

3

IDEOLOGY AND PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY

*Denise Baron, Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington,
and Nour Kteily*

Introduction

Contemporary issues of social inequality continue to attract attention and debate in theatres of public opinion and policy. There is increasing disagreement between political parties, decision-makers, and segments of the population on whether inequality between social groups is a problem, and how it should be addressed (Baker & Fausset, 2015; Blow, 2013; Elliott, 2017; Grant & Sandberg, 2014; Ratcliffe, 2015; Williams & Ceci, 2015). Indeed, one need look no further than the recent rise of populism to see how perceived divergence between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ animates political action on both the left and the right (Andrain, 2014; Cassidy, 2016; Goodwin & Heath, 2016; Gray, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Chapter 5).

Opinions diverge not only on the desirability and causes of inequality but also on its very nature and functioning. Individuals from across the political spectrum have different perceptions of how much inequality exists between economic, racial, gender, and other social groups, and how much mobility is available within intergroup hierarchies (Chambers, Swan, & Heesacker, 2015; Cohn, 2014; Kraus, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017; Kraus & Tan, 2015; Kteily, Sheehy-Skeffington, & Ho, 2017; Porter, 2014). If people perceive inequality at varying levels and in conflicting ways, their perceived need for public policy interventions may differ as well. Recent research has thus started to consider the inputs that shape individuals’ perceptions of inequality (Dawtry, Sutton, & Sibley, 2015; see also Sheehy-Skeffington, Kteily, & Hauser, 2016).

Foremost among these inputs, and our current focus, is ideology. This chapter will first outline our understanding of both ideology and perceptions of inequality, before considering a range of origins of people’s inequality perceptions. It will then consider evidence for how ideology may influence perceptions of

inequality, and what that could mean for contemporary political debates. This analysis will focus primarily on the potential influence ideology exerts on perceptions of inequality, but we will also touch on the reflexive nature of these two constructs by highlighting the implications of varied and biased perceptions of inequality in public debate.

Ideology

Ideology in its most general form refers to a system of ideas and ideals about how power, status, and other resources should be distributed in society (see e.g. Eagleton, 1991). It is conventionally discussed in the social sciences as political orientation, an aggregation of attitudes about personal and collective liberties, law and order, the role of government, appropriate social behaviour, and other elements that organise society. When analysing contemporary Western democracies, this spectrum of political orientation typically runs from conservative or right-wing to liberal or left-wing (see Knapp & Wright, 2006; Ruypers, 2005; though see Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2017).

Digging deeper than policy preferences, research in political psychology has examined the mechanisms underlying political orientation in terms of two attitudinal dimensions: support for or opposition to change (linked with social liberalism vs. conservatism, respectively) and support for or opposition to equality (linked with economic liberalism and conservatism, respectively; see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Kandler, Bleidorn, & Riemann, 2012; Treier & Hillygus, 2009; though see Malka et al., 2017). Given its explicit link to inequality, this chapter focuses on the second of these two dimensions. Anti-egalitarianism specifically indexes the extent to which one supports a hierarchical structure of society in which valued goods are distributed unevenly between individuals and social groups.

Perceptions of inequality

Social inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, such as power, wealth, opportunities, and rewards, between individuals or groups in society, as well as the resulting status hierarchy formed by these differential resource allocations.

In this chapter, we use the term ‘inequality perceptions’ to refer to how large or small we perceive the difference in resources between individuals or groups to be, and our perception of how fixed it is. That is, we are concerned with perceptions of the *extent* of inequality or hierarchy in any given society, and *mobility* within that hierarchy. These features of inequality are distinct from value judgements such as whether inequality is just or beneficial. Whereas ideology is inherently linked to evaluations of the *desirability* of inequality, its relationship with perceptions of the *extent* of inequality and social mobility is not self-evident. It is thus worth considering whether ideological beliefs play a role even in shaping these more ‘objective’ aspects of inequality perception.

Origins of inequality perceptions

One's understanding of the nature and extent of inequality between social groups is not merely a case of 'reading' information easily accessible from societal observation. Rather, as with most judgements of political realities, it is the product of multiple inputs, from personal experience to media consumption and social influence.

The most intuitive source of inequality perceptions is personal exposure to signals of inequality, such as through interactions and encounters in everyday life. Perceiving resource disparities depends in part on whether one has had the opportunity to observe extreme cases of advantage and disadvantage, as indexed through differences in clothing, housing quality, and neighbourhood appearance across the socio-economic spectrum (see Dawtry et al., 2015; Kraus, Park, & Tan, 2017; Sheehy-Skeffington et al., 2016).

A similarly straightforward source of influence on the perceived degree of inequality is the news media one consumes. Whereas classically liberal or left-wing news outlets are likely to report on the existence of extreme poverty or group-based discrimination, conservative or right-wing television channels and newspapers spend less time reporting on such topics (see e.g. McKendrick et al., 2008; McNair, 2009), leading to very different pictures across their audiences of the nature and functioning of inequality in their society (e.g. Diermeier, Goecke, Niehues, & Thomas, 2017; Kraus & Tan, 2015).

