

CALL FOR ARTICLES

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Inequality in America: Beliefs, Attitudes, and Actions

Edited by

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Societal *inequality* refers to the unequal distribution of economic resources, political power, social identities, and legal status. A widely shared value holds that inequality is undesirable, yet researchers continue to debate exactly how inequality-related beliefs are affected by inequalities of various kinds, as well as by changes in inequality across space and time. An important area of research also considers how inequality itself partially reflects what people believe about social groups, the economy, and political institutions, and how they process cognate information. The connection between inequality and behavioral outcomes therefore often depends on people's beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, values, motivations, emotions, and other measurable mental processes. In short, there are fundamental and multi-faceted relationships between inequality and *psychology*.

In this issue, we invite original research contributions pertaining to the relationships between societal inequalities and individuals' psychology in the United States. Proposals should include a clearly stated research question, details on data and some initial analysis, and a timeline that describes how and when the project will be completed by. While proposals should engage with some aspect of psychology, we welcome proposals from any and all social science disciplines. Below are more details regarding the parameters of the call.

- *Domains:* Inequalities touch all domains of society and, as such, we welcome research from any area including work that focuses on economic inequality and/or social mobility (e.g., income, pay, wealth, employment, consumption), political inequality (e.g., participation, representation, enfranchisement), or social inequality (education, well-being) as well as work that crosses these and other domains. Research can focus on inequality at one or more geographical levels (national, state, local, etc.), and explore states or trends in inequality.

- *Psychological Targets:* We define psychology broadly as beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, values, motivations, emotions, and other measurable mental processes. We, therefore, welcome work done in multiple academic disciplines. We are interested in work that considers psychological variables relevant to groups (e.g., solidarity, respect, belonging, animosity, prejudice), institutions (e.g., trust, policy attitudes, efficacy), and individuals (e.g., well-being, happiness, identities, mindsets, agency), and with an eye toward incorporating sociocultural histories and their relationship to psychological variables.
- *Relationships:* The focus must be on a psychological cause, consequence, or correlate of inequality, or on a psychological pathway or moderator of the relationships between inequality and a behavioral/institutional outcome.
- *Analytical Approach:* We also welcome a wide range of data types (i.e., qualitative and/or quantitative) and methodological approaches, including observational, correlational, longitudinal, and/or experimental approaches as well as interviews or focus groups. Proposals must be based on projects with initial data collected and preliminary analyses completed and include a detailed plan for how the remaining data (if any) will be collected and analyzed prior to the deadline for a completed paper.
- *Populations:* The RSF mission concerns “the improvement of social and living conditions in the United States.” As such, work should be centered on the U.S. and groups in the U.S. (e.g., based on class/economic position, race/ethnicity, immigration or citizenship status, gender, gender identity), although comparative work is welcome if it informs understanding of inequalities in the U.S. Work can focus on socialization processes to the extent they contribute to the beliefs and/or status of adults.

We welcome research that addresses the questions below or other questions related to the topic of this call. We are especially interested in proposals that: (1) seek to address major unresolved questions and debates within the extensive multidisciplinary literature on the psychology of inequality (broadly construed); (2) seek to extend current research in substantially new directions, for instance through cross-status, cross-domain, cross-disciplinary, or cross-level (micro and macro) research; or (3) seek to identify the psychological dimensions and consequences of contemporary political, economic, and social crises. Below we have specific questions in particular domains, as exemplars.

Economics

- How do social and political attitudes (e.g., about the “American Dream”) shape the structure of social mobility as well as perceptions of inequality and social mobility? How does this vary across different groups (e.g., varying immigration groups and statuses), over the lifespan, and between generations (e.g., Boomers, Gen X)? How are beliefs regarding social mobility related to action or inaction in interpersonal relations (e.g., prejudice, solidarity) and politics (e.g., participation)? And, conversely, how do levels of inequality or perceptions of inequality affect views of social mobility?
- How do inequalities in the exposure to climate change or climate engineering affect the public’s perception of climate change and its connection to concerns about economic inequality and social mobility?

- Are certain perspectives (e.g., ideologies) more likely to give rise to a strong relationship between intergroup attitudes (e.g., prejudice, solidarity) and economic status? And, for which groups may this happen? How might the relationship between ideologies and intergroup attitudes and economic status shift across the lifespan?
- Related, do people compare themselves to those above or below themselves economically, or to people who are of different races, genders, ethnicities, nationalities, ages, or sexualities? These comparisons are often referred to as concerns about *either* relative economic *or* cultural/social status, but it can be difficult to distinguish between perceptions of economic and cultural/social inequities. How can we better understand these comparisons and their potential implications for workplace conditions, political organizing, and intergroup relations?
- Which aspects or kinds of economic inequality or insecurity (e.g., low and stagnant wages at the bottom and in the middle, concentrations of wealth at the top and among whites, the uneven distribution of job benefits) are most troubling to people and why? Which aspects of inequality may violate fairness norms and/or motivate action to reduce inequality?

