

FOR THE GOOD OF THE GROUP: HOW EMPATHY AND SELF-INTEREST
SIMULTANEOUSLY CONDITION INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FOR ECONOMIC
REDISTRIBUTION

BY

MATTHEW ALLEN SPEARS

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Carol Skalnik Leff, Chair
Associate Professor Cara J. Wong
Professor James H. Kuklinski
Professor William T. Bernard

ABSTRACT

Why do some people support redistribution from the rich to the poor while others do not? A very large literature centers on this question, and the list of possible answers researchers have offered is both long and, occasionally, contradictory. For instance, while certain scholars posit that a Hobbesian sense of self-interest motivates individuals to oppose redistribution, other researchers argue that empathy for those in need encourage individuals to support systems of welfare redistribution. Building on the work of social and political psychologists, I argue that perceptions of group identity are central to determining when, or among whom, self-interest is of primary concern and when, or among whom, empathy leads to higher support for welfare redistribution. Using a variety of existing national and cross-national surveys and a set of original, small-n survey experiments, I find that among individuals who perceive that they share no commonality with the poor, support for redistribution largely is a function of self-interest. Yet, when individuals perceive that they share much in common with the poor, feelings of empathy are more likely to form and self-interest matters less.

To S, and a more equal society

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Chapter 1

Inequality and Support for Economic Redistribution

The topic of economic inequality recently has come quite into vogue both within the academe and among politicians, and for good reason. Economic inequality is linked to a number of economic and social ills. On the economic front, inequality within a nation leads to inferior economic growth (Alesina & Rodrik 1994; Mo 2000) and weakens human capital that is fundamental to economic prosperity (Castelló & Doménech 2002). Although these costs are high, they are also controversial. For balance: Depending on econometric techniques, other scholars have found that inequality is good for economic growth (Forbes 2000), and others have identified additional economic benefits of inequality, such as the diversification of the labor market (Welch 1999).

What is far less controversial, however, are inequality's social costs. Higher economic inequality has been linked to higher rates of human mortality (Wilkinson 2006), environmental degradation (Mikkelsen et al. 2007), violent crime (Fajnzylber et al. 2002), and political instability (Alesina & Perotti 1996). Inequality has also been linked to a wide range of disparities in citizens' health and education (Lynch et al. 2000; Neckerman & Torche 2007; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). On a general and larger scale, research has demonstrated that economic inequality is bad for democracy (Bartels 2008). Indeed, scholars of regime change have identified high levels of inequality as an obstacle to democratization and democratic consolidation (Przeworski et al. 2000; Boix 2003; Acemoglu & Robinson 2009).

Poor health, environmental problems, crime, and democratic instability speak directly to a nation's economic and national security interests, and in perhaps a rare instance of convergence between academe and public discourse, President Barack Obama declared inequality "a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life and what we stand for around the globe" (Goldfarb 2014), and it was no less noteworthy when the Chairwoman of the United States Federal Reserve announced that "The extent of and continuing increase in inequality in the United States greatly concern me" (Yellen 2014).¹

Tackling inequality, naturally, is no easy task. The distribution of resources, however defined, determines who has power and who does not. It is thus unsurprising that the *redistribution* of resources—namely, of wealth or income—is a pervasive and contentious political issue in both post-industrialized and developing countries. Although economic redistribution from the rich to the poor ameliorates the effects of poverty (Dagdeviren et al. 2002) and might even help ensure the survival of democratic regimes (Karl 2000), it remains a contested practice nearly everywhere it occurs. It is also a practice whose quality and survival depend in no small part on a reservoir of public support (Brooks & Manza 2006).

These considerations have spurred an encompassing research agenda that explores why some citizens support economic redistribution from the rich to the poor, while others do not. If inequality is to be reduced—and democracy protected, redistribution will necessitate more than a modicum of public support. Unfortunately, our knowledge of

¹ Advocates for reducing economic inequality, however, were disappointed when Obama replaced discussions about inequality with those about the middle class as the 2014 midterm elections neared.

why people support redistribution is far from systemized. The laundry list of factors that scholars have identified as leading to, or inhibiting, public support for welfare is both staggering and bewildering. Existing theoretical and empirical work paradoxically suggests that both self-interest and factors related to compassion—be that in the form of group solidarity, empathy, or values—motivate people’s attitudes toward redistribution. Yet few works delve deeper by questioning how this could possibly be the case.

It would appear that the literature is divided starkly into two camps: One that emphasizes the centrality of Hobbesian self-interest, where citizens are loath for government tax officials to expropriate their hard-earned money for the betterment of society’s economic losers, and another that centers on human beings’ capacity for solidarity and altruism, which encourages willingness to support the downtrodden and those down on their luck. Proponents of opposite sides of the literature rarely engage with one another, which is problematic insofar as simple common sense reveals the possibility that people—even the same people—can be motivated by self-interest or altruism in different situations or, potentially, simultaneously. The purpose of this study is to bridge this divide, which I intend to do by providing answers to two primary questions. First, when, or among whom, is self-interest a strong determinant of attitudes toward redistribution? Second, when, or among whom, do non-self-interested concerns, such as empathy and values, emerge to influence these attitudes?

The answers to these questions potentially have wide-ranging implications for how pro-welfare policymakers and activists frame their messages to induce support for redistribution among the general public. This is a particularly prescient concern, considering ever-growing economic inequality within capitalist democracies (Picketty

2014). When self-interest is paramount, for instance, messages that tout the economic benefits of redistribution and downplay the personal costs on those who contribute through higher taxes will be vital to sustaining this support. These cost-benefit frames will be unnecessary, however, when messages that draw on citizens' empathy and values can be used more successfully to spark support. Tailoring messages to specific types of people in specific contexts is key to bolstering public support for redistribution—or, inversely, to decimating this support.

I argue that whether self-interested or compassionate concerns affect support for redistribution is a function of individuals' perceptions that they share commonalities with welfare recipients. In brief, I hypothesize and find evidence to support the argument that self-interest most strongly influences redistributive attitudes in the absence of perceptions of commonality. When these perceptions do exist, less self-interested factors, such as empathy, deservingness, and values take hold. Moreover, I argue and demonstrate that not only is self-interest's ability to influence public attitudes about redistribution curtailed by individuals' perceptions of commonality with the poor, but so too is self-interest's direct relationship with partisanship. Economic redistribution is a key political issue in politics throughout the world—especially within industrialized democratic states—and we should expect that voters' party loyalties are shaped by, or at least correlated with, their redistributive preferences. In fact, a broad literature on economic voting, which I discuss in greater depth in Chapter Five, is predicated on this argument. But, as I show, the identical forces that motivate people to support redistribution to the poor in spite of their self-interest also motivate people to support parties that favor redistribution, even when this is not predicted by self-interest-centered theories of economic voting. Thus, not

only do perceptions of commonality influence self-interest's and altruism's influences on people's attitudes about redistribution, but these perceptions potentially also mitigate the relationship between self-interest and the most fundamental and democratic of all political behaviors: Voting.

In addition to having implications for how opinion makers can (or already do) influence public preferences for redistribution and voting behavior, this study also helps tidy up a rather unwieldy and, at times, contradictory literature by tying together three of its most entrenched strands. As I detail in a following section, the literature that examines the underpinnings of public support for redistribution falls generally into three camps. In the first, and perhaps oldest, research has focused on the centrality of self-interest. Simply put, the higher one's income, the less like one is to support redistribution. The second camp, however, finds that group solidarity—or, in many cases, the lack thereof—is strongly determinate of welfare preferences. In these accounts, race, ethnicity, and social diversity are of primary relevance. Lastly, researchers have looked at an array of other factors—such as empathy, values, and perceptions of deservingness—that tap into people's compassion for welfare recipients as opposed to their self-interest.

By linking these three strands of the literature, this study contributes not by adding new factors to the list, but by explicating how well-established factors work, or interact, with each other. More importantly, by showing how perceptions of commonality condition the extent to which self-interest and empathy-based appeals influence public attitudes, this study seeks to enable policymakers to craft sustainable programs of redistribution to tackle the inequality that threatens not only vital national interests, but threatens also democracy itself.

A Note on Redistribution

Before delving into the literature on public support for redistribution, it is necessary to clarify the term “redistribution” as it will be used throughout this study.² I employ the term “redistribution” to capture movement of wealth or income from society’s richer members to its poorest. Naturally, redistribution can also flow from the poor to the rich—in fact this is the more typical direction of redistribution in the United States today (Reich 2014)—and a variety of programs and policies can be, and are, used to redistribute income and/or wealth. The arguments I present are generalizable both to attitudes about redistribution from rich to poor generally and to attitudes toward specific redistributive programs. As such, some of the measures used in later chapters will examine both general attitudes toward redistribution (e.g. *to what extent do you support the government redistributing income from the rich to the poor?*) and more specific attitudes (e.g. *to what extent do you support contributing assistance to the unemployed?*). Furthermore, the arguments I advance are applicable to people’s attitudes toward reducing both income and wealth inequalities, the import of the latter being often minimized or overlooked by economists and political scientists (Sen 1999; Picketty 2014). Throughout the study, I use the terms redistribution and welfare interchangeably to avoid tedious repetition, even though the latter term might conjure images of specific types of redistributive schemes.

² Later chapters will define the terms self-interest, empathy, values, identity, etcetera.

A Vast Literature

Traditionally, economists and political scientists believed that one's support for social welfare provisions was a direct—and rational—function of socio-economic status; that is, of self-interest. The poor call for redistribution, the rich oppose. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion, Meltzer and Richard argue that the median voter's income determines the amount of government spending on social programs in democracies that operate under majority rule, writing that “the voter with median income among the enfranchised citizens is decisive. Voters with income below the income of the decisive voter choose candidates who favor higher taxes and more redistribution; voters with income above the decisive voter desire lower taxes and less redistribution” (1981, p. 924). Thus, not only does self-interest affect opinions on redistribution, the self-interest of citizens—particularly the self-interest of the illustrious median voter—directly determines the size and scope of the democratic state.

The Meltzer-Richard model remains influential in political economy, although scholars in the interim have taken welfare's insurance aspects into consideration (Moene & Wallerstein 2001; Iverson & Soskice 2001; Iverson 2005; Rehm 2005; Barber et al. 2013). This refinement allows that the rich will support social protection in the form of insurance in line with their exposure to labor market risks (Iverson 2005). Accordingly, the theorist need not abandon the parsimonious logic of self-interest simply because a number of citizens with above-median income support redistribution. From this literature, we can draw the conclusion that the poor will always favor welfare programs, whereas

the rich will oppose it, unless they have reason to believe they are personally at risk and may need help at a future point in time.

The theory that people's support for redistribution is a direct function of self-interest, however, finds relatively weak support in a number of empirical studies (Gilens 1999; Fong 2001; Fong et al. 2006). Indeed, if it were true that individuals base their views about redistribution solely on their economic interests, we would likely see a great deal of variability across time in people's preferences toward welfare programs as the economic situation changes. Yet, in fact, people's economic situations exhibit greater variability than do trends in favorability toward welfare state programs (Brooks & Manza 2007). In more recent years, rationalists have qualified their arguments by demonstrating that both economic and non-economic factors are important predictors of redistributive attitudes (e.g. Blekesaune & Quadagno 2003).

A large body of work, however, suggests that identity—and not self-interest—drives people's redistributive attitudes. One popular argument holds that redistribution “presupposes the existence of a...cohesive community whose members...are linked by reciprocity ties vis-à-vis common risks and similar needs” (Ferrera 2005, p. 2). This argument, which links directly to theories of categorization (Turner 1975) and social identity theory (Billig & Tajfel 1973), is supported by evidence demonstrating that racial and ethnic cleavages within a country decrease support for redistribution (Gilens 1999; Luttmer 2001; Eger 2010; see also Alesina & Glaeser 2004), as well as by evidence that identification with the nation mitigates the negative effects of racial/ethnic heterogeneity (Transue 2007; Johnston et al. 2010).

Scholars of social diversity, however, are not self-interest's only detractors. European sociologists have pinpointed citizens' perceptions that welfare recipients are "deserving" as being predictive of their support for redistribution (van Oorschot 2006; Slothuus 2007). Deservingness has also been found to be an important predictor among Americans' attitudes toward welfare (Aarøe & Petersen 2013), as have Americans' perceptions that the poor are willing to work (Gilens 1999; Miller 1999). Overlapping to some extent with theories of deservingness, Fong (2006) argues that feelings of empathy are important for support. Fong's work builds on a large body of work in social psychology (introduced in the next chapter) that highlights the role of empathy in motivating individuals to help others.

In this brief review, which I expand upon in following chapters, I have attempted to cover the most compelling and accepted aspects of the literature. The review highlights not only the diversity of possible explanations for people's support for redistribution, but it also reveals, I believe, an important—and often overlooked—puzzle. It is clear that self-interest, group identity, and compassionate concerns (e.g. empathy, deservingness, values) appear to play a role in fostering individuals' attitudes about redistribution. What fewer works have sought to do, however, is explore how these multifarious factors interact. Indeed, existing evidence and theories lead to a somewhat paradoxical conclusion: Attitudes about welfare redistribution simultaneously are affected both by a Hobbesian sense of self-preservation and by feelings of empathy and obligation toward others. This study seeks to untangle this paradox.

The Public's Role

One assumption that underlies the vast literature on public support for economic redistribution is that this support is necessary—along both a practical and normative dimension—for the continued operation of governmental redistributive programs. This assumption is supported by a separate literature demonstrating the linkage between citizen support for redistribution and the existence of welfare programs in the West. Given the nature of the available data, these studies are unable to address causality directly. Nonetheless, although it is unlikely that public opinion always drives, let alone determines, politicians' choices, it is likely that public opinion bounds the range of policy choices that politicians can make if they wish to seek reelection (see Page & Shapiro 1983 and, for a more detailed perspective, Manza et al. 2002).

Especially in democracies, citizens' opinions about redistribution are likely to play an important role in determining the degree of social welfare protection offered by the state.³ The institutionalization of redistribution, however, may serve to cement public support for welfare. In other words, not only might citizens' support for redistribution help ensure the survival of welfare programs, but the existence of welfare programs might serve to bolster public support for redistribution. This study steers clear of this complex issue by focusing on the uncontroversial argument that public support, though perhaps neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the survival of welfare programs, does provide the bounds in which politicians can operate safely. In settings where public support for redistribution is high, a politician risks losing the next election if

³ This, of course, is an ideal, and recent work by Gilens (2012) suggests this ideal is far from being reached, at least in the American case.

he or she instigates reforms to shutter welfare programs. In contexts where mass support for redistribution is low, however, politicians do not risk their re-election bids when they support weakening the redistributive power of the state (Pierson 1995; Manza et al. 2002).

Only Americans Hate Welfare?

The United States is oftentimes considered the outlier in discussions regarding welfare provisions in the developed world. The problems associated with inequality, of course, are not confined to the United States. Although research often links Americans' distaste for redistribution to the degree of social heterogeneity in the US (Alesina & Glaeser 2004), similar dynamics operate in other advanced welfare states as well—"even in Sweden" (Eger 2010). In fact, current debates throughout the industrialized world suggest that the contours of welfare redistribution are in flux and possibly under threat. Recent news reports suggest that citizens in both the United States (Luhby 2012) and Germany (Wiedermann & Turzer 2012) have reason to believe that welfare provisions fail to cover the basic needs of recipients. Minority communities are frequently perceived as burdening the social welfare system, not only in California (Light 2011), but also in Germany (*Focus* 2010) and Sweden (Daley 2011). Furthermore, politicians in the US frequently toy with the idea of drastically cutting aid to the poor (Luhby 2012); and, in Europe, citizens' as well as politicians' opinions about growing redistribution of national funds to assist citizens in poorer European states, in the forms of economic bailouts and a number of European Union programs, are anything but certain (e.g. Hall 2011;

Kirschbaum 2012; Schoen 2012; *Spiegel* 2012). In short, Americans may be renowned for opposing welfare programs, but redistribution is contentious—or at least has the potential to be so—even in places where these programs are strongly entrenched.

What Follows, in Brief

The following chapters will present and test the argument that people's perceptions of commonality with welfare recipients condition the extent to which other factors—namely, self-interest, empathy, and values—influence their attitudes about redistribution. The following chapter develops this argument in greater depth. Later chapters will use a variety of data sources to test hypotheses drawn from this theory. Specifically, the third chapter uses cross-national and experimental data to test the conditional effect of perceptions of similarity on self-interest's influence on redistributive attitudes. Because empathy is difficult—indeed impossible—to measure on cross-national surveys, chapter four presents results from a series of experiments to demonstrate, first, how a change in perceptions of commonality affect the extent to which empathetic concerns influence redistributive attitudes and, second, how manipulating empathetic concerns results in divergent attitudes conditional on pre-existing perceptions of commonality. Chapter five takes a step back from the discussion on attitudes toward redistribution to examine the extent to which perceptions of commonality with the poor condition self-interest's role in predicting partisanship. It is generally true that wealth correlates with support for parties on the right, but as I show in the fifth chapter, higher

income individuals support parties of the left when they perceive they share commonalities with the poor.

