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JEL Codes: D31, D63, D83, H23, H24, H53, I38, J62, P16.

Keywords: Meritocracy; Fairness Preferences; Income Inequality; Beliefs;  
Redistribution; Government Duty.

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# Meritocracy as a WEIRD Phenomenon: Fairness Reasoning and Redistributive Preferences across the World

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May 15, 2023

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## **Abstract**

Meritocratic redistributive preferences - where people regard it as more unfair and demand more redistribution, when the income difference is due to luck rather than effort - is often used as an implicit assumption in previous studies of redistributive preferences. We provide ample evidence from representative international survey datasets to demonstrate that meritocratic redistributive preference is a phenomenon particular to the Western, Educated, Rich, Industrialized and Democratic (WEIRD) countries, and to a narrower sense only Anglo-Saxon and Protestant European countries. We show that first of all, a robustly significant negative correlation between demand for redistribution and the perceived importance of efforts in determining income inequalities exists only in WEIRD countries. Secondly, not all sources of income inequalities out of human control are considered unfair: gender, racial and religious hierarchies are often considered fair inequalities which do not require redistribution in non-WEIRD countries, while family-wealth-based inequalities are universally denounced and should be redistributed. Finally, we also discuss the reasons on the formation of non-meritocratic preferences from two perspectives: heterogeneities in fairness views and government responsibilities across the world.

**JEL Classification:** D31, D63, D83, H23, H24, H53, I38, J62, P16

**Keywords:** Meritocracy; Fairness Preferences; Income Inequality; Beliefs; Redistribution; Government Duty

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# 1 Introduction: Meritocratic Fairness as the Norm

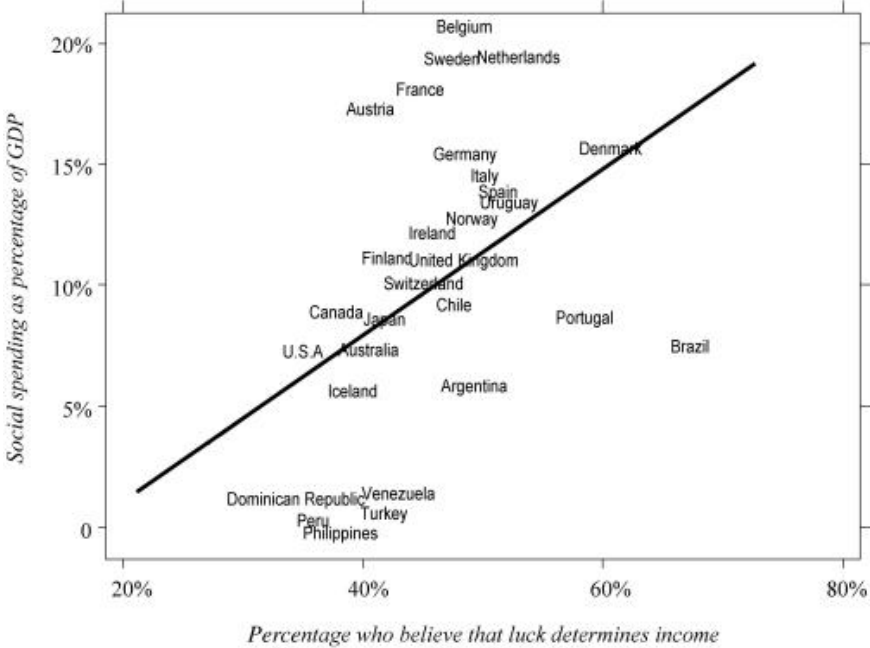
## 1.1 Beliefs and Support for Redistribution: Are We All Meritocrats?

There exists a large literature investigating the divergence in redistributive preferences across countries in various social science disciplines. Past research has mostly focused on a paradigm of two equilibria of diverging redistributive preferences in the developed world. On the one hand, American citizens are documented to be excessively optimistic about the role that one's own effort plays in determining his or her income, believing more in the deserving-ness of the rich and demand less redistribution. On the other hand, many European citizens are reported to be rather pessimistic about the importance of personal efforts in the income generating process, attributing one's success more to luck, family or other background factors, resulting in a stronger support for redistribution accordingly ([Alesina & Glaeser, 2004](#); [Benabou & Tirole, 2006](#); [Iversen & Soskice, 2006](#); [Alesina et al., 2018](#)).

A series of existing studies have interpreted this bifurcation in the light of "American Dream", or an optimism about returns to effort and the story of self-made people. For instance, [Alesina and Angeletos \(2005\)](#) built a self-fulfilling model of taxation and beliefs with respect to returns to effort: the more citizens in a given society believe that individual efforts determine income outcomes, the less they support redistribution in the form of tax and transfer. There thus exist two equilibria, one with high redistribution and high taxation, hence also relatively low returns to efforts; the other with low redistribution and a low tax regime, subsequently also high returns to efforts. [Benabou and Tirole \(2006\)](#) elaborated this self-fulfilling prophecy further with a behavioral motive. They stated that an individual has the incentive to adopt a belief system about a just world where the return to effort is high compared to incentives themselves in the presence of present bias or other behavioral biases. A closely related strand of literature focuses on inter-generational mobility: [Benabou and Ok \(2001\)](#) studied the Prospect of Upward Mobility (POUM) hypothesis, stating that a majority of poor people could reject redistribution due to the prospect of becoming rich in the future. Ultimately, [Alesina et al. \(2018\)](#) have run comparative surveys in several European countries and the United

States, and they have shown that Americans were (wrongly) more optimistic about upward inter-generational mobility compared to the Europeans. However, an information intervention revealing the true extent of inequality of opportunities only had a significantly positive impact on support for redistribution for left-wing respondents only in the US.

Figure 1.1: Correlation between percentage of GDP allocated to social spending (size of government) and the fraction of respondents who believe that luck determines income - reproduced from [Alesina and Angeletos \(2005\)](#)



The aforementioned strands of literature all, in fact, have an implicit assumption that the government ought to implement a meritocratic version of fairness, where **income differences generated by merit (which is an aggregation of personal ability and effort) are considered fair, and should thus be protected, while those generated by luck (or other background factors which an individual does not have agency over) are not fair and should be redistributed away.**

Under this set of assumptions, the more people think inequality is generated by factors beyond one’s control (such as family background and race, which will be subsequently termed as **outside factors**), the more they would demand redistribution from the government. On the other hand, if the more people think income inequality is gener-

ated by factors within one's control (such as personal efforts, which will be subsequently termed as **personal factors**), the less they would demand redistribution from the government. In other words, if we assume that people hold meritocratic fairness views, we should find a positive correlation between the perceived importance of outside factors and the demand for redistribution, and a negative correlation between the perceived importance of personal factors and the demand for redistribution.

This memorandum aims at empirically testing the aforementioned hypotheses with cross-country survey data, and documenting the limits of such meritocratic fairness views. In particular, with the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) datasets, which surveyed in detail the perceived importance of different determinants of success in forty-one middle- to higher-income countries in the 2009 wave (henceforth ISSP-2009), we show that **meritocratic fairness preference should be considered as a special phenomenon mostly applied to Western developed democracies, or even Western Protestant countries only**. Other countries, not only the developing world in general, but also inclusive of non-Western developed countries and to a certain extent some developed non-Protestant Western European countries, do not systematically exhibit a significant negative (positive) association between the beliefs in the importance of personal (outside) factors and the demand for redistribution.

We then further validate the robustness of such results with other independently collected survey datasets, attempting to confirm the patterns observed above. Specifically, we perform similar analyses with the World Value Survey (WVS) datasets which allow us to control for perceived government corruption. In addition, we complement the cross-country results with country-specific surveys in China (the China National Survey of Inequality and Distributive Justice), South Korea (the Korean General Social Survey), Germany (the German Socio-Economic Panel) as well as the Latinobarómetro to further confirm the above-mentioned patterns.

Finally, we briefly discuss the potential mechanisms underlying the formation of such non-meritocratic redistributive preferences.



## 1.2 Contributions to the Literature

Our research contributes first and foremost to the vast literature studying the determinants of redistributive preferences. Fairness view is a major determinant of redistributive preferences; and in the majority of previous studies, researchers often implicitly assume that income generated by luck is unfair & income generated effort is fair, and further integrate such an assumption into either models (Alesina & Angeletos, 2005; Akbaş et al., 2019) or survey experiments (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2020; Mu, 2022). A noticeable exception is Corneo and Grüner (2002), where the authors explored the determinants of redistributive preferences using the 1992 wave of the International Social Survey Program (henceforth ISSP). They found that people who believed that hard work was key to success demanded significantly less redistribution in Western European countries, but a similarly robust and significant relationship didn't hold in former socialist Eastern European countries. Similarly, in Kambayashi and Lechevalier (2022), the authors noticed that the belief about to which extent income is generated by luck significantly affected redistributive preferences in France and the United States, but not so in Japan. Instead of focusing on a few stand-alone countries, we provide a more global analysis using the whole dataset of ISSP-2009 and also study all factors beyond human control (instead of focusing on pure luck alone). By demonstrating the non-universality of meritocratic redistributive preferences, we help to gain further insights into some puzzles observed in the existing literature, for example in Mu (2022), when respondents received an information treatment about their true relative income positions in China, they updated their beliefs that success was more determined by family backgrounds than personal efforts, but they didn't adjust their redistributive preferences accordingly. We argue that such an insignificant relationship between the update of beliefs on different factors in generating income inequalities and redistributive preferences could be potentially due to the non-meritocratic fairness preferences we intend to explore further in this paper.

Our research also makes a contribution to the vast literature on WEIRD psychology. This concept was first established by the seminal paper of Henrich et al. (2010), where the authors suggest that there are significant differences in psychological responses between

participants in WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries, and emphasize that research conducted on WEIRD populations should not be assumed to be universal. [Henrich \(2020\)](#) builds on this work and further defines the characteristics of WEIRD psychology, such as individualism, guilt, self-regulation, and universalism. He also explains how historical Western European institutions, particularly the Catholic Church and the ethics of Protestantism and capitalism, played an important role in shaping WEIRD psychology.

Our study adds to this literature by demonstrating the relationship between WEIRD psychology and redistributive preferences, using cross-country survey data. Our findings are consistent with some previous research, which suggests that WEIRD populations tend to value universal fairness, while non-WEIRD populations might place greater value on relationship networks and hierarchy. However, we also highlight the intriguing interaction between fairness reasoning and redistributive preferences. For instance, previous research has shown that WEIRD societies are more likely to attribute human behaviors to personality and individual decisions, while non-WEIRD societies tend to attribute it more to circumstances. Nevertheless, we demonstrate that attributing behavior to circumstances does not necessarily lead to a greater demand for redistribution in non-WEIRD societies. That is to say, while income inequalities in real life are generated beyond an individual's control, the government is not necessarily expected to remediate such inequalities.

Furthermore, we also contribute to the literature that largely focuses on fairness views and seeks to confirm experimentally whether people are naturally inclined to accept more inequalities if said inequalities are generated by effort rather than luck ([Krawczyk, 2010](#); [Cappelen et al., 2010, 2013](#); [Almås et al., 2020, 2021](#)). The study of the largest scale in this strand of literature is [Almås et al. \(2021\)](#), where the authors have run the standard spectator game of redistribution<sup>1</sup> in 60 countries and found that respondents from all countries redistribute more when the inequalities are due to luck instead of effort, apart from China and India where the differences in redistribution across these two modes of spectator games (effort-based versus luck-based) are exceptionally small

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<sup>1</sup>namely the spectator (respondent) is asked to make a real-stake redistribution decision between two real-life workers with a certain level of initial earnings.

and only marginally significant. The share of the people who redistribute in a meritocratic manner (namely they redistribute more when the income difference is more due to luck rather than effort), however, varies a lot across countries, with OECD countries being significantly more meritocratic than non-OECD countries. We complement their results by using survey data and further provide additional evidence showing that meritocratic preferences might be a phenomenon unique to rich Western countries, or even a subset of these countries. We also show that while people might prefer a meritocratic income distribution, their demand for redistribution does not necessarily align with such preferences.

Last but not least, we highlight that not all inequalities under the broad “luck” category are treated similarly; while family-wealth-based privileges and political connections are considered less fair and evoke redistribution almost universally, in many countries inequalities based on gender, race and religion might be considered fair and do not trigger a demand for redistribution. To the best of our knowledge, only a small handful of papers are devoted to understanding different types of luck. For example, [Preuss et al. \(2022\)](#) made a distinction between “lucky outcomes” where the result is directly determined by luck and “lucky opportunities” where a multiplier is applied to the effort of the lucky person. [Lekfuangfu et al. \(2022\)](#) randomly matched subjects in pairs of **parents** and **children** and studied different types of inherited inequalities in an experimental setting. They found that people redistribute significantly less when the **parents’** incomes were generated by effort rather than luck, even if the pairing between the **parents** and **children** was artificial and random.

## 2 Methodology

We employ individual-level survey data within a given country and use the regression coefficient between the demand for redistribution and the perceived importance of a given factor (such as effort or luck) in the income generating process as a proxy for the extent of meritocratic redistributive preference associated with this factor in a given country.

Figure 2.1: Meritocratic preference and Belief about the Importance of Personal Effort



Visually, Figure 2.1 explains this correlation and its link to the meritocratic fairness view. When one has a meritocratic fairness view, the more you think the income generating process in a given society is determined by luck or connection (instead of personal efforts and other merit-based traits), the more you think the government should be responsible for shrinking the income gap and ensuring provision for everyone, because the current level of inequality is "not fair" and larger than it ideally should be. However, if one does not hold a meritocratic fairness view, then whether the existing inequality is generated by effort or luck should not be particularly correlated with how much he or she demands for redistribution. One could even be "anti-meritocratic", where a higher share of inequality attributed to effort would lead to a higher demand for redistribution.

The main identification equation is thus:

$$Redis_i = \pi_0 + \pi_1 Hardwork_i + \beta X^i + \epsilon$$

where  $Redis_i$  stands for the demand for redistribution of a given individual  $i$ ,  $Hardwork_i$  stands for the degree to which the individual  $i$  thinks that hard work is important in the

income-generating process,  $\mathbf{X}'$  is a battery of relevant controls.<sup>2</sup> We run one separate regression for one factor and one country at a time and record the regression coefficient accordingly.

We are most interested in the correlation between the perceived role of hard work and demand for redistribution, as it represents most directly the meritocratic redistributive preference. However, whenever possible, we run this exercise for all determinants of the income generating process available in the datasets under study. To make the results more legible, we group the determinants into more aggregate categories whenever possible and regress the demand for distribution on the mean values of these factors at the individual level. The identification equation is thus

$$Redis_i = \pi_0 + \pi_1 Factor_i + \beta \mathbf{X}' + \epsilon$$

Where  $Factor_i$  is the mean value of the perceived importance of several determinants of the income generating process by the following groups:

- Personal Factors: Ambition and Hard Work
- Family Factors: Having Wealthy Parents and Having Highly-Educated Parents
- Political Factors: Knowing the Right People, Having Political Connection and Giving Bribes
- Sacred Orders: Being of a Certain Religion, Being of a Certain Race and Being of a Certain Gender

Regression results by separate individual factors alone are also reported in the appendix.

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<sup>2</sup>The number of controls are indeed constrained by the availability of relevant variables specific to the datasets under study, but they always include basic demographics such as gender, age, the level of education, and region-level fixed effects.

## 3 Main Results

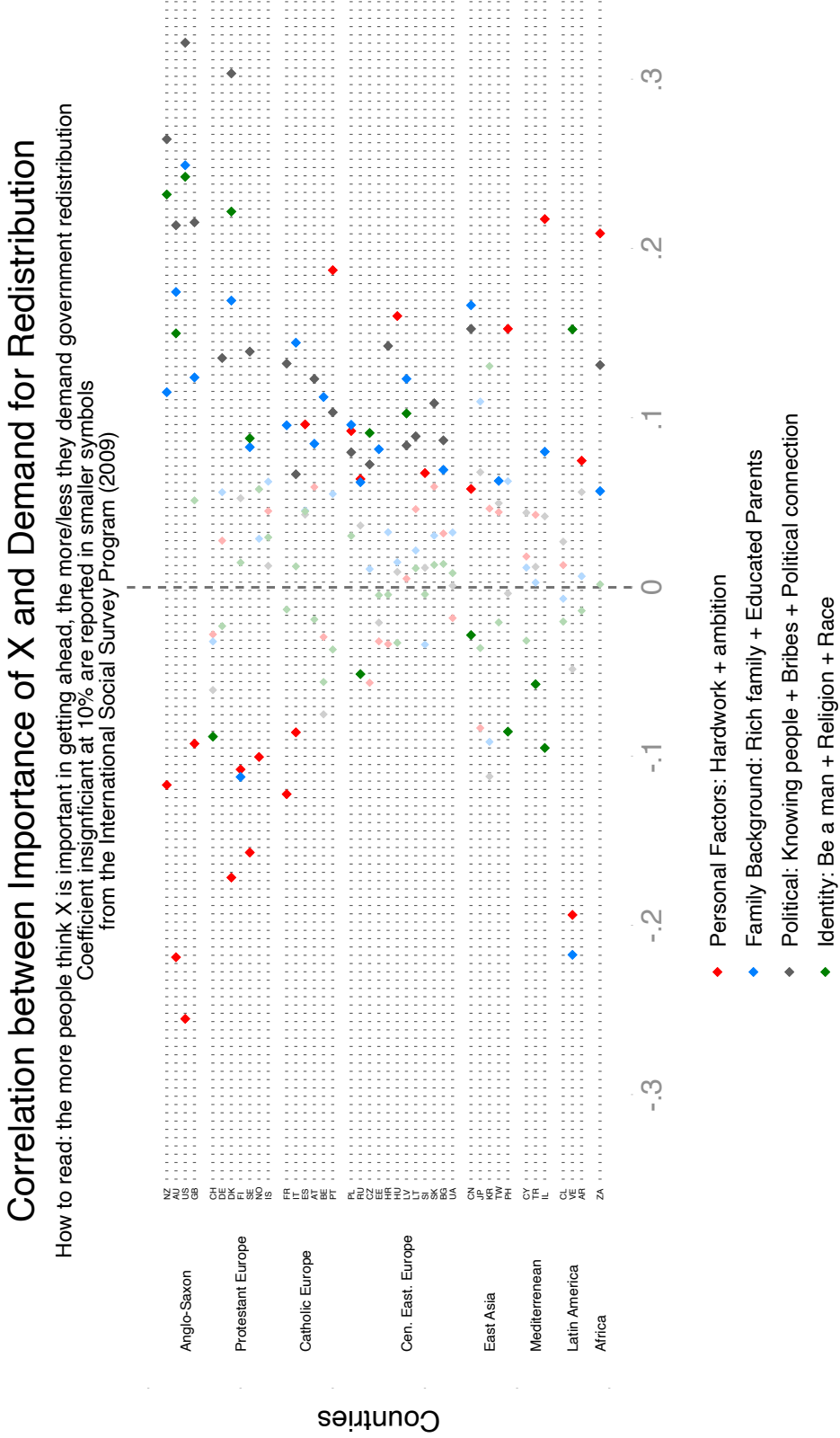
### 3.1 Evidence from Cross-country Surveys

#### 3.1.1 Main Results from International Social Survey Program - 2009 (ISSP-2009)

Figure 3.1 and 3.2 report the regression coefficients between the demand for redistribution (the outcome variables), proxied respectively by either endorsing that it is the government's duty to reduce the income gap (Figure 3.1), or that the rich should be taxed more (Figure 3.2), and how much one thinks different factors are important for getting ahead (the independent variables), by utilising the ISSP-2009 dataset.

