

Political Ideology Outdoes Personal Experience in Predicting Support for Gender Equality

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Indices of gender equality provide an inconsistent picture of current gender inequality in countries with relatively high equality. We examined women's and men's subjectively perceived gender inequality and their support for gender equality in the general population and in politicians, respectively, in three countries with relatively high gender equality: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany (total N = 1,612). In both women's and men's perceptions, women were treated more unequally than men. However, the inequality that women perceived was larger than the inequality men perceived. Additionally, women reported they personally experience less inequality than women as a group (person-group discrepancy). Finally, women's and men's left/liberal (vs. right/conservative) political ideology turned out to be a relatively more powerful predictor of support for gender equality than perceived personal and societal inequality. We discuss reasons for why political ideology emerged as the strongest predictor of equality support and sketch out implications for policy efforts toward promoting gender equality.

KEY WORDS: political ideology, gender equality, perceived inequality, person-group discrepancy, pluralistic ignorance

Gender equality is a prominent topic in society and academia. A search of the term revealed over 30 million hits in Google and over 700,000 scientific publications in Google Scholar. While the different indices of gender equality agree that over the past decades progress has been made toward attaining equality, they disagree about the extent to which equality has been achieved.

According to some indices (Global Gender Gap Index, GGGI, World Economic Forum, 2018; Gender Inequality Index, GII, United Nations, 2018), no country has yet achieved equality. According to others (Basic Index of Gender Inequality, BIGI, Stoet & Geary, 2019), in many countries, women have surpassed men in several domains. Given that these indices provide an inconsistent picture of gender equality in countries with relatively high equality, we were interested in, first, how people in such countries subjectively perceive their current gender inequality, and second, to what extent people's perceptions and their political ideology inform their support for equality.

Inconsistent Indices of Gender Equality

The indices estimate gender inequality by looking at indicators for inequality from various life domains to calculate an overall inequality index. Inconsistencies arise because the indices may focus on different domains and use different indicators, scale formats, and calculation formulas.

Global Gender Gap Index

The GGGI focuses on four domains: economy, politics, education, and health. It uses indicators such as income, women in ministerial positions, literacy rate, and sex ratio at birth, among others. The GGGI calculates women's disadvantage compared to men and can take values between 1 (complete disadvantage for women) and 0 (no disadvantage for women). Advantages for women on some indicators (more women holding degrees than men) do not cancel out disadvantages on others.

Gender Inequality Index

The GII focuses on the same four domains as the GGGI: economy, politics, education, and health. It uses different indicators however: women in the workforce, women in parliament, academic degrees, maternal mortality, among others. Like the GGGI, the GII calculates women's disadvantage compared to men and can take values between 0 (complete disadvantage for women) and 1 (no disadvantage for women). As with the GGGI, advantages for women on some indicators do not cancel out disadvantages on others.

Basic Index of Gender Inequality

The BIGI focuses on three domains. As the GGGI and GII, it focuses on education and health. It also focuses on life satisfaction. And it uses different indicators than the GGGI and GI: years of secondary education, life expectancy, and self-reported well-being, among others. Unlike the GGGI and GII, the BIGI calculates *women's and men's disadvantage compared to each other*. It can take values between -1 (complete disadvantage for men) and 1 (complete disadvantage for women), with 0 being equality (no advantage/ disadvantage for women or men). With the BIGI, advantages for one gender on some indicators can cancel out disadvantages on others.

Actively Supporting Gender Equality

Gender equality involves not only equal rights but also equal access to resources and opportunities. Arguments for improving gender equality involve moral reasons (both

genders¹ should be treated equally fairly) and economic reasons (the economy benefits when both genders are treated equally fairly). In principle, both genders may benefit from more equality (when social norms allow both men and women to take on whichever role they prefer).

As for what leads people to actively support equality, the starting point may be some objective disadvantage (e.g., fewer rights for one gender). Support for equality may also be instigated, however, by people subjectively perceiving inequality, disadvantage, or injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Several mediating mechanisms have been proposed for the link between inequality perceptions and equality support. These involve shared identity or fate with the disadvantaged (Jenkins et al., 2021), political involvement (Castle et al., 2020), and efficacy to bring about change (van Zomeren et al., 2008), among others.

Perceived Personal Versus Societal Inequality

Research on how people perceive inequality distinguishes between inequality people personally experience and inequality people believe their group experiences. The inequality people personally experience is how they perceive themselves treated compared to a member of another group. This *perceived personal inequality* is also known as personal discrimination or egoistic relative deprivation. The inequality people believe their group experiences is how they perceive their group is treated compared to another group. This *perceived societal inequality* is also known as group discrimination or collective relative deprivation (Foster & Matheson, 1995; Moghaddam et al., 1997).

People often report the inequality they themselves experience as being different from the inequality their group experiences. For example, members of historically disadvantaged groups (women) reported experiencing *less* discrimination personally than they reported their group experiences, even though they were objectively discriminated against (Crosby, 1982, 1984). The literature identified four reasons for this person-group discrepancy: First, people deny personal disadvantage to avoid discomfort and maintain a sense of control (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). Second, they exaggerate their group's disadvantage to promote change (Taylor et al., 1990). Third, they overestimate their group's disadvantage because examples of the group's disadvantage come easier to mind (availability heuristic; Moghaddam et al., 1997). Fourth, they compare themselves to a different reference group when estimating personal disadvantage (themselves to other group members) versus group disadvantage (their group to another group; Kessler et al., 2000). Because many societies have achieved more gender equality in the last decades and respective studies are now at least 25 years old (Crosby, 1982, 1984, Moghaddam et al., 1997), we were interested in how much gender inequality women and men would perceive in present time and whether there would still be a person-group discrepancy. Moreover, both *perceived personal inequality* and *perceived societal inequality* should promote readiness to reduce the inequality (Kessler et al., 2000).

Predicting Support for Gender Equality

Perceived Personal Inequality

Perceived personal inequality is grounded in direct personal experiences (Bandura, 1977; Paluck & Green, 2009). When people experience a gap between their current state (personal

¹We perceive the term “gender” as including people with diverse gender identities.

inequality) and an ideal state (personal equality), it should lead them to act to reduce the gap (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Therefore, experiencing personal inequality should lead to attempts to reduce the personal inequality (speaking up to one's boss if one feels overlooked because of gender; Kessler et al., 2000). In line with this theorizing, perceived personal inequality predicted equality support in the domain of gender (Foster & Matheson, 1995) and related domains (ethnic minorities; Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983).

Perceived Societal Inequality

By contrast, perceived societal inequality is grounded in vicarious experience rather than experiences that happen to one's own person. Examples are witnessing or learning from others or the media about discrimination of others (Moghaddam et al., 1997). Thus, people should attempt to reduce the *perceived societal inequality* (advocate for more women in leadership positions or support programs to improve men's health) through collective action (Mummendey et al., 1999). Collective action should be favored partly because experiencing inequality for one's group may be perceived as a norm violation that leads people to identify stronger with the ingroup and reject the discriminating outgroup (van Zomeren, 2015). If attaining gender equality is a collective rather than individual responsibility, *perceived societal inequality* should be a stronger predictor of equality support than perceived personal inequality. Indeed, perceived societal (vs. personal) inequality more strongly predicted support for gender equality (Foster & Matheson, 1995) and was a powerful predictor for support in related domains (meta-analysis by Smith & Ortiz, 2002).

