



# Does societal discontent predict prejudice? The role of low- and high socio-economic status

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### Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to investigate to what extent societal discontent predicted prejudice and whether this is the same for people with either a relatively high or low objective or self-perceived socio-economic status (SES). By means of a sample of 467 participants, we found as hypothesized, that for low-SES people, societal discontent predicted more prejudice toward high-status people. However, high-SES people showed the same relation between these variables. Further, not as hypothesized, societal discontent predicted *less* prejudice toward refugees instead of more among low-SES people. However, societal discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards refugees via increased realistic threat. Interestingly, this was the same for high self-perceived SES participants. Finally, not as hypothesized, societal discontent not predicted more prejudice towards low-status people. However, we found that societal discontent indirectly predicted prejudice towards low-status people via increased status threat. However, this was also the case for low self-perceived and objective SES participants. This study adds to previous research supporting the link between societal discontent and prejudice and extends it by focusing on different outgroups and the role of threat. Interestingly, the relation between societal discontent and prejudice is in some cases different from what was found before in literature. Taken together, the current research shows how prejudice against different groups is related to how people feel about society in general, and as such can offer some practical implications.

*Keywords:* societal discontent, prejudice, socio-economic status, realistic threat, status threat

**Does societal discontent predict prejudice? The role of low- and high socio-economic status**

The increasing flow of refugees to the West is creating a sense of unease among citizens, this often goes along with prejudice toward immigrants. Citizens may feel that immigrants are getting more than they receive, which makes them feel threatened. Recently in the Netherlands, for example, when citizens heard that a hotel in Albergen was going to receive 300 immigrants, resident citizens protested. They showed texts like: “Soon there will be 10 percent immigrants. Will we be able to live here safely? No AZC in our beautiful Albergen!” (Willemsen, 2022).

The question is which citizens will feel negative about the arrival of refugees. We think it might specially be people who already feel discontented about society. Societal discontent can be conceptualized as a global negative feeling about society (Gootjes et al., 2021). It has been found that people who experience societal discontent are more likely to be prejudiced (e.g., have negative thoughts about the outgroup) (Filindra et al., 2022). Indeed, Gootjes et al. (2021) found that societal discontent was related to prejudice towards refugees. In the current research, we want to further study this relationship by focusing on different groups people may be prejudiced about. Moreover, we want to examine the role of socio-economic status. Socio-economic status refers to people’s position on the social economic ladder. That position emerges from a mix of (1) material circumstances, (2) skills, abilities and knowledge and (3), the social network, and the status and power of people in that network (Saegert et al., 2006). There are different ways to conceptualize socio-economic status, for example as self-perceived and objective status. Self-perceived status is about how someone perceived him/herself in society, and objective status is about a person’s income and level of education (Saegert et al., 2006). The aim of the current research is to examine whether one’s perceived or objective social status moderates the relationship between societal discontent and

prejudice towards different groups. Moreover, we want to explore the role of the perceived threat from other groups as this may mediate the relation between societal discontent and prejudice.

### **Societal discontent and its relationship with prejudice**

Many people in Western democracies experience societal discontent (Gootjes et al., 2021). Societal discontent can be defined as the belief that society is moving in the wrong direction. This feeling is not specific, but concerns a global negative feeling about society as a whole. More specifically, this ‘feeling’ can express itself in different ways and can be measured in different ways (Gootjes et al., 2021). In previous studies, societal discontent is measured in terms of different underlying mechanisms of the feeling. By example: overestimating the prevalence of societal problems (Van der Bles et al, 2015), being convinced by the fact that society is in decline (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016), having a low political trust (Van der Meer & Hakverdian, 2016), having a pessimistic view about the direction that one’s country is going (Steenvoorden, 2015), and taking in consideration that leadership is going to break down (Teymoori et al., 2016). These conceptualizations of societal discontent are correlated (Gootjes et al., .2021). Previous research on societal discontent has focused, for example, on the relation between societal discontent and voting for ‘extreme’ political parties, both on the extreme left and the extreme right sides (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015). Research shows that even though extremely right- and left voting concerns different ideological ideas, there is a common denominator: namely populism. Populism refers to a set of ideas, which claims that there is a distinction between the ‘good’ people (the society) and the ‘bad’ people (the elite) (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015).

However, it also has been found that people who experience societal discontent are people who are also more likely to be prejudiced (e.g., have negative thoughts about the

outgroup) (Filindra et al., 2022). Prejudice can be conceptualized as an attitude, which is an evaluation of a group and is often negative (Dovidio et al., 2010).

In the research from Filindra et al. (2022), they conducted research on the possible relationship between prejudice and public trust. They theorized that white Americans' beliefs about racial policies may have been integrated into whites' racial attitudes, resulting in an association between racial prejudice and public trust. They measured this by analyzing eight ANES surveys (1992-2020). The results of this study showed that racial prejudice (measured in terms of anti-Black stereotypes) was a (negative) significant predictor of public trust. In conclusion, this study showed a relationship between societal discontent and prejudice: That is, prejudice predicted less public trust (which can be seen as an indicator of societal discontent) (Van der Meer & Hakverdian, 2016).

However, we are interested in the reversed relationship: Does societal discontent predict prejudice? In the research from Gootjes et al. (2021), they investigated the relationship between societal discontent, intergroup threat, and action toward refugees and the state. They disentangled societal discontent from intergroup threat, related to their relationship with divergent action intentions concerning refugees and the government. They examined this via a correlational design, with a sample drawn from a survey panel of an internet research company. They found that when refugees were perceived as a threat societal discontent predict anti-refugee actions (prejudice).

Prejudice can be about different groups. For example, prejudice against elites or politicians is different from prejudice against migrants or refugees. In this research, we aim to investigate how these prejudices differ from each other by focusing on the groups that people may be prejudiced about. What may play a role with respect to prejudice toward different groups, is one's social status. Is the relationship between societal discontent and prejudice the same for people with a higher status compared to people with a lower status?

### **The relation between societal discontent and prejudice among people with a low social economic status**

With respect to societal discontent and its relationship with prejudice, the question is to what extent this relationship is found among people with a lower social economic status? Foster and Frieden (2017) investigated the socio-economic determinants of Europeans' confidence in government. They found that a person's position in the labor market affected their baseline level of trust in society: in all European countries, citizens with less education and lower skill levels, or even the unemployed, had less trust in government than citizens with more education and higher skill levels. This suggests that people with a lower social economic status are likely to experience discontent.

Given that people from lower social economic status often experience discontent, and this is known to be related to prejudice, the question is why and toward which groups they are prejudiced. Low social status people experience a lot of disadvantages because of their status (lower income, lower education, etc.). Therefore, it may be logical for them to hold the high-status' people (the elite) responsible for their own conditions and the state of the world, because they are controlling their lives. Indeed, Mirowsky and Ross (1983) found that a low socio-economic status was related to mistrust, as well as with a belief in 'external control', which means that important outcomes in one's life are in control of external forces rather than by one's own choice and control. They state that a low income, education, and prestige teaches people that powerful others (people with a higher status) control their lives. Various studies found that this belief is related to social class (Koh, 1973; Farris & Glenn, 1976; Wheaton, 1980). Research from Crawford and Brandt (2020) also stated that with respect to people with a lower socio-economic status, there is evidence that they are prejudiced against the elite, that is people they perceive to have a higher socio-economic status. These kinds of prejudice are mostly receptive and considered an expectation of being discriminated against

by members of majority groups (Johnson & Lecci, 2003). These outcomes could indicate that people with a lower status are likely to be prejudiced toward people with a higher status, and probably even more so when they experience societal discontent.

Given that societal discontent is related to prejudice (Gootjes et al., 2021), we predict that among people with a perceived and objective lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is related to prejudice towards higher socio-economic status people (*hypothesis 1*).

When thinking about people with a lower socio-economic status, it may also be that they feel negative about other groups with a lower status in society, such as refugees. The reason for this may be found in the integrated threat theory by Stephan and Stephan (2017), who argue that the underlying mechanism of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping is 'threat'. They propose that there are two different types of threats that people might feel regarding outgroups: i.e., realistic threat and symbolic threat, (Stephan et al., 2002). Symbolic threat refers to a perceived difference in norms between the ingroup and outgroup. Within this study, we only focus on realistic threat, because this is more related to the threat low status people may feel from refugees.

The realistic threat idea originates from the 'realistic group conflict theory' (Campbell, 1965). It refers to concerns of the ingroup about their existence, power, and well-being, (being threatened by the outgroup). Besides that, it also includes intergroup competition over scarce resources such as jobs and houses (Jackson, 1993; Levine & Campbell, 1972). Furthermore, it also includes threats to social status, welfare (e.g., health threats), and the economic interest of the ingroup (Sherif, 1966; Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Stephan and Stephan (1996) demonstrated realistic threat as one of the most reliable predictors of prejudice. People who have a lower socio-economic status are likely to perceive a realistic threat from other lower



status groups such as refugees as they may be competing for the same jobs and housing, for example, and hence feel more prejudiced towards them (Manstead, 2018).

