

Accepted Manuscript

Title: Perceptions of Inevitability and Demand for Redistribution: Evidence from a Survey Experiment

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PII: S0167-2681(17)30355-4
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2017.12.013>
Reference: JEBO 4227



To appear in: *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*

Received date: 31-1-2017
Revised date: 19-9-2017
Accepted date: 16-12-2017

Please cite this article as: Pellicer, Miquel, Piraino, Patrizio, Wegner, Eva, Perceptions of Inevitability and Demand for Redistribution: Evidence from a Survey Experiment. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2017.12.013>

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Perceptions of Inevitability and Demand for Redistribution: Evidence from a Survey Experiment

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Highlights

- Believing that inequality is inevitable may affect demand for redistribution
- We explore this idea with a survey experiment in a high-inequality context
- Inevitability beliefs can be reduced by learning about lower inequality elsewhere
- Exposure to this type of information increases support for redistributive policies
- Our analysis sheds light on a novel mechanism in the literature on redistribution

ABSTRACT

Believing that inequality is inevitable may limit demand for redistribution. We explore this idea with a survey experiment in South Africa, one of the most unequal countries in the world. Inevitability beliefs can be influenced by learning about lower inequality elsewhere. We find that the demand for redistributive policies reacts to this information, while it is insensitive to other types of information/messages. Our analysis suggests a promising, and heretofore unexplored, avenue of research for refining our understanding of the determinants of demand for redistribution.

Keywords: inequality, demand for redistribution

This research has received funding from the NOPOOR project under the FP7 of the European Commission (grant agreement #290752). We would like to thank Martin Abel, Michael Carter, Nahomi Ichino, Ilyana Kuziemko, Ellen Lust, Jim Sallee, and Tim Smeeding for useful comments and suggestions. This is a revised version of a paper presented to the NYU-CESS Conference on Experimental Political Science; the UNU-WIDER conference on "Inequality measurement, trends, impacts, and policies"; the ERSA Political Economy workshop in Soweto, the Toronto Political Behaviour Workshop, the SITES-IDEAS meeting in Florence, the EPSA Annual Meeting, the Euro-African Conference in Marseille, the IMEBESS conference in Rome. We thank the participants at the above conferences as well as attendees at departmental seminars at the University of Bologna, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Davis, University of Gothenburg, University of Pretoria, University of San Francisco, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. A supplemental appendix, along with the data and replication files, will be available in the online data warehouse of the NoPoor project (www.nopoor.eu).

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