

Economic Inequality, Immigration, and Selective Solidarity

Experimental and Cross-National Evidence on Welfare Support

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Does economic inequality make individuals less generous toward immigrants? Inequality and immigration have emerged as central challenges in many post-industrial democracies. Existing scholarship has explored the separate impact of economic inequality and immigration on preferences for redistribution, but still lacking is a good understanding of how the economic context and communal identity interact to shape welfare support. This study argues that economic inequality generates selective solidarity. By highlighting the contrast between the haves and the have-nots, inequality weakens beliefs in meritocracy and the importance of hard work as a way to improve one's own economic condition. This perceived lack of opportunities, in turn, produces two outcomes. First, it increases support for redistribution that takes from the rich as a way to redress the unbalance. Second, it intensifies welfare chauvinism: willingness to provide welfare support to natives grows, while support for welfare policies benefiting immigrants decreases. I test this argument with an original survey experiment conducted with a nationally representative sample of Italian residents and a cross-national observational analysis, in which I link survey data from the European Social Survey to contextual socio-economic indicators. The analysis provides support to the hypotheses and produces a surprising finding: inequality demobilizes individuals with lower education, who are less likely to take action consistent with their attitudinal positions when they become aware of the economic disparities. This work contributes to the study of the role of economic inequality and identity considerations in the politics of welfare.

Paper prepared for the EUSA Fifteenth Biennial Conference, Miami, May 4-6, 2017

Many post-industrial democracies have faced two fundamental challenges in recent decades: economic inequality and immigration. Inequality has reached its highest levels in 30 years. Since the mid-1980s, the GINI coefficient has grown on average by 3 points in the OECD countries, with increases greater than 5 points in the US and Sweden. The richest 10% of the population now earn 9.5 times more than the bottom 10%, up from 7.1 times in the mid-1980s (OECD 2014). Citizens' awareness of inequality has also increased. In a 2013 Pew Research Center poll, a median of 85% of Europeans believed that the gap between rich and poor had increased, and 60% agreed that inequality was a "very big" problem (Pew 2013). Similarly, 62% of Americans judged the economic system unfair (Pew 2014), and the popularity of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Bernie Sanders campaign highlighted the importance of economic inequality in the political debate. At the same time, immigration has become one of the most controversial issues in Europe and the US and has developed as a fundamental social cleavage that shapes political contestation (Hooghe and Marks n.d., Kriesi 2010, Van der Brug and Spanje 2009, Kriesi et al. 2006). Between 2002 and 2016, the number of Europeans considering immigration a top issue has grown from 17% to 45% (Eurobarometer 2016a).¹ The refugee crisis and Brexit have further increased the saliency of immigration.²

Does economic inequality make individuals less generous toward immigrants? While the relation between competition over limited resource in times of economic hardship and hostility toward immigrants has been widely studied (e.g. Quillian 1995, Citrin et al. 1997, Cavaillé and Ferwerda n.d.; but see Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), the impact of inequality is less obvious. Existing scholarship has investigated the separate effects of economic inequality and immigration on preferences for redistribution. Still lacking, however, is a good understanding of how the economic context and communal identity interact to shape welfare support. Furthermore, while redistributive policies can be divided into those that 'take from the rich' and those that 'give to the needy' (Trump and Cavaillé 2015), most of the comparative literature on welfare preferences has focused on general support for redistribution. As a result, it is not clear what groups benefit or are penalized under inequality.

¹ 2002 was the first year in which the question was asked. 2016 provides the most recent data available.

² The link between Brexit and immigration is confirmed by a recent analysis of the Brexit vote, which found that 90% of those who had negative opinions about immigration voted 'Leave' (Goodwin and Heath 2016).

This study argues that economic inequality generates *selective solidarity*: it increases willingness to help low-income natives but decreases support for welfare programs that benefit immigrants. Inequality produces such effects via its impact on meritocracy and deservingness considerations. When economic disparities grow, beliefs in meritocracy weaken and individuals are less likely to believe that hard work is conducive to economic success. This perceived lack of individual opportunities to improve one's own condition, in turn, produces two outcomes. First, it strengthens support for redistribution that takes from the rich as a way to redress the unfairness. Second, it intensifies welfare chauvinism and deepens the gap between support for natives and support for immigrants. This is because concerns about distributive justice are limited to natives, and prioritizing natives in welfare access ensures that they are no longer bypassed in the provision of economic opportunities

I test these hypotheses with experimental data and cross-national observational analysis. I rely on an original survey experiment conducted with a nationally representative sample of Italian residents. The experiment includes both attitudinal and behavioral measures of welfare support. By measuring real political action rather than self-reported compliance, the behavioral task offers insights into the mobilization power of inequality. I then link survey data from the 2008 European Social Survey, which includes a rich module on welfare state attitudes, with contextual macro socio-economic indicators. Combining experimental data with cross-national analysis offers important advantages. While the experiment allows me to evaluate causality, the cross-national analysis provides external validity to the experimental findings. Additionally, while the survey experiment analyzes the impact of inequality awareness, the cross-national analysis offers a test for objective inequality measured by contextual indicators.

This work helps us understand important contemporary challenges. By exploring whether economic inequality makes individuals less generous toward immigrants, it brings together two separate robust strands in the literature on the politics of welfare, which have focused, respectively, on the impact of inequality on support for redistribution and the link between identity and welfare attitudes. I introduce a new social affinity model of welfare support, in which inequality sparks selective solidarity, and I propose a novel mechanism based on the impact of inequality on meritocracy and deservingness perceptions. More broadly, studying how economic inequality affects welfare support is important in times of severe fiscal stress. In contexts where growing inequality raises the stakes of redistribution and the political relevance

of immigration makes identity considerations salient, governments must decide how to allocate welfare resources among competing groups. Understanding how the economic environment makes citizens more or less supportive of immigrants is an important step toward more inclusive societies.

Economic Inequality and Preferences for Redistribution

The study of the impact of economic inequality on pro-social dispositions has a long history. Plato believed that inequality generates divisions between the rich and the poor and that it makes the rich neglecting of their responsibilities (Plato n.d.). Aristotle proposed an overall negative but more nuanced view on economic inequality. In *Politics*, he suggested that inequality reduces solidarity by making individuals concerned only about their short-term self-interest and by pitting the rich against the poor (Aristotle 2013, Pol. 1295b; see also Ward 2011, Tranvik n.d.).³ But the philosopher also argued in *Nicomachean Ethics* that inequality sparks both generosity and magnificence,⁴ even if these actions are often spurred more by a desire for self-aggrandizement than altruism (Aristotle 2011, NE 1120b; Ward 2011). In his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Rousseau warned that inequality negatively affects fairness and generosity and leads to fragmented societies in which the rich are less inclined to help the poor (Rousseau [and Gourevitch] 1997, 137, 171, 185; see also Lay Williams 2014).⁵ While Adam Smith believed that moderate inequality boosts productivity and political stability, he also worried that high inequality diminishes sympathies for and willingness to help the poor (Smith 1982, I.iii.2, 50–61; Rasmussen 2016).

Modern social science has devoted a great deal of attention to economic inequality and welfare support. The median voter theorem suggests that an increase in pretax inequality favors greater support for redistribution because the distance between the income of the median voter and the average income is greater in more unequal societies (Romer 1975, Meltzer and Richard 1981). Empirical work on the impact of economic inequality on preferences for redistribution, however, has yielded mixed results. Some studies find that inequality increases support for

³ Aristotle argues that under inequality the wealthy exhibit content for the poor and wish to rule “in the fashion of masters,” while the poor are consumed by envy.

⁴ Generosity is defined as private donations for private purposes, while magnificence as private donations for public goods benefiting the entire community.

⁵ This is because “the rich would acquire a ‘pleasure of dominating’ that renders them ‘like those ravenous wolves which once they have tasted human flesh scorn all other food, and from then on want only to devour men’.”

redistribution (Tóth and Keller 2011, Holm and Jaeger 2011, Finseraas 2009) by making the rich more altruistic (Rueda and Stegmueller 2015) or more concerned about negative inequality externalities such as crime (Dimitrick, Rueda and Stegmueller 2016). Other studies, however, find no effect of inequality on preferences for redistribution (Lubker 2007, Kuziemko et al. 2015). Still others show that inequality has a negative impact on support for redistribution (Bowles and Gintis 2000, Paskov and Dewilde 2012), especially among higher-income individuals (Côté et al. 2015) and when wealth disparities are more visible (Nishi et al. 2015).⁶

The reason why previous studies have produced such disparate and inconsistent outcomes is because they have usually focused on support for *general* redistribution rather than *specific* welfare policies. Redistribution, however, can assume various meanings and elicit different attitudes depending on the social groups who are thought to benefit from social policies. In the US, for instance, welfare has become racially coded and associated with blacks among large subsets of the white electorate (Gilens 1996, 1999), while Social Security has become linked to whiteness (Winter 2006). As a result, the effect of inequality on welfare preferences is conditional on the type of redistributive measures under consideration (Moene and Wallerstein 2001). Specifically, redistributive policies can be divided between those that “take from the rich” and those that “give to the poor” (Cavaillé and Trump 2015). Since the latter are more likely to generate other-oriented social affinity considerations rather than self-oriented income maximization, the identity of welfare receivers critically shapes the effects of inequality on preferences for redistribution toward low-income recipients.

Identity, Immigration and Welfare Preferences

Identity considerations often influence help-giving and welfare support. Individuals tend to display parochial altruism: they are prone to help members of their own community but deny support to out-group individuals (Bernhard et al. 2006, Bowles and Gintis 2011; see also Marks 2012). The relevance of race in shaping welfare attitudes confirms the conditionality of help. Support for welfare increases in the US as the number of welfare recipients sharing the race of respondents grows (Luttmer 2001, Bobo and Kluegel 1993), while attitudes toward welfare are

⁶ Some studies also find a negative macro-link between pre-transfer inequality and redistribution, indicating either a weaker demand for redistribution or a failure of translating preferences into policies (Iversen and Soskice 2006, Moene and Wallerstein 2001).

more negative in environments that are more racially or ethnically heterogeneous (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Habyarimana et al. 2007; Hopkins 2009). Race also shapes welfare preferences through negative attitudes and stereotypes: individuals who believe that blacks are lazy exhibit lower support for welfare (Gilens 1999, Pfefferly et al. 1997, Fox 2004, Kinder and Kam 2009).

