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SOCIAL INCLUSION

Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe

Volume 12

2024

Open Access Journal

ISSN: 2183-2803

Edited by Frances Stewart, Arnim Langer, and Line Kuppens

Social Inclusion, 2024, Volume 12
Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe

Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070–129 Lisbon
Portugal

Design by Typografia®
http://www.typografia.pt/en/

Cover image: © Olivier Le Moal from iStock

Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion

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2024 • Volume 12 • Editorial 8387
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.8387

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EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal

Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe

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Submitted: 28 March 2024 **Published:** 16 April 2024

Issue: This editorial is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

While recent literature has extensively addressed inequalities between households or individuals, known as "vertical inequalities," there remains a dearth of research on socio-economic disparities among culturally defined groups, termed "horizontal inequalities" (HIs). In diverse societies, addressing such group disparities is imperative to promote economic efficiency, political stability, and social cohesion. This thematic issue investigates the level of public support for HI-correcting policies across nine contexts: Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Malaysia, Kenya, Western Balkans, India, the United States, and Northern Ireland. The articles within this issue collectively identify and analyze crucial factors at the individual, group, and national levels. In this editorial, we summarize major findings, reflecting on the salience of group identity across majority and minority contexts, the role of perceptions vs more objective measures of inequality and its causes, and the significance of shifting political climates and societal discourses.

Keywords

affirmative action; attitudes; ethnicity; horizontal inequalities; race; redistribution

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, the concept and phenomenon of inequality have been widely studied across a range of disciplines. Most research has focused on income and wealth inequalities between individuals or households, or what Stewart (2002) termed "vertical inequality" as distinct from "horizontal inequalities" (HIs), that is, socio-economic inequalities between culturally defined groups. Socio-economic HIs cover a range of dimensions, referring for example to inequalities in the ownership of assets, incomes, and

employment opportunities. They may also pertain to inequalities in access to a range of social services (including education, healthcare, and public housing) as well as health and educational outcomes. Hence, socio-economic HIs cover both inequalities in opportunities and outcomes.

While much less attention has been paid to HIs in the massive literature on inequality, there are important reasons to be concerned with their presence. On the one hand, HIs matter because they may affect people's happiness and well-being, and may unfairly trap individuals and groups in a position of inferiority. On the other hand, HIs may also matter instrumentally. Reducing severe socio-economic HIs may be necessary for maintaining political stability and social cohesion and for promoting economic efficiency in diverse societies (Stewart, 2008). A growing body of both qualitative and quantitative research has found evidence that the presence of HIs significantly increases the risk of violent conflicts (e.g., Cederman et al., 2011; Langer, 2005). Furthermore, case study research from across the globe has shown socio-economic HIs to be extremely persistent, locking certain groups into positions of inferiority, sometimes even for centuries (e.g., Canelas & Gisselquist, 2018; Stewart & Langer, 2008). Hence, in cases where there are sharp and persistent socio-economic HIs, there may be a strong case for the introduction of redistributive policies aimed at correcting socio-economic HIs—or what we term "horizontal redistribution" (HR).

The impact of inequalities on people's well-being and social cohesion depends as much on individuals' perceptions of HIs as on the "objective" measured inequalities. While extensive research has been conducted on perceptions of vertical inequalities (e.g., Hauser & Norton, 2017) as well as on how perceived levels and sources of income inequality affect preferences for redistribution in Western countries (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 2000; Dion & Birchfield, 2010), extremely little research has been conducted on the drivers and consequences of people's attitudes towards HR in diverse societies. Existing research concerning people's attitudes towards HR is largely limited to research on affirmative action in the United States. The objective of this thematic issue is to address this academic and policy void by analyzing support for group-based redistributive policies in nine different contexts (i.e., the United States, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Malaysia, Kenya, Western Balkans, India, and Northern Ireland) using a variety of methods, including statistical analysis drawing on perceptions surveys, and discourse and historical analysis.

In what follows, we first discuss the main themes addressed in the contributions. After discussing the main themes and lessons learned, we identify some avenues for future research.

2. Themes in This Thematic Issue

2.1. Salient Identity Groups

All contributions in this thematic issue deal with contexts where there are substantial socio-economic HIs between different groups. Yet, the characteristics of the salient groups vary across the cases. In the United States, Brazil, and South Africa, redistributive policies across races aim to overcome the disadvantage of the country's Black populations following histories of slavery, settler colonialism, and Apartheid. Whereas these policies favor the majority in South Africa, Blacks constitute minorities in Brazil and the United States. In Malaysia too, the policies favor the majority—the historically disadvantaged population of local origin—as against the more privileged Chinese group. Inequalities in Nigeria, Kenya, and the Western Balkans in contrast follow ethnic lines. In most of these cases, the most economically disadvantaged ethnic groups

constitute a minority of the population. Other contributions focus on yet different dividing lines, including religion in Northern Ireland and caste in India.

The population share of salient groups is important in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, in democracies, the majority populations tend to have the political power that enables them to introduce redistributive policies. On the other hand, the budgetary cost of policies is lower the smaller the population share of the disadvantaged group(s). We see from the cases covered here that these factors play out in different ways in the examples with redistributive policies adopted in both majority and minority contexts. However, there are no effective redistributive policies towards the minority Roma community in the Western Balkans where they are subsumed in a general category of "non-majorities" and face exclusion within this category (Zdeb & Vermeersch, 2024).

2.2. Support for HI Redistributive Policies

In this issue, we focus mainly on direct HI-correcting policies (Stewart et al., 2008). In contrast to indirect approaches which aim to reduce HIs through general policies such as universal benefits, direct approaches specifically target disadvantaged groups in a variety of ways. They are sometimes known as affirmative action. They risk increasing the salience of group identities, but they may be necessary to emphasize "the significance of race [or any other salient group] as a source of discrimination" (p. 5), in the words of Ikawa (2024) and assure "equal rights to all in practice" (p. 1); since formal universal rights risk being blind to differences among identity groups. Ikawa (2024) and Sadharwal (2024) focus on attitudes towards affirmative action policies in higher education for Blacks in Brazil, and for Scheduled Castes, scheduled tribes, and "other backward classes" in India. Williams and Bloeser (2024) and Lee (2024) in their contributions compare support across a variety of specific race-targeted policies in the United States and Malaysia. Their results show that affirmative action in employment, and equity ownership in particular, is more controversial than affirmative action in education. Similarly, Burns et al. (2024) show that there is little support for Black economic empowerment among advantaged South Africans. Finally, Kuppens et al. (2024) and Langer et al. (2024) focus on attitudes towards government-led HR in general and show that there are very high levels of support for this type of policy intervention in Kenya and Nigeria respectively. Support levels appeared to be considerably lower in all other contexts studied in this thematic issue. What is more, across these contexts, calls to replace direct policies with indirect—needs-based or economic-based—approaches, such as universal antipoverty programs or progressive taxation, were clearly gaining ground. Yet, such false binaries, Lee (2024) convincingly argues, unduly reduce the debate to continuing vs terminating direct approaches, while implementing them *alongside* indirect approaches would have true potential to systematically and constructively safeguard *all* citizens' well-being and rights.

Successfully reducing socio-economic inequalities is not an end point, however, as the case of Northern Ireland illustrates. As socio-economic redistributive policies wound down, cultural reforms were increasingly contested: The new claim to respect each culture clashed, in the perception of Protestant unionists, with the loosening of practices linking the Province to the British state and its institutions (Todd, 2024).

2.3. "Winners" and "Losers" of Redistribution: How Within-Group Differences Mediate the Effect of Group Position

Clearly, not all groups in society stand to gain from direct approaches, thereby creating "winners" and "losers." Much like the "median voter hypothesis," which argues that support for vertical or needs-based redistribution will be higher among individuals who earn less than a country's median income, group position theory hypothesizes that support for HR varies between members of beneficiary and non-beneficiary groups. HR may potentially trigger resentment and social tensions among members of advantaged groups who fear losing their relative advantage and thereby enhance social tensions.

Nearly all contributions in this issue confirm that material group self-interest is at play at least to some degree. Support for affirmative action in higher education in India, for instance, is lowest among higher castes (Sadharwal, 2024), while Nigerians who considered their ethnic group to be relatively poorer than others were more likely to support HR (Langer et al., 2024). The relation is complex, however. In Kenya, support for HR among historically privileged group members only decreased compared to more disadvantaged groups when advantaged members themselves experienced some sense of political exclusion (Kuppens et al., 2024). And, even though racial sympathy—i.e., white distress over the circumstances of racial outgroups—only translates into support for race-targeted policies among white Americans with higher incomes, Williams and Bloeser (2024) find that the share of whites in economically vulnerable situations who express racial sympathy is similar to better-off group members. Perceptions of advantage are relative, however. While selected for participation because of their advantaged, middle-class status, white focus group participants in South Africa denied their privilege by positioning themselves as "the-middle-of-the-middle" (Burns et al., 2024).

2.4. Determinants of Attitudes Towards Redistribution

Attitudes and perceptions regarding the (historical) circumstances of disadvantaged groups certainly matter, not only in the United States. Statistical analysis of attitudinal data from Nigeria and Kenya show that support for HR is stronger among people who believe that the causes of inequality are beyond, rather than within, a group's control. Such beliefs can even supersede groups' economic self-interests, as was the case in Kenya. More generally, the Nigerian survey data showed that the more people considered group inequalities to be unfair, the more they supported HR. Relatedly, historical analysis in Brazil describes how race-based policies followed the societal uptake of the counter-narrative of the Black movement that debunked the formerly hegemonic myths of gentler slavery and racial democracy, and fully acknowledged Brazil's history of brutal slavery and structural racism instead (Ikawa, 2024). In contrast, when people *believe* that the causes of inequality revolve around certain internal traits of group members, usually expressed through outgroup prejudices or stereotypes, with feelings of in-group superiority, support for HR is likely to be low. White middle-class South Africans, for instance, attributed poverty among their Black compatriots to the "psyche of dependence" (Burns et al., 2024). This can create a vicious circle: Zdeb and Vermeersch (2024) explain how a lack of effective policies targeting Roma in the Western Balkans can be traced back to, and in turn reinforces Romaphobia, further isolating them.

3. Avenues for Future Research

While the contributions in this thematic issue yield many insights for improving understanding of support for HI-reducing policies in diverse contexts, we identify three areas of research that require further theorizing and empirical research.

First, we argue that there is a need to develop common measures of HR to improve comparability across country contexts. Whereas Langer et al. (2024) and Kuppens et al. (2024) used generic measures to assess support for direct redistributive policies which did not explicitly specify the beneficiary group, Williams and Bloeser (2024) used four specific measures aimed at improving the socio-economic position of Black Americans in particular. Sadharwal (2024), for her part, measured opposition to, instead of support for, HR. The use of different measures prevents us from drawing strong conclusions regarding the role of a country's context. Developing comparable measures would also contribute to a better understanding of how salient group characteristics, such as demographic size and intra-group inequality, affect support for redistribution across contexts.

Second, both quantitative and qualitative contributions show that there is a plethora of explanatory variables that remain underexplored. Sadharwal's (2024) work, for instance, points to the relevance of inter-group contact, and Williams and Bloeser (2024) expose the importance of political ideology and institutional trust. In the focus groups of Burns et al. (2024) too, institutional trust was crucial in understanding advantaged South Africans opposition to governmental-led HR, as well as perceptions of corruption and inefficacy.

Third, more attention needs to be paid to changes over time and their relation to the political climate, political power, and the prevalent discourse. In their discussions, Ikawa (2024) and Williams and Bloeser (2024), for instance, reflect on the relevance of their findings in light of the Bolsonaro and Trump presidencies during which support for HR dwindled. Support for group-based redistribution is not just a matter of the views of the person or political party with political power, but dominant values and opinions in society at large as Ikawa (2024) showed. A much-underresearched area is an exploration of the factors that influence these values, which may include political leaders, media, and grassroots movements, among others. These factors work at local, national, and global levels.

Funding

We are grateful for the generous project funding (G068320N) from the Research Foundation–Flanders (FWO) as well as KU Leuven's Internal Funds (C14/20/0727).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7594
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7594

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ARTICLE

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Group-Based Redistribution in Malaysia: Polarization, Incoherence, Stasis

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Submitted: 13 September 2023 **Accepted:** 25 January 2024 **Published:** 7 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Group-based redistribution is extensive and embedded in Malaysia, and has comprehensively transformed the country since the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. The NEP established a "two-pronged" framework of poverty reduction irrespective of race and social restructuring to redress racial inequalities primarily through preferential programmes targeting the disadvantaged Bumiputera majority. The debate surrounding the NEP has under-appreciated its strengths and augmented its omissions and misconceptions, which in turn have shaped policy discourses and attitudes in two ways. First, there is marked polarization, largely along ethnic lines, with the majority group overwhelmingly predisposed in favour of Bumiputera policy and minority groups generally wary of its continuation. The polarization unduly reduces the debate to monolithic pro-NEP vs anti-NEP dispositions, and constricts the solutions to a false binary question of continuing vs terminating the NEP. Second, a broad but incoherent consensus has consolidated around the notion that "need-based" policies should comprehensively replace "race-based" policies. While "need-based" policies are widely embraced, they emphatically do not constitute a substitute for "race-based" policies, or group-based redistribution more generally. Surveys have captured the ethnic polarization surrounding "Malay privileges," but also show that Malaysians unanimously support universal basic assistance. A systematic policy reformulation with universal basic needs and group-based interventions as enduring and distinct domains might hold out possibilities for new and constructive compromise.

Keywords

affirmative action; inequality; Malaysia; race and ethnicity; redistribution

1. Introduction

Group-based redistribution policies, also known as affirmative action, invariably spur spirited, contentious, and even acrimonious debate in the countries where they are implemented. Unsurprisingly, this policy genre, which preferentially provides opportunities to distinct population groups for upward mobility and capability building, is bound to trigger opposing reactions among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. It is also plausible to expect that increasing the scale of intervention heightens the stakes, vested interests, and contestations, and intensifies the attitudes and perceptions toward the policy. Malaysian society, which grapples with one the most embedded and expansive—and majority-favouring—group-based redistributive regimes in the world, tends to hold opinions that induce polarization in some respects, and consensus in others. The combined effect of these concurrent and contrasting outcomes is to perpetuate deadlock and stasis in policy discourses and popular attitudes.

This article investigates the historical, intellectual, and practical factors that contribute to this state of affairs. Group-based redistribution—specifically, in favour of the socioeconomically disadvantaged Bumiputera majority—is rooted in Malaysia's federal constitution. The term "Bumiputera" refers to the Malays, who presently comprise 56% of Malaysia's population, and other indigenous groups (14%). Chinese (23.2%), Indian (6.7%), and other categories (0.7%) make up the balance (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Malaysia adhered more literally to the constitutional provisions for group-based redistribution in the first dozen years after independence, but vastly expanded this policy regime in the aftermath of the May 13th, 1969, ethnic carnage and the subsequent promulgation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which has remained embedded beyond its original 1971–1990 timeline. Every major national policy has reaffirmed the NEP and preserved its essence, from its immediate successor the National Development Policy 1991–2000 (Malaysia, 1991) to the latest Madani Economy (Malaysia, 2023). Perceptions and sentiments toward the NEP have been antagonistic from the onset, but the deadlock goes beyond general contentions between policy beneficiaries who favour the policy and others who oppose it.

This article will discuss how the original articulation of the NEP, compounded by misconceptions of the NEP, has amplified conflict and negated reform. Policy discourses have been reduced to clashes between narrow dogmas of continuing vs terminating group-based redistribution and between sweeping assessments of "success" vs "failure." Ingrained mindsets and sentiments fuel Malaysian tendencies to close ranks along ethnic or partisan lines, or to recycle dogmas and polemics, rather than examine these complex issues in a systematic and critical manner (Chin, 2009; Gomez et al., 2021; Kua, 2018; Lim, 2020; Saniman, 2019; Zainuddin, 2019). Empirical literature on the NEP, in both official and academic sources, has adopted the template of Malaysia's development plans in focusing heavily on ethnic equity ownership, omitting systematic analysis of the policy's immediate goal of promoting group participation and mobility and the attendant objective of developing capability and competitiveness. At the same time, the notion that Malaysia should pursue "need-based" in place of "race-based" affirmative action is widely held, most pronouncedly among political elites, popular media, and academia. The emergence and consolidation of this multi-partisan consensus has provided anodyne moral affirmation—that Malaysia has supposedly moved on from race-based policy—but ultimately perpetuates an incoherent prescription and false sense of progress (H.-A. Lee, 2022).

This article references credible surveys that provide evidence that Malaysians are amenable to a coherent system that provides both universal social assistance and group-based redistribution as complements, not substitutes. Nationally representative opinion polls have found unanimous endorsement of basic assistance for all regardless of race, but diverging attitudes toward pro-Bumiputera policies—with sharp polarization between Malays and non-Malays, and significant differentiation between supporters of ethnic-based parties and multi-ethnic parties. Negotiating these complexities will be challenging, but the muddled mainstream discourse of need-based policies replacing race-based policies gets nowhere. Malaysia should instead systematically and constructively provide universal basic needs provision to safeguard well-being and rights *alongside* group-targeted programmes that promote participation and capability (H.-A. Lee, 2023a).

2. Policy Foundations and Discourses

2.1. Contexts and Precedents

This section discusses key legislative or policy landmarks and the political context within which they emerged. Malaysia's constitution safeguards equality while also allowing for preferential treatment for the majority Bumiputera group. Article 8 guarantees freedom from discrimination for all without exception, unless "expressly authorized by this constitution." Article 153 provides such authorization, specifically in safeguarding the "special position" of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, "in such manner as may be necessary" through the reservation of a "reasonable" proportion of public service employment, scholarships, training, higher education admissions, and licenses (Commissioner of Law Revision, 2010).

From Malaya's independence in 1957 and throughout the 1960s, the country arguably adhered to Article 153 in a literal sense, by preferentially providing the listed items—especially scholarships and public sector employment—for the Malays. With Malaysia's formation in 1963, through the merger of Malaya (subsequently termed Peninsular Malaysia) with Sabah and Sarawak of Borneo Island, the scope of beneficiaries, also known as Bumiputeras, broadened from the Malays to the indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak. More generally, the public policy disposition of 1957–1969, characterized as *laissez-faire*, focused on economic growth and rural development, but treaded lightly in redressing inequality (Gomez & Jomo, 1999). From the mid-1960s, demands for more decisive and effective action to promote Bumiputera interests, which heightened at the first Bumiputera Economic Congress of 1965, gave rise to the creation of Bank Bumiputera and the conversion of the Rural Industrial Development Agency (RIDA) into MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat, or Council of Trust for the People), which more explicitly and extensively focused on Bumiputera development.

Inter-ethnic disparities persisted through the 1960s, most consequentially in the Malay community's lower rates of urbanisation, higher incidence of poverty, limited access to higher education, and under-representation in high-level occupations. By 1970, Malays constituted 53.1% of the total Peninsular Malaysia population but only 27.6% of the urban population, and recorded a poverty rate of 64.8%, above that of the Indians (39.2%) and Chinese (26.0%; see Leete, 2007). Malay students comprised about 40% of the enrolment in the University of Malaya, the only public university at the time, but were severely under-represented among science, engineering, and medical graduates (Selvaratnam, 1988). In employment, Malays constituted 51.4% of all occupations, but only 22.4% of administrative and managerial positions (Malaysia, 1976).

Malaysia was comprehensively transformed by the NEP. The NEP was crafted in the aftermath of the May 13th, 1969, ethnic violence that erupted amid a post-election political crisis. While the tragedy stemmed from political conflicts, the socioeconomic problems of persisting poverty and inter-ethnic disparities made for a combustible social milieu (Von Vorys, 1975). The NEP took root amid a political ferment characterized by the reassertion of Malay political primacy and the proscription of dissent. In 1970, the Sedition Act was amended under emergency rule to expand the definition of seditious tendencies criminalized under this law, making it an offense to "question any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected" by Article 153 and other provisions in the constitution. Over the years, the constitutionally stipulated Malay special position and concomitant socioeconomic quotas have become distorted into Malay "special rights"—and propagated through popular discourses and the national school syllabus (Brown, 2007).

Debates over group-based redistribution, and the pro-Malay preferential system in particular, have had to contend with invocations of Article 153, reinforced by the Sedition Act. Notwithstanding this article's focus on policy, one crucial point must be recorded on these recurrent efforts to pre-empt or censor critique. The defense of privileges for the Malay community, couched in the language of "special rights," imputes a permanent, inalienable, and fundamental quality that departs from the constitution. The status quo can be maintained by vested interests and cemented dogmas favouring "Malay special rights" in perpetuity, which can also rally support by inflaming a sense of threat of losing these "rights." Efforts to probe new thinking and compromise will continually face such challenges. Nonetheless, breakthroughs could be possible with more tempered and empathetic approaches that recognize the sensitivity of the issue at stake and anchor the discussion on the imperative of promoting Bumiputera, especially Malay, economic participation and capability.

The NEP, promulgated as a vision statement in 1971 and a full-fledged development programme in 1976, would set the tone and template for more extensive pro-Malay redistribution (Malaysia, 1971, 1976). The NEP established a two-pronged framework and proposed a twenty-year time frame, 1971–1990. The first prong set out to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty irrespective of race; the second prong aspired to accelerate social restructuring by reducing and eventually eliminating the identification of race with economic function. This structure judiciously recognized two national objectives that were distinct but interrelated in a "mutually reinforcing" relationship. The articulation of the two prongs implicitly acknowledged that achieving the second prong's social restructuring would require social restructuring instruments; in other words, Malaysia could not employ the first prong's instruments of basic needs provisions to achieve the second prong's objectives of promoting Bumiputera participation in higher education, upward occupational mobility, commercial and industrial enterprise, and equity and wealth ownership.

The basic structure of the NEP has remained firmly in place, with variations over time. The NEP was succeeded by the National Development Plan (1991–2000), the National Vision Plan (2001–2010), various transformation programmes (2011–2020), and short-lived policy rebranding amid post-2020 milieu political fluidity. Each plan recommitted to the NEP, such that it is meaningless to claim that the NEP ended in 1990. Although the relative emphasis of policies may have changed, and new initiatives have been introduced or old programmes modified or retired, the core has endured. Table 1 summarizes the main pro-Bumiputera group-based programmes that are, by and large, still operating currently. The list omits some major projects that have definitively stopped, notably Malaysia's creation of Bumiputera corporate titans through privatization which was unravelled by the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Table 1. Malaysia: Major Bumiputera group-based programmes and approximate timing.

Policy sector	Programme, preferential mode, and key information	Start period
Higher education	Exclusively Bumiputera MARA technical institutions and university	1960s
	Exclusively Bumiputera MARA education sponsorship	1960s
	Bumiputera preference in public university admissions	1970s
	90% Bumiputera quota: MARA secondary-level science residential colleges (MRSM) and pre-university matriculation colleges	2000–2003
	Yayasan Peneraju Pendidikan Bumiputera (financial support for technical and professional training)	2012
High-level employment	De facto Bumiputera preference in public sector and government-linked companies (GLCs)	1957
Enterprise development	Public procurement—seven classes, G1 smallest to G7 largest:	1970s
	G1: reserved for 100% Bumiputera-owned companies	
	G2-G6: carve-outs and price preference for majority-Bumiputera companies	
	GLC procurement, vendor development	1970s
	Entrepreneurship training through UiTM, GiatMARA, and other MARA programmes	1980s
	Loans and support for small and micro firms (Tekun Nasional[1]), small and medium enterprises primarily in retail and distribution (PUNB[2]); Bumiputera programmes within SME Bank and SME Corp[3]; government credit guarantee schemes under SJPP[4]	1990s
	Ekuinas: private equity fund holding substantial stakes in Bumiputera private enterprise	2009
	Teras selection of competitive and high-growth enterprises for preferential public procurement (2013–2018), INSKEN Entrepreneurship Institute, SUPERB grant for youth entrepreneurs, Bumiputera Facilitation Fund (reconfigured to Bumiputera Prosperity Fund)	2010s
	Bumiputera Economic Action 2030 identification of seven key economic growth activities, three Bumiputera economic transformation areas, seven priority areas	2021
Wealth and property ownership	Property purchase discounts	1970s
	Public listing equity requirements	1970s
	Amanah Saham Bumiputera (unit trust) managed by Permodalan Nasional Bhd (National Equity Ltd)	1978

Notes: [1] Tekun Nasional also designates Indians as beneficiaries in some of its programmes; [2] National Entrepreneurship Corporation Ltd. (PUNB) has partnered with Teraju to set up Prosper Teras; [3] Bumiputera Economic Enhancement Program (finance and advisory services; SME Corp), Tunas Usahawan Belia Bumiputera (entrepreneurship and self-employment for young adults; TUBE), Equibumi (financing for taking over divestments or public listing; SME Bank); [4] Syarikat Jaminan Pembiayaan Perniagaan (SJPP), a subsidiary of Ministry of Finance, Inc., operates the Working Capital Guarantee Scheme (Bumiputera), and a parallel scheme for women. Source: H.-A. Lee (2021a).

Malaysia's policy practices have essentially, if implicitly, maintained the NEP's two-pronged structure, including major developments since 2010, such as the introduction of cash transfers for low-income households, minimum wage, and broadening of social protection in general, alongside group-targeted assistance in higher education and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for the Indian and Orang Asli communities. These more recent developments expand on the poverty alleviation and group-based programmes that have been in place since the NEP.

The embeddedness and durability of Bumiputera group-based programmes are underscored by the absence of fundamental policy change despite Malaysia's political transformation in the wake of the 2018 general election. Since the Barisan Nasional ethnic coalition lost power and its hegemonic Malay party UMNO lost credibility, after ruling for six decades and institutionalising ethnic policies, multi-ethnic parties have consolidated their urban strongholds. Yet Malaysia has seen not only a continuation of ethnic policies (with minor modifications), but indeed a reassertion of pro-Bumiputera policies—with a focus on capacity building and entrepreneurship. Three state-sponsored Bumiputera congresses were held with at high frequency—in 2018, 2020, and 2024. The four preceding Bumiputera economic congresses occurred in 1965, 1968, 1980, and 1992. There are underlying political factors, most saliently the heightened competition for Malay votes among Malay parties, but group-based redistribution policies are also sustained by the logic of their enduring objectives and distinct mechanisms that any Malaysian government, whether constituted by mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic parties, will do better grapple with systematically and effectively rather than conflating the decline of the Barisan Nasional's ethnic *politics* with the hoped-for demise of ethnic *policies*.

2.2. Omissions and Misconceptions

Notwithstanding the clarity in articulating the two prongs, the NEP was marred by three omissions and misconceptions that shaped perceptions, expectations, and attitudes—and, in turn, fuelled contestation and conflict.

First, the NEP insufficiently specified the mechanism, scope, and outcome of its two prongs, especially the second. The first poverty eradication prong would be achieved through raising productivity and income and generating employment opportunities, alongside expanding social services. A vast array of interventions coalesced around a singular target of reducing the poverty rate from 50% in 1971 to 17% in 1990. Toward the second prong's objective of accelerating social restructuring and redressing racial imbalance, Malaysia would modernise rural economies, facilitate urbanisation, and create a Bumiputera commercial and industrial community. Policy documents conveyed an awareness that Bumiputera to non-Bumiputera disparities were most acute in higher education, high-level occupations (professional and managerial positions), enterprise, and wealth ownership. Targets were set for increasing Bumiputera representation in higher education and high-level occupations, and equity ownership. However, the NEP neglected to articulate the imperatives of making steady gains in upward mobility and of ensuring that preferential selection promoted learning and capacity building. Indeed, the progress of Bumiputera participation in higher education and advanced fields would by the mid-1980s cease to be tracked and reported. The NEP did not establish and sustain focus on developing Bumiputera capability.

The NEP also failed to clearly acknowledge that facilitating Bumiputera participation and capability in these areas would involve preferential selection and would operate primarily in the public sector and public institutions. This application of preference would also entail some degree of inclusion and exclusion, given the scarcity of opportunities in the main vehicles: public universities and colleges, government employment, or loans disbursed by public institutions. In other words, the pursuit of the NEP's second prong would unavoidably cause some degree of exclusion of non-beneficiary groups and thus would need to maintain as its driving objective the cultivation of the beneficiary groups' graduation away from receiving preferential treatment.

Second, the NEP lacked a cohesive and consistent articulation of its ultimate objectives, and the implications of its 1971–1990 timeline—again, particularly concerning the second prong. A greater mindfulness toward the fact that these interventions involved higher education, upward occupational mobility, enterprise, and ownership might have helped the NEP discern that each sector demanded different approaches, targets, and timelines. Interestingly, the Second Malaysia Plan noted that some goals, especially the creation of the Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC), might "take longer than one generation" to achieve (Malaysia, 1971, p. 9). This phrase intimated that the NEP might extend beyond 1990 and that different policy spheres might follow different timelines. However, this important and perceptive observation was made in a passing, inconsequential manner. It is also important to note that the NEP was not a monolith erected all at once. Few of its policies started operating in 1971. Indeed, the full policy was launched in 1976, and programmes, laws, and measures under its auspices were rolled out piecemeal (Table 1). In light of the complexity and fluidity, it is impossible to envisage the system being dismantled all at once, and more reasonable to formulate targets and timelines specific to each policy sector.

Policy debates were further skewed, and polarization deepened, due to a lack of precision and coherence in other aspects—and tendencies to superimpose preconceived positions onto those ambiguities. The NEP was opaque and noncommittal about its 1971–1990 timeframe. Policy documents omitted a clear and consistent articulation of ultimate objectives, although they provided hints of the goals that the Bumiputera community should achieve "within one generation." These aspirations were not only vague but also altered between the 1971 and 1976 versions. In the former, the "within one generation" goal was expressed in terms of Bumiputeras being "full partners in the economic life of the nation," which was suitably lofty, although there was scant elaboration of the meaning of full partnership (Malaysia, 1971, p. 1). The phrase suggests that proportional participation would be one element, but there is also a sense of the Bumiputeras engaging on equal terms with their non-Bumiputera counterparts—that is, without the need for preferential treatment. For this to materialize, the NEP would need to cultivate Bumiputera's capability and competitiveness, leading to confidence and self-reliance. However, the Outline Perspective Plan, while detailing the NEP's execution, reduced the "within one generation" aim from full economic partnership to 30% Bumiputera equity ownership (H.-A. Lee, 2021b; Malaysia, 1976).

The inordinate emphasis of the NEP on equity ownership would materialize in the 1975 Industrial Coordination Act, which mandated industrial firms above a certain size threshold to relinquish 30% of equity to Bumiputera interests and would also shape policy discourses. Instead of a sustained and holistic programme of broadening Bumiputera participation and developing capability, both the policy pursuit of the NEP and pushback against it became rather consumed with the ethnic equity target. Of course, the Industrial Coordination Act was an especially aggressive intervention that triggered strenuous objections from private businesses, resulting in increases in the scale threshold that exempted small- and medium-sized firms, predominantly Chinese-owned, from allocating equity to Bumiputera interests. However, the fixation on equity skewed debates more generally. Equity ownership became among the most highly prioritized and closely monitored policy outcomes.

The NEP unduly rankled policy debates for a third, subtle, and perhaps counterintuitive reason pertaining to overpromises to minority groups that derived from ethnicity-based deliberations rather than a systematic policy formulation, coupled with a misguided growth *versus* redistribution mindset. As Milne (1976, p. 239) aptly put it, the NEP constituted "a restatement of the 'bargain' between the races." This bargain had, at

Malaya's independence, straddled political and economic domains, safeguarding citizenship and equality before the law for Malaya-born non-Malays alongside special provisions for Malay monarchies, language, Islam, and socioeconomic opportunity. The corollary in the NEP involved policy assertions and pushbacks within the economic domain that represented lofty community interests rather than grappling with real compromises. For decades, the debates have rather unwittingly perpetuated this incoherence.

The assertion of overt and aggressive pro-Malay policies—under emergency rule, and with some consultative processes sidestepped—had raised consternation among non-Malay political figures and senior bureaucrats (Kathirasen, 2019). The thrust of the new agenda was captured in a March 18, 1970, paper by the newly empowered Department of National Unity entitled *The New Economic Policy*. This document represented the government's disposition to be incorporated into the Second Malaysia Plan. Three main objectives were set out: (a) reduction of racial economic disparities; (b) creation of employment opportunities; and (c) promotion of overall economic growth. This article added, rather combatively, that "the Government is determined that the *reduction in racial economic disparities should be the overriding target* even if unforeseen developments occur which pose a harsher conflict than now foreseen between the three objectives" (Department of National Unity, 1970, p. 310; italics in original).

The Economic Planning Unit had taken a different, more growth-centric approach (Faaland et al., 1990). Director-General Thong Yaw Hong was moved to counterbalance what he characterized as "extreme interventionist measures" and prospective policies that could potentially undermine Chinese business interests (Heng, 1997). Thong intervened by including a proviso in the NEP that poverty alleviation would be conducted "irrespective of race," and efforts to promote national unity and develop a just and progressive Malaysian society would resolutely proceed "in a rapidly expanding economy so that no one will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation of his rights, privileges, income, job or opportunity" (Heng, 1997).

This assurance, while magnanimous and uplifting, conflated private sector growth potential with the broader redistributive system that the NEP would oversee, which predominantly operated in the public sector and public institutions. While economic growth could continuously generate private investment and employment and potentially obviate conflicts over the distribution of opportunity, the main sectors of group-based redistribution involved public higher education enrolment, public sector employment, and state-owned enterprise employment, and public financial institutions—in which resources were more finite and hence preferential allocation to Bumiputeras would unavoidably attenuate some opportunity for non-Bumiputeras. Poverty reduction could morally and practically operate on the basis of equality and universalism—"irrespective of race"—but large swathes of the social restructuring regime emphatically could not guarantee the same. For decades Malaysia has witnessed an annual affair of high-scoring public university applicants of minority groups venting their frustrations at being rejected admission to public university or pre-university programmes. Their grievances are valid, but Malaysia remains trapped in a reactionary mode that advocates the abolition of racial quotas and institutionalisation of "meritocracy" as the only solution to this complex predicament.

The NEP, from its onset, failed to systematically and judiciously account for its internal tensions; it promised absolute equality and zero deprivation on matters that should have instead been guided by a commitment to maximize fairness and minimize exclusion. That ethnic considerations drove policymaking is understandable, in light of the ethnic strife and political pressures. Nonetheless, the emerging policy template precluded a

more systematic approach that seeks to balance the role of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, and other criteria in the distribution of opportunity.

3. Attitudes and Perceptions

Debates over group-based redistribution are substantively static, even if the issue receives spirited attention in the public arena. This stasis stems from a failure to appreciate the NEP's strengths and an inertia that retains the omissions and misconceptions in the policy's original articulation. This section discusses how popular and academic discourses have reproduced or amplified the polarization and incoherence surrounding the NEP, reducing the policy questions to simplistic dichotomies like (a) continuing vs terminating "the NEP," (b) ethnic quotas vs meritocracy, or (c) "race-based" policy vs "need-based" policy.

3.1. Polarized Deadlock

Policy debates and popular discourses accentuate and perpetuate the polarization in three specific ways. The first involves the polemical and dichotomous framing discussed in the previous section, which reduces the debate to continuity of the entire system vs termination of the entire system and seeks to replace the problem of "racial quotas" with zero preferential treatment or purist forms of meritocracy. Imperious projection of Bumiputera preferential policies often sets the tone, but the counterclaim that such policies should be abolished unduly—and illogically—widens the rift.

NEP critiques are often rooted in legitimate grievance at minority exclusion, but the lines of argument also confine the notion of deprivation to ethnicity, which accordingly reduces the solution to the elimination of ethnic quotas (Means, 1990). This is saliently replayed in annual complaints of students of minority ethnic groups who are denied admission to public university. Gerakan party president Lim Keng Yaik, a member of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, represented this stance in his 1984 critique of the "rigid quota system" for vastly promoting Bumiputera upward mobility but depriving "many young and qualified non-Bumiputeras," such that the government must bring the "racial quota system…to an end as quickly as possible" (Gerakan, 1984, p. 157). Such posturing, by perpetuating a binary quota-vs-no quota mentality, precludes more systematic approaches that explore ways to conduct merit-based selection (prior academic achievement) in tandem with need-based selection (preference to disadvantaged students) and diversity considerations (public institutions should reflect the population's composition, not just ethnically, but by region, gender, etc.). Unfortunately, such candid and critical conversations have been forestalled for decades.

Second, dispositions toward the NEP's results, akin to the conceptual errors discussed above, also commit various empirical missteps or overblown narratives that fuel the polarization. Propagation of biased, inchoate, and monolithic stances toward NEP "success" and "failure," rather than objective and systematic evaluation commensurate with the policy's breadth and complexity, reinforces the reflexive tendencies for Malaysians to huddle in irreconcilable pro-NEP vs anti-NEP camps.

The case for the NEP conventionally rides on praise for the successes that warrant policy continuity, or the shortcomings of a project that must stay the course. Such appraisals effusively laud the NEP (Saniman, 2019) or uncritically praise the NEP's design while only faulting its poor implementation ("Success of the new,"

2018). A number of evaluations of the NEP or affirmative action across multiple policy sectors present a more objective set of findings, but do not address questions of policy continuity or reform (H. G. Lee, 2005; Yusof, 2012). The literature has also replicated the NEP's omission of clear, coherent, and consistent objectives, instruments, and long-term implications of the second prong. These conceptual omissions discussed earlier, together with empirical gaps that have inadequately accounted for the relevant and effective outcomes of group-based policies, have contributed to the polarization that persists in debates and attitudes.

The opposing view commits empirical missteps of its own. The most simplistic posture asserts NEP failure in broad strokes and prescribes the policy's dismantlement (Kua, 2018; Lim, 2020). Another popularly vented view takes a more specific position in holding that the NEP has only benefited the Malay elites or the "UMNO-putras" who milk the patronage system, and has "failed the masses" (Chin, 2009). Exploitation by the elites undeniably features in some pro-Bumiputera policies, particularly wealth redistribution, licensing, and public procurement, but not the entire system. These NEP critiques lack a framework that conducts rigorous cost-benefit analysis and seem to have predetermined that the NEP's costs overwhelmingly outweigh the benefits. The policy implication that typically proceeds from this conclusion—that the NEP must be abolished—also appears to be conveniently aligned. If the NEP only benefits the elites and omits the masses, then its removal will be well-received by the masses. Since it delivers no benefits, its absence will not be felt. Such sweeping conclusions are demonstrably false.

A wide range of data can be marshalled to demonstrate the achievements in broadening Bumiputera socioeconomic access and participation, such as higher education qualifications and professional and management positions, but shortcomings in capacity and competitiveness, such as the higher concentration of Bumiputera enterprises in the micro and small categories with fewer graduating to the middle tier (H.-A. Lee, 2021a, 2023a). The lists in Table 1, which cover an array of Bumiputera programmes, including initiatives of the post-2010 period largely absent in the literature, illustrate the breadth of the system's outreach, contrary to the polemic that it only benefits a Malay elite, and underscore the impossibility of imposing a one-off, sweeping termination date. The multitude of programmes started operating at different times with different scopes and mandates, and must be managed with targets and timelines of their own.

The subject demands a more detailed analysis such as presented in H.-A. Lee (2021a, 2021c, 2022), but a few points are worth a brief note here. Bumiputera share of public university enrolment, a key policy goal, rose from 40% in 1970 to 67% in 1985, according to the Fourth Malaysia Plan and Fifth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1981, 1986). Notably, the latter was the last time these defining policy documents reported the ethnic composition of universities, despite the centrality of this policy outcome—whereas monitoring of the ethnic distribution of employment and equity ownership continued. Subsequently, reports were sparse except for Mukherjee et al. (2017) who, through exceedingly rare access to the data, found that the Bumiputera share of the degree-level enrolment had reached 81.8% in 2005 and 83.1% in 2008. A recent disclosure, in the form of a parliamentary reply of October 2023, showed a further increase to 86.5% (Rahim et al., 2023). Alongside these marked gains in access and certification, there is considerable evidence corroborating the view that Bumiputera graduates—who predominantly attend public colleges and universities—on average struggle more than other groups to secure employment, particularly for highly skilled jobs in the private sector (H.-A. Lee, 2021a).

A similar pattern of quantitative gains with qualitative shortfalls manifests in the occupational, commercial, and industrial spheres. In 2020, Bumiputeras accounted for 66% of all employed Malaysians, 68% of

professionals, and 65% of technicians and associate professionals. Among managers, however, the Bumiputera share remains the lowest of the occupation groups, at 39% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). The community's upward mobility into these positions has relied on the public sector (H.-A. Lee, 2012). Registries of professional bodies show variations across fields, with Bumiputeras comprising 80% of medical assistants and nurses, 49% of interior designers, 40% of lawyers, 37% of real estate professionals, and 31% of accountants (Teraju, 2021). Bumiputera enterprise ownership and the proportion of firms that are micro, small, and medium in scale constitute newer and impactful policy indicators of both Bumiputera participation and capacity (the data were not available at the NEP's inception). In 2015, Bumiputera-owned MSMEs comprised just 38% of all Malaysian-owned MSMEs, and among the Bumiputera-owned MSMEs, 88% were classified as micro and only 1% attained medium scale, compared to non-Bumiputera SMEs (69% micro, 3% medium; see H.-A. Lee, 2021c).

A third angle is narrower but worth a note here. Both the justifications of the NEP and objections to it have placed an inordinate emphasis on equity ownership. These stances were induced by the NEP's driving fixation on 30% Bumiputera equity holdings and Chinese businesses' antipathy toward policy encroachment on ownership and control, but also became too hinged on the target as the grounds for eliminating the policy. In other words, showing that Bumiputera equity remains beneath 30% has been a linchpin of the case for continuing the NEP (Alhadjri, 2021; Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2019), but proving that Bumiputera ownership has reached 30% has also been leveraged to assert that the NEP has lost its justification and needs to be abolished (CPPS, 2006).

While monitoring progress in ethnic equity ownership is pertinent, NEP critiques that are consumed by this one portion of a vast regime of Bumiputera preferences replicate the NEP's error in omitting the community's overall increase in participation and capability—which are the more consequential factors in enabling the community to undertake reforms that will attenuate the privileges they enjoy. Even if Bumiputera equity ownership can be demonstrated to reach or exceed 30%, as some studies have argued by including government ownership, it is a long stretch to then argue that the NEP has completed its mission and should no longer function. Ultimately, rolling back preferential treatment rides on attaining something closer to the NEP's original goal of Bumiputera full economic partnership—i.e., the community being empowered with capability, competitiveness, and confidence such that rolling back preferential treatment can actually be contemplated.

3.2. Incoherent Consensus

Attitudes toward group-based redistribution are in the grip of another dominant discourse—a multi-partisan consensus that starkly contrasts the divisive debate discussed above. This view holds that Malaysia should replace "race-based" policies with "need-based" policies. However, "need-based" assistance, while offering the sentimental appeal of averting racial categorisations, cannot logically or practically serve as an alternative to group-based redistribution.

The stance that Malaysia should pursue "need-based" policies in place of "race-based" policies has echoed at least since the 1980s, but without gaining widespread traction (Gerakan, 1984; Lim, 1988; Osman-Rani, 1990). Decades, later, discourses reached a crescendo following the 2009 dissemination of the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition's policy that expressly advocated replacing "race-based" policies with "need-based"

policies, followed by reactions to the Barisan Nasional Government's New Economic Model (NEM) of 2010 that was popularly misinterpreted as calling for race-based affirmative action to end (National Economic Advisory Council, 2010; see also H.-A. Lee, 2022). The case is emotively resonant and morally appealing. Despite the conclusion that "affirmative action programmes and institutions will continue in the NEM but…will be revamped to remove the rent-seeking and market distorting features which have blemished the effectiveness of the programme" (NEAC, 2010, p. 61), the NEM was rapturously—and erroneously—received as a reform that would terminate pro-Bumiputera affirmative action (Gomez, 2015).

Deep aversion to "race-based" policies—the term itself is loaded and provocative—inclines proponents of reform to embrace "need-based" alternatives, which extend publicly funded help based on need instead of race. However, this notion of need-based alternatives, which continually enjoys resonance in the public sphere and among the intelligentsia—from popular media opinion of influential persons ("Malaysia's system of racial preferences," 2017; Zainuddin, 2019) to civil society groups (Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia, 2019)—stultifies policy progress by propagating an illusory multi-partisan consensus. Ironically, the seemingly bold reform of replacing race-based with need-based policies cleaves to platitudes while evading critical engagement with actual solutions, thereby perpetuating a vacuous and static non-debate.

4. Popular Sentiments and Prospects for Change

How have the discourses translated into attitudes on the ground? A few surveys have shed credible light on this delicate subject. On the whole, the empirical evidence emphatically shows polarization, especially between Malays and non-Malays, including the indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak officially conferred Bumiputera status. The findings also reveal strong preconceived understandings of discrimination, Article 153 (Bumiputera special position), and fairness—or ingrained reactions to such triggering words.

Merdeka Center, Malaysia's pioneering opinion poll practitioner, has contributed various informative surveys, of which two have asked the most direct questions on perceptions and sentiments toward Malay special rights or privileges. Merdeka Center's polls obtained a nationally representative, stratified random sample employing telephone interviews. The survey of January–April 2010 obtained 3,000 respondents; the survey of February–March 2022 obtained 1,202 respondents. Asking respondents' opinions toward precise statements, Merdeka Center (2010) found that wide majorities of Bumiputeras agreed with the NEP and Malay/Bumiputera privileges. Specifically, 73% of Bumiputera respondents agreed with the statement "Malays/Bumiputeras need all the help they can get to move ahead so programs like the NEP should be welcome," while 59% agreed that "as the original inhabitants of this country, Malays/Bumiputeras should continue to be accorded with special rights and privileges." Al Ramiah et al. (2017), addressing a similar issue from a different angle, obtained a Peninsular Malaysia representative, stratified random sample of 1,504 respondents in a face-to-face interview, during September–October 2016. They found that, on a scale of 1 to 5 in terms of the level of comfort with Malays being accorded special privileges, Malay respondents averaged almost 4 per 5, while Chinese and Indian respondents averaged about 2 per 5.

