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Preferences for redistribution

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Abstract

We survey the literature on preferences for redistribution. We discuss different ways the literature has measured these preferences and review literature on the different determinants of preferences for redistribution. These range from institutions and demographic factors to fairness views and social preferences. Income inequality is, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most important determinants of preferences for redistribution. While our survey is largely focused on the economics literature, we also review some work from political science, sociology, and psychology.

KEYWORDS
income inequality, preferences for redistribution

JEL CLASSIFICATION
C92, D30, I30

1 | INTRODUCTION

Redistribution of income and wealth is the transfer of income and wealth from some individuals to others through means such as taxation, benefits, provision of public goods and services, or charitable giving. But also changes in law, such as land reforms, confiscations, or divorce laws can lead to a redistribution of income and wealth in a society.

The question of what is the right amount of redistribution has occupied generations of philosophers, economists, sociologists, and political scientists alike. Philosophers have focused on theories of distributive justice, dealing with the just distribution of goods within a society. Social

scientists, by contrast, are usually concerned with the social and economic impact of inequality and redistribution.

This survey focuses on preferences for redistribution, that is, the views that people hold on the degree of redistribution they would like to see in a society. We say that someone expresses a preference for redistribution if their preferences rank different alternatives in a way that options involving a higher degree of redistribution are preferred to others. We do not believe that utility derived from the act of redistributing per se is of key importance for these preferences. Instead, the reason people reveal a preference for redistribution will typically be that they prefer the resulting allocations.

Such preferences can be expressed either explicitly, for example, in surveys and opinion polls or implicitly, for example, via choices or support for certain political parties and their distributive policies. Broadly, measures of preferences for redistribution fall into three categories (i) survey measures, (ii) experimental measures, and (iii) nonexperimental measures. The most direct way to measure preferences for redistribution is by simply asking people about their preferences. Typical survey measures include asking people to which extent they agree with statements like "Taxation should be more progressive in this country.", "The rich should pay more to help the poor.", and so forth. Experimental measures confront people with different scenarios and ask them to make choices involving implicitly or explicitly different degrees of redistribution. We will discuss different designs in detail when we discuss the literature below. In line with the common usage of the term discussed above most measurements are revealed preference measures, that is, the attempt to elicit preferences for redistribution by observing either people's real or hypothetical choices over different outcomes. Last, preferences for redistribution can also be measured using administrative data, for example, from elections. The vote share of parties or candidates who differ in terms of their policies regarding government spending and redistribution can be used to identify preferences for redistribution. Similarly, data on shifts in party positions or government policies can be used as revealed preference measures. The downside of using votes or party positions is that they are usually not observable at the individual level but only at some level of aggregation. Still such data can be useful, for example, to identify factors which cause shifts in preferences for redistribution over time.

Our survey will include research using all of these methods. It will focus on the economics literature, but we also review some work from political science, sociology, and psychology.

2 | WHAT DETERMINES PREFERENCES FOR REDISTRIBUTION?

In this section, we discuss some of the most commonly identified environmental, institutional, and demographic covariates of preferences for redistribution. One important challenge for the literature is to identify which of these can be considered causal determinants. We will highlight in each subsection how much progress has been made on determining causal impacts.

Further, as Figure 1 highlights, the web of relationships between the various determinants studied in the literature is complex. Preferences for redistribution determine institutions and policies as people express these preferences, for example, via their votes. Institutions then affect the level of income inequality and the level of social mobility in a society. It has further been shown that institutions can also affect people's preferences and beliefs, such as belief in meritocracy as well as fairness preferences and fairness views. All of these factors in turn can impact preferences for redistribution. Last, demographic factors have been shown to covary with many of these.

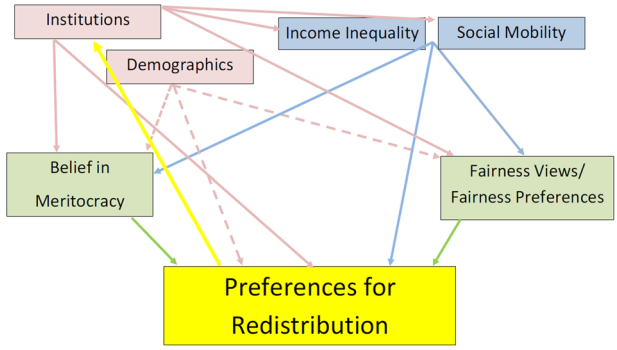

FIGURE 1 Figure highlighting the different covariates and determinants of preferences for redistribution discussed in this survey. The key object of study is preferences for redistribution (colored yellow). Green are individual sets of beliefs and preferences found to be important. Blue are societal level properties intimately linked to preferences for redistribution and pink are broad higher level factors with the potential to affect all of these

In each of the following subsections, we will focus on one of the arrows in Figure 1 and try to summarize the research on the direct link between, for example, inequality and preferences for redistribution (Section 2.1). As the figure highlights, income inequality will also have indirect impacts on preferences for redistribution, for example, by affecting belief in meritocracy. Of course it is well possible that for some of the research on the direct link between inequality and preferences for redistribution the impact is still via belief in meritocracy (or other factors), but this was simply not measured in the research in question. We cannot make definite claims in this case but this should be kept in mind when interpreting the evidence.

