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Wealth inequality and activism: Perceiving injustice galvanizes social change but perceptions depend on political ideologies

Crystal L. Hoyt
University of Richmond, choyt@richmond.edu

Aaron J. Moss

Jeni L. Burnette

Annette Schieffelin

Abigail Goethals

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Crystal L. Hoyt

University of Richmond

Aaron J. Moss

Tulane University

Jeni L. Burnette

North Carolina State University

Annette Schieffelin & Abigail Goethals

University of Richmond

Crystal L. Hoyt, Jepson School of Leadership Studies and Department of Psychology; Aaron J. Moss, Department of Psychology; Jeni L. Burnette, Department of Psychology; Annette Schieffelin, Jepson School of Leadership Studies; Abigail Goethals, Jepson School of Leadership Studies.

Address correspondence concerning this article to Crystal L. Hoyt, Jepson Hall, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, 23173; Email: choyt@richmond.edu. The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Abstract

What motivates people to engage in activism against wealth inequality? The simple answer is, perceiving injustice. However, the current work demonstrates that these perceptions depend on political ideologies. More specifically, for political liberals who frequently question the fairness of the economic system, messages simply describing the extent of the inequality (distributive injustice) are enough to motivate activism (Study 1). For political conservatives, who are inclined to believe that inequality results from fair procedures, messages must also detail how the system of economic forces is unjust (procedural injustice; Studies 2 and 3). Together, these studies suggest perceiving injustice can galvanize social change, but for conservatives, this means more than simply outlining the extent of the inequality.

Key words: wealth inequality; political ideology; procedural justice; distributive justice;

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Across the globe, wealth inequality is high. Some nations and some people possess far more wealth than others do, and within nations—even those with developed economies—there is a stark gap between rich and poor people (Ortiz & Cummins, 2011). With 75% of the wealth in America owned by 10% of the population, the United States is a global leader in economic inequality (Shorrocks, Davies, & Lluberas, 2013). Importantly, the majority of Americans, across political parties, oppose such disparity in the distribution of wealth (Norton & Ariely, 2011; Riffkin, 2014), making it somewhat surprising that there is not greater mobilization to reduce inequality. What motivates people to take action against inequality? In the current research, we investigate this question, grounding our inquiry in people's fundamental motivation for fairness. More specifically, we merge justice theoretical frameworks with political ideology research to gain a better understanding of the types of wealth inequality messages that are most effective at blunting system justification and instead encouraging social change.

There is clear evidence that people experience moral outrage and are motivated to restore justice when they believe that something is unfair (Haidt, 2003; Lerner, 1977; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Wakslak, Jost, Tyler, & Chen, 2007). However, there is also evidence that people engage in system justification to protect the status quo, using ideological defensive reasoning (Jost & Andrews, 2011). Applied to wealth inequality, this suggests that motivating people to engage in activism hinges on convincing them that the inequality is unfair and requires overcoming the powerful inclination to support the status quo (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Armed with this knowledge, activists have tried to develop campaigns to foster change, and researchers have started to examine factors that can increase the effectiveness of the

messages in these campaigns (Chow & Galak, 2012). In the current work, we suggest that

merging two theoretical perspectives in the social and political psychology literatures can help us

understand the effectiveness of campaigns aimed at galvanizing social change—namely, we

merge justice research (i.e., distributive and procedural) with work on political ideology as a

system justification belief.

Justice Research. Activists trying to raise awareness about wealth inequality frequently

communicate messages emphasizing *how much* inequality exists, rather than fundamentally

questioning the fairness of the system that gives rise to the inequalities (Politizane, 2012;

TheRulesOrg, 2013). In other words, messages about wealth inequality often focus on

illuminating distributive injustice, or injustice in the distribution of resources across people (i.e.,

the outcomes). Oftentimes, these messages rely on sensational statistics like, "just 85 people

have as much wealth as the poorest half of humanity. And it's getting worse" (Oxfam, 2014).

Although such messages may seem appropriate given that Americans generally agree that

inequality is too high when they are informed how much inequality actually exists (Norton &

Ariely, 2011), we suggest that getting some people to take action depends on also convincing

them that the system is unfair. That is, messages must also highlight procedural injustice, or the

extent to which processes, in this case the processes of resource distribution, are unfair or

illegitimate. According to Tyler (2011, p.15) "studies of justice consistently suggest that people

evaluate social institutions primarily through a framework of procedural justice." That is, what

people care most about in determining the legitimacy of a system is procedural justice. Thus,

people are most likely to support social change if they believe that the system of economic forces

influencing status and wealth is an unfair one (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008;

Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). Indeed, even grave inequalities can be seen as justified if viewed as an outcome of a fair system.

In the current work, we add nuance to this idea, suggesting that certain people rely more heavily on information about procedural injustice. We expect that basic messages focused on distributive injustice will be effective for those who are inclined to fundamentally question the legitimacy of the system that produced the unequal outcomes. However, in order to spur change for people who believe the system is fair, the campaign must also overcome the power of system justification by making people question the legitimacy of the system.

