Ideological underpinnings of distributive unfairness evaluations: Evidence from Latin America between 1997 and 2020

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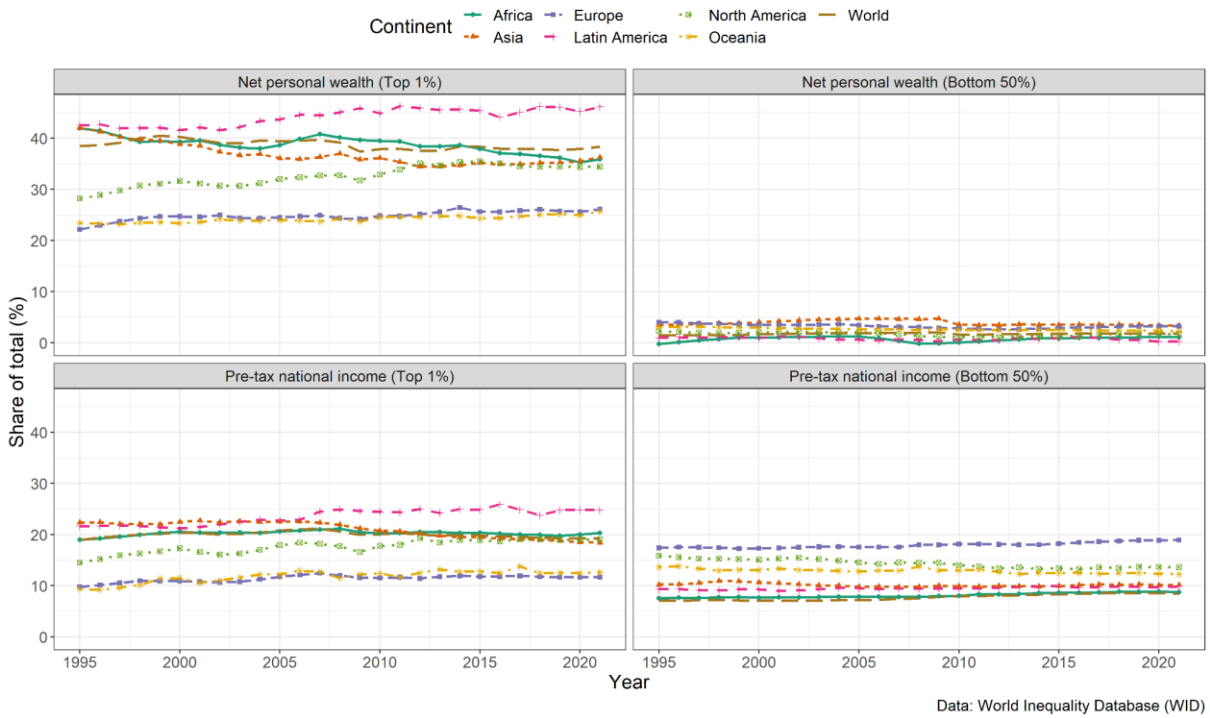
The Ideological Underpinnings of Distributive Unfairness Evaluations: Evidence from Latin America Between 1997 and 2020

Tú no puedes comprar las nubes
Tú no puedes comprar los colores
Tú no puedes comprar mi alegría
Tú no puedes comprar mis dolores
Calle 13, Latinoamérica

Social inequality has been one of Latin America's (LA) defining characteristics since its colonization (Pérez, 2014). By 2021, the top 1% of the population in LA captured 46.1% of the wealth and 24.8% of the income, while the bottom 50% of the people only own 0.27% of the wealth and concentrate 9.82% of the total incomes in the region. These economic inequalities have been maintained over the years since the elites have always concentrated most of the wealth (See Figure 1), and the poorest people have been impoverished. Despite the social developments and slight reductions in economic inequality, LA still reflects long-standing divided and unequal societies.

Figure 1. Net personal wealth inequality for the top 1% (upper-left) and the bottom 50% of the population (upper-right), and National income for the top 1% (bottom-left) and the bottom 50% (bottom-right) of the population by regions of the world.



These critical and permanent inequalities make Latin American societies vulnerable to economic, social, and health crises, as recently shown by the severe impact of the coronavirus pandemic. At the time of this writing, LA comprised about 8.5% of the world's population but had 18.3% of total COVID-19 cases and about 30% of COVID-19 deaths (Sullivan et al., 2020). Besides these health correlations of inequality, LA has one of the highest homicide rates worldwide (UNODC, 2019), along with excessive unemployment, work informality, and poverty (Maurizio, 2021). However, it is not only important to understand the consequences of these social realities but also to comprehend how people perceive and respond to them. Indeed, some research has found that perceptions and beliefs about inequality are better predictors of political attitudes than objective economic disparities (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2015; Hauser & Norton, 2017; Loveless & Whitefield, 2011).

In this vein, objective economic inequality does not always motivate people to support measures to reduce it (Breznau & Hommerich, 2019; Choi, 2019). Instead, inequality perceptions and unfairness evaluations are crucial to mobilize people toward reaching a more just society (Oxendine, 2019; Willis et al., 2022). Similarly, the willingness to participate in protest and collective actions is driven by citizens' outrage and unfair evaluations rather than objective inequalities (Ortiz et al., 2022; Yagci, 2017). Indeed, despite the reduction of economic inequality in LA over the last years, protests increased because of people's injustice assessment (Justino & Martorano, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to study the distributive unfairness evaluations to understand how this subjective dimension of inequality experienced in LA can shape people's responses to social and political issues.

This chapter aims to study distributive justice evaluations in LA over the last 23 years (from 1997 to 2020). We argue that (a) fairness evaluations of the income distribution would vary substantially due to individual and contextual characteristics and (b) those objective facts do not account for such variations; it depends on people's ideological beliefs. Specifically, we argue that system-justifying ideologies shape evaluations of income distribution beyond country-level objective conditions.

We start our approach to the study of fairness evaluations of economic income distribution from the theory of distributive justice. However, we add a social psychological perspective by integrating

insights from the social psychology of economic inequality (Easterbrook, 2021; Jetten & Peters, 2019). We argue that people evaluate more unfairness when living in an unequal context but that such an evaluation differs as a function of people's ideologies. As such, we empirically examine how societal factors and ideologies shape distributive fairness evaluations in LA over time.