Other sources of information on perceptions of inequality arise from the social context: through communication among one's family, friends, and political groups. Given that one's ideological orientation is heavily influenced by upbringing and socialisation (e.g. Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Guimond & Palmer, 1996; see Sears & Levy, 2003), it is likely that one's perception about how society is structured reflects discussions with parents and peers. At a broader level, political parties and elites send cues to their followers about what they would like them to believe are the most important societal concerns, inequality being one among many competing issues (see Dettrey & Campbell, 2013; Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994).

In sum, individual perceptions of societal inequality and intergroup hierarchy originate, in part, from the same sources as do ideological attitudes: experience, media framing, and social context. The next question is whether ideological motivation itself – and specifically, egalitarianism – might be another important source of inequality perceptions.

The role of motivation

In order to understand the possibility that inequality perceptions may be sensitive to individual motivations, we need to consider the political effect of drawing attention to inequality and its functioning. In liberal democracies, there is a pervasive norm of egalitarianism and in particular of equality of opportunity. Where resource inequalities do exist, public consensus is that they should not be

extreme, and should involve the ability for anyone with the appropriate ability and effort to move up the social hierarchy (e.g. Fong, 2001; Inglehart, 2008; Katz, & Hass, 1988). One implication is that those who benefit from inequality, and thus stand to lose if it is addressed, might be motivated to downplay its existence, or to emphasise its fair or meritocratic nature (see Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Kteily et al., 2017; Piketty, 1995).

The most obvious way in which one might benefit from inequality is by being positioned at the top of a power or resource hierarchy. This motivation likely underpins the fact that White Americans and American males perceive the American racial and gender hierarchies to be less steep than do minorities and women, respectively (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Kraus, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017; Kteily et al., 2017, Study 1a; Sears & Henry, 2005). Judgements of the fixedness of inequality are also related to social position, with White Americans perceiving greater advances towards racial equality than people of colour (Brodish, Brazy, & Devine, 2008; Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Eibach & Keegan, 2006). Similarly, occupying a higher socio-economic position in the United States is associated with judgements of greater social mobility (Kraus & Tan, 2015).

Beyond the material benefits offered by inequality to those positioned at the top, inequality provides psychological benefits to those who, as individuals, simply have a stronger underlying preference for it. The question thus arises whether those with an ideological motivation to support inequality or the economic status quo might experience or report perceptions of inequality in line with this motivation. The next section turns to evidence for the relationship between political orientation or trait egalitarianism on the one hand, and perceptions of the extent and functioning of inequality on the other.

The relationship between ideology and perceptions of inequality

The link between ideology and inequality perceptions has primarily been studied within the context of liberals and conservatives in the United States. Looking specifically at income inequality, Chambers, Swan, and Heesacker (2014) found that political liberals overestimated the increase in inequality that has occurred in the United States in comparison with political conservatives. This link between political orientation and inequality perceptions extends beyond judgements of the degree of or changes in inequality, to its functioning in the form of social mobility. The same paper reported that the underestimation of trends in social mobility was greatest among politically liberal participants in comparison with moderates and conservative participants (Chambers et al., 2015).

Looking at deeper ideological motivations, the link between egalitarianism and inequality perceptions was the topic of a recent paper by Kteily et al. (2017). These authors considered the link between perceptions of the extent of inequality and individual levels of anti-egalitarianism, the latter measured as social dominance orientation (SDO). SDO indexes support inequality between social groups

(Ho et al., 2015) and are thus an ideological orientation towards maintaining social hierarchy. High SDO individuals favour ideologies that justify the hierarchical status quo (e.g. meritocracy, belief in Karma), while low SDO individuals favour ideologies (e.g. universalism, socialism) that emphasise the need for changes of the status quo and redistributive policies (Cotterill et al., 2014; Kteily, Ho, & Sidanius, 2012; Kteily, Sheehy-Skeffington, & Ho, 2017; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; for a review, see Sidanius, Cotterill, Sheehy-Skeffington, Kteily, & Carvacho, 2016).

Across eight studies, Kteily et al. (2017) found that the more individuals supported hierarchy between different groups, the lower the levels of inequality they perceived between groups at either end of the social hierarchy. Perceiving less inequality between groups was, in turn, associated with disapproval of policies designed to reduce inequality. This association between ideology and perceptions of the extent of inequality was observed in the case of real societal groups, fictitious scenarios, and even abstract images depicting hierarchy. The authors found that it was not clearly a case of bias on just one end of the political spectrum: in a study of memory of inequality, low SDO individuals were found to overestimate the degree of hierarchy they had previously seen, while high SDO individuals underestimated the degree of hierarchy they had seen (Kteily et al., 2017, Study 5).