Merdeka Center (2022) inquired about Malaysian attitudes toward discrimination, Malay special treatment, and fairness—in the context of the country's failed initiative to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The survey found a preponderant 81% of Malays agreeing that "Malay special rights and privileges" are a "core feature of our society" that "should stay in

place forever." A sizable but substantially smaller 44% of non-Malay Bumiputeras agreed, reflecting some reservations at disproportionately receiving fewer benefits. Predictably, a minuscule 4% of Chinese respondents and 1% of Indians agreed, while half of the respondents of these communities most closely identified with the view that "I don't approve of Malay special rights and privileges, but we have to be patient for the sake of national unity." The question of ICERD is also sharply polarizing, with 16% of Malays, 89% of Chinese, 91% of Indians, and 35% of non-Malay Bumiputeras registering unconditional support. On whether they would "support ICERD if Article 153 also protected," the polarization is less pronounced but this comes with lessened minority support. In this case, 31% of Malays, 49% of non-Malay Bumiputeras, 53% of Chinese, and 56% of Indians agree. Notably, Chinese and Indians view the preservation of Article 153, or the Malay primacy that it symbolizes in popular discourses, as negating a commitment to anti-discrimination. However, this finding also suggests that the compromise of explicitly preserving Article 153 might make ICERD ratification possible.

A few other survey findings warrant our consideration, to fill in the picture and also provide reference for the possibilities that attitudes can be reshaped and the divisions bridged. Among other issues posed in Merdeka Center (2022) are need-based assistance and fair competition. The proposition that people should be "assisted based on need not ethnicity" finds near unanimous support, with 92% of Malays and 99% of all other groups agreeing. On the prospect of "introducing fair competition," 57% of Malays, 82% of other Bumiputeras, and 98% of Chinese and Indians agree. These responses may be conditioned by desirability bias. Nonetheless, they reflect a Malaysian public that has clarity of mind to distinguish universalist provision of need-oriented assistance from group-targeted policies, particularly pro-Malay policies—and to grasp that both can coexist.

The dominant discourses arguably socialize Malaysians into imbibing restrictive understandings of Article 153 and group-targeted policies and believing that need-based policies should replace race-based policies, despite the ability of the general public to grasp that both can operate concurrently and are not replacements one for the other. Thus, there is some scope for rearticulating policies to propagate more systematic and constructive paths forward. Chai's (2023) nationally representative survey of youth sheds another important light: that partisan affiliation and different policy sectors also matter. Among youth who support the multi-ethnic coalition Pakatan Harapan, 37% hold the view that "race should not be a consideration in any policy," compared with 14% of supporters of ethnic party-based Barisan Nasional. Among those who allow for the role of race in policy design, the largest proportion (75–78%) deem that such policies are most pertinent to university admissions. The variations in this assessment across policy sectors—others include employment, primary schooling, and housing—suggest that sector-specific policy design can also be pursued and candidly communicated to the public.

5. Concurrent Polarization and Consensus: Political Conundrums, Policy Solutions

Malaysians are divided by the politics of ethnic representation, but also by habits of thought that heighten the confrontation and induce ethnic or partisan alignment. The Bumiputera majority, especially the Malay community, gravitate toward support for the system of privileges, while minority groups overwhelmingly close ranks in dissent, calling for the system's dissolution. Recent years have seen a reconfiguration of this polarization in the wake of the system's resilience despite the overthrow of the Barisan Nasional coalition of ethnic parties. The rise of multi-ethnic political parties has not delivered the expected demise of ethnicity in

policy-making. Minority groups have overwhelmingly embraced multi-ethnic parties as, inter alia, vehicles that ostensibly represent their opposition to Bumiputera preferential policies.

However, such expectations, emerging from a conflation of ethnic politics with ethnic policies, are simply untenable (Gomez et al., 2021). Malaysia's pursuit of the NEP's specific objectives of promoting a disadvantaged group's participation in areas where they are under-represented called for some application of preferential treatment primarily based on identity. Regardless of the government's ideological orientation or demographic composition—i.e., whether ruling parties are ethnically exclusive or multi-ethnic—the between-ethnic disparities would have required ethnically targeted redress measures (H.-A. Lee, 2022).

Group-based redistribution policies endure in Malaysia, not just because of political vested interests as often highlighted (although such impulses will persist), but also because they are embedded and coherent in meeting specific nationally established objectives. The emotive basis for supporting minority-favouring policies is understandable, but policy discourses that explicitly oppose Malay-targeted interventions while implicitly welcoming the same types of interventions benefiting minority ethnic groups or women, crumble under the weight of their bias and illogic. Group-targeted interventions, by preferentially providing opportunity, are undoubtedly more hazardous and prone to abuse compared to basic needs provisions. But the policy implication that arises from this acknowledgement is to add safeguards and more stringent implementation to promote equity and accountability, not to terminate group-targeted policies.

The other angle of this policy discourse—that "need-based" measures should replace "race-based" measures—also adds little value to questions of policy reform. This wide consensus holds that pro-poor, "need-based" policies suffice to safeguard the interests of the Bumiputeras since the community comprises a disproportionately higher share of the poor; hence, the community will receive the bulk of help that is targeted at the poor.

This line of argument conflates the objectives and mechanisms of two distinct policy domains and fails to distinguish universalist, rights-based, welfare-oriented policies that provide basic needs from group-based interventions to promote participation and capability (Gomez, 2012). The two prongs of the NEP had conceptualized this distinction, albeit in limited ways. The first prong of poverty eradication irrespective of race was rightly premised on universalism, although the present policy objectives in Malaysia extend beyond helping the poor to safeguarding rights and providing basic needs more broadly—e.g., quality primary and secondary schooling for all, access to public healthcare, broadband access, and more. What is often construed as need-based policies squarely fit within this domain focused on the universal provision of basic needs, which are distinct from the policy domain in which Bumiputera preferential policies of the second prong operate.

Indeed, a case can be made for the terminology of "need-based" and "race-based" itself to be jettisoned for propagating conceptual confusion, particularly in constricting the latter to "race" when the key feature is group-targeted interventions that can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, location, or other identity markers. Over the past decade, Malaysia has maintained and modified Bumiputera policies, notably under the Bumiputera Transformation Programme and Bumiputera Prosperity Vision 2030, and mainstreamed group-based policies targeting the Orang Asli (Peninsular Malaysia indigenous), Indian community, East Malaysian indigenous groups, and women. Enmity and distrust grow in public discourses when opposition to

"race-based" policies translates into calls to abandon only pro-Bumiputera policies, while explicitly or implicitly supporting the same types of group-targeted policies that benefit minorities or women.

In sum, a key step toward breaking out of deadlocked polarization and the dead-end consensus is by pursuing both universal basic needs provisions and protection of basic rights, and group-targeted interventions that promote participation, capability, and diversity in higher education, high-level employment, enterprise, and ownership (H.-A. Lee, 2023b).

6. Conclusion

This article has endeavoured to show how polarization and incoherence have come to pervade group-targeted redistribution, and how such discourses shape public attitudes toward the policy in Malaysia. The transformative NEP positively distinguished poverty reduction policies that reach out to all regardless of race, and acceleration of social restructuring to reduce ethnic imbalances, especially in the Bumiputera community's opportunity, participation, and capability. However, the NEP fell short. It did not elucidate how and where these two prongs would operate, did not emphasize the ultimate goal of developing capability, and did not clarify the diversity of interventions that demand sector-specific targets and timelines. The NEP allowed for debates to be framed as discussions about (a) majority interests vs minority interests, (b) continuing vs terminating a monolithic notion of the NEP, and (c) maintaining ethnic quotas vs abolishing quotas and introducing pure meritocracy. In recent years, the notion of need-based replacement for race-based policies has also taken hold, propagating platitudes rather than solutions.

Can Malaysia extricate itself from both the deadlock of fierce divisions and the quagmire of a hollow consensus? Entrenched habits of thought and blind spots, which fuel popular sentiments, will be difficult to dispense. At the same time, policy documents of the past decade have begun to identify and integrate Malaysia's group-based redistributive programmes more clearly and specifically (Malaysia, 2010, 2015, 2021), although there is still much room for improvement. After socioeconomic opportunity has been extensively availed to the Bumiputeras for decades, particularly through mass higher education, policy implementation must increasingly focus on developing capability, competitiveness, and confidence—such as by focusing on quality education and talent development, and promoting dynamic enterprises independent of government-linked companies. There are glimmers of possibility that Malaysians are receptive to more systematic and conciliatory approaches that jointly pursue universalist policies safeguarding rights and basic needs, alongside group-targeted policies promoting participation and capability—for multiple designated ethnic groups, including the Malays, other indigenous groups, and Indian community, and gender-based interventions as well. Such rethinking may be at its inception, but after more than fifty years of stasis, might hold out new possibilities for compromise and coherence.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to this thematic issue's editors and three anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier drafts, and does not implicate any of them for the contents of this article.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7595
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7595

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Open Access Journal

Remedying Horizontal Inequality: The Changing Impact of Reform in Northern Ireland

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Submitted: 13 September 2023 **Accepted:** 5 February 2024 **Published:** 14 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Northern Ireland is a case that lets us explore how people respond when deep-set horizontal inequality is substantively reduced. This article focusses on the reform of horizontal inequality in the cultural sphere and argues that it is likely to be contentious because units and measures are directly related to conflicting constructs of group identity, meaning, and value, and intertwined with conflict over state legitimacy. Northern Ireland shows when and how this becomes politically problematic. The article traces an uneven but largely successful process of economic and political reform, followed by a reversal in the second decade of the 21st century, when unionist unease with cultural equality was reframed into political opposition which at times threatened the stability of the settlement itself. The backlash came when it did because of a confluence of processes: a particularly inappropriate presentation of cultural equality, at a time when the momentum of the peace process was coming to an end, and other opportunities, in particular for the Protestant working class, were closing. The case suggests the need to develop a conception of cultural (in)equality that is attuned to the asymmetric and contested constructions of "groupness" well before backlash occurs.

Keywords

backlash; cultural inequality; group asymmetry; Northern Ireland

1. Introduction

Northern Ireland is a case that lets us explore how people respond when deep-set horizontal inequality is reformed. Horizontal inequality in Ireland was embedded, symbolically highly meaningful, consistent across political, military, economic, and cultural fields, part-constituted and reproduced by the structure of the British state and its embedded state-craft, and in unionist-governed Northern Ireland it deepened after partition.

It constituted opposing ethno-national groups at least as much as it was produced by them. It was highlighted by the Civil Rights Movement in 1968–1969, but it took two decades of ongoing civic struggle and armed conflict before it was seriously tackled by the British government, and three decades before provisions for remedying it were systematically laid out in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998.

Initial moves towards reform met with strong unionist and Protestant opposition. But once horizontal inequality began effectively to be tackled, there was a rapid move towards political settlement, and Protestants and unionists soon came to terms with the new order. If they had not initially wanted to share, redistribution was less painful than they had expected and they were ready to "get on with it." The good news story changed in the second decade of the 21st century, when political and economic reforms were all but completed. Unionist unease with cultural equality was reframed into political opposition by loyalist activists, most prominently Jamie Bryson, who came to public and media prominence with the flags protest in 2012 and contested not just cultural equality but the settlement itself. The protest hardened public attitudes and changed political direction, and at times threatened the stability of settlement. Unionists, who had seemingly come to terms with the process of reform, changed tack.

This article asks why cultural inequality and its reform became a focus of attention and backlash. It argues that the cultural dimension of horizontal inequality is inherently intersubjective and dependent on the construction of groupness and the sense of legitimacy of the state. This means that conventional units and measures of cultural inequality may ascribe inappropriate symmetry to groups in ways that provoke resistance. Second, it traces the reversal of the political trajectory in Northern Ireland, showing that unionist discourse and declared motivation centred around cultural norms. Third, this leads to an explanation of the unionist backlash that focusses on the "groupist" concept of cultural (in)equality that was politically dominant at the time and that failed to recognise either the asymmetric forms of cultural identity, or the efforts and concerns of unionists in their adaptation to the new order. This explains the content, moral intensity, and direction of unionists' political trajectory, and thus adds to existing emphases on blocked economic prospects and opening political opportunity. Fourth, it raises questions for further comparative research about when reform of cultural inequality becomes politically polarising and suggests that policy needs to elaborate a notion of cultural (in)equality that is attuned to asymmetric and contested constructions of groupness well before backlash occurs.

2. Cultural Inequality

Langer and Brown (2008, p. 42) define cultural status inequality as "perceived or actual differences in the treatment, public recognition or status of different groups' cultural norms, practices, symbols and customs." They point out that it has a major impact on life chances, personal dignity, and the likelihood of conflict. The wider literature concurs: Relative cultural status is one of the powerful motivators of group solidarity and conflict (Horowitz, 2000); it affects ordinary people even more than elites (Stewart, 2008) and motivates ordinary people to go to extraordinary lengths to ensure respect (Lamont et al., 2016).

But if the gross elements of inequality are evident to all—the banning of a minority language or religion and the stereotyping and caricaturing of group practices in the public sphere—the relevant units and measures of cultural inequality are contestable between and within given groups. This is because cultural inequality is a matter of meaning and valuation, and intergroup relations and intra-group contest frequently generate

disputed perceptions of the meanings of different practices. This makes horizontal inequality in the cultural sphere complex and difficult to assess.

Of course the concept of horizontal inequality, even in its economic guise, has also been contested on the grounds that the ascribed categories in terms of which inequality is measured (in Northern Ireland, Protestant or Catholic by community background) do not fit self-identifications (Finlay, 2011, 2015). However, allowing for a few cases difficult to classify, there are generally ways to assign most people to one or another category. (For Northern Ireland see Equality Commission, 2011, which requires that each employer monitors the religious community background of employees. Where this is not stated in answer to a direct question, indirect evidence already supplied by the employee [name, place of residence, school, sports, etc.] is used, and the employee is informed and invited to point out any "material inaccuracy.") Notwithstanding the serious moral concerns raised by Finlay (2014), such ascription of community background is a normal part of life in Northern Ireland. In my research, the assigned labels were worn lightly even by those who didn't identify with the communities: Out of 150 respondents in open-ended interviews conducted with long-term residents in Northern Ireland between 2003–2022, only a tiny handful did not volunteer community background, although most highly qualified its meaning and relevance. Only three (all children of mixed-marriage families) actively argued against categorisation. The measures of economic inequality—including employment, poverty, presence in the civil service and security services, educational opportunities and achievement—are internationally used and clearly defined, and in some cases (for example, poverty) have been refined to better capture over-time variation in socially important characteristics (Stewart, 2008). The contentious issues *in practice* are not the measures or units of inequality, but its causes, justification, and consequences.

Cultural inequality in contrast is contentious not simply in terms of its causes and justifications, but in its very units and measures. The units of comparison are the group-specific practices in which members of a group wish to participate. Some cultural fields are socially core—language, religion, the name of the group—such that it is almost inconceivable that each group would not participate in some way. Thus discrimination by the state in, for example, banning one religion and incorporating another into its own rituals, may simply be identified. But in other areas cultural practices are asymmetric: It is not a matter of the state discriminating in its treatment of the same practice, but of its treatment of *different* cultural practices, differentially valued by different groups. Adding to the complexity, each such practice already embodies cultural meaning and group resonances which may be contested, and which may change as the group repositions. The field, in short, is diverse and moving. In Northern Ireland, for example, a local authority's treatment of a local largely Catholic handball team may be compared not with a "Protestant" sport (there may not be any equivalent) but rather with the treatment of a local Protestant flute band. The diversity of practices raises perennial moral questions about the limits of tolerance in cultural practices: When are they to be protected and when are they to be constrained as harmful to others (Dobbernack & Modood, 2013)? It also introduces contentious intra- and intergroup interpretations of the practices—whether particular practices of marching are authentic expressions of group culture, or practices in which group members happen contingently to engage, or expressions of opposition to another group (Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, 2021). And there is intra- and intergroup dispute about which areas of practice are most important for group cultural identity and which require explicit recognition: There may be disputes on how to balance recognition of "small" items of one group's culture (choice of personal names) with recognition of "big" items of another group's culture (their nationality as Irish or British), making measurement of actual status inequality problematic and inviting contention over relative smallness, bigness, and balance.

Moreover, inequality in the cultural sphere is not simply regulated by the state and its laws, but also as Langer and Brown (2008, p. 48) note, part-constituted by it:

> The state's recognition of, and support for, the cultural practices of different groups is another important aspect of cultural status inequality. Also important in this respect are the ethnocultural practices and customs employed in the functioning of the state itself.

Where the legitimacy of the state is itself contested, so too will be judgements of the extent to which its practices are even-handed (even if accepted and internalised only by some groups of citizens and not others) or ethnically biased.

Public symbolism, discourse, official historical narratives, formal laws, and political self-presentation directly and indirectly impact the status and cultural capacity of different groups. Such state-frames constitute the socio-cultural value of different group characteristics, so that inequality of cultural condition is based in part on the political-constitutional structure of the state. The form of the state confirms or undermines informal hierarchies of respect or contempt; it facilitates or precludes public action and argument to counter low status. Thus issues of cultural inequality do not remain self-contained but easily spread into debates over the meanings and legitimacy of the state, and open the symbolic meaning and legitimacy of group practices to challenge. The debates are potentially polarizing because they foreground foundational constitutional issues and foundational ontological issues of groupness.

When moves to cultural equality become politically polarizing needs to be investigated empirically. There are examples of successful reform of cultural inequality (for example in South Africa) which changed both state and group norms to allow reciprocal acceptability (Guelke, 2023, pp. 102–122). In situations of conflict and group contest over the nature of the state, it is likely that the ground rules of reform require careful, creative, and iterative negotiation which takes account of ongoing changes in group understandings and prioritisations. In Northern Ireland this process was hardly begun.

3. Northern Ireland: Context and Process

Horizontal inequality was long embedded in the industrial economy of the North-east of Ireland. Protestant demographic, economic, and military dominance were crucial factors in the very foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921, for they gave unionists a de facto veto on British policy and a key role in the negotiations over partition. Their demographic dominance in the new Northern Ireland ensured them political power which they used to augment still further their economic, political, and cultural advantage over the Catholic and nationalist minority (Ruane & Todd, 1996). By 1971, fifty years after the foundation of the state, Protestant political power, economic position, and cultural status relative to Catholics had increased still further.

The Catholic minority—who opposed the very foundation of Northern Ireland—also opposed the multiplex inequality they faced within it. However, their political opposition to inequality was often subordinated to their demand for constitutional change, which would change the demographic balance with immediate implications for political power and cultural status. Thus inequality was only intermittently prioritised by Catholics and nationalists.

This changed in the 1960s. Traditional nationalist politics had had no impact, and a new generation of leaders seized the opportunity for civil rights agitation. The foregrounding of inequality in voting, housing, public employment, and security forces by the Civil Rights Movement from 1968–1972 provoked intense loyalist counter-mobilisation and violence, which divided the Protestant population, radically weakened the unionist government, and provoked republican reorganisation and armed struggle, British Direct Rule and a quarter century of violent conflict (Bosi, 2006).

As Nelson (1975) and Rose (1971, p. 272) have shown, discrimination was barely even acknowledged by Protestants and unionists before and during the Civil Rights Movement. Unionist resistance even to mild reform thereafter has been well documented. The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act of 1976 had neither teeth nor impact, and it met with bitter unionist protest (Doyle, 1994; Smith & Chambers, 1991). But, in any case, the British government was slow to intervene in a meaningful way to reform the economic or security spheres: They insisted on political power-sharing in 1973, while letting the Protestant community retain decisive economic power to bring it down—for example the almost wholly Protestant workforce in the electricity industry enabled a strike that shut down the whole society. Harold Wilson considered British withdrawal from Northern Ireland in 1974–1975, but not reconstruction of it as a more equal society. Only after a decade of failed political initiatives and little effective reform did Mrs. Thatcher explore alternative paths through partnership with the Irish state, culminating in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. This signalled an important symbolic and cultural shift, although significantly less than the symbolic equality that even moderate nationalists desired; but it had longer-term effects in a set of reforms and a new mode of intergovernmental management of conflict (Todd, 2011). The most important reform that followed was the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act of 1989 which—by the early 1990s—was bringing substantial improvement in employment ratios (McCrudden, 1999; Ruane & Todd, 1996, pp. 166–170).

The swift improvement of communal inequality in employment in Northern Ireland added to nationalist and republican confidence that the British state was able to achieve incremental change that might in the future give a path to a united Ireland. This encouraged republicans to engage in a peace process which would later lead to the GFA of 1998 and further strengthen the equality regime by bringing not just power-sharing, but a frame for reform of policing and security, a broadening of the economic equality measures to cover a range of categories, not just religion (Collins & Crowley, 2023), and promises of significant new investment in disadvantaged areas. By 2010, political, policing, and security measures were fully implemented and employment equality achieved (Nolan, 2013, pp. 95–96), national borders opened and the legitimacy of Irish identity and aspirations recognised; equality of educational funding for schools had been in place since the 1990s and the longstanding Protestant/Catholic unemployment differential was very substantially reduced with only "small differentials" remaining in 2011 (Rowland et al., 2022, p. 5). Horizontal inequality in employment still exists in the police service and security employment where the Catholic presence has not reached parity (Gray et al., 2018, pp. 114–116; Nolan, 2013, p. 111). Other lags included the failure to achieve the proposed bill of rights, and the fact that cultural equality ("parity of esteem") was never codified by British or British and Irish governments, or the Northern Ireland executive. Nonetheless—and notwithstanding further negotiations through the 2010s over victims, "the past," and intrinsically non-communalist economic issues like welfare provision and corporation tax (see O'Leary, 2019, pp. 269–282)—the achievement by 2010 was impressive.

Nationalist voters were reasonably satisfied with the new order. In 1968, 74% of Catholics reported feeling that they were discriminated against or treated unfairly (Rose, 1971, p. 272); in 2010, it was only 6%

(Supplementary File, Section 1). By 2010, a plurality of Catholics preferred the new Northern Ireland to the prospects of a united Ireland, and only a tiny handful of those who wanted a united Ireland said they would find it almost impossible to accept remaining in the UK (Supplementary File, Sections 3 and 4).

The unionist public came to terms with the new equality regime more quickly than might have been expected. By the mid-1990s, they accepted and even saw potential benefits in the new fair employment legislation (Miller, 1996). The issues in contention in the early years after the GFA were not primarily power-sharing or economic equality but IRA decommissioning of weapons, the absence of which led unionists serially to withdraw from the executive, reform of policing, significantly the symbolism of the reform involving a new name and uniform (Godson, 2004, p. 472), and, for nationalists and republicans, the slow and grudging engagement by the unionist parties.

Even the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) came to see the GFA as less bad than they had expected and participated in the power-sharing executive before it was suspended in 2002. By 2003, the DUP became the majority unionist party and, once decommissioning eventually occurred in 2005, they became open to more serious negotiations: Given the alternatives (a form of direct rule in which the Irish government had a key role) even Rev. Ian Paisley came to accept the need for a return to power-sharing in the St. Andrews Agreement of 2006/7.

Protestants found the cultural content of the GFA hard to accept. It was not simply that they believed that nationalists had benefitted more than unionists—they did (Supplementary File, Section 5) but they were willing to put up with that. Their worry about the new cultural ethos in Northern Ireland was more diffuse (McCall, 2003): Peter Weir spoke of the application of the "dimmer switch to Britishness" ("Barristers win case," 2000) and Protestants lacked confidence that their culture was protected (Supplementary File, Section 6). But the cultural changes meant that Catholics and nationalists were increasingly content to remain in the UK. As one young nationalist teacher said: "Now I'm much more confident about saying I'm Irish and…proud to say I'm Irish…because there seems to be less attack on that notion of Irishness." And while he himself would like a united Ireland, he had no wish to impose it while unionists did not want it (Todd, 2018, p. 129). Once decommissioning began, Protestants relaxed and unionists became more accepting of change, prepared to make their way in a now peaceful and more communally egalitarian society. In the dozens of interviews we conducted with Protestants in Northern Ireland in the mid-2000s, most accepted equality and welcomed the new order. For example, one young tradesman from a strong unionist background decided to "go with the flow" after the GFA:

> My father or my family's generation, they'd be more into standing up for you know, like Protestant and British and all. I know I say I'm British and all but…times have changed and people have to move on, you know what I mean. (Todd, 2018, 111)

Their unease was not about economic unfairness, power-sharing, or even cultural changes, but about lack of respect in everyday interactions. One man who had radically moderated his own politics (from DUP to Alliance) felt hurt by the republican lack of respect for the British state and the police and army, and one working-class woman noted caustically that they were being told to "express your identity and enjoy it" when their traditional modes of expressing identity in flags and marches were regulated or banned. Our respondents did not linger on these points. Some veterans and victims were bitter that they were no longer able to express their experience as victims of terrorism (Donnan & Simpson, 2007), but these people felt, and increasingly

were, marginal both socially and politically. The predominant attitude amongst the unionist population through the 2000s was to "get on with it." Progressives within the new loyalist parties were looking at forms of social democracy, and loyalist complaints were about austerity and the lack of a peace dividend, rather than about power-sharing (Edwards, 2023, pp. 216, 219). The Protestant population was becoming comfortable with the reforms. Even the threat of a united Ireland weighed less heavily on them: While in 1968 half of Protestants were willing to fight to keep Northern Ireland Protestant (and by extension British), by 2004 only 14% of pro-Union Protestants would find a united Ireland "almost impossible to accept" (see Figure 1).

By 2007, then, as a power-sharing executive was formed, there was wide convergence in support for the new post-GFA political and social order. The two main parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, presided over a sort of competitive communalism, where each fought for resources for "its side" while keeping competition constrained for neither party had an interest in disrupting this equilibrium. The dominant ideology was one of affirming the given identity and traditions of each group and reaching pluralist coexistence. This was clearly expressed in the *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*, an executive consultation document that was launched by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in July 2010 after much deliberation between the parties in government. It affirmed "mutual accommodation" (OFMDFM, 2010, para. 7.1) between the different interacting "cultures and communities" (para. 2.6) and the need to express "pride in who we are and confidence in our different cultural identities" (para. 2.3). After considerable criticism of the static concepts of "cultures and communities," the consultation document was withdrawn, but it gave a clear expression of the official views of the time (Ruane & Todd, 2011).

By 2010 when responsibility for now-reformed policing was devolved to Northern Ireland, the main provisions of the GFA in security, justice, Northern Ireland, North-South and East-West political institutions, and strong employment equality legislation had been implemented and the Irish constitutional claim to jurisdiction over the whole island had been changed to express an aspiration (a "firm will") for unification by consent. There was still no bill of rights, no codification of cultural parity of esteem, and victims' issues had not been tackled. But there had, already in 2007, been a commitment from the British government that the issue of Irish language provision would be resolved in the coming years. As O'Leary (2019, pp. 253, 264–265) shows, however, this commitment was far from water-tight since it left the initiative with the Northern Ireland parties. Politics began to focus on economic and other issues that in principle cross-cut the sectarian divide, for example, welfare reform and corporation tax; studies showed that party polarization decreased; there was effective accountability in policy making through the role of Assembly committees; attempts to mobilize unionist resistance failed; there was increased sharing of public space; and, despite continuing tensions, there was a commitment on the part of the two main parties to make the institutions work (Conley, 2013; Garry et al., 2017; McEvoy, 2015, pp. 103–104; Mitchell et al., 2009; Nagle, 2009; Tilley et al., 2008; Whiting & Bauchowitz, 2020). At the same time, there was a widespread public distancing from the political blocs, shown in a fall-off in voting (from 70% in the Assembly elections in 1998 to 55.7% in 2011) and a public focus on an ongoing sex scandal in the DUP rather than on constitutional issues. Among the mass public, there was majority support for the agreement—very strong in the Catholic and nationalist population and more marginal but still clear amongst Protestants and unionists. In 2007, well over half of Protestants thought the GFA a good thing, and in 2010 a clear majority of Protestants believed the Northern Ireland Assembly had made at least some achievements (Supplementary File, Sections 7 and 8). Despite the multiple political crises before and after, the measures to ensure power sharing and horizontal economic equality did not form a major area of conflict. By 2010, the political trajectory was positive and it

was widely believed that a period of stability had been achieved. Reflecting this public mood, the leader of the DUP, Peter Robinson, in a series of speeches in 2011–2012, argued that unionism had to move beyond its traditional Protestant base and reach out to the new pro-union constituency of Catholic background in order to stabilise the union. For these reasons, events at the end of 2012 were highly unexpected.

4. Mapping the Reversal: How Cultural Concerns Fed Into and Informed Loyalist Backlash

The flags protest which began in December 2012 had a lasting and serious impact on politics in Northern Ireland. Both republicans and loyalists recognised that it reversed the trajectory of political cooperation (Deeney, 2022; McGuinness, 2014). It began with grassroots unionist resistance, focussed on a decision by Belfast City Council to fly the British flag over Belfast City Hall on a limited number of days only, equivalent to the practice in Great Britain and in some Northern Ireland local councils (see Nolan et al., 2014). Despite some initial actions by the DUP and UUP, who had targeted the Alliance seat in East Belfast by criticising their policy on flags, the real dynamism came from the grassroots who went out to protest day after day (Nolan et al., 2014, pp. 80–81). The protestors included women and young people as well as men, working class and farmers, and those who had tried to compromise and had been involved in cross-community work, not just those who had always resisted such compromise (Nolan et al., 2014, pp. 36, 132).

After some weeks, the DUP followed the protestors. The following three years saw the DUP pull back on agreed policies that had already gained European funding—for example, a heritage centre at the Maze/Long Kesh prison—and refuse to support an Irish language bill. In addition, issues of "legacy" and historical commemoration became newly politically contentious (O'Leary, 2019, pp. 264–274, 280–281). None of these issues concerned horizontal inequality between the communities in the economic or political fields: Welfare was a political and class issue not one of horizontal inequality. Almost all of them were of high symbolic importance and relevant to horizontal inequality in the cultural field. The power-sharing government remained in place but there was a stalemate, with few new policies and pull back on older ones. Much-delayed intervention by British and Irish governments was ineffective (for a detailed discussion see O'Leary, 2019, pp. 264–282), and the institutions drifted on, losing credibility by the week. In the absence of political direction, clientelism and corruption came to a head in a "cash-for-ash" scandal. In 2016, 60% of Protestants and 70% of DUP supporters voted for Brexit, despite warnings of its destabilizing effect in Northern Ireland; and Brexit, when it came, made political relations in Northern Ireland much worse. But that Brexit won such support in Northern Ireland was a function of the unionist sovereigntist turn already underway since 2013. The executive fell in January 2017—brought down by Sinn Féin explicitly because of the corruption scandal but reflecting their frustration at what they perceived as a unionist lack of cooperation on policy issues. It was not restored until January 2020, to fall again in 2022, this time a result of the out-workings of Brexit.

Cultural (in)equality was at the centre of the flags protest. That protest marked a step-change for it transformed unionist concerns into a statement of Protestant, loyalist, and British identity and pride. The flags protest of December 2012 was presented as "ordinary people simply expressing their cultural identity" (Nolan et al., 2014, p. 73) against those who were "trying to take away our Britishness" (McAuley, 2016, 145). Jamie Bryson, who came to public prominence as a spokesperson at this period, said: "It went beyond a flag. For me it epitomised the ultimate trajectory of the peace process. Little by little, every vestige of Protestant-unionist-loyalist culture is being stripped from this country" (Rutherford, 2015).

Only a minority protested (Nolan et al., 2014), supporters of power-sharing remained in the majority among Protestants (Garry et al., 2023), and many DUP voters remained pragmatic and moderate. But the protests tapped into discontent and impacted public attitudes as well as unionist political discourse and direction. In Bryson's perception, before the protests "the vast majority of unionism and loyalism was pro-agreement, it was supportive of the institutions, and it was in a bit of a slumber" (Deeney, 2022). Afterwards, the moderates and pragmatists were no longer in the driving seat of unionism.

Die-hards increased amongst pro-union Protestants—those who found it almost impossible to accept a united Ireland jumped from 18% in 2010 to 25% in 2012, to 32% in 2014, and to 41% in 2019 (Figure 1). For a key period through the 2010s, the once marginalised position moved into the unionist mainstream. Reflecting the worsening political climate, the percentage of both Catholics and Protestants who thought their community was treated unequally increased significantly (Supplementary File, Section 2). Fall-off from identification with the unionist and nationalist blocs continued through the 2010s, but Figure 2 shows that even while the self-defined unionist bloc contracted relative to the population as a whole, the percentage of strong unionists held steady. If the hardening process was temporary (Leahy, 2023), it was significant and politically impactful. There was no corresponding hardening of nationalism, although it began to increase in strength after Brexit.

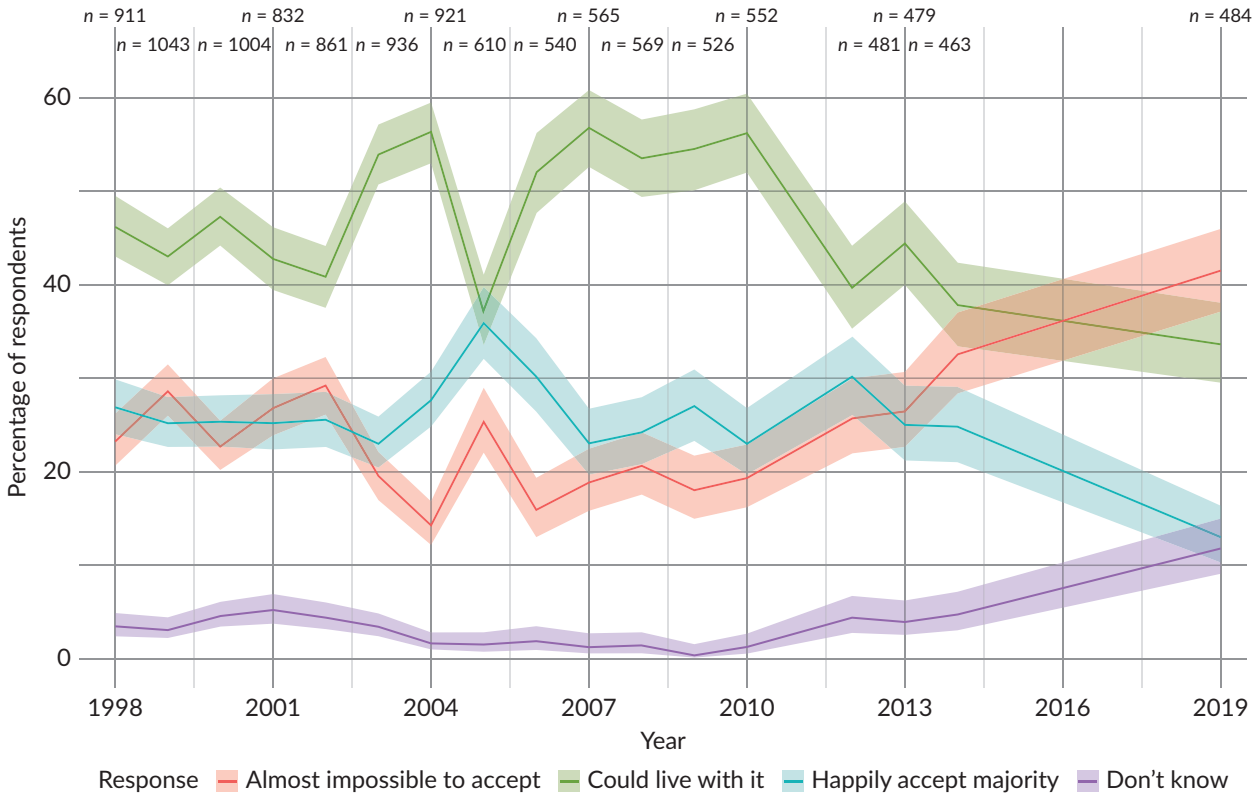

Figure 1. Attitude to a united Ireland amongst Protestants whose preference is to stay in the UK. Source: NILT (1998–2019).

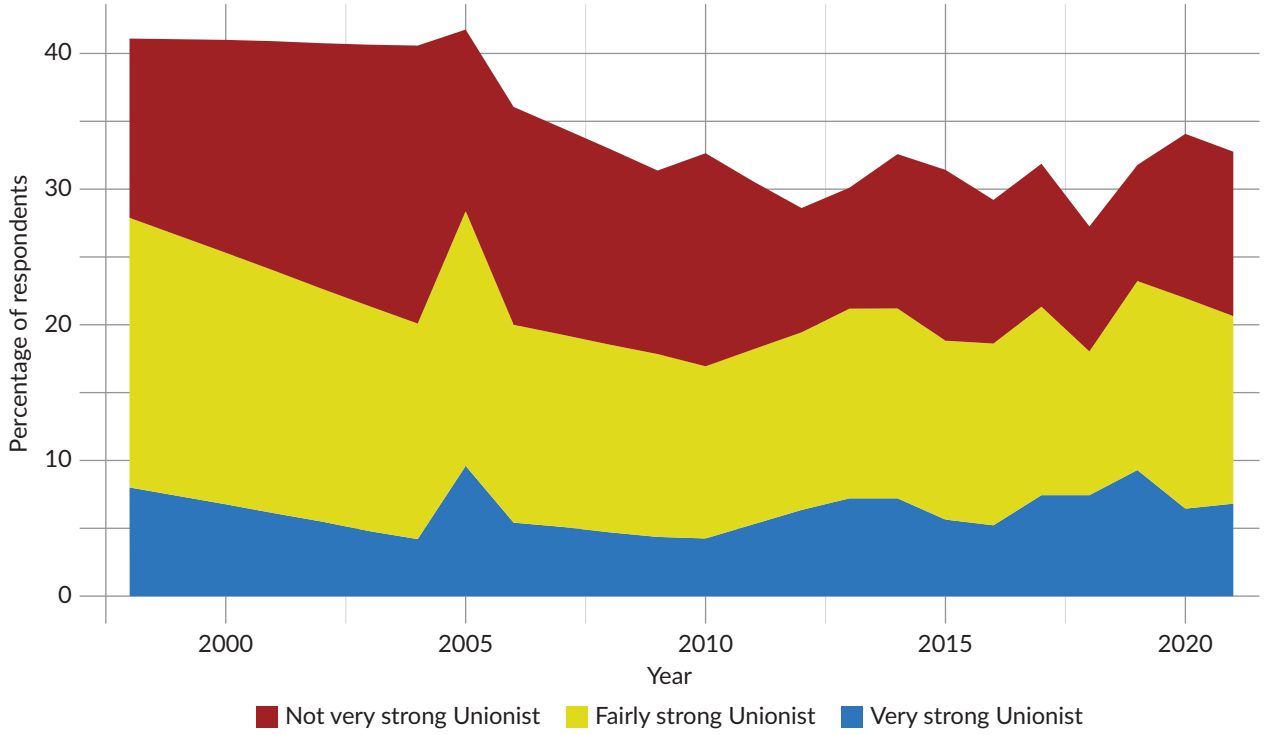

Figure 2. Strength of unionist identification as proportion of whole population. Source: NILT (1998–2022).

Changing unionist attitudes coincided with a new hardened political discourse that contrasts sharply with the openness of Robinson's speeches in 2011–2012. It converted the previously dominant cultural pluralism—which framed cultural equality in terms of existing identities—to hard-line unionist purposes. It spoke of the need to protect and respect unionist identity, which was said to be demeaned by any erosion of British public culture in Northern Ireland. This principle—respect our identity by respecting our state and its symbolism—gave unionists a new ideological weapon and won widespread Protestant support, crystallizing the unease of large sections of the unionist public, accentuating their moral disillusion with the GFA, using consociational norms of respect for identity to fight against equality of cultural status in the public sphere, and effectively marginalizing internal unionist and non-aligned opposition.

It was politically impactful. Unionism throughout the UK has had many faces (Keating, 2021) and the DUP's assertion of unqualified British sovereignty and symbolism brought it into line with the robust sovereigntist unionism now becoming dominant within the English Conservative Party (Keating, 2021; Kenny & Sheldon, 2021). It later allowed Brexit to be used as a symbol of unionism even though close to 40% of Protestants voted against it. In a Lucid Talk poll in 2018, Coakley (2020) points out that 70% of unionists supported Brexit "even if this were to damage the peace process." This view was not sustained (Garry et al., 2023) but the fact that it was a plausible response even for a short time shows how much the cultural ethos had changed.

The change in ethos was also clear in qualitative research. In 2018–2019, moderates whom I interviewed came back again and again to highly contested claims of cultural commensurability. One unionist—who had already come to terms with Irish language signs—was irked that Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports shirts were so widely worn, while Glasgow Rangers sports shirts were seen as sectarian:

> For me that's still one of the things that niggles me because if you run around in a Rangers top everybody looks at you and judges you. People run around in GAA tops. In my sight, it's as bad as running around in a Rangers top. It's the same.

One moderate nationalist mused about the unfairness that the poppy (the British symbol of commemoration of the war dead) was worn widely while he would be fired from his job if he wore the Easter lily (in commemoration of the republican Easter Rising of 1916): "I don't see why it's okay for someone to wear a poppy and not okay for someone to wear an Easter Lily because the both of them are about memories." In short, contention over cultural inequality had permeated everyday life.

5. Explaining the Political Reversal

Five factors have been put forward to explain the reversal in Northern Ireland. Without discounting their proximate impact, I argue that the underlying problem lay in the conceptualisation of horizontal cultural inequality and its reform: this problem became intense in the early 2010s for conjunctural reasons—in part because the conceptualisation was highlighted politically by the new executive, at a time when the settlement-momentum was slowing and other reform processes were grinding to a halt, in part because of other factors which accentuated grievance and opportunity.

5.1. Unionist Resistance to Equality

Nationalists sometimes explain the unionist stance in terms of a deep-set resistance to equality: "Unionists," it is said, "can't stomach a Catholic around the place." Of course there were and are extreme unionists ready to resist any move towards greater communal equality. But they had been marginalised in the late 1990s and 2000s. The reversal happened a full decade and a half after the GFA, when most of the economic and political reforms had already been implemented, and it was cultural and symbolic change that provoked protests and contention in the name of accommodation and equality for unionists.

5.2. Working Class Disadvantage and Resentment

The less well-educated and the "left behind" were overrepresented both among the "die-hard" Protestants who would find a united Ireland almost impossible to accept and among Brexit voters (see Garry, 2017). This may be explained by the unevenness of the reform process which disproportionately benefitted the educated and upwardly mobile clusters of the Catholic population, and least benefitted sections of the working class, including the Protestant men whose access to traditional heavy industrial jobs had been closed off with deindustrialisation. The Peace Monitoring Reports show that predominantly Catholic areas made up 16 of the 20 most deprived wards (Nolan, 2013, pp. 89–95). Still, Protestants had less hope: In education, urban working-class Protestant boys had by far the worst examination results and progression to third level education (Nolan, 2013, pp. 105–109; Purvis & Working Group on Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class, 2011). Protestant working-class grievances were accentuated by the recession and the Conservative government's resistance to giving additional funding to Northern Ireland. Once the protest began, sections of the Protestant working class took a lead role, repeating their traditional repertoire by which street mobilisation, and only such mobilisation, gets them influence and impact on the "middle class" unionist parties.

5.3. Unionist Insecurity in Response to Changing Demography

In the 2021 census, for the first time, the percentage of the population who were Catholics by background (45.7%) overtook the percentage who were Protestants and other Christians by background (43.48%). In fact this had been expected since the 1990s, and the change was slower and less decisive than unionists had feared. Most important of all, in the crucial period around 2011 when the census showed the two communities of about equal size, demography no longer carried with it definite constitutional implications. Catholics had become less nationalist, preferring that Northern Ireland remain within the UK with its present devolved institutions to a united Ireland. Indeed loyalists and unionists sometimes mentioned their new minority status, but it is hard to see this as a decisive change that explains their mobilisation.

5.4. Unionist response to exogenous opportunity (British-Irish absence and British Conservative Party dominance)

Was the unionist turn simply opportunistic? It began as the British and Irish governments withdrew from intervening in Northern Ireland (Todd, 2017). It converged with a more robust unionism within British Conservatism. The opportunity proffered by British-Irish inaction, and the potential alliance with the party in power in the UK gave added weight to the hard-line unionist position. Brexit and the contention surrounding it massively increased the opportunities for hard-line unionists to find allies in London. But that the hardliners triumphed in Northern Ireland required support from others within unionism, both political elites and grass-roots. It required them to transform what before had been slight unease into game-changing hard-line politics, despite the danger that this would destroy the hard-won peace and stability that up to so recently they had supported. They did so before Brexit, and their change of tack made the unionist vote for Brexit more likely.

5.5. The Impact of Consociation

Some have argued that consociational power-sharing highlights and hardens ascribed identity oppositions that do not reflect self-conceptions, and thus induces continued group opposition and disempowers alternative political movements. While it is true that the bloc categories do not fit everyone equally, the fact remains that power-sharing never became seriously problematic for the mass of the population and was welcomed by a majority of Protestants. Moreover, it requires explanation that identity issues became more politically problematic in 2012–2013 than in 1999 or 2007.

