

Sounds like meritocracy to my ears: Exploring the link between inequality in popular music and private culture

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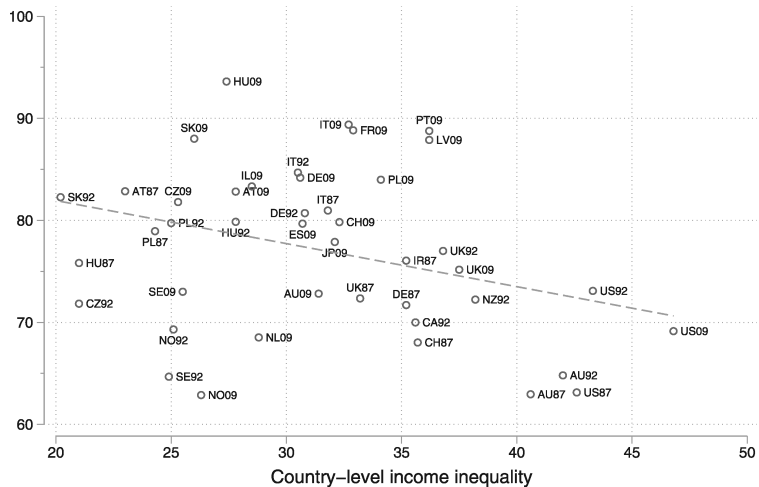
Jonathan Mijs (Harvard University, Erasmus University)

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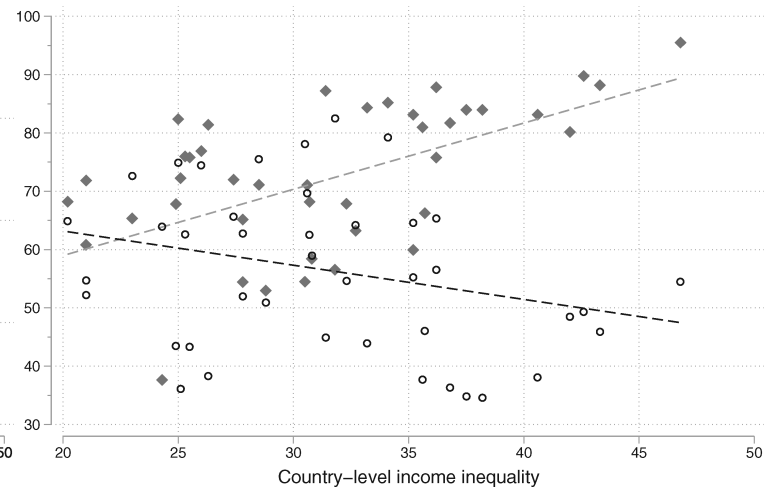
18/06/2021

Theoretical background: Inequalities and meritocracy.

Source: Mijs (2019)



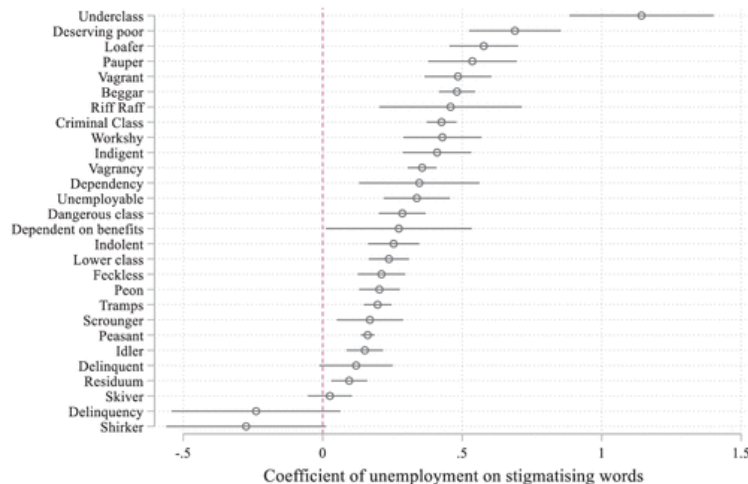
Note: Y axis represents individuals' **concerns** about inequalities.



