

# Personal Relative Deprivation, Not Subjective Status, Explains Support for Economic Redistribution

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## Abstract

Economic inequality is high and associated with negative societal consequences in many countries. Although economic redistribution policies (e.g., higher taxes) can reduce inequality, support is mixed and only moderately explained by political orientation. Prior research suggests subjective socioeconomic status (SES) can help account for redistributive attitudes. We suggest that personal relative deprivation (PRD)—the experience of perceiving an unfair disadvantage compared to similar others—may also provide useful insight. In four U.S. studies (total  $n = 2,256$ ), we examined whether PRD, subjective SES, or both consistently explained redistribution support. Higher PRD uniquely related to stronger support for income and wealth redistribution across studies, beyond political orientation and background factors (e.g., income, education). Notably, subjective SES did not consistently predict income or wealth redistribution support. We discuss the contribution of PRD to understanding redistribution policy support and caution about the usefulness of subjective SES for theory and interpretation in this domain.

## Keywords

personal relative deprivation, subjective socioeconomic status, political orientation, economic inequality, redistribution

Economic inequality has been growing in many countries since the 1980s with increasingly large gaps between the rich and the poor (Chancel et al., 2022). High inequality is linked to many unwanted consequences including increased school bullying and risk-taking, as well as decreased mental health, increased physical illness and shorter life expectancies (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Elgar et al., 2019; Payne et al., 2017; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015). As people typically want more equality in society than currently exists (Day & Norton, 2023; García-Sánchez et al., 2019; Kelley & Evans, 1993; Kiatpongsan & Norton, 2014), a general aim of the current research is to better understand support for reducing inequality.

Although there are many potential ways to reduce economic inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011), a primary method involves economic redistribution, such as through higher income and wealth taxes for the rich (Krugman, 2009). From a rational voter perspective, people should demand redistribution when it benefits them, such as in contexts of high inequality and relatively low income. However, higher support for economic redistribution is not predicted by higher inequality and tends to be only modestly related to self-interest indicators of objective socioeconomic status (SES), such as lower income (e.g., Dawtry et al., 2015; Son Hing et al., 2019).

In the present research, we consider the relatively unexplored role of personal relative deprivation (PRD) in support for redistribution. PRD is characterized by feelings of resentment, dissatisfaction, or anger due to comparing with the circumstances of similar others (e.g., those that are better-off) and believing one is not getting what is fairly deserved (Pettigrew, 2016; Smith & Huo, 2014). In other words, the experience of feeling deprived centers on local social comparison processes (Callan et al., 2015) and justice-based affective reactions (Smith, Pettigrew, & Huo, 2020). Feeling personally deprived has been linked to many outcomes, including worse physical and mental health, higher rates of gambling, and increased aggression (Callan et al., 2011, 2015; Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2019; Mishra & Carleton, 2015; Nadler et al., 2020; Smith, Ryan, et al., 2020). As we elaborate below, PRD, which inherently involves the belief that one is not

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getting what one deserves, may also uniquely explain support for redistribution policies.

In prior research explaining support for redistribution, it has been suggested that subjective SES—a person's assessment of where they rank compared to all others in society (Adler et al., 2000)—may play a critical role (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). Across two studies using U.S. residents recruited from Mechanical Turk, Brown-Iannuzzi and colleagues (2015) found lower subjective SES linked to higher support for redistribution independent from objective SES (i.e., household income, education) and political orientation. These findings have been cited widely and used as supporting evidence and an interpretative guide for a variety of emerging theoretical psychological scholarship, suggesting a notable and continuing impact on the field (e.g., Bullock, 2017; García-Castro et al., 2020; Y. Kim & Sommet, 2023; Manstead, 2018; Piff et al., 2018). Indeed, a link between subjective SES and redistribution support has some logical appeal and conceptual grounding (e.g., subjective reality should better predict attitudes and behaviors than objective conditions; Lewin, 1935). However, additional research has showed mixed results. While other American research found a similar link between lower subjective SES and support for redistribution (Condon & Wichowsky, 2020), studies conducted, for example, in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan revealed minor and nonsignificant associations (H. Kim, Huh, et al., 2018; H. Kim & Lee, 2018). Therefore, further examination may be needed to clarify the role of subjective SES in redistribution support.