In addition to cleaning up a rather unwieldy literature by tying together its most important strands, this study has the potential to speak practically to policymakers, pundits, and other influential citizens who are interested in ways to bolster (or, on the contrary, weaken) mass support for redistributive programs. As I have noted, it is commonly assumed that individuals' attitudes about redistribution are a function of their self-interest. Politicians, particularly those who are opposed to redistribution, often speak of these programs' costs. Yet, if this study's findings are correct, self-interest is likely to appeal only to a subset of the population: Those who feel disconnected from, or perceive that they have little in common with, the targeted recipients. Those who wish to boost support, attempts to spark empathy or attempts to make values conducive to helping the less well-off salient will increase support for redistribution, but only among those who perceive that they share similarities with the poor.

Among people who feel they share very little in common with the poor, self-interest dominates and empathetic and value appeals by politicians and pro-redistribution influential activists will fall on deaf ears. For people who do not perceive similarities with others, life takes on a Hobbesian tint, whereby goals are concomitant with individuals' narrow self-interest and little concern is paid to the nasty, brutish, and short lives of others. Luckily, as I demonstrate below, the world is not entirely run by self-interest. Empathy, spurred by perceptions that individuals are linked by commonalities, can increase support the welfare of others. As perceptions of commonality increase, the

power of empathy also rises to positively influence redistributive attitudes and the power of self-interest recedes.

Chapter 2

Fitting the Pieces Together

In the first chapter, I outlined the literature that has sprung up to explain public attitudes about economic redistribution in democracies from the rich to the poor and identified the paradoxical finding that both self-interested and altruistic concerns exert influence over these attitudes. It is unlikely that these two opposing sources of motivation are capable of exerting influence over the same person's attitudes simultaneously and to the same degree, so the question arises of when, or among whom, is self-interest a stronger predictor of redistributive attitudes and when, or among whom, are altruistic concerns—such as empathy or values—predominant?

I contend that the answers to these questions hinge on the degree to which individuals identify with the recipients of redistribution. As I will describe in more depth below, identification with recipients—or, more accurately, perceptions of similarity or commonality⁴ with recipients—provides for the psychological conditions that enable helping behaviors and that bring altruistic concerns to the fore. These conditions minimize the relevance of self-interest, as the distinctions between self and other become less salient. On the other hand, the absence of perceptions of similarity makes for an environment less amenable to the materialization of altruistic concerns. Here, the distinctions between self and other are highly salient, and, when asked about their willingness to contribute assistance to others, individuals are more likely to think in terms of their own self-interest.

⁴ I use the terms commonality and similarity interchangeably throughout.

The Centrality of Commonality

Perceptions of commonality are central to understanding people's support for welfare redistribution. These perceptions go hand-in-hand with the development of communal obligations, and have a direct effect on people's willingness to lend assistance to those in need (Wong 2010). It is a sense of community, or solidarity, with others that lead directly to helping obligations, but in addition to having a direct influence on citizens' attitudes and behaviors, a sense of community offers a sense of security in which altruistic endeavors can flourish and provides the space for the expression of shared values.

That the welfare of similar others is of more direct relevance to individuals relative to the welfare of dissimilar others is relatively unsurprising in light of the literature on identity and redistribution. Economic and political science literatures have been relatively slow, however, in identifying the mechanisms that induce people to provide support to similarly-perceived others. The tendency for people to behave prosocially toward similar others fills in this gap. People are more likely to support redistribution that benefits similar others not just out of a sense of group solidarity, but because feelings of altruism and empathy are more likely to spur people to assist others with whom they share commonality. It is difficult to feel empathetic toward a person whose situation and background one does not comprehend. Perceptions of similarity, by definition, provide, or at least signify, this comprehension. Perceptions of similarity provide people with an a priori intuition that they understand the plight of others. When this plight is brought to the fore, they are then more likely to be spurred by their

empathetic leanings to behave in altruistic manner than individuals who do not have this a priori sense of understanding.

The relationship between perceptions of similarity and empathy is largely supported in the psychological literature on helping and empathy, which reveals how shared group identity induces individuals to behave prosocially. Existing research demonstrates that empathy motivates people to behave altruistically toward (Krebs 1975; Stürmer et al. 2006) and, more specifically, to help (Hornstein 1978; Batson et al., 1981) others, especially when those others are perceived as similar.

More generally, perceptions of similarity provide a safe space in which altruistic endeavors are more likely to occur. Within groups of similar others, people are likely to believe that the chances of reciprocation of altruistic help are high, compared to situations involving more heterogeneous groups of people (Fong et al, 2006). It is important to note, however, that with the minimization of interpersonal differences comes a greater sense of shared humanity, which potentially encourages altruistic behaviors even in the absence of reciprocation. Indeed, when it comes to contemporary welfare redistribution, it is unreasonable to believe that the rich, or even the upper middle classes, ever expect lower class recipients of government assistance to return the favor. Yet, as I will show, this does not hinder some members of the upper classes to favor redistribution for altruistic reasons.

These arguments fit well with a newer dimension in the larger psychological literature on helping in general, where findings demonstrate that different sources of motivation spur individuals to help more-similar and more-different others (Dovidio et al., 1997; Levine et al., 2005; Omoto & Snyder 2002). I argue, however, that the

importance of perceptions of similarity can tell us about much more than people's attitudes toward redistribution. Just as these perceptions should condition the influence of self-interest on redistributive attitudes, perceptions of commonality should also condition the relationship between self-interest and partisanship. While it is true that income often correlates with support for parties of the right, I expect that perceptions of commonality with the poor mitigate wealthier people's support for parties traditionally opposed to redistribution. In other words, not only do perceptions of similarity with the poor influence people's attitudes about redistribution—both directly and indirectly by conditioning factors such as self-interest and empathy—but these perceptions have clear political implications insofar as they influence citizens' partisanship in ways not predicted by theories of self-interest.

This discussion highlights at least two relevant questions. First, who perceives similarities with whom? Extant research typically uses broad categories of identification, such as nation, ethnicity, or race to gauge individuals' social identities, but these measures do not allow for the permeability of group boundaries, which is troublesome when one wishes to study the ability of individuals to feel similar to (or identify with) members of different demographic categories. Second, are these perceptions static or are they influenced by contextual or environmental factors? Again, existing theories and research methods have done more to reify group boundaries, while ignoring the extent to which group identifications are contextually dependent and fluid.

The answer to the question of who perceives similarities with whom is a complicated one, to say the least. Perceptions of similarity undoubtedly are used to navigate everyday life, as people categorize themselves and others as belonging to groups

in order to simplify the otherwise complex social world in which they find themselves (Turner 1975). This categorization—and resulting identification with one’s group—in turn results in ingroup favoritism at the expense of the outgroup, which has a direct influence on behavior (Billig & Tajfel 1973). People typically categorize both themselves and others as belonging to multiple groups, and which categories are most salient depends on the specific context (Brewer 1991). It is important to highlight this caveat because its implications have been minimized in political science research.

For instance, one would expect that poor citizens might strongly favor welfare, but if identification with the nation is most salient, the poor may be less likely to support redistribution compared to contexts when class-based identities are most salient (Shayo 2009). That individuals have multiple identities also helps explain why not all white Americans oppose redistribution to African Americans (e.g. Gilens 1999) or why not all Swedes appear to oppose redistribution to immigrants (Eger 2010). It is certainly the case that the white/black and native/immigrant categorizations are important for some people. Yet, because, for example, native Swedes can categorize themselves as belonging to a number of different groups, sometimes they may categorize themselves and immigrants as belonging to the same group. Because these individuals categorize themselves and immigrants as sharing membership in a third (and possibly fourth, fifth, etc.) group, the native/immigrant divide may lessen in importance in determining their support for redistribution. This line of reasoning draws much from Gaertner & Dovidio’s (2000) Common Ingroup Identity Model, which draws attention to the possibility of expanding people’s perceptions of their ingroup’s boundaries in order to include former outgroup

members. What is noteworthy is that group boundaries are hardly as static as they are made to appear in survey-based social scientific research.

Nevertheless, most research on redistribution has focused on discrete identity traits that correlate with an individual's stand on redistribution. What is lacking is a bigger-picture assessment of how particular combinations and configurations of these multiple traits factor into the equation. This is why I believe it is necessary to draw attention to people's perceptions of similarity as opposed to their direct group identity. In other words, it is a question of complex and multi-layered, or multi-dimensional, identity, as opposed to single identity traits, that is key. This mode of conceptualizing identity fits well with Wimmer's (2000) theory of cultural compromise, which stresses the importance of the researcher's neutrality in regards to the specific group identifications (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity, race, etc.) that individuals use to structure their social interactions. Thus, the pertinent question becomes *to what extent do you feel you are similar to x*, as opposed to *to what extent do you identify as [nationality]* or *to what extent do you and x identify with the same group*.

Given the socially-dependent nature of people's perceptions of commonality with others and the various dimensions on which people may form linkages, people's feelings of similarity toward others are fluid and can change overtime and in different contexts (Brewer 1991). This implies that people can support redistribution to one group of people, but not to another, and that one person's attitudes about redistribution may change overtime as that individual's perceptions of similarity with welfare recipients change.

Receding Commonality

Although identification with others enables empathy and, by extension, extends support for redistribution, the fact of the matter is that a great number of groups of individuals perceive that they are dissimilar from one another. It is well established that the ingroup/outgroup dynamics arising from perceptions of dissimilarities between the rich and the poor are associated with a sharp decline in support for economic redistribution. This finding is most commonly witnessed in the United States, where better-off citizens (whites) are hesitant to support welfare programs they see as catering to the poor (blacks), whom are typically stereotyped as lazy and undeserving (Gilens 1999). The same story, however, plays out in Europe as well, where rising rates of migration of citizens from poorer, darker-skinned countries are often portrayed as taking unfair advantages of welfare state benefits. Even Sweden, whose welfare state has helped bring citizens perhaps the greatest amount of economic equality in the industrialized world, increases in immigration and the migration of refugees are linked to decreased support for redistribution (Eger 2009).

In the absence of perceptions of commonality, the chance that empathy with the poor might spark a sense of obligation to help others tumbles. As perceptions of similarity with others recede, so too do perceived understandings of the other's situation and plight. This, naturally, does not imply that people who perceive that they share little or nothing in common with the poor automatically oppose welfare—although it does imply that these people will be less likely to support redistribution than others. Why,

though, might individuals who do not identify with the poor, and who have little empathy for the poor, support welfare?

One factor that I believe is key in understanding support for redistribution among this subset of the population is self-interest. The distinction between the self and others becomes fuzzy when one strongly identifies with these others. Thus, the power of self-interest to influence one's opinions about providing assistance to these others becomes equally opaque. As perceptions of similarity—a key component of ingroup identification—fade, the boundary between self and others becomes starker by definition. Whereas self-interest may be indistinguishable from group interest or muted entirely by solidarity with others among those who perceive they share similarities with the poor, a different picture emerges when we examine those who feel they are different from the poor. Among this group of individuals, self-interest is no longer muted or indistinguishable from other factors. Hence, support for welfare becomes more heavily dependent on the extent to which redistribution is in the perceived interests of the individual. In other words, individuals who do not identify with welfare recipients nonetheless believe that they personally will benefit from redistribution are likely to support redistributive programs. On the other hand, individuals who do not identify with recipients and who do not believe that redistribution serves their interests are much less likely to support welfare.

Defining Self-Interest

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define self-interest, which, without proper specification, risks becoming tautological. Following the lead of Sears and Funk (1991), I define self-interest narrowly by focusing on individuals' calculations of their own short-term material costs and benefits. This definition includes five important components: calculations, own, short-term, material, and costs and benefits. I will discuss each of these components in detail, justifying why they are theoretically and empirically necessary in defining self-interest for the project at hand.

The first and last components of the definition of self-interest, calculations and costs and benefits, work in tandem and are highly cognitive in nature. These components require individuals to assess, either consciously or subconsciously, all information relevant to both their current and prospective wellbeing. While these components are relatively uncontroversial (and, at first glance, trite), their importance becomes clearer when one considers how socioeconomic factors and informational flows influence the extent to which citizens make, and are capable of making, these calculations. For instance, people with higher education levels arguably are more capable of calculating the material costs and benefits of government policies relative to the uneducated. Relatedly, the quality of information at one's disposal also influences people's ability to calculate costs and benefits.

The second component of the definition, own, likely is no more controversial, but it is perhaps somewhat more difficult to pin down. Although there is a distinction between self and group-interest, where this distinction lies is less than clear. Here, "own"

refers to one's calculation of *personal* short-term material cost and benefits—not the cost and benefits associated with the material wellbeing of a larger group. It is important, however, to concede that it is occasionally impossible to discriminate one's own, personal wellbeing from that of others'. This is especially the case when one takes into account family structures where one's material wellbeing is inseparable from that of fellow family members. Theoretically, this familial caveat applies where individuals are cognitively unable to calculate their own costs and benefits without taking into consideration other family members' costs and benefits. For example, this could result from situations where one family member relies on the income of another family member, or in situations where income from every family member is combined to cover everyone's living expenses.

Following the lead of other scholars of self-interest, I define the concept with a view toward individuals' short-term costs and benefits (Sears & Funk 1991). By focusing narrowly on the short-term, I am able to avoid the empirical pitfalls inherent in mapping out individuals' long-term interests. Although individuals indubitably have long-term interests, it is also undoubtedly the case that people are more capable of identifying what is better for them in the short-term as opposed to what is best in the long-term. Over the long-term, past costs may turn out to have later benefits, and vice-versa. For example, no one wants to lose their job because doing so is not in their short-term best interest; however, though a lost job means less money in the short-term, it may result in finding a higher paying job down the road. Is this to say that losing the job was in a person's self-interest? In the short-term the answer is a definite no; in the long-term, extraneous events, and luck or fate, muddle the picture. People typically are myopic when it comes to their

economic well being. This may be so because it is easier for people to foresee what their personal (household) finances will look like next month than it is to tell what their economic situation will be in seven years. It definitely is no easier for academics to identify and measure people's long-term interests. As suggested by the example above, in the long-term, nearly any life contingency might be construed in hindsight as being in one's self-interest. A lost job might result in a better-paying job; having a near-death experience might lead to a life-altering epiphany; higher taxes early in life might lead to better care later in life. Few people want to lose their job, have a near-death experience, or pay higher taxes, of course, because of the short-term consequences, which are easier to quantify and predict.

Lastly, the definition of self-interest used in this study concentrates attention on individuals' material resources. Critics might argue that this is too narrow a definition. They might cite that people who contribute to charities do so in their self-interest, not because doing so will bring them any profit but because it makes them feel good about themselves. Using the critic's definition of self-interest, any action that positively affects an individual's mood, emotions, or more generally psychological state, is in that individual's self-interest to pursue—even when these acts contradict the individual's material interests. Not only is the critic's definition tautological (which is enough of a reason to discount it), but it also contradicts how the vast majority of people both in and out of academia define and use the concept. It is in an individual's self-interest to donate to charity if one is chasing tax deductions; but self-interest's role disappears when one donates to charity out of a sense of altruism or empathy.

Acting on altruism, empathy, and related motivations might make people feel good about themselves. Interestingly, however, among some individuals this feeling likely stems from a recognition, or sense of pride, that they acted despite of their own self-interest. It is, of course, illogical that one furthers one's self-interest by purposefully negating one's self-interest. Therefore, in line with other mainstream researchers, the current study emphasizes material resources in its analysis of self-interest.

Conclusion

It should be clear that both self-interest and altruism affect people's attitudes toward helping others. It is perfectly reasonable that some people, in certain contexts, find their behaviors and beliefs governed by self-interest, whereas the behaviors and beliefs of other people, in other contexts, are influenced more strongly by altruism or empathy. It is also quite expectable that people might find their opinions dictated by self-interest at one time and by empathetic emotions at another. Yet, the literature to date on public attitudes toward redistribution has frequently pitted one explanation against the other in a dichotomous fashion that left little room for the possibility that both matter. This blindness, I suspect, in part results from the disposition of scholars to base their theories on grand theories of human nature. In other words, theorists' focus on self-interest versus altruism likely boils down to their assumptions of human beings as being naturally selfish or giving in nature.

But, of course, humans are capable of being both selfish and giving, and this chapter laid the groundwork for understanding how both self-interest and altruism-

empathy together explain public attitudes toward redistribution from the rich to the poor. Tying in studies of group identity, I argue that perceptions of commonality vis-à-vis welfare recipients condition the influence these separate considerations have on redistributive attitudes. Namely, redistributive attitudes are more likely to be driven by self-interest when the people in question do not perceive they share commonalities with the poor. For these people, no sense of community, obligation, or linked fate binds them to those in need, thus leaving ample room for self-interest to play a defining role. People, however, who perceive that they share commonality with welfare recipients are more likely to find themselves swayed by altruism-empathy and less by self-interest. This is because perceptions of commonality underscore a shared group identity, replete with feelings—either conscious or, perhaps more likely, not—of community, obligation, and shared fate. Not only does the distinction between the self and the other become blurred, but group values and norms, as well as the psychological benefit of feeling part of a group, dilute the salience of monetary or material concerns—concerns that are vital in academic and lay conceptions of self-interest. It is the topic of self-interest to which I turn in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Self-Interest

Although a review of the evidence makes it quite clear that self-interest is far from the solitary factor determining people's attitudes toward welfare redistribution, it is nonetheless equally as obvious that self-interest does figure into some people's opinions about welfare at least some of the time. Indeed, the underlying logic inherent in the Meltzer & Richard model, that the rich oppose the redistribution of their wealth to the poor and that the poor support this redistribution, appears so commonsensical that it must accurately reflect some degree of reality.