In Europe nationality has arguably become the most salient identity in the context of welfare. While communal identity has always played a fundamental role in shaping opinions toward the European project (Hooghe and Marks 2005), national identity has emerged more decisively as a boundary to transnational solidarity during the recent Eurocrisis (Kuhn n.d., Kuhn and Stoeckel n.d., Bechtel, Hainmueller and Margalit 2012). Within countries, the divide between natives and immigrants occupies a privileged position: “Identifying the state – likewise the ‘welfare state’ – inherently requires delineating who is ‘in’ (citizens of the state) and ‘out’ (non-citizens)” (Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012, 122). As a result, welfare chauvinism, which is a political belief that advocates for the limitation of welfare benefits to the natives of the country (Van der Waal et al. 2010), has gained increased relevance. Not only have far-right parties moved over time from promoting small government to proposing welfare chauvinism (Kitschelt 2007, 1997). But welfare chauvinism today is also embraced by larger sectors of the electorate because of the zero-sum competition reasoning induced by fiscal stress and resource scarcity (Cavaillé and Ferwerda n.d.).

The exclusion of immigrants from welfare benefits may have material or cultural roots. Regarding material considerations, the group threat hypothesis explains zero-sum reasoning: hostility toward out-groups – often minorities, including immigrants – emerges when out-groups are perceived as competitors over limited resources (Quillian 1995). Relatedly, the fiscal burden argument – which is based on the assumption that immigrants are net beneficiaries of welfare – posits that an increase in immigration generates a reduction in welfare generosity, unless taxes are raised (Cavaillé and Ferwerda n.d., 5-6), even if empirical support for these claims is mixed at best (Hanson et al. 2005, Facchini and Mayda 2009, Hainmueller & Hiscox 2010). As for cultural concerns, individuals who have negative attitudes toward immigrants express lower support for the welfare state (Garand, Xu and Davis 2016) and those who exhibit ethnocentrism are more likely to embrace welfare chauvinism (Ford 2015). Some evidence also suggests that immigrants are seen as less deserving than other social groups (Van Oorschot 2006), especially if they are low-skilled (Helbing and Kriesi 2014).

While existing scholarship provides explanations for the possible negative link between immigration and welfare support, previous work has not explored the impact of economic inequality on support for welfare programs benefiting immigrants.⁷ Considering that inequality increases the stakes of redistribution and that immigration has acquired growing political relevance, it is important to understand how economic disparities affect willingness to help different groups in society. Indeed, inequality has the potential to affect both material considerations (because of skewed resource distribution and resulting differentiated tax burden) and ideal concerns, given its potential impact on perceptions of distributive justice, fairness and meritocracy. In the next section, I develop a theory that links economic inequality to welfare support for low-income natives and immigrants.

Economic Inequality, Immigration, and Selective Solidarity

Individuals who believe in meritocracy and the importance of hard work – rather than luck – to determine one’s own economic position exhibit greater aversion to redistribution (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005, Fong 2001). Negative income shocks, and more broadly the economic context in which individuals live, can influence the relative importance of luck and effort (Piketty 1995).

I argue that economic inequality alters the equilibrium between effort and luck and diminishes the perceived importance of effort. By increasing the distance between the top and the bottom, inequality highlights the contrast between the rich and the poor. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and the worsened position of a relatively larger number, in turn, weaken beliefs in meritocracy. Under high inequality, individuals are less likely to believe that hard work is conducive to economic success.⁸ And when citizens believe that one’s own economic condition is determined more by external social causes rather than individually

⁷ As a partial exception, Van der Waal, de Kooster and Van Oorschot (2013) find that individuals living in liberal and conservative welfare regimes embrace welfare chauvinism more than citizens in social-democratic welfare states.

⁸ While such negative impact on meritocracy beliefs in the US is limited to lower-income individuals (Newman et al. 2015), I expect the effect to be widespread in Europe for two reasons. First, Europeans have traditionally shown a greater support for the welfare state and exhibited a distaste for high inequality (Kaase, Newton & Scarbrough 1997). Second, there is often a disconnection between one’s actual income and one’s subjective perception of their own relative socio-economic position. The latest data from Eurobarometer (2016b) show that only 1% of Europeans identified themselves as belonging to the higher class of society, and only 7% described themselves as members of the upper middle class. Since 88% of individuals identify as middle, lower middle, or working class, feelings of relative deprivation and lack of opportunities are likely to emerge even among relatively wealthy citizens who do not see themselves as belonging to the top of the income distribution.

controllable factors, they are more likely to support redistribution (see Weiner et al. 2011).⁹ As a result, inequality increases support for redistribution that takes from the rich as a way to redress the unbalanced resource distribution and the lack of opportunities for those at the bottom.

Under high inequality, therefore, citizens are more willing to support the needy. Not everyone, however, is perceived as equally deserving of help. By negatively affecting beliefs in meritocracy – I argue – economic inequality intensifies welfare chauvinism: willingness to help natives grows, but support for immigrants decreases. This is because concerns about distributive justice are limited to natives, and the belief that those at the bottom have received less than what they deserve does not extend to immigrants. Low-income natives, who are denied the possibility to climb the social ladder under inequality, should receive priority in the access to welfare as a remedy for their unfair condition.¹⁰ Prioritizing low-income natives over immigrants ensures that they are no longer bypassed in the provision of economic opportunities.

Why are distributive concerns and help-giving conditional on communal identity under inequality? The answer lies in both the general tendency of individuals to favor members of their own group and the specific relevance of the natives vs. immigrants divide in regard to welfare. Group identity favors ingroup favoritism (Brewer and Brown 1998), and ingroup members are usually judged more deserving than out-group individuals (Feather 1999, Van Oorschot 2006). Crucially, group identification also limits the scope of concerns about distributive justice, so that individuals are less likely to worry about the condition of out-groups (Tyler 2001). I expect this dynamic to play out in economically unequal societies. Inequality stimulates the conviction that those at the bottom lack the opportunity to rise through hard work, and the perception of social constraints spurs support for redistribution. These considerations, however, do not extend to out-groups, whose condition is less likely to be seen as unjust with regard to redistributive concerns. The belief that meritocracy is lacking, therefore, increases the perceived deservingness of low-income ingroup members, but does not positively affect perceptions of out-group deservingness. As a result, redistributive policies in favor of out-groups are not seen as a priority. Further, out-groups are even likely to be directly penalized in times when inequality is accompanied by fiscal

⁹ The attributional theory of poverty argues that the perceived causes of poverty influence willingness to help and that perceived causal control over one's condition of need is a dominant determinant. See Weiner et al. (2011).

¹⁰ The belief that natives have higher deservingness of welfare support compared to immigrants corresponds to the softer definition of welfare chauvinism (Van der Waal et al. 2010), which is opposed to a stricter definition in which immigrants are *tout court* excluded from welfare access (see Reeskens and Van Oorschot 2012).

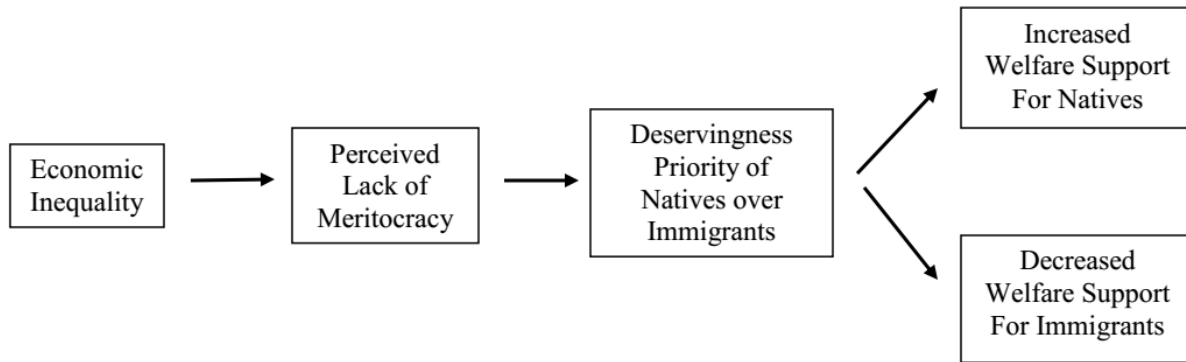
stress. This combination is indeed conducive to a zero-sum reasoning in which ingroup and out-group individuals compete over limited resources. In such a context, prioritizing the ingroup and denying support to out-groups guarantees that fellow community members are not left behind.

With regard to welfare, the natives vs. immigrants opposition has emerged as the most relevant ingroup/out-group divide. This is not just because immigration has recently become a dominant social cleavage (Hooghe and Marks n.d., Kriesi et al., 2006; Van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). Immigration also provides an “encompassing distinction” between those who are either citizens of the state – and therefore ingroup members – or non-citizens – hence, out-group individuals (see Reeskens and Van Oorschot 2012, 122; Van Oorschot 2006). Over time, a strong linkage has developed between citizenship and the welfare state. The welfare state requires individuals to make sacrifices to help “anonymous others.” These sacrifices are more likely to be accepted if donors and receivers are united by a common identity and a shared membership, “such that sacrifices being made for anonymous others are still, in some sense, sacrifices for ‘one of us’” (Kymlicka 2001, 225). In modern times, nationality has provided the common identity that made such sacrifices acceptable. Immigrants who come from outside the national community are therefore less likely to be perceived as entitled to a fair (re)distribution of community resources. As a result, welfare support as a remedy against distributive injustice under inequality is reserved for natives and denied to immigrants.

Theory Summary and Hypotheses

By highlighting the contrast between the haves and the have-nots, inequality weakens beliefs in the importance of hard work and meritocracy. The perceived lack of opportunities for those at the bottom to improve their own condition, in turn, produces two outcomes. First, it increases support for redistribution that takes from the rich as a way to redress the unbalance. Second, it intensifies welfare chauvinism: willingness to provide welfare support to natives increases, while, at the same time, individuals become less generous toward immigrants. Since concerns about distributive injustice are limited to natives, the perceived lack of meritocracy increases the relative deservingness of natives over immigrants, which stimulates the conviction that natives should receive welfare priority under economic inequality.