Although other substitutes may exist, PRD is an individual-level psychological construct that may better explain redistribution attitudes than subjective SES, as we further outline below. We then test whether PRD or subjective SES or both factors consistently predict support for redistribution across four studies (beyond political orientation and background factors such as income). Thus, this research will examine which factor(s) may provide superior psychological insight into this consequential societal issue.

### **Personal Relative Deprivation, Subjective Socioeconomic Status, and Support for Redistribution**

Although the study of PRD has evolved over time (Pettigrew, 2016; Runciman, 1966; Stouffer et al., 1949; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984), it critically involves construct-related emotional reactions (e.g., resentment, dissatisfaction, anger) when comparing to similar others (e.g., coworkers, friends, family; Callan et al., 2011; Olson et al., 1995; Pettigrew, 2002). For example, experiences of PRD that involve feelings of resentment and anger appear to be linked to challenging actions, whereas merely feeling sadness does not (Osborne et al., 2012). In general, a sense of personal deprivation can arise when comparisons involve

something one cares about and feels deserving of, but without a sense of responsibility for the disadvantaged outcome (Crosby, 1976; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). Feelings of deprivation also tend to stem from upward comparisons with similar others involving status-related content, such as higher income (H. Kim, Callan, et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2012).

While PRD and subjective SES vary in several ways (e.g., Callan et al., 2015; Pettigrew, 2016), there are at least a couple of conceptual reasons why subjective SES may be less suitable than PRD to explain economic redistribution preferences. First, subjective SES inherently involves comparing oneself to others throughout society (i.e., individuals mostly different from oneself). This contrasts with the local comparisons central to PRD that social comparison theory emphasizes as important to explaining subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Festinger, 1954; Gerber et al., 2018; Goethals & Darley, 1977), including in domains involving status-goods and pay (e.g., Brown et al., 2008; Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2011). Second, subjective SES is a cognitive assessment that does not directly account for how the individual feels (i.e., affectively) about their status, let alone the justice-based affective reactions associated with feeling personally deprived. For example, while some may expect that people relatively lower in subjective SES (e.g., a three or four on a 10-point ladder) should be dissatisfied about their societal position, this may not accurately reflect how respondents feel. Alternatively, they may be genuinely content with their subjective SES, rationalize their position, care more about how they compare with local than societal others or some other possibility. An association between subjective SES and support for redistribution would thus appear to rest on assumptions (e.g., lower subjective SES means dissatisfaction) that may be only loosely and not necessarily, grounded in reality.

There are also reasons to suggest a stronger experience of PRD may be related to higher support for economic redistribution. As individuals experiencing PRD have an absence of personal responsibility for their disadvantaged outcomes, they may attribute blame for unfair circumstances externally and support “constructive change of society,” such as through voting (Crosby, 1976, p. 100). External explanations for unequal outcomes (e.g., regarding societal and institutional conditions, policies) tend to be associated with higher support for redistribution (Piff et al., 2020). Furthermore, the emotional experience of believing one is not getting what one deserves compared to others—including feeling dissatisfied, resentment, or anger—shows some overlap with emotional predictors (e.g., anger) of seeking societal change (Jost et al., 2012). A similar pattern is also suggested by a link between stronger feelings of personal deprivation and increased intentions to rebel (Chen et al., 2018). Moreover, a study conducted in New Zealand found higher levels of PRD explained support for increased income redistribution among majority group members (Lilly et al., 2024). Although this study

**Table 1.** Participant Exclusion Criteria and Demographics for All Studies

Participant Details	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
Participants recruited (N)	201	438	305	2,000
Exclusion criteria (Participant . . .)				
. . . requested data be omitted	0	0	0	59
. . . less than 18 years old	0	0	0	0
. . . failed quality checks <sup>a</sup>	6	54	4	119
. . . beyond 7-point political orientation	12	15	35	360
. . . met multiple exclusion criteria	0	3	0	21
Participants retained (n)	183	366	266	1,441
Demographics				
Age in years [ <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )]	36.91 (11.68)	36.86 (11.24)	35.58 (21.31)	48.60 (16.91)
Gender (Female)	47.5%	42.6%	53.8%	50.6%
Ethnicity (White)	79.2%	73.5%	80.1%	51.6%
Education (Bachelor's or higher)	45.3%	53.8%	53.3%	31.5%
Household income (median)	\$30,001–\$45,000	\$45,001–\$60,000	\$45,001–\$60,000	\$30,001–\$45,000

Note. Check 1: Completed less than 50% of materials (Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4). Check 2: Spent less than 5 s on a materials page (Studies 1 and 2); Spent less than 3 min on the study (Study 3); Incorrect answer to attention question (Study 4).