It is to delineating when, or among whom, self-interest plays an important role in predicting, or even affecting, people's attitudes about economic redistribution that I turn my attention in this chapter. As sketched out in the previous chapter, I expect that the importance self-interest has in influencing helping behavior becomes less salient in step with heightened perceptions of commonality vis-à-vis others. Group norms, psychological benefits, or perhaps group interests diminish the power of raw self-interest in situations where individuals identify themselves as being similar to those in need.

The opposite is the case, naturally, among those individuals who identify themselves as being dissimilar to those in need. The less that group obligations bind people together, the more decisive self-interest becomes. In these contexts, individuals are prone to think of and for themselves—they are individualized. Many times, people in this situation might dismiss extending support to those in need out of hand. In the context of this study, this implies that these individuals' likelihood of opposing welfare

redistribution is higher than those who perceive similarities link them to recipients. Social (ethnic, racial, class, etcetera) differences between the haves and the have-nots potentially elicit reflexive opposition to welfare—a hypothesis broadly supported by the empirical literature (e.g. Gilens 1999; Wong 2010).

Yet, this opposition is not guaranteed and, in fact, can be mitigated by self-interest. Not all “haves” are, after all, equal. Some are more at risk of requiring welfare assistance than others. In simplified form, the rich who perceive that they have very little in common with welfare recipients support redistribution with a low probability. They lack the sense of solidarity to do so, and they find that redistribution is at odds with their self-interest. As one goes down the economic ladder, however, the picture changes. Although, for instance, a person in the lower-middle class might still perceive that he shares very little in common with his vision of the prototypical welfare recipient, he is more likely than the tycoon to find redistribution in his self-interest. He might already benefit from redistribution or believe that he might in the future.

This chapter seeks to investigate these claims empirically, using both pre-existing and new data resources. A number of existing national and cross-national survey projects include questions regarding respondents’ attitudes about redistribution in their protocols. Unfortunately, fewer existing surveys probe respondents about their perceptions of commonalities vis-à-vis welfare recipients. Nonetheless, the data I turn to below are global in scope: From the United States and Western Europe to greater Eurasia. I use these survey data to assess the extent to which the predictive power of self-interest on redistributive attitudes is conditional upon perceptions of similarity. I augment the large-n analysis with a series of original experiments I conducted in the United States. As I

explain in more depth below, these experiments allow me to test more explicitly the relationships between self-interest, perceptions of commonality, and redistributive attitudes.

The United States

I begin the analysis with data from the United States, where welfare redistribution is commonly conceived as a highly contentious political issue even though, relative to redistributive programs in other industrialized democracies, very little income or wealth is redistributed from the rich to the poor (Alesina and Glaeser 2004). Some scholars, such as Alesina and Glaeser (2004) and Gilens (1999), argue that welfare spending and welfare support are low in the United States due to the country's relatively high degree of social heterogeneity, which works to undermine the social solidarity many see as necessary for economic redistribution. At the same time, however, the assumptions of the Meltzer-Richard (1981) model that holds that redistributive preferences are a direct outcome of one's placement on the economic ladder, such as majority rule electoral rules, are predicated on the American and British experience.

In this section, I analyze 1996 American National Election Study (ANES) survey results to see if American's perceptions of similarity with the poor condition the extent to which their self-interest influences their attitudes about redistribution. Preferably, I could use newer ANES data to augment the 1996 data, but unfortunately, the relevant questions regarding respondents' perceptions of similarity with the poor were not included in subsequent years.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used in analysis of the US data is drawn from a single, straightforward question that asks about people's thoughts about redistribution from the rich to the poor:

Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale at point 1. Other people think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. Suppose these people are at the other end of a scale at point 7. And of course some other people have opinions at points 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?

Independent Variables and their Differing Influences

Self-interest is captured using income. In order to differentiate respondents who perceive similarities with welfare recipients from those who do not, I use responses based on responses to the following: "Please read over the list and tell me the letter for those groups you feel particularly close to—people who are most like you in their ideas and interests and feelings about things." Respondents were shown the following list of groups, which were assigned a letter: Poor people, Asian Americans, Liberals, The elderly, Blacks, Labor unions, Feminists, Southerners, Business people, Young people, Conservatives, Hispanic-Americans, Women, Working-class people, Whites, Middle-class people, and Men.

To capture respondents' perceptions of similarity with welfare beneficiaries, I created a zero to three index. Respondents who did not list the poor, blacks, or Hispanics were assigned a zero, those who chose all three were assigned a three, and those who chose one or two of the groups were coded accordingly. This measure accounts for the major groups that are perceived to benefit from economic redistribution in the United States.⁵

Results

Table 3.1 shows the estimates from ordinary least squares (OLS) regression from the analysis of the American data. As shown, the hypothesis is unsupported in these data, and in fact, the coefficient for the Income*Dissimilarity interaction leans in the wrong direction. These findings, while disappointing, do not fully undermine this chapter's hypotheses.

Namely, it is important to note that the variable measuring perceptions of similarity does not account well for the possibility that, though people coded 0 do not feel that they share similarities with probable recipients of redistribution, these individuals might not feel that they are dissimilar from recipients either. In other words, not choosing African Americans, Poor people, or Hispanics from the list of groups to whom you feel close to does not imply that you feel far from members of these groups. As such, the measure provides a decent measure of who feels close to probable recipients, but not of

⁵ It should be noted, however, that using the measure of any group individually or using a combination of any two of the groups does not alter the results in any meaningful way.

who perceives they are dissimilar. As I show below, a better measure of perceptions of similarity produces results more in line with this study's hypotheses.

The United Kingdom

The situation in the United Kingdom regarding the redistribution of income from the rich to the poor is similar to that found in the United States insofar as the 1980's witnessed a degree of welfare retrenchment under Thatcher and Reagan not experienced in other industrialized democracies (Pierson 1994). Furthermore, the United Kingdom and the United States are among the most unequal of the top industrialized democracies in terms of income distribution (Wilkerson & Pickett, 2010), and both are generally categorized as welfare states in the economically liberal tradition (Esping-Anderson, 1990).

The following analysis, therefore, offers a test of the self-interest hypothesis in a similar social context, and importantly using different measures. Indeed, the British Social Attitudes Survey (2009) offers a more finely tuned measure of people's perceptions of the poor than that found in other social surveys, as discussed below. Given the null results of the American study, testing the hypothesis in a relatively similar context, using stronger measures, is of vital importance. If the data were to uncover no conditional influence of perceptions of similarity on self-interest's relationship with redistributive attitudes, the validity of the theory presented in this study rightly would be called into question. In fact, the results presented below lend support to this hypothesis. Unsurprisingly, it appears that a stronger, more adequate measure of perceptions of

commonality is better able to demonstrate the power of these perceptions to alter the relationship between self-interest and attitudes toward welfare redistribution.

Dependent Variable

To measure support for redistribution among respondents to the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey, I use responses to the following question:

“It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.” [1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree]

Independent Variables and their Differing Influences

In order to measure self-interest, I again follow the literature by focusing on respondents’ household income. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables, however, are expected to diverge across different subgroups in the sample. In order to measure perceptions of similarity, I turn to responses to the following question: “In general, how close do you feel to immigrants from non-western countries? By close we mean how much do you feel you have in common with them. Please answer on a scale from 1 to 9 where a score of 1 means not at all close and a score of 9 means very close.” Unfortunately, similar questions were not asked pertaining to perceptions toward the unemployed or the poor more generally. However, because the British elite and public often associate welfare recipients with immigrants (Daley, 2011; Light, 2011;

Osborn, 2013), it is logical to assume that people's perceptions of immigrants are tightly tied to their perceptions of welfare recipients more generally.

Results

The OLS estimates in Table 3.2 show provide support for the hypothesis: Namely, as perceptions of dissimilarity increase, self-interest's negative influence on support for redistribution also increases.

Data from the 2009 survey also allow me to delve somewhat deeper to test the self-interest hypothesis. For this part of the analysis, I use the following question to measure the dependent variable: "Do you think Britain spends too much money, too little money, or about the right amount on improving the living conditions of immigrants from non-western countries?" [1 too much to 3 too little]. Redistribution favoring immigrants is likely to evince at least two dimensions of self-interest. In line with the previously used measure, self-interested individuals are likely to think in terms of their personal income. However, some richer individuals may favor government redistribution to immigrants because they perceive immigration as beneficial to their personal business interests. Although benefits for immigrants may come out of their pockets, this cost may be more than offset by the benefits of cheap immigrant labor for their firms.

Among other workers, however, this should not be the case. Among workers who glean no self-interested benefits from the government providing benefits to immigrants, we should find that the more one earns and the more one perceives oneself to be

dissimilar to immigrants, the less one should support redistribution to immigrants (i.e. hypothesis two).

In order to distinguish between those whose self-interest might lead them to support redistribution toward immigrants despite its possible effects on personal income and those for whom this should not be the case, I divide respondents by occupational class. In the first group, I include those who have higher positions in organizations that are likely to benefit from immigration. These are workers who are (or were) employers in large organizations; are (were) in higher management and professional positions as well as lower management and professional positions; those in higher technical and supervisory occupations; and those classified as having intermediate occupations. In the second group, I include individuals who are more likely to perceive immigrants as competing for their jobs. These are employers in small organizations, own account workers; those employed in lower supervisory and technical occupations; and those employed in semi-routine and routine occupations. All other measures are the same as above.

As a first step, I test if type of occupation is associated with support for redistribution favoring immigrants. This simple test allows me to confirm that attitudes about redistribution to immigrants are associated with one's placement in one of the two occupational classes. The first column in Table 3.3 presents the OLS results from a non-interactive model and shows that occupational type (Group 1 coded 1, Group 2 coded 0) is positively and statistically significantly related to support for redistribution toward immigrants, as is income. That is, people who stand to gain from immigration favor redistribution to immigrants more than those who do not.

The second and third columns support the claim made above that the people who both perceive that they share dissimilarities with immigrants and have greater income are less supportive of redistribution than are people who share similarities or have smaller incomes—but only when their earnings do not stand to benefit from immigration. Among individuals whose earnings do stand to benefit from immigration, the relationship between income and perceptions of dissimilarity disappears.

It is important to point out that, on average, individuals in Group 1 have higher incomes than those in Group 2 (11.70 and 7.94, respectively on a 1 to 17 point scale; $t = 20.95$, $df = 2653.68$; $p < 0.001$). However, income in both groups is similarly distributed around the mean (standard deviations: 4.63 and 4.61, respectively). In other words, although incomes in Group 1 are higher than in Group 2 on average, we find a great deal of variation in income in both groups. Thus, the results are not driven by a lack of variation in income in either group.

Cross-National Analysis

To this point, I have examined the extent to which perceptions of commonality condition the influence of self-interest on respondents' attitudes about redistribution within two fairly similar contexts—the United States and the United Kingdom. Although the opinions of citizens of these two countries are undoubtedly important, it could be the case that perceptions of similarity exert a different influence on self-interest's relationship on redistributive attitudes than is found in other contexts.

In this section, I test the hypothesis on a much larger and more diverse sample. Using the 2008 wave of the European Values Survey, which surveys respondents in forty-six countries on their opinions on a variety of political and social issues, I am able to probe if the self-interest hypothesis is generalizable beyond the liberal welfare states of the United States and the United Kingdom. Although the survey includes respondents from welfare state stalwarts in Scandinavia and Western Europe, the survey was also fielded in countries research on redistribution often overlooks, such as Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and Armenia among many others.⁶ Although it is certainly the case that entrenched welfare programs are most evident in wealthier industrialized democracies, as epitomized by the Scandinavian welfare states, redistribution—whether in practice or in aspiration—is a common feature common to more political systems than is apparent in the list of countries typically included in academic studies on the subject.

Dependent Variable

Turning to the final survey analysis, in order to capture people's attitudes toward redistribution, I use responses to the following prompt: "On this card you see a number of opposite views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale?: 1

⁶ The full list of countries/regions include: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Cyprus Turkish Cypriot Community, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine.

incomes should be made more equal [through] 10 there should be greater incentives for individual effort.”⁷

Independent Variables and their Different Influences

In order to measure self-interest, I again use a measure of household income. In order to assess whether individuals perceive the poor to be more similar or more different, I use a question on the EVS that asks about respondents’ perceptions regarding the causes of poverty: “Why are there people in this country who live in need? Here are four possible reasons. Which one reason do you consider to be most important? [because they are unlucky; because of laziness and lack of willpower; because of injustice in our society; it’s an inevitable part of modern progress; none of these].”

While the adequacy of this question may not be immediately apparent, I argue that people’s perceptions of the causes of poverty relate very much to how they perceive the poor vis-à-vis themselves. For instance, people who believe that those in need are poor out of laziness or lack of willpower hold negative stereotypes of the poor. Because people are less likely to use negative stereotypes to define the groups to which they themselves belong (Fishkin et al. 1993; Ryan & Bogart 1997), I argue that people who stereotype the poor as lazy perceive very few similarities between themselves and the poor.⁸ When people do not negatively stereotype the poor, it is less likely the case that

⁷ Responses were coded in the reverse, so that 1 denotes opposition to and 10 support for redistribution.

⁸ By using this measure, I assume that people are unlikely to describe themselves as lazy. I would argue that poor individuals who believe that people live in need because of their

they consider that they and the poor belong to two separate groups, and are therefore more likely to perceive that they share similarities.⁹

This assumption is supported using data the 1996 American sample. In addition to the variables analyzed above, the 1996 survey asked respondents if they believed African Americans were hardworking (coded 1) or lazy (coded 7). Using the measure of perceived similarities specifically with blacks discussed above, I find that these perceptions are strongly associated with believing that African Americans are hardworking as opposed to lazy, even when controlling for a host of demographic variables such as income and minority status. The same is true of the relationship between believing that whites are hardworking and perceiving similarities with whites. This additional analysis lends credence to my supposition that perceptions of laziness are closely tied to perceptions of similarities.

Naturally, the lack of a negative stereotype does not immediately translate into perceptions of shared similarities, and, as such, I am more capable of identifying with this measure the subgroup that perceives the poor as being dissimilar than I am of identifying those who perceive that they share many similarities with the beneficiaries of

laziness consider themselves the exception to the rule, and as such consider themselves as distinct (dissimilar) from other poor people.

⁹ Of course, given the finding that members of certain minority groups may subscribe to negative group stereotypes (Simon & Hamilton 1994; Rudman et al. 2002), this measure is unable to sparse out poor people who identify with the poor while still considering the poor lazy. This, I believe, is a very minor problem. First, these individuals, if they exist at all, would represent a miniscule proportion of the sample. Second, studies of minority individuals' negative self-stereotypes focus primarily on the influence these stereotypes have on individuals' personal performance or behavior and have yet to thoroughly examine if these negative stereotypes bolster or undermine group solidarity. I would wager that individuals who associate negative stereotypes with other ingroup members feel less similar to these other members than do individuals who associate positive stereotypes with the group. This, of course, is an empirical question, but is beyond the purview of the current study.

redistribution. Nonetheless, I do believe that this measure is capable of identifying those individuals who are more likely to perceive similarities linking them to the poor. I count respondents who believe that people live in need because they are unlucky, because of injustice in society, and because it's an inevitable part of modern progress as those who are more likely than others to perceive that they share similarities with the poor. These individuals do not associate negative stereotypes with being poor; instead, they are more likely to believe that being in need could happen to people like themselves.

Results

Table 3.4 shows the OLS estimates from the cross-national analysis. Here, I again find support for the self-interest hypothesis. Among people who perceive that they are dissimilar from recipients, higher incomes are strongly and negatively related to support for redistribution, as shown by the interaction coefficient in the second column.

Experiments

To this point, I have examined if variance in individuals' perceptions of similarity with welfare recipients is associated with a change in the correlation between self-interest and redistributive attitudes. Naturally, by using cross-sectional survey data, the analysis thus far has been unable to ascertain the extent to which any of these relationships—i.e. the conditional relationship between perceptions of similarity on the one hand and self-

interest and redistributive attitudes on the other, and the relationship between self-interest and redistributive attitudes—may be causal.

In order to gauge the extent to which changes in perceptions of commonality affect the extent to which self-interest influences attitudes about redistribution—and, separately, to capture the extent to which changes in self-interest matters only when perceptions of commonality are low—I conducted two experiments using undergraduate subjects at the University of Illinois. As the sample of students is hardly representative of any national population, the goal of the experiments is not to measure attitudes representative of any larger population. Instead, the experiments in this chapter aim to capture, first, the extent to which changes in perceptions affect changes in the relationship between self-interest and redistributive attitudes and, second, how changes in self-interest result in change in attitudes contingent on pre-existing perceptions of similarity.