Figure 1: From Economic Inequality to Selective Solidarity



Main outcomes

- H1: Economic inequality *increases* support for redistribution that takes from the rich
- H2: Economic inequality *increases* support for welfare policies that benefit low-income natives
- H3: Economic inequality *decreases* support for welfare policies that benefit low-income immigrants

Causal mechanism

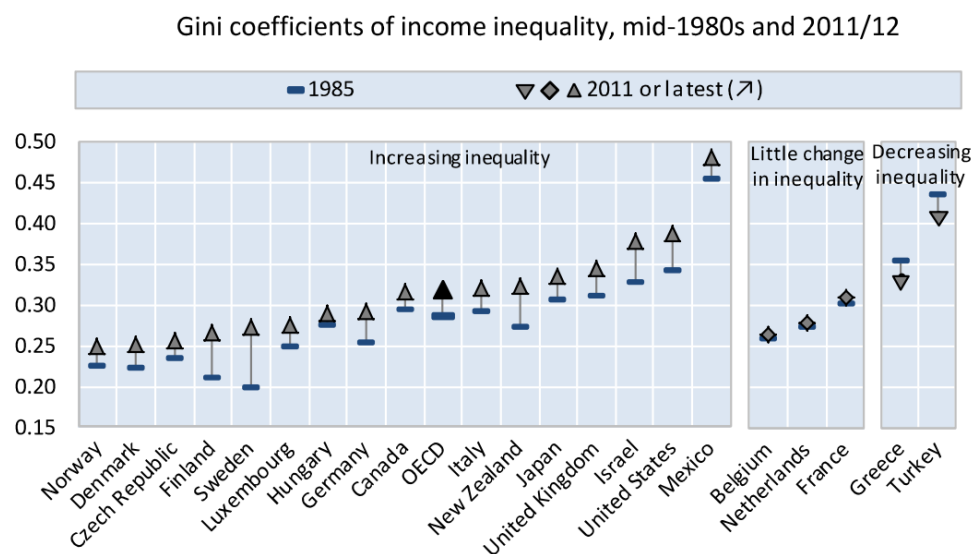
- H4: Economic inequality weakens beliefs in meritocracy and hard work as a way to improve one's own economic condition
- H5: The inequality-induced perceptions of lack of meritocracy *increase* support for redistribution that takes from the rich
- H6: The inequality-induced perceptions of lack of meritocracy *increase* support for welfare policies that benefit low-income natives
- H7: The inequality-induced perceptions of lack of meritocracy *decrease* support for welfare policies that benefit low-income immigrants
- H8: The inequality-induced perceptions of lack of meritocracy *increase* the relative *deservingness* of low-income natives vis-à-vis low-income immigrants (which explains the opposite impact of meritocracy on support for low-income natives and low-income immigrants)

Data and Methods

To test the hypotheses above, I combine an original survey experiment conducted in Italy with cross-national observational analysis. Italy is an interesting case to test my theory. The country is representative of the level and the trend of inequality in OECD countries (see figure below).

While immigration is a central concern in Italy,¹¹ far-right parties have not enjoyed the same level of popularity that they have recently gathered in other European countries.¹² This makes Italy a relevant case without turning it into an outlier in terms of inequality or immigration-induced polarization. I then test the main hypotheses with cross-national analysis by linking respondents from the 2008 wave of the European Social Survey to contextual socio-economic indicators to provide external validity to the experimental findings. I first present the results of the experiment and then move to the observational analysis.

Figure 2 – GINI coefficient in OECD countries



Note: Incomes refer to household disposable income, adjusted for household size.
Source: OECD Income Distribution Database (<http://oe.cd/idd>).

Figure obtained from OECD (2014)

¹¹ In the spring 2016 Eurobarometer survey (2016a), immigration was the second-most cited issue (selected by 31% of respondents) among the most important issues faced by Italy and the most cited issue among the most important issues faced by the EU (43% of respondents).

¹² See, for instance, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria or Denmark.

Survey experiment

Experimental design

The survey experiment was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,275 Italian residents.¹³ Respondents are randomly assigned to one of the three following conditions: the economic inequality treatment, the poverty treatment, or the control group. The poverty condition is not the focus of this paper, but allows me to test whether inequality has effects on redistribution and welfare chauvinism that are unique and separate from those produced by economic hardship. The two treatments are built symmetrically: they are divided into two pages; provide bullet point information about levels of economic inequality and poverty, respectively, in Italy; show a graph of income distribution by quintiles or levels of absolute poverty; and present a picture depicting inequality or poverty.

I gauge opinions on welfare support in two ways. First, I measure support for redistribution that takes from the rich. The survey item asks whether respondents believe that the “government should increase taxes on the rich to decrease income differences in Italy” to emphasize the cost of redistribution for the rich. Second, I focus on policies that distribute to the needy. Specifically, I measure support for welfare programs that are targeted at low-income natives and low-income immigrants in the form of monthly income subsidies. Focusing on concrete welfare policies rather than general willingness to help – as often the case in large cross-national surveys – should make the survey items more meaningful for respondents.¹⁴

I also evaluate a behavioral measure of welfare support, which consists in the possibility for survey respondents to write a message in favor of a petition asking the government to increase resources for the National Fund for Social Policies. This is a relatively demanding task because it requires respondents to craft their own message without providing any guiding script, rather than just signing an existing petition.¹⁵ Since I collect all the messages, this task allows me

¹³ The survey was distributed by the survey platform company Cint. Data were collected on December 13, 14 and 15, 2016. The survey was administered in Italian and the median time for completion was 12 minutes. The experiment was registered with EGAP (Evidence in Governance and Politics: www.egap.org) before data collection. More information on survey respondents and pilot studies can be found in the appendix.

¹⁴ The survey experiment also measured support for policies targeted at the unemployed (natives and immigrants) and the Italian middle class. These policies are not the focus of this study. All survey respondents answered all of the welfare support questions and the question order was randomized across respondents.

¹⁵ This is confirmed by the survey completion time. The median time for respondents who did not write a message was 11 minutes. The median time for those who did write a message was 14 minutes.

to directly observe real political action, rather than self-reported compliance. I can therefore evaluate whether inequality affects actions beyond opinions and gauge its mobilization power.¹⁶

To evaluate the causal mechanism through which inequality shapes support for redistribution and welfare chauvinism, I collect measures on meritocracy captured by the perceived importance of effort to improve one's own economic condition; absolute deservingness of low-income natives and low-income immigrants; and relative deservingness of low-income natives compared to low-income immigrants. In the second part of the survey, respondents answer questions about their socio-economic situation and their political preferences.¹⁷ The post-experiment questionnaire also includes manipulation and attention checks. The manipulation checks consist in factual information questions about inequality and poverty and allow me to test the effectiveness of the treatments. The attention check consists in a question asking respondents to select a specific answer, regardless of their personal preference. Attention checks are important because they reveal inattentive respondents and reduce noise.¹⁸

Experimental findings

The manipulation checks confirm that both the inequality treatment and the poverty treatment increased awareness and knowledge about inequality and poverty, respectively. Respondents in the treatment groups are statistically significantly more likely to answer correctly questions about levels and growth of economic inequality and poverty (see appendix). Below I present and discuss the results from the analysis conducted with the entire sample of respondents. As a

¹⁶ Respondents were explained that the messages would be delivered at the end of the survey to the President of the National Institute for Social Policies, the President of the Republic, and the Prime Minister. In order to avoid any potential partisan effect, I clarified that the petition was not promoted or supported by any political party. Furthermore, in order to avoid interest distortion, respondents were told that they would not receive any additional benefit from writing a message and that they would not be penalized if they decided not to write.

¹⁷ I also asked respondents to provide the first three digits of their zip code, which allowed me to code their province of residence (there are 107 provinces in Italy, ranging from 86,000 to 1.2 million residents). By linking socio-economic indicators at the province level to individual survey responses, I will be able to evaluate whether the impact of the treatment is moderated by contextual indicators. I still have to run this analysis.

¹⁸ Some research argues that attention checks are more flexible and less likely to introduce bias than traditional manipulation checks (Berinsky et al. 2014). The inclusion of the attention check allows me to run the analysis with both the entire sample and the subset of respondents who passed the screener, and evaluate whether substantial differences emerge in the results. Even if current research generally believes that the position of attention checks does not have a significant relevance, I placed the attention check at the end of the survey to avoid bias that could be elicited by the screener-induced feeling that the respondent is being monitored. This makes the attention check a strong screener, since respondents are more likely to lose attention at the end of a survey. Of the 1,275 respondents that completed the survey, 1,018 passed the attention check.

robustness check, I also ran the analysis with the subset of respondents who passed the attention check and the subset that excludes the 5% fastest and slowest respondents. Results do not substantially change and are reported in the appendix.

Redistribution that takes from the rich

I first analyze support for redistribution that takes from the rich. The dependent variable is obtained from the following item: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The government should increase taxes on the rich to decrease income differences in Italy.” The table below reports the results of an ordered logit model in which the dependent variable is measured on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”¹⁹

Table 1 – Support for Redistribution

	Support for Redistribution
Inequality treatment	0.40** (0.14)
Poverty treatment	-0.12 (0.14)
Education	-0.06 (0.06)
Age	0.01** (0.004)
Female	-0.23+ (0.12)
Income (household)	-0.09** (0.03)
Economic right	-0.20*** (0.03)
Social conservative	-0.04+ (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.33

¹⁹ The total number of observations is 1,098 because some respondents did not answer questions about their income (and a few respondents also skipped questions about their political preferences). Running the analysis on the entire sample by excluding those variables does not change the findings on the impact of the treatment. To this regard, the appendix shows the difference in support for redistribution between treatment and control groups without any control. As a robustness check, the appendix also shows the result of a logit model in which support for redistribution is operationalized as a dummy variable for which 1 corresponds to “strongly agree.”

	(0.30)
Location (North-East)	0.19
	(0.19)
Observations	1,098
Residual Variance	2742.943
AIC	2788.943
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The findings show that inequality increases support for redistribution through higher taxation on the rich. The impact of the poverty treatment, on the other hand, is not significant. This lack of significance suggests that it is the peculiar effect of inequality that produces the observed results, which calls for an analysis – developed below – on the causal mechanism through which such outcome arises. Not surprisingly, richer and economically conservative individuals display significant opposition to redistribution, while older residents exhibit greater support.

Support for low-income natives vs. low-income immigrants

I now test the impact of inequality on willingness to provide welfare support to low-income natives and low-income immigrants.²⁰ Since the dependent variables are measured on a five-point scale, I adopt ordered logit models.²¹

²⁰ “How much are you in favor or against a government intervention to promote the following policies, even if such intervention required a tax increase or a spending cut in other sectors? Providing a payment card of 350 euros per month for food, health and bills-related expenses to Italian citizens who live in absolute poverty? [to immigrants who live in Italy in absolute poverty?].” Hence, the policy is the same, but the identity of potential receivers varies.