Political Ideology

Finally, a powerful driver of behavior is political ideology (Koestler, 1978). One definition of ideology is that “[i]deologies are broad and general, pervade wide areas of belief and behavior, and give core meaning to many issues of human concern. They unify thought and action” (Kerlinger, 1984, p. 13, as cited by Jost, 2006). Most people's political ideology can be plotted on a left/liberal–right/conservative dimension (Hibbing et al., 2013; Tomkins, 1963). This dimension encompasses attitudes about a wide range of societal issues. Two main components that distinguish the poles of this axis are that people with left/liberal (vs. right/conservative) views (1) are more advocating (vs. resisting) of change and (2) are more rejecting (vs. accepting) of inequalities (Jost et al., 2009; Kerlinger, 1984). Political ideology specifies an ideal state of society (a gender equal society) and how it can be achieved. In line with this reasoning, left/liberal (vs. right/conservative) ideology predicted stronger support for gender equality (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Lizotte et al., 2020) and equality in related domains (McFarland & Mathews, 2005).

In summary, research so far found that perceived personal and societal inequality both predict gender-equality support with perceived societal inequality typically being the stronger predictor. Left/liberal political ideology also predicted support. However, research neglected the predictive power of political ideology versus perceived personal and social inequality. Here, we pitted ideology against these two forms of perceived inequality.

We reasoned in two ways: On the one hand, perceived personal or societal inequality may be a more potent predictor of gender-equality support than ideology because perceived gender inequality is directly tied to the topic of gender equality whereas left/liberal–right/conservative ideology encompasses beliefs about a whole range of societal topics. On the other hand, the

topic of gender equality exemplifies precisely the two components that distinguish people with left/liberal versus right/conservative views: advocating (vs. resisting) change and rejecting (vs. accepting) inequality. Therefore, political ideology might be a more potent predictor of gender-equality support than perceived personal or societal inequality.

The Present Research

First, we investigated how much inequality women and men report they experience hoping to inform discussions around inequality (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019; Nadal, 2017; Sowell, 2019). Second, we compared the power of *perceived personal inequality* and *perceived societal inequality* versus *political ideology* in predicting equality support. These predictors typically have been examined separately.

Because perceived inequality is often measured by people's self-reported degree of fair treatment (Glick & Whitehead, 2010; Greenstein, 1996),² to assess *perceived personal inequality*, participants reported the extent to which they perceive themselves being treated fairly compared to a member of the other gender. To assess *perceived societal inequality*, participants reported the extent to which they perceive one gender in general to be treated fairly compared to the other gender. Research often assessed perceived inequality toward women only (Glick & Whitehead, 2010). However, as countries approach gender equality, historical inequalities become reduced or even reversed (Reeves, 2022; Stewart-Williams & Halsey, 2021; Stoet & Geary, 2019). Therefore, when measuring perceived inequality, we gave participants the option to indicate whether they perceive more inequality of women or men using a bipolar scale. Finally, participants reported their left/liberal–right/conservative ideology (Conway III et al., 2012).

We assessed our outcome measure, support for gender equality, by three indicators. First, we measured attitudes toward equality. Second, we measured intentions to promote equality. Attitudes and intentions both predict behavior (Kruglanski et al., 2015; Sheeran, 2002). Third, because scientists highlight the importance to observe actual behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007), we gave participants the opportunity to donate to an organization to promote gender equality. During 2020, we conducted four studies in three countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. All three countries rank medium to high on indices of gender equality with the United States ranking lowest, the United Kingdom middle, and Germany highest.

Our studies extend previous work in several ways. First, we tested whether the person-group discrepancy documented in women in the 1980s and 1990s (Crosby, 1982; Moghaddam et al., 1997) is still observable in the 2020s. Second, previous research tended to measure perceived inequality toward women only: We measured perceived inequality toward men and women. Third, previous research focused on comparing perceived personal inequality and perceived societal inequality: We added ideology as a predictor. Fourth, we included a sample of politicians. Empirical studies using politicians are rare (see Tetlock, 1984, for an exception), and thus we wanted to learn whether and how they differ from the general population. When it comes to gender equality, politicians have more power to foster or impede equality policies than the general population. Therefore, studying what leads politicians to support equality may elucidate what drives societies toward equality.

²People can have different understandings of fairness, for example, having the same chances (equal opportunities), getting what one deserves (proportionality), or getting the same outcomes (equity; Haidt, 2012)

STUDY 1

Equality Support: United States

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 260 Americans recruited via Prolific for a study on “current trends in society.” We aimed to recruit a large enough sample to detect a small effect ($r = .02$) with 90% power. Moreover, with such a sample size the observed correlations between variables remain stable (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). We excluded 30 participants: 12 because they completed less than half of the questionnaire and 18 because they failed the attention check. Because we were interested in women’s and men’s perceptions and support of equality, we also excluded two participants who selected “other” for gender. Our final sample consisted of 227 participants (118 female, 109 male, $M_{\text{age}} = 31.2$ years, $SD = 11.8$).

Demographic information on the sample is in [Table S1](#) (p. 1 in the online supporting information). In Studies 1, 2, and 3, we aimed to recruit a balanced gender ratio and a balanced ratio of participants who identify as left/liberal versus right/conservative using the prescreening option in Prolific. Moreover, in those studies, the distribution of Caucasian participants versus those from other ethnic groups and the distribution of educational degrees was close to representative of the general population ([Table S1](#)). Participants received \$1.00 for participating. The design was correlational.³

Materials and Procedure

Predictors of equality support. To measure perceived inequality (personal and societal), we modified an item from the legitimacy of gender inequality scale (Glick & Whitehead, 2010). Whereas the original item measured perceived gender inequality toward women only, we modified it to capture perceived inequality toward women and men.

Perceived personal inequality. To measure how much gender inequality participants personally experience, we used one item: “Overall, do you think there is a difference in how fairly you yourself are treated compared to a person of the opposite gender? If you are a woman do you believe you yourself are treated more or less fairly than men? If you are a man do you believe you yourself are treated more or less fairly than women?” We used a bipolar 7-point scale (1 = *I am treated a lot less fair*; 4 = *I am treated equally fair*; 7 = *A person of the opposite gender is treated a lot less fair*). The lower participants’ score the more disadvantage they personally experienced.

Perceived societal inequality. To measure participants’ estimates of how much inequality women and men as a group experience, we used one item: “Overall, do you think there are differences in how fairly women and men are treated in the current U.S. society? I think....” We used a bipolar 7-point scale (1 = *women are treated a lot less fairly*; 4 = *women and men are treated equally fairly*; 7 = *men are treated a lot less fairly*).

³In Study 1, we also measured gender stereotypes about math, logic, language, social, and intellectual skills. Because these measures are unrelated to the present research question, we do not discuss them here.