2.1 | Income inequality

As redistribution is all about reducing income or wealth inequality, a very natural question to ask is—how does income inequality covary with preferences for redistribution? Are people more in favor of redistribution when there is considerable inequality? And conversely, in societies where people express a high preference for redistribution, are these preferences successfully implemented, that is, do we see less inequality?

Recent literature has shown that countries with a higher level of inequality which are often associated with less support for redistribution and greater acceptance of inequality (specifically the United States or United Kingdom), indeed show a lower support level for redistribution than what is observed in Scandinavian countries (Almas et al., 2020; Buser et al., 2020; Grimalda et al., 2018). If individual nations with a relatively high level of inequality evolve along this pattern, a vicious cycle could form with reduced social concern amplifying primal increases in inequality. However, the evidence on the strength of this relationship is mixed. Kerr (2014) finds, for example, that while larger compensation differentials are accepted as inequality grows, growth in inequality is met with greater support for government-led redistribution. Roth and Wohlfarth (2018) use several large nationally representative datasets to show that people, who have experienced higher inequality during their lives, are less in favor of redistribution, after controlling for income, demographics, unemployment experiences, and current macroeconomic conditions. Using a very different approach, Sands (2017) finds that exposure to inequality in the form homeless people in a street experiment decreases support for redistribution in affluent people. Magni (2020) also shows that solidarity can be selective: when inequality is high, individuals grow more supportive of redistribution—but only if redistribution benefits native citizens.

Redistribution can occur directly via transfers from rich to poor or indirectly if, for example, the rich contribute more to public goods than the poor. A lot of actual redistribution takes the

latter form usually via tax-funded public goods. There is a huge literature in behavioral economics on the determinants of private contributions to public goods and some behavioral economists have studied the causal impacts of inequality on public good contributions. Mostly, this is done using lab experiments and inequality in this research is usually manipulated within the lab, for example, by giving participants different endowments. A number of papers in this area have used this technique to study the effect of exogenous income inequality on public good contributions. This literature finds similarly mixed results (Chan et al., 1996; van Dijk et al., 2002; Ostrom et al., 1994; Reuben & Riedl, 2013; Sadrieh & Verbon, 2006). Gaechter et al. (2017) study public good games with dynamic interdependencies, where each agent's wealth at the end of period t serves as their endowment in $t + 1$. In this setting, growth and inequality arise endogenously. They find that variation in wealth is substantial with the richest groups earning more than 10 times what the poorest groups earn. They also find a negative impact of endogenous inequality (created over time by differing past contributions) on contributions.[1] In sum, the empirical relationship between income inequality and support for redistribution is far from straightforward. To understand why this is the case we need to look deeper into what motivates preferences for redistribution and how people think about inequality.

One complication is that individuals struggle to think about income inequality without considering their personal relative position. Indeed Charité et al. (2015) find evidence that people's experience in terms of past relative position matters and that furthermore others tend to respect these kind of reference points when thinking about redistribution. A number of authors have been interested in how support for redistribution changes with relative position and if—in an unequal society—it is mostly the poor or the rich demanding redistribution. Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) suggest that the social groups supporting the welfare state are the economically and socially vulnerable who identify with social democratic values. Cruces et al. (2013) and Karadja et al. (2017) find that most people hold biased beliefs about the income distribution. When informed of their true relative position, individuals who are richer than they initially thought, demand less redistribution. By contrast (Hoy & Mager, 2021) find that people who are told they are relatively poorer than they thought are less concerned about inequality and are not more supportive of redistribution.

Last, income inequality cannot only affect preferences for redistribution directly, but also indirectly by, for example, affecting belief in meritocracy (see Figure 1). Albertazzi et al. (2021) provide people with information about the income distribution of various boroughs in England. They find that exposing people to high degrees of inequality only affects belief in meritocracy when it is accompanied by information about relative position. McCall et al. (2017) show that when people are exposed to information about rising economic inequality in the United States they afterwards display lower belief in meritocracy and Nishi et al. (2015) find that poor relative position (visible wealth differences) has a much more negative effect on welfare than inequality per se. This is in line with the findings from Albertazzi et al. (2021). Hence, changes in income inequality, but not levels of income inequality seem to matter and relative position seems at least as important as income inequality per se in determining belief in meritocracy. We will see below that belief in meritocracy, in turn, is one of the most robust predictors of preferences for redistribution.