The x axis reports the size of the regression coefficient, with larger and solid symbols representing coefficients significant at least at the 10% level and smaller, transparent symbols representing coefficients not significant at the 10% level. On the y axis, countries are grouped together by geographic and cultural distances. For each factor and each single country, one regression is run separately. A bright red symbol in the negative zone, for example in the first line of Figure 3.1, means that for citizens of New Zealand, the more they think that personal factors are important in determining success, the less they agree that it is the government's responsibility to reduce the gap between the rich and poor. And this correlation is statistically significant at least at the 10% level. In a conventional meritocratic fairness framework, we would assume that the red dots, which are correlation coefficients associated with factors within one's control, should be aligned on the left of the graph, hence representing negative correlations with the redistribution outcomes, while blue (family), green (demographics) and black (political connection) coefficients, all associated with factors beyond human control, should be on the right and hence be positively correlated with the demand for redistribution.

Figure 3.1: Government duty to reduce income gap and determinants of income, ISSP (2009)



Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: agreeing to it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes, on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).  
 Independent variable: answer to the question [factor X] is very important for getting ahead on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all).  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
 Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

Overall, Figure 3.1 shows a striking pattern: only for the first group - Anglo-Saxon countries - is there a clear and significant separation between personal and outside factors in their respective correlations with the demand for redistribution.

Even for the second and third group on the graph - Protestant and Catholic European countries - this separation is much less clear and straightforward. For the rest of the world, it is even more striking that the correlations associated with personal factors are often significantly positive (to the right of the zero x-axis), which means that the more one thinks ambition and hard work matters to get ahead, the more they think the government is responsible for reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Some patterns could also be observed for other groups of factors. The blue factors, which indicate the association between the perceived importance of rich family and highly educated parents for getting ahead and redistribution, are almost always on the right-hand side of the zero x-axis, which implies that such factors' influence in determining income inequalities are rather universally unjust for almost all countries. The black factors - the correlation between the importance of political connection and redistribution - is similarly on the right side and positively associated with redistribution.

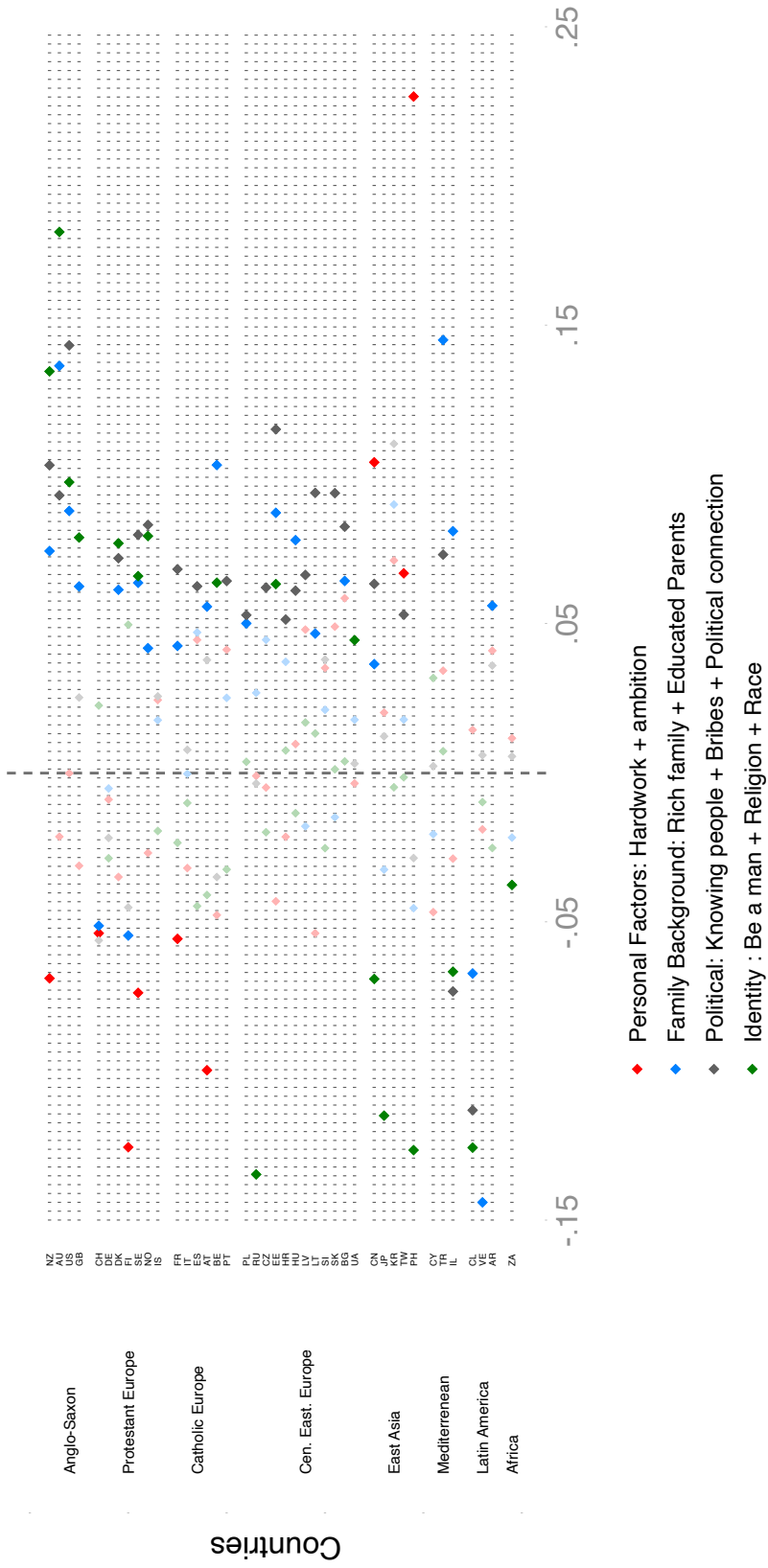
Results for green factors - what we have named **sacred orders** are more ambivalent. These are demographic factors that are beyond one's control, randomly assigned at birth yet very important for traditional social hierarchies. While in Anglo-Saxon countries, success due to being male or due to race is textbook examples of discrimination and are to the right-hand side of the zero x-axis as family and political factors, in many other countries it is significantly and negatively associated with the demand for redistribution, such as Switzerland (Protestant Europe), Portugal (Catholic Europe), the Philippines (Southeast Asia), Turkey and Israel (Mediterranean countries). A simple reading into this correlation is that people think income differences due to being born male, of a certain race or into a certain religion should not be corrected (or redistributed away) and enjoy a similar legitimacy as personal efforts do in Anglo-Saxon countries.



Figure 3.2: Tax the rich more and determinants of income, ISSP (2009)

## Correlation between Importance of X and More Tax for The Rich

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they agree that the rich should be taxed more  
Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



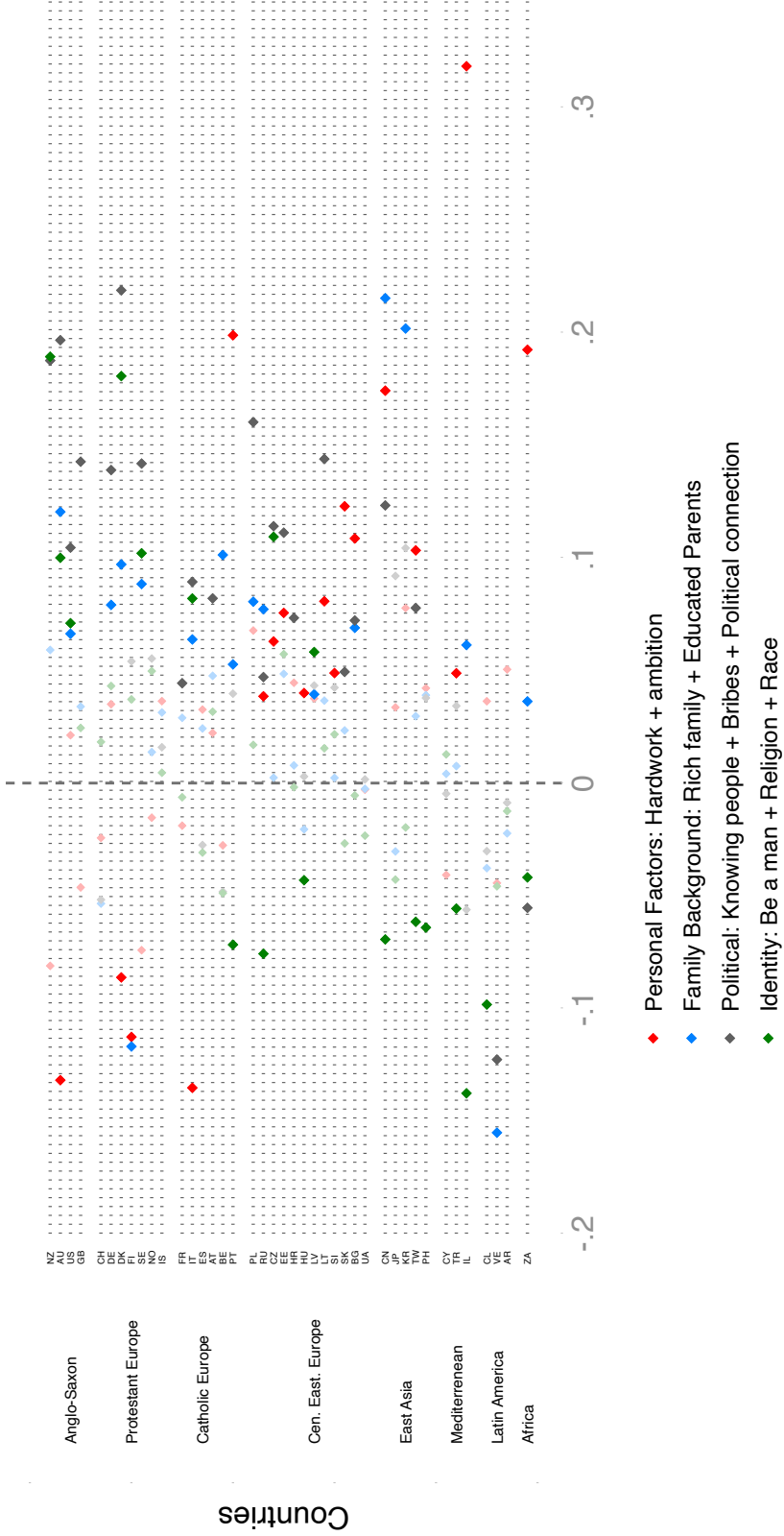
Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
The dependent variable: agreeing to "People with high incomes should pay a larger share of their incomes in taxes than those with low incomes" on a scale of 5 (Much larger share) to 1 (Much smaller share).  
Independent variable: answer to the question "Factor X" is very important for getting ahead" on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

Figure 3.2 shows a similar picture, although with more insignificant coefficients. Here, we observe also that personal factors - ambition and effort - are negatively correlated with the demand for redistribution only in American and Western European countries, the so-called "WEIRD" countries. While the blue (family) and black (political connection) factors are commonly considered unjustified and are hence positively correlated with the demand to tax the rich in most countries, the green (demographic) factors are significantly and negatively correlated with the demand for redistribution in many non-WEIRD countries, especially among the East Asian countries.

Figure 3.3: The inequality is too big and determinants of income, ISSP (2009)

### Correlation between Importance of X and Inequality is too Big

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they agree that the inequality is too big  
 Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: agreeing to 'Income inequality in [country X] is too big' on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)  
 Independent variable: answer to the question '[factor X] is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
 Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

One might worry that the above-mentioned survey questions focus too much on government responsibility and that people in non-WEIRD countries do not necessarily ask for redistribution even when they find the current distribution unfair, simply due to mistrust in the government for fears of corruption and low institutional qualities. To test this argument, we regress the outcome variable measured by the perception of inequality<sup>3</sup> on different factors of success. The results are reported in Figure 3.3. The pattern is again similar to the other two : while the red (effort) coefficients are only significantly negative in Anglo-Saxon and Protestant European countries, it is almost positively significant in all other countries.

Regression coefficients by individual determinant of success instead of group-level indices are reported in the appendix in Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3.

We perform the same analyses with the latest round of the ISSP survey in 2019. Despite a much smaller country coverage, we observe consistently interesting findings by comparing within-country correlation estimates (which are reported in Figure 6.5 in the appendix), where a significantly negative correlation is detected for countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, Denmark and New Zealand, which all belong to the Western and Protestant European (as well as European offshoots in Oceania and North America) paradigm meritocratic countries uncovered in our previous analyses, while countries such as Israel, Chile, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa and Thailand all exhibit quasi-positive correlation estimates between the importance of hard work and the demand for redistribution on the contrary.

One might also wonder whether such a difference in redistributive preferences is driven by the fact that people in different countries assign dramatically different importance to different factors. Figure 6.1 in the appendix reports the raw mean of the importance people assign to each factor in getting ahead; even though the specific importance one gives to each factor varies in different countries, the order seems to be pretty consistent: in most countries, people seem to recognize personal factors as the most important determinant of income, followed by family factors and finally demographic factors. Po-

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<sup>3</sup>The question is asked as the following: "Do you think inequality is too large in [country]?", with the answer ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1)

litical factor is the only category where heterogeneity is large between countries: they are considered the least important in the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant European countries, while more important than demographic factors in Central and Eastern European countries.

Finally, it might be that what matters is the relative importance of effort and outside factors rather than the absolute importance of a given factor. To test this possibility, we regress the demand for redistribution on the **gap** between the average importance assigned to personal factors (ambition and effort) and the average importance assigned to the outside factors. For an individual in a meritocratic country, the larger this gap is, the more this person believes that effort and ambition are more important than outside factors in determining success, and the less we should expect him or her to demand redistribution. We first construct the gap index: Figure 6.6 in the appendix reports the mean and interquartile range for this gap by countries. On average, respondents from all countries assign 1.5 more points (out of a total maximum point of 5) to the importance of personal factors than outside factors, which is consistent with the raw statistics reported in 6.1; the mean and interquartile range seem rather stable across countries with the Anglo-Saxon countries having a higher mean and lower interquartile range. We then regress the demand for redistribution on this relative difference in the importance across different factors and report the results in appendix Figure 6.7. Similarly, we find that only WEIRD countries and to some extent only Anglo-Saxon countries exhibit a significantly negative coefficient, while most other countries report a non-significant or even positive relationship.

### **3.1.2 Results from the World Value Surveys (WVS)**

We complement the results from the ISSP with the World Value Survey (henceforth WVS) data to demonstrate that the results hold in other independently collected datasets and are also robust to including controls such as the trust in the government and perceived corruption.

In the WVS, there is no question about the importance of each determinant but rather a question opposing the importance of hard work with that of luck. We perform the same

estimation for each country in the WVS, controlling for a set of demographic characteristics. Figure 3.4 reports the coefficients and confidence intervals of the regressions, with countries color-coded by geographical and cultural groups.

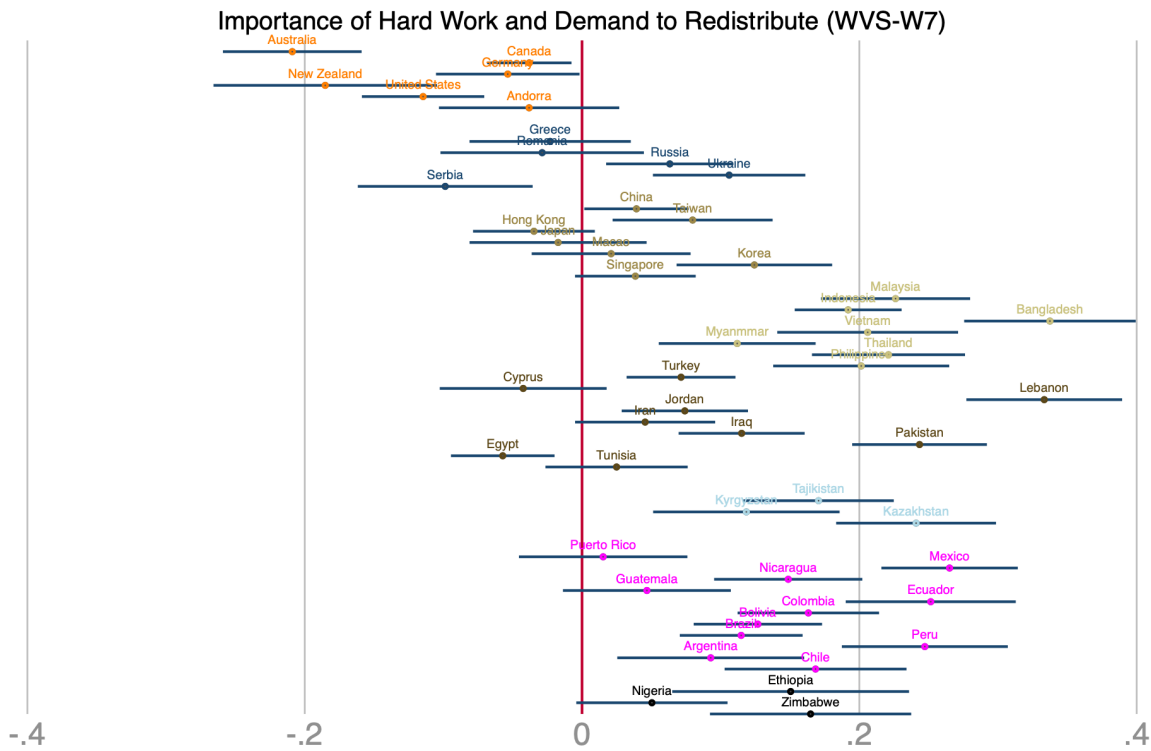
The overall pattern is consistent with that of the ISSP data: only a small handful of countries, mostly western developed countries (narrowly speaking only Anglo-Saxon countries), exhibit a positive and significant correlation coefficient estimate between the importance of effort and the demand for redistribution, while the vast majority of the countries in the sample exhibit a positive and oftentimes also statistically significant coefficient estimate.

