ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

"Undeserving instead of unfortunate[1]": links between belief in meritocracy and low support for redistribution in Australia.

Master Thesis

MSc Sociology – Politics & Society

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[1] (Bruni, 2017, n.p)

Abstract

Belief that society is a meritocracy has been linked to growing inequality. I assert that the meritocratic belief that success is internally derived legitimates unequal outcomes, entrenches status differences and frames government redistribution as preventing individuals getting what they deserve. Using data from a meritocratic and unequal context in which recent electoral support for addressing inequality was low, Australia, I explore whether the relationship between meritocratic beliefs and inequality may be a function of the way these beliefs reduce support for redistribution. Furthermore, I test other mechanisms through which meritocracy beliefs may relate to redistribution, finding that perceptions of the fairness of the income distribution explain this relationship. However, other predicted mechanisms, including the impact of meritocratic beliefs on perceptions of experienced and expected mobility, the income distribution and individual place in it as well as generalised trust, were not found to be significantly related. Given meritocracy's link with status, comparison was also made to test predictions that the relationship would differ for low and high-status groups. Results indicate that low status groups believe more in meritocracy and that the link between the two key variables is stronger for this group, pointing to the power of system justifying tendencies to negate economic self-interest in determining redistribution attitudes.
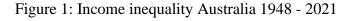
Keywords

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1   Introduction

     Australia exemplifies the decades-long rise in economic inequality broadly observed across developed economies. Globally, the latest figures indicate gaps between rich and poor comparable to the heyday of aristocracy and imperialism during the early twentieth century (Chancel et al., 2021). That inequality has risen so much for so long across so many democracies seems to indicate a level of permissive consent from voters and the representatives they elect. By contrast, in the decades post-war, a broad commitment to moderating inequality meant that by 1978, the poorest half of the Australian population received a share of national income just over four percent smaller than the richest 10 percent (World Inequality Database, 2022). In 2021 however, the gap was nearly four times as large (trend illustrated in figure 1), leaving Australia with inequality exceeding the OECD average (OECD, n.d).

Figure 1: Income inequality Australia 1948 - 2021

     The egalitarian idea that every individual is offered a 'fair go' at achieving social mobility is a principle deeply intertwined with Australian identity (Bolton, 2003). Yet over time, this vision of advancing a fair and mobile socio-economic system transitioned from using policy to promote collective equality toward ensuring excessive intervention would not stifle growth. Deregulation, offshoring and employment casualisation shifted responsibility for outcomes away from governments and businesses and toward individuals and laid the foundations for the inequality that has persisted in the decades since (Cahill & Toner, 2018). This individualisation was in part underpinned by the

principle of meritocracy, an idea that found fertile ground in the notion that in Australia, unlike the classist European societies from which most of its citizens were descended, life outcomes were not pre-determined by the lottery of birth but the result of individuals making use of hard work and talent to grasp opportunities offered to all (Sheppard & Biddle, 2017). Accordingly, figure 2 uses survey data to illustrate that hard work, rather than who you are born as or associated with is viewed as the most important factor determining success in life.
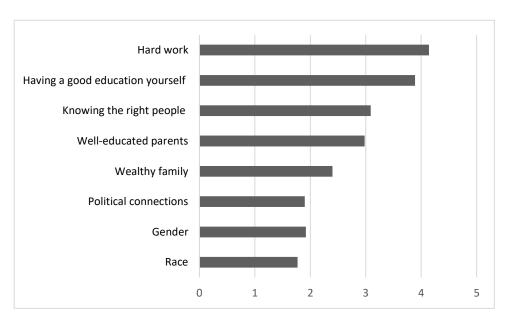
Figure 2: Factors important to getting ahead in life (Australian data) (ISSP, 2019)[2]

That inequality deepened so extensively as state intervention gave way to individualisation hints that government action is needed to arrest the upward trend (Chancel et al., 2021). Specifically, inequality experts assert that broad, progressive redistribution of resources is necessary to reduce gaps and roll back their harmful consequences (Atkinson, 2015). But even as inequality deepens, its impacts are felt and it rises on the agenda, popular desire to address it with redistributive policy remains scant, despite evidence of widespread desire for more equal societies (Norton & Ariely, 2011) (Norton et al., 2014).

This tension is illustrated by the 2019 federal election; in which the Labor Party's commitment of significant parts of its platform toward policy to rebalance inequalities and redistribute resources was resoundingly rejected by voters (Burke, 2019). Instead, voters were attracted to the rhetoric of the incumbent, which insisted inequality was improving, criticised plans to redistribute wealth and told

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[2] Means; scale 1-5

voters that in Australia, all who "have a go" will "get a go" (Johnson, 2020) (Morrison cited in Janda, 2019).

This political reality seems to diverge from research demonstrating that groups society wide prefer a much more equal distribution of wealth (Norton et al., 2014). So how can the seemingly incompatible dichotomy between recognition that society is too unequal be reconciled with electoral rejection of a policy program centred around addressing this issue? In this thesis, I assert that the answer lies in the belief that society is meritocratic, and success is available to all, so redistribution is unnecessary and even unfair. Accordingly, I explore this relationship theoretically and empirically before investigating the implications it holds for groups according to their status.

Low support for redistribution amidst growing inequality runs contrary to the orthodox view that redistribution preferences are tied to income and will strengthen as rising inequality means the median voter drops into a position to benefit (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). However, this account rests on the individual's ability to rationally develop preferences according to their relative position; meaning inaccurate perceptions can lead to miscalculation of redistribution's benefits. Here, I therefore test the claim that meritocratic beliefs link to redistribution because they influence these (mis)perceptions by pushing subjective sense of economic position toward the middle and heightening expectations of social mobility. A rational cost-benefit analysis is further inhibited because redistribution attitudes develop from values, beliefs and "cultural ideas" about fairness and deservingness rather than logical self-interest alone (Dallinger, 2010: p. 339) (Larsen 2016). Although individuals broadly desire a more equal economic system, this does not necessarily equate to government intervention to transfer resources from rich to poor (Norton et al., 2014). Although outcomes delivered post-redistribution might be fairer in the ideal, the means of achieving that fairness are not seen as so; and support for redistributive policy remains low.

Support for more equal societies has been attributed to a desire for fairness (Starmans et al., 2017). However, in a society in which meritocratic views are widespread, perceptions about fairness are influenced by the idea that individuals get what they deserve, according to their hard work and talent. Here, I explore the proposition that progressive redistribution sits uneasily with this sense of fairness. Those who believe that success can be achieved meritocratically may see redistribution as an infringement on the fair assignment of outcomes. Meritocracy beliefs internalise attributions for life outcomes, boost perceptions of fairness and erode support for redistribution.