The social psychology of economic inequality is an emerging field that covers how income disparities shape people's thoughts about interpersonal relations (Jetten & Peters, 2019). Although economic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of income, wealth, and opportunity between different groups in society (IZA World of Labor, 2022); economic inequality also represents power differences in the capitalist market between different groups of people (social classes) (Pérez, 2014). This definition focuses on societal and material resource disparities but overlooks psychological processes that guide people's attitudes and behaviors. Economic inequality has been studied to understand societies' development, but less work has explored how economic inequality influences people's behaviors, beliefs, or emotions (Castillo et al., 2022; Willis et al., 2022).

As such, the social psychology of inequality aims to understand the interaction between unequal contexts or situations and people's characteristics. For instance, some research questions under this research agenda cover how people perceive and legitimate inequality, how they behave under unequal contexts, and which emotions they experience before unequal and unfair scenarios, among others. However, this approach has mainly focused on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies, omitting important insights from LA (García-Castro et al., 2021) and other regions. Furthermore, in terms of political attitudes, people respond more to subjective inequalities and subjective experiences of relative deprivation rather than to objective indicators of inequality or scarcity (Rodriguez-Bailon et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2012), which stresses the importance of understanding how people make sense of the unequal distribution of resources to pursue and demand social change.

One area researchers have addressed for understanding people's subjectivity related to economic inequality is distributive fairness evaluations. Distributive justice theory focuses on the fairness attributed to the distribution of outcomes, such as income or wealth (Jasso, 1980). This

framework focuses on fair payment when gains are sufficiently fair and adequate and what information guides such evaluations (Jasso, 2015). This approach allows an understanding of what leads people to see fairness in unequal income distribution and to what extent such evaluations trigger social unrest. Distributive justice theory relies on models that stress a type of rational thinking that implies relationships between people's estimates of current and ideal earnings. The theory also relies on models based on moral principles that justify unequal distribution, such as merit, equity, or need (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015). However, this perspective overlooks the role of individual ideological differences in shaping fairness evaluations of income distribution.

Although distributive justice theory considers ideological differences for explaining fairness evaluations (Jasso, 1980; Walster et al., 1978), such ideas are mostly framed as social norms at the societal level. Therefore, we aim to revise the roles of ideologies and norms from a social psychological perspective that accounts for people's differences. We will do this by focusing on individuals' system-justifying ideologies, that is, belief systems that serve to legitimate inequality and resist social change (Jost, 2017; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Because people are likely to see the world through the lens of their ideologies, this means that people would be motivated to match their evaluations of the current state of affairs to their pre-existence beliefs (Jost, 2018; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

We discuss the contributions of distributive fairness evaluations as a function of people's understanding of their reality and the role of ideological beliefs that account for people's justice evaluations that address aspects beyond structural factors. This will allow us to broaden the scope of distributive justice theory by showing that distributive fairness evaluations differ according to individuals' ideological differences. In other words, we argue that people evaluate the unfairness of the income distribution when they are aware of great economic inequality and reject beliefs that legitimate social disparities. We reason that, under the same unequal contexts, the extent of unfairness evaluated by the people would be a function of people's ideologies above and beyond their objective reality.

We have several goals in this chapter. First, we aim to examine whether distributive fairness evaluations have changed in LA from 1997 to 2020 and, if so, how societal factors are associated with

such change. Second, we test how ideological beliefs explain people's distributive fairness evaluations beyond structural and situational variables. Indeed, previous research showed that people evaluated less unfairness in the income distribution in LA when objective inequality was reduced between 1997 and 2015 (Reyes & Gasparini, 2021). Our chapter builds on this research and extends it as we broaden the period (from 1997-2020), use all the spectrum of fairness evaluations (from fair to unfair[1]), look at the different patterns of change between countries and analyze the role of ideological beliefs on justice evaluations.

These goals allow us to answer whether distributive fairness evaluations respond to the structural changes experienced in LA over the years and whether those changes differ between countries. Furthermore, we can also illustrate how ideological beliefs influence distributive fairness assessments, thus shaping how much inequality is perceived and justified. These findings help us to understand people's distributive fairness evaluations by showing that people not only respond to structural changes but also make their assessments depending on their worldviews.

Distributive Justice Evaluations and Psychological Motivations

Justice evaluations are cognitive processes that aim to understand how much fairness is assessed in the resource's distribution, why it is considered fair, and the potential implications for social justice. Distributive justice theory states that people judge the implied fairness in the allocation of resources (income or wealth) based on a set of moral principles (i.e., equality, merit, and need), the allocator's and awardees' characteristics, and the social and historical context (Jasso, 1980, 2015). This approach relies on other proposals, such as equity theory (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; Walster et al., 1978), status value theory (Berger et al., 1972), social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), and relative deprivation theory (Runciman, 1966). Similar to these theories, the justice evaluation framework proposes that people make comparisons to determine a just distribution of resources: An observer makes a justice evaluation comparing the actual reward (the result of an allocator's decisions) and the just reward for a

[1] Gasparini and Reyes (2021) used a dichotomous variable that indicated whether income distribution was unfair or very unfair, which left out about 20% of responses indicating fair and very fair distribution.

given situation (Jasso, 2015). Thus, social comparison and relative deprivation go hand in hand to calibrate distributive fairness evaluations and political responses toward the system (Osborne et al., 2021).

Studies that cover different aspects of subjective inequality, such as perceptions, beliefs, assessments, and preferences, among others, usually confuse justice evaluations with other terms (Castillo et al., 2012; Heiserman & Simpson, 2021). To clarify common misunderstandings, a primary distinction is between descriptive statements about *what is* (the amount of perceived disparity) and normative ideas about *what should be* (the ideal or just amount of inequality) (Janmaat, 2013). In this framework, the justice evaluation is a normative statement about a particular fairness situation, such as the fairness of a country's income distribution, which is this paper's focus.

Regarding the determinants of distributive evaluations, self-interest theory proposes that people reason and make choices based on expected utility (d'Anjou et al., 1995; Ng & Allen, 2005). People should evaluate more fairness in distributing resources to benefit them, which is usually the case with the upper classes. Other proposals, such as attribution theory, dictate that assignment for causes (internal or external) for one's behavior is related to unfairness evaluation (Ng & Allen, 2005). People who believe that the differences between actual and just rewards are internal causes (e.g., laziness) tend to evaluate those differences as fairer.

However, research on distributive justice evaluations has mainly focused on structural and situational factors, overlooking the roles of ideologies and individual differences. For example, research in this area has shown that people with a higher education evaluate less unfairness (c.f. for teen population Salgado, 2020), while unemployed and older people estimate more unfairness (Reyes & Gasparini, 2021). Similarly, studies also show that people assess more unfairness when identifying with the middle class (Cramer & Kaufman, 2011).