Political Ideology as a System-Justifying Belief. The ultimate goal of telling people about wealth inequality is convincing them to take action that reduces inequality. However, messages about wealth inequality may be viewed as a threat to democracy and the American Dream, and this system threat might activate system justification processes rather than promote social action (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Thus, despite the benevolent intentions of inequality messages, psychological processes may render these messages ineffective, causing people to avoid alternatives to the status quo for ideologically defensive reasons (Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). More specifically, according to system justification theory "people are motivated to justify and rationalize the way things are, so that existing social, economic, and political arrangements tend to be perceived as fair and legitimate" (Jost & Hunyady, 2005, p. 260).

Research on system justification theory outlines psychological processes that serve to bolster the status quo and outlines the contexts in which people are more or less likely to engage in system-justifying processes (Kay & Friesen, 2011). Powerful motivational belief systems, termed system-justifying beliefs, contribute to whether systems are seen as legitimate or not. One

important set of beliefs that guides people's interpretation of the fairness of social systems is

political ideology (Jost & Amodio, 2012). Ideological differences between liberals (i.e., left-

wingers) and conservatives (i.e., right-wingers) are often described along two core dimensions.

First, is the extent to which people advocate for or resist social change (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling,

2008; Kerlinger, 1984). Compared to liberals, conservatives are more likely to justify the way

things are (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Van der Toorn, Nail, Liviatan, & Jost, 2013). People

with a conservative ideology tend to believe that existing social, economic, and political

arrangements are fair and legitimate, even when those arrangements are challenged (Jost &

Hunyady, 2005). People with a liberal ideology, on the other hand, are consistently more critical

of the system and are more likely to advocate for social change. Second, is the extent to which

people accept or reject inequality. Compared to liberals, conservatives are more inclined to

accept inequality, thereby engaging in more system justification (Skitka & Tetlock, 1993;

Rasinski, 1987). Additionally, conservatives and liberals differ markedly in their adherence to

the American Dream (Jost & Hunyady, 2005), with conservatives more strongly believing that

the American economic system provides equal opportunity to compete for wealth and social

mobility through effort and hard work (Feather, 1984). Such strong procedural justice beliefs

dampen desires to combat social inequality.

An important component of conservatives' view of fair markets is the "Horatio Alger

myth" (Tyler, 2011); this is the belief that wealth and prosperity are a direct result of hard work

and talent. Thus, a message arguing that the allocation of economic outcomes comes from a

system that does not provide equal opportunities to compete for wealth through hard work should

disrupt system-justifying processes. In support of these predictions, Chow and Galak (2012)

demonstrated that when conservatives question whether the wealthy are responsible for their own

success, for example, or question if the wealthy are more hard-working than the poor, they are more likely to support action to address wealth inequality.

In light of the idea that political ideologies can serve as powerful system justifying beliefs, we hypothesized that liberals would report greater activism intent than conservatives. Additionally, merging justice theory research with political ideology findings, we argue that believing that the unequal wealth outcomes stem from a broken system is critical for the effectiveness of a wealth inequality campaign for conservatives but not for liberals. Thus, messages that focus solely on *distributive* injustice by simply highlighting the extent of wealth inequality will likely only be effective in galvanizing social activism for those who already perceive the procedures through which allocations occur to be unfair; that is, for liberals. However, for those who are more predisposed to view the system as fair and legitimate (i.e., conservatives), an effective campaign against wealth inequality must first demonstrate *procedural* injustice by highlighting the flaws in the system in order to thwart system-justifying processes and motivate social action.

We tested our predictions in Study 1 by measuring people's political ideology, assigning them to watch a video describing the extent of wealth inequality (distributive injustice) or to a no-video control condition, and assessing their intent to engage in activism. However, to galvanize change for conservatives, we suggested that procedural justice messages need to precede the distributive justice message in order to override the system justification that conservatives are more inclined to use. Thus, in Studies 2 and 3, we randomly assigned participants to either the distributive injustice condition or to a condition that prefaced the video detailing the extent of wealth inequality with a message that calls into question the legitimacy of the system that produced these outcomes (procedural + distributive injustice condition). In these

latter two studies, we expected that liberals would still be more likely than conservatives to report intentions to engage in activism, but that the message emphasizing procedural injustice would narrow the gap in inequality activism between liberals and conservatives.

Study 1

To investigate how liberals and conservatives respond to a message describing wealth inequality in terms of distributive injustice, we randomly assigned participants to watch a six-minute video entitled, "Wealth Inequality in America" (Politizane, 2012) or to a no video control condition. The video outlines Norton and Ariely's (2011) work which, according to Tyler (2011), "falls clearly within the distributive justice framework" (p. 15). More specifically, the video describes three findings from Norton and Ariely (2011) that are associated with the distribution of wealth in America: (a) Americans underestimate wealth inequality in the U.S., (b) people report that the ideal distribution of wealth is more equal than current levels of inequality, and (c) all demographic groups, including the wealthy, prefer greater equality than currently exists. We predicted that, overall, liberals would report greater levels of intended activism than conservatives, and that the distributive justice only message would galvanize social change for liberals, but not for conservatives.

Method

Participants and procedure. We tested our predictions by combining an undergraduate sample with a community sample. We recruited 75 students from an east coast university and 202 adults from the U.S. on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). We removed fifteen people from analyses for not completing the survey, not responding to the manipulation check, or indicating that the video about wealth inequality did not load, leaving a sample of 262 people (50.4% female; 47.7% male; 1.9% missing/other; median age = 27).

