

Project A6**The Legitimation of Inequalities: The Structural Conditions of Attitudes to Justice**

Stefan Liebig

Meike May, Carsten Sauer, Simone Schneider, Peter Valet

**Inequality aversion as a methodological artifact in large-scale attitude surveys:
How interviewer presence influences measures of justice attitudes.**

Stefan Friedhoff, Meike May, Simone Schneider, Stefan Liebig, Carsten Sauer, Peter Valet

According to Lindenberg's goal-framing theory and based on findings from psychological justice research individuals prefer equality in cooperative situations and inequality in competitive situations. When people cooperate the normative frame is activated more strongly which leads to an increase of inequality aversion, whereas, when people are in competitive situations the gain frame is activated which leads to an increased preference for inequality. This is an important issue for the research on attitudes towards inequality as most of the national and international survey data – e.g. ISSP, ESS, EVS, WVS – rely on interviews with an interviewer present – either physically in the CAPI mode or via telephone in the CATI mode. One strategy for interviewers to motivate respondents to participate in a survey is to establish a cooperative situation by asking “for help” or “support.” Therefore respondents might show different preferences for inequality during interview situations because the normative frame might be activated due to the interviewers request to “cooperate” in the interview situation. To investigate whether respondents, indeed, show different attitudes on matters of inequality in different interviewing modes, we test equality preferences in a large scale population survey—CAPI vs. self-administered interviews—as well as in an experiment with university students in which the cooperative frame is induced by priming techniques (scrambled word test). Both studies use the factorial survey method assessing justice evaluations of gross earnings of several descriptions of fictitious employees. The Gini-coefficient of the “just earnings” is calculated and used for the analysis. The results based on the population survey show strong interviewer effects meaning that the perceived just Gini is lower in the presence of an interviewer than in the absence of an interviewer. Nevertheless, there is no possibility with this data to empirically test whether these effects are really triggered by the assumed cooperative situation established by interviewers. So, we cannot rule out that these interview mode effects are actually due to enhanced probabilities to show social desirable response patterns while another person is present or due to unobserved selection processes of respondents to the respective mode of the interview. Therefore, the follow-up experiment reconstructs whether establishing cooperative situations really leads to higher inequality aversion. The results of the experiment indicate that students who were primed on cooperation showed more inequality aversion in presence of another student than students who were not primed or completed the interview without presence of another person in the room.

In sum, these results suggest that interviewer presence, indeed, influences individual preferences for inequality or equality. Therefore, results of previous research on individual attitudes might be biased due the mode of the interviews.