In the first experiment, I directly manipulate subjects' perceptions of commonality with welfare recipients. I then gauge the extent to which this manipulation results in a change in the relationship between subjects' self-interest and their attitudes toward redistribution to the poor. Building on the first experiment, the second experiment first gauges subjects' pre-existing perceptions of similarity with recipients. I then manipulate subjects' self-interest. As I explain below, based on the theory explicated above, changes in self-interest should affect a commensurate change in redistributive attitudes among subjects who perceive few commonalities vis-à-vis recipients but should not be associated with any change in welfare attitudes among subjects who perceive many commonalities.

As is the case throughout this larger study, the use of undergraduate students as subjects in the experiments may serve as a hard test for the hypotheses under scrutiny. Undergraduate students are, by and large, more liberal, less (overtly) prejudiced, more educated, and most definitely younger than the larger population, making them perhaps one of the groups most likely to favor redistribution according to the literature. Therefore, self-interest manipulations, in this chapter, and empathy manipulations, in the next, that decrease support for redistribution among subsets of this small sample would likely have even greater effects among members of larger, national samples.

Experiment 1

In the first experiment, I manipulate subjects' perceived similarity with recipients and then test if the predictive power of subjects' of self-interest diverges across these perceptions. To manipulate subjects' perceptions of commonality with welfare beneficiaries, sixty-four white college undergraduates were randomly assigned to one of the following two questions:

Thinking for a moment of a group of poorer people who are very similar to you—who share many of your feelings, opinions, and ideas—to what extent do you support the redistribution of income from the rich to the poor? (1 to 5 scale) (n = 34)

Thinking for a moment of a group of poorer people who are very different from you—who share few of your feelings, opinions, and ideas—to what extent do you support the redistribution of income from the rich to the poor? (1 to 5 scale) (n = 30)

Unlike the measures of self-interest used in the analyses in the previous sections, which rely on income, the protocol in this experiment attempts to measure self-interest more directly. All subjects were asked the following question: “To what extent do you believe you might need government assistance, such as food stamps or unemployment benefits, in the next ten years?” Subjects could choose one of the following responses: Will definitely not need government assistance; most likely will not need government assistance; most likely will need government assistance; will definitely need government assistance. None of the sixty-four subjects chose “will definitely need government assistance.” Responses were coded from 0 (most likely will need assistance) to 2 (will definitely not need assistance).

This measure explicitly measures prospective self-interest by identifying those individuals who believe that they will need government assistance (a form of redistribution) in the near future and who, thus, have a strong interest to support redistribution from the rich to the poor. At the other end, the measure identifies those individuals who believe that they will not require assistance and, thus, would find it in their self-interest to oppose the redistribution from the rich to the poor. Importantly, subjects across the two groups expressed identical levels of self-interest, with those primed to consider more similar recipients expressing a mean degree of self-interest of 1.18, and those who were primed to consider more dissimilar recipients expressed a 1.23 mean of self-interest ($t = -0.36$, $df = 57.23$, $p = 0.72$).

If the theory introduced in this study is accurate, I expect to find that the measure for self-interest is negatively correlated with the measure capturing support for redistribution among subjects who were primed to consider more dissimilar recipients.

On the other hand, among those subjects primed to consider more similar recipients, we should not expect to find this negative correlation. These hypotheses are supported by the data. Among more-dissimilar subjects, redistributive attitudes and the self-interest measure are indeed negatively correlated ($r = -0.33$, $p = 0.08$); whereas among more-similar subjects, we find a positive, though statistically insignificant, correlation ($r = 0.26$, $p = 0.14$).

In addition to examining divergent correlations, I follow the method used in the preceding sections and model the interactive effect of perceptions and self-interest. Here the expectations are equally as clear. Individuals who find it in their self-interest to support redistribution will most likely do so whether or not they are primed to consider themselves similar or dissimilar from recipients. On the other hand, individuals who find it in their self-interest to oppose redistribution should be more likely to do so when they perceive similarities with recipients and much less likely when they perceive dissimilarities with the poor.

The results, displayed in Table 3.5 and graphically in Figure 3.1, largely substantiate these expectations. Whereas priming subjects to consider more dissimilar/similar recipients has no discernable effect among those subjects whose self-interest leads them to favor redistribution, the effect is large among those whose self-interest leads them to oppose redistribution, as depicted in Figure 1.

In other words, individuals whose self-interest dictates that they oppose redistribution will do so when they perceive they are dissimilar from recipients, but will waive their self-interested concerns by supporting redistribution that benefits more-similar others. Individuals whose self-interest encourages them to support redistribution,

however, will do so regardless if they perceive that redistribution will go toward similar or dissimilar others.

Experiment 2

In order to assess further the extent to which the effect of self-interest on people's redistributive attitudes is conditioned on their perceptions of similarity vis-à-vis recipients, I fielded a second experiment. Instead of manipulating subjects' perceptions of commonality with welfare recipients, the second experiment alters subjects' self-interest. If the theory that self-interest matters only when individuals perceive that they share little in common with beneficiaries is true, then manipulating subjects' self-interest should result in a change of redistributive attitudes only among those subjects who claimed to have little in common with the recipients. Conversely, changes in self-interest should not be associated with changes in redistributive attitudes among subjects who perceive themselves closer to welfare recipients.

In the fall of 2013, 213 undergraduate students participated in an online survey experiment.¹⁰ Subjects were first asked to identify the groups of people they feel particularly close to (see Figure 3.2). Following this, they were asked the inverse of the question; namely, to identify the groups they feel particularly far from. This method of measuring perceptions of commonality with welfare recipients, importantly, ensconces the target group (African Americans) within a larger list of social groups, which helps to

¹⁰ In total, 216 students participated; however, I exclude three subjects who chose that they “answered the questions with no thought and/or effort” in response to a post-test question designed to gauge subjects' level of attentiveness.

limit possible priming effects. The ordering of the groups in these first two questions was randomized across all subjects. These two questions would produce a measure of perceptions of commonality ranging 1 (close), 0 (neither close nor far—i.e. did not choose African Americans in either question), -1 (far).

Following the questions designed to measure perceptions of commonality, subjects were then asked three demographic-type questions in order to obfuscate further the purpose of the experiment.

After answering the filler questions, the computer randomly assigned the subjects to one of two groups. All subjects read the following fictional, though believable, information: “The number of people on food stamps is at record high. According to official estimates, roughly 8% of all whites and 28% of all African Americans receive food stamps.” However, subjects who were randomly assigned to the first group (Self-Interest to Oppose) read the following: “The typical college graduate will never need food stamps, but should expect to pay more in taxes to keep the program running.” This manipulation leads the subject to believe that the chances s/he will need food stamps in the future are exceedingly low, but that the costs of the program will cut into their personal economic wellbeing. In other words, the manipulation is designed to trigger a self-interested opposition to the program.

Subjects assigned to the second group (Self-Interest to Favor) read the following: “Given the weak job market, the typical college graduate will need food stamps at some point within the first three years of graduating.” This prompt is designed to trigger self-interest in support of the program.

As such, this experiment's self-interest manipulation should not be conceived of as *self-interest/~self-interest*, but rather *self-interest to oppose/self-interest to favor*. This allows for a more nuanced analysis of self-interest's role in fomenting support/opposition for redistribution. Although discussions on self-interest's role often focus on self-interest diluting the support for welfare by the rich, the discussion easily expands to encompass self-interest's part in mobilizing support among the poor.

In terser terms, the reasoning put forth in this study suggests that the self-interested poor should support redistribution even if they do not perceive that they share commonalities with those who find themselves in the same boat. Naturally, poor people who do perceive that they share commonalities with the poor can therefore support redistribution for both self-interest and group solidarity reasons, and it is likely that their support for welfare surpasses the support of the poor whose motivations are based solely upon their self-interest.

After the subjects read their respective prompts they were asked "To what extent do you support or oppose the food stamp program?" [strongly support (coded 4) to strongly oppose (coded 0)].

If it is true that self-interest effects attitudes about redistribution, but only when individuals perceive themselves to be different from recipients, I expect that the self-interest manipulation induces a change in responses among those who earlier expressed that they feel they are particularly far, or different from, African Americans. The self-interest manipulation should not be associated with any changes when we look at people who did not express that they feel far from African Americans.

Table 3.6 shows that the OLS regression coefficient for the interaction between my pre-test measure of similarity and Self-Interest (Group 1 coded 1, Group 2 coded 0) is negative and approaches the traditional bounds of statistical significance.

Figure 3.3 shows the interaction in a manner more amenable to interpretation. Here, it is clear that, among subjects who perceive themselves to be closer to African Americans, it matters little if they find it in their personal self-interest to favor or oppose food stamps. In fact, the chances that individuals in this group supports redistribution remains virtually unchanged as we move from subjects who find it in their self-interest to support redistribution to subjects who should find it in their self-interest to oppose redistribution. This, clearly, is not a result that one would expect using the logic of traditional economists and political scientists who place self-interest at the center of their analysis.

On the other hand, among subjects who perceive themselves to be dissimilar from African Americans, support for food stamps is lower if they find it in their self-interest to oppose the program (i.e. it is unlikely they'll ever need food stamps, but they will have to pay for the program) than if they find it in their self-interest to support the program (i.e. they might need it themselves in the short-term). These results are supportive of the hypothesis that self-interest matters when it comes to affecting support for redistribution, but it matters mostly (only) for those who perceive that they are dissimilar from redistribution's prototypical recipients.

Conclusions

This chapter has assessed the extent to which individuals' self-interest influence their attitudes about welfare redistribution from the rich to the poor. Although self-interest commonly is used by pundits, academics, and laypeople alike to explain preferences toward redistribution, the evidence I presented in this chapter strongly suggests that self-interest's role is heavily conditioned on people's identifications with the poor. Contributing to work in psychology and experimental economics, I demonstrate that when individuals identify with the poor—i.e. when they perceive they share similarities—their conceptualization of the self expands and their material interests become less salient. It is only when people with means perceive that they are different from the poor that their self-interest gains importance in explaining their attitudes toward redistribution.

The evidence presented in this chapter sheds important light on the limitations of the classical view that welfare attitudes—and, by extension, welfare policies—are built upon citizens' rational calculations of their self-interest. While it is true that some of the rich oppose redistribution because it cuts into their personal net worth, it is also the case that some wealthy citizens favor welfare programs because they sense a bond of commonality, or solidarity, with those who benefit from these programs.

It would appear that the poor support redistribution regardless of whether or not they identify with fellow recipients. In terms of the first experiment presented above, subjects who believed it was in their self-interest to support redistribution favored redistribution at equal rates when asked specifically about recipients who they perceived

as similar to themselves and different from themselves. In the second experiment, as shown in Figure 3, it appears that subjects who perceived themselves as far from recipients voiced less support for redistribution even when it was in their self-interest to support it, compared to subjects who both found it in their self-interest to support redistribution and who perceived similarities with recipients. Though this difference is not statistically significant, it does suggest that the redistributive attitudes of those in need are conditioned by perceptions of similarity just as are the attitudes of the wealthy.

Future work could easily build on and expand the experiments presented above. In addition to altering the manipulations—self-interest could be primed in a variety of ways—future experiments could attempt to manipulate both perceptions of similarity with welfare recipients and subjects’ degree of self-interest. Given the small *n* available using undergraduate subject pools as utilized in the above experiments, I was unable to include multiple manipulations in one design.

Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, it appears that people who perceive that they share commonalities with welfare recipients consistently support redistribution regardless of their self-interest. This initial evidence suggests that though the attitudes of people who find it in their self-interest to support redistribution can be diminished if they perceive they are different from other recipients, the attitudes of individuals who perceive that they share similarities with welfare recipients is not moderated by their self-interest. As discussed, future work is necessary to test the resilience of this claim, but the following chapter will explore how another important factor—empathy—conditions attitudes, not of those who perceive that they are different from, but of those who perceive that they are similar to recipients.

Tables and Figures

Table 3.1 ANES 1996

Model	
Intercept	4.05***
Income*Dissimilarity	0.001
Similarity/Dissimilarity	-0.25 ^a
Income	-0.05
Sex	-0.15
Age	0.005
n	949
adj. R ²	0.20

Party fixed-effects not shown. ^a Similarity reverse coded

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 3.2 BSAS 2009

Model	
Intercept	2.60***
Income*Dissimilarity	-0.01**
Dissimilarity	0.07 ^a
Income	0.02
Sex	0.04
Age	0.02
n	749
adj. R ²	0.13

Party fixed-effects not shown. ^a Similarity reverse coded

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 3.3 BSAS 2009

Model	Overall	Group 1	Group 2
Intercept	2.14***	1.88***	1.92***
Income*Dissimilarity		0.0003	-0.01**
Dissimilarity	-0.12***	-0.10*	-0.06*
Income	0.02***	0.03	0.08**
Sex	0.01	0.17	-0.15**
Age	-0.01	-0.02	-0.08
Occupation Type	0.14**		
n	810	382	428
adj. R ²	0.20	0.20	0.20

Party fixed-effects not shown.

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 3.4 EVS 2008

Intercept	6.80***
Income*Dissimilarity	-0.09***
Similarity/Dissimilarity	0.11 ^a
Income	-0.11***
Immigrant	-0.34*
Ideology	-0.12***
Age	0.003**
Sex	-0.10**
n	39,700
adj. R ²	0.15

Models run with clustered standard errors.

Country fixed-effects not shown.

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

^a Similarity reverse coded

Table 3.5 Similarity and Self-Interest, small-n survey experiment 1

Intercept	3.41***
Self-Interest	-0.49
Similarity Condition	-0.59
Self-Interest * Similarity	1.00*
adj. R ²	0.11

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Table 3.6 Similarity and Self-Interest, small-n survey experiment 2

Intercept	2.83***
Self-Interest	-0.008
Similarity Condition	-0.12
Self-Interest * Similarity	-0.60+
adj. R ²	0.04

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$ + $p < 0.06$

Figure 3.1

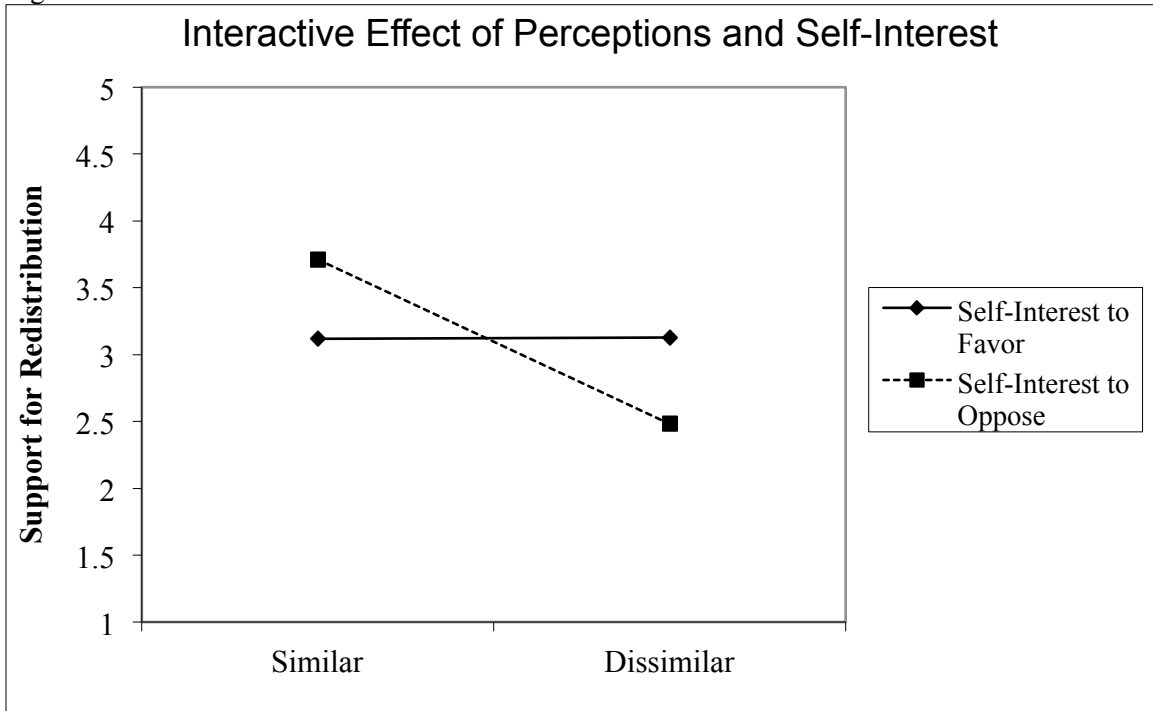
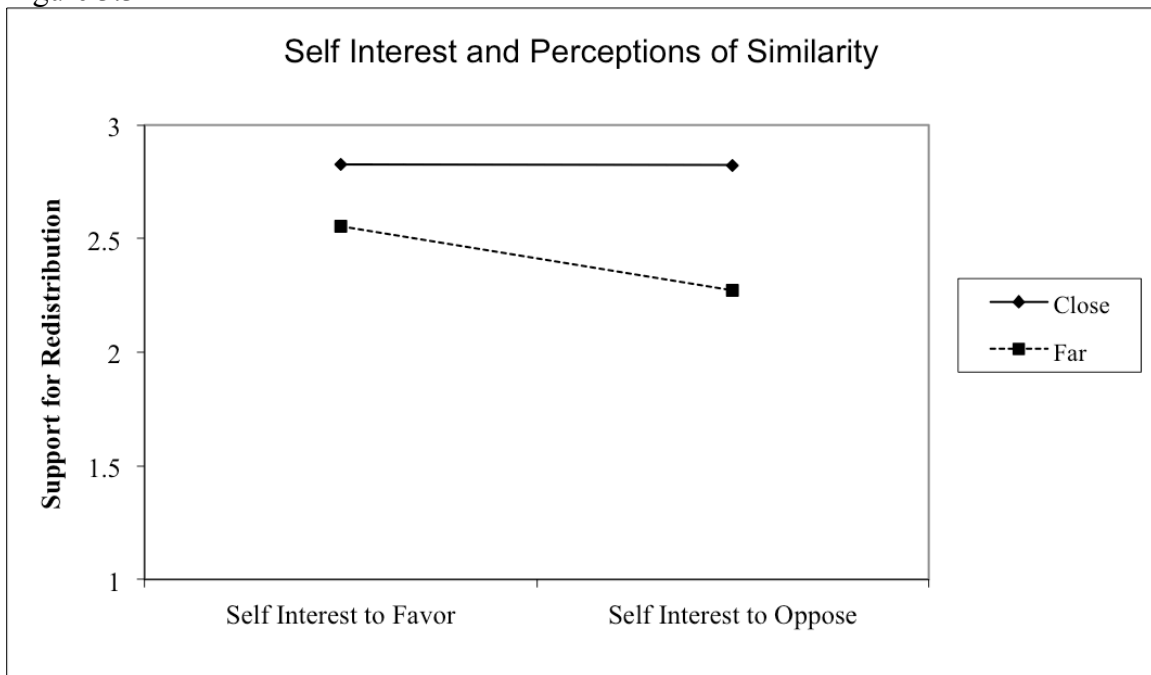