After giving consent, people completed questions measuring their political ideology and how fair they believe the free market system is[1]. Next, we randomly assigned people to conditions, a wealth inequality message (distributive injustice condition) or a no video control. After those in the distributive injustice condition watched the video, we asked them to describe the main point, which served as a manipulation check. We also included a third exploratory condition for a related project where participants were shown the video and then presented with a message arguing that high amounts of wealth can disconnect people from reality, which may lead to a dangerous world for everyone. As this is not relevant to the current paper, it will not be discussed further. Finally, all participants completed a measure of activism related to wealth inequality[2] and answered demographic questions.

Measures

Political ideology. Using a 9-point scale (*very liberal* to *very conservative*), people responded to three questions indicating their political views generally, their social political views, and their fiscal political views ($\alpha = .91$).

Wealth inequality activism scale. On a 9-point scale (*extremely unlikely* to *extremely likely*), people indicated how likely they were to engage in 15 activities addressing wealth inequality. The items were modified from Corning and Myers (2002) social action scale ($\alpha = .95$), and similar items have routinely been used as measures of activism (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Sample items include: "Display a poster or bumper sticker about wealth inequality" and "Send a letter or e-mail about wealth inequality to a public official."

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[1] Across all studies, we ran analyses using fair market beliefs instead of ideology and these beliefs do not moderate responses to the wealth inequality messages. These questions assess perceived fairness in common business practices and market-driven procedures, but do not tap directly into beliefs about all Americans having equal opportunity to achieve success through hard work and initiative.

[2] As an exploratory dependent variable, we measured people's feelings of moral outrage in response to the video about wealth inequality in all three studies. There was a significant interaction between condition and ideology in Study 1 that resembled the effect on activism, but the interaction between condition and ideology was not significant in Studies 2 and 3.

Results and Discussion

First, to confirm that we manipulated distributive injustice and not procedural injustice, we coded participants' brief descriptions of the video into one of two categories: (a) whether they wrote about distributive injustice, or (b) whether they wrote about procedural injustice. We considered responses to be about distributive injustice if the participant wrote about any of the three components identified in the video: the extent of wealth inequality, that inequality is more unequal than most people think it *is*, and/or that inequality is more unequal than most people think it *should be*. We considered responses to be about procedural injustice if the participant questioned the fairness of the American market system, wrote about a lack of mobility, or wrote about the loss of the American Dream. Responses that were either unintelligible or not representative of either category were categorized as such. Finally, responses that noted both distributive and procedural injustice were categorized as procedural injustice to allow for a careful estimate of the effectiveness of the manipulation. We computed Cohen's Kappa to determine agreement between raters; there was strong agreement between the two raters, $\kappa =$ .819, $p < .001$. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to produce consensus. The majority of participants (85%) wrote about distributive injustice, whereas only a minority of participants (4%) wrote about procedural injustice (12% of responses were unintelligible/uncategorizable). Across all three studies, we conduct analyses removing participants who did not write something related to wealth inequality injustice in their response to the manipulation check (i.e., those with responses that were unintelligible/uncategorizable). In Study 1, this resulted in removing 13 participants (5 in the student sample and 8 in the community sample) for a final sample size of 249. Table 1 provides scale means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations.

After confirming that we triggered thoughts about distributive injustice, we next tested

our two predictions—that liberals engage in more activism than conservatives and that the

inequality video, relative to the no video control (control=0; distributive injustice=1), would

increase activism for people with a liberal but not conservative ideology. Specifically, we

conducted a moderation analysis using Hayes's PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2013).

Because the pattern of results was similar across both samples (i.e., student and M-turk), we

combined samples and entered participant sample as a covariate in the analyses[3].

The OLS regression-based moderation analysis revealed a significant effect of political

ideology on intended activism. As expected, a liberal ideology predicted higher levels of

intended activism ($B = -.47$, $p<.001$) than a conservative ideology. There was also a direct effect

of condition ($B = .50$, $p=.023$), with people in the distributive injustice condition reporting

greater intended activism than people in the control condition. And, in line with predictions,

political ideology interacted with message condition ($B = -.26$, $p=.015$) to predict intended

activism (see Figure 1). Tests of simple slopes across low (-1SD, more liberal) and high (+1SD,

more conservative) political ideology revealed a significant effect of distributive injustice

information, relative to a control at -1SD ($B =1.04$, $p=.001$), but a non significant effect at +1SD,

($B = -.04$, $p=.892$). That is, liberals responded to the distributive injustice information related to

wealth inequality with an increase in intent to engage in activism, relative to the no message

control, but conservatives did not. Examining simple slopes the other way, people with liberal

ideologies reported greater levels of activism intent than those with conservative ideologies

overall, and more so in the distributive injustice condition ($B =-.63$, $p<.001$) relative to the

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[3] Regression analyses revealed that the covariate did not significantly interact with either predictor (political ideology or condition; ps > .70) nor was there a significant three-way interaction between the covariate and both predictors ($p = .14$) on the outcome variable. Furthermore, as suspected, the covariate had a marginal direct effect ($p= .06$) on intended activism, with the college students reporting higher levels.

control condition ($B =-.36, p<.001$).