From a social psychological perspective, there are cognitive and motivational approaches to evaluating justice (Jost et al., 2009). From a cognitive perspective, fairness heuristic theory argues that once people form their justice evaluations, they use such acquired knowledge as an anchor to infer (and

bias) future justice evaluations (Lind, 2001; van den Bos et al., 2001). From a motivational perspective, the justice motive theory claims that people have a fundamental need to believe in a just world in which people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Bobocel & Hafer, 2007; Lerner, 1980). Thus, people engage in motivated reasoning to perceive situations according to their beliefs (Kunda, 1990) and to rationalize (or justify) the status quo (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). As such, justice evaluations rely on the interplay between people's assessment of their reality and their psychological motivations.

Ideological Approaches of Distributive Justice Evaluations

Distributive justice evaluations are not solely rational assessments of countries' economic performance and are not the confluence of moral principles. Instead, distributive justice evaluations consist of a motivated process based on people's ideologies. From a psychological perspective, ideologies are conceptualized as belief systems about how the world should work, fulfilling psychological needs of reducing uncertainty and increasing belongingness to social groups (Jost et al., 2009). The role of ideologies in distributive justice evaluations is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. First, according to the justice motive theory, people are psychologically motivated to believe that the world is a fair place where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner, 1980). This approach has received empirical support across countries and has shown that just-world beliefs serve as a coping mechanism to deal with stressful events (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006; Furnham, 2003).

Second, system justification theory argues that people are motivated to rationalize their status quo to reduce uncertainty and restore a sense of control (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). People rely on system-justifying ideologies, which are belief systems that explain and reinforce inequality (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). These ideologies fulfill psychological motivations to see the world as a fair and legitimate place, contributing to coping with threats and anxieties related to system uncertainties (Jost et al., 2015). Some examples of these system-justifying beliefs are classic political conservatism (left-

right scale) (Jost, 2017), neoliberal beliefs (Azevedo et al., 2019), beliefs in upward social mobility (Davidai & Wienk, 2021), and religiosity (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

Third, the social cognitive theory claims that people use motivated reasoning to process information (Kunda, 1990). Therefore, people perceive their world through the lens of their ideologies. For instance, when people endorse system-justifying ideologies, they are less aware of ethnic inequalities (Bahamondes et al., 2019), they justify more economic inequalities (García-Sánchez et al., 2021), and they reduce people's support for redistribution (Alesina et al., 2012). These system-justifying ideologies share a common goal of legitimating inequality by assessing less unfairness in the world. As such, being conservative and supporting neoliberal ideology is also related to assessing the distribution of resources as fair (Ng & Allen, 2005). Beliefs in upward social mobility enclose the idea that people will benefit from an unequal system in the future (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973). Finally, religiosity is rooted in conservative values claiming that good deeds will be compensated, and evil deeds will be punished (van der Toorn et al., 2017).

Some of the first empirical studies examining the relationship between ideology and justice evaluations argued that people's judgments correspond more to their worldviews than to their objective reality (Kluegel, 1989; Shepelak & Alwin, 1986). Concepts such as *market justice beliefs* (Kluegel et al., 1999; Lane, 1986)*, free-market ideology* (d'Anjou et al., 1995), and *justice ideologies* (Wegener & Liebig, 2000) assess whether people prefer egalitarian (e.g., equality, safety net) or individualistic (e.g., merit) values in terms of determining resources allocation. In LA, individualistic beliefs are positively associated with a preference for more considerable income differences, and egalitarian ideas are related to income inequality disapproval (Castillo, 2011; Castillo et al., 2008).

In sum, research on justice evaluations has mainly focused on structural variables linked to political, economic, or social characteristics per country (Reyes & Gasparini, 2021) as well as situational variables related to people's social standing and living conditions (Cramer & Kaufman, 2011). However, this approach overlooks the role of individual ideological differences in how people form their justice evaluations. Therefore, this chapter argues that ideological differences shape justice evaluations of

income distributions beyond structural indicators. We advance in the social-psychological dimension of distributive fairness evaluations by showing that people are motivated to evaluate more fairness when they endorse systems justifying ideologies. Hence, distributive fairness evaluations capture a rational part linked to people's awareness of inequality and a psychological dimension about people's motivation to see fairness in the world. This motivation encodes through several systems justifying ideologies. Thus, approving or rejecting those ideologies can make people evaluate their country's income distribution differently. We tested this claim using empirical data gathered for 23 years in LA in the following section.

Structural and ideological underpinnings of justice evaluations: empirical support from LA

For this research, we used data from the Latinobarometro survey. Latinobarometro is an international study in LA carried out by a private non-profit organization designed and produced by Latin American social and political actors to assess public opinion issues (e.g., perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, etc.) of interest for the region. This study has been carried out from 1995 to the present. We used information from 18 Latin American countries[2] distributed along 13 waves[3] that measured distributive justice evaluations through the following item: "*How fair do you think is the income distribution in (country)?*" The participants were offered four response options: *very fair* (1), *fair* (2), *unfair* (3), and *very unfair* (4). The final dataset was composed of 273,880 participants that reflected the overall composition of each country (the pooled sample included 51.67% Female, 48.33% Male; M_{age} = 40.34 years, *SD* = 16.51) distributed across 231 country-years groups[4]. The survey did not include items for measuring objective levels of socioeconomic status by income, but a proxy indicator of subjective income[5] suggest that the sample covered people from all socioeconomic levels: 11.33% reported having sufficient and being able to save, 41.78% reported having sufficient incomes without

[2] The countries included in the dataset were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, República Dominicana, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

[3] The year's corresponding to each wave were: 1997, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020.

[4] Thirteen waves across 18 countries; there are three excluded waves from Dominican Rep. because the country did not participate in 1997, 2000, and 2001 surveys.

[5] The subjective income indicator was not included in the 2017, 2018, and 2020 waves.

major problems, 34.46% reported not having sufficient and having problems, and 12.43% of the people answered that did not have sufficient and had big problems. Furthermore, examining the pooled dataset, we found the income distribution was assessed as *very unfair* (28.35%), *unfair* (52.17%), *fair* (16.84%), and *very fair* (2.64%). Therefore, distributive justice is usually framed in unfairness; this chapter will coin the term "distributive unfairness" because it best represents participants' responses.

