

# POLINEQUAL: The Politicisation of Economic Inequality

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## Research Question

Under which Circumstances Do Perceptions of Economic Inequality Become Politically Salient?

## Assumptions

Perceptions of Economic Inequality Are:

- **Micro-level:** A function of individually held distributive justice norms
- **Meso-level:** Affected by processes of politicisation
- **Macro-level:** Associated with distributive justice norms institutionalised in welfare regimes

# Theoretical Approach & Research Focus

**Socialisation:** Societal Norms of Distributive Justice Resulting from Welfare Regime Institutions

**Politicisation:** Elites' Discourse, Media Frames, Political Decisions, Information

**Perceptions of Economic Inequality**

**Individually Held Norms of Distributive Justice**

**Individual:** Personality Traits, Values, Sociodemographics, Social Networks, Political Ideology, Political Knowledge

Emotions

Attitudes &  
Preferences

Social & Political  
Behavior

# Research Design: Most Dissimilar Cases, Mixed-Methods



Work Packages & Timeline	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year
<b>WP 1: Focus Groups</b> Individual Heuristics					
<b>WP 2: Elites' Discourses</b> Rhetoric, Metaphors, etc.	← Entire Period Covered →		Start Data Collection		
<b>WP 3: Mass Media</b> Framing & Representations	← Entire Period Covered →		Start Data Collection		
<b>WP 4: Population Surveys</b> Emotions, Attitudes, Behavior, Media Consumption Patterns					
<b>WP 5: Online Experiments</b> Framing Devices' Effects					
<b>Operationalizations</b> <b>Data Management</b> <b>Analyses, Writing, Discussing</b>					

# Details on Work Packages

## WP 1

- **Focus:** Heuristics of economic inequality
- 8 focus groups per country, urban and rural areas, diverse groups

## WP 2

- **Focus:** Elites' discourses on economic inequality
- Politicians' speeches, interviews, tweets, political party programmes and campaigns, economic elites and think tanks, EU, IMF, OECD, etc.

## WP 3

- **Focus:** Mass media's framing and representation of economic inequality
- Selection of broadsheet papers, tabloids, public and private TV news, infotainment, possibly series, such as "Benefits Street" by Channel 4, UK

## WP 4

- **Focus:** Citizens' emotions, distributive justice evaluations, attitudes, social and political behavior, mass media consumption patterns
- Representative online population survey

## WP 5

- **Focus:** Framing effects (e.g. metaphors, images, etc.) and mechanisms
- Online experiments with representative national samples
- **Own results:** Framing effects on emotions, distributive fairness perceptions, trust, etc. enhanced by images and news source credibility

# POLINEQUAL: High Risks, High Gains, Strong Impact

## RISKS

- Conceptual Overlaps (with social inequality, poverty)
- Cross-Country Qualitative Data Harmonisation
- Less Systematic Welfare-Regime Differences

## GAINS

- Theory-Building by Linking Macro-, Meso- & Micro-Level
- Causes, Mechanisms and Political and Social Consequences of Inequality Perceptions

## SCIENTIFIC IMPACT

- Paradigmatic Shift: Exposing and Explaining the Interrelated Causes for the Predictable „Irrationality“ of Individuals
- Transposing this New Paradigm to Neighbouring Fields of Research

## SOCIETAL IMPACT

- Raising Publics' Awareness of Politicisation Processes
- Providing tools to improve public and political discourse

# POLINEQUAL's Impact and Future Pathways

**Scientific:** **I.** Initiating a paradigmatic shift in economic inequality research which explains the formation and effects of citizens' inequality perceptions by linking factors of socialisation (macro-), politicisation (meso-) and the micro-level. **II.** Broadening the theoretical foundations of Political Sociology and Political Economy. **III.** Transposing this theoretical advancement to disciplines concerned with individuals' emotions, attitudes and behaviour. **IV.** Promoting research on individual-level effects in Political Communication, Sociology, Social Psychology and Behavioral Economics.

**Societal:** **I.** Raising international public awareness of politicisation processes engrained in communication. **II.** Enhancing individuals' understanding of the principles of their perception formation, justice evaluation and decision-making processes.

**Political:** **I.** Promoting elites' „inclusive“ discourses on economic inequality. **II.** Communicating findings and consequences thereof to the EU, OECD, think tanks, the media, political parties and actors.

**Future Pathways:** **I.** Investigating the impact of competing social networks' discourses on users. **II.** Conducting follow-up panel studies to identify the longevity of politicisation effects.