In sum, the literature has shown that, as expected, inequality is a major determinant of preferences for redistribution. (Perceived) relative position is crucial for the support of redistribution, and the type of inequality people believe should be corrected depends on a number of complex factors, such as the degree of geographic disaggregation (regional, national, global), the underlying causes of inequality and historic patterns (whether inequality has been increasing or decreasing).

2.2 | Social mobility

A lot of literature has focused on social mobility as a key determinant of redistribution. Piketty (1998) introduces a theoretical model in which a person's social status, defined as the publicly observed social mobility experience of the individual, influences the extent of economic inequality between groups with different social backgrounds. He argues that if socially mobile people get too little social recognition ("nouveaux riches") then this may decrease people's motivation to exert effort. Following the "reference group" argument of French sociologist Raymond Boudon, he shows that if the effect of effort and ability on economic success is little and the impact of social origin is large, then the rewards of moving upwards socially are little and people from a low social background will choose to put little effort to achieve social mobility. The "prospect of upward mobility theory" (POUM) discussed in Roemer (1998) and Putterman (1997) states that voters, even if their income is below the average in society, will not support high tax rates as they do not wish to impede their offsprings' chances of moving up the social ladder. Benabou and Ok (2001) formalize the POUM hypothesis in a theoretical model. They use the Panel Study on Income Dynamics to study whether agents with rational expectations about their social upward mobility show the behavior described in the theory or whether it is agents overestimating their mobility who drive tax rates. They show that rational expectations are compatible with the theory and that the effect is present in the US mobility data.

More recent work on social mobility and preferences for redistribution includes Alesina et al. (2018), Agranov and Palfrey (2020), and Sands (2017). Alesina et al. (2018) use survey and experimental data to study the influence of beliefs about intergenerational mobility on the taste for redistribution. They look at five Western countries and find US-Americans to be overly optimistic about social mobility and Europeans to be too pessimistic. In the experiment, subjects are provided with pessimistic information about social mobility. They are made aware of the small likelihood of poor children becoming rich later in life. The treatment significantly decreases belief in social mobility for all subjects. Interestingly, it only interferes with politically left-wing subjects' choices of redistribution levels. While politically left-wing subjects increase their support for redistribution, there is no such effect for politically right-wing subjects. Agranov and Palfrey (2020) present a two-period dynamic tax rate model following POUM. They run a laboratory experiment to study the effect of income mobility and tax persistence on tax rates and inequality levels. They find that only in a mix with sticky enough tax rates, mobility has a negative effect on redistribution levels whereas social mobility on its own is not enough (see also Section 2.3).

Over the past two decades, the divide between right- and left-wing politics over topics such as taxes, immigration, and public social support networks deepened in many Western countries initiating research on whether personal political preferences influence the taste for redistribution. Alesina et al. (2020) review the existing literature on polarization between Republicans and Democrats in the US. Democrats prove to be more accurate than Republicans in estimating levels of income inequality and tax rates. The taste for redistribution, however, depends on the perception of social and intergenerational mobility. If mobility is perceived to be high, people are made personally responsible for not being able to climb up the social ladder and inequality is considered to be fair. Both, Republicans and Democrats, overestimate the chances for social mobility with the latter being more realistic. As a result, Democrats support redistribution more than Republicans. Related to this result, and highlighting the intertwined relationship between preferences for redistribution, belief in meritocracy and institutions/political views (see Figure 1) are the results in Fehr and Vollmann (2020). They argue that belief in meritocracy is more pronounced in conservatives

and study how personal success influences belief in meritocracy and the taste for redistribution. They find that economically successful subjects, regardless of their political preferences, assign a larger role to effort in determining their success. Further, once successful, subjects opt for less redistribution through lower tax rates and decide not to question the role luck played in their financial success.