Meritocracy, with its legitimation of unequal outcomes, is intimately linked with modern social hierarchy (Appiah, 2018). Understanding policy attitudes therefore requires consideration of status and

its implications beyond material outcomes (Ridgeway, 2014). In a meritocratic system, status is accorded to the successful, not because they were born into privilege, but because they are seen to be worthy of rewards fairly earned with hard work and talent (O'Brien & Major, 2009). In this way, status derived from merit legitimates unequal outcomes in a broadly accepted hierarchy. I therefore question whether belief in meritocracy lowers support for redistribution because it makes individuals less trusting of the average individual. More broadly, I investigate whether the link between meritocracy and inequality relates to the implications this situation holds for the way different groups perceive one another, themselves and the possibility of redistribution.

This is important because the electoral rejection of redistribution cannot solely hinge on the rich who benefit accordingly. Intuitively, self-interested high-status individuals have few reasons to question their position or support redistribution toward the less meritorious. But in 2019, electoral results demonstrate that Labor's platform to address inequalityfound little support in middle and working-class electorates (Wright et al., 2019) (ALP, 2019). This thesis therefore seeks to understand how lower status individuals conceive social policy that is ostensibly aimed at benefiting them. Specifically, it investigates whether meritocratic ideals help explain why low status groups may paradoxically be inclined not to advocate redistribution. For example, poorer people may be more likely to perceive their status as fair, misperceive the income distribution or their chance at mobility or may defend meritocracy because of the anxiety attached to their position in the status hierarchy (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) (Hafer & Choma, 2009) (Benabou & Ok, 2001). In a meritocratic and stratified society, individuals of all statuses may be inclined to justify the system, making political repudiation of meritocracy via economic redistribution unlikely, even if contrary to the rational self-interest of many. Ultimately, therefore, the impact of meritocracy is that it loosens the classic linear relationship between income and support for redistribution, with important political repercussions.

As such, the research questions addressed here are:

Does belief in meritocracy lower support for redistribution? How can this link be explained?

Does this link function differently for different societal groups?

These questions are addressed using the 2019 wave of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in which a representative Australian sample were surveyed on social inequality. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) linear regression analyses are used to interpret data. Alongside relevant controls, the initial model tests the preliminary relationship before other explanatory variables are added. Finally, analysis is repeated after separating the sample according to several status groups, to determine whether results differ in line with expectations.

1.1   Societal Relevance

Both in Australia and elsewhere, while meritocracy has become embedded in conceptions of how society works, there is growing awareness that inequality is deep and growing. However, a link between the two is not often made, while the impact of widespread meritocratic beliefs as a legitimator of status stratification is also under appreciated. This research contributes by addressing these omissions in societal understanding.

Inequality's impacts have attracted broad popular and academic attention. It has been implicated not only in stagnating growth and poverty but in worsening trends of crime, obesity, incarceration, educational attainment and even mental health (Kelly, 2000) (Pickett et al, 2005) (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017) (Layte, 2012). The harmful implications of inequality therefore make better understanding of low policy support to address it societally relevant.

1.2   Scientific Relevance

This thesis adds to a broad literature that has sought to understand why rising inequality has not resulted in growing demand for related policy. It extends much of the extant work by focusing on meritocracy as a key explanatory factor for variation in redistribution attitudes and also investigates a range of related variables that help explain the relationship. Moreover, unlike previous work, this study will consider the implications that meritocracy holds for low status groups specifically because of the status it entrenches. Additionally, I bring together strands of political science and sociology research that account for the lack of electoral support for redistribution from its prospective beneficiaries because of misperceptions (Hauser & Norton, 2017) with work from political psychology that addresses the tendency of low status groups to sustain systems from which they see little benefit (Hafer & Choma, 2009) (McCoy et al, 2013).

2   Theoretical Background

A link between beliefs about forces responsible for personal outcomes in society and political attitudes that shape inequality has been demonstrated in various forms. Mijs showed that inequality has risen in harmony with meritocratic beliefs, including in Australia (2021). The implication is that a cycle may therefore exist in which meritocratic ideals and inequalities in outcomes increase, but citizens do not perceive them as unjust, and support intervention, because they are seen to emerge from factors within an individual's control rather than underlying structural determinants (Brunori et al., 2013) (Castillo & Maldonado, 2021) (Roberts et al., 2021). Garcia-Sanchez et al. (2020) specifically related

meritocracy beliefs to redistribution by showing that they attenuate the relationship between inequality perception and support for both government redistribution and progressive tax measures specifically.

Accordingly, H1 is that: meritocratic beliefs relate negatively with support for redistribution.

The following sections theoretically explore specific mechanisms through which this relationship may function before the results of empirical tests are discussed.

2.1   Perceived fairness

Persisting tolerance for inequality is explained because even if citizens perceive unequal outcomes, they do not challenge them when presumed to be allocated fairly. Starmans et. al (2017) suggest that results suggesting a widespread concern about inequality[3], are actually indicative of a universal desire for fairness rather than equality. They assert that individuals considering hypothetical resource distribution typically opt for equality only because they have no information with which to form an opinion about fairness based in merit and deservingness. Conversely, in reality, attitudes toward unequal outcomes result from an evaluation of whether they eventuate from a process in which opportunities for success were distributed evenly. Belief in meritocracy means that unequal outcomes are attributed to internal traits and individual choices and reflect inevitable differences in people's effort and ability. Ultimately therefore, individuals may "prefer fair inequality over unfair equality" (Starmans et. al, 2017: 1). It is the apparent fairness of outcomes in a meritocracy makes redistributing the resources of the meritorious objectionable.

Accordingly, H2 is that: the negative relationship between meritocratic beliefs and support for redistribution can be explained because meritocratic beliefs relate negatively with perceptions of fairness which relate negatively to support for redistribution.

2.2   (Mis)perceptions of the income distribution

Existing research attributes low support for redistribution to individual misperception of economic inequality and relative economic standing (Hauser & Norton, 2017). Importantly, it is subjective assessments of the income distribution rather than objective realities that have been found to determine policy support; meaning that inequality data can diverge from how individuals view society and form policy preferences (Bussolo et al., 2019). Moreover, as inequality increases, individual understandings may drift further toward inaccuracy. This is because perceptions extend from the inherently limited scope of everyday life but in an unequal context, encounters with non-similar others become rarer.

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[3] They refer to Norton & Ariely, 2011 and Norton et., al 2014.

Individuals may therefore erroneously position themselves toward the average, underestimate the extent of inequality and make incorrect assessments of the benefits of redistribution (Mijs, 2021) (Jaime-Castillo, 2008) (Roberts et al., 2021).

The link between surroundings and perceptions of the broader income distribution implies that some part of variance in redistribution attitudes can be attributed to relative differences in these experiences. Exposure to local inequality has been found to drive support for redistribution (Sands & de Kadt, 2020). Conversely, people who live economically homogenous lives may be more likely to misperceive their place in the income distribution than those who are frequently exposed to non-similar others. Given that (mis)perceptions contribute to redistribution attitudes, those who are more prone to them should think differently than those who are not. I investigate whether meritocratic beliefs link to misperceptions because it strengthens the likelihood of perceiving oneself and others as closer to the middle of the income distribution. By extension, if an individual believes anyone can succeed, then they are more likely to consider others as occupying the middle of the income distribution (Larsen, 2016).