It is worth noting that income alone doesn't seem to explain this pattern. While developed Western countries seems to exhibit a meritocratic redistributive preference, some East Asia countries who are incontestably developed do not necessarily subscribe to a similar set of norms, such as South Korea and Taiwan.

One might reasonably doubt that the lack of meritocratic redistributive preference is due to the quality of institution in a given country (especially in a developing one), perception of the actual size of inequality or trust in the government. Thanks to the wide scope of topics covered in the WVS, we are also able to control for perceived inequality, trust in government and perception of corruption. Figure 3.5 reports the coefficient estimates after adding these controls. The pattern is robust to the inclusion of the additional battery of controls, if not even further strengthened by it. Now almost all WEIRD countries in the first group have a significantly negative coefficient estimate while very few other countries do. East Asian developed countries, such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, all demonstrate a significant positive correlation between the importance of hard work and a demand for redistribution, as well as the vast majority of South-East Asian countries, Islamic countries and Latin American countries.

We observe the exact same pattern for Wave 6 of the WVS in Figure 6.14 in the appendix. Here high-income Western countries such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands all exhibit statistically significant negative correlation coefficient estimates, while the overwhelming majority of the rest of the countries in this sample either exhibit insignificant or significantly positive estimates.

Figure 3.4: World Values Survey - Wave 7 (2017-2020) - Comparison of Within-country Estimates



Coefficients and confident intervals of regressions by country in the World Value Survey Wave 7 (2017-2022).  
 The dependent variable : on a scale of 10-1, agreeing to 'Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for' (10) versus 'People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves'(1)  
 Independent variable: on a scale of 10-1, agreeing to 'In the long run, hard work ususally brings a better life' (10) versus 'Hard work doesn't bring success - it's more a matter of luck and connections' (1)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, subjective social class, education, urban/rural resident, employment status and regional fixed effect.

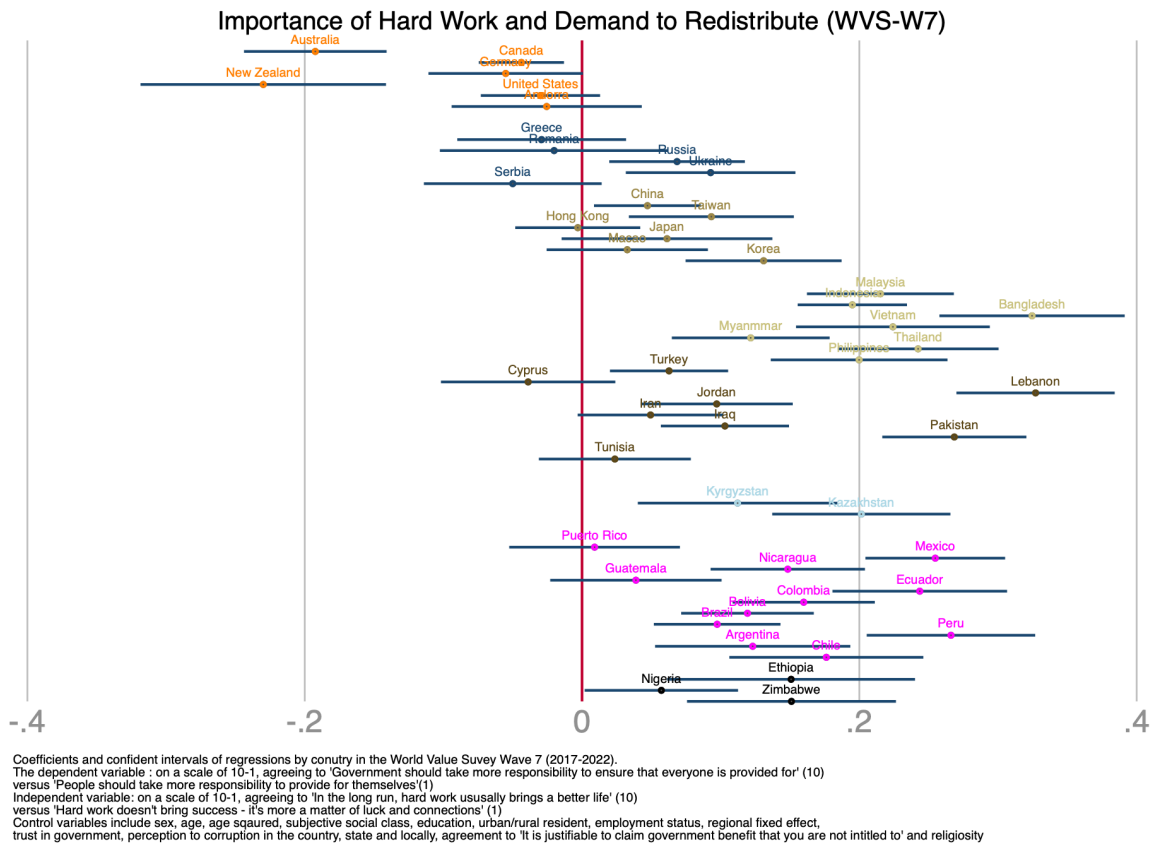
### 3.2 Evidence from Country-specific Surveys

To further support our claim, we employ country-specific survey data which ask these similar questions, but either outside the framework of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), such as the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), or with more available waves such as the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS).

#### 3.2.1 Results from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)

The German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) is a representative panel survey dataset maintained by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) with an annual innovative module where individual researchers would submit questions specific to their

Figure 3.5: World Values Survey - Wave 7 (2017-2020) - Comparison of Within-country Estimates



own research. The innovative module of the 2014 wave included a series of the following questions about redistributive preferences and the origins of high and low incomes following the proposal from [Fong and Poutvaara \(2019\)](#):

- What is your opinion on the following proposals? (On a scale of strongly in favor to strongly against)
  - Taxes on those with high incomes in Germany should be increased.
  - Financial help to those with low incomes in Germany should be increased.
- Just in your opinion, if a working-age person's income is low in Germany, which is most often the reason - lack of effort on his or her part, circumstances beyond his or her control, or both?



- Just in your opinion, if a working-age person’s income is high in Germany, which is most often the reason - strong effort on his or her part, circumstances beyond his or her control, or both?

Compare to questions in the ISSP and the WVS proxying for redistributive preferences, these questions have the advantage of focusing more clearly on redistribution (rather than social insurance), also benchmarking more clearly on status quo and separating causes for wealth and poverty (Fong & Poutvaara, 2019). Summary statistics for these variables are reported below in Table 3.1. The majority of the German public think both high and low incomes result from a mix of outside circumstances and personal efforts, but there is an asymmetry: 17% of respondents would attribute high income to effort yet only 8% of respondents attribute low income to a lack of effort.

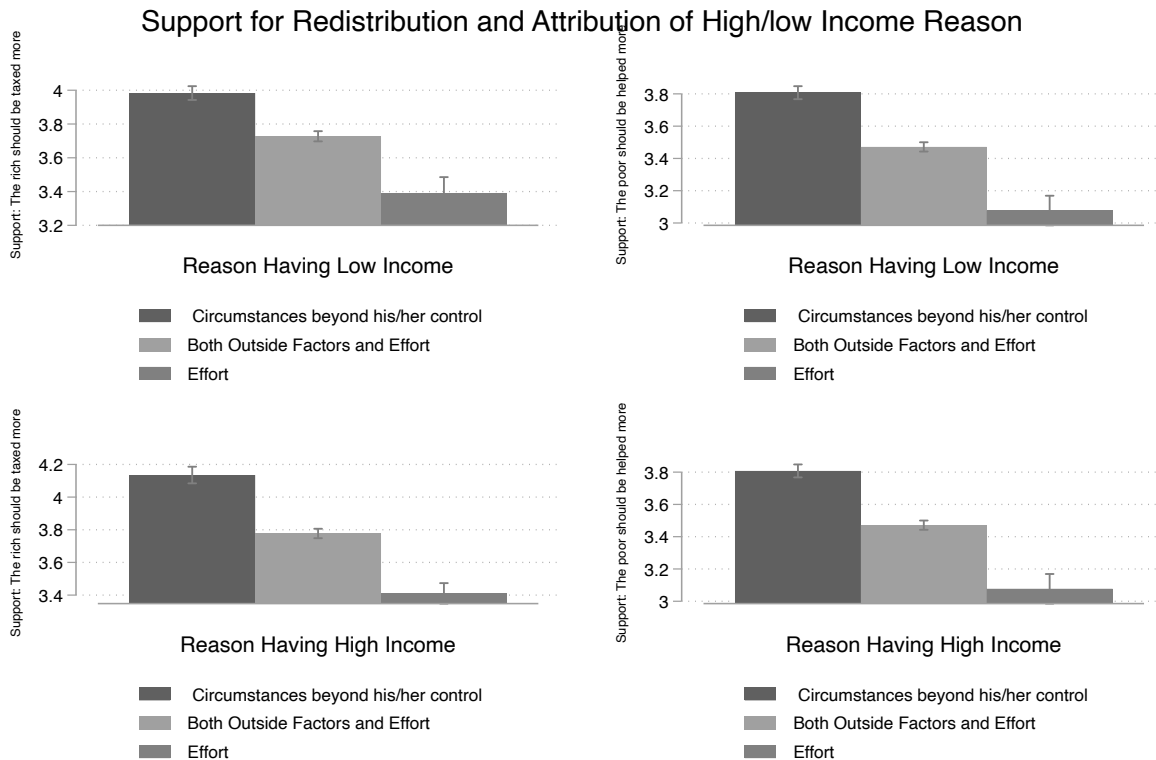
	Mean	St.Dev	p25	Median	p75
<b>Reasons of Low Income</b>					
Circumstances beyond his/her control	0.31	0.46	0.00	0.00	1.00
Both	0.62	0.49	0.00	1.00	1.00
Lack of Effort	0.08	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Reason of High Income</b>					
Circumstances beyond his/her control	0.18	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.00
Both	0.64	0.48	0.00	1.00	1.00
Strong Effort	0.17	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Demand for Redistribution</b>					
Progressive Taxation	3.78	1.16	3.00	4.00	5.00
Financial Help for the Poor	3.54	1.12	3.00	4.00	4.00
Observations	9,203				

Table 3.1: Summary Statistics of the Redistribution and Attribution Questions in SOEP-Innovative Module, 2014 and 2019

To confirm our results in Section 3.1.1, we plot the mean of agreeing to a certain redistributive question by whether one thinks high/low income is driven by effort or outside factors, or both.

Figure 3.6 shows clearly that people who think that high and low incomes are generated by effort instead of outside factors support less redistribution, with the people answering "both" standing in between. This result is also symmetric in both directions:

Figure 3.6: German Socio-economic Panel (SOEP) 2014 2019 - Demand for Redistribution by Attribution of Income Inequalities To Different Factors



people who think that high or low incomes are due to effort support both more redistribution from the rich and to the poor. The demand for redistribution is seemingly (at least partially) meritocratic in the sense that people who believe in more human efforts support less redistribution, even in a country known for very extensive social welfare coverage such as Germany. This result is also robust to controlling for demographics, income and job status; regression coefficients are reported in the appendix Figure 6.15 and Figure 6.16. Controlling for political party, however, makes the effect insignificant but we suspect it is due to the loss of statistical power, since about half of the respondents reported not having party preferences and are hence dropped out of the sample.

### 3.2.2 Results from the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS)

What is more interesting is to contrast this result with another non-western country which is arguably as developed. The Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) is a part of

the ISSP surveys, but it also adds more original questions outside the ISSP framework. For example, while the determinants of high or low income were asked only in 2009 for most countries in ISSP (for some countries also in 2019), it is repeated in KGSS also in 2014 and 2021.

In an attempt to produce a parallel to the SOEP data, we code the importance of outside factor as the average of family wealth, educated parents, gender and race - the factors over which one has no control among all the determinants of success. Then, we code the variable the main determinant of success in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Determinant\_Success}_i &= \text{Effort}_i && \text{if } \text{imp\_effort} \geq \text{median}(\text{imp\_effort}) \\
 & && \quad \& \text{imp\_outside\_factor} \leq \text{median}(\text{imp\_outside\_factor}) \\
 &= \text{Outside\_factor}_i && \text{if } \text{imp\_effort} \leq \text{median}(\text{imp\_effort}) \\
 & && \quad \& \text{imp\_outside\_factor} \geq \text{median}(\text{imp\_outside\_factor}) \\
 &= \text{Both\_Factors}_i && \text{if } \text{Else}
 \end{aligned}$$

where we divide the population by medians of the two variables, and categorise someone as thinking effort is important if his or her assigned importance is below the median for outside factors and above the median for the effort factor.

Then, we plot the average of support for redistribution measured by several different questions in different waves of the survey:

- Progressive Taxation: Do you think people with high incomes should pay a larger share of their incomes in taxes than those with low incomes, the same share, or a smaller share? (only surveyed in 2009)
- Tax for the rich too low: Generally, how would you describe taxes in South Korea today for those with high incomes? (only surveyed in 2009)
- Universal Basic Income: Opinion on implementing the policy about a universal basic income (only surveyed in 2021)

	N	Mean	St.Dev	p25	Median	p75
<b>Reason of Success</b>						
Circumstances beyond his/her control	3,147	0.14	0.34	0.00	0.00	0.00
Both	3,147	0.66	0.47	0.00	1.00	1.00
Strong Effort	3,147	0.20	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Raw Data</b>						
Importance of effort to success(1-5)	3,147	4.35	0.77	4.00	5.00	5.00
Importance of all outside factor to success(1-5)	3,147	3.13	0.73	2.75	3.00	3.50
<b>Demand for Redistribution</b>						
Progressive Taxation (1-5)	1,207	4.43	0.68	4.00	5.00	5.00
Tax for the rich is too low (1-5)	1,179	3.88	0.95	4.00	4.00	5.00
Universal Basic Income (1-5)	986	2.92	1.13	2.00	3.00	4.00
Less welfare for the poor (1-5)	3,138	2.35	1.08	1.00	2.00	3.00
Observations	3,147					

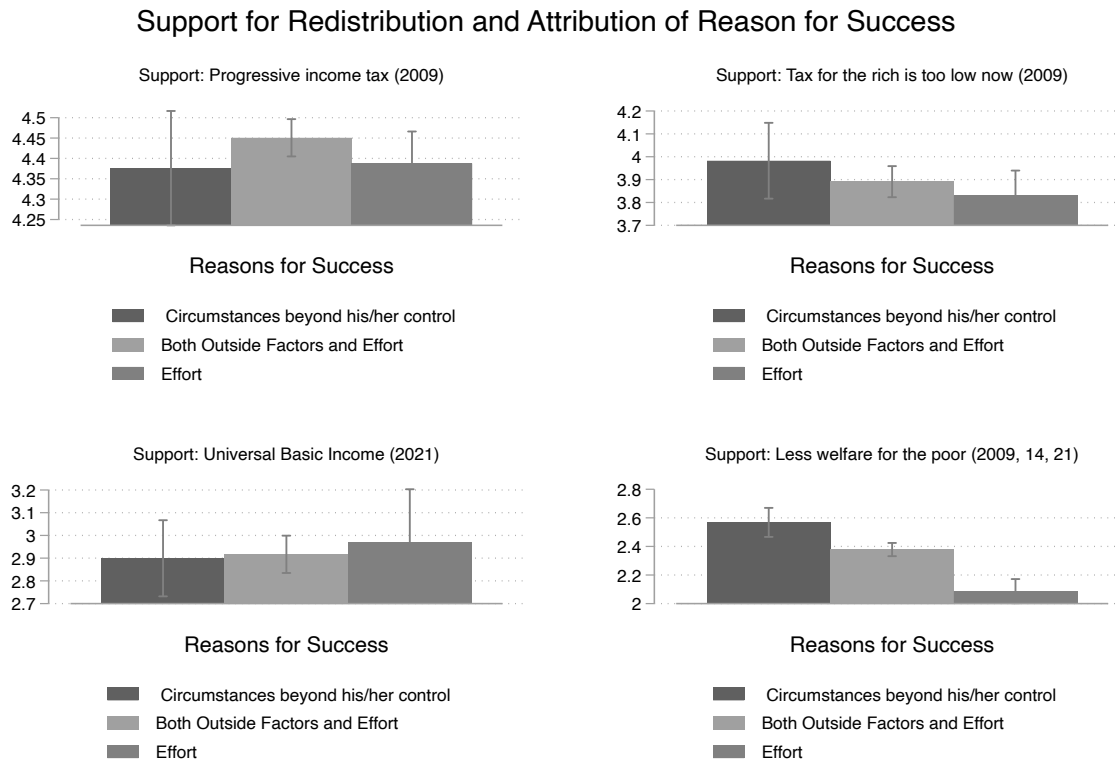
Table 3.2: Summary Statistics from the Korean General Social Survey (2009, 2014, 2021)

- Less benefit for the poor: The government should spend less on benefits for the poor. (surveyed in 2009, 2014 and 2021)

The raw statistics are reported in Table 3.2 : The Korean public have a similar division of responsibility compared to the German respondents in the SOEP, where over 60 % of respondents in the three waves combined think that both effort and circumstances beyond one’s control are important for success, and about 14% attribute success to only outside circumstances or luck. The Korean respondents are slightly more optimistic with the importance of effort: 20% of the respondents believe strong effort is the only driver of success where the number is 17% with the Germans. Overall, the Korean public are supportive of progressive taxation and higher taxation for the rich, ranking a support of 4.4 points and 3.9 points out of 5 respectively; they are also relatively unsupportive of giving less welfare to the poor, where the average support is only 2.35 on a scale of 1-5.

What is interesting is that while the Koreans reason about success in a similar way as the Germans, the correlations between this attribution of success and their support for different policies are quite different. We have done a similar exercise to aggregate support for different policies by reasoning of success in Figure 3.7. Apart from spending less money for the poor, the other three questions on redistributive demand do not have

Figure 3.7: Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) - Demand for Redistribution by Attribution of Income to Effort or Outside Factors



a significant gradient where people who answer that efforts are important support less redistribution, and people who answer that outside factors are more important support more redistribution.<sup>4</sup>

We have also performed the same kind of analyses as in Section 3.1.1 for all three waves of the Korean data that asked the question about what is important in getting ahead; the results are reported in Table 3.3.

What we find intriguing here is that while only some of the coefficients are consistently significant (family wealth and knowing the right people), almost all of them are positive. That means that not only for effort but also for all factors such as family wealth, gender or even political connection, the more one thinks it is important, the more they

<sup>4</sup>While it seems that there is a gradient for the statement "Tax for the rich is too low", the difference is not statistically significant at the 10% level. We do not think that it turns insignificant due to the sample size, since for a truly significant difference such as the one in 'less welfare to the poor', the significance is maintained even when we perform the analysis on only one wave out of the three.

would demand redistribution.