While the main focus of this review lies on the current economic literature, there are also plenty of contributions on redistributive preferences from other disciplines within the social sciences. A vibrant string of literature on the topic can be attributed to psychology. A key question in the psychological literature on redistribution is why people, living in increasingly unequal societies, tolerate and/or support comparatively low levels of redistribution. One principal reason found in the literature is the misperception of social inequality and social mobility. Davidai and Gilovich (2015) ask whether the perception of intergenerational mobility in the United States is in line with the data. In an online experiment, they use a large cross-sectional US sample to study people's beliefs about the chances of a randomly selected US citizen to move up and down the social ladder. In line with results in Alesina and Ferrara (2005), the study finds people overestimate the chances of upward mobility and underestimate downward mobility. They further find that social status and political views influence beliefs, with poor and conservative individuals overestimating the dynamic of the economic system more than others. Kraus and Tan (2015) confirm these results using a mix of correlational and experimental studies. They show that especially age and social class affect the level of overestimation. In more recent research, Davidai (2018) studies the direct relationship between economic inequality and belief in economic mobility by manipulating subjects' perception of the level of economic inequality in online experiments. He finds a consistently negative relationship where increased economic inequality weakens belief in social mobility. Combined with the prevalent tendency to underestimate economic inequality, the result could explain the relatively strong belief in economic mobility in the United States and, related to this, a continuing belief in the American dream. The result is supported by findings in McCall et al. (2017), which reports a similar negative relationship looking at the opportunity model of beliefs about economic inequality. They show that growing economic inequality can increase skepticism about economic opportunities which, in turn, could change people's taste for more redistributive policies by a government and the industry. Further studies about the tolerance of income inequality include Shariff et al. (2016) who show that experimentally manipulating people's perception of social mobility increases their tolerance for income inequality and Wiwad et al. (2021) who follow beliefs of a sample of the US citizens through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and find that even though there was a shift in the perception to which extend poverty is caused by external factors, the overall support for redistributive policies did not increase. For a broader discussion of the topic and a review of the recent research, see McCall (2016) and Davidai et al. (2018).

2.3 | Institutions and demographic factors

While the extent of income inequality and beliefs about social mobility seem obvious, drivers of support for redistribution, institutions, and other environmental factors can be crucially important as well. Environmental conditions have been studied mostly in the context of social cohesion and there is some evidence that adversarial environmental conditions create social cohesion (Calo-Blanco et al., 2017; Diamond, 1997, 2005; Harris, 1979; Kuper & Kroepelin, 2006). The idea is that harsher environmental conditions lead people to be more cooperative either because they understand the necessity of cooperating in order to survive (Diamond, 1997), or because stronger

evolutionary pressures select for more cooperative communities (Dietz et al., 2003). Harsher environmental conditions, however, could also lead to increased competition for scarce resources (Gleditsch, 1998), more conflict and as a result less social cohesion (Brancati, 2007; Hsiang et al., 2013; Scheffran et al., 2012).

There is comparatively little research on how environmental conditions or institutions affect preferences for redistribution. One exception is maybe Almas et al. (2020) who compare spectators from the United States and Norway. They find that Norwegians in the role of spectators implement less unequal distributions on average and are less accepting than Americans of unfairness purely due to luck (see also Grimalda et al. (2018)). Their data does not allow definite conclusions, however, as to which aspect of environmental or institutional differences between these countries is responsible for these differences. Such analysis is complicated by the fact that preferences for redistribution typically affect institutions, creating a reflection problem (Manski (1993), see Figure 1). Agranov and Palfrey (2020) develop and test a theoretical model that explores the effect of income mobility and the persistence of redistributive tax policy on the level of redistribution in democratic societies. They allow both, income level and tax rate, to change with a certain possibility between the two stages of their experiment and find that mobility (a high possibility of income change) and stickiness of the tax policy (a low possibility that the tax rate changes in a democratic process after the first stage of the experiment) are both negatively related to the equilibrium tax rate.

Democratization and the political system are clearly linked to preferences for redistribution expressed by voters. Many theories of democratization predict that extensions of the right to vote to the poor will be associated with increases in government expenditure. Some studies show that poorer citizens demand higher transfer payments since they bear a relatively low share of the tax burden (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Boix, 2003; Meltzer & Richard, 1981). Lizzeri and Persico (2004) show that an expanded electorate incentivises parties to offer higher expenditure on public goods. By contrast, Chapman (2018) shows evidence that democratization can lead to lower government expenditure on infrastructure if the median prereform voter is middle class. This negative effect is strongest when democratic reform transferred power from the middle class to the poor.