Politics

- How does the experience of political inequality – such as disparities in participatory opportunities, recognition by the state, political efficacy, or government access – affect well-being, policy attitudes, engagement, and inter-group relations? For instance, how does variation in experiences with governmental institutions or actors affect beliefs about the role of government policies in addressing inequalities and actual levels of political engagement? How do these relationships develop over the lifespan or vary across generations?
- How are policies aimed at vitiating inequalities (e.g., redistributive, regulatory, reparative, and abolitionist policies) perceived and how do those perceptions translate into political action? What processes—at the individual, organizational, institutional, or sociohistorical level—contribute to the variation in support for equity-oriented processes and inter-group solidarity? How do variables such as trust in political and other kinds of institutions come into play? And how might shifting narratives (or other interventions) surrounding these policies impact perceptions of anti-inequality policies as well as motivations to engage in political action?
- What is the role of psychological mechanisms, such as fairness beliefs, stereotypes, prejudice, and perceived competition, in perpetuating inequality in specific institutions, such as in the criminal justice and legal system? To take another example, what psychological factors (e.g., ideologies, naïve realism, system justifying or challenging beliefs, moral convictions, self-righteousness, essentialism, dispositional attribution) or situational factors (e.g., economic growth, recession, the number of new immigrants, geographic differences in party segregation/integration, gerrymandering) influence beliefs about partisan discrimination and/or inequality? That is, what types of variables or mechanisms shape opposition or support for disenfranchising members of the other party.

Do these relationships vary across age cohorts? How do they influence policy attitudes and political participation?

- How do people think about political inequalities? Do they consider benchmarks relative to the past, relative to their normative expectations, or in some other way? Do they believe in a consistent linear trend toward equality? What explains variations in these beliefs? How successful are interventions aimed at altering perceptions of inequalities regarding certain groups, in particularly contexts, or over time? What role does group isolation and/or segregation play when it comes to beliefs about political inequality?
- How does the existence of societal inequality affect the perception of those with varying citizenship statuses? Does immigration increase perceived competitiveness of labor markets in an unequal city more than in an equal city? Alternatively, how does immigration and perceptions of immigration and citizenship impact intergroup attitudes and political attitudes? Does this relationship vary based on individuals' status or geographic location? What policies or factors may increase positivity toward immigration and immigrants?

Social

- Does living in an uneven society impact well-being, marriage, family relations, burn out, one's sense of belonging (in their community or greater societal context), interpersonal trust, experiences of loneliness, or experiences of social support? If so, what are the psychological mechanisms of this association? How do narratives, stories, mindsets, and/or models of agency explain it?
- How do general income and societal inequalities affect our world beliefs (e.g., how competitive, harmonious, benevolent the world is), narratives, sense of belonging and motivation to engage in paid work, neighborhood events and activities, and local or national politics?
- How does educational inequality affect beliefs about fairness, future upward mobility, and hopes and expectations about the future in general? How are personal experiences in school shaped by income and educational inequality in society, and how do personal experiences and stories about their education shape economic activities and political beliefs, attitudes, and/or behaviors? Why might individuals question the value of higher education and/or have low trust in educational institutions?
- What are the psychological mechanisms that could explain the association between inequalities and health/well-being, above and beyond health behaviors, family structure, and access to services and resources? How do inequalities in other domains compound or exacerbate health-based inequalities?
- What are the mechanisms that cause social inequality to put strain on, or relieve strain from, intergroup relations? Conversely, what individual or contextual factors moderate the relationship between social inequalities and intergroup relations?

ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

Prospective contributors should submit a CV and an abstract (up to two pages in length, single or double spaced) of their study along with up to two pages of supporting material (e.g., tables, figures, pictures, etc.) no later than 5 PM EST on **6/4/25**, to:

<https://rsf.fluxx.io>

NOTE that if you wish to submit an abstract and do not yet have an account with the Russell Sage Foundation, it can take up to 48 hours to get credentials, so please start your application at least two days before the deadline. All submissions must be original work that has not been previously published in part or in full. Only abstracts submitted to <https://rsf.fluxx.io> will be considered. More than one proposal may be submitted. If you are submitting for a multiply authored paper, the submitter should upload the CV's for the other authors as well as their own. Each paper will receive a \$1,000 honorarium when the issue is published. All questions regarding this issue should be directed to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications, at journal@rsage.org. Do not email the editors of the issue. In early July, the co-editors of the issue and the journal editorial board will decide which proposals to accept and will notify all applicants of their decision.

A conference will take place at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City on 10/24/25 (with a group dinner the night before). The selected contributors will gather for a one-day workshop to present draft papers (due a month prior to the conference on 9/26/25) and receive feedback from the other contributors and editors. Travel costs, food, and lodging for one author per paper will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. After the conference, the authors will submit their revised drafts by 2/26/26. The papers will then be sent out to three additional scholars for formal peer review. Having received feedback from reviewers and the RSF board, authors will revise their papers by 6/25/26. The full and final issue will be published in the spring of 2027. Papers will be published open access on the RSF website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Muse.