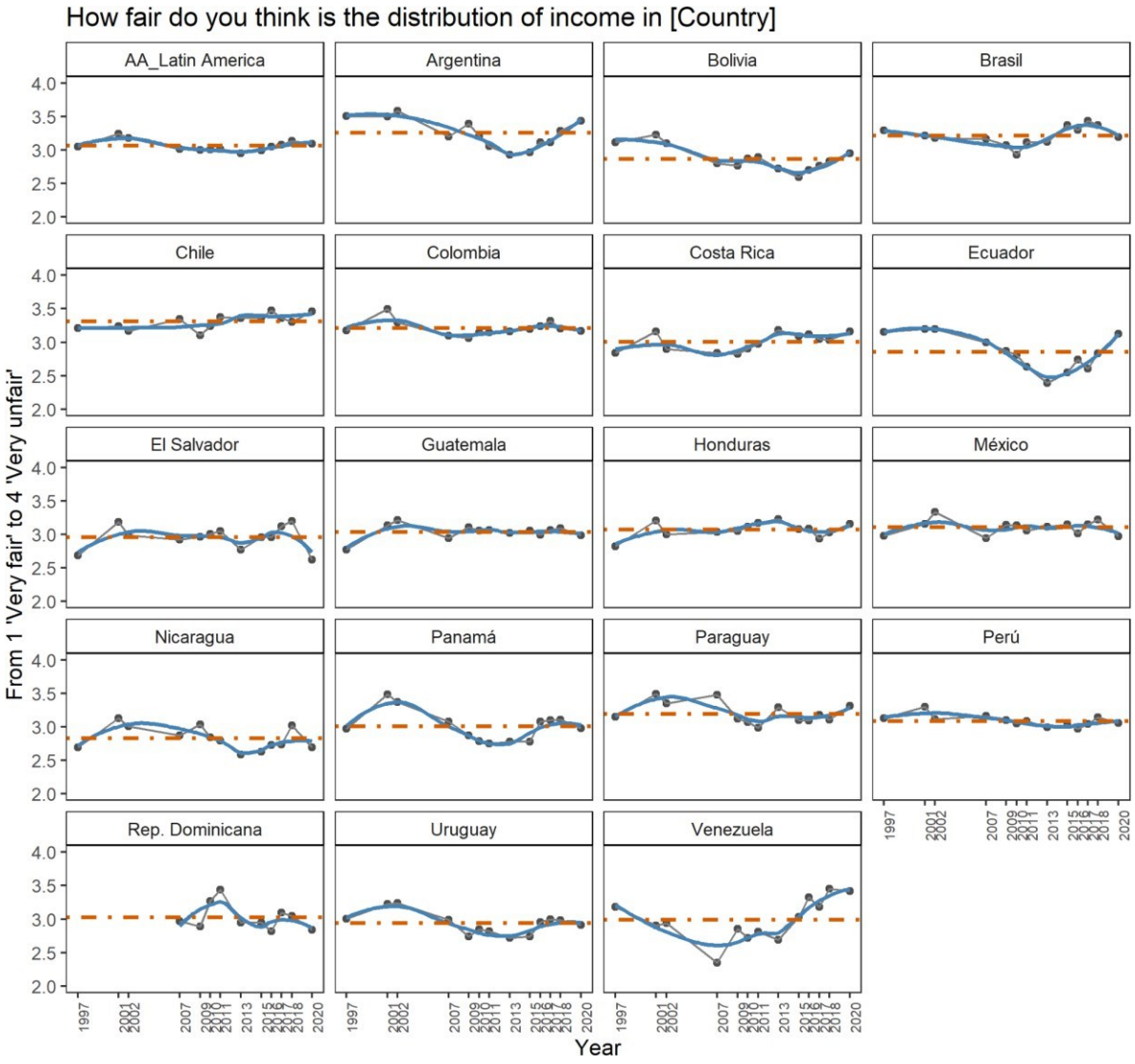
The empirical section is organized into three stages. First, we describe the evolution of unfairness evaluations across times per country. Second, we examine potential differences in time patterns between countries and investigate whether time affects the evolution of unfairness evaluations in each country. Third, we test our central hypothesis that system-justifying ideologies are negatively associated with unfair evaluations of income distribution. Data, code, and supplementary materials are available at: https://osf.io/wz3rx/.

The Evolution of Distributive Unfairness Evaluations Across Time in Latin America

To show the evolution of distributive unfairness evaluations, we depict the average values for each country over the years (see Figure 2). We found that values for all countries ranged primarily on the spectrum of unfairness views (responses above option 2), suggesting that most people considered income distribution unfair. The average score for the LA region was about 3.06, with Nicaragua (M = 2.82), Ecuador (M = 2.85), and Bolivia (M = 2.86) being the countries with the lowest unfairness evaluations on average. Conversely, Chile (M = 3.30), Argentina (M = 3.25) and Brazil (M = 3.21) had the highest unfairness evaluations (see Table S1 in the supplementary material: https://osf.io/agu57/).

Figure 2

Distributive unfairness evaluations by country over the years



Note. Dots are the mean values in each year, the blue-curved line is the LOESS function depicting the pattern of change, and the red-dotted line indicates the average mean value per country over the years.

Looking at the evolution of distributive unfairness evaluations, the most striking result was that the evaluations in LA hardly changed over the years despite some minor fluctuations. On average, distributive unfairness evaluations in Latin America went from 3.05 points in 1997 to 3.09 points in 2020. In other words, the overall region maintained a stable assessment of distributive unfairness despite inequality and poverty reduction (Alvaredo et al., 2018; PNUD, 2021). This situation conveys a trap in which people still live under infamous inequalities and unfairness that the COVID-19 crisis reinforced.

Different Changes in Distributive Unfairness Evaluations Over Time Per Country

We examined the trajectories of unfairness evolutions per country separately and found that different countries told distinct stories. The overall pattern for the region showed some nuances in the development of distributive unfairness evaluations when we looked at each country separately. Indeed, most countries showed a stable assessment of distributive unfairness across years (e.g., Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, México). In contrast, other countries showed more fluctuations over the last decade (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Panamá, Uruguay, Venezuela).

The visualization of the change patterns per country shown in Figure 2 depicts the evolution across time. However, it does not test the association between distributive unfairness evaluations per country and time. Therefore, we tested such an association by fitting an ordered logistic multilevel regression per country, in which we regressed distributive unfairness evaluations on time. This provided a formal test of the association between those variables per country. To fit this model, we decided to recode the original scale into three options because the data were highly skewed toward *unfair* (52.17%) and *very unfair* (28.35%) options, compared to *fair* (16.84%) and *very fair* (2.64%). Therefore, we merged *fair* and *very fair* options, which became our reference category (1), and we kept *unfair* (2) and *very unfair* (3) as in the original scale. This way, we kept the complete information of the data ranging from *very fair* to *very unfair*.