Figure 3.2

***1. Here is a list of groups. Please read over the list and select which groups you feel particularly close to--people who are most like you in their ideas and feelings about things. Select as many as apply.**

☐ rich people	☐ members of your immediate family
☐ middle-class people	☐ Christians
☐ African Americans	☐ business people
☐ Muslims	☐ atheists
☐ young people	☐ poor people
☐ educated people	☐ children
☐ Hispanics	☐ Americans
☐ whites	☐ all humans
☐ uneducated people	☐ None of the above
☐ the elderly	

Figure 3.3



Chapter 4

Empathy

Two Versions of Empathy

In contrast to the Hobbesian view of the world promulgated by adherents to the Meltzer-Richard model, as outlined in previous chapters, other researchers have turned to altruism and feelings of empathy to explain why some individuals behave prosocially even at the expense of their pure self-interest (see Batson & Powell 2003 for a recent review).

Altruism is “the motivation to increase another person’s welfare” (Batson & Powell 2003). The nature of altruism is a much-studied and occasionally controversial topic in social psychology; however, the preponderance of evidence strongly suggests that many individuals do act altruistically, or prosocially, at the expense of their self-interest in a variety of contexts (Batson & Powell 2003). As understood in the psychological literature, the empathy-altruism hypothesis holds that empathy sparks individuals to act altruistically. Although this argument finds general acceptance, researchers are sharply divided into two camps when it comes to conceptualizing empathy. On the one side of the divide, empathy is understood as the result of a cognitive process whereby an individual takes a moment to consider the views and/or feelings of the empathy-inducing individual or group (e.g. Finley & Stephan 2000). This conceptualization is closest to lay usages of empathy, but it has its flaws. Mainly, the cognitive conceptualization places a high burden on empathy by stipulating that, in order

to be empathetic, individuals must undertake the possibly grueling task of imagining the world from other people's perspectives. Though research studies and lived experience suggests that human beings do—or at least can—take the time to step back and think about life from another's perspective, researchers in the other camp argue that, as opposed to being the result of a cognitive process, empathy is “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person” (Batson & Powell 2003, p. 463, 474). This emotive conceptualization suggests that people are capable of feeling empathy without stepping into anyone else's shoes and fits real world instances of empathetic feeling when individuals are faced with situation where help is needed sooner than empathy can be cognitively processed.

In actuality, empathy probably has both cognitive and emotive foundations: Individuals can become empathetic toward a fellow individual by thinking for a moment of that other's perspective, or empathy may be the result of an emotional shock that spurs the individual into action before explicit cognition takes place. In any case, research demonstrates that empathy motivates people to behave altruistically toward (Krebs 1975; Stürmer et al. 2006) and help (Hornstein 1978; Batson et al., 1981) others, specifically when those others are perceived as similar.

Perceptions of similarity remain important regardless of the conceptualization of empathy to which one wishes to adhere. These perceptions provide the basis on which the cognitive conceptualization is built: Individuals who perceive that they are similar to each other should have a very easy time indeed imagining each other's perspectives, thoughts, and feelings. On the other side of the conceptual divide, perceptions of similarity should ease the degree to which emotional appeals are registered, as the welfare of similar others

is of more direct relevance to individuals relative to the welfare of dissimilar others (Stürmer et al. 2006).

Recent work by Dimick, Rueda, and Stegmuller (2014) has brought attention to the relationship between altruism and empathy on the one hand and support for redistribution on the other. In their working paper, the team examines why richer Americans voice stronger support for redistribution in some places over others. They argue that rich Americans are moved by altruistic motives to support redistribution in highly unequal U.S. states. By extension, according to this line of reasoning, rich Americans living in more equal states are not eyewitnesses to the plight of poverty and therefore are not compelled to support welfare programs. While this argument might make intuitive sense, Dimick et al. do not include a measure of altruism in their statistical models, and thus are forced to assume what mechanisms are at play in compelling wealthier Americans living in more unequal states to support redistribution. Indeed, it could just as likely be the case, based on their analysis, that richer Americans living in unequal states fear uprisings or revolutions and thus support redistribution from a purely self-interested standpoint. Without including a measure for altruism or empathy, researchers are unable to conclude that these factors matter.

Furthermore, I should note that Dimick et al.'s (2014) argument that rich Americans are compelled to empathize or behave altruistically toward the poor in more unequal states relative to rich Americans living in more equal states does not fit well within the theory of perceptions of similarity put forward in this study. Based on the theory forwarded here, I would hypothesize that rich Americans living in less equal states would perceive themselves to be less similar than the poor than rich Americans living in

more equal states, as economic inequality correlates with—if not causes—a host of divergent lifestyle, health, educational, occupational, and social differences (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). Perceptions of dissimilarity in these unequal states should then limit the room for empathy or altruism to take root. Unfortunately, as Dimick et al.'s data do not include a measure of empathy or altruism, this issue remains unresolved for the time being. Nonetheless, the evidence I present in this chapter lends credence to my argument that perceptions of similarity are vital in determining among whom empathy triggers support for redistribution.

In this chapter, I test the effects of empathy more directly than existing studies have done. In doing so, I demonstrate that support among individuals who perceive that they do share similarities with beneficiaries can be—and is—motivated by empathy. Survey data of the variety used by Dimick et al. (2014) is not conducive to testing this relationship for a number of reasons. First and foremost, no national or cross-national survey that I am aware of has asked respondents pertinent questions about their level of altruism or empathy toward welfare recipients. This is hardly surprising, given the difficulty—if not impossibility—of capturing empathy on a questionnaire. For this reason, the data I use to test the relationship between empathy and redistributive attitudes come from two original experiments I fielded at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2013 and 2014.

The use of experiments in studies of empathy is neither particularly novel nor controversial. Indeed, a number of existing studies in political science and related fields have manipulated subjects' empathy experimentally to gauge empathy's effects on helping and redistributive behavior (Feldman et al. 2014). What is novel is that the

current study contributes to these existing studies by examining how empathy's effects differ between those who share an underlying sense of identification with welfare recipients and those who do not. The first experiment manipulates empathy emotively, while the second is a test of cognitive empathy. In addition, the second experiment I present shows how experimental empathy manipulations may have a tendency to elicit socially desirable responses—particularly among those who do not identify with recipients—while leaving feelings of empathy themselves untouched.

Experiment 1: Empathy as Emotive

The evidence presented in the previous chapter suggests that self-interest motivates redistributive attitudes among different types of individuals in society—namely, self-interest is important to individuals who do not perceive that they share commonalities with welfare beneficiaries. Based on the theory in the previous section, however, I expect that empathetic appeals should spark support for welfare among some individuals who do perceive that they are similar to those in need.

In order to test this hypothesis, I designed an experiment that manipulates the degree of respondents' empathy toward recipients in a manner wherein subjects are not explicitly induced to think of themselves in the others' shoes. Instead, this experiment attempts to manipulate subjects' empathy emotionally. The manipulation allows for empathy to occur automatically, without much thought. Indeed, the speed at which most subjects completed the experiment strongly suggests that few, if any, individuals pondered over any of the questions or the manipulation. Overall, the design was crafted

to allow me to demonstrate that increasing or decreasing respondents' empathy for recipients results in greater change in support for redistribution among those who feel similar to recipients compared to those who feel dissimilar to recipients.

The survey experiment was administered in a university computer lab, and eighty-eight college undergraduates participated.¹¹ As in the previous chapter, the attitudinal results are not intended to be generalizable to any larger population. Instead, the focus here is on the extent to which the effects of empathy—both emotive and cognitive—on redistributive attitudes are conditional on perceptions of similarity.

First, all respondents were asked the following: “Here is a list of groups. Please read over the list and select which groups you feel particularly close to—people who are most like you in their ideas and interests and feelings about things. Select as many as apply.” The groups were: poor people, whites, uneducated people, business people, members of your immediate family, Americans, the elderly, African Americans, young people, the rich, Christians, people who lost their jobs, the unemployed, atheists, all humans, Hispanics, middle-class people, children, educated people, Muslims, and people who quite their jobs.

Next, they were then shown an identical question asking them to check the groups they felt particularly far from. These questions are identical to the ones used in the second self-interest experiment in Chapter Three. As I explained above, the questions capture respondents' feelings toward African Americans in an inconspicuous manner by including African Americans in a longer list of various groups. Again, the ordering of the groups was randomized across all subjects. From these two questions, I created a measure

¹¹ This n represents the number of participants once African American participants were excluded.

of their perceived distance specifically to African Americans. Individuals who chose that they were close to African Americans were assigned a 2 ($n = 7$), those who chose that they were far from African Americans were assigned 0 ($n = 31$), and those who chose neither that they were close to nor far from African Americans were assigned a 1 ($n = 50$).

Following these questions, respondents were randomly assigned one of three versions of the same question, designed to manipulate respondents' empathy toward the recipients. Manipulating empathy emotively, of course, is not a straightforward matter. Most, if not all, empathy manipulations in the existing experimental literature fall under the cognitive approach. A review of the larger empathy literature, however, revealed one promising method of manipulating empathy emotionally. Specifically, a number of works strongly suggests that people are more empathetic toward down-on-their-luck individuals who are not responsible for their plight than they are toward those who are responsible (McDonell, 1993; Batson et al. 1997; Bécares & Turner 2004). This literature focuses largely on individuals' feelings of empathy toward those diagnosed with AIDS, though I believe the insight is generalizable. Other studies induce empathy by asking subjects directly to consider the feelings or emotions of the victim in question (e.g. Finlay & Stephan 2000). I believe, however, that inducing empathy by assigning responsibility or blame more closely mirrors how empathy is sparked emotionally in the real world. Moreover, asking subjects to consider the feelings and emotions of others is akin to the cognitive, as opposed to emotive, conceptualization of empathy. Building on this work, I manipulate empathy emotively by distinguishing between people who lose their jobs (high empathy condition) and that those who quit their jobs (low empathy condition).

The first version represents a “control,” in that no empathetic-inducing information is included: “To what extent do you support a portion of your tax money going to programs that contribute assistance to unemployed African Americans? 1 strong oppose to 5 strongly support” (n = 33). The second version of the question is designed to make respondents feel less empathetic toward recipients: “To what extent do you support a portion of your tax money going to programs that contribute assistance to unemployed African Americans who quit their jobs?” (n = 28). The third version, on the other hand, is designed to induce respondents to feel empathetic toward recipients: “To what extent do you support a portion of your tax money going to programs that contribute assistance to unemployed African Americans who lost their jobs?” (n = 27).

In the first part of the analysis, I examine if these different versions of the question elicited different answers depending on respondents’ pre-existing perceptions of similarity to African Americans. Given the low n, here I pool respondents who felt close to African Americans and who felt neither close nor far from African Americans. Based on the hypothesis, I expect that respondents who perceive themselves to be dissimilar from African Americans will express similar levels of (low) support for redistribution across the three conditions.

On the other hand, I expect the other respondents to express variability across the three conditions. Specifically, the difference between those who perceive similarities in the high-empathy condition should be most supportive of redistribution, whereas those randomly assigned to the low-empathy condition should be least supportive. The first two figures, which present the group means with 95% confidence intervals, show that this is precisely what occurs. In Figure 4.1, we see that inducing low or high levels of

empathetic feelings vis-à-vis welfare recipients does not alter the redistributive attitudes of individuals who perceive that they share no similarities with these recipients.

The picture changes, however, turning to Figure 4.2. It appears that empathetic feelings have more power to sway attitudes among those who perceive that they share similarities with the recipients in question. Here, respondents in the high-empathy condition were substantively (and nearly statistically)¹² more likely to support redistribution than their counterparts in the low-empathy condition. Moreover, these respondents also show slightly higher support for redistribution than their counterparts in the control condition.

I additionally run a model, using OLS regression, wherein respondents' pre-existing perceptions of similarities with African Americans is interacted with their placement in either high or low-empathy conditions. When individuals perceive that they are similar to recipients and when they are provided with empathy-inducing information (such as the fact that the recipient lost his or her job), I expect to see an increase in support for redistribution. I limit my attention only to those in either the low (coded 1) or high-empathy (coded 2) conditions in order to hone in on the effects of empathy.

As presented in Table 4.1, the results support the hypothesis that when individuals who perceive that they share similarities with the recipients in question are induced to feel empathetic toward the recipients, their support for redistribution increases. Figure 4.3 plots the interaction, again showing that the empathy manipulation affected the attitudes

¹² ANOVA analysis, not shown, reveals that the difference in means between the high-empathy and low-empathy conditions among those who perceive they are similar to recipients is significant at $p = 0.06$.

of those who perceived themselves close to African Americans and not the attitudes of those who perceived African Americans as dissimilar.

Experiment 2: Cognitive Empathy

In the second experiment, using a separate pool of student subjects, I manipulated empathy in line with its cognitive conceptualization. After they were asked identical questions to measure their perceived similarities to African Americans, subjects were asked a set of demographic questions before being randomly assigned to one of two groups. Subjects assigned to the first, or control, group were asked the following: “To what extent do you support a portion of your tax money going to programs that contribute assistance to unemployed African Americans?” [5 possible responses ranging from strongly oppose to strongly support].

Subjects assigned to the treatment group were asked the identical question but, in addition, were told “Before you answer, if possible please take a moment to consider yourself in an unemployed African American’s position.” This manipulation adheres strictly to the cognitive conceptualization of empathy by asking subjects to consider the others’ perspective.

Figure 4.4 shows the mean response levels between control and treatment subjects, subdivided by their perceived similarities to African Americans as measured by the pre-test questions (Far, $n = 83$; Middle, $n = 191$; Close, $n = 31$).

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, it appears that the empathy manipulation elicited a similar effect among subjects in each subgroup—in fact, those who according to their

pre-test measures professed the greatest dissimilarity from African Americans were affected the greatest by the empathy manipulation, which is a direct contradiction of the hypothesis that empathy most strongly effects those who perceive that they are close to welfare recipients. These results suggest this expectation requires a degree of refining; however, they do not allow for the outright rejection of the theory.

First, it is possible that individuals who feel particularly close to a given group of individuals have reached the empathetic ceiling, at least the cognitive empathetic ceiling. Furthermore, individuals who identify strongly with recipients may have a pre-existing high degree of empathy for recipients. In fact, the data show that pre-test perceptions of commonality with African Americans correlates highly with post-test expressions of empathetic feelings toward African Americans.

Because they identify with African Americans, subjects in this subset may automatically consider the perspective of unemployed African Americans: The cognitive treatment changes nothing. Therefore, one should not expect great differences between similarly-identifying subjects in control and treatment conditions. As shown in Figure 4, it is between strongly (Close) identifying subjects that I find the smallest differences between mean Treatment and Control responses. A more troubling possibility brings the conceptual, or at least operational, distinction between cognitive empathy and identification into question. Future work must assess the extent to which manipulations that prompt subjects to cognitively empathize with others simultaneously induces subjects to identify with said others.

But what about those who feel farthest from African Americans? According to the results in Figure 4.4, the empathy treatment caused a spike of support for redistribution

among this subset. I argue, however, that this spike is the result of a phenomenon other than empathy. Near the end of the experiment, subjects were asked the following question: “To what extent do you feel empathetic towards members of the following groups?” Among the target groups, subjects were asked their feelings toward African Americans [strongly do not empathize, do not empathize, empathize, strongly empathize].