Political ideology. Participants completed the statements: “Based on what I know about politics I am most likely to vote...” (7-point scale, 1 = *democratic*; 7 = *republican*), and “Based on what I know about politics, I am...” (7-point scale, 1 = *liberal*; 7 = *conservative*; Conway III et al., 2012). We combined the two items into one ideology index, $r = .79$ ($\alpha = .88$).

Gender-Equality Support

Attitudes. We asked: “How much do you oppose or support measures of equal opportunity in the context of gender equality for men and women?” We used a bipolar 7-point scale (1 = *I am extremely opposed toward measures of equal opportunity*; 4 = *I am neither opposed nor supportive of measures of equal opportunity*; 7 = *I am extremely supportive of measures of equal opportunity*).

Intentions. We used the collective-action intentions scale (Tausch et al., 2011) and adapted it to the present context. We asked how likely it is that participants would engage in each of the following four actions: (1) partake in gender equality measures at the workplace, (2) sign a petition, (3) engage in a Twitter or Facebook post, and (4) participate in protests. We used 7-point scales (1 = *very unlikely*; 7 = *very likely*). Because internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .87$), we combined the four items into one intention index.

Actions. We gave participants the opportunity to donate all or some of their pay, which they had received for participating in the study, to an organization that campaigns for gender equality. This measure was based on a measure by Bélanger et al. (2014) tapping behavioral support for promoting religious equality, which we adapted to gender equality. Participants read:

Keep in mind that in today’s U.S. there are inequalities for women (e.g., there are relatively fewer women in leadership positions than men) as well as inequalities for men (e.g., men tend to be treated less favorably in child custody evaluations than women).

They then could enter a chosen amount of their pay of \$1.00 they wished to donate to a women’s rights organization—an organization that is “dedicated to supporting gender equality and empowering women by supporting women’s rights in the U.S.” And they could enter a chosen amount of their pay they wished to donate to a men’s right’s organization—an organization that is “dedicated to supporting gender equality and empowering men by supporting men’s rights in the U.S.” They also learned that they could keep the amount of money they did not donate, choosing to donate nothing and keeping their entire pay. For example, one participant chose to donate \$0.10 of their \$1.00 to a women’s rights organization and \$0.05 to a men’s rights organization; thus they could keep \$0.85 for themselves. We used the total amount donated to both organizations as our index of action to support equality.

Because people may understand equality support as support for women’s rather than men’s causes, we also calculated an index of how much participants would act to support gender equality toward women relative to men by subtracting the amount donated for men from the amount donated for women. In this and all following studies the pattern of results did not change when we used this relative index.

Attention check and demographic questionnaire. Within the questionnaire, we included an attention-check measure. We asked: “What color is grass? The fresh, uncut grass, not leaves or

hay. Please select purple instead of green to show that you have read the complete question.” Participants could select either “green” or “purple.”

To conclude, participants answered a demographic questionnaire. They then were debriefed and informed that they would receive their entire pay (all participants were paid \$1.00). They were also given the link to a website of a women’s rights organization and a men’s rights organization in case they wanted to donate the money.

Results

Descriptives

Table 1 depicts descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures.

Perceived Inequality: Gender Differences

Perceived personal inequality. One-sample *t*-tests with the scale mean (4 = both genders are treated equally fairly) indicated that women believed they personally were treated less fairly than men ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(117) = 8.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.84, -0.51]$, $d = 0.45$. Men believed they personally were treated *more* fairly than women ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(108) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.23, 0.66]$, $d = 0.39$. To investigate whether women’s scores are farther away from the scale mean than men’s scores, we created a dummy variable with women’s perceived inequality scores and men’s reverse-coded perceived inequality scores. Women’s scores did not significantly differ⁴ from men’s reverse coded scores, $t(225) = 1.68$, $p = .094$, 95% CI $[-0.50, 0.04]$, indicating that the magnitude of women’s perceived personal disadvantage did not significantly differ from the magnitude of men’s perceived personal advantage (Figure 1).

Perceived societal inequality. Women believed that women in general were treated less fairly than men ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(116) = 13.11$, $p < .000001$, 95% CI $[-1.67, -1.23]$, $d = 1.22$. Men also believed women in general were treated less fairly than men ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(108) = 4.08$, $p < .000001$, 95% CI $[-0.87, -0.30]$, $d = 0.39$. The effect size was very large for women and small for men, indicating that women believed women in general were treated much less fairly than men, whereas men believed women in general were treated just somewhat less fairly, and this difference between women’s and men’s beliefs was significant, $t(205.54) = 4.74$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.63$ (Figure 1). Because we accumulated several *t*-tests, in this and all following studies we repeated the analyses with Bonferroni-adjusted the *p*-values. The pattern of results did not change (p. 2 in the online supporting information).

Perceived Personal Versus Societal Inequality

Women believed they personally were treated more fairly ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .91$) than they believed women in general were treated ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(115) = 7.53$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.96, -0.56]$, $d = 1.00$. There was no significant difference between how fairly men believed they were personally treated ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.13$, reverse-coded) and how fairly they believed

⁴We interpret effects above $p < .05$ as nonsignificant effects. We highlight that a significance above $p > .05$ does not prove the absence of an effect (Amrhein et al., 2019).

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Measure	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Perceptions of gender inequality											
1. Perceived personal inequality: Women less fairly	227	4.57	1.03	–							
2. Perceived societal inequality: Women less fairly	225	5.03	1.42	.49	–						
Support for gender equality											
3. Supportive attitudes toward equality	226	5.69	1.52	.31	.47	–					
4. Intentions to support equality	227	4.067	1.93	.34	.48	.49	–				
5. Donation to women's rights organization (\$)	227	0.19	0.33	.11	.27	.22	.31	–			
6. Donation to men's rights organization (\$)	227	0.05	0.14	–.07	–.14	.01	.02	.27	–		
Demographics											
7. Older age	223	31.2	11.8	.02	–.08	–.06	–.19	–.12	–.12	–	
8. Higher educational attainment	223	2.83	0.82	–.07	–.01	.03	.11	.01	.04	.09	
9. Left/liberal political orientation	225	4.26	2.15	.24	.45	.40	.49	.36	.10	–.29	.14

Note: Correlations printed in bold are below $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