In this first study, we found support for our predictions that liberals demonstrate greater inclinations to engage in wealth inequality activism relative to conservatives and that wealth inequality campaigns focused on highlighting distributive injustice serve to motivate liberals to engage in activism, but not conservatives. We argue that it is system justification processes, in the form of justifying the unfair outcomes as a result of a fair economic system, that thwart conservatives' motivation to engage in action. In Studies 2 and 3, we sought to test this by examining whether messages that first highlight *procedural injustice* by questioning the fairness of the system can motivate conservatives to engage in activism. To test this, in the next two studies, we presented participants with either the distributive injustice video used in Study 1, or we prefaced that video with a message about procedural injustice. Given that the goal in the upcoming studies is to examine responses to a social change video message focused on distributive injustice (by examining the role of both ideology and a procedural injustice message), we do not include a no-video condition.

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedure. Two-hundred sixty-one adults from the U.S. (55% female; 43% male; 2% other or did not indicate; median age = 30; median income range $40,000-$60,000) completed the experiment on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. We embedded three attention check items in the survey (e.g. "Please answer strongly disagree for this question") and excluded twelve people who failed more than one attention check or indicated that the video did not play properly, leaving a sample of 249[4].

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[4] Analyses are similar when these people are retained.

Once again, after giving consent, people completed the same measures of market beliefs and political ideology (α = .88) as in Study 1. Next, we randomly assigned people to watch the same distributive injustice video as in Study 1 (distributive injustice only condition) or to first read a procedural injustice message before watching the video (procedural + distributive injustice condition). The procedural injustice message focused on highlighting the unjust procedures through which wealth distribution in America occurs, which is the American economic market system. Given the preeminent role of the Horatio Alger myth in Americans' views on fair markets (Tyler, 2011), we questioned the legitimacy of the American Dream by describing low rates of social mobility in the United States. The message concludes with the following sentence: "*Americans are working harder than ever however, this is not being properly rewarded with increased movement up the income and living standards ladder*" (messages presented as shown in the Appendix). After the manipulation, all participants watched the same distributive justice video as in Study 1 and then completed the same activism measure (α = .95) used in Study 1.

Results and Discussion

Similar to Study 1, we checked our manipulations by coding participants' brief descriptions of the message and the video. Again, we coded whether participants wrote about distributive injustice or procedural injustice. There was strong agreement between the two raters' coding of responses to the video (κ = .967, *p* < .001) and the procedural injustice message (κ = .956, *p* < .001). Similar to Study 1, in response to the distributive injustice video, 94% of participants wrote about distributive injustice with only 1% writing something related to procedural injustice (5% of responses were unintelligible/uncategorizable). Next, as expected, for participants who also read the procedural injustice message, the majority (76%) wrote about procedural injustice, whereas only a minority of participants (13%) wrote about distributive

injustice (11% of responses were unintelligible/uncategorizable)[5]. Removing participants who did not write about wealth inequality injustice resulted in a final sample size of 228. Table 1 provides scale means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations.

We tested our prediction that the procedural + distributive injustice message, relative to the distributive injustice message alone (distributive injustice=0; procedural + distributive injustice=1), would increase intended activism for people with a conservative political ideology using Hayes's PROCESS macro model 1. First, in replication of Study 1, the analysis revealed a significant effect of political ideology on intended activism. A liberal ideology predicted higher levels of intended activism (B = -.46, $p<.001$) than did a conservative ideology. There was no main effect of condition ($p=.149$). However, there was a marginally significant interaction between political ideology and message condition (B = .11, $p=.094$; see Figure 2). Tests of simple slopes across low (-1SD, more liberal) and high (+1SD, more conservative) political ideology revealed a non significant effect of the procedural injustice message at − 1 SD, (B = -.03, $p=.872$), but a significant effect at + 1SD (B =.40, $p=.028$). That is, the procedural injustice message did not increase activism intent for liberal participants but it did increase conservatives' intent to engage in activism relative to those only presented the distributive injustice message. People with liberal ideologies reported greater levels of activism intent than those with conservative ideologies overall, and within the distributive injustice condition (B =-.56, $p<.001$) and the procedural plus distributive condition (B =-.33, $p<.001$); however, the procedural injustice message decreased the gap between liberals and conservatives.

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[5] One potential methodological confound is the medium of the messages, with the procedural injustice presented as text and the distributive injustice message communicated via video. However, this is less of a concern considering the manipulation check data as well as research showing that liberals can be persuaded via textual messages and conservatives can be persuaded via video messages (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; van der Toorn et al., 2014).

In Study 2, we found support for our prediction that framing a message detailing the extent of wealth inequality (distributive injustice) in America as the result of an unfair economic system (procedural injustice) will motivate conservatives to engage in activism. In Study 3, we sought to replicate these results using a different procedural injustice message. This message directly challenged the American Dream, referring to it as a myth and detailing how hard work is no longer fairly rewarded in the economic system.