²¹ The appendix presents results from logit models in which the dependent variables are operationalized as binary for which 1 corresponds to the most extreme category. The appendix also shows the difference in support for natives and immigrants between treatment and control groups without any control.

Table 2 – Support for welfare policies benefiting low-income natives and low-income immigrants

	Support for			
	Low-Income Natives		Low-Income Immigrants	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Inequality treatment	0.31*	0.40*	-0.07	0.11
	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.16)
Inequality treatment*Social conserv	--	-0.36	--	-0.69*
		(0.32)		(0.31)
Poverty treatment	0.09	0.28 ⁺	-0.14	-0.06
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.15)
Poverty treatment*Social conserv	--	-0.88**	--	-0.35
		(0.34)		(0.33)
Education	-0.08	-0.09	0.12*	0.12*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Age	0.01*	0.01*	-0.0004	-0.0004
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Female	0.29*	0.30**	0.08	0.09
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Income (household)	-0.05	-0.05	-0.002	-0.003
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Economic right	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.16***	-0.16***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Social conservative	-0.04	0.35	-0.10	0.27
	(0.14)	(0.23)	(0.14)	(0.23)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.06	0.05	-0.67*	-0.65*
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Location (North-East)	0.03	0.04	-0.27	-0.27
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Observations	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098
Residual Deviance	2754.502	2692.001	3240.294	3159.739
AIC	2800.502	2744.001	3286.294	3211.739
Note:	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001			

Model 1 and 3 show that inequality significantly increases willingness to support low-income natives, but does not have a significant effect on willingness to help immigrants. Therefore, the

increased support for redistribution sparked by inequality is limited to policies that benefit natives of the country.

I also test the impact of inequality conditional on respondents' social conservatism.²² This allows me to evaluate whether a situational trigger like inequality activates a predisposing factor (i.e. social conservatism) to spark welfare chauvinism (see Sinderman et al. 2004).²³ Model 4 shows that inequality decreases support for immigrant access to welfare among socially conservative individuals, who – on the other hand – do not display greater opposition to welfare for natives (model 2). Moreover, the non-significance of the social conservative coefficient in model 4 reveals that conservative individuals in the control group do not exhibit greater opposition to helping immigrants. Inequality is therefore instrumental to activate a latent welfare chauvinistic inclination.

Taken together these findings reveal that it is the peculiar effect of inequality that generates selective solidarity, rather than the impact of awareness of economic hardship and poverty. Inequality intensifies welfare chauvinism: while individuals may generally prioritize natives over immigrants, this tendency becomes more pronounced as inequality increases. The next section explores the mechanism through which inequality widens the gap between support for natives and support for immigrants.

Causal mediation: Lack of meritocracy and deservingness considerations

This section explores the mechanism through which economic inequality affects welfare preferences. I first present separate models and then run causal mediation analysis. The models below test the impact of inequality on perceptions of lack of opportunities in society and the impact of lack of opportunities on welfare support. Model A is a logit model in which the binary dependent variable equals 1 for respondents who “strongly disagree” or “disagree” that hard work leads to improving one's own situation. Models B1, B2 and B3 are ordered logit models in which lack of meritocracy enters the equation as an independent variable, while the dependent variables are the same presented in the analysis above.

²² Socially conservative is operationalized as a dummy variable in which 1 corresponds to respondents who placed themselves on 7 or higher on a 10-point scale ranging from liberal to conservative. As a robustness check, I ran the analysis with different cutoff points, in which 1 corresponds to individuals who selected a value of 8 or higher and 9 or higher. Results remain substantially unchanged.

²³ This is also consistent with Moral Foundations Theory. Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) find that conservatives endorse the ingroup/loyalty foundation more than liberals.

Table 3 – Inequality, meritocracy, and welfare preferences

	Belief that: Society Lacks Meritocratic Opportunities	Support for: Redistribution	Low-Income Natives	Low-Income Immigrants
	(A)	(B1)	(B2)	(B3)
Inequality treatment	0.37* (0.15)	--	--	--
Poverty treatment	0.07 (0.15)	--	--	--
Lack meritocracy	--	0.49*** (0.12)	0.28* (0.12)	-0.54*** (0.11)
Education	0.01 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)	0.12* (0.06)
Age	-0.01 (0.005)	0.01** (0.004)	0.01* (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Female	0.17 (0.13)	-0.25* (0.12)	0.26* (0.12)	0.09 (0.11)
Income (household)	-0.001 (0.03)	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.002 (0.03)
Economic right	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.20*** (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.14*** (0.03)
Social conservative	-0.05+ (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.07** (0.02)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.57+ (0.34)	0.23 (0.30)	0.001 (0.33)	-0.62+ (0.32)
Location (North-East)	0.16 (0.21)	0.18 (0.19)	0.02 (0.19)	-0.30+ (0.18)
Observations	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098
Log Likelihood	-739.85	--	--	--
Residual Deviance	--	2,738.905	2,708.08	3,139.431
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,519.71	2,782.905	2,752.08	3,183.431
<i>Note:</i>		+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

The results show that inequality strengthens the belief that hard work is not conducive to economic success, while the poverty treatment does not have a significant effect on meritocracy

perceptions. In turn, believing that society is not offering a channel for those at the bottom to improve their own condition *increases* support for redistribution that takes from the rich and for welfare programs benefiting natives, but *decreases* willingness to help immigrants.

I now run causal mediation analysis to test more systematically whether beliefs about lack of meritocracy mediate the impact of inequality on welfare preferences. The notion of mediation suggests that the treatment affects the outcome indirectly through a mediator, so that the total effect of the treatment can be divided into its direct effect and the causal mediation. Causal mediation analysis allows us to test the impact of a mediator: if the treatment does not influence the mediator, the effect of the causal mediation is null (Imai, Keele and Tingley 2010, 309-12). In this analysis, inequality is the treatment, lack of meritocratic opportunities is the mediator, and the outcome is support for redistribution (or for welfare policies benefiting either low-income natives or low-income immigrants). Since I treat all the outcomes as binary, the estimated effects should be interpreted as the increase in the probability that respondents support the policy under consideration.²⁴

Table 4 – Causal mediation analysis

	Redistribution	<i>Support for</i>	
		Low-income natives	Low-income immigrants
ACME (average)	0.0106* (0.0009, 0.0231)	0.0062* (0.00005, 0.0158)	-0.0103* (-0.0214, -0.0011)
ADE (average)	0.1239*** (0.0565, 0.1963)	0.0834* (0.0108, 0.1560)	-0.0041 (-0.0694, 0.0603)
Total Effect	0.1345*** (0.0652, 0.2049)	0.0896* (0.0153, 0.1630)	-0.0144 (-0.0799, 0.0514)

Estimates of the effect and 95% C.I. in parenthesis; White's heteroskedasticity-consistent estimator. For each of the three mediation analyses: Sample size: 1098; Simulations: 1000

²⁴ I also ran causal mediation analysis with lack of meritocracy as a five-category ordered variable, the outcome variables as five-category ordered variables, and without any control. The results of the causal mediation remain unchanged.

The results show that the causal mediation (ACME coefficient) is consistently statistically significant at the .05 level in the three analyses.²⁵ ACME is positive for redistribution and low-income natives and negative for low-income immigrants. This indicates that the treatment (inequality) has a significant impact on the mediator (lack of meritocracy), which in turn has a significant and positive (for redistribution and natives) or negative (for immigrants) impact on support for welfare. The analysis also reveals that the average direct effect (ADE) and the total effect are positive and significant for support for redistribution and low-income natives, which confirms that inequality also produces a direct positive impact on support for these policies. On the other hand, ADE and the total effect are not significant in regard to support for immigrants. This finding suggests that inequality does not have a direct negative impact, but negatively affects support for immigrants via its negative impact on perceptions of meritocracy. The inequality treatment increased perceptions of lack of meritocracy, which in turn made respondents more likely to oppose support for low-income immigrants.²⁶

I also conducted further causal mediation analysis to test more directly the impact of inequality on relative deservingness of natives vs. immigrants and the resulting impact on welfare chauvinism. This analysis (which can be found in the appendix) confirms the conditioning role of national identity. First, as already shown, inequality strengthens the belief that society is not offering meritocratic opportunities. This, in turn, variously shapes deservingness beliefs. On the one hand, it *strengthens* the opinion that low-income natives have received less than what they deserve. On the other, it *weakens* the belief that immigrants have received less than what they deserve. As a consequence, the inequality-induced perceived lack of opportunities promotes the conviction that natives should receive priority over immigrants in welfare access. Second, inequality directly *positively* influences perceptions of poor deservingness and *negatively* affects perceptions of immigrant deservingness. Causal mediation analysis confirms that inequality shapes welfare support for natives and immigrants in a diametrically opposing way via these contrasting deservingness perceptions.

²⁵ To run the causal mediation analysis, I used the R mediation package developed by Tingley and coauthors.

²⁶ See Tingley et al. (n.d., 7) for interpretation of causal mediation analysis results when ACME is significant but ADE and total effect are not.

The (de)mobilization power of inequality

Inequality, therefore, increases support for redistribution that takes from the rich and gives to low-income natives via its impact on meritocracy perceptions. But how far are individuals willing to go to support natives considered deserving of help? Does inequality have a mobilizing power that affects actions beyond opinions? To answer these questions, I analyze the impact of the inequality treatment on the likelihood that survey participants write a message to elected officials in support of the National Fund for Social Policies. In the logit models below, the dependent variable equals 1 for respondents who wrote a message and 0 for those who did not.