There is thus emergent evidence that variation in ideological orientation predicts variation in perceptions both of the extent and of the functioning of inequality in social systems. The question remains, however, as to what mechanisms underlie the relationship. How exactly might varying ideological preferences contribute to different perceptions, observations, or reports of inequality? Below we consider the most likely candidate explanations, weighing the evidence for each.

Differential exposure

One reason that ideology and inequality perceptions are related could be ideological preferences causing us to self-select into environments and information sources offering exposure to more or less disparities in power and resources. Experimental research has demonstrated that we seek out information and news consistent with our political identities, which therefore reinforces and narrows our exposure to information from specific ideological perspectives (Hart et al., 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Conservatives or those higher in anti-egalitarianism are thus drawn towards right-wing news sources which play down the existence of unfair inequality, while liberals or egalitarians preferentially select new sources emphasising severe inequality or discrimination. This process is likely exacerbated with increases in the consumption of online and informal news, leading to polarisation in exposure to information about inequality and how it operates (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010; see also Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015).

Similarly, it might be that conservatism or anti-egalitarianism yields a desire to spend time with high-status people or in wealthy environments, thus diminishing one's opportunities to observe disadvantage or disparities wealth

and life outcomes (see Dawtry et al., 2015; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2003). Conversely, we know that liberals and egalitarians are more drawn towards socio-economically diverse environments and jobs that serve the underprivileged or attenuate hierarchy (Sidanius, Pratto, Sinclair, & van Laar, 1996; Sidanius et al., 2003), giving them more exposure to inequality on a daily basis.

Although differential exposure very likely plays some role in explaining the link between ideology and perceptions of inequality, Kteily et al. (2017) present evidence that it cannot be the only explanation. When participants were presented with the same stimuli depicting inequality (i.e. such as vignettes of novel intergroup conflicts or images of organisational hierarchies), the association between perceptions of inequality and SDO persisted, with those higher on SDO perceiving lower levels of inequality than those lower on SDO (Kteily et al., 2017). As all participants had been given the same initial information about the fictitious societies or organisations, this association between ideology and inequality perceptions could not have been due to differential exposure.

Strategic reporting

A second possibility is that individuals notice the same situations and objective realities of social inequality, yet they strategically and consciously report the differences between groups in a way that either downplays or exaggerates inequality, depending on their motivation to avoid or push for egalitarian social change, respectively. The perception of the degree of social hierarchy is not, according to this explanation, truly determined by ideology. Rather, everyone perceives the degree of inequality equivalently, but individuals simply report it differently to align with their strategic goals. Seen in this light, the under-reporting of inequality by those higher in SDO is similar to the selective presentation of information consistent with partisan agendas, as observed in American media outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

Kteily et al. (2017) directly investigated the role of strategic reporting in underpinning their observed association between ideology and inequality perceptions. In two studies, they offered participants financial incentives for accuracy, introducing a strong motivation for them to match their reports with what they had really had perceived. In both studies, those low in SDO still reported higher levels of hierarchy than those high in SDO, suggestive that ideological differences brought with them differences in perceptions extending beyond strategic reporting (Kteily et al., 2017, Studies 4 and 5). It is still possible that participants' motivation to bias inequality claims to fit with ideological preferences was greater than their motivation to report accurately and thus maximise monetary outcome (similar to research showing that people will forgo financial gain in order to avoid hearing information from political adversaries; Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017). Nevertheless, as such monetary incentives have been found to be powerful enough as to affect conscious motivation in other studies (see Waytz, Young, & Ginges, 2014) and also increased participants' self-reported motivation

to respond with accuracy in this study, their ineffectiveness here is a sign that strategic reporting is not the sole mechanism in the link between ideology and inequality perceptions.

Motivated cognition

Rather than reporting what they observe from differential exposure or what they strategically believe will reinforce their preferences, it is possible that individuals may in fact process information in a biased manner based on their motivations to maintain or reduce social hierarchy. From this perspective, individuals' beliefs about the desirability of hierarchy (as assessed through their political orientation or more precisely via their SDO) alter their very perceptions and inferences of how much inequality exists.

This approach is in line with research on the phenomenon of motivated cognition, the tendency to conform assessments or perceptions of information to a specific goal or objective extrinsic to precision or truth (Balcetis & Dunning, 2006; Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009). A growing literature has demonstrated how motivated cognition biases individuals' perceptions of reality. In five studies, Balcetis and Dunning (2006) found that individuals' motivations, such as their preferences or wishes, strongly influence their processing and assessment of visual stimuli. Their study presented participants with an ambiguous figure (e.g. one that could be interpreted as either the letter *B* or the number *13*) and found that the participants reported seeing the interpretation which produced the outcomes they favoured. The implicit measures of perception and the experimental procedures used in these studies imply that motivation influences visual information processing at the preconscious level and therefore directs which information is presented to conscious awareness (Balcetis & Dunning, 2006).