In earlier work, Svallfors (1997) empirically compares four sets of countries, each attributed to a certain political welfare system (radical, liberal, conservative, and social democratic). He finds that the regime type has an influence on the support for redistribution. People, living in traditionally social democratic countries, typically show a higher overall level of support for redistribution. He further highlights that group patterns for gender and class within different regime types are similar. Women and lower-class people show a higher support level. Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) develop and test a causal model of determinants of public attitudes toward welfare state programs. They propose that the support of welfare state programs is a function of self-interest and the resultant identification with dominant social ideologies. The identification with such ideologies influences the opinion about social rights and the support of welfare state programs. Data from the 1983 Detroit Area Study generally confirms the model and shows some important differences in the effects of social ideologies. The findings suggest that the social groups supporting the welfare state are economically and socially vulnerable people who identify with social democratic values. Corneo and Grüner (2002) study what factors other than monetary self-interest influence people's support for redistribution. They assume that all people share the same basic redistributive values and that an individual's belief in meritocracy mitigates the taste for redistribution. They compare a set of Western and former Soviet Union countries and find that belief in meritocracy significantly decreases the taste for redistribution in all countries. In general, former Socialist countries

tend to be more open to redistribution supporting the results in Almas et al. (2020), which states that subjects in the United States, irrespective of their political identification, are more inequality accepting than in Norway.

Apart from income or personal relative position, a number of other demographic characteristics have been identified to predict demand for redistribution. Buser et al. (2020) analyze data from a number of different experiments on redistribution and find that women tend to choose higher tax rates, favoring more redistribution. Their findings are in line with results from Aidt and Dallal (2008) who show that women's suffrage has helped increase redistribution and government expenditure in Western Europe between 1869 and 1960. Shapiro & Mahajan (1986), Inglehart and Norris (2000), and Giger (2009) all show that women in Western countries tend to lean more left in elections. A similar trend can be found in the literature on gender attitudes towards redistributive policies with women's demand for redistribution being higher on aggregate. Using data from Durante et al. (2014) and Grimalda et al. (2018), Buser et al. (2020) study the behavioral roots of gender differences in redistributive choices. They show that women's choices depend on external circumstances and to a great degree on differences in confidence. Women choose higher tax rates in the role of an external observer and when the initial income depends on effort whereas there is not any significant difference between men and women when income is distributed randomly. Women also redistribute more when they are part of a group and they do not know their relative position within this group. The paper suggests that this is due to men being overconfident about their performance and the resulting relative income rank. Gender differences in risk aversion on social preferences seem to play a smaller role. Similar results on gender differences in redistributive taste in experiments can be found in Ranehill and Weber (2017) and Buser et al. (2016). Several studies using the support for redistribution as an independent variable in a regression analysis report significant results for the gender dummy variable (Alesina & Giuliano, 2010; Alesina & Ferrara, 2005; Almas et al., 2020).

Based on the idea that an individual's identity can potentially influence the taste for redistribution, economists have further been interested in the influence of other demographic variables such as age, race, religion, immigration status, group identification, and education on the taste for redistribution (Alesina and Ferrara, 2005; Alesina et al., 2004; Alesina et al., 2004; Luttmer & Singhal, 2011; Luttmer, 2001). Keely and Tan (2008) use General Social Survey data to identify group characteristics, which play a key role in determining a subject's preferred level of income distribution. They consider a set of exogenously identifiable variables and find that race, gender, age, and socioeconomic class play a significant role for the preferences for redistribution in the US population. They show that non-white people and young white females from a low socioeconomic background have the strongest preferences to redistribute. Durante et al. (2014) study how demand for income redistribution depends on self-interest, insurance motives, and social concerns in a lab experiment. Groups of subjects are endowed with unequal incomes reflecting the actual income distribution in the United States. They are then asked to choose a proportional tax rate, one of which is chosen randomly at the end of the experiment. They find that all three motives influence the subjects' tax level choices. A higher pretax income will decrease the demand for redistribution. Subjects, who are confident about their own work performance, care more about maximizing their own income and choose lower tax rates. Social concerns matter with most subjects being willing to contribute to the reduction of income inequality but only if the efficiency loss from taxation is not too big. Following the experimental framework of Durante et al. (2014), Grimalda et al. (2018) study the difference in distributional preferences between different nationalities in the Western world. They find Norwegian people demand significantly higher levels of redistribution than people in the United States and Italy. Contrary to the widespread belief that the United

States is the most meritocratic place in the Western hemisphere, they find no significant difference in the redistribution choices of United States and Italian subjects when income depends on personal effort. Fong and Luttmer (2011) run a charitable giving experiment. In a dictator game set-up, they manipulate the level of the charity's worthiness and the race of people benefitting from the charity. They find that describing a charity as worthy, increases the amount donated significantly whereas manipulating the race of the charity's recipients does not have any effect. However, there is a significant racial bias in the perception of worthiness itself. Black recipients are perceived to be significantly less worthy of charitable giving than non-black recipients and this effect is stronger among non-black respondents. Earlier findings in Fong and Luttmer (2009) show a similar pattern. They study charitable giving after Hurricane Katrina and find that the victim's race does not have a significant effect on the amount given but racial group loyalty increases the taste for redistribution. Cognitive ability has also been identified as an important determinant of the demand for redistribution by Mollerstrom and Seim (2014) with people of higher cognitive ability demanding more redistribution.