Accordingly, H3 is that: the negative relationship between meritocratic beliefs and support for redistribution can be explained because meritocratic beliefs relate negatively with reporting contact with individuals poorer or richer and positively with belief in a middle-income society and these variables relate negatively to support for redistribution.

2.3   Social mobility

Meritocratic beliefs reduce support for redistribution because they promise a better future regardless of government intervention. The perception of meritocratic mobility has been shown to strengthen tolerance for inequality and weaken support for redistribution, thus transforming an unequal society into one in which all are assured of eventual payoff for their hard work (Benabou & Ok, 2001) (Jaime-Castillo, 2008). Accordingly, redistribution sceptics assert that the promise of mobility is the key motivator that drives individuals to contribute to the economy and one that is jeopardised by increased welfare generosity (Saunders, 2003).

More broadly, the 'tunnel effect' explains tolerance for inequality through perception of upward mobility for others, based on the expectation of personal mobility accordingly (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973). Meritocratic beliefs may reduce solidarity with the poor or envy of the wealthy in the expectation that current differences are only temporary; a perception strengthened by 'rags to riches' narratives abundant in popular culture. Importantly, expectations of mobility explain why low

status individuals may not support redistribution because, like those richer than them, they see it as not in their (long-term) interest.

Accordingly, H4 is that: the negative relationship between meritocratic beliefs and support for redistribution can be explained because meritocratic beliefs relate positively with experienced and expected mobility which relate negatively to support for redistribution.

2.4   Generalised trust

Meritocratic beliefs reduce support for redistribution because legitimated status differences corrode trust and internal attribution for outcomes weakens a sense of shared fate with outgroups (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). A cycle may therefore emerge where meritocracy erodes solidarity and reduces support for redistribution (Paskov & Dewilde, 2012), solidifying inequality and further reducing trust (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Investing personal resources in public services is inherently a "leap of faith" that hinges on trust in others not to exploit the system but meritocratic beliefs undermine confidence for all actors (Rothstein et al., 2011: 9). They entrench the perception that citizens only demand public funds because of a lack of effort and so, as asserted by former Australian Treasurer Joe Hockey, society is divided between undeserving "leaners" who take from the more industrious and meritorious "lifters" (Hockey cited in Martin, 2015). This sentiment may mean that those who would actually benefit from redistribution doubt that transferring their meagre resources will ultimately result in beneficial outcomes. Moreover, in a meritocratic context, in which anti-beneficiary currents are strong, even those who are generally supportive may ultimately opt out if they fear that others have reduced their own support.

Accordingly, H5 is that: the negative relationship between meritocratic beliefs and not supporting redistribution can be explained because meritocratic beliefs relate negatively with generalised trust which reduces support for redistribution.

2.5   Status

Understanding the link between meritocracy and redistribution also requires consideration of the impact of status in a society in which differences between individuals are attributed to personal failings not structural inequalities. Without explicitly implicating meritocracy and redistribution, authors have outlined how the unique way low status individuals perceive themselves and others is linked to political attitudes and increased discontent (Cramer, 2016) (Hochschild, 2016). In legitimating the provision of societal rewards for some and not others, meritocracy creates a status hierarchy in which 'winners' feel entitled to their superior position over low status subordinates, who are increasingly seen as

"undeserving instead of unfortunate" (Bruni, 2017, n.p). Meritocracy therefore deepens societal stratification over and above inequalities in material power (Ridegeway, 2014). I assert that this process has implications for identity and perceptions that mean the link between meritocracy and redistribution is different according to status (Layte & Whelan, 2014) (Trump, 2018).

Intuitively, belief in meritocracy and rejection of redistribution is likely to be high among high status meritocratic 'winners' whose success is validated as the result of their intrinsic talent and hard work. However, other literature indicates presence of some countervailing pressures. High education may for example guard against misperceptions about inequality and promote recognition of the influence of unmeritocratic discrimination and luck (Hunt, 2004), (Wodtke, 2018), (McCall, 2013). High status individuals may also predict less mobility than low status groups, given their existing situation entails limited 'room to move'. Finally, they may also be more trusting and therefore inclined to support government redistribution (van der Meer, 2010) (Medve-Balint & Boda, 2014).

For low status individuals, attitudes toward meritocracy may also be the result of opposing forces. While they are likelier to have personal experience of the systemic barriers that demonstrate flaws in meritocracy their lower education could enhance misperceptions. Accordingly, they may therefore misunderstand the extent of inequality, misjudge their own position and overestimate their future mobility which could all reduce support for redistribution.

2.5.1   System justification

Some research finds that the puzzling political attitudes of low status groups can be explained by a tendency to engage in behaviour that justifies the existing system. I assert that low status groups may be inclined to perceive meritocracy and not support redistribution because it provides benefits to esteem that dampen their rational economic self-interest. For example, while meritocracy is connected to perceptions of fairness, those who are most disadvantaged and most dependent on the system for their future prospects, may benefit psychologically from believing that their situation is fair rather than the result of structural injustice. As such, believing in meritocracy has been shown to have a palliative impact for low status individuals by enhancing perceptions of control and increasing willpower (Brandt, 2013) (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012) (Norton & Ariely, 2011). This 'belief in a just world' (Lerner, 1980) promotes internal attribution of outcomes and erodes deservingness (Hafer & Choma, 2009) but increases satisfaction with unequal outcomes (Jost & Banaji, 1994) (McCoy & Major, 2007) (Durante et al., 2013) (Virginie et al., 2016). Low status may therefore paradoxically engender a defence of the status quo that manifests in stronger belief in meritocracy and fairness and lower support for redistribution.

Authors have identified 'status anxiety' as a characteristic of stratified societies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010: 40) and so individuals may therefore be sceptical of redistribution because expressing support for it causes them concern about their relative social standing. Endorsing redistribution requires that low status individuals acknowledge their low position and accept their inability to move up meritocratically. As such, it would challenge "pride, dignity and self-confidence" in a way that conceiving of oneself as a "temporarily embarrassed millionaire" does not (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010: 40) (Delhey et al., 2017) (Steinbeck, 1966 cited in Alesina & Teso, 2018: 1). This conception of redistribution as a threat to identity aligns with research highlighting cognitive processes of motivated reasoning in understanding policy support that appears irrational (Brooks, 2021) (Sherman & Cohen, 2002). Conversely, attributing low status to external factors would entail a refutation of the ideologically dominant principles of fairness and meritocracy and challenge the status of those widely perceived as deservedly superior (Ridgeway, 2014). The inherently weak societal standing of low status groups may therefore motivate them to justify their position rather than acknowledge their inability to change a flawed system.