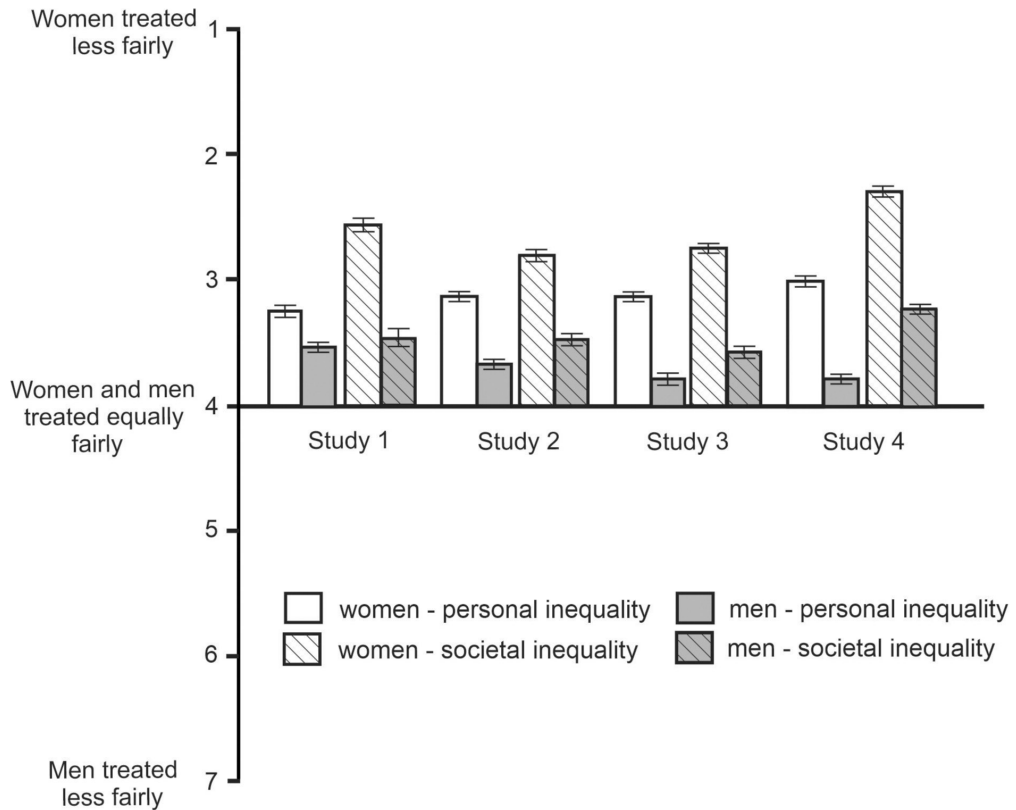


Figure 1. Studies 1–4: Mean perceived personal and perceived societal inequality of women and men (men’s personal inequality scores are reverse coded).

men in general were treated ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(108) = 1.03$, $p = .304$ (Figure 1). This pattern points to a person-group discrepancy in women’s—but not men’s—perception of gender inequality.

Equality Support: Gender Differences

Attitudes. Both women and men had favorable attitudes toward equality measures and their attitudes did not significantly differ from each other ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.50$ vs. $M = 5.55$, $SD = 1.53$ on the 7-point scale), $t(224) = 1.38$, $p = .17$.

Intentions. Women and men had moderately strong intentions to act toward equality. Women, however, reported stronger intentions ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.00$) than men ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.82$), $t(225) = 2.31$, $p = .022$, 95% CI [0.09, 1.09], $d = 0.31$.

Actions. Table 2 depicts the mean amount women and men donated to the women’s rights and the men’s rights organization in Studies 1, 2, and 3. To investigate whether women and men differed in the amount donated, we estimated a mixed general linear model with amount donated to each organization (women’s rights, men’s rights) as within-subject factor and

Table 2. Studies 1, 2, and 3: Amount (in U.S. and UK Currency, Respectively) Women and Men Donated to the Women's Rights and the Men's Rights Organization

Organization				
Gender	<i>N/n</i>	Women's Rights	Men's Rights	Total
Study 1: United States				
Women	118	19.0 (33.6)	3.3 (10.9)	22.3 (37.6)
Men	109	18.2 (32.4)	7.7 (17.0)	25.9 (41.0)
Both	227	18.6 (32.9)	5.4 (14.3)	24.0 (39.2)
Study 2: United States				
Women	185	13.3 (38.2)	2.5 (10.6)	15.9 (33.5)
Men	186	13.2 (23.8)	9.9 (20.6)	23.1 (41.2)
Both	371	13.3 (26.1)	6.2 (16.8)	19.5 (37.6)
Study 3: United Kingdom				
Women	180	12.0 (24.3)	3.7 (11.7)	15.7 (30.6)
Men	180	9.8 (23.9)	2.8 (9.9)	12.6 (28.8)
Both	360	10.9 (24.1)	3.2 (10.8)	14.16 (29.7)

gender as between-subject factor. We observed no significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 225) = .46, p = .50$, indicating that men and women did not significantly differ in the overall amount donated. There was a main effect of organization, $F(1, 225) = 37.73, p < .001, d = 0.80$, indicating that participants donated more to the women's rights than men's rights organization. There was no significant interaction effect of gender by organization, $F(1, 225) = 1.47, p = .23$, indicating that men and women did not significantly differ in the amount they donated to each organization. However, we calculated the power of Study 1 to detect (small) main effects; thus the power of Study 1 may have been too low to detect an interaction effect.

Moreover, because the amount participants donated may depend on their financial means, in this and all following studies, we repeated the analyses controlling for socioeconomic status. With the exception that, in Study 2, the observed main effect of organization ceased to be significant, the pattern of results did not change (Table S2, p.3 in the online supporting information). Finally, because we accumulated several tests, we also repeated the analyses with Bonferroni-adjusted p -values. The pattern of results remained generally the same. The analyses are on p. 2 in the online supporting information.

Perceived Inequality and Political Ideology Predicting Equality Support

Because the three subindices (attitudes, intentions, actions) of equality support were conceptually related and moderately positively correlated among each other, $r_s = .49, .19, \text{ and } .26, p_s < .001$, we used a multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) with the three subindices as dependent variables (Leech et al., 2014). Because we wanted to examine the single unique contribution of each predictor, we entered the three variables simultaneously (entered as covariates; Weinfurt, 1995). In other words, we examined the effect of each predictor while controlling for the effect of the other two predictors. Perceived personal inequality did not significantly predict support, $F(3, 215) = 2.12, p = .099$, while perceived societal inequality, $F(3, 215) = 7.44, p < .001$, and liberal ideology, $F(3, 215) = 17.75, p < .001$ significantly predicted support. Gender did not significantly predict support, $F(3, 215) = 0.80, p = .50$. This pattern indicates that the less fairly participants believed women as a group were treated and the more liberal views they held, the more supportive they were of gender equality as indicated by their attitudes, intentions, and actions (the amount they donated). The

effect size was largest for ideology ($d = 0.99$) followed by perceived societal inequality ($d = 0.64$). Perceived personal inequality did not significantly predict support.

Because women may associate gender-equality support with more equality for women, but men may associate it with more equality for men, we conducted the above analyses for women and men separately. The pattern did not systematically differ between women and men in that ideology emerged as the strongest predictor followed by perceived societal inequality. Perceived personal inequality did not predict support for women and men (Table S3, pp. 4–6 in the online supporting information).

In this and all following studies, we repeated all analyses entering all two-way, three-way, and the four-way interaction effects as predictors. Except for Study 2, where there was a significant four-way interaction effect, in Studies 1, 3, and 4, there were no further significant interaction effects (Table S4, pp. 6–9 in the online supporting information). Because the interaction effect emerged only in Study 2, it likely is a spurious finding, and we will not discuss it any further.

Discussion

American women and men believed that in the United States women personally and women in general were treated less fairly than men. Women, however, believed that women were treated less fairly than men believed women were treated. Women also believed they were personally treated more fairly than they believed women in general were treated (person-group discrepancy).

