UC RIVERSIDE

POLITICAL SCIENCE

PRACTICE JOB TALKS



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WHEN DOES EMPATHY FOR THE POOR SHAPE REDISTRIBUTIVE PREFERENCES? EVIDENCE FROM TWO PERSPECTIVE-TAKING EXPERIMENTS

Does empathy for the poor increase support for redistribution? A large corpus of research finds that empathy for outgroups can reduce belief in negative stereotypes about them and galvanize support for progroup policies, but the effect of empathy toward the poor is less clear. That is, while some extant research finds strong evidence of empathy's impact on redistributive preferences, other work reports null effects. I argue that these mixed findings are in part due to prior research gauging support for policies that would not directly alleviate the source(s) of the empathetic target's financial distress, thereby attenuating empathy's influence on policy preferences. Leveraging two original perspective-taking survey experiments, I find that empathy for the poor consistently predicts support for redistributive policies that directly map onto the causes of distress signaled in the vignette, and uncover inconsistent levels of support for more general redistributive efforts and policies that do not correspond to the dimensions of the empathetic target's distress. These findings provide compelling evidence that the cause of a person's poverty indeed shapes redistributive preferences, and work toward reconciling the scope of empathy's impact on policy attitudes at large.

TIME

Monday, Nov 9, 2026
12:00PM-12:50PM

LOCATION

WINSTON CHUNG HALL 142