Figure 4.5 shows that the treatment affected the empathetic feelings only among subjects who were identified as being neither very close to nor very far from African Americans pre-test.¹³ As suggested in the preceding paragraph, subjects who closely identified with African Americans pre-test expressed high levels of empathy toward African Americans post-test, regardless of their assignment to treatment or control. Similarly, subjects who selected African Americans as a group to which they felt particularly far from in the pre-test expressed relatively low levels of empathy toward African Americans post-test regardless of treatment.

What, then, explains the apparent effect of treatment on the redistributive attitudes of subjects who perceive they share no commonalities with African Americans? At least two possibilities come to mind, the first somewhat more idealistic and unlikelier than the second. It may be the case that when subjects in this subgroup are asked to think for a moment of the plight of unemployed African Americans, they find that they are not so dissimilar after all. This would explain the surge in support for redistribution, but if it were the case, I would also expect a surge in empathetic feelings toward blacks. The

¹³ The means in this subset were 2.66 (Control) and 2.85 (Treatment), $t = -2.17$, $df = 177.20$, $p = 0.03$. Differences between Control and Treatment in the other subgroups were statistically insignificant.

second possibility is that the group of subjects who perceived no commonality with African Americans and who were placed in treatment modify their preferences to accord with what they believe are socially desirable responses.

Though the current experimental design does not allow me to test explicitly for social desirability effects, it does allow me to probe if assignment to treatment changed how individuals behaved in their capacity as subjects. If treatment elicited socially desirable responses among those who do not identify with African Americans, I should expect to find that the treatment instrument prompted these individuals to behave in a way that would safeguard their true opinions.

In other words, these individuals should have extended more effort responding to the questions than their counterparts who were randomly assigned to treatment, as greater effort would be needed in order to ensure that their responses were in line with those they believed were socially desirable. To test this possibility, I turn to the last question: “As a quality check, please mark which of the following describes your participation in this survey. Your answer will remain anonymous and will not effect your extra credit” [I answered the questions with no thought and/or effort; I answered...with some thought and/or effort; I answered...with much thought and/or effort].

The evidence presented in Figure 4.6 lends credence to this suggestion. Individuals who identified as dissimilar from blacks, and were placed in the control condition, did not seem to extend much effort in answering the questionnaire. When subjects of the same subgroup were placed in the treatment condition, however, effort appears to have shot up to mirror all other participants. Although this jump could be explained by other factors, I argue that it is most likely to be the case that these

individuals extended more energy than they normally would have because they were on high alert to answer the questions in a socially desirable manner.

Future work should explore these admittedly ad hoc explanations further. While more work must be done regarding the distinction between identification with and cognitive empathy with others, as discussed above, it might be relatively easier to disentangle the effects of cognitive empathy manipulations and social desirability effects on the opinions of those who perceive that they are far from African Americans in future studies. For instance, it might be feasible to manipulate cognitive empathy more subtly, which, in turn, would potentially decrease the prevalence of social desirability motivations. Another option would be to develop an indirect measure of people's support for redistribution to African Americans (Fisher 1993). For example, more general questions that do not explicitly mention African Americans may be used to gauge people's support for redistribution. This may reduce social desirability by obscuring the link between the cognitive empathy manipulation and the question measuring the dependent variable.

Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter support the hypothesis that feelings of empathy can play an important role in promoting support for programs of redistribution. Furthermore, the findings contribute to our understanding of group identity's relationship with redistributive attitudes. Whereas extant studies examine the direct effect group identifications have on people's attitudes, the fact of the matter remains that even those

who identify with welfare recipients may have reason to voice diminished support for redistribution—or, to put it conversely, those who perceive that they share commonalities with recipients may be spurred by additional factors to increase their support for the redistribution of income or wealth from the rich to the poor.

An important example of such a factor is empathy. As described above, empathetic concerns can take root in emotional or cognitive processes and induces people to extend assistance to those in need. The two experiments in this chapter demonstrated how these two processes work to affect subjects' attitudes toward welfare redistribution. In the first experiment, the effect of empathy, as conceived emotively, had a stark effect on the attitudes of those people who perceived themselves as close to recipients. The second experiment suggested that the effects of cognitively manipulating empathy are more circumspect.

I argue that the results of the second experiment are due to the likelihood that individuals who perceive that they share similarities with others already have a built-in sense of cognitive empathy—they already think, or have thought, about what life's like in the other's shoes, and having them do so again in an experimental setting elicits little to no change in their attitudes. Among individuals who see some, but not too many, similarities linking them and recipients, activating empathy cognitively results in a larger increase in support for redistribution.

The effect of empathy, as predicted, is relegated to those who perceive that they share commonalities, or at least some commonalities, with recipients. Individuals who do not perceive that they share a bond to those in need have neither the cognitive willingness (or perhaps ability) to consider the other's perspective nor the foundation on which

emotive empathetic appeals can find resonance. The evidence presented in this and the previous chapter suggests that these individuals may be motivated to support redistribution out of self-interested concerns, but the power of group-based motivations to catalyze a change in attitudes is limited, if not chimerical.

Tables and Figures

Table 4.1 Similarity and Empathy, small-n survey experiment

Intercept	3.00***
Empathy Condition	-0.46
Perceived Similarities	-0.48
Empathy * Similarities	1.31*
adj. R^2	0.09