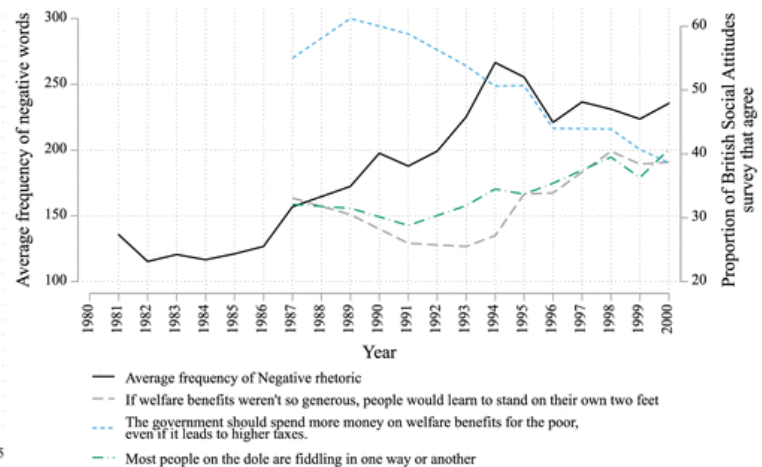
Note: Y axis represents individuals' **beliefs** about inequalities.
 Grey diamonds: meritocratic
 Empty circles: structuralist

Theoretical background: Media as sources of information about inequalities

Source: McArthur & Reeves (2019)



Note: Association between unemployment and the frequency of stigmatising words or phrases, 1896–2000.



Note: Public opinion data from the British Social Attitudes Survey 1987–2000.

Theoretical background:

Music as mirror of values about inequalities

- Production side:
 - Conspicuous consumption (Baksh-Mohammed & Callison, 2014; Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014)
 - Industry-specific motives (Wilderom & van Venrooij, 2019)
 - Artist-specific motives (Lena, 2006)
- Consumption side:
 - Symbolic position of music in a cultural hierarchy (Ollivier, 2008)
 - Resonance of contents with prior worldviews (Oware, 2014)
 - Influence of music on individuals beliefs (Pieschl & Fegers, 2015)

Theoretical background: Relationships between forms of culture

How are public forms of culture (e.g., frames) related to private forms of culture (e.g., beliefs)?



Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes

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© American Sociological
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<http://asr.sagepub.com>



3 principles:

- Correspondence
- Redundant encoding
- Disassociation

Omar Lizardo^a

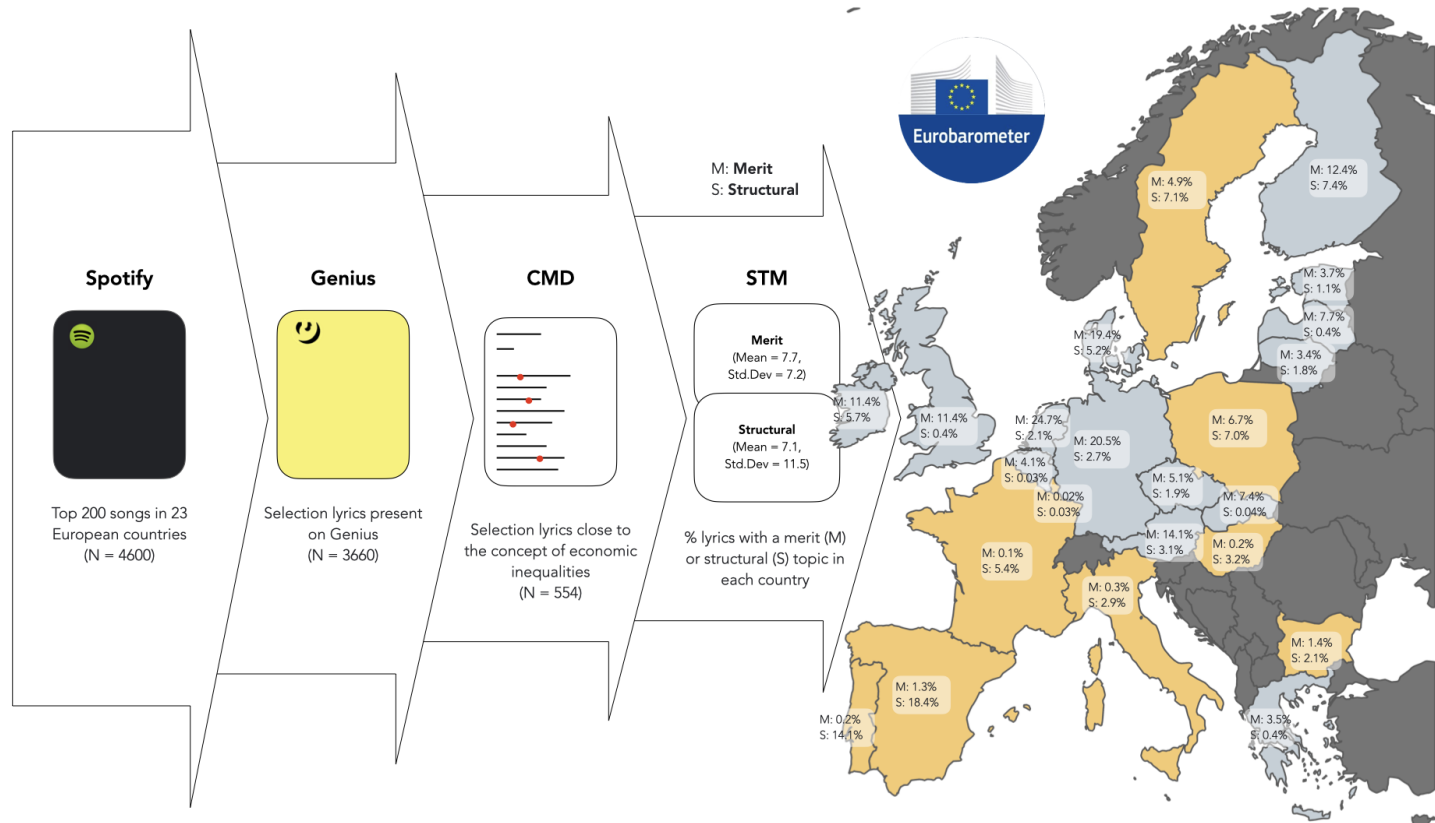
Abstract

While influential across a wide variety of subfields, cultural analysis in sociology continues to be hampered by coarse-grained conceptualizations of the different modes in which culture becomes personal, as well as the process via which persons acquire and use different forms of culture. In this article, I argue that persons acquire and use culture in two analytically and empirically distinct forms, which I label declarative and nondeclarative. The mode of cultural acquisition depends on the dynamics of exposure and encoding, and modulates the process of cultural accessibility, activation, and use. Cultural knowledge about one domain may be redundantly represented in both declarative and nondeclarative forms, each linked via analytically separable pathways to corresponding public cultural forms and ultimately to substantive outcomes. I outline how the new theoretical vocabulary, theoretical model, and analytic distinctions that I propose can be used to resolve contradictions and improve our understanding of outstanding substantive issues in empirically oriented subfields that have recently incorporated cultural processes as a core explanatory resource.