5.6. Cultural Rationale

If the proximate conditions for the turnaround are given by recession, Conservative party policy, and working-class lack of opportunity, the rationale lies elsewhere, in the outright rejection of the pluralist norms that informed this phase of power-sharing. As outlined above, unionists were always uneasy about the cultural egalitarianism that informed the GFA. This cultural egalitarianism was particularly clearly—some would argue crudely—expressed after 2007, in terms of "mutual accommodation" of existing "cultures and communities." Unionists were acutely aware of the contradictions in the claim to respect each culture when their culture—centred on the practices surrounding the British state and its institutions—had to change as the state itself changed to accommodate nationalists and republicans. They could put up with it as long as a

peace momentum was underway and the norms were flexibly stated and pragmatically applied. But the momentum ceased: With the devolution of policing, the settlement process was seen as complete and economic recession prevented any further economic peace dividend. Meanwhile, the executive presented cultural equality in a way that highlighted the contradictions. The moral vacuum was filled by the flags protest which articulated unionist unease, legitimated resistance, empowered working-class loyalists, resonated with British conservatives, and put nationalists on the back foot. It also upset the competitive communal equilibrium and drove nationalists back to nationalism.

Multiple factors are causally relevant to the reversal—the new unionism of the British Conservative elite, the lack of opportunity for the Protestant working class especially in the recession, and the long-standing Protestant working class repertoire of gaining influence over political unionism by street protest. But the executive's framing of cultural (in)equality, without overarching values and without negotiation on the form and limits of stateness and groupness, made the achievement of significant cultural equality all but impossible. It was not power-sharing per se that caused the problem but the ideology that—at this time at least—informed it, and that affirmed equal respect for existing group identities even while the cultural reforms undermined one of those group identities. As the political and economic reform process wound down, culture came back into focus and the contradictions became apparent. A way forward was provided by a hard-line unionism that used the tropes of identity politics to undermine the very basis of the GFA compromise. This might have been pre-empted by earlier negotiation of the parameters of cultural equality that allowed a morally coherent way forward for nationalists, unionists, and others.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that there was an endogenous group dynamic whereby undoing horizontal inequality in the political and economic spheres lessened group antagonism and closure in Northern Ireland, but policies to undo horizontal inequality in the cultural sphere had contradictory aspects, highlighting incommensurable constructions of groupness and stateness and giving rise to unease which came sharply into focus as other aspects of reform were completed. Unionist activists took advantage of the ideological vacuum and the political opportunities offered by the new Conservative government, making it all the more difficult to deal with the problems generated in Northern Ireland by Brexit.

The unionist political reversal was driven neither by inequality, insecurity nor by supremacism, but rather by a perception that the norms around cultural reform disrespected their identity. The discourse of mutual accommodation and confidence in existing "cultural identities" failed to recognise the asymmetry of these identities or to respect the cultural changes that unionists had already made. It created a constituency open to backlash. The ensuing events set back political progress for a decade. Whether similar cultural dynamics exist in other cases, when they become politically polarising, and how they are overcome are important questions for further research.

In Northern Ireland, the framing and context of cultural reforms were crucial, and little public deliberation or negotiation of an agreed framework for change was undertaken. To articulate more appropriate and reciprocally acceptable cultural norms sensitive to group asymmetries is a crucial task. It would require iterative negotiation and deliberation which would at once reconstitutionalise the polity while recognising and respecting the necessity of group change. The GFA might have been developed as such a project:

Whether this is renewed in a new phase of devolution or whether the emergent discussion about a united Ireland could develop into such a project remain open questions.

Acknowledgments

The author acknowledges the comments of the reviewers and editors, Joseph Ruane and Dino Wildi, who helped construct the figures.

Funding

The author acknowledges funding from UCD's OBRSS (Output Based Research Support Scheme).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7597
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7597

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Open Access Journal

Contextualized Rights as Effective Rights to All: The Case of Affirmative Action in Brazil

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Submitted: 13 September 2023 **Accepted:** 31 January 2024 **Published:** 11 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

This article explores how two main narratives about slavery may lead to varying perspectives on social rights. Some collective narratives endorse a superficial idea of equality of rights, neglecting factors such as race and ethnicity, while others reject this apparent universalistic view, promoting more effective, de facto equality. The latter narrative supports horizontal redistribution, strongly contrasting with the former. Using Brazil's affirmative action programs for Black students as a case study, this article will address two prevalent national narratives about the slavery of Black Africans and persons of Black African descent. Only one of those narratives could lead to what I would identify as a "contextualized theory of rights," ensuring horizontal equality amidst a backdrop of brutal slavery and structural racism. This narrative offers a plurally faceted, dialogical approach to rights that can respond to the needs of differently situated individuals. The article will explore the evolution of such a collective narrative in Brazil's race relations.

Keywords

affirmative action; education; narrative; racial discrimination; structural racism

1. Introduction

An effective theory of rights—that is, a theory of rights aimed at assuring equal rights to all in practice—requires a realistic definition of each individual as a rights subject. The term "realistic," in this context, means to consider both abstract and concrete human characteristics. Given our inability to define ourselves in purely concrete terms due to limited knowledge about the extent of our individual freedom vis-a-vis environmental factors, a realistic approach may involve a combination of known concrete traits and abstract prescriptive traits. Concrete traits include gender, race, class, nationality, age, and sexual orientation, while abstract traits

refer to what we aspire to be, i.e., our "capacity to formulate and live by universalizable principles" (Kant, as cited in Benhabib, 2007, p. 12); our capacity "to feel for each other" at a higher level than other animals (Rorty, 1993, p. 122); our being "creatures of God" (Stackhouse, 1999); our capacity for "communicative freedom," for building meaning through dialogue (Benhabib, 2007, pp. 13, 16–19).

While formal equality relies on recognizing shared abstract traits, substantive or de facto equality acknowledges the impact of diverse contexts on the implementation of rights. Dialogue emerges as the key to ensuring equal rights in practice (Benhabib, 2007, pp. 15, 16)—where diverse obstacles to the fruition of rights and responses are shared and articulated. The challenge lies in promoting a dialogue that encompasses the widest diversity in a society to reflect the most comprehensive image of that society. A realistic definition of the "rights subject" aims at rendering invisible individuals visible, enabling their participation in shaping new collective narratives and conceptualizing rights that accommodate the diverse needs, aspirations, and capabilities of distinct individuals.

Individuals, as communicative agents, are shaped by both their individual narratives and the collective narratives in which they are immersed. Understanding these collective narratives is crucial for framing theories of rights, as they help define individual identities within historical processes that artificially assign value to various races, ethnicities, and salient characteristics. These narratives may extend to national identities, forming "imagined communities" based on shared beliefs or values rather than direct personal connections (Anderson, 1983/2006; Haas, 1986, p. 709; Tamir, 1995, p. 423). The focus of this article is on broad national narratives framing national identities.

These collective narratives not only contribute to shaping individual identities but are also subject to change by the individuals immersed within them, both in terms of values and image. Regarding values, national narratives only remain relevant in bringing society together if they allow ongoing internal bargaining around core collective values that rearrange "wealth, status, and power" (Haas, 1986, p. 710). As values evolve, such narratives may create new "community images" (Tamir, 1995, p. 422).

In this article, I will explore how changes in collective narratives have influenced the establishment of more effective rights, focusing specifically on contrasting narratives regarding the slavery of Black Africans and people of Black African descent in Brazil. One narrative portrays cordial slavery, mixed races, and racial democracy, while the other highlights harsh slavery practices and structural racism. These narratives connect respectively to neutral (or formal) rights, which disregard race and other concrete traits, and to "contextualized rights," which consider such traits. Although those two narratives do not exist in isolation, I will emphasize them to highlight two opposite approaches to rights, particularly their impact on values and national image, shifting from a racially homogeneous and non-discriminatory image to the image of a racially plural country that needs to tackle structural racism.

My analysis will centre on affirmative action for Blacks in Brazilian universities, emphasizing, first, the reasons why the narrative of brutal slavery gained space in the national discourse in the last two decades, and second, how an expanded dialogue about race and racism enabled the mainstream acceptance of a collective narrative that recognizes structural racism. This expanded dialogue has paved the way for adopting a more effective rights theory and a more diverse array of "possibilities of existence" (e.g., Butler, 1986, pp. 41, 48).

In the 2022 census, 45.3% of Brazilians identified as brown, 10.6% as Black, and 42.8% as white—a significant shift from the 2012 census, which reported 46.6%, 7.4%, and 46.3%, respectively (IBGE, 2023, pp. 1, 12), and the 2000 census figures of 38.5%, 6.2%, and 53.7% (IBGE, 2007). The increase in the Black population over the past two decades primarily stems from a rise in self-identification as Black (Miranda, 2015) despite consistent categories in census data (Telles, 2004, pp. 80–81). Throughout this article, I will use Black to encompass both Black and brown, as is common practice in Brazilian literature.

2. A Collective Narrative of Cordial Slavery, Mixed Races, and Racial Democracy

Anthropologists Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda built a narrative that became widely accepted in Brazilian society throughout the 20th century (Itaborai, 2005). This narrative portrayed Brazil as having experienced a milder form of slavery compared to other economies with a slave-based system. The idea was rooted in a unique form of Catholicism and Portuguese interactions with diverse cultures, asserting that Brazil's Christianity was "lyric" and "festive," fostering bonds among Blacks, the "Brazilian family," and its culture (Freyre, 1963b, pp. 81, 184, 372; Itaborai, 2005, p. 171; Souza, 2000, pp. 70–76). This narrative attributed the purportedly less severe treatment of slaves to Moorish influence and the perception that "slaves were [often] members of the household" (Freyre, 1963a, pp. 222–23). In 1936, Freyre even characterized the Brazilian slavery system as a "cooperative system of society" (Freyre, 1963a, p. 679).

According to this narrative, the notion of a milder form of slavery laid the foundation for a 20th-century concept of racial democracy, emphasizing a single mixed race and national unity (Putnam, 1943, pp. 325, 335). In essence, Brazilian society embraced the idea of a nation built on racial mixing (A. S. A. Guimarães, 2002, pp. 117–118, 152–154; Zaid, 2006, p. 63).

The myth of racial democracy in Brazil claims the country has always been harmonious and racially inclusive—an idea deeply flawed given the historical cruelty and high mortality rates within Brazil's slavery system. Criticism of this narrative emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, but the military regime (1964–1985) reinforced the narrative. In a 1970 report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs asserted there was no racial discrimination in the country, thus no need for legislative action. This period saw the exile of individuals who researched racism or challenged the ideology of racial democracy, including figures such as Abdias do Nascimento, Florestan Fernandes, Guerreiro Ramos, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Octavo Ianni (A. S. A. Guimarães, 2002, pp. 98, 155; Telles, 2003, pp. 57–61).

The narrative of racial democracy was still prevalent in Brazil in the early 1990s, and there were attempts to revive it under Bolsonaro's government (2019–2022), as mentioned below.

3. A Collective Narrative of Harsh Slavery Practices, Structural Racism, and the Myth of Racial Democracy

The narrative against racial democracy (see Ikawa, 2017) centres on the brutal history of slavery in Brazil. It was highlighted by the Brazilian Black movement throughout the 20th century, but it only transcended the limits of the movement in the last two decades (Martins, 2007, p. 179). This narrative highlights a grim

reality: Brazil's slave trade lasted over 300 years (Rout, 1976, p. 73), making it one of the longest transatlantic slavery regimes. In 1888, Brazil was the last independent nation in the Western world to abolish slavery.

Slaves occupied diverse roles, including on sugar cane plantations in the Northeast (peaking in the 17th century), mining in the state of Minas Gerais (peaking in the 18th century), and in cotton plantations in the state of Maranhao (from mid-18th to mid-19th century). Contrary to the notion of gentler slavery, slaves endured gruelling labour and were merely replaced if injured or killed (Siqueira, 2007, pp. 177–178). Mines alone saw the sale of half a million slaves, primarily from the Gulf of Guinea, with an annual death rate reaching 7,000. Slaves were subject to cruel punishments, including whipping, beating, poisoning, and hanging (Grinberg, 2018, pp. 149–154). Although some achieved freedom or emancipation, they faced challenges finding employment due to stigma, as whites did not accept their change of status (Rout, 1976, p. 86). Access to clerical, civil, and administrative appointments depended on proving "cleanliness of blood" (Rout, 1976, pp. 79–87).

In this narrative, the myth of racial democracy is a myth of denial that has perpetuated de facto discrimination in Brazil. This denial operates on three levels: denial of race, denial of racism, and denial of structural forms of racism, that is, of institutionalized or widespread representations of racism. The statistics presented below pertain to a period predating affirmative action programs and the shifting of narratives, characterized by particularly high levels of denial despite a growing number of statistical studies.

Denial of race in Brazil results from conceptual confusion regarding the definition of race, driven by the belief that objective definitions are elusive in a nation marked by extensive racial mixing and the absence of institutionalized segregation policies (Ikawa, 2008, Chapter 3). Although often overestimated, racial mixing does exist in Brazil and at a much higher level than in the United States, for instance. In 1992, the rates for endogamic marriages were 99.8% among whites and 96.6% among Blacks in the United States (A. S. A. Guimarães, 2002, pp. 138–152; Telles, 2003, pp. 57–61), but 83% among the general Brazilian population (Braziliano, 2022, p. 18). With no legal segregation since slavery's abolition and a racially mixed society, some argue that identifying distinct races in Brazil is not possible. Consequently, many Brazilians deny the existence of race. This argument overlooks, however, the understanding of race as a socially constructed concept that varies across societies, involving complex definitions and identification processes.

In Brazil, census-based racial classification has always relied on self-declaration (Telles, 2004, pp. 80–81). Reliable data collection on race in Brazil started in 1872 (Zaid, 2006, pp. 45–47, 52–58). Presently, the Brazilian census administered by the IBGE employs five categories: Black, white, yellow, brown or *pardo* (mixed-race), and Indigenous. Racial fluidity has not impeded a considerable degree of shared racial classification. Illustratively, surveys in 1976 and 1995 revealed that although Brazilians mentioned 135 colours and races to identify themselves, "94 percent of the respondents from both studies classified themselves within six principal categories" (dos Santos & Anya, 2006, p. 41).

The denial of racism in Brazil operates on two fronts: First, there is the belief that racism will be automatically overcome by an anti-racialist ideology (A. S. A. Guimarães, 1997, p. 66), that is, by the belief that racism will be defeated by avoiding any discussion of individuals' categorization into distinct races; and second, there is the belief that discrimination in Brazil stems from class rather than race. As to the former front, eliminating race-related discourse while discrimination persists undermines the development of

policies to critique and combat racial discrimination. A 2003 survey conducted by the Perseu Abramo and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Foundations, which interviewed more than 5,000 people in 266 municipalities, shed light on the consequences of this form of denial. While 96% of the Brazilian population denied being racist themselves, 89% of all Brazilians recognized that racism existed in the country, and 74% expressed some degree of racial discrimination as they commented on the following statements:

> A good Black is a Black with a white soul.
>
> When Blacks do not make a mistake entering a building, they do so exiting the building.
>
> What would you do if you had a Black boss?

Eighty-one percent of browns and 57% of Blacks reported that they had personally never suffered any form of racial discrimination (Santos & Palmira da Silva, 2005, pp. 117, 130, 141–148). In sum, although Brazilians were able to recognize the presence of racial discrimination in the country, they denied being either the perpetrator or the victim. They denied guilt; they denied responsibility; and they also tried to flee from discrimination's oppressive mantle by denying its existence. The second front of denial, supported in the early 20th century by figures such as Freyre and Pierson, argued that Brazil's hierarchical social structure is rooted in class rather than race (Telles, 2004, pp. 7–8, 35). Despite increased statistical research at the end of the century revealing structural racism (Telles, 2004, pp. 54–55), many Brazilians persisted in this belief, undermining the significance of race as a source of discrimination. Certainly, not only class, but also gender, disability, sexual orientation, and age, among others, intersect and inform how race is perceived (Battle & Ashley, 2008; Carbado, 2019). The flaw with this second front of denial lies not in the indication that class is an additional factor of discrimination but rather in the deep disregard of race as a source of discrimination.

A third source of denial is the focus on immediate discriminatory treatment rather than on structural racism. Until the early 2000s, the prevailing perception among Brazilians regarded racism as an isolated, non-structural issue grounded in individual guilt and responsibility despite three centuries of brutal slavery and evident racial disparities (Ikawa, 2008, pp. 106–119, 139–205). The Perceu Abramo survey highlighted this belief, indicating that 49% of Brazilians felt that combatting racial discrimination was an individual responsibility, with only 36% acknowledging it as a governmental duty (Santos & Palmira da Silva, 2005).

Structural exclusion reinforces a narrative of exclusion, strengthening stigma and lack of recognition, thus validating the existing structure. In the 1990s, exclusion was deeply reflected in income distribution, health, and education. In 1992, Blacks earned merely 44% of what their white counterparts did. By 1999, income inequality had worsened, dropping that percentage to 42% (Henriques, 2005). Also, in 1999, the poorest tenth of the population was 70% Black and 30% white, while the richest tenth was approximately 85% white and 15% Black (Henriques, 2001). According to the 2000 census, while Brazilian whites had a life expectancy of 74, browns and Blacks averaged only 68. Mortality rates due to specific health issues were substantially higher for Blacks compared to whites, notably in reproductive and sexual health, where pregnancy-related mortality was twice as high for Blacks as for whites (Lopes, 2003, p. 25).

In education, the stark racial disparities persisted, with 51.1% of the Black population over 25 years old being illiterate in 1999, while only 10.4% of the white population in the same age group faced illiteracy (Henriques,

2005, Table 22). Data from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) for the period between 1929 and 1974 revealed that, despite an increase in schooling years and the implementation of universal education policies, inequality between whites and Blacks remained largely unaffected (Henriques, 2001, pp. 26–30). In 1991, there were 1.1 million white students aged 18 years old or over enrolled in universities, compared to only 277,000 Blacks and browns, with the result that white students accounted for 78.3% of the university population, and Blacks and browns for only 19.7%.

Economic exclusion extended to political participation and positions of power (e.g., Stewart, 2009, pp. 317–318). In 1996, only one in 10 judges were Black. A survey of over 2,000 House of Representatives members from the late 1980s to 1994 revealed that only 29 were Black or brown. Edward Telles noted that there was only one Black general in 100 and eight Black prosecutors among 600 in the Federal Prosecutor's Office. Using 1980 census data, he found that whites were eleven times more likely to hold professional or managerial occupations than Blacks (A. S. A. Guimarães, 2002, pp. 189, 208–209; Telles, 2003, pp. 57–61; Telles & Paixao, 2013).

4. Two Narratives, Different Concepts of Rights

Different responses emerge in terms of rights, depending on the narratives we embrace. Embracing the narrative of cordial slavery and racial democracy tends to favour allegedly neutral or formal rights and policies, sustaining the denial of race and racism; doing so, then, favours the denial of a more realistic subject of rights that encompasses not only abstract but also concrete traits. This seemingly neutral stance disregards specific obstacles faced by racial groups, perpetuating de facto or substantive inequality. Such apparently universal policies may seem neutral, but they can disproportionately affect different groups due to unaddressed barriers (Langer et al., 2017, p. 1), promoting only formal equality and disregarding actual disparities. In education, neutrality could mean a uniform entrance exam for public universities, ignoring disparities between public and private schooling and the underrepresentation of Black students. This approach also undermines effective access to resources in various fields, including civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights. In sum, neutrality usually means formal equality only, that is, "equality on paper."

Contrarily, adopting the narrative of harsh slavery, structural racism, and rejecting racial democracy calls for contextualized rights. This approach considers diverse real-life experiences, acknowledging history and racism when analyzing rights and policies, and, therefore, acknowledging a more realistic subject of rights.

Using affirmative action in Brazilian higher education as a case study, I will explore how the narrative of brutal slavery and structural racism gained traction in the past 20 years, enabling a contextualized and more effective theory of rights. First, I will address the growing dialogue about race and racism within the population at large. Second, I will delve into how debunking the myth of racial democracy led to embracing a more realistic subject of rights and broader "possibilities of existence."

5. A Narrative Transition: The Expansion of Dialogue About Race and the Fallacy of Racial Democracy

The Brazilian journey towards a more effective theory of rights began with an expanded dialogue around race. Having existed within the black movement throughout the 20th century (e.g., Ardoin, 2023,

pp. 27–40), it engaged the Brazilian population at large after two sets of events: the official recognition of racial discrimination in the 2001 UN World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, held in Durban, and the subsequent implementation of race-based affirmative action programs. The inclusion of new actors in the debate legitimized the anti-racism dialogue in a way not seen before (Domingues, 2005, p. 174; Htun, 2003; Santos & Palmira da Silva, 2005, pp. 10–11; Telles & Paixão, 2013, p. 11).

The creation of this mainstream space for dialogue, this expanded "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983/2006, pp. 6–7, 62), allowed the "bargaining," to use Haas's (1986, p. 710) expression, of a narrative of denial into a narrative of structural racism, leading to a new image of the nation and the restructuring of values in the distribution of goods: The nation was to be perceived not as a homogeneous group of mixed-race individuals but rather as a racially plural group, and goods, such as education, were to be redistributed through affirmative action programs, in response to structural racism. In this mainstream space, the specific obstacles faced by Blacks to the realization of rights would finally be considered in relation to the definition of those rights to encompass affirmative action programs.

The expansion of the narrative of structural racism to new actors was made possible by the mobilization of the Brazilian black movement, an opening in the federal government to promote change, and the increasing adoption of race-based affirmative action programs. In 1995, the Black movement engaged the newly democratized Brazilian government in discussions about combating racial discrimination and adopting affirmative action initiatives (Bailey et al., 2018; Telles, 2004, p. 56). This engagement gained traction through active participation in the 2000 National Preparatory Committee for the Durban conference, where pressure was exerted on Fernando Cardoso's government to acknowledge racial discrimination in Brazil (Bailey et al., 2018; Htun, 2003, pp. 61–62; Silva & Trapp, 2012, pp. 41–43). Collaborating with national and international groups further bolstered the movement's legitimacy and advocacy strategy and generated political support (Htun, 2003, pp. 81–84). At the Durban conference, the Brazilian president not only recognized the existence of racial discrimination but also the need for affirmative action. After the conference, there was a shift in the affirmative action discourse from the black movement to politics in general. This change spurred institutional reforms, prompting more conversations about race and racism across Brazilian society.

Following Durban, Brazil introduced a national human rights program committed to combatting racial discrimination and promoting equality. Government bodies began implementing quotas for hiring Blacks, women, and individuals with disabilities in the diplomatic service (Domingues, 2005, p. 167; Htun, 2003, pp. 61–62), the Ministry of Agrarian Development, the Supreme Court, and the Ministry of Justice (Htun, 2003, pp. 68–72). In 2003, a special secretary was appointed to promote racial equality and embed racially based policies in federal agendas.

The rise of affirmative action programs in education, starting in 2001, fueled discourse further. By 2012, 70 public universities, primarily through local laws or university regulations, had adopted affirmative action programs, benefiting public school students (60 out of 70 public universities) and Black students (41 out of 70 universities; Daflon et al., 2013, pp. 307–312).

Institutionalization of affirmative action programs evolved further when the issue reached the Brazilian Supreme Court and the Brazilian Congress in 2012, expanding dialogue across Brazilian society. ADPF 186

(an allegation of non-compliance with a fundamental constitutional precept) presented by the Democratas political party, aimed to challenge the University of Brasilia's 20% racial quotas for student admissions, seeking its declaration as unconstitutional (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012).

In this case, the University of Brasilia highlighted the positive results of its affirmative action policies. Out of 3,980 students admitted through quotas since 2004, both quota and general system admissions showed similar graduation rates (7.1% and 7.9%, respectively) and comparable grades. Also, this case prompted the Supreme Court's fifth public hearing in its history, where 38 experts from academia, social movements, human rights organizations, and government agencies debated the issue extensively ("Cronograma da audiência pública," 2010; L. G. Guimarães, 2021).

The Supreme Court deemed the University of Brasilia's affirmative action constitutional, citing principles of substantive equality and pluralism of ideas within the Brazilian Constitution. The Court highlighted that affirmative action aligns with substantive or de facto equality, allowing both universalist policies and targeted actions benefiting specific social groups to address historical inequalities. It stressed that measures tackling the historical structure of inequality within universities should not be judged solely based on individual constitutional principles such as merit, considered in isolation. Affirmative action should rather be viewed within the broader framework of Brazil's principles (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012, pp. 2–3, 19). For instance, the principle of pluralism of ideas, a cornerstone of the Brazilian state, justified differentiated admissions that consider racial or socioeconomic criteria for the benefit of society. Justice Gilmar Mendes defined pluralism in light of a history of racial inequalities and as part of the "value of equality." He stated that, in a racially diverse society marked by such history, the Court was compelled to go beyond formal equality to promote the constitutional value of de facto equality through the adoption of affirmative action programs (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012, pp. 178–179).

The Supreme Court decision triggered the enactment of a new federal law (Law no. 12.711) in 2012, mandating affirmative action in admissions to federal public universities and technical schools. This law reserved 50% of positions for students from public high schools, with 50% of those reserved for low-income families. Moreover, positions were to be reserved at least in the same proportion as the representation of Blacks, browns, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities in the state where the educational institution was located (Law no. 13409/2016).

Educational institutions were given four years to fully implement the law, and the executive branch would revise the racial quotas ten years after the law's publication (Law no. 12.711), a date that will most probably be postponed by a few decades (e.g., Bill no. 1788/2021 and Bill no. 3422/2021; see Feres Júnior & Luz, 2022). By the end of 2012, all public universities were using either class quotas (mainly focusing on students who had attended public schools) or a combination of class and race quotas rather than purely race quotas (Telles & Paixão, 2013, p. 10).

The number of Blacks and browns at universities doubled between 2003 and 2013, that is, in the first ten years of affirmative action programs, from 19% to 38% (Gois & Duarte, 2013). By 2020, among the 5,574.551 students in undergraduate programs, 44.91% were white (2,503.874), and 37.19% were Black (2,073.667) (IBGE, 2022).

The extended debate about race and racism in Brazil, the debate that encompassed an expanded "imagined community" opposed to the myth of racial democracy, promoted a shift in public opinion over the years, with increased support for affirmative action for Blacks in universities.

In 2003, a survey conducted by the Perseu Abramo Foundation indicated that 59% of those interviewed supported racial quotas for university admission (Domingues, 2005, p. 172). In 2008, a survey by the Datafolha Institute concluded that 62% of Brazilians at least partially agreed with quotas for Blacks in the field of education (Telles & Paixão, 2013, p. 11). In 2010, a survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University posed the following question to a nationally representative sample of 2,482 Brazilians: To what extent do you consider reserving spaces in universities for Black students fair (on a scale from 1 to 7)? More than two-thirds of the interviewees substantially agreed with the statement, choosing either 7 (*strongly agree*), 6, or 5 (Smith, 2010, pp. 1–2).

In 2015, a survey conducted by Caregnato and Oliven, covering a representative sample of 900 Brazilians living in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, found that 75.8% of Brazilians supported the 2012 federal law that established racial and class quotas for all federal universities (Caregnato & Oliven, 2017, p. 179; Turgeon & Habel, 2022). Results differ, however, depending on factors like race and income, as well as the type of affirmative action under scrutiny. Turgeon and Habel (2022, p. 506) found that whites and high-income respondents are less supportive of quotas than others and that racial quotas have lower support than income and public-school quotas.

The shift from a narrative of denial to a narrative that recognized the fallacy of racial democracy did not happen in a vacuum, however. Other narratives have either sustained or limited that shift. For instance, Brazil's constitutional process in the 1980s, supported by social movements like the Unified Black Movement, shaped a narrative emphasizing pluralism and political engagement. Born in the 1970s in reaction to racial inequalities and police violence, the Unified Black Movement became a key force behind Congress's small black caucus. It was successful in ensuring that racism was treated as a crime in the 1988 Constitution when the narrative of denial was still prevalent (Paixão, 2019; Telles, 2004, p. 50). The movement's success stemmed from unifying Black leaders, grassroots campaigns, and the establishment of influential NGOs such as Geledes, CEERT, and CEAP (Telles, 2004, pp. 48–52). Subsequently, however, an opposing narrative gained strength. Bolsonaro's administration (2019–2022) amplified the old denialist narrative while also embracing explicit racism (Bledsoe, 2019). During his campaign for the presidency, Bolsonaro rejected the notion of "special classes" (Utida, 2022) based on race, gender, or sexual orientation, coining the term *coitadismo* or "underdog-ism" to delegitimize any discourse around discrimination and exclusion (Alencar & Silveira, 2022, p. 36; Caleiro, 2018). When the Black Lives Matter movement gathered momentum in the United States and when the racially motivated murder of a Black man in a Brazilian supermarket caused outrage around the country, Bolsonaro's vice president, Hamilton Mourao, reinstated the narrative of racial democracy, by arguing that there was no racial discrimination in Brazil (Rios, 2022). Additionally, Bolsonaro made overtly discriminatory statements about Quilombolas, suggesting they were unproductive (Bledsoe, 2019, p. 165). His discriminating discourse may have been connected to an increase in killings of Quilombolas by 350% in 2017. He also promoted aggressive police actions, particularly impacting the Black community (Bledsoe, 2019, pp. 166–168). In 2018, he argued that the police should shoot first and then ask questions, adding that those killing more should be decorated, not punished. Such comments might also have led to steep increases in the number of people killed by the police. In the state of

Rio de Janeiro alone, 1,810 people were killed by the police in Bolsonaro's first year of mandate, the highest level in two decades (Gortazar, 2020).

The change in Brazilian politics from the Bolsonaro regime to that of Lula in 2023 has brought about another change in discourse. Despite 81% of the Brazilian population acknowledging the country's racism in 2023 (Lucca, 2023), a 2022 survey by the Datafolha Institute revealed that only 50% of respondents still supported race-based affirmative action programs in universities ("Datafolha: Metade dos brasileiros," 2022). The impact of the Lula administration, and its pro-affirmative action discourse (Carvalho, 2023) on this scenario remains unknown. As of 2024, the 2012 federal law implementing race-based affirmative action programs in federal universities and the 2012 Supreme Court decision affirming their constitutionality remain in force.

6. A More Realistic Identity for the Subject of Rights and a Contextualized Theory of Rights

Despite Bolsonaro's discourse of denial and overt racism, the extended discourse on race and racism has led to the acceptance of a more realistic view of identity concerning the subject of rights. While this discourse preserved an idea of abstract equality, it also unveiled a broader spectrum of "possibilities of existence" or of individual ways of being in a particular social context regarding race, gender, sexuality, and other traits (e.g., Butler, 1986, pp. 41, 48; Butler & Reddy, 2004, pp. 115–23; Honneth, 1995; Lopez, 1994; Miller & Vance, 2004). In other words, a broader array of concrete individual traits that were rendered invisible by the narrative of denial were made visible in the first decade of the 2000s by a narrative of structural racism.

Individual identities are malleable and dependent on the context in which they are immersed. Each person's possibility of existing in a certain way is limited by the set of identities considered acceptable in a given society. This idea applies especially to racial identities. Such identities are not held in isolation. They are a social construction grounded in our interaction with pre-established social norms, or, more specifically, as argued in this article, in social norms immersed in collective narratives about slavery, denial of race and racism, or recognition of race and racism. They are identities embedded in divergent life experiences around race.

The narrative that developed centred on the myth of racial democracy downplayed the relevance of race despite existing racial inequalities. Considering Brazil's lengthy slavery regime and its historical utilization of race for purposes of exclusion, silence over race and racism not only threw a veil of invisibility over people's experiences of living in a society entrenched in racism but also over the possibility of producing a collective (national) narrative that embraced Black identities as valuable, that is, that created diverse racial possibilities of existence that would be valued by society at large. In sum, the narrative of denial, to a considerable extent, erased racial identities, especially Black identities, and reinforced structural racism itself. If one cannot openly explain structural racism within a society deeply embedded in racial inequalities, the responsibility for social exclusion is implicitly allocated to the victim of discrimination. This allocation of responsibility, in turn, justifies those inequalities.

The erasure of Black identities in the context of rights and affirmative action programs was highlighted in the 2012 Brazilian Supreme Court case mentioned above. Here, the Fundação Nacional do Índio, one of the organizations to intervene in the case, stressed that denying the existence of racism "disqualifies the life

experience of the persons who have been discriminated against, denying their reality" (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012). Additionally, the Court referenced Zygmunt Bauman, noting that mutual understanding requires shared experiences, which can only occur if a "common space" is created (Bauman, 2005, p. 44, also cited in Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012). This common space, where distinct racial experiences can be exchanged, may be found at a racially inclusive university or, more generally, in a more amorphous dialogue space involving a society at large.

The increasing adoption of a narrative of structural racism across Brazilian society has indeed dispelled, at least in part, the veil of invisibility, revealing a wider range of valued possibilities of existence, particularly concerning race. It has created a national space where more pluralist racial experiences of existence, including experiences of discrimination, are mainstreamed, that is, where experiences of living within the realm of structural racism are mainstreamed. It has created a space for collective and plural learning about race and racism. Such a change in narrative has allowed for a better understanding of the reasons why particular racial groups are excluded from access to resources, such as education, and has given us a new starting point for addressing those reasons to the extent that one can include race as an element in the conceptualization and implementation of rights. One could start thinking, for instance, of race-based affirmative action programs as an element of the right to education. In other words, one could reconceptualize the formal right to education as a contextualized right to education by considering affirmative action programs based on race as one of the elements of the right to promote de facto equality or equality in practice. In sum, while a formal right to education would be blind to differences among racial identities, the contextualized right to education would be aware of such differences, encompassing a right to affirmative action programs.

The shift toward recognizing a more realistic subject of rights, a subject with a race and a class, marked a transition from stigmatized and marginalized racial identities to empowered, visible, and valued agents. This transformation turns race from a foundation for oppressive social hierarchies into a tool for dismantling such structures (Ikawa, 2008; Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2012). Indeed, Bragato and Colares (2017) interpret the recognition of the demands by Blacks in the 2012 Supreme Court decision as a "decolonial turning," a disruptive move through discourse from otherness and non-existence to inclusion and empowerment. More specifically, they stress that "the decision highlights a discourse according to which the claim itself (reservation of quotas) has the potential to break with [inferiorization] discourses and reverse the negative effects of discrimination, promoting what [a] Supreme Court justice calls inclusion, a compatible reading, in many points with the concept of empowerment" (p. 976). By combining this empowerment theory with Benhabib's (2007) and Anderson's (2006) approaches, this shift could be interpreted as the recognition of concrete individuals with specific race-related and class-related experiences as equal communicative agents in an expanded "imagined community." As equal communicative agents in dialogue, they were able to mainstream a collective narrative of structural racism and, from there, the possibility of rights that included affirmative action programs. More specifically, they were able to push for the recognition of a right to education that included race-based affirmative action programs in Brazilian universities.

7. Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, an effective theory of rights would start with some understanding of who we are and what we need—the recognition of a more realistic subject of rights. Such recognition is possible through the articulation of collective, intersubjective narratives that may become dominant in the

national sphere. In the context of racial identities, these narratives have emerged with the history of slavery, and they have continued to be developed over the last century and a half.

Two main narratives were considered here: the narrative built around the myths of gentler slavery and racial democracy, prevalent in Brazilian society throughout the 20th century, and that of brutal slavery and structural racism that emerged from the Black movement and became more familiar to society at large after the Conference in Durban.

The anti-racialist narrative (the narrative of denial) is in itself a form of structural racism, as it makes invisible a status quo immersed in racial inequalities. It protects this status quo from criticism and creates a false myth of racial democracy: a dogma that cannot be questioned. It legitimizes, therefore, the de facto racial inequalities underneath the myth.

The narrative of brutal slavery provides a basis for responses to structural racism, as it lifts that veil of invisibility for the Brazilian society at large. Indeed, the reinforcement of this narrative has led to institutional changes that have impacted structural racism.

Moreover, while existing affirmative action programs do not encompass all possible contextualized approaches to rights and do not guarantee complete de facto equality in terms of rights, they do reflect a significant transformation in how society perceives racial groups—from a stigmatized group to empowered agents whose history of discrimination is made visible, whose existence is made visible, and whose rights are finally recognized in their contextualized entirety.

This progress reflects substantial gains in representation and inclusion. However, persistent regional disparities and unequal representation in prestigious courses remain. Additionally, higher education participation is one facet of the broader landscape of structural racism in Brazil. According to numbers just published by IBGE in 2022, for instance, those living below the poverty line (1.90 USD/day) in Brazil included 5% of whites, 9% of Blacks, and 11.4% of browns. Whites comprised 69% of management positions, while Blacks and browns comprised 29.5% (IBGE, 2022, p. 1).

Although some progress has been made towards racial equality, there is still much work ahead and a stronger narrative to be crafted. One major obstacle may be the legacy of Bolsonaro's narrative of denial and the overt racism he normalized. The Bolsonaro period shows that political factors influence how narratives evolve, and the changes recorded here are not necessarily irreversible. The narrative of structural racism may be reinforced if a more realistic subject of rights is widely acknowledged, including the consideration of race in an enlarged "imagined community."

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7601
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7601

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Understanding Students' Attitudes Towards Affirmative Action Policy in Higher Education in India

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Submitted: 15 September 2023 **Accepted:** 11 March 2024 **Published:** 8 April 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

To mitigate the severe educational horizontal inequalities in India, affirmative action (AA) measures in higher education (HE) have been implemented for socially excluded groups, such as the Scheduled Castes (former "untouchables"), the scheduled tribes (whose status resembles indigenous groups in other countries), and other classes lower in the caste hierarchy. Despite the introduction of AA measures, societal attitudes generally remain resistant to caste-based reservation policies. Interestingly, very few studies in India have examined AA support among the most directly affected group of people when it comes to AA measures in HE—college students. The current article aims to fill this gap. It asks: Which factors (such as students' background characteristics, pre-college credentials, experience in college, and caste-based beliefs) underlie college students' attitudes (support or resistance) towards AA? This study builds on a large-scale survey conducted among 3200 students studying in 12 public higher education institutions across six provinces in India. The results of the empirical analysis indicate that students' attitudes towards AA are shaped and influenced by their social identity and educational experiences in college. It is also noteworthy that caste-based biases and prejudices affect students' attitudes particularly and may explain opposition to AA.

Keywords

caste; higher education; India; quota system; reservation policy

1. Introduction

Given the recognition of the role of higher education (HE) in increasing inter-generational mobility, inequalities in opportunities to pursue HE can become a significant driver in the persistence of inequalities across generations (Langer & Kuppens, 2019). Affirmative action (AA) policies consider variations in opportunity structures in society and aim to provide equality in opportunities to pursue HE (Varghese, 2019).

In India, AA policy in HE is the constitutionally mandated reservation policy that gives preference for HE admissions to members of socially excluded groups (SEGs). The caste and ethnicity-based group preference in the policy aims to enable a greater proportion of members from SEGs into HE than would otherwise have been possible (Borooah, 2017). The SEGs comprise the Scheduled Castes (SCs)—the former "untouchables" of the caste system—and castes that are socially and economically lower in the caste hierarchy, i.e., the officially termed "other backward classes" (OBCs). These groups have faced historical denial of human and educational rights, are viewed as inferior, and have experienced untouchability—resulting in limited participation in society and economy (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2015). Being placed lower in the caste system is India's most predominant form of enforcing social disadvantage (Ambedkar, 1987). Also included in the SEGs are the scheduled tribes (STs), who face physical isolation and exclusion from mainstream society.

Public HEIs are mandated to apply reservation-based quotas proportionally to the group's share of the population. While the SEGs (SCs, OBCs, STs) account for roughly 66.5% of India's population (Thorat & Newman, 2010), India's Supreme Court has capped the caste and ethnicity-based reservations at 50%. Fifteen percent of HE seats are allocated to SCs, 7.5% to STs, and 27% to OBCs in HE admissions (Borooah, 2017; Government of India [GOI], 1950). The implementation of reservations in HE is facilitated through relaxing entry-level qualifications, scholarships, fee reductions, and accommodation.

Access to HE in India has increased dramatically in recent decades across all groups (Varghese, 2015). As a result of the reservation policy, SEGs have been able to access HE opportunities crucial to their upward social mobility. However, social inequalities in access to HE persist. In 2021, the GER of India was 27.3% (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2021). However, in the case of the SC group, it remained lower (at 23.1%) and it was even lower (at 18.9%) for the ST group (MOE, 2021).

Students from SEGs continue to face significant barriers to pursuing HE due to a combination of factors, including stigmatised social identity and inequitable study conditions (Borooah et al., 2015; Sabharwal, 2020). Despite being initially created as a temporary measure in 1949 (GOI, 1950), the reservation policy in India remains necessary due to the continuing prevalence of caste-based discrimination (Borooah et al., 2015) and the persistence of inter-group inequalities in access to HE.

While constitutionally guaranteed reservation policies have been implemented to ensure fair representation of the SEGs, contemporary societal reactions generally remain resistant to caste- and ethnicity-based reservation policies (Deshpande, 2019; Raina, 2006). Public protests have showcased widespread disapproval of caste-based AA policies (Akella, 2012) and there have been demands from political spheres that economic criteria should replace caste in reservation policy (Thorat et al., 2016). Studies show that students from the SEGs experience feelings of resentment toward the reservation policy as expressed by their upper-caste (UC) peers and teachers (Deshpande, 2019; Sabharwal, 2020; Sharma & Subramanyam, 2020).

Scholars (e.g., Thorat et al., 2016) have argued that caste-based prejudicial attitudes underlie public opinion against reservation policy and there is growing evidence that public opinion can significantly influence educational policies (Busemeyer et al., 2018). An indication of this can be seen in a recent amendment to the Constitution in India: The 2019 103rd Amendment Act now requires that 10% of seats in HEIs be reserved for non-SC/ST/OBC students who come from economically weaker sections (GOI, 2019). Continued resistance to AA could lead to more changes that may worsen inter-caste inequalities in access to HE.

As individuals among the public who are influenced by and influencers of public opinion (Steele & Breznau, 2019), students provide valuable insights into public attitudes towards AA in HE. Moreover, examining students' attitudes towards AA can help uncover the underlying basis of exclusionary behaviour experienced by students who benefit from AA (Thorat, 2007). There have been few studies conducted in India that explore AA attitudes among college students, who are most directly impacted by AA measures in HE. This article fills this gap by asking which factors (such as students' background characteristics, pre-college credentials, experience in college, or caste-based beliefs) underlie college students' attitudes (support or resistance) towards AA. This study is based on empirical evidence drawn from a large-scale student survey across six provinces in India. The results of this empirical analysis show that students' attitudes towards AA are associated with their social identity and educational experiences while in college.

2. Attitudes of College Students Towards AA: Literature Review, and Hypotheses

2.1. Literature Review

In addition to the scant literature in the Indian context, this study's conceptual framework draws on constructs from research undertaken mainly in the West to analyse predictors of college students' attitudes toward race-based AA. Four constructs that predict college students' attitudes emerge in the literature, which are discussed in this section.

2.1.1. Groups' Self-Interest

Studies have shown that student attitudes towards AA policies are influenced by groups' self-interest (Lowery et al., 2006). Amongst the demographic characteristics, support or opposition to AA depends on one's group affiliation or membership (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) and the degree to which the policies affect one's group. Many studies have found that students of colour who gain from AA policies are more likely than whites to support AA policies (Oh et al., 2010; Park, 2009; Sax & Arredondo, 1999). In India, the likelihood of admission to HEIs is directly linked to students' caste and ethnicity identity. Students from the SEGs (SCs, OBCs, STs) are expected to be more supportive of the reservation policy than their UC, privileged peers. In terms of religion, individuals from SEGs who identify their religion as Hindus are eligible for reservation policy, with scholars arguing that this practice gives preferential treatment to the majority religion by excluding non-Hindus from the benefits of these policies (Fazal, 2017).

Related to gender, in India, women are considered a disadvantaged group and the government reserves the right to pass legislation or administrative orders designed to provide them with special provisions to support their progress. In HE admissions, these special provisions take the form of horizontal reservations for women across all social groups (SCs, STs, OBCs, and UCs). While caste remains the primary basis of AA policy in India, through such special provisions, a multiplicity of disadvantages along gender and caste dimensions are considered. The proportion of seats reserved for women across caste groups in HE varies across provinces and is determined by provincial government policies (Munusamy, 2022). There is expected to be an association between students' gender and AA attitudes in this context.

Another important characteristic that reflects group identities and material self-interest includes students' socio-economic status (SES, measured by parents' educational level and family income level). Research has

shown that students from high SES families tend to have a more negative attitude towards AA (Sax & Arredondo, 1999). Scholars (e.g., Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989) have also proposed that individuals from higher SES tend to oppose AA as they are more likely to identify with the ideology of economic individualism and express principled moral objections. Those who hold this ideology view government interventions that support or redistribute opportunities as promoting dependency and being morally unjust.

Understanding AA attitudes by SES in India is complex, as economic status intersects with the traditional caste system; income distribution is generally skewed across caste lines, with SCs/STs suffering from relatively high levels of poverty (Thorat et al., 2016). The source of poverty of SEGs, scholars argue, is a consequence of the customary rules in the caste system, where access to sources of income and economic rewards is determined by the unequal assignment of educational, social, and economic rights (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Scholars demand not only continuing caste-based AA to protect SEGs from discrimination but also reform AA to address the consequences of past discrimination (Thorat et al., 2016).

