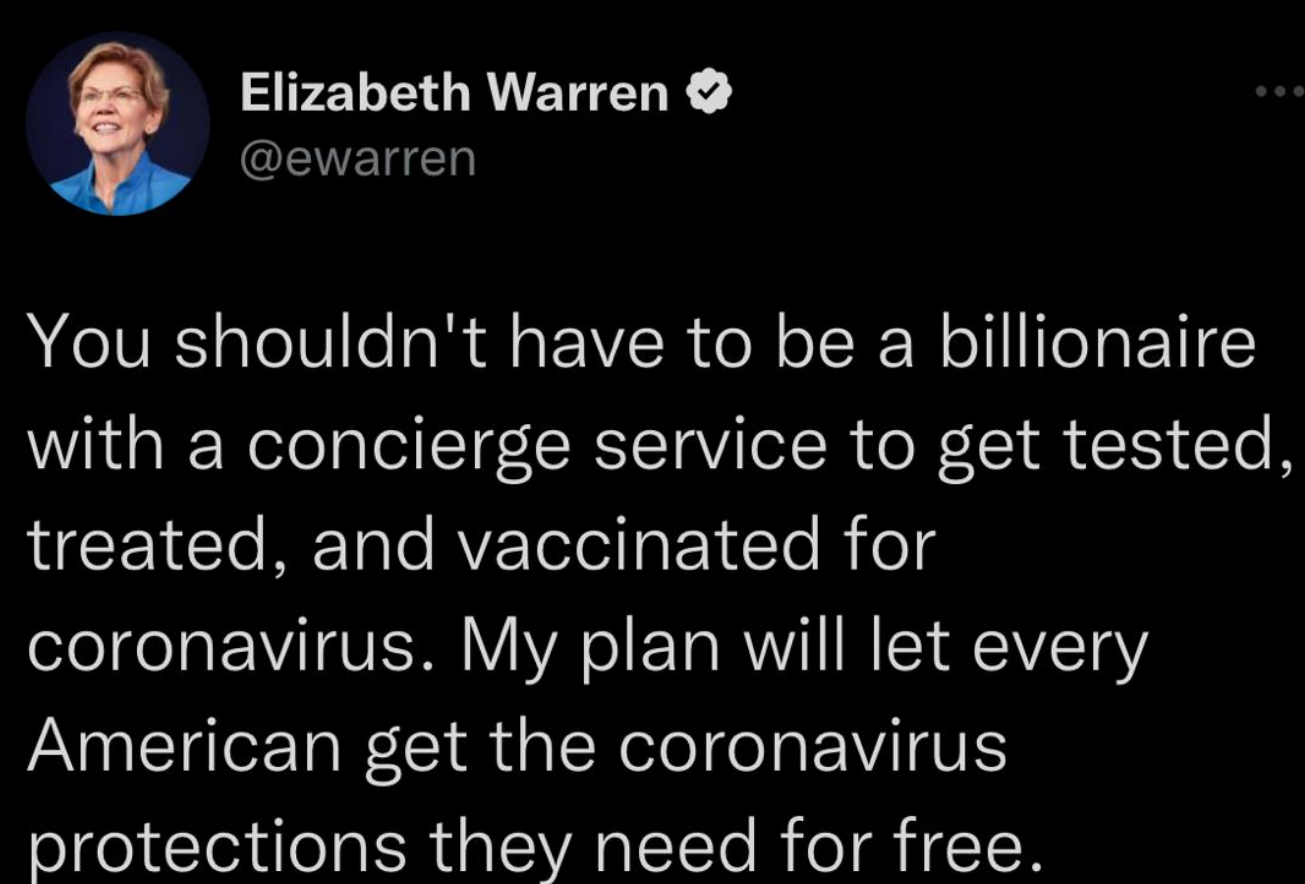
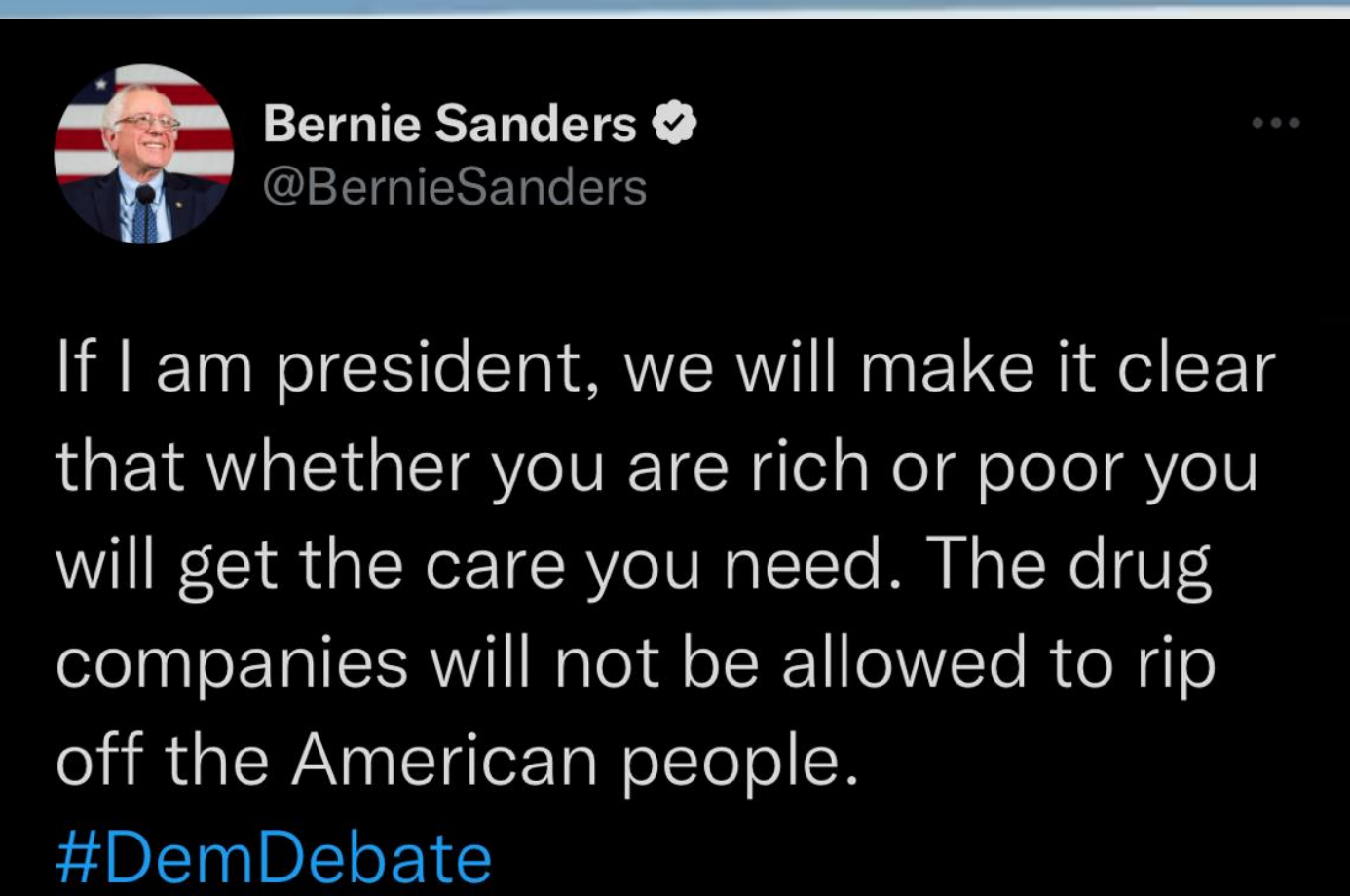