<sup>a</sup>Each study had two quality checks (failure criterion indicated).

suggests a positive relationship exists, it did not examine the potential role of subjective SES and thus cannot determine whether PRD, subjective SES, or both may uniquely explain support for redistribution. As direct evidence is limited, additional research involving PRD could provide useful insight into people's economic redistribution attitudes.

## Current Research

Across four studies, we primarily tested whether the experience of personal relative deprivation (PRD), subjective SES, or both factors consistently explain support for economic redistribution, beyond what is explained by political orientation. Having a stronger liberal orientation generally relates to support for redistributive policies (Jost et al., 2003; Kuziemko et al., 2015); therefore, we examined redistribution support taking this factor into account. Studies 1 and 2 were exploratory and included unrelated experimental conditions that did not affect the dependent measures. In Study 1, we explored the associations between the three main predictors (i.e., PRD, subjective SES, political orientation) and support for income redistribution. In Study 2, we extended the conceptual exploration of these predictors by separately examining support for income and wealth redistribution. Studies 3 and 4 examined the same factors as Study 2 but were pre-registered to confirm the consistency of the patterns observed in Studies 1 and 2. We also explored patterns across studies by controlling for participant background factors, including indicators of objective SES (e.g., education, household income). Throughout these studies, the goal was to examine which primary factors (i.e., subjective SES, PRD) consistently explain redistribution support. This research can help clarify how personal circumstances may matter for redistribution support, which in turn, may matter for the degree of equality in society.

## Studies 1 to 4

### Transparency and Openness

The following sections summarize the combined details of all four studies. See the Supplemental File and link (<https://osf.io/p24nt/>) for additional information including study materials, data files, coding, additional analyses for each study, and preregistrations for Studies 3 and 4. Sample size determinations for Studies 1 and 2 were unrelated to the present research. Study 3 sample size was determined through a compromise of desire to detect relatively small effect sizes (sensitivity analyses indicates overall regression variance detection of  $f^2 = .04$ , with 80% power) and available resources. Study 4 sample size was determined by demands of other projects; however, because of the relatively large sample size ( $n = 1,441$ ), it provided sufficient power for the present purposes.

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were American residents recruited from Mechanical Turk (Studies 1 and 2; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), Prolific (Study 3; Peer et al., 2017), or Qualtrics Panel Service (Study 4). All participants received monetary compensation. See Table 1 for details on sample sizes, exclusion criteria, and main demographic information across studies. While participants in Studies 1 to 3 showed background characteristics typical of online convenience samples (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), Study 4 aimed to have a larger, more nationally balanced sample in terms of gender, age, and education. It was also composed of approximately equal numbers of White and Black participants to meet requirements of a different study (our study was one of four completed by participants). Although involving different research topics, preregistrations, and

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Variables for All Studies

Variable	Study 1 M (SD)	Study 2 M (SD)	Study 3 M (SD)	Study 4 M (SD)
1. PRD	3.76 (1.36)	3.92 (1.24)	3.47 (1.25)	3.50 (1.60)
2. Subjective SES	4.34 (1.66)	4.90 (1.81)	5.38 (1.72)	6.00 (2.03)
3. Political orientation	3.53 (1.79)	3.54 (1.72)	2.96 (1.54)	3.96 (1.69)
4. Income redistribution	5.26 (1.51)	5.21 (1.42)	5.28 (1.45)	4.99 (1.61)
5. Wealth redistribution	-	4.49 (1.76)	4.72 (1.60)	4.32 (1.79)
Presentation order (of above factors)	4, 1, 3, 2	4, 5, 1, 3, 2	1 <sup>a</sup> , 2 <sup>a</sup> , 4 <sup>b</sup> , 5 <sup>b</sup> , 3	1 <sup>a</sup> , 3 <sup>a</sup> , 2 <sup>a</sup> , 4 <sup>b</sup> , 5 <sup>b</sup>

Note. Wealth Redistribution Support was not assessed in Study 1. PRD = personal relative deprivation; SES = socioeconomic status.