Study 3

Method and Measures

Participants and procedure. Two-hundred seventy-four adults from the U.S. (54% female; 46% male; median age = 32; median income range $40,000-$60,000) completed the experiment on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Similar to Study 2, we used three attention check items (e.g. "Please answer strongly disagree for this question") and excluded eight people who failed more than one attention check or reported that the video did not play correctly. This left a final sample of 266[6] people. The procedures and measures were identical to Study 2 with participants completing the political ideology measure ($\alpha = .92$) before being presented with the inequality messages. In this study, however, the content of the procedural injustice message focused on the American Dream being a myth arguing that "*In the United States' economy, worker productivity has more than doubled in the last 30 years, yet workers' wages have remained stagnant or decreased with inflation*" (messages presented as shown in the Appendix). After the manipulation participants completed the activism measure ($\alpha = .96$).

Results and Discussion

Our two raters' coding of responses to the video ($\kappa = .948$, $p < .001$) and the procedural

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[6] Again, analyses are similar when these people are retained.

injustice message (κ = .976, p < .001) were highly reliable. Analyses showed that in response to the distributive injustice video, 88% of participants wrote about distributive injustice with only 7% writing something related to procedural injustice (5% of responses were unintelligible/uncategorizable). Next, as expected, of those participants who read the procedural injustice message, the majority (82%) wrote about procedural injustice, whereas only a minority of participants (12%) wrote about distributive injustice (6% of responses were unintelligible/uncategorizable). Removing participants who did not write about wealth inequality injustice resulted in a final sample size of 247. See Table 1 for scale means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations.

We tested our prediction that the procedural + distributive injustice message, relative to the distributive injustice message alone (distributive injustice=0; procedural + distributive injustice=1), would increase intended activism for people with a conservative political ideology using Hayes's PROCESS macro model 1. Once again, the analysis revealed a significant effect of political ideology on intended activism; a liberal ideology predicted higher intended activism (B =-.40, p<.001) than a conservative ideology. There was no direct effect of condition (p=.719), however, there was a significant interaction between political ideology and message condition (B = .22, p=.050; see Figure 3). Tests of simple slopes across low (-1SD, more liberal) and high (+1SD, more conservative) political ideology revealed no significant effect for liberals (B = -.40, p=.257) but there was a marginally significant effect of the message for conservatives (B =.58, p=.100). For conservatives, framing the message detailing the extent of wealth inequality in America with a message that questions the fairness in the economic system increased intended activism relative to only presenting information on the extent of wealth inequality. Liberals still reported greater levels of intended activism relative to conservatives and this was stronger in the

distributive injustice condition (B =-.50, p<.001) than the procedural plus distributive condition (B =-.28, p=.001).

General Discussion

What motivates people to take action against wealth inequality? Our research suggests that the effectiveness of wealth inequality campaign messages is largely dependent upon not only political ideology but also whether the message focuses on educating the public on the realities of these wealth disparities (distributive injustice) or whether the message also calls into question the fairness of the system that gives rise to the inequality (procedural injustice). Across all studies, conservatives reported lower levels of activism intent than liberals ($ps < .001$ in all three studies). Importantly, this ideological gap was moderated by the type of wealth inequality message (i.e., distributive only or procedural + distributive) presented to participants; a distributive injustice only message widened the gap, whereas this same message preceded by a message challenging the American Dream narrowed the gap. Specifically, liberals responded to a video framing inequality as a distributive injustice with an enhanced desire to engage in activism, but conservatives did not. However, when this video was preceded by a message that framed the unequal outcomes as a result of an unfair system, political conservatives showed an increase in their intention to take action to reduce wealth inequality.

By merging the justice literature with the idea that political ideology can serve as a system justifying belief, this research makes important contributions to both lines of research. These studies indicate that social inequality messages designed to inform the public on the actual state of inequality can serve as a threat to the system—but only for those who believe in the system (i.e., conservatives). This research helps us better understand when messages advocating for social change will be met with system-justification process and when they will be met with

motivation to change the status quo. Most of the extant work in this area focuses on *contexts* that lead to greater system justification effects, whereas the current research contributes to the nascent research by examining *individual-level factors* that can attenuate system justification, thereby contributing to social change (Kay & Friesen, 2011). We argue that questioning the legitimacy of the system is critical for messages to motivate change. Extending the research demonstrating that viewing systems as fundamentally illegitimate can provoke system change (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijin, & Otten, 2008), our work highlights how perceptions of the legitimacy of a system depend on pre-existing system-justifying belief structures. More specifically, for political liberals who frequently question the legitimacy of the economic system, messages simply describing the extent of the inequality (distributive injustice) are enough to motivate activism. However, for political conservatives, who are inclined to believe that inequality results from fair procedures, messages must also call into question the legitimacy of the system (procedural injustice) in order to motivate change. Our findings add nuance to Tyler's (2011, p. 15) claim that "the key issue in justice research is not the distribution of resources but public understanding of the procedures through which that distribution occurs. As long as people generally believe that outcomes flow from fair allocation procedures, discontent will be muted." Thus, our research shows that the effectiveness of campaigns aimed at motivating change around wealth inequality depend not only on the form of injustice the campaign draws attention to, but also must consider the political ideology of the perceiver. Messages detailing how the system of economic forces motivating status and wealth is unfair are critical for motivating political conservatives to address inequality but are not necessary for liberals who persistently question the legitimacy of the system.