# How Presidential Candidates Are Shaping Inequality Rhetoric in the New Gilded Age

Abby Doria & Dr. Amber Wichowsky  
Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

## Background

No other year was quite as polarizing for America as 2020 was. It brought an incredible amount of social strife. Many Americans faced financial crises because of the COVID-19 pandemic while the nation's biggest corporations grew more in value. Furthermore, the rise in discussion of systemic racial inequality following the Black Lives Matter movement brought to light the ways in which marginalized groups are affected by economic inequality. These issues became incredibly divisive between America's two major political parties, and this tension culminated in the 2020 Presidential Election. With these issues weighing heavily on Americans' minds, Democrat candidates made sure to emphasize their stances on them in their campaign messages on Twitter.



## Research Questions

Q1: As inequality rose as a campaign issue in the 2020 Presidential Election, how were the Democratic candidates talking about the gaps between various socioeconomic, racial, or gender groups?  
Q2: Are there gender or racial differences in candidate rhetoric?

## Data and Methods

The data being analyzed are tweets posted by Democratic presidential candidates in the time leading up to the election. We developed a codebook for the data and coded the data for mention of the wealthy, the middle class, the working class, the poor, racial inequality, and gender inequality.

## Preliminary Findings

The first group of data shows that out of the six groups, candidates were most likely to mention the rich by a landslide margin. The other aforementioned socioeconomic statuses were secondary, while racial inequality, and, finally, gender inequality brought up the rear. It could be inferred that Democratic candidates were making an attempt to appeal to middle-class voters by creating a common enemy--the nation's wealthiest.

