

Supporting global redistribution across economic divides

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Research Area 2: Mobilizing Global Solidarity

Challenge: Global Economic Inequality

Data Contribution: Global Inequality Survey, Survey Experiments

Link to Theoretical Approaches of the Cluster: Cosmopolitanism

Summary: In view of the persistence of stark economic inequalities between different world regions, this project asks **when and why mass publics across the world support or oppose measures to mitigate global inequality**. Solidarity is challenging in this context because egalitarian aspirations have become universalized, but global inequality dynamics and transnational interdependencies give rise to cross-nationally diverging interests in global redistribution. While different measures to mitigate global economic inequality have been proposed – e.g., debt cuts for poor countries, a liberalization of migration, increased development aid, or raising taxes on the Global one percent – it is unclear which ones would be met with far-reaching popular approval and who their main supporters (or opponents) would be. Cross-national surveys and experimental approaches shall be used to answer this question.

Background and Research Question

Just before the Start of the World Economic Forum in January 2023, the non-profit organization Oxfam reported that the richest 1% of the world population have appropriated almost two-thirds of all new wealth created between 2020 and 2022, whereas the remaining 99% received 37% and the bottom 90% were left with 10% (Oxfam 2023). Also with regard to the global distribution of income, stark discrepancies exist. While the richest 1% receive about one fifth of the total global income, the bottom 50 % of the world population received less than one tenth (Chancel et al. 2022).

Thus, despite the decrease in economic inequality between countries that has occurred between 1980s and 2000s, **enormous economic discrepancies continue to persist in the world** (Hung 2021). Together with rising inequalities within countries in recent decades, global inequality dynamics have produced **distinct winners and losers**: Next to the global one percent, aspiring middle classes in China and India have emerged, whereas the incomes of the old industrial working classes in Western core nations have stagnated and countries in the world's periphery, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, continue to fall behind (Milanovic 2016; Chancel et al. 2022). These shifts in global economic inequality also have **repercussions for global distributive politics**. While the emerging Asian middle classes strive for greater influence in shaping the global order, many of the poorest citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa see few other options than to embark on dangerous and often deadly journeys to the Global North to improve their economic situation (Faist, 2009). Meanwhile, the turn of the working classes in North America and Europe to populist parties has generated backlash against globalization and furthered a resurgence of nationalism and welfare chauvinism (Hung 2021; Mewes & Mau 2013).

Against this backdrop, **devising measures that balance these stark transnational economic inequalities is a major challenge for global solidarity**. Surely, egalitarian standards and aspirations have become universal and widely shared. Academics, activists as

well as citizens themselves frequently voice demands for global sharing (Moellendorf, 2009; Pogge 2001). Yet, global economic inequalities are intrinsically bound up with transnational interdependencies. But the impact of global production chains, capital flows, migration etc. on the socioeconomic situation of people in different world regions is highly uneven. Therefore, the demand for global redistribution is likely to be heterogeneous and vary widely within and across countries. Furthermore, redistribution of resources always imposes costs on some to the benefit of others. Who bears the costs and who benefits differs across specific measures to mitigate global inequality. For instance, while raising taxes on the Global one percent concentrates the burden on a small (but powerful) elite, debt relief for over-indebted countries or increasing development aid spreads costs more widely. Furthermore, as global redistribution involves transfers not only across economic but also across political, ethnic, cultural and religious divides, the providers and beneficiaries of solidarity are highly dissimilar. Thus, popular support for global redistribution may depend on specific policy designs and measures on the one hand and the identity of net payers and net beneficiaries on the other hand.

Contrary to what optimistic assumptions about the emergence of a “global organic solidarity” out of transnational interdependencies (Münch 2016: 27) might suggest, then, both the demand for globally redistributive policies and the willingness to bear their costs are likely to be contested both across and within countries. Thus, **research question** of this project is: **When do people support all-inclusive redistribution?** When do they **prefer local redistribution** among particular actors, groups, or countries? **Which motives** – economic, emotional, normative, political – **underlie popular support for (and opposition to) global redistribution** between countries and classes?