We found that, on average, there was no meaningful change in distributive fairness evaluations over time in L.A. Although the effect of time on distributive fairness evaluations was statistically significant, it was relatively small ($b = -.011$, $SE = .001$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [− .012, −.009], OR = .98). That is, taking together the whole Latin American region, the odds of rating the income distribution as *fair* versus *unfair* or *very unfair* increased by 2% (.02 times) per year. This estimate can infer the change in distributive unfairness evaluations when all measures remain constant. It will take the region about 50 years to go from *fair* to *unfair* evaluations (odds of .02 times by 50 years), which suggests that cultural changes over time can be challenging and should be interpreted historically. This finding corroborates Reyes and Gasparini (2021) results, who found that the odds rating *unfair* (vs. *very unfair*) increased across years in LA.

However, as seen in Figure 1, it is not entirely accurate to speak of the Latin American region without recognizing its particularities. Despite the similarities and shared history, LA is a diverse region regarding cultural, political, and economic issues. Therefore, each country has its particular history, signaling different societies, cultures, and worldviews. We confirmed this idea empirically by examining how distributive unfairness evaluations evolved in each country over time. We identified three patterns of change when we examined change within each country.

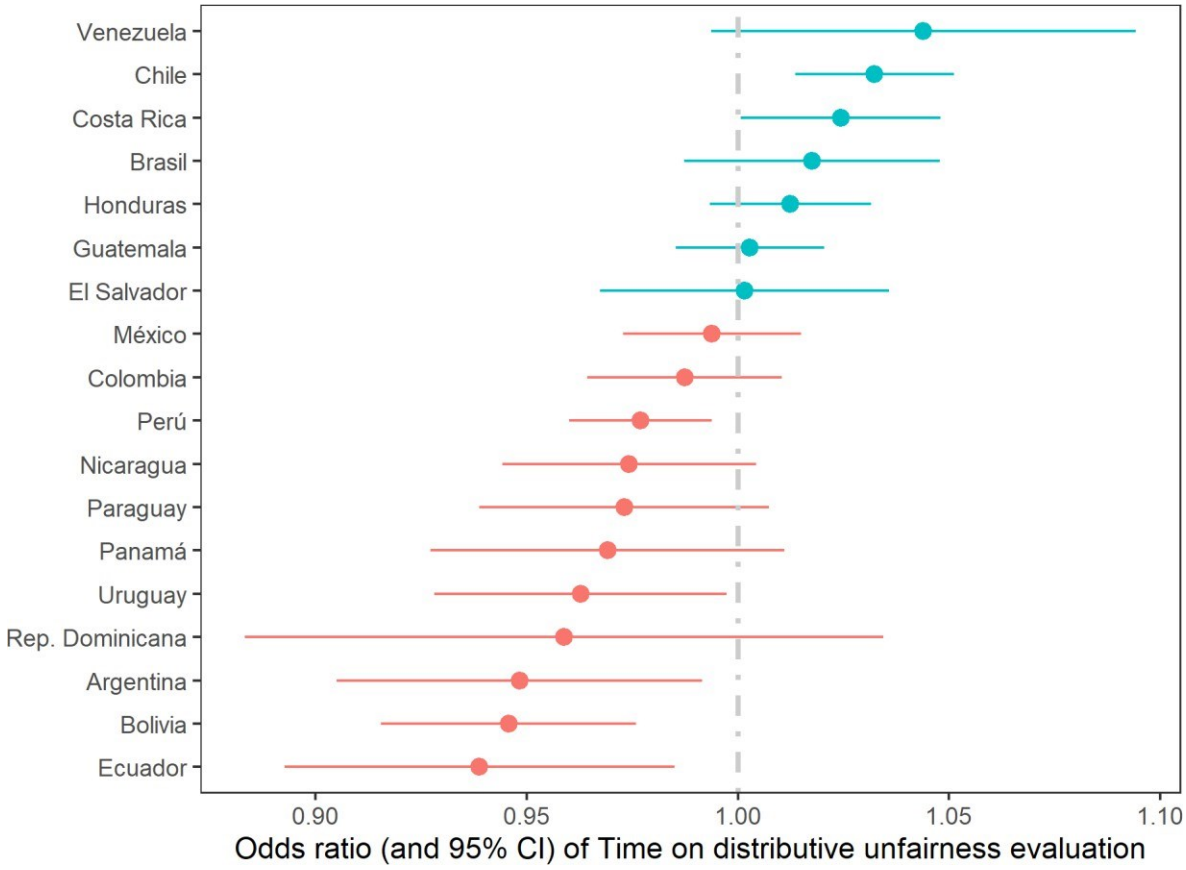
The first pattern mirrored the trend previously shown for the overall LA region. In most countries (10 out of 18), there was no statistically significant association between time and distributive unfairness evaluation. In other words, the effect of time on distributive unfairness evaluations was statistically indistinguishable from zero (See Figure 3). This indicates that those countries' distributive unfairness evaluations were relatively stable over the years.

The second pattern was that distributive unfairness evaluations decreased over the years in five countries (Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, and Perú). In these countries, the views that the income distribution was unfair decreased over the years. The third pattern includes just two countries (Chile and Costa Rica), which positively links increased distributive unfairness evaluations. In both Chile and Costa Rica, each elapsed year related to a higher probability of assessing more unfairness in the income distribution of their countries[6].

Figure 3

The odds ratio for the effect of time on distributive unfairness evaluations

[6] See Table S2. In the supplementary material for details.



Note. Dots represent the point estimate in the odds ratio. The lines indicate the 95% confidence interval and colors indicate the sign of the effect (red for negative and blue for positive effects). If the line crosses the gray-dotted vertical line, it suggests that such an effect is not statistically significant.

Interpreting the previous patterns is challenging, given the complexity of the last 23 years in terms of political and economic changes experienced in LA. However, speculation can be made about some broad issues involved in the evolution of distributive unfairness evaluations at the country level. LA was the only region globally with a reduction in economic inequality (Alvaredo et al., 2018), which coincided with economic growth and left-wing parties in different countries seizing power (PNUD, 2021). In general, there has been an increase in health, education, and household incomes in almost all Latin American nations over the last decades. However, this improvement was not equally distributed. Despite poverty alleviation, most growth concentrated on the elites (Bull & Robles Rivera, 2020). This scenario describes a trap by which people improve their living standing but still experience a very unfair distribution of resources (PNUD, 2021). Therefore, societal narratives or ideological beliefs can explain

why most countries did not experience any change over the years in their distributive unfairness evaluations (Larsen, 2016).