The self-interest hypothesis also applies to students' academic scores, with those scoring at a higher level more likely to oppose AA than those with lower scores who may stand to gain from AA (Park, 2009). Studies conducted in India have shown significant differences in the entry scores of students from SEGs, such as the SC group and UC students when they apply for HEIs (Deshpande, 2019; EPW, 2007). This difference in entry scores is expected as the reservation policy mandates that a certain percentage of seats be reserved for students from specific caste groups, which can't exceed 50%; the beneficiary caste groups are admitted by relaxing the entry examination scores. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of such reservation policies is that students from the SEGs are often negatively evaluated by their peers and stigmatized as incompetent (Deshpande, 2019).

Research further demonstrates that the selectivity of HEIs at the admission stage influences students' attitudes toward AA (Park, 2009). In India, selective public HEIs have highly competitive test-based admissions. Scholars have argued that rank ordering in such institutions comes to be viewed as a measure of "differential intelligence" (Subramanian, 2019, p 165), with students from the SEGs facing the stigma of gaining admission through reservation. Students in elite HEIs with higher selectivity may hold negative attitudes toward AA as they may consider it to violate merit-based selection.

2.1.2. Socialisation Through Inter-Group Contact at Home, School, and College

Allport's (1954) theory of inter-group contact with diverse peers provides the theoretical basis for understanding how social interaction between different groups can positively impact reducing prejudice towards outgroups. The theory suggests that interaction with diverse peers is beneficial for cognitive development and is critical for reducing prejudice. Research suggests that family and school can provide opportunities for inter-group contact that can play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of children and young adults towards inequalities and social injustices (Mijs, 2018; Steele & Breznau, 2019).

The effects of family as a socialisation space can be seen through students' place of residence and their neighbourhood's racial composition. In India, the distinction between rural and urban areas is significant; in many parts of rural India, SEGs in villages continue to be socially segregated. Migration of these groups to towns is encouraged for them to escape their caste identity, which is a source of discriminatory practices

living in the village (Ambedkar, 1987). Although greater diversity exists in urban areas, significant caste-based residential segregation persists at the neighbourhood level, impeding inter-group contact (Bharathi et al., 2019).

Concerning schools, India has a stratified school system with socially and economically homogenous student composition in each stratum. Government schools serve a large population of SEGs, with student fees being subsidised by provincial and federal governments. On the other hand, private schools are mostly selective and have an elite status, charging high fees and catering to students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds (Rao, 2019). These features indicate a prevalence of homogenous high schools in India, where students have limited opportunities for cross-group interactions.

When opportunities for cross-racial interactions for students from families residing in homogenous neighbourhoods are limited, this can influence their knowledge of and perspective toward the prevalence of racial disparities or discrimination (Jayakumar, 2015). Likewise, students' prior high school is where pre-college-going adults develop their beliefs towards fairness through inter-group contacts with their peers, which shapes attitudes toward AA policies in college (Bullock, 2021). Studies indicate that segregated white neighbourhoods and homogenous high schools where students have limited cross-racial interactions promote conservative racial attitudes (Jayakumar, 2015), which can continue in college.

While at college, how students are guided to navigate academic and social spaces can shape their attitudes toward AA (Park, 2009). This includes friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds and teaching practices that promote intergroup interaction between students. Such forms of pedagogy indicate teachers' influence on students' views toward support for AA policies. The duration of exposure to diverse peer experiences offered by staying in education for longer, such as undergraduate or postgraduate levels, can affect AA attitudes (Bullock, 2021). However, it is important to recognise that the presence of elite faculty can also uphold status quo privileges (Gelepithis & Giani, 2022), as is the case in India. In India, contemporary demographics show that teachers in universities and colleges are typically from privileged social groups (non-SC/ST/OBC). This social mismatch with students from SEGs often leads to a disconnection between the curriculum and pedagogical approaches, which fails to address the legacy of discrimination in the caste system. As a result, institutional culture tends to normalise prejudicial practices. Consequently, scholars have called for better preparation of teachers to teach in diverse classrooms (EPW, 2007).

2.1.3. Academic Orientation of Students

The field of study in college can significantly influence students' views on AA. Research suggests that students in social sciences and liberal arts are more supportive of AA policies compared to those in technical sciences (Park, 2009). Two mutually non-exclusive explanations in the literature explain how students' attitudes may relate to their field of study (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2009). Students choose a field of study based on pre-existing attitudes (selection hypothesis) or develop attitudes that align with the discipline ("discipline socialisation" hypothesis). Studies indicate that taking courses in the social sciences or liberal arts can enhance moral reasoning and foster respect for diverse individuals (Freedman, 2010; Hagendoorn, 2018). A study conducted in India that included both a public and a private university (Deshpande, 2019) found that UC students attending the private university had a more favourable attitude towards AA. The reasons attributed to the differences in attitudes were twofold: On the one hand, the self-interest of the majority

wasn't directly under threat because AA in private universities is not mandated by law and SEGs form a minority on campus; on the other, progressive attitudes were attributed to the liberal arts education focus of the UC students.

2.1.4. Race-Based Prejudicial Beliefs

Studies suggest that prejudice and racist beliefs can become a source of opposition to AA—for instance, whites will oppose policies designed to assist African Americans because they view them in an inferior and prejudicial light (Awad et al., 2005; Kinder & Sears, 1981). Research also suggests that prejudiced beliefs can manifest as feelings of hostility towards individuals who belong to different groups (Bowman & Denson, 2012). Studies on race have suggested that racial prejudice in contemporary society is reflected covertly as a combination of beliefs in group-based hierarchies, in the dominance of one group, and in the notion that "discrimination is in the past" (Mconahay, 1986).

Scholars in India (Thorat et al., 2016) argue that the caste system's group dominance ideology significantly influences the political ideology behind AA. This influence stems from the belief in the purity of UCs and the impurity of lower castes, which leads to caste-based prejudices. These prejudices serve the interests of the higher castes, who benefit from their material wealth and high social status. Consequently, dominant castes resist AA policies designed to provide opportunities for SEGs.

Some studies have also linked opposition to AA with students' belief that AA violates the principle of meritocracy (DiTomaso et al., 2011; Lowery et al., 2006). However, the merit-based justification to oppose AA is often seen as a form of racial prejudice since prejudice is believed to be the underlying cause for such opposition. Scholars have argued (Knowles & Lowery, 2012) that the notion of meritocracy can suggest a lack of acknowledgement of one's racial privilege. In the Indian context, research indicates that beneficiaries of the reservation policy experience a stigma of incompetence (Deshpande, 2019).

Concerning attitudes towards AA, perspectives towards diversity play a prominent role in explaining attitudes towards AA. Aberson (2021) suggests that those students who valued diverse perspectives and believed in the benefits of diverse student composition for their college were more likely to support AA policies. Similarly, research conducted in elite schools in India has shown that having an economically diverse student composition in classrooms can make wealthy students more pro-social (Rao, 2019).

2.2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

This study's conceptual framework draws on constructs from the literature review to analyse predictors of college students' attitudes toward AA. The study's conceptual framework includes these four constructs: (a) groups' self-interest, (b) socialisation through inter-group contact at home, school, and college, (c) academic orientation, and (d) caste-based beliefs.

In line with the premise that groups' self-interest influences attitudes towards AA, it is expected that students who are affiliated with a group that gains to benefit from AA are more likely to support AA than those who are not beneficiaries. The following is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There is an association between AA attitudes and students' caste and ethnicity background, religion, gender, family SES, high school exam scores, and level of HEI selectivity.

College students' attitudes toward AA can also be shaped by the socio-cultural context of their family backgrounds and previous school experiences. As discussed in the previous section, prior research indicates that socio-cultural context is influenced by opportunities for inter-group contact that can significantly shape AA attitudes. Consequently, it is postulated that:

Hypothesis 2a: Students residing in urban areas where opportunities for group interaction are limited due to segregated neighbourhoods will be less supportive of AA than students from rural areas.

Hypothesis 2b: Related to prior schooling, it is hypothesised that there is an association between prior school type (government or private) and college students' AA attitudes.

Hypothesis 2c: In India, it is on college campuses that young adults from diverse backgrounds come together. Thus, it is expected that college students who interact with diverse peers will be more supportive of AA than students with homogenous peer groups.

Hypothesis 2d: The same is true for college students who are encouraged by their teachers to study in mixed peer groups.

Hypothesis 2e: Finally, it is hypothesised that postgraduate students are more supportive of AA than undergraduate students.

Concerning academic orientation and its influence on AA attitudes, there is a demonstrable association between the field of study and students' attitudes. Thus:

Hypothesis 3: It is expected that students studying social science and humanities, which offer more occasions to discuss societal issues, are more likely to support AA policies as compared to those studying science and engineering subjects.

Finally, we propose that prejudicial caste-based beliefs are a source of opposition to AA:

Hypothesis 4: Students with prejudicial caste beliefs (such as holding beliefs of caste superiority and hostility towards diversity) are less likely to support AA than those who do not hold such beliefs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Description and Sampling

This article is based on a large-scale survey which was part of a mixed-method research study (Sabharwal & Malish, 2016) on student diversity and inclusion in HE in India. Given the limitations of detailed data sets related to students' AA attitudes, this study forms the critical basis for studying this phenomenon. The study was conducted in 12 public HEIs in six states (Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar

Pradesh). Case study states were selected to represent different regions of the country (north, west, south, and east). The research employed a multi-institutional case study approach. In each state, two HEIs were selected as case studies. The study also employed a purposive mixed-method sampling selection technique (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) where 12 HEIs were selected to represent those funded by the provincial and federal governments. Since the focus of the study was to understand the HE experiences of students from SEGs, public HEIs were selected as they are mandated by law to carry out AA measures. These institutions also varied in their admission policies, including qualifying high school examination marks and entrance tests.

Students selected for the survey were studying in the second year at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as this is the year when students are best placed to evaluate their college experience critically (Schaller, 2005). A stratified sampling technique was used to select students. Students were selected across three disciplines: social sciences, humanities, and STEM. Informed consent was obtained from the students. The survey was completed in one hour in classrooms. All students present in the class were approached, and all completed the survey. Hence the final sample matched the target. It took two weeks to conduct the survey, and all those students present participated in that period. The data was collected in 2015. It followed ethical procedures, including obtaining institutional approvals and anonymising the data collected. The sample of students in the survey is 3,200 (see Table 1 for student background descriptive statistics). The percentage distribution of students from HEIs located across the six states is as follows: Bihar = 15.6%; Delhi = 16.7%; Kerela = 16.8%; Karnataka = 15.8%; Maharashtra = 19.5%; Uttar Pradesh = 15.6%. Most students identified themselves as OBCs (42%, vs. national 35.8%), SCs (14%, vs. national 14.2%), STs (5%, vs. national 5.8%), and non–SC/ST/OBC (39%, vs. national 44%; see MOE, 2021).

3.2. Variables

What follows is a discussion of the dependent and explanatory variables tested to account for support or opposition to the reservation policy.

Related to the dependent variable, to assess students' attitudes towards AA, the student survey included a four-point Likert scale response to the statement: "Reservation policy for the SCs/STs/OBCs is no longer needed." Response ranged from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*.

The following are the independent variables related to the four constructs tested to account for support or opposition to the reservation policy:

1. Groups' self-interest: Independent variables that reflect the group's self-interest include: students' gender, caste, ethnicity, and religious background; students' SES; students' high school examination scores; and the admissions selection process of the HEI (competitive/test-based/based on high school academic scores).
2. Socialisation through inter-group contact at home, school, and college: Whether students were residing in urban or rural areas was included as an independent variable. Students' pre-college schooling is determined by whether they attended a private or a government (or government-aided) high school. To assess the level of inter-social group contact in college, independent variables included the social background of students' closest friends and teachers' encouragement to work in diverse

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Student background characteristics.

Variables	Share (%)
%	
Social groups	
SCs	14.00
STs	5.00
OBCs	41.20
Non-SC/ST/OBC (upper castes)	39.80
Gender	
Male	46.34
Female	53.66
Religion	
Hindu	78.51
Muslim	13.78
Other religious minorities	7.71
Level of study	
postgraduate	33.48
undergraduate	66.52
Location of permanent residence	
Rural	43.91
Urban	56.09
Parents' education (father)	
Undergraduate & above	40.60
High school graduate	13.40
Less than high school school	41.00
No education	4.30
Monthly household income	
High (INR 50,001 & above)	14.99
Middle (INR 10,001–50,000)	43.00
Low (less than INR 10,000)	42.01

groups; on the duration of exposure to college experiences, the independent variable included students' level of study (undergraduate/postgraduate).

3. Two independent variables were used to assess students' academic orientation: high school subjects and college subjects in social sciences, commerce, sciences, and engineering.
4. Caste-based prejudicial beliefs: Students' opinions on the following statements were measured: "Discrimination against SC/ST/OBCs is no longer an issue in India"; "Certain castes are superior to others"; "Due to reservation policy, less talented students are admitted to HEI." To assess how negative beliefs towards diverse social and cultural backgrounds might affect AA attitudes, we also included statements that asked students' level of agreement on the following: "Diversity in population groups in a country leads to conflicts and tensions."

3.3. Method of Analysis

The following research question is proposed: What are the factors that underlie college students' attitudes (support or resistance) towards AA? To answer this question, the method of analysis involved a two-step process involving chi-square tests and logistic regression.

The first step involved chi-squared tests to examine statistically significant differences in students' attitudes towards reservation policy by group self-interest variables, variables to capture socialisation effects of inter-group contact, and academic orientation and variables to assess caste-based prejudicial beliefs. Correlations among all the variables were conducted to identify inter-relationships and account for multicollinearity.

In the second step, binary logistic regression analysis was used to discern which variables significantly predict opposition to the reservation policy. As mentioned above, the dependent variable is an item that gauges students' attitudes toward AA. The attitude is measured through students' level of agreement with the statement "Reservation policy for the SCs/STs/OBCs is no longer needed" (measured on a scale of 1 = *disagree strongly* to 4 = *agree strongly*).

The current study adds up the four response categories into two broad ones—agree (as the sum of *strongly agree* and *agree*) and disagree (as the sum of *strongly disagree* and *disagree*)—as per Deshpande (2019). Thus, in binary logistic regression analysis, the dependent variable is in a binary response variable, Y = {1, if "agree" and Y = 0, if "disagree"} with the statement that asked, "Reservation policy for the SCs/STs/OBCs is no longer needed."

It is acknowledged that there may be limitations in some of the measurements of attitudes of AA. For instance, how the outcome variable (reservation policy is no longer needed) is assessed may not imply that students are principally against AA—they might think it is no longer needed in today's society. Additionally, the variable used to evaluate meritocratic principles ("Due to reservation policy, less talented students are admitted to HEI") carries a negative connotation. This aspect could have been assessed using alternative measurements (for example, "Admission to universities should be solely based on high school performance"), which would better illustrate how objections to AA based on meritocratic principles are insensitive to inequalities based on group membership. Even if there were misunderstandings about AA, it was important to gather students' perspectives on the reservation policy and gauge their AA attitudes, regardless of their level of knowledge on the topic.

4. Results With Discussion

4.1. Analysis of Differences in AA Attitudes by Group Affiliation

The association between various variables and AA attitude in college admissions is assessed in this section.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, on differences between caste/ethnic groups' attitudes towards AA, support or opposition to AA has a significant association with the social background of students. The strongest support towards AA is from SCs (71%) and STs (66.4%), followed by OBCs (56.5%), and the UC category (41%; Pearson $X^2(3, N = 3200) = 90.518$, $p = .000$). Students from SEGs who benefit from AA are more likely to support and have a positive attitude towards AA than those who do not. Of interest in the analysis is an intra-group difference in response of students from SEGs to AA policy. Not only UCs but also a lower proportion of students from the OBCs, compared to SCs and STs, expressed support for the reservation policy. This can be explained by whether students were admitted in the open-merit or reserved categories. A lower proportion of students from the OBC group (87%) were admitted in the reserved category than

students from the SC group (98.2%). This implies that the OBC group was less likely to benefit from the reservation policy. Thus, OBC students were less supportive of AA, as their self-interest may affect their attitudes towards AA.

Opposition to AA attitudes is also significantly associated with the SES of students' families, with opposition to AA coming from students from high SES backgrounds, such as families' income ($X^2(2, N = 3137) = 15.390$, $p = .000$) and parent's (father) educational level ($X^2(3, N = 3176) = 33.747$, $p = .000$). Students from high socio-economic backgrounds oppose reservation policies; students from high SES families may feel less likely to benefit from the AA policy, as they are more likely to belong to UCs than SEGs (see Supplementary File, Table A).

Regarding the association between attitudes towards AA and final high school examination scores, which indicate levels of academic preparation, students who scored higher in high school are more likely to oppose the AA policy ($X^2(3, N = 3091) = 22.397$, $p = .000$). This suggests that opposition to the reservation policy may be driven by self-interest and concern for missed opportunities resulting from the policy. As highlighted, the reservation policy involves lowering entry-level scores. Similarly, the association between the attitudes towards the AA policy and the admissions selection process was significant ($X^2(1, N = 3200) = 6.221$, $p = .007$).

Students from highly competitive and selective HEIs following test-based admissions were more likely to oppose (48%) the AA policy than students from less selective HEIs (43%). These selective HEIs represent those public HEIs in India that offer technical courses with highly competitive admissions—less than 3% of students who take the test are accepted into these HEIs (Subramanian, 2019). These statistics suggest that opposition to AA may arise from the fear of one's group losing out. Additionally, scholars have argued that students from selective HEIs tend to oppose AA since they believe it contradicts the principle of merit-based admissions (Park, 2009).

However, students' gender and religion do not significantly affect AA attitudes at a 5% significance level. There appear to be minimal differences between attitudinal support to AA between male and female students ($X^2(1, N = 3200) = 0.419$, $p = .270$), or those from different religions ($X^2(2, N = 3190) = 3.197$, $p = .653$). The lack of association between AA attitudes and religion may be because, besides the Hindu religion, other religions such as Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity have been included in the reservation list of SCs, OBCs, or STs (GOI, 2011, 2016; Ministry of Law and Justice, 1990). This could be a contributing factor as students of all religions can feel that they are receiving benefits from the reservation policy.

Regarding Hypothesis 2a (neighbourhood effect), it appears that students from urban areas tend to oppose the reservation policy ($X^2(1, N = 3194) = 7.476$, $p = .003$), indicating that the location of their family residence plays a role in shaping their attitudes towards it. Since UC students are more likely to reside in urban areas than rural (see Supplementary File, Table A) and considering the prevalence of socially segregated residential areas in urban India, living in socially segregated urban areas may not provide them with enough chances for socialising with people from different ethnic or social backgrounds. Thus, a lack of inter-social group interaction in urban areas may contribute to AA opposition.

Regarding Hypothesis 2b (the effect of high school attended before joining college), college students who have studied in private high school are more likely to oppose the AA policy in HE than students from government

(or government-aided) schools (X^2(2, N = 3179) = 16.095, p = .000). College students with limited prior interaction with diverse peers may develop conservative caste beliefs. UC students are more susceptible to developing such beliefs as they are more likely to have studied in private schools than in government schools (see Supplementary File, Table A).

Hypotheses 2c and 2d are related to the association between attitudes towards AA and the experience of interacting with diverse peers in college. A significant association is found between AA attitudes and interaction with diverse peer groups (Hypothesis 2c). Those subsets of students who reported their closest friend being from the SEGs, indicating exposure to peers from diverse backgrounds, were less likely to oppose the AA policy (X^2(4, N = 2977) = 32.756, p = .000). UC students were more likely to form friendships within their own group and thereby had fewer opportunities to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds (see Supplementary File, Table A). Related to Hypothesis 2d, students who were encouraged by their teachers to study with students from diverse backgrounds were less likely to oppose the AA policy (X^2(1, N = 3109) = 6.190, p = .007). However, students' levels of study, that is, whether they were studying at undergraduate or postgraduate levels (Hypothesis 2e), do not significantly affect attitudes towards AA (X^2 (1, N = 3200) = 0.006, p = .940).

The association between students' attitudes towards AA policy and the field of study (Hypothesis 3) is significant. This association shows that, on average, subsets of students studying commerce or sciences subjects in high school were significantly more likely to oppose AA policy than those studying humanities or social sciences (X^2(2, N = 3109) = 9.188, p = .027). Similarly, in college, sub-sets of students studying commerce or engineering subjects were significantly more likely to oppose the AA policy (X^2(3, N = 2813) = 21.536, p = .000). It is worth noting that UC students are more likely to pursue science and engineering courses during their high school and college years (see Supplementary File, Table A). This indicates that they may have had less exposure to subjects related to social sciences or liberal arts that promote egalitarian beliefs.

Finally, a significant association is found between opposition to the reservation policy and students' caste-based prejudicial beliefs (Hypothesis 4), which include a negative attitude towards social diversity in society. Opposition to AA came from subsets of students who believed that AA lowers academic quality (X^2(1, N = 3046) = 121.924, p = .000). However, students' belief in meritocracy was influenced by their caste background, with UC students more likely to view AA as lowering academic standards (see Supplementary File, Table A). Previous research (Deshpande, 2019) has also found that students from UC groups are less likely to consider students admitted through the quota system as hardworking and competent. Students who believed that caste discrimination is not a problem in India were significantly more likely to oppose AA policy (X^2(1, N = 3028) = 62.482, p = .000). Results further show that those subsets of students who believed in caste superiority were significantly more likely to oppose AA policy (X^2(1, N = 3036) = 15.421, p = .000). Students who viewed social diversity leads to tension in society were significantly more likely to oppose the AA policy (X^2(1, N = 3148) = 52.737, p = .000). Students who believed in meritocracy were also more likely to disregard the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India, believe in the superiority of castes and hold negative views towards diversity (see Supplementary File, Table A). These results suggest that caste-based prejudicial beliefs are interconnected and, in combination, reflect covert casteism.

The descriptive results of this sub-section show that attitudes towards AA vary by student characteristics, which are influenced by multiple factors, including self-interest, inter-group contact, academic orientation, and caste-based beliefs. However, determining the key drivers of attitudes towards AA is complex, as these factors are not mutually exclusive. To identify key determinants of AA attitudes, the next sub-section presents a logistic regression analysis.

4.2. Estimation Results to Explain Opposition to AA: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

This sub-section provides binary logistic regression analysis results of the variables predicting attitudes towards AA. The binary logistic regression analysis provides us with the direction and significance of the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, that is, support or opposition to AA policy. The multicollinearity assumptions were tested, and none of the independent variables had a variation inflation factor greater than five. Furthermore, the bivariate correlation between all the variables in the regression model is also low (see Supplementary File, Table A), indicating a low multicollinearity between the variables.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant ($X^2(30, N = 2401) = 259.003$, $p = .001$). The model explained 13.7% (Nagelkerke R2) of the variance in opposition or support to AA and correctly classified 63.6% of cases. Table 2 indicates the results of the logistic regression modelling, with regression coefficients (B) at a 5% level of significance, Wald statistics (to test the significance level of the statistics), and the exponentials of the coefficients (Exp(B)), that is the odds ratio.

Among all variables that reflect the group's self-interest, caste background emerges as the strongest and most significant determinant of attitudes towards AA in the binary logistic regression model (Table 2). The results show that *ceteris paribus* students from privileged backgrounds (UC category) were close to two times significantly more likely to oppose AA than those from the SC background.

Concerning gender, while the chi-square results showed that gender was not significant, the effect of gender as a determinant of group self-interest is significant when included with other explanatory variables in the logistic regression. When controlling for other explanatory variables, women were significantly less likely than men to express opposition to AA. Scholars suggest that groups that experience discrimination are more likely to support AA, with studies showing that women generally have more favourable AA attitudes than men (Park, 2009; Sax & Arredondo, 1999). Women's support for such policies is believed to stem from a sense of self-interest, as it justifies advocating for measures that combat gender-based discrimination.

It is noteworthy to mention that female students in the study sample were less likely than male students to have high scores or attend selective HEIs following test-based admissions (see Supplementary File, Table A). This suggests that men may perceive AA as a risk to their self-interest because they believe it goes against merit-based selection, with the feeling that they stand to lose the most from the AA policy. Regarding SES background, students from low-SES families, especially first-generation learners were less likely to oppose the reservation policy than those from high-SES families.

Based on Hypothesis 2c, regarding the impact of inter-group interactions on students' attitudes towards AA, friendship with diverse peers in college emerged to be the significant variable affecting attitudes. It was found

Table 2. Variables in the logistic regression model.

	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Social background: SC (ref.)			20.510	3	.000*	
ST	.180	.263	.470	1	.493	1.198
OBC	.392	.150	6.821	1	.009*	1.479
Upper castes	.674	.155	18.889	1	.000*	1.962
Gender (*male = ref.*; female = 1)	−.200	.094	4.505	1	.034*	.818
Religion: Hindu (ref.)			2.646	2	.266	
Muslims	.040	.135	.088	1	.766	1.041
Other religious minorities	−.274	.174	2.481	1	.115	.760
Father's education: Undergraduate & above *(ref.)*			6.282	3	.099	
Higher secondary school graduate	−.235	.141	2.777	1	.096	.791
Less than higher secondary school	−.112	.115	.956	1	.328	.894
No education	−.518	.240	4.680	1	.031*	.596
Family income level: High (ref.)			3.057	2	.217	
Middle	−.181	.147	1.520	1	.218	.835
Low	−.271	.156	3.009	1	.083	.762
High school scores: Third division (less than 50%) (ref.)			2.108	3	.550	
Second division (50–60%)	.265	.197	1.811	1	.178	1.304
First division (60% and above)	.205	.171	1.435	1	.231	1.228
Distinction (75% and above)	.247	.192	1.654	1	.198	1.280
Selectivity in admission (no selection test = *ref.*; selection test = 1)	.055	.136	.163	1	.686	1.057
Location of permanent residence (*rural = ref.*; urban = 1)	.033	.100	.111	1	.739	1.034
Type of high school: Government (ref.)			1.864	2	.394	
Private-aided	−.053	.099	.285	1	.593	.949
Private-unaided	.148	.143	1.067	1	.302	1.159
Social group of best friend SC (ref.)			9.689	4	.046*	
ST	.188	.267	.497	1	.481	1.207
OBC	.289	.142	4.123	1	.042*	1.335
Upper castes	.330	.143	5.314	1	.021*	1.390
Don't know	.526	.173	9.191	1	.002*	1.692
Teachers encourage to work together (*never = ref.*; always = 1)	.073	.093	.619	1	.432	1.076
Level of study (*undergraduate = ref.*; postgraduate = 1)	−.062	.104	.356	1	.551	.940
Subjects in high school: Social sciences (ref.)			6.397	3	.094	
Sciences	.304	.133	5.242	1	.022*	1.355
Commerce	.295	.161	3.340	1	.068	1.343
Other	.062	.248	.062	1	.803	1.064
Subjects in college: Social sciences (ref.)			18.603	3	.000*	
Science	.517	.125	17.145	1	.000*	1.677
Commerce	.319	.177	3.235	1	.072	1.376
Computer science/engineering	.126	.418	.090	1	.764	1.134
Due to reservation, HEIs have to admit less talented students (*disagree = ref.*; agree = 1)	.599	.091	43.061	1	.000*	1.820
Caste discrimination is not a problem in India (*disagree = ref.*; agree = 1)	.544	.090	36.249	1	.000*	1.723
Belief in caste superiority (*disagree = ref.*; agree = 1)	.288	.091	9.989	1	.002*	1.334
Social diversity leads to tension in the society (*disagree = ref*; agree = 1)	.245	.089	7.585	1	.006*	1.277
Constant	−1.836	.304	36.437	1	.000	.159

Notes: *ref.* stands for reference category; * significance at 5% level of significance.

that students who had friends from the UC were 1.4 times more likely to oppose AA policies compared to those who socialised with students from disadvantaged groups.

Academic discipline also significantly affects the likelihood of students' opposition to AA. All other factors being equal, students who studied sciences in their high school were 1.3 times more likely to oppose AA in college admissions than those who studied social sciences. Similarly, those who chose to study commerce subjects in college were 1.6 times more likely to oppose AA than those studying subjects in social sciences. In this study, since the correlation results show that students' field of study in college is more likely to be the same as in high school (see Supplementary File, Table A), this implies that their attitudes were formed even before entering college and were further reinforced through their selected field of study in college. Regardless of whether pre-existing attitudes influence the selection of an academic field or if attitudes are influenced by it, the results indicate that social sciences play a positive role in shaping favourable attitudes towards AA.

Among the measures of caste-based prejudice, opposition to AA based on meritocracy was found to strongly influence students' attitudes towards AA. Students who believed that the reservation policy would lower academic standards were 1.8 times more likely to oppose AA than those who did not hold this belief. Those who doubted the existence of caste-based discrimination in society were 1.7 times more likely to oppose reservation policy than those who were aware of it. Belief in caste superiority was another significant factor influencing students' attitudes towards AA. Students who believed in social hierarchies were 1.3 times more likely to oppose AA than those who did not. Additionally, students with a negative attitude towards social diversity were nearly 1.3 times more likely to oppose AA than those who recognised the value of social diversity in society. Thus, it is clear from the logistic analysis that opposition to AA is more likely to come from students from privileged backgrounds (UC category), in particular male students studying commerce or science disciplines, and who harbour caste-based prejudices.

5. Concluding Remarks and Observations

This study fills a significant gap in the literature by systematically examining college students' attitudes toward the AA policy of reservation in HE admissions for SEGs in India. To our knowledge, this is the first study using a large-scale data set to study college students' AA attitudes in India. The study results revealed that, with various controls in regression analyses, the caste affiliation of students remains the most important predictor and is significantly associated with AA attitudes. The support or opposition to AA reflected the self–interest of caste groups. While students from SEGs expressed significantly greater support for the reservation policy, students from the UCs, specifically male students, strongly opposed the reservation policy. These results are unsurprising as the policy favours members from the reserved categories (SCs, STs, OBCs) over those from the non-reserved categories (UCs) in HE admissions, with the UC group feeling that they have the most to lose from the AA policy. While caste affiliation emerges as the best indicator of AA attitudes, there are strong underpinnings of caste-based prejudices influencing AA attitudes.

Results indicate that students who believe in caste superiority oppose AA policies. Although constitutional provisions have abolished the traditional practices of the caste system by ensuring equal treatment under the law, the results suggest the prevalence of modern casteism. In other words, those with a sense of superiority oppose AA as they may view these policies as a threat to their caste-related privileges. In addition, students' views that AA goes against the principle of meritocracy imply caste-based prejudice since they think they

are being unfairly disadvantaged because lower–caste students are admitted through the reservation policy. Previous research has also shown that students admitted through the quota system are perceived as less hardworking and competent by UC students (Deshpande, 2019).

This study shows that students with low openness to diversity oppose AA policy. Such attitudes and beliefs may explain unfavourable social conditions of inter-relations on HE campuses for students from the SEGs. Previous research has established that students from SEGs experience discrimination which takes the form of low in-class interactions with their teachers, strained social interactions with their peers, and unsupportive administration (EPW, 2007; Sabharwal, 2020).

Furthermore, this study has shown that those students who doubt the existence of caste-based discrimination in society tend to oppose AA policy. In contrast to the doubts expressed by the respondents, studies in India reveal high levels of discrimination in access to public health services, housing, and labour markets (Borooah et al., 2015; Thorat & Newman, 2010). Scholars have argued that because caste-based discrimination in access to opportunities exists, a class-based approach to AA may not address persisting inter-group inequalities (Thorat et al., 2016). The reason is that members from lower-income, socially privileged groups are more likely to benefit from AA than those from similar-income but stigmatised groups, as the latter is "socially excluded" due to their group identity (Borooah, 2017). Identity-based group preference in AA policy is thus a method of providing equality of treatment in accessing opportunities, ultimately resulting in greater equality of opportunities.

Despite the study's limitations, including the need for more precise measurements to express AA attitudes, or that it is unable to fully explain why women students support AA more than men, and that it was not explicitly designed to examine attitudes toward AA policy, this study is pathbreaking. It comprehensively analyses college students' views on the AA policy of reservation in HE admissions in India. The logistic estimates indicate that the overall model includes significant variables that explain the variation in attitudes toward AA. It is important to note that the results of this study may not be generalisable to all HEIs. Therefore, we encourage further research that includes public and private universities across different disciplines. Future research in India could examine responses to specific items to capture caste-based prejudices, views on approaches to AA policy (that is, quota vs. positive measures), and perception of fairness of AA policy to better understand and account for more variation. Nevertheless, some general conclusions can be drawn.

In conclusion, the study's findings offer insights for HEIs to combat caste-based prejudices and biases towards the reservation policy, especially with diverse students on their campuses (Sabharwal, 2020). The study's findings suggest that faculty and administrators must provide a range of curricular interventions to address the misunderstandings or opposition to AA among privileged students. This is because these attitudes are often rooted in societal ideologies of caste and ignorance and may persist without such interventions. More academic courses must be offered to help students learn about the prevalence of discrimination based on caste and its role in the persistence of social inequalities. This will help promote a better understanding of inter-group inequalities in access to opportunity structures and the rationale of identity-based group preference in AA policies. Furthermore, a significant association between supportive attitudes toward AA and interaction with diverse peer groups implies the positive influence of intergroup contact on attitudes toward AA. To promote positive attitudes towards diversity, it is essential to foster

greater interaction among peers from diverse backgrounds based on a culture of respect. This is crucial in garnering widespread support for AA policy in India and creating HE campuses that are socially just and inclusive.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Dr. Emily Henderson, the academic editors, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Funding

The data analysed for this article was collected as part of the Diversity and Discrimination in Higher Education: A Study of Institutions in Selected States of India project funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7603
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7603

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Open Access Journal

Who Deserves To Be Supported? Analysing Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution in Nigeria

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Submitted: 15 September 2023 **Accepted:** 19 December 2023 **Published:** 11 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Despite the widespread recognition of the risk that group-based inequalities, or so-called horizontal inequalities (HIs), pose for the political stability and social cohesion of multi-ethnic societies, extremely little research has been conducted on how people perceive these inequalities and how these perceptions, in turn, are associated with people's attitudes towards group-based or horizontal redistribution. In this article, we systematically analyse how people's perceptions of prevailing socio-economic HIs shape their attitudes towards horizontal redistribution in Nigeria, a country confronted with sharp and persistent inequalities between different ethnic groups. We develop a set of hypotheses for explaining differences in support for horizontal redistribution policies and test these hypotheses empirically with the help of a unique survey panel of about 2300 Nigerians.

Keywords

fairness; horizontal inequality; horizontal redistribution; Nigeria; redistributive attitudes

1. Introduction

The sharp rise in income and wealth inequalities in many countries around the world has rekindled academic interest in understanding people's redistribution preferences (Pellicer et al., 2019). However, while there is an extensive and growing literature concerning the demand for alleviating inequality between the "poor" and "wealthy" (i.e., vertical inequality), so far, less research has been conducted on attitudes towards redistribution aimed at reducing inequalities between culturally defined groups, or so-called horizontal inequalities (HIs). The notable exception is the literature on attitudes towards affirmative action in the

United States (Harrison et al., 2006). This is surprising because HIs are pervasive and can have serious impacts on multi-ethnic societies, not only because they are fundamentally unjust but also because the presence of severe HIs has been shown to increase the risk of political instability and violent conflict and often leads to considerable economic inefficiencies (Stewart, 2008). In addition, HIs have been shown to be extremely persistent, and they may trap certain groups in positions of inferiority and relative disadvantage for long periods (Stewart & Langer, 2008). Thus, in contexts with sharp and persistent socio-economic HIs, there may be a strong case for introducing redistributive policies to correct these inequalities—or what we term here "horizontal redistribution." Importantly, the introduction and continuation of horizontal redistribution measures is crucially dependent on public support for these policies. Unfortunately, little is known about the determinants of people's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution, especially in countries in the Global South. However, many of the countries in this geographical space are highly diverse and often confronted with persistent HIs between different ethnic, religious, or racial groups.

The current article aims to address this important academic and policy void by analysing attitudes towards horizontal redistribution in Nigeria, a country confronted with sharp and persistent inequalities between different ethnic groups and regions (see, e.g., Archibong, 2018). Nigeria is a highly ethnically diverse country, with three dominant ethnic groups forming a "tripodal" ethnic structure, i.e., the Hausa and the Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the Southwest, and the Igbo of the Southeast (Langer et al., 2009; Mustapha, 2009). Yet, the eight largest ethnic groups comprise around 75% of the country's population. Moreover, Nigeria is characterised by a pervasive politicisation of ethnicity. The introduction of multiparty elections in 1999 has done little to mitigate this (Kendhammer, 2015). However, Nigeria has implemented a range of initiatives to address its diversity challenges and keep its political and socio-economic HIs in check. Most notable in this respect was the establishment of the Federal Character Commission in 1996, which was aimed at ensuring "fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts and socio-economic infrastructures" across Nigeria (Federal Character Commission, 2023). Despite such efforts, socio-economic HIs remain very severe, especially between the more economically developed South and the relatively disadvantaged North of the country. Given Nigeria's severe socio-economic HIs and its efforts to keep these inequalities in check, we think it constitutes a highly instructive case for studying and investigating our hypotheses concerning the determinants of people's preferences for horizontal redistribution.

Drawing on the literature that focuses on the determinants of the demand for vertical redistribution (i.e., redistribution between the "poor" and the "wealthy" in society) as well as the literature that focuses on explaining attitudes towards affirmative action, we will develop a set of original hypotheses aimed at explaining differences in support for horizontal redistribution in Nigeria. We theorise that support for horizontal redistribution can be explained by differences in the perceived causes of the prevailing HIs, the perceived severity of these inequalities, fairness concerns, and self-interest considerations. To test our hypotheses, we utilized data from a unique survey panel of about 2300 Nigerians.

The article is structured as follows: In the next section, we will review the most important theoretical approaches to explaining people's attitudes towards (horizontal) redistribution. Drawing on this literature review, we will then formulate several hypotheses regarding people's support for horizontal redistribution in Section 3. We test these hypotheses in our empirical analysis of Nigeria. Our empirical strategy is explained in Section 4, and we discuss the results of our analysis in Section 5. Section 6 concludes the article.

2. Demand for (Horizontal) Redistribution: Insights From Previous Research

Before theorising about the determinants of people's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution, it is worthwhile reviewing the extensive literature on people's attitudes towards redistribution between the "poor" and the "wealthy" (i.e., vertical redistribution). We argue that some of the theories developed to explain attitudes towards vertical redistribution may also be relevant for understanding attitudes towards horizontal redistribution. In particular, economists and sociologists have proposed and empirically tested a range of different factors and theoretical mechanisms to explain differences in support for redistributive policies across the world. While drawing on Jaime-Castillo and Sáez-Lozano (2016), Pittau et al. (2016) argue that there are essentially two main approaches in this literature: The first approach "is based on the material utility individuals can obtain from redistributive policies," while the "second approach, not necessarily mutually exclusive, evokes the adherence to ideological principles and beliefs in supporting public welfare" (Pittau et al., 2016, p. 714).

The first approach is theoretically underpinned by Meltzer and Richard's (1981) "median voter model," which argues that political support for redistribution will be higher among individuals whose income is below a country's median income level (Pittau et al., 2016). Hence, according to this theory, there will be more demand and support for economic redistribution in countries with more severe levels of vertical inequality because more voters will fall below the median income level in these countries (see also Schmidt-Catran, 2016). The main assumption underlying this theory is that people are essentially motivated by economic self-interest. Yet, it is worth noting that the empirical evidence supporting the median voter hypothesis is inconclusive (see, e.g., Iversen & Soskice, 2006).

The second approach argues that differences in attitudes towards vertical redistribution are essentially the result of differences in "beliefs in regard to the causes of inequality, concerns for fairness, religious convictions, forms of altruism, as well as social norms about what is acceptable or not in terms of inequality and poverty" (Pittau et al., 2016, p. 715). Importantly, sometimes, these principles, beliefs, and other sociotropic considerations may supersede individuals' narrow economic self-interest and motivate them to accept and support redistribution policies that may hurt them materially (Pittau et al., 2016, p. 715). In what follows, we will zoom in on four factors that largely fall within this second approach and appear particularly relevant, not only for explaining attitudes towards vertical redistribution but may also potentially be important for understanding differences in support for horizontal redistribution.

A first factor focuses on the perceived causes of inequality. Both experimental (e.g., Cappelen et al., 2007) and survey research (Fong, 2001) have yielded that support for vertical redistribution is stronger among people who believe that the prevailing economic inequalities and the precarious economic situation of disadvantaged individuals and groups are the result of "circumstances beyond individual control (such as luck) rather than within individual control (such as work)" (Valero, 2022, p. 876). Similarly, the literature studying attitudes towards affirmative action in the United States has used concepts such as "responsibility stereotypes" (Reyna et al., 2006) or "beliefs in a just world" (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014) to tap into beliefs about whether the causes of HIs are within or beyond a group's control. Given the overwhelming empirical support provided by these studies, we argue that the same logic is also relevant for explaining differences in support for horizontal redistribution in Nigeria.

A second factor that is crucial for shaping redistributive preferences focuses on the extent of perceived HIs. It is worth noting that a large body of research has shown that perceptions of vertical inequalities often differ substantially from objective assessments of these inequalities (see, e.g., Hauser & Norton, 2017). As it turns out, the limited amount of research conducted on subjective HIs also shows that perceptions of HIs may differ markedly from more objective assessments of these HIs (see, e.g., Kraus et al., 2017). Illustratively, Langer and Smedts (2013) find notable mismatches between objective and subjective HIs in 19 African countries. Hence, they conclude that "the assumption that objective and subjective HIs are largely the same…needs to be revisited and challenged" (p. 2). Drawing on Gimpelson and Treisman (2018) and Kuhn (2019), Marandola and Xu (2021) further pointedly argue that people's perceptions of inequalities are more important for understanding attitudes towards redistribution than objective or actual levels of income or wealth inequalities. In other words, how HIs are perceived is arguably a more important driver of people's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution than the actual levels of HIs.

A third factor that is important for explaining redistribution preferences focuses on differences in fairness concerns and social justice orientations. Importantly, the kind and level of inequality that may be considered "fair" may differ across individuals, groups, and countries. Regarding differences in fairness beliefs between different countries, Almås et al. (2020) have shown, for instance, that Americans and Norwegians have very different fairness views related to inequality. This, in turn, helps to explain differences in inequality acceptance between these two countries. Conversely, differences in fairness concerns between individuals from the same country may result from a range of factors, experiences, and circumstances, including, for example, personal experiences of high inequality during one's youth (Roth & Wohlfart, 2018) and exposure to severe inequality in everyday life (Sands, 2017).

While there are additional factors, circumstances, and mechanisms put forward in the extensive literature concerning attitudes towards vertical redistribution, including, for example, differences in perceived social mobility, background characteristics of potential beneficiaries, and individuals' past exposure to inequality (for a detailed review of these and other determinants of people's perceptions of inequality and redistribution preferences see Marandola & Xu, 2021), in this short review, we have focused exclusively on those factors and mechanisms which we think will also be relevant for explaining attitudes towards horizontal redistribution.

3. Theorising Support for Horizontal Redistribution: Some Hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical insights gained from the literature review above, we now formulate a set of hypotheses to explain differences in support for horizontal redistribution. We subsequently test these hypotheses against survey data from Nigerian respondents.

Our first hypothesis to explain horizontal redistribution preferences directly relates to self-interest considerations. Building on Meltzer and Richard's (1981) research, we hypothesise that economic self-interest considerations will likely affect people's preferences towards horizontal redistribution. In particular, we hypothesise that individuals who consider themselves part of a relatively advantaged group are more likely to oppose horizontal redistribution policies because they may worry that these policies will negatively affect themselves and their group. Conversely, individuals who perceive themselves to belong to a relatively disadvantaged group are likely to support horizontal redistribution because they may believe that

they themselves and their group may benefit materially from these policies. Our first hypothesis, therefore, reads as follows:

> Hypothesis 1: Individuals who consider themselves to belong to a relatively disadvantaged group are likely to be more supportive of horizontal redistribution policies than individuals who consider themselves to belong to a relatively advantaged group.

Our second hypothesis is related to people's perceptions of the causes of the prevailing HIs. We hypothesise that people who consider disadvantaged groups themselves to be responsible for their relatively deprived position are less likely to support horizontal redistribution policies. Conversely, people who believe that the prevailing HIs are mainly caused by factors and circumstances that are largely outside the control of disadvantaged groups are likely to be more supportive of policies aimed at reducing HIs. Our second hypothesis, therefore, reads as follows:

> Hypothesis 2: People are likely to be more supportive of horizontal redistribution when the relatively disadvantaged groups that stand to benefit from these policies are perceived to be less responsible for their disadvantaged position.

Our third hypothesis for explaining horizontal redistribution preferences focuses on the perceived severity of the prevailing HIs. As discussed above, people act and react on the basis of their perceptions of reality. Hence, in order to understand horizontal redistribution preferences, it is crucial to assess how people perceive the prevailing HIs. Moreover, we argue that people's assessment of the severity of the prevailing HIs will likely affect the extent to which they think something needs to be done about them. In line with this reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 3: The more severe people perceive the prevailing economic HIs to be, the more they will support horizontal redistribution towards disadvantaged groups.

Our fourth hypothesis relates to people's fairness considerations. As discussed above, fairness concerns matter a great deal when it comes to understanding vertical redistributive preferences. We hypothesise that people's beliefs and attitudes towards fairness are also likely to affect their horizontal redistribution preferences, and we argue that it is crucial to assess how people assess the fairness of the prevailing HIs. More specifically, we put forward the following hypothesis in this regard:

> Hypothesis 4: The more unfair people consider the prevailing HIs to be, the more likely they are to support horizontal redistribution policies.