<sup>a,b</sup>Measure presented in counterbalanced order with other measure(s) with the same symbol.

largely other variables, results based on participants in Studies 3 and 4 have been previously published (McAleese & Day, 2022; Nadler et al., 2020).

**Procedure.** Participants in all studies completed measures using Qualtrics online software. In Study 1, this included the main predictor variables (PRD, subjective SES, political orientation) and a single dependent variable (income redistribution support). These same predictor variables were used in Studies 2 to 4 but also included a second dependent variable (wealth redistribution support). The order of variables varied across studies (see Table 2). Specifically, Studies 1 and 2 were completed in a single order and with the dependent variable(s) first, whereas Study 3 varied the order of PRD and subjective SES, followed by a counterbalanced order of income and wealth redistribution. For Study 4, the orders of all predictor variables varied, followed by the dependent variables. As the presentation orders for Studies 3 and 4 did not predict or significantly interact with the main predictors for the dependent variables, we do not discuss order further (see Supplemental File). Participants provided demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, household income) at the end of each study. In all studies, additional measures were completed among the above variables for other research purposes. Studies 1 and 2 also included an experimental manipulation prior to the completion of the other measures. Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two passages about the availability of money in society. This manipulation did not affect the dependent measures as anticipated and including this factor in analyses did not significantly affect the results (see Supplemental File).

**Measures.** All multiple-item measures described below were averaged to create index scores across studies. See the Supplemental File for more information regarding the items used in each measure across studies.

**Personal Relative Deprivation (PRD).** Participants indicated how much they felt deprived compared to similar others

using a multi-item measure (Callan et al., 2011). Participants rated their agreement with statements (e.g., “I feel deprived when I think about what I have compared to what other people like me have”) using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For Studies 1 to 3, the full five-item measure was administered; in Study 4, however, only two items were retained because of space constraints ( $\alpha_{\text{Studies 1-4}} = .87, .78, .84, .84$ ).

**Subjective Socioeconomic Status (SES).** We assessed people’s perception of their place in the societal hierarchy using a single-item measure (Adler et al., 2000). Participants indicated their position in America on a 10-rung ladder in terms of their money, education, and job (1 = *bottom of the ladder*, 10 = *top of the ladder*).

**Political Orientation.** Participants indicated their political position using a three-item measure of general, social, and economic beliefs (Graham et al., 2009). For example, “In general, when it comes to politics, do you usually think about yourself as a liberal, moderate, conservative, or something else?” ( $\alpha_{\text{Studies 1-4}} = .95, .93, .92, .92$ ). For Studies 1 to 3, all social and economic items were completed using the following scale: 1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*, 8 = *do not know/not political*; however, for the general item in each study and all political orientation items in Study 4, there were additional options: 9 = *Libertarian*, 10 = *Other*.

**Income Redistribution Support.** We assessed general support for reallocating incomes and making them relatively more equal. Items were modified versions of prior assessments of income redistribution attitudes (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Page & Jacobs, 2009; Shariff et al., 2016). Participants read a brief definition of income inequality (H. Kim et al., 2017) and then indicated their agreement with relevant statements (e.g., “Incomes in this country should be more evenly distributed”) using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For Studies 1 to 3, a five-item measure was used, whereas Study 4 used a two-item version because of limited space ( $\alpha_{\text{Studies 1-4}} = .93, .88, .91, .87$ ). In Studies 1 and 2, this measure originally included seven items, but we