Alesina and Stantcheva (2020) introduce a conceptual framework to study the role of possibly biased attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities on redistributive policies. Their model supports earlier findings in Tabellini (2020), Alesina et al. (2018), and Abramitzky and Boustan (2017). Tabellini (2020) looks at historical data and finds that US cities with a higher percentage of Jewish and Catholic immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century reduced their tax rates and public spending significantly more than homogenous protestant communities. Dahlberg et al. (2012) find a similar effect in attitudes towards redistribution for refugee placement in Swedish communities. The model further supports findings on people's preferences to live in homogenous neighborhoods and to support their own racial group when making redistributive and charitable decisions.

2.4 | Belief in meritocracy

We have seen above that the relationship between income inequality and preferences for redistribution is complex and it is not always the case that higher income inequality leads people to demand more redistribution. Indeed Gilens (1999) argues that this is because the public's views on welfare are a complex mixture of cynicism and compassion. They are sometimes misinformed and racially charged and reflect at the same time both a distrust of welfare recipients and a desire to do more to help the "deserving" poor. But when are the poor seen as "deserving"? A key role in understanding this question is belief in meritocracy.

"If you work hard and meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead, no matter where you come from, what you look like or who you love." (Obama, 2013). Belief in meritocracy is sometimes expressed as a belief in social mobility as in this quote by Barack Obama. The concept, however, is somewhat broader than merely reflecting a belief in social mobility. People have a strong motivation to believe that the world is a just place. Such "just world" beliefs (Lerner, 1980) are a form of motivated social cognition that can help to offset the stress and uncertainty inherent in a world that is indifferent to human suffering (Furnham, 2003). Research spanning several distinct literatures from psychology, economics, and political science illustrates how such beliefs can serve palliative functions for both the relatively advantaged and disadvantaged (Bullock, 2008; Davidai & Gilovich, 2016; Jost et al., 2004; Langer, 1975; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Meritocratic beliefs offer up a set of well-worn attributions for wealth and poverty to assuage negative psychological states. For the advantaged, meritocratic beliefs can resolve potential

feelings of guilt when exposed to inequality (Bullock, 2008; Jost & Hunyady, 2003). Wealth in this case is viewed as the result of virtuous traits of the wealthy while poverty is the result of the shortcomings of the poor (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). For the disadvantaged, belief in meritocracy is a psychological road-map for success—namely working harder—to the exclusion of other avenues such as collective action, as each individual is seen as responsible for their inability to improve their own situation. Routine experiences of failure, often the result of systemic injustice, and the psychological weight of poverty, can lead to passivity and hence an inability to learn that providing effort is effective (Seligman, 1972). Growing up in a meritocratic society consolidates the belief that social success is driven by personal effort only, resulting in a lack of concern about the ever increasing income gap between rich and poor (Mijs, 2021).

Behavioral economists have studied the influence of a strong belief in meritocracy on people's taste for redistribution. Several authors suggest that the effect of inequality might operate via respondents' fairness views (Cappelen et al., 2017, 2013; Fehr et al., 2019; Karadja et al., 2017; Roth & Wohlfarth, 2018). A number of papers show that people tend to tolerate inequality due to merit a lot more than as a result of luck or circumstances that are out of hand of people themselves (Alesina & Ferrara, 2005; Alesina & Angeletos, 2005; Alesina & Giuliano, 2011; Fong, 2001). Some researchers study attitudes towards fairness and meritocracy by allowing people to redistribute earnings in online experiments (Almas et al., 2020; Cappelen et al., 2017; Krawczyk, 2010; Mollerstrom et al., 2015).

In Mollerstrom et al. (2015), income depends either on merit (individual effort in a real effort task) or luck. A third-party spectator is asked to redistribute unequal income between participants. They find that spectators do not always compensate for uncontrollable luck. Krawczyk (2010) studies whether belief in meritocracy decreases the support for redistribution and shows that redistributive transfers within a group of subjects are 20% lower when the individual's income is determined by effort instead of pure luck. Cappelen et al. (2017) investigate fairness views of third party spectators on the role of merit and luck in the reward process. They introduce and formalize the idea of a merit primacy effect, a positive complementarity between luck and merit regarding the reward allocation of high-earners. In an experiment, they show that there is a significant primacy effect for high-earners as soon as only a little merit is introduced into the reward process. Subjects view inequality due to luck as unfair whereas inequality due to merit is widely tolerated. Cappelen et al. (2019) suggest that more uncertainty about the source of income inequality makes subjects more egalitarian. They show theoretically and experimentally that a taste for meritocracy in combination with a dislike for making mistakes about the uncertain source of income inequality leads to more egalitarian behavior.