Our interpretation is that: there is a sub-category of Korean citizens who simultaneously answered "everything is important" and also thought that the government has a lot of responsibility in reducing the income gap, while the others simultaneously think that nothing is important and also do not demand the government to reduce the income gap. We would discuss our interpretation for this phenomenon further in Section 4.

### 3.2.3 Results from the Latinobarómetro (LB)

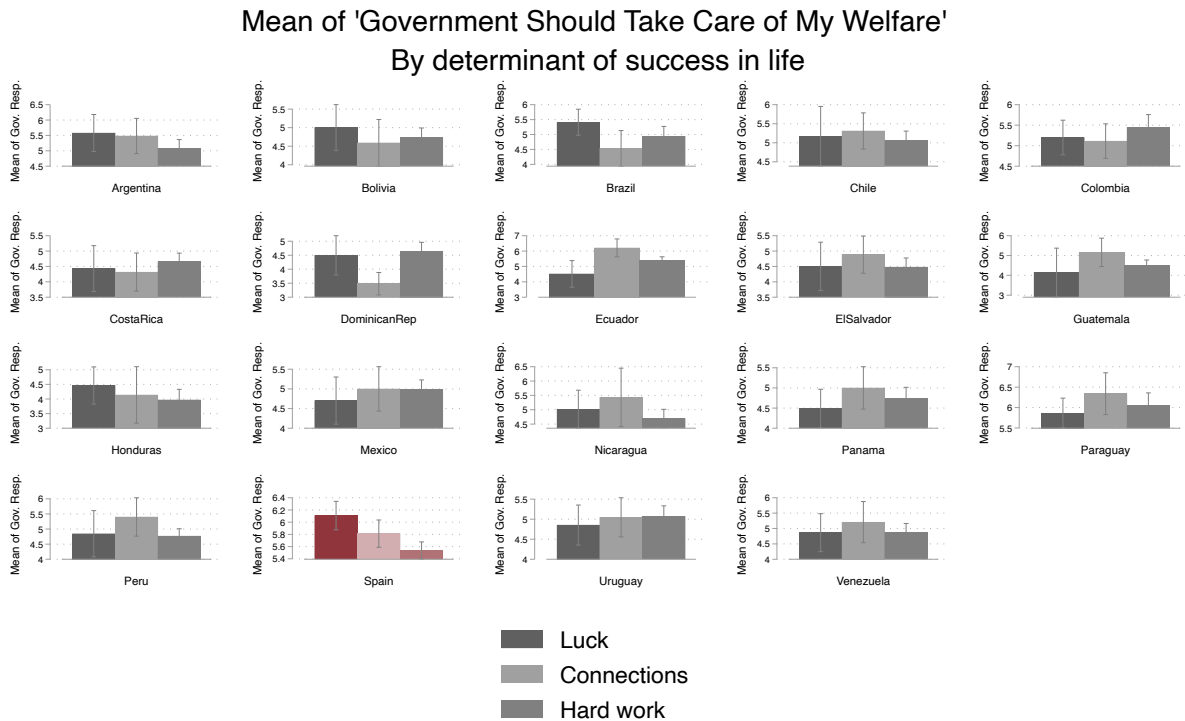
A final complement of the results comes from the Latinobarómetro, a cross-country annual representative survey run in Latin American countries and Spain since 1995. The 2002 and 2006 waves contain questions about respondents' perceived importance of different determinants of success. In particular, we report results from the 2006 wave, which are closer to the other surveys in this paper. We perform the same aggregation exercise as in the SOEP and the KGSS, and plot the demand for redistribution according to whether one thinks the main driver of success is luck, effort or connections.

For the outcome variable, the 2006 Latinobarómetro Survey contains this question on *"Government or people should take responsibility for their welfare: On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that each person should take responsibility for his own welfare, and 10 means that the government should take responsibility for the welfare of people, where would you put yourself?"*. We report the summary statistics by country in the appendix.

We then calculate the means and confidence intervals by country by answers to the question *"Most important thing to have success in life: Taking into consideration, what do you think is that the most important thing to have success in life?"*. We show the means for the factors "Hard Work", "Connection" and "Luck" to better resemble the previous results and omit "Education" because of its ambiguity: education could be considered as either effort or as a factor outside of one's control.

The results are reported in Figure 3.8. In the 19 countries surveyed in this wave, only in the European country of Spain, do people who think hard work determines success significantly demand less government responsibility in redistribution than those who think connection or luck determines success, while this is not the case for all other

Figure 3.8: Latinobarómetro 2006 - Government Responsibility by Attribution of Success to Different Determinants

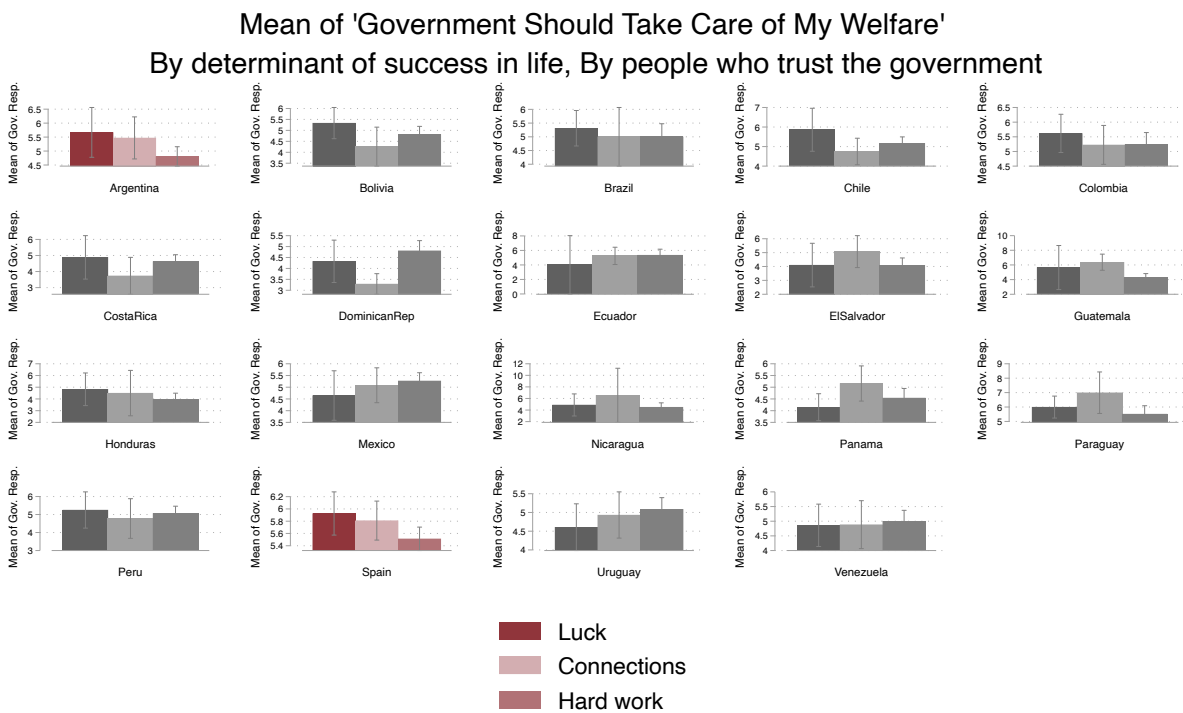


The mean and 95% confidence interval of the answer to 'On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that each person should take responsibility for his own welfare, and 10 means that the government should take responsibility for the welfare of people, where would you put yourself?' By answer to the question 'Taking into consideration, what do you think is that the most important thing to have success in life? Do you think the most important thing is:' From Latinobarometro 2006

countries in the survey.

This pattern is unlikely to be all due to differences in the quality of institutions. In Figure 3.9, we report the same results for the sub-sample in every country that claim to have "a lot of confidence" or "some confidence" in the government. Apart from the noticeable exception of Argentina, the overall pattern does not change into resembling that of Spain. Even in the sub-sample where people report at least some trust in the government and are unlikely to be against redistribution due to distrust in the government, we do not see a significant decrease in redistributive demand when one believes that success is more due to personal efforts.

Figure 3.9: Latinobarómetro 2006 - Government Responsibility by Attribution of Success to Different Determinants, Sub-sample who Trust the Government



The mean and 95% confidence interval of the answer to 'On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that each person should take responsibility for his own welfare, and 10 means that the government should take responsibility for the welfare of people, where would you put yourself?' By answer to the question 'Taking into consideration, what do you think is that the most important thing to have success in life? Do you think the most important thing is:' From Latinobarometro 2006 For the sub-sample that say they have 'a lot of confidence' or 'some confidence' to the government



	Government Responsibility		
	2009	2014	2021
Family Wealth	0.112* (0.046)	0.114** (0.030)	0.066* (0.021)
Educated Parents	0.122* (0.040)	0.075* (0.022)	0.057 (0.027)
Education	0.100* (0.034)	0.048 (0.038)	0.056 (0.034)
Ambition	0.046 (0.066)	0.027 (0.031)	0.017 (0.045)
Effort	0.143* (0.052)	0.035 (0.031)	0.045 (0.028)
Knowing Right People	0.151* (0.043)	0.130* (0.046)	0.068* (0.027)
Political Connection	0.081** (0.020)	0.042 (0.044)	0.015 (0.025)
Bribes	0.077 (0.036)	-0.011 (0.030)	0.007 (0.023)
Race	0.103* (0.041)	0.041 (0.028)	0.025 (0.021)
Religion	0.053 (0.038)	0.000 (0.035)	-0.002 (0.022)
Gender	0.113 (0.057)	0.015 (0.032)	0.016 (0.018)

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 3.3: Regression coefficient and standard error. The left hand side variable is agreeing to the statement "The government has responsibility to reduce the gap between those who have high and low income" and the right hand side variable is "How important do you think [X factor] is in getting ahead" on a scale of 1 to 5. Control variables include age, age squared, sex, education level, marital status, income and year and regional fixed effect. The standard error are clustered at the regional level.

## 4 Exploration of Mechanisms

From the survey data results, it seems that meritocratic redistributive preference is an exception rather than a norm, and can be consistently observed only in developed western countries, or more strictly speaking only in Anglo-Saxon and Protestant European countries.

Why would it be the case? There are two pieces of puzzle in the relationship between the demand for redistribution and the determinants of success : fairness views, which means what is just and what is not just, and the hope that the government could execute this fairness view. To have a significant relationship between the importance of hard work and the demand for redistribution, one must simultaneously believe firstly that the fair amount of income is proportional to one's efforts, and also believe that it is the government's role to implement the just income distribution and eliminate the unjust component of the income distribution. In the following part of this section, we are going to discuss the two hypotheses separately.

### 4.1 Universal Meritocratic Fairness (?)

A first question lies in the universality of meritocratic fairness: do people around the world think that getting rich by hard work is more fair than striking it rich by luck and inherited privilege?

We think that the answer is mixed. A distinction must be made between "pure" privileges mostly associated with family wealth, whose unfairness is plausibly universal, and identity-based inequalities of opportunities. The latter are considered "discrimination" in Western developed countries but might be justifiable natural social hierarchies elsewhere.

Privilege in the narrow sense - being born in a poor or rich family by chance - is almost universally unfair, although with some highly notable exceptions. In our main results, especially in Figure 3.1, the blue dots representing the regression coefficients between family background factors and the demand for redistribution is positive and significant for almost all countries, although they tend to be of larger magnitudes in

WEIRD countries.

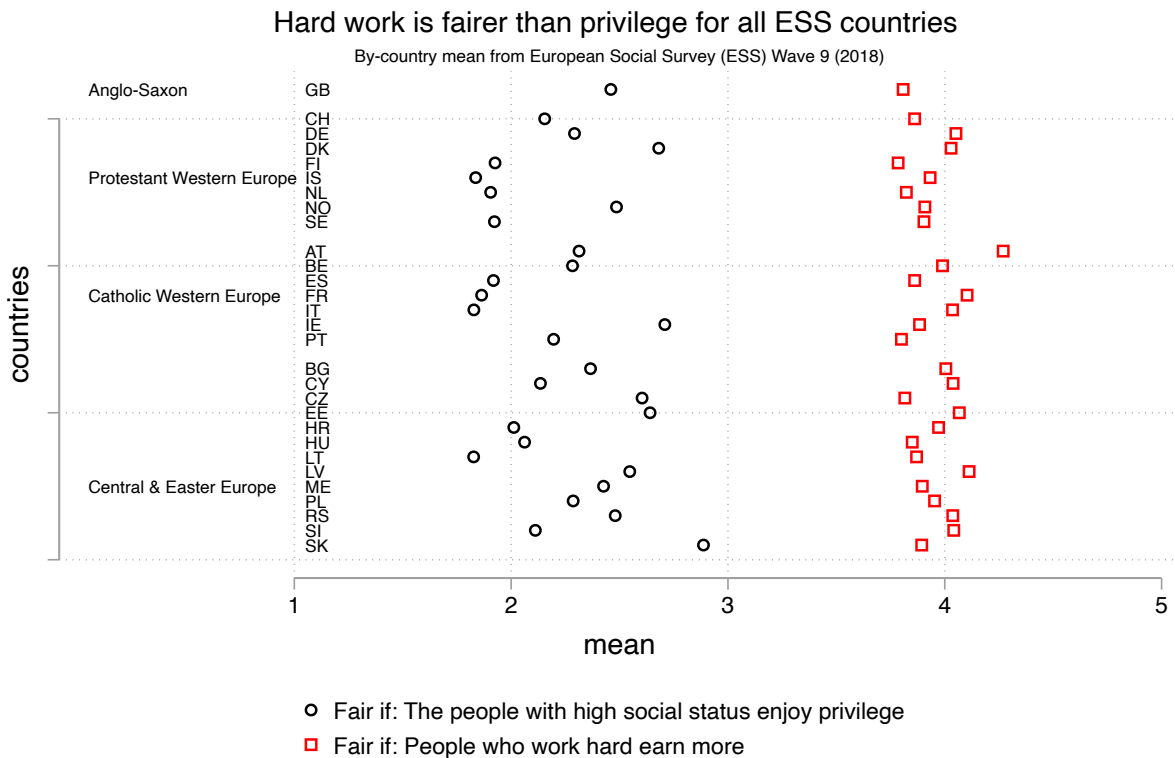
Other survey and experimental evidence also support our results. Few surveys contain questions directly asking whether people think income earned by hard work or privilege is fair, but we could find similar questions for example in Wave 9 of the European Social Survey (2018). The question asked is *"There are many different views as to what makes a society fair or unfair. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (on a scale of 1 to 5)"* . The options are:

- A society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed among all people.
- A society is fair when hard-working people earn more than others.
- A society is fair when it takes care of those who are poor and in need regardless of what they give back to society.
- A society is fair when people from families with high social status enjoy privileges in their lives.

Figure 4.1 reports the raw mean by country of these variables for the third and fourth options. It is clear that in all countries surveyed in this round, respondents consider a society where hard working people earn more to be much more fair than a society where families with high socio-economic status enjoy privileges. This corresponds to our observation from the ISSP-2009 that family-related inequalities are largely considered to be unfair. Indeed, when asked directly about whether hard work is fair, people around the world tend to admit that hard work is more fair than privilege.

Since surveys can introduce social desirability biases, a more direct and causal way to discern people's fairness views is by experiment. In [Almås et al. \(2021\)](#), the authors conducted a cross-country experiment where they asked a third-party observer to redistribute money between two workers whose inequality in pay is generated by either merit (the quality of work) or pure luck. We reproduce their graph in Figure 6.17 in the appendix: on average, people in almost all countries redistribute significantly more if the inequality is generated by luck than by merit, with the notable exceptions of China and India.

Figure 4.1: European Social Survey Wave 9 - 2018



The exceptions - China and India - are unlikely to be a pure coincidence. We tend to perceive that there are real "un-meritocratic" fairness preferences in these two countries. It is demonstrated in [N. Y. Chen et al. \(2022\)](#) that Chinese people significantly reduce their demand for redistribution after being exposed to a cue that rich people's wealth partially comes from luck under high-growth regimes. This seems to imply that people consider these incomes to be just, and the part of the sample that reduces the most significantly their demand for redistribution are the ones who are most likely to have benefited from the opportunities present under the high-growth regime. Thus, we do not rule out that with rapid growth and an abundance of lucky opportunities, people would develop non-meritocratic fairness due to self-serving bias. India could be in a similar situation due to its high-growth profiles in the past decades as well, but it could also present a different facade of the story. [Dixit \(2022\)](#) shows that there is a strong and significant negative correlation between economic fatalism (a belief that income is generated by forces out of human control) and the demand for redistribution in India. In

a society with strong traditional hierarchy, people might think that it is fair to accept fatal arrangements and safeguard social hierarchies, and consider instead that hard work, which breaks the existing social hierarchies, as unfair.

This is shown by the regression coefficient plots in Section 3.1.1. Unlike family factors (blue dots), identity factors (green dots) - race, gender and religion - are treated quite differently in western countries and the rest of the world. While in the former it is packed with family privilege and considered unfair discrimination, they might be more justified in the rest of the world. The green dots are very often in the negative zones (left to the zero x-axis), which means that the more one thinks success is due to gender, race or religion, the **less** they want the government to redistribute. Most interestingly, in Figure 3.3 we even observe that the red (effort) and green (identity) dots switched positions between WEIRD countries and the rest of the world, suggesting that people might even be willing to redistribute away from hard-working people to preserve identity-based orders.

## 4.2 Expectation on the Government to Implement Meritocracy

To establish a link between fairness and redistribution, the government must be expected to implement the fair distribution via redistributive policies. Thus, another possibility why the non-WEIRD countries do not appear meritocratic is that they do not expect the government to execute a meritocratic income distribution.

We must emphasize that this possibility extends beyond a simple assertion stating that "the government is corrupt". If the state is kleptocratic, in the sense that the state serves the interest of the wealthiest and redistribution even happens from the poor to the rich, one would expect a total lack of trust in the government from the people and a different set of correlations between fairness and redistribution (like ours) could exist. To begin with, a relatively low importance would be attributed to hard work and a high importance would be associated with political connection in determining success. There should also be a negative correlation between the demand for redistribution and the importance of political connection, since the government is corrupted and the more

one thinks political connection is important, the less one wants government intervention. Moreover, there should also be a negative correlation between perception of inequality and demand for government responsibility. In other words, the larger one thinks inequality is, the less he or she would demand that the government be responsible for shrinking the gap for the government is not to be trusted.