Theoretical background: Questions

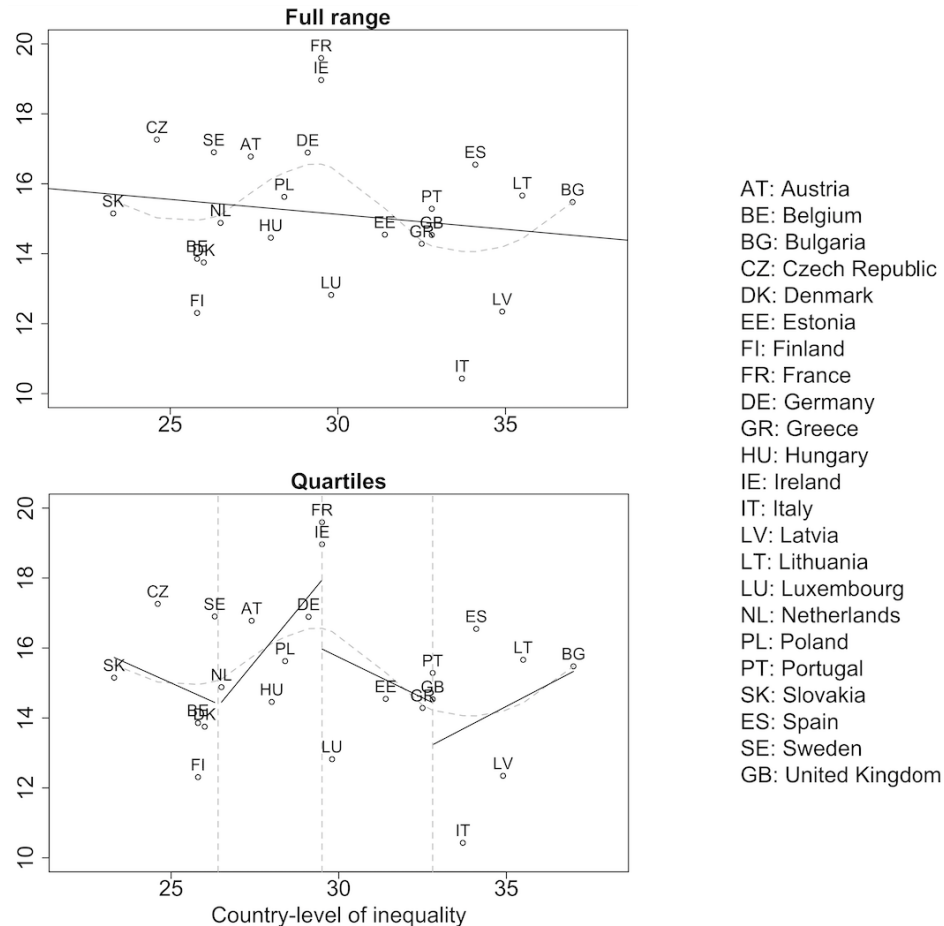
- RQ1: Do the lyrics of popular songs across European countries mirror the reality of economic inequality?
- RQ2: Do popular music lyrics across European countries talk about economic inequality using meritocratic and structuralist frames?
- RQ3: Do frames about economic inequality present in music lyrics (public declarative culture) resonate with individual beliefs about meritocracy (private declarative culture)?