These mechanisms lend weight to the assertion that despite their intuitive scepticism of meritocracy and support for redistribution, low status individuals may subvert expectations based on economic self-interest alone, especially in a context in which meritocracy is ideologically dominant. It is predicted that among low status individuals, the link between belief in meritocracy and low support for redistribution will be strong. This is because those who do not believe in meritocracy are very likely to support redistribution but because of the system justifying tendencies outlined here, those who believe in meritocracy are especially likely not to support redistribution as a result. Conversely, high status individual's attitudes to redistribution are more likely to be related to their economic self-interest, even if they are more trusting or their belief in meritocracy is checked by fewer misperceptions about the income distribution and inequality. This means that in a meritocratic context like Australia, the beliefs of low status individuals may converge with high status groups, facilitating the formation of an anti-redistribution coalition.

Accordingly, H6 is that: meritocratic beliefs are higher for lower status groups than corresponding higher status groups.

And H7 is that: the negative relationship between meritocratic beliefs and support for redistribution is stronger for low status individuals.

3   Data and Methodology

3.1   Data

Data are drawn from the 2019 wave of the Social Inequality module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP, 2019). The ISSP is a cross-national survey that provides data on a range of topics from countries around the world across many years. The representative sample is drawn from the population of Australia (n = 1089).

3.2   Operationalisation

Independent variables

Following other similar research, the independent variable is individual belief in what is needed to get "ahead in life" (Mijs, 2021) (Garcia-Sanchez et al, 2020) (Larsen, 2016). The key judgement is whether factors outside an individual's control prevent them from achieving success, or whether outcomes result purely from aptitude and effort, as in the idea of meritocracy. An overarching perspective on any individual's ability to get ahead is derived from the 'score' that results from combining a range of factors into one scale.

Most of the factors indicate that would suggest this is not the case, such as those relating to the situation into which an individual is born ("coming from a wealthy family" and "having well-educated parents"). Similarly, other measures indicate outcomes relate to intrinsic traits ("a person's race") or ("being born a man or a woman"). Other factors such as "knowing the right people" and "having political connections" are not assigned at birth but can reasonably be linked to anti-meritocratic factors including family and upbringing rather than being available to all individuals. Conversely, a meritocratic situation is characterised by equality of opportunity in which anyone's "hard work" can bring success. Additionally, respondents indicate the importance of "having a good education yourself". While the best educated in Australia are disproportionately more likely to be born into privileged social positions (OECD, 2009), the fact that Australia has an effective, well-resourced and public education system means that it is likely that attaining a "good education" is broadly seen as accessible and therefore meritocratic. Moreover, the moderate Pearson's correlation (r = .247) between this variable and "hard work", a particularly meritocratic factor, indicates it is generally seen this way.

Some studies have separated anti-meritocratic from meritocratic factors (Mijs, 2021). Here, however, the goal is a broad understanding of how individuals understand opportunities to get ahead in sum. Individuals may believe "hard work" to be important to getting ahead, but still see society as anti-meritocratic, which is reflected in the importance of other factors. Taking hard work alone in this

case would entail an ill-founded conclusion that society is meritocratic. The deepest understanding therefore comes from combination of factors into one scale.

Not every available measure has been included. A question on the importance of "giving bribes" was omitted because it was evaluated to reflect a respondent's opinions about certain figures or political scandals rather an objective, generalised judgement. The importance of a "person's religion" was also not included. This measure would likely invite very different evaluations from person to person, depending on which religion came to mind. If religion was interpreted as an individual, inward trait unlikely to be the subject of discrimination then responses will differ to those for whom religion reflects cultural difference. It may or may not disadvantage the individual depending on how the individual expresses their faith. Given that the other measures reflect factors over which the individual has either very little or nearly total control, it was deemed inappropriate to include in the scale.

Responses were reverse coded for simple interpretation. The possible answers increase in importance from "not important at all" (1), "not very important" (2), "fairly important" (3), "very important" (4) to "essential" (5). The sum of each respondent's eight answers gives a possible score from 8 to 40 where a high score reflects low belief in meritocracy. The scale is internally consistent, with Cronbach's alpha 0.741 (Nunnally, 1978).

Several other factors that may explain the link between beliefs about meritocracy and attitudes toward redistribution which will be also included as independent variables. Firstly, perceptions of fairness are operationalised using the question, "how fair or unfair do you think the income distribution is in Australia? The scale runs from "very unfair" (1) to "very fair" (4). This variable, while similar to ideas about getting ahead, is included because it accounts for deficiencies in the operationalisation of meritocracy. For example, key factors such as ambition, talent and luck are not considered in the survey but form part of the respondent's overall judgement conveyed in this question. It also accounts for those who believe that while hard work is critical to getting ahead, not all hard workers get ahead; a situation entailing high meritocratic beliefs but lower sense of fairness.

Perceptions of the income distribution that are important in determining attitudes may also be influenced by belief in meritocracy. A belief that any individual can "get ahead" may shift the sense of where others are on the income distribution closer to the middle. This is operationalised using a variable that indicates the regularity of public contact with those who are noticeably poorer or richer. Possible answers run from "never" to "less than once a month" to "several times a month" to "once a week" to "everyday". The shifting of perceptions toward the middle is also accounted for using a

variable that asks respondents to select a visualisation of relative positions of segments of the population that aligns with their understanding of society (cf. Larsen, 2016). Three place most people toward the bottom, one has most people toward the top and one is distributed with even numbers in each position above and below the centre. Those who see society as the latter are coded 1 while responses that visualise a society weighted away from the centre are coded 0. These three measures provide insight into whether people perceive themselves and others as occupying the economic middle ground.

Individual experience of social mobility may also influence the link between belief in meritocracy and support for redistribution. Two scales that capture mobility have been developed also informed by Larsen (2016). Both frame society for respondents as one in which "groups tend to be towards the top" or "towards the bottom". Respondents are asked to place themselves on a scale ranging from the bottom (1) to the top (10). To measure experienced mobility the position the respondent would "put yourself now" is subtracted from the one of "the family that you grew up in" for a score from -9 (falling from top to bottom) to +9 (highest possible mobility). Similarly, expected future mobility is derived from subtracting the response "thinking ahead 10 years from now" from that in the present.

Generalised trust is measured using the item "generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?". The aim is that responses reflect trust in the average person but the operationalisation is imperfect given its vagueness and responses may therefore differ depending on which individuals come to mind. Moreover, support for redistribution is also linked to confidence in government and public agencies but there is no measure available for trust in specific entities. However, this measure of generalised trust is widely used and remains analytically useful. The scale runs from "you almost always can't be too careful in dealing with people" (1) to "people can almost always be trusted" (4).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is support for redistribution. I follow other research in using responses to the statement "it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes". Possible responses are "strongly disagree" (1), "disagree" (2), "neither agree nor disagree" (3) "agree" (4) or "strongly agree" (5). This measure is widely used but may be excessively broad to properly measure policy preferences Dallinger (2022). While validity would be improved by gauging support for specific policies, this question does capture

the state led interventionism advocated by policy experts (and rejected by voters) that I aim to investigate in this study.