Based on this reasoning, we assume that among people with a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is also related to prejudice towards other (outgroup) people with a lower status, such as refugees (*hypothesis 2*). Further, we want to explore if this is mediated by the experience of a realistic threat

### **High-status groups and prejudices towards lower-status groups**

The question is whether there is also a similar relationship between societal discontent and prejudice among people with a higher socio-economic status. Quite likely realistic threat is not a concern for them. However, people with a high socio-economic status benefit from a lot of advantages. They may fear losing these privileges. Perhaps especially people who experience societal discontent are the ones who feel threatened about this as they want to maintain and protect their high status. This idea is in line with findings by Jetten et al. (2017), who found that people who were prosperous experienced fear of losing their economic gains in the future in times of economic instability, which was related to collective angst and bitterness towards minorities (Jetten et al., 2017).

Therefore, we want to examine whether the same relationships between discontent and prejudice against outgroups (but in this case prejudice towards people with a lower socio-economic status) are also found in people with high socio-economic status, (*hypothesis 3*). Moreover, we want to explore if this can be explained by the threat of losing their high status.

### **Current study**

In this research, we examined the extent to which people experience societal discontent and were prejudiced against different outgroups, and we related this to their socio-economic status. The research question is: *To what extent does societal discontent predict*

*prejudice towards different (out)groups, and does this relationship depend on socio-economic status?*

We expected that among people who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is related to prejudice towards higher socio-economic status people (*hypothesis 1*). Further, we expected that among who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is also related to prejudice towards other (out)groups with a lower status (*hypothesis 2*). Finally, we expected that among people who perceive they are of a higher socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is related to prejudice towards (out)groups of lower socio-economic status (*hypothesis 3*). We investigated these hypotheses, by means of an online Survey with American participants. Moreover, we examined both the role of objective and subjective socio-economic status, and we explored whether H2 is mediated by realistic threat and H3 by status threat.

## Method

### Participants and design

We used a Monte Carlo Power Analysis to estimate how many participants we need to have power of .8 with correlations of at least .25 to test the indirect effects that we aimed to explore. This resulted in a  $N$  of 234. Given that we want to test this for both high status and low status groups we doubled the number of participants suggesting that we need a  $N$  of 468. In the current study, we recruited a total of 478 American participants, selected within the online panel of Prolific.co". <sup>1</sup>The participants received 1,35 pound for participating. Before the collection of data, the study was preregistered via [https://aspredicted.org/see\\_one.php](https://aspredicted.org/see_one.php). The

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<sup>1</sup> Originally we planned to use Amazon Mechanical Turk. However, during data collection the time to answer the questions was accidentally set too low, causing people to rush through the questionnaire. This resulted in very low quality data. Hence, we decided to run the study again using participants from Prolific.

including criteria were participants who were at least 18 years, and self-identified as a citizen of the United States. The exclusion criteria were participants who failed at least 2 of the 3 control questions ( $N=1$ ), participants who showed response bias ( $N=2$ ), participants who did not complete at least 50% of the items that measure the dependent variable ( $N=6$ ), and finally, participants who finished the questionnaire in less than 2 minutes ( $N=2$ ). This led to the exclusion of 11 participants and resulted in a final sample of 467 participants giving us enough power test our hypotheses.

We used a correlational quantitative design, in which discontent was our predictor, self-perceived and objective status were moderator variables, prejudice (low, high, refugees) were the dependent variables and realistic threat and status threat were the mediator variables.

### **Procedure**

Before we ran the study and collected data, the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences of the university, approved this study. The study was created and conducted via an online questionnaire, with the program Qualtrics. The link to the questionnaire was published in an advertisement on “Prolific”. First, the participants were provided with information about the study and had the possibility to fill in the informed consent form. Via this form, they could agree or not to participate in the study and give us permission to use their data. When the participants disagreed, we asked them to give a reason why they do not want to participate (not mandatory) and thanked them for their time. After the information about the study and the informed consent form, the demographic variables followed. These items consisted of age, gender, nationality, and ethnicity. Next, all measures were taken. Please note that the study is part of a larger project, meaning that also measures were taken for another project. See appendix A for the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they had any comments and debriefed, after which they were thanked for their participation.

## Measures

### *Objective socio-economic status*

We measured objective socio-economic status via 3 multiple-choice questions. First, participants had to indicate their (1) highest educational level, there were 11 levels, varying from (lowest; “no diploma or degree or certificate/I did not finish any degree” to highest; “doctorate”);  $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ . After that, participants indicated their (2) current monthly level of income, there were 7 levels, varying from from (lowest; “<\$500”, to highest; “>\$4000”);  $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ . Next, participants selected the best description of (3) what they have been doing for the last 4 weeks, varying from (“In paid work” to “Other (please specify)”; 70 % in paid work, 2,8 percent in education, 8,6 percent unemployed, 3,2 percent permanently sick or disabled, 6,4 percent retired, 6,4 percent doing housework, looking after children or other persons, 2,6 percent other. We did not use this variable for the analyses. We standardized the income and education level and combined these two into one scale:  $M = -.0012$ ,  $SD = .84$ .  $r = .37$ .

### *Subjective socio-economic status*

For measuring subjective socio-economic status, we created a scale based on the “MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status” (Goodman et al., 2001). This ladder represented American society with respect to people’s socio-economic backgrounds. There was an image on display in which the top of the ladder represented “the people that have the most money, the highest degree of schooling, the best jobs, and the most respect”, and the bottom of the ladder represented “the people who have the least money, little or no education, no jobs or jobs that no one wants and the least respect”. The participants had to answer three questions about this. First, they had to indicate their own position on the ladder. Next, they were asked how they perceive the position of their family on the ladder. And finally, they were asked what they think their position on the ladder will be in 5 years. The response

options range from (1; “*Extremely low position on the ladder*”) to (10; “*Extremely high position on the ladder*”); we combined the answers to the three questions into one scale:  $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , Cronbach’s alpha = .87.

### ***Societal discontent***

Societal discontent was measured via the “Negative emotions about society” scale by Gootjes et al., (2021). This is a 7-point Likert scale, consisting of 4 items. The answer options varied from (1; *absolutely disagree* to 7; *absolutely agree*). Example items are “I feel shocked about the way things are going in society” and “I am frustrated because society is not as it should be.”; we combined this into one scale:  $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ , Cronbach’s alpha = .88.

### ***Realistic threat***

Our measure of realistic threat, was inspired by ideas concerning “realistic threat” (Stephan et al., 2002). We adapted the scale into our research and created 3 items. The participants had to think about other groups in society and how they were related to people like them. They had to answer 3 statements with a 7-point Likert scale, varying from (1; *absolutely disagree*, to 7; *absolutely agree*). The items are: “I fear that other groups in society will take houses that people like me need”, “I am sure that groups in society can have their share without threatening people like me”, and “I fear that other groups in society will take jobs that people like me need”. Due to low reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .637$ ), we decided to remove the following item: (“I am sure that groups in society can have their share without threatening people like me”). After deleting of this item the scale had a high reliability;  $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$  (The items were combined into a scale after recoding the positively framed items, meaning that a higher score means more realistic threat).

### ***Status threat***

In order to measure status threat we created a scale based on ideas by Bendersky and Hays (2012). Our scale consisted of 4 items. Example items are: “People like me are losing

their power in the United States” and “People like me are likely to enact policies in line with their core values”; The items were combined into a scale after recoding the two positively framed items, meaning that a higher score means more status threat:  $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ .

### ***Prejudice***

In order to measure prejudice against different groups in society, we asked participants how they feel about 6 different groups in society (i.e., poor, highly educated, refugees, rich, low educated, people in power) by means of 7-points Likert scales: 1; *absolutely negative*, 7; *absolutely positive*. Since we were interested in prejudice against low SES groups and high SES groups, we created two scales. We used two lower SES groups in society (i.e. lower educated and poor people);  $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ . Next, we used two higher SES groups in society (people in power, and rich people);  $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ . We used two groups instead of three groups after looking at the factor analysis. The item regarding higher educated people did not load on the same factor as the other high SES groups, hence we did not include it. Prejudice against refugees was measured with one item;  $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ . All the prejudice items were recoded, such that higher score on prejudice means people feel more negative about the group.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive statistics**

Table 1 provides an overview of correlations between all our measures. Most relations were as expected. For example, the relation between self-perceived SES and societal discontent was negative and significant, but small ( $r = -.17$ ), also the relation between objective SES and societal discontent was negative and significant, but small ( $r = -.18$ ). Further, the relation between self-perceived SES and prejudice towards high-status people was negative, significant and medium ( $r = -.30$ ), for objective SES, this relation was also

negative and significant, but small ( $r = -.14$ ). In addition, the relation between self-perceived SES and prejudice towards low-status people was positive and significant, but small ( $r = .12$ ). Also, self-perceived SES was significantly related to realistic threat ( $r = -.21$ ), and this relation was negative and small.

However, we also found relations not as expected. For example, self-perceived SES was significantly related to status threat ( $r = -.40$ ), and this relation was negative and medium. Also, the relation between objective SES and realistic threat was positive and significant, and medium ( $r = .33$ ). Furthermore, the relation between objective SES and status threat was negative and significant ( $r = -.27$ ). In addition, societal discontent was significantly related to less prejudice towards refugees ( $r = -.19$ ), and this relation was negative and small. Finally, the findings for self-perceived SES and objective SES were mainly similar, with the exception of prejudice towards low-status groups, towards refugees and realistic threat (see table 1).