In addition to the four hypotheses about direct effects, we expect the variable fairness to—at least partially—mediate the effects of the three other independent variables. First, we would expect to see that the effects of perceived relative group position are mediated by fairness, because members of disadvantaged groups, due to their living experiences, are more likely to see the consequences of inequality and are thus more likely to believe that the existing HIs are unfair. Second, we expect that the effect of group responsibility perceptions will likewise be mediated by fairness concerns. Respondents who attribute existing economic HIs more strongly to factors that are within the control of disadvantaged groups should

be more likely to consider the prevailing HIs as fair. In contrast, we argue that those who do not think that less well-off groups are themselves to blame are more likely to think that the existing inequalities are unfair. Third, in line with previous research (e.g., Becker, 2020), we expect that the perceived severity of economic HIs has an impact on perceptions of fairness and, therefore, on redistributive preferences. More precisely, we expect that—all else being equal—respondents who perceive HIs as more severe are more likely to think that the status quo violates norms of distributive justice, to which redistribution could be seen as a possible remedy.

Finally, we also expect that the perceived relative position of one's group impacts perceptions of group responsibility. In line with Pettigrew (1979), group members may engage in self-serving biases when trying to make sense of the differences in outcomes between their in-group and other out-groups. Members of relatively advantaged groups may, therefore, engage in self-enhancing attributions, viewing their own success as a result of their own abilities or agency. Conversely, members of relatively disadvantaged groups may engage in self-protective effects, explaining their situation as being the result of factors beyond their control (Hewstone, 1990). Even if studies have shown that the direction of causal attributions can depend on the specific context, especially social stereotypes, testing this hypothesis can serve as a point of departure for further research in the case of Nigeria, where a large number of groups is competing for their piece of the "national cake" (Kendhammer, 2015). Figure 1 summarises the full theoretical model.

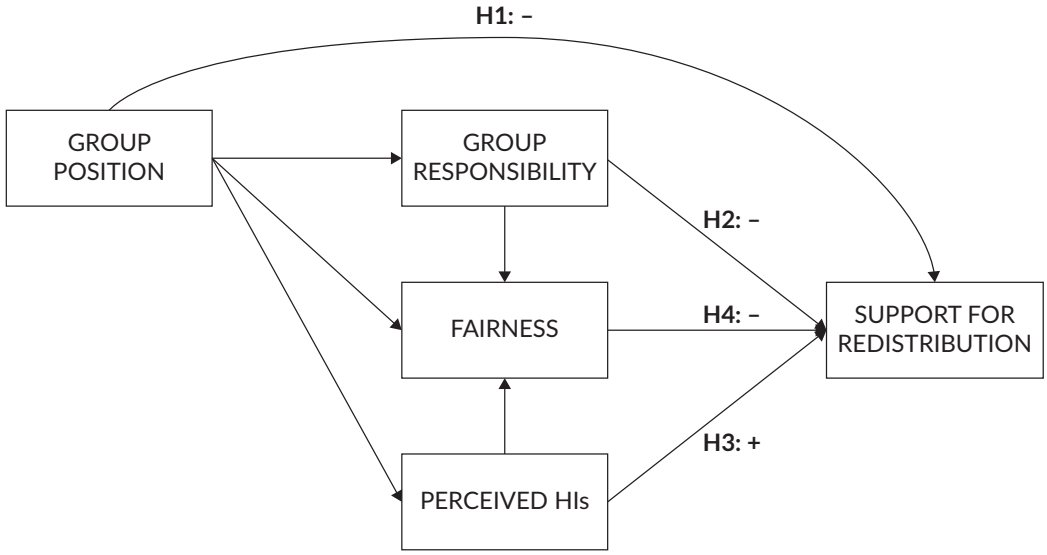

Figure 1. Hypothesised theoretical model.

4. Empirical Methodology

4.1. Study Design and Data Collection

To empirically investigate the main drivers of people's redistribution preferences in Nigeria, we conducted a unique online panel survey, i.e., the Perceptions of Inequalities and Redistribution Survey (PIRS), among Nigerian citizens of 18 years and above. To recruit respondents from different strata of society, we used targeted advertisements on the social media platform Facebook. Moreover, we used Facebook's options to

target potential participants based on their self-reported gender, age, and level of education, as well as their location data. Potential participants were shown an advertisement banner inviting them to participate in the survey. Users who clicked on this banner were redirected to our survey registration page. People who registered their mobile phone number on that page and indicated that they used the messaging service WhatsApp (i.e., 2711 people, or 73% of the 3715 people who registered for our survey) were then sent a survey link to participate in the first round of our survey. In total, we conducted four online survey rounds from March to April 2023. The surveys were relatively short and generally took less than 10 minutes to complete. Respondents received a small quasi-cash incentive in the form of mobile phone credit of 500 Nigerian Naira (i.e., approximately equivalent to 1 EUR at the time of recruitment) after completing each survey round.

Table 1 below provides summary statistics for the four survey rounds of Nigeria's PIRS. The attrition rate between the different survey rounds was very low. This, in turn, meant that the survey completion rate was very high, given that only respondents who had successfully completed a particular survey round were subsequently invited to participate in the next survey round. Importantly, our empirical analysis below is only based on respondents who completed all four survey rounds.

4.2. Selection Bias and Limitations

Our sample is clearly not nationally representative because of our recruitment strategy (i.e., the use of Facebook-targeting as a recruitment strategy for prospective respondents) and survey mode (i.e., online self-completion English questionnaire). Moreover, our sample is especially skewed regarding respondents' educational attainment levels. Illustratively, while most respondents in our sample (i.e., 80%) had attended postsecondary education, in the general population of Nigeria, this proportion is much smaller. As shown in the Afrobarometer survey (last column in Table 1), only 23% of this nationally representative sample attended postsecondary education. Similarly, while in the Afrobarometer survey about 34% of respondents had no formal education or only primary education, in our sample, all respondents had obtained at least secondary education. The fact that our sample is seriously skewed regarding educational attainment levels may have an important impact on our empirical findings. Thus, for instance, higher education often translates into higher income, which, in turn, may be associated with lower levels of support for redistribution because relatively advantaged individuals may be more concerned that they will have to pay for redistribution interventions. Similarly, higher education may be associated with more urban living environments, which may be associated with more inter-ethnic contact and possibly more positive attitudes towards other ethnic groups. This, in turn, could be associated with higher levels of support for redistribution towards more disadvantaged groups. Further, while our sample had a good representation of the three major ethnic groups (i.e., Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani) as well as from the six different geopolitical zones, these proportions were not fully in line with the demographic proportions in the general population of Nigeria. Yet, given that we do not plan to aggregate our results to the Nigerian population as a whole, this distortion appears to be less relevant. Thus, while we recognise the limited generalizability of our empirical findings, it is important to emphasise here that we see the current study as a first step towards testing the original hypotheses we developed in the previous section.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Nigeria's PIRS (rounds 1–4).

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Reference[1]
Surveys					
# invitations	2712	2333	2171	2107	
# completed surveys	2332	2171	2107	2008	
Completion rate (%)	86.0%	93.1%	97.1%	95.3%	
Gender				Not asked	
Male (%)	62.0%	62.5%	62.1%	–	51.9%
Female (%)	37.9%	37.5%	37.8%	–	48.1%
Age		Not asked[2]			
Median (# years)	27	–	27	27	32[3]
Average (# years)	29	–	29	29	36[3]
Ethnic groups				Not asked	
Yoruba (%)	36.4%	37.2%	37.4%	–	18.5%
Igbo (%)	16.2%	16.1%	15.7%	–	15.6%
Hausa-Fulani (%)	14.2%	15.1%	15.1%	–	29.8%
Other ethnicities (%)	33.2%	31.6%	31.8%	–	36.1%
Education		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
No formal education (%)	0.00%	–	–	–	15.8%
Primary education (%)	0.00%	–	–	–	17.7%
Secondary education (%)[4]	20.1%	–	–	–	43.3%
Postsecondary education (%)[5]	79.9%	–	–	–	23.1%
Residence (geopol. zone)		Not asked		Not asked	
North Central (%)	25.4%	–	24.55%	–	14.2%
North East (%)	10.0%	–	10.21%	–	12.7%
North West (%)	13.8%	–	14.24%	–	24.2%
South East (%)	7.5%	–	7.87%	–	11.8%
South South (%)	11.6%	–	11.75%	–	15.4%
South West (%)	31.7%	–	31.37%	–	21.3%

Notes: [1] Weighted data from Afrobarometer round 9 except where noted; [2] in this round, we asked for the respondents' year of birth, instead (mean year of birth was 1993, median was 1996, which aligns with the data from the other three rounds); [3] 2023 data for the Nigerian population of 18 years and above taken from the US Census Bureau International Database; [4] includes "lower secondary completed" and "upper secondary completed"; [5] includes "post-secondary qualifications (other than university)," "bachelor's or equivalent completed," "master's or equivalent completed," and "doctoral degree."

4.3. Operationalisation

Our empirical analysis revolves around two dependent variables that capture the respondents' support for ethnic-based redistribution policies. The first survey item, labelled CTCHUP, asked the respondents to indicate whether or not they agreed with the statement: "The Nigerian government should implement redistribution policies because these policies are necessary for disadvantaged ethnic groups to catch up with more advantaged ethnic groups." The response scale ranged from one (*strongly disagree*) to seven (*strongly agree*).

The second survey item, which we label GOVSPEND, is based on the extensive literature on affirmative action attitudes in the United States (see, e.g, Byrd & Ray, 2015; Tuch & Hughes, 2011) and reads as follows:

"In your opinion, is the Nigerian government spending too much, about right, or too little on reducing the prevailing economic inequalities between different ethnic groups and states in Nigeria?" Participants were asked to indicate their opinion on a three-point scale with options *too much* (1), *about right* (2), and *too little* (3). Scores on both variables are positively correlated (Spearman's $r(1537) = .128$; $p < .001$).

Figure 2 visualises the distributions of both dependent variables. Clearly, the support for horizontal redistribution is exceptionally high among the respondents in our sample. Approximately 78% of the respondents at least *somewhat agree* with the statement that the Nigerian government should implement horizontal redistribution policies. Similarly, around 75% of the respondents in our sample think that the government spends too little on reducing ethnic inequalities in Nigeria.

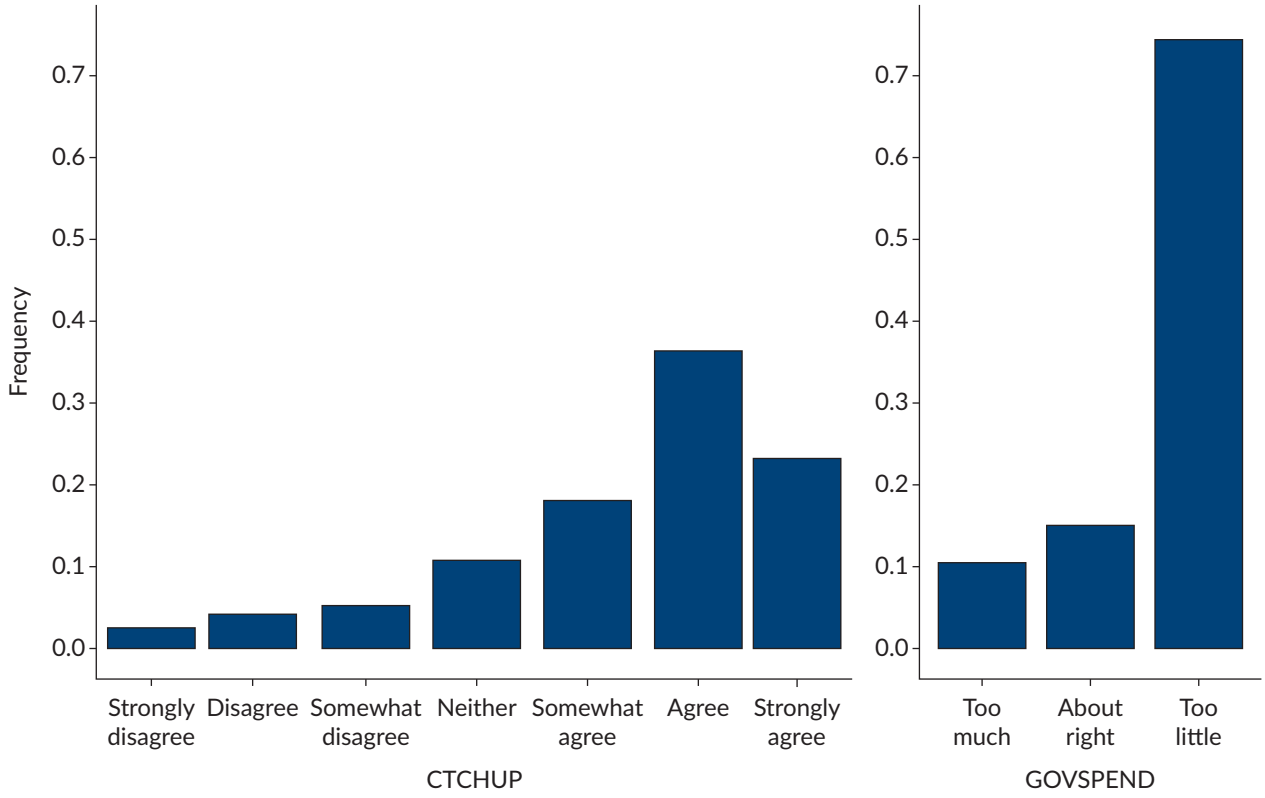

Figure 2. Histograms of dependent variables.

Let us now turn to the operationalisation of our key independent variables. Our first independent variable of interest, which is labelled RELATIVE POSITION, aims to operationalise respondents' economic self-interest considerations. In this regard, we hypothesised above that individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a relatively disadvantaged group are more likely to support horizontal redistribution policies. In contrast, members of relatively advantaged groups are likely to be less supportive of such policies. In order to determine where respondents situate their own ethnic group compared to other ethnic groups, we asked them the following question: "How does the poverty level of [your ethnic group] compare to that of other ethnic groups in Nigeria?" Respondents had to answer this question on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *much better* (1) to *much worse* (5). We reversed the coding of this variable so that higher values correspond to better perceived group position. We include the variable RELATIVE POSITION as a continuous variable in our empirical analysis and expect it to be negatively correlated with our dependent variables, meaning that

individuals who think their group is relatively worse off should show higher support for redistribution (see Hypothesis 1).

Second, in order to determine to what extent respondents considered disadvantaged groups themselves responsible for their precarious situation (see Hypothesis 2), respondents were asked to rate on an 11-point scale ranging from *not important at all* (0) to *very important* (10) how important they thought the following factors were for explaining why some groups were doing worse economically than others in Nigeria:

1. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they have been discriminated against by past Nigerian governments.
2. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they have fewer in-born abilities than other ethnic groups.
3. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they value education less than other ethnic groups.
4. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they are not hardworking enough to escape poverty.
5. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because their economic development was more severely affected or harmed by the colonial period than other ethnic groups.
6. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they have less access to (quality) education than other ethnic groups.
7. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they tend to live in regions with fewer economic resources and opportunities.
8. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they do not support their own group sufficiently.
9. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they are usually not very good businessmen/-women.
10. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they have backward cultural traditions and practices.
11. Those ethnic groups are doing worse economically because they have less access to political power than other ethnic groups.

While we expected agreement with items 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10 to capture sentiments stressing the responsibility of disadvantaged groups themselves, agreement with items 1, 5, 6, 7, and 11 points to the importance of contextual, historical, and/or structural factors for explaining why some groups are doing worse, i.e., factors largely outside disadvantaged groups' control. In the subsequent section, we will conduct an exploratory factor analysis on the items listed above in order to determine the underlying factor structure.

Our third independent variable, labelled PERCEIVED HIs, assesses people's perceptions of the prevailing HIs. Respondents were asked to indicate on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from *not severe at all* (0) to *very severe* (10) how severe they considered the prevailing economic inequalities between different ethnic groups in Nigeria to be. PERCEIVED HIs is included as a continuous variable in our empirical analysis and is expected to be positively correlated with our dependent variables (see Hypothesis 3).

Our fourth key variable is labelled FAIRNESS. In order to determine how fair or unfair respondents considered the prevailing economic HIs to be, they were asked the following question: "How fair or unfair are the existing

economic inequalities between different ethnic groups in Nigeria?" The question's rating scale ranged from *very fair* (0) to *very unfair* (10). FAIRNESS is included as a continuous variable in our empirical analysis, and we expect this variable to be negatively correlated with our dependent variables; the fairer respondents consider the prevailing economic HIs to be, the less supportive they are likely to be of horizontal redistribution policies (see Hypothesis 4). Table 2 presents the summary statistics of the independent variables included in our model.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of key independent variables.

Variable name	Mean	p25	median	p75	min	max	Obs.
RELATIVE POSITION	3.13	3	3	4	1	5	1884
PERCEIVED HIs	7.06	5	7	9	0	10	1923
FAIRNESS	6.19	5	6	8	0	10	1937

In addition to these key variables, the following control variables are included in our statistical analysis: age, gender, ethnic background, and level of education. Age is included as a continuous variable. Gender is a dichotomous variable (female = 1). The ethnic background of respondents is included as a categorical variable with eight categories: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Ijaw, Tiv, northern ethnic minorities, and southern ethnic minorities. Respondents' level of education is included as a continuous variable with eight categories, ranging from *no formal education* (1) to *doctoral degree* (8).

5. Empirical Analysis and Findings

5.1. Perceived Causes of Inequality

Figure 3 visualises the importance that the respondents in our sample attached to each of the factors raised in the previous section in explaining existing ethnic inequality. It appears that respondents were more likely to support structural explanations, as the approval of most items ranged between 30% and 40%, while most items that emphasised the responsibility of the disadvantaged groups themselves scored between 20% and 30%. Notable exceptions were perceptions that inequality was due to members of poorer groups usually being bad businesspersons and having backward traditions, with about 40% of respondents agreeing with both statements. The statements that received the highest level of support were the views that members of some groups have less access to (quality) education and that members of some groups have less access to political power. The least support was expressed for (only around 18%) the idea that members of some ethnic groups had fewer in-born abilities.

In order to unveil a potential underlying factor structure, we scrutinised all eleven survey items using exploratory factor analysis based on principal axis factoring. As a point of departure, we used several different statistical criteria to determine the appropriate number of factors to extract from the data at hand, namely parallel analysis, MAP, and a visual examination of the scree plot. It must be noted that parallel analysis has been found to have a tendency to overestimate the number of factors in some cases, while MAP may tend to underestimate (Watkins, 2021, pp. 75–76). The MAP criterion hinted towards retaining one single factor, while parallel analysis and the scree plot indicated that the optimal factor solution would consist of two and three factors, respectively. Thus, after performing oblique oblimin rotation, we evaluated different factor solutions with one, two, and three factors regarding model fit and interpretability. Upon

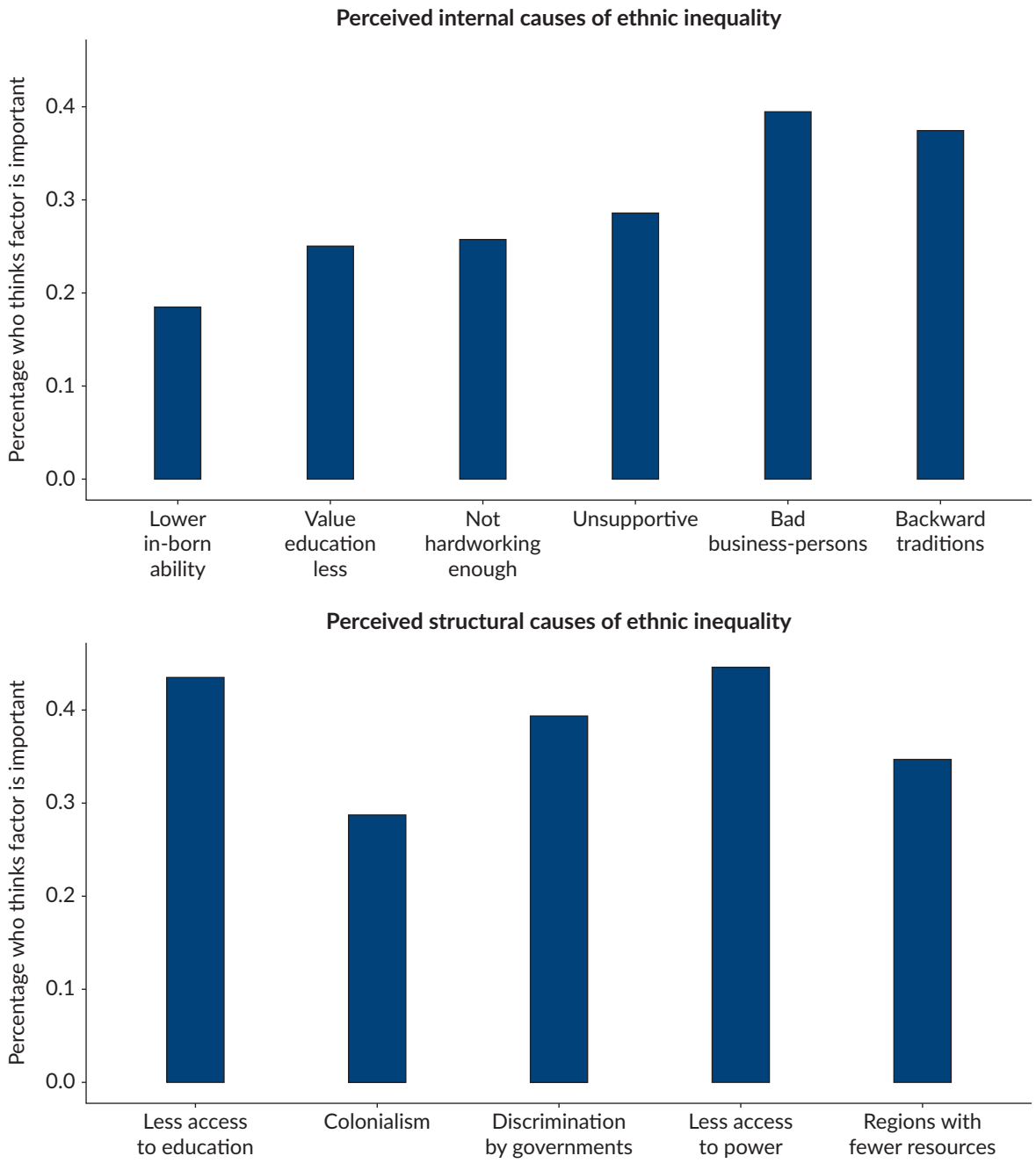

Figure 3. Perceived importance of different potential causes for ethnic inequality (calculated by the proportion of respondents in the sample who rated each item higher than 6).

evaluating these initial models, we decided to drop items 5 ("harmed by colonial period"), 7 ("live in regions with fewer resources and opportunities"), and 8 ("insufficient support within group") from the analysis due to their failure to load systematically on one single factor across different solutions, thus approaching a simple structure.

Table 3 summarises the different factor solutions after removing the three variables mentioned above and re-fitting the models. We regard pattern coefficients ≥.40 as salient, as they signify both a correlation with the underlying factor that is statistically significant and also a significant contribution to explained variance.

The solution of the 1-factor model produces a factor that is positively correlated with all indicators, even though the coefficients for items 1 and 11 do not reach our threshold for salience. While all items that we expected to capture internal attributions for horizontal inequality load positively and saliently onto this factor, it is also confounded by a salient relationship with item 6 ("less access to education"), which we expected to capture a contextual cause of inequality. Nevertheless, a scale produced from these six indicators reaches an acceptable alpha level of .74. However, the fit of this model is subpar at best. The RMSR is above the conventional threshold of .08 (Brown, 2015). Further, when comparing the model-implied correlation matrix with the actual correlations, 16 out of 28 residual coefficients surpass the conventional threshold of .05 (5 coefficients >.10), thus indicating poor model fit.

Turning to the model with two factors, model fit indices improve substantially. The explained variance increases by twelve percentage points, and both BIC and RMSR are reduced significantly. What is more, the relationship of factor one with indicator six is alleviated, falling below our threshold for salience. Therefore, factor one only retains its association with the items that we expected to probe into the internal attributions of economic HIs. The internal consistency, as signified by Cronbach's α decreases only marginally to .73, which is still acceptable. It is thus plausible that factor one captures the respondents' ideas about some ethnic groups having a disadvantage due to their perceived shortcomings and lack of agency. The second factor in this model is associated with beliefs that economic HIs are due to some ethnic groups being discriminated against by past Nigerian governments and having less access to power. Interestingly, the belief that inequalities are due to some groups having less access to quality education is more strongly correlated with the first factor. It thus seems that the second factor captures not contextual obstacles for some groups in general but rather political marginalisation.

Table 3. Pattern coefficients after oblique oblimin rotation.

		1-factor model	2-factor model		3-factor model		
		F1	*F1*	*F2*	*F1*	*F2*	*F3*
1	Discrimination by governments	.33	.08	**.63**	.05	**.58**	.08
2	Lower in-born ability	**.56**	**.54**	.05	**.65**	.07	−.09
3	Value education less	**.55**	**.53**	.06	.03	−.03	**.71**
4	Not hardworking enough	**.60**	**.70**	−.10	**.65**	−.10	.07
6	Less access to education	**.49**	.37	.25	.01	.21	**.48**
9	Bad businessmen/women	**.60**	**.60**	.03	**.63**	.05	.00
10	Backward traditions	**.57**	**.58**	.00	**.40**	−.02	.23
11	Less access to power	.27	−.04	**.78**	−.01	**.82**	−.02
Cronbach's α		.74	.73	.65	.70	.65	.54
Variance explained (%)		26	38			43	
BIC		586.02	64.85			−12.29	
RMSR		0.1	0.04			0.02	
Factor correlations							
F2		—	.23	—	.19	—	.21
F3		—	—	—	.62	.21	—

This view is supported when inspecting the pattern coefficients produced by the three-factor model. While items 2, 4, 9, and 10 still load onto the first factor and items 1 and 11 on the second, the two indicators that capture aspects of education load onto a third factor. While the overall fit of this model is higher in comparison to the two-factor model, the internal consistency of factor one drops further to a value of .70. Furthermore, this factor solution shows more serious signs of overfitting, having two undetermined factors with only two salient loadings.

In our eyes, the two-factor solution provided the best balance between model fit, parsimony, internal consistency, and interpretability. Thus, we constructed a scale from the five indicators that saliently load on the first factor in this model, as it is the only determined factor in the model (≥3 salient loadings). We label this scale GROUP RESPONSIBILITY, as each of its indicators stresses causes of economic HIs that are perceived or stereotyped characteristics of disadvantaged groups. The resulting scale has a median of 4.8 and significant zero-order correlations with both dependent variables CTCHUP ($r(1823) = -.068$; $p < .01$) and GOVSPEND ($r(1508) = -.192$; $p < .001$).

5.2. Structural Equation Models

In this section, we discuss the results from two structural equation models (SEM) in which we incorporated the dependent variables CTCHUP and GOVSPEND separately (see Table 4). The fit indices for both models are good, implying that the models give an adequate description of the observed data structure (CTCHUP model: CFI = 0.993, RMSEA = 0.032, SRMR = 0.006; GOVSPEND model: CFI = 0.993, RMSEA = 0.032, SRMR = 0.006). We estimated the coefficients using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to account for the high item non-response on one of the dependent variables.

Starting with the direct effects of how one perceives their group's relative position, we find mixed evidence related to Hypothesis 1. While the coefficient in both models is negative, indicating higher support for redistribution among individuals who perceive their own ethnic group to be relatively poorer, this coefficient is only statistically significant (at the 5% level) in the model predicting CTCHUP.

Furthermore, the perceived poverty levels of one's group is a highly significant predictor of both GROUP RESPONSIBILITY and FAIRNESS. According to the structural models, respondents who perceive their ethnic group to be comparatively poorer are less likely to think that economic HIs are mainly the result of individual characteristics of their members and, therefore, less likely to think that poorer groups are themselves to blame for their relative disadvantage. This aligns with much of the literature around attribution theory and hints towards self-serving biases in how members of disadvantaged groups make sense of their situation. Also, individuals of groups with a lower (perceived) economic position are significantly more likely to deem the status quo as unfair.

With regard to the perceived causes of horizontal inequality, we again find mixed evidence for our hypothesis. In the model predicting attitudes towards increased government spending (GOVSPEND), a stronger adherence to explanations that "blame" relatively disadvantaged groups themselves for their situation is strongly and significantly associated with lower support for redistribution. In the model predicting CTCHUP, however, the coefficient is substantially smaller and not statistically significant by conventional standards.

Table 4. Structural equation models explaining attitudes towards redistribution across ethnic groups (CTCHUP; $N = 1953$) and increasing government spending aimed at reducing interethnic inequality (GOVSPEND; $N = 1952$).

	FAIRNESS			CTCHUP (direct effect)			Indirect effect via FAIRNESS			Total indirect effect		
	St. Est.	*p*	SE	St. Est.	*P*	SE	St. Est.	*p*	SE	St. Est.	*p*	SE
RELATIVE POSITION	−.092	**	0.028	−.059	*	0.029	−.008	*	0.004	−.012	**	0.005
GROUP RESPONSIBILITY	.061	*	0.029	−.045		0.026	.005		0.003	.005		0.003
PERCEIVED HIs	.224	***	0.027	.128	***	0.027	.019	**	0.006	.019	**	0.006
FAIRNESS				.086	**	0.027						

	FAIRNESS			GOVSPEND (direct effect)			Indirect effect via FAIRNESS			Total indirect effect		
	St. Est.	*p*	SE	St. Est	*P*	SE	St. Est.	*p*	SE	St. Est.	*p*	SE
RELATIVE POSITION	−.092	***	0.027	−.054		0.037	−.008		0.004	−.031	***	0.008
GROUP RESPONSIBILITY	.061	*	0.028	−.214	***	0.033	.005		0.003	.005		0.003
PERCEIVED HIs	.217	***	0.026	.005		0.036	.018	*	0.008	.018	*	0.008
FAIRNESS				.085	*	0.036						

Notes: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; estimation using FIML estimator; standard errors for indirect effects obtained from 5000 bootstrap iterations.

Concerning the third hypothesis, the variable PERCEIVED HIs shows a highly statistically significant main effect ($p < .001$) in the first model and runs in the direction we expected. Thus, higher levels of perceived horizontal economic inequality are associated with greater support for redistribution measures.

As mentioned above, the coefficients for FAIRNESS are positive and statistically significant across both models, which signifies that the less fair one perceives the existing HIs to be, the more one is in favour of redistribution policies. We interpret this finding as support for Hypothesis 4.

Finally, the model points towards several indirect effects. While the perceived poverty levels of one's ethnic group showed a negative direct effect in the first model, this variable also has a significant indirect effect, which runs in the same direction and is mediated by individual perceptions of fairness. Thus, individuals who perceive their own group as poorer are more likely to judge the status quo as less fair and, therefore, support higher levels of redistribution. This finding gives additional support to Hypothesis 1. Likewise, we found a significant indirect effect of perceived poverty of one's group in the GOVSPEND model; however, this effect is mediated by perceptions of group responsibility. This means that individuals who think that they are members of a relatively poorer group are more likely to show in-group serving biases and, therefore, support more horizontal redistribution.

Also, the perceived levels of horizontal inequality have significant indirect effects in both models, which are mediated by perceptions of fairness. Therefore, individuals who perceive the existing inequalities as more severe are more likely to think that the status quo is unfair and, for this reason, support higher levels of redistribution. This lends additional support to Hypothesis 3. This is in line with similar research conducted in the United States, which yielded that the effects of perceived inequality on redistributive attitudes might be mediated by lower perceived distributive justice, which may be mitigated by introducing redistribution policies (Becker, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Our article brings important new data and original theoretical insights to bear concerning the determinants of people's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution in Nigeria. In our empirical analysis, we find support for our hypotheses. First, respondents who thought of their ethnic groups as being relatively poorer were more likely to support horizontal redistribution. Second, as hypothesised, perceptions of the origins of the existing HIs matter in shaping attitudes towards redistribution. As shown in our empirical analysis, respondents who attached more weight to contextual causes of horizontal inequality were much more likely to support redistribution. Third, the perceived severity of the prevailing HIs was also important for explaining support for horizontal redistribution policies. Again, in line with our hypothesis, we found that people who perceived the prevailing economic HIs to be more severe were more supportive of horizontal redistribution. Lastly, people's perceptions of fairness also strongly impacted their attitudes towards redistribution. As expected, the more people considered the prevailing HIs to be unfair, the more they supported horizontal redistribution. Overall, based on our empirical research, we can conclude that if one wants to understand—and possibly increase—popular support towards horizontal redistribution policies, it is clearly not sufficient to look only at the objective socio-economic situation of different individuals and groups. People's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution are in no small manner driven by people's perceptions of the origins and severity of the prevailing HIs and existing norms and perceptions of fairness.

While this is an important conclusion, there are several important caveats and reflections which need to be highlighted and which point towards interesting avenues for future research. First, while perceptions of the origins and severity of the prevailing HIs matter greatly for shaping attitudes towards horizontal redistribution, these perceptions may be distorted, biased, and objectively inaccurate. Future research should zoom in on these perceptions and try to understand how these perceptions are formed and to what extent these perceptions remain stable over time—or whether they can be changed by, for instance, providing certain informational cues about the severity of the prevailing socio-economic HIs or about the complex origins of the prevailing HIs.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to expand the current research and analyse how other factors and variables that were not included in our study affect and shape people's attitudes towards horizontal redistribution, such as, for example, perceptions of social mobility, background characteristics of potential beneficiaries, and people's exposure to HIs. Further, as noted above, it could be very interesting to unpack the relationship between individuals' and groups' objective and perceived (relative) position in society and their attitudes towards horizontal redistribution. The findings of the current study suggest that this relationship appears to be more complex than originally hypothesised.

Lastly, our analysis was conducted on a sample that was not nationally representative and which contained a number of biases due to the fact that we decided to exclude Nigerians younger than 18 years old, to conduct an online self-completion questionnaire, to use Facebook-targeting as a recruitment strategy for prospective respondents, to restrict our survey to people who use the messaging service WhatsApp, and to conduct our survey solely in English rather than other Nigerian languages. We, therefore, cannot generalise our findings to the wider population of Nigeria. Moreover, a very interesting avenue of future research would not only be to replicate this study in other countries in the Global South but also to try to collect a nationally representative sample in Nigeria. Our current sample is clearly biased regarding respondents' educational attainment levels, technological literacy rates, and socio-economic welfare. These are factors that may have an important impact on people's views about the prevailing HIs and policies aimed at correcting them.

Funding

We are grateful for the generous project funding (G068320N) we received from the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7604
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7604

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Open Access Journal

A Matter of Solidarity: Racial Redistribution and the Economic Limits of Racial Sympathy

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Submitted: 15 September 2023 **Accepted:** 14 December 2023 **Published:** 29 February 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

The goal of horizontal redistribution is to provide economic resources to groups that have experienced discrimination and exploitation. In the United States, horizontal redistribution based on race remains controversial, particularly among white Americans. Not surprisingly, many white Americans oppose racial redistribution policies in some cases because of resentments they have toward racial outgroups. But this is not the only way that racial attitudes shape policy support. Chudy (2021) demonstrates that racial sympathy, or white distress over the misfortune of racial outgroups, can increase support for racially redistributive policies. However, supporting horizontal redistribution may be easier for individuals who are more economically secure, even when they are racially sympathetic. In this study, we explore whether the influence of racial sympathy is conditional on economic position. We expect that the influence of racial sympathy will be strongest among individuals who have higher incomes, as they are less concerned with competition over resources. Using the 2013 CCES, we use a newly developed measure of racial sympathy (Chudy, 2021) to study white Americans' support for policies designed to provide resources to black Americans. Consistent with expectations, we find that whites with higher levels of racial sympathy have higher levels of support for such policies, but that this pattern is stronger among whites who are more affluent. For white Americans of lesser means, the relationship between racial sympathy and support for racial redistribution is weaker, likely because of concerns for their own relative economic status.

Keywords

American politics; economic position; group position theory; horizontal redistribution; racial sympathy

1. Introduction

In America, economic hardship is a widely shared experience. For many Americans, income has not kept pace with the increased costs of daily life. Consumer debt has increased over the past twenty years, even among Americans who are in the "middle class." For many Americans, and especially those with lower incomes, concerns about how they will pay for housing and health care expenses have become a fact of life (Kirzinger et al., 2022; Schaeffer, 2022). Some even express concerns about their ability to pay for unexpected expenses in the event of an emergency (Hacker, 2019; see also Melcher, 2023).

Yet Americans are not equally likely to experience these sorts of economic hardships. Black Americans, in particular, are more likely to experience economic adversity than Americans of other racial groups (Lin & Harris, 2008; Thompson & Suarez, 2019). The reasons for this are well-known. Throughout America's history, black Americans have endured discriminatory and exploitative economic policies that began with slavery and continued with Jim Crow, redlining, gentrification, and predatory lending (Haney López, 2014; Rothstein, 2017; K.-Y. Taylor, 2019).

Race-targeted policies, as a form of horizontal redistribution, provide one approach to addressing this long-standing problem. As the term itself suggests, race-targeted policies aim to improve access to resources, education, employment, and entrepreneurship for individuals who belong to historically marginalized racial groups. Of course, such policies have proven controversial because they intentionally provide no direct benefits to America's historically dominant racial group, the nation's white population. The question, concerning race-targeted policies, is whether—and under what conditions—white Americans will support such policies. Undoubtedly, America's racial history has cast a long shadow and a considerable body of research finds that many whites oppose race-targeted policies. Even so, America's racial history does not predetermine the racial attitudes of all white Americans nor does it automatically preclude their support for race-targeted policies (Castiglia, 2002; McAdam, 2003; Sawyer & Gampa, 2018). Pioneering research on racial sympathy provides important insight into when support for such policies is likely to emerge. This research demonstrates that many whites recognize the persistence of racial inequalities and express "distress over black misfortune" (Chudy, 2021, p. 122). Just as importantly, this research demonstrates that whites with higher levels of racial sympathy are more inclined to support race-targeted policies that address economic disparities.

Taken at first glance, this research on racial sympathy suggests that, when white Americans feel distress about the circumstances of black Americans, support for race-targeted policies will follow. This conclusion, however, would be premature, as it does not take into consideration another way that America's racial history might undermine support for race-targeted policies. Scholars have noted that, across many generations, white Americans with lower incomes might be particularly opposed to race-targeted policies that benefit black Americans because they are more likely to perceive a threat to their own opportunities, resources, and status (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Katznelson, 2005; Roediger, 2022). Consistent with group position theory, even when lower-income whites have high levels of racial sympathy, they may still oppose racial redistribution for reasons connected to their own material self-interest.

In this study, we examine this possibility by focusing on the attitudes of white Americans using a nationally representative sample. We conclude that the link between racial sympathy and white support for racial

redistribution depends heavily on a person's economic position. We find that whites with high levels of racial sympathy can be found, at roughly equal proportions, across the income spectrum. But we also find that the relationship between racial sympathy and support for race-targeted policies is weaker among less affluent whites. We argue that this finding reflects the importance of racial sympathy and also brings into view its limitations. Although racial sympathy can lead to support for policies that help black Americans, this appears more likely to happen when white Americans have greater economic stability. This, in turn, implies that building support for racial redistribution will remain difficult so long as economic hardship persists among a significant proportion of white Americans.

2. A Matter of Solidarity: The Potential and Limitations of Racial Sympathy

The basic premise of race-targeted policies is that "concerted action is required to tackle systemic racial gaps in everything from income and wealth to employment rates, poverty rates, and educational achievement" (Sawhill & Reeves, 2016, p. 1). Although this concerted action could potentially take a number of forms, government action has a distinctive political justification. In a democracy, public policy reflects the prevailing sentiment of citizens about what problems deserve attention and resources. By this logic, race-targeted policies, as a democratic form of "concerted action," signal both widespread recognition of persistent racial disparities *and* a public commitment to allocating resources toward reducing such disparities (Thomas, 2002, p. 232). The creation of such policies, however, requires something profound. It requires members of historically dominant racial groups to demonstrate what democratic theorists have termed "political solidarity" with racial groups that have experienced systemic injustice.

Political solidarity, by definition, refers to "the ability of individuals to engage in relations of trust and obligation with fellow members of a political community *whom they see as inherently 'other' in some way*" (Hooker, 2009, pp. 1–2, emphasis added; see also Rorty, 1989). The emphasis on "otherness" in this definition is crucial. Solidarity, on this account, requires citizens to recognize that members of the same community or nation have experienced different life circumstances and different kinds of problems. It also requires citizens to develop a willingness to help those who are different than themselves in some significant way (Allen, 2004; Hooker, 2009) when they have experienced undue hardships (Allen, 2004; Nussbaum, 2013). Importantly, for such help to constitute solidarity, the individual or group providing the help must do so even when they will not directly gain (or perhaps even sacrifice) if a policy goal is achieved. Solidarity is not reducible to pursuing a mutually beneficial goal or convergent interest (contra Bell, 1980; Strand & Mirkay, 2022). It is motivated instead by sympathy—a feeling of distress about the circumstances of others (Hooker, 2009; Nussbaum, 2013).

In the case of race-targeted policies that would benefit black Americans, the presence of such sympathy among white Americans may be indispensable. Although racial sympathy does not appear to influence white Americans' support for "race-neutral" forms of redistribution (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sniderman & Carmines, 1999), it seems to matter significantly for policies that specifically benefit black Americans (Chudy, 2021, p. 131). Given that black Americans constitute approximately 13 percent of the American electorate and also remain a minority in the United States Congress (Schaeffer, 2023), this has clear implications for national-level policy. For race-targeted policies to be enacted at the national level, substantial amounts of white support, and thus a substantial amount of white sympathy for black Americans is a practical necessity. In light of this, two questions become important to consider: In the first place, to what extent do white Americans sympathize

with black Americans? Secondly, under what circumstances does the sympathy of white Americans translate into support for race-targeted policies?

To date, however, these matters have received relatively little consideration by scholars interested in racial attitudes and their political consequences. Scholarly concerns about racial attitudes have instead focused on the persistence and consequences of racial antipathy. In the context of American politics, a considerable amount of research has examined the scope of racial resentment and has found that a significant number of white Americans continue to believe that black Americans lack work ethic and are undeserving of assistance (DeSante, 2013; Enders, 2021; Enders & Scott, 2019). There is also evidence that such attitudes are increasingly pervasive. In some areas of the country, the proportion of citizens holding this view appears to be increasing over the past few decades (Watts Smith et al., 2020). Other research also finds that white Americans with higher levels of racial resentment—unsurprisingly—oppose race-targeted policies that would improve the economic conditions of black Americans (Kam & Burge, 2019; Sears et al., 2004). Without question, this research identifies an important challenge to horizontal redistribution across racial lines. However, if we also want to understand racial attitudes that might facilitate racial redistribution, this focus on racial resentment is not sufficient.

As Chudy (2021, p. 123) argues, "racial sympathy is not merely the opposite of racial prejudice." Prejudice refers to a feeling of disdain for others and, in addressing racial disparities, reducing prejudice remains an important goal. Nonetheless, the reduction of prejudice, by itself, is unlikely to translate into support for policies that can reduce racial disparities. A person might lack feelings of disdain toward others but not feel any sense of distress about their circumstances. They may instead feel indifferent to the circumstances of others and indifference is unlikely to motivate support for race-targeted policies. Accordingly, to understand what makes support for race-targeted policies more likely, we must instead consider whether white Americans, in particular, actively feel sympathy, for black Americans.

In her path-breaking research, Chudy (2021) undertakes precisely this sort of inquiry. Notably, she finds that most white Americans have a moderate tendency toward racial sympathy. When asked to consider scenarios describing the discriminatory treatment of black Americans, most white Americans express some degree of distress (p. 127). Just as importantly, Chudy also finds that white Americans with higher levels of racial sympathy are more inclined to support policies like affirmative action and policies that provide resources specifically to businesses in black neighborhoods, black schools, and black students (p. 130). This is consistent with previous scholarship that finds that white Americans with lower levels of racial resentment are more likely to support race-targeted policies specifically aimed to assist black Americans (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; M. C. Taylor & Mateyka, 2011), but it also adds an important insight. It is not merely the absence of racial prejudice but the presence of racial sympathy that promotes support for racial redistribution.

Even so, this understanding of racial sympathy among white Americans has an important limitation. It implicitly conceptualizes white Americans as a monolithic group and overlooks an important implication of race-targeted policies that may divide even white Americans who feel a sense of racial sympathy. America, after all, is divided not only by economic disparities between racial groups but also by economic disparities within racial groups. Some white Americans are relatively affluent. Others have lower incomes (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014; Kocchar & Cilluffo, 2018). Although race-targeted policies aim to close racial economic disparities and create a more level economic playing field, in practice, white Americans will experience the consequences of a leveled

playing field in different ways. One might wonder if white Americans with lower incomes, therefore, will experience a sense of threat from the prospect of policies that would help black Americans. One might also wonder if that sense of threat makes whites with lower incomes less likely to support race-targeted policies, even when they are racially sympathetic. There is reason to believe this will be the case.

3. Taking Economic Position Into Account

Racial redistribution is ultimately about the allocation of economic resources and opportunities and race-targeted policies are ultimately about improving the economic circumstances of Americans who are not white (Maye, 2022; Nelson, 2019; Sawhill & Reeves, 2016). This raises the possibility that some white Americans—namely, those with lower incomes—may be less likely to translate their racial sympathy into support for race-targeted policies. Simply put, the consequences of improving the economic fortunes of others may look very different depending on one's own financial circumstances.