Our main result from the ISSP contradicts all these predictions. To begin with, in Table 6.1, we see that almost all countries recognize hard work as the most important determinant of income and far more important than political connection or bribes. In our main results, we also observe a positive correlation between the perceived importance of political factors and the demand for redistribution in most countries apart from a few developing countries, where such estimates are not significant. To put it differently, the more one thinks corruption is important for getting ahead, the more he or she would demand for government redistribution. It implies that the respondents take the corruption as a problem that the government should fix rather than a sign that the government is untrustworthy. In a similar spirit, we have also run a regression between agreeing to the statement "inequality is perceived to be too big" and demand for redistribution, and report the corresponding results in Figure 6.10 in the appendix. In all countries, the larger one perceives the extent of inequality to be, the more he or she would demand for redistribution. As such, it is unlikely that they are viewing the government as the source of the problem. While we should not rule out the possibility of preference falsification, where the respondents do not actually believe the government but appear to do so, we doubt that they would systematically falsify answers on demand for government redistribution but not on the perception of inequality, or vice versa. We also test robustness of our results by controlling for trust in government whenever possible, and our results from the WVS and the Latinobarómetro are both robust to including measures on the trust in political institutions.

We argue that the decrease in support for government redistribution runs deeper than simple corruption and a lack of trust in the government. Even if the non-meritocratic preferences in developing countries are indeed caused by institutions, it should have already been internalized as a part of the prevailing cultures in the respective countries.

In Appendix Table 6.1, we report the summary statistics of the 2006 wave of Latino-barómetro. Spain does not have significantly higher trust in the government than other Latin American countries at an average point of 2.38 out of maximum total of 4. Eight countries in Latin America have a higher level of trust in the government than Spain, yet Spain is the only country that robustly displays meritocratic redistributive preferences.

We argue that instead of distrust in the government, the non-WEIRD countries may hold different expectations from the government. While a meritocratic income distribution is considered fair and desired, it is not the government's (primary) responsibility to implement it. Their desire for government redistribution might be independent from and unconditional on fairness: for example, a basic social safety net regardless of the reason of poverty. It could even be the antithesis of meritocratic fairness, where the government was considered as a safeguard against meritocracy which is a product of the free market, as we discussed at the end of Section 4.1.

A particularly intriguing case concerns the developed Asian countries, such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. They do not exhibit meritocratic redistributive preferences despite the relatively high-quality institutions and high standards of living. More interestingly, they demonstrate an interesting pattern: as we see in Table 3.3, significant or not, the coefficients are positive for all factors in South Korea. A similar pattern can be seen in Appendix Figure 6.2 for the East Asian countries, where the regression coefficients for most factors are positive, as well as in another Appendix Figure 6.18 from a separate national survey in China reproduced from N. Y. Chen et al. (2022).

All the coefficients being positive plausibly indicates that there is a group of people who simultaneously claim that all factors are important and also demand more redistribution, and another group of citizens who claim that none of the factors are important and demand less redistribution. While further studies are needed to explore the mechanism of these correlations, we propose the following conjecture: we hypothesize such a phenomenon might be linked to people's self-identification with an paternalistic government. These states are often characterized by state capitalism and paternalistic culture, where the state often takes the role of a patriarch to whom people associate themselves. People who started with favorable conditions (such as being highly educated or from

families with high socio-economic status) are more likely to be optimistic, hard working, and also consider that hard work is important, but also more likely to identify with the government and believe that it has more responsibility. Meanwhile, people started under unfavorable and discriminated conditions are more likely to reject the importance of hard work, and also have little demand or expectation from the government, thinking that government policies may not benefit them after all.

To summarize, we think that the existence of non-meritocratic preferences might very well be associated with a different perceived role of the government. And this difference in perceived government responsibility is more nuanced than simple distrust in a corrupt kleptocracy. While a meritocratic income distribution might be fair, the government's role is not primarily focused on implementing such redistributive policies.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, we use cross-country survey data and country-specific survey data to show that meritocratic redistributive preferences are far from being a universal phenomenon. Only in WEIRD countries, or even the smaller circle of Anglo-Saxon and Protestant Western European countries, do we observe a sharp separation between personal and outside factors, where the importance of the former is significantly negatively correlated with the demand for redistribution, and the latter in a positive way. We further demonstrate that different types of outside factors of success are treated quite differently in non-WEIRD countries: while the importance of family-wealth-based privilege is always positively associated with the demand for redistribution, identity-based (gender, race, religion) inequalities are often significantly negatively correlated with the demand for redistribution. This might suggest that identity-based discrimination is considered a legitimate source of social hierarchy to be maintained and not an inequality of opportunity to be corrected. Finally, we discuss the mechanisms of non-meritocratic redistributive preferences. Two channels could be present here: that people do not actually hold meritocratic fairness, or they do not expect the government to implement a meritocratic income distribution. Different mechanisms, or a combination of the two, could be at play in our



results.

Following the aforementioned results, several potential directions of research present themselves. It might be interesting to investigate why East Asia does not adopt a meritocratic attitude toward redistribution despite having developed a highly meritocratic selection system early in its history, which have consistent impacts on its social values, such as the importance of education (T. Chen et al., 2020). We are also interested in confirming whether different types of inequalities "by luck" are indeed treated differently on a preference level. One of the most striking takeaways from this paper is that while family-wealth-based privileges universally triggers redistribution, identity-based discrimination do not seem to be associated with an increase in the demand for redistribution in non-WEIRD countries. It would be of interest to confirm whether this exists on a fairness level - that is to say, whether people consider gender-, race- and religion-based inequalities of opportunities to be truly fair. Finally, efforts could be made to understand the perceived role of the government in non-WEIRD countries. While it is understandable that many other factors (such as ensuring basic living standard) takes priority over meritocracy in developing countries while deciding the order of potential redistributive policies, it is surprising that meritocratic fairness is not correlated with redistributive demand. An even more interesting scenario is the case of developed East Asian countries mentioned in Section 4.2, where the relationship between redistribution and the perceived importance of merit could be shaped by factors other than fairness, such as optimism and self-identification with the political institutions, etc.

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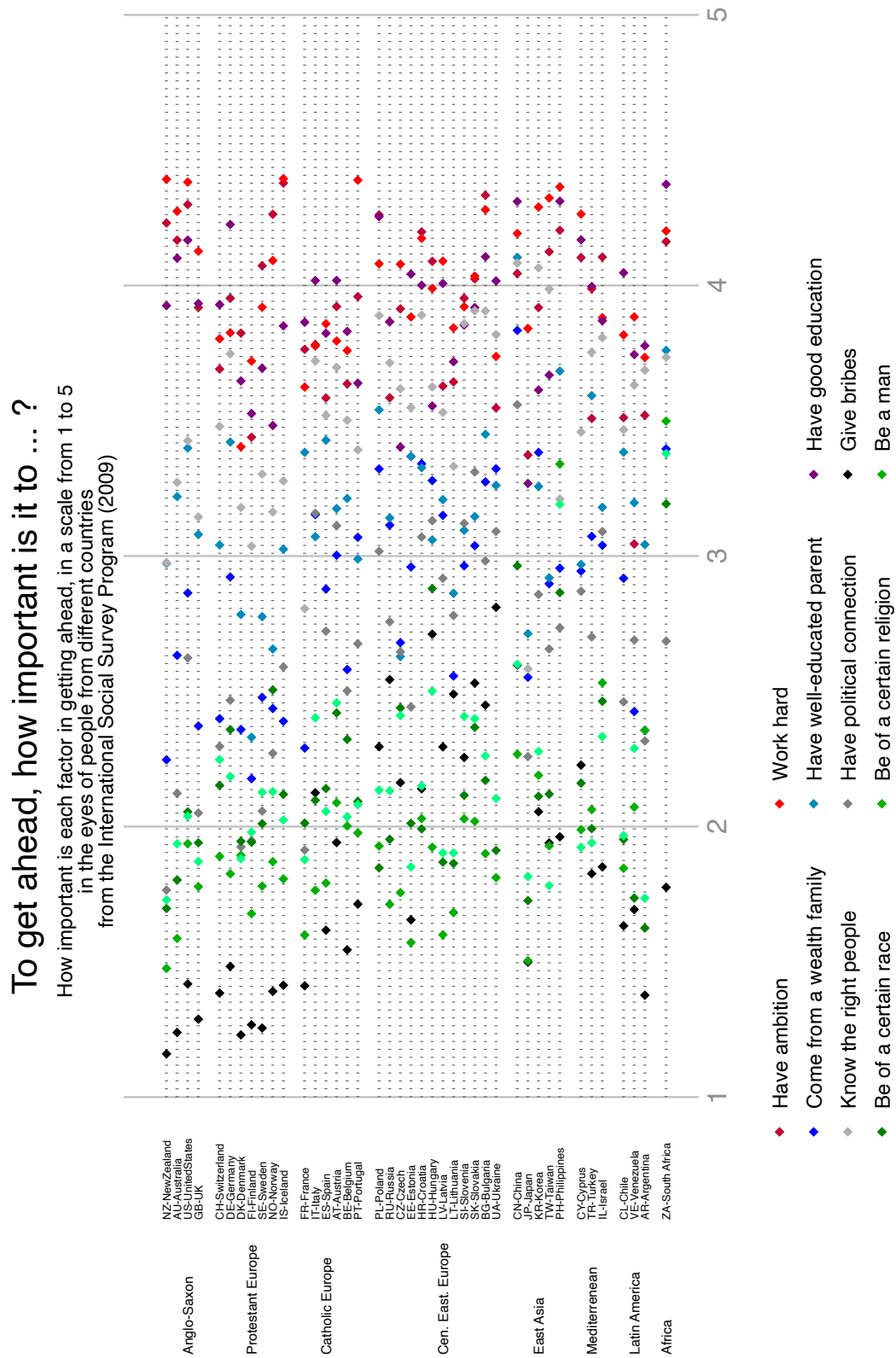
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## 6 Appendices

Figure 6.1: Mean of importance of different determinants of success, ISSP (2009)

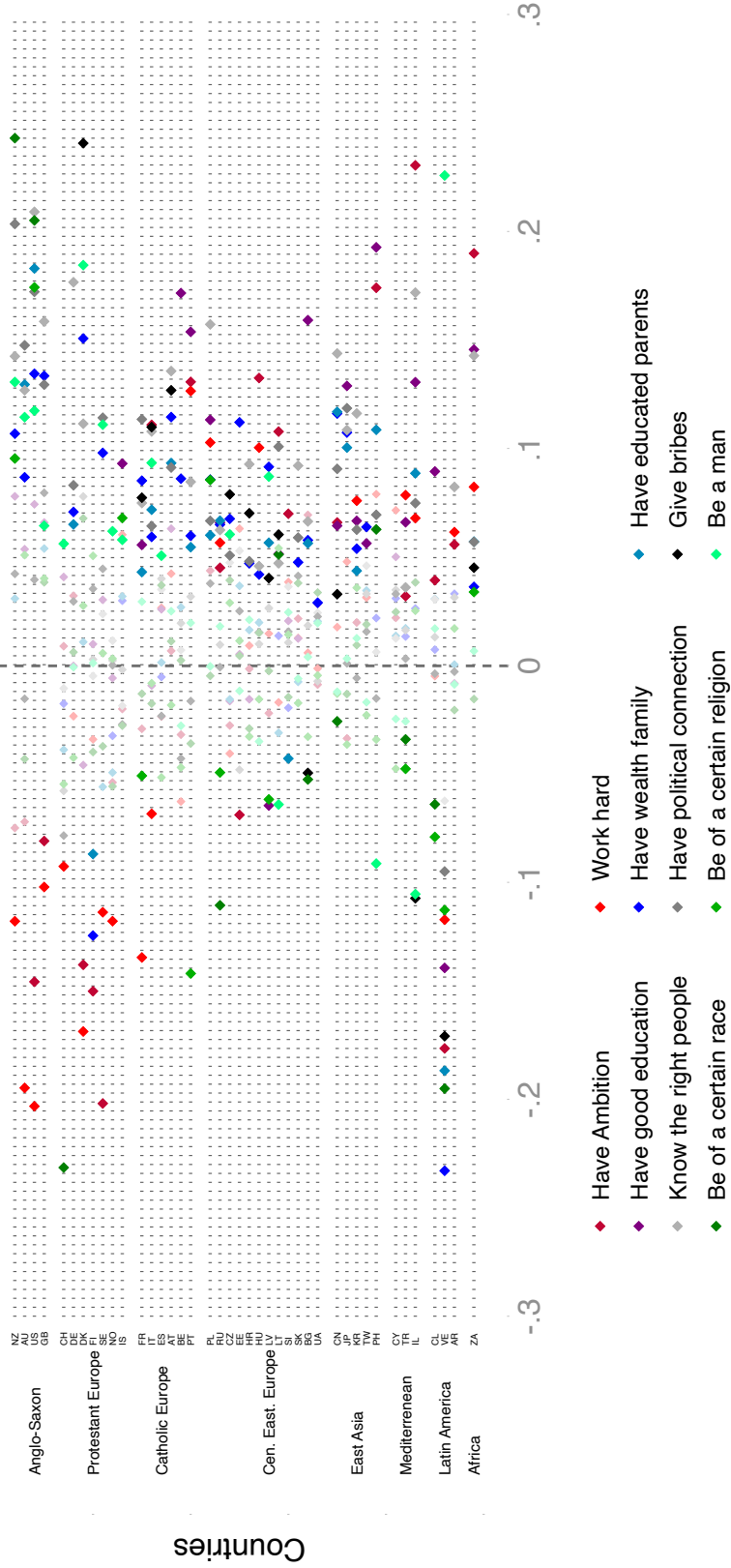


## 6.1 Supplementary Materials from the ISSP

Figure 6.2: Government duty to reduce income gap and determinants of income, ISSP (2009) by individual factors

## Correlation between Importance of X and Demand for Redistribution

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they demand government redistribution in the eyes of people from different countries from the International Social Survey Program (2009)  
Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



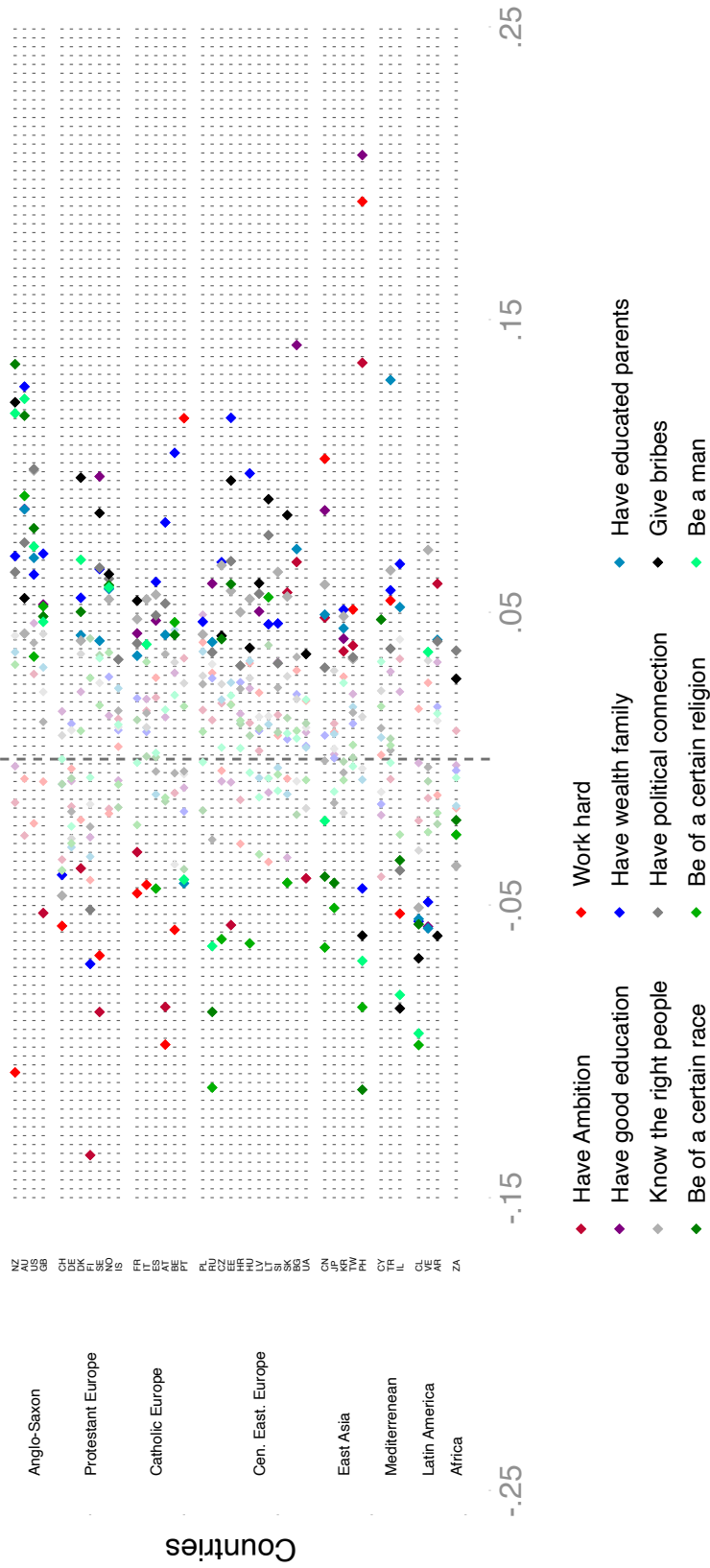
Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
The dependent variable: agreeing to 'it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes' on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).  
Independent variable: answer to the question 'factor X' is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all).  
Control variables include sex, age, age squared, subjective social class, education and regional fixed effect.