**Table 3.** Predicting Income Redistribution Support, Studies 1 to 4

Predictors	b	SE b	95% CI for b		$\beta$	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
			Lower	Upper				
<b>Study 1</b>								
Constant	5.633	.479	4.687	6.578		11.754	<.001	.421
PRD	.276	.070	.137	.415	.249	3.921	<.001	
Subjective SES	.071	.058	-.043	.184	.078	1.227	.221	
Political orientation	-.487	.049	-.583	-.390	-.577	-9.956	<.001	
<b>Study 2</b>								
Constant	6.167	.323	5.533	6.802		19.103	<.001	.388
PRD	.193	.050	.095	.291	.168	3.868	<.001	
Subjective SES	-.008	.034	-.075	.059	-.010	-.237	.813	
Political orientation	-.475	.035	-.543	-.408	-.575	-13.778	<.001	
<b>Study 3</b>								
Constant	7.216	.395	6.439	7.993		18.286	<.001	.449
PRD	.099	.059	-.017	.214	.085	1.685	.093	
Subjective SES	-.096	.042	-.179	-.012	-.113	-2.261	.025	
Political orientation	-.596	.044	-.682	-.510	-.632	-13.640	<.001	
<b>Study 4</b>								
Constant	5.993	.183	5.633	6.353		32.662	<.001	.213
PRD	.190	.024	.143	.237	.188	7.949	<.001	
Subjective SES	-.027	.019	-.064	.009	-.034	-1.453	.146	
Political orientation	-.381	.022	-.425	-.337	-.401	-17.036	<.001	

Note. PRD = personal relative deprivation; SES = socioeconomic status.

removed two items to conceptually improve the measure and facilitate study comparisons (including these items does not affect significance or conclusions of the main findings).

**Wealth Redistribution Support.** Participants' opinions about rearranging wealth in society were assessed using a five-item measure of estate tax support based on assessments used in past research (Kuziemko et al., 2015; Newport, 2015; Page & Jacobs, 2009). Participants read a brief description of the wealth inheritance tax and indicated their agreement with statements regarding their support and expansion of it (e.g., "Do you support the idea of the Estate Tax?") using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*). Five items were administered in Studies 2 and 3 and two of these items in Study 4 ( $\alpha_{\text{Studies 2-4}} = .93, .93, .77$ ).

**Demographics.** Participants also provided background information including their gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and household income.

## Results and Discussion

### Analytic Procedure

Given that our main goal was to test factors that may explain support for income or wealth redistribution, we first examined correlations among study variables. For each study, we then conducted linear regressions to examine whether the main variables (PRD, subjective SES, political orientation) explain support for income

redistribution (significance =  $p < .05$ ). For Studies 2 to 4, we conducted similar regressions but also examined predictors of support for wealth redistribution. As exploratory robustness checks, we repeated the regression analyses above with the addition of background variables as predictors (gender, age, ethnicity, education, and household income). Below we analyze income redistribution support followed by wealth redistribution support in the next section.

### Income Redistribution Support

**Preliminary Analyses.** Descriptive statistics of the main variables for each study can be seen in Table 2 (all correlations available in Table S3, Supplemental File). Across all studies, higher PRD correlated positively with support for income redistribution ( $r = .209$  to  $.315$ ). Lower subjective SES modestly related to higher income redistribution support ( $r = -.038$  to  $-.183$ ). A stronger conservative political orientation was related to less income redistribution support ( $r = -.418$  to  $-.649$ ).

**Primary Analyses.** See Table 3 for the results of multiple regressions simultaneously testing whether PRD, subjective SES, and political orientation uniquely predicted income redistribution support.

In Studies 1 and 2, regression analyses revealed that higher PRD significantly explained higher support for income redistribution. However, subjective SES was not significantly related to support for income redistribution in

either study. Stronger conservative political orientation was related to less support for income redistribution in both studies. A slightly different pattern emerged in Study 3. Although in the hypothesized direction, PRD did not significantly relate to income redistribution support. Also, higher subjective SES significantly predicted lower support for income redistribution. Political orientation showed the same significant association as in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 4, the patterns observed in Studies 1 and 2 again emerged, this time as predicted; higher PRD significantly explained more support for income redistribution and conservative political orientation significantly explained less support, but subjective SES did not significantly relate.

In sum, PRD showed a reasonably consistent pattern of association with higher income redistribution support across Studies 1 to 4 ( $\beta$ s = .249, .168, .085, .188, respectively) while subjective SES showed an inconsistent pattern suggesting little to no unique overall association ( $\beta$ s = .078, -.010, -.113, -.034, respectively).