**Table 1**<sup>2</sup>

*Inter correlations of Study Variables*

	1.Self-perceived SES	2.Objective SES	3.Societal discontent	4.Prejudice high status	5.Prejudice low status	6.Prejudice refugees	7.Realistic threat	8.Status threat
1.Self-perceived SES	-	.53**	-.17**	-.30**	.12**	.08	-.31**	-.40**
2.Objective SES		-	-.18**	-.14**	.03	-.06	.33**	-.27**
3.Societal discontent			-	.27**	-.11*	-.19**	.17**	.31**

<sup>2</sup> We also measured prejudice towards murderers. However, this was intended as a 'control question'. Therefore, we decided to not include this in the analysis.

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4.Prejudice high status	-	.08	-.04	.27**	.34**
5.Prejudice low status		-	.71**	.04	.07
6.Prejudice refugees			-	.10*	.07
7.Realistic threat				-	.46**
8.Status threat					-

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### Main Analysis

In order to test our hypotheses, we used the SPSS macro-PROCESS model 1 and model 8 for moderation and moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017). All variables that define products were mean centered in SPSS. We estimated simple main effects (e.g., the relation between discontent and prejudice) at -1SD (lower SES), the mean level of SES, and +1SD (higher SES).

**Testing Hypothesis 1:** With respect to *prejudice towards higher SES groups*, we expected that among people who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent was related to prejudice towards higher socio-economic status people (*Hypothesis 1*). Within Process, we tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis) in which the predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards high SES people, and the moderator was self-perceived SES.

The overall model was significant.  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 23.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of discontent on prejudice ( $B = .22$ ,  $t = 4.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that the more discontent people experienced, the more negative they thought about higher-status groups. There was also a significant main effect of self-perceived SES on

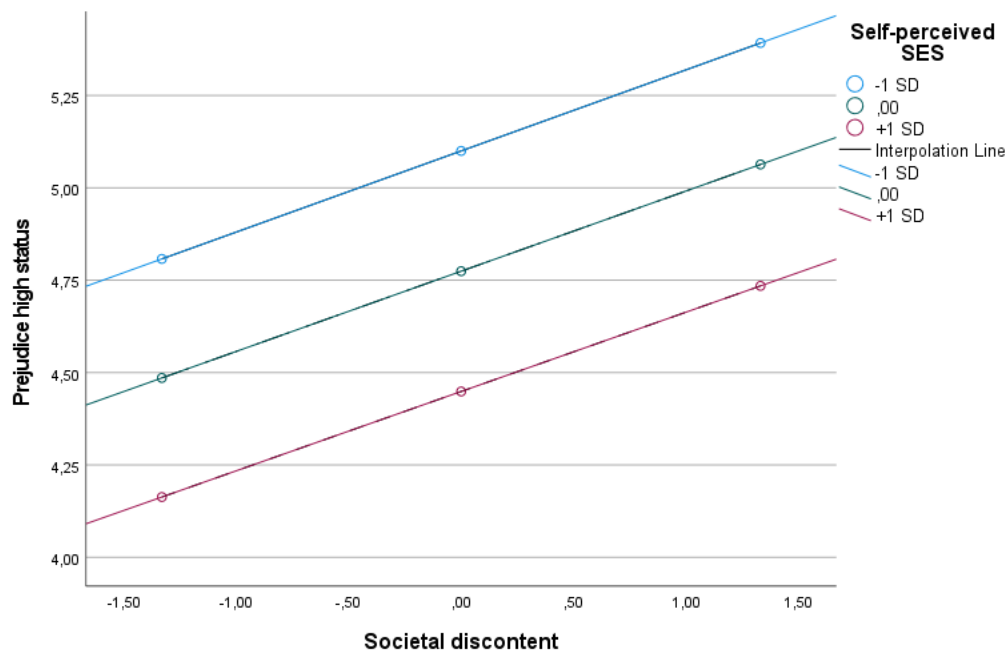


prejudice ( $B = -.20$ ,  $t = -5.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that a higher SES predicted less prejudice towards higher-status groups. There was no significant interaction effect ( $B = -.00$ ,  $t = -.06$ ,  $p = .95$ ).

To test hypothesis 1, we examined the main effects at -1SD (i.e., lower socio-economic status). In line with hypothesis 1, the simple effect at -1SD was significant ( $B = .22$ , LLCI = .09, ULCI = .35), meaning that for the people with a lower self-perceived SES (-1SD), the experience of societal discontent predicted more prejudice towards high-status groups. However, for those with higher SES (+1SD), there was also a significant simple main effect ( $B = .21$ , LLCI = .11, ULCI = .32), meaning that for the people with a higher perceived socio-economic status (+1SD), the experience of societal discontent also predicted more prejudice towards higher SES groups. In Figure 1, these effects are visualized. Although among high self-perceived SES participants societal discontent also predicts more prejudice towards people with a higher SES, they do think more positively about higher SES groups in general, compared to people with a lower self-perceived SES. To conclude, hypothesis 1 is supported. However, this effect was also found for people who perceive they have a higher SES: although they are in general somewhat more positive about higher status groups, if they experience more societal discontent, they are also more negative about higher SES groups.

### **Figure 1**

*Prejudice towards higher SES groups as a function of societal discontent and self-perceived socio-economic status*



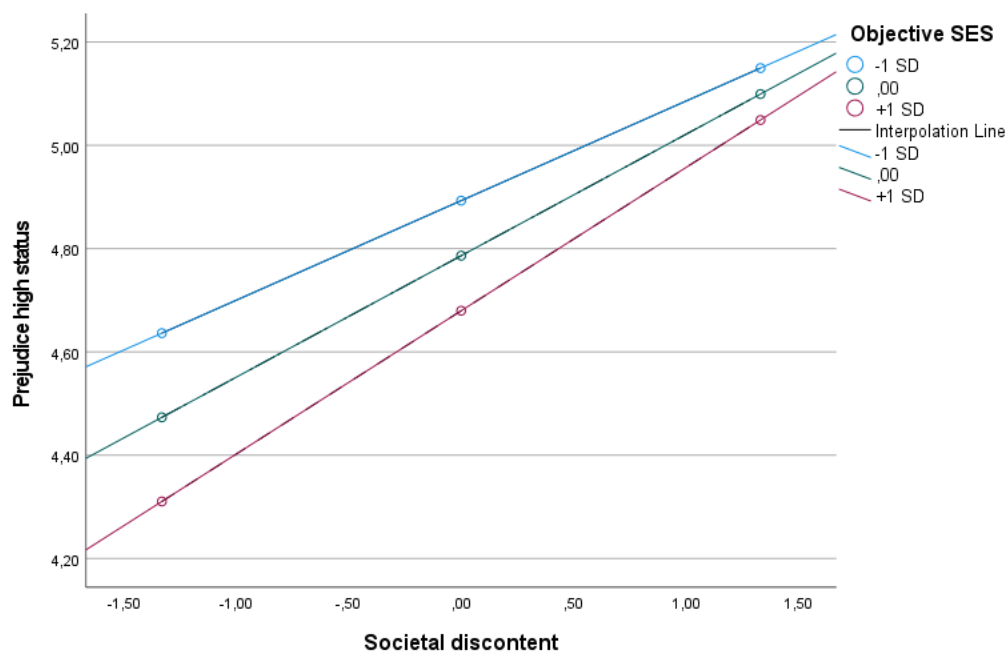
**Testing hypothesis 1 for objective SES:** Regarding H1, we also wanted to investigate the same relationship for objective socio-economic status. We used a standardized mean of education and income for this variable. Within Process, we tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis), with objective socio-economic status as moderator. The overall model was significant.  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 13.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . We found that societal discontent predicted more prejudice towards higher-status people ( $B = .24$ ,  $t = 5.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We also found that a higher objective socio-economic status predicted less prejudice towards people with a higher status. However, this relationship was not significant ( $B = -.13$ ,  $t = -1.80$ ,  $p = .07$ ). The interaction was not significant ( $B = .05$ ,  $t = 1.03$ ,  $p = .31$ ).

To explore hypothesis 1 with objective SES, we examined the effect at -1SD (i.e., lower socio-economic status). In line with hypothesis 1, the simple effect at -1SD was significant ( $B = .19$ , LLCI = .06, ULCI = .32), meaning that for the people with a lower objective SES (-1SD), the experience of societal discontent predicted more prejudice towards high status groups. However, for those with higher SES (+1SD), there was also a significant simple main effect ( $B = .28$ , LLCI = .17, ULCI = .39), meaning that for people with a higher

objective SES (+1SD), the experience of societal discontent also predicted more prejudice towards higher SES groups. In figure 2, these effects are visualized. To conclude, H1 related to objective socio-economic status is supported. However, again the people with a higher status (+1SD) are also more prejudiced when they experience more discontent.

**Figure 2**

*Prejudice towards high-status people as a function of societal discontent and objective socio-economic status*



**Testing Hypothesis 2:** We expected that among people with a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent is also related to prejudice towards other (outgroup) people with lower status (in this case refugees; *hypothesis 2*), and we explored whether this is mediated by realistic threat. We examined model 1 to test H2a a basic moderation analysis, within Process initially, and model 8; a moderated mediation analysis to test H2b.