Recent research has identified motivated cognition processes in the domain of political psychology. Hulsizer, Munro, Fagerlin, and Taylor (2004) explored whether political ideology biases perceptions of historical information and events, by asking participants about the 1970 shooting of protestors by the National Guard at Kent State University. Conservative participants were less likely than liberal participants to hold the National Guard and government officials responsible for the shooting, and instead, assigned blame to the protestors (Hulsizer et al., 2004). In another paper, political ideology was shown to influence individuals' assessment and understanding of political activity such that participants with divergent political ideologies sharply disagreed about the nature and conduct of a political protest (Kahan, Hoffman, Braman, Evans, & Rachlinski, 2012). After viewing the same video of a protest, half of the participants were told that it was an anti-abortion demonstration, and the other half were told that it was a pro-gay rights demonstration. Participants of opposing political orientations in the same experimental condition disagreed about basic elements of the protest, such as whether demonstrators threatened and obstructed pedestrians. Moreover, those with shared political orientations in different experimental conditions

also sharply disagreed about such elements of the protest, illustrating the influence of ideology on perceptions of the same content (Kahan, Hoffman, Bramen, Evans, & Rachlinski, 2012). Anti-egalitarian orientations, such as SDO, have also been found to predict social perceptions, particularly those associated with maintaining hierarchy. In a study on SDO and perceptions of race and status, White Americans higher in SDO judged low-status (but not high-status) mixed-race individuals as looking less White, maintaining the status difference between the two racial groups (Kteily, Cotterill, Sidanius, Sheehy-Skeffington, & Bergh, 2014; see also Ho et al., 2012). Given these links between ideology and political perceptions, it seems plausible that levels of egalitarianism might bias perceptions of social inequality through motivated reasoning processes.

In considering multiple explanations for their observed association between SDO and perceptions of the extent of inequality, Kteily et al. (2017) arrived at motivated cognition as the most likely explanation. They came to this conclusion, first, as a result of the inadequacy of differential exposure and strategic reporting in accounting for their findings, particularly in light of the effort made to financially incentivise accurate responding. Second, they observed that even the recognition of previously seen images of inequality in an incentivised memory study was coloured by ideology, implying that motivation was affecting basic cognitive processes (see Kteily et al., 2017, Study 5).

If the motivated cognition account is true, one might expect high SDO individuals to show the most biased perceptions as the objective degree of inequality they are judging increases (thereby raising the spectre of pressures for change). Conversely, egalitarians should appear most biased when the objective degree of inequality they were judging *decreases* (thereby risking that the egalitarian social change they favoured would drop from the social agenda).

In order to examine this question, Kteily et al. (2017) tested how the perceptions of inequality varied across the objective degrees of hierarchy among those high and low on SDO compared to those 'average' in SDO (placing individuals into these categories on the basis of a tertile split). True enough, as the objective hierarchy being judged became more steep, high SDO individuals' estimates of the degree of inequality lagged increasingly behind the estimates of those average and low in SDO. In contrast, when the objective hierarchy being judged became particularly flat, it was the *low* SDOs who deviated in their perceptions from high and average SDOs, continuing to see (relatively) high levels of inequality where others didn't. Taken together, these results are highly consistent with a motivated account and, in combination with the other findings, led the authors to settle on motivated cognition as the most plausible explanation for their pattern of results (see Kteily et al., 2017).

Ideologically motivated perceptions of inequality

We will now briefly consider *how* the process of motivated cognition might operate in order to ideologically colour one's perceptions of inequality. Variation in ideological motivation seems to produce different reactions to the same stimuli,

influencing which information is considered and how that information is interpreted, thereby shaping judgements about overall degree of inequality.

When one first encounters information relevant to inequality, ideological motivations may act as a lens, focusing on some stimuli at the cost of others. Recent research suggests such selective attention occurs in ways that support previously held beliefs. For instance, we are more likely to view and share social media posts from other users that reinforce our political beliefs (Bakshy et al., 2015; Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015). Balcetis and Dunning (2006) found that motivational states impact the assessment and description of visual stimuli, while Kteily et al. (2017, Studies 3–5) demonstrated the ideological colouring of perceptions of inequality and hierarchy in images.

Motivated reasoning may also influence the manner in which information is interpreted or the inferences drawn from it. Granot and colleagues (2014) found that group identification acts as a motivation to influence the attention paid to legal evidence, the interpretation of that information, and the resulting inferences (i.e. punishment decisions). Participants were presented with videos of altercations between a civilian and a police officer, where the guilt of the (outgroup) officer was ambiguous. Participants' identification with the police was measured and their visual attention to the officer tracked through eye-tracking technology. Among those who fixated often on the officer (but not among those who rarely paid attention), participants who weakly identified with the police punished the officer more harshly than those who strongly identified with the police, an effect driven by more incriminating interpretations of the officer's actions (Granot, Balcetis, Schneider, Tyler, & Gauthier, 2014). Crawford et al. (2013) found that hierarchy-related motives have also been shown to bias information evaluation. They presented participants with newspaper articles that espoused either pro- or anti-affirmative action evidence and conclusions, followed by questions about the veracity and author bias of the articles. The researchers found that lower SDO was associated with perceiving more bias in the anti-affirmative action article and less bias in the pro-affirmative action article (Crawford et al., 2013).