Construction dataset



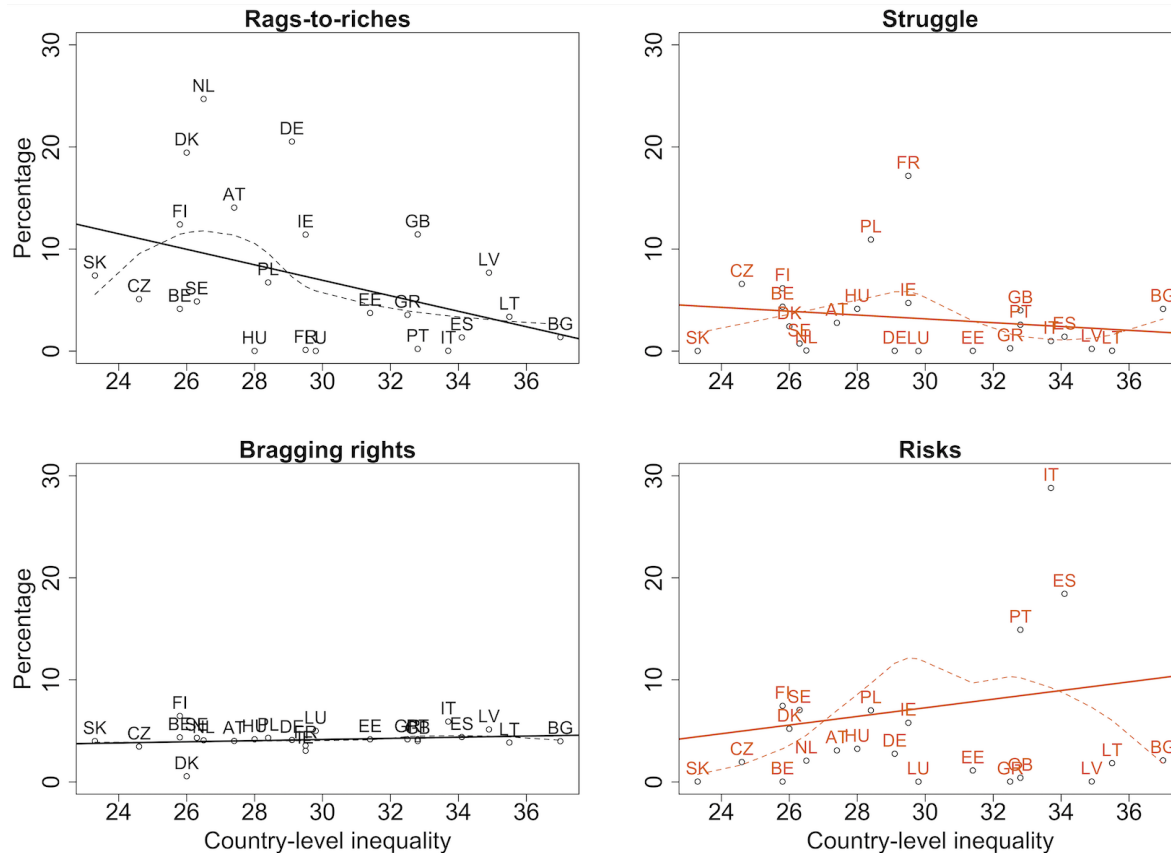
Results

RQ1: Do the lyrics of popular songs across European countries mirror the reality of economic inequality?



Results

RQ2: Do popular music lyrics across European countries talk about economic inequality using meritocratic and structuralist frames?



Results

RQ3: Do frames about economic inequality present in music lyrics (public declarative culture) resonate with individual beliefs about meritocracy (private declarative culture)?

Table 3: Music models

Variables	DV: meritocratic beliefs			DV: structuralist beliefs		
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 1c	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
(Intercept)	60.17 *** (1.87)	60.69 *** (1.79)	60.40 *** (1.85)	79.63 *** (1.91)	79.79 *** (1.87)	79.74 *** (1.89)
Gini	0.97 (1.3)	2.16 (1.26)	1.22 (1.26)	2.32 (1.36)	1.56 (1.4)	2.43 † (1.32)
Digital Capital	0.53 *** (0.08)	0.52 *** (0.08)	0.53 *** (0.08)	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.15 † (0.08)	-0.13 (0.08)
Inequality frame	-0.50 (1.33)			0.89 (1.38)		
Inequality frame * Digital Capital	0.07 (0.07)			-0.17 * (0.07)		
Merit frame		3.53 * (1.37)			-0.73 (1.5)	
Merit frame * Digital Capital		-0.13 (0.08)			-0.22 ** (0.08)	
Structural frame			-2.15 (1.3)			-1.81 (1.35)
Structural frame * Digital Capital			0.13 † (0.07)			0.15 * (0.07)
REML	2064862	2064792	2064822	2066292	2066242	2066292
Var (Between)	37.58 (6.13)	30.14 (5.49)	35.48 (5.96)	40.81 (6.39)	37.02 (6.08)	38.86 (6.23)
Var (Within)	452.46 (21.27)	452.43 (21.27)	452.4 (21.27)	455.79 (21.35)	455.75 (21.35)	455.81 (21.35)

Significance codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*' 0.1 '†' 1 '.'

Note: Models estimated controlling for age, sex, education, job, and class (not shown). Reference categories for control variables are Man, Not completed primary, Unemployed, Working class. Standardized estimates are shown (SE between brackets).³

Conclusions

- The topic of economic inequality is fairly present in music lyrics across European countries, ranging from 20 percent of all popular songs analyzed in France to 10 percent in Italy.
- Individuals in more unequal countries listen to fewer meritocratic and more structuralist songs about inequality.
- In countries where a meritocratic frame is widely available, individuals have more meritocratic beliefs, while in those where a structuralist frame is more prevalent, individuals hold more structuralist beliefs.

Resources

Code, data, and pre-registration available on



SocArXiv preprint available on