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Figure 4.1

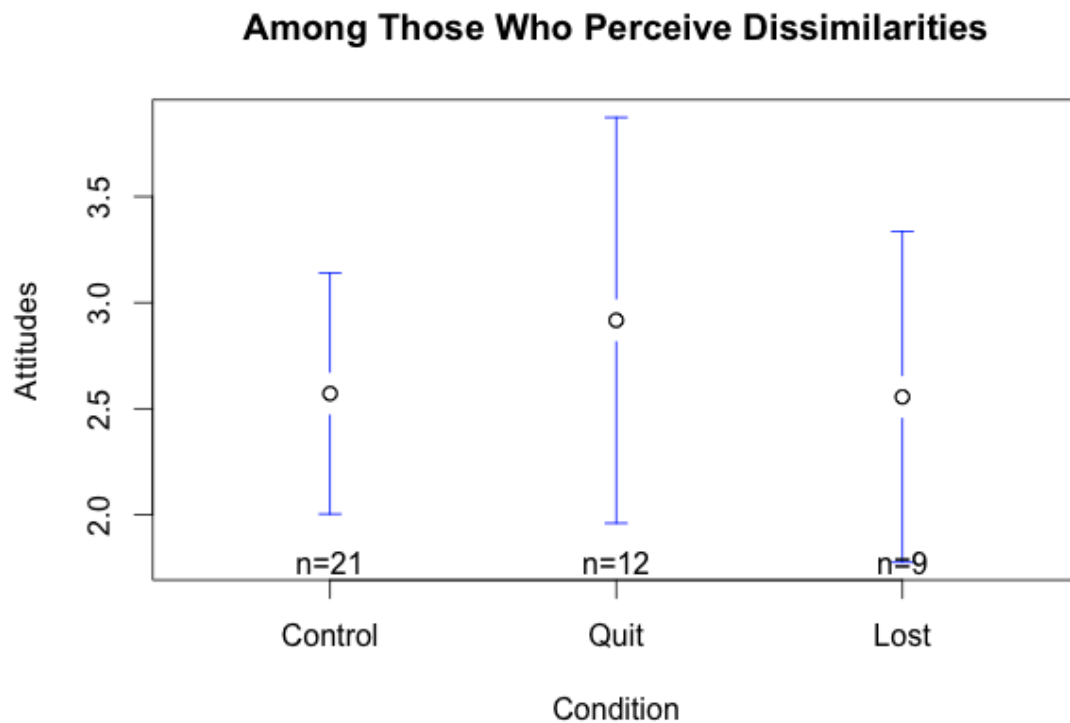


Figure 4.2

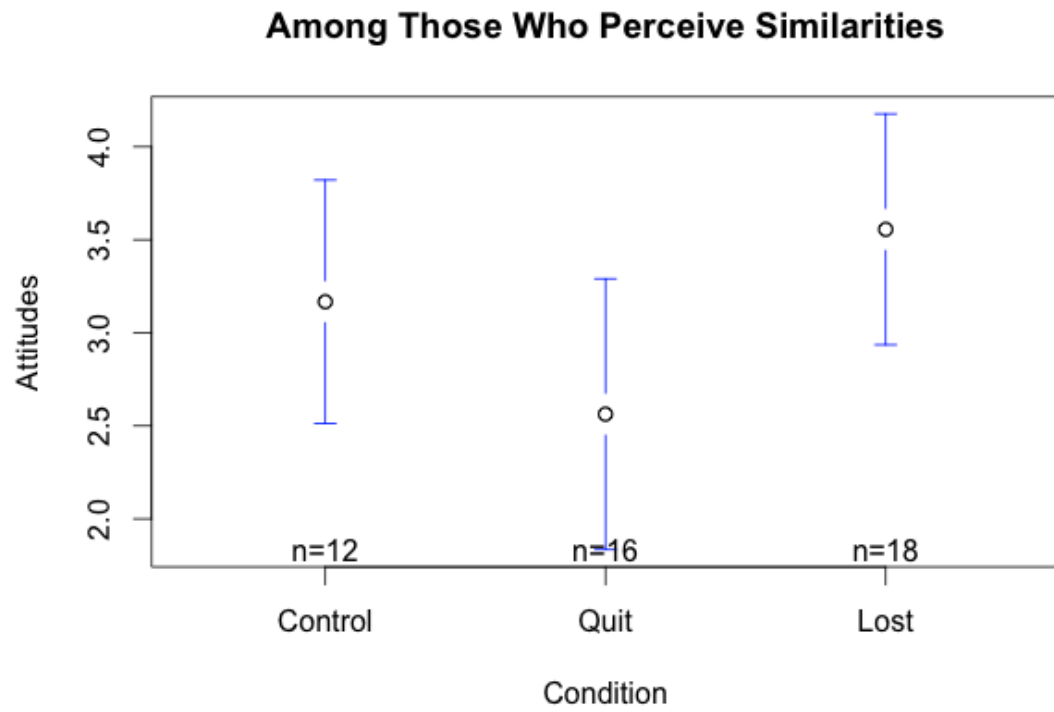


Figure 4.3

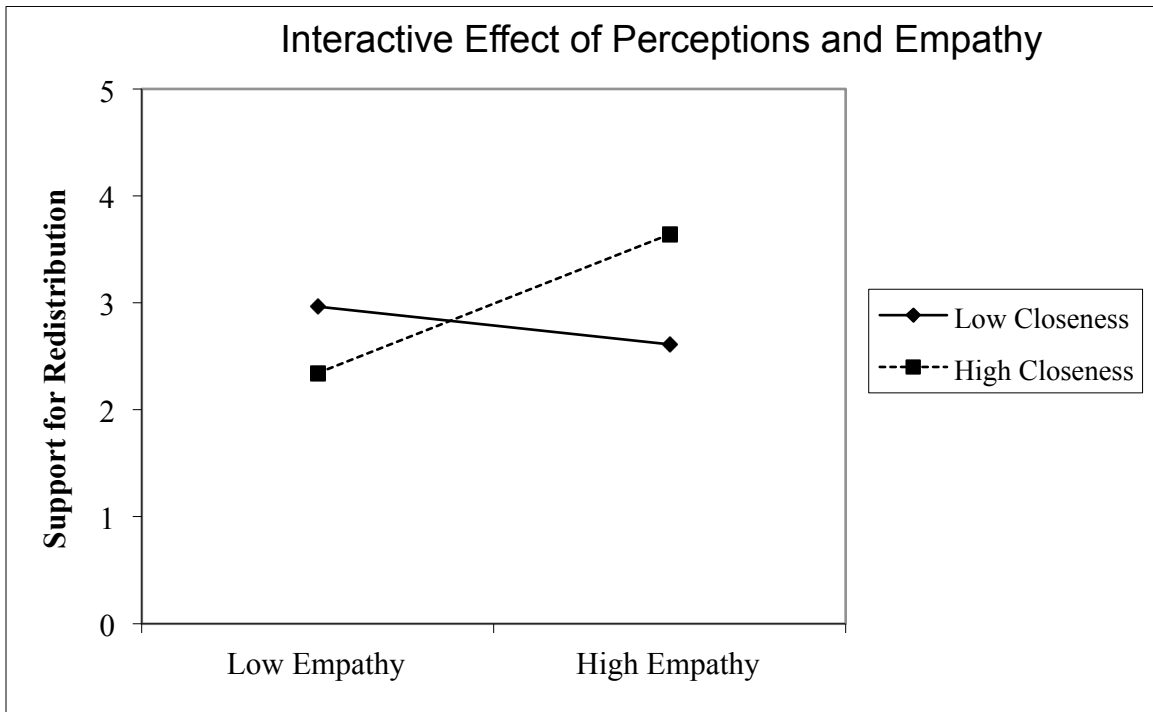


Figure 4.4

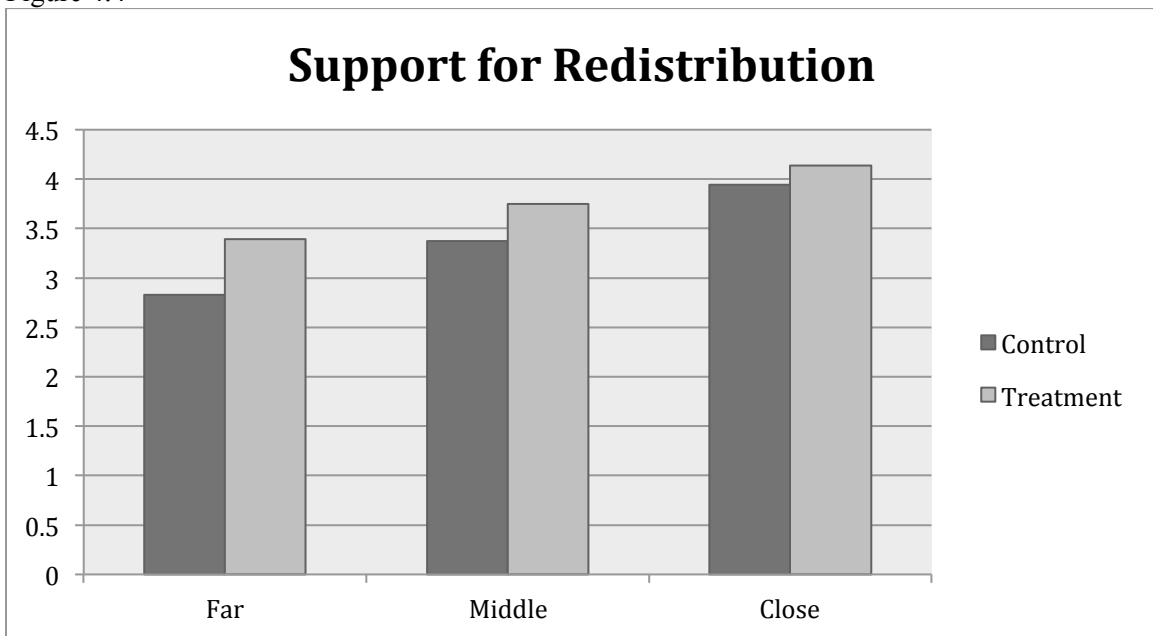


Figure 4.5

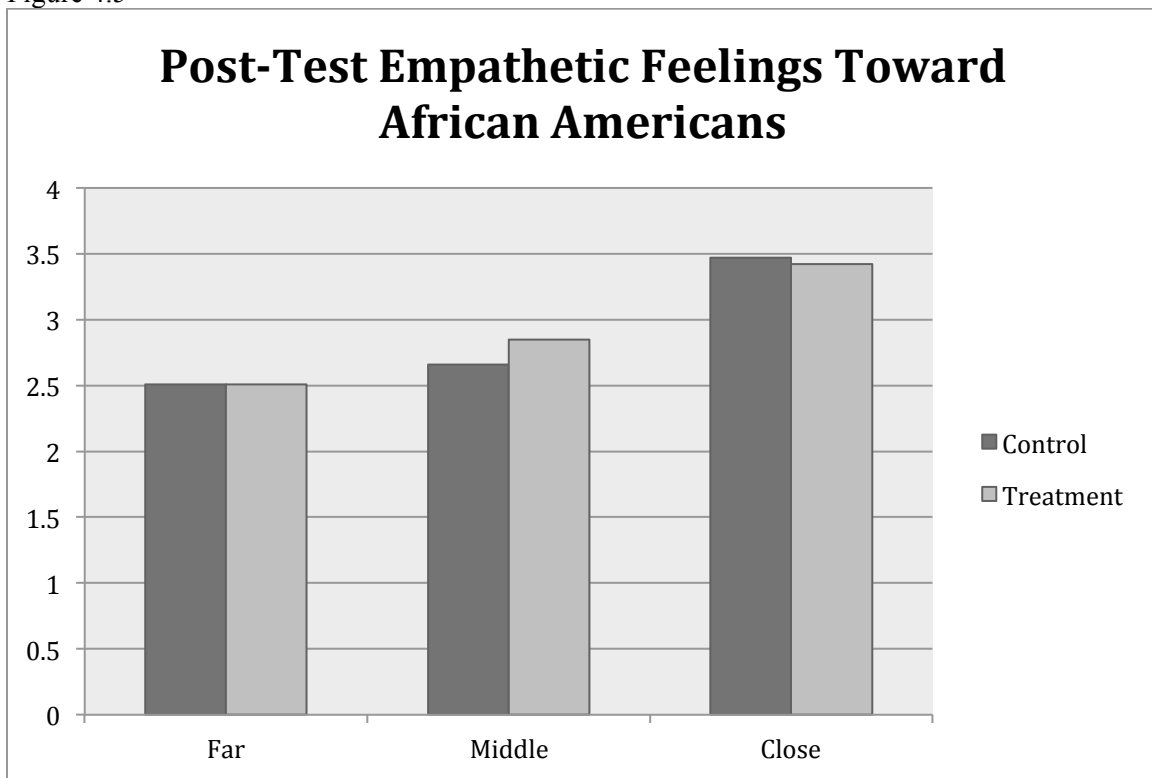
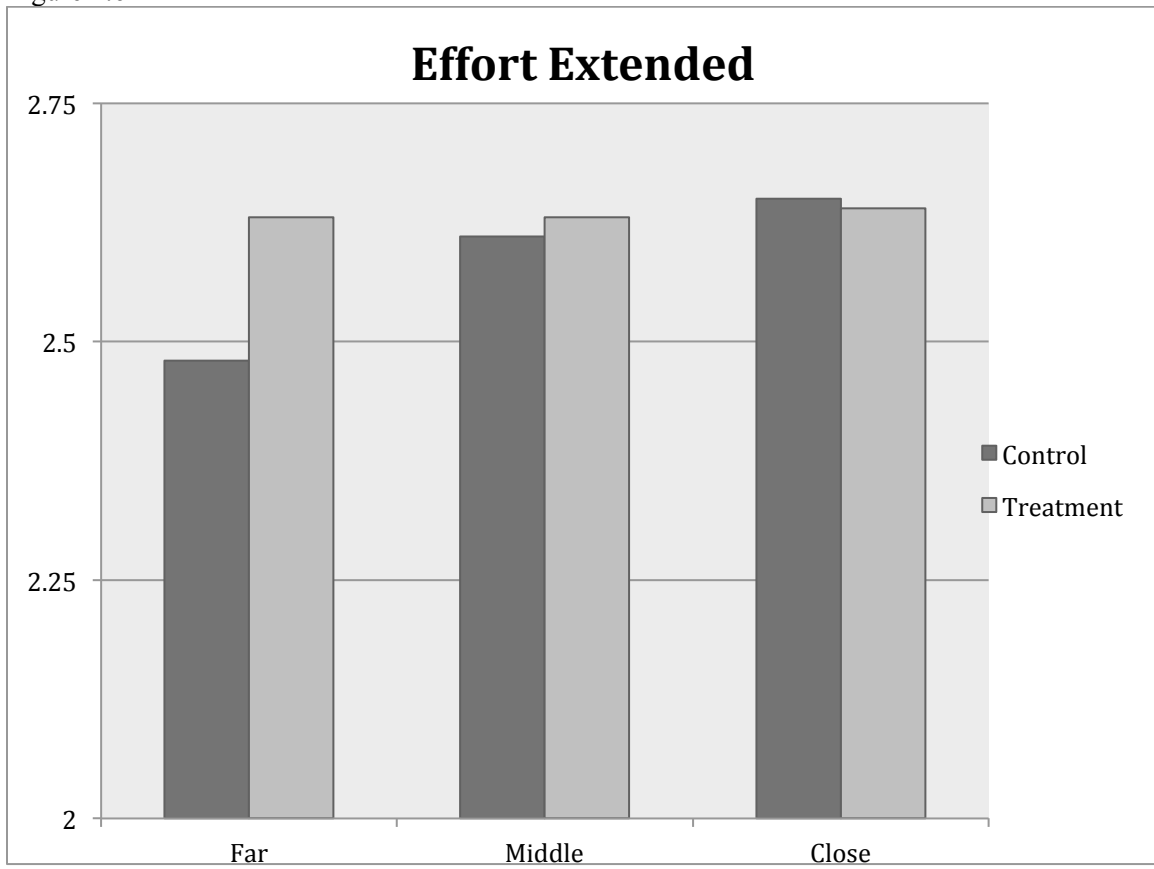


Figure 4.6



Chapter 5

From Redistribution to Parties

As previous chapters have shown, matters of self-interest and empathy matter in determining individuals' redistributive attitudes, but the importance of these factors is contingent on individuals' underlying perceptions of similarity with welfare recipients. Redistribution is one of the most important issues in politics worldwide—economic redistribution is the essence of politics classically defined as “who gets what, where, and when.” Because redistribution is at the heart of politics, we should expect that the factors important to understanding citizens' redistributive attitudes also enlighten other political attitudes and behaviors.

Moreover, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the political relevance of earlier chapters' findings. If people hold pro-redistribution attitudes, but support traditionally anti-redistribution parties, then this study's findings shed very little light on the relationship between perceptions of commonality and politics proper. If, on the other hand, perceptions of similarity exert similar influence over both redistributive attitudes and party support,¹⁴ then these perceptions should be afforded greater attention by both political scientists and policymakers. In order to capture the extent to which this is true, the current chapter moves from examining the effect perceptions of similarity exert on attitudinal outcomes to explore how these perceptions influence political behavior directly.

¹⁴ I use the terms “party support,” “party identification,” and “partisanship” interchangeably throughout.

In line with the preceding chapters, the focus here is not on the direct relationship between perceptions of commonality and partisanship. Nor is the focus on the direct relationship between self-interest and partisanship. Instead, I focus on how perceptions of similarity with the poor condition the influence of self-interest on party support. Although empathy is less commonly—never?—used to explain or predict citizens’ partisanship, as I detail more below theorists have long held that self-interest is vital in understanding partisanship. The assumption of the economic, rational voter, undergirds both Meltzer and Richards’ (1981) claims on the size of government, but also many other theories of voter behavior. Yet, as previous chapters have demonstrated, people are only, or at least primarily, self-interested insofar as they feel isolated or different from those in their community.

The question this chapter seeks to answer is if perceptions of similarity with the poor mitigate the relationship between self-interest and political party support as they do self-interest’s relationship with redistributive attitudes. In other words, do perceptions of similarity with the poor spur wealthier citizens to minimize or ignore their self-interest and, by extension, vote for parties that support redistribution?

This chapter will demonstrate that perceptions of similarity which link the rich to the poor condition not only attitudes about redistribution, but condition also the extent to which the rich support political parties that favor redistribution to the poor. Using data from the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey and the 1996 American National Election Study,¹⁵ I demonstrate that the rich forego their self-interest and voice support for parties on the left when they perceive similarities with recipients of redistribution. As the

¹⁵ These surveys are the only ones of those analyzed in earlier chapter that include adequate measures of respondents’ party support.

literature on economic voting would suggest, however, self-interest motivates the rich to support parties on the right in the absence of these perceptions.

Parties and Economic Redistribution

The link between party support and redistributive politics is engrained in the literature. The Meltzer and Richard (1981) study discussed at multiple times in previous chapters models people's preferences for redistribution as a function of their income; their findings translate redistributive preferences directly into party (or candidate) preferences. This argument fares relatively well in political science literature on pocketbook voting (Lewis-Beck 1985), wherein citizens' economic situation explains their political behavior. However, most studies have found little empirical evidence of this linkage (Feldman 1982; Sigelman et al. 1991). Feldman (1982) argues that economic individualism negates the effect of people's economic situation on their vote choice, economic individualists take full responsibility for their plight (or success), not politicians. Sears and Lau (1983) find that the apparent correlation between survey respondents' economic situation and their political opinions is an artifact of survey instruments themselves due to question placement: When questions regarding the economy are asked prior to political preference questions, surveys "personalize" political preferences by making respondents' economic situation salient. On the other hand, when political questions are asked prior to economic ones, surveys tend to "politicize" respondents' economic situations by making salient their political preferences.

The debate concerning the relationship between people's economic situation and their political preferences, which began decades ago, is ongoing. Although Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier insist that "[e]conomic conditions shape election outcomes in the world's democracies" because voters heavily weigh economic matters when holding governments responsible, economic voting models appear to be "contingent" insofar as institutional and individual-level factors impede a direct relationship between economics and voting behavior (Anderson 2007). For instance, in muddled institutional contexts citizens may not be able to assign blame for poor economic performance to a party or incumbent; relatedly, individuals may not have the information or the cognitive abilities to link economic performance to political decisions. Duch and Stevenson (2006) also call into question the strong assertion that economics determines voting behavior with their finding that the relationship between economics and voting varies across time and across countries.

Building on the work that highlights the contingent and variable nature of economic voting, what if much like people's attitudes toward redistribution, the relationship between economic self-interest and party preference was provisional on people's perceptions of commonality with others? Because welfare redistribution is among the primary issues in partisan politics in industrialized democracies, one might expect—much in line with the Meltzer and Richard (1981) model—that the richer favor parties of the right that oppose redistribution, whereas the poorer vote for parties of the left that support welfare. However, based on the theory and evidence presented in the previous chapters, one might hypothesize that the rich will support parties of the left

when they perceive that they share commonalities with those who benefit from redistribution.

This chapter tests this hypothesis using survey data from the United Kingdom and the United States—two countries where redistribution is a highly contentious political issue even though the scale of redistribution falls below that found in other industrialized democracies.

Labour, Liberals, and Conservatives

In the United Kingdom, the political left consists of two parties: Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Whereas the Liberal Democrats are generally seen as more socially liberal, progressive, and supportive of the welfare state, the Labour Party is considered the more centrist, “big tent” party of the left—a position that was concretized with the advent of “New Labour” under Tony Blair. On the right, the Conservatives tout free market principles and campaign on and implement policies to reduce the number of state benefits claimants and to enforce austerity in state spending.

The Meltzer and Richard model assumes a two-party system, and although the UK is often considered to have a de-facto two party system, with the Conservatives and Labour the most powerful, reality is a bit more complex. For instance, though the Liberal Democrats currently hold less than 9% of the seats in the House of Commons, the party received 23% of the vote in the 2010 elections, compared to the 29% and the 36.1% garnered by Labour and the Conservatives, respectively (BBC News 2010). Furthermore, despite their differences, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats formed a coalition

government in the wake of the 2010 elections—the first in the post-war period.

Nonetheless, based on the economic voting literature, as well as the precepts of the Meltzer and Richard (1981) model, one would suspect that wealthier voters in Britain vote predominantly for the Conservatives, whereas less wealthy voters vote for parties of the left.

However, according to the arguments offered above, an important factor in determining self-interest's influence on partisanship is an individual's perception of commonality with beneficiaries of the state's largesse. Thus, we should expect that wealthier voters in the United Kingdom favor parties of the left when they perceive they share commonalities with welfare recipients. In the data used in this chapter—as well as in the preceding chapters—perceived commonalities with welfare recipients in the UK is gauged by the extent to which survey respondents felt similar to immigrants. Wealthier citizens who do not perceive that they share commonalities with welfare recipients should be more likely to behave in line with models of economic voting—that is, they should support the Conservatives, who wish to limit taxation and state spending.

The dependent variable in the first part of the analysis captures people's probability of favoring Labour (measured as 1) versus their probability of favoring the Conservative party (measured 0), and is derived from a question on the 2009 BSAS asking respondents “If there was a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?”¹⁶ Using a logit model, I control for age and sex, as older individuals and males are more likely to favor parties of the right than

¹⁶ Supporters of other parties are dropped from the analysis in order to provide for a comparison between the major parties that generally favor (Labour) and oppose (Conservatives) welfare redistribution.

are younger people and females. I also control for education using fixed effects, though the variable is omitted from the tables for visual purposes. The independent variables of interest are income, which is reverse-coded and labeled “Poor,” and perceptions of similarity with fellow recipients, which is measured as perceptions toward immigrants and also is reverse-coded and labeled “Dissimilar.”

Based on the theory above, we should expect the poor to favor Labour. We should also suspect that respondents who feel dissimilar from recipients favor the Conservatives. However, we should further expect that Labour can count on the support of the wealthy when the wealthy perceive that they share similarities with those in need.

Table 5.1 shows the probability of Labour’s success over the conservatives in garnering votes from respondents one standard deviation above (Rich) and one standard deviation below (Poor) the median income. As expected, the Poor consistently favor Labour over the Conservatives, regardless of their perceptions toward fellow welfare recipients. The attitudes of the Rich, however, are conditional upon their perceptions of similarity (or dissimilarity) with beneficiaries, as shown in Figure 5.1.

In short, looking first at the two main parties in British politics, I find initial support for the hypothesis that Labour can successfully capture the support of wealthier citizens when those citizens perceive that they share commonalities with welfare recipients. However, as these perceptions recede, the probability that Labour will capture the wealthy’s support also declines. Regardless of perceptions, the relatively less wealthy support Labour nine times out of ten. Given the centrist nature of Labour, it is perhaps unsurprising that though the interaction between perceptions of similarity and personal income leans in the expected direction, it is not statistically significant.

An additional test of the hypothesis can be performed by analyzing the differences in support between the rich and the poor for the combined left (Labour and Liberal Democrats coded as 1) versus the Conservatives (coded 0), and indeed, a stronger relationship in support of the hypothesis is found when comparing support for these two groupings (see Table 5.2 and Figure 5.2) Here, wealthier individuals' probability of supporting the left is roughly 0.85 when they perceive that they share similarities with welfare recipients. However, as perceptions of similarity decrease, so too does the probability among the wealthy to support the left over the Conservatives—falling to 0.60. That this relationship is crisper when limiting the analysis to supporters of either the two parties of the left or the Conservatives is hardly surprising, considering that the distinction between the two parties in terms of welfare state politics is starker than that between Labour on its own and the Conservatives.

Democrats and Republicans

Moving to the United States, the story is very similar. Although support for aspects of the limited American welfare state, such as Social Security, could be found across the political spectrum for most of the post-war period, following the Reagan administration, few could ignore the Republican Party's aspirations to further curtail welfare spending (Pierson 1991). Although Democratic leaders, such as Bill Clinton in 1996, are hardly staunch bulwarks of generous welfare spending, of the two dominant American political parties, the Democrats typically are more supportive of welfare and redistribution generally. Thus, I hypothesize that relatively poorer Americans should

exhibit a higher probability of supporting the Democratic Party regardless of their perceptions of similarity—or sense of solidarity—with welfare recipients. Wealthier Americans, on the other hand, should support the Democratic Party specifically when they perceive they share commonalities with the poor. Among wealthier Americans who do not hold these perceptions, the probability of supporting the Democrats should be much lower.

In order to test these hypotheses, I return to the 1996 American National Election Study introduced in earlier chapters. I use a seven-point measure of partisanship, where 0 is used to code strong Republicans and 6, strong Democrats. As in the case above, I control for education (the educated typically lean to the left), age (older Americans skew to the right), and gender (males skew to the right).

The interaction estimated using OLS, the results of which are shown in Table 5.3, lends support to the hypotheses regarding perceptions of similarity's conditioning influence on self-interest. As illustrated in Figure 5.3, relatively poorer respondents generally lean Democratic, regardless of their sense of similarity with other poor Americans. This finding, it should be noted, does not grow out of the fact that poor Americans do not identify with other poor Americans. Because I use a measure of people's perceived similarities specifically with African Americans—who are perceived as the prototypical welfare recipients in the U.S. (Gilens 1999)—a large number of both wealthy and poorer respondents voiced no sense of commonality with blacks.

Relatively wealthier Americans follow a very different path. Wealthy Americans who identify with the poor are supportive of the Democrats—in fact, their support for the Democrats slightly, though not significantly, surpasses the support the Democratic Party

enjoys from poorer Americans. As expected, however, support for the Democrats falls precipitously when we turn our attention to wealthy Americans who perceive fewer similarities with the poor. Wealthy Americans who do not perceive they are bound to the poor are, as we would expect, highly unlikely to support the Democrats who are more likely to extend government benefits to the disadvantaged. It is in their self-interest to support the party (the Republican Party) that protects their wealth from expropriation and redistribution to others.

Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter highlight the important role of perceptions of similarities that link contributors and beneficiaries of welfare. Not only do these perceptions condition self-interest's ability to affect attitudes about redistribution, they also condition self-interest's influence on party preferences. Citizens' self-interest does matter when it comes to deciding which political party to support, but it only matters among very specific subsets of the population: Those who perceive that they are dissimilar from the recipients of the largesse bestowed by the parties of the left. It appears that citizens who perceive that they share similarities with welfare beneficiaries support parties of the left, as these are the parties that favor redistribution.

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is important to note that the relationships presented in this chapter may arise due to the presence of an unobserved variable—it is not impossible that individuals support parties of the left and perceive that they are closer to the poor, not because feeling close to the poor *causes* them to support

left-leaning parties, but because some third variable induces both left-leaning political views and identification with the poor.