### Exploratory Analyses

It is possible that participants' background characteristics, such as objective SES (education, income), may partly explain their support for economic redistribution. For example, higher household income modestly related to lower income and wealth redistribution support across studies ( $r = -.048$  to  $-.150$ ; Tables S3–4, Supplemental File). Thus, we explored whether the prior multiple regression patterns observed between the main predictor variables and support for income redistribution would hold while also controlling for five potentially relevant background variables (age, gender, ethnicity, education, household income). Across studies, the patterns largely remained the same, with a few exceptions (Table S5, Supplemental File).

Specifically, in Studies 1 and 2, the regression patterns were consistent to those found previously. That is, higher PRD ( $\beta = .223, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = .161, p < .001$ ; respectively) predicted higher redistribution support, and conservative political orientation ( $\beta = -.546, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -.586, p < .001$ ; respectively) predicted lower redistribution support, even when controlling for background variables. Subjective SES was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = .027, p = .758$ ;  $\beta = .029, p = .577$ ; respectively). All other variables, including objective SES indicators, were non-significant,  $ps > .05$ .

In Study 3, however, only conservative political orientation significantly predicted lower income redistribution support ( $\beta = -.637, p < .001$ ) when controlling for the background variables. Unlike the pattern from the primary regression analysis above, in this exploratory regression subjective SES no longer was a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.092, p = .093$ ); while PRD remained nonsignificant ( $\beta = .078, p = .135$ ), all other variables  $ps > .05$ .

Study 4 yielded the same patterns found in the primary regression but had an additional significant predictor of income redistribution not significant in Studies 1 to 3. Specifically, when controlling for background variables, PRD ( $\beta = .189, p < .001$ ) and political orientation ( $\beta = -.361, p < .001$ ) again significantly predicted support for income redistribution; however, ethnicity was also significant. More specifically, identifying as a minority ethnicity predicted stronger support for income redistribution ( $\beta = .143, p < .001$ ), all other background variables  $ps > .05$ . However, we approach this finding with caution given its inconsistency across studies.

### Wealth Redistribution Support

**Preliminary Analyses.** We first describe zero-order correlations among the independent variables and wealth redistribution support (see also Table S4, Supplemental File). In Studies 2 to 4, higher PRD associated with higher support for wealth redistribution ( $r = .195$  to  $.263$ ). Subjective SES showed mixed results. While lower subjective SES was related to wealth redistribution support in Studies 2 and 3 ( $r = -.099$  to  $-.188$ ), these factors were practically unrelated in Study 4 ( $r = .004$ ). Conservative political orientation had consistent negative relationships with wealth redistribution support ( $r = -.312$  to  $-.500$ ).

### Primary Analyses

See Table 4 for the results of the regressions testing whether PRD, subjective SES, and political orientation uniquely predicted wealth redistribution support across Studies 2 to 4.

A similar pattern emerged for wealth redistribution support to that of income redistribution support. Specifically, the regressions for Studies 2 to 4 revealed that higher PRD consistently predicted positive attitudes toward wealth redistribution ( $\beta$ s = .140, .169, .167, respectively) and stronger conservative political orientation consistently predicted negative attitudes toward wealth redistribution ( $\beta$ s = -.439, -.473, -.295, respectively). Meanwhile, subjective SES consistently did not significantly predict wealth redistribution support in Studies 2 to 4 ( $\beta$ s = -.002, -.099, .010, respectively).

**Exploratory Analyses.** When controlling for the background variables the patterns of the exploratory regressions involving predictors of wealth redistribution support remained very similar to the primary regressions above (Table S6, Supplemental File). In Studies 2 to 4, higher PRD explained greater wealth redistribution support ( $\beta = .114, p = .027$ ;  $\beta = .157, p = .008$ ;  $\beta = .161, p < .001$ ; respectively) and political orientation explained lower wealth redistribution support ( $\beta = -.430, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -.469, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -.287, p < .001$ ; respectively), but