Moreover, ideology was the strongest predictor of equality support, and perceived societal inequality came in second. Perceived personal inequality did not predict support. We thus replicated previous findings (Foster & Matheson, 1995; Mummendey et al., 1999) that perceived societal inequality was a stronger predictor for collective political endeavors in the domain of gender equality than perceived personal inequality. We added to these findings by showing that ideology was a stronger predictor than both perceived societal and personal inequality. Study 2 attempted to replicate the observed pattern using preregistration.

STUDY 2

U.S. Replication study

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 411 Americans recruited via Prolific for a study on “current trends in society.” Study 1 obtained 90% power to detect a small effect ($r = .02$). In Study 2, we aimed to increase power even further. We aimed to recruit a large enough sample to detect a small effect ($r = .02$) with 98% power. We preregistered the study at [https://aspredicted.org/](https://aspredicted.org/#48779) (#48779). We excluded 40 participants: seven because they completed less than half of the questionnaire, 30 because they failed the attention check, and three because they selected “other” for gender or did not indicate their gender. Our final sample consisted of 371 participants (185 female, 186 male, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.3$ years, $SD = 13.2$). Participants received \$1.00 for participating. The study used the same correlational design as Study 1.

Materials and Procedure

We used the same materials and procedure as in Study 1, except that in Study 1, we presented the item to measure perceived personal inequality and the item to measure perceived societal inequality in a fixed order, whereas in Study 2, to assure that the observed results were not due to order effects, we randomized the order. Internal consistency of the four intention items was $\alpha = .86$, and for the two ideology items it was $r = .83$, $\alpha = .90$.

Results

Descriptives

We performed analogous analyses as in Study 1. Table 3 depicts descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures.

Perceived Inequality: Gender Differences

The results mirrored the pattern of Study 1.

Perceived personal inequality. As in Study 1, women believed they personally were treated less fairly than men ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(184) = 9.81$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-0.97, -0.65]$, $d = 0.65$. Men believed they personally were treated *more* fairly than women ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.14$), $t(184) = 4.18$, $p = .00004$, 95% CI $[0.19, 0.52]$, $d = 0.31$. The effect size was medium for women and small for men, and women's scores were higher than men's reverse-coded scores, $t(368) = 3.90$, $p < .0002$, 95% CI $[-0.69, -0.23]$, $d = 0.41$ (Figure 1).

Perceived societal inequality. As in Study 1, women believed that women in general were treated less fairly than men ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(184) = 13.48$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-1.38, -1.02]$, $d = 0.99$. Men also believed that women in general were treated less fairly ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(185) = 5.20$, $p < .00005$, 95% CI $[-0.74, -0.33]$, $d = 0.38$. The effect size was large for women and small for men. Thus, women believed that women in general were treated less fairly than men believed women were treated, $t(361.23) = 4.85$, $p = .000002$, $d = 0.50$ (Figure 1).

Perceived Personal Versus Societal Inequality

As in Study 1, women believed they personally were treated more fairly ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.12$) than they believed women in general were treated ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(184) = 4.98$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-0.54, -0.24]$, $d = 0.32$. There was no significant difference between how fairly men believed they were personally treated ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.14$, reverse-coded) and how fairly men in general were treated ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(184) = 1.59$, $p = .11$ (Figure 1).

Equality Support: Gender Differences

Attitudes. As in Study 1, women and men had favorable attitudes toward equality measures, and their attitudes did not significantly differ from each other ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.44$ vs. $M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.56$ on the 7-point scale), $t(367) = 1.72$, $p = .087$.

Table 3. Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Measure	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Perceptions of gender inequality											
1. Perceived personal inequality: Women less fairly	370	4.58	1.16	–							
2. Perceived societal inequality: Women less fairly	371	4.87	1.35	.44	–						
Support for gender equality											
3. Supportive attitudes toward equality	369	5.78	1.50	.25	.42	–					
4. Intentions to support equality	369	4.25	1.87	.32	.37	.51	–				
5. Donation to women's rights organization (\$)	371	0.13	0.26	.18	.13	.09	.27	–			
6. Donation to men's rights organization (\$)	371	0.06	0.17	–.09	–.18	–.05	.08	.52	–		
Demographics											
7. Older age	352	36.3	13.3	–.05	.00	–.09	–.13	–.04	–.05	–	
8. Higher socioeconomic status	368	2.97	0.83	.00	–.08	.01	.19	.07	.08	.08	–
9. Left/liberal political orientation	368	4.16	2.29	.30	.36	.41	.43	.43	.05	–.11	–.13

Note: Correlations printed in bold are below $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Intentions. As in Study 1, both women and men reported moderately strong intentions to promote equality. Unlike in Study 1, intentions did not significantly differ between women ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.93$) and men ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.81$), $t(367) = 1.50$, $p = .135$.

Actions. As in Study 1, women and men did not significantly differ in the amount they donated overall, $F(1, 369) = 3.47$, $p = .063$, $d = 0.19$, and participants donated more to the women's rights than men's rights organization, $F(1, 369) = 37.58$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$. Unlike in Study 1, where there was no significant interaction effect, in Study 2, we observed an interaction effect of gender by organization, $F(1, 369) = 10.45$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.34$, indicating that whereas women and men did not differ in the amount donated to the women's rights organization, $t = 0.32$, $p = .97$, women donated less to the men's rights than women's rights organization, $t = 4.32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-10.69, -4.00]$, $d = 0.45$ (Table 2).

Perceived Inequality and Political Ideology Predicting Equality Support

Of the three dependent variables, intentions correlated moderately with attitudes and actions, $r_s = .51$ and $.25$, $ps < .007$. Attitudes and actions did not correlate, $r = .04$, $p = .47$. As in Study 1, perceived societal inequality and ideology predicted support, $F_s > 12.67$, $ps < .001$. Unlike Study 1, this time, perceived personal inequality, $F(3, 356) = 2.86$, $p = .04$, also predicted support. Gender did not significantly predict support, $F(3, 356) = 1.60$, $p = .19$. As in Study 1, the effect size was largest for ideology ($d = 0.83$), followed by perceived societal inequality ($d = 0.66$) and perceived personal inequality ($d = 0.31$).

Discussion

We generally replicated the pattern of Study 1. Studies 1 and 2 focused on the United States; Study 3 examined whether the results would also emerge in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is like the United States in many respects (language, wealth, majority protestant religion), but it scores higher on indices of gender equality (on the GGGI and GII, the United Kingdom ranks 21 and 27, respectively; the United States ranks 53 and 42). Thus, participants in the United Kingdom may perceive higher levels of equality (i.e., lower levels of inequality) than in the United States, and their perceived equality/inequality may not be as influential in predicting their equality support as in the United States.

STUDY 3

Equality Support: United Kingdom

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 405 Britons recruited via Prolific for a study on "current trends in society." We determined sample size as in Study 2. We preregistered the study at <https://aspredicted.org/> (#48508). We excluded 45 participants: four because they completed less than half of the questionnaire, 39 because they failed the attention check, and two because of unidentified gender. Our final sample consisted of 360 participants (180 female, 180 male; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.0$ years,

$SD = 14.3$). Participants received £1.00 for participating. The study used the same correlational design as Studies 1 and 2.