Concerning the countries that have changed over time, the interpretations should be made in light of each country's specificities. As for the countries that reduced their unfairness evaluations over time, note that most of them link to the "turn-to-the-left" politics experienced in the region. That is the case with Ecuador, Bolivia, Perú, Argentina, and Uruguay. Those countries introduced a set of politics that tried to regulate the economy and reinforce the safety net, thereby changing the course of their history (Santos, 2018). These politics could have led people to perceive or experience a better allocation of resources in their country because more opportunities or subsidies were given. Therefore, people could have responded to such policies by evaluating less unfairness over time.

On the other hand, countries where the income distribution was assessed as more unfair, such as Chile and Costa Rica, represent particular cases. In Chile, political grievances associated with the neoliberal socioeconomic model established during the dictatorship unleashed a recent social outburst in 2019 (Somma et al., 2020) that may have helped the election of a left-wing president in 2021. Costa Rica has been one of the Latin American countries where inequality has grown the most in recent years (Seligson & Franzoni, 2009). For example, in Costa Rica, a person in the highest income quintile receives 18 times more than someone within the lowest income quintile (INEC, 2021; Valverde, 2021).

In sum, LA cannot be summarized into a single story. The different patterns in unfairness evaluations of income distribution seem to be the interplay between many processes at several levels. For instance, Colombia has experienced massive demonstrations because of regressive tax reforms in 2021, Venezuela and Nicaragua fell into "populist dictatorships," and Mesoamerica has been experiencing an immigration crisis. Still, their unfairness evaluations have been relatively stable over time in those regions. Andean countries have maintained left-wing politicians in power but still have scandalous levels of inequality. Structural variables are not enough to explain people's evaluations of distributive fairness. Therefore, in the next section, we account for the influence of structural variables and the potential effect of ideological variables that shape distributive unfairness evaluations.

Structural Variables on Distributive Fairness Evaluations Across Time in Latin America

As noted above, on average, the unfair evaluation of income distribution in LA was relatively stable over time, yet with a weak negative effect of time. There is a minimal decrease in evaluating the income distribution unfairness as the years proceed. However, this pattern changes as a function of the country's characteristics. Therefore, we decided to run an ordinal multilevel analysis to examine some of the variables—both at the individual and at the societal level—that can be associated with distributive fairness evaluations. This technique allows us to explore the variance of distributive unfairness evaluations at different levels: At the individual level, we can examine differences between people who are in each country for each year (Level 1); at the country-year level, which indicates differences between countries along the years (Level 2); and, at the between-country level (Level 3), which refers to differences between the averaged scores per each country. The individual-level variables were centered within each country-year group to ease the interpretation. The estimates should be interpreted as the average variability of people in the survey for each country each year. The between-country year levels were group mean centered on each country's mean value. This value refers to the variability of each country over the years concerning their average score. The between-country level was grand-mean centered on the scores of all the country-level variables.

The first model tested whether structural variables were associated with people's distributive fairness evaluations (see Table S3 in the online supplementary material). In this model, we had 196,349 individuals (Level 1) clustered in 229 country years (Level 2), which in turn were grouped into 18 countries (Level 3). At the structural level, we measured economic inequality and human development. We used the Gini index to measure economic inequality on a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates total equality (all have the same resources) and 1 total inequality (one person has all the resources). The Gini index was retrieved primarily from the World Income Inequality Database (WIID) (UNU-WIDER, 2021).[7] When we did not find information for some country-year groups in this source, we used the World Bank (2021) data to retrieve economic indicators. When we could not find information in either

[7] Data released 31 May 2021.

of the two previous sources, we attributed the value to the closest year (before or after) available in the WIID. Human development was measured using the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines life expectancy, income per capita, and education attainment per country. This measure was also scaled from 0 to 1, such that higher values mean better quality of life standards in each country. We retrieved this data from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021).

Our findings suggest that income inequality positively affected distributive unfairness evaluations. That is, people assessed the income distribution more unfair (vs. unfair and fair) when the countries had more objective economic inequality on average (b = 5.111, SE = 2.193, p = .020, OR = 165.85); further, when each country experienced an increase in economic inequality over the years (b = 5.802, SE = 1.250, p < .001, OR = 330.88). In other words, the odds of evaluating the income distribution as very unfair (vs. unfair and fair) decreased .05 times per each .01 unit decrease in the Gini index. Similarly, the odds of assessing unfairness in the income distribution were reduced by .06 units for every .01 unit decrease in inequality across time within each country (see Table S3 in the supplementary material, Model 1).

The Human Development Index (HDI) was also associated with distributive unfairness evaluations. We found that countries with higher HDI were more likely to see unfairness in the income distribution (b = 3.050, SE = 1.171, p = .009, OR = 21.122). The odds of evaluating more unfairness in the income distribution increased by .03 times for every .01 unit increase in the country's HDI. However, the increase in the HDI over the years was negatively related to the evaluation of distributive unfairness (b = −8.164, SE = 3.117, p = .009, OR = .0001). For every .01 unit increase in which the countries experienced an improvement in their human development index, there was a decrease of .08 times the odds of seeing unfairness in the income distribution in their country. In other words, people are more aware of income unfairness in more developed countries and when their development is being undermined over the years.

These results confirm that people respond to objective structural changes. A decrease in economic inequality over the years leads people to evaluate less unfairness in income distribution.

Similarly, people also showed fewer concerns about income distribution when the overall living standards increased. These results seem to be robust in light of the high statistical power of our study, and other researchers have confirmed them (Reyes & Gasparini, 2021). However, we reason that such a model overlooks the influence of ideological variables in people's justice evaluations. Indeed, this model includes structural and sociodemographic variables that only explained 2.8% of the variance (or 10% if we included the variance due to between-country differences) from justice evaluations. We also accounted for sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, sex, employment status, and education level) to keep their influence constant on testing the effect of ideological variables on unfairness evaluations. We argue that additional ideological variables at the individual level should drive a stronger role in shaping justice evaluations.