Although the research reviewed earlier has made a convincing case for the ideological shaping of inequality perceptions, questions remain as to the precise mechanism through which this colouring occurs. If it is indeed the case that one's ideological motivation focuses one's attention on social stimuli that ally with that motivation, this could be illustrated through studies of visual perception. As a first attempt to address this question, Sheehy-Skeffington et al. (2016) obtained evidence indicating that individuals low in SDO were more likely to notice cues related to wealth, poverty, or inequality in a set of photographs of urban scenes than individuals high in SDO. Future studies might use methods such as eye tracking to observe this attentional bias in action, in the case of perceptions both of inequality severity and of its functioning. They could also include control conditions designed to examine whether the bias is specific to social stimuli and intergroup contexts. There is thus plenty of work to be done to illuminate the psychological processes underpinning and interacting with the ideological colouring of inequality perceptions.

Inequality perceptions shaping ideology

Before moving on from considering the processes linking ideological motivation and perceptions of inequality, it is worth considering the reverse pathway: whether perceptions of inequality might affect ideological orientation. Although this question has not been tested directly to our knowledge, it has been shown that experiences of differing levels of socio-economic status and inequality have profound psychological effects (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017). We also know from the work of Dawtry and colleagues that neighbourhood income affects perceptions of inequality, with implications for political views (Dawtry et al., 2015). Kteily et al. (2017) provide evidence that the link between ideology and inequality perceptions is not primarily a case of the latter influencing the former, however. In four of their studies, the link between ideology and perceptions in inequality was observed with new vignettes or images depicting inequality: given that perceptions of inequality in the new scenarios were formed in the study and measured after SDO was measured, they cannot be affecting SDO in this case. In another study, longitudinal cross-lag analysis supported the conclusion that SDO affected inequality perceptions over time and not the reverse. Finally, in one study it was found that the placing of SDO before or after asking about inequality perceptions did not affect the correlations observed (Kteily et al., 2017). None of these demonstrations is definitive as one could argue that it is perceptions of inequality in general (as opposed to of the inequality in these vignettes) that influence ideology and that they do so over longer time periods than that assessed in the cross-lagged analysis (6 months) and/or earlier in life than among the adults, which Kteily et al. (2017) considered. Nevertheless, when considered in the context of the general, stable, and causally powerful nature of ideological orientations such as SDO (see, e.g. Bratt, Sidanius, & Sheehy-Skeffington, 2016; Kteily, Ho, & Sidanius, 2012; Sidanius et al., 2016), the evidence for ideology as a shaper of inequality perceptions is persuasive.

Implications of the ideological nature of inequality perceptions

That there may be ideological bias in the very perception of how much inequality exists in society and how much mobility exists within it (to say nothing of the other spheres of inequality perception, such as within organisations – see Kteily et al., 2017) has implications both theoretical and applied.

Implications for political psychology research

The work reviewed in this chapter has important theoretical implications for research in political psychology. For one, the finding that the link between SDO and perceptions of inequality seems to reflect processes operating among both anti-egalitarians and egalitarians adds to debates about whether motivated reasoning operates more on the political right than left, or, rather, extends equally

across the political spectrum (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, Sulloway, & Cooper, 2003).

This work also contributes to an emerging body of research showing how individuals' equality motives can shape their perceptions of the world around them. For example, recent work shows that individuals' SDO levels affect their perception of biracials, with anti-egalitarian Whites tending to perceive Black-White biracials as looking more Black, particularly when considering low-status Black targets (Kteily et al., 2014), or feeling a sense of threat to their group's standing (Ho et al., 2012; see also Krosch, Berntsen, Amodio, Jost, & Van Bavel, 2013). Research also suggests that individuals' equality motives predict the extent to which they perceive damaging events (e.g. having one's pay cut or home robbed) as meaningfully harmful to a given target depending on whether that target is socially advantaged or disadvantaged (Lucas & Kteily, under review), with low SDO individuals perceiving that the same act is more harmful than high SDO individuals when the target is disadvantaged (e.g. a blue-collar worker) but *less* harmful than high SDO individuals when the target is advantaged (e.g. a corporate executive).

Our work also calls for a broader examination of the inputs into perceptions of inequality. Although we have highlighted how ideology impacts perceived inequality via motivated processes, we also noted other processes that could play a role, including exposure to different media, neighbourhoods, and so on. Notably, exposure to different environments could itself be either incidental (e.g. being born and raised in one town vs. another) or motivated (e.g. explicitly seeking or avoiding certain neighbourhoods or moving to a location where others share your beliefs; Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014). This review suggests that it will be important to more comprehensively examine the multitude of factors shaping how individuals come to perceive inequality in the world around them while considering the proportional contribution of motivated versus non-motivated processes.

Implications in the political sphere

The understanding of ideology and perceptions of inequality that has been reviewed in this chapter provides insight into the nature of contemporary political debate and action, as well as how it might evolve.