Control variables

Individual level factors include age, gender and household income may influence the key variables and so will be controlled for to ensure they do not confound expectations. The variable for household income was found to be significantly skewed so the logarithm for this variable is used.

Relationship to the labour market is likely to determine individual cost-benefit analysis of redistributive policies and so will also be controlled for. Dummies were used to indicate whether the individual is likely to be eligible for welfare support or not. Those who are "in paid work" or "looking after the house" (likely relying on someone else's income) are grouped, as are those who are "unemployed and looking for a job", "in education", "apprentice or trainee", "permanently sick or disabled" or "retired". Religious affiliation has also been shown to relate to preferences for redistribution and so belonging to a religion or not will also be part of the model as a dummy variable (Jaime-Castillo, 2016).

Finally, it is likely that individual political affiliation will have a significant relationship on the variables in question, especially given the political salience of these issues. Addressing social inequality with redistributive policy was a clear policy agenda of two parties, but these measures were criticised by the other mainstream candidate, so it is therefore important to ensure party support is accounted for in the model. This is done using the variable that asks respondents which party they voted for in the federal election. Responses were split between those who voted for a left-wing party (Labor Party or Greens) and those who did not.

3.3   Outline of analysis

Initially I will model the relationship between belief in meritocracy and support for redistribution through OLS linear regression. I will first report the links between the key variables including relevant controls, before adding the other independent variables. If relevant results change as new variables are added, I will have found evidence to support my hypotheses.

The second part of the analysis aims to reveal how the relationships differ depending on individual status. Status is operationalised using the question referred to above that asks respondents to place themselves on a rung of the figurative social ladder. This operationalisation captures the relational aspect of status effectively, meaning a perspective of individual standing derived from that person's

impression of others. This comparative measure is therefore preferable to relying solely on income or education as a status marker.

Initially I will explore these variables by reporting means across status groups and using T tests to indicate significant differences. I will then run identical OLS regressions with the sample split evenly by status so statistical comparisons can be made. I will group answers of the 50 percent lowest and highest status individuals, then test how results differ between the lowest third and middle third, groups roughly representing the 'working class' and 'middle class'. Next, I test the scale's extremes, namely the 20 percent of individuals at the very top and bottom. As a final robustness check, I test whether results differ when splitting the sample with an objective rather than economic indicator, household income (log).

3.4   Ethics and privacy considerations

The checklist demonstrating that ethics and privacy concerns are accounted for is attached in the appendix in accordance with the relevant requirements. All data used is secondary and anonymised.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Support for redistribution	3.41	1.251	1	5
Meritocracy	22.00	4.353	8	40
Fairness	2.32	.705	8	40
Contact with poorer	4.83	1.825	1	7
Contact with richer	4.33	1.905	1	7
Belief in equal society	0.349	0.477	0	1
Mobility experienced	0.484	1.822	-9	9
Mobility expected	-0.07	1.343	-9	9

Generalised trust	2.40	0.712	1	4
Gender	0.51	0.50	0	1
Age (birth year)	1962.971	16.486	1920	2004
Household income (log)	4.94	0.451	0.3	6.72
Welfare recipient	0.40	0.491	0	1
Religious belief	0.55	0.497	0	1
Left-wing vote	0.52	0.50	0	1

4   Results

OLS regression analyses were used to investigate whether meritocratic beliefs link to redistribution and if other variables could help explain this relationship. The results are presented below in Table 2. Model 1 predicts changes in support for redistribution from belief in meritocracy including relevant controls. It shows that the link is small, although statistically significant ($\beta = .102$, $p < 0.05$) so that for every one standard deviation decrease in meritocratic beliefs (a higher score on the scale), redistribution increases by .102 standard deviations. The model explains just more than 22 percent of the variance in support for redistribution or about one percent more than the null model containing only control variables. This provides support, although tentative, for hypothesis 1, that meritocratic beliefs reduce support for redistribution.

A range of control variables were included to minimise omitted variable bias. The results indicate that the bulk of these variables had little influence, indicating the robustness of the reported results. Notably, income did not have a significant impact on attitudes toward redistribution in all models excluding the first. Generally, therefore, these results indicate that support for redistribution is not closely tied to demographic factors, which are surprisingly poor predictors. However, recent political party support was a much more significant contributor to the variance in redistribution attitudes (in model 5: $\beta = -.274$, $p<0.001$).

Model 2 adds perceptions of the fairness of the income distribution to look at whether meritocratic beliefs are associated with a stronger perception of fairness and lower support for

redistribution. Doing so increases the explained variance in the dependent variable to nearly 31 percent while reducing belief in meritocracy to non-significance[4]. Impressions of fairness are therefore crucial in determining support for redistribution but only partially derived from the range of factors important to getting ahead in life that was used as a measure of meritocracy. Perceptions of fairness explain the link between meritocracy and redistribution, confirming hypothesis 2.

The next model tested the effect of three variables that were asserted to each reflect the way in which meritocratic beliefs may influence an individual's perspective of their own position and that of others in the income distribution, and of the distribution in general. It found no relationship between contact with those who are noticeably poorer or richer and the key variables, but perception of an equal society did significantly relate to lower support for redistribution (β =-.068, p<.05). However, neither impacted the coefficient for meritocracy, meaning that the predicted relationship was not found and hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Both perceptions of past and future mobility were also expected to make up support for redistribution but it was only upward movement already experienced that significantly altered the model (β =-.095, p<.05). Mobility increased the explained variance in redistribution attitudes slightly, but did so independently from meritocratic belief, disproving the assertion in hypothesis 4 that meritocratic beliefs would strengthen perceptions of mobility. Finally, generalised trust was added in model 5 but this variable did not have a significant influence, meaning hypothesis 5 can also be rejected.

The link between belief in meritocracy and support for redistribution has been established, and a range of mechanisms test to explore how it functions. The focus therefore now turns to the second research question, whether this link operates differently for individuals of different social statuses. It may be expected that those who have attained a high status in the meritocratic system would be likely to attribute their success to internal factors rather than acknowledge that their position is the result of factors beyond their control. Conversely, since those who espouse a meritocratic world view may frame low status individuals as responsible for their own position, this group's own belief in meritocracy would seem likely to be low. However, other theoretical and empirical work was presented to advance the idea that a tendency toward system justifying beliefs may actually strengthen belief in meritocracy for low status individuals to the extent that it is stronger than their higher status counterparts.