Ideological Beliefs and Distributive Unfairness Evaluations

Ideological variables can affect how people evaluate the fairness of income distribution in their country. This means that people respond to structural inequalities by considering unfairness in the income distribution and have different motivations to determine their unfairness evaluations. Therefore, we selected four proxy measures of system-justifying ideologies to examine whether they were associated with distributive unfairness evaluations. First, political conservatism was measured by the left-right self-placement scale. In this variable, people were asked to indicate which position they placed themselves on a scale ranging from 0 = *left*, and 10 = *right*[8] ($M_{Pooled\text{-}sample}$ = 5.28, *SD* = 2.79). Second, we used a proxy indicator of neoliberal ideology in which people should indicate whether they agree or disagree with the idea that the economic market is the best way to bring development[9] using a response scale from 1= *strongly agree* to 4 = *strongly disagree* ($M_{Pooled\text{-}sample}$ = 2.27, *SD* = .79). The third ideology comprises the prospect of upward social mobility from personal and societal perspectives. We used two proxy indicators related to people's expectations that their individual ($M_{Pooled\text{-}sample}$ = 2.63, *SD* = 1.00)

[8] Wording: "In politics, people normally speak of "left" and "right." On a scale where 0 is left and 10 is right, where would you place yourself?"

[9] Wording: "Market economy is the only system with which the country can become a developed country."

and country's economic situation ($M_{Pooled\text{-}sample}$ = 3.02, *SD* = 1.08)[10] would be better in the future, which used a scale ranging from 1 = *much better* to 5 = *much worse*. Finally, religiosity was considered a proxy measure of ideological conservatism. If people endorse any religion, they signal their religiosity commitment by using a scale ranging from 1= *very devout* to 4 = *Not devout at all* ($M_{Pooled\text{-}sample}$ = 2.51, *SD* = .88).

The final model, which tested the influence of ideological beliefs on unfairness evaluations, comprised 88,914 participants clustered in 143 country years within 18 countries. The sample size of this model is smaller than in the previous models because ideological variables were not included in all waves.[11] We then fitted ordinal multilevel modeling, including sociodemographic and structural variables, along with ideological variables at the three levels of analyses: at the individual level (within-country year), at the country-by-year level (between-country year), and at the country level (between countries; see Figure 4).

At the individual level, we found that all ideological measures were positively associated with distributive unfairness evaluations, except for political orientation. The odds that people evaluated more unfairness in the income distribution was higher when they disagreed most strongly that the economy market was the best option for development (*b.* = .093, *SE* = .009, $p < .001$, *OR* = 1.098), expected a worst economic situation in the future both for their household income (*b* = .196, *SE* = .008, $p < .001$, *OR* = 1.216) and their country's economic situation (*b* = .363, *SE* = .007, $p < .001$, *OR* = 1.438), and reported less religiosity commitment (*b* = .070, *SE* = .008, $p < .001$, *OR* = 1.072). However, the effect of political conservatism was not statistically significant (*b* = −.002, *SE* = .093, *p* = .382, *OR* = .998),

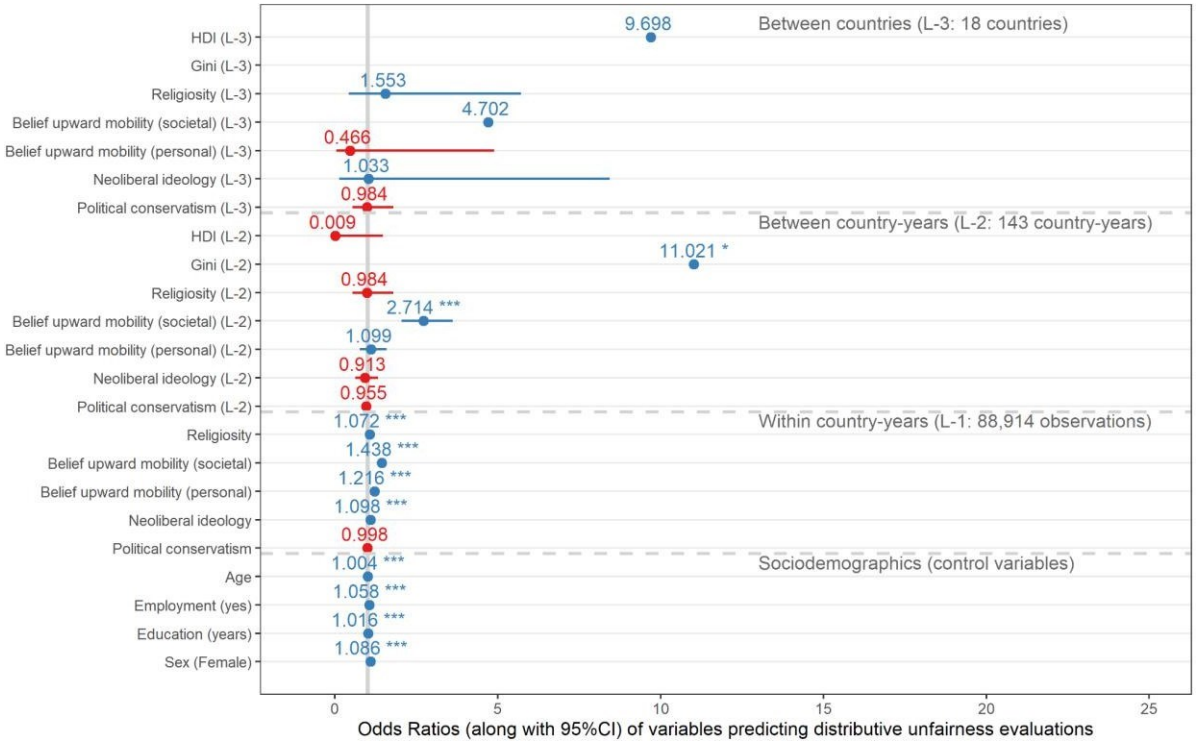
At the country-years level, we found that the odds of evaluating more unfairness in income distribution increased as the countries reported a decrease in the expectancy of societal upward mobility over the years (*b* = .998, *SE* =.147, $p < .001$, *OR* = 2.714). That is, the odds of evaluating income

[10] Wording: "In the next 12 months, do you think that, in general, the economic situation of your country will be much better, a little better, the same, a little worse, or much worse than now?"
[11] The pool of ideological variables was included in eight waves: 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2020.

distribution as very unfair (vs. unfair and fair) were 2.714 times higher for every unit increase in the country-level belief that the economy would be worse in the future. The remaining ideological variables at the country-year level were not statistically significant (see Table S3 for details). Similarly, ideological variables at the between-country level (Level 3) were unassociated with distributive fairness evaluations after controlling for individual and country-year variables.