	Wrote the message			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Inequality treatment	-0.12 (0.15)	--	-1.38 ⁺ (0.75)	-1.99 [*] (0.85)
Inequality treatment * Education	--	--	0.25 ⁺ (0.15)	0.37 [*] (0.17)
Poverty treatment	-0.09 (0.15)	--	-1.68 [*] (0.77)	-1.89 [*] (0.89)
Poverty treatment * Education	--	--	0.32 [*] (0.15)	0.35 [*] (0.17)
Lack meritocracy	--	0.46 ^{***} (0.13)	--	--
Education	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.23 [*] (0.11)	-0.30 [*] (0.12)
Age	0.03 ^{***} (0.01)	0.03 ^{***} (0.01)	0.03 ^{***} (0.01)	0.03 ^{***} (0.01)
Female	0.17 (0.12)	0.15 (0.13)	0.19 (0.12)	0.04 (0.14)
Job uncertainty	0.18 ^{***} (0.04)	0.18 ^{***} (0.04)	0.18 ^{***} (0.04)	0.22 ^{***} (0.04)
Economic right	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.62 ⁺ (0.35)	0.57 (0.35)	0.62 ⁺ (0.35)	0.53 (0.37)
Location (North-East)	0.14 (0.21)	0.14 (0.21)	0.13 (0.21)	0.11 (0.23)

Constant	-2.63*** (0.63)	-2.88*** (0.62)	-1.72* (0.74)	-1.16 (0.85)
Observations	1,246	1,246	1,246	999
Log Likelihood	-764.43	-757.97	-761.88	-618.15
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,566.87	1,551.94	1,565.77	1,278.31
<i>Note:</i>	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001			

The analysis reveals surprising results. The inequality treatment does not directly increase the likelihood that respondents write a message in support of low-income natives (model 1). However, inequality does produce an indirect significant effect: the inequality-induced perceptions of lack of meritocracy positively affects the probability that respondents write a message (model 2), and mediation analysis confirms the significance of the mediated effect.

How do we explain that inequality increases support for welfare policies benefiting natives but produces only an indirect effect on actual behavior in support of this position? The answer may lie in the fact that the task proposed is cognitively demanding. Composing a message without any guiding script, rather than just signing an existing petition, requires cognitive resources that may not be readily available to everyone. Since education promotes the development of cognitive ability (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and is a predictor of costly forms of political participation (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995), models 3 and 4 explore the impact of the treatment conditional on the educational level of respondents. The interaction reveals that inequality negatively affects the likelihood of writing a message among individuals with lower education, but this negative effect disappears among the highly educated (model 3). The effect is stronger in the subset of respondents who passed the attention check (model 4).²⁷

With regard to political action, therefore, inequality has a demobilizing effect among individuals with lower education: the lowly educated in the inequality treatment group are less likely to write a message than the lowly educated in the control group. The fact that higher awareness of inequality increases support for redistribution but decreases the likelihood of

²⁷ Focusing on the subset of individuals who passed the attention check is especially important when evaluating the effect of the treatment on the behavioral task because of the demanding nature of the task. Individuals who did not pass the attention check, and therefore did not read carefully the survey questions, are less likely to pause and write a message, a time-consuming task that would slow down their survey completion. For this reason, differences between treatment and control groups in the whole sample may be attenuated with regard to message writing.

following up with consistent political action is surprising. How can we make sense of it? One hypothesis could be that lower education is associated with lower trust in politicians and lower political efficacy (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Wu 2003). Under inequality, the lowly educated may grow supportive of redistributive measures, but they may also not trust politicians to take action to redress the unfairness and believe that writing to elected officials will yield no effect. Additionally, elected officials who belong to the elite may be perceived as part of the problem in the unfair resource distribution. As a result, acquiring information about economic disparities may favor alienation and draw the lowly educated further away from the (political) elite who has contributed to distributive injustice.²⁸ Regardless of the specific mechanism, the demobilizing effect of inequality on political action among individuals with lower education is a troubling finding. If these citizens are less likely to support their opinions with concrete actions, economic inequality could provide elected officials with little incentive to reduce economic disparities and generate a self-reinforcing loop in which inequality breeds further inequality.

Inequality beyond Italy: Cross-National Analysis

I now turn to cross-national analysis to explore whether the impact of inequality holds outside the Italian context and whether objective conditions of inequality – beyond awareness – lead to selective solidarity. I merge survey data from the 2008 European Social Survey (ESS), which presents a rich module on welfare state attitudes, with macro socio-economic variables measured at the regional and national level. The countries in the analysis are the OECD countries included in the 2008 ESS module for which the measure of regional inequality is available.²⁹ I adopt multilevel random effect models with varying intercept.

Economic inequality is measured by the Gini index at the regional level and is captured by the indicator built by Rueda and Stegmueller (2016).³⁰ In theory, the Gini index ranges from 0 (a condition of perfect equality) to 1 (a condition of absolute inequality). In the sample of

²⁸ While the data at hand do not allow me to test these suppositions, these claims are consistent with other work. In a separate study I show that perceptions of economic injustice reduce conventional costly political participation among the lowly educated because of decreased perceived legitimacy of the political system. Furthermore, some work suggests that inequality has sometimes failed to promote support for redistributive policies because of the low level of trust in the government that should promote those policies (Kuziemko et al. 2015).

²⁹ The countries are: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

³⁰ The authors have built regional Gini indicators from the full sample of imputed individual level ESS data and accounted for measurement errors in their estimates. See Rueda and Stegmueller (2016) for further information.

countries considered, the regional Gini goes from a value of 0.22 (Spain, Cantabria) to a value of 0.43 (Ireland, Mid-West).³¹ I adopt two separate dependent variables, one measuring support for low-income natives and the other capturing support for low-income immigrants. I operationalize willingness to help low-income natives with an item that asks respondents to what extent they agree that government help for the poor in the country is insufficient. Higher values correspond to the belief that benefits for the poor are insufficient.³² Willingness to provide economic help to immigrants is measured by an item focused on support for provision of welfare services to immigrants.³³ Greater values indicate greater willingness to support immigrants.

The models also include controls at the individual, regional, and national level. At the individual level, I control for gender, age, education, income (whose measure is based on deciles and therefore comparable across countries), political ideology (where 10 corresponds to “right”), union membership, religiosity, household size, employment status, economic security, attitudes toward inequality, perceived number of poor and immigrants, and negative feelings toward the poor. At the regional level, I control for average GDP per capita, unemployment rate, share of foreigners, and population density. Finally, at the national level I include average GDP per capita, social expenditure, unemployment rate, and share of foreigners.³⁴

³¹ An indicator of inequality at the regional rather than national level is preferable because it captures contextual socio-economic conditions that are closer to the everyday experience of residents, which increases the likelihood that respondents are exposed to the inequality “treatment” (see Newman et al. 2015). This issue deserves attention considering that recent studies show the importance of visibility of inequality (Nishi et al. 2015) and perceptions of inequality (Gimpelson and Treisman 2015) in affecting preferences for redistribution. Furthermore, an indicator of inequality at the regional level offers more nuanced measures that allow me to capture within-country variation, a relevant dimension given the substantial differences in levels of inequality within many European countries. For instance, in Denmark the region Københavns Amt has a Gini value of 0.34, while the region of Roskilde Amt has a Gini value of 0.25. Even more striking is the variation in Spain: the Cantabria region has a Gini value of 0.22, the lowest in the entire sample, while the Castilla-La Mancha has a Gini value of 0.37, which is higher than the value corresponding to the 3rd quartile.

³² Respondents stated to what extent they agreed or disagreed that “[t]here are insufficient benefits in [country] to help the people who are in real need.” This wording is especially fitting in my analysis because it contains the mention of the country in which the question was asked, which should emphasize considerations related to one’s national identity. The variable is measured on a 5-point scale.

³³ “Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?” This is a categorical variable measured on a five-point scale with the following categories: “They should never get the same rights; Once they have become a citizen; After worked and paid taxes at least a year; After a year, whether or not have worked; Immediately on arrival.”

³⁴ Further information on these variables and their operationalization can be found in the online appendix.

Table 5 – Support for low-income natives and immigrants (European Social Survey)

	Support for Low-Income Natives				Support for Low-Income Immigrants			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Inequality	1.469** (0.518)	1.509** (0.516)	1.222* (0.523)	1.170* (0.517)	-1.064* (0.527)	-1.059* (0.526)	-1.208* (0.528)	-1.020* (0.517)
<i>Individuals Controls</i>								
Income	-0.010*** (0.003)	0.011** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.004)	0.011** (0.004)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.011** (0.004)	-0.008* (0.004)
Female	0.061*** (0.013)	0.066*** (0.014)	0.066*** (0.014)	0.058*** (0.015)	0.033* (0.014)	0.039** (0.014)	0.059*** (0.015)	0.044** (0.015)
Age	-0.001 (0.0004)	-0.0001 (0.0004)	0.0002 (0.0005)	0.00004 (0.0005)	-0.001** (0.0004)	-0.001** (0.0005)	-0.001* (0.0005)	-0.002** (0.0005)
Education	-0.063*** (0.006)	-0.058*** (0.006)	-0.039*** (0.006)	-0.032*** (0.006)	0.072*** (0.006)	0.067*** (0.006)	0.025*** (0.006)	0.017** (0.006)
Right	-0.023*** (0.003)	-0.021*** (0.003)	-0.016*** (0.003)	-0.016*** (0.003)	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.033*** (0.003)	-0.025*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.004)
Union	0.022 (0.016)	0.018 (0.016)	0.0001 (0.017)	0.009 (0.017)	0.060*** (0.016)	0.062*** (0.016)	0.057*** (0.017)	0.053** (0.017)
Citizen					-0.567*** (0.035)	-0.579*** (0.035)	-0.431*** (0.036)	-0.446*** (0.036)
Religious		-0.002 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)		-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)
Household		-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.006)	0.008 (0.006)		-0.007 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
Unemployed		0.108*** (0.028)	0.067* (0.030)	0.031 (0.031)		0.041 (0.029)	-0.001 (0.031)	0.025 (0.031)
Economic security		-0.133*** (0.010)	-0.091*** (0.011)	-0.092*** (0.011)		0.038*** (0.010)	0.006 (0.011)	0.022 (0.011)
Perceived # Poor			0.026*** (0.003)	0.038*** (0.003)			-0.007* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)
Perceived # Immigrants			0.009* (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)			-0.002 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.004)
Inequality Evaluat			0.072*** (0.008)	0.088*** (0.008)				
Poor Undeservingness			-0.258*** (0.008)	-0.240*** (0.008)				
Immigr Attitudes (Econ)							0.058*** (0.004)	0.056*** (0.004)
Immigr Attitudes (Cult)							0.048*** (0.004)	0.049*** (0.004)
Immigrant Undeservingness							-0.051*** (0.004)	-0.041*** (0.004)