Materials and Procedure

We used the same materials and procedure as in Study 2, adapted to the United Kingdom. To measure ideology, participants indicated their ideology on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*left-wing*) to 7 (*right-wing*), and on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*liberal*) to 7 (*conservative*). Internal consistency of the two ideology items was $r = .75$, $\alpha = .84$ and of the four intention items it was $\alpha = .79$.

Results

Descriptives

We performed analogous analyses as in Studies 1 and 2. [Table 3](#) depicts the descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures.

Perceived Inequality: Gender Differences

The results mirrored the pattern of Studies 1 and 2.

Perceived personal inequality. Women believed they personally were treated less fairly than men ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(179) = 14.18$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-0.94, -0.71]$, $d = 1.08$. Men believed they personally were treated *more* fairly than women ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(178) = 2.80$, $p = .006$, 95% CI $[0.07, 0.40]$, $d = 0.21$. The effect size was large for women and small for men, and women's scores were higher than men's reverse-coded scores, $t(316.82) = 5.76$, $p < .0000001$, 95% CI $[-0.79, -0.39]$, $d = 0.61$ ([Figure 1](#)).

Perceived societal inequality. Women believed that women were treated less fairly than men ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(179) = 18.54$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-1.38, -1.11]$, $d = 1.38$. Men also believed that women were treated less fairly ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(179) = 3.94$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-0.52, -0.17]$, $d = 0.29$. The effect size was very large for women and small for men. Thus, women believed that women in general were treated less fairly more so than men believed women in general were treated, $t(335.54) = 8.16$, $p < .000001$, $d = 0.50$ ([Figure 1](#)).

Perceived Personal Versus Societal Inequality

As in Studies 1 and 2, women believed they personally were treated more fairly ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.78$) than they believed women in general were treated ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(179) = 7.23$, $p < .00001$, 95% CI $[-0.54, -0.31]$, $d = 0.50$. There was no significant difference in how fairly men believed they were personally treated ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.12$, reverse-coded) and how fairly they believed men in general were treated ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(178) = 1.36$, $p = .174$ ([Figure 1](#)).

Equality Support: Gender Differences

Attitudes. Women and men had favorable attitudes toward equality measures. Women, however, had even more favorable attitudes ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.03$) than men ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.43$), $t(326.69) = 3.68$, $p = .0003$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.74], $d = 0.39$.

Intentions. Women and men reported moderately strong intentions to promote gender equality. Women however reported stronger intentions ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.58$) than men ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(357) = 4.20$, $p = .00003$, 95% CI [0.37, 1.03], $d = 0.44$.

Actions. Women and men did not significantly differ in the total amount donated $F(1, 358) = .97$, $p = .33$. Participants donated more to the women's rights than men's rights organization, $F(1, 358) = 41.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.65$. There was no significant gender by organization interaction effect, $F(1, 358) = .32$, $p = .57$ (Table 2).

Perceived Inequality and Political Ideology Predicting Equality Support

We performed analogous analyses as in Study 1. The three support subindices (attitudes, intentions, actions) correlated moderately with each other, $r_s = .49$, $.29$, and $.12$, $p_s < .025$. The observed pattern mirrored the pattern of Study 2: Political ideology was the strongest predictor, $d = 0.68$, followed by perceived societal inequality, $d = 0.42$, and perceived personal inequality, $d = 0.37$, $F_s > 4.34$, $p_s < .005$. Gender did not significantly predict support, $F(3, 340) = 1.00$, $p = .39$.

Discussion

Study 3 in the United Kingdom generally replicated the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in the United States.

In Study 3, we additionally performed supplementary analyses to investigate how much gender inequality participants believed average women and men perceive in their society: The women (and men) overestimated the inequality that average women perceive; the men (and women) underestimated the inequality that average men perceive. This pattern can be interpreted as pluralistic ignorance in the perception of inequality. Pluralistic ignorance refers to the idea that people may overestimate (or underestimate) the prevalence of a particular belief in a group when in fact, the single members of the group do not hold that belief to the same degree (Katz & Allport, 1931). The method, analyses, and discussion are in the online supporting information (pp. 9–11).

Studies 1, 2, and 3 used samples from the general population. Study 4 tested whether the findings from Studies 1–3 would generalize to politicians. Politicians, and in particular middle- to high-level politicians, are an understudied group. Research on equality support focused on activist groups (Nadal, 2017; van Zomeren, 2015; van Zomeren et al., 2008). However, politicians have more power to bring about societal change by implementing new laws. Therefore, it is important to examine whether the same predictors that lead the general population or activists to act toward equality also apply to politicians. Further, because politicians are more competent in their field than the general population (Dal Bó et al., 2017), they may perceive different levels of inequality.

STUDY 4

German Politicians

Method

Participants and Design

We contacted all 1,843 members of the 16 state parliaments in Germany who had made their professional email address publicly available. We sent these members an email asking whether they would participate in an online study on “current trends in society.” The email contained the study link. Of the 1,843 members, 536 participated (response rate: 29.1%). We preregistered the study at <https://aspredicted.org/> (#50847). We excluded 209 participants: 135 because they completed less than half of the questionnaire, 54 because they failed the attention check, and 20 because they selected “other” for gender or did not report gender. Our final sample consisted of 327 participants (135 female, 192 male; $M_{\text{age}} = 49.0$ years, $SD = 11.2$). As compensation, we informed participants that their participation would increase knowledge about perceived gender inequality, and we would email them the preliminary results if they wished.

Materials and Procedure

We used analogous materials and procedures as in Studies 1–3, adapted to Germany, except that because we did not pay participants, we assessed equality support by attitudes and intentions only and not by donation. Moreover, because we examined support in politicians, we adapted our intention measure to political context: We asked the politicians how likely it is that they would (1) publicly support gender equality measures, (2) integrate support for gender equality measures in the party manifesto, (3) sign bills that implement gender-equality measures, and (4) support a parity law. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .92$. To measure ideology, we used the same two items as in Study 3, $r = .65$, $\alpha = .78$.

Results

Descriptives

We performed analogous analyses as in Studies 1–3. **Table 5** depicts the descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures.

Perceived Inequality: Gender Differences

Perceived personal inequality. As in Studies 1–3, women believed they personally were treated less fairly than men ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(133) = 10.53$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.17, -0.80]$, $d = 0.92$. Men believed they personally were treated *more* fairly than women ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(190) = 2.95$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[0.08, 0.38]$, $d = 0.21$. The effect size was large for women and small for men, and women’s scores were higher than men’s reverse-coded scores, $t(323) = 6.19$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.99, -0.52]$, $d = 0.70$ (**Figure 1**).

Perceived societal inequality. As in Studies 1–3, women believed that women in general were treated less fairly than men ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(133) = 18.86$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.86, -1.50]$, $d = 1.63$. Men also believed women in general were treated less fairly ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(190) = 7.52$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.81, -0.47]$, $d = 0.54$. The effect size was very large for women and medium for men. Thus, women believed women in general were treated less fairly than men believed women were treated, $t(323) = 8.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.93$ (Figure 1).