Figure 4

Odds ratio (and 95% CI) for the effects of predictors on distributive fairness evaluations



Note. Dots are the estimates in OR. The lines linked to the dots show the confidence intervals; stars mark statistically significant values (***p <.001, **p <.01, *p <.05); the gray-solid vertical line indicates 1. Thus values to the right of the line indicate positive effects, and values to the left show negative effects; the horizontal dotted-gray lines divide the variables' levels of analysis. The estimate for the Gini index at level 3 is not plotted because it was beyond the axis limit and was not statistically significant (OR = 92.39).

Concluding remarks

This chapter aimed to describe distributive justice evaluations in LA from 1997 to 2020 and to test whether such evaluations were related to countries' objective inequality and people's ideological differences. We showed that most people in LA evaluate income distribution as unfair, which has not changed meaningfully over the years. However, the region cannot be characterized by a single story. Regardless of region similarities, each country has its history, reflecting different societies and worldviews. For instance, although most countries remain stable in their income distributive justice evaluations, some other countries experienced an increase, while others experienced a decline in unfairness evaluations.

The results confirm that evaluating the distribution of economic resources is sensitive to the context's social characteristics. Large economic disparities are associated with assessing more unfairness in income distribution (Reyes & Gasparini, 2021). It stands out as the hitherto unexplored effect of the HDI. We found that countries with higher HDI (after controlling for objective inequality) were more likely to evaluate the income distribution as unfair. This might seem contradictory, but it can be explained by an "enlightening effect" by which people in more developed conditions (e.g., higher education levels, incomes, and life expectancy) become more aware of inequality and consider it more unfair. However, each country's average increase in the HDI over the years was negatively associated with assessing greater unfairness. We interpret this result as a product of perceived social mobility (Davidai & Wienk, 2021; Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973). As such, when countries' quality of life improves, the perception of social mobility increases, reducing the assessment of unfairness in income distribution. Our findings provide some support for such an idea because higher expectancies of social mobility were linked to lower evaluations of unfairness evaluations. However, future research should address this specific research question by testing whether beliefs and experiences of upward social mobility impair people's unfair evaluations of the extreme inequalities they have in their society.

Furthermore, we showed that ideological beliefs shaped distributive unfairness evaluations beyond structural and situational variables. Notably, higher endorsement of neoliberal ideologies, expectations of upward social mobility, and religiosity were related to lower evaluations of unfairness

in the income distribution. Therefore, we provided evidence of how distributive fairness evaluations were more than rational assessments of countries' economic situations. Indeed, distributive fairness evaluation was also motivated based on people's ideologies. By integrating a social psychological perspective on distributive justice, we shed light on the psychological processes linked to people's motivations to explain and evaluate their reality.

The study of distributive justice and the main ideological theories of contemporary social psychology (e.g., system justification theory) have been developed to explain system legitimacy in WEIRD societies. However, the data from LA show that people assess the income distribution from the "unfairness" point of view, which could bring a different understanding. To comprehend the social unrest in the region, theories that are better adjusted to the reality of the context are needed. In this case, exploring beliefs in an unjust world associated with distrust in the laws, anger, and less compliance (Lench & Chang, 2007) in LA could be an opportunity to achieve it.

Furthermore, studies from LA can enrich contemporary psychosocial theories associated with income disparities. Recently, the literature has begun to be interested in the cultural influence on psychosocial experiences related to inequality (Oishi et al., 2022). These cultural references are intertwined with popular discourses and institutions reinforcing social disparities. We reason that LA has at least two complementary components that make it a particular case. On the one hand, the longstanding economic inequality in LA is mainly held by a historical legacy of social institutions (i.e., education, work, religion, gender roles, etc.) that maintain power distance between groups of people by unequally allocating valuable social resources to get ahead (Robinson & Acemoglu, 2013).

On the other hand, unlike Asian countries influenced by Confucian philosophy that promotes conservative values and submission to authorities (Oishi et al., 2022), the post-colonial nature of LA societies makes it a special case for understanding unfairness evaluations. As such, the LA region shows a unique combination of a history of social struggles to free themselves from foreign oppressors, a remarkable resilience to deal with a wide variety of social problems, and a profound endorsement of religion and conservative values that perpetuate the status quo. Indeed, despite the repression and

violence that characterize Latin American societies, its inhabitants constantly struggle to change a system they consider unfair, as can be seen in the popular uprisings held in Nicaragua in 2018, the social revolt in Chile in 2019, and the demonstrations in Colombia in 2019 and 2020, among others. All these social movements have been motivated by social justice causes. Therefore, our chapter contributes to the theory of distributive justice evaluations by arguing that people might be motivated by their ideologies and cultural characteristics to perceive more (or less) unfairness in the income distribution, which in turn can motivate the pursuit of social change.

Although this chapter has the most extended study of the evolution of distributive unfairness in LA so far, our findings have some limitations. First, we need to thoughtfully extend these patterns beyond this period. Considering that economic inequality is rooted in political changes, any change in political regimes or public policies will change the trend unexpectedly (the case of Venezuela and Nicaragua, for instance). However, we found consistent results regarding the effects of ideology, which reflect deep psychological motivations. Second, although we cover 23 years, we just have access to 13 waves that include the item of distributive justice. Therefore, this sample size of waves contains too few data points for estimating a well-powered and reliable country-level pattern. Third, we focus on the ideological underpinnings of justice evaluations. However, we still need to examine the interplay between contextual and individual factors—the interaction between sociological and psychological phenomena in how people evaluate inequality and respond to it. We need more research on this idea to better understand potential implications for collective action, mental health, redistributive preferences, or the disillusionment of the social contract.

The objective conditions of economic inequality in LA are not enough to provoke actions that seek to resolve our social unrest. Indeed, perceived unfairness in income, health, and education distribution seems crucial for motivating collective action to reduce inequalities (Ortiz et al., 2022). For instance, social outbursts in Chile, Colombia, and Brazil between 2019 and 2021 prove that people are worried about inequality and have received some results in the political agenda. In Colombia, citizens elected their first left-wing president in its history, Chile began a process of constitutional change, and the presidential campaigns in Brazil showed high popularity ratings for the left-wing candidate Luiz

Ignácio Lula da Silva by the time we write this chapter. Therefore, subjective elements such as ideological beliefs about the distribution of economic resources play a decisive role in evaluating social reality and mobilizing people to pursue social change. The historical tasks of social psychology and critical social sciences in the region deepen this psychosocial process and seek actions that pursue better forms of coexistence (Martín-Baró, 1990). We hope that this chapter enriches the understanding of what drives justice evaluations and, thus, helps to reflect on strategies to move toward the pursuit of just societies.

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