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[4] A result that raised concerns of multicollinearity; relevant checks returned no concerning results, VIF<1.1

Table 2 - OLS Regressions of support for redistribution

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Meritocracy	.102* (.010)	.088†(.009)	.087†(.009)	.088†(.009)	.088†(.009)
Fairness		-326***(.063)	-.315***(.064)	-.311***(.064)	-.311***(.064)
Contact with poorer			-.000(.024)	.004(.024)	.003(.024)
Contact with richer			-.055(.023)	-.063†(.023)	-.063†(.023)
Equal society			-.068*(.088)	-.068*(.087)	-.067*(.088)
Mobility experienced				-.095*(.022)	-.095*(.022)
Mobility expected				.009(.033)	.008(.033)
Generalised trust					.010(.057)
Gender	.092† (.086)	.059†(.081)	.061†(.081)	.059†(.081)	.059†(.081)
Age	-.023(.003)	-.007(.003)	.006(.003)	-.005(.003)	-.005(.003)
Household income (log)	-.088*(.101)	-.053(.096)	-.055(.096)	-.041(.097)	-.040(.097)
Welfare Recipient	.025(.106)	.029(.100)	.023(.100)	.015(.100)	.015(.100)
Religious Belief	-.056(.089)	-.040(.084)	-.048(.084)	-.053(.084)	-.054(.084)
Left-wing vote	-409***(.089)	-.288*** (.090)	-.274***(.091)	-.274***(.090)	-.274***(.090)
R squared	.221	.309	.316	.325	.325
Standardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$, †$p<0.10$ (two-tailed)					

Comparisons of mean responses according to status are presented in table 3 which reveals that belief in meritocracy is indeed significantly stronger for the lower status half (20.93 vs. 22.97, where a lower score is more meritocratic). This is also true of the lower status third in relation to the middle third (20.83 vs. 22.69) and the lower and upper 20 percent group (22.00 vs. 24.07). These results mean that hypothesis 6 is confirmed and provide more evidence that meritocratic beliefs are high among low status groups. It is notable that the standard deviation is higher for lower status groups which reflects greater polarisation in meritocratic belief. However, despite their belief in meritocracy, support for redistribution remains significantly higher for the lower groups, and they also feel that the income distribution is less fair, although they are actually more trusting.

Table 3 – Comparison of means of selected variables by status group

	Lowest 50%	Highest 50%	Lowest 1/3	Middle 1/3	Lowest 20%	Top 20%
Redistribution (1– 5)	3.55 (1.226)	3.26 (1.253)	3.66 (1.198)	3.35 (1.289)	3.79 (1.239)	3.38 (1.241)
Meritocratic beliefs (8 – 40)	20.934 (4.78)	22.973 (3.71)	20.8362 (4.747)	22.692 (3.602)	22.00 (6.181)	24.079 (3.78)
Fairness (1 – 4)	2.26 (.722)	2.39 (.678)	2.19(.725)	2.41(.718)	2.08 (.740)	2.28 (.718)
General trust (1-4)	2.48 (.756)	2.30 (.650)	2.49†(.766)	2.46†(.651)	2.51 (.799)	2.16 (.635)
Denotes mean pairs found not to be statistically significant; standard deviation in parentheses						

Taken together, the descriptive statistics indicate that there are notable differences between status groups. To investigate further and draw out links between variables, regression analyses were run that restricted samples according to status. Sample sizes remained consistent so that the significance of results could be compared. I predicted that the lower status groups could be more likely to misperceive the income distribution which would increase perceptions of meritocracy and lower support for redistribution. Furthermore, various system justifying patterns of thought, including a strong belief in the fairness of the status quo, greater expectations of mobility and the need to guard

against status anxiety would mean that belief in meritocracy would be high and have an especially powerful impact on this group, including on their support for redistribution.

Table 4 shows that for the low status group, the link between belief in meritocracy and support for redistribution is only significant ($p<0.05$) when the full suite of independent variables is added. However, comparison of model 7 and model 9 shows a significant relationship for the low status half ($\beta=.115$, $p<0.05$) but no link for the high-status half, confirming the expectation in hypothesis 7 that this link would be stronger for low status individuals. The high-status model was significantly influenced by experienced mobility and the perception of an evenly distributed society ($\beta=.-.088$, $p<0.05$ and $\beta=-.043$, $p<0.05$). Perceptions of future mobility and generalised trust did not impact either of the models significantly but perceptions of fairness were strongly related ($\beta=-.269$, $p<.001$ vs. $\beta=-.359$, $p<.001$).

Table 4 - OLS Regression analysis of support for redistribution by status group

	Lowest status 50%		Highest status 50%	
	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Meritocracy	.144†(.014)	.115*(.013)	.099*(.014)	.075†(.015)
Fairness		-.269***(.092)		-.359*** (.095)
Contact with poorer		.082(.036)		-.082 (.033)
Contact with richer		-.093†(.033)		-.017(.034)
Equal society		-.048(.143)		-.043*(.114)
Experienced mobility		-.063(.034)		-.088*(.034)
Expected mobility		-.028 (.048)		.041(.047)
Generalised trust		-.048 (.143)		-.009 (.088)
R-squared	.197	.287	.266	.375

Standardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$, †$p<0.10$(two-tailed).

Control variables included but not shown: Gender, age, household income, welfare recipient, religious belief, left wing vote.

Table 5 (see appendix) was used to test whether the differences between each half of the status scale remained when only the lowest third and the middle third were used in the analysis. Once more, the link between meritocracy and redistribution was stronger for the lower group and not statistically significant for the higher (β=-..126, $p<0.05$ vs. β=.071, $p>0.05$). This points to the possibility that system justifying factors exert an influence over low status individuals but not their middle-class counterparts.

Table 6 – OLS regressions for support for redistribution by status group

	Lowest status 20%		Highest status 20%	
	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16	Model 17
Meritocracy	.148(.018)	.151(.019)	-.002(.025)	-.009(.024)
Fairness		-.257*(.019)		-.336***(.150)
Contact with poorer		.063(.063)		-.146*(.050)
Contact with richer		-.109(.058)		.078(.053)
Equal society		-.047(.297)		-.260***(.177)
Experienced mobility		-.063(.053)		-.062(.051)
Expected mobility		-.012(.084)		-.036(.070)
Generalised trust		-.074(.141)		-.073(.145)
R-squared	.265	.281	.396	.473

Standardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$, †$p<0.10$ (two-tailed).

Control variables included but not shown: Gender, age, household income, welfare recipient, religious belief, left wing vote.

Finally, the models in table 6 were used to demonstrate whether the same patterns are observable at the extremes of the status scale, among the 20 percent of individuals with highest and lowest status position. For these very low and high-status individuals, the relationship between meritocracy and redistribution dropped to non-significance. This result points to the highest and lowest groups having a clearer understanding of whether redistribution will benefit them and being less inclined to lean on other beliefs such as meritocracy in making this determination. However, it was also notable that high status support for redistribution was significantly reduced by belief in an equal income society (β=-..126, $p<0.01$) and contact with poorer individuals (β=-..146, $p<0.05$).