Figure 6.3: Taxing the rich more and determinants of income, ISSP (2009)

### Correlation between Importance of X and More Tax for the Rich

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they think the rich should be taxed more/less in the eyes of people from different countries from the International Social Survey Program (2009)  
Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
The dependent variable: agreeing to 'People with high incomes should pay a larger share of their incomes in taxes than those with low incomes' on a scale of 5 (Much larger share) to 1 (Much smaller share).  
Independent variable: answer to the question 'Factor X' is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
Control variables include sex, age, age squared, subjective social class, education and regional fixed effect.  
Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

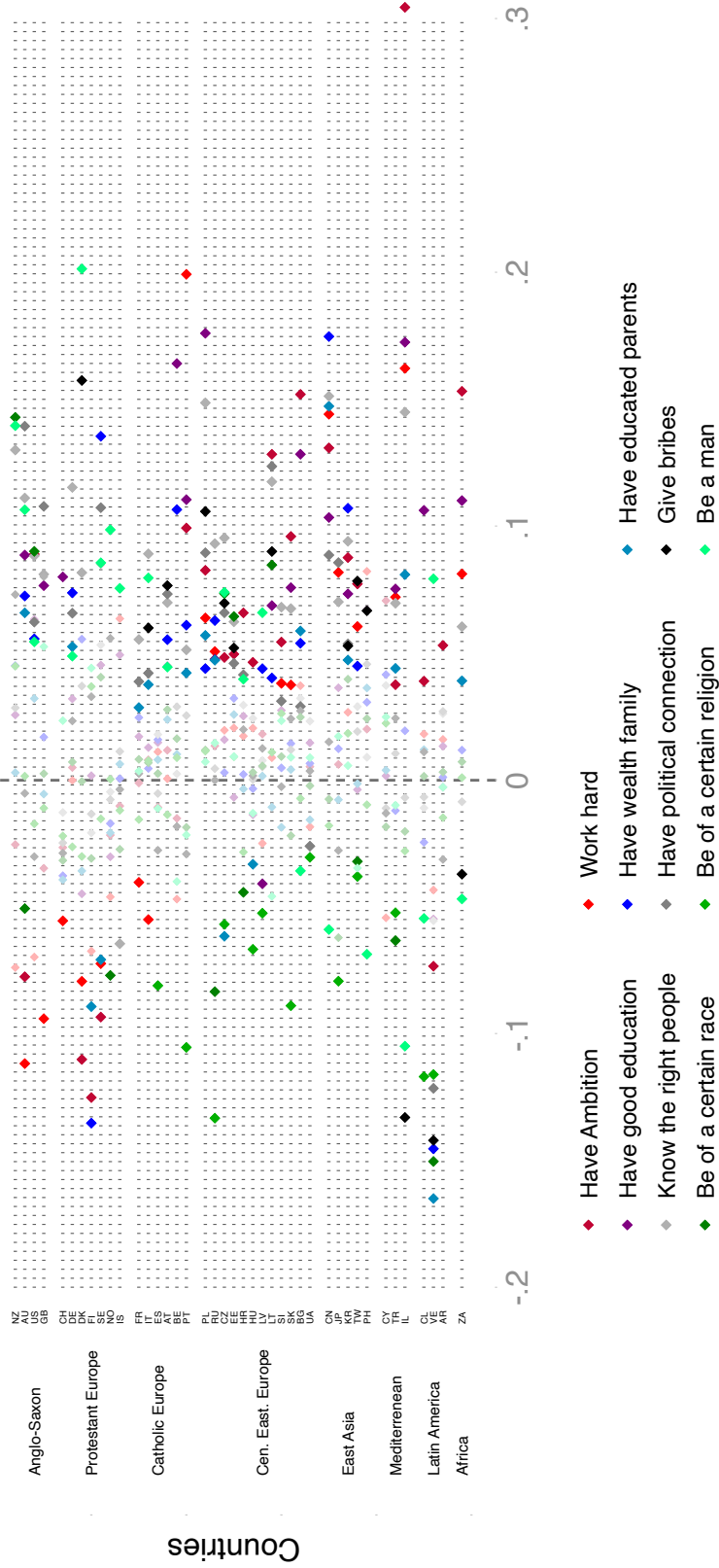
Figure 6.4: Inequality is too big and determinants of income, ISSP (2009)

## Correlation between Importance of X and Thinking Inequality is too Big

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they think inequality is big in the country in the eyes of people from different countries

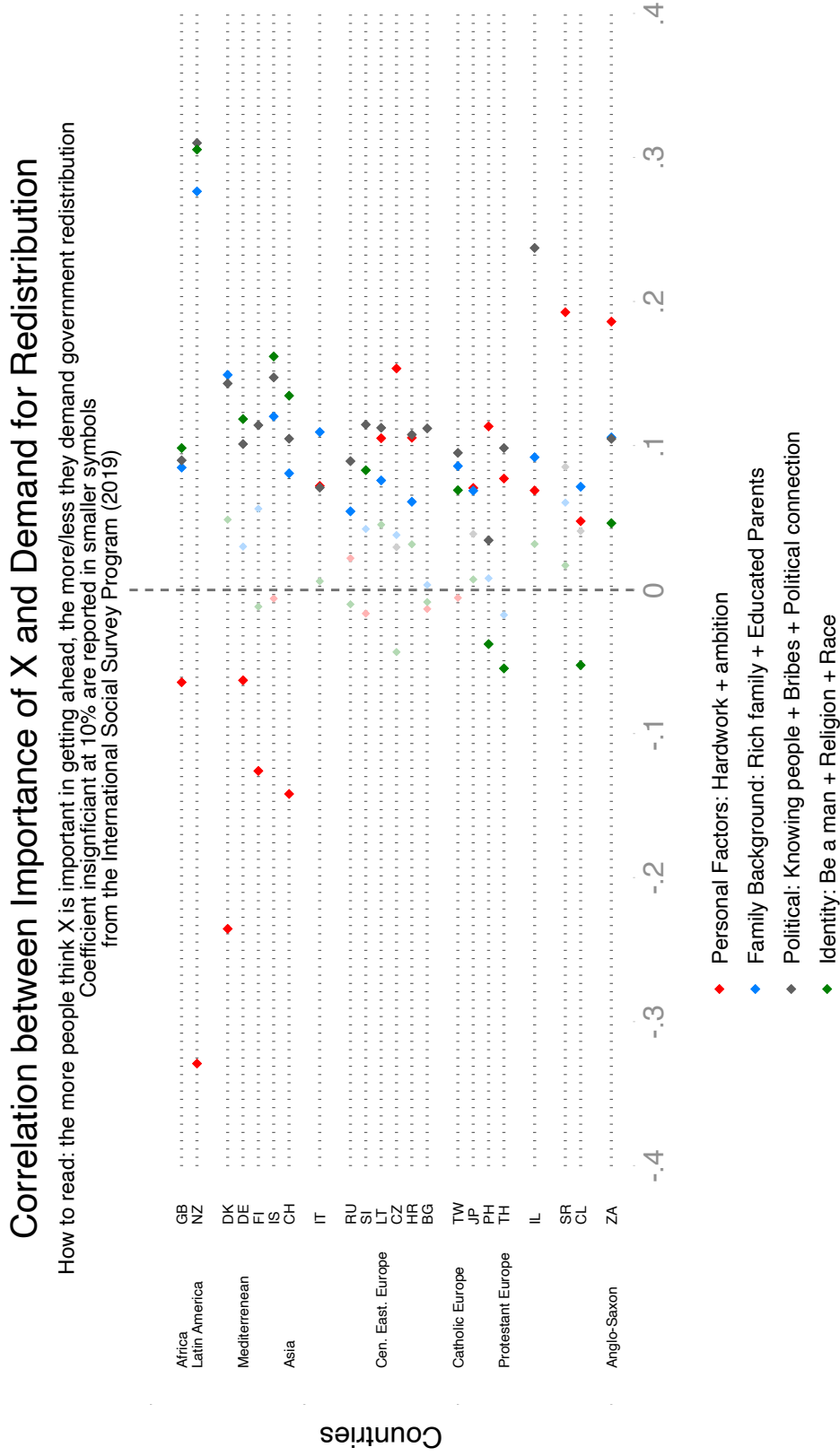
from the International Social Survey Program (2009)

Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



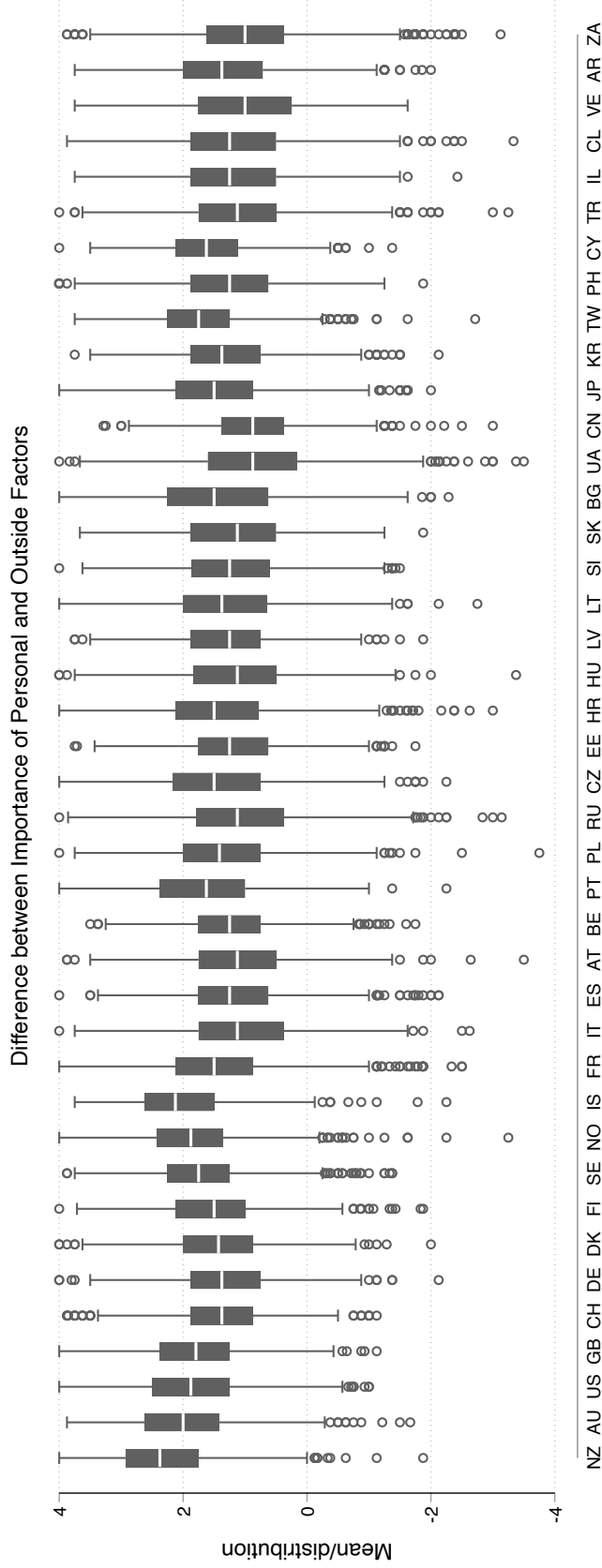
Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: agreeing to 'Income inequality in [country X] is too big on a scale of 5 (strongly disagree),  
 Independent variable: answer to the question 'factor X] is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, subjective social class, education and regional fixed effect.

Figure 6.5: Government duty to reduce income gap and determinants of income, ISSP (2019) by individual factors



Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
The dependent variable: agreeing to 'it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes' on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).  
Independent variable: answer to the question 'Factor X' is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all).  
Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

Figure 6.6: Difference Between Importance of Personal and Outside Factors, ISSP(2009)

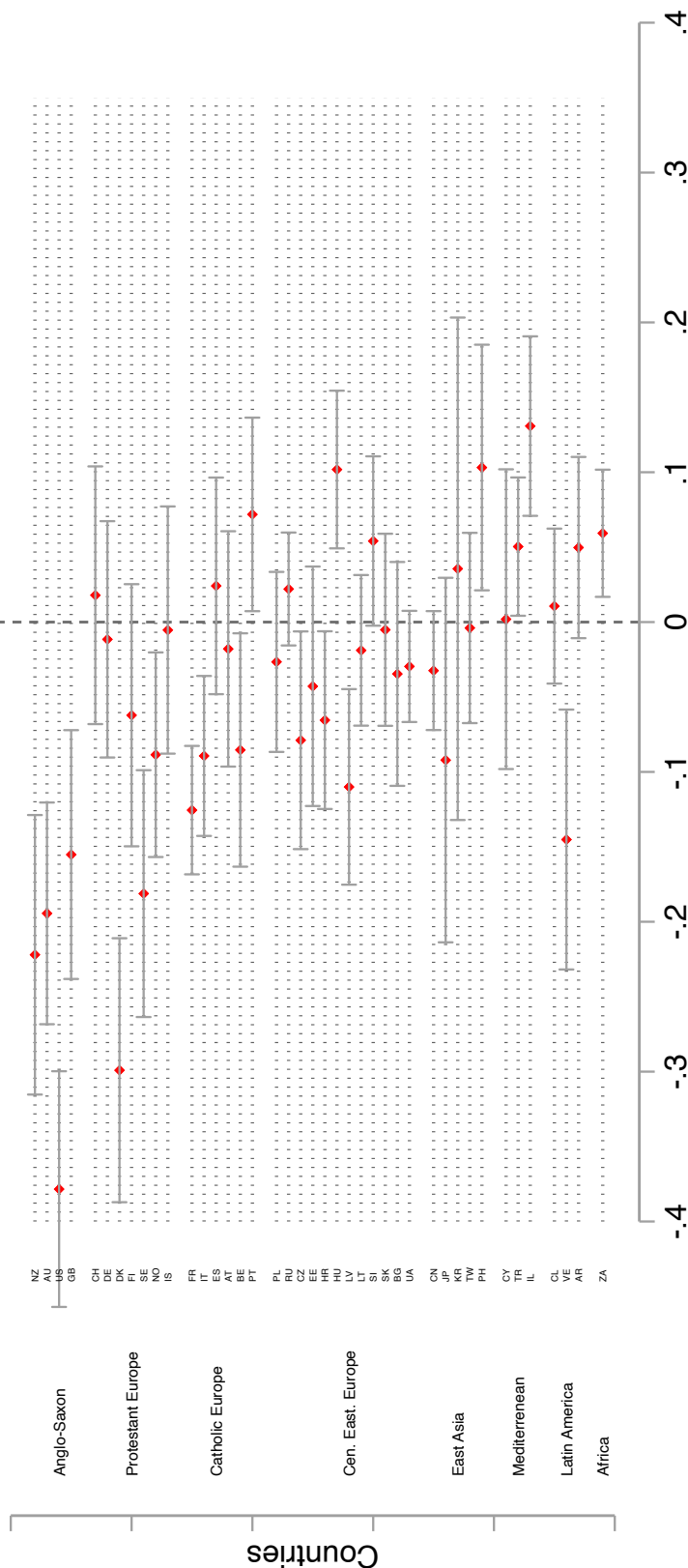


**Summary (Median, Interquartile Range and Outliers) of the relative importance of personal factors with respect to outside factors.** The index is constructed using the determinant of success questions (“[factor X] is very important for getting ahead’ on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)”) by taking the difference between the average of importance of ambition and effort and the average between importance of gender, race, religion, educated parents, wealthy parents, bribes, knowing the right people and political connections.

Figure 6.7: Difference Between Importance of Personal and Outside Factors and Government Responsibility, ISSP(2009)

### Difference between importance of personal/outside factors and Demand for Redistribution

How to read: the more important people think personal factors are in success relative to outside factors, the more/less they demand government redistribution  
 Coefficient and 95% confidence interval  
 from the International Social Survey Program (2009)



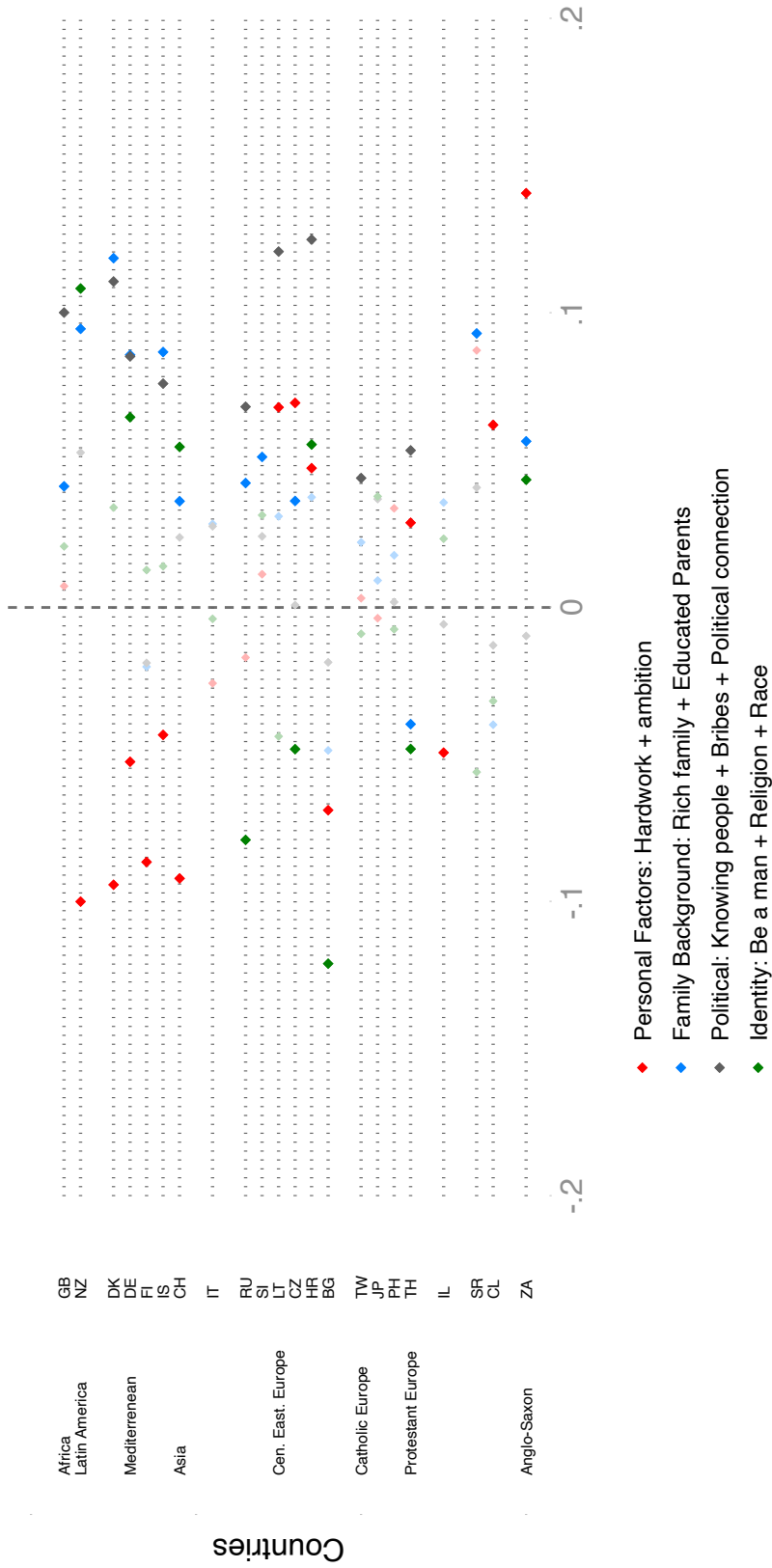
◆ Difference between Importance of Personal Factors and Outside Factors

Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: 'It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes' on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).  
 Independent variable: differences between the importance of personal factors (ambition and hard work) and outside factors (family wealth, political and identity factors)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.