**Table 4.** Predicting Wealth Redistribution Support, Studies 2 to 4

Predictors	b	SE b	95% CI for b		$\beta$	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>
			Lower	Upper				
Study 2								
Constant	5.309	.449	4.426	6.191		11.823	<.001	.230
PRD	.200	.069	.064	.337	.140	2.884	.004	
Subjective SES	-.002	.047	-.095	.091	-.002	-.039	.969	
Political orientation	-.450	.048	-.544	-.356	-.439	-9.375	<.001	
Study 3								
Constant	5.920	.485	4.965	6.874		12.208	<.001	.301
PRD	.215	.072	.073	.357	.169	2.986	.003	
Subjective SES	-.092	.052	-.194	.011	-.099	-1.767	.078	
Political orientation	-.487	.054	-.593	-.381	-.473	-9.064	<.001	
Study 4								
Constant	4.846	.216	4.423	5.268		22.481	<.001	.125
PRD	.188	.028	.133	.243	.167	6.688	<.001	
Subjective SES	.008	.022	-.034	.051	.010	.388	.698	
Political orientation	-.312	.026	-.363	-.260	-.295	-11.875	<.001	

Note. PRD = personal relative deprivation; SES = socioeconomic status.

subjective SES did not significantly predict,  $ps > .05$ . Also, in Study 4 only, gender (identifying as woman) significantly predicted higher wealth redistribution support ( $\beta = -.063$ ,  $p = .023$ ). All other background variables in Studies 1 to 4 (e.g., including objective SES indicators, minority ethnicity) were nonsignificant,  $ps > .05$ .

## General Discussion

Economic inequality is large and has been increasing for years. For example, the most dramatic increase in growth of billionaires worldwide occurred in 2020 (Chancel et al., 2022). While there are practical barriers to reducing inequality (e.g., Gilens, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012), one potentially helpful approach involves better understanding support for economic redistribution policies, such as increased taxes on the wealthy. Prior research has suggested that people's perception of their status compared to others throughout society (i.e., subjective SES) is a key factor to explaining redistribution support beyond what is accounted for by political orientation (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). The present research examined whether such a pattern can be consistently detected and whether the situation of feeling personally deprived relative to similar others (i.e., PRD) may provide unique insight. A clear pattern of findings emerged across four studies (three studies assessed income and wealth redistribution support, one assessed income redistribution support). While higher PRD provided reasonably consistent and unique insight into greater support for income and wealth redistribution policies, subjective SES was mostly unrelated to either type of redistribution support. A stronger conservative political orientation was related to less redistribution support (i.e., a stronger liberal orientation was linked to greater support). Thus, to understand people's support for economic redistribution, their

belief about their societal position may not matter as much as their local context, specifically their sense of deprivation (e.g., not getting what they feel is deserved) compared to similar others in their lives.

There are several conceptual contributions of uncovering the potential role of feeling personally deprived in explaining support for redistribution. It builds upon and clarifies research that found an association between PRD and income redistribution support among a sample of New Zealanders (Lilly et al., 2024). In particular, by revealing the unique explanatory power of PRD beyond subjective SES, extending the pattern to wealth redistribution support, and revealing the consistency of these associations. Thus, the present findings broaden the literature on predictors of economic redistribution attitudes (e.g., Alesina et al., 2018; Dawtry et al., 2015; Jost et al., 2003; Kuziemko et al., 2015; Piff et al., 2020; Son Hing et al., 2019) and suggest a conceptual update may be needed. While the lack of consistent predictive value of subjective SES in redistribution support across the present studies contrasts with a couple of prior research findings (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Condon & Wichowsky, 2020), it matches relatively more closely with high-powered, weak, or nonsignificant patterns previously detected (H. Kim, Huh, et al., 2018; H. Kim & Lee, 2018). In sum, socioeconomic ranking beliefs may not be a helpful or necessary step for understanding people's support for income or wealth redistribution and caution seems warranted when interpreting redistribution support through a subjective SES lens. To clarify, the present research may diminish the importance of societal rank in this domain, but it does not rule it out. For instance, while the local comparison processes inherent to PRD mean it can be experienced by individuals at all ranks in society, lower income tends to modestly associate with greater PRD (Lilly et al., 2024;

Pettigrew, 2002; Tables S3–4, Supplemental File). That is, income may be informative to redistribution attitudes to the extent it explains relatively more proximal PRD experiences. While beliefs about societal rank may not be needed, future research could determine the value of considering indirect roles of self-interest indicators of objective SES in redistribution support.

