  • Talking to journalists who study wealth
• I am looking to do all of these. While this project is not what I had originally anticipated, I am far happier with the result. This process has been a great learning experience for me.

Survey Redesign

• Making the survey representative of how the rich live is difficult due to the lack of data, however we plan to draw on many different sources to arrive at a rough estimate.
• Also, the original survey only ranged in wealth from $400,000 to $80 million. In the new survey we plan to increase the lowest wealth levels, and raise the highest to $100 million or even $1 billion.

References