Figure 6.8: Taxing the rich and determinants of income, ISSP (2019)

## Correlation between Importance of X and More Tax for The Rich

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they agree that the rich should be taxed more  
 Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols

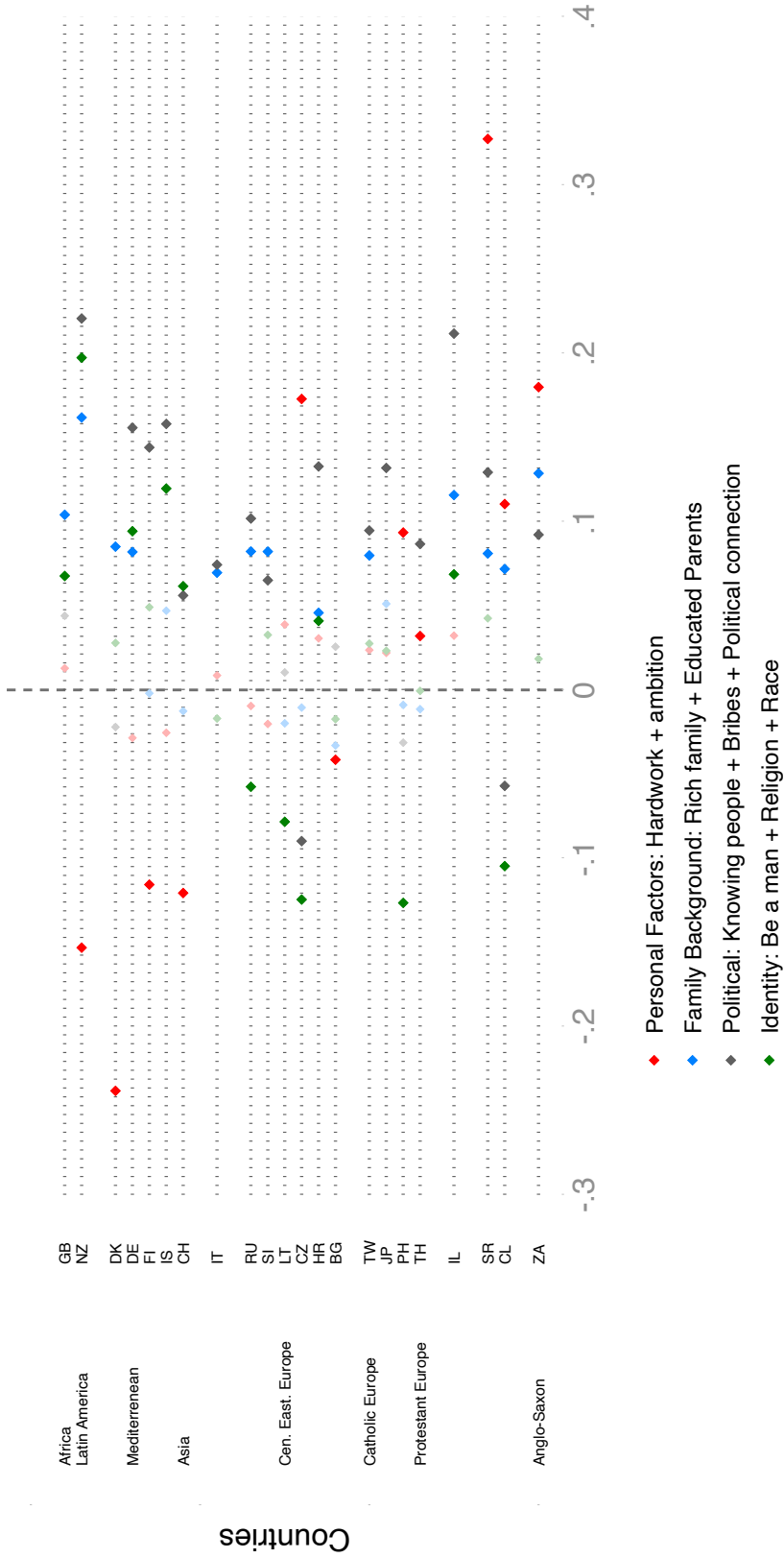


Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: agreeing to 'People with high incomes should pay a larger share of their incomes in taxes than those with low incomes' on a scale of 5 (Much larger share) to 1 (Much smaller share).  
 Independent variable: answer to the question 'Factor X' is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
 Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

Figure 6.9: Inequality is too big and determinants of income, ISSP (2019)

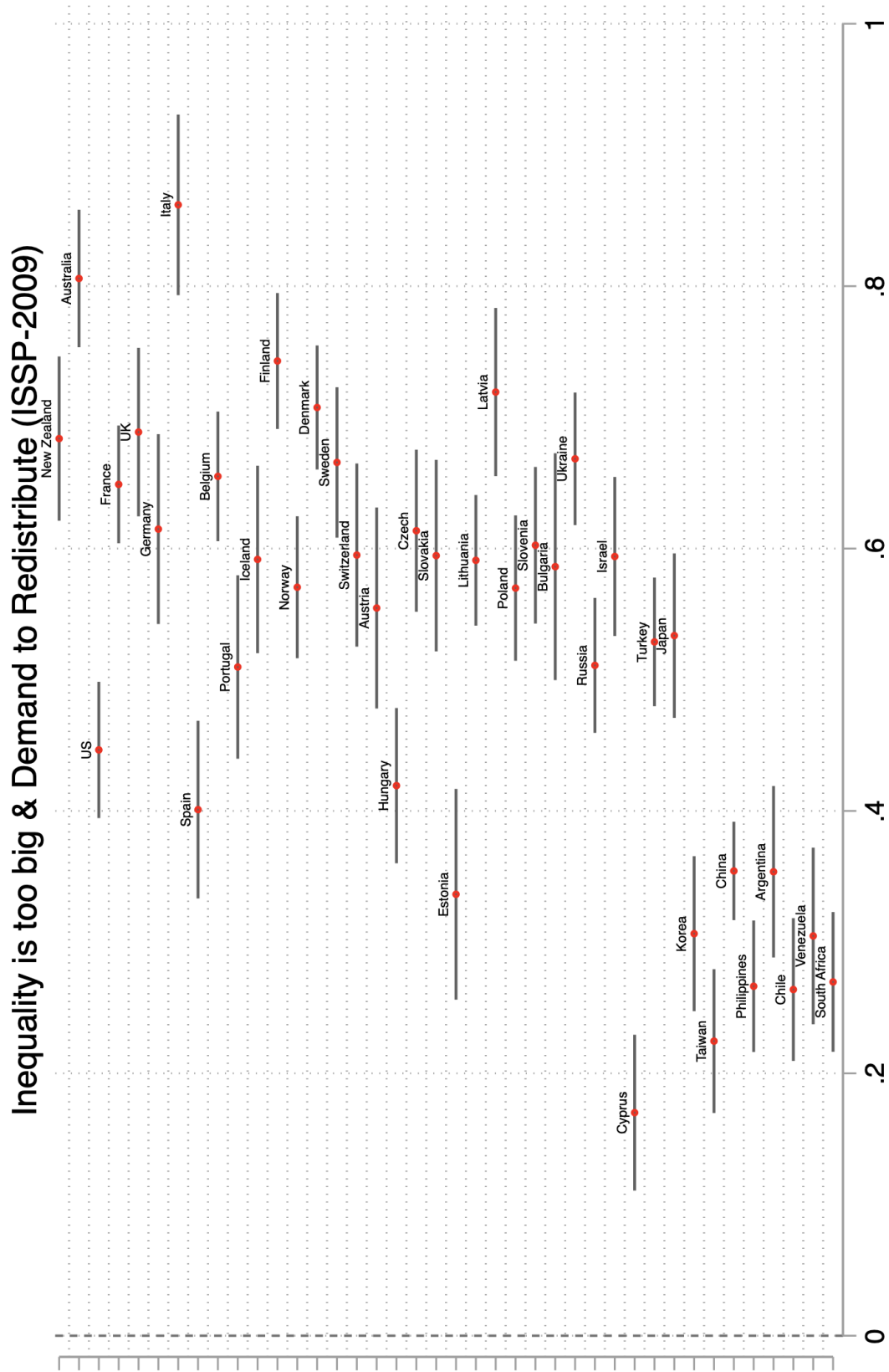
### Correlation between Importance of X and Inequality is too Big

How to read: the more people think X is important in getting ahead, the more/less they agree that the inequality is too big  
 Coefficient insignificant at 10% are reported in smaller symbols



Regression coefficients by country in the International Social Survey Program (2009).  
 The dependent variable: agreeing to 'Income inequality in [country X] is too big' on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)  
 Independent variable: answer to the question '[factor X] is very important for getting ahead' on a scale of 5 (essential) to 1 (not important at all)  
 Control variables include sex, age, age squared, education, personal income and regional fixed effect.  
 Coefficient that are not significant at the 10% level is reported in smaller symbol and lighter colors

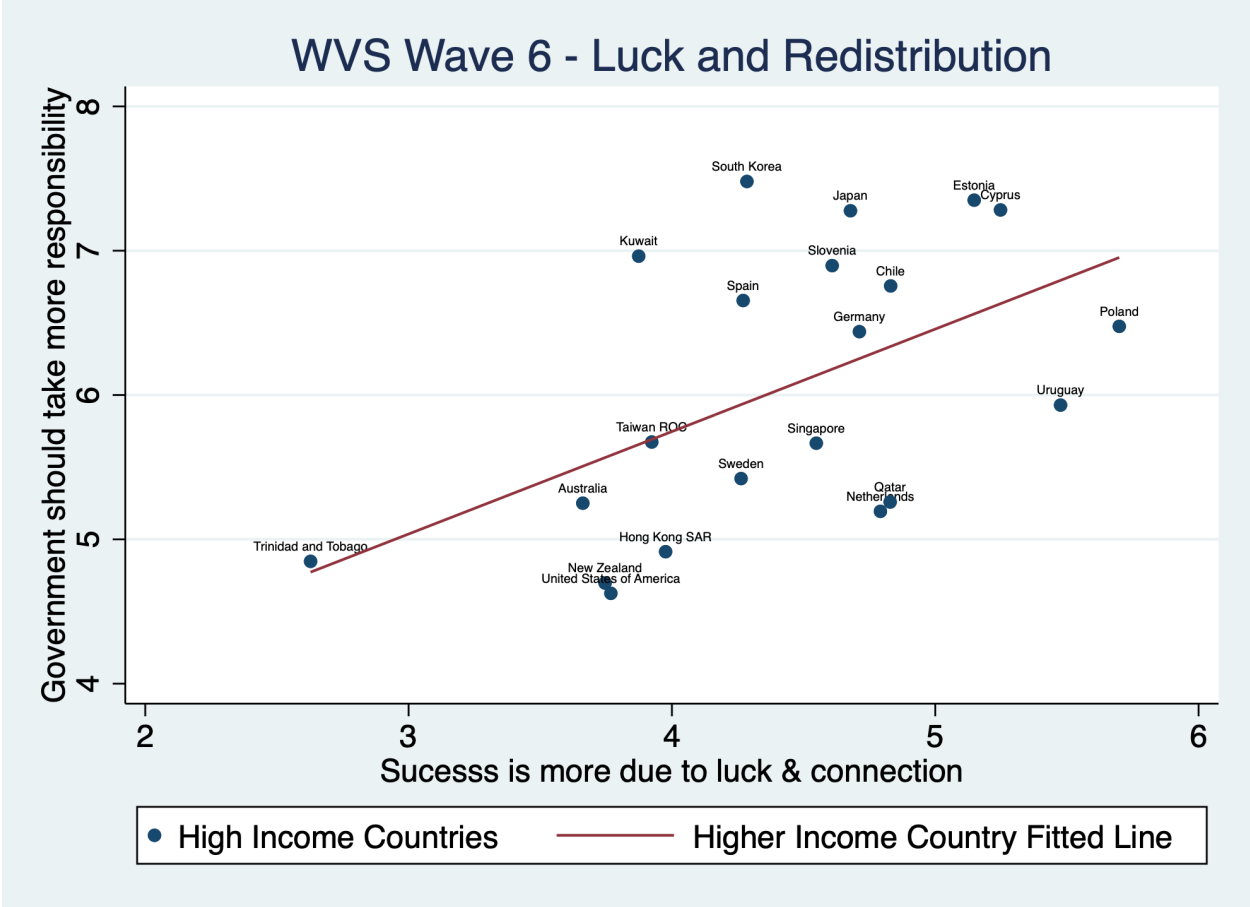
Figure 6.10: Inequality is too big and demand to redistribute, ISSP (2009)





## 6.2 Supplementary Materials from the World Value Survey

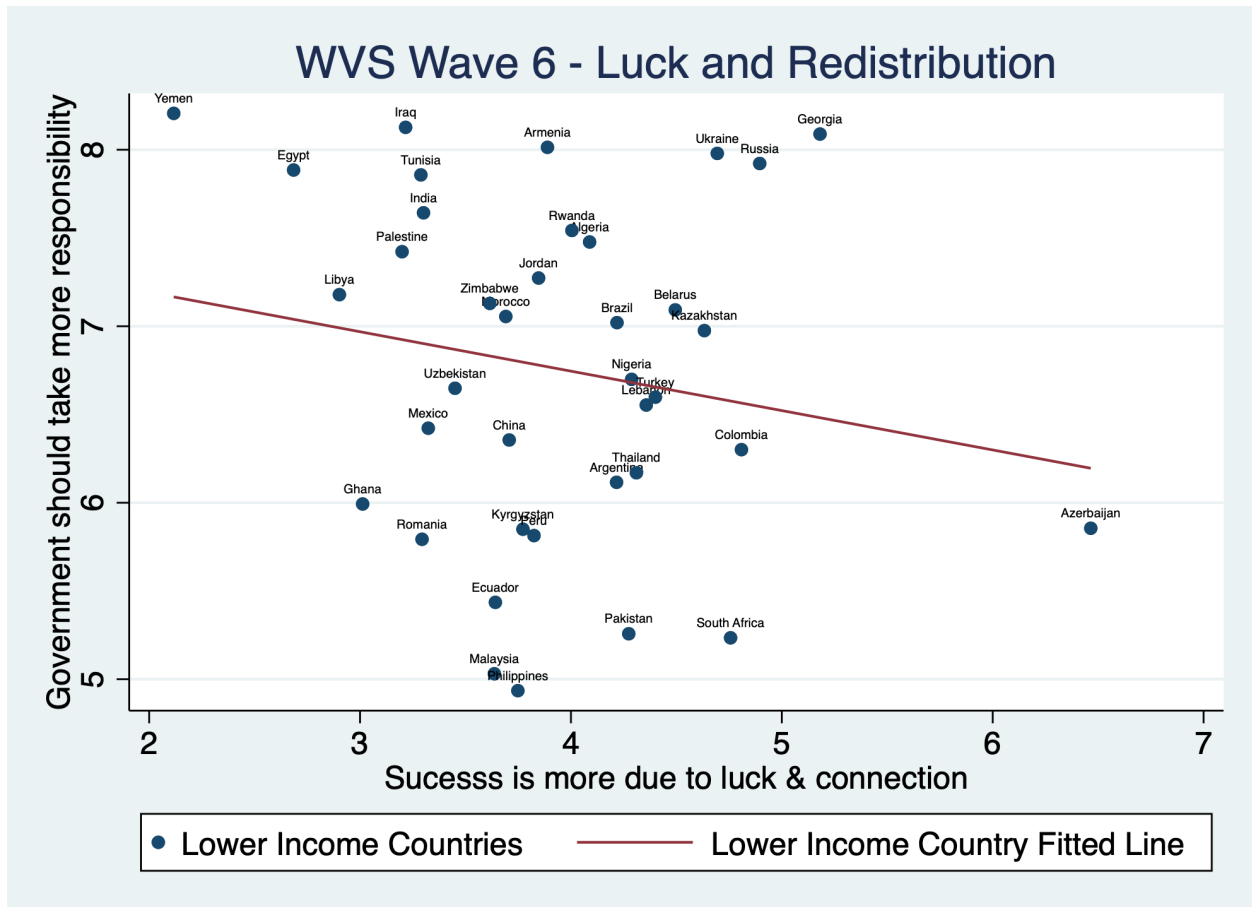
Figure 6.11: World Values Survey - Wave 6 (2010-2014) - Cross-country Correlation (Higher-income Countries)



On the y-axis: a discrete variable on a scale from 1 to 10 indicating the extent of agreement to the following statement "People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves" (1) versus "The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for" (10). On the x-axis: a discrete variable on a scale from 1 to 10 indicating the extent of agreement to the following statement "In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life" (1) versus "Hard work doesn't generally bring success - it's more a matter of luck and connections" (10).