Perceived Personal Versus Societal Inequality

As in Studies 1–3, female politicians believed they personally were treated more fairly ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.08$) than they believed women in general were treated ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(133) = 6.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.90, -0.49]$, $d = 0.65$. As for the men, in Studies 1 to 3 there was no significant difference in how fairly men believed they were personally treated and how fairly men in general were treated. By contrast, in Study 4, male politicians believed that they personally were treated only a little more fairly than female politicians ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.08$) but men in general were treated moderately more fairly than women ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.17$, reverse coded), $t(189) = 5.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.57, -0.27]$, $d = 0.37$ (Figure 1).

Equality Support: Gender Differences

Attitudes. Both women and men had favorable attitudes toward equality measures; women, however, had more favorable attitudes ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 1.22$) than men ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.99$), $t(319.09) = 7.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[1.01, 1.71]$, $d = 0.86$.

Intentions. Women reported stronger intentions ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.53$) to politically support equality than men ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 2.04$), $t(320.71) = 7.00$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[1.00, 1.78]$, $d = 0.79$.

Perceived Inequality and Political Ideology Predicting Support for Equality

The two dependent variables (attitudes, intentions) were positively correlated, $r = .89$. The pattern mirrored the pattern in Studies 2 and 3: Ideology was the strongest predictor, $d = 1.08$, followed by perceived societal inequality, $d = 0.65$, and perceived personal inequality, $d = 0.46$, $F_s > 8.12$, $p_s < .001$.

Discussion

Women and men who were professional politicians believed women were treated less fairly than men, and this difference was more pronounced for female politicians. We also observed the person-group discrepancy for female politicians. In these respects, the pattern mirrored the pattern in Studies 1–3, suggesting that the same factors that predict equality support for the general population also hold true for politicians. However, unlike in Studies 1–3, in Study 4 there was a person-group discrepancy for male politicians such that male politicians believed men in general were treated *more* fairly than they personally were treated. We return to this point in the General Discussion.

Meta-Analysis

Across studies ($N = 1,287$), ideology was the strongest predictor of equality support, perceived societal inequality the second strongest, and perceived personal inequality the weakest. Weighted effect sizes (d s) were 0.88, 0.59, and 0.37, respectively.

Perceived Inequality Across Countries

For exploratory purposes, we compared perceived inequality in women and men between countries. German women (politicians) perceived more personal inequality than American women, $t(435) = 2.06$, $p = .04$. German women also perceived more societal inequality than American and British women, t s > 3.22 , p s $< .001$, and German men perceived more societal inequality than American men, $t(369) = 2.41$, $p = .02$. Finally, the person-group discrepancy in German women was larger than in British women, $t(213.65) = 2.27$, $p = .02$. At first glance, this pattern may seem paradoxical because Germany ranks higher on objective indicators of gender inequality (the GGGI, and GII) than both the United Kingdom and the United States. However, perceived inequality does not consistently depend on actual inequality (Ayalon, 2014; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Moreover, in Germany, we used a sample of politicians rather than the general population as in the United Kingdom and the United States. We return to this point in the next section.

General Discussion

Both women and men believed women were treated more unequally, but women felt the inequality was greater than men felt it was. This latter result extends findings that in some institutions women perceive more inequality at their workplace than men do (García-González et al., 2019) to the level of society. In line with previous research (Foster & Matheson, 1995), perceived societal inequality was a stronger predictor of equality support than perceived personal inequality. Going beyond previous findings, consistently across studies the strongest predictor was ideology.

Political Ideology and Support for Gender Equality

Supportive attitudes toward equality were high across studies (higher than 5.4 on the 7-point scale), suggesting that equality is important for both people on the left/liberal and right/conservative spectrum. However, the literature indicates that the views of left/liberal people on (gender) equality differ from those of right/conservative people as follows: Left/liberal people emphasize equality of outcomes (vs. equality of opportunity) more than right/conservative people (Scruton, 1980). Left/liberal people also more strongly endorse policy measures (affirmative action, quotas) aimed at establishing equality of outcomes whereas right/conservative people tend to maintain that such measures may even hurt disadvantaged groups (Lawrence III, 2001). Moreover, left/liberal people overestimate social inequality whereas right/conservative people underestimate it (Kteily et al., 2017). Finally, left/liberal people emphasize structural discrimination (Pratto et al., 1997; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001), and stereotypes (Jost & Kay, 2005) as explanations for inequality, whereas right/conservative people emphasize personal responsibility, cultural differences, and dispositional differences (differences in interests and life choices; Sowell, 2019). For these reasons, (gender) inequality remains a divisive political issue (Kteily et al., 2017).

The fact that (gender) inequality is a prominent political topic may explain in part why political ideology was a stronger predictor of equality support than perceived inequality. Ideology is a potent force that guides how people interpret the world: Humans have been described as looking at reality through an ideological lens (Jost, 2006). In this vein, people's ideology often becomes part of their group identity, and a shared identity makes people liable to tribalism and us-versus-them thinking in which they tend to align their personal views and experiences with those held by the group (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; but see Klar & McCoy, 2021, for how cross-party movements such as #MeToo can mitigate partisan bias). Indeed, people's attitudes toward specific political issues were more strongly influenced by their partisan identity than the objective merits of the political issues at hand (Cohen, 2003), even when specific issues did not represent long-standing party policies but were arbitrarily generated (Macy et al., 2019). Paradoxically then, the issue of equality being a prominent political topic may potentiate partisan divisions on this topic and in this way hamper efforts to foster equality.

Measuring Gender Inequality: Zero-Sum or Non-Zero-Sum?

Because previous research tended to measure perceived inequality of women only (Glick & Whitehead, 2010), we assessed perceived inequality of women and men on a bipolar scale. This measure can be interpreted as implying a zero-sum scenario of gender inequality. In a zero-sum scenario, less disadvantage for one gender means less advantage for the other. Gender equality can also be viewed as a non-zero-sum scenario, however. In a non-zero-sum scenario, less disadvantage for one gender does not necessarily mean less advantage for the other; less disadvantage for one gender can even mean less disadvantage for the other as well.

In everyday life, both scenarios should apply. In some domains gender equality is predominantly non-zero sum—for example, when weak rather than strong social norms allow both women and men to take on whatever role they prefer (caring for infants, pursuing a career). In other domains, however, gender equality is zero-sum. When there is a finite pool of resources more resources for one gender can mean less resources for the other (leadership positions or programs that devote resources to only one gender, such as promoting men's career or women's health). In fact, indices of gender equality (GGGI and GII) often use zero-sum domains (e.g., leadership positions). Our bipolar item and the behavioral donation measure more closely mirror these zero-sum situations. Future research may use one unipolar item to measure inequality toward men and one unipolar item to measure inequality toward women to mirror non-zero-sum situations.

Person-Group Discrepancy

The women consistently reported less inequality for themselves than they reported for their group. Apparently, women in the 2020s still display the person-group discrepancy observed in the 1980s and 1990s. In theory, the discrepancy should become narrower or disappear the more gender-equal societies become over time, and it should be narrower in more than in less gender-equal countries. Research should use longitudinal designs and samples from multiple countries to test these ideas.

In Study 4, examining German politicians, a significant person-group discrepancy emerged for men: Male politicians perceived personally having less advantage compared to female politicians than they perceived men in general have. Thus, in Study 4, both men and women perceived the inequality to be larger in the society than in their personal lives. We offer several speculative explanations for this finding.

