

# The Role of Inequality Perceptions, Perceived Material Threat and Political Ideology in Support to Social Welfare Policies among the Advantaged – A Research Plan

## Political Solidarity Model of The Powerful

### Introduction

Earlier research and theories in social psychology have largely focused either on the role of minorities in social change or on the system perpetuating tendencies of members of dominant groups, such as the lower support for redistribution among members of higher social classes. Few studies, however, have looked at the determinants of outgroup support by the advantaged.

### Variation in welfare support among the advantaged

Results from preliminary analyses with data from the ESS Round 3 (2007, 25 countries) show that: Among individuals with tertiary education, 21 percent disagreed with the statement that the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels, while 61 percent agreed. Thus, using education as a measure of social position, we can conclude that not all members of advantaged groups oppose redistributive measures.

-The aim of my PhD study will be to: explain political solidarity, i.e. support to redistributive social policies by members of dominant groups

### Predictors

-Perceptions of inequality – a largely unexplored predictor of support to redistribution (Leach, Snyder & Iyer, 2002)

-Collective country level material threat (e.g. unemployment level), and perceived individual level material threat as predictors of welfare support (Elcheroth & Spini, 2007), as well as the interplay between different level threats will be studied. In a post-modern society, even members of advantaged groups are likely to experience different forms of material vulnerability.

-Political ideology (egalitarianism vs. free-market ideology) influences welfare attitudes (Staerklé et al. 2007)

## Data & Measures

-Data (forthcoming): European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4, 2009, in particular the rotating module on welfare attitudes (40 items), includes 30 countries, N=approx. 60 000

-Definition of the powerful using alternative measures (income, education)

### Dependent variables

-Single and multi-item measures of welfare support (e.g. "Government should increase taxes and spend more on social benefits and services")

### Independent variables

-Indicator of perceived inequality, examples of items:

-"Of every 100 people of working age in your country, how many would you say do not have enough money for basic necessities?"

-"What do you think of the overall standard of living of pensioners / the unemployed?"

-"There are insufficient benefits to help the people who are really in need."

-Perceived material threat: items on the individual's perceptions that he/she will become unemployed or not be able to make ends meet

-Collective threat (country level): comparative measures of social inequality and exclusion, e.g. unemployment, and changes in these

-Political ideology, two items:

-"Large differences in people's incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences in talents and efforts."

-"For a society to be fair, differences in people's standard of living should be small."

## Hypotheses

-The advantaged are expected to support redistribution only to the extent that they are aware of social inequality

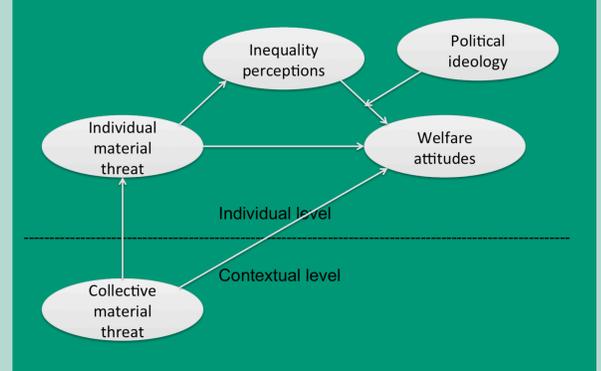
-Threat, i.e. perceived individual vulnerability is expected to predict higher support for welfare. This effect is expected to be partly mediated by inequality perceptions. I.e. threat leads to increased awareness of inequality, which in turn increases support to welfare.

-Inequality perceptions mediate the relationship between threat and welfare attitudes only for left-wing oriented individuals (moderated mediation)

-Finally, the idea is to see whether the expected relationships are the same across the 30 countries or whether some cultural and structural factors intervene in the process

- On the contextual level, collective threat is expected to lead higher support for welfare.

## Political Solidarity Model



### Expected outcomes

The study is expected to result in a comparative cross-national typology of different rationales or logics explaining support to welfare (e.g. self-interest, group-interest, social stability, guilt, altruism).

### References

- Elcheroth, G., & Spini, D. (2007). Classes sociales et jugements normatifs de jeunes français: La justification du système par les défavorisés revisitée. *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, 75–76, 117–131.
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- Staerklé, C., Delay, C., Gianettoni, L., Roux, P., (2007). *Qui a droit à quoi? Représentations et légitimation de l'ordre social*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.