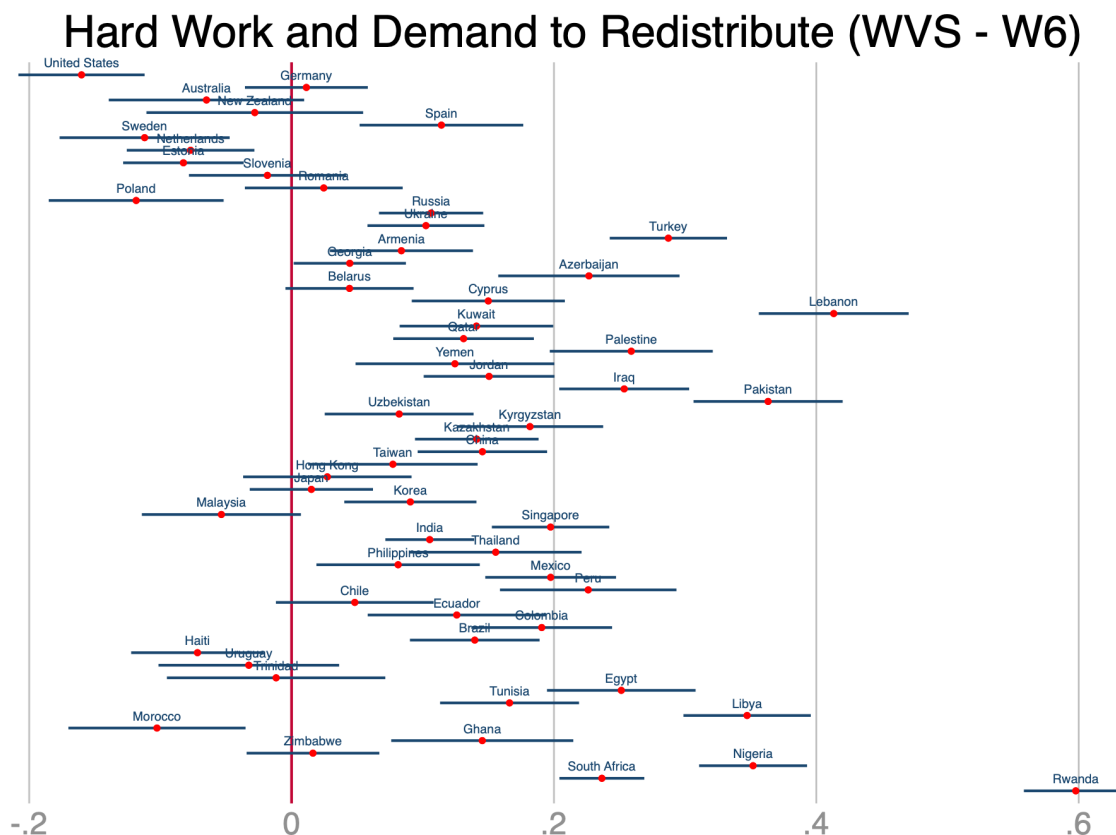
## 6.3 Supplementary Materials from SOEP

Figure 6.12: World Values Survey - Wave 6 (2010-2014) - Cross-country Correlation (Lower-income Countries)



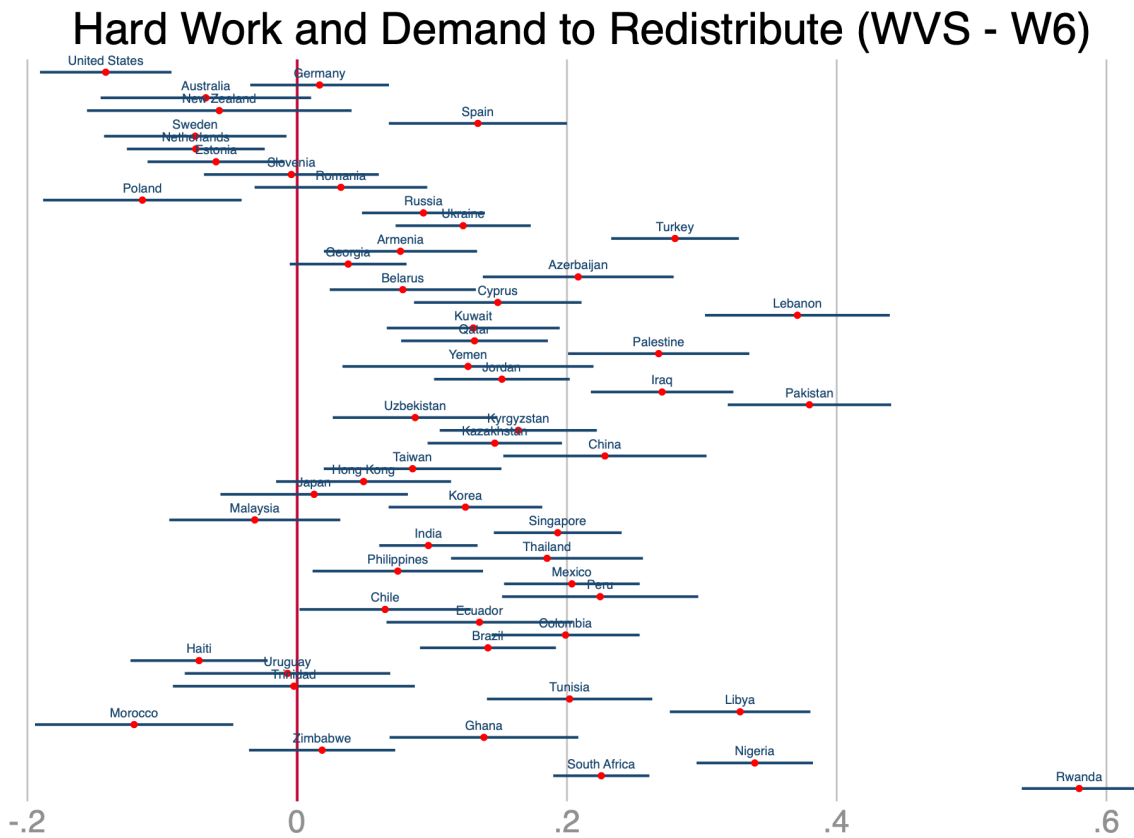
On the y-axis: a discrete variable on a scale from 1 to 10 indicating the extent of agreement to the following statement "People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves" (1) versus "The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for" (10). On the x-axis: a discrete variable on a scale from 1 to 10 indicating the extent of agreement to the following statement "In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life" (1) versus "Hard work doesn't generally bring success - it's more a matter of luck and connections" (10).

Figure 6.13: World Values Survey - Wave 6 (2010-2014) - Comparison of Within-country Estimates



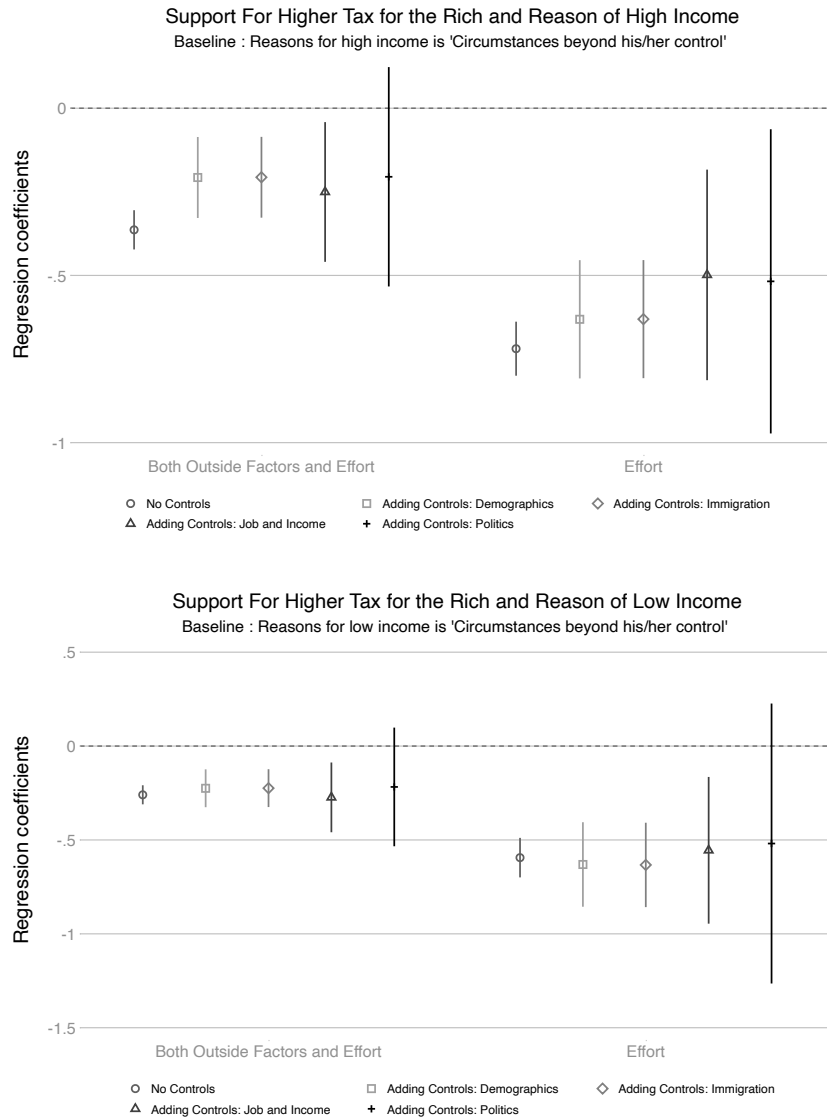
Cross-country correlation coefficient estimates between "Success is more due to hard work or luck/connection" and "Government should take more responsibility in ensuring provision for everyone or not", with 95% confidence intervals and baseline controls including gender, age, income scales, education level, and region fixed effects.

Figure 6.14: World Values Survey - Wave 6 (2010-2014) - Comparison of Within-country Estimates



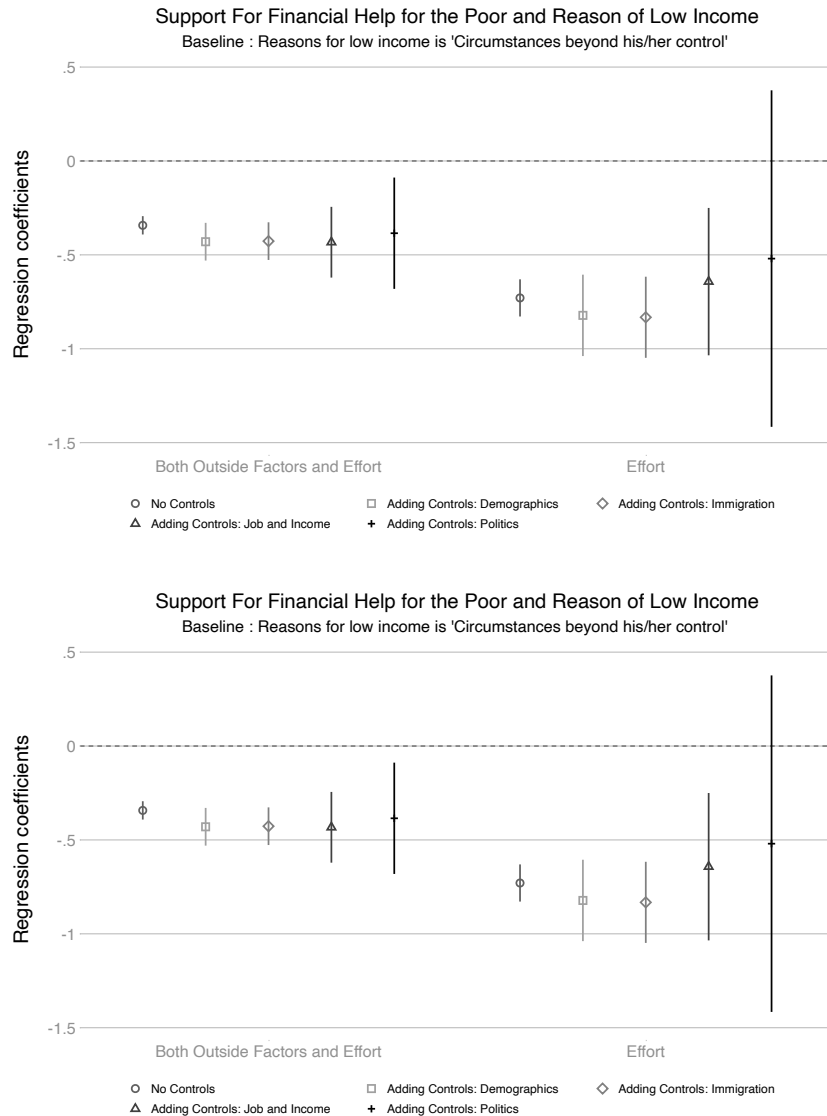
Cross-country correlation coefficient estimates between "Success is more due to hard work or luck/connection" and "Government should take more responsibility in ensuring provision for everyone or not", with 95% confidence intervals and baseline controls including gender, age, subjective social class, religiosity, employment status, income scales, education level, confidence in the government, agreeing to "It is justifiable to claim government benefits to which you are entitled" and region fixed effects.

Figure 6.15: Regression Coefficient From German Socio-Economic Panel



Regression Coefficient between the Question "Persons with high income should be taxed more" and the question "Reason for high/low income", where the reference category is "Circumstances beyond his/her control". The controls include year FEs, gender, region (demographics), german nationality (immigration), current employment status, income (Job and income), political party involvement and party preference (politics)

Figure 6.16: Regression Coefficient From German Socio-Economic Panel, Cont'd



Regression Coefficient between the Question "Persons with low income should prospectively receive larger financial help." and the question "Reason for high/low income", where the reference category is "Circumstances beyond his/her control". The controls include year FEs, gender, region (demographics), german nationality (immigration), current employment status, income (Job and income), political party involvement and party preference (politics)

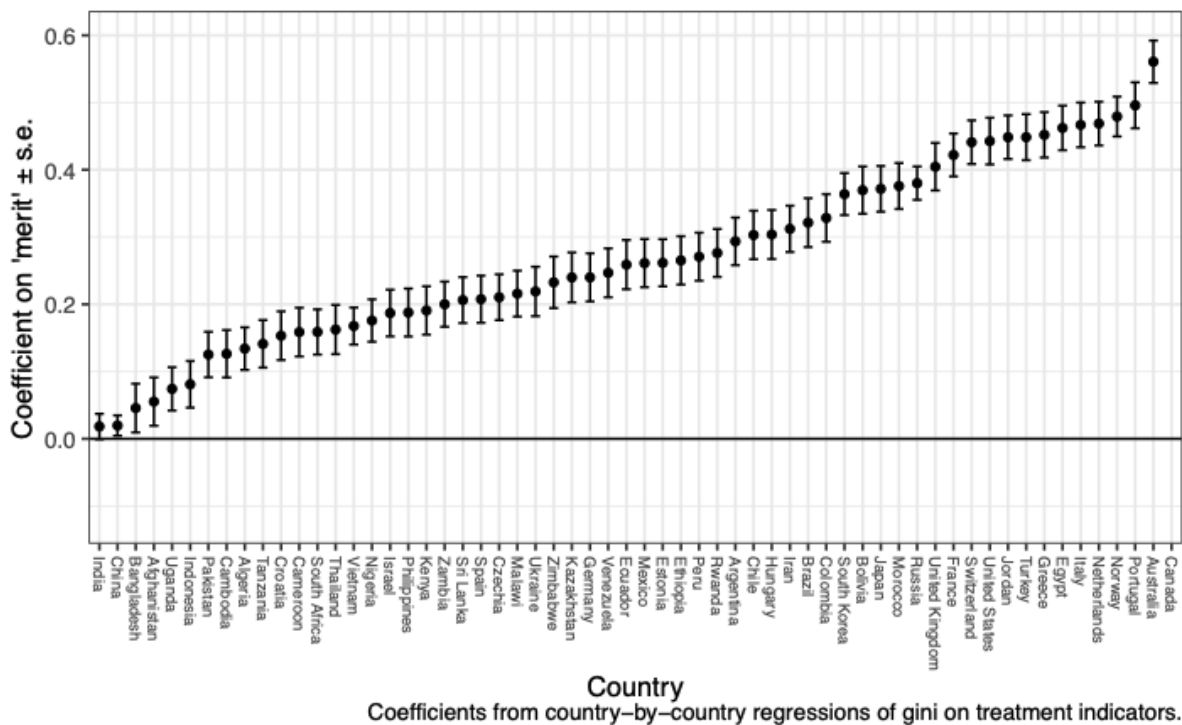
## 6.4 Supplementary Materials from Latinobarómetro

	Gov. Resp (1-10)	Success: Education	Success: Hard Work	Success: Connections	Success: Luck	Trust Gov(1-4)
Argentina	5.35	0.61	0.24	0.07	0.06	2.68
Bolivia	4.57	0.56	0.31	0.05	0.07	2.48
Brazil	5.08	0.62	0.19	0.05	0.13	2.46
Chile	4.95	0.62	0.25	0.08	0.04	2.64
Colombia	5.05	0.50	0.24	0.11	0.14	2.50
Costa Rica	4.50	0.57	0.31	0.04	0.06	2.34
Dominican Republic	4.05	0.50	0.26	0.16	0.08	2.71
Ecuador	5.27	0.57	0.34	0.06	0.03	1.51
El Salvador	4.58	0.55	0.32	0.08	0.04	2.09
Guatemala	4.40	0.57	0.35	0.04	0.02	2.01
Honduras	4.13	0.58	0.30	0.03	0.08	2.35
Mexico	5.02	0.54	0.33	0.06	0.05	2.38
Nicaragua	4.88	0.54	0.32	0.04	0.09	1.71
Panama	4.60	0.57	0.26	0.08	0.08	2.36
Paraguay	5.75	0.55	0.23	0.07	0.15	1.96
Peru	4.73	0.58	0.32	0.05	0.04	2.23
Spain	5.73	0.38	0.33	0.13	0.13	2.38
Uruguay	4.96	0.53	0.26	0.08	0.10	2.78
Venezuela	4.79	0.60	0.25	0.07	0.04	2.95
Total	4.94	0.54	0.29	0.07	0.08	2.35
Observations	22,418					

Table 6.1: Summary Statistics from the 2006 wave of Latinobarómetro

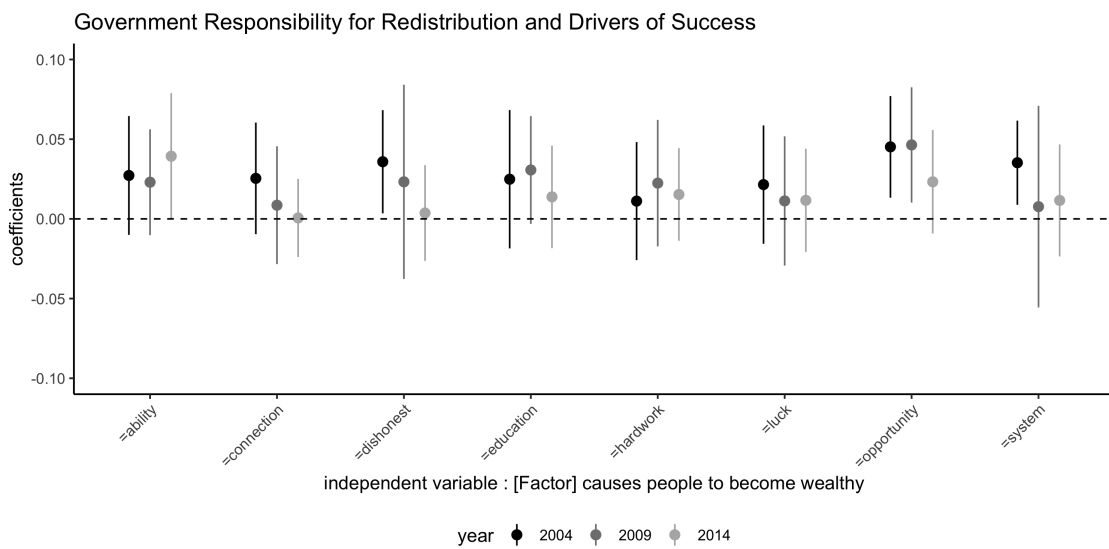
## 6.5 Others

Figure 6.17: Differences in Redistribution when Inequality is caused by luck of effort, Almås et al. (2021)





**Figure 6.18: Correlations between Importance of Different Factors in Getting Rich and Demand for Redistribution in China**



Regression Coefficient between the Question "Government has the responsibility to shrink the gap between high and low incomes" and the question "In your opinion, to what degree do each of the following factors currently cause people to become wealthy?" from the China National Survey of Inequality and Distributive Justice, reproduced from [N. Y. Chen et al. \(2022\)](#)