Accompanied by the acceptance of meritocracy is the belief that people are personally responsible for their own choices and the resulting financial success or failure. Cappelen et al. (2016) find that when people make risky choices, forced or voluntarily, a third party spectator's willingness to accept income inequality increases strongly. Further, Cappelen et al. (2013) experimentally study fairness views on risk taking and find that people focus on equal ex ante opportunities instead of equal ex post outcomes. They show that support for ex post redistribution depends on whether inequality is the result of luck or choice with both, stakeholders and third-party spectators, being more accepting of inequality as the result of personal choices.

Recent economic literature studies how people's beliefs about the determinants of income inequality influence their taste for redistribution (Fehr & Vollmann, 2020; Lobeck, 2021; Valero, 2021). Given that previous literature highlighted the importance of luck and merit on individually chosen redistribution levels, Valero (2021) experimentally investigates whether subjects form beliefs about the role of effort versus luck to justify their own successful economic outcome.

She replicates findings with successful people being overconfident and overestimating the role of effort while unsuccessful people overestimate the role of luck in the reward process but she does not find any self-serving motivation on top of that. Lobeck (2021) studies a related question. He looks at whether subjects distort their beliefs to motivate themselves. He finds that subjects indeed use information about a future task to motivate themselves, particularly, when the prospects of success are low. He does, however, not find a similar effect of the incentive structure on the willingness to redistribute.

2.5 | Fairness views and fairness preferences

Inspired by the seminal work in Fehr and Schmidt (1999) and Bolton and Ockenfels (2000) on inequality aversion and selfishness, many economists have studied the role of social preferences on the taste for redistribution. Based on the models presented in Fehr and Schmidt (1999) and Bolton and Ockenfels (2000), Engelmann and Strobel (2004) experimentally investigate the importance of inequality aversion, people's concern for efficiency, and maximin preferences on redistributive choices. They run dictator game experiments and find that neither of the models fits well as inequality aversion seems to play only a little role for decision makers. They suggest that a combination of efficiency concerns, maximin preferences, and selfishness is able to explain their subjects' behavior. These results have been discussed further in Fehr et al. (2006) where the authors defend the Fehr and Schmidt model. They run another set of experiments similar to the Engelmann and Strobel (2004) setup and come up with two supporting arguments. First, they find a strong subject pool effect due to the large number of economics students in the Engelmann and Strobel experiment. In contrast to the general population, these students seem to prefer efficiency over equity. Second, they stress the noninteractive character of the dictator games used in the Engelmann and Strobel (2004) setup and argue that efficiency concerns are far less important in strategic settings.

Following the growing interest in fairness preferences in the economic literature, there is a substantial number of experimental and empirical studies on the influence of fairness considerations on tax rates (Alesina & Angeletos, 2005; Ackert et al., 2007; Benabou & Tirole, 2006; Durante et al., 2014; Fong, 2001; Krawczyk, 2010; Sugden & Wang, 2020; Tyran & Sausgruber, 2006). Seminal work by Alesina and Angeletos (2005) studies how fairness beliefs about a society's inequality level influence welfare policies. Previous studies showed Americans to have a much higher belief in social upward mobility and Europeans to belief a lot less in meritocracy (see Section 2.2). There is a strong correlation between the belief about the role played by luck and connections to succeed economically and a country's level of GDP spent on social welfare. The model, introduced in Alesina and Angeletos (2005), has multiple equilibria. Hence, both scenarios, a strong belief in meritocracy and low tax rates like in the United States as well as a weaker belief in meritocracy and higher tax rates like in the EU countries, can be an equilibrium outcome. Jimenez-Jimenez et al. (2020) experimentally test the validity of the model. They support the findings in Alesina and Angeletos (2005) by showing that societies are less redistributive when the median voter has strong meritocratic beliefs. However, in the experiment, the level of initial income inequality plays a crucial role for the outcome. Only when the initial inequality is high, the experimental results match the model's prediction. Further, efficiency concerns do not seem to play a role for redistribution in either inequality scenario. Sznycer et al. (2017) find that endorsement of redistribution is independently predicted by dispositional compassion, dispositional envy, and the expectation of personal gain from redistribution. By contrast, a taste for fairness, in the sense of (i) universality

in the application of laws and standards, or (ii) low variance in group-level payoffs, fails to predict attitudes about redistribution. Balafoutas et al. (2012) find that also competitiveness can predict the level of support for redistribution.