First, this work provides a window into the psychological processes which contribute to the extreme levels of political polarisation currently observed in many industrialised countries. To the extent that people on the political left and right perceive fundamentally different social realities (both with respect to inequality, and more broadly) as a function of their motivations, common ground between them will be elusive. When people cannot even agree on the *degree* of the problem at hand, they are doubly unlikely to converge on similar solutions (and more likely to be distrustful of and incredulous about the other side's stance). Furthermore, divergent perceptions of inequality can be expressed as frustration

with either the failure to address inequality or the excessive attention paid to it in the public sphere. These expressions can impact attitudes and beliefs of public figures, such as political leaders, thought leaders, and political pundits. As these figures themselves are in a position to shape individuals' ideological beliefs, there is the possibility of a cyclical relationship existing between ideology's influence on perceptions of inequality and vice versa.

Second, the link between ideology and inequality perceptions impacts the likelihood of implementing policies related to equal opportunity and social mobility. The very fact that inequality perceptions seem to be distorted to avoid pressures towards undesirable social change means that prospects for progress in this policy arena are slim.

Conclusion

As with other kinds of perception considered in this book, individual perceptions of the political world can be illuminated by looking at individual preferences for how society should be run. This relationship, though not surprising, has only recently been revealed empirically, and work remains to solidify our understanding of it. It is yet another case of how our apprehension of the social world is not a simple case of 'reading' objective information but is one of perceiving it through the lens of our underlying motivations, preferences, and interests.

References

- Alesina, A., & La Ferrara, E. (2005). Preferences for redistribution in the land of opportunities. *Journal of Public Economics*, 89(5), 897–931.
- Andrain, C. F. (2014). *Political power and economic inequality: A comparative politics approach*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Baker, P., & Fausset, R. (2015, March 7). Obama, at Selma memorial, says, "We know the march is not yet over". *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/us/obama-in-selma-for-edmund-pettus-bridge-attack-anniversary.html.
- Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Political science. Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. *Science (New York, N.Y.)*, 348(6239), 1130. doi:10.1126/science.aaa1160.
- Balcetis, E., & Dunning, D. (2006). See what you want to see: Motivational influences on visual perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(4), 612–625. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.91.4.612.
- Barberá, P., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., Tucker, J. A., & Bonneau, R. (2015). Tweeting from left to right. *Psychological Science*, 26(10), 1531–1542. doi:10.1177/0956797615594620.
- Blow, C. M. (2013, September 13). Occupy wall street legacy. *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2013/09/14/opinion/blow-occupy-wall-street-legacy.html.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Brandt, M. J., Reyna, C., Chambers, J. R., Crawford, J. T., & Wetherell, G. (2014). The ideological-conflict hypothesis: Intolerance among both liberals and conservatives. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(1), 27–34.

- Bratt, C., Sidanius, J., & Sheehy-Skeffington, J. (2016). Shaping the development of prejudice: A latent growth curve analysis of the influence of social dominance orientation on outgroup affect in youth. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*.
- Brodish, A. B., Brazy, P. C., & Devine, P. G. (2008). More eyes on the prize: Variability in white Americans: Perceptions of progress toward racial equality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(4), 513–527. doi:10.1177/0146167207311337.
- Cassidy, J. (2016, February 10). Bernie Sanders and the new populism. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/bernie-sanders-and-the-new-populism.
- Chambers, J. R., Swan, L. K., & Heesacker, M. (2014). Better off than we know: Distorted perceptions of incomes and income inequality in America. *Psychological Science*, 25(2), 613. doi:10.1177/0956797613504965.
- Chambers, J. R., Swan, L. K., & Heesacker, M. (2015). Perceptions of U.S. social mobility are divided (and distorted) along ideological lines. *Psychological Science*, 26(4), 413–423. doi:10.1177/0956797614566657.
- Cohn, N. (2014). Polarization is dividing American society, not just politics. *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2014/06/12/upshot/polarization-is-dividing-american-society-not-just-politics.html.
- Cotterill, S., Sidanius, J., Bhardwaj, A., & Kumar, V. (2014). Ideological support for the Indian caste system: Social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism and karma. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 2, 98–116. doi:10.5964/jssp.v2i1.171.
- Crawford, J. T., Jussim, L., Cain, T. R., & Cohen, F. (2013). Right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation differentially predict biased evaluations of media reports. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(1), 163–174. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2012.00990.x.
- Dawtry, R. J., Sutton, R. M., & Sibley, C. G. (2015). Why wealthier people think people are wealthier, and why it matters: From social sampling to attitudes to redistribution. *Psychological Science*, 26(9), 1389. doi:10.1177/0956797615586560.
- Dettrey, B. J., & Campbell, J. E. (2013). Has growing income inequality polarized the American electorate? Class, party, and ideological polarization. *Social Science Quarterly*, 94(4), 1062–1083.
- Diermeier, M., Goecke, H., Niehues, J., & Thomas, T. (2017). *Impact of inequality-related media coverage on the concerns of the citizens* (No. 258). DICE Discussion Paper.
- Duriez, B., & Soenens, B. (2009). The intergenerational transmission of racism: The role of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 43(5), 906–909, ISSN 0092-6566, doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2009.05.014.
- Eagleton T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.
- Eibach, R. P., & Ehrlinger, J. (2006). “Keep your eyes on the prize”: Reference points and racial differences in assessing progress toward equality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(1), 66–77. doi:10.1177/0146167205279585.
- Eibach, R. P., & Keegan, T. (2006). Free at last? Social dominance, loss aversion, and white and black Americans; differing assessments of racial progress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(3), 453–467. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.90.3.453.
- Elliott, L. (2017, January 11). Rising inequality threatens world economy, says WEF. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/11/inequality-world-economy-wef-brexit-donald-trump-world-economic-forum-risk-report.
- Fong, C. (2001). Social preferences, self-interest, and the demand for redistribution. *Journal of Public Economics*, 82(2), 225–246.
- Frimer, J., Skitka, L., & Motyl, M., (2017). Liberals and conservatives are similarly motivated to avoid exposure to one another’s opinions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 72, 1–12, ISSN 0022-1031, doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2017.04.003.