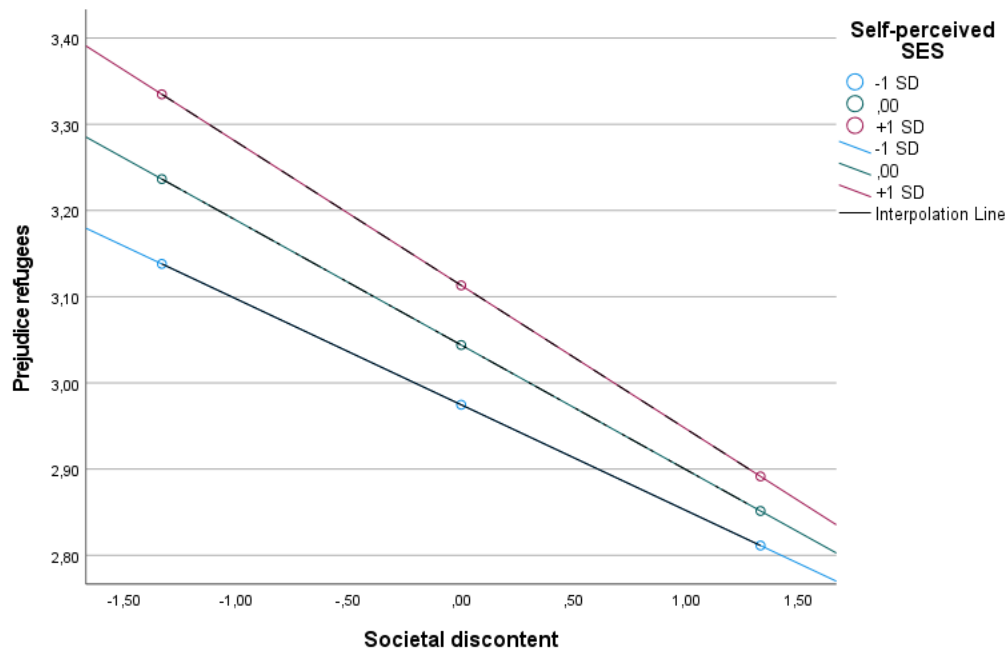
**Testing hypothesis 2 for self-perceived SES:** With respect to *prejudice towards refugees*, we expected that among people who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent was related towards refugees. Within Process, we

tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis) in which the predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards refugees, and the moderator was self-perceived SES. The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 3.74$ ,  $p = .01$ . There was a significant main effect of discontent on prejudice towards refugees ( $B = -.14$ ,  $t = -2.77$ ,  $p = .01$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicts *less* prejudice towards refugees (not as expected). The main effect of self-perceived SES on prejudice towards refugees was not significant ( $B = .04$ ,  $t = 1.02$ ,  $p = .31$ ). The interaction effect was also not significant ( $B = -.01$ ,  $t = -.44$ ,  $p = .66$ ).

To test hypothesis 2, we examined the main effects at -1SD (i.e., lower socio-economic status). Not in line with hypothesis 2, the simple effect at -1SD was not significant ( $B = -.12$ , LLCI =  $-.28$ , ULCI =  $.03$ ), meaning that for people with a lower self-perceived SES (-1SD), the experience of societal discontent *not* predicted prejudice towards refugees. However, for those with higher SES (+1SD), there was a significant main effect ( $B = -.17$ , LLCI =  $-.29$ , ULCI =  $-.04$ ) meaning that for people with a higher self-perceived SES (+1SD), the experience of societal discontent predicted *less* prejudice towards refugees. In figure 3, these effects are visualized. To conclude, hypothesis 2a with respect to self-perceived SES is not supported.

### Figure 3

*Prejudice towards refugees as a function of societal discontent and self-perceived socio-economic status*



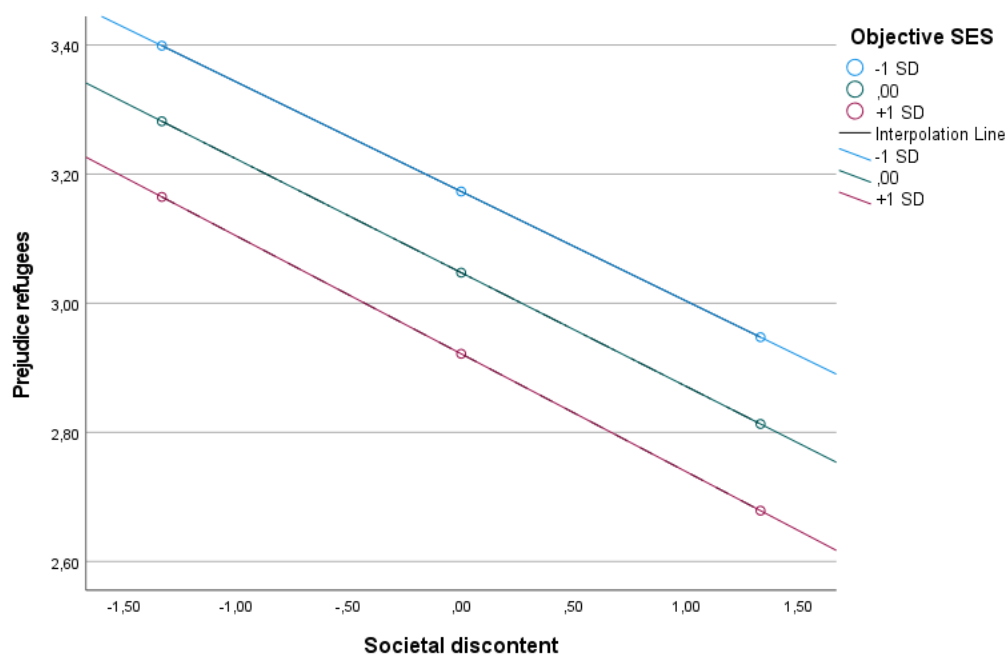
**Testing hypothesis 2 for objective SES:** With respect to *prejudice towards refugees*, we also wanted to investigate if for people with a lower objective SES, the experience of societal discontent was also related to prejudice towards refugees. Within process, we tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis) in which the predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards refugees, and the moderator was objective SES. The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(3, 46) = 4.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of discontent on prejudice towards refugees, but not in line with our expectations ( $B = -.18$ ,  $t = -3.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that discontent predicted *less* prejudice towards refugees. However, the main effect of objective status on prejudice towards refugees was not significant ( $B = -.15$ ,  $t = -1.84$ ,  $p = .07$ ), although objective status tended to predict less prejudice towards refugees.

To test hypothesis 2 related to objective SES, we examined the main effects at -1SD (i.e., lower socio-economic status). The simple effect at -1SD was significant ( $B = -.17$ , LLCI =  $-.32$ , ULCI =  $-.02$ ), meaning that for people with a lower objective SES (-1SD), the experience of societal discontent predicted *less* prejudice towards refugees. However, we

expected that societal discontent predicted *more* prejudice towards refugees, therefore, hypothesis 2 is not supported. Interestingly, also for those with higher SES (+1SD), there was a significant main effect ( $B = -.18$ , LLCI =  $-.31$ , ULCI =  $-.06$ ), meaning that for people with a higher objective SES, the experience of societal discontent also predicted *less* prejudice toward refugees. In figure 4, these effects are visualized. To conclude, hypothesis 2 is not supported. Interestingly, for people with a lower SES and a higher SES, the experience of societal discontent did predict less prejudice towards refugees.

**Figure 4**

*Prejudice towards refugees as a function of societal discontent and objective socio-economic status*

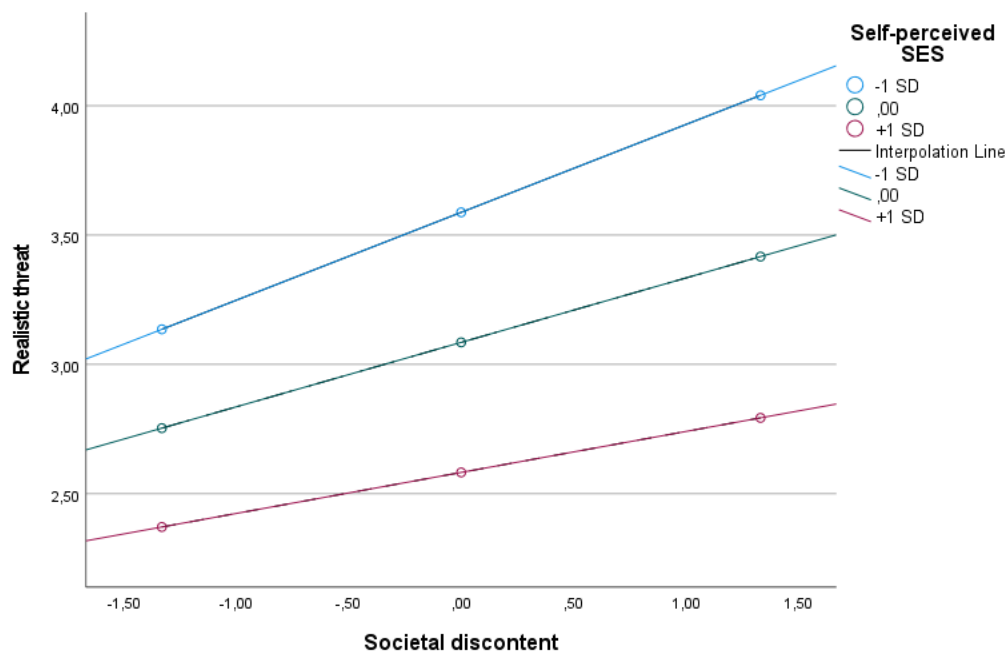


**Exploring the mediational role of realistic threat as a function of self-perceived SES.** With respect to *prejudice towards refugees*, we explored whether among people who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent and prejudice towards refugees is mediated by realistic threat. Within Process, we tested model 8 (moderated mediation analysis) in which predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards refugees, the moderator was self-perceived SES and the mediator

was realistic threat. The overall model (outcome variable; realistic threat) was significant.  $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(3,463) = 21.57$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of discontent on realistic threat ( $B = .25$ ,  $t = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicted realistic threat. Furthermore, there was also a significant main effect of self-perceived socio-economic status on realistic threat ( $B = -.31$ ,  $t = -6.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that a higher self-perceived socio-economic status predicts *less* realistic threat. The interaction effect was not significant ( $B = -.05$ ,  $t = -1.56$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Further, the simple effect for lower status people ( $-1SD$ ), was significant ( $B = .34$ , LLCI = .15, ULCI = .53), meaning that more discontent predicted more threat. The simple effect for higher status people ( $+1SD$ ), was also significant but somewhat smaller ( $B = .16$ , LLCI = .01, ULCI = .31).

### Figure 5

*Realistic threat as a function of societal discontent and self-perceived SES*



The model with respect to prejudice towards refugees was also significant.  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(3,462) = 4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of societal discontent ( $B = -.17$ ,  $t = -3.23$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicted *less*

prejudice towards refugees. There was also a significant main effect of realistic threat ( $B = .10, t = 2.70, p = .01$ ), meaning that realistic threat predicted more prejudice towards refugees. The main effect of self-perceived SES was not significant ( $B = .07, t = 1.73, p = .09$ ). The interaction effect was also not significant ( $B = -.01, t = -.25, p = .80$ )

To explore the indirect effects, we examined the indirect main effects at -1SD (i.e., lower socio-economic status). The simple effect at -1SD was significant ( $B = .04, LLCI = .01, ULCI = .07$ ), meaning that for the people with a lower perceived SESs (-1SD), societal discontent indirectly predicted *more* prejudice towards refugees via realistic threat. Furthermore, for those with a higher SES (+1SD), the simple effect was also significant ( $B = .02, LLCI = .00, ULCI = .04$ ), meaning that for people with a higher self-perceived SES, societal discontent also predicts prejudice towards refugees indirectly via realistic threat. To conclude, even though for people who perceive they are of a lower socio-economic status societal discontent predicts less prejudice towards refugees, if discontent increases realistic threat, it predicts more prejudice towards refugees. Interestingly, this was also found in case of higher self-perceived SES.

#### **Exploring the mediational role of realistic threat as a function of objective SES:**

With respect to *prejudice towards refugees*, we explored whether among people who have a lower objective socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent and prejudice towards refugees is mediated by realistic threat. Within Process, we tested model 8 (moderated mediation analysis) in which predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards refugees, the moderator was objective SES and the mediator was realistic threat. The overall model (outcome variable; realistic threat) was significant,  $R^2 = .13, F(3,463) = 22.10, p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of societal discontent on realistic threat ( $B = .23, t = 3.58, p < .001$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicts realistic threat. There was also a significant main effect of objective status on realistic



threat ( $B = -.64, t = -6.48, p < .001$ ), meaning that objective status predicts *less* realistic threat. The interaction was not significant ( $B = -.04, t = -.60, p = .55$ ). Further, the simple effect for lower status people ( $-1SD$ ), was significant ( $B = .26, LLCI = .08, ULCI = .44$ ), meaning that more discontent predicted more threat. The simple effect for higher status people ( $+1SD$ ) was also significant ( $B = .19, LLCI = .04, ULCI = .34$ ).

The model with respect to prejudice towards refugees was also significant.  $R^2 = .04, F(4, 462) = 4.28, p = .002$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of discontent ( $B = -.19, t = -3.66, p < .001$ ), meaning that discontent predicted *less* prejudice towards refugees. The main effect of realistic threat was not significant ( $B = -.07, t = 1.89, p = .06$ ). The main effect of objective status was also not significant ( $B = -.10, t = -1.23, p = .22$ ). Finally, the interaction effect was also not significant ( $B = -.004, t = -.08, p = .93$ ).

To explore the indirect effects, we examined the indirect main effects at  $-1SD$  (i.e., lower objective socio-economic status). The simple effect at  $-1SD$  was not significant ( $B = .02, LLCI = -.00, ULCI = .05$ ), meaning that for the people with a lower objective SES ( $-1SD$ ), discontent did not predict prejudice towards refugees indirectly through realistic threat. Neither was it for people with a higher objective status ( $+1SD$ ) ( $B = .01, LLCI = -.00, ULCI = .04$ ). To conclude, realistic threat did not mediate the relation between discontent and prejudice towards refugees.<sup>3</sup>

**Testing hypothesis 3.** With respect to *prejudice towards lower SES groups*, we expected that among people who perceive they are of a higher socio-economic status the experience of societal discontent was related to prejudice towards lower socio-economic status people (not refugees), and we explored whether this could be explained by the threat of

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<sup>3</sup> The figure which illustrates realistic threat as a function of societal discontent and objective SES is almost identical to that of "self-perceived SES" (figure 5). Therefore, we decided to only add figure 5 to this section.

losing their high status. We examined model 1 to test  $H_a$  a basic moderation analysis, within Process initially, and model 8; a moderated mediation analysis to explore mediation.

**Testing hypothesis 3 for self-perceived SES:** With respect to *prejudice towards lower SES people*, we expected that among people who perceive they are of a higher socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent was related towards prejudice towards lower SES people. Within Process, we tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis) in which the predictor  $X$  was discontent, the dependent variable  $Y$  was prejudice towards lower SES people, and the moderator was self-perceived SES.

The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 3.65$ ,  $p = .01$ . Furthermore, societal discontent tended to predict less prejudice towards lower SES people, however, this relationship was not significant. ( $B = -.08$ ,  $t = -1.86$ ,  $p = .06$ ). However, there was a significant main effect of self-perceived SES on prejudice towards lower SES people ( $B = .07$ ,  $t = 2.21$ ,  $p = .03$ ), meaning that a higher status predicted more prejudice towards low status people. There was no significant interaction effect ( $B = -.01$ ,  $t = -.44$ ,  $p = .66$ ).

To test hypothesis 3, we examined the main effect at +1SD (i.e., higher socio-economic status). Not in line with hypothesis 3a, the simple effect at +1SD was not significant ( $B = -.10$ , LLCI =  $-.20$ , ULCI =  $.01$ ), meaning that for people with a higher self-perceived socio-economic status (+1SD), the experience of societal discontent did not predict more prejudice towards people with a lower status. For people with a lower status (-1SD), the simple effect was also not significant ( $B = -.06$ , LLCI =  $-.19$ , ULCI =  $.07$ ). To conclude, hypothesis 3 regarding self-perceived socio-economic status is not supported.

**Testing hypothesis 3 for objective SES:** We also wanted to investigate hypothesis 3 for objective status. Within process, we tested model 1 (basic moderation analysis) in which the predictor  $X$  was discontent, the dependent variable  $Y$  was prejudice towards lower SES people, and the moderator was objective SES.

The overall model was not significant.  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .11$ .

Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of societal discontent on prejudice towards lower status people ( $B = -.10$ ,  $t = -2.28$ ,  $p = .02$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicted *less* prejudice towards lower status people. There was no significant main effect of objective status on prejudice towards lower status people ( $B = .03$ ,  $t = .47$ ,  $p = .64$ ). There was also no significant interaction effect ( $B = .01$ ,  $t = .18$ ,  $p = .85$ ).

To test hypothesis 3, we examined the main effect at +1SD (i.e., higher socio-economic status). Not in line with our hypothesis, this effect was not significant ( $B = -.09$ , LLCI =  $-.19$ , ULCI =  $.01$ ). For people with a lower status (-1SD), the effect was also not significant ( $B = -.10$ , LLCI =  $-.23$ , ULCI =  $.02$ ). To conclude, hypothesis 3 regarding objective socio-economic status is not supported.<sup>4</sup>

**Exploring the mediational role of status threat as a function of self-perceived SES:** With respect to *prejudice towards lower-status people*, we explored whether among people who have a higher self-perceived socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent and prejudice towards low status people is mediated by status threat. Within Process, we tested model 8 (moderated mediation analysis) in which predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards low status people, the moderator was self-perceived SES and the mediator was status threat. The overall model (outcome variable; status threat) was significant,  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(3, 463) = 43.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of societal discontent on status threat ( $B = .24$ ,  $t = 5.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicted more status threat. Moreover, there was also a significant main effect of self-perceived SES on status threat ( $B = -.29$ ,  $t = -8.59$ ,  $p$

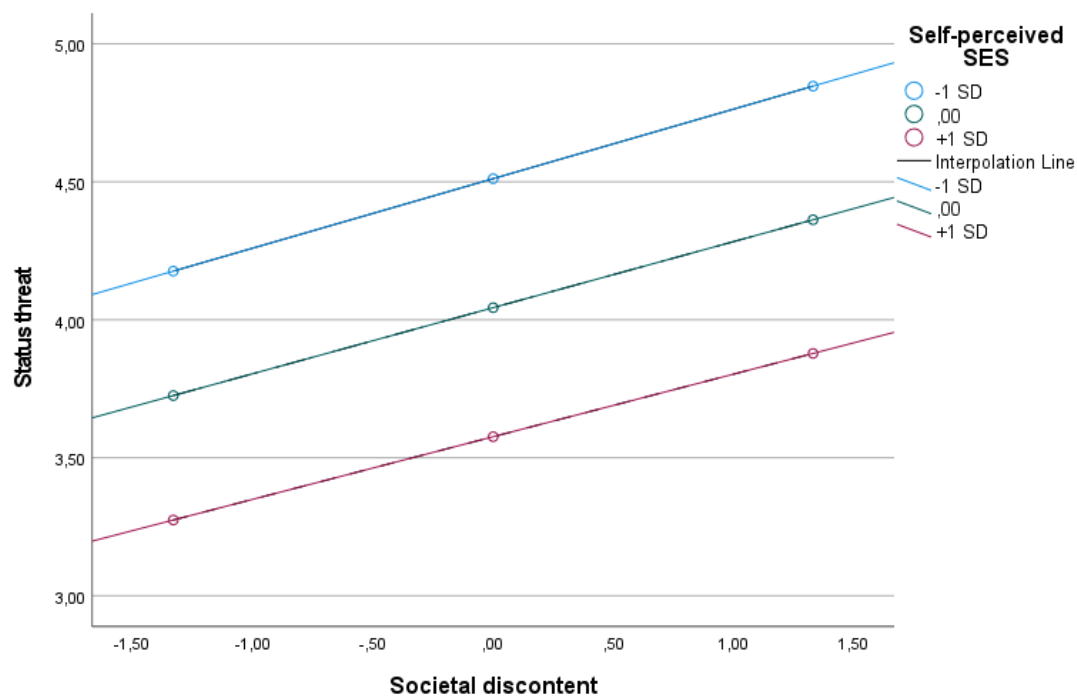
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<sup>4</sup> Both relationships (prejudice low status as a function of societal discontent and self-perceived and objective SES) are not significant. Therefore, we have not added figures for these relationships.

<.001), meaning that self-perceived SES predicted less status threat. The interaction effect was not significant ( $B = -.01$ ,  $t = -.31$ ,  $p = .76$ ). Further, the simple effect for higher status people (+1SD), was significant ( $B = .23$ , LLCI = .13, ULCI = .33), meaning that for people with a higher self-perceived SES, societal discontent predicted status threat. However, for people with a lower self-perceived status (-1SD), the effect was also significant ( $B = .23$ , LLCI = .13, ULCI = .38).

**Figure 6**

*Status threat as a function of societal discontent and self-perceived SES*



The model with respect to prejudice towards low-status groups was also significant,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(4, 462) = 6.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was also a significant main effect of societal discontent ( $B = -.12$ ,  $t = -2.75$ ,  $p = .01$ ), meaning that discontent predicted less prejudice towards low-status people. The main effect of status threat was also significant ( $B = .17$ ,  $t = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that status threat predicted more prejudice towards low-status people. Finally, the main effect of self-perceived SES was also significant ( $B = .12$ ,  $t = 3.43$ ,  $p$

<.001), meaning that self-perceived SES predicted more prejudice towards low status people.

The interaction effect was not significant ( $B = -.01, t = -.39, p = .69$ ).

To explore the indirect effects, we examined the indirect main effect at + 1SD (i.e., higher self-perceived socio-economic status) and - 1SD. In line with our hypothesis, the simple effect at +1SD was significant ( $B = .04, LLCI = .01, ULCI = .07$ ), meaning that for the people with a higher self-perceived SES (+1SD), discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards lower status people via more status threat. However, the simple effect at - 1SD was also significant ( $B = .04, LLCI = .01, ULCI = .08$ ), meaning that for people with a lower perceived SESs (-1SD), discontent also indirectly predicted more prejudice towards lower status people via more status threat.

In conclusion, even though for people who perceive they are of higher socio-economic status societal discontent predicts less prejudice towards low SES people, if discontent increases status threat, it predicts more prejudice towards them. Interestingly, this is also found in case of lower self-perceived SES.

#### **Exploring the mediational role of status threat as a function of objective SES:**

With respect to *prejudice towards lower-status people*, we explored whether among people who have a higher objective socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent and prejudice towards low status people is mediated by status threat. Within Process, we tested model 8 (moderated mediation analysis) in which predictor X was discontent, the dependent variable Y was prejudice towards low status people, the moderator was objective SES and the mediator was status threat. The overall model (outcome variable; status threat) was significant,  $R^2 = .15, F(3, 463) = 26.89, p < .001$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of societal discontent on status threat ( $B = .26, t = 5.84, p < .001$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicted more status threat. There was also a significant main effect of objective status on status threat ( $B = -.37, t = -5.40, p < .001$ ), meaning that objective status predicted

less status threat. The interaction effect was not significant ( $B = -.004$ ,  $t = -10$ ,  $p = .92$ ).

Further, the simple effect for a higher objective status (+1SD), was significant ( $B = .25$ , LLCI = .15, ULCI = .36), meaning that more discontent predicted more status threat. However, for people with a lower objective status (-1SD), the simple effect was also significant ( $B = .26$ , LLCI = .13, ULCI = .39), meaning that more discontent also predicted more status threat.<sup>5</sup>

The model with respect to prejudice towards low-status people was also significant,  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(4,462) = 3.40$ ,  $p = .01$ . Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of discontent on prejudice towards lower-status people ( $B = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.92$ ,  $p = .003$ ), meaning that societal discontent predicts *less* prejudice towards lower status people. The main effect of status threat was also significant ( $B = .12$ ,  $t = 2.72$ ,  $p = .01$ ), meaning that status threat predicted more prejudice towards lower-status people. However, the main effect of objective status was not significant ( $B = .08$ ,  $t = 1.12$ ,  $p = .26$ ), the interaction effect was also not significant ( $B = .01$ ,  $t = .20$ ,  $p = .84$ ),

To explore the indirect effects, we examined the indirect main effects at + 1SD (i.e., higher objective socio-economic status). In line with our hypothesis, the simple effect at +1SD was significant ( $B = .03$ , LLCI = .01, ULCI = .06), meaning that for the people with a higher objective SESs (+1SD), societal discontent predicted status threat and prejudice towards lower status people. However, for those with a lower SES (-1SD), there was also a significant simple main effect ( $B = .03$ , LLCI = .01, ULCI = .06), meaning that for people with a lower objective SESs (-1SD), societal discontent also predicted status threat and prejudice towards lower status people. To conclude, status threat mediated the relation

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<sup>5</sup> The figure which illustrates status threat as a function of societal discontent and objective SES is almost identical to that of "self-perceived SES" (Figure 6). Therefore, we decided to add only Figure 6 to this section.

between discontent and prejudice towards low-status people. However, interestingly, for people with a lower status ( $-1SD$ ), status threat also mediated the relation between discontent and prejudice towards low-status people.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate to what extent societal discontent predicted prejudice towards other (out)groups, and if this relationship depends on socio-economic status. In line with hypothesis 1, we found that among people who have a relatively lower socio-economic status (both self-perceived and objective), the experience of societal discontent predicted prejudice towards higher socio-economic status people. However, this effect was also found for people with a relatively higher socio-economic status (self-perceived and objective), although they were in general somewhat more positive about higher-status groups.

Further, according to Hypothesis 2, for people with a lower socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent should be related to more prejudice towards refugees (a low-status group that they do not belong to). We found no support for this hypothesis as for people with a lower self-perceived status societal discontent did not predict prejudice towards refugees. When we looked at objective SES, people with a lower SES actually showed *less* prejudice towards refugees. Moreover, for people with a higher self-perceived or objective SES, this was also found. However, we did find that for people with a lower self-perceived SES (but not for objective SES) that societal discontent indirectly predicted *more* prejudice towards refugees via increased realistic threat. This suggests some support for Hypothesis 2, but only indirectly through increased realistic threat. Interestingly, this was also found for people with a higher self-perceived SES.

Further, according to Hypothesis 3, for people with a higher socio-economic status, the experience of societal discontent should be related to more prejudice towards low-status

people. We found no support for this hypothesis as for people with a higher self-perceived and objective socio-economic status societal discontent did not predict more prejudice towards low-status people. However, we did find that for people with a higher self-perceived and objective SES, that societal discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards low-status people via increased status threat. This suggests some support for Hypothesis 3, but only indirectly through increased status threat. Interestingly, this effect was also found for people with a relatively lower self-perceived and objective SES. Although it should be noted that overall people with a relatively higher SES were more negative about lower SES groups than people with a relatively lower SES.

To summarize, societal discontent predicted *more* prejudice towards higher-status people for both low and high-status people. Societal discontent predicted *less* instead of more prejudice towards refugees. This was the case for both low and high-status people (except for people with a lower self-perceived SES). However, for people with a low self-perceived SES, societal discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards refugees via increased realistic threat. Finally, societal discontent did not predict prejudice towards lower SES people for higher SES people (self-perceived and objective), but discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards low-status people via increased status threat.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

Our research obtained interesting findings that, in some cases, replicated, extended, but also contradicted prior research.

#### ***Main effects***

First, consistent with previous research, we found a relation between societal discontent and prejudice, as people who feel more discontent about society feel more negative about higher-status groups. This is in line with earlier research, that found that people who



experience discontent are more likely to be prejudiced against an outgroup (Filindra et al., 2020).

However, we also found contradicting evidence. Not in all cases societal discontent predicted more prejudice, because discontent actually related to less prejudice against refugees. We also found an unexpected relation between societal discontent and prejudice, as people who feel more discontent about society felt less negative about lower-status groups. These main effects were contradicting the research from Filindra et al. (2020). A possible explanation for these contradicting effects could be the political orientation of the participants as our sample may have contained more left-oriented participants, who may actually feel less prejudice towards other lower-status groups in society when they experience societal discontent. Future research should take political orientation into account.

Also consistent with previous research, we found a relation between socio-economic status and prejudice, as people who had a relatively lower socio-economic status feel more negative about higher status groups. This is in line with earlier research that found that there is evidence that people with lower socio-economic status are prejudiced against the elite (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Johnson & Lecci, 2002). Also consistent with previous research, we found another relation between socio-economic status and prejudice, as people who had a higher self-perceived status, feel more negative about lower status people. This is line with earlier research that found that there is evidence that people with a higher socio-economic status are prejudiced against low-status people (Jetten et al., 2017). However, for people with a higher objective status, this effect was not found. A possible explanation could be that there is a difference in meaning between objective and self-perceived status. Contradicting to earlier research, we found no relation between socio-economic status and prejudice towards refugees, as a lower socio-economic status did not predict prejudice towards refugees (although objective status tended to predict less prejudice toward refugees, however, this

effect was not significant). This is not in line with earlier research that found that people with a lower status are more likely to perceive a realistic threat and hence feel more prejudiced towards refugees (Manstead, 2018). A possible explanation could again be the political orientation of the participants.

Again, consistent with previous research, we found a relation between societal discontent and realistic threat, as people who experienced societal discontent experienced more realistic threat. This is in line with earlier research that found a relation between societal discontent and threat (Gootjes et al., 2021). We also found a main effect of discontent on status threat, meaning that discontent predicted more status threat. This is also in line with research from Jetten et al. (2017), who stated that people experienced fear of losing their economic gains in times of economic instability, which could be an indicator of societal discontent.

Also consistent with previous research, we found a relation between socio-economic status and realistic threat, as a higher self-perceived and objective socio-economic status predicted less realistic threat. This is in line with Manstead (2018), which stated that people who had a lower socio-economic status were likely to perceive a realistic threat. However, we also found contradicting effects, as a higher self-perceived and objective SES predicted less status threat. This is not in line with research from Jetten et al., (2017), which stated that prosperous people experienced fear of losing their economic gains. A possible explanation could be that our sample not contained ‘real’ people with a high status, by which they did not feel a threat of losing their high status.

### *Indirect effects*

Consistent with earlier research, we found a relation between socio-economic status, prejudice against refugees and realistic threat. This in line with earlier research, which stated that the underlying reason behind prejudice is ‘threat’ (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). Also, their

earlier research found that one of the most reliable predictors of prejudice is a realistic threat (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). The research from Manstead (2018) found that this relationship between realistic threat and prejudice has to do with competing for the same jobs and houses. We indeed found that people with a lower perceived SES were more prejudiced against refugees when faced with a realistic threat.

Further, our findings regarding realistic threat partly extended the research from Gootjes et al., (2021), since we found an indirect relation between societal discontent and prejudice via realistic threat. Gootjes et al. (2021) found that people who took action against refugees, did so either because of a perceived threat from refugees or because they were dissatisfied with society as a whole: only when there was a perceived threat from refugees did discontent predict anti-refugee actions. Our findings did not examine action but *prejudice* against refugees, and showed that societal discontent indirectly predicted more prejudice towards refugees via increased realistic threat.

With respect to status threat, we replicated previous findings. The study from Jetten (2017) found that wealthy people experienced fear of losing their economic gains in the future, which was fed by discontent and bitterness towards minorities. Our findings also found that discontent predicted prejudice towards lower-status people indirectly through status threat.

### ***SES as moderation***

With respect to the socio-economic status, we did not find any moderation effects. First, the indirect effects results for higher SES people regarding H1 was unexpected. We found that people with higher SES may also be prejudiced toward people with a higher status. Furthermore, with respect to H2, we also looked at the role of SES with respect to the relationship between socio-economic status, prejudice towards refugees, and realistic threat, this was different from Gootjes et al. (2021). We did not find SES played a role, as for people

with a low and high self-perceived and objective SES showed similar pattern. In addition, we found that there is an indirect effect when we looked at self-perceived SES but not with objective SES. So, including objective or rather subjective SES in the analyses as a predictor change something in the indirect relationship between discontent and prejudice against refugees via threat. Finally, with respect to H3, the indirect effect of discontent on prejudice towards lower-status people was also found for people with a lower SES.

A possible explanation for not finding any moderating effect of socio-economic status could be the relative status of the participants. Our sample did not contain 'real' high-status people, which may indicate that people with a not 'real' high status (for example, students who are highly educated), yet perceive the 'real' high-status groups (for example; the elite) as an outgroup. Another reason could be that people with a lower SES still realize there are people who have even less than them.

In summary, we found mainly main effects and some indirect effects, but not any moderating role of SES.

### **Practical implications**

Our findings also suggested some practical implications for a better understanding of the relationship between societal discontent and prejudice. First, we investigated the role of discontent on prejudice because it is important to know the extent to which the discontent people feel regarding society is also related to negative feelings toward various outgroups. This is important because it can increase problems in society. What we have learned from this research is that societal discontent can predict less or more prejudice. We also learned that socio-economic status has a direct influence on societal discontent and prejudice, but not moderate the relationship between societal discontent and prejudice. We also learned that realistic threat and status threat play a role in prejudice toward other groups. For a healthy society, it is important to understand these factors. We must recognize that societal discontent

may increase realistic and status threat, which could influence how we feel about specific groups. Our research can provide insight into how groups oppose each other and what factors can stimulate this, especially in today's times when there are many groups opposing each other and there is a greater disparity than ever between rich and poor. Our research can offer advice to policymakers. Our advice would be that we should try to counter societal discontent. By offering insight into the relationship between societal discontent and prejudice, how these prejudices work and which factors can contribute to this, government policy can zoom in on this and, for example, implement targeted campaign policy. Within such a targeted campaign policy, it would be important to focus on countering societal discontent and reducing prejudices towards outgroups. This can be achieved by focusing the campaign on the feeling of the society as a whole and reducing the prejudices of citizens.

### **Limitations and future research**

#### ***Correlational design***

Our study contains several limitations. First, we used a correlational design, which can never indicate any causal relationship. Therefore, the findings have to be met with caution. We used a model in which our predictive order was as follows: societal discontent predicted prejudice and this depended on own socio-economic status, and we explored the mediating role of realistic and status threat. Since we thus used a correlational design, the order could also be the other way around (prejudice predicts societal discontent). However, we think our order makes theoretical sense and is in line with previous literature (Gootjes et al., 2021). When people feel discontent about the society, they may look for scapegoats, which are quite likely members of the outgroup. The reversed relationship seems less logical. Why would people experience more discontent when they think negative about other groups in society? However, future research could investigate this claim by manipulating societal discontent in an experimental design, to find any causal evidence.

***Representativeness***

Second, our sample is not representative due to the use of “Prolific”. This sample is typically composed of more lower educated and poor individuals than highly-educated and rich individuals, with the motivation to earn money on the side. In fact, with respect to self-perceived status, our participants placed themselves on average as 5.35 on the ladder. The highest level was a 10, indicating that our participants generally had an average self-perceived status. Further, most of the participants in our sample (37.7 percent) had a bachelor’s degree as their highest educational level and the participants had an average current monthly income of 1500-2000 dollars. Because our sample is not representative, our results should be interpreted with caution. Future research could use a more representative sample that represents more strata of society.

***SES***

Furthermore, we measured socio-economic status in terms of self-perceived and objective status. Self-perceived status is about how an individual perceived him/herself in society, and objective status is about a person’s income and level of education (Saegert et al., 2006). Both measures tell something about status, but yet mean something different. Furthermore, we predicted relations for lower and higher SES, but in fact, our sample did not include participants with a very high status (‘elite’) and hardly people with a very low SES. Consequently, we can only say something about the relative contribution of SES among the people in our sample. Future research could use a more representative sample in which there is a clear distinction between high and low socio-economic status, to make the results more interpretable.

***Political orientation***

Finally, we did not measure political orientation. As a result, we do not know from which political perspective the participants responded to the questions, which could have

provided us with additional insight into the relationship between societal discontent, prejudice, and SES. Especially within the cases where societal discontent predicted less instead of more prejudice as this may be related to political orientation. For example, the study from Knappert et al. (2020), showed that left-oriented people had fewer negative attitudes toward refugees compared to right-oriented people. If our sample consists mainly of left-oriented people, a possible explanation could be that they are more positive towards refugees, and especially if they felt discontent about society (e.g., they may feel negative about the strict refugee policy of the government). Future research could add political orientation as a variable in the questionnaire, in order to identify additional insights about the relationship between the variables.

### **Conclusion**

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between societal discontent and prejudice towards different groups and tested whether this relationship depended on socio-economic status. We examined both the role of self-perceived and objective socio-economic status and whether the relation between discontent and prejudice differs between them (e.g., in terms of which outgroups they may feel prejudiced about). Furthermore, we explored the potential mediating role of realistic threat and status threat. We found that societal discontent indeed predicted more prejudice in some cases, with the exception of prejudice against refugees and low-status people. We also found some evidence for indirect relationships between discontent and prejudice through realistic threat and status threat.