The same could be true for right-leaning political views and perceptions of dissimilarity with welfare beneficiaries. This hypothetical unobserved variable could conceivably influence the effect of self-interest, as well. What the evidence in this chapter suggests, however, is that the relationship between self-interest and partisanship changes in line with citizens' group identification with those lowest on society's socio-economic ladder.

This contribution to the literature on economic voting has implications for strategies parties could use to attract support. Based on the evidence at hand, it appears that the key to winning wealthier voters' support for left parties is by making salient, or developing, a shared identification with the poor. The rich will support redistribution—and by extension, parties of the left—not because of their limited self-interest, but rather out of a sense of obligation for those in need.

This may be a significant point, insofar as it suggests that parties of the left should forego great effort attempting to convince wealthier voters that redistribution is in their economic self-interest. The rich realize that they will never require recourse to forms of welfare assistance designed to mitigate the effects of poverty, and as such, it will very rarely ever be the case that the wealthy find self-interested reasons (defined narrowly, in accordance with the definition provided in the second chapter) to support welfare redistribution from the rich to the poor.

Furthermore, the evidence presented in earlier chapters suggests that the redistributive attitudes of those who already identify with the poor are unlikely to be

swayed by appeals to their self-interest. Where and when parties of the left can highlight the similarities of the haves and the have-nots, they should find it easier to foment support for themselves and, relatedly and importantly, for redistributive programs that benefit the poor. Conversely, where and when parties of the right are able to highlight the differences splitting the haves from the have-nots, self-interest will spur the wealthy to oppose redistribution and support the right.

Tables and Figures

Table 5.1 Labour or Conservative? BSAS 2009

	Model
Intercept	1.83*
Dissimilar	-0.24*
Poor	0.05
Dissimilar * Poor	0.01
Age	-0.22***
Sex	-0.11
n	469

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Education fixed-effects (HEdQual) not shown; Poor is inverse of Income;

Table 5.2 Labour/Liberal Democrat or Conservative? BSAS 2009

	Model
Intercept	3.01***
Dissimilar	-0.34***
Poor	-0.02
Dissimilar * Poor	0.02*
Age	0.17
Sex	-0.12
n	586

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Education fixed-effects (HEdQual) not shown; Poor is inverse of Income;
Logit

Table 5.3 Partisanship in US, ANES1996

	Model
Intercept	5.17***
Dissimilar	-1.61***
Poor	-0.01
Dissimilar * Poor	0.07*
Age	-0.04
Male	-0.34**
n	1,189
adj. R ²	0.07

*** $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$

Education fixed-effects (V960610) not shown. Poor is inverse of Income;
Dissimilar to Black. DV is 0 (strong R) to 6 (strong D), see V960420

Figure 5.1

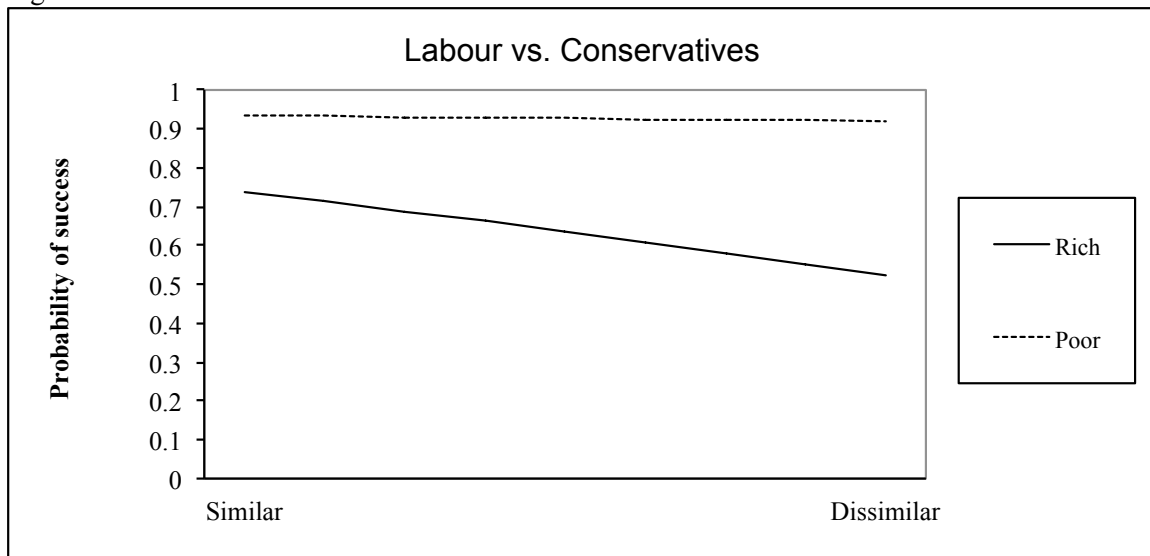


Figure 5.2

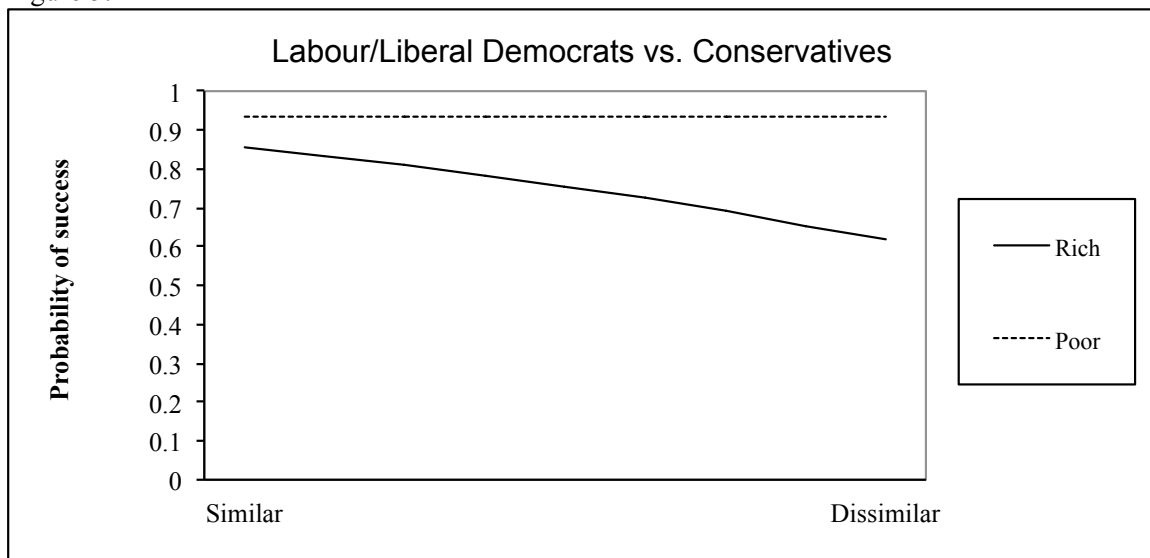
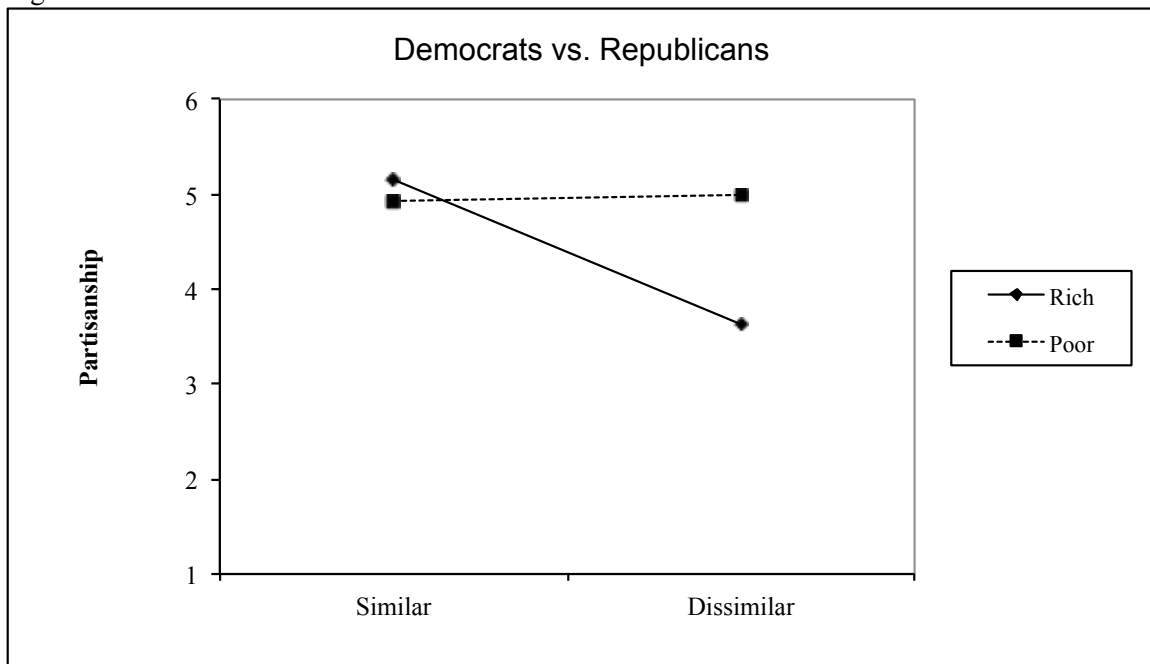


Figure 5.3



Chapter 6

Concluding Thoughts

This study has sought to contribute to a wide and ever-growing body of work that probes the bases of public support for welfare redistribution from the rich to the poor. While many existing studies narrow their focus to measure the importance of a single variable, or at most a set of single variables, the previous chapters have demonstrated how some of the major factors these extant studies have identified work together. In summation, the effects of at least two of the leading explanations or predictors of citizens' redistributive attitudes are conditional upon citizens' perceptions of similarity with welfare recipients.

As theorists whose pedigree stretches back to Hobbes believe, self-interest matters. The classical story stipulates that the rich oppose redistribution to the poor in order to protect their interests, and the poor support redistribution in order to further theirs. But this self-interested story is only of limited value. While it is certainly true that some—maybe even many—rich people oppose redistribution, it is also apparent that a fair number of them do not. In fact, working at the opposite end of the theoretical spectrum, researchers argue that feelings of empathy and altruism operate to induce favorability toward redistribution. Although few scholars would deny that a multitude of considerations explain people's attitudes about welfare, fewer have explored how it is possible that two starkly opposing and mutually exclusive factors function simultaneously across a population to mold attitudes.

This study offered a first-jab at the issue by showing that the effects of self-interest and/or empathy on people's redistributive attitudes is a function of people's perceived similarities with those in need. I theorized and demonstrated empirically that self-interest matters in the absence of perceived similarities, whereas empathy matters only in similarity's presence. These findings are important for a variety of reasons. At the most basic level, this study has helped organize a growing and disjointed literature. As research on important scholarly and policy questions accumulates, researchers are often left with an unwieldy litany of explanatory factors, with new additions being added and little work being done to systematize the various factors beyond efforts to advocate for the r-squared of one over the others. This study purposefully has not waded into an attempt to test whether self-interest, empathy, or group identity explains most variance in people's redistributive attitudes. Reams of studies demonstrate that each factor matters, and it has been the goal of this study to explicate when, or among whom, these various factors are important in explaining attitudes.

One key point of this study is that perceptions matter—in particular, people's perceptions of their social distance to others is key in determining their attitudes, and the effect of other concerns on these attitudes, about redistribution. These perceptions of similarity hold societies together, but only precariously so. When it comes to the rich and the poor, perceptions of similarities may be scarce. Theoretically, this is likely less true in more equal societies than less equal ones. In more equal societies, the rich and the poor are more similar definitionally, but as inequality increases, so too do social markers of socioeconomic status (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). The rich and the poor wear different types of clothes, live in different neighborhoods, go to different schools, shop in different

grocery stores, go to different churches—in other words, live in separate worlds hardly conducive to forging cross-group perceptions of similarities.

The perceived differences between the rich and the poor are further compounded in some societies where socio-economic status overlaps with racial, ethnic, and other divisions. In the United States, this division is most evident between whites and people of color. This division's effect on redistributive attitudes (Gilens 1999; Luttmer 2001) and redistributive spending (Alesina & Glaeser 2004) is well documented. In a number of European countries, the socio-economic divide is increasingly associated with the divide between native Europeans and members of recent (and not-so-recent) immigrant groups, which research has documented appears to influence public opinion about welfare spending (Eger 2010).

Importantly, none of this is meant to imply that increasing diversity automatically diminishes support for welfare. On the contrary, the evidence presented throughout this study confirms that a fair number of whites perceive similarities with African Americans and, for example, many native British citizens believe that they share a great deal in common with immigrants. For supporters of the welfare state, the key is not in limiting diversity, but rather in increasing the perception that members of the majority share commonalities with minorities. This, naturally, is far easier said than done—and identifying methods for fomenting perceptions of similarity fall beyond the purview of this study—but the task is far from impossible.

Indeed, the psychological social identity literature that inspired political scientists to pinpoint the correlation between outgroup prejudices and decreased support for redistribution prompted other researchers to study the conditions under which

individuals' perceptions of the ingroup expand to include members of former outgroups. For instance, in his 2007 study, Transue builds on the insights from the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio 2004) to show how making a non-racialized American identity salient in a survey-experiment setting dilutes the distinction between whites and blacks, resulting in higher favorability of welfare spending. Additional, more practical work must be undertaken in order to explore how real-world interventions can accomplish similar outcomes.

In addition to the relationship between group identification, self-interest, empathy and support for welfare redistribution, in Chapter Five, I demonstrated that perceptions of similarities condition self-interest's influence on partisanship more generally. This finding further underlines the precariousness of theorizing that a single factor has a uniform effect across a wide, diverse population. Although self-interest is important in politics, this study has shown that it is not important to everyone. Namely, among people who perceive that they share commonalities with the poor, self-interest explains little about preferences for redistribution and, by extension, little about partisan support.

The arguments and evidence presented in this study have additional implications on existing ways of thinking and that illuminate paths for future work. For instance, the theory of perceptions of similarity's conditioning effect on self-interest and empathy presented in this study refine and contribute to theories of moral parochialism—i.e. the philosophical argument that individuals prefer to provide assistance to fellow countrymen before assisting others. Theorists have previously argued that individuals restrict their assistance to compatriots out of a psychological necessity to sub-categorize the population; that doing so is the most efficient method of addressing need; because doing

so fulfills other needs, such as group solidarity; or that the restriction of help to compatriots is borne out of reciprocal obligations among group members (see Dagger 1985 for an overview of these arguments). I would wager that, where moral parochialism exists, it in part results because the psychological triggers (e.g. empathy) that are conducive to individuals providing assistance to others are more likely to be activated when the others in question are more similar, as opposed to more different, to the individual.

Furthermore, I believe the framework in this study can be expanded to explain possible variances in the effects that other established factors exert on public support for welfare redistribution. For example, values also should be incorporated into this framework. Just as perceptions of commonality encourage altruism by creating communal space in which promises of reciprocation and/or a sense of shared humanity flourish, a sense of community also provides the space for the emergence and expression of values, such as egalitarianism and humanistic values. Feelings of community provide the boundaries egalitarians and humanitarians are likely to use as constraints either due to the scarcity of resources or because communities and values overlap.

Even the most socially-minded egalitarian recognizes that limited resources constrain the scope of redistribution—an argument that ties into moral parochialism, as discussed above. This hypothetical egalitarian might believe that all people should enjoy a relatively equal standard of living, but given scarce resources, he is still more likely to apply these egalitarian principles to his own ingroup first.¹⁷ Future research into the

¹⁷ It is possible, of course, that people who hold egalitarian and/or humanitarian values perceive fewer distinctions between themselves and most other human beings relative to

effects of values on public opinion should explore how perceptions of similarity—perceptions of community, in other words—demarcate the boundaries of egalitarianism and humanism.¹⁸

The Bigger Picture

Self-interest is not the bedrock upon which politics of redistribution is built. Instead, support for redistribution is intimately entangled with group identities, or more specifically with perceptions of commonality, that influence attitudes both directly and indirectly. The importance of community and perceptions of community in politics has been documented by others (Wong 2010; Walsh 2012), and this study has sought to contribute by exploring in more depth how these perceptions condition the political role of other factors—namely, self-interest and empathy.

Perceptions of commonality have the ability to mitigate the power of raw self-interest and to open up space for the emergence of altruistic actions spurred by empathetic emotions and thought processes. That these perceptions can and do change both overtime and within individuals (as demonstrated by the experiments in this study) further underlines the malleability of self-interest and empathy's influence in politics. It is quite conceivable that a politics built on empathy and altruism could craft sustainable welfare policies in contexts where citizens' perceptions of commonality vis-à-vis the poorest members of society are strengthened. Unfortunately, in today's political climate

those who do not have these values. Exploring how, or if, values overlap with people's perceptions of others offers yet another possible avenue for future research.

¹⁸ At present, to the best of my knowledge no available public opinion dataset includes relevant measures of values, perceptions of commonality, and redistributive attitudes.

both in the United States and in Europe, where traditional demographic majorities are losing their hegemony to immigrant newcomers, elites and parties of the right have ample opportunity to stoke xenophobic fears, which undermine empathy's relevance and, in turn, increase the power of self-interest.

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