Despite significant theoretical implications of our research, there are a few limitations that future research should address. First, given our primary research questions, we did not present participants with only a procedural injustice message. Thus, for example, although we suggest that the procedural justice message is required prior to the distributive justice message to thwart system justification, it is possible that we also are seeing somewhat of a dosage effect. Future research might examine whether a message about procedural injustice alone, without accompanying evidence of the extent of wealth inequality, is sufficient to motivate political conservatives and should test the argument that the procedural injustice message disrupts system justification processes amongst conservatives by examining whether the order of the messages matters. Second, tests of hypothesized moderating effects using moderated multiple regression often have low statistical power (Aguinis, 1995). Indeed, using Aguinis and colleagues' approach to estimating power in moderated mediation models with dichotomous moderator, our power was low across all three studies (ranging from .32 to .49; (Aguinis, Pierce, & Stone-Romero, 1994). We sought to demonstrate the robustness of our findings, by demonstrating the effects across two different messages designed to question the fairness of the economic system that gives rise to wealth inequality. However, future research should not only seek to replicate effects with greater power but also work to gain a better understanding of what makes for a more or less effective procedural injustice message in relation to wealth inequality.

Future research should also focus on better understanding and investigating the processes involved in the observed effects. We argue that beliefs about the fairness of the American economic market system, specifically, the idea that everyone has an equal opportunity to work hard and thus achieve prosperity, undergird responses to wealth inequality messages. Future research should directly test the role of these beliefs, and changes in them, in the observed

effects. Moreover, we focused on ideologies and inequalities in the United States. Future work should explore if similar effects emerge across cultures and ideologies. For example, although the correspondence is not perfect, liberals (US) generally align ideologically with left-wingers (Europe) and conservatives tend to align ideologically with right-wingers. Finally, not only might cultural differences make findings context sensitive (Van Bavel, Mende-Siedlecki, Brady, & Reinero, 2016), but procedures, such as having participants respond to a measure of fair market beliefs at the start of the study, might create a contextual factor (e.g., making the economic system salient) relevant to the psychological processes at play. Future work could advance our understanding of the potential boundary conditions of the effects in the current work.

In sum, in this research we endeavored to gain a better understanding of what type of wealth inequality messages are most effective depending on political ideologies. Whether or not people are motivated to decrease wealth inequality depends largely on how much they view inequality to be a result of unfair allocation procedures. For liberals who already question the fairness of the economic system, messages reminding or informing them of the extent of inequality are enough to motivate activism. However, political conservatives are more inclined to believe that inequality flows from fair procedures and these distributive injustice messages alone are not successful for them. For messages to effectively motivate conservatives, they must also detail how the system of economic forces motivating status and wealth is unfair. The findings from the current work have practical implications for activists who seek to motivate people to engage in action that reduces inequality. Understanding when and how inequality messages influence attitudes and subsequent behavior is critical for the future of our political and economic systems. With an extreme and ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, wealth

inequality is a threat to these systems. "Instead of moving forward together, people are increasingly separated by economic and political power, inevitably heightening social tensions and increasing the risk of societal breakdown" (Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014; p. 2). We hope that the current research, by elucidating how political ideologies may undergird the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of wealth inequality campaigns, both informs activists focused on galvanizing a movement toward a greater redistribution of wealth and sparks further inquiry into how inequality messages can be tailored to overcome barriers to progress.