A final analytical step was taken to determine whether the effects observed when the model was split according to subjective social status also held for an objective indicator of success in life. Table 7 shows that when the sample was split evenly according to income, meritocracy linked to redistribution attitudes for the lower group (β=.-.124, $p<0.05$) but there was no significant relationship for the higher. When all independent variables and controls were added, in models 19 and 21, the relationship between meritocracy and redistribution diminished to non-significance for both halves of the income distribution. Among the higher income group, and following the results of the higher half and top 20% of the status scale, perceptions of fairness accounted for much more of the variance directly and experienced mobility and the type of society also significantly influenced the model. The pattern of results were therefore largely mirrored when split according to an objective indicator of status, although the explained variance of individual variables and the model in full was lower.

Table 7 – OLS regressions for support for redistribution by income group

	Income Lower 50%		Income Higher 50%	
	Model 18	Model 19	Model 20	Model 21
Meritocracy	.124*(.014)	.084(.014)	.030(.017)	.079(.016)
Fairness		-.243***(.095)		-.407*** (.109)
Contact with poorer		-.004 (.039)		.009(.037)
Contact with richer		-.007 (.037)		-.068(.036)
Equal society		-.046(.144)		-.089†(.125)
Experienced mobility		-.042 (.056)		-.097*(.036)
Expected mobility		.006 (.052)		.037(.058)
Generalised trust		-.044(.090)		-.012(.094)
R-squared	.209	.270	.249	.402

Standardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses,***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$, †$p<0.10$ (two-tailed).

Control variables included in all models but not shown: Gender, age, household income, welfare recipient, religious belief, left wing vote.

5   Discussion

In this thesis I have investigated the assertion that meritocratic beliefs reduce support for redistribution and laid out various mechanisms through which the two variables may relate. Results reveal that while beliefs about 'getting ahead' are somewhat important, it is a broader sense of fairness that explains more of the variance in redistributive attitudes. Moreover, among low status groups, meritocratic beliefs are stronger and more closely linked to reduced support for redistribution, pointing to the

influence of system justification as a force reducing electoral support for redistribution. While higher status individuals are surprisingly anti-meritocratic, this does not make them supportive of redistribution. Their attitudes are less reliant on beliefs about how individuals come to succeed and more closely linked to belief in an equal, middle-income society and their experiences of upward social mobility.

I asserted that belief in meritocracy would make individuals less likely to perceive others as poor or rich and more inclined to think of the entire income distribution as split around the middle, limiting their support for redistribution. Yet, neither people's relative status position (Bussolo et al., 2019) nor their belief in meritocracy helps explain their redistributive attitudes. It is possible that meritocratic beliefs are higher in unequal contexts but that this actually means *more* rather than *less* exposure to economic diversity (Morris et al., 2022). If inequality implies greater economic diversity, then the expected effect of meritocratic beliefs in making individuals seem less in need of redistribution would be counteracted by increased contact with rich and poor. This calls for more research to determine whether inequality facilitates rich rubbing shoulders with poor or increased income segregation. At the same time, there is evidence that the direction of the effect might be reversed: Sands (2017) demonstrated that exposure to poorer individuals can lower support for redistribution rather than strengthen it, contradicting the expectation that framing individuals as richer leads to reduced support for redistribution .

Similarly, generalised trust, conceptualised as a proxy for how individuals perceive others, was not found to relate to meritocracy nor redistribution. It was predicted that believers in meritocracy would distrust low status welfare beneficiaries while trusting the wealthy. However, while low meritocratic beliefs may entail more trust of welfare beneficiaries, it is also possible that trusting the poor does not degrade faith in the rich, and so trust does not link to redistributive attitudes because sympathy for beneficiaries is balanced by a desire not to disadvantage the wealthy. Splitting the analysis by status produced interesting results in a similar vein. While it was predicted that trust would fall alongside status (van der Meer, 2010), the opposite was found to be true and the lowest status individuals were most trusting of all. This may indicate that meritocratic beliefs strengthen trust in those who have earned a higher status. As there are fewer higher status people in society, high-status individuals trust the median individual less while the lowest group are most trusting because more people sit above them in the status scale. Notably, the trust of the lower half status group remains high; perhaps they are more trusting of the higher status group but this has not degraded their faith in those of similar status (even though they are strong believers in meritocracy). Conversely the very low trust of the highest status individuals provides some indication that they view lower status individuals as

less worthy. Although the broader predicted correlation between trust and support for redistribution was not found, these findings imply that the impact that meritocracy and status have on theoretical understandings of trust should be further explored.

Finally, I asserted that because belief in meritocracy entails equality of opportunity, it would engender a confidence in future mobility that would reduce support for redistribution. While I found a significant negative relationship between the mobility an individual had already experienced and their redistributive attitudes, this finding did not extend to impressions of meritocracy in society more generally. I also found no link with expected mobility, so it would appear that past and present position is a stronger determinant of redistributive attitudes than future expectations. However, this may be because mean expected mobility was negative for all groups tested (excepting the lower 50%) but those who expect downward social mobility are not more supportive of redistribution (cf. Rodrik, 1999). Theoretically, this could imply that this effect does not work in both directions. It may also align with other evidence that complicates this assumption by showing that fear of downward mobility is associated with a rejection of conventional politics and therefore traditional government redistribution (Mitrea et al., 2021).

These reflections inform the following recommendations for future research. First, while these results point to meritocratic beliefs as explaining tolerance for contemporary inequalities, this is not to say that that they will continue to sustain perceptions of fairness and low support for redistribution indefinitely. Conversely, belief in meritocracy may become even more widespread and existing support for redistribution will evaporate. This presents an empirical challenge for future research to adopt a longitudinal perspective that traces changing attitudes toward meritocracy and support for redistribution with trends in actual levels of inequality that could help predict future patterns.

Second, research demonstrates that support for redistribution as recorded in survey data used here may not translate to actual policy support (Dallinger, 2022). Hence, the conclusions would be bolstered if related to specific policies which make clear from whom and to whom income would move. Attitudes toward policies such as universal basic income may be interpreted differently to those explicitly redirecting wealth from the very wealthiest (e.g., a 'billionaire tax') or implying higher taxation (e.g, increased welfare spending). Future research should therefore gauge whether the patterns here described hold when the winners and losers of proposed policies are made explicit.

Third, it is important to reflect that attitudes may differ according to people's subjective understanding of 'getting ahead'. If social mobility is achieved alongside others, then some may feel that they have not gained at all. If getting ahead is more about these relative gains, then government

led redistribution is unlikely to find support even though it can benefit low status groups collectively. Conversely, meritocratic advancement according to individual deservingness does provide for relative gains. Future work should investigate whether meritocratic beliefs and policy attitudes of low status individuals reflect aspirations for relative rather than collective gains. This could mean that specifically targeted redistributive policies providing relative rather than collective benefits are received differently.

