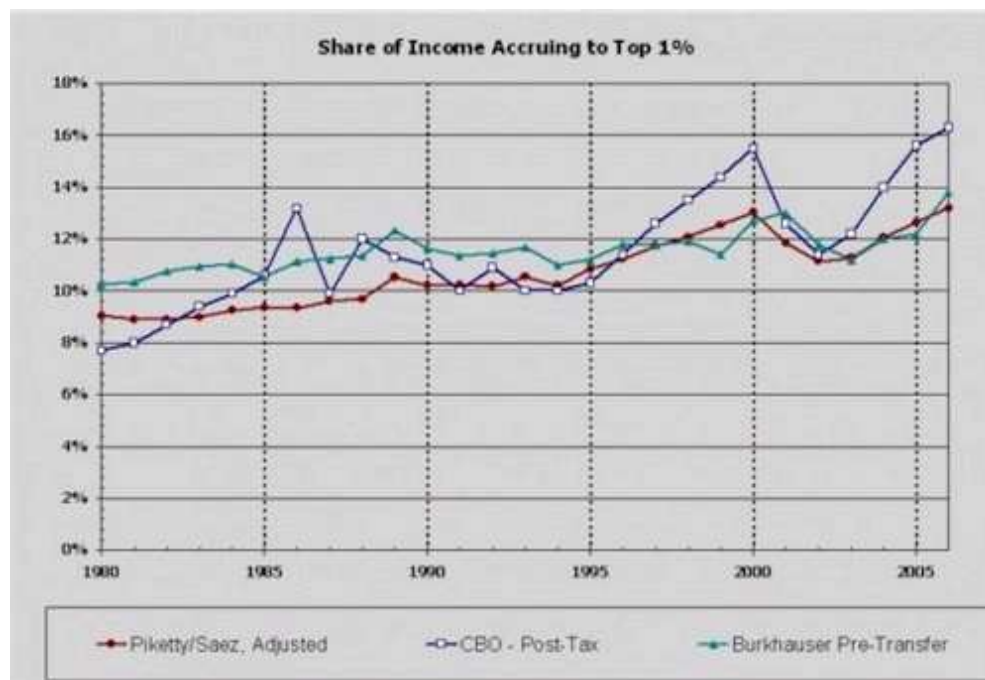


Matt Yglesias

Nov 12th, 2009 at 3:57 pm

Winship on Inequality

Scott Winship has an interesting, but slightly bizarre, [post about inequality trends](#) in the United States. He writes as if he's debunking liberal claims about growing inequality. But, in fact, his post seems to me to support the liberal position. In particular, he pretends not to realize that an important school of right-of-center thought holds that [there's been no increase](#) in inequality whatsoever. Winship shows that this is wrong.



In particular, he shows that while there's room for disagreement about exactly how large the magnitude has been, there's been a substantial increase in the share of national income going to the top one percent. The growth in inequality in the United States is often—usually by centrist sorts—exclusively attributed to college preparation issues or graduation rates, but the concentration in the top one percent is hard to understand in those terms. My read of this data, which I think is a pretty conventional liberal understanding, is that increased taxes on high-income individuals can make most people better off by either paying for more and better public services or else reducing the need to cut Medicare benefits in the future.

At any rate, Winship is very good with numbers but always seems overwhelmingly more interested in annoying liberals than in rectifying social problems. But what he's shown here is that even a pretty serious effort to debunk the Pittkey-Saez inequality data that liberals like to cite shows that their main conclusions are pretty unassailable. There's a separate issue of should we care (Will Wilkinson makes the case that we shouldn't [here](#)) or should we care as much as some liberal say we should. But the basic facts seem pretty clear.