For societal issues, current relative deprivation theorizing has focused on how group deprivation should play a role in group-based support for change, while it has been suggested that personal deprivation should primarily explain individual-based outcomes (e.g., well-being) rather than those concerning society (e.g., Smith et al., 2012). We did not focus on group deprivation; however, prior research has found that PRD uniquely explains redistribution support even when controlling for it, with a pattern stronger for ethnic majority group than ethnic minority group members (Lilly et al., 2024). Thus, the emerging pattern of the present and recent research, as well as prior theorizing on the potential role of PRD in individual support for constructive change in society (Crosby, 1976), highlights the relevance of personal injustice-based experiences which may matter for evaluating inequality (Starmans et al., 2017). This suggests some reconfiguration of current thinking about group and personal deprivation may be due to better understand societal change efforts, at least for the consequential domain of economic redistribution.

The role of PRD in the present research also shows broad consistency with PRD construct development efforts (Callan et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2016), including how it can uniquely explain outcomes typically associated with subjective SES (e.g., Callan et al., 2015). Contributing to these efforts is needed, in part, as conceptual confusion can sometimes arise by researchers using PRD content (e.g., terminology, study manipulations) interchangeably with related but distinct constructs (e.g., subjective SES) despite pains to distinguish PRD (Pettigrew, 2002; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015).

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

There are several limitations and future directions to the present research. First, to help us examine the consistency of the potential predictors of economic redistribution support, we relied on correlational evidence and thus cannot make claims about causality. Future research that utilized reliable experimental or longitudinal designs for each predictor could help verify the current findings. Second, while we relied on widely used measures of subjective SES and PRD, in part, to facilitate comparability with prior research, different numbers of items were used for each construct (e.g., one item vs. five items, respectively). This difference was minimized in Study 4 (one-item subjective SES measure, two-item PRD measure), which found PRD explained redistribution support, but subjective SES did

not. Moreover, the same pattern emerged in Study 4 when relying on either single PRD item (see Supplemental File). Future research with multi-item assessments of subjective SES (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2011) as well as other tests that compare variations of these measures (e.g., Callan et al., 2015) could further reduce concerns and increase understanding of these concepts. Third, we relied only on U.S. participants. Although country uniformity was useful for examining consistency among the findings, it limits our understanding about generalizability. Theoretically, a link between deprivation and policy support should be stronger when such societal change is perceived to be more possible as compared to less possible (Smith & Huo, 2014). Based on the pattern observed in prior multi-nation research (Smith et al., 2018), PRD should also be a stronger predictor of economic redistribution attitudes in individualist countries (such as the United States) than collectivist countries. Additional research focused on PRD would be needed to confirm these speculations. Fourth, as noted above, a number of other factors may explain support for economic redistribution, for example, perceived (but not objective) degree of inequality in society (Trump, 2023). It may be helpful for future research to examine which factors, including PRD, uniquely explain redistribution attitudes, as well as if more complex associations exist among such factors. For instance, as local circumstances may influence perceived inequality (Jachimowicz et al., 2023), it is possible that experiencing PRD through local comparisons may also affect broader perceptions of economic inequality and in turn redistribution support.

Although PRD seems linked to higher income and wealth redistribution support (i.e., reducing the top), it is unclear whether feeling deprived shows similar associations with other means of reducing high levels of inequality such as by boosting the bottom through welfare support (Cooley et al., 2024; Henry et al., 2004), strengthening the middle through union support (Kamphorst & Willer, 2024; McAleese & Day, 2022) or through support for broader conceptualizations of redistribution such as public education (Son Hing et al., 2019). Such possibilities may hinge on whether feeling personally deprived explains redistribution support primarily through desires to even the playing field for better off individuals (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017; H. Kim, Callan, et al., 2018), fixed mindsets about wealth (Hoyt et al., 2023), more general wishes to instill economic system fairness, or the salience of part of the economic distribution (Jachimowicz et al., 2023). Identifying the boundary conditions and processes (cognitive, affective) involved, as well as subsequent interventions, may be a rewarding avenue for additional research.




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## Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

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