Regional Controls

GDP	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)
Unemployment Rate	0.091 (0.482)	0.070 (0.480)	-0.109 (0.480)	-0.056 (0.473)	0.098 (0.490)	0.085 (0.489)	0.334 (0.486)	0.570 (0.474)
% Foreign	-0.413 (0.362)	-0.249 (0.361)	-0.009 (0.369)	-0.208 (0.367)	0.149 (0.369)	0.102 (0.369)	0.078 (0.375)	0.021 (0.368)
Pop. Density	-0.0004 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.0002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.0001 (0.002)

National Controls

GDP				-0.003 (0.003)				0.005 (0.003)
Social Expenditure				-0.019 (0.011)				0.010 (0.011)
Unemployment Rate				0.004 (0.023)				0.042 (0.023)
% Foreign				-0.015 (0.008)				0.011 (0.008)
Constant	3.579*** (0.200)	3.704*** (0.198)	3.968*** (0.199)	4.466*** (0.311)	3.817*** (0.200)	3.826*** (0.201)	3.555*** (0.202)	2.650*** (0.311)

Observations	20,476	20,311	16,976	15,810	20,164	20,009	16,648	15,524
Log Likelihood	-28,115.180	-27,800.930	-22,570.710	-20,825.320	-28,007.140	-27,769.470	-22,325.180	-20,444.090
Akaike Inf. Crit.	56,258.350	55,637.850	45,185.420	41,702.640	56,044.290	55,576.950	44,698.360	40,944.180
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	56,369.330	55,780.390	45,355.690	41,902.020	56,162.960	55,727.120	44,883.640	41,158.380

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Models 1 through 4 show that higher levels of inequality increase willingness to provide help to low-income natives, even after controlling for numerous individual and contextual indicators. On the other hand, models 5 through 8 reveal that the average willingness to provide economic help to immigrants decreases as inequality grows. The robustness of these findings is quite remarkable if one considers that inequality remains significant even after controlling for feelings of undeservingness of the poor (models 3 and 4) and immigrants (models 7 and 8), and for individual economic and cultural attitudes toward immigration (models 7 and 8). The cross-national analysis, therefore, confirms that economic inequality generates selective solidarity.

Conclusions

Economic inequality is a growing concern in many western democracies. Inequality generates severe negative social consequences, including resentment and weakened sense of community (Neckerman and Torche 2007, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009), decreased social trust (Uslaner and Brown 2005, Alesina and La Ferrara 2002, Knack and Keefer 1997), reduced civic and social participation (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, Lance and Werfhorst 2012, Costa and Kahn 2003, Putnam 2000), diminished life satisfaction (Alesina, Di Tella and MacCulloch 2004), and possibly decreased life expectancy (Wilkinson 1990). Adding to the list, this work shows that economic inequality deepens social fragmentation along communal identity lines. When inequality is high, individuals are more willing to provide help to natives in need, but display greater opposition to welfare programs that benefit immigrants.

Not only does this finding raise serious concerns about the boundaries of solidarity in times of high inequality and deepening immigration concerns. It also suggests a way through which political actors may take advantage of the intersection of inequality and immigration. If populist or far-right parties become aware that economic inequality favors welfare chauvinism, they may emphasize the economic disparities existing in society as a way to promote selective support for welfare policies. On the other hand, the results of this study also explain why reducing inequality is important to contrast exclusionary tendencies. Since more equal societies are less likely to embrace selective solidarity, diminishing the existing levels of inequality would at the same time alleviate the condition of those at the bottom and create environments more welcoming of immigrants.

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Economic Inequality, Immigration, and Selective Solidarity
Experimental and Cross-National Evidence on Welfare Support

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Online appendix

Survey experiment

The survey is based on a nationally representative sample of the population of Italian residents according to census data for gender, age, and location of residence. The survey value for income also closely resembles the national average value. The average household income in Italy in 2015 was 23,443 € and the average income among survey respondents is 6.89 (where category 6 equals 20,000-25,000 €).

Before running the survey experiment, I conducted two pilot studies. I ran the first pilot study on Amazon MTurk in August 2016 with 200 American respondents. The second pilot study was run in November 2016 with a nationally representative sample of 120 Italian respondents and was administered by the survey company Cint.

Group covariates

The table below show the mean (or proportion) values for the main controls across the three groups: control group, inequality treatment, and poverty treatment.

	Control Group	Inequality Treatment	Poverty Treatment
Female	48.57%	48.01%	50.82%
Age	44.55	45.53	44.18
Education (1-7)	5.05	4.95	5.08
Income (1-15)	6.84	6.83	7.03
Economic right (1-10)	5.58	5.62	5.22
Socially conservative (1-10)	5.02	5.29	4.63

Variable operationalization

Female: 0 = Male; 1 = Female

Age: years of age

Education: 1 = No degree; 2 = Elementary school; 3 = Middle school; 4 = Professional qualification; 5 = High school degree; 6 = College degree; 7 = Post-college degree

Income: 1 = no income; 2 = less than 5,000 €; 3 = 5,000-10,000 €; 4 = 10,000-15,000 €; 5 = 15,000-20,000 €; 6 = 20,000-25,000 €; 7 = 25,000-30,000 €; 8 = 30,000-35,000 €; 9 = 35,000-40,000 €; 10 = 40,000-50,000 €; 11 = 50,000-60,000 €; 12 = 60,000-70,000 €; 13 = 70,000-85,000 €; 14 = 85,000-100,000 €; 15 = more than 100,000 €

Economic right: 1 = left; 10 = right

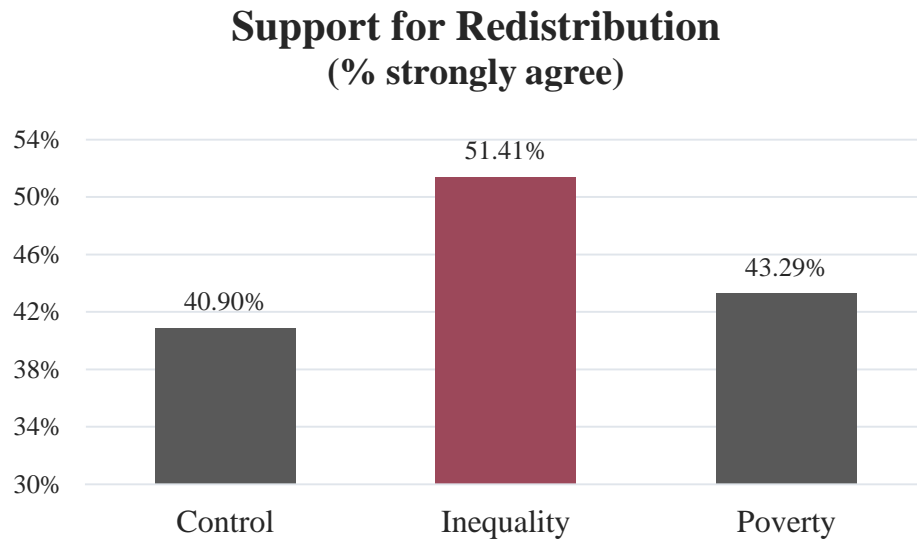
Socially conservative: 1 = liberal; 10 = conservative

Manipulation checks

	Manipulation check			
	Awareness of Inequality		Awareness of Poverty	
	Entire sample	Subset: Passed Attention Check	Entire sample	Subset: Passed Attention Check
Inequality treatment	0.37* (0.15)	0.48** (0.17)	-0.08 (0.17)	0.06 (0.20)
Poverty treatment	0.26 (0.15)	0.33 (0.17)	0.34* (0.17)	0.48* (0.20)
Education	0.07 (0.06)	0.09 (0.08)	0.06 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.09)
Age	0.01 (0.005)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Female	-0.07 (0.13)	-0.15 (0.14)	-0.09 (0.14)	-0.31 (0.17)
Income	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)
Economic insecurity	0.02 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	0.09 (0.09)
Economic right	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.04)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	-0.11 (0.34)	-0.33 (0.37)	-0.20 (0.40)	-0.13 (0.45)
Location (North-East)	-0.05 (0.21)	-0.05 (0.23)	0.14 (0.24)	0.22 (0.28)
Constant	-0.23 (0.64)	-0.01 (0.77)	0.62 (0.72)	1.26 (0.92)
Observations	1,136	910	1,137	910
Log Likelihood	-767.13	-605.08	-642.02	-466.57
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,574.25	1,252.16	1,324.03	975.14
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001	

Logit models in which the binary dependent variables equal 1 for correct answers in the manipulation check questions.

Support for redistribution



Percentage difference in support for redistribution among control group, inequality treatment and poverty treatment without any other control variables.

The red bar indicates a statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups at the .05 level.

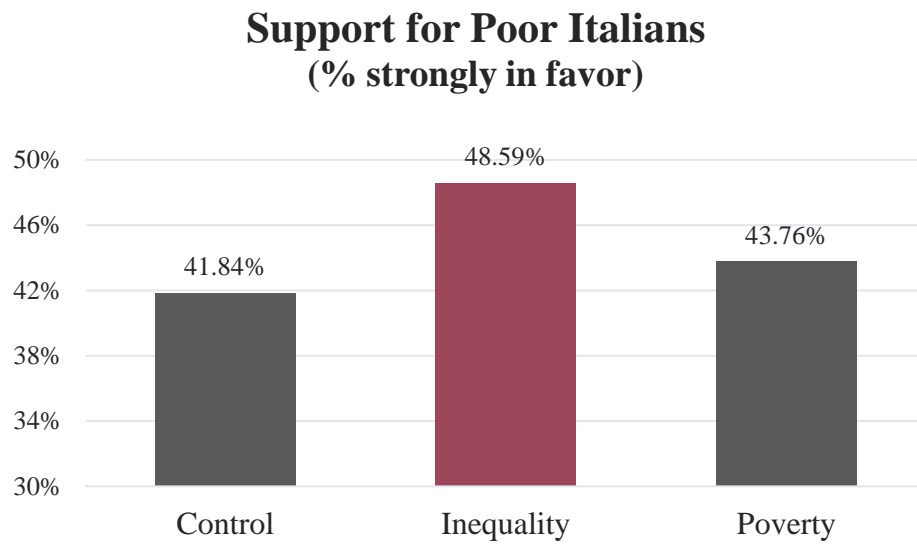
Support for redistribution: Logit model

DV: 1 = strongly agree

Hence, number of observations: DV= 0 : n=697; DV=1 : n=576

	Support for Redistribution
Inequality treatment	0.61*** (0.16)
Poverty treatment	0.05 (0.16)
Education	-0.01 (0.07)
Age	0.01* (0.01)
Female	-0.25+ (0.13)
Income (household)	-0.09* (0.04)
Economic right	-0.18*** (0.03)
Socially conservative	-0.06* (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.72+ (0.41)
Location (South)	-0.14 (0.20)
Constant	0.04 (0.65)
Observations	1,098
Log Likelihood	-689.95
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,419.89
Note:	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