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Figure 1. Study 1: Wealth inequality activism intent as a function of political ideology and exposure to a wealth inequality message focused on distributive injustice.
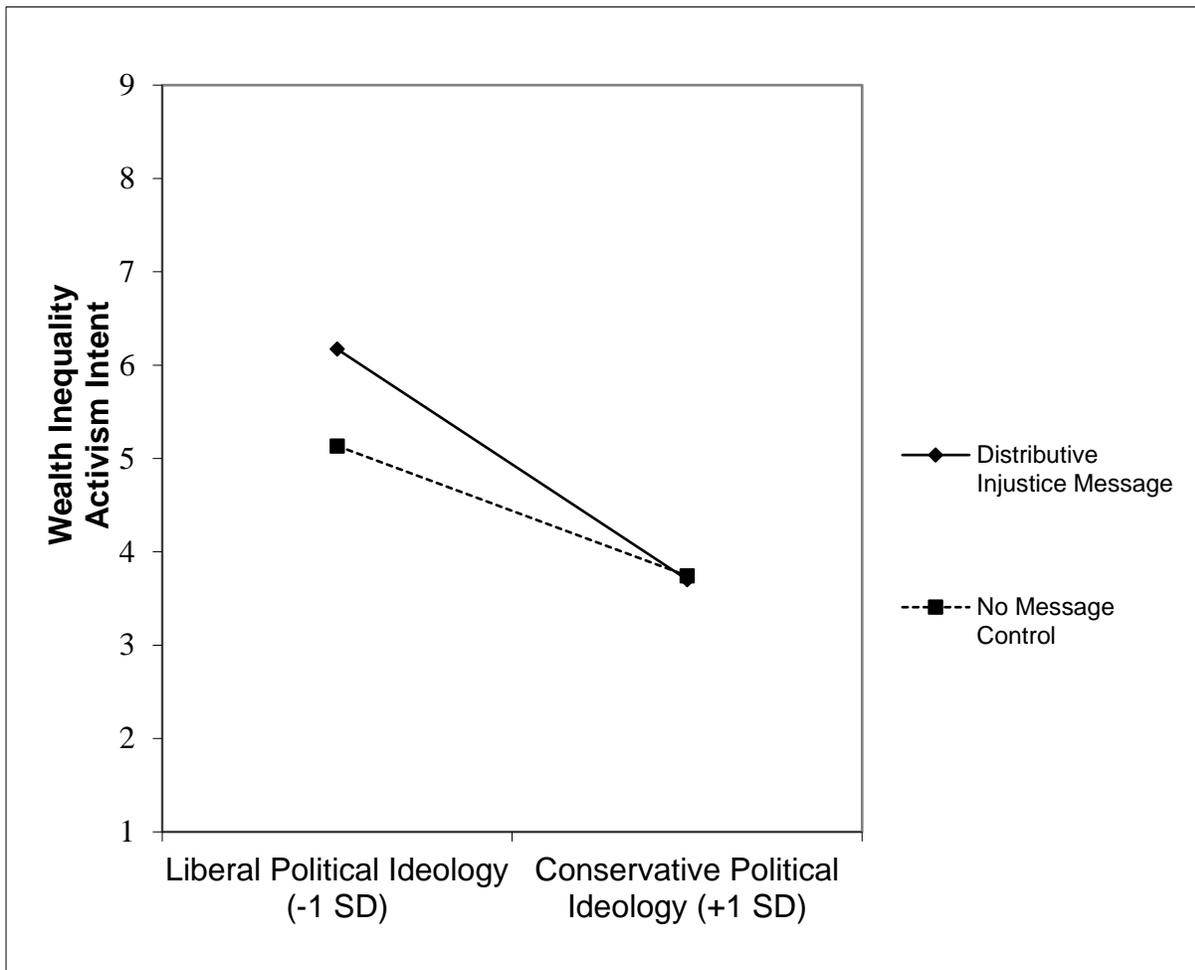
Figure 2. Study 2: Wealth inequality activism intent as a function of political ideology and exposure to either a wealth inequality message focused on distributive injustice alone or a message that focuses on both procedural and distributive injustice.
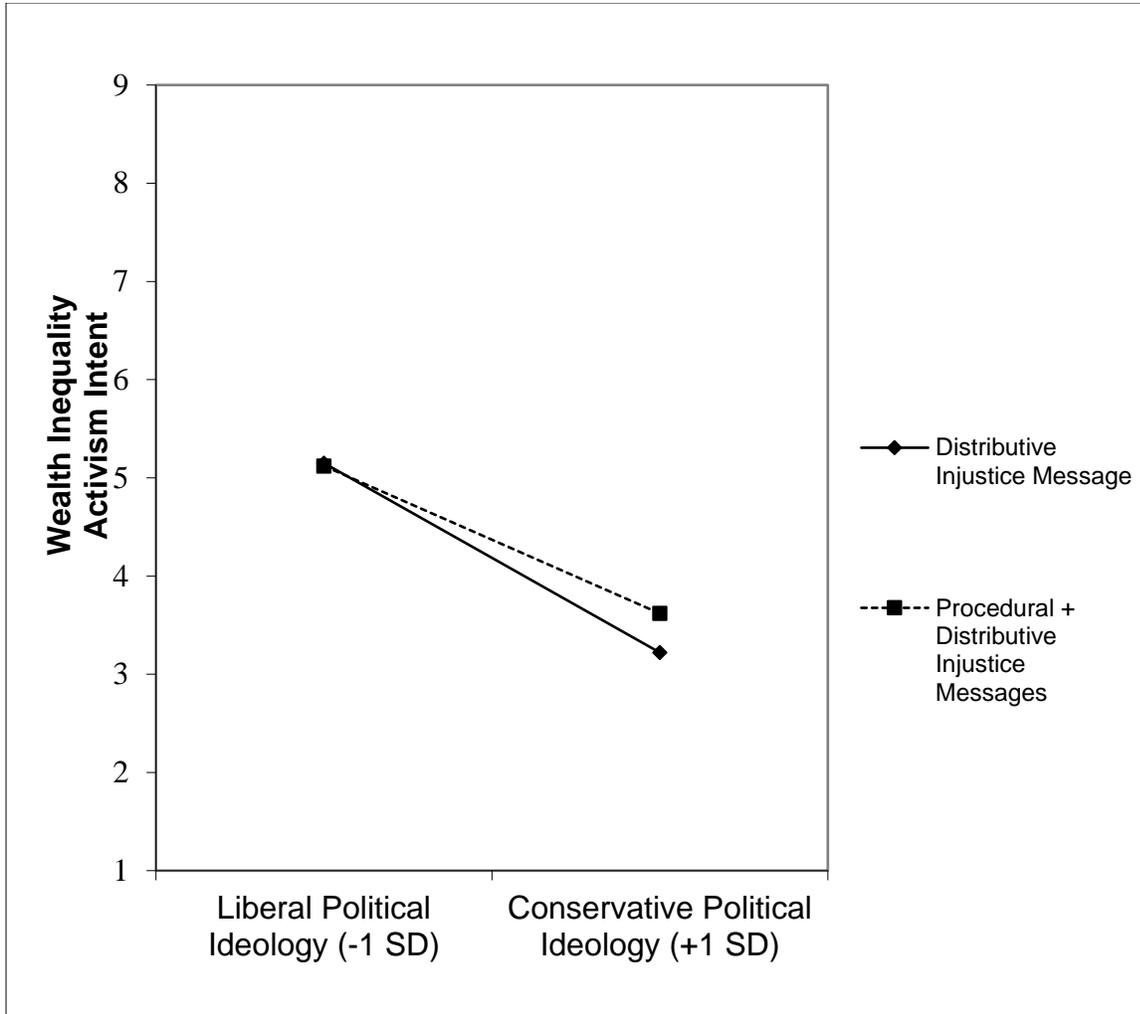