- Goodwin, M. & Heath, O. (2016). Brexit vote explained: Poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Retrieved from www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI0Oy5tOyF1QIVFzwbCh2IZgzMEAMYASAAEgJtsfD_BwE.
- Granot, Y., Balcetis, E., Schneider, K., Tyler, T., & Gauthier, I. (2014). Justice is not blind: Visual attention exaggerates effects of group identification on legal punishment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *143*(6), 2196–2208.
- Grant, A., & Sandberg, S. (2014, December 6). When talking about bias back-fires. *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/opinion/sunday/adam-grant-and-sheryl-sandberg-on-discrimination-at-work.html.
- Gray, F. (2017, June 17). Corbyn copy: Why Jeremy and Trump are (almost) the same. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from www.spectator.co.uk/2017/06/corbyn-copy-why-jeremy-and-trump-are-almost-the-same/.
- Guimond, S., & Palmer, D. L. (1996). The political socialization of commerce and social science students: Epistemic authority and attitude change. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *26*(22), 1985–2013.
- Hart, W., Albarracín, D., Eagly, A. H., Brechan, I., Lindberg, M. J., & Merrill, L. (2009). Feeling validated versus being correct: A meta-analysis of selective exposure to information. *Psychological Bulletin*, *135*(4), 555–588. doi:10.1037/a0015701.
- Ho, A. K., Kteily, N., & Chen, J. M. (in press). “You’re one of us”: Black Americans’ use of hypodescent and its association with egalitarianism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Ho, A. K., Sidanius, J., Kteily, N., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Pratto, F., Henkel, K. E., ... Stewart, A. L. (2015). The nature of social dominance orientation: Theorizing and measuring preferences for intergroup inequality using the new SDO 7 scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. doi:10.1037/pspi0000033.
- Ho, A. K., Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., Levin, S., Thomsen, L., Kteily, N., & Sheehy-Skeffington, J. (2012). Social dominance orientation: Revisiting the structure and function of a variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *38*(5), 583–606. doi:10.1177/0146167211432765.
- Hulsizer, M., Munro, G., Fagerlin, A., & Taylor, S. (2004). Molding the past: Biased assimilation of historical information 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *34*(5), 1048–1074.
- Inglehart, R. & Norris, P. (2016). “Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash.” HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP16-026.
- Iyengar, S., & Hahn, K. S. (2009). Red media, blue media: Evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(1), 19–39. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01402.x.
- Jost, J., Glaser, J., Sulloway, F., & Cooper, H. (2003). Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(3), 339–375.
- Jost, J. T., Federico, C. M., & Napier, J. L. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*, 307–337.
- Kahan, D., Hoffman, D., Braman, D., Evans, D., & Rachlinski, J. (2012). “They saw a protest”: Cognitive illiberalism and the speech-conduct distinction. *Stanford Law Review*, *64*(4), 851–906.
- Kandler, C., Bleidorn, W., & Riemann, R. (2012). Left or right? Sources of political orientation: The roles of genetic factors, cultural transmission, assortative mating, and personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(3), 633.
- Katz, I., & Hass, R. G. (1988). Racial ambivalence and American value conflict: Correlational and priming studies of dual cognitive structures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *55*(6), 893–905.