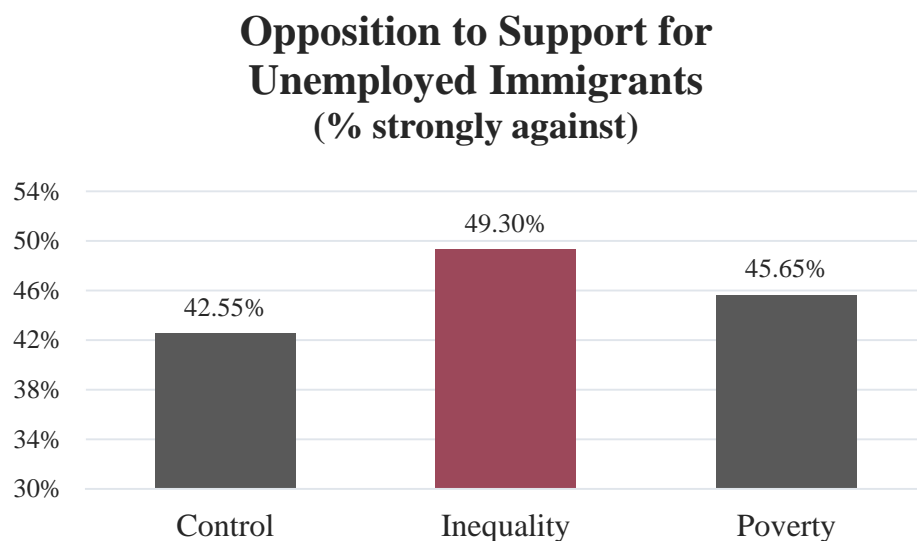
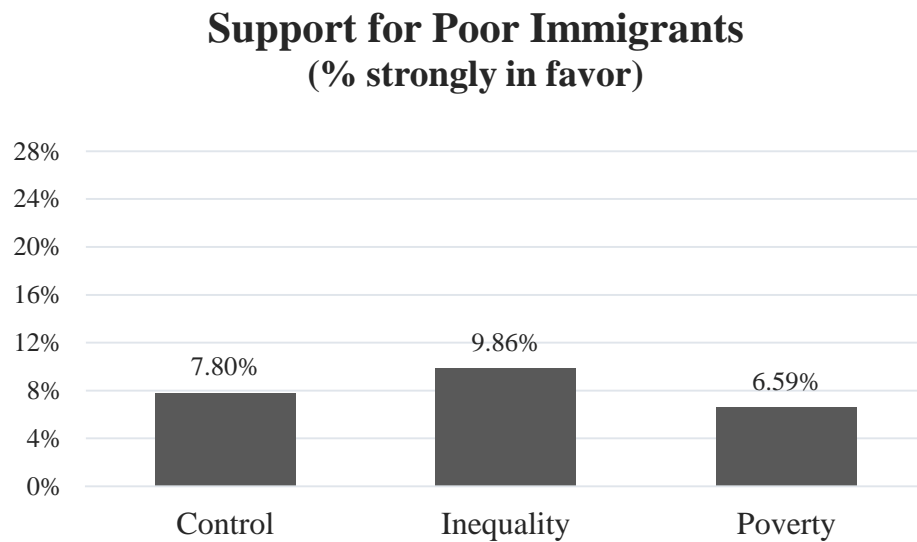
Support for low-income natives



Percentage difference in support for low-income natives among control group, inequality treatment and poverty treatment without any other control variables.

The red bar indicates a statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups at the .05 level.

Support for low-income immigrants



Percentage difference in support (top) and opposition (bottom) to low-income immigrants among control group, inequality treatment and poverty treatment without any other control variables.

The red bar indicates a statistically significant difference between treatment and control groups at the .05 level.

Support for low-income natives vs. low-income immigrants: Logit models

Support for low-income natives: 1 = strongly in favor (n=570); 0 = all others (n=703)

Support for low-income immigrants: 0 = strongly against (n=439); 1 = all others (n=834)

	Support for			
	Low-Income Natives		Low-Income Immigrants	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Inequality treatment	0.39 [*] (0.15)	0.40 [*] (0.18)	-0.07 (0.17)	0.18 (0.20)
Inequality treatment*Social conserv	--	-0.09 (0.34)	--	-0.82 [*] (0.37)
Poverty treatment	0.17 (0.15)	0.27 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.17)	0.07 (0.19)
Poverty treatment*Social conserv	--	-0.49 (0.37)	--	-0.42 (0.40)
Education	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.11 ⁺ (0.07)	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)
Age	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.002 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)
Female	0.30 [*] (0.13)	0.31 [*] (0.13)	-0.11 (0.14)	-0.09 (0.14)
Income (household)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)
Economic right	-0.05 ⁺ (0.03)	-0.05 ⁺ (0.03)	-0.13 ^{***} (0.03)	-0.13 ^{***} (0.03)
Social conservative	0.06 (0.15)	0.23 (0.26)	-0.13 (0.16)	0.32 (0.28)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.06 (0.34)	0.04 (0.34)	-0.70 [*] (0.35)	-0.68 ⁺ (0.35)
Location (North-East)	0.41 ⁺ (0.21)	0.40 ⁺ (0.21)	-0.17 (0.23)	-0.18 (0.23)
Constant	0.20 (0.58)	0.14 (0.59)	1.01 (0.62)	0.90 (0.62)
Observations	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098
Log Likelihood	-727.03	-726.06	-636.46	-633.96
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,494.06	1,496.12	1,312.92	1,311.91

Note: +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Full table of causal mediation analysis presented in the paper

Support for redistribution

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0105	0.0010	0.0229	0.03
ACME (treated)	0.0108	0.0009	0.0234	0.04
ADE (control)	0.1238	0.0566	0.1962	0.00
ADE (treated)	0.1241	0.0565	0.1971	0.00
Total Effect	0.1345	0.0652	0.2049	0.00
ACME (average)	0.0106	0.0009	0.0231	0.03
ADE (average)	0.1239	0.0565	0.1963	0.00

Sample size: 1098; Simulations: 1000

Support for low-income natives

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0060	0.00005	0.0156	0.04
ACME (treated)	0.0063	0.00004	0.0160	0.04
ADE (control)	0.0833	0.0108	0.1560	0.02
ADE (treated)	0.0835	0.0109	0.1560	0.02
Total Effect	0.0896	0.0153	0.1630	0.02
ACME (average)	0.0062	0.00005	0.0158	0.04
ADE (average)	0.0834	0.0108	0.1560	0.02

Sample size: 1098; Simulations: 1000

Support for low-income immigrants

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME (control)	-0.0102	-0.0216	-0.0011	0.03
ACME (treated)	-0.0103	-0.0211	-0.0011	0.03
ADE (control)	-0.0041	-0.0691	0.0599	0.89
ADE (treated)	-0.0041	-0.0697	0.0606	0.89
Total Effect	-0.0144	-0.0799	0.0514	0.65
ACME (average)	-0.0103	-0.0214	-0.0011	0.03
ADE (average)	-0.0041	-0.0694	0.0603	0.65

Sample size: 1098; Simulations: 1000

Impact of inequality on perceived meritocracy (model A)

Impact of meritocracy on perceptions of deservingness (models B1, B2 and B3)

(A: logit model, B: ordered logit models)

	<i>Beliefs that</i>			
	Society Lacks Meritocratic Opportunities	Poor are Undeserving	Immigrants are Undeserving	Natives Deserve Welfare Priority Over Immigrants
	(A)	(B1)	(B2)	(B3)
Inequality treatment	0.37* (0.15)	--	--	--
Poverty treatment	0.07 (0.15)	--	--	--
Lack meritocracy	--	-0.83*** (0.12)	0.50*** (0.12)	0.64*** (0.12)
Education	0.01 (0.06)	0.11+ (0.06)	-0.12+ (0.06)	-0.13* (0.06)
Age	-0.01 (0.005)	-0.02*** (0.005)	0.01** (0.004)	0.01* (0.005)
Female	0.17 (0.13)	-0.14 (0.12)	0.24* (0.12)	0.02 (0.12)
Economic right	-0.04 (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)
Social conservative	-0.05+ (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)
Income (household)	-0.001 (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.57+ (0.34)	-0.29 (0.34)	0.65+ (0.33)	0.82* (0.34)
Location (North-East)	0.16 (0.21)	-0.06 (0.19)	0.24 (0.19)	-0.01 (0.19)
Observations	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098
Log Likelihood	-739.85	--	--	--
Residual Deviance	--	2,232.227	2,780.10	2,645.191
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,519.71	2,276.227	2,824.10	2,689.191

Note:

+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Causal mediation analysis

Inequality, lack of meritocracy, and poor undeservingness

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME	-0.0292	-0.0621	-0.0011	0.04
ADE	-0.1044	-0.2264	0.0155	0.10
Total Effect	-0.1336	-0.2590	-0.0065	0.04

Inequality, lack of meritocracy, and immigrants undeservingness

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME	0.0186	0.0012	0.0433	0.04
ADE	0.0830	-0.0888	0.2464	0.34
Total Effect	0.1016	-0.0720	0.2631	0.25

Inequality, lack of meritocracy, and beliefs in welfare priority for low-income natives over low-income immigrants

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0130	0.0003	0.0270	0.04
ACME (treated)	0.0131	0.0005	0.0270	0.04
ADE (control)	0.0197	-0.0495	0.0903	0.58
ADE (treated)	0.0198	-0.0495	0.0908	0.58
Total Effect	0.0328	-0.0390	0.1040	0.36
ACME (average)	0.0131	0.0004	0.0269	0.04
ADE (average)	0.0198	-0.0495	0.0905	0.58

Impact of inequality on perceptions of deservingness (models A) and impact of perceptions of deservingness on welfare support for natives and immigrants (models B)

(All models are ordered logit models)