The Fehr and Schmidt model has been used to study the affect of fairness preferences on redistributional preferences in various different ways. Ackert et al. (2007) use the Fehr and Schmidt model to design an experiment studying the role of fairness preferences on redistributive choices. They endow subjects with one out of nine random incomes and ask them to make a choice between a lump sum per head transfer and a progressive income tax. They find that subjects are inequality averse as well as that they show concern for their own payoff. There further is an alleviating effect of the deadweight loss caused by high progressive tax rates on redistribution. Tyran and Sausgruber (2006) adapt the Fehr and Schmidt framework for a voting experiment on redistribution. The proposed theoretical model suggests agents with a preference for fairness implement a higher level of redistribution than self-centered agents. The experiment underlines the theoretical result. The Fehr and Schmidt framework predicts the observed redistribution levels better than the standard model. Gärtner et al. (2017) focus on risk aversion and how it can influence people's taste for redistribution. They use Swedish survey data to show a robust positive correlation between the level of risk aversion and the demand for redistribution. Risk averse people do not only care about the present but they also worry about the future. Risk averse people choose a higher level of redistribution as an insurance against future economic shocks. More recently, Cappelen et al. (2021) study the impact of the Covid19 crisis on solidarity and fairness views within a large US sample. They find that subjects, who are reminded of the crisis before answering questions on their moral and political views, behave different from the control group. The subjects show a greater interest in solving problems concerning the whole society while also becoming more tolerant to inequality caused by luck. They suggest that this either is a self-serving bias with people trying to keep believing in a just world or the pandemic highlighted the role of individual choices during the Covid19 crisis.

3 | CONCLUSIONS

Ever since the beginning of the new millennium, we have observed a renewed interest in the social sciences, specifically economics, in finding and understanding possible influences on distributional preferences. The restored interest might have been amplified by the increasing social inequality in many places around the globe and the resulting tensions between the political left and right (Alvaredo et al., 2013; Atkinson, 2015). In addition, the development of experimental economics and its range of tools has given researchers the possibility to measure and understand preferences for redistribution not only via surveys and administrative data but also via controlled experiments.

While there remains scope for future research, some interesting patterns have been uncovered. Income inequality is clearly an important mediator of preferences for redistribution with perceived relative personal position playing an important role. While there is substantial literature on the impact of income inequality (reviewed in Section 2.1), much less attention has been paid to wealth inequality. It would be interesting for future research to study whether wealth and income inequality impact preferences for redistribution in similar ways or whether there are some important differences. It is conceivable, for example, that wealth is perceived differently as it may appear less "earned" compared to income. Indeed we have seen that people's opinion on whether inequality is the result of an individual's own choices or the result of external circumstances seems a key

determinant of the preferred amount of redistribution. Whether a person deserves to be worse off than others can in turn depend on people's social identity as well as on the manifestation of meritocratic beliefs within a society, its institutions and social systems. An active line of research is asking to which extent stable social preferences can be identified to explain preferences for redistribution (Bruhin et al., 2019; Hedegaard et al., 2021; Kerschbamer & Müller, 2020).

There has been an impressive amount of evidence on covariates and determinants of preferences for redistribution recently, in different research discipline within the social sciences. Reviewing the literature on the topic made us aware of an apparent disconnect between the research in sociology, psychology, and economics. Even though all fields work on similar research questions, they do not always seem be aware, recogniszng, or cite each other's work and results enough. Future work should aim at a better understanding of how the different approaches can fit together in shaping preferences for redistribution. Even within economics, we found that there is a variety of methods used (surveys, experimental designs) but there is not much work on the relationship between the different measures obtained by using these various methods.[2] Structural modeling and a combined use of experimental measurements, mixture models, survey, and administrative data could further our understanding of which motives can be expected to shape decisions under which circumstances. Last, we note that a lot of the evidence stems from Western countries especially the United States and the United Kingdom. It would be useful to broaden the evidence base also in this sense.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Redistribution can also occur via charitable actions. There is a substantial literature on the impact of inequality on pro-social behavior, often focusing on the effect of relative position as opposed to inequality per se (Andreoni et al., 2017; Cote et al., 2015; Korndoerfer et al., 2015; Piff et al., 2012; Smeets et al., 2015; Schmukle et al., 2019; Trautmann et al., 2013). This literature usually focuses on a general measure of charitable giving and not on directed giving from the rich to the poor.

[2] An exception is maybe Albertazzi et al. (2021) who use both experimental and survey measures to corroborate their findings. But even in their work, the correlation among them is not explicitly studied as they are elicited on different sets of participants.

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