- Knapp, A., & Wright, V. (2006). *The government and politics of France*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Kraus, M. W., Park, J. W., & Tan, J. J. X. (2017). Signs of social class: The experience of economic inequality in everyday life. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(3), 422–435.
- Kraus, M. W., Rucker, J. M., & Richeson, J. A. (2017). Americans misperceive racial economic equality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114*(39), 10324–10331.
- Kraus, M. W., & Tan, J. J. X. (2015). Americans overestimate social class mobility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 58*, 101–111. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2015.01.005.
- Krosch, A., Berntsen, L., Amodio, D., Jost, J., & Van Bavel, J. (2013). On the ideology of hypodescent: Political conservatism predicts categorization of racially ambiguous faces as Black. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*(6), 1196–1203.
- Kteily, N., Cotterill, S., Sidanius, J., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., & Bergh, R. (2014). “Not one of us”: Predictors and consequences of denying ingroup characteristics to ambiguous targets. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 40*(10), 1231. doi:10.1177/0146167214539708.
- Kteily, N. S., Ho, A. K., & Sidanius, J. (2012). Hierarchy in the mind: The predictive power of social dominance orientation across social contexts and domains. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48*, 543–549. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2011.11.007.
- Kteily, N. S., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., & Ho, A. K. (2017). Hierarchy in the eye of the beholder: (Anti-)egalitarianism shapes perceived levels of social inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112*(1), 136–159.
- Kuklinski, J. H., & Hurley, N. L. (1994). On hearing and interpreting political messages: A cautionary tale of citizen cue-taking. *The Journal of Politics, 56*(3), 729–751.
- Lawrence, E., Sides, J., & Farrell, H. (2010). Self-segregation or deliberation? Blog readership, participation, and polarization in American politics. *Perspectives on Politics, 8*(1), 141–157.
- Lucas, B., & Kteily, N. S. (Under review). (Anti-)egalitarianism differentially predicts empathy for members of advantaged versus disadvantaged groups.
- Malka, A., Lelkes, Y., & Soto, C. J. (2017). Are cultural and economic conservatism positively correlated? A large-scale cross-national test. *British Journal of Political Science, 1*–25.
- McKendrick, J. H., Sinclair, S., Irwin, A., O'Donnell, H., Scott, G., & Dobbie, L. (2008). *The media, poverty and public opinion in the UK*. New York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- McNair, B. (2009). *News and journalism in the UK*. London: Routledge.
- Motyl, M., Iyer, R., Oishi, S., Trawalter, S., & Nosek, B. (2014). How ideological migration geographically segregates groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 51*(C), 1–14.
- Napier, J. L., & Jost, J. T. (2008). The “antidemocratic personality” revisited: A cross-national investigation of working class authoritarianism. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*, 595–617.
- Piketty, T. (1995). Social mobility and redistributive politics. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 110*(3), 551–584.
- Porter, E. (2014, May 13). The politics of income inequality. *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14/business/economy/the-politics-of-income-inequality.html.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*(4), 741–763. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.67.4.741.

- Ratcliffe, R. (2015, June 10). Nobel scientist Tim Hunt: Female scientists cause trouble for me in labs. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/10/nobel-scientist-tim-hunt-female-scientists-cause-trouble-for-men-in-labs.
- Ruyppers, J. (2005). *Canadian and world politics*. Toronto. Emond Montgomery Publication.
- Sears, D. O., & Henry, P. J. (2005). Over thirty years later: A contemporary look at symbolic racism. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 37, 95–150. San Diego, CA, US: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Sears, D. O., & Levy, S. (2003). Childhood and adult political development. *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
- Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Kteily, N. S., & Hauser, O. (2016). *Antecedents and consequences of perceptions of economic inequality*. Paper presented at the Tobin Project Conference on Inequality and Decision-Making, Cambridge, MA.
- Sidanius, J., Cotterill, S., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Kteily, N. S., & Carvacho, H. (2016). Social dominance theory: Explorations in the psychology of oppression. In C. G. Sibley & F. K. Barlow (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of the psychology of prejudice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.4135/9781446249222.n47.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., & Mitchell, M. (1994). In-group identification, social dominance orientation, and differential intergroup social allocation. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 134(2), 151. doi:10.1080/00224545.1994.9711378.
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., Sinclair, S., & van Laar, C. (1996). Mother Teresa meets Genghis Khan: The dialectics of hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating career choices. *Social Justice Research*, 9, 145–170.
- Sidanius, J., Van Laar, C., Levin, S., & Sinclair, S. (2003). Social hierarchy maintenance and assortment into social roles: A social dominance perspective. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 6(4), 333–352.
- Treier, S., & Hillygus, D. S. (2009). The nature of political ideology in the contemporary electorate. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 73, 679–703.
- Uhlmann, E. L., Pizarro, D. A., Tannenbaum, D., & Ditto, P. H. (2009). The motivated use of moral principles. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 4(6), 479–491.
- Waytz, A., Young, L. L., & Ginges, J. (2014). Motive attribution asymmetry for love vs. hate drives intractable conflict. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111, 15687–15692. doi:10.1073/pnas.1414146111.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2017). The enemy between us: The psychological and social costs of inequality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 47(1), 11–24.
- Williams, W. M., & Ceci, S. J. (2015). National hiring experiments reveal 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 112, 5360–5365. doi:10.1073/pnas.1418878112.