Group position theory helps explain why this is likely to occur. Group position theory begins with the notion that individuals understand that societies contain multiple groups and finite resources. It posits that individuals will feel threatened by developments that benefit groups other than their own and will, in turn, oppose those developments and even develop prejudicial attitudes toward out-groups they find threatening. One notable implication of this theory pertains to historically dominant groups who become concerned about their own relative position in society. Since these individuals are more likely to perceive themselves as having something to lose, they are particularly susceptible to feelings of threat even when no clear evidence of a threat is present (Bobo, 1998, 1999; Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996).

Importantly, group position theory can help us think about how white Americans' support for race-targeted policies might be shaped by experiences related both to their race and their economic position. Although white Americans are generally less likely to think about their own race on a consistent basis, situations that call attention to the function of race in society can nonetheless prime them to think about themselves as a member of a racial group. Race-targeted policies, which explicitly direct benefits to non-white racial groups, can serve as one such prime (Bobo, 1998; Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996; Wetts & Willer, 2018). When this prime is activated, whites may act as "opportunity hoarders" (Lewis & Diamond, 2015) by becoming hostile to policies they believe will impose costs on them for the benefit of others (Gilens, 1999; Pearson-Merkowitz & Lang, 2020).

Likewise, group position theory implies that lower-income whites will be especially inclined to oppose race-targeted policies. In a relative sense, they may feel the most threatened because their own economic circumstances are less secure. This implication is supported by evidence. Among whites, lower socioeconomic status is generally correlated with greater out-group prejudice (Carvacho et al., 2013; Manstead, 2018) and less support for race-based policies (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; M. C. Taylor & Mateyka, 2011; see also Hines & Rios, 2021). Taken together, this research demonstrates that when lower-income whites consider their economic position relative to black Americans, the potential opposition towards race-targeted policies increases.

Although, to date, group position theory has focused on explaining experiences of resentment, there is also reason to believe that relative economic position may constrain the influence of racial sympathy. It is certainly notable that whites with higher levels of racial sympathy are more likely to support racial

redistribution (Chudy, 2021), yet it may also be the case that the effect of sympathy depends upon the material conditions of those who feel this emotion. Consistent with group position theory, it is plausible that racially sympathetic whites with higher incomes feel at liberty to support policies that would help racial out-groups. They may feel secure in the resources they possess, less threatened by racial out-groups, and, consequently, may be willing to support allocating resources to a racial out-group when that out-group has their sympathy. They may have the luxury, so to speak, of adopting a position consistent with their sensibilities on racial issues.

Lower-income whites, by contrast, may not feel that they have that same luxury because they are more likely to be in direct competition with black Americans for resources like school funding, scholarships, business loans, and employment. Accordingly, when racially sympathetic whites have lower incomes, their sense of financial security may be lower and their sense of competition with others, including racial others, may be greater. Although many lower-income whites may genuinely feel sympathy toward black Americans, their own financial circumstances may dampen their support for economic policies that place the needs of others ahead of their own. In counterpoint to earlier research, it may not always be the case that lower-income whites oppose racial redistribution because of resentment. Instead, it may be that economic conditions disrupt the move from racial sympathy to support for race-targeted policies. This gives rise to the following hypothesis:

> H1: The influence of racial sympathy will be smaller among lower-income white Americans (as compared to those with higher incomes).

Corroboration for this hypothesis would indicate that support for race-targeted policies has two important conditions. First, consistent with previous research, for individuals to support such policies, they may need to develop racial sympathy (Chudy, 2021; see also Hooker, 2009). When whites lack that sympathy, they are unlikely to see the need for policies designed to specifically benefit black Americans. Second, the development of racial sympathy, by itself, may generally be insufficient to generate support for race-targeted economic redistribution. Even among whites who have higher levels of racial sympathy, it may be easier to move from sympathy to support for people who feel relatively secure in their own financial circumstances.

4. Data and Method

Racial sympathy is still an emerging concept and is not yet included in major surveys. For this reason, few existing datasets include this measure. Therefore, to test our hypotheses, we rely on the dataset that initially demonstrated the influence and conceptual validity of racial sympathy—the 2013 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES; Chudy, 2021). In addition to providing a nationally representative US sample, the CCES also contains measures of racial sympathy, income, and support for horizontal distribution. For our analysis, we focus exclusively on the attitudes of white Americans.

4.1. Horizontal Redistribution

To examine support for horizontal redistribution, we focus on four race-targeted policies: subsidies for businesses in black neighborhoods, support for funding for schools in black neighborhoods, scholarships for black students, and affirmative action in employment and education. Each question asks about support or opposition towards these policies. For businesses, schools, and scholarships, respondents selected their

response from a 5-item Likert scale, ranging from *strongly favor* to *strongly oppose*, with a middle option, *neither favor nor oppose*. The affirmative action item asked respondents for their level of support on a four-point scale ranging from *strongly support* to *strongly oppose* with no middle option. Notably, support is not overwhelming for any of these items. Most items center on the middle point on the scale, with the exception of affirmative action where strong opposition is the modal response and the average falls at 0.39 on a 0 to 1 point scale.

Unfortunately for our purposes, three of the questions about race-targeted policies on the CCES were part of a randomized experiment where some were asked about "poor" businesses, schools, and scholarships, and some were asked about "black" businesses, schools, and scholarships. Given our focus on horizontal redistribution, we focus only on the versions of the questions that explicitly mention race. This decreases our sample sizes relative to other studies relying on CCES data to the low 320s for these questions, whereas nearly twice as many respondents answered the affirmative action question. Analysis of the vertical redistribution questions can be found in Table A4 of the Supplementary File.

4.2. Racial Sympathy and Economic Position

As referenced above, we rely on the 2013 CCES because it includes a distinct measure of racial sympathy. This measure of racial sympathy includes responses to four different vignettes, each "depicting an instance of black suffering" in the present day (Chudy, 2021, p. 126). Two vignettes describe discrimination in hiring (one towards an individual and one towards a group), one describes discrimination in policing, and the final vignette focuses on discrimination faced by a black neighborhood in public service provision. This emphasis on present-day discrimination in the measure of racial sympathy is important for our purposes. Although the rationale for race-targeted policies is that they are necessary for addressing both past and present conditions of discrimination, there is reason to believe that sympathy for present hardships may be especially consequential. Even if people felt bad for past suffering, they may not believe a present-day policy is necessary. Concern with current suffering, however, may be closely related to beliefs about whether new policies are needed to address the challenges black Americans are currently facing. A full description of the measures is included in Table A1 in the Supplementary File. After reading each vignette, respondents express their sympathy for the plight of the individual in the vignette, ranging from *I do not feel any sympathy* to feeling *a great deal of sympathy* (Chronbach's alpha: 0.74).

Because our interest is in how the influence of racial sympathy might vary by material circumstances, we also require a measure of income. We use the income measure that the CCES includes: "Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?" This measure includes 13 different options ranging from "less than $10,000" to "$250,000 or more." It also provides a decent amount of variation, and even though it cannot completely capture the material circumstances of an individual (including things like wealth or debt), it is well-suited for our inquiry.

In addition to these primary measures, we include a measure of ideology and some demographic questions, including age, gender, and education. We use the same measure of ideology as Chudy (2021), a composite of three questions about the role of government (Chronbach's alpha: 0.81). As with much work on racial attitudes, questions often arise about whether policy support results from racial attitudes or a commitment to limited government (DeSante, 2013; Enders, 2021). This measure helps us tailor our approach to account

for this possibility. We also account for other correlates of policy attitudes. Those who are older have become less supportive of government distribution (Ashok et al., 2015), women are more supportive of redistributive policies compared to men (H. E. Bullock & Reppond, 2017; Condon & Wichowsky, 2020), and those with higher levels of education more strongly oppose redistribution (J. G. Bullock, 2021). We rescaled all variables in the models to range between 0 and 1. We also tested for multicollinearity in our models by examining the variance inflation factor scores. Our tests indicate multicollinearity is not a concern in our models.

For ease of interpretation, we report ordinary least squares models below. This is also consistent with the modeling approach used by Chudy (2021) in her original study of the relationship between racial sympathy and support for race-targeted policies. However, given the ordinal structure of our dependent variables, we also verify the robustness of these findings with ordinal logistic regression models in our Supplementary File. Each model predicts support for a horizontally redistributive policy. For each policy, we first model the direct effects of all variables. Then, the second column under each policy reports the models that include an interactive term for racial sympathy and economic position. This enables us to assess whether economic position changes the influence of racial sympathy on policy attitudes. All models reported in the main text and in the Supplementary File use survey weights that incorporate demographic information about the United States population to improve the accuracy of estimates.

5. Does the Influence of Racial Sympathy Depend on Economic Position?

At question in this study is whether the influence of racial sympathy on support for racial redistribution depends on an individual's relative economic position. Group position theory suggests that it will and that racial sympathy will have less influence on the attitudes of lower-income whites. Of course, to examine whether this pattern emerges, there must be sufficient numbers of racially sympathetic individuals across the income scale to generate reliable findings. Accordingly, we first turn to the levels of racial sympathy that exist across income categories.

As a simple test, we divide the income scale into three broad categories: high (those with incomes above $70,000), medium (those with incomes between $30,000 and $70,000), and low (those with incomes below $30,000). Both the mean and median income fell between $40,000 and $50,000, making them comparable measures of central tendency. The high, medium, and low income categories were derived by adding and subtracting one-half of one standard deviation around the mean income. Using this method, we find that levels of racial sympathy across these categories are very similar. For the high, medium, and low-income groups, the average levels of racial sympathy (on a 0 to 1 scale) are 0.655, 0.637, and 0.641, respectively. This allows us to make reasonable inferences about the influence of racial sympathy across the range of income and know that differences in the distribution of racial sympathy are not driving our results. This similarity across income categories is also substantively important in its own right. Lower-income Americans are no less inclined to feel distress for the circumstances of black Americans than their more affluent peers. What remains to be seen is whether their economic position is conducive to channeling racial sympathy into support for racial redistribution.

Table 1 presents our main findings. It is clear that a number of factors influence support for race-targeted policies. Unsurprisingly, support for limited government has a strong negative relationship to support for horizontal redistribution. For those seeking less government, race-based redistribution is counter to their

Table 1. Predicting support for horizontal redistribution by racial sympathy and income.

	Black business		Black schools		Black scholarships		Affirmative action	
Racial sympathy	0.34*** (0.07)	0.14 (0.11)	0.34*** (0.07)	0.11 (0.12)	0.46*** (.07)	0.32** (0.12)	0.23*** (0.05)	0.16* (0.08)
Income	0.08 (0.06)	−0.30+ (0.16)	0.08 (0.06)	−0.34+ (0.18)	0.09 (0.07)	−0.16 (0.18)	0.00 (0.05)	−0.13 (0.12)
Limited government	−0.11** (0.03)	−0.10** (0.03)	−0.25*** (0.04)	−0.24*** (0.04)	−0.18*** (0.04)	−0.18*** (0.04)	−0.30*** (0.03)	−0.29*** (0.03)
Age	−0.00 (0.06)	−0.00 (0.06)	−0.16* (0.07)	−0.16 (0.06)	−0.15* (0.03)	−0.14* (0.07)	−0.16*** (0.05)	−0.16*** (0.05)
Female	−0.08** (0.03)	−0.08** (0.03)	−0.05 (0.03)	−0.05 (0.03)	−0.06+ (0.03)	−0.06+ (0.03)	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)
Education	0.15** (0.05)	0.14** (0.05)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	0.16** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	−0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
Racial sympathy X income		0.57* (0.23)		0.64* (0.25)		0.38 (0.25)		0.22 (0.17)
Constant	0.22*** (0.06)	0.35*** (0.08)	0.46*** (0.07)	0.61*** (0.09)	0.27*** (0.07)	0.36*** (0.09)	0.43*** (0.05)	0.47*** (0.06)
Adj. R2	0.20	0.22	0.27	0.28	0.29	0.29	0.26	0.26
N	322	322	323	323	323	323	640	640

Notes: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$;*$p < 0.05$; +p < 0.1; estimated ordinary least squares models using survey weights; standard errors are in parentheses.

preferences, regardless of whether that policy is to support businesses in black neighborhoods, schools, scholars, or hires. Education is positively related to all four of our dependent variables, though statistically significant for only two models. Women, when controlling for the other factors in the model, are less supportive of horizontally redistributive policies compared to men (but this effect only reaches traditional levels of statistical significance for the models predicting support for black businesses). This contrasts with our prediction for gender, but it is worth noting that there are gender differences in some of our model's other constituent terms–namely support for limited government, racial sympathy, and income. The effect of age is negative across all models but significant for only two of the policies, scholarships for black students and affirmative action.

Most importantly given the focus of this study, the direct effect of racial sympathy comports with expectations. In each of the direct models, the influence of racial sympathy on policy support is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, the base models suggest no direct effect of income on racial redistribution attitudes. Yet to more thoroughly understand how racial sympathy and income contribute to attitudes toward race-targeted policy, we must consider how these factors can work in combination.

We now turn to the relationship of greatest interest: whether the influence of racial sympathy is weaker for lower-income whites. As expected, we find that the interaction term representing the influence of racial sympathy conditional on income is positive and significant in predicting support for funding that benefits businesses and schools in black neighborhoods. The expected interaction of sympathy and income is also positive in the models of support for scholarships for black students and for affirmative action, however, the

interactions do not reach standard levels of statistical significance. A coarse emphasis on statistical significance, however, would obscure the consistency with which the effect of racial sympathy differs by income level. With this in mind, we report the average marginal effect of racial sympathy for respondents across the income scale on support for each race-targeted policy included in this study. This enables us to illustrate whether the effect of racial sympathy differs from 0 (or *no effect*) for respondents with different levels of income and also enables us to illustrate whether the influence of racial sympathy is weaker for those with lower incomes.

Figure 1 presents the marginal effect of racial sympathy across the income scale with respect to each of the four different redistributive policies we consider: subsidies for businesses in black neighborhoods, funding for black schools, scholarships for black students, and affirmative action. For those with lower incomes, the marginal effect of racial sympathy on their preferences for each form of race-targeted policy is smaller, relative to those who are higher on the income scale.

The direction of these findings is consistent with the expectation of group position theory, which anticipates that, as an individual experiences more economic vulnerability, their inclination to support other groups will decline—even when they have sympathy for those groups. Most notably, for two policies—support for businesses in black neighborhoods and support for black schools—the effect of racial sympathy cannot be

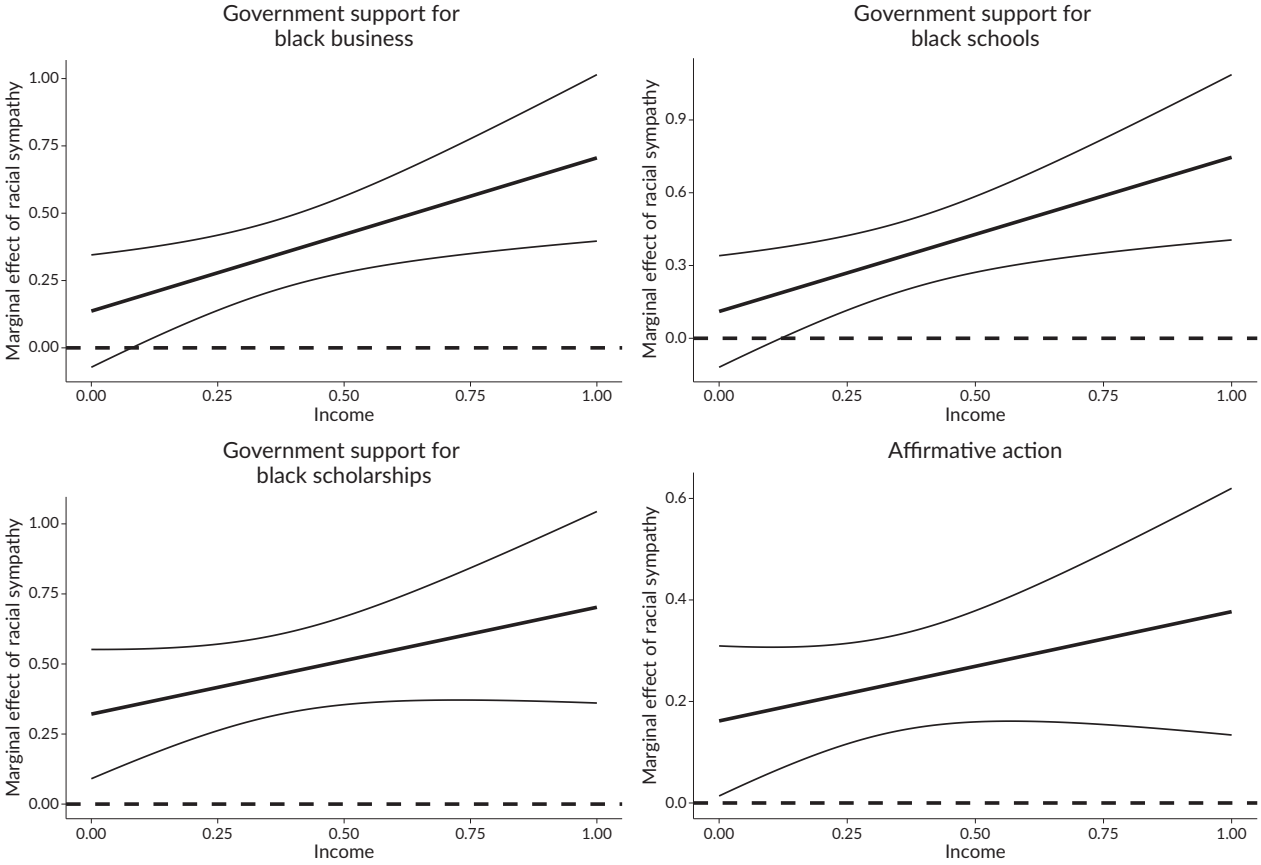

Figure 1. Marginal effect of racial sympathy on horizontal redistribution by income. Notes: Figures show the marginal effect of racial sympathy on support for horizontal policy redistribution across the income distribution; lighter lines indicate confidence intervals; marginal effects are based on the estimates in Table 1.

statistically differentiated from zero for whites with the lowest levels of income. These white Americans are among the least inclined to support race-targeted policies, even when they are racially sympathetic. By contrast, among whites with higher incomes, racial sympathy is more likely to correspond with support for race-targeted policies. Where economic security is greater, sympathy is more likely to translate into support for historically marginalized groups.

However, although these findings corroborate the expectation of group position theory, it warrants noting that the influence of racial sympathy is not completely limited to those with higher incomes. Racial sympathy does matter for lower-income whites, albeit to a lesser degree. Among whites with lower incomes, there is a difference in policy attitudes among those who have greater racial sympathy and those who lack it. This influence of racial sympathy on support for race-targeted policy declines as income declines, but even among relatively low-income citizens, racial sympathy has some effect across all four policies we examine.

It is clearly not impossible for lower-income whites to translate racial sympathy into policy support. This speaks to the power of racial sympathy to generate support for policies that will help others without providing any material benefit to the individual. Nonetheless, the influence of racial sympathy is notably lower at the lower end of the income scale, a pattern that attests to the importance of the material conditions that individuals experience. As hypothesized, expressing support for policies that help a sympathetic group appears to be easiest when one's own material resources provide greater security.

6. Conclusion

It is hardly news that America's history of systemic racial discrimination has contributed to enduring economic disparities between white and black Americans (Katznelson, 2005; Roediger, 2022; Rothstein, 2017; K.-Y. Taylor, 2019). Race-targeted policies that aim to horizontally redistribute resources to black Americans provide one means of addressing this long-standing problem. Yet building the political will necessary to enact such policies, or even to sustain existing policies, remains difficult. Any forward progress requires substantial support from Americans who are white, and white Americans have tended to oppose horizontal redistribution across racial lines (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; M. C. Taylor & Mateyka, 2011; Wetts & Willer, 2018). Accordingly, for those interested in this form of horizontal redistribution, one unavoidable question is how to promote racial solidarity among white Americans (Allen, 2004; Hooker, 2009).

As previous research suggests, the challenge of promoting racial solidarity and the racial sympathy that undergirds it, while difficult, is not impossible. At least when measured in 2013 on the CCES, most white Americans had an inclination toward racial sympathy. Just as importantly, racially sympathetic whites were more likely to support a variety of race-targeted policies (Chudy, 2021). While we do not believe that these findings are unique to 2013, it warrants noting that the data underlying these findings were collected before the emergence of Donald Trump and his uniquely explicit racial politics (Sides et al., 2019). It is possible that the proportion of white Americans expressing racial sympathy has declined in the years since 2013. It is also possible that the influence of racial sympathy on attitudes about racial redistribution may have declined among some whites during these years.

While we cannot definitively rule out this possibility, it is important to note that racial attitudes associated with the election of Donald Trump were already reflected in public opinion before his rise. During the

Obama presidency, race was chronically accessible in the minds of many Americans (Luttig & Callaghan, 2016). Additionally, evidence from this same period indicates that some white Americans were becoming more accepting of hostile rhetoric toward racial minorities (Valentino et al., 2018). This suggests that, relative to 2013, levels of racial sympathy and the influence of racial sympathy on support for race-targeted policies may be similar today. Ultimately, further research is needed to determine whether this is the case. Nonetheless, evidence from the 2013 CCES signals that racial sympathy has existed among many white Americans in recent history and, when it has, this sympathy makes support for racial redistribution more likely.

Our findings echo this insight but also demonstrate how the influence of racial sympathy can be constrained. Consistent with the logic of group position theory, we find that the influence of racial sympathy is smaller among whites with lower incomes who, on material grounds, may find it more difficult to support policies that benefit others. Consequently, the economic challenges of lower-income whites appear to suppress the level of support that whites, as a majority racial group, will provide for horizontal racial redistribution.

This poses a notable challenge for addressing racialized economic disparities in the American context. It also reveals an important pre-condition for developing greater feelings of solidarity across racial lines. It may be critically important to cultivate racial sympathy among whites, but ultimately, that is not enough. Our findings suggest that unless the material position of lower-income white Americans improves, their support for the allocation of resources to other racial groups will remain unlikely. Simply put, political solidarity across racial lines may first require creating the material conditions that enable solidarity to flourish. That, in turn, may require attention to both the economic disparities that exist between racial groups and the economic hardships that people in all racial groups—including many white Americans—continue to face. Feelings of sympathy and expressions of solidarity may be possible, but they are also fragile.

Acknowledgments

We thank the editors and staff of *Social Inclusion* and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on this project. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Dr. Arnim Langer, Dr. Frances Stewart, and Dr. Line Kuppens for their encouragement and constructive feedback in the early stages of this research. Finally, we thank Dr. Jennifer Chudy for developing the concept of racial sympathy and making her data publicly available.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7607
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7607

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Open Access Journal

Exploring Perceptions of Advantage and Attitudes Towards Redistribution in South Africa

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Submitted: 15 September 2023 **Accepted:** 4 January 2024 **Published:** 16 April 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Tackling inequalities and poverty in South Africa has proven extremely difficult and contentious. Indeed, redistribution policies are often widely criticized both by people who argue that these policies are not far-reaching and comprehensive enough and by those who argue they are not justified, too large-scale and/or ineffective, and should be scaled back. While public support amongst relatively advantaged South Africans is crucial for these redistribution policies to be enacted and maintained, interestingly, we know very little about how respective groups of "advantaged" South Africans from different ethnic groups view wealth transfers and other redistribution measures aimed at reducing the prevailing inequalities in South Africa. Drawing on a series of focus group discussions, we gain insights into perceptions of advantage and attitudes towards redistribution amongst groups of black and white "advantaged" South Africans respectively. We find that both black and white "advantaged" South Africans are reluctant to part with some of their wealth in the interests of greater economic equality, citing state corruption and extended network obligations as justification. In addition, there is a shared tendency to understate their economic advantage by identifying firmly as the middle class, thereby abrogating responsibility to the super-wealthy whilst simultaneously expressing paternalistic views towards the poor.

Keywords

economic advantage; elites; inequality; redistribution; South Africa

1. Introduction

That the stark material inequalities that characterise contemporary South Africa are borne out of the country's settler-colonial and apartheid past is little disputed. The path dependencies of uneven capital accumulation—which have conformed to the dictates of racialized economic policy in determining beneficiation and exploitation of respective groups—have, without coincidence, shaped a South Africa where, generally, *those who have* are white and *those without* are black. Despite state-led attempts at positive discrimination in remedying the economic advantages and disadvantages of the past, and despite the efforts of a well-meaning and largely "colour-blind" developmental agenda to elevate the circumstances and prospects of South Africa's black poor, the grand chasm of inequality remains intact in South Africa.

While public support amongst relatively advantaged South Africans, which for our purposes includes all white South Africans and middle-income or affluent people of colour, is crucial for redistribution policies to be enacted and maintained, interestingly, we know very little about how economically and/or professionally relatively advantaged South Africans from different racial groups view their own advantaged position, as well as how they think about wealth transfers and other redistribution measures aimed at reducing the prevailing racial inequalities in South Africa. Over the course of a series of focus group discussions with relatively advantaged black and white South Africans, we aim to explore two things. First, we aim to explore people's views on what it means to be or seen to be "privileged" or "advantaged" in South Africa. Moreover, spurred by the notions of privilege and disadvantage—and a historical understanding of these terms that has not been materially rectified to the degree of the country's democratic legislative changes—our conversations sought to probe the notion of "advantage" amongst the *advantaged*. Particularly, we sought to understand, amongst other things, how advantaged South Africans conceive of themselves, their obligations or specific stressors that are distinct based on their privilege, and their understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the South African context. The last issue feeds to our second objective which was to disentangle people's attitudes and willingness to participate in, and contribute to, some form of wealth transfer in the interests of elevating poor South Africans.

The results of our focus groups are perhaps unsurprising but highly instructive. Both black and white "advantaged" individuals are reluctant to part with some of their wealth in the interests of greater economic equality. This shared reluctance, however, stems from divergent experiences, interpretations of the past, and ultimately different reasoning within each group. More than the economic aspect, this inquiry has provided a window into the anxieties and rationales of middle-class identity in making sense of themselves in relation to an environment of inequality. The findings will be of interest to policymakers and others who see the prospect of a socially cohesive society as being contingent on the material conditions of its people. More specifically, it will be of interest to those who identify the middle class as having a special role to play (on account of their material agency) in fomenting social cohesion broadly, and to those who track the formation of middle-class identity in a changing South Africa.

2. Dynamics of Inequality in South Africa

South Africa stands out as one of the most unequal societies around the globe and an abundance of statistical evidence supports this view. South Africa is plagued by economic inequalities on multiple dimensions: First, there is sharp inequality between the haves and the have-nots. This form of economic inequality between rich

and poor individuals and households can be referred to as "vertical inequality." Furthermore, South Africa is host to economic inequalities that are "horizontal" in nature, i.e., they exist and persist between groups that share a salient identity, such as racial or ethnic groups (Stewart, 2008). A product of centuries of colonialization and the subsequent period of apartheid, the most prominent line of horizontal inequality manifests along the divide between white and black South Africans.

According to World Bank data on the Gini coefficient, a common measure to quantify vertical income inequality, South Africa ranks last amongst all 167 countries for which data was available. What is more, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that the top-earning 10% of the population were responsible for 51% of total incomes while 40% of the population lived below the lower national poverty line, pointing towards a large gap between the rich and the poor (IMF, 2020). Chatterjee et al. (2021) note that the wealthiest 0.01% of South Africans hold around 15% of aggregate wealth, which is more than the poorest 90% of the population. Many scholars agree that since the end of apartheid, the level of vertical inequality has not improved but—quite contrarily—has increased on both the overall level and within population groups (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Also, despite manifold policy initiatives aimed at reducing vertical inequality, David et al. (2023) show that significant portions of South African society do not perceive any improvements in inequality, which may be associated with low reported levels of social cohesion.

Above and beyond inequality between the rich and the poor, colonialization and apartheid created significant levels of racial inequality. Shortly after the end of apartheid, resulting from broad exclusion from economic participation, the black majority (76.9% of the population) earned only 35.7% of the total personal incomes while white South Africans, who accounted for just over 9% of the population at the time, earned more than 50% (Terreblanche, 2002). This also manifested in education: while in 1994, 90% of white South Africans had at least some basic education, the share amongst black South Africans was as low as 46% (Nattrass & Seekings, 2001). Even more illustratively, while 100% of the white population enjoyed electricity and piped water, access to those services amongst black South Africans was only as high as 37% and 18% respectively (Nattrass & Seekings, 2001). Even in 2007, the small white minority still owned around 90% of the land (Stewart, 2008).

The immediate post-apartheid period saw the advent of numerous policy initiatives aimed at the correction of past injustices. Many of the policy efforts of this time aimed specifically at inequalities in the labour market, with the main goal being the establishment of a framework that allowed for labour to unionize, the eradication of inhumane working conditions, and mandating larger firms to report on the representation of the different population groups (especially race and gender) and the structure of salaries. In addition to the interventions related to the labour market, an important instrument in the reduction of horizontal inequality has been the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act since 2003, which has seen two major revisions since its inception (Burger & Jafta, 2010). An important aspect of this policy is a scorecard that captures the progress of private enterprises in multiple fields: the share of equity ownership and managerial positions held by black persons ("ownership" and "management control"), investments in special training for black employees ("skills development"), and procurement from other companies with high scores ("enterprise and supplier development"). High scores on those dimensions can give a given business advantages over others, for example in public procurement. In the context of the BBE, black refers more generally to groups that have faced past discrimination, thus including Indian South Africans, Coloureds, women, and members of other disadvantaged groups. In addition to this, Stewart (2016) notes that an array

of universalist welfare policies have benefitted black South Africans disproportionally more than whites, thus contributing to a reduction in between-group inequality.

While studies have shown that economic HIs have generally reduced between 1970 and 2012 (David et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2010), significant challenges remain. The most recent data shows that 55% of South Africa's 57 million people live in households in which the average per capita monthly income is under the upper bound poverty line of R1, 138. By comparison, the top 2% of South Africans live in households in which the average per capita monthly income falls above R19, 089 (Stewart, 2008). The policy initiatives from the previous years were not free of criticism: The BEE Act, for example, has been criticized for benefitting mainly a small black elite rather than the group as a whole (see, e.g., Freund, 2007; Mbeki, 2009; Tangri & Southall, 2008). Indeed, Stewart et al. (2010) show that between 1996 and 2001, economic inequality between wealthy black and white South Africans has reduced while it has increased amongst the poorer segments of society. Similarly, Espi et al. (2019) point towards significant inequities at the intersection of race and gender by showing that black females suffer both from a pay gap—i.e., they earn less than their white counterparts working in the same occupation—and occupational segregation.

3. Theorizing Perceptions of Inequality and Support for Redistribution

Few studies have thus far explored how widespread support for redistribution is amongst South Africans and under which circumstances they would be willing to endorse government policies aimed at the alleviation of horizontal inequality. Nyamnjoh et al. (2020) show that black South Africans are the group that is most in favour of racial restitution while white South Africans show the highest levels of opposition. Their analysis further indicates that intergroup threat, negative outgroup attitudes, and intergroup contact may be amongst the factors that drive policy attitudes. Similar results were found for issues of affirmative action and land reform (Dixon et al., 2007; Durrheim et al., 2007). These group differences may partly be attributable to self-interest effects, whereby those who expect to benefit the most from a given policy should be the most in favour of it (Roberts et al., 2011)

Apart from these few exceptions, however, research on attitudes towards horizontal forms of redistribution has been quite scarce—maybe with the exception of affirmative action in the United States—and much more literature has focused on vertical inequality. This constitutes the first lacuna we want to address in this article. Not much is known about what drives individual reactions toward group-based redistribution despite the importance of economic HIs all around the globe and in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa (see also Dixon et al., 2017).

An increasing literature in recent years has advanced the assumption that perceptions of inequality play a major role in whether one is willing to support horizontal redistribution instruments or not (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2017; Hauser & Norton, 2017; Niehues, 2014). The underlying premise is that individuals are inequality averse and that perceiving higher levels of inequality will, all else equal, be related to higher support for redistributive policies. However, many individuals are unable to accurately assess the prevailing inequality levels in their society and thus their demand for redistribution might be based on false ideas about how specific assets are distributed. One who severely underestimates the existing inequalities should thus be more likely to reject government intervention aimed at horizontal redistribution. Studies from the American context have shown that individuals are notoriously bad at estimating racial inequality. Further,

when false assessments of inequality are rectified by giving accurate data, many individuals adjust their redistributive preferences (Becker, 2019). In the study at hand, we are interested in how advantaged South Africans perceive the severity of the existing racial inequalities.

An important aspect of how inequality is perceived is related to lay beliefs about the causes of inequality. Existing studies have shown that ideas about the causes of inequality are commonly structured along two dimensions: Some arguments emphasize structural causes of inequality, such as systemic discrimination of specific groups, while others revolve around internal characteristics of members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Previous studies have shown that individuals who perceive the causes of inequality as predominantly structural exhibit a higher demand for redistribution compared to those who emphasise internal causes, thereby shifting the blame to members of disadvantaged groups (Ramasubramanian, 2010; Reyna et al., 2006). Interestingly, in forming ideas about the causes of group inequality, individuals may be subject to biases introduced by motivated reasoning. As group membership constitutes an important aspect of one's self-concept (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), perceptions of group success or failure may be prone to misperceptions that serve to enhance or protect the status of one's group. Consequently, members of disadvantaged groups might be motivated to perceive the causes of their relative disadvantage as being external, such as systemic discrimination, while members of advantaged groups may be more likely to explain their relative advantage as a result of agentic traits of themselves and their fellow in-group members (Hewstone, 1990). Our work aims to document whether both black and white South Africans will agree on past discrimination as the main cause of today's inequality or whether their ideas about the causes of inequality will diverge.

Apart from individual perceptions of horizontal inequalities, we want to focus on how South Africans perceive and make sense of the notion of advantage. Much of the literature about attitudes towards group-based redistribution in other contexts (most notably the United States) has assumed that members of objectively advantaged groups should be less likely to support redistribution policies as they should see this as a threat to their individual or collective interest, while disadvantaged groups should show higher levels of support (Aberson, 2003; Jacobson, 1985). However, recent studies document that perceptions of group advantage often differ significantly—even within groups. For instance, increasing numbers of white Americans seem to perceive themselves as a disadvantaged group in their country (Norton & Sommers, 2011). DiTomaso et al. (2011) highlight the importance of the domestic policy environment for the emergence of this somewhat counterintuitive phenomenon. According to their study based on a series of focus group discussions, it is a widespread belief amongst members of the white middle class that unequal opportunities across gender and racial groups no longer exist in this day and age, which gives beneficiaries of affirmative action an undeserved benefit. Thus, the perception of inequities created by policies such as affirmative action may obscure the picture that is drawn by objective measures of inequality and cause members of dominant groups to see themselves as relatively disadvantaged.

This leads us to the second gap we want to address in this contribution. Little is known about how black and white South Africans perceive their group's fate beyond what statistical inequality measures tell us. We are specifically interested in the narratives that South Africans use to frame their own and their group's relative status within society, and whether white South Africans will acknowledge their privileged position or will position themselves as a group which faces discrimination now, due to the political dominance of black South Africans and the range of policies that have been adopted to reduce the prevailing inequalities.

4. Research Design and Methodology

Since the objective of this research was to understand and explore perceptions of advantage and attitudes towards redistribution amongst relatively advantaged South Africans, a key challenge lies in how we define the notion of *advantage*—and in so doing identifying the target group to be addressed by this study. The first issue here is that in many respects, *advantage* is a thinly veiled euphemism for *privilege*—a word that, to use contemporary parlance, can be particularly triggering for those it is employed to describe. In this sense, it was expedience that led us to the less emotive *advantaged* which we intended to use as a proxy for the dynamics of privilege and dispossession.

The second issue was delineating the parameters of the advantaged group. As a point of departure, we assumed that all white people are privileged notwithstanding the variation of economic status within this group. We did not test this assumption to its limits (and elected not to interview poor white South Africans) but we thought it an important methodological mechanism that would generate emotive and relevant discussion (within white groups). The second component of the *advantaged* was more difficult to identify but broadly speaking, we were looking for middle-income or affluent people of colour. While facing additional financial challenges like a "black tax"—something that does not affect their white contemporaries—this group is nevertheless comparatively financially advantaged and can leverage social and professional capital from their vantage of relative privilege.

We define the middle class based on vulnerability or rather, the (in)vulnerability to poverty as the key criterion defining middle-class status (Zizzamia et al., 2016). The notion of (in)vulnerability is drawn from a socio-political reading of the middle class that identifies this group as being especially empowered and thus possessing a degree of security that is not available to the lower class, working class, and poor. While we are sympathetic to the assumptions of (in)vulnerability in identifying a materially secure group that possesses the capacity and security to resist poverty, our own identification of the *advantaged* was far more rudimentary. This is mostly for methodological reasons. Recruiting focus groups of middle-class participants proved challenging enough without the complexity of cross-checking each participant against external data to ensure their (in)vulnerability to poverty.

As the study was intended to be exploratory, we opted for a variant of a snowballing methodology that began with identifying a key contact person who expressed interest in exploring questions of advantage and redistribution in a focus group setting. Primary targets for recruitment of these individuals included individuals participating in business chambers of commerce or finance, school governing board members, and individuals who were members of sports clubs, country clubs, and service associations such as Rotary or Lions clubs, as well as administrative staff working at local Universities.

Having identified a key contact person, we typically left the recruitment of participants to them, that is, someone who was not a stranger to those they were recruiting and whose home provided a comfortable and casual setting for the focus group discussions. We asked our focus group hosts to ensure that all the participants invited could "reasonably be considered advantaged." If they enquired further as to what we meant by this, we clarified that we were interested in those people on the "middle to upper end of the social ladder," avoiding conflating income as the sole determinant of advantage. This approach means that advantage in our study is necessarily subjective, based both on the host's perception of advantage as

well as that of invited individuals who would have to assess whether they could reasonably be considered advantaged.

For the most part, the indirect recruitment conformed with our expectations of what the advantaged looked like, with most groups comprising wealthy corporate professionals, lawyers, middle management, local government employees, and doctors, in addition to third- or fourth-generation middle-class participants (see Table 1). In a few instances, the variance of the *advantaged* became more apparent, with struggling entrepreneurs and teachers joining this group. This variance or "spectrum of advantaged," while not controlled for by the researchers, offered a window into notions of relative privilege and how this played out amongst the heterogeneous material subjectivities of this group. One unanticipated effect of the indirect recruitment was evident in the lack of generational variance in groups. This was a consequence of hosts inviting their friends and colleagues to participate. By way of example, one group was comprised of eight women in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Another was comprised of a balanced gender mix of 20-something-year-olds, the majority of whom were young doctors.

We were initially concerned that the commonality of gender, generation, or profession, and that participants knew one another prior to the focus group, would limit the discussion or provide a distinct perspective consistent with the common denominator of each group. Instead, the shared commonality and the existing relations between participants allowed certain liberties that a focus group amongst strangers might not permit. For one, participants appeared comfortable amongst friends and acquaintances. This comfort translated into deeper, often personally compromising, reflections on the guiding questions. It also allowed a certain robustness to emerge as participants' histories or views were known to the group and might challenge a speaker who was speaking in a way that was considered to be inconsistent with their perspective. One downside of the familiarity however, although impossible to control for, was the degree to which participants withheld their views for fear of judgement from the same people who form part of their social network. While it did not appear that participants were hesitant to share their views, it was not clear whether this concern had any bearing on participants' responses.

Each focus group was deliberately kept racially homogenous. Black focus groups were facilitated by a middle-class black facilitator and equally, white focus groups were run by a middle-class white facilitator. Our insistence on racial homogeneity was in maintaining a methodological consistency with the identarian impetus for this study and the application of a "safe spaces" logic. The racially exclusive "safe space" allowed a depth to the focus group discussion that was left unobstructed by the fear of causing offense or being offended. This took different forms in both cases. Typically, in white groups, the liberty of exclusivity was experienced as freedom from the fear of being labelled a racist. In black groups, this exclusivity was experienced as freedom from the hegemony of whiteness, and black groups tended to be more vulnerable and tentative, lacking a shared understanding or common denominator that was more apparent in white groups.

Our research insights are based on insights gained from 15 focus group discussions and two individual interviews. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants by gender, age range, vocation, and where the focus group was held. In total, 91 people partook in this study. The focus groups were held in Cape Town, Knysna, Makhanda, and East London, with the researchers traveling to the Eastern Cape to gain a degree of geographical variety. A larger study would require crossing the country and certainly Johannesburg—

Table 1. Composition of the discussions by number of participants, gender, place, age range, and vocation (black and white discussants).

	No. of discussions	No. of participants		Place	Age range	Vocation of participants
		Women	Men			
People of colour	3 FGDs	12	10	East London	25–50	Doctors, young professionals, teachers, entrepreneurs
	1 FGDs	1	3	Makhanda	27–40	University administrators and music producers
	2 FGDs	2	9	Cape Town	26–47	Working professionals, finance, IT, students engaged in tertiary study
	2 interviews	1	1	Kynsna	28–45	Communications manager, mid-level management
White	1 FGDs	3	1	East London	25–32	Doctors, entrepreneur, teacher
	1 FGDs	1	3	Makhanda	35–55	Lawyers, business owners, farmers
	2 FGDs	3	5	Knysna	38–60	Management, secretary, business owners (textiles and tourism)
	5 FGDs	26	10	Cape Town	28–72	Retirees, corporate execs, developers, accountants, business owners
Subtotal						
People of colour	8	16	23			
White	9	33	19			
Total	17	49	42			

Note: FGDs stands for focus group discussions.

regarded as the economic heartland of South Africa and having a distinct elite identity of its own—warrants substantial attention in securing conclusive national-level findings. The majority of the sample was white, with 43% of the sample being people of colour. Similarly, just over half the sample (53%) were women, although, within white groups, men were the majority of participants, whilst the converse was true of the groups with people of colour.

5. Denial of Responsibility

In tackling questions of advantage, inequality, and redistribution, building consensus around a single issue is not easy. Yet, there was one point that almost all participants agreed on—that material redistribution imposed on the advantaged should, if anything, be a recourse of last resort. However, the reasons advanced for the abrogation of responsibility for redress differed between groups of white participants and those comprising people of colour.

Barring two groups and a handful of individual participants, the majority of white respondents did not support the principle of material redistribution in the interests of equality, nor did they support the notion of sacrifice. Those who were supportive in principle tended toward a charitable reading of the notion and felt that any compulsory mechanism that would affect their material status would be undesirable in the context of more effective solutions.

Typically, the preferred, more effective solutions proposed by these groups amounted to an externalisation of personal responsibility and the scapegoating of other institutions that have failed in their mandate to uplift South Africa's poor. Government, and notably the provision of education, was the primary target in the displacing of respondents' responsibility. As one participant put it: "If you're going to change anything in this country, its education, education, education: There's no two ways about it" (developer (w)). This view was supplemented by expressed exasperation over the disbanding of technikons and teacher training colleges and called for their re-establishment, thereby boosting the number of teachers and skilled artisans as "not everyone can go to university" (business executive (w)).

After education, tackling corruption (and in particular the institutionalised malfeasance known as "state capture") as well as doing away with market unfriendly policies like BEE were high priority issues on white respondents' lists. The side-stepping of personal responsibility, even by those participants who claimed to feel a sense of guilt for having unduly benefited from apartheid was a common theme across white groups.

One participant described her friends' feelings of guilt for having benefited from apartheid around the time of the onset of democracy in 1994 explaining:

> [In 1994], I think that most white people felt like they needed to help and help now and there was this huge feeling of *ubuntu* [but] it's just petering out because white people are going, "I pay all these taxes and it just gets scooped off by people like the Guptas and the corruption." (business owner (w))

When asked whether the wealthy, in addition to taxes, should sacrifice more to improve the lives of the poor, white participants provided historical anecdotes, cultural explanations, migratory threat, and recipients' poor financial planning skills in explaining why a personal sacrifice would be an ineffective course of action. For example, when the conversation shifted to land restitution, a participant reminded the group of how traditional leaders and "Pondo chiefs" had benefited from the colonial acquisition of land. This was met with agreement from the other participants, and it was suggested that "they" (poor black people) should seek first material assistance from "their" leaders: the chiefs and traditional leaders who too have unduly benefited from the past. Interestingly, in contrast to this view, a generational division emerged in some groups with many younger white participants describing the stifling guilt that they feel and a sense of shame that has not eroded but has rather intensified as they have come to understand the extent of the injustices that have benefited them. Rather than see the avenues for recourse close, their problem is the opposite one, and they feel overwhelmed with the many ways in which they ought to "give it all back" and, in some way, relinquish their privilege. In most instances, this conundrum becomes a nihilistic contortion without ever bearing a substantive outcome as even against this guilt, they are not ready to part freely with their assets, land, or inheritance. Interestingly, the net impact of those who are fatigued and no longer feel guilty, and those who are paralysed by their guilt, is still nil.