Explaining Support for Global Redistribution

A first stream of theorizing that contributes to the explanation of support for global solidarity comes from the literature on the emergence of a new **globalization cleavage**. Here it is argued that the shifts in global inequality that have occurred in the wake of globalization and supra-nationalization have created distinct winners and losers. Several observers have pointed to a new cleavage between highly educated upper- and middle-classes in urban areas on the one hand and less-educated lower- and lower middle-classes in rural areas on the other (Kriesi et al. 2006; Teney et al. 2014). The former are supposed to hold a **cosmopolitan** outlook which also involves attention to problems of global inequality and willingness to engage in transnational solidarity, whereas the latter hold a **communitarian** perspective that pays less attention to global inequality and transnational solidarity. Importantly, while this globalization cleavage has frequently been mobilized to explain the emergence of new political conflicts and the rise of right-wing populism in countries of the Global North (Goodheart 2017; Kriesi et al. 2006; de Wilde et al. 2019), some scholars maintain that this distinction applies to countries worldwide, especially with regard to urban educated elites in global cities (Beck 2011, Sassen 2001). Hence, from this perspective one would expect highly educated residents of large urban areas across the world – especially, but not exclusively in core countries – to be among the supporters of measures to mitigate global inequality. However, research on the **self-identification as a world citizen** finds that not only educated upper- and middle-classes in core countries but also citizens in (semi-)peripheral countries identify as world citizens. Insofar as this self-identification is indicative of cosmopolitan attitudes, these can also be expected to be among the supporters of global solidarity. Indeed, previous studies find that support for

global measures to reduce inequality are also supported by lower-educated citizens (Sikora 2002; Sachweh & Koos 2019).

Besides these factors relating to people's social positioning, the literature on **transnationality** points to the importance of cross-border interconnectedness. Drawing on insights from intergroup contact theory, this perspective suggests that having contacts to outgroups in other countries goes along with greater openness towards other cultures (Pettigrew 1998). Hence, people with more cross-border contacts also sympathize more with the concerns of others in distant world regions (Brett & Moran 2011; Mau et al. 2008). This argument not only applies to the individual level but can also be made at the country level. The more transnational or global interconnections a country has – e.g., through economic globalization, migration inflows or also through a colonial legacy – the more its citizens can be supposed to not only take into account their national interests but also show a concern for distant others. Interestingly, this not only applies to present transnational interconnections but also to past historical legacies. For instance, while the residents of countries who were former colonizers show a higher awareness of global economic inequalities, citizens in former colonies are more likely to demand economic redistribution from rich to poor nations (Sachweh & Koos, 2019).

Finally, these two streams of theorizing mainly focus on the “redistribution from”-aspect of global resource transfers (Cavaille & Trump 2015), i.e. on the characteristics of the providers of solidarity. However, the literature on European solidarity shows that also the “redistribution-to” aspect – i.e. the characteristics of the beneficiaries of solidarity – matters for public support for cross-border resource transfers (Heerman et al. 2022). As studies of redistributive attitudes in national contexts have shown, perceptions regarding the **deservingness of beneficiaries** of redistribution also play an important role (van Oorschot 2006). They are considered more deserving when they are viewed to be genuinely needy, when their disadvantage is due to circumstances beyond their control, when they make efforts to reciprocate and overcome their situation and when they are not too dissimilar from the majority population.

Methodology

To analyze these questions, GlobaLab will field a **large-scale survey** in major countries on all continents to find out what measures for addressing global economic inequality the public supports. This will particularly enable us to address the “redistribution from”-aspect of attitudes towards global inequality mitigation. To also take into account the “redistribution-to”-side of transnational resource transfers, **experimental methodology** (vignette and conjoint experiments) will be used to vary systematically the characteristics of those who would benefit from global solidarity. This will enable us to model different scenarios of global redistribution in greater detail.

Besides taking into account the characteristics of providers and recipients of global solidarity, we will also assess the support that different measures of cross-border redistribution would command, such as taxing the Global one percent, liberalizing migration, levying a global resources dividend, debt cuts for over-indebted countries or increasing development aid.

In doing so, we build on our own experience with large-scale surveys in the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC) and make use of the complementary expertise of our partners in Chile (COES), Africa (ACEIR) and Europe (EUI). Offline and online sampling techniques will be used to ensure the inclusion of hard-to-reach populations.

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