Pre-Analysis Plan

Study Information

1. Title: **Inequality and Voter Perceptions of Parties' Ideological Positions**

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3. Research Questions

We explore how income comparisons and accurate information about income inequality influence voters' perceptions of political parties' ideological positions. We employ survey experiments embedded in representative surveys of individuals with access to the internet in the US, Denmark, Italy, and Mexico. Our study is meant to improve our understanding of the political consequences of economic inequality and the mass perceptions of political parties.

We study inequality-based explanations of voters' policy preferences and mass perceptions of the ideological positions of policy options. We are interested in exploring how varying respondents' perceptions of relative economic positions and income inequality affect the perceived ideological positions of political parties.

Inequality and Ideology Vignette Experiment

This is a vignette experiment that manipulates respondents' perceptions of their relative economic standings in the country. We use a 3 × 2 design, where we randomly assign respondents into a downward comparison, upward comparison, or no comparison group and subsequently tell half of the respondents in each group the true state of income inequality in the country. Then, we ask them to indicate their redistributive policy preferences and views on political options in terms of their left--right positions.

The statement for downward and upward comparison in the US is (the randomized parts in parentheses):

> (RANDOM 2/3 OF RESPONDENTS)
> There is a lot of discussion nowadays about the distribution of wealth in the United States. We would like you to think of the (poorest/richest) people in your country, those who have the (least/most) money.

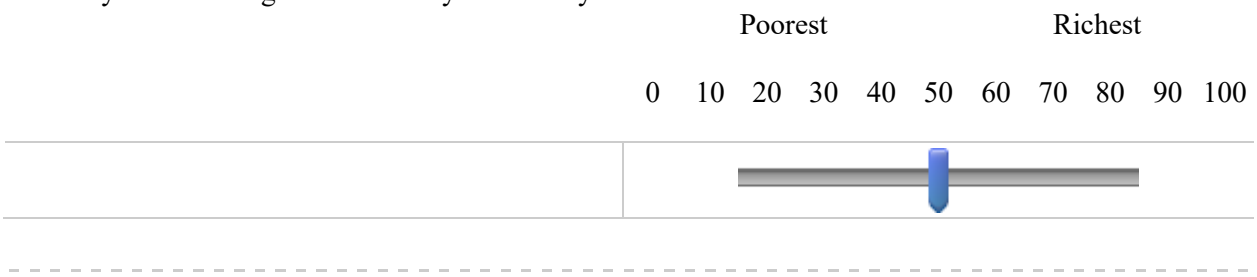
And the statement for the true state of economic inequality is:

> NEXT PAGE (RANDOM HALF OF RESPONDENTS)
> Now we would like to provide you with information about the actual distribution of income in the United States.
>
> The actual share of total assets held by the richest 10% in the United State is in fact 46%, whereas the bottom 50% only holds 13% (source link).

After these treatments, we ask respondents to indicate their perceived financial standing on an income ladder:

> NEXT PAGE (ALL RESPONDENTS)
> Please compare yourself to (other people/the poorest people/the richest people) in your country. Where would you place yourself relative to these people on the scale below in terms of your own

financial standing? On this scale, 0 indicates that you are among the poorest and 100 means that you are among the richest in your country.



We then collect responses to items that function as manipulation checks and intermediate outcomes (perceptions of income inequality and support for redistribution) and main outcome variables (the left-right placement of the main parties). We also include a placebo outcome that asks respondents to place a politician who openly supports gender equality in military service on the left-right spectrum.

Additional questions: To what extent do the answers to the questions above differ across subgroups including partisanship, ideology, knowledge, sex, race, education, age, parental status, income, other sociodemographic characteristics, fairness norms and beliefs, subjective assessments of economic and environmental conditions, objective economic and environmental conditions, risk and time preferences, and measures of attention?

Study Design and Sampling Plan
Described in "Preregistration Inequality Main.docx".

Estimation of quantities of interest
The main quantities of interest in our experiment are the effects of downward and upward economic comparisons and the information about inequality on the perceptions of parties' ideological positions. We estimate these effects based on a vignette experiment. Because treatments will be randomized across individuals, we will resort to difference in means tests across randomized treatment groups to estimate quantities of interest. We will also estimate models that include additional socioeconomic predictors, including respondents' self-reported income, in regression models; inclusion of such socioeconomic predictors aims to reduce estimation uncertainty (because of randomization, we do not expect these predictors to be correlated with assignment into different treatment conditions).

Expectations
1. We expect respondents treated with information about inequality to deliver more extreme assessments of the left—right positions of political parties (i.e., more leftist for parties on the Left, more rightist for parties on the Right) than those not treated with this information.
2. We expect respondents in the downward comparison arm to place all political parties closer to the left end of the ideological spectrum compared to those in the upward comparison arm.
3. We expect party placement disagreement between the downward and upward comparison arms to be greater when respondents are treated with information about inequality.
4. As an alternative argument against H2 and H3, we expect respondents in the downward and upward comparison arms to place all political parties to the right end of the ideological spectrum compared to those in the control arm.

Ethics Oversight
IRB at Washington University in St. Louis, United States.