Like white groups, the onus of responsibility for decreasing inequality in black groups was reflected onto the state and sparingly, onto white South Africans that had benefited from the past. However, the responses of black participants sketched a highly complex relationship with wealth with almost all participants being subjected to financial pressures and expectations from immediate and extended family. "Black tax"—as described by participants—was recognised as an already existing financial burden on middle-class black participants concerning poorer people in their immediate circles and, as such, there was no enthusiasm for additional forms of material redistribution beyond existing stressors on individuals' wealth. Supporting cousins' schooling, a nephew's university degree, and aged parents were common anecdotes. Asking whether participants ought to pay more in addition to the "black tax" was largely rendered redundant for black participants. However, a few participants, especially younger black participants, were willing to entertain this idea in relation to the responsibility of white South Africans. Those who supported the idea that material redistribution should start with white people tended to be young and described how land and "the ownership of assets is not held by the people" (student (poc)). Older participants tended to be reconciliatory and conservative in response to this question and would sooner chide poorer black South Africans' lack of individual ambition and laziness for being the cause of inequality rather than an unfairness attributed to white people. This generational division was evidenced in the tension between a particular social conservatism or liberalism and was most pronounced between a group of women, all of whom were teachers. The younger women offered unambiguous views that identified white people as being variously implicated in inequality whereas the older women were reticent to implicate any one group as if that might be considered unbecoming or impolite.

6. Denial of Privilege

An interesting comparative angle between respective groups emerged through the way individuals made sense of their social status and where they were located in the socio-economic hierarchy of South Africa. The more immediate comparative frame of reference for all participants tended to be with people of the same skin colour and of the same racial community. Thus, the success and status of neighbours, colleagues, friends, and family members provided comparative markers in locating one's own position. Moving beyond the immediate markers, however, the opposing ends of this hierarchy—privilege and poverty—were by-and-large concepts that remained racialized across groups with privilege being white and poverty being black. Generally, white groups used the opportunity to position themselves within the social hierarchy of the middle class as another avenue by which to evade responsibility and relinquish personal agency. The idea of being "the-middle-of-the-middle" came up across a few groups. While understanding that they were fortunate, white participants described how they lacked the power and wealth of those above them and were unable to effect any real change, although many acknowledged too that they were not "just scraping by."

By "middling," white participants were able to shirk any acknowledgement of their special circumstances or undue privilege. This responsibility was reflected onto the higher-ranked and super-wealthy group who was said to buy 100 million Rand houses and who were perceived as never engaging in any volunteer activities. Ironically, one focus group, comprised of business leaders seated in a lavishly decorated lounge, suggested that it is this mega-wealthy group who should be made to pay more towards reducing inequality. Displacing responsibility on to a far wealthier and, what was often implied, a more reprehensible group of rich people served to diminish respondents' own agency. The powerlessness of respondents (regardless of their good intentions) was summed up by a participant. Acknowledging that "the economy sits with the whites and the

demographics sits on the other side," they went on to say, "we [white South Africans] are 4 million against 56 million, there's not a hell of a lot of influence you can have" (developer (w)).

In addition to the super-wealthy, white participants were wary of, and intimidated by, an emerging *nouveau riche*. An "old money" versus "new money" division emerged in groups as white participants described the garish displays and conspicuous consumption of what they referred to as "the black diamonds"—a colloquial and pejorative term used to describe a newly wealthy class of black elite in South Africa. One respondent described how the black "new money" made him feel uncomfortable on a recent trip back to his home city of Johannesburg. This discomfort translated into a sense of not belonging there and he left dejected. This was reflected in other groups and participants, who appeared comfortable wearing an "old money" moniker, expressed how they were intimidated by the "new money" group. Raising the spectre of the super-wealthy and the newly wealthy served again to minimize the role and agency of the white advantaged. This added complexity, while relevant, was defensively employed by participants who were evasive in responding to a question of wealth redistribution from their own material positionality.

In contrast, the responses of black participants were considerably less uniform, and while many spoke generally on behalf of "black people," these generalisations were often contradictory across groups. The majority of black participants, like their white counterparts, denied any form of privilege notwithstanding their relative financial status. One young group, having grown up middle class, acknowledged feeling a degree of privilege, but explained that they would not want people to know that they conceded this. In the main, the "black tax," historical dispossession of land, apartheid, and the idea that "whiteness" is interchangeable with "privilege," set the benchmark for a notion of advantage that was unattainable for black participants, and highlighted the inaccuracy of comparisons with the white middle class for this group. As one participant—who acknowledged some degree of financial advantage—explained:

> If you are a person of colour you can't be privileged. If you are white, you are allowed to [be] accepted in a lot of spaces. But if you think about it, how many people in your family have the same success as you? I am still helping my family to do better. I can never be privileged until everyone in my family can stand on their own. (doctor (poc))

Where white participants discussed advantage in terms of "old money" and "new money," this distinction held less relevance in black groups. In some instances, participants exhibited a particular working-class solidarity and, despite obvious material discrepancies and bourgeois aesthetics, were reluctant to identify out of this class. For others, this was balanced by a breezy and passing appreciation of the notion of having "made it," and in some instances, an open shame about not enjoying the same material identifiers of wealth as one's contemporaries. By way of example, an interview with a local government employee in the Western Cape revealed the participant's sense of inadequacy when he visited the Eastern Cape:

> When you go to the Eastern Cape, you feel so small because people there are driving German cars. If we go to social spaces, I feel like leaving my car. In the Eastern Cape, average government employees have nice perks; there you kind of feel like people are balling. (poc)

Moreover, how people describe the accomplishments of others (who were not present), rather than themselves, indicated that while a modesty associated with working-class solidarity is good, so too is the

boldness associated with "balling," a term used to denote an abundance of money, possessions, property, or other material goods. For the most part, modesty and aspiring to material success were not brought into conflict with one another as competing ideas locked in tension. Rather, participants appeared comfortable holding and expressing both positions without discomfort.

7. Guilt-Laden Paternalism

While black and white participants largely differed on the historical drivers of inequality, they found some common ground concerning their attitudes towards the poor. Both groups subscribed to popular perceptions about the poor and demonstrated a sometimes scornful and other times paternalistic view of poor South Africans. White concern about inequality was rarely understood by participants as having any empirical basis in the past. Instead, white participants explained that inequality was the result of multiple crises in the democratic era in failed affirmative action, corruption and "the Guptas," poor education, etc., and that these were the most pressing drivers of economic division. Overwhelmingly, the majority of white participants were opposed to the idea of material redistribution on this basis, as well as a deep distrust of the institutions of state and the state's capacity to allocate tax revenue.

Barring affirmative action, the above criticism had significant traction within black groups as well. Certainly, many black participants identified colonialism and apartheid as drivers of racialized inequality but many who did also cited the same drivers of inequality as their white counterparts. Many responses echoed a distrust of the government and its ability to facilitate some form of material redistribution. The notion of "black laziness" that emerged in some white groups was applied by black participants to describe poor black people and explain their circumstances. This was accompanied by tropes about the "psyche of dependence" that was attributed to all black people in white groups, and was, in its own way, utilised in black groups to stress a class division with the poor. In this way, a strong commonality between white and black groups emerged in how both described poorer South Africans.

Generally, references to the poor ranged from concerned paternalism to outright disdain. Social grant recipients were considered cunning in some white groups where it was implied that poor people were falling pregnant intentionally in order to derive more social grant support. Similarly, in one black group, participants expressed frustration with the "free hand-outs" received by those on social grants, and supported one participant's proposal that grants should only be paid "after some form of labour has been given in exchange by the recipient" (teacher (poc)). This paternalism reflected a strong class dynamic amongst black South Africans and was perhaps most tellingly outlined in a participant's reflection on her relationship with her domestic worker. Conceding that she might pay her domestic worker less than other white people, she explained, however, that she provided more tangible benefits: "We eat the same food…our contract is informal…I treat and regard her as my sister….I know where she lives, and this might not be the case with most whites" (teacher (poc)).

This dynamic was identified by a black participant in another group. Responding to a question about intra-race inequality and whether "black people who get ahead economically see themselves as better than poor blacks," the participant responded: "It happens…I am sure it happens a lot. I know sometimes that even black domestics often say 'I will rather work for a white person'" (civil servant (poc)). The respective paternalism of both black and white participants was identified in each instance by reflective and self-critical

group members—most of whom tended to be younger participants. Interestingly, against the middle-class scorn and paternalism, an alternative corollary of middle-class guilt also emerged in both black and white groups, although it found expression in divergent ways. Conceding that "we don't help each other as blacks," a black participant identified a very real class division in black South Africa. This was reiterated in another black group that, although not exonerating white peoples' historical contribution to black poverty, placed the onus of responsibility for socio-economic change on black people and bemoaned black peoples' failure to uplift poorer members of their community.

These feelings of frustration with black middle-class paternalism and a disdain for the poor translated into what self-critical black respondents described as "black guilt." Concerned that they had not done enough to uplift those around them, it was "black guilt" that led advantaged black South Africans to part with some of their wealth. It was black guilt too that, in addition to the financial need of recipients and familial expectation, could be understood as a driver behind the "black tax" that almost all black participants were subject to. Similar in name alone, it was "white guilt" that formed one of the drivers in the charitable impulses of white groups. Yet rather than a sense of guilt for not supporting "their own" or those in their community, this was a guilt that—to varying degrees—recognizes a connection between black poverty and white participants' relative advantage. For white participants however, guilt was scarcely acknowledged and for the most part, participants' charitable inclinations were motivated not by a sense of sacrifice for their advantaged status or to assuage past wrongdoings but by a confluence of philanthropic or religious values or good intent.

It is difficult to gauge at which point the "black tax" and broader black philanthropy meet scornful paternalism and the notion that "we don't help each other as blacks." While so many financially advantaged black South Africans are involved in a mechanism of material redistribution to uplift and sustain those around them, it is clear that this does not preclude a disdain for poor people and a strong sense of class division. This division forms the point at which different black middle-class identities pivot and are shaped. Feelings of shame—perhaps more readily expressed privately rather than in a group—and celebrated notions of success in balling are held in tandem with a working-class solidarity and, in other moments, a disdain for the same said working class.

8. Hollowness, "Tokenism," and Privilege

In the immediate reflections after a focus group, facilitators recorded the state of groups, the predominant feelings, and any changes in the group's cohesiveness. In black groups, participants often expressed relief and surprise that their thoughts, experiences, and feelings were reflected in the contributions of other participants. Barring the somewhat formal tension that a generational dynamic registered in groups, black focus groups concluded with constructive and supportive energy, with participants who had not known each other before, swapping phone numbers and thanking one another. This cohesiveness was evident in four of the nine white groups, where the discussion led to a sense of break-through, with the conversation flowing easily. After these groups, participants thanked one another and approached the facilitator to express how much they enjoyed a difficult conversation, or that they thought it was important to have more difficult conversations of this nature. The opposite was true for the remaining white groups which were at times tense and uncomfortable or outright confrontational, and ended without the casual chit-chat that proceeded the other four groups. Those groups where the cohesiveness between participants flat-lined were the same groups where participants could not agree on notions of privilege and the drivers of racial inequality.

Apart from a general discrepancy in group cohesiveness between white and black focus groups, a smaller sample of participants in each described similar feelings of professional insecurity, anxiety, and "hollowness" as a result of racism (in black groups) and the accusation of "white privilege" (in white groups). Responding to a question of whether black people could be privileged, a black participant explained:

> Here is my problem with accepting the label of being privileged….There are things that we can't ignore…a successful black person is always looked at negatively because it is questioned how they got to the top. They [white people] don't see it as legitimate success. (IT professional (poc))

This view was echoed in black groups in a broader expression of professional anxiety related to success and achievement that participants outlined. Particularly, participants described how they always felt that they had to prove themselves against a sometimes expressed but mostly unspoken stigma that sought to delegitimise their achievements by insinuating that every professional success was the result of affirmative action or "tokenism."

Affirmative action through BEE and racial quotas in sport are divisive talking points in South Africa that are regularly debated on radio talk shows and newspaper columns. Participant descriptions echoed much of what is described by black professionals in the public domain which identifies an unfair expectation on black professionals to work harder and achieve extraordinary heights to be able to defend themselves against the suggestion that their professional achievements are not of their own making, but rather a consequence of their skin colour. Black participants went on to describe the resultant psychological burden of this expectation and the feeling that their achievements were always hollow and would never be recognised as a result of their skill, hard work, and dedication.

The same feeling of professional hollowness, and anxiety that their achievements were the result of their skin colour and not their skill, was echoed by some early-career professional white participants. A white group in their late 20s and early 30s and on the cusp of their careers did not deny their own privilege and how they had been advantaged by the past, although they cautioned against essentialising history. This group took issue with a popular, and what they described as an unhelpful discourse around privilege which they felt demonised success and invalidated their personal achievements:

> I don't feel like being described as privileged is necessarily helpful. I know it and I don't think it accomplishes anything. (professional (w))

> To me, the tone and the aim of the conversation is really important. If someone describes me as privileged in a discussion about our past and with a commitment to understanding each other and working towards a shared, better future, it elicits engagement from me, even though it is difficult. But if the point is to attack me, I would prefer to disengage and prefer not to be part of that type of conversation. (professional (w))

> What bothers me about the recent discourse on privilege in South Africa is that, for me, as a white man, any success I have in my life feels hollow. If I succeed, there will always be whispers that it is a result of my privilege, and if I fail, no one cares. Any victory would be a hollow victory. I would never be able to bask in glory, even though I worked for it. (professional (w))

These participants did not want to be made to feel bad for doing well. They held both an acknowledgement of privilege and a refusal to let it contradict their own achievements. This same group thought that a compulsory contribution that singled out white people would constitute a step too far, yet they spoke earnestly of their intentions to support charities, NGOs, and their domestic workers' children if they became financially successful in their careers. The participants recognized their advantage, and that inequality is a grave problem in South Africa. However, they did not see themselves as part of a problem but wanted to be seen as part of the solution. They described how they were willing to help to redistribute advantage, but not at the cost of their own hopes and futures, and were unwilling to give their money to the state or have to do so through extended taxes. They recognized the contradiction inherent in this position.

A popular meme on social media, highlighting the inequality of the gender pay gap and the lack of racial transformation in business, encouraged (women and black) people to "carry yourself with the confidence of a mediocre white man." It was a humorous jibe intended to identify an evident enough truth: that mediocre white men are a common commodity in the working world; are full of unwavering confidence in their own ability born of their privilege and entitlement and suffer little to no professional anxiety, and no sense of inadequacy or "imposter syndrome" as a result. It is the consequence of some celestial cynicism that the accusation of "privilege"—the very foundation of mediocre white confidence—has, in being identified, had the converse effect on some white people, registering an inadequacy and "hollowness" in their professional achievements. This hollowness is comparable to the psychological burden faced by many black professionals as a result of the racist stigma attached to their own successes. If both phenomena are to persist, the prevalence of professional inadequacy and anxiety in South Africa can be expected to increase.

9. Conclusion

"Black guilt," "white guilt," and "hollowness" are experiences of deep inadequacy for the black and white middle class. Stemming from very different material drivers and reflecting divergent subjective realities, it is nevertheless somewhat uncanny that both groups can experience very similar feelings of professional inadequacy or feel a comparable sense of guilt in relation to the poor, but for different reasons. In fact, what is perhaps one of the more surprising aspects to emerge from this work is the similarity of attitudes between White and Black participants who, despite oftentimes quite different reasonings and certainly different life trajectories, were united in their denial of their own privilege, their rejection of redistribution as a productive way forward, and in their shared feelings of guilt and anxiety about how they might be perceived.

Whilst it was clear that notions of poverty and privilege, the two extremes of the distribution as it were, remained racialised in the minds of participants, perceptions of the severity of inequality across all focus groups were limited by the tendency of participants to make within-group comparisons rather than between-group comparisons of their own socio-economic position relative to others. In making sense of their own socio-economic position, white participants typically positioned themselves as part of the middle class, thereby transferring responsibility for redress of inequality elsewhere, either to the super-wealthy (typically White) or to the newly wealthy (typically Black). Similarly, the majority of black participants denied any form of privilege notwithstanding their relative financial status, citing historical dispossession, current material family obligations, and privilege as being synonymous with whiteness as reasons to deny privilege.

A strong commonality between white and black groups also emerged through how both described the drivers of inequality. Whilst black participants were more likely to identify colonialism and apartheid as historical drivers of racialized inequality, conversations did not typically dwell on these factors but shifted quickly to contemporary external factors, such as corruption, a failing education system, and counter-productive affirmative action policies. There was a lot of agreement on these matters amongst black and white participants, with relatively less attention or importance being attached to the legacy effects of apartheid and colonialism.

Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that most participants were opposed to the idea of material redistribution, with most participants expressing a deep distrust of the institutions of the state and the state's capacity to allocate tax revenue. Without the intergenerational wealth transfer and capital accumulation over generations that has cemented the middle-class status of white South Africans, the middle-class status of black South Africans is vulnerable and precarious. Moreover, this group faces additional financial demands on their resources in supporting family and those within their immediate circles through "black tax." However, probing for a proclivity towards material redistribution amongst this group revealed a complex and unclear set of dynamics that inform black middle-class identity in relation to wealth and the poor. This dynamic can be identified as a tension that demands a strong generational, familial, and working-class solidarity on the one hand that is in tension with a particular paternalism in relation to the poor, the resultant corollary of "black guilt," and a celebration of success and abundance and the openly expressed aspiration to achieve "baller" status.

Discounting the "hollowness" described in one white group, the contributions of white participants affirm much of the existing literature on White identity in South Africa. Cast against the recent efforts by young black students to rectify the narrative on inequality and dispossession in South Africa, the responses of white participants represent a hardening of white identity and a reticence to engage with this phenomenon. While there are some, generally younger, white professionals who recognize the veracity of calls for economic justice, they too are unwilling to part with their wealth in the interests of broader equality and they are not unaware of the inherent contradiction therein. For the majority of white participants however, the hardening of middle-class white identity around notions of "middling," paternalism and suspicion of the poor, and the scapegoating of all but one's own role or history, enable a certain "willed denialism" (Steyn, 2012) and the ability to claim a powerful sense of victimhood (Msimang, 2016). Victimhood and denial form a concerning and heady concoction that feeds into a growing normalization of ethno-nationalism and the global resurgence of white supremacy in sympathetic administrations.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the participants in our focus groups, as well as participants in a roundtable discussion at the University of Cape Town for helpful comments on the focus group questions.

Funding

Funding for the study was provided by VLIR-UOS (ref: ZEIN2016PR427 (ZKD0952)).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The original audio recordings from the focus groups are held by the authors in a secure data storage facility. Any requests to access the data should be made to the corresponding author.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7608
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7608

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Open Access Journal

Horizontal Redistribution and Roma Inclusion in the Western Balkans: The "Exclusion Amid Inclusion" Dilemma

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Submitted: 15 September 2023 **Accepted:** 4 January 2024 **Published:** 11 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants To Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Many Roma across Europe continue to face a range of social problems, including ethnic discrimination, marginalisation, residential segregation, socio-economic inequality, and extremist violence. The lack of effective policies to address these issues has reinforced a climate of hatred against Roma, further isolating many of them. It has also affected their position in the political arena, where Roma remain severely underrepresented. In this article, we analyse the situation of Roma in three Western Balkan countries and the policies developed to support them. We discuss the institutional structures for managing and improving the socio-economic conditions of identity-based communities and examine the position of the Roma within these institutional contexts. We also explore attitudes towards Roma-related policies and how Roma citizens themselves in these three countries perceive their position.

Keywords

horizontal redistribution; identity-based communities; inclusion dilemma; Roma; Western Balkans

1. Introduction

Many Roma across Europe continue to face an alarming array of social problems, including ethnic discrimination, marginalisation, residential segregation, socio-economic inequality, and extremist violence. While their plight was once seen as a by-product of the political and economic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe after the end of communism, it is now clear that more fundamental forms of structural exclusion have occurred and persist across Europe. Today, a disproportionate number of Roma (including those who use other ethnic names to identify themselves but are still considered to be part of the same

group by scholars, activists, politicians, Roma representatives, or the wider society) are forced to live in substandard housing, suffer from segregated education, and continue to face high levels of unemployment, especially in remote areas where labour market opportunities are not available. Inadequate health services and reliance on social benefits further exacerbate reduced employability and increase poverty levels among Roma, resulting in increased physical and mental health needs (Guerrero et al., 2023). The lack of effective policies to address this situation has reinforced a climate of hatred against Roma, further isolating them. It has also affected their position in the political arena, where Roma remain severely underrepresented.

In the Western Balkans, the situation of the Roma people has been shaped by two additional variables. First, the post-Yugoslav succession wars of the 1990s created a difficult situation for those who did not identify with the warring parties (i.e., the so-called majority ethnic groups), not only triggering outbreaks of violence and revenge by the dominant communities against these other groups but also aggravating their exclusion. Second, the consociational systems created as part of the post-war conflict management architecture were intended to improve their status in the political and socio-economic sphere but largely failed to do so. While these structures were supposed to work for the benefit of all ethnic groups, Roma were still treated as second-class citizens, and their dependence on (international) non-state support remained high. In the eyes of many Roma, the power-sharing systems that were supposed to allow for a more equitable horizontal distribution of socio-economic and political power are nothing more than Potemkin villages.

This article delves deeper into this question in three countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter shortened to "Bosnia"), Kosovo, and North Macedonia (hereafter shortened to "Macedonia"). In each of these countries, Roma are part of a horizontal redistributive arrangement but remain the most excluded and impoverished of all ethnic communities. We explore this problem of "exclusion amid inclusion" (often referred to as a dilemma because of the perceived tension between policies that seek to promote inclusion and those that seek to strengthen ethnic institutions) and examine how it is related to general attitudes towards horizontal redistribution.

Our discussion pertains to Roma, Ashkali, as well as Egyptian communities in these three countries. For practical reasons, however, we use the single term Roma as a shorthand for all three of these groups throughout most of the article, except where the distinction between the communities is essential for our analysis. It should be noted that in most South-Eastern European countries only the term Roma is widely used, except in Kosovo, where all three terms—Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (the abbreviation RAE is also used)—are common. Ashkali and Egyptians largely speak Albanian as their first language, while this is not necessarily the case for Roma people in Kosovo (Trubeta, 2005, p. 71; Visoka, 2008, p. 157).

The article is divided into four parts. First, we provide a background sketch of existing policies aimed at responding to the situation of Roma in South-Eastern Europe. Second, we explore the current state of research on attitudes towards Roma-related redistributive policies. Third, we examine the ethnic power-sharing structures and minority protection mechanisms intended to promote horizontal equality in the three countries in focus. Fourth, we examine how Roma in these three cases perceive the structures and mechanisms in place to support their inclusion.

As will become clear from our discussion, the challenges to adequate protection of Roma revolve around the relevance and enforcement of protection mechanisms as well as the limitations of political representation

mechanisms, particularly for smaller groups (Bieber, 2005, pp. 240, 242). While protection policies, mechanisms, and institutions clearly do not tell the whole story—deeply rooted patterns of anti-Roma racism and stigmatisation persist in society and constitute a crucial barrier to political and socio-economic inclusion (see Powell & Lever, 2017)—it is nevertheless worth examining what protection policies, special representation mechanisms, and ethnic institutions can and cannot achieve. With our discussion, we aim to contribute to the ongoing debate on power-sharing systems in diverse societies. The three countries we focus on have implemented consociational systems that differ in the way they organise political inclusion, but in all three they have not significantly improved the socio-economic situation of the Roma. Attitudes clearly play a crucial role, requiring more positive citizen support for horizontal redistribution and cultural equality between ethnic groups. However, the potential and limitations of the consociational systems themselves, which were designed to achieve horizontal redistribution of power and resources, also need to be reconsidered.

2. Current Policies Addressing the Plight of Roma People Across Europe

Roma constitute a significant minority across Europe—estimated at between 8 and 12 million people—and include many citizens who find themselves in extremely vulnerable socio-economic circumstances. Many Roma are citizens of EU member states, or reside in the EU, while at least one million Roma live in the Western Balkans. Across the EU, policies have been developed to combat discrimination and promote the inclusion of Roma in society, mostly at the instigation of European institutions (see, e.g., Vermeersch, 2017a). In October 2020, a European Commission communication outlined the EU's strategic framework for promoting equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma, with the aim of achieving significant improvements by 2030 (European Commission, 2020). As part of this framework, EU member states have to report every two years on the implementation of policies in these domains. In 2021 and 2022, the countries of the Western Balkan adopted their own Roma inclusion policies to align with the EU's strategic framework. The EU, in turn, has supported the Western Balkans' efforts to achieve this alignment through funding under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2021–2027.

However, despite these policy efforts at the national and European level, the situation on the ground remains problematic. Socio-economic problems are compounded by persistent negative public attitudes towards Roma and Roma-related policies. How Roma are portrayed in politics and the media continues to reinforce misguided old romantic and stereotypical notions of Roma as perpetual outsiders. In the context of current regulatory practices aimed at mitigating (or at least controlling) the situation—i.e., settlement policies, targeted education policies and health campaigns, as well as the creation of overarching European instruments to stimulate national Roma inclusion policies—new ways of problematizing Roma have emerged (Van Baar & Vermeersch, 2017). The extent of prejudice and stereotyping faced by Roma underlines the urgent need for more and better comprehensive efforts to address these deep-rooted societal problems and to work towards the promotion of redistributive policies.

What are the main trends in current research on policies to promote Roma inclusion that involve horizontal redistribution? A large part of the literature on Roma focuses on problems rather than solutions: It describes and examines the social processes that push Roma into positions of exclusion (e.g., A. McGarry, 2017; Van Baar, 2012; Vermeersch, 2017b). Another important body of literature examines the tensions inherent in policy-making efforts to promote Roma inclusion. Policymakers tend to frame Roma in ethnic terms, but as

programmes often fail to produce tangible improvements in Roma's lives, they also risk perpetuating rather than overcoming stereotypical views of the target group. Conversely, generalised policies, i.e., non-ethnically defined social inclusion programmes, have also proved inadequate precisely because such policies do not reach the group or are unable to address the specific "ethnic challenges" faced by Roma (Rostas, 2019).

Several authors have argued that the absence of redistributive policies capable of adequately addressing both the socio-economic and ethnic dimensions of Roma exclusion is due to a general lack of political will, combined with shortcomings in institutional design (for a discussion see Kóczé & Van Baar, 2020; Van Baar & Vermeersch, 2017). A number of recent papers, for example, argue that existing EU-initiated policies have proved ineffective because they divide responsibility for these policies between the EU and national member-state levels, allowing national governments to shift the burden to the supranational level (see Iusmen, 2018).

On the national state level, the limitations of institutional design are particularly evident in those countries that rely on some form of cultural or ethnic autonomy or a type of consociational arrangement in which ethnic groups are given a previously negotiated share of the power. Although cultural autonomy and power-sharing in theory offer both institutional guarantees and equal cultural status to a host of ethnically defined groups who would otherwise remain disadvantaged, Roma often fall through the cracks of the system. This may be due to their demographic weakness per country or to the fact that Roma often do not belong to one of the main ethnic segments of a power-sharing arrangement and therefore miss out on the institutional benefits that the system offers to other ethnic groups. Moreover, in systems where there is (non-territorial) cultural autonomy for ethnic groups, Roma also seem to miss out. While in theory, such systems could enforce the protection of some special linguistic, educational, or other cultural rights, concrete cases show that such policies do not provide a clear path to economic equality and more equal political participation (e.g., Sansum & Dobos, 2020).

3. Attitudes Towards Roma-Related Redistribution Policies: State of the Field

While a limited level of government commitment and lack of political will is often cited as a key reason for the failure to achieve better policies for Roma (e.g., Matache & Oehlke, 2017, p. 103), it should be assumed that such political will is in part also dependent on whether it is nurtured. Because of a lack of awareness and a limited understanding of the problem, citizens may be unwilling to support horizontal redistribution, which in turn could lead to a stalling of the situation on the ground.

Survey results from the Pew Research Center (Wike et al., 2019) show that among the minority groups surveyed in Europe, Roma stand out for the prevalence of negative attitudes towards them. In 10 of the 16 countries surveyed, half or more of respondents have an unfavourable opinion of Roma. These findings are consistent with what many Roma themselves have reported about their experiences of problems preventing them from enjoying their fundamental rights to employment, education, health care, and housing. Regular surveys conducted by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency since 2008 have consistently shown that efforts by the EU and its member states have resulted in limited and uneven progress for Roma. In addition, Romaphobia and related forms of discrimination persist (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023).

There is a paucity of research on citizens' attitudes and views towards policies aimed at reducing group differences in countries with significantly poor Roma communities. However, there is a growing body of literature examining the dynamics of interactions between Roma and non-Roma in different sociological and political settings. Some of the findings from this latter strand of empirical work can serve as a proxy for the study of more general attitudes towards horizontal redistributive policies in cases involving Roma populations. For example, Bracic (2020) argues that many Roma individuals tend to develop survival strategies in response to discriminatory actions by the majority population. Conversely, the majority population tends to resent these survival strategies, often attributing them to what they see as inherent characteristics of the minority group, rather than acknowledging their own discriminatory behaviour as the root cause. Negative views of the group discourage redistributive welfare and poverty reduction policies.

Moreover, positive attitudes towards horizontal redistributive policies may be hampered by majority beliefs about the nature of EU funding and the populist idea that Roma are the main beneficiaries of support programmes. While it is true that EU funds are intended to support Roma inclusion, the problematic narrative that is sometimes promoted about such support is that Roma are "privileged" recipients. Several authors have pointed out that EU funding has been politicised: There has been a far-right populist-nationalist backlash against EU-promoted Roma rights or national minority rights (Vermeersch, 2012). However, various studies show that financial support from the EU level does not necessarily lead to real improvements on the ground (e.g., Sobotka & Vermeersch, 2012).

Research on how to reduce ethnocentric bias in redistributive policies targeting marginalised minority groups is rather scarce. Experimental research in Slovakia by Findor et al. (2023) found that when Roma were mentioned as recipients or co-recipients of a policy, there was a significant decrease in majority support. Yet arguments emphasising the principle of reciprocity had the effect of strengthening majority support for redistributive transfers to "out-groups," these researchers found. The implications are relevant not only for national and local policies towards Roma but also for the development of policy frameworks at the EU level that effectively encourage the creation of policies targeted at an "out-group." The emphasis on reciprocity is likely to increase the willingness of majorities to support Roma assistance programmes, but, as Findor et al. (2023) caution, it is far from a panacea. Reciprocity has been at the heart of certain "Roma activation" policies that have emerged in Central Europe in recent years. These policies have sometimes been punitive in nature, forcing Roma to accept low-paid (or sometimes unpaid) and substandard jobs (Grill, 2018; Škobla & Filčák, 2020; Van Baar, 2012), thereby perpetuating their marginal position.

4. Redistribution Questions and the Structures of Inclusion in the Western Balkans

In what follows we zoom in on three cases in the Western Balkans: Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. In all three cases, armed conflict has occurred and the international community has used consociationalist governance strategies to resolve it, although each country has implemented them in a different way. In Bosnia, the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement—the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia—created a pluralist, corporatist consociational arrangement mixed with asymmetric federalism (Bose, 2002, p. 216; Chandler, 2000, p. 67). In Kosovo, a hybrid (mostly corporate) consociational arrangement was first imposed by the UN administration in 2001 and later extended in the 2008 constitution and the Ahtisaari Plan (Baliqi, 2018, p. 56; Visoka, 2017, p. 14). The Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia

created a constitutional system that has been described as a "minimalist consociational system" (Bieber, 2011, p. 14).

Each case has different institutional structures for managing identity-based communities and views identities in different ways. The Bosnian model recognises both constituent nations and minorities but places the former in a privileged position. Therefore, anyone who does not belong to the three constituent peoples operates on the margins or even outside the system (F. Cordoba, interview, 2019). On the other hand, both Kosovo and Macedonia have based their systems on multiethnicity. They recognise the dominant nations, while all minorities—or rather "non-majority communities"—are lumped into one basket (including the parties to the conflict) following the assumption that "smaller communities are not supposed to be a factor in the overall structure of power-sharing arrangements" (Andeva, 2015, p. 16). The former warring groups, Serbs and Albanians respectively, are in a dominant position. In Kosovo, Serbs have corporate guarantees of their status, while in Macedonia, Albanians are de facto the only group able to take full advantage of the special provisions hidden behind the 20% threshold.

In all these cases Roma belong to the so-called non-dominant group of "others" that refers to "all those citizens who live in a consociational system but do not belong to any of the 'significant' segments of the society" (Stojanović, 2018, p. 7). "Others" has served as a catch-all category for those who do not align with the dominant social cleavage (Agarin et al., 2018, pp. 301–303). Only in Bosnia, however, the word "others" is incorporated in legal documents; in Kosovo and Macedonia the term "non-majority communities" is used. Stojanović (2018, p. 9) claims that the "challenge of others" primarily concerns corporate consociations, thus, there are also calls to liberalise power-sharing institutions in order to improve the status of micro-minorities. J. McGarry (2017, p. 282) goes even further, arguing that liberal consociations "need not privilege ethnic identities, and are more likely to create political space for previously weak and marginalised identity groups than conventional majoritarian systems." Therefore, based on the theoretical literature, we should expect that the more liberal the system, the better the situation for minorities. However, the case of Roma people does not necessarily confirm this. Their political inclusion looks formally better in Macedonia than in Bosnia, but in practice, this does not translate into more horizontal equality and a better socio-economic or political position (see Table 1). We explore whether the lack of effectiveness means that the pervasive climate of hatred and stigmatisation overshadows the available governance mechanisms and thus thwarts more positive attitudes towards better horizontal equality policies.

4.1. Minority Protection Mechanisms

It is important to bear in mind that the consociational systems in our three cases were initially created to address the pre-war tensions that led to armed ethnicised conflict; it is only over the years that they have been mixed with minority protection mechanisms. To some extent, Bosnia is the outlier here—state-level institutions still completely ignore the non-constituent nations and in some cases are openly ethnically discriminatory (Bochsler, 2012, p. 66). Those who fall into the category of "others" are institutionally discriminated against and unable to fully participate in the political processes of the country (Council of Europe, 2017). It is the sub-federal level that offers them at least some token recognition, but there is no doubt that the three titular nations are the main "owners" of the state. In Kosovo and Macedonia, on the other hand, all levels of government treat the groups involved in the conflict as part of a larger set of non-majority communities. Here, consociational mechanisms are granted to all non-majority communities

(although in Kosovo the self-government provisions are still disputed and granted only to Serb-majority municipalities), but this arrangement translates to a very limited extent into the position of other minorities. Despite their ostensible multi-ethnicity, both countries are seen as bi-national states in which "other ethnic communities are largely relegated to the fringes of political life" (Engström, 2002, p. 3).

Consociational institutions have been designed differently in each case. Only in Kosovo, there is proportional representation in the form of guaranteed parliamentary representation for non-majority communities at the central level. In Bosnia, after the 2002 constitutional reforms, the ethnic key was extended to the "others" at the entity level (Banović, 2016, pp. 26–28; Rrahmani, 2018, p. 239). The Macedonian system does not offer guaranteed seats but here the informal practice of creating pre-electoral coalitions usually gives minorities several seats (Andeva, 2015, pp. 14–15). Yet, the system of reserved seats is seen by minorities as tokenistic at best and used by majority groups to tip the balance of power (I. Kožemjakin, interview, 2019). In all three cases, the public administration also relies on guaranteed ethnic representation. In Bosnia, the system is based on the constituent peoples. In Kosovo, as the 2017 OSCE report shows, minority presence rose to 9.63% in 2015, falling just short of the required 10% (OSCE, 2021, p. 20). In Macedonia, where proportionality within the civil service is encouraged, out of the 112,164 employees in the public sector, 1.88% were Turks and 1.21% were Roma (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 7) which means that they are significantly underrepresented (Andonovski, 2018, p. 34; Lyon, 2015, p. 161; Risteska, 2013, p. 32). Inclusion in the executive arena is rather limited. Only in Kosovo, there must be at least two ministers from ethnic minorities within the government (Rrahmani, 2018, p. 239). In Bosnia, it is stipulated that one ministry should be given to a candidate from the "others," but it was only in 2018 that it was agreed between the governing parties that the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees was to be headed by a non-partisan person who comes from the "others" group ("Kako će SNSD dobiti," 2021). In Macedonia, only the Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations reflects the country's foundation on the minority principle. However, in both Macedonia and Kosovo, the minority veto principle has been extended to all minority communities (Auerbach, 2011, p. 32).

All three countries have also developed minority councils, which in all cases are seen as powerless bodies. In Kosovo, the Assembly Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Return has been mandated to review draft legislation, while the Consultative Council for Communities within the Office of the President is to ensure that community perspectives are included in decision-making processes (OSCE, 2021, p. 18). In Bosnia, there are councils for national minorities in the state parliamentary assembly and in the entity and local parliaments, which operate in a limited advisory capacity (Sadiković, 2011). In addition, since 2002 there has been the Roma Committee within the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an advisory and coordinating body (Galicić, 2017, p. 105). Finally, in Macedonia, the Committee for Inter-Community Relations is supposed to ensure dialogue. The Ohrid Framework Agreement also re-established committees for inter-community relations in municipalities where at least 20% of the local population belongs to a particular non-majority community (Czymmeck & Viciska, 2011, p. 83).

The most important level at which minorities can express themselves is the local level. All three cases rely on several instruments to achieve this. In Macedonia, given the 20% threshold that activates pro-minority provisions (regarding veto mechanisms, language use, emblems, etc.), there are 17 municipalities with an Albanian majority, two with a Turkish majority, and one with a Roma majority (Cekikj, 2014, p. 234). In Kosovo, in municipalities where at least 10% of the residents belong to minority communities, there are special, minority bodies guaranteeing their representation: Communities Committee, Deputy Chairperson of

the Municipal Assembly for Communities, Deputy Mayor for Communities, and Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for Communities (Popova, 2013, p. 11). Finally, in Bosnia, reserved seats in local assemblies were introduced in 2004. Minorities are entitled to representation in municipal and city councils and assemblies in proportion to their share of the population, with a reserved seat guaranteed by law if they make up at least 3% of the local population. This has led to an increase in political mobilisation and awareness among minorities (Hodžić & Mraović, 2015, pp. 423, 430).

All three countries have also adopted laws and policies to promote equal opportunities for Roma (mainly required in the context of the EU accession process), including anti-discrimination laws and strategies and action plans for Roma inclusion. However, most of these laws and policies either remain on paper or their implementation remains very limited. As a result, their impact on the position of Roma is very limited and the authorities have become accustomed to a situation where non-implementation goes unpunished (Civil Rights Defenders, 2018, p. 10).

4.2. Inclusion of Roma in the Minority Structures

In the three cases discussed, there was a tradition of power-sharing and minority rights protection. Yugoslavia was arguably one of the most progressive states in its treatment of Roma—positive attention to Roma increased in the 1970s and 1980s, with the extension of cultural and educational rights and anti-discrimination legislation, as well as the first official use of the term "Roma" in the 1971 census (Friedman, 2014, pp. 5–6). The League of Communists of Yugoslavia clearly preferred integration to assimilation, thus Roma enjoyed a more secure social status and benefited from a more tolerant state but at the same time, their situation remained a "serious basic social issue" (Barany, 2000, p. 428). It was still imperfect and marked by anti-Gypsyism, but many Roma identify this period as one of greater equality and assess it as much better than the present (Humphries, 2011, pp. 12–14). After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the position of Roma communities developed differently in each case, partly due to the growing disparity in the size of their population, which affected their significance in the political arena. In Kosovo, the group has been divided into three self-identifying entities, Roma, Ashkali, and RAE (Ashkaeli and Egyptians) in an effort to reject the homogenising label "Roma" (Bhabha et al., 2014, p. 8). According to the official census, there are 8,824 Roma, with estimates ranging from 23,000 to 27,000; 15,436 Ashkali (estimated at 12,000); and 11,524 Egyptians (with varying estimates, some of which go as high as 25,000). In Bosnia, according to the 2013 census, there are 12,896 Roma (estimated at 40,000–100,000), and in Macedonia, according to the 2021 census, 2,53% of the population identifies as Roma—according to the 2002 census, there were 53,879 Roma (estimated at 110,000–260,000) and 3,843 Egyptians (estimated at 20,000; see Friedman, 2014; Popova, 2013; State Statistical Office, 2022).

Those numbers are the basis for all Roma political organisation and activity. In Bosnia, where the system is openly discriminatory, their political inclusion is almost non-existent. The first short-lived Roma political party (Democratic Party of Roma) was registered in 2003 (OSCE, 2006, p. 7), a short period in 2012 saw the emergence of the Democratic Union of Roma, and 2022 saw the rise of yet another party ("Politički aktivizam: Počeo," 2022). The lack of credible minority parties leaves Roma with two options: to be represented by independent candidates or to join a major political party (for example, in the 2022 Bosnian general election, Dervo Sejdić ran on the list of the Social Democratic Party, but without success). In the latter case, however, they have limited opportunities to represent their community ("Romi na listama," 2022). As a result, only one

person of Roma origin has ever been a member of the entity and cantonal parliaments (from the list of the dominant party), and around 20 Roma councillors have been elected to municipal councils—usually from the local lists of the major parties ("Romi u susret novoj vlasti," 2023).

In Macedonia, Roma are relatively active on the political scene, but also highly divided. Since the 1990s, several Roma political parties have been in government and opposition at the national and local levels. For example, the 2013 local elections resulted in one Roma mayor, one Roma president of a local council, and 25 Roma councillors (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2014). Major Roma political parties include the Party for the Full Emancipation of Roma in Macedonia, the Union of Roma in Macedonia, the United Roma of Macedonia, and the Party for Roma Integration. As a result of the minority veto mechanism—the "Badinter principle"—they have become an important factor in pre-election coalition building and operate in the political arena in the "shadows" of their "big brothers." In the 2002–2006 government, the party representing Roma held the position of Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy, and in the 2011–2014 and 2014–2018 governments, it held the position of minister without portfolio. It created an opportunity to initiate programmes that would help the community, but the success was modest (Andeva, 2015, p. 20; Taleski, 2008, pp. 145–146).

In Kosovo, there are four RAE parties in the current parliament: the Ashkali Party for Integration, the Romani Initiative, the Progressive Movement of Kosovar Roma, and the New Democratic Initiative of Kosovo. Similarly, despite the socio-political reality of RAE groups, their parties have joined parliamentary groups formed mainly by Albanian and Serb MPs (Cocoşatu, 2012, pp. 115–116; Visoka & Beha, 2011, p. 13). In the 2021 elections, the community also became of interest to Serb politicians, who sought to control the seats guaranteed to other groups by creating new Roma and Bosniak political parties and encouraging Serb citizens to vote for them to increase their influence beyond the guaranteed 10 seats. However, the Supreme Court annulled the votes and withdrew their seats (Bochsler, 2022).

Although there are formal channels to express their interests—the more institutions there are, the more politically active they become—they still lack real opportunities to influence their position (Calu, 2020, p. 191). Their exclusion from meaningful participation in political life and decision-making processes in all three countries is aggravated by several factors: low status because of low levels of education, poor health conditions hindering social mobility, lack of civil registration and basic legal documentation, discrimination, political pawn status, and lack of a kin state (Visoka, 2008, p. 154). In all three cases, they face similar obstacles in obtaining formal registration and documents, housing, education, health care, and employment. Moreover, as Table 1 shows, despite a visibly higher level of inclusion in the more liberal consociations (Macedonia and, to some extent, Kosovo), the extent of these problems remains quite similar. Looking for reasons for this unchanged situation, some authors point to the isolation of Roma issues from mainstream public policy, budgeting, services and administration, and a number of provisions designed to change this have had limited success. While some achievements can be noted, such as a growing number of Roma activists, increasing numbers of Roma attending and graduating from secondary schools and universities, and progress in preventing statelessness, systemic change has not been achieved (Civil Rights Defenders, 2018, p. 5). It is clear that the problems of political inclusion faced by Roma are strongly linked to the social exclusion, discrimination, segregation, and marginalisation they face (Regional Cooperation Council, n.d.).

What matters beyond the power-sharing systems are the attitudes of majorities. The failure of Western Balkan governments to recognise the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism—"a social and political construction reproduced

Table 1. Roma inclusion indicators in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

Indicator	Bosnia	Kosovo	Macedonia
School enrolment (ages 7–15)*	61%	75%	74%
School enrolment (ages 16–19)*	15%	30%	27%
Education enrolment rate (% of population, ages 7–15)**	70%	72%	78%
Completion rate in compulsory education**	43%	60%	69%
Completion rate in upper secondary education (% of population, ages 22–25)**	21%	20%	31%
Unemployment*	54% (56%**)	58% (49%**)	53% (49%**)
Access to medicines (essential drugs out of financial reach)*	68%	86%	68%
Health insurance coverage (% of population aged 16+)**	72%	10%	94%
Insecure housing*	35%	—	25%

Sources: * United Nations Development Programme, as cited in Friedman (2014, pp. 17–19); ** United Nations Development Programme (2019).

in society through processes of racialisation" (Fejzula & Fernández, 2022, p. 395)—helps explain why their strategies for inclusion of Roma have had such a limited impact. As a result, the notion of danger was combined with a vision of Roma as fundamentally uncivilised and associated with relationships based on violence (Fejzula, 2022). In the 2022 Balkan Barometer, only 17% of the respondents in Bosnia, 35% in Kosovo, and 11% in Macedonia said they would feel comfortable or somewhat comfortable marrying someone from the Roma community or if their child had a Roma spouse. However, other responses were to some extent more promising. When asked whether they would be comfortable working with Roma, 70% of respondents in Bosnia, 66% in Kosovo, and 77% in Macedonia answered in the affirmative. Surprisingly, respondents were also comfortable with their children going to school with Roma children (Bosnia, 70%; Kosovo, 64%; and Macedonia, 72%) and with having friends who are Roma (Bosnia, 64%; Kosovo, 63%; and Macedonia, 76%; see Balkan Public Barometer, n.d.).