Fourth, this thesis put forward various mechanisms through which meritocratic beliefs can dampen support for redistribution but only perceptions of fairness were shown to significantly explain this relationship. The implication for future research is to better understand the sources of people's sense of fairness and to explore other factors that come between belief in meritocracy and support for redistribution. Notably, the role of subjective (mis)perceptions is important in shaping attitudes, but inherently difficult to test, so future work should continue to analyse their causes and impact, for example by drawing comparisons before and after they are treated with information provision.

Finally, operationalising meritocracy using conventional survey items presents some limitations which necessitate ongoing research. While a broad scale provides the most complete picture of individual attitudes, only the "hard work" item truly reflects belief in meritocracy; and there is no measure for talent, ambition or luck. A low score was taken to indicate belief in meritocracy, but since the majority of items reflect anti-meritocratic forces, it may actually reflect a lack of awareness or denial of discrimination. The reported meritocratic beliefs of low status groups could therefore reflect their lower cultural capital and increased scepticism of discrimination against other low status groups such as ethnic minorities and women (van der Waal & Houtman, 2011). Future research should therefore consider using bespoke measures to account for 'getting ahead' meritocratically as well as scepticism and misperceptions about the experiences of others. It could also explore how education relates to these variables in reducing misperceptions and strengthening appreciation of structural inequalities.

5.1   Conclusion

This thesis was informed by the apparent disconnect between inequality in Australia, a documented desire for a more equal society and public rejection of a political platform that explicitly set out to achieve this. I hypothesised and empirically established that belief in meritocracy informed people's attitudes and prompted scepticism of these political intentions. However, based on the research presented in this thesis, it cannot be concluded that belief in meritocracy is the best or only explanation for Labor's defeat. Inevitably, many unaccounted factors have influenced that outcome.

Nevertheless, my findings are indicative of the power of beliefs about society in determining political attitudes beyond material self-interest. This is especially the case since income was not found to be an effective predictor of redistributive attitudes. Instead, public support for reducing inequality may hinge on beliefs about what society is and ought to be, not in terms of economic needs but as moral ideas about merit and fairness.

These findings have political implications for politicians and those looking to secure support for promoting equality through redistribution. Policymakers should be aware that support for redistribution is at least partially detached from objective economic indicators so fighting inequality requires appealing to perceptions and fairness beliefs as much as addressing income gaps and information deficits. The underlying meritocratic narrative of the Australian 'fair go' retains its influence, even if it sits uneasily with economic reality. The challenge for politicians is that to remedy inequality they must uncover the falsehood of a promise so fundamental to Australian national identity. Telling voters that their dreams of meritocratic mobility are simply wrong could be viewed as condescending (or worse, unpatriotic), especially because of the scale of the status divide and the fact that the low status voters they need to reach the most are the most believing in meritocracy. The idea that support for redistribution is rejected by those who would benefit from it most, specifically because of the statement it makes about their low status should be at the forefront of political thinking. Furthermore, promulgating an alternate vision around the idea that poor individuals have little hope of advancement without government intervention is problematic. This is especially so given that combatants in the 'battle of ideas' about 'who gets what and why' are drawn from well beyond the political realm and conventional tools for shifting public opinion face competition from other influences in the media, on internet platforms and in entertainment.

Moreover, the challenge of promoting progressive change runs squarely against the power of system justifying beliefs. Advancing a grand vision for a more equal society through widespread redistribution, even if explicitly asserted to benefit low status groups, may trigger tighter support for the status quo. Labor's vision for the future collapsed under the weight of its own promises because aversion to widescale change pushed voters toward political conservatism despite the commitment to a more prosperous future for low and middle income individuals. Big solutions are needed to address what the United Nations describes as the "defining challenge of our time" (U.N, n.d) so finding a way drive change and fight inequality in an electorate with a predilection for the present is a truly paramount imperative. This thesis finds that answers to inequality are detached from material 'self-interest' which is an unhelpful indicator of support for redistribution; instead it is more important than ever to better understand the emergence, sustenance and evolution of meritocratic beliefs.

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7   Appendix

Table 5 – OLS regressions for support for redistribution by status group

	Lowest 1/3		Middle 1/3	
	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13
Meritocracy	.162*(.017)	.126*(.016)	-.102(.018)	.071(.018)
Fairness		-.321***(.114)		-.217** (.120)
Contact with poorer		.086(.043)		.056(.048)
Contact with richer		-.099(.040)		-.093(.046)
Equal society		-.024(.182)		-.028(.161)
Experienced mobility		-.046(.040)		-.098(.049)
Expected mobility		-.042(.056)		-.063(.070)
Generalised trust		-.023(.097)		.065(.115)
R-squared	.201	.312	.177	.242

Standardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$, †$p<0.10$ (two-tailed).

Control variables included in all models but not shown: Gender, age, household income, welfare recipient, religious belief, left wing vote.

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Peter Crisp Master Thesis

Name, email of student: Peter Crisp, petercrisp15@gmail.com

Name, email of supervisor:

Start date and duration: 18 / 3 / 2022

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   **YES** - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   **<u>YES</u>**   -   NO

   If 'NO': skip to part V.

   If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   YES - **<u>NO</u>**
   Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2.   Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
   that will not involve identification of participants.   YES - **<u>NO</u>**

   If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3.   Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
   data that has been anonymized by someone else).   **<u>YES</u>** - NO

   If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1.   Will   information   about   the   nature   of   the   study   and   about   what
        participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?   YES - NO

2.   Will   any   of   the   participants   not   be   asked   for   verbal   or   written
        'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?   YES - NO

3.   Will   information   about   the   possibility   to   discontinue   the   participation
        at any time be withheld from participants?   YES - NO

4.   Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?   YES   -   NO
        *Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to
        think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study
        is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they
        harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5.   Does   the   study   involve   the   risk   of   causing   psychological   stress   or
        negative   emotions   beyond   those   normally   encountered   by
        participants?   `   YES - NO

6.   Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the
        GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical
        beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose
        of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health,
        data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)?   YES
        - NO

7.   Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other
        groups   that   cannot   give   consent?
                                                                        Y
        ES - NO

8.   Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?   YES - NO

9.   Can   participants   be   identified   by   the   study   results   or   can   the
        confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?   YES   -   NO

10.   Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study?   YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2019. Dataset downloaded from GESIS.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

N = 1089

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Representative sample from Australia total population.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

I will save data on my personal device, which is used only by myself and protected by strong password.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I am solely responsible.

_____

_____

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I will store the data on my personal laptop and back it up on my personal hard drive after accessing it.

_____

_____

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

N/A

_____

_____

_____

_____

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Peter Crisp   Name (EUR) supervisor:

Date: 18 / 3 / 2022   Date: 18/3/2022

 APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)