	Belief that:		Support for:	
	Poor are Undeserving	Immigrants are Undeserving	Low-Income Natives	Low-Income Immigrants
	(A1)	(A2)	(B1)	(B2)
Inequality treatment	-0.47** (0.15)	0.26+ (0.14)	--	--
Poverty treatment	-0.14 (0.14)	0.16 (0.14)	--	--
Poor undeserving	--	--	-0.65*** (0.07)	--
Immigrants undeserving	--	--	--	-0.76*** (0.06)
Education	0.10 (0.06)	-0.11+ (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)
Age	-0.02*** (0.005)	0.01* (0.004)	0.005 (0.005)	0.01 (0.004)
Female	-0.18 (0.12)	0.26* (0.12)	0.25* (0.12)	0.13 (0.11)
Income (household)	0.07* (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Economic right	0.15*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)
Social conservative	-0.01 (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	-0.40 (0.33)	0.73* (0.33)	-0.01 (0.33)	-0.50 (0.32)
Location (North-East)	-0.07 (0.19)	0.24 (0.19)	-0.05 (0.19)	-0.20 (0.18)
Observations	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098
Residual Deviance	2,268.222	2,795.566	2,629.522	2,973.716
AIC	2,314.222	2,841.566	2,673.522	3,017.716
<i>Note:</i>		+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001		

Causal mediation analysis

Inequality, poor undeservingness, and support for low-income natives

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0377	0.0127	0.0638	0.00
ACME (treated)	0.0388	0.0131	0.0648	0.00
ADE (control)	0.0525	-0.0116	0.1215	0.10
ADE (treated)	0.0535	-0.0121	0.1235	0.10
Total Effect	0.0913	0.0214	0.1627	0.01
ACME (average)	0.0383	0.0130	0.0642	0.00
ADE (average)	0.0530	-0.0118	0.1225	0.10

Inequality, immigrant undeservingness, and support for low-income immigrants

	Estimate	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p-value
ACME	-0.0297	-0.0634	-0.0003	0.049
ADE	0.0154	-0.0422	0.0718	0.61
Total Effect	-0.0143	-0.0805	0.0504	0.68

Analysis with subsets of respondents

(Same models as in the main paper)

Support for redistribution (ordered logit)

	Support for redistribution	
	<i>Passed attention check</i>	<i>Eliminated 5% slowest and fastest</i>
	(1)	(2)
Inequality treatment	0.44** (0.16)	0.60*** (0.17)
Poverty treatment	-0.04 (0.16)	0.02 (0.17)
Education	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.07)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 ⁺ (0.01)
Female	-0.29* (0.13)	-0.30* (0.14)
Income (household)	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.08* (0.04)
Economic right	-0.24*** (0.03)	-0.20*** (0.03)
Social conservative	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 ⁺ (0.03)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	0.25 (0.34)	0.74 ⁺ (0.43)
Location (North-East)	0.30 (0.21)	0.24 (0.23)
Observations	878	1,032
Residual variance	2104.718	1294.6
AIC	2150.718	1334.6
<i>Note:</i>	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001	

Support for low-income natives and low-income immigrants (ordered logit)

	<i>Passed attention check</i>				<i>Eliminated 5% slowest and fastest</i>			
	Support for							
	Low-Income Natives		Low-Income Immigrants		Low-Income Natives		Low-Income Immigrants	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Inequality treatment	0.38*	0.42*	0.003	0.23	0.25 ⁺	0.35*	-0.08	0.33
	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.17)
InequalityTreat*Soc.Conserv	--	-0.18	--	-0.99**	--	-0.43	--	-0.85**
		(0.37)		(0.37)		(0.33)		(0.33)
Poverty treatment	0.14	0.27	0.01	0.13	0.06	0.28 ⁺	-0.16	-0.08
	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.16)
PovertyTreat*Soc.Conserv	--	-0.66 ⁺	--	-0.62	--	-0.99**	--	-0.34
		(0.39)		(0.39)		(0.35)		(0.34)
Education	-0.13 ⁺	-0.13 ⁺	0.12 ⁺	0.11 ⁺	-0.14*	-0.14*	0.11 ⁺	0.10 ⁺
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Age	0.003	0.003	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.0002	0.0001
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Female	0.24 ⁺	0.25 ⁺	0.12	0.14	0.21 ⁺	0.23 ⁺	0.10	0.1q
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Income (household)	-0.04	-0.04	0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.02	0.001	0.001
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Economic right	-0.05	-0.05	-0.19***	-0.20***	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.16***	-0.17***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Social conservative	0.06	0.32	-0.30 ⁺	0.27	0.07	0.38	-0.15	0.29
	(0.16)	(0.27)	(0.16)	(0.27)	(0.15)	(0.25)	(0.14)	(0.25)
Party ID (Lega Nord)	-0.11	-0.11	-0.57	-0.52	0.03	0.04	-0.77*	-0.72*
	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.34)	(0.34)
Location (North-East)	0.07	0.08	-0.29	-0.28	-0.03	-0.02	-0.22	-0.22
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Observations	878	878	878	878	1,032	1,032	1,032	1,032
Residual variance	2,038	2,035	2,456	2,449	2,478	2,470	2,952	2,945
AIC	2,084	2,085	2,502	2,499	2,524	2,520	2,998	2,995

Note: +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Observational analysis: 2008 ESS data

Independent variables: Controls

Individual level

Models 1 and 5 include basic socio-demographic controls:

Income: The variable contains 10 categories, each of which corresponds to a decile in the income distribution. A measure that relies on deciles, rather than actual values of income, offers two advantages. First, it makes data comparable across countries. Indeed, 10,000 euro have a different value in Switzerland or Portugal. A measure based on deciles overcomes this shortcoming because a category of 1 corresponds to the lowest decile in the country in which the respondent resides, regardless of different costs of living. Second, this measure allows me to consider relative income by providing information to infer the position of the respondent in the income distribution. We know, for instance, that respondents with a value of 4 are always below the median income in their country.

Gender: The variable “Female” is equal to 1 for women and 0 for men.

Age: Measures the age of respondents in years.

Education: The variable, which ranges from 0 to 4, measures the highest level of education attained by the respondent. Compared to variables that simply count the total years of education, the categories of this variable are harmonized and comparable across countries.

Political ideology: I control for respondents’ general political preferences, since right-wing individuals are expected to be less supportive of both redistribution and assistance for immigrants. The variable “Right” ranges from 0 (left) to 10 (right).

Union membership: I control for whether the respondent is, or has been, a union member, since such a membership is likely positively correlated with support for redistribution.

In model 5 measuring support for immigrants, I also control for *citizenship*, which is equal to 1 for respondents who are citizens of the country in which they reside. One can expect non-citizens to be more supportive of assistance to immigrants, since they have direct personal material interests at stake.

Models 2 and 6 include additional socio-demographic controls and an indicator of perceived economic security:

Religiosity: This 11-category variable is equal to 0 for respondents who are “not at all” religious and 10 for those who are “very” religious.

Household size: The variable controls for the number of individuals living in the household and ranges from 1 to 7.

Unemployment status: It controls for respondents’ current working situation and is equal to 1 for those who are unemployed. Unemployed individuals likely have a direct material interest in supporting redistribution.

Economic security: While one’s income position is directly related to the benefits and costs of redistribution, individuals with similar income may have different evaluations of their economic conditions.³⁵ Recent work has shown that economic insecurity is related to welfare attitudes (Ford 2015). For this reason, I include a variable that measures a personal assessment of whether one’s own economic means are adequate to live comfortably.

Model 3 and 7 include perceptions of one’ socio-economic surroundings and attitudinal variables:

Perceived number of poor and *perceived number of immigrants*: These items, which control for the perceived number of individuals who can potentially benefit from economic support, are at the same time measures of perceived spread of neediness and possible costs of assistance.

Model 3 also includes:

Attitudes toward inequality: This variable measures to what extent respondents agree that differences in income should be small for a society to be fair (higher values indicate stronger agreement). This is arguably a strong robustness test, since we expect concerns about distributive justice to be closely correlated with support for redistribution and willingness to help those at the bottom of society.

Feelings of poor undeservingness. This item asks respondents whether they agree that low-income individuals get less benefits than what they are entitled to. Higher values indicate more negative feelings.

Model 7 introduces additional controls:

Two controls measure *attitudes toward immigration*, because these attitudinal positions likely affect willingness to help immigrants. These two indicators measure opinions about the impact of immigrants on the economy and the cultural life of the country, respectively.

³⁵ Consider, for instance, the vast literature on relative deprivation. See e.g. Walker and Smith 2002.

Perceptions of *immigrant deservingness*: this control is operationalized by an item measuring respondents' opinion about whether immigrants contribute to society more than what they receive, or vice versa. This item follows Petersen's (2012) operationalization of deservingness, in which the fundamental distinction is between reciprocators (i.e. individuals who contribute to society) and cheaters (i.e. individuals who free ride). Higher values correspond to the belief that immigrants are underserving.

Regional level

In addition to economic inequality, all of the models present four regional controls that are obtained from Eurostat:

Average GDP per capita: This item is measured at current prices in US Dollars and controls for average levels of wealth in society.

Unemployment rate: The variable measures unemployment rate by all ages. As a measure of economic hardship, unemployment rate can potentially affect support for redistribution and attitudes toward outgroups.

Share of foreigners: This variable provides a measure of immigrant and ethnic heterogeneity. Previous studies have shown that ethnic heterogeneity is related to welfare provision and support for redistribution (Alesina and Glaeser 2004, Finseraas 2008). Regarding support for immigrants, this variable also controls for a possible exposure effect. Its predicted direction is not clear, since previous work has yielded mixed results (e.g. Luttmer 2001, Fox 2004).

Population density: This macro-economic variable controls for the fact that individuals who live in high-density, mostly urban areas may exhibit different preferences (Cho et al. 2006).

National level

Finally, model 4 and 8 include four additional contextual indicators at the national level: *average GDP per capita*, *social expenditure*, *unemployment rate*, and *percentage of foreigners* living in the country. These indicators control for common trends that may affect individuals living in the same country and that may be emphasized by national media. Specifically, controlling for current levels of social expenditure³⁶ is important because the type of welfare state influences

³⁶ Social expenditure is measured as a percentage of GDP. The variable comes from the OECD Social Expenditure Database and includes the following social policy areas: old age, survivors, incapacity-related benefits, health, family, active labor market programs, unemployment, housing, and other social policy areas.

opinions about the role of the state in society (Korpi 1980), which could be correlated with support for redistribution.