There were three statistically significant differences between how male and female candidates discussed inequality in their campaign tweets, the first of which being that female candidates were much more likely to discuss the rich. On the other hand, male candidates were more likely to discuss the working class and the poor. This is unique because while the working class is now majority-female and quite racially diverse, the image that may come to many Americans' minds is a white man in a hard hat.

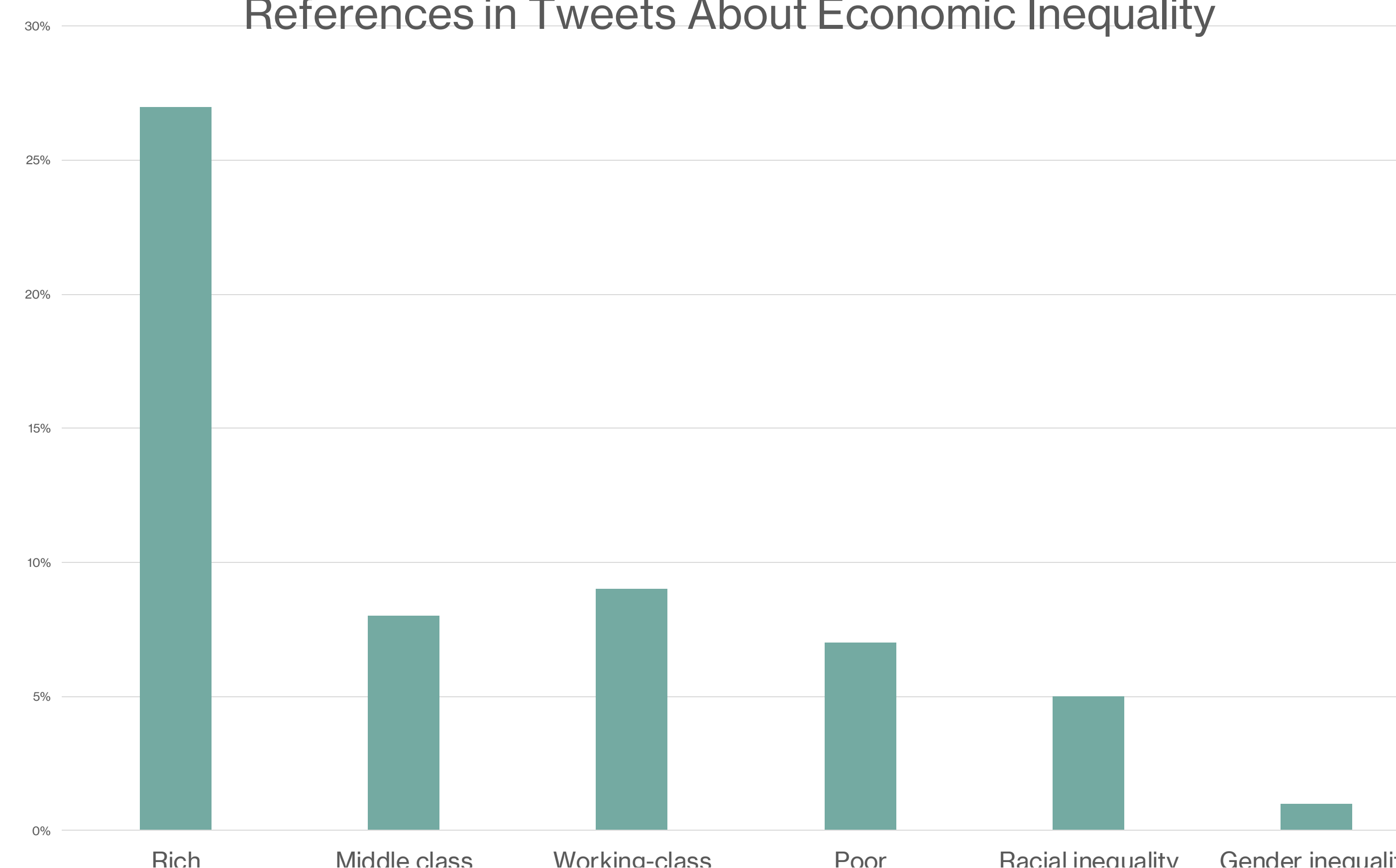
Similar to the gender comparison, there were also three statistically significant differences between white and nonwhite candidates. White candidates were more likely to talk about the rich, and this could be because a disproportionately high amount of wealthy people in the United States are white. On the contrary, nonwhite candidates were more likely to reference the poor and racial and gender inequality. This result could be because people of color have a higher likelihood of suffering the negative consequences of economic, racial, and gender inequality.