First, there was also a tendency for a person-group discrepancy in men in Studies 1–3, although it was nonsignificant ($ps > .11$). If men generally display the person-group discrepancy, they may do so for similar reasons as women. According to Ruggiero and Taylor (1995), one reason why women report less personal disadvantage than disadvantage of their group is to maintain a sense of personal agency. That is, they may be reluctant to attribute their personal outcomes (successes or failures) to forces outside their control (personal disadvantage). Similarly, to maintain a sense of personal agency, men may also be reluctant to attribute their personal outcomes to outside forces (personal advantage). We stress, however, that future research should test whether the person-group discrepancy indeed emerges in men generally, not only in male politicians.

Second, although there was a nonsignificant person-group discrepancy in men in Studies 1–3, the person-group discrepancy in male politicians in Study 4 was significantly larger than in Studies 1–3 (see Table S5, pp. 9–11 in the online supporting information). One reason for this difference might be that gender equality in some domains (political participation) is a prominent political topic. Therefore, examples of such inequalities might come easier to mind to politicians than to men in general.

Third, another reason why male politicians reported less personal advantage than they reported men in general have might be that male politicians do not consider themselves representative of the general population and believe that in their field inequalities are smaller than in society at large. Study 4 was conducted in a different country and used a different sample than Studies 1–3. Therefore, it is unclear whether the observed pattern in Study 4 is due to country or sample, or both. Future research should examine whether the person-group discrepancy for male politicians emerges in other countries as well.

Implications for Gender Equality Policies

Examining how much inequality women and men subjectively experience and observe may help uncover the sources of current controversies on this topic. It may also open up women and men to take each other's perspective. Although ideology was the strongest predictor, perceived personal and societal inequality also predicted equality support. Because higher perceived inequality is related to lower well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014), perceived inequality should be integrated in discussions around equality and well-being. Such discussions may also involve whether people's subjective perceptions of societal inequality align with the inequality as gauged by the inequality indices (GGGI, GII, BIGI). Finally, neither the relatively low perceived personal inequality nor its relatively low power to predict equality support should be interpreted as indicating that efforts to establish equality for women and men are not needed anymore.

Limitations and Future Directions

As mentioned above, support for gender equality was relatively high, in particular when measured by our one-item attitude measure (Tables 1, 3, 4, and 5). Responses on such general attitude measures may be exaggerated in comparison to support for specific policies to foster equality (Schwarz et al., 1998). However, the attitude measure correlated positively with the other two support measures (intentions and donation behavior) in all studies ($rs > .22$, $ps < .007$), suggesting it is a valid proxy of equality support.

We examined countries with relatively high equality. Future research should examine countries with lower equality and non-WEIRD countries (Henrich et al., 2010). Moreover, one may

Table 4. Study 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Measure	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Perceptions of gender inequality											
1. Perceived personal inequality: Women less fairly	359	4.53	1.01	–							
2. Perceived societal inequality: Women less fairly	360	4.79	1.14	.63	–						
Support for gender equality											
3. Supportive attitudes toward equality	360	6.12	1.27	.38	.41	–					
4. Intentions to support equality	359	3.98	1.61	.42	.42	.49	–				
5. Donation to women's rights organization (£)	360	0.11	0.24	.14	.19	.12	.29	–			
6. Donation to men's rights organization (£)	360	0.03	0.11	.03	.02	.06	.16	.36	–		
Demographics											
7. Older age	356	37.0	14.3	–.10	–.08	–.02	–.24	.01	–.14	–	
8. Higher socioeconomic status	360	5.46	1.50	.05	.06	.06	.00	–.01	.03	.10	–
9. Left/liberal political orientation	349	4.29	1.65	.33	.36	.31	.41	.23	.05	–.20	–.11

Note: Correlations printed in bold are significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 5. Study 4: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Measure	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Perceptions of gender inequality									
1. Perceived personal inequality: Women less fairly	325	4.54	1.14	–					
2. Perceived societal inequality: Women less fairly	325	5.07	1.23	.55	–				
Support for gender equality									
3. Supportive attitudes toward equality measures	325	5.46	1.84	.48	.59	–			
4. Intentions to support equality	324	5.24	1.97	.44	.61	.89	–		
Demographics									
5. Older age	319	49.0	11.2	–.03	–.03	–.03	–.02	–	
6. Higher socioeconomic status	311	7.86	1.20	.06	.20	.13	.19	–.04	–
7. Left/liberal political orientation	316	4.81	1.40	.36	.49	.55	.63	–.11	.12

Note: Correlations printed in bold are significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

correlate perceived inequality with gender-equality indices (GGGI, GDI, BIGI) to investigate whether some subindices (e.g., economic participation) correlate more strongly with perceived inequality than others (e.g., life expectancy). Doing so may illuminate which domains most crucially influence perceived inequality. One should also examine perceived inequality and support in other groups (ethnic, sexual, or religious groups).

Finally, one may explore mechanisms for the observed relationship between ideology and support. A strong (vs. weak) identification with a subgroup (women who support societal change) rather than a superordinate group (Americans) may foster support for societal change (Gorska & Bilewicz, 2015). Thus, because people with a left/liberal (vs. right/conservative) ideology may identify more with the subgroup than the superordinate group, the stronger identification with the subgroup may mediate the relationship between ideology and support. Future research may include measures of group identification to examine this possibility.

Conclusion

Indices of gender equality paint an inconsistent picture of current inequality in countries with relatively high equality. When it comes to the inequality people subjectively perceive, both women and men reported women were treated less equally than men. More so than personal or vicarious experiences of inequality, however, left/liberal–right/conservative ideology guided support for equality. This finding may suggest entrenched political views can override personal experiences and, in this way, strengthen a political divide.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Table S1. Studies 1–4: Sociodemographic Characteristics (Percentages) of Participants in the U.S. (Studies 1 and 2), the U.K. (Study 3), and Germany (Study 4), and Benchmark Values in the General Population (According to Census Data)

Table S2. Studies 1–3. Summary of Mixed General Linear Model with Amount Donated to each Organization (Women's Rights, Men's Rights) as Within-Subject Factor, Gender as Between-Subject Factor, and SES as Covariate

Table S3. Studies 1–4: Summary of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with Equality Support (Attitudes, Intentions, Actions) as Dependent Variable, and Gender, Perceived Personal Inequality, Perceived Societal Inequality, and Liberal Political Ideology, as Predictors for Women and Men Separately

Table S4. Studies 1–4: Summary of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with Equality Support (Attitudes, Intentions, Actions) as Dependent Variable, and Gender, Perceived Personal Inequality, Perceived Societal Inequality, Liberal Political Ideology, and All Two-Way, all Three-Way, and the Four-Way Interaction as Predictors

Figure S1. Study 3: Participants' mean perceived societal inequality compared with participants' estimates of the perceived societal inequality as perceived by others.

Table S5. Studies 1–4. Summary of Mixed GLM with Perceived Inequality (Personal vs. Societal) as Within-subject Factor and Study (Dummy-Coded: Study 4 vs. Studies 1 to 3) as Between-Subject Factor