As a race-based system of domination and "the most tolerated form of racism in Europe" (Fejzula, 2019, p. 2106; A. McGarry, 2017), at the policy level, Romaphobia is expressed in the way policies or laws that should promote horizontal redistribution and inclusion remain unimplemented, or in the way discrimination against Roma is denied, reinforcing their exclusion. In all these countries, negative or racist attitudes dominate public and sometimes even political discourse on Roma. For example, public perception and discourse do not recognise Roma as victims of war. Crimes against Roma are often ignored by the judicial system. War crimes committed against Roma in Bosnia and Kosovo are not prosecuted, so Roma are either ignored as victims (Bosnia) or perceived as perpetrators (Kosovo). The (often forced) collaboration of some Roma with the former Serb-dominated regime in Kosovo has been used to impose collective guilt on all Roma and as a pretext to ignore post-war crimes against Roma (Civil Rights Defenders, 2018, p. 6).

5. Perceptions of Roma

While there are differences between countries, the overall picture in our three cases seems to be that Roma people often do not see their political representatives as effective agents working on behalf of their communities—regardless of the institutional set-up. Roma often assume that their representatives are

involved in nepotism and patronage, a perception that may be linked to a general lack of trust among citizens in the political class.

Monitoring reports on Kosovo, for example, suggest that RAE leaders are not seen as actors with strong political influence who can effectively address RAE issues at the national level (European Commission, 2019, p. 37). It was clear from our interviews in Bosnia that Roma communities are often seen as groups that can be easily manipulated in the context of a wider game of ethnicised politics. Roma politicians are often seen as "extra hands"—producers of votes that can be easily bought. This means that they are often not seen as advocates for Roma, and there remains a significant gap between the community and its leaders ("Romi na listama," 2022). In a pre-election survey conducted by AKSIOM in Bosnia in 2022, 95.3% of Roma said that they did not believe that any politician or political party in Bosnia had stood up for their interests and that many of them have positioned themselves as the legitimate voice of the community despite having little to do with it. As a result, Roma people rarely vote for Roma politicians, even at the local level (European Roma Rights Centre, 2022).

While the consociational system in Macedonia is generally seen as working better for Roma, it still requires strong political will and majority support to "make it work" (EU Delegation, Macedonia, interview, 2019). Indeed, there is better political representation and participation of Roma in Macedonia than in the other cases, but this does not translate into a better socio-economic position for Roma. Many people do not seem to trust mainstream Roma political leaders, dismissing them as being in the service of the ruling party and pursuing personal interests at the expense of the community. Roma political parties work as satellites around larger, dominant parties or are seen as "puppets" in their hands (S. Kacarska, interview, 2019). In this sense, political decisions favourable to Roma are the result of a calculated effort by dominant parties to balance the will of the country's ethnic Albanian minority (Sudetić, 2013). Moreover, as in Kosovo, despite the supposed multi-ethnicity, the systems in place appear to remain a smokescreen for bi-national (or, in the case of Bosnia, tri-national) politics. Among the Roma, the feeling of being second-class citizens is still prevalent in all three cases—and consociationalism is only one of the variables influencing their difficult position.

6. Conclusion

Overall, our analysis of the position of Roma within the power-sharing systems of three Western Balkan countries has highlighted a significant and recurring theme—the dilemma of "exclusion amidst inclusion." Despite the ostensibly inclusive principles underpinning these complex systems, a significant proportion of the population continues to experience exclusion. This exclusion is not just an unintended consequence of an otherwise genuine attempt to create a just system that guarantees equal socio-economic opportunities and political rights for all. To a considerable extent, it is also the result of the design and operation of these post-conflict power-sharing mechanisms in a context where public attitudes towards some groups remain extremely negative. While there have been ambitious efforts to promote inclusiveness through these systems, our analysis suggests that these attempts have so far fallen short of their goals. The challenge of reconciling the need for ethnic representation with the imperative of achieving equitable socio-economic outcomes for all citizens remains. Therefore, we argue that public attitudes towards horizontal redistributive policies will be crucial to making these power-sharing systems work in favour of more horizontal equality. Indeed, more favourable attitudes of citizens towards horizontal redistribution and the establishment of cultural equality for all ethnic groups is an essential prerequisite for addressing the marginalised status of

Roma in our three case study countries. However, improving public attitudes should not be pursued in isolation from a thorough reassessment of existing power-sharing systems. There continues to be a need to review and possibly reform these systems to make them more responsive to the goals of equity and inclusion. Only by simultaneously fostering positive public attitudes towards equality and revising the structures and mechanisms of these systems to ensure that they serve as effective instruments of inclusion can we begin to address the persistent challenges faced by marginalised communities in the Western Balkans.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Social Inclusion
2024 • Volume 12 • Article 7687
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.7687

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Open Access Journal

Group Self-Interest vs. Equity: Explaining Support for Horizontal Redistribution in (Former) Competitive Clientelist States

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Submitted: 18 October 2023 **Accepted:** 5 February 2024 **Published:** 21 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Who Wants to Share? Attitudes Towards Horizontal Redistribution Across the Globe" edited by Frances Stewart (University of Oxford), Arnim Langer (KU Leuven), and Line Kuppens (University of Amsterdam), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i414

Abstract

Extant literature links intergroup disparities, or horizontal inequalities, in Sub-Saharan Africa to the unequal representation of ethnic groups in central power, who accumulate wealth at the expense of politically marginalized groups. Over time, these politically-induced inequalities have trapped some ethnic groups in positions of relative disadvantage. Group-based, or horizontal, redistribution can help redress these inequalities yet require popular support if they are not to contribute to intergroup tensions. In this article, we examine how people's experiences of political exclusion, on the one hand, and their attributional beliefs about the causes of political exclusion, on the other, condition support for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. We argue that people are more likely to be supportive of horizontal redistribution either when (H1a) they belong to ethnic groups that have not had access to central power, and/or (H1b) feel that their ethnic group is politically marginalized (and thus stands to gain); or when (H2) they attribute the political exclusion of the politically marginalized group(s) that stand(s) to benefit from these policies to the legacies of colonialism and clientelism (thus seeking to foster equity). To test our hypotheses, we examine these issues in the context of Kenya, a society with politically salient ethnic cleavages and a history of clientelism. Based on a unique online survey involving 2,286 Kenyans, we show that, notwithstanding group self-interest being at play, there is strong support for horizontal redistribution across groups.

Keywords

clientelism; ethnic favoritism; horizontal inequality; horizontal redistribution; Kenya

1. Introduction

In contrast to a recent decrease in intergroup inequality elsewhere, the gap between various ethno-regions, or geo-ethnicities, has increased in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bormann et al., 2021). A large and growing literature on the politics of ethnic favoritism links intergroup disparities, or horizontal inequalities (HIs), on the continent to the unequal representation of groups in central power: African elites would use political power to gain economic advantages and channel state resources toward their co-ethnics and home regions, thereby widening HIs created and shaped by geography and early colonial economic institutions (Kimenyi, 2013; van de Walle, 2009). Illustratively, Theisen et al. (2020) use data on maternal healthcare across Sub-Saharan African states to demonstrate that having a co-ethnic in power, whether in the cabinet or presidency, increases women's probability of receiving maternal healthcare services, especially in periods around (competitive) elections. Franck and Rainer (2012) provide evidence of co-ethnic targeting affecting primary education and infant mortality of ethnic groups, and Hodler and Raschky (2014) find evidence of regional favoritism (within and beyond Africa) using satellite data on nighttime light intensity and information about the birthplaces of the countries' political leaders.

Notwithstanding the suggestive evidence, the degree of ethnic favoritism appears to vary by public goods (Kramon & Posner, 2013) and by the spatial distribution of ethnic groups (Ejdemyr et al., 2018). Over time, moreover, clientelist practices would have decreased with the advent of democracy. While co-ethnic districts of Kenya's president received twice as much expenditure on roads and had five times the length of paved roads built in the post-dependence era, for instance, these favors were no longer apparent during periods of democracy (Burgess et al., 2015). Certainly, most African states have diversified the composition of group representation in formal offices in recent decades (François et al., 2015), and newly introduced formal institutional rules increasingly shape possibilities for transactions between patrons and clients (on the role of non-co-ethnic brokers see, for instance, Carlson, 2021; on the shrinking space for local patronage in Kenya see Harris & Posner, 2019, 2022). Other scholars, such as Kendhammer (2015), nonetheless argue that the introduction of power-sharing institutions in contexts of neopatrimonialism has entrenched the centrality of identity-based networks and provides "formal cover for rent-seeking demands on state resources" (p. 144) by defining state access in terms of ethno-regional identities (see also Wanyama & McCord, 2017).

Notwithstanding continuing debates on the persistence of ethnic favoritism and its effects on HIs between ethnic groups in current-day Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a clear imperative to address intergroup inequality. Besides improving the life conditions of marginalized groups, it contributes to reducing the likelihood of violent conflict emerging—a condition societies with consistent political and socio-economic inequalities are particularly prone to (Langer & Mikami, 2013). HI-correcting policies, or horizontal redistribution (from now on referred to as HR), can be either direct or indirect (Stewart et al., 2008). Direct approaches aim to reduce HIs by specifically targeting deprived groups, such as affirmative action programs aimed at increasing representation of ethnic minorities in employment, education, and business, or targeted transfers of public resources. Intriguingly, the literature on ethnic favoritism generally dismisses the latter because it is equated to clientelism. While targeted transfers can indeed create perceptions of favoritism when receivers are co-ethnics of political elites, HR is motivated by equity instead of ethnic considerations (see also Gisselquist, 2014; Langer & Mikami, 2013). We further agree with van de Walle (2009) that clientelist benefits rarely trickle down to entire communities to redistribute wealth, in contrast to equitable transfers

(on diversion vs. local goods provision see also Carlson, 2021). Where direct approaches can increase the saliency of ethnic identities, indirect approaches do not specify group affiliation. Instead, these approaches seek to reduce HI through general policies, such as universal antipoverty programs, progressive taxation, and anti-discrimination policies. Regional tax policies are another example of indirect correction policies, which are particularly useful in societies where group identities overlap with regional disparities (Stewart et al., 2008).

The question remains to what extent HR finds support in (formerly) clientelist African states—an issue that is widely underresearched in the current literature. We argue in this article that the widespread experience with and perception of ethnic favoritism reduces resistance to socio-economic HI-correcting reforms, not only of formerly and currently marginalized groups (i.e., group self-interest) but also of members of ethnic groups with a history of economic and political dominance who acknowledge the structural causes of ethnic disparities and favor social cohesion (i.e., equity concerns). On the other hand, people might feel that group-based redistribution only further entrenches ethnic identities or that promises of HR will not be realized as long as groups with a history of economic or political dominance are in power. To understand how clientelism shapes support for HR across historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups, we turn to the case of Kenya, a society with politically salient ethnic cleavages where political and socio-economic inequalities have historically been manifest in government representation and access to public services and infrastructure respectively (see, e.g., Kanyinga, 2016; Langer & Mikami, 2013; Stewart, 2010). Although ethno-regional tensions and inequalities have been addressed to some extent in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 post-electoral violence, inequalities persist, and clientelist practices have been brought down to the local level (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Hassan, 2020; for similar observations in the case of Nigeria see Kendhammer, 2015).

In what follows, we will start by giving a brief overview of political exclusion, ethnic favoritism, and HIs in Kenya. Next, we will theorize about the relation between ethnic favoritism and support for HR before outlining our empirical approach. Section 5 presents the results of the study. We conclude by outlining some directions for future research in this area.

2. Political Exclusion, Ethnic Favoritism, and HIs in Kenya

Kenya is ethnically diverse, with over 40 distinct ethnic groups. The major ethnic groups include the Kikuyu (22%), Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), and Kalenjin (12%; 2010 data; see Kimenyi, 2013). While all regions have become increasingly ethnically diverse, ethnicity is historically closely tied to the country's geographical regions. To accommodate this diversity and mitigate tensions between geo-ethnicities, the original constitution extolled *majimboism*, or federalism, granting different groups a degree of self-governance and autonomy in managing their local affairs (Kanyinga, 2016). Yet, the first president, Jomo Kenyatta, soon dismantled the constitution, which negatively affected his Kikuyu community, and concentrated power in the executive branch (Hassan, 2020). In doing so, he widened discretionary powers to direct resources to the Kikuyu and disproportionally appointed co-ethnics in the districts, provinces, and central ministries (Hassan, 2020; Kimenyi, 2013). He also politicized land allocation by disproportionately allocating state-owned Rift Valley land (formerly occupied by the British) to his cronies rather than giving it back to the original Kalenjin inhabitants (Boone, 2012; Kanyinga, 2016; Stewart, 2010). After Jomo Kenyatta's death in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi, an ethnic Kalenjin, assumed the presidency, turning Kenya from a de facto into a

de jure one-party state. Following this, the number of Kikuyu in the cabinet fell significantly, while Kalenjin's and Luhya's representation increased (Kimenyi, 2013). Concomitantly, there was a shift in the bias of government resource allocation towards Moi's political base (Hassan, 2020). This was the case for project aid and local funds (Briggs, 2014), road infrastructure (Burgess et al., 2015; see also Kanyinga, 2016), and educational expenditure, resulting in higher primary and secondary completion rates among co-ethnics of Moi, and before that, of Kenyatta (Kramon & Posner, 2016).

The advent of multi-party democracy in 1991, however, pushed political leaders to pursue non-co-ethnic voters too. Yet, ethnicity remained the main axis of political mobilization (e.g., Kanyinga, 2016; Kimenyi, 2013; Kramon & Posner, 2016). Because the emerging political parties continued to have an ethnic base and thus remained divided, Moi initially remained in power. In 2002, however, the opposition united under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Under the leadership of Mwai Kibaki (an ethnic Kikuyu), the party managed to secure the support of the Luo community, led by Raila Odinga, and that of other historically disenfranchised groups with a promise of employing decentralization to address a range of issues, including both geographical and political exclusion (Cheeseman, 2008). In the spirit of *majimboism*, decentralization was believed to guarantee resources that the historically disadvantaged groups had been unable to access through a centralized system (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016). Upon winning the elections, the NARC-led government initiated an agenda aimed at redistributing resources more equitably, which included experimentation with local cash transfer programs (see Wanyama & McCord, 2017) and the creation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The latter institutionalized the clientelist Harambee Movement, an informal fiscal and redistributive institution of aspiring politicians and incumbents sponsoring local development projects with private funds. Replacing the rising Harambee costs, from then onwards, a total of 2.5% of all ordinary government revenues was distributed over the country's 210 electoral constituencies—75% of the monies was divided equally, while the remaining 25% was allocated based on constituency need (Opalo, 2022a; see also Hassan, 2020). Although these programs served the poverty reduction agenda, they also ushered in competitive clientelism at the local level (Wanyama & McCord, 2017)—the grafting of democratic competition onto existing patterns of patron–client politics (see also Lavers & Hickey, 2016). However, beyond the CDF, Kibaki failed to deliver the promise to devolve powers, opting instead to endorse a set of constitutional reforms that largely preserved presidential powers. This led to Odinga defecting from NARC to create the Orange Democratic Movement with a renewed campaign focusing on *majimboism* and land reform ahead of the 2007 presidential elections. Yet, Odinga lost to Kibaki, who ran on the ticket of the newly established Party of National Unity that, despite its name, was largely perceived to have a pro-Kikuyu bias. Highly contested allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities in the vote counting process subsequently turned violent, with hotbeds in Nairobi, Nyanza Province, the Rift Valley, and the Coast.

Various agreements and reports concluded in the wake of the violence, such as Agenda Item 4 (for a discussion see Kanyinga & Long, 2012) or the Waki Report, asserted that the causes of conflict could be traced back to "a feeling among certain ethnic groups of historical marginalization, arising from perceived inequities concerning the allocation of land and other national resources, as well as access to public goods and services" (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence, 2008, p. 23). Survey data from 2010 confirmed that there was a collective sense of deprivation across nearly all groups compared to the Kikuyu (the baseline group) (Langer & Mikami, 2013; for a discussion of perceptions of unfair treatment in securing a government position, or contract, and land ownership see Kimenyi, 2013). To address these concerns, a

new constitution was adopted in 2010 with the devolution of political, fiscal, and administrative powers to 47 ethnically mixed counties at its heart (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Kimenyi, 2013). Since then, counties have annually received at least 15% of the national revenue to implement their own policies and development programs, in addition to the creation of an "equalization fund" assisting previously disadvantaged groups (for a discussion of Article 203[2] see Kanyinga, 2016; for a general discussion of the 2010 constitution see Murunga et al., 2014). While devolution thus effectively limited the space for center-led patronage, new opportunities for local-led patronage emerged beside the CDF (Hassan, 2020; see also D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016; Harris & Posner, 2019; Kanyinga, 2016; Kramon, 2019; Opalo, 2022a; Wanyama & McCord, 2017; note that CDF rules were further tightened in 2015, but also included the omission of the redistributive allocation key of 75–25%). Moreover, because there are still clear ethnic majorities and minorities in many counties (Bosire, 2014), some minority groups have found themselves out of power both nationally and locally (D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016). Besides devolution, complementary direct and indirect HI-correcting policies were drafted and put in place. The 2008 National Cohesion and Integration Act, for instance, prohibits public establishments from hiring more than 30% of their employees from a single ethnic community, while the 2016 Diversity Policy for the Public Service explicitly recommends the use of affirmative action—note that affirmative action measures had already been in place prior to the crisis in the education sector. These direct policies have, in effect, contributed to creating comparatively inclusive public services, even though job access remains somewhat unequal because of historical ethnic disparities in educational attainment (see Simson, 2019). Indirect policies include the continuation and expansion of social programs targeting those living in extreme poverty. As most poor Kenyans live concentrated in the former North Eastern province and, to a lesser extent, the Rift Valley and Coastal provinces (Kimenyi, 2013), these transfers may nonetheless create perceptions of direct redistribution (Opalo, 2021).

In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the country's first Kikuyu president, took over power from the power-sharing coalition government of Kibaki and Odinga, with William Ruto, a Kalenjin, as his running mate. They were re-elected in 2017, notwithstanding an earlier annulment of the results. Whereas the outcomes of both elections were still split largely along ethnic lines—although not all ethnic groups voted as predictable blocs—class-based wedge issues dominated the 2022 elections. Deputy President William Ruto's "hustler" politics, which denounced the political "dynasties" and instead championed the working classes, garnered significant support in the strongholds of his main Luo opponent, Raila Odinga, and those of former President Uhuru Kenyatta, who no longer backed his former running mate (Opalo, 2022b).

3. Theorizing Support for Redistribution

In this section, we theorize the determinants of people's attitudes towards HR in an ethnically diverse context of competitive clientelism. Building on the existing literature concerning attitudes toward redistribution, we are interested in how ethnic group membership and political status affect individual support. We test and compare two mechanisms in particular.

In line with explanations on ethnic voting in Kenya (Opalo, 2022b), the first mechanism posits that in contrast to more advantaged group members, members of historically disadvantaged groups are more likely to approve of HR to offset their discrimination and catch up with those groups that had co-ethnic presidents in the postcolonial era, i.e., the Kikuyu (Presidents Kenyatta and Kibaki) and the Kalenjin (President Moi and current President Ruto). Thus, because of the strong overlap between political and economic marginalization, we

expect that support for HR coincides with ethnic exclusion. Rather than applying any primordial logic, we assume in this respect that ethnic identities continue to derive their importance from the organization of political and economic power within the state and from fears of the costs of not having one of their "own" in office (see also Kimenyi, 2013; Opalo, 2022b). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

> H1a. Kenyan citizens who belong to politically excluded ethnic groups, i.e., groups who have not occupied the highest office in recent decades, are likely to be more supportive of HR compared to Kenyans who have had a co-ethnic in power (i.e., Kikuyu and Kalenjin).

Perceptions of political exclusion and disfavoring might be more significant in explaining support for HR, however, than actual histories of in- and exclusion and ethnic favoritism, as was the case in Nigeria and Uganda (Langer et al., 2016). Notably, while past research has shown that there is consistency between objective and subjective inequalities among both the most frustrated (Somali) and the most privileged (Kikuyu) groups in Kenya, this was not the case for larger groups without a history in power (2010 data; Langer & Mikami, 2013). The Luo, for instance, appeared rather satisfied with their influence in politics, and across the surveyed population, they were perceived to be the second most favored group after the Kikuyu (Kimenyi, 2013). Not surprisingly, their mobilization for electoral competition—and that of other numerically larger groups, for that matter—puts them in a better position to "claim" socio-economic benefits and resources from the state (see Kanyinga, 2016). Moreover, with the introduction of devolution, these perceptions may have changed. Local representation, for instance, might compensate for any perceived lack of political clout nationally. Research suggests that legislative candidates' constituency service matters greatly in determining Kenyans' votes (Opalo, 2022a). Also, Ruto's election may have affected Kikuyu's perceptions of their relative advantage—like those of the Kalenjin (in the opposite direction). We thus formulate the following alternative hypothesis:

> H1b. Kenyan citizens who are under the perception that their ethnic group is politically excluded, notwithstanding actual exclusion, are more likely to be more supportive of HR.

Our second main mechanism turns to equity considerations. In parallel with our argument for the introduction of HR, we examine whether Kenyans who acknowledge that state power has been used to accumulate wealth among the "winners" are more supportive of HR towards the "losers," irrespective of their own group membership and status. We thus depart from traditional political economy applications that assume that ethnic groups share a "taste for discrimination" (Becker, 1971) or have a commonality of tastes for which ethnic group members may only be willing to bear the cost of providing public goods if their co-ethnics are the primary recipients (see, for instance, Sambanis & Shayo, 2013; Schmidt-Catran, 2016; while Miguel & Gugerty, 2005, also examine this mechanism, their evidence does not support it). Since past studies could not establish ethnic discrimination to occur in experimental games unless threatened with social sanctions (for the Ugandan context see Habyarimana et al., 2007) and support for economic redistribution to poorer ethnic groups seems high across a number of sub-Saharan contexts (Langer & Mikami, 2013; Langer et al., 2016), we expect that equity considerations are common across groups:

> H2. Kenyan citizens who attribute the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups to past political exclusion and historical discrimination are likely to be more supportive of HR.

Although equity concerns are, in principle, diametrically opposed to group self-interest (unless one belongs to deprived groups), we argue that they are not necessarily incongruent in contexts marked by clientelism. After all, previous research in Kenya has shown that even Kenyans who do not care much for their ethnic group identity tend to vote for their co-ethnic MPs in anticipation of other groups' voting behavior (Kramon, 2019).

4. Empirical Strategy

4.1. Survey Methodology and Data

How do experiences of political exclusion, on the one hand, and public opinion on the causes of group poverty, on the other, condition support for government-led HR towards marginalized ethnic groups? To answer this question, we invited Kenyan citizens aged 18 years and above (via Facebook advertisements) to participate in an online panel survey on their perceptions of inequalities and redistribution. In total, 1,241.854 Kenyan Facebook users were shown an ad banner at least once (an average of 3.89 views per user). The ad consisted of a small introductory text ("How do you feel about inequalities in Kenya? Register now to take part in our survey") and a visual of four pictures representing Kenyans from different walks of life (see Figure 1 in Supplementary File). To ensure the inclusion of respondents from different strata of society, we targeted our ads based on potential participants' self-reported gender, age, and level of education on their profiles, as well as using people's location at a total cost of 1,785.76 EUR. In total, 61,049 users clicked on the banner and were subsequently redirected to our survey registration page, where 6,246 registered by sharing their mobile phone numbers. Among all who registered, 4,875 used WhatsApp. Among those, we invited 3,410 respondents to participate after stratified random sampling based on background demographics. Over the course of eight weeks, this sample was invited via the messaging service to complete four short surveys on the Qualtrics platform. After completing each round (median completion time of 10.5 min with 75% of the respondents completing in less than 15 minutes), respondents received 140 Kenyan shillings (equivalent to 0.88 EUR at the time when the first round was launched) worth of mobile phone credit to compensate their internet data use and express our appreciation for participation.

In total, 2,286 Kenyans completed all four rounds—only 215 respondents dropped out throughout the various rounds (overall attrition rate of 9.4%). Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of our sample in each round. The ethnic composition of our sample deviates somewhat from the country's ethnic distribution (according to weighted Afrobarometer data): In contrast to the overrepresentation of Luhya and Luo, there is an underrepresentation of the smaller ethnic groups. This could indicate a larger interest in the topic among members of the larger ethnic groups that have been excluded from the highest office. Regionally (current residence expressed by former province), biases are less pronounced, notwithstanding greater numbers from Nairobi and fewer participants from the former North Eastern province, the most destitute region of the country. Further, there are more men (≈57%) than women. Regarding age, respondents are, on average, 32 years old (the youngest respondent is 18; the oldest respondent is 72). Finally, and most notably, our sample has a strong bias toward higher-educated Kenyans. While only one-fourth of Kenyans have a post-secondary degree, according to the latest Afrobarometer data, about 77% of our respondents have completed some tertiary education. Whereas our results will largely be statistically representative of highly educated, rather young WhatsApp users with presumably some interest in the topic (for they registered to participate in the survey), we argue that this populace is key in informing political action. Our results, therefore, have important implications for Kenyan society more generally.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Reference[1]
Surveys					
# invitations	3410	2501	2423	2358	–
# completed surveys	2501	2423	2366	2286	–
Completion rate (%)	73.3	96.9	97.6	96.9	–
Gender				Not asked	
Male (%)	57.4	56.4	56.6	–	50.0
Female (%)	42.6	43.6	43.3	–	50.0
Age					
18–25 years (%)	31.2	29.9	32.4	32.7	29.1
26–35 years (%)	34.3	34.5	34.1	34.4	26.7
36–45 years (%)	23.5	23.4	23.0	22.3	16.4
46–55 years (%)	8.4	9.6	8.2	8.5	13.0
56–65 years (%)	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.0	8.9
Over 65 years (%)	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	5.8
Ethnic identification				Not asked	
Kalenjin (%)	14.5	14.4	14.4	–	12.9
Kamba (%)	10.3	10.3	10.3	–	9.9
Kikuyu (%)	17.6	17.8	17.8	–	17.7
Kisii (%)	8.5	8.5	8.5	–	6.5
Luhya (%)	20.1	20.5	20.8	–	14.8
Luo (%)	14.8	15.1	15.0	–	11.9
Meru (%)	4.5	4.3	4.2	–	5.9
Mijikenda (%)	2.4	2.3	2.3	–	3.0
Somali (%)	1.7	1.6	1.5	–	3.4
Other ethnicities (%)	5.7	5.2	5.3	–	14.0
Education		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
No formal education (%)	0.1	–	–	–	4.0
Primary education (%)	2.1	–	–	–	36.0
Secondary education (%)	20.5	–	-	–	35.0
Postsecondary education (%)	77.3	–	–	–	24.0
Residence (by former province)		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
Central	12.1	–	–	–	13.7
Coast	8.0	-	–	–	9.7
Eastern	11.9	–	–	–	14.9
Nairobi	14.6	–	–	–	11.0
North Eastern	2.4	–	–	-	3.6
Nyanza	14.3	–	–	–	12.3
Rift Valley	24.7	–	–	–	25.4
Western	12.0	–	–	–	9.4
Residence (urban--rural)		Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	
Large city	28.6	–	–	–	35.0
Small city	43.3	–	–	–	
Rural village	28.2	–	–	–	65.0

Notes: [1] Results from weighted Afrobarometer Round 9 sample (Afrobarometer, 2023); Afrobarometer makes no distinction between large and small cities, but rather between urban and rural residences, which is reflected here.

4.2. Operationalization

We use the Perceptions of Inequalities and Redistribution Survey (PIRS), designed by our research team, to capture Kenyans' attitudes towards HIs and group-based redistribution. In the current article, we build on a small subset of questions related to political and socio-economic HIs between ethnic groups and their causes to assess our hypotheses.

Our main dependent variable is a general measure of support for government-led HR. Respondents were asked to indicate, on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from *not support at all* (0) to *fully support* (10), to what extent they would support government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. The item did not specify through which policy this objective would be achieved nor whether it would benefit one or more specific ethnic groups. Respondents may, therefore, have had either direct or indirect policy approaches in mind, and so to measure support for direct approaches in particular, we include a second dependent variable, which asked respondents to what extent they (dis)agreed with the following statement: "The government should give extra economic assistance to disadvantaged ethnic groups," using a 7-point scale.

To evaluate whether political exclusion from the highest office affects support for HR (H1a), we composed the independent variable 'political exclusion' based on group identification. While checking the robustness of results by controlling for each group individually, we constructed three categories: (a) advantaged groups, i.e., groups that have had a co-ethnic president (i.e., Kikuyu and Kalenjin) irrespective of population share; (b) groups that are numerically larger (>10% of the Kenyan population; Luo, Luhya, Kamba); and (c) smaller groups (<10% of the population) that have never accessed the highest echelons of central power. We assume in this respect that larger groups have more political clout even when not in power because of their electoral weight. The advantaged group (a) serves as the reference category.

To test whether subjective perceptions matter (more) when it comes to support for HR (H1b), the second predictor (perceived political exclusion) measures respondents' perception of their group's relative political position. It is a composite score based on their responses to the following three questions (see also Figure 2 in the Supplementary File for the distribution by item):

1. "According to you, how well is your ethnic group represented in the national government compared to your group's demographic size in the total population?" (responses provided via a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *very overrepresented* to 5 = *very underrepresented*)
2. "How much political influence does your ethnic group have in the national government compared to other ethnic groups in Kenya?" (responses provided via a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *much more* to 5 = *much less*)
3. "How often is your ethnic group treated unfairly by the national government?" (responses provided via a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *always*)

After recoding the scores on these items to a range between 0 and 1 and summing the recoded values, we obtain an index that ranges from 0 (corresponding to low perceived political exclusion) to 3 (high perceived political exclusion), which allows us to examine the impact of perceived ethnic group marginalization on support for HR (H1b).

The third predictor measures how important the following factors are, according to our respondents, in explaining why some ethnic groups are doing worse economically:

1. Because their economic development was more severely affected or harmed by the colonial period than other ethnic groups;
2. Because they have been discriminated against by past Kenyan governments; or
3. Because they have less access to political power than other ethnic groups.

All three items were measured on the same 11-point scale (0 = *not important at all* to 10 = *very important*; see Figure 3 in the Supplementary File for the distribution by item). As for the second predictor, we used these scores to calculate an index (acknowledgement of political exclusion), which will enable us to test our second hypothesis. Like the above composite index, this ranges from 0 (corresponding to the perception that political exclusion is not important in explaining the current situation of the poorest ethnic groups) to 3 (which attributes a high importance to political exclusion).

Finally, the models also include a range of control variables, including gender, age, urban–rural residence, perceived severity of ethnic disparities, perceived level of group poverty, and ethnic identification. Notably, past research has shown that Kenyans who consider their ethnic identity very important and think that their group's economic situation is worse than that of other ethnic groups are more likely to support economic group-based redistribution (Langer et al., 2016).

4.3. Statistical Model

After presenting some descriptive statistics, we rely on an OLS and logistic regression model to test the hypotheses using support for general and direct HI-correcting policies as dependent variables. While 11-point scales are usually treated as continuous, we also conduct a logistic regression (proportional odds model) using the former as a robustness check since the scale is actually ordinal in nature.

We enter the covariates following a stepwise procedure. First, we test for the main effects of our three independent variables (political exclusion, perceived political exclusion, and acknowledgment of political exclusion). Second, we include interaction effects between perceived political exclusion and acknowledgment of political exclusion on the one hand, and the objective measure of political exclusion on the other. As discussed above (Section 3), there are important differences between ethnic groups regarding their subjective experiences of exclusion compared to their objective representation in government (which we attributed, among others, to their electoral weight). The final model includes all independent variables, interactions, and control variables, as presented in the previous section.

5. Results and Findings

Generally, there is very strong support among our respondents for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between different ethnic groups. Markedly, 55.2% of the respondents "fully supported" (ticked value of 10) general policies ($M = 9.4$, $SD = 2.4$). Relatedly, 81.9% (strongly) agreed that the government should give extra economic assistance to disadvantaged ethnic groups.

In what follows, we examine whether remaining differences in levels of support for HR can be understood by turning to objective (H1a) and subjective (H1b) measures of political exclusion of respondents' own ethnic group and/or equity considerations, as expressed through the recognition of the importance of past and current clientelist practices in explaining the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups (H2). Before evaluating our hypotheses, it is interesting to note that perceptions do matter. Table 2 shows that not all members of groups that have never had a co-ethnic in power feel that their group is politically marginalized to the same extent.

Table 2. Perceptions of perceived political exclusion by ethnic group.

	(0, 1]---Lowest	(1, 2]	(2, 3]---Highest	Differences
Kalenjin	110 (39.4%)	166 (59.5%)	3 (1.1%)	(ref.)
Kamba	18 (8.6%)	151 (72.2%)	40 (19.1%)	$p < .001$
Kikuyu	137 (39.8%)	199 (57.8%)	8 (2.3%)	n.s.
Kisii	11 (6.2%)	125 (70.6%)	41 (23.2%)	$p < .001$
Luhya	39 (9.1%)	310 (72.4%)	79 (18.5%)	$p < .001$
Luo	25 (8.0%)	196 (62.6%)	92 (29.4%)	$p < .001$
Meru	12 (14.1%)	63 (74.1%)	10 (11.8%)	$p < .001$
Mijikenda	1 (2.1%)	26 (54.2%)	21 (43.8%)	$p < .001$
Somali	4 (12.1%)	22 (66.7%)	7 (21.1%)	$p < .001$

Note: Significance levels of groupwise comparisons obtained from pairwise Wilcoxon tests with Holm-adjustment.

Turning to our first hypothesis, we find that neither objective nor subjective measures of political exclusion directly impact support for HR (see OLS 1 in Table 3). Thus, at first sight, it neither seems to matter whether someone has (had) a co-ethnic president or feels that their ethnic group is fairly represented within national politics. Yet, as hypothesized, group effects may cancel out the effect of perceived exclusion in particular, which the second model (OLS 2) demonstrates. Notably, among Kenyans who do not perceive any political inequality, support is highest among the Kikuyu and Kalenjin (reference group). However, whenever political exclusion is experienced, support among the latter group significantly decreases, whereas support increases among the other groups, and the smaller groups in particular. This is well visualized by the predicted probability plot in Figure 1. We thus reject hypothesis 1a and partially accept the alternative hypothesis (1b). Accordingly, we conclude that perceptions of political exclusion are positively related to support for HR among historically excluded groups, i.e., those who stand to benefit, rather than lose out, from the policies.

Second, we test whether equity considerations affect support for HR (H2). The data show that Kenyan respondents, who think that structural causes are important in explaining why some ethnic groups are doing worse economically, are more likely to support group-based redistributive policies controlling for political

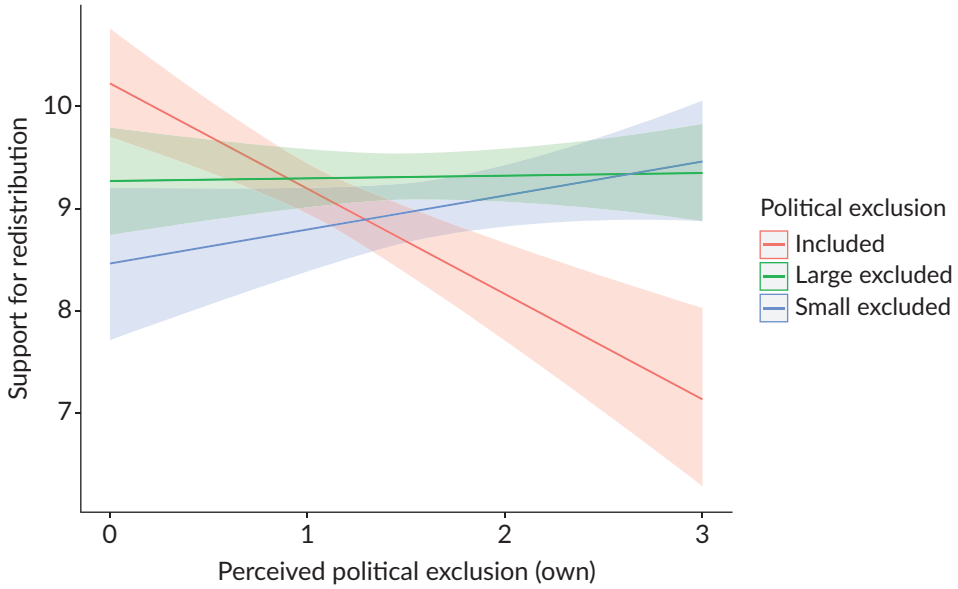

Figure 1. Predicted probability plot of support for redistribution. Note: Redistribution by level of perceived political exclusion in Kenya plotted separately for (a) groups that have had a co-ethnic president, (b) numerically larger groups, and (c) smaller groups that didn't have a co-ethnic president.

exclusion (OLS 3). However, it is particularly among the larger and, to a lesser extent, the smaller groups who have historically been out of power that attributing the relative disadvantage of the poorest ethnic groups to structural causes results in increased support for HR (OLS 4). This provides partial support for H2. Rather than equity considerations, however, this measure might represent another dimension of group self-interest, i.e., past unfair treatment may have greater explanatory power regarding their disadvantage than current exclusion (which is alleviated by their potential for electoral mobilization).

Third, we control for gender, age, urban–rural residence, perceived severity of ethnic and economic disparities, perceived level of group poverty, and closeness to the Kenyan nationality (OLS 5). Whereas there are no significant differences between men and women, there is a very minor yet significant effect of age, with older respondents being more supportive. Remarkably, respondents living in smaller cities are also more in favor of HR than those living in large cities. Perceptions of group poverty and the severity of ethnic disparities also matter. As expected, a positive association exists between the perceived severity of ethnic inequalities and support for government-led HR. Counter-intuitively, however, there is a negative effect of perceived group poverty. Although puzzling initially, its significance appears to be a statistical artifact of treating the variable as numeric rather than ordinal. Finally, there is a minor effect of national identification, with Kenyans who feel closer to their nationality being slightly more supportive.

Using a logistic regression model instead yields similar results (see Table 1 in the Supplementary File). We also reran the reported analyses using the various ethnic groups instead of the three categories of political exclusion (see Table 2 in the Supplementary File). It follows that the effect of perceptions of political exclusion on support for HR among smaller groups is driven particularly by the Somali, which aligns with the findings we presented from previous research. Compared to the Kalenjin, second, equity considerations only positively impacted support among the Luyha, but not the Luo and the Kamba (i.e., other larger groups with a history of political exclusion) respondents.

Table 3. Explaining attitudes toward HR.

	OLS 1 (general)	OLS 2 (general)	OLS 3 (general)	OLS 4 (general)	OLS 5 (general)	PO1 (direct) policy)
(Intercept)	9.142***	10.471***	8.669***	9.139***	8.166***	
	(0.150)	(0.271)	(0.148)	(0.220)	(0.440)	
Pol. exclusion (ref.: avantaged groups)						
Large excluded groups	0.228	−1.578***	0.132	−0.734*	−1.546***	−0.585
	(0.135)	(0.372)	(0.118)	(0.309)	(0.450)	(0.391)
Small excluded groups	−0.090	−2.072***	−0.131	−0.649	−2.072***	−1.079*
	(0.162)	(0.455)	(0.141)	(0.373)	(0.532)	(0.463)
Perceived pol. exclusion (own)	0.120	−1.102***			−1.028***	−0.564**
	(0.108)	(0.234)			(0.227)	(0.199)
X Large excl. groups		1.512***			1.055***	0.587*
		(0.277)			(0.272)	(0.239)
X Small excl. groups		1.602***			1.364***	0.701**
		(0.309)			(0.308)	(0.270)
Acknowledgment pol. Exclusion			0.401***	0.086	0.009	0.273*
			(0.079)	(0.135)	(0.137)	(0.117)
X Large excl. groups				0.545**	0.354	0.010
				(0.179)	(0.182)	(0.157)
X Small excl. groups				0.344	0.181	0.122
				(0.217)	(0.221)	(0.192)
Perceived HI severity					0.169***	0.037
					(0.022)	(0.019)
National identification					0.035*	0.022
					(0.018)	(0.016)
Group poverty					−0.121*	0.117*
					(0.055)	(0.048)
Age					0.035***	0.016**
					(0.005)	(0.005)
Gender (ref.: male)						
Female					0.059	−0.206*
					(0.104)	(0.089)
Residence (ref.: Large city)						
Small city					0.391**	0.126
					(0.122)	(0.105)
Village					0.148	0.060
					(0.137)	(0.117)
Num.Obs.	2010	2010	2196	2196	1913	2010
R2	0.005	0.022	0.014	0.019	0.095	
R2 Adj.	0.003	0.019	0.013	0.016	0.088	

Using our alternative dependent variable instead (economic assistance targeted to the most deprived ethnic groups), we find similar effects of the interaction between perceptions of political exclusion and group history in power (see proportional odds model in Table 3, column PO1). Thus, perceptions of political exclusion only

result in increased support for direct assistance to the most destitute groups for politically marginalized groups. Where the general measure, however, exposed increased support among members of larger excluded groups who attribute ethnic group poverty to structural exclusion; in this model, particularly Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents who acknowledge unfair treatment show increased support for HR. More generally, support for HR is highest among these groups when controlled for all other predictors. These results, in our opinion, do grasp equity considerations. In terms of control variables, it is striking that perceived severity, national identification, and urban–rural residence no longer have significant effects. In contrast, the effect of group poverty now is positive as we would have originally expected—the effect is only marginal in size, however, when we include the variable as ordinal. Further striking is that support for direct economic assistance is lower among women.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Scholars have recently started exploring the politics of group-based redistribution to redress politically induced disparities between ethnic groups. This article extends this new line of research to the study of ethnic favoritism and its impact on popular support for HR with a unique online survey conducted in Kenya. We put two main hypotheses to the test. First, we hypothesized that members of ethnic groups historically excluded from political power are more likely to support government-led HR towards disadvantaged ethnic groups because of the strong overlap between political exclusion and economic marginalization of ethnic groups in Kenya (H1a). Redistributive policies would, in other words, be in their groups' self-interest, enabling them to offset their exclusion. While having a co-ethnic president in power is usually associated with having "your turn to eat" in Kenya, it is likely that not all Kenyans who have not had a co-ethnic president in power feel politically excluded. Hence, our alternative hypothesis read that Kenyans would support HR to a greater extent when they *perceived* their ethnic group to be politically excluded (H1b). Instead of self-interest, our second hypothesis put forward equity considerations. Thus, we argued that Kenyans who attribute the relative disadvantage of politically marginalized groups to colonial legacies and historical exclusion from the highest office would be more in favor of redistribution towards these very groups, even if their group does not stand to win.

Our results show that there is generally strong demand for redistributive policies that tackle economic inequalities between different ethnic groups in Kenya, including when economic assistance is explicitly targeted to the poorest ethnic groups only. Among Kenyans who do not feel that their ethnic group is excluded from power, support for HR is even highest among the historically privileged groups of the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. However, their support decreased when members felt that their group was disadvantaged. In contrast, support increased among all other groups whose members felt disadvantaged, particularly for the numerically smallest groups such as the Somali. H1b thus only holds for politically marginalized groups and is indicative of the role of group self-interest. Indeed, subjectively deprived Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents seemingly realize that their group does not stand to benefit from these policies. In contrast, respondents with similar feelings of political deprivation among smaller excluded groups would be the "winners." It is important to deal carefully with these "losers" to avoid that further perceived loss in relative advantage could cause resentment and social tensions (see also Langer & Mikami, 2013). To a lesser degree, group self-interest was also apparent regarding respondents' attributional beliefs on the causes of ethnic disparities. Whereas we expected that equity considerations would cut across groups (H2), only among the larger groups excluded from power did acknowledging past exclusion result in increased support for HR.

Yet, we have to be careful to conclude that Kenyans are more supportive of group-based redistribution *only* when they and their fellow group members are likely to benefit from it. First, there was overwhelming general support for government policies aimed at eradicating economic inequalities between ethnic groups. This clearly shows that our respondents are concerned with the welfare of all groups, particularly disadvantaged groups. And, while there are significant differences between groups according to individual members' perceptions of political exclusion and attributional beliefs, there is actually strong support among historically advantaged group members, even when they feel deprived. Third, when using the alternative dependent variable that measured direct HI-correcting policies (i.e., economic assistance targeted to the most deprived ethnic groups), Kikuyu and Kalenjin respondents who acknowledged unfair treatment even showed more support for HR than members of larger excluded groups. Hence, we suggest viewing Kenyan politics less through the prism of "our turn to eat" and more through one of "everyone's turn to eat."

To end, in terms of future research, we believe it would be interesting to replicate this study among a more representative sample of Kenyans and in other (formerly) clientelist societies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such studies could help to understand to what extent our findings are generalizable beyond (mainly) tertiary-educated Kenyans with regular access to the internet, and similar to insights from societies with slightly different histories of clientelism and/or different ethnic compositions. Researchers could also look at other variables that affect the relationship, such as religion. At the macro level, Franck and Rainer (2012) found that ethnic favoritism is less prevalent in African states with one dominant religion, while Nel (2021) used individual-level data to show that more devoted Africans are more tolerant of income (vertical) inequality. Future research could also include political partisanship. Opalo (2021) found that opinions on financing cash transfer programs in Kenya strongly correlate with party affiliation. He argues that varying levels of trust and perceived legitimacy of the government explain why co-partisans are more likely to support tax increases. Similarly, these factors could influence whether promises of HR to marginalized ethnic groups are actually seen as credible. Exploring how finance modalities affect support for HR is also a promising future path for research.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the Kenyans who participated in our research and the three anonymous reviewers who provided constructive and insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Funding

We are grateful for the generous project funding (G068320N) from the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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