## Next Steps and Acknowledgements

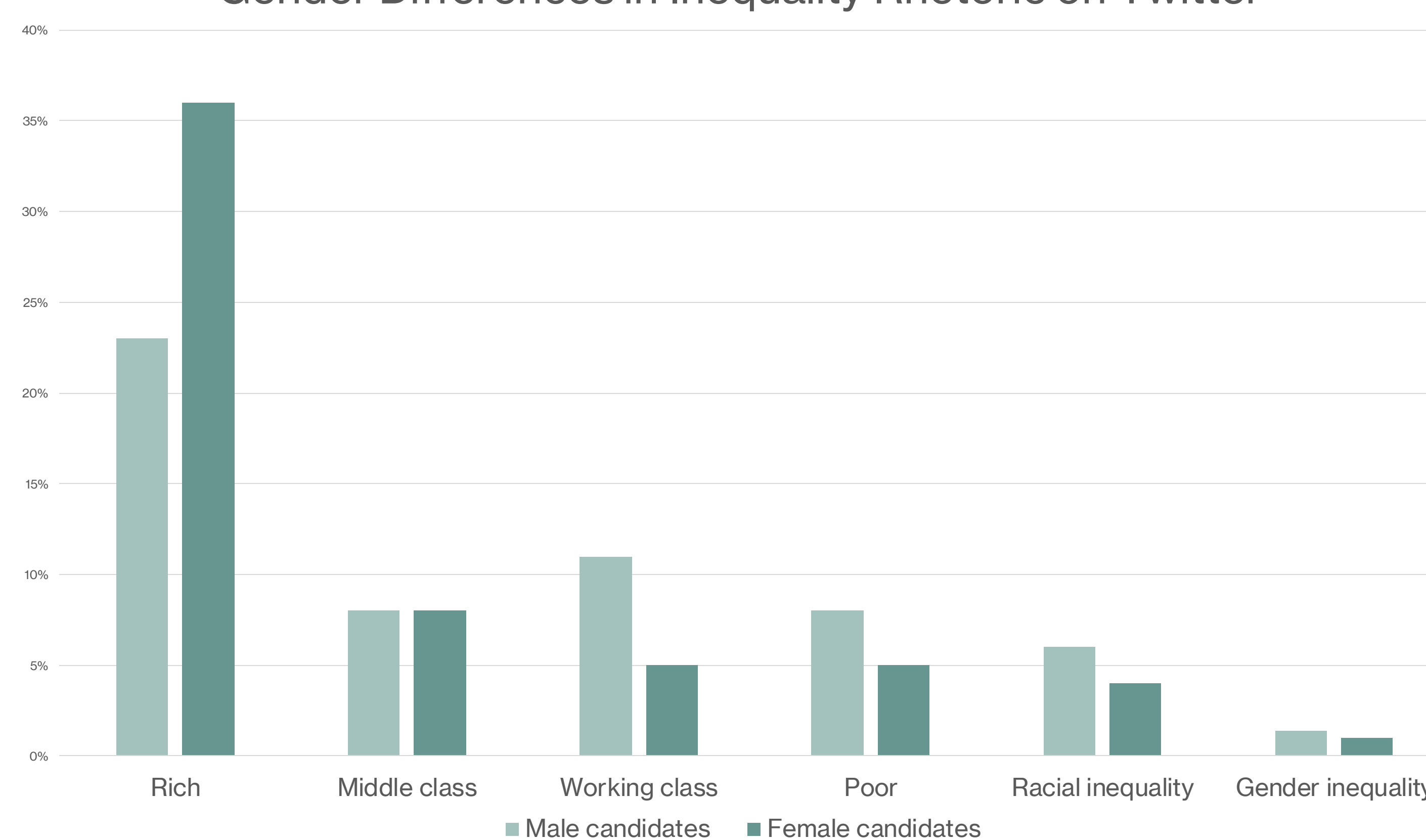
It should be noted that the data presented is not the complete data set, and only just over half of the collected data in the codebook has been coded and analyzed. Nothing can be concluded yet, and only the patterns found thus far have been noted. In the next few months, coding will be completed, and I will be applying to present this research at the Midwest Political Science Association in April of 2023.

I would like to thank Dr. Amber Wichowsky for being an outstanding research mentor and the MU4Gold Scholars Program for providing me with this rare and wonderful opportunity.

References in Tweets About Economic Inequality



Gender Differences in Inequality Rhetoric on Twitter



Racial Differences in Inequality Rhetoric on Twitter