Overall, current findings suggest that socio-economic status predicts prejudice, however it does not influence the relationship between discontent and prejudice. We also found an indirect relation between discontent and prejudice through realistic and status threat. This could be of interest to policymakers because we live in a time of great polarizations, societal discontent, and a wide disparity between rich and poor. Whether discontent

contributes to more prejudice towards other groups is therefore of relevance. In order to have a better future, it is critical to grasp the social psychological basis and context of these social phenomena.



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## Appendix A

### Qualtrics questionnaire<sup>6</sup>

# How you view society and how do you think society views you?

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Start of Block: landing page

Info\_P1

**"WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF SOCIETY AND HOW DO YOU THINK SOCIETY VIEWS YOU?"**

**Welcome to this study! Please read the study information below and after that, click on the red arrow to continue to the next page.**

#### **Why do I receive this information?**

You are being invited to participate in this research, because we are interested in how you think about the society you live in, and your socio-economic status in this society. This research involves two students, L. Jonkers and J. Arzbach, from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and is supervised by E. Gordijn.

#### **Do I have to participate in this research?**

Participation in the research is voluntary. However, your consent is needed. Therefore, please read this information carefully. You can withdraw from participation at every moment without explanation, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You have this right at all times, also after you have given consent for participation.

#### **Why this research?**

For this research, we are looking for participants: 1) Who live in the United states 2) Who are older than 18

#### **What do we ask of you during the research?**

First, we will ask you for consent to participate. When you agree to participate, you will receive a questionnaire, in which you first are asked to give some demographic information about yourself, such as your age, ethnicity, gender, and your socio-economic status. Next, you will be asked questions about, for example how you think you are perceived in society, the way you perceive society, and how you feel about different groups in society. The questionnaire will take approximately 7 minutes to complete.

#### **What are the consequences of participation?**

We believe there are little to no risks associated with participation in this study. However, you

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<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire also measured other variables for other studies. In this appendix, only the variables related to our study have been added to the questionnaire.

may find some questions difficult to answer or would prefer not to answer them. Please remember that you may always withdraw from the study, which does not have any negative consequences for you.

**How will we treat your data?**

Your data will contribute to two Master Theses and to a scientific publication. Your data is confidential. While no personal data is collected, some information may act as identifiers when combined (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or age in combination with personal remarks). Only the researchers of this study will have access to it. We will also use given MTurk ID numbers to compensate for the participation. This can be deemed as an indirect identifier. After making payments, we will immediately delete these indirect identifiers from the data for the sake of keeping participant anonymity. The data consists of your responses to the questions, which will be collected using an online questionnaire. We collect this data for scientific purposes. If the data is published, we will anonymize information that could be used to identify individual participants (e.g., if you made remarks that could identify you). Please note that the data is collected and stored in Europe. When the study is finished, the data will be stored at a safe University of Groningen server in the Netherlands and will be stored for 10 years.

**What else do you need to know?**

You may always ask questions about the research: now, during the research, and after the end of the research. You can do so by sending an e-mail to [e.h.gordijn@rug.nl](mailto:e.h.gordijn@rug.nl). If you have questions/concerns about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the research, you may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: [ec-bss@rug.nl](mailto:ec-bss@rug.nl). Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: [privacy@rug.nl](mailto:privacy@rug.nl). As a research participant, you have the right to receive a copy of this research information (i.e., you can take a screenshot).



Consent

**INFORMED CONSENT**

**"WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF SOCIETY AND HOW DO YOU THINK SOCIETY VIEWS YOU?"**

I have read the information about the research. I have had enough opportunity to ask questions about it. I understand what the research is about, what is being asked of me, which consequences participation can have, how my data will be handled, and what my rights as a participant are. I understand that participation in the research is voluntary. I myself choose to participate. I can stop participating at any moment. If I stop, I do not need to explain why. Stopping will have no negative consequences for me. Below I indicate what I am consenting to.

**Consent to participate in the research:**

- Yes, I consent to participate, and I consent to the processing of my personal data as mentioned in the study information. (1)
- No, I do not consent to participate (2)

End of Block: landing page

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Start of Block: no consent

no consent You indicated you do not want to participate in this research. If you want to let us know why you do not want to participate, you can do so below. We thank you for your time!

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End of Block: no consent

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Start of Block: questionnaire

Demographics. First, we ask you to provide some demographic information below before starting the main survey.

Age What is your age?

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Gender Please indicate your gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Nationality Are you American?

- Yes, I am American (1)
- No (2)

Ethnicity Which of these best describes your ethnic background? Please select one answer

- Asian or Pacific Islander (1)
- Black (2)
- Hispanic or Latino (3)
- Native American or Alaskan Native (4)
- White (5)
- Multiracial or Biracial (6)
- An ethnicity not listed here (7)

education Please indicate your highest educational level (only select the highest level possible)

- No diploma or degree or certificate / I did not finish any degree (1)
- High School Diploma (2)
- Certificate (sub-bachelor or vocational) (3)
- Associate Degree (4)
- Bachelor's Degree (5)
- First Professional Degree (6)
- Post-bachelor's Diploma/Certificate (7)
- Master's Degree (8)
- Certificate of Advances Study (9)
- Education of Specialist Degree (10)
- Doctorate (11)

income Please indicate your current monthly net level of income

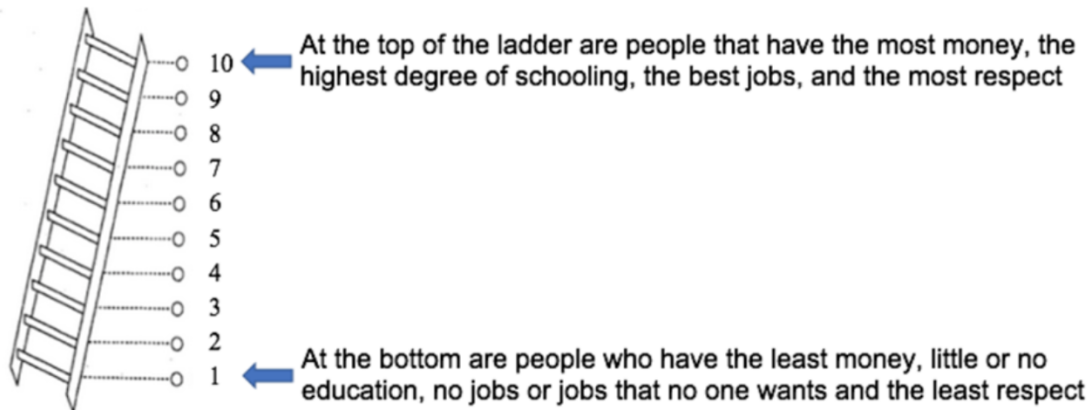
- <500 (1)
- 500-1000 (2)
- 1000-1500 (3)
- 1500-2000 (4)
- 2000-3000 (5)
- 3000-4000 (6)
- >4000 (7)

Job Which of the following describes best what you have been doing for the last 4 weeks (select the option that represents this most accurately).

- In paid work (or away temporarily, employee, self-employed, working for family business) (1)
  - In education (not paid by employer) even if on vacation (2)
  - Unemployed (3)
  - Permanently sick or disabled (4)
  - Retired (5)
  - In community or military service (6)
  - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons (7)
  - Other (please specify) (8)
-

## SES subjective

Imagine that this ladder is a picture of American society with respect to people's socio-economic background (which depends on their income, education level, job status, and extent to which they feel respected).



Now, think about your socio-economic background relative to other people in the USA. Please select for each question the position on the ladder (1=extremely low position on the ladder, 10 = extremely high position on the ladder).

	1: Extremely low position on the ladder (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	8 (8)	9 (9)	10: extremely high position on the ladder (10)
What is your position on the ladder? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What is the position of your family? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What do you expect your position on the ladder will be in 5 years? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

check1 To check if you are still paying attention, please type a 3

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Discontent How do you feel about and perceive American society?

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements (1=absolutely disagree;

7=absolutely agree).

	1=absolutely disagree (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7=absolutely agree (7)
I feel shocked about the way things are going in society (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel concerned when I think about the future of society (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am frustrated because society is not as it should be (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am afraid that things will go wrong in society (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Realistic Now, think about other groups in society and how they relate to people like you.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements (1=absolutely disagree; 7=absolutely agree)?







Prejudice How do you feel about the following groups of people in society?

Please indicate with respect to each group of people how you feel about them (1=absolutely negative; 7=absolutely positive)

	1=absolutely negative (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4=neutral (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7=absolutely positive (7)
With respect to POOR people, I feel (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With respect to HIGHLY EDUCATED people, I feel (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With respect to REFUGEES, I feel (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With respect to RICH people, I feel (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With respect to LOWER EDUCATED people, I feel (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
With respect to PEOPLE IN POWER, I feel (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: questionnaire

Start of Block: final

Feedback You are about to come to the end of the study. We would like to hear your thoughts and feedback about the study. If any, please report them in the box below.

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debrief This is the end of the questionnaire.

We are very grateful for your participation! Your participation will help us to get an insight into how Americans perceive their society and how this is related to their own (perceived) position in society.

If you have any further questions, complaints or if you would like to receive the final results of our research, you can send an email to [l.l.jonkers@student.rug.nl](mailto:l.l.jonkers@student.rug.nl) or to [j.arzbach@student.rug.nl](mailto:j.arzbach@student.rug.nl).

Thank you! If you click on the red arrow you will receive your mechanical Turk code.

mturk code Thank you for your time.

Here is your Mechanical Turk Code:  
`#{e://Field/Random%20ID}`