

## Power elites: Predictors of the support for public policies to reduce poverty in Argentina

### Elites de poder: Predictores del apoyo a políticas públicas para reducir la pobreza en Argentina

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#### Background

Reducing poverty and inequality is one of the main objectives of international organizations, which have proposed political and social guidelines for this, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, these policies are often criticized and have little social support. On the one hand, previous research suggest that people's perception of inequality often does not align with real inequality levels. Furthermore, the existence of inequality does not necessarily correlate with increased pressures for redistribution. Instead, this relation is influenced by ideologies that justify the prevailing system and individuals' idealized beliefs about economic inequality. Another line of research has explored the relations between variables such as causal attributions of poverty, prejudice, ideological beliefs, and support for public policies. However, the limited political relevance of these studies, primarily conducted with university students, has raised concerns about their social impact and influence on political decision-making.

#### Aims

This study aims to analyze the predictive influence of socio-cognitive and ideological factors on the support for public policies to reduce multidimensional poverty and social inequality in Argentina. The analysis focuses on the power elite of San Juan, an Argentine province, and compares the outcomes across different sectors within this elite group. Moreover, the study pretends to enhance the comprehension of the perspectives held by privileged sectors and their stance on local strategies for addressing these social issues. Additionally, the research aims to contribute to the development of tools for fostering dialogue and constructing innovative pathways to effectively tackle these challenges.

#### Method & procedures

We conducted a prospective ex post facto study, utilizing a non-probabilistic sampling method. Fixed quotas were established for each sector of the elite, based on Dye's (1997) definition of the political elite. The study included 179 participants from San Juan, who had between 20 and 72 years old ( $M = 45.07$ ,  $SD = 11.59$ ) and held hierarchical positions in the different elite sectors. We applied a self-administered questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions. This questionnaire aimed to gather sociodemographic information such as gender, age, educational level, socioeconomic status, and the sector in which participants were employed. Additionally, we included adapted and validated scales to measure variables including: belief in a just world, social domination orientation, economic inequality justification, political ideology, prejudice towards poor people and causal attribution of poverty. Furthermore, we developed and implemented instruments to measure negative beliefs regarding social plans in Argentina as well as support for policies against social inequality and poverty. The data collection process occurred in two phases and employed different modalities.

The study strictly adhered to all relevant ethical regulations. People were invited to participate in the study anonymously and voluntarily. They were informed about the study's objectives and provided their informed consent.

## Results & discussion

To identify the predictive variables for support of public policies, we performed three separate multiple regression analyses. One analysis focused on the overall support for public policies, while the other two analyses examined the factors within the scale: income transfer policies and employment and education policies. In the initial analysis, three models were examined, all of which demonstrated satisfactory significance indices, statistical power, and effect size. However, the third model, which included additional variables, exhibited a higher predictive capacity for the dependent variable (42.4%). The results indicated that lower levels of negative beliefs regarding social plans ( $\beta=-.28$ ), a progressive political ideology ( $\beta=.25$ ), and reduced levels of blatant prejudice ( $\beta=-.21$ ) were significant predictors of support for public policies among the elite participants. In the subsequent analysis concerning income transfer policies, the model accounted for 50.7% of the variance. Support for such policies was predicted by lower levels of negative beliefs towards social plans ( $\beta=-.31$ ), decreased economic inequality justification ( $\beta=-.26$ ), and a political ideology aligned with progressivism ( $\beta=.25$ ). Finally, concerning public policies about employment and education, the model explained a lower percentage of variance compared to the previous analysis (23% vs 50.7%). Nonetheless, the predictor variables were, once again, negative beliefs about social plans ( $\beta=-.28$ ) and a political ideology oriented towards progressivism ( $\beta=.25$ ). We also conducted comparisons between different groups of power elites.

## Conclusion

Findings of this study hold significant relevance as they shed light on power elites, influential social actors with the capacity to shape and drive social changes. The support for the examined public policies was found to be influenced by factors such as reduced negative beliefs about social plans, a higher adherence to progressive ideology, and a decreased inclination towards blatant prejudice against individuals experiencing poverty. Additionally, the findings suggest that lesser justification of economic inequality predicts support for income transfers policies. These results are consistent with previous research, particularly studies conducted in Argentina with university student samples. The similarities observed between the elite participants and other sample groups resume the discussion about the culture of the political elite. On the other hand, minimal differences were observed between the elite sectors, suggesting an apparently homogeneous elite. These findings imply that the sectors may share common ideological, socio-cognitive and attitudinal characteristics, indicating that the sector may not be a decisive or predictive factor in the variables under study. However, it is important to emphasize that these results pertain specifically to a particular group from an Argentine province and should not be generalized to other elites' groups from other sociopolitical contexts.

**Keywords:** poverty, power elites, social inequality, support for public policies

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