Figure 3. Study 3: Wealth inequality activism intent as a function of political ideology and exposure to either a wealth inequality message focused on distributive injustice alone or a message that focuses on both procedural and distributive injustice.
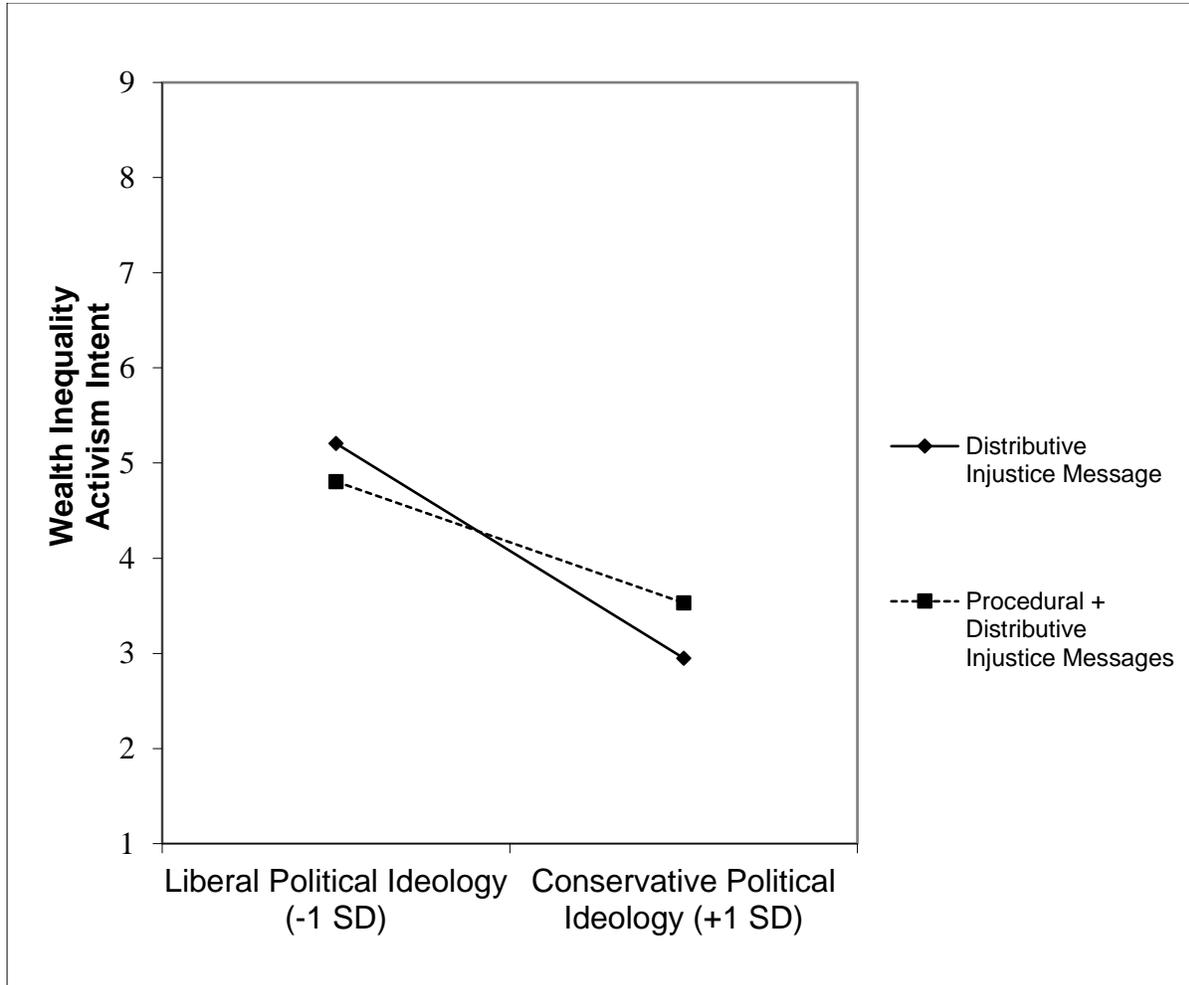
Table 1
Scale Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

Dependent Variable	M	SD	1	2
Study 1				
1. Political ideology	4.60	2.06	--	
2. Activism	3.84	1.96	-.49*	--
Study 2				
1. Political ideology	4.08	1.88	--	
2. Activism	4.29	2.09	-.40*	--
Study 3				
1. Political ideology	4.21	2.21	--	
2. Activism	4.13	2